

**PAINTING'S WRONGFUL DEATH:
THE REVIVALIST PRACTICES OF GLENN BROWN AND
GERHARD RICHTER**

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This thesis entitled *Painting's Wrongful Death: The revivalist practices of Glenn Brown and Gerhard Richter* has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made within the research paper itself.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers how the Twentieth Century ‘death of painting’ debate brought about a series of challenges and changes to painting that have ironically ensured its survival. This is illustrated in the practice of artists Gerhard Richter and Glenn Brown, whose investigations into painting’s failures and limitations have paradoxically resulted in their works demonstrating the continued relevance and success of the medium. Specifically, this discussion analyses Richter’s *Annunciation After Titian* (1973) series and Brown’s series of works that appropriate Frank Auerbach paintings (1998 - 2000). These works illustrate the ways in which painting has developed in the last half of the Twentieth Century as a result of the ‘death of painting’ debate. The primary developments identified are that painting now draws from and references many other media; painting now embraces photography (instead of seeing it as a threat); the use of appropriation in painting is now seen as expansive rather than as representing depletion; there has been a return to romanticism and pleasure in painting; and women are now included in the broader discussion of painting. In considering the ‘death of painting’ debate, as well as the changes painting has experienced as a result of it, the primary point of departure is Yve-Alain Bois’ pivotal essay ‘Painting: The Task of Mourning’ (1986) and his analysis of Hubert Damisch’s ‘theory of games’. The evolution of the ‘death of painting’ debate is also outlined via the writings of Douglas Crimp, Arthur C. Danto, Douglas Fogle, Michael Fried, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. This thesis also considers how the debate has impacted contemporary painters’ practices, as well as how my own practice owes a debt not only to the response of artists like Brown and Richter, but also to the debate itself.

INTRODUCTION

For decades now critics and artists have discussed the ‘death of painting’. ‘...at times the heralding of these deaths seems downright apocalyptic (“Really, this is the end...seriously”)’ (Fogle 2001, 14). However, the endurance of painting as a medium and its recent resurgence in popularity has necessitated a re-evaluation of arguments about the ‘death of painting’. We are now beginning to see painters turn away from demonstrating the absolute ‘death’ of painting, towards less nihilistic investigations into the ‘failures’ or ‘limitations’ of painting that acknowledge its continued relevance and importance.

This research paper considers how artists Glenn Brown and Gerhard Richter initially started painting about the ‘failures’ and ‘limitations’ of their medium, yet their investigations have resulted in their works negating the very thing they set out to discuss. That is, they address the failure of painting but in successfully doing so demonstrate its enduring relevance and success. I am exploring how Brown and Richter paint with the issue of the medium’s ‘failure’ and ‘limitations’ as their subject, yet paradoxically make works that demonstrate painting’s legitimacy. The legitimacy and success of both Brown’s and Richter’s work, is evidenced by their practices being judged as relevant and important in the critical arena and is achieved by embracing a number of changes brought about by the ‘death of painting’ debate.

There are many reasons why painting experienced a crisis as a medium during the Twentieth Century and why the ‘death of painting’ debate was initiated. In *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* (1999), Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe identifies Duchamp as precipitating the initial and most significant early twentieth century crisis for painting, through his ‘abolition of the retinal in the interests of a very old-fashioned distinction between form and content’ (Gilbert-Rolfe 1999, 19-20). Gilbert-Rolfe also adds that Russian artists contributed to that initial debate with their claims that ‘easel painting and the concept of originality associated with it [...] were hopelessly bourgeois’, and that pop and conceptual artists reiterating ideas

of the 'Duchampian attack on the retinal and the grounds of the forms *embourgeoisement*' were the other contributing factors to painting's crisis (Gilbert-Rolfe 1999, 19-20). Douglas Crimp argues that Modernism, provoked the scaling down of painting, causing artists to move further away from photography and work towards some kind of a conclusion for the medium (Crimp 1981, 92). The 'death of painting' has been written about extensively by theorists both at the time of the emergence of the debate and in retrospect. Among the most important of these writings are Hegel's 'Lectures on Aesthetics' (delivered 1823-29); Michael Fried's essay *Art and Objecthood* (1965); Douglas Crimp's essay 'End of Painting' (1981); Yve-Alain Bois' essay 'Painting: the task of mourning' (1986); Arthur C. Danto's *State of the Art* (1987) and *After the End of Art* (1997); Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe's *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* (1999) and Douglas Fogle's essay 'The Trouble with Painting' (2001). These theorists have offered different hypotheses on painting's 'death' as seen in the art and literature around them and are pivotal to understanding the crisis as it unfolded.

Since its recent perceived return or resuscitation, painting has undergone a significant re-evaluation. In his 1993 book *The Exile's Return: toward a redefinition of painting for the Post-Modern era*, Thomas McEvelley proposes that in light of what he describes as the mass disengagement with painting, painting's return (from 'exile') brought with it a new kind of self-awareness and interest in its own limitations.

For the exile itself could not be disregarded; it became a major part of painting's meaning for a new generation of artists...As if to demonstrate its awareness of its past sins, it returned from exile with a self-critical manner (McEvelley 1994, 6-7).

A number of contemporary artists demonstrate this new-found self-reflexivity and critical nature and of these I am primarily interested in Brown and Richter. Seventy-three year old German artist Richter has made work about the legitimacy of painting for many years, rigorously debating its abilities and failures throughout his long career. Born in Dresden in 1932, he has been painting for over four decades and is one of contemporary painting's most

respected figures (Storr 2003, 32). His oeuvre includes both realist and abstract series, ranging from very blank monochromatic works to those based on photographs and images from newspapers and magazines. His photo-based works are what he is most well known for. In these he imitates the photographic source image, including blurs, smudges and other photographic attributes. While his paintings have led to much critical success, Richter's relationship with the medium creates a paradox for his practice. He has built a career upon 'testing the medium's limits yet remaining one of its most loyal adherents' (Holert 2002, 98). In discussing Richter's work I primarily reference writers Benjamin Buchloh, Michael Fried, Michael Kimmelman, David Reed and Robert Storr.

Thirty-eight year old British painter Glenn Brown uses appropriation and photorealism to challenge the position of contemporary painting. Writers Stephen Hepworth, Terry R. Myers, Paulo Lauffente and Frederic Paul have all written about Brown's practice in the past decade. He has been painting and exhibiting professionally for approximately ten years, graduating from London art school Goldsmiths College in 1992. Brown appropriates well-known works from art books and magazines and immaculately reproduces them as paintings. In making these reproductions he goes so far as to eliminate all traces of his own workmanship by meticulously simulating the original work's brushstrokes, all the while maintaining a photographic flat surface. Brown addresses the question of the 'failure of painting' by suggesting the 'failure' he recognises means that all that remains for a painter to do is to paint someone else's painting, not even allowing one's own brushstrokes to prevail. However, by removing himself so entirely from the process he makes a powerful statement about the possibilities left for the medium he is simultaneously abandoning and embracing. In discussing Brown's work, Max Hetzler states that,

Everything is linked together to confuse the issue of authorship by showing a deliberate appropriation of well-known art works by an artist who, nevertheless, has never painted like anyone else, although he shows that he would have liked to. He presents this "would-have-liked-to" as a concept that takes failure for granted: an artist must have a sense of humour – a distance from oneself – and be strong enough to push the existence of

failure to the front line of his work (Hetzler 2000, 110).

In order to look at this idea of the ‘failure of painting’ I will use as examples Richter’s series of works *Annunciation after Titian* (1973), which are painted reproductions of Titian’s *Annunciation* (approximately 1530), along with Brown’s series of painted reproductions of Frank Auerbach paintings which include *The Marquess of Breadalbane* (2000) and *The Day the World Turned Auerbach* (2000). In these works, Richter and Brown adopt different positions in relation to painting’s history, yet arrive at similar outcomes as to painting’s future. In Brown’s works, he sets out with the task of revealing painting’s bankruptcy whereas Richter arrives at this point after starting from a more reverential place. Julien Stallabrass describes Brown’s reproductions of Auerbach paintings as ‘specifically an attack on painterly touch as a vehicle of personal expression’, and suggests that ‘in no way are these works homage to the work of the older master, who Brown describes as a third rate Van Gogh’ (Stallabrass 1999, 57). Brown’s attack on what he sees as the Modernist hangover of ‘daft, culturally sanctioned gesturalism’ provides a contrast to Richter’s motivations for painting his Titian reproductions (Morgan in Stallabrass 1999, 57). These paintings began because Richter admired Titian’s original work and wanted a copy for himself. However, in the act of reproducing the work he came to the conclusion that it was impossible to paint with that kind of sincerity and simplicity any more. He went on to confirm and illustrate this conclusion in a further four paintings of the same image (Storr 2003, 104).

But then my copy went wrong, and the pictures that finally emerged went to show that it just can’t be done any more, not even by way of a copy. All I could do was break the whole thing down to show that it’s no longer possible (Richter in Storr 2003, 226).

Separated by a number of decades, Brown’s and Richter’s practices illustrate the changed nature of the ‘death of painting’ debate. This is relevant because there has been much discussion of the debate historically, but little in relation to the contemporary artists of today

and none comparing relative new-comer Brown's practice with the more established Richter. Furthermore, it is important to collate contemporary theorists' views about the current situation that painting is in, in order to determine how it stands now in relation to the criticisms levelled at it in the past.

Paradoxically, both Brown's and Richter's works are grounded in ideas about the 'death' or 'failure' of painting however their works ultimately counter these assumptions and ideas. 'Painting is dead, killed by video and photography, the artist [Richter] intimates – and then proceeds to paint magnificently to prove the point' (Fischer 2002, 1). Brown's and Richter's works are investigations grounded in the argument that suggests that painting could be irrelevant. However, in making works about this they have ultimately produced a body of work that contradicts this.

“It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident any more,” Adorno wrote in 1969, “not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist...In many ways, expansion appears as contraction.” Today, thirty-plus years later, might this statement circle back as to include its own implicit assumption about “the end of art”? In other words, might “the end of art” be one more thing about art that is not “self-evident any more”? (Foster 2002, 123).

In the same way that “expansion appeared to be contraction” in 1969, in relation to the 'failure' or 'death' of painting, could contraction have since meant expansion? I propose that discussions about the failures and limitations of painting have been fuel for a generation of painters, who have disproved painting's negation by directly addressing the failure of their medium.

Roland Barthes stated that, “To be modern is to know *that which is not possible any more*” (Barthes in Bois 1986, 33). By making paintings about the failures and limitations of painting, I see Brown's and Richter's work to be grounded in this idea. I am exploring how they have taken on the threats levelled at painting and how this has resulted in expanded possibilities for the medium. This research paper considers how Brown and Richter have done this by

analysing their work and identifying the specific tools that they have used to ensure their paintings are successful and relevant. I will be analysing and comparing these two artists' approaches to their medium, and illustrating how they make reproductions from painting's history to make a case for painting's future. They have been able to achieve this paradox in a number of ways that illustrate the changed nature of painting brought about by the 'death of painting' debate.

