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Susan Connolly, October 2019.
Content page

Everything and Nothing: A Painting Project: The Concept

Acrylic paint, medium gel, wooden armature
Photo credit: Simon Mills
Photo credit: Davey Moor

(YMC1: The MAC), (YMC2: Highlanes), (YMC3: dlrLexicon)

Traces of an Activity Atlas I

Fig. 2  \(P1\) (painting 1)
When the Ceiling Meets the Floor
The Lab gallery, Dublin. April-June 2015
Photo credit: Susan Connolly

Fig. 3 \(P2\) (painting 2)
When the Ceiling Meets the Floor
The Lab gallery, Dublin. April-June 2015
Photo credit: Susan Connolly

Title: \(P1\) (painting 1) + \(P2\) (painting 2)

Traces of an Activity Atlas II

Traces of an Activity Atlas III

Fig. 4  \(Everything and Nothing\)
When the Ceiling Meets the Floor
The Lab gallery, Dublin. April-June 2015
Photo credit: Davey Moor

Title: \(Everything and Nothing\)

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Photo credit: Simon Mills  40


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Processual activity making itself through methods of Slippage: How new knowledge has visually come to be evident in the *E+N Painting project*

*Everything and Nothing: A Painting Project*

Concept: Using just three colours: cyan, magenta and yellow and 3 shapes: circles, squares and triangles, the work attempts to make the same painting over and over again to test a methodology for and of how a painting can Making Itself?
   (YMC1:The MAC), (YMC2:Highlanes), (YMC3:dlrLexicon)
Title:

(YMC1: The MAC), (YMC2: Highlanes), (YMC3: dlrLexicon)

Details:

Some thing about something to do with Paint
The MAC, Belfast, May-June 2014
What is and What Might be
Highlanes Gallery, Drogheda, April-July 2015
over&over+overandover
dlrLexicon, Dublin, Oct-Nov, 2015

Material Details:

Acrylic paint, medium gel, wood armature
500x200cm approx.
2014-ongoing

Photo Credits:

Davey Moor
Simon Mills
Susan Connolly

Y,M,C,C,Y,M,M,C,Y,YMCCYMMCY,YMC,CYM,MCY is a site-specific work that has now been remade in a number of venues. The painting is made directly onto the gallery wall through a process of applying a number of layers of acrylic and household paint that has been mixed with acrylic medium gel. The first three layers applied are the process colours cyan, followed by magenta, followed by yellow. Then multiple coats of household paint mixed with medium gel is applied to make a paint skin directly onto the wall/site. Once fully dry the paint is them measured out into a rectangle and very delicately scored with a Stanley knife to separate the paint skin from the wall.

The next step involves very carefully peeling back the paint from its site. This stage has proven difficult on occasions, as each specific site holds very different surface qualities and adhesiveness, for example when I installed the piece for its first outing in the MAC in Belfast the walls were very porous from the continual touching up of the walls between exhibitions.
What this meant for the work was that the intended revealing of the CMY paint I had applied completely disappeared into the paint skin, and at one point in the cutting process the work revealed a previously installed work by the artist Lothar Götz\(^\text{302}\), this later also disappeared as I allowed the paint to dry further and the resulting paint peel completely returned to the white colour of the original wall.

During later installations of the work at the Highlanes Gallery, dlrLexicon, and The Golden Thread Gallery the work exposed similar issues. At the Highlanes the work was installed directly onto a very old wall and when it was peeled back once again the colour, CMY, had completely disappeared into the removed paint skin. But interestingly on this occasion what was also made visible was the scars upon the wall of past installational activities. Notably there is a large white scaring in the centre of this paint skin and that occurred due to the previous installation of a work by artist Maud Cotter. The skin was holding traces of earlier interventions, revealing its own history of the gallery’s activities.

There were no such discoveries to be made through the paint skin process at the dlrLexicon install as the walls were new and they were yet to acquire the information of their own past installations. These walls also absorbed the CMY process paint applied during the making of the work. Interestingly on the last installation of the piece at The Golden Thread Gallery the colour did appear for the first time. Muted and silent revealing traces of the processual activity.

Traces of an Activity Atlas I
2. *PI (painting 1)*
3. *P2 (painting 2)*
Title:  

_P1 (painting 1) + P2 (painting 2)_

Details:

_When the Ceiling Meets the Floor_

The Lab gallery, Dublin, April-June 2015

Material Details:

Acrylic paint, medium gel, pre-primed canvas, steel, uv light
250x210cm approx.

