

An Investigation of The Space Between The Painting and The Photograph:
Deconstructing The Process and Reflecting on
The Two Media that Constitute my Art Practice

Natalie LeBlanc

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ABSTRACT

An Investigation of The Space Between The Painting and The Photograph:
Deconstructing The Process and Reflecting on
The Two Media that Constitute my Art Practice

Natalie LeBlanc

Painting from a photographic source had become a structure for me and I became intrigued as to how I interpreted it as an experience. By engaging in a hermeneutic-phenomenological study, I distinguished the spaces between the source and the product, and I revealed the meaning that is made from this process. By deconstructing and re-evaluating my habitual way of creating a painting, I was able to understand the reasons why I use a photograph as reference in the studio. Since I take the photograph with the intention of painting it, I realized that the photograph not only informs my painting process, but the painting informs my photographic process as well. The two media are dependent on one another: the photograph is created for the painting; the painting is created in relation to it. They are different, yet similar, and there is a dialectical relationship between the two of them. My thesis question was: What is the dialogue between the painting and the photograph and how will exhibiting the two together emphasize the dialectical relationship that is present in my artistic process?

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

A Personal Experience

A little uncertain, I do as she instructs. I choose a picture that I like from one of her magazines and sit looking at the canvas in front of me. Is this how it's done? Is this how an artist makes a painting? "Look closely at the photograph," she says, "Look closely at the colors." I must try and make these colors with this paint. Looking at my palette that consists of a small piece of wax paper, small dabs of color are placed carefully around the outer edge. Everything is neat and organized. I don't want to start. Everything has its place. I don't want to mess it up. How am I supposed to go from this paint, to this photograph in my hand? The canvas is intimidating. It represents an unknown space with unlimited possibilities. I want my painting to look real. I want it to look like this photograph.

I think that I'll start with the sky. The sky is the best part of the picture. It's a beautiful sunset. The horizon seems to explode with color: strong, hot tones of bright oranges, reds, pinks and yellows. The colors get softer towards the top; they seem to float out of the picture. Different shades of purple blend into soft yellow clouds. Dabbing my brush into the cobalt blue, I thin it out across my palette. So fluid, I think to myself, I can make paint move. Adding a little red, I mix the two colors together and witness it change before my eyes. Purple. I apply my "perfect" shade of purple to the top of the canvas, using my lines and the photograph as my guide, I apply it to the appropriate places, then I clean off my brush and begin to mix the next color. Dipping the brush into the blob of white, I add just a touch of cadmium yellow. I begin to apply the soft yellow color around the purple, I am careful not to get it 'dirty' from the purple. But – oh no – I've caught the purple and am dragging it into the yellow! Great - now I have to start over! But on second thought, that looks neat. I like how the yellow has blended into the purple. It looks real. I've seen real clouds that look like this before... I pick up a dry, clean brush and very gently, I blend the yellow and the purple together all over. I gradually begin to play with all of the colors on my palette. Moving my brush from side to side, up and down, diagonally, using strong brushstrokes, then soft. I realize that this is me, that these are my movements and that I am making this image. I can choose where I put things, where I don't put things, when I want to blend the colors together, and when I want to stop. But when do I stop? When it looks right? When will it look right? What is right? When it looks like the photograph? Does it have to look like the photograph? I don't entirely know the answers to all of these questions. But I do know that I love how I've made those light wispy clouds at the top of my painting, and they don't look anything like the photograph. But I can't change them. They look just right.

-A personal recollection (Natalie LeBlanc)

Collapsing Structures: My Question

The previous story recounts an early experience that I encountered while painting with oil colors. I bring forth this experience because it reveals how I paint in relation to a source photograph, and it reveals many interesting questions regarding this issue. I have been painting from a photographic source for almost eighteen years now. This method was not only how I first learned how to paint, but it is the method in which still I prefer to paint. As an artist, I regularly take photographs and use them as references for my paintings. Painting from a photographic source has become a structure for me and I have become intrigued as to why I value working in this manner.

There is a duality present within me. I feel caught between my roles as a photographer and as a painter. The photograph inspires me to paint, but it plays a crucial role in my painting process. There is a strong connection between the painting and its photographic source. I find it highly intriguing that I cannot understand a photograph simply by looking at it: I have to re-create it in paint. This process not only allows me to understand the image, but my own process of interpretation, which is important to my art practice and development as an artist.

I often question *why* I must paint my photographs. Throughout this study I hope to reveal and understand this dualistic way of working. For the purpose of this study I would like to build an understanding of the practice of painting through the perspective of a painter who relies on a photograph for reference. I will therefore examine how the

dialogue between the photograph and the painting has significance to my development as an artist and I will describe the implications that this study has for art education.

Through my art practice, I would like to examine how my learning occurs *between* media by building an understanding of how I make meaning between the painting and the source material. I will document the unfolding of the painting process and reflect on the three interrelated aspects of time, space, and language. I am looking to understand myself as a learner and to understand how I make meaning through painting from a photograph, and I would like to understand how meaning is heightened through a comparison of these two images in an installation format.

For the purpose of this study I would like to document how painting from a photograph is the method I use to construct meaning about the world and myself and to further understand how this activity combines my inner reflective process with the outer world. Using a hermeneutic-phenomological form of arts-based research, I will consciously reflect on my own practice, developing my own aesthetic sensibility and thus add to a bigger question such as what do I value in art? And what do these values represent?

The Pilot Study

In a past pilot study, I reviewed all of my paintings that were produced from a photographic source. The number of paintings that I produced working in this manner was startling to me. Although I remembered each painting in detail, the process of how I made them was somehow forgotten. I scanned each photographic source and each painting into my computer; I made both images the same size, directly compared them together, and reviewed them in a chronological sequence for the first time. This study revealed important aspects pertaining to the role that the photograph played in my painting process. I was able to judge how far/close I remained from the model, and I gained a clearer understanding of what my intentions were for making the painting. The comparison heightened my personal style that was embedded in each painting by revealing the elements of the image and the color contrasts that I chose to emphasize and de-emphasize. This exercise provided me with insight into my inner state of being, and the character of my subjective experience in response to the photograph.

The painting and the photographic source represented multiple layers of meaning. They demonstrated my personal view of the subject in two different media that when presented simultaneously brought forth more reflections, more insights, and more questions than when the painting was viewed alone. This comparative exercise demonstrated an intriguing juxtaposition. The two images became metaphors for “before” and “after” and I couldn’t help but feel a gap form between them. What was the space between the two? And what significance does this space have?

The following are examples of comparisons that were studied for my pilot project.



Figure 1.
Photographic source for *Short Time/Vast Space* (2000), Natalie LeBlanc.



Figure 2.
Short Time/Vast Space (2002), Natalie LeBlanc, 36"h x 24"w, oil on canvas.

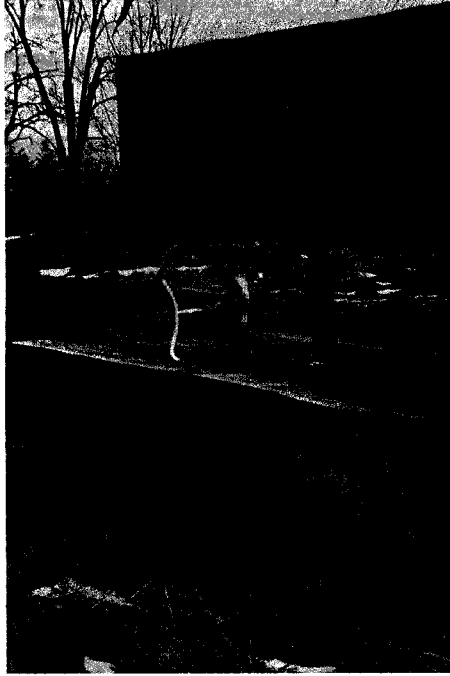


Figure 3.
Photographic source for *Abandoned Innocence* (2000), Natalie LeBlanc.

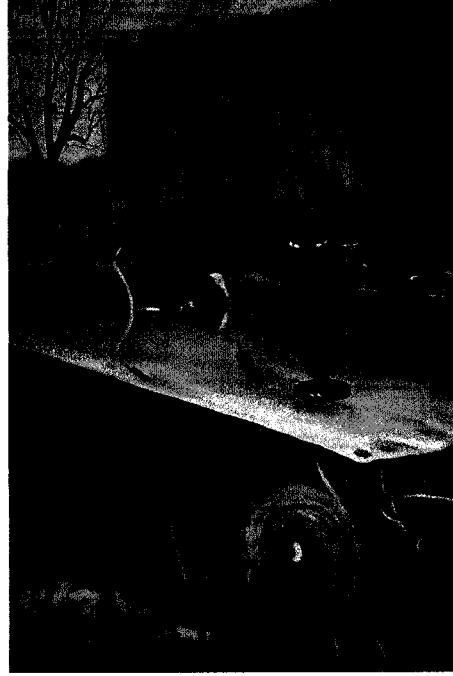


Figure 4.
Abandoned Innocence (2002),
Natalie LeBlanc, 36"h x 24"w, oil on canvas.

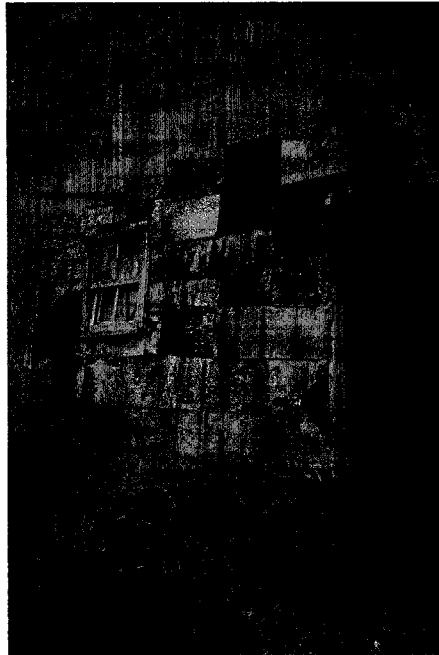


Figure 5.
Photographic source for *Waiting*
(2000), Natalie LeBlanc.

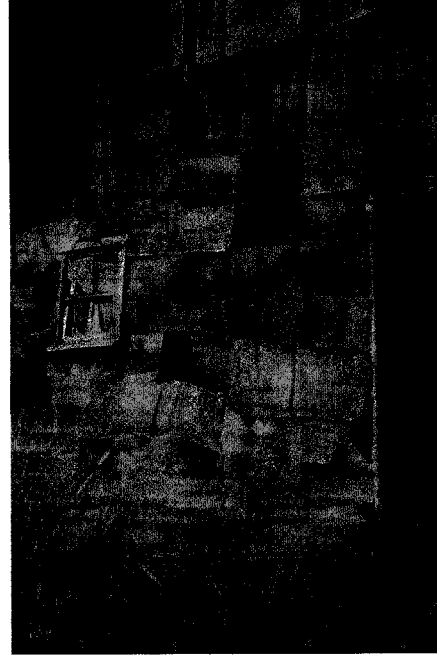


Figure 6.
Waiting (2002), Natalie LeBlanc,
36"h x 24"w, oil on canvas.

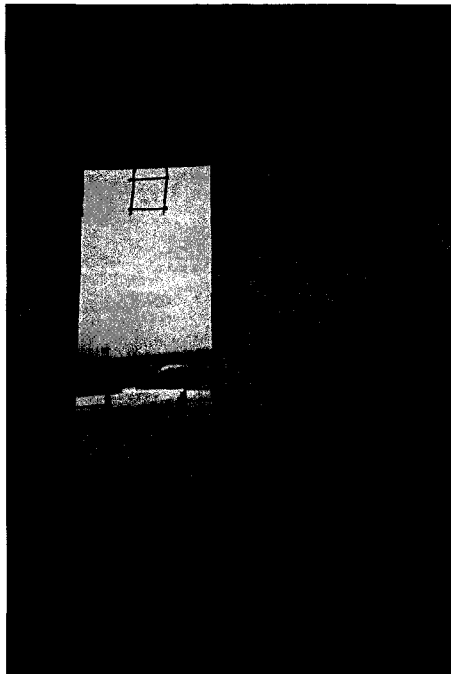


Figure 7.
Photographic source for *Looking Out*
(2000), Natalie LeBlanc.

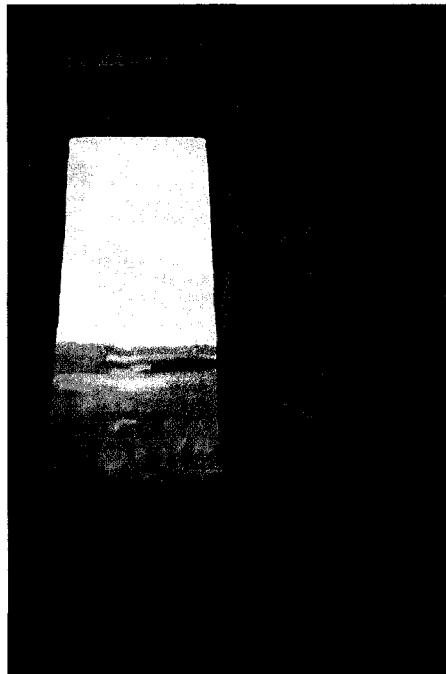


Figure 8.
Looking Out (2001), Natalie LeBlanc,
36" h x 24" w, acrylic on canvas.

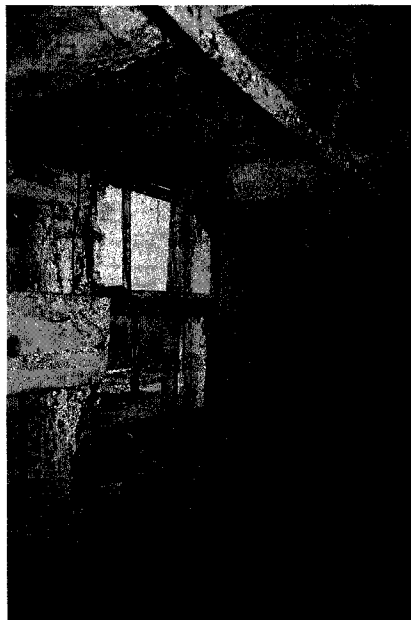


Figure 9.
Photographic source for *The Passage*
(2000), Natalie LeBlanc.



Figure 10.
The Passage (2001), Natalie LeBlanc,
36" h x 24" w, acrylic on canvas.



Figure 11.
Photographic source for *There's Two Sides to Every Story III* (2003), Natalie LeBlanc.

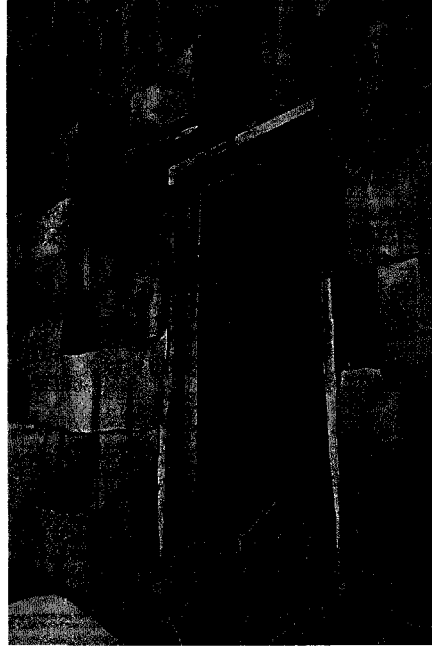


Figure 12.
There's Two Sides to Every Story III (2003), Natalie LeBlanc, 36"h x 24"w, oil on canvas.

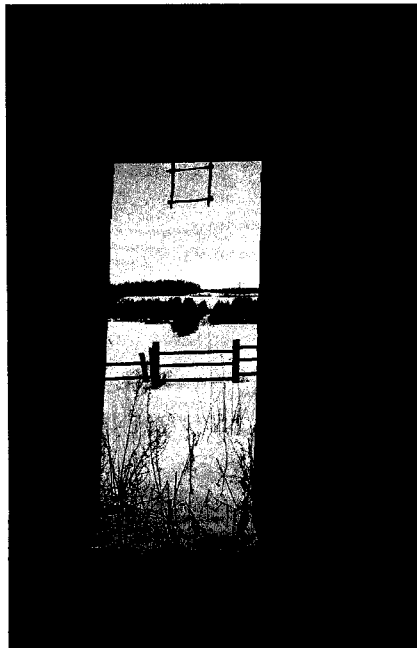


Figure 13.
Photographic source for *There's Two Sides to Every Story IV* (2003), Natalie LeBlanc.

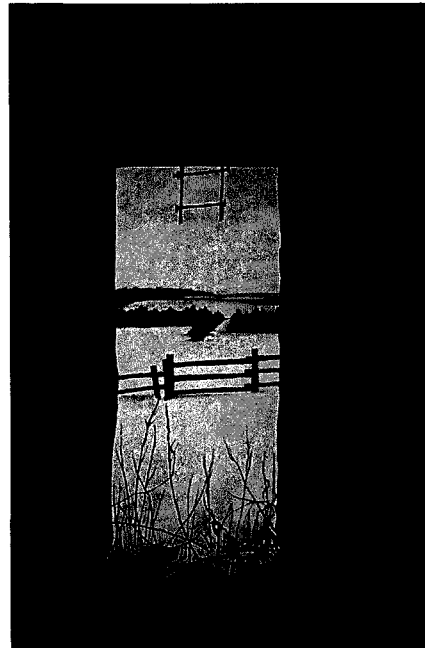


Figure 14.
There's Two Sides to Every Story IV (2003), Natalie LeBlanc, 36"h x 24"w, oil on canvas.

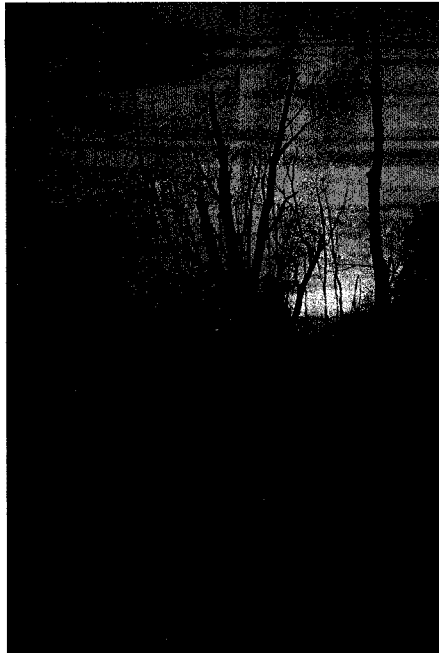


Figure 15.
Photographic source for *Beaver Pond*
(2003), Natalie LeBlanc.



