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Painting, Still Life, Repetition and Death of the Object

Ryan Durrant

Submitted in partial fulfilment of
its requirements for the award of

MA by Research

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An Exhibition of Paintings and Text

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The gallery is fluid. The paintings are next to each other, further apart, above one another, opposite each other, and in separate spaces. The text flows throughout the gallery. On occasions it morphs to the shape of the paintings, on others it seeks to illustrate the process and the experience of 'repetition'. In some of the paintings the individual canvases can be seen

at the same time,

in others there is a delay;

a distance needs to be travelled,

memory uncertain.

This research is presented as an exhibition of paintings and text. The paintings and writing are symbiotic. The paintings shape the text and the text shapes the paintings. Each have informed and questioned each other and continue to do so. The text is not intended to explain or describe the Object paintings, but to be viewed alongside them, highlighting similar themes arising through the writing and artwork of various critics, writers, philosophers and artists. Specific attention is paid to a selection of artists who use various forms of 'repetition' within their paintings:

Peter Dreher, Bernhard Pifferetti, Cecilia Edefalk, Gillian Carnegie.

Painting, Still Life, Repetition
and Death of the Object

Welcome



Fig. 1

It is a cat.

We see a cat.

The original is a cat.

The repeat is a cat.

It is not a cat.

It is a painting.

It is a painting of a painting.

They are the same.

They are different.

Written about one of the 'Object' paintings in this research, *Object 10*, the above text is indicative of the paradoxical nature of its being, and, to unravel it, is essentially the purpose of this study.

Through the act of painting, and repetition as a 'formula', to examine what effect repetition has on the singular, original subject: the object(s) of a 'Still Life'. How the subject changes or is transferred through the process of repetition and what effect this has on the imagery in the resulting artwork. A change from the singular to the multiple, from the individual to the collective conscience, from isolation to the collective principles of individuation. The original simultaneously destroyed and reaffirmed by the 'repeat'.

To paint it, then destroy it:

“this, my Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying”
(Nietzsche, 1968, p. 550).

The original object(s), a thing, a definite, then becomes another thing, a painting.

That thing, the painting, is then repeated.

The first painting becomes the subject of the second.

The second is now the subject of the first.

Is the object still the subject? Was the object ever the subject?

Its imagery remains, but does it still exist within the painting?

As in Magritte's painting *The Treachery of Images* (1929), 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' or Matisse's apparent retort, "it's not a woman; it's a painting" (Fyfe, 2006), is the subject still that of the object, the Still Life, or is it now inherent within the paint? In the singular, the very negation that it is 'not a pipe' and 'not a woman' may suggest otherwise, yet in its translation to a painting, another 'thing', however close an imitation, there is little truth to the original object. The only fact would seemingly be its actuality, its 'being' as a painting, and any supposed imagery, purely fiction.

And what if repetition is added?

I WOULD PREFER NOT TO

So why the repetition?

It is the 'formula'.

It is how the paintings are made. It is what they are.

Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!

Throughout Herman Melville's short story *Bartleby the Scrivener*, Bartleby repeats his response (or variations of): "I would prefer not to" (Melville, 2019). Bartleby is a man of unknown history; he lacks any references. His response is neither a refusal nor an affirmation of what he would rather do.

As Giles Deleuze writes in his essay *Bartleby; or, The Formula*:

The formula is devastating because it eliminates the preferable just as mercilessly as any nonpreferred. It not only abolishes the term it refers to, and that it rejects, but also abolishes the other term it seemed to preserve, and that becomes impossible ... All particularity, all reference is abolished. The formula annihilates "copying," the only reference in relation to which something might or might not be preferred (Deleuze, 1997, p. 71).

Subjectivity is abandoned, 'reference abolished'. A painting is just a painting, its imagery superficial, it is what it is. And like

Bartleby has won the right to survive, that is, to remain immobile and upright before a blind wall. Pure patient passivity, as Blanchot would say. Being as being, and nothing more (Deleuze, 1997, p. 71).

Perhaps? But the 'formula' must be applied. And perhaps, it is here, in the process itself, that reality lies: in the act of painting, the action of the 'repeat'.

The result, the painting, merely the process made visible.

While, there are of course many precedents to the use of the repeated image in art, this study is not an analysis or comment on the proliferation or mass production, either mechanical or digital, of the image. It is not about the imagery of the image, but its 'subject' objectivity. It is an exploration of what happens to it through repetition, to question the truth of its singularity, and to understand its 'being' as both present and absent within the reality of artwork.

To borrow from Shrodinger, the cat is both 'dead and alive', that is, until we open the box.

The 'Formula'

Adding the 'Formula'



Fig. 2 i



Fig. 2 ii

All the Object paintings are made using a process of repetition, and within each artwork, the individual parts follow similarities of composition and colour. They are re-presented, rather than reproduced; there is no real intent to copy the first painting, but similar proportions, colours and gestures are adhered to. While there is a sizable nod to the first painting, the second is equally independent as an individual part (its marks and colours relating to each other within the canvas confines), yet, simultaneously it is dependent on the first painting for its very existence, it is inextricably linked.

A painting is made from an object, or more particularly, a photograph of the object. A photograph of a reproduction of an idealized form, that is in itself a reproduction. The photographs act as instigators for defining a set of limits or rules that distinguish between the separate artworks; colours and shapes outline what the painting will become. The subject is already distanced from the painting, a pictorial content is readymade, and any illusionistic tendency to portray the objects three dimensions is diminished.

A second painting is then made from the first painting. The second painting uses the first painting as its subject. It is not a repetition, rather a new event that seeks to repeat the first event; an act of painting repeated.

The first painting is to some extent expressionistic, a series of marks, colour and texture made from the photograph of the still life. It is the first creation of an event that subsequent paintings will follow. The limits are now set. The original still life is already receding. Talking about his own repeated paintings, Pifferetti said:

The first half of the painting is worked on until it attains a sufficient pictorial content. It is already the memory of what will be produced on the other half of the canvas. Subjectivity has already been strangled (Fyfe, 2006).

The Object paintings are all fairly 'figurative' or 'representational', with perhaps only *Objects 4* veering towards any kind of abstraction. This seemed necessary in order to question the subjectivity of the original object and its standing as an image within the painting.



Fig. 3

The first painting is a depiction of an object(s),
the second is a depiction of a painting.

The first painting has now become the object of the next painting, and the next the object of the next.

The subject is transferred.

The imagery remains.

The more the images are repeated, the more differences emerge. Rather than devaluing and diluting the original, the repetitive process highlights the uniqueness and authenticity of each individual canvas. It is not so much about repeating an artwork but rather through repetition the artwork emerges.

There is an accumulation of experience. The resulting artwork stands as a testament to these experiences; the image shifts, colours differ and merge uniquely within each canvas. The very fact of repeating makes the 'repeat' different to the original:

that which is repeated has been – otherwise it would not be repeated – but the very fact that it has been makes the repetition something new (Kierkegaard, 1983, p. 149).

Each individual painting is on a separate canvas of equal size, and as such this process could continue ad infinitum but for: determined limits, time, material deficiency, or human fallibility. In theory, another painting can always be added. This would change were the repetitions to be confined within a single canvas.

There are a number of variables.

Most of the still lifes paintings were 'repeated' once.

Some are repeated more than once.

The timescale between the 'repeats' differs within the separate artworks.

The time taken to complete each individual canvas is variable, especially in relation to the first and second canvases within each painting.

No timescale limits were predetermined.

There is a change in scale.

Most are single motif still lifes.

Some have multiple objects within the still lifes.

There is a change of medium from oil paint to acrylic paint.



Fig. 4

the effect repetition has on the singular, original subject: the object(s) of a Still Life

the status of hierarchical subject matter, and its importance or irrelevance in both the singular and the 'repeated' paintings

how the subject changes, or is transferred through the process of repetition

what effect this has on the imagery in the resulting artwork

the inevitable failure of repetition

originality, imitation and appropriation

how the act of painting and its subsequent materiality as an object, affects notions of 'representation' and 'abstraction'

time, experience, memory and temporality in both the making and reception of the painting

the process as the subject

the painting as a relational object

the translation of the painting to an image through digital reproduction

The single motif paintings are titled as 'Object 1', 'Object 2' etc.
They are numbered in chronological order.
Where there is more than one motif, they are titled as 'Objects 1', 'Objects 2' etc.

Collectively they are referred to as the 'Object' paintings.

Within this exhibition, which largely questions the validity of the original subject, even to doubt its existence within the painting, it seemed appropriate to avoid any direct reference to what they resemble, for there is little to be gained from labels such as: 'Cat', 'Horse' or 'Woman in a flouncy dress holding a parasol'.

As soon as it is seen as a describable picture, justifiable in the light of a title, the work of the painter has lost its true subject (Gilson, 2020, p. 137).

If the representation is questioned within the painting,

then it should equally be addressed to the object.

The titles of "Object" or "Objects", where chosen to give an unprejudiced openness to this study, while also providing a direct reference to the original subjects 'thingness' and objectivity.

It remains to be seen whether they stay that way, for, if indeed the 'object' is dead within the paintings, then maybe 'Untitled' would be more apt.

Repetition

The Paradox



Fig. 5

In reality as such, there is no repetition. This is not because everything is different, not at all. If everything in the world were completely identical, in reality there would be no repetition, because reality is only in the moment

(Kierkegaard, 1983, p. 275).

Within this context 'repetition' must be treated as an abstract notion. As Kierkegaard points out, 'there is no repetition ... because reality is only in the moment', if a repeat was truly possible, we would have no memory of it. And it is this paradox that drives much of this research; repetition cannot exist without difference, and yet, there is no signifier of difference without repetition.

The paintings do not seek to define repetition, but to use it as a tool for interrogation. Repetition as a process, rather than a definition; to question through repetition, not to question repetition. However, an understanding as to what is meant by repetition, and fundamentally its failure, is examined necessarily.

Integral within the process is the assumption that no two things can ever be the same, however similar. Even the simplest of objects or the most tedious of actions has infinite and perpetually changing possibilities forced upon it:

The conclusions that we seek to draw from the likeness of events are unreliable, because events are always unlike.

Resemblance does not make things as much alike as difference makes them dissimilar

(Montaigne, 1993, p. 344).

