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CARTONE

David Dernie [a]

[a] Chinese University of Hong Kong
daviddernie@cuhk.edu.hk

This paper explores the use of mixed media in contemporary spatial and architectural practice. It is an introduction to a set of preparatory works for wall paintings, completed between 2017-20. The 12 panels are inspired by the tradition of '*cartone*', or *cartoons* in the visual arts, that were preliminary studies for painted space. They are made using natural coloured pigments, paper collage and material textures. As such they appear as arrangements of fields of colour, and their surfaces tend to have a complex depth.

The project is grounded on the understanding of architecture as a representational discipline. It draws on notions of spatial perception that are first articulated by Merleau Ponty (1962), enmeshed sensorial experience, and participatory experience in visual phenomena - the work is intended to take forward the dialogue between architecture and the humanities.

Colour and its materiality have also long been the subject of philosophical and theoretical debate and by exploring colour and space through hybrid drawing, we may inquire if colour is mind-independent: are colours simply qualities of objects/spaces or can colour be understood relationally, integral to spatial and material experience? Situating the work in the context of the historical development of pictorial space in painting and architecture, this study then asks how mixed media visual practice can contribute to the development of forms of critical spatial practice. For instance, in an age of resource depletion, an exploration of the potential of low-impact pigmented surfaces has an ecological imperative.

Introduction

Pictorial Space is the illusion of space and volume in paintings and other two-dimensional art. It is generally described in terms of the formal tools that generate the visual effect, painterly elements of chiaroscuro, framing, scale, linear perspective, anamorphosis (Dunning, 1991; Penny, 2017). These combine in different ways to create degrees of illusion, understood for the most part, as visual conceit.

Discussion of pictorial space tends to oscillate between the description of the effects of the painter's illusionistic tools (linear perspective, projection, shadow, scale, texture and so forth) and the analysis of colour according to scientific method or instrument (as an absolute value). Reception of visual experience tends to be framed as a personal and visual sensation. Each of these approaches is reductive, omitting to take into account the field of relationships that constitute the setting of a particular painting and the relationship to the viewer in their historical context – the *where and when* of spatial and pictorial experience.

The experience of pictorial space and colour's agency in the perception of a surface-in-a-given-place is more complicated than it first appears. Both the science of colours and the aesthetics of colour reception overlook colour's latent connection with its setting, its cultural and physical context: we cannot assume that colour values are somehow absolute, nor that visual recognition or emotional response is standardised, absolute or disconnected from its context. (Albers, 1963) The inescapable evidence is rather the opposite; the colours we see in space are like fleeting moments in networks of relationships that make up a spatial and social experience. Hues shift in light and in time, according to material contexts and even with the language we use to describe them. Colours also depend on who sees them, how and where: they have histories and belong to places, people, the things people make, the day to day of lives. To better understand colours - and the potential of pictorial space in spatial, and communicative, practice - requires analysis that takes into account the lived conditions of places. In this sense this exercise is limited to a focus on the inherent constraints and boundaries of the painted solidity of wall, through framing, orientation light and other conditions of viewing: in sum, the experience of pictorial depth depends as much on formal, painterly conceit as it does on the actuality of the spatial encounter.

The story of 'pictorial space' in architecture is as old as spatial practice itself. Historically it is of pivotal importance to the development of the visual arts. Its form and materiality determine how an image was *seen* – what was directed to be seen. Strikingly modern in appearance, pictorial space is, for example, a key component of Imperial Roman architecture (Pappalardo, 2009). Shaped by sequences of courtyards, fountains, pools, gardens and openings onto landscapes, the overriding character of the architectural language was the relationship between built form and the 'natural' world. Its rooms situated day to day life with respect to the manifold gods that inhabited the landscapes, skies, woods and rivers. They were painted to reverberate with a sense of the invisible worlds beyond physical boundaries, the sacred and profane, the legendary and mythical, nature and artifice, heaven and earth.

Early stages of Roman wall painting have a 'rustic' decorative order, often imitating natural stones. Later painted stones are relegated to form a plinth, with the mural above it then 'breaking through' the wall to depict illusionistic openings that open up a drama of fictive and real space, engaging the observer in the painted spaces of sacred landscapes, distant mythical scenes or the immediacy of life-like gods as they move across the walls the room. The architecture is now fragmented in a radical opening of the room, now painted as a rhythm of framing and projection.