Figure 16.
Beaver Pond (2003), Natalie LeBlanc,
36" h x 24" w, oil on canvas.



Figure 17.
Photographic source for *The Distance
Between Us III* (2001), Natalie LeBlanc.



Figure 18.
The Distance Between Us III (2003), Natalie
LeBlanc, 48" h x 36" w, oil on canvas.

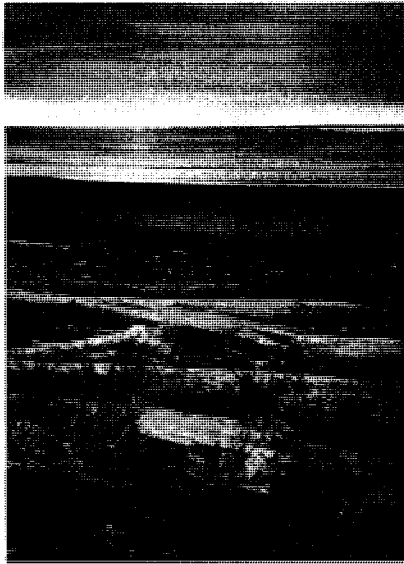


Figure 19.
Photographic source for *My Arms
Aren't Big Enough to Embrace Your
Sea I* (2001), Natalie LeBlanc.

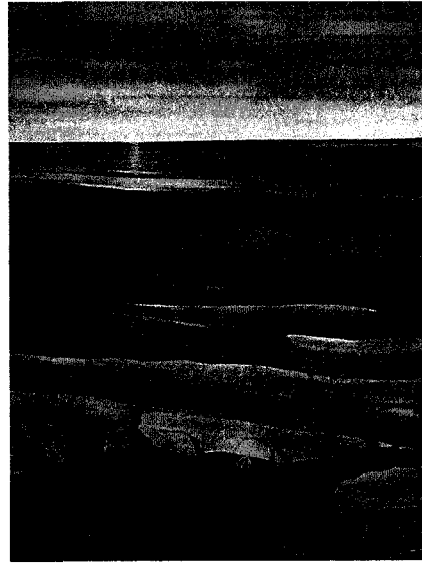


Figure 20.
*My Arms Aren't Big Enough to
Embrace Your Sea I* (2003), Natalie
LeBlanc, 48"h x 36"w, oil on canvas.

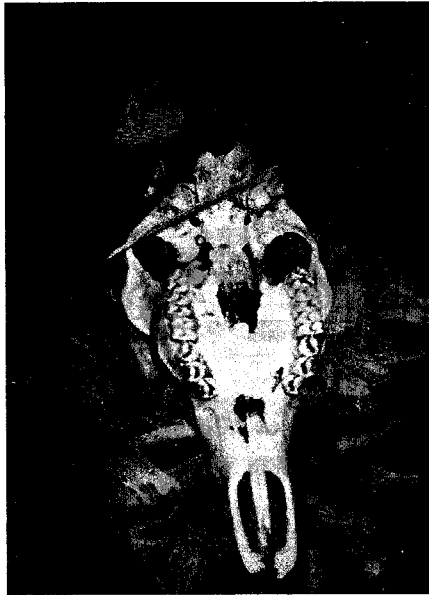


Figure 21.
Photographic source for *My Arms Aren't
Big Enough to Embrace Your Sea II*
(2001), Natalie LeBlanc.

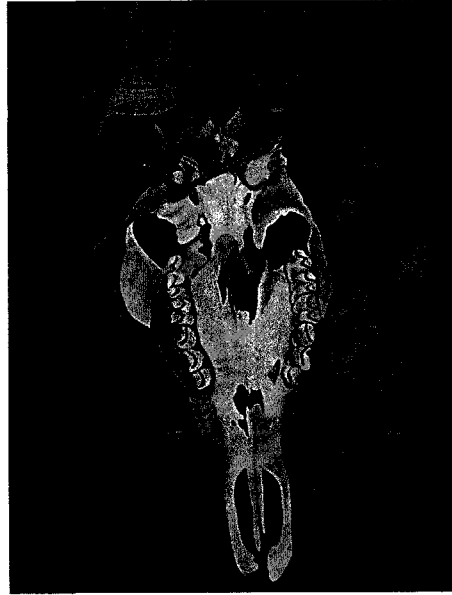


Figure 22.
*My Arms Aren't Big Enough to Embrace
Your Sea II* (2003), Natalie LeBlanc,
48"h x 36"w, oil on canvas.

Multiple perspectives of the same object have always intrigued me and my comparative study reminded me of concepts such as parallel worlds, mirrored reflections; acts of miming, mimicking, and copying. I questioned why I find meaning in variations (i.e. similar images repeated with slight differences in color, angles, or perspectives: in different media, or the same image produced/reproduced by different artists). How do repetitive actions reveal change? How does the process of re-creating heighten transformation? How does it demonstrate how I organize and re-organize my interpretations of the subject?

The comparison of the painting and the photograph presented two different visions of an objective reality, which consequently heightened my subjective experience. It revealed that the photographic source informs my practice in many ways. It is a model, a structural organizer and a mnemonic device. My final conclusions were that the relationship between the photograph and the painting is a process that encourages ideas to flow back and forth. It is a relationship that brings forth many questions and it is one that I would like to explore further.

As a result of this pilot study, I realized how the photographic source and the painting are both equally important to my process. Since I take the photograph with the intention of painting it, the photograph not only informs my painting process, but the painting informs my photographic process as well. The two media are dependant on one another: the photograph is created for the painting; the painting is created in relation to it. They are different, yet similar, and there is a dialectical relationship between the two of

them. It is my intention to answer the question: What is the dialogue between the painting and the photograph and how will exhibiting the two together emphasize the dialectical relationship that is present in my artistic process?

In my study I will reflect on how the painting and the photograph come together to form a whole: documenting how they compliment one another in my studio practice. Viewing the photograph as a pre-text (an opening, beginning, and introduction), and the painting as a post-text (post-script, afterward, conclusion): what is the relation between the two parts? How do these two parts point to the text's wholeness?

CHAPTER 2: The Historical Relationship Between the Photograph and the Painting

The history of photography is understood as the history of technological change (Snyder, 1998). It has had such an important impact on other fields that it is woven into the histories of art, printing and electronic media. Although photo-technology began with capturing the action of light on a prepared surface, it soon developed into an electronic agency composing of transient light and screens (television and cinema), and then, with the invention of the computer, it morphed into the digital image. Although quite different from the photograph, the digital image falls under the umbrella of photo technology even though its image process and make up is very different. The digital photograph bypasses photochemical processes; it can be stored, copied and transmitted electronically, altered, and printed on paper to appear like a photograph made from traditional processes (Maynard, 1998 and Savedoff, 1998).

According to the Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics (1998), whether chemical or electronic: photo technology has amplified the human behaviour of intentional surface marking. Photo depictions and representations have been found to “stimulate, extend, and channel our imagining powers” such as visualization while providing “a wealth of opportunities for reflexive” and “critical investigations” (Maynard, 1998, p. 496-497).

As an artist I am mainly interested in how photographs and photo technology inspire paintings. This chapter will therefore, describe how painters have been using optics as well as photographic technology for years as a method of enhancing their

painting techniques. It will also describe how the camera has allowed the painter to see things differently in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding pertaining to the relationship between the painter and the photographic source.

As early as the fifteenth century (before the invention of the camera), artists were using optical instruments composed of lenses and mirrors as tools for painting purposes. Research implemented by visual artist David Hockney (2001) has proven how a concave mirror has the same optical qualities of a lens and can project images onto a flat surface, which can then be traced by the artist's hand. Some of the most acclaimed artists such as Ingres, Caravaggio, Raphael, Holbein, van Eyck, Dürer, Rembrandt, Velázquez and daVinci, have all shown evidence that image-capturing systems such as the camera obscura and the camera lucida were used and employed in their painting processes (David Hockney, 2001).

Philip Steadman's book entitled "Vermeer's Camera: Uncovering the truth behind the masterpieces" (2001) describes how the Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) used the camera obscura as an aid to his painting. The camera obscura was the forerunner of the camera. It was a simple device that consisted of a pinhole and lens, in which an image was projected onto a screen in a dark room and then traced by the artists' hand. The camera obscura allowed Vermeer to study optical phenomena that extended the experience of vision and to explore methods that could be translated into paint. In Steadman's opinion (2001) "the use of the camera obscura for painting is hardly a matter of short cuts or technical ease. On the contrary, it forces protracted and attentive looking

and analysis” (p.1-2). His book argues that the camera obscura presented optical phenomena, which could not be experienced in normal vision. As a consequence, Vermeer’s paintings demonstrate highly accurate perspective, rendered and precise details that present a sensitivity to light, tonal values, shadow and color (Coke, 1974, Steadman, 2001). Art historians have spent years studying the influence of the camera obscura, re-enacting the procedure in order to test their theories. The camera obscura, however, worked much like a projector. The image was projected and drawn directly on the canvas, therefore, it did not produce a source image that can be analysed in conjunction with the final product.

In 1839, Jacques Louis Mandé Daguerre, “a painter in search of ways to heighten the illusionism of his paintings” (Jansen, 1995, p.698), invented the first photographic process called the daguerreotype. Daguerre formulated the first permanent photographic image in which the action of light was captured onto a surface. It was a process that fixed an image on a silver or silver covered copper plate, it had an extremely long exposure speed and it was prone to distorting reality. Due to the fact that it could produce no more than a single image at a time, it was superseded by the glass-plate negative and paper print (the Calotype) in the 1850s. By the early 1900s, photography had undergone a rapid series of improvements; the Kodak replaced heavy and cumbersome equipment with a smaller and more lightweight camera, and chemical processes had improved significantly (Trachtenberg, 1998).

The Influence of Early Photography on Painting

Early photographic images presented highly contrasting light and dark tonal qualities. They lacked precision and detail; but they had a mysterious charm, which have been described as being romantic and ghostlike in character. Slow moving objects, such as branches moving in the wind, and people walking in the distance, were often captured as blurred objects. Historical research demonstrates that many well-known artists such as Manet, Monet, Cezanne, Degas, Delacroix, Ingres, Carot, and Gauguin were all inspired by early photography (Coke, 1974, Michini, 1976, Scharf, 1974). Katz and Dars (1991) Lewis (1995), Milner (1991), and Scharf (1974) demonstrate how it may have influenced the following paintings in the nineteenth century.



Figure 23.
Manet, Édouard (1863). *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (*Luncheon on the Grass*) Cited in Milner (1991) *Monet*, p.10.

Light

Milner (1991) uses Manet's painting entitled "Déjeuner sur l'Herbe" (1863), as an example of an artwork at the time that presents "a new spatial convention" with

“dramatic” and “simplified contrasts” (p.9-10). In Lewis’ opinion (1995) “Early photography showed Manet that extremely realistic images could be made even if one eliminated most detail and subtle shades” (p.343).

Composition

Degas’ paintings entitled “L’orchestre de l’opéra de Paris” (1868-69) and “Musiciens à l’orchestre” (1870-71), were novel arrangements for their time. Art historians Katz and Dars (1991) believe that the influence of photography is very evident in Degas’ work. Stating that, “the figures are caught as though in a photograph – cut off at seemingly random points, and standing at odd angles to the artist. This is very different from the highly stylized, carefully posed, and fully framed tableaux of the classical schools, and represented a radical departure” (p. 91).



Figure 24.
Degas, Edgar (1868-69). *L'Orchestre de L'Opéra de Paris*. Cited in Katz & Dars (1991) *The Impressionists in Context*, p.91.

Movement

Aaron Scharf's book entitled "Art and Photography" (1974) directly compares an early daguerreotype (Figure 25) with Monet's painting entitled *Boulevard des Capucines* (figure 26). Demonstrating how a daguerreotype typically captures movement of a fleeting crowd, he proves that Monet had borrowed visual distortions from the photograph. In his opinion, Monet has not only mimicked the movement of the crowd and treetops, but he was also influenced by over exposure that can be seen in his rendering of the dark figures on the light background (p. 171).

The daguerreotype and other early photographic prints are extremely important because for the first time in history, we have evidence of how photo technology directly influenced painters. Comparisons between the painting and the photographic source could be formed in order to reveal how it became an explicit source of inspiration and information.

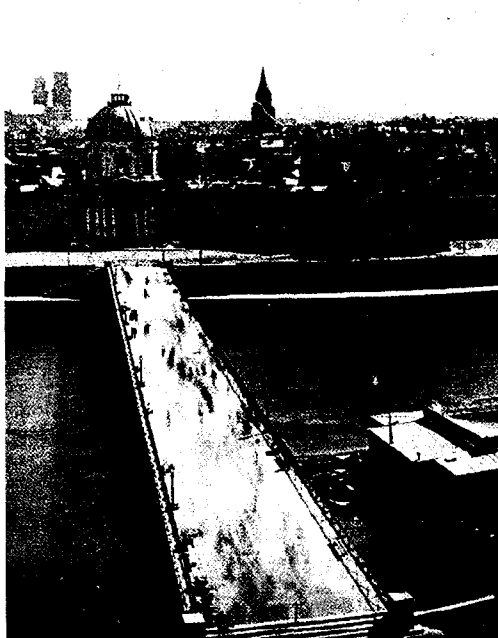


Figure 25.
Braun, Adolphe (1867). *Points des Arts* (detail from panoramic photograph of Paris). Cited in Scharf (1974) *Art and Photography*, p.171.

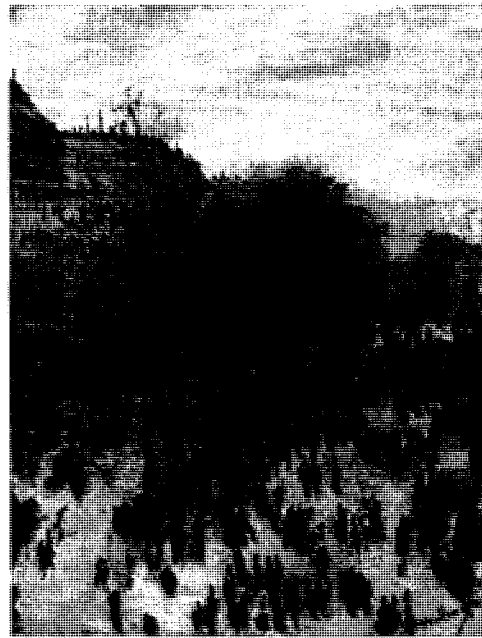


Figure 26.
Monet, Claude (1873-74). *Boulevard des Capucines*. Cited in Scharf (1974) *Art and Photography*, p.171.

Painters Inspired by the Photograph

Many art movements and artists painted from photographic sources. In addition to Impressionist artists, there were the American Impressionists (Theodore Robinson), Post Impressionists (Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec), the Pre-Raphaelites (Ruskin, Burne-Jones, Morris), Surrealists (Ernst, Magritte, Dali), Constructivists (Lissitzy, Malevich, van Doesburg), The Bauhaus School (Maholy-Nagy, Man Ray, Klee), Pop Artists (Warhol, Rauschenburg), Cubists (Braque, Picasso), Precisionists (Schealer, O'Keefe), Abstract Expressionists (de Kooning, Frankenthaler) and lest we forget: the Photo-Realists (Estes, Close, Bechtle) and the Super-Realists (Flack) (Coke, 1972 and Scharf, 1974).

The photograph has been used extensively in portrait painting, nude painting, landscape painting, and genre painting, including both figurative and abstract interpretations. Over the years artists have become experimental with the photograph: creating hybrid images that combine the photograph with paint on the same image (such as Dadaist Hannah Höch), or even painting directly on the photograph (such as Pop artist Rosalyn Drexler) (Coke, 1972 and Scharf, 1974). Today, it is not uncommon to see photographs and paintings as components of the same installation (such as contemporary artists Astrid Klein and Karen Kilimnik) (Grosenick, 2001 and www.icaphila.org/exhibitions/kilimnik.php).

I have selected the following artists to discuss as examples, because they were influenced by photographs that they had taken themselves or by people very close to them. This point demonstrates that there was an emotional attachment to the photograph, and that a dialogue between the two media existed in their process.

Frida Kahlo (1907-1954)



Figure 27.
Kahlo, Guillermo (1926)
Photograph of Frida (taken
by her father). Cited in
Zamora (1990) *Frida Kahlo:
The brush of anguish*, p.24.



Figure 28.
Kahlo, Frida (1926) *Self-
Portrait Wearing a Velvet
Dress*, detail. Cited in
Zamora (1990) *Frida Kahlo:
The brush of anguish*, p.24.

“The Camera’s Seductress” written by Carla Stellweg (1992), discusses how Frida Kahlo’s paintings often drew upon the many photographs that she had pinned to the headboard of her bed. The photographs were of her family, close friends, the Mexican revolution, famous people who fascinated her, as well as pictures of herself, taken by her father, and other famous photographers that she met throughout her life. These were rich sources of inspiration for her paintings. According to Stellweg (1992), “her attention to detail, her tiny brushstrokes, the colors that she chose, and even the formality of her small-scale works can be credited to her appreciation of, and involvement with, photography” (p. 106-107).



Figure 29.
Packard, Emmy Lou
(1940) *Frida*, detail. As
reproduced in Stellweg
(1992) *Frida Kahlo: The
camera seduced*, p.113.



Figure 30.
Kahlo, Frida (1941) *My
parots and I*, detail. As
reproduced in Zamora
(1990) *Frida Kahlo: The
brush of anguish*, p.52.



Figure 31.
Silbetein, Bernard G. (1942). *Frida*. As
reproduced in Stellweg (1992) *Frida
Kahlo: The camera seduced*, p.53.



Figure 32.
Kahlo, Frida (1943). *Self-Portrait as a
Tehuana (Diego in my thoughts)*,
detail. In Zamora (1990) *Frida Kahlo:
The brush of anguish*, p.83.

