

School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry

**The Line of the Light:
Painting backstage affective atmospheres.**

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis/project is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Acknowledgment of Country

I wish to acknowledge that Curtin University works across hundreds of traditional lands and custodial groups in Australia, and with First Nations people around the globe. I wish to pay my deepest respects to their ancestors and members of their communities, past, present, and to their emerging leaders.

Abstract

From within the field of representational painting, this project identifies, defines, and explores the embodied experience of the affective atmosphere of the backstage of the theatre, and questions how this site can be visually translated using the materiality and techniques of oil painting. Through the analysis of the affective capabilities of painting, the phenomenology of acting processes, and the atmospheres that reside in backstage interiors, I investigate how the lived experience of backstage sites can contribute to paintings which register affective atmospheres linked to heightened energy, focused concentration, imaginative processes, and liminal sensations.

Backstage interiors are working, productive sites, imbued with the remnants of endlessly cycling theatrical performances, the trace energy of myriad past creatives, and the residue of processes that by design focus energy, encourage play, and engender transformation. I choose to scrutinize these backstage interiors as they are locations familiar to me, as are the imaginative and practical processes which take place within them. As an actor, I feel that my intimate knowledge of the tactile and haptic qualities of this site, as well as my experience of working in and observing the theatre, provides me with a unique point of view as a painter. It is from this point of view that I have aimed to attune to, and visually translate, the experience of the affective atmosphere of the backstage space.

There are many historical and contemporary artists who explore, through painting, the affective atmosphere of place, and I examine the work of several in this project; some who focus primarily on interiors, and some landscape painters whose work translates the unfurling of atmosphere in expressive and compelling ways. Artists include Jude Rae, Mamma Andersson, Matthias Weischer, Walter Sickert, Caspar David Friedrich, Clarice Beckett, Peter Doig, Johannes Vermeer, Vilhelm Hammershøi, Edward Hopper, and Adrian Ghenie. I have engaged with their approaches to the inscription of atmosphere via embodied mark making, creation of surface tension, and their use of colour, tonality, scale, and composition. Through engagement with their work, I have developed my own methodology which seeks to unearth the affective atmosphere of the backstage space as it is impacted by the matterings, practical and imaginative processes, and the actual physicality of the space. This project does not attempt to illustrate the backstage, but rather register the cumulative impact of several factors contributing to its affective atmosphere.

I have engaged with the work of art theorists, philosophers, writers, and researchers to underpin my understanding of embodiment, affect, and affective atmospheres as these concepts relate to place, the happenings that occur within them, and the ways in which painting can translate the embodied-experience of them into objects which in themselves have affective resonances. I have also examined the phenomenology of acting, and unpacked the processes that come to fruition in the backstage space, at the liminal threshold between the backstage and onstage. Paul Crowther and Nigel Wentworth have been key in informing my understanding of the embodied nature of painting, and its potential to visually translate the embodied experience of the backstage site, while Philip Zarrilli has been an invaluable source in defining the lived experience of acting. The writings of Gernot Böhme, Thomas Fuchs, Teresa Brennan, and Kathleen Stewart, amongst others, have made clear the link between place, experience, and the affective atmospheres that can unfurl within a site.

I employ the materiality and potentiality of oil paint within this project to uncover information as to how the affective atmosphere of a backstage space can be experienced, processed, and visually expressed. The methodology that I have developed through this research sits at the nexus of painting, performance and analysis of lived-experience, and affective atmospheres, and has provided insights into the development of an original approach to the registration of the affective and physical experience of the backstage space. An original painting methodology informed by *perezhivanie*, and processes related to performance has come to light by way of this research, as have significant discoveries related to the unexpected registration of the atmosphere of the offstage, or *unconscious* of the stage.

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PROLOGUE

Behind the Act: Painting Backstage Affective Atmospheres

PROLOGUE

Behind the Act: Painting Backstage Affective Atmospheres

This doctoral research uses practical visual investigation, and phenomenological engagement to illuminate the lived experience of the backstage by an actor. I employ the potential of figurative interior oil painting to explore the *affective atmosphere* of the backstage space, and the experience of actors working within it. The affective atmosphere of the backstage space, I argue, exists as an all-encompassing gestalt, which is the cumulative result of the physical characteristics of the space, and the various behaviours, processes, tasks, and sensations of the lived-bodies resonating within it.

In order for its form to reflect its content, the structure of this exegesis borrows from the language of the theatre, and is broken into a Prologue together with three Acts divided into Scenes, and an Epilogue as a conclusion. Key concepts related to the phenomenology of painting, affect, affective atmospheres, and acting which underpin this research are defined and unpacked in ACT I, whilst ACT II and ACT III place a greater emphasis on field work, studio investigation, and results. The Epilogue acts as a conclusion, where discussion of the originality and relevance of my research is located.

All Acts contain references to painters and paintings, including ACT I, whereby I ground my research in philosophy, in particular phenomenological philosophy, which asserts the value of knowing the world through the sensing body, lived experience, and pre-reflective embodied inquiry. I reference Paul Crowther, Nigel Wentworth, Philip Zarrilli, Kathleen Stewart, Melissa Greg, Susan Best, Jill Bennett, amongst other philosophers and writers whose theories are underpinned by the phenomenological inquiries of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty¹, and the affect theory of Brian Massumi.²

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) is a French philosopher whose principal academic concerns were the study of phenomenology and existentialism. His exploration of perception and embodiment in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) and *Eye and Mind* (1961) and his lecture on *Art and Perception*, within the published series *The World of Perception* (1948) are relevant to painting and its potential for revealing the details of embodied experience and the nature of perception.

² Brian Massumi and Eve Sedgwick brought about a resurgence in the discussion of affect theory in the mid-1990s, and were responsible for the further development and wide circulation of the two main streams of affect theory. In *The Autonomy Affect* (1995) Massumi expands on “Gilles Deleuze’s Spinozist ethology of bodily capacities” (Gregg 2010, 7). Massumi investigated affects in relation to immanence, or the body’s intercausal relationship to the forces and intensities related to things and places. The simultaneous accumulation of these

To provide a basis to this research it has proven particularly crucial to define the somewhat ambiguous term ‘affective atmosphere’, and I do so by looking to several philosophers and scholars including Gernot Böhme, Ben Anderson, Matthew Gandy Teresa Brennan, and Thomas Fuchs, most of whom begin by pinning down the vague concept of atmosphere. Böhme, defines atmospheres as ‘tuned spaces’ (2017, 1), writing that “atmospheres can be divided into moods, phenomena of synaesthesia, suggestions for motions, communicative and social-conventional atmospheres” (2003, 1). In the introduction to Böhme’s *Atmospheric Architectures*, Professor Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul writes that,

Atmospheres, which are experienced through immersion and by the ways in which they affect our disposition, are impossible to locate precisely. They are dynamic, diffused and, as pre- and inter-subjective, spatial carriers of mood, suffused with emotional power (Böhme, 2017, 1).

I locate such a diffused mood – co-created, encountered, and experienced through the body – within the backstage environment. In the article “The Art of the Stage Set as a Paradigm for an Aesthetics of Atmospheres” (2013), Böhme focuses on the art of set design as a discipline wherein atmospheres are “made”. Although I am pursuing a way to register a visual equivalence to the atmosphere *behind* the staged atmosphere, Böhme’s analysis of the factors that contribute to an affective atmosphere provides an important foundational basis to this research, whilst also creating a philosophical bridge to the theatre. I discuss this in detail in ACT I, scene iii.

The processes that I identify as contributing to the immersive, enveloping gestalt of the backstage are linked to acting, and the preparation of a performance and character. I explore these processes in greater detail in ACT I, Scene iv, but note here that I refer to these preparatory processes as *perezhivanie*, which is a Russian term that roughly translates to ‘experience and re-experience’ and underscores modern approaches to rehearsal and acting techniques.

forces and intensities within bodies and worlds, and the way that these constructs come to interact with one another, are the focus of affect theory.

I interrogate how to produce paintings that somehow register the lived experience of perceiving the affective atmospheres of places through the body, therefore investigations into the phenomenology, history, and process of painting sit at the heart of the research. Like Crowther and Wentworth, this research advocates for painting as a tool that can unveil the sometimes-overlooked everyday details of lived experiences and perception. I examine how these philosophers have expanded on Merleau-Ponty's exploration of the lived experience of perception and painting, and the potential for a painting to reveal the lived experience of a being. Specifically, as Merleau-Ponty wrote, "painting thrusts us once again into the presence of the world of lived experience...painting led us back to a vision of things themselves" (2004, 69). These theories have encouraged me to use paint to reveal the lived experience of the backstage.

In this research I use painting as a tool to inscribe the "enveloping aura" of the backstage as I had lived and experienced it, prior to analysis or reflection. How to capture the actor's experience of the backstage space through painting is the question addressed in this research; however, simply inscribing the physical site of the backstage onto a surface using paint is not the aim of this work. To be clear, this research does not seek to illustrate the backstage of the theatre with paint. Instead, this research seeks to understand and record the affective atmosphere of the backstage, and the experience of encountering and engaging with this atmosphere.

I do not seek to expose an *everyday* affective atmosphere in a well-known place. Instead, I investigate a place and affective atmosphere that to most people remains unseen and unsensed – the backstage of the theatre, which Sir Ian McKellen describes as "this secret world that the public knows nothing about" (Stephenson 2017, 35:03). I am very familiar with the backstage due to my background, training, and practice as a professional actor, and I use my painting practice to draw other people's attention to this space. This research enlists my own experience of the backstage space, as well as the experience of other actors, to support my visual inquiries and experiences of the backstage space.

I look to the recorded first-person experiences of well-known and respected actors and theatre practitioners. I am uniquely placed to reveal, through painting, the affective atmospheres present in the backstage of a theatre during a performance. I have spent the last twenty-two years passing through backstage spaces and the last seven years developing

my painting practice in art studios. Using painting, I attempt to better understand my own experiences, and reveal the affects, sensations, and places that are kept from view and usually remain unseen by others. The palpable affective atmosphere of the backstage is intrinsically linked to and informed by the processes and behaviours of the actors as they prepare to act.

Analysing and detailing the processes that an actor may engage with backstage underwrite the objective of my research. There are many approaches to acting which have been formulated and taught over the centuries, however in this research I build on the training that I received at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) from 2002–2005. The fundamentals of acting to which I refer also underpin most of the myriad techniques which have evolved in Western performance culture over the last two centuries, and which are taught in most acting schools worldwide. Traces of this technique can be located within the training of most contemporary professional actors who perform on the world’s stages and screens.³ Exploring acting technique is relevant to this project because the backstage becomes a concentration point for the preparation that has gone into the performance, and the affective atmosphere is therefore impacted by it. In addition to Stanislavski’s primary text *An Actor Prepares* ([1936] 1980), I reference Isaac Butler’s book *The Method: How the Twentieth Century Learned to Act* (2022) as well as Phillip Zarrilli’s book (*Toward*) a *Phenomenology of Acting* (2020).

Beyond being a locus for the concentration and preparation of the actors, I also identify the backstage as the home of a *threshold site* – specifically the door in the set. In this research I explore the way that this threshold site further impacts the affective atmosphere within the space. I identify this threshold visually as ‘the line of the light’, where the muffled surfaces and dimmed lights of the backstage meet the bright illumination of the stage. Using the unique ontology of painting, my aim is to inscribe the experience of the

³ “Something happened to overturn that old order, a revolution in how we think about acting. In the United States in the 1950s, that revolution was called the Method.... [T]he Method created both a system of norms and a stylistic and technical lineage...an American adaptation of the theories and practices of the Russian actor and director Konstantin Stanislavski. Stanislavski’s ideas – and the Moscow Art Theatre, which he co-founded in the 1890s – upended hundreds of years of conventional wisdom about what acting was supposed to be, first in Russia and then in the United States. At the heart of Stanislavski’s revolution was the concept of *perezhivanie*, which, loosely translated, means something like ‘experiencing,’ or perhaps ‘re-experiencing’. *Perezhivanie* occurs when an actor is so connected to the truth of a role, and has so thoroughly entered into the imaginary reality of the character, that they feel what the character feels, perhaps even think what the character thinks” (Butler 2022, iii).

atmospherically charged nature of this private space behind the public stage. I have chosen to investigate this via painting following the logic that Nigel Wentworth articulates when he writes that, “the process of realising plastic and figurative elements out of experience in order to give a figurative expression to whichever aspect of it the painter is drawn to communicate” (2004, 104).

Throughout this exegesis I engage with artists who I assess as making affective atmospheres and spaces visible in their paintings. I employ the work of the following painters to illustrate philosophical theories and to inform my studio processes: Johannes Vermeer, Vilhelm Hammershøi, Giorgio de Chirico, Edward Hopper, Peter Doig, Mamma Andersson, Adrian Ghenie, Matthias Weischer, Clarice Beckett, Walter Sickert, Caspar David Friedrich, Sydney Long, and Jude Rae. I investigate the way that each artist approaches their subject matter, and uses painting techniques, plastic choices⁴, and the materiality of the paint to “infect”⁵ the viewer with the affective atmosphere of the places and scenarios they paint. I expand upon “contagion” via engagement with affect theory, and the analysis of other painters whose work affects me in this way. I aim for my research to contribute to the continuum of artists who explore the potentiality of paint to make tacit and visible an experience for viewers open to the affective qualities of figurative painting.

I have investigated works from the history of figurative painting to inform my approach to this concept of a threshold site within the backstage space. In the thirteenth century, Andrea del Verrocchio, Lorenzo di Credi, and Fra Angelico addressed spiritual thresholds in their religious paintings, while in the seventeenth century Johannes Vermeer was arguably preoccupied by thresholds in time, and moments of liminality. Vilhelm Hammershøi explored similar subject matter to Vermeer in the early nineteenth century, while contemporary Australian painter Jude Rae’s approach to depth, liminal interior

⁴ Plastic choices refer to the pictorial elements that contribute to the construction and interpretation of a (painted) image: point, line, colour (value), tone, volume, shape, texture. As Wentworth writes, “The kind of plastic elements that are realised in a painting result from the ways in which the materials are used” (2004, 53).

⁵ Infection and contagion in art relate to affect theory, and the ability of a work of art to inscribe affect within a work in such a way that the viewer can experience a similar embodied response and, potentially, related emotions. This is explored further in ACT I, Scene ii. Jill Bennett explains,

Thus, the kinds of ‘transcriptions’ of experience one encounters in art do not usually invite us to extrapolate a subject, a persona, from them. Under these conditions, the affective responses engendered by artworks are not born of emotional identification or sympathy; rather, they emerge from a direct engagement with sensation as it is registered in the work. (2005, 7)

spaces, as well as her written ideas on the potential of painting to explore embodiment and perception make her another invaluable source.

In ACT II, I outline my field research, where I gathered visual information to bring back to process in the studio. The primary physical backstage locations identified in this project are at the Drama Theatre at the Sydney Opera House, and the Heath Ledger Theatre at the State Theatre of Western Australia. I examine my lived experience of the backstage whilst playing the part of Gwynne Thomas in the realist production of *The Torrents* by Oriel Gray in 2019, and consolidate my own experience with research together with the experience of other actors. Supplementary visual research was also carried out backstage at other theatres, and analysis of the unique physical details of these backstage sites is crucial not only due to their potential function as painted motifs, but also their phenomenological affective atmosphere, which is what I am addressing in my body of creative work.

After discussing the sites of my field research in ACT II, I turn to focus on my own practice-based studio research. I examine my own painting techniques and studio experiments and contextualise them with reference to the work of other artists and the ideas of the philosophers and phenomenologists mentioned in ACT I. The practice-based component of this research scrutinises how my paintings can reveal an otherwise unseen place and the affective experience of being within it. I break my different experiments into sections within the scenes of ACT II which reflect the technique or process the works were seeking to test. I have created paintings that engage with traditions of interior painting and still life, as well as the techniques and painterly discoveries of contemporary and historical painters. I have pursued the development of my own painterly language driven by a goal to discover how to make visible the otherwise shrouded affective atmosphere of the backstage.

This pursuit has motivated visual research into the outcomes of various choices and processes which I describe in the scenes within ACT II. I test the application of layers of oil paint on different surfaces questioning how this can inscribe my subject matter. I investigate the effect of scale on the affective quality of a painting and the impact of different compositions, particularly using pictorial depth and perspective on the viewer. The way in which figurative and abstract imagery can relate to one another within the same composition has underpinned some studio tests, and I have investigated the efficacy

of different colour palettes and tonal ranges to best communicate the affective atmosphere of the backstage space. The resultant body of work has delivered some unexpected outcomes.

Over the course of study, it became apparent I was not simply using painting to illustrate the theatre, but rather that paint, when used in a less figurative way, could make visible affective atmospheres related to the backstage experience. ACT II contains analysis of the results of my studio research, and ACT III an explanation of the wider significance of the project. I found that I could use the materiality of paint to illuminate some of the affects that I, and others, describe as experiencing when preparing to step onto the stage in character. I expand upon these results in ACT III, relating these results back to both the literature review in ACT I, and the studio experimentation in ACT II.

Phenomenologists who explore the affective qualities associated with place and time reveal that there is merit in identifying an embodied, non-Cartesian way of engaging with the world. Kathleen Stewart is one such writer, and her description of the lived experience of place informs the analysis of my results. The visual language that developed both during the collection of research in the field, and the development of works in the studio showed that paint can illuminate the affective atmospheres backstage by behaving as illusively and ephemerally as the atmospheres themselves – slipping, melding, melting, and layering into, and upon, itself.

To conclude this prologue, it must be stated that to make paintings within a contemporary digital age seems almost a radical act, and one that undoubtedly involves far more time, effort, and financial output when compared to creating a digital image via Artificial Intelligence websites or easily accessible iPhone technology (Figure 2-3). However, within this research I posit that the form and materiality of these painted works are inherently linked to the subject matter. Simply put, the embodied act of repetition inherent in rehearsal of a performance, and the connection between the lived-bodies of the performer's backstage during preparation for performance, contributes significantly to the affective atmosphere – the “emotional and material life” – of the backstage (Gandy, 2017, 357), and I inscribe this embodied lived experience via the embodied, gestural process of painting. The embodied gestural nature of *perezhivanie* related processes, that contribute to the lived experience of the tuned space of the backstage, are reference points for the

embodied painting methodology used to inscribe the supports. To put it in another way, the embodied method emerges from, and then mirrors, the embodied subject matter.

I have developed this embodied methodology in order to register the atmosphere behind the designed and ‘made’ atmosphere of the stage, however, it has broader implications. This methodology could foreseeably be applied to the revelation of the atmospheric scaffolding that lies behind *everyday atmospheres*. Through the creation of this original approach to making paintings, I aim to contribute to a wider understanding through visual insights, of the atmospheres that reside, and sometimes hide, in everyday experiences. I unpack this further in the conclusion of this document, which I refer to as The Epilogue, wherein I explore the significance of this project, and its original contribution to the field of oil painting. This project advocates for, and hopefully provides evidence of, painting’s ability to contribute to an understanding of an experience of the world that is embodied and sensed.



Figure 1. Photograph of Installation of *Study for Set Piece* and *Set Piece* in the Project Space at Curtin University. 2023. Image: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 2. Screenshot of instructions in a free AI image generator called Craiyon for creating a painting of the affective atmosphere of the backstage of the theatre. 2023. Image: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 3. Screenshot of the resultant images from the AI image generator, which almost all show a red curtain, and a view from the auditorium, rather than the backstage. 2023. Image: Emily Rose Brennan.

ACT I

Painting, Acting, and the Affective Atmosphere of the Backstage

ACT I

Scene i

Painting: An Embodied Way to Inscribe an Embodied Experience

In this Scene, I provide the background for understanding the lived body in oriented space and how this relates to the use of painting to inscribe the experience of an affective atmosphere. I have underscored my studio experimentation with philosophical engagement and come to understand that the unique ontology of painting has the potential to inscribe this very thing, although the results have been surprising. To understand the potential of painting, I approach the ontology of painting from a pre-reflective phenomenological approach, underpinning my investigations with the written work of philosophers who have explored lived experience in this way.

Key painting scholars Nigel Wentworth and Paul Crowther, who ground their own research in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's texts *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) and *Eye and Mind* (1961), as well as Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), have been invaluable. Wentworth's *The Phenomenology of Painting* (2004), and Crowther's *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (even the frame)* (2009) – expand on Merleau-Ponty's and Heidegger's ideas, providing a contemporary philosophical starting point for this investigation. The foundation of the phenomenological approach of these philosophers to being, and to painting, is embodiment.

This project argues for the potential of analysing experience gathered through the lived body and registered through the physical act of painting as a way to provide insights into the affective atmosphere of a space. An understanding of embodiment and the 'concausal', interactional relationship between the lived body and oriented space has been intrinsic to my visual research, as has the relationship of painting to these concepts. This is because my paintings attempt to inscribe the experience of an affective atmosphere as it is registered through the lived body in the oriented space that is the backstage. Furthermore, the backstage affective atmosphere is a result of the embodied processes of preparing to perform, as actor Sir Ian McKellen puts it in the documentary *Playing the Part*, "the whole body" is what becomes important for the actor in the theatre (Stephenson, 21:52). This project attempts the embodied, dynamic registration of an embodied, dynamic experience.

I use the term concausal in this doctoral research to refer to the way in which elements inherent within an experience exist alongside one another, affecting and interpenetrating one another, defining one another whilst creating a cumulative result. This result then continues to evolve and is not fixed. The term concausal is utilised to describe the way that the self and world infuse one another in a dynamic and interwoven fashion, at once defining and being defined by one another. The lived body and oriented space interpenetrate, infuse, and diffuse one another, and this porosity inherently informs the lived experience of the embodied subject. Atmospheres and affects are similarly flexible, interactive, and affected by embodied beings, as philosopher and psychiatrist Thomas Fuchs writes in “The Phenomenology of Affectivity”, “phenomenology regards affects as encompassing phenomena that connect body, self, and world... Thus emotions are regarded as resulting from the circular interaction between affective accordances in the environment and the subject's bodily resonance, be it in the form of sensations, postures, gestures, or movement tendencies”(2013, 61).

Embodiment is a phenomenological approach to understanding what it is to experience the world as a living human being. In his book *In Defense of the Human Being: Foundational Questions of an Embodied Anthropology*, Fuchs describes the human person as a “physical or embodied being...not mere spirits or monads of consciousness but embodied, living beings” (2021, 2). Relating this to affective atmospheres, Professor of Cultural and Historical Geography, Matthew Gandy attributes the process of the “liquidation of the ‘Cartesian’ bourgeois-individual subject” to the way in which subjects encounter atmospheres, writing that “We contend with shifting constellations of affective subjectivities moving between the single and the multiple, and from the human to other forms of life and materiality” (2017, 369). I have chosen the embodied act of painting to speak to these phenomenological approaches to the concausal nature of lived experience.

Wentworth defines painting as “a bodily activity, one that is an expression of the lived body’s way of being in the world” (2004, 10). As I will go on to discuss, painting is an open-ended and intercausal process between the painter and the painting, and this can be understood to reflect the relationship of the lived body to the world. Philosopher Jussi A. Saarinen writes that painting is a,

[p]rocess of exploration rather than the execution of fully predetermined ideas or intentions. Seeing as the artist does not initially possess fixed or precise knowledge of

how the work will turn out, she must remain attentive and responsive to the emerging, cue-like features of the painting. Under these circumstances, the painting is experienced as an interlocutor: a living presence that responds to the artist's painterly gestures by shutting down certain possibilities while opening up others, and by resisting, suggesting, or even demanding further courses of action. (2019, 71)

Interestingly, I have found that the paintings that were approached with a less 'scripted', more improvised approach, following the 'cue-like features of the painting', and created in a more physically engaged way, seemed to be most successful in inscribing the affective atmosphere I was attempting to register. I will unpack this later in ACT I and ACT II. Here, I will expand on concepts that have been key to choosing painting as my means of studio experimentation, and analyse the work of other painters who explore similar concepts and processes.

ACT 1

Scene i

a) Painting Embodiment

The embodied-being is a concept central to the work of Merleau-Ponty, while contemporary philosophers Wentworth and Crowther also understand the experience of being a human in the world as an embodied one, relative to, oriented by, and engaged with the surrounding world. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's ideas, Crowther argues that painting has the potential to "draw upon and express" the "brute meaning" of this "fundamental cognition and orientation within the world, in a unique way that other art forms are incapable of" (2009, 74). The phenomenological approach of Merleau-Ponty's takes a different view to the Cartesian Dualism which preceded him. Crowther, quotes Merleau-Ponty, in asserting that scientific thinking "must return to the 'there is' which underlies it; to the site, the soil of the sensible and opened world such that it is in our life and for our body" (Merleau-Ponty, (1961) as quoted by Crowther 2009, 73). A phenomenological understanding of atmospheres as tuned spaces similarly rejects the 'pervasive and debilitating split between subject and object' that scarred modernity (Latham, 1999: 466, in Böhme, 2017, 2).

What Merleau-Ponty, Crowther, (and Böhme), mean is that the body is the primary detector – it orientates the being in the world and should be considered the main source of information regarding experience. The being is *embodied*. According to Merleau-Ponty and Crowther, the unique ontology of painting can record and communicate information about this experience and knowledge. This is why I initially thought that painting could be an ontologically appropriate medium for exploring the way a lived body resonates within the affective atmosphere of the backstage space.

Fuchs, whose work on affective atmospheres is explored throughout this exegesis, explains that embodiment is characterised by two main, inseparable concepts, involving the body, the world, the mind, and the circular interactions between them. In an interview titled *The Embodied Mind*, he says,

The body is not just a mechanistic system; the body is a living system. The body is a living whole.... So embodiment, in the end, means that being a subject, I'm not within my brain but I am an embodied subject which is extended over my whole

body, which is moving and feeling with my limbs, and acting with my limbs, and it is not something that is done externally by commands of the brain. I am this living-body and this embodied organism. (Psicologia Fenomenologica 2019)

This understanding of the body as a living, resonating system that simultaneously experiences and contributes to the affective atmosphere around it, is crucial to analysing the experience of the backstage affective atmosphere, and the way that painting can potentially make it perceivable to a viewer.

The expressive materiality of paint, the versatility of its applications, and the potential of scale, depth within compositions, and other painterly plastic choices, allow a painting to uncover details related to the way that the lived body perceives itself as at once a member, and an observer, of the oriented-world. These choices can perhaps reveal how the lived body resonates within the atmosphere it encounters “as an enveloping aura, resonating or emanating from the space or environment that one enters” and then contributes to it (Fuchs, 2013, 6). In the case of this research, the execution of a painting through the action of the lived body concretises not only the embodied experience of the affective backstage atmosphere that it attempts to convey, but also the embodied experience that formed it. This quality, together with the unique ontology of painting as perceivable whilst also revealing details of that perception, makes it a medium that has the potential to visually translate the experience of the affective atmosphere of the backstage of the theatre.

ACT I

Scene i

b) Pre-consciousness, Oriented space, and Concausality

Merleau-Ponty defines the lived body as *pre-conscious*, arguing that it is not solely governed by consciousness but is already engaged in knowing the world *pre-consciously*. Wentworth writes, “The lived body is always already within the world: it does not exist in an essentially separate world like a Cartesian consciousness” (2004, 11). To quote Thomas Fuchs,

the human being is often taken to be something that *I am*, as a subject, that I am as a self-conscious being, and somehow reduced to a psychological state or psychological entity that continues over time. But from an embodied point of view, I’m of course not only a subject when I’m aware of myself, but I’m still continuous.... So the continuity of myself essentially rests on the continuity of the life of my organism – on the life of my body... the human being is always the embodied person that I am, so the continuity of myself is the continuity of embodied being and that is what we usually call in western philosophy, and in western thought, *the person*. ((Psicologia Fenomenologica 2019) italics added)

Merleau-Ponty’s pre-conscious lived body – Fuchs’s ‘person’ – is considered neither a split between the consciousness and the body, nor a combination of the two. This is because the lived body occupies the privileged, subjective position within the world of being both observed and *an observer*. Neither purely subject, nor purely object, the lived body is a concept that slides somewhere in-between, existing in a slippery realm defined by the lived body’s relationship with space. On this, Wentworth writes:

The lived body cannot be part of the physical world, subject to causal processes, because it is still a subject, a privileged locus of experience and activity against which all else is given as a ‘milieu’ or surrounding world. Within causal processes there is no room for such a subject. It is fundamentally through this dimension of subjecthood – as the privileged locus of experience within a surrounding world – that the lived body can be understood. (2004, 11)

By this statement, Wentworth illustrates how a phenomenological understanding of the lived body considers the way that the subject interacts with the world around it, whilst also being a part of the world.

To characterise the dynamic relationship between the body and space, the lived body is defined as *situated* in *oriented space* with things around it that are not simply meaningless objects, but items which form “an environment with meaning” (Wentworth 2004, 11). The oriented space around the subject is at once defined by its relationship to the lived body, and inherent in the definition of the subject. Oriented space around the lived body exists *for* that subject, extending out from it and activated by the lived body as it passes through it. My painting research is attempting to make visible and *sensible* an experience that is a result of the actor’s body simultaneously being impacted by, and impacting on, the backstage oriented space. Painting, Wentworth and Crowther argue, makes visible this subjective embodied experience through its ability to interrogate perception, space and depth, subjectivity, and the nature of the gesture that leaves traces of the embodied means by which the work was created.

The relationship between the lived body and the oriented-world is cyclical, characterised by circular exchanges and concausality. Following Merleau-Ponty, Crowther and Wentworth assert that the lived body experiences the oriented-world through a series of interactions and exchanges that engage bodily sensation and thought, simultaneously engaging the brain, the body, and the world. The lived body makes meaning through interactions with the situated-world, with some interactions entirely governed by knowledge possessed by the body pre-consciously. Wentworth writes that,

The body seeks its way in the world and ‘understands’ its world. It is neither a mechanism endowed with ready-made patterns of activity that operate as soon as an external stimulus makes itself felt, nor a pure consciousness that ‘thinks’ a world. (2004, 13)

The painting can be understood as an interface where the painter and the world meet and where this concausal relationship can be questioned and made visible, while the process of painting itself – the feedback loop – similarly mirrors the circular relationship between the lived body and oriented space.

I explore the interpenetrable, concausal nature of the relationship between the lived body and oriented space through painting using edge quality and the relationship between objects and the grounds in which they are sitting. Crowther explains why painting is a relevant way in which to explore this dynamic,

The phenomenological depth of painting, then, consists of the following. On the one hand it reveals how its represented subject matter comes to be seen and stylised in visual terms through the artist's bodily positioning and, on the other hand, this revelation is made possible by the painting's auto-disclosure as this specific work, composed from this unique configuration of gestures. Through painting, the virtual and the physical, the world and the body, are shown to inhabit one another simultaneously and inseparably. (2009, 77)

The interactive, concausal relationship between the lived body and oriented space is reflected in the process of painting. The subject matter is repeatedly observed, recorded, then re-observed and re-recorded, and this process is repeated until the work is resolved. The marks made on the surface reflect the painter's perception of the subject matter, and those marks can change the perception of the subject matter for both the artist and the viewer. Crowther writes that the gestural quality of painting has a unique way of reshaping the correlation between the subject and object of experience. Drawing again on the ideas of Merleau-Ponty (1961), he describes painting as "a creative, gestural act which interprets and changes visual reality" underpinned by a "reciprocal interaction between the painter, the ontology of his or her medium, and the visible world" (2009, 73).

ACT I

Scene i

Painting: An Embodied Way to Inscribe an Embodied Experience

c) Painting and the Relationship between the Lived body and Oriented space

Underwritten by the knowledge that the lived body is pre-conscious and has an enmeshed, intertwined relationship with the oriented space within which it exists, the purpose of this scene is to interrogate how painting can relate to this understanding and engage with the affective atmosphere of the backstage. Merleau-Ponty, Crowther, and Wentworth purport that painting has the potential to make visible the true nature or “fabric” of this experience (Crowther 2009, 74). The notion that painting can potentially record and make visible details which lie beyond the primary function, or experience of a place or object, is intrinsic to this investigation. In *The World of Perception* Merleau-Ponty describes some of the paintings of Paul Cezanne and others as being able to “hold our gaze” and reveal the nature of their subject matter in a very specific way, potentially allowing the viewer to “discover the world as we apprehend it in lived experience” (2004, 39). While these paintings are holding our gaze, they allow us to ask questions of the objects, and reveal to the viewer the “very secret of their substance, the very mode of their material existence” as they “stand ‘bleeding’ before us” (2004, 69).

Clarifying the way that the act of painting, the ontology of a painting, and the way a viewer can potentially engage with it, can relate to the experience of the lived body in oriented space has been important to this research. This is because an actor’s body in the backstage space, and the affective atmosphere the actor both contributes to and experiences, are processed through the body. There are several ways that painting is potentially able to do this, and these concepts have informed my studio practice.

Firstly, the way that the lived body understands itself in space is relational to the oriented-world, and can be registered through painting, especially through painting’s potential depiction of depth and perspective. The composition of a painting also speaks to the human experience of being able to imagine oneself in other spaces and in other times. Secondly, a painting can bring attention to the way that the lived body perceives the space around it by drawing focus to the details that make up the visibility of the subject matter, which might otherwise be ignored. The painting is revealed to the viewer in the same way

that subject matter reveals itself to the artist, layer by layer, unveiling information about the very act of perception.

Thirdly, the stylistic nature of painting draws attention to the lived body's subjective way of interacting with and processing the world through the senses, speaking to the unique perspective of each lived body. The perceptual experience of the lived body in the world is subjective and relative to many factors contingent on the individual, and a painting can illuminate this. Finally, the embodied gestures that form the painting are evidence of the physical interaction at the interface between the body of the painter and the support. This record of the physical encounters between the artist, the subject matter, and the support records the concausal relationship between the lived body and the oriented-world. The gestural quality of painting also draws attention to the unique position of the lived body, both within the world and as an observer of the world.

Extrapolating on the work of Merleau-Ponty, Crowther writes of how understanding painting as “something that has been brought forth through the bodily activity and positioning of the creator” (2009, 76) allows it to be comparable with visual perception, which, like painting, is related to bodily orientation, or to put another way, the body's position in and relationship to the space around it. Painting, as Crowther puts it, “thematizes” the role of the body in perception and experience (2009, 76). In the case of my studio research, I use painting to thematise the role of the body in the perception and experience of the backstage affective atmosphere.

Depth and Composition

A painting can question and reveal subjective details of the experience of the lived body in oriented space by way of representing space. This can be pictorially expressed through painting, especially through painting's potential depiction of depth and perspective, via compositional and plastic choices, including the use of tone and colour. The mobility of the lived body forms the basis of one's knowledge of the world, and the way that one perceives depth. The way that a lived body perceives itself is contingent on its perceptual abilities, its size in comparison to, and distance from, the objects in the world around it.

The body's perception of itself in space is usually a passive acceptance, which is part of 'ordinary' everyday experience. As painter Jude Rae writes in her essay "In Plain Sight", "mostly we see what we expect to see" (2017). A lived body will barely notice their relationship to the space that they are in, except perhaps reflectively, or unless that space has been designed to draw attention to itself. A painting can draw attention to this detail of experience, make it visible, and therefore illuminate a facet of experience for the viewer. Crowther writes,

the visual field is not some passively registered set of data, rather the juxtaposition and overlap of objects is mapped out by my own immediate position in relation to them.... We recognise a visible item or state of affairs on the basis of its position within a complex network of bodily competences and visual relations. (2009, 74)

This subjective and relative experience of the world can be reflected and made visible in the composition of a painting, the way that a painter explores space, depth, and distance using perspective, colour, tone, and scale. As Rae writes, great art and great painting can subtly reset "our relationship to the world and ourselves, by prompting us to recognise, question, or reconsider aspects of our sensory life" (2017).

The embodied self can imagine itself in other spaces and other times, and painting can explore this facet of the lived body's experience. Merleau-Ponty writes that "it is a self through confusion, narcissism, through inherence of the one who sees in that which he sees, and through inherence of sensing in the sensed – a self therefore that is caught up in things that has a front and a back a past and the future" (as quoted by Crowther 2009, 75). This sentient self-awareness, sensitivity, and capability for imaginative thought lands the embodied being in a unique position of being able to picture themselves in different spaces and times, characterising the "embodied perceptual relation to the world" as creative and interpretive (Crowther 2009, 75). Painting makes visible alternative positionings within alternative worlds; it makes perceivable what it is to have experienced and sensed the world through another lived body.



Figure 4. Emily Rose Brennan, 2020. *Imaginary Circumstances I*, Oil on board, 60 x 90 cm.

In the painting *Imaginary Circumstances I* (Figure 4) I experimented with the ability of paint to inscribe the embodied experience of space, and the visual perception of depth. I attempt to register what Rae refers to as “the more haptic or the ‘whole of body’ experience of vision”, not just the optical qualities of observation (2017). I attempt here to use paint to inscribe more than just the visual elements of my subject matter. I am certainly not the only painter to attempt this, and I am in awe of the long history of painters who have done the same. As Rae notes,

From Velázquez to Freud, Chardin to Tapies...painters have acknowledged this more elusive aspect of vision in the physical structure of their works, capturing an equivalence in paint that establishes an important link with the viewer. In the imaginative conception of the painter, vision may even have olfactory and auditory dimensions, if only we will bring our imagination to the task. (2017)

Within this work, I have made specific choices relating to the composition and colour value to explore these concepts.

Using a composition dominated by strong perspectival lines, I have attempted to create a sense of visual and spatial depth. This work also refers to the physical depth and

the multiple thresholds present in the backstage space of the theatre. The work additionally references the depth of analysis and imaginary work required of an actor when creating a character, specifically whilst using contemporary acting techniques related to realism. I unpack this technique in later scenes. It suffices to briefly state here that acting requires the actor to create depth for their character in the form of an imaginative backstory. The actor then relates this imagined set of circumstances to their own real experience so to empathise with the character, thus bringing truth to the performance. This also explains the title of the work.

When creating this painting, I engaged with techniques used by Vilhelm Hammershøi in *Interior, Strangade 30* (Figure 5) and Jude Rae in *T5 (Heathrow #247)* (Figure 6) to inform my approach to creating depth. Both painters use perspectival lines that draw the viewers' eyes toward the furthest point in the interiors being depicted and have softened the edges of the forms in the background, while using linear perspective to reduce the size of objects further from view. Both have also reduced the warmth and saturation of colour characterising the objects in the background of their compositions. The space in both paintings is broken into clear areas – foreground, midground, and background – which I have replicated in my work. The composition of both paintings draw attention not only to the depth that existed in the original place, but also the way that the eye perceives depth. Rae writes,

A painting can recall not only the look of things, but also the feel of that seeing...Space or depth in painting can be generated in an enormous variety of ways (linear structures, chromatic variations, transparency and opacity, material impositions to name a few) but whatever form it takes, the integrity of the phenomenon emerges from some element of perceptual experience shared by the painter and the viewer. (2017)

The approach of Hammershøi and Rae to visually inscribe three-dimensional depth on a two-dimensional surface have had a significant impact on my approach to painting. The way that these paintings draw attention to how it feels to see depth has also been informative to my approach.



Figure 5. Vilhelm Hammershøi, *Interior, Strandgade 30*. 1901, Oil on canvas, 66 x 55 cm. Amsterdam: Stadel Museum. Reproduced from: Stadel Museum Digital Collection (Stadel Museum 2022).

Figure 6. Jude Rae, *T5 (Heathrow #247)*. 2010, Oil on linen, 240 x 180 cm. Private Collection, New Zealand. Reproduced from: JudeRae.com (Rae 2022).

Evidently Rae has used the techniques outlined above to create much of the depth in *T5 (Heathrow #247)*, however in her essay she draws attention to the fact that depth can be created in paintings in many ways. She writes,

A sense of space in painting is not dependent on representation however. One only has to think of the paintings of Mark Rothko or Ad Reinhardt to understand that with Modernism the experience of pictorial depth became less attached to illusionism and perspective, a sense of depth emerging instead from the subtle integration of formal and material components of the work. (2017)

I have implemented this idea in later works but in *Imaginary Circumstances I*, I have certainly employed techniques usually linked to illusionism. I have also used colour temperature and saturation to convey a sense of depth. Borrowing compositionally from Hammershøi and Rae, *Imaginary Circumstances I* has three distinctive areas – the foreground, midground, and background. I intentionally broke the painting into these pictorial areas to create two clearly demarcated thresholds. These demarcations refer both to the physical threshold within the backstage of the theatre, and the imaginative threshold, mentioned above, that the actor is required to cross between themselves and the character.

Influenced by Hammershøi and Rae, I have intentionally used cool colours in this work, particularly in the background. I use cool colours and soft lines in the background of the work to enhance the sense of atmospheric depth. Unlike Hammershøi and Rae, my painting draws attention to the affective atmosphere of the backstage. I have considered this in my depiction of light and shadow, particularly in the foreground. In this area I have used hard edges, and intentionally exaggerated the definition between shadow and light, and this is markedly different from the selected works of Hammershøi and Rae. I emphasise the contrast between light and dark in order to register the artificial light and shadows that characterise the backstage, and to register a vibrant, dense atmosphere, as opposed to the quieter, more subtle atmospheres I detect in the Hammershøi and Rae works.

Compared to the Hammershøi and Rae works, *Imaginary Circumstances I* contains an overall brighter and more saturated colour palette particularly in the foreground. Again, this relates to the backstage affective atmosphere, which I define as being imbued with a concentration of energy and a sense of anticipation. Rae describes some painting as possessing the ability to communicate more than just a representation of space:

A painting can recall not only the look of things, but also the feel of that seeing. It reminds us that vision is primary because it is not just visual. The eye brings together a complex interweaving of the senses so that vision registers as both spatial and tactile.... (2017)

I attempt to bring together my experience of the backstage, as I sense it, and make it visual, whilst also registering the affective atmosphere I detect as present.

Imaginary Circumstances I is overall less figurative, and certainly less visually ‘quiet’ than Hammershøi’s and Rae’s works. I have left the brushstrokes that make up the abstracted shadows on the floor of the foreground quite visible. This is an intentional choice as I was interested in exploring the gestural quality of paint, and the way that the hand of the painter and the role of the brush can be visible. This area of painted shadows in the foreground of the painting is also a visual threshold that the eye must cross in order to enter into the depth of the painting and resonates with the actor’s imaginative threshold. The gestural quality inherent in the application of paint in this area has the potential to elicit sensations in the viewer, whilst visually translating details related to the backstage and the imaginative thresholds crossed by the actors.

Details of Perception

Painting has the ability to simultaneously engage and reveal the nature of the embodied experience of perception. Details of the visual that are usually overlooked can be highlighted by the painter. By focusing on the subject matter for a significant amount of time, the artist has the potential to make visible the sometimes imperceptible or easily ignored visual details that the viewer is rarely engaged with. This idea is expressed in this quote by Merleau-Ponty,

Light, lighting, shadows, reflections, colour, all the objects of his quest are not altogether real objects; like ghosts they have only virtual existence. In fact, they exist only at the threshold of profane vision; they are not seen by everyone. The painter's gaze asks them what they do to suddenly cause something to *be* and to be this thing what they do to compose this worldly talisman and to make us see the visible.

(Merleau-Ponty, as quoted by Crowther 2009, 76, italics in the original)

The painting makes the scaffolding of perception visible to the viewer.

A painter can potentially gather up the details of an experience that may otherwise be too fleeting or too complex to be fully perceived in the moment and make details of it visible and sensible. Cezanne wrote, "The blue smell of the pines... must be married to the green smell of the plains which are refreshed every morning, with the smell of stones, the perfume of distant marble from Sainte-Victoire..." (as quoted by Rae 2017). This quote tells us that the painter has the potential to not simply sense with their eyes and their vision, but with their entire lived body. Cezanne biographer Jonathon Kear describes that, in relation to Cezanne's paintings, "sensations remained the starting point of his work" (2002, 137). This emphasis on sensation corresponds to the notion of painting as single-mindedly devoted to the visual aspect of things, to pictorial art as an exploration of the material act of perception by a specific embodied observer (Kear 2002, 137-138). The resultant painting has the potential to ask a viewer to slow down and take the time to pay attention to these details, and to perhaps ask questions related to how the painter looked and made sense, and how the painting is making the viewer do the same themselves.

