# Provoking Beauty: a Studio Research Project Examining the Provocative Dimensions of Beauty in Visual Art Today

**by**

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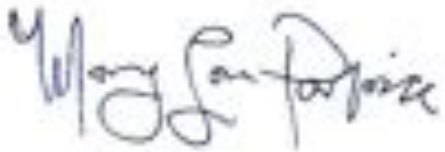
**Declaration of Originality**

This exegesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University or other institution and, to the best of my knowledge, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the documentation.



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**Abstract:**

My studio research is largely influenced by the things that I find beautiful, for example, water bowls decorated with floating flowers, found all over the streets of Bali, Indonesia. I am interested in beauty's power and its ability to instill pleasure. In response to the Balinese floral pools, I have created a whole trajectory of sculptural forms that address notions of suspension.

My exegetical research has revealed that aspects of my studio work—water, nature, flowers and intense colours—are associated with beauty in philosophy, art history or form part of the vernacular of beauty. That my practice engages subject matter discussed in academia in relation to beauty or utilised in everyday estimations of beauty (for example, nature) provides the anchor for the subject of beauty to be considered in my PhD from a more objective perspective, as opposed to personal.

Additionally, while exhibitions about beauty are common in contemporary art, beauty is often marginalised in dominant art theory. In influential anti-aesthetic theory, for example, to claim interest in beauty in art is largely regarded as conservative. I believe that I have identified a gap—between predominating art theory that is hostile to beauty, and studio work that asserts the relevancy and importance of beauty in Visual Arts practice. The major research question in the exegesis is: can beauty be positioned provocatively in contemporary art, as opposed to conservatively, in order to demonstrate that the subject of beauty is never closed, and remains open-ended?

The methodologies of enquiry surrounding the exegesis have been constructed from a range of disciplines that include art history, philosophy and cultural theory. The studio methodology includes casting, assemblage, carving, painting, photography and public art. Working intuitively as part of my studio methodology, I have juxtaposed various elements, for example, organic shaped flowers and classical sculptural forms to create studio research that is not fully integrated with the world around it. As the practice refers to nature, the exegetical research considers the contemporary relevance of the German philosopher Theodor Adorno's concepts regarding aesthetic otherness in the illusion of autonomous art and its relationship to natural beauty. In a brightly coloured painted public artwork and discrete sculptural forms, my studio work also engages decorative elements and intense colour—related to prettiness—a form of beauty. I have examined the British artist Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe's ideas about prettiness' (often considered in binary opposition to the forceful sublime as passive) capacity to subvert sublime related seriousness in art. My project requests that we consider seriously beauty's provocative dimension. In failing to do so, we lose the opportunity to experience beauty as a substantial resource for provocative thinking in contemporary art.

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## Glossary: Key Words and Terms

The glossary below provides a general overview of key words and terms in the exegesis that may be helpful in clarifying the context in which I refer to them. The written document reflects on and responds to the concepts listed below.

### Anti-Aesthetic

Anti-aesthetic theory in contemporary art is first conceptualised by American cultural theorist, Hal Foster, and remains influential in the field of art today. In 1983, Foster edits an influential book, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*.[1] Positioning the anti-aesthetic against traditional aesthetics, hence beauty, Foster states that:

> Anti-aesthetic signals the very notion of the aesthetic, its network of ideas is in question here: the ideas that aesthetic experience exists apart, without 'purpose', all but beyond history, or that art can now effect a world at once (inter)-subjective, concrete and universal—a symbolic totality. Like post-modernism then, 'anti-aesthetic' marks a cultural position on the present: are categories afforded by the aesthetic still valid? ... Anti-aesthetic also signals a practice, cross-disciplinary in nature that is sensitive to cultural forms engaged in a politic (e.g. feminist art) or rooted in a vernacular, that is, to forms that deny a privileged aesthetic realm.'[2]

In 2011, British artist Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe draws attention to the continued dominance of anti-aesthetic theory in contemporary art, arguing that:

> It is my impression that the theories of the anti-aesthetic that dominate the contemporary art world are either inspired or supported by Duchamp's anti-retinal art … Since the 1980s this prejudice has achieved a new explicitness. It is now quite clear that when we hear the term anti-aesthetic, we mean *anti-beauty* …[3]

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[1] Hal Foster (ed.) *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Washington, Port Townsend: Bay Press. 1983.

[2] Ibid. p.15.

[3] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. 'Attractiveness and the Uncontrollable: An Update.' Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction*. Brisbane: Editions 3. 2011. p.13–31: p.14.

**Autonomous Art**

In this exegesis, the concept of autonomous art is positioned as a necessary illusion, a complex play between the autonomous and the social. In 2007, the British cultural theorist, Andy Hamilton states that 'autonomy is normally taken to mean that art is governed by its own rules and laws, and that artistic value makes no reference to social and political value.'[4] Autonomous art is often associated with modernism.[5] The German Marxist philosopher, Theodor Adorno, (1903–1969) however, conceives of autonomy in art as social mimesis. For Adorno social mimesis is autonomous art's radical political agency. In his aesthetic treatise, *Aesthetic Theory*, first published in 1970, he argues that 'only by immersing its autonomy in society's *imagerie* can art surmount the heteronomous market. (Autonomous) Art is modern art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated.'[6] In Adorno's views, art and society are intertwined inextricably.

The concept of autonomous art appears to be a valid term in the current academic context. What is important in two contemporary academic's ideas is that the concept of autonomy in art is acknowledged as a social construction. The British art historian, Claire Bishop, and the French philosopher Jacques Rancière argue that by granting radical autonomy to the socially constructed aesthetic that art may act as a critique of all that is not art.[7] All of the ideas mentioned in these paragraphs regarding autonomous art are developed further in the exegesis.

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[4] Andy Hamilton. *Adorno and the Autonomy of Art*. 2007. Accessed January 19, 2014. URL: http://www.andyhamilton.org.uk/andy_pdfs/Adorno_and_the_autonomy_of_art.pdf Hamilton refers to R Geuss. 'Art and Criticism in Adorno's Aesthetics.' *Outside Ethics.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2005. p.161–183: p.161.

[5] See: Charles Altieri. 'Why Modernist Claims for Autonomy Matter.' *Journal of Modern Literature.* Vol. 32. 3. Spring. 2009: p.1–21.

[6] Theodor Adorno. Robert Hullot-Kentor (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1998: p.17.

[7] See: Claire Bishop. 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.' *October*. Fall. No.110. 2004: p.51–79. And: Jacques Rancière. Steve Corcoran (ed.) *Dissensus Aesthetics and Politics*. Kindle Edition. London: Continuum. 2010.

**Beauty**

Firstly, the British art historian Elizabeth Prettejohn argues that 'it is not possible to wholly isolate current thinking on beauty in art from longer and wider traditions.'[8] In this light, and because reflecting on history may offer valuable insight into artistic problems about beauty today, the exegesis draws attention to Enlightenment philosophical concepts of the beautiful that lay the foundation for contemporary theoretical aesthetic studies in the field of art. The written document refers to an open-ended theory of beauty originally conceived of in 1736 in the new philosophical discipline of aesthetics in German universities. The German Enlightenment philosopher, Alexander Baumgarten, (1714–1762) argues that beauty is experienced through sensory perception and offers its own excellence.[9] This concept is taken up by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804,) (Baumgarten's immediate predecessor,) Kant remains central to discussion of beauty in art today. Baumgarten's concept of beauty remains relevant to my studio research for the PhD, because it connects philosophical thought, taken up in the exegesis, to the sensory aspects generated by my practice.

Secondly, the elusive, sensory aspects relating to my practice and their relation to beauty are the focus of this PhD. Adorno states that the concept of beauty 'cannot be defined, but neither

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[8] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 –2000.* Kindle Edition. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. 2005: p.10.

[9] Paul Guyer. '18th Century German Aesthetics.' Edward H. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* California: Stanford University. Fall. 2008. Accessed June 30, 2012. URL: http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/aesthetics-18th-german/ Guyer states that Baumgarten argues that the concept of beauty can be scientifically proven, I have not adopted this rhetoric here. Guyer refers to: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. *Aesthetica/Ästhetik*. Dagmar Mirbach (ed.) 2 vols. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag. 2007. Partial translation in: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. Hans Rudolf Schweizer (trans.) *Ästhetik als Philosophie der sinnlichen Erkenntnis: Eine Interpretation der "Aesthetica" A.G. Baumgartens mit teilweiser Wiedergabe der lateinischen Textes und deutscher Übersetzung.* Basel: Schwabe. 1973.

can the concept of beauty be dispensed with altogether.'[10] And, further, in his insistence that beauty remains fundamental to aesthetics, Adorno states that 'to put a complete ban on the concept of beauty would be as damaging for aesthetics as would the removal of the concept of psyche from psychology or that of society from sociology.'[11] No closed definition of beauty is offered in the written document, but I argue that it is difficult for my practice to be read without the consideration of beauty.

In 1993, the American cultural theorist, Dave Hickey asks 'if images don't do anything in this culture … if they haven't *done* anything, then why are we sitting here in the twilight of the twentieth century talking about them?'[12] He argues that to engage the agency of beauty, what beauty does to us—its rhetoric—is a methodology that enriches post-modern discussion on beauty. By examining beauty's agency, we are not tied to discussing the beautiful in more conservative terms, for example, as a universally appreciated quality inherent in objects. Hickey's ideas are in keeping with Adorno's arguments. Adorno's conceptualisation of beauty is that it is in what beauty does as opposed to listing what passes historically for beauty, where one experiences the dynamic life inherent in the concept of beauty.[13] Beauty's agency, and how this operates in a provocative capacity in contemporary art and my practice forms an important investigation in this PhD.

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[10] Theodor Adorno. 'On the Concept of the Beautiful//1970.' *Beauty*. Dave Beech (ed.) London, Cambridge and Massachusetts. Whitechapel Art Gallery and MIT Press. 2009. p.78–81: p.78.

[11] Ibid. p.78.

[12] Dave Hickey. 'Enter the Dragon: On the Vernacular of Beauty//1993.' *Beauty*. Dave Beech. (ed.) 2009. p.22–30: p.22.

[13] Theodor Adorno. 'On the Concept of the Beautiful//1970.' *Beauty*. Dave Beech (ed.) 2009. p.78–81: p.78.

**Kitsch**

The exegesis explores the relationship of materials that I engage in the practice, for example, artificial flowers, which may be deemed kitsch, to fine art. Whitney Rugg, a lecturer in Art History at the University of Chicago, provides a helpful explanation of kitsch that assists with its conceptual underpinnings in the exegesis:

> Whether loved or reviled, indulged or condemned, kitsch indexes mass-cultural values in a given era while simultaneously exposing the relationship between the masses and the forces controlling production. 'Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same,' Greenberg declared, suggesting that, while the forms and contents of kitsch may shift over time, the nature of kitsch in relation to culture at large is invariable.[14]

**Orientalism**

As my studio research utilises the cultures and environment of Bali, Indonesia, South East Asia as a primary influence, I argue that it is necessary to reflect on the concept of Orientalism. The Palestinian American scholar Edward Said's (1935–2003) theories of Orientalism have had a wide reaching impact on the field of Asian studies.[15] Said states that in addition to Orientalism being connected to academic studies of the Orient that:

> Related to this academic tradition, whose fortunes, transmigrations, specializations, and transmissions are in part the subject of this study, is a more general meaning for

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[14] Whitney Rugg. 'Kitsch'. *Keywords Glossary.* Chicago: University of Chicago, Media Studies, Art History. 2002. Accessed January 21, 2014.
URL: http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/kitsch.htm
Rugg refers to Clement Greenberg. 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch.' *Partisan Review.* 6. 1939: p.34 – 49: p.41.

[15] Vladimir Braginsky. 'Rediscovering the Oriental in the Orient and Europe: New Books on the East–West Cultural Interface: a Review Article.' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.* London: Cambridge University. 1997. Vol. 60. Issue 3. p.511–532: p.511. Braginsky refers to: Edward Said. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient.* London: Penguin Books. 1991.

> Orientalism. Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident.' Thus a very large mass of writers, among who are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny, and so on . . . the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient . . . despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient.[16]

**Pretty/Prettiness**

The German Enlightenment philosopher, Immanuel Kant distinguishes prettiness from beauty. In his work on taste published in 1790, *The Critique of Judgement*, Kant argues that beauty may be considered in two ways.[17] Firstly, in his concept of reflective (disinterested) beauty, he argues that there is a type of beauty that humans can experience which is not prejudiced. This is, that we bring no personal preferences to what we deem beautiful, as we might do, for example, in judgements regarding the human body. For Kant, an example of disinterested beauty may be a rose. Kant argues, as this judgement is non-prejudiced, that it ought to be shared by all, it is objective and universal. Prettiness, according to Kant, however, is not impartial. In Kant's concept of determinant (dependent) beauty, other factors, for example, personal taste, may be brought to bear on what we find pleasing. Determinant beauty is subjective and Kant deems prettiness not as a judgement of the beautiful, but as a judgement of pleasantness.

In 2011, referring to, and adopting in part these Kantian ideas, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe argues that the concept of pretty is Kant's disinterested beauty secularised. And that Kant's concept of disinterested beauty ultimately is morally dutiful as Kant refutes the pleasure of admiring the human body as being disinterestedly beautiful. Gilbert-Rolfe provides a useful way to consider the value of prettiness in art today stating that 'I am more interested in aesthetic contexts than in

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[16] Edward Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage. 1979: p.3, 5.

[17] Immanuel Kant. James Meredith Creed (trans.) *The Critique of Judgement. (1790)*. Oxford: Clarendon. 1952. All ideas outlined above are referred to in this text.

separating out the specifically aesthetic part of the (Kantian) judgements that take place in them and how that can complicate any reconciliation between aesthetic and ethical ideas of the good.'[18] Prettiness, then, may be regarded as a secularised version of Kantian beauty that is appreciated for its form. Prettiness distances itself more readily than the beautiful from worthy moral judgements, ethical behaviour or religious piety.

**Provocative Positioning**

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary provides a definition of the word provocative: 'causing discussion, thought, argument, etc.'[19] In this exegesis I claim that beauty is predominantly viewed in conventional contemporary art historical scholarship, partially informed by the socio-political, as either nostalgic or relating to conservative ideals. These ideals are illustrated, for example, in the American art critic Clement Greenberg's idea that beauty is an inherent property of the art object.[20] Instead, my exegesis seeks to align beauty with more progressive thinking in the field of contemporary art, in that the abstract term beauty is an open-ended subject in which the final word is never said. In aligning beauty with more progressive thinking, for example, exploring beauty's agency, the subject of beauty may be provocatively positioned in the field of contemporary art, challenging a dominating idea that beauty is purely associated with nostalgia or conservative thought.

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[18] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. 'Attractiveness and the Uncontrollable: An Update.' Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction*. 2011. p.13–31: p.15.

[19] *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster. Accessed October 10, 2014. URL: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/provocative

[20] See: Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. 2005: p.173–175.

## Introduction

On a personal level, I think that my studio research predominantly celebrates beauty. Inspired by the things that I deem beautiful in the world, I select materials and/or processes in the studio that I think are beautiful in order to make what I think are beautiful works. Flowers, crystal clear sparkling water pools, bright colours, patterned surfaces—hallmarks of beauty—find their way into my studio work. I do not, however, wish to directly copy the beautiful things that I find. Instead, what I perceive goes into my brain, is somehow rearranged, and comes back out into the world as an imaginative art form.

I have been inspired unforgettably by Bali's beauty, a place I have travelled to often since 2008. What I love about Bali is this: the bright green rice fields. Sometimes these are flooded into large fields, glimmering as they are hit by sunlight. I think of glassy surfaces when I see them. Days spent snorkelling, purposelessly floating in the ocean, just taking in the thrilling underwater world. A sense of freedom prevails in Bali. Most of all, what has captured my sustained visual attention are the pretty bowls of water decorated with flowers, found all over the public, built environment on the island. This simple craft practice, a vivid example of the more humbly beautiful as opposed to the vast sublime, has inspired a whole trajectory of artworks created for my research project.

In Bali, other public, fragile objects catch my eye and incantations of these eventually appear in my studio production. Dazzling gold and checkered fabrics adorning shrines, intricately carved, repetitious, wooden lotus patterns in doorways, and fragile architectural structures, made of non-permanent bamboo and thatched wood. I love all of the above, Bali informs my studio work. One of the interesting questions I have encountered, however, in beginning the research for this PhD, is how do I talk about beauty seriously and theoretically? How, for example, can the beauty of snorkelling be used as a springboard for my art and also be taken seriously in critical practice? Surely a thoughtful, solemn, endeavour in which snorkelling may be deemed flippant.

Furthermore, in contemporary art historical scholarship, the concept of beauty is largely deemed conservative or nostalgic. In 2005 the British art historian, Elizabeth Prettejohn, writes:

> (Academic Art History) since the 1970s has focused predominantly on questions of historical, social and political context. During the past thirty years the beauty of the work of art has seemed secondary to the work's ideological functions in negotiations of class and power, gender and politics. The love of beauty has seemed at best an evasion or escape from the problems of social reality, at worst a way of shoring up the status of the rich and powerful.[21]

This suspicion of beauty in dominant art theory appears to continue in current debate. In 2011, the British artist Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe remarks that 'I had finally noticed—at the age of forty eight or so, that the word (beauty) was diminished and marginalised … It is now quite clear when we hear the term anti-aesthetic we mean anti-beauty, and this is because the beautiful is regarded as inherently frivolous …'[22] The anti-aesthetic, of course, is an artistic position that revokes traditional aesthetics. The term is first utilised by the American cultural theorist Hal Foster in a collection of essays published in 1983, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture.*[23]

And yet, in commencing this research, I have found that exhibitions about beauty abound in contemporary art.[24] In 1999/2000, the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington DC stages the

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[21] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. Kindle Edition. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. 2005: p.9.

[22] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction*. Brisbane: Editions 3. 2011: p.14.

[23] Hal Foster (ed.) *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Washington, Port Townsend: Bay Press. 1983.

[24] A Google search on beauty and art undertaken on 28th June 2014, displayed results on the following exhibitions: Lutz Bacher. *Black Beauty*. London: Institute of Contemporary Art. June 27 – September 7, 2014. John Baldessari. *Pure Beauty.* London: Tate Modern. October 13, 2009 – January 15, 2010. *Future Beauty: 30 Years of Japanese Fashion.* Brisbane: Queensland

exhibition, *Regarding Beauty: A View of the Late Twentieth Century.*[25] In 2000 in London, the Royal Academy of Art showcases *Apocalypse: Beauty and Horror in Contemporary Art.*[26] In 2012/13, the American painter Alex Katz, who states that his work 'is a search for beauty',[27] undertakes a solo exhibition in England, *Give Me Tomorrow,* at Turner Contemporary.[28] In 2014, the Kennedy Foundation in Adelaide offers an art prize for artworks about beauty.[29]

A literature review regarding the topic of beauty in art reveals that there is a gap between studio research that invokes beauty to celebrate it as opposed to being critical of it, and conventional, institutionalised art theory. This idea is supported by American art critic Michael Kelly. He argues that the anti-aesthetic position in art theory is institutionalised, long after artists have once again begun to speculate on the beautiful.[30] What do other scholars have to say about artists invoking beauty in contemporary art? Prettejohn notes that a leading American art critic and philosopher on the subject of beauty, Arthur C. Danto, (1924–2013)

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Art Gallery. November 1, 2013 – February 15, 2014. *Posing Beauty in African American Culture*. Virginia: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. April 26 – July 27, 2014. Alexander McQueen. *Savage Beauty*. New York: Metropolitan Museum. May 4 – August 7, 2011.

[25] *Regarding Beauty: A View of the Late Twentieth Century*. Washington: Hirshhorn Museum. October 17, 1999 – January 17, 2000.

[26] *Apocalypse: Beauty and Horror in Contemporary Art*. London: Royal Academy of Arts. September 23, 2000 – December 15, 2000.

[27] Alex Katz, David Sylvester. 'Alex Katz Interview with David Sylvester//1997.' Dave Beech. (ed.) *Beauty*. London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Art Gallery and MIT Press. 2009: p.196.

[28] Alex Katz. *Give Me Tomorrow*. Margate: Turner Contemporary. October 6, 2012 – January 13, 2013.

[29] See the Kennedy Foundation website. Accessed January 5, 2014. URL: http://kennedyprize.com.au/about/

[30] Michael Kelly. 'The Richter Effect on the Regeneration of Aesthetics.' Francis Halsall (ed.) Julia Jansen (ed.) Tony O'Connor (ed.) *Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy and Art Practice*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 2009. p.256–259: p.256.

cautiously supports a 'revival' of beauty in contemporary art. She says that while discussing two exhibitions about beauty by Robert Mangold and Dorothea Rockburne, he conservatively characterises the art as revivalist, that is, celebrating past values. Rather than demarcating beauty as a valid point for critical departure—'Rockburne and Mangold stand with a past that unites them with a classical antiquity, with marbled forms and cadenced architectures … and the kind of universality Kant believed integral to our concept of beauty.'[31] I agree with Prettejohn, Danto's comments appear revivalist.

American art theorist James Meyer and Australian art theorist Toni Ross also engage the idea of 'revivalism' throughout a cautious journal article titled, 'Aesthetic/Anti Aesthetic: An Introduction', which discusses current art world interest in beauty.[32] Their article appears to be biased, favouring those who are critical of beauty. The essay only expands on Danto's ideas of cautionary beauty and other academics' ideas that are anti-beauty.[33] There is no critical discussion, for example, of the ideas underpinning a seminal, critical book about beauty that is regarded as heralding renewed art world interest in the subject: Dave Hickey's, *The Invisible Dragon Four Essays on Beauty*.[34] Hickey offers a valuable methodology for engaging with

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[31] Arthur C. Danto quoted in: Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. 2005: p.196. Prettejohn refers to: Arthur C. Danto. 'Whatever Happened to Beauty?' *Embodied Meanings*: *Critical Essays and Aesthetic Meditations*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 1994: p.254.

[32] James Meyer, Toni Ross. 'Aesthetic/Anti-Aesthetic: An Introduction.' *Art Journal*. Vol. 63. No. 2. Summer. 2004: p.20–23.

[33] Ibid. p.20. The authors refer, for example, to: Frederic Jameson. 'Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity.' *The Cultural Turn*: *Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983 – 1998*. London and New York: Verso. 1998: p.134–135. Jameson argues that to invoke beauty in art today is pseudo-aestheticism, as the market dominates all. On p.22, the authors also refer to: Alexander Alberro. 'Beauty Knows No Pain.' *Art Journal*. Vol. 63. No.2. Summer. 2004: p.36–43. Alberro characterises the 'nostalgia' of wishing to return to beauty as a naïve assumption of universal self-hood.

[34] Dave Hickey. *The Invisible Dragon Four Essays on Beauty*. Los Angeles: LosAngeles.Press. 1993. In: Rex Butler. 'Introduction'. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction.* 2011. p.7–11: p.7. Rex Butler remarks that Hickey's book is generally seen as the founding moment of a renewed art world interest in beauty.

beauty in post-modernism. This is in terms of considering its agency, what beauty is *doing* in the work of art.[35] Hickey's ideas prevent beauty from being analysed in a more conservative manner, for example, in terms of it being a quality of the art object.[36] Meyer and Ross offer no analysis of any pro-beauty scholarship in their article. Scholars arguing for the importance of beauty in art today are lumped together with artists who are interested in this subject as 'the revivalists.' The sub-text of 'Aesthetic/Anti-Aesthetic: An Introduction' is that beauty is not as important as the anti-aesthetic.

Meyer and Ross are, however, open to the idea of beauty being aligned with non-conservative thinking in art. They state that 'so, rather than call for a classical return to aesthetic theory unchanged or an anti-aesthetic suppression of aesthetics, we have sought a structural understanding of these discourses as historically intertwined and a possible cross-pollination of the terms of the debate'.[37] I agree with Ross and Meyer regarding this idea. If, for example, the American artist Cindy Sherman is considered, we could say that her early photographic self-portraits that relate to Hollywood film stills, may be applauded by the anti-aesthetic audience. This is because her photographs provide a feminist critique of the female body imaged in film.[38] I see that the high production values that Sherman engages, for example, careful lighting of the model, as in *Untitled Film Still #13*, 1978, to create these photographs, ensures that filmic, glamorous beauty forms part of the reading.[39] (figure i.i.) Sherman employs traditional

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[35] Dave Hickey. 'Enter the Dragon: On the Vernacular of Beauty//1993.' *Beauty*. Dave Beech. (ed.) 2009. p.22–30: p.22.

[36] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* 2005: p.157–191. Prettejohn discusses modernism's Formalism, noting that throughout the twentieth century, a major theory persists in Formalism that beauty is a property of certain art objects. The author discusses how art historical scholarship since the 1970s has widely dismissed this idea.

[37] James Meyer, Toni Ross. 'Aesthetic/Anti-Aesthetic: An Introduction.' *Art Journal*. 2004. p.20–23: p.23.

[38] See Meg Floryan. 'Sherman's Untitled Film Still #21.' *Smarthistory*. Accessed July 25, 2014. URL: http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/cindy-sherman.html

[39] Cindy Sherman. *Untitled Film Still # 13*. Gelatin silver print. 1978. Approx. 7 1/2" x 9 1/2″. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Accessed August 9, 2014.

aesthetic judgement, creating high production values that are interwoven through her studio work's feminist text.

Figure i.i. Cindy Sherman. *Untitled Film Still # 13*. Gelatin silver print. 1978. Approx. 7 1/2" x 9 1/2″. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Accessed August 9, 2014. URL: http://thelonelyonedotnet.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/g02a13untitled-film-still-13-1978_large.jpg

Additionally, the American feminist scholar, Wendy Steiner, argues that beauty is so entwined with the female model that to deny beauty is misogynist.[40] She argues that in twentieth century art at the same time the female life-model disappears so does beauty. Steiner equates beauty with the feminine. Elizabeth Prettejohn draws attention to the fact that flowers, which I use in abundance, are the symbol for femininity and for beauty, in art and life.[41] Can I realise ideas about femininity and beauty in my own research to link beauty with more provocative ideas as opposed to conservative, in a way that moves beyond a clichéd idea of merely reasserting the value of the essentialist feminine?[42] Are there other dimensions in which beauty, with regards

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URL: http://thelonelyonedotnet.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/g02a13untitled-film-still-13-1978_large.jpg

[40] Wendy Steiner. *Venus in Exile*: *The Rejection of Beauty in Twentieth Century Art*. New York: The Free Press. 2001.

[41] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* 2005: p.195.

[42] See: Anne Phillips. 'What's Wrong with Essentialism?' *LSE Research Online*. April, 2012. Accessed November 27, 2014. URL: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/30900/ Phillips notes that in current conventional academic scholarship to speculate on universal qualities about women, for example, that all women are feminine, is deemed inappropriate: essentialist.

to my practice, is positioned more provocatively as opposed to conservatively? I believe, through all of my studies and previous art practice, that this topic and subsequent creative outcomes will make a significant contribution to knowledge and studio art results. The opportunity to explore specifically a provocative dimension of beauty in this PhD is timely as it addresses important and challenging issues connected to contemporary art theory and practice.

**Research aims and methodologies**

**i.i. The practice**

At the commencement of the research, as I am making public art, painting, photography, and traditional sculptural objects, my practice is cross-disciplinary, utilising a non-specific approach to materials and art forms. Because of this approach and given the practice is largely three-dimensional, the studio research also falls within the area of contemporary post-modern spatial practices.[43] My studio production is firstly a series of what appears to be classical sculptural forms, for example, rectangular blocks and cylindrical rods, these are realised in the floral resin works. The bases for some of the resin works, however, are not the traditional white plinth employed in conventional gallery display, and associated with traditional sculptural objects. Instead, they are painted with a black and white grid, as I have seen in public, grid-patterned textiles in Bali. Simultaneously I have commenced work on a large public artwork around the Telstra telephone exchange in St. Kilda, an inner city suburb of Melbourne. I think that this public art project is partially indebted to bright, patterned fabrics celebrating Balinese Hinduism that I have found in abundance around public, architectural fixtures in Bali. Bricks will be decoratively painted around the building in colours that reflect a television test pattern.

In the early phase of the thesis, the research aims for the practice are intentionally broad, because this ensures that developing the studio research in process remains open-ended. If my studio production merely illustrates written aims, I fear it risks the danger of becoming literal. I think that the greater challenge in my studio research is to respond intuitively and not mechanically to what is happening visually in the studio, even if in reality this may be engaging theories that are already digested and present in my unconscious mind. Responding intuitively to studio work in process is an approach to practice that I encountered on my MA in Fine Art at

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[43] See: Rosalind Krauss. 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field.' *October.* Vol.8. 1979: p.31–44.

Goldsmiths College, London, and with which I maintain collegiality.[44] Addressing visual problems as they arise has a practical dimension: this can assist my studio production to look more unique, non-literal and open new creative possibilities. My exegesis begins as a response to issues beginning to arise in some completed studio work.

With these ideas in mind, and as I am inspired by beauty, the practice aims are to develop a cross-disciplinary (largely spatial) practice, but focused on aesthetic outcomes. Using ideas that Meyer and Ross outline above, it could be argued that my practice is a cross-pollination of post-modern discourses, in this case spatial practice, entwined with traditional aesthetic discourses that fall in the realms of sensory engagement with a work of art. Furthermore, the aesthetic outcomes of the practice will be realised using symbols and signs for beauty from art, philosophy and the vernacular of beauty, for example, nature.[45]

As this is a visual arts PhD about beauty, and as the artist I am heavily invested, I wish to follow my desire to create what I deem beautiful. Therefore, I acknowledge that there is a subjective element to the practice. I also retain collegial allegiance with another approach to practice learned at Goldsmiths College. This is that art be autonomous, in that there is something about art that is not quite integrated with the world around it, my practice can only be read as art.[46] I conceive of this autonomy in my practice, however, as socially constructed,

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[44] I completed a Masters of Art in Fine Art at Goldsmiths College, University of London in 1996.

[45] Tobin Siebers notes that the philosopher Theodor Adorno's philosophy of beauty in art stems from natural beauty in Tobin Siebers. 'Kant and the Politics of Beauty.' *Philosophy and Literature.* 22. 1. 1998. p.31–50: p.13.

[46] My research has revealed that the term autonomous art has more than one meaning. On the one hand, British scholar Andy Hamilton argues that 'autonomy is normally taken to mean that art is governed by its own rules and laws, and that artistic value makes no reference to social and political value.' See: Andy Hamilton. *Adorno and the Autonomy of Art*. 2007. Accessed January 19, 2014.
URL: http://www.andyhamilton.org.uk/andy_pdfs/Adorno_and_the_autonomy_of_art.pdf.
Hamilton refers to R Geuss. 'Art and Criticism in Adorno's Aesthetics.' *Outside Ethics.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2005. p.161–183: p.161. On the other hand, the German

and will explore this concept further throughout the exegesis. My studio work, in its appearance, will maintain its boundary from life. My practice is alternative to studio research that collapses the boundaries between art and life, for example, those that do so under the influential theories of relational aesthetics.[47]

At the outset, the studio methodology employed to create these works is primarily intuitive. There are no *conscious* preconceived ideas. I will make decisions about how the work *looks*, for example, I have already discovered that carefully selected artificial flowers look real as opposed to fake—the kitsch element appears to be somewhat diminished. I will experiment with lighting some of the resin works to ascertain whether or not this improves their visual quality. Questions of technical proficiencies in pouring resin, mould making and assembling

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Marxist philosopher, Theodor Adorno, (1903–1969) conceives of autonomy in art as social mimesis. For Adorno social mimesis is autonomous art's radical political agency. In his aesthetic treatise, *Aesthetic Theory*, first published in 1970, he argues that 'only by immersing its autonomy in society's *imagerie* can art surmount the heteronomous market. (Autonomous) Art is modern art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated.'[46] In Adorno's views, art and society are intertwined. I refer to: Theodor Adorno. Robert Hullot-Kentor (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1998: p.17.

The concept of autonomous art appears to be a valid term in the current academic context. What appears to be important is that the concept of autonomy in art is acknowledged as a social construction. Autonomous art, art may act as a critique of all that is not art. See: Claire Bishop. 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.' *October*. Fall. No.110. 2004: p.51–79. And: Jacques Rancière. Steve Corcoran (ed.) *Dissensus Aesthetics and Politics*. Kindle Edition. London: Continuum. 2010.

[47] See Nicolas Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Les Presses Du Reel. 1998. The British art historian, Claire Bishop, throughout a 2004 article, discusses that the Thai-American artist Rikrit Tiravanaja's studio works, for example, those that serve noodles to the audience in the gallery, illustrate Bourriaud's theories of relational aesthetics and collapse the boundaries between art and life: Claire Bishop. 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.' *October*. 2004. p.51–79: 51 –70.

three-dimensional works, painting geometric patterns and the appropriate photographic 'look' will also be prominent: aesthetic issues.

**i.i. The exegesis**

The exegesis is a supporting document for my practice. My written document will focus on questions of beauty that arise from my studio work. This approach will be undertaken in order to ascertain how issues of beauty in the practice may be provocatively positioned in the field of contemporary art, that is, neither nostalgically nor conservatively. The exegesis will not be a grand, contextualising narrative for the practice. Rather, the exegesis acts as an anchor point to position my studio works in relation to more provocative ideas about beauty in the field of contemporary art. I anticipate that research undertaken for the exegesis will inform later studio research. The methodologies engaged to create the written research will draw from my subjective experiences and the scholarly disciplines of art history, philosophy, and cultural theory. The exegesis will utilise a combination of voices. As I am invested in my practice, it is appropriate to employ the first person, (commentary) model.[48] I also look out to the field of art to position my studio work. Therefore I will engage an objective voice, the third person, (contextual) model, utilised in scholarly writing about the field.

**i.ii a) Research questions**

The primary research question will be: Can beauty in art today be provocatively positioned in the field of art? To draw conclusions about this question further research questions will be: What is beauty? Why has beauty been so marginalised in art of the twentieth century to the present day? What does 'positioned provocatively' mean in the field of contemporary art? Has beauty ever been used historically in a provocative manner? Are other artists invoking beauty today in ways that may be deemed provocative? What are the implications of drawing inspiration for the practice from the beauty of Bali, a South East Asian culture so different to my own? How is my practice a text that expresses a provocative dimension of beauty?

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[48] B. H. Milech, A. Schilo. 'Exit Jesus: Relating the Exegesis and the Creative/Production Components of a Research Thesis.' *The Journal of Writers and Writing Courses*. Special Issue No. 3. 2004. The authors have identified the contextual and commentary models of exegeses as common in the creative PhD.