Photo Credits:

Davey Moor
Susan Connolly

I begin every painting within the _E+N Painting project_ the same way. I paint the circle/square (which once layered also make a triangle shape) motif using the cyan/yellow/magenta process paint; carefully, systematically and methodically this is applied all over the surface of each site. Importantly, within the project this breaks the pervasive issue of what to paint whilst it also notably gets rid of the whiteness of the surfaces. This method allows for time, so as to get a sense of scale, surface and the potential of what will unfold visually through the processual activity. Basically, within the _E+N Painting project_ I have been painting the same painting over and over + over again, what art historian Anthony White has called a “repetition of sameness”. But why?

One answer: is to test the presumed limitations of what this combination of basic materials can really visually achieve. The decision to limit the colour palette to only the CMY colours and the use of just 3 shapes (square, circle, triangle) has conceptually been significant within the _E+N Painting project_, as it suggests the possibility of these paints making every colour, (as the manufacturer’s claims) thus a test, even a game in itself ensues.

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The second answer is rooted in a more art historical enquiry with one of the essential aspects throughout the *E+N Painting project* having been the fact that process paint/colours are produced and used for printing, and not painting. This has been important because, to print something is to produce a copy of an artwork over and over again and in theory diminishes issues such as the original, what philosopher Roland Barthes refers to as its aura. In the selection of the colour/shape elements I am visually acknowledging and using both artists Donald Judd’s and Robert Morris’s methodologies for testing Greenbergian theory of flatness, as Judd approached his work from a painting perspective (through colour) whereas Morris examined his work from a sculptural context (through shape).

P1 and P2 started out as paintings investigating such enquiries. How to make the same painting twice, over and over, to see when the slippage would begin. I started each painting as identical as possible, size, canvas ground, circles, squares, all over motif through the CMY combinations, the layering, the drawing and eventually the cutting. Below are the atlases of the processual activity and the documentation of each painting and of the method of making itself.
Traces of an Activity Atlas II
Traces of an Activity Atlas III
4. *Everything and Nothing*
Colour has played a very important role in abstract painting’s development since its inception in the early 20th century, as colour was seen as the “basic signifier of the new language, the “essential,” “natural,” metonym for pure painting”. My use of these three colours, cyan, yellow, magenta, both acknowledges and nods to this tradition but also breaks with it. Colour thus becomes rudimentary and as basic (materially) as you can get, colour and shape visually become tested through a playfulness of the “boundaries between ‘high art’ and commodity culture”.

The installation of the wall painting titled, *Everything and Nothing*, started as a small drawing to explore the colour combinations of the CMY process paint. There was the forethought in preparation for the exhibition that I would paint directly onto the gallery wall, but there were also the limitations of the gallery as the team there were not comfortable with the cutting/peeling technique used in the work Y,M,C,C,C,Y,M,M,C,Y,YMCCYMMCY,YMC,CYM,MCY. Thus, the decision to make this monumental work only really came into realization because of the very particular requirements...
and architectural difficulties of The Lab’s gallery layout.

The work itself took 3 weeks to install. With both a technician and I firstly drawing each circle by hand followed by a square, followed by another, succeed by the CMY combination of paint application until the whole wall of the gallery was covered.

Theorist and art historian Isabelle Graw had referred to the brush mark as the trace of an activity to the eye and undeniably it is. However, the brush marks are also the trace of the activity of the brush or rather the tools that an artist may select in their application of paint onto any given surface. My brushes are rather basic, nothing fancy, nothing of artist quality, only three brushes of various sizes, bought in three packs so as not to cross contaminate the colours (cyan, yellow, magenta) when applying them to surfaces (slippage avoided). There is in other words no fetishizing and absolutely nothing other than work expected of these tools.

The major observations to be made here about this work is how it helped with the conceptual thinking within the *E+N Painting project*. The fact that the labour involved in the production became apparent very early on in the process due to the macro/micro viewing and what would it mean for example to make a wall painting which held so main hours of production only to disappear after the exhibition/event? Importantly, I had been considering what it would mean for a painting to be painted without the artist’s hand? And although I did not quite achieve this during the installation it definitely influenced the method of production with *E+N Painting project* beyond this show.
Traces of an Activity Atlas IV
5. over&over+overandover
All paintings have a front and back, a fact that is so obvious that it can be taken for granted. The front we always see (even if that front is in fact the back) but the back (the reverse side) we rarely do. But can it be said that paintings also have an inside and an outside and what would this mean to the findings within the E+N Painting project?

