

**Strange connections: An investigation  
into the combining of recognisable and  
disparate imagery in a contemporary  
painting practice.**

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## Abstract

This research project investigates how the practice of joining familiar and disparate imagery together can create new contexts of meaning and effect in a contemporary painting practice. In the era of Modernism, artists sought to reconfigure established art conventions, birthing many artistic discoveries through the emergence of different avant-garde movements. The artworks produced were radically new for their time, challenging modes of representation, methods of making art and the very constitution of art itself. The Surrealists discovered the potential of combining the unfamiliar in creating new realities. They harnessed the creative potential of the sub conscious mind through employing methods that relied on the roles of chance, intuition and surprise in the art-making process. My research explores the visual interaction of disparate elements within a methodology that utilises both chance and reason in the creative process.

The nature of combination can yield infinite possibilities, and therefore combining imagery for the purpose of seeking out original meanings, effects and aesthetic properties required a continuous interrogation of the image to take place. Negotiating a balance between strangeness and familiarity in imagery led me to draw on aesthetic theories based on beauty, repulsion and the strange. Defining preferences for formal painting qualities arose through applying this theoretical knowledge in conjunction with the practical knowledge gained through the experience and materiality of painting.

The integration of planning, chance, playfulness and problem solving in the making process broadened my understanding of how art can be made effectively. With a synthesis of formal and conceptual qualities, my work became more effective and engaging. This has led to a greater understanding of practice related research.

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# Introduction

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## Overview of Document

This document is a comprehensive text that chronicles the unfolding of my Masters Project. Images of my paintings and the works of other artists are included in the text to provide visual references to my discussion. The introductory section touches on my art background prior to undertaking the Masters Project, highlighting how the Research Question and Aim of the project emerged. Section One articulates the first phase of the project, where initial explorations were undertaken and theories discovered. Section Two expands on these initial discoveries, describing the clarifying of my ideas and sensibilities as I sought to develop solutions in my practice. Section Three describes my final body of work, the visual culmination of my project. Section Four highlights the wider understandings around the practice of painting that I gained through this research. The summary section concludes my ideas and research findings.

## Background



Figure 1. *Inflection*, Rosanne Croucher (2010). 200 x 150 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 2. *Crawl*, Rosanne Croucher (2010). 170 x 135 cm, oil on canvas.

An interest in painting from multiple photographic images arose during my high school years, where several art class projects demanded the stitching together of different images into collage-like paintings. In a subsequent project I adopted this method of my own accord, producing landscape paintings from several image sources each to create a more ideal sense of place.

In my recent undergraduate studies I continued making landscape paintings comprised of more than one image, mainly with the aim of including a variety of desired content. Although parts of the works were abstracted, I predominantly considered myself a representational painter. The photographic images I used were of real places, plants and trees. A desire to paint from reality unfolded as a result of a love of observation and the desire to express this through painting.

I experience enjoyment when I can look at an object or image and paint its likeness. In the words of David Hockney, “I’ve always had intense pleasure from looking” (Gayford 85), and painting what is seen provides expression to continue the practice of looking. Capturing the light, colours and form of an object as I can see it is satisfying, as is the way paint is applied to achieve these effects. Due to these reasons, painting from photographs has been a

fundamental part of my painting practice to date, a defining feature that I have quite naturally included and articulated in my research question.

My undergraduate degree culminated in a series of paintings that focused explicitly on placing undomesticated animals into modern home interiors. These works were the first to deliberately convey a combining of disparate imagery. This new presence of contradiction significantly broadened the possibilities of making and interpreting the work. At my graduation show I began to see the potential effects of putting together what would normally be kept apart; viewers had a variety of responses such as surprise, delight and disgust. The new emergence of this notion of disparity provided the drive for further investigation, which led to embarking on a Masters project.



Figure 3. *Triumph of the Domestic*, Rosanne Croucher (2011). 100 x 80 cm, oil on board.



Figure 4. *Collecting Yellow*, Rosanne Croucher (2011). 60 x 46 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 5. *The Last Survivors*, Rosanne Croucher (2011). 130 x 100 cm, oil on canvas.

## Research Question and Aim

I initially approached my research question as a continuation of what I had already explored, focusing on combining the established content of landscape and interior. I soon broadened the focus to accommodate for wider exploration of process and content.

My intention for combining was to create something fundamentally ‘new’, in terms of the visual, psychological and theoretical associations that would arise. Art critic Boris Groys advocates the validity of this approach-

“In our time, the context is seen as changing and unstable. So the strategy of contemporary art consists in creating a specific context that can make a certain form or thing look other, new and interesting— even if this form has already been collected. Traditional art worked on the level of form. Contemporary art works on the level of context, framework, background, or of a new theoretical interpretation. But the goal is the same: to create a contrast between form and historical background, to make the form look other and new.” (47)

**Research Question-** how can recognizable and disparate imagery be combined in order to create new contexts of meaning and effect in a contemporary painting practice?

**Aim-** this research aims to investigate how the combining of recognizable and disparate imagery can create new visual contexts and can develop new working processes, content, meaning and effect within a contemporary painting practice. This includes discovering subject matter, imagery, and different strategies for combining imagery that are appropriate to my ideas.

## SECTION ONE: First Endeavours

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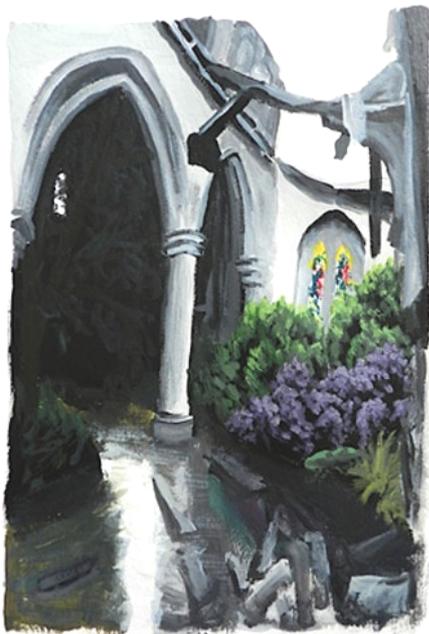


Figure 6. *Painted Drawing*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).



Figure 7. *Painted Drawing*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).