**i.ii b) Structure of the exegesis**

The exegesis will be divided into two main areas: 'The Field' and 'The Practice'. In 'The Field', my practice will be connected to the field. I will examine issues of provocative beauty for my studio work in terms of context, historical precedents and peers who engage beauty provocatively in their practices. This method will demonstrate my practice's relevance to the broad field of art. In 'The Practice', my studio research will be addressed in terms of its inspirations and how it unfolds as a journey of discovery. 'The Practice' will also demonstrate how the field informs my studio research. 'The Practice' will maintain a concentrated, voiced and personalised aspect to this project, appropriate for examining my own studio research.

**The field**

Chapter One is titled, 'A Bevy of Beauties—Contexts for Beauty in Contemporary Art.' A contextual chapter, it demonstrates the marginalisation of beauty in twentieth century art to the present day. The chapter will firstly examine scholarly approaches towards conceptualising beauty, identifying those relevant to my practice. I will then focus on the rejection of beauty by anti-aesthetic theory, as this is a meta-discourse existing today in the field. The chapter will also establish a definition for 'provocative positioning' in the field of art. A range of artists and thinkers who are working with beauty in art today in a provocative capacity will be presented for discussion.

Chapter Two, 'A History of Daisies—Historic Precedents for Provocative Beauty,' will consider the question of historical precedence for beauty and progressive thinking in art. This chapter will discuss aspects of my practice that engage with questions of beauty, for example, autonomy and prettiness, and trace their historical roots.[49] Chapter Two will raise the question: to what extent is there is continuity with the past for my studio research? The radical philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) in German Enlightenment aesthetics will be examined with regards to autonomous art.[50] The radical ideas associated with the artists of English Aestheticism's use of beauty in the form of prettiness will be discussed throughout

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[49] See: Theodor W. Adorno. C. Lenhardt (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory.* New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1984. Adorno theorises the relationship between natural beauty and autonomous art.

[50] Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Indiana: Hackett Publishing. 1847.

Chapter Two. Chapter Three, 'Mountains, Resin, Glitter, Forests—Contemporary Practice and Provocative Beauty', will elaborate on contemporary artists in the field who are engaging beauty in a provocative manner. This discussion will establish valid contemporary positions in art for those asserting the provocative dimension of beauty. My practice will be situated in relation to the other artists' practices. The nature paintings of British artist Kate Bright and American artist Alex Katz, and the wall works of German artist Peter Zimmermann, in which brightly coloured resin obliterates images sourced from the Internet will be analysed throughout this chapter.

**The practice**

Chapter Four, 'Water and Flowers in Bali', will examine the inspiration for my studio production—the cultures and environment of Bali. Chapter Four will describe what it is about Bali that I find so beautiful. This chapter will determine a methodology for my studio research's engagement with Bali—*how* does it engage with Bali? Chapter Four also analyses Bali's relevance in terms of inspiration versus the final product: the studio research. In order to make an ethical enquiry into my practice, the concept of Orientalism, as conceived of by Palestinian American scholar Edward Said, (1935–2003) will be addressed in Chapter Four.[51] Evaluating Said's theories, a cultural model of the practice will be provided: Orientalism or synthesis? This will develop in part a position for my practice in the field.

Chapter Five, 'Floating Flora, Death, and Lolly Colours—Provocative Beauty in my Practice', is a chapter dedicated to the practice. The chapter will document the studio production and its developments throughout the research period. Chapter Five will establish a position for the practice in relation to the question of a provocative notion of beauty embedded in the studio work. The 'Conclusion' will summarise the research, and focus on its outcomes. Conclusions will be drawn regarding the provocative capacity of beauty in art today. This Introduction to my project has raised the question as to whether or not beauty can be positioned provocatively in the current art context. In order to commence the investigation, it must be considered what beauty is and why it has been so marginalised in the field of recent art; these issues will be addressed in the following chapter.

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[51] Edward Said. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin. 1977.

# The field

Chapter One

## A Bevy of Beauties—Contexts for Provocative Beauty in Contemporary Art

After months of struggling with new studio work, trying to resolve how a resin cube filled with flowers could be presented, that is—what it would sit on—tonight I have made a sculpture almost in one evening. (figures 1.1, 1.2) It came together rapidly. Going back to the event: a long, transparent, plastic pipe balances upright in my studio and is slowly being filled with flowers that float in clear liquid. The clear, runny substance is a non-smelling, low-toxic resin. I have chosen this specific resin because it does not crack the pipe when having a heat reaction in the hardening process. A funnel sits on top of the pipe; attached to the funnel is a transparent hose that transports the liquid resin down to the area in the pipe that I am working on.

**Figure 1.1 Mary Lou Pavlovic. *Ophelia*. 2011. Polyurethane, acrylic, artificial flowers. 1.53 x .06m diam. Source: The artist.**

**Figure 1.2 Mary Lou Pavlovic. (detail) *Ophelia*. 2011. Source: The artist.**

From the first pour I know that this sculpture will be successful because it looks so beautiful in a contemporary manner. A pink centered white blossom and a leafy twig, slowly enveloped by the glassy resin, are caught as the resin hardens in the tube. I can only create a few inches at a time because the resin cracks and discolours if it is poured too thickly; that would look ugly. It is late at night and the whole process is silent but in motion. I do not want to stop working, because quite frankly, making this sumptuous thing is addictive! I want to see what happens when different flowers are added to the mix.

The resin flows elegantly down the funnel and hose to the flowers. The flowers start to float, and are quickly suspended in what could pass for water. The kitsch artificial blossoms and twigs that I am using—unbelievably—now look real, and beautiful! Looking through the clear pipe and resin to the flowers it is difficult to detect their fabric origins. As I sit, adding layer by layer of floral resin and watching this night beauty materialise, my mind starts to wander about beauty. What exactly is it and why is it so valuable? How could beauty—something that is so life affirming—be marginalised in recent art and art theory? Is it possible that my research could not only reclaim beauty's importance but also assert its provocative dimension?

In this contextual chapter, I assert that beauty is seen as a problematic quality in much of the discourse surrounding visual art of the twentieth century—continuing to the present moment—because beauty is positioned largely as relating to conservative ideals that extend back in time and have very little resonance today. Instead, I argue that beauty is a subject where discussion

is never finished. Rather, beauty can offer fresh insight into seemingly dead issues. In this 'open-ended' approach, arguments around beauty can be positioned provocatively in discourses of contemporary art. This chapter, then, will examine an alternative context in which beauty may be engaged non-conservatively. In doing so, a context will be established to demonstrate how issues of beauty relating to my studio research may express provocative arguments in the pursuit of knowledge and new art forms.

**The diverse concept of beauty: its historic dimensions remain relevant**

So what exactly is suggested by engaging the abstract term beauty when considering visual art? Is there more than one concept of beauty, and if so, which concepts relate to my studio research? Reflecting on these questions will inform a later analysis in this chapter about whether or not beauty is wholly problematic in the field of recent art. Answers to these questions will have implications for my practice. To begin this enquiry, I have often heard a term 'the beautiful' referred to in artistic discussion, but what is it? To clarify this, I argue that it is important to turn to history. This idea is supported by British art historian Elizabeth Prettejohn who argues that 'it is not possible to wholly isolate current thinking on beauty in art from longer and wider traditions.'[52] In this light, and because reflecting on history may offer valuable insight into artistic problems about beauty today, I draw attention to Enlightenment philosophical concepts of the beautiful that lay the foundation for contemporary theoretical aesthetic studies in the field of art.

In 1735 the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten (1714–1762) introduces the new philosophical discipline of aesthetics into German universities.[53] Baumgarten argues that

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[52] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 –2000.* Kindle Edition. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. 2005: p.10.

[53] Paul Guyer. '18th Century German Aesthetics.' Edward H. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Fall. 2008. Accessed June 30, 2012. URL: http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/aesthetics-18th-german/ Guyer refers to: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. *Aesthetica/Ästhetik*. Dagmar Mirbach (ed.) 2 vols. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag. 2007. Partial translation in: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, Hans Rudolf Schweizer. *Ästhetik als Philosophie der sinnlichen Erkenntnis: Eine Interpretation der "Aesthetica" A.G. Baumgartens mit teilweiser Wiedergabe der lateinischen Textes und*

sensory perception offers its own excellence. (Prior to Baumgarten's enquiry, philosophers regard sensory perception as raw, undigested material.)[54] For Baumgarten, a pleasurable sensory experience offers a richness that is not improved using logical analysis. This special quality is conceived of as the beautiful. Perhaps Baumgarten's ideas regarding the beautiful could be found, for example, in a vivid sensory experience of a snowy mountain scene. For him, scientific enquiry into the conditions for the mountains' existence would not improve the quality of this sensory experience.

Baumgarten's conceptualisation of beauty is important because later in this exegesis I examine how Enlightenment ideas about beauty and sensory perception remain prevalent in contemporary art. The philosophy of Immanuel Kant, (1724–1804) Baumgarten's immediate predecessor, for example, builds on Baumgarten's foundational principles about beauty and sensory perception.[55] Kant remains central today to any discussion of beauty in art. What is important about Baumgarten's definition, specifically for my studio research, however, is that beauty engages with the senses. The sensory aspect of beauty, in that I have such a vivid visual reaction to my flower sculptures that are influenced by decorative floral pools in Bali, forms the basis for my PhD research.

Another dimension in which beauty in art is conceived of is in the relationship between the beautiful and the good. German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) is often credited as the 'father' of art history.[56] Travelling to Rome in the mid-eighteenth century to study the arts of classical antiquity, Winckelmann creates an extensive account, *The History of Ancient Art*, in which he gives names, dates, and social conditions for ancient Roman and

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*deutscher Übersetzung.* Basel: Schwabe.1973. Baumgarten also argues that beauty can be scientifically proven; the philosophical discipline of aesthetics is the science of the sensed and imagined. I have not adopted this dimension of Baumgarten's exposition in this chapter, as it is not relevant to the contemporary field of art or my practice.

[54] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* 2005: p.40.

[55] Immanuel Kant. James Creed Meredith (trans.) *Critique of Judgement (1790).* Oxford: Clarendon. 1952.

[56] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* 2005: p.15.

Greek artistic production.[57] Winckelmann's writings also reflect on his sensory experience of beauty in viewing this art.

An important idea in Winckelmann's writings is that artistic beauty can be found only after prolonged and sustained observation. Discussing the task of finding beauty in ancient sculpture, he says that 'I imposed upon myself the rule of not turning back until I had found some beauty, and the grounds of it.'[58] Winckelmann finds beauty in the Greek bronze sculptural male nude, *Apollo Belvedere*.[59] This depicts the Greek god Apollo having just delivered a fateful arrow. Winckelmann does not find the sculpture beautiful in formal terms, but instead finds beauty in things not able to be seen, Apollo's heroism and nobility.[60] He connects his sensory perception of beauty to aspects of goodness. Prettejohn writes: 'But for Winckelmann, beauty is not synonymous with the material characteristics of the object, as it often became in the modernist criticism of the twentieth century.'[61]

Winckelmann's thinking allows us to rely on sensory perception to find something beautiful and good that may even be considered heroic. For him, it is not necessarily important to be able to see visual beauty. Courage, altruism and nobility are qualities that may be associated with virtuous individuals and may also be associated with progressive thinking in contemporary art—this will be elaborated later in this chapter. Although I have found researching

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[57] Johann Joachim Winckelmann. G. Henry Lodge (trans.) *The History of Ancient Art.* Boston: James R. Osgood and Company. 1873. Accessed June 12, 2012. Openlibrary.org:
URL: https://archive.org/stream/historyancienta01lodggoog#page/n5/mode/2up

[58] Ibid. p.188.

[59] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* 2005: p.27–29. The author discusses Winckelmann's appreciation of *Apollo Belvedere*. Prettejohn refers to: Johann Joachim Winckelmann. *The History of Ancient Art*. George Henry Lodge (trans.) London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington. 1881: Vol.1. p.314. Also: A marble copy of *Apollo Belvedere* remains in existence today: After Leochares. *Apollo Belvedere*. Circa 120–140. White Marble. 2.24m high. Vatican Museums, Vatican City.

[60] Ibid. p.28–29.

[61] Ibid. p.28.

Winckelmann's ideas of beauty illuminating, I do not see that my studio research is overtly about the subject of goodness as relates to beauty in my studio research. I think that, whilst certainly I must address the ethical consideration of drawing on Balinese culture in my studio production, for example, in my practice specifically, I see this as a political dimension in the background of my practice. My studio research's primary subject is not the ethical subject of intercultural politics. Instead, I argue that the visual appearance of my studio work is fore-fronted, for example, in formal decisions that I make in order for the practice to relate to formal beauty, and also for my studio production to be resolved artworks.

In 1790 Kant publishes his philosophy of beauty, *The Critique of Judgement.*[62] There are no rules or hierarchies for beauty; for Kant each judgement of beauty is found in singular, unique experiences, beauty is not a special quality of any class of objects. Kant's philosophy is not originally intended for art. Something that is intentionally executed, for example, art, is not beautiful. Briefly, Kant conceptualises reflective (free) beauty that is disinterested. In other words, when contemplating beauty in the universe, we can have no personal investment in what we are witnessing before us. The experience of disinterested beauty should not give us personal gratification, for example, physical pleasure in seeing a beautiful woman or handsome man. Nor should we feel morally edified, for example, feeling pleasure when admiring a virtuous act of goodness.

Kant often refers to nature as exemplifying reflective disinterested beauty, for example, flowers or birdsongs. In appreciating disinterested beauty, we should combine the mind and the senses to garner delight. Only when we can do this are we truly free, in other words we are free because there is no finite outcome, (purpose) and only objects judged in this way are beautiful. As Kant sees that there is no personal investment in the judgement of disinterested beauty he proposes that this judgement *ought* to be universal, shared by all.

Kant distinguishes another type of beauty from reflective beauty: dependent beauty. Dependent beauty has a subjective dimension, for example, judgements made about the human body—an attractive woman or a handsome man. Kant proposes that these are judgements of pleasantness, not the beautiful. Kant also introduces an idea of the sublime, which is an idea of

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[62] Immanuel Kant. James Creed Meredith (trans.) *Critique of Judgement. (1790).* 1952.

the beautiful being *so* beautiful, when we witness sublime beauty we experience a realisation of our lack of control over the world. We may become awe-inspired by a sublime experience. A vast starry night is an example of the sublime because we may find it beautiful but also the sky's vastness can prompt thoughts of our lack of understanding about all aspects of life. Regarding my studio practice that references water and flowers, I am very interested in the smaller territory of the Kantian beautiful: my inspiration that focuses on the small, beautiful floral bowls of water in Bali. This is opposed to, say, a more sublime experience of snorkelling in the vast ocean, for example in the Java Sea, North Bali, where, whilst suspended over gigantic blue ocean drops, I am filled with awe at the serene movements of tropical flora and fauna.

As it is obvious that Kant's theories have implications for art, he eventually turns to artistic questions about beauty, examining how beauty may be disinterested in art. Kant acknowledges that art is never really disinterested as it is made with intention, but he bridges the gap from the disinterestedly beautiful in nature to the disinterestedly beautiful in art by introducing the concept of the genius. According to Kant, the genius artist works with aesthetic ideas derived from the imagination, as opposed to, for example, providing social commentary about life. For Kant, aesthetic ideas in artworks that are indebted to the artist's imagination maintain to a degree, the concept of the disinterestedly beautiful. Kant argues that the genius cannot explain the origins of his/her ideas. The studio production of the genius is associated with originality. Genius' produce and communicate beautiful ideas; viewers receive them, combining the senses and ideas in the mind to achieve delight. It would seem that Kant's insistence that the genius creates art derived from the imagination as opposed to duplicating or providing commentary on social realities lays the foundations for what today is conceived of as autonomous art.[63]

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[63] Tobin Siebers. 'Kant and the Politics of Beauty.' *Philosophy and Literature.* Vol. 22. 1. 1998. p.31–50: p.37. Siebers argues that Kant's philosophical enquiry into the disinterestedly beautiful in art bares resemblance to autonomous art in contemporary terms. I suggest that we may think of autonomous art in this instance in the way that British cultural theorist Andy Hamilton refers to it, that 'autonomy is normally taken to mean that art is governed by its own rules and laws, and that artistic value makes no reference to social and political value.' Andy Hamilton. *Adorno and the Autonomy of Art*. 2007. Accessed January 19, 2014. http://www.andyhamilton.org.uk/andy_pdfs/Adorno_and_the_autonomy_of_art.pdf

Certainly, my autonomous studio research is indebted to Kant. Disinterested free beauty, and its relation to a contemporary notion of autonomous art, permeate the field and inform my studio methodology. Kant's philosophy of the beautiful revolves around nature as a construct in determining content for his enquiry. As my studio work references nature, Kant's ideas are helpful in defining why my practice may be more objectively positioned as being about the subject of beauty in art—as opposed to the more subjective claim that my practice is beautiful for me and therefore must be for others. It is difficult, though, to find Kant's ideas credible regarding universal notions of beauty, and the originality of the artist's ideas. These concepts have been critiqued—that they are socially constructed now forms a meta-discourse in contemporary western art historical scholarship.[64] The German Marxist philosopher, Theodor Adorno, however, in theorising autonomous art in 1970, is indebted to the Kantian notion of reflective disinterested beauty exemplified in nature. Adorno argues that in autonomous art's complex play between autonomy and the social, the illusion of (beautiful) autonomous art that relates to natural beauty is a politically effective tool, as it is the antidote for commodification.[65] These ideas will be explored further in Chapter Three, 'Mountains, Resin, Glitter and Forests—Contemporary Practice and Provocative Beauty.'

**Beauty: maligned in recent art**

Why is beauty rejected in the field of twentieth century art? Answering this question will demonstrate that the focus of my practice, beauty, has been regarded with a high degree of hostility in recent art history. I will examine this hostility and question its validity. This

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Hamilton refers to R Geuss. 'Art and Criticism in Adorno's Aesthetics.' *Outside Ethics.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2005. p.161–183: p.161.

[64] Michael Bise. 'Biggs and Collings: Suspicious Utopias, An Interview.' *Glasstire*. 2013. Accessed September 9, 2014. URL: http://glasstire.com/2013/05/03/biggs-and-collings-suspicious-utopias-an-email-interview/. British art critic Matthew Collings refers to the widespread dismissal of these Enlightenment ideas in the field of contemporary art in this article.

[65] See Tobin Siebers. 'Kant and the Politics of Beauty.' 1998. p.37–40. Siebers discusses Adorno's radical aesthetic philosophy regarding autonomous art and its debt to Kant's philosophy of disinterestedly beautiful art forms. Siebers refers to Theodor W. Adorno. C. Lenhardt (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory.* New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1984.

approach will provide preliminary support for the idea that beauty in relation to my own studio-work need not be seen as problematic but rather, in this section of the chapter, I will suggest that beauty may be associated with provocative thinking in art today. Arthur C. Danto (1924–2013) discusses the modernist avant-garde's preoccupation with creating 'anti-beauty' art. He conceives of a term, 'kalliphobia,' defining this as the 'threat of beauty', arguing a clinical term is required as twentieth century artists' pursuit of the ugly and/or absurd are so endemic.[66] Danto refers to Zurich Dadaist art, where beauty is repressed as a gesture of contempt towards a society responsible for the First World War. The Austrian artist Max Ernst (1891–1978) says that 'Dada …was a moral reaction. We had experienced the collapse … of everything represented to us as just, true, and beautiful. My works … were not meant to attract, but to make people scream.[67]

Only with an historical background of beauty being so important in society and art, Danto says, could the deprivation of artistic beauty from that society make such a powerful statement.[68] He argues that Dada's project would be doomed if in hindsight we found it beautiful. I think, however, that aspects of Dada art can be associated with beauty. I admire the moral stance of Dada artists in providing social critique and also their formal strategies of employing the ugly and absurd to provoke their audience. Why does Danto find it difficult to judge Dada art as beautiful? To say that aspects of the Dadaist condition may be beautiful permits the idea of beauty to be associated with radical thinking, and freedom of choice for images, ideas and materials. As discussed in Winckelmann's conception of beauty referred to earlier in this chapter, we may find beauty in something that is perceived of as good, not in its visual characteristics. I find the moral courage of Dada artists' social critique embodied in their

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[66] Arthur C. Danto. 'Kalliphobia in Contemporary Art.' *The Art Journal*. 2. 63. 2004. p.24–32: p.24.

[67] Ibid. p.24. Danto's source is: Max Ernst, quoted in Marc Dachy. *The Dada Movement: 1915–1923*. New York: Rizzoli. 1990: p.122.

[68] Ibid. p.27. For further information see also: Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* 2005. This book is a study into various ways that beauty is interpreted in artistic and philosophical circles throughout eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. It is a contention of the book that beauty is highly regarded in these circles.

studio production beautiful in the context of the underlying intention and genuine expression for bettering humankind appropriate to their times, that is still, in my opinion, relevant today.

Throughout a 1948 essay, 'The Sublime is Now', the American painter, Barnett Newman (1905–1970) denies that American art is concerned with beauty, and argues that modernism's impulse is to destroy beauty.[69] Newman repeatedly utilises the Kantian aesthetic differential, the beautiful and sublime, but characterises these as the merely beautiful and the greater sublime. Newman's abstract paintings claim that the act of painting itself is sublime and transcends beauty, promoting a distinctively American, spiritual aesthetic, in forging new territory.[70] In my opinion, Newman's anti-beauty rhetoric seems sexist. I think that his masculine-sounding terms, 'destroying beauty' and 'mere beauty,' attack beauty as a dimension of the feminine.[71] Prettejohn suggests that invoking beauty can be a powerful way to challenge patriarchy. She refers to the American cultural critic, Dave Hickey, who writes that in the 'Balkanised gender politics of art, the self-consciously "lovely", i.e. the "effeminate"… is pretty much the domain of the male homosexual.'[72] Hickey finds this situation 'blatantly sexist (and covertly homophobic.)' It seems that beauty might be engaged provocatively to challenge patriarchy, prominent in Newman's modernist ideas.

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[69] Barnett Newman. John P. O'Neill (ed.) 'The Sublime is Now'. *Selected Writings and Interviews.* Berkeley, Los Angeles*:* University of California Press. 1992: p.170–173.

[70] For further discussion, please see Arthur C. Danto. 'Barnett Newman and the Heroic Sublime.' *The Nation*. 274. 23. June 17. 2002: p.25.

[71] In the 'Introduction', I referred to the scholar Wendy Steiner's book that equates beauty with the feminine: Wendy Steiner. *The Rejection of Beauty in Twentieth Century Art*. New York: The Free Press: 2001.

[72] Dave Hickey. *The Invisible Dragon Four Essays on Beauty.* Los Angeles: Art Issues Press. 1993: p.47, 41, quoted in: Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. 2005: p.194.

It is in the 1980s, however, that influential, persistent objection to aesthetics, hence beauty in art, emerges on political grounds. In 2011, referring to continued anti-beauty thinking in contemporary art exemplified in anti-aesthetic theory, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe says that the '1980s started in 1975 and won't go away.'[73] In 1983 the American cultural critic, Hal Foster, states that:

> Anti-aesthetic signals the very notion of the aesthetic, its network of ideas is in question here: the ideas that aesthetic experience exists apart, without 'purpose', all but beyond history, or that art can now effect a world at once (inter) subjective, concrete and universal—a symbolic totality …'anti-aesthetic' marks a cultural position on the present: are categories afforded by the aesthetic still valid? … Anti-aesthetic also signals a practice, … that is sensitive to cultural forms engaged in a politic…[74]

Foster's comments are nebulous and easily dismiss centuries of aesthetic speculation, argued from many points of view, including those from the left.[75] Aesthetic experience, for example, for Winckelmann is not conceived of as 'apart', it is found in the sensory appreciation of goodness. Prettejohn also criticises Foster's statement above, arguing that '… the cloudy language betrays Foster's weak grasp of the philosophical tradition he criticises; as we have seen, the aesthetic (as it has been theorised since the late eighteenth century) does not afford "categories", still less anything that could be described as a "symbolic totality." '[76]

I agree with Prettejohn. Kant's free reflective beauty is against rules, hierarchies and categories. Beauty is found in the singular. Prettejohn proposes that the French artist Marcel

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[73] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction*. Brisbane: Editions 3. 2011: p.36.

[74] Hal Foster (ed.) *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press. 1983: p.xv.

[75] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. 2005: p.77. Prettejohn refers to the fact that beauty is debated in many ways across right and left wing politics throughout eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe.

[76] Ibid. p.193.

Duchamp's (1887–1968) *Fountain,*[77] is beautiful in Kantian terms.[78] In turning a ready-made urinal on its back, it becomes an object for aesthetic contemplation, losing its use value. And, using the ready-made, Duchamp solves one of Kant's problems for art: that something intentionally executed can be associated with beauty. Precisely by demonstrating that nothing about the object can distinguish it as art or non-art, beautiful or ugly, *Fountain* reinstates the Kantian judgement of taste. Duchamp confers aesthetic ideas on the urinal. As a result, the viewer is free to find this urinal artwork beautiful. I think that the fact that Duchamp creates a disinterested Kantian object and is an artist with whom Foster identifies politically further weakens Foster's objection to traditional aesthetics.[79]

Perhaps Foster's objections are made in relation to the influential modernist American art critic, Clement Greenberg's (1909–1994) aesthetics, which are widely dismissed in art historical scholarship since the 1970s.[80] The French philosopher Thierry De Deuve notes that Greenberg's critics appear to 'take it for granted that Greenbergian aesthetics are identical to Kantian aesthetics.'[81] I argue that in reality Kant and Greenberg are very different thinkers. Greenberg believes that art should be autonomous from life, and should be saved from both American consumerism and totalitarian regimes.[82] This is expressed in his 1938 essay, 'Avant

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[77] Marcel Duchamp. *Fountain.* 1917. Glazed ceramic. 0.61m x 0.36m x 0.48m. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco.

[78] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. 2005: p.178–179.

[79] See: Hal Foster. 'What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?' *The Duchamp Effect.* Martha Buskirk (ed.) Mignon Nixon (ed.) Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. 1994: p.5–32. Foster applauds Duchamp's Dada art and its attacks on the market.

[80] Jeanne S.M. Willette. 'Beginning Postmodernism Forming the Theory.' *Art History Unstuffed*. 2013. Accessed August 7, 2014.
URL: http://www.arthistoryunstuffed.com/beginning-postmodernism-theory/

[81] Thierry De Deuve. *Kant after Duchamp*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. 2006: p.322.

[82] See: Michael J. Lewis. 'Art, Politics and Clement Greenberg'. *Commentary*. January 6, 1998. Accessed August 22, 2014.
URL: http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/art-politics-clement-greenberg/
Greenberg's conception of autonomous art is different to Adorno's, he conceives of it more

Garde and Kitsch'.[83] In the late 1950s and 1960s he proposes that art should only refer exclusively to its own formal properties.[84]

The appreciation of abstract forms relevant to specific mediums—a flat, geometric abstract painting, for example, is seen as an illustration of the Kantian notion of disinterest, as it frees the mind from associated ideas, for example, ideas in narrative painting. In concentrating on looking exclusively, we are open to new possibilities.[85] Prettejohn argues that when Greenberg creates strict rules for aesthetic judgement, however, allowing aesthetic appreciation for only a narrow domain of art, he diminishes the Kantian judgement of free beauty, against rules and hierarchies and not limited to art.[86] Greenberg makes beauty a characteristic of the art object, Kant is very much against this idea. I think that Greenberg's contemporary critics, for example, the American scholar Rosalind Krauss, associated with the influential Visual Arts publication, *October*, or the German cultural theorist Peter Bürger are correct in dismissing Greenberg's narrow and authoritarian requirements for art.[87] I argue that it is incorrect, however, to dismiss the entire tradition of aesthetics.

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traditionally. Art must not reference narrative, figuration and social or political concerns, art must be about its own medium. Adorno, on the other hand, conceives of autonomous art as immersing itself in society's *imagerie*, but not duplicating social reality. As stated earlier in this chapter, he believes autonomous art is a necessary social illusion. See: Theodor W. Adorno. Robert Hullot-Kentor (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1998: p.17.

[83] Clement Greenberg. 'Avant Garde and Kitsch.' *Partisan Review*. 6: 5. 1939: p.34–49.

[84] Clement Greenberg. 'Modernist Painting.' *Clement Greenberg*. Accessed December 2, 2014. URL: http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/modernism.html

[85] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. 2005: p.189.

[86] Ibid. p.175.

[87] See: David Plant. 'The Real Thing: An Interview with Rosalind E. Krauss.' *Artcritical.* Friday August 30, 2013. Accessed August 31, 2014. URL: http://www.artcritical.com/2013/08/30/rosalind-krauss-interview/ Krauss talks about being initially a disciple of Greenberg, then splitting from him over his narrow requirements for specific works of Formalist art. Krauss thinks that the socio-political in art is of equal importance. See also: Peter Bürger. *Theory of the Avant Garde*. Manchester: Manchester

What are other political objections to beauty in art towards the end of the twentieth century? In 1995, the American cultural theorist Frederic Jameson argues that the image is the commodity today and that it is vain for those appealing to beauty in art to expect a negation of the logic of commodity production.[88] In 1983, the German philosopher, Jurgen Habermas, questions the elitism of high-art aesthetic experience as disseminated by privileged institutions of the art industry.[89] Are these not issues related to the site of art that produces the art commodity or determines social status, and in the end are non-aesthetic concerns? I have also already outlined above that beauty is a diverse concept that may be applied, (using, for example, Winckelmann's aesthetic ideas,) to political artworks critiquing elitism or the art market. Therefore, one does not need to negate the logic of commodity production in the appreciation of beauty in art. As referred to earlier in this chapter, the German philosopher, Theodor Adorno, (1903–1969) argues that autonomous art (a model of beauty,) is the *antidote* for commodification.[90] Adorno's theory will be investigated further in Chapter Three, 'Mountains, Resin, Glitter and Forests.'

**Engaging provocative beauty today: Dave Hickey, Biggs and Collings, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe**

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary provides a definition of the word provocative: 'causing discussion, thought, argument, etc.'[91] Firstly, I argue that if I am to engage the term provocative in relation to beauty in the field of art, that it *must* denote non-conservative ideas about beauty. Conservative ideas, for example, the modernist Formalist idea that beauty is a property of certain art objects and not others, have been rightly and widely refuted in

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University Press. 1984. Bürger is dramatically opposed to Greenberg's hegemonic theory of art practice.

[88] Frederic Jameson. 'Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity//1995.' Dave Beech (ed.) *Beauty*. London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Art Gallery and MIT Press. 2009: p.107.

[89] Jurgen Habermas. 'Modernity—An Incomplete Project.' Hal Foster (ed.) *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture.* 1983. p.3–15: p.12–14.

[90] Theodor W. Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory*. 1984.

[91] *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster. Accessed October 10, 2014. URL: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/provocative

contemporary art historical scholarship. In engaging non-conservative ideas about beauty, however, I suggest that secondly, those who do so align beauty with more progressive thinking in the field of contemporary art. In aligning beauty with more progressive thinking, the subject of beauty may be provocatively positioned in the field of contemporary art, challenging a dominating idea that beauty is purely associated with nostalgia or conservative thought.

Is engaging a provocative dimension of beauty in art a valid contemporary position? To demonstrate that there are others that claim to engage beauty provocatively for their research would support the claim that my research has a valid context today. In a 1993 book, *The Invisible Dragon,* the American cultural critic, Dave Hickey insists that beauty is not a thing, the beautiful is a thing, and asks, if images don't do anything in this culture, then why are we still discussing them?[92] Hickey's argument—that it is the rhetoric of beauty—what beauty does, its agency, is a valuable method to employ when considering beauty in art today because beauty's rhetoric can be radical and subversive.

The American artist Robert Mapplethorpe's (1946–1989) photographs of explicit homosexuality, Hickey argues, employ 'formal beauty to propose sexual submission.'[93] Hickey refers to *Helmut and Brooks N.Y.C.*, 1978, a photographic image of a man's arm disappearing into another's anus.[94] When looking at this image, I think it is a celebration of sensually beautiful, classical organic forms—visual beauty seems paramount. Then I become aware that I am seeing: explicit, marginalised aspects of gay sexuality. Hickey reminds us that this image and others in Mapplethorpe's 1998 American exhibition are censored and publicly litigated for obscenity, but simultaneously there are many other artist's images with explicit content on show in American galleries.[95] Hickey argues that the difference is Mapplethorpe's images

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[92] Dave Hickey. 'Enter the Dragon: On the Vernacular of Beauty//1993.' Dave Beech (ed.) *Beauty*. 2009. p.22–30: p.22.

[93] Dave Hickey. *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty*. Los Angeles: LosAngeles.Press. 1993: p.30.

[94] Robert Mapplethorpe. *Helmut and Brooks.* 1978. Gelatin silver print. 7 11/16″ x 7 5/8″. Los Angeles County Museum, John Paul Getty Trust, Los Angeles.

[95] Dave Hickey. 'Enter the Dragon: On the Vernacular of Beauty//1993.' *Beauty*. Dave Beech (ed.) 2009: p.28–29. Hickey refers to the censorship of: Robert Mapplethorpe. *Robert*

celebrate the vernacular of beauty; this is how his images attract attention and become so challenging to the mainstream. In Mapplethorpe's literal and visually beautiful celebration of his marginalised sexuality beauty becomes radical and subversive in contemporary art.

What about practice closer to my own because it is principally concerned with visual appearance; can this be provocative? British painters Biggs and Collings are staunch defenders of the importance of beauty and aesthetics in art today, publishing much manifesto-like commentary.[96] Their practice is formally abstract and is concerned with colour and light.[97] Triangles are often delicately imaged in nuanced colours. An example is, *A Flaming Sword,*

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*Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment*. Pennsylvania: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania and touring. December 9, 1988 – January 29, 1989. My research finds that in the early 1990s the Corcoran Museum, Washington, is scheduled to show this exhibition but refuses to do so because of public outrage about a number of Mapplethorpe's images. Later that year, the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Centre and its director Dennis Barrie are trialled for obscenity charges in allowing the exhibition to proceed. See: Sam Schlinkert. 'Art Censorship Controversies: A Brief History (NSFW).' *Flavorwide.* December 2, 2010. Accessed December 1, 2014. URL: http://flavorwire.com/133635/art-censorship-controversies-a-brief-history-nsfw/2

[96] See the Biggs and Collings website for manifesto style writings about the importance of beauty and aesthetics today: Accessed August 7, 2014.
URL: www.emmabiggsandmatthewcollings.net/ An example is the exhibition catalogue: Emma Biggs and Matthew Collings. *The Whole Earth*. London: Vigo Gallery. 2010. Matthew Collings is also an art critic and television broadcaster, authoring books and television programs about beauty both in historic and contemporary art, for example: Matthew Collings. *Matt's Old Masters*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. 2003. And: Matthew Collings. 'What is Beauty?' *Modern Beauty.* Aired November 14, 2009 at 8.30pm on BBC2 Television, United Kingdom. See also Collings' Facebook page in which issues of aesthetics are discussed with five thousand friends. Accessed August 25, 2014.
URL: https://www.facebook.com/matthew.collings1?fref=ts Emma Biggs is also a mosaicist.

