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# Swinging the lantern: spatial narrative in visual arts

Jenny Cuthbert  
*University of Wollongong*

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# **Swinging the Lantern: Spatial Narrative in Visual Arts**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the award of the degree

**Master of Philosophy**

from

**UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

by

**Jenny Cuthbert (BFA Hons)**

Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts

**2015**

## CERTIFICATION

I, Jenny Cuthbert, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy, in the School of Arts, English and Media, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Jenny Cuthbert

September 27<sup>th</sup> 2015



## ABSTRACT

Literary narratologists have long argued that narrative is not as present in the visual arts as in literary texts due to the lack of perceived linear sequencing and temporal movement. Such research has primarily focussed on pictorial narratives prior to modernism, leaving a notable absence of narrative theory surrounding a broader sphere of art forms from modernism to the present day. In this thesis, I propose that narratives within visual arts should be analysed from a new perspective that focuses on the spatial essence of visual arts practice. I examine diverse art-forms such as film, painting, installation and sculpture, from several art periods and, using a combination of methodologies and concepts developed by Mieke Bal, Michael Fried, Lev Manovich and Roland Barthes, offer an alternative framework with which to view narrative in visual art: spatial narrative.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Swinging the Lantern: Spatial Narrative in Visual arts

*In Lessing's Laocoon on which we squandered study time when we were young, much fuss is made about temporal and spatial art. Yet looking into the matter more closely we find all this is but a scholastic delusion. For space, too, is a temporal concept.*

*- Paul Klee (1964, p.184)*

### INTRODUCTION

Narrative in visual art, or more specifically, pictorial narrative has often been taken for granted. Before even looking at a painting from, for example, the Renaissance, there is often an assumption that it must be narrative, simply because it is a scene from a larger story. The lack of obvious temporal activity apparent in such paintings has led literary narratologists to dispute whether narrative is present in still pictures or not. The conclusions usually sit between a flat denial of narrative in any media but literary texts (Worth, 1981) and the concession that painting could be a narrative vehicle but only if it meets a certain number of conditions, which causes some paintings to be more narrative than others (Wolf, 2003).

There are several problems with this situation. Firstly, how can literary narratologists accurately determine an artwork's narrativity while attempting to employ literary narrative conventions on an art form that is spatial in essence? Secondly, most research on narrative in the visual arts focuses primarily on pictorial narratives as though they are the only kind of visual art. Thirdly, the pictorial narratives that are commonly examined are from a very limited number of art periods – and all are prior to modernism.<sup>1</sup> A great majority of the research surrounds medieval art, and the Bayeux

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<sup>1</sup> The general consensus is that modernism began in the mid to late 1800s and occurred in line with developments in science and technology. Modernism in visual art signalled a shift between paintings telling stories as an illusory extension of the world, to realising the potential of art to be an object, with a greater focus on materials than an intrinsic subject matter. Clement Greenberg (1986) notes that the common element of modernist art is its flatness.

Tapestry is usually mentioned due to its illustration of numerous events from a single story in the one image. The Renaissance features largely, with the developments in perspectival composition being the primary focus. The developments in perspectival compositions are the main reason why paintings cannot be narrative, according to some narratologists, due to the limitations in their conveyance of time. Narrative studies in visual arts then tend to focus on William Hogarth, and eventually, Victorian art. The common thread between each of these periods is that the pictures described all seek to tell a story, and with the rise of modernism in Europe and America, the kind of painting that might have been considered narrative ceased to be fashionable. Subsequently, there is very little narrative theory surrounding visual art from modernism onwards. In Chapter 1, I discuss the progression of images from the medieval period to modernism and show how they have been used to confirm or disavow narrative in visual art.

The serial-lithographs in Hogarth's work are key here, as they are primarily social commentaries of the era (1727-1760) in which they were produced and consequently, are not based in any extrinsic narratives. Hogarth's lithographs are of particular



Fig. 1 William Hogarth, 1751, *The Four Stages of Cruelty*, etching, 32 x 38 cm (each plate), Tate Britain

interest to narratologists who believe that pictures can be narrative, due to the ease in which narrative constructs found in literary narratology can be applied in their analysis. For example, Roberto Bartual's (2010) paper 'William Hogarth's *A Harlots Progress*: The Beginning of a Purely Pictographic Sequential Language', details the semiotic and indexical content of the work, but the focus remains on making the series of images fit into the structures of literary narratives. In such studies the



terms “repetition”, “narrative arc” and “sequential” arise, and they are all used to describe the passing of time through a change of state within the image/s. In Hogarth’s (1751) series, *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (Fig.1) the passing of time is apparent in the appearance of the main protagonist, who we see as he grows from a child to an adult; as a middle-aged balding adult; and finally, in death. Between the first two plates, we can only tell it is the same person due to the repetition of a particularly obvious tri-corn hat. We are also made aware that the man’s crimes become worse as he ages in the sequencing of images: He begins with cruelty to a dog; he moves on to larger creatures such as a horse and a sheep in the second plate; and in the third, he is captured as a crowd of people gather near a woman who has been murdered. This sequencing of time and content in *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (Hogarth, 1751) is sufficient for this series of plates to be considered narratively strong in light of the conventions developed by literary narratologists such as Werner Wolf (2003). These conventions tend to leave a lot of artwork without narrative, even if the audience were to have the intuition that there was a story to be told.

Though I maintain in this thesis that temporality is an important element of narrativity, I argue that temporality is not only to be found in a linear sequence as is common in the literary arts. *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (Hogarth, 1751), though fitting the narrative criteria of writers such as Wolf (2003), could be examined in two other ways: through temporal montage and spatial montage.

If a contemporary audience were to view *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (Hogarth, 1751) it could be argued that the originally intended narrative, a cautionary tale of morality, has become diluted, which creates a kind of temporal montage between the implied time in the plates and the present. Two-and-a-half centuries has lapsed between the present and the publication of the plates, and the audience’s understanding of the time period (unless well versed in history), is potentially based in cinema and documentary. The subject matter in *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (Hogarth, 1751) marks the beginning of the popular notion that the developing sociopath will harm animals in their youth (Benetato et al. 2011) and from this alone, the subject matter then has the potential to become affected by extrinsic narratives. These extrinsic narratives might include, for example, the work of contemporary animal rights activists or popular television programs following the lives of serial killers, such as *Dexter* (2006). In the absence of

a direct path to the image, a theatricality in viewing the work has the potential to evolve within a contemporary audience. This kind of viewing has the potential for the perceptions of an audience to create a temporal event. I discuss this in context to Michael Fried's notions of absorption in Chapter 2 in an exploration of films directed by Alfred Hitchcock and in two works by Sigmar Polke.

Mieke Bal, in her book, *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art-Writing* (2001) develops a methodology with which to view and write about art, which involves discarding the anterior narratives surrounding the artwork. This enables the artwork to be viewed as a 'theoretical object' (Bal, 2001) to the exclusion of its material or artistic genre; the artist's intention; or a critic's reading of the work. I own a small book published in 1957 called *Hogarth's England* by Eveline Cruikshanks. It mostly contains reproductions of Hogarth's lithographs and around each plate, is a commentary on the images by Cruikshanks. This is in no way unusual of an art book but by attempting to supplement the images with words, the focus of the audience is shifted from the images, to the text. In many ways the book becomes a spatial montage of image and text. In Chapter 3, I consider how an audience might make use of Lev Manovich's (2001) ideas about spatial montage, in combination with a discussion of concepts developed by Roland Barthes (1977 and 1964) and Mieke Bal (2001). To demonstrate these ideas, I examine the artwork, *The Refusal of Time* (2012) by William Kentridge and discuss how an audience might respond to the many signifiers in his work to the exclusion of anterior narratives, thus developing the framework for an alternative to linear narrative: Spatial narrative.

## CHAPTER 1: HOW LINEAR NARRATIVE RUINED EVERYTHING

This chapter discusses the way in which artistic developments in the Renaissance have affected the way that we have come to regard narrative in images and the subsequent theories that cemented discipline-based understandings of narrative. Beginning with an examination of the development of perspective as a whole in the Renaissance, the chapter extends its focus to the general shift in compositional technique in painting over the whole of Europe – though it should be noted that artists in each country had a slightly different approach. I will discuss how the use of perspective came to be a regular technique in the way that pictorial compositions were developed in Europe, and connect this with the arguments presented by literary narratologists who continuously employ narrow definitions of narrative to disparage narrative painting. Literary narratologists have done this by viewing painting in the “photographic convention” (Speidel, 2013, sec. 3.1.4), that is, as a singular moment, which limits narrative potential by denying temporality.

Narrative, according to Roland Barthes (1977, p. 79) is ingrained in human history over a broad spectrum of activities. Barthes makes a list of cultural activities that he considers narrative, including: literature, conversation, mime, and painting; and Klaus Speidel (2013) likewise notes that we are able to intuitively determine what is narrative and what is not. If these assumptions are true, then one must question why literary narratologists came to the general consensus that some cultural artefacts like painting have less narrative than literature. Rather than refer to narratologists in the broader sense, I have chosen to refer to them specifically as “literary narratologists”, as the base of their research tends to be in literature. This in itself seems to be problematic and it is odd that the definitions of narrative used to describe one form of art – writing, which is linear in essence — would be then used as a blanket definition of narrative in other art forms, such as images, which are spatial in nature. Gotthold Lessing (1853) recognised this difference between the arts but rather than accepting that the nature of narrative could vary over media, his focus was on the limitations of painting and poetry as drivers of narrative. While he concedes that painting can be narrative, he suggests that the spatial nature of painting confines it to a singular moment. He suggests that if an artist were to insist on partaking in narrative painting, that they depict the ‘pregnant moment’ of the story that they are attempting to relate. This, he

says, allows the viewer to easily determine what has taken place and what is to follow (Lessing 1853, p. 102). This concept was further expanded upon by Lew Andrews (1998) who notes that the immediacy and the realism of so-called pregnant moment paintings – in contrast to multi-episodic paintings – helped them merge with the real world and though the audience would be aware that they were viewing a painting, it assisted with the suspension of disbelief by extending real space into painted space. The assertion that pictures do not convey temporal movement as readily as writing, forms the basis of the argument about whether images can have narrative or not.

The concept that images do not convey a sense of temporality as readily as literature is the primary issue as far as temporality and narrative is concerned. The most basic requirement for something to be considered ‘narrative’, according to literary narratologists (Ryan (2004), Steiner (2004), Prince (2003), Wolf (2003), Fludernik (2002)) is that the work needs an element that indicates the passing of time – that is, a change of state needs to occur. The most commonly used definition of narrative is by Gerald Prince which is “the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other” (1982, p. 4). This definition is not very helpful when used in relation to visual mediums, and Markku Lehtimäki makes the comment that “...some narratological readings of visual art are still strongly based on employing literary theories for the analysis of films, paintings, or photographs” (2010, p. 86). This is obviously problematic since each of these mediums is rather different from the other. To begin with, they employ different modes of temporality and occupy a variety of contexts in which the work could be presented or exhibited. Additionally, each mode of transmission, if viewed as a ‘theoretical object’ (Bal, 2008), without considering its content or subject matter, is loaded with a variety of cultural signifiers, for example, traditional painting exists within a cultural sphere perhaps associated with wealth or power. This differs from literature, which one might associate with the development of affordable printing, and a wider distribution of texts to the public. These examples are only a few of the problems associated with applying a definition of narrative intended for literature to an array of art-forms.

The whole problem of using literary narrative theory in the analysis of narrative painting seems to have originated from the development of perspectival painting in the Renaissance. In a painting with vanishing point perspective and chiaroscuro, the assumption is that the viewer is observing a scene through a frame from a fixed vantage point at one moment in time. However, Andrews (1998) notes that it would be more accurate to say that a growing preference for visual realism contributed more to the loss of fluidity in pictorial space and that perspective was simply a contributing tool for it. This is where Lessing's pregnant moment arose. The loss of fluidity in perspectival painting created a differentiation between medieval art and early Renaissance art and as noted by Speidel (2013) and Wendy Steiner (1991), it was not uncommon to see paintings that showed the same figure in several different locations of a single pictorial plain. That the figure could be recognised through several moments, making his or her way through the pictorial plain, is an indication of a change in state for the protagonist of the painting, thus an indication of temporality. A particularly well-known image that displays this kind of journey is that of the *The Bayeux Tapestry* (c. 1070) (Fig. 2), which

relates the events leading up to the Norman conquest in England over 70 metres, with a narrow 60cm height. The work is spatially interesting because although the narrative is essentially linear and runs from left to right, it also has three bands of pictorial narrative running horizontally from one



Fig. 2 Artists unknown, c.1070, *The Bayeux Tapestry* (detail), tapestry, 70m x 60cm, Bayeux Museum

end of the tapestry to the other. The centre band is the widest and main source of the narrative and though the top band only rarely carries an image in connection to the centre band, the lower margin frequently features images relevant to the main narrative (Noxon, 1967 p. 30). This means that instead of a singular left to right reading, the attention of the audience is able to move vertically through the space as well. They are also periodically forced to view the tapestry through the vertical axis due to the marginalia interrupting the flow of the centre band. Furthermore, since the work is 70

metres long, it is impossible to really understand and view the narrative from one position, thus the viewer is required to move physically through space to experience the work in its entirety. The format of the tapestry works in support of Martin Kemp's assertion that there is no real standard set by artists for viewing, though in Western audiences, there is a general lean towards reading an image from left to right and from top to bottom due to linguistic conventions (1990, p.78). Kemp goes on to say that there are numerous examples where the space in works is exploited in this fashion, and though he doesn't explicitly reference the Bayeux tapestry, it is a good example of this exploitation.

Though there are several terms for this kind of image, I will use Göran Sonesson's (1997, p. 244) term 'multiphase' which describes several strands of a narrative in the one image. Wolf (2003) suggests that this might actually make the visual arts narratively superior, since images are able to show several narrative strands simultaneously. In opposition to the multiphase image is the monophase image, which describes images that depict a singular moment such as those from the Renaissance. According to Andrews (1998) the illustration of several moments in a single image is illogical, though Speidel counters this by saying that we would recognise the repetition of the character as an indication of temporality in the image, rather than mistaking the figures for a "cohort of identical twins" (2013, sec. 3.1.4). But, if we consider that Renaissance painting was striving towards a greater realism, it was logical to move away from multiphase painting into monophase painting, that is, painting that depicts a singular moment much like a photograph.

Ernst Gombrich says:

*Indeed, we tend to look back upon the aspirations of the fifteenth century in terms of what we understand to be the special characteristics of photography, the artists of the quattrocento are presumed to have been groping for what is finally achieved (more or less) in a photograph, not only with descriptive realism, an accurate or realistic depiction of the natural world, but also with respect to time. We assume in that the goal of the Renaissance painter was to arrest movement with the precision we impute to a photographer, to create an instantaneous view of a piece of the world. (1982, p. 21)*

Steiner (1991) notes the irony that in attempting to portray narratives more realistically, Renaissance painting limits temporality, thus making it less narrative – if the work is examined through the literary definition of narrative. In addition to monophase painting having an effect on temporality in the image, monophase paintings also capture the pregnant moment of a larger literary or oratory narrative which may cause the painting to not only be illustrational of the story but also to make it secondary to the larger story.

Steiner suggests that the two cultural activities of looking at images and reading texts have been disciplined through the promotion of realism as the basic mode of reading, Jonathan Crary notes that an “observer is [...] one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations” (1992, p. 6). And so, if realism is promoted as a basic mode of reading, it was certainly promoted as a basic mode of picture-making in the Renaissance. It should probably be noted that perspective and thus the creation of illusionistic spaces was not an overnight ‘invention’ – from its first kind of conception by Filippo Brunelleschi in 1413, it took over a hundred years for it to come into common practice (Kemp, 1990, p. 9). Another few hundred years was then spent by artists, architects and mathematicians trying to perfect, or agree on the technique. Federigo Zuccaro wrote in 1607 that “art is the mirror of holy nature [...], a practice more divine than human” (in: Kemp 1990, p. 85). It seems pertinent then that the illusionistic spaces so popular in a catholic Europe, intended to correctly portray religious or historical scenes, should be as accurate and reflective of reality, or of God’s creations as possible. In order to do this, in combination with complex geometrical techniques, the philosophers and artists of the time also needed to understand how another of God’s creations worked: the eye. This brings us to the camera obscura. Kemp (1990) says that there are some references to the camera obscura in documents from the ancient world and that there was a renewed interest in them during the Renaissance. Crary (1992) and Barthes (1981) both note that the primary use of the camera obscura was not to create or trace more realistic looking scenes in Renaissance painting but as a scientific device to study the workings of the eye, and how we see. Athanasius Kircher was an enthusiast of the camera obscura, and it appeared in the context of “natural magic” in *Ars magna lucis et*

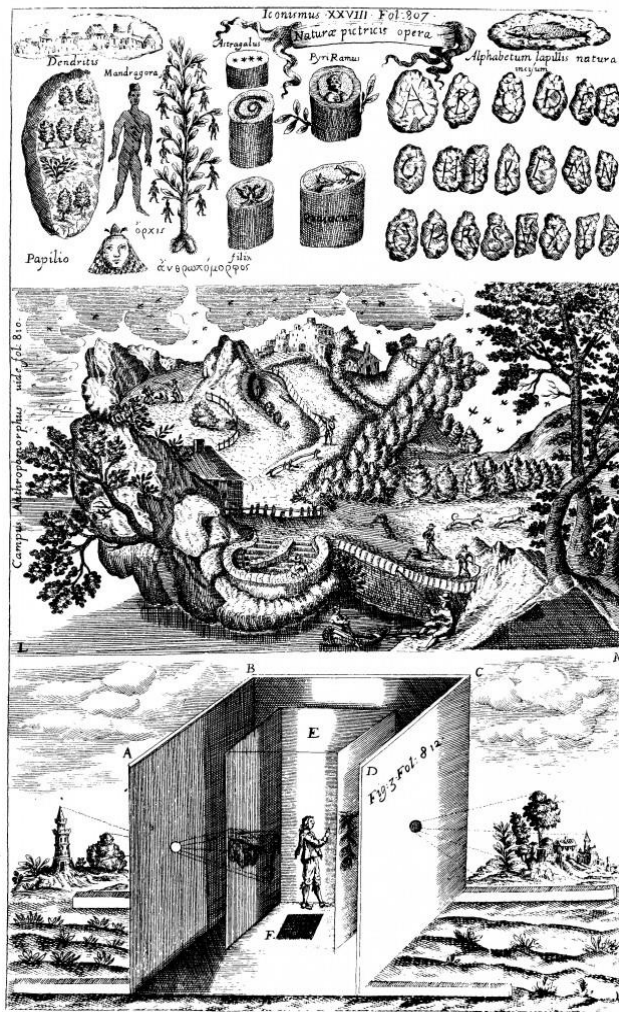


Fig. 3 Athanasius Kircher, 1671, *Nature as Artist in Ars magna lucis et umbrae*, print, Stanford University

rendered through monophase painting.

