The Colour of Consciousness: An Exploration of Play and the Everyday Through Paint

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ABSTRACT

This practice-led research focuses on the process of translating the experiences that occur within my imagination as I commute from my home to my studio. The translation of these experiences manifests into a series of abstract paintings. Through this process of translation, I explore how play, boredom, and daydreams can be used as tools to inform my painting by analysing how these states of mind alter my aesthetic sensibilities and affect relations. This is aided by critical theories like Deleuzo-Guattarian 'Smooth and Striated Space', Lefebvre's 'Rhythmanaylsis' and Burnett's 'Art of Play.'

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously written or published by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of another degree or diploma or a university or institution of higher learning.

Signed: Becks Ireland

8th June 2022

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Ingrid Boberg and Jeena Shin, without your patience and trust in me this project would not have been possible. Thank you for believing in me even when I didn't. I would like to thank my friends and family who saw me through the sleepless nights and kept me sane, and thank you to my peers who have weathered this storm with me through all the lockdowns and zoom calls.

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(Figure 14) Josef Albers, *selection of paintings from: 'Homage to the Square: Edition Keller Ia-Ik',* oil on Masonite, 1970. Artsy, Starnberg, Germany, https://www.artsy.net/artwork/josef-albers-homage-to-the-square-edition-keller-ia-ik-1

(Figure 15) '*First Date'*, 2022, oil on canvas, 30.48x40.64cm.

Introduction

This practice-led research project is centred around the experience of daydreams that recur in my everyday, and the feeling/thinking translation of these experiences through my painting practice. This project has two main aspects that run parallel through its entirety. One is what occurs in my mind, within what I call 'play space', and the other is what is being created through the painting/making process. 'Play space' is a term used in this project to describe the state of mind that I am in whilst I am playing. In this practice, 'play' is defined as a series of light-hearted movements and explorations within a set of constraints or boundaries. This manifests through daydreaming, where I am softly and sometimes spontaneously lifted out of my reality into a kind of virtual-like reality where different imagined scenarios play out in my mind and can be translated through playful and sometimes considered acts of painting. I prefer to describe play space as a space rather than a mindset or state of being because I feel those terms signify a heavier emphasis on imagination and daydreaming but exclude the playfulness occurring within the acts of my painting process. Play space is a mental space that hosts both the imaginative thinking of my daydreams and the creative, generative thinking that emerge through the acts of painting. In Peter Gray's article 'The Value of Play', he states that play is a "realm you are always free to leave".[1] Gray uses the example of when adults initiate play with children and create their own set of game rules – adults assume a rigidity in these rules that often leave the children feeling trapped in the activity. For the children, the activity is no longer play because they have lost their freedom to change the rules, alter the play, or leave it. He also describes play as something that must be actively established and maintained. By actively establishing a designated space in my practice for play I can be more intentional in the way that I am playing. As a result of this intentionality, I can be aware of when the constraints and rules no longer serve the play but begin to suffocate it. This adds flexibility to the boundaries and makes the process of play far more satisfying, keeping the light-heartedness of play in the practice.

In the first chapter, titled *Play*, I explore the play that occurs within this project by first defining it further and then expanding upon its application to painting and more specifically to my practice. Restriction and boundaries are a fundamental part of play, which I explore in the subheading *Boundaries*. This covers how I implement boundaries to my play space and my paintings, and is supported by Brian Upton's *The Aesthetic of Play*.[2] Part of how I implement restrictions is through boredom, so this subsection also covers the importance of the relationship between boredom and play, referencing Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries' text, 'Doing Nothing and Nothing to Do: The Hidden Value of Empty Time'.[3] The subheading *Strategies*

[1] Peter Gray, 'The Value of Play I: The Definition of Play Gives Insights', *Psychology Today New Zealand*, 19 November 2008,
https://www.psychologytoday.com/nz/blog/freedom-learn/200811/the-value-play-i-the-definition-play-gives-insights.
[2] Brian Upton, *The Aesthetic of Play* (MIT Press, 2015).
[3] Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries, 'Doing Nothing and Nothing to Do: The Hidden Value of Empty Time and Boredom', *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2014, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2432964.

covers how I maintain and communicate play in my practice, through tools like using patterning that is adjacent to board games, and through colours that are bright and saturated.

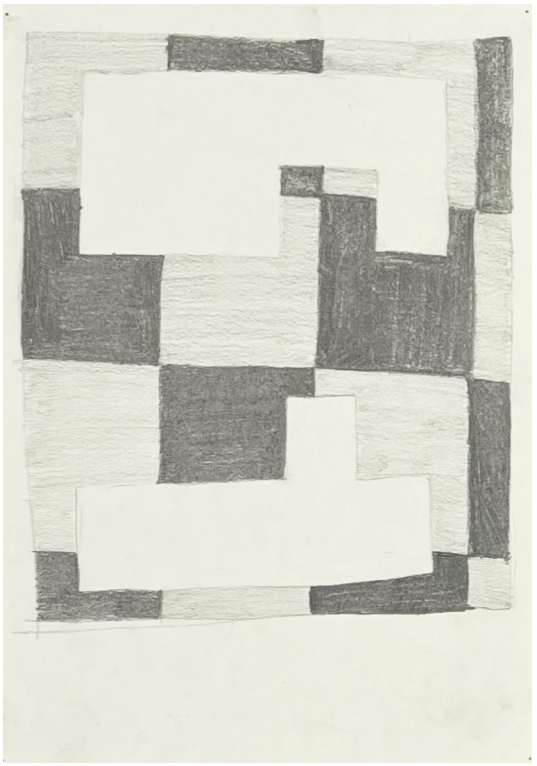
In the second chapter, *Imagination,* I provide an explanation of daydreams, internal space, and the process of translating these experiences into paintings. This chapter focusses on my experiences during my commute, while daydreaming, and the feelings and visuals that derive from that. *Imagination* corrals a definition around my experiences using texts from both Gaston Bachelard[4] and Sigmund Freud.[5] The subsection *Internal Space* describes the acts of painting and references philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.[6] In the section titled *Translations*, I explain the process of extracting something from my experiences that I can translate and use in my paintings I discuss shapes, colour palette, and compositions, which helps to contextualise why I make art the way I do.

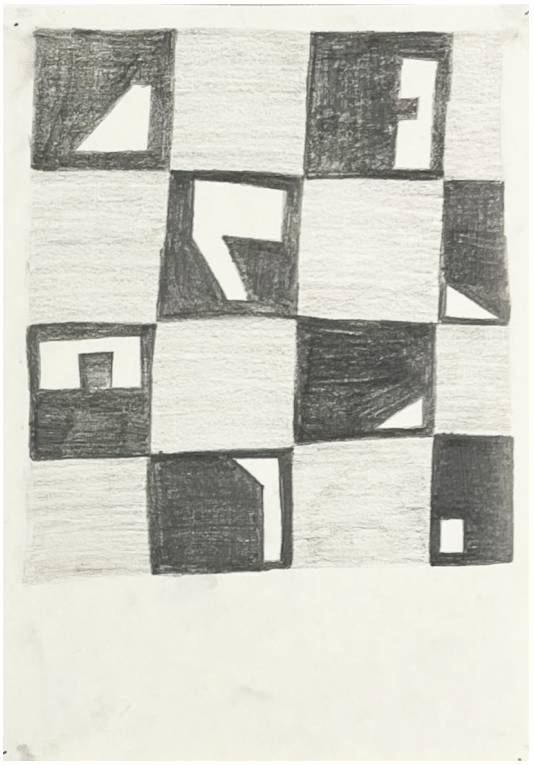
Chapter three, *Movement,* links ideas concerning movement, process, and speed to the visual output of my paintings. It is about the visual and physical movement involved in all aspects of this project. The subsection, also titled *Movement,* establishes the definition between 'moves' and 'movement', both of which are necessary in this project but hold different nuances that need to be clearly separated. The next subheading, *Process*, provides a synopsis of how my exploration with media and my considerations of format over the course of this project have helped me develop the translation process from my commutes and the experiences of play into the paintings. It covers my journey from overwhelming, large-scale works, with bold colours taken directly from the imagery on my commute, to a less derived and more abstract series of works that no longer seek to illustrate the experience but create a new experience inspired by the original commute. The final subheading of this chapter, *Speed*, is about the optical movement created in the paintings through my colour choices and patterning densities. It also covers the speed of my daily commutes and how that influences my aesthetic choices and informs my translation process. It also covers how the repetitive, monotonous movements in the painting process can enable me to daydream, and to perpetuate the experiences that inform my painting.