[97] Michael Bise. 'Biggs and Collings: Suspicious Utopias, An Interview.' *Glasstire*. May 3, 2013. All facts about the artists in the paragraphs in this chapter about them unless otherwise stated have been taken from this interview.

2010, one of a group of paintings in which they say that they replicate the colour schemes in contexts of shimmering beauty associated with European historic religious paintings, for example, bodies, expressions, objects and architecture—in a contemporary manner.[98] (figure 1.3) Biggs and Collings also argue that their practice generally challenges preoccupation with the socio-political in art and institutional critique:

> …We feel that kind of art (institutional critique) is obsessed with fashion, that it takes an attitude to authority that one might call obedient disobedience … And … the solemn version … this goes from say Andrea Fraser up to Daniel Buren. That is, up to the initiators of the institutional critique tradition celebrated by the writer, Benjamin Buchloh …We reject its atmosphere of institutional sanctification. We don't propose retro-formalism as the answer, but in the gap that institutional critique opens up, we want to force a bit of formal tough mindedness and see what happens. That's our experiment.[99]

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[98] Biggs and Collings. *A Flaming Sword*. 2010. Oil on canvas. 60″x 60″. **Courtesy Vigo Gallery,** London. Accessed September 3, 2014. URL: http://design-milk.com/emma-biggs-matthew-collings/ Some of the paintings that Biggs and Collings draw on in their practice, for example, are: Masaccio. *Saints Jerome and John the Baptist.* About 1428–9. Tempera on poplar wood. 114cm x 55cm. The National Gallery, London. And: Piero Della Francesca. *The Baptism of Christ.* About 1448– 50. Tempera on wood. 167cm x 116cm. National Gallery, London. And: Unknown. The *Harrowing of Hades.* 1315. Fresco. Chora Church, Istanbul. And: Lucas Cranach. *The Fall of Man.* 1530. Oil on lime. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. This information is taken from Matthew Collings' Facebook page. Accessed August 25, 2014. URL: https://www.facebook.com/matthew.collings1?fref=ts

[99] Michael Bise. 'Biggs and Collings: Suspicious Utopias, An Interview.' *Glasstire*. May 3, 2013.

**Figure 1.3 Biggs and Collings. *A Flaming Sword.* 2010. Oil on canvas. 60′′ x 60′′. Courtesy Vigo Gallery, London. Accessed September 3, 2014. URL: http://design-milk.com/emma-biggs-matthew-collings/**

I think that the gap that Biggs and Collings refer to is the consideration of aesthetics in the work of art. They say that they value beauty today because of the danger that if the current climate favours investigating the socio-political in art, for example, in applying anti-aesthetic theory to art or engaging the genre of institutional critique—aesthetics is not valued and centuries of practical visual traditions will be lost. I think that employing the strategy of turning to what is regarded as beautiful in historic paintings is one way that Biggs and Collings delineate their studio work from current dominating trends of disinterest in the visual. Utilising geometric abstraction, their work is linked to contemporary art.[100] These studio methodologies enable their practice to provide commentary on the present.

How could we think of their studio research as expressing a provocative dimension of beauty? Certainly, the artists are not conservative in their commentary about their practice. They say that they do not empathise with conservative ideologies of aesthetics, for example, Formalism's 'veneration of handicraft' or the 'genius individual creator,' they see the world through a contemporary lens. They do not believe that Formalism is the only appropriate pursuit for art.

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[100] Ibid. The artists, however, acknowledge a lingering interest in modernism's emphasis on the visual.

They acknowledge that our attitudes to colour (beauty) may be socially constructed, but are interested in colour theory's persistence through the ages and colour in painting's relationship to life. These ideas vary from more conservative aesthetic theories, for example, those of Clement Greenberg discussed earlier in this chapter. I argue that, firstly, in their non-conservative efforts to raise the power and status of beauty in their manifesto-like publications and paintings about aesthetics and beauty and that they use position their research to critique artistic trends that are non visual, that Biggs and Collings are engaging beauty provocatively.

The visual, Biggs and Collings say, is connected to the political.[101] I believe that the philosophy of French scholar Jacques Rancière is one way to elucidate this statement. Rancière reminds us that art has been freed from the dictates of mimetic logic and argues that the aesthetic, in its confusion between autonomy and heteronomy, is always at one removed from politics, but also already always political.[102] For Rancière, political art does not necessarily illustrate political concerns, but redistributes sensible (consensual) forms of every day life and becomes 'dissensual'. The consensual—consensus—refers to the 'proper' order of the everyday that defines hierarchical distributions, where all speech and activity is determined by its proper place without surplus. The dissensual—dissensus—refers to tearing things from their assigned places. Dissensus frees speech and expression from functionality. Rancière believes that dissensus liberates us from the oppressive rationalism of every day life. In this art has ameliorative potential. I argue secondly, that in light of Rancière's ideas, Biggs and Collings' aesthetic studio production is political—as beauty, referred to in *A Flaming Sword,* for example, (and sourced from the 'proper order' of classical standards of beauty in historic religious narrative paintings that engage mimetic logic to picture bodies, architecture and landscapes) becomes radically autonomous.[103]

In a feedback session about the progress of my research, a lecturer remarks that my studio works are not beautiful, but instead they are pretty. Intrigued by this statement, I discover a

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[101] Ibid. The statement is not expanded upon in this interview.

[102] Jacques Ranciére. Steve Corcoran (ed.) *Dissensus: Aesthetics and Politics*. Kindle Edition. London. Continuum. 2010. All facts regarding Ranciére's thoughts have been taken from this book.

[103] Biggs and Collings. *A Flaming Sword*. 2010.

2011 book authored by British artist Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, *Art After Deconstruction.*[104] Gilbert-Rolfe argues for the provocative capacity of prettiness in relation to the serious intellectual trajectories of anti-aesthetic and related theory. He argues that attractiveness or prettiness is not held in high regard in serious contemporary art. As art involves aesthetic discussion, he thinks that serious, scholarly artistic ideas that come after Kant are indebted to Kantian aesthetics, in the beautiful and sublime differential. Gilbert-Rolfe thinks that the sublime experience, which is characterised by the subject's feelings of a lack of control, is taken seriously in contemporary art. Conceptualisation of the sublime in art historical scholarship is an attempt to control the unmanageable experience. Gilbert-Rolfe suggests that dominant forms of art history are about gloom and lack, derived from Winckelmann, who finds sublime beauty in what is not there, for example in the *Laocoön,* in which we must imagine a father's screams as he and his sons are devoured by snakes.[105] Gilbert-Rolfe argues that this focus on the sublime beauty of what is not there in the artwork continues in art to the present day:

> The difference between the *Laocoön* and Warhol is that … in Winckelmann's interpretation of the *Laocoön,* negation works to drive thinking to a level unattainable in the exclusively visual, because it depends on contemplating pain … whereas in Warhol, (Warhol's ironic flower paintings) negation has become the sign of what art is supposed to be and as such neither undermines anything nor leads us to think any thoughts we haven't already had. Otherwise they are quite similar, both lead to gloom, one as enlightenment, the other as cleverness.[106]

Gilbert-Rolfe points out that beauty, to which Warhol refers, is present only as a critique of beauty. Prettiness, on the other hand, must be experienced as what it is there in front of us. Prettiness is conceptualised by Gilbert-Rolfe as the Kantian judgement of disinterested free

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[104] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Rex Butler (ed.) 'Attractiveness and the Uncontrollable: An Update.' *Art After Deconstruction*. 2011: p.13–31. All facts about Gilbert-Rolfe's ideas have been taken from this essay.

[105] Ibid. p.18–23. Gilbert Rolfe refers to: Unknown. *Laocoön and His Sons*. Year Unknown. Marble. 208cm x 163cm x 112cm. Vatican Museums, Vatican City.

[106] Ibid. p.24.

beauty secularised; he refers to images of fashion models, when we look at them, we are invited to look at them for the sake of doing so, we are not lead away from the image. Gilbert-Rolfe says that he is not interested in separating out the difference between Kant's aesthetic judgements. Rather, he is interested in prettiness as an aspect of the beautiful because it is what most succinctly delays any relation between the ethical and the good; anti-aesthetic and related theory applauds goodness in terms of morality and politics. Gilbert-Rolfe notes that the art critic Peter Schedjhal says that visually attractive art stops thought.[107] Gilbert-Rolfe agrees: prettiness may suspend rationalisation, subversively intervening in art historical narratives and returning us to Kantian involuntary feelings of bodily pleasure which are difficult to reduce to a proposition, even a complex one. In this, prettiness in art may resist the fascism of the idea:

> Felix Guattari, Deleuze's long-term collaborator, would call any system of thought that thought it had all the answers, including Freudianism or Marxism, a kind of fascism. In the counter-tradition (of art history) I've proposed, (one of charm and frivolity) the visual resists the fascism of the idea, by making the work about what is happening in front of one's face …[108]

Advocating serious thought in art, however, Gilbert-Rolfe says that he is interested in this serious thought being driven by sensation rather than the other way round. Prettiness is inherently frivolous, especially in contemporary art dominated by anti-aesthetic theory. Gilbert-Rolfe notes that the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) has drawn attention to the term frivolous, it can never be *fully* conveyed in the dictionary—as dictionaries can convey only serious meanings.[109] This gives frivolous prettiness immense power, as serious concepts cannot completely control prettiness. Prettiness is what the sublime's designated seriousness, realised often in art history in terms of what is not present—negation — cannot control in art. Gilbert-Rolfe argues that prettiness is an aspect of the idea of the feminine, and that it is intransitive. As feminine frivolous prettiness is indifferent to serious

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[107] Ibid. p.14. Schedjhal communicates this to Gilbert-Rolfe in a personal conversation.

[108] Ibid. p.28. Gilbert-Rolfe does not cite this reference.

[109] Ibid. p.14. Gilbert-Rolfe refers to Jacques Derrida. John P. Leavey Jr. (ed.) *The Archeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac.* Netherlands: Brill Publishers. 1980.

sublime-related aesthetic thinking—negation—it is not passive in relation to this serious thought and contains much power.[110]

I respond positively to Gilbert-Rolfe's ideas. I think that prettiness *can* suspend rationalisation and when viewing something pretty we experience Kantian involuntary pleasure, which is difficult to describe only in purely academic ideas. I think that pretty art is regarded as frivolous and not taken seriously in many discussions in contemporary art, which require art to have a measure of seriousness, discussed throughout this chapter. Although there are many serious ideas in my practice that relate to its conceptual underpinnings, for example, the notion of cross-disciplinary practice, Gilbert-Rolfe's ideas about the power of the frivolity of prettiness are important to pursue for my studio research. I appreciate, for example, how he liberates the frivolously pretty from a binary opposition of powerlessness in relation to powerful seriousness related to the sublime. I believe that my studio production falls in the realm of attractiveness or frivolous prettiness as it uses flowers, decorativeness and bright colours.

The brickwork that I am painting at the Telstra exchange in St Kilda, Melbourne, engages lolly, effeminate colours, my studio production relates to an idea of the feminine. I cannot see how the frivolous gaiety of this public artwork may be deemed passive. I am interested to evaluate the idea that the pretty gaiety of my work may have a dimension that is uncontrollable by serious ideas. I am aware that this evaluation will need careful consideration as discourses about the assertion of the purely feminine, for example, that it is an expression of essentialism, of which I am in agreement, relies on serious conceptual and political ideas.[111] Equating the

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[110] Ibid. p.16. I think it is important to note that Gilbert-Rolfe is careful not to position the sublime as masculine in binary opposition to the femininity of prettiness. He positions the sublime as androgynous for two reasons: first that the sublime is discursive, made of argument, and language is itself androgynous; secondly, the eighteenth century idea of masculinity has become wholly symbolic, existing without contradiction in fields only such as sports or military. Images that drive the culture at large, which express themselves more in the androgynous have been present since the 1960's, seen, for example, in Mick Jagger, who Gilbert-Rolfe says is neither bucolic nor traditionally boyish.

[111] See: Anne Phillips. 'What's Wrong with Essentialism?' *LSE Research Online*. April, 2012. Accessed November 27, 2014. URL: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/30900/ Phillips notes that in

power of the feminine with bodily pleasure may also prove problematic as this may re-iterate clichés about women dominating the realms of nature as opposed to thought, seen for example, in the construct of Mother Nature. In Chapter Five, 'Floating Flora, Death and Lolly Colours—Provocative beauty in My Practice,' I will explore the notion of feminine beauty further.

In this chapter, I have offered insights into what is meant by the term beauty in art. I have shown how beauty is maligned in twentieth century art to the present day. I have suggested throughout that dismissing beauty limits the valuable, progressive manner in which we can think of aesthetics. Additionally, there are others working in the field today that engage a beauty provocatively. My research concerns, therefore, have a valid context. Hickey provides a useful proposition for considering beauty from which I can draw to discuss beauty objectively in my practice. This is in beauty's agency, as opposed the more conservative way of finding beautiful qualities inherent in my studio works.

My studio work relates to the Kantian notion of sensory, disinterested beauty and its relationship to autonomous art. I am interested to pursue this Kantian idea in relation to the more contemporary Marxist aesthetic theory of Theodor Adorno. Adorno's ideas that radical, beautiful autonomous art is a necessary, social illusion are indebted to Kant. Adorno and Kant refer to nature in their philosophies. As my practice refers to nature, I think that it is more important to pursue Adorno and Kant's lines of aesthetic philosophical enquiry rather than Rancière's, who also theorises the radical politics of aesthetics in autonomous art. I have located prettiness as a possible agent for expressing a provocative dimension in art. Prettiness relates to my practice. Prettiness and beautiful autonomous art will further be investigated in this exegesis. I will start by examining their radical histories in the next chapter.

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current conventional academic scholarship to speculate on universal qualities about women, for example, that all women are feminine, is deemed inappropriate: essentialist.

Chapter Two

## A History of Daisies—Historic Precedents for Provocative Beauty in Art

I am attending a lecture for Fine Art post-graduate students in the cavernous, dark, institutional auditorium at Monash University today. The lecturer is speaking in prolix terms about the practice of the American artist, Andrea Fraser, an artist who engages strategies associated with institutional critique. Institutional critique is an artistic practice that reflects critically on its own place in museums and galleries and about the concept and social function of art itself.[112] The lecturer refers to one of Fraser's most infamous studio works, *Untitled (2003)*, in which Fraser videos herself having sexual intercourse with an art collector in a hotel room. Her New York commercial gallery, Friedrich Petzel, sells an edition of four of these videos. Fraser says that this studio work provides commentary on the art world's focus on the market.[113] She also states that the video edition sells for much less than a male painter who also exhibits at Friedrich Petzel Gallery. I think that Fraser's message in *Untitled (2003),* is that artists, producing commodity forms, are complicit with collectors and commercial galleries in prioritising the market in the art world, one in which women fare more badly.

The lecture is delivered quickly and in such complex theoretical terms that I find following it difficult. I empathise with Fraser's feminist concerns, but I have this gnawing feeling that the specific studio work of hers that I am being invited to consider is extremely literal and obvious. This is because Fraser's video appears to spell out a singular, non-revelatory, socio-political issue regarding the art market, using the easy, attention-grabbing strategy of sex. Before I can put up my hand and discuss the discrepancy that I am feeling between being asked to examine

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[112] See Alexander Alberro (ed.) Blake Stimson (ed.) *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artist's Writings*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. 2011.

[113] Andrew Russeth. 'At MoMA, Andrea Fraser on a Life Spent Addressing "Factories of Edification and of Taste."' *New York Observer/Culture*. February 1, 2012. Accessed September 15, 2014.
URL: http://observer.com/2012/02/at-moma-andrea-fraser-on-a-life-spent-addressing-factories-of-edification-and-of-taste/ All facts about Fraser's work are taken from this article.

such prolix ideas that theorise a seemingly literal, simplistic studio work within a PhD course in Visual Art—which takes into account the sophistication of the studio work being created—the fluorescent lights go on and everyone is filing out of the lecture theatre.

I am down at the Telstra telephone exchange in St. Kilda, an inner city suburb of Melbourne now, where I have been commissioned to paint the walls around the building. (figure 2.1) It is a glorious blue afternoon with a cool breeze and the spectacular colours relating to a television test pattern that I am mixing and applying hard-edged onto the bricks glow luminously as the sun shines on the brickwork. Several passers-by stop and say that they are enjoying seeing the vibrant colours slowly transforming this dilapidated space. I am moved when a sex worker comments that seeing these beautiful colours makes her feel better, as when she is working on the streets, she is usually very depressed. Painting away in the afternoon sun, I reflect on how different my approach to practice is from Fraser's studio production. The first aspect about my studio research is that it is not made with any conscious preconceived ideas, for example, political messages, which are then illustrated in the art form.


**Figure 2.1 Mary Lou Pavlovic. *The Outsider*. (In Progress) 2011-14. Acrylic house paint on Telstra Exchange at 62 Inkerman Street, St Kilda, Melbourne. Variable dimensions. Source: The artist.**

I argue that an example of this type of practice is Fraser's *Untitled (2003)*. The purpose of her studio research appears to be to create an obvious political message. Overall, Fraser's video performance work utilises the conventions of pornographic film narratives or more private

sexual practices of filming sexual intercourse. These are genres that may be seen other than in an art context. Fraser's *Untitled (2003)* communicates its message literally and rationally; the video is created to ensure a specific reading is communicated to the viewer. There is little room for viewers to project their own ideas or to construct alternate readings of *Untitled 2003*. It appears that amongst Fraser's preconceived ideas for this work is to directly communicate the political message outlined above: participants in the field of visual art are compromised by the market. In this the conceptual idea comes first and the video illustrates it. There is a clear, preconceived purpose, and a logical result.

In contrast, my studio production is resolved aesthetically and formally as it progresses, I do not know its outcome until I think that it is complete. Although I acknowledge that my autonomous practice may be socially constructed, my art is largely purposeless. I aim to make open-ended studio work that stems from a non-logical, imaginative response to life. I do not believe my practice to be fully integrated with the world around me; when I consider the finished product, my complete control over what I am seeing is lost. I aim, however, for my work to be communicable to others. This communication is not intended, like Fraser, to be an instantly comprehended message, but is more open-ended and mysterious, whilst retaining a degree of intelligibility. The brickwork that I am painting at the Telstra telephone exchange juxtaposes lolly, effeminate colours with 1950s serious modernist architecture. A television test pattern, a visual sign for television communications technology, plays against the architecture that houses telephone communication technologies. This public art project is derived from my imagination. The outcome is not similar to anything else other than visual art, nor can it be tied easily to a single, specific meaning, as my process is open-ended, each brick presents an opportunity for experimentation.

One of the fascinating things that I have discovered in commencing research for this PhD regarding my desire to make autonomous art[114]—is that I actually have a desire to create a

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[114] The academic Charles Altieri argues that the concept of autonomous art is a modernist term. See: Charles Altieri. 'Why Modernist Claims for Autonomy Matter.' *Journal of Modern Literature.* Vol. 32. 3. Spring. 2009: p.1–21. The concept of autonomous art, however, appears to be a valid term in the current academic context. What is important in two contemporary academic's ideas is that the concept of autonomy in art is acknowledged as a social

model of the beautiful, grounded in Kantian terms.[115] As discussed in Chapter One, 'A Bevy of Beauties—Contexts for Provocative Beauty in Contemporary Art,' Kant's conception of reflective (disinterested) beauty relates to the contemporary notion of autonomous art in the visual arts.[116] (Although much contemporary art may be described as autonomous, in that autonomous art may not be fully integrated with the world around it, I will pursue the Kantian-based model of beautiful autonomous art because Kant describes autonomous art as relating to nature. My practice, unlike various other forms of autonomous art, references nature. I wish to discover to what degree Kant's theories are relevant to my own practice about the subject of beauty in nature.) Additionally, I have identified prettiness, a secularised model of Kantian beauty, also discussed in Chapter One, 'A Bevy of Beauties—Contexts for Provocative Beauty in Contemporary Art,' as another area of interest for my studio and exegetical research.[117]

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construction. The British art historian, Claire Bishop and the French philosopher Jacques Rancière argue that by granting radical autonomy to the socially constructed aesthetic that art may act as a critique of all that is not art.[114] See: Claire Bishop. 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.' *October*. Fall. No.110. 2004: p.51–79. And: Jacques Rancière. Steve Corcoran (ed.) *Dissensus Aesthetics and Politics*. Kindle Edition. London: Continuum. 2010.

[115] A detailed explanation of the Kantian-based model of beautiful, autonomous art is explicated in Chapter One of this exegesis, 'A Bevy of Beauties—Contexts for Provocative Beauty in Contemporary Art. Kant believes that disinterestedly beautiful art does not duplicate the world around it, nor provides commentary on it, but instead the artist engages his/her imagination and aesthetic ideas, which are non-logical, to produce art that stands apart from the world. See: Immanuel Kant. James Creed Meredith (trans.) *The Critique of Judgement (1790).* Oxford: Clarendon. 1952.

[116] Tobin Siebers. 'Kant and the Politics of Beauty.' *Philosophy and Literature.* Vol. 22. 1. 1998: p.31–50. Throughout, Siebers refers to his proposition that Kant's theories that beautiful art does not duplicate reality or provide social commentary but instead engages the artist's imagination, are ideas that describe what we would refer to today as autonomous art.

[117] To define prettiness as a secularised version of the Kantian beautiful, I have referred to Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe's definition in: Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Rex Butler (ed.) 'Attractiveness and the Uncontrollable.' *Art After Deconstruction*. Brisbane: Editions 3. 2011. p.13–31: p.15.

In this current chapter, I will explore the historical background of these types of beauty because I want to know more about their origins. Has beautiful autonomous art and prettiness been engaged in a provocative capacity elsewhere in history? Have these types of beauty been asserted as politically radical in their own right over studio production that, like Andrea Fraser's, *Untitled (2003)*, teaches an overtly political lesson? Is this debate, one that positions the provocative dimension of beauty against overtly political, literal artworks mirrored elsewhere in history? Is there any viable degree of continuity with these provocative historical ideas about beauty in my studio research created today, made at a different time and set in new social circumstances? Can turning to historical art assist in clarifying the relationship between beautiful, autonomous art and prettiness in my own studio work? To demonstrate that beauty is artistically radical at times other to our current academic context also lends support to the central aim of this thesis: that beauty may be associated with provocative ideas in the field of art.

In the following discussion, I will focus on two historical periods that relate to the aspects of beauty in my studio research outlined above. These are the introduction of German Enlightenment aesthetics into German universities by philosopher Alexander Baumgarten and developed by philosopher Immanuel Kant (approximately 1738–1800) and English Aestheticism (approximately 1860–1900.) The progressive, provocative politics of each era will be identified and contextualised. Then, with ideas of the past explored, I will return to the present for a further discussion on relations between the contemporary and the past. This is in order to address the degree of viability for continuity with the past for progressive thinking around beauty today. In doing so, this will be relevant to not only my own studio research, but by implication has broader significance to the culture of visual art today.

**Enlightenment aesthetics, autonomous art and otherness**

Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) revolutionary writings on beauty in 1790 are written against the backdrop of the tumultuous Enlightenment. Characterised by upheavals in politics, society, science and philosophy, the Enlightenment is seen as 'the period of sweeping out the medieval world-view and the ushering in of the modern western democratic world.'[118] Prior to the

[118] William Bristow. Edward H. Zalta (ed.) 'Enlightenment'. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* California: Stanford University. Summer. 2011. Accessed June 7, 2013.

Enlightenment, philosophy is regarded as the servant of theology, limited by its methodology and purposes. Instead, Enlightenment philosophy independently and systematically constructs new ideas founded on its own principles. Endorsing pleasure in the face of Christian asceticism, beauty is reclaimed as important in all human lives. Aesthetic philosophy in German universities is controversial and deemed hedonistic by moralistic elders.[119] In the period leading up to Kant's philosophical enquiry into beauty, philosophical aesthetics is already radically progressive in that it usurps religious and aristocratic authority.

In 1790, Kant further radicalises the study of beauty. *The Critique of Judgement* analyses three areas of aesthetic judgement, the beautiful, the sublime, and fine art.[120] Kant rejects the idea that beauty can be scientifically proven, an argument utilised by a major philosophical thinker immediately prior to Kant, Alexander Baumgarten. (1714–1762) Instead, Kant argues that the appreciation of beauty is subjective, in that the judgement of taste takes place in the mind. Also, of critical importance for my theme, Kant argues that the appreciation of beauty is non-logical.[121] In academic thought regarding beauty, Kant rejects classical standards of beauty that relate to the human form, democratically and progressively arguing that we bring our personal prejudices to this judgement.[122] This type of judgement, made when we bring our own personal interests to what we believe is beautiful, is classified by Kant as determinant or dependent beauty. Kant deems judgements made about agreeable human forms judgements of pleasantness, not the beautiful.[123]

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URL: http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/enlightenment/

[119] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* Kindle Edition. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. 2005: p.40.

[120] Paul Guyer. Edward H Zalta. (ed.) '18th Century German Aesthetics.' *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Fall. 2008. Accessed June 14, 2013.
URL: http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/aesthetics-18th-german/ The author refers to: Immanuel Kant. James Creed Meredith (trans.) *The Critique of Judgement. (1790).* Oxford: Clarendon. 1952.

[121] See: Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* 2005: p.40–45.

[122] Tobin Siebers. 'Kant and the Politics of Beauty.' *Philosophy and Literature.* 1998: p.31.

[123] Ibid. p.32–33.

Kant theorises a second type of beauty. This is mostly in terms of nature; he often refers to flowers and bird songs.[124] He insists that the beauty we experience in nature (although overall his theories are not limited to nature) is objective. He names this judgement of taste, reflective (disinterested) beauty. In the appreciation of a rose, for example, Kant thinks that we bring no personal prejudices to finding beauty in the rose; according to Kant, we are free to combine the mind and senses to feel delight and for no other purpose except to delight in beauty. For Kant, objects of beauty stand apart from the world, as something about them escapes our control in accounting for them. Kant also brings this idea of disinterested objective beauty to art.

Kant's leap from the beautiful in nature to art is to say that artists create disinterested beauty when they engage original, non-logical aesthetic ideas stemming from the imagination, creating objects that also emit something non-logical. Kant says that, like beautiful objects in nature, these art objects also stand apart from the world (the contemporary word is autonomous) as aspects of them are beyond our control to fully apprehend them. Artists engaging aesthetic, imaginative ideas do not solely copy, for example, the landscape around them. Kant says that artists cannot explain how their ideas enter the mind and are assembled; therefore their imaginative ideas cannot be taught to others. Viewers, according to Kant, experience the same lack of complete explanation when confronted with the work of original art. The American visual arts theorist Tobin Siebers explains Kant's ideas regarding beautiful objects (art, natural and others) standing apart from the world by saying that:

> He (Kant) suggests that a class of objects exists that confronts human beings with an experience that is alien to their normal means of understanding … In short, beautiful objects stand apart in the way that they represent themselves to the mind, and the mind in turn discovers that it can find no rule or law readily available in its repertoire to account for the uniqueness and particularity presented by them. Remarkably, objects of beauty have somehow freed themselves from the mind's grasp, shining forth as only themselves and asserting their own unique form and integrity as presences dwelling both with us and apart.

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[124] Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement* (*1790).* 1952. All references are to Kant's theories in this book unless stated otherwise.

> There is something irrational and ineffable about beautiful objects in Kant's opinion. To use modern vocabulary, objects of beauty present us with the experience of 'otherness'.[125]

Kant equates art created by artists who engage aesthetic, original ideas with nature. Siebers argues that 'Kant's point is that art, like nature, must evade human understanding, and thus escape our control, in order to be experienced as beautiful.'[126] To illuminate the progressive politics of these concepts and how they remain relevant in the twentieth century, Siebers refers to anti-authoritarian twentieth century German philosopher and political theorist Herbert Marcuse, (1898–1978,) who is an enthusiast for Kant's theories. Marcuse argues that Kant's ideas are non-repressive, in so far as the work of beauty (autonomous art) resists, by 'virtue of its otherness,' the 'superimposed administered unification' and homogeneity of modern society.[127] Siebers writes that Marcuse insists that the work of art is as qualitatively 'other' than the established reality, thereby making it possible to imagine the appearance of freedom and an image of the end of power. For Marcuse, the work of art can attain political relevance only through its (beautiful) autonomy. Marcuse believes that the aesthetic form is essential to its social function in the world as is our response to such forms.

I think that Siebers' argument regarding Kant's model of reflective (disinterested) beauty as relating to a contemporary notion of otherness is interesting. As I believe that, in terms of political thinking, allowing for a concept of otherness is very important, as it allows for a concept of difference. I am troubled, however, that Kant's ideas regarding what we would call the autonomy of art have been well and truly deconstructed within contemporary conventional art historical scholarship.[128] It is widely regarded that art's autonomy is a social idea, that is, human beings have constructed this concept of autonomy. Also, within the parameters of contemporary conventional art historical and philosophical scholarship, it is difficult to think of objects in the world as conceptless, that is, as not defined by our own mental concepts: even if

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[125] Tobin Siebers. 'Kant and the Politics of Beauty.' *Philosophy and Literature.* 1998. p.35.

[126] Ibid. p.39.

[127] Ibid. p.36: Siebers quotes: Herbert Marcuse. *Eros and Civilization.* Boston: Beacon Press. 1955: Chapter 9. (especially p.46, 52, 53,177.)

[128] See: Peter V. Zima. *Deconstruction and Critical Theory*. London: A&C Black. 2002: (especially. p.188, 189.)

the work of art seems conceptless and about pure form, this remains a concept.[129] I am in agreement with this widespread contemporary critique of Kant's philosophy of the beautiful. The role of Kantian beauty, in contemporary practice, however, is constantly evolving and relevant to the current academic context.

In my research I have found that it is not only Marcuse who applauds the radical potential of Kant's ideas regarding reflective beauty. It is also not only Marcuse who argues that autonomous art necessarily bares relations to the social. The contemporary German Marxist philosopher Theodor Adorno (1903–1969) is also indebted to the Kantian notion that the judgement of reflective beauty stands apart from other things in the world. Additionally, Adorno relates natural beauty and his perception of autonomous art, (for Adorno autonomous art relates to social mimesis), as relating to otherness.[130] He argues that the configuration of autonomous art, a model of the beautiful, is the site for radical politics. Adorno is critical of Kant's theory that beautiful objects are conceptless, he argues that all human perception of the world is based on mental concepts, but he retains Kant's idea that fine art proper is characterised by formal autonomy.[131] The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* outlines that Adorno combines Kant's ideas with German philosopher Karl Marx's (1818–1883) Marxist emphasis that fine art is necessarily embedded in society as a whole.[132]

My intention in this chapter of the exegesis is to firstly demonstrate that the subject of beauty in art and its relation to progressive or provocative thinking has historical precedence. This is evident if we consider the radical nature of Enlightenment aesthetics and also that Kant's theories of beauty relate to a contemporary concept of aesthetic otherness. Secondly, I wish to examine how these historical concepts of radical beauty relate to the contemporary world. I

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[129] See: Lambert Zuidervaart. 'Theodor W. Adorno'. Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Winter. 2011. Accessed January 23, 2014. URL: http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/adorno/

[130] Theodor W. Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory.* New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1984. See p.98, 104, 105.

[131] Lambert Zuidervaart. 'Theodor W. Adorno'. Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Winter. 2011.

[132] Ibid.

have introduced Adorno's argument regarding autonomous art and its relation to the beauty that we find in nature and that this beauty is characterised as embodying otherness. Adorno critiques Kant's concept of conceptless beauty but retains Kantian thought about the beautiful and its relation to autonomous art. Therefore, there is a degree of continuity with the past for radical ideas of beauty in art. Adorno's theories regarding the otherness of the beauty of autonomous art and whether or not they remain relevant to art today and hence my practice will be expanded in full in Chapter Three, 'Mountains Resin, Glitter, Forests—Contemporary Practice and Provocative Beauty', in this exegesis.

The question that remains is what is a more specific definition for the otherness of beauty outlined by Kant, Adorno and Marcuse? In an article incorporating these three philosopher's thoughts on beauty, Tobin Siebers says that the otherness of the naturally beautiful and autonomous art is aesthetic otherness realised in the small, human scale of the beautiful and is experienced by the subject as the embodied difference of beauty.[133] Siebers argues that the value of the aesthetic otherness of the beautiful lies in asking us to confront otherness in our world, rather than referring, for example, to ideas of aesthetic otherness in the mind. Siebers reminds us that the French philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard's characterisation of the otherness of the sublime takes place wholly in the mind of the subject.[134] I wish to retain Siebers' thoughts regarding the value in the aesthetic otherness of the beautiful for further examination in Chapter Three, 'Mountains, Resin, Glitter, Forests—Contemporary Practice and Provocative Beauty.'

**English Aestheticism, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe and the power of pretty**

The artistic movement, English Aestheticism, emerges in Victorian England in the mid to late nineteenth century. Aestheticism adopts the doctrine that art exists for its beauty alone, and pursues the beautiful, disregarding other worldly factors, for example, morality or politics.[135] A leading Aesthetic movement poet and critic, Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909) is

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[133] Tobin Siebers. 'Kant and the Politics of Beauty.' *Philosophy and Literature.* 1998. p.37.

[134] Ibid. p.37. Siebers refers to: Jean-François Lyotard. 'Acinema.' Andrew Benjamin (ed.) Paisley N. Livingston (trans.) *The Lyotard Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell. 1989.

[135] 'Aestheticism'. *Encylopaedia Britannica.* Accessed April 2, 2013. http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/7474/Aestheticism

credited for advancing the term, 'art for art's sake,' an adaptation of the French term, *l'pour art l'pour art.*[136] Key figures in English Aestheticism also include the Irish playwright Oscar Wilde, (1854–1900) English illustrator and author, Aubrey Beardsley, (1872–1898) English painter, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, (1828–1882) English art critic, Walther Horatio Pater, (1839–1894) and American painter, James McNeill Whistler. (1834–1903)[137]

English Aestheticism may well be part of a wider trend of Aestheticism that emerges in Europe in the nineteenth century.[138] Artists and thinkers debate and adapt Kantian principles of reflective beauty, delineated from morality or politics, and additionally in art, from duplicating scenes of life—art derived from the imagination is prioritised. English Aestheticism is also characterised as being politically radical. In 1995, the American cultural theorist, Frederic Jameson, describes English Aestheticism as radical, stating that '… it only seems appropriate in the present context to recall beauty's subversive role (as utilised in English Aestheticism) in a society marred by nascent commodification. The *fin de siècle,* from William Morris to Oscar Wilde, deployed beauty as a political weapon against a complacent, materialist, Victorian bourgeois society.'[139]

The British art historian Elizabeth Prettejohn argues that by invoking visual beauty Aestheticism also challenges the dominating values of supposedly prudish and visually insensitive Victorian England.[140] These values perpetuate ideas that art should be utilitarian. In Victorian England dominance is placed on the utilitarian purpose of art to disseminate goodness in terms of religious conduct or socio-political realities. In order to better understand the progressive politics of English Aestheticism, I will firstly expand briefly on the widely held view that art should be associated with goodness in Victorian England. A leading art critic at

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[136] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* Kindle Edition. 2005: p.124.