This technique of framing and projection is later beautifully developed in an extraordinary period of painting that dates from around 20BC to 20 AD (the so-called Third Style, see Villa Agrippa, Postumus). Here the framed panels and naturalistic scenes are reduced to miniatures - like cinematic long shots - in fields of deep red or black. By virtue of the proportional relationships, shifts in scale and luminous depths of the pigmented wall, the observer is 'looking out' into a colour field, a fictive, flattened space, the landscapes of the imagination.

These late-style walls have a remarkable dependence on the materiality of colour, the opportunities afforded by dark tones and surface depth. While oblique projection and some degree of perspectival recession was available, mathematical perspective was not and this remains true for the traditions of sacred art that immediately followed. Here, non-perspectival experience was designed to connect earthly experience to the heavens: a wall painting was to be vision of – or participation in – the scared. From the mysterious gilded space of early icon paintings (Evseyeva, 2005) to the pre-perspectival frescoes of Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel (Padua, 1305) -where sacred narratives are choregraphed as fields of symbolic colours, framed in an architecture of light – the tradition relies on non-perspectival instruments to deceive the eye, to engage the observer in the sacred narrative. Mathematical perspective – a newly regulated windowing of the visible world comes available in the early renaissance (Panovsky, Wood, 1991) and with it *perspectivity*, the ability to *see* the world from the outside, and as a composition, organised in terms of a mathematically-understood, pictorial recession.

The tools of *framing* and *projection* established in early roman painting had found a productive companion in mathematical perspective laying the ground for *quadrattura* painting that was to characterise renaissance visual arts. It culminated in the theatrical convergence of heaven and earth in Andrea Pozzo's painted vaults in S. Ignazio (Rome, after 1685). A late example of *quadrattura* painting, it blurs the boundaries between real and fictive space, combining the basilica form with stucco and painted frames with perspectival recession and colour field that appears to open up a vast drama, an endless space within the actual shallow recess of the vault itself. With Pozzo, the story of pictorial space reaches a climax.

Fields of Inquiry

This essay presents 12 mixed media works completed between 2017 and 2020 to inquire into three interrelated components of pictorial space and colour experience: First, the *Instruments* - the tools and components of pictorial space-making – projection, perspective, colour, framing and projection; Second, *Material* – the perception of coloured surfaces as a material experience, the weight of surface and the immateriality of spatial imagination, and Third, the *Non-visible* - the representational or embodied value of colour in a given, lived space.

Background

1. Instruments

The traditional painterly instruments for the construction of illusion combine projections, perspective and framing with textures and planes of colour recession. Light effects, shifts in scale or different levels of detail contribute to the primary framing of projection and recession. Outlines, edges, tonal juxtapositions, are traditionally the key apparatus of seeing. It was only when Paul Cézanne broke down the 'outline' of what he saw was he able to represent the *experience* of being in the landscape. His fragmented forms of Mont Sainte-Vittoire (1904-1906) set a radical rethinking of pictorial space – and

the autonomy of outline – for the purposes of rethinking the role of visual representation in an age where film and photography were increasingly becoming *the* media to capture visible reality as forms in space.

These early decades of the twentieth century saw a move away from the forms of perspectival or projected figuration: seeing was to be demonstrated as experience through a refiguration of the pictorial space. These flattened, inflected surfaces, where the synthesis of visual experience, like the experience of *all perspectives at once*, was to be the touchstone of cubism. (Cox, 2000) The final remnants of the traditional instruments of pictorial space were dissolved to the point on invisibility. By the middle decades of the century, in the context of Minimalism of the mid 1960s New York, the painter Agnes Martin for instance, declared 'My paintings have neither objects, nor space, nor time, nor anything – no forms' (Lovatt, 2015).

Martin's works from the early 1960s, at the Coenties Slip Studios, are grids that are scratched into or drawn over a neutral tone. The result is a meditative surface (Islands [1961]; Friendship [1963]). The lines of the grid, particularly those in graphite, are set on a toned or coloured surface, sometimes paper, otherwise painted. The viewer is confronted with an intensity and depth of pictorial space. A few paces back and a middle reading reveals the scale, proportion and spacing of the overall work. Tonal differences emerge as the details of the lines merge into more of a field of marks. Each line, obsessively drawn, evenly weighted and uniform, fades into a veil, like the veining of marble, or the texture of a wall. Further away the works stand silent, neutral, tense and open. Standing for what they 'are' rather than what they represent, these iconic works are like statements of 'absolute surface': methodical and repetitive, resistant to conventional reading of pictorial space, devoid of any reference to their environment.