It is reasonable to assume then that Renaissance developments in pictorial space (which became the dominant way to make images in Europe), seem to be where interactions between literary narrative theory and narrative painting began. That perspectival painting continued for centuries, regardless of changing tastes between romanticism and classicism indicates how potent the endeavour for realism was and is indicative of how embedded it has become in the wider cultural imagination. Even though perspective had become a usual artistic technique prior to the invention of the camera, we are able view a long history of the various incarnations of perspectival machines. Kemp (1990) devotes an entire chapter to them, describing their various styles and developments from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution. He notes that he doesn't find it coincidental that there was a renewed interest in perspectival

*umbrae* (1671) (Fig. 3), pictured next to a mountain range that looks like a face, and some rocks that appear to have some kind of tribal markings on them.

It is suggested by Kemp (1990, p. 211) that Kircher was the first to have used the camera obscura as a magic lantern, which puts it in the context of being an entertainment or a scientific wonder of the time. Even if the camera obscura was not primarily used to create realistic scenes, it certainly confirmed how we see objects in space, and so, in combination with developments in geometry, it had an effect on painting and image making in general. This resulted in a greater realism being



machines in the Renaissance and then again in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, as this would be in line with each phase of development in science and technology. With the improvements in these fields in the nineteenth century, the quality of lenses became greatly improved and advertisements for such devices often promised the buyer that they would now be able to “take nature accurately” (Kemp 1990 p. 186).

That a painting is multiphase or monophase is irrelevant in literary definitions of narrative. Even if the all-important change of state such as those seen in Medieval painting has occurred, thus making it fit the criteria for a ‘proper’ narrative, literary narratologists, such as Wolf and the others cited here, still deny that painting has as much narrativity as a literary text. Furthermore, many, like Wolf (2003), go on to develop various systems that are intended to measure the levels of narrative present in various types of painting. Multiphase painting thus ends up containing more narrative than a monophase painting (Wolf, 2003). However, even were it true that monophase painting has very little narrativity and monophase painting is arguably the most present in our collective cultural memories, it seems misplaced that monophase painting appears to be the main focus of most narrative-image studies. Speidel (2013, sec. 2.1) notes that upholding the belief that literature is a superior vehicle for narrative (as opposed to the image as a narrative vehicle), is similar to saying that the English language is superior to Mandarin, because, as understood by English speakers, Mandarin lacks a past and present tense.

Steiner writes:

*Narrativity is basically a non-topic for art historians – not only is the concept poorly understood, but the pictures that are governed by it are now out of fashion. The last association that one would have with modern art is that the adjective ‘narrative.’ And in the formalistic criticism in recent years, the term has a distinctly negative voice.* (2004, p. 146)

It is perhaps an over-generalisation to say that narrativity is basically a non-topic for art historians. A thorough search through the back catalogue of Burlington magazine, for example, reveals a great number of articles about narrative works from the Renaissance, the medieval period and from Victorian England, and so Steiner is largely correct in her assertion that the pictures that are primarily intended to be narrative are now out of fashion. Arguably, images that are regarded as narrative seem to be

approached with the assumption that the work is narrative, without the question of what makes it narrative, and this is one of the ideas that the literary narratologists have grasped on to. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that few art theorists have discussed narrative painting and since literary theorists have picked it up – and apart from a few artists working in an intentionally narrative style – most of the theory based around narrative painting has become mired in discussions of perspectival-type paintings since the Renaissance. Arguably, this kind of image is perhaps what occupies the cultural mind when narrative is mentioned. Though some will say that this kind of painting was halted by modernism (Crary, 1992), it was perhaps only halted within the main streams of modernism itself. In this context the consideration of images with narrative intent, or even the continuation of such a practice within post-modernism appears absent within the theories of contemporary art.

## CHAPTER 2: PERCEPTION AS NARRATIVE TIME IN VISUAL ARTS

*There is then no doubt about this importance of time in the plastic arts, about its double presence as time of contemplation and intrinsic time of the work and about the existence of an interplay of harmonies and disharmonies between the one and the other of these two times.*

- Etienne Souriau (1949, p. 300)

While the word “narrative” would be most readily associated with story-telling within the arts, its contemporary usage has become quite broad. A brief database search yielded results such as mathematical narrative (mostly graphs); narrative therapy; and a whole subject area based on “narrative business techniques”. Apart from literary narratologists losing their hold on the purity of narrative, it seems to demonstrate just how prevalent story-telling is in human activity. If we consider Klaus Speidel’s (2013) notion that we have an intuition as to whether something is narrative or not, how many of these seemingly tenuous narrative areas would fit into that intuition?

Speidel suggests that literary narratologists seem to be seeking to protect their own generally accepted definition and quotes Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan : “By narrowing the scope of narrative, I am trying to defend the term against being emptied of all semantic content: If everything is narrative, then nothing is.” (in: Speidel 2013, sec. 2) This is but one example of the difficulties that visual media suffers in regards to its narrative content. David Bordwell (1985) and Edward R. Branigan (1984) state that there is no narrator in film; which led to Gérard Genette (1988) and F.K Stanzel (1984) to both insist that narrative is a product of narration, so if there is no active narrator, there is no narrative. Marie-Laure Ryan agrees with Sol Worth that visual media “lacks the code, the grammar and the syntactic rules necessary to articulate specific meanings” (2004, p.1). With the ongoing assumption that visual modes of transmission are less narrative than literature, narratologists such as Roberto Bartual (2010), Steiner (2004), Gerald Prince (2003), Werner Wolf (2003) and Monika Fludernik (2002) all suggest that narrative is quantifiable, that is, that some images have more narrative than others, and develop systems for narrative to be measured with. Mieke Bal notes that “against other texts like [...] visual arts, linguistic text is linear” (2009, p. 52). And so, despite the differences between linguistic texts, and visual arts, Speidel (2013), Bartual (2010),

Wolf (2003), Fludernik (2002), Prince (2003) and even Steiner (2004) to some extent, who all favour the notion that painting – as tends to be the focus – can be narrative and tend to defend its narrative status, do so within the boundaries of literary narratology.

Despite narrative being “present in most human activities” (Barthes, 1977 p. 79), what is the result when something is intentionally “anarrative”? A great majority of narrative theory surrounding the visual arts lies in the analysis of perspectival-type painting as developed in the Renaissance, and the progressive narratives found in a number of medieval tapestries. The narratives in these works usually reference pre-existing stories, mythologies and history, and the kind of illusionistic painting developed in the Renaissance continued on – albeit with changing fashions and stories considered worthy of painting – until modernism. Clement Greenberg (1940) pinpoints a moment in art history

where this narrative shift occurred in his discussion of Gustave Courbet’s paintings, which, instead of being based on extrinsic narratives,



Fig. 4 (left) Artists unknown, c.1070, *Bayeux Tapestry* (detail), tapestry, 70m x 60cm, Bayeux Museum



Fig. 5 (right) Pablo Picasso, 1907, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O Version O)*, oil on canvas, 244 x 234cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

were based on things that Courbet could see. This raises the question of whether art that is focussed on form can be narrative. If we compare the pictorial space and form from medieval art, for example, a section of the Bayeux Tapestry (c.1070) (Fig. 4), to the pictorial space and form in Pablo Picasso’s *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907) (Fig. 5), a canonical early modernist painting, visually, they are quite similar. The human form in both images has been simplified using basic shapes; the colours are relatively flat; and the backgrounds are abstracted, yet create an environment – even if somewhat

flattened – for the figures. Likewise, the structural elements – the flattening of the space in particular – of many modernist paintings could easily be compared to many other artworks from the medieval period and be described as visually similar.

The difference really lies in the intention of the pieces, where the Bayeux Tapestry seeks to tell a story (diegesis), and *Les Femmes d'Alger* means to show (mimesis) – especially in connection to its subject matter. Despite the modernists' intention to focus on the formal aspects of art, one might still argue that this piece by Picasso is still narrative, because even if the figures are not realistic, they still refer to an object – a human figure – and the baboon-style faces when used in place of a human face, still signify some meaning through the juxtaposition to the naked women, who by popular account were initially supposed to be *belles de nuit*. These elements distract from the formal elements of the work by the arguably automatic activity of creating narratives undertaken by the viewer. The purposeful naivety of the forms additionally refers to primitive art (if coming from a western cultural background), and from this reference a temporal effect is created on two levels. The first level is created by reaching back through time to before “western civilisation” to our ancestors; and the second by the creation of a direct link to the artwork of various African tribes (in Picasso's case), whose cultural practices have remained largely unchanged for thousands of years. If narrative is an indication of temporality, this kind of temporal connection between our collective past and present further grounds the work in narrative. It is when Picasso's work evolves from the figurative into the abstract that the question of whether the work can be regarded as narrative arises.

To answer this question, I will, in the remainder of this chapter, discuss the unlikely vehicle of narrative that is minimalism in connection to Michael Fried's (in)famous essay ‘Art and Objecthood’ (1998). Using Fried's ideas, I will go on to examine some visual and aural compositions from selected scenes in several films by Alfred Hitchcock. Finally, I will discuss Sigmar Polke's manipulation of time in two of his artworks.

### *I: Fried's Absorption*

In his much debated paper, 'Art and Objecthood' (1998), Michel Fried takes exception to the lack of "absorption" present in minimalist art. Absorption refers to his research that began in a series of lectures on pre-modernist French art in the early 1960s, which culminated in his much later work, *Absorption and Theatricality* (1988). Absorption refers to the level to which a figure in a painting is absorbed in their activity – that is, they

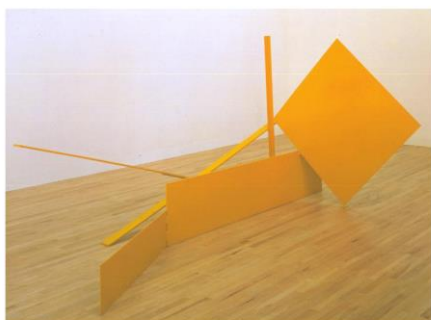


Fig. 6 (top) Anthony Caro, 1955, *Yellow Swing*, painted steel, Tate

Fig. 7 (bottom) Barnett Newman, 1951-2 *Adam*, oil on canvas, 242 x 202cm, Tate

are distracted and unselfconscious in their activity, for example, reading or weeping, without any awareness that beyond the painting, they may have an audience, someone peeking into their world. The phenomenon of a figure being absorbed in their activity by extension affects the viewer, in the sense that the viewer does not experience the sensation that the figure is performing for their benefit. The viewer is then allowed to experience the work privately and without any awareness of themselves as the spectator – they too become absorbed. Fried indicates that as soon as one becomes aware of their physicality and gaze in relation to the art object,

absorption is lost and theatricality begins.

This is the major point where Fried takes umbrage with Minimalism – how can one get absorbed in something that is so shallow? By dropping the illusion that a painting was simply an extension of the space, the audience becomes confronted with pigment and canvas; or its stretcher. By making the art-object apparent by discarding layers of intrinsic story-telling, the artist discards any risk of absorption in the subject matter by making the viewer aware of themselves through the lack of intricacy or separate parts

(it is this which Fried calls theatricality); the flat, monochrome surfaces; and a complete awareness of the unyielding surfaces that constitute some of the sculptural forms which shifts into the viewer. At the current moment in time, where examples of neo-minimalism are not uncommon in contemporary art, it is slightly difficult to imagine how confronting it must have been to be witness one of Anthony Caro's sculptures (Fig. 6), or Barnett Newman's paintings (Fig. 7) for the first time. By questioning the removal of signifiers or referents, which results in a theatricality for the audience, Fried uncovers not only the essence of minimalism, but also a description of modernism in general. He also realises the potential of art to involve the viewer when he quotes Rob Morris who said "Whereas in previous art what is to be had from the work is located strictly within [it]" (in: Fried 1998 p.153). Fried goes on to say that "the experience of literalist [minimalist] art is of an object in a situation - one that, virtually by definition, includes the beholder" (Fried, 1998 p.153). By involving the viewer, spatial interactions which develop a relationship with the artwork become more apparent. Keith Moxey (2013 p. 60) notes the emergence of a scholarly field which examines the phenomena of the way that visual objects communicate with their audiences outside of linguistics, and names Fried (amongst others) as a proponent of these ideas. He terms this interaction "anachronic" and says "...[M]any images have the capacity to create their own time for attentive beholders." (2013 p. 174). Moxey and Fried's ideas suggest that a spatio-temporal experience can be attained while viewing an art object. If during the Renaissance the audience was given a fixed position to view a painting as an extension of space, Fried's criticism allowed the audience to move around the space that the art object inhabited – although, this is not a new concept – as the audience in order to view, for example, the *Bayeux Tapestry* (c.1070), has to move along its 70 metre length to view the entire tapestry. If as Etienne Souriau (1949 p. 295) proposes, viewing an artwork is like viewing a cathedral, which is a successive process that happens over time, moving around to witness an artwork from various positions in space becomes the equivalent of being able to move around the cathedral.

To digress to a perfectly still moment in front of an art-form which does not inspire the theatricality of movement, except for the eye, I would like to discuss film. The common factor between perspectival painting, the camera obscura, and cinema is that for the illusion of space to be most effective, the viewer needs to be in a particular position. As Stephen Heath (1981) notes in regard to film, the spectator is "placed" in

relation to its images. Much like Plato's allegory of the cave, this refers back to the artist or director as having chosen the particular illusion that the viewer will see, and further to this, in film, the director will also make the decision as to how long the audience will see it – though arguably the difference between a cinema audience and Plato's prisoners is that one audience knows that what they are seeing is not reality. Phillippe Marion (1997) describes two time-modes of viewing, "homochrone" and "heterochrone". Books and paintings, for example, are heterochronic, due to the varying lengths of time readers may take to read or view them and no matter how long the reader takes, they will essentially glean the same content – though I proffer that the longer that one takes to view a piece of art, the richer the experience will be. Film is homochronic as a time limit is imposed on the viewer, in both the overall length of the film and from shot to shot. By controlling the film time, I would like to suggest that it is possible to influence the perception and involvement of the audience, thus taking film out of Fried's absorptive zone and back into theatricality.

Alfred Hitchcock, who is widely regarded as a modernist, made films that are interesting in regards to Fried's theatricality. Steven Derosa (2001) describes Hitchcock's collaborations with his writers as notable due to his insistence that the story be told primarily through visual, rather than verbal means. Hitchcock (1968) writes in his article, 'Rear Window' that the story in his film, *Rear Window* (1954) is told in visual terms and notes that too many narratives in films are conveyed through dialogue. *Rear Window* (1954) is theatrical in nature, due to the entire narrative being contained within a single set. The opening scene, which has been much written about, consists of a long crane-shot over an apartment complex, with various close ups of the residents of the apartments, including the sleeping protagonist, Jeff. The camera eventually returns to Jeff's apartment and we see his broken leg, a broken camera and finally some photographs of car races and other action photographs. Without a word spoken, and even though we have only been given clues or partial answers, we have an idea as to what happened; where the film is set; and who Jeff's neighbours are.

Though the visual aspects of Hitchcock's works are a major contributor to the experience of his narratives, his use of time and space also create a rich narrative layer that not only shows or tells, but involves the audience. Richard Nilsen describes Hitchcock as a "...master of time and space, stretching and shrinking both to suit his



needs” (1999, p. D3). The stretching of time can be witnessed in the protracted durations of various frames, and is a concept that Majia Holmer-Nadesan (2002) discusses in relation to M.G Flaherty’s book, *Watched Pot: How We Experience Time* (1999). Flaherty describes three modes of experiencing passing time, and his description of protracted time is that “time is perceived to pass slowly in situations with abnormally high *or* abnormally low levels of overt activity” (1999, p. 29). Holmer-Nadesan (2002, p. 258) notes that Flaherty “draws upon a vast array of personal narratives” and that he uses this data to examine subjective experiences of time. He found that time became protracted in moments of trauma, suffering or intense emotion – earthquakes, accidents, torture and so on; and conversely, in moments of low activity, like waiting in a queue. It is the moments of waiting – the long silences, or still camera frames contrasted with intense moments of activity in Hitchcock’s films that assist with his “stretching and shrinking of time” (Nilsen, 1999, p. D3). Hitchcock in his article ‘Rear Window’ (1968) describes his method for creating suspense in *Psycho* (1960), which he created by having the famous shower-stabbing scene occur in the first half of the film. As a result, the suspense that something horrible might happen to any of the other characters follows the audience throughout the remainder of the film. Thus, Hitchcock (1968) notes, there was no need for any extreme violence after that scene – the atmosphere and nature of the killer had been shown.

Richard Gilmore says:

*[Hitchcock’s] use of these different narrative voices, [such as time manipulation or visual arrangements] produces a layered narration, which constantly shuttles the spectator back and forth from one level to another and from identification with one narrative voice to that with another. In playing with different kinds of narration, Hitchcock foregrounds the process of narration itself, making us aware of the various mediating agencies through which the story is told. (2011, p. 471)*

In Hitchcock’s film *Marnie* (1964) the opening scene is quite short but due to the silence and the composition of the frame, the time of the scene could be, according to Flaherty’s research, perceived as being longer. After the opening titles, which are accompanied with some slightly dramatic music, the audience arrives in the film, and is immediately given a close up on what Brigitte Peuker (2011) describes as an “overtly sexualised” yellow purse. The camera zooms out to a rear mid-shot of the purse being carried away from us by a woman who is walking along a deserted train platform (Fig.

8). The view of the set at this point can only be described as perspectival, and the colours – the muted greys and browns of the station and the woman's clothing, contrasted with the bright yellow – can be compared to an earlier Ben Nicolson painting (Fig. 9). Though the painting and the film were made thirty years apart, a definition of modernist film did not arise until the 1960s, as noted by Bordwell (1997 p. 83). The aesthetics in many of Hitchcock's sets are reminiscent of many modernist paintings, and this aspect tends to lend weight to claims that Hitchcock was influenced by modernism as it appeared in France, America and England, and not solely by early German film. The set shows no organic edges, except for the purse, and, in combination with the one-point perspective of the trains on either side of the train platform and the woman's figure blocking the view of the exit point of the perspective, leaves the audience no escape. The only sound is the clicking of the woman's shoes on the platform, stripping away any use of music – another layer of narrative device. We are immediately conscious of the absence of music, thanks to the dramatic music in the opening titles. Michael Chion (1994) describes the use of music in Ingmar Bergman's film, *Persona* (1966), and he notes that if the music were to be removed in the opening scenes, the horror of the imagery would become abstracted and no longer 'real' (1994, p.6). By removing the music in this scene in *Marnie* (1954) Hitchcock creates an abstraction which leads to an additional element of space for the audience to connect consciously with the film. The camera stops zooming out when the platform is fully in frame, and it is revealed that there is no other movement except for the woman walking. It becomes apparent that she is walking on a red line, and in contrast to the muted colours and harsh geometry in the rest of the scene, this seems rather sinister. The woman stops, places



Fig. 8 (top) Alfred Hitchcock, 1964, *Marnie*, film still  
 Fig. 9 (bottom) Ben Nicholson, 1931/6, *Untitled (Greek Landscape)*, oil on canvas, 69 x 79cm, British Council

her suitcase on the station, and the next scene bursts onto the screen – a businessman in an office shouting “Robbed!” In this opening scene, nothing is left to chance – the audience is essentially forced to note each and every element of the composition. Thomas Hemmeter (2011) notes that Hitchcock’s narratives often pull “film spectators into the fiction as co-narrators, their fears and anticipations and assumptions informing the film events even as the director’s images do”. This manipulation of time, apparent in the opening scene of *Marnie* (Hitchcock, 1964) due to the removal of devices such as camera movement and music, is contrary to David Bordwell’s (1985) ideas that narration should control fictional time as invisibly as possible. Without the invisible forward progression of time, the audience becomes conscious of narrative movement, and though they remain in a fixed position and are not physically theatrical, there is some level of awareness of the narrative that prevents complete absorption in this particular portrayal of time. Thus a narrative relationship between the film and the audience is forged. Further to this, Heath (1981) notes that, in contrast to the smooth flow of time in real life, cinema interrupts that flow so arguably, even in the most invisible forward-flows of story events, it is difficult to completely absorb an audience.