[137] 'Aestheticism'. *Encylopaedia Britannica.*

[138] Ibid.

[139] Frederic Jameson. 'Transformations of the Image in Post Modernity//1995.' Dave Beech (ed.) *Beauty*. London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Art Gallery and MIT Press. 2009: p.107.

[140] Elizabeth Prettejohn. 'Victorian England: Swinburne, Ruskin, Pater.' *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* 2005: p.111–156. All facts in this paragraph have been taken from this source.

this time is John Ruskin (1819–1907). In his influential writings, as the first Slade Professor of Fine Arts at Oxford University, and author of a set of five volumes on art, *Modern Painters*, (1834–1860) Ruskin argues for art's value in promoting the good.[141] He believes that art should illustrate preconceived ideas, educating people about greater moral, social and political worth. In *The Works of John Ruskin,* for example, Ruskin asserts that the best artists believe it their duty to impart fundamental truths, not only about the facts of vision, but about religion and the correct way to live life.[142]

Elizabeth Prettejohn refers to Ruskin's championing of art in much the same way the French proponents of a social art were demanding at the time. She writes that Ruskin favours:

> A modern-life subject, relentlessly honest in its portrayal of ungainly furniture and ugly costumes, and aimed at social reform in the real world … (For Ruskin) … art … is thoroughly integrated with the most urgent social, moral and political issues of the real world.[143]

In Book One of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin also argues for the superiority of British landscape painters such as Joseph William Turner (1775–1851) over post-Renaissance European painters who resort to pictorial conventions.[144] Ruskin argues that because Turner adheres to depicting the reality of nature such literalness is morally uplifting in art. Ruskin then, is anti-Kantian in his thinking, firstly in his insistence that art must follow the ethically good, and also because

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[141] John Ruskin. Lawrence Wood (ed.) Roger Garside (ed.) Ray Haslam (ed.) *Modern Painters 1*. Project Gutenberg. 2010. Accessed April 16, 2013.
URL: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29907/29907-h/29907-h.htm

[142] John Ruskin. E.T. Cook (ed.) Alexander Wedderburn (ed.) *The Works of John Ruskin*. London, New York: George Allen, Green & Co. 1903–1912. Vol.3: p.xvii – liv. & Vol.12: p.333–340. Accessed September 9, 2014.
URL: http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/users/ruskinlib/Pages/Works.html

[143] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art: 1750 –2000.* 2005: p.113.

[144] John Ruskin. Lawrence Wood (ed.) Roger Garside (ed.) Ray Haslam (ed.) *Modern Painters 1*. 2010. Ruskin refers throughout to Turner's superiority as a landscape painter.

Kant argues that artists use non-logical, aesthetic ideas generated by the imagination to create beautiful art. Ruskin views 'truth to nature' as more moralistic.

So, how does English Aesthetic art challenge the dominant value that art should be associated with goodness, (hence the authority of religious doctrine,) in Victorian England? In contrast to thinking exemplified by Ruskin, the artists of English Aestheticism, inspired by Kantian thinking on the beautiful, reject art as the handmaiden of religion, servant of fact, or the pioneer of morality.[145] English Aesthetic artists favour art associated with the imagination, often turning within painting at least, to what are regarded by the artists as pretty, female forms, sometimes incorporating decorative, floral elements.[146] (figures 2.2, 2.3, 2.4)[147] I engage the term pretty in Kant's sense of the quality pertaining to an agreeable human form.

A contradiction may seem apparent here as discussed earlier in this chapter—Aestheticism celebrates Kantian disinterested beauty, in that art should not be aligned with morality, the socio-political or duplications of reality, but Kant is also insistent that the judgement of prettiness in relation to the human body is a subjective judgement and therefore not disinterested. Elizabeth Prettejohn argues that English Aesthetic artwork is still aligned with Kantian artistic thought on the beautiful regardless of the use of agreeable, attractive human

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[145] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art: 1750 – 2000.* 2005: p.124.

[146] Ibid. p.119–141. Prettejohn refers to the way that Rossetti's painting caught on in Victorian England and several other artists at the time created single female figures whose no other purpose was to delight the senses: These artists included Frederic Leighton, George Watts, Margaret Cameron, Gustave Courbet, and James Whistler.

[147] Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Bocca Baciata.* 1859. Oil on canvas. 32.1cm x 27cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Accessed May 12, 2013.
URL: http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/bocca-baciata-lips-that-have-been-kissed-34360
Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Venus Verticordia.* 1864–8. Oil on canvas. 38 5/8" x 27 1/2". Private Collection. Accessed September 14, 2014.
URL: http://pictify.com/462224/venus-verticordia-1868-d-g-rossetti
George Frederick Watts. *The Wife of Pygmalion.* 1868. Oil on canvas. 26 1/4" x 21". The Farringdon Trust, Oxfordshire. Accessed October 17, 2014.
URL: http://www.wikiart.org/en/george-frederick-watts/the-wife-of-pygmalion

forms. This is because the artworks are presented as 'beautiful' in the wider sense of offering something that logical and intellectual thought, moral and religious duty cannot offer, but which is nonetheless vital to human experience.'[148]

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Bocca Baciata*, 1859, is seen as founding English Aesthetic painting.[149] (figure 2.1) Rossetti develops a technical method, building up layers of paint, so that the surface of the painting conveys its own lusciousness and sensuality.[150] Prettejohn notes how different this is to the thinly painted surfaces of Pre-Raphaelite painting, dominant in Victorian England in 1859. *Bocca Baciata* depicts a young woman with long flowing red hair and soft, pale skin. She is adorned with jewels and flowers. I think that it seems as if we are invited to enjoy the prettiness and heady sensuality of this portrait for the sole reason of doing so. There is nothing to connect this painting to a social or moral issue; there is no illustration of religious values. Rossetti creates the painting observing a life model but adding details from his imagination, such as jewels and flowers, and titles his painting after it is finished.[151] The term *bocca baciata* is a literary reference to a tale in the *Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) in which the female heroine, Alteil, has nine lovers and lives happily ever after—a tale in which promiscuity is cause for celebration. I argue that celebrating sexuality embodied in pretty female forms is a way that English Aestheticism provocatively challenges Victorian ideas that art should be connected to moral and religious goodness.

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[148] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. 2005: p.124.

[149] Simon Poe. 'The Cult of Beauty The Aesthetic Movement: 1860–1890'. *The British Art Journal.* Volume 11. no.3. 2011. p.89–90: p.89. Poe refers to Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Bocca Baciata.* 1859. Oil on canvas. 32.1cm x 27cm. Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

[150] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art: 1750 – 2000.* 2005: p.117. All facts in this paragraph about Rosetti's painting *Bocca Baciata* are taken from this source.

[151] Ibid. p.118. Prettejohn refers to: Giovanni Boccaccio. John Payne (trans.) *The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio*. New York: Walter J Black Inc. Project Gutenberg: 2007. URL: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23700/23700-h/23700-h.htm

**Figure 2.2 Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Bocca Baciata.* 1859. Oil on canvas. 32.1cm x 27cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Accessed May 12, 2013. URL: http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/bocca-baciata-lips-that-have-been-kissed-34360**

**Figure 2.3 Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Venus Verticordia.* 1864-8. Oil on canvas. 38 5/8" x 27 1/2". Private Collection. Accessed September 14, 2014. URL: http://pictify.com/462224/venus-verticordia-1868-d-g-rossetti**

**Figure 2.4 George Frederick Watts. *The Wife of Pygmalion.* 1868. Oil on canvas. 26 1/4" x 21". The Farringdon Trust, Oxfordshire. Accessed October 17, 2014.**
**URL: http://www.wikiart.org/en/george-frederick-watts/the-wife-of-pygmalion**

Three things regarding English Aestheticism are of further importance, if we are to consider the relation of English Aesthetic artists' ideas about beauty to provocative thinking around beauty in art today. Firstly, the artists and thinkers of English Aestheticism believe that beautiful art is not connected to ideas of religious transcendence, but is to be appreciated in the here and now.[152] The pleasures of beauty are to be enjoyed seriously in this life. Little faith is placed in salvation after death. Swinburne writes that:

> … If art is genuinely to be 'for art's sake' only, then we cannot seek its value anywhere else … Art's 'principle'… makes the manner of doing a thing the essence of the thing done, the purpose or result of it is not hope for redemption or transcendence, but places its faith in the passing 'moment' or in 'the manner of doing a thing.'[153]

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[152] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. 2005: p.125–126. Prettejohn has noted that European Aestheticism poet Charles Baudelaire places faith in the idea that appreciating beauty was connected to the after life. She refers to Charles Baudelaire quoted in: Martin Rosenberg. *Raphael and France: The Artist as Paradigm and Symbol*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. 1995: p.50.

[153] Algernon Charles Swinburne. *William Blake: A Critical Essay*. London: John Camden Hotten. 1868: p.98.

According to Elizabeth Prettejohn, the fundamental premise of English art for art's sake is that art delivers its value in itself in the present moment.[154] Rather than deferring pleasure for the afterlife, or negating beauty (pleasure) for duty, I think that arguably English Aestheticism turns to prettiness to request that we live in the present to experience bodily pleasure. Swinburne's ideas about the value of beauty/prettiness being experienced in the present moment are echoed in the writings of contemporary British artist, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, who theorises the provocative capacity of prettiness in art today. In Gilbert-Rolfe's essay on the power of prettiness in art, he argues that pretty art challenges the 'fascism of the idea', by invoking pleasure in the beholder, temporarily suspending rationalisation, and forcing us to live in the present:

> (In suspending rationalisation) … the attractive resists giving way to intellectual sublimity, in doing so setting in motion the terms of the Kantian sublime. In this it reiterates the actions not of the mind but of the body that knows itself as a completeness … (in a continuum) of the world as … (infinite) space and time …The freedom in question is the freedom to be in the present rather than constantly being sucked into historical time in which the present disappears … The difference is ultimately between an art that activates and an art that defers… (Art) has a thoroughly Kantian obligation to arouse sensation. Otherwise we'll be stuck with predetermined meanings and unable to get at what's in the air.[155]

The second point that I wish to make is that one of English Aestheticism's leading art critics, Walther Pater, abandons theoretical writing about the movement after arguing for the value of art for art's sake. He thinks that to define beauty (configured often as prettiness in English Aestheticism) is only to provide a controlling, academic idea of what constitutes beauty.[156] Today, Gilbert-Rolfe also argues that prettiness cannot be easily controlled by serious ideas. Gilbert-Rolfe says that prettiness in art is inherently frivolous. He refers to the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida's arguments that the frivolous cannot be fully controlled by

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[154] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* 2005: p.126.

[155] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction*. 2011: p.28, 31.

[156] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* 2005: p.151.

serious ideas as the dictionary can only provide a serious idea of frivolity.[157] Therefore frivolous prettiness has great power. Differently to Pater, Gilbert-Rolfe does not abandon theory, instead arguing for serious thought in art, but one that emanates from the 'vaguer realm of sensation, which is to say aesthesis rather than discourse—and for that reason cannot be reduced or returned to a proposition, even a complex one.'[158]

Thirdly, the English Aesthetic artists' pursuit of prettiness or beauty is deemed non-serious in broader Victorian England. Aestheticism's 'frivolousness' is lampooned in caricature in a serious social commentary publication. George Du Maurier's *Punch* cartoon regarding Oscar Wilde's quip of aspiring to live up to the design of his teapot is a famous example.[159] In dominant artistic and cultural discussion in Victorian England, bound up with religious goodness and social realities, the concepts of attractiveness and prettiness in art are deemed frivolous. Today, Gilbert-Rolfe also argues that prettiness in contemporary art is not taken seriously, and that to invoke prettiness is deemed frivolous by those invoking the anti-aesthetic and related theory such as that which underpins institutional critique.[160]

In both cases—English Aesthetic art and Gilbert-Rolfe's text about prettiness—prettiness is engaged to challenge serious ideas emanating from a purely intellectual domain that are about negating bodily pleasure. In viewing something in art that we deem pretty, we experience bodily pleasure, which, by virtue of suspending rationalisation, places us in the present and offers something more than predetermined meaning, asking us to contend with what is in front of us. This is a powerful dimension of beauty because after experiencing pleasure in seeing

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[157] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction*. 2011: p.14. Gilbert-Rolfe refers to Jacques Derrida. John P. Leavey Jr. (ed.) *The Archeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac.* Netherlands: Brill Publishers. 1980.

[158] Ibid. p.27.

[159] Fiona Macarthy. 'Aestheticism.' *The Guardian Newspaper*. Saturday March 26, 2011. Accessed April 19, 2013.
URL: http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/mar/26/aestheticism-exhibition-victoria-albert-museum#start-of-comments. The *Punch* image is reproduced here.

[160] See: Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. 'Attractiveness and the Uncontrollable.' Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction*. 2011: p.13–31.

pretty/beautiful art we are invited to proceed with our thoughts from the place of sensation. I argue that the sensory dimension of art is equally as important as the more overtly socio-political dimension of art. The sensory nature of art can lead us to a political dimension of art discussed throughout this chapter. Prettiness or attractiveness can be provocative in art as prettiness can be the catalyst to begin aesthetic thoughts that are provocative and do not begin with predetermined meaning but rather begin with sensation.

In conclusion, in undertaking this research on English Aestheticism, I have been struck by the historic, polarised artistic debate which incorporate Ruskin's ideals for a literal socio-political art linked to religious goodness; then these are subsequently challenged by the English Aesthetic artists in the form of painterly, sensual prettiness embodied in female forms. How similar this debate is to the terms of a contemporary artistic debate that I have outlined in this exegesis. The serious, literal, socio-political commentary of Andrea Fraser's *Untitled 2003,* for example, is an exemplary institutional critique studio work linked to anti-aesthetic thinking that is concerned with politics and morality and is unconcerned with prettiness or aesthetic concerns generally in the work of art.[161]

In contrast, on another side of the aesthetic argument, with reference to contemporary scholars, I seek to claim in this exegesis that beauty, in the form of prettiness operating in my own practice, may be positioned provocatively in the field of contemporary art. Furthermore, English Aestheticism is deemed frivolous by more overtly serious endeavours such as *Punch* social commentary magazine. It is notable that historically speaking, to invoke beauty/prettiness for the sake of doing so has been regarded as a trivial pursuit for art. Tobin Siebers, English Aesthetic artists and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe all position beauty provocatively in the field of art by referring to Kantian ideas of the beautiful. These are smaller and more human than Kant's theory of the sublime, the beauty that delivers a beauty that is awe-inspiring and overwhelming, for example, the sublime beauty of a starry night. Gilbert-Rolfe argues that the sublime is designated seriousness in contemporary art and invoking the pretty is a means of

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[161] Ibid. p.14. Gilbert-Rolfe notes that to adopt the anti-aesthetic position in the field of art is, in general, to be hostile to prettiness in the work of art.

challenging that authority.[162] Siebers notes it is the Kantian ideas of the autonomy of the beautiful that have changed art, not the sublime.[163]

The provocative nature of beauty in art in history has been attested to in this chapter, and acts as a reminder of beauty's vast potential to engage with progressive politics in art. Firstly beautiful art can be associated with aesthetic otherness in Immanuel Kant's theory of reflective beauty. The configuration of this otherness in Kant's reflective beauty is modified but utilised in the twentieth century in Adorno's philosophical enquiry. Adorno argues that the otherness of autonomous art is a necessary social illusion. Tobin Seibers says that we experience this otherness as the embodied difference of beauty. How Adorno's thoughts about the beautiful otherness of autonomous art may be relevant to my studio work, hence art today, will be explored throughout the remainder of this exegesis.

Secondly, engaging prettiness can challenge religious suppression, visual insensitivity and the authority of purely intellectually based ideas. I argue, therefore, that there is continuity with the past for invoking beauty provocatively in art. The aesthetic ideas in my studio research have long historical lineage. Also, I have referred to Elizabeth Prettejohn's idea that prettiness in art, a secularised version of Kantian beauty, is still beautiful in the wider Kantian sense, because it offers an experience that cannot straightforwardly be mapped onto religious, intellectual, political or logical thought. I would like to use Prettejohn's argument for my own practice: the two areas I have outlined of interest in my practice, autonomy and prettiness are not in conflict because prettiness cannot be mapped exactly onto other areas of human endeavour. The question remains, however, as to how autonomous art might be seen as other in art today. This question will be addressed in the next chapter.

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[162] Ibid. p.14.

[163] Tobin Siebers. 'Kant and the Politics of Beauty.' *Philosophy and Literature.* 1998. p.36.

Chapter Three

## Mountains, Resin, Glitter, Forests—Contemporary Practice and Provocative Beauty

I am sitting in my St. Kilda studio, Melbourne, considering various elements of my studio research: my practice is mostly constructed around the use of artificial flowers and resins to create visual metaphors for nature. (figure 3.1)) Or I paint geometric, abstract surfaces that have decorative qualities. (figure 3.2) The resin produces a sparkling, light surface that I associate with water and the tropical light that I see in Bali. I often engage vivid colour in connection to flowers, and in painted studio work, as in, for example, *The Outsider* public art project in which bricks are painted in lolly, effeminate colours around the Telstra exchange at St. Kilda in Melbourne. I think that flowers, decorativeness and lolly colours in my practice are associated with prettiness, a type of beauty. If I were to throw all these attributes up in the air, (metaphorically speaking), how might they land in the studio? The possibility is remarkably similar to other professional artists' studio production.

**Figure 3.1 Mary Lou Pavlovic. Detail: *Rosebud*. 2011. Resin, artificial flowers, wood, paint, light. Variable dimensions. Source: The artist.**

**Figure 3.2 Mary Lou Pavlovic. *The Outsider*. 2011–2014. Acrylic house paint on the Telstra Exchange at 62 Inkerman Street, St Kilda, Melbourne. Variable dimensions. Source: The artist.**

In my exegetical research I have been motivated to investigate other contemporary artists' studio research that is engaged with the subject of beauty. For discussion in this chapter, I have selected artists whose work that I find beautiful. In all cases I am also drawn to their studio works because they use materials and ideas that resonate with my own practice. They may refer to nature, engage vivid colour, pretty decoration, shimmering surfaces, or are preoccupied with light. What is fascinating about each of the artists' practices is that the issue of beauty is identified either by the artists or other cultural thinkers as important. I argue that, furthermore, by invoking beauty, these artists stimulate debate about beauty in the field of contemporary art. That is, beauty is engaged in the field in a provocative manner, as opposed to being considered conservative or nostalgic, which is a dominant view in the current academic context.[164] I think that in all cases that will be discussed, the artists seek to engage primarily with pleasurable

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[164] See: Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. Kindle Edition. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. 2005: p.9. Also: Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction*. Brisbane: Editions 3. 2011: p.36. Throughout their respective books, both authors repeatedly draw attention to the dominance of anti-aesthetic theory in contemporary art and that anti-aesthetic theory is hostile towards beauty.

sensory experience, which I argue proceeds to serious thought about beauty's provocative capacity in art today. The subjective desire for beauty leads to studio production that can also be examined in terms of beauty's agency.

How do the artists that I have selected invoke beauty provocatively in the field of contemporary art? What do the artists have to say, if anything, about this subject? How is my studio work, which I argue is about beauty and may be positioned provocatively in the field, positioned against these artists' practices? Where are the similarities of approach and where are we different? Demonstrating that contemporary artists invoke beauty and that this may be viewed progressively surely lends support to the central aim of this exegesis: that beauty can be invoked in art and be aligned with provocative thought. The greater part of this chapter will focus on the work of British artist Kate Bright because I think that an analysis of Bright's studio work may provide insight into my own studio production, and its surrounding issues of kitsch materials, nature and beauty. In Bright's nature paintings, she adds glitter, making them sparkle brightly.[165] Like my practice, hers is concerned with producing metaphors for nature, often alluding to shimmering water or ice. Bright also engages elements of kitsch (Bright uses glitter, I use artificial flowers) to create non-kitsch works of art.[166] A brief discussion will also be

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[165] See Kate Bright's website. Accessed January 17, 2014. URL: http://www.katebright.net

[166] See Whitney Rugg. 'Kitsch'. *Keywords Glossary.* Chicago: University of Chicago, Media Studies, Art History. 2002. Accessed January 21, 2014.
URL: http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/kitsch.htm Rugg defines kitsch in the following manner:

> Whether loved or reviled, indulged or condemned, kitsch indexes mass-cultural values in a given era while simultaneously exposing the relationship between the masses and the forces controlling production. 'Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same,' Greenberg declared, suggesting that, while the forms and contents of kitsch may shift over time, the nature of kitsch in relation to culture at large is invariable.

Rugg refers to: Clement Greenberg. 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch.' *Partisan Review*. 6. 1939: p.34 –49: p.41.

undertaken on the practices of the American artist Alex Katz who also paints images of nature.[167]

**Kate Bright: diagrams of aesthetic otherness and debunking the heroic sublime**

What comprises Kate Bright's studio production? She most often creates large paintings of nature: seascapes, ponds, snowy mountains and frosted woods.[168] (figures 3.3, 3.4, 3.5)[169] Bright derives these paintings from photographs of landscapes.[170] A distortion of the original landscapes, then, resulting from the technological processes of photography, is already inherent in her reference materials. Bright may take the photographs herself or appropriate them from elsewhere; whether her source material is her own work or not is unimportant to her. Additionally, she further distances her art from faithful attempts to observe and depict an original landscape, via her painting technique. She paints stylised, flat looking images; sometimes these are only tonal in black, white and grey.

The British curator Stephen Hepworth remarks, and I agree, that some of Bright's paintings are akin to advertising images.[171] After rendering her flattened landscapes in paint, Bright often covers snow and water in banks of glitter. This causes her paintings to glisten and sparkle approximating sunlight hitting natural objects. As a friend, fellow student and colleague of the

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[167] See Alex Katz's website: Accessed February 22, 2014. URL: http://www.alexkatz.com Please refer also to footnote 228 in this chapter about the practice of German artist, Peter Zimmermann, who creates abstract wall works with brightly coloured resins. There is insufficient space in this chapter in which to explore his practice.

[168] See Kate Bright's website. Accessed February 15, 2014. URL: http://www.katebright.net

[169] Kate Bright. *Glen*. 2002. Acrylic paint and glitter on canvas. 6ft x 4ft. Source: Kate Bright. Kate Bright. *By Here*. 2011. Acrylic paint and glitter on canvas. 7ft x 5ft. Accessed February 19, 2014. URL: http://www.katebright.net/paintings/winter
Kate Bright. *North Sea.* 1999. Acrylic paint and glitter on canvas. 5ft x 8ft. Accessed February 19, 2014. URL: http://www.katebright.net/paintings/ocean

[170] Stephen Hepworth. 'But then I'm a Girl … and I Make Work with Glitter.' *Bright.* Walsall: Walsall Art Gallery. 2003. p.2–12. All facts about Kate Bright's practice have been taken from this essay, in which the author refers to an interview with Kate Bright.

[171] Ibid. p.2.

artist, I often encounter her studio production.[172] I am impressed by the skill that Bright deploys in handling her subject—the glitter, for example, never looks crusty. The glitter in her paintings sparkles, lighting up and then receding at different angles, as sunlight may as one moves through a landscape. I experience a sense of joy at the beauty of her glimmering, snowy, watery worlds.

**Figure 3.3 Kate Bright. *Glen*. 2002. Acrylic paint and glitter on canvas. 6ft x 4ft. Source: Kate Bright.**

[172] I met Kate Bright on the MA in Fine Art that we undertook between 1994 and 1996 at Goldsmiths College, University of London. We have remained friends and colleagues since, often discussing our practices.

**Figure 3.4 Kate Bright. *By Here*. 2011. Acrylic paint and glitter on canvas. 7ft x 5ft. Accessed February 19, 2014. URL: http://www.katebright.net/paintings/winter**

**Figure 3.5 Kate Bright. *North Sea.* 1999. Acrylic paint and glitter on canvas. 5ft x 8ft. Accessed February 19, 2014. URL: http://www.katebright.net/paintings/ocean**

That Bright is working with subject matter that relates to beauty hardly needs any qualification. Firstly, Kate Bright works with images, (most specifically, oceans and mountains,) which are philosophically associated with the sublime. This is a dimension of beauty, theorised, for example, by German philosopher Immanuel Kant in 1790, in *The Critique*

*of Judgement*.[173] The sublime in nature is associated with scenes of infiniteness, for example, starry nights, oceans, or mountains. Witnessing these vast stretches of natural beauty, the viewer may feel an inability to fully comprehend what he/she is viewing, and this gives way to a sense of awe or wonder.[174] The subject of the sublime is a significant theme for art after Kant develops his philosophical enquiry into the sublime, and this continues to the present day.[175] Secondly, Kate Bright acknowledges her interest in beauty, saying that her practice is about the 'impossible notion of possessing the sublime.'[176] It appears that, for her, through her painting, she subjectively defines the sublime, and like many other artists, fails to clearly objectify this condition because of its expansive condition.

In seeming contrast to her working methods, that distance themselves from simply duplicating an original landscape, Bright assures us that she is keen to communicate something of the beauty of her original encounter with nature.[177] She says of her work process, that from the moment she sees some glitter in a shop, the glitter is 'screaming to be sunshine in my hand.'[178]

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[173] See Immanuel Kant. James Creed Meredith (trans.) *Critique of Judgement (1790)*. Oxford: Clarendon: 1952.

[174] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. 2005: p.56. Prettejohn remarks that it is Kantian theorising of the sublime that locates the sublime in the viewer's reaction to it, rather than as a thing in the world.

[175] Ibid. See: 'Winckelmann and Kant.' p.15–63. Prettejohn refers throughout to the significant impact that Kant's theorisation of the sublime has on art to the present day. She refers specifically to: Caspar David Friedrich. *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*. 1818. Oil on canvas. 98.4cm x 74.8cm. Kunsthalle Hamburg, Hamburg. Also Tobin Siebers discusses the contemporary French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard's influential theories of the sublime and its relation to contemporary art in: Tobin Siebers. 'Kant and the Politics of Beauty.' *Philosophy and Literature.* Vol.22. 1. 1998. p.31–50: p.37. Siebers refers to: Jean-François Lyotard. 'Acinema.' Andrew Benjamin (ed.) Paisley N. Livingston (trans.) *The Lyotard Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell. 1989.

[176] Stephen Hepworth. 'But then I'm a Girl … and I Make Work with Glitter.' *Bright*. 2003: p.4.

[177] Ibid. p.4.

[178] Ibid. p.4.

And, if she tries to paint the landscape seated in the midst of it, she does not succeed in recreating the thrill of this experience. The glitter assists her to achieve her desire of communicating aspects of the original beauty she sees whilst encountering specific landscapes. Finally, in experimenting with photographs, glitter and paint in the studio in an attempt to create something that she finds beautiful, Bright starts with the desire to create something aesthetically pleasing, a positive sensory experience. I argue that, in this, her work gives way to serious thought and that this is an example of how an artist being preoccupied with creating beauty may lead to an assertion of the provocative capacity of beauty in contemporary art. This will be elaborated on for the rest of this chapter.

Before a more thorough discussion is undertaken on Bright's studio works' relationship to a provocative dimension of beauty, though, I wish to broadly contextualise her practice. I have described what her practice is, but how may it be positioned in the field of contemporary art? Outlining a context for the artist's studio research will further enrich the ensuing discussion of beauty. I think that Kate Bright's practice stands in contrast to more traditional representational landscape genres, where the intention may be to increase skill in directly observing and depicting nature. The most obvious example is *en plein air* (in plain air, outdoor) landscape painting.[179] Hepworth notes that traditional landscape painting such as this is relegated to amateurism in contemporary art.[180]

I think that this may be because traditional landscape painting is deemed either sentimental (there is no critical aspect) or merely as an exercise in increasing technical skill. Additionally, some gender ideology discourses argue that many traditional landscape paintings, such as those

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[179] John A Parks. 'Plein Air Pioneers: Oil Sketches from the Thaw Collection: a New Exhibition at the Morgan Library and Museum Reveals that the Pleasure of Oil Painting En Plein Air Started More than Two Centuries Ago. (Studying Nature: Oil Sketches from the Thaw Collection.)' *American Artist.* Volume 73. 797. April 2009: p.22. Parks states that the intention of *en plein air* painting is to increase skill in observing and depicting nature.

[180] Stephen Hepworth. 'But then I'm a Girl … and I Make Work with Glitter.' *Bright*. 2003: p.2.

that show a confrontation with dangerous nature are a 'battle for phallic integrity,'[181] depicting the heroic man in his conquest of nature.[182] In contrast, Bright's strategies of working from photographic landscapes, stylising them and adding glitter, allows us to say that her 'natural' world begins to be brought to life in the 'artificial' world of the studio, where her imagination plays a significant role. There is a conscious effort to create something more than a straightforward reproduction of nature.

By employing glitter to stand in for sunlight, the artist satisfies her desire to approximate the beauty of sunlight, creating a metaphor for sunlight. In adhering glitter to the painted landscape background, however, I think that a relationship is also immediately set up between the high art of Western traditions of landscape painting and the more decorative, kitsch nature of glitter, that heralds from the domain of popular culture. Glitter is associated, for example, with carnival costumes or kindergarten craft exercises. This high art/low art relationship plays out on the surface of Bright's paintings. I argue that in setting up this dialogue between traditional landscape painting and aspects of kitsch, Bright's practice is self-reflexive: her studio research could be viewed as being *about* landscape painting, over *simply* landscape painting. Because glitter, associated with kitsch, is such an uncomfortable companion to the traditional landscape genre, I think that the glitter makes it more obvious that the landscape painting is a high art Western painting tradition, and the studio research becomes overtly about this subject. In a personal conversation, Bright acknowledges that the surface of her work, where glitter subverts traditional landscape painting, may be a reading of her practice.[183]

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[181] Terry Eagleton. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1990: p.54.

[182] Rebecca Solnit. *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics.* Berkeley: University of California. 2007: especially p.35–40. See also: Virginia MacKenny. 'Landscape Painting.' *Art South Africa*. 2005. Accessed March 21, 2014.
URL: http://www.westerncape.gov.za/text/2005/11/ja_05_the_arts.pdf This article discusses the studio research of Lola Frost and Catherine Nash, artists who are engaged in subverting the naturalness of the masculine heroic in landscape painting.

[183] Kate Bright. In email conversation with the author. September 12, 2013.

Therefore, I argue that Kate Bright's studio research serves to counter non-reflexive traditional landscape painting traditions. I also define her practice as autonomous in the sense that the German philosopher Theodor Adorno (1903–1969) conceives of autonomy, as social mimesis.[184] Bright refers to recognisable scenes of the world around her, but I think that her paintings can only be read as fine art, there is something about her practice that is not fully integrated with the world around it. How then can Kate Bright's studio work be associated with a provocative dimension of beauty? I argue that, in Kate Bright's practice *not* being *only* a technical duplication on canvas of natural beauty, her studio research asserts a provocative dimension of beauty. Furthermore, that it is in the surfaces of her paintings, where we experience an example of provocative beauty.

Bright achieves this provocative beauty in two ways. Firstly, there is an incongruous dimension in her practice that exceeds interpretation, if we consider that the different language of decorative, kitsch glitter, more often to be found in the primary school classroom at craft

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[184] Theodor W. Adorno. Robert Hullot-Kentor (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1998: p.17. For Adorno social mimesis is autonomous art's radical political agency. Adorno argues that 'only by immersing its autonomy in society's *imagerie* can art surmount the heteronomous market. (Autonomous) Art is modern art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated.' In Adorno's views, art and society are intertwined. British philosopher, Andy Hamilton notes that autonomy in art is normally taken to mean something different to Adorno's utilisation of the concept: that art is separate from the social, for example, religion, morality or politics. See: Andy Hamilton. *Adorno and the Autonomy of Art*. 2007. Accessed January 19, 2014.
URL: http://www.andyhamilton.org.uk/andy_pdfs/Adorno_and_the_autonomy_of_art.pdf

In my research, I have discovered that the term autonomous art is still referred to, and seen as a valid term in the current academic context. What appears to be important in two contemporary academic's ideas is that the concept of autonomy in art is acknowledged as a social construction. Through the illusion of autonomous art, art may act as a critique of all that is not art. See: Claire Bishop. 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.' *October*. Fall. No.110. 2004: p.51–79. And: Jacques Rancière. Steve Corcoran (ed.) *Dissensus Aesthetics and Politics*. Kindle Edition. London: Continuum. 2010.

time, is juxtaposed with the language of high Western painting. In the painting *Glen,* 2002, for example, decorative, frivolous glitter that reads as snow wells up over flatly painted grey mountains—I think that the austere mountains are a worthy subject for Western painting depicting the serious Kantian sublime.[185] In deciphering Bright's studio work, these constituent parts, glitter and Western traditional landscape painting, can never totally fuse, allowing for a seamless reading of her practice.

Adorno names this incongruous play of elements in an autonomous work of art *tension*[186] and he relates this incongruity in autonomous art to what he characterises as the incongruity of natural beauty.[187] (Adorno examines beauty's agency, what beauty does as opposed to defining what beauty is.[188] He believes that natural beauty is socially constructed but also authoritatively valid.[189] That Adorno does not fetishise beauty is important to outline at this point in the discussion in order to lay the ground for future argument in this chapter. Also, to demonstrate the extent of Adorno's critical thinking about nature as a social construct, in Chapter Five of this exegesis, 'Floating Flora, Death and Lolly Colours—Provocative Beauty in My Practice', I will discuss how Adorno argues that the promise of natural beauty, its immanence, does not appear in nature, but as natural beauty is artificial, socially constructed, it

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[185] Kate Bright. *Glen*. 2002.

[186] Theodor W. Adorno. 'On the Concept of the Beautiful//1970.' Dave Beech (ed.) *Beauty.* London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Art Gallery, MIT Press. 2009. p.78–81: p.80 –81.

[187] Theodor W. Adorno. C. Lenhardt (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory*. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1984: especially p. 99–105.

[188] Theodor W. Adorno. 'On the Concept of the Beautiful//1970.' Dave Beech (ed.) *Beauty.* 2009. p.78–81: p.78. Adorno emphasises that it is not possible to define what beauty is but it is impossible to live without beauty. His approach in conceptualising beauty is to explore beauty's agency, what beauty does, as opposed to describing what passes for beauty in different historical periods. He is interested, rather, in the dynamic life inherent in the concept of beauty.

