



SCARLET MAYER-PAYNE

Movement. Space. Emotion.



# Movement. Space. Emotion.

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# ABSTRACT

Through the depiction of abstract, fictitious spaces, my work aims to question and engage with positive and negative space. Space means something different to each individual and affects everyone in different ways. Throughout this project I have challenged myself to think about what space means for me. We have spent the past year, during the pandemic, occupying the same space day in and day out; for some this space has been a comfort and for others, a prison.

When viewing my work, I ask that the viewer take a moment to ask themselves:

**What does space mean to me?**

By taking a moment to meditate on this question, the viewer will hopefully be able to form a connection to my paintings and in turn, a connection to others. Art has the potential to be universal and accessible to all. Whilst the methodology behind abstract art can be confusing for some, the appreciation of, and individual connection to the work is accessible to everyone.

I invite you to take a seat and immerse yourself in my work. Allow yourself to travel somewhere different, it may be somewhere new and undiscovered, somewhere old and experienced or simply just somewhere fictitious.



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# INTRODUCTION

Paint is powerful.

Paint is empowering.

Paint demands time.

Paint demands devotion.

In the chapters that follow, paint and all that it entails, will be discussed in relation to three different concepts. Movement, space and emotion.

A trinity, the notion of a group of three things/objects/ideas existing harmoniously as one.

Through the depiction of abstract, fictitious spaces, positive and negative space is questioned and engaged with to encourage the viewer to query what space means to them. When confronted with a space of any size, individuals will all respond differently, whether that be through a feeling of comfort or discomfort, each will interpret the given space in a way that is personal to them.



A trinity of actions...

The original movement, space, or emotion.

The recollection of the movement, space, or emotion.

The act of responding to the movement space, space, or emotion.

A trinity of spaces (both physical and mental) ...

The past space.

The space in which we recollect.

The space in which we respond, the studio and the canvas.

This essay will consist of three main chapters, past, present and future. A trinity. Each chapter will focus on a different aspect of my process. I will begin by discussing my art historical research and their influence on my work. A chronological evaluation of my methodology and process will then follow, leading into a full assessment of my project.

"Paintings are there to be experienced, they are events. They are also to be meditated on and to be enjoyed by the senses; to be felt through the eye."

(John Hoyland, 1979)