Regarding this point, Rae writes,

I am interested in what might be referred to as 'a poetics of description'. Imagine this as a kind of painting that does not so much challenge normal vision as quietly recall the attention to something, which might otherwise be, as Norman Bryson put

it, overlooked. In the making or contemplating of such paintings, conventions or habits which allow normal seeing can be quietly disrupted. The path of sight is retraced and vision itself is slowed, questioned, revised. (2011, 5)

To put it another way, a painting is an object that is both visible to the viewer and can explore the way the viewer perceives and experiences the oriented-world through their senses, whilst also making visible details of that perception. I refer again to Rae, who writes that painting has the potential to register the “felt temporality of embodied experience” in terms of how “the painter observes and interprets over time. The resulting work compresses many perceptual moments” (2017). Rae describes a great painting as an object in which the experience of the perception of time and space has been concentrated and made visible. She states,

I am interested [sic] the way great painters can bring a kind of density to stillness, an intensity that conveys the mobility inherent in visual perception. In such work, by taking time, compressing it, making it visible, the artist draws the viewer, even across centuries, into a tacit sense of time experienced and shared. (2017, 4)

Painting can shine a light on the phantoms of perception, such as the shadows that surround and define the visible shape of an object, but often remain visually unattended to. This not only reveals deeper and more intrinsic information regarding the subject matter of the painting, but also draws attention to the mechanics of seeing and perceiving.

The attention that Rae’s artworks give these phantoms of perception serves to make the representational abstract. *Interior 370 (Foyer 1)* (Figure 7) is described on the Art Gallery of New South Wales website,

[I]ght from the windows and reflections in the shiny surfaces of the foyer serve to dematerialise form and to emphasis [sic]the closeness of representation and abstraction, a proximity we experience visually every day without necessarily being aware of it. (AGNSW 2023)

[Find Image here](#)

Figure 7. Jude Rae, *Interior 370 (Foyer I)*. 2017, Oil on linen, 198 x 260 cm. Sydney: Art Gallery of NSW Collection. Reproduced from: JudeRae.com (Rae 2022).

In my painting *Liminal Resonance I*, (Figure 8) I paid particular attention to the light and shadows in the backstage space, and how these visual details contributed to the overall pervasive gestalt of the backstage. I gave particular attention to the subtle shifts in colour that occurred where different light sources overlapped, resulting in dreamy, soft edges. Through this approach I feel that the affective atmosphere I was attempting to register seemed to come into view. Making this work allowed me to realise how the refraction of the different lights, and their visual impact on the plywood back of the set, was so intrinsic to the affective atmosphere of the backstage space.



Figure 8. Emily Rose Brennan, *Liminal Resonance I* (detail). 2020, Oil on canvas, 58.5 x 91 cm.

[Find Image here](#)

Figure 9. Edward Hopper, *Sheridan Theatre*. 1937, Oil on canvas, 43.56 x 64.13 cm. The Newark Museum of Art. Reproduced from: Google Arts and Culture (Google Arts and Culture 2023).

Sheridan Theatre (Figure 9) by Edward Hopper is a painting that, under examination, successfully conveys the affective atmosphere on the balcony of a theatre during a performance, particularly through the attention given to the details of the shadows, lights, and textures. It appears that Hopper has paid careful attention to these subtle transitions of light, and the shadows cast by objects within the space, and inscribed them through the application of delicately blended colour, conveying the soft luxury of the carpet, the focussed attention of the audience, and the sense of energy within the space. I propose that this painting transfers a sense of the affective atmosphere which is a result of both the physical features of the space and the activity that is occurring within it. Registered here is a sense of the hushed softness and concentration that can characterise an engaged audience.

Style, Gesture, and Scale

Influenced by the paintings of Hopper, I employ my painting practice to engage with my perception of the atmosphere of the backstage space through *my own subjective filters*. The way a lived body perceives and interprets the world is dependent on perceptual history, previous encounters with the subject matter, investment in personal visual analysis, “as well as upon general factors inherent in the human mode of embodiment” (Crowther 2009, 75). The act of perception is therefore defined by a series of subjective, reciprocal exchanges between the lived body, its history, and the world. As Crowther puts it,

just as the sensible configuration of the world is given its character by human embodiment and personal history, so too that mode of embodiment and its particular history is called forth by the demands of a re-encounterable sensible world. (2009, 75)

Owing to the fact that the lived body cannot freeze experience or perception, our perception of the world is related to a convergent range of factors, and because of the stylised and subjective way in which we perceive, our interpretation of the world involves a “characterisation” of it (Crowther 2009, 75). Cezanne was concerned with inscribing, through painting, his own way of seeing the world. Kear points out that Cezanne, in a letter to Emile Bernard, spoke of his painting as an expression and development of an “optic”. Kear writes that Cezanne,

indicated his concern to communicate the particularities of his way of seeing through his manner of rendering. As this implies, technical handling and style were

understood as representing the way the artist individually perceived nature rather than a shared inherited system of preconceived pictorial conventions. (2002, 138) Kear offers an insightful interpretation of how Cezanne used paint to make visible the unique characterisation and stylisation of the world that he perceived.



Figure 10. Emily Rose Brennan, *Threshold II*. 2022, Oil on canvas, 141 x 90 cm.

In the painting *Threshold II* (Figure 10), I attempt to simultaneously inscribe the experience of the affective atmosphere of the backstage, and the embodied act of making the work. I feel that this painting is also an example of the subjective style that painting can encompass, speaking to the innate subjectivity of perception. Many of the embodied gestures related to the making of the work are visible on the surface of this painting. The

concausal relationship between myself and the canvas is intentionally left visible to explore, and perhaps reflect, the concausal relationship between my lived body and the affective atmosphere of the backstage space. My material and plastic choices, and the physical actions are visible as a record of my subjective interpretation and translation of my lived experience of my subject matter. The result is a stylised interpretation of the affective atmosphere of the backstage space.

Although I have used illusionistic perspective in this work to underpin the figurative representation of the backstage, I have not hidden the physical experience of making the painting – I have not made the presence of the painter invisible. The painting is therefore not entirely mimetic of the physical space, but more a registration of the lived experience of the enveloping atmosphere of the backstage as processed through an individual lived body, and as a record of the making of the work. This painting can be read not just as a picture of a space, or even just the registration of the affective atmosphere of the backstage, but also as a self-disclosing inscription of the embodied experience of its own creation. The ability to make visible the concausal relationship between myself, the subject matter, and the painting – the many steps and moves taken to make the work – can be seen as reflective of the concausal dynamic between the sensing lived body and the affective atmosphere of the oriented space, and how the two things are inescapably linked.

In his writing, Crowther refers to “the presence of the painter” and he explores the unique relationship that painting has to “the holistic core of experience” (2009, 73). Here Crowther is asserting that when viewers look at a painting, they know that they are in the presence of an accumulation of contingent choices and moments that went into the experience of its creation. A painting, he states, visually translates the way that a lived body – the artist’s or the viewer’s – is similarly formed through a sequence of accumulated experiences. When observing a work of art, particularly a painting, Crowther writes that the viewer can see a “finished and self-subsistent item whose conditions of creation are, in a significant sense, preserved” (2009, 82). The collection of marks upon the surface of a painting, can be understood as a record of the artist’s experience with creating the work. As Crowther puts it, the reworkings and brushstrokes “are all necessarily present as conditions of the identity of this particular completed work” (2009, 82).

When brushstrokes are visible, the “complex of contingencies” that form the structure of the qualitative nature of experience are also revealed to the viewer (Crowther 2009, 82). The way that a painting can potentially expose the contingent nature of the steps that made up its creation, through visible brush strokes and layers, makes it reflective of the lived body’s experience of encountering and knowing the world via multiple interactions with it over time. On this idea of the painting as indicative of the processes that went into the making of it, Wentworth writes,

it is sometimes possible to read off the nature of the process from the nature of the end product. This can be done to a significant extent with paintings. It means that it is possible to draw out from the nature of paintings as finished products something of the nature of the structures of the lived world that gave rise to or lay behind them. (2004, 16)

The inscription of the marks of a painter’s experience – which are also both qualitative and quantitative – can create a visual equivalence to the way experience impacts a lived body.

The way a painting is made via embodied gestural movements reflects the physical means through which the lived body comes to know the world. The lived body physically senses the world, knows itself in comparison to the things around it, and learns about itself in the world by moving through it. We cannot outrun the fact that we are stitched into the fabric of the outside world, and are affected, through our skin, limbs, and senses by it. Crowther, following Merleau-Ponty, labels this knowledge the “fabric of brute meaning”, asserting that the embodied, gestural act of painting can draw on and express this knowledge in a manner that other symbolic art forms cannot (2009, 74).

Crowther is referring to the idea that, as Merleau-Ponty writes, the body is a “thing amongst things”, at once an observer of *objects*, an observer of *itself*, and an object of observation within the world (Merleau-Ponty, (1961) as quoted by Crowther 2009, 74). The gestural quality of painting is a record of the embodied being, with the marks made on the canvas a result of the interface of perception, embodied movement, and the surrounding world or subject matter. Crowther writes that,

[j]ust as our visual perception is made possible by bodily orientation, painting thematises this necessary role of the body, through our knowledge that the painting is something which has been brought forth through the bodily activity and positioning of its creator. (2009, 76)

The painter can “gather up” the visual details of the perceived world and use their own stylised and embodied gestures to make the subjective nature of vision and perception visible, whilst drawing attention to the details in the way the subject matter looks – details often overlooked in favour of a focus on the function of the thing (Crowther 2009, 76). A painter can accrue the visual details of an experience, and then influenced by the haptic, aural, and atmospheric features, use paint to make a visual equivalence.

I have been influenced by several contemporary painters who allow the presence of the painter to be sensed within their works. The artists who I have researched utilise painting to register affective atmospheres and create subsequent resonances within me as a viewer. The embodied act of painting is evident in Adrian Ghenie’s work *Nickelodeon* (Figure 11) in which the directional marks of the palette knife are visible, the tape is still physically present, drips and splashes remain on the canvas, and areas where thick paint has been applied and wiped, or violently scraped back, are vividly apparent, all of which assist in the inscription of a palpable affective atmosphere.

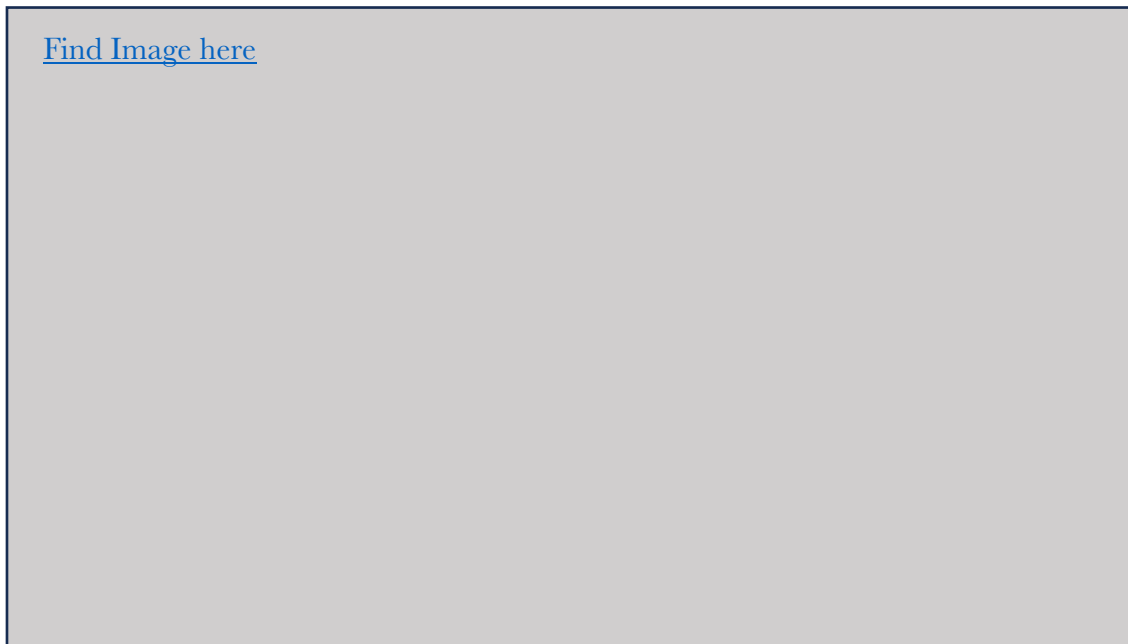


Figure 11. Adrian Ghenie, *Nickelodeon*. 2008, Oil, acrylic, and tape on canvas in two parts, 238 x 414 cm. Private collection. Reproduced from: Christies.com (Christie’s 2023).

Nickelodeon draws my attention to the surface of the canvas, and the marks made via Ghenie’s stylised physical and material interactions with it. The embodied act of making the painting physically resonates with me as a viewer. Through its form and appearance, *Nickelodeon* encourages the viewer to question and reflect on how it has been made.

Crowther writes that the ontology of a painting can include the “auto disclosure as this specific work, composed from this unique configuration of gestures” (2009, 77). In the Lot Essay for *Nickelodeon*, Christie’s refers to the embodied, painterly quality of this painting. It notes how the figures are “blurred and swallowed in thick swathes of abstract impasto, or effaced as if by the ravages of time.... Elsewhere their bodies recede into the settings rich painterly gloom which shimmers darkly with drips and splashes of paint” (Christie’s 2023). The visibly altered quality of the work’s surface not only enhances the viewer’s understanding and engagement with the subject matter evoking affective responses, but also draws attention to the act of perception.

In order to engage with this work, the viewer’s eye has to work through the visceral surface of the painting to find the figures within the composition. This is an embodied act which demands that the lived body negotiate with the oriented world of the painting. This challenging encounter, when combined with the corporeal tonal palette and dramatic chiaroscuro, enhances the disturbing atmosphere communicated by the ambiguous subject matter of the painting. Ghenie’s dark decaying colour palette made up of Burnt Umber, chromatic blacks, murky greens, and corporeal creams, with bright slashes of pustular yellows and blood-like reds reflect the colour palette of some of Mamma Andersson’s highly affective works catalogued in ACT I, Scene ii, as well as Peter Doig’s *Echo Lake* (Figure 23). These saturated, carnal colours work in harmony with the aggressive physical mode of application, inscribing a confronting and haunting affective atmosphere that envelops me when I encounter the work.

Regarding his construction of this work, Ghenie refers to art historical influences and expressive modern painters whose works show the mode of their construction and the hand of the artist. Ghenie relates his use of painterly texture to the historical subject matter of his paintings, explaining to art historian Magda Radu in 2015 that he is interested in “the texture of history” (Christie’s 2017). In practical terms, this is demonstrated by his use of colours mixed on a trowel and applied directly to the canvas, or by intentionally provoking an “accidental” spill of paint to create unpredictable effects that were not controlled or pre-planned (Radu 2016).

[Find Image here](#)

Figure 12. Christie's staff views painting titled *Nickelodeon* by artist Adrian Ghenie. 2008. Photo: Ray Tang. Reproduced from Getty Images.com (Getty Images 2023).

There are several credible reasons why *Nickelodeon* can be understood as resonating physically with its viewers. One is the dynamic application of paint discussed above. Scale is another tangible way through which this painting physically resonates with a viewer (Figure 12). A large-scale painting can draw attention to the viewer's own size and position in space and interrogate the concausal relationship between the lived body and oriented space. As Jude Rae writes, describing her Victoria Chambers drawings (Figure 13), scale can be used for a multitude of reasons related to the sense of the subject matter that the artist is seeking to express: "To give adequate force to the sense of silence and isolation I sought in the work required a certain degree of monumentality. The large scale also enhanced the play between spatial illusion, or depth, and flatness" (2008, 38). Like Rae and Ghenie I have made choices related to scale, in my case to encourage an embodied response to the atmospheric subject matter I am inscribing.

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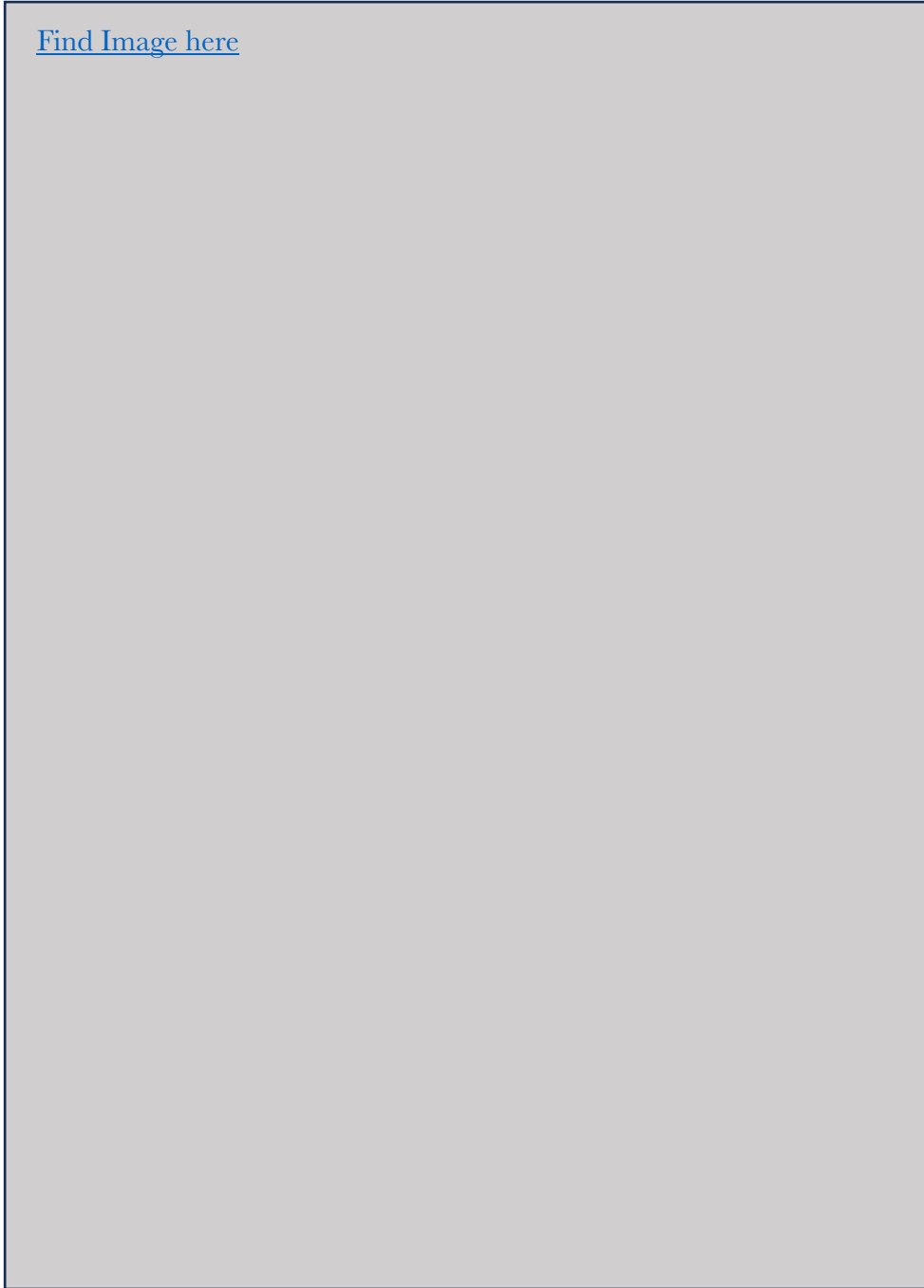


Figure 13. Jude Rae, *Victoria Chambers I (entrance)*. 2006, Willow charcoal on Fabriano paper, 200 x 140 cm. Reproduced from: Juderae.com (Rae 2023).

Influenced by Ghenie, I used scale, texture, and shadow in my work *Backstage* (Figure 14) to attempt to register this affective atmosphere. I used tape, a palette knife, and both scraping and wiping to create the varied surface of the painting. This can be seen in detail in Figure 15, where the charcoal underdrawing and thinly applied washes sit alongside thick impasto paint that has a creamy and uncontrollable dynamic. By leaving these details visible I attempt to encourage the viewer to be aware of the presence of the painter and the embodied way in which this work has been constructed. It is arguable that

this also quite successfully draws attention to the physical way in which I originally experienced the space and its layered affective atmosphere. The affective atmosphere of the backstage space is all-enveloping, radiant, and full of potential, and this painting can be seen to translate this through colour, scale, and the visible embodied gestures on its surface.



Figure 14. Emily Rose Brennan, *Backstage*. 2020, Oil on canvas, 100 x 120 cm.

I painted *Backstage* at a relatively early point in my research when I was exploring the potential uncanniness inherent in the theatre. Marvin Carlson refers to the theatre as a “memory machine”, writing that the theatre involves the “haunted” processes of repetition, and the resurfacing of the ghosts of the past through theatrical storytelling (2001, 1). The layering and scraping of paint, the unearthing of the paintings surface, seemed to be an appropriate way to explore this concept, although I did not continue this line of enquiry as my research moved forward. These experiments, however, have revealed more about how a lived-being experiences an affective atmosphere in an embodied way – and how it can be inscribed using oil painting techniques.



Figure 15. Emily Rose Brennan, *Backstage* (detail). 2020, Oil on canvas, 100 x 120 cm.

Contemporary German painter Matthias Weischer creates paintings in a nuanced way which draws attention to the experience of the lived body in the oriented world, and whose work provides context to my own. On his employment of texture, Weischer comments,

The texture is the result of many layers of paint and the use of different tools.

Mostly, I work with a huge spatula. I think the viewer can see my physical exertion and respond to its materiality, maybe stimulating a person's own tactile experiences.

(Friedman 2022)

Weischer's creation of texture via visible painterly gestures invites the viewer to engage with the temporal and physical processes inherent in the work, and the way that perception is not only a visual experience but related to and filtered through the bodily senses.

Perception of the affective atmosphere of a space resonates through the senses, as does a painting which engages the viewer on a haptic level via a varied, textured painterly surface.

I have examined Weischer's uncanny domestic interior paintings (Figure 16 and 17) – looking specifically at his compositional choices, his application of thick, textured paint, his use of saturated colour, the depiction of light, and the scale which draws attention to the experience of space and enlarges the view of the texture. Arts writer David Ebony describes

the works in Weischer's solo show, *Stage*, as containing "a sense of grand theatre in which time and space are the protagonists" (2020). He writes that Weischer's works "explore spatial phenomenology" and the poetics of space (Ebony, 2020). The sense of the artist's embodied experience of space is explored through the slightly distorted perspective of the compositions, use of illusionistic techniques such as exaggerated shading, highly saturated (though subtly modulated) colours, and presence of painterly marks and textures on the surface of the works.

[Find Image here](#)

Figure 16. Matthias Weischer, *Interior*. 2003, Oil on canvas, 75 x 96 cm. Reproduced from: Wikiart.org (Wikiart 2023).

Weischer's works register a space, and an affective atmosphere similar to the backstage, impregnated with radiant possibility. The subject matter of uninhabited spaces combined with the thick build-up of richly coloured paint on the surface of the support, evoke in me a sensation of concentrated energy and potential action, whilst also positioning the viewer as the lead character and sole observer of the scene. Interestingly, Weischer's paintings in the *Stage* series (Figure 16 and 17) are depictions of sets he built in his studio. While these works have been deeply influential, I am a subject who has a history of

inhabiting an actual theatrical space, and as result, I detect, in Weischer's work, the distance between the artist and the experience of the theatrical subject matter. By contrast, my works attempt to capture a sense of being enmeshed within the enlivened backstage space, rather than observing it from a distance.

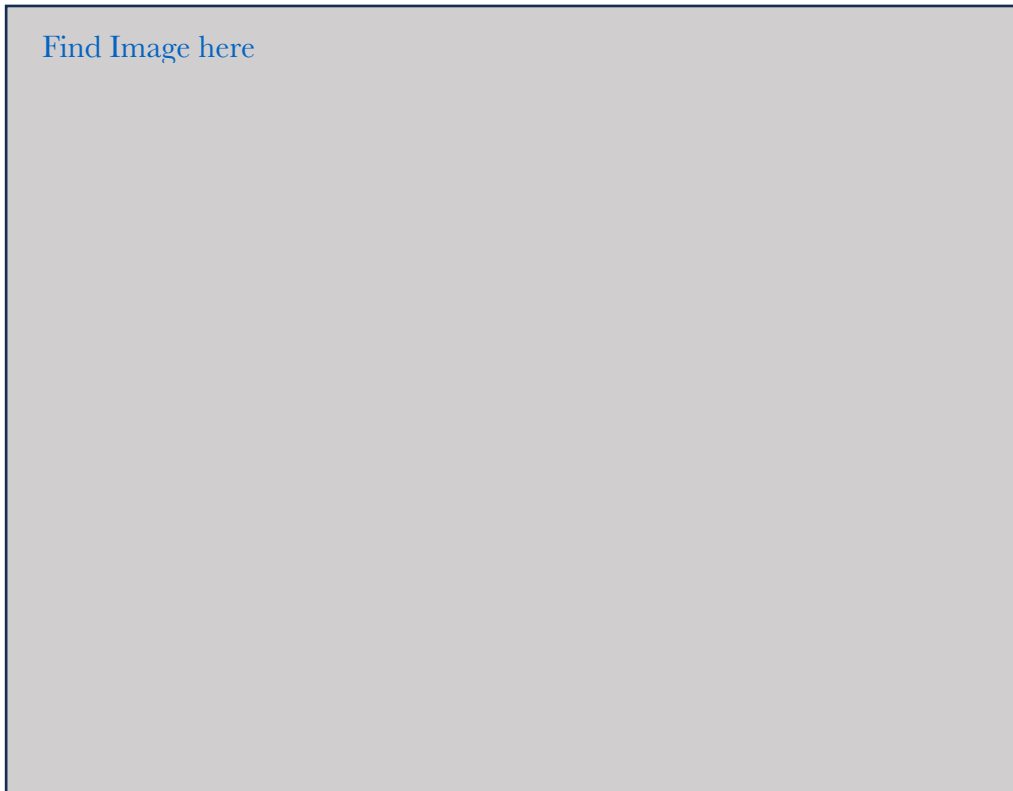


Figure 17. Matthias Weischer, *Last Supper*. 2022, Oil on canvas, 183 x 236 cm. Seoul: König Galerie. Reproduced from: KönigGalerie.com (König Galerie 2023).

Nonetheless, the composition of Weischer's painting *Last Supper* (Figure 17) has provided a visual reference for my work, as it inscribes the affective atmosphere of a space through shimmering colour and spatial composition. This painting focuses the viewer's eye on details related to the visual perception of depth, using subtle gradations of colour and tonal modulations to imply the shifts in light as the room recedes. Compositionally, Weischer uses strong perspectival lines and an open door which leads the eyes into the picture plane implying an unknown space beyond the threshold.

The low ceiling in this composition (also seen in Ghenie's *Nickelodeon*) gives a sense of an enclosed, concentrated affective atmosphere within the interior, which is enhanced by the saturated colour palette. This is a motif I have employed in some of my own work to potentially elicit a similar atmosphere. Ebony (2020) compares Weischer's work to the

interior paintings of Hammershøi, and I detect similarities to the work of Rae in this composition, as it hints at the presence of a liminal affective atmosphere, charged with an all-encompassing gestalt linked to transition and potentiality. I have used the motifs of the open door in several of my paintings to explore notions of the threshold and to imply the existence of the space on the other side of the set, imbued with its own affective atmosphere.

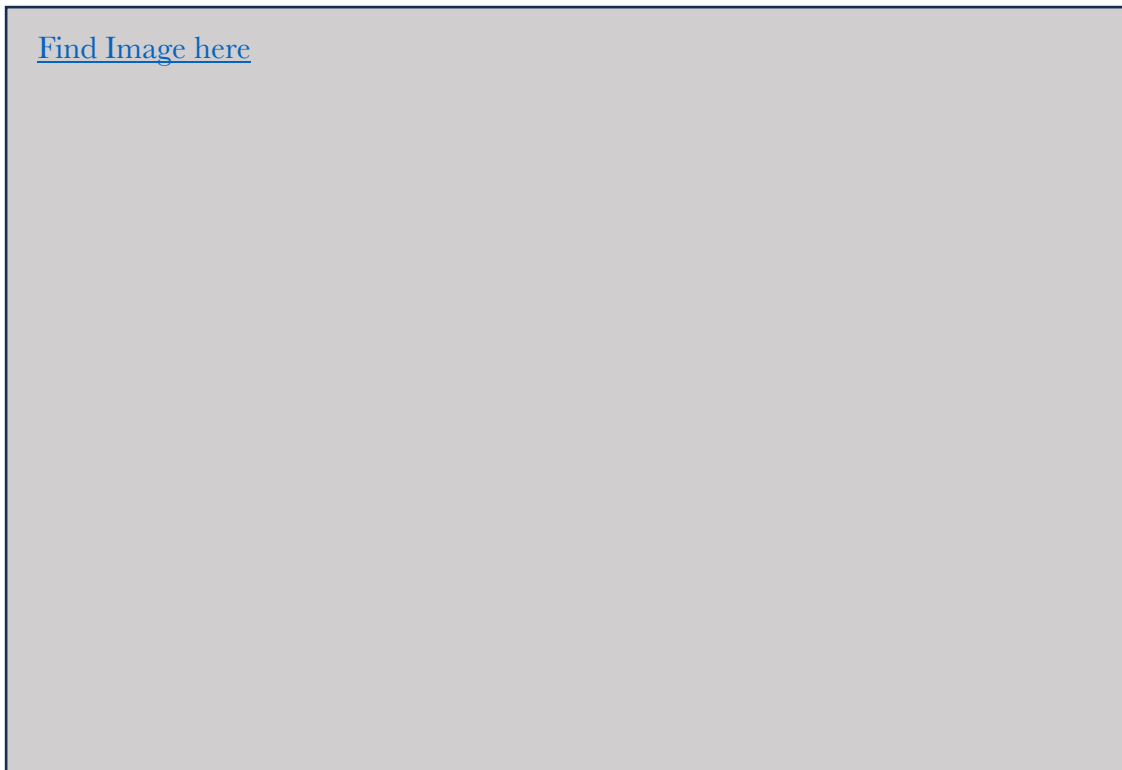


Figure 18. Matthias Weischer's *Last Supper* installed in the König Galerie, Seoul. 2022. Photo: Uwe Walte. Reproduced from: KönigGalerie.com (König Galerie 2023).

Weischer's *Last Supper* is large scale and, like *Nickelodeon*, creates a unique embodied encounter that, as well as magnifying both the details of perception and the painted gesture, also potentially looms over the viewer, encompassing them in the atmosphere that is inscribed upon the canvas. Rae explains to Lucy Stranger that the larger the scale, the more "immersive" the painting can potentially become (2017). Influenced by large-scale paintings, I built a linen support measuring 101 x 201 cm and painted *The Line of the Light* (Figure 19).

Through this experiment, I investigated using a large scale to create an enveloping embodied experience for the viewer. Unlike Weischer, I do not paint one large-scale room

on the support, rather I have borrowed his saturated colour to depict multiple threshold doorways. I will unpack this compositional choice, and its relation to temporality and theatrical ‘scenes’, when I revisit this work again in ACT II.



Figure 19. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Line of the Light* (studio documentation). 2022, Oil on linen, 101 x 201 cm.

ACT I

Scene ii

Painting, Affect, and Contagion

I explore the ability of an aesthetic object such as an oil painting to infect the viewer with the contagion of the original subject matter of the work, in this case the atmosphere of the backstage of the theatre. Feminist philosopher and social-political theorist Teresa Brennan explores this in her book *Transmission of Affect* (2004). Before unpacking Brennan's work, I return to Böhme to provide the background on the transmission of affect that an artwork can be capable of. He writes,

Aesthetic work consists of endowing things, environments, or people themselves with properties that make something emanate from them. That is, it is about *making* atmospheres through work on the object. In listing the branches of aesthetic work, one can see that it constitutes a large part of the work of society as a whole. These branches include design, scenography, advertising, the production of musical atmospheres (acoustic furnishing), cosmetics, interior architecture – and then, of course, the whole sphere of visual arts proper.” (2017, 24-25)

Böhme describes how an artist can intentionally create an object that emanates a particular atmosphere, and he grounds this notion in Plato's theory of mimesis.

Böhme explains how Plato identified two types of performing art - *Eikastike techne* and *Phantastike techne*. *Eikastike techne* is complete mimesis of reality, whilst *Phantastike techne* allows for diversion from the original subject matter, in order to shape the experience of the observer. While Böhme acknowledges that art of *Phantastike* is not the exact art of making atmospheres, he states however that “it already contains the decisive feature: that the artist does not see his actual goal in the production of an object or work of art, but in the imaginative idea the observer receives through the object” (Böhme, 2013, 4). According to Böhme a work of art can be designed to have an intentional atmosphere that can be absorbed by the viewer. To add to this theory, Böhme engages with the theories of philosopher Walter Benjamin, who argued that an original work of art has an *aura*, as a result of being an original work of art.

Böhme describes how Benjamin's term *aura* is synonymous with atmosphere, and refers to Benjamin's text *The Work of Art In the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935), within

which Benjamin adopted the word *aura* “to designate that atmosphere of distance and awe which surrounds original works of art” (2017, 17). This was in an effort, by Benjamin, to differentiate original works of art from reproductions, and track what he saw as the loss of aura that resulted from the use of technical reproduction in art. Benjamin linked this aura to the presence in time and space that is inherent in an original work, as opposed to a reproduction.

According to Böhme, after Benjamin, the term aura describes a “strange tissue of space and time” which is almost like a “breath or haze”, and can therefore not only surround the body, but be taken in, and absorbed by the corporeal being (2017, 18). To quote Böhme, the aura “can infuse the self” (2017, 18). Informed by Benjamin, Böhme describes how “[t]o sense aura means to absorb it into one’s own bodily disposition. What is sensed is an indeterminate, spatially diffused quality of feeling” (2017, 18). Teresa Brennan expands upon this in her text *The Transmission of Affect*, where she explores “affective contagion” and the ability for affects related to environments, other subjects and objects to burrow into one’s skin and have a physiological effect (2004).

Transmission of affect is a concausal phenomenon, resulting from the interwoven interaction of the subject and the environment, or to quote Brennan,

we are not self-contained in terms of our energies. There is no secure distinction between the “individual” and the “environment.” But transmission does not mean that a person's particular emotional experience is irrelevant. We may influence the registration of the transmitted affect in a variety of ways; affects are not received or registered in a vacuum. (2004, 6)

Brennan counters the belief that feelings and energies are purely constrained within the individual, contained within the skin envelope, and impervious to the affects of other subjects, objects, or environments. She writes that the subject is “not affectively contained” (2004, 2), explaining that a “social and psychological affect buries itself within or rests on the skin of an utterly corporeal body” (2004, 3). Brennan describes how the atmosphere of an environment “literally gets into the individual” (2004,1), explaining that,

the transmission of affect, if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject... Physically and biologically, something is present that was

not there before, but it did not originate *sui generis*: it was not generated solely or sometimes even in part by the individual organism or its genes. (2004, 1)

Brennan argues that “transmission of affect” is a process that is biological and physical in effect, writing that “these affects do not only arise within a particular person but also come from without. They come via an interaction with other people and an environment. But they have a physiological impact” (2004, 3). Benjamin’s notions of the aura of a piece of original art, Böhme’s description of the absorbability of such atmospheres by lived-bodies, and the transmission of affect described by Brennan inform my sense that an oil painting can indeed create an affective response in a viewer, making their affective atmosphere *contagious*.

The transmission of affect is certainly at play in the backstage space, and I would argue has its genesis in the rehearsal room where it then develops via *perezhivanie*, interpersonal and personal atmospheres, the physicality of the backstage space, and the imaginative threshold of the doorway onto the stage. Lived-experience tells me that the breath and physical exercises one takes part in before a performance can shift one’s personal atmosphere, and the atmosphere of the backstage can influence it once again.

When an actor is performing in a play, it is a workplace, and therefore maintaining a professional backstage space is imperative, however it is also a place of stored energy and creativity, peopled with individuals who are existing at the threshold between two realities – that of actor and character. This is a potent affective atmosphere indeed. The question that this research poses is whether this aura can be transferred via oil paintings. My experimentations seek to uncover a methodology whereby my oil paintings can create a visual equivalent to an illusive and yet intense atmosphere, which then transfers to the viewer.

Through experimentation with certain colours, visible painterly gestures, scale of supports, compositions and the installation of my paintings, I have trialled the ability of my paintings to create a physical, and physiological impact on a viewer, to transfer the affect of my experience. My research includes the analysis of the techniques of other painters whose works bury their affective atmosphere in, and under my skin, and create the transmission of affect for me as a viewer via their aesthetic choices and use of painterly processes.

In the article “Surface Tension”, Berlin based arts writer Martin Herbert describes how Mamma Andersson’s paintings “regularly attune themselves to the psychological frequencies of a place” (2021, 61). Andersson herself refers to the “slow unpleasant atmosphere” that she admires in Stanley Kubrick’s 1980 film, *The Shining*, and attempts to capture in her own paintings (Herbert 2021, 61). In this Scene I engage with theoretical sources that define and expand upon affective atmospheres and the way that a painting can allow the viewer to resonate, or ‘empathise’, with the subject matter or experience registered in the work.

[Find Image here](#)

Figure 20. Mamma Andersson, *Heimat land*. 2004, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 80 x 280 cm. Private collection. Reproduced from: Artnet.com (Artnet 2023).

Many of Andersson’s paintings infect me with a sense of foreboding, building tension, anticipation, and sometimes anxiety. When I look at the work *Heimat land* (Figure 20), my eyes search the landscape for clues of what has just been, or what might be about to happen. This search leads to a compelling sensation of curiosity and intrigue that physically manifests. The composition of the painting with its areas of patchy empty space, contrasted with more visually populated areas, guides my eyes in their hunt for the danger that seems to be lurking. The brownish sky in the top third of the composition, with its solid, tumbling clouds, intimate an impending storm which adds to the atmosphere of building tension. The colour of the clouds – dirty white streaked with desaturated grey and pale brown – enhances the sensation of impending doom.

Overall, the colour palette conveys an unsettled atmosphere, creating a sensation of edginess in my body. The black shape that spreads across the middle right third of the composition has the appearance of a stain leaching into the lake. Looking at the shape, and colour of this area, as well as the way Andersson has applied that black paint physically resonates with me, which in turn leads to a change in my mood. Andersson’s application of

paint – alternate watery layers; visible drips; and areas of translucent paint that reveal earlier applications; simplified, sometimes very flat and solid, abstract shapes (at times applied using ‘scratchy’ brushwork) – create a surface tension that infects me with a physical tension, enhancing emotions related to fear, morbid curiosity, and anticipation.

[Find Image here](#)

Figure 21. Mamma Andersson, *The Blank Memories Always Open From South*. 2002, Oil on canvas, 80 x 280 cm. Private collection. Reproduced from: StephenFriedman.com (Stephen Friedman Gallery 2023).

In *Heimat land*, Andersson has successfully used paint to inscribe an atmosphere which is then unleashed upon the viewer, and this is a result of her employment of the diverse and expressive materiality of paint – her colour choices, composition, and application. Andersson has been similarly successful in *The Blank Memories Always Open From South* (Figure 21). Large scale is an affective factor in both works. The almost three metre width of both paintings encourages the viewer’s eye to scan them in a side-to-side fashion that resembles a search across the horizon. Herbert notes that Andersson’s paintings convey the atmosphere of the exposition of a horror film, wherein everything is unfolding as it should, but something is lurking just around the corner. He writes,

One is allowed to feel somewhat easeful – you can generally see what’s going on in one of Andersson’s paintings, they’re spatially comprehensible, they offer familiar forms, their architect is exceptionally skilled at atmospherically muted colour combinations – but never released from a sense that, on multiple levels, they’re barely hanging together, that all is provisional. (2021, 61)

American curator Heidi Zuckerman explains that Andersson’s works are “simultaneously imbued with seduction, bleakness, hope, melancholy, and acceptance.... Andersson reminds us that the lives we live are filled with complexity, hope bleeding into reality, daydreams filling real time and space” (2010, 46). I agree with both Zuckerman and Herbert, that the phenomena which Andersson seems to inscribe in her works is affect.

According to Thomas Fuchs, affects are “encompassing phenomena that connect the body, the self and the world”, and that moods and atmospheres can be triggered by the intercausal relationship between the affective resonances of the world and responses of the lived body (2013, 1). My paintings specifically look at the affective atmosphere that occurs because of the intercausal relationships between the lived body of the actors and the backstage space. I look at the work of Andersson and others to gather clues on how I might best inscribe this phenomenon of affect in my own work. I have also engaged with scholars who define affect in specific terms. Art academics Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth describe affect as,

critical discourses of the emotions...leaving behind interiorized self or subjectivity...to unfold regimes of expressivity that are tied much more to resonant worldings and diffusions of feeling/passions – often including atmospheres of sociality, crowd behaviours, contagions of feelings, matters of belonging. (2010, 8)

Affects are considered a product of the embodied being interacting with the elements and forces around it, both consciously and unconsciously, and the subsequent moods and atmospheres that occur as a result.

As Gregg and Seigworth write, “affect is persistent proof of a body’s never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world’s obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations” (2010, 1). From this, it can be understood that affects are not internalised subjective thoughts or feelings, but are linked to the experience of the lived being within a physical world, which they come to know and experience through bodily resonances. It can be concluded, then, that the embodied nature of painting and the elements of painting described in Scene ii could make it an appropriate means by which to translate affect visually. Affects can be seen as evidence of the way that a lived body is firmly enmeshed within the fabric of the world. In *Empathic Vision*, Jill Bennett writes, “we might say that a kind of bodily knowledge is at stake here: recognition is less a cognitive function as one proceeding from an awareness of embodiment” (2005, 2). The argument here is that affects create the bodily resonances that in turn lead to feelings, thoughts, and knowledge of the world.

The lived body’s inescapably interwoven relationship with the rest of the world, its unconscious falling into step with, or rejection of, the resonances of the space outside of its own exterior interface, its “skin envelope”, as Gregg and Seigworth put it, are notions

which can be explored through the investigation of affects (2010, 2). On this, Bennett writes,

Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can leave us overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability. (2005, 2, italics in the original)

On understanding affect in visual art, Bennett writes, “affect, properly conjured up, produces a real-time somatic experience, no longer framed as representation” (2005, 2). The works of art are not revealing a secret experience, or the nature of the artist’s emotions or thoughts, but rather they are inscribed with the affective atmosphere that the artist ascribes to a place and conveys to the viewer. The affects inscribed within and conveyed by the paintings may be the result of the painter’s encounter with a physical place, the happenings that they are aware of, or imagine took place within it, and/or the personal and interpersonal atmospheres of the beings that exist within the space. Bennett writes that “the affective responses engendered by artworks are not born of emotional identification or sympathy, rather they emerge from a direct engagement with sensation as it is registered in the work” (2005, 7).

In the Waiting Room, (Figure 22) by Andersson, investigates and registers the enmeshed circular relationship between the lived body and oriented space which can be understood as the crucible for affect – the forces occurring around beings that are either propelling or freezing them. Here this is registered via a composition wherein the exterior world seems to bleed into the interior. The translucent yellow form that seeps in from the outside into the interior of the room implies the existence of an unstoppable atmosphere. I detect that the shape seems to illuminate and expose both spaces in an otherworldly way, appearing almost like a portal or a force that magnifies the outside world. In the next Scene, I will go further into the definition and experience of affective atmospheres, and how the experience of an affective atmosphere can be investigated through painting.