Yet, in isolation the individual has no meaning, for without reference or comparison there is no means of evaluation. The repetitive process perhaps provides such a basis for evaluation. As the vagaries of 'likeness' and realities of 'difference' become apparent, so too does the importance of the individual part and its relationship to the whole. While similarities may satisfy a need for order, and offer an overall picture, they lead to generalisation and gross misunderstanding. In closer observation differences emerge and such limitations are ultimately challenged.



Fig. 6

In Kierkegaard's *Repetition*, Constantin Constantius seeks to understand his own meaningful existence through repetition and recollection: "If one does not have the category of recollection or of repetition, all life dissolves into an empty, meaningless noise" (Kierkegaard, 1983, p. 149). Deeming recollection to be merely an attempt to re-experience a past moment in the present, Constantin turns to repetition, for he wants the moment to be in the present.

Repetition and recollection are the same motion, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward (Kierkegaard 1983, p. 131).

He wants to experience it as he did before, immediately, and in this very moment in time; not as something new, but as it was.

Indeed, what would life be if there were no repetition? Who could want to be a tablet on which time writes something new every instant or to be a memorial volume of the past? (Kierkegaard 1983, pp.132-133).

Determined to relive experiences he had some months earlier, Constantin sets off on a return trip to Berlin. He books into the same apartment, walks the same streets, visits the same theatre, and frequents the same cafés and restaurants.

But all is not well.

“No matter how I turned and shifted, all was futile.”

The prized coffee
“was just as good as last time; one would almost expect it to be, but it was not to my liking.”
The restaurant he had frequented every evening on his previous trip
“and, no doubt by force of habit, had even found satisfactory”,
was so dull and predictable as to be
“absolutely the same — in short, the same sameness.”
The beautiful tree lined street of Unter den Linden was
“unbearably dusty”.
The little dancer, previously so graceful
“on the verge of a leap”
had already leapt. The blind man’s coat had changed
from an appealing light green to mixed grey.

Even the Beadle’s nose had turned pallid.

Disappointed,

“The only repetition was the impossibility of a repetition.”

(Kierkegaard 1983, *all from*, pp. 170-171).

In trying to relive his experiences, Constantin, unable to reproduce his past, gets caught in his own paradox:

When this had repeated itself several days, I became so furious, so weary of the repetition, that I decided to return home. My discovery was not significant, and yet it was curious, for I had discovered that there simply is no repetition and had verified it by having it repeated in every possible way (Kierkegaard 1983, p. 171).

When this had repeated itself several days, I became so furious, so weary of the repetition, that I decided to return home. My discovery was not significant, and yet it was curious, for I had discovered that there simply is no repetition and had verified it by having it repeated in every possible way (Kierkegaard 1983, p. 171).

His failure is humanity's gain, confirming his existence and reality of being, where all experiences are new, built by previous experiences, moments and memories. Had Constantin achieved his repetition he would have no memory of it, he would just be in another moment. Lacking temporality, there would be no past, present or future. Stuck in a Nietzschean world of the eternal recurrence, he would exist in singularity, devoid of comparison, ecstasy or euphoria, his only option, **to be**.

Copy, No Copy



Fig. 7

Questions of originality and authenticity lie at the heart of the 'copy', yet, it is not only the impossibility of repetition but also the newness of materials and the failure of the artist's hand to faithfully copy that inevitably leads to the new. However similar, or dependent on the original, a painting cannot be reproduced. By purely physical reasoning:

Since they are two in number, the material out of which one of them is made cannot be the material included in the other one (Gilson, 2020, p. 58).

It may be imitated, but even still, the 'copy' must now assume its own independent state of being. Whether a fake, imitation, or an honest appropriation, it is made of different materials, and evidently, due to its intention, at a different moment in time to the 'original'; either way it exists, as well as, and alongside the original.

Gilson goes on to describe that even with the most ardent copyist, there would be a difference in the quality of canvas, differing colours, the use of different brushes, and even if this proved indiscernible, he would not be using the same hand. So, what then of the artist reproducing his own work, well, this would just be another original. If authenticity is ascribed to the artist, then no matter how little they deviate from the original, the next painting is neither a repeat nor a copy but as something new, equally as truthful as the original. Any question of imitation is made redundant. As artist Bernard Pifferetti explains in an interview with Joe Fyfe in 2006,

Every painting crystallizes a survival and a rupture. It clearly says that the image is not imitation. The image is the difference made visible (Fyfe, 2006).

There are many cases of misappropriation, plagiarism, or straightforward fakery within art. When arrested in 1945, art forger Van Meegeren, accused of treason for selling a Vermeer to the Nazis, admitted to his forgery. Disbelieved by the Dutch authorities, he was asked to paint a copy:

"A copy," Van Meegeren is reported to have exclaimed, "I'll do better than that. Give me the materials and I will paint another Vermeer before witnesses" (Hogenboom, 2012).

Not to get side-tracked, but the point being that while he was certainly deceitful, he had not painted a Vermeer in the first place. He may well have wished to pass off his imitation as a Vermeer, but what he has painted is a Van Meegeren. They are both authentic, though only one an authentic Vermeer.

Heidegger takes this further in his question and title of his book *What is a Thing?*, disregarding the importance of the materiality and placing the emphasis on "place and time point":

The fact, one could say, that we cannot distinguish between the two exactly alike things does not prove that, in the end, they are not different. However, even assuming that two single things are simply alike, each is still this thing because each of these two pine needles is in another place; and if they are to occupy the same place, they can do so only at a different time point. Place and time point make even absolutely alike things be these very ones (je diesen), i.e., different ones. Insofar as each thing has its place, its time, and its time duration, there are never two same things (Heidegger, 1967, pp. 15-16).

There is no copy.

There is no copy.

The Still Life

The Low Life



Fig. 8

The objects of the still lifes were largely bought from local charity shops. They are mass produced low value objects, mainly ceramic figurines. It is not the aim to relate any story to these objects and any cultural or social importance is irrelevant to this study. They exist, for this purpose, only as objects. As the original subject and as things to paint. As Etienne Gilson observes in *Painting and Reality*:

If, by the word “subject” we mean the description of some scene or some action, then it can rightly be said that a still life has no subject ... The things a still life represents exercise only one single act, but it is the simplest and most primitive of all acts, namely, to be (Gilson, 2020, p. 24).

Perfect for this study, yet, to pretend that the objects hold no significance would be disingenuous. It may not be necessary to go into the specific detail of the object(s) subjectivity, but it is necessary to understand it as being present, if only to evaluate its continuing presence or absence within the painting. In his four essays in *Looking at the Overlooked* (1990), Norman Bryson gives a more substantive viewpoint. For while, Still life as a genre, is often overlooked and seen historically as of a lower order “at the bottom of the hierarchy, unworthy of the kind of superior attention reserved for history painting or the *grande maniere*” (Bryson, 1990, p. 8), it is its lowliness that is also its strength.

Often seen to be an expression of abundance, wealth and possession, especially within the Dutch Still Lifes of

the 17th Century, and as Barthes refers to, the “matter’s most superficial quality, sheen” (Barthes, 1972, p. 5), still lifes have equally dealt within the lower orders of everyday existence. Of the ‘kitchen’ still life paintings of Juan Sanchez Cotan, Bryson sees “as exercises in the renunciation of normal human priorities” (Bryson, 1990, p. 63). Drawing a distinction between the grandiose ‘megalography’ of historical or allegorical paintings, and Cotan’s ‘rhopography’ paintings, that which deal with the low value, mundane and trivial, Bryson points to a world where traditional values are overturned:

Cotan makes it the mission of his paintings to reverse this worldly mode of seeing by taking what is of least importance in the world – the disregarded contents of a larder – and by lavishing there the kind of attention normally reserved for what is of supreme value (Bryson, 1990, p. 64).

As Bryson explains, the two categories, ‘megalography’ and ‘rhopography’, are naturally ‘intertwined’. In order for there to be something of high importance there must be something of less importance. The cheap, trivial, mundane and everyday, must coexist with the expensive, important and unique. There is a hierarchy, but this is open to change, and only something society can evaluate. Trends and fashion are nothing new, values forever differ. This is not a modern trait: Cotan’s still lifes were painted sometime between 1561 and 1627.



Fig. 9

One of still lifes main detractors was Joshua Reynolds, himself a strong advocate for the 'Grand Manner', whereby art should seek to embellish nature to create idealised forms of the imperfect; not, as he criticised to slavishly copy it. In his *Discourses* (1769-1790), a series of lectures delivered at the Royal Academy, Reynolds largely denounces still life painting as closer to craft than art; that it is mechanical, lacking in thought and concerned mainly with imitation: "a mere matter of ornament; and the painter has but the humble province of furnishing our apartments with elegance" (Bryson, 1990, p. 175). Faint praise indeed, but he does offer some solace:

Even the painter of still life, whose highest ambition is to give a minute representation of every part of those low objects which he sets before him, deserves praise in proportion to his attainment; because no part of his excellent art, so much the ornament of polished life, is destitute of value and use (Bryson, 1990, p. 175).

Over obsessed with detail, realism, hyper-realism and trompe l'oeil;
Reynolds has a point.

If the objective is only to imitate, to copy, where is the art? Yet, were it just a matter of style, it remains unlikely that Reynolds would have been any more appreciative of still life painters such as, Morandi, Corbet, Manet or Soutine, who moved away from such 'minute representation'; nor the differing approaches of contemporary painters: Gillian Carnegie, Jenny Packer, or Katherine Bernhardt. No expression or intensity could ever elevate 'those low objects' to be equal to any within his grand manner.

If the still life has 'no subject' then the painting is also lacking in the 'general ideas' Reynolds considered essential to great art; the greatness of the painting directly proportionate to the hierarchical importance of the subject. If flower paintings were nothing without colour: "these petty excellencies (of colour) are here the essential beauties; and without their merit the artist's work will be more short lived than the object of his imitation" (Bryson, 1990, p. 176), it can be assumed that colour is their only importance. Far from being mere 'imitation', Reynolds appears to have unearthed arts' first instances of abstraction and acts of pure painting. The flip side being, if we place greater importance on the subjectivity, can the paintings ever lose their reliance on it. Are they always 'about' and never 'it'?

Are We In It?