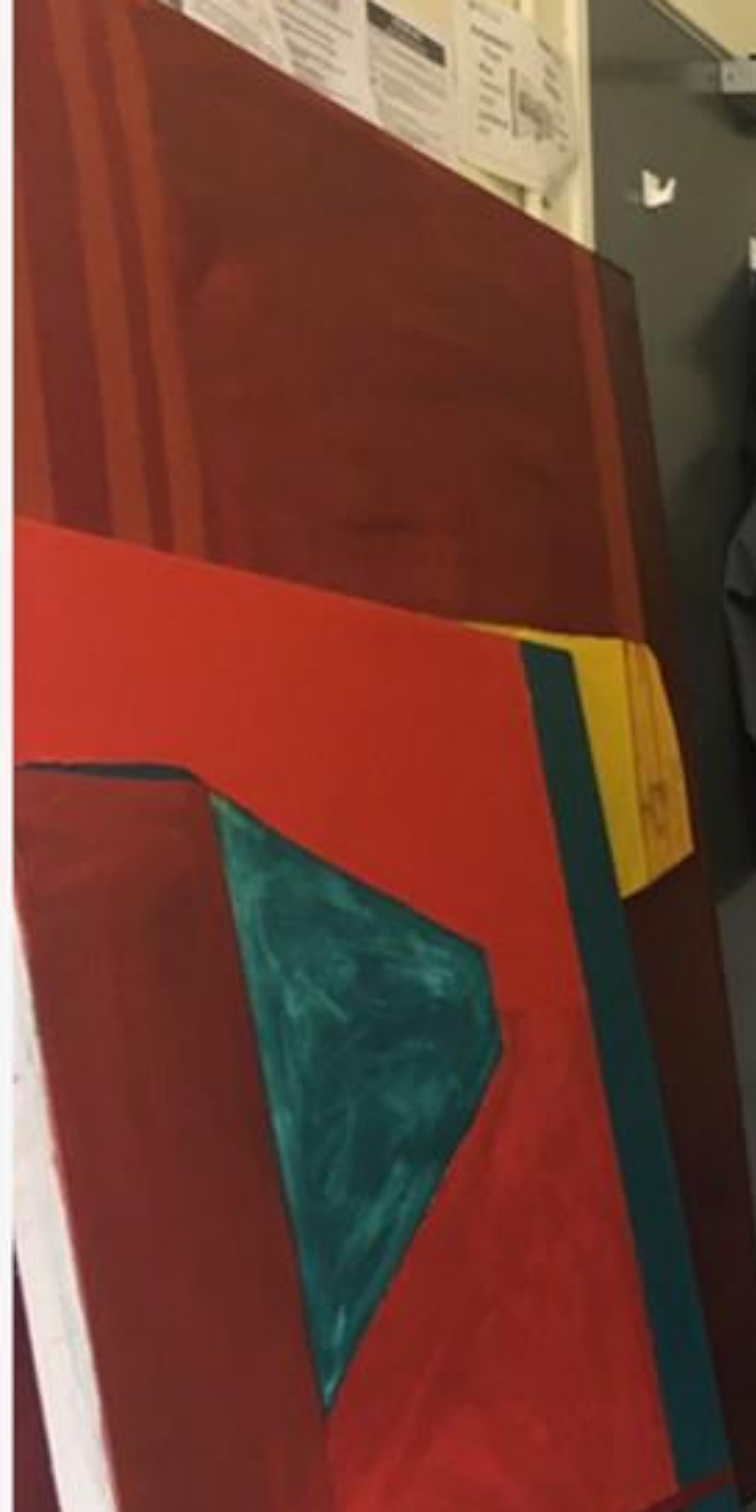


Figure 1 (Right)

*Scarlet Mayer-Payne sat in her studio.*



# THE PAST

## I - Modernism

“[T]he artists expresses what [they perceive]; [they perceive] what [they express].”

Herbert Read

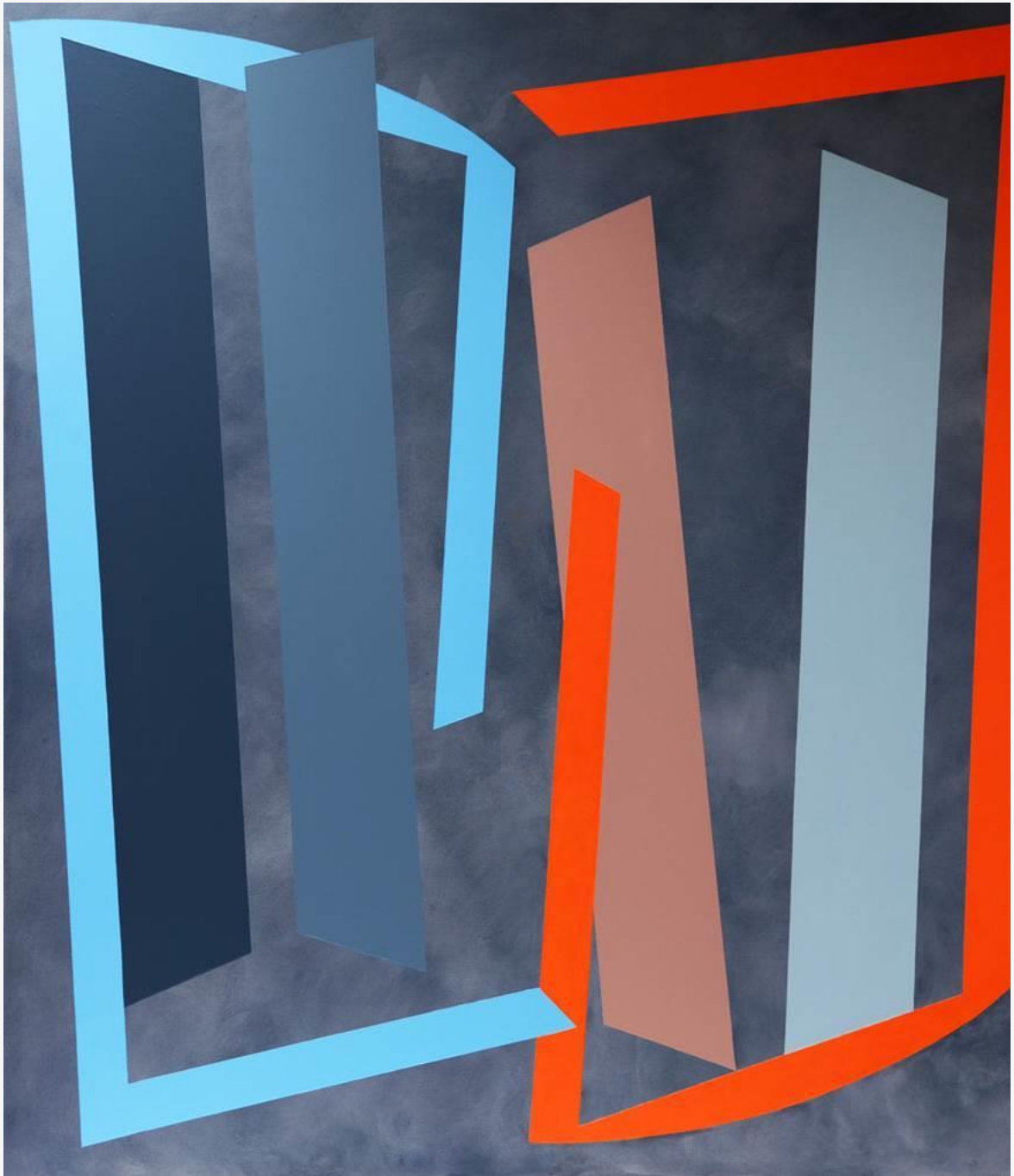
When we hear the term modern, we instantly associate it with anything that is current and of the time. Societal modernism revises and adapts itself as we move through time, therefore it will never be the same as the previous day, the last week, month or year. So, how is that translated into modernism as an art movement? Rather than being one singular movement, modernism was used as an umbrella term for a collection of movements that all shared the same ethos and rules when it came to visual culture.