Chapter four, *Rhythms,* contains three subsections: *Rhythms*, *Colour*, and *Structure*. The subsection *Rhythms* provides a discussion around Henri Lefebvre's *Elements of Rhythmanalysis: An Introduction to the Understanding of Rhythms*[7] and how the practice utilises aspects of this theory. This section also analyses daydreams and play space through Deleuze and Guattari's 'smooth' and 'striated'[8] framework. The subsection *Colour* is about how I have evolved my

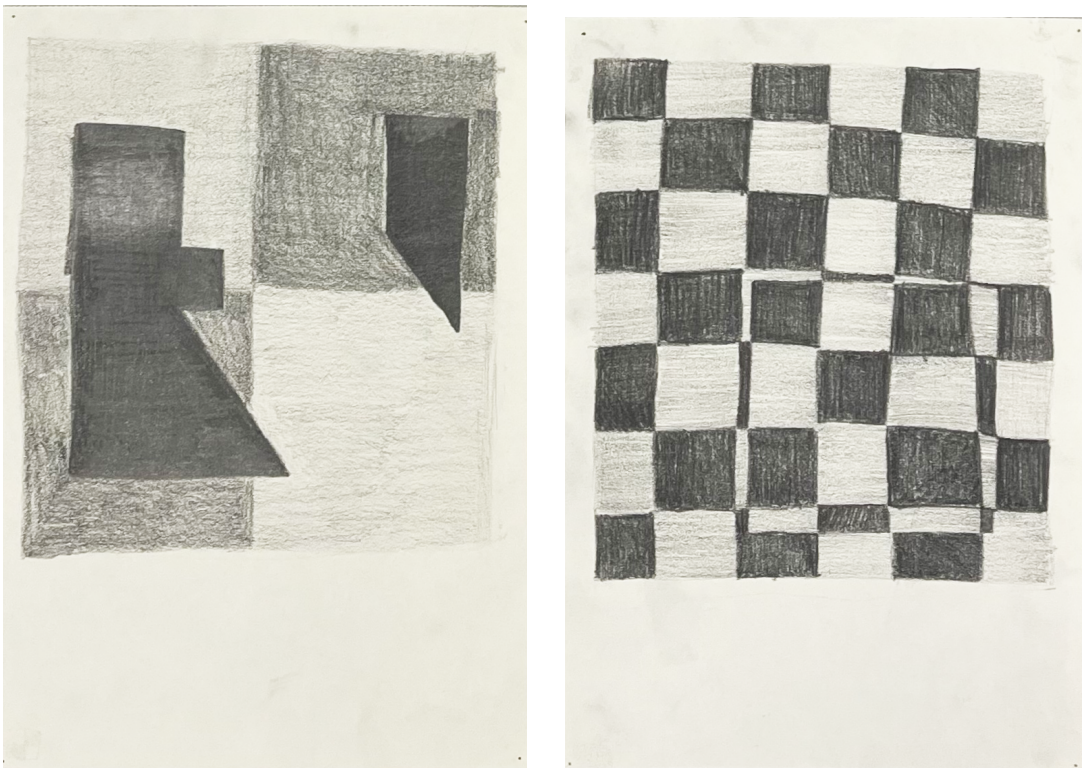
[4] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).
[5] Sigmund Freud, 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming', Collection of Papers Vol.4. The Institute of Psychoanalysis, London. 1908.
[6] Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and Brian Massumi, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, vol. 19, 1989, https://www.jstor.org/stable/203963?origin=crossref.
[7] Henri Lefebvre, *Elements of Rhythmanalysis: An Introduction to the Understanding of Rhythms* (New York: Continuum, 2004), https://monoskop.org/images/d/d2/Lefebvre_Henri_Rhythmanalysis_Space_Time_and_Everyday_Life.pdf.
[8] Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and Brian Massumi, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, vol. 19, 1989, https://www.jstor.org/stable/203963?origin=crossref.

colour sensibilities in line with translation, the commutes from my home to studio, and how I apply colour in my work. I talk about the relationship between colours and patterns and the rhythms that form within the application of patterns. The subsection *Structure* focusses on why my paintings are structured the way they are, looking at Rosalind Krauss' text *Grids,*[9] and why I am drawn to that aesthetic.





[9] Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids', *October* 9 (1979): 51–64, https://doi.org/10.2307/778321.



(Figure 1) 'Untitled Sketches', 2022, pencil on paper, 14.8x21cm.

CHAPTER 1: PLAY

Definition

Play is a complex term weighted with a multitude of connotations. For this practice-led research project, I am using Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga's definition. Huizinga defines play as "a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly",[10] continuing on to say, "It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner".[11] What is important about this definition is the articulation of the dichotomies of play. Play is understood by the player to not be serious, but to be taken very seriously. It is freedom and movement but within a set of structures and constraints. This is echoed by video game designer Brian Upton in his text *The Aesthetic of Play,*[12] who defines play as "free movement within a system of constraints",[13] further elaborating that "play is a process. It's a series of moves, either mental or physical, carried out by the player".[14] His requirements for a person to be 'playing' are that they must feel as if they are progressing through different configurations of space or levels within the 'game'. Freedom and movement here become a critical component of play because, according to Upton, a static modus operandi is not playful. He discusses that frivolous movement isn't 'play' either. The restriction is a crucial element of play, and a balance must be found between the two to create rich grounds for play to occur.[15] For me, restriction establishes the boundaries and borders of the play space, and what happens within the play space helps to form my methodology – the methods and processes of my work. When I think about play and how it manifests through my painting practice, I distinguish the key elements as imagination, movement, boundaries, and repetition.

Play space enables me to engage in material exploration within a set of constraints. The constraints are the edges of the painting I am working on, my colour palette, and the set of pattern styles I use, such as the checkerboard and harlequin patterns. The 'play' in my process creates new relationships between these elements by repeating them in different configurations and being open to unexpected outcomes. For example, in my painting *Scoobie* (Figure 2), through the process of painting the turquoise checkers over the red underpainting, I found that the colours aggravated each other and created far more optical movement than the forest green I was intending. This painting became far more interesting than I had initially planned because of this focus on playful exploration, rather than a rigid attachment to an

[10] John L. Gillin and J. Huizinga, 'Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture', *American Sociological Review* 16, no. 2 (April 1951): 274, https://doi.org/10.2307/2087716, 13.
[11] Gillin and Huizinga, 13.
[12] Upton, *The Aesthetic of Play*.
[13] Upton, 15.
[14] Upton, 15.
[15] Upton.

envisioned end result. My decisions, while painting, are made both intuitively and responsively based on my experiences of the commute, in the play space, and can be dependent on what I think works best for the affective relations I am wanting to achieve.

(Figure 2) 'Scoobie', 2022, oil on canvas, 30.48x40.64cm.

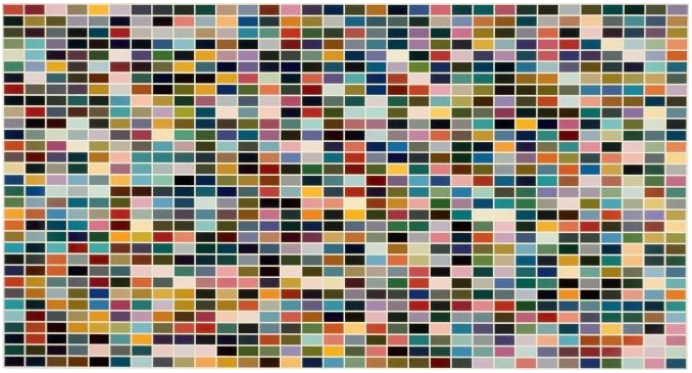
Boundaries

Play for me is both mental and physical, so, by extension, the boundaries I establish in my process have the same duality. The mental boundaries I implement begin as physical boundaries, by putting myself in situations where I become bored, like in the consistent and mundane setting of the commute. This enables me to access the play space. As writer Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries writes in his article, boredom is "a critical resource that pushes us to seek the unfamiliar".[16] He describes boredom as a catalyst for "excursions into our inner world"[17] and "free-associative thinking".[18] It is in these spaces of boredom that my play space is established. In making my paintings and executing the patterning, I am attending to mundane tasks that encourage me to become 'unfocused'[19] on the task at hand. There are two main ways in this project that I encourage boredom: through the physical act of painting repetitive forms, and through my daily commutes between home and studio. My commutes are the perfect combination of movement and monotony. That environment creates a door for me through which I can access the play space. The boundaries around the play space, the space that I occupy in my imagination, are established by simply naming it the play space. Understanding that the imaginative play I wish to engage in is going to occur within the

[16] Kets de Vries, 'Doing Nothing and Nothing to Do'.
[17] Kets de Vries, 5.
[18] Kets de Vries, 5.
[19] Kets de Vries, 14.

self-appointed space I have created for it, is enough. The purpose of the play space would become over-indulged and suffocated if I over-defined it.

