

Chasing the light

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A thesis support paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts



Emily Carr University of Art + Design
2023

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Abstract

The thesis titled *Chasing the Light*, delves into the experience of art through a phenomenological approach to painting. By examining the relationship between painting, embodied experiences, and the built environment, the artist incorporates the concept of the expanded field of painting into her practice, creating site-adjusted installations that utilize light, temperature, and traditional painting tactics to elicit an immersive experience. Through the progression of her research and artistic output, the thesis demonstrates how lighting conditions can shape the perception of an installation and lead to a haptic, retinal, temperature, and atmospheric shift in the viewer's experience. The goal is to understand the relationship between the viewer, the artwork, and the environment, and how this relationship can be used to create a more meaningful and impactful experience for the viewer.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge that both Emily Carr University of Art + Design and my Industrial Street studio are located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples, including the xʷməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwítlh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. I recognize and honor the rich cultural heritage and enduring relationships that the First Nations have with this land and waters, an environment I enjoy, respect, create on, and draw inspiration from, and I pay respect to their Elders, past and present.

The success of this research is greatly owed to the unwavering support and guidance of numerous kind, patient, and inspiring individuals within the MFA community. If I have not had the chance to express my gratitude during our interactions, I would like to formally thank each one of them.

I would also like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Shumka Centre at Emily Carr University of Art + Design for pairing me for an entrepreneurship program with artist and mentor Landon Mackenzie. Her expertise and encouragement helped shape the direction of my research and provided me with invaluable insights.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Ingrid Koenig, for her steadfast support, encouragement, and guidance throughout my artistic journey. Her fervent passion for the arts and her ability to discuss my work with such eloquence and poise inspired me to nurture my own voice and to weave my stories with grace and power.

Finally, special recognition goes to my artist peers, who generously shared their perspectives and experiences. I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with such inspiring individuals and for the impact they have had on my creative growth and development.

Last but certainly not least, I want to express my infinite gratitude to my partner, Marc Charalambous, for his support throughout this program. He has nourished my soul with his encouragement and my stomach with his delicious meals. He has faced every challenge by my side and has been my rock through the ups and downs of this journey. I could not have made it this far without him.

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Introduction: Expanded field of painting

About the experience of art: The thesis research

My artistic practice is grounded in a phenomenological approach, which emphasizes an embodied experience through the process of painting.¹ By incorporating the concept of the expanded field of painting into my practice, I create site-adjusted installations that utilize light, temperature, and traditional painting techniques to create immersive experiences. The recent shift towards viewing light as a material rather than just a means of illumination has been a significant change in the thesis research and painting production.

The focus of my thesis research is to investigate how painterly practices can elicit embodied experiences that lead to a greater awareness of space; mental and physical. Through my research, I have expanded my painting practice that uses the language of geometric abstraction, to include the use of light as a material and dynamic component of the work. This increased awareness of space is reflected in the various projects that will be discussed in this thesis. From this central theme, a series of questions arose, leading to the identification of two main ideas that will be explored in this thesis:

- a) How can the materiality of painting be used to manifest lighting phenomena?
- b) How does the context of viewing, including the specificity of a space and its lighting conditions, impact the perception of a painting and trigger awareness of an embodied experience with haptic, retinal, temperature, and atmospheric shifts in perception?

Titled *Chasing the Light*, this thesis delves into the experience of art through the lens of a phenomenological approach to art making anchored in the process of painting. By examining materiality,

¹ In post-war France, philosopher Merleau-Ponty developed fundamental theories about perception and embodiment, to further understand “the relation between the mind and the body, the objective world and the experienced world, expression in language and art, history, politics, and nature”. Building on this understanding of phenomenology, the references to a phenomenological approach in my artistic practice aligns with the ideas of neuroscience researcher and literary theorist Paul B. Armstrong, who argues that painting is not merely a process of creating an artwork, but rather a process of experiencing and exploring the world around us. As Armstrong explains in his book *What is Phenomenology?*, “phenomenology is a philosophy of experience that emphasizes the lived experience of human beings as the ultimate source of meaning and value” (Armstrong 15). This aligns with my own personal reflection on my practice, which centers on capturing the embodied experience of painting and communicating the essence of lived experience through my work.

and perception, the research also examines the ways in which the lighting conditions of an installation can suggest an immersive experience. The objectives are to gain insights into the relationship between the viewer, the artwork, and the space in which it is presented, and to examine the ways in which the artist can use this relationship to create a dynamic experience for the viewer.

This paper unfolds the progression, interconnected ideas, and artistic output that resulted from the thesis research over the course of seventeen months. It will specifically delve into four distinct projects that were undertaken during this time period:

1. The painting titled *Blue Elements #1*, 2021 and its accompanying site-adjusted installation, adapted to the Grad Gallery, which was presented in December 2021. (Figure 3)
2. The painting titled *Diamond Dust*, 2022, and its related site-adjusted installation titled *Diamonds for winter sun* installed in response to the specificity of room B4130 on campus in April 2022. (Figure 11)
3. The painting titled *Untitled, first iteration for Hue Element*, 2022 and site-adjusted installation presented in the Grad Gallery during January of that year. (Figure 20)
4. The painting titled *9 Elements*, 2022, installed in two different locations on the ECU campus; the Outer wall of the Knee Gallery (Figure 25) and the sculpture gallery of the Michael O'Brian Exhibition Commons (Figure 27)

Positionality

As a Francophone Québécoise, my family has been deeply involved in the preservation and promotion of francophone culture within Canada. My early art education was heavily influenced by the rich cultural heritage of the Québec art scene. The Montréal-based movement known as the Plasticiens which emphasized the use of abstract forms and the manipulation of colour and texture to create works that were both visually striking and emotionally evocative, has had a significant impact on my interests in geometric abstraction and has played a vital role in shaping my artistic identity.² In the early 90s, the

² Les Plasticiens was a Québec-based art movement active in the 1950s and 60s that revolutionized the art world through its focus on geometric abstraction and innovative use of industrial materials and techniques. This movement, led by members such as Jean-Paul Riopelle, Marcelle Ferron, Guido Molinari, Françoise Sullivan, Denis Juneau, Rita Letendre, and Yves Gaucher, blended modernist principles with the technological and industrial advancements of the era to create works that were bold, bright, and dynamic. Their art pieces, which often featured simple shapes like circles, squares, and rectangles, made a significant impact on the development of modern art in Québec and had a profound influence on my artistic practice. (Nasgaard, 165-208)

discovery of Rita Letendre's large canvases of bold colors and dynamic compositions inspired me as an artist. As a female painter in a predominantly male-dominated art movement, Letendre's work gave me hope for my future and showed me that I too could pursue a career as a painter.³ My interest in geometrical abstraction can be traced back to my previous experience in the field of architecture and design, where an acute understanding of space and form is fundamental. My perception of light and space is informed by a parallel career as a 3D Architecture Visualization Specialist.⁴ My paintings share a similar attunement to light and space, as seen in both the tactics and subjects explored, as well as in the way the work is installed to respond to the unique qualities of the viewing context.

³ During my thesis research, I have paid special attention to women artists, as they were historically and unjustly underrepresented, wanting to focus the conversation on women in the field of painting and to recognize their contribution to my practice as a painter.

⁴ Throughout my 20-year career in computer graphics and 3D animation I have published multiple papers on the topic of rendering engines with a focus on simulating light to accurately represent the way it interacts with 3D models.

Chapter 1: Influences & Methodologies

Light as a subject

Early enlightenment ideas in the 17th century developed understandings of light, including Newton's optical theories. By the 19th century, new theories of vision and colour continued to emerge. For example, the research of physicist Hermann von Helmholtz furthered the understandings of vision and coloured light, while artists' growing knowledge and use of colour theory was explored in their studios, and scientists like chemist Chevreul developed understandings of the phenomena of colour contrasts, temperature, etc. Coming into the 20th century, profound developments in understanding the phenomena of light emerged in physics along with the physiology of perception. While it is beyond the purview of this paper to account for this complex history leading towards artistic experimentation with patterns of colour and form, I acknowledge my entry into these conversations starts with mid-century modernism. But there is no absolute timeline in terms of my fascination with light.

My fascination with the importance of light in painting was further strengthened when I visited the Cathedral of San Martino in Lucca, Italy and saw Tintoretto's 16th century painting of the Last Supper still in its original location. Tintoretto carefully considered the natural source of light entering from the window next to the painting and replicated the same source of light within the painting. This experience allowed me to fully understand the power of light, the context, and the impact of the work on the viewer. As artists and scientists continue to explore the nature of light and color, we gain new insights into the ways in which these phenomena shape our perceptions of the world around us and our experiences of painting.

Light in my practice is multi-faceted, encompassing both the physical and metaphysical aspects of illumination. Light has a strong presence in my life: I begin my day with spiritual practices, such as prayer and meditation, to seek inner light and maintain a positive mindset. This physical engagement with light is not only beneficial for the observation of the world, a world I depict through painterly practices, but also for the psychological and physiological well-being, as it sends signals to my body to produce vitamin D and contributes to my overall happiness levels. Light in my practice can be seen as an attempt to not only depict but also to embody the transformative and transcendent power of illumination. In my painting practice I moved away from the digital space as I found that the capacity for thinking in painting attended to important aspects of embodiment and the phenomena of light.

Campus as a condition

An in-depth examination of the lighting conditions on campus was crucial during the thesis research, which explores the use of light as a material. As Joseph Albers notes in *Interaction of Color*, "In visual perception a color is almost never seen as it really is – as it physically is. This fact makes color the most relative medium in art." (Albers,1) Albers' books highlight the importance of considering the surrounding colour as strong influences in our understanding and viewing of it. However, I question how much of the physical element of light is considered in this understanding. What happens when colours are viewed under different light spectrums? Does their appearance change? A prime example of the relationship between light and colour can be observed in the white painted Cycladic houses in Greece, which I have had the opportunity to observe extensively through multiple trips since 2007. These houses appear warm peach coloured under the golden sun, in contrast to the white exterior of the Emily Carr campus in Vancouver, which is mostly seen as cooler blue due to the Pacific Northwest atmospheric conditions. This highlights the need for further investigation of the relationship between light and colour in my research.

As I began to observe the different qualities of light throughout the campus, I became increasingly aware of the complexity of the lighting system. Instead of focusing on its limitations, I became precise in my desire to take advantage of the qualities it can offer. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard explores the idea of small, intimate spaces and areas of darkness as being inspiring. (Bachelard, 34-39) He argues that these types of spaces offer a sense of enclosure and protection, which allows the imagination to flourish. (Bachelard, 34-39) Similarly, I sought out spaces on campus that offered a sense of security and comfort, which could inspire contemplation and reverie.⁵ With that in mind, I explored the campus looking for spaces that could fulfill my creative needs by considering the specifics of each room such as temperature, presence of windows, and the natural light available and its orientation to the sun. Living in a building designed through digital architecture for the first time gave me valuable insight into the human experience of being in an environment controlled by a computer program for energy efficiency. This understanding is further developed in *Appendix #1: The conditions of ECU + The context of viewing*.

⁵ The start of my MFA coincided with COVID restrictions which resulted in the campus being nearly emptied of its residents. The emptiness transformed the campus into a hollow shell, in which the presence of light became more prominent and visible.

For each of the projects I presented during my thesis research, the space was carefully chosen for its specific qualities or used as a starting point for an artwork.⁶ I share many similarities with Robert Irwin's method of creating art that is specific to its location. As Irwin explains in his work, "Site conditioned/determined art" should involve an "intimate, hands-on reading of the site" in order to create a "sculptural response [that] draws all of its cues (reasons for being) from its surroundings." (Irwin, *Circumstances*, 27)⁷ This approach, which I also adopt, emphasizes the importance of considering every aspect of the space for installing an artwork. As a result, my paintings are highly responsive - and at times - dependent on their viewing context. Created in my studio and then installed in specific locations, this method aligns closely with Irwin's concept of 'Site Adjusted' art, a term that I chose to adopt in relation to my projects. (Irwin, *Circumstances*, 26)⁸

As I adapted to the new environment of the MFA program, both physically and mentally, I noticed a reduction of colour and form in my work. I became particularly interested in the potential of light as a material, and as a result, throughout the duration of my thesis research, my painting practice mainly focused on the use of white hues. I believe that white is the most conducive colour for me to explore, interact with, and observe the impact and objective nature of the light spectrum in my works.

Geometrical compositions

In choosing the language of geometrical composition, my work builds on the ideals of the post-war generation of artists who aimed to "express confidence in Enlightenment ideas by creating geometric abstract art that was orderly, executed with detachment, and expressed the power of human reason." (Gamwell, Preface xvi)⁹ They used abstraction for diverse reasons, amongst them, exploring the release from representational form, as well as communicating more spiritual concepts. My geometrical compositions draw upon iconic optical strategies, such as chromatic vibrations, hard-edged forms, and

⁶ During the thesis research, I utilized various locations on campus, including The Grad, Neighborhood, Elbow, Knee, Zone 1, the Michael O'Brian Exhibition Commons Gallery, as well as Room B4130.