Artists within the modernist era rejected past artistic movements and, quite arrogantly, claimed that their work was the epitome of perfection. They believed that all work that came before them lacked any real source of individualism. This way of thinking, whilst enabling visual culture to develop has also held back certain demographics, for example female, black, and queer artists. Modernist discourse favored the ‘white male genius’, stripping artists outside of this group of any form of credibility.

The Abstract Expressionists emerged towards the end of the modernist movement; women of Abstract Expressionism found themselves battling the 'white male genius' for recognition and to gain validation from the many infamous male artists. "Women painters may have been marginalized by modernism...but they have been far from absent from modernist practice" (Deepwell 242).

Although modernist behaviors are questionable, their approach to painting is one that is of interest to me and my painting process. Modernist painting, particularly within the Abstract Expressionist movement aimed to "[emphasize] the planarity of the canvas [and use it] as a vehicle for expressing the impenetrability of the painting" (Crowther 207). Paintings were no longer intended to be representational and akin to real life, but instead focused on making "manual space visible" (Crowther 207).

An impenetrable painting aims to further remind the viewer of its tactility; with no attempt to hide it's properties the painting becomes purely paint on canvas. The viewer cannot enter the space depicted but rather experience the space. Depth becomes a feature within the composition and is no longer simply a well-known notion.



“Geometry gave me the sense that one could construct without referencing the appearance of the world; offering a structure in which to manifest experience.”

(Vanessa Jackson, 2010)

Figure 2 (Left)

Vanessa Jackson

*Lighten Up*

## II - Abstraction

Abstraction has been at the forefront of my own personal practice. I began by abstracting from my surroundings to eventually discarding any recognizable figurative element and instead depicting a variety of abstract shapes.

To discuss Abstraction and all the different movements within it would be an enormous task. As a result, focus in this chapter shall be given solely to Abstract Expressionist painting.

“Essentially there are two types of abstract expressionist painting...the first [being] energetic and gestural [and] the other kind, is more purely abstract and more tranquil.”

(Lucie-Smith 40-2)

Moving from gestural abstraction to a more geometric approach, my own relationship with abstraction has developed as time has gone on; not only my approach but my understanding of abstraction has also matured. Abstraction offers potential, an endless stream of problems in need of answers, a space for unrestrained expression. Interpreted differently by each recipient, abstract art becomes universal. Universality is a valuable trait within any period, but more so after the Second World War. Abstract Expressionism emerged in the wake of the terror and was seen as “the only viable form of creative communication, in a world that had lost confidence in the ability of appearances to convey any meaningful content” (Heard Hamilton 523).