[Find Image here](#)

Figure 22. Mamma Andersson, *In the Waiting Room*. 2003, Oil on panel, 85 x 122 cm. Hort Family Collection. Reproduced from: Pinterest.com (Pinterest 2023).

ACT I

Scene iii

a) Defining Affective Atmospheres

The term *affective atmosphere* is an ambiguous one, and to unpack it, I have engaged with multiple scholars and phenomenologists, many of whom acknowledge its inherent illusive character. I understand the term ‘affective atmosphere’ as informed by Böhme, as well as cultural-political geographer Ben Andersson, professor of cultural and historical geography Matthew Gandy, anthropologist Kathleen Stewart, and Fuchs. Anderson and Gandy list the many conceptions of affective atmosphere explored by Böhme, as well as Brian Massumi, Nigel Thrift, and Teresa Brennan, which are relevant to cataloguing, analysing, and translating the affective atmosphere of the backstage.

Gandy considers affective atmosphere in relation to “recent developments in phenomenology, extended conceptions of agency, and new understandings of materialism”, defining it as “a distinctive kind of mood or shared corporeal phenomenon” (2017, 353). Gandy registers the “eclectic range of phenomena” that are explored under the term affective atmosphere, such as, “forms of impersonal or transpersonal intensity ... the mimetic behaviour of crowds...forms of non-linguistic corporeal communication... the ‘qualified arura’ that emanates from individual bodies...” (Gandy, 2017, 357). These elements can be identified and analysed at the locus of the backstage, and I unpack these contributing factors further in Act I, scene iv, v and vi of this document.

In his article “Affective Atmospheres” (2009), Anderson begins by defining ‘atmospheres’ as “collective affects that are simultaneously indeterminate and determinate”, and as “a class of experience that occur before and alongside the formation of subjectivity, across human and non-human materialities, and in-between subject/object distinctions” (2009, 78-79). Gandy builds on the work of Anderson, providing a definition of affective atmospheres that I find relevant to the backstage space. Gandy describes how, “atmospheres are both experienced and created: they encompass extant features of emotional and material life, as well as it’s staging or manipulation” (2017, 357). I understand the affective atmosphere of the backstage as the result of the geography, and architecture of the place, and the “auras” emanating from the subjects or objects, as well as the happenings that are unfurling within the space. These elements work in a concausal fashion, infusing and diffusing, impacting one another creating an all-encompassing gestalt,

which continues to develop and change as, to quote Kathleen Stewart the “worlding” of the place occurs (2011, 445).

I subscribe to the notion of affective atmospheres as “typical intermediate phenomenon, something between subject and object” (Böhme, 2013, 2) and “always in the process of emerging and transforming...always being taken up and reworked in lived experience – becoming part of feelings and emotions that may themselves become elements within other atmospheres” (Anderson, 2009, 79). In other words, like the relationship between the lived body and the oriented world, the relationship between the subject and an affective atmosphere is concausal, and constantly evolving, as a dynamic interaction between multiple factors. Or as Böhme explains, “The character of an atmosphere is the way in which it communicates a feeling to us as *participating subjects*” (2013, 2, italics added). My research involves attending and attuning to the shifting, ephemeral affective atmosphere that unfurls within the backstage space.

Gandy defines affective atmosphere as the “prevailing mood of a place, situation, or cultural representation” (2017, 354). While Anderson states that that “to attend to affective atmospheres is to learn to be affected by the ambiguities of affect/emotion, by that which is determinate and indeterminate, present and absent, singular and vague” (2009, 77) and quotes Massumi, writing that: “Perhaps the use of atmosphere in everyday speech and aesthetic discourse provides the best approximation of the concept of affect – where affect is taken to be the transpersonal or prepersonal intensities that emerge as bodies affect one another (Massumi, 2002)” (Anderson, 78). So, atmospheres can be understood as a collection of affects, but the use of the word atmosphere to describe such a phenomenon is rooted in history and meteorology.

Böhme, and many of the phenomenologists that I refer to in my understanding of affective atmospheres, begins by analysing the etymology, and history of the use, of the term atmosphere. In his article “Urban Atmospheres”, Gandy explores how the word atmosphere has been used to describe both the “layers of gas” surrounding a planet, and also “the prevailing mood of a place, situation, cultural representation such as the feeling evoked by a film or novel” (Gandy, 2017, 355). Gandy explains that the second definition contains more complexity as it extends from “the sensory realm of individual bodies to crowd-like situations” (2017, 355).

Anderson expands on this semantic analysis via phenomenology, and a spread of other approaches including historical materialism – particularly referencing Karl Marx’s 1856 description of revolutionary society; “the atmosphere in which we live, weighs upon everyone with a 20,000-pound force, but do you feel it?” (ibid, 577)” (Anderson, 2008, 77). Both Gandy and Anderson draw attention to the disparate and “heterogeneous array of perspectives” that combine to explore and form contemporary conceptions of affective atmospheres, collaged from fields such as anthropology, critical theory, phenomenology, and other disciplines. (Gandy, 2017, 357). Atmospheres can be thought of as simultaneously emanating from the subject in the form of their “personal aura” (Böhme, 2017,103 and Gandy, 2017, 353), and as a result of the world beyond the interiority of the subject. Böhme explains the illusive nature of atmospheres as existing at the interface of subjective and objective experience,

atmospheres are something entirely subjective: in order to say what they are or, better, to define their character, one must expose oneself to them, one must experience them in terms of one’s own emotional state. Without the sentient subject, they are nothing. And yet: the subject experiences them as something “out there”, something which can come over us...The truth is that atmospheres are a typical intermediate phenomenon, something between subject and object. (2013, 2)

Böhme claims that despite the “airy, indeterminate” quality of atmospheres, they can be *made*, and cites the stage set as an art form which “endows the idea of making atmospheres with objective reality” (2013, 1). This project, however, looks at the reverse side of the stage set instead focussing on that of the backstage, rather than the manufactured atmosphere on the stage.

Böhme posits that the theatrical stage set is a place where otherwise ethereal atmospheres can be “made”, and although I do not focus on this constructed onstage atmosphere, but rather the backstage immersive world, the link which Böhme makes between theatre and atmosphere is important to this research (2013, 1). Böhme draws the analysis of atmospheres within the walls of the theatre (2013, 2) and links the theatrical term ‘character’ to the mood inducing phenomena of atmosphere. Böhme writes that, “The character of an atmosphere is the way in which it communicates a feeling to us as participating subjects” (2013, 1).

Böhme identifies an atmosphere as a “typical intermediate phenomenon, something between subject and object” and therefore intangible (2013, 3). The intangibility, and in-between nature of an atmosphere, has a crossover with the sensations linked to liminal spaces, and also the nature of rehearsal and performance which I will unpack further in Act II, scene I, but which occurs at the imaginative, physical, and emotional threshold between actor and character. With the knowledge that atmospheres are a result of both the emanating moods and auras of subjects, as well as the external environment, it is little wonder that the backstage atmosphere is a potent one, and appropriate for painterly exploration.

Böhme’s analysis of constructed atmospheres *onstage* ironically provides a backdrop to my exploration of the pervading affective atmosphere of the world unfolding *behind the stage*. As stated, I focus on the atmosphere beyond this intentionally constructed theatrical space, which Böhme characterises as the “atmospheric background to the action” created “to attune the spectators to the theatrical performance and to provide the actors with a sounding board for what they present” (2003, 3). I identify the backstage atmosphere as not only the scaffolding to this onstage atmosphere, but also as affected by it.

ACT I

Scene iii

b)Painting Affective Atmospheres

This project investigates the experience of the affective atmosphere of the backstage space, and the potential of paint to translate it into a visual realm, creating an object that may reproduce the atmosphere itself. In this Scene, I define the techniques and processes that painters use to inscribe their work with what I consider affective atmospheres related to the experience of places.

In *The Phenomenology of Affectivity*, Thomas Fuchs writes that the world itself is not neutral but charged with “affective atmospheres” (2013, 6). A phenomenological approach to understanding affects encompasses “phenomena that connect body, self and world” (Fuchs 2013, 626). Fuchs states that feelings and affects are not only part of an isolated inner psyche but in fact, arise from an interaction between the world, the body, and the mind (2013, 6). “The experienced space around us is always charged with affective qualities,” he explains. “We may feel ‘something in the air,’ or we sense an interpersonal ‘climate,’ for example, a serene, solemn, or threatening atmosphere” (2013, 6).

As Böhme describes, the production and experience of atmospheres are a phenomenon located between object and subject which, “makes them, as such, intangible” with “no secure ontological status” (2013, 2). He explains that it is this unstable ontology that makes it fascinating, and important to understand them from two sides, “from the side of subjects and from the side of objects, from the side of reception aesthetics and from the side of production aesthetics” (2013, 2). This Scene explores the production of paintings that can transmit this intangible phenomenon.

In her article “Atmospheric Attunements”, Kathleen Stewart suggests “that atmospheric attunements are a process of what Heidegger (1962) called worlding – an intimate, compositional process of dwelling in spaces that bears, gestures, gestates, worlds...” (2011, 445). Stewart expands on this in her investigation of how “circulating forces are generated as atmospheres per se, how they spawn worlds, animate forms of attachment and detachment, and become the live background of living in and living through things...” (2011,445). As Fuchs writes, affective atmospheres are charged and resonate with the lived-bodies existing within them: “They appear as warm or cold, serene

or melancholic, relaxed or charged, familiar or sinister, and so forth” (2013, 6). Some paintings that I have engaged with throughout this investigation resonate with me, translating an affective atmosphere and affecting me as a viewer.



Figure 23. Peter Doig, *Echo Lake*. 1998, Oil on canvas, 230.5 x 360.5 cm. London: Tate Collection. Reproduced from: Tate.com (Tate 2022).

The atmospheres that unfurl within *Echo Lake* (Figure 23) by Peter Doig, as well as *The Day After* (Figure 24) and *Untitled* (Figure 25) by Mamma Andersson, reflect this phenomenological notion of the energies that come to resonate in a space, and the atmospheres that may be transferrable via a work of art. These paintings testify to the ability of the materiality of paint to make this phenomenon visible. Stewart’s description of the way that a site can become imbued with moods, sensations, and affective atmospheres not only relates to what I am attempting to achieve in my paintings, but also what I witness in the work of the above-mentioned painters. Stewart describes her attempt to,

open a proliferative list of questions about how forces come to reside in experiences, conditions, things, dreams, land-scapes, imaginaries, and lived sensory moments. How do people dwelling in them become attuned to the sense of something coming into existence or something waning, sagging, dissipating, enduring, or resonating with what is lost or promising? (2011, 445)

Echo Lake is a painting that demonstrates the registration of the atmospheres that Stewart describes above. The painting inscribes not only its subject matter but also an affective atmosphere related to the place and the experience of the figure within it. Anderson's description of atmospheres as "finished and unfinished", the "property of objects and a property of subjects", and "reducible to bodies affecting other bodies and yet exceeding the bodies they emerge from" is made manifest in this work by Doig, through his painterly choices (2009, 79). This includes the use of melting, inky mark making, colour choices—including the use of desaturated dirty cream, otherworldly, glowing pale green, and murky, brown water. The scale of the work is also a contributing factor to the paintings translation of a disturbing and overwhelming affective atmosphere.

The immersive quality of this painting is arguably also due to the sensual registration of paint, and the artist's use of myriad gestures and mark making. To quote Doig:

People often say that my paintings remind them of particular scenes from films or certain passages from books, but I think it's a different thing altogether. There is something more primal about painting. In terms of my own paintings, there is something quite basic about them, which inevitably is to do with their materiality. They are totally non-linguistic... I often use heightened colours to create a sense of the experience, or mood or feeling of being there.... I think the paintings always refer back to a reality that we all have experience of.... I am using...natural phenomena and amplifying them through the materiality of paint and the activity of painting. (Victoria Miro Gallery 2002)

The affective atmosphere in *Echo Lake* is inscribed, in part, through the composition; wherein the figure is dwarfed by the landscape and is also inescapably part of it. The figure appears to be utterly defined by and enmeshed within the environment, reflecting the concausal relationship between, and inescapable position of, the lived body in oriented space.

Doig's application of paint, and use of colour, contributes to the disquieting affective atmosphere present in *Echo Lake*. The transparency of the painted lake in the foreground, where areas of pooling paint and colours melting into one another appear at

once congealed and insipid, create a sense of unease. The materiality of the paint is on display, alluding to its embodied application. The simplified forms and soft edges create a mysterious affective atmosphere, where the eye of the viewer is confounded, and details, such as the man's face, cannot be discerned no matter how hard one focuses.

Untitled and *The Day After* by Mamma Andersson are works which inscribe the affective atmosphere related to the places they depict, and resonate with the viewer in a physical and sensual way. The way that Andersson has allowed the thinner grey paint to soak into, and drip down, the canvas in both works has created a softness and ghostliness that resonates in a mysterious, uncertain way. In both works I detect an affective atmosphere of doom, or a coming moment that could swallow the worlds she portrays. The contrast between the bleeding, transparent paint, and the areas of thicker, jagged forms and hard edges, translates to an affective atmosphere of unstable energy and fragility, as if something is about to break, or dissolve.

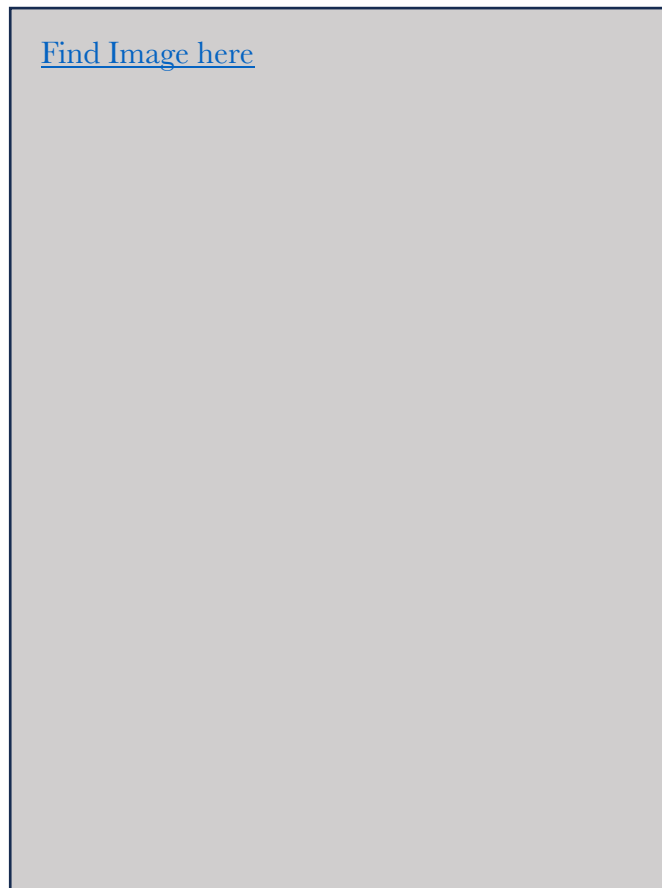


Figure 24. Mamma Andersson, *The Day After*. 2020, Oil on canvas, 200 x 100 cm. Reproduced. From: Kulturformidleren.dk (Kulturformidleren 2023)

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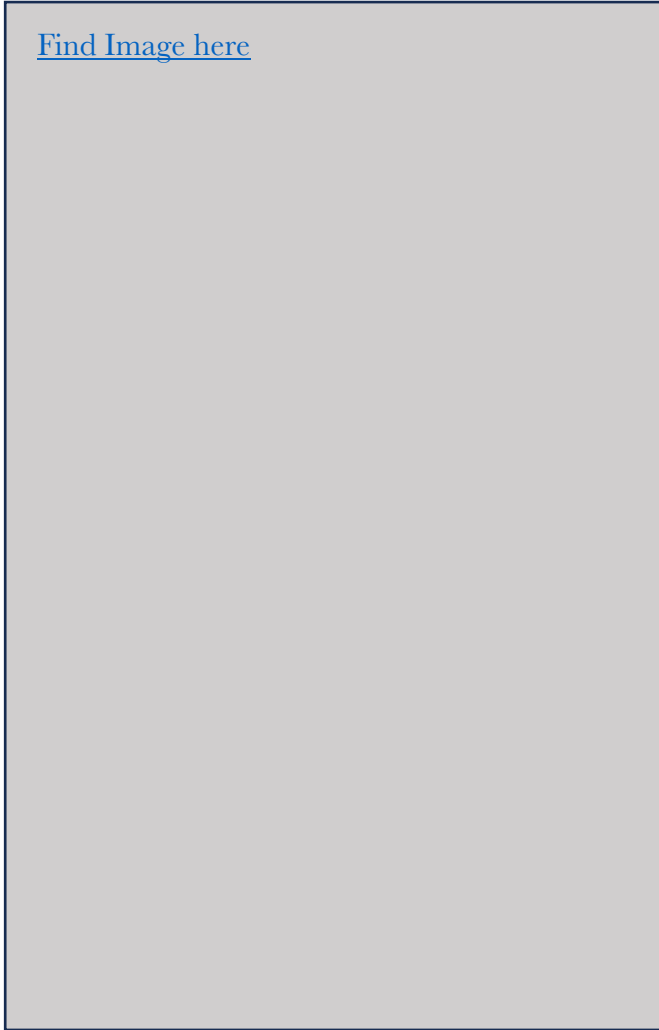


Figure 25. Mamma Andersson, *Untitled*. 2006, Watercolour and graphite on paper, 98.4 x 62.9 cm. London: Christie's. Reproduced from: Christies.com (Christie's 2022).

The contrast between saturated and desaturated colours also contributes to the sense of disquiet and disharmony in these works, as the colours seem to compete for attention. Andersson does not use colours to create classic atmospheric perspective in the works, and while both works do create a sense of depth, there is a disconcerting flatness to the composition in *The Day After*. The perspective within these works has been manipulated, and this further contributes to the unsettled aura, which is that of an eroded or drowned world. The composition of *Untitled* contrasts accurate linear perspective with large amorphous abstract forms that appear to be invading the space. Both works testify to the ability of painting to capture and translate the affective atmosphere of a place.

[Find Image here](#)



Figure 26. Mamma Andersson, *Rooms Under the Influence*. 2006, Oil and lacquer on panel, three panels, each 182.9 x 243.8 cm. Reproduced from: Artmap.com (Artmap 2023)

Another compositional technique which contributes to a palpable affective atmosphere in some of Andersson's paintings is the use of a tripartite composition (Figure 26 and 27). In *Rooms Under the Influence* (Figure 26) Andersson creates a composition made up of three separate 'scenes' which reflect and bleed into one another. The top third shows a countryside, while the other two depict the same interior, the bottom one flipped and appearing as a less defined mirror image of the middle. The interior component of this composition appears to be a stage set. This painting is relevant to my investigation not only because of the affective atmosphere it communicates through painterly application, but also due to its theatrical subject matter. The horizontal, tripartite composition implies the simultaneous existence of multiple spaces and temporalities, which is something that relates to my work, as I investigate the contrast between the fictive temporality of the play, the 'real' time beyond the stage, and the threshold between the two. I discuss this in more detail in the next Scene, and how the liminality inherent in this threshold impacts the affective atmosphere of the backstage.

[Find Image here](#)

Figure 27. Mamma Andersson, *Dollhouse*. 2008, Oil on panel, three panels, each 122 x 229 cm. Reproduced from: stephenfriedman.com (stephenfriedman 2024).

The tripartite composition of Andersson's work, as well as the material processes in hers and Doig's works, have influenced my approach to translating the affective atmosphere of the backstage into my paintings. I have borrowed the contrasting thicknesses and edge qualities in several of my works including *Imaginary Circumstances II* (Figure 28) and *The Hour Before the Call* (Figure 29). In *Imaginary Circumstances II*, it is clear to see how I have incorporated the tripartite composition, as well as the contrasting internal and external imagery, and hard and soft edges, observed in the Andersson paintings to inscribe the affective atmosphere I relate to the experience of being in the backstage of the theatre. I use the tripartite composition to allude to the sensation of existing as both the actor, and within the 'imaginary circumstances' of the character, and existing within both the fictive time of the play and the real time of the backstage. I will discuss this further in ACT II, where I discuss my methodology. Like Andersson and Doig, I have allowed layers of transparent paint and painterly marks to remain visible, attempting to inscribe the multi-layered quality of the affective atmosphere present in the backstage space.



Figure 28. Emily Rose Brennan, *Imaginary Circumstances II*. 2022, Oil on linen, 106 x 129 cm.



Figure 29. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Hour Before the Call*. 2021, Oil on canvas, 31 x 41 cm.

In *The Hour Before the Call* (Figure 29) I have borrowed painterly techniques from Doig and Andersson to inscribe the affective atmosphere, and visual details, of the backstage space that I observed in the time before the show began one evening. I have also borrowed the more muted palette of Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864-1916), who manages to capture interiors resonant with “quietude, melancholy and mystery” (Dobrzynski 2015). The time inscribed is the late afternoon when the theatre is not yet live. There is no artificial light, no costumed actors, and no crew in the backstage space. My lived experience of this affective atmosphere was a sense of energy slowly gathering as the performance time grew closer. There was a pregnant stillness in the affective atmosphere of the backstage during this time. The space felt as if it was shimmering with promise, and the affective atmosphere was slowly transitioning from one state to another. This transition can be related to liminality and the threshold nature of the backstage space.

Although I have always been vaguely aware of the affective atmosphere of this time and space before a show, I have never up until this point paid, as Stewart describes, “analytic attention to the charged atmospheres” of it (2011, 445). Perhaps the affective atmosphere I register here is related to the upcoming show, or the stored energy that is

drifting in with arrival of the actors, together with the sound of their warm-ups filtering into the theatre, maybe it's the remnants of the energy from the night before still hovering in the space. The affective atmosphere that can unfurl in an empty space has been investigated in the paintings of Hammershøi and American artist Edward Hopper (1882-1967), as demonstrated in *Dust Motes Dancing in the Sunbeams* (Figure 30) and *Sun in an Empty Room* (Figure 31) respectively.

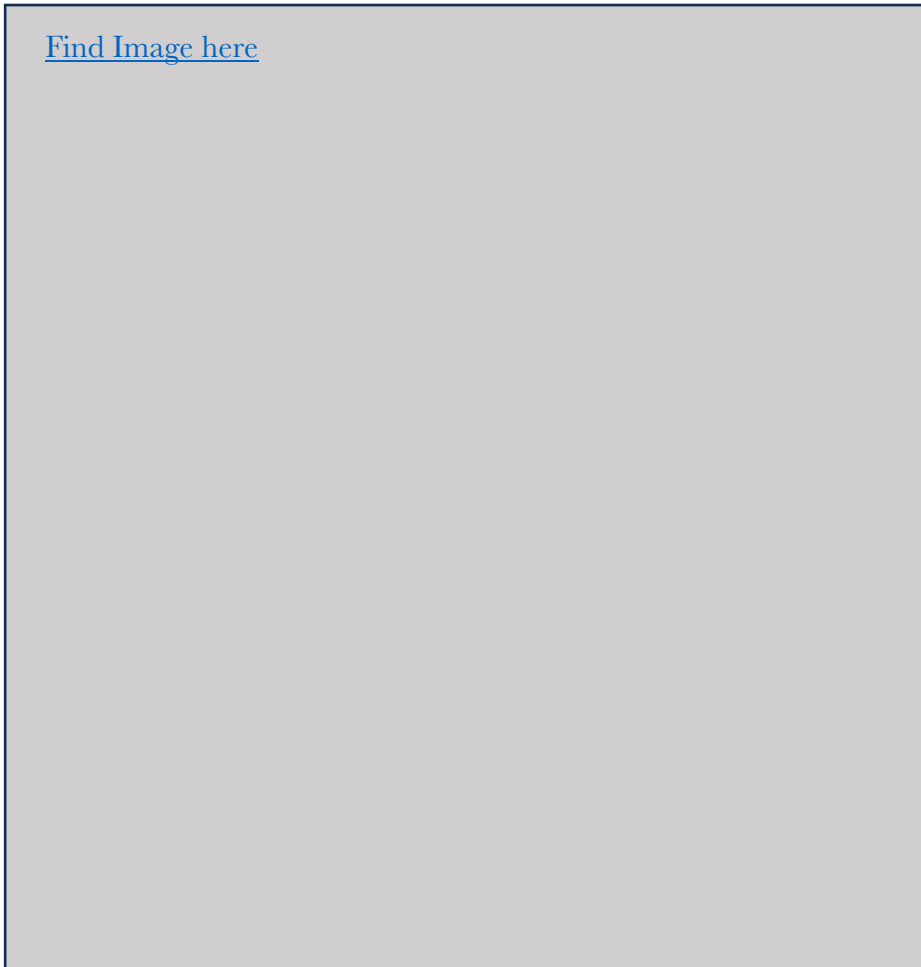


Figure 30. Vilhelm Hammershøi, *Dust Motes Dancing in the Sunbeams*.1900, Oil on canvas, 70 x 59 cm. Denmark: Ordrupgaard. Reproduced from: Artsy.net.

Hammershøi's influence on Hopper is well documented and can be seen particularly in Hopper's later works where he emptied out his compositions, recording his experience of the effects of light on interior spaces as a means by which to communicate the "vast and varied realm" of his own emotional interior (Koob 2004, 66-68). American curator Pamela Koob quotes Hopper as saying that "his paintings reflected his sympathetic response to human experience", writing that "Hopper's challenge was to convey both the light and the emotion" (2004, 64). Similarly, Hammershøi's works indicate a concern with

“the line and the light” (Christie’s 2018). The affective atmosphere redolent in Hammershøi’s and Hopper’s interiors can be described as mysterious and shimmering with potential, with Koob describing both artists as tapping into “the world around them to create pictorial equivalences for their own experiences” (2004, 74).

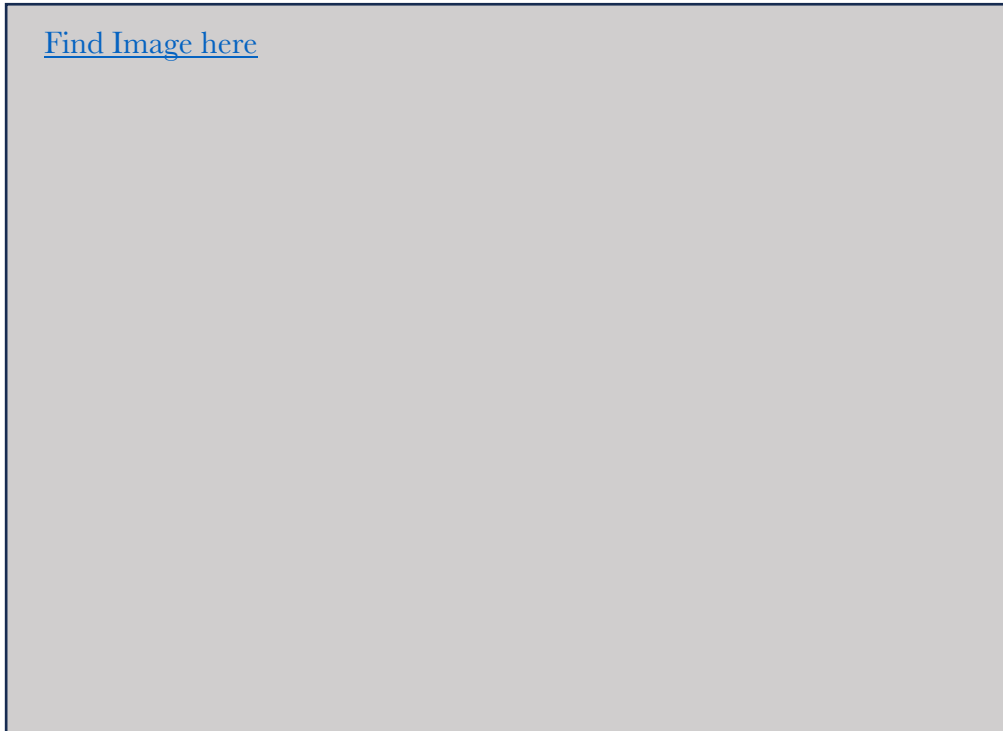


Figure 31. Edward Hopper, *Sun in an Empty Room*. 1963, Oil on canvas, 73 x 100 cm. Private collection. Reproduced from: EdwardHopper.net (EdwardHopper.net 2023).

Influenced by Hammershøi’s and Hopper in *The Hour Before the Call*, I have paid particular attention to the incremental shifts within the tonal quality of the shadows and highlights that I observed, and how these visual details shaped my body’s perception of the space and sense of the affective atmosphere. The incremental tonal shifts are also a visual motif for the subtle incoming of the affective atmosphere that was creeping into the space. The composition is based on a photograph I took of a backstage space at the Sunset Heritage Precinct in the hours before a show began. Visually, the composition is dominated by a strong dark diagonal line from the bottom left corner which pulls the eye through all the shifts in light and shadow, and into the threshold space of the doorway onto the stage. I have intentionally employed compositional techniques to create perspective and illusion in my painting to draw attention to both the depth of the backstage space and the psychological depth that an actor explores as part of their preparation to portray a character.



Figure 32-35. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Hour Before the Call* (process documentation). 2021, Oil on board, 31 x 41 cm.

I have left some of the initial drips from the underpainting, as well as some dynamic painted and wiped marks, visible to reflect a sense of the building energy and anticipation within the backstage space (Figure 32-35). I have allowed this visibility and transparency as a technique to illuminate and make visible this shifting, building quality that I locate within the backstage at this time. In this work, I was also aiming to investigate a visual registration of the threshold quality of the stage door, by applying luminous, thin, and overlapping layers of paint.

Academic Joanna Bourke proposes that visual art has the potential to resonate with, and affect a viewer, allowing them to experience the affective atmosphere or physical sensations associated with the artist, and their embodied perception of the subject matter. In analysing the embodied quality and potential of a work of art, Bourke focuses on how, [b]asic bodily movements, such as agitated brush marks, broad strokes, thick scrapings of pigment, and frenzied jabs, provide forms of knowledge – they help to

create and even connect the ‘poetics of revelation’ and ‘the aesthetics of destruction’. (2020)

The above quote is particularly meaningful to my research as I utilise the materiality of paint to inscribe knowledge about the affective atmosphere of the backstage of the theatre. Also relevant to my research is Bourke’s introduction of the idea that “empathy emerges as a capacity of imaginative embodiment”, and that art which attempts to inscribe experiences should move the viewer, eliciting empathy in them (2020).

Discovering material ways in which to elicit empathy, or cause a turning towards the embodied experience of the affective atmosphere of the backstage, is one of the aims of my studio research. I attempted this in the creation of *Backstage* (Figure 36 and 37). I use paint to encourage ‘atmospheric empathy’ and an embodied interaction with the work, and a possible resonance with the embodied experience of the affective atmosphere of the actual subject matter. To stimulate the viewer’s eyes, I intentionally created a high degree of contrast by using cool, dark receding areas alongside the bright, glowing areas of artificial light. I applied the paint energetically, and left evidence of this, to intentionally create a physical resonance. As discussed in ACT I, Scene i c), I also utilised a large scale to elicit an embodied response.



Figure 36. Emily Rose Brennan, *Backstage* (process documentation showing use of tape to protect areas of underpainting). 2020, Oil on canvas, 100 x 120 cm.



Figure 37. Emily Rose Brennan, *Backstage* (process documentation showing the results of applying thick paint over tape). 2020, Oil on canvas, 100 x 120 cm.

ACT I

Scene iv

Painting the Affective Atmosphere of the Backstage Space

In the preceding Scenes, I have catalogued my research into affect and affective atmosphere, and the potential of paint to register them. In this Scene, I identify and characterise the *specific* affective atmosphere that characterises the backstage space, while explaining the factors that contribute to it. Kathleen Stewart's examination of affective atmospheres, specifically her exploration of "moments and scenes in which the sense of something happening becomes tactile" (2011, 445), underpins this section. I explore how the tactile affective atmosphere of the backstage space results from the accumulation of the physicality of the site, along with the personal and interpersonal affective atmospheres, behaviours, and processes of the actors.

The enveloping aura I have experienced in the backstage is multifoliate and becomes more concentrated as the performance time draws closer. As most of my paintings inscribe the backstage immediately before, or during a performance, I will describe this affective atmosphere, however there are some paintings in my visual research which register the lead up to this intensity. The affective atmosphere of the backstage could be described as concentrated, focused, calm, and pregnant with potentiality. The atmosphere is also charged with excitement, playfulness, contained adrenaline, and a sense of unpredictability.

There is a sense of being enveloped in a dark, private world invisible to the audience, and a sense of being moments away from exposure underneath the stage lights, where energy and volume must increase to serve the performance. The backstage affective atmosphere is impacted by the knowledge that there is a completely different experience taking place on the stage, and that when you pass through the door onto the stage, you must meet that experience and be ready to step into the fictive time and place of the play. This door is the threshold between the backstage and onstage space and time.

The affective atmosphere that permeates the backstage environment is one of shared energy coming together, consolidating, ready to be channelled onto the stage. Based on my lived experience, I could liken the moment of stepping onto stage to the experience

of standing on the blocks about to dive into a swimming race, or the moment of take-off in an aeroplane. My lived experience of stepping across the threshold and onto stage involves the processes, preparation, and discoveries made in rehearsals being unfurled upon the stage in a controlled and yet utterly alive and visceral form. It is both a predictable and unpredictable sensation – it involves a blurring of space, time, and identity; an awareness of two realities occurring at once.

Actor, Sir Ian McKellen describes backstage as a place where the prepared energy of the actors collects, as they wait to cross the threshold onto the stage and unleash it:

Your duty is to arrive in a theatre as absolutely physically fit and relaxed and alert as possible, having rested during the day so that you come onto the stage full of energy at the peak of your abilities – physical and mental... And you give your energy to the people who have been working all day who need some energy to revive their spirits for the next day. That's what acting is about. That's how you contribute to society. (Stephenson 2017, 20:58)

Here, McKellen explains the importance of the actor's preparation and the concentrated energy they must have ready to expel in order to do their job professionally on stage. The building of this energy within the backstage space contributes to the affective atmosphere of anticipation and concentration that I locate and attempt to inscribe through paint. The door onto the stage is the threshold whereby this energy transforms from inner preparation to performance, from private to public, where there is a transition.

Creating visual equivalences to these atmospheres via an embodied painterly technique has potential beyond the backstage. This is related to Böhme's analysis of the staging of atmospheres prevalent within contemporary society. Drawing attention to an atmosphere that results from the interaction of lived bodies and an environment, as opposed to being a *made* atmosphere, makes visible the constructed and manipulated nature of contemporary lived experience. I discuss this further in the Epilogue if this exegesis, where I discuss the potential for my original methodology to investigate the 'backstage of *everyday staged experiences*'. However, first I define the elements that contribute to the atmosphere that occurs behind the *staged atmosphere* of the stage.

In order to explain the origins of the backstage atmosphere, it is crucial to attune attention to the elements that make up the backstage space. Firstly, I consider the physical

characteristics of the space, and engage with phenomenologists who explore physical spaces, especially those that resemble the backstage space. Secondly, I examine the backstage behaviour. The physicality of the backstage and the behaviours of the actors are related to the type of performance that is taking place and the impact of the rehearsal period that has preceded the production entering the theatre. For example, the play *The Torrents* was a performance in the realist style, with a set designed to serve it.

I also identify the backstage of the realist set as encompassing a threshold space – the door in the set – where, after stepping through, the actor completely transforms into the character and begins speaking the lines of the play, within the story of the play, sometimes referred to as ‘the world of the play’. The threshold is a physical structure that creates a specific change in behaviour, and so I briefly examine the phenomenology of the threshold and its related liminal affective atmosphere in Scene v.

ACT I

Scene v

The Backstage Physical Space and Thresholds

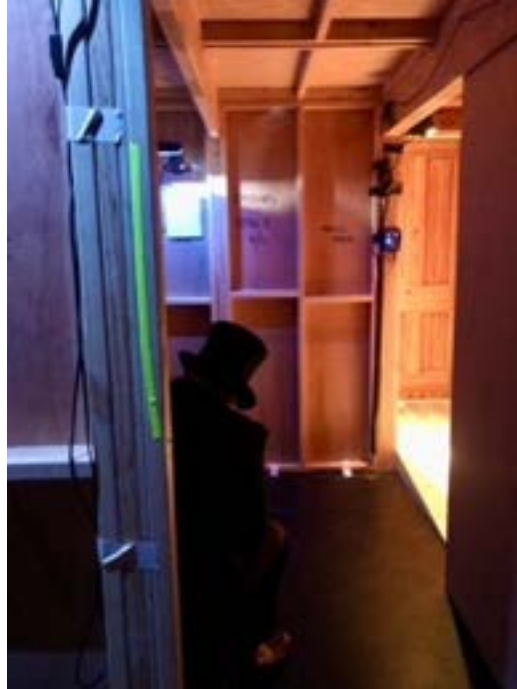


Figure 38. Backstage of the set for the production of *The Torrents* at the Drama Theatre showing a small space built into the back of the set with an actor waiting to make an entrance. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

To my painter's sensibility, the backstage of the theatre, particularly the back of the set, is just as visually interesting as, if not more so than, the view from the auditorium. Here, I consider the way that the backstage is physically structured and experienced, and how the physical features of the backstage contribute to the aura of the site. I understand that, along with the processes related to *perezhivanie* and the interpersonal and personal auras of the subjects present, the physical, haptic, and aural qualities of the space, contribute significantly to the affective atmosphere of the backstage.

I have come to discover that the effect of artificial lighting on the backstage structures contributes in a significant way to the affective atmosphere of the backstage. The backstage of *The Torrents* was a space that, like most backstage spaces, remained mostly in darkness. For safety, there were glowing orange and blue lamps (Figure 38), and some stage light crept in from under the doors, or from joins in the set (Figure 42). Some lights set

behind and beneath the windows in the set were programmed to create the illusion of sunrise and sunset crossing the stage through the windows. These warm orange, gold, and apricot lights made the back of the set around the windows glow, and were a visual equivalent to the affective atmosphere I came to identify as associated with the backstage space (Figure 39). Some glowing white and fluorescent tape on the carpet guided the way to entrances and exits, and on the edges of the wooden structures (Figure 41).



Figure 39. Backstage of the set for the production of *The Torrents* at the Heath Ledger Theatre showing the back of the Western side of the set, with artificial lights on to resemble a sunset. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Physically, the backstage space is somewhat of a paradox. It is at once a soft carpeted space, softly lit, with heavy, black curtains to muffle any sharp noises. Simultaneously it is a looming black and shadowy space, with ceilings necessarily high enough to fit in equipment to facilitate a professional performance. It feels concurrently intimate and enormous. The small alcoves for changing costumes and waiting in the backstage are protective like small shells (Figure 38), while the soaring space above seems overwhelmingly large and imposing (Figure 39).

The Torrents had a particularly looming set. Stretching up into the rigging, the pale wood of the unpainted pine and marine plywood appeared bone-like and luminescent, with in some areas lit up by the spill of the stage lights (Figure 42). Closer to the ground, there were several small doorways in the back of the set with structures built around them to make them invisible to the audience (Figure 38). The height of the set meant that there was a sense of being well hidden, dwarfed by the structures of the set, and enclosed in the darkness. A sense of the stage and audience waiting on the other side was hinted at by the light leaking through gaps in the set (Figure 43).



Figure 40. Backstage of the set for the production of *The Torrents* at the Heath Ledger Theatre showing scaffolding supporting large set structures. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

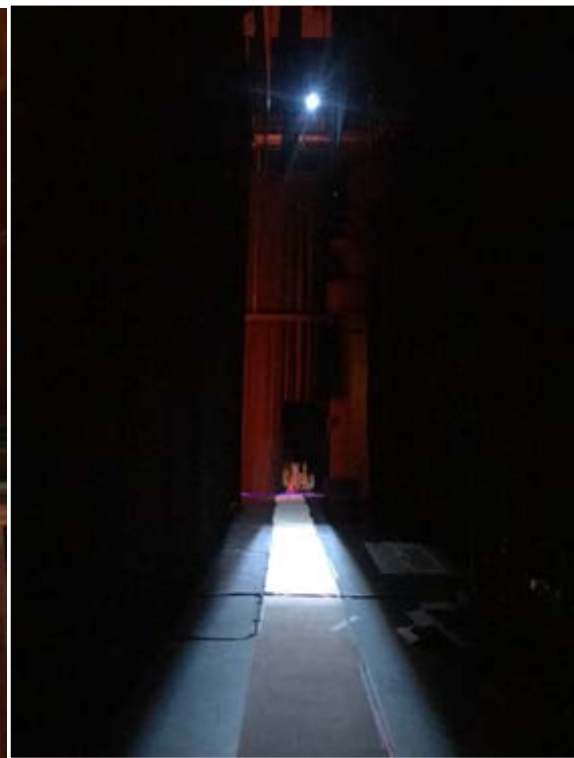


Figure 41. Backstage of the set for the production of *The Torrents* at the Heath Ledger Theatre showing the path between two sets of black curtains used to cross the back of the set. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 42. Backstage of the set for the production of *The Torrents* at the Drama Theatre showing a small space built into the back of the set and a props table. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 43. Backstage of the set for the production of *The Torrents* at the Drama Theatre showing a door onto the stage and also the high ceilings and large structures of the back of the set. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

To look into the phenomenology of darkness I engage with psychiatrist Eugene Minkowski. Minkowski concludes that darkness, rather than being an empty, meaningless void, is in fact a phenomenon that comes into contact with the lived body in an intimate way, “touching” the body (1970, 405). For Minkowski, darkness envelops the lived body, covering it completely and penetrating it (1970, 405). Darkness, he proposed, has a physical effect on lived-bodies. Phenomenologist Sue Cataldi writes that physical touch and affect are concausal and connected to one another, much like the lived body in oriented space. She writes,

Tactile and emotionally felt feelings overlap. They are reversible.... There are tactile dimensions to emotional feelings and emotional dimensions to tactile ones. To say that we have been ‘touched’, or that a situation was ‘touching’ is synonymous with saying that we have been emotionally affected. (1993, 128-129)

Following this argument, it could be concluded that the darkness inherent in the backstage space contributes to the affective atmosphere, and how it ‘touches’ the bodies within it. This notion of the tactility of a space affecting the lived body is also relevant when applied to the softness of the backstage carpet underfoot and the curtaining. As art historian Reesa Greenberg notes, “changes in lighting and floor coverings [serve] to shift mood and sensory perceptions” (as quoted by Messham-Muir 2015, 436). The closeness, softness, and darkness of portions of the backstage space clearly contribute to its affective atmosphere, and contrast sharply to the bright, hardness of the waiting stage.

The Backstage as the Shadow of the Stage

The backstage *is not* the stage and could be thought of as a shadow to the stage. The backstage can only exist in the presence of a stage, and furthermore exists as a site of preparation for the stage, a *pre-stage*. This contrasting nature contributes to the quality of the affective atmosphere of the backstage space, characterising it as a place of potential, where the gathered energy and focus of the ‘moment before’ is cultivated and concentrated. It is a site resonant with promise and potential. During a performance, the stage is considered *the front, visible to the audience and exposed*; the backstage, in contrast, can be understood as *the behind, the invisible, and the hidden*.

