Investigating the Scope for Contemporary Landscape Painting to Represent the Anthropocene Age

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ABSTRACT

This project contends that landscape painting offers an important visual language and a suitable medium and mode to represent the Anthropocene age. I argue that painting traditions have provided a fertile site from which to critically respond to changes in our environment. Landscape painting inevitably draws from and reflects the traditions of its history, but also extends and transforms itself through creating hybrid interpretations and shifts of position throughout time and place. The aim of this study is to re-evaluate landscape painting in the Anthropocene age; at times, this may result in images that seem either ambiguous or contradictory, as contemporary responses to the landscape challenge our existing perspectives. I suggest that the establishment of an inferred subjectivity between depictions of the landscape and the position of the viewer may provide a means of suggesting, and at times visualising, a connectedness through which to better instil awareness of complicit behaviours that affect the environment. Historical records of landscape painting suggest that how humans depict the landscape is a response to how humans treat the landscape.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university to the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signature:                      Date:   24. 07.2021
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I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this land and Elders past, present and emerging. I am aware that I live on land that was owned, lived on and cared for over 65,000 years by Indigenous cultures. Cultural representations such as sand drawings, body painting, mapping the land, and stories and songs that extend to the celestial realms remain as cultural language from ancient to contemporary times. Indigenous representations include many responses to culture, story and place that include performative elements of ritual and ceremony. With great respect, I acknowledge cultural traditions from Indigenous cultures.
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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this project is to investigate the potential to re-evaluate landscape painting as a mode to represent or respond to the Anthropocene age—a period of time in which human activity has changed the eco-systems of the planet, perpetuating global warming and dramatic weather events. In recent decades, scientists and researchers have concluded that fossil fuel-driven industrial processes have caused enormous and ongoing damage to the natural world. Science proves that the earth is warming, glaciers are melting, global temperatures are rising, and tropical islands are sinking into the ocean, resulting in whole communities evacuating and migrating. The Anthropocene age, generated by a global consumer culture that burns fossil fuel and generates excessive waste, has resulted in conditions that have changed the relationship between the landscape and humans. The everchanging nature of landscape is experienced physically and vicariously every day through extreme weather, environmental conditions, and disasters.¹

This doctoral inquiry is a personal response to the Anthropocene age, presented in the form of this exegesis and a series of painted landscapes. Throughout the research, I discuss elements from the history of landscape painting to consider how humans view the landscape through frames of reference that have enabled documentation and mapping, which have provided a visual means through which to ‘lay claim’ to the landscape. To date, the prominent approach of Western thinking and aesthetic practice has been to define culture as a separate category to that of nature, and as one that dominates and controls nature. Through the act of painting landscape in the Anthropocene age, I suggest that the establishment of an inferred subjectivity between the landscape painting and the viewer may provide a means of suggesting and visualising a connectedness through which to better instil awareness of complicit behaviours that affect the environment. My motivation is to re-negotiate an awareness of the role that sustainability can play in relation to nature. This approach implies that an ethics of inactivity is no longer acceptable. The study refers and responds to diverse conceptual and philosophical approaches to landscape painting and follows recurring themes that have been presented throughout the history of the genre and that now face uncertain and

¹ David Archer, Global Warming: Understanding the Forecast (Malden USA: Oxford, UK; Carlton, Australia: Blackwell, 2007).
changing times. Contextualised within contemporary and historical painting, this thesis highlights the work of artists and writers who have inspired and guided the progress of the project.

Sixteenth-century European artists established the genre of traditional landscape paintings of picturesque scenery. They viewed the land as a vista through precise images that engaged techniques of linear perspective, among others, to present a format structured to ideals of representation that reconfigured the chaos of nature into the compositional clarity of foreground, middle-ground, and background.² This way of representing nature places the viewer in the centre of the frame, implying that nature is available to be captured and contained as an aspect of culture. Landscape painting provided a way to define and represent a range of knowledges: flora and fauna, geology, agricultural practices, and scientific reflections on natural resources. These practices were engaged as part of the process of documenting and colonising newly discovered lands.³ Landscape painting further developed throughout Europe as the action of acquiring land and the gentrifying of land steadily increased. Landscape painting became respectable as “a historiated genre in the work of painters such as Nicolas Poussin, and Claude Lorrain—that is, a sort of compromise between landscape and history painting, the most esteemed of the classical genres.”⁴ This doctoral investigation initially framed a series of historical references to establish that landscape painting in Western art history spans broad observations and genres used as instruments to represent experiences and narratives in the landscape. Painted landscapes are engaged to describe the memories and events from the time and place in which paintings are produced.⁵

Of particular interest in my research is the historical use of landscape painting as a means of representing violent and dramatic weather events. The cataclysmic potential of landscape emerged in Western landscape painting well before the advent and acknowledgement of the Anthropocene. For example, the forbidding landscapes of John Martin (1789–1854) are an

example of the *apocalyptic sublime*. Martin’s pivotal triptych on the theme of the Last Judgment, *The Great Day of His Wrath* (1851), was one of the most popular images of the time. This powerful painting presents a dramatic weather event of apocalyptic proportions. In a raging storm, lightning and large rocks are shown hurtling down towards a mountain onto people who are positioned in the shadows. Martin presents a red vision of the last days on earth, with the wealthy classes suffering damnation from God. Martin’s ‘Last Judgment’ paintings are an attempt to re-inspire religious feelings, encourage people to live morally and to fear God in an attempt to intervene in a move away from Catholicism during an age of steam trains and technology. Martin raises questions that express the anxiety and instability of social and institutional change at the time. Apocalyptic sublime images are once again appropriate in this time of the Anthropocene age.

Figure 1 John Martin (1789–1854) *The Great Day of His Wrath* 1851, oil on canvas, 2400 x 3470cm
Source: http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/john-martin-the-great-day-of-his-wrath-

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Many painters have also responded to climatic extremes and the particular effect they have on the lives of humans through landscapes. For example, J.M.W. Turner presents images that suggest that extreme weather is far more powerful than humans and technology. Japanese artist Hokusai’s *The Great Wave at Kanagawa* (1831–1833) depicts a destructive tidal wave, and in Australian painting, Sidney Nolan’s *Drought* (1944) is an example of the devastating effects on the land from drought. Even though formidable and awe-inspiring weather events have featured throughout landscape painting for a range of reasons, the Anthropocene age has emphasised climate in terms of the relationship of mankind to nature. We now have to examine the effects of human culture on the natural world and find ways to weather the impending storms of climate crisis metaphorically and literally. This thesis focusses on a selection of painted landscapes from Western art history to develop an iconographic vocabulary through which to examine the rise of landscape painting as a vehicle to represent important or uncertain moments in the history of humans in the environment. My studio inquiry offers a focussed exemplar of how contemporary practitioners can harness landscape painting as a response to changing relationships between and an understanding of the culture and nature nexus in the Anthropocene age.

In order to reflect on the operational potential for landscape painting, the exegesis offers an analysis of selected paintings produced over the course of the candidature (2017–21). I have employed landscape painting to depict narratives on conditions of the earth, ocean, geology, and atmospherics and on our (or my) felt relationship with them. Throughout the studio investigation, I worked primarily in series or groups of paintings that had related stylistic linkages and explored different visual conceptions of the Anthropocene. Four major series ran in tandem or parallel production—*New Depths, Weather Patterns, Architecture for Unknown Worlds, Mining Matters*—and they fed into the culminating series *Landskins*. All the series thematically related to my interest in representations of the Anthropocene, but the final installation titled *Landskins* is the resolution of the study. It has been developed as an immersive, subjective experience for the viewer—an intervention created through visual concepts, themes and the mechanics of painting.
Using a studio arts-based research inquiry, I argue the value of experience as knowledge,\(^8\) that informs my responses to extensive data through investigative studio practice. This approach follows the well-established field of creative arts-research methodology, and it has been characterised by James Haywood Rollings Jr. as a creative worldview that offers “an ontology … wherein theory and praxis are viewed as constructing one another. The cycle of cause resulting in effect, and effect regenerating cause understands a work of art as works of research.”\(^9\) Positioned within this relatively recent approach to academic research, my work adopts a sensory response to the natural environment through both first-person encounters with nature and second-hand imagery in popular culture and the internet, interpreting that knowledge through the materiality of paint and the process of painting. The painting process involves complex considerations, including those of time and place, which are inspirational aspects for expression. The subject matter of place is continually reinvented through personal, natural and ecological events, human interventions and interpretations. The paintings therefore constitute visual maps of human relationships to the landscape. This process of working employs a montage approach to landscape-influenced imagery that includes references to architectural drawings, maps, and cartography.

By drawing from visual references sourced from the internet and unlimited time periods, I extend that data into relational imagery that reflects both analytical and emotive responses to narratives of place. Such a way of working has been described by Laura Hoptman, the curator of the *Forever New* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York in 2015 as “atemporal.”\(^10\) She asserts that “unlike past periods of revivalism, such as the appropriations of the eighties, this super-charged art historicism is not even nostalgic. It is closest to a connoisseurship of boundless information, a picking and choosing of elements of the past to resolve a problem or task at hand.”\(^11\) The term ‘atemporal’ was first identified and used by science fiction writer Willian Gibson to describe how the internet created a world where all time frames exist at once, with the result being the opening of a portal to a new and

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\(^11\) Ibid. Gibson and Bruce Sterling, who coined the term *steampunk*, are cited as first responders in literature tracking ideas of *atemporality*. 
strange world of seemingly unlimited information. Atemporality can be observed in all artistic genres, including music, fashion, and literature.\textsuperscript{12} This term is of particular value in my research because it foregrounds the cumulative relationship between human culture and the natural world across time that we are now having to reconcile.

The research is also informed by other theoretical discussions of approaches to painting, drawing on key texts such as Catherine Sousslof’s publication \textit{Foucault on Painting}, which describes painting as a visual language that combines elements of history and contemporary times stating that “painting retains some or all of its aesthetic aspects both in the past and in the potentially transformed present.”\textsuperscript{13} I respond by exploring definitions of a non-linear approach to narrative by embracing painting as a conduit that delineates the mark of a current and future story.