Joan Mitchell, John Hoyland, Mark Rothko and Vanessa Jackson are four of my personal favourite abstract artists; each has a different approach to painting and has offered a varied outlook on abstract art and all that it is capable of. From Mitchell's gestural canvases to Rothko's contemplative use of paint, Hoyland's layering of shapes and colours and Jackson's illusions of space, my personal paintings take influence from all four approaches to create my own interpretation of abstract art.

Abstract art is there to be encountered, to exist passively would strip it of any form of validation.

Abstract art requires contemplation and attention.

Abstract art questions the dependable and recognizable figure and offers an alternative representation of the world around us.





# THE PRESENT

## III- What

“The decisions I make that determine the way I paint have less to do with aligning myself to a certain way of painting, than with the actual process of discovery through making.”

Helen Pavel

When bouncing between the gestural and the geometric, an established and effective approach was hard to find. Discovering what each method brought to the table required contemplation: gesture supplied vigour and movement, geometry supplied calmness and stillness. But which would best represent space?

A few months back, a family friend passed away and they were buried in a woodland burial site close to home. Two weeks after the funeral I went to visit her grave and was taken aback by what I was greeted with. A semi-filled in grave. As one can imagine, the confrontation of a large, empty space has stayed with me ever since and has not surprisingly emerged within my art practice.

Later that day, whilst working on some small intuitive ink studies, a shape appeared. Long and oval, it appeared reminiscent of the grave I had visited earlier that day. Having never really delved into the subconscious or psychic automatism, the idea that something previously experienced could emerge unknowingly through my art sparked some interest. The space encountered left a mark in my subconscious, emotionally affected by its presence I began to wonder, how might I use space to create a dialogue between the viewer and canvas?

Figure 3 & 4 (Previous Page) *Details of Intertwine*

Figure 5 (Right) *Ink Study*





*Settle* was a turning point within my process, working with large shapes and on a larger scale, I challenged myself to create a harmonious mix of gestural, flat and impasto application of paint. Creating a simplistic composition that was both enticing and aesthetically pleasing was a welcomed challenge. By being selective about the individual components of the painting, I taught myself to be more contemplative within my practice. Knowing when to stop will always be a struggle, but even more so when working with so few elements. Each mark made needs to have purpose and intent. There is no room for indecisiveness on the canvas.

In retrospect, I think that the experience of seeing the semi-filled in grave stirred something within me. Confronted with this large, ominous hole in the ground I began to wonder...

**What is it that certain shapes and/or spaces possess that enables them to have such an impact on our mental psyche?**

The more I thought about space and how we can occupy it both passively and confidently, my paintings began to develop. Depicting large, abstract, fictitious spaces, the work would often appear confrontational. A large, static space forces the viewer to acknowledge its presence and encourages them to question what space means to them as well as how large space affects them.

Below are a set of questions I encourage the viewer to ask themselves when experiencing my paintings.

How does the space depicted on the canvas affect you?

Is it positive or negative?

What does space mean to you?

Is it physical, mental or both?

Does large space make you comfortable or uncomfortable?

Do you find small space comforting or daunting?

Figure 6 (Left) *Settle*

## IV - Process

A well-established process is key to a successful painting practice. I, myself, trialed many different approaches before eventually finding one that enabled me to work through my ideas effectively before committing to my large canvases.

### Intuitive Ink

Created prior to any of my large canvases, I used my ink studies to experiment with the division of space. They formed a gateway for understanding the importance and impact of large blank spaces, these studies allowed me to investigate movement, space and gesture in a pressure free environment.

Each measuring roughly 50 x 50 cm, they are a mix of collage, drawing and painting. These studies aimed to trial whether the gestural and the geometric could co-exist within a singular composition. Would they complement one another or just compete?

The overriding approach to these works involved geometry, but the application of the ink paired with its fluidity meant that the shapes retained a sense of movement and gesture. In comparison to my later, larger paintings, these ink studies manage to pair gesture and geometry harmoniously. Whether or not this can be used and translated the same way with oil paint is something that I would like to revisit in the future.