[189] An expanded account of Adorno's enquiry into the social construction of nature is beyond the scope of this exegesis. For further reading please see: Deborah Cook. *Adorno on Nature.* Oxford: Acumen. 2011.

appears only in the work of art.) Adorno also believes that *tension* in autonomous art (autonomous art being a model of the beautiful) such as Bright's has a political dimension.

Adorno theorises that *tension*, which I argue is demonstrated in Bright's paintings, results in the viewer being confronted with the aesthetic otherness of the beautiful. Otherness is conceived of in this argument as a sense of the subject perceiving the object as alien. Furthermore, Adorno presents the otherness of a particular type of art—art that exceeds the mere duplication of reality—as the remedy for commodification.[190] The second way that

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[190] Theodor W. Adorno. C. Lenhardt (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory*.1984: p.99–103. Adorno argues that autonomous art is the remedy for commodification. How could we think of Bright's paintings—which are so readily saleable— as a remedy for commodification? In 2007, the British cultural theorist, Martin Stewart, enquires into a key concept Adorno utilises in establishing his theories—the *absolute commodity*, and its relevance in art today. See: Stewart Martin. 'The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity'. *Radical Philosophy.*146. November/December. 2007: p.15–25. Throughout, Martin refers to: Theodor W. Adorno. Robert Hullot-Kentor (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1998. In the following paragraphs, Adorno refers to: Karl Marx. *Das Kapital*. Vol 1, Vol. 23 *Werke*. Berlin: Karl Dietz. 1962.

In his article, Stewart Martin reminds us that far from fetishising (concealing its social determination) the concept of autonomous art, Adorno argues that autonomous art does not alternate from the commodity; autonomous art is produced, (since its secularisation away from the church,) by commodification. Furthermore, autonomous art is not rendered obsolete through commodification, but is a refusal of commodification by a subversive mimesis of it. On page seventeen of *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno states that 'only by immersing its autonomy in society's *imagerie* can art surmount the heteronomous market. Art is modern art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated.' Stewart also reminds us that Adorno argues that, similar to the concepts of autonomous art and the naturally beautiful, the commodity is also fetishised. All three concepts conceal their social determination. Adorno refers to the German philosopher Karl Marx, who argues that the idea commodities relinquish all their properties to exchange value, however, is a lie. Marx says that if the commodity loses its use value it loses its exchange value. Ultimately use value is exchanged in the exchange of commodities.

Bright's practice provocatively situates beauty in contemporary art is, if Bright's practice is considered in another light, her use of pretty, decorative, frivolous glitter acts as a feminist challenge, posed to the more 'serious' masculine heroics bound up with traditional landscape painting that I have mentioned earlier in this chapter. Bright may not succeed in objectifying the sublime, as is her stated desire, but she successfully asserts the power of the decoratively pretty to subvert the authority of the sublime's association with masculine heroics. These ideas will be investigated in the following discussion.

What then comprises an expanded argument for Bright's paintings to be considered an example of the aesthetic otherness of the beautiful in relation to art? As outlined above, Bright's paintings are more than just technical renderings of landscapes. In Adorno's, *Aesthetic Theory,* first published posthumously in 1970, he notes that contemporary fine art obeys a strict taboo against the duplication of beauty in nature.[191] Adorno argues that if one sincerely attempts to emulate a sunset on canvas, for example, even the most unsophisticated viewers will

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Adorno argues that art's social function is its functionlessness, by mimesis of 'the hardened and the alienated'. Adorno argues that this functionlessness cannot be consumed by exchange value in the configuration of the commodity. Rather, the autonomous art form best reveals contradictions in the commodity form. Stewart believes that contemporary interest in the social dimensions of art does not diminish autonomous practices' power. Instead, contemporary forms of autonomous art are located in new scenes of the social. On page seventeen of his article Stewart argues that:

> If art's autonomy is a produced, and reproduced contradiction of developed capitalist culture, then it remains a vital form through which this culture can be resisted and criticised. And in times and places where commodification has become a pervasive form of social life, such an immanent critique is essential.

Bright's studio work, as autonomous practice then, if considered in the above light, may be a remedy for commodification.

[191] Theodor W. Adorno. C. Lenhardt (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory.* 1984: p.99.

label the results as kitsch. Adorno theorises kitsch as heteronomous art, which is art that is compromised by commercial influences.[192]

Instead of faithfully duplicating landscapes and them being dubbed kitsch, (it is notable that Bright says that she cannot communicate the beauty of sunlight by copying it directly,) Bright brings kitsch material to her landscape paintings, in juxtaposition. Glitter, as already partially stated earlier in this chapter, is commonly associated with events such as children's craft activities, greetings cards, nail-polish art, or fancy-dress costumes—heteronomous art forms. Bright transforms the kitsch associations of glitter, making glitter part of an artwork that is neither fully comprehensible, (because the constituent parts do not totally fuse,) nor fully integrated with the world around it, (because her paintings are autonomous art, they cannot be read as anything else except art.)

Beautiful autonomous art, according to Adorno, operates in the same way as when we encounter something beautiful in nature; it seems beyond our capability to fully comprehend natural beauty.[193] With regards to nature, Adorno argues that there is no other way except in terms of otherness, to understand our aesthetic predisposition towards natural beauty, natural beauty is authoritatively valid.[194] Natural beauty embodies otherness for Adorno, firstly because in addition to our attraction to it, the naturally beautiful also embodies a threat. He reminds us, Eurocentrically, that 'no sensitive person of European background' remains unmoved by the song of a robin after the rain, but there is also something 'frightening lurking in the song of birds.'[195] Birds are the messengers, for example, of ill fortune, divination or death. Secondly, Adorno argues that our aesthetic preference for natural beauty demonstrates a 'non-identity' between subject and object. Adorno argues that, as well as our attraction to nature we

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[192] Theodor W. Adorno. 'On Popular Music'. *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science.* 9. 1941: p.17–48. This is an article that examines Adorno's theories of kitsch.

[193] Theodor W. Adorno. C. Lenhardt (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory.* 1984: p.99.

[194] My paragraph also refers to Tobin Siebers' discussion of Adorno's theories of otherness and the naturally beautiful in: Tobin Siebers. 'Kant and the Politics of Beauty.' *Philosophy and Literature*. 1998: p.37–39.

[195] Theodor W. Adorno. C. Lenhardt (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory.* 1984: p.98.

see natural beauty as a problem requiring resolution.[196] It is impossible to fully comprehend that which we designate as the beauty of nature, Adorno argues that the experience of natural beauty is not seamless or smooth, but rather it is other.

The otherness of autonomous art is linked to the otherness of the naturally beautiful argues Adorno.[197] Adorno believes that reproductions of nature reveal the marks of capitalism: increasingly, our first view of nature (original) in which we may experience nature's otherness is mediated by our second view, (social) where we might, for example, view nature through a reproduction of it. Therefore our view of nature is increasingly commodified. Only autonomous fine art returns us to the unmediated vision of natural beauty, its otherness. Adorno argues that this is because autonomous art is not constrained by the forces that govern modern subjectivity.[198] For Adorno, if fine art is in excess of realist reproduction then fine art is the remedy for commodification. Condemning art that *only* duplicates reality, even for seeming political benefit, he remarks that 'it is better to have no art at all than an art of social realism.'[199]

I think that Kate Bright's studio work is a contemporary example of the Adornian model of the beautiful otherness of autonomous art, and its associated arguments in relation to natural beauty. It might be said that, if we follow Adorno's arguments, that perhaps all autonomous art reflects the otherness of natural beauty. I argue, however, that Bright's practice is not only

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[196] Ibid. p.104–105.

[197] Unless otherwise stated, all facts in this paragraph refer to: Theodor W. Adorno. C. Lenhardt (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory.* 1984.

[198] See: Andrew Fagan. 'Adorno, Theodor (1903–1969).' Bradley Dowden (ed.) James Fieser (ed.) *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy A Peer Reviewed Academic Resource.* Accessed November 20, 2014. URL: http://www.iep.utm.edu/eds/adorno Adorno believes that human beings in modern societies are subsumed and governed by highly restrictive social, economic and political forces. He believes that these restrictive forces extend to culture, mass entertainment, language, family, and education, and that the individual has no chance of becoming free and able to take part in the creation of society.

[199] Theodor W. Adorno. 'On the Concept of the Beautiful//1970.' Dave Beech. (ed.) *Beauty.* 2009: p.78–81: 81.

autonomous in Adorno's sense of autonomy in art as social mimesis, but additionally, her practice acts as a diagram of how autonomous art reflects Adorno's otherness of natural beauty. Bright's paintings literally transform kitsch, (non-other) heteronomous material that is governed by the forces of modern subjectivity, into paintings that directly reflect the otherness of natural beauty. Her practice establishes overt visual links between heteronomous art, autonomous art and natural beauty. In this way, her paintings demonstrate how beauty may be positioned provocatively in the field of contemporary practice today.

I think that two further points require elaboration in this discussion. The first is how is Adorno's aesthetic otherness expanded upon, and how is it valuable? The American cultural theorist, Tobin Siebers, provides a helpful summary of the relevance of Adorno's theories of beautiful otherness. He says that the otherness of natural beauty and autonomous art is aesthetic otherness experienced as the embodied difference of beauty.[200] Beauty's otherness is realised on a small, human scale. For Siebers, what is valuable about Adorno's theories are that the viewer must confront otherness in the world amongst us, as opposed to, for example, in the world of thought. (Siebers refers to the French philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard's characterisation of the otherness of the sublime as taking place wholly in the mind of the subject.)[201] I am in agreement with Siebers. Bright's practice, although often referring to the sublime, does not theorise the otherness of the sublime. We are instead forced to confront the physical aspects of painting juxtaposed with glitter. In the resulting incongruity of the juxtaposed elements, we are left with images that exceed our interpretation. We must acknowledge their difference and our inability to know all there is about all aspects of art.

The second issue that requires further discussion, is how do Adorno's theories of the otherness of autonomous art remain relevant today, given that in our current cultural and academic context, the concept of otherness is complex, conceptualised differently by various scholars and is regarded by some as problematic. It is argued by some academics, for example, that Otherness spelt with a capital O, is conceptually a mystification that reduces Otherness to a

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[200] Tobin Siebers. 'Kant and the Politics of Beauty.' *Philosophy and Literature*. 1998: p.37–44.

[201] Ibid. p.37. Siebers refers to: Jean-François Lyotard. 'Acinema.' Andrew Benjamin (ed.) Paisley N. Livingston (trans.) *The Lyotard Reader*. 1989.

fetishisation by a hegemonic subject.[202] This is damaging, for example, when utilising the term Other in relation to people of different races to oneself,[203] or in binary opposition, say, of woman as Other to man, because engaging the term Other in this context fetishises and exoticises human beings.[204]

Other scholars, however, concerned with accounting for the subject's perceived feeling of alterity that he/she may encounter in experiencing the world external to him/her, or indeed within his/her own identity, embrace otherness. The French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, for example, theorises decentred otherness.[205] In 2002, with regards to the Visual Arts, the American Professor of Philosophy at Georgia University, James J. Winchester, reminds us that the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, (1930–2004) who is associated with the post-modern term *deconstruction*, is very clear that artworks cannot be interpreted completely.[206] Derrida argues that there will always be some remainder: artworks will always exceed our attempts to frame them, because artworks open up new worlds, making it impossible for anyone to have complete mastery over them.

Both Derrida and Adorno argue that artworks may reference reality, but in the end they are different to reality, they are artworks. Both philosophers argue that the concept of alterity is never pure as it is a social construction. Winchester argues that Adorno's theories of the otherness of autonomous art remain relevant today because Adorno insists that the enigma of

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[202] See, for example, Edward Said. *Orientalism.* London: Penguin. 1978. Throughout Said refers to this conceptualisation of Otherness. See especially. p.202.

[203] Ibid. p.202.

[204] See Tamise Van Pelt. *Otherness.* Idaho: Idaho State University. 2000. Idaho State University. 2000. Accessed November 13, 2014.
URL: http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.100/10.2vanpelt.txt

[205] Jacques Lacan. *Ècrits*. Paris: Editions du Seuil. 1966.

[206] James J. Winchester. *Aesthetics Across the Color Line: Why Nietzche (Sometimes) Can't Sing the Blues.* Maryland, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield. 2002: p.100. The author refers to: Jacques Derrida. Geoff Bennington (trans.) Ian McCleod (trans.) *The Truth in Painting.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1987. For all facts regarding Derrida and Adorno in this paragraph and the next I have referred to this Winchester publication, especially p.100–102.

autonomous art is not unapproachable or an esoteric realm reserved for the initiated.[207] Rather, Adorno argues that the enigma of autonomous art necessarily demands explanation with thought. I think that Bright's paintings are enigmatic, and picture the whole enigmatic relationship between natural beauty, autonomous art and kitsch materials. In this way I argue that Bright's practice, by virtue of its otherness, places beauty in a provocative context today.

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[207] A further analysis of the relevance of Adorno's theories today is outside the scope of this PhD. I think it is important to mention, however, because Adorno theorises modernist art, that scholar Lambert Zuidervaart, writing for *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* has drawn attention to the current interest in Adorno's philosophical enquiry into aesthetics and its relevance to current academic contexts. Zuidervaart says that the renewed interest in Adorno is partly due to more sophisticated translations of philosophical works being available since the 1990s. See: Lambert Zuidervaart. 'Theodor W. Adorno'. Edward N Zalta. (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* California: Stanford University. Winter. 2011. Accessed November 17, 2014. URL: http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/adorno/

Amongst the art theorists, philosophers and cultural theorists that I have discovered in my research who argue for the relevance of Adorno's theories of autonomous art today are:
Geoffrey Boucher. *Adorno Reframed: Interpreting Key Thinkers for the Arts.* London: IB Tauris. 2013.
Andy Hamilton. *Adorno and the Autonomy of Art*. 2007. Accessed January 19, 2014. URL:http://www.andyhamilton.org.uk/andy_pdfs/Adorno_and_the_autonomy_of_art.pdf
Peter Uwe Hoendahl. *The Fleeting Promise of Art: Adorno's Aesthetic Theory Revisited.* New York: Cornell University Press. 2013.
Stewart Martin. 'The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity'. *Radical Philosophy.* 146. November/December. 2007.
Sebastian Truskolaski. 'Images Without Images. Adorno on Natural Beauty.' *Mute.* February13, 2013. Accessed January 19, 2014.
URL: http://www.metamute.org/community/your-posts/images-without-images-–-adorno-natural-beauty.

To view Bright's practice another way, the issue remains that she often 'prettifies' austere images of the sublime by decorating them with glitter, related to craft practices. Hepworth notes 'that the two (Western landscape and glitter) have different languages, painting and applied decoration sit uncomfortably next to each other.'[208] On the subject of Bright's landscapes he says that:

> The use of glitter within art has always carried associations of camp or kitsch, specifically when used by male artists, where issues of gender, sexuality and difference tended to be to the fore. Practices and material use have become less dogmatic, although the suspicion of a girlie cuteness remains in the absence of a masculine heroic.[209]

The artist herself, however, also acknowledges the issue of gender in her practice, playfully relating gender to craft in an interview for Hepworth's 2003 catalogue essay, saying, 'but then I'm a girl, my surname's Bright, and I make work with glitter.'[210] I argue that contemporary artists' more liberal use of craft, decoration and materials is substantially indebted to feminism. In the 1960s, the German artist Eva Hesse (1936–1970) comments on the notion that the use of craft in art is generally coded as feminine, and aligned with the decorative. She says that craft is a cardinal 'art sin,' and one that female artists are chronically, reflexively charged with committing in art.[211] Additionally, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, Bright's other primary reference, traditional sublime landscape painting, is critiqued by feminist discourse. South African artist and curator, Virginia Mackenny, in an article including a discussion of South African women landscape artists, comments that they are either interested in the sublime landscape as the terrain of persistent patriarchal assault, (as in the practice of Lola Frost), or are engaged in subverting the natural-ness of the masculine heroic, (as in the practice of Catherine Nash.) [212]

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[208] Stephen Hepworth. 'But then I'm a Girl, … and I Make Work with Glitter.' *Bright*. 2003: p.3.

[209] Ibid. p.3.

[210] Ibid. p.1.

[211] Eva Hesse, quoted in Cindy Nemser. *Art Talk: Conversations with Twelve Women Artists*. New York: Scribner's. 1975: p.217.

[212] Virginia MacKenny. 'Landscape Painting.' *Art South Africa*. 2005. Accessed March 21, 2014. URL: http://www.westerncape.gov.za/text/2005/11/ja_05_the_arts.pdf

In response to Hepworth's observation that Bright's studio work, *Panorama,* 2003, a twenty-meter painted, glittery, snowy mountain panorama takes up the entire gallery and is more reminiscent of family holiday snapshots sellotaped together, Bright says that she has 'no desire to be heroic, I would feel stupid, it's not about size.'[213] I argue that, in some of her paintings, Bright usurps the masculine authority of traditional landscape painting by decoratively applying pretty, effeminate glitter to images of those heroic sublime scenes, for example, as in *Glen*, 2002, an icy austere mountain scene, or in *The North Sea*, 1999, a smaller part of a vast ocean.[214]

I am interested in the similarities between Bright's and my own studio research. We both know that it is not possible in critical art practice to present a mere duplication of landscapes that we find beautiful; they will be dubbed kitsch. We both bring kitsch elements to our work, Bright brings glitter, and I bring artificial flowers. We transform the heteronomous nature of our kitsch materials into autonomous art. We choose surfaces that sparkle, how often we both refer to water in all its forms, frozen liquid, vast expanse of oceans and pools. We both start our studio production with a romantic, subjective desire to communicate an idea of beauty that we experience in nature, but in that process our work becomes also about something else—more about how the objects we create function in the field of art provocatively and in critical discourse around the subject of beauty. Bright's practice usurps the authority of the heroic traditional sublime landscape, by employing pretty glitter, associated with the feminine. In my practice, I am not interested in critiquing the sublime directly, I am more interested in the smaller territory of the beautiful, seen perhaps in Bright's, *By Here,* 2012, a scene of snowy, frosted branches covered in glitter.[215]

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[213] Stephen Hepworth. 'But then I'm a Girl … and I Make Work with Glitter.' *Bright*. 2003: p.3. Hepworth refers to: Kate Bright. *Panorama.* 2003. Acrylic paint and glitter on canvas. 180cm x 2033cm.

[214] Kate Bright. *Glen*. 2002. Kate Bright. *North Sea.* 1999.

[215] Kate Bright. *By Here*. 2011.

Is the Adornian reading of the otherness of autonomous art in conflict with the feminist reading of Bright's practice? I think not, as Adorno acknowledges that autonomous art is a complex play between the social and autonomy. Bright's practice does not literally illustrate feminist ideas; I think that feminist concepts are embodied in her autonomous practice. I also believe that contemporary art exists in new scenes of the social, compared to Adorno's 1960s context, and that it is possible to produce autonomous art with social texts in these new scenes. I believe that Bright's practice is functionless at one level, in its otherness, its lack of seamlessness, but simultaneously masculine heroics relating to the sublime are subverted in her practice.

**Alex Katz: knocking them off the wall with a flower**

American painter Alex Katz describes his work as optimistic[216] and also as a search for beauty.[217] His paintings of nature are characterised by stylised, flat images suffused with light, influenced by advertising and the bright light of film.[218] (figures 3.6, 3.7)[219] A Tate Modern Museum online caption says that Katz's work is now regarded as a precursor to Pop Art.[220] In an interview in 2013 with British artist and art critic, Matthew Collings, Katz states that he is predominantly interested in capturing the light that he sees in the world, and that this is a way

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[216] Vincent Dowd. 'Alex Katz: The Art of Optimism.' *BBC News Entertainment & Arts.* October 9, 2012. Accessed February 21, 2014.
URL: http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-19874745.

[217] Alex Katz, David Sylvester. 'Alex Katz Interview with David Sylvester//1997.' Dave Beech (ed.) *Beauty*. 2009: p.196.

[218] See Alex Katz's website: Accessed February 22, 2014. URL: http://www.alexkatz.com

[219] Alex Katz. *Wildflowers*. 2010. Oil on canvas. Courtesy Gavin Brown Gallery, New York. Accessed February 25, 2014. URL: http://purple.fr/diary/entry/alez-katz-at-gavin-brown-s-enterprise
Alex Katz. *Forest.* 1992. Aquatint. Accessed February 25, 2014. Accessed February 25, 2014. URL: http://art.state.gov/artistdetail.aspx?id=100124.

[220] 'Online Caption'. *Tate.* Accessed November 20, 2014.
URL: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/katz-grey-marine-ar00016 The caption refers to: Alex Katz. *Grey Marine*. 2000. Oil paint on hardboard. 24.9mm x 325mm x 34mm. National Galleries of Scotland, Scotland.

of bringing his practice into the present.[221] He says that when he tries to paint *en plein air* his paintings look old fashioned. So, instead, his paintings more often originate from sketches that he undertakes *en plein air*. Then, planned in advance, the paintings are executed from sketches in the studio.

Katz says that the way he captures light must be a 'now version of light.' As a painter his work must look contemporary. I empathise with Katz; I select the glassy resin that I employ for my floral resin sculptures because it looks like a contemporary material. I also think that it is a way of bringing my studio research, also concerned with beauty, into the present. I think that Katz's practice, because he mediates the landscape he physically encounters through stylised, flat images created in the studio, contrasts with traditional landscape painting concerned with duplicating the landscape. Because of his studio methodologies, I think that his practice is taken seriously within the parameters of contemporary art and not relegated to amateurism that Hepworth describes earlier in this chapter as being associated with traditional landscape painting.

**Figure 3.6 Alex Katz. *Wildflowers*. 2010. Oil on canvas. Courtesy Gavin Brown's Enterprises, New York. Accessed February 25, 2014. URL: http://purple.fr/diary/entry/alez-katz-at-gavin-brown-s-enterprise**

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[221] Mark Castro, Max Philo. *Artist Alex Katz in Conversation with Matthew Collings at Turner Contemporary, on the Occasion of the Exhibition Alex Katz: Give Me Tomorrow. October 6, 2012 – January 13, 2013.* (Online video.) London: Modus Film Productions. 2013. Accessed February 19, 2014. URL: http://vimeo.com/channels/411190 In this paragraph and the next, all facts about Katz unless otherwise stated are taken from Katz's statements in this interview.

**Figure 3.7 Alex Katz. *Forest.* 1992. Aquatint. Accessed February 25, 2014.**
**URL: http://art.state.gov/artistdetail.aspx?id=100124**

Does Katz consider that he engages with provocative dimensions of beauty in his practice? He claims that he is aggressive about optimism.[222] Referring to his paintings of flowers in the 1960s, for example, Katz says that 'there were all these macho abstract-expressionist paintings; the idea was to knock them off the wall with a flower.'[223] The British art historian, Elizabeth Prettejohn draws attention to the American art critic, Dave Hickey's argument that the only time self-conscious loveliness is invoked in contemporary art is by gay men, and that this is a situation that he finds blatantly sexist (and covertly homophobic).[224] Prettejohn also reminds us that the flower is a long-standing symbol for both beauty and femininity.[225] I argue that Katz, by deliberately engaging flowers that are associated with more feminine enterprises and with beauty, and with envisioning that these flowers will 'knock' what he considers more macho practices off the wall, that he engages beauty in a provocative manner. Katz subverts masculine

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[222] Ibid. See also: Diane Page. 'Thinking about Running and Painting.' *The Wondering Artist*. December 13. 2013. Accessed November 21, 2014.
URL: http://dianapage.wordpress.com/2012/12/13/thinking-about-running-and-painting/

[223] Claire Hazelton. 'Interview with Alex Katz.' *Aesthetica Blog*. 2012. Accessed November 17, 2014. URL: http://www.aestheticamagazine.com/blog/interview-with-alex-katz/

[224] Dave Hickey, quoted in: Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. 2005: p.194. Prettejohn refers to: *The Invisible Dragon Four Essays on Beauty*. Los Angeles: Art Issues Press. 1993: p.47, 41.

[225] Ibid. p.195.

hierarchies regarding appropriate subject matter for art made by men during the times that he refers to.

Does Katz see his practice as being provocative today? In the 2013 film interview with Collings, Katz and Collings discuss the issue that not much art is currently optimistic and also overtly about the pleasurable subject of beauty.[226] Katz says that he has never fit into the conceptual art genre, and is ignored in the 1980s when the New York art world favours aspects of art that he does not identify with, for example deconstructionist practice. Katz says that he remains aggressive about optimism and beauty, and Katz and Collings discuss that his work provokes discussion as to why these attributes are not greatly valued in contemporary art.

Although the conversation is general, as contemporary art embodies diverse ranges of practice, that may or may not engage beauty, dominant theories in contemporary art reject beauty, for example, influential anti-aesthetic theory.[227] I think that Katz's practice, like all art practice, forms a dialogue with other practices. In his desire to be aggressive about optimism and beauty in his practice, and his public statements to this effect, I argue that Katz's practice provokes discussion as to why beauty is not valued in dominant theories of contemporary art. I think that Katz's practice is non-conservative; he is not a realistic landscape painter championing the values of truth to nature that may be viewed as kitsch. His flat, stylised painting is non-heroic or expressive, it references popular culture as much as nature in its relationship to film and bright metropolitan lights. He repeatedly refers to flowers, which are signs for femininity, breaking down gender stereotypes for subject matter in the visual arts. I believe that these aspects of his practice give his verbal statements weight and allow us to associate his ideas with a provocative dimension of beauty.

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[226] Mark Castro, Max Philo. *Artist Alex Katz in Conversation with Matthew Collings at Turner Contemporary, on the Occasion of the Exhibition Alex Katz: Give Me Tomorrow. October 6, 2012 – January 13, 2013.* (Online video.) 2013.

[227] See: Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. 2005: p.9. Also: Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction*. 2011: p.36. Throughout their respective books, both authors repeatedly draw attention to the dominance of anti-aesthetic theory in contemporary art and that anti-aesthetic theory is hostile towards beauty.

This chapter has shown that contemporary artists engage provocatively with the subject of beauty, establishing that there are contemporary precedents for doing so and providing support for my thesis that beauty may be engaged provocatively in the field today. In the next chapter, I will advance from the field to focus on my own studio research, firstly dealing with a major influence on my practice: the cultures and environment of Bali, Indonesia.[228]

[228] In this footnote, I draw attention to the practice of German artist, Peter Zimmermann. This is in order to provide further support for my argument that contemporary artists engage beauty provocatively in the field today, and to investigate artists who engage material processes relevant to my own, outlined in the first paragraph of this chapter. Much of Zimmermann's studio research consists of wall works that are brightly coloured epoxy resins poured onto canvas to create abstract forms. In a 2014 video, talking about his practice, Zimmermann explains that he begins to create his studio production with recognisable images sourced from the Internet. He then obfuscates these images and aestheticises them by pouring brightly coloured resins in layers over the top. (figure 3.8, 3.9) The original Internet image is unimportant; it provides a platform made of shapes and forms over which to pour the coloured resin.

**Figure 3.8 Peter Zimmermann. *District.* 2009. Airbrush and epoxy resin on canvas. 80cm x 60cm. Accessed November 25, 2014. URL: http://siongchin.com/blog/?p=1991**

**Figure 3.9 Peter Zimmermann. Left: *Cipro.* 2006. Epoxy resin on canvas. 80cm x 60cm. Right: *Amaryl.* 2007. Epoxy resin on canvas. 180cm x 130cm. Accessed November 25, 2014. URL: http://siongchin.com/blog/?p=1991**

I experience a sense of pleasure when I view Zimmermann's sumptuous, intensely coloured resin works. I enjoy watching the movement of the colours across his studio works, especially when different coloured resins in overlapping layers create new colours. I find them beautiful. How could we think of Zimmermann's practice as an example of provocative beauty? I think that the writings of British artist Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, who asserts the power of prettiness to challenge the dominance of anti-aesthetic and other related thinking in art, are relevant when thinking about this question.

In a 2011 essay about beauty, Gilbert-Rolfe says that colours, movement and intensity are the hallmarks of beauty, manifested as attractiveness or prettiness; these are agents that artists often turn to in referring to prettiness in their studio research. These attributes of prettiness generally may cause involuntary pleasure when we see them. The experience of prettiness demands that we experience what is in front of us; prettiness does not take us immediately to historical thinking or intellectualisation. Gilbert-Rolfe refers to the way that fashion models are signs of the attractive, and, using an example of the fashion model Christie Turlington in an advertisement, we are invited through the image's composition, to look at Turlington, and not lead away to any serious thoughts about other subjects. We are invited to remain with her attractiveness.

Certainly I think that Zimmermann's *District* 2009, *Cipro,* 2006 and *Amaryl,* 2007, invite us principally to look around these resin works and stay with them, rather than leading us away from them to consider a purely conceptual idea. This is due to the composition of these studio works. The gentle intensity of their luminosity and the shiny resin makes these studio works eye-catching. The bright colours lead us around the image, there is no narrative; there is no negation of any kind that might take us to a predominantly intellectual idea.

When I look at Zimmermann's studio works, because I find them so attractive, my rational thoughts are temporarily suspended and I experience involuntary bodily pleasure. Gilbert-Rolfe says that this process is one that challenges the 'fascism of the idea,' which dominates art history, composed of ideas that control aesthetic experience. He refers, without citation, to French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who deem systems of thought that claim to provide all answers as fascist; ideas cannot be the only component of and reception to

artworks. Gilbert-Rolfe argues that it is hard to provide a proposition for aesthesis, even a complex one. When we are experiencing visual pleasure, we are also forced to deal with our reactions in the present, in bodily space and time. We are returned to our bodies that are complete and know themselves in a continuum of space and time.

He argues that art history is dominated by ideas, which attempt to control uncontrollable experiences, for example, the subject's experience of the conventionally sublime, that is that which overwhelms us. Gilbert-Rolfe believes that the result is that bodily experience of the incomplete, which must be filled in with words to try ands account for it, leads to negation and deferral of sensory experience, and to viewing artworks predominantly in historical time. Gilbert-Rolfe believes experiencing prettiness or attractiveness in art to be important because otherwise, we are stuck with 'predetermined meanings and unable to get at what is in the air.' I think that Gilbert-Rolfe's ideas about attractiveness refer to knowledge that comes from the physical dimensions of a work of art and that have a physical impact on the viewer. Physical experience opens us to a line of questioning that is about sensation and its place in the understanding of art.

I think that Zimmermann's studio works, through their attractiveness, challenge the 'fascism' of the idea, because they return us to the pleasures of the body, which are difficult to explain entirely with ideas. I do not seek to dismiss ideas, Gilbert-Rolfe does not dismiss ideas, but rather, he thinks that it is important in art for ideas to also emanate from the sensory. I am also not arguing that Zimmermann's practice is not engaged with ideas, for example, the idea of abstraction is asserted over figuration. I am interested rather in this study to consider the aesthetic component of his practice. I find that the beauty of his work challenges the authority of ideas as being the sole aspect of what is important in art practice. Some may not find Zimmermann's studio work beautiful, attractive or pretty, but I think that his images are undeniably, through use of bright colour, movement and intensity, and their insistence that we stay with them when we look at them, as opposed to being lead away to academic thoughts that defer physical sensation, about the subject of the attractive. They are signs of the attractive. This in turn opens up a provocative line of questioning emanating from sensory experience to beauty's provocative dimension in art today.

I refer to *Peter Zimmermann*. (Online video.) New York: Galerie Perrotin. 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. URL: https://www.perrotin.com/artiste-Peter_Zimmermann-25.html Jeremy Gilbert Rolfe. 'Attractiveness and the Uncontrollable.' Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction*. 2011: p.13–31. Peter Zimmermann. *District.* 2009. Airbrush and epoxy resin on canvas. 80cm x 60cm. Peter Zimmermann. *Cipro.* 2006. Epoxy resin on canvas. 80cm x 60cm. Peter Zimmermann. *Amaryl.* 2007. Epoxy resin on canvas. 180cm x 130cm. (ed.)

# The practice

Chapter Four

## Water and Flowers in Bali—the Impact of Bali on my Research

Water: the first time I visit the island of Bali, Indonesia in 2008—Ubud—to be more precise, I am dazzled by its beauty and abundance of lush, tropical green foliage, rice fields, and mostly, water. Droplets on cool frangipani leaves. I see thick brown water in beautiful lotus ponds. Water trickling through small canals or along streams at the sides of roads throughout Ubud, which is the artistic centre of Bali. Water, pooling serenely inside water palaces and temples. Water flooding rice fields, sparkling in the sun; water, surrounding the island—in which I enjoy lazy days snorkelling, just hovering over the magical, tropical sea-life.

Flowers: firstly, I notice the Ubud lotus ponds—giant pink and white lotus, with olive green, velvety leaf pads spread out over the surfaces of the brownish pools. But then I see that pretty flowers are also used by Balinese Hindu women in small, identical offerings (*canang sari*) (figure 4.1)[229] to the gods and placed all over the streets of Ubud daily. Signage at the Monkey Forest, Ubud, reveals that water and flowers are sacred in Balinese Hinduism, (*Agama Hindu Dharma*) the religion practiced predominantly on the island.[230] I see that flowers and water are featured in abundance in the ornate, intricate and sometimes fragile architectural structures and landscape architecture in Bali, that, like much of the traditional Balinese Hindu arts, are concerned with creating beauty[231] and dedicated to the gods.[232] (figure 4.2)[233] I am also drawn to architecture and architectural fixtures referring to flowers and water. (figure 4.3)[234]

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[229] Anonymous. *Canang Sari (Small Offering.)* 2012. Bali. Source: Mary Lou Pavlovic.

[230] Monkey Forest, Ubud. Didactic panel accompanying a temple and river. Visited July 6, 2012.

[231] I Made Marajaya. *Tri Hita Karana A Conception in Conducting Balinese Arts.* Denpasar: Institut Seni Indonesia. 2010. Accessed March 9, 2012. URL: http://www.isi-dps.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/Tri-Hita-Karana-A- Conception-In-Conducting-Balinese-Arts.pdf Of creative artworks, Marajaya says that in Balinese Hinduism, the religiously successful creative work should fulfill three elements, which are *satwam* (truth), *siwam* (greatness) and *sundaram* (beauty.)

[232] See: Fred B. Eiseman. 'Good and Evil'. *How Balinese People Express Ideas*. Jimbaran, Bali: 2010: p.211–212. Eiseman says that there are no words for 'art' or 'culture' in the

**Figure 4.1 Anonymous. *Canang Sari (Small Offering.)* 2012. Bali. Source: Mary Lou Pavlovic.**

**Figure 4.2 Dewi Sri Carving Group. Detail: *Pintu. (Door).* 2012. Wood. Detail size: approx 0.30m x 0.40m. ARMA Museum, Ubud. Source: Mary Lou Pavlovic.**

**Figure 4.3 *Karangasem Water Temple, Bali.* Accessed December 11, 2014.**
**URL: http://www.dreamstime.com/royalty-free-stock-photography-water-temple-bali-image24166897**

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Balinese language, the arts in Bali form part of every day life. All creative activities undertaken for Balinese Hinduism are for religion and dedicated to the gods. These include offering production, painting, wood and stone carving, gamelan, Balinese dance and textile production

[233] Dewi Sri Carving Group. Detail: *Pintu* (Door). Wood. Detail size: Approx: 0.3m x 0.4m. ARMA Museum, Ubud. Source: Mary Lou Pavlovic.