Within the E+N Painting project the paintings have been about experiencing the hybrid frontality of the painting as an object, while also exploring the frontality of the surface; here both the canvas and the skin of the painting. Within the large-scale works there is an offer and a possibility of another proposition in relation to how the viewing and the experience of the painting can be had, what art historian David Joselit sees as a “recent…tendency to suture spectators to extra-perceptual social networks rather than merely situating them in a phenomenological relationship of individual perception”.

Therefore, the E+N Painting project could be called theatrical in the art historian Michael Fried’s sense; they individually and collectively go beyond their abstractness and optical over-all-ness and importantly their formalist flatness. They move their painted surfaces away from

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306 David Joselit, “Painting beside Itself,” *October* 130, Fall (2009), 132.
the wall, altering the traditional viewing position and their relationship to the rectangular easel painting forcing the viewer towards an embodied experience, the paintings now performing beyond themselves.

This has resulted in the *E+N Painting project* visually investigating how looking through documentation (here presented as an Atlas) and looking through embodied viewing, can never happen in one glance, how the painted surface and structural support/framing can coax “a constant change of focus and an examination of detail through looking from place to place without giving the bigger picture”\(^{307}\) all at once.

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Traces of an Activity Atlas V
Trickery uses optical illusion to upset normal perception and in many ways, this is what appears within the cut-out areas upon the surfaces within the *E+N Painting project*. Art historian Michael Fried discusses in his essay, *Three American Painters*, such spatial contradictions when analysing the *Cut Out* (1948-50) painting of Jackson Pollock, a work he feels Pollock arrived at “almost certainly through intuition rather than through rational analysis”\(^{308}\). This I believe supports a theory of the possibility for the materials making-themselves (*making-itself*) through their processual activity rather than through artistic intention alone.

Absence is made more notably evident, and the surfaces that result from the cutting process in the *E+N Painting project* employ and test the reading of the painted surface as a field of visual and even tactile perception. It is a method of painting literally only made visual through material displacement, which transforms tactility into absence\(^{309}\).

The viewer becomes directly invited to visually engage with the artist’s intended plan, their

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methods and imaging, and although there is some working out of the image before the act of making it on the artist’s behalf, the surfaces that remain show all manner of slippage/s between artist and materials in their processual formation, empty and full, a hole and a whole.

Slippage, between idea, intent and material, becomes a method of making-itself and visually appears within the unfolding that results upon the skin of the canvas/support. There is a steady almost rhythmic referencing and reflecting within the paint skin, which the viewer becomes aware of as one painting leads to another painting leading to another. This cycle of repetition is adopted in the E+N Painting project in order to test the painted shapes (circle, square, triangle) into making-itself, what artist Donald Judd has referred to as a method of “all art…involves several things at once, none developed toward exclusivity”.310

The process of cutting into the painted skin could (and does) imply violence, but the resulting surfaces also leave traces of the delicate removal and a commitment to the in-between space that is now made possible between paint and canvas, those imperative conventions and norms. This new space, a space somewhere between painting and sculpture, offers new possibility within the current discourse concerning what is still possible within the long history and tradition of painting311. It supersedes “painters who sought formal purity by reducing painting to its bare essentials”312 and becomes “…an eloquent visual argument for a radical expansion of the medium”.313

311 Note that I have not chosen to include the discipline of sculpture. That would be a different form of research not possible to carry out here.
313 White, “No Form.”
Traces of an Activity Atlas VI
Appendix 1

**Exhibitions Activities as part of the Research 2018/14**

2018  
*After an Act*, The Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast, curator: Peter Richards (May-July)  
*Slippage*, Platform Arts, Belfast (March)  
*White*, qss, Belfast, curator: Colin Drake (Feb)  

2017  
*Traces of an Activity*, The Ashford Gallery, RHA, Dublin, curator: Ruth Carroll, Patrick Murphy, Victoria Evans (Sept/Oct)  
Group Exhibition, Gorey School of Art, curator: James Merrigan (Aug)  

2016  
Artbox Bazaar, Dublin, curator: Dr. Hilary Murray (Dec)  
*Mirror*, Independent Studios, Dublin/London, curator: Paul Hallahan (Dec)  
*Veins*, Molesworth Gallery, Dublin, curators; Prendergast & Moor (July)  
*Eigse* Arts Festival, Carlow, selectors: Annie Fletcher, Claire Feeley, Emma Lucy O’Brien (June)  
186th RHA Annual Exhibition (Mar-June)  