Like Agnes Martin's sparse surfaces, this language posits the reader and observer as the locus of meaning and interpretation. Like the different readings of Martin's surfaces at different distances, the rigorous focus on repetitive detail in the prose creates an otherwise expressionless, floating space. They echo the sparse language of the *Nouveau Roman* of the 1950s that replaced descriptive texts of human drama with a precise language devoid of any one interpretation of events. Characteristic of the genre is Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* (1957) which is unusually set in a plantation house. It opens with a line drawing of a plan of the house labelled in some detail, including in the living/dining room the "*mark of a centipede on the wall".* This anticipates the texture of a language that is measured, almost remote but contained in such a way as to engage the reader with the screening of details: edges, boundaries and walls that make up often dislocated relationships are observed with a particular clarity: "*Thus six interior surfaces of the cube are distinctly outlined by thin laths of constant dimensions, vertical on the four vertical surfaces, running east and west on the two horizontal surfaces…. The outside walls of the house are made of planks set horizontally; they are also wider – about eight inches – and overlap each other on the outer edge. Their surface is therefore not contained within a single vertical plane, but in many parallel planes, inclined at several degrees pitch and a plank's thickness from each other*" (Dernie, Gaspari, 2016). The drama of suspicion unfolds slowly against such rigorously observed surfaces and details and *layers of absence*, of the person of narration, of emotion and relationships between things: '*It is six thirty. The whole house is empty. It has been empty since the morning. It is now six thirty*' (Dernie, Gaspari, 2016).

My own panels are similarly obsessive non-representational surfaces. While they do not embody the remoteness of Martin or Robbe-Grillet, they open a similar unravelling narrative that is initiated by an

experience of an otherwise muted surface. While denying the traditional instruments of pictorial space, my work asks what pictorial space can be discovered in and through their abstract textures, linear definitions, edges and glazed coloured depths?

2. Material and Immaterial

The minimalists' *layers of absence* have a materiality. Their muted colours are not absolute: "*There is in fact no such thing as pure colour*" the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre argued in *Imaginaire* "*If Matisse chose a rug rather than a sheet of dry and glossy paper it is because the voluptuous mixture of the colour, the density and tactile quality of the wool. Consequently, the red can be truly enjoyed only in grasping it as the red of the rug, and therefore unreal*" (Sartre, 1972: 221). Just as the 'unreal' wool-red is an image in our imaginations, so we are reminded of the painting traditions that explore surface in order to connect material to visible colour.

The point here is that painted work-on-walls always has an integral materiality, the colour does not have an independent value - our experience of it is embedded in a constellation of references that comprise the subjective response of the viewer in the contexts of colour/surface interactions. This is evident in for example Art Informel of the 1950s and *Matter Paintings* of Antoni Tàpies, for whom a painting's material qualities became *the* primary source of expression. In the context of post-war Spain, "*logically enough*" writes Borja-Villel "*artists, writers and philosophers gradually began turning their attention away from everything that involved fantasy, moving increasingly closer to existential or phenomenological reality*" (Borja-Villel , 1992: 297). Matter paintings take their impulse from the dual actions of the artist and of the material as it dries, cracks or bleeds. The process of making them is only in part compositional because the action of the artist and the action of the material may not coincide. In this sense the properties of the material are informing the qualities and composition of the final work. Tàpies may add drawn lines that establish a dialogue with the depths of the matter-surface. This emphasizes a sense of a 'floating space' and establishes a spatial relationship, between the formed lines and the partially formed matter, that captures the imagination, and promotes a creative involvement in work.