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986)

Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz had an intense romantic relationship that centered on "their mutual high regard for art and photography" (Castro, 1985, p.95). In "Two Lives: A Conversation in Paintings and Photographs," Belinda Rathbone (1992) explains that "as artists working side by side, O'Keeffe and Stieglitz traded places often as they followed each other's lead. As O'Keeffe's pictures became increasingly realistic and grounded, Stieglitz's became increasingly abstract and ephemeral" (p. 56).

Through the comparison of Stieglitz's photographs and O'Keeffe's paintings, we can see an interchange between both style and form. O'Keeffe's paintings are smooth and rendered, with no apparent traces of a brush, whereas Stieglitz's sky appears very painterly. Stieglitz's photographs played a large role in O'Keeffe's search as an artist. She was greatly influenced by his literal abstractions found in nature because they were direct and intense: and they depicted radiant curves with deep black tones. O'Keeffe's paintings adapted the aesthetics of photography: they combined organic abstraction with naturalism. By presenting objects in extreme close up, she magnified their surface so that they depicted deep valleys and sensuous folds, reminiscent to both skin and landscapes (Arrowsmith & West, 1992).

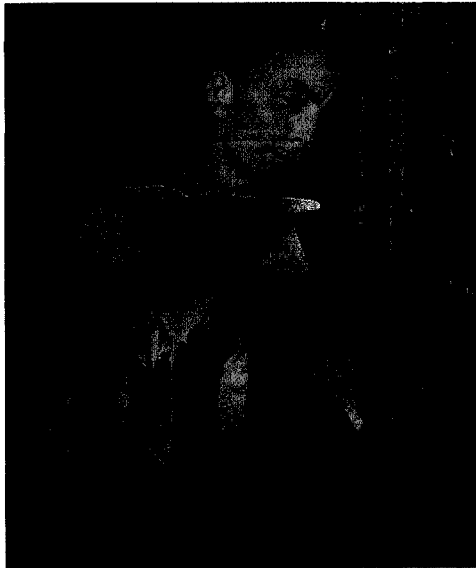


Figure 33.
Stieglitz, Alfred (1931). *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait with Cow Skull*. Photograph. Cited in Arrowsmith & West (Eds) (1992) *Two lives: A conversation in paintings and photographs*, p.110.

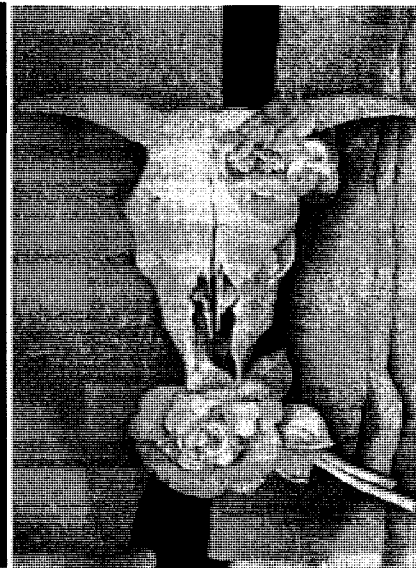


Figure 34.
O'Keeffe, Georgia (1932). *Cow's Skull with Calico Roses*. Cited in Arrowsmith & West (Eds) (1992) *Two lives: A conversation in paintings and photographs*, p.113.

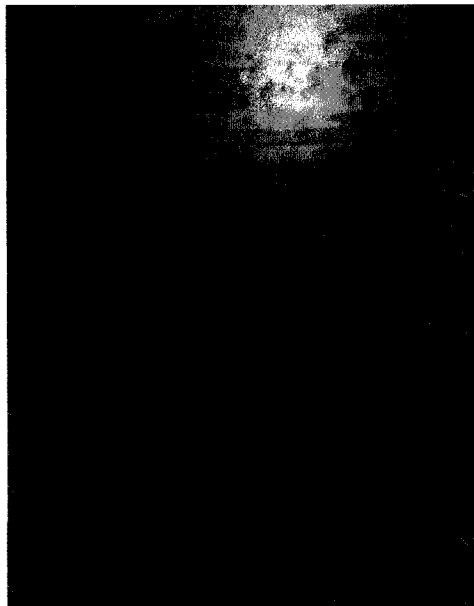


Figure 35.
Stieglitz, Alfred (1926). *Equivalent*. Photograph. Cited in Arrowsmith & West (Eds.) (1992), *Two lives: A conversation in paintings and photographs*, p.137.



Figure 36.
O'Keeffe, Georgia (1927). *Dark Iris No.2*. Cited in Arrowsmith & West (Eds.) (1992) *Two lives: A conversation in paintings and photographs*, p.77.

Charles Sheeler (1883-1965)

Charles Sheeler was a professional commercial photographer. He worked for Vogue and Vanity Fair magazines, and he surrounded himself with a group of well-recognized modernist and “pictorialist” photographers at the time that included Stieglitz, Steichen, Strand and Weston (Troyen, 2004). Sheeler, however, abandoned photography in the later years of his life and he produced many paintings that were based on the compositions of his prior photographic work.

Attracted to old, handcrafted artefacts, he created a photographic series of an old rural dwelling called the Doylestown House. These are examples of the interior views of the house that center on features such as doors, windows and staircases. This series of photographs depict “dramatic lighting, spatial distortions, and unconventional framing” (Lucic, 1997, p.20). In this series, Sheeler demonstrates how an old building could exemplify modern aesthetic concerns. By comparing the paintings to their photographic sources, we can see that there are only subtle transformations. He has distorted the beams in the ceiling slightly more than in the photograph and eliminated details such as the hinges, latches and cracks in the walls. Sheeler was inspired by the machine age that he was a product of. His paintings depict flat surfaces, straight and defining lines, stark tonal contrasts and simplified geometric shapes.

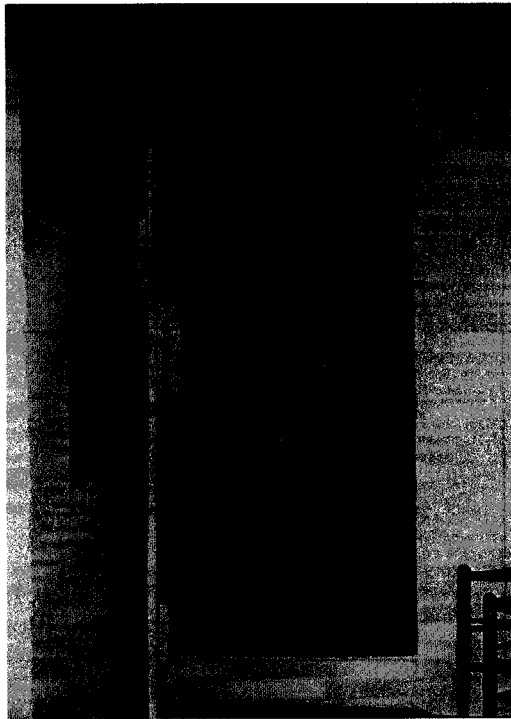


Figure 37.
Sheeler, Charles (1917). *Stairway with Chair*.
Photograph. Cited in Lucic (1997) *Charles
Sheeler in Doylestown*, p.44.

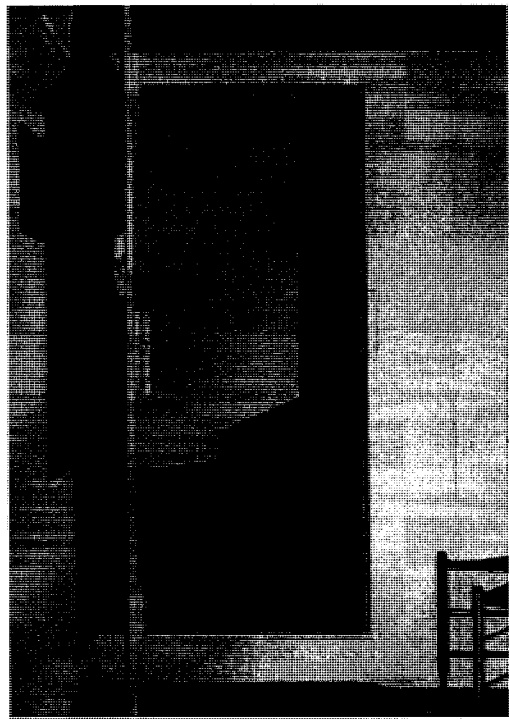


Figure 38.
Sheeler, Charles (1938). *The Upstairs*. Painting.
Cited in Lucic (1997) *Charles Sheeler in
Doylestown*, p.109.

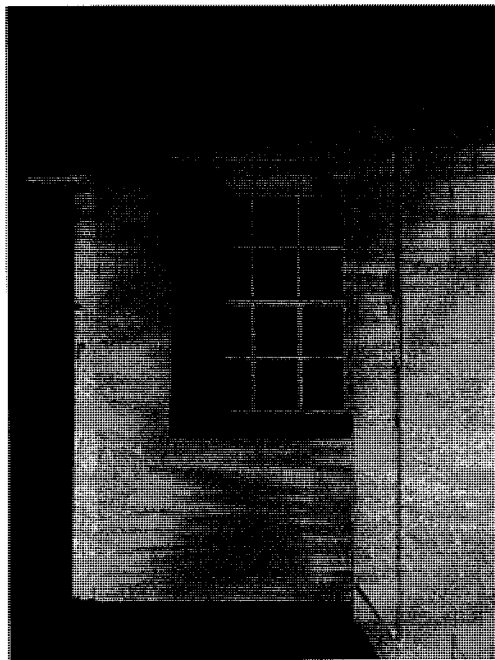


Figure 39.
Sheeler, Charles (1917). *Downstairs Window*.
Photograph. Cited in Lucic (1997) *Charles
Sheeler in Doylestown*, p.48.

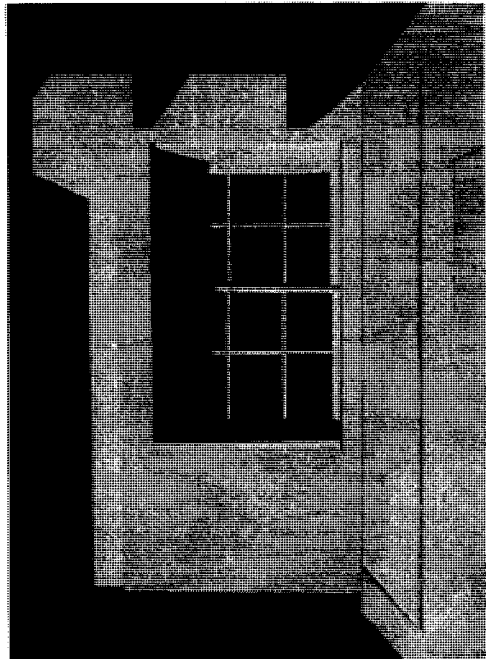


Figure 40.
Sheeler, Charles (1946). *The Yellow Wall*.
Painting. Cited in Lucic (1997) *Charles
Sheeler in Doylestown*, p.114.

Convenience

By the twentieth century, photographs served as a reminder of many details. They supplied the painter with a ready-made composition, and in some cases, it inspired the handling of the material. The camera was a convenient and valuable “notebook” that was capable of freezing time, space, color, and light. Changing factors such as sunlight and seasons were no longer interruptions (Coke, 1972). The still image allowed the painter time to study their subjects at ease and to learn important formulae such as perspective, geometric shapes and architectural ornaments, thus helping the artist to build a keen awareness of visual detail (Duncum, 1984).

Camera Vision

The camera also allowed the painter to see things differently than with direct experience alone. Shadows are deeper in tonal value in photographs than in nature and the edges of dark areas are also more distinct in photographs than in life. Some artists believed that the camera provided more information than a preliminary sketch. It presented innovative ways in which artists could frame and crop scenes. It explored different points of view, such as close ups and looking up at subjects through exaggerated angles. At times it distorted perspective and depicted extreme foreshortening. Multiple-exposures, high-speed shots, stop-action photography, photomicrographs, telephotographs and chronophotography presented painters’ new methods of interpreting

the world (Scharf, 1974). Therefore, the camera not only offered the painter more information, but more choices and a broader pictorial vocabulary.

Secrets and Misconceptions

The painter rarely reveals their photographic source. It is most often only revealed by the art historian. This is an issue that has appeared regularly throughout my research on this topic. One can easily conclude that painters were secretive about their use of the photograph. Thus begging the question: why?

The photograph as aid to the painter brings forth issues such as tracing, projecting and copying: actions that have been referred to in the past as deceitful or even inartistic. The practice has even been difficult to trace because the photographic source was concealed and in some cases, destroyed (Scharf, 1974). The following examples demonstrate how artists have shown ambivalence towards painting from a photographic source. American Impressionist painter Theodore Robinson (1852-1896) expressed his secret feelings of guilt towards his use of the camera. His diary quotes: "I don't know why I do this...partly I fear because I am in New York where other men are doing this, - it is in the air" (cited in Johnston, 1973, p.xiii). More recently, Francis Bacon (1909-1992) went to extreme measures in order to ensure that his source imagery was destroyed. Towards the end of his life, when a researcher asked to archive his source imagery, Bacon gathered all of the photographic sources as well as press and magazine

cuttings that were scattered all over his studio floor, and set them on fire (cited in Harrison, 2005).

Formalist and modernist critics perceived artists who painted from a photograph as weak, because in their opinion, a 'true artist' is someone who is "inventive," with "naturally extraordinary technical skills" (Auping, 2005, p.36). Many people continued to express that painters used photographs as source imagery because it was a shortcut, or a crutch because they had "not yet developed" or "mastered the plastic elements" that were needed to be "a successful painter" (Weinberg, 2005, p. 48). Statements such as these however, have caused the practice to be misunderstood and have left the painter feeling as though they have to hide the significance that it plays in their process.

Artists such as Bacon and Robinson failed to recognize that their photographic sources had the ability to reveal a deeper understanding of their painting process. Clearly, as we compare the painting to the photographic source, we can see the positive implications that photo technology has had on their practice, and gain a deeper understanding of their creative process. We can learn more by looking at the painting and the photographic source simultaneously, than by simply looking at the painting alone.

Comparisons

The photograph is an artifact: it presents a fragment of a process: evidence of what the painter saw before commencing to paint. Art historian Coke (1972) has

produced a comprehensive compilation dedicated to the activity of painting from photographic sources. His text reveals many artists source imagery in order for the reader to compare it with the final painting. Through a comparison of the painting and the photographic source, the reader gains a 'behind the scenes' account of the artists' process that is often not included in museum or gallery exhibitions or even in artists' bibliographies. Tracing artists from Delacroix to Warhol, Coke (1972) directly compares the painting with its photographic source. By doing so, he proves that the final painting most often involves a certain amount of variation from the source photograph and on many occasions, the photograph acts as a catalyst for change. It is Coke's opinion that, "through a comparison of paintings and their photographic sources we gain a better understanding of how the camera affects the artist's work. Much is revealed about the artist when we see what [the artist] keeps, what [the artist] omits, and what [the artist] modifies" (p.1).

A comparison between the painting and the photographic source demonstrates the significance of the variation, and it focuses on the 'before and after' heightening the differences and disparities between the two images. Although the examples demonstrate how the painter changed certain elements from the photographic model, the reader is left wondering why these things were changed. The comparisons are extremely interesting. They bring forth many interesting questions, such as: how did reflections on the painting and photograph affect the artist's decisions? What were the reasons why certain elements were modified or exaggerated?

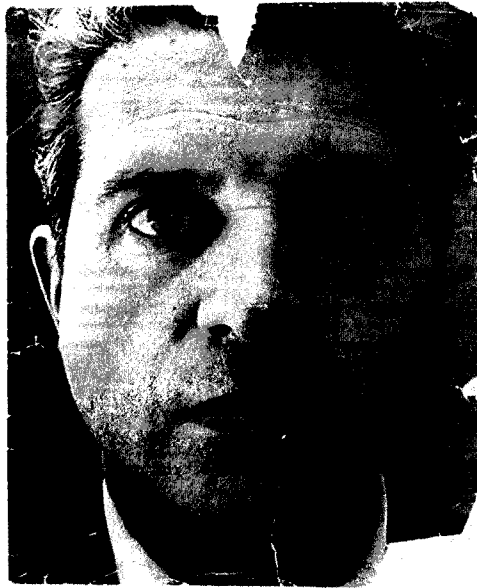


Figure 41.
Deakin, John (1952). *Francis Bacon*.
Retrieved from
[http://www.vam.ac.uk/images/image/22640-
popup.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/images/image/22640-popup.html) on January 17, 2008.

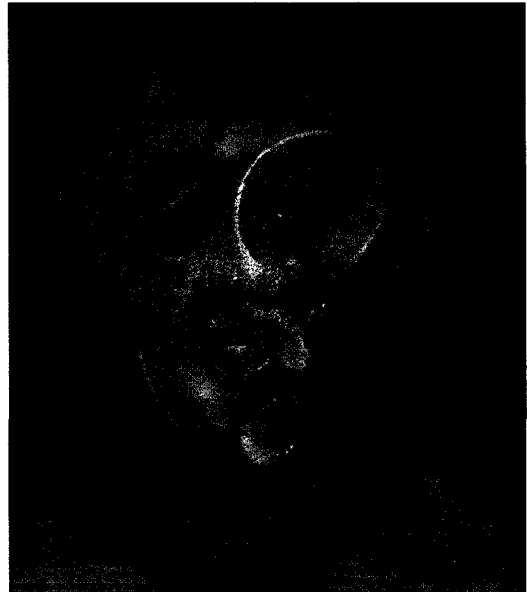


Figure 42.
Bacon, Francis (1969). *Self-portrait*.
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[http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/graphics/2007/11/
/20/bacon350.jpg](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/graphics/2007/11/20/bacon350.jpg) on January 17, 2008.



Figure 43.
Source Unknown (n.d.)
Photographic source for *Fig. II.26*.
Cited in Gagosian Gallery (2005) *Saville*, p.53.



Figure 44.
Saville, Jenny (1996-97). *Fig. II.26*. Cited in
Gagosian Gallery (2005) *Saville*, p.51.

Variations

Even when I paint a straightforward copy, - something new creeps in, whether I want it to or not: something that even I don't really grasp. (Gerhard Richter, cited in Obrist, 1995, p. 24).