Montage is a device used by Hitchcock and many other film makers to manipulate time, space and information. Lev Manovich (2001) notes that though there are many types of montage, the two main types are spatial and temporal. Temporal montage is often used to communicate narrative information out of real-time, and spatial montage is used to communicate information through the juxtaposition of several images on the same screen. They both consequently become vehicles for compressed layers of narrative. Montage is most often seen in cinema in its temporal form and as Manovich says, “[Cinema] replaced all other modes of narration with a sequential one, an assembly line of shots that appear on the screen one at a time” (2001 p. 322). Manovich goes on to note that this is at odds with the prominent role that spatial narrative played in European visual culture for centuries, and suggests that spatial montage, though not an entirely new concept, will become more prominent as technology continues to evolve. In this chapter, though, I will focus primarily on temporal montage, and return to spatial montage later in the thesis. The experimental film, *The Kuleshov Effect* (Kuleshov, 1910) is an early example of montage. The film, which only runs for 16 seconds, alternates between a shot of actor Ivan Moszhukin

with a seemingly expressionless face and shots of a bowl of soup, a young girl in a coffin and a woman on a lounge. Though the same shot of Moszhukin was used for each cut, audiences were apparently impressed at his subtlety of facial expressions in acting (Gilmore, 2011).

The Kuleshov Effect demonstrates that the audience will continue to make narrative decisions even when seemingly disparate images are juxtaposed. To apply this idea to the temporal montage in the opening scenes of *Marnie* (Hitchcock, 1964), the moment that the businessman shouts “Robbed!” connects with a strong intuition as to what the first scene of the woman on the train platform was about. There has been no close-up of the woman’s face and the audience has not had an opportunity to identify with her character. Consequently, the audience is pulled between sympathy for the woman and the desire that she will get away; and sympathy for the man who has been robbed – though, the man is moderately unpleasant and seems to be a misogynist, so even in this short period of time, we start to wish for the woman’s successful escape. It is the concept of juxtaposing seemingly disparate events, or images that give the audience a starting point to begin processing the visual and/or aural clues in the narrative, which ultimately creates a narrative extrinsic to the film: that is, via the perception of the audience. As Eisenstein (1949) suggests, the collision of two concepts will produce a new meaning.

## *II: Laterna Magica*

Though temporal montage is mostly associated with film and photography it is not unreasonable for it to be an element in visual arts. Sigmar Polke’s practice has often been described as “resistant to analysis” by theorists such as Donald Kuspit who said “Polke’s work is so resistant to analysis as to deprive the critic of their prime functions of interpretation and mediation” (1996, p. 14). That this was written in the opening paragraphs in his contribution to the exhibition catalogue, *Sigmar Polke: Back to Post-Modernity* (1996) does not indicate a promising beginning. Kuspit seems to get mired in “joker” style metaphors that are unable to penetrate the substance of Polke’s work. He describes the work as a new act of surrealism, then goes on to make accusations of banality and narcissism, and finally elevates the work to the true sublime – and all along, he seems to allow his anterior-narrative of Polke “The Artist” interfere with his

reading. There has been an ongoing discussion amongst various theorists as to whether Polke's work is post-modern, or modern, and if it is modern, is he a terrible modernist, or is it pop, or is it surrealism? I would like to suggest that it probably does not matter. Much in the same way that Mieke Bal (2001) notes in her discussion that Louise Bourgeois' art practice is resistant to classification, I will not attempt to pigeon-hole Polke's work. The key to understanding Polke's work, Roy Holt asserts, is that one should not.

Holt says:

*[It is] wrong to look for answers in Polke's work, while the clues are there, there are no answers. Clues open up possibilities, while answers are closures. Polke's work is certainly not about closures, nor should we be looking for them* (1996, p. 125).

He goes on to indicate that we should allow time for our perception to bring together the seemingly dissonant images, which act as clues, but should never be solved.

Apart from the montage of images drawn from every source imaginable, which act as clues on the surface of Polke's paintings, he also uses a transparent material in place of traditional canvas. This has two effects: firstly, even if the images that Polke selects are perspectival, the depth of space is contradicted by the stretcher and/or space beyond the painting; and secondly, the material tends to reflect light in a self-contained ethereal sense, especially in the works where Polke experimented with chemical glazing. However, being able to look beyond the surface of the painting removes the flatness that Greenberg (1986) describes as the dominant element of modernism, and instead of being repelled from the painting, or at least, not being allowed through the surface of it, the audience is pulled through the transparent material, even if only on to a gallery wall. Subsequently, the negative spaces between Polke's images do not allow for a pause of contemplation and returning to Flaherty's (1999) ideas about the manipulation of time, the compression of conceptual triggers on the surface has the potential to affect the audience's perception of time.

One example of this kind of work is Polke's *Fastest Gun in the West* (2002) (Fig. 10)



Fig. 10 Sigmar Polke, 2002, *Fastest Gun in the West*, mixed media on fabric, 302 x 503cm, Tate Modern

which is composed of a perspectival image of a black and white photograph of white middle aged man wearing jeans and suspenders, shooting two cowboy figures to the left, in the middle ground. The triangle is completed with a

snippet of a café slightly above shooter's head in the background. We know it is a café, as it is written, but in a font that one would associate with an old west sign that proclaimed "saloon". On an initial glance at the artwork, the arrangement of the composition (arguably) creates tension within the image for those that are accustomed to reading from left-to-right. The position of the shooter is our first point of contact, as he is visually the closest to the audience and his position consequently forces a right-to-left viewing. A longer inspection of the work reveals that the two figures that are being shot at are cut-outs or mock-ups of cowboys with target paper mounted on their chests, and that they have no arms. Their heads however, though just vague head shapes, are dark in tone, suggesting African Americans. Despite the heavy narratives and social commentaries in the images that Polke presents to us, a layer of additional narrative thickens the plot – and that is the exposure of the stretcher bars. The audience is doubly pulled through the image as described earlier by the transparent nature of the canvas, and also via the perspective. Upon hitting the gallery wall though, the illusion of perspective is destroyed and like an audience viewing a piece of Minimalist art, or from the silences and hard geometry of the set in Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964), the audience viewing *Fastest Gun in the West* (2002) is forced out of the artwork. The shooter at the front is also pushed out of the artwork; he already looks like a clipping from a newspaper or an old film, and his suspension on the transparent canvas emphasises this. This creates a struggle between being reminded that it is an artwork by the stretcher bars, and the reality that the shooter may have been photographed for

a local newspaper; or from the “Wild West” film genre. Finally, the bars in their grid-like formation break the surface and each part of the grid frames its own section, leaving the audience no time to rest between each element of the work. The combination of these elements has the potential to manipulate the audience’s perception of time in the way that Flaherty (1999) describes – the push-pull of the space acts as a constant and baffling interruption to viewing the image due to the grid structure and the subsequent conceptual compression has the potential to slow time.

Beyond the structures of the canvas and the stretchers, Polke’s icons are numerous and their combinations are fraught with ontological complexity. The resultant narratives in the combinations of his montages are infinite and Holt notes while discussing Polke’s work that “an object cannot be meaningless or unintelligible while there is the slightest possibility that a viewer will find or construct meaning within it” (1996, p. 122). It is this relationship that Polke’s work has to montage that returns us to Eisenstein’s (1949) idea about the placement of two images creating a third, unspoken meaning. If Polke’s work is contrasted to something with fewer overt signifiers, such as minimalism, which Fried (1998) notes is mostly criticised as being boring, the narrative effects are obviously very different. In minimalism, the audience may consider colour or form; or the perfection of the object’s manufacture; the space that the artwork is in; or the space that they are sharing with it; while with Polke’s work, there is so much information given through disparate iconographical and structural (physical) complexities that the actual viewing may take some time.

David Thistlewood notes:

*Polke’s images oblige the viewer to operate in the conceptual spaces between the conventions that he so liberally deploys. He exploits the human survival instinct of pattern perception – of connecting the seemingly unconnected...* (1996, p. 15)



Fig. 11 John McCracken, 1967, *Untitled (black plank)*, polyester resin, fibreglass and plywood, 243 x 40cm, Tate

Consequently, the narrative experience that one would have while viewing a Polke work varies substantially from the narrative experience that one would have viewing a minimalist piece such as John McCracken's work, *Untitled (black plank)* (1967) (Fig. 11). To once again refer back to Flaherty's concepts about our perceptions of time, abnormally high activity, or abnormally low activity both have the potential to manipulate our perception of time. So it emerges that not only are narratives possible in visual arts, there are also a variety of them.



Fig 12 Sigmar Polke, 1988-1996, *Laterna Magica*, mixed media, Portikus, Frankfurt

Polke's *Laterna Magica* (1988-1996) (Fig. 12), which is exhibited with fluctuating numbers of panels is a kind of installation of paintings, or painting-installation that contains an additional narrative layer due to the viewer being able to physically move around the screens, in what was described by Fiona Elliot (1996) as a maze-like arrangement. It was first exhibited in Polke's *American Retrospective* (1991) at the Brooklyn Museum, and it is interesting to note that the installation was shown off to the side of the main exhibition, in a room with low lighting and predominantly used to house nineteenth century American Landscape painting (Hartley et al. 1994).

That the work was shown in such a room has the potential to emphasize the pull between temporality and spatiality, especially for patrons already familiar with the



permanent collection. As Roland Barthes writes in *Elements of Semiology* (1964), a sign can also derive its value from its surroundings. When I first heard about the work, the title alone created a sense of mystery and excitement. Athanasius Kircher once placed the camera obscura into the same category as “natural magic”, as something that mechanically reproduces the function of the human eye, and as time progressed various developments of the camera obscura were used by artists to “take nature accurately” (Kemp, 1990). There are varying accounts of who actually invented the early magic lantern, but it seems that it was about forty years after Kircher completed his work on *Ars magna lucis et umbrae* (1600) that the magic lantern came into common use. It was used primarily by scientists, and as the lighting technique improved from candles to oil wicks, it was adopted by illusionists in the 1700s as a means to project ghosts and phantoms into smoke – a practice referred to as phantasmagoria. It was additionally used for slide shows of images from various exotic locations in lectures.

This short history of the magic lantern reveals at least three things about Polke’s *Laterna Magica* (1988-96) – first, that the work shows rather than tells and therefore gives the audience the conceptual space to become conscious of the narratives in the work. Second, Polke’s seemingly random selection of images correspond directly to the title of the installation and the images subsequently have the ability to pull the perceptions of the audience not only back through time, but also into an unwritten future. Finally, this is furthered by Polke’s use of alchemy – that is, his experimentations with pigments, metals, inks and resins – in the production of the works which is connotative of humanities dark past full of experiments, superstition and magic. It adds to the mystery already begun by the title of the installation, and in combination with the wide variety of images, the paintings could be viewed as a temporal montage of human history. The images, which include “transformers” fighting in a medieval landscape in-front of a silhouette of the earth; a reproduction of a woodcut of a medieval mermaid with erotically dangling fruit; and a meteor shower, exist in the realm of the magic lantern and phantasmagoria but due to the requirement to move around the works Fried’s absorption cannot be achieved. The audience must also remain in the present.

Fried's analysis of minimalism has provided a basis for a narrative to be formed through the theatricality of movement, and the concept that an audience member can contribute to a narrative, or become part of it, simply through the act of viewing. This concept indicates that, for a work to be narrative, it does not have to be immediately identifiably narrative, in the sense that we recognise that a typical Renaissance painting is narrative before even attempting to untangle the story. That viewing a piece of minimalist art becomes a narrative experience indicates that even the smallest piece of information can contribute to the beginning of a story. In my study of the Hitchcock film *Marnie* (1964), the rejection of the audience from the hard geometry of the set, in combination with the lack of music, contributed to a kind of external participatory narrative suspense. This, in addition to the requirement of the audience to piece together information imparted in the temporal montage, demonstrates



Fig. 13 Pablo Picasso, 1910, *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, oil on canvas, Art Institute of Chicago

Fried's ideas of theatricality and audience involvement. Finally, I identified the same kind of perceptual rejection present in the work of Sigmar Polke due to his manipulation of time in his presentation and selection of images. At the beginning of this chapter, I pondered whether something that was intentionally anarrative could be narrative. I then went on to question whether one of Picasso's later cubist paintings could be considered through a narrative lens. For example, could *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* (1910) (Fig. 13) be considered narrative, even though it contains very few recognisable objects? I would like to propose that the answer to both of these question is "Yes" – if there is some theatricality in the process of viewing, there will always be some kind of narrative.

## CHAPTER 3: SPATIAL NARRATIVE – AN ALTERNATIVE

Despite much debate by literary narratologists, who either support or disavow the notion of narrative in the visual arts, Klaus Speidel (2013) points out, the reason that this argument about visual media and its narrative status continues is that those who question it have an intuition as to what is narrative and what is not. Rick Altman (2008) goes so far to suggest that if someone is told that a line across a page is narrative, they will find things about the line that indicates a story, such as its variations in its width. This supports the notion that not only is there narrative to be found in the visual arts, but also suggests that linear narrative, as found in literature, is not the only kind of narrative. To try and make linear narrative “fit” the visual arts seems to be a redundant task, simply because the way we experience each media is so different. In recognising that visual media is presented differently, and therefore experienced differently to literary texts, I would like to propose an alternative to linear narrative: spatial narrative. In this chapter I will examine how spatial narrative can be gleaned from spatial montage, and is therefore a better suited approach to experiencing visual art than attempting to experience it in a linear fashion. I do this via a discussion of Mieke Bal’s (1999) methodology in her examination of Louise Bourgeois’ *Spider*, where she treats the artwork as a theoretical object and responds to narratives intrinsic to the work, while discarding anterior narratives. Anterior narratives have the potential to influence the experience of any artwork, including the creation of a linear narrative, where the audience may be tempted to create a kind of mental-checklist. I then connect Bal’s methodology to Roland Barthes’ essay, ‘Death of the Author’ (1977), as her method relies heavily on personally experiencing an artwork. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how William Kentridge’s installation, *The Refusal of Time* (2014), which, in its dense employment of spatial montage and signifiers, questions the linearity of time that is dominant in Western thinking.

*I: Spatial Montage/Spatial Narrative*

Lev Manovich (2001) notes that spatial narrative is not a new concept, that it was a dominant mode of visual narrative in Europe for centuries and cites Giotto as an early practitioner of it. Manovich (2001) proposes that the shift to sequential narrative came in line with developments in science and technology, specifically cinema – though I will go further and suggest that developments in printing techniques which provided affordable reading material also contributed to the rise of linear narrative. Manovich (2001) predicts that with the development of various computing technologies in recent history, and developments in the future, spatial narrative will once again become the dominant mode of narrative, through what he terms “spatial montage.” Manovich (2001) describes spatial montage in its basic form, as several images or modes of information appearing at the one time, on the one screen. He specifically describes the superimposition of images, or a screen split into several sections, but also refers to multiphase paintings such as those that were produced in the Renaissance.

For spatial narrative to become a dominant way to experience narrative in visual art, the way in which the audience understands narrative needs to undertake a shift. Anecdotally, in attending an exhibition, it is frustrating to witness a great number of fellow exhibition attendees conducting a close reading of the statement beside the artwork, before finally giving a quick glance to the artwork and roaming off to the next plate of written information. Bal’s book, *Louise Bourgeois’ Spider: The Architecture of Art Writing* (2001) uses its namesake to demonstrate an alternative approach to writing about, or viewing art by treating artworks as theoretical objects. This means that when an artwork is examined, it is not examined solely in regards to the artist’s biographical history; nor in a way that proffers only a reading of the “official” semiotic content of the work. The artwork should not be viewed exclusively in context to what a critic has said about it; nor solely in context to the artworks art-period or material genre. Bal (2001) reduces the viewing of visual art to three levels of narrativity: The artist, the critic and the viewer. Each plays a part in the understanding or experience of the artwork: the artist selects, suggests and creates signs in space; the critic suggests how the work should be read; and the audience or viewer fills in the details, thus making them, as Rick Altman (2008) suggests, the narrators, as opposed to the narratees. To

demonstrate how the audience could contribute to the narrative in an artwork, Bal includes a description of her experience of Bourgeois' *Spider* (1997) (Fig. 14), and we



Fig. 14 Louise Bourgeois, 1997, *Spider*, steel and mixed media, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

are taken on a journey with Bal as she moves around its legs, spying details that perhaps she hadn't noticed at first; we get to experience the emotions that are triggered in Bal by the spider and the paraphernalia that it contains and the physical space that it consumes and controls. In short, Bal has a viewing experience that discards anterior narratives, which in

turn becomes a narrative for the reader as the artwork slowly unfolds for her.

If we interchange Roland Barthes' (1977) "author" and "reader" with "narrators and/or artist" and "narratees and/or audience", the result is an audience liberated from the dictates of the critic, and even the limitations created by simply knowing what the artist (or in Barthes case – the author) intended, allowing the viewer to experience the artwork individually, rather than confirming what knowledge they already had of it. In Barthes' writing it is possible to trace a movement between what are arguably his key works; *The Elements of Semiology* (1964) and *Death of the Author* (1967). The evolution between the texts seems to be from the indication that language is universal — that is language is a system common for all, thus language can signify and define set of ideas — to a position which tends to favour language as more malleable and audience-centred. Speidel refers to C.S Peirce and notes that "words are mostly symbolic, they link to their object through habit or convention" (in: Speidel, 2013, sec. 3.14). He goes on to say that a word on its own has less meaning than if it were surrounded by others, and without any ordering, they have arguably less meaning than an image (icon) on its own, which we understand because it "look[s] similar to [its] referent" (Speidel, 2013, sec. 3.1.4). This frees images from words, and allows them to exist in their own right as a tool for communication, which is something that Keith Moxey (2013 p.79) discusses in his examination of the various ways that Pieter Bruegel the Elder's

paintings have been written about. He notes that “words often fail to do justice to the infinite potential of visual experience”. This lends support to his ideas about anachrony, and by downgrading the importance of texts which may seek to make transparent Bruegel’s intentions, the potential for the artworks to convey their own time through their aesthetic emerges.