Martin Jay’s \textit{Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in the Twentieth-Century French Thought}\textsuperscript{14} discusses the denigration of visuality in French theory with reference to how academic writing took precedence over visual language. Jay emphasises his belief in support of the value of the lived experience as a reliable source of knowledge and argues that narratives formed by lived experience contain elements of important information and define a counter argument to those restricted by the demands of academe. Jay emphasises the value of visuality as a reliable source of philosophical, conceptual, and specific knowledge, positioned in time, place and culture.\textsuperscript{15}

In \textit{Aspiring to the Landscape: On Painting and the Subject of Nature}, Petra Halkes analyses the relationship between humans and the natural world by presenting a psychological argument that articulates ideas of why and how the human world is constantly exploiting the natural world.\textsuperscript{16} The text \textit{Landscape and Memory} by Simon Schama presents a historical study identifying how landscape is politicised by tracing the remnants of site-specific events

\textsuperscript{12} Hoptman, \textit{The Forever Now}, 13.
\textsuperscript{13} Catherine M. Soussloff, \textit{Foucault on Painting} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 18.
\textsuperscript{15} Jay, "The Limits of Limit-Experience."
\textsuperscript{16} Halkes, \textit{Aspiring to the Landscape}.
throughout history that continue to exist as human markers of important sites of memory and narrative. Schama argues that landscape retains the history and memory of the lived experiences of places and narratives linked to mythology and cultures and events.\textsuperscript{17}

Selected essays by Barry Schwabsky continue to be influential as observations and publications about contemporary painting that critique and reveal contemporary voices by documenting innovative global shifts in thinking and making.\textsuperscript{18} Todd Bradway’s edited book \textit{Landscape Painting Now}, which includes an essay by Schwabsky, speaks of the global condition, presenting multiple exemplars of painting as research, and offering detailed discussions on aspects of painting in the context of the Anthropocene age.\textsuperscript{19}

Through the context of this theoretical research and the development of my studio outcomes, I argue for the value of understanding mimetic, abstract and pure abstract representations of landscape along with immersive and experimental practices that relate to painting as cogent responses to changing responses to landscape arising as a result of the Anthropocene. I outline how my own and others’ works are positioned within the context of contemporary and historical painting and allude to where genres overlap in content and style to form new hybrid categories. Select exemplars are highlighted and discussed as important influences on the ongoing development in responses to landscape painting; they include Mark Rothko, Georgia O’Keeffe, Ross Bleckner, Julie Mehretu, and Wanda Koop.

Having outlined the thematic concern of this research, I will now briefly provide an overview of the structure of this exegesis. In Chapter 1, I introduce the important issue of the Anthropocene and how explorations in landscape painting may re-articulate ways of viewing the landscape. This chapter also outlines the beginnings of the studio investigation with an analysis of the first series of works, positioning them within the developmental trajectory of the project.

\textsuperscript{17} Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}.
In Chapter 2, I discuss the work of a selection of theorists and educators who write about the conceptual and philosophical history of landscape and painting. In Chapter 3, I introduce and discuss a selection of contemporary artist exemplars to explore the history of abstract and semi-abstract works, drawing from mapping and discussions of painting landscape from the built environment. The emphasis is on the descriptive techniques and aspects of painting particular to the artist. I extend this discussion by introducing approaches to painting that explore ideas of what painting is, and by describing how these have influenced personal works.

In Chapter 4, I discuss how the developments and outcomes of the various series of works produced during the candidature from 2017 to 2019 converged into the culminating Landskins series of 2020 to 2021.
The Anthropocene is best described as a geological epoch and a marker that delineates a section of time in which human activities have impacted dramatically on the Earth’s ecosystems. The Industrial Revolution (1760–1840) and World War 2 (1939–1945) were great accelerators of damage to the atmosphere and biosphere, and dramatic shifts in the environment were identified in the 1950s. Current relationships between the human race and the environment have reached an ecological tipping point. This ecological crisis has been described as having arisen through the use of fossil fuels, causing global warming and the emissions of greenhouse gas emissions that have drastically altered the climate on Earth. Climate scientist David Archer defines the difference between weather and climate as follows: “Weather is chaotic, which means that it cannot be forecast very far into the future. By climate we refer to an average in the weather and we arrive at something that is not chaotic, and in some ways, predictable.” Archer describes the process that determines climate in technical terms by discussing how energy flowing to and from the sun and into space interacts with increasing temperatures that alter the energy flows, resulting in an increase of energy and heat from the sun to the Earth. This human-caused development is recognised by scientists as the major influencing agent forcing the global warming issue of climate change. Gases such as methane, CH4 and hydrocarbon molecules, nitrous oxide, and ozone are also changing because of human developments. The 2013 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report concluded that “Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, sea level has risen, and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased substantially.”

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20 According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the Anthropocene epoch is the “unofficial interval of geologic time, making up the third worldwide division of the Quaternary Period (2.6 million years ago to the present), characterized as the time in which the collective activities of human beings (HOMO SAPIENS) began to substantially alter Earth’s surface, atmosphere, oceans, and systems of nutrient cycling”. John Rafferty, “Anthropocene Epoch,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last updated 20 March 2020, [https://www.britannica.com/science/Anthropocene-Epoch](https://www.britannica.com/science/Anthropocene-Epoch).
22 Ibid.
Carbon emissions can be reduced by the use of carbon-free energy, such as wind and solar energy, which are already used in many countries as an alternative to coal. As the global population grows and consumes more energy, new and innovative ways of using energy are required for future generations. Forecasts for the coming century describe how climate change will alter the way humans inhabit the planet, with a temperature rise of 2 to 5 degrees Celsius by the year 2200 and onward. Impacts on the global community are evident through the news and media by presenting discussions on events of rising waters, dramatic weather and defence strategies for fire, landslides and flooding. Archer discusses climate change in terms of social sciences and economics, ethics and fairness, and highlights the costs that are evident now and in the future. Extreme weather conditions have become a major challenge to everyday life in the Anthropocene age. When added to the effects caused by the global viral pandemic COVID-19 in 2020–21, this situation amplifies global anxiety and will arguably change human behaviour in the natural and cultural world for the foreseeable future.

The Anthropocene age presents artists with new challenges to respond to a multiplicity of factors affecting the environment today. The purpose of this exegesis is to re-evaluate landscape painting as an investigative inquiry into the Anthropocene age through approaches that may include responses to global warming, climate change, resulting dramatic weather events, and the effects on cultures, lives and eco systems. In my landscape paintings, I draw from records of weather events, sustainable design, and climate change. This doctoral study records developments in Western art history and identifies genres of interest that inform personal landscape paintings—in particular, art historical conceptions of the abstract and the sublime. Select exemplars highlight ways that landscape painting negotiates a painted language. I nominate landscape painting as a legitimate visual language to represent the Anthropocene age.

While landscape painting historically encapsulated a romantic vision of a sublime view or vista, I assert that in response to the Anthropocene age we must reconsider our relationship to the landscape and our representations of it. As humans, we are deeply connected to the environment and part of the profound natural world. In her book *Aspiring to the Landscape*,

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25 Ibid., 5–6.
Halkes draws from psychological analysis to argue that “landscape is enmeshed in a story of longing for seemingly opposite ends: the conquest of nature and an affirmation of self on the one hand, and the merging with nature an effacement of the mortal self on the other.” The ‘conquest’ of nature includes, among other things, the overuse and removal of natural resources, the claiming of land for settlement, disregarding the inhabitation and ownership of Indigenous peoples and the overuse of fossil fuels. Land has been organised according to human needs and in Western culture representational painting has employed principles of linear perspective as a formulaic proposition of encapsulating and representing nature. Traditional devices and formulas for representing nature may seem ‘natural’ in themselves; however, critically reflexive theoretical positions have pointed out how traditional representation has tended to provide an ordered means through which nature can be represented as a commodity to be claimed and owned by humans.

Undoubtedly, conflicts between humans and the natural environment developed from attitudes associated with ownership rather than custodianship. As a result, little consideration is given to the future generations of all species, including humans. Halkes observes this situation and considers the question “does this conflict stem from the deep dissatisfaction of being in the immortal human state and the limitations of this state?” History informs us that the human engagement with nature is one of separation and dominance over natural resources and subsequent disrespect for the environment.

The significance of climate change to artists is evidenced through the multiple global exhibitions that have responded to scientific and policy issues as well as to weather-based events. Diverse approaches are engaged globally by artists who were recorded and discussed in visual artist Roslyn Taplin’s doctoral dissertation titled “Climate Change: A Different Subjectivity”. Taplin asserts that it may be possible for different people living across the globe to contribute to mitigating climate change effects through developing an altered subjectivity within the viewer of climate change art. Taplin argues that this is achieved

26 Halkes, Aspiring to the Landscape, 3–4.
27 Rollings, Arts Based Research, 137. The practice-led research model embraces the reflexive and hermeneutic processes of intuitive responses to the original meanings of texts. Interpretation is achieved through improvisatory processes of making meaning by reconnecting various parts into new configurations.
28 Rollings, Arts Based Research.
through the artist–viewer relationship, where the visual is used to stimulate realisations that impact on future implications of inaction. Taplin writes that domestic and international policies and actions are responded to through creative activities including “political rhetoric, economic values and beliefs, and social realities that also influence climate change policy development and implementation.” Taplin insists that visual art has a different way of communicating that does not require the digestion of multiple texts.29

I support Taplin’s idea of defining a new subjectivity between the viewer and the artist enabled by visualisations of our collective anxiety about climate change: this idea is perhaps the central driver in my art production. My final body of work, *Landskins*, discussed in Chapter 4, draws the viewer into an immersive painted installation of landscape-influenced imagery. The viewer is submerged in a room of large painted landscape-influenced images that explore colour fields that define space and positioned as a meaning maker and a collaborator—a being complicit in the landscape experience. A subjective view is implied, and the painted skins represent thoughts, marks, and maps that are expressions of the experience of the Anthropocene. The immersive process is engaged to negate outworn modes of linear perspective by positioning the viewer in the centre of the field of multiple renditions of landscape to re-present an inclusive model.

My first works produced in response to the Anthropocene thematic were more descriptive exploring images about sustainability and climate conditions and fall within the “art and climate change” genre that Taplin described in her 2015 study. My doctoral inquiry began in 2017, after an image of the Svalbard Seed Repository prompted me to think about what I call ‘Architecture for Unknown Worlds’. By this I mean paintings that are influenced by unpredictable conditions and geological changes and that question how these may inform sustainable design and architecture. This idea, among others, continued through bodies of work that I developed between 2017 and 2021. The Svalbard Seed Repository, located on the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen, is designed as a vault to protect the seeds of threatened species, some of which may vanish altogether due to war and changing climate conditions. Working in series of painted images provided me with a way to expand my initial responses

and imagery. Ideas were further expanded through developing a dialogue between works as the series progressed. Research, narrative and intuition combined with imagery to identify visual connections through the manipulation of multiple layers of translucent and opaque paint. In my working process, I value experience as well as intuition as legitimate ways of developing imagery. The series of works titled *Architecture for Unknown Worlds* continued from 2018 to 2021 (Figures 2–4).