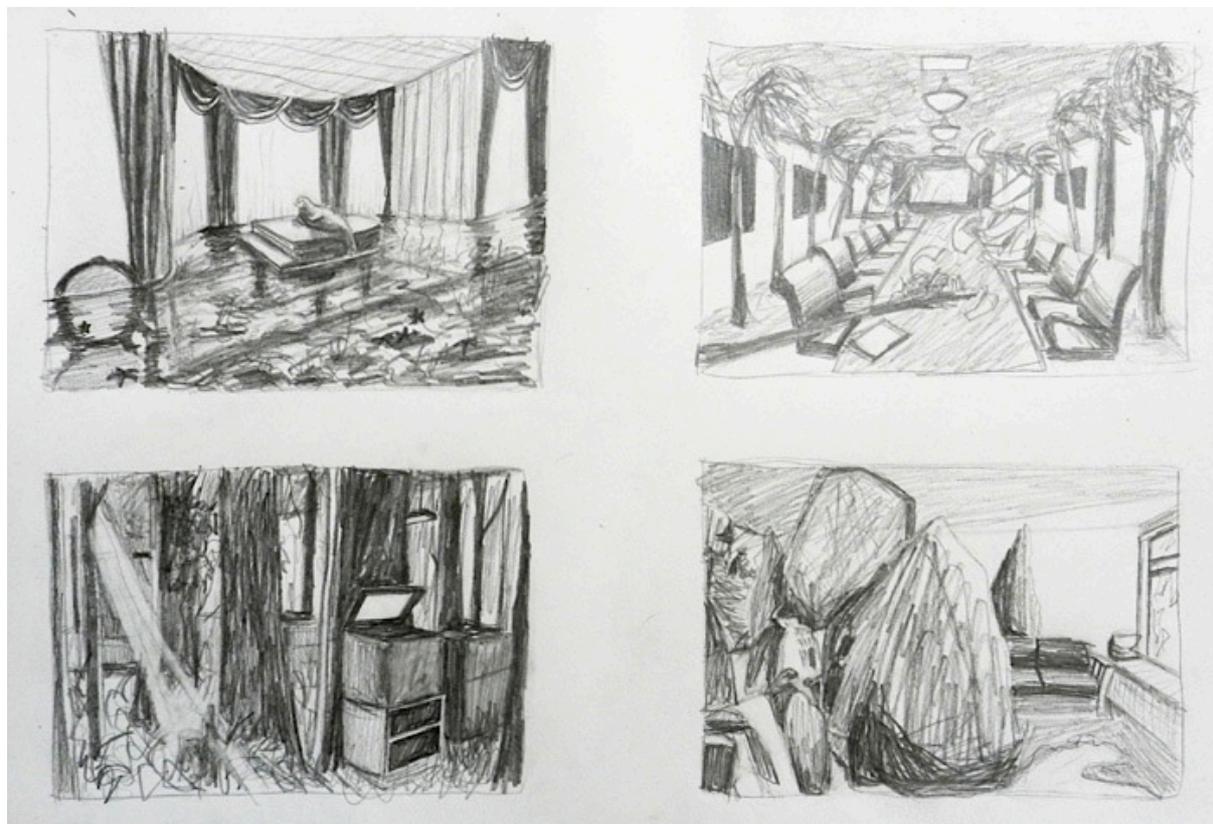


Figure 8. *Pencil Drawings*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).

## Preliminary Explorations

I made preliminary explorations through image collection and drawing based processes. Still focusing on landscape and interior content, I gathered a variety of photographic images. Many of these were still of modern home interiors, although I branched out a little into other spaces such as ruins, offices and churches. The origin of these images tended to dictate my drawing methods to some extent. Images from magazines are effectively ready-made pages, so I would paint landscape or animal imagery directly on them. I also made more traditional drawings by combining imagery from digital photos with landscape imagery on separate paper in pencil sketches or painted drawings. Both of these processes enabled me to quickly put together two images in order to generate ideas.

## Overview of Intuition and Reason

Reflecting on these initial drawings enabled me to discern what made some drawings more useful than others. The key determinants of success arose from utilising two different areas of thought- the sub conscious (intuition and chance) and the conscious (reason, analysis and reflection). The sub conscious was best used at the initial stage of my making process, where an immediate response took place on my part to a form or area of space in the original interior image. This means that when I act on my first thought of what other image to add in and where to put it, the combination is more likely to be immediately effective. For instance, when looking at an original image of a desk and shelving, my first instinct was to fill the shelves with rocks. If I began considering other options of what I could put in the shelves instead of acting on my subconscious impulse, the drawing may have appeared more contrived.



Figure 9. *Painted Magazine Drawing*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).

Conscious thought processes come into play if I ended up with image combinations that were not as immediately successful. In this drawing (giraffe), I intuitively connected the giraffe to a kitchen, but was not convinced of my first attempt at my placement of the giraffe. This meant I had to shift the giraffe around in the interior space until I settled on a spot for it in the drawing.



Figure 10. *Pencil Drawing*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).

Effective use of subconscious thought is best evidenced when two separate images instantly seem to belong together. It relies on the chance that I have access to the right images and will *act* on joining them, which only happens some of the time. Conscious thought is useful for all the images that don't fit together immediately and require the considered shuffling through of images to find the best possible fit, and then altering this as needed in the subsequent drawing or painting. Both approaches inform each other and are often used in conjunction in my practice.

## Context of Surrealism

The Surrealists explored the power of joining disparate images together, with the purpose of bringing about new meanings and visual dynamics. This avant-garde art movement arose in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in response to the political and social art climate of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Art at this time was controlled and shown by the bourgeoisie, distinct from the everyday existence of the lower class (Hopkins 16). Dada, now described as an art movement, at the time sought to wage war on this pretentiousness that pervaded the arts, and break away from traditional artistic conventions by professing an 'anti-art' philosophy. By 1922, Andre Breton signalled the end of Dada by claiming its hypocritical nature, so he could usher in a new set

of priorities for the avant-garde. Surrealism was born, its goals and values characterised by Andre Breton in his 1924 manifesto (Hopkins 16, 17).

Surrealism sought to dispute the prevailing separation between art and the mundane aspects of everyday life. The redefined role of the artist was “to move beyond aesthetic pleasure and to affect people’s lives; to make them see and experience things differently.” (Hopkins 3). Art historian David Hopkins points out the culmination of these aims and processes-

“Breton’s aesthetics, which were rooted in Hegelian dialectics, returned constantly to the notion of the new reality produced when two incompatible images collide. The much quoted exemplification of this for the Surrealists was Lautréamont’s extended simile ‘Beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella.’” (20)



Figure 11. Plate from *Une Semaine de Bonté: A Surrealistic Novel in Collage*, Max Ernst (1934).

There was an emphasis on artistic innovation and the ‘new’, which was sought out by harnessing the subconscious mind through the practice of automatism, prioritising the role of chance, and the removal of rational thought during the creative process. These strategies “reveal the everyday and familiar as marvellously unknown” (Allmer 13). Surrealism often relied on the combination of what was familiar and what was disparate in order to produce new realities. For this reason Surrealism contributed to a large portion of the theoretical context for my project.

Three reputable Surrealist artists whose works have been influential in my project are Max Ernst, Rene Magritte and Meret Oppenheim. Max Ernst pioneered some notable

explorations in Surrealism, the most pertinent to me being his collage novels. He constructed these by reconfiguring existing catalogue illustrations, introducing new forms seamlessly to create a bizarre conglomeration of unlike images. Breton described them as having a “marvellous ability to reach out, without leaving the field of our experience, to two distant realities and bring them together to create a spark” (Ades 21).

Similarly, the paintings of René Magritte bring together objects and concepts in surprising ways. His concern was to reveal those secret aspects and deeper truths of life that are masked by what is visible on the surface (Paquet, Magritte and Claridge 55). He worked predominantly with recognisable images; focusing on the ways their synthesis could bring about the ironic and shocking.

Meret Oppenheim’s oeuvre of work sought, through union, to highlight the contradiction of nature and culture

(Oppenheim, Levy and Gardner 12). I focused solely on her most celebrated object *Breakfast in Fur*, a fur lined teacup, saucer and spoon. The conception of this object was brought about through a chance conversation, leading to an immediate idea of joining fur and a teacup together. This object, through its simple combination of two unlike elements, sparked an array of meanings and effects drawn from the association of each element and their interaction. This became particularly relevant in bringing about ideas and processes that lead to a resolution in my project.

Before embarking on this project, I admittedly disliked the majority of Surrealist artworks. I find it confusing and somewhat terrifying when reality is twisted into foreign and metamorphosing forms, bodies and beings, evident in a number of Surrealist works. I cannot form a desired familiar connection with these images, where the “fusion of opposites produces monstrosity rather than reconciliation” (Hopkins 111-112). In fact, psychological



Figure 12. *The Lovers*, René Magritte (1928). 54.2 x 73 cm, oil on canvas.

studies have suggested that positive associations are eliminated when strangeness exceeds a comfortable distance from the familiar, resulting in aggression or rejection towards the object in question (Grabes 135-136). For this reason my theoretical and practice based concerns with Surrealism have focused on artists and processes that uphold a recognisability with the familiar, and is the reason that artists like Ernst, Magritte and Oppenheim influenced me.