Fig. 10

In our era of the post-postmodern or altermodern (Bourriaud), unlike Reynolds, we have little problem placing the oblique or understated on equal footing as the grand gesture, yet, one of still life's greatest reprovals still exists: that it largely fails to address the importance of the human plight. We, as humans, are not in it, and as a genre it: "negates the whole process of constructing and asserting human beings as the primary focus of depiction" (Bryson, 1990, p. 60).

If the aim or subject of the painting is to narrate a story, once read, we need to look further to the story and not the painting. If there is no story, we need to look at the painting. As Bryson puts it:

the whole principle of story telling is jeopardised or paralysed by the hearer's objection: 'so what?' But still life loves the 'so what?' (Bryson, 1990, p. 60).

The still life, while seemingly more particular, a straight-forward depiction of what is on the 'table', is possibly more intriguing for its lack of story. Closer to abstraction, and ultimately less particular to the painting. Yet, for all their colour, from the Dutch Still Lives to the violent explosive animation of Soutine, the muted palette of Morandi and Carnegie, or the vibrancy and emotion of Packer and the neon of Bernhardt, still life paintings are far from 'petty excellencies'. As I found out in my search for the mundane, inconsequential object, everything has baggage. There isn't an object devoid of cultural reference; from possessions of wealth to inane mass-produced tat, objects merely produced to be consumed, once deemed necessary but now discarded, everything has a tale to tell.

The cheap equally important as the expensive, the everyday objects of use or the ultimate vanity of desire - they speak of us.

Most notably known for her intimate portraits of friends and family, Jenny Packer instils the same level of political intensity into her flower paintings. Painted from life, and in reaction to institutional violence against black Americans, she has described her flower compositions as ‘funerary bouquets’ and ‘vessels of personal grief’. In *Say Her Name*, (2017), a painting made in memoriam to Sandra Bland, a Black American believed to have been murdered while in police custody, Packer puts ‘us’ very much centre stage:

The bouquets like ‘Say Her Name’ highlighted something that’s been true in my practice overall, which is this appreciation for observation and also understanding the emotional resonance of the things, the spaces in which we exist and around the people that we care about, whether we know them or not (Westall, 2020).

It may be ‘merely’ a flower still life, but as she is reported to have questioned in response to seeing Henri Fantin-Latours flower paintings: “How can a painting of a bouquet feel more compelling than a painting of a person? How do I feel the humanness of a thing?” (Manlaykhaf & McVeigh, 2020).

In contrast, Katherine Bernhardt’s paintings would appear to highlight “a light-hearted interpretation of banal or everyday subject matter” (Melic & Morrill, 2019, p. 30). Objects of ‘daily life’, fast food, cigarettes, basketballs, headphones, watermelons, Sharpies, bananas, trainers and socks. All jumbled together in what she describes as her ‘pattern paintings’; our consumer world shoved before us in large scale neon paintings, the repeated imagery indicative of our own profligacy. We are in it.

Rosalind Krauss points to Fredric Jameson characterisation of ‘postmodernity as the total saturation of cultural space by the image’, a saturation in which “aesthetic experience is now everywhere, in an expansion of culture that has not only made the notion of an individual work of art wholly problematic, but has also emptied out the very concept of aesthetic autonomy.” In what Jameson refers to as ‘a postmodern sensation’: “everything is now fully translated into the visible and the culturally familiar” (Krauss, 2000, p. 56).

Rather than being just an object to paint, I have stumbled into a genre hell bent on cultural reference and one that speaks of our very existence. Devoid of a particular story, one that: “finds the truth of human life in those things which greatness overlooks, the ordinariness of daily routine and the anonymous, creatural life of the table” (Bryson, 1990, p. 178).

So, can such imagery be ignored, and what of our expanded culture that makes ‘the notion of an individual work of art wholly problematic’?

The Object Paintings

Time and Labour



Fig. 11

All, bar two of the paintings, are painted onto a traditional substrate of wooden stretcher and canvas. *Object 14 & 15* are painted onto aluminium plates. There is no particular importance placed on the type of substrate other than to explain their make-up as objects in themselves. *Object 1-15* and *Objects 1-3* are painted in oils, all subsequent paintings were acrylic. While, there was no particular reason for this change, other than a personal choice, there were significant differences when it came to painting the 'repeat'.

All, bar one of the paintings were completed in sequence, one after another. Within each painting the first canvas setting the parameters that the rest will follow. Each individual canvas marking a period of time and labour unique to itself. There were no time limits set and each canvas was worked on until it reached a conclusion: essentially a satisfactory state of likeness to the previous. Most of the canvases within any of the paintings

were finished in one sitting. The length of the sitting varied, determined by the time taken to complete the canvas. In some instances, mainly with the larger Objects paintings the 'sitting' would stretch to the next day. Invariably, the repeat in all cases took longer than the painting of the first. There is an increased amount of time and concentration required to mix similar colours, and to execute similar marks. There are measurements, and a necessary order of marks that need to be followed. There is memory to overcome, and there is fatigue.

The first canvas is free of any such restrictions;

**the repeat, by nature, a more methodical
and calculating experience.**



Fig. 12

Where there are two canvases, this fundamental difference in the way they are painted is more keenly felt. With increased repeats the act of painting becomes somewhat less intense. The repeat of the repeat is painted under similar conditions, it comes under less scrutiny, and with experience a sense of understanding and learning is implemented.

The first repeat is always the hardest.

Working in sequence there is more of a sense of a painting repeated,



more distinguishable moments in time, one after another.



When painted simultaneously, as in Object 17, there is no first and last, and consequently the moment and labour time is equally shared. The result is very similar, but the process: sequentially repeated marks, a very different dynamic.



There were some advantages (mainly in the mixing of paint) and gone was the sense of the methodical repeat. There are artists who have worked very successfully in this simultaneous fashion, most notably: Robert Rauschenberg in the making of *Factum I* and *Factum II* (1957), or Cecilia Edefalk, who often uses repetition in her paintings, in *In the painting the painting* (1995-1996). Yet, it felt somehow unconvincing, and ultimately a very unnatural way to work. I may return to it, but for now *Object 17* is the only painting completed in this way.

The Paint



Fig. 13

In the individually painted canvases, the colours were mixed afresh within each repeat. This was not such a dilemma when using oils, as the colour differs only slightly from wet to dry. In fact, due to the extended drying time most were still wet at the time of the repeat. However, when switching to acrylics there was a noticeable difference between the wet and the dried colour, and allowances had to be made to counteract the difference.

While there is no intention within the Object paintings to create an exact copy, and differences are naturally welcomed, Etienne Gilson recounts an example which highlights this material understanding. Amaury-Duval, a pupil of Ingres, creates a copy of Ingres portrait of M. Bertin. He does so with Ingres's blessing and succeeds to such a degree that on examining the recently finished copy: "Ingres simply concluded: 'I would willingly sign it.'" The problem for Amaury-Duval comes some years later, when revisiting his work. He finds that his version has darkened, and when painting the copy, had failed to consider any darkening of the paint that had already taken place in Ingres's original (Gilson, 2020, p. 60).

Within the Object paintings the period between each painted canvas is not sufficient to expect any noticeable difference in aging. They will age together, that is, if their material make-up is similar. This is probably most true of the acrylic paintings, and despite the initial problem of the change in colour as the paint dries, they are essentially more stable. Without getting too scientific, the acrylic paint dries by vaporization, a relatively fast process, and once dry there is little change in their consistency. The oil paints, however, will continue to 'dry' as the oil within the paint oxidises and hardens, and are less predictable. Essentially, they continue to change, and under relatively normal indoor settings are more likely to crack or yellow (Jones, 2004). How this affects the Object paintings, only time will tell, and any incidental cracking or yellowing only serves to highlight the individuality of each canvas, and its means of existence.



Fig. 14

Most repeats were painted the following day. Where there is a longer period between the repeat, it is only a matter of days. The only exception to this was *Objects 1*. The second painting was completed two months later. This was partly circumstance, but also an uncertainty about the painting itself. It was only after the first two paintings of *Objects 2* were completed that I returned to *Objects 1*. Perhaps, still unsure about the painting, I decided to repeat it anyway. Logic suggested that it was the repeat that was necessary, and any judgement as to whether I was 'happy' with the original largely irrelevant. This slight irreverence had come about in the painting of *Objects 2* and was a move away from the now seemingly rigid 'formula' of the single motif Object paintings.

In *Objects 2*, the first painting was never really resolved into what was, at the time, considered a satisfactory state. At the end of painting on the first day the top right-hand corner was scraped away, with the intention that it was completed on returning. However, that is how it stayed, there was nothing else I wanted to add, and it was to be repeated in the same way. The limits had been set, whether complete or not, and at the end of the second day I scraped away the top right-hand corner of the second canvas. This process continued each day until the six canvases, and indeed the whole, was complete. Slightly more naively painted, it highlighted the 'repeat' as a moment in time, the process and act of painting, rather than just the repeated object. In some ways, it acted as a release, and the following Object paintings, *Object 16-19* and *Objects 3-7*, were afforded greater variation in their execution.



Fig. 15

While each Object painting is made through a repetitive process, repeating its individual parts, it must also be seen as a whole. Whether the number of 'repeated paintings is two, four or six, each individual canvas is only part of the whole artwork. There is always going to be a repeat, with one being the least possible for the artwork to exist. The first canvas is only a part of the painting; the second canvas is not so much a repeat of the first but rather the second half of the whole. Equally, if there are four canvases, each makes up a quarter of the artwork. The final artwork is not four times one (though this is how the artwork comes into being), but a whole of four parts:

4/4 as opposed to 1x4 or 1+1+1+1

The number of repetitions is not always predetermined. Yet, whether, a conscious decision or out of circumstance, the number of repetitions is finite to the artwork (the whole painting). While each canvas is a 'finished' individual painting in itself, it does not exist as an artwork in isolation, only in combination do they constitute 'the painting'.

As individual canvases, in theory there could always be another repeat, they could continue ad infinitum. This would, however, create a series of ongoing individual paintings, or perhaps an ever changing whole. The painting would never be complete, or indeed completed. This is perhaps a moot point, as we can only view what is presented to us. An unfinished painting is no longer an unfinished painting when viewed. It is a totality; it is what it is. It is no more unfinished as a painting, as a finished painting is finished. If another canvas is added, or indeed taken away, the painting is only what we are confronted with. Other repetitions may exist, but if we are not aware of them, they do not exist as part of the painting experienced. If we are made aware of them, it becomes what we can see plus the knowledge of more. The painting changes from 'what we see', 'to what we see, plus imagined others'.