I consolidate my own experience of the backstage space with the writing of Turkish theatre scholar Beliz Güçbilmez. Güçbilmez explores the “offstage”, a term found in a theatre script which refers to the place and time in which characters exist when not on

stage. Physically, in real terms, the offstage lives somewhere in the backstage. The offstage exists as an extension of the fictive world of the stage that exists in the shared imagination of the actors and audience. On this, Güçbilmez writes,

The theatre building has three locations: the stage, the auditorium, and backstage. These are all real places, but the stage is different in its capacity of signifying a fictional space (and time). But in defining the offstage one faces a major problem, since it lies between the fictionality of the stage and the reality of the auditorium. (2007, 154)

Güçbilmez investigates the offstage as the “unconscious of the stage” characterising it as a “Locus of the Uncanny” (2007, 152). Interestingly, in analysing the results of this research, I circled back to this theory posited by Güçbilmez, which I discuss further in ACT III, and the Epilogue.

The Door onto the Stage as a Threshold

The theatre set provides a barrier between the backstage and the onstage space (Figure 44). Actor, Sir Ian McKellen describes his awareness of this threshold: “I’m always looking for that dividing line in the theatre. When you are on stage when you are backstage” (Stephenson 2017, 12:58). The door in the set, from the backstage to the stage, is a part of the backstage physicality, but also has metaphysical and psychological implications. English drama scholar and lecturer Dr Jean Chothia writes that the actors “cross the threshold from the real private space of the dressing room into the public space of the stage” (2011, 17). I consider the door in the set a threshold and have investigated the way that it contributes to the affective atmosphere of the backstage.



Figure 44. Backstage of the set for the production of *Water* at the Drama Studio showing the door onto the set. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

In a realist play, like *The Torrents*, the door in the set is the opening between the backstage space and the fictive time and space of the play – it is the entry point onto the stage through which the actors pass into the physical “world of the play”⁶. Stepping through the door, the actor becomes the character, the darkness of the backstage gives way to the light of the stage, the private becomes public, the preparation and potential become performance. In the context of realist theatre, this doorway is the locus of a transformation. The doorway as threshold has become a central motif within my paintings. As a result, I have researched the historical, metaphysical, and psychological meaning attached to threshold sites, and the liminal quality that is attributed to them.⁷ These considerations have also been key to this project.

⁶ According to Stephen Curtis (2014) theatre makers, create a whole world. A wonderful thing happens when the lights go down at the start of a show. While the bodies remained seated the imagination of each audience member goes for a virtual journey into the *world* of the production. This illusory world is made up of a multilayered mix of characters, action, context, moods and ideas. (8, italics in the original)

⁷ Phillip Wheelwright wrote that psychological, spiritual, temporal, and spatial transitions are an almost constant part of the experience of being a human, and therefore threshold experiences are

Thresholds are moments, spaces, or psychological states in which one feels adrift within what once was and what is about to be; definitions and boundaries are illusive. Inbuilt into the threshold is a dual sensation of precarious instability and potential; it is the “tentative in-between state”, Professor of literature Subha Mukherji writes, wherein “clarity, definition and even interiority are just beyond grasp” (2011, xvii). As part of this research, I have considered whether the affective atmosphere of the backstage is impacted by the liminal quality of the threshold door and how this could be translated into the visual via oil painting.

In her article, “Liminality, Space and the Importance of ‘transitory dwelling places’ at Work.” (2014) Associate Professor of Organisational Studies Dr Harriet Shortt uses language directly linked to the theatre. She references Kate Dale and Gibson Burrell (2008), writing that “liminal space is defined as a space that is on the ‘border’, a space that is somewhere in-between the front stage/backstage; a space ‘at the boundary of two dominant spaces, which is not fully part of either’” (Dale and Burrell 2008, 238, as quoted by Shortt 2014, 633). Shortt goes on to reference Dale and Burrell, and Victor Turner’s 1974 book *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, writing that “The ‘no man’s land’ feature of liminal space is an important characteristic and, as such, spaces like these are not easily defined in terms of their use, are not clearly ‘owned’ by a particular party and are where anything can happen.” (Dale and Burrell 2008, 238, and Victor Turner 1974, 13, as quoted by Harriet Shortt 2014, 633). This definition of a liminal space as a ‘no mans land’, and ‘somewhere in-between the front stage/backstage’ can be directly applied to my characterisation of the door in the set.

Academics Rory Slater and Adrian Coyle write that liminality is a realm where “the structural limits of the ‘outside’ are removed creating a space of alternative ordering and possibility” (2017, 370). Liminal spaces, they argue, are formative within the process of

fundamental to what it is to be a lived body (1953, 56-57). Liminality is a condition related to passing through a threshold. The notion of the threshold and liminality originated from anthropological studies into ritual and social development in the early twentieth century. These notions have since been linked to the social sciences, art, and literature, and, as Rory Slater and Adrian Coyle write, “the transformation of the self” (2017, 370). Arthur Van Gennep’s text *Rites de Passage* (1909) and Victor Turner’s *The Forest of Symbols* (1967) provide original definitions derived from anthropological investigations of thresholds and liminal spaces.

creating ‘in-between’ sites. Mukherji writes that the liminal is located at a sensory threshold, something barely perceptible, poised between the explicit and the implicit, between external and internal, and by extension, between familiar and alien (2011, xix). An interesting avenue opened up when I discovered that thresholds and liminality have a link to the uncanny. In his book *The Uncanny* Professor of English Nicholas Royle directly links threshold and liminal spaces to the uncanny. He identifies the word uncanny as originating from Scotland, a place he characterises as liminal, “beyond the borders” (2003 12). Linking this to my exploration of the theatre, I refer to theatre Professor Marvin Carlson’s book *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (2001).



Figure 45. Backstage of the set for the production of *The Torrents* at the Heath Ledger Theatre showing the path between two sets of black curtains and the coloured tape used as a guide when the theatre is live. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

The repetition, or experiencing and re-experiencing, which characterises *perezhivanie* can also be interpreted, as Carlson does, as uncanny. The form of a performance is one of repetition and *déjà vu*, where the voices of ghosts are spoken by the actor’s recycled bodies, in clothes worn by many before them, under lights which

illuminate memories and emotions which have been experienced, written, and played in the past. *Perezhivanie* refers to the actor experiencing the character's circumstances through imagination and empathy during rehearsals and then again (and again, and again...) onstage during a performance. Carlson writes that the theatre involves "haunted" processes of repetition and the re-emergence of the ghosts of the past through theatrical storytelling (2001, 1).

Theatricality and ghostly, dream-like sensations, as well as a sense of the past, seep into the present, lending themselves to visual representations, particularly the materiality of oil paint, which can be applied in thin diaphanous layers, scraped back to unearth the 'ghosts' of former marks, and used to make printed marks that mirror and distort the ones that came before. These processes are inherently expressive of memory, *déjà vu*, and the uncovering of past experience. As Zuckerman writes of Mamma Andersson's paintings, She creates a stage, a frame for actions past and present...the remnants of events alluded to.... Theatre and photography both depict what once was or what could somehow be, and Andersson's paintings exhibit the same narrative anxiety that can result from these temporal dislocations. (2010, 40)

The resurfacing past and the potential of the future moment are visually manifested in the paintings of Andersson and resonate with an affective atmosphere charged with potentiality and liminality that relates to my inquiry.

Güçbilmez characterises the backstage as housing the theatrical "offstage" which she describes in liminal terms, "with its ambiguous, transitory nature, the offstage softens the sharpness between the fictional and the real world: it is related to both but possessed by neither. It's where we are in limbo" (2007, 154). As Güçbilmez conjectures, "Offstage is, then, the locus of the uncanny. In its sense of homelessness, uncanny is stage-lessness" (2007, 154). If the stage is *heim* – the home of the performance – then the offstage becomes *unheimlich*, and to make it visible through painting unearths that which perhaps should remain hidden, an uncanny act indeed (2007, 154).

While the idea of the uncanny backstage guided this research for some time, and led to some of the transparency and layering I explored with paint, I ultimately concluded that the affective atmosphere of the backstage was not solely or overwhelmingly an uncanny one, although the affective atmosphere of the space is impacted by the

uncanniness of the offstage and the threshold. I subsequently focused on what I have identified as the loaded potential of the contained energy and focus backstage, the physicality of the backstage space, and the behaviours that are occurring therein. The threshold door, however, continued to be a metaphysical and visual motif that I explored in my paintings.

The Threshold as a Visual Motif

Thresholds have been depicted in paintings for centuries and were used as a visual and metaphorical motif in the religious paintings of the thirteenth century. In the seventeenth century Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) explored liminality in his paintings through the soft light he depicted filtering through windows, illuminating moments shimmering with potential. Later still Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) painted uncanny, metaphysical images of plazas and monuments that seem to freeze time and space, alluding to the threshold world of the unconscious, while Edward Hopper's interiors are imbued with a sense of still foreboding, often because of the threshold spaces they explore. Below I engage with the techniques used by these painters, as well as the religious artists that preceded them by centuries.

Paintings of religious subjects contain imagery within their compositions that can be read as commenting on the threshold between visibility and invisibility, humanity and divinity, and the proximity and complete transcendence of Christ and God (National Gallery 2017). According to Chloë Reddaway of the National Gallery, London, thresholds are “everywhere” in religious art. These thresholds are sometimes in the form of physical frames built around the paintings, or steps, frames, or curtains within the painted composition. Reddaway states that these motifs comment on the space between the viewer (human) and the subject matter (divine), and “create transitional areas between us as viewers and the painting” itself (National Gallery 2017, 03:54). The viewer has to cross these visual thresholds to enter into the painting and get closer to the sacred subject matter.

In *The Annunciation*, (Figure 46), a fresco by Italian painter Fra Angelico (1395-1455), the artist creates a threshold by way of the arched shapes which frame the figures. In my early studio research, I consciously included these threshold spaces into my compositions, with mixed results. I created imagined backstage compositions in which steps, scaffolds, and areas of light and shade invite the viewer to cross painted thresholds, move further into the

composition, and make discoveries. Figure 47 is an example of an early composition where the focus of the work was to incorporate these threshold motifs. Ultimately, I abandoned this approach, as simply focusing on the physical thresholds negated the consideration of the liminality achievable through the materiality of paint.



Figure 46. Fra Angelico, *The Annunciation*. c.1440-1445, Fresco painting, 230 x 321 cm. Florence: Convent of San Marco. Reproduced from: Wikipedia.com (Wikipedia 2023).



Figure 47. Emily Rose Brennan, *Backstage/Onstage* (process documentation of painting influenced by the threshold motifs in religious art). 2020, Charcoal and oil paint on canvas, 150 x 200 cm.

Reddaway explains that painted curtains framing the subject matter of a painting, like those in *The Virgin and Child* (Figure 48) by Italian artists Andrea del Verriocchia (1435-1488) and Lorenzo di Credi (1459-1537), are a threshold between the viewer and the divine subject matter. The painted curtains, comment on paintings and paint itself, specifically the ability of paint to “unveil itself to show something deeper in the image” (National Gallery 2017, 04:00). In *The Vision of the Blessed Gabriele* (Figure 50) by Italian artist Carlo Crivelli (1430-1495), Reddaway points out that the fruit garlands cast a shadow on the sky, as if they exist in a space in front of the painted image, creating another threshold. In my visual research, I experimented with these motifs to mixed results (Figure 49), which I will unpack in ACT II.



Figure 48. Andrea del Verrocchia and Lorenzo di Credi, *The Virgin and Child with Two Angels*. 1476-78, Egg tempera on wood, 96.5 x 70.5 cm. London: The National Gallery. Reproduced from: NationalGallery.com (National Gallery 2023).

Figure 49. Emily Rose Brennan. *Set Piece* (process documentation of painting showing experimentation with curtains and shadows). 2021, Oil on linen, 100 x 75.5 cm.

Figure 50. Carlo Crivelli, *The Vision of the Blessed Gabriele*. c.1489, Egg and oil on poplar, 141 x 87 cm. London: The National Gallery. Reproduced from: NationalGallery.com (National Gallery 2023).

Vermeer's interior paintings contain interplays of light and shadow and, despite their focus on seemingly mundane duties, they convey a profound atmosphere of expectation and potential (Figure 51). Through his registration of the effects of light, Vermeer captures moments of discovery and transition, which can be understood as threshold moments, as discussed by philosopher and critic Morgan Meis in his article "Vermeer and the Threshold" (2014). Meis suggests that although Vermeer paints figures who seemingly "engage in simple tasks", he uses "various painterly tricks to make these moments...look special" (2014). Meis proposes that Vermeer captures an affective atmosphere linked to thresholds of concentration, describing that the artist was: "interested in what happens when that concentration is broken. Vermeer, then, was fascinated with thresholds" (2014), thresholds related to this transition.

[Find Image here](#)

Figure 51. Johannes Vermeer,
Woman in Blue Reading a Letter. c.1663, Oil on canvas, 46.6 x
39.9 cm. Amsterdam: Rijkmuseum. Reproduced from:
Wikipedia.com (Wikipedia 2023).

Meis writes that “it is a lack of distinction between the physical and spiritual world [in Vermeer’s paintings] that creates the sense of mystery. You know you are looking at something more than what you seem to be looking at” ((2014) brackets added). This resonates with my understanding of the backstage space. Simply put, it is an unseen, unpainted side of set, carpeted, curtained, partially illuminated by the leftover light of the stage. However, the way the bodies resonate within this space, the actor’s concentration, and preparedness, and the potential that the door onto the stage radiates, altogether contribute to something more. This affective atmosphere is far more nuanced than simply the back of a set. It is the invisible but palpable affective atmosphere that I wish to inscribe in works such as *The Hour Before the Call* (Figure 29) and *Backstage Shadows* (Figure 70). Meis writes that “threshold moments are, in Vermeer’s [paintings], hidden and obvious simultaneously. It is not Vermeer’s intention to pull away the veil, to reveal the hidden structures.... It is his purpose to show them to us *as hidden* and *as right there*” ((2014) Italics in original, brackets added).

Although I am not attempting to create paintings that precisely resemble those of Vermeer's, I do focus on different qualities of painted edges to create areas of dreamy, diffused atmosphere and harder flatter areas. Vermeer painted wet on wet to achieve what Meis calls a "slight haze" (2014, 3), and I have used this technique from his approach in some areas of my paintings. The softness is a result of letting "the colours, especially along the edges, merge and blend with one another, just enough to give everything a slight haze" (Meis 2014, 3). This is a painterly choice made to register the artist's subjective understanding of the space, and a technique I tried in several of my works to attempt to register a similarly liminal atmosphere.

The soft haziness is also a result of the low and cool tones that Vermeer has used, keeping areas of high contrast to a minimum. This is something I have explored myself in *The Hour Before the Call* (Figure 29) and *Imaginary Circumstances II* (Figure 28) in pursuit of this liminal quality. The combination of low saturation, cool colour harmonies, and the incremental shifts in tone, indicates an affective atmosphere of liminality and moments in time that are silently building up to a moment of action or change, making them appropriate choices for these works.



Figure 52. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Hour Before the Call* (detail). 2020, Oil on board, 31 x 41 cm.

Figure 53. Emily Rose Brennan, *Imaginary Circumstances II* (detail). 2022, Oil on linen, 106 x 129 cm.

The affective atmosphere I am attempting to capture relates to the energy that builds and shifts in the backstage space in the lead up to a performance. Prior to performance, the space is quieter, and seems to slowly wake up, preparing for the night ahead and for the performers to fill it with energy. As the actors enter the theatre and begin to warm up, the atmosphere of the backstage develops further; the technicians checking the sound, light, costumes, and props add to this building sense of anticipation. I intentionally chose a desaturated, cool, and relatively low contrast colour palette for *The Hour Before the Call* in order to register an affective atmosphere that is slowly unfolding. The atmosphere that I sensed in that space and time was almost veil-like, creeping into the space over the hours.

Later, during the show, the actors are in the backstage – prepared, concentrating, getting ready to step on stage, through the threshold of the door. The atmosphere is more intense, and I have attempted to capture this more elevated affective energy in other works, such as *Heavy Curtain* (Figure 54) and *Threshold* (Figure 52). In these, I have intentionally increased the intensity of the colour saturation, contrast, and the sharpness of the painted edges.



Figure 54. Emily Rose Brennan, *Heavy Curtain*. 2022, Oil on board, 23 x 31 cm.



Figure 55. Emily Rose Brennan, *Threshold II* (detail; process documentation). 2022, Oil on canvas, 141 x 90 cm.

Like Vermeer, Hammershøi's paintings inscribe threshold spaces, imbued with liminality and a sense of anticipation. Art writer Judith Dobryznski (2015) describes Hammershøi as creating paintings containing "atmosphere, ambiance [and] enigma" (brackets added). Hammershøi created tonally limited compositions layered with multiple doorways and windows, and veils of painted light. I have borrowed compositional elements and allowed my palette to be influenced by his work. Specifically, I examined *Interior with a Woman Standing* (Figure 56) and *Interior Strandgade 30* (Figure 57). I have looked to his compositions, use of colour, tone, and subject matter to inform my work. Hammershøi displays a Vermeer-like approach to veils of light, and Mukherji describes the painting *Interior with a Woman Standing* as one which "encapsulates the lure of the poetics of the threshold" (2011, xvii).

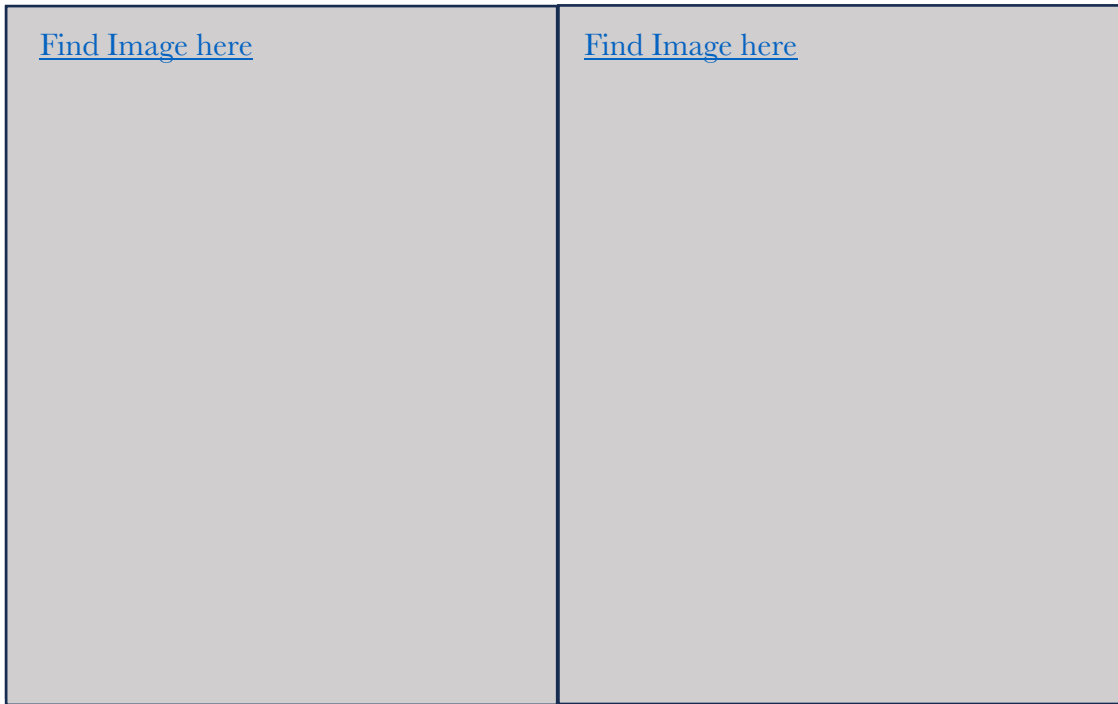


Figure 56. Vilhelm Hammershøi, *Interior with a Woman Standing*. 1913, Oil on canvas, 67.5 x 54.3 cm. Private Collection. Reproduced from: Wikimedia Commons (Wikimedia Commons 2023).

Figure 57. Vilhelm Hammershøi, *Interior, Strandgade 30*. 1901, Oil on canvas, 66 x 55 cm. Amsterdam: Stadel Museum. Reproduced from: Stadel Museum Digital Collection (Stadel Museum 2023).

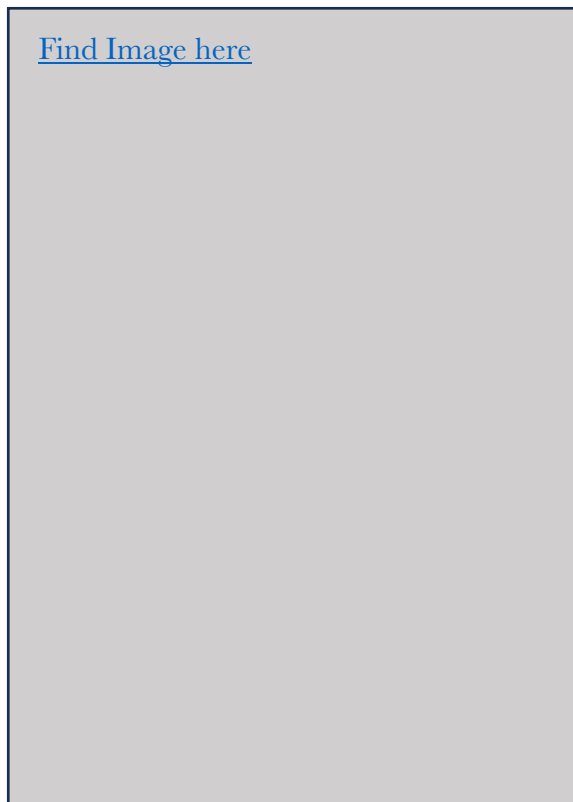


Figure 58. Vilhelm Hammershøi, *Interior of Courtyard, Strandgade 30*. 1899, Oil on canvas, 66 x 47 cm. Ohio: Toledo Museum of Art. Reproduced from: Toledo Museum of Art Online (Toledo Museum of Art 2023).

Mukheri suggests that the painting freezes the viewer at the brink of a moment where “clarity, definition and even interiority are just beyond grasp” (2011, xvii). Mukheri describes the painting as an image that distils the experience of the threshold as a transitory space, infused with risk, discomfort, excitement, and the expectation of a moment with an uncertain outcome. The painting captures the affective atmosphere of a “tentative in-between space” (2011, xvii). The palette and the application of soft, hazy paint inscribe an affective atmosphere tinged with ambiguity.

Hammershøi brings attention to areas of shadow and light, and the luminous, subtle shifts between them. In *Interior of Courtyard, Strandgade 30* (Figure 58), the almost smudgy, muddy quality of painterly application is particularly effective in conveying an atmosphere infused with ambiguity, while the strangeness of the composition, arguably implying a reflection or a sunken world, rather than the continuation of the building, adds to this uncertain atmosphere.

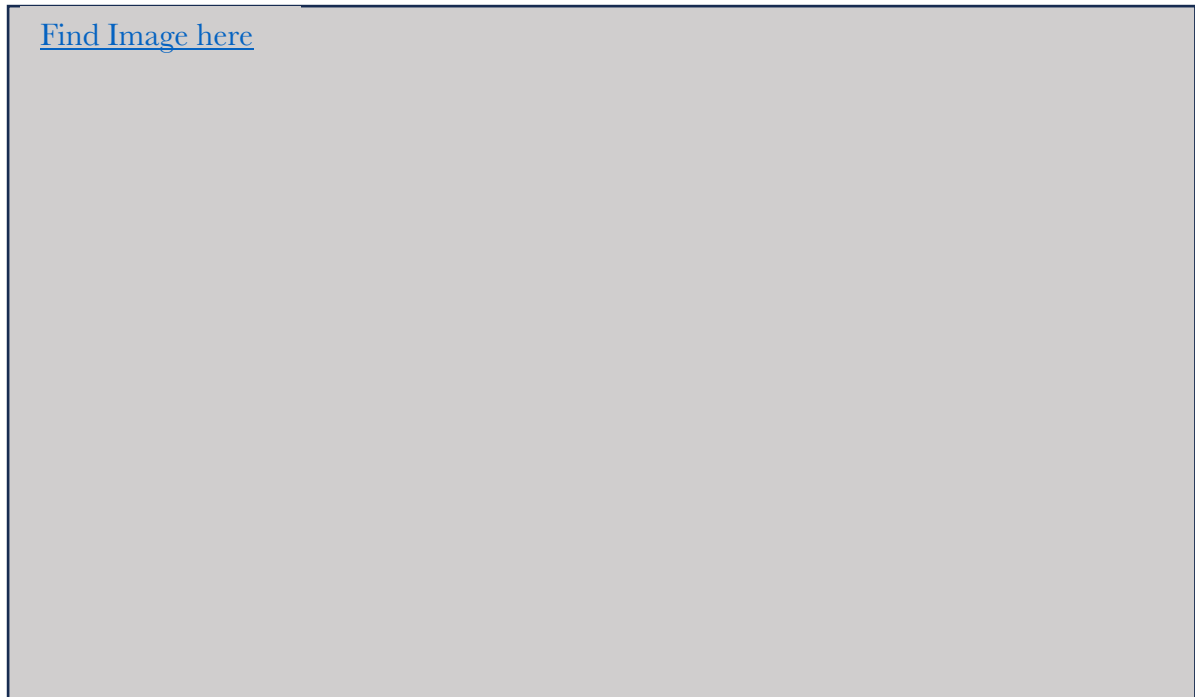


Figure 59. Jude Rae, *Interior 370 (Foyer I)*. 2017, Oil on linen, 198 x 260 cm. Sydney: Art Gallery of NSW Collection. Reproduced from: JudeRae.com (Rae 2023).

Jude Rae's interior paintings depict transitory threshold spaces⁸ and are imbued with liminal sensations. The painted registration of shadows and reflections in the work *Interior 370 (Foyer 1)* (Figure 59) not only details the physical structure of the building, and the way that the eye perceives it, but also inscribes the liminal quality of threshold spaces. Rae's interiors inscribe the embodied experience of the affective atmosphere of the in-between spaces that she depicts. "Those highly reflective glass interiors are like halls of mirrors. The paintings explore the interplay between illusion and materiality" (Stranger 2017). The application of paint in Rae's works also contributes to this sense of a shifting, shimmering affective atmosphere. Academic and artist Eva L. Hample describes how Rae "creates a liminal effect largely through quality of light, reflections or transparency and a dissolving painted surface (the works are "stippled" and uneven, revealing tiny glimpses of the painted ground beneath)" ((2019, 34) brackets in original). In Rae's works, allowing the ground to show through, allows the potential inherent in the affective atmosphere of the space to be sensed.

⁸ Several of Jude Rae's interior paintings depict spaces considered as liminal or in between, such as airports, corridors and foyers, and even her still life paintings have been described as 'liminal'. In her PhD thesis *Liminal Speculations: Art, Nature and the Material Turn* (2019), Eva L. Hample describes how in Rae's paintings:

there is an elusive sense of empty, but pregnant, space. A lack of focus, a sense of dissolution, and a heightened sensitivity to nuances of light, suggesting concealed energy, contribute to the sense of the liminal in Rae's work...Rae engages the liminal in placing the viewer in this position between states, in a state of transformation and potential, crossing accepted perceptual boundaries. (2019, 34-35)

ACT I

Scene vi

Backstage Behaviours

As noted, actors use the backstage space to prepare to step onto the stage. Such preparation is needed to allow the audience to believe that on stage the characters are truly existing in the time and space of the performance: believability is the main objective of the actor. Actor, Dame Judi Dench defines acting in a similar way: “My job is trying to play a character that will convince people that I am that person...all you’ve got to do is make people believe you are that person in that circumstance” (ESClad 2015, 1:33). The backstage space is where actors spend time the moment before stepping onto stage to convince the audience to believe, and the way to communicate this is to act as if the things happening on stage are happening for the first time, to replicate true lived experience. In *(Towards) a Phenomenology of Acting*, Professor Phillip Zarrilli writes:

If and when we carefully examine in detail how any specific experience is structured temporally, spatially, sensorially, etc., we can be transported to a place where it is possible to ‘discover things anew’ – what seemed everyday might be ‘retranslated into a new experience’ (ibid). This process of making experience anew is central to the actor in two ways: through processes of embodied imagining and processes of (re)discovering ‘anew’ a set of rehearsed actions in the performative moment. (2020, 14)

In the backstage, the actors are preparing to embody this experience.

Within the training an actor receives, there is an emphasis on being present and being attuned to the moment. The body needs to be simultaneously physically relaxed, and alert to perform. Zarrilli describes a process that “emphasizes [sic] slowing the actor down so that one becomes attentive to the breath and sensory awareness and thereby learns how to better attend to the details of embodied/sensory awareness”. Zarrilli writes, “It is precisely this process of slowing down and engaging attention and awareness that can...enliven all performance (2020, 73). Zarrilli describes the actor’s need “‘to listen’...to attend...and begin to hear” (2020, 3). In order to react truthfully on stage, the actor must be ‘tuned in’ to the stimulus around them, particularly the other actors, and free themselves from tension and distraction.

This ‘tuning in’ is reliant on the actors being simultaneously physically at ease, and hyper-aware. Zarrilli describes how,

[p]rocesses of actor training and acting itself may be considered pathways into embodying consciousness that attune attention and open sensory aware-ness within the structure offered by specific dramaturgies. And for directors and teachers of acting, it is especially important to understand, reflect upon, and be able to communicate about the nature of embodied consciousness in the work of the actor, i.e., how the actor attends to, becomes sensorially/kinaesthetically aware, imagines, etc. (2020, 4)

I propose that the affective atmosphere of the backstage space is connected to this attuned state, amongst other things. I consider acting, and preparing to perform, embodied experiences and have found that painting, a technique that is characterised by embodied gestures, is an appropriate embodied means by which to inscribe the resultant affective atmosphere.

To analyse the behaviour in the backstage space, an understanding of the concept of *perezhivanie* – coined by theatre practitioner and director Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) in relation to realistic, truthful acting – is crucial. Zarrilli refers to Stanislavski’s text *An Actor’s Work* wherein the director addressed acting as a “phenomenon and process” focusing on “experiencing” and “embodiment” (2008)” (Stanislavski 2008, as quoted by Zarrilli 2020, 5). Zarrilli notes that Stanislavski’s “fundamental concern was the actor’s embodied consciousness as a phenomenon and process of living a role” (2020, 5).

Perezhivanie, which translates from Russian to mean “experience” or “re-experience” (Butler 2022, 3), is part of an approach to acting that is centred on the absolute belief in the truth of onstage reality with every repetition. To further explain perezhivanie, Zarrilli refers to Anatoly Smeliansky and his colleague Oleg Efreimov practitioners at Stanislavski’s Moscow Art Theatre, who define it as a process of repeatedly,

‘living in’ by which was understood the actor’s ability to penetrate and fill every moment of his life onstage with vibrant material to create life, at others to complete an action. Living in means remaining alive in every second of the stage action, which moves ahead as a non-stop, complex process. (2008: 692). (Smeliansky 2008 quoted by Zarilli 2020, 6)

The preparedness that actors must have in the moments before stepping onto stage contributes not only to professional performances on stage, but also to the affective atmosphere backstage that I am attempting to inscribe on the surface of my paintings.

The ability to create this truth requires an actor to be present within their lived body and attuned to their surroundings. This attunement and focus are key to the atmosphere located in the backstage space. On the techniques the actor can use to achieve this, Zarrilli writes of the importance of,

pre-performative process(es) of attending to, awakening and attuning energy, and opening the senses and affect. Going through a pre-performative practice...a performer can be introduced to the subtler nuances of a sensitized [sic], 'lived/living' bodymind.... [T]hey are best understood as preparing or forming the performer's body-mind to embody, inhabit, and live through a performance more fully. ((2020, 24) brackets added)

The behaviour and dynamics of actors backstage is formative in the overall affective atmosphere backstage.

In tandem with personal voice and body exercises, at times a cast will engage in a group pre-show ritual to encourage connection, strengthen interpersonal dynamics, and to focus energy. In the case of *The Torrents*, a backstage mini-golf tournament lasted for the entire season (Figure 60). This also serves as a reminder that the actors are participating in a *play*, which requires the ability to do just that - play. A pre-show routine forms an important component of being a professional actor who can be responsible for their own performance, whilst remaining open, aware, and playful with the entire team, and this impacts the affective atmosphere and mood of the backstage.



Figure 60. Backstage golf, as a pre-show ritual, during the Sydney run of *The Torrents*. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Pre-show warmups are performed to create openness and attunement, while also settling the cortisol in the nervous system which may make attunement less achievable. These processes have been encouraged by acting teachers since the early twentieth century. In *An Actor Prepares* Stanislavski writes chapters on both the “Concentration of Attention” and the “Relaxation of Muscles” ([1936] 1980, 72-110). He writes,

As long as you have physical tenseness you cannot even think about delicate shadings of feeling or the spiritual life of your part, consequently, before you attempt to create anything it is necessary for you to get your muscles in proper condition, so that they do not impede your actions. ([1936] 1980, 84-85)

The physical and psychological practices related to relaxation and concentration are often continued as the actors sit backstage during the show, contributing to the focussed backstage affective atmosphere. Sometimes, due to increased cortisol, there is a sense of nervousness and apprehension in the backstage related to performance anxiety.⁹ Some

⁹ Performance anxiety is a well-researched phenomenon. In 2020, actor and psychotherapist Linda Brennan published a book called *Stage Fright in the Actor*. As part of her research an actor, who wished to

actors take part in breathing, meditation, or relaxation backstage during the show in order to quell the physical and psychological effects associated with this phenomenon, and this can also add to the focused quality of the backstage.

Backstage Imaginative Processes

By ‘imaginative processes’, I refer to the work that the actors are doing backstage that is related to the craft of acting, and their entrance, in character, onto the stage. This behaviour is related to the character they are playing, and the story being told onstage, and is parallel to the physical and vocal preparations that have taken place. Like the practical behaviour, the imaginative behaviour is dependent on the kind of production that is taking place, and in the case of *The Torrents*, to theatrical realism.

During a realist play, there is a performed reality taking place on stage that the audience is being positioned to believe in. To make the audience believe in this reality, the actors must also believe in it, and whilst backstage they must be aware of the fictive time and place being presented to the audience. In *Lived Time* phenomenologist and psychiatrist Eugene Minkowski writes, “The experience of lived time is always an affective one” (2019, xxiv). The theatre can be understood as having a doubled spatial reality (a backstage and an onstage) and *multiple temporalities*, or ‘lived times’ for actors, which adds to the affective atmosphere of the space.

In this research, I define backstage time as ‘real time’ or the actor’s reality. The actors are still engaged imaginatively in the play in a sense – still in costume, makeup, microphones etc. – but are not visible to the audience, not performing, and there is no script. The time onstage continues to run alongside this real time, while the actors wait backstage to jump back into it. The time onstage is the present for those performers onstage but is the future for the actors waiting backstage. It is as if there are two worlds and two temporalities existing concurrently, one that is frozen and waiting, and one that keeps moving forward. This split experience of time adds to the multi-layered and liminal nature of the affective atmosphere backstage.

remain anonymous, reported that: “I become hyper-reactive, and any sound, movement or comment can make me jump – or scream...Stage fright feels like it is literally choking me (Alberge 2020).



Figure 61. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Dressing Room*. 2021-2023, Oil on canvas, 80 x 121 cm.

I attempted to inscribe this experience in my painting *The Dressing Room* (Figure 61). In this painting I composite visual motifs from the backstage and the onstage. The composition intentionally blurs perspective and temporal realities, while materially I allow the texture of other iterations of the painting to show through, suggesting several layers of time and space existing concurrently. This painterly approach was not entirely successful, and in ACT II, I will analyse this and other more successful methodologies.

ACT II

The Backstage, the Studio, and Painting Affective Atmospheres

ACT II

Scene i

From Rehearsal Room to Studio Methodology

In this second act, I trace the development of my methodology from its beginnings as visual research in the rehearsal rooms, dressing rooms, and backstage spaces, to the tableau vivants I painted in the studio, and the eventual development of a practice steeped in the multi-layered and embodied nature of both acting and the painted gesture. I begin by briefly describing the specific physical sites where my visual research was sourced, and the unique “life-world” (Zarrilli 2020, 14) or *Lebenswelt*¹⁰ contained within each site. I analyse the value of drawing and photographing these environments, then detail the development of my approach to inscribing the affective atmosphere of the backstage space, and the various methodologies I employed in my studio experimentation.

¹⁰ On the ‘life-world’, Zarrilli quotes phenomenologist David Abram who explains that it is

the world of our immediately lived experience *as* we live it, prior to all our thoughts about it. It is that which is present to us in our everyday tasks and enjoyments – reality as it engages us, before being analyzed by our theories and our science.... Easily overlooked, this primordial world is always already there when we begin to reflect or philosophize[sic]. It is not a private, but a collective, dimension – the common field of our lives and the other lives with which ours are entwined – and yet it is profoundly ambiguous and indeterminate, since our experience of this field is always relative to our situation within it. The life-world is thus the world as we organically experience it in its enigmatic multiplicity and open-endedness, prior to conceptually freezing it into a static space of ‘facts’ – prior indeed, to conceptualizing it in any complete fashion.... The life-world is thus peripherally present in any thought or activity we undertake. (Abram 2011, 40-41, as quoted by Zarrilli 2020, 14, italics in the original)

ACT II

Scene ii

a) Rehearsal Room One, Perth Theatre Centre, 5th May to 5th June 2019

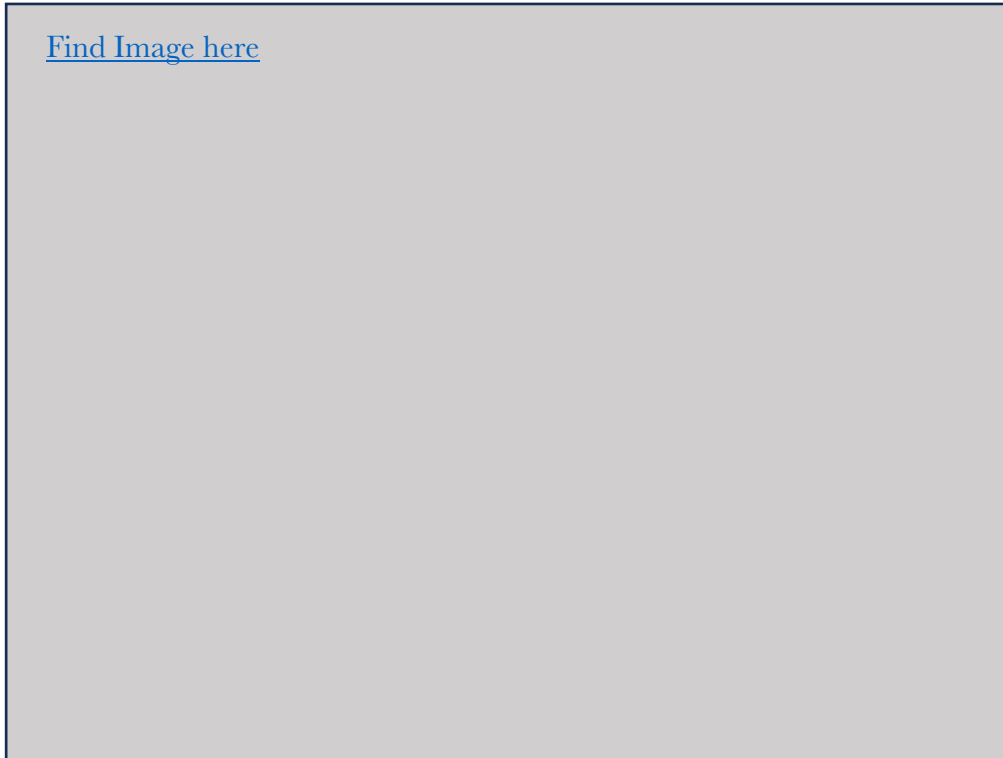


Figure 62. Rehearsal Room One at the State Theatre Centre, facing North, 2014. Photo: Evad37. Reproduced from: Wikimedia Commons (Evad37 2023).

Rehearsal Room One at the State Theatre (Figure 62), whilst not the dominant site of my visual research, has informed the motifs present within my paintings. The rehearsal process for most performances starts here, with a design presentation and full company meeting. The company is aware that this begins a shared experience that will last several months, and as a result, the atmosphere of the rehearsal room is charged with nerves, anticipation, and excitement. The design presentation allows the company to see details of the costumes, and a model of the set, including the entrances and exits that will mark the future thresholds between actor and character. The model set allows the actors to imagine themselves in the space and time of the performance. The imaginative process is supported by these objects and images.

Designer Renee Mulder's model set, her costume designs and some of her source imagery (Figure 63-65) contributed significantly to my visual language, and development of painted motifs. From an actor's point of view, I characterise these objects as rough sketches

of the characters and their world, informative to character development. From the point of view of a painter, these *avatars* serve as a striking visual motif.



Figure 63. Reference imagery and character renderings by Renee Mulder for *The Torrents* photographed in the rehearsal room. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 64. Set design box by Renee Mulder for *The Torrents* photographed in the rehearsal room. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 65. Costume design for Gwynne Thomas in *The Torrents* by Renee Mulder. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Early in my research I decided that figures were not going to feature dominantly within my compositions. While the transition of actor to character contributes to the backstage affective atmosphere, I did not want it to dictate the visual language of my paintings. Concurrently, I came to realise that I wanted to position the viewer to have an experience of the space unmediated by a figure, which I discuss further in ACT III. I searched for visual motifs that could represent the presence of the transition from actor to character in a visually interesting way and realised that the imagery from the rehearsal room could be an answer.

To paint these objects from life, I located some props of my own (Figure 66-67). Within my work, these objects represent the incremental steps that the actors take during rehearsal as they begin to realise their characters. The use of these objects was also linked to my early interest in modalities of the uncanny, such as mannequins and dolls (Iversen

1998, 419). Although the uncanny did not remain the focus of this investigation, I enjoyed their forms, and so they remained as motifs in my work.



Figure 66.
Figurines set up
and lit as a still
life in the studio.
2021. Photo:
Emily Rose
Brennan.



Figure 67. Still life of a corset from *The Torrents*, and wig heads set up and lit in the studio. 2020. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

The rehearsal and eventual performance of a play has a structure that is metaphorically comparable to the construction of a painting. The process of repeating and adjusting the various details of a character can be likened to the repetitive sketching and gathering of visual research that takes place in the planning and execution of a painting. Through rehearsals, each actor is creating the physical form of the character from themselves – they are the material from which the character is built. As actor and author Isaac Butler expresses it “Unlike most art forms, the actor is both the work of art and the artist and the material all at once. They are the painting, the painter, and the paint” (Carthcart 2022, 47:26). Acting, like painting, is an embodied activity, and the processes that occur in the rehearsal room, like those in the painter’s studio, cannot be defined as “intentional” (Wentworth, 2004, 5-7).

Although, in a scripted production like *The Torrents* the intention is to create a production of a pre-existing script; there is no precise, pre-determined result that exists in the collective minds-eye at the beginning of rehearsals. Similarly, to assume that the actor has a precise idea of the exact way that their character will develop is not the case. Wentworth characterises the idea of a “painter having a fully formed mental image of a finished painting” before they begin the work as “utterly implausible” (2004, 7). Similar can be said of an actor’s relationship to a character. Wentworth asserts that while an artist may have thoughts about the placement of items, the practice is “less conscious or calculating” than this, with “the precise place being determined in the physical action of moving it there” (2004, 6). I propose that the rehearsal period of a play – during which similarly curious embodied experiments form part of the scaffolding for the eventual performance – contributes to the eventual affective atmosphere of the backstage of the theatre.

The above premise has guided me to include in this project the research I began and executed in the rehearsal room. I hope to communicate my understanding of the way that the affective atmosphere of the backstage develops over time, with its roots in acting technique and the rehearsal room. In some ways, this replicates the processes that occur within the painting studio, processes that are dependent on the sometimes “large amounts of preparatory drawings, as well as the almost endless number of reworkings of a painting itself once it is underway” (Wentworth 2004, 7).

During the first week of rehearsals for *The Torrents* a skeleton set was constructed (Figure 68). This rehearsal set was constructed from marine ply-wood and pine, similar to the backstage scaffolding that supported the eventual performance set. This was fascinating to photograph and draw. The entrances and exits were marked in tape on the ground of the rehearsal room, clarifying the line between preparation and performance, actor and character (Figure 68).