Shapes are static, hard-edged and universal. When context is removed, shapes have the potential to become confrontational; the viewer is faced with a context-free shape and is pushed to give it meaning.

Figure 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12 (Right), *Gesture*



After some contemplation, I decided not to proceed with the development of these ink studies onto a large canvas. I felt they stood well on their own as they said and did everything I was asking of them and to recreate them did not feel necessary. Rather than replicating them, I used them to govern the way in which I would build-up my paintings. Layering and interlocking, each shape needed to have a purpose within the composition and create balance in the structure of the work.





## Oil Bar

Working with oil bar is relatively new to me, I've found it to be useful when working rapidly on multiple small works. Fortunate enough to have a wide range of colours, I can quickly pick up the bars as needed and not worry about mixing up individual colours. Working with such a basic colour palette enabled me to think more about the placement of individual tones and how they might interact with one another on a larger scale.



As the oil bar produces a rather flat, opaque mark compared to the fluidity of the ink, these studies were concerned more with composition than the type of marks made. Working with basic geometric shapes, I found myself wanting to play with space. Whilst this was hard to do on such a small scale (20 x 20 cm), I was still able to get a feel for what might work and what wouldn't.



Shown in the order they were created (top to bottom), the three works on the left were each developed from the version prior. The last one accentuates the playful use of space the most with the defined green shape obviously interlocking with both the square frame and the oval.

The studies on the opposite page were also done in quick succession, but unlike this suite of studies, they are not directly related to each other.

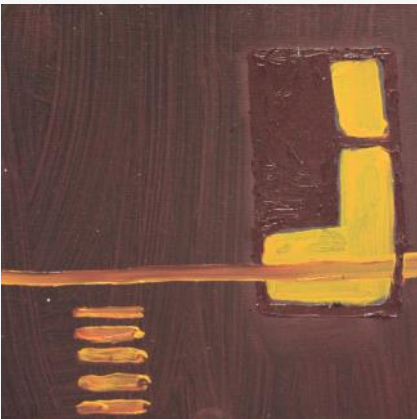
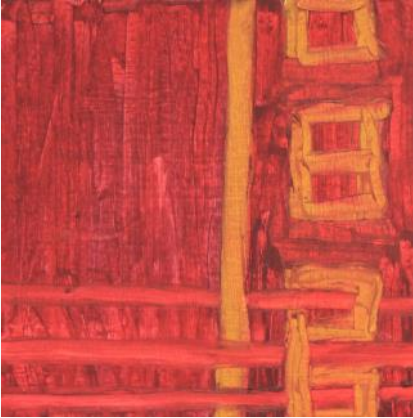


Figure 13, 14 & 15. (Left Page), *Oil Bar Suite*

Figure 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 & 23. (Right Page), *Study*

## V - Work

The pages that follow will showcase my final paintings as well as discuss in detail the process and methodology behind them.



Figure 24, *Hypothetical Exhibition*



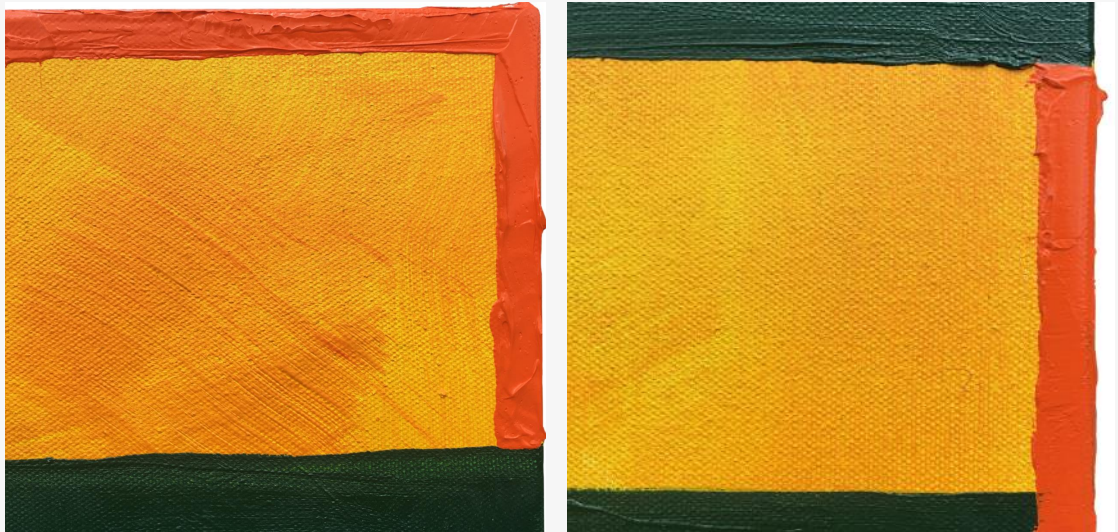
When painting *Suspended* I found myself entering a very calm and meditative mental space. Concentration and contemplation were key to the creation of this painting. Playing with and dividing space, I wanted to create an image that was not only calming but also impactful.