⁷ Robert Irwin further describes this type of installation: "This requires the process to begin with an intimate, hands-on reading of the site. A quiet distillation of all of this - while directly experiencing the site - determines all the facets of the "sculptural response": aesthetic sensibility, level, and kind, of physicality, gesture, dimensions, materials, kind and level of finish, details, etc." (Irwin, *Circumstance*, 27)

⁸ "Site adjusted: Here consideration is given to adjustments of scale, appropriateness, placement, etc. But the 'work of art' is still either made or conceived in the studio and transported to, or assembled on, the site." (Irwin, *Circumstance*, 26)

⁹ There are many styles of geometrical abstraction that reduced art to a physical, formalist essence from which I can draw a parallel with my work - such as Concrete art, Constructivism, Suprematism, De Stijl, and Bauhaus. (Gamwell, *Mathematics + art* 436)

graphic lines, positioning my work in dialogue with, but not defined by, the tenets of Modernist abstract art. These echoes aim to open possibilities for exploring and interrogating the potentialities of abstraction today.

As an artist inspired by the pioneering work of Agnes Martin, I am deeply invested in the use of the non-objective language of abstraction to paint light. I see this approach to artmaking as a way to tap into the spiritual and meditative aspects of creation, inviting the viewer to contemplate the artwork and engage with it on a deeper level. Just like Martin, I strive to create a sense of serenity and contemplation in my work through the use of clean lines, labor-intensive repetition of geometric shapes, and a minimal color palette.¹⁰

William Seitz, the American art historian who wrote the publication accompanying *The Perceptual Eyes* exhibition that he curated for the MoMA in 1965, had a similar view of non-objective art.¹¹ In his book, Seitz refers to non-objective art as arising from "immediate sense experience" and being "freed of representation." (Seitz, 7) He believed that this type of art concentrated more sharply on interest in conveying movement. The exhibition was a seminal event in the career of Bridget Riley and featured several artists who were exploring the optical effects and perceptual challenges of abstraction in painting. This exhibition, reinforced Seitz's beliefs on the importance of abstraction in capturing the essence of light and nature and expressing the spiritual and meditative aspects of art. Seitz also believed that: "The eye responds most directly when nonessentials such as freely modulated shape and tone, brush gestures and impasto are absent. These means muffle and distort the purely perceptual effect of lines, areas, and colors." (Seitz, 7) My use of non-objective language aligns with William C. Seitz's views on the importance of abstraction as a strategy to capture the phenomenological essence of light as experienced in nature.

¹⁰ Arne Glimcher is an American art historian, gallerist, and the founder of the Pace Gallery, known for its support of artists central to the Abstract Expressionist and Light and Space movements. In *Agnes Martin: Paintings, Writings, Remembrances*, he brings together Martin's paintings, writings, and conversations recorded during studio visits. The chapter *About the Paintings* offers a comprehensive overview of Martin's artistic approach. The words of Glimcher in this chapter served as inspiration for the paragraph. (Glimcher, 11)

¹¹ *The Perceptual Eyes* exhibition was a seminal event in the world of art that took place at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 1965. During the mid-1960s, the cultural discussion surrounding art, fashion, and photography was centered around perception. Artists, critics, and philosophers were exploring the relationship between the observer and the artwork and how perception could be considered a creative process in its own right. There was a growing interest in optical and perceptual effects in art, which aimed to engage the viewer's visual perception and create a dynamic experience. *The Perceptual Eyes* exhibition brought these conversations to the forefront and showcased the work of artists who were pushing the boundaries of perception through abstraction and the exploration of optical effects. Bridget Riley's inclusion in the exhibition helped establish her as a leading figure in the Op Art movement, with her painting *Current, 64* featured on the cover of the accompanying publication by William C. Seitz.

Through this focus on light and color phenomena, my work aims to evoke a meditative response in the viewer, creating a sensory and potentially spiritual experience. However, it's worth noting that this is my subjective aim, and may not resonate with all viewers in the same way.

Technically executed with dedication and respect for the traditions of painting, my work speaks directly to the cultural climate of today. With ongoing trauma from conflict and an overwhelming saturation of information, media, and technology, today's socio-political contexts can result in emotional numbness. In his introduction to Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, Richard Kearney observes that "[...] comes at a moment when contemporary society needs imagination more than ever. So much of our experience today is processed by digital communication networks and social media, leaving little room for inner spaces of reverie and meditation – the sorts of places that Bachelard cherishes and celebrates in his poetic visiting of basements and attics, nests and shelters, closets and stairwells, cupboards and chests." (Kearney, xviii) In response, I aim to create physical and mental space with my subtle painterly gestures, low colour contrast, and minimal gridded compositions. My painting installations offer a necessary antidote to the current "attention-scarce economy", inviting viewers to take a moment of contemplation and silence, offering a pathway into the inner self for those willing to give it time.

Atmospheric embodied knowledge: research into phenomenal art

My embodied knowledge and personal experiences have led to a deep understanding and appreciation of the intricacies of light and atmospheric phenomena in nature which I carry forward in my art practice. The experiences I've had in nature, from my early childhood canoeing adventure to my daily walk in Pacific Spirit Park, or skiing at dusk to the quiet slowness of morning bird-watching, have helped shape my perception and understanding of the world around me. The interaction of light with water droplets in the atmosphere, for example, is something I've observed and found to be a source of stimulation in my artistic practice. These subtle natural occurrences require a willing mind and time to discover their wonder. In their discovery, the notion of time becomes much more subjective and collapses to a specific moment. This embodiment of knowledge is not just cognitive, but also physical and emotional. It is deeply rooted in my senses and in bodily experiences. As Robert Irwin states in *Being and circumstance: Notes toward a conditional art* "The phenomenal, as we can know it, exists in the dynamics of our perceiving (experiencing) the nature of the world about us and of our being in it." (Irwin, 23) Building on Irwin's idea that our perception of the world exists in the dynamics of our experiencing it, I find embodied knowledge to be especially relevant in my exploration of the ECU campus. Here, I have witnessed the intricate

interplay of light and weather as they shape the built environment, influencing the physical and mental spaces. It is this embodied experience of space's complexities that I strive to capture in my abstract paintings.

Materiality

My art practice is built on a foundation of intuitive, unplanned, and undirected painting exercises that allow for openness towards an unknown outcome. I find that these non-cognitive exercises are essential in building an embodied knowledge. Although my paintings often stem from a visceral experience of light in the natural world, the technical execution of these ideas often arises from less structured explorations. Smaller paintings (Fig 1) often serve as the starting point for larger-scale works, grouped together as a collection or series exploring a specific theme. As I gather more knowledge and understanding through these smaller paintings, I develop a method I refer to as a “recipe” that I later apply to my larger-scale paintings, making them more formal and following a rigorous technical method. However, I question the use of a “recipe” as a painting is created with the body, which is always in response to the real-time conditions of its being. Even when I attempt to follow the method for a large painting, the painting is always a unique interpretation. Art historian and critic Isabelle Graw would refer to this uniqueness as the “vitalist qualities” of a painting, each containing the “aura” of the artist as a reflection of a specific moment in time. (Graw, *Symposium*) The way my body moves the paint, the randomness of my brush marks, how I perceive colour on that day, the condition of my studio, and my mental state, are all qualities that are imprinted in the motion of painting, making it unique and impossible to reproduce in its exact form.



Figure 1: The *Blue Element* series.
In production at the Industrial Street

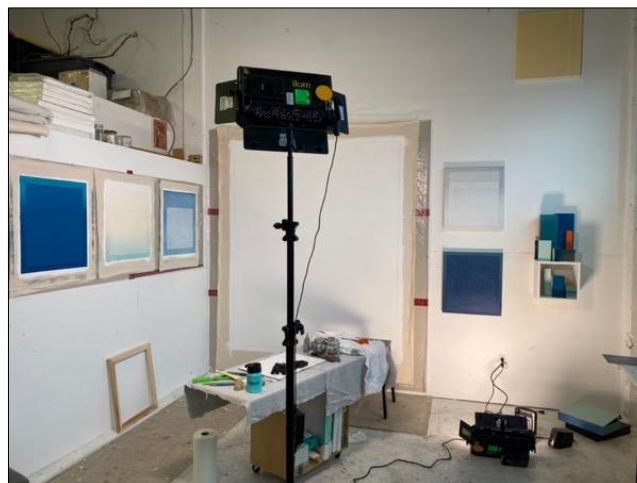


Figure 2: The *Blue Element* series.
In production at the Industrial Street Studio

Chapter 2: Light as a subject of painting

Painting light

To create the illusion of light and space in my paintings, I utilize a variety of techniques beyond traditional geometric language, such as: 1) colour gradients and the use of thin layers of paint for transparency, 2) an understanding of the reflectivity and light absorption of different oil mediums, 3) subdued tonal colour changes, and 4) the creation of optical illusions.¹² These techniques not only capture the essence of light and space, but also broaden the conventional scope of painting, offering a greater comprehension and relationship with our physical environment. In this thesis chapter, I will explore these tactics, giving context for their use and tying them to the main theme of my research.

Painting Tactic #1: Colour Gradient and transparency: Blue Element

Colour gradation is one of the tactics I explore to communicate allusion to light and space.¹³ To expand on this tactic, I will use the painting titled *Blue Element #1* (Fig 3) as an example.¹⁴ This large-scale oil painting is part of a series (Fig 7) where the application of a gradient is used to mimic the gradual changes

¹² Optical is used here for its broader concept and relevance to psychology, neuroscience, and vision science. Studying optical illusions provides insight into the visual system and how it can be misled. Labeling art movements (opt-art, geometrical, kinetic) is often imprecise, as noted by William Seitz: "The tags affixed to art movement and tendencies are seldom precise. Josef Albers objects to the terms "optical" and "retinal" because the responses they denote "are psychological and thus happen behind our retina, where all optics end." Recent experiments show that some phases of these effects are physiological and photochemical, occurring in the retina. Despite its limitations, the term "optical" is provisionally accepted." (Seitz, 18)

¹³ Light is a form of electromagnetic radiation that travels as waves and is perceived as a gradient of intensity and hue. Gradual changes in light intensity and hue are created by different sources of light, such as the sun, a light bulb, or a fire. The amplitude of light wave also determines the way it affects an object with surfaces that are not perfectly smooth, like the undulation of water for example, scattering the light and creating shadows, highlights and other variations in brightness, which our eyes and brains interpret as a gradient. The way light affects color perception is also related to wave amplitude, causing changes in perceived color and hue under different lighting conditions. While the scientific explanation of light gradation is rooted in the amplitude of electromagnetic waves, it also evokes a sense of wonder, and to me, that is the main reference.

¹⁴ Note that the low range of contrast in my paintings can make it difficult to capture the tonal gradient in digital documentation. *Blue Element #1* is one of the highest contrasted gradients I produced during my thesis research and is used as an example here. Other paintings such as *Hue Element* and *Diamond Dust* which are discussed later in the document also utilize this gradual shift in colour technique.

of brightness and hue that occur in the natural world, and to convey a sense of depth and movement, much like the way the amplitude of light waves affects the perception of colour.



Figure 3: Marion Landry, *Blue Elements #1*, 2021, 72 x 60 inches, oil on canvas.
Grad Gallery, ECU, December 2021

Shifting hues

The inspiration for this series of paintings came from observing the gradual shift in colours of the Mediterranean Sea and the way light affects it. My daily visits to an isolated beach under a sandstone cliff influenced my perception and understanding of colour.¹⁵ From the moment I could perceive the sea from the stairs above, to when I was swimming in it, my perception and understanding of the sea colour kept on shifting. While sitting on the edge of the water, it was a gradient of pale blue to turquoise, and as I entered and swam in the water, the colour shifted to a deep blue with hints of sapphire.¹⁶ The horizon line was the constant that grounded me and offered a point of reference to understand the nuances of colour.¹⁷ This embodied experience of observing the sea and how my perception of colour changed with my position and viewing angle is translated into my paintings as I strive to create a similar experience for the viewer using colour gradation, transparency and the use of different paint finishes that respond to light.¹⁸

Gentle Gradient / Body strength

Painting on a large scale involves a sequence of body movements not dissimilar to a dance or an exercise routine. Time, body strength and arm dexterity is involved in a sequence of motion to manipulate the paint using gentle brush marks to transition a colour into another, directly on the canvas. It can take hours, sometimes needing pauses to relax the body before another sequence of motion is applied onto the canvas so that the colour appears smoothed out. In the end, these small gestures will only be observable at close range or at a specific viewing angle but to the patient viewer, it will contribute to the

¹⁵ This referred to an August 2021 trip to the Peloponnese, a peninsula located in the southern part of Greece.

¹⁶ It is important to note that the perception and understanding of colour is subjective. The colour descriptions used in this paper are based on my personal understanding and relate to the inspiration for the piece. However, it should be acknowledged that these colours may be perceived and understood differently by others.