The *floating* pictorial space that in Tàpies and Martin is captured somewhere between an orientation towards the material conditions of the work and the accidental, the attention to material processes, establishes a fresh non-mathematical framing for the pictorial imagination. In a complimentary direction, and in the context of the monochrome works of minimalist contemporaries in the mid 1960s (Barnett Newman, Ellsworth Kelly) Gerhard Richter sets out on a series of paintings in 1967 called *Fenster* or Window (Buchloh, 2002) where the same dual register between material depth and accidental or informal surface marks (shadows, reflections) subvert the traditional instruments of pictorial space making. Richter's works on glass and mirror recall "*These works have also questioned the fate of painting were it to become a merely reflective or transparent spatial divider, dissolving the traditionally private space of pictorial contemplation and opening up visual experience to a wide range of perceptual , phenomenological, tactile, and social interactions*" (Buchloh, 2002, p. 14). His powerfully austere and silent grey mirrors installed at Dia:Beacon "*depriviledge vision*" (Buchloh, 2002: 28) and are at once obscuring and reflective: "*Drained of memory, repulsing history, these penumbral surfaces obscure as they reflect*" (Cooke L., and Govan M., 2003: 240).

3. Visible-Non Visual

The surface of Richter's grey mirrors is animated with fleeting reflections. At the same time their silent, monochrome surfaces absorb the viewer's gaze. And on account of this, the experience of the installation is only partly visible. The observer is invited to participate in their grey, empty depths, creating an altogether more complex notion of pictorial space. Stripped of all falsehoods and visual conceit, the space of the encounter is an inbetween, located somewhere between the imaginative, tactile response to the authority of the material plane, and the visible fragments of the actual space of the installation. These spaces of interaction, one real or reflected and one imagined, could be said to overlap, as a form of *phenomenal* transparency.

Rowe and Slutzky (1963) distinguished literal from phenomenal transparency. Literal transparency was *see through* space. *Phenomenal* transparency was concerned with the implicit structuring of space – or visual experience - layerings, overlappings that imply spatial and formal continuity or experience of the presence of a spatial condition that isn't entirely visible. The latter was connected to simultaneity of non-perspectival, visual experience. In a follow up article they ask "…..*can there be in visual space a simultaneous perception of two objects one behind the other ? …. are we able to see two complimentary colours as one behind the other even though both a stimulating the same retinal area…. we are not referring to the 'real space in which of course, one object is closer to the observer than the other. Our problem deals with phenomenal visual spac*e" (Rowe, Slutzky, 1971).

The unseen, latent or non-visual component of experience is integral to the discussion of the non-formal aspects of pictorial space, as it has to do with a participation in the space of the work, its colours, textures and relational components – that has in part to do with its placement, orientation and formal arrangement but otherwise resides in the experience of the observer. The experience of the material colour is the immaterial (what is *embodied*, invisible) as well as that which is material (*articulated*), here expressed by the philosopher Merleau-Ponty, who argues that the abstract value of any colour is only one part of a deeper 'constancy of things' that belongs to the world and our experiences: "*The color is yet another variant in another dimension of variation, that of its relations with the surroundings: this red is what it is only by connecting up from its place with other reds about it, with which it forms a constellation, or with other colors it dominates or that dominate it, that it attracts or that attracts it, that it repels or that repel it. In short, it is a certain node in the woof of the simultaneous and the successive*" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 132-33).

FIGURE 1: HTTP://WWW.METMUSEUM.ORG/ART/COLLECTION/SEARCH/250930 SPACES OF THE IMAGINATION, PROJECTION AND FRAMING. ROMAN, POMPEIAN, WALL PAINTING ON BLACK GROUND: AEDICULA WITH SMALL LANDSCAPE, FROM THE IMPERIAL VILLA AT BOSCOTRECASE, LAST DECADE OF THE 1ST CENTURY B.C., FRESCO. THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK. ROGERS FUND, 1920 (20.192.1)

Making

The careful application of layers of colour glazes meant that the process was slow. Light conditions and even seasons changed as each layer dried. It was non-linear and never illustrative. At times it seems to have nowhere to go and most times the surface was worked and reworked, repeatedly laid down, only to be scraped away, covered over, swept up.

The process was driven by an impulse for which I was not entirely responsible, a game of chance, the recognition of personal associations that are detectable in edges or surface formations. The crafting of the work was important. The papers are chinese or indian, the glue is made of rabbit skin. The colours are natural pigments ground in oil. I worked on sized board with a light canvas surface, gessoed. This sizing, grinding, defining, gluing, tearing, overlaying is preceded with drawings in soft charcoal.

Working with crystal pigments meant that colour was always a material colour and making surfaces this way bound colour and light together into the surface with conditions of transparency, rendering far-off effects of shimmering coloured glazes and the close-up qualities of surface depths. They became fields of light reflecting off crystalline colours, suspended in oils, egg or glue.