Within this process there are two overarching decisions needed: when is the first canvas completed and how many repetitions will make up the whole. Artist, Peter Dreher who painted the same empty glass over 5000 times, initially only intended to paint five or six so "people could understand what I meant", and yet: "then I felt like doing another and another – and now there are 5,000" (Dreher & Spira, 2014, p. 19).

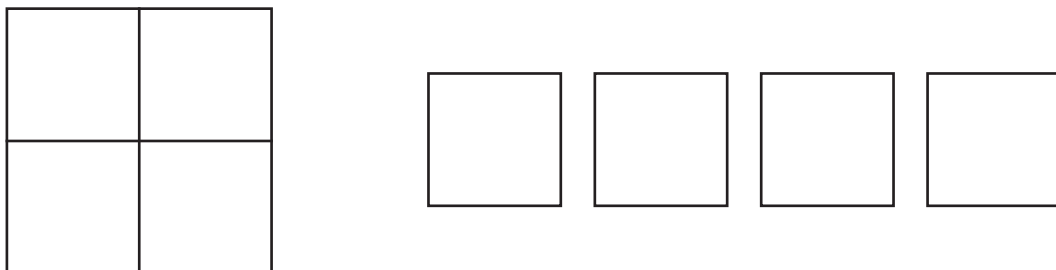
Since 1974, Peter Dreher painted the same empty glass over 5000 times. Each painting 25 x 20cm, the glass is centred on a neutral background.

That Dreher did not see them as a series, nor as one piece of work, but as thousands of individual paintings may explain the quantity.

Each painting is a new event, a new moment, a new day, there is no repetition and no sense of an overall painting or artwork being complete.

There is never a reason to move on to a new subject; individual paintings have been completed, but there is not a whole to work to - the next new painting is a straight-sided cider glass sitting on a table. Everything is in a similar place (glass, table, canvas), yet the state of being, the act of painting is unique, and only in that moment. They may have a collective title, *Tag um Tag guter Tag (Every Day is a Good Day)* (1974-2014), and have often been exhibited together, grid-like, in groups of various numbers, making it difficult not to see them as one painting, yet, from the artists point of view they are neither a series nor a whole, they remain individual.

The question as to how many repeats becomes somewhat simpler if the repeats are confined to the same canvas (something I have used in earlier paintings). The number of repeats is predetermined, the overall dimensions set. Even still, there is an option not to repeat and leave an area blank, something Pifferetti has occasionally resorted to, or to repeat the whole.



In Pifferetti's paintings the canvas is split in two, down the centre, with the same image 'repeated' left and right. The centre mark, the split, is often a single line, that seemingly belongs to the whole; it is the only unrepeated mark. It halves the picture plane; the surface and the number of repetitions is immediately defined.

The repeats are held within the confines of the canvas's object quality, its 'objectness', its being, and there is no sense that another repeat exists, or ever could. The two inherently belong to one, their position as left and right fulfilling the whole. They are more obviously one painting, the individuality of the two separate halves becoming one image with repeated marks. Even when the repeat is unresolved (one half left blank), the canvas still defines the whole, the repeat is implied and the painting complete.

In most of the Object Paintings, there is only one repeat (two canvases), in others there are four or six canvases. As the numbers increase it is initially the sameness that comes to the fore: there is strength in numbers as the canvases form a collective. The superficiality of the imagery binds them together, patterns emerge and there is a greater spectacle of fluctuating colour and brushstroke. There is no pre-set number of repetitions. Perhaps two parts are enough, the whole is complete and there is no inclination to produce more – the next painting is already in mind. On other occasions there feels a need to go further, to explore a greater number of repetitions, an increase in ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’, and ultimately to move away from binary comparisons.

The First Object Painting



Fig. 16

Object 1, oil on canvas, 2 x (40 x 30cm),

The figurine is photographed against a black background. Both canvasses were painted in the same day, one after another.

The painting consists of two canvases: the same image painted on each canvas. The two individual paintings are complete in their own right but form one piece of artwork. The first canvas is painted with direct reference to the figurine, or more particularly, a photograph of the figurine, the second painting is painted from the first. Each canvas is 40cm x 30cm, the image slightly larger than the original figurine. There is no reference to scale, other than our knowledge of the average size of such a figurine, designed for shelf or mantelpiece.

Working from the photograph, the first painting starts loosely, the figure blocked in, the proportions and composition marked. The dark background, a reference to 17th Century Dutch Still Lifes (though equally a common photographic archival trait), is added. The background colour, a mixture of Burnt umber and Prussian blue, veers more to the umber, slightly warmer than the photograph.

The same brush is used throughout the painting, brush marks differing in thickness through pressure, angle and adjacent strokes. Other than proportions, little truth to detail is preserved from the tightly painted original. Arms become single brush strokes, the dress a variety of flowing green marks, the under-dress a

swirl of pink and white paint. The detail of the face is lost by the thickness of the brush and a downward slanting stroke serves as both eye and nose. An image may be read from these marks, though ultimately, they serve as abstract movements of paint whose reality lies in their substance and their relation to each other.

The second canvas perhaps highlights this simultaneity. The painting is 'copied' from the first painting, further distancing itself from the original subject. Maintaining a freshness, a sense of energy and spontaneity is problematic, certainly initially. There is a sense of performance, a hesitancy and lack of freedom that the first painting possessed. A question over the ability to 'repeat' hangs heavy; there is a tension, a sense of fallibility. However, once the second painting is in process, the natural order of creating a painting takes over. Marks respond to marks, brushstrokes naturally follow one another and colours merge and mingle within their own confines. The aim being not to copy but to produce marks of equal quality. The slash of paint that describes the face in the first painting, becomes a slash of paint that mimics the first slash in the second painting. The dash of red, once giving notion to the mouth of the figurine becomes another dash referring to the first. Although the marks are new and different, there are similarities and it is difficult not to be drawn into a game of 'spot the difference' as the eye wanders back and forth.

The Act of Painting

The Painting as an Object



Fig. 17 i



Fig. 17 ii

Though subtle, the difference between the repeated image and the repeated painting appears to be more than semantics. Within the individual canvases of the Object paintings, as opposed to numerous repeats on a single canvas, there is a greater feeling of 'a painting' repeated. Like Dreher, standing in front of a new blank canvas, beginning a new event, I am in the same position, the dimensions and physicality of the canvas the same. There is a feeling of *déjà vu*. I am not moving along a row, shifting position, lifting the canvas to paint the bottom images. There is nothing adjacent to it, touching it, I cannot invade the next painting. I am held within its confines. There is autonomy in its existence and a greater sense of individuality. The collective is less assured and there is a vulnerability to the whole: that they could exist alone, that there could always be another, or that one could be taken away. They are less defined as a group, they are not 'penned in', their space and position changeable. Individually they have a substance, they are objects in themselves.

Michel Foucault refers to Manet as one of the first artists to really understand the materiality and objectness of the canvas: "And Manet reinvents [or perhaps he invents] the picture-object, the picture as materiality, the picture as something coloured which clarifies an external light and in front of which, or about which, the viewer revolves" (Foucault, 2011, p. 31).

Not only acknowledging the painted surface, but also its being as an object that light shines upon and in front of which we stand. Whereas previously art had sought in some ways to deceive the viewer "to make the viewer forget, to try to mask and sidestep the

fact that painting was put down or inscribed on a certain fragment of space” (Foucault, 2011, p. 29), Manet, in his acceptance of the two-dimensional plane, highlights the three-dimensional quality of the ‘picture-object’:

Manet certainly did not invent non-representative painting because everything in Manet is representative, but he made a representational play of the fundamental material elements of the canvas. He was therefore inventing, if you like, the ‘picture-object’, the ‘painting object’, and this no doubt was the fundamental condition so that finally one day we can get rid of representation itself and allow space to play with its pure and simple properties, its material properties (Foucault, 2011, p. 79).

Such ‘objectness’ is not defined by excessive substance, such as impasto paint or the thickness of the canvas, but by the very fact of its being, its ontological presence, its existence as a physical object, its existence as being a painting. While each canvas of the Object paintings is essentially traditional in its make-up: oil or acrylic on canvas, it is not a case of trying to make a painting a ‘thing’ but to recognise it as a thing. Its size, shape, or depth is irrelevant. It doesn’t need to be imposingly physical or sculptural, but essentially for the painting itself to contain the subject. To be a painting, rather than just a painting of something. As Gillian Carnegie said of her own paintings, “I prefer to consider the painting as a thing in the world than the painting as a picture of



Fig. 18

things in the world” (Wilson, 2013). Important here is the word ‘prefer’, as it’s not quite as simple as something that is just willed.

This sense of honesty to materiality is certainly important in trying to understanding where the subject lies, but only through its inherence as a subject can the painting truly shed what Fried refers to as: “the relational character of almost all painting and the ubiquitousness, indeed the virtual inescapability, of pictorial illusion” (Fried, 1998, p. 149).

In an ever-increasing image-based culture, painting may never “get rid of representation itself”, but it can still “play with its pure and simple properties” (Foucault, 2011, p. 79).

‘Dumb like a Painter’



Fig. 19

In his essay *Modernist Painting* (1965) Clement Greenberg put great emphasis on the physicality and medium specificity of painting; stressing the need for purity, abolishing all that is external, both physically and aesthetically to painting itself. Essential to this was the acknowledgement of its materiality and the flatness of the picture plane itself:

One is made aware of the flatness of their pictures before, instead of after, being made aware of what the flatness contains. Whereas one tends to see what is in an Old Master before one sees the picture itself, one sees a Modernist picture as a picture first (Greenberg, 1965, p. 6).

Greenberg's Modernism doesn't necessarily call for the abandonment of representational imagery "in principle", but rather: "What it has abandoned in principle is the representation of the kind of space that recognizable objects can inhabit" (Greenberg, 1965, p. 6). Fairly much one and the same thing, for even the hint of representation "The fragmentary silhouette of a human figure, or of a teacup" (Greenberg, 1965, p. 6) would serve as an allusion to a three-dimensional space. To maintain its autonomy, lest it got confused with sculpture, painting was to take on its Kantian self-criticism, and the answer was abstraction.