In the two preceding examples, Francis Bacon and Jenny Saville demonstrate how it is often not the artists' intention to duplicate the photograph. They both used the photograph as a source of reference in an attempt to depict a personal interpretation of their subject. *The Artist and the Camera* by Albert Michini (1976) compiles a variety of artists' work that all began with a source photograph. He presents the reader with a short statement of how the photograph inspired each artist to paint it. Most artists stated that they "interpret" the photograph, as opposed to "copying" it (Michini, 1976). Not all of the artists worked in a realistic fashion, some were abstract, most stated they rely on the photo for remembering their "feelings" associated with the place that they were depicting (Michini, 1976, 72-80).

The term *variation* applies to when an artist takes the formal structure of another picture and uses it as a point of departure for his or her own work. Susan Galassi (1991) has written significantly on the variations that Picasso created during his long career as a visual artist. She states that:

In a variation, the structure or the schema of the original is preserved, while style, technique, and most significantly, content undergo transformation. The relationship between the two works can vary considerably from a close approximation to a loose and tenuous connection. The "originality" of the variation depends largely on the ingenuity of the artist in constructing a new and disjunctive entity of different and often opposing stylistic elements, while keeping in mind the source from which they are diverging. A variation is always more revealing of the sensibility of its creator than of the material that served as the basis of the transformation. (p.11-12)

I have chosen to borrow the term *variation* from Galassi, because it describes a practice of making “interpretive works” as opposed to “copying.” In Galassi’s opinion, “a variation forms a reciprocal relationship with its source, rooted in contrast, in which the new work and the old modify and define one another in turn” (Galassi, 1996, p.8).



Figure 45.
Photographer Unknown (1923) *Picasso's son Paul on a donkey*. Cited in Coke (1972) *The painter and the photograph: from Delacroix to Warhol*, p.64.



Figure 46.
Picasso, Pablo (1923). *Paul*. Cited in Coke (1972) *The painter and the photograph: from Delacroix to Warhol*, p.64.



Figure 47.
Sescau, Paul (1890) *Man and woman in café*. Cited in Coke (1972) *The painter and the photograph: from Delacroix to Warhol*, p. 91.



Figure 48.
Toulouse-Lautrec, Henri (1891). *À La Mîe*. Cited in Coke (1972) *The painter and the photograph: from Delacroix to Warhol*, p.91.

David Pariser (1999) has extensively researched the work of Picasso, Toulouse-Lautrec and Klee. In his opinion, “reproductive realism was of minor interest” to these three artists, who consequently created very “expressive imagery” (p. 165). The previous *variations* demonstrate how Picasso and Toulouse-Lautec were “not concerned with capturing optical impressions” (Ibid, p.165) but rather, they demonstrate their concern “with capturing an expression, a gesture, an image that is psychologically rather than optically *true* of [their] subject” (Ibid, p.165). Studying the variation between the painting and the photographic source highlights the artists’ process of interpretation - what Pariser (1979) has referred to as “the pivotal issue” in artistic skills (p. 40).

Painting, Photography and Technology

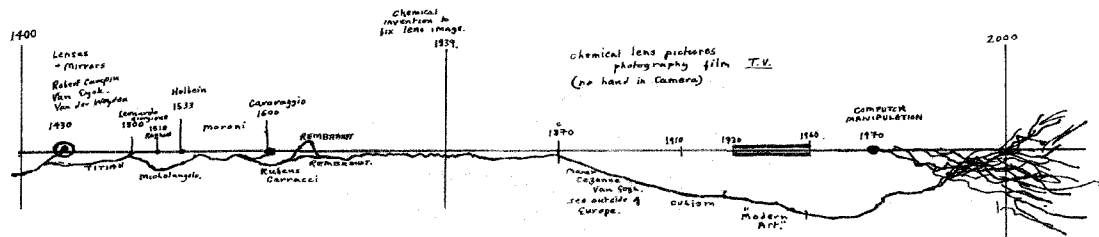


Figure 49.
Hockney, David (2001). *Timeline*. As produced in Hockney (2001) *Secret knowledge: rediscovering the lost techniques of the old masters*, p.184-185.

David Hockney (2001) devised a chronological map that describes the relationship between the “eyeballing” and “lens-based” traditions (p.184). The green line represents the eyeballing tradition while the red line represents the lens-based tradition (see figure 25). The lines demonstrate how eyeballing closely followed the lens for four centuries, in which during this time, artists were trying to emulate the “naturalistic effect” of lens-based images with their hand (p.184). After the invention and widespread use the camera, the eyeballing tradition moves the furthest away from the lens as a reaction to the mechanical and automatic production of lens-based images. The eyeballing tradition ascends with the advent of the computer where it intertwines, intercepts, and branches off with the lens-based image for the first time. The action of the artists’ hand returns to the lens based image with computer programs such as Photoshop. Now that the photograph can be manipulated, the photograph is closer to painting once again (Hockney, 2001).

The issue of how digital technologies are affecting hand-made art processes and art production has significance to my research topic. “Making Art in a digital/cyber culture: Exploring the dialectic between the manual creator and the digital self” written by Tracey

Bowen (2003) interviews six different artists in order to examine the effects that machines have on artists who use more manual modes of art making such as drawing and painting. She questions if this topic produces a dichotomy between newer and older forms of art media and she questions whether artists are “comfortable with this dichotomy” (p.220). Through emerging themes between the statements made by each artist interviewed, Bowen reached the following conclusion:

It became clear throughout the conversations that the artists were very much looking for links between the older ways of working developed by their manual selves and the new found possibilities inherent in becoming digital. These links were not just technical, but also physical in form and feeling. It appears that what is at stake in becoming digital for many artists, is the autonomous self. The Autonomous self is grounded in the physical world, with the hand acting as an extension of that self, leaving the embodied trace of the maker/self. (p.227)

This article emphasizes the artist’s perspective. It demonstrates how some artists are looking for ways in which digital technology can complement their manual methods of art making, while understanding the value that this process has for them. The “autonomous self” as Bowen explains it, is perhaps the reason why many artists feel the need to interpret a photograph through paint.

The next chapter discusses the dialectical relationship between the painting and the photograph in a critical context. The theory will demonstrate how painting from a photograph can be understood as a process that opens a space for contemplation and reflection.

CHAPTER 3: The Dialogue Between the Photograph and the Painting:

Dialectical Relationships and Intermedia:

Rita Irwin (2004) has written extensively on the subject of dichotomies and has brought forth interesting comments pertaining to liminal spaces. In her opinion, dichotomous thinking separates categories of thought and places one form above another, thereby (mis)leading to hierarchical considerations. Over the last two decades she has witnessed how dialectical relationships between categories of thought have become more prominent, stating that “a dialectical perspective views categories of thought as being in equal relationship to one another, thereby allowing the inherent concepts to vibrate constantly with active energy” (p. 28). Irwin (2004) believes that a dialectical stance works best when it encourages a “multilectical view that encourages thirdness” (p.28). This third space is extremely important. Because it exists between categories, it represents “a point of convergence – yet respect for divergence – where differences and similarities are woven together” (Irwin, 2004, p. 29). This third space houses new understandings between categories.

Dick Higgins was the first to use the term *intermedia* in 1965 to describe artwork that falls between media. He stated that artwork, which belongs to a rigid category, “demonstrates a compartmentalized approach that does not allow for any sense of dialogue” (p.49). It is his opinion that, “a happening” displays “continuity rather than categorization” specifically because it is “an event that lies between media” (p.50). The *intermedia* chart presented by Higgins is important because it demonstrates how traditional categories may overlap and consequently lead to intertextuality (refer to

Figure 50). Higgins' diagram was a starting point for my own diagram, causing me to reflect and question my own methodology as a painter (refer to Figure 51).

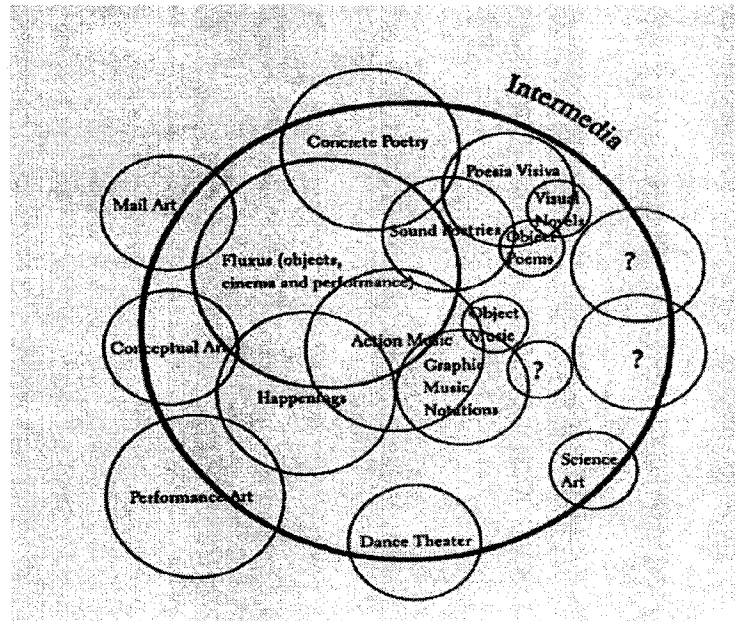


Figure 50.
Higgins, Dick. (1984). *Intermedia Chart*. Cited in *Horizons: The poetics and theory of the intermedia*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Press.

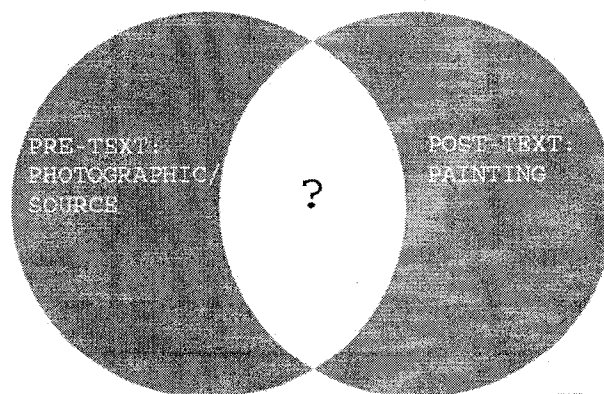


Figure 51.
LeBlanc, Natalie (2007). *Venn Diagram: Looking at the interconnection between the painting and the photographic source that is present in my artistic practice*.

Looking at the artistic process may reveal insights pertaining to ideas, memories, and experiences. According to Rita Irwin (2003), an “aesthetic of unfolding” is an active opening of the spaces between possibilities and limitations. It is an aesthetic way of knowing that appreciates the awkward spaces existing between dialectical relationships (such as chaos and order, complexity and simplicity, certainty and uncertainty, practice and theory). In dialectical relationships, she states, “both entities are valued equally” (p.63-64). This “in-between” space is described as “an active space where knowledge is created through sensing, feeling, and thinking. Tensions between polarities are held within a dialectical balance where unfolding, opening, evolving, expanding, manifesting take place” (p.64). Irwin highlights the importance of insight during the art making process, renaming it “*in/sight*” because “it (delves) into the inner structure of things, beings, and ideas (to) perceive and apprehend knowledge” (p.64).

In 2004 Janine Hopkinson wrote a thesis at Concordia University in the Department of Études Francaises, entitled “Multiplicity and Metaphor: Gerhard Richter’s Intermedia Translation.” For this study, Hopkinson discussed the conceptual and metaphoric framework of language. She explained post structural theories based largely on the work of Jacques D  rri  da in order to question the duality between the original and the copy as it pertains to translation. Addressing issues such as binary oppositions between two texts, she argues that the focus should not be on the authority of the initial text because this perspective focuses on origin, and movement away from origin. Alternatively, she values the importance of locating “diff  rence,” which she defines as “sameness which is not identical” (p. 27). In her opinion, “diff  rence” seeks to consider

the interrelations between the “copy and the original,” which establishes “connections among variables that are themselves constantly variable.” She argues that the metaphor of translation is “a dynamic process of exchange”. In her opinion, this approach can provide an endless network of associations and pluralisations. She also states that this can be “a tool for understanding dynamic processes within other disciplines” (Hopkinson, 2004, p. 27). I appreciated how she used the work of visual artist Gerhard Richter in order to illustrate her point.

Gerhard Richter

Gerhard Richter’s artwork focuses on the relationship between the discourses of photography and painting, both literally and metaphorically (Brown, 2002, p. 44).

Drawing upon the theories of deconstruction and intertextuality, Richter not only refers to a photograph while making a painting; he intentionally questions and reflects upon the meaning of photography and painting through his art.



Figure 52.
Photographer Unknown (1988) *Gerhard Richter in his studio, Cologne*. As reproduced in Obrist (Ed)(1995) *The daily practice of painting: writings and interviews, 1962-1993*, p. 184.

Painterly blurring of a photograph is a theme that Richter has explored repetitively throughout his career. His series entitled "October 18, 1977," is a strong example of this. The theme for the series was the deaths of four German social activist/terrorists. The deaths were ruled as suicide however there was widespread suspicion that they had been murdered. Their stories and photographs were published in many magazines and newspapers in Germany, in which Richter used as sources for some of the paintings (Storr, 2000).

All fifteen paintings in the series are painted in tones of grey, and the reality of the images is quite stark. The technique that Richter employs is deeply imbedded in the concept of the series. The feathered edges and the dragging of a large brush or squeegee through wet pigment, gives them a blurry and diffused quality. Each work is a reminder of how details can be forgotten, or overlooked. The realism has intentionally been muted: the works almost mimic "out-of-focus photography" (Schjeldahl, 1990, p. 255). Richter deepens the black and makes shapes and spaces more ambiguous: everything seems to dissolve, or float in a ghostly void. When we compare the paintings to their photographic source, we can see how there is a removal of information and how there is a "near-total dematerialization of the images" (Storr, 2000, p.108). According to Storr (2000) "depainting," or "unpainting" is an aesthetic subtraction, or a kind of erasure (p.110). In his opinion it differs from photorealism because it does not "paint an artificially crisp version of a photograph" (p.111). Rather, it forces the viewer to realize that they are unable to supply the missing details or complete the resolution of the images (Storr, 2000).



Figure 53.
Gudrun Ensslin, hanged in her cell, October 18, 1977. Photographic model for Hanged, from Richter's notebook. Cited in Storr (2000) Gerhard Richter October 18, 1977, p. 112.

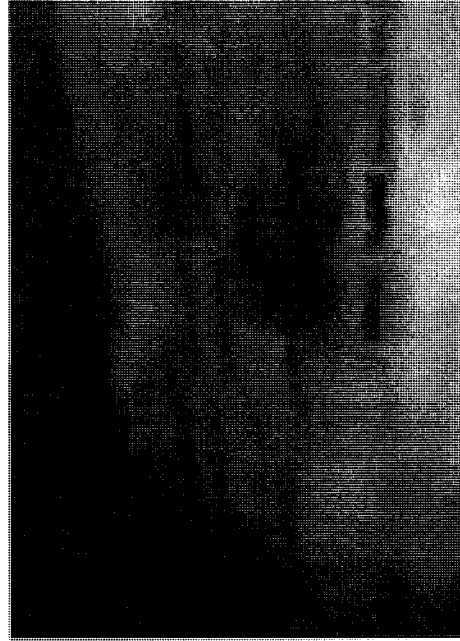


Figure 54.
Richter, Gerhard (1988). *Hanged* Cited in Storr (2000) *Gerhard Richter October 18, 1977*, p. 15.

Richter has chosen to blur the photograph in order to open a space between the image and the surface of the painting (Ritchie, 1992). Rapaport (2004) proposes how the process of erasure illustrates the theory of deconstruction:

Richter has put photography under erasure by means of painting ... putting under erasure equals deconstruction, something that could be extended by arguing that the blur in art would be a figure equivalent to undecidability (neither photography nor painting, both photography and painting), its consequence being the dismantling difference – certainly the difference of media that, in one respect, bears on the blurring of the difference between mechanical/non-mechanical reproduction. (p. 102)

Richter is not attempting to duplicate the photographic source: he is in a way, attempting to create a photograph with paint: complete with deficient lighting, under-exposure and imagery that is out of focus. Although Richter describes himself as a

painter, he is a conceptual artist in that he reveals his process of questioning throughout his practice. His work situates itself directly between painting and photography and directly between the mechanical re-production of an image and the human production of an art object.

Richter is very well known for his works in series that emphasize the action of accumulation. His work often comprises of multiple images that are presented in a sequential manner. An example of this can be seen in his work entitled *Atlas*, which binds together in a book form, various images ranging from abstract to figurative and representational images. The images appear to be random; ranging from paintings, sketches, photographs, collages, magazine and newspaper clippings, color grids, source photographs (complete with paint smudges, viewfinders and masking tape), and sketches and plans for installations. The depictions range from still lives, portraits, landscapes, pornographic images, and images of concentration camp victims. They are pictures that Richter has both created and found. Some include friends and family that are close to him, and others are extracted from mass media (Richter, 2007).

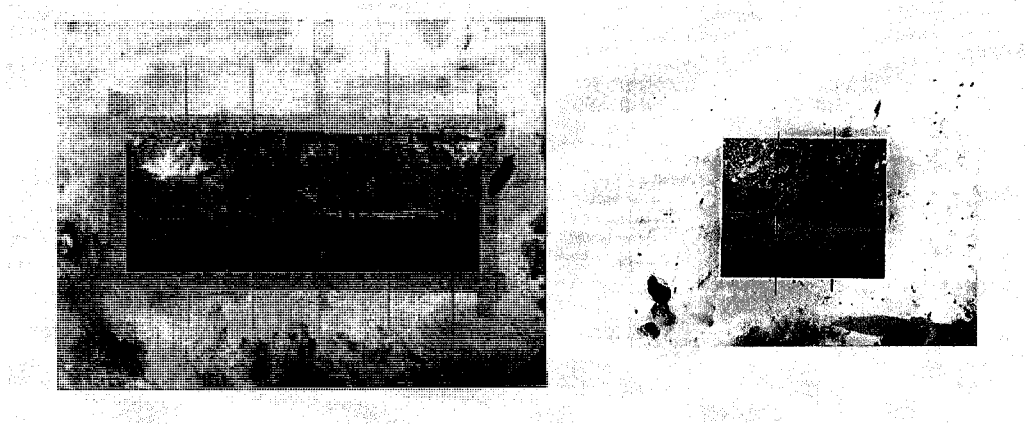


Figure 55.
Richter, Gerhard (1971). *Parkscapes*. As reproduced in Richter (2007) *Atlas*, p. 155.