Figure 68. Rehearsal set of *The Torrents* at the State Theatre Centre rehearsal room. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Like the many choices and repeated attempts that go into the making of a painting, the rehearsal period involves trying a multitude of choices to best communicate the play. The rehearsing performances, like marks on the surface of a support, are still adjustable and open to change. Zarrilli applies a phenomenological lens to this period, describing it as a time when the actor's body becomes attuned to the stimulus written into the play, and thus the nature of the character's experience is discovered. This process involves imagining and embodying how the character responds to the space and time that they are

experiencing, as if for the first time, and being able to repeat this experience. This is the embodiment of *perezhivanie*, discussed in the previous Scene.

Acting processes and rehearsals at a foundationally require a phenomenological approach to experience. Zarrilli writes that “it is surprising that phenomenology has not figured more prominently in discussions of acting, since acting is a phenomenon and process which engages us in perceiving, attending to, becoming aware of, sensing, being affected by, imagining, etc” (2020, 14). During the rehearsal period, and eventual performances, the actors are engaging in these embodied processes, in order to create a truthfulness within their characters scripted lived experiences. Quoting philosopher Dylan Trigg, Zarrilli explains that this is why breath and relaxation is of such import, as it unconsciously allows for an openness to experience, and highlights “the strangeness of things in their phenomenality”(Trigg 2012, xxi, as quoted by Zarrilli 2020, 13), thus allowing knowledge of what it is to experience being a lived body in oriented space, even if that lived body belongs to a character and the oriented world is the world of the play.

Zarrilli advocates that the life-world of the character can be created truthfully through an attunement to one’s own life-world – rediscovering the ‘strange phenomenon of everyday life’. Zarrilli quotes Stanislavski who described the need for actors to “discover things anew”:

All our acts, even the simplest, which are so familiar to us in everyday life, become strained when we appear...before a public...that is why it is necessary...to learn again how to walk, move about, sit, or lie down. It is essential to re-educate ourselves to look and see, on the stage, to listen, and to hear. (Stanislavski [1936] 1980, 73, as quoted by Zarrilli 2020, 14)

It is through this knowledge gained via training, rehearsal, and repetition that an actor can discover the life-world of a character. The physical repetition inherent in the rehearsal period allowed for the discoveries to be made to look spontaneous.

The experiencing and re-experiencing of the character’s movements and thoughts as if for the first time in the rehearsal room is the embodiment of *perezhivanie*. The time spent in the rehearsal space, sketching and resketching, and eventually making final decisions on the resolved character, parallels the time spent in the painting studio, literally sketching and resketching, forming and reforming, and testing the effectiveness of visual

and material choices made in the construction of a resolved painting. The openness to the other actors, and the engagement with imagined or simulated sensorial stimulants required to create a believable performance score, mirrors the attention to perceiving, sensing, and inscribing that creating a painting that ‘works’ requires.¹¹



Figure 69. Actors using some stand-in costumes and props in the rehearsal room at the State Theatre Centre, facing West. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

As the rehearsals moved into the second week, actors could request certain pieces of costume and specific props, thereby allowing them to experience the way that physical additions adjusted their way of being the embodied character in the “world of the play”¹² (Figure 69). I wore a corset, rehearsal skirt, and character shoes throughout rehearsals (Figure 72). I borrowed or replicated some of these items for the studio and they became visual motifs in my paintings. The corset became a recurring motif in many of my works as

¹¹ Nigel Wentworth (2002) describes that when a painting *works* it,

A painting can be said to work when while looking at it one feels that nothing within it needs to be changed to make it better...We can say, then, that a painting works when an adequately sensitive viewer who looks at it feels that nothing in it needs to or could be changed to make it better. (122)

¹² ¹² According to Stephen Curtis (2014) theatre makers, create a whole world. A wonderful thing happens when the lights go down at the start of a show. While the bodies remained seated the imagination of each audience member goes for a virtual journey into the *world* of the production. This illusory world is made up of a multilayered mix of characters, action, context, moods and ideas. (8, italics in the original)

can be seen in *Backstage Shadows* and *Imaginary Circumstances I* and *II* (Figure 70, Figure 188, and Figure 136).



Figure 70. Emily Rose Brennan, *Backstage Shadows*. 2021, Oil on Board, 60 x 39.5 cm.



Figure 71. The rehearsal room and rehearsal set of *The Torrents*. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

[Find Image here](#)

Figure 72. Emily Rose Brennan rehearsing as Gwynne Thomas on the rehearsal set of *The Torrents*. 2019. Photo: Philip Gostelow. Reproduced from: Facebook/Black Swan Theatre Company (Black Swan Theatre Company 2023).

At the end of the fourth week, *The Torrents* moved onto the waiting set in the theatre auditorium, to complete technical and dress rehearsals. This is where lights, sound, and complete costumes were added, and the affective atmosphere taken from the rehearsal room was consolidated by the addition of these new factors. Actors were assigned dressing rooms, that contained a screen showing a live feed of the stage, and a speaker through which the whispered calls of the stage manager can be heard (Figure 73). It is in this dressing room space that the actors generally see their characters fully physically realised

for the first time (Figure 74). The actors have physically transformed into the drawings they saw on the first day of rehearsals in the design presentation, and the next step is to enter the darkened backstage.



Figure 73. Dressing room at the State Theatre Centre, showing wig stand, scripts, and hair and make-up charts. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 74. Emily Rose Brennan in full costume, wig, and make-up for the first time as Gwynne Thomas in the dressing room at the State Theatre Centre at the technical rehearsal for *The Torrents*. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

ACT II

Scene ii

b) The Heath Ledger Theatre, Perth Theatre Centre, 15th June to 13th July 2019

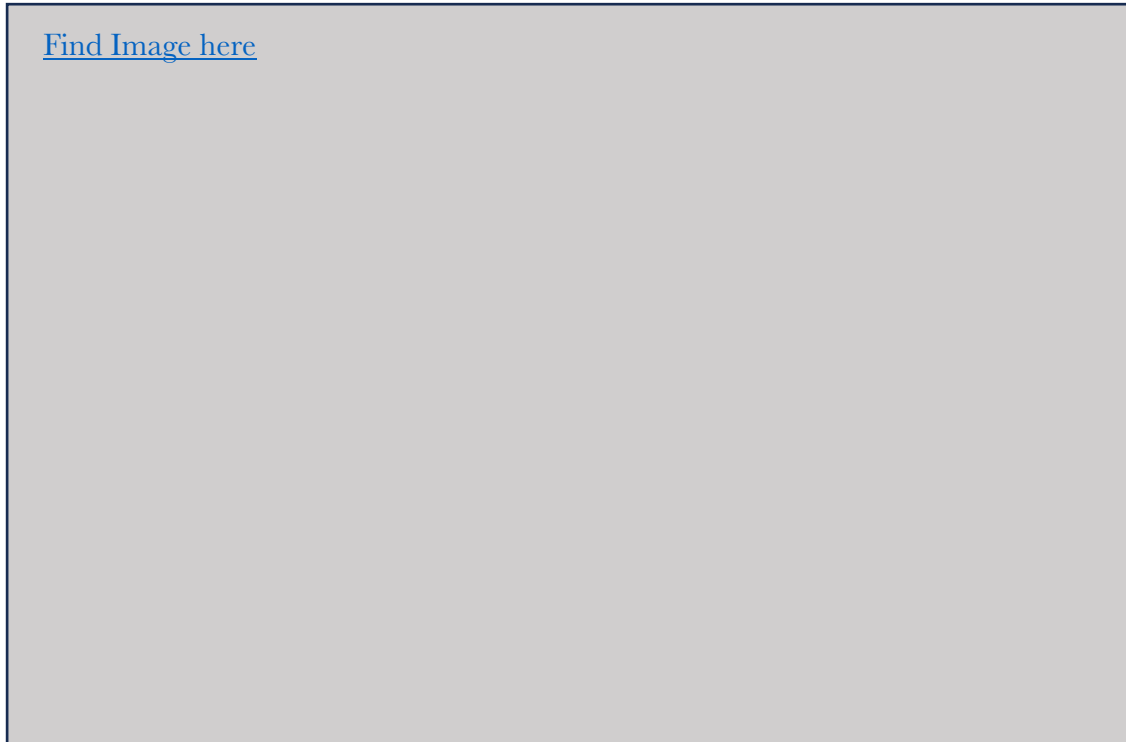


Figure 75. The Heath Ledger Theatre. 2023. Photo: Reproduced from: Bridge 42 Website (Bridge 42.com.au 2023).

The Heath Ledger Theatre (Figure 75) is located at the Perth Theatre Centre and is where *The Torrents* was performed. Between the dressing rooms and the backstage there is a corridor and a sound lock door. The dressing rooms run adjacent to the auditorium wall and have no windows, so there is a sense of being in the heart of the building (Figure 76).

The dressing rooms of the theatre are warmly lit with dressing tables which the actor inhabits for the entire season. The dressing table becomes the actor's backstage home base for the duration of the show and is where the characters and actor's accoutrements collect. The image of the actor's belongings and those of the character comingling on the dressing room desk became an interesting visual metaphor for the process of the actor and character merging (Figure 77). This materiality influenced my use of the layering and transparency achievable with oil paint.

[Find Image here](#)

Figure 76. Floorplan of Level 2 of the State Theatre Centre of Western Australia (pathway from dressing rooms to the backstage marked in red by Emily Rose Brennan). 2011. Photo: Acorn Photo for Architecture and Design.com. Reproduced from: Architecture and Design.com (Architecture and Design 2023).

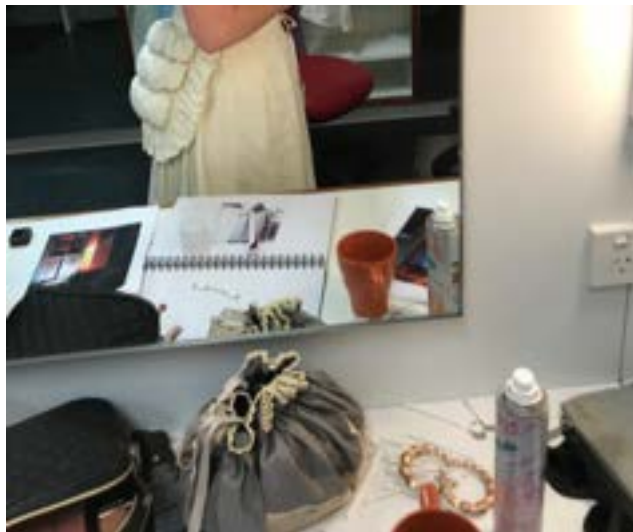


Figure 77. Dressing room desk showing a combination of Gwynne Thomas's props, and the belongings of Emily Rose Brennan, including sketch pad with drawing of the backstage. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Onstage, the realist set of *The Torrents* was installed within the frame of the theatre's proscenium arch and consisted of what appeared as a section of a newspaper publishing office with three arched windows (Figure 78). Adding the only abstract element to the set, while also adding masking to the backstage, were tall stacks of newspapers towering the

actors. Neither the text, nor the actors, ever referred to the newspapers, and the performance style, as mentioned, was shaped to be believable, using the techniques of realist acting. Whilst working in this space I took extensive photographs, made sketches, and recorded ideas to consolidate my research (Figure 79-84).

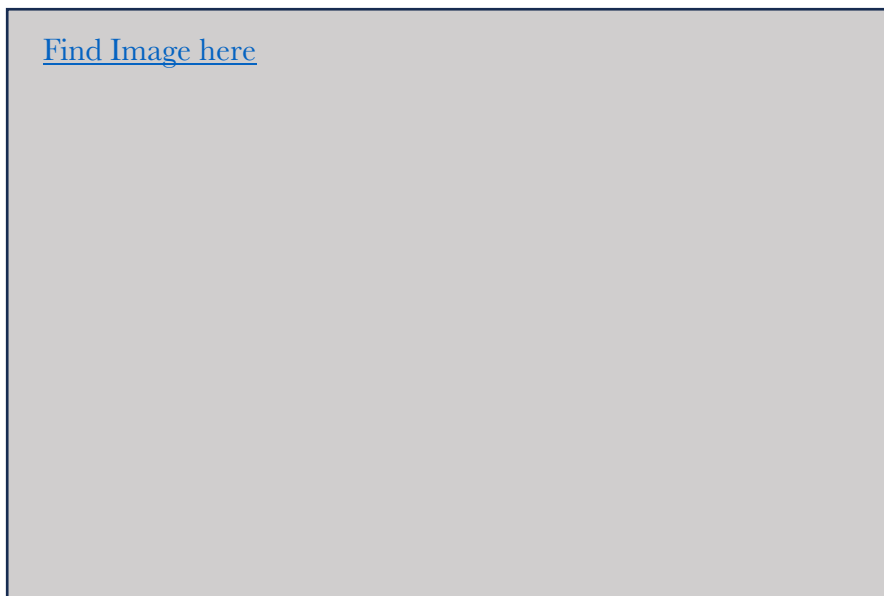


Figure 78. The cast of *The Torrents* on the set. 2019. Photo: Philip Gostelow. Reproduced from: Black Swan Theatre Company Facebook account. (facebook.com 2023)

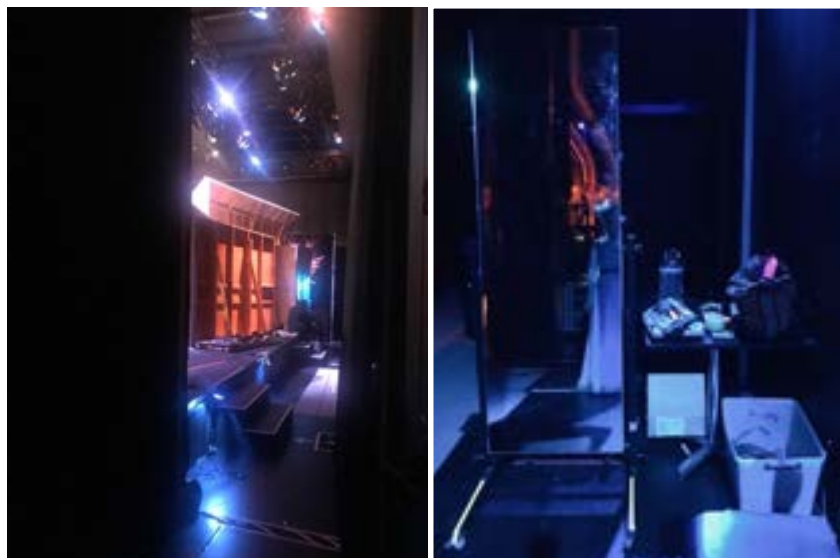


Figure 79. Backstage of the Heath Ledger Theatre. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 80. Backstage of the Heath Ledger Theatre. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 81. Backstage of the Heath Ledger Theatre. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 82. Backstage of the Heath Ledger Theatre. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 83. Backstage of the Heath Ledger Theatre. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 84. Emily Rose Brennan, Drawing of the backstage of the Heath Ledger Theatre. 2019, Biro on paper, 10 x 20 cm.

ACT II

Scene ii

c) The Drama Theatre at the Opera House, 18th July to 24th August 2019

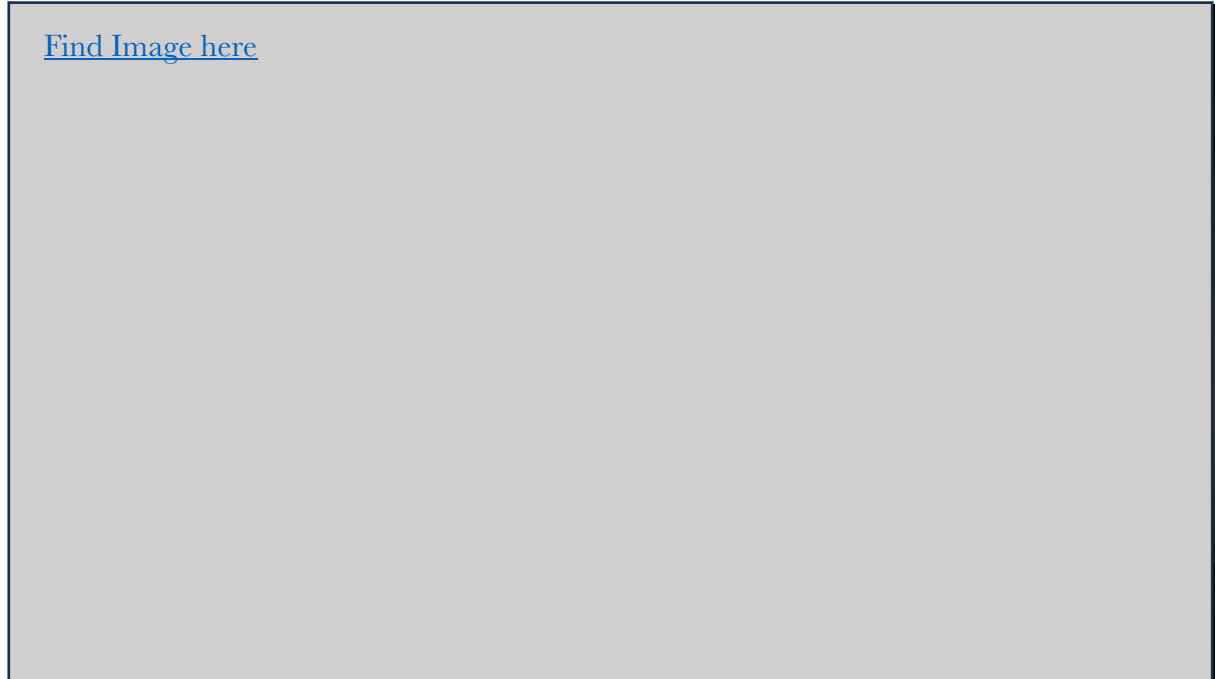


Figure 85. Drama Theatre stage and auditorium. 2023. Photo: Jack Atley. Reproduced from: SydneyOperaHouse.com (Sydney Opera House 2023).

The Drama Theatre (Figure 85) is smaller than the Heath Ledger Theatre though the same set was installed on the stage. The backstage space at the Drama Theatre was shallower, and required a different journey from the dressing room to the stage. As the dressing rooms are located a floor above the theatre a flight of dark, narrow stairs leads down to the backstage space. On this elevated dressing room level, a carpeted corridor runs outside all of the dressing rooms, and it became a place for the previously described group warm-ups. There was also a wig and dressing room on this level, containing a live video feed of the stage (Figure 86). This area became the original stimulus for the painting *The Dressing Room* (Figure 61).



Figure 86. Wig dressing room during the show. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

The backstage area (Figure 87, 88 and 89) was darker than the Heath Ledger, perhaps a result of being below and separate to the dressing rooms. There was a sense of a more confined backstage space. Apart from the narrowness of the backstage space, however, the back of the set had similar labelling and similar safety lighting. Whilst working in this space I collected extensive visual research via drawing, writing and photography (Figure 87-90).



Figure 87. Backstage of the Drama Theatre. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 88. Backstage of the Drama Theatre. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 89. Backstage of the Drama Theatre. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 90. Emily Rose Brennan, Drawing of the backstage of the Drama Theatre. 2019, Biro on paper, 15 x 10 cm.

The performances of *The Torrents* took place at 7.30 or 8.00 p.m. on most nights, with the exception of matinees. As my costume and makeup preparation took approximately two hours, I would arrive at the theatre at 5.00 p.m. The season took place during the winter months in Sydney, which meant I walked to the theatre just before dusk. Arriving at the theatre at twilight and emerging into the darkness of night after the show characterised the experience of doing the show, and also influenced the colours I use in my paintings.

I have incorporated the colours of the dusk sky into my paintings for several reasons, and here I establish the origin of the concept. I began photographing the sky on the way to and from the theatre (Figure 91-95) in order to develop a visual language related to the temporality of the actor's experience, as I relate it to liminality and transformation. Later in my research I came to associate these colours with the liminality I detected in the threshold doorway in the backstage. I link this to the work of Caspar David Friedrich,

Walter Sickert Sydney Long, and Clarice Beckett which I discuss at length in Act II, Scene iii.



Figure 91. View of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, looking West. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 92. View of the Sydney Opera House steps, looking East. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 93. View of Sydney Harbour, looking South-west. 2019.
Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 94. View of the Sydney Harbour and Opera House, looking North, on the way to the theatre. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 95. View of the Sydney Opera House, looking North, after the show. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

ACT II

Scene ii

d) **The Octagon Theatre, University of Western Australia, October 20th – November 20th, 2020**



Figure 96. View of the auditorium of the Octagon Theatre, looking South. 2019.
Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

I worked backstage at the Octagon Theatre as an understudy for several roles on *Bambert's Book of Lost Stories*. Whilst there I was able to observe the behaviour and habits of the actors, the physical environment of the backstage, and the resultant affective atmosphere (Figure 96-98). I collected visual research and, as I was not called onto stage, was able to paint backstage in the dressing room (Figure 99-100). I noticed differences in the affective atmosphere of the backstage of the Octagon and attempted to understand the cause. This informed my understanding of the importance of several factors contributing to the affective atmosphere of the backstage of *The Torrents*.



Figure 97. View of the auditorium of the Octagon Theatre, looking South. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 98. View of the backstage of the Bambert set. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 99. View of the dressing room of the Octagon Theatre, looking West. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 100. Emily Rose Brennan, Sketch of the dressing room of the Octagon Theatre, looking West. 2019, Oil on board, 25 x 40 cm.

Firstly, and importantly, I was never required to perform in the show, and this led me to realise that the sensations I experience as an actor working backstage are unique to that subjective experience and are not simply a result of being in the physical place – the theatre – or one’s proximity to the performers. I did not experience the same affective atmosphere as I did on *The Torrents*, although I could observe it to some extent in the other actors during both their rehearsals and during the performance. This led me to understand that the experience of the affective atmosphere of a backstage space is related to the

processes I undertake within it, practically demonstrating the theories about affective atmospheres discussed by Böhme and others.

Secondly, the backstage physical environment of Bamberg differed from that of the previous theatres. There was no proscenium arch, so the major masking around the stage consisted of black curtains. The set was, shorter, and narrower, with a very small space behind for the actors to go unseen, and with a larger curtained backstage area behind the small set. There was much less of a sense of separation of the two worlds, that of the backstage and the onstage, due to the absence of solid set pieces. Thirdly and lastly, the style of acting in Bamberg was not realist, but presentational, and something closer to a *commedia dell'arte*¹³ style of clowning. The actors often addressed the audience directly and transitioned quickly into multiple characters over the course of the play. There was less of an emphasis on truth in performance. The production also required the actors to transform the set in a way that drew attention to the *fictional nature* of the play, and the set as *a set*.

Another contrast I noticed was the different affective atmosphere between the day and night shows in the Octagon Theatre. Most of the performances in that season occurred during the day or in the very early evening. The performances that began with actor warm-ups at dusk and took place during the transitional time between day and night were infused with a greater sense of concentrated energy, potential, excitement, and focus amongst the actors, than those that occurred during the day. This is something I noticed to an even greater extent in 2021 when I photographed the set of *York* during the day – the set remained interesting and visually compelling, but the affective atmosphere was very different.

¹³ *Commedia dell'arte* is a style of comedy theatre that originated in Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries becoming popular throughout Europe. The characters within the performances are based on 'stock types' or 'masks' with predictable, broad styles of speech and behaviour in any circumstance.

ACT II

Scene ii

e) The Sunset Heritage Precinct, 15th January to 15th March 2021



Figure 101. View of the exterior of the Sunset Heritage Precinct, looking South-west. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

I rehearsed and performed in a production of *The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekov at the Sunset Heritage Precinct and used this as an opportunity to collect further research. This realist production was presented in ‘promenade style’¹⁴, and was not performed on a stage using a built set, so it did not have a distinct backstage area. Several pre-existing locations functioned as the set. The main hall which served as the family home in the first and fourth act *did* have a proscenium arch stage at one end of it, including a traditional ‘backstage’ area, and I photographed this area to develop in my studio investigations.

The performance started every day at 5.30 p.m., and this meant that during the production, when not on stage, I could collect photographs of the dusk sky to further develop my palette (Figure 101, 105-107). The sections of the main hall that most interested me, and that I photographed most extensively, contained peeling paint and relics of the past iterations of the building (Figure 102-104). This resonated with me as it connected to Marvin Carlson’s concept of the theatre as a memory machine, filled with the

¹⁴ Otherwise known as site-specific theatre, promenade style theatre refers to performances that do not take place in traditional theatres, and which require the audience to move about a venue during the performance.

ghosts and atmospheres of past inhabitants, happenings, and performances. This space also embodies Kathleen Stewart’s description of “how forces come to reside in experiences, conditions, things, dreams, landscapes, imaginaries, and lived sensory moments” (2011, 1).



Figure 102. View of the interior of the Sunset Heritage Precinct main hall. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 103. Detail of an interior wall of the Sunset Heritage Precinct main hall. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 104. Backstage interior of the Sunset Heritage Precinct main hall. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 105. View of an exterior performance structure outside the Sunset Heritage Precinct, looking South-west. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 106. View of the exterior of the Sunset Heritage Precinct, looking West. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 107. View of the exterior of the Sunset Heritage Precinct, looking West. 2021.
Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 108. Emily Rose Brennan, Study for *The Hour Before the Call*. 2021, Pencil on paper, 15 x 20 cm.

ACT II

Scene ii

f) The set of *York* at the Heath Ledger Theatre, 2nd August 2021



Figure 109. The set of *York* from the backstage, looking West. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

I gathered additional visual research on a field trip to the set of *York* at the Heath Ledger Theatre. I was not an actor in this play, and I photographed the set under working lights during the day, after the season had finished but before the set was deconstructed (Figure 109-113). I noticed again that while the physical structures were interesting and provided some compelling visual motifs, the affective atmosphere was not present. This further convinced me of the contributing factors to the affective atmosphere of the backstage; the presence of the actors, the processes they are engaged in whilst performing, the darkness and muffled floors and sound locked doors backstage, the shadows and patches of artificial light that leak into the backstage space through the set, the waiting audience on the other side, and the conceit of, and belief in, a second imagined reality taking place on the stage.

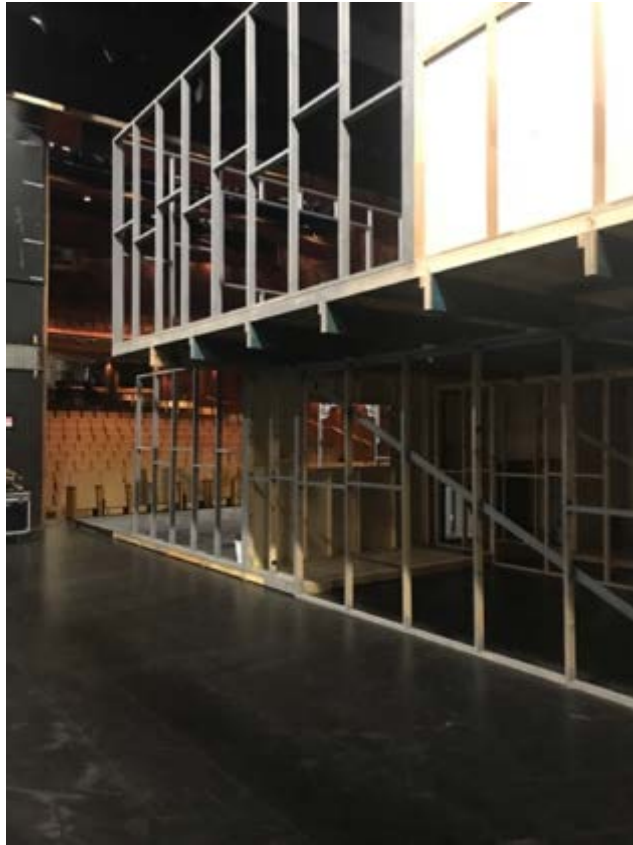


Figure 110. The set of *York* from the backstage, looking South. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 111. The set of *York* from the backstage, looking South-west. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 112. Backstage of the set of *York*. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 113. Backstage of the set of *York*. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

ACT II

Scene iii

Studio Process

In the studio space, I developed my visual research into oil paintings using supports that I built. I often applied my rabbit skin glue, gesso, and ground colours while the supports were on the studio floor. I began my studio research by working on one painting at a time, but as my methodology evolved, I found that developing multiple works at once was preferable. In this chapter, I explain why drawing and photography were initially helpful to the development of my methodology, but ultimately not the mediums I chose to inscribe the affective atmosphere of the backstage space with. I then step through the stages that I traversed in my practice-led research.

ACT II

Scene iii

a) Painting, Drawing, and Colour



Figure 114. Emily Rose Brennan, Study for *Character III*. 2021, Charcoal on paper, 42 x 29.7 cm.

Figure 115. Emily Rose Brennan, Study of mannequin and top hat. 2020, Charcoal on paper, 42 x 29.7 cm.

The potential of colour to convey the aura of the backstage space was an important factor in determining to use oil paint to investigate and register the subject matter. While utilising drawing as a tool to gather visual research whilst onsite, or from photographs or still life arrangements in my studio, I did not use it in my ‘finished’ creative works. Crowther and Wentworth both consider painting to be unique within art making due to the embodied gesture. Painting is characterised by the artist’s engagement with, and attention to, their perception of the world around their body, and their body’s ability to physically record it. While Crowther considers drawing very similar to painting, he argues that painting actually ‘incorporates’ drawing, and is “the more comprehensive medium, ontologically speaking” due to its inclusion of colour (2009, 77).



Figure 116. Emily Rose Brennan, *Back of the Set Study*. 2023, Lead pencil on paper, 29.7 x 42cm.

While painting and drawing both utilise line, shape, mass, and composition to investigate the way that the lived body experiences oriented space, the addition of colour makes painting the more effective medium to capture the details of my subject matter. In my more successful paintings, I use large areas of colour to inscribe the affective atmosphere resonating within the backstage space. I observed the way in which the coloured lights from onstage and backstage interacted, finding that it was visually interesting, and largely contributed to the affective atmosphere of the site. I believe that the mood of the space is most potent when the artificial coloured lights are present in the backstage, and discovered that the materiality and processes of oil painting are able to inscribe this.

The vibrancy and luminosity of colour achievable with oil paint lends itself to visually translating the dynamic and concentrated energy that characterises the backstage. Simultaneously, the potential of using mediums to layer semi-transparent glazes allows for the quality of the backstage lighting to be registered. As discussed, Vermeer and Hammershøi's depictions of light, and their registration of liminal spaces in oil paint, has much to do with the edge qualities they created using wet-on-wet technique. The contrast between soft and hard edges I could achieve using oil paint allowed for the registration of the light and shadow, and therefore the affective atmosphere of the backstage. Through studio experimentation I discovered that drawing, which I consider as being more reliant

on line, and therefore more descriptive, was less affective in inscribing this affective atmosphere.



Figure 117. Photographic basis of *Liminal Resonance*. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

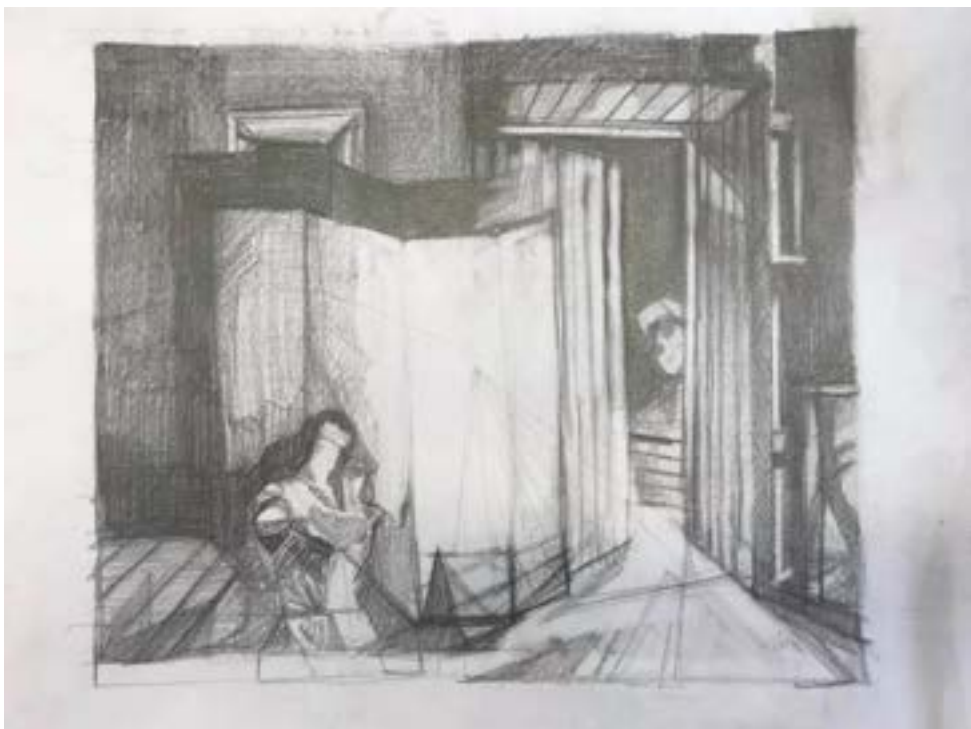


Figure 118. Emily Rose Brennan, Preparatory sketches for *Liminal Resonance*. 2020, Pencil on paper, 29.7 x 42 cm.

Liminal Resonance (Figure 119) is the first painting that I made based on a backstage space. Its composition, in part, was developed from a photograph I took of the backstage space of a show called *Water* that I was performing in at night, whilst I was rehearsing *The Torrents* during the day. It is the only painting that refers directly to this production. This painting was made as I was solidifying my hypothesis as it related to the affective atmosphere of the backstage, and when I was exploring the potential of the backstage as an uncanny space. As well as referencing the original photograph, I also placed a mannequin, a Japanese screen, and some fabric in the composition that I sketched. This is one of the first ‘imagined backstage space’ paintings that I made, in which I incorporated visual motifs into existing or imagined theatrical spaces. I will discuss this process in following Scenes, while here I wish to focus on the depiction of artificial light using oil paint. By making *Liminal Resonance* I came to realise that the overlap of the different coloured lights and their reflection off the plywood of the back of the set was intrinsic to the affective atmosphere of the backstage space.

Throughout this research, my colour choices have been governed by what I perceive as the affective resonances of the backstage site, partially related to the actual visual quality of the space, and partially related to the pervasive gestalt present within it. In *Liminal Resonance* I bring particular attention to the light and shadows in the backstage space, and the way that these small physical, visual details contributed to the overall affective atmosphere of the backstage. I gave particular attention to the subtle shifts in colour that occurred where different light sources overlapped, and the dreamy, soft edges that resulted. I experimented with colours present in the backstage space and adjusted some in order to register the lived experience of the site.

In *Liminal Resonance* I incorporated some warmer colours to create a sense of the enclosed, softness of the backstage, and contrasted this with the cooler light coming from the stage. I thinned oil paint with solvent to inscribe the floor with the layered colours of light spilling in from the door onto the stage. Painting soft and hard edges allowed me to contrast the softness of the lights on the floor with the hard edges of the shadows cast by the mannequin and the foliage. I was able to capture a luminous quality in the white of the screen and the mannequin’s costume by increasing the ratio of linseed oil in the paint. The luminosity, colour adjustment, contrast, and layering afforded by oil paint allowed me to capture what I have identified as the multifoliate nature of the backstage space.



Figure 119. Emily Rose Brennan, *Liminal Resonance*. 2020, Oil on canvas, 58.5 x 91 cm.



Figure 120. Emily Rose Brennan, *Liminal Resonance* (process documentation). 2020, Oil on canvas, 58.5 x 91cm.

Figure 121. Emily Rose Brennan, *Liminal Resonance* (process documentation). 2020, Oil on canvas, 58.5 x 91cm.

Sickert and Theatre Interiors

German-born British painter Walter Sickert (1860-1942) is a notable artist who painted theatrical motifs, whilst inscribing affective atmosphere in his works. Sickert, initially an actor, was a pupil and etching assistant to English-based, American artist

James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), who encouraged the young Sickert to paint *alla prima* from nature. Sickert later met French artist Edgar Degas (1834-1917), who had a major influence on his approach to painting, guiding Sickert to work from drawings in his studio. Later in his career, Sickert abandoned drawing, instead choosing to base his paintings on photographs, both personal and from newspapers. Drawing, however, contributed greatly to his painting methodology for a significant period of his career.

In reviewing Wendy Baron and Richard Stone's book *Sickert: Paintings*, American author and critic, Sanford Schwartz describes the method Sickert had developed by the time he was in his late thirties. Schwartz catalogues Sickert's creation of "straightforward, fast" drawings, wherein the artist was "careful to retain on paper all the awkward lines and mistakes" he made (1993, 43). Sickert worked this way to "get a rough, working sense of how and where light and dark intersected in the scene before him", but was careful to collect the visual missteps that might contribute to a more interesting painting (1993, 43). Sickert would then use a grid to enlarge the drawing onto the canvas where "its camouflage-like, patchy self would be the basis for the color[sic] to come" (1993, 43). Sickert would then create a tonal underpainting, laying in the darkest tones first. Schwartz writes that "[i]n the finished painting we look at layers of rough-edged, squiggly and furry lines and passages that have been dashed down over numerous underlying layers" (1993, 43). This technique to layer thicker paint over the top of a tonal underpainting, is an approach that I have experimented with throughout this research.

In *The PS Wings in an OP Mirror* (Figure 122), Sickert shows how coloured paint can elucidate the affective atmosphere of the interior of a theatre, through his depiction of the effects of artificial, theatrical light on the space. The hot red Sickert uses – especially radiant where the stage lights hit the performer's dress – burns brightly within the otherwise shadowy auditorium. The dark purple of the footlight cases, aimed up at the performer is velvety, while touches of pale pink and yellow illuminate the profiles of the audience members. The warmth of the colour palette overall creates a sense of an enlivened space, resonating with the voice of the performer and the energy of the audience.

Find Image Here

Figure 122. Walter Sickert, *The P.S. Wings in O.P. Mirror*. 1888-1889, Oil on canvas, 61 x 51 cm. Normandy: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen. Reproduced from: Wikimedia Commons.org (Wikimedia Commons 2023).

I explored a similar warm palette in my painting *Backstage* (Figure 123), utilising the glow of red and yellow mixed together with zinc White; the velvety softness of warm pinks and purples; and recessive, shadowy violet-tinged dark grey. The radiant quality of colour achievable using oil paint with the addition of linseed oil, has allowed me to register the intensity of the artificial light and deep shadows which contribute inherently to the affective atmosphere of the backstage space.



Figure 123. Emily Rose Brennan, *Backstage*. 2020, Oil on canvas, 100 x 120 cm.

Twilight Palette

Additional colours that have been important within the development of my work, have been the crepuscular colours of twilight (Figure 124-126). Twilight is a time of day known to have a distinct effect on the physicality and psychology of lived-bodies¹⁵, and is commonly known as the magic hour. The reason for my use of these colours is twofold, and these have been mentioned briefly in ACT II, Scene ii. Firstly, I investigated these dusky colours to reflect the time that I would arrive at work to perform in *The Torrents* (Figure 124 and 126). The dusk was the last natural light I would see before entering the artificially lit theatre to transform into character, and step into the time and space of the play. By the time the show was finished, it was night, and I would exit the theatre into the darkness. The transformation of day into night occurred while I was performing in character under the artificial lights of the theatre, and therefore I experimented with these colours to conceptually, and visually, explore the notion of the real time outside the theatre, coinciding with the fictional time occurring under the artificial lights.

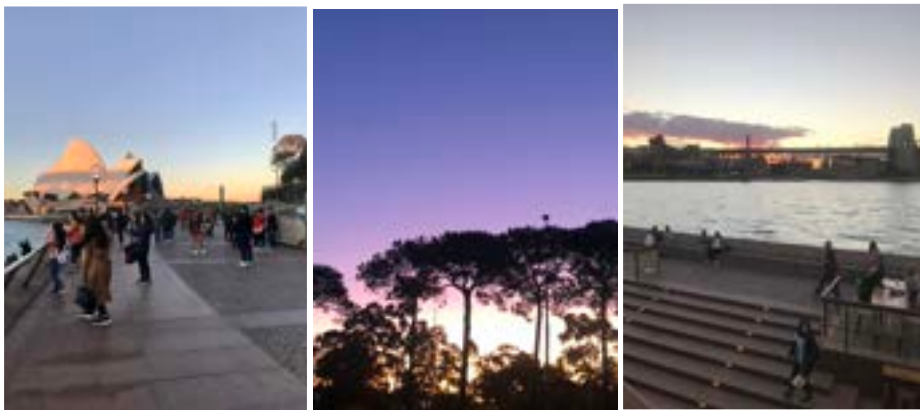


Figure 124. View of the Sydney Opera House, looking North, on the way to the theatre. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 125. View of a twilight sky in Perth, Western Australia. 2020. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 126. View of the Sydney Harbour, looking South-west. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Secondly, dusk is known as a ‘liminal time’, a transition between day and night, and I relate this liminal light to the transformation from actor to character that occurs as the actor steps across the threshold of the set door and into the unknown of the audience. This

¹⁵ The dusk light has a known physical effect on the eye, and as a result impacts on the behaviour and experience of the lived-bodies that perceive it. In the article “Liminal Light and Primate Evolution”, Nathaniel J. Dominy and Amanda D. Melin write that “[t]wilight exemplifies liminal light conditions. It spans the photopic-mesopic-scotopic continuum and does so quickly, with corresponding changes in colour. Rapid changes in illuminant conditions are expected to tax the visual abilities of any animal” (2020, 268).

has led me to incorporate twilight colours into my paintings to register the liminality I detect as present in threshold doors in the set. As Professor of Theatre Studies Patrice Pavis explains regarding a script, “*Enter* and *exit* mark the boundary between the stage and the outside, hence the real and the symbolic importance of the door in theatre” ((as quoted by Güçbilmez 2006, 152) italics in the original). The translucent layers of twilight coloured paint, as well as the inclusion of threshold doorways as visual motifs within my most successful paintings, reveal the liminal charge of the affective atmosphere of the backstage space, and the doorway as significant contributor to this atmosphere. Over the history of painting, many artists have investigated dusky light in their paintings, often to great effect in conveying atmosphere and mood. Below I discuss several influences including the German Romantic painter Casper David Friedrich (1774-1840) , the previously mentioned Sickert, and Australian painters Sydney Long (1871-1955) and Clarice Beckett (1887-1935).

European Twilight Palette: Friedrich and Sickert

Friedrich is well known for the use of twilight colours to inscribe moody and atmospheric scenes in his paintings. Friedrich was one of the main proponents of Romanticism (c1770-c1850), and sought to uncover spiritual meaning within the natural world, capturing, via painting, the thresholds between the emotional, spiritual, individual, and natural elements that characterise lived experience. Like his British counterpart Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), Friedrich painted ethereal landscapes swathed in mists and fogs. Friedrich’s works were often peopled by faceless figures, sometimes observing a rising moon, which was widely accepted as a Romantic symbol of piety, and connection with the spiritual world. Friedrich used softly blended colour to convey the transcendent atmosphere of his landscapes, and speak to the state of mind of the figures.

In his book *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape Second Edition* (2009), Joseph Leo Koerner describes the painterly techniques that Friedrich used to register the moods within the landscapes, as they first appealed to him. He notes that Friedrich did not use drawings, but rather worked directly onto the support using paint, in order to create works “suspended between two notional paintings: on the one hand, the total replication of a valley in all its detail that has been overpainted in white; on the other hand, a blank canvas on which have begun to appear, here and there, the fragments of a scene”(2009,

219). The idea was that Friedrich inscribed the mood of the landscape as he first experienced it directly, immediately transferring the atmosphere into visual language.