Freedom thrives within boundaries, and the physical restrictions in my practice are a great example of this. By limiting my visual motifs to just patterns and shapes, I can achieve far more fruitful explorations with colour and density. Abstraction frees me from the burden of symbolism and the very literal nature of figurative painting, leaving me an open format of pure colour and form to work within. This is important to me because I don't want to illustrate my daydreams or experiences in play space, but I want to transform them into something new, something that takes them beyond mere experience. In his lecture 'Creative Writers and Day-dreaming', Sigmund Freud says that "the opposite of play is not what is serious but what is real".[20] He says that the player is well aware that their creation isn't real but continues to take it very seriously.[21] By using abstract language, I can align my work with the well-established history of abstract painting as a serious and academic pursuit, referencing painters like Mark Rothko and Gerhard Richter, whilst maintaining a playful and light-hearted subject matter.

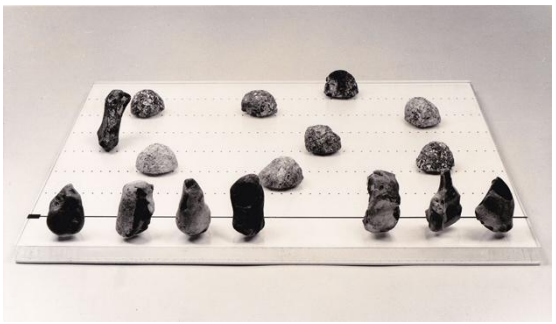


(Figure 3) Gerhard Richter, '1024 Colours)', 1973, Lacquer on Canvas, 254x478cm

Strategy

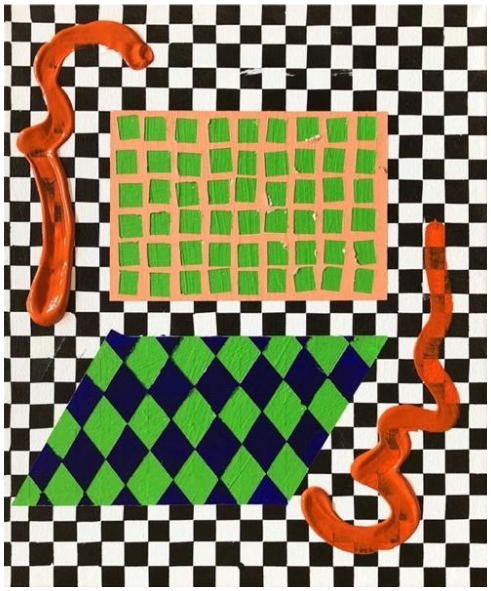
I often compare my decision-making process, and overall approach to painting, with playing a board game. Firstly, because board games are a widely accessible example of play within rules and structure, and secondly because I think of my painting practice as a playful exercise. I think about my shapes, colours, and patterns like game pieces. Each action and decision in the process becomes like making 'moves'. Applying a checkerboard pattern would be considered one 'move', and placing a stripe of colour would be another 'move'. Like conceptual sculptor Jean Michel Sanejouand's *Jeu De Topo,* the game ends when the players reach a satisfying composition.

[20] Freud, 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming'.
[21] Freud.



(Figure 4) Jean Michel Sanejouand, 'Jeu De Topo', 1963, stones on board.

As well as referencing board games in my thinking and in the language surrounding my practice, I also reference their aesthetics in my painting. The most obvious example is the checkerboard patterning that is a continued motif across most of my paintings. A particularly good example of this is in the background of my painting *Tick the Boxes* (Figure 5). I feel this patterning comes with a simplicity and playfulness that is not arbitrary or naïve. The board game analogy extends to my colour choices too, as I often opt for a combination of bright and saturated colours that vibrate off each other in the grid.



(Figure 5) 'Tick the Boxes', Oct 2021, acrylic on stretched canvas, 25x30cm.

I use frames within frames, borders, and grids to establish my painted field. Inserting these elements, like a ritual, opens the space for me to experiment. The monotony of painting the repetitive squares that make up the grid becomes quite relaxing, and often allows me to daydream as my stream of consciousness strays from my current task and my attention drifts to a more imaginative space. This became a very important way of accessing the play space

during the three-month Covid-19 lockdown that Auckland experienced in 2021, where it was my only point of entry when my commutes stopped happening. In my practice, establishing the painted field is the commencing act of the game. From there I create corners and internal spaces within the painting, continually creating rhythms and then interrupting them. Each new 'move' or each new element added continues the game. When I have finished a painting, I want the 'game' to continue unfolding the longer it is viewed. Like Jule Korneffel's work, my paintings are "palpable records of their own making".[22]

[22] Jamie Martinez, 'Interview with Jule Korneffel', *Arte Fuse* (blog), 9 February 2019, https://artefuse.com/2019/02/09/interview-with-artist-jule-korneffel/.

CHAPTER 2: Imagination

Imagination

Imagination is an important facet of play and holds significance within this project. As Peter Gray states in his article, 'The Value of Play I: The Definition of Play Gives Insights', due to the importance of rules within play, as well as the importance of consent and active participation during play, the rules of the game must be consciously invented and actively maintained.[23] I must actively maintain my imagination in my practice to retain the immersion required for satisfying daydreams. If the play space is not actively guarded from what I call 'practical thoughts' – things like making a to do list for the day or answering texts – then the immersion is broken and the daydreams either do not happen or are watered down and do not give the same intensity of experience as being fully immersed. In the same way, if the practical thoughts become too intrusive then it ceases to become play, the way that often play ruled by adults is no longer play for the children. The intensity of the daydreams is crucial to the affective experience that comes from them. If the daydream is not satisfying, then the affective experience is weakened and creates a more fragile or inadequate resource to paint from.

In both my daydreaming and my painting, there is a very intentional engagement with playful generation of affect relations and ideas that enables me to become responsive to new input. In the daydreams it would be the way that different playlists affect the tone of the daydreams, and in the painting it is the way a new colour reacts in the composition. In the preparatory acts made before painting, like taping off the edges, priming the canvasses, and mixing my colours, I feel I am meticulously standing up dominoes and the moment the first bit of paint touches the canvas, I topple the first piece, and begin the chain reaction. I experience a similar feeling in the processual acts of commuting between my home and my studio, where I manufacture the conditions necessary to access the play space, like choosing a curated playlist, putting my headphones on, and turning my notifications off so I can get absorbed in the atmospheric ambience. Whilst these feelings get altered in translation, they are there at the initial stages and begin to inform the affective quality of the work. I define imagination in this practice as the processes of creation, construction, and play that all happen within my mind. This often manifests as daydreams.

French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who discusses daydreams in depth in his book, *The Poetics of Space*, says that daydreams "illuminate the synthesis of immemorial and recollected".[24] He describes the process of blurring the lines between daydreaming and reality as "intoxicating",[25] and he insists that both daydreams and imagination must feel positive for

[23] Peter Gray, 'The Value of Play I'.
[24] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 5.
[25] Bachelard, 34.

them to count as such. He calls daydreams "documents of fantasy"[26] and elaborates that the daydreams contemplate grandeur, which creates a euphoric emotional response and provides an escapism from reality, "that the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world".[27] This mirrors a quote from Freud's 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming' lecture, where he states,

> The unreality of the writer's imaginative world, however, has very important consequences for the technique of his art; for many things which, if they were real, could give no enjoyment.[28]

These insights, for me, coalesce in the sentiment that daydreaming is an incredible tool for creativity, joy, and expansive thinking. Still, the importance of defining the borders of reality and fantastical construction is also stressed. This definition of borders stops daydreaming from becoming an unproductive 'delusion'.[29]

Internal Space

Play space is my name for the borders that frame the daydreams and situate these fantasies in play, keeping them separated from my reality. However, 'internal space' in the context of this project is a more practical term that is used to distinguish the discrete pictorial spaces within the composition of my paintings.

Philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari categorise spaces into 'smooth space' and 'striated space'. Deleuze and Guattari base these categories on an energetic difference, a form of interpreting the world that precedes logical thought and perception. In their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* they differentiate smooth and striated, saying, "The striated is that which intertwines fixed and variable elements",[30] and, "The smooth is the continuous variation, continuous development of form".[31] Academic Rebecca L. Breuer called these "the processual dynamisms that characterise life".[32] Breuer stresses in her article 'Inbetween and Immediate',[33] that the smooth and the striated are not separate binaries that exist outside of each other but that they happen simultaneously. I use this differentiation of space as the foundation for play space and internal space. I categorise my experiences in play space as smooth experiences within striated spaces, like regularly scheduled public transport and rigid commute timetables.

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[26] Bachelard, 182.
[27] Bachelard, 30.
[28] Sigmund Freud, 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming', *SIGMUND FREUD*, 1908, 421.
[29] Freud.
[30] Deleuze, Guattari, and Massumi, *A Thousand Plateaus*.
[31] Deleuze, Guattari, and Massumi.
[32] Rebecca Louise Breuer, 'Inbetween and Immediate'. (Amsterdam, Hogeschool van Amsterdam, 2017), https://pure.hva.nl/ws/files/4198390/Breuer_InBETWEEN.pdf.
[33] Rebecca Louise Breuer.

However, another facet of the Deleuze-Guattarian smooth and striated space concept is "a distinction between 'free action' in smooth space and 'work-related action' in striated space".[34] I use this thinking alongside my painting directly by applying structure, control, and continued effort in the gridded backgrounds of my paintings. This is not to say that these painted grounds are devoid of smooth moments, however, because they are full of them. The 'free action' in my painting presents itself in the moments where the fluid paint evades the structure and slips away, revealing the undercoat, as in my painting *PNG 2* (Figure 6).

(Figure 6) 'PNG 2', 2022, Oil on Canvas, 30.48x40.64cm.

Internal spaces occur within the paintings themselves; within each shape the quality of the brushwork changes, as does the colour, to create a series of smaller interactions within the larger composition. Diverse environments populate each painting, creating conversations in their containment. The brushwork and colours butt up against the edges of the shape and vibrate within their boundaries.

Jason Stopa is a painter whose work has been credited for reviving joy in contemporary painting.[35] His work uses bright colours and walks the line between figurative and abstract painting. A pervasive visual theme within his compositions is the exploration of internal spaces and juxtaposed environments. He does this through a repeated structural format that he has used across different series of paintings over the last few years. It consists of two floating rectangles and painted lines that imply a vague interior of a house, as seen in his works *The Gate II* (Figure 7) and *A Portrait of Luis Barragan* (Figure 8). The way I read this format is that I

[34] Deleuze, Guattari, and Massumi, *A Thousand Plateaus*.
[35] Yau, 'Where Painting Can Live'.

am standing in a room looking at two paintings on a wall. I read his horizontal lines in the bottom third of the paintings and diamond grid as the floor, the vertical lines as the wall, and the three rectangles in the composition as windows.

(Figure 7) Jason Stopa, 'The Gate II', 2020, oil on canvas, 71.12x 58.42cm

(Figure 8) Jason Stopa, 'A Portrait of Luis Barragan',2021, oil on canvas, 71.12x58.42cm

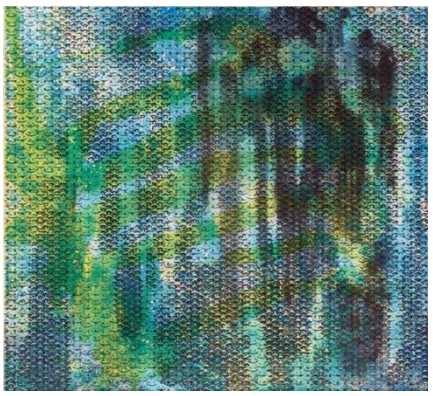
Stopa conducts experiments in this format, often creating a duotone gestural expression in one frame, and a colourful structured composition in the other. Stopa always situates the two frames inside the outer frame of the painting itself, and he uses the brushwork surrounding the rectangles to imply a wall and a patterned floor. Stopa's way of presenting these contrasts within this format comes with humour: he is presenting two mini paintings within a bigger work. Anyone viewing this in the gallery context, who reads the paintings in the same way I do, is witnessing a painting on a wall of two paintings on a wall. This play raises questions of the boundaries of internal space – where does the framing stop? By creating designated areas for interaction, I can tease out gestural interactions and observe them like petri dishes.

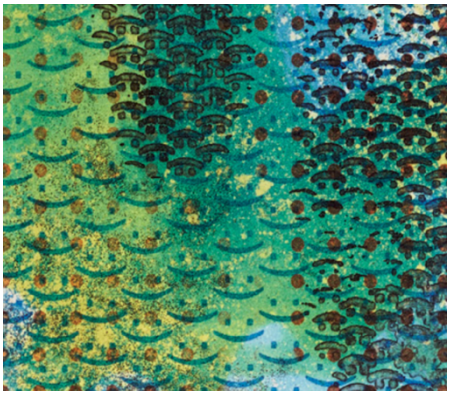
Translation

Translation in this project is the process of turning the affective experiences of my daydreams and my commutes into paintings that communicate joy, playfulness, and satisfaction. Through the translation process, the original experience is altered until the end product is a new experience that contains the essence of the original one. My experiences in play space are fleeting and ephemeral. After the daydream is over all that is left is an affective impression. This impression has a limited shelf life before it fades. My painting practice benefits from my daily commutes because they create a consistent stream of new, imagined experiences. This creates a cache of affective impressions that form a distilled and complex pool of experiences to paint from. This cache of experiences is then drawn upon in studio and used as a tool, alongside the

paint, brushes, and tape. Like the other tools, it becomes a part of the process but does not become an overwhelming element in the final work.

Whilst the references to board games are useful tools to communicate play in my work, they allude to a very tangible and tactile type of play, which excludes the ephemerality of the daydreams and their relationship with imagination. I have found that when using digital aesthetics, like the PNG file background, which is made up of a grey and cream checkerboard, as seen in my painting *PNG 2* (Figure 6), the digital connotations of these forms and patterns communicate the intangibility of the daydreams where the board games cannot, because of their association with tactile play. The very act of translating intangible experiences into a tangible and 'touched object'[36] creates another layer of the translation process that removes some of the elements of ephemerality associated with the original experience. Using patterning and visual information that implies intangibility, I can insert back into my work more of the feeling of being disconnected from my reality while I am in my imagination. The internet is a space that holds a lot of fun for me. It hosts creativity, imagination, and play, but it is only accessible through a frame made up of pixels in a grid. Jaqueline Humphries also works with digital language, using emojis as a repeating pattern across her paintings, adding humour into her work as she represents imagery we have become so familiar with, as in her work *:) :) :) :)* (Figure 9) where she repeats the ':)' emoticon in layers across the ground.





(Figure 9) Jacqueline Humphries, :) :) :) :) , 2016, Colour sugar lift flat bite, spit bite aquatint and aquatint with drypoint on gampi paper chine collé, 71x73.7cm, Crowne Point Press, San Francisco.

(Figure 10) Jacqueline Humphries, :) :) :) :) (Detail), 2016, colour sugar lift flat bite, spit bite aquatint and aquatint with drypoint on gampi paper chine collé, 71x73.7cm, Crowne Point Press, San Francisco.

The translation process is one of assessment and curation. It is both reactive to the new input in the painting process and conscious of maintaining the essence of the original affective experience. I want the feeling of playfulness from painting and daydreaming to survive the process of translation. As Jason Stopa says,

[36] New York Studio School, *Clare Grill: On Her Work*, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lSkbZtUwDbU.

> I'm interested in making images that reference an innocent way of looking at the world, but which are coming from an adult's perspective, so they incorporate intellectual and formal concerns.[37]

In my practice, I am often considering a balance between the light-heartedness of play and the more serious and formal consideration of composition. One of the ways I do this is by making small jokes to myself in the work. An example of this is in my PNG paintings where I used a blue underpainting to poke fun at the 'blue light' buzzwords surrounding digital screens. I found this especially humorous during the zeitgeist of 'working from home', zoom calls, and online classes during Covid-19 lockdowns, whilst still acknowledging the formal tradition of an underpainting.