[234] *Karangasem Water Temple, Bali*. Accessed December 11, 2014.
URL: http://www.dreamstime.com/royalty-free-stock-photography-water-temple-bali-image24166897

In the 1930s the Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias, visiting Bali, describes the ornateness of Balinese arts, saying that 'they (the Balinese) admire technique and good craftsmanship above other points … Balinese art is a highly developed, although informal Baroque folk-art.'[235] I am interested in Covarrubias' term 'Informal Baroque' to describe Balinese art forms. The term Baroque relates to the characteristics of a western artistic style prevalent in the seventeenth century.[236] Baroque engages complex forms and bold ornamentation, often conveying a sense of movement.

I think that Covarrubias' term 'Informal Baroque' relates to the manner in which the Balinese often engage ephemeral, economical materials such as coconut leaf, as opposed to expensive materials, for example, marble or gold in their artistic production. Coconut leaf, for example, is engaged with dramatic ornamentation to create religious offerings. In an interview with Balinese curator, Nyoman Muka, at the Museum Rudana in Peliatan village, Bali, I ask about the ornateness of Balinese arts.[237] Muka says that the intricate, ornate quality of many Balinese art forms is an expression of one of the three basic human qualities important in Hindu cosmology—patience (the others are ignorance and goodness.) Patience must be practiced for example, in the complex carving or the minute details of traditional Balinese painting.

Muka says that in Balinese Hinduism, visual beauty, an important aspiration of traditional visual art and design, is realised often referring to nature, or with natural materials and excellent crafting.[238] Ornate design in a traditional artwork invites a momentary, pleasurable, sensory

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[235] Miguel Covarrubias. *Island of Bali*. London: Oxford University Press. 1972: p.139. In his introduction to Covarrubias's book, the current Professor of South East Asian Studies at Sydney University, Adrien Vickers, says that although written in a manner no twenty first century author would dare to use (imperialistically), Covarrubias's book has withstood the critical scrutiny of contemporary anthropologists. See: 'Foreword.' p.xxii.

[236] 'Baroque'. *Merriam Webster Dictionary*. Accessed December 10, 2014. URL: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/baroque

[237] Nyoman Muka, in conversation with the author. Rudana Museum, Peliatan. Bali. May 15, 2012.

[238] See: Fred B. Eiseman. 'Good and Evil'. *How Balinese People Express Ideas*. 2010: p.211–212. Eiseman says that beauty pleases the gods; Balinese Hindus believe that they are safe

from harmful influence if the gods are appeased; this assists a Balinese Hindu to maintain balance in daily life. A central focus of Balinese Hindu religious practice is to find balance between good and evil, or balance between opposing forces: *rwa bhineda*. The Balinese Hindus consider that the *niskala* (unseen world) is just as real and powerful as their *sekala* (seen world.) *Niskala* consists of many higher gods, ancestors, lower gods and evil beings. The Balinese consider that offerings of visual beauty not only help to ensure safety, they aid in gaining prosperity.

See also: I Made Marajaya. *Tri Hita Karana A Conception in Conducting Balinese Arts*. 2010. Marajaya says that by invoking visual beauty to express Hindu concepts also keeps those who encounter these focused on Hinduism. Visual beauty assists all who see Hindu activities to enjoy them. Marajaya alludes to the idea that in Balinese Hindu cosmology, beauty is also the concept of harmony. Harmony is achieved through *Tri Hita Karana* (the three ways to peace/happiness): finding balance in the individual's relationship to god, (*parhyangan*) relationship to each other, (*pawongan*) and the individual's relationship to the environment (*palemahan.*) *Tri Hita Karana* not only finds expression in ideal Hindu daily life, the principles of *Tri Hita Karana* are also emphasised in ceremonial activity in which creative works play a dominant role.

Marajaya writes that the principles of *Tri Hita Karana* can be found in all Balinese arts. A sacred dance, for example, expresses Balinese Hindus' relationship to god— *parhyangan*— as the dance is offered to god and gods are enacted in the dance. It is often performed on special days of human importance (for example, exhibition openings, national days, anniversaries), expressing balance in human relationships—*pawongan*—and often incorporates animals from the natural world, expressing a humans' relationship with nature—*palemahan.* The dance itself displays Hindu ethics; the means that is used to communicate this is visual beauty. As mentioned in an earlier footnote in this chapter, of creative artworks, Marajaya also says that in Balinese Hinduism, the religiously successful (hence beautiful, harmonious) creative work should fulfill three elements, which are *satwam* (truth), *siwam* (greatness) and *sundaram* (beauty). Ethical acts and visually pleasing craft forms are an expression of beauty in Balinese culture.

response from viewers. Muka says Balinese Hinduism teaches that the subject's fleeting experience of visual beauty in creative art forms reminds us that life is transitory and afterwards comes death. The Baroque, moving quality in many Balinese art forms that reflects a sense of 'aliveness' heightens this experience. From what I can determine, Muka thinks that some of the traditional Balinese arts engage a vernacular of beauty—flowers and ornamentation—hoping that others will find these beautiful too in order to experience aspects of the Balinese Hindu teachings.

During several trips to Ubud from 2008–2014, a sense of the informal Baroque catches my eye in floral water bowls, found all over the streets. Flowers are arranged abundantly and informally, but with a sense of ornate, decorative design, and suspended in large ceramic bowls of water. (figure 4.4)[239] The decorating of these Balinese flower bowls is more or less a profane practice outside many shops and hotels.[240] I think that the effect is spectacularly beautiful and complex, and because of this, I am drawn to closely examine these flower water arrangements. The floral water bowls of Ubud give rise to the sculptural body of studio research created for my PhD. A whole trajectory of sculptural forms, derived from the simple idea of placing flowers to float in water has been created for my studio research, that also identifies with the ephemeral nature of life in Balinese culture, but my practice is executed in more permanent forms. An example of my studio production is *Sample Stick from the Garden of Atlantis,* 2011, in which artificial flowers and resin emulate real flowers and water.[241] (figure 4.5)

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[239] *Example of a Balinese Decorative Floral Water Bowl*. Accessed December 9, 2014. URL: http://www.edwebproject.org/bali/gallery/pics/ubud.prettyflowers.jpg

[240] See: Fred B. Eiseman. 'Good and Evil'. *How Balinese People Express Ideas*. 2010: p.211–212. Eiseman says that there are actually no words for 'art' or 'culture' in the Balinese language, the arts in Bali form part of every day life. All activities undertaken for Balinese Hinduism are for religion, therefore sacred. The floral water bowls that I see, then, in the strictest sense are sacred. They do not have any other purpose, however, except for decoration around shops and hotels.

[241] Artificial flowers are chosen for their durability as real flowers brown and burn in my studio production processes. Also I think that artificial flowers are transformed into life-like flowers when I pour the resin over them. It is difficult to detect their fabric origins.

Whilst I do not believe that my studio research relates primarily to a sense of the Baroque, for example, there is no dramatic ornamentation, the aesthetic dimension relating to suspended flowers in clear liquid is important. I incorporate suspended flowers in resin, principally because I find the effect beautiful. I am aware, however, that the issue of life and death in my practice might become relevant later in my research. Flowers are also signs for beauty in Western art history, philosophy and also in an every-day sense.[242] Suspended flowers, abundantly displayed in Bali, are arranged in my practice in classical Western sculptural forms that engage the vernacular of Western contemporary art in the form of mixed media, plastic, lights and decorated sculptural plinths.

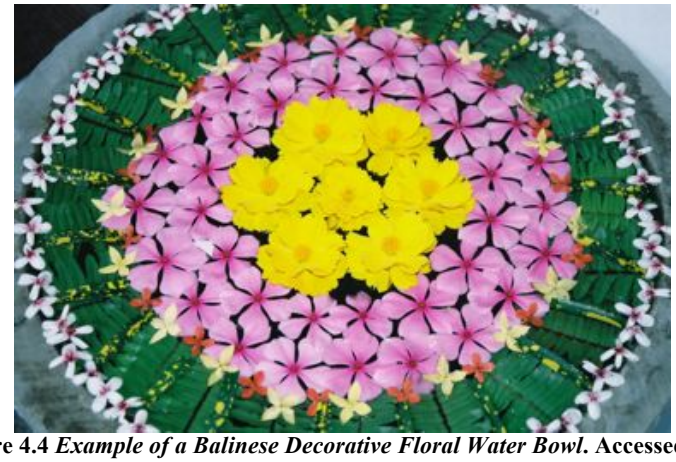

**Figure 4.4** ***Example of a Balinese Decorative Floral Water Bowl*****. Accessed December 9, 2014. URL: http://www.edwebproject.org/bali/gallery/pics/ubud.prettyflowers.jpg**

**Figure 4.5 Mary Lou Pavlovic.** ***Sample Stick from the Garden of Atlantis*****. 2011. Polyurethane resin, acrylic sheeting, artificial flowers. 0.17m x 0.10m. Source: The artist.**

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[242] See: Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* Kindle Edition. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. 2005: p.195. And: Immanuel Kant. James Creed Meredith (trans.) *The Critique of Judgement (1790)*. Oxford: Clarendon 1952.

Other fragile elements of the Ubud public environment are incorporated into my studio research. I see black and white checked fabrics adorning shrines and temples, wrapped around trees, and worn as sarongs on members of the village security (*pecalang*.) (figure 4.6)[243] Eventually, this checked pattern is painted onto the supporting structures for two of my cast resin studio works, *Rosebud,* 2011, (figure 4.7) and *Bali on a Blue Day*, 2011. These are sculptural works that juxtapose a black, grey and white hard-edged grid with the organic shapes of flowers floating in water-like resin.

The checked pattern juxtaposed with organic forms provides a strong aesthetic contrast in my studio works that I think increases their aesthetic complexity. A painted, decorated, checked base is also an aesthetic solution for a support structure needed for these studio works to save them from what I think is a more visually mundane solution, a conventional white plinth. Painted checks draw attention to the sculptural support and incorporate it into the studio work lending the practice a postmodern idiom that deconstructs the idea that a traditional white plinth neutrally supports sculpture.[244] Therefore the studio work becomes part of critical contemporary sculptural dialogue about sculptural objects but remains tied to traditional aesthetic discourses. The check pattern is a loaded form. I see it in a Balinese Hindu context, Western textiles and sport, for example, racing car flags and in art as modernist grid. I think that, however, my use of this ubiquitous form in combinations of check and floral resin and the title of the work, *Bali on a Blue Day*, also link the practice to Bali, more so for viewers that are familiar with Bali.

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[243] *Example of the Balinese Kain Poleng (Square Textile.)* Accessed December 9, 2014. URL: http://mungkopas.blogspot.com/2013/01/makna-saput-poleng.html

[244] See: Barbara Cuetto. 'What Lasts from the Site-Specificity? New Practices in Monumental Museums of the XXI Century.' *Autonomous Department.* Accessed December 30, 2014. URL: http://autonomousdepartment.com/writting/what-lasts-from-the-site-specificity-new-practices-in-monumental-museums-of-the-xxi-century/ Cuetto draws attention to within postmodernism, the idea that the white cube gallery and its accompanying décor is neutral, (without ideology,) is critiqued heavily by artists and theorists.

In Bali, the checked textile (*kain poleng)* is the most sacred Balinese Hindu textile.[245] The *kain poleng* symbolises good, (white) bad (black) and the grey formed by overlapping thread from the black and white represents the mix of good and bad, symbolising the balance of the two opposing forces. *Kain poleng* is placed anywhere that Balinese Hindus believe potentially has negative *niskala* (other worldly) forces. Balinese Hindus use fabric for protection against the forces of negative *niskala*; complex patterns and motifs historically form a language of protection.[246]

After I finish making *Rosebud,* 2011 and *Bali on a Blue Day,* 2011, I ask Balinese Hindu painter, Pak Bendi Yudha, who also has a research interest in Hinduism, if it is considered offensive to Balinese Hindus for a non-Balinese Hindu to make images relating to the *kain poleng*.[247] As combinations of check and floral offerings are familiar to visitors of Bali who may also encounter my studio work, thereby making a connection to Bali.[248] Also, a broader audience is provided with a reference to Bali in the titling of my studio work. Pak Bendi assures me that it is not offensive for non-Balinese Hindus to reference the *kain poleng*; he is aware that checked fabrics are part of other cultures and carry other readings. Yudha also says that Balinese Hindus consider that if religious symbols are not denigrated, then they are only celebrated in sharing them.

I think that it is the uniformity and repeated utilisation of flowers, water and textiles in Balinese Hindu religious and creative activities, dominant in the public environment, which causes me be drawn to them as visual, sensory magnets in the first place. This repetition gives

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[245] Brigitta Hauser-Schaublin, Marie-Louise Nabholz-Kartaschoff, Urs Ramseyer. *Balinese Textiles.* London: British Museum Press. 1991: p.22–23.

[246] See: Robyn J. Maxwell. *Textiles of South East Asia: Tradition, Trade and Transformation.* Canberra: Australian National Gallery, Oxford University Press. 1990.

[247] Pak Bendi Yudha in conversation with the author. Painting Department, Indonesia Institute of the Arts, Denpasar. April 16, 2012. Yudha is a senior lecturer in Painting and has a research interest in Hindu scripture.

[248] I also see liberal use of the *kain poleng* in Bali. During my trips there I see curtains, dresses and shirts in Ubud shops, and decorations for parties at ARMA Museum Ubud, all made with *kain poleng* fabric.

rise to the creation of my above-mentioned studio works. Uniformity and repetition of flowers, water and checked textiles that I encounter throughout Bali are strong reasons for their impact on my practice. Furthermore, the Russian Southeast Asian academic, Vladimir Braginsky, suggests that repetition in the arts of Eastern cultures historically often captures the attention of Western artists, enabling Western artists to draw on what they need for their own cultural development.[249]

**Figure 4.6** ***Example of the Balinese Kain Poleng (Square Textile.)*** **Accessed December 9, 2014. URL: http://mungkopas.blogspot.com/2013/01/makna-saput-poleng.html**

**Figure 4.7 Mary Lou Pavlovic.** ***Rosebud.*** **2011. Resin, artificial flowers, wood, acrylic paint, light. Source: The artist.**

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[249] Vladimir Braginsky. 'Rediscovering the Oriental in the Orient and Europe: New Books on the East-West Cultural Interface: a Review Article.' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.* Vol. 60. Issue 3. London: Cambridge University. 1997. p.511–532: p.514.

In 2012, I am awarded an Endeavour Research Fellowship to examine the impact of Bali on my research.[250] I am based for six months at the Institut Seni, Indonesia, Denpasar, (Indonesian Institute of the Arts Indonesia, Denpasar: ISI Denpasar.) Prior to this point in my PhD candidature, I create my studio research in what I see as an open-ended approach to referencing Bali. Flowers, (not necessarily native to Bali,) water and the black, white and grey checked pattern to which I refer in my practice are not only seen in Bali, I see them in Melbourne.

I think that another studio work, *The Outsider*, a public artwork painted around the Telstra exchange in St. Kilda, Melbourne, is partially indebted to the Balinese Hindu practice of wrapping colourful textiles around architectural structures in the built environment. (figures 4.8, 4.9)[251] I see the painted surface in *The Outsider* work as a type of fragile skin around the Telstra exchange. That I am partially influenced in *The Outsider* by shrines draped with textiles in Bali may not be an immediately recognisable aspect of this public artwork. Overall, viewers of all my research works who have visited Bali may appreciate the Balinese references. I believe that ultimately, however, these studio works begun early in my research remain in their own Western dialogue, in that they reference Bali in varying degrees, but engage the broad language of Western contemporary art.

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[250] The Endeavour Research Fellowship is undertaken from February 25, 2012 – August 24, 2012. I am based at the Institut Seni, Indonesia, Denpasar, (Indonesian Institute of the Arts, Denpasar) in Bali. Fieldwork is undertaken at Mas Village, (I research glass factories, stone and wood carving) Bali Butterfly Park in Tabanan, and Amed (for snorkelling.) I develop a professional relationship with Balinese woodcarver, Ketut Suaka, who is based at ARMA Museum, Ubud.

[251] *Example of a Balinese Shrine*. Source: Mary Lou Pavlovic.

**Figure 4.8 Mary Lou Pavlovic. *The Outsider*. 2011–14. Acrylic house paint on Telstra Exchange at 62 Inkerman Street, St Kilda, Melbourne. Variable dimensions. Source: The artist.**

**Figure 4.9 *Example of a Balinese Shrine.* Source: Mary Lou Pavlovic.**

Working in a creative research environment at ISI Denpasar with Balinese artistic practitioners, however, quickly influences my studio research. I create a group of long, thin poles, made with artificial flowers and resin. (figure 4.10) The flowers in the poles are much brighter than in previous studio research. I am searching for methods in which to visually link my resin studio works to the brightness of the coloured brick work in *The Outsider* project, in order for the final exhibition/examination to be aesthetically cohesive. In my subjective aesthetic judgement I believe that a sense of aesthetic cohesion will contribute to the exhibition's beauty. A support structure for each pole in order for them to be able to stand is required. Pak Bendi Yudha, a senior lecturer at ISI, suggests that I work with a Balinese traditional woodcarver who will create a stand, incorporating traditional Balinese Hindu design patterns.[252] (figure 4.11) Pak Bendi thinks that, by doing so, a collaborative Balinese/Australian studio work will illustrate the Hindu principle of *lingga-yoni* (union of opposing forces) that is often seen in Hindu sculpture as a vertical element joined with a more horizontal element. (figure 4.12)[253]

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[252] Pak Bendi Yudha in conversation with the author. Painting Department, Indonesia Institute of the Arts, Denpasar, May 5, 2012.

[253] Anonymous. *Example of Representation of Lingga and Yoni Becoming One: Lingga Yoni.* Accessed May 16, 2014. URL: http://binginbanjah.wordpress.com/2014/01/30/makna-hari-raya-siwarat

At first I am reticent, I am concerned again about the ethics of appropriating another culture's imagery. The Balinese Hindu traditional patterns, incorporating floral designs are also culturally specific. Pak Bendi's Balinese Hindu reading of a collaborative art project combining my pole works and Balinese carved patterns is one thing, but how will my studio work be read in Melbourne? Will my practice be regarded as Orientalist, in that I am seen to construct images of an Eastern culture that serve the West in maintaining domination over the East?[254] Am I just helping myself to whatever cultural items that I like, arrogantly disregarding their significance and importance to others? But then, my Balinese colleagues are so enthusiastic and supportive of an artistic collaboration, and so I decide to explore this question of cultural appropriation in my practice. I am concerned that not working collaboratively with Balinese artists, because we are from different cultures is potentially a dangerous idea, promoting cultural segregation and I am against cultural segregation.

I think of the Australian artist, Tim Johnson, who embraces spiritual iconography in indigenous and Eastern cultures.[255] Johnson invites friends from different cultures to contribute to his paintings, imbuing them with spiritual icons.[256] An example is the collaborative installation, *Yab Yum,* 2001, in which Johnson paints his imagery and Vietnamese artist My Le Thi paints Buddhist images of the Buddha Shakyamuni in meditation.[257] Like Johnson, I am open to my practice charting human relations across cultural divisions especially when there is a shared interest in the subject of beauty. Traditional Balinese Hindu carving practice often utilises flowers and is concerned with creating beauty, for sharing and for the hope of conveying positive experiences of Hinduism. Although this idea may be quickly countered by saying that beauty is subjective for everyone, and not all people find the same things beautiful, I am interested to experiment with one to whom beauty is important, and who, like me, utilises a conventional sign for beauty, the flower, in order to begin to draw some conclusions about the

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[254] See: Edward Said. *Orientalism.* London: Penguin. 1977.

[255] See: The Tolarno Gallery, Melbourne, website: Accessed December 12, 2014. URL: http://tolarnogalleries.com/artists/tim-johnson/

[256] 'Collectors Dossier: Tim Johnson.' *Art Collector.* Issue 52. April–June. 2010. Accessed December 12, 2014. URL: http://www.artcollector.net.au/CollectorsDossierTimJohnson

[257] Tim Johnson, My Le Thi. *Yab Yum.* Sydney*:* Art Gallery of New South Wales. November 10, 2001 – January 14, 2002.

subject of beauty in the studio research. I also believe that in collaborative practice, there has to be an element of risk undertaken, that is, not knowing what the outcomes will be, in order to make any advances in studio production.

In the spirit of experimentation, I collaborate with Balinese traditional woodcarver Ketut Suaka to create stands for the pole studio works. Suaka carves the bases, adorning them with the traditional Balinese Hindu *patra*, (patterns.) These are ornate, official Balinese Hindu patterns used in textiles and wood and stone carving that adorn Balinese Hindu buildings and various Balinese objects.[258] The *patra* are largely comprised of flowers and leaves—stylised versions of the lotus—a major Hindu religious symbol. Suaka combines *patra sari, patra cina, patra olanda*, and ornamentation motifs, *bungan tuwung* and *mas-masan*, stylising these as he sees fit.[259] As we work together our ideas develop, and we also complete a series of wall hanging poles, in which Suaka and I join our respective practices. Suaka responds to my floral resin poles, creating and stylising the types of traditional patterns in Balinese Hindu design that he deems aesthetically appropriate for my studio work. The resulting studio production for two studio works in the final exhibition/examination is overtly cross-cultural. Western art forms influenced by the aesthetics of Bali are fused with Balinese Hindu religious design, in which beauty is an important ideal.

**Figure 4.10 Mary Lou Pavlovic and Ketut Suaka. *Work in Progress*. 2013. Wood, resin, artificial flowers, acrylic plastic. Variable dimensions. Source: Mary Lou Pavlovic.**

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[258] See: Agus Mulyadi Utomo, I Made Radiawan and I Made Jana. *Seni & Ornamen Tradisional Bali.* Denpasar: Fakultas Seni Rupa Dan Desain, Institut Seni Indonesia, Denpasar. 2012.

[259] Ibid. p.116–136.

**Figure 4.11 Mary Lou Pavlovic and Ketut Suaka. Detail: *Work in Progress*. 2013. Source: Mary Lou Pavlovic. (This carved pattern is stylised from *patra cina*. It is Suaka's own design.)**

**Figure 4.12 Anonymous. *Example of Representation of Lingga and Yoni Becoming One: Lingga Yoni.* Accessed May 16, 2014. URL: http://binginbanjah.wordpress.com/2014/01/30/makna-hari-raya-siwarat**

Overall, the studio works referencing flowers draw on Western and Balinese symbols of beauty. The methodology engaged to create the studio works in the PhD practice are derived from Suaka's and my subjective perceptions of beauty. Our aesthetic ideas incorporate flowers and refer to nature and patterns. I argue that because the final studio works reference readily recognisable symbols of beauty that I am then able to consider beauty's agency operating in the practice and subsequently assign a theory of beauty's provocative capacity in the field of Western contemporary art.

I acknowledge that there are issues in my practice, for example, intercultural relations, that fall outside my research project's primary focus: the provocative capacity of beauty. My exegesis is not intended as an encompassing narrative for the practice—rather, I have chosen to focus on one question of importance in aesthetic discussion today. Yet in advancing the studio research I am open to exploring new avenues of practice that are in keeping with my interest in the subject of beauty.

My subjective response to what I perceive as beautiful in Bali and such references to Balinese culture undoubtedly informs the methodology for the studio research. I think, however, that it is a matter of determining what is important in reading the practice, and this is not my subjective experiences of the beautiful, but how the resulting artworks function in culture. What can invoking beauty in art do today? This question preserves the practice from mere speculation about subjective experience. I will therefore elaborate on beauty's agency in my practice in Chapter Five, 'Floating Flora, Death and Lolly Colours: Provocative Beauty in my Practice.'

**Orientalism or synthesis?**

The allure of Bali for my studio research, however, opens up a question. What general considerations, might be addressed for a Western artist working in the domain of the East-West cultural interface, in the era of globalisation? In the past, much attention has been given in Western academia regarding Western artists appropriating Asian motifs, images and practices. The Russian Southeast Asian studies academic, Vladimir Braginsky, draws attention to the recent dominant impact in Asian studies of the Palestinian American scholar Edward Said's

(1935–2003) theories of Orientalism expressed (although not specifically on Southeast Asia) in his 1978 book of the same name.[260] Said's theory of Orientalism, analyses the discourse of Orientalism, in which (predominantly) French and British scholars, writers and artists of the colonial period, in their pursuit of knowledge about the East (primarily Arab-Islamic) consciously and unconsciously serve the colonial powers of the West in maintaining superiority over the East, by distorting images of it, rather than congnising images of reality.[261]

In his review of two books emerging from a 1991 conference on East-West cultural relations on the themes of Europe and the Orient at the Australian National University, Canberra, Braginsky refers to the editors' argument that it is the task of scholars today in the entire Asian studies profession to problematise and to question every dimension of that Orientalist

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[260] Vladimir Braginsky. 'Rediscovering the Oriental in the Orient and Europe: New Books on the East-West Cultural Interface: a Review Article.' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.* 1997: p.516.

[261] Edward Said. *Orientalism.* New York: Vintage. 1978: p.3, 5. Said states that in addition to Orientalism being connected to academic studies of the Orient that:

> Related to this academic tradition, whose fortunes, transmigrations, specializations, and transmissions are in part the subject of this study, is a more general meaning for Orientalism. Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident.' Thus a very large mass of writers, among who are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny, and so on . . . the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient . . . despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient.

The colonial period, to which Said refers, extends from the last half of the nineteenth century into the first third of the twentieth century.

division.[262] I would like to explore this idea in my own research project referencing Bali, surely one way (albeit narrow) to read the studio works referencing the *kain poleng* and flowers may be seen as literally distorted image of Balinese culture. Flowers are often located where the *kain poleng* is placed around shrines, and my practice responds to this idea. Additionally, is there an alternative to an Orientalist model of practice for Suaka and my collaborative studio work?

In terms of Western artists and scholars engaging with the East, Braginksy, whilst acknowledging Said's humane and ethical pathos, (as do I) argues against some of his ideas. Fundamentally, Braginsky argues that it is well known that long before *Orientalism*, as early as the 1920s and 1930s in social sciences, scholars are acknowledging that the researcher herself inevitably causes distortions of truth.[263] This is because the researcher's mentality is determined by culture, and can only be the sum total of semiotic systems of the given society; all research is always only an image or model of truth. Braginsky rightly asks why Said argues that this distortion of truth is specific to colonialism, and not of anybody encountering another

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[262] Vladimir Braginsky. 'Rediscovering the Oriental in the Orient and Europe: New Books on the East-West Cultural Interface: a Review Article.' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.* 1997: p.516. Braginsky refers to the conference of the same name as the article title above. The books are: Drew Gerstle (ed.) and Anthony Milner (ed.) *Europe and the Orient*. Canberra: Humanities Research Centre, ANU. 1994. And: Andrew C. Gerstle (ed.) Anthony Milner (ed.) *Recovering the Orient: Artists, Scholars, Appropriations*. *Studies in Anthropology and History*. Vol.11. ix. Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers. 1994.

[263] Ibid. p.517. Braginsky refers to the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bahktin's 1920s criticism of 'vulgar social poetics' that establish too strong a link between the writer's creativity and class affiliation. Bahktin argues that that the forces acting on the writer are the sum total of semiotic systems in society. Therefore, the outcomes of the writer's mind are unpredictable—a model of truth. Braginsky refers to: P. N. Medvedev. *Formal'niy Metod v Literature Ovedenii: Kriticheskoye Vvedenivev Sotsiologi Chesku u Poetiku*. Leningrad: Priboy.1928. Braginsky goes on to say that the step between a mono-dimensional theorisation of class affiliation to Said's mono-dimensional theory of political power is close.

culture. My research project is no different—no claims are made in my research for presenting unmediated truths.

Whilst power relations are important considerations between cultures, Braginsky argues that they are far from the sole or immediate determinant of the artist or scholar's thoughts.[264] He also argues that there is a basic difference between scholar and artist. Scholars studying the East are concerned with how to present the East *proper*, to a state of accumulated knowledge, whereas Braginsky says that the only job of the artist, at home or abroad is to create—through immediate, intimately personal works artists are solving the problems of their own cultures at any given time.[265] I agree with Braginsky in terms of power relations. In my mind, I am certainly thinking of more than power relations when encountering the artists and culture of Bali, for example, I consciously think in terms of empathy—by researching Balinese society; ethics, formal techniques, visual and conceptual similarities and differences. I think of what knowledge I can share with Balinese practitioners interested in my practice. And homage: how much further ahead in creating the beautiful aesthetic arrangements incorporating flowers, water and geometric textiles that I refer to in my own practice, are the Balinese.

I view the processes in my studio research as a type of synthesis with specific elements of Balinese culture, checked textiles, aqueous floral arrangements and traditional, patterned wood carving. Suaka's contribution, floral carving, retains its Balinese identity, I do not suggest that he alters his practice or participate in a project in conflict with his religious beliefs. There is Balinese agency in our studio research that is referred to throughout this chapter. In my experience as a visiting lecturer at ISI Denpasar, I am invited to share skills and knowledge about my Western practice in a contemporary Balinese artistic environment that draws on Western art, Eastern art, and largely Balinese traditions and contemporary Indonesian art.[266]

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[264] Ibid. p.517. Braginsky refers, for example, to the colonial scholars who returned to the peoples of the East entire millennia of their pasts, which had been largely forgotten: the cultures of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia or Iran, the civilisations of Mohenjo Daro and Harrappa in India and the Srivijaya and Majaphit of Indonesia.

[265] Ibid. p.515.

[266] As part of the Endeavour Research Fellowship I am invited to conduct a two-day workshop for the Sculpture students at Indonesian Institute of the Arts, Denpasar, Bali. May 6,7, 2012.

Additionally, I draw attention to how much the Balinese themselves appropriate from other cultures what they need for their culture. The Balinese *barong*, the good spirit commonly imaged as half-lion, half-Pekinese dog, relates to the Chinese dragon, and Balinese painting adopts European elements into some traditional painting that today has many forms.[267]

From my perspective, my research is not designed to contribute to discussions of Balinese culture *proper,* it is designed to further my own practice in terms of my own Western culture and recognise my own practices' capacity to respect and engage with other cultures to extend knowledge. I disagree with Braginsky, however, that to create is the only job of the artist. I believe that in critical practice, the job of the artist is to create *and* to use one's brains to think about what has been created—this exegesis is an example of a critical written contribution to culture by an artist, functioning as a supporting document for my practice.

All this, however, leads to two more points made by Braginsky. He discusses the scholarship in the books that he is reviewing, regarding the valuable place that the East represents to Western artists. He refers, amongst others, to the importance the Indonesian gamelan provides for French composer Claude Debussy, (1862–1918) Japanese painting provides for French painter Claude Monet, (1840–1926) Chinese drama for German playwright Berthold Brecht, (1898–1956) Javanese architecture for Dutch architects Maclaine Pont (1884–1971) and Thomas Karsten, (1884–1945) and to the European avant-garde artists in the first half of last century who are searching for ways to express anti-traditionalism. To many significant Western artists, the East represents a place where what the artists are looking for has already started in their own culture and is exaggerated in the East. Braginsky says that 'sometimes Western artists found in cultures of the East a repository of the creative decisions they were looking for, sometimes a resonator of sorts, amplifying the 'loudness' of decisions almost made, and sometimes a confirmation that the decisions were made rightly.'[268]

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[267] Miguel Covarrubias. *Island of Bali*. 1972. (For Chinese influence on the Balinese *barong* see p.320–323 and for European influence on traditional Balinese painting see p.135–185.)

[268] Vladimir Braginsky. 'Rediscovering the Oriental in the Orient and Europe: New Books on the East-West Cultural Interface: a Review Article.' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.* 1997: p.514.

I identify wholeheartedly with Braginsky's comments, I had already begun to use flowers in my practice before my first visit to Bali, for example in *The PavModern Art Plinth*, 2007, which comprises a rose joined to a rat's body, suspended in a geometric resin block. In 2007, my intention is to develop this studio research in terms of beauty—the flowers remain, as these are obvious referents to beauty, but I dispense with what I think are ugly elements, for example, the rat. The Balinese Hindus' preoccupation with beauty with which I identify, and its repetition throughout the public environment referred to earlier in this chapter, helps me enormously to realise my PhD studio and exegetical work about my own culture. In creating objects inspired by my subjective ideals of beauty seen in Bali, I am then able to construct my own largely Western studio production that acts, by virtue of its referents to beauty in Western art history, philosophy, and every day life (flowers, nature) as a catalyst for discussion about Western notions of the provocative nature of beauty.

Another point that Braginsky makes is that Western artists engaging with the East are criticised for not being more erudite, engaging superficially with the Eastern cultures from which they draw inspiration. Although he does not clarify where this is located in the books that he reviews, prior to departing for Bali for the Endeavour Research Fellowship, I am also given academic advice for this research project to research Balinese concepts of beauty more thoroughly, in order not to appear 'superficial', in my creative decisions. Of artists working in the colonial period (second half of the nineteenth and the first third of the twentieth century) Braginsky says:

> Their knowledge of Eastern cultures may have been superficial, fragmentary, and second-hand. More often than not, however, they managed to counter-balance its inadequacies by the power of creative imagination and intuitive insights. Such has been the case always everywhere, and it is therefore plain nonsense to criticise artists for their lack of erudition. Much more important is the fact that the East proved to be just as essential to the solution of the cultural problems of the West as the West was to its Eastern colleagues in dealing with theirs.[269]

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[269] Ibid. p.515.

In my research I have discovered most certainly the Surrealist playwright, Antonin Artaud, (1896–1948) is so inspired by the perfection of Balinese dance that he draws on it to create a radical work in his own culture. Artaud's book, *The Theatre and Its Double*, is widely regarded as changing the course of Western theatre, and the foundation of modernist theatre.[270] Occidental theatre, in Artaud's time, is based on linear narratives. Knowing little of Balinese dance, Artaud draws on its non-linear narratives and syncopations to argue instead that theatre and life are separate entities—hence the use of the word double in his book's title.[271] *The Theatre and its Double* expands permanently and politically the language of theatre in the West. Artaud solves theatrical problems in his Western context in a specific place and time, for example, how to make theatre more abstract and non-literal, by turning to Balinese culture.