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 2** Paula Payne *Vault* from *The Architecture for Unknown Worlds* series 2017, acrylic on canvas, 94 x 70cm Image credit: Paula Payne

The *Architecture for Unknown Worlds* images explore our environmental predicament. Working with references to architectural drawings and landscape, I present convoluted structures that reveal possible architecture for a more naturally unstable world, even though it
is unlikely that these structures would be able to survive a storm. I present these painted images as an inquiry with an emphasis on uncertainty as the visual narrative. Key issues in this body of work include how humans will adapt if resources are depleted and no longer sustainable. The implied visual fragility of the imagery is portrayed in delicate blue hues of misty, scumbled and poured layers of paint, in which I use metaphor to support thematic elements of ‘absence as presence’, considering if humans will be present in a future landscape and what we are losing through climate change. Through multiple translucent veils and fine washes of paint, otherworldly environments appear as ghost-like apparitions that suggest the past or, perhaps, of a future where the fragile and uncertain nature of human habitation is held in the balance. Monochromatic hues create a solitary visual space to suggest an illusion of calm yet uncertain terrain. The abstract skeletal form of an architectural shelter hovers as a morphing conglomeration of styles (see Figure3) and history that floats on a fragile horizon line. In this image, a hybrid mutation of the hard-edged modernist aesthetic combines with organic forms to suggest that modern cultures can no longer offer a sustainable vision.

Current effects of climate change include extreme weather, mass migration, the energy crisis, and viral pathogens. My works reflect on the human predicament and reference architectural drawing and mapping devices as well as more traditional landscape imagery. Empty of figures, these landscapes imply a troubling absence. The missing human form is replaced by linear drawings and mapping, and remnants of shelters that act as avatars for presence. These evoke questions about how humans might provide adequate shelter when resources are rendered unstable or depleted in an unpredictable environment. Such questions encourage the viewer to take an active stance and to review their own role in environmental protection and to reconsider how important sustainable design might be to the future of humankind.

In this research enquiry, the visual image generates a unique means for apprehending information; each painting operates, in part, as an idiosyncratic transmission of subjectivity from one to another. Some of these images refer to personal reflections on narratives of lives lived and places that are reviewed as portals into the past, present or projected towards an imagined future. I remain aware that ‘the personal is political’ and that I cannot be separated from my culture, class, gender, experiences, and education. Influenced by Western art
traditions, I choose to respond to global and local situations through painted landscape works that engage semi-abstract, pure abstract and graphic approaches.

Figure 3 Paula Payne Architecture for Unknown Worlds no 1 2019, acrylic on canvas, 101 x 101cm
Image credit: Alex Shaw
Throughout my life, I have been influenced by my father’s engineering work and workshop inventions. Part of this included my constant exposure to technical drawings rendered by hand. I studied technical drawing with my father’s help as well as at school, and these elements of fine line graphic renderings are integrated into many of my landscape works, identifiable as a personal style. I feel that this linear component of the work is a reflection on both historical ways of capturing the landscape and as a form of contemporary mapping that
reflects the anxious world humans now inhabit. The line renderings extend to cartography, including lines of latitude and longitude, and refer to ways that humans have named and claimed the globe through physical explorations and world travel. My own personal interest in mapping emerged in my youth during two trips I took by sea to and from England with my mother. I realise that from these experiences I learnt about mappings of lines of latitude and longitude, the Equator, Tropic of Capricorn and the Tropic of Cancer, and expansive ways of viewing the world by defining the land, sea, and sky. My particular interest in visions informed by large spaces suggesting the infinity of the night sky was formed during my childhood and teenage years.
Figure 5 Paula Payne *Latitude and the Night Sky* 2021, acrylic on canvas, 101 x 101cm

Image credit: Paula Payne
CHAPTER 2: KEY THEORETICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE LANGUAGE OF PAINTING

As part of this doctoral research, I have studied depictions of painted landscapes produced in relation to, and informed by, traditions of Western landscape painting that have historically linked depictions of place to particular cultural interpretations of story, memory, and critical inquiry. For the purpose of this research, I have chosen to focus on aspects that relate to my own studio research, including abstract and sublime works of art. Traditions of landscape painting that include natural and constructed elements and extended painting including installation, are part of the broad register of contemporary abstract painting. Personal approaches have emerged in response to changing relationships with ‘place’, ‘country’ and the ‘land’.

This chapter examines the work of influential theorists, critics and writers who have addressed visual explorations of the environment. In his seminal text *Landscape as Memory*, Simon Schama discusses the idea of ‘landscape’ as both culture and nature, and that landscape can be described as “constructs of the imagination projected onto wood, water, rock.”³⁰ Schama rejects the notion of landscape as being a ‘natural’ representation of scenery, or a view of the natural world by reiterating that myth, memory, and conceptual vision are also vital elements to our understanding and experience of place. Schama asserts that “This is a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents: of becoming in fact part of the scenery.”³¹

The importance of landscape in European painting during the early nineteenth century is evident in Romantic painting at its peak, approximately between 1800 and 1850. In the later part of the century, artists working in the movement of French Impressionism (prominent 1870–1880) and its various other national or regional offshoots around the globe presented new ways of thinking about and representing the landscape. Innovations included dramatic renditions of light, vigorous brushstrokes and broken applications of colour (not blended) embedded in moody and shimmering landscapes emerging from plein-air painting about time and place. Many developments in painting were a response to developments in photography,

³¹ Ibid.
which presented an unprecedented capacity to document and present realism. In his essay contribution to *Landscape Painting Now: From Pop Abstraction to New Romanticism*, “Painting with the Flow of the World,” Barry Schwabsky discusses nineteenth-century landscape painting as “the most abstract form of painting before abstraction.”32 Painted imagery moved away from the figurative representation of nature and towards the interplay of all of the elements in the picture, which included a new focus on quality of light and ways of developing colour through an immediacy of paint. Plein air painting emphasised light to describe the time of day and by applying broken colour mixed optically and directly on the canvas to expand ideas of landscape painting.

With the advent of the twentieth century, Modernism played out with “Fauve landscapes, Expressionist landscapes, Cubist landscapes”,33 opening doors to new worlds and representations by exploring themes using wild gestures and discordant colour, vivid emotive outpourings, and fragmented geometric imagery with raw references to primitive art and artifacts. These explorations all appeared to be heading toward the direction of pure abstraction that progressed during the twentieth century.34 The shift away from realism in painting provided many exciting shifts in landscape painting that did not disappear from discussions and have continued to be a focus for many contemporary painters to represent landscape now: an approach that takes into account a felt or abstract relationship with landscape apart from the concretely visual or textual. Schwabsky quotes Al Gore’s famous phrase ‘the inconvenient truth’ as a reminder of the environmental challenges that humans face, stating that “in the twenty-first century, the idea of landscape painting has become more fraught with challenges.”35

In the pre-digital and pre-photographic era, the burden of the mimetic image or visual representation was dominated by painting. The role played by digital sources in contemporary life continue as prominent modes of the visual and challenge traditional approaches to landscape painting. However, digitised imagery has also augmented and extended traditional approaches through the multiplicity of images available for artists to

33 Ibid. These genres also focussed on still life and figurative works.
34 Ibid. 14
35 Ibid., 23.
embrace as data. This approach can become a layering of imagery from different time periods and was identified in the introduction to this exegesis as ‘atemporal’, a term first identified and used by science fiction writer Willian Gibson to describe how the internet created a world where all time frames exist at once. Resultant images often oscillate between references to form and content, and contexts. Today, more landscapes are produced digitally, either as still or moving images, than they are produced using traditional approaches to art making.

The twenty-first century is a media-infused technological world. However, within this field of representation dominated by non-material or digital images, artists continue to explore specific traditions of painting and, as I have already noted, the language of landscape painting retains its value as a mode of critical enquiry. Part of the enduring appeal of painting is its capacity to slow down the experience of viewing and for practitioners. The process of painting takes time to think, to experiment and to work toward resolving an image. During this process, the artist undertakes a type of visual and material meditation on the subject matter.

Schwabsky speaks about buried painting as a way of articulating the question as to how and why the terms ‘landscape’ and ‘painting’ would work together in the twenty-first century. His discussion implies that painting is buried in new media and various iterations and expressions that overlook the value of painting. However, the Anthropocene age provides landscape painting with a wealth of information from which to reconfigured interpretations of our relationship to the land. Schwabsky identifies the word ‘landscape’ as a complex term and implies that it signifies nature as a picture or being conceived of as scenery. The result of this disconnect with nature presents a legitimate position from a human vantage point for nature to have open access for material exploitation. Schwabsky insists that “this point of view has meant the transformation of the natural world in destructive and transforming ways that currently threatens to make nature uninhabitable for humans.”

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37 Mode of critical enquiry as an aesthetic medium; Concise Oxford Dictionary; seventh edition, p650
38 Schwabsky, “Painting with the Flow of the World.”
39 Ibid. He defines is as a picture of natural scenery dating from the sixteenth century.
history, the genre of landscape painting has continued to be expanded and redefined through particular experiences of time and place. Currently, the era of the Anthropocene offers even more challenges to the capacity of landscape painting to offer a critically informed and challenging visual language through which to re-think our relationship to nature.

2.01 FOUCAULT ON PAINTING

In her text *Foucault on Painting*, 41 Soussloff describes how Foucault framed painting as a philosophy, a historical investigation and an ongoing conceptual methodology. In effect, Soussloff’s interpretation of Foucault’s writing on painting describes it as a visual language that defines visuality and experiences from memory with observations made at a specific place and specific time. Soussloff states that “Foucault’s philosophy indicates the strength that painting maintained both as a historical tool, and as conceptual methodology in a system conceived of as centrally concerned with vision and visibility, and as a way to understand the situation of the subject in the world.” 42 Described by Foucault as a transformative process, painting enables the painter to attain knowledge of the self. This is achieved through the production of painted interpretations that have arrived through investigative and experimental processes and then projected back into the world as a visual language. As a result, the personal then potentially becomes political; Foucault speaks about painting as a way of evolving and being “and as a form of ethics that required an understanding of aesthetics.” 43

Understood in this way, painting can be seen as a visual language; and craft that can be read and analysed through an understanding of the maker, and social and economic conditions of the time, and through examinations of the reception of the work. Furthermore, painting is discussed as a theory that directly relates to the social sciences, and paintings are treated as cultural objects and as texts that can be analysed. 44

This argument in turn implies a relationship with written language. As the term suggests, visual language is produced via responses and experiences that link time to place, as well as to the experiences and memories of the maker. Martin Jay described Foucault’s position in

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 3.
44 I am aware that in the past critics such as Martin Jay were critical of Foucault and other French theorists for their ocular-phobic or anti-visual attitudes. Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 15.
relation to his own argument about the value of experience, stating that “appeals to lived experience may defy an academic rationale for those who identify with empiricism and are always a re-interpretation of the facts.”