If we consider the act of viewing an art-object as responding to signs in space, in contrast to reading a written text linearly, the need to have the signs ordered fades away. This results in spatial montage, even if the signs are not presented in the manner described by Manovich. Though the icons look similar to their referents, the order is determined by the viewer in an infinite number of combinations, which will make each reading individual, even if only a slight difference occurs between each reading. This results in the audience or the narratees filling in the details, or stringing their experiences and readings together, and having a narrative unfold before them. While Barthes notes that “text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (1977, p. 146), the audience are also drawn from similar, innumerable positions.

An early example of spatial montage occurs in the experimental film, Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) (Fig. 15). The film famously experiments with spatial montage as described by Manovich (2001), including frames which show the superimposition of several images, or several screens in a singular shot. However, a less obvious kind of spatial montage occurs over the entire film, for example, a cluster of thematically similar images of several kinds of people sleeping in various locations: a child, a woman, a homeless person and a worker at the beginning of the film. While the montage in these sections is not presented on a singular screen or even simultaneously, in the way that Manovich describes spatial narrative, there is also no linear narrative apparent, and the frames do not fit together to form a singular narrative arc. Instead,



Fig. 15 Dziga Vertov, 1929, *Man with a Movie Camera*, film still

Vertov presents us with several lives with varying narratives, linked together in the very earthly pursuit of sleep. Svetlana Alpers (1983, p. 187) notes (in regards to viewing painting), that we will “look through the pictorial surface to the deeper meaning of the text” and consequently, even if visual imagery is not displayed in a sequential manner, a narrative can be gleaned by the audience and their response to the signs provided.

To return to Bal and her approach to viewing artworks as theoretical objects, it becomes clear that she demonstrates Barthes’ dictum that we need to kill the dominance of the author in order to liberate the narrative for the viewer, who is capable of developing independent narrative experiences. This is reflected in Bal’s ideas that artworks should not be read through the artist’s biography, for example, but through an individual experience of an artwork. To view an artwork to the exclusion of anterior-narratives, creates just that: an object, complete in its own right. This takes us away from the single level of narrative that might be contained in the subject within the artwork. Instead of treating each facet of the work separately, Bal approaches the work holistically. This is perhaps an obvious approach in the act of viewing a large sculpture made up of seemingly disparate facets which also occupies one’s space, but what if we were to look beyond the image in a painting, and perhaps consider it in context to its location or its framing? It is in these considerations (but not limited to) that additional layers of spatial narrative start to become apparent.

The consistent element that makes a narrative a narrative is that of temporality. As noted previously, the main focus that literary narratologists have is that of linear temporality – that is that the story unfolds in a controlled sort of way, in a sequential, logical order. Claire Colebrook (2002) notes that western thinking has a tendency to think of time in terms of movement and she uses the examples of hands on a clock, or the progress of the sun across the sky. These things are linear in a sense, though really, there is no real starting point for either action. When Bal views Bourgeois’ *Spider* (1997), there is no prescribed starting point and no real endpoint in her narrative and thus to the work. Bal (2001, p. 110) notes that many aspects of the work enforce a viewing that takes time, imposing on the viewer an awareness of temporality. On viewing a sister piece to Bourgeois’ *Spider* (1997), another monumentally sized arachnid in the exhibition *Les Papesses* (2013) at Le Palais des Papes, Avignon, France, I can attest that even though the structure of the spider was without a cell beneath it, that



this is certainly true of other works by Bourgeois.<sup>2</sup> From the extended and stretched time that it seemed to take to walk across the hall to get to the work and then the time spent weaving slowly in and out of the legs; looking up at its belly and considering its surroundings from beneath it; and pondering its stark blackness in contrast to the huge lit windows behind it all imposed the awareness (and loss) of time that Bal refers to. And while the time flittered away as I moved bodily through the space, my mind was also flung towards an awareness that I was standing in a mediaeval gothic church with an artwork, though only created in the last century, whose structure somehow connected directly to its surrounding; the heavy metal connecting to the weight of the stone; the legs becoming a repetition of the fan vaulting on the ceiling. The way that I experienced time while sharing this space with the spider at no point felt linear – my sense of time was skewed between each of the elements that made up the installation.

## *II: The Refusal of Time*

William Kentridge's recent five-channel video/sculpture installation, *The Refusal of Time* (2012) (Fig. 16) is a direct response (or refusal) to the Western, linear perception of



Fig. 16 William Kentridge, 2012, *The Refusal of Time*, video/mixed media, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston

time that Colebrook describes – in both subject matter and execution.

The sculptural element of the installation is a large, “breathing” wooden structure, and while apparent chaos ensues on the five projections around the

space, its breathing stays constant and reliable. As with most video installations, there is no clear beginning or end for the audience, who can wander into the space at any

<sup>2</sup> While the work that Bal reviews is a spider structure with a cell (a cage structure), the two elements were separate in the exhibition *Les Papesses* (2013) at le Palais des Papes, Avignon. The spider stood alone in a voluminous hall, with a cell (a cage) located somewhere nearby, containing a 1950s style dress and underwear.



point in the film. This lack of a clear beginning and end in the viewing of an artwork is reflective of Bal's experience of Louise Bourgeois' *Spider*, and representative of the viewing of any artwork. All five channels are projected simultaneously, producing the kind of spatial montage that Manovich (2001) describes, in addition to the spatial montage that occurs within each channel through almost constant superimposition. The projections are from floor to ceiling, and they are quite close in proximity to one another. This leads to at least two outcomes in viewing the film(s): first, even if trying to focus on a singular projection, there is always at least a second one in peripheral view; and second, to view the work in its entirety, one has to move around the space and around the other members of the audience who become silhouetted against the screens and so, in a way, become part of the artwork. This physical movement causes an additional awareness of temporality that moves out-of-sync with the movement of time in the film/s. It is this arrangement of the installation that creates the first level of spatial montage and which contributes to a narrative experience of the artwork.

The second layer of narrative occurs in the cacophony of sound throughout the installation, which varies between ominous or mischievous sounding horns; the sounds of a ticking clock; the click of several metronomes; amplified ambient noise and a male voice instructing on the nature of time and energy. The sounds are played through comical looking megaphone structures positioned throughout the room, and moving around the space, the sound levels vary depending on the positioning of oneself. The apparent chaos of the sound has a similar narrative effect to the arrangement of signs in space: while each audio track may have a basic level of meaning on its own, their juxtaposition to the rest of film and to the other audio tracks is capable of influencing their various connotations.

In addition to the arrangement of the space and soundscape, which imposes an awareness of time through physical movement, the content of *The Refusal of Time* also does this – though this is unsurprising, at least due to the title of the installation. Examples of Kentridge's refusal of western linear time become apparent through several means, for example, in moments when the same footage is displayed over all five channels. Similarly to the sleeping people in Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1936), Kentridge montages seemingly disparate imagery and sound. The channels cycle through a variety of images and periodically, though each channel may begin with

the same video footage synchronously, each screen eventually slips out-of-sync with the others which creates an unsettling sensation similar to when the dubbing in a movie is out-of-sync with the actor's mouths. Footage is often played forward and then backwards creating an awareness that time is not always forward moving. Some of the footage, the metronomes for example, seem to operate as intended at first, but then their speed is hastened, or slowed, which interrupts the flow of time and creates a great paradox for the audience watching it, while aware of their own time slipping away. There are many examples of time-associated imagery in the projections – and by spatially montaging them, they interrupt the linear flow of time as we have come to expect it.

In the spatial montage, there are also some images, which viewed out of context to the rest of the installation, may not have anything to do with time at all. Some of this footage that does not obviously have a connection to time, or its refusal has the potential to become over shadowed by the prior knowledge of Kentridge's practice, which has in the past been greatly motivated by South African politics and Apartheid.

As Barthes notes:

*[T]he explanation of the work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author confiding in us.*  
(1977, p. 143)

There is an enormous amount of documentation about the installation, including material from various galleries who have hosted it, catalogue essays, newspaper reviews and interviews with Kentridge. There are even films of the installation made by audience members on YouTube. Each kind of documentation adds a level of anterior narrativity to the way that the installation can be viewed, and most attempt to both signpost the artwork's semiotic content, both time related and not, while discussing it in context to Kentridge the Artist. Barthes says that "to give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text" (1977 p. 147) – and this is a text that surely does not allow for limitations. The spatial montage which is so dense in each element of *The Refusal of Time* (Kentridge, 2012) creates a spatial narrative that does not need such explicit signposting.

*The Refusal of Time* (Kentridge 2012) is a poignant illustration of two things. Firstly, it demonstrates through spatial montage blended through the arrangement of the installation and intrinsic imagery in the work, that time does not need to be experienced linearly to create a narrative experience. Secondly, it illustrates that it seems to be a redundant task to signpost each and every element of the work through written commentary, as the work is self-contained. As a theoretical object, it directs its own narrative experience.

To try to peddle anterior narratives restricts the potential of the audience to develop a narrative experience of the work through their personal response to signs in space. If extrinsic narrators, in the form of information plates by curators and other commentaries, were to be removed from such situations, the audience could realise their ability to interact directly with the object, instead of becoming conceptually restricted by anterior narratives. Thus the artwork, as a theoretical object, could finally fulfil its own narrative potential.

Mieke Bal experienced Bourgeois' *Spider* (1997) by moving around the object and consequently developed a layered narrative from each element of the installation as it became apparent to her. I similarly responded to a sister piece of *Spider* (1997) by connecting it to the space that it inhabited. This kind of narrative viewing experience was mirrored in *The Refusal of Time* (Kentridge, 2013), which questions the very essence of linear temporality. These three examples demonstrate the limitations of approaching visual art within the linear constructs of literary narrative. The visual arts are intuitively narrative, but to attempt to experience the narrative content in a linear fashion, as in literary texts, is an impossible task. Through this discussion we have reached a point where the logical way to describe these works and indeed, any visual art, is through the framework of spatial narrative.

## CONCLUSION

Early in my research, I had a conversation with academic Dr. Simon Heywood, whose field of research focusses on story-telling and folklore in Britain. In this conversation, he introduced me to the term “swinging the lantern”. It refers to the action or prank of swinging a lantern somewhat violently on a sea-faring vessel outside of another ship-mate’s portal, to simulate rough weather, and it has come to take on the meaning of telling a tall-tale. In combination with the development of this thesis, I developed the exhibition *Swinging the Lantern: Flocks* by creating a narrative environment to reflect the ideas that I uncovered in my research. The paintings were not necessarily the perspectival-type narrative paintings that have come to occupy the cultural imagination: they were a series of paintings of ornate birds and related items arranged in a novel way. I have included the book, *Swinging the Lantern: Flocks (Production Notes)* (Cuthbert, 2015), which outlines the process of production of the exhibition and how it reflects the research that I undertook, at the end of this document (Appendix 1).

At the beginning of this thesis, I discussed how the shift from multiphase images such as those in the medieval period, to monophase painting in the Renaissance created a field of study for literary narratologists intent on confirming or disavowing pictorial narrative. I initially identified that the main problem with this approach was the exclusive focus on pictorial narratives, rather than an engagement with a wider spectrum of mediums. Secondly, I noted that narrative theory became mired in discussions of perspectival painting, as developed Renaissance, thus denying narrativity to anything outside of this sphere. This raised the question of narrativity in the visual arts in general, especially if Speidel’s (2013) assumption that an audience has an intuition as to whether something is narrative or not is true. I went on to reframe the general discussion about the narrativity of Hogarth’s etchings – as though they are narrative according to literary narratologists, they are still spatial in essence. I discussed the *Four Stages of Cruelty* (Hogarth, 1751) in relation to concepts that I later explored in the thesis: temporal montage and spatial montage.

Throughout this thesis, I have taken an alternative approach to narrative in visual art; one that discards the notion that narrative needs to be linear, as found in literary studies. I began with the question of whether an artwork had to be representational or

not to convey narrative, and concluded that it didn't. Michael Fried's study of minimalism suggested that theatricality is caused when an audience member is no longer absorbed in the artwork. This theatricality leads to an awareness of time and space, and can have an effect on both. I examined this in context with Flaherty's (1999) ideas about the perception of time and concluded that, if time becomes part of the process of viewing an artwork, viewing becomes a narrative experience. I used these concepts to demonstrate Alfred Hitchcock's manipulation of time in an analysis of the opening scenes of *Marnie* (1964), by noting that each element of the composition (aural and visual) rejected the audience, thus questioning the absorptive nature of film. Though it would have been arguably a more natural response to examine Sigmar Polke's works, *Fastest Gun in the West* (2002) and *Laterna Magica* (1986-1996) as examples of spatial montage, I discussed them in terms of temporal montage. I postulated that the spaces and implied temporality in his work had the potential to influence the perception of time in the audience.

I then shifted from notions of temporal montage to Lev Manovich's (2001) ideas about spatial montage. I examined the term "spatial montage" in a wider context to the description that Manovich (2001) supplies, by including potential physical elements, sound and the location of the artwork. I examined the dense layers of spatial montage in *The Refusal of Time* (William Kentridge, 2012) and the temporality that each layer created by denying linearity. I surmised that if we were to view an artwork as a "theoretical object", as suggested by Mieke Bal (1999), to the exclusion of anterior narratives, individual narratives for each audience member would be allowed to evolve. If these ideas were to become a regular convention in galleries and other such places, a limitless number of artworks could reach their full narrative potential without a reliance on anterior narratives.

It has become apparent, over the course of this thesis, that linear narrative as considered in literary studies is an inappropriate construct with which to analyse the narrative potential of visual art. If, as stated by literary narratologists, the main component of narrative is a sense of temporality, I have throughout this thesis demonstrated that temporality does not have to be linear to convey narrative. The logical conclusion to this argument is that instead of continuing to impose literary constructs of linear temporality onto an art form that is spatial in nature, spatial

narrativity should become the dominant mode in which to explore narrative in visual art.

The key to viewing visual art as a vehicle for spatial narrative lies in the perception of the audience, and in the hands of art galleries and museums. The main challenge in recognising spatial narrative in the visual arts is to overcome the dependence of the audience on anterior narratives, such as those on the information plates next to artworks. With the rise of technology, accompanied by vast amounts of readily available information and the approach that galleries now take to make museum experiences interactive (Megan Axelsen, 2006), the amount of time that an audience member spends with any piece of art is arguably lessening. This is sure to affect potential narrative experiences that an audience may have by simply spending time with an artwork and it may be time for museums and galleries to seek an alternative approach.

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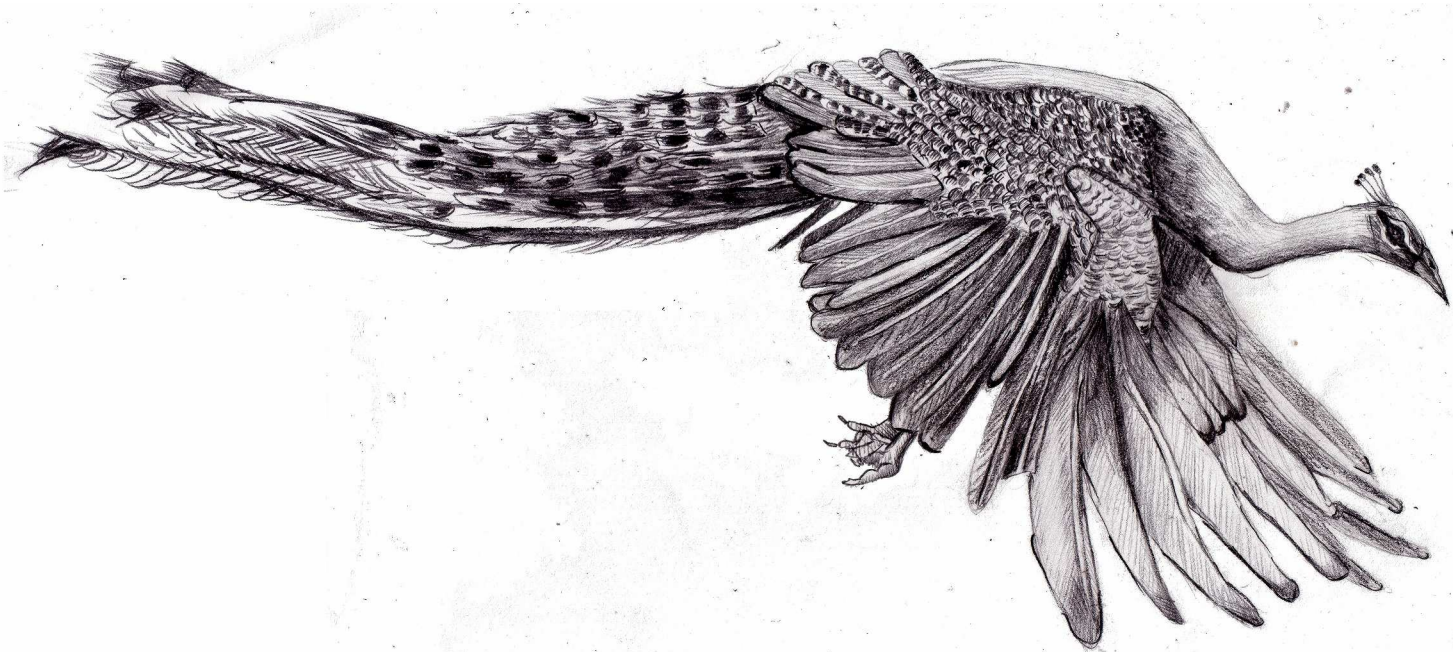
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APPENDIX I: *Swinging the Lantern: Flocks (production notes)*

# Swinging the Lantern - *Flocks*

*(production notes)*

Jenny Cuthbert





MARRICKVILLE council

**CCG**

Chrissie Cotter Gallery

# Swinging the lantern: *flocks*

an exhibition by

Jenny Cuthbert

**JUNE 3-14**

Chrissie Cotter Gallery

Pidcock St, Camperdown

Opening hours: Thurs-Sun 11am-5pm

Opening night:

**Wednesday JUNE 3, 7pm**

## Swinging the Lantern: *Flocks*

Swinging the lantern: *flocks* was produced in conjunction with my research in spatial narrative within visual art. Literary narratologists have long argued that narrative was not as present in the visual arts as in literary texts due to the lack of linear, temporal sequences.

The exhibition demonstrates that visual material can create narratives equal to those found in linear narrative by connecting elements of painting, sculpture and installation. Each element, in combination with the images selected, contributes to a dense spatial montage. The spatial montage leads to spatial narrative, and thus provides a narrative viewing experience for the audience as they respond to the work.

That the works are intrinsically narrative contributes to the question of how audiences interact with art objects, without the distraction of anterior narratives which often dictate how the work should be viewed.

In this document, there is a notable evolution in the way that I first approach the task of producing narrative paintings to the end. My focus shifts from making the paintings tell the story, to creating works that allow a narrative to happen in the process of viewing the work.

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The following pages contain an annotated visual journey through the production of *Swinging the Lantern: Flocks*.

The documentation illustrates developing concepts, excerpts from sketchbooks, drawings and photographs.

## Medieval Wall Painting.

Painted mostly from  
Christian history.

Behaviour through  
moral instruction  
and example.