¹⁷ In my paintings, I engage with the ideas of linear perspective discussed *In Free Fall*, the e-flux article by Hito Steyerl. The horizon line, which serves as a grounding point in my work, offers a different perspective than the one-eyed and immobile viewpoint assumed by linear perspective. My paintings challenge the flattened and continuous space defined by linear perspective and instead present a fluid and changing reality, influenced by the viewer's position and angle of view. This shift away from the dominant visual paradigm of linear perspective towards a more dynamic and subjective visuality aligns with the ideas explored in Steyerl's article.

¹⁸ The technical method used to create the gradient for Blue Element #1 (Fig 3) is built with four different oil colours that have been mixed from a combination of pigments and oil mediums. The first layer of colour is painted in a smooth gradient formation starting at the bottom with a deep sapphire blue shifting into turquoise. For this piece I chose a sharper transition between the blue and white hues towards the center point of the canvas as I wanted it to recreate a sense of space similar to that of the horizon line where sea meets the sky.

overall effect of shifting light and colour.¹⁹ The use of gradients to create illusions of light and depth is a prominent technique in my work, both in the colour foundation and in the painting of geometrical shapes. This technique is also central to the work of Rita Letendre, for example in her piece titled *Tecumseth*, 1977 (Fig 4) as she strives for an 'expression of light and of its corollary, shade.'²⁰ My approach however differs from Letendre in that I use low contrast colours with gradients that are often close in tonality, resulting in subdued and sometimes barely visible transitions within the field of colour. In my paintings, I use a ground colour as the foundation and then layer geometrical shapes on top, creating a sense of foreground and background and emphasizing the depth of the pictorial plane which is not a focus in Letendre's works. The transparency of each shape acts as a veil to the space beyond the canvas, and where shapes overlap, it creates additional colours and blurring effects (Fig 6).

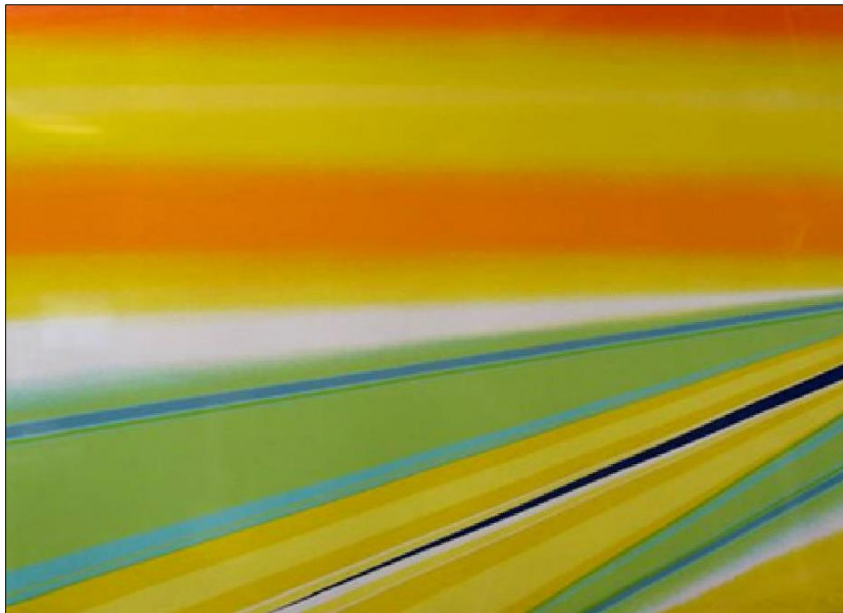


Figure 4: Rita Letendre (1928-2021) *Tecumseth*, 1977, Sérigraphie, XI/XV, 71 x 101.6 cm.

File: "Rita Letendre *Tecumseth* 1977.JPG" by Misterlobat is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/?ref=openverse>.

¹⁹ As William Seitz notes in *The Perceptual Eye*, "A disinterested, hurried, or inattentive gallery visitor can easily dismiss these "invisible" works as entirely homogeneous, so slight are the differences in tone and color that distinguish their elements and mark the individuality of each artist". (Seiz,16)

²⁰ One of Letendre's signature elements was the use of gradient colour. She utilized the gradual transition of one colour to another in her compositions to create a sense of movement and dynamism, as well as to explore the interplay of light and colour. "Rita Letendre abandoned academic training and joined the Plasticiens. Rejecting all forms of figuration, she embraced the adventure of abstract art. At first, she practiced gestural abstraction, producing densely coloured compositions shaped by a relatively controlled formal lyricism. Then, in the 1960s, her work gradually evolved to a more geometric abstraction, approaching the structural dynamics of the Plasticiens. Spontaneous gesture gave way to the sharp contours obtained with the hard-edge technique. Her colour palette narrowed, and her forms grew refined in works that resemble large colour fields shot through by light-drenched arrows." (Beaudry, E.-L., & Fraser, 38)



Figure 5: *Blue Element #1*.

The image shows the foundation colour gradient that has been applied to *Blue Element #1*. Documented during the painting process at Industrial Street Studio in Vancouver.



Figure 6: Close-up of *Blue Element #1*.

Section detail of beige and turquoise rectangles overlapping creating a new color. Exhibited at the Grad Gallery, ECU in December 2021.

Light as a source for perception

The *Blue Element* series of paintings emerged from my fascination with the warm light spectrum of Greece and its influence on my perception of color. In contrast, November in Vancouver brings very little sunlight, and most days tend to be overcast, casting a bluish-grey tint in the studio.²¹ This made it difficult for me to mix colours accurately, and I became interested in understanding how light spectrum affects colour perception. From this inquiry, a desire to experiment with artificial lights in the studio arose with the aim of changing the light temperature (Fig 2) in hopes of reproducing the warm hues experienced in

²¹ In Greece, the quality of light can be perceived as warm and orange or peach because of the way the light reflects, bends and penetrates through the water, the way the light reflects on the surface of the sand, and the way it reflects off surfaces such as the sandstone cliffs. The sun is also much closer to the horizon at sunset and sunrise creating warmer tones of light. This different quality of the light can make it appear warmer than in other locations. On the other hand, in Vancouver, the latitude (49°N as compared to 37°N in Greece) of the city causes the sun to be higher in the sky, which decreases the amount of atmospheric scattering that occurs, making the sky appear a deeper blue. Additionally, the presence of overcast and cloudy weather condition that Vancouver is famous for, reduces the amount of direct sunlight, which creates a less intense, more diffused bluish-gray light.

Greece. By setting the light to a yellow-orange tone of 2700 Kelvin, I found that my perception of colour shifted, and this then became important to reproduce this perceptual shift for the viewing of my work, believing that the embodied experience with the presence of warm light in the gallery space could alter the perception of the work. The beginning of the ideas around the extended field of painting to include light as a medium in my practice was experienced first in the site-adjusted installation titled *Blue Element* (Fig 7).



Figure 7: Marion Landry, *Blue Element*, a site-adjusted installation.
Grad Gallery, December 2022, 72 x 60" and 16 x 20", oil on canvas, coloured gels, sheet of canvas.

Gradual light transition

The site-adjusted installation titled *Blue Element* showcased a series of seven paintings of varying sizes (Fig 7). To enter the gallery, visitors walked through a sheet of canvas that covered the archway entrance, blocking any light penetration from the hallway (Fig 8).²² This added a tactile element that created a sense of intimacy and privacy in the gallery, while also reducing noise from outside by muffling some of the loudest sounds and softening echoes.²³ For this installation, I used the technique of gradient not only in the colour foundation of the paintings, but also in the lighting of the gallery space. A warm orange atmospheric light greeted visitors upon entering the gallery (Fig 9), which was created by applying lighting gels to the spots and flood lights of the track lighting.²⁴ A gradient of warm orange light was visible on the walls of the gallery starting at the entrance and gradually fading in saturation towards the right, bathing the highest installed painting on the east wall with a bright white spotlight (Fig 10). In this installation, I aimed to create a unique experience for visitors by balancing light and colour within the gallery space. This approach is similar to that of James Turrell, who throughout his career has explored the manipulation of light, colour, and space to challenge our perceptions.²⁵ Turrell has created numerous works that include perceptual spaces, large installations, projections, and sky spaces. Like Turrell, I aimed to engage the viewer's senses using light and colour, creating a space that transforms and challenges viewer's perceptions. While Turrell's art form focuses on immaterial perceptual spaces, my focus remains on the tangible object of painting. Despite this difference, both Turrell and I explore the relationship between light and colour in our work. In my *Blue Element* installation, the choice of matte and glossy finishes made

²² This quote by William C. Seitz further highlights the importance of proper viewing conditions for close-valued paintings, such as the *Blue Element* installation. According to Seitz: "It is wrong, perhaps, to show close-valued paintings in crowded exhibitions, for their viability lies at the threshold of invisibility. Each work should be seen in isolation, for a meditative state of mind, proper lighting, and passage of time are absolutely essential to a meaningful response." (Seitz,17)

²³ The open design and large atria of ECU campus galleries contribute to noise pollution, making it difficult to have intimate viewing and focused critiques. Closing the gallery space could provide a peaceful and intimate moment with the work, separate from daily activities. Since the related experience of Greece was one of calm and serenity, I found that by closing the gallery space, one could feel separated from the daily activities of school and perhaps find a more peaceful and intimate moment with the work.

²⁴ Lighting gels are coloured, translucent sheets of thin plastic. Photographers, filmmakers, and stage lighting technicians use them as filters to correct colour and lighting issues. The gels were applied in a subtle way to the existing lights of the gallery, drawing attention to the atmospheric conditions rather than the lighting rig as per the initial experience in my studio (Fig 2)

²⁵ Amongst many installations I have experience from James Turrell, *Aftershock*, 2021 presented at Copenhagen Contemporary for the exhibition *Light + Spaces* in June 2022 comes to mind. This piece is well illustrated in the publication that accompanies the show. (Walther, 117-119)

the paintings responsive to light and body movement, creating a dynamic relationship with the coloured lighting.²⁶

Spatial relationships

In the *Blue Element* series, three of the paintings - including *Blue Element #1* - demonstrate the idea of a horizon line through both their geometric composition and wall positioning. The paintings were arranged by colours to visually extend a horizon line in the gallery space. The gradient element used in *Blue Element #1* was also extended on the wall through the colour relationships between the other paintings. The paintings with beige tones were installed above the imagined horizon line, while those with blue hues were installed below it, evoking the relationship between the sea and the sun (Fig 10).



Figure 8: Grad Gallery.
Canvas sheet closing the archway entrance.



Figure 9: The orange light inside the Grad Gallery.

²⁶ Dynamic relationship and dynamic viewing in this paper refers to an immersive and engaging experience for the viewer that is active, changing, and responsive. It involves the interplay between the artwork, lighting, and the viewer's perception, creating a multi-dimensional experience that changes depending on the viewer's position and movement within the space. This approach emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the viewer, the artwork, and the surrounding environment, and highlights the potential for this relationship to create a more engaging and meaningful experience for the viewer.



Figure 10: The South-East corner view of the Grad Gallery.
Featuring five of the seven paintings of the site-adjusted installation titled *Blue Element*.

Painting tactic #2: Reflection/Absorption of light: Diamond Dust

Reflection in painting is the technique of creating the illusion of depth and space on a flat surface by depicting the way light reflects off different surfaces. Reflectivity implies a viewing angle in relation to the source of light, and the latter implies body movement. The painting titled *Diamond Dust* (Fig 11) was created with this concept in mind. The painting was intended to be lit by the sun and to change in appearance based on the sun's direct illumination. The goal was to achieve the real-time dynamic change of the painting by the real lighting conditions in the room where it was placed.

Light phenomenon

The painting titled *Diamond Dust* was driven by a spur-of-the-moment trip to Magog, Quebec in January 2022 to celebrate my grandmother's 100th birthday.²⁷ On the morning of the trip, I woke up to find a sunny yet freezing day, with a thermometer reading minus thirty-two degrees. Despite the picturesque scenery outside, I opted to stay inside and observe from my window. As I looked out, I was lucky enough to witness a rare atmospheric phenomenon known as 'diamond dust'. This phenomenon features slow-moving, diamond-shaped (i.e. rhombus shaped) crystals that appear suspended in space, sparkling as they reflect light. However, because of the bright snow-covered environment and shining sun, it was difficult to see the 'diamond dust'. To truly appreciate it, I needed to close my eyes for a few seconds to re-adjust my vision and then, upon opening them, I could perceive the light blue, pink, yellow and purple lights shimmering off the floating crystals. The inspiration for the painting titled after this phenomenon, came from this beautiful yet hard to see natural occurrence. In terms of technique, the painting was created using a limited range of white hues. Instead of relying on colour to create the illusion of light, the painting explores the play of light reflection and absorption using matte and glossy mediums.