Koerner explains that Friedrich's paintings "[a]re both already finished before they begin, being fully present to their maker, and never final when they are done" (2009, 220). In other words, Friedrich's paintings unfurled as one complete experience on the support. In terms of application, Koerner notes the importance of the use of seamless transitions between colours and brushstrokes in order to create this unified surface. He writes,

[w]hat Friedrich's fog demands, and indeed advertises is that any transition from one procedure to the other be absolutely imperceptible, that the cloud before the summit should be of the same substance and moment as the cloud behind, and that, in short, the necessary temporality of an artist's manual labour be erased. Painting, therefore, will be more than the sequential application of colours on the canvas, appearing instead as the simultaneous revelation and concealment of what is always already there. (2009, 219)

I experimented with this seamless painted transition in some areas of some works, such as the cloudlike skirts in *Imaginary Circumstances* (Figure 136), although ultimately found that a more embodied, gestural approach suited the physicality inherent in the atmosphere I was attempting to inscribe. I did however borrow significantly from the palette of Friedrich.

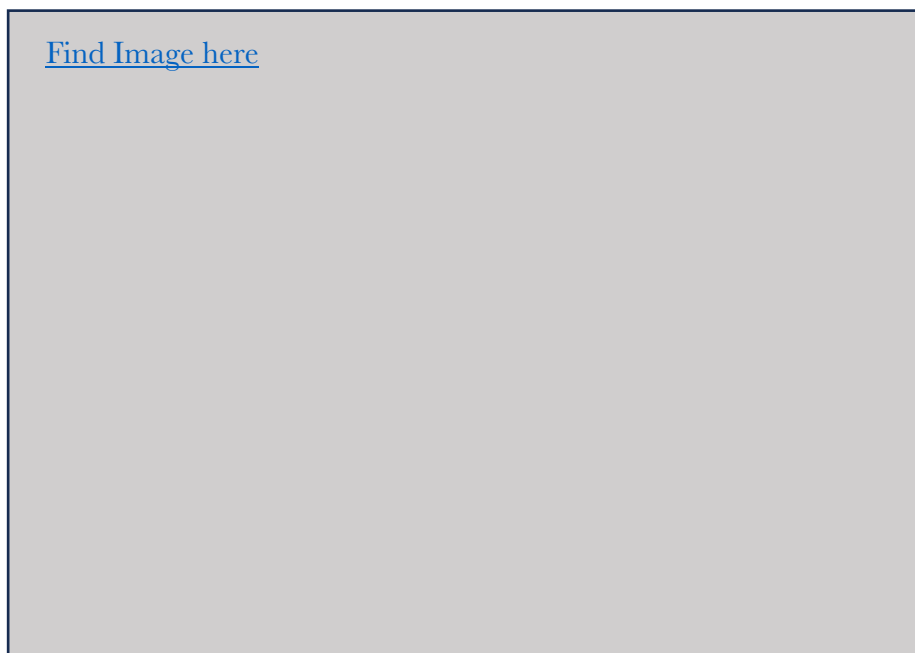


Figure 127. Caspar David Friedrich, *Reisenberg*. 1835, Oil on canvas, 73.5 x 102.5 cm. Berlin: Alte Nationalgalerie. Reproduced from: Artchive.com (Artchive 2024).

Contemporary X-ray fluorescence imaging has revealed the colours that Friedrich used to convey his auratic scenes, showing the chromatic yellows and blues he employed. The research shows that in his paintings such as *Reisenberg* (Figure 127), Friedrich used cadmium yellow along with cobalt blue, which was invented at the end of the 18th century (Alfeld, Mösl, Reiche, 2021, 349). Building on this continuum of atmospheric painting, and influenced by Friedrich, I have engaged with these colours in my twilight palette as a way to convey the liminal atmosphere I detect in the backstage.

Backstage Shadows (Figure 129) is an example of a painting where I have used mixes of Friedrich's cobalt blue, cadmium yellow, along with cobalt violet, ultramarine blue, cadmium red, raw umber, and titanium white to convey a transitional backstage atmosphere. I have used the brown, blue and violet to mix the shadow hues, and the yellow, white, and red to create the contrasting tints of peach, pink, mauve and pale yellow (Figure 128).



Figure 128. Paint palette with the paler, twilight tints mixed in the studio. 2022. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 129. Emily Rose Brennan, *Backstage Shadows*. 2021-2022, Oil on board, 60 x 39.5 cm.

In my paintings I combine these moody, mysterious colours with the high contrast of the artificial light of the theatre. The low-key quality of the backstage light creates a

chiaroscuro effect, and I use a chromatic white to transcribe the highlights. I mix this from Zinc White tinted with tiny amounts of the colours listed above. Although in *Reisenberg*, Friedrich depicts a softer, more natural light, the contrast between the dusk sky and the dark mountainous forms in the foreground, as well as his twilight colours, have influenced my work.

[Find Image here](#)

Figure 130. Walter Sickert, *Brighton Pierrots*. 1915, Oil on canvas, 63.5 x 76.2 cm. London: Tate Gallery. Reproduced from: Tate.org.uk (Tate 2023).

Brighton Pierrots (Figure 130) by Sickert illustrates how he applied thinly scrubbed films of paint, allowing underpainting to shine through and influence the colours on the top surface of the painting. Sickert contrasts the soft crepuscular light of the dusk sky, with artificial outdoor theatre lights, and this has been a valuable reference for the works where I have incorporated the colours of dusk into interior scenes. According to Baron, these colours were typical of Sickert's work around this time, which she describes as a "lively light-toned range of colours, encompassing pale blues, pink-tinged creams, lilac and touches of rusty orange" (2013, 258). A study of these colours has informed my methodology, and the development of my own palette. The hot pink of the light on the

shoulders of the performers, as well as the yellow and white of the lights above the stage, convey a sense of the adrenaline of a live performance, although there is also a melancholy implication indicated by the empty deckchairs and the sickly green that pervades the painting. The twilight colours imply a moody, transient time. In *Sickert Paintings* this “release of colour” is described as inextricable to the subject matter,

from the crepuscular peach and purple of the sky to the pink, green and venetian red of the costumes. The surprising effects of the natural and artificial lights playing on listless performers and empty deckchairs make this one of Sickert’s great evocations of transient pleasure. (Baron 1993, 252)

Here Baron clearly links Sickert’s use of colour to the affective atmosphere this painting conveys.

For further information on Sickert's use of colour, I again quote Schwartz, who writes that,

“[y]ou look forward to his peculiar blues, greens, purples and violets, his unexpected orange, aqua, maroon...Sickert was for much of his life the maker of a lush, powdery easel picture in which brilliant and quite disparate colors [sic] play against each other in a small space (1993, 43).

This effect is certainly evident in *Brighton Pierrots* which displays chalky, pastel illumination. Sickert’s use of colour, and his layered approach to painterly application has enriched my experimentation with oil paint, and my conviction that paint is the correct material to visually inscribe the affective atmosphere of the backstage.

Australian Twilight Palette: Long and Beckett

A sense of melancholic mystery and the registration of an inexplicable, magical atmosphere appears in the paintings of artist Sydney Long. Many of his melancholic symbolist landscapes are set against a backdrop of what Anne Gray calls the “rosy-purple coloured haze of twilight” (2012a, 6). In the book *Sydney Long: The Spirit of the Land*, Gray writes that Long uses colour “emotively, in fine shades” (2012b, 9). The sensation and atmosphere resonant in Long’s twilight painting *The Hour of Romance* (Figure 131) is infused with magic and reverie (Harpley 2012). As anthropologist Bjørn Thomassen writes regarding the illusiveness of liminality, “[l]iminality is indeed not *any* concept. Liminality does not and cannot ‘explain’” (2014, 7, italics in the original). Long’s painting does not

attempt to explain why the dusk resonates with a magical, spiritual energy, but simply conveys it through colour.

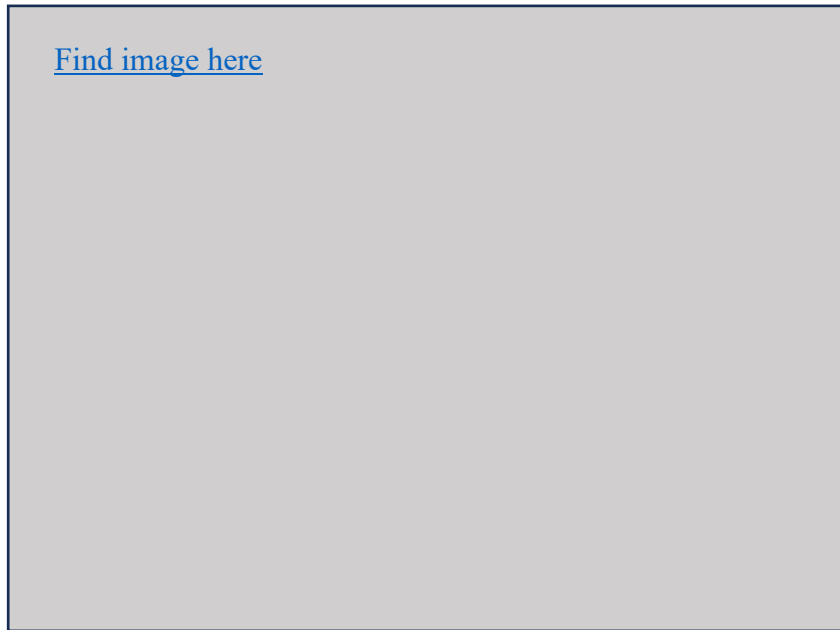


Figure 131. Sydney Long, *The Hour of Romance*. 1914, Oil on canvas, 76.5 x 102.0cm. Perth: State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia. Reproduced from: National Gallery Australia Website (NGA 2023).

In the work *Set Piece Study*, I incorporate the liminal colours of twilight into a rendering of some theatre set pieces. I used these colours to allude to the effect that the threshold doors and windows have upon the affective atmosphere present in the backstage of the theatre. I experimented with exaggerating the saturation of the colours to reflect the artificial light of the backstage, and the heightened energy, concentration, and adrenaline that also contributes to the affective atmosphere. I will further discuss the success of the Set Piece paintings in ACT III.



Figure 132. Emily Rose Brennan, *Set Piece Study* (process documentation). 2021-2022, Oil on board, 30 x 45 cm.

In December 2022 I observed some of the remaining paintings from the *Clarice Beckett: The Present Moment* exhibition at the Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA). These works had featured in a major retrospective which ran from the 27th of February until the 23rd of May 2021, curated by Tracy Lock. In the didactic panels for the exhibition, which are now on the AGSA website, Beckett's works are described as containing the "optical trickery of a magician" (AGSA 2024). The works are described as containing "innovative use of refracted light...convey[ing] startling phenomenological effects", and that "[t]here is a palpable sensory experience recorded in the works" (AGSA 2024). This is what I am attempting to register in my paintings, albeit in relation to an interior space. In an interview with Kerrie O'Brien for *The Sydney Morning Herald* Lock describes "a vibration to the work, an optical one. It's as though you can walk into that space with her.... To create that spatial depth, that mistiness, that veil, her works are transcendent, taking us into a spiritual realm" (O'Brien 2021). This language resonates with my own attempts to record and convey atmospheric realm of the backstage space.

Beckett's shimmering paintings have informed the colours and edge quality I experiment with in my paintings. The way that Beckett's paintings register the affective atmosphere and sensations associated with the changing natural light, and time passing, particularly the "luminous fleeting instant of twilight" (AGSA 2024), has deeply impacted my own visual research. Her paintings of the twilight and the artificial lights of cars in the

night have had an influence on my visual research because, as arts writer Briony Downes writes, Beckett “possessed a remarkable ability to capture not only the likeness of a place, but also how it felt to be there” (Downes, 2023). Beckett achieved this effect by “using round brushes she applied thin layers of oil paint in broad planes of tone. She achieved the effect of the paint being ‘sighed’ onto the board, generating an illusion of a breathing atmospheric moment” (AGSA, 2024). While Beckett’s approach to colour, and the application of oil paint was in part responsible for the atmospheres and effects of the light she was able to register, it was also due to her focus on a restricted tonal palette.

Beckett’s training with the tonalist painter Max Meldrum, and the incorporation of his principles of Tonalism, also contributes to this sense of an atmosphere being ‘sighed’ onto the support. Beckett focused on variations of tone, following Meldrum’s notion that “tone can be arranged to reproduce how light, structure and space are perceived by the human eye” (Cannon, 2023). Like the other members of the Meldrum Group, Beckett used a direct approach to painting, applying paint straight onto the support, and used very few tones. Beckett is, however, known as the member of the tonalist group with the “finest” and “brightest” approach to colour (Art Gallery of South Australia, 2024). Beckett created “seamless” transitions between tones in her work. The velvety, soft atmosphere that these paintings convey are a result of this tonally reduced palette and the soft blending, or “feathering” between the areas of light and dark (Art Gallery of South Australia, 2024). This can be observed in Figure 133 and 134.

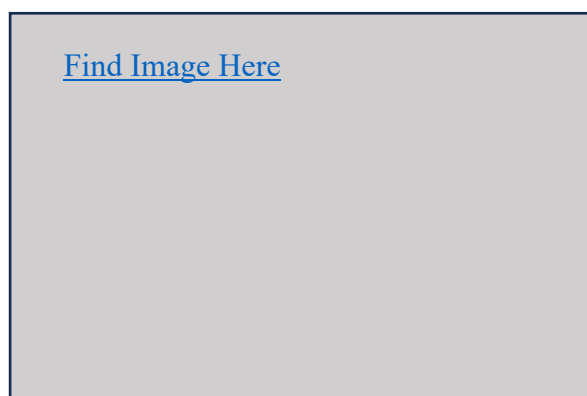


Figure 133. Clarice Beckett, *Summer fields*. 1926, Oil on board, 24.5 x 34.5 cm. Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia. Reproduced from: Art Gallery of South Australia Online (AGSA 2023).



Figure 134. Clarice Beckett, *Evening landscape*. c.1925, Oil on cardboard, 35.5 x 40.7cm. Canberra: National Gallery Australia. Reproduced from: National Gallery Australia Online (NGA 2023).

In her article “Clarice Beckett and Mood”, American philosopher of art, Cynthia Freeland examines *Evening, St Kilda Road* (Figure 135) in terms of the pervasive mood and atmosphere it conveys. She writes that the painting first intrigued her because it seemed so “atmospheric”, writing that, “Although it is evening, the scene is unusually bright; the air seems tinged with a pink glow” (2019, 27). Because of this, she writes, the painting, “conveys a sense of stillness or hush” (2019, 27). Freeland addresses the “eerie and evocative” mood the painting conveys, one she describes as imbued with a “strange silence” (2019, 27). Beckett analyses this work through the theories of American philosopher Jenefer Robinson who describes how expression of emotion in a work of art can lie in “the very actions by which the paintings are made that express the artist’s...emotions” (Robinson 2005, 276, in Freeland 2019, 32). Through this lens, Freeland asserts that Beckett is attempting to express a mood of “detachment”, writing that, “[t]he relevant implied actions include the artist’s choice of muted neutral colors [sic], the lack of figures, a central viewpoint, and the smooth surface treatment” (2019, 32). According to Freeland, the muted creams, pinks and greys present in the work contribute to this ethereal, serene atmosphere, colouring the mood, and therefore the “the entire “world” of the artwork” (2019, 32).



Figure 135. Clarice Beckett, *Evening, St Kilda Road*. c.1930, Oil on board, 33.8 x 39.5 cm. Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales. Accessed from: Art Gallery of New South Wales Online (AGNSW 2023).

Attuning to the atmosphere of a place – bringing, as Stewart writes, focus to “moments and scenes in which the sense of something happening becomes tactile” (2011, 445) – is made manifest in the works of Beckett. Her use of paint to attune to, and register, the affective atmospheres of her selected scenes has informed my works. Lock describes to O’Brien how Beckett’s paintings “ache with feeling” (2021), and I observe that Beckett achieves this with forms that at times blur into abstract shapes. As Lock puts it, “Her works are distinctive because they look very soft and quite ethereal. Her painting method was that she simplified the image, they look almost abstract” (O’Brien 2021).

In my paintings *Imaginary Circumstances II* (Figure 136) and *Backstory* (Figure 137), I attempt to register the backstage atmosphere via the use of the soft edges, and low contrast misty colours borrowed from some of the paintings of Beckett. Beckett’s use of these techniques to register the otherwise invisible incremental shifts of light related to the falling of dusk, is echoed in the way that I try to register the incremental shifting of actor into character, via twilight colours, and forms which move toward something more abstract. *Backstory* is also an example where I, like Beckett, painted *alla prima*, rather than in the studio.



Figure 136. Emily Rose Brennan, *Imaginary Circumstances II*. 2022, Oil on linen, 106 x 129 cm.



Figure 137. Emily Rose Brennan, *Backstory*. 2020, Oil on canvas, 21 x 24 cm.

Beckett inscribed the artificial light, related to the early dully-lit electric streetlights and headlights of 1920s Melbourne, in a sensuous, evocative manner linked to the experience of witnessing them in situ. Beckett paints this light in a way that allows for the sensation of experiencing it to register. As described in the AGSA didactics, “With great economy Beckett creates the sensory feeling of movement, sound, and the chill of winter. Using the reflection of car lights, she transforms the street from an unremarkable flat grey into a vibrating field of atmospheric space, reflected light and liquid colour” (AGSA, 2024). I have tried to evoke the sensations and affective atmosphere related to experiencing the vibrantly coloured artificial light of the backstage in my works *Threshold* (Figure 138), *The Line of the Light* (Figure 207) and *Dress Rehearsal* (Figure 140). In these paintings, I attempt to convey the sensory experience of being in the backstage by making visible the effects of the dull electric lights positioned backstage, and the brighter, though still diffused, spill from the lights onstage.

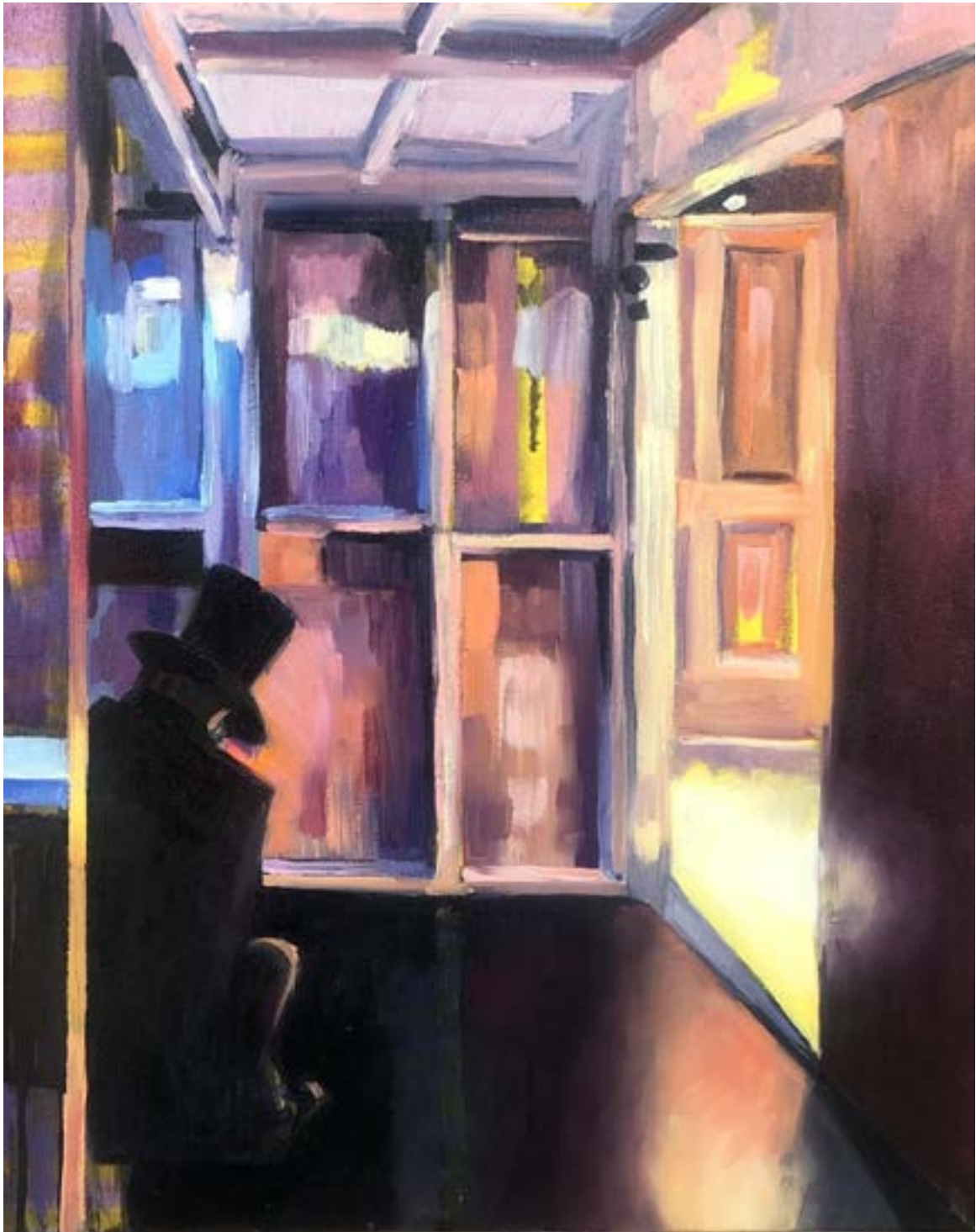


Figure 138. Emily Rose Brennan, *Threshold*. 2022, Oil on canvas, 51 x 41 cm.



Figure 139. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Line of the Light* (detail). 2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 201 cm.



Figure 140. Emily Rose Brennan, *Dress Rehearsal*. 2022, Oil on canvas, 131 x 140 cm.

In my paintings, the saturated, vibrant colours can be seen as a visual representation of the adrenaline, concentration of energy, and liminal transformation that characterises the activities backstage. In my paintings I have attempted to convey this by using vibrant colour tinted with Zinc White, and applied with soft edges blended into the background colour. I have continued to use the pastel colours of twilight – tints mixed from cobalt violet, cobalt blue, cadmium yellow and cadmium red with zinc white – but have also incorporated these saturated, jewel hues. In *Dress Rehearsal* I have contrasted the complementary colours of violet and yellow to inscribe a radiant affective atmosphere, shimmering with possibility and potential.

ACT II

Scene iii

b) Painting, Photography, Style, and Perception

Alongside drawing, I have also utilised photography as a research tool to support my investigation of my subject matter. Like painting, photography can record a sliver of time, and the physical attributes of a space, and I have utilised photography significantly in my research.



Figure 141. Back of the set for *The Torrents* at the Drama Theatre at the Opera House. 2019. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Crowther writes that photography indexes time and is “causally rigid in terms of its relation to the referent” (2009, 141) making it an excellent preliminary tool of investigation for this research. Like Sickert who was known to use photographs as early as 1905-1906, and eventually primarily used photographs as the basis of his work, I have also utilised my photography to develop paintings. While photography has allowed for the confirmation of visual elements of the space, and assisted in the creation of some interesting compositions via cropping and some collages, the painting process has allowed for choices that can communicate the nature of the lived experience of the backstage affective atmosphere in a way that is more effective. Crowther writes that painting can offer “direct traces of those gestures by means of which the referent is represented” (2009, 141). The ‘traces’ of gestures

that a painting can include is precisely what has made it the medium to investigate the traces of the affective atmosphere inherent in the backstage space, which is only in part related to the temporality of the site.

Furthermore, painting reflects the embodied nature of experiencing the affective atmosphere of the backstage space, by allowing for the subject matter to be processed through the perception and gestural movement of the lived body of the artist, as demonstrated in Figures 142-144. This process inscribes both the details of the subject matter, and the way that it has been perceived and registered over time, through close observation, repetition, practice, and reiteration. The embodied physicality involved in the creation of a painting – the way that painting engages the senses and involves direct, unmediated perception, and physical inscription via gesture – has instructed my choice to use it to register the subject matter of the backstage. The layered and repetitive processes that characterise my approach to painting, also overlap with the processes by which a character is created for a theatre performance through rehearsal, adjustment, and repetition. I will explore this in detail in the next Scene.



Figure 142. Emily Rose Brennan, *Dress Rehearsal* (Detail of process documentation showing gestural marks achieved using oil paint applied with a brush). 2021, Oil on canvas, 131 x 140 cm.



Figure 143. Emily Rose Brennan, *Threshold II* (process documentation showing gestural marks achieved using oil paint applied using tape, a spatula, and pouring). 2022. Oil on canvas, 141 x 90 cm.



Figure 144. Detail of Process documentation showing gestural marks achieved using oil paint applied with a spatula. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

ACT II

Scene iii

c) Painting Process/Acting Process

My approach to, and experience of, acting – the rehearsal period, the *perezhivanie*, the experimentation, the layering and stripping back of character, the feedback loop between the work on stage and the director and oneself – has underscored my approach to painting throughout this research. The overlap I have identified between these two processes has underwritten my choice to use oil painting to investigate the affective atmosphere of the backstage space. This is because the way that actors come to be in the backstage – physically, emotionally, psychologically, and professionally – is strongly connected to the rehearsal process and *perezhivanie*. I have already unpacked these concepts in detail in ACT I, while in this Scene, I am more concerned with my painting methodology, and its relation to these processes.

The development of a production of a play, wherein the actor discovers the details that make up a character, involves rehearsal – repetition of the same subject matter in slightly adjusted ways as guided by the director – until a final performance/production is formed. The same scenes are rehearsed many times over, reiterating the same subject matter, whilst making small changes and adjustments, trying to get closer to the truth of the scene. Sometimes these initial rehearsals are referred to by the director as sketching in a scene, or marking in a character using broad strokes first, with the details developing over the rehearsal period. American film and television actress Christine Baranski describes a process that I can relate to in my approach to both acting and painting. In an article titled “Building a Characterization” [sic] in the publication *Back Stage*, she immediately identifies the process as “not an intellectual concept,” but instead a result of “a kind of energy you bring to it” (1989, 28a). She tells Ira Bilowit that,

[t]o build a character, first of all you have to start with yourself...and put yourself in that situation. I just layer it slowly. But sometimes it’s really good to just take a jump and make a strong choice, and then see if you can fit into it.... That’s the job of rehearsals. Then you layer it slowly bringing in the details about the character.
(1989, 28a)

In my acting and rehearsal process I, too, use observation, analysis, experimentation with choices, reflection, adjustment, repetition, re-adjustment, and reiteration.

Similar to the process described by Baranski, my character technique initially involves using empathy to identify similarities I have with the character which I might *reveal* to make the character truthful. I then go about *layering* in the details that are more closely aligned to the character and their circumstances. I therefore identify *layering* and *revealing* as key methods in my acting process. According to Baranski, “I almost think there are character leitmotifs...little things that just add detail...this is something that takes time, and you see how far you can go with any one choice, and then you can repeat the choice through the play” (1989, 28a). This repetition and adjustment over time is integral to the rehearsal process. As part of this visual research, as part of the experimentation in developing my painting methodology, I have likewise experimented with similar processes and repeated motifs.

My painting process involves gathering visual information through photographing, sketching, and making painted studies. I then make choices in the studio, *rehearsing* some of these choices and motifs several times, adjusting and refining these details through processes of layering and revealing. In some of my paintings, such as *Threshold II* (Figure 200), the layers and some of the choices and adjustments are left intentionally visible on the support. In others, such as *Liminal Resonances* (Figure 119), I have erased the process, making the layers less identifiable. *The Dressing Room* (Figure 150) is an example of where, in addition to leaving layers and evidence of major shifts in composition visible, I have also cast motifs ‘rehearsed’ in multiple paintings within the main ‘performance’ of the painting. I painted the motifs of the wig heads, mannequins, and set model several times, ‘rehearsing’ them in their own separate paintings (Figure 145-149). The potential application of rehearsal processes to the materiality and techniques related to painting, has been fascinating to explore, and has resulted in a methodology appropriate to the registration of the affective atmosphere of the backstage space.

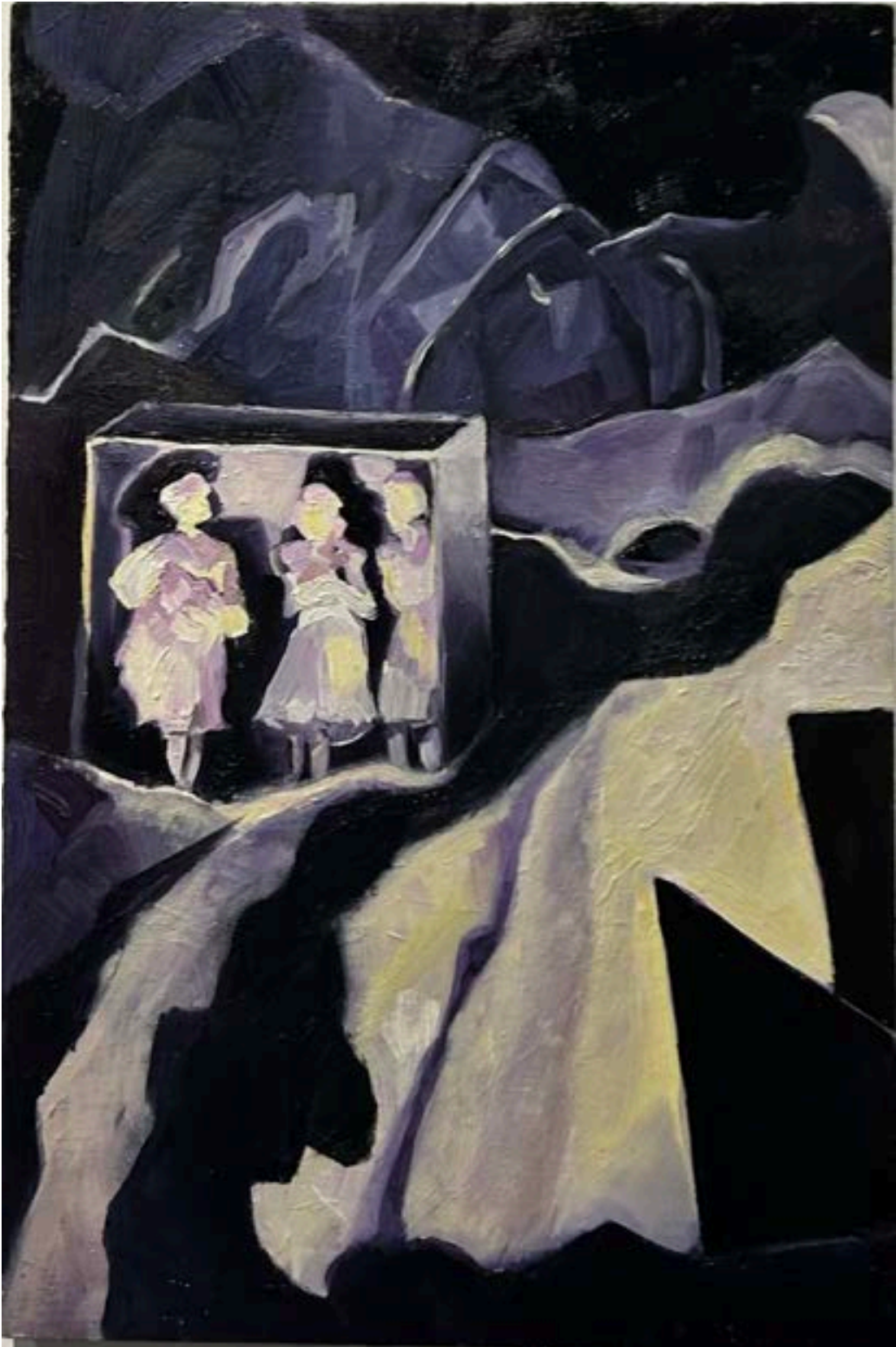


Figure 145. Emily Rose Brennan, *Model Box*. 2021-2023, Oil on board, 60 x 40 cm.



Figure 146. Emily Rose Brennan, *Character III*. 2022, Oil on canvas, 61 x 41 cm.

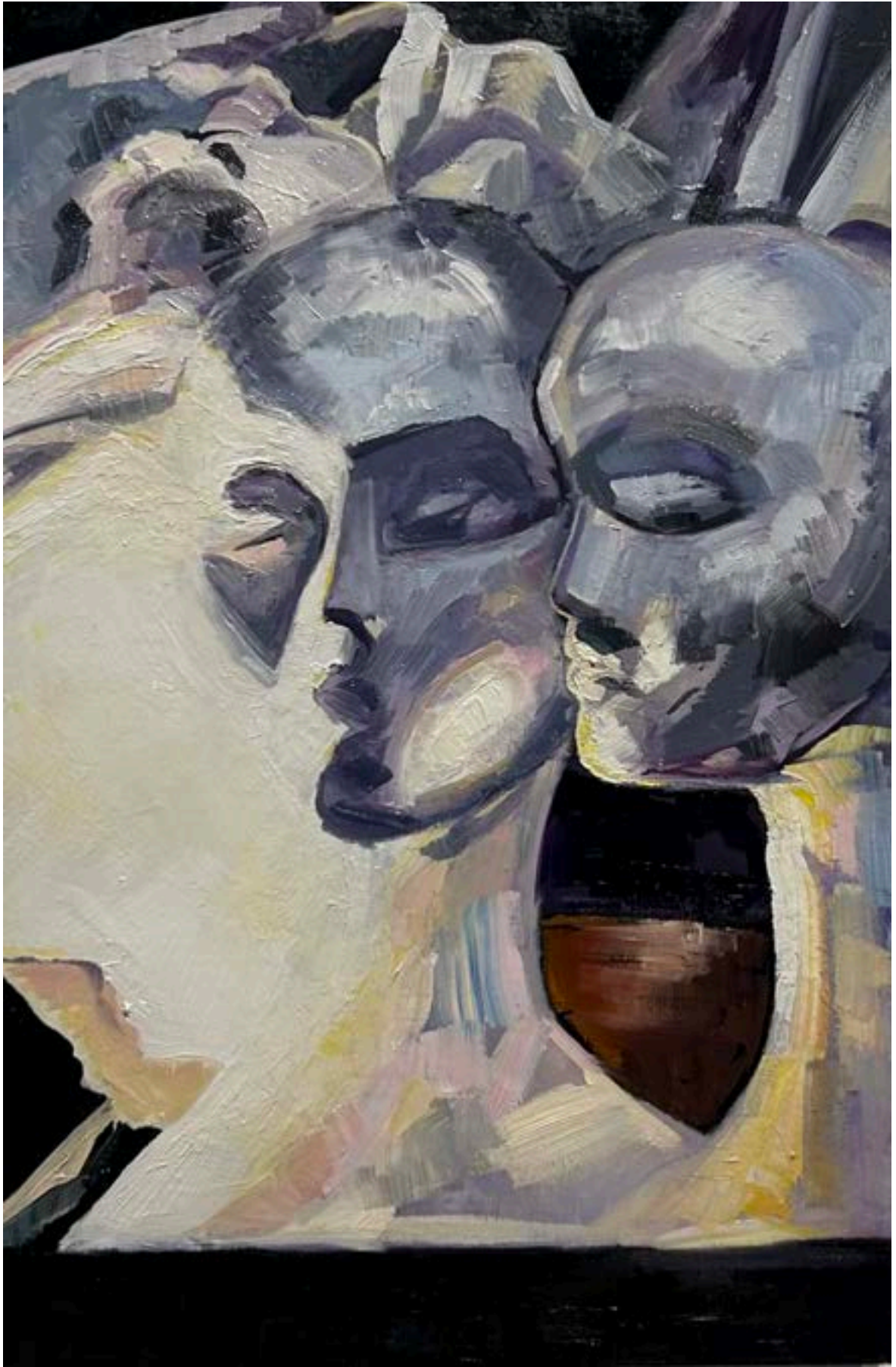


Figure 147. Emily Rose Brennan, *Character IV*. 2020-2022, Oil on board, 60 x 40 cm.



Figure 148. Emily Rose Brennan, *Character II*. 2020-2022, Oil on board, 18 x 12 cm.



Figure 149. Emily Rose Brennan, *Character I*. 2020-2022, Oil on board, 29 x 21 cm.



Figure 150. Emily Rose Brennan. *The Dressing Room* (process documentation). 2020-2023, Oil on canvas, 80 x 121 cm.

I am not claiming that the processes of acting and painting are identical. A significant difference between painting and acting is that the painter can see the results of their changes immediately, while the actor needs the eyes of the director for feedback. The painter could be understood as both actor and director. In my role of painter in this research, I have taken on the role of the actor – making big choices and slowly layering in details – and also that of the director, standing back and analysing from the outside and making adjustments to get closer to the overall objective of the work. Another major difference between the two processes is that there is no pre-written ‘script’ for painting. Within my methodology, the act of painting is in some ways closer to improvisation, where I am interacting with the subject matter, materials, and my developing methodology, and the painting becomes a recording, or inscription, of this act. I will discuss my methodology in more detail in the next Scene.

ACT II

Scene iv

Directing the Paint

Nigel Wentworth writes that,

for a reader to gain an understanding of the pre-reflective activity of painting he needs to live the experience involved in it, and this can be achieved through learning to look at paintings in certain ways, ways that reveal something of how the painting came to being...[and] draw out the nature of this process and its elements, in such a way that the reader can *see* it, that is to say actually *live* it from within the practice. (2004, 19, italics in the original)

In this Scene, I explain the physical steps I took to bring my paintings into being.

Initially I was working on board, but as my methodology developed, and I became cognisant to the impact of scale, I realised that I wanted to produce some larger works. I also wanted to experiment with the soft, hazy edges and textures I had observed in Vermeer and Beckett. To serve these ends I stretched some linen and canvas supports, which I primed with rabbit skin glue and gesso. My initial works were quite dark and so I used a thin yellow ground in order to have a bright light colour for my revealed highlights; I generally applied this using a cloth and diluted oil paint (Figure 151-152).



Figure 151. Emily Rose Brennan, Process documentation oil paint under sketch. 2022, Oil paint on canvas, 70 x 40 cm.



Figure 152. Emily Rose Brennan, Original underpainting for *Imaginary Circumstances II*. 2021, Oil on linen, 106 x 129 cm.

I began to incorporate the colours of twilight into my grounds so that I could allow this reference to liminality to be present and allow the viewer to sense the affective atmosphere of the backstage space as I was trying to translate it. I found that using more colours in my underpainting benefitted the works, especially as my methodology developed to include more visible underpainting. I made a thin mix of the various colours in separate bottles and spread with a cloth. I would then tilt and scrub the canvas to get the drips to move in visually interesting ways (Figure 153). Scrubbing of the thinned paint created what I identified as a dynamic texture (Figure 154), while the dripping registers for me as more gentle, whimsical, and mysterious (Figure 153).



Figure 153. Emily Rose Brennan, Underpainting for *The Line of the Light* (process documentation). 2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 201 cm.



Figure 154. Emily Rose Brennan, Underpainting for *Dress Rehearsal* (process documentation). 2021, Oil on canvas, 131 x 140 cm.

Early in this research I used charcoal to do initial sketches on the canvas over a coloured ground. I realised that the charcoal was not fixing, and I was getting a dullness to my colours as they picked it up (Figure 155-156). I stopped using the charcoal, deciding instead to sketch in thin oil paint. Generally, I underpainted my composition in dark grey to block in dark shadows (Figure 157). If I was using a board, sometimes I would use a process of reduction, using a cloth to wipe away the grey, revealing the more vibrant ground (Figure 158).



Figure 155. Emily Rose Brennan, *Backstage* (process documentation showing charcoal and oil paint under sketch). 2020, Oil on canvas, 100 x 120 cm.



Figure 156. Emily Rose Brennan, *Backstage/Onstage* (process documentation showing charcoal and oil paint under sketch). 2020, Charcoal and oil paint on canvas, 150 x 200 cm.



Figure 157. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Dressing Room* (process documentation). 2020-2023, Oil on canvas, 80 x 121 cm.



Figure 158. Emily Rose Brennan, Underpainting for unfinished work showing the wiping away of oil paint with a rag to create an underpainting. 2020, Oil on board, 60 x 40 cm.

ACT II

Scene iv

a) Imagined Backstage Spaces

I call some of my initial compositions ‘imagined backstage spaces’, as I would use imagery from my photographs, along with added elements that I had sourced to attempt to inscribe the affective atmosphere via the subject matter. Several of these works were unsuccessful as I was not as yet engaging with the way that the materiality of paint could help to register the nature of the affective atmosphere. It was also difficult to inscribe accurate perspective within a completely imagined space, like that depicted in the now destroyed painting *Backstage/Onstage* (Figure 159).



Figure 159. Emily Rose Brennan, *Backstage/Onstage* (process documentation). 2019-2020, Oil on canvas, 100 x 200 cm.



Figure 160. Emily Rose Brennan, *Backstage*. 2020, Oil on canvas, 100 x 120 cm.

Figure 161. Emily Rose Brennan, *Liminal Resonance I* (detail). 2020, Oil on canvas, 58.5 x 91 cm.

Backstage (Figure 160) and *Liminal Resonance* (161) were more successful than *Backstage/Onstage* as they relied on less imagined spaces, however, they still incorporated elements that I took from other sources and added to photographs. I set up multiple still life installations, which I lit to emulate the artificial light backstage, and then sketched and photographed (Figure 162-166). I used some craft wood to build a maquette of a set to draw (Figure 167), and I used paper to create the Japanese screen in *Liminal Resonance*. I then sketched the imagined compositions several times. I also ‘rehearsed’ these motifs in smaller works, such as *Character I* (Figure 149) *Character II* (Figure 148), *Character III* (Figure 146), *Character IV* (Figure 147), *Model Box* (Figure 145), and *Backstage Shadows* (Figure 129).



Figure 162. Studio set-up. 2020. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 163. Studio set-up. 2020. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 164. Studio set-up for *Character III*. 2020.
Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 165. Studio set-up for *Character IV*. 2021.
Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 166. Studio set-up of set model figurines. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 167. Maquette of set pieces made from craft wood. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 168. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Dressing Room* (process documentation). 2019-2022, Oil on canvas, 80 x 121 cm.



Figure 169. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Dressing Room* (process documentation). 2019-2022, Oil on canvas, 80 x 121 cm.



Figure 170. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Dressing Room* (process documentation). 2020-2022, Oil on canvas, 80 x 121 cm.

When I was making this series of paintings, I was engaged with the metaphysical paintings of Giorgio de Chirico (Figure 171-172). I felt that the artificial light sources, long shadows, and intentionally misleading perspective could potentially serve my objective in inscribing the affective atmosphere of the backstage. Again, this was part of exploring the (later abandoned) uncanny, and perhaps relying on the subject matter to communicate affective atmosphere, rather than investigating painterly techniques (Figure 168-170). I also replicated the illustrative approach of de Chirico. After reflecting on these paintings, I decided that I needed to explore a new approach to using oil paint to inscribe the affective atmosphere of the theatre.

[Find Image Here](#)

Figure 171. Giorgio de Chirico, *The Enigma of a Day*. 1914, Oil on canvas, 185.5 x 139.7 cm. New York: Museum of Modern Art. Reproduced from: Moma.org (MOMA 2023).

[Find Image Here](#)

Figure 172. Giorgio de Chirico, *The Soothsayers Recompense*. 1913, Oil on canvas, 135.6 x 180 cm. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Fine Art. Reproduced from: Philadelphia Museum of Fine Art Website (Philadelphia Museum of Fine Art 2023).

[Find Image Here](#)

Figure 173. Mamma Andersson. *Teater* (Theatre). 2004, Oil, acrylic, graphite on panel, 122 x 150 cm. Private collection. Reproduced from: Artnet.com (Artnet 2023).