2015  
*over & over + over and over*, (Solo exhibition) dlr LexIcon, Municipal Gallery, Dun Laoghaire, Dublin (Oct-Nov’15), curator Rowan Sexton  
*When the Ceiling Meets the Floor*, (Solo exhibition) The Lab, Dublin, Apr/June, curator Sheena Barrett  
*What is and What Might be*, The Highlanes Gallery, Drogheda, Apr/Aug, curators; Aoife Ruane, Colin Martin, Cliodhna Shaffrey  

2014  
*Persona*, ArtBox Project Space, Dublin, curator: Dr Hilary Murray (Dec’14/Jan’15)  
*Something about Some Thing to do with Paint*, (Solo exhibition), The MAC, Belfast, curator: Hugh Mulholland, Eoin Dara (May-June)  

**Publication**


Skin?, IMMA artist Blog, Dublin (Dec’17)

Others, Other-d and Otherness, Response to a Request, online journal, Dec’16

Visual Arts Round up, The Irish Times, Aidan Dunne, July’16

VAN, curated by James Merrigan, Spring 2016


Visual Arts Round up, Painters who break the rules, Aidan Dunne, The Irish Times, 05/05/15

When the Ceiling Meets the Floor, Eoin Dara, http://www.susanconnolly.com/#/text ,April 2015

Short texts...., Declan Long, June’15
https://declanlongtexts.wordpress.com/2015/06/06/short-texts-on-some-recent-shows-in-ireland/

The Dance, James Merrigan, Billion,, May’15
http://www.billionjournal.com/time/S.Connolly_G. Dunne The Lab.html

Susan Connolly at the Mac, by Declan Long,
http://declanlongtexts.wordpress.com/2014/06/04/susan-connolly-at-the-mac-belfast/ , June 2014

Something about Some Thing to do with Paint, by Slavka Serakova,

Awards/Residencies and Commissions

2018
Invited Speaker, Riverbank Art Center, Feb’18
Invited Speaker, Ulster University, Feb’18

2017
Shortlisted panelist, Infrastructure, Fingal County Council
Invited Speaker, Painting/Materiality, RHA School, Dublin, Nov’17
Chair, Painting a Situation, Frensendersky Gallery, Belfast, VAI event, Oct’17
Artist Residency, The Golden Foundation, NY, Feb/Mar’17

2016
VAI Get Together, Invited Speaker, IMMA, Dublin, Aug’16
PhD conference 2016, awarded presentation of excellence award
Invited participant in a documentary about Contemporary Irish Painting, curated by James Merrigan and filmed/produced by Saskia Vermeulen

2015
Artist Talk, LSAD, Dec’15
in-conversation with Dougal McKenzie, dlrLexicon, Oct’15
What is and What might be, artist talk and workshop, July 15
Invited Speaker, Artists present, University of Ulster, Belfast

2014
Invited Speaker, The Place of Painting, Symposium, The Mac, Belfast

Exhibitions/Symposiums and research trips undertaken

2014
Richard Tuttle, WhiteChapel Gallery, London (October).


2015

**2016**


**2017**


Appendix 2

Text 1
“most radically… seems to undo the fabric of the gallery itself, apparently peeling back a layer of wall-covering to reveal bare plaster. But the peeled layer is actually paint, and we realise we are looking at paint. It’s a visual conundrum worthy of dialogue”.314

“Susan Connolly’s quizzically colour-theory titled piece, Y, M, C, C, Y, M, M, C, Y, YMCCYMMCY, YMC, CYM, MCY, gives the appearance of the physical deconstruction of the building. I am unclear how this was made, and this adds to the work’s significance. Aidan Dunne of The Irish Times writes about it: “It’s a visual conundrum worthy of the dialogue with Holbein that the curators have in mind.” Like other recent work by the artist, it involves a peeled surface. But here the surface is the gallery/church wall itself and without ornament or artistic embellishment. It is not clear but appears to be painted wallpaper carefully pulled back intact and draped over a shelf and onto the floor. Leaving a long unseen undersurface exposed, or did it? A sort of archaeological dig into the architecture”.315

Text 2
“Upon being introduced to Susan Connolly as a painter and looking at her work for the first time, I recall myriad questions tripping over one another to reach the forefront of my mind. What am I looking at? Is that a canvas? Is this actually paint? What has fallen here? Has this collapsed? Where are the supports and fixings to secure and stabilise these materials?