²⁷ Magog is a city in the Eastern Townships about 120 kilometers east of Montreal at the confluence of Lake Memphremagog—after which the city is named—with the Rivière aux Cerises and the Magog River. Both of my parents are originally from that region where most of my extended family still lives. I didn't know at the time that this would be my last time seeing my grandmother. In memory of Thérèse Longchamps Rouillard, 1922 – 2022.



Figure 11: Marion Landry *Diamond Dust*, 2022, 140 x 120 cm, oil on canvas.

A view as part of the site-adjusted installation titled *Diamonds for winter sun* created for room B4130 at ECU. The installation featured the painting *Diamond Dust* and a stop motion video (1m22sec) showing the changing light pattern on the painting as the rotating earth orbited the sun on March 31st, 2022, from 1pm to 5pm.



Figure 12: The painting titled *Diamond Dust*. Installed in room B4130 at ECU documented under overcast conditions, April 2022.



Figure 12.2: The painting titled *Diamond Dust*. Installed in room B4130 at ECU documented under clear sky sunny conditions, April 2022.

Light as a surface activator

Diamond Dust is a good example of a painting that was created in relation to the specific condition of the site. In this installation I used light as a medium by creating a painting that responds to the specific lighting and architecture of the site. In contrast, for the installation titled *Blue Element* discussed earlier in this paper, I adjusted the lighting of the space to suit the needs of the paintings.

Light and Space: An Embodied Experience

The painting *Diamond Dust* is mostly white, gridded with 550 rhombus shapes, and painted to create a shimmering effect.²⁸ The use of gloss finishes added strong highlights and reflectivity to the work making it highly responsive to its environment. Artist Mary Corse explores paintings that respond to their environment.²⁹ Corse's work is described by Pace Gallery as "emphasizing the abstract nature of human perception, expanding beyond the visual to include subtleties of feeling and awareness". (Pace Website) Just like her contemporaries, Corse has a deep fascination with perception and the potential of light to serve as both a subject and medium of art. In her 2018 painting *Untitled (White Inner Band, Beveled)* (Fig 13), the microbeads used in her paintings reflect and refract light, creating a perceptual and optical effect.³⁰ Her paintings demand a willing viewer to walk around the work to observe it's effect, that is also true for my painting titled *Diamond Dust*. This quote is from a symposium titled *Mary Corse: A Symposium* held by Whitney and Dia Art Foundation. During the symposium, Mary Corse spoke about her approach to painting and stated that "For me painting has never been about the paint but what the painting does – I wanted to put the light in the painting so I searched for material that would do that. I wanted to make a painting that would depend on the viewer's perceptions, I use this material to create change in relation to the viewer's position." (Corse) The experience of viewing Corse's painting is not just visual, but also embodied, meaning that it involves the viewer's whole body and physical interaction with the artwork. The painting explores themes of space, perception, optical phenomena, and materiality in a way that cannot be fully understood through abstract analysis alone. The viewer's willingness to engage with the work is key in this experience, as the brightness of the painting requires effort to experience it

²⁸ The foundation colour gradient is composed of four white hues: a warm white achieved with Michael Harding pigment named lead white replacement, a pale yellow derived from deep yellow cadmium and zinc white, a pale pink created from cadmium red and zinc white, and a pale peach which is a mix of the pink and yellow hues. To create the foundation gradient, a combination of mediums and techniques were used that allowed it to dry matte and slightly textured, absorbing most light electromagnetic radiation as a result. The shimmering effect of the painting was further enhanced by manually tracing a grid based on 4 x 7cm rectangles using a light pink colour pen. Six hundred rhombus shapes were then traced using the diagonal of the grid. This drew attention to the fractal smoothness of the subdued colour gradient foundation tessellating it into small surfaces. Then, each of the rhombus shapes were painted using an oil paint mixed with a glossy medium. This conscious exploration of glossiness and matte finishes has a direct impact on the responsiveness to the painting in relation to its environment.

²⁹ Mary Corse developed her initial work during the emergence of the Light and Space movement in Southern California in the 1960s, which emphasized perceptual phenomena, such as light, volume, and scale, and the use of industrial materials. The group also expanded their art to the site and/or environment by taking the focus away from objects toward a greater awareness of self by creating 'site conditioned' installations, to borrow Robert Irwin's terminology. She is one of the few women associated with the movement and the only one who kept painting central to her practice.

³⁰ In June 2022 I attended the *Light + Space* exhibition at the Copenhagen Contemporary (CC). This was my first-time encountering the paintings of Mary Corse's work in person.

fully. As art historian Marlene Vest Hansen stated in the opening lecture of the symposium titled *The Art of Light and Space*: "The only reality is in the experience; we use words to try to communicate this experience, words that try to describe the sense of ourselves sensing and our space in the world." (Hansen) Hansen's quote highlights the idea that the experience of art is a reality that cannot be fully captured by words. For both the white painting of Mary Corse and *Diamond Dust* the appearance and impact are dependent on the viewer's experience and interaction, making it a prime example of the idea that reality lies in experience.³¹



Figure 13: Mary Corse, *Untitled (White Inner Band, Beveled)*, 2018. Glass microspheres in acrylic on canvas, 228.6 x 228.6 cm. Photographed by Marion Landry at the Light & Space exhibition at Copenhagen Contemporary on June 4, 2022.

³¹ Seitz argues that the primary aim of a painting is to activate vision, and that color is not necessary to achieve perceptual ambiguity, variability, and movement when he states that "The primary aim from which both result is not beauty of form, tasteful relationships, nor equilibrium in the old sense but the activation of vision. And color is unnecessary for perceptual ambiguity, variability, and movement." (Seitz, 30)

The relationship to the sun's illumination

In the site-adjusted installation titled *Diamonds for Winter Sun*, my hope was for the sun to illuminate the painting and provide a frame of light around the work, as well as produce a strong highlight reproducing a similar effect of blindness experienced back in Magog.³² I was also thinking that if the viewer engages in movement around the work, the light will illuminate the glossy rhombus shapes of the painting making it flicker in the viewer's eye. On sunny days, when the sun entered the room and aligned with the painting, it became so bright that it was hard to look at the painting, drawing strong parallel with the optical phenomena that inspired the piece.³³ The concept of time played a significant role in the viewing experience of this installation. The painting's appearance was highly dependent on the weather, as it reflected the qualities of its atmosphere. Strategically located on the west facing wall and close to the windows, the painting had the ability to reflect both the exterior environment and the architecture of the building it was housed in, depending on the viewer's position in relation to the work. The "ideal" time for viewing the installation – which had to do with the ideal moment of "blindness" – was determined to be on a sunny day at around 2:30pm.³⁴ This installation highlighted the relationship between time and space, and the ever-changing nature of both.

Shimmer

³² *Diamonds for Winter Sun* was a site-adjusted installation located in room B4130 that included both the painting titled *Diamond Dust*, as well as video. The video depicted the progression of the sun over the painting framing it with light while condensing into a 1 minute and 22 seconds video from a much longer time period, specifically on March 31st, 2022, from 1pm to 5pm. I am choosing not to discuss the video in the context of this thesis as this was my first attempt in presenting both a painting and a video. However, based on the critique received, I have learned that the inclusion of the video detracted from the experience of the painting and resulted in a conversation more focused on the digital realm than the painting itself. The categorization of site-adjusted, site-specific and of site-conditioned came in conversation during many of my critiques. In using site-adjusted, I believe to align with the categories established by Robert Irwin. (*Circumstance*, 26-27)

³³ For those who wonder, under regular lighting *Diamond Dust* is perceived as a light pink pattern. The diamonds become more subdued with a subtle shimmer activated by the viewer's body movements. The painting was re-installed under LED ceiling and flood light in the MOEC for the State of Practice exhibition in September 2022.

³⁴ However, I had not considered the speed at which the angle of the sun was moving during the two-week period of the installation – the installation was being experienced during spring equinox –which required the positioning of the painting on the wall to be adjusted three times in order to maintain the desired framing effect of light. In 2022, the springtime changes forward happened on Sunday March 20th when Daylight Saving Time (DST) begins. This shift moves an hour of daylight from the morning to the evening, extending daylight hours in the evenings. Spring equinox is the moment in the year when the sun is directly above the Earth's equator, and the day and night are of equal length, it is considered the first day of spring in the northern hemisphere. This experience made me aware of my relationship to the sun, and the position of my physical body on the planet, specifically in Vancouver at ECU, in a room on the fourth floor of a south-facing building.

The rhombus pattern is a recurring element in my paintings. The specific pattern in my artwork is based on an experience of shimmering light on a surface that I had while walking in Athens on a sunny day.³⁵ The pavement in my neighborhood was covered with a similar rhombus pattern. The sun hit the pattern and the pavement shimmered, creating an animated, moving surface reminiscent of the Mediterranean Sea. The shimmering effect was mesmerizing to me, leaving a strong imprint on my mind. When I experienced the phenomena of diamond dust back in Magog on that frigid day, I immediately reflected to that experience and the rhombus pattern in Athens and wanted to evaluate if I could achieve a similar dynamic effect in painting. On the other hand, the large rectangle shapes in my composition, as seen in *Blue Element #1* (Fig 3), are closely tied to the concept of space. They are often painted with matte finishes that make them appear to absorb light, emphasizing the illusion of depth in the pictorial composition, making them more atmospheric. The rhombus patterns (Fig 14 to 19) in contrast serve as small reflectors, bouncing light off the surface of the canvas, creating an effect that focuses more on surfaces rather than an illusion of space. In thinking about the concept of shimmering I would like to mention the essay by anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose titled *Shimmer, when all you love is being trashed*. This essay focuses on the Aboriginal aesthetic Yolngu term "bir'yun," which translates to "brilliant" or "shimmering." (Bird Rose, 53) This Aboriginal aesthetic is found in many parts of Australia and implies the cross-hatching of an artwork to allow it to shift into brilliance. Bird Rose describes shimmering as a kind of motion when they say: "Brilliance actually grabs you. Brilliance allows you, or brings you, into the experience of being part of a vibrant and vibrating world. When a painting reaches brilliance, for example, people say that it captures the eye much in the way that the eye is captured by sun glinting on water". (Bird Rose, 53) Much like the brilliance described by Bird Rose, the cross-hatching rhombus pattern in my painting embodies the transformative and transcendent power of illumination, that aims to create a mesmerizing and dynamic viewing experience.

³⁵ This refers to a one-month artist residency at Athens Standard Residency, Greece in 2019.



Figure 14: Close up details of *Diamond Dust*.
In progress at the Industrial Street Studio.



Figure 15: Close up details of *Diamond Dust*.
Painting in progress also showing a cardboard
prototype at the Industrial Street Studio.



Figure 16: Detail of the painting titled *Diamond Dust*.
Installed in room B4130 at ECU documented under
overcast sky conditions.



Figure 17: Detail of the painting titled *Diamond Dust*.
Installed in room B4130 at ECU documented under
clear sky conditions.



Figure 18: Close up detail of *Diamond Dust*.
Installed in the Michael O'Brian Exhibition Commons
at ECU. Conditions clear sky and rising sun.



Figure 19: Marion Landry, *Diamond Dust*.
Installed in room B4130. Conditions overcast and flat light.

Painting tactic #3: Tone on tones: *Hue Element*

The temperature of white

The motivation behind my painting *Untitled, first iteration for Hue Element* (Fig 20) arose from observing the *Hue Heat Hypothesis* in action, as outlined by Electronic Engineering and Cognitive Science researcher Mounia Ziat. The hypothesis states that the subjective feeling of temperature can change based on the colour of an object, with human subjects able to hold a freezing cup longer if it is red instead of blue.³⁶ Referring back to the afternoon of the day I had observed the phenomena of diamond dust in Magog, I noticed that the snow outside looked warm and more yellow as opposed to the rigid blues of the morning. Despite the thermometer indicating a temperature of minus twenty-eight degrees, I stepped

³⁶ I encountered this information while riding an elevator in downtown Vancouver to a business, where a TV was installed in the corner and displayed 20-second snippets of various daily news. This serves as an example of the overwhelming abundance of information in our daily lives, which can be both a blessing and a curse, containing both valuable insights and misleading information.

outside. The sun made the snow feel warm and inviting, impacting my interpretation of the temperature as per the Hue Heat Hypothesis (Ziat). The snow looked buttery and warm and yet within a few minutes, I was shivering and barely able to breathe due to the extreme cold. As I observed the interplay of the warm yellow snow and the cool lavender shadow, I came to understand the concept of colour relativity that Joseph Albers had expounded upon as mentioned prior in the thesis.³⁷ The contrast between the two colours made the yellowness of the snow more pronounced and brought attention to the way in which our perception of colour is shaped by the colours that surround it. This idea was the inspiration for my site-adjusted installation titled *Hue Element*, (Fig 21) which aims to explore the way colours and their relationships can impact our perception of the world around us.