Firstly, by embracing all the other media that had bombarded and taken over painting, these other media, far from being threats, became tools that artists could use to make new and relevant paintings. By embracing appropriation (which was initially used to illustrate that there was nothing left to do but imitate something already made), appropriation too went from being a threat to painting to being another tool that painters could use to make new and innovative works. By embracing photography (the medium that was said to mean the end for painting) it went from being the major threat to painting's existence, to being a tool for painters who make important and contemporary work based on photography. Finally, by re-acquainting itself with the pre-Modernist attributes of romanticism and romantic sentimentality, painting was able to draw from its previously unfashionable past to ensure its future.

This line of investigation has developed because as a painter my practice comes after the 'death of painting' debate and sits within the current painting revival. Therefore it is important for me to understand the crisis that painting has so recently gone through and to recognise the resulting possibilities and limitations of the medium that I have chosen to work with. Brown and Richter both reference painting's recent history and explore the options left for the medium, and as a painter working in the post-'death of painting' era it is vital to have an understanding of this history.

This thesis is built on Hubert Damisch's 'theory of games' and Roland Barthes' statement

that “To be modern is to know *that which is not possible any more*” (Barthes in Bois 1986, 33). The subsequent discussion takes the form of a review of the literature on the ‘death of painting’ debate, a visual analysis of the specific works by Brown and Richter and a discussion of the changes that painting has undergone as demonstrated through their work. I will conclude with an account of how my own painting owes a debt to Richter and Brown (as well as to the debate itself) and a speculative discussion around what the perceived changes mean for the future painting. Finally, a more thorough description of my studio project is outlined in the Appendix along with reproductions of the body of work I have made throughout my candidature.

To facilitate this discussion, Chapter One will outline how the ‘death of painting’ argument has played out in both practice and in theory. This chapter will discuss the work of important artists in the forming of the debate including Edouard Manet, Marcel Duchamp, Kasimir Malevich and Alexander Rodchenko. Additionally it will identify a number of theorists as the central figures of the debate, and will discuss their theories on the ‘death of painting’. In discussing the history of the ‘death of painting’ debate Yve-Alain Bois’ ‘Painting: The Task of Mourning’ is a primary point of reference and pivotal in outlining the nature of the changes that painting has undergone, within and after the debate.

Referencing theorists such as Benjamin Buchloh, Michael Fried, Michael Kimmelman, David Reed and Robert Storr, Chapter Two will outline Richter’s and Brown’s practices, describing their works in detail and addressing their ideas about their medium. This chapter also introduces the specific works by Richter and Brown that I am focusing on – Richter’s *Annunciation after Titian* series and Brown’s reproductions of Frank Auerbach paintings.

Chapter Three will use Richter’s and Brown’s work, along with a number of other key artists’ works, to describe what I see to be the changed nature of painting as a result of the previously outlined ‘death of painting’ debate. Through the analysis of Brown’s and Richter’s works, I

will identify five developments in painting that can be traced to the 'death of painting' debate. Of the recent discussions of painting's contemporary state, Morgan Falconer's *Art Monthly* essay 'The Undead' (2003) is of particular interest. Also of importance is the *Artforum* article 'The Mourning After' (2003), in which a group of respected theorists (many of whom were writing about the 'death of painting' at the time of its initial demise) were brought together to discuss the current state of painting. This chapter will also include a discussion about my own practice in terms of how it has benefited from the 'death of painting' debate and the debt it owes Brown and Richter.

CHAPTER I. THE 'DEATH OF PAINTING' ARGUMENT IN LITERATURE AND PRACTICE

To understand the issues both Glenn Brown and Gerhard Richter are referencing in their work, it is important to have an understanding of the 'end of painting' debate as it has been played out in art practice and literature. While many theorists and artists wrote and made work about the 'death of painting' there were a number of key people whose ideas were influential at the time. Artists Edouard Manet, Marcel Duchamp, Kasimir Malevich and Alexander Rodchenko significantly contributed to the debate surrounding painting's 'death'. Theorists Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Michael Fried, Douglas Crimp, Yve-Alain Bois, Arthur C Danto, Jeremy Gilbert-Rofle and Douglas Fogle have all made important contributions in their responses to the work made by the artists and in considering the validity of the 'death of painting' claims.

Both critics and painters have entertained the idea of the 'death of painting' since the early nineteenth century, yet for every hailing of its death comes a subsequent declaration of resurrection (Fogle 2001, 14). This chapter discusses the major events in the timeline of this argument and identifies reasons why painting has been declared dead so often. It is important to note that declarations of the 'end of painting' did not literally suppose that painting would cease to exist, but rather that it would cease to be relevant and lose any sense of forward movement, which is at the core of being contemporary and relevant according to conceptions of the avant-garde.

In Berlin in the 1820s, Hegel delivered a series of lectures on aesthetics and the recent historical and contemporary status of the arts (Karelis 1979, 58). He declared that art was unquestionably influenced by states of history and the time in which it was made. He was among the first to identify separate styles of art in relation to the differing relationships between idea and form. Hegel also proposed that art was an expression of the spirit and the

soul, both of the individual artist and of the culture from which they came (Karelis, 1979 xxvii). Hegel hypothesised that the role of art was in a state of great change and was the first to put forward the idea that art would come to an end – not that people would stop making art, but that its role in the development of the spirit would be fulfilled’ or taken up by other disciplines such as religion and philosophy (Gaiger 2002, 136). This proved to be somewhat prophetic, as over a century later with Modernism the conceptual and the philosophical appeared to overtake the aesthetic.

It is only in the classical period that art attains a perfect correspondence of form and content; the postclassical or romantic era is marked by new forms of knowledge which can no longer adequately be articulated in sensuous form (Gaiger 2002, 136).

When Hegel proposed this, it was the first time the idea of art, and in particular painting, coming to the end of its usefulness was suggested. The kind of ‘end’ that Hegel was referring to centred around painting coming to an end as the dominant medium of emotional and spiritual expression. However, the end he discussed was not driven by art he was seeing made, rather it lay more in the realm of hypothesis.

According to Michael Fried, the first painter whose work appeared to suggest that painting might eventually have to come to an end was the nineteenth century painter Edouard Manet (Fried 1965, 260). Fried argues that Manet was the first to be acutely aware of his relation to, and often alienation from, the reality he was depicting. This concept of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity later went on to become one of the defining features of Modernism, hence Manet is generally referred to as the ‘first Modernist’ (Fried 1965, 260). His awareness of his own engagement with the paintings he made raised a number of problems that Fried suggests soon became part of the subject of his works (Fried 1965, 261). This self-awareness meant that he was ‘forced to paint not merely his world but his problematic relation to it’ (Fried 1965, 261). Manet’s self-consciousness is initially seen in the expressions and configurations of people he depicts (Fried cites as an example the ‘distancing calm stare’ of Victorine

Meurent in *Olympia* 1863 [Figure1]) (Fried, 1965 261). Further to this, his self-conscious acknowledgment of the nature of the art-object he was making is seen by Fried to be illustrated in the apparent ‘flatness’ of the painting style he used.

Manet emphasises the flatness of the picture surface by eschewing modelling and (as in *Dejeuner*) refusing to depict depth convincingly, calls attention to the limits of the canvas by truncating extended forms by the framing edge, and underscores the rectangular shape of the picture support by aligning with it, more or less conspicuously, various elements within the painting (Fried 1965, 261).

By being the first to abandon strict pictorial realism, albeit in a subtle way, Manet was the first to paint with the *act of painting* as his subject. In Manet’s lifetime, the precursors to mass-production photography (the daguerreotype and the calotype) were being developed. By the time he died in 1883 the world was on the cusp of easily producible and reproducible photographs, developments that brought with them the most significant crisis painting would ever face (Gauss & Grundberg 1987, 15).

The invention of photography had a tremendous impact on painting and the whole late nineteenth and twentieth century ‘end of painting’ crisis is widely believed to be based in this scientific development (Gilbert-Rolfe 1999, 19). Painting’s task before photography was representation – capturing images from nature for documentation and decoration. However, with the invention of photography, painting was liberated from its documentary role, as now the task of capturing ‘visual truth’ could be done more quickly and cheaply by photography. As Yve-Alain Bois states, ‘Challenged by the mechanical apparatus of photography, and by the mass-produced, painting had to redefine its status, to reclaim a specific domain’ (Bois 1986, 31).

A seminal text in the end of painting debate, in which photography’s attack on painting is reiterated, came amidst the 1980s explosion of what was hailed to be the latest ‘return to painting’, neo-expressionism (Dempsey 2002, 276). In ‘Painting: The Task of Mourning’,

Yve-Alain Bois looks back on the troubled history of painting and what he sees as the major triggers of the early stages of the 'death of painting' debate. The neo-expressionist return to all things outdated and previously discarded¹, provoked the publication of Bois' paper in the exhibition catalogue *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture* in 1986 and it has been widely reproduced since. In it Bois attempts to identify what he sees to be the reasons for the 'beginning of the end' of painting (Bois 1986, 30).

Bois first identifies the crisis he is referring to. He sees industrialisation and the changes it provoked (as seen in the writings of critics such as Walter Benjamin) as the first major blow to painting. Here, he cites Paul Delaroche's famous statement upon seeing the photo daguerreotype 'from today painting is dead' (Bois 1986, 31). Bois sees that painting's role in society was under threat with the arrival of photography and mass-production. Before photography and mass-production, painting held a privileged place in society because its role was an essential one. However, with it now not having a definite and important role – that of recording information – it was seen to be in danger of becoming an object of novelty and commodity (Bois 1986, 33).

Even at the outset, industrialisation meant much more for painting than the invention of photography and the incorporation of the mechanical into the artist's process through the readymade tube of paint. It also meant a threat of the collapse of art's special status into a fetish or commodity (Bois 1986, 33).

Essentially this fear was well-founded, as artwork now exists in society as an object and a commodity that's value is determined by other disparate factors such as trends and fashions, not by necessity. Where painting's position in society used to be a privileged one, it now exists as an object of novelty and commodity, the value of which is determined by subjective factors (Bois 1986, 33).

¹, Amy Dempsey described the explosion of neo-expressionism, which embraced the so recently declared dead medium of painting as flaunting 'all that had been discredited - figuration, subjectivity, overt emotion, autobiography, memory, psychology, symbolism, sexuality, literature and narrative' (Dempsey 2002, 276).

Value in the art world is determined by the “psychological” mechanisms that are at the core of any monopoly system: rarity, authenticity, uniqueness, and the law of supply and demand. In other words, art objects are absolute fetishes without a use value but also without an exchange value, fulfilling absolutely the collector’s fantasy of a purely symbolic or ideal value, a supplement to his soul (Bois 1986, 35).