## Image Gathering

Enabling the incidence of chance meant that I needed to facilitate my own effective responses to images. Therefore, collecting images became the first stage in my making process. Image gathering requires making decisions about what to search for and what to keep. The almost infinite scope of imagery available demanded that I set restrictions in place to make my task more manageable. I wanted to stick with landscape and interior themes, but introduce the figure as a third element, in order to open up more possibilities for the beginning of the project. This scope defined the limits of my subject matter for a large portion of my Masters project. Adhering to this set three-way content was a way of dealing with initial issues of subject matter, allowing me to focus on how I would make work, and the development of technical skill and formal aesthetic qualities. For this reason I had no concrete restriction on what types of interiors, landscapes and figures to collect, instead leaving it up to my own intuitive preferences and allowing the making process to guide me.

My image collection already consisted of a variety of interiors. I responded best to interiors that were spatially interesting, containing aspects like different levels/stairs and the jutting out of forms along with a receding of space. I gravitated towards National Geographic magazine to gain my landscape and figurative imagery. Landscapes found in here were beautiful and varied, and supplemented my own photographs of New Zealand landscapes. I especially found this magazine to be a valuable source for figurative images. Its documentary style yielded figures that were often in the middle of doing something. This appealed to me over the more commercial, posed images of people that I found in other magazines and photographs.

## Context of Collage

Collage has been an integral part of my process for developing concepts. I utilised it as a drawing method to produce painting ideas. However it is a genre of art in itself, not simply a means to an end. The term collage is derived from the French word *coller*, which means ‘to glue’. As an art form it has been around for centuries, yet did not become influential as a genre until the Modernist era (Craig 7). Collage was later employed by the Surrealists and was an ideal method for facilitating the merging of unexpected elements. Max Ernst in particular experimented extensively with it. He coined this well known definition that so aptly describes collage,

“Collage is the systematic exploitation of the coincidental and artificially induced encounter of two or more unrelated realities on an apparently inappropriate plane- and the spark of poetry that leaps across the gaps between them.” (Klanten, Hellige and Gallagher 6).

Collage can be considered as an inclusive art form, as anyone can understand how one is made and is qualified to make one. Yet in order to make a successful collage, the artist must anticipate a reaction to imagery and manipulate the connections and interaction each element has with another and with the viewer (Craig 19). Max Ernst was able to master collage in this way because he “knew how to set limits on the infinite number of possibilities offered by existing materials and forms” (Ernst, Spies and Von Maur 19). He made conscious choices to restrict how he made collages and what they looked like, so that chance could play a large role in determining the image without undermining the consistency of his body of work.

## Collage in Practice

Physically cutting and pasting images together brought an entirely different dynamic to my practice. When drawing or painting images together, I could change colours and light, and blend the joins of the different forms together. Collaging confronted me with the hard edges of where one form began and another ended. I had to learn the value of cutting into whole images without regretting what I was discarding and what I was using. Areas that I wanted to

look three-dimensional would sometimes appear flat, and the finished collage was not always a neat rectangle that could easily be translated into painting. Although these challenges needed to be worked through, collage was an enjoyable and quick method of juxtaposition that widened the methodology and conceptual possibilities of my work.



Figure 9. *Collage*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).



Figure 10. *Collage*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).



Figure 11. *Collage*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).

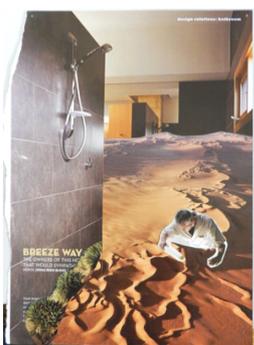


Figure 12. *Collage*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).



Figure 13. *Collage*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).



Figure 14. *Collage*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).

## Transitioning from Collage to Paint

Translating collages into my first paintings was a revealing activity. My previous attitude to painting from photographs was to imitate closely, editing out parts that weren't necessary. The collages were already satisfactory to me in their compositions, but it was the description of the different forms and their relationship to one another that challenged me in the painting stage. I discovered a dislike for the sharp edges and disjunctions in the collages, yet wanted to paint from the image as closely as possible like I was used to. This resulted in rendering some parts of the painting in highly photographic detail, while other areas consisted of washy paint, describing forms more simply and blending their edges together.



Figure 15. *The Marsh*, Rosanne Croucher (2012). 90 x 60 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 16. *The Mountain*, Rosanne Croucher (2012). 46 x 60 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 17. *The Watchman*, Rosanne Croucher (2012). 50 x 40 cm, oil on canvas.

I wanted to diminish the appearance of the collage edges. Author Blanche Craig describes this erasure of the edge as a form of camouflage, acting as an illusion through concealment of



Figure 22. Plate from *Une Semaine de Bonté: A Surrealistic Novel in Collage*, Max Ernst (1934).

that which signifies the presence of an illusion. Forms are bound to one another, caught between the tension of their own nature and their transformation into something other (41). The collages of Max Ernst provided significant inspiration in regards to this strategy of arrangement. His joins had to be concealed, so that the origin of each distinct element was obscured in the final image. His collages sought coherence and technical credibility (Ernst, Spies and Von Maur 20).

I grasped for a semblance of this coherence in my paintings. In Figure 17 I automatically flipped the man horizontally while painting him, so the sunlight on his jacket logically came from the window to the left, not from the rock on the right. Consistency of logic and its aesthetic qualities was important- I wanted the depiction of an 'other' world to play by the visual rules of reality.



Figure 23. *Collage*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).



Figure 24. *Collage*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).

Another strategy that I developed came about through making further collages and paintings. The figures began to interact with the interiors and landscapes, not merely floating in them but forming integral connections with them as both surroundings and objects. It seems that I was automatically trying to create a sense of unity, bringing these disparate elements into a form of reconciliation on the canvas.



Figure 25. *Bending*, Rosanne Croucher (2012). 50 x 50 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 26. *The Burden*, Rosanne Croucher (2012). 60 x 50 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 27. *The Trespass*, Rosanne Croucher (2012). 100 x 70 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 28. *You Found Me*, Rosanne Croucher (2012). 130 x 100 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 29. *Photoshop Collage*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).



Figure 30. *Photoshop Collage*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).

A foray into digital collage enabled exploration of a more integrative method. Images could easily be flipped and resized, and edges softened. Figures 27 and 28 were produced from digital collages of interior and landscape, with figures pasted on top after printing. Distorting the scale of the figures in relation to their environments interested me, and proved more effective when using magazine pictures as the scale of the figures was already physically determined.



Figure 31. *Ariane*, Valentine Penrose (1934-42).

The way in which I gathered natural, documentary style figures and wanted them to interact with their environment resembles a particular aspect of some Surrealist collages I admire. This trait is present when the figures in the collage seem unaffected by whatever bizarre situation is unfolding or creature is present. Art

historian Patricia Allmer describes the women in Valentine Penrose's collage *Ariane*,

“Their lack of concern is bewitching, because frustratingly inexplicable: the surreal effect inheres in *our* perception of a danger to which *they* seem indifferent, and this discrepancy is what irritates our rational mind.” (41).