Arguing that the act painting is itself an act of re-experiencing, an attempt to unify experiences and data and responses as provisional constructions of identity that open up towards a discursive, rather than a definitive experience, Jay asserts “experience is at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted.”

Jay observes that Foucault and Bataille defined experience as an event undertaken in a manner that was often lost in translation. However, Foucault describes his own experiences as ones that are often highly psychological when he discusses the books he has written and how transformative those experiences were in relation to personal growth. Jay observes that Foucault continued to expand on notions of experience as knowledge, speaking about the value of experience as a means of reaffirming character and a way of developing meaning and “experience as a post facto reconstruction of that action, experience is always a fiction, something constructed, that has been which exists only after it has been made, not before: it isn’t something that is true, but it has been a reality.”

These discussions on experience suggest the ways in which literature and visual languages describe and form interpretations of truths that invite further speculation from the viewer and the artist. Shared cultural experiences can also coalesce into either visual or verbal narratives that can represent cohesive human stories, responses and intentions that connect to a range of communities.

Jay also discusses the value of visuality and a history of vision in relation to social forms, beliefs, languages and philosophical concepts. In Downcast Eyes, Jay argues that twentieth-century French theorists were “contributors to a sustained attack on vision, and collectively formed a tradition of ‘antiocularcentric’ discourse.” Such opinions contributed to the

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46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., 156–158.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 158.
51 Ibid., 2–3.
denigration of painting and other creative practices in academe. In an essay called “Scopic Regimes of Modernity,” Jay describes how contemporary modern life is obsessed with visual imagery to produce a world of voyeurism fed by multiple media sources. Jay presents a perspective on intellectual and cultural histories with an emphasis on visual interpretations and changing visual languages. For example, Jay nominates the “slitting of the eye in ‘un chein andalou’ as a massive cultural pun for the violent denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought.” In other words, French theorists denigrated visual language to uphold the power of written language.

Jay’s discussion of Foucault highlights the philosopher’s description of the power of written language and ‘panoptic surveillance’. Jay suggests that although creative works have been viewed as a less reliable sources of knowledge than the written word, they are valid sources of knowledge. The recognition of visual language to the acquisition of knowledge at times has continued to be contested. Soussloff, however, contradicts Foucault’s views and highlights that nothing has changed within Foucault’s written work since his death in 1984. However, the dominance of academe has expanded, encompassing the value of visuality as a language that negotiates and considers varied interpretations as experiences to be included in the field of knowledge. Foucault wrote of the predictive quality of painting: “painting can do what no other practice can do, in effect it can figure something else out”. Paintings explore a range of subjects simultaneously—they refer to visual origins, historical objects or re-enactments, and re-inventions of enactments. The process of observing and engaging with surface, shadow, colour, and the implied image in abstract and semi-abstract works of art enables a painting to mirror the author’s thoughts and to reveal insights into how images are conceived.

Painting asks what does today speak of, and what is the relationship of painted imagery to yesterday and tomorrow. Foucault stated that, “Paintings speak of the future, the past, the now; as theory, practice, artifact, and an expressive trace of its maker, it appears to exist in an

54 Soussloff, Foucault on Painting, 15.
entirely novel situation.” Painting has retained its influence on theoretical inquiries into the value of visual language to engage in an image-saturated era. In my research, I value that the genre of landscape painting continues to offer a unique interpretive tool through which to recreate new images and visual languages that can redefine the human relationship to place. I refer here to themes and narratives of the Anthropocene as subject matter.

2.02 THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS OF INTEREST PRE-1960

Western art history is the focus of this inquiry. Personal creative explorations and developments move forward by acknowledging pivotal events such as wars, mass migration, technology, weather events, and pandemics that host new visual developments and representations during collisions of new contexts. In the next chapter, I will outline how particular artists harnessed the genre of landscape painting as a means through which they could suggest new ways of negotiating relationships with place. By doing this, I will extend my argument that landscape painting has provided an active interrogative, critical means through which to challenge assumptions, and traditions about what landscape can be.

As I have already noted, landscape painting has evolved through a range of styles and approaches, not all of which strive for recognisable representational approaches to the subject matter. Abstraction has offered an approach where relationships between pictorial elements can suggest, rather than describe the broader implications of the relationships between culture and nature. In this section, I cite paintings from romantic influences of the sublime, and semi-abstract and abstract works from before and after the world wars.

Landscape painting has also provided a tradition through which individuals, communities and cultures can explore their ideas about, and relationship to a range of emotive and imaginative states. A growing interest in the notion of landscape as a realm that offered a means for metaphysical reconsiderations gave rise to what has been referred to as the “romantic sublime.” Terror, awe, divine nature, and infinity were part of the language used to define early sublime landscape painting. Ideas of the sublime were developed in literature and philosophy as well as the visual arts. As American art historian Robert Rosenblum (1927–2006) observes, “The sublime was fervently explored in the latter eighteenth and early

55 Ibid., 18.
nineteenth centuries and recurs constantly in the aesthetics of such writers as Burke, Reynolds, Kant, Diderot and Delacroix.” Edmond Burke’s seminal text *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* explores different emotional states experienced in relation to the sublime and suggests that terrible objects, subjects or danger are all sources of the sublime. Burke suggests that sympathy and pain can be considered emotions of self-preservation and a source of the sublime. Burke’s position argued that landscape painting as well as other forms of art were able to “transfuse passions from one, to another person, and are capable of grafting a form of pleasure on misery.” In other words, a viewer may respond to a painting by recognising the artist’s anxiety and experience a cathartic connection in response to the communication.

![Figure 6 Caspar David Fredrich (1774–1840) Wanderer above the Sea of Mist 1818, oil on canvas, 94.8 x 74.8cm Source: https://library-artstor-org.libraryproxy.griffith.edu.au/asset/AIC_930031](https://library-artstor-org.libraryproxy.griffith.edu.au/asset/AIC_930031)

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58 Ibid.
Caspar David Friedrich’s (1774–1840) romantic sublime painting titled *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog, or Monk by the Sea* (1818) is an iconic visual expression of the sublime. A lone man seems to search for answers as he faces a turbulent sea (Figure 6). A state of melancholy is inferred by searching the horizon for magnitude of the god in nature. As discussed by Rosenblum, Friedrich’s image encompasses characteristics of the void—a space of contemplation that is open to interpretation, where the viewer becomes the lone monk looking to nature for answers. Mimesis is fully embraced in the painting, yet ideas of empathy and the religious experience of transcendence are evident through a symbolism of the dimension of space, and the Romantic Sublime genre. During the post-war era, paintings were highly charged with emotional expressions of what it is to be human and formed a rupture in the sublime painting of earlier traditions that expanded and evolved toward a pure form of abstraction.

Rosenblum wrote about abstraction as a religious experience and felt that the sublime spectacle of abandoning reason for empathy was the true meaning of twentieth-century abstract painting. Given the history of mimetic painting based on boundaries set by representations of natural scenes, the new large abstract works could be considered as offering a disturbing experience. The abstract sublime and abstract expressionist paintings from the 1960s onwards embraced spatial dimensions to immerse and seduce the viewer. Many of the painters defined an immersive experience as the relationship between the work and the viewer produced feelings that could be emotive and all encompassing. Rosenblum related the large void-like spaces of the abstract works of the 1960s as sharing a history with the romantic sublime painters. Rosenblum argues that “there is a relationship between works of so-called American abstract expressionists like Rothko, Pollock, Newman and Still and painters from the Romantic period, such as Friedrich, Turner, Ward and Martin.” Many painters working with abstraction were influenced by the romantic sublime painters who

62 Ibid., 239–244.
were known to embrace the beauty and terror of the natural landscape, extending feelings and ideas of the sublime and spiritual transcendence associated with the religious experiences or reinforcing ideas of faith.

Schwabsky challenges Rosenblum’s idea of the romantic sublime mimetic landscape painting period as the only influence of the abstract sublime. Schwabsky insists abstract developments in painting most evident in painting landscape were initiated during times of Impressionist, Fauve, and Expressionist imagery, and queries Rosenblum’s omission of these in his 1961 discussion. Schwabsky states that “landscape was the most abstract form of painting before pure abstraction downplaying narrative and resisting the dichotomy between figure and ground: it shifts the accent away from the human and divine as sole agencies toward the interplay of all entities in the space.” Forty years after Rosenblum, Schwabsky implied that Rosenblum failed to take into account the importance of the varied developments in landscape paintings that could be described as abstract painting, influencing the way that abstraction played out through twentieth-century modernism.

These theoretical arguments provide a means through which to understand the capacity of the landscape painting genre, and to provide languages through which reinventions of changing relationships between people and places have been visualised through selected periods of Western art history. Conversations about spiritualism in modernism are discussed by Joseph Henderson in his review of “The Spirit of Abstract Art” written by Maurice Tuchman (1890–1985) in *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*. Developments in abstract art from the 1940s onward led to a strong interest in Carl Jung’s ideas on myth and the collective unconscious. Jungian analysis recognised a mysterious ability to create new forms and imagery by expressing connections to old patterns and imagery through feelings and attempts to connect to the spiritual world of the unconscious. Stimulated by “Steiner and the theosophical artists Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater,” Swedish artist Hilma af Klint’s paintings nominated as a true testament of unconscious activity and connection to the spiritual world. This approach to

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64 Schwabsky, “Painting with the Flow of the World,” 15.
65 Ibid., 14.
66 Ibid., 16.
67 Carl Jung described ‘synchronicity’ as a way of channelling information from a universal mind.
abstraction was subjective and described as theosophy, as explained by Rudolf Steiner, who offered “to teach his reader ‘the faculty of forming images even where no sensible objects are present.’” Abstraction and spirituality along with connections to the primitive mind and mythologies in imagery were investigated during these abstract developments.