Fundamentally, the viewer is left to sort through the wide variety of images, in search of a common theme that will tie them all together. The concept is that each image is a text, presented in a sequential and repetitious format that encourages the viewer to make meaning through comparing them as a whole. In my opinion, *Atlas* is a representation of intertextuality: and in their ambiguity, they evoke temporality. Richter not only reveals the source imagery for his art, he archives it and publishes it in book form. The format, and the title suggests that each picture is a fragmented idea that when viewed together, forms a map to his creative process. As a viewer, I am guided along a visual journey: I gain insight into Richter's process as a visual artist, yet I am still somehow in charge of the navigation.

The concepts of intertextuality and deconstruction can be further noted in his series entitled *Paint-Overs*, in which Richter makes selections from his extensive collection of photographs and paints on them. These paintings are very different from his earlier works in which he translated photographs onto canvas. In this work, he uses the actual photograph as a support and covers it with thick layers of paint. Although they make reference to the "original" (i.e. the source photographs), he does not intend to duplicate it. In painting directly on the image, Richter is intentionally demonstrating how duplication is the furthest from his intentions.

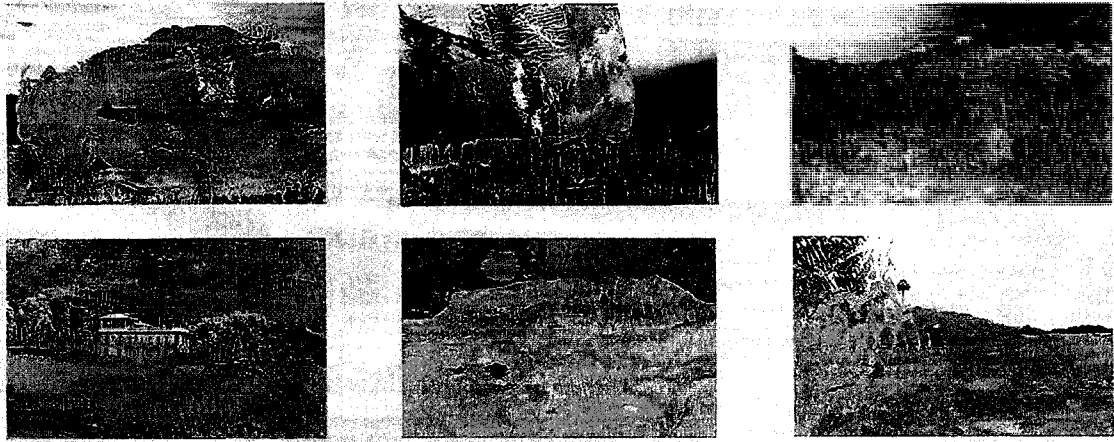


Figure 56.
Richter, Gerhard (1989). *Paint-Overs*. As reproduced Richter (2007) *Atlas*, p. 468.

In his three-dimensional works entitled “Four Panes of Glass” (1967) and “Eight Gray”(2001), Richter works with glass and other reflective surfaces in order to address issues of transparency and reflection. He is clearly using objects as metaphor: questioning the dialectical relationship between painting and reality. Buchloh (2002) describes how these installations engage the spectator in a dialectical reflection:

These works question the fate of painting were it to become a merely reflective or transparent spatial divider, dissolving the traditionally private space of pictorial contemplation and opening up visual experience to a wide range of perceptual, phenomenological, tactile, and social interactions. (p.14)

Although Richter describes himself as a painter, he is a conceptual artist in that he reveals his process of questioning throughout his practice. His work situates itself directly between painting and photography and directly between the mechanical re-production of an image and the human production of an art object.

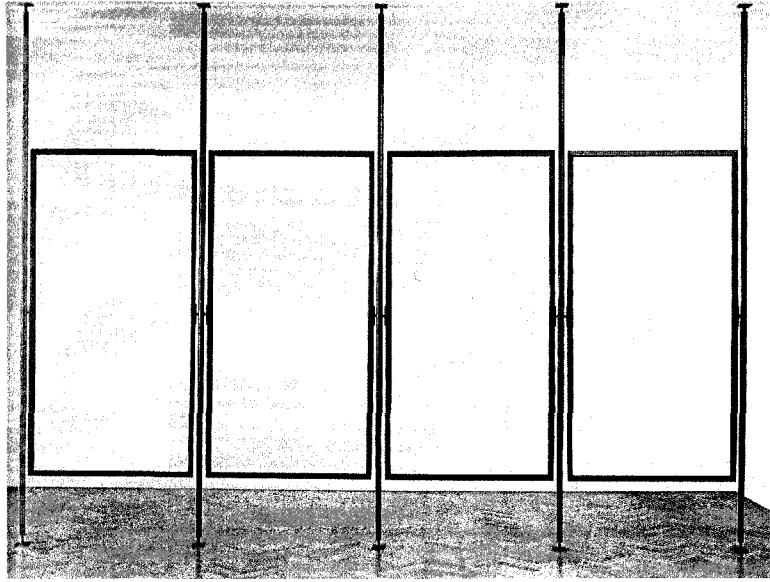


Figure 57.
Richter, Gerhard (1967). *Four Panes of Glass*. As reproduced in Buchloh (2002) *Eight Gray*, p. 33.

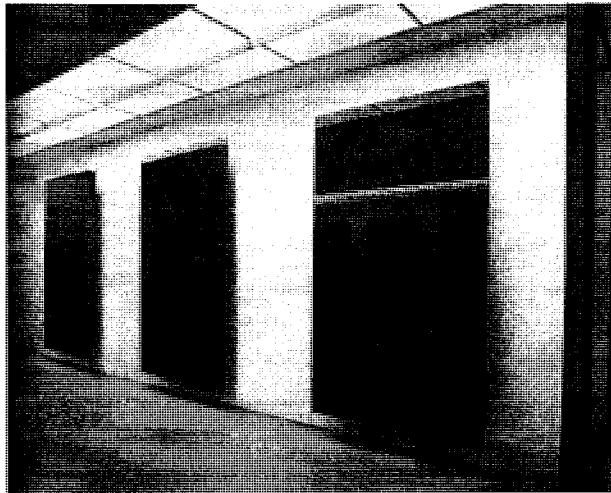


Figure 58.
Richter, Gerhard (2001). *Eight Gray*. As reproduced in Buchloh (2002) *Eight Gray*, p. 101.

Concepts covered in the literature review provide the premise for my study. The next chapter will discuss in detail how I plan to document the aesthetic unfolding and call into question the order of priority as it pertains to the painting and the photographic source.

CHAPTER 4: Methodology

Research Method

Using a self-reflective, arts-based methodology, this study drew upon my personal experience of painting from a photographic source. I documented my routine and analyzed the structure of my painting process. In creating a space between the painting and the photograph, I was able to examine the dialogue between the two media in order to reveal how they inform one another in my process. After the painting process was complete, I compared the two media, and recorded my thoughts associated to their similarities and differences. According to Graeme Sullivan (2006), “as explanations are revealed, connections are made, and new forms of understanding emerge”(p.72). In his opinion, “research study in the visual arts asks questions about the processes and products of artistic knowing, the main research is to investigate how knowledge is created in the process of making art” (p.79).

For the purpose of this study the methodology that I employed was hermeneutic-phenomenology combined with arts based research. I gathered data from qualitative descriptions of my experiences in the studio. While phenomenology is a purely descriptive study of an experience and its essences (Encyclopedia of Aesthetics, 1998, 485, Stockrocki, 1997, 31), phenomenology becomes hermeneutic when it involves interpretation and when it involves a search for essential statements that may appear in the description leading to an in-depth thematic analysis of them (Encyclopedia of Aesthetics, 1998, 396, Van-Manen, 1984, 2002).

McNiff (1998) describes arts based research as a combination of empirical and introspection inquiries. In his opinion, art-based research involves reflecting on the interplay between mental and physical motivations that appear through the contact with the medium. He describes it as a method in which the artist/researcher initiates a series of artistic expressions as a means of personal introspection. The process of inquiry generates empirical data, which is then “systematically reviewed” (p.56-57). Most importantly, arts based research is an inquiry that allows the researcher’s insights to emerge from “sustained reflections” of the phenomenon that is under investigation (McNiff, 1998, p. 47).

I hypothesized that my work would take on new metaphorical forms during the data analysis. I wrote down evolving questions and assumptions at the beginning of the study, and I kept a running account of how they changed. I created rich descriptions from my painting process that I later collected, analyzed and interpreted. I searched my noted observations and grouped my findings into themes, which I later synthesized into an installation format.

Procedure

The procedure for the study involved four parts: 1-Painting, 2- documenting the process, 3- reflecting on the process and 4- and finally, presenting the painting with its photographic source.

1. PAINTING

Although, I produced nine paintings from nine different photographic sources, only two of these paintings were fully recorded throughout their creation, with the use of a journal and photo documentation. I began each of these paintings by describing what drew me to paint the photograph. During the painting process my attention remained on the comparison between the painting and the photographic source: paying close attention to how I was comparing the painting to the photographic source throughout the process. This allowed me to make my painting procedure visible, for further examination. Reflections on the painting process described my attachment and non-attachment to the model, providing descriptions of how I was working towards the photograph and how I was working away from it.

2. DOCUMENTING

After each studio session, I took notes in a journal, remarking whenever possible on the intersection/overlapping of the pre (photograph) and post (painting) texts as well as my evolution pertaining to deconstruction and intertextuality. I also noted any other important themes, thoughts, reactions, dilemmas, feelings, and questions that emerged throughout the studio activity. I documented the amount of time I spent looking at the source as well as the reasons (either technical or emotional) for referring to the source. These documents allowed me to note whether or not these reasons changed, or the frequency that these reasons changed throughout the paintings' evolution. It allowed me to gain a more objective perspective regarding my process. The reflexive journal was an essential part of my study. Immediately after the studio session, I recorded impressions,

thoughts, ideas, and questions that arose from the sessions. I also took digital pictures of the painting at different stages of the process.

3. REFLECTING.

I had the photographic sources printed the same size as each painting. Placing the works side by side I reflected upon the comparison of the two images: Focusing on the differences and similarities between the them, I documented whether or not my perceptions of the photograph changed, how each medium portrays how I perceived my subject, and how they complimented one another. I also spent a significant amount of time reviewing and analyzing the photo documentations and written reflections after the painting was complete.

4. PRESENTING.

For the purpose of the exhibition, I placed the painting and the photograph side by side, in order for the viewer to compare them together as I did in the previous step. The installation focused on the relationship between the two works instead of the works themselves.

CHAPTER 5: DATA

Selecting



Figure 59.
Collection of digital and 35mm photographs (2000-2004).

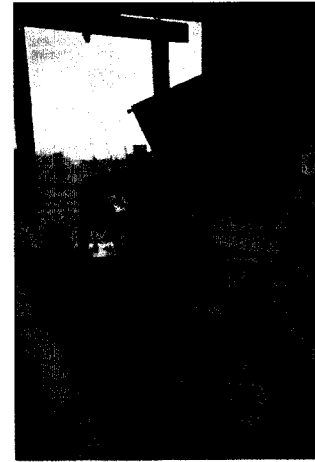
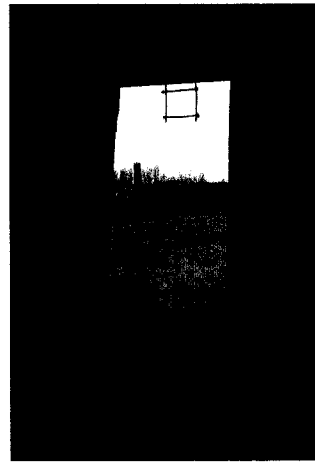


Figure 60.
Collection of digital and 35mm photographs (2000-2004).

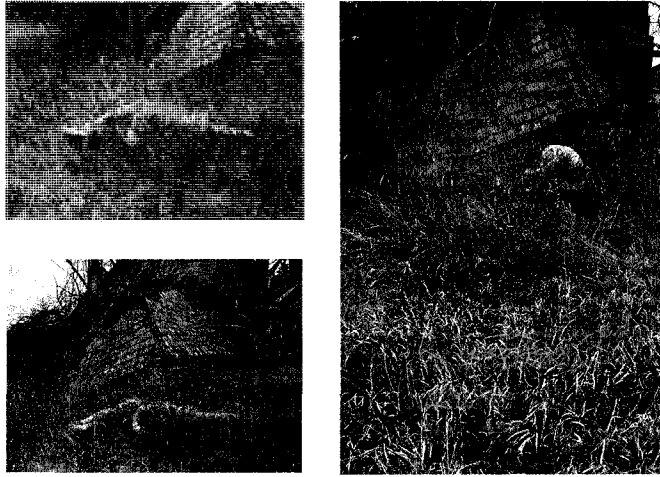


Figure 61.
Collection of digital photographs (2004).



Figure 62.
Collection of digital photographs (2007).

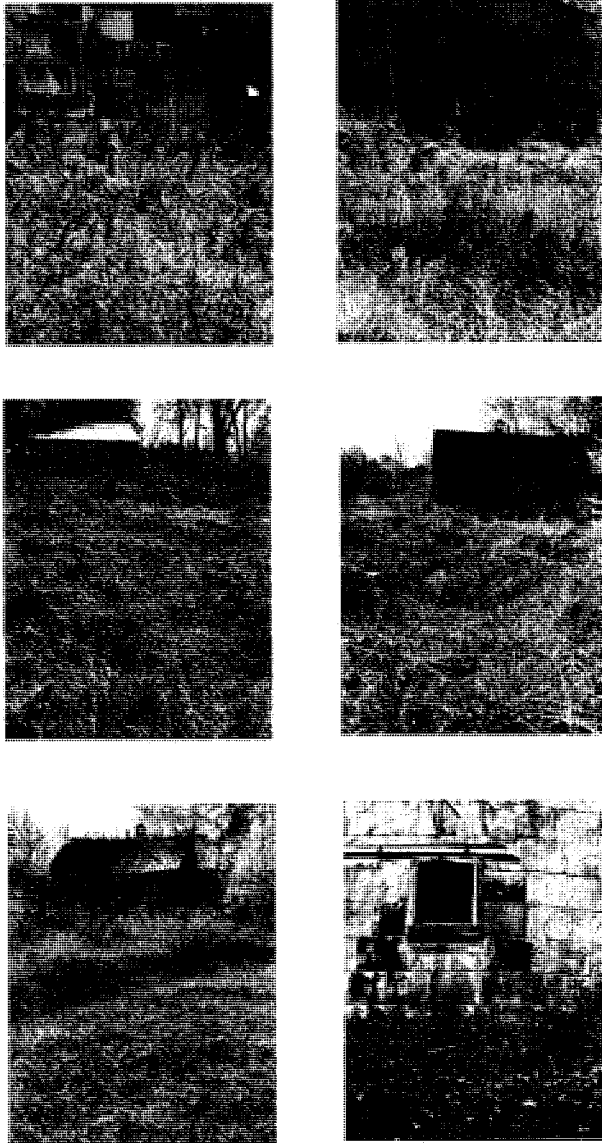


Figure 63.
Collection of digital photographs (2004-2007).



Figure 64.
Collection of digital photographs (2004-2007).



Figure 65.
Collection of Digital Photographs (2004-2007).

Fascinated by the effect that weathering processes have on human-made structures, I have produced photo documentations of the collapse of an old abandoned barn. Rusted aluminum shingles cover many sections of the barn walls, while other parts of the barn's structure have broken and fallen down due to time, weather and the land's overgrowth. I am drawn to the rural landscape where the barn is located. I often take long walks with my camera; exploring the land and the old, weathered structures that have been abandoned. Observing, discovering and photographing this space allows me to draw parallels to myself, both physically and emotionally. The subjects that I photograph are often metaphors for journeys, decisions, slowing down and looking at objects more closely: taking time to appreciate my surroundings and my place within in it. This activity allows me to re-connect with my thoughts. The photographs not only capture these moments in time, but they are metaphors for the 'stillness' that I feel when I am in the country. Later, in my studio, I review the digital pictures that I take when I'm in the country and I print out the ones that I like best. I select photos to paint from based on their formal qualities (such as color contrast, composition, and mood). Sometimes I am drawn to the photograph for reasons I don't fully understand.

For the purpose of this study, I created nine paintings. Six paintings are extreme close ups of the rusted shingles (selections from Figures 64 & 65) and three paintings are views of the barn in which nature's overgrowth is emphasized (selections from Figures 61 & 63). The sections to follow will focus on two paintings entitled "Collapse" and "Searching Horizons: Red." Complimenting one another: *Collapse* depicts an object in landscape: whereas *Searching Horizons: Red* depicts a landscape in an object.

Collapse

Painting and Documenting

Four feet high by six feet wide, *Collapse* is in exact proportion to a standard photograph. Out of all of the paintings produced for this study, it took the longest to complete (approximately 95 to 100 hours).



Figure 66.
Photographic source for *Collapse* (2004).

This photograph was selected from my large collection of photographs: it was taken in 2004 with a digital camera. Part of the reason why I was drawn to this image is because this view of the barn no longer exists. The thin wall has collapsed much more since this photograph was taken; the window is no longer visible today, it is almost entirely overgrown by a tree and tall weeds (refer to Figure 62).

Before starting the painting, I spent about thirty minutes just looking at the photograph. I traced the lines with my eyes, studying the relationships between the objects, paying close attention to the colors and the details. My gaze shifted, and I spent time looking at the blank canvas. Imagining the painting: or, rather, visualizing the photograph already transformed as a painting. I became conscious of what I wanted to emphasize and de-emphasize. I realized that the photograph was quite grey, and that I wanted to add more color. I also wanted the vines to have more life- more gesture in their application. I wanted them to feel as if they were alive and growing. Because the photograph had such a flat, smooth surface, I wanted the painting to be highly textured – almost a physical reaction against knowing that I would be unable to achieve the detail that the photograph had. At this stage of the process, I left a lot of questions unanswered. I knew for certain that the photograph evoked in me an urge to paint it, and I was on a quest to find out the reason why as the painting process evolved.