Amidst fears of photography, mass-production and critics predicting painting’s demise, Bois identifies a number of artists who attempted to prove or disprove the claims that painting was coming to an end. In 1917, Marcel Duchamp was making work with the Dadaists and exhibited the first incarnation of the ‘readymade’. His mass-manufactured items such as his famous urinal *Fountain* (1917) (Figure 2) were selected and displayed not based on ‘taste’ but ‘based on a reaction of visual indifference’ (Dempsey 2002, 118). Bois argues that Duchamp’s readymades were a defining moment in the ‘end of painting’ debate because they were among the first works by an artist to directly attack and subsequently change the face of painting (Bois 1986, 35). Readymades challenged painting by declaring that it could be something other than a painted canvas. This led the way to debunking the myth of the ‘genius’ painter and attempting to make works that were conceptual before they were aesthetic. As John Moffit says in his 2003 book *Alchemist of the Avant-Garde: the case of Marcel Duchamp*,

Duchamp’s express goal is to overcome ‘taste’ and thereby to distance himself from the Cult of the Genius expressed in painterly aesthetics; instead, he wishes to again make art the expression of intellect (Moffitt 2003, 226).

Gilbert-Rolfe describes how the invention of the readymade was a threat to painting because if art was no longer primarily about the ‘retinal’ (the aesthetic) and was now about the intellectual (the conceptual), where would that leave painting – a medium historically firmly rooted in the retinal? (Gilbert-Rolfe 1999, 20). Duchamp’s urinal undeniably signalled the death of one way of thinking about art and the birth of another. Joseph Kosuth also sees this change to be a shift away from the strictly visual to the intellectual.

According to the American Conceptualist Joseph Kosuth, Duchamp's readymades 'changed the nature of art from a question of morphology to a question of function. This change from "appearance" to "conception" – was the beginning of "modern" art and the beginning of "conceptual" art (Hopkins 2002, 258).

Bois also identifies the birth of the ready-made as the both the beginning of Modernism and the 'beginning of the end' for painting, or what he calls the beginning of the period of 'official mourning' (Bois 1986, 30). In this period of mourning, he argues it became the role of abstract painting to keep reducing painting to a kind of end, or 'the pure *parousia* of its own essence, to tell the final truth and thereby terminate its course' (Bois 1986, 30). This reduction was a time of both positive feverish production and underlying nihilism.

[...] it is the question about the (still) possibility of painting that is at the beginning of the end, and it is this beginning of the end that has been our history, namely, what we are accustomed to name *modernism* (Bois 1986, 30).

With Modernism came a great number of artists who were all claiming to be painting towards some kind of conclusion – and therefore to be making, as Douglas Crimp argues, the 'last paintings that anyone could ever make' (Crimp 1981, 92). Among these were Piet Mondrian, Alexander Rodchenko, Ad Reinhardt and Kasimir Malevich, who were all making work with this sense of impending finality.

In 1921 Rodchenko exhibited a series of three monochrome paintings, one red, one blue and one yellow, claiming that through the process of negation this was all that was left for painting (Bois, 1986 37). He described this gesture as painting's logical conclusion. 'I affirmed: It's all over. Basic colours. Every plane is a plane, and there is to be no more representation' (Rodchenko in Bois 1986, 37). Bois cites Mondrian as another artist who was playing a similar game of negation around the same time.

Mondrian was involved in the *De Stijl* movement in the Netherlands and he and his contemporaries were committed to creating a new style of painting that sought to displace the medium from its history.

They were dedicated to the absolute devaluation of tradition...the exposure of the whole swindle of lyricism and sentiment. The means to do this was reduction – the purification of art to its basics (form, colour and line) (Dempsey 2002, 122).

In an overview of styles and movements in the twentieth-century, Ann Dempsey writes that Malevich was also embracing abstraction in the form of harsh angles and geometric designs in order to release art, and in particular painting, from the realms of the political or the social (and subsequently emotional), giving it over to a kind of base reaction of ‘feeling’ and ‘sensation’ (Dempsey 2002, 103). Malevich himself describes moving away from painting’s history as an attempt to liberate painting from its historical roles and expectations. ‘In 1913, trying desperately to liberate art from the ballast of the representational world, I sought refuge in the form of the square’ (Malevich in Dempsey 2002, 103). This statement by Malevich further illustrates the prevailing need at the time (the beginning of Modernism) for negation in painting (the idea of moving away from representational works and reducing painting to its most base level).

Bois sees these gestures by Malevich and other Modernist to be significant, because they demonstrated that painting could only have a future after the emergence of industrialisation, photography, mass-production and Duchamp’s readymade, if it ‘claimed its end’ (Bois, 1986 37). This proved to be true in the immediate decades after the emergence of the ‘death of painting’ argument, as artists working through to ‘the end’ were given an infinitely expanded and more pressing reason to paint. That is, in the instance of Modernism, the ‘death of painting’ debate provoked a frenzy of activity that appeared to have invigorated the medium, thus confidently disproving cries of ‘the end’. In contrast to this, the 1980s re-emergence of the ‘death of painting’ debate is a far more contentious issue. At no time was painting’s death

more widely heralded than in the 1980s, when critics including Douglas Crimp, Arthur C. Danto, Thierry De Duve, Thomas Lawson and Peter Osborne all produced pivotal essays on painting's perceived decline.

In his 1981 essay 'The End of Painting' Crimp provocatively declared that painting had finally played out its usefulness. Crimp discusses painter Daniel Buren's work and likens Buren's motives and attitudes towards painting to Richter's famous declaration that painting is 'pure idiocy' (Crimp 1981, 88). Buren spent a great deal of time in the sixties making stripe paintings using 8.7 centimetre-wide vertical stripes, in varying colours, as a means of announcing that the end had arrived (Figure 3) (Crimp 1981, 103). Crimp sees these works, and works by others such as Ryman, as evidence of painting's death. He states that the moment that these kind of works are regarded as 'paintings', it will represent painting having finally reached its end.

[...] when his stripes are seen as painting, painting will be understood as the "pure idiocy" that it is. At the moment when Buren's work becomes visible, the code of painting will have been abolished and Buren's repetitions can stop: the end of painting will have finally been acknowledged (Crimp 1981, 105).

Also writing at this time was theorist and philosopher Arthur C. Danto. In his 1997 book *After the End of Art*, Danto discusses changes made since he published *The State of the Art* in 1989, which included his seminal essay 'Approaching the End of Art' (1987), an essay which discussed the position of art, and specifically painting, during and after Modernism. Danto sees the whole of twentieth century art as the 'collective quest for the essence and nature of art' (Danto 1987, 204). This he says, accounts for the feverish artistic progressions made after Duchamp's invention of the readymade and the birth of Modernism, in the form of numerous movements and stylistic divergences. However, Danto writes that in the 1970s this all came to an end. After the energetic debates of the first two-thirds of the century, and countless

aggressive claims and counter-claims that there was only 'one way to make art now', this all gave way to what Danto identifies as a sort of pluralism.

The abstractionist of the 1970s was prepared to allow realism, the minimalist resigned to allow decoration, the hard-edgers tolerated soft-edgers, the seekers after absolute flatness saw all about them the exploiters of illusionary space – and if one wanted, one could paint the flaying of Marsyas or the descent from the cross or appropriate styles and images of the discarded past. Anything was permitted (Danto 1987, 204).

Art made under this condition of pluralism was identified by Danto as being *post-historical*, in that art with a sense of its place in the progression of history had come to an end (Danto 1997, 12). In this post-historical condition, art was unable to be defined by style or concept and Danto describes 'the dawning sense that the absence of direction was the defining trait of the new period' (Danto 1997, 13).

This period of calm then made way for the 1980s, which brought with them Neo-Expression, which, as previously mentioned, embraced all that was unfashionable by re-hashing the most emotive and least conceptual style of Modernism, expressionism. By way of reaction to decades of conceptual and minimalist investigations into painting, Neo-Expressionism served as an antidote to the more conceptual investigations by painters claiming an end, such as Malevich, Rodchenko and Reinhardt (Dempsey 2002, 276). However, this explosion of painting was different from the explosion provoked by Modernism, as the act of re-hashing the outmoded style of expressionism was seen by some to be the final nail in the coffin for painting.

Yet has painting come to an end? To say no (painting is still alive, just look at the galleries) is undoubtedly an act of denial, for it has never been more evident that most painting one sees have abandoned the task that historically belonged to modern painting (that, precisely, of working through the end of painting) and are simply artefacts created for the market and by the market (absolutely interchangeable artefacts created by interchangeable producers) (Bois 1986, 40).

Danto addressed this accusation of ‘the end’ in *After the End of Art* (1997). Danto describes the 80s as being a time when critics and painters were declaring not just an ‘end’ for painting but a more emphatic ‘death’ for painting. He distinguishes an ‘end’ and a ‘death’ as being quite separate claims to do with the nature of what he calls ‘post-historical art’ (Danto 1997, 4). The word ‘death’ implies that painting would cease to exist and Danto points out that he did not believe in a ‘death’ for painting so much as an ‘end’ for painting – two claims he sees as very different (Danto 1997, 4). To distinguish between a ‘death’ and an ‘end’ of painting, that Danto uses the term ‘post-historical’ art.

Danto’s explanation of post-historicism centres around the idea that art history was previously based in a sense of narrative and logical progression (Danto 1997, 135). He describes this view of art history as ‘a narrative of progress in which gains and breakthroughs were made in the advancement of art’s goals’ (Danto 1997, 135). The result of art existing within this state was a succession of definable eras or movements that drew from their predecessors to move forward in a rational way. However, with the birth of Modernism, Danto saw this as coming to an end. As art became more conceptual and more in line with philosophy, Danto saw it as ‘moving onto a different plane of consciousness’ (Danto 1997, 135). On this ‘different plane’ it was more important for art, and in particular painting, to extend itself philosophically and conceptually rather than purely aesthetically (Danto 1997, 135).

The reductionism that claimed an end for painting could be more accurately seen to be the end of a particular historical way of thinking about art. Painting around the declining years of Modernism was in a state of upheaval and was irrevocably changed because according to Danto, art’s agenda had shifted. This shift in the agenda allowed painting to be relieved of its historical position of being the dominant artistic medium (born to play out to a set of conclusions) allowing other media to be explored with equal importance, ‘none more privileged’ than the rest (Danto 1997, 136). This in turn meant a drastic change for painting

that some critics and artists interpreted as a 'death', but which Danto believed to be an 'end' that was not a terminal but simply a case of its moving in a different direction. As Danto said:

Once we move to some sector of the visual arts other than painting and possibly sculpture, we encounter practices that can doubtless be refined upon, but where the potentialities are lacking for a progressive development of the kind painting had so readily lead itself to over the centuries, in its first phase as the project of achieving increasingly adequate representations of the world, and, in its modernist phase, increasingly adequate attainment's of its pure state (Danto 1997, 136).