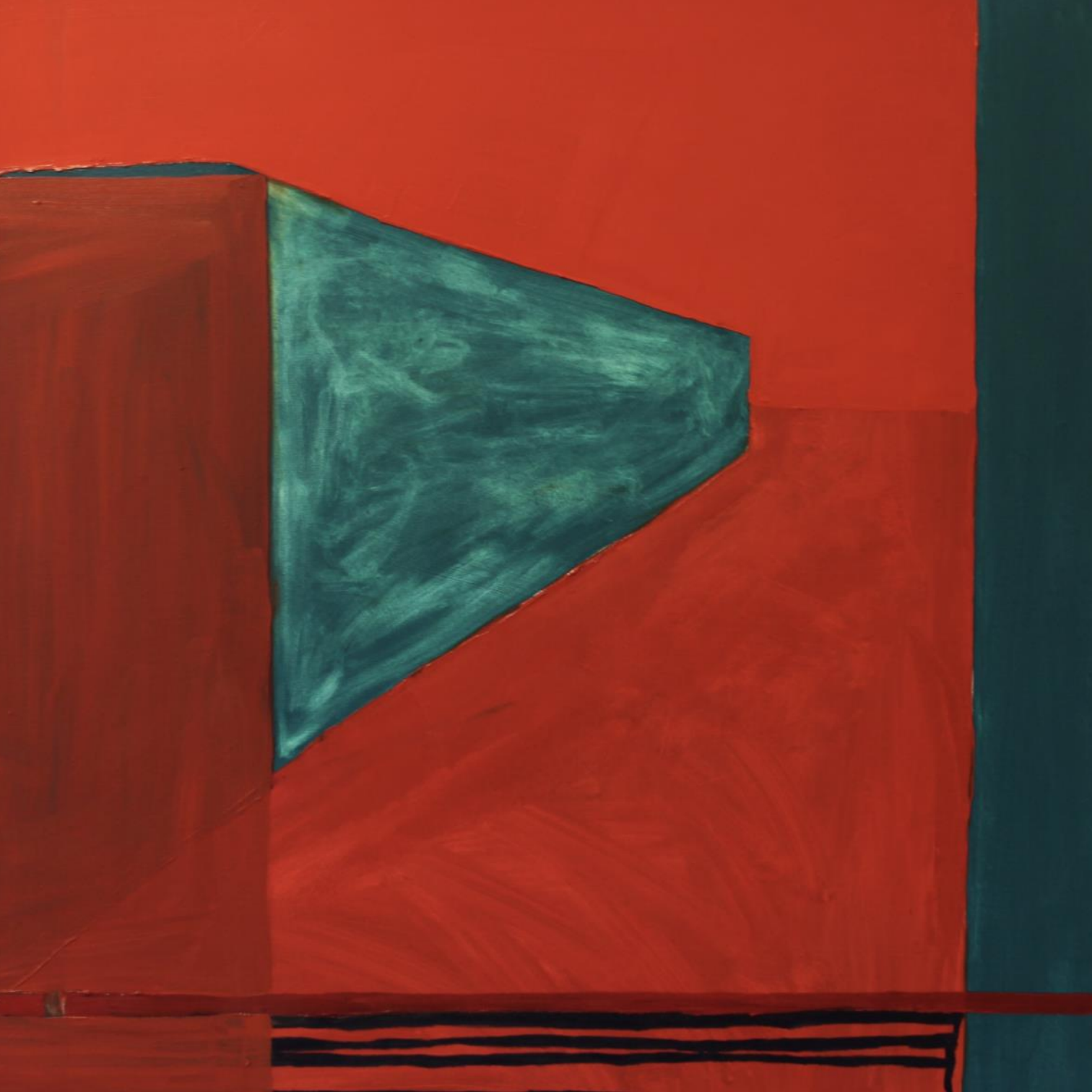
Suspended in the center of the canvas, the static green square acts as an undisturbed positive space amongst the gestural yellow base and thick impasto orange edging. Organic in nature, the soft edges of the green square work against the straight, hard-edge of the canvas. Whilst powerful and confrontational, the green square also brings a softness to the composition. Floating peacefully amidst the vigor of the yellow background and heaviness of the orange edging, the square may offer comfort to the viewer.