Look at Charlemagne's

Dream of St Cyriacus.

Also look at legend of  
the Hairy Anachorite



I began the production of *Swinging the Lantern: Flocks* with the idea that the exhibition would consist of a series of narrative paintings, based on stories from England, where my family is from.

As paintings and tapestry from the medieval period seemed to successfully convey narratives, this is where I started.

## Medieval Wall Painting.

Provide links to  
the past

→ wall painting  
images do not  
correspond to any  
medieval book.

→ They may represent  
scenes, but are  
not illustrative.

→ reflection of  
the culture at the time.

Dream of St Cyriacus

Hog  
naked → clothed.  
church  
roof





On the presence of Narrative.

Owen Glanville

"Evidence strongly suggests that humans in all cultures come to cast their own identity in some sort of narrative form. We are inveterate story tellers... [N]arrative may also refer to psychological memory and meaning making."

Order Narrative and consciousness: literature, psychology and the brain.

Series of paintings could reflect the rise and fall of the narrative, that

Notes on narrative

Apr 21 - Storings.

John Waters - vis art-tales.

Kara Walker

Cyclo Rama - 19th century.

~~Make~~ Create illusion of depth.

Immerse viewer into feeling a part of the scene.

Illusions of past events, highlighting complexities of old time.

Picture of old self that is loved. Gone with the Wind - beautiful.

even about the unexpected.

Wanting to be the heroin, wanting to be also.

ing, this dilemma.

Georgia moved to Calif. to the south - frightening cultural identity in U.S.

exchange of power.

Interested in Melodramatic.

creating stage → characters on that stage.

Freeze frame a moment.

projecting fictions into fact.  
Work takes on narrative needs the viewer to fill in rest.

Freedom: A Fable - Book,

Blurs lines between fiction & reality.

How do you make representation of your world?

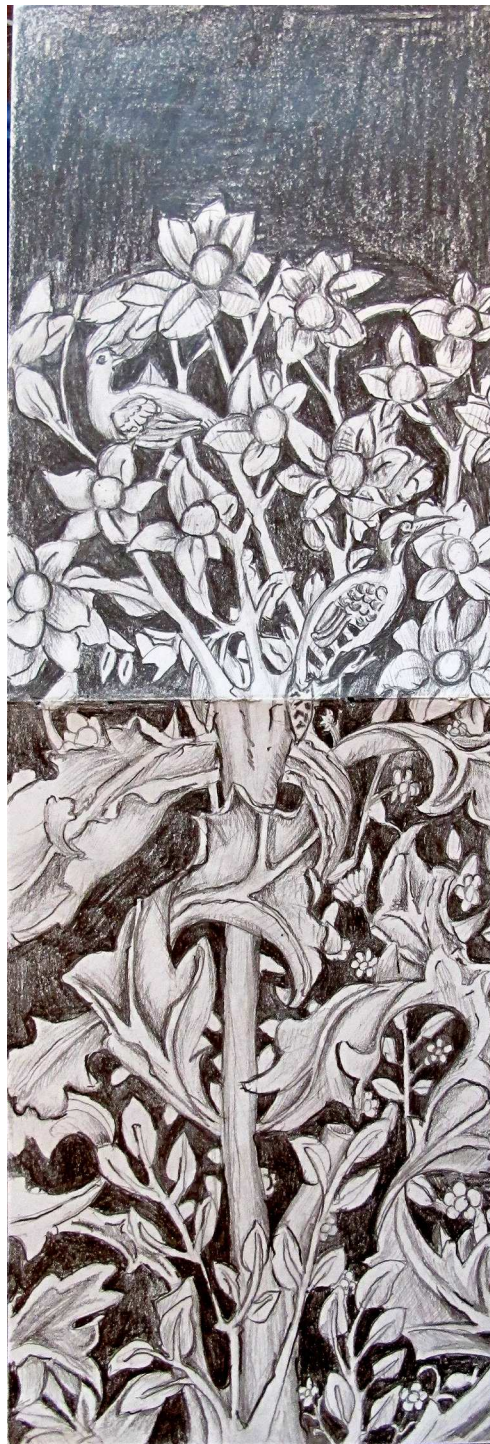
Notes on Kara Walker

Still thinking about wanting to create a series of paintings based on an old story or tale, and feeling encouraged by Kara Walker, I bought a book that detailed various folktales. One tale piqued my interest - a story of a mother and daughter from the 1600s in Guilsborough in England who were, upon agitating other people in their village, branded witches. The tale details events leading from the accusation to their executions and I found the tale interesting enough to perhaps base a series of paintings on it. I did not have plans to illustrate it, but to use the events as jumping-off points.

I had been looking at tapestries for some time, and to get to know the visual language within them, I reproduced a few in drawings. It is also at this time that I discovered William Morris. Though the project changed over the course of its production, the William Morris element didn't fade out.

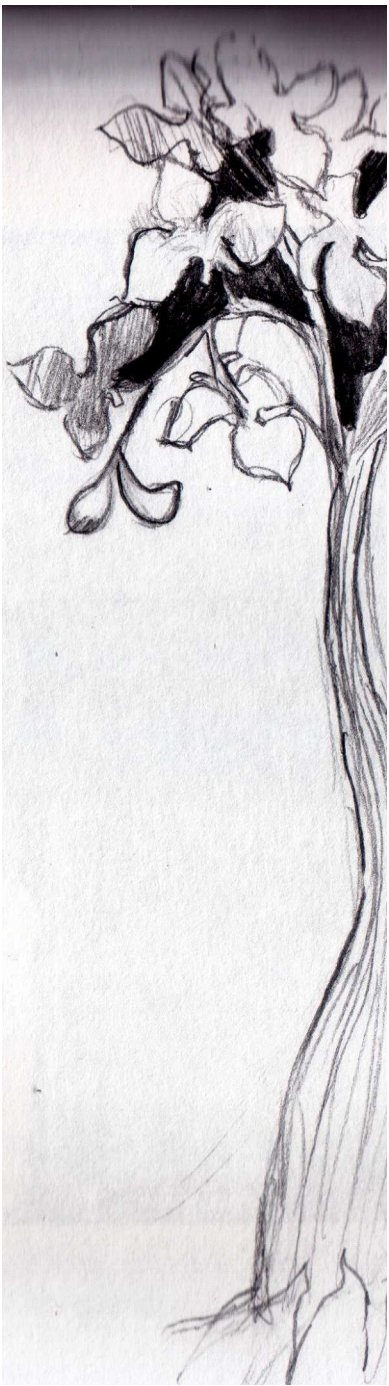




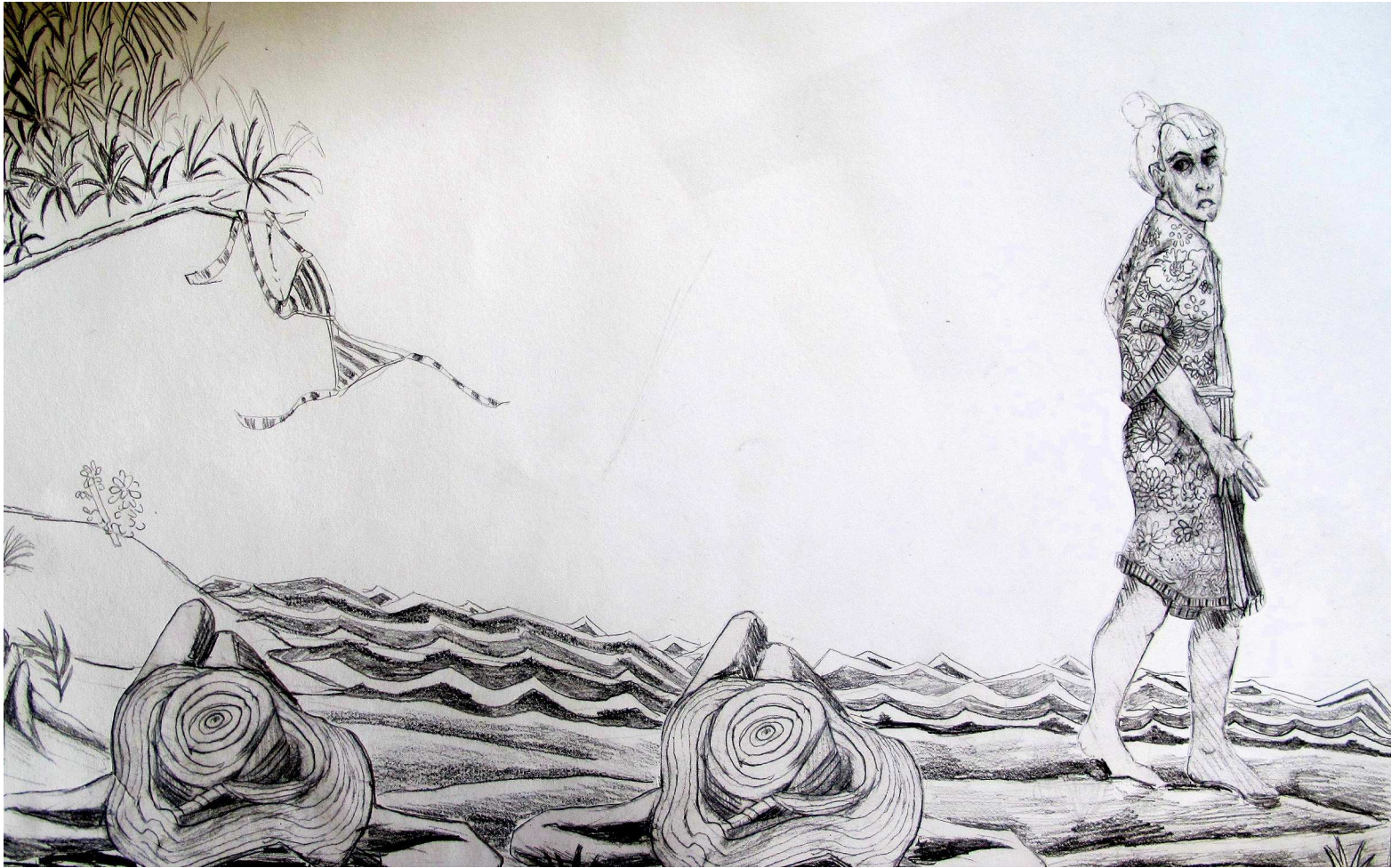










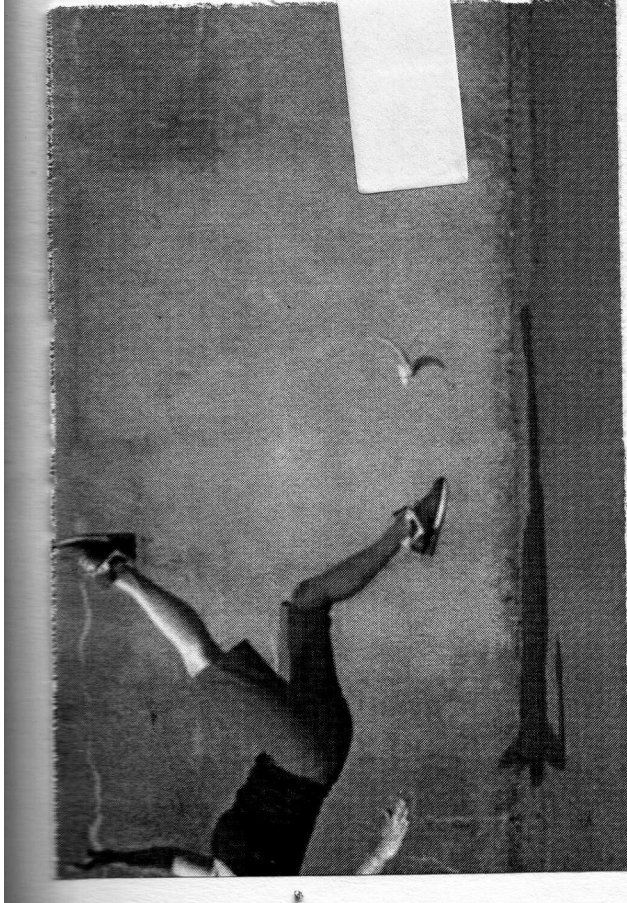


I started to think about compositions for the paintings based on the Guilsborough Witches, but without a connection to tapestry at this point





Experimenting with various compositions



Note:

10th feb

Each figure should  
be capture in  
movement. This

- a) stops a "pose" from  
happening
- b) creates some notion  
of time passing/  
moving.
- c) And creates some  
movement between  
compositions.



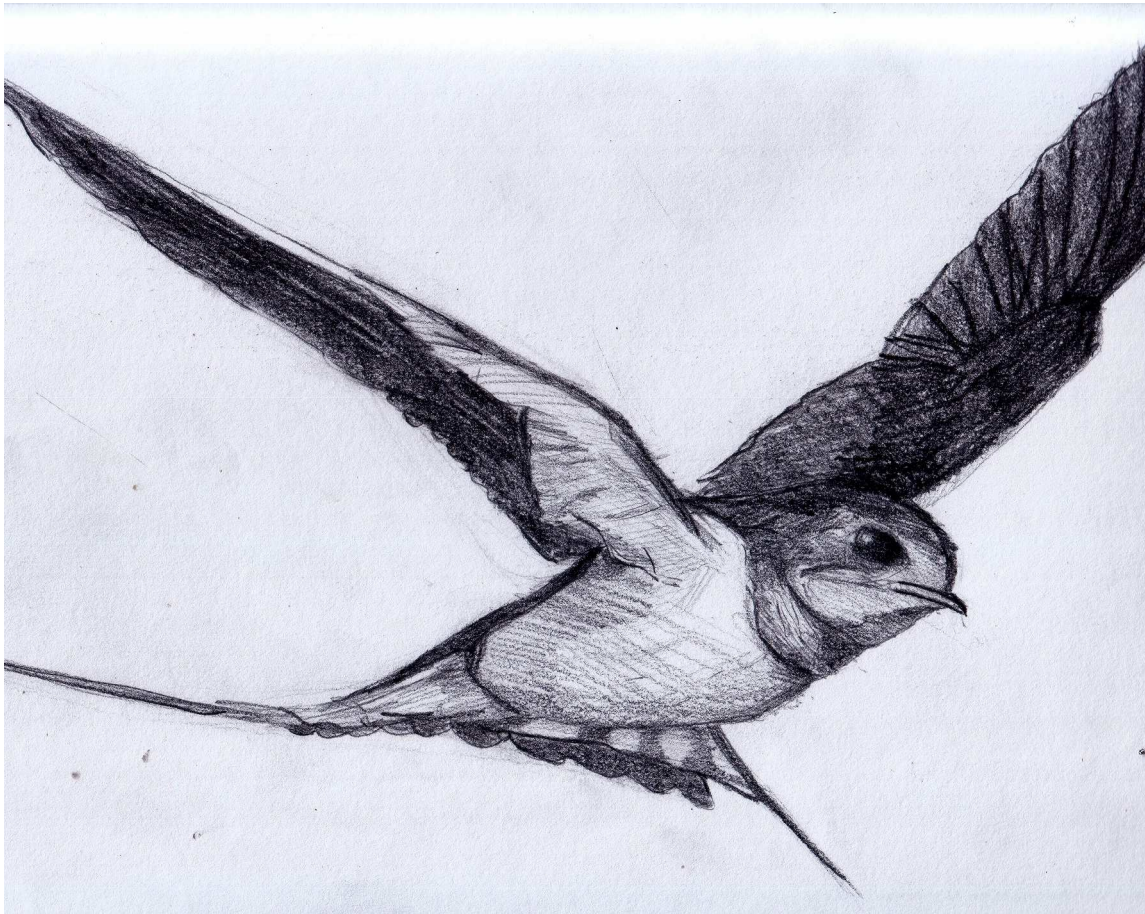


I was still having trouble working out how to link the tapestries with my paintings, but had enjoyed drawing the birds in the tapestries, so thought I would look at pigeons. Witches were said to have a connection to animals, so a pigeon seemed an appropriate "familiar" to have.