The collage that is integrated into the panels contribute a direction for close-up reading. Otherwise, the surfaces are deliberately impersonal - emptied of explicit reference and any ‘painterly’ hand. In their play of abstraction and intimacy of surface the emphasis is on the spatiality of the plane and their potential to enrich actual space. They are intended to be open to interpretation, combining fragments that allude to landscapes or urban fragments, horizons, densities, openings and clusters that have different rhythms and spatial structures. Of course, they are hung as objects, but as they are intentionally prototypes for thinking about painted space, they have the register of both painting and installation.

The Work

12 untitled panels:

1. 124 x 124 см

2. 102 x 102 см

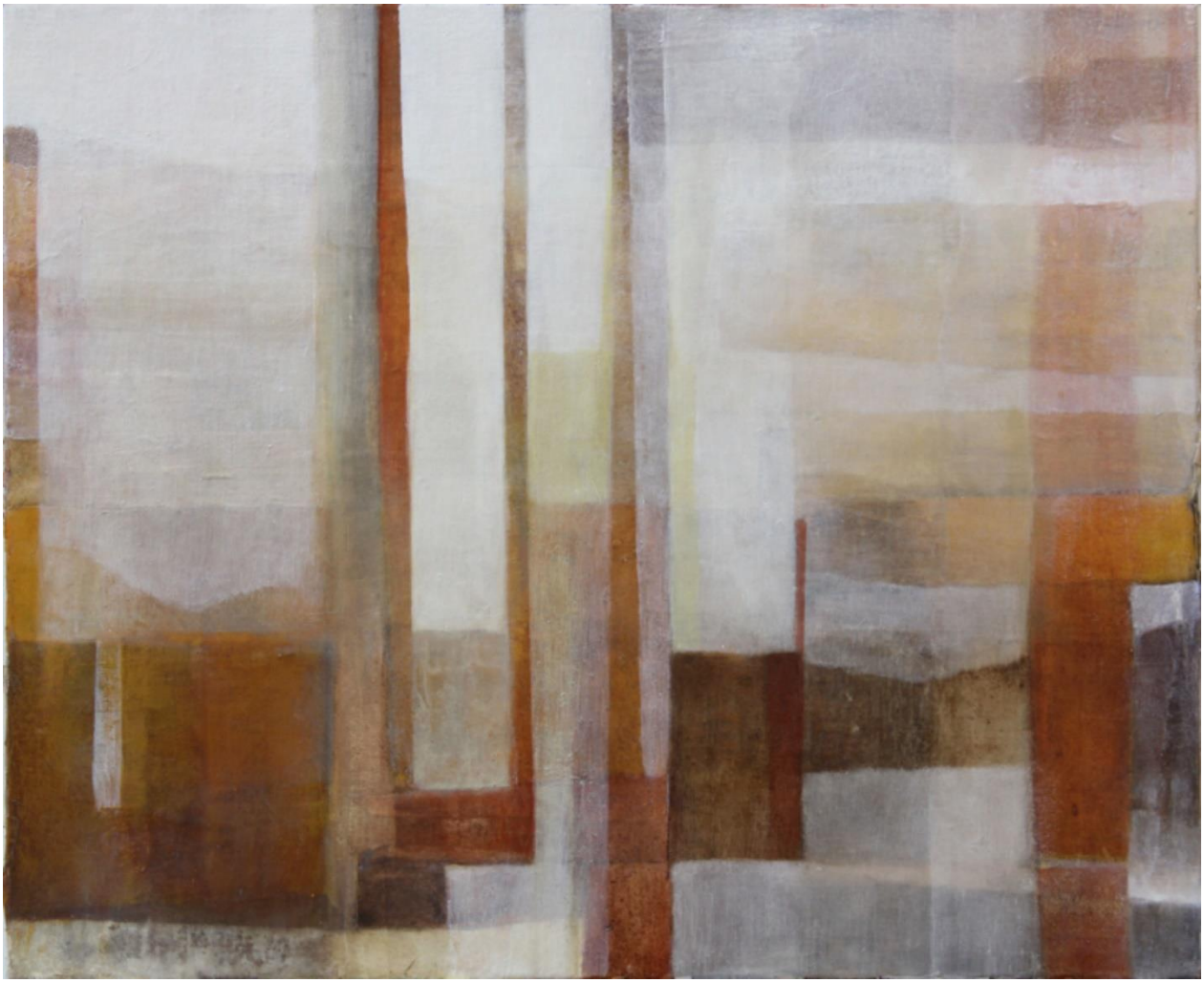
3. 102 x 102 см

4. 102 x 102 CM

5. 100 x 100 CM

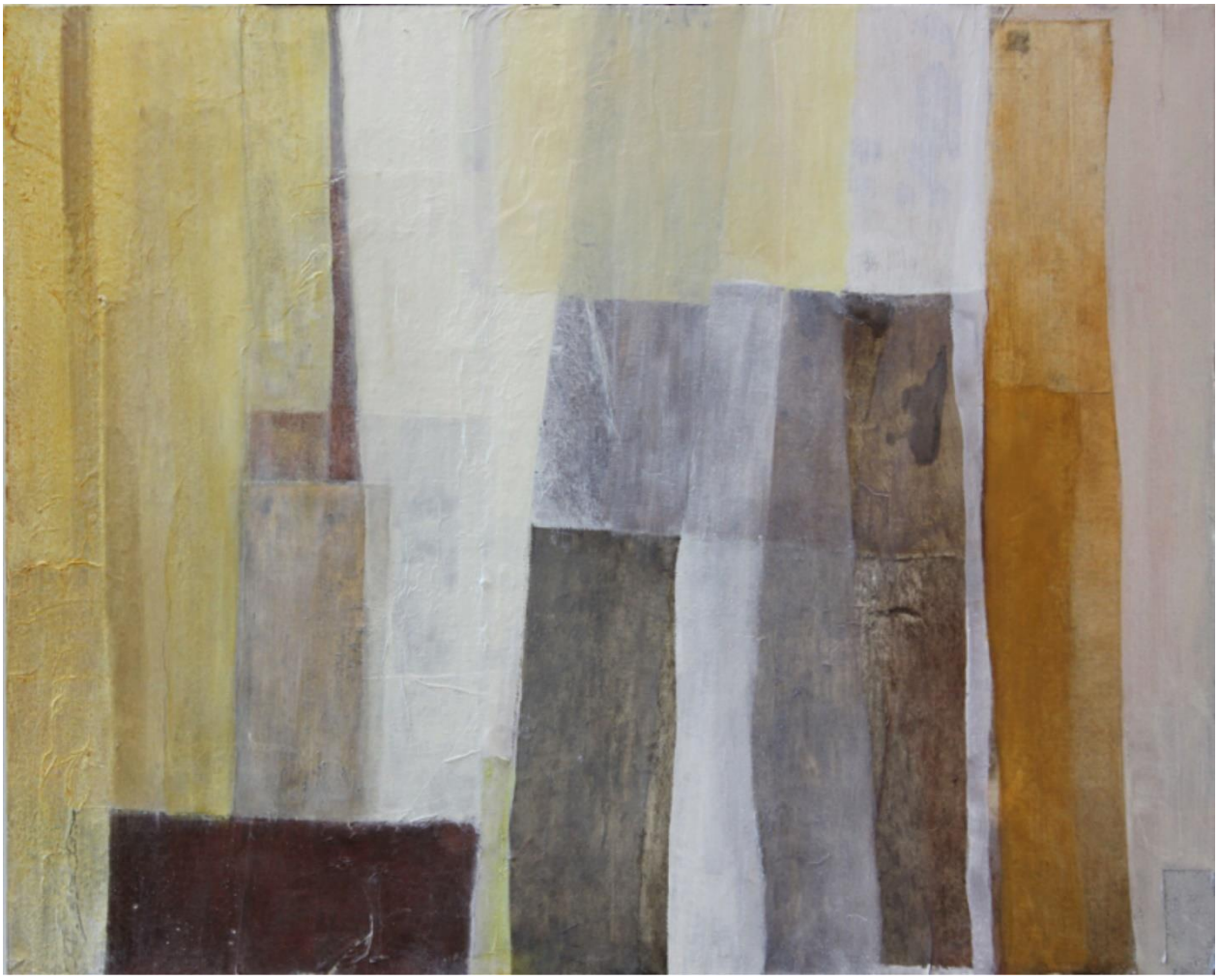
6. 35 x 44 CM

7. 35 x 44 см



8. 35 x 44 cm

9. 38 x 48 см



10. 35 x 44 см

11. 35 x 44 см

12. 124 x 124 см

13. 124 x 124 см

Discussion

The panels are heavy. They have a material presence – some are like fragments of walls (but all are hung). Their surfaces grew with moves that shifted between hunches to certainties. They were worked 'additively' and 'subtractively'- they were layered with ground crystal pigments, papers, cloths, glues, and oils so that their surfaces approximated to ambiguous space that is at once connected to the panel and at the same time floating. Experience varies with incident light.