When I first created the studio work inspired by Bali, I too knew little of the cultural context of the sources that I drew from. My response was visual; indeed it may have been superficial and fragmented in terms of understanding specific Balinese meanings in spoken language. I agree, however, with Braginsky: in responding visually to Balinese culture, I am able to counterbalance this superficiality by means of artistic intuition and creative imagination, hardly superficial processes, and further—the studio work that I create is not superficial, but rather, delves deeper into the subject of beauty and the complexity of Balinese culture. I believe that my studio work necessarily questions intercultural relations and also makes a contribution to important enquiries about the subject of aesthetics in visual arts practice today.

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[270] Antonin Artaud. Mary Caroline Richards (trans.) *The Theatre and its Double.* New York: Grove Weidenfeld. 1958.

[271] See: Nicola Savarese. '1931. Antonin Artaud sees Balinese Theatre at the Paris Colonial Exhibition.' *The Drama Review.* Vol. 45. Issue 3. Fall. 2001: p.51–77. For all facts about Artaud's engagement with Balinese culture in this paragraph I refer to this article. Savarese refers to: Antonin Artaud. 'Sur le Theatre Balinais vu l'Exposition Coloniale.' *Nouvelle Revue Francaise.* 217: 655–658. 1931. And: Antonin Artaud. Mary Caroline Richards (trans.) *The Theatre and its Double.* New York: Grove Weidenfeld. 1958.

I see my practice as drawing on aesthetic elements of Balinese culture to assist in resolving aesthetic problems in my own culture, namely how can artists invoke beauty and do so in a provocative manner? In today's globalised art world it is possible that these issues may be relevant also to Balinese contemporary art. I believe that Suaka's and my collaborative works are a consensual synthetic practice benefitting both he any myself. I view this as synthesis, not Orientalism. Through our collaboration, I am able to realise ideas about the provocative capacity of beauty that I think are important in contemporary Western cultural debate. Suaka is able to realise an idea important to his Balinese Hindu religious beliefs: *lingga-yoni.*

Undertaking research about Orientalism for the exegesis assists in my decision to exhibit Suaka's and my collaborative practice for the final exhibition/examination. I believe that my exegetical research goes some way to understanding important issues about beauty in Balinese culture, but it is not possible to be completely knowledgeable about the nuances of Balinese culture. I am neither Balinese nor a scholar of Bali, who contributes to accumulative knowledge about Bali. I empathise with the processes of Balinese art and design. My subjective experience of beauty found in Bali prepares the ground for my practice to be regarded in terms of beauty's agency; these issues will be addressed in the following chapter.

Chapter Five

## Floating Flora, Death, and Lolly Colours—Provocative Beauty in my Practice

In Chapter Four of this exegesis, 'Water and Flowers in Bali: the Impact of Bali on my Research', I discussed the influence of Balinese culture on my practice. I concluded that the studio work created for this PhD draws inspiration from what I find subjectively beautiful and meaningful about Bali. My studio production also makes direct reference to Balinese culture. A studio work is titled *Bali on A Blue Day*, 2011. I also draw on Balinese combinations of flowers and black and white checked textiles that I see in the public environment, for example, in the studio works, *Rosebud*, 2011, and *Bali on a Blue Day*, 2011. I work collaboratively with Balinese Hindu woodcarver Ketut Suaka on two works created for the studio production. These efforts combine my sculptural works, (clear resin poles filled with flowers) and Suaka's woodcarvings, concerned with creating beauty in traditional and stylised Balinese Hindu floral *patra* (patterns).[272] I think that the larger part of my practice draws on Balinese culture but engages its own Western dialogue. This is because my studio research engages the vernacular of Western contemporary art in the form of Western classical sculptural forms—cylinders, rectangular prisms, circles, grids—combined with contemporary materials for example, plastic, artificial flowers, lighting and house paint.

My subjective appreciation of beauty coincides with signs and symbols for beauty in Western art history and philosophy, Balinese Hinduism, and every day life, both in Western terms and

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[272] I Made Marajaya. *Tri Hita Karana A Conception in Conducting Balinese Arts.* Denpasar: Institut Seni Indonesia. 2010. Accessed March 9, 2012. URL: http://www.isi-dps.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/Tri-Hita-Karana-A- Conception-In-Conducting-Balinese-Arts.pdf Of creative artworks, Marajaya says that in Balinese Hinduism, the religiously successful creative work should fulfill three elements, which are *satwam* (truth), *siwam* (greatness) and *sundaram* (beauty.) For a detailed account of the traditional Balinese *patra* see: Agus Mulyadi Utomo, I Made Radiawan and I Made Jana. *Seni & Ornamen Tradisional Bali.* Denpasar: Fakultas Seni Rupa Dan Desain, Institut Seni Indonesia, Denpasar. 2012.

Balinese terms: flowers[273] and intense colours.[274] I argue that because signs for beauty are conventionally recognisable in my practice that it is possible to discuss the practice in more objective terms than merely presenting what I subjectively find beautiful for academic contemplation. I am less interested in this exegesis to examine my subjective appraisals of beauty and more interested in examining how my practice functions in the field of Western contemporary art. A question that I am interested to pursue, then, is how can we talk about what beauty is doing in my practice? What is beauty's agency and how does it affect our reading of particular objects and images?

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[273] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. Kindle Edition. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. 2005: p.195. Prettejohn states that flowers are a conventional sign for beauty and femininity in Western art history and philosophy. Also see: Agus Mulyadi Utomo. I Made Radiawan. I Made Jana. *Seni & Ornamen Tradisional Bali.* 2012. This book examines the creation of Balinese pattern making which features the lotus motif; lotus imagery is utilised in order to create beauty for Balinese Hinduism.

[274] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction.* Brisbane: Editions 3. 2011: p.24. Gilbert-Rolfe says that intensity, colours and movement are the ingredients of attractiveness.

**Floating flowers, Adorno and death**

The discrete sculptural objects that I construct in my practice combine either cast or non-cast resin forms that are embedded with artificial flowers. Over the duration of the research period, many viewers have commented that they think the artificial flowers in my studio production are real. I think that this is because I have carefully selected artificial flowers that look real and, when the resin is poured over them, it is difficult to detect the flowers' fabric origins. I believe that my studio methods make the studio production look more beautiful, as I think that the artificial flowers read on their own from a personal point of view are kitsch and not conventionally beautiful. I experiment with pouring resin over real flowers and this discolours them, often making them look ugly.[275] (figure 5.1)

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**Figure 5.1 Mary Lou Pavlovic. *Experimental Work in Progress Undertaken for my PhD Research*. (Left Overview and Right Detail.) 2012. Resin, fresh flowers. 1m x 0.7m. Source: The artist.**

I find the effect of live flowers caught in resin in this studio work beautiful, but I decide not to include this work in the final exhibition because it complicates the theoretical readings of my practice that are discussed throughout this chapter. In terms of experimental work undertaken for this PhD I was also interested to try to aesthetically relate my floral resin practice to the brightly coloured brickwork studio research, *The Outsider*, in order to make the final exhibition cohesive, a subjective interest of mine in creating beauty. I experimented with suspending brightly coloured tissue paper in resin but I discovered that the weight and density of brightly coloured artificial flowers was a more successful formal resolution in terms of the sculptural forms I was experimenting with: long, thin poles. The brightly coloured artificial flowers

For the studio works included in the final exhibition/examination, artificial flowers are selected to create discrete sculptures, because they retain their shape and colour, appearing more conventionally beautiful, and make an uncanny play with the illusion of being real. I experiment with creating bubbles in the resin by changing the resin and hardener ratios in the mixing process to make the resin appear more like water, as opposed to smooth blocks of plastic. The floral resin works all read as metaphors for flowers suspended in water or ice-like resin classical Western sculptural forms.

The earlier floral resin works were created so that individual flower forms were immediately recognisable, as in *Imperfect Nature*, 2011. (figure 5.3) In some of the later studio work, however, for example, in *Flora and Patra*, 2014, to make the studio work more innovative, I have packed the flowers into acrylic pipes before I filled them with resin, and the flowers read less as individual flowers and more as brightly coloured abstract organic masses. (figure 5.4) Also in some of the studio works, for example, *Rosebud,* 2011, and *Bali on a Blue Day*, 2011, lighting is used to illuminate cast resin blocks, as I discover that pouring resin in large masses makes it look dark grey and slightly opaque, it is possible that it is difficult for light to pass through dense structures of resin. Lighting these studio works allows for the resin to appear as clear, so that the viewers can readily see the suspended flowers. I also subjectively think that

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correlate in a physically stronger way to the coloured brickwork in my practice because the fabric in the artificial flowers is denser than coloured tissue paper. (figure 5.2)

**Figure 5.2 Mary Lou Pavlovic. Details: *Experimental Work in Progress Undertaken for PhD* 2. 2012. Tissue paper, resin. Variable dimensions. Source: The artist.**

illuminating these floral resin sculptural forms makes them look more pretty, as they shine and glow, gaining intensity.

**Figure 5.3 Mary Lou Pavlovic. *Imperfect Nature.* 2011. Artificial flowers, resin. 0.17m w x 0.10 diam. Source: The artist.**

**Figure 5.4 Mary Lou Pavlovic and Ketut Suaka. *Work in Progress*. 2014. Carved wood, artificial flowers, resin, acrylic. Variable dimensions. Source: Mary Lou Pavlovic.**

The artificial flowers appear to be forever enshrined in the ice-like or water-like resin, and I think this fact and that the materials I select are person-made and not natural (my materials are

not alive but refer to life) that I may conjure up a relationship to death in my practice. Even the studio work, *Sleeping Beauty*, 2011, which does not engage suspended flowers, but instead reads as a type of funereal flower arrangement in a long, thin, horizontal, curved rectangular form relates to a coffin, and thus to death. (figure 5.3) As does an experimental work, a body of photographs taken close up of the floral resin studio work *Ophelia* in my studio.[276] These photographs capture abstracted images of flowers suspended in water, creating the appearance of an eerie, ghostly, but I think beautiful underwater world.

**Figure 5.5 Mary Lou Pavlovic. *Sleeping Beauty*. 2012. Perspex, artificial flowers. 1.53cm l x 12cm h x 10cm w. Source: The artist.**

How may the elements in my practice that relate to death be thought of as a provocative dimension of beauty? In a 2012 conference on historical materialism held at Goldsmiths College London, the British academic Sebastian Truskolaski presents a paper on the German philosopher, Theodor Adorno's (1903–1969) philosophical enquiry into natural beauty.[277]

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[276] William Shakespeare. *Hamlet.* London: Dover Thrift Editions. 1992. Ophelia is a female character from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* who drowns in a brook. She is often depicted in Western historical art including: John Everett Millais. *Ophelia.* 1852. Oil on canvas. 76.2cm x 111.8cm. Tate Gallery of London. And: John William Waterhouse. *Ophelia.* 1894. Oil on canvas. 106cm x 61cm. And: Alexandre Cabanel. *Ophelia.* 1883. Oil on canvas. 77cm x 115.5cm. Private Collection.

[277] Sebastian Truskolaski. 'Images Without Images: Adorno on Natural Beauty.' *Mute.* February 13, 2013. Accessed January 19, 2014.
URL: http://www.metamute.org/community/your-posts/images-without-images-–-adorno-natural-beauty Truskolaski originally presented this article as a conference paper at: *9th Annual Historical Materialism Conference.* London: Goldsmiths College, University of London. November 9–11, 2012.

Truskolaski reminds us that Adorno's concept of the promise of natural beauty, which surpasses all human immanence, cannot be schematised or experienced by the subject. Natural beauty does not appear in nature, but instead appears in the sheer artifice of the work of art. Truskolaski refers to Adorno's idea that precisely by breaking its promise of natural beauty, the work of art honours it, creating a negative utopia.

Adorno says that 'even in the past the portrayal of nature was probably only authentic as nature morte, when painting knew how to read nature as the cipher of the historical …'[278] What might Adorno mean? To explain Adorno's ideas, Truskolaski refers to Adorno's concepts of first and second nature. Adorno's first nature is nature as we experience it, 'out there'. Adorno's second nature is the world of human convention, the social world. The treacherous thing about second nature, according to both Adorno and Truskolaski, is that it presents itself as first nature, thereby creating the illusion of things, that is, social conditions, as naturally ordained. Truskolaski says that there is always something mythical about what we misperceive as nature.[279]

I think that my floral resin studio work literally represents the idea that the concept of natural beauty is a social construction. The artifice in my practice, artificial flowers, or resin that alludes to water, points to the social construction and artifice of the idea of natural beauty. The materials are social, person made materials. Even more so, however, the flowers suspended in resin, on first inspection may appear as real, for some, it is only on close examination that it might be realised that the flowers are fake. The idea that natural beauty is socially constructed and relates to death and in turn my practice will be elaborated further by first considering Truskolaski's ideas about Adorno and natural beauty.

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[278] Theodor W. Adorno. Robert Hullot-Kentor (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory*. London. Continuum. 2001: p.67.

[279] Sebastian Truskolaski. 'Images Without Images: Adorno on Natural Beauty.' *Mute.* February 13, 2013.

Truskolaski notes that the Goldsmiths College, University of London academic, Alex Düttmann says that the authentic work of art is the *afterlife* of nature.[280] Certainly I think that my floral resin studio work literally alludes to an afterlife, the artificial flowers are immortalised in the resin. Following on from this concept of afterlife of nature in the artwork, Truskolaski says that '… Adorno characterises nature as a cipher of transience … Only where it is dead can nature be treated as a type of philosophical hermeneutics. And inasmuch as it is dead—second nature—natural beauty (as it appears in art) is allegorical.'[281] In his footnotes about the concept of allegory, Truskolaski states that 'natural beauty as it appears in the self-consciousness of its own artifice, qua second nature then, is allegorical. It bespeaks the truth of its own impossibility.'[282]

I think that my floral and floral resin works literally image the artifice and death-like state of natural beauty as conceived of by Adorno. In my research methods, what starts as a subjective desire to allude to natural beauty in the form of flowers and water first encountered in Bali, and then this desire is mediated by my own aesthetic judgement in the studio, can be read more objectively in the field of Western contemporary art. My practice literally images the provocative idea that Adorno's natural beauty and the promise of its immanence, is artificial and cannot be seen in nature but only in the work of art.

There are other ways that my floral resin works directly image Adorno's provocative ideas about art and natural beauty. In Chapter Three of this exegesis, 'Mountains, Resin, Glitter, Forests—Contemporary Practice and Provocative Beauty', I discussed the idea that in Adorno's, *Aesthetic Theory,* first published posthumously in 1970, Adorno notes that contemporary fine art obeys a strict taboo against the duplication of beauty in nature.[283] Adorno says that those whose art works earnestly attempt to capture a sunset, for example, are

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[280] Ibid. Truskolaski does not cite this reference. Düttmann, a Professor of Visual Culture and Philosophy, however, is a colleague of Truskolaski's at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

[281] Ibid.

[282] Ibid.

[283] Theodor W. Adorno. C. Lenhardt (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory.* New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1984: p.99.

quickly dubbed as dallying in kitsch. For Adorno, kitsch is heteronomous art, which is art that is compromised by commercialism.[284] When I see natural beauty in Bali, in flowers and water, instead of faithfully rendering what I see and it being dubbed kitsch, I bring kitsch material, artificial flowers, to my sculptural works, to create autonomous art forms, that are recognisable only as art. Like Adorno I conceive of this autonomy as a complex play between the social and autonomy, I think in terms of social mimesis.

In Chapter Three, I discussed the idea that beautiful autonomous art, according to Adorno, operates in the same way as when we encounter something beautiful in nature; it seems beyond our capability to fully comprehend natural beauty.[285] Adorno argues that natural beauty is aesthetically other because we are both confounded and attracted to it, and in finding it beautiful we also find it threatening.[286] Adorno believes then that the experience of natural

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[284] Theodor W. Adorno. 'On Popular Music'. *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science.* 9. 1941: p.17–48. This is an article that examines Adorno's theories of kitsch.

[285] Theodor W. Adorno. C. Lenhardt (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory.* 1984: p.99–102.

[286] Please refer to Chapter Three of this exegesis, 'Mountains, Resin, Glitter, Forests—Contemporary Practice and Provocative Beauty', to see an expanded argument on the relevance of the otherness of natural beauty and autonomous art today. Adorno argues that it seems beyond our capability to fully comprehend natural beauty. With regards to nature, Adorno argues that there is no other way except in terms of otherness, to understand our aesthetic predisposition towards natural beauty, natural beauty is authoritatively valid and appears to be naturally ordained. Natural beauty embodies otherness for Adorno, firstly because in addition to our attraction to it, the naturally beautiful also embodies a threat. He reminds us, Eurocentrically, that 'no sensitive person of European background' remains unmoved by the song of a robin after the rain, but there is also something 'frightening lurking in the song of birds.' Birds are the messengers, for example, of ill fortune, divination or death. Secondly, Adorno argues that our aesthetic preference for natural beauty demonstrates a 'non-identity' between subject and object. Adorno argues that, as well as our attraction to nature we see natural beauty as a problem requiring resolution. It is impossible to fully comprehend that which we designate as the beauty of nature, Adorno argues that natural beauty is not smooth, but rather it is other.

beauty is not smooth, we cannot fully schematise or experience it. He also argues that natural beauty's otherness is linked to the aesthetic otherness of autonomous art. Adorno argues that, in reading autonomous art, the experience is also disruptive, because in autonomous art's abstraction of the social, tension is created: the sum total of an autonomous artwork's various parts cannot offer a complete, seamless reading.

In my studio research, I create social mimesis: I abstractedly juxtapose kitsch, artificial flowers with classical sculptural forms, hard edge abstract grids with organic shapes, or as in the *Outsider* public artwork, 2011–14, bright lolly colours against serious modernist architecture. It is difficult to give a complete, non-ruptured reading of my practice; I believe a complete reading is disrupted through the strategy of juxtaposition. As the different elements play against each other they lack fusion and demonstrate tension, a term introduced by Adorno to account for the presence of seamlessness in a work of art. Like all autonomous art, as in my studio work, there will always be a point at which, because of this lack of fusion, that we cannot know everything about the artwork, we cannot have complete comprehension of it. Therefore my studio research is aesthetically other and reflects the otherness that we encounter in an experience of natural beauty.[287] I believe that the value of this otherness is the experience of the embodied difference of beauty. Adorno believes that the forces that control society cannot fully control autonomous art, it stands as a powerful challenge to these social forces as a

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I refer to: Theodor W. Adorno. C. Lenhardt (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory.* New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1984: p.98–105.

[287] In Chapter Three of this exegesis, I also discussed in detail the concept of otherness that Adorno and I claim for our research: aesthetic otherness. This otherness does not relate to people or places, but rather relates to our incapability of knowing everything about an artwork, artworks may refer to reality, but they are always also artworks, they open up new worlds. We can never have complete control over them. In his book, *Art, Origins, Otherness* from 2003, the scholar William Desmond writes that throughout history to the present day philosophers continue to regard seriously the concept of otherness and our inability to know everything about the world. See: William Desmond. *Art, Origins, Otherness.* New York: Suny Press. 2003: p.13. For a detailed account on the power of the radical autonomy of the autonomous artwork including as a remedy for commodification and as a source of disruption in contemporary culture please refer to Chapter Three of this exegesis.

remedy for commodification and also as source of disruption.[288] I believe also that my practice cannot be fully controlled by governing social forces because there is always a way that it is other.

It might be said that, in Adornian terms, that perhaps all autonomous art reflects the otherness of natural beauty. I argue, however, that my studio work is not only beautifully autonomous in Adorno's sense of autonomy in art as social mimesis, but additionally, my floral resin studio work acts as a diagram of how autonomous art reflects Adorno's otherness of natural beauty. My practice, literally transforms kitsch, (non-other) heteronomous material that is governed by the forces of modern subjectivity into sculptures and photographs that directly reflect the aesthetic otherness of natural beauty.[289] My practice establishes overt visual links between heteronomous art, autonomous art and the naturally beautiful. In this way, my studio work demonstrates how additional arguments of Adornian beauty may be positioned provocatively in the field of contemporary practice today. My studio work provokes discussion as to how beauty may be engaged in art today in a progressive manner, as opposed to being deemed conservative or nostalgic, as is often the case in influential anti-aesthetic theory.[290]

**Lolly coloured bricks**

Earlier in this chapter I have described beauty operating in my studio production in quite a melancholy way, as my practice is associated with philosophical and artistic concepts of natural beauty as dead. My studio research may also be associated also with the joy of beauty, with beauty's living qualities. I believe that no artwork carries only one text, and that my practice,

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[288] See: Andrew Fagan. 'Adorno, Theodor (1903–1969).' Bradley Dowden (ed.) James Fieser (ed.) *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy A Peer Reviewed Academic Resource.* Accessed November 20, 2014. URL: http://www.iep.utm.edu/eds/adorno Adorno believes that human beings in modern societies are subsumed and governed by highly restrictive social, economic and political forces. He believes that these restrictive forces extend to culture, mass entertainment, language, family, and education, and that the individual has no chance of becoming free and able to take part in the creation of society. Adorno sees that autonomous art disrupts these societal forces that govern the individual.

[289] Ibid.

[290] Elizabeth Prettejohn. 'Afterword'. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. 2005: p.193. Prettejohn discusses the hostility to beauty by those favouring the anti-aesthetic position in art.

as it is open-ended and not a literal narrative acts as a kind of catalyst for discussion, where many textual readings are possible. I argue, though, in the framing of my studio production, in order not to undermine my arguments that these texts should not be contradictory. I believe that in the acknowledgement that all ideas about my practice are socially constructed, and therefore my studio approach and the methodologies employed remain consistent throughout my research project.

For the studio research that was predominately undertaken indoors, I have also created a public artwork, *The Outsider,* located at the Telstra telephone exchange at 62 Inkerman Street, St Kilda, which is an inner city suburb of Melbourne where I live and work. Commissioned by Telstra, in order to combat graffiti, (the logic being that graffiti artists will not tag the building if there is a painted artwork on it) I am invited to paint the bricks around the telephone exchange in my own design.

I select the idea of a television test pattern as a basis to begin the project, as it is a visual sign for communication, and relates to the industry of telecommunications going on inside the building. With my interest in creating autonomous art, I am thinking of juxtaposing the gridded section of a television test pattern with a building that houses telephone technology, as opposed to making a literal statement about communications, seen in other areas of life, for example, in advertising. I wish my public artwork to be read only as art, I believe that there is a political tension in autonomous art that is a site to provide critique of the world. I also think that the television test pattern is pretty, I am attracted to bright, luminous colours. I think that my project acts as a colourful intervention, making a stark contrast with the local, dilapidated, unattractive, urban environment.

Painting each brick an individual, solid colour will form a brightly coloured, pretty grid that flickers like electronic lights. I mix television test pattern paint colours with nuances of black white, grey, dark blue, turquoise, bright green, orange, yellow, magenta, and red. Quite early in the project, as this painted skin around the building begins to develop, I see that the work needs to be colour balanced with tertiary colours as it is looking what I would call childish; it is all too bright. I think that adding tertiary colours, browns, blue-greys, grey-greens, or flesh tones gives some breathing space to the viewer, whilst maintaining the flickering pattern that alludes to electronics.

As I am painting the public artwork, I am overwhelmed by the response of passers by who in hundreds comment that the work is beautiful and that they do not see enough work like this—celebrating colour—in the public, urban environment. I think that the painted skin is beautiful. The British artist Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe comments that intensity, colours and movement in images, all of which are present in *The Outsider* are the ingredients of attractiveness, beauty or prettiness.[291] I think that if one does not find this public artwork personally beautiful, because it relates to things commonly deemed attractive in art or vernacular beauty—bright colours, light and movement—that a viewer might be able to see how my project relates to the subject of beauty. In this way I think it is possible to consider the agency of beauty operating in my practice.

I believe that *The Outsider* public artwork relates to prettiness, a form of beauty.[292] It is decorative, engages bright lolly colours and looks soft. Gilbert-Rolfe has analysed the concept of prettiness, first of all terming it a secularised form of Kantian beauty.[293] For Kant, prettiness contrasts with objective, disinterested beauty and must relate to objects from which we receive no subjective gratification; we receive gratification, for example, in viewing a handsome man or pretty woman. Kant's famous example of disinterested beauty is in the appreciation of a rose; for Kant we bring no subjective prejudice to this judgement, it is objectively beautiful. Prettiness, on the other hand, may be seen in that which Gilbert-Rolfe terms secularised and overtly subjective, for example, the appreciation of pretty women. Gilbert-Rolfe associates

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[291] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction.* 2011: p.24.

[292] In Chapter Two of this exegesis, 'A History of Daisies—Historic Precedents for Provocative Beauty,' I discussed the relationship between beauty and prettiness and that I am without conflict in claiming both for my practice. This was a strategy adopted by the English Aesthetic artists. Elizabeth Prettejohn argues that prettiness is aligned with formal beauty. This is because prettiness and beauty are both beautiful in the wider sense of offering something that logical and intellectual thought, moral and religious duty cannot offer, but which is nonetheless vital to human experience. I refer to: Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* 2005: p.124.

[293] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. 'Attractiveness and the Uncontrollable: An Update.' Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction.* 2011. p.13–31: p.15. All facts in this chapter about Gilbert-Rolfe's theories of prettiness have been taken from this essay.

prettiness or attractiveness with fashion models. I think that it is interesting that the manner in which Gilbert-Rolfe describes prettiness, as a secularised form of Kantian beauty, directly refers to its social nature. A major critique in contemporary academic scholarship is that Kant's concept of disinterested beauty is not objective, but subjectivity of the powerful disguised as objectivity.[294]

Utilising Kantian beauty secularised today in the form of prettiness is an overt admission that beauty is socially constructed, not a purely objective concept. I think that although I have framed my practice as relating to Adorno's concepts of the beauty associated with autonomous art that this is not in conflict with also claiming prettiness for it.[295] Both beauty and prettiness offer something that cannot be mapped straightforwardly onto logical thought or other aspects of society, for example, religion or politics.

Gilbert-Rolfe claims prettiness or attractiveness for his practice because it is the thing that most delays any relationship to goodness, which is what he believes that dominant contemporary art relating to anti-aesthetic thinking is concerned with in terms of the ethics of

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[294] See: Dave Beech. 'Introduction//Art and the Politics of Beauty.' Dave Beech (ed.) *Beauty.* London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Art Gallery and MIT Press: 2009: p.12–19. esp. p.12, 13.

[295] See: Stewart Martin. 'The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity'. *Radical Philosophy.* 146. November/December. 2007. p.15–25: p.25. Martin, in an article about the relevance of Adorno's concept of socially constructed autonomous art being relevant today, says that contemporary art now takes place in new scenes of the social, as compared to Adorno's 1960s art world but that Adorno's theories remain relevant, we must adapt them to new autonomous art. I think that as Adorno argues that art is socially constructed, that it is possible for autonomous works of art to have social texts, for example, a gender reading of texts embodied in autonomous art or prettiness as opposed to beauty, is not in conflict with Adorno's theories of autonomous art. I think that it is possible to mimic the social, as Adorno believes autonomous art does, and still bring socio-political readings to autonomous art. The important thing for Adorno and what I think is relevant to my practice is that art remains a mimesis of the social, not an illustration of it. This is one of autonomous art's political powers discussed throughout this exegesis.

socio-political enquiry. He says that in the end, Kant's judgement of reflective beauty, that denies the pleasures of the body, relates to goodness as exercised in moral duty. The experience of prettiness in the work of art, according to Gilbert-Rolfe is similar to viewing fashion models. If we consider images of fashion models, they do not take us to thoughts leading away from the image; we are invited to look around them for the sake of doing so, and for pleasure. I think that this is the case with *The Outsider*; I have selected a patterned design that leads the eye around the public artwork, for the sake of doing so. I think that the primary purpose of this artwork is the celebration of pretty colours.

Gilbert-Rolfe says that experiencing prettiness can suspend rationalisation. When we see something pretty, we stop thinking and are returned to uncontrollable (therefore sublime) bodily pleasure, experienced in the present moment, in the body that knows itself as complete in a continuum of space and time. Prettiness can act as a challenge to the fascism of the controlling idea. Gilbert-Rolfe thinks that art history since Kant is predominantly about trying to control the uncontrollable—sublime aesthetic experience—with ideas. Gilbert-Rolfe refers to the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari who denounce any system of thought that claims to have all the answers such as Western art history, (by the very nature that we can only think of it in terms of ideas) as fascist.[296] Gilbert-Rolfe argues for serious ideas, however, but those that develop from aesthesis, which he says are difficult to reduce to a proposition, even a complex one. Without this possibility of ideas emanating from aesthesis, we are stuck with predetermined meaning when viewing a work of art and unable to 'get at what's in the air.'

He argues that the conventional concept of the sublime, our attempt to manage the uncontrollable with words, illustrates our awe-filled reaction to scenes of vast beauty, for example, heroic suffering that inspires wonder in an act of goodness or starry nights.[297] Experiences such as these, lead to thoughts that take us away from what is present in the work of art, often negating what is in front of us. Gilbert-Rolfe says that this negation of what is in front of us in the work of art continues in the present day, he refers to Andy Warhol's degraded silk screen images of flowers, which have the subject of beauty at their centre, but negates this

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[296] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction*. 2011: p.28. Gilbert-Rolfe does not cite this reference.

[297] Ibid. p.18–23. Gilbert Rolfe refers to: Unknown. *Laocoön and His Sons*. Year Unknown. Marble. 208cm x 163cm x 112cm. Vatican Museums, Vatican City.

beauty with post-modern irony. Gilbert-Rolfe thinks that conventional images of the serious sublime and negation are taken seriously in art.[298]

Prettiness, however, in the current climate of anti-aesthetic thinking, is deemed frivolous. Gilbert-Rolfe says that frivolous prettiness, instead of being powerless in binary opposition to the serious sublime, holds much power, as the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) asserts that frivolity can never be fully defined in the dictionary, as the dictionary can provide only serious meanings of the word frivolous.[299] For Gilbert-Rolfe, the power of prettiness is also that it is intransitive, and not passive in relation to everything around it.[300]

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[298] Ibid. p.24. Gilbert-Rolfe argues that this focus on the sublime beauty of what is not there in the artwork continues in art to the present day:

> The difference between the *Laocoön* and Warhol is that … in Winckelmann's interpretation of the *Laocoön,* negation works to drive thinking to a level unattainable in the exclusively visual, because it depends on contemplating pain … whereas in Warhol, (Warhol's ironic flower paintings) negation has become the sign of what art is supposed to be and as such neither undermines anything nor leads us to think any thoughts we haven't already had. Otherwise they are quite similar, both lead to gloom, one as enlightenment, the other as cleverness.

[299] Ibid. p.14. Gilbert-Rolfe refers to Jacques Derrida. John P. Leavey Jr. (ed.) *The Archeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac.* Netherlands: Brill Publishers. 1980.

[300] In Chapter One of this exegesis, 'A Bevy of Beauties—Contexts for Provocative Beauty in Contemporary Art,' I noted that Gilbert-Rolfe relates feminine beauty to the pleasures of the body, and adopts this as a position with which to critique dominant forms of art that are hostile to prettiness. I have not developed or evaluated his ideas regarding feminine prettiness in this chapter, although I believe that he thinks that prettiness as relates to frivolity holds great power because it cannot be fully defined by the dictionary. If prettiness is feminine then, the feminine, which may be seen as conventionally powerless in terms of discourse, is very powerful. I was unable to source enough scholarly material to research this notion of feminine prettiness as being powerful concept to the full extent that I think it requires and I believe this to be a limitation of this research.

In the sheer celebration of bright, pretty colours in *The Outsider* I think that my project is frivolous. Because of the sheer, vast dimensions of the work, I believe that this colourful intervention in beige concrete environment is anything but passive. If *The Outsider* is indeed frivolous then its intransitivity gives it great power, as serious ideas emanating from a non-aesthetic place cannot thoroughly control my public artwork. Regularly, I have seen viewers of the public artwork, exclaiming, "Oh, its beautiful!" When they are doing this, rationalisation is suspended and involuntary bodily pleasure takes over, a type of uncontrollable, unconventional (sublime) experience. The viewer is returned to the present moment to experience what is in front of him or her. The authority of the idea is momentarily lost.

The aesthetic experience connected to *The Outsider* is difficult to reduce to a proposition, even a complex one. I think that, in usurping the authority of the idea, *The Outsider* demands the equality of aesthetic experience with conceptual thinking, thereby making the project an expression of the provocative dimension of beauty. In returning us to a bodily experience of pleasure that we know well, it is complete, (as are our bodies in a continuum of space and time,) that is, we are not trying to step in to manage something that is incomplete—our experiences of the conventional sublime—with words. To account for the power of sensory experience of prettiness, we must proceed from sensory experience and develop theory from there, as opposed to the other way around.

Whilst certainly there are serious scholarly ideas emanating from non-aesthetic concerns in *The Outsider*, for example that its form is a post modern urban intervention, I think that the aesthetic dimension of the work, by challenging the authority of the idea, calls for the practice to be also be considered seriously in aesthetic terms. In these ways I think that the agency of prettiness operating in *The Outsider* explores the provocative dimension of beauty in today's contemporary art climate that favours anti-aesthetic thinking that is hostile to beauty. Experiencing beauty in the present moment, its living qualities can be associated with provocative thought because beauty may be regarded as powerful in its frivolity.

**Feminine beauty in my practice**

The question remains, however, as to the utilisation of what may be at first glance be read as modernist grid in my practice, both in the bases employed to support *Rosebud*, 2011, and *Bali on a Blue Day*, 2011 and as painted bricks in *The Outsider*, 2014. The modernist grid is a form employed by many artists since the early twentieth century as embodying many serious and

academic conceptual ideas. The American art historian, Rosalind Krauss, points to the critical structure of the grid in twentieth century art, saying that the grid 'announces … modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative …'[301] Contemporary artists, however, continue to use the form of the grid, for example, in the studio production of American artists Sarah Morris and Julie Graham,[302] and Australian artist Janenne Eaton.[303] Although in my practice I am interested in not utilising overt narrative, which may be found in other areas of life, for example, literature, but instead in creating autonomous art, I believe that it is in the way that I use the grid structure, that Krauss argues extends to infinity, as grids are found everywhere in society, which is important in the consideration of beauty's agency in my practice.[304]

I believe that, largely, I employ the grid form in my studio research, not only to provide aesthetic contrast to the organic flowers, but also to decorate things that conventionally go undecorated, in an attempt to prettify the structure that exists below the painted surface. The grid is employed in *Rosebud*, 2011 and *Bali on a Blue Day*, 2011, on the support structure for the cast floral resin blocks, the plinth. In conventional gallery display, the plinth is a 'neutral' white object, designed to support the object but not interfere with its reading.[305] Instead, I incorporate the plinths overtly into my sculptural works, by means of what I see as playful decoration. The title of my studio work, *Bali on a Blue Day,* is a direct reference to Bali. Anyone that has visited Bali will have seen the gridded textile, the black, white and grey *kain poleng* (square textile) used to adorn buildings, sculptures, trees and the body. For future

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[301] Rosalind Krauss. 'Grids.' *October.* Vol. 9. Summer. 1979: p.50–64: p.53.