[37] Jennifer Samet, 'Beer with a Painter: Jason Stopa', *Hyperallergic*, 18 April 2015, https://hyperallergic.com/200026/beer-with-a-painter-jason-stopa/.

CHAPTER 3: Movement

Movement is one of the key elements of play and games. As Upton says, "In order for play to occur, there must be a sense that the player has travelled from one configuration of play to another".[38] However, there is an important distinction to be made between 'movement' and 'moves' in the context of this project. 'Moves' are implemented strategies and steps taken in the act of painting, whereas 'movement' refers to the physical sensation of travel between points, or the optical movement of your eye across and through the composition of a painting. There has been a significant amount of exploration throughout this project of different mediums; these distinct configurations and formats of painting and drawing help me peel back layers of the process and unlock new information with each set.

Process

In some of the earlier works in this project, like the two-piece work *Untitled Ants* (Figure 11), I began to make paintings while thinking about colour, frequency, and optical movement. I designed the diptych so that each painting was an inversion of the other and created the mental after-image. The translation from commute to painting was literal: I wanted to illustrate the commute through abstract language, for example, neon colours and shapes reminiscent of traffic lights and road works cones.The colours were burning in my peripheral vision as I was painting these. I would frequently have to look away only to see the after image. I tried to use jarring colour combinations and a larger scale to overwhelm the viewer into experiencing what I was experiencing in the commutes.

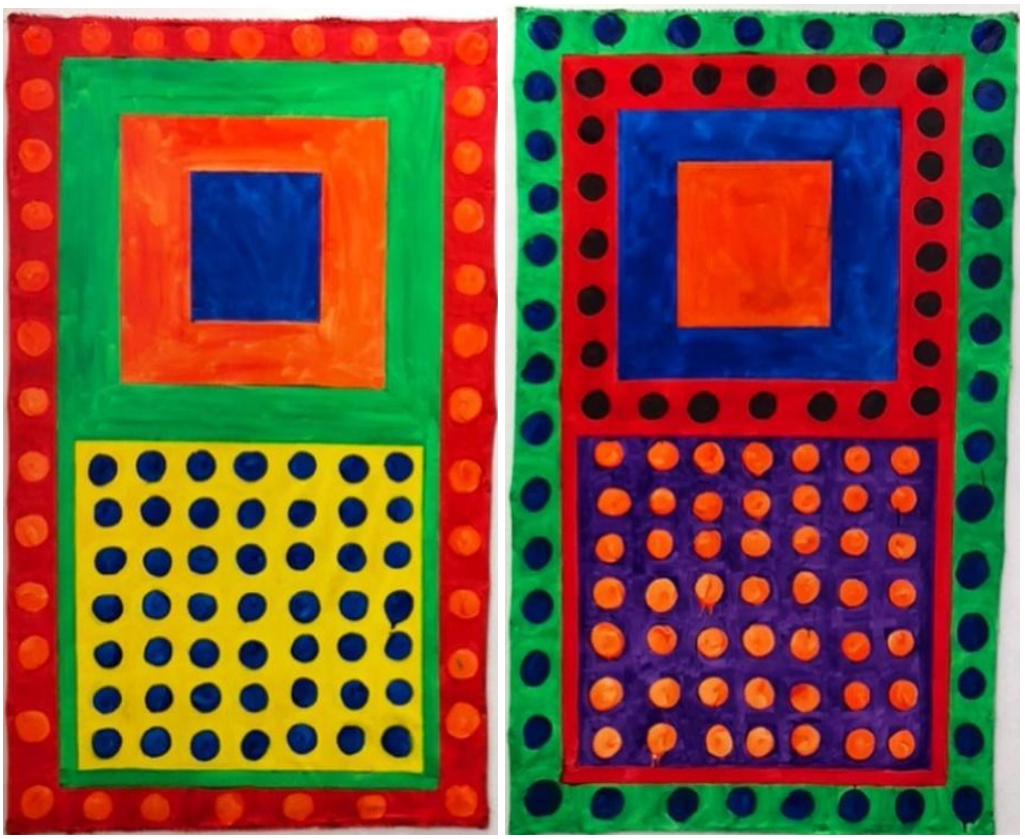
Alongside these larger works, I made smaller sketches on paper with oil pastels, and on MDF with A4 acrylic paint. These smaller works emulate the commute experience more abstractly, focussing on the feelings from the experience I had after my commute on that particular day. These sketches grew into a collection of small paintings that became one larger work, called *Grid I* (Figure 12). The colours in this work shifted from becoming brutish tools of overstimulation to being a vessel for affective reflection. At this point in the practice, I was especially interested in the works from Jason Stopa's exhibition 'The Gate'[39] and Laura Owens' 2003 digital paintings because of their colour use and overall nostalgic aesthetic. Over the course of the project, my colour selections have drifted further away from the visual aesthetics associated with the commute and daydreams that I began with. They have become more aligned to the act of painting itself. Painter Claire Grill discusses in an interview with Jennifer Samet,

> One day, I was on a bus talking to an old man in Spanish, and I realized I wasn't translating into English. I was just understanding. There's something that happens in

[38] Upton, *The Aesthetic of Play*.
[39] 'Jason Stopa: The Gate', *Art Week*, 1 August 2018, https://www.artweek.com/events/united-states/art-design/new-york/jason-stopa-gate.

> painting that's not unlike that. You are not translating with words or your mind — you are just knowing.[40]

I feel as though, throughout this project, I have spent so much time in commute space and play space that it has become an inherent part of how I move through the world and how I make art.



(Figure 11) 'Untitled Ants', June 2021, oil on canvas, 1000cmx1600cm each.

Speed

I prefer compositions that create circuits, probably because they feel like they circulate their energy rather than releasing it. There is a nice parallel for me between circuits and the sensation of daydreaming. The circuits in the compositions echo the circular and churning energy of the daydreams, which recycle the same imaginary environments and scenarios.

[40] Jennifer Samet, 'Beer with a Painter'

When painting the shapes in my later works, as in *PNG 2* (Figure 6), I mentally categorise them as either pointers or absorbers. Much like the Kiki/Bouba effect,[41] it is intuitive to me which shape is which. Pointers direct the eye to a part of the composition, and absorbers soak it up and hold the attention. Together they act as a border in my compositions, but I prefer to think of the relationship as a circuit. I particularly like this word for its digital connotations and its closeness with Monopoly and similar types of board gameplay. Artist and writer Amy Sillman writes in depth about shape and points out their inherently playful and imaginative nature.[42] Sillman says that to explore shape is "to consider that one's own imagination is of enough value to warrant investigation".[43]

The speed of my paintings directly links to the physical speeds that go into their making. When I paint a smaller checkerboard pattern, I get taken over by a sense of urgency (probably from a lack of patience) that adds a frenetic quality to the smaller checks. In the paintings with larger checks, I feel more intentional with their application. I can slow down more. They move at a slower speed visually.

The speed of my commute determines the types of daydreams I experience. Faster commutes create higher-energy and adrenaline-fuelled daydreams, and slower commutes where I am walking or stuck in traffic create slower-burn daydreams with more details. This variation informs my internal understanding of what a successful translation is or is not. My experiences in commutes, imagination, and play are all important formulators of my internal sensibilities for painting. Deleuze and Guattari say, "Movements, speed and slowness, are sometimes enough to reconstruct a smooth space",[44] and in the same way, through the physical movement of commutes I can enter the smooth space of daydreaming. The density of checks that I deem suitable, the colour combinations I lean towards, and the types of shapes I use directly correlate with the internal and external speeds I experience in my commutes. I inherently make the frequencies and speeds of the paintings align with the commute experiences.

[41] The kiki/bouba effect is a phenomenon whereby people can quite distinctly identify whether a shape would be called 'kiki' or 'bouba' by whether it is a sharp or soft shape. It is developed from Wolfgang Kohler's gestalt psychology.
[42] 'Artist's Choice: Amy Sillman—The Shape of Shape', The Museum of Modern Art, accessed 10 August 2021, https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/5175, 7.
[43] 'Artist's Choice', 6.
[44] Sander L. Gilman et al., 'A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 19, no. 4 (1989): 657, https://doi.org/10.2307/203963, 500.

(Figure 12) 'Grid I', August 2021, acrylic and oil pastel on MDF, 1260x891cm.