Gilson, similarly keen on the materiality of the painting and the abolishment of the external, makes a distinction between 'pictures' and 'painting', where the 'art of "picturing" – that is, doing pictures' is essentially to represent or imitate, and within which there is immediate pleasure in the recognition of faces or objects. It is directly reliant on the external reality it imitates, whereas: "A painting has its own rule, its own justification within itself ... As it is, all judgments and appreciations of paintings founded upon their relation to an external model are irrelevant to painting" (Gilson, 2020, p. 243).

In both Greenberg and Gilson, painting is treated as an independent entity. A closed shop, in which its materiality and medium specificity is its only subject. A dead-end street that led to Ad Reinhardt's claim of his 'black' paintings, "I am merely making the last painting which anyone can make" (Kellein, 1985). Perhaps tongue in cheek, as Reinhardt continued to 'repeat' many versions of the same black painting, the only thing he had to say needed to be said again and again, "No object, no subject, no matter. No symbols, images, or signs" (Schwabsky, 2020, p34).

Famously in opposition to Greenberg's Modernist theory, critic Rosalind Krauss saw

such a drive for purity and “a definition of the medium as mere physical object, in all its reductiveness and drive toward reification” (Krauss, 2000, p. 6) as lacking in complexity, and that Greenberg’s “whole relationship to art was incredibly teleological” (Plante, 2013). Rather than raising the separate arts to one unifying notion of Art, Modernism had become: “the stupefying particularity of individual techniques, of everything that embeds practice in the tedium of its making: “Dumb like a painter,” they say” (Krauss, 2000, p. 9).

In aligning painting, or indeed, any art form solely to its substance, created an insularity that meant it could only ever be about itself:

The specific mediums - painting, sculpture, drawing - had vested their claims to purity in being autonomous, which is to say that in their declaration of being about nothing but their own essence, they were necessarily disengaged from everything outside their frames (Krauss, 2000, p. 11).

Krauss’s criticism is not so much of the medium itself, but how it was perceived as merely a physical substance. Paintings introspection and self-defining purity, placed solely on its being, was, in Krauss’s ‘post-medium condition’, pretty “Dumb”. Her call for artists to invent their own medium, was not that a new substance should be created, but that the medium should be used for a cause: “the specificity of mediums, even modernist ones, must be understood as differential, self-differing, and thus layering conventions never simply collapsed into the physicality of their support” (Krauss, 2000, p. 53).

If Modernism was too limiting and prescriptive, it nonetheless provided an extreme from which painting could proceed. In Krauss’s wish to erase the term ‘medium’, to “bury it like so much critical toxic waste, and walk away from it into a world of lexical freedom” (Krauss, 2000, p. 5), there are many terms within the notion of painting that equally seem too contaminated. When talking of ‘objectness’, ‘materiality’, or ‘picture-object’, such terms should be seen in their contemporary context as well as their historical origins. Within this, even the term ‘Painting’ becomes somewhat anachronistic. Contemporary painting can be made of, or, in any medium, and in any conceivable way. It is not specific, and yet comes within a label that is. As artist Joseph Kosuth famously wrote:

Being an artist now means to question the nature of art. If one is questioning the nature of painting, one cannot be questioning the nature of art. If an artist accepts painting (or sculpture) he is accepting the tradition that goes with it. That’s because the word art is general and the word painting is specific (Kosuth, 1991, p. 18).

So, where does this leave paintings of paintings made of paint?

Paint, Painting, Paintings



Fig. 20

The Object paintings are made of paint on a canvas and wood substrate, they are undoubtedly paintings, and they are objects; they sit in a 'post-medium condition'. Such contradictions are central to their making.

they are made of paint

they are paintings

they are paintings of paintings

they use paint

they are not paint

they are painting

the act of painting

the painting is painting

painting is an action

painting is an experience

painting is a memory

the paintings are not paint

the paintings are painting

the paintings are paintings of painting itself painting

A painting need not be made of paint, but a painting can be made of paint. As Isabelle Graw writes, "Once the medium can no longer be delimited, then no qualities can be inherent to it. Its character, rather, depends on how the artist will proceed with it" (Graw et al, 2012, p. 48).

It may no longer be medium-specific, and though 'Painting' as a term may have expanded into different forms and refer to a variety of mediums - at which maybe it should be considered as just 'art' - it does not preclude the use of paint. Within this expanded notion, paint is not the only medium of expression, but it is one of them, and with it comes all its historical context, and its familiarity. Paintings' path, like all art, is not a linear timeline, "It develops by going backward, sideways, around, in, and over – and, yes, sometimes, but only sometimes, by going forward" (Schwabsky, 2019, p. x).

That as a culture we have moved from Modernism, to Postmodernism or Altermodernism, it is not that previous practices should be dismissed, but that we are forced to consider them in a different light; as artist and audience, we are a product of our times. To understand our own context as present, we need to look to the past and equally to the future, “today’s painting is not necessarily more conscious than modernist painting, but it is conscious of different things” (Schwabsky, 2019, p. 8).

Painting has moved away from “self referentiality to self-reflexivity” (Graw et al, 2012, p. 11), to move within its societal context and not above or as a separate entity. Painting today may take on many forms and influences, but by virtue of its title “Painting” and all its reference, can only really succeed “by coming to terms with its own gratuitousness” (Schwabsky, 2019, p. 257). It doesn’t solve any problems, but essentially aware of its context, can question and play within its own being, “They are paintings, yes, but also allegories of painting” (Schwabsky, 2019, p. 14).



Fig. 21

Contemporary painting is not so concerned with being a vehicle to represent an image, but that the image becomes a way to represent ‘the painting’s idea of painting’:

That is one reason there is so little contradiction now between abstract and representational painting: in both cases, the painting is not there to represent the image; the image exists to represent the painting (that is, the painting’s idea of painting) (Schwabsky, 2019, p. 10).

The painting, the ‘picture-object’, very much the subject, yet accepting it as purely autonomous is another matter. There may be ‘little contradiction’ between abstraction and representation, but there will always be questions as to what it is ‘a painting of’, rather than it just being seen as ‘a painting’; a tendency to look outside of the painting, and not within. It is a “virtual inescapability” (Fried, 1998, p. 149), one where notions of ‘representational’ or ‘abstract’ are hard to ignore, but of equal irrelevance. Abstract painting is often regarded as painting that is most essentially about itself, but either can refer to an outside source. They are interchangeable. ‘Abstract’ painting is no less about nothing than ‘representation’ is about something. Both serve as labels imploring the viewer to look externally for the subject.

If both use paint, colour and brushstrokes, there is little physical distinction between them. In terms of the ‘materiality’ they are the same, and as such, in terms of the ‘picture-object’, they are also the same. Both may refer to an external source as the subject, yet equally, the subject may also be inherent in both. That we see a glass in Dreher’s paintings is no different, subjectively, to the imagery that we may imagine in Pifferetti’s. Any visual difference between the artists’ work comes down to the arrangement of the paint on the surface of the canvas. As Maurice Denis is often quoted from his article, *Définition du néo-traditionnisme* (1890):

It is well to remember that a picture - before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote - is essentially a plane surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order (Krauss, 2000, p. 6).

Not just its materiality or flatness, but as Krauss refers to in difference to Greenberg:

he is instead describing the layered, complex relationship that we could call a recursive structure – a structure, that is, some of the elements of which will produce the rules that generate the structure itself (Krauss, 2000, p. 6).

The materiality of the paint and the representation are not mutually exclusive; the marks of paint are the representation. It is a combination of these marks, and their configuration, that result in what we call ‘representational’, or, a combination of these marks, in a different position ‘abstract’. Not only does our brain recognise these marks

as having some kind of equivalent in a natural world, but such recognition can also trigger a neurological response similar to seeing the original of what is represented. According to a study published in *Social Neuroscience*, we now react to emoticons as real faces ' :-) '. It is thought that the 'emoticon' originated around 1982, and that prior to this a semicolon, dash, bracket would not have produced such recognition. Dr Owen Churches described it as "an entirely culturally-created neural response" (Hudson, 2014).

Furthermore, the research found that whilst this combination, in this order:

:-)

activated such a response, when reversed:

(-:

this was not so. The marks are the same, just a different configuration.

Whether innate or learned, such powerful processes of recognition are difficult to ignore or unlearn. It is perhaps just easier for the viewer to readily accept representational painting. There is something for the viewer to recognise, the 'what is it?' is immediately satiated.

However, there is little difference between them within the actuality of the painting. Dreher doesn't set out to paint an illusion of a glass, but "simply sets down islands of colour next to each other" and, "Thus, an abstract painting has come into being, in which one can also see a glass" (Dreher & Spira, 2014, p. 108).

A Cat, or Not a Cat? (Fact or Fiction)



Fig. 22

In an interview in 2013, Carnegie told journalist Simon Grant, “What my drawings depict doesn’t concern me as much as drawing them. I’m just not concerned with knowing about, say, what images tell us. That cat, those stairs, these flowers, this or that tree is really just a support for drawing itself” (Wroe & Grant, 2013).

Schwabsky takes up on this is a chapter from his book *Gillian Carnegie* (2020); the title of the chapter taken from Carnegie’s own words ‘What Images Tell Us’:

But surely it’s a paradox, painting cats and trees and the rest while asking the beholder not to think too much about cats and trees? (Schwabsky, 2020, p.33).

Written about Carnegie’s paintings, such a paradox is equally at the heart of trying to understand the status of the image, the original subject, within the Object paintings. Back to Matisse and Magritte, is this paradox only relevant to the painting in its singularity, or does it remain within the multiple? Can one paradox be cancelled by another, that is if we add repetition.

While not repetitions as such, although she does ‘copy’ or ‘repeat’ smaller paintings to make larger ones, Carnegie’s paintings often return to the same motifs: trees, staircases, dried flowers and cats.

Within each category the motifs are often painted differently, but unlike Dreher’s glass that responds to differing light reflections, Carnegie’s paintings seemingly ignore any particularity to the moment and its effect on the object. There is a distance and deflection away from any singular verisimilitude, yet, at the same time there is a surface realism to many of her paintings that leads to a definite recognition of the objects by the viewer, and that far from being generic by category, as: tree, cat, flower, they are specifically: that tree, “that black cat, these dried flowers” (Schwabsky, 2020, p.37). What species, breed or truth to reality is inconclusive: “I think I can see that it is the same black cat each time, that (at least until she later starts painting a white cat — or painting a cat white) she always paints that cat, whatever its name is” (Schwabsky, 2020, p.37).