In discussing this changing of art's agenda and move into post-historicism, Bois sites Hubert Damisch's 'theory of games' (Bois 1986, 40). Damisch's 'theory of games' likens the production of art at the end of Modernism to a *match*, which was part of a larger *game* of which he sees the whole of painting to be. In other words, Bois uses this analogy to conclude that if the 'match "modernist painting"' is finished, it does not necessarily mean that the entire game of "painting" is finished' (Bois 1986, 40).

Let us simply say that the desire for painting remains, and that this desire is not entirely programmed or subsumed by the market: this desire is the sole factor of a future possibility for painting, that is, of a nonpathological mourning (Bois 1986, 44).

Bois saw the *match* of Modernist painting, which was centred around acknowledging and reaching an 'end', to be over. However, as the *game* would continue, he declared painters after Modernism to have inherited the historical task of 'nonpathological mourning' (Bois 1986, 43). That is to say, always keeping in mind paintings' past (mourning) while wholeheartedly engaging with its future (nonpathologically).

The idea of a 'nonpathological mourning' has subsequently been embraced by painters. Richter and Brown have enthusiastically taken painting to task producing overwhelmingly positive results that acknowledge painting's past and its failures in order to embrace its future. It is important to note that Richter began his practice while Modernist painters were working

their way toward an 'end' for painting. His practice makes an interesting investigation, as it has occurred partly within paintings' decline and partly within its revival (as opposed to Brown's practice which is solely in the latter).

The 'death of painting' argument was primarily brought to the fore through the work of artists like Manet and Duchamp, followed later by like-minded Modernist painters Malevich and Rodchenko. These artists prompted a new way of thinking about painting that was grounded in self-awareness, the conceptual and negation. It was through using these that they became aware of and illustrated painting's 'death'. In literature, theorists Hegel, Fried, Crimp, Bois and Danto all wrote seminal texts declaring the 'death of painting', followed later by Gilbert-Rofle, Fogle and other contemporary writers who have written about the history of this 'death' in retrospect and also in relation to painting's current status.

Amidst the turbulent events that shaped Modernist painting, came Gerhard Richter and following much later Glenn Brown. The events that provoked the 'death of painting' debate and the debate itself have undoubtedly redirected painting's future. This is reflected in the practices of these two painters who give their own unique takes on how the medium has fared.

CHAPTER II. TWO TAKES ON DEATH: GLENN BROWN AND GERHARD RICHTER

It could be said that Gerhard Richter and Glenn Brown both make photo-based paintings in an attempt to explore and better understand the medium of painting. They are both critically acclaimed artists whose vast bodies of work have been exhibited widely and have made significant contributions to the debate on the medium's state. Theorists Benjamin Buchloh, Michael Fried, Michael Kimmelman, David Reed and Robert Storr are among many writers who have discussed Richter's work over the past decade. A great number of writers have also written about Brown, though I have chosen to focus on Paulo Laufente's essay 'Glenn Brown: Classic Contemporary', along with Stephen Hepworth's, Terry R. Myers' and Frederic Paul's essays in their 2002 book *Glenn Brown, Volume 1*.

Richter's extensive body of work has always had one constant motivation by which it has been driven: to question and challenge the medium of painting. Having painted for over five decades, Richter has an intimate understanding of the changing nature of the medium's perceived abilities and limitations. Instead of just championing painting in the face of the early 'death of painting' arguments, Robert Storr (curator of the first major retrospective of Richter's work in America at the Museum of Modern Art in New York) writes that Richter chose to explore the negative contentions of painting, and engage in a critical investigation into their validity (Storr 2003, 15).

Pressed by the critic (Buchloh) to admit that the tension in his work between depiction and self-reflection – in other words, the making of images and the critical examination of them – was set up in order “to show the inadequacy, the bankruptcy of both” Richter replied, “not the bankruptcy, but always the inadequacy,” after which he took care to stipulate that he meant this “in relation to what is expected of painting” (Storr 2003, 15).

Richter began his painting career in Germany, by painting murals and imitating other painters (such as Pablo Picasso and Diago Rivera) and it was not until he travelled and was introduced to Western art that he began an engagement with contemporary conceptual artists such as

Jackson Pollock and Lucio Fontana and an interest in photographs and figurative painting (Kimmelman 2002, 9-10). He began collecting photographs and newspaper and magazine clippings that were later exhibited as a collection (*Atlas*, 1964-1995), and also used as source of material to paint from (Kimmelman 2002, 5).

His painting style has varied throughout his career from being loosely representational (as in the case of his late 60s aerial-view landscapes [Figure 4]), to being very photoreal (as in works like *Two Candles* and *Betty* (Figure 5)). He has also made a large number of colour chart works, along with two divergent styles of abstraction in his 'grey paintings', followed by the purely abstract 'scraped' paintings (Figure 6). Richter's complex and contentious relationship to painting is the complicated subject matter for his vast body of work. He has at once been painting's greatest defender in the face of accusations of its redundancy, while also taking pains to illustrate his acknowledgment of its failures. The tension between these two opposing attitudes is what makes Richter's work so interesting and complex.

In interviews, letters, and private ruminations, the leitmotifs of Richter's thought have been clearly stated from the very beginning: faith versus scepticism; hope versus pessimism; engagement versus neutrality; self determination versus fatalism; imaginative freedom versus ideology (Storr 2003, 16).

In 2002, to coincide with Robert Storr's MOMA retrospective, a number of key theorists wrote about Richter's work and the successes and failures of the exhibition for *Artforum* magazine. Rosalind E. Krauss's article 'Alien Encounter', suggests that Richter's unique perspective is a result of his having been completely 'unprepared for the complex developments of the Twentieth Century avant-garde' (having trained in East Germany unaware of activity in the West until he moved there in the 60s) (Krauss 2002, 158).

The complexities of the avant-garde that Richter had to face are discussed by Katy Siegal in her *Artforum* article 'Blurred Visions', where she hypothesises that painting's 'failure' lies in its inability to capture the 'complicated reality' of 20th and 21st century life (Siegal 2002,

162). Richter acknowledges this failure, yet Seigal suggests that what Richter attempts to show us is that photography and video cannot do this either - 'they have interruptions of their own' (Seigal 2002, 162). The main 'interruption' could be seen to be the increased subjectivity of photography and video (due to advancements in digital technology). Media that were once assumed to be reliable and objective are now subject to easy manipulation. Recording information as a photograph is a process of 'evening out' everything, as all the information in that photo is recorded equally in a 'flat' way. In producing the appearance of the photograph Richter is attempting to replicate this device by blurring and softening the image until it all appears to be one united flat surface.

I blur things to make everything equally important and equally unimportant. I blur things so that they do not look artistic or craftsmanlike but technological, smooth and perfect. I blur things to make all parts a closer fit. Perhaps I also blur out the excess of unimportant information (Richter 1993, 37).

Storr states that this 'flatness' is a distancing mechanism aimed to keep Richter's as well as the viewer's distance from the subject matter (Storr 2003, 62). Historically, photo-realism in painting worked to create a distance between the viewer and the painting, due to the viewer's inability to relate to anything human in the construction of the painting (Bourriaud 1992, 90). Richter employs this distancing device by eliminating any trace of the artist's brushstroke, creating an all over even blur or softness that obscures the image and conceals how it is constructed (Storr 2003, 91). Often this blurring leaves traces across the painting and works to subtly 'conceal' the images, but as Seigel suggests, perhaps it also animates the surfaces creating a 'conflict of stillness and movement' (Seigel 2002, 162).

Richter's blurring is taken to the extreme in his 'smudged' or 'dragged' paintings, where he constructs an image and then obscures it completely by dragging a spatula across the surface blending all the paint into one giant smudge (Storr 2003, 62). Storr believes that the action of smudging the paint 'was the antithesis of the forceful and heartfelt expressionist gesture that declares itself and proclaims the painter's involvement' (Storr 2003, 62). The idea of distance

is compounded by the use of a spatula or squeegee as the device for obscuring the images, as this takes the works yet another step away from the 'hand of the artist' being visible in the art work. This distancing mechanism and reducing of painting to a non-committal evenness, can be further seen in Richter's series of monochrome grey paintings, of which he has painted over one hundred (Figure 7) (Storr 2003, 93).

[...]in the aesthetic context of the time, where vibrant colour was the common currency of expressionism, depleted colour or the colourless colours of the tonal spectrum operate as a rhetorical rejoinder, which is to say they retain an expressive function by announcing their expressionlessness (Storr 2003, 63).

Richter's grey paintings were made in response to the animosity surrounding painting in the 60s. His deliberately austere works proposed that the kind of sincerity in painting that was exploited by the expressionists was no longer possible once painting had been overtaken by photography and video, provoking the reduction of painting to its formalist roots (Storr 2003, 92). However, as with all of Richter's works in the construction of the paintings, born out of a sense of nihilism, there grew hope.

It was the ultimate possible statement of powerlessness and desperation. Nothing, absolutely nothing left, no figures, no colour, nothing. Then you realise after you've painted three of them that one's better than the others and you ask yourself why that is (Richter in Storr 2003, 95).

This was an important moment in Richter's practice, as it hinted that Modernist negation was not necessarily working toward an end from which there was no return. In the *Artforum* debate David Reed sees these works together with the colour chart paintings as 'a turning point from hopelessness to new possibility' (Reed 2002, 159).

In 1966 alongside his figurative works Richter began work on a series of paintings of colour charts (Figure 8). They worked as part Pop Art, part Minimalism and part Conceptualism, and were a place from which Richter could approach what he saw to be the 'worn-out clichés of

abstraction' (Kimmelman 2002, 6). A widely declared criticism of the 2002 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art was of its focus on Richter's representational works, and its neglect of his seemingly more 'abstract' works such as the colour charts and grey paintings (Siegal 2002, 161). Krauss called for 'broader samplings of the work' that would have better illustrated the depth of Richter's entire practice (Krauss 2002, 161). Reed sees these works to be equally as important in Richter's oeuvre as the representational paintings, as while they appear radically different, they are made by the same process (that is, they are both painted convincingly from their source-imagery) (Reed 2002, 159). Michael Kimmelman, art critic for the *New York Times*, states that while these works appeared to be an interesting diversion from his interests in representation, they were as grounded in the 'real' as his photo paintings because of their source material (Kimmelman 2002, 6). These paintings were copies of paint charts, yet the colours were ordered in a random fashion instead of being in a rainbow-like colour order (Kimmelman 2002, 6). With this knowledge, they clearly work in the same way as the photo-based paintings work, exploring painting's bankruptcy (albeit from a slightly different standpoint).

As Richter avoids aesthetic decisions by using readymade sources, these paintings, although very different in appearance from the photo-based paintings, share their philosophical underpinnings. Richter absorbs aspects of photography into paintings rather than relying on the appearance of the photograph per se (Reed 2002, 159).