I think these concerns will inevitably emerge when approaching this work initially, and anyone holding conservative views on painting, and what it ought to be, is likely to be instantly alarmed by Connolly’s propositions which so flagrantly abuse the commonplace in paint and canvas. Take *R/Y/B Fluorescent* as an example. Almost all the intrinsic source materials of traditional painting are in play here. However, we are presented with a canvas from which paint, once richly slathered across the surface, has been systematically stripped. Scrapes, scores and cuts seem to skitter across the work with slices and slivers of paint sparking fitfully and suggesting, but never quite offering, a kaleidoscopic prism of hazy colour. Towards the bottom of the piece, gravity enters the dynamic. With almost surgical precision, the artist has flayed a delicate membrane of deep murky hues progressively built up across the canvas and now pulled downwards, spread over the gallery floor - at once separate from but connected to the body of the painting. Such corporeal elements mean that the piece appeals not only to the eye but also to our compulsion to touch, a desire surely fuelled by uncertainty about what we are seeing. And what we are seeing is both material and indeterminate, challenging our sense of order in refreshingly unsettling ways.

I myself am still not sure if I can easily explain how these artworks are produced. This is not because I am not familiar with them – quite the contrary. Nor is it because I have chosen to overlook, or pay insufficient attention to, the artist’s own practical explanations of her approach and techniques. Rather, it is the case that my memory seems to eschew the retention of such mechanistic process information in favour of absorbing and maintaining the feelings of curiosity and knotty agitation that invariably surface whenever I am confronted by the work. Yet contemplating, even for a short time, what would have been necessary to create these (de)constructions prompts the thought as to the painstaking and intensive studio work required.
Indeed, Connolly herself has commented on the long hours spent making paintings only to destroy them in order to establish the limitations of the processes she employs.\textsuperscript{316}

When making such work, Connolly seems to be pursuing an idea of painting as a time-based medium, exploring its boundaries and destabilising its status by stepping aside at a certain stages of the artistic process and allowing external forces beyond her control to come into play. Considered in this way, we might read her approach as, in effect, a collaboration with gravity – playing with the potential energy locked up in the materials being used, suspending or floating certain elements whilst permitting others to detach and subside, coming to rest in unpredictable and dramatic ways.

In the surviving drafts of \textit{Six Memos for the Next Millennium}, Italo Calvino sought to define the virtues of the art of the past to help shape the values of the future, one particular treatise focusing on the concept of ‘lightness’. For Calvino, lightness in art is desirable, a quality to be pursued and not a defect in, or criticism of, an artwork. He describes lightness as an endeavour to subtract weight from things rather than it being a pre-existing condition.\textsuperscript{317} In Connolly’s work we see this subtraction of weight manifested in more ways than one. Most obviously, there is the previously described physical act of removing layers of paint from painstakingly built up surfaces. There is also the fact that her works are often suspended in space in some way, removed from gallery walls, invalidating the very places we expect to see paintings hanging. And then there is, at times, the artist’s actual use of illumination in the form of ultraviolet light to cause certain areas of paint to fluoresce and float in front of our eyes.

\textsuperscript{316} Susan Connolly in conversation with Dougal McKenzie. December 2012. Part of the \textit{Subjects of the Painter: Interviews on Contemporary Painting} series, to be found at subjectsofthepainter.blogspot.co.uk

\textsuperscript{317} Calvino, Italo \textit{Six Memos for the Next Millennium} (London: Penguin Classics 2009) Page 3. Started in the summer of 1985, these lectures were left unfinished at the time of the author’s death later that year.
complicating further the interplay with gravity.

Calvino also comments, somewhat prophetically, on the developments stemming from computer science at the end of the 20th century. He speaks of lightness contained within “‘bits’ of information coursing along circuits in the form of electronic impulses.”\(^{318}\) With this image in mind, it is interesting to consider that Connolly herself has spoken of her work in similar terms, describing ‘glitches’ to be found on certain surfaces.\(^{319}\) Glitch, of course, is a term usually associated with technological malfunctions or problems – rarely is it applied to human error or interjection. However, the word itself comes from the German ‘glitschen’ which means ‘to slip or slide’ and which, rather felicitously, accords with Connolly’s scored and scalped swathes of paint slithering off their support, leaving behind ‘bits’ pulsing on the canvas or wall. Connolly’s practice exudes lightness as defined by Calvino. She always maintains a sense of precision and, while relinquishing some control, never quite allows the pull of gravity to get the upper hand in the completion of her work. Instead, she builds a retaining structure or framework around the paint she is using which enables it almost to luxuriate in its own physicality, its viscosity and glutinousness, often untethered from the constraints of the canvas. This framework allows for a re-imagining of the physical realities of paint – away from the notion of fixedness or solidity towards something more flexible, mutable and, in more than one sense of the word, light.