The pigment matching game

I often play the game of connecting oil pigments to the physical world. As I was experiencing the sun's impact on the snow's temperature through the Hue Heat Hypothesis (Ziat) I quickly linked the butteriness of the snow to the new discovery of Michael Harding lead white replacement oil paint.³⁸ Lead white replacement enhances colours by brightening them into a rich, yellow undertone, creating opaque and dense fields of colour unparalleled to what zinc or titanium white can provide. In *Chroma*, Derek Jarman makes a reference to white being “metallic” since most white, with the exception of chalk-based grounds like gesso, are made from metal oxides (Jarman,14).³⁹ This idea of white being metallic is particularly interesting when thinking about the white paintings of Mary Corse, as it adds a new layer of understanding to the use of white. For my painting titled *Untitled, first iteration for Hue Element*, I paid careful attention to the usage of different white pigments, such as titanium, zinc, and lead white replacement, to achieve the desired effect.

³⁷ This realization aligns with the words of Joseph Albers, who stated that "Colors present themselves in continuous flux, constantly related to changing neighbors and changing conditions." (Albers, 5)

³⁸ Lead white was a popular choice among painters such as Vermeer and later the Impressionists like Van Gogh for its density, opacity, and warm tones. However, it was banned in the 1970s due to its poisonous properties. Zinc white and titanium white were proposed as replacements, but they never quite achieved the same level of satisfaction among painters. I personally never understood the fuss until I started using the Michael Harding lead white replacement oil paint. The experience was transformative for my studio practice.

³⁹ In *Chroma*, a book of reflections on colour, Derek Jarman dedicates a chapter to the colour white titled *White Lies*. (Jarman,14)



Figure 20: Marion Landry, *Untitled, first iteration for Hue Element*, 2022.
72 x 58 inches, oil on canvas, Grad Gallery, ECU, January 2022

Light has a material

The site-adjusted installation titled *Hue Element* (Fig 21-22) was designed to take advantage of the artificial light conditions in the Grad Gallery. It was important for this installation to create a warm feeling against a cold temperature, similar to the Hue Heat Hypothesis (Ziat). Installed in the Grad Gallery a single painting featured a simple geometric form composed in a manner that enters conversation with the work of Joseph Albers' *Homage to the Square paintings*, with rectangles receding in size towards the top right corner.⁴⁰ The painting *Untitled, first iteration for Hue Element* was built on a gradient ranging from warm white to butter-yellow tones. The overlaid rectangle composition, painted with a mix of glossy and matte finishes, reflects, or absorbs light, giving the illusion of a foggy deep space. The otherwise generic ambiance of the gallery was altered by affixing gels directly on the ceiling strip lights using a mix of cool tones on the left side, and a warm tone on the right. The lights cast warm and cool tones on both the painting and the walls of the gallery completely changing the space's atmosphere. (Fig 21) The painting was strategically positioned on the wall at the intersection of the cool and warm light. Two comfortable seats were installed at the back edge of the gallery with enough distance for the viewer to capture the entirety of the space (Fig 22). To limit light leaking from the archway entrance of the gallery, a white blackout curtain was installed which also served as a barrier for sound. Upon entering, the viewer needed a moment of adjustment, both for the eyes and the mind, as the atmosphere of the gallery greatly differed from that of the campus sealed from view.⁴¹

The first impression was one of gentle perplexity; the painting was very minimal and felt vaporous in the space. The painting's warm hue tones appeared to expand to the walls of the gallery. What looked like a pale lavender shadow was cast on the left side (Fig 23) of the painting while on the right side a more orange shadow emerged (Fig 24). In contrast, the top edge of the canvas appeared to be glowing, creating a strong parallel to the atmospheric effect observed when sun is reflecting on snow, which was

⁴⁰ Joseph Albers produced over 2,000 iterations of squares in his *Homage to the Square* series. Through adjustments in hue, tone, and intensity, Albers explored the interaction of colors in his work. In *The Perceptual Eye*, William Seitz wrote about Albers' approach to color and his famous "nests of squares." According to Seitz, "The potentialities of optical painting can only be suggested [in Albers' work]; complementary oppositions are simply its most dramatic manifestation. Albers, indeed, has always avoided them as a hostile attack on the senses. His famous nests of squares are assembled from softer contrasts and analogies in which the median tones interact subtly with the central and outer areas. The addition of the third, mediating color, its appearance delicately modulated by its neighbors into gaseous transparency, produces a more tranquil mode of interaction." (Seitz, 19)

⁴¹ Additionally, Seitz writes that Albers believed that artists are always aware, on a sensory level, of the discrepancy between physical fact and psychic effect, which he saw as the origin of art. Seitz notes that artists have learned, either in school or in their own studios, that no color or shape has an invariable identity, and that the appearance of a given mixture of pigment or a line or shape can change based on the elements surrounding it. (Seitz, 18)

the inspiration for this piece. A sense of calm was felt in the gallery space as the viewer was invited to sit and contemplate. The perception of the painting continually shifted between surface and space offering a reflection on time as in taking the time to discover what the painting had to offer. In that atmospheric context, my painting appeared completely stripped down of extra gestures and was mostly reduced to its core simplicity. It was meticulously crafted demanding a level of precision which made it appear minimal. I can relate to Agnes Martin describing her painting as being “about perfection” and not perfect (Glimcher, 71).⁴² This idea of perfection is something often perceived in my work, and yet, due to the free hand process used, my paintings are far from perfect when one takes the time to observe them more closely. Underlying many of my works, including this painting, are measurement marks that reveal information about the hand-drawing process of a grid as well as the structural work needed to render the geometrical shapes. This grid can be seen as a notational residue from the process of making the work and acts as an anchor to a 2D dimensional space at close range, easily disappearing with distance from the piece. In her writing, Rosalind Krauss argues that the grid serves as a critical tool for modern artists, allowing them to explore themes of space, structure, and representation. She sees the grid as both a visual and a conceptual framework that can be used to deconstruct and reinterpret the traditional expectations of painting. Krauss argues that the grid is not just a formal device, but also a tool for disrupting the relationship between representation and reality, as well as for exploring the limits of abstraction and the limits of the medium of painting. (Krauss, 50-64) I find her statement on the grid's capacity to serve as a paradigm or model for the "antidevelopmental, the antinarrative, the antihistorical" to be insightful in the context of this piece. (Krauss, 64)

⁴² The quote from Agnes Martin, “I paint about perfection that transcends what you see – the perfection that only exists in awareness,” was recorded during a studio visit and later cited by Arne Glimcher in his book *Agnes Martin: Paintings, Writings, Remembrances*. (Glimcher, 71).



Figure 21: *Hue Element*, a site-adjusted installation. Grad Gallery, January 2022.



Figure 22: *Hue Element*, a site-adjusted installation. Grad Gallery, January 2022.



Figure 23: Close up view of *Untitled, first iteration for Hue Element*, 2022.

Showcasing the purple shadow edge produced by the blue/cool gels applied to the left row of lights in the Grad Gallery's ceiling at ECU.



Figure 24: Close up view of *Untitled, first iteration for Hue Element*, 2022.

Showcasing the orange shadow edge produced by the orange/warm gels applied to the right row of lights in the Grad Gallery's ceiling at ECU.

Painting tactic #4: Optical illusion: 9 Elements

The painting titled *9 Elements* (Fig 25) represents the apex of my thesis research with regards to a reduction of colour and form, highlighting an emphasis on surface and material. This painting is the only one of the thesis productions that was painted with only one layer of paint to exemplify a heightened focus on surface. The matte finish on the painting allows for the absorption of light, enabling the

evaluation of light as a potential material in the artwork. The creation of *9 Elements* was a direct result of my examination of the conditions of the ECU campus, further demonstrating the significant impact of light and space in my practice.



Figure 25: Marion Landry, *9 Elements*, 2022, 275 x 375 cm.
polymere on display on the outer wall of the Knee Gallery at ECU in January 2023 under clear sky conditions.

Painting driven by conditions

The painting titled *9 Elements* was envisioned to respond to the unique conditions of the Outer Wall of the Knee Gallery located on the fourth floor of the campus and highlights its relationship with natural light. This work is in conversation with Robert Irwin's site-condition art, as this painting was crafted to interact with and respond to its specific surroundings, creating an immersive and perceptual experience for the viewer. (Irwin, *Circumstance*, 27) In February the sun is at a low angle on the horizon with natural light penetrating deeply into the ECU campus, illuminating the Outer wall of the Knee Gallery with a linear pattern cast by the rectangular mullions of the skylight. Through its engagement with the unique

conditions of its location, this painting encourages a heightened awareness and appreciation of the viewer's surroundings.

The vibrating colours

The large-scale painting has been divided into nine vertical strips. The colour of the strips starts as a thinly painted yellow on the left and becomes gradually more saturated as you move towards the right. Between each of these yellow strips, there is a faint pinkish pencil line that was used as a boundary when the painting was being done and was left visible in the final piece as part of the design.⁴³ The painting shares many similarities with the works of Bridget Riley in its use of clean, simple geometric shapes, creation of optical illusions that evoke a sense of movement on the canvas, focus on a smooth surface, and intentional composition. (Dr. Lauson, video) However, *9 Elements* distinguishes itself from Riley's work by relying on a low contrast of colour and a matte polymer paint mix to activate the surface. The mid-range view of the painting *9 Elements* (from 10-15 feet away) reveals a retinal illusion of a narrow purple band appearing between the yellow bands.⁴⁴ This illusion is so convincing that it can be hard to believe it was not painted that way.⁴⁵ The tonality of each band is so close that the eye has difficulty adjusting, leading to the illusion. The even distribution of colour throughout the band creates an illusion of vibrating surface and a wave-like effect (bands of colour). This technique is similar to the work of Bridget Riley, who draws inspiration from her exploration of colour, form, and perception through geometric shapes and patterns. (Dr. Lauson, video) In her painting *Deny 11* (Fig 26) she uses silver-looking elliptical shapes arranged in a geometric grid pattern to create the illusion of movement and depth, similar to the way the vertical bands of colour in *9 Elements* creates an illusion of movement, drawing the viewer into the artwork and challenging their perception of the work.

⁴³ The edge of the bands is traced with a rose-beige pencil line, which is barely visible but adds a touch of colour that can be observed at close range.

⁴⁴ A retinal illusion refers to a phenomenon that occurs at the level of the retina, the light-sensitive layer of tissue at the back of the eye, and results from the way the retina processes and interprets visual information. This can change our perception of size, brightness, or color. Examples of retinal illusions include afterimages seen after looking at a bright light and then looking away, or the way a grid of black and white squares can appear to shimmer or flicker. Unfortunately, this retinal illusion cannot be captured in a digital format, so it is not illustrated in the documentation of the piece. To fully experience this effect, the artwork must be viewed in person.

⁴⁵ The thinly painted piece displays brush marks at times revealing the underpaint of light pink gesso which might be contributing to the illusion.

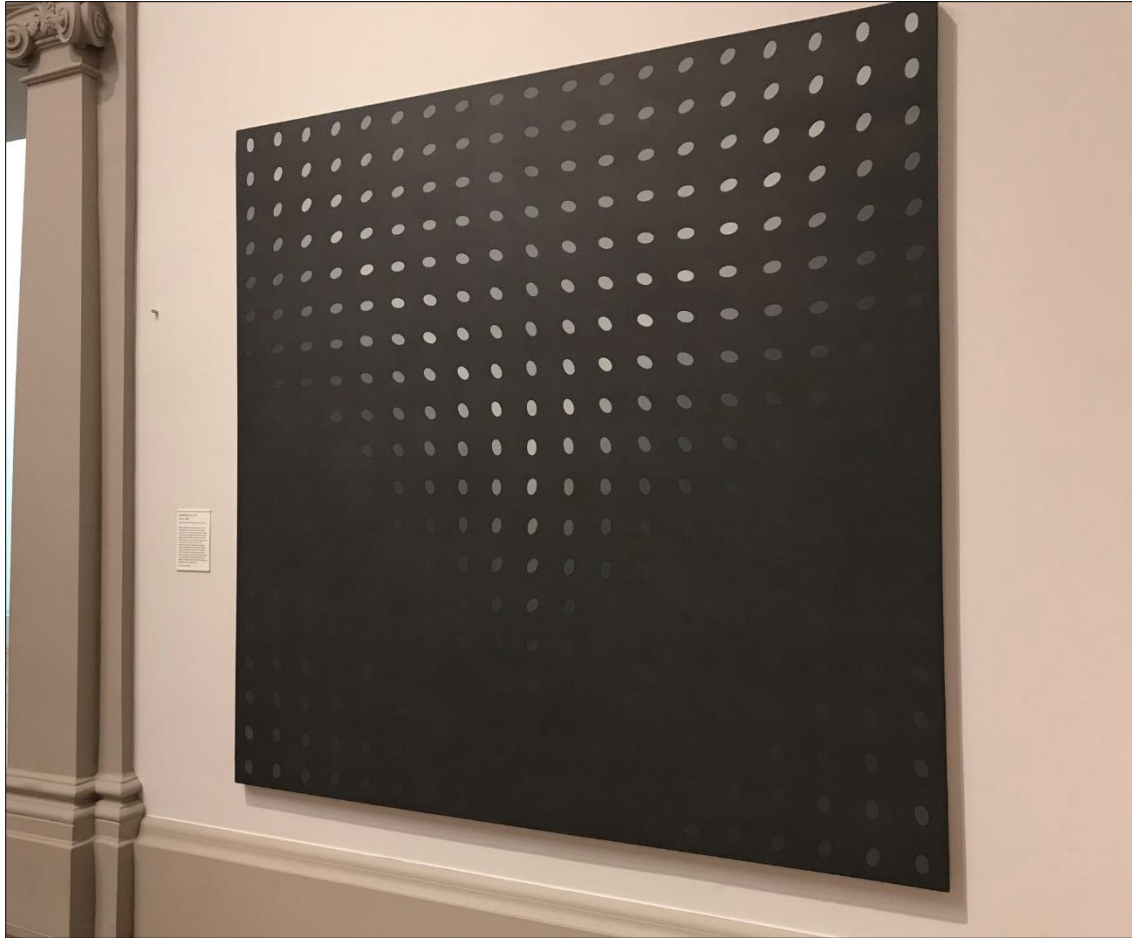


Figure 26: Bridget Riley, *Deny 11*, 1967.
Polyvinyl acetate emulsion paint on canvas, 2172 x 2172mm.
Photographed by Marion Landry at the Tate Britain, 2018

The illusion of light emission and dynamic viewing.