Appropriations of tribal cultures or the so-called “primitive arts” were explored during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by Pablo Picasso and others who considered their responses to be authentic imagery. However, in twenty-first century contemporary art, cultural appropriation is under debate and often not considered ethical. There is a questionable resonance at times that exists between the Traditional Owners of this land and cultural imagery and abstraction. In 1941, Margaret Preston painted *Aboriginal Landscape*, a provocative painting that infused the immediate landscape with references to a style informed by Aboriginal styles, pigments and imagery. Carolyn Kastner observes that “Preston felt an urgency to realise an ‘Australian spirit’, noting Preston’s confusion as to why an Aboriginal identity was not being represented in Australian culture and identity when so many other nations were. However, Preston’s image is a generalisation and cannot represent Aboriginal culture as many regions and languages are particular to specific place, and the notion of country that informs Aboriginal identity. Through the appropriation of specific designs and colour and an altered perspective, Preston’s attempt to connect Aboriginal people to Australian culture highlights that Aboriginal people were not part of a white Australia. By painting an ‘Aboriginal landscape’, Preston misunderstood the contentious relationship between Aboriginal land and the imagery that she produced.

The Australian cultural landscape is a continuum for Aboriginal people, who have inhabited the land for over 65,000 years. Abstract representations such as sand drawing, body painting, mapping the land and images of the celestial realms are visual languages. Indigenous representations include many responses to culture, story and place that include performative elements of ritual and ceremony. Cultural abstract through visual and performative

69 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
representations are not to be confused with abstract art from Western art history. Developments in the history of semi-abstract and pure abstract painting are of particular interest as a mode that defines a subjective response and approach to landscape painting. The anxiety produced because of the world wars provoked dramatic changes in visual expression. Writing on contemporary painting in relation to history, Peter Weibel describes how painterly abstraction in painting as emerged in Europe around 1910 during and following World War 1, with what he describes as the second phase of abstraction emerging around 1920 and during and after World War 2 predominantly in the United States as a response to fascist ideas and the loss of reason. Weibel describes how the first phase can be identified by a search for pure forms that is evident in paintings by Kandinsky, arguing that subject matter “arose as a mixture of rationality, emotion and feeling.” In contrast, the Russian Constructivists took a formalist approach as a rational analytic method, where new, idealist utopian models were sought. For example, Kazimir Malevich’s (1878–1935) The Black Square (1923, Figure 7) seems to feature a void that hovers as a vision into an unknown world. Both wars opened portals to abstract worlds of anxiety and loss, hope and despair in which the dominant interest in mimetic painting was replaced by images that opened into internal, psychological worlds and intellectual dialogues. The ‘formless forms’ that emerged seemed to prompt further questions about what might emerge to “take place of the painting as an object?” The new world order emerged from the midst of war in the turmoil of a tumultuous world during the process of rebuilding while mourning its losses.

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72 Bruce Pascoe, Dark Emu (Broome, WA: Magabala Books, 2014).
74 Ibid., 43.
75 Ibid.
Weibel stated that “Instead of the relation of forms to the outside, object world, the second phase would direct the attention to the inner world: the object was replaced by the soul.”

Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) harnessed a kaleidoscope of colour and movement to break through mimetic imagery. Even so, his images retained non-specific visual references to nature that linger on in the space and depth and textures in the works, no matter how formless.

The human form was no longer positioned in the picture of the landscape and the viewer became a voyeur into the internal worlds of the maker. Abstract painting focused on formal relationships and approaches rather than emphasising realistic representations of nature or the figure in nature. Creative responses of form and method that are resituated into problems of code. The principle of identifying code in the reading of works is evident in new abstract painting between post-war and modern times. Abstract focus continued through to the 1960s through a consistent reflection on the inner life and experience of the maker and directed by

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76 Ibid., 44.
inward reflections and cognitive and emotive references. Many forms of art and life remain intrinsically linked to histories of ideology and contexts by preserving visual documentation of a continuum of cultural and social events and signifiers.

Figure 8 Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) Cossacks 1910–11, oil on canvas, 946 x 1302 cm
Image credit: Tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kandinski-cossacks-n04948

Ibid., 43.
CHAPTER 3: EXEMPLARS OF ARTISTS OF INFLUENCE

In this chapter, the emphasis is on the physical and descriptive aspects in the landscape paintings of five selected painters: Mark Rothko, Georgia O’Keeffe, Ross Bleckner, Julie Mehretu, and Wanda Koop. The approaches of these artists define place, story, and memory through diverse and varied references to landscape painting. The works discussed have been chosen for their influences on my own developments in landscape painting. Although the select exemplars are not about the Anthropocene age, they present a variety of modes referring to semi-abstract and abstract immersive, multi-layered, or cartographic references to the built environment. Similar approaches have been reflected in some of my works. Landscape painting provides artists with a means to extend traditional concepts and approaches by expanding into contemporary contexts.

3.01 MARK ROTHKO: ABSTRACT SUBLIME LANDSCAPE

American artist Mark Rothko’s (1903–1970) Chapel (1970, Figure 9) remains an influential work. The scale and theatrical immersive nature of the piece positions the viewer as the final element completing the work. The subjective position that Rothko presents infuses the work with a sense of the sublime space. My final body of work for the doctoral examination, the painting installation titled Landskins, is influenced by Rothko. I use the Onespace Gallery as a site of engagement between the viewer and a large-scale landscape-influenced installation. The ‘absence’ of the figure in the work is re-ignited by the ‘presence’ of the viewer; in effect, the viewer completes the work as the human participant in the environment. This strategy is used to highlight the complicit nature of being human in the Anthropocene age.

Rothko was commissioned by Dominique de Menil to produce the Chapel in Houston, Texas, that opened after his death in 1971. He designed it in the shape of an octagon, referencing early Eastern Orthodox churches. On its walls are fourteen monochrome, layered colour-hued paintings of purple and mauve imagery and large black rectangles, forming triptychs that, though conceptually linked, maintain an individual presence. The scale of the

paintings, averaging 180 x 297cm, are formless painted objects that define the space of the chapel and articulate a sense of infinite space. Each composition is carefully considered, as the translucent veils of paint and pigments create a sombre reflective mood and an immersive experience. Rothko’s intention is to instigate an empathy between the paintings and the viewer, attesting to an emotional state. The works are synthesised through paint into combinations of a range of topics that include human vulnerability, empathy, and emotional depths. Rothko stated that, “I’m not interested in relationships of colour or form but interested in expressing human emotions, tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on. The fact that many people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows that I communicate these basic emotions.”

As Wessel Stoker observes, it is possible to interpret the chapel work as a kind of stage or as a site for performance, as “Rothko also spoke of his paintings as voices in an opera.” Together, the works unify through the colour and repetition to form a symmetry that immerses the viewer. Multiple layers of pigment and glazing produce deep depths of abstract space that is magnified through repetition and the way in which the paintings surround the viewer. Stoker describes the experience as one of transcendence, achieved through the monumental scale, the colour, and depths of the works. Stoker refers to the installation as evoking “a feeling of being confronted with our own mortality and with the notion of the tragic in the human experience.” Rosenblum refers to the work as “a presentation of transcendental landscapes able to carry us beyond reason to the sublime; we can submit to them in an act of faith and let ourselves be absorbed into their radiant depths.” Schwabsky asserts a counter argument, asking us to consider that relationships to the sublime are a recurring cliché in the interpretation of abstract painting “as an attempt to connect with some kind of wild landscape, it is not a foregone conclusion, and that we are not necessarily justified in reading Abstract works as abstracted landscapes.” This may be the case, however, large abstract works in multiples are subject to the viewer’s experience.

79 Ibid., 90.
80 Ibid., 92.
81 Ibid., 95.
3.02 GEORGIA O’KEEFFE: SEMI ABSTRACT LANDSCAPE

American artist Georgia O’Keeffe (1887–1986) is the second artist I discuss in this chapter. Personal connections to O’Keeffe’s paintings are identified by embracing painting as a descriptive visual language through semi-abstract approaches of distortion, atmospheric light, and at times mapping devices, in order to explore expansive spaces. I paint in series in response to narratives that highlight environmental challenges; however, the metaphysical aspect of being immersed in nature is real and made visible through emotional responses to narrative and place. In alignment with O’Keeffe’s approach, I use smooth paint applications to emphasise the vast spaces and to simplify form. Narratives of history and acknowledgement of Indigenous cultures on the land are inclusive aspects of personal works.

O’Keeffe depicted the natural world through the mode of semi-abstract imagery, investigating ideas of differing scales, microscopic views, distortions, and curvilinear renditions of her immediate landscape. O’Keeffe expanded ideas about modern ways of
representing the natural environment through magnifying the micro systems of the natural world and produced paintings that reveal layers and contours of coloured rhythms and harmonies, referring to her belief in spiritual connections to nature.84 Many of her paintings were created in response to the vast expanding spaces of New Mexico, inspired by the space and seasons visible from O’Keeffe’s home in the American desert. The landscapes flowed from her direct experiences of living in isolation and harmony in wild nature. O’Keeffe embedded imagery with political awareness and acknowledgment of the Native American and Hispanic populations through motifs and her knowledge of the sites, evidenced within the imagery.85 The painted landscapes present as smooth applications of painted semi-abstract surfaces expressing a connection to undulating movement in cloud formations, silent, strong, dark mountains, the shimmer of a lake, articulating an appreciation for the living earth. Embracing the notion of the natural world through visuality, O’Keeffe presents clever expansive distortions, patterns and cropped imagery creating emotive reflections through landscape painting.

Lesley Mimmocchi nominates Storm Cloud over Lake George (1923 Figure 10) as one of the foundational images of O’Keeffe’s landscapes. The image traces an emotive personal memory of a dark night rowing across the lake and walking its shores. Darkness is embraced as a powerful aesthetic providing a mystical metaphor for a mood of being alone and in tune with a specific place, while formulating a visual memory of a sublime moment immersed in the dark depths of nature.86 The image alludes to the sublime, as well as presenting a symbol of oneness with the mystery of nature, and a deep contemplation of connection. O’Keeffe acknowledges the Indigenous peoples who also live there from a position of respect, connection, and experience of the landscape. Although the romantic landscapes of the past may have informed O’Keeffe, narrative and place are re-articulated in her paintings becoming icons of modern imagery that explore visible nature and hovering between contemporary and historical interpretation. O’Keeffe observes and documents the power of the natural world by exploring amplified, and simplified visual cues of semi-abstraction, to express the essence of the metaphysical that is present in landscape through memory and a

85 Ibid., 58.
86 Ibid., 68.
story of place. Schama spoke of the frame through which our eyes and senses survey the landscape, stating that “For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before a landscape painting can ever be a response to the environment for the senses, it is a work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.”