CHAPTER 4: Rhythms

Rhythms

Whilst I am commuting, daydreaming, and playing, I am absorbing all the sensations around me, all of which inform the way I translate my experiences. Henri Lefebvre categorises these sensations as rhythms and discusses the way we process them in his book *Elements of Rhythmanalysis: An Introduction to the Understanding of Rhythms*. He describes them as something we all subconsciously process, but he encourages us to 'tune in' and become aware of the rhythms around us. *Rhythmanylysis* identifies rhythms as embodied ways of moving through and experiencing time, which helps me articulate my experiences in play space. Lefebvre defines rhythms as a series of repetitions and differences that we understand intuitively, and that are measured against our own bodily rhythms like our heartbeat, breathing, and walking.[45]

Lefebvre says, "repetition does not exclude differences, it also gives birth to them; it produces them".[46] Through repetition comes difference: particularly when the task of painting becomes more tiresome, there are more slippages and imperfections in each mark I make. As Elly Thomas says on the topic of Phillip Guston's process, it is in repetition that difference and new outcomes emerge.[47] For me, these new outcomes are moments where the grid warps and new rhythms are created in the painting. Through this handmade repetition, an organic and intimate quality can arise in the work that, for me, echoes the fluidity of memory and of daydreaming.

Lefebvre calls people who are 'tuned in' to rhythms 'rhythmanalysts', whose role is to "arrive at the concrete through experience"[48]. This concept of arriving at the concrete through experience is how I think about my practice. I am creating a tangible art from an ephemeral experience. Lefebvre states that "to grasp a rhythm, it is necessary to have been grasped by it".[49] Immersion becomes an important part of actively engaging with rhythms. I find that the moments of immersion both in daydreaming and my painting are important moments of connection and alignment that inform the translation process. For me to be immersed in either process is to be saturated in the experience. Kasper Levin, Tone Roald, and Bjarne Sode Funch in their text *Visual Art and the Rhythm of Experience* state, "Rhythm is the organising principle that unifies sensing in an immanent connection to movement and time".[50] They suggest that

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[45] Henri Lefebvre, *Elements of Rhythmanalysis: An Introduction to the Understanding of Rhythms* (New York: Continuum, 2004), https://monoskop.org/images/d/d2/Lefebvre_Henri_Rhythmanalysis_Space_Time_and_Everyday_Life.pdf, 27.
[46] Lefebvre.
[47] Elly Thomas, *Play and the Artist's Creative Process: The Work of Philip Guston and Eduardo Paolozzi* (Routledge, 2019).
[48] Lefebvre, *Elements of Rhythmanalysis: An Introduction to the Understanding of Rhythms*. 21.
[49] Lefebvre, 27.
[50] Kasper Levin, Tone Roald, and Bjarne Sode Funch, 'Visual Art and the Rhythm of Experience', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 77, no. 3 (June 2019): 281–93, https://doi.org/10.1111/jaac.12647.

rhythms are the key to unlock "the viewer's perceptual and affective absorption in the work of art".[51] By applying Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis to Deleuze and Guattari's smooth space and straited space concept, I can better understand the ways I create movement in my work, and this gives me a language to describe my internal understanding of speeds. Within striated space, restriction and rules prevail; on a bus, for example, the route stays the same and the mechanical movements create similar and consistent rhythms. In this environment I am able to drift into the smooth space of daydreaming more easily than if I were surrounded by more diverse rhythms. By being able to recognise smooth and striated spaces, I am engaging in the role of rhythmanalyst.

Structure

The slippages in the freehand painting process are where the technicality of the grid fails, and the new, warped grid becomes a rich terrain of rhythm. As artist Caroline Kent said in an interview with Matt Morris, "Only when the construction fails can I obtain what it could not achieve".[52] The grid acts as a vehicle for repetition, which gives rise to difference. It is in these moments of difference that I find the most joy in the final painting. The more mechanical and strictly applied grid in previous works such as *Tick the Boxes* (Figure 5), have felt concrete and rigid, whereas the grids in *PNG 2* (Figure 6) and *Scoobie* (Figure 2) are less rigid and hold more playfulness. The technical checkerboard still creates rhythms, but it neglects the temporary and playful nature of the daydreams. Rosalind Krauss' text 'Grids' discusses the grid's ability to first and foremost establish a painting in materialist terrain: to work on the grid is to embrace the materiality of paint.[53] Krauss suggests that when you paint a grid into your work it is no longer bound by the edges of the painting but becomes part of a larger expansive field.[54] The grid is implied to continue infinitely.

Art critic John Yau, in an article called 'The Democracy of Abstraction', wrote that "there is a sense of tension between what is contained within the painting's physical boundaries and what extends beyond".[55] This is best seen in my painting *Jeetle-Boose* (Figure 13). What is most interesting to me in this painting is the moment in the bottom corner of the green shape where it just grazes the edge of the painting. This tension is palpable in the composition, and the near crop combined with the checkerboard implies that the composition extends beyond what is shown.

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[51] Levin, Roald, and Funch.
[52] Matt Morris, 'It Will Be More like Scratching than Writing', Goldfinch press, 6 May 2017, https://issuu.com/goldfinchprojects/docs/final3fold_pages.
[53] Krauss, 'Grids'.
[54] Krauss, 61.
[55] John Yau, 'The Democracy of Abstraction', *Hyperallergic*, 6 October 2021, http://hyperallergic.com/682452/thomas-nozkowski-the-last-paintings/.

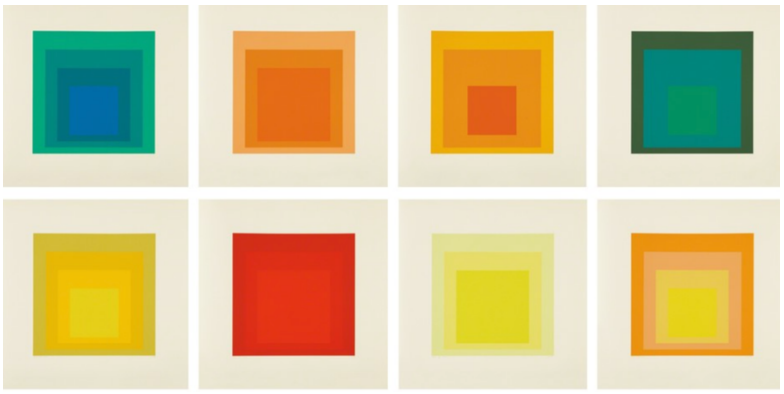
I find that using a checkerboard as the foundation of my paintings creates a sense of unity across them – catching them all in the grid like a spider web, or, as Vanja V. Malloy calls it in the book *Intersecting Colours; Albers and his Contemporaries*, "a shared relational structure that jumps from one image to the next".[56]

(Figure 13) 'Jeetle-Boose', 2021, oil on ply, 29.7x42cm.

Colour

Colour is the first thing I notice about a painting, and it carries with it a special set of qualities that make it uniquely perfect for creating rhythms. Colours, for me, holds depth and can create illusionistic space as they push and pull each other around the canvas. It is the most important tool of my translations.

[56] Vanja V. Malloy, ed., *Intersecting Colors: Josef Albers and His Contemporaries* (Amherst, Massachusetts: Amherst College Press, 2015).



(Figure 14) Josef Albers, selection of paintings from 'Homage to the Square: Edition Keller Ia-Ik,' 1970, oil on Masonite.

Artist Josef Albers talks about colour in depth. He is more interested in the relationships between colours than studying them in isolation from each other, saying "colors present themselves in continuous flux, constantly related to changing neighbors and changing conditions".[57] Because of this, Albers promotes "thinking in situations".[58] He discusses how some colours "exert influence" and others "accept influence".[59] Colours that exert influence pull the other colour closer toward their perception, whilst colours that accept influence are pushed away from their isolated perception. Albers states that when we study colour interactions, we study ourselves – what biases we hold and what preferences we have. Much like Lefebvre's Rhythmanalyst, Albers believes that the aim of his teachings was "to develop awareness of what we do out of habit as opposed to choice".[60] Because of this push and pull that happens with colour, I can create illusionistic space in my paintings. As well as the horizontal and vertical pull of colours, different combinations also create a depth that recedes in the composition. I find the most interest in my paintings that mix warm and cool contrasting colours. I find this especially when these combine with shapes that are layered over the checkerboard grid; by putting the active colours in the background and the receding colour over it with a shape, the composition follows a contradicting logic, it churns like the daydreams do. One day a friend told me that my paintings look like you have just pulled your pyjamas out of the washing machine and there was one sock in the pocket that dried in an awkward shape, and I think about that all the time. It is exactly the energy I want them to have.