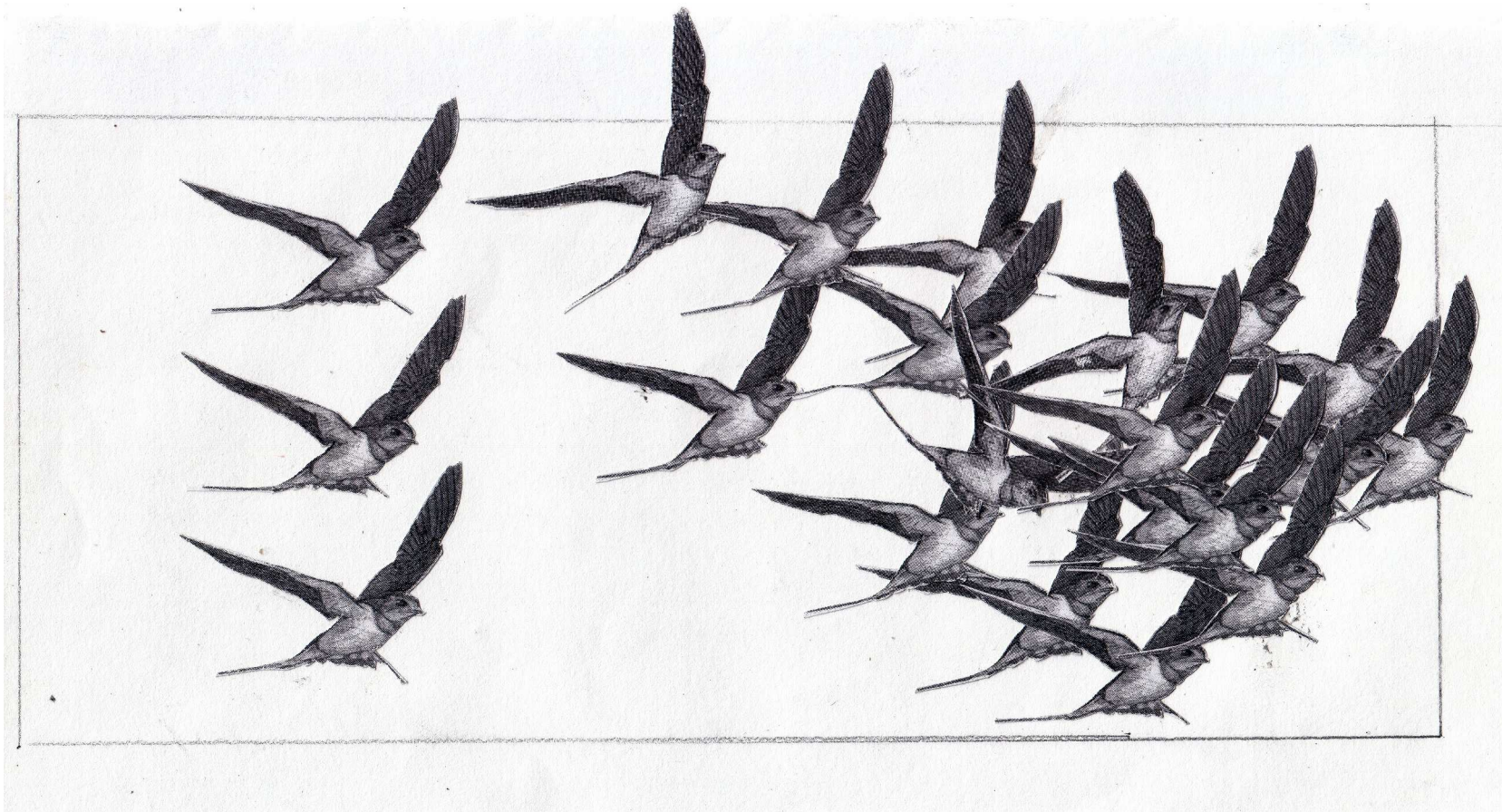


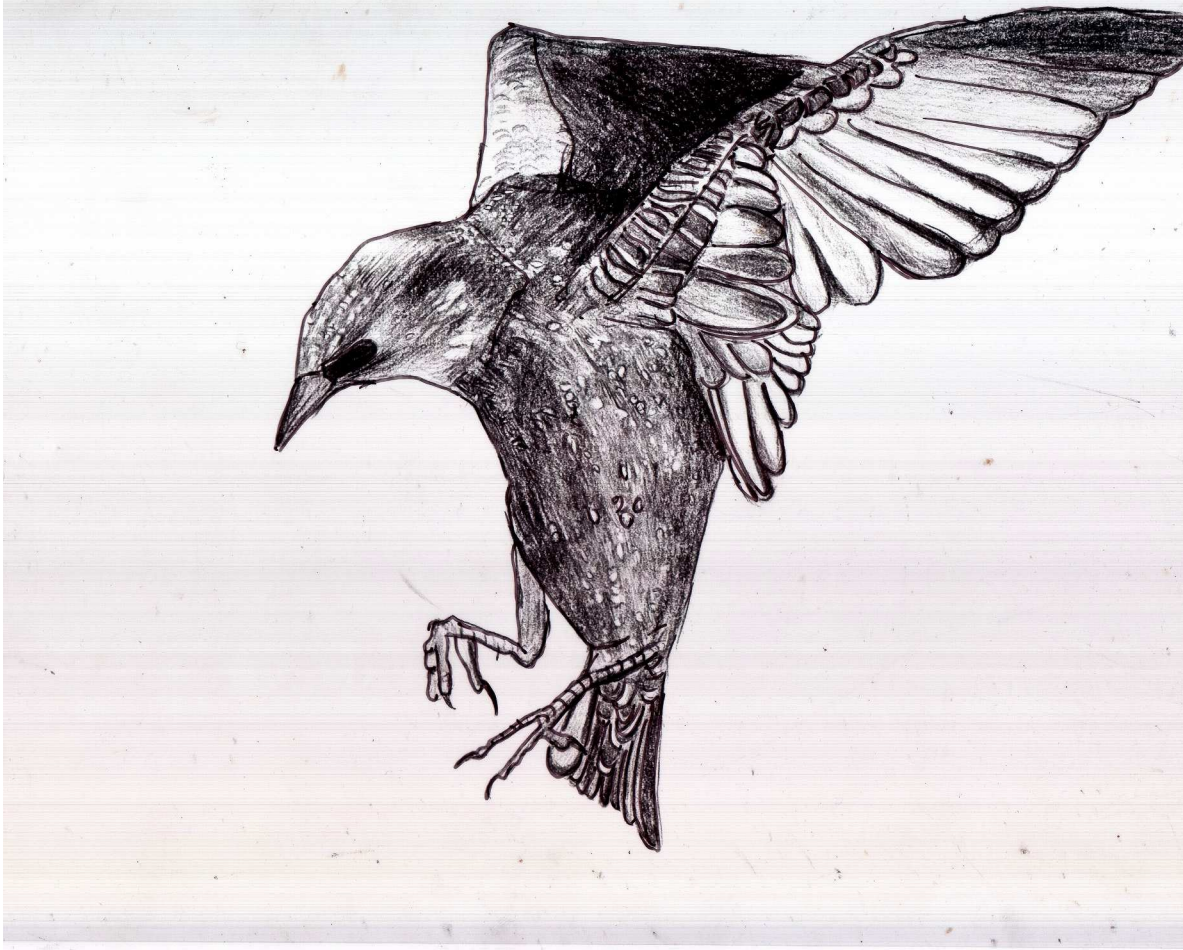


This ended up being the connection between the figures and the birds. It made a perfectly innocent pigeon become menacing, and when combined with the dissected figure, created an additional narrativity that wasn't apparent in the earlier drawings.