For the purposes of my discussion I will be focusing on Richter's series of five works titled *Verkündigung nach Tizian* or *Annunciation after Titian* (1973) (Figures 9-13). These works provide an interesting comparison with Brown's work, as they both employ the device of appropriating another artist's paintings. Richter painted these works in 1973 after seeing the original *The Annunciation* by Titian (c 1530) in Venice. His initial motivation for reproducing the painting was as a homage to Titian's original. Upon seeing the work he describes being so taken with its beauty that he simply wanted a copy of it for himself. 'I saw it in Venice and thought: I'd like to have that for myself. To start with, I only meant to make a copy, so that I

could have a beautiful painting at home with a piece of that period, all that potential beauty and sublimity' (Richter 1993, 226).

Titian's original painting is a religious illustration recounting the story of the Virgin Mary kneeling to receive the Holy Spirit, when the angel Gabriel comes to tell her that she will be bearing God's son (Smithsonian Hirshhorn Collection Website 2000). It is a large work 166cms x 266cms held in the Scuola di San Rocco, Venice (Figure 14). On the right of the painting is the kneeling figure of the Virgin Mary dressed in black, gazing downwards, while on the left is the luminous elevated Angel Gabriel dressed in flowing red and white robes. The foreground is the chapel in which the event takes place and the background is a simple landscape with a foreboding sky. It has been said that the theme of the original work is 'light', used here to emphasise the gravity of the occasion (Wethey 1969, 70). The light emanating from the sky in a beam toward the Virgin Mary and the illuminated angel is the actual physical light, and the metaphorical light is the light of the 'divine'. 'A standard medieval explanation of the Immaculate Conception was that God's insemination of the Virgin resembled the passage of the sun's rays through clear glass' (Storr 2003, 102).

Richter's five paintings begin with a relatively accurate copy of the original *Annunciation* and end with unrecognisable abstractions. The first painting imitates the figures and the foreground accurately and obscures the background. The painting is instantly recognisable, however the entire image is 'blurred'. Richter's famous blurring technique is achieved by painting the initial painting in a straightforward and sharp way, and then using a large and very soft brush, gently brushing backwards and forwards over the image until the colours begin to merge into one another. The more this is done, the more soft and blurred the image appears. In the first painting of this series Richter has used this technique to soften the image so that it appears slightly 'out of focus'. In the second painting of the series, he uses this technique to make the image unrecognisable and appear almost like mist or fog. The light and dark areas of the original are still in the correct places, however the figurative image is all but

illegible. In the remaining three paintings from the series, Richter has laid down the original image and roughly smudged it to varying degrees. While in the first two images the brushstrokes are applied lightly so as to not be seen, in the final three paintings the brush strokes are hard, jagged and obvious. In the first image, figures and the ray of light can be made out, whereas in the fourth and fifth images the light and dark patches are roughly where they appear in the original but nothing is discernible.

One of the reasons I am looking at this series of paintings is because I am interested in the way they have been critically received. Little has been written about these works and while the initial copy (that is most like the original and hardly blurred at all) of the five paintings can be found in the occasional publication on Richter, all five paintings can only be found reproduced, in black and white, in one book published in 1986, *Gerhard Richter Bilder Paintings 1962-1985*. In this way the works are almost always overlooked and in this there is a sense that they are thought of as an unfortunate and slightly embarrassing deviation from Richter's other works based on his own snapshots and media clippings. In one of the few statements addressing Richter's Titian paintings (and addressing Richter's engagement with art-history) Storr alludes to the works' frosty reception when he writes that 'Richter's apparent detour into art history or art-historical ways of seeing earned him the enmity, or at least the suspicion, of a number of people in the contemporary art world' (Storr 2003, 105). It could be argued that people found these works to be slightly backward or embarrassing, because they were so reverential and born out of homage and a will to paint something beautiful rather than something clever. Perhaps the shunning of these works is because this could be seen to be a slightly unfashionable thing to do (especially towards the end of Modernism). Homage in this manner was at the time seen to be more the domain of students, not great painters. As Storr says, 'copying has long been a basic component of traditional studio education' (Storr 2003, 104).

As this series was painted in the seventies at the height of conceptual art and Modernist thinking, it is clear that they were a significant and daring departure from the norm of the time. Richter likens his painting a copy of the Titian to his desire at various times in his career to paint beautiful landscapes (an equally unfashionable move due to its perceived lack of conceptual foundation). Storr sees this as more than just a desire to make beautiful images, but rather as a 'quiet act of defiance directed at those who traditionally claimed a monopoly on "subversive" means and ends' (Storr 2003, 105). Therefore it could be said that Richter's painting something unashamedly beautiful or Romantic at that time was not antiquated, but rather a bold gesture resisting the standard of the time.

Richter talks extensively about his body of work and refers to these paintings as having 'failed' and goes on to say that he chose to continue painting them to illustrate this 'failure'. '[..]But then my copy went wrong, and the pictures that finally emerged went to show that it just can't be done any more, not even by way of a copy. All I could do was break the whole thing down and show that it's no longer possible' (Richter 1993, 226). In this way, contrary to the consensus of the time, Richter's attempt to paint a copy of a Titian painting could be seen to be a very Modernist thing to do – as it uses the idea of breaking down an image to reach some kind of a conclusion.

A possible reason why Richter may have considered his paintings to have failed can be found in what Fried deems Richter's oeuvre to be founded in: 'the recognition of the impossibility of making paintings of singular expressiveness and profound conviction' (Fried, 2002). Perhaps Richter's copy of the Titian failed because it lacked the sincerity of the original (because it was simply a hollowed out and shallow copy) and therefore it only succeeded in illustrating that painting in that way could not be done any more.

Richter has long been a great admirer of nineteenth century romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, who is widely known for his sharply rendered landscapes that often depict icebergs

and shipwrecks (Storr 2003, 106). Richter once travelled to Greenland in an attempt to replicate the majesty of the Friedrich paintings he had seen. However, similar to outcomes of the Titian appropriations, in his own words, 'it just didn't work' (Richter 1993, 268). Out of the hundreds of photographs that Richter took, few were successful and even fewer paintings resulted from them. An exception was *Iceberg in Fog (Eisberg im Nebel)* (1982) (Figure 15). This painting and Richter's experience in trying to replicate Friedrich's style proves an interesting study, because unlike the *Annunciation after Titian* series, which was a much older painting designed to be a religious narrative, the Friedrich works were more recent and more straightforward landscapes. The fact that these images were not laden with obvious symbolism and associations (as with religious works) could possibly have meant that Richter had more of a chance of succeeding in his attempts to imitate them. Further to this, the images from which he was painting were his own photographs (that he composed) and while they looked similar to Friedrich works they were more personal source imagery. But despite the differences in the work's source materials, many believe that they too have 'failed' for similar reasons to the Titian paintings. Foremost of these was the time in which he painted these works. This serves to highlight the different way we think about painting now as opposed to the time when the Friedrich and Titian painted their paintings.

In discussing the difference between Richter's *Iceberg in Fog (Eisberg im Nebel)* and Friedrich's *The Sea of Ice* (Figure 16), Storr hypothesises that 'the differences between the two have less to do with how the paintings look than with what we are encouraged to read or discouraged from reading into them' (Storr 2003, 106). While the two paintings do look very different (the most obvious difference being the 'sharp focus' of the Friedrich and the focal softness of the Richter) it is important to acknowledge how the times in which they were painted frame the way they are to be read (Storr 2003, 106).

The overt human emotion embedded in the landscapes of the Romantics and the sincerity of their paintings is precisely what was called into question by Modernism. This sincerity was

what Richter struggled with when painting the Titian paintings, at once denying it while claiming that there was still a place for it and that he had a right to investigate this. 'A painting by Caspar David Friedrich is not a thing of the past. What is past is only the set of circumstances that allowed it to be painted' (Richter 1993, 80). As with Richter's broader practice, he does not make works solely to highlight any particular style's inabilities, but rather to propose that despite painting's problems, all of these ways of painting can tell us as much about the medium's future and the possibilities for painting as they can about the medium's past and what cannot be done any more. The key is in acknowledging the things that they can not do, the things that have 'died', in order to give the medium a future.

While declaring that none of his images from Greenland 'worked', Richter went on to say that despite this he still believed that at the time, it was 'possible to paint like Caspar David Friedrich' (Richter in Storr 2003, 106). Storr writes, that in saying this Richter is 'simultaneously defending his right to paint as he sees fit and preparing the way for a fundamental reinterpretation of the type of painting he has seemingly resuscitated' (Storr 2003, 106).

Richter's practice makes an interesting topic for investigation as he has been painting about painting for so many years, through all the dramatic upheavals that have shaped the medium, provoking many stylistic shifts in his work (for example: grey paintings, colour chart paintings, abstracts, photo-based paintings). This is in contrast to Glenn Brown who, as a young painter has only been making work for about ten years. Both Richter and Brown paint about painting but from drastically different perspectives. For example, contemporary painting no longer holds the same coveted position it once did, making Brown's perspective very different from Richter's (Storr 2003, 17). When Richter was initially painting about painting's failures in response to accusations of its redundancy, it was still the dominant artistic medium, yet with numerous other media replacing it as the medium of choice for artists, it now faces a whole new series of issues.

Painting is no longer the dominant medium it once was. There is no urgent need to topple it from its pedestal when other practices have begun to crowd painting on an equal, or nearly equal, footing. Moreover, the new art forms championed at its expense have begun to show their age and accumulate the burdens that come with tradition in any medium (Storr 2003, 17).

Brown began his career around the time of the Young British Artists (YBAs) explosion in the United Kingdom, where new media such as installation and video-art were the dominant art forms and painting was far less prominent. Therefore, Brown approached the medium of painting at a time when fewer people are using it and attention was focused more on other media alternatives.

Brown held his first major exhibition at Karsten Schubert Gallery in London in 1995 after having emerged as a member of the 'Saatchi Generation' of YBAs and graduating from Goldsmiths College in London in 1992 (Hepworth 2000, 62). He has since been involved in numerous other exhibitions and curatorial projects and was included in the recent 2002 Sydney Biennale. He is known mostly for his painting but is also a prolific sculptor and occasionally curates and writes about art in London. His work has been very well received, as Michael Wilson writes when comparing the reception of Brown's work to that of other YBAs, 'Brown has enjoyed an easy ride in the press compared with many of his contemporaries' (Wilson 2004, 246). Brown's work is based on the practice of appropriation as he chooses paintings from art history, distorts colours and other aspects of the works and then paints them. His sources are varied and he appropriates anyone from Rembrandt (Figure 17) and Dali (Figure 18), to the tackiest of 1960s science-fiction painters (Figure 19) (Lafuente 2004, 111).

Brown takes his source imagery of the paintings not from the works themselves but from often poor quality images taken from books, magazines and exhibition catalogues. He frequently exaggerates colours and heightens contrasts, making the darks darker and the lights lighter. His paintings are often made with sickly bright colours that make their subjects both

alluring and repulsive. In his 2004 article in *Flash Art*, Pablo Lafuente describes Brown's manipulation of colour as making 'the subjects of his portraits sometimes look sick, even dead' (Lafuente 2004, 112).