[57] Josef Albers, *Interaction of Color* (USA: Yale University Press, 2013), https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300179354/interaction-color, 4.
[58] Albers, 9.
[59] Albers, 9.
[60] Eva Díaz, 'The Ethics of Perception: Josef Albers in the United States', *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 2 (June 2008): 260–85, https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2008.10786393.

(Figure 15) 'First Date', 2022, oil on canvas, 30.48x40.64cm.

In an interview with Jenifer Samet, Clare Grill talks about her paintings and how "they radiate with a joy of making, an awareness of the imperfections and complexities of everyday life, and also a consciousness of what's beneath the surface".[61] My colours hold the memory of the underpainting and let small moments slip through. As in my painting *First Date* (Figure 15) there are quiet moments where the square forms do not meet and the blue underpainting pokes through, or even through the slightly translucent pink you can see hints of the deeper tone beneath it. This painting also carries joy for me: the way the cold green falls back and the warm pinks push forwards is contradicted by the way the green shape's edge sits on top of the pink squares.

The deep satisfaction that I get from the daydreams and the commute plays a large role in informing my colour sensibilities. I saturate my colours in the same way that I am saturated in the experience. My affective environment in the context of this project has been largely the commutes from Devonport to the Auckland CBD by bus, which follow the shoreline of the harbour and go over the harbour bridge. I have been painting over the course of the summer in beautiful, sunny weather, which inevitably has influenced the colours I want to use in my paintings. Whilst the brighter colour palette points to playful activities, joy, and games, it feels more authentic to me when I paint with them on sunny days. Clare Grill, on the topic of her painting and grief, said that the paintings themselves aren't about grief, but were made in and

[61] Samet, 'Beer with a Painter'.

around it.[62] Her colour choices in her work at this time were soft, smoky greys and deep, navy blues, with hints of lighter colours in small doses.

This project conceptually revolves around harmonious but necessary contrasts, such as play and restriction, reality and imagination, movement and stillness. This extends into my colour selections as well. I love exploiting combinations like a duotone checkerboard with a nearly opposite but not-quite colour for the shape. For example, in my painting *First Date* (Figure 15) I have the two-tone warm pink checkerboard and a cold green shape over the top. Not only does this exacerbate the push and pull backwards and forwards, with the green seeking recession but the warm pink underneath pushing it forwards, but it visually creates, for me, the perfect harmonious contrast.

[62] John Yau, 'Clare Grill's Untranslatable Paint', *Hyperallergic*, 24 April 2021, http://hyperallergic.com/639695/clare-grill-untranslatable-paint/.

Conclusion

Through play, daydreams, translating, and painting, this project has allowed me to both escape the rhythms of experience and memorialise them. This series of work connects board games, the repetition and nuanced difference of commutes , play, daydreaming, grids, shapes, and colour, all where I initially thought mutual ground did not occur. My translations are intuitively negotiated, and through the processes of making I have expanded my boundaries around play and play space, shifting them from solely being experiences of the commute into acknowledging them as catalysts within the acts of painting as well. Play is no longer a subject matter in my practice but is now deeply rooted in both my motivations and my methods. It is now an active contributor to my painting in all stages of its creation. By integrating play in every part of the art making process, it has allowed me to create a practice that sustains itself. When my play acts as both inspirations and methods, through the making of a painting I am informing the next. The initial duality of my play as separate mental and physical activities has been united through this project into a more unified and holistic approach to translation, experience, and painting. The processes of painting and playing have gained a new level of satisfaction and joy for me through this project. Establishing the play space has become like muscle memory, and I can use my energy to trust in the paint and my intuition, knowing that the paintings will reveal themselves in process of translating. My play has more freedom and maintains its light-heartedness as I have better learned how to move its boundaries. Much as Clare Grill did, I have stopped translating and started understanding.

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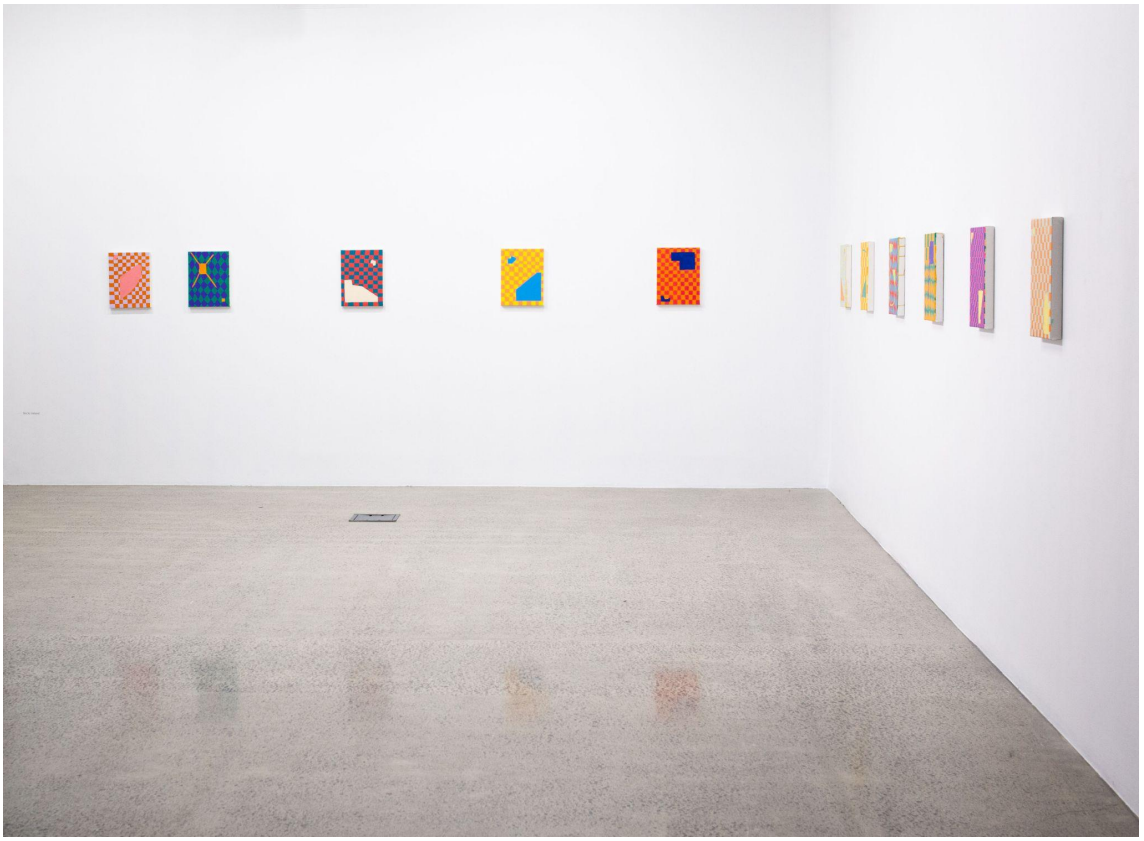
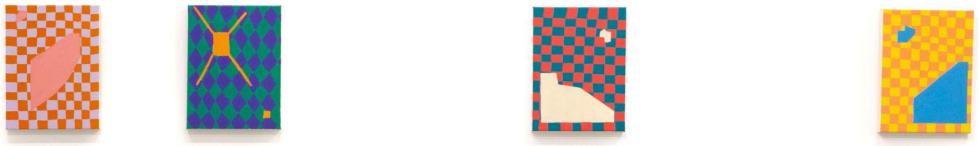
Exhibition Documentation
St Paul's St Gallery
10.7.22





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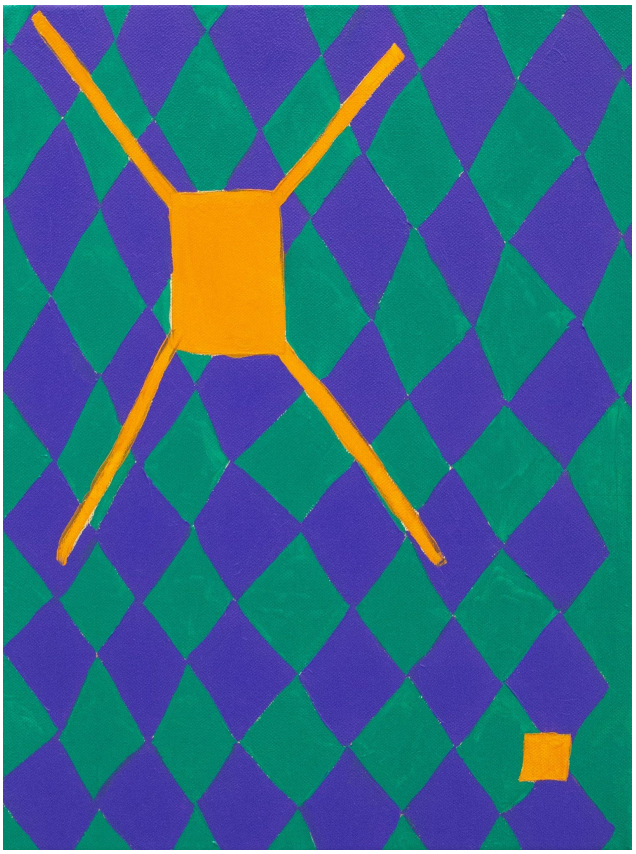