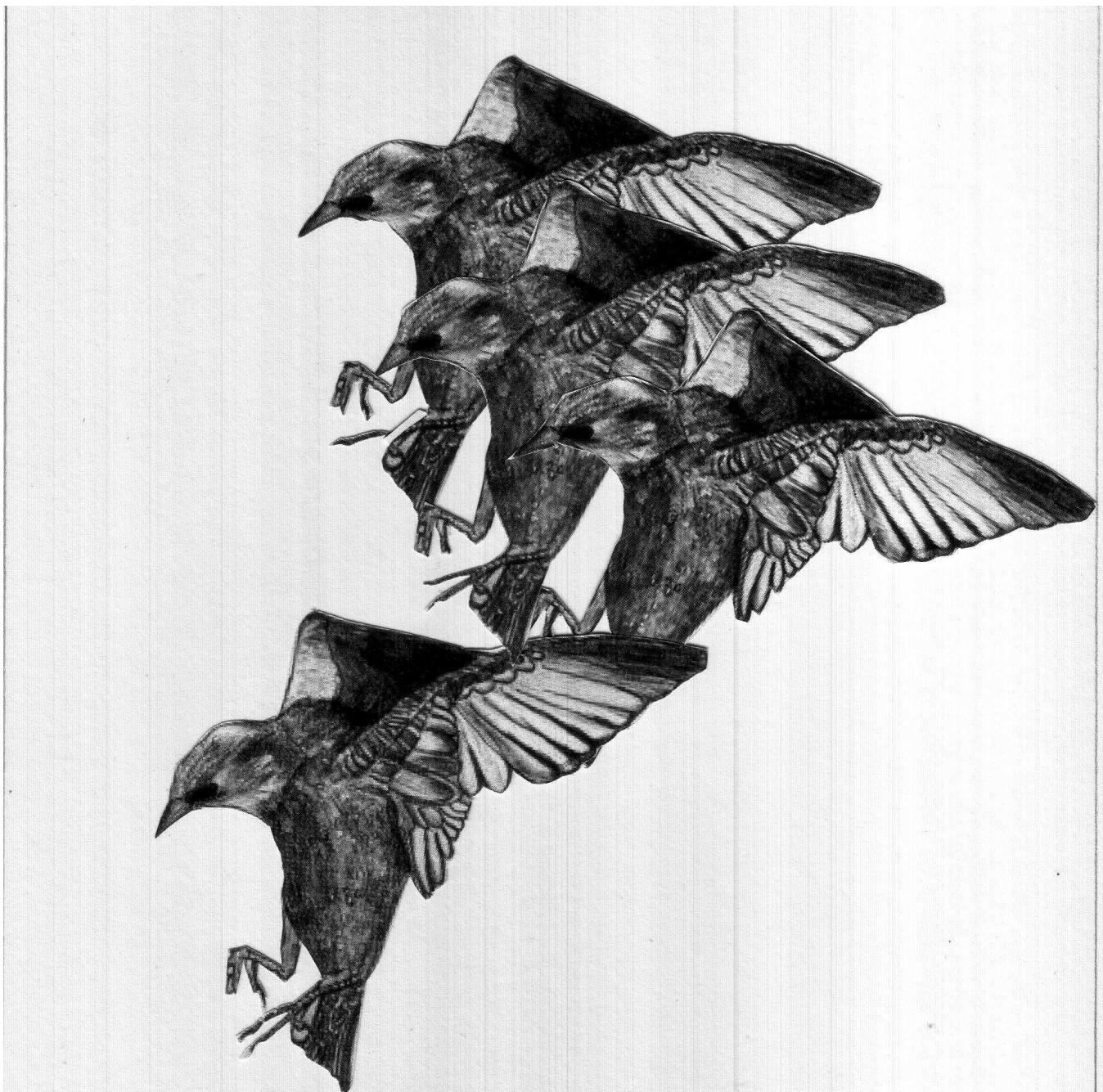


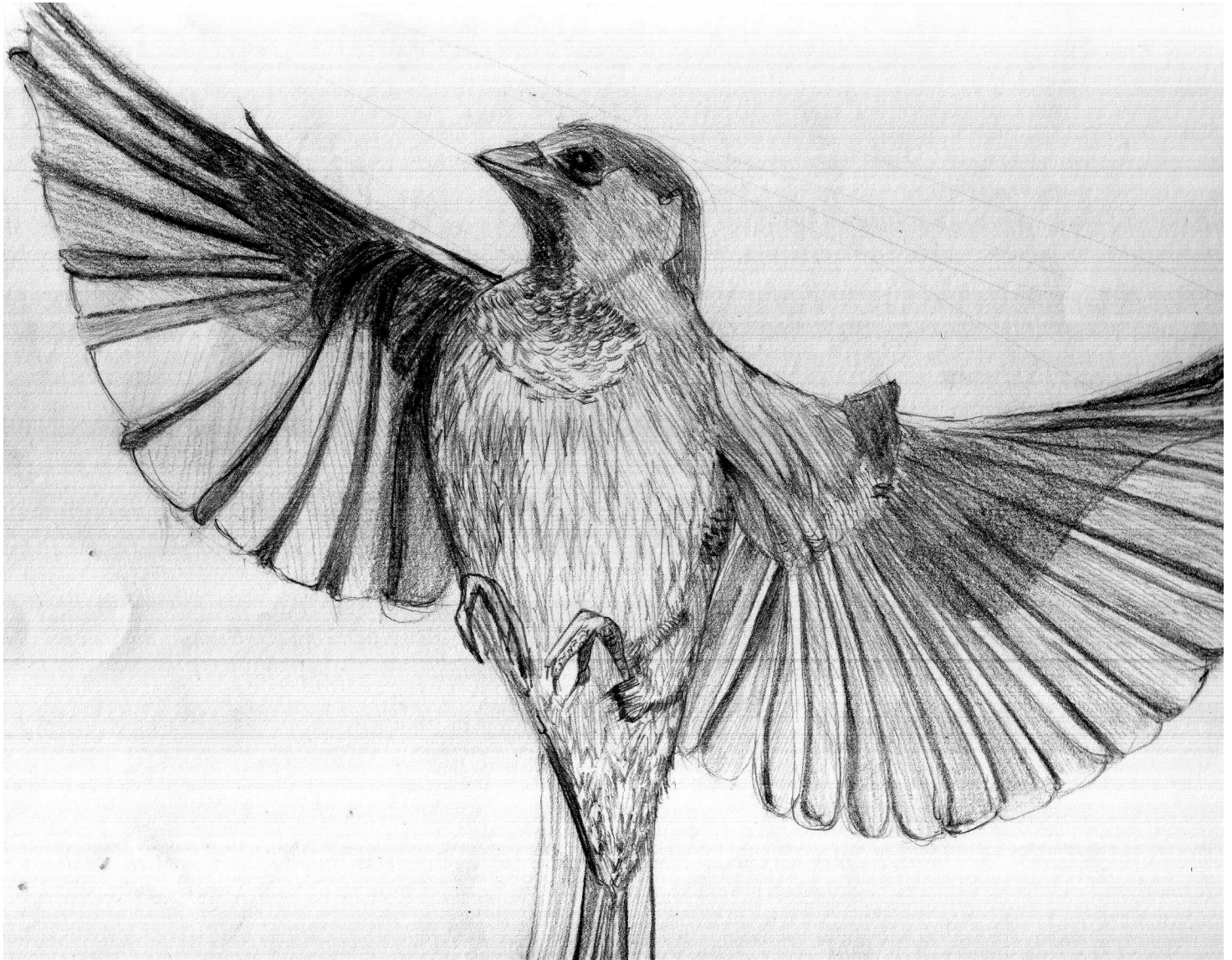




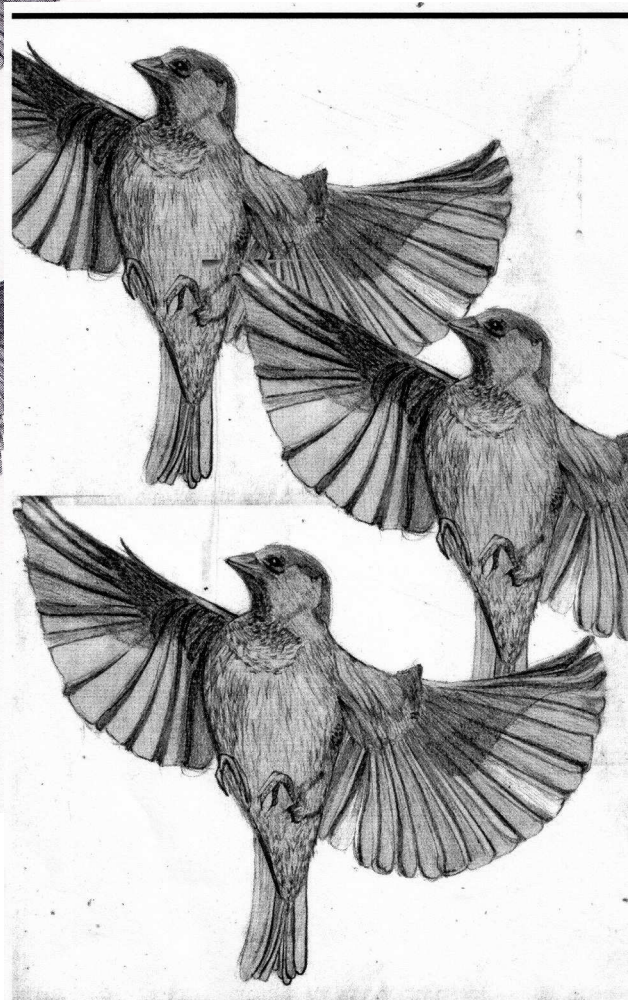




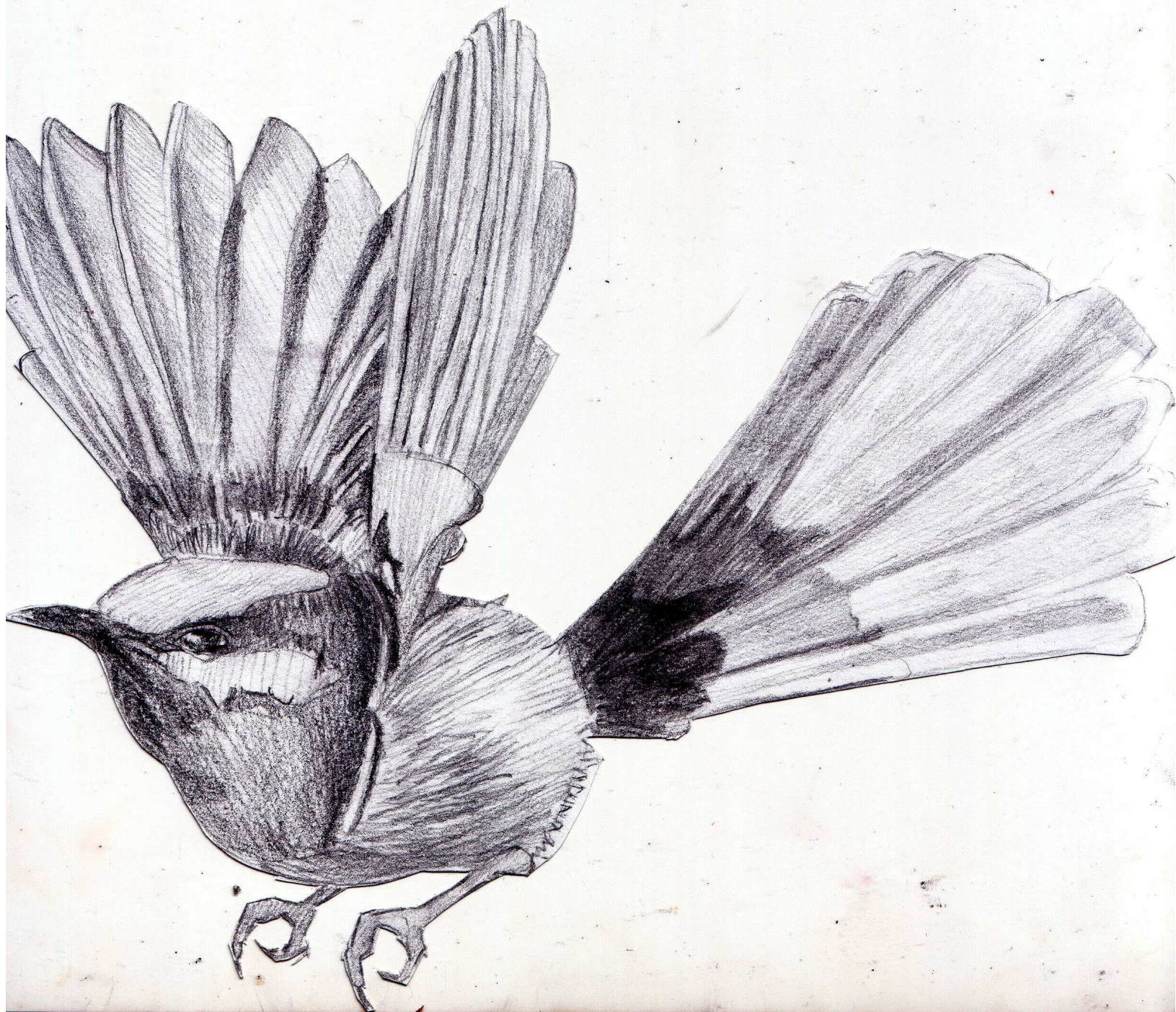




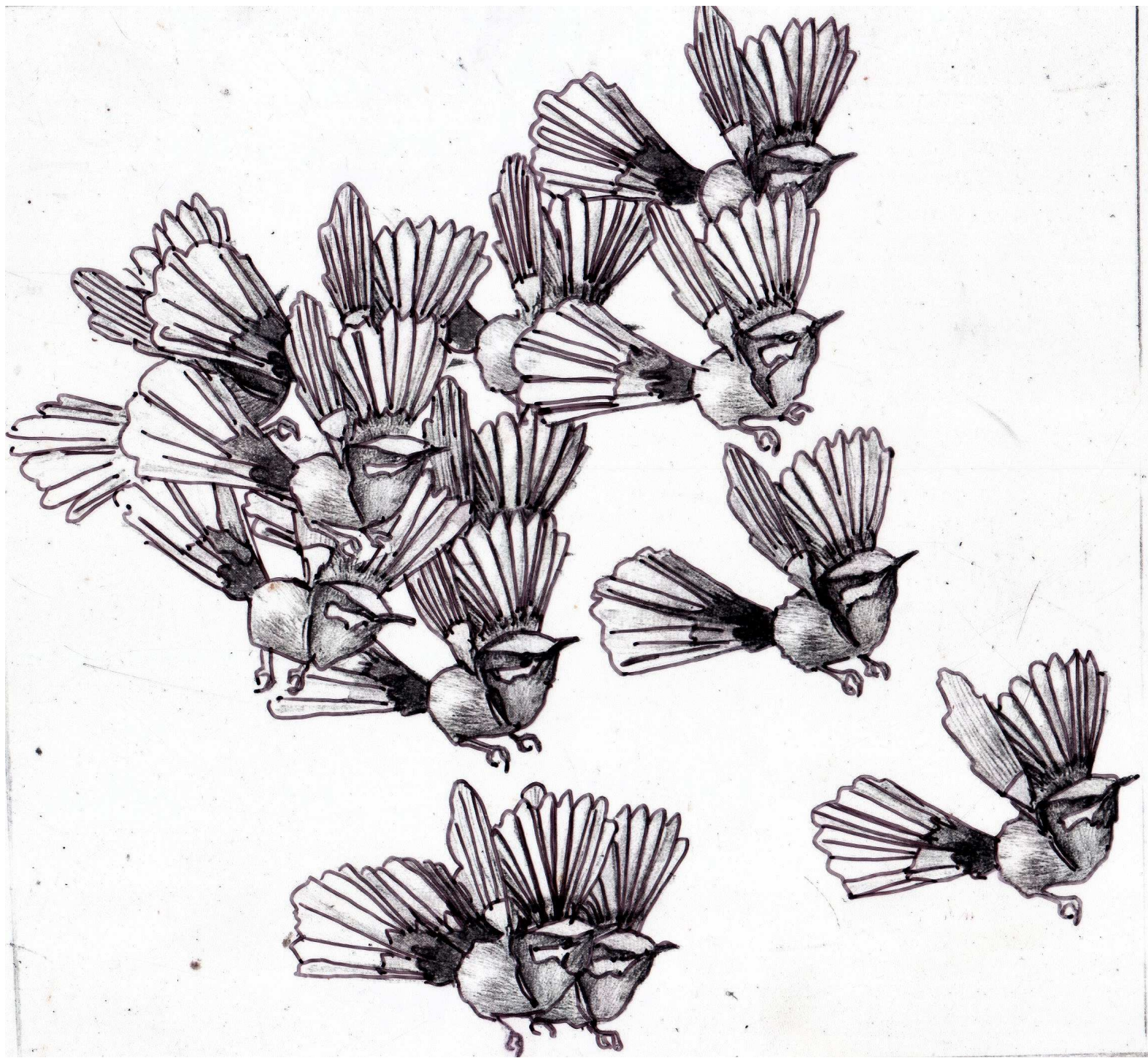




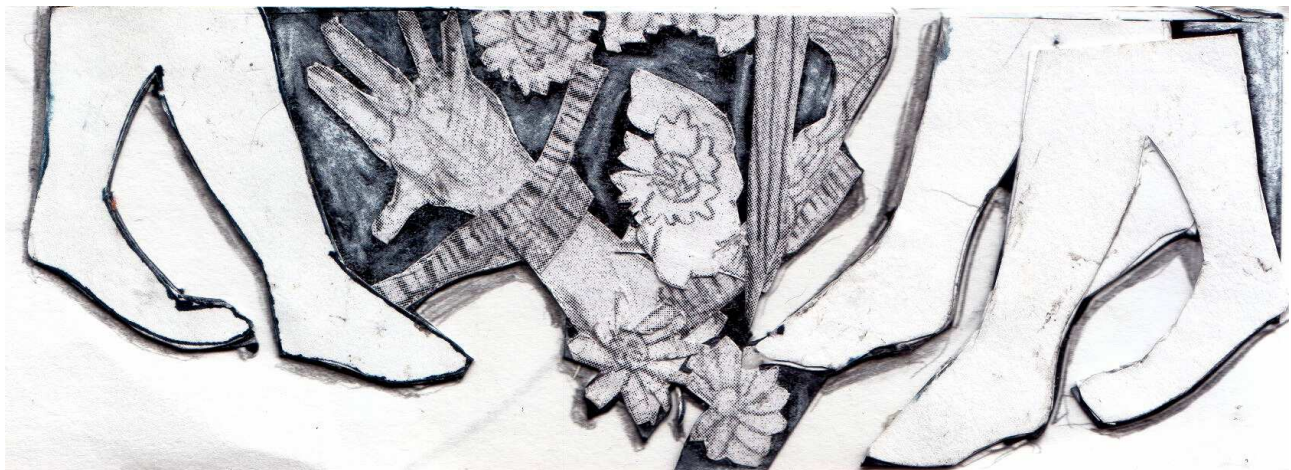




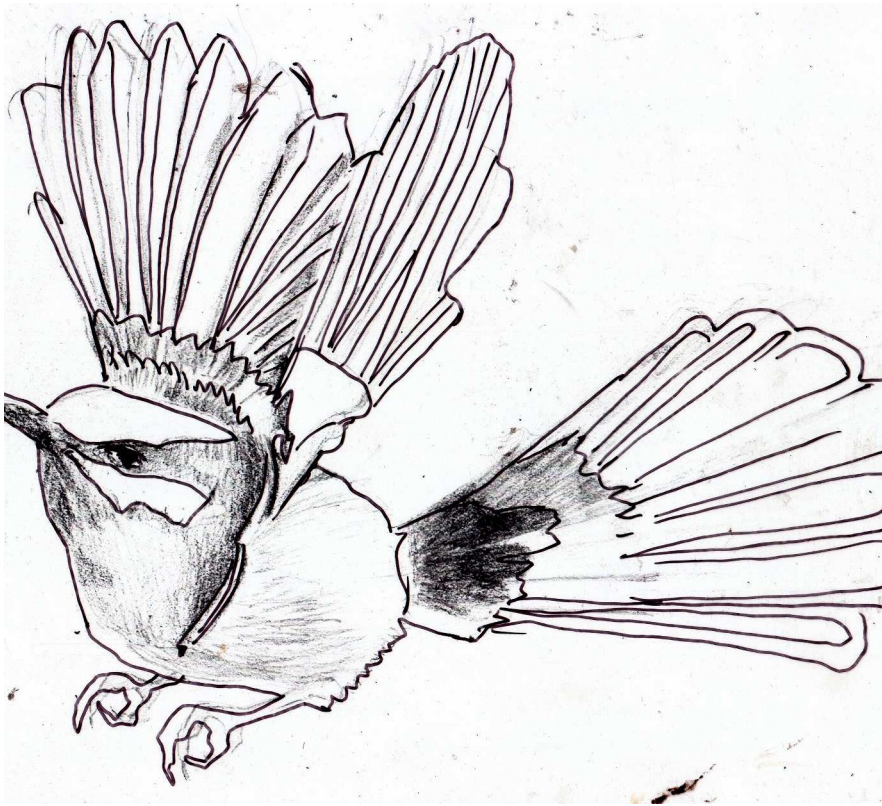




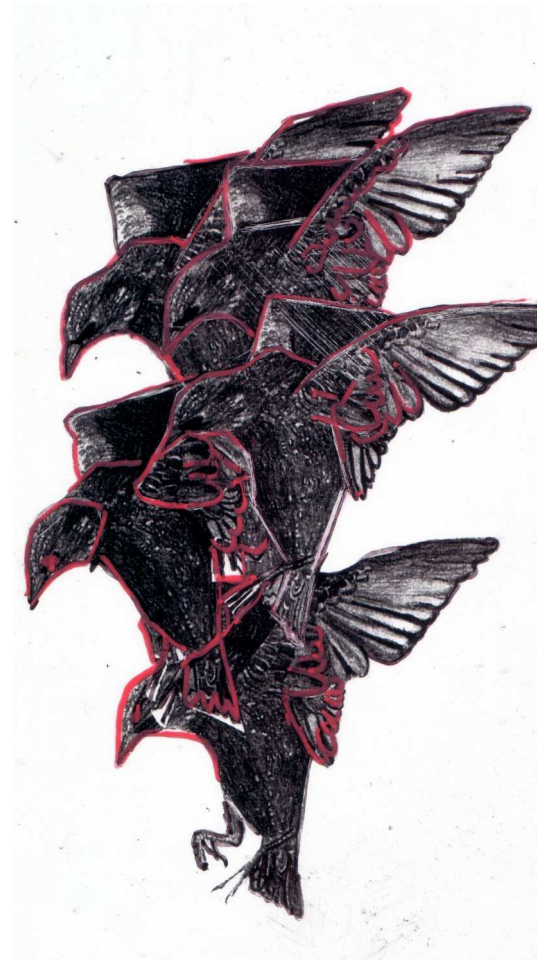






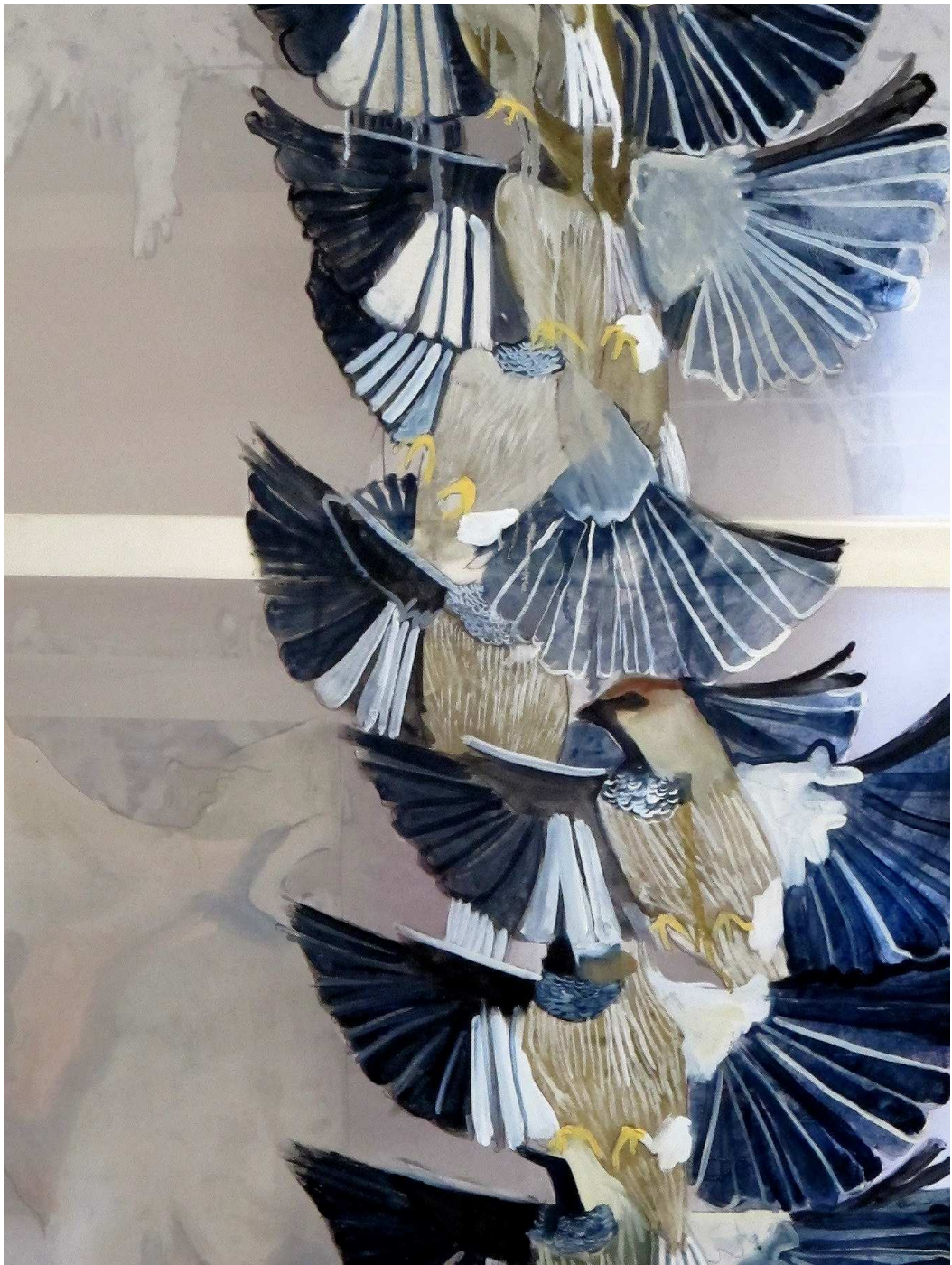


The previous drawings were executed in context to the tale of the witches and they developed an unarticulated narrative of wild nature and people. I had intended initially to put the paintings on canvas but as I began to transfer the images onto transparencies with the intention of projecting the complicated drawings on to the canvases with an overhead projector, everything changed. Noting the depth that was created by placing the birds and such on transparent backgrounds, I started experimenting with transparent/translucent materials as such as tulle, curtain netting, satin and finally organza with the intention of replacing the traditional canvas supports.









It became apparent to me in the production of the paintings that they did not need to be hung on a wall and that there was some narrative layering occurring in the overlap of the images, as noted in the photographs previously.

The following photographs are of an experimental hanging of Swinging the Lantern:  
*Flocks* in the Project Space at the University of Wollongong.





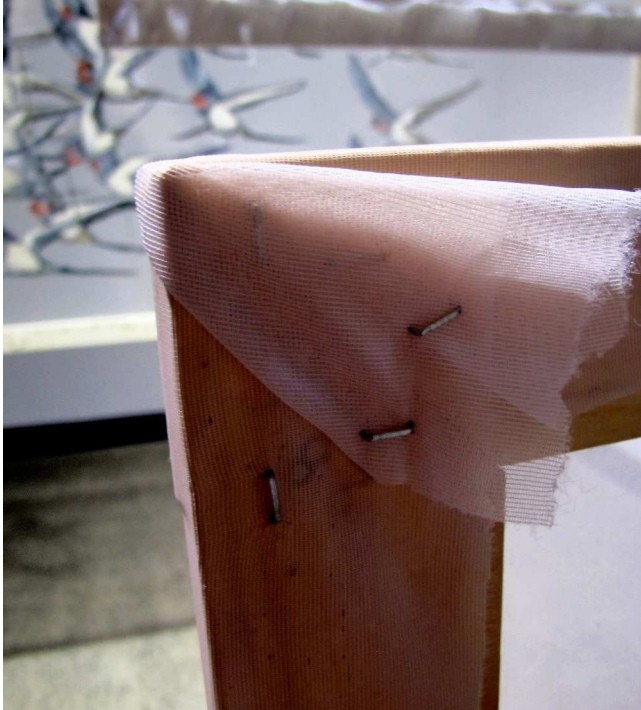






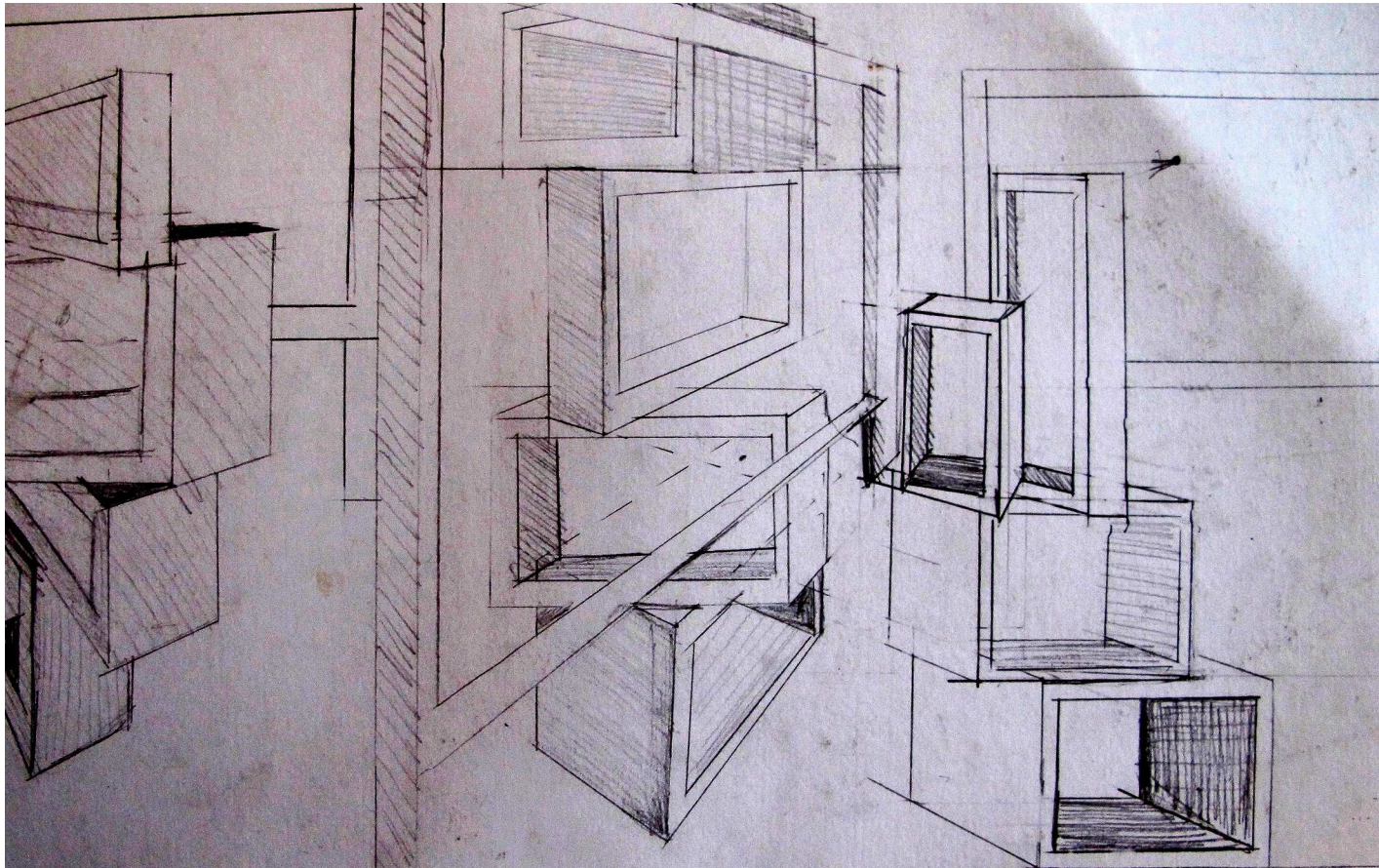






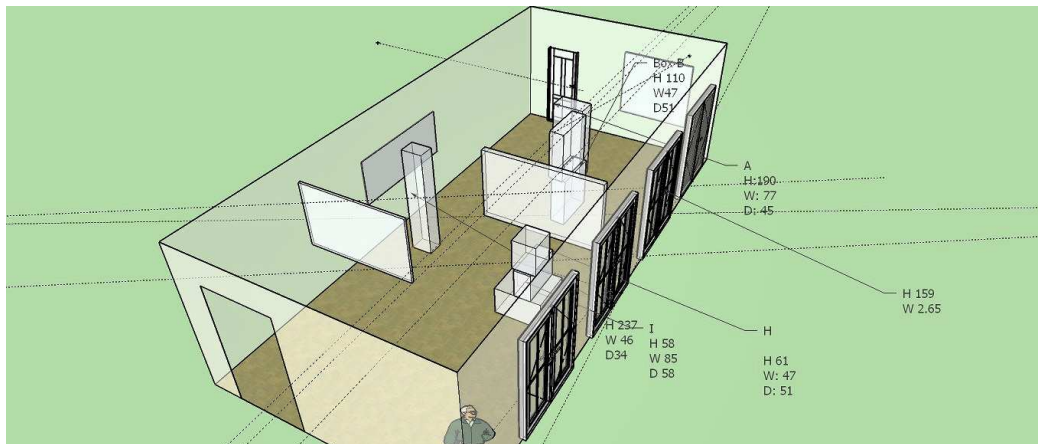
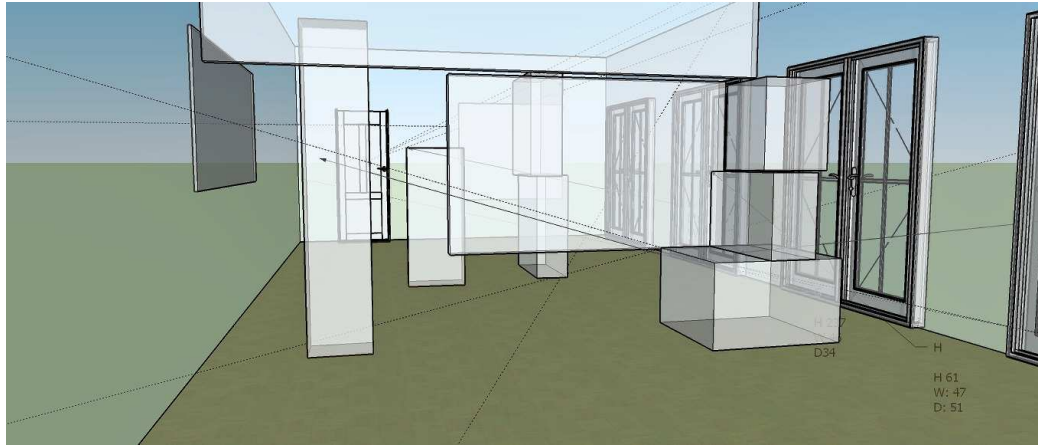
The exhibition looked great. My thesis was also evolving, and I had moved away from narrative painting as one would expect it, into spatial narrative. The work certainly reflected this. However, there were some presentation issues, as pictured. In moving away from pure painting, and into something that might be loosely termed as an installation, the whole art object started to become important.