Figure 10 Georgia O’Keeffe (1887–1986) Storm Cloud Lake George 1923, oil on canvas, 45 x 76cm
Image credit: Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe.

3.03 ROSS BLECKNER: ABSTRACTION AND THE AIDS VIRUS

New York–based artist Ross Bleckner (b. 1949) provides sublime references through images that document loss of life with regards to the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s and 1990s.

87 Ibid.
88 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 7.
Seductive abstractions of microscopic images of the virus are presented as biological landscapes of disaster. During the unprecedented experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, the statistics of loss of life influenced my painted personal responses to living in a pandemic. Not unlike Bleckner, the resulting imagery takes on a cool subversive approach through references to a sublime space and techniques of colour field painting overlaided with intricate repetitive anxious patterns. Undeniably, difficult situations and events provide a focal point for artists, as personal works act as markers of important events in time. The abstraction of these responses can be viewed as psychological landscapes in a time of reflection, and a time to remember the finite nature of human existence.

Several series brought Bleckner to fame: *Dome, Stripe, Bird, and Burn*. The paintings are seductive abstract images that represent cells from the AIDS virus, domes from religious sites, birds accompanying the spirit to the higher realms, and the dark depths of black burns. The image *Behaviour* (1999, Figure 11) presents a biological landscape of the microscopic visual elements of mutating cells of the AIDS virus. Bleckner engages the tradition of a sublime beauty in some paintings yet infuses them with particular tragedies as a means of embedding paradox in the works. Works have titles such as *8,122+ as of January 1986*. Absence had a particular relevance during the AIDS epidemic in the mid-1980s when Bleckner began to express the devastating effects of the pandemic through painting, highlighting the emptiness left behind in the lives of those who lost loved ones.

Bleckner paints psychological landscapes, bearing traces of a range symbols of anxiety and references to the devastating losses reporting on AIDS-related fatalities in the United States. His images infuse the social reality and the subjective imagination through references to light and dark expanses of low-key colour. The metaphor of a biological landscape is presented, as Bleckner reminds us that epidemics of these proportions still have potential to re-appear in the contemporary world. Sophisticated semi-abstract imagery holds emotional levels at a cool...

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90 Ibid., 13.
91 This is a reference to the number of deaths in the United States caused by the AIDS virus as of January 1986.
distance while generating real empathetic responses for those directly involved in the pandemic.\footnote{Burke, \textit{A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful}, 30.}
3.04 JULIE MEHRETU: MAPPING SPACE AND TIME

Ethiopian-born American artist Julie Mehretu (b. 1970) has inspired personal works through the abstract political narratives she presents. Mehretu engages mapping devices and gestural marks and graffiti combined as abstractions developed through mixed media on a large scale. Technology and abstraction are presented as immersive environments that include the viewer as a figurative element in the paintings. The graphic nature of Mehretu’s imagery relates to personal developments that are layered narratives combined with technical drawing and references to cartography; however, the gestural marks and surfaces of my works are painted responses to landscape. I employ an atemporal approach, drawing from mixed data and multiple sources and montage techniques, enabling me to layer narratives and techniques in response to the Anthropocene.

Mehretu’s large-scale paintings express narratives through historical, topical, and fictional landscapes that she composes through energetic mark making, graffiti and cartography in layered and complex ways. In conversation, Mehretu nominates approaches developed from “Renaissance architectural drawing, mapping techniques, modernist grids, Chinese calligraphy, mid-century gestural abstraction, technology, charts and architectural renderings related to specific sites.”93 She uses acrylic paint, ink, and graphite as media for layers that map and trace social histories of sites such as airports, malls, and cities of political conflict. Embracing time, place, and memory, a multiplicity of approaches in the works seem to compress time and space. Mehretu reveals narratives of contemporary culture by developing an idiosyncratic visual language, and by presenting issues through the social mapping and recording of historical events. Twenty-first-century cities, countries, and political events become fodder for inspiration; for example, the Arab Spring, the Iraq war, Hurricane Katrina, the Black Lives Matter movement, and global social and political unrest have all provided specific focus for her bodies of work.94

Influences in Mehretu’s multi-media works can be identified from futurism, abstract expressionism, calligraphy, and graffiti. In Cairo (2013, Figure 12), energetic, expressive mark making traces layers across a mapped surface of a large canvas, highlighting events

93 Bradway, Landscape Painting Now, 268.
94 Hoptman, The Forever Now.
around the Arab Spring in the city of Cairo. Bold slashes of linear colour cut across and around a monochromatic field of chaotic marks to create a frantic turbulence, not unlike or a chaotic weather event. Mehretu presents the viewer with a dramatic emotional expression of a city during tumultuous times.

**IMAGE REMOVED**

**Figure 12** Julie Mehretu *Cairo* 2013, ink and acrylic on canvas, 300 x 729 cm

Source: *The Forever Now, Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World* (New York: MoMA, 2015), 121

**3.05 WANDA KOOP: PAINTING THE URBAN LANDSCAPE – AN IMPOSSIBLE PLACE**

Canadian-born artist Wanda Koop (b. 1951) negotiates a disruption in the landscape painting tradition by highlighting the notion of landscape as a built environment. Koop achieves this through the visual disjuncture that she presents to shock and challenge the viewer by presenting constructed definitions of landscape. The imagery contrasts between mimetic painting and cropped images from film stills. Koop reminds us that landscape is often constructed through human interventions and needs.
Personal landscape influenced paintings reflect on ideas of constructions and human intervention in the landscape resulting in the painted installation titled *Landskins*. In alignment with Koop, some of my paintings refer to atemporal technological data combined with traditional renditions of physical responses to landscapes. However, my argument represents landscape painting as a tradition to represent the Anthropocene age. I consider the value of built environments and emphasise that the way that humans depict and think about the land is the way that humans treat the land. The *Landskins* series combines various themes and seemingly disparate images and is designed as an immersive experience to disrupt existing models of landscape painting, encouraging inclusivity from the viewer and engagement from a personal context.

Koop is known for her large-scale paintings and video installations. In reference to twelve paintings installed in two adjoining rooms in the Winnipeg Art Gallery in 1997, Koop describes how our experiences in constructed urban landscapes cannot replace an engagement with the natural environment. The focus of the work is on the urban landscape—specifically, the built environment on the site of Bois de Vincennes in Paris. Initially, the viewer enters an immersive work titled *Paintings for Dimly Lit Rooms* (Figure 13). The installation is composed of a panoramic romantic vision of nature in six large paintings, exploiting the division between a natural landscape and the representation of a landscape environment. Koop commented that “While living in Paris, I felt a longing for home and a need to connect to myself through nature. I made a trip to the Bois de Vincennes and my sense of loss was magnified. I felt the place to be a complete fabrication of an idea of nature.”

In an adjoining gallery, Koop presents the antithesis to the realistic panorama: an immersive installation of six paintings titled *Paintings for Brightly Lit Rooms* (Figure 14). In this gallery, Koop presents random cropped images painted directly from video stills. These moments in time deliberately negate the concept of a cohesive vision or a panoramic view. The stark contrast between the man-made interpretation of a natural site is used to question interpretations of how landscape painting can be and represented.

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The cropping of the images in *Paintings for Brightly Lit Rooms* provides a response to realism, yet is fractured, stripping away meanings that could define landscape painting in order to reach a presence of the unidentifiable other. Koop suggests the presence of the technological age through an avalanche of diverse imagery from media and other sources. These images permeate our existence and cannot avoid identification via naming. In a complex way, Koop searches for an impossible place by appropriating the essence of representation. The deliberate positioning of the contrasting rooms emphasises the notion of difference by observing a deep longing for something that is whole and unified. The painted installations presented in the two bodies of paintings provoke the viewer to seek meaning. Koop presents a courageous attempt to reach into other places as part of a thought process not a rational empiric process. The experience from the works is one of disjuncture where there is no possibility of resolving the aspects of translation within the space.

It is useful to consider Koop’s work in relation to Halkes’s conception of contemporary landscape as a search for new ways of describing landscape by artists. Koop nominates the possibility that “regret and hope is embedded in the deconstruction of a seamless vision that drives artists, and how hope lies forever within new imagery.” Koop’s painted installations refer to a longing for unity and understanding, suggesting that the search can be defined as a dream and an unreachable, impossible place. Halkes suggests *Dimly Lit Rooms* alludes to Walter Benjamin’s dream image, a term he applied to nineteenth-century architecture and public spaces during the Industrial Revolution. Benjamin implied that “these spaces perform as a connection in relation to a deep longing for connection with nature.” Dream images in the urban environment are discussed as being associated with a desire for a utopian society and act as a way to connect with the collective consciousness. In some way, this body of work not only feeds a search for beauty and unity but reminds us of the impossibility of that fabricated dream. In Koop’s case an attempt at reaching a seamless whole, between the panoramic vision of *Dimly Lit Rooms* and the colourful stark photographic commercial shock

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98 Ibid., 39.
99 Ibid. 24–27.
100 Ibid. 24–27.
101 Ibid. 24–27.
of *Brightly Lit Rooms*, is like a wake-up call reminding us that the dream image is temporal, everchanging and elusive

Figure 13 Wanda Koop *Paintings for Dimly Lit Rooms* 1997, installation View, Winnipeg Art Gallery
Image credit: [http://www.wandakoop.com/studio/the%20work%20paintings%20for%20rooms/index.html](http://www.wandakoop.com/studio/the%20work%20paintings%20for%20rooms/index.html)
Figure 14 Wanda Koop *Paintings for Brightly Lit Rooms* 1997, installation view, Winnipeg Art Gallery

Image credit: [http://www.wandakoop.com/studio/the%20work%20paintings%20for%20rooms/index.html](http://www.wandakoop.com/studio/the%20work%20paintings%20for%20rooms/index.html)
CHAPTER 4: LANDSCAPE PAINTING – STUDIO WORK RESPONDING TO
THE ANTHROPOCENE AGE, 2017–21

The paintings produced during this doctoral research explore visual dualities that refer to a variety of traditions, including semi-abstract, abstract, and sublime visual languages, along with connections to traditional painting techniques and cartography and technical drawing. My process of working reflects on the relational nature of history to contemporary times. In creative practice, I find that the research moves between the handling of materials, interpretation, critical interpretation, and reflections upon painting traditions and of Western art. The data selected is analysed and re-composed in a way that emphasises the relational nature of the information. I resolve the imagery by responding through painting techniques and medium, and by considering the complexity of non-human and human temporalities, by which I mean the changing relationships between the natural world and humans.