Much of the source material from which Brown paints is highly gestural. With the exception of the reproductions of Dali paintings and the science fiction paintings, the artists he chooses to appropriate from are generally very gestural painters. The artist from whom he has sourced the most material is Modernist painter Frank Auerbach. Auerbach's thickly painted expressionist works are feverishly constructed portraits of a small group of his friends and relatives. The aim of these works is to capture the sitter's character (Spalding 2001, 145).

These brush strokes, forever catching the changing light, the accidental drips, the swirling paint sometimes laid on like butter or mixed up like concrete or at other times reminiscent of the viscousness of black pitch, are all testaments to a unique way of making and marking down in a visual way (Rosenthal 2004, 1).

As Brown most frequently appropriates Auerbach paintings it is important to have an understanding of what these works were about to gain a better insight into why Brown might use them. The seventy-four year old British painter was of the so-called 'School of London' generation of painters, which included Lucian Freud and Leon Kossof, who were working in London mid-last century making very expressive and gestural work (Searle 2001, 1).

Auerbach's paintings epitomised all the moral and practical characteristics that have been made difficult to reproduce now after the 'death of painting' – '[...]honesty, sincerity, the hard-won image, masterpieces' (Searle 2001, 1). The works are based on real people who have sat for the artist, however, as Adrian Searle suggests in his review of Auerbach's 2001 retrospective at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, 'his models frequently end up looking the same' (Searle 2001, 3). The paintings Brown focuses on are Auerbach's portraits made early in his career, which are the more densely painted (Spalding 2001, 145). The originals of these works are all small scale paintings that are made from roughly built up oil paint. They

appear frantic and almost aggressive in their compositions of seemingly randomly applied strokes of paint and muted colours (Figure 20). In discussing Auerbach's London show, Frances Spalding notes,

[...]the most startling feature of the works in this first room will be the extreme thickness of Auerbach's paint. It hangs in great viscous clots and drips, is dragged, flicked, and brusquely spread into position. In one, *Head of Gerba Boehm*, the head is almost modelled in paint, and we are able to look under her chin as we would with a sculpture or relief. In another painting, a small, rather distant seated figure is again so thickly painted that it stands out in relief from the canvas (Spalding 2001, 145).

As Brown made so many copies of these paintings they have come to be among his most characteristic works, and it is in these where his craftsmanship and attention to detail is most visible. Brown replicates Auerbach's chaotic expressionist style using small brushes to reproduce the appearance of each individual stroke made by Auerbach (Figure 21). The originals were painted with large brushes and along with the textured build up of paint, the paintings have small visible peaks and troughs created by the hairs from the brush dragging through the paint. Brown simulates these thick layers of oil paint of the original in a labour-intensive manner that can take months to complete (Wilson 2004, 246). He individually recreates each brushstroke in relation to the next, blurring and smudging them into each other to create a convincing likeness of an intensely painted gestural work. In an interesting extension of this practice, Brown also makes sculptures based loosely on the Auerbach works that highlight their thick surfaces. These giant balls of paint sit behind perspex boxes and look as if they have come directly out of one of Auerbach's portraits.

In these works (both the Auerbach reproductions and the sculptures), by replicating this style of painting yet in a very different way from how it is normally made, Brown could be seen to be mourning a style of painting that can no longer be sincere. Overly expressionist and gestural painting is a hallmark of high-Modernist painting that quickly lost its appeal in the

face of Minimalism and cool Post-Modern practice. Brown attempts to show that this way of painting is lost in the same way that the subjects of the portraits he copies are lost.

When I work from thick-surfaced paintings – the Auerbach's, the Karel Appel, the De Kooning – they've almost all been portrait heads, in all of them there was originally a model sitting in a chair in the studio who gets characterised by that artist. He finishes it and it gets photographed. Then the photograph gets turned into a print, which gets put in a book. I get that book and do my paintings from it. Through those stages, the original person gets further and further back. Further and further lost, further removed. The whole notion that there was a character underneath the image kept me wanting to do them. It was that sort of loss, as if they were ghosts (Brown in Myers 2000, 74).

Similarly to Richter, Brown began painting other painters' works with the intention of creating exact copies. When the initial works were conceived and painted, Brown was hoping to make trompe l'oeil style reproductions. However, as he worked through each painting, the subjects (in the portraits) began to appeal to him. Appropriation usually affords the artist a kind of distance, in that they are one step removed from the image because it is not their own. This is true of Brown's work, however as he reproduced the images, the people in the paintings he was appropriating became increasingly more interesting to him.

The first two or three paintings derived from Frank Auerbach were about the belief in, and the trickery of, trompe l'oeil. Also the time consuming labour intensively reproducing someone else's work was a means in itself. Almost in spite of that appropriationist stance, I started to fall in love with portraits. The Auerbach and Karel Appel and Jean-Honore Fragonard paintings weren't just empty subjects but people and that almost came on me unawares and took me over (Brown in Hepworth 2004, 65).

When Brown discusses his contentious relationship with Modernism in an interview with Stephen Hepworth, he states that he is distancing himself from many of the attributes that Modernist painting stood for (Hepworth 2000, 67). His work could be seen to be mocking the expressive qualities of Modernism in the way that he denies his brushstroke in favour of someone else's. The subjects he selects can often be gaudy as they are borrowed from the 'low' and are so appealing that they provide a striking contrast to the seriousness and earnestness of much of Modernist painting.

I want to describe the underlying structures without falling for the cliché developed by bourgeois Modernism. Avoiding anything that was beautiful, natural, and escapist which are things the masses adore and the elite despise even though the elite have beauty and the poor are perceived as ugly. I want to make work that has popular sentiment but involves deconstruction (Brown in Hepworth 2000, 67).

It could be said that people might have trouble reading his work because of its often ‘low’ subject matter and to some extent given that as most of his contemporaries were working with new media, painting seemed to be a particularly old-fashioned thing to be doing. Dali paintings and science-fiction landscapes are seen to be rather kitsch and popular, and are not normally the subjects of ‘high art’ or for that matter serious criticism.

My liking for kitsch is a liking for subversion. My desire to paint with detail and dexterity is due to the fact that it is seen as bad taste. To use skill and craftsmanship is vulgar to the art establishment for the most part. A lot of art relies on a degree of irritation, I’m not alone in this (Brown in Hepworth 2000, 69).

Perhaps this is what makes Brown’s work so appealing to both art-educated audiences and audiences who know nothing about art. Art’s educated audiences like them for their irreverence and those who know nothing about art like them for all the reasons that the source imagery was ‘popular’ in the first place, such as their sentiment and their exaggerated relaying of information and skill. At first glance Brown’s work appears to be mocking the paintings he is appropriating. His deliberate choice of such ‘low-brow’ images grouped together act like a gallery of all that is looked back on as being gaudy and in poor taste from the last century. However, what he is doing could also be seen to be very humble and modest. When he discusses the works he copies he says that the reason he chooses them is primarily because he likes something about them (similar to Richer’s copies of the Titian works). In discussing the painting *Eno Esicrexe* (1997) (Figure 22) of a portrait he found by an amateur in the street and copied, he stated that ‘I sometimes sit and think: “How could I paint like that, how could I paint with such innocence and genuineness?”’ (Brown in Hepworth 2000, 69).

This is similar to assumptions as to why Richter's Titian copies failed – because the sincerity of the originals was unable to be replicated any more (Storr 2003, 104).

This is indicative of the notion of being at the 'end of painting', and that this position disallows the kind of genuineness that Brown is referring to. Before photography, painting had the important purpose of documentation. Throughout Modernism, painting had the noble purpose of working through to a kind of 'end'. Perhaps what Brown and Richter highlight is the question – how can you paint seriously any more without a compelling purpose?

Everytime the avant-garde appropriates elements from the discourses of low, folk or mass culture, it publicly denounces its own elitist isolation and the obsolescence of its inherited production procedures (Brown in Lafuente 2004, 112).

Richter's *Annunciation After Titian* series and Brown's series of reproductions of Auerbach paintings are similar yet divergent in a number of ways. Both artists base these works on appropriation, yet from very different time periods. One appropriates a religious sixteenth century painting and the other appropriates a Twentieth-Century high-Modernist painter's most iconic works. Both acts of appropriation illustrate painting's loss of sincerity from the times in which their source images were painted. In Richter's case this is a loss of religious sincerity and in Brown's case it is a loss of expressionist sincerity. Both artists select appropriated source imagery but for very different reasons. Richter chose the Titian works out of homage to Titian, whereas Brown chose the Auerbach and expressionist works to illustrate their outdatedness. Richter's series of paintings were not well received, whereas Brown's works have been almost universally praised.

Understanding these two artist's practices helps to illustrate the changed nature of contemporary painting. Having outlined Richter's and Brown's practices, I will now detail characteristics of their work that serve to illustrate the changes that painting has undergone as a result of the 'death of painting' debate.

CHAPTER III. AFTER THE 'DEATH OF PAINTING'

The almost constant debate as to the status and relevance of contemporary painting over the past century has unquestionably altered the nature of painting we see today. Richter's and Brown's works serve as examples of this changed nature of painting that has been brought about by the 'death of painting' debate. Further to this, they illustrate the claim that if painting were to have a future after this debate, it had to embrace the accusations that were levelled at so that it could survive critically. While the debate resurfaces every few years, painting continues to be a relevant medium for many contemporary artists. The 'death of painting' debate now tends to represent the 'death' of an older way of thinking about painting and the emergence of a new type of painting. This new kind of painting has a number of major recognisable characteristics that can be seen in the work of Richter and Brown and countless other painters making work today.

Firstly, painting now draws from many other media and does not only involve paint on canvas. Whereas in the past painting was defined as the application of paint on canvas it now is more a 'mode of thought than just a medium' (Bradley in Daniel-McElroy 2003, 50). For example, a recent exhibition at the Tate St Ives in the United Kingdom titled *Painting not Painting* (2003) showcased a number of painters whose interpretations of the medium were widely varied. Included in this exhibition was the work of Scottish artist Jim Lambie, whose work is part installation and part sculpture while also being undeniably painterly. His brightly coloured vinyl-tape works have been exhibited internationally, most memorably in the 2002 Sydney Biennale where he covered an entire room at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney with his coloured stripes. In *Painting not Painting*, Lambie showed a similar work where he "painted" a room and an entrance way with thousands of vinyl stripes (Figure 23). He is typical of a great number of contemporary painters who are making exciting and challenging works that alter the definition of painting in new and interesting ways. When discussing painting's most recent 'return' in his 2003 *Art Monthly* article, Morgan Falconer

wrote that a defining characteristic of painting's post-death revival was this willingness to embrace other media.