The cat may change colour but it is still the same cat. The same flowers in a cut off water bottle, the same tree, yet, they all reappear in different guises from painting to painting.

This cat that I always recognize as the same one is nonetheless no cat in particular, the flowers no flowers in particular, in the sense that there is no evident significance attached to the fact that it is this cat and not another, those flowers and not others. Their specificity is allied to something generic (Schwabsky, 2020, p.37).

They may have no particularity to reality, but they do to themselves, and it is seemingly in the repetition or appropriation that the specificity lies. As in the objects of the Object paintings, Dreher's glass or Edefalk's figures there is a familiarity that comes from within the repeat. Any truth to the original becomes increasingly lost, as each time the cat appears its specificity is to its previous and equally to its next appearance.

In Edefalk's painting *Echo* (1992-94), a series of twelve self-portraits, we see a three-quarter profile of a woman. The first is painted from a photograph, the second from the first, the third from the second, and so on. It could be Edefalk, it could be anybody. The paintings are of differing sizes, some mirror each other, others are hung upside-down and one appears to have been erased. In the singular we may search for external likeness, but as a collective we are forced engage within the work. Each painting speaks to and of the other, forcing the viewer around the room, consumed by the confines of an "autonomous entity" (Edefalk, 1999, p. 53).

There is a woman and **there is another one,**

there are likenesses, but they are different.

When you look at my self-portraits, it seems like you always are seeing the same figure. If you look carefully, however, you will notice that they are painted very differently, and that each bears a different expression (Edefalk, 1999, p. 53).

The first painting is a painting of a photograph of Cecilia Edefalk; the subject already reproduced. The second is a painting of the first painting. The image of a woman still remains, but it is not a painting of Cecilia Edefalk. It is a painting of a painting that is a painting of a photograph of Cecilia Edefalk. The only truth to reality is that it is a painting by Cecilia Edefalk.

We are forced away from the original subject towards the collective values of the twelve paintings, the sameness, and ultimately to the individual qualities of each painting distinguished by differences. As the reliance on an external reference recedes the individual parts take on greater significance, increased individuality and towards a Jungian sense of individuation:

the process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology. Individuation, therefore, is a process of differentiation, having for its goal the development of the individual personality (Jung, 2017, p. 411).

As each subsequent painting questions the validity of the previous, rather than devaluing the unique, it serves to intensify it. The repetition, in Edefalk's words, "a way to underline the uniqueness of a painting" (Edefalk, 1999, p. 53). The image may be devalued through proliferation, but not the individual canvases; within the 'repeats' the image is generic, the paintings are specific. Any importance placed on the likeness to Cecilia Edefalk, is finally abolished, and with it, any misplaced definitive, unveiling an ever-changing form that speaks of life itself. The paintings may well be a 'self-portrait', but they have little to do with likeness to appearance. As Daniel Birnbaum points out in his essay 'Angelic, Demonic: On Cecilia Edefalk':

The personal appears not in the form of a confident assertion of a unique self, but rather in those marginal, sometimes hardly detectable deviations which produce difference in repetitions (Edefalk, 1999, p. 52).

In Edefalk's *Another Movement* (1990), seven paintings of differing sizes, the original image is taken from a magazine advert for sun cream. The cream absent, we see a man touching the back of a woman sitting in the sun. We don't know the characters, nor the story and in the singular it is an anonymous, ubiquitous advertising image. Yet, the longer we spend with the paintings and the more we become involved, the slight changes within the repetitions offer both familiarity and individualisation.

In the first painting the imagery may have specificity to the original subject, though essentially is a work of fiction, as any truth to reality is dispelled in its translation to a painting. Through repetition the external specificity is lost, and the image becomes generic. Its specificity is only to itself, within the repeats and the painting as a whole. As Pifferetti said of his own repetition:

The painting will, in the end, never represent anything. It will present painting, representing itself in its intimacy and its difference (Fyfe, 2006).

The Obviousness of 'Globs'



Fig. 23

In her desire to differentiate the imagery from the painting, Carnegie describes her own work “as filling the space with miniature abstractions as I don’t imagine my paintings as a surface made from images” (Schwabsky, 2020, p. 115). As Michael Archer points out, even in his most photorealistic paintings, Malcolm Morely’s concerns when painting, were not of an overall illusion, but of a small area he has masked off, limiting his concerns to only that of colour and not to what his marks might represent (Dreher & Spira, 2014, p. 16). Morley himself states:

So, each section receives the same attention, has the same value and you get away from the idea of foreground and background (Wroe, 2013).

Morley is clearly dealing with an idea of ‘pure’ painting, only on a more microscopic level. However, without the knowledge of Morely’s methods, this may remain undetected by the viewer, and brings into question whether scale is an important factor in understanding the subject of the painting. Photorealistic painting is by nature illusionistic but fundamentally its make-up is no different to any large-scale abstract painting. The size of brush mark or thickness of paint, while relative to the size of the painting, should not necessarily define its intention. How small the brushstrokes, or how well they are hidden, are not criteria to judge their existence. Morley talks of the “physical reality of the surface” (Wroe, 2013), and although his intentions are to create an illusion, a representation of a photograph, he is fundamentally making a painting that understands its own reality. He is trying to make a painting that looks like a photograph, but he is not trying to deceive us that it is a photograph. As he appreciated in Velasquez:

When you look at Velásquez, they look like [globs] that he’s flicked on the canvas, and you stand back, it’s this astonishing diamond (McDermott, 2015).

Perhaps it comes down to the obviousness of the ‘globs’, and what we experience as the viewer. The loose ‘globs’ of Velasquez can be observed close-up, but mostly we just see a ‘diamond’. So, in order to appreciate the ‘globs’ and see beyond the purely representational, do we need to zoom in? To make the ‘globs’ bigger, of greater scale, or do we just need to look more closely. Cecilia Edefalk offers her own solution: “I want to keep alive a certain vulnerability that functions both as integrity and openness, and lets the viewer enter into the painting. I seek to achieve a kind of clumsiness, in order to enhance the brushstroke” (Edefalk, 1999, p. 55).

Carnegie seeks a similar openness, but through different means, describing how “separating the image from the marks that make it engages a complex relationship between observation and experience”, at which Schwabsky reasons, “so that as viewers we engage with how the image is painted more than with what the image is” (Schwabsky, 2020, p. 51).

Within two of the Object paintings, Object 10 and Object 16, there is a change of scale, with the latter four times the size. The brush strokes are broader and more obvious, the marks less frequent and the colour more muted. There is a greater sense of 'clumsiness', and yes, to stand in front of it, there is, perhaps, an easier route for the viewer. It is in many ways a simpler painting. Yet, the image of the figurine remains, and much like reading the emoticon, while flatter and less defined it is at the same time just as obvious.

The imagery is more generic, less particular to the original object, but more particular to itself. It is no particular 'dog-in-bag', but it is *that* 'dog-in-bag'. There is a greater play between the painted mark, as independent as just a brushstroke and collectively within the imagery it apparently depicts. A play that creates a tension, a push and pull, between the painting and the picture. The 'picture-object' seemingly intact, yet so is the image. As Schwabsky writes of Carnegie, her "work does not promote form or technique over subject, but instead pursues the rigor of form and technique precisely to better catch sight of the point of non-contact between form and subject" (Schwabsky, 2020, p. 51).

All painting needs some point of departure. Painter Cecily Brown sees the subject as "something to hang the paint on" (Bech Dyg, 2014), for Carnegie it is "just a support for the painting itself, a means to an end" (Schwabsky, 2020, p. 51). Like Morely and Dreher, there is an apparent need to distance themselves from the image or object in order to solely concentrate on the act of painting. The supposed constraints set by the original subject, allowing for greater freedom (rather than less), and ultimately, to a more concentrated act of painting. As Dreher describes, an "ego-less state ... almost independent of what you are painting, independent of the motif itself" (Dreher & Spira, 2014, p. 16).



Fig. 24

In Dreher's *Tag um Tag guter Tag* (1974-2014), the paintings are never repeated. What he repeats is a situation. Each painting is a new response to the still life. The light is different, as are reflections and background colours. Some are painted at night, some in daylight. They are unique responses to a unique situation. The paintings are individual, but there is a 'sameness' that draws them together, in: size, composition, brush mark and the same use of muted colours. There is no hint of duplication, rather, an honest repeated act devoid of artifice.

In Piffaretti, Edefalk, and indeed the Object paintings, this is a different matter. The 'repeats' are of an image or painting. While, never faithful copies, the initial image is mimicked in the 'repeat'. The first painting is fresh and impulsive, the second, systematically methodical and deliberate. The original painting is original, the next an original response to the first. They are both individual but wholly dependent on each other. Is one art the other artifice, or are both equally authentic? Whether made in sequence or simultaneously, in either case, there is a series of repeated marks that question the original.

When Rauschenberg made *Factum I* and *Factum II* (1957), he did so, as Robert Hughes suggests: "to refute the myth of abstract expressionist spontaneity, on which the special authenticity of the painting was thought to depend" (Hughes, 2006). He goes on to describes the elements of photo-collage and typography as identical in both pictures, and whilst this is debatable, he points to the "accidental" drip and "casual" smudge of the paint as "not precisely identical...they are only similar, but that is enough" and that:

In the very act of mimicking the heat of the creative moment, they give a perfect and ruthless critique of the very notion of accident (Hughes, 2006).

It is not only the repeat that is questioned but also the original and as Pifferetti put it, (Fyfe, 2006)

"It is already the memory
of what will be produced on
the other half of the canvas."



Fig. 25

Had Dreher painted only one glass, it may be difficult to move away from the illusionistic quality of the painting. It is hard not to see the first painting as anything other than representational. We see a glass, reflections and all, sitting on a table. Yet, he always intended to paint another, up to five or six. He is already anticipating the next, and in doing so is already referring to the painting as the subject and not the glass:

I was always cautious about narrative pictures charged with meaning. But an individual painting loses its relationship with reality as soon as it is repeated. It is just a painting (Dreher & Spira, 2014, p.19).