Susan Connolly is contributing to an already extensive body of artists working to unfold new methodologies within painting. Significantly, it is through her firm refusal to relinquish completely certain essential elements or actions usually found within a traditional painting

\(^{318}\) Ibid. Page 8.

\(^{319}\) Interview with the artist in advance of her solo exhibition at the MAC, Belfast in 2014, to be found at themaclive.com/shows/Susan-Connolly
paradigm that she is carving out a distinctive position within contemporary discourse. She posits a way of working which is far from restricted by certain simple or seemingly old-fashioned components: she offers a perspective in which the potential of her materials is not limited but, arguably, limitless. The resulting works defy easy categorisation – are they paintings, sculptures, installations or interventions? They certainly distort the viewer’s frame of reference. As we negotiate the gallery space, we do so, no longer in the role of passive spectators looking to the walls to deliver artworks to us, but rather as active bodies stepping into a world of new spatial relationships between ceiling and floor. We are now considering things “from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognition and verification.”

Text 3

“ART CRITIC” David Joselit asked in his much-vaunted essay ‘Painting Beside Itself’ (2009), “How does painting belong to a network?” The genesis of this question sprung from enfant terrible Martin Kippenberger, who said in an interview in the ’90s that “To simply hang a picture on a wall and say it’s art is dreadful. The whole network is important.” Kippenberger’s interviewer at the time was funnily enough Jutta Koether, an artist who Joselit then proceeds to discuss in relation to her solo show ‘Lux Interior’ at New York’s Reena Spawling Gallery in 2009.

320 Calvino, Italo Six Memos for the Next Millennium (London: Penguin Classics 2009) Page 7. Summing up some of his musings on the opposition between lightness and weight he says, “Whenever humanity seems condemned to heaviness, I think I should fly like Perseus into a different space. I don’t mean escaping into dreams or into the irrational. I mean that I have to change my approach, look at the world from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognition and verification. The images of lightness that I seek should not fade away like dreams dissolved by the realities of present and future…”
Koether, like all good apostles, visualised the gospel according to Kippenberger by placing a braced screen with a painting attached in the centre of Reena Spauling where two levels of the gallery floor meet. The screen stood slightly askew, with one foot of the wall brace standing on a step (what Joselit theatrically refers to as a “stage”) and one foot off the step: a painting-cum-stickman. To complete the staging a scoop light (stage light) “salvaged from The Saint, an ex-Manhattan gay night club” brings the scene into rhetorical focus: ‘rhetorical’ in the sense that three lecture-performances took place during the exhibition run, performed by Koether herself. Joselit goes on to describe this work as a “cynosure of performance, installation and painted canvas”. In addition, the critic’s term of endearment for this dance is “transitive” painting. By stepping away from the wall Joselit suggests painting begins to acknowledge that the wall is just not enough in this digital age of hyperlinks and multitudinous networks.

At The LAB Gabhann Dunne teeters on tradition; Susan Connolly embraces the transitive. Although officially presented as two independent exhibitions with two commissioned essays to boot, the work by these two artists cannot be viewed in isolation. Yes, it all looks like fun and games on the surface at The LAB but there’s a libidinal argy-bargy taking place due to the proximity of Connolly’s subtractive vandalism and Dunne’s cumulative nesting.

Dunne gets in the first slap, however, in The LAB’s atrium with a painted set-piece combined of a large tondo-shaped canvas with a gush of blue. Springing from the tondo are laces of blossom painted directly onto the wall. Up and up they go, from tondo to ceiling, as if caught in a jet of fresh air. There’s more of the same upstairs from Dunne, where his paintings and gallery garlands are aching for tradition and childhood. Sure, we could talk Tiepolo and eighteen century Rococo – but no, Dunne’s pastel palette, soft and heavy, dotes on woodland game, not the empyrean disco of the Italian Baroque church. We could also invoke Albrecht
Dürer’s hare but enough is enough. Peter Rabbit? Laura Ashley interiors? Does Dunne not know that civilisation is built on the nursery room notion that girls prefer pastels and boys primaries? Why is he messing with the order of things! This is a form of latent vandalism in its own right.