Whilst the green shapes are quite static in the application, the orange edging is weighty and full of movement. Clearly visible, the strokes of the palette knife, offer the viewer chance to visualize the artist in action, building up the paint with both precision and intent.

Figure 25  
(Left),  
*Suspended*

Figure 26 & 27  
(Right), *Detail  
of Suspended*







## Semblance Definition:

“A situation in which something seems to exist although this may not, in fact, be the case” (Oxford Learners Dictionary).

*Semblance* has been referred to by others as a visually confusing or uncomfortable painting. The triangular shape in the center of the canvas alludes to a vanishing point. A wall perhaps? But then, if it is a wall, what's hiding behind it?

When deciding on the colour palette for this painting I knew I wanted it to be very simplistic with only a handful of individual colours; I also knew that I wanted to create an interaction between the chosen colours. The fluorescence of the orange paired with the teal green makes for an interesting visual, they almost compete against each other for the viewer's attention. Not only that but I also feel that the choice of colour adds to the uneasiness of the composition.

In relation to Modernism and its influence on my personal practice, the accentuation of the two-dimensionality of a painting has been of interest to me. Making the painting process visible is a concept associated with modernist painting, the artist does not want to hide the tactile properties of the painting but rather accentuate them. The work is not an illusion, it is simply paint on canvas. I often choose to leave small sections of the base layer showing through the top layers of paint in an attempt to play with this concept. Not only does this create a real sense of depth but it celebrates and highlights the impenetrability of the canvas.

An example of this within ‘*Semblance*’ can be seen to the left.



Figure 28 (Left), *Semblance*

Figure 29, 30 (Above),  
*Details of Semblance*



Lacuna Definition:

“A blank space or a missing part” (Merriam Webster).

An equal balance between positive and negative space, this composition bears some resemblance to a passageway, a door or a window. The flat application next to the gestural wash of colour aims to create the illusion of space and depth. As an abstract fictitious space, this painting hopes to encourage the viewer to consider the trinity of spaces mentioned in the introduction.

The past space.

The space in which we recollect.

The space in which we respond, the studio and the canvas.

If fictitious, then what is the past space? Left up to the viewer to decide, the past space becomes personal. Each individual will find their own space within the painting.

The space in which we recollect. This space can be both the space in which the viewer finds themselves as well as the artist. Co-existing in two different tenses, the artist and viewer become connected as they reflect on the space they are reminded of.

The space in which we respond. For the artist, this is within the studio and on the canvas; for the viewer, this may be within the gallery setting or back at home in a moment of reflection. The artist responds physically through the process of the painting, whereas the viewer will likely respond emotionally and in their own time.

Figure 31 (Left), *Lacuna*



*Intertwine* was the last painting I did during this semester, it is based on the same geometric pattern found in 'Oil bar suite 1, 2 & 3' (shown on page 26). Working with a variety of paint applications, I aimed to explore the different ways I could create depth as well as different weights throughout the composition. The thick, impasto application of paint is juxtaposed by the transparent wash of colour behind it, thus creating a sense of a foreground and a background.

Where the yellow lies behind the purple oval and in front of the orange line is the type of interaction between shapes that I want to enhance in future works of a similar nature. This interaction between the yellow, purple and orange is the only real attempt at playing with space in this painting; unsure as to what the final effect would be, I was only really testing the waters. Further disruption of space within a composition like this could potentially work, but I feel it would have to be subtle alterations that are not obvious at first glance. The longer you look at the work the more the painting draws you in.