What is surely the most forceful claim for the strength of the revival, however, is the manner in which the medium has expanded beyond the confines of painting's traditional support. Instead of the old metaphors of dying that were so prevalent only a few years ago – all that dripping, dribbling and entropic collapse – painting has vaulted off the canvas entirely and exploded into life (Falconer 2003, 2).

Lambie was also included in the American exhibition *Painting at the Edge of the World* (2001), in which curator Douglas Fogle drew together thirty artists to present a survey of contemporary painting. Interestingly, only around half of the artists included worked simply with paint on canvas. Belgian, Francis Alys, American, Paul McCarthy and German, Thomas Schutte all work in performance and installation and yet were included in this exhibition and are often referred to as painters.

Critic Katy Siegel states that other media, and in particular more technological media, capture the changing technology-driven world more successfully than painting (Siegel 2004, 162).

Theorist Gilbert-Rolfe concurs, proposing that the difficulty for painting is that it will always struggle to capture a technological based world because it itself is not technologically based.

Paradoxical though it may be, the problem for painting, for example, an art of images, becomes how to live as a thing in a world that has ceased to be a world of things and become itself a world of images (Gilbert-Rolfe 1999, 123).

In response to these types of accusations that came along with technological advances, it became vital for painting to move with the times. Instead of being eclipsed by these other artforms, painting's willingness to be flexible and change has enabled it to embrace them, which has in turn proven the key to its survival. As Fogle describes, the philosophy of painting is permeating other media in order to sustain its own.

No longer solely bound by such traditional categories as figuration, abstraction, portraiture, and landscape, or even by the conventional definition of the medium as paint on canvas, many artists today demonstrate that a philosophy of painting is to be found not only in these genres, but also in photographic, conceptual, performative, popular culture, and architectural manifestations (Fogle 2001, 370).

The most widespread and significant alternative medium that painting has been forced to embrace to secure its future is photography. This new definition of painting embraces photography entirely, and no longer sees it as a threat but an aid to propel painting and help it endure. This is ironic considering photography was famously hailed to be the end for painting. However, as Gilbert-Rolfe suggests in his discussion of painting and photography “Painting and the Invention of Photography (Forget Duchamp)” (1999), ‘While some artists have seen photography as a weapon against painting, others have found it irresistibly attractive’ (Gilbert-Rolfe 1999, 19).

Artists like Richter and Brown have come to rely on photography as a means to continue painting. Where once it was the medium to replace painting, it is now the tool that helps sustain it. In saying this, I am not simply referring to artists using photography to illustrate painting’s death, but artists who are using photography to make paintings that are not even concerned with painting’s death. Now photography can be used in discussions about painting’s new role or relevance, or simply as a device used to make images. Thierry De Duve demonstrates this new positive way of looking at photography, when he states ‘What is a photograph, if not a readymade painting?’ (De Duve in Danto 2003, 269).

A third characteristic of painting that has emerged as a result of the ‘death of painting’ debate is seen in the work of Brown and Richter through their reliance on appropriation, and a shift in what this reliance has now come to signify. In Modernism, appropriation was seen as an illustration of futility. As Danto states in ‘The Mourning After’ (2003), appropriation was rife around the time of ‘death of painting’ declarations, ‘because it conceded the point that there

was nothing left to do' (Danto 2003, 208). Conversely, now it is seen as an extremely liberating thing to do (not merely something that must be done because there is 'nothing else to do'). Richter was among the first to recognise the liberating nature of appropriation and has been exploiting it ever since. He began using appropriation in the early 1960s, copying newspaper articles and postcards from his collection *Atlas* (Figure 24) to make paintings.

Writing in 1986, Richter states,

In 1962 I found my first escape hatch: by painting from photographs, I was relieved of the need to choose or construct a subject [...] My appropriation of photographs, my policy of copying them without alteration and without translating them into a modern form (as Warhol and others do), represented a principled avoidance of the subject (Richter 1993, 130).

In this way, Brown could be seen to owe a debt to Richter. Here, Richter calls using appropriated images 'liberating', in that using found images to base his paintings on allowed him to concentrate on other aspects of painting. Richter was among the first painters to pioneer this use of appropriation in painting instead of simply doing it to illustrate that there was nothing else left to do. In this way appropriation has come to be seen as surprisingly expanding for painting. Brown would not be able to make the paintings he has made if he was using his own imagery as this would bring another factor into what essentially is intended to be a discussion primarily about painting. It should be noted that while both artists share similarities in the way they use appropriation (in Brown's Auerbach works and in Richter's Titian appropriations) there are fundamental differences in the motives of their broader bodies of work. Brown's use of appropriation is far more 'loaded' throughout his entire oeuvre as he repeatedly appropriates from other artist's works. In contrast, the Titian appropriations are not the norm for Richter, who generally appropriates from newspapers, magazines and other less 'authored' media – employing appropriation for the freedom it affords him as a subject matter.

When Richter appropriated the Titian painting (from the realm of 'high art'), he obscured it and made it less and less recognisable across the series of works. In an act of futility and frustration, the clarity of the original image is seen to slowly degenerate through the series until the canvas is one giant unrecognisable blur. When Brown appropriates the works he bases his paintings on he also alters them, but in a much less nihilistic way. While Richter's series could be seen to be very serious and sombre, Brown's series of works appear comparatively hopeful and up-beat partly because the whole nature of appropriation had changed by the time Brown came to be using it and partly because of how he treats his source imagery. His works are brightly coloured and often taken from the joyously low and gaudy. Brown's methods of altering colours and increasing the contrast transform the images from potentially being stale and historical to new and youthful. Furthermore, it is significant that Brown also appropriates images from the 'low' as well as the 'high'. Perhaps appropriating something that is seen to have 'failed' in the first place is an easier thing to do than appropriating something that is universally revered. Richter's Titian appropriations come with so much history and so many religious subtexts that there was always going to be a sense of having something to 'live up to'. Whereas when Brown appropriates a Dali or a Science-Fiction painting he could be seen to be starting from a 'lower' cultural place and therefore more likely to succeed in making a successful work, as there was never that initial sense of reverence associated with the source imagery.

Another feature that has emerged as a result of the 'death of painting' debate is the return to romanticism, pleasure and sentiment. As a result of the weight of decades of anxiety in relation to painting's place in the world, theorists such as Falconer believe that painters are now able to 'exploit sensuous pleasure in ways that used to be very unfashionable' (Falconer, 2003, 2). Falconer cites painters Sophie Von Hellerman and Elizabeth Peyton as examples of this newfound acceptability of a kind of 'romanticism' in contemporary painting. It is no longer unacceptable or unfashionable to show a pleasure in painting, and furthermore, it is now even accepted as a motivation for a body of work and an entire practice. Peyton is an

American artist who makes soft watery paintings of pop stars and celebrities, that are ‘genuinely felt’ works about the people she paints and the joy of putting paint of canvas (Falconer 2003, 2).

[...] critics are once again seeing the notions of pleasure and freedom buried in the tradition of idealist aesthetics as valuable – in a vague, ethical kind of way, if not politically. It may well be just this new licence for pleasure which has allowed painting to slip its moorings and leave off the thoroughly exhausted modernist terms of surface, depth, form, space; terms which were an onerous preoccupation for the drippers and stretchers of the mid 90s (Falconer 2003, 4).

Critic Russell Ferguson sees painter Vija Celmins to be an example of the return to pleasure in painting, as described in Falconer’s essay. Celmins predicted this return early in the debate in the 60s when she abandoned the Modernist models of the day for a return to ‘slowness’ and observation. Declaring that the models of the day seemed ‘somewhat played out’, she did this by returning to her studio and going back to looking at the objects around her (in the tradition of Morandi’s still lives) (Ferguson 2004, 99). Seen at that time to be irrelevant, ‘At first, she recalls, “I got no response at all. Sometimes people laughed” ’ it is now seen to be an acceptable way to make work (Celmins in Ferguson 2004, 99).

While many would agree that a return to pleasure in painting is a good thing, not all critics agree that a return to romanticism and sentimentality is. For example, Fried proposes that these attributes simply cannot exist (in a credible way) anymore, in light of what has come before in painting (that is, with the knowledge of what painting has lost throughout the past century as new ways of working with the medium were embraced and then played out). In a lecture at the Tate Modern in London in 2002, when describing Richter, Fried states that he paints ‘fully accepting the impossibility of recuperating for painting the now discredited values of uniqueness, expressivity, presentness and aesthetic transcendentality’ (Fried, 2002).

Another significant development that the 'death of painting' debate provoked, was the inclusion of women in the broad discussion of painting. Prior to the debate, there were few women who were included in the primarily male-dominated realm of 'high-art', and in particular painting. However in the 60s women artists such as Jo Baer (USA), Lee Lozano (USA), Ree Morton (USA) and Dorothea Rockburne (Canada) were all beginning to make significant impacts in painting (Reed in Danto 2003, 210). The reason for this can be seen in David Reed's statement that, 'It's very strange that the history of painting could be thought to end just as women were beginning to make their contributions' (Reed in Danto 2003, 210). The idea of the 'male-heroic artist' was a distinct characteristic of the old style of painting that came to an end with Modernism as a result of the 'death of painting' debate.

When De Duve discusses the movement of 'bad painting' in the 70s (an anti-aesthetic movement grounded in making deliberately bad works as a reaction to the very serious models of Modernism), he hypothesises as to why there were no women 'bad painters'. 'Irony and cynicism are not yet the order of the day when you simply don't qualify for the title of great painter (not capitalised) because of your gender (De Duve in Danto 2003, 268). Proof of the widespread acceptance of women as painters today can be seen in the great number of women successfully practicing, including such prominent artists as Cecily Brown (USA), Lisa Milroy (UK) and Elisabeth Peyton (USA).

With the invention of photography, painting underwent a number of changes that suggested that there might be an approaching end to the medium. It initially appeared as if the medium would be forced to play out toward a conclusion due to the sheer weight of arguments mounted against it. However Richter and other contemporary painters have embraced these arguments and used them as a weapon in the defence of painting. The expansion of the definition of painting to include other media, the expanded role of photography in painting, the shift in what it means to use appropriation, the re-acceptance of romanticism and sentimentality and the inclusion of women, all demonstrate the changed nature of painting

brought about by the ‘death of painting’ debate. This could be because the idea of painting playing out to its death, ended up only referring to a particular kind of painting, and a specific (and rather traditional) way of thinking about the medium and what was expected from it. A narrow way of thinking about painting has since been replaced by a broad and fractured approach that draws in and discards other media and concepts at will. Perhaps this new kind of painting is most accurately defined by its inability to be defined.

The modernist logic of painting [...] was tested to exhaustion in the 50s and 60s: it is no longer of much relevance at all. [...] The fact of contemporary painting’s disorientating pluralism, however, is surely evidence of the fact that there are no central concerns, no governing logic, in current practice at all (Falconer 2003, 270).