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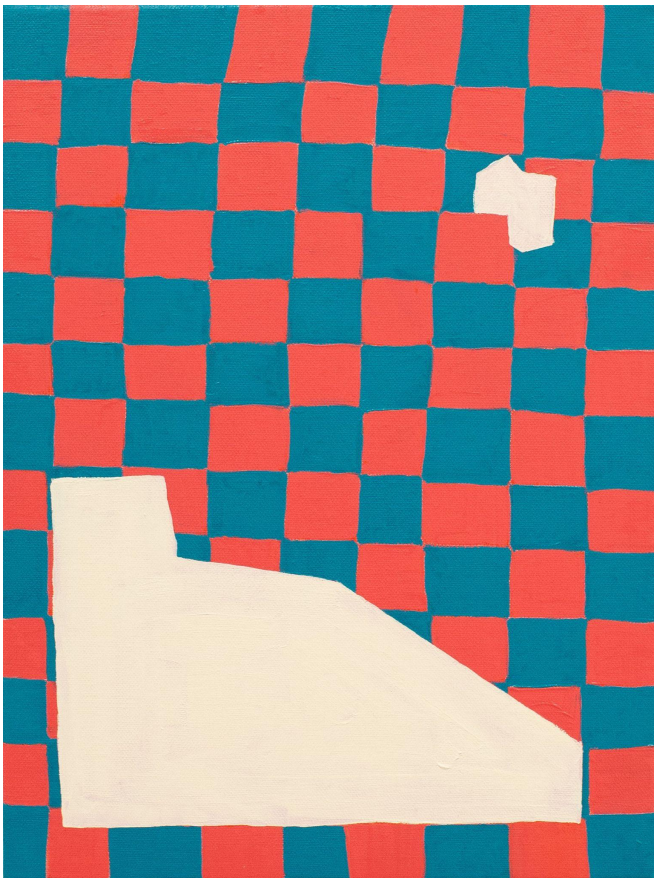

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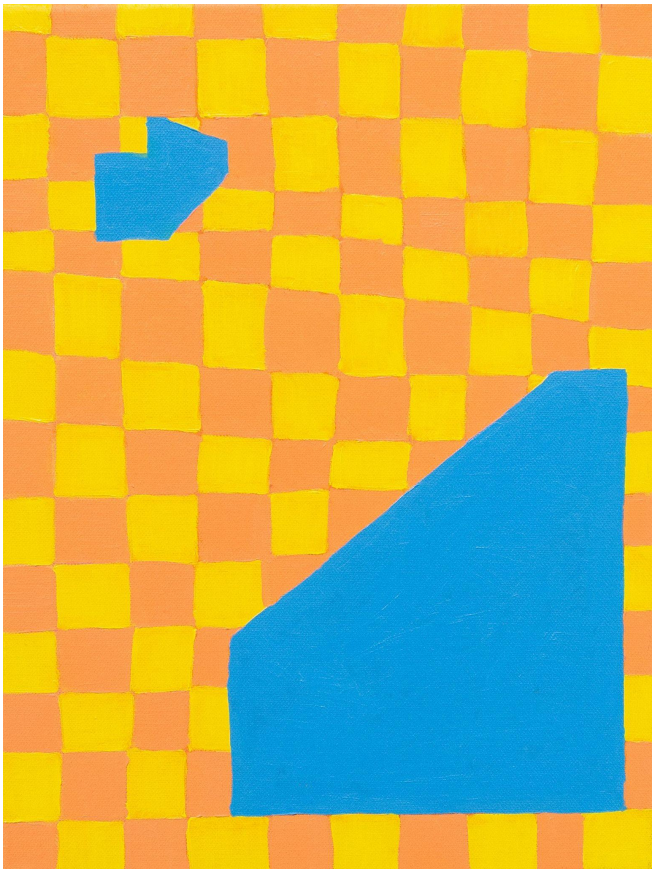

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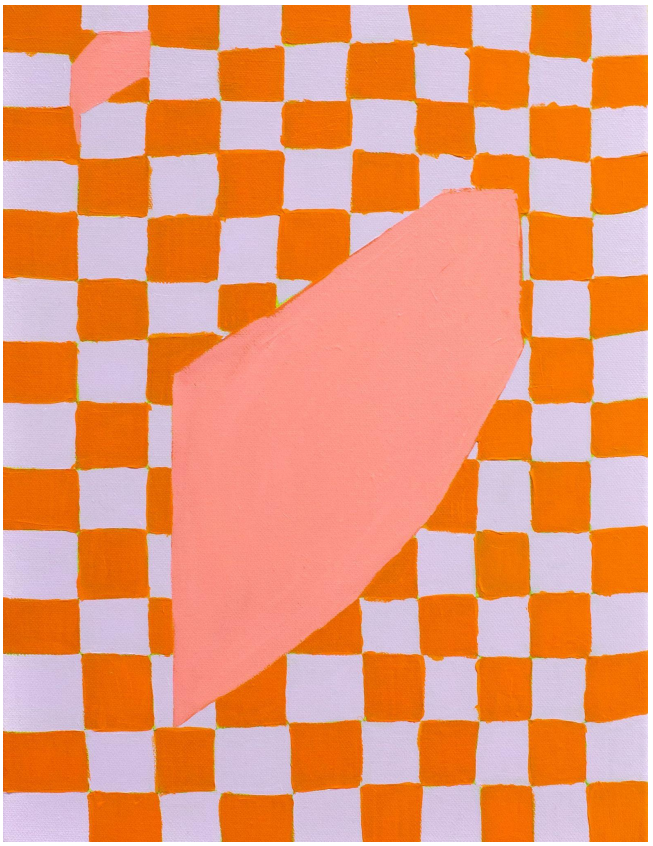

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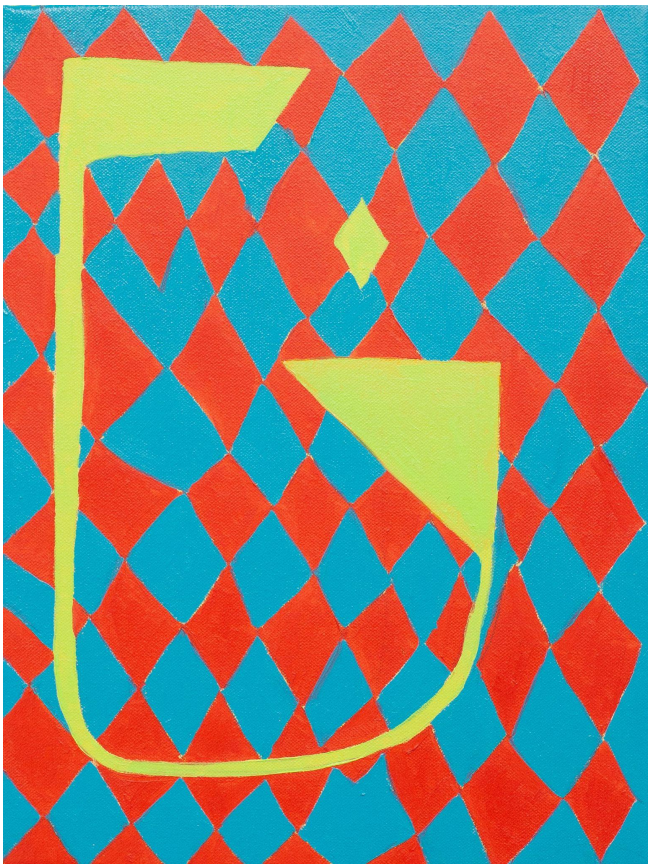

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