Figure 32 (Left), *Intertwine*

Figure 33 & 34 (Above), *Detail of Intertwine*





Figure 35  
(Left),  
*Configuration*



Figure 36 & 37  
(Right), *Detail of  
Configuration*

An even mix of large, flat blocks of colour and small gestural marks this painting, *Configuration*, explores the possible relationship between the gestural and the geometric. Predominantly gestural, *Configuration* possesses a sense of naivety, possibly down to the fact that it was my first time working on such a large scale. Stunned by the vast amount of space, I used this canvas as a playground for experimentation and discovery.

Out of all my works, *Configuration* is the only work that began with a specific location in mind. Struggling to abstract the landscape successfully, I realized that, as a subject matter, landscape wasn't working for me. Thus, the depiction of abstract, fictitious spaces was born. The fictionality of the spaces I began to depict allowed me total freedom, with no previous wires holding me down to a pre-conceived notion or visual, I was able to create a space that would be unknown to anyone but interpretable by everyone.





# THE FUTURE

## VI - Conclusion

Through the depiction of abstract, fictitious spaces, movement, space and emotion has been successfully questioned in such a way that the viewer has no choice but to stop and contemplate. Capturing movement through different weights of paint application, this series of work has enabled me to discover how paint can be heightened and used to its fullest potential in order to create the most intriguing composition. Balance has been fundamental when painting, especially when working with so few elements, each addition to the work needs to be purposeful and balance out the overall composition.

Going forward I plan to continue my own personal practice outside of education; sustaining contact with other artists and groups will be key when getting my work recognized within the art community. I plan to continue exploring a possible relationship between gesture and geometry to determine if I can successfully collate them in a harmonious but unsettling way. Should the two be mixed? How might one affect or complement the other?

In relation to the trinity of actions, I think that I was successful in using this concept when creating my paintings as well as when discussing them. The notion of a past, present and future in relation to my practice has enabled me to reflect on my process and methodology in a chronological order. Not only that but it has encouraged me to question my own motives at each stage of my process.

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# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

## Front Cover:

Scarlet Mayer-Payne, Detail of *Suspended*, Oil on Canvas, 5' x 5'. 2021

## Introduction:

Figure 1: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, *Scarlet Mayer-Payne sat in her studio*, Digital photograph. 2021

## The Past:

Figure 2: Vanessa Jackson, *Lighten Up*, Oil on Canvas, 214 x 183 cm. 2014.

## The Present:

Figure 3 & 4: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, Detail of *Intertwine*, Oil on Canvas, 100 x 100 cm. 2021.

Figure 5: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, *Ink Study*, Ink on paper, 20 x 20 cm. 2021

Figure 6: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, *Settle*, Oil on Canvas, 5' x 5'. 2021.

Figure 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, *Gesture*, Ink on Paper, 50 x 50 cm. 2021.

Figure 13, 14 & 15: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, *Oil Bar Suite*, Oil bar on Canvas Paper, 20 x 20 cm. 2021.

Figure 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 & 23: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, *Study*, Oil bar on Board, 20 x 20 cm. 2021.

Figure 24: Scarlet Mayer Payne, *Hypothetical Exhibition*, Digital edit. 2021

Figure 25: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, *Suspended*, Oil on Canvas, 5' x 5'. 2021.

Figure 26 & 27: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, Detail of *Suspended*, Oil on Canvas, 5' x 5'. 2021.

Figure 28: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, *Semblance*, Oil on Canvas, 100 x 100 cm. 2021.

Figure 29 & 30: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, Detail of *Semblance*, Oil on Canvas, 100 x 100 cm. 2021.

Figure 31: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, *Lacuna*, Oil on Canvas, 5' x 5'. 2021.

Figure 32: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, *Intertwine*, Oil on Canvas, 100 x 100 cm. 2021.

Figure 33 & 34: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, Detail of *Intertwine*, Oil on Canvas, 100 x 100 cm. 2021.

Figure 35: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, *Configuration*, Oil on Canvas, 5' x 5'. 2021.

Figure 36 & 37: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, Detail of *Configuration*, Oil on Canvas, 5' x 5'. 2021.

## The Future:

Figure 38: Scarlet Mayer-Payne, *Scarlet Mayer-Payne painting in her studio*, Digital Photograph. 2021.

Scarlet Mayer-Payne

May 2021