Excerpts from my journal before starting *Collapse*:

September 23rd, 2007.

I've decided to paint the collapsing barn. I'm drawn to the grid-like pattern of the wooden shingles and their downward slope. The window is important. Because I can see sky behind it – the barn appears to be a thin wall – a broken structure, with vines crawling all over it. There is a tension between the wall and the scenery in the distance. I would like to heighten the tension between the foreground and the background – using the wooden shingles to pull the viewer's gaze towards the horizon. Perhaps making the horizon lower than in the photograph...

The photograph is very grey – especially the shingles and the sky. I want to add more color, accentuating the hints of colors that are hiding in the tones of grey. I want the natural elements (vines/branches/grass/reeds) to have more life – more expression. I predict that the painting will have more depth, more texture, and more movement. My main objective for painting this image is to represent the fact that the wall is a human made structure that has deteriorated over time. The land is overtaking it, swallowing it- a subtle demonstration of its power and force.

I began by sketching the composition, and then applying several thin coats of oil paint to cover the entire canvas. At the beginning of the painting I used the photograph for technical support, but I also relied on the photograph for emotional support and reassurance. I was afraid of placing the objects, lines, angles, thus rendering the perspective, incorrectly. I was less concerned with color at the beginning: knowing that it would build up throughout the layering process. Fear was present throughout the initial process and there was tension between the photograph, the painting, and myself. As a result of this fear, I hardly let go (physically and emotionally) of the photograph; I referred to it after almost every single brushstroke. Notice in the photo documentation that the source is almost always in my hand as I paint.

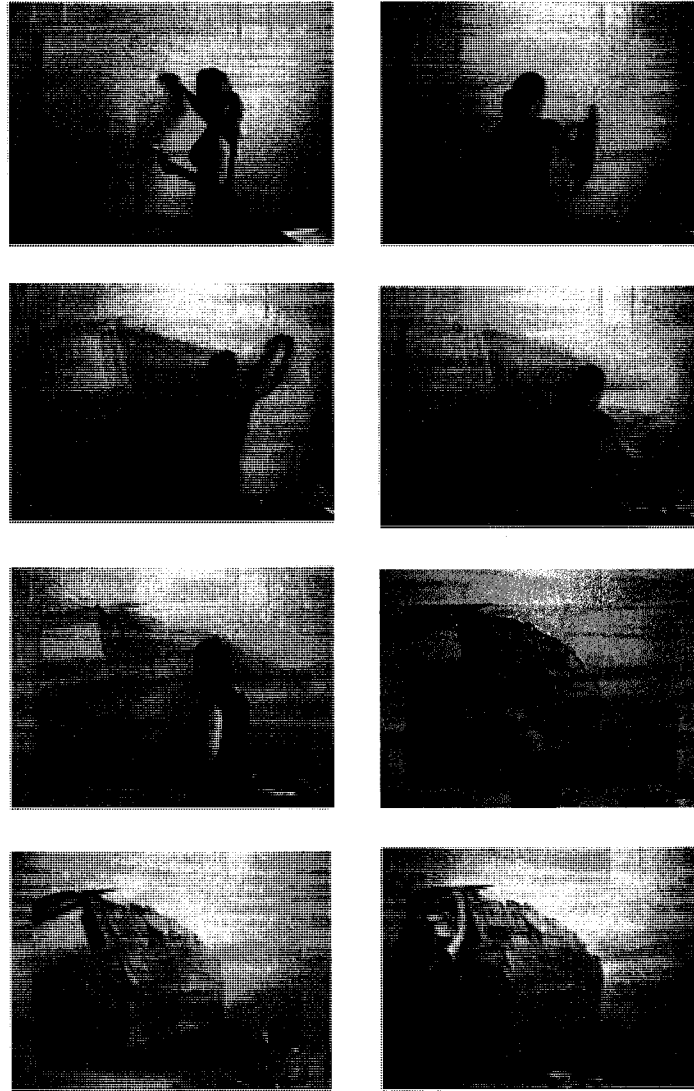


Figure 67.
Process of *Collapse* (2007).
Stage 1: Under painting.

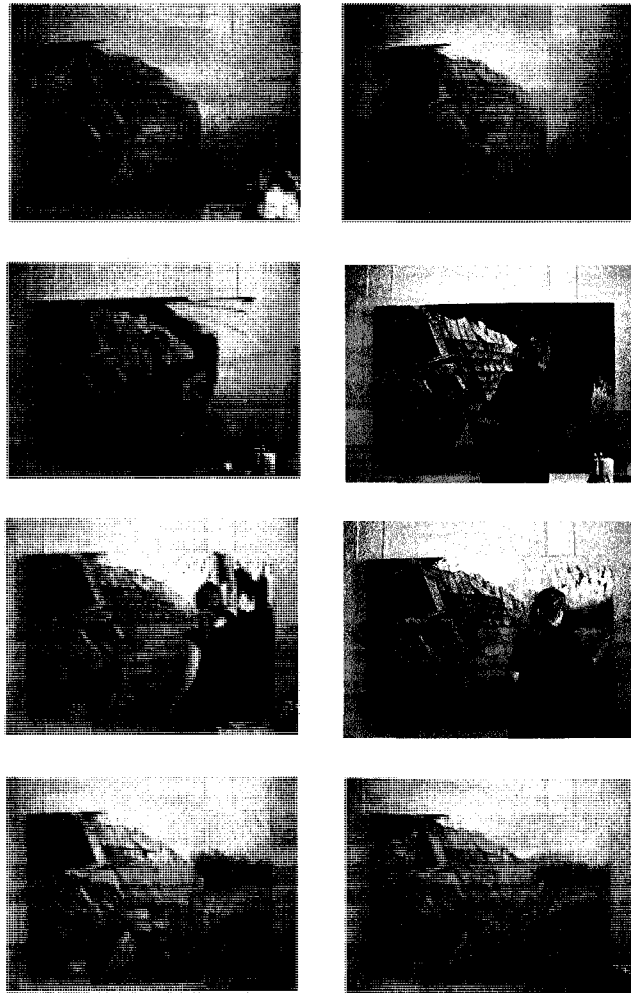


Figure 68.
Process of Collapse (2007-2008)
Stage 2: Over painting

Excerpts from my journal during the painting process:

October 9th, 2007.

The process is taking me much longer than I had assumed it would. I'm still at the modeling stage of the painting – and I am still referring back to the photograph frequently for technical aid. There is a constant back-and-forth right now, but I anticipate that it will diminish as the painting progresses. Fear has played a crucial role in the process so far. I fear not reproducing the photograph as initially desired. It's strange, because although I know that I do not want my painting to be exactly like the photograph, I still feel this way.

I have begun to feel frustrated and to pull away from the photograph. I spent a long time just looking at the painting: to establish what is working in the painting thus far, and what it not. I have begun to reference the photo less. I have grown tired of comparing the two together.

October 10th, 2007.

I was extremely frustrated today. I am sick of the photograph. Annoyed at holding it and looking at it. I didn't look at it once today. I used Prussian blue to darken the sky and the opening in the window. I had to make the painting my own - to make it different than the source. I'm happier about it now, the wall feels closer to me and I am beginning to feel the image. I can imagine the photograph in my mind but I refuse to look at it. I need space. I need to let the painting grow away from it.

October 29th, 2007.

I think that painting is about being fearless. Letting go of the ideal, of the image that I have in my mind: letting go of the photograph: allowing the painting to emerge as if it has a life of its own. Letting it come through, instead of "rendering" it. Today, I let go, finally. I began to apply thick layers of paint with a free wrist -something that I could not do while looking at the photograph.

December 7th, 2007.

I've realized why the perspective of the shingles doesn't look/feel right to me. Although they've been applied in accordance to the photograph - they look wrong! I was wrong to think that there is a tension between the shingles and the horizon...the tension is between them and the bottom of the barn - where the barn intercepts with the overgrown grass. All lines should be meeting here - the slopes of the window, the shingles, the furthest edge of the barn and the grass. If it's my intention to emphasize how the land is swallowing the structure, then I must change the perspective that is present in the photograph. I don't know why I didn't realize this before...

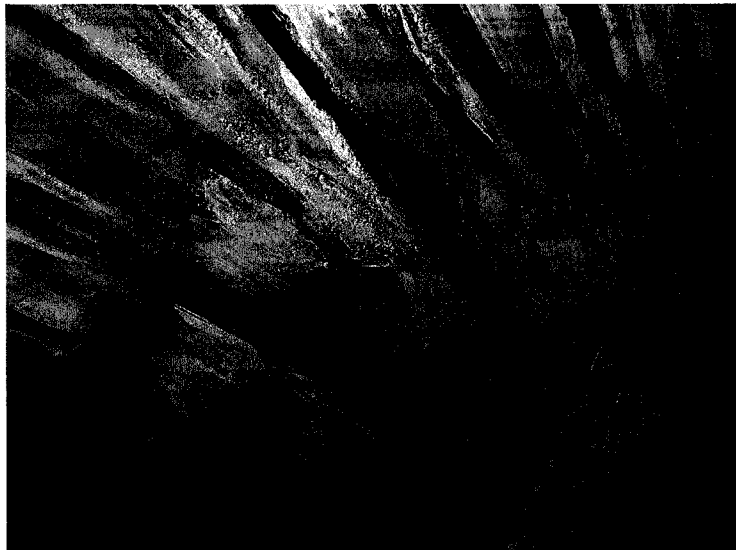


Figure 69.
Collapse (2008) detail.

Reflecting

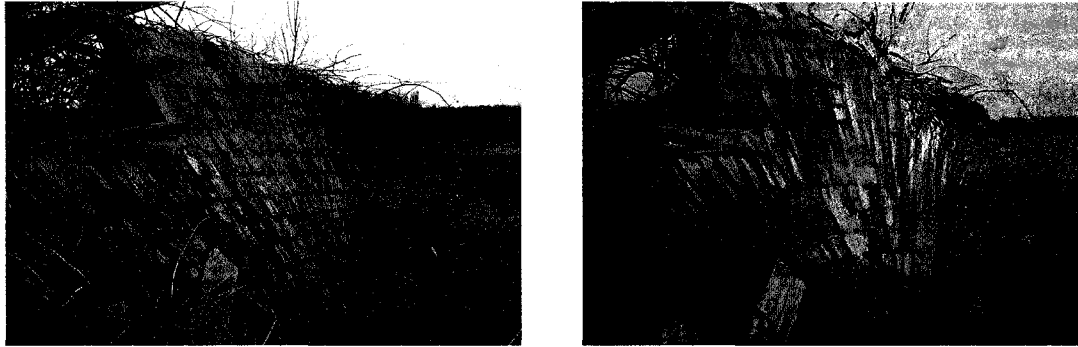


Figure 70.
Comparison between the painting and the photographic source for *Collapse* (2007-2008).

I had the source photographs printed on canvas, the same size as the painting. I made a stretcher for it, and mounted it exactly like the painting. Although the print was made before the painting was finished, I did not allow myself to study it until *Collapse* was completed. I did not want the large photograph to change the outcome of the painting.

I was very eager to see the two images the same size. The photograph could be compared on the same level as the painting. The large version of the photograph emphasized every little detail. After analyzing the comparison for *Collapse*, I reached the following conclusions: in terms of composition, I made very little changes in the painting. In terms of color, I heightened colors found in the “grey” tones of the photo. I emphasized the values: creating a greater contrast between the light and dark areas. The painting has much more texture, more gesture, and more emotion. Although the painting has less detail than the photograph, there is an addition of information. The painting recedes into the distance more so than the photograph, and on close inspection, the surface quality of the painting is much more layered.

Searching Horizons: Red

Painting and Documenting

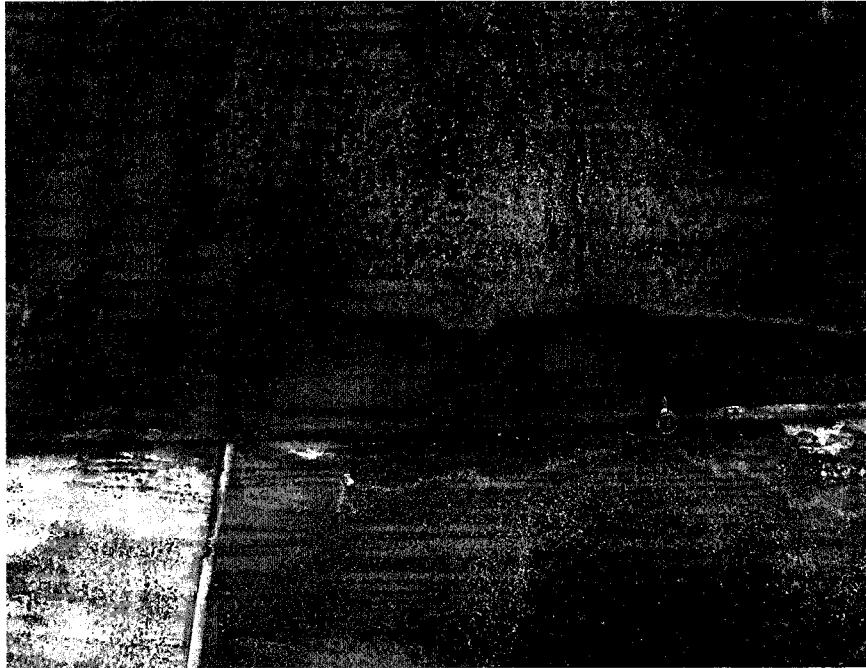


Figure 71.
Photographic source for *Searching Horizons: Red*
(2004).

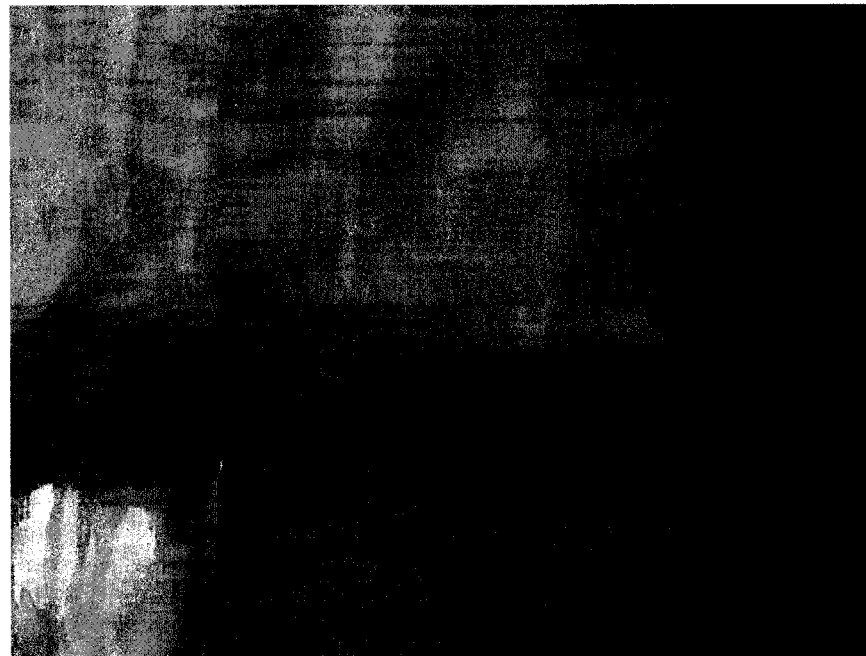


Figure 72.
Preliminary watercolor study for *Searching Horizons: Red* (2006).



Figure 73.
Searching Horizons: Red, Stage 1 (2007).

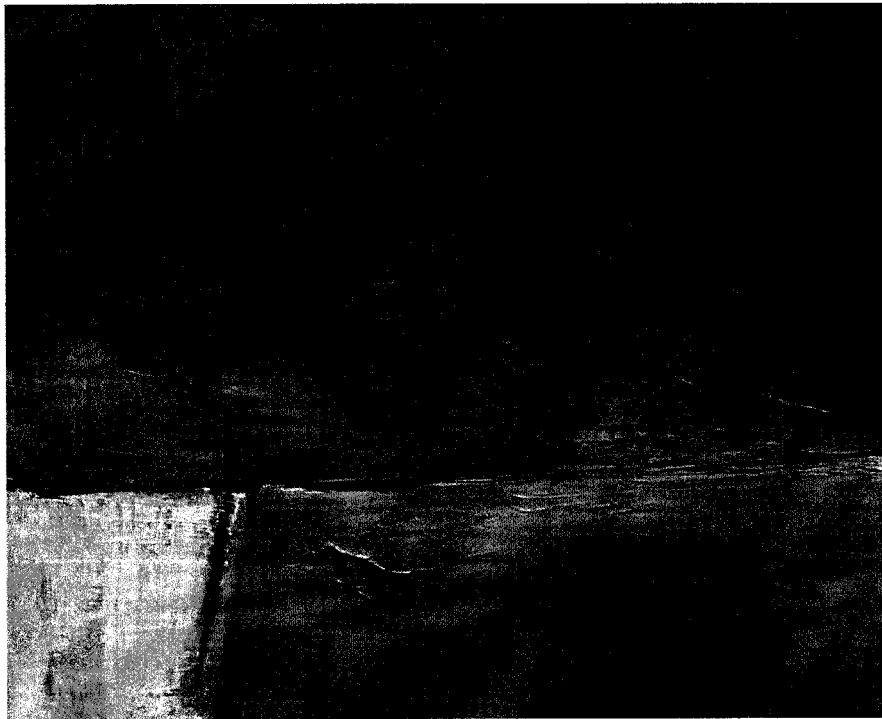


Figure 74.
Searching Horizons: Red, Stage 2 (2008).