Teater (Figure 173) by Mamma Andersson was an important reference in my experimentation at this stage. In retrospect, I wish that I had attuned my attention to her painterly techniques, and trusted myself to let more underpainting come through in my paintings, utilising the transparency achievable by using mediums. I went on to incorporate this approach in later works in the project, and will certainly continue to do so in future works. I thought at the time that *Teater* resonates with an affective atmosphere because of the subject matter and composition, but through my studio practice, I came to realise that it is instead because of how the areas of transparency in the background contrast to the areas of creamier, more opaque paint that make up the set structure depicted. I was still developing my layering methodology at this time and was yet to create works where I let the underpainting show through.

Within *Teater*, I observed the way Andersson creates a sense of space and depth via composition. While making a study of the work (Figure 174), I noted Andersson's use of a low ceiling, as well as multiple grounds to create a sense of a space. *Teater* has many doorways and windows which lead to the mysterious black space in the background, and I included this in my own composition for *Backstage/Onstage* (Figure 159). I felt that these discoveries were the most useful to emerge from the creation of *Backstage/Onstage*, and I explored this further in the next series of paintings that I produced.



Figure 174. Emily Rose Brennan, Study of Mama Andersson's painting *Teater* with some visual motifs added by Emily Rose Brennan. 2020, 2B pencil on paper, 21 x 30 cm.

ACT II

Scene iv

b) Set Pieces

After analysing the first series of paintings, I decided to inscribe the affective atmosphere of the backstage by attempting to work from life. I obtained some theatre set equipment and set up larger still life arrangements to resemble backstage spaces in my studio (Figure 175-176).



Figure 175. Studio installation of stage flats with landscape painting in background and stage props in foreground. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 176. Studio installation of stage flat with stage stairs and lighting. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

From these studio set-ups I painted a series of works in which I set the backstage threshold in an environment that came from the given circumstances of my character, Gwynne Thomas, in *The Torrents*. The character Gwynne was a young woman living in Kalgoorlie. Having never lived in Kalgoorlie myself, my way of empathising with her rural existence, was to relate it to my own childhood, where I had lived in the Southwest of Western Australia. I used imagery from the paddocks of Rosa Brook as a visual motif to represent this characterisation.

During this portion of my research, I was using a palette I located in the backstage, and also in the early twilight sky (Figure 177-178). The warm, pale yellows, peaches, and pinks I developed seemed to be appropriate, however I found that my palette became a little grey and flat, and the paintings at times seemed dull and heavy. At this stage warm ultramarine blue formed the basis of my deeper colours, mostly mixed with cool vandyke brown and raw umber. I was also incorporating some darker brownish-greens into my backgrounds. I hadn't yet employed cobalt violet, flinders violet, permanent mauve, or cobalt blue, and when I made that transition in later works, I found that my paintings were more vibrant and conveyed the affective atmosphere in a more convincing way.

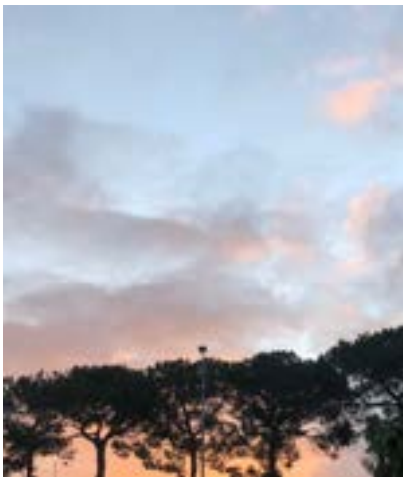


Figure 177. Example of a twilight sky which influenced the palette I used for earlier works. 2020. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 178. Example of an earlier 'twilight palette' characterised by cool blue-greys, apricots, and pale yellow; this was adjusted to a different 'twilight palette' in later works. 2020. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 179. Emily Rose Brennan, *Set piece study*. 2021, Oil on board, 30 x 45 cm.

In the 'set piece' paintings, my aim was to explore multiple layers of scenery within an interior space, as I had witnessed in the composition of *Teater*. Just as the presence of the ceiling had been important in my *Imagined Backstage Spaces* series, in these paintings I utilised the simultaneous presence of interior and exterior motifs to allude to the liminality inherent in the threshold door, and the processes of imagination and transformation related to acting. In *Set Piece Study* (Figure 179) I represent three layers of constructed reality in the composition, using a soft edge quality of the various 'set pieces' to imply a fragility. The creamy, luminous yellow of the middle flat contrasting with the cool blue grey of the shadows works to draw attention to the threshold site of the window. The simplified looseness of the gestures which register the 'trees' in the background contrasts with the smooth, blended quality of the flats, and allows for the embodied act of painting to be visible. To some extent, this painting is successful in conveying the affective atmosphere of the backstage. The attention this work brings to the places where the shadow meets the light, and the way that it is inscribed with wet-on-wet application, helps to register this.

In the larger work *Set Piece* (Figure 180-182), I experimented with painting the abstracted form of the florescent lights of the studio ceiling intermingling with the cloudy twilight sky. I used linseed oil and a painterly gestural approach to application in order to

create soft edges. Ultimately, I decided that having no edge to the 'sky set' made this painting resemble a piece of theatre set in a paddock and not within an interior space, (Figure 180), so I simplified the 'sky', and gave it an edge, clearly demarking it as another piece of set within a dark theatre space (Figure 181-182). It was in this work that I experimented most with the threshold techniques I discovered in religious paintings. I cast shadows onto the sky and painted in a pale blue curtain into the foreground.



Figure 180. Emily Rose Brennan, *Set Piece* (process documentation), 2021-2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 75.5 cm.



Figure 181. Emily Rose Brennan, *Set Piece* (process documentation). 2021-2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 75.5 cm.



Figure 182. Emily Rose Brennan, *Set Piece*. 2021-2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 75.5 cm.

This painting was an excellent lesson in allowing painterly gestures to be present in a work. Although I think there are some interesting moments in this work where the light and shadows meet, particularly on the left hand flat, ultimately I feel that I lost the quality of the affective atmosphere of the backstage by making the painting too smooth and blended out. Similarly, *Backstage World* (Figure 183) is a painting that was eventually repurposed for similar reasons. Ultimately, it did not convey the affective atmosphere of the backstage as I think it lacked the necessary depth; compositionally, there was too much happening, and the paint was too thick. The incorporation of the mirror was something that I wanted to test; likewise, the shadow of the wig head, due to its link to uncanny doubling.



Figure 183. Emily Rose Brennan, *Backstage World* (process documentation). 2021-2022, Oil on board, 61 x 92 cm.

At the same time as working on these paintings in the studio, I also made a short field trip to Rosa Brook to gather the imagery to use as backgrounds in my 'set piece' series. I set up a still life and painted in situ for three days (Figure 184-185). The resulting paintings are probably the more successful of the series. The first is a study called *Study for Imaginary Circumstances I* (Figure 187) and the other is *Imaginary Circumstances I* (Figure 188). I also completed a third small work *Backstory* (Figure 189), using the small set box and figure.



Figure 184. Still life set-up for *Imaginary Circumstances I* in Rosa Brook. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 185. Emily Rose Brennan, *Imaginary Circumstances I* (process documentation). 2021, Charcoal and oil paint on board, 90 x 60 cm.



Figure 186. Emily Rose Brennan, *Imaginary Circumstances I* (process documentation). 2021, Charcoal and oil paint on board, 60 x 90 cm.

I have previously discussed the way that I engaged with the work of Vermeer, Hammershøi, and Rae in my interrogation of creating depth and a sense of liminality in *Imaginary Circumstances I*. In the study (Figure 187), I began to discover that by allowing more of the sketchiness and transparency to show through in the final work, a sense of the layered, multifoliate affective atmosphere could be somewhat inscribed. The history and process of the actor's characterisation could be embodied through the application of paint, rather than through composing a painting that consisted (pictorially) of multiple physical layers. This was a breakthrough moment in this research.



Figure 187. Emily Rose Brennan. *Study for Imaginary Circumstances I* (process documentation). 2021, Charcoal and oil paint on board, 21 x 30 cm.



Figure 188. Emily Rose Brennan, *Imaginary Circumstances I*. 2021, Oil on board, 60 x 90 cm.



Figure 189. Emily Rose Brennan, *Backstory*. 2020, Oil on canvas, 21 x 24 cm.

I will briefly mention here the influence of Australian painter Emanuel Phillips Fox (1865-1915) upon my creation of *Imaginary Circumstances I*. In the days before I painted *Imaginary Circumstances I*, I saw his painting *Convalescent* (Figure 190) at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. I was struck by the way Fox had captured the light and shadows in this painting, and the way that this contributed to the affective atmosphere it communicated. I photographed the work extensively focusing on the illuminated edges of the objects. When painting *Imaginary Circumstances I*, I paid particular attention to the light and shadows, and although I was painting in natural light, I exaggerated the contrast in order to relate it to the artificial, hot lights of the backstage space.



Figure 190. Photograph of a detail in *Convalescent* by Emmanuel Phillips Fox at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. 2021. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.

ACT II

Scene iv

c) Embodied Gestures and the Tripartite Composition

The final series of paintings that I made are possibly the most successful in inscribing the affective atmosphere of the backstage. The paintings in this section are *Imaginary Circumstances II* (Figure 193-194), *Backstage* (Figure 197), *Threshold* (Figure 198), *Threshold II* (Figure 200), and *The Line of the Light* (Figure 207). There are several plausible reasons as to why these paintings seem to register a visual equivalence of the backstage affective atmosphere most convincingly. The first is that I began to inscribe the surface of the support with the affective atmosphere of the backstage from the ground up. For the grounds, I used watered-down acrylic paint in the liminal twilight colours discussed earlier, and employed an embodied action of moving the canvas in multiple directions while the paint was wet to allow for the colours to melt into one another. Using a cloth at times, I created some interesting gestures and marks through wiping and scrubbing. I also decided to try some different compositions, to prioritise mark making and use more embodied gesture. Creating and experimenting with some more vibrant colours became a priority, as did adding warmth to my palette.

I immediately began work on several paintings. I wanted to try the tripartite compositional technique that I had seen in Mamma Andersson's painting *Coming Home* (Figure 191) and others, which causes the paintings to resonate with a sense of shifting temporality and liminality. I can relate these compositions to the sensations inherent when, as Isaac Butler puts it, "the consciousness of the actor and the fictional consciousness of the character kind of collide" (Carthcart 2022, 35:03).

Find Image Here

Figure 191. Mamma Andersson, *Coming Home*. 2006, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 121.92 x 159.7 cm. Reproduced from: Pinterest Website (Pinterest 2023).

I marked up a large canvas into horizontal thirds to reflect Andersson's approach. In the visual language of my body of work, the three sections allude to the actor, the character, and the threshold in-between where they overlap. I had decided to use imagery derived from *Imaginary Circumstances I* (Figure 188) and repeat the mannequin motif three times. I combined this with the stairs, lights, and window that I had painted in the 'set piece' works, the section of the dressing room I had painted at the Octagon Theatre, the set box models, and the doorway from *The Hour Before the Call* (Figure 29). I approached the application of paint in thin transparent layers, influenced by my discoveries in *Study for Imaginary Circumstances I* (Figure 187).

In these works, I was determined to allow layers to show through in order to inscribe the inter-causal and multi-layered nature of the backstage affective atmosphere. I intentionally allowed drips and underpainting to show through the final layers, and contrasted this with thicker, creamier paint on certain areas, like the central mannequin and skirt, the model box, the stairs, and the door. As the painting developed, I added some

more transparent mannequin forms and softly brushed out the edges to allow the forms to seem as if they were part of the background. I was also working on *Dress Rehearsal* (Figure 196-197) and a study that would be the source for *Threshold II* (Figure 199).



Figure 192. Emily Rose Brennan, *Imaginary Circumstances II* (process documentation). 2022, Oil on linen, 106 x 129 cm.



Figure 193. Emily Rose Brennan, *Imaginary Circumstances II* (process documentation). 2022, Oil on linen, 106 x 129 cm.



Figure 194. Emily Rose Brennan, *Imaginary Circumstances II*. 2022, Oil on linen, 106 x 129 cm.

Dress Rehearsal and *Threshold* (Figure 197, and Figure 198) fed into one another in terms of colour, mark making, and subject matter. *Dress Rehearsal* is composed in the main from a photograph I took of the *York* set. I enhanced the saturation of the colours using my iPhone to make the set appear as though illuminated by the artificial lights of the live theatre. As the work progressed, I found that the colours weren't working – they were too cool, and the application was too flat and smooth (Figure 196). Fortunately, the work I was doing on *Threshold* influenced my approach to colour and mark making in *Dress Rehearsal*, making it a much more dynamic painting which captures the affective atmosphere of the backstage in a way that resonates with me (Figure 197).

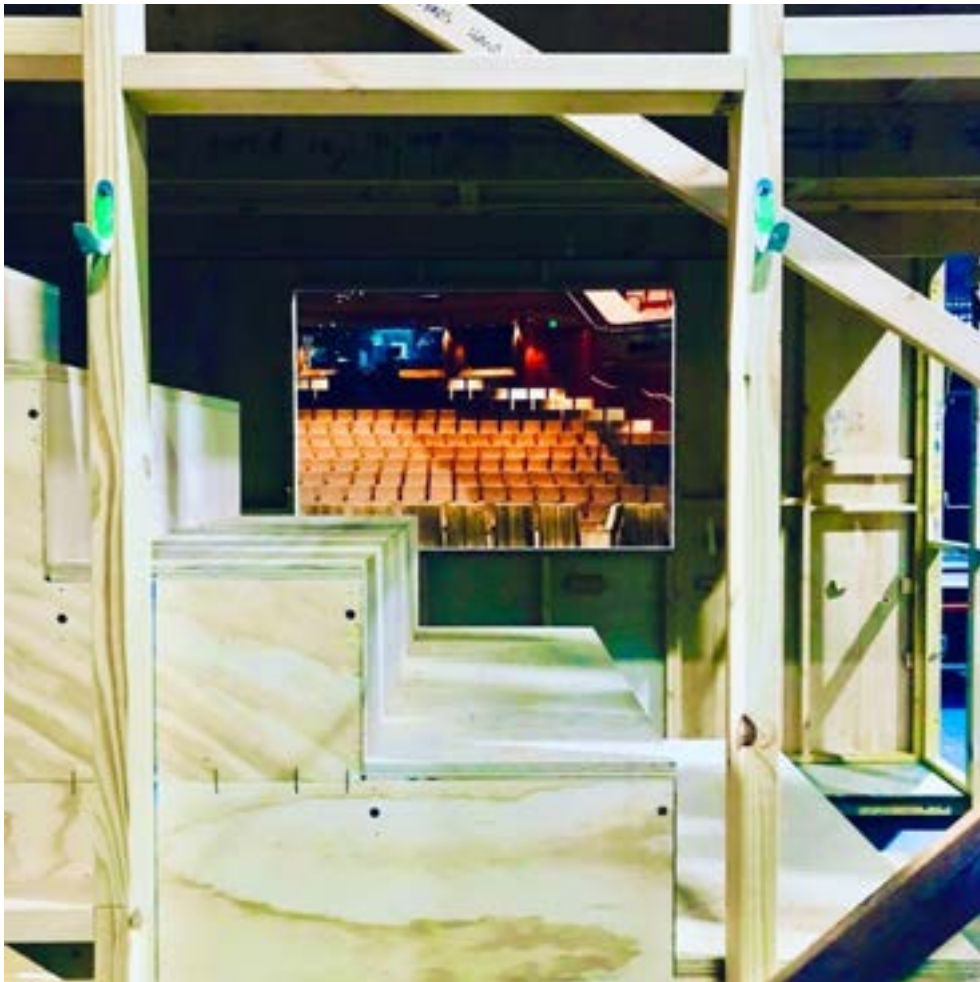


Figure 195. Filtered photograph of the set of *York* looking from the back of the set towards the audience. 2022. Photo: Emily Rose Brennan.



Figure 196. Emily Rose Brennan, *Dress Rehearsal* (process documentation showing original colour scheme). 2022, Oil on canvas, 131 x 140 cm.



Figure 197. Emily Rose Brennan, *Dress Rehearsal*. 2022, Oil on canvas, 131 x 140 cm.

In *Threshold*, I attempt to inscribe the compressed energy and sense of potential that characterises the affective atmosphere backstage by using richly saturated colours influenced by the light spilling off the stage, and the purple-blue light used to illuminate the backstage enclaves. Here, I mixed a warm orange, and contrast it with shades of violet. I include the motif of the doorway to register the threshold nature and atmosphere of this space, and use titanium white here to tint the yellow, attempting to create the glow of the hot stage lighting. This is another example of the influence of Sickert's depiction of artificial theatre light on my work. Like Sickert I employed saturated, jewel-like and pastel hues to register both the light, and the atmosphere.



Figure 198. Emily Rose Brennan, *Threshold*. 2022, Oil on canvas, 51 x 41 cm.

I worked on a small study based on another photograph of the *York* set which I had altered to make it appear as if it was under artificial lights. The study was unsuccessful as I used paint that was too thick and left no underpainting showing through. However, this study led to another large-scale painting that affectively inscribes the backstage affective atmosphere, *Threshold II* (Figure 200).



Figure 199. Emily Rose Brennan, *Study for Threshold II* (detail). 2021, Oil on board, 50 x 39.5 cm.



Figure 200. Emily Rose Brennan, *Threshold II*. 2022, Oil on canvas, 141 x 90 cm.

Threshold II was made using many layers of paint and varied means of embodied application (Figure 201-206). I created a ground by splattering on thinned paint. I then taped in the form of the set and painted over the tape using a dark blue grey. I wanted the set to loom up, and parts of it to embody the bone-like quality that I originally observed in the backstage of *The Torrents*. Working with mediums ranging from lean to fat I went on to paint in sections using various brushes. The rest of the process involved using tape to block out areas and then applying paint with both brushes and palette knives. In some sections I flipped the used tape over and used the remnants on it as a stamp, leaving traces, or ‘ghosts’ of marks on the surface. Towards the end of the process, I poured fat paint down

the surface to achieve some more organic shapes and scrubbed at some marks to soften the edges.

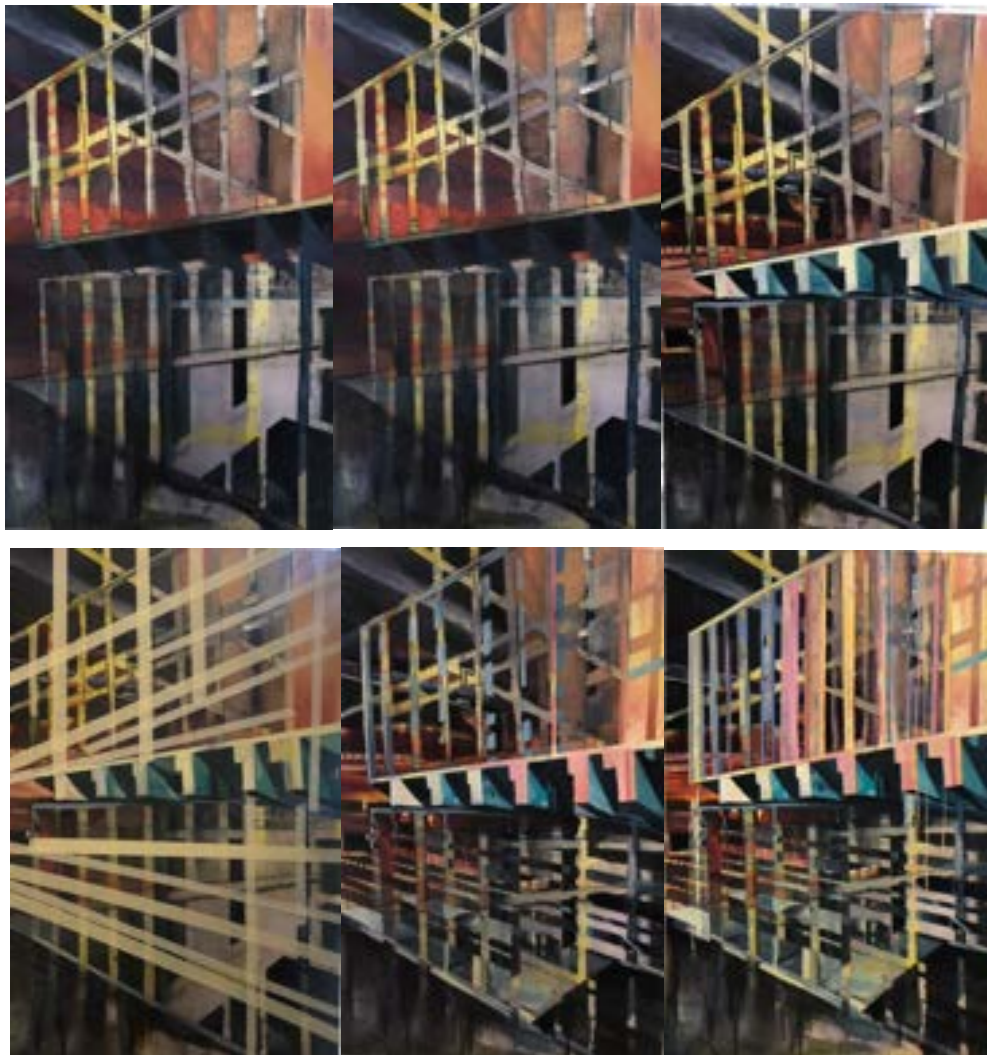


Figure 201-206. Emily Rose Brennan, *Threshold II* (process documentation). 2022, Oil on canvas, 141 x 90 cm.

I never would have anticipated making a painting like this when I began this research and would not have tried this technique without the mistakes and small achievements I had made in the studio previously. This layered technique of applying paint resonates as intriguing and full of tension, whilst creating a sense of building, shifting atmosphere and expectation. The visibility of the underpainting and drips of thin paint allow my eye to witness the layering process inherent in the construction of the work, whilst also alluding to layers of affective atmospheres within the space. I posit that this painterly effect speaks to the process of ‘worlding’ that Kathleen Stewart argues can accrue in a place over time, allowing for energies and sensations to bloom within a site while worlds –

resounding with affective atmospheres – unfurl and develop. I pushed this methodology further in the final painting in this series – *The Line of The Light* (Figure 207). In it I incorporate techniques developed throughout this research, which by this point had formed into a methodology.



Figure 207. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Line of the Light*. 2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 201 cm.

This painting was made in multiple steps involving several repeated cycles of painting and masking with tape. After I had applied the twilight-coloured ground, I split the painting into three horizontal sections using tape (Figure 208). This was to allow me to experiment with the tripartite composition, whilst protecting some of my original underpainting which I knew I wanted to be present in the finished composition. I wanted the ground to be threaded throughout the composition and for there to be an integration of all layers and processes in the final surface of the work.

For this painting, I wanted to depict multiple backstage scenes in the bottom third, which were repeated in more transparent, less saturated paint in the middle and top rows. To achieve this visual effect, I began by painting the various backstage scenes in the bottom third, first in a mix of dark grey, and then in saturated creamy paint. I continued with this process until I had painted six backstage scenes (Figure 212). I then applied a more transparent grey underpainting of the scenes in the middle row and, when dry, split it into

smaller sections using tape (Figure 210). The placement of the tape was based on the main structural lines in the scenes below.

In this middle third, I used the tape to protect sections of the ground, and also to fracture the image that was painted over the top (Figure 209). I tinted my original colours with zinc white, making them contrast less with the ground and creating a less impactful effect, reducing the tonal range of the colours. I wanted to inscribe the sensation of the backstage reality dissolving as the actor crosses the threshold, to register how the concentration and attunement required on the stage can make the backstage space disappear in the mind of the engaged actor, leaving only the stage and the performance. In the middle section I painted simplified and desaturated versions of the scenes over the top of the tape (Figure 210), which I then removed to expose more underpainting.

In the top third, I painted in the main structural lines in a very thin wash of dark grey. I then continued the tape up in vertical lines that were closer together in order to atomise the image into even smaller sections and draw the viewer's eye up towards the top of the support. Over the top of this tape, I painted a pale transparent yellow wash and the three mannequin figures from *Imaginary Circumstances II* in warm zinc white, with some simplified mauve and grey marks to allude to form (Figure 211). In this top section, it was important to me to have a much more limited tonal palette, and misty atmospheric visual quality.



Figure 208. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Line of the Light* (process documentation showing underpainting and first layer of tape). 2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 201 cm.



Figure 209. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Line of the Light* (process documentation showing middle third of the painting with tape to protect underpainting). 2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 201 cm.



Figure 210. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Line of the Light* (detail of finished middle third of painting). 2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 201 cm..



Figure 211. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Line of the Light* (detail of finished top third of painting). 2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 201 cm.



Figure 212. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Line of the Light* (detail of finished bottom third of painting). 2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 201 cm.cm.

I consider this painting to be one the most successful at inscribing the affective atmosphere of the backstage for several reasons. Firstly, the large scale of the work contributes to the physical immersion of the viewer. Secondly, the colours in the painting allow me to register the way that the energy resonates in the backstage space and through the threshold as the actor enters the stage. The colours in the bottom third are vibrant and

saturated, which I consider as alluding to the potential of the stored energy in the backstage space, while the tinted and transparent colours in the middle which move toward a warm tinted zinc white in the top third allow the affective atmosphere of the actor's transformation into character, and the release of the coiled energy onto the stage, to be registered. The tonality becomes reduced as the viewer's eye travels up the support, creating an embodied sense of a rising atmosphere.

The colours of this painting work together with the tripartite composition, which is also a reason why I feel that this work successfully registers the affective atmosphere of the backstage space. This composition allows for the registration of three states – the backstage preparation, the threshold, and the performance. The composition and colours present in the top third also allude to the imaginative processes that are at play when one creates a character; the lightness of the colours, the similarity in tone, and the transparency register a sense of engagement with the fiction of the play and the interface between the actor and character blurring and interweaving. This composition also registers something of the multi-layered temporality that is inherent in the backstage experience during a performance, as I have discussed in ACT II.

Finally, I think that the embodied processes that went into making this work, and the evidence of these processes that remain on the linen, resonate with the energy inherent in the affective atmosphere of the backstage space, and the embodied processes inherent in performing and preparing to perform. I have experimented in the construction of the surface of this work in several ways. I have made marks that are 'ghosts' of other marks, by applying thick oil paint, then taking a 'print' of it with a piece of tape to create a copy of the mark. I then reapplied this elsewhere on the canvas, like a stamp. The 'stamped' marks are incomplete and have a broken quality which allows for the layers beneath to show through. The marks that are left by the tape being removed are also patchy revealing areas of differing transparency. I have also used tape to create strong demarcations between areas of thickly applied 'masking' paint, and exposed thinner layers of underpainting. Furthermore, I have used tape as a mask which I paint around, creating a stencilled effect on the painted surface.

The gestures and marks that remain on the support allude to the presence of the painter and the engagement of their body in the creation of the work. This seems only

appropriate for a work which is attempting to inscribe an affective atmosphere which is itself a result of, and sensed by, a lived body in oriented space. These marks also tune into the semi-formed elements of the affective atmosphere of the backstage, namely the liminality inherent in the threshold doorways and the impact of the fictive off-stage located in the backstage of the theatre. I describe this further in ACT III and the Epilogue of this document.

ACT III

Can Paint Act, and How?

ACT III

Scene i

The Development of a Painted Visual Language

A new understanding of the materiality of paint and the effect that the surface quality can have in inscribing an affective atmosphere has been gained through my practice-led research, several installations of my work in gallery spaces, engagement with writers who approach painting from a phenomenological standpoint, and painters who explore similar concerns and subject matter. In ACT I, I engaged with Paul Crowther and Nigel Wentworth, who both investigate the way that painting can work to illuminate the experience of the lived body in oriented space, expanding on the concepts originally posited by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Their work provided a foundation for my use of painting to explore the embodied-experience of the affective atmosphere of place, as did the work and writing of Jude Rae who writes of the effective way that painting and drawing can articulate “embodied vision” (Rae 2008). I have created works that record the dense, multi-faceted character of the backstage gestalt as experienced through my lived body.

I have been guided by artists who explore the perception of space and the registration of affective atmospheres in their paintings. I have discussed their influence throughout ACT I, and into ACT II where I have enfolded examples of their work into the analysis. The registration of depth and interior atmospheres related to thresholds of time and experience by Johannes Vermeer, Vilhelm Hammershøi, and Jude Rae have influenced my works, as have the muted desaturated colours which occur to varying degrees in their paintings, and the softened edges and wet-on-wet mutability present particularly in Vermeer’s and Hammershøi’s paintings.

Edward Hopper’s translation of atmosphere and emotion into two-dimensional flattened forms in his interior paintings, particularly those without figures, has informed my registration of light, and the textures of different backstage surfaces. Hopper’s filmic framing devices and compositional choices, which similarly underpin the affective atmosphere present in his works, have also impacted my investigation. Similarly, Matthias Weischer’s interrogations of artificial light and shadow in his *Stage* series of paintings have

informed my approach to colour and tonal modulation, as has the inclusion of doorways and threshold imagery wherein he blurs boundaries between interior and exterior spaces.

I have examined the visceral, embodied surface quality of Adrian Ghenie's paintings, his use of palette knives, corporeal colours, and thick creamy paint to create works through which intense atmospheres and moods are conveyed. Peter Doig's use of gesture and surface treatment to embed palpable affective atmospheres in his works, and Mamma Andersson's use of painted translucency, tripartite compositions, layering of interior and exterior imagery, and contrasts between opaque and transparent paint, have guided my journey towards the development of a painted visual language of my own to communicate the affective atmosphere of the backstage space. The results of this research have been surprising, indicating the extent to which oil paint allows for experiences to become more transparent and understandable than they were before they were ever painted, even to the painter making the work.

ACT III

Scene ii

From an Actor (who paints) to a Painter (who acts)

I began this doctoral research as an actor who paints, and as I reach its conclusion several years on, I consider myself a painter who acts. My engagement with philosophers and artists, and significantly, my practice-based research, has been the guide across this transformative threshold. The research process has involved periods characterised by sensations of liminality and in-betweenness, and my results have unravelled via a feedback loop of experimentation, reflection, research, and adjustment. Situating this research at the nexus of painting, affect, and acting has allowed for each ontology to inform my investigation in a way that is concausal and interwoven, allowing for a visual equivalence of the affective atmosphere to emerge via painterly exploration in surprising and unexpected ways, and a new painterly language has emerged.

I have been uniquely positioned to attune my attention to the affective atmosphere of the backstage space to investigate the various ways that oil paint can inscribe my lived experience of it. My technique has developed via experimentation with some processes and concepts related to acting – particularly *perezhivanie*, wherein I have imagined myself in the space of the backstage and attempted to recreate and re-experience it during the painting process, and the repetition (rehearsal) of certain scenes and motifs multiple times in order to deepen my understanding of their ‘character’. I have engaged with the work of contemporary and art historical painters who successfully transmit affective atmospheres in their work, or experiment with similar subject matter. However, when investigating the painting practice of other actors, I have not found any who attempt to register the affective atmosphere of the backstage space. I am not, however, the only *painter* to have explored the backstage as subject matter.

Beginning this research, I was aware that throughout history, many artists have painted backstage spaces. Famously, Edgar Degas painted ballerinas backstage, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901) the dancers at the Moulin Rouge, and Australian painter Jeffrey Smart (1921-2013) painted backstage circus performers. These artists were primarily painters, and not professional performers, although Smart is on record comparing the objectives of a painter to that of an actor, saying, “An artist has to be like an

actor in that he can take on that feeling, *that mood, that thing*” (Gaynor 2015, italics in the original). Clearly, each of these artists had an interest in, and access to, the backstage of the theatres. There is, however, a crucial difference in these paintings, compared to my own.

The works of these painters often focus on *performers* within the space, with the mood of the space communicated through the depiction of the experience of the figure, rather than the experience of the painter themselves. In the works there is a separation and a sense of the artist as an outside observer or cataloguer of the experience of the performers. In my visual research I have sought to collapse this division, as I seek to allow the viewer to experience a first-person perspective on the space and experience from the point of view of the painter/actor.

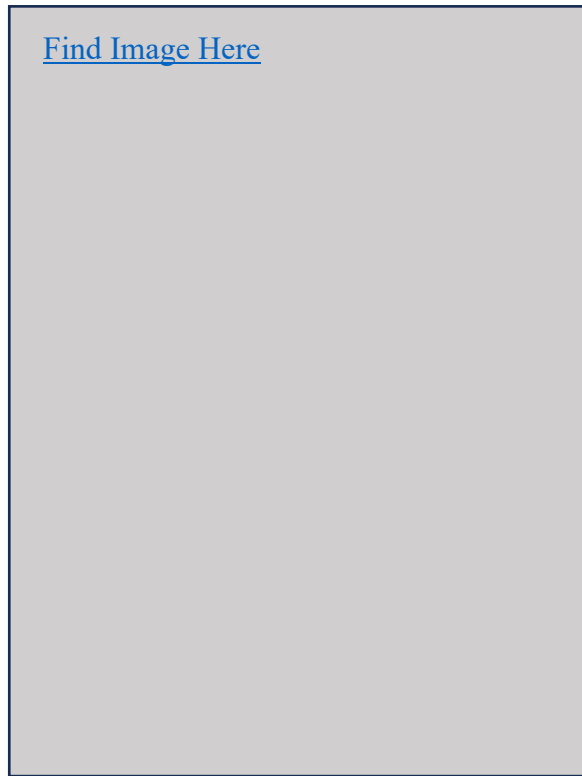


Figure 213. Edgar Degas, *Dancers Backstage*. 1876-1883, Oil on canvas, 24.2 x 18.8 cm. Reproduced from: National Gallery of Art.org (NGA 2023).

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Figure 214. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *At the Backstage or the Dancer*. 1888, Gouache on cardboard, 60 x 48 cm. Reproduced from: Meisterdrucke.ie (Meisterdrucke 2023).

[Find Image Here](#)

Figure 215. Jeffrey Smart, *Backstage*. 1957, Oil on board, 41 x 35.5 cm. Reproduced from: deutscherandhackett.com (Deutscher and Hackett 2023).

Similarly, contemporary artists who incorporate backstage imagery into their work, such as Japanese painter Kenichi Hoshine (1977–) and German painter Neo Rauch (1960–), do so as observers interested in the imagery of backstage, and the theatre generally, not as actors who have lived and worked in the space for significant periods of time. On his experience of the backstage of the Metropolitan Opera in New York, Hoshine explains,

The backstage is probably twice the size of the actual stage the audience sees....

There you have hundreds of people running around with machinery, props and sets to make the performance possible. This hidden production intrigued me very much; it was a lot more interesting than what was occurring on stage. I strive to incorporate some of this illusion and deceit into my paintings. (Cowie 2019)

Hoshine's painting *The Rehearsal* (Figure 216) gives an insight into the artist's observation of the charged energy, colour, and potentiality of the backstage. This is due to the vertical format of the composition, which creates a sensation of energy building, the inclusion of theatrical imagery painted in saturated colour. However, from his above statement, it is evident that Hoshine is an external observer looking in, witnessing the action and the energy of the backstage, and utilising its motifs, as opposed to someone experiencing the affective atmosphere of the backstage space, multiple times, whilst working within it.

[Find Image Here](#)

Figure 216. Kenichi Hoshine, *The Rehearsal*. 2018, Acrylic on panel, 60.96 x 50.8 cm. Reproduced from: Kenichihoshine.com (Hoshine 2023).

Neo Rauch not only employs visual motifs sourced from the theatre but compares composing a painting to directing a play. According to Arthur Lubow, Rauch's method can be understood as "first daubing in the backdrops" then introducing the "characters" (Lubow 2006). Rauch states, "It is important to create a definite environment or stage on which things can happen" (Rauch quoted in Lublow 2007, 69). Although the painting *Para* (Figure 217) successfully locates a sense of backstage liminality via the saturated colours, depiction of the artificial hot lights, and the melting quality of some of the painterly application, it still positions the painter and viewer as outside observers. Perhaps this is a result of the figures in the work. In response to a question about the inclusion of theatrical imagery and costumes into his work, Rauch declares,

Of course, the large formats, which I favour already open up a stage area in which I can boss around personnel that is almost life-size. So as long as it stays limited to a two-dimensionality, a self-understanding as stage director is not too digressive.

(Rauch quoted in Dickie 2015)

The assemblage of figures within a space is perhaps the work of a director/painter. As a painter with an actor's background, I understand the processes and behaviours that occur backstage, during rehearsal, and in the imagination of the performers, which I translate via paint. Interestingly, while I have developed certain successful techniques linked to acting and creating a character, some other approaches have had to be stripped back in order to reveal the affective atmosphere of the backstage.

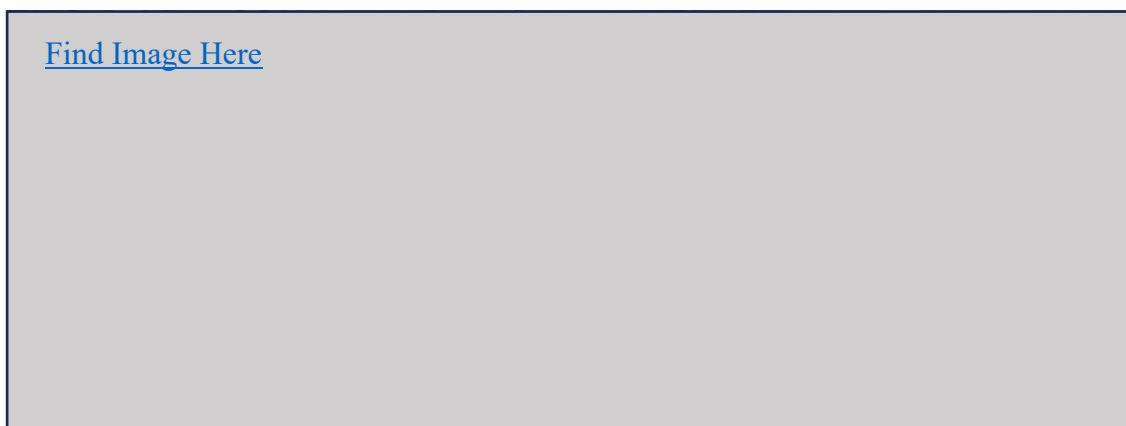


Figure 217. Neo Rauch, *Para*. 2007, Oil on canvas, 150 x 400 cm. Reproduced from: The Met Museum.org (Metropolitan Museum of Art 2023).

ACT III

Scene iii

Revealing the Scaffolding, Exposing the Rehearsals

It has become clear to me that my experience as an actor has impacted my perspective on the backstage affective atmosphere and my approach to the painterly registration of it. My approach to the materiality of paint has, however, completely transformed over the course of my studio experimentation, requiring me to abandon some concepts linked to acting and performance that were impeding my ability to record the affective atmosphere of the backstage space. I have come to discover that to simply equate the production of a play, or creation of a character, with the execution of a painting is to ignore the distinct knowledge that both artforms can reveal about perception and experience.

Significantly, through studio investigations, I have come to realise that as an actor I have been trained to *smooth out* a performance, to intentionally *hide* the sketches and rehearsals that have gone into the creation of a character. This is in part because an actor's task is to use the processes and techniques developed during their training, to create and present a product which does not reveal their own perception or style but rather, to use a painterly term, to create a *trompe-l'œil* of another human that is completely believable to an audience. I have realised that a painting does not have to reflect this to communicate the affective atmosphere of the backstage.

While the audience of a performance (particularly one formed within the conceits of realism) may be aware that they are watching the result of a temporal process (including the training and rehearsals of the actors), the record of these many moments has been deliberately effaced so that the character is completely believable, the world of the play utterly convincing, with only the fictive reality of the play on display. Unbeknownst to me, in the initial stages of this doctoral investigation, my acting background influenced my approach to creating a painting, and to the materiality of paint, in a significant way. Initial paintings in this series did not consider the importance of the surface quality in communicating the nature of the backstage experience, or creating an embodied, affective response. As a result of this research, I now realise the potential of painting to expose the

nature of experience in a unique way which is related to mark-making, gesture, transparency, and the resultant surface quality of a painting.

While the emotional life of the actor is required to be revealed during a performance, the rehearsals are not – the production must appear to be happening for the first time every time, with no reference to the rehearsal that went before. In *‘Zero...Zero...and Zero’: Permeable Walls and Off-Stage Spaces*, Chothia describes the ‘realness’ that is required in a production of realist theatre, writing that “the set, a temporary structure, must appear permanent, its walls seem solid, and the actors who appear within it must seem to *be* the characters they impersonate” (2011, 17, italics in the original). The affective atmosphere of the backstage, however, while linked to processes of acting and the building of the truthful (though fictive) onstage world, has its own visual equivalences. Translating the affective atmosphere into a visual equivalent via painting appears to benefit from an approach that allows the mechanisms of the work, the ‘rehearsals’, to remain visible.

Through this project, it has become apparent that it is precisely the manifestation of the details of construction and, to borrow a phrase from Paul Crowther (2009), “the presence of the painter” (72), that translates most effectively into a visual equivalence of the experience of the affective atmosphere of the backstage space. The works that reveal their own ‘scaffolding’ and construction – the transparent layers of underpainting, charcoal drawings, scrapes of the palette knife, and prints of the tape – have been most successful at registering the experience of the affective atmosphere by the lived body of the actor in the oriented-world of the backstage. This is via the quality of their surfaces. While a piece of realist theatre consciously erases the work that has gone into its formation, disguising the temporality of the process from which it results, and smoothing the mechanics of the product that the audience witnesses, a painting can expose the layered temporality that has led to the instantaneous moment of its revelation via the recorded marks present on the surface of the support. The importance of the self-disclosure, related to time and experience, inherent in the form of a painting that I discovered via the formation of these works, has been a significant breakthrough within this research.

In ACT II, I reference Isaac Butler, who explains that the actor can be considered “the painting, the painter and the paint”, meaning that they *use themselves* as the tools,

techniques, and materials to create the final product – the character. The actor is the means and the end. As I conclude this research, and to reverse the logic of Butler’s analogy, I would say that the *painting* could be considered the actor’s training, rehearsal, and performance all together, all at once, in one concentrated revelation of time, process, and experience. All of the moves of the painter (actor), all of the time spent, and all of the choices made, are present for the viewer to experience through their senses and perceive. And this potential visibility inherent in the form of a painting makes it a revealing way to make an otherwise invisible phenomenon – the affective atmosphere of the backstage – visible. Intriguingly, revealing the backstage affective atmosphere via painting has led to the development of the visual equivalent to another phenomenon – the *offstage*.

ACT III

Scene iv

Painting the Backstage Reveals the ‘Offstage’

It is perhaps not surprising that inscribing the affective atmosphere of the backstage benefits most from an approach to painting which employs both transparency and visible painterly gestures. After all, these techniques allow for the revelation of what lies in the ‘backstage’ of the painting (beneath the top layers, beneath the surface). My painting practice has demonstrated the substantial impact of the visible embodied gesture, and the layering of these gestures, in the registration of the lived experience of the affective atmosphere of the backstage space. The embodied act of painting, as well as the way that the paint acts materially, allow for the affective atmosphere of the backstage (which itself is impacted by the embodied experience of acting) to be translated into a visual, affective object.

While investigating the way that a painting practice can register the affective atmosphere of the backstage, another discovery manifested itself in a surprising way. This new information came to light via the investigation of transparency and the use of imagery accumulated from different times and places related to the backstage space on the one surface. While I used a figurative approach to painting the subject matter, in some paintings I brought the visual motifs together in compositions that are more abstract and collage-like. Experimentation with translucency, a layered painterly surface, and a palimpsest of temporal and spatial imagery on the one support has allowed me to discover a visual equivalence to another theatrical phenomenon. Through this research, I have become aware that perhaps I am painting more than the affective atmosphere of the backstage. Another space seems to have become visible through my painted experiments – the imaginary *offstage*.