The appearance of light emission observed on the top edge of *9 Elements* can be described as a resemblance of light pink hue being emitted at the top edge of the painting (Fig 27). It glows strong enough that it could be interpreted as if a neon light was attached to the top of the painting, similar to the use of fluorescent light fixtures in the early work of Dan Flavin (Fig 28). However, in my work, the illusion of physical objects is created not through their use, but rather through the application of a high-gloss medium with a medium pink color on the top edge of the painting. Due to its high placement, the top edge cannot be seen from a normal viewing angle and no visual clues are revealed. However, the reflective quality of the medium creates the illusion of light transfer, making the top edge of the painting seem to glow. I strive to move beyond simply adding physical objects to my paintings and instead focus on the interplay of light and its relationship to the surrounding space. Viewed from a far distance, the

painting appears to expand beyond its physical boundaries, further emphasizing the idea of the expanded field of painting.⁴⁶



Figure 27: Marion Landry, *9 Elements*, 2022, 275 x 375 cm.

⁴⁶ When experiencing the painting *9 Elements*, the distance from which it is viewed greatly impacts the overall experience of the work. From close range (about 2 feet away), the viewer is fully enveloped in the intense yellow tone, with the large scale of the piece filling their field of vision. The matte finish of the paint absorbs light while imperfections and unevenness in the paint application can be observed. At mid-range (5-10 feet away), the viewer is presented with a retinal illusion, where each band of colour appears to have a vertical gradient from purple to yellow. At far range (15-20 feet away), the individual bands of colour blend to form a unified gradient from pale to saturated yellow. At that range, the glowing pink top edge becomes more visible due to its contrast with the flat plane of yellow.

On display at the Sculpture Gallery of the Michael O'Brian Exhibition Commons at ECU for the State of Practice exhibition in September 2022.



Figure 28: Dan Flavin, *Icon III (blood) (the blood of a martyr)*, 1962.

Also showing on the left of *Icon III*, *Icon II, (the mystery) (to John Reeves)* 1961, as well as *Icons VII (via crucis)* 1962-64.

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Thesis Project and Exhibition

The thesis project consists of a series of paintings titled *Chasing the Light*, with two large-format pieces from the series, *Chasing the Light #6* and *#7*, installed in the Michael O'Brian Exhibition Commons for the Biophysicalmateria Thesis Exhibition.⁴⁷ These paintings were displayed as part of a site-adjusted installation that used light, temperature, and traditional painting techniques to create an immersive experience for viewers, examining how the context of viewing affects perception and can potentially trigger self-awareness through embodied experience.

⁴⁷ Biophysicalmateria, MFA 2023 Thesis Exhibition was presented in the Michael O'Brian Exhibition Commons from March 24th to April 9th, 2023.

To enhance the viewing experience, I implemented a complete relighting of the MOEC, building upon my research in the expanded field of painting that uses light as a material. By reducing the light intensity from the ceiling light and creating uneven light distribution through the use of track lighting, I aimed to create an immersive and engaging experience for viewers. My goal in relighting the MOEC was to reconfigure the viewers' haptic response to the exhibition space's architecture, enhancing the sense of materiality, texture, weight, density of space, and materialized light.

My inspiration for the painting series came from the deep blues and greens of the Burrard Inlet, which I observed during my summer bike rides to school. I sought to capture the interplay of light and shadow on its surface through a phenomenological approach that investigated the experience of art. To create an illusion of light and space intrinsic to the artwork that could still become activated by the Exhibition Commons' varying lighting conditions, I revisited the rhombus shape pattern used in my previous work, *Diamond Dust*. As winter approached, the deep blue of the water observed during the summer months merged with the cold blues of snow I experienced during my cross-country skiing evenings, leading me to experiment for this series of paintings with an overlapping grid pattern for my rhombus composition, suggesting a shift in a new direction.

I displayed the large-scale paintings on an adjacent corner wall separated by a main corridor, allowing viewers to experience the artwork from different distances and angles. The careful use of matte and glossy finishes captivated the eye, shimmering as viewers approached the painting, creating a dynamic viewing experience that encouraged them to spend more time with the work, exploring its subtle nuances.

Additionally, I deliberately reintroduced color into my work, departing from the reductive color palette used in my thesis research, to make it more accessible to a wider audience. Through the *Chasing the Light* series and site-adjusted installation, I aimed to examine the relationship between painting, embodied experiences, and the built environment, while continuing to explore the expanded field of painting.



Figure 29: *Chasing the light* #6 and #7, 2023.

On display at the Michael O'Brian Exhibition Commons at ECU as part of the MFA 2023 Thesis Exhibition titled *Biometaphysicalmateria*.



Figure 30: Marion Landry, *Chasing the light #6*, 2023.
60 x 50", oil on canvas



Figure 31: Angled view of *Chasing the light #6*, 2023.

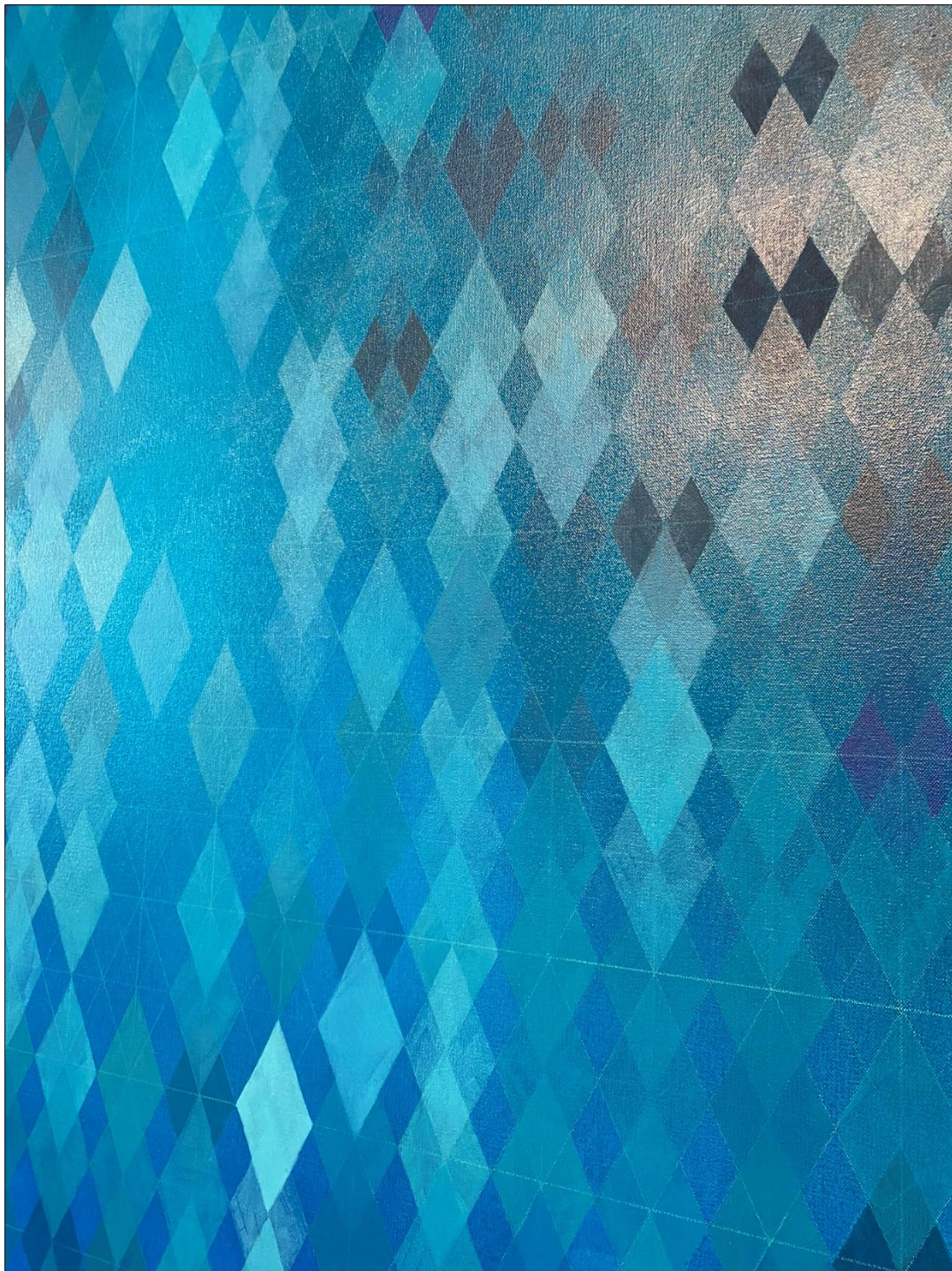


Figure 32: Close up, angled view of *Chasing the light #6*, 2023.

This image showcases the glossy and matte finishes of the painting in detail, as well as the variation in color that becomes apparent when viewed up close.



Figure 33: Close-up detail of the materiality of *Chasing the light* #6, 2023.
©Michael Love 2023

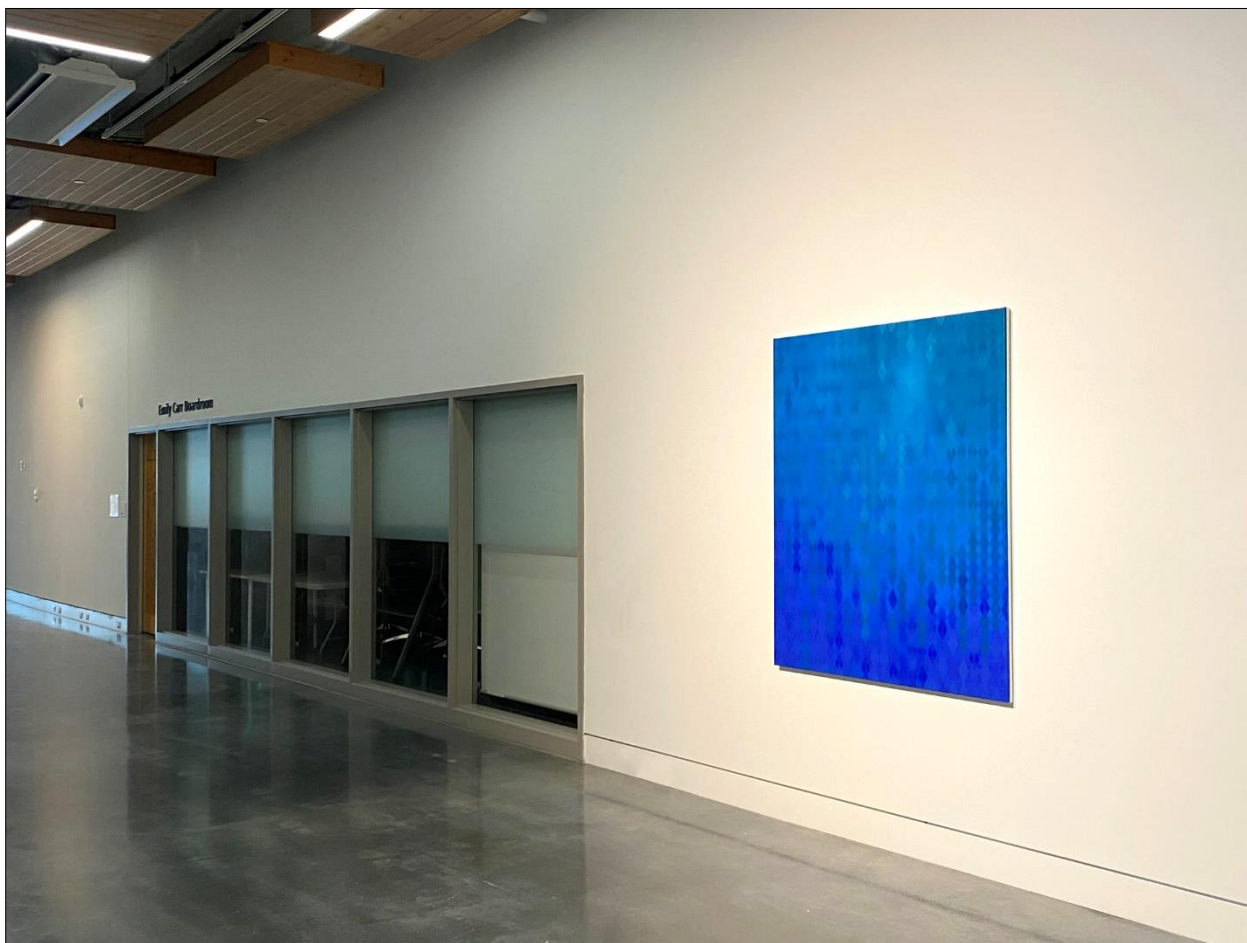


Figure 34: Wide angle view of *Chasing the light #7*, 2023.