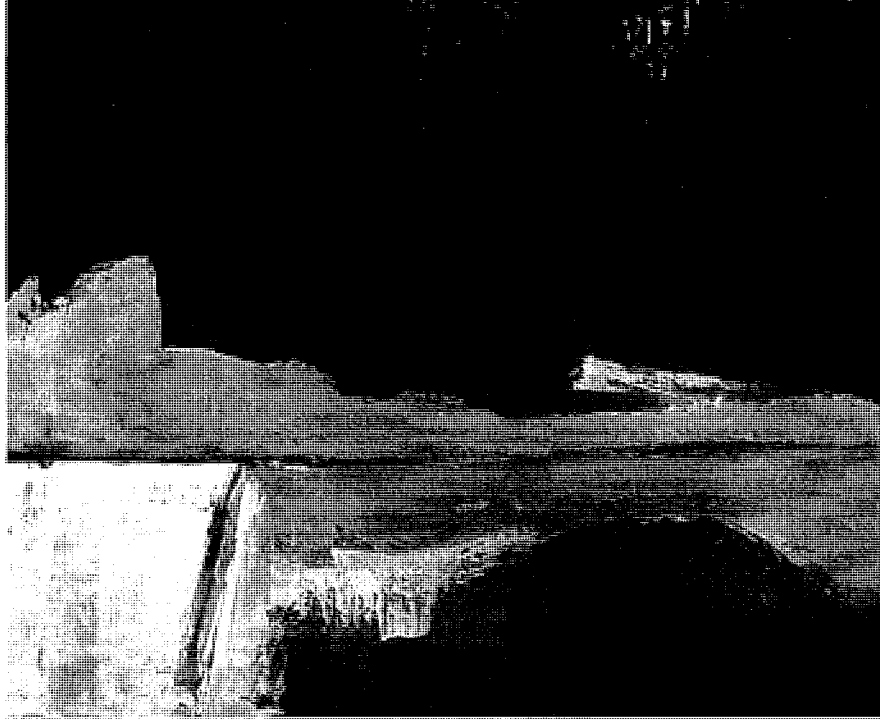


Figure 75.
Searching Horizons: Red, Final Painting (2008).

Reflecting

Like all of the other images, I had the photographic source printed and mounted the same size as the finished painting. After comparing the two media side by side, I reached the following conclusions: the final painting strays from the photograph much more than *Collapse* did. The colors are thicker, and bolder. Shapes are more ambiguous. There are more layers, and there are more manipulations to the surface (such as peeling and scratching). The painting has much more depth than the photograph: the “horizon line” recedes further into the distance. Although I struggled a great deal with this painting, the colors appear as though they have been applied liberally, with a free wrist and much confidence. The painting has a sense of wonder, mystery and atmosphere. I decide that it looks like a landscape, although it does not conform to a typical landscape. I

decide that I am happier with this painting than I am with the final version of *Collapse* because I did not let the photograph dictate the final outcome and because I took a greater risk.

It is extremely interesting how I chose to document and reflect on *Collapse* and *Searching Horizons: Red*. They were only completed a couple of weeks apart from each other, yet they differ the most out of the whole series that was created for this study. *Collapse* remained the most true to the photograph, while *Searching Horizons: Red* differed the greatest.

Presenting:

The Installation and Exhibition

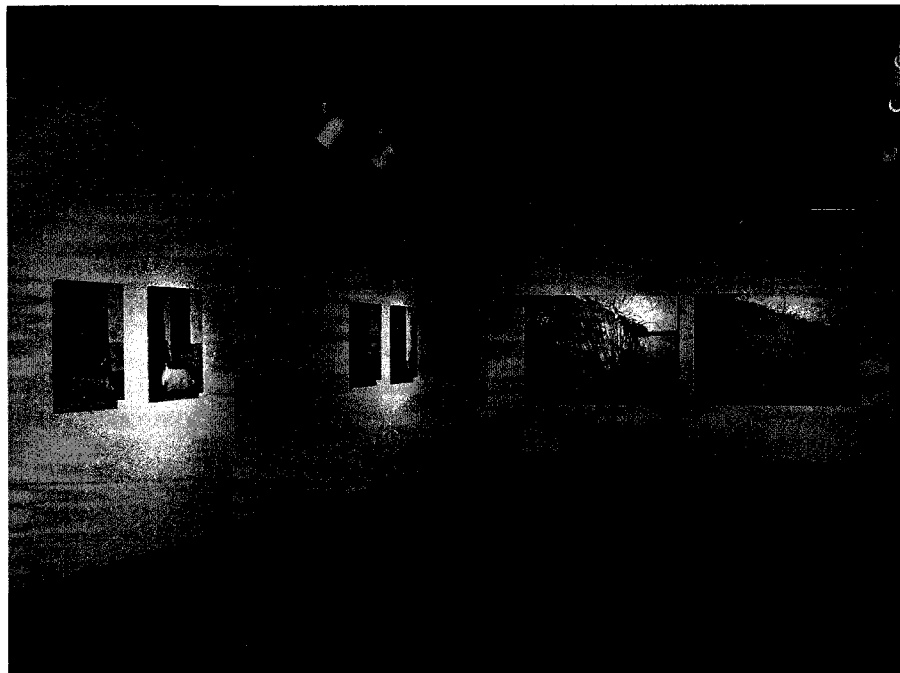


Figure 76.
Exhibition documentation. Galerie Art Mûr. Photograph by Natalie LeBlanc (2008).



Figure 77.
Exhibition documentation. Galerie Art Mûr. Photograph by Natalie LeBlanc (2008).

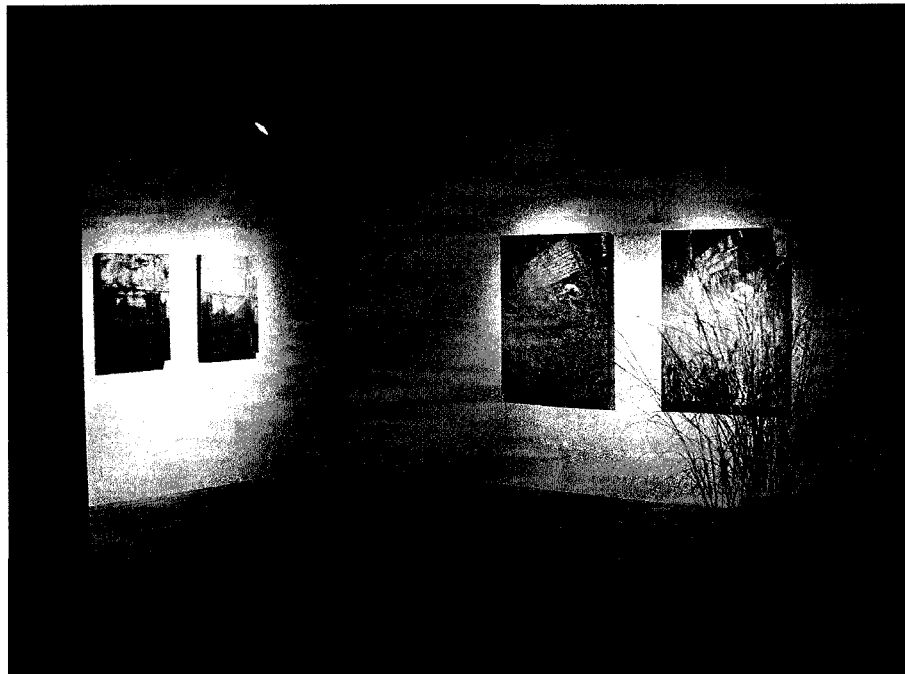


Figure 78.
Exhibition documentation. Galerie Art Mûr. Photograph by Natalie LeBlanc (2008).



Figure 79.
Exhibition documentation. Galerie Art Mûr. Photograph by Natalie LeBlanc (2008).



Figure 80.
Exhibition documentation. Galerie Art Mûr. Photograph by Natalie LeBlanc (2008).



Figure 81.
Exhibition documentation. Galerie Art Mûr. Photograph by Natalie LeBlanc (2008).

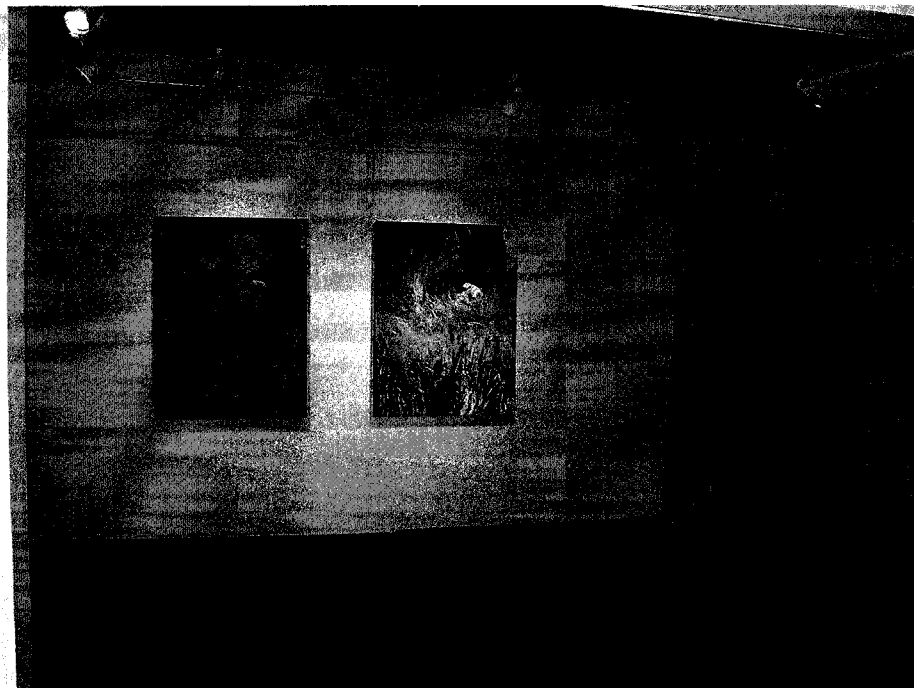


Figure 82.
Exhibition documentation. Galerie Art Mûr. Photograph by Natalie LeBlanc (2008).

The final exhibition involved repetition. Not exact duplication, but similarity. More importantly, it revealed my process of questioning throughout my practice. I chose to reveal this process of questioning to the viewer, and to allow the viewer to see the two works side by side and to experience their own reflections on the differences between the painting and the photograph: between a mechanical production of an image and the human production of an object.

Each image is meant to be a text, presented in a sequential and repetitious format that encourages the viewer to make meaning through comparing them as a whole. In revealing the source imagery for each painting and exhibiting the source the same way as the painting: I was calling into question the value of the source. The viewer was shown the before and after, guided along a visual journey, while gaining insight into my creative process.

The Other Comparisons



Figure 83.
Searching Horizons: Violet (2007).

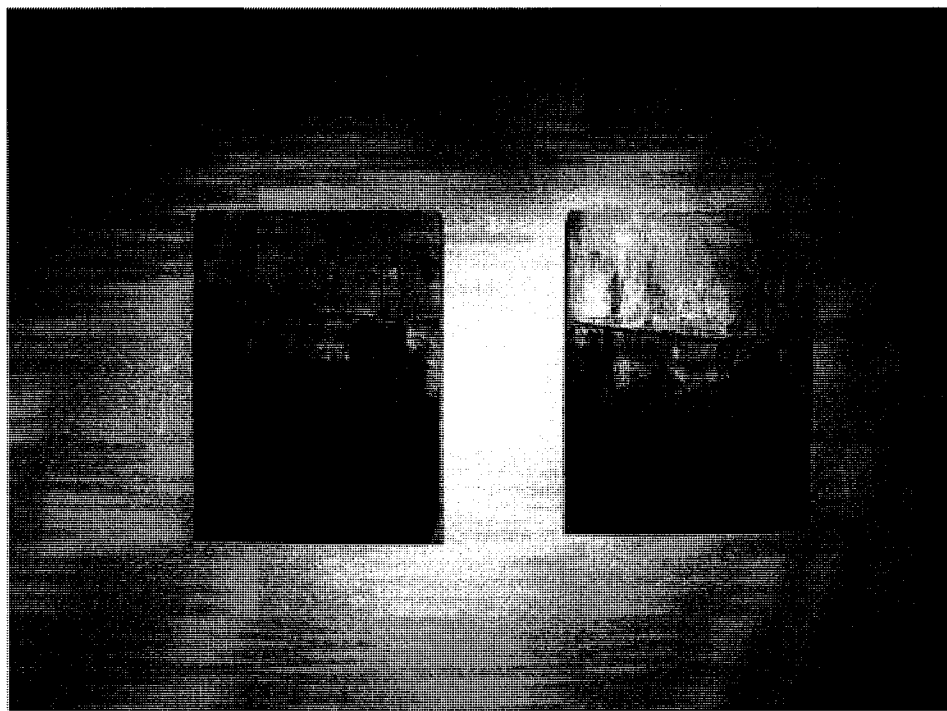


Figure 84.
Searching Horizons: Magenta (2007).

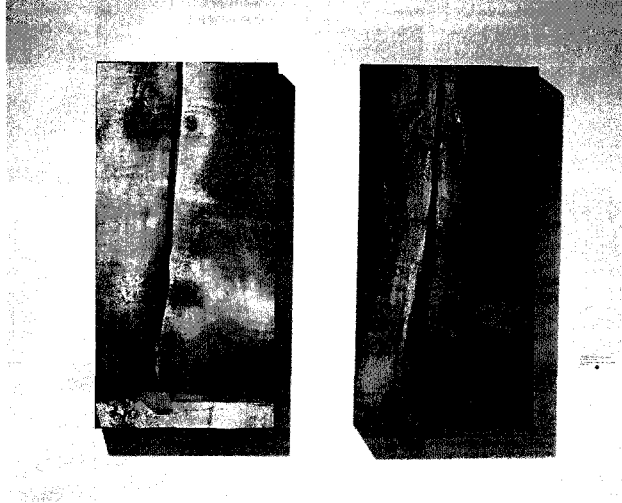


Figure 85.
Searching Horizons: Blue (2008).

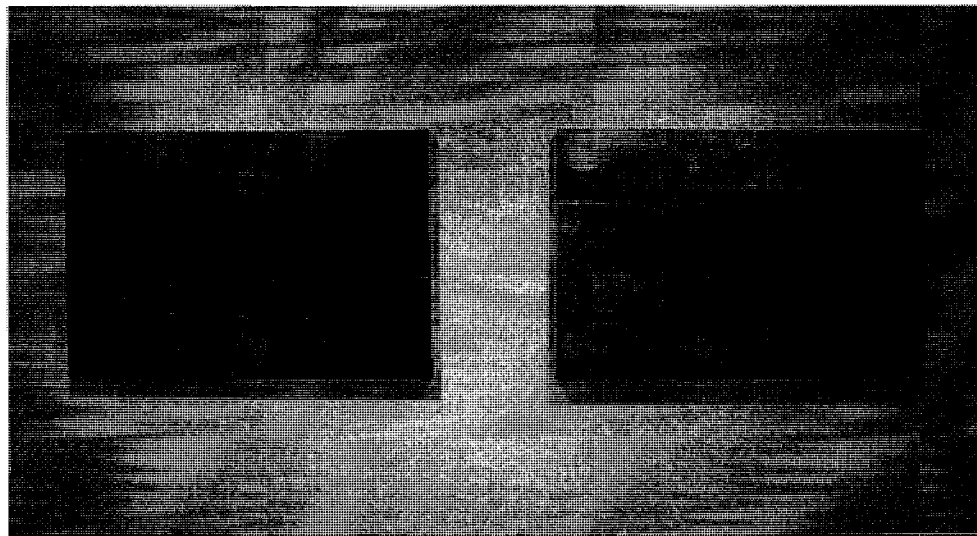


Figure 86.
Searching Horizons: Orange (2008).

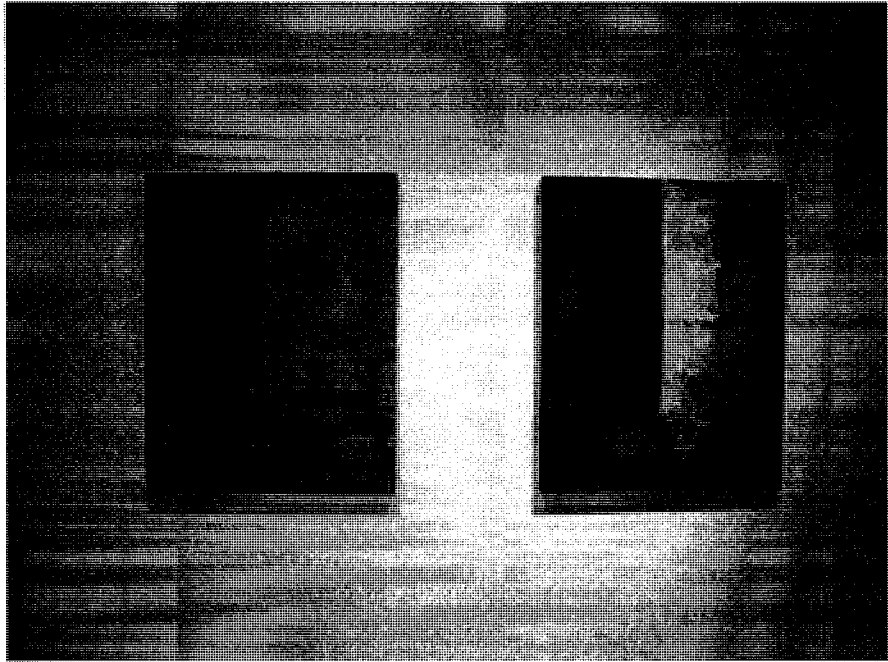


Figure 87.
Searching Horizons: Green (2008).

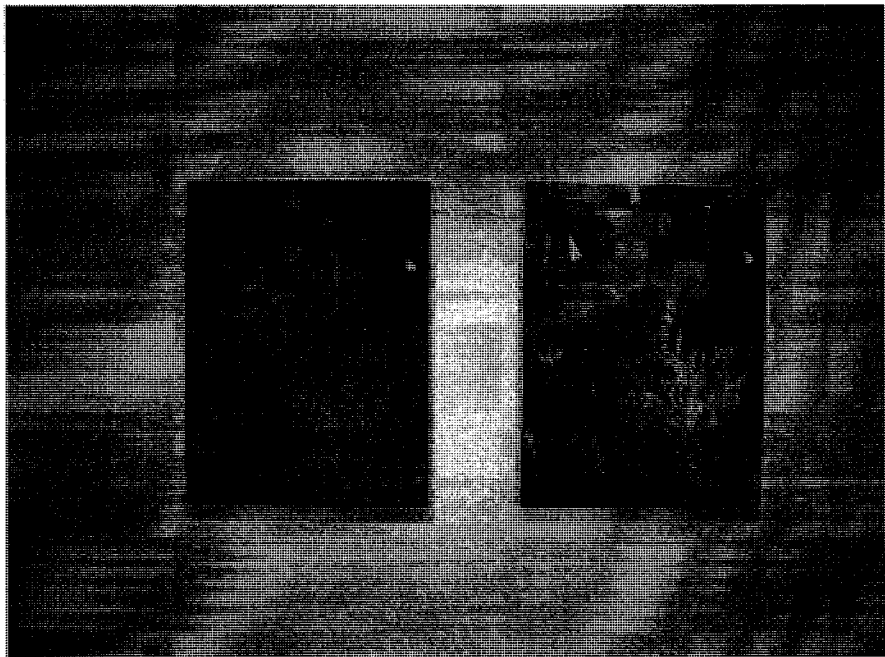


Figure 88.
Summer (Growth) (2007).