Because the figures in the collage are reacting differently to how we might if we were in the same situation, our reaction to the collage as a whole becomes more intriguing- we are repelled by its strangeness and danger, yet drawn in by the ease with which the figures reside there.



Figure 32. *Collage Drawing*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).



Figure 33. *Collage Drawing*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).



Figure 34. *Collage Drawing*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).



Figure 35. *Collage Drawing*, Rosanne Croucher (2012).

## SECTION TWO: Searching for clarity

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### Understanding the Unknown

Involvement in the practice of intuition and chance at the genesis of the making process caused some unforeseen effects. It was easy to spot preferred patterns in the technical aspects of my paintings, such as the aforementioned tendencies to attempt minimisation of the edge and the coherence of light and space. However the conceptual meaning of the paintings remained unknown to me- I had no conscious understanding of what I wanted to communicate and why. Literal or theoretical associations were often prescribed from the outset in past artworks. In these new paintings I felt like I was tapping into a more genuine and personal expression of something that went beyond articulation. A detachment from known meaning brought about a deeper attachment to the work.

Although I enjoyed the instinctive responses that collage yielded, it was once again the translation from collage into painted form that allowed some issues to surface.

The majority of the collage stage required the practise of intuition, chance, and the diminution of conscious thought. Painting from the collages required a visual advancement and refinement of the collage image to take place, otherwise the painting would be a direct imitation of the collage, and its relevance would be rendered void against the original collage piece. Intuition could be heavily relied on in my collages, but paintings needed to be made using both intuition and analytical decision-making. I began to have difficulty solving unsuccessful areas in the drawings and paintings, because I was unaware of what exactly I wanted to communicate and therefore which aspects of the work I should emphasise or diminish. It became apparent that I needed to find and apply a framework of reading or interpreting my paintings in order for critical thought to be directed during the painting process.



Figure 36. *Four in the Fire*, Rosanne Croucher (2012). 90 x 60 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 37. *Intangible Pursuit*, Rosanne Croucher (2012). 150 x 120 cm, oil on canvas.

## Aesthetic of the Strange

Immanuel Kant, a philosopher in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, proposed an aesthetic theory that remains influential to this day. He endorsed a dichotomy of aesthetic experiences consisting of the beautiful and the sublime. According to Kant, the beautiful is represented as the item of universal delight and pleasure, independent of one's interest in or knowledge of the object in question (Kant, Walker and Meredith 42, 51). Beauty is characterised by form and a *direct* sense of enjoyment, and is “compatible with charms and a playful imagination” (Kant, Walker and Meredith 75). The sublime, on the other hand, provokes a representation of limitlessness, and can be devoid of form. It is the confrontation with incomprehensible vastness, terror or power that causes the mind to abandon sensibility and fix itself upon ideas of a higher purpose. It *indirectly* brings about pleasure in the form of admiration or respect, after the initial shock and inconceivability is overcome (Kant, Walker and Meredith 76).

Professor Herbert Grabes claims that art since the dawn of Modernism no longer fits into either of these two aesthetic categories. The avant-garde art that emerged from this time was characterised by the term “the shock of the new”, because it broke away from established conventions, aiming for an effect of strangeness and alienation (20). These works can no longer be classed as beautiful because of the initial alienation they cause, however they can still indirectly cause pleasure through the broadening of the viewer's mind when the initial reaction is successfully overcome (Grabes 3). They also cannot be classed as sublime, because although these works shock through their strangeness in varying degrees, they are incapable for the most part of causing the kind of life-threatening shock that would be present in an encounter with the sublime (Grabes 8).

Therefore a ‘third’ aesthetic was proposed- the aesthetic of the strange. This allows for visual arts to be situated somewhere between the gulf of the beautiful and the sublime, ranging from the merely unsettling to the uncanny (Grabes 11). Due to the abundance of experimentation that occurred throughout Modernism and Postmodernism in discovering the radically strange, possibilities for a truly ‘new’ effect have been mostly exhausted, so contemporary art tends to take on a more subtle form of strangeness through varying what has already been done before (Grabes 103).

The effect of this subtle form of strangeness in contemporary art lies in the interaction of the viewer with the artwork. When confronted with a sense of initial alienation, the viewer can overcome the challenge to their coping abilities and attempt to understand and appreciate the work despite its strangeness, an exercise which could enable the viewer to experience their deepest self (Grabes 130-131). When a viewer participates in responding to an artwork in this way the result is the pleasure and satisfaction in being able to use ones own cognitive resources to draw meaningful connections and understandings from the work (Grabes 141). Throughout my project, I have aimed to create paintings that are open ended, avoiding direct narratives that result in fixed meanings. Over-thinking through what elements could be combined in a meaningful way caused the abandonment of several drawings and collages. In contrast, when first responding intuitively to an existing image and initially suppressing a rational application of meaning, the potential for surprising myself and others became greater.

## Simplifying the Scene

Strangeness in a painting can take on a variety of forms and be present in varying degrees.

When combining the three elements of figure, interior and landscape in a collage, it is possible to produce many different aspects of strangeness. Both the synthesis of the elements and their individual properties can contribute to this. Mark Tansey lists Magritte's eight strategies of activating a picture through the crisis of the object. These are "isolation, modification, hybridisation, scale change, accidental encounters, double-image puns, paradox, [and] double viewpoints in one" (Tansey 265). I began to see that my paintings sometimes contained several of these methods in one canvas, and that perhaps the activation of a painting would be more effective if one method was dominant.

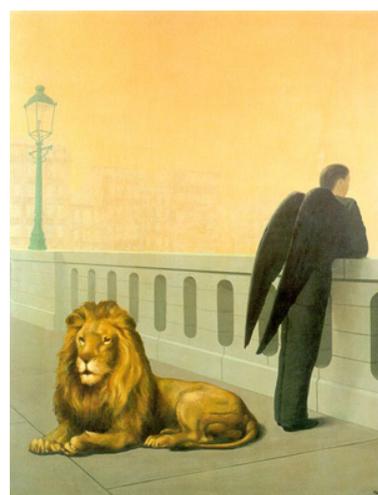


Figure 38. *Homesickness*, René Magritte (1940). 102 x 81 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 39. *The Doorway*, Rosanne Croucher (2012). 120 x 90 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 40. *Higher than I*, Rosanne Croucher (2012). 100 x 70 cm, oil on canvas.

Figure 40 depicts the obvious accidental encounter of interior, landscape and figure, and additionally includes scale discrepancies between the boy and the room, and the paradox of weighty rocks sitting on top of a light, fluffy duvet. As the transition from collage to painting in my practice became smoother, the application and materiality of the paint suggested the presence of a further method of activation. Close observation of the photographic images of the rocks used in these paintings brought to my attention the intrinsic strangeness of their textures. Painting the detail of these rocks in one layer of wet, softly blended oil paint allowed me to highlight and accentuate this quality, bringing forth a subtle ambiguity of form.

When viewing the rocks, visual associations can be made to other forms and textures, for instance faces, skin, and bones. In this way, the painted rock became a viable agent of strange combination on its own. The other, aforementioned methods of activation became distracting, cluttering the canvas with unnecessary multiple visual and narrative implications.



Figure 41. *Opposite Day*, Tilo Baumgärtel (2012). 30 x 40 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 42. *Brod*, Tilo Baumgärtel (2012). 190 x 240 cm, oil on canvas.

Too many constituents in a work can give of the impression of trying too hard, of making the ‘tricks’ too obvious. As Patricia Allmer says, “A more convincing strategy would have been to simplify the scene, leaving room for the unspoken.” (41).