On display at the Michael O'Brian Exhibition Commons at ECU as part of the MFA 2023 Thesis Exhibition titled *Biometaphysicalmateria*.



Figure 35: Marion Landry, *Chasing the light #7*, 2023.

60 x 50", oil on canvas.



Figure 36: Angled view of *Chasing the light #7*, 2023.

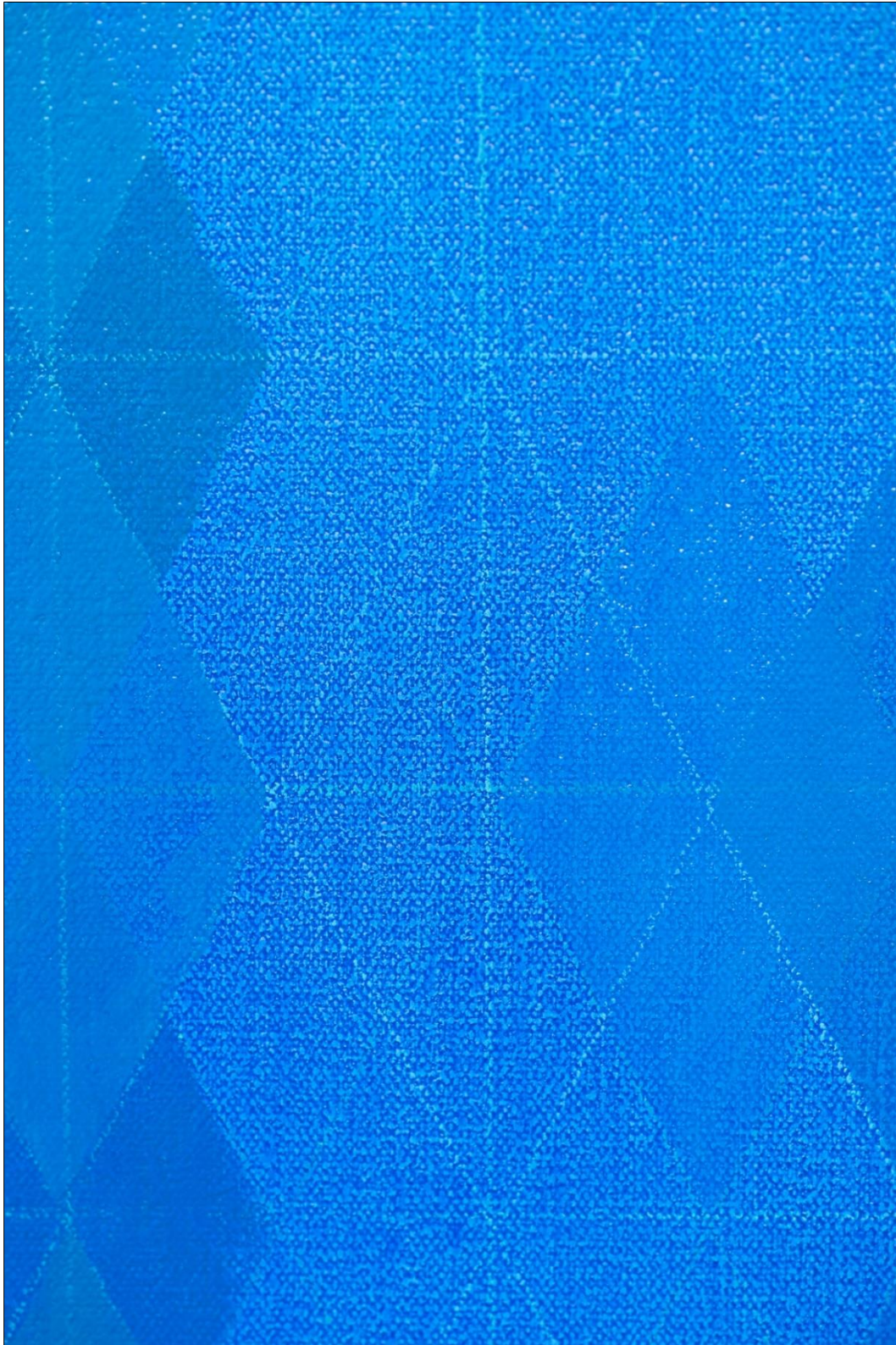


Figure 37: A detail of the line drawing of *Chasing the light #7*, 2023.
©Michael Love 2023

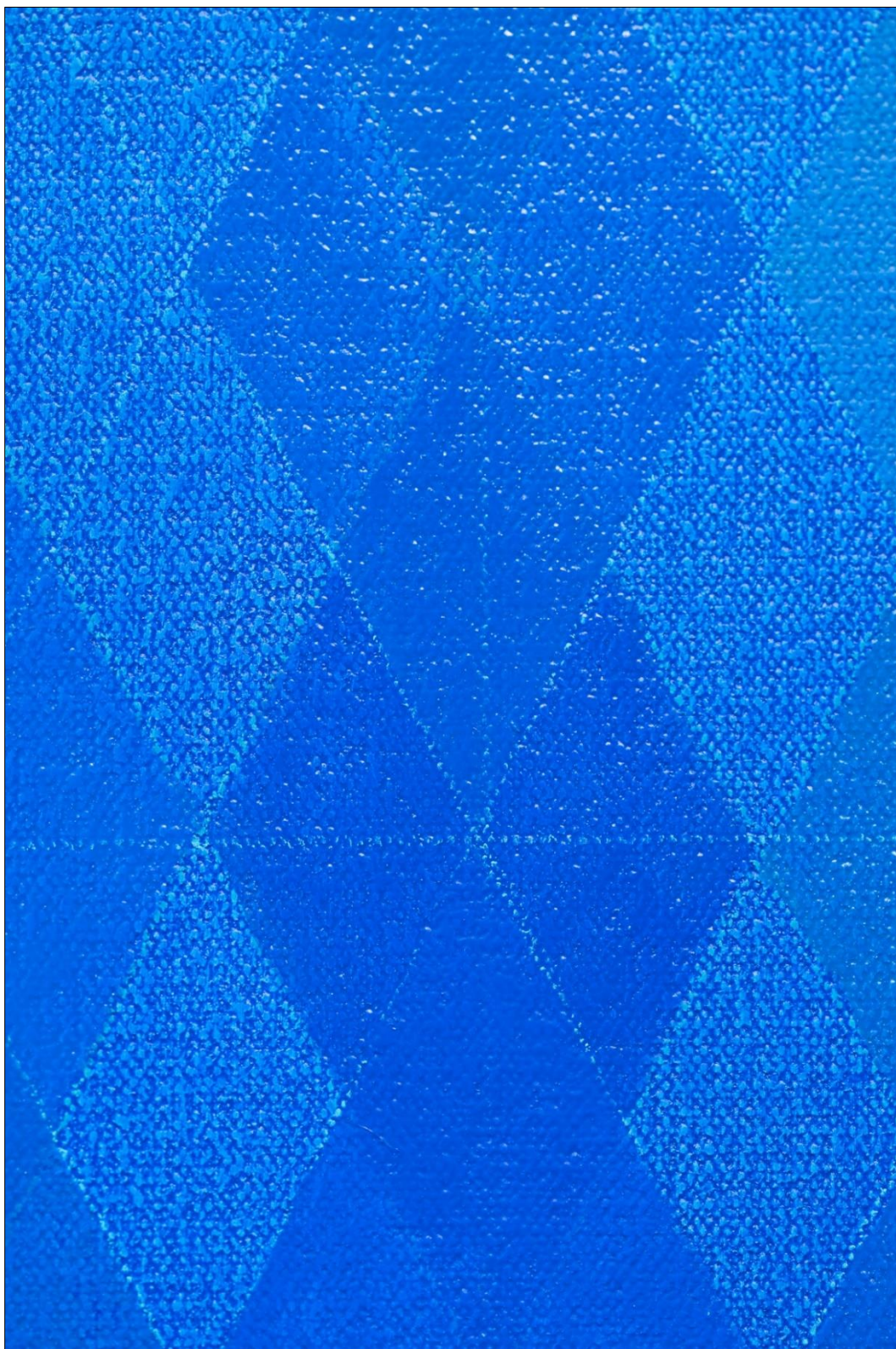


Figure 38: A close-up detail of the materiality of *Chasing the light #7*, 2023.
©Michael Love 2023

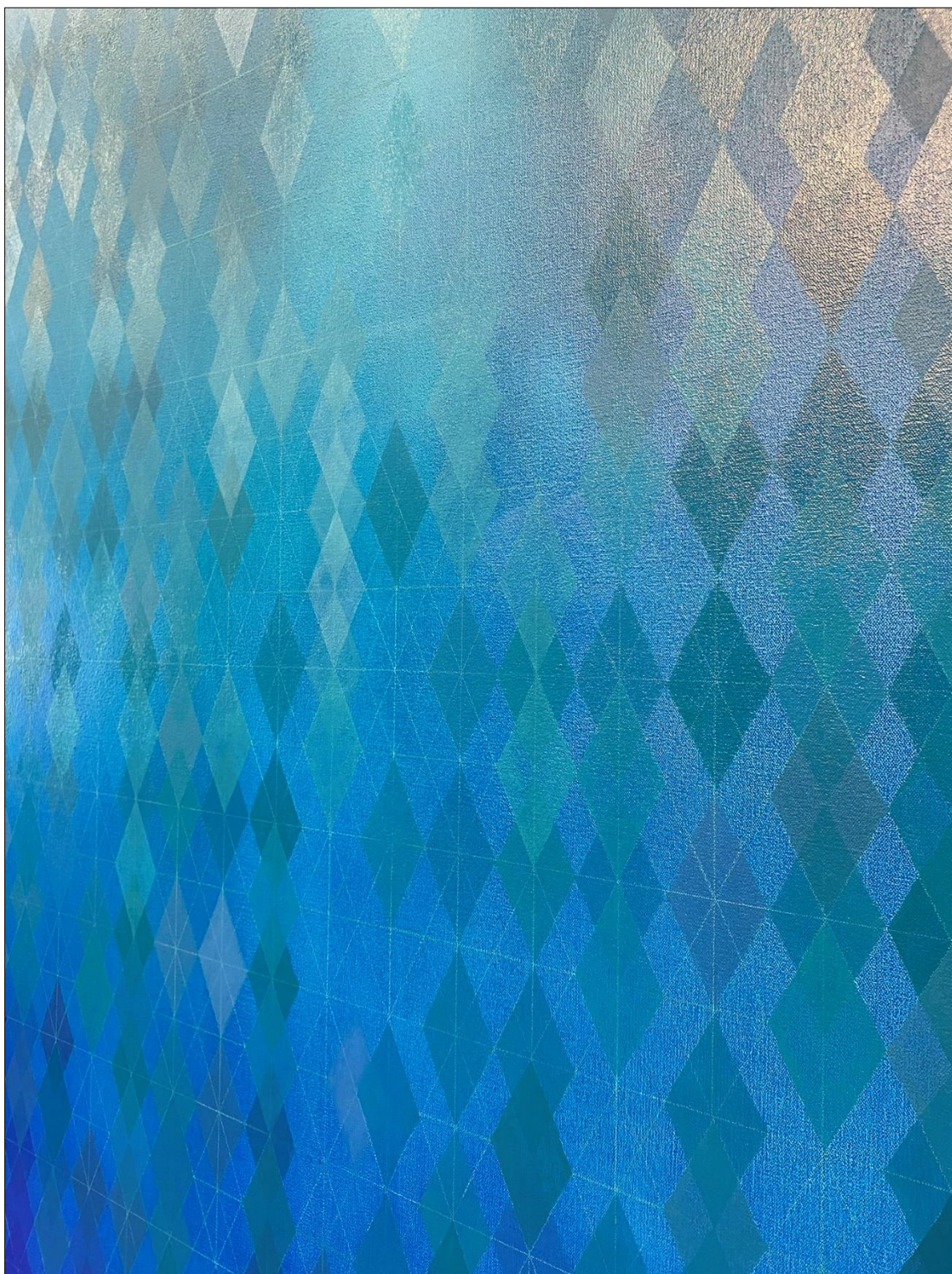


Figure 39: Angled view of *Chasing the light #7*, 2023.
This image showcases the glossy and matte finishes of the painting in detail, as well as the variation in color that becomes apparent when viewed up close.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has explored the relationship between painting and embodied experiences through a phenomenological approach. By incorporating light as a material, the focus of this research was to understand how painterly practices can elicit embodied experiences that lead to a greater understanding of space, both mental and physical. The four distinct projects discussed in this thesis demonstrated the impact of materiality and perception in creating immersive experiences that shift the viewer's haptic, retinal, temperature, and atmospheric perception. The central theme of this thesis is to promote self-reflection and awareness through the creation of a calming and contemplative space. My work aims to provide a respite from the fast-paced and visually saturated world, and to offer a pause, a moment of stillness, and perhaps a mental check for the viewer. The approach to my practice is atemporal, a culmination of many different styles and influences, all of which have shifted in a focus on light and its physical, and optical impact on the self, and its potential conversation with painting. My site-adjusted installations offer a unique opportunity for the viewer to become more aware of the conditions of the space and their relationship to it, aligning with Robert Irwin's statement that "it has the potential to make you more aware." (Irwin, *Circumstances*, 181) By providing an immersive experience that promotes self-reflection and awareness, my work aims to create a sense of silence and a contemplative object for the viewer.