Tidying up the backs of the paintings seemed a daunting task. The materials were very difficult (and frustrating) to stretch, as it behaved differently to canvas. I also had not decided on a specific material at that point, so perfection through repetition had not occurred either. I started thinking about tape to conceal the backs, and eventually started thinking about placing the paintings back to back - that way, there would be the immediate layering of two images, and the backs would be hidden. After some days of trying to work out how to conceal the backs, I came up with an idea to put each painting on a face of a box that would allow two paintings to be positioned together. The paintings would be juxtaposed with each other, and in a larger sense, each box would in unity with the rest of the boxes. The picture above is an early sketch of what the installation might look like.

At around the same time as the work began to evolve into the third-dimension, my proposal to exhibit *Swinging the Lantern: Flocks* at Chrissie Cotter Gallery in Camperdown was accepted. I was then able to use Sketchup to imagine the space.

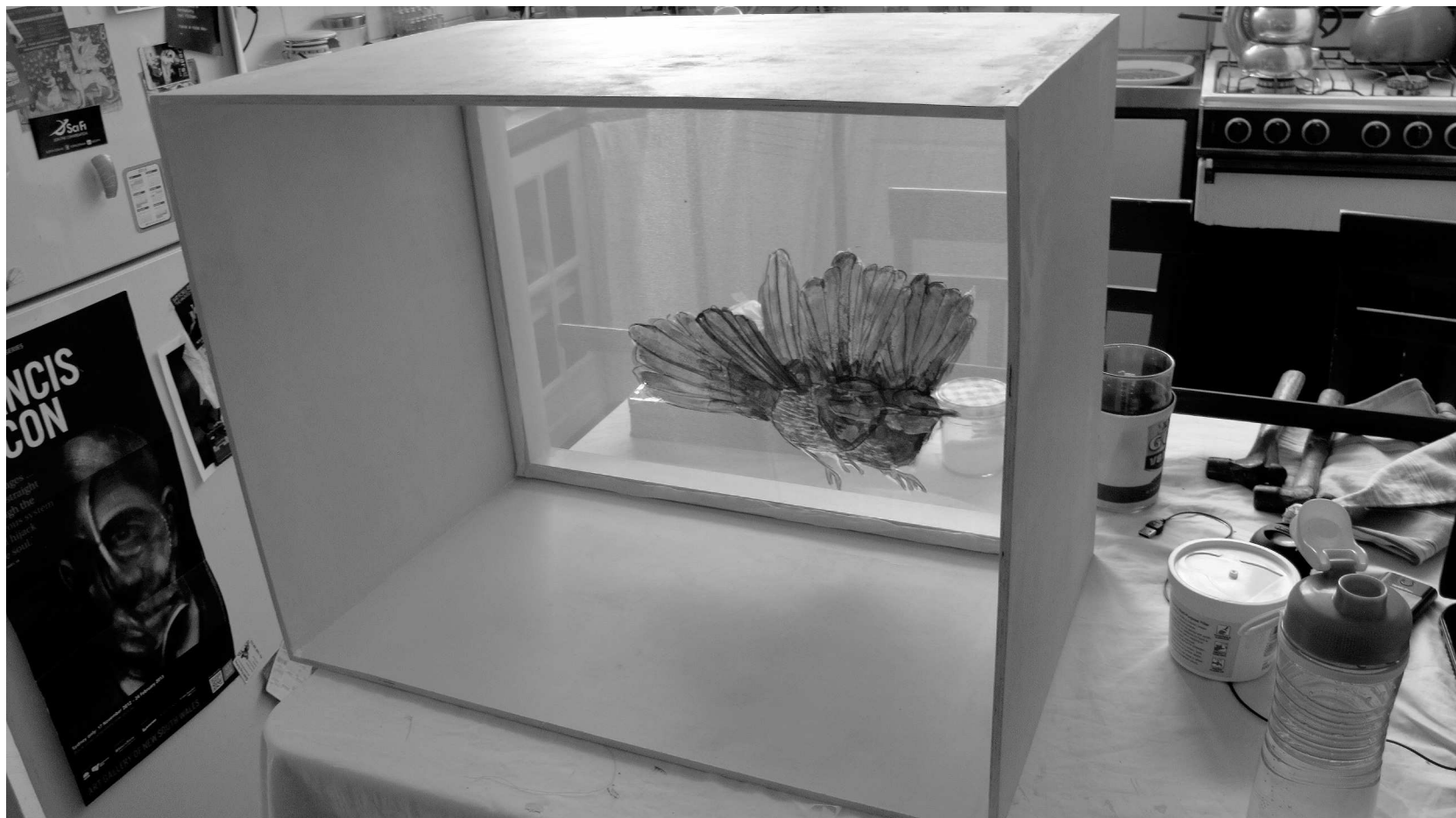


















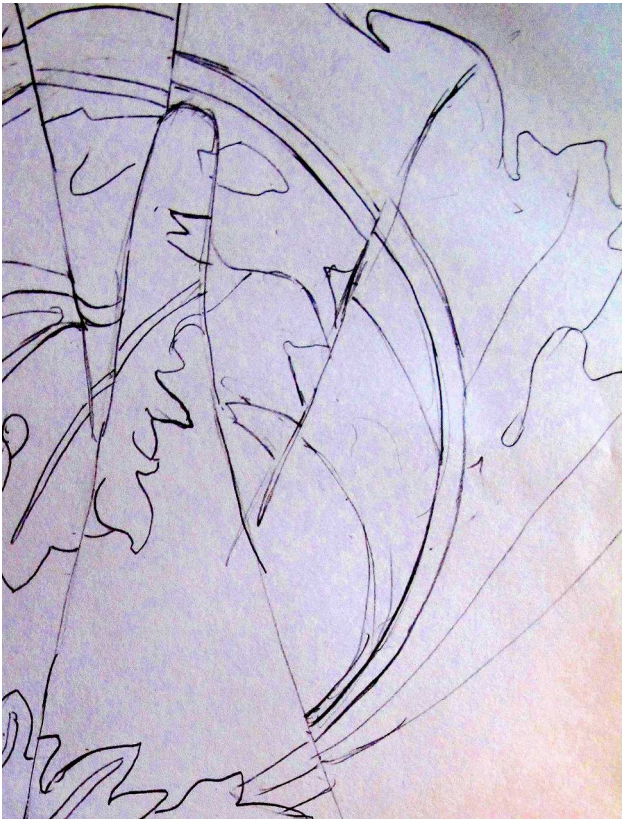
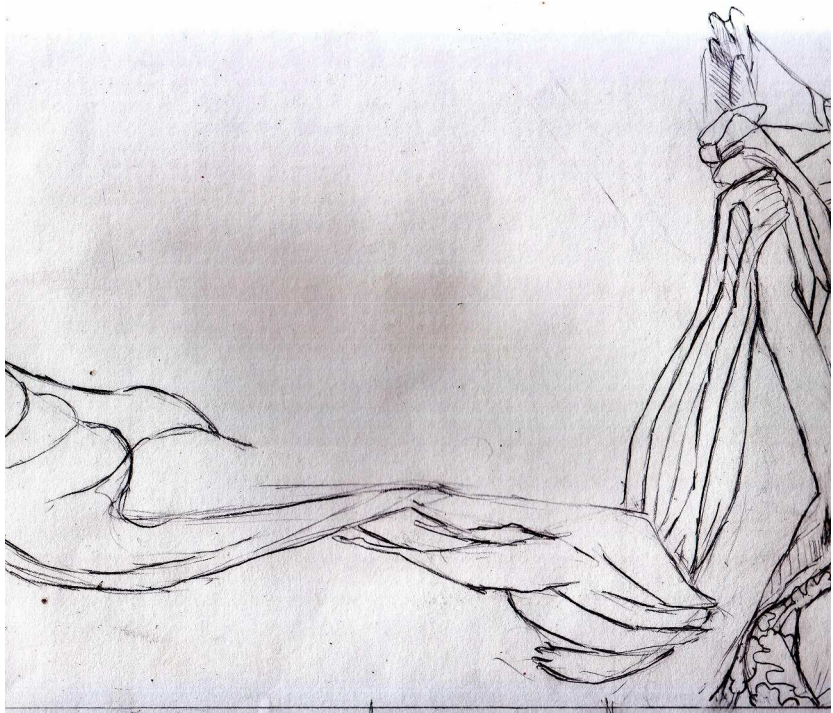


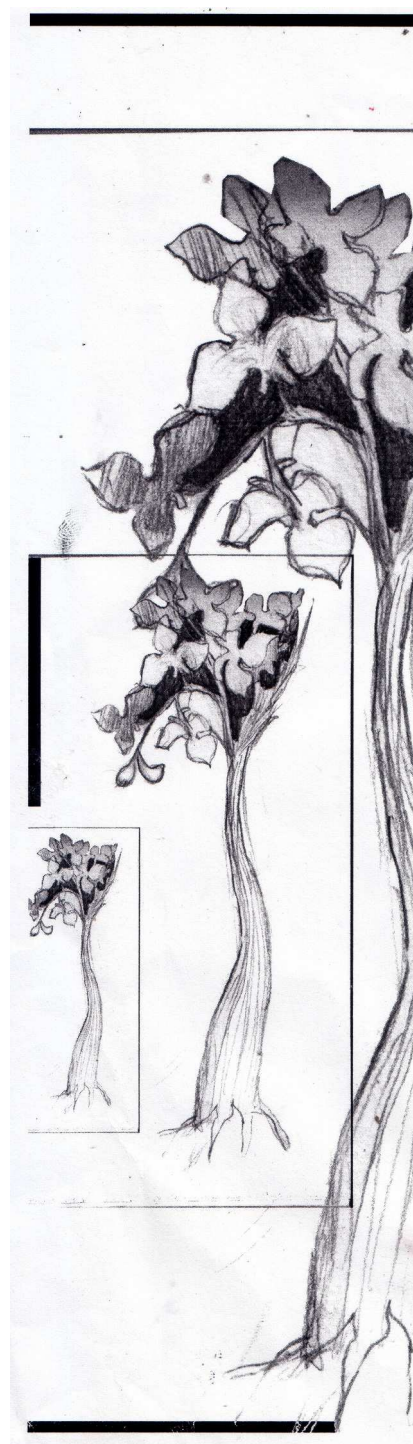












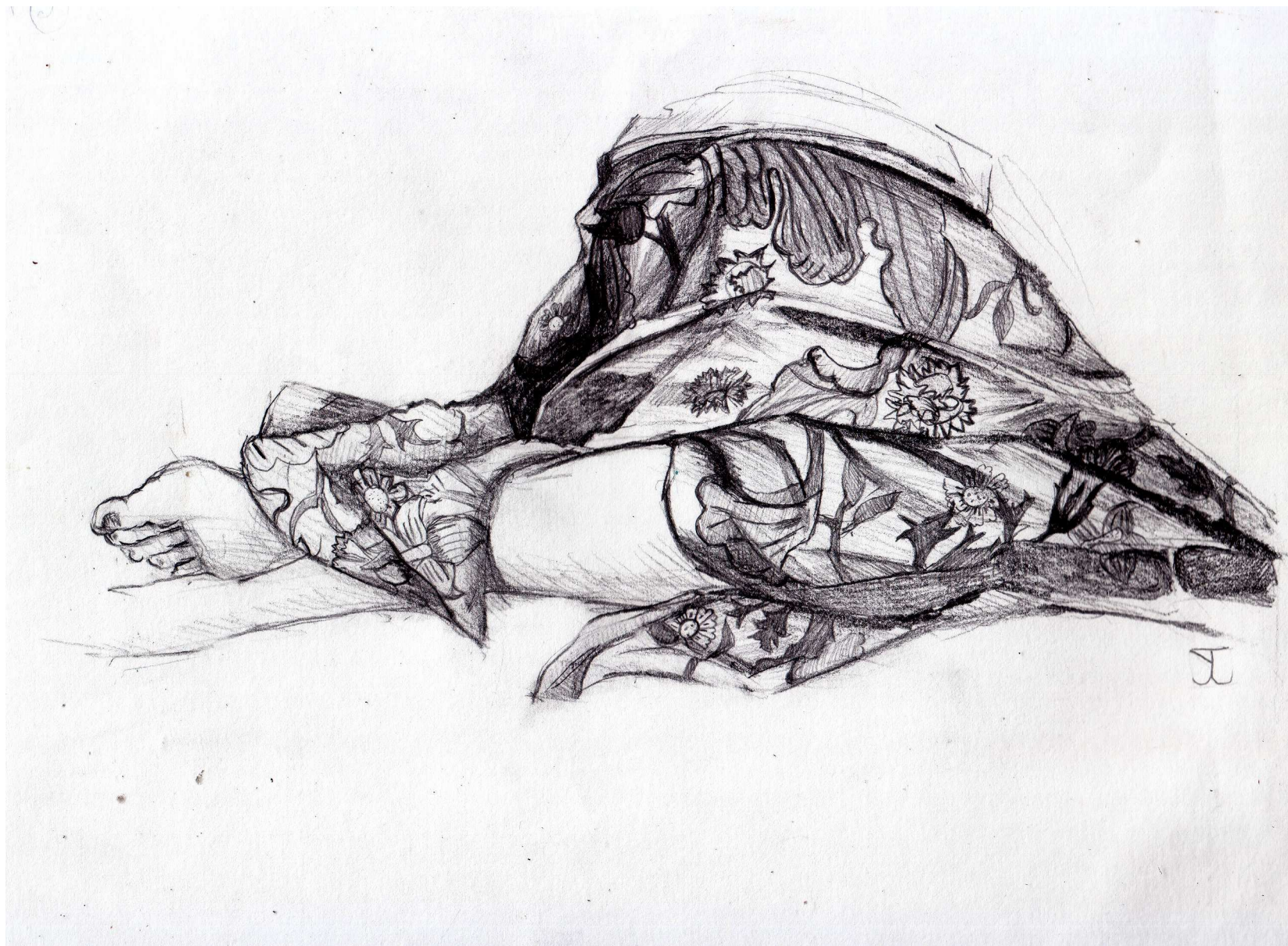


















Another test run at the Project Space at the University of Wollongong. The boxes are set up here in the same configuration as the boxes in the Sketchup images for Chrissie Cotter. However, there were still two or three boxes missing.

In a discussion with my supervisors, they recommended that I didn't add extra boxes to the installation, as the space that the existing ones consumed was sufficient. While I did not end up making extra boxes, there were still two screens to be made. I was unsure as to whether they were necessary at this stage, but they could of course be left out of the exhibition if they didn't work, so I ended up making them anyway.

There was also a discussion about how I would finish the boxes, as at this stage, they were still bare recycled ply-board, and the edges and such were quite roughly cut. As pictured in the previous pages, I had been using an eggshell acrylic in the early experimental boxes to finish them inside and out. I was never been entirely happy with this decision and had been reviewing wallpapers and other textures for some months. I eventually decided to use blackboard paint on the exteriors, leaving the insides white. The white interiors created an inner-luminosity, while the blackboard paint offered a potential extension to the paintings.



## Afterword

The space was more difficult than anticipated to curate, due to a row of doors on the right-hand side of the gallery and I was forced to move away from the original arrangement of the works as I had planned in Sketch-up. In an attempt at the art of misdirection, I arranged the works to create a deliberate movement of the audience along the length of the room so that their backs were almost always to the doors while exploring the work.

The potential movement of the audience both through the gallery space and around the installation reinforced the notion that I discussed in my thesis[1] regarding the potential of physical movement around the space to inspire a narrative experience. It was reminiscent of Michael Fried's essay *Art and Objecthood*[2] in which he discusses minimalism, and his disdain for the lack of attainable absorption when experiencing it. That is, the impossibility for the audience to become absorbed, to lose themselves, in a minimalist art object. Instead, theatricality is achieved, and the audience becomes aware of their physical presence in relation the artworks - which in turn could lead to a kind a kind of spatial-temporal movement as they view the artwork.

In addition to the narrative experience that the audience might have moving around the work, the transparent screens also had the potential to effect a pause in ones journey around the gallery space. As mentioned earlier in the book, I resolved to use organza, due to the possibility to layer and juxtapose the images, thus creating additional narrative layers. The doubling, and in one case the tripling of the screens created not only a juxtaposition between the images that I selected, but also an extra axis for the eye to be drawn into and through while viewing the work.

The following images are of the final installation of *Swinging the Lantern: Flocks*.

[1] Cuthbert, J 2015, *Swinging the Lantern: Spatial Narrative in Visual Art*. <http://jennycuthbert.id.au>

[2] Fried, M 1998, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago





