My Practice

It is with this fractured state in mind that I have developed my own practice. Drawing from a number of painting traditions and taking into account recent developments, I make paintings that primarily investigate ordinary objects along with the contemporary relationship between photography and painting. In my practice I enjoy the liberations that the ‘death of painting’ debate provoked, and owe a debt to the painters who, in response to the debate, changed the nature of painting.

The main source imagery of my paintings is domestic and banal objects that have drama and narrative despite their sometimes prosaic nature. I have sourced these banal and sometimes slightly obscure objects from thrift stores and markets so that they have come with their own sense of history and character. In my most recent series of works, I have set these objects in stark, white, studio environments, paring down their backgrounds so that their rich narratives and characters are contrasted with the minimal backgrounds in which they sit (Figures 25-26).

These works serve as an investigation into the act of painting where the painter's relationship is to the photograph as well as to the object itself. In this way, the act of collecting and photographing the work in a controlled studio setting holds as much importance as the subsequent putting of paint on canvas. Figures 25 - 26 are from a series based on old books, and explore the beauty and the hidden narratives found in the everyday, the ordinary and the overlooked.

All of these works are based on photography, and are only able to be made as a result of the 'death of painting' debate. As demonstrated in both Richter and Brown's work, it is now possible for painters to base their work on photography without simply using it to illustrate painting's death. Many contemporary painters base their work on photography, including Lisa Milroy (UK), Damien Loeb (USA) and Australians Julie Fragar and Michael Zavros. All these artists make works from photographs not to deny painting but to use it as a tool to extend it.

At the beginning of my Doctor of Visual Arts I made a series of works based on junk mail clippings that were painted very flatly in an attempt to imitate the bland consistency of a junk mail magazine (Figure 27). Just as there is more freedom associated with photography now, I am also able to use appropriation in my work not simply to illustrate the fact that there is nothing else left to do. As previously mentioned, artists who use appropriation now owe a debt to Richter as he was one of the first painters to use appropriation in a positive way (as opposed to other artists who appropriated mass-media images to prove that painting or originality are dead).

The junk mail works are different from the paintings I am making now at the conclusion of my Doctorate, as now the paintings are less about flatness and the banal image and more about the objects themselves, which are books. The objects I was initially painting were very two dimensional and the goal of the work was more about copying the junk mail magazine

than the actual objects. In trying to copy the magazine, these works were more of an investigation into appropriation, whereas the current series is more an investigation into the objects themselves. In my most recent works, when constructing the image (from which to take the source photograph), I take into account the narratives and histories of the books, grouping together titles that are sometimes nostalgic and sometimes kitsch (as in the case of *Tales in Toyland* [Figure 28]). I then paint them in a slow and methodical way, generally using only one or two layers of paint to build up a convincing surface. It could be said that painting in this way would not have been likely before the ‘death of painting’ debate, as I am taking advantage of the ‘return to looking’ and quiet observation that Ferguson sees Celmins as displaying, and also of the return to ‘pleasure in painting’ and sincerity (particularly in the case of the nostalgic books) that Falconer sees artists like Peyton to be displaying.

I began with Roland Barthes’ statement that ‘to be modern is to know that which is not possible any more’ (Barthes in Bois 1985. 232). Only by knowing and embracing what is not possible can we move forward. Painting has done this primarily in five ways. By embracing the media which were bombarding and ‘taking over’ painting, those media went from being weapons against painting to being tools that painters could use to make new and interesting work (and in turn a future for the medium). By using appropriation which was once seen as a way of illustrating that there was nothing else to do, appropriation went from being a sign of the end to being a tool that painters could use to make contemporary and relevant work. By accepting and using photography it went from being a weapon against painting, to being a tool that has enabled generations of painters to make newly innovative works. By enabling a return to the pre-Modernist attributes of romanticism & sentimentality, painting was able to draw from its past to ensure its future. Finally, the death of the ‘heroic male painter’ allowed women to enter the debate, putting an end to the exclusion of women in the discussions about painting.

CONCLUSION

It has been established that the 'death of painting' debate has greatly impacted late Twentieth Century painting. Gerhard Richter's practice has unfolded during this debate and prevails after it, while the younger artist Glenn Brown's practice has become prominent at the point that the debate has played out. Both painters have undeniably been influenced by this debate and both can be seen to have had an impact upon its course. Painting's triumphant response to the accusations of redundancy levelled at it is evident in the recent resurgence of the medium in galleries and art colleges.

Proof of painting's expansion can be seen in the great number of artists returning to it and the resurgence of critical interest in discussing it. While the revival of painting has been declared almost as often as its death, it is undeniable that there is an abundance of painting in galleries and that the medium is thriving. Exhibitions such as *Painting at the Edge of the World* (2001) (Walker Arts Centre, Minneapolis), *The Triumph of Painting* (2005) (The Saatchi Gallery, London) and publications such as *Vitamin P: New Perspectives in Painting* (2002) are just a selection of high profile projects focussing on this renewed interest in painting.

The most recent resurgence of painting is directly associated with the responses artists like Richter and Brown made to accusations of the medium's death. In this way, the debate expanded the possibilities for painting enabling it to; draw from other media; embrace photography; use appropriation for purposes other than to demonstrate painting's death; return to sincerity, romanticism and the enjoyment of painting as process; and include women in the broad discussion of contemporary painting. Since the 'death of painting' accusations, the medium has been forced to become more conceptual and it is this added depth that has enabled it to remain challenging. Where in high Modernism painting was primarily about painting, it is now able to embrace other theoretical issues. Another possible reason for its most recent revival is fatigue for technology-based art and a return to the physical object (as

opposed to the virtual). Related to this is a return to an interest in talent and skill based work. When discussing high Modernist painters Markus Lupertz and Georg Baselitz, Isabelle Graw suggests ‘nothing was more despised by artists like Lupertz and Baselitz than talent’ (Graw in Danto 2003, 210). Perhaps along with possible fatigue for the virtual comes a new interest in seeing time and talent invested in painting.

Today it could be said that painting started out being fairly easy to define with a definite role and purpose. Speaking broadly, pre-photography, painting’s task was the transcription of visual information, and post-photography, painting’s task was the conceptual assignment of working through to an end. As these tasks have run their courses, this now leaves us in the awkward position of having to rethink the purpose of a medium that is still so weighed down with the history of its recent past. It is a challenge to paint critically today, because painters must work with both painting’s expanded possibilities and the burden of the history of the medium. It has been my assertion throughout this paper that the endurance of painting is due to the fact that painters have been able to use the former as a tool to overcome the latter. Specifically, it is the ‘death of painting’ debate and the braveness of painters who are critical about their medium and have embraced this debate, that has enabled painting to endure and expand.

I have outlined painting’s troubled history, yet in discussing the accusations that have been levelled at it, it has become clear that instead of ending, the medium has emerged stronger than ever because of its ability to change and adapt. It is a sign of the medium’s richness that it was able to take on the threats levelled at it and not be overcome by them – having survived its turbulent past suggests that painting is well equipped to continue to thrive. In this way the ‘death of painting’ debate has ultimately been the ‘vampire’s kiss’ that has enabled painting to endure (Reed in Danto 2003, 268).

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- Figure 8. Gerhard Richter. *256 Colors [256 Fraben]*. 1974. Synthetic Polymer Paint on Canvas. 221 x 439.5cm. Private Collection, San Francisco. Source: Storr, R. 2002. *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, p.180-181.
- Figure 9. Gerhard Richter. *Annunciation after Titian (Verkündigung nach Tizian)*. 1973. Oil on Linen. 125.4 x 200.3cm. Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. Source: Harten, J. 1986. *Gerhard Richter Bilder Paintings*, Germany, DuMont Buchverlag Köln. p.343.
- Figure 10. Gerhard Richter. *Annunciation after Titian (Verkündigung nach Tizian)*. 1973. Oil on Linen. 125.4 x 200.3cm. Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. Source: Harten, J. 1986. *Gerhard Richter Bilder Paintings*, Germany, DuMont Buchverlag Köln. p.343.
- Figure 11. Gerhard Richter. *Annunciation after Titian (Verkündigung nach Tizian)*. 1973.

Oil on Linen. 125.4 x 200.3cm. Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. Source: Harten, J. 1986. *Gerhard Richter Bilder Paintings*, Germany, DuMont Buchverlag Köln. p.343.

Figure 12. Gerhard Richter. *Annunciation after Titian (Verkündigung nach Tizian)*. 1973.

Oil on Linen. 125.4 x 200.3cm. Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. Source: Harten, J. 1986. *Gerhard Richter Bilder Paintings*, Germany, DuMont Buchverlag Köln. p.344.

Figure 13. Gerhard Richter. *Annunciation after Titian (Verkündigung nach Tizian)*. 1973.

Oil on Linen. 125.4 x 200.3cm. Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. Source: Harten, J. 1986. *Gerhard Richter Bilder Paintings*, Germany, DuMont Buchverlag Köln. p.344.

Figure 14. Titian (Tiziano Vecellio). *Annunciation*. approximately 1530. 1.66 x 2.66cm. Oil

on Canvas. Scuola di San Rocco, Venice. Source: Wethey, H. E. 1969. *Titian: The Religious Paintings*, London, Phaidon, p.235.

Figure 15. Gerhard Richter. *Iceberg in Fog (Eisberg im Nebel)*. 1982. Oil on Canvas. 70 x

100cm. Private Collection, San Francisco. Source: Storr, R. 2002. *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, p.189.

Figure 16. Caspar David Friedrich. *The Sea of Ice*. 1823-25. Oil on Canvas. 96.7 x 126.9cm.

Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg. Source: <http://www.wga.hu/html/f/friedric/3/>

Figure 17. Glenn Brown. *I Lost My Heart to a Starship Trooper*. 1996. Oil on Canvas.

64.8cm x 53.5cm. Collection of Frac Limousin, Limoges. Source: Hepworth, S, Myers. T & Paul. F. *Glenn Brown*, Bignan, Domaine de Kerguéhennec, Centre d'Art Contemporain, p.25.

Figure 18. Glenn Brown. *Oscillate Wildly*. 1999. Oil on Canvas. 175.5 x 391.5cm.

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Figure 19. Glenn Brown. *Bocklin's Tomb (After Chris Foss)*. 1998. Oil on Canvas. 221 x

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Figure 21. Glenn Brown. *Beautification*. 1999. Oil on Canvas. 59 x 56cm. Collection of

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- Figure 22. Glenn Brown. *Eno Esicrexe* (installation photo). 1997. Oil on Canvas. 227 x 170cm. Private Collection, London. Source: Hepworth, S, Myers, T & Paul, F. *Glenn Brown*, Bignan, Domaine de Kerguéhennec, Centre d'Art Contemporain, p.31.
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- Figure 24. Gerhard Richter. *Mr Heyde (Herr Heyde)*. 1965. Oil on Canvas. 55 x 65cm. Private Collection. Source: Storr, R. 2003. *Doubt and Belief in Painting*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, p.59.
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