Final Analysis

After the painting process was complete, I extracted the following themes from my written journals: uncertainty, map, fear, tension, letting go, direction, choice, chance, time, place, space, multiple, texture, layering.

At the beginning of the study, I hypothesized that the process of referencing the photograph would be like a gradual transition of tonal value: I would refer to it the most at the beginning, less during the middle of the painting process, and gradually not at all. As I documented the time spent referring to the source, however, I noticed that fear played a larger role than I had assumed. The process became about breaking the fear. Although I wanted to let go of the photograph's predetermined standard, I had a very hard time releasing it. As a result, there were periods of release and return to the photograph for aid, and these periods repeated over and over in a cyclical fashion. As this cycle continued, the painting did not progress, and I became extremely frustrated. I had to force myself to stop referring to the photograph, in order to allow the painting to take shape and to unfold more naturally.

The process demonstrated that I abandon the photograph for the sake of the painting. Although the photographic source is convenient and extremely helpful, too much reliance upon the photograph hindered the painting. Following it too closely, forced the painting into an unnatural direction. Since the photograph is taken for the painting and the painting is painted in relation to it, I had a hard time defining the line between the two media and tension grew between them, because I did not want my paintings to

emulate the photograph, but they did. I had difficulty breaking the cycle. As soon as I abandoned the photograph, however, I felt relief while seeing a distinction between the two media. I realized that the photograph, although created for the painting, is a separate entity. Realizing that I did not want my painting to become the photograph, allowed my painting to move forward, to become more about my gesture and less about realism. This study made me realize that the photograph is not an ideal that I want to copy or be compared to and as a consequence, it allowed my painting style to mature and develop.

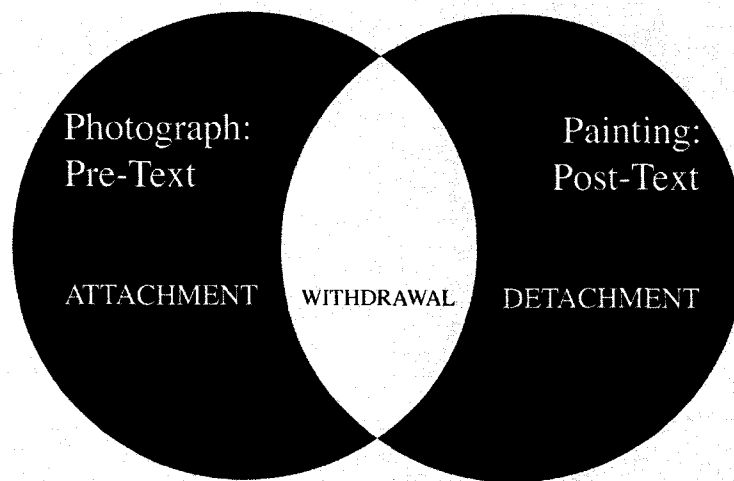


Figure 89.
LeBlanc, Natalie. *Withdrawal Diagram* (2008).

The space between the painting and the photograph is a journey: it is not a leap, but a gradual transition. It involves a process of letting go. As I enter the image, I let go of the photograph; I let go of the ideal, in order to allow the painting to take shape. By engaging in this study, I've realized that my methodology is similar to my subject matter. I am drawn to openings: cracks, seams, windows, doors, passageways. The

photograph is an opening: a window, in which I enter with paint. Every brushstroke and layer of paint that is applied to the canvas allows me to enter the image deeper.

The dialogue between the two media establishes that neither the photograph nor the painting is a higher standard. If my intention was to “copy” the photograph then the photograph could possibly be perceived as the ideal that the painting must attempt to duplicate, or emulate. But where interpretation is concerned there is a give and take, a push and pull. The painting changes things – edits things – because it can – and because some things work better as a painting (after all, we already know what it looks like as a photograph). They are two different mediums. What works as a photograph won’t necessarily work as a painting, and vice versa. I reached the conclusion that I am working towards the photograph during the drawing and modeling stages, and I begin to work away from the photograph with the application of layers and texture.

I used this information in conjunction with the insights from the comparison to form the following diagram:

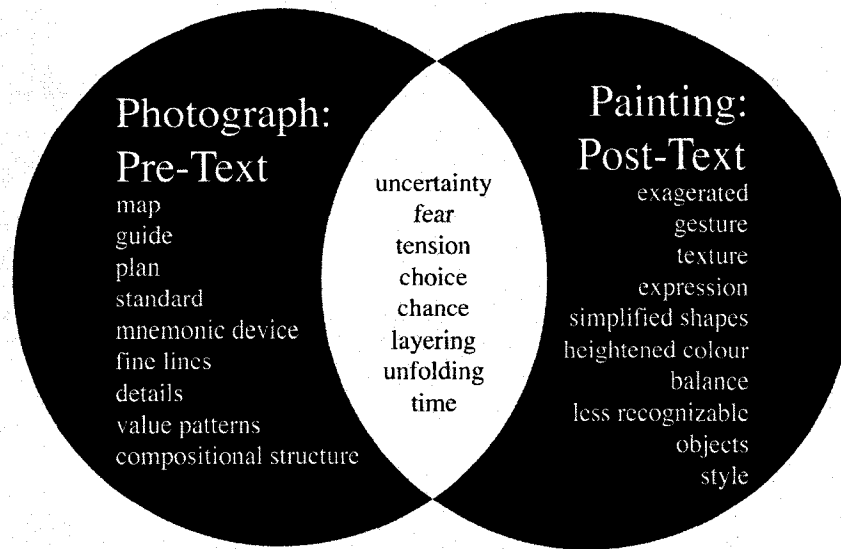


Figure 90.
LeBlanc, Natalie. *Process Diagram*, (2008).

I realize that I am clearly not trying to duplicate the photograph, and that there is a clear difference between the two works. The texture is in a way, covering up the photograph, similar to Gerhard Richter, I am deliberately moving away from the photograph and opening up a space between them. Although they are both constructions that I have made, the photograph is more descriptive of the subject, whereas the painting is more descriptive about me, and my interpretations of the subject. The photograph is a method in which I collect information, during the painting process, I shift my frames of reference and I add my own personal experience to the information.

The process of painting in effect, deconstructs the photograph. I am *reading* the text through re-creating it. The process of painting a photograph combines physical, perceptual, intuitive, and analytical skills. In documenting and analyzing the conversion from photograph to painting, there is a spatialization from one medium to another that

occurs intuitively and freely. The process of deconstruction is a natural process of unfolding: I allowed the power of the photograph to affect the painting, but not necessarily dictate it. Comparing the two brings forth the idea of translation. The photo is a fragment of reality and the painting is a translation of the reality, much like poetry. The photograph is a window to the outer world, whereas, the painting is a mirror that represents my gesture.

The intertextual connection is that both texts speak of the same subject. Seeing the painting and the photographic source together visually expresses paradox. It juxtaposes multiple points of view as a way of exploring the relativity of my experiences. I approach a subject several times: each from different angles, perspectives, and media. The comparison demonstrates a before and after: thereby exemplifying the complexity of interpretation. The photo and the painting are both fragmented ideas, that when presented together, form a map to my creative process. The structure of the photograph is preserved, but the style and content have undergone a transformation. The variation is more revealing of the sensibility of myself, compared to the photograph.

I always produce my paintings in the city. Studying the photograph, I reflect and respond to my experiences in the rural landscape, transforming my past experience into a new one. The painting process is very similar to my photographic process: it allows me time for further reflections pertaining to personal spaces (where I was in the past, where I am in the present). The painting process is not simply a duplication of the photograph; it adds another dimension to the photograph, which adds to my understanding and interpretation of the experience, thereby completing the image. The photograph captures a moment,

while the painting reflects on that moment, recreating it and extending it, allowing me to re-live it and to perceive that space through a different lens. Painting a photograph is an event that unfolds over time. During this amount of time, I enter the photograph, and recreate it layer-by-layer, brushstroke by brushstroke. The activity of painting a photographic image is a method in which I construct knowledge about my craft and about my interpretive processes.

Although I am glad that I did this study and exhibited my paintings side by side with their source material: I would not do it again. This study clarified that the painting is adding another dimension to the photograph, thereby completing it. However, I have found that when the source material is hidden, a certain mystery and wonder surrounds the painting, making it more appealing to a viewing audience. In the future, I will exhibit paintings as well as photographs; however, I will not repeat the same image in the two media. I would prefer to combine a series of photographs with paintings. I have realized that a photograph lends itself to a series much more easily than a painting simply due to the speed in which the images are produced. I think that it would be interesting to provide the intertextual framework for the painting by surrounding it with a series of photographs – perhaps even a grid of photographs. This would demonstrate how the two media are complimentary, much more than my study was capable of demonstrating.

CHAPTER 6: Summary and Conclusion

Significance of the Study

This study discusses the importance of the painting process as opposed to the final product. It emphasizes the importance of interpretation as the process is unfolding, and it addresses the development of a post-modern painting curriculum.

When people view my paintings, I am often asked whether or not I paint from a photographic source. When I answer yes, I am often left feeling guilty, as though I have just revealed a secret. Why do I feel this way? Why is there a stigma attached to a painter who uses a photographic source as reference? Why do some people perceive it as a weakness, a shortcut, or a crutch?

As an art teacher, I am primarily interested in working with adults and the question of how painting skills are acquired. I find it very intriguing how I have met many painters who are both inspired and aided by the photograph throughout the painting process, but then rarely speak of its role once the painting has been completed. In my opinion, the instructor should directly address the act of referencing both during and after the process, in order to teach the difference between mechanically copying the image and using it as an inspirational guide. Knowing the difference between these two actions is crucial to the development of the painter especially as it pertains to fostering their creative and innovative skills in conjunction with their technical skills.

It is my opinion that the student should pay attention to the method that they have chosen in order to paint because their process may potentially reveal what they value as artists. The purposes for duplicating an image in paint should be a conscious decision. Does the student want to paint the photograph as an easy way out of having to use their imagination? Are they painting the photograph simply to demonstrate that they have the technical skill to do so? Is mastering painting skills more important to them than making a statement? Or are they choosing to paint the image in order to “say” something that the photograph cannot? By encouraging students to be more reflective about why they have adopted an image to paint, they may begin to understand what kind of meaning their process has to them both personally and theoretically (Spicanovic, 2000).

Modernist concepts (which still determines most educational practices) emphasize order, organization and rationality and ignore the role of the student (Roger Clark, 1998). Post-modern and post-structural practices of education, however, places value on the experience of the self and views these experiences as important sources of knowledge. According to Gooding-Brown (2000) deconstruction or disruption are actions in which one critically dismantles the concept of structures. These processes focus on a problematic experience, which creates a space, allowing for deeper understandings to occur (p.36). Kerry Freedman (2001) elaborates further stating “art education based merely on production, on instrumental skills or talents, has been replaced by analysis and interpretation” (p.42). In her opinion, the essential function of art education in the context of a post-modern curriculum is the development of interpretation skills.

Conclusion

This study has enabled me to draw many parallels between my work and the work of other artists who were and are inspired by photography and photo technology. Similar to Frida Kahlo, my photographs also adorn the walls of my studio. I simply enjoy looking at them, and studying them. They repeatedly inspire me to paint. They guide how I choose my colors and my compositions. Similar to Georgia O'Keeffe, I enjoy presenting objects in extreme close up. Using my camera as a viewfinder, I crop an object in a series of aesthetically pleasing ways where I can magnify the surface and emphasize mysterious landscapes that remain hidden to the human eye. Similar to Charles Sheeler, I paint from photographs that I have taken myself. I am also attracted to old artifacts, rural dwellings and geometric shapes that are revealed in this unique form of architecture. But most of all, I've realized that my work is most similar to that of Gerhard Richter. I always look at the bigger picture: questioning my reason for painting, in addition to my reflective and conceptual processes as an artist.

I've realized that this type of study can also be important for a painter who wants to learn from their past work. By reviewing paintings in conjunction with the photographic source: new themes, new reflections, and new trends begin to emerge. This analysis clarified where I would like my work to go. It has made me conscious of how it has evolved and how it can continue to grow. This study has made me realize that time and place are important factors in my artwork: it is apparent in both my subject matter and in my methodology as a painter.

Through writing and reflecting on my work, I gained deeper insights into my aesthetic decision-making experience. By documenting the painting process, it revealed how I interpret the photograph and translate it through another language. The photograph symbolized the outer world while the painting symbolized my inner responses to it. It clarified how images breed other images: and how the process could continue forever. It demonstrated that a filtration system is at work every time a similar image is repeated. Time and space play an important factor in how we repeat an action. Where we are, how we are feeling affects our actions. Every image I make is a culmination of every image I have made before. It has in fact taken my whole lifetime to make each painting. It has in fact, taken my whole lifetime to write this thesis.

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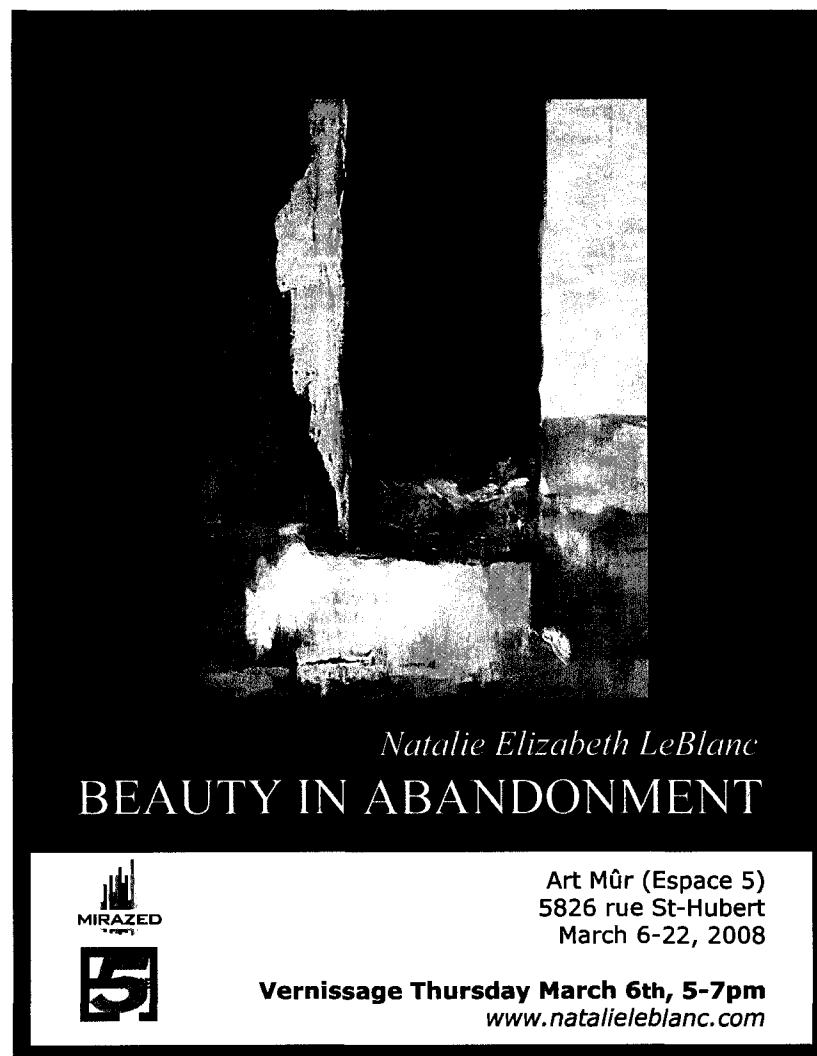
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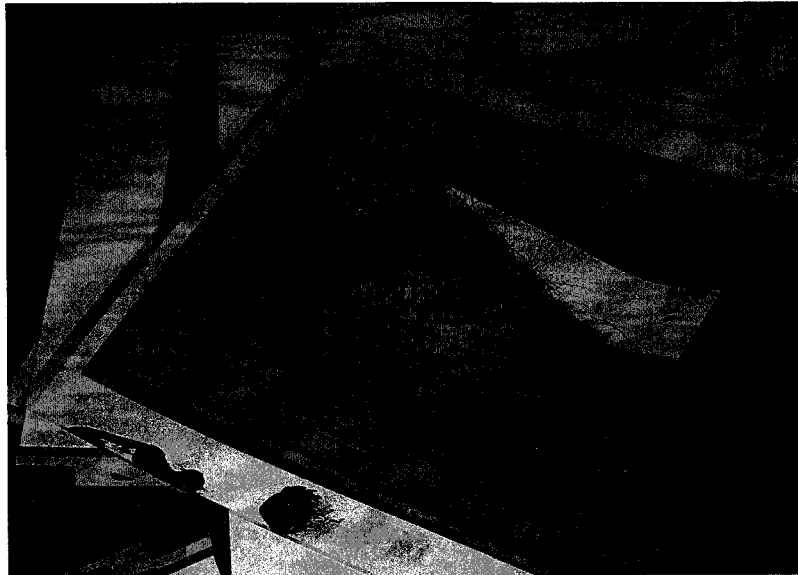
APPENDICES

Appendix 1.



Exhibition documentation, invitation card by Natalie LeBlanc, 2008.

Appendix 2.



Working Documents for *Collapse* and *Searching Horizons: Orange*, 2008.

The actual photograph (i.e. working document + raw material) that served as reference during the painting process is so intriguing. After the process is complete; the paint splatters and fingerprints have a certain aesthetic quality — Presenting evidence that the process did in fact happen and this artifact proves it.

Journal entry, Natalie LeBlanc, 2008.