Similarly, for Pifferetti :

The simple act of redoing almost identically everything (every think) that was painted the first time around has the effect of cutting off any subjective effects due to the painting's form, style or color, so that it is now just painting (Fyfe, 2006).

**Within both artists work
is the importance of the doing,
the action of the repeat;
the painting or paintings
the result of the action made visible,**

the process essentially the subject.

As in the Object paintings, they are not concerned with the proliferation of images but rather with of a repeated process of experience.

We wash, dress go to work, seemingly repetitive actions. We do so readily the next day, we revisit the same place, we do the same things, but they are always different. We take a break from the monotony at the weekend, and then we go again. Our weekly experiences of sameness are not isolated incidents but an accumulation. We learn from them and become grounded through the comparative differences.

In our own Sisyphean world, it is the very 'repetition' that keeps us going:

This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself, forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy (Camus, 2005, p. 119).

What we see in the numerous paintings of Dreher, is not the glass, but his own daily routine. The activity his 'time and place point', the painting, the 'thing', a document of his unique experience: "“What is a thing?” A thing is always a this one (je dieses)” (Heidegger, 1967, p.18). The subject lies in the act of painting, the moment is 'his' reality. It is not just in the substance of the paint, or the materiality of the canvas, but within the process; the action of the 'repeat' in some ways more important than the result. The paintings possess what Isabelle Graw describes as 'the value of liveliness'. Not an 'aesthetic' liveliness, but:

Rather, the sense of liveliness we get from painting results from the fact that life and work time of the respective artists have been spent on it (Birnbaum & Graw, p. 81).

And not just the 'living labour' required to make the painting, but more so, "the labor and lifetime of the painter are seemingly stored in it" (Birnbaum & Graw, p. 82).

the subject is now contained within the multiple parts of the artwork, within the process and as a whole.

A Relational Object



Fig. 26

Transitivity is as old as the hills. It is a tangible property of the artwork. Without it, the work is nothing other than a dead object, crushed by contemplation (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 26).

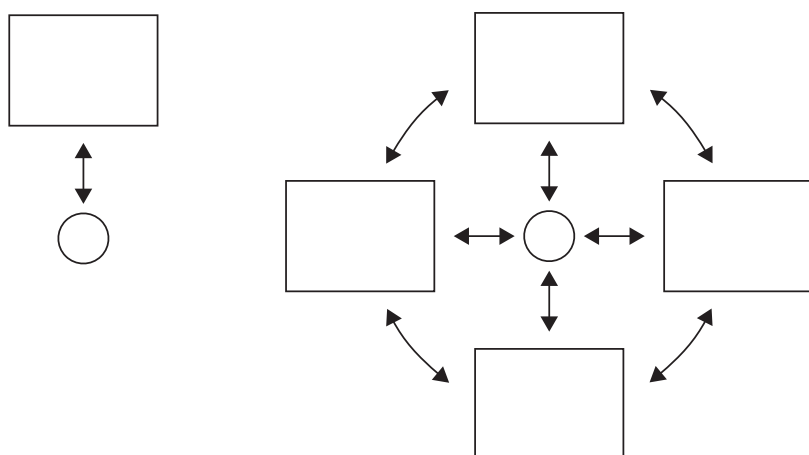
The painting may exist in its ontological state as an object, but without any interaction it remains just that, an object. In order for the agency of the artist to be conveyed, a viewer or recipient is needed and essentially a phenomenological approach. All art requires some level of interaction, and it's not to say that the repeated paintings need a higher degree of interaction, but it does need to be active. As Isabelle Graw refers to the "quasi-person" (Graw et al, 2012, p. 54), or Alfred Gell in *Art and Agency*, that "the immediate 'other' in a social relationship does not have to be another 'human being'" (Gell, 1998, p. 17), the interactivity between the viewer and the repeated paintings bears a closer resemblance to that of the relation art:

If a work of art is successful, it will invariably set its sights beyond its mere presence in space: it will be open to dialogue, discussion, and that form of inter-human negotiation that Marcel Duchamp called "the coefficient of art", which is a temporal process, being played out here and now (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 41).

Cecilia Edefalk approaches the hanging of her exhibitions very much as an installation. Whether the 'white cube' created for her show at the XXII Bienal de Sao Paulo, or the more directly connected response to the space of the Kunsthalle Bern gallery, her repeated works create an autonomy that we need not look outside of. As observed by Bernhard Fibicher in an interview with the artist:

An object that you can approach from all sides, that forces you to circle it and to concentrate your attention on it, is an autonomous entity with its own laws (Edefalk, 1999, p. 53).

In the singular this may be a largely static activity, within the repeats the viewer is part of the action. Actively involved in the process of the repetition, the memory and the accumulated experience.



Rauschenberg's *Factum I* and *Factum II* now exist in separate locations, one in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the other to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, and as such begs the question whether the repetitions need to be seen together.

This is not a question we need apply to Pifferetti, where the repeats are confined to one canvas, but in say Dreher, Edefalk or the Object paintings, how they are hung, in relation to each other, comes into greater importance. Are they hung side by side, close by each other, or further apart? One above the other, in separate rooms, or in the case of Edefalk, which way up or at which angle. These are all variables that change how the works are experienced. Side by side becomes a quickfire movement of the eye, switching from one canvas to the other. Some cultures read left to right, others right to left, some vertically. Placing one painting above another, alters our eye movement and for some may be less intuitive than a sideways movement. Hung further apart, opposite or in different rooms, we are forced to rely on memory and there is a greater distance to travel back to the next or previous.

There is a difference in time.

Our experience is slowed,

or equally our movement may be quickened

to counteract the uncertainty of memory.

In the extreme, Rauschenberg's *Factum I* and *Factum II* are together, that is, if we travel back and forth from New York to Los Angeles, merely placing greater significance on time and memory.

Reproductions of Reproductions of Reproductions of Reproductions

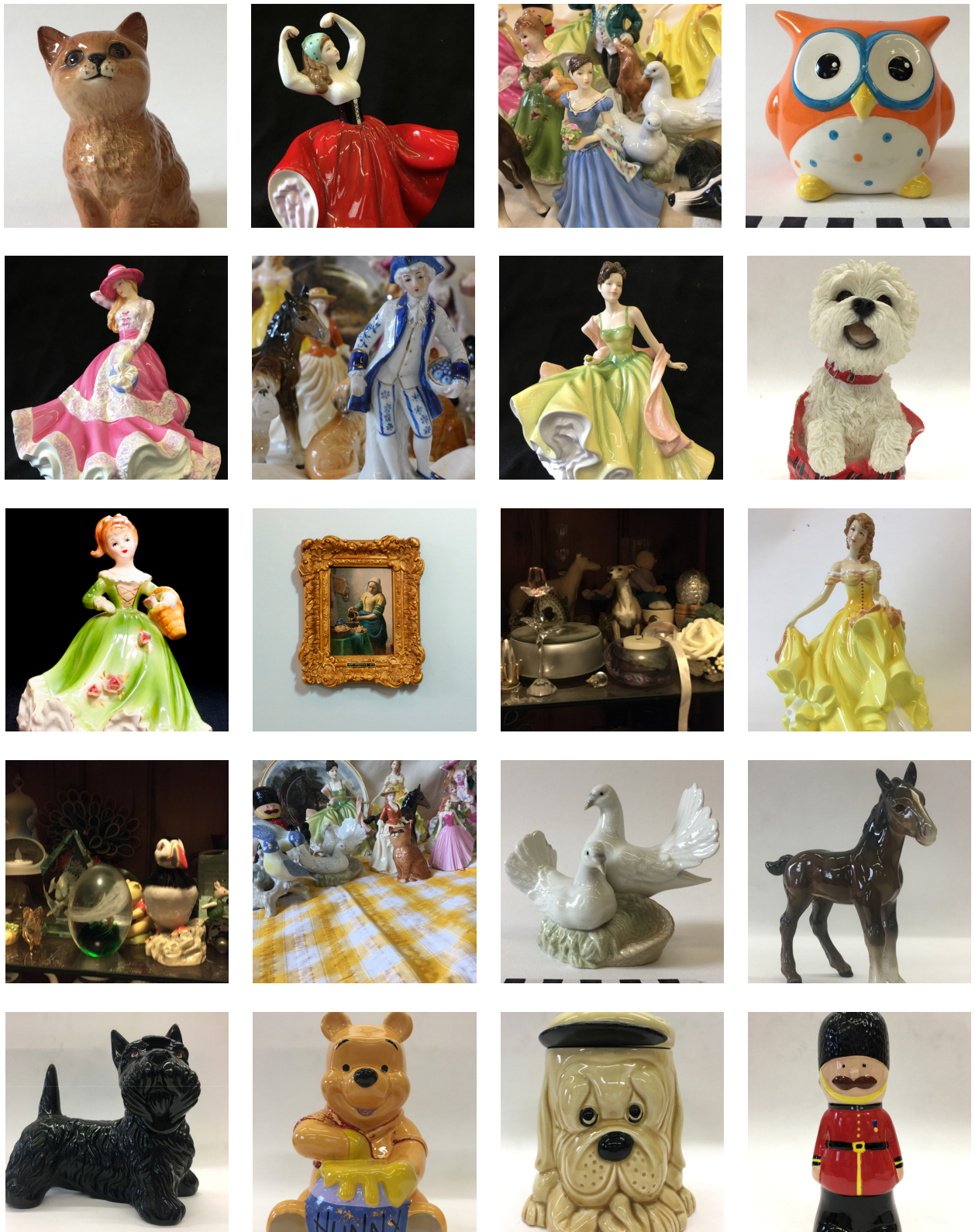


Fig. 27

In an increasingly digital or virtual world, there is an inevitability that many works of art will only ever be viewed, by the majority, as reproductions. As David Joselit explains, in a move away from ‘Cezanne’s doubt’ towards what he refers to as ‘Duchamp’s doubt’:

The question has become, not where to deposit a quantum of paint on its support, but rather, where will the painting—or the image—go. How will it behave? Duchamp’s doubt begins when the work enters the world (Graw et al, 2016, p. 17).

Photography and mass-produced images have brought an egalitarianism to art. The viewer has instant access, and as Berger points out: “the painting now travels to the spectator rather than the spectator to the painting” (Berger, 2008, p. 20). Yet, as it does so its context is continually altered, and is “submitted to infinite dislocations, fragmentations, and degradations” (Joselit, 2009, p.134).