Reflecting on the works of other artists at this time enabled me to hone in on what I found to be the most successfully strange. Tilo Baumgärtel is a contemporary artist that I admire for his dream-like paintings of places and events. I began to notice a pattern in some of his works, whereby strange figures were often depicted in normal surroundings, and normal figures in stranger surroundings. The balance of strange and familiar is one of the aspects that make these works successful.

Max Ernst sought to make collages that were plausible. Although the physical joins of his collages were concealed, he also disguised the mental joins, for “the hinges linking one piece of source material with another had to remain invisible, which also explains why leaps in scale tended to be avoided.” (Ernst, Spies and Von Maur 20). These conditions removed emphasis from the origins and meanings of the separate images, bringing a greater coherence to the new image made from them. Ernst’s collages are effective because they adhere to a set of strict limitations, which decrease the likelihood of cluttering and bring lucidity to the strange aspect of the works.

I came to the conclusion that in order to move forward, I needed to pursue a greater sense of clarity and subtlety by focusing on one element of strangeness. At this point I abandoned my set content scope of figure, landscape and interior, and decided to pursue the strangeness of texture present in landscape forms.



Figure 43. *The Flock*, Rosanne Croucher (2012). 100 x 130 cm, oil on canvas.

## Superimposing Texture



Figure 44. *Collage*, Rosanne Croucher (2013).



Figure 45. *Collage*, Rosanne Croucher (2013).



Figure 46. *Collage*, Rosanne Croucher (2013).



Figure 47. *Sweet Tooth*, Rosanne Croucher (2013). 50 x 60 cm, oil on canvas.

I began collaging again, now using images of interesting textures as the dominant focus- tree roots, shells, rocks, bread, and flowers, initially combining each of these images with either an interior or a figure. I was still holding on to the familiarity of content and juxtapositions in collage however, not fully embracing the advantages of exploring this narrowed focus on texture.

Figure 49 was the first painting in my project that I made from one single photographic image. I indulged purely in painting a strange, ambiguous texture, without needing to combine anything. It was through this brief departure from my project aims that a shift began to take place. The painting mainly looks like the tree roots from its photographic origin, but there are suggestions of other forms and textures- skin, scales, faces and arms. In reflecting on this and how I might advance into the practise of combining again, a new idea began emerging. I started to mull over the possibilities of a method of combining whereby a texture was placed on top of the original texture of a form. In this way I could develop beyond a side-by-side juxtaposition method and begin combining by superimposing one image on top of another.

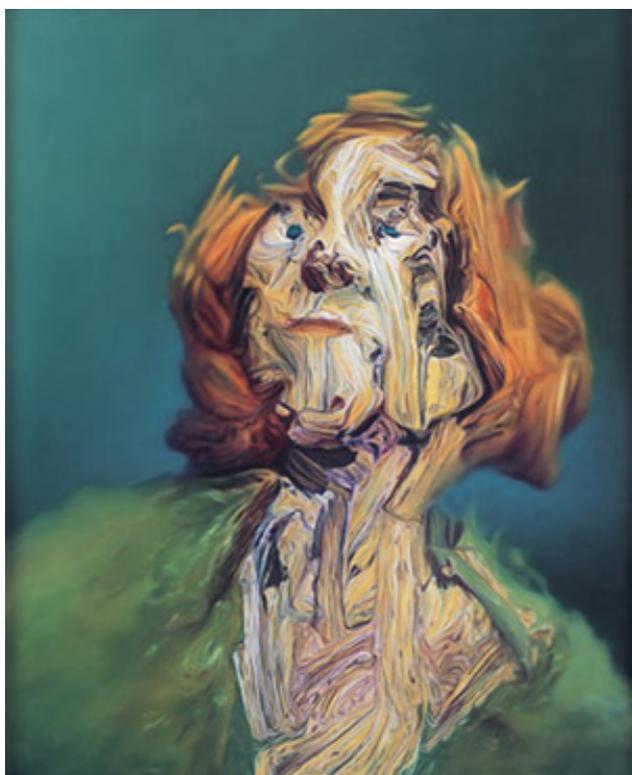


Figure 48. *The Real Thing*, Glenn Brown (2000). 81.3 x 66 cm, oil on panel.

Looking at the paintings of Glenn Brown was helpful in seeing how representing something with a different texture to its normal one could play out. The majority of his practice is based around the combination of figure/portrait and the depiction of a textural paint surface. The figure is still recognisable as an individual figure- evident when Brown uses the same models in multiple paintings. However the new texture alters the shape of the figure, its density in space and its colour. Both elements are capable of simultaneously retaining and losing their individual properties when combined.



Figure 49. *Skins*, Rosanne Croucher (2013). 120 x 90 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 50. *Vestibule*, Rosanne Croucher (2013). 120 x 90 cm, oil on canvas.

I began the painting in Figure 50 with this notion of depicting the form and composition of one image, but giving it the texture of something else. An image of tree roots became an ambiguous bodily place when painted with a slimy texture and fleshy colours. Although this painting was a step in the right direction, it didn't quite yield the results I was after. I found it too alienating and unfamiliar, because the base photo I had used was a reasonably ambiguous close up of tree roots. This resulted in the paintings refusal to appear like it had one texture on top of another, as it wasn't recognisable what the image was of in the first place.

## The Uncanny

The uncanny is a form of strangeness that relies on the presence of familiarity. Studies into the German word for uncanny '*unheimlich*' (unhomely) show that its common definition is the unagreeable and unfamiliar. Nevertheless the uncanny can also be defined as a feeling of uncertainty that can arise when a sense of the new or foreign is paired with the physicality of the familiar (Jentsch 4). Sigmund Freud in his acclaimed essay on the uncanny examines this second definition, claiming that everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light is *unheimlich*- it is something familiar the mind has repressed (Freud, Part II). This correlates with the Surrealist belief in using the subconscious mind to make artwork, creating images that bring to light the deeper truths of reality.

Andre Breton was influenced by Freud's concepts of the uncanny, and became convinced that to authentically experience beauty, one must experience surprise or anxiety in conjunction with it (Devonport 2).

## Balancing the Strange and Familiar

Through studying the Surrealist works I preferred the most and considering the theory of the uncanny, I found that my works could be more effective when most of the image is familiar and only one thing has been added or replaced to subvert reality. The recognisability of a work is just as important as its disparity- the two must find an ideal balance.

Meret Oppenheim's fur cup sparked inspiration during this time. Her simple combination of fur on top of a familiar teacup and saucer was capable of producing multiple effects. Both the fur and the teacup are familiar, and both carry their own individual meanings and associations. When combined, both elements are still recognisable, but it is their interaction that is strange, opening up a host of meanings unique to their combination.



Figure 51. *Breakfast in Fur*, Meret Oppenheim (1936). Fur covered cup, saucer, and spoon.

I knew I needed to bring back the familiarity of my previous works, choosing a type of imagery that was easily recognisable and adaptable to combination with other textures. I chose landscape over interior, initially because I am more familiar with painting landscapes. In addition, landscape painting plays a significant role in art history and especially New Zealand art; landscape paintings are familiar territory to most of us. Landscapes generally have a scale framework from which we can understand what is near or far in the painting, and what is large and small. We are also familiar with the components a landscape might contain such as land, water and sky. This makes landscape an ideal genre for modifying without losing its recognisability.

I began three paintings where landscape imagery would be combined with different textures- one with hair, one with lace and one with emeralds. Hair proved to be an easy and successful fit, and the other two paintings, which were more problematic in their combination, were never finished in light of the hair painting's success.