The presence of material in the panels is far less evident than say Antoni Tàpies (for instance, *Forma Negra Sobre Quadrat Gris, Black Form on Grey Square,* 1960) or Anselm Kiefer (say, Nigredo-Morgenthau, 2012) for whom the alchemy of process determines more explicitly the experience of the work and its possible connection to personal or collective memory, myth even. Rather my own use of materials is subjugated to the containment of a layered, textured surface, retaining a spatiality of pictorial space.

They contrast to Sol Le Witt's wall drawings (Garrels, 2000) that tend to rely less on their material presence. Le Witt's work is invariably drawn large, at the scale of a wall in various media, from pencil, crayon, chalk, and ink to acrylic (Wall Drawing#1136, 2004). This graphic work illustrates how experience of the work/s that shifts between that of a sequence of interrelated drawings, to the overall experience of the whole drawing as part of the wall. On occasion the experience of the 'mural' is keyed to relationships dependent on distance and scale (Six Geometric Figures (+Two)(Wall Drawings), 1980-1), at others it is deliberately designed to evoke an experience of meandering eye, or walking across the room. These generic conditions of visual experience, proximity, and distance are beautifully illustrated by Richard Wright's *Untitled, 2009* whose luminous presence on the wall at a distance is no less authoritative than a close inspection of the intricate decorative order of its gilded surface.

This broad dialogue between matter and light, represented by Tàpies and Kiefer on the one hand and Sol de Witt and Wright on the other, frame the panels I present here. On the one hand the complex surface calls for a proximity of reading while at the same time the pigmented surfaces tend to float, as though immaterial. It is a balance that inflects as the light changes and as the viewer moves across the space: they are not designed to be viewed from the front.

The floating surfaces of the panels appear as hesitant, fractured by edges, and shifts of colour. There is no intended narrative, but they do stand for a larger range of experiences. The rawness of coloured cloth, layers of papers, charcoal lines and pigmented colours develop a spatial complexity generated by chance or intuition (as in un-formulated) rather than geometric abstraction. Is such work lacking all measure and rules - the so-called 'excesses of abstraction'? Perhaps the only rules lie in the rhythms of the body, materials, and slow time of crafting.

Conclusions

This work sets out to develop preparatory studies, or *Cartone*, for non-specific architectural settings. Unlike the tradition of Cartone, the panels are heavy, wooden, and layered in order to explore ideas of pictorial space.

The discussion outlines the traditional instruments used to create pictorial conceit in different histories. These omit to reference the history of mechanical drawings (Coelho, Branco, Moura, 2019) and the

artifice of simulating drawing experience as the work here is connected to a manual/analogue craft tradition.

The radically new notions of pictorial space that emerged with the minimalist lexicon – the non-perspectival (flattened) and the monochrome – not only give rise to the significance of the materiality of colour (for which Rothko remains a key source, see Weiss, 1986) but also to the notion of the *unseen*. The invisible, or space of the imagination is the final instrument in the tool kit of pictorial space.

Drawing on this context, the panels suggest, but do not determine, spatial relationships through shifts of tone, edge and light and at the same time they are 'open' to spatial and thematic interpretation: their 'reading' is caught in the space between the work and the subjective viewer.

They reveal that the use of colour in space is more complex than it might first appear. It is a field that has been dominated by taste and fashion on the one hand, and by colour science on the other. As a consequence, we overlook colour's subtle interrelationships with its environments and its inhabitants, assuming that colour values are somehow fixed, absolute.

Ultimately this exercise explores the development of architectural drawing and the spatial experience of colours, the creation of real and fictive boundaries of space. We have explored colour phenomena through drawing and pigmented surfaces, with an approach that is aligned with the philosophies of colour that take a *relational*, or *ecological* view, one that challenges the separation of the abstract qualities of colours from the perceiver, and the spatial circumstances of viewing.

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