Appendix #1: The conditions of ECU + The context of viewing.

Light as a condition

In this appendix, I will delve into the viewing context at Emily Carr University of Art + Design (ECU), where I conducted my MFA research, and examine the influence of computerized lighting conditions on the outcome of my thesis. This shift towards viewing light as a material rather than just a means of illumination has been a significant change in the thesis research and painting production.⁴⁸

Early in my MFA program, I shifted my focus to examine the campus and the specificity of viewing conditions. This was driven by the realization that the lighting conditions in the Grad Gallery were suboptimal for displaying my paintings. The first installation I presented for critique starting the thesis research process was presented as a wall tableau and included a large-scale painting, six painting studies, as well as painted objects (Fig 29 and 30). After hours trying to adjust the tableau, I struggled to bring it to life. The Grad Gallery lighting worsened this condition by flattening the installation even more.

⁴⁸ I defined light as a physical condition that is characterized by the presence of electromagnetic radiation within a specific range of the electromagnetic spectrum, the visible light spectrum. This encompasses various forms of light, including sunlight, artificial light, or other forms that are visible to the human eye. Light plays a crucial role in perception and has various properties, such as color, brightness, and intensity, that can impact the way it is experienced and perceived by the observer.

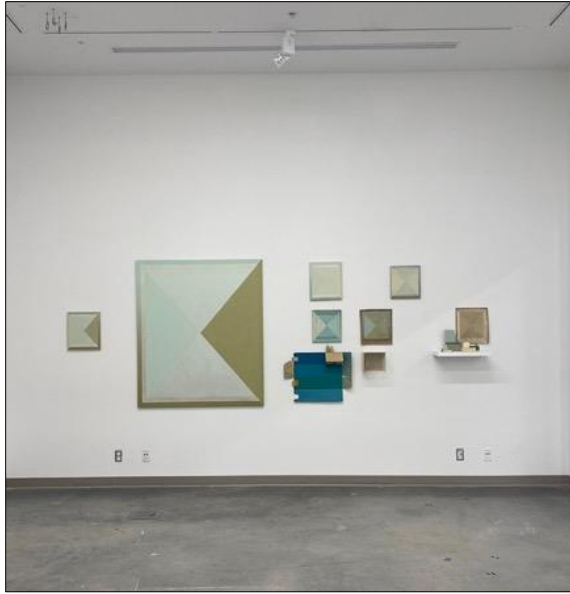


Figure 40: Marion Landry, *Gems*.
A wall-tableau installed on the west side of the Grad Gallery lit by ceiling LED light strips. The hallway lighting is also visible, as it seeps through the archway of the gallery, creating a triangle of brightness on the right side of the installation.



Figure 41: Marion Landry, *Gems*.
Lit using the track lighting with a combination of spot and flood lights.



Figure 42: Hues cast by the track lighting in the Grad Gallery.
On the right side a spotlight casts a pink hue, while the left side is lit by a floodlight that casts a green hue.

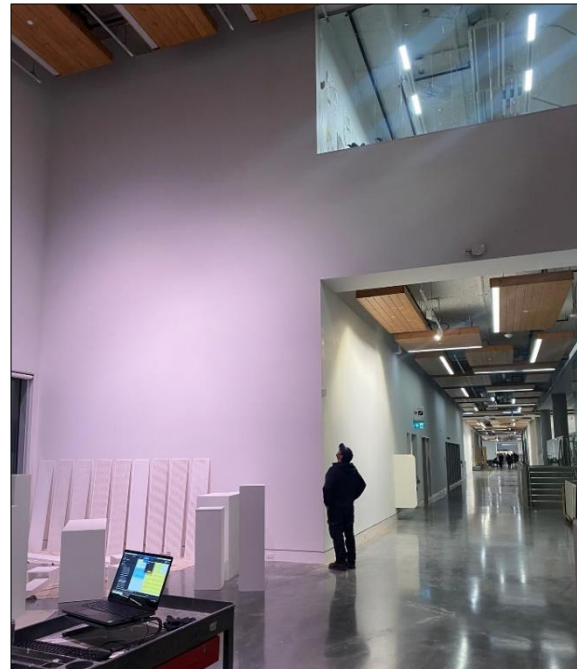


Figure 43: The Sculpture Gallery of the MOEC.
This photo highlights the difference in lighting effect in the Sculpture Gallery of the MOEC. The spotlights on the right side are casting a pink hue and the flood light on the left side wall in the hallway are casting a green hue.

Campus as a condition

As I began to observe the different qualities of light throughout the campus, I became increasingly aware of the complexity of the lighting system. Instead of focusing on its limitations, I became precise in my desire to take advantage of the qualities it can offer.⁴⁹

The conditions of the Grad Gallery

The Grad Gallery is a space designated for MFA students, divided into two parts by two pivotal walls, with the East side being narrow and rectangular and the West side being larger and nearly square. The gallery features two lighting options that can be controlled by on/off switches.⁵⁰ The first option is a series of three panel LED ceiling lights that provide even lighting and reduce contrast between light and shadow, casting a greenish tint to the gallery space.⁵¹ The second option is track lighting, which includes a selection of flood and spotlights that can be adjusted and rotated to direct the viewer's gaze.⁵² This option presents challenges as well. The spots emit a pink hue (as seen in Fig 31 and 32), while the flood lights give off a “neutral hue” that appears green when seen next to the pink (as seen in Fig 31 and 32). Furthermore, the archway leading to the hallway allows for additional brightness and shadow from the corridor lights to enter the Grad Gallery. When the ceiling lights are turned off and the space is lit solely with spots and flood lights, contrast between brightness and deep shadows can be used to enhance the artwork and create different moods. As architect and author Juhani Pallasmaa notes in *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, “Deep shadows and darkness are essential, because they dim the sharpness of vision, make depth and distance ambiguous, and invite unconscious peripheral vision and

⁴⁹ A more detailed explanation of this emphasis can be found on pages 10 and 11, where Bachelard's ideas and my approach to evaluating the lighting and spatial aspects of the campus are discussed.

⁵⁰ The on/off switches for the ceiling lights are only available in the Grad Gallery and Elbow Gallery.

⁵¹ It is important to note that when it comes to LED lights, options on the market include Warm white, Neutral white, and Cool white. LED lights are known to tend to cast a greenish hue. The Neutral white LED emits a 4000K on the Kelvin scale, placing it between the 2700K warm white that appears yellow, and the 5700K cool white that appears blue. As a result, the Neutral white LED emits a green tint, which can be explained by the fact that mixing yellow and blue creates green.

⁵² For those unfamiliar with lighting basics, here's a quick overview: Floodlights and spotlights are two common types of lighting used in various settings. Floodlights produce a short, wide light pattern and are often used to illuminate a wide area. Spotlights have a round light pattern that travels a longer distance in a narrower beam and are used to provide strong, direct light for highlighting objects.

tactile fantasy.”⁵³ (Pallasmaa, 46). This is the type of mood my painting required, a more relaxed atmosphere that can induce self-reflection.⁵⁴

The campus

The complexity of the lighting conditions only grows when exploring beyond the Grad Gallery. The lighting conditions in most of the exhibition spaces within the campus, including Elbow, Knee, Neighborhood, Zone 4, and Michael O’Brian Exhibition Commons (MOEC), are equipped with similar lighting options of ceiling lights and track lighting. However, the ceiling lights cannot be switched off as they are controlled by computer software, producing a constant flat greenish brightness that lacks depth and emotional qualities.⁵⁵ This unappealing lighting condition - although energy efficient and environmentally friendly due to the building's LEED Gold certification - can result in a flattening of the perception of artwork. The absence of human control or the possibility for artistic light intervention can contribute to a sense of alienation for those attuned to such conditions. In *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, Juhani Pallasmaa addresses the sense of alienation that is often associated with computerized and modern architecture. He argues that this sense of estrangement is a result of a suppression of the senses, and the dominance of the eye in design. He states that,

“The growing experiences of alienation, detachment, and solitude in the technological world today, for instance, may be related with a certain pathology of the senses. It is thought-provoking that this sense of estrangement and detachment is often evoked by the technologically most advanced settings, such as hospitals and airports. The dominance of the eye and the suppression of the other senses tends to push us into detachment, isolation, and exteriority. The art of the eye has certainly produced imposing and thought-provoking structures, but it has not facilitated human rootedness in the world. In fact, that the modernist idiom has not generally been able to penetrate the surface of popular taste and values seems to be due to its one-sided intellectual and visual emphasis; modernist design at large has housed the intellect and the eye, but it has

⁵³ Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, Wiley, Chichester, 2019

⁵⁴ This mood is also understood by William Seitz when he states that: “The eyes must accommodate to the painting as they do to a dimly lit room, after having been in sunlight or, conversely, as they accommodate to the transition from darkness to bright light. The eyes and the mind must be prepared gradually to approach the acuity of perception and feeling that was possible in the quiet of the studio, and must slowly follow the experiences of depth or encompassment, appearance or disappearance, unity or multiplicity for which the painter provided the conditions.” (Seitz,17)

⁵⁵ The maintenance of the campus is sub-contracted to a private company, and they are the gate keeper of the lighting software.

left the body and the other senses, as well as our memories, imagination and dreams, homeless.”
(Pallasmaa, 19)

This observation highlights the complex nature of modernist design such as that of the ECU campus, which prioritizes the intellect and the eye, but often leaves the body, other senses, memories, imagination, and dreams deprived - such was the case for me being in that environment.

Chasing the light

In my quest to understand the impact of the LED greenish tint on my mood, creation and perception of painting, I was led to a deeper awareness of the role of space and the relation it has to my painting. My focus shifted to considering not only the physical environment of the many galleries at ECU, but also the pictorial space within my paintings and the mental space required to thrive within this context. In his introduction to Gaston Bachelard's book *The Poetics of Space*, Mark Z. Danielewski highlights the importance of rediscovering the immense within the intimate and reclaiming a sense of inhabitation in physical space. He says:

“Amidst our culture of broadcast and bigness, Bachelard recommends that we rediscover the immense in the most intimate of things. In a world where Facebook and Twitter expose our most private thoughts to public view, and where so many places of work and habitation are featureless, climate-controlled and quarantined against surprise, Bachelard shows us ways of dwelling again in the flesh of space, of dreaming our homes as nests and shells, of reimagining hidden garden and caverns where we can delve back into a world of natality, newness and beginning. (Danielewski, xviii)

Appendix Conclusions

In today's technologically advanced world, personal privacy is frequently violated and the focus on having a strong online presence through social media is heavily emphasized. Spaces like the galleries found on the ECU campus can often feel bland and lack individuality and excitement. These galleries are designed to be multi-purpose and energy efficient, which often results in featureless and lighting-controlled environments. However, Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, provides a way for me to reconsider this computerized atmosphere and delve into a new world of beginnings that could support my growth during the thesis research. My art practice is informed by my personal experiences and embodied knowledge of

light and atmospheric phenomena in nature. Through abstraction, I aim to capture this embodied knowledge, which is physical, emotional, and cognitive, and rooted in my senses and experiences. This concept is particularly relevant to my exploration of the ECU campus, examination of the intricacies of light, weather complexities, and installations that responded to the specificity of the site.

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