## SECTION THREE: Towards a Resolution

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### Process and Formal Qualities

Hair is such an appropriate fit with landscape- it is organic and soft, just like grass and foliage. Perhaps it is these tactile and visual similarities that make the combination of hair with landscape in painting truly unusual, as they both have different origins and contexts. By combining a landscape with hair, the space and light within the image is already coherent- a quality I was constantly striving for when painting juxtaposed imagery. Individual forms are altered but it becomes much easier to keep the consistency of light and space present in the original composition. Art historian Joseph Koerner asserts that “landscape’s task is to establish continuities between bodies, to harness the manifold into a unified whole.” (117-118). The way a landscape painting is structured to recede from foreground to background, and its typical application of the sun as the singular light source serve to unite all elements across the canvas if treated appropriately.



Figure 52. *Paper*, Hong Chun Zhang (2008). 30 x 40 inches, oil on canvas.

An artist who represents hair in Surrealistic ways is Hong Chun Zhang. Her series of “hairy objects” drawings and paintings gave me insight into the ways hair can be rendered as separate from a person’s head. She substitutes hair for toilet paper or the wire from a plug, retaining the integrity of the original object while simultaneously rendering the hair beautifully. Through looking at Zhang’s representations of hair, and the act of painting hair myself, I discovered how easily and effectively hair takes on the form or space of whatever landscape element I am replacing it with. Hair is a single line, yet can come together to make a voluminous mass.

It can be bent, twisted, plaited, styled and curled. This makes it incredibly versatile for replacing any form with, while still retaining the original form's basic shape and position in the composition.

A marker of success in my first hair painting (Figure 53) was that the main body of hair wasn't trying to be anything other than hair. It replaced the form of a tree but didn't need to take on any visual qualities of the tree; it just had to occupy its space. In my subsequent paintings I retained this idea, ensuring that the hair preserves its authenticity and imbuing it with a sense of movement and life that permits extension past the defined shape of the object it replaces.

This quality of movement was something I deliberately explored in several works. Hair is light, and can easily blow around in the wind or bounce and flip as a result of the body's motion. Hair is also in a constant state of growth. It is slowly moving all the time, in increments too small to notice, except by the passing of time. As the common saying goes, hair can "have a mind of its own" in the way it moves and appears, and this can be explored freely in my work due to the absence of a head dictating where the hair is coming from and where it's going.

A further aspect about painting hair that I've realised through practice is its relationship to the paintbrush. The paintbrush is made out of hair, and so the hair I paint is an extension of the paintbrush in a way. Different sizes and shapes of brushes can be used to paint hair in varying ways, naturally replicating their form through paint on the canvas. As evident in my earlier paintings in this project, I typically concealed my brushstrokes in favour of elevating the photorealistic representation of a form. Making the connection between paintbrush and hair has provided an avenue to paint hair both realistically and more gesturally. Although I still need to use photo references, I am also able to paint parts of the hair on the canvas convincingly without needing to refer to specific pictures. Hair is relatively consistent in terms of the way light falls on it, and it can be made up of many colours and go in any direction. This means I can supplement my images by painting from memory when necessary, which brings more freedom to my painting approach.

The formal relationship between hair and landscape was an area that I needed to purposefully focus on developing. My first two paintings described the majority of forms in the image as hair-like, while depicting sky and ground more naturalistically. There was no decisive reason for me doing so, other than to provide visual breathing space from the texture of the hair. After becoming aware of this tendency, I experimented more with my next paintings, pushing the visual limits of how hair and landscape could be combined.

I attempted a slightly different method of integration in each painting. My third painting (Figure 55) sought to paint all aspects with a hair like quality, and my fourth painting (Figure 56) to paint one body of hair in a naturalistic landscape. The next painting (Figure 57) pushed the ability of hair to describe landscape forms, where the majority of the canvas was painted like hair, receding into the background. The sixth painting (Figure 58) again asserted a dominance of hair over the canvas, and in this work the hair is moving forwards, imposing on the landscape. In this work and my final painting (Figure 59), I painted the visible landscape more loosely than I had been doing, investing it with more of a painterly quality than if I were to paint the landscape with greater realistic detail. This method unites the elements across the painting through a consistency of painted style.

## Final Paintings



Figure 53. *Tousle Me Softly*, Rosanne Croucher (2013). 100 x 70 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 54. *Am I Fair?*, Rosanne Croucher (2013). 90 x 120 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 55. *Love and Leave You*, Rosanne Croucher (2013). 120 x 90 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 56. *Morning Conflict*, Rosanne Croucher (2013). 135 x 170 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 57. *Through the Ages*, Rosanne Croucher (2013). 120 x 90 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 58. *Lasting Colour*, Rosanne Croucher (2013). 90 x 120 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 59. *Pony Taming*, Rosanne Croucher (2013). 135 x 170 cm, oil on canvas.

## Content and Theoretical Connections

Hair has an extensive array of meanings and personal and cultural connections. Hair is a part of the body and therefore raises associations around identity and control. It is perhaps the only part of the body that can be altered so easily, drastically and variously. Because of this quality, hair is connected to social values and individuality, and seems to act as a metaphor for these. The authors of the book *Hair'em Scare'em* describe how the intriguing nature of hair itself mirrors this dualistic effect. The individual, fragile strands that make up hair come together to form a strong and homogenous whole, akin to our will to stand out and assert ourselves as individuals yet also have a compulsion to be part of a group. Hair can thus be a symbol of social status, health, beauty, age, power, and rebellion (Klanten, Hübner and Ehmann 2).

Throughout history, hair has also been a gender marker. Long hair has been predominantly linked with the feminine and an expectation of women to have long hair so they could be distinct from men (Milliken 10). In this way long hair became a symbol of femininity, with the power to attract and seduce. This has been reflected in fairy tales and mythology, where golden hair in particular possesses a sense of desirability.

Deeper emotional and spiritual meanings can also be uncovered in hair. In the Bible story of Samson and Delilah, God uses Samson's hair as a vehicle for housing his supernatural strength. Delilah, wanting to betray Samson, badgers him to reveal the secret source of his power. When Samson concedes, Delilah cuts off his hair and his strength leaves him, and he is handed over to his enemies.

In Maori belief, the head is tapu (sacred) and by association the hair is too. The hair of a Maori chief was often untidy, dirty, and rarely cut, because to touch the head or hair was forbidden (Hooker 35). Cutting one's hair was also a sign of mourning; a display of respect to honour loved ones who had passed away (Hooker, 2). In New Zealand in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, human hair was seen tied to trees near crops or burial grounds, and attached to posts marking tribal boundaries in order to bestow mana upon them (Hooker 67). Hair is perhaps a symbol in this way for power struggles and boundary issues.

Hair seems to signify life and power while attached to the head, but once severed can bring forth a whole new set of meanings around remembrance, reverence, sacrifice and loss. I found it interesting that a tie between hair and landscape has already been established in New Zealand history, perhaps as a symbol of the connection between people and the land.

Hair can carry a sense of personal attachment, reminding us of someone in particular or an experience we may have had. Places can also have this quality, which makes the combination of hair with New Zealand landscapes in my paintings so uncanny. Both the hair and place depicted could seem familiar and specific, yet their combination is strange, situating the viewer in the tension between the known and the mysterious. The viewer can therefore engage with and interpret the works to their own liking. Receptivity and attentiveness are important responses to this type of work, because “the full impact of a surrealist picture depends as much on the participation of the viewer as on the disposition of shapes and colours within the frame.” (Allmer 39).