I have made reference to Beliz Güçbilmez earlier in the exegesis, and how she examines the nature of the offstage in her article “An Uncanny Theatricality: The Representation of the Offstage”. Güçbilmez conjectures that the offstage can be understood as the “prefix” of the stage (2007, 154). The offstage is the *imaginary world* which the audience and actors develop an idea of, via the words of the playwright. The actors develop a shared idea of the world beyond the play during rehearsals, and then communicate it to the audience. When characters in a script refer to where they have come

from, or where they are going beyond the world of the stage, it is known as the offstage, and although it is a space and time that resides in the imagination of the actors and audience, it is referred to, and physically placed, by the performers as beyond the set, and can be thus understood as located within the backstage space. As the actors enter the stage, they embody the after-effects of the fictive offstage world they have just arrived from – the actors/characters carry embodied knowledge of it with them.

The *offstage* is a different concept to the *backstage*, although they both exist beyond the stage, and support the fictive reality of the stage. The offstage, like the backstage, is intentionally hidden from the audience, but for different reasons. In the case of the offstage, this is to allow the audience to imagine the size and scope of the fictional world beyond the constructed reality of the stage. The backstage is hidden so as not to interrupt this imagining; in a sense, the backstage serves the offstage. By comparison, while the backstage is the *physical reality* of the actors, the offstage exists within the imaginations of both the actors and the audience – it is a fictional extension of the onstage world. The offstage is created only as an image in the mind’s eye of an audience member – evoked through the words and bodies of the actors, or as Phillip Zarrilli describes it, the “dynamic, embodied/enactive psychophysical phenomenon and process by means of which a (theatrical) world is made available at the moment of its appearance/experience for both actors and audience” (2020, 12, italics in the original). This is to create a sense of “aesthetic illusion”¹⁶ for the audience, a term Professor Werner Wolf uses to describe the effect that

¹⁶ In *Immersion and Distance: Aesthetic Illusion in Literature and Other Media* Werner Wolf defines “aesthetic illusion” as the one of “the most powerful transmedial effects that representational media and genres can illicit” where a performance or artefact can lead to an experience of “dominant immersion and residual distance” (2013, v). Wolf writes,

In essence it conveys the impression of being imaginatively and emotionally immersed in a represented world, or parts thereof, and of experiencing this world, which may be factual or fictional, but in any case not really present at the very moment of reception in a similar way to real life, while the recipient is still residually aware that this experience is imaginative and triggered by an artefact and not reality. (2013, v)

Audiences willingly surrender to a sensation of being “recentred in an imaginary here and now that is different from the hic et nunc addressed by the moment of reception” (2013, v). The theatre allows for a suspension of disbelief in which a fictive spatial and temporal ‘world’ is presented to create an experience of aesthetic illusion.

theatre and other representational media can have on an audience wherein they can believe and empathise with the fictive reality they are witnessing.

In Act 1, Scene 1 of *The Torrents*, upon entering through a door onto the stage, Gwynne Thomas refers to the unbearable early morning heat of the street ‘outside’; later, she describes the dusty goldfields that shimmer beyond the windows of the set. As well as saying the words written by the playwright, the actor behaves as if their lived-bodies have experienced these times and places – that these traces still linger with them – and the audience are invited to imagine this. The more truthful the performance – the more the imagery hovers in the voices, bodies, and imaginations of the actors – the more vibrant and convincing the imagined world becomes for the audience. This vibrant world of the imagined offstage contributes to the affective atmosphere of the backstage, and traces of its presence seem to have become visible in my more successful paintings.

The offstage adds an interesting metaphysical dimension to the affective atmosphere of the backstage which is related to imagination and a shared experience between the performers and the audience. Güçbilmez characterises the offstage as laying “between the fictionality of the stage and the reality of the auditorium”, describing it as having an “ambiguous, transitory nature” which “softens the sharpness between the fictional and the real world: it is related to both but possessed by neither” (2007 154). It is a third space. Güçbilmez describes it as a place with a language and time of its own and as made up of unknown boundaries, “making it impossible to determine its scale” (2007, 153). This interpretation of the offstage, as boundless, applies to the perspective of the audience members, who truly do not know the bounds of the offstage (or the backstage).

At the same time, however, the offstage is part of the actor’s experience too. It is a reality that the actors create for the audience and must do so by entering and exiting the stage as if *their characters* are encountering this offstage world. The imagined offstage must be real for the lived-bodies of the *characters*, and therefore, to be convincing, must have been real at one time in the lived-bodies of the *actors*. On the nature of the offstage for characters, Güçbilmez writes,

From the point of view of the characters on the stage and within their fictitious world, offstage is where they have been before, and can be considered as the womb

of the stage. The knowledge of this womb is the knowledge of the unconscious.

Thus, from now on, the offstage is the unconscious of the stage. (2007 156)

This offstage, this “unconscious of the stage”, is housed within the backstage, within the processes, rehearsals, and embodied actions of the actors, and therefore its unique temporal and spatial qualities leach into the affective atmosphere of the space and seem to have become visible in some of my paintings.

I have come to realise that this cross-over has influenced the unique visual language that has emerged through my pursuit of registering the affective atmosphere backstage through paint. This visual equivalence of the offstage, this inscription of floating traces of another space and time, seems to manifest most in the areas of my paintings where there is soft edge quality or visible brushstrokes; the earlier layers remain visible through paint that is a combination and contrast of opaque and transparent; and finally, the colours are cool or crepuscular, and often of similar value. The collage and layering of visual motifs gathered from imaginative acting processes and various backstage spaces also contribute to the visualisation of this metaphysical space. This can be seen in the details of some of the paintings shown below.



Figure 218. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Line of the Light* (detail). 2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 201 cm.



Figure 219. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Line of the Light* (detail). 2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 201 cm.



Figure 220. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Line of the Light* (detail). 2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 201 cm..



Figure 221. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Line of the Light II*. 2022, Oil on board, 121 x 120 cm.



Figure 222. Emily Rose Brennan, *Study for Imaginary Circumstances I* (detail). 2020, Oil on board, 21 x 30 cm.



Figure 223. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Hour Before the Call* (detail). 2021, Oil on board, 21 x 41 cm.

Figure 224. Emily Rose Brennan, *Imaginary Circumstances II* (detail). 2022, Oil on linen, 106 x 129 cm.



Figure 225. Emily Rose Brennan, *Threshold* (detail). 2022, Oil on canvas, 51 x 41 cm.



Figure 226. Emily Rose Brennan, *The Line of the Light*. 2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 201cm.



Figure 227. Emily Rose Brennan, *Imaginary Circumstances II*, 2022, Oil on linen, 106 x 129cm.



Figure 228. Emily Rose Brennan, *Threshold II*. 2022, Oil on canvas, 141 x 90 cm.

In my paintings *The Line of the Light*, *Imaginary Circumstances II*, and *Threshold II*, (Figure 226 - 228) I have perhaps unconsciously translated the experience of the *affective atmosphere of the offstage* in a more prominent way. Güçbilmez posits that within a play, the offstage is *everywhere but* the place and time where the play is taking place – it is the past, the future, the places that characters go unseen by audience, and where often the unspeakable or unstageable acts (that are then discussed on stage) take place.

In *Threshold II*, I utilised the bleeding of translucent yellow, pink, grey, and violet paint to translate the energised affective atmosphere I have experienced in the backstage space. However, the transparency allowing the underpainting to come through has also allowed for the existence of the space behind the subject matter to emerge. In the bottom third of the composition, I paint the ‘reality’ of the backstage spaces in opaque, saturated, creamy colours, with only tiny areas of underpainting peeking through. It is intentionally heavy and solid. While the middle third is compositionally a mirror of the bottom third, I left the major structural lines taped out, so that they would show up as underpainting. I applied much thinner paint and less saturated colours in this middle third to imply a space of transition and liminality.

The application of paint in the top third of *Threshold II* is extremely thin, and I have fractured the space into multiple shards using masking with tape. This is in part to inscribe the transition of actor into character, and the melding of reality into the fictive world of the play. The three mannequins in the top third of the composition are ghost-like in their transparency and are woven into the ground, sometimes sitting atop thicker paint, sometimes beneath it. I now see that this fracturing of the space, the transparency, and the allowance of grounds to blend into and intersect one another, are perhaps where the offstage is given the chance to become visible. Somehow this offstage place where the character floats in the imagination of the actor and the audience in a boundless imagined world has accidentally shown itself.

In *Imaginary Circumstances II* the interior of a dressing room fades into the exterior of a rural setting where, during rehearsals and performances of *The Torrents*, I imagined Gwynne Thomas lived with her family, who she speaks about, but the audience never sees. Gwynne’s home is located in the imaginative realm of the offstage, referred to by the character, imagined by the actor, and ideally the audience. In *Imaginary Circumstances II* the

doorway to the extremely hot yellow artificial light of the stage gradually blurs into the rehearsal skirt of a mannequin, while stairs onto this bright stage sit alongside a set box containing miniatures of the actors. In this painting the boundaries between the rehearsal room and stage, the interior and exterior, the imagined and real, and preparation and performance blur through painterly application. Temporality is clouded and the imagined offstage floats in areas of soft edges where visible drips and scrubbed-in paint slip in and out of visibility. The contrast between areas where paint is thickly applied, scraped, and scumbled back, dripped and splashed onto the surface, and left as clearly made gestures, draws attention to this shifting simultaneity, and the embodied and varied nature of its creation via paint.

Where my most successful paintings have a surface characterised by the visibility of multiple layers, and where transparent areas of paint bleed into one another, they speak to the liminality and loaded affective atmosphere of both the backstage *and* the offstage. For evidence of the proliferation of this third space in the work of other painters, I look again to Mamma Andersson and Peter Doig. In the paintings of both Andersson and Doig, there is often a sense that you are looking at a straightforward interior or landscape, but that there is something else afoot, running simultaneously alongside, beneath, or behind the reality depicted. Similar to the paintings of Doig and Andersson, which have been described respectively as “sickly foreboding” (Denny, 2002), and as infused with the energy of “a dangerous storm... forever brewing” (Herbert 2021, 68), the use of layers of paint and translucency in my work contributes to the revelation of an affective atmosphere backstage/offstage that is permeated with potential and potency.

In *Dollhouse* (Figure 229) Andersson creates a sense of more than simply three scenes in a theatre taking place, but also captures an unsettling atmosphere via the use of leaching paint, creeping like mould across the surfaces, and the tripartite composition which collapses a sense of linear time, alluding to simultaneity where time and space are layered and able to bleed into one another, perhaps into the offstage. She certainly seems to capture an unconscious belying the reality of the scene. In *Blotter* (Figure 230), Doig conjures a world beneath the ice through his use of thin oil paint “soaked” and “blotted” into the canvas, and the painterly gestures demarcating the dreamy reflections and areas of transparency of the frozen lake (National Museums Liverpool, 2023). This painting conveys

an affective atmosphere linked to the icy lake depicted, and the invisible world beneath its frozen surface.

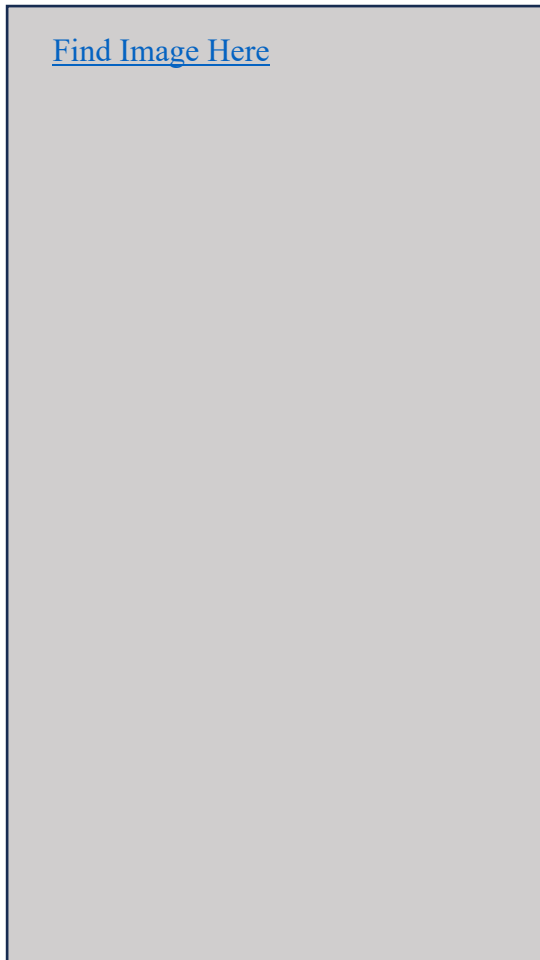


Figure 229. Mamma Andersson, *Dollhouse*. 2008, Oil on panel, 3 panels, each 122 x 229 cm. Reproduced from: StephenFriedman.com (Stephen Friedman 2024)

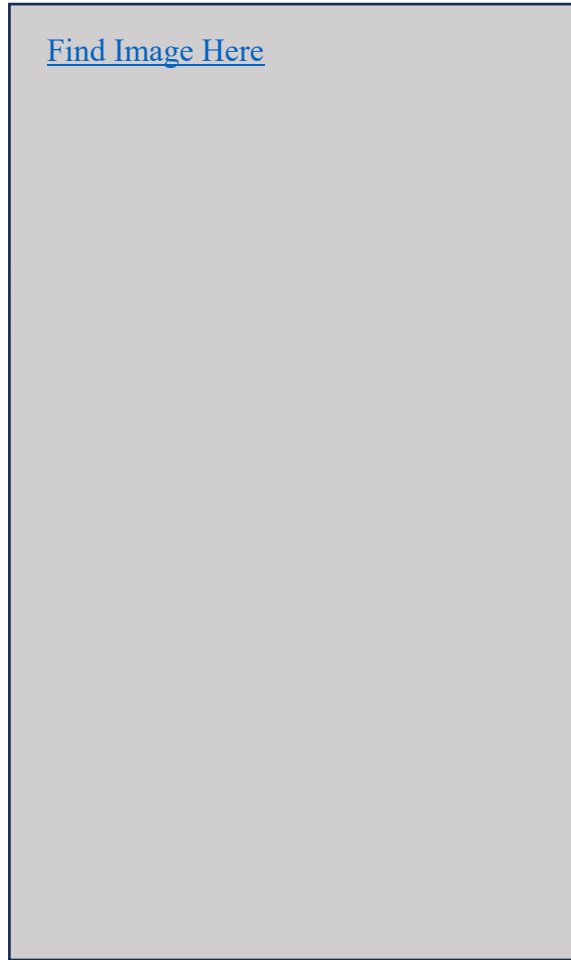


Figure 230. Peter Doig, *Blotter*. 1993, Oil on canvas, 264.2 x 214 cm. Liverpool: Walker Art Gallery. Reproduced from: Liverpoolmuseums.org.au (National Museums Liverpool 2023).

ACT III

Scene v

Offstage and the Blind Field

There is perhaps a cross-over between the implied, imagined world of the theatre offstage, and the imaginative possibilities unlocked by encounters with figurative paintings. Figurative paintings have the potential to activate an imagined space and time outside of the *mise en scène* of the painting. There is an implied *offstage* in the staged vignette of a figurative painting.

Matt Bollinger, artist and curator of the 2022 exhibition *Blind Field* at 1969 Gallery, New York, relates this to Roland Barthes' concept of "the blind field" described in *Camera Lucida*. Bollinger writes that the blind field is a filmic term which expresses the sense of "suspension" one experiences when a character in a film walks off frame but there is an implication that they continue to move about in an imagined continuation of the fictional space, off camera (Bollinger 2022). It is a projection of the viewer's imagination, created by the way the screen and *mise en scène* of film operates. Relating this to painting, Bollinger writes,

The blind field creates a double inside for a painting. There is the painterly or pictorial space, but then a side door through which the imagination can wander.

The painting is a fixed aperture adjacent to the blind field, just as the viewer is adjacent to the painting. But the blind field only appears to be just beyond the space described by the painting, when in fact, it is in the viewer's mind. (2022, 169)

The *imagined* offstage world, and the *real* backstage space, both cloaked together in darkness behind the stage, mirror the "double inside" of a painting that Bollinger describes, with its ability to allow the imagination of the viewer to roam, their own unconscious infiltrating their imaginative associations.

[Find Image Here](#)

Figure 231. Edward Hopper, *Manhattan Bridge Loop*. 1928, Oil on canvas, 88.9 x 152.4 cm. Massachusetts: Addison Gallery of American Art. Reproduced from: Wikimedia Commons (2023).

[Find Image Here](#)

Figure 232. Edward Hopper, *Rooms by the Sea*. 1928, Oil on canvas, 73.66 x 101.98 cm. New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery. Reproduced from: Wikiart.org (Wikiart 2023).

In her article “In the Blind Field: Hopper and the Uncanny”, Margaret Iverson discusses the way that Edward Hopper’s paintings express the unconscious of the artist, attributing this to both the way that he painted in the studio, from memory “allowing the

motif to become saturated with unconscious reverie” (1998, 412) and in part by utilising the blind field in his compositions. She cites Hopper who states that “[s]o much of every art is an expression of the subconscious, that it seems to me most all of the important qualities are put there unconsciously, and little of importance by the conscious intellect” (Hopper as quoted by Iverson 1998, 412).

For Iversen, the blind field in the composition of Hopper’s paintings draws attention to the imagined world beyond the *mise en scène* of his paintings, eliciting sensations tinged with the uncanny. She describes how,

Hopper always included a blind field in his paintings. He said of Manhattan Bridge Loop, 1928, that its long, uninterrupted horizontal lines were intended ‘to make us conscious of the spaces and elements beyond the limits of the scene itself’. But the blind field is not just on the periphery of a painting; it infiltrates the whole composition. (1998, 422)

The unconscious of the stage, this offstage space, has also perhaps become visible in my work as a result of the way that the form of figurative painting opens up the notion of a blind field, or a fictive imaginary world beyond the subject matter of the painting.

The exposure of the layers that reside beneath the finished painted surface of my works have a direct link to the notion of the unconscious. The paintings I have made which expose the accumulation of processes, both material and technical, inherent in their making, reflect the subject matter, which is the otherwise hidden affective atmosphere of the backstage, and perhaps Güçbilmez’s offstage unconscious of the stage.

EPILOGUE

A Surface Acted Upon

EPILOGUE

A Surface Acted Upon

The affective atmosphere of the backstage is not only fleeting but is also not the focus of the actor in the moment of being backstage during a live show. For an actor at work, the backstage affective atmosphere, the onstage realisation of a character within a fictive world, and the offstage imaginative world collapse into one experience known as ‘acting’. For the most part, the details, and certainly the affective atmosphere of the backstage, remain unexplored to any being who hasn’t experienced it, and even those who may have. This is where the painter who acts can perhaps translate this lived experience into a visual equivalence, and where the attuned attention of the artist/researcher can contribute valuable insights into the nature of lived-experience.

Scrutinising this experience through paint can add to knowledge regarding the creative potential of painting to unveil a level of information linked to experience that may otherwise remain buried and unknown. This research focusses on an experience unique to an actor backstage during a theatre show and the affects that combine to colour the aura of the site. Exploration of affects, however, is relevant to furthering the understanding of lived human experience and atmospheres in broader terms, whilst also adding to the continuum of painters who use the ontology of painting to inscribe the sensed experiences of lived spaces. This research has led me to an attunement with the layers that reside beneath the surface of an experience, and the potential of a surface acted upon with paint to reveal the details of it.

This research adds to a history of artists who advocate for the use of the materiality and techniques of oil painting to examine, register, and share an understanding of the lived body in oriented space. I use painting to further contribute to the research of phenomenologists like Kathleen Stewart in uncovering and exploring atmospheres residing in places, experiences, and happenings which resonate through the lived-body. While Stewart uses writing and “fictocriticism” to bring attention to the atmospheres and “live backgrounds” that come to unfurl within the processes of living (2011, 445), I use painting - supported by the knowledge that its tactile and gestural nature has the potential to do the same. To circle back to the question of why someone would paint during a time where

technology is able to create painterly images for us, the answer that has surfaced, is that painting can create an embodied record of an embodied experience, and has the potential, via experimentations, planned actions, and even ‘mistakes’, to reveal unexpected insights into both the subject matter, and the processes of creation.

Making a painting involves embedding the lived experience of the perception of, and interaction with, a place and time via the lived experience of physically marking a support. To this end Sandford Schwartz writes that in a Sickert painting for example, what a viewer responds to is “basically, a performance of his hand and mind” (1993, 43). In 2014, Marc Valli addressed the relevance of painting within the digital age, in he and Margherita Dessanay’s book *A Brush with the Real*. Valli advocates for painting as a medium that has the distinctive potential to express the embodied experience of a place. He writes,

Painting knows texture. It can still render the idea of touch.... Painters manage to entertain an intimate relationship with accident, without having to give up on purposeful action and method.... While images are constantly flying around, being digitalized, re-used, cropped, intercut, blown, shrunk, lit, printed, projected, edited, Photoshopped, etc., and all the time fading losing their original meaning, poignancy and context – painters keep going back to their studios and slowly, patiently, trying to hold back the flood. (Dessanay and Valli 2014, 8)

Creating a painting is distinctive *because* of the time and physical effort that goes into its translation of space and time into a flattened image – into a surface that renders concrete the idea of the touch, feeling and lived experience of a place and time.

Painting has the potential to inscribe the experience of a place via the formation of a unique surface which stands as a record of the time, meditations, gestures, accidents, and improvisations inherent within its own creation. Citing Peter Doig, Sue Hubbard states that “[p]ainting is about working your way across the surface, getting lost in it” (Doig, as quoted by Hubbard 2020). To get lost in the surface of my more successful paintings is hopefully to find yourself immersed in the pervasive gestalt of the backstage space, a space not accessed by many people. My aim in creating these works has been to make accessible a space and affective atmosphere otherwise unknown, testing the ability of oil paint to do so. Significantly, my paintings are from the point of view of an actor, who has worked within, and contributed to, the affective atmosphere registered in the works. This distinct access to and experience of the space are foundational to the significance and originality of

this doctoral research. The original contribution that I bring to the field of painting, is to consider and incorporate the processes and theories of acting, and embodied gestural character of *perezhivanie* to a painting methodology.

Via the immersion over time within backstage spaces, close attunement to the visual, aural, and haptic details of the site, analysis of the behaviours that precede, and occur within, the backstage space, and the collection of visual information from the site, I have created an in-depth phenomenological study into the *character* of the backstage gestalt. Through phenomenological analysis of the backstage space, affect and atmosphere, as well as processes related to performance, and backstage behaviour, I have developed a unique methodology. This original methodology adds new information to the continuum of oil painting by acknowledging and engaging with the artists who precede me, while incorporating techniques informed by the processes of *perezhivanie* and character development. My unique position as an ‘actor who paints turned painter who acts’ has allowed me to approach painting from a point of view filtered through an entirely different art form, and set of practises. Below I summarise the techniques and insights I have devised through this practice-based research.

Performing the Painted Gesture

During this research I have developed an original style of mark making which has emerged from engagement with concepts related to acting and character development. I refer to these acting techniques, and the resultant painted gestures, as *masking* and *revealing*. In her book *Acting and Being* actress and writer Elizabeth Hess writes of character development, stating that “Certain aspects of a character will surface before others. How the character’s state of being interacts with our inner life depends greatly on our openness and emotional availability” (2017, 187). She goes on to discuss the formation of character via experiments during rehearsal that allow for this interaction between the actor’s inner life and the character to take place. Through this experimentation and the recognition of these details, the actor can develop “an empathetic relationship to the character” (Hess, 2017, 117).

The technique of character building that I call *masking* and *revealing*, involves an actor analysing a script with the aim to discover the similarities and differences between the character and themselves. These overlaps and discrepancies can be related to physicality,

emotional life, psychology, history, or memory. *Masking*, from an actor's the point of view, refers to the diminishing of one's own characteristics if they are irrelevant to the character one is playing, i.e. if an actor has a naturally loud voice, but are playing an introspective, quiet character they will mask this part of themselves. In contrast *revealing* refers to the revelation and intensification of those characteristics which are relevant to the character, i.e. if the character has a past steeped in trauma, and the actor can relate, then this cross over will be explored. These terms, which I have used as both an actor and an acting teacher, became relevant during my studio research as they are grounded in embodied language which can be enacted upon a support.

Informed by these acting processes I utilised embodied gestures involving tape, palette knives, and oil paint to create surfaces that are multilayered, tactile, and dynamic. An example of this process is depicted in the video stills (Figure 233-235) which shows the physical gestures inherent in the masking and revealing technique. This technique allowed for areas of underpainting to remain visible on the finished surface of several paintings, revealing some of the 'scaffolding' of the painting. For some works I repeated these techniques several times on the same support, allowing sections of several layers to show through.

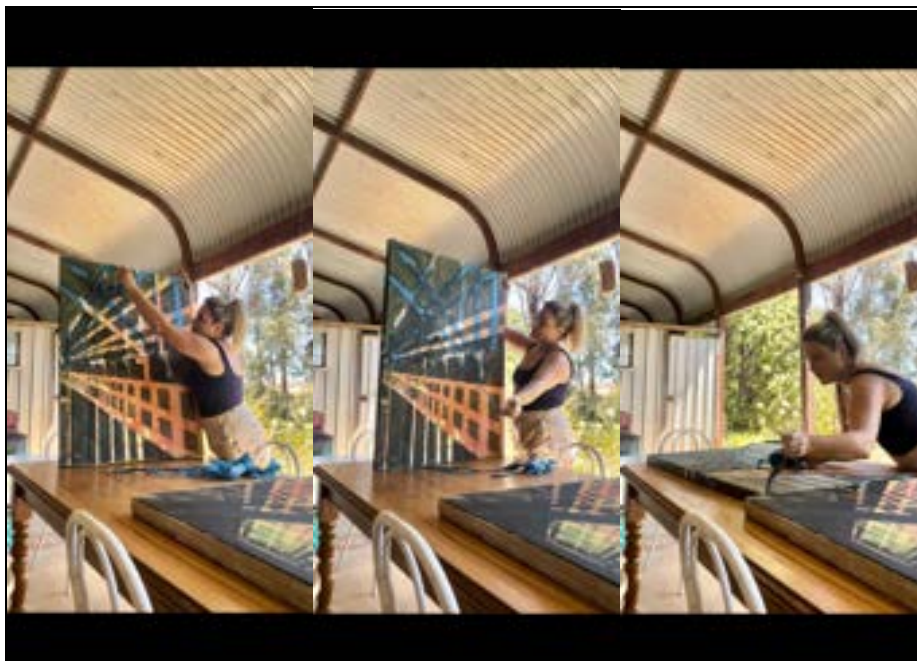


Figure 233-235. Emily Rose Brennan, Stills from a video recording of the construction of *Threshold II*. 2022, Oil on canvas, 141 x 90 cm.

Rehearsed Visual Motifs

The repetition at the heart of rehearsal underscored the development of my painting methodology. Examination of acting processes, specifically *perezhivanie* provided a basis for physical painted gestures. I intentionally repeated the gestures inherent in the visual creation of certain ‘characters’ within my paintings to solidify the physical experience in my body (Figure 236-237). This painterly process reflects the way that an actor rehearses physical gestures, and the delivery of lines, in order to discover their underlying quality, and experiment with their delivery. After *experiencing* the repetition of the physical and vocal choices throughout rehearsal, the actor then *re-experiences* them in front of an audience. The idea is that in spite of the repetition night upon night, the performance remains truthful due to the discoveries made, and character work explored, through the repetition in the rehearsal room, the *perezhivanie*, and the muscle and emotional memory that has been developed.

By replicating this process in paint, by repeating the painted gestures required to visually represent an object several times, on several supports, I found that I discovered more detailed visual information about the subject matter, and could also experiment with elements such as texture, colour, and brush strokes. Repeating the imagery also allowed me to create works that contained these recurring characters, giving the overall body of work a sense of narrative and interaction between pieces – almost as if the works were scenes in a play. I experimented with installation of the paintings in a sequential way in my studio, standing them up like set pieces (Figure 238-239), but ultimately decided that this kind of sculptural quality could be alluded to via the positioning of the floating walls in the gallery in my final installation of the works.

In the final installation of the work, I intentionally engaged with conventions of the theatre and the structure of a play. I thought of the floating walls in the gallery as set pieces, and the spaces between the walls as doorway/thresholds. I created these threshold doorways between floating walls so that viewers had to walk through them to access larger works (Figure 241 and 242). To reference the format of a play and performance, I positioned three of my ‘character’ series of paintings on the first floating wall facing the entrance (Figure 240). This installation choice referred to the way that characters are introduced in the exposition of a play. I lit the paintings with low-key spotlights to create a

theatrical atmosphere within the gallery and encourage highlighted areas and theatrical shadows within the space.



Figure 236-237. Emily Rose Brennan, Examples of the 'rehearsal' and repetition of visual motifs across two paintings. The left shows the use of sharp, smooth edged gestures and brushstrokes, while the right indicates more impasto painterly approach using less linseed oil as medium. 2021-23.



Figure 238. Emily Rose Brennan, Studio experimentation showing practise installation of paintings to replicate the assembly of stage flats. 2020.



Figure 239. Emily Rose Brennan, Practise installation of unfinished paintings in gallery space to replicate the assembly of stage flats. 2020.



Figure 240. Emily Rose Brennan, Installation of paintings on floating walls to reflect the assembly of stage flats, and threshold doors, as seen in the final assessment of this PhD. 2023.



Figure 241. Emily Rose Brennan, Installation of paintings on floating walls to reflect the assembly of stage flats, and threshold doors. 2023.

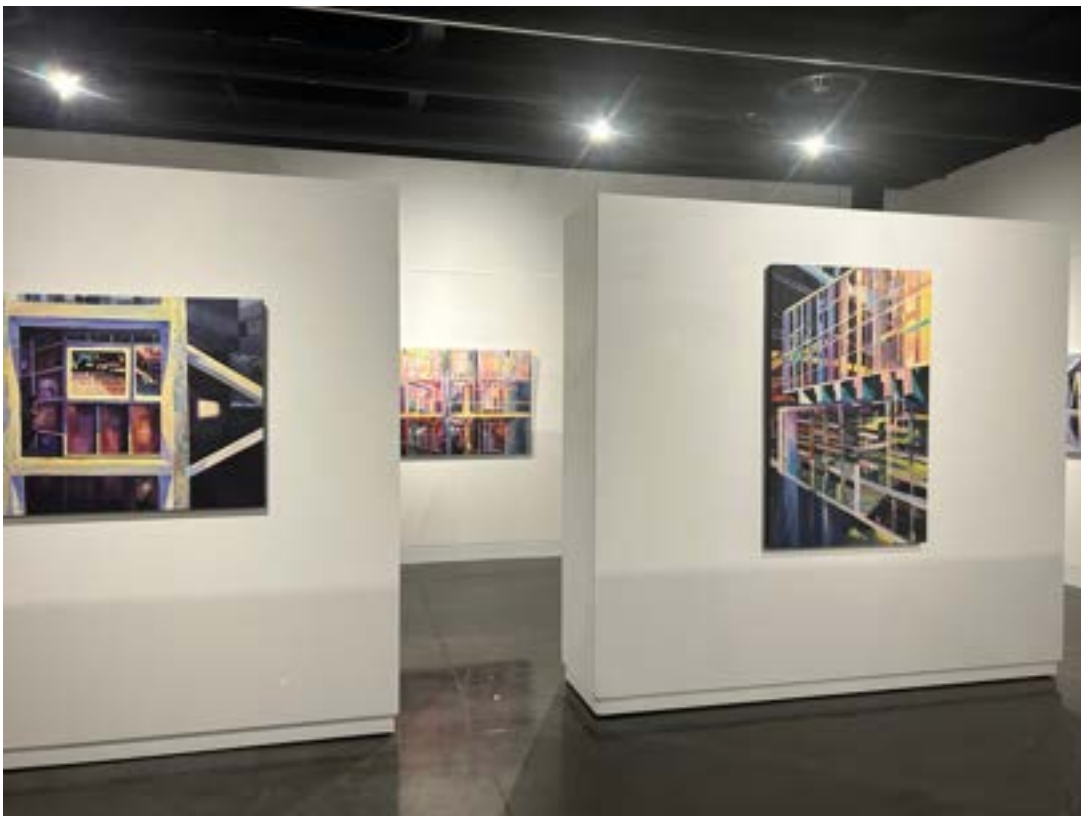


Figure 242. Emily Rose Brennan, Installation of paintings on floating walls to reflect the assembly of stage flats, and threshold doors. 2023.

Working from Maquettes and Models

I made maquettes and sourced some costume related objects to use as the starting point for paintings as another way to develop my original methodology. Replicating the process by which the actor first sees a version of their character – via the models in the set box, or the costumes and wigs on mannequins and wig-heads in the design studio – I experimented with incorporating these maquettes, and rehearsal room items, as the subject matter of paintings. I began with drawings and painted studies of the items in dramatically lit still-life installations, which I often then incorporated into larger works. This proved at times to be an effective way to experiment with scale and proportion within my composition (Figure 244). The inclusion of the model of the set box allowed for some uncanny paintings to emerge wherein the seemingly shrunken actors cast dark and looming shadows.



Figure 243. Emily Rose Brennan, A maquette of a set box. 2020, Carboard, Plastic Railway Train Figurines, Paint, Blu Tac, 12x12x7cm.

Figure 244. Emily Rose Brennan, Detail of the depiction of the maquette within the painting *Imaginary Circumstances II*. 2022.

An Original Act

The embodied approach, informed by acting methodologies, that I have developed to engagement with both the subject matter and materials involved in this doctoral research, is key to the project's significance, and underpins the value that it can potentially bring to future students of painting. Acting as a concept has 'action' at its very etymological and corporeal heart, and the gestural, physical nature of rehearsal, processes of perezhivanie, and performance, have informed my approach to painting.

A painting methodology imbued with processes of repetition, physical gesture, ‘character building’ via masking and revealing, and layering techniques, has surfaced from an approach to painting informed by acting. The use of these physical approaches to visually transcribing subject matter related to the prevailing mood and aura of the backstage, has resulted in paintings which at times successfully encapsulate the affective atmosphere of the site. Physically approaching paint with this methodology in mind, whilst concurrently allowing the materiality of the paint to dictate the development of the methodology, reflects the concausal relationship between the factors that contribute to the subject matter I register.

What has come as a surprise to me is that while attuning to and inscribing the aura of the backstage via these actorly, embodied gestures, I witnessed a third space – the offstage – unfurling on the surface of my supports, elevating my more successful works beyond the registration of the affective atmosphere. This notion of an Offstage – the imaginative world that the characters live in when they are not on stage – is fertile ground for further painterly investigation. If the stage is a place that has a *made atmosphere* designed to effect the audience and the actors, and the backstage contains an atmosphere that evolves from the preparation to perform on the stage, then perhaps the atmosphere of the “Offstage” is the most elusive of all, as it exists purely in the imaginations of the actors, the audience and the offstage lives of the characters. As Güçbilmez characterises it, the offstage is,

[n]ot a place but an idea. When the stage represents ‘a slice of life’, as the realists would wish it to do, offstage is ‘life without that slice’. Offstage is world minus stage; this means that it is ‘anywhere but here’, and its time is time-minus-now, so it is impossible to determine the scale of it. So dilating upon offstage is to be ‘then and there’; thus it is a foreign tongue; a language with an unknown grammar. We have no lexicon or atlas to help us find our way. And the ones who enter this realm feel disoriented...(2007, 154)

Painting the Offstage Atmosphere of Everyday Experience

What has become clear through this research is that the time spent with subject matter, experimentation with embodied registration, and the exploration of the potential of surface quality, can conceivably elicit more than simply a visual equivalence of a spatial or temporal experience, but can speak to phenomena that is perhaps even less tangible. I will

use the methodology formulated in this research to attune my focus to the interiors and landscapes of the contemporary world around me in the pursuit of surfacing original phenomenological and visual information related to lived-experience. I feel that I am equipped to visually translate the “worlding” that occurs in various spaces, ideally revealing information pertinent to the history and past experiences within the place (Stewart, 2011, 445).

An area of interest to me would be to explore Güçbilmez’s conception of the Offstage alongside Böhme’s concept related to the staging of the contemporary world, and people’s experiences within it. To this end, I wonder what it would look like to paint the *Offstage* of the *Staged World*. Böhme’s research into the ‘made’ atmospheres of the theatre set leads to his description of contemporary society as living within many generated, staged atmospheres. He explains that,

[s]taging has become a basic feature of our society: the staging of politics, of sporting events, of cities, of commodities, of personalities, of ourselves. The choice of the paradigm of the *stage set* for the art of generating atmospheres therefore mirrors the real theatricalisation of our life. (2013, 6)

To combine Böhme’s notion of the manufactured atmospheres prevalent within the staged contemporary world in which we exist, with Güçbilmez notion of the uncanny Offstage – where staged lives live when not on the stage – is a thrilling prospect to explore using the painterly methodology that I have developed through this research and opens a proliferation of creative opportunities to explore.

An ideal, and relevant, subject matter to bring this methodology to would be the abandoned buildings, and regional landscapes of Western Australia, and the staging that has been erected to enable the enacting of contemporary Australian identity. As a West Australian painter, with a historical familial connection to Perth and Western Australia’s Southwest, I will apply this methodology to uncovering the effect of the colonial past and buried history of my own state on the affective atmosphere of selected places. A focus on the recording of affective atmospheres present in various Western Australian buildings and landscapes will add to the visually recorded history of the state, as it is registered through paint, but in a way that uncovers more than the refurbished heritage sites, bucolic green paddocks, and cliché abandoned farmhouses that sit on the surface of the land. To capture the Offstage of the land, the unconscious of contemporary Western Australian culture

through painting, could contribute a significant knowledge to the continuum of painterly/phenomenological inquiry.

The Sunset Heritage Precinct is a place with a multifaceted history and a palpable affective atmosphere that could benefit from deeper interrogation via my original painting methodology. In 1904 it functioned as a home for elderly men, and then as the Sunset Hospital until 1995. When working there in 2021, I was struck by the affective atmosphere that the space emitted, and the contrast of this atmosphere with the creatives who were present in the space. On the first day of rehearsals of *The Cherry Orchard*, Whadjuk Noongar educator Vaughn McGuire performed a smoking ceremony on the site of the precinct, both inside and out.¹⁷ The place was described as having a spiritual history. I would be interested in respectfully researching the history preceding the construction of the building, to deeply understand the multilayers of the affective atmosphere of the place. I will seek other sites within the state such as The East Perth Power Station, The Fremantle Arts Centre, and the Midland Railway Workshops, and use this methodology to access and record the third space – the offstage - of these visually striking places.

Furthermore, I will apply the painterly discoveries I have made to an exploration of the South-West region of Western Australia, and the hidden history beneath this evocative landscape. I feel that the attention that I now attune to the haptic potentiality of the surface of a painting, will allow for the affective atmosphere of this and many other places to unfurl and become visible. Painting which can create an affective response in a viewer has the potential to lead to a deeper understanding of the experience of the oriented space with which lived-bodies resonate and concausally interrelate. Adding to this knowledge, even in a small way, could be a significant way to contribute to visual culture and understanding.

¹⁷ According to noongarculture.org.au a Smoking Ceremony (Cleansing Ceremony) is a “traditional Noongar ritual used to not only cleanse and purify a specific area but it cleanses the spirit, body and soul whilst you are on Noongar Country. It also helps to ward off *warra wirrin* – bad spirits and to bring in the blessings of the *kwop wirrin* – good spirits. The leaves and shavings from the *balga* (grass tree) smolder and the smoke purifies the area and prepares for a new beginning. This ritual of purification and unity – signifies the beginning of something new” (Noongarculture.org.au 2023).

I look to the work of contemporary Western Australian painters such as Fiona Harman and Nicole Slatter, as well as Kevin Robertson, who approach and register the experience of local place and space in a way which uncovers something of the affective atmosphere inherent within it. These artists use colour, composition, and the creation of a surface quality to evocatively register and communicate the resonance of their bodies within the spaces they paint. As Slatter writes, she uses ‘attunement’ to the places she paints to “attempt to move from representing the obvious physical space, to associations of moods and memories” (2015, 14). I too choose this approach to translate the oriented space and affective atmospheres I experience.

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woman_Reading_a_Letter_\(Vermeer\)#/media/File:Vermeer,_Johannes_-_Woman_reading_a_letter_-_ca._1662-1663.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woman_Reading_a_Letter_(Vermeer)#/media/File:Vermeer,_Johannes_-_Woman_reading_a_letter_-_ca._1662-1663.jpg)

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Accessed: 13th August 2023. <https://sammlung.staedelmuseum.de/en/work/interior-strandgade-30>

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Accessed: 13th August 2023. <http://emuseum.toledomuseum.org/objects/58472/interior-of-courtyard-strandgade-30>

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<https://www.juderae.com/interiors/ohiz7i6ji5wimrrwlcir7d732rqn5u>

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Accessed: 13th August 2023.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:State_Theatre_Centre_of_Western_Australia_43_\(E37@OpenHousePerth2014\).JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:State_Theatre_Centre_of_Western_Australia_43_(E37@OpenHousePerth2014).JPG)

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Accessed 13th August 2023.

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Accessed 13th August 2023. <https://www.bridge42.com.au/project/state-theatre-centre-of-wa/>

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<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10156746264108173&set=a.101567462580031>

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Photograph by Emily Rose Brennan.

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Accessed 13th August 2023. <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/hire-a-venue/stage-a-performance/venues/drama-theatre>

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Accessed 4th March 2024. <https://www.artchive.com/artwork/riesengebirge-caspar-david-friedrich-1835/>

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Accessed 13th August 2023. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/sickert-brighton-pierrots-t07041>

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Accessed 13th August 2023. <https://www.agsa.sa.gov.au/collection-publications/collection/works/summer-fields/65020/>

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Accessed 13th August 2023. <https://searchthecollection.nga.gov.au/object/36477>

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Accessed 13th August 2023.

<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/197.2013/>

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Accessed: 13th August 2023.

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Accessed: 13th August 2023.

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Accessed: 13th August 2023.

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Accessed: 13th August 2023. <http://www.kenichihoshine.com/the-rehearsal>

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<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7b/Manhattan-bridge-loop-edward-hopper-1928.jpg>

Figure 232. Edward Hopper, *Rooms by the Sea*. 1928, Oil on canvas, 73.66 x101.98 cm. Accessed: 13th August 2023.

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/edward-hopper/rooms-by-the-sea>

Figure 233-235. Emily Rose Brennan, Stills from a video recording of the construction of *Threshold II*. 2022, Oil on canvas, 141 x 90 cm.

Photograph by Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 236-237. Emily Rose Brennan, Examples of the ‘rehearsal’ and repetition of visual motifs across two paintings. The left shows the use of sharp, smooth edged gestures and brushstrokes, while the right indicates more impasto painterly approach using less linseed oil as medium. 2021-23.

Photograph by Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 238. Emily Rose Brennan, Studio experimentation showing practise installation of paintings to replicate the assembly of stage flats. 2020.

Photograph by Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 239. Emily Rose Brennan, Practise installation of unfinished paintings in gallery space to replicate the assembly of stage flats. 2020.

Photograph by Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 240. Emily Rose Brennan, Installation of character paintings on the first wall of the gallery. 2023.

Photograph by Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 241. Emily Rose Brennan, Installation of character paintings on the first wall of the gallery. 2023.

Photograph by Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 242. Emily Rose Brennan, Installation of paintings on floating walls to reflect the assembly of stage flats, and threshold doors. 2023.

Photograph by Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 243. Emily Rose Brennan, A maquette of a set box. 2020, Carboard, Plastic Railway Train Figurines, Paint, Blu Tac, 12x12x7cm.

Photograph by Emily Rose Brennan.

Figure 244. Emily Rose Brennan, Detail of the depiction of the maquette within the painting *Imaginary Circumstances II*. 2022.

Photograph by Emily Rose Brennan.