Having already discussed my series Architecture for Unknown Worlds in Chapter 1, in this chapter the following series of works are discussed: Weather Patterns, New Depths, Mining Matters, and Landskins.

The series Weather Patterns (2018) is a visual response to changes to the biosphere that are attributed to global warming caused by human interventions. In Float (Figure 15), the past and future collide, becoming visible while floating into uncharted waters. These cool blue land and seascapes are relevant to a way of thinking through “listening visually.” The image highlights how extreme weather events impact upon the environment and humans. Watery, fluid paint features as a focus in a cool, post-apocalyptic landscape. Techniques of glazing and pouring thin veils of multiple blue tints and tones develop a visual language to describe the aftermath of flooding, a sense of isolation, anxiety and uncertainty. A floating geometric shape of a roof hovers and drifts into the calm post-apocalyptic storm landscape. A fracture between the calm in the scene and the narrative of an apocalyptic event offers a lacuna in which viewers are invited to respond personally to dramatic life events and to reflect on the fragility of life and environment.

In Aspiring to the Landscape, Petra Halkes considers how the troubled relationship between humans and the natural world has provided subject matter for landscape imagery. Halkes states, “During the twenty-first century the environmental crisis is the urgent issue for humans and artists to act upon.” My work depicts images of watery scenes and floating debris similar to those that are regularly seen on the news. Lived experiences influence my visual language and by gleaning from the media, magazines and the internet, paintings evolve as research and are experienced as a physical response. The language of these images is sought for through painting techniques and by finding a balance between the subtle, the sharp and an evocative depth. I surmise that in unprecedented times such as these, painters will continue to develop concepts and approaches that seek out ways of thinking about and redefining landscape imagery (see Figures 15–16).

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103 ‘Listening visually’ is my term for visual stimulus being considered as a voice, by making connections of seeing with your ears. I was told to listen with my eyes at a symposium on climate change at Newcastle University in 2017 by an Indigenous elder in a discussion that influenced me.

104 Halkes, Aspiring to the Landscape, 44.

105 Ibid.

106 Arts based research is a system of communication and the expression of situated knowledge about a human relationship with his or her social world. Rollings, Arts Based Research.
**Figure 15** Paula Payne *Weather Patterns-Float* 2018, acrylic on canvas, 101 x 101cm
Image credit: Alex Shaw
4.02 NEW DEPTHS

The series *New Depths* (2018, Figures 17 and 18) refers to emotional as well as geological depths to present conversations that trace and respond to a range of linked concerns. Metaphor is explored through floating shapes that imply the presence of humans and interventions on the land, evidenced through layers of paint, earthy tints and tones and shapes that suggest physical and visual references. Presented through a narrative of rich warm hues,
the depth of a black hole suggests environmental degradation. An uprooted tree is suspended precariously in an uncertain ground and a floating transparent shape overshadows the land. Thoughts of melting ice are never far from my mind. The introduction of geometric shapes act as an anthropomorphic presence. These images are contemplations on the fact that human activity has changed the world.

Sites and the residue of events that happen are the subject matter of paintings where past, present and future stories appear to collide and conflate. Within these works, the interpretation of the ‘outcome’ of these processes is always implied, rather than spelled out, so that the viewer’s response is always complicit as an implied force within the compositions. This use of landscape painting is not static; rather, it invites active responses to imagery that appear to have materialised through combinations of geological depths and expansive notions of time and space.
Figure 17 Paula Payne *New Depths No 3* 2018, acrylic on canvas, 133 x 91cm
Image credit: Alex Shaw
Figure 18 Paula Payne *New Depths No 4* 2018, acrylic on linen, 150 x 100cm
Image credit: Alex Shaw
4.03 MINING MATTERS

The series Mining Matters (2020–21) presents the idea of ‘cultural geography’ is identified through physical interventions and cuts into the earth made visible from the mining process. In the article, “Fresh Air: Space–Time and New Models for Landscape Painting.” Clair Joy implies that landscape painting is a tradition to understand the present that can be discussed as a form of “cultural geography.” The idea of cultural geography presents a sense of place as a process, and a record of activity that refers to a site-specific related narrative. Specific works from the Mining Matters and Landskins series can be referred to as cultural geography. In this case, cultural geography identifies how human interventions into the natural world and industrial actions interrupt the natural order of the land through mining events that disrupt the local geography (Figures 19, 28, 29).

Large earthworks and open-cut mine sites are the subject of the inquiry. In this series, the visual image politicises landscapes that have become zones for ethical and environmental conflict. In mining images, the geometric open cuts are represented as patterns that inflict wounds into the depths, fracturing the land. My aim is to make visible the damage that results from mining contracts. Central to this subject matter is the presence of ongoing debates about land ownership with regards to Indigenous peoples. As an Australian of British descent, it is impossible for me not to consider the lack of adequate recognition of Aboriginal Land Rights and the lack of respect for cultural sites and lore by mining companies. I acknowledge that all Australians are living on stolen Indigenous land and believe that mining companies should negotiate equitable deals with Indigenous people and be held accountable for compensation and damage to cultural land and cultural ownership.

107 Joy, "Fresh Air."
Figure 19 Paula Payne Mining Matters No 4 2021, acrylic on canvas, 133 x 91cm

Image credit: Paula Payne
The *Landskins* series was initiated during a three-month artist residence at the Mt Gravatt studios at Griffith University, in 2020–21. The rationale for these works included developing new ways of thinking about and presenting landscape painting; exploring approaches to visual aspects of a point of view; mixing genres and styles in atemporal ways; and working in large scale to develop painting as an immersive installation. Research and analysis informed the visual concepts and developments, including imagery infused with personal narratives, as a response to the Anthropocene.

I refer to the *Landskins* as a *body*—an anthropomorphic reference to physical skins that are marked by particular stories and contexts of place and time, and experience. As the work is designed as an active viewing experience, a reading of the spatial organisation of the works is as relevant as the engagement with each individual work. Hybrid and atemporal mixes of traditional, philosophical, and physical approaches to landscape painting are explored as a way to extend narratives into contemporary contexts. Laura Hoptman describes “atemporality as a song, story or painting that contains elements of history but isn’t historical; it is innovative, but it is not novel; pertinent rather than prescient.”  

Contemporary life is fuelled by a layering of fragmented time frames and narratives from the internet and other data that mutate and influence creative interpretations. To expand the scope of landscape painting, I include data about advances in geological markers and epochs. Influences from traditional landscape painting, architectural rendering, modernist grids, gestural mark making, and navigation charts, when appropriate, become aerial views. At times, images from drones and experiences of flying in an aircraft are visualised.

I highlight touch as an important sensory device during production, observing that when working on the large skins without supports, the handling of the paint differs from traditional easel painting. Physically, the works in development intermittently need to be painted flat and vertical and are continuously viewed and worked on from multiple perspectives. The shifting of the image from a flat plane to a vertical one back and forth influences the nature of the

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applications of paint, working between fluid and opaque layers of surface to create the image. The imagery itself hinges loosely and closely (if that is possible) to themes and genres. Memories, metaphors, and references to events are presented as markers to mirror the journey of human habitation. The viewer is invited to enter into the body of the Landskins to connect with and reflect on the narratives that are transported from past, present, and into possible futures.

4.05 LANDSKINS (2020–21), ENDURING MEMORY

Landscape painting can respond to enduring memories from specific sites and social contexts. I reflect on how layers of memory remain in a place, noticing that over time memory mutates and may influence new responses. In this case, memory can be reclaimed to reconsider history and experiences that retain truths to be reviewed as sites for new explorations. I handle paint as a tactile emotive medium to add fuel to the concept of a work. Observations and responses engage with touch, shadow, variations in colour, abstract forms and implied imagery. At times, I deliberately encourage paint to run during the process of layering surfaces to express ideas of chance and a less controllable element in a painting. The importance of ‘feeling’ in response to a specific place or event is paramount in the development of my imagery. Approaches are explored through varieties of muted tones or bold colour, gesture, and illusions of space to produce an image. Imagination and intention are manipulated through physical responses to the materiality of paint.
Figure 20 Paula Payne *Landskins series—Time Trace* 2020, acrylic on canvas, 232 x 133cm
Image credit: Louis Lim

*Landskins series—Time Trace* (Figure 20) comprises multiple layers of painted shapes, veils and floating motifs, forming a visual connect to imply an infinite depth. Warm and cool blues hues create a mood of space and time as an attempt to cut through the ridged confines of linear perspective. The image instructs the viewer to embrace the notion of depth by exploring combinations of abstract, illusionistic representation and displacements that allude to a transitional way of seeing. Through trusting my imagination and highlighting the value of feeling as intelligence, the image takes form with regards to the subject matter. Techniques and analytical considerations combine to enable the author’s thoughts and feelings, and to reveal insights into how images are produced.
Figure 21 Paula Payne *Landskins series—Geological Time Trace* 2020, acrylic on canvas, 232 x 133cm
Image credit: Louis Lim

*Landskins series—Geological Time Trace* (2020, Figure 21) takes the author and the viewer to a place of the mind through the language of semi-abstraction and the romantic sublime. Floating referents in the image highlight predictions of catastrophic events in response to melting ice and rising waters. A subterranean atmospheric place of yesterday harbours tiny fragile particles and geological entities, and as the ice melts, ancient cells of a previous epoch are released into the biosphere.

During my working process, the narrative develops through channelling the imagination in response to a non-discursive rationale and the research. Influenced by images of subterranean water systems known as ‘cenotes’, the narrative is an investigative response into geological depths of the earth and the ancient substances there. Cross referenced with a recognisable symbol of global environmental degradation, the ‘melting ice’ features as the

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A non-discursive rationale applies to a language of painting and discovery through process.
focus of the image. Conversations about climate change emphasise statistics of rising waters and the melting ice is displayed regularly on digital devices and news channels expressing the anxiety of the Anthropocene.

In this case, specific paintings refer to geological time as a way to consider the current crisis and how geological epochs have beginnings and endings and move on toward developments into new epochs. Physical and philosophical developments in landscape painting are also relational to their space and time. The four seasons and night and day have always been a measure of time; however, geology delves into the depths of the earth right to the core. The glacial pace of geological time is explored through this landscape as a way of reiterating depths of knowledge that are literally embedded in the landscape. Although I emphasise the natural forces of change within any natural environment, I cannot negate the fact that human-induced climate change continues to impact on the geological world.