The wide array of meanings and practices that hair brings forth, in conjunction with its process-based advantages, make it an ideal subject for my artistic exploration. Hair is most commonly painted as part of a portrait, where it is one of many features of a person’s appearance and identity. Painting hair in isolation from the head and body allows me to focus on its intriguing qualities, and how these can connect with and challenge the familiar landscape view. Melinda Klayman broadened my knowledge of hair and its artistic implications through her research on hair as a subject and medium in contemporary art. Here she aptly sums up its contradictory and fascinating features,

“Hair is unique in its inherent ability to foster human connections while maintaining an aura of self-contained mystery, to serve as a synecdochal reminder of the entire body, to embody the Other. Hair stands in for the artist’s body while its removability disturbs the integrity of the self.” (8).

## Beauty and repulsion

Hair can be attractive, seductive and alluring, yet suddenly becomes revolting when cut, shed, clogging up the drain or found in somebody's food. It is both beautiful and repulsive. Beauty and disgust are linked in our experiences of the aesthetic. Literary Professor Winifried Menninghaus describes this phenomenon with the German word "*Eckel*", which denotes "both that which repels and the (too) ticklish, (too) delicate sensibility, which (too) easily allows itself to be repelled by something." (25). Experiences of both the merely pleasant and the excessively beautiful satiate the viewer too easily, producing *Eckel* in connection with a feeling of over satisfaction- the oppression and displeasure of excess (Menninghaus 26, 27). In contrast, the beautiful that is already mixed with the unpleasant captures our attention and prevents early satiation (Menninghaus 26). This effect of aesthetic duality, similar to the tension also present between the strange and the familiar, is not always a natural consequence of combining the recognisable and the disparate in painting. It must be pursued through the refinement of the making process.

Despite this, painting seems to have an affinity for making the repulsive attractive and enjoyable. This is perhaps because the reality of being confronted with the actual object presented has been removed through an understanding that the painting is artifice. Painting can therefore re-present and reframe the repulsive by surpassing natural defensiveness when confronted with a disgusting object. If my paintings were to be experienced literally, the reality of being present in a landscape covered with hair would be disquieting. Yet when experienced in the confines of a painting, a viewer can appreciate and understand the attractive aspects of hair- its softness, colours, texture and movement, and how these complement and contrast with the landscape.



Figure 60. Detail from *Lasting Colour*, Rosanne Croucher (2013).

## SECTION FOUR: Wider Contexts and Understandings

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### The Role of Intuition

“Because creative arts research is often motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns, it operates not only on the basis of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on that of tacit knowledge. An innovative dimension of this subjective approach to research lies in its capacity to bring into view particularities of lived experience that reflect alternative realities that are either marginalised or not yet recognised in established theory and practice.” (Barrett and Bolt 143).

Practice based artistic research integrates theoretical and materials based knowledge in order to express alternative processes and visual contexts. The purpose of an art object is not to procure or communicate factual knowledge; instead it provides insights of a cognitive nature, offering ways of seeing and being (Scrivener 8). The philosopher Heidegger claims that we come to understand the world theoretically through first coming to know it via involvement with handling material processes and methods (Barrett and Bolt 143). Engaging in a painting based research investigation ensures that improved proficiency will be gained in the physical handling of paint and other related materials. Connecting and articulating this growth in material based skill with the wider theoretical ideas and contexts highlighted can be challenging. This is due to the involvement of tacit knowledge and intuition in the artistic process. Intuition relates to the knowledge and meaning gained from first hand experience, rather than through logical description (Jarvis 206).

I was most aware of the influence of intuition in the initial stages of my studio processes- the image collection and collage stages. The instinctual knowledge of whether a particular image will ‘work’ is what guides my practice to a certain extent through a narrowing down of infinite possibilities to a focus on what is most suitable to my artistic goals and preferences. Intuition also plays a role during the painting process, in determining the way in which the

image is painted and as a marker of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in gauging when a painting is finished. Lucian Freud claims that intuition is more valuable to painters than intelligence or logical knowledge. And because painting expresses something inside the artist, it is the practice of self-indulgence which disciplines the painter to focus on what is fascinating to them and to discard what is unimportant (Freud 243). This subjective approach to practice allows for original and specific research to arise through the immersion and focus that emerge from engaging with personally vested interests.

The mutual relationship between intuition and planning allows room for chance and freedom within a predetermined set of restrictions. Jarvis describes the act of investigating through making as the-

“practising and acquiring of expertise within a context of repetitive routines, procedures and repertoires so that an apparent mastery and ease of execution hides the tacit ‘artistry’ of laborious preparation and improvised, seemingly flawless execution.” (207)

Intuition, learned routines and consistent practice can allow an artist to operate at a more subconscious level, allowing room for new insights to be made (Jarvis 207). During this investigation I’ve found that a positive synthesis of intuition and planning usually leads to more successful paintings. I can attest to the truth in Jarvis’ comments about the freedom of execution that a foundation of preparation can bring. When I intuitively know that two images fit well together, I can paint with confidence, assured through experience that if a painting idea feels ‘right’ at the beginning, it usually also ends up being successful in its completion.

However, when intuition is subdued at the outset, or when my intention for a work changes course in the middle of its construction, intuition also plays a large role in problem solving. Pinpointing unsuccessful areas in a painting, or identifying that the whole work is unsuccessful can sometimes require drastic action to take place. In these cases the painting must either be abandoned in an unfinished state, or significantly altered. The intuitive recognition of problem areas also provides the impetus to sacrifice- to deviate from the plan in order to bring back the feeling of satisfaction tied to a knowing of what is successful. A significant degree of learning can occur during this stage, where new techniques and new

plans must be formulated in order to redeem the work, and this process feeds back into the next cycle of intuitive pre-planning.

## The Role of Reason

For all its benefits, intuition can be misleading. Sometimes guesses and mistakes have greater credibility than the artist assigns to them, or a sense of ‘rightness’ can in fact be leading the artist further away from a desired solution instead of closer to it (Atkinson and Claxton 42). I have found that intuition and reason complement one another in a painting practice.

Intuition in creativity develops alongside my practice, evident when I look back at past works and wonder why I felt so right about a particular intuitive decision when in hindsight it is so obviously wrong. Trusting in intuition alone limits the possibilities of expanding practice through reason, reflection and self-awareness.

Gaining perspectives from others on my works was one way that an objective awareness could be fostered. This advice would often resonate within me as being a problem or solution that I was partially aware of, but hadn’t critically reflected on enough. Although I work on more than one painting at a time, it was often not until I physically grouped several paintings together and studied them that I would consciously become aware of the intrinsic habits present. Routine aesthetic preferences that I was holding became apparent, particularly during the middle stage of my project, which were limiting the development of my work. A mostly equal proportioning of all three elements of figure, interior and landscape in the paintings was hindering my progress into the simplicity and ideal balance of strange and familiar that I sought after.

A more recent habit arose during my first few hair and landscape paintings, whereby I fell into a particular method of painting hair through the convenience of being able to paint faster using that method. This involved roughly blocking in the colours and shapes of the hair with a large to medium sized brush as a first layer, and then finishing the hair with a second layer painted with a fine brush, beginning with the highlights. The hair lost some of its softness when painted all over with individual strands. Once again, a conscious awareness

of this habit drove me to explore better ways of painting hair through studying the techniques that Master painters such as Titian and Rubens used. The hair in their paintings looks soft and luminous, and I sought to apply this effect in my paintings, adapting it to accommodate for hair being a part of the landscape and not part of portrait. Using a larger brush for the second layer of paint resulted in softer hair, and painting in the highlights last and with more scarcity created more effective light. Further attention was given to areas of hair in the foreground of the painting, making use of my fine brush again to break up the larger chunks of hair with a scattering of individual strands.