It doesn’t end there. Social and aesthetic binaries also come into play at The LAB: alive and dead, poetry and politics, interiority and exteriority, violence and protection, rape and love, beauty and the fugly. But it’s not Dunne’s paintings alone that do all this, oh no, that would be too much to ask from any artist. What complicates Dunne’s paintings is Connolly, who more than shares the attention in the main gallery downstairs at The LAB.

Earlier I described Joselit’s “transitive painting” as a dance. Most painters don’t like to dance, so the experience of paintings posturing on timber or metal braces on the gallery floor is understandably a rare thing. When painters do take to the floor the majority of the time it looks ungainly. In this country we have seen a few painters do just that – Nevan Lahart, Mark O’Kelly (elegantly so at eva International 2014) and Neil Carroll among the few. Connolly has been braving the floor for a few years now, but only in recent years has she produced the true fruits of her labour.

Hanging and standing full-back and full-frontal on metal braces in the main gallery and towards the back in the darkroom space, Connelly (sic) presents just three results of her performative process. I say ‘results’ because there is something highly experimental in these works that not only challenges the observer as to the process and property of their anatomy, but also, I suspect, challenges Connolly herself in how they may or may not turn out in her roll-the-dice final surgeries.
You can spy Connolly’s geometric anatomy just under the canvas covers, canvases that have been sliced to leave scores of gashes and scars: Lucio Fontana anyone? This is followed by incisions made along the vertical edges of the painting so a layer can be stripped back to see what remains underneath, back and front, and in the skirt of material that ends up draped on the floor.

It’s quite difficult to ascertain where Connolly’s paintings begin and end. However, like a true deconstructionist suspicious of illusion, the artist disrobes her paintings by painting the bare bones of her process directly onto the gallery wall. The bare bones that undergird Connolly’s work is a simple geomatic anatomy of layered circles, squares and diamonds of process colour (magenta, cyan, yellow). This geometric anatomy, a process that precedes her maiming of the canvas, forms a Tetris tower that spans the height and width of a very, very tall wall in the main gallery of The LAB. In a sense this is Connolly’s underpainting revealed. It reminds me of the strategy game Connect Four from the 1970s and after. In fact Connolly’s process is seemingly based on regimental tactics and routines that are faithfully followed until it is time to lose her religion. In another sense this is the setting up of the chessboard before the game; before the dance.

The Greek myth of Marsyas the satyr comes to mind when surrounded by Connolly’s work. Marsyas was hung from a tree and skinned alive for his hubris in challenging the gods to a musical contest of all things (viscerally portrayed by Titian in the 1570s). From Marsyas blood “came the source of the river in Phrygia”. In this myth, as in Connolly’s paintings, skinning and regeneration go hand-in-hand.
We could say “transitive painting” is released from the shackles of tradition; or, just a way of inventing new shackles for those bored with the old restrictions of the frame and the wall: a case of Harry Houdini. I’m not advocating all painters take up Connolly’s dance, a dance that invariably falls flat in most hands. But at The LAB, where nature and nurture can be experienced passively suckling on one another in an orgy of consensual colours and forms in the paintings of Gabhann Dunne, Susan Connolly’s surgery of the canvas in contrast is somehow regenerative. It lives.”

Text 4

“Susan Connolly, *When the Ceiling Meets the Floor*, The Lab, 30 April – 13 June

Artists can be breakers as well as makers. The urge to take apart is almost as common as the need to construct. At times, the destructive instinct is an iconoclastic one, directed outwards at what is perceived to be conservative or outdated. (Think of the Italian Futurists’ wish to “exalt aggressive action”, or even the Sex Pistols’ desire to “destroy everything.”) In other cases, art turns against itself, becoming self-destructive as it resists conventions or tests assumptions about what a finished artwork should look like.

Painters have often been particularly eager to attack their own creations. In the 1950s, Italian painter Lucio Fontana chose to complete his canvases by violently slashing them. More recently, Spanish artist Angela de la Cruz gained fame for making large, abstract paintings that are then strategically smashed. With snapped stretchers and twisted surfaces, the resulting artworks lie on the floor like brutalised bodies.