As with the translation from the original object, to a photograph, and to a painting, the translation of the painting to a photograph, is again, a translation to another thing. In some ways the Object paintings have come full circle: painted from a photograph, a **reproduction, of a reproduction of an object**, they are now viewed as photographs, a **reproduction, of a reproduction of an object**.

The new status of the original work is the perfectly rational consequence of the new means of reproduction (Berger, 2008, p. 21).

It is inevitably, it is how the Object paintings are exhibited within this virtual gallery, and as Andre Rottmann describes, the media of reproduction and distribution of the paintings, are: “the very circuits and trajectories of dissemination and validation” (Graw et al, 2016, p. 10).

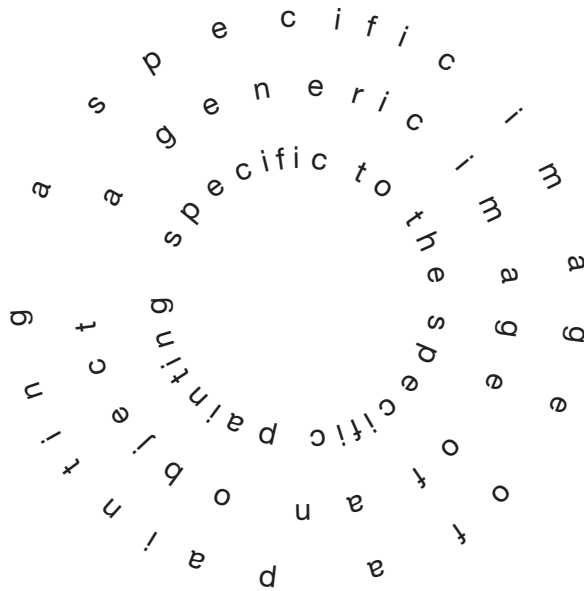
It is how they will predominately be received. It is how I have viewed and responded to the paintings of Dreher, Pifferetti, Edefalk, Packer, Bernhardt and to some extent Carnegie. It does not prevent a relational interaction with the paintings, but it is a different relationship, or in the case of Carnegie’s paintings (which I have seen in person) an additional relationship.

Seen in reproduction, as Morely said of his own photo-realistic painting: “it does look like a photograph, but when you see the physical reality of the surface it seems to work on you through your central nervous system” (Wroe, 2013). In reproduction, his painting looks like a photograph. A photographic reproduction of a painting that was painted to give the illusion of a photograph. The viewer is not looking at the painting, but a facsimile. It is difficult to respond to it emotively, there is no scale or sense of materiality, our ‘central nervous system’ untouched. It is now an image, albeit initially, a specific image, within a network of ever-increasing images.

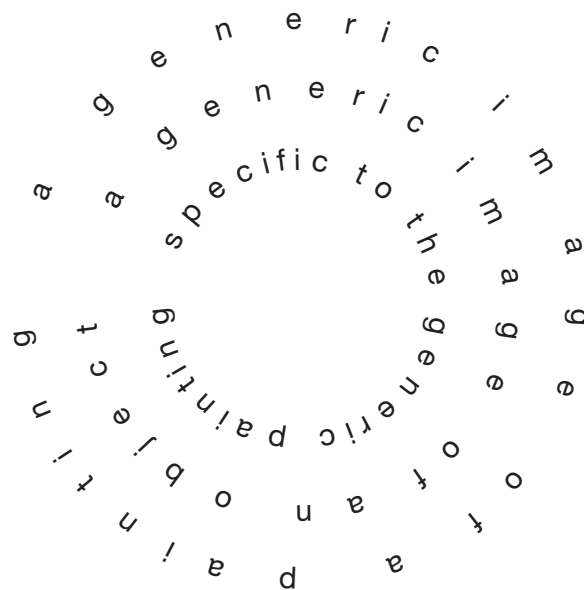
A network, within which the paintings are transitive, “defined by their circulation from

place to place and their subsequent translation into new contexts” (Joselit, 2009, p. 128).

Within the Object paintings, a specific painting translates to a specific image of a painting, within which there is a generic image of an object that is specific to that specific painting.



If that specific image is reproduced to represent a painting, it becomes a generic image of a painting within which there is a generic image of an object that is specific to that generic painting.



It is no longer the painting, **that** thing, but it is a thing, and there is an image in it.

It is all about context

And essentially, understanding the context in which the image of the painting is situated. The painting itself is nothing on its own but an object. It is reliant on “the social-relational matrix in which it is embedded. It has no ‘intrinsic’ nature, independent of the relational context” (Gell, 1998, p. 7), and if that context is the media of reproduction and distribution of the painting, then that is the context of its relational interaction.

How well a painting fairs will be dependent on “its capacity to hold in suspension the passages internal to a canvas, and those external to it” (Joselit, 2009, p. 129). The Object paintings may have distanced themselves from external subjectivity but they cannot exist as self-contained entities. Translated to another thing, the image of the painting exists simultaneously with the painting, in Joselit’s words, “Painting is beside itself” (Joselit, 2009, p. 134).

Experience and Memory (Repeat)



Fig. 28 i



Fig. 28 ii



Fig. 28 iii



Fig. 28 iv



Fig. 28 v



Fig. 28 vi

Individuation

The Mash Up



Fig. 29

Individuation, repetition, repetition, repetition, process. “The process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated.....a process of differentiation.”^[1] Group, mass, culture, populism, fascism, the fear of difference, democracy. The people, the people have spoken. Gleichschaltung! Gleichschaltung! Standardisation, assimilation, difference. “You don’t need to follow me. You don’t need to follow anybody! You’ve got to think for yourselves. You’re all individuals!”^[2] Majority, mass production, consumerism. “Yes, we’re all individuals!”^[2] Flock, herd, instinct, mentality. To paint it. Destroy it....“this, my Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying.”^[3] Isolation. Idealism. Art. Temporality. Object. Singularity. Death of God. Repetition: “there is no repetition..... reality is only in the moment.”^[4] Real, fake, copy, reproduction. Collective conscience. Repeat. Paradox. Repetition cannot exist without difference. There is no signifier of difference without repetition. No two things can ever be the same. “The conclusions that we seek to draw from the likeness of events are unreliable, because events are always unlike.”^[5] They are the same. Isolation. Evaluation. Figurine. Grotesque idealism. Colour, form, composition. Timescale. Scale. Replica. The danger of the precedent. Duplication. Value, devalue, original - “that which is repeated has been.”^[6] Memory. Appropriation of the artist by the artist. Process. Picture. Image. Abstraction. “Subjectivity has already been strangled.”^[7] Dematerialisation. Copy, mimic. It is a cat. We see a cat. The original is a cat. The repeat is a cat. It is not a cat. It is a painting. It is a painting of a painting. They are the same. They are different - “a perfect and ruthless critique of the very notion of accident.”^[8] The cat is dead. The cat is alive. The mouse is now dead. It is now the subject of the second, which in itself is a painting of the first. Imagery. Superficiality. They are all a cat and they are not a cat. Simultaneity. Object. Subject. Death of the object through the object. “God is dead, but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.”^[9] Infinity. Eternal recurrence. Repeat. Exist. Original. It is inextricably linked. Principium individuationis.

- 1 (Jung, 2017, p. 411).
- 2 (Jones & Goldstone, 1979).
- 3 (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 550).
- 4 (Kierkegaard, 1983, p. 275)
- 5 (Montaigne, 1993, p. 344).
- 6 (Kierkegaard, 1983, p. 149).
- 7 (Fyfe, 2006).
- 8 (Hughes, 2006).
- 9 (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 167).

When Bartleby repeats, 'I would prefer not to', he cuts himself off from any normal relationship with his work, the subject of his employment. He doesn't refuse to work, but nor does he. In a similar way, the repetition within the Object paintings shifts the emphasis away from the original subject. The paintings now exist in relation, and indeed reliance to each other, all subjectivity effectively abandoned.

This was outlined at the beginning of this study, and was very much a straight-forward all-consuming ideal from the outset of the research: the paintings were no longer paintings of the original figurine, that was now dead, the paintings are paintings of themselves, solely concerned with the unique quality of experience and the impossibility of repetition. The image a by-product of the painting. Oh, were it so simple! The problem was the image, it just never went away. As Nietzsche wrote in *The Gay Science* (1882):

God is dead, but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 167).

And it is in these shadows that the image remains. The object (the singularity) is no longer the subject of the painting, 'God is Dead', but the superficiality of the image remains. There may be little truth to the original object, translated to another thing, a painting, it is a work of fiction. It is, essentially, a generic image, its only specificity is to itself within the repeats - but it exists, and with that goes every external cultural reference.

As the painting itself is translated to an image and moves with the networks of reproduction and communication, its context continually altered, the imagery comes under further scrutiny and cannot be ignored. The cheap and mundane equal to anything within Reynolds hierarchy?. The everyday objects that speak of our existence, memorium and profligacy; our own lives reflected back at us, or, just everyday tat? The image relies on context, "How will it behave?" (Graw et al, 2016, p. 17), the continuing doubt. In a culture awash with images there is an image of a cat. Which particular cat is irrelevant; it is an image of a cat, and that is enough.

That the image can exist and simultaneously be absent as the subject, is, just one of a number of paradoxes evident within the Object paintings: repetitions of a painting of an object in which neither repetition nor the object exist; made of paint, but not about paint; simultaneously representational and abstract; an object and an image.

Apparent contradictions to which there are no definitive answers, only suggestions: repetition is not a reality; the painting of a thing is a translation to another thing; there

is no Greenbergian purity; they are about painting, the experience of painting, an act; notions of representation and abstraction are effectively irrelevant, cut off by the repeat, the image is a representation of the painting; they are dependent on context and affected by differing modes of communication and reproduction.

And it is in celebration of such contradictions and paradoxes that the Object paintings stand. They question painting. They question themselves. They are gratuitous.

As Schwabsky wrote of Carnegie's paintings, "The multiplication of different repetitions of the same shows the artist's fascination with representing, her pleasure in doing it, and the impossibility of its ever being the truth" (Schwabsky, 2020, p. 122).

They are all a cat and they are not a cat

Death of the object through the object

Maybe

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