The ability to consistently apply and develop intuition and reason in painting takes practice in finding a “balance between effort and playfulness” (Atkinson and Claxton 44). Too much focus on either way of knowing will hinder the advancement of my painting practice. As previously mentioned in the previous chapter, Heidegger points out that theoretical knowledge arises out of a knowledge gained from practical involvement. Awareness and reflection are therefore crucial skills to be used in conjunction with intuition in order to improve practical processes and to connect practice to wider theoretical contexts.

## Colour and Light

From the early stages of my project, I discovered a desire for consistency across the painting of colour, light and perspective. I found that consistency in perspective was often achieved in the collage stage. This was occasionally the case for light too, but for the most part I needed to alter light and colour from the original collage during the painting stage to bring about more consistency.

Colour and light have a partnership within the image, where one influences the other. For instance when outside on an overcast day, light is diffuse and colours are duller and more mid-toned. On a sunny day, light falls directly on some areas and not on others, causing bright highlights, dark shadows and colours with greater intensity. Light itself also can appear coloured, evident in the perceived orange/pink glow radiating from the sun at sunset.

As my project developed, I became more aware of improved ways to paint light and colour consistently, and the relationship between the two. Initially, I changed colour and light minimally in individual forms while painting- changing the colour of a figures clothing, or flipping a form so the light was falling on an angle that matched the light source better. Applying principles of light and colour across the whole canvas came through practice, as I gained a greater understanding of the integration of forms into a whole. I began to pre determine light sources/qualities and colour palettes for the whole paintings, and individual elements within the image submitted to the colour and light framework applied to the whole.



Figures 61, 62, 63, 64, 65. *Colour and light details from paintings*, Rosanne Croucher (2012-13).

Consistency in colour is usually not as obvious as consistency in light. In most light conditions except for dim light, a large range of colours can be present and visible in any image. Colour choices in my paintings are therefore based largely on intuition or a deliberate colour plan. Sometimes the colours in my collage images already fit together quite nicely. Occasionally I changed the colours of certain elements or all elements in an intentional limiting of the colour palette. Limiting the colours allows the painting to appear more consistent and integrated.

Other artists I was studying, such as Tilo Baumgärtel and Mark Tansey, use limited colour schemes in their works. Baumgärtel tends to limit his colours to a narrow range of adjacent colours like red, violet and ultramarine, and accent these with a complementary colour like yellow ochre. This limited combination of both cool and warm



Figure 66. *Untitled*, Tilo Baumgärtel (2012). 80 x 70 cm, oil on canvas.



Figure 67. *White on White*, Mark Tansey (1986). 78 x 138 inches.

colours brings cohesion to the image, allowing both for the dramatization of elements and their more naturalistic depiction. Tansey uses monochromatic colour schemes, which serve to unite the constituents in his imagery through strong tonal contrasts and the emphasis of light and shadow in describing form.

Because of the focus of combining in

my project, limiting my colours allowed me to gain control over the appearance of the image as a whole, instead of just imitating the colours of the original forms.

## Materiality of Oil Paint

One of the distinguishing characteristics of oil paint is its blendability. Oil paint on canvas will take a day to become touch dry if mixed with medium, or several days if the paint is applied directly. The methodology of my project had to take into account the material properties of oil paint, my medium of choice. This enabled the physicality of the paint and my methods of painting to complement one another. Consistently during this project, my initial contact of paint to canvas has been to cover the surface with a quick layer of thinned paint, loosely describing forms, colours and composition as accurately as possible.

Approaching painting in this way has several benefits. Firstly, it quickly eliminates the intimidation of facing a blank white canvas for too long. Because I know the first layer will mostly be covered over later with subsequent layers, the pressure in putting the first marks on the blank canvas is minimal, and once paint is on the canvas there's something to work with. Secondly, it enables an immediate visualisation of the image translated onto canvas. This allows me to assess what alterations could be made to improve the composition, forms and colours in further layers. Often this stage also brings to my attention whether or not an image is going to work at all. Sometimes this occurs when an image doesn't translate well from idea form into paint on canvas, but happens most often when there has been a gap

between the forming of the image combination and the first attempt to paint it. The gap doesn't have to be lengthy in the amount of time passed, just long enough for my thinking to have moved ahead into a better idea that makes pursuing the current one pointless.



Figure 68. *Initial Painting Layer*, Rosanne Croucher (2013).



Figure 69. *Final Painting*, Rosanne Croucher (2013).

After the initial layer is dry, the painting is built up in sections. I aim to paint the second layer in greater detail and accuracy, getting it to an almost finished state in one go. This allows the paint to blend as I work, giving the forms and colours a quality of softness. I prioritise getting the dark and mid-tones right, as the lighter colours tend to become muddy as they blend. Using medium sized brushes for this layer aids me in avoiding painting fine lines in too soon. Subsequent layers serve to clarify the highlights in the painting, add brighter colours, and build up areas in finer detail.

Painting in layers and the slow drying of oil paint requires planning and timing. Developing a sense of how much painting can be accomplished in the time available, and when to cease painting if the paint is blending too much are important. The more I come to know about the material properties of oil paint, the more effectively I can execute a painting.

## SECTION FIVE: Summary

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### Conclusion

“All components of the work are parts of a desire to transform the spirit; prior meanings, existing meanings, and newly attached meanings, all necessary to create in the work an accumulative meaning whose configuration is something no one has seen before. This doesn’t mean you can’t recognise it when you see it.” (Schnabel 283)

In embarking on this Masters project, I sought to discover new ways to paint and think about painting, and to continue building on the knowledge in these two areas that I had accumulated so far. Combining recognisable and disparate imagery allowed me to implement new working processes such as collage, and consider new theories such as the aesthetic of the strange. Engaging in these areas challenged and extended my technical skill, my ability to synthesise elements in a painting, and the refinement of aesthetic notions around what I wanted to paint.

Creating new visual contexts in order to develop new working processes, content, meaning, and effect within painting was articulated in my research aim. I deliberately sought to find ways of depicting what could be surprising or intriguing, in order to bring about a potential widening of understandings and perceptions. The philosopher Descartes claims that experiences of wonder is how man learns, and wonder is brought about through being confronted with the unexpected and surprising within an area that we feel confident in knowing (Fisher 57).

I navigated this research project through consistently making work, studying the work of other artists, and researching related art theories. Successful findings in any of these areas would feed into the others and refine the direction and purpose of my practice. Because of the nature of this cyclical method of investigation, I ordered the chapters in this document chronologically, so that direct links between my art, the art of others and theories could be made in the manner they actually arose. I aspired to conclude this project having produced a

final body of paintings that I could have never foreseen from the outset. In this, I succeeded, for at the outset of my project I could not have predicted that I would combine hair and landscape together, or the extent in which my painting skill would develop in synthesising aesthetics and methods.

My final body of paintings focused solely on the combination of landscape and hair. This subject matter has provided an ideal context for refining the integration of elements across the canvas, achieving a balance of the strange and familiar, and providing access for new meanings to come forth. For now and the foreseeable future, I will continue to investigate the connection of hair and landscape. In time, I will come across new methods, subject matter and theories that further expand my practice, and my work will continue to evolve in ways I cannot now predict. The desire to discover the new and better in my painting practice will allow the process of creation to continue. As painter Lucian Freud puts it,

“A moment of complete happiness never occurs in the creation of a work of art...It is this great insufficiency that drives him on. Thus the process of creation becomes necessary to the painter perhaps more than is the picture.” (245)

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