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There is less aggression in Irish artist Susan Connolly’s paintings — but just as much perversity. Connolly’s method involves, firstly, layering paint onto a canvas very thickly. Then, when the sticky substance has dried, she makes multiple micro-incisions into the surface, before, in a freakish final act, peeling back the leathery acrylic skin. With its grand-scale combination of swirling decorative patterns and draped painterly ‘fabric’, a work like ‘Primary Process P2’ — included in her current show at The Lab — typifies the dramatic effects of Connolly’s risky process. By pulling apart a painting’s essential components, Connolly has found fresh means of constructing a distinctive artistic style”.322

Text 5

“Susan Connolly's work focuses on the space in-between what defines painting and sculpture. Her works involve layering, cutting and peeling back layers of paint from canvas, walls and miscellaneous structures. Through the use of appendages and the draping of the paint itself - which has been removed from its base support - Connolly creates a hybrid of the average two-dimensional painting into a three-dimensional object.

Connolly explores the limits and the limitlessness of paint as a material. Her method of working involves careful planning, using a pre-determined number of primary materials. Each of the artworks is produced using a formula of layering paint, cutting, staining and peeling. This working technique examines the idea of chance through the process of painting itself, and how a diverse range of artworks can arise from an original point of departure.

The presentation of Connolly's work takes into consideration the experience for viewers and the effect of encountering an artwork; as canvases are supported by a series of armatures

enabling the visitor to see both in front of, and behind works. Elements such as painted walls, steel supports, wooden structures and lighting also play an extended role in the artworks. The studio work is fully activated when positioned in the gallery space and seen with these integrated components. Emphasis is placed on the embodied experience of the viewer through the nuanced placement and collaborative effect of works, which respond directly to the building through the use of considered display and site-specific installation”.

**Text 6**

“Susan Connolly exhibits acrylic paint either as a skin, or on canvas and armature. I enthusiastically respond to her “convincing lies” (words I borrowed from Picasso). In her exhibits she offers intimate magic of puzzling my senses. Yes, I love the freedom of the visual thought – it has been, of course, recognised by Schiller as a condition sine qua non of poetics as kingdom of freedom. At times she reverses the proposition – what you see is what it is. Painted cloth.

Sometimes it is not what you see. On the largest exhibit, installed on its own in a dark room, the fold on the right is not painted, it is not cloth, it is malleable paint in layers. Under blue purple neon-light it operates as process and system at once. Palpably tactile, the light saturates the space in the manner described by James Turrell: “lights unites the spiritual world with the ephemeral world”. The whole interior becomes a work of art- one you can walk into, around, back and forth. Not just an elaborate screen patiently built from layers for one directional viewing. Demand we operate in nature.

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This painting carries its beauty without becoming overtly triumphant. Beauty differs from the truth, good or justice, by being present in the world. It is a fact of ordinary perception, and people freely disagree what is and is not beautiful. Often, beauty connotes physical appearance, patterns, structures, e.g. golden ratio, elegance of scientific proof. In all it is individual sensual response. Connolly’s extravagant manipulation of conventional materials is to invent reality, not to represent, describe, an object and or image, but be one.

Leaning to the aesthetics of pealed poster board, this white wounded sheet refuses to seduce by beauty. It is ugly with confidence resulting from unknown conflict. Getting old, getting used up? And yes, it manages to awake empathy (and a touch of drama in those torn up edges).

Displayed like a triptych, Everything+Nothing, plays up the illusion of hanging cloth. It is the paint alone anchored on an invisible wooden holder on the wall. Three parts, three objects. Connolly placed layers of acrylic on directly on the wall, let it settle, and peeled it off. On some the white surface of the wall stayed attached too. Some of the marks echo their twins in a mirror image, like the pink below. In one case, the rectangle imprint on the wall of the layers before Connolly pulled the “skin” down is visible as a friendly accuser. As if accustomed to the conflictive process of forming opinion the tromp l’oeil gives up its truth hesitantly. As if in acknowledgement that public sphere has disintegrated. What is, is the art object and a discerning eye of each viewer.

Connolly places her trust into the mute poetry without consecutive narrative. The story is the story of being and viewing. Not enough? It is the view of good thinkers, like Italo Calvino that the power of thinking in terms of visual images is value to be saved and protected. He proposes to learn how to control our own inner vision without suffocating it or letting it fall
(Six Memos: 92). These art objects embody Kant’s questions: What can I know? What should I know? I allow that philosophy and that belief in visibility to embrace Connolly’s art as its true support”.\textsuperscript{324}