My praxis combines the physical, emotional, and intellectual components of research that embraces the term “intertextuality.” This way of thinking can render an individual and social identity difficult to be defined as fixed or absolute. The outcome is complex, relational, and multi-faceted, implying that the artist invests specific intentions within a creative work to find and define meaning. Foucault refers to painting as a historical investigation that combines philosophy and conceptual methodology, as a theory in relation to the social sciences, a cultural object, and as texts to analyse. In this context, painting remains deeply connected to its origins and all paintings exist as images that continue from points of reference to be re-invigorated and explored. By referring to historical origins in a search for meaning, the horizon is extended, as are interpretations that refer to the origin of the new painting. In the history of painting, the visual extends from and to historical and new beginnings. Submerged in the context of a painting, artists understand that within the context of visual life there are historical references and that every picture has an origin. The point I make here is that interpreting a painting is not a passive position. Images are made to

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110 Intertextuality refers to a system of colliding interrelationships between the individual psyche, society, and the world. Rollings, Arts Based Research, 9.
111 Soussloff, Foucault on Painting,
influence the viewer into performing a visual reading. Considerations of the time and place of production, socio-economic position of the maker, gender, race, political influence, and relationships to narrative all contribute to a reading.

The absence of human form in my imagery invites the viewer into a painting as an experience to become the anthropomorphic form. The work Landskins series—Green Zone (2021, Figure 22) presents a cropped landscape of green, blue, and yellow tints and tones, forming shadows and space within the landscape. It presents linear expressions and gestural paint that emphasises organic depths of nature to vaguely emulate a forest. Latitude and longitude are identified through brief expressive linear marks that define depth and refer to mapping. In a world that continues to promote disharmony and destruction, I retreat into the world of cognitive and imaginative solutions of survival. In this case, the narrative moves towards achieving harmony by finding relief in green zones.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 22** Paula Payne Landskins series—Green Zone 2021, acrylic on canvas, 204 x 131cm

Image credit: Paula Payne
As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, narratives of anxieties in contemporary life are embedded in the image *Landskins series—The Pause* (2020, Figure 23). The painting is a psychological response that documents each day during the time spent in lockdown. The tracing of time is a solitary pursuit, a map, a form of personal note taking, in response to a dialogue of the threat of a pandemic, and a way to pass time. The image refers to a sublime space through the blue colour field of scumbled paint, overlaid with slow labour-intensive applications of linear marks, forming a repetitive pattern that floats above the void. I feel very disconnected from normal life during this time in lockdown; each day I listen and watch stories of the world on varieties of media as a way of connecting. My response is documented through physical approaches to emotions through visceral paint and the fine linear marks of a
time within the confines of my studio.

In *Landscape and Memory*, Schama initiated a historical study that identified how landscape is politicised by tracing the remnants of natural sites and sites of significant events throughout European history. Schama argues that landscape retains the memory of the lived experiences of a place and its narratives. Creative sites in the landscape are linked to cultural and physical events that permeate the landscape through artistic interventions.¹¹³

![Image of Paula Payne's Illuminations 2000, Light environmental work](image)

**Figure 24** Paula Payne *Illuminations* 2000, Light environmental work
Image credit: Paula Payne

Twenty-one years on from the year 2000, I reflect on my environmental light work *Illuminations* (Figure 24) and re-consider the original idea as a painted work. In the original image, the depth of night is illuminated by the light of an idea. A proposed awareness

¹¹³ Schama, *Landscape and Memory*. 
presents the silent networks and grids of technological fibers that cut through the surface of society. The dominant floating light circle hovers as a memorial to technological advances and the unknown effects on the contemporary landscape. The image demonstrates how research can expand and deviate while still encompassing elements of original research. The memory of specific sites can be engaged as interventions of place that are recorded, defined, and redefined, at times. In this case, the context of the Anthropocene age and history of human engagement is redefined through considerations of how technology can be considered as a human intervention and in ways of representing the landscape.
The painting *Landskins series—Enduring Memory in Green* (2021, Figure 25) re-presents a memory of the environmental work *Illuminations*. The re-articulation of the ephemeral environmental artwork is referenced through a photograph and memories. The concept of the invisible technologies that flow through the visible world is re-visited and the invisible networks that concerned me in the year 2000 have multiplied and as such become a painted response.
Figure 26 Paula Payne *Landskins series—Eagle’s Lair* 2021, acrylic on canvas, 137 x 133cm
Image credit: Louis Lim

*Landskins series—Eagle’s Lair* (2021, Figure 26) is a record of an attempt at conservation in the Amazon Jungle. Verdant greens and fleshy colours and multiple vertical linear marks imply the dense space of the jungle and refer to a contemporary narrative that plays out there. A reference to ‘architecture for unknown worlds’ becomes visible within this image applied in another context.

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The environment can be viewed as a temporal zone that is ever changing and mutating, responding to natural and human interventions. In this image (Figure 27), the cartographic influence is visible as layers of linear marks define entry points into the composition. Tertiary and secondary palettes in contrast to sky blue hues, tints and tones of acrylic paint with added natural pigments, highlight layers of earth and sky and imaginings in time.

4.06 LANDSKINS (2020–21), PAINTING AS MAPPING

Svetlana Alpers’s book *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* highlights the connection between maps and paintings and describes a moment in history when both were being developed in collusion.115 The related qualities between painting and mapping landscape are described as active roles of ways to depict and define a place through visual language. Alpers argues that visual language accumulates information as a form of historical documentation.116 Mapping enables a mathematical comprehension of space and can define personal associations to a geographical place or land mass. The mapping of space and time can refer to urban and geological spaces. Through a historical lens, the mapping-painting relationship extends the way we think about landscape painting. During history, the mapping and colonisation of land translated into the ownership of land through land claims. Personal experiences of land mapping have been conducted by camping on the land, walking the land, surveying from light and commercial aircrafts, and photography from drones.

I paint maps of mine sites and large earthworks, responding to photographs, images on television, and site plans from the internet. Reproduction techniques include technical drawing and observational approaches, and any necessary visual device. Previously I referred to Clair Joy who defined the term “cultural geography”117 by identifying industrial interventions into urban and geographical landscapes. The *Mining Matters* series presents large earthworks and the mapping of sites as contemporary painting. The notion of cultural

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116 Ibid.
117 Joy, "Fresh Air."
geography presents issues of accountability from mining companies toward Indigenous peoples and their land, and environmental degradation caused. In these paintings, I present contemporary landscape painting from a geological and political context.

Figure 28 Paula Payne Landskins series—Mine Map 2021, acrylic on canvas, 204 x 131cm
Image credit: Louis Lim
Figure 29 Paula Payne *Landskins series—Earthworks No 2* 2021, acrylic on canvas, 198 x 141cm
Image credit: Louis Lim
CONCLUSION

What has been confirmed during the doctoral study is that landscape painting responds to history and tradition and is currently positioned within the digital world of urban and rural life. In this context, the landscape has ceased to be regarded as scenery or a pleasing view, becoming the natural systems that surround us to form an ecological world. Martin Friedman in *Landscape as Metaphor in the Late Twentieth Century* speaks about the vast spaces of land and boundaries that have been divided by natural and non-natural processes, and how “national boundaries and oceanic barriers no longer defend against the planetary perils that scientists unveil.”

Through painted landscapes, I respond to scientific research about the Anthropocene, including climate change and geological epochs, and geographical sites of environmental degradation. However, I am not a scientist but an artist, and so I engage the problem on a level of intellectual and sensory responses to information, including engaging metaphor to imply the presence of the Anthropocene, and envisioning the metaphysics of space as either semi-abstract, abstract, and sublime forms. I view landscape and the environment as the spaces and systems that human lives depend upon. As a contemporary artist, my responses to landscape include considering sites of economic and political debate, endangered species, weather events, macro, and micro views, but I position no human figures in the landscape.

Robert Hughes titled his first popular series of television shows on the history of Australian art *Landscape with Figures*, suggesting that landscape is the key to understanding Australian identity. John McDonald’s *The Art of Australia* from 2008 continues that tradition. More recently, the 2013 exhibition *Growing an Art Nation: Australian Land and Landscape. Australia at the Royal Academy* in London was also dominated by figures in landscape (excluding Indigenous painting). In turn, Sasha Grishin’s book *Australian Art: A*

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118 Martin Friedman, “As Far as the Eye Can See,” in Martin Friedman, John Beardsley, Denver Art Museum, and Columbus Museum of Art, *Visions of America: Landscape as Metaphor in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York; Columbus, Ohio; Denver, Colo; Denver Art Museum, 1994), 10–33.
History, which also included Indigenous art, continued the figure in landscape conception. This is perhaps not surprising as psychological drama is enacted or evoked with the interaction of figures with each other and the landscape, but my approach negates any literal imagery adhering to the well-established European tradition of positioning figures in landscape. As I have noted, the visual strategies I have used also sit outside the symbolic vocabulary of Indigenous painting. I maintain this approach to painting landscape devoid of figurative presence that has brought new understanding to how paintings operate on the viewer, especially when attempting to achieve an immersive response. To begin with, the large scale of the work insinuates a macro or aerial view even though, in reproduction this aspect may be lost.

My use of linear elements sitting above or interrupting painted grounds or veils of colour can in some way be considered as the replacement of a physical human presence in the landscape with a metaphor for human impact on the landscape. I feel that if metaphors resonate the changes to the land, then the geographic and conceptual may encourage and inform humans to take responsibility for how they inhabit the land. As I noted in the last chapter, it is the viewer who becomes the only anthropomorphic form in the viewing process of the immersive painted installation work Landskins. The degree to which the resulting paintings represent a new or Anthropocene landscape will undoubtedly vary depending on viewer response. Nevertheless, the atemporal reaction created by conflating constructive trace of human presence with pure ethereal signifiers of natural forms and spaces will ensure the longevity of the reception of these works. In this sense, they are painted skins that map the Anthropocene moment.

My aim is to articulate the interconnected activities and important responses to the Anthropocene as conditions of survival. Through personal explorations in landscape painting, the changing relationship between human and non-human temporalities is responded to and represented as a unique communication in a technological world. I argue that for several reasons previously discussed, important narratives and conversations from the Anthropocene age can be addressed through contemporary landscape painting by documenting and expanding imagery about the environmental crisis, now and in the future.

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Friedman, Martin. “As Far as the Eye Can See.” In Martin Friedman, John Beardsley, Denver Art Museum, and Columbus Museum of Art, *Visions of America: Landscape as Metaphor in the Late Twentieth Century,* 10–33. New York; Columbus, Ohio; Denver, Colo; Denver Art Museum, 1994.


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