[302] Nessia Pope. 'How the Grid Conquered Contemporary Art.' *Artspace.* September 12, 2014. Accessed January 14, 2015.
URL: http://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/how_the_grid_conquered_contemporary_art

[303] See Janenne Eaton's website: Accessed January 14, 2015.
URL: http://www.janenneeaton.com.au

[304] Rosalind Krauss. 'Grids.' *October.* 1979: p.60.

[305] Barbara Cuetto. 'What Lasts from the Site-Specificity? New Practices in Monumental Museums of the XXI Century.' *Autonomous Department.* Accessed December 30, 2014.
URL: http://autonomousdepartment.com/writting/what-lasts-from-the-site-specificity-new-practices-in-monumental-museums-of-the-xxi-century/

purposes in this chapter, I draw attention to the fact that the craft of textile production in South East Asia is also generally the domain of women.[306] There is a reference to the work of women in my studio work. I see the gridded forms in my practice as a type of feminine decoration. The gridded public artwork, *The Outsider*, 2014, playfully prettifies and decorates the Telstra exchange in St. Kilda in lolly, feminine-looking colours.

In these ways, I see the grids in my practice referring more to decorative craft practices rather than overtly referring to serious academic ideas about the grid in modernist art outlined by Krauss earlier in this chapter. Of course, it is not possible to wholly ignore these readings as I am using the grid in a contemporary art context, but I see that the deployment of the grid as decoration is far more dominant in my practice. In its deployment as aesthetic decoration, I see that the grid joins with other elements in my practice, flowers and prettiness, allusion to fluids, or studio work titles such as *Sleeping Beauty* or *Ophelia*, for example, which are associated with Western notions of the feminine.[307] I also empathise with Indonesian women's domain of textile production.

But what does it mean today in contemporary art to attempt to make meaning from the position of the feminine? To claim the feminine position in art as a woman artist risks being

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[306] Leedom Lefferts. 'Southeast Asian Textiles: New Research and Writing.' *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. Vol. 23. 2. London: Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Department of History, National University of Singapore. 1992. p.405–417: p.406. Lefferts writes:

> Southeast Asian textiles—women's work, not composed as writings but codified in the items produced and the ways they are used—involved the dynamic presentation of culture in women's terms. Thus conceptualization about the nature of Southeast Asian cultural systems stemming from the analyses of textiles relate to perceptions coming from women and reconfigurations of cultural systems from their points of view.

[307] Elizabeth Mangini. 'Pipilotti's Pickle: Making Meaning from the Feminine Position.' *A Journal of Performance and Art.* 23. 2. 2001. p.1–9: p.1. Mangini discusses the motif of fluid as often designating the feminine in art. She discusses the Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist's use of a body of water as a metaphor for the feminine in the studio work: Pipilotti Rist. 'Sip My Ocean.' 1995. Video.

seen as essentialist in the current academic framework.[308] I empathise with a contemporary woman artist who engages flowers, urban interventions and the feminine in her practice, Swiss artist, Pipilotti Rist. In a video work from 1997, *Ever is Overall*, Rist employs a flower wand (a symbol of the feminine) and proceeds to smash windows of cars parked down a street with her wand. American curator, Elizabeth Mangini, writes that not only does Rist assert the feminine but she also alludes to the carnivalesque, a temporary lapse of rationality and order that includes freedom from traditional symbolic systems.[309] Mangini believes that women artists deploying the feminine may also incorporate elements in their practice that are non-feminine, in order to start making meaning out of femininity, in a way that does not simply re-iterate the female-male binary.

Certainly, my public artwork, *The Outsider,* does not induce the violent chaos of Rist's studio work discussed earlier in this chapter. I think, however, that *The Outsider* has the feel of gaiety associated with the carnival, of public spectacle. And in its girly, pretty, frivolous pattern making in a dilapidated urban environment it is disruptive in the urban landscape, which hardly features artistic undertakings such as mine. I think that, for a viewer, my project represents a temporary lapse of rationality and order in the urban environment. I believe that even though my practice celebrates the feminine, this lapse of rationality and order may be non-gendered.

Also, in the collaborative floral resin works undertaken with Ketut Suaka, a man, my feminine flowers are joined with his that for him are not signs for femininity, but the primary symbol of Balinese Hindu religion, the lotus. I often see men in Bali wearing flowers in their hair to express dedication to Hinduism. I believe that it would be improper after an investigation into our collaborative works for a viewer to conceive of Suaka's flowers as feminine, this would only play into cultural stereotypes of the East as feminine to the West's masculine outlined by

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[308] Ibid. p.1. Mangini argues that to only assert the feminine in art risks claiming essential positions for women and plays into a binary opposition that all women are feminine and all men are masculine.

[309] Ibid. p.4. Mangini refers to Russian scholar Mikhail Bahktin's ideas of the carnivalesque but does not cite her reference.

the Palestinian American scholar Edward Said.[310] (1935–2003) I think that our collaborative research made by a man and woman that embody different cultural meanings for the symbol of the flower begin to be disruptive and ambiguous through the juxtaposition of the cultural elements and texts. There is no overall reading of the studio work.

A total reading of the works, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter with reference to Adorno's philosophy of autonomous art, in a Western sense, is not possible, a gap is always in remainder. I believe that my practice moves some way to making meaning out of the feminine, in that it asserts the feminine, but not only the feminine. In its disruptive elements, which are non-gendered, symbols lose their meaning or become ambiguous. A further interrogation into making meaning out of the feminine is not possible in the word limit of this exegesis and I believe that is a limitation of this project. In the 'Conclusion' I will bring together the major points made in this exegesis about the provocative nature of beauty in order to discuss the outcomes of my research.

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[310] Edward Said. *Orientalism.* New York: Vintage. 1978*:* p.206. Writing about Western traditions of the study of cultures of Asia in the colonial period Said writes that … 'Every one of them kept intact the separateness of the Orient … its feminine penetrability …'

## Conclusion

This 'Conclusion' will focus on the outcomes of my research, and offers an analysis of the methodologies that I employed throughout my project, regarding whether or not beauty may be positioned provocatively in the field of contemporary art today. The answer to my major research question is yes beauty may be positioned provocatively in the current Visual Arts context. Furthermore, I believe that my practice and exegesis are testimony to this idea. To better facilitate a discussion on how my practice embodies texts of provocative beauty, I will first present the outcomes of my studio production.

The outcomes of the studio research are cross-disciplinary in nature; I have produced them across the traditional Visual Arts disciplines of sculpture, photography, and painting. I believe that due to the largely three-dimensional nature of the practice, it falls in the realms of contemporary spatial practices incorporating public art. The studio research embodies post-modern discourses in its forms, as traditional Visual Arts disciplines are broken down or joined and become new forms.[311] *The Outsider* public artwork, for example, is a painted intervention in the urban landscape. I believe, however, that the studio production also emphasises traditional aesthetic discourses that focus on signs and symbols for beauty referred to repeatedly throughout Western philosophy and art history, and/or vernacular beauty: flowers[312], nature,[313]

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[311] See: Rosalind Krauss. 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field.' *October.* Vol.8. 1979: p.31–44.

[312] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* Kindle Edition. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. 2005: p.195.

[313] Theodor W. Adorno. C. Lenhardt (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory.* New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1984. Adorno relies on the concept of natural beauty to develop his arguments about the relevance of autonomous art in modern society. He is indebted to German philosopher Immanuel Kant's aesthetics that also focus on the relationship between natural beauty and art. See: Immanuel Kant. James Creed Meredith (trans.) *Critique of Judgement (1790).* Oxford: Clarendon. 1952.

and intense colours.[314] My practice therefore entwines post-modern and traditional aesthetic discourses.

In order to emphasise that the focus of this research project is the traditional aesthetic subject of beauty, the mode in which the final exhibition/examination will be displayed is in a classical, contemporary manner in The Faculty Gallery, Department of Art, Design and Architecture at Monash University. Common photographs including documentation of the public artwork, *The Outsider*, will hang on the walls together and discrete sculptural objects, a separate body of work, will be placed in a cluster elsewhere. I will not experiment with more unconventional exhibition design, for example, dispersing the photographs throughout the exhibition; I think that this would detract from highlighting that the major area of focus for my project is traditional aesthetics. The viewer is also offered the opportunity for the exhibition to read as a classical, cohesive whole through formal cues. Grid structures, bright, intense colours and decorative elements, for example, the employment of painted surfaces to decorate what conventionally goes undecorated—sculptural plinths and austere buildings—are repeated throughout the studio production.

The final exhibition comprises firstly a body of discrete sculptures that have been created using clear resins, artificial flowers, wood, painted gridded structures, lights and traditional Balinese carving. In most instances, flowers are suspended in the resin to create an illusion of flowers floating or suspended in water or ice. An example of a studio work is *Bali On a Blue Day,* 2011, a studio work incorporating artificial flowers, resin, a gridded, painted, wooden base and lighting. (figure vi.1) Another example is *Flora and Patra,* 2015, a collaborative studio work with Balinese Hindu woodcarver, Ketut Suaka that combines my floral resin sculpture

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[314] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction*. Brisbane: Editions 3. 2011: p.15. Gilbert-Rolfe states that the ingredients of the attractive or prettiness, forms of beauty, may be intensity, colour and movement.

with his wood carving incorporating the traditional Balinese Hindu (often floral) *patra* (patterns.)

**Figure vi.1 Mary Lou Pavlovic. *Bali on a Blue Day*. 2011. Resin, artificial flowers, wood, acrylic house paint, lights. 0.6m h x 0.5m w x 0.3m w. Source: The artist.**

Secondly, documentation of the public artwork, *The Outsider* (2011–2014) will be presented in photographic form. (figure vi.2) Each photograph will be encased in Perspex to link the aesthetics of *The Outsider* to those of the floral resin works, in order to further emphasise the aesthetic dimension of the exhibition. *The Outsider* is a painted public artwork located at 62 Inkerman Street, St. Kilda in Melbourne in which individual bricks are painted around the Telstra telephone exchange in intense, bright colours loosely relating to the gridded colours that comprise a television test pattern.

**Figure vi.2 Mary Lou Pavlovic. *The Outsider.* 2011–2014. Acrylic house paint on the Telstra exchange, 62 Inkerman Street, St Kilda, Melbourne. Variable dimensions. Source: The artist.**

The studio works, which were the initial starting point for the research, commenced in Bali, Indonesia, where I subjectively found arrangements of flowers, water and fabrics in the public environments magnetically beautiful. The floral resin sculptures (without carving) especially

drew on Balinese water bowls decorated with spectacular, suspended floral arrangements that I saw outside many shops and hotels in the streets of Ubud. *The Outsider* was inspired by fabrics draped around shrines in the public environment—the painted surface of my artwork bares resemblance to a soft, decorative skin around the building. After beginning my studio production, in which I focused extensively on what I found beautiful, I asked the major research question, how may my studio research which celebrates beauty, be taken seriously in the field of contemporary art? This has been dominated recently by anti-aesthetic theory, which favours a socio-political dimension of art that is hostile to beauty.[315] Objections to the love of beauty from the anti-aesthetic view include political irresponsibility, for example, in either romantic escapism or shoring up the status of the rich and/or powerful.[316]

The exegesis engaged mainly with the question of how beauty may be regarded in art in more progressive terms. I read the American scholar Dave Hickey's seminal book about the importance of beauty in art today, *The Invisible Dragon*,[317] which insisted on the provocative nature of beauty in contemporary art. I wondered if I could also address this issue of provocative beauty in my research.[318] This would make a contribution to knowledge and studio art results, demonstrating that beauty has much to offer, long after the institutionalisation of the anti-aesthetic position in art today.[319]

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[315] Ibid. p.14.

[316] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* 2005: p.9.

[317] Dave Hickey. *The Invisible Dragon Four Essays on Beauty.* Los Angeles: LosAngeles.Press. 1993.

[318] Rex Butler. 'Introduction'. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction.* 2011. p.7–11: p.7. Butler draws attention to Hickey's book, stating that it is the founding moment of renewed interest in beauty in contemporary art.

[319] Michael Kelly. 'The Richter Effect on the Regeneration of Aesthetics.' Francis Halsall (ed.) Julia Jansen (ed.) Tony O'Connor (ed.) *Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy and Art Practice*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 2009. p.256–259: p.256. Kelly states that artists are once again speculating on the beautiful, long after the institutionalisation of anti-aesthetic theory in the art world.

**The conflict of Bali**

Before I outline how I arrived at a position of provocative beauty for my studio production, I will discuss the issue of Balinese culture in relation to my practice in more detail. This is because my methods throughout this exegesis have spoken of my subjective enthrallment with Balinese beauty, but I claim also to investigate the agency of beauty in my practice—what beauty may *do* in the work of art. The island of Bali was vital to my research but it needs to be outlined in this Conclusion exactly how and why it was important.

As already mentioned earlier in the Conclusion, there was a subjective component to my studio research, I drew on what I found personally beautiful about Bali. In one sense, it could be said that my studio production revealed a love for Bali. I believe, however, that it was a matter of locating significance as to what is important about reading works of art. This is how they function more objectively in the field of art, that is, what are they doing in culture? The American scholar Susan Sontag (1933–2004) draws attention to this idea in an essay in 1966, 'Against Interpretation.'[320] She argues that it is more productive to consider the form of an artwork and how it functions in culture, rather than the personal motivations of the artist. If we speculate on why the artist made a work, we simply find the 'cure' for the artist, rather than addressing the magical properties of what the art is *doing* in the world.

Bali was vital to my research, but not only because I found it subjectively beautiful. Firstly, by drawing on Balinese combinations of flowers, water, decoration and textile design, elements that I had already started to engage with in a less culturally specific sense in Australia, in Bali these elements were more pronounced, hence capturing my attention. Therefore I was provided with a catalyst to create objects that largely appear as recognisable forms of contemporary art in my own culture.[321] An urban street intervention, discrete sculptural forms that playfully

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[320] Susan Sontag. 'Against Interpretation.' *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 1966: p. 3–14.

[321] In Chapter Five of this exegesis, 'Water and Flowers in Bali—the Impact of Bali on my Research,' I examine in detail the relationship between what I found inspirational in Balinese culture and what I already knew of these things in my own culture. I refer to: Vladimir Braginsky. 'Rediscovering the Oriental in the Orient and Europe: New Books on the East-West Cultural Interface: a Review Article.' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and*

decorate their bases, sculptures that come to life only when the lights are switched on. These are the vernacular of Western post-modern art forms that by their form may provide critique of Western traditional art forms. The traditional sculpture, for example, that sits on a 'neutral' white plinth, or the notion that an urban intervention extends traditional conceptions of what three dimensional practice may entail to include a critique of its environment. I experienced beauty in Bali but this attraction was entwined with Western forms of contemporary art that allows for a principle discussion of my studio research in Western terms.

References to non-culturally specific flowers, water, and gridded structures in my studio production that were first seen in exaggerated forms in Bali because of repetition in the environment, also provided the means to access Western traditional aesthetic discourses that centre around conventional symbols of beauty, for example, the flower. In doing so, I was able to address the agency of beauty in my practice and ask the question how could beauty be positioned provocatively in the field of contemporary art? Like Western artists before me, I drew on a culture of Asia, in my case, aspects of Balinese culture, to resolve a problem in my own culture, specifically for me, that the problem of invoking beauty in contemporary art is often deemed nostalgic or politically irresponsible.[322]

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*African Studies.* London: Cambridge University. 1997. Vol. 60. Issue 3. p.511–532: p.514. Braginsky notes that Western artists have often responded to repetition in the cultures of Asia and also that Western artists on seeing repetition in Asian cultures were responding to things already known in part in their own cultures. Braginsky refers, for example, to the impact of the Indonesian gamelan for French composer, Claude Debussy (1862–1918) and Javanese architecture for Dutch architects Maclaine Pont (1884–1971) and Thomas Karsten, (1884–1945.)

[322] Ibid. p.15. I also discovered that the French Surrealist playwright, Antonin Artaud (1896–1948) was so inspired by Balinese dance, he wrote the seminal book, *The Theatre and its Double*, which, according to Italian scholar Nicola Savarese, is widely regarded as changing the course of Western theatre. By examining the non-linear aspects of Balinese dance Artaud provided a critique of Western theatre that to that time had been based on linear narrative. He resolved a problem in his own culture, which was how to expand the language of Western theatre, by turning to Balinese dance. I refer to: Antonin Artaud. Mary Caroline Richards (trans.) *The Theatre and its Double.* New York: Grove Weidenfeld. 1958. And: Nicola

In the collaboration with Ketut Suaka, (Suaka's references were specifically Balinese Hindu traditional floral patterns,) Balinese culture became important to my research because it had to be addressed that flowers, associated with beauty, symbolise different things to different cultures. In Western art history, for example, flowers are associated easily with femininity but in Balinese Hindu culture flowers are the fundamental symbol for Hinduism, the lotus.[323] Our collaborative studio research makes the conventional Western reading of flowers as important signs for feminine beauty in my studio research more ambiguous, hence transgressing gender readings and allowing the possibility of a feminine that is not wholly controlled by the patriarchal order in the practice.[324] I will elaborate this idea later in this Conclusion.

**Structure of the exegesis**

I will now articulate how and why the exegesis was structured as it was, to demonstrate how it best illustrates an argument for the provocative nature of beauty in art today. The exegesis is not a grand narrative incorporating all issues in my studio production. Rather, the written document focuses on the traditional aesthetic discourses running throughout my studio research, annexed with contemporary thought, in order to argue and enlighten the rationale of using beauty as a conceptual and aesthetic agent in my studio research.

The following is a general summation of the major methodologies employed in the exegesis. I divided the exegesis into 'The Field' and 'The Practice'. 'The Field' connected my studio production to the field of contemporary art. Chapter One titled, 'A Bevy of Beauties—Contexts for Provocative Beauty in Contemporary Art,' a contextual chapter, provided context for my arguments. To address beauty's disparagement in the field of recent art, I first determined

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Savarese. '1931. Antonin Artaud sees Balinese Theatre at the Paris Colonial Exhibition.' *The Drama Review.* Vol. 45. Issue 3. Fall. 2001: p.51–77.

[323] Nyoman Muka, in conversation with the author. Rudana Museum, Peliatan. Bali. May 15, 2012. And see: Agus Mulyadi Utomo. I Made Radiawan. I Made Jana. *Seni & Ornamen Tradisional Bali.* Denpasar: Fakultas Seni Rupa dan Desain, Institut Seni Indonesia, Denpasar. 2012.

[324] For a detailed account of this concept, please refer to 'Feminine Beauty in my Practice' in Chapter Five of this exegesis, Floating Flowers, Lolly Colours and Death—Provocative Beauty in my Practice.'

definitions of beauty. In creating my studio work, I realised that the sensory aspects of the studio research were of interest to me. I found in my exegetical research that it was not possible to isolate my practice from longer and wider traditions of philosophical enquiry into the sensory aspects of beauty in art today.[325] Beauty was alluded to in the exegesis as when it first came to be regarded in philosophical terms as sensory excellence.[326]

The German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten (1714–1762) introduced the sensory excellence concept of beauty into German universities in 1736, establishing the modern philosophical discipline of aesthetics. Baumgarten's immediate predecessor, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, (1724–1804)) developed Baumgarten's ideas emanating from sensory beauty and Kant remains central to any discussion of beauty in art today.[327] In Chapter

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[325] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 –2000.* 2005: p.10. Prettejohn argues that 'it is not possible to wholly isolate current thinking on beauty in art from longer and wider traditions.' Her book is about the relationship of historic figures thoughts about beauty, for example, Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and their relevance to ideas about beauty in art today.

[326] Paul Guyer. '18th Century German Aesthetics.' Edward H. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Fall. 2008. Accessed June 30, 2012. URL: http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/aesthetics-18th-german/ Guyer refers to: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. *Aesthetica/Ästhetik*. Dagmar Mirbach (ed.) 2 vols. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag. 2007. Partial translation in: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, Hans Rudolf Schweizer. *Ästhetik als Philosophie der sinnlichen Erkenntnis: Eine Interpretation der "Aesthetica" A.G. Baumgartens mit teilweiser Wiedergabe der lateinischen Textes und deutscher Übersetzung.* Basel: Schwabe.1973. Baumgarten also argues that beauty can be scientifically proved; the philosophical discipline of aesthetics is the science of the sensed and imagined. I have not adopted this dimension of Baumgarten's exposition in this chapter, as it is not relevant to the contemporary field of art or my practice.

[327] Tobin Siebers. 'Kant and the Politics of Beauty.' *Philosophy and Literature.* Vol. 22. 1. 1998: p.31–50. This article demonstrates Kant's aesthetic theory continues to be debated today in art. Throughout, Siebers refers especially to the influence Kant's theories had on twentieth century philosophers Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Hannah Arendt and Theodor Adorno.

One, I identified that the German philosopher, Theodor W. Adorno, to whom I have subscribed so often throughout this exegesis as relevant to my practice, was indebted to Kantian aesthetics regarding art, nature and disinterested beauty.[328]

Chapter One also established that beauty was maligned in art not only in recent anti-aesthetic theory, but also often in Western twentieth century art, for example, by the Dada movement[329] and the American modernist painter Barnett Newman.[330] I established that beauty, and therefore the aesthetic issues in my practice, are marginalised in dominant forms of recent Western art history. In order to provide alternative view points to a recent conventional scholarly suspicion of beauty, I then contextualised my use of the term provocative, and so I referred to a dictionary definition, that is, provocative is to provoke or stimulate discussion.[331] I argued that any provocative use of beauty in contemporary art could not re-iterate conservative notions of art in a reactionary manner, for example, that beauty is inherent in the art object, but rather must utilise genuinely progressive ideas.[332] I thought that reactionary ideas about beauty were no match for the systematic sophistication of post-modern thought.[333] I briefly referred to

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Siebers refers to Immanuel Kant. James Creed Meredith (trans.) *Critique of Judgement (1790).* Oxford, Clarendon. 1952.

[328] Theodor W. Adorno. C. Lenhardt (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory.* 1984.

[329] See: Arthur C. Danto. 'Kalliphobia in Contemporary Art.' *The Art Journal*. 2. 63. 2004. p.24–32: p.24. Danto discusses Dada artists' hostility to beauty, referring to: Marc Dachy. *The Dada Movement: 1915–1923*. New York: Rizzoli. 1990: p.122.

[330] Barnett Newman. John P. O'Neill (ed.) 'The Sublime is Now'. *Selected Writings and Interviews.* Berkeley, Los Angeles*:* University of California Press. 1992: p.170–173.

[331] *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster. Accessed October 10, 2014. URL: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/provocative

[332] Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000*. 2005: p.175. Prettejohn discusses the aesthetic ideas of American art critic Clement Greenberg who believes that beauty is a property of the art object.

[333] See: Rex Butler. 'Introduction.' Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Rex Butler (ed.) *Art After Deconstruction*. 2011. p.7–11: p.7–8. My ideas is supported here by Rex Butler, who discusses that reactionary ideas about beauty are no match for the rigorous, systematic objections to beauty in post modern theory.

the research of my peers who argue for the provocative dimension of beauty in art today, Dave Hickey, Biggs and Collings and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. In doing so I demonstrated that there is a contemporary context for working with provocative beauty in art today.

To strengthen my case that beauty may be positioned provocatively in the field, in Chapter Two, titled, 'A History of Daisies—Historic Precedents for Provocative Beauty,' I searched for historical precedents relating to my practice as to when beauty was radically positioned in art. I researched whether or not these historic ideas about provocative beauty had been developed in the present academic context, in order to show relevance to my practice. As my studio work took the forms of autonomous art, (in that it can be read only as art,) I researched and discovered that autonomous art was a model of beauty. And as my practice engages intense colour and decorative elements I regarded it as pretty. I researched concepts of autonomous art and prettiness. I discovered that Kant's philosophy of the disinterestedly beautiful in art, which relates to a contemporary concept of autonomous art, relates to natural beauty, for example, flowers.[334] Disinterestedly beautiful art was generated by the artist's imagination and was not concerned with social realities.[335] Kant's concept of disinterested beauty challenged Christian asceticism and the authority of the human form as a standard of beauty.[336]

My research revealed that American scholar Tobin Siebers argued that Kant's theories of disinterested beauty related to a contemporary notion of aesthetic otherness.[337] Aesthetic

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[334] See: Tobin Siebers. 'Kant and the Politics of Beauty.' *Philosophy and Literature.* 1998. This article discusses the relationship between Kant's aesthetic theories and autonomous art today.

[335] See: Immanuel Kant. James Creed Meredith (trans.) *Critique of Judgement (1790).* 1952.

[336] Tobin Siebers. 'Kant and the Politics of Beauty.' *Philosophy and Literature.* 1998.

[337] Ibid.p.37. Siebers argues that the otherness of the naturally beautiful and autonomous art is aesthetic otherness realised in the small, human scale of the beautiful and is experienced by the subject as the embodied difference of beauty. Siebers argues that the value of the aesthetic otherness of the beautiful lies in asking us to confront otherness in our world, rather than referring, for example, to ideas of aesthetic otherness in the mind. Siebers reminds us that the French philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard's characterisation of the otherness of the sublime takes place wholly in the mind of the subject. Siebers refers to: Jean-François Lyotard.

otherness and its relationship to natural beauty and autonomous art was a philosophical investigation developed in a late twentieth century contemporary enquiry by Adorno.[338] Adorno acknowledged that art and natural beauty were socially constructed but also important concepts with which to argue radicalism for the work of art. Prettiness, another dimension of my studio production, was a dimension of beauty taken up by the English Aesthetic artists in order to challenge religious authority and the prudishness of Victorian society.[339] Adapting Kantian thought that art should not be concerned with religion or socio-political realities, English Aesthetic painters, often depicting pretty women, celebrated sensuality. I found that the philosophy of the English Aesthetic painters around the provocative nature of beauty related to the contemporary thoughts of British artist Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Both place value in appreciating art in the present moment as a means of utilising provocative beauty.[340]

Chapter Two raised the issue that prettiness, in which English Aesthetic artists subscribed to, relating it to Kantian beauty, was not regarded by Kant as a form of disinterested beauty. Kant regarded judgements made about the human body as subjective and not disinterested. The British art historian Elizabeth Prettejohn argued that English Aesthetic artists' use of the ideas of prettiness remained Kantian in the wider sense, in that the artists were concerned with issues that could not be mapped straightforwardly onto religion, the socio-political or logical thought.

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'Acinema.' Andrew Benjamin (ed.) Paisley N. Livingston (trans.) *The Lyotard Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell. 1989.

[338] Theodor W. Adorno. C. Lenhardt (trans.) *Aesthetic Theory.* 1984. In Chapter Three of this exegesis, 'Mountains, Resin, Glitter, Forests—Contemporary Practice and Provocative Beauty', I have presented a discussion on the contemporary concept of otherness, its problematic nature around, for example, the mystification and fetishisation of people, and the fact that some philosophers regard the concept of otherness, that is, how we account for difference, as a matter for philosophical enquiry today. I have concluded that Adorno's enquiry, to which I subscribe for my studio research, is of the latter enquiry.

[339] Elizabeth Prettejohn. 'Victorian England: Swinburne, Ruskin, Pater.' *Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000.* 2005: p.111–156. See esp. p.111–113, 125–126.

[340] See my discussion in Chapter Two of this exegesis: 'English Aestheticism, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe and the Power of Pretty' in 'A History of Daisies—Historic Precedents for Provocative Beauty in Art.'

I believed that this idea about prettiness was relevant to my practice in that was possible to engage the issue of prettiness and still be concerned with creating autonomous art (which, in any case, I believe embodies the social.) Prettiness could be regarded as a secularised form of Kant's disinterested beauty.

In order to provide further support for my argument that beauty may be used provocatively in visual art today, in Chapter Three, titled, 'Mountains, Resin, Glitter, Forests—Contemporary Practice and Provocative Beauty,' I examined contemporary artists whose practices embodied provocative beauty. I discussed, for example, the landscape paintings decorated with glitter by British artist Kate Bright and the stylised, pop art-like nature paintings of American artist Alex Katz. Both artists employed subject matter similar to mine and I believed that arguments about provocative beauty in their studio production had correlation with my own practice. Katz engaged feminine flowers in order to provocatively challenge the dominant macho abstract expressionism of the 1960s. Bright's practice, by utilising kitsch material to depict landscapes, literally alludes to Adorno's aesthetic otherness of the work of art, its relationship to natural beauty and its power to disrupt dominant forms of social control in which kitsch material manifests as art that is compromised by commercial influences, in fashion, entertainment and across popular culture.

This aesthetic otherness was valuable when considered as the embodied otherness of beauty experienced when encountering things in the world. My investigation revealed that some philosophers today continue to regard the concept of otherness in art as important, for example, the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, (1930–2004) similar to Adorno, believed that we could not know everything there was to know about an artwork; we could never be in full possession of all its meanings.[341] Artworks reflect reality but they are always also artworks, opening up new worlds. Adorno's theories of natural beauty and autonomous art are compatible with post modern thought which argues that our concepts of natural beauty and autonomous art are socially constructed; this does not prevent us from not knowing everything

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[341] James J. Winchester. *Aesthetics Across the Color Line: Why Nietzche (Sometimes) Can't Sing the Blues*. Maryland, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield. 2002: p.100. Winchester discusses Derrida's ideas in: Jacques Derrida. Geoff Bennington (trans.) Ian McCleod (trans.) *The Truth in Painting.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1987.

possible about works of art; I think that this remains their political power. The fact that many scholars today remain engaged with Adorno's aesthetic theories and argue for their relevance in contemporary culture is testimony to the fact that his ideas still have much to offer us.[342]

'The Field' mapped the contemporary contexts for my practice to be considered as a form of provocative beauty. It demonstrated that there was historic lineage with major ideas today about the progressive politics of beauty in art and 'The Field' provided support for the idea of provocative beauty in my studio research by identifying peers who engage a progressive dimension of beauty in their practice. In 'The Practice', I discussed my research as a journey of discovery. As the concept of Orientalism has had such a large impact on scholarly research about the East, and Bali, an island of South East Asia was the source of inspiration for my studio research about beauty, I decided to dedicate Chapter Four of the exegesis, titled, 'Water and Flowers in Bali—The Impact of Bali on my Research', to the impact of Bali on my studio production, as there were many issues to address.[343]

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[342] Amongst the art theorists, philosophers and cultural theorists that I have discovered in my research who argue for the relevance of Adorno's theories of autonomous art today are:
Geoffrey Boucher. *Adorno Reframed: Interpreting Key Thinkers for the Arts.* London: IB Tauris. 2013.
Andy Hamilton. *Adorno and the Autonomy of Art*. 2007. Accessed January 19, 2014. URL:http://www.andyhamilton.org.uk/andy_pdfs/Adorno_and_the_autonomy_of_art.pdf
Peter Uwe Hoendahl. *The Fleeting Promise of Art: Adorno's Aesthetic Theory Revisited.* New York: Cornell University Press. 2013.
Stewart Martin. 'The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity'. *Radical Philosophy.* 146. November/December. 2007.
Sebastian Truskolaski. 'Images Without Images. Adorno on Natural Beauty.' *Mute.* February13, 2013. Accessed January 19, 2014.
URL: http://www.metamute.org/community/your-posts/images-without-images-–-adorno-natural-beauty.

[343] Vladimir Braginsky. 'Rediscovering the Oriental in the Orient and Europe: New Books on the East-West Cultural Interface: a Review Article.' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.* 1997: p.511. Braginsky states that 'the literature on the cultural interrelations of East and West published up to the present time is enormous. Even so, every new scholarly

Although my project is largely about visual beauty, from an ethical perspective, I felt that I could not proceed with my project without some investigation into the politics of creating art at the East–West cultural interface. I believe that this investigation is testimony to an idea that I support—that beauty does not exist in a vacuum in contemporary culture. I have already discussed the issue of Bali in relation to my subjective appreciation of it earlier in this Conclusion. In addition, however, I think that it is important to state, after careful deliberation about the concepts of Orientalism and with reference to the Russian South East Asian academic, Vladimir Braginsky's arguments about the concepts of Orientalism, that I regard my studio work as an example of cultural synthesis, not Orientalism.[344] Importantly, there is Balinese agency in my practice, in that the collaborative works undertaken with Ketut Suaka were instigated by Balinese people and the Balinese Hindus receive religious benefits from our studio production. Chapter Five, titled, 'Floating Flora Death and Lolly Colours—Provocative Beauty in my Practice', documented the practice in writing as it unfolded throughout the research period. This chapter also provided the opportunity to bring theory explored in the exegesis to the practice.

**The studio production: provocative beauty**

To summarise my findings throughout this research project: my studio production embodies various texts in which the provocative capacity of beauty in art is demonstrated today. Importantly, these texts are all located in the more human dimension of the beautiful as opposed to the vast sublime. The beautiful relates very much to a primary source of inspiration for my

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study in this field cannot but provoke interest, so important is the topic, particularly today in the era of so-called globalization.'

On p.511 he also refers to the fact that the Palestinian American scholar, Edward Said, in his book *Orientalism* has brought about a complete transformation of the field of Asian studies. Braginsky refers to: Edward Said. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient.* London: Penguin Books. 1991.

[344] Ibid. p.513–515. Braginsky refers to a model of cultural synthesism as opposed to Orientalism in the work of some Western artists engaging with the East. He discusses, for example, Dutch architects Maclaine Pont and Karsten and their inspiration in Javanese architecture, the effect of Japanese art on French painter, Claude Monet, and the effect of the Javanese gamelan on French composer Claude Debussey.

practice—small, pretty, feminine, decorated floral water bowls that I discovered in Ubud, Bali. Issues of beauty in my practice demonstrate that beauty may be associated with progressive thinking that provokes discussion about the way beauty has been positioned by theory that relates to anti-aesthetic thought. In this context, beauty has been viewed as being reactionary and an expression of conservatism. I believe instead, that my research makes a contribution to studio art results and knowledge that claim the provocative capacity of beauty in art today. I think that it is unnecessary for a viewer to personally find my work beautiful. In my practice's employment of conventional symbols for beauty I think that the viewer can access the agency of beauty in my practice.

Firstly my studio work, in its employment of artificial materials as metaphors for natural beauty, and also in its references to an afterlife (artificial flowers are forever enshrined in the resin) literally demonstrates the Adornian idea that the promise of human immanence in the concept of the naturally beautiful does not appear in nature (a social construction) but only in the work of art. By breaking the promise of our immanence, (we realise it is artificial,) the promise of natural beauty is upheld in the practice.

Additionally, in its autonomous nature, a complex play between autonomy and the social, my practice literally illustrates Adornian ideas that autonomous art, in its mimicry of the tension that we find in the concept of the naturally beautiful is aesthetically other to the society it refers to by virtue of mimesis. This otherness bares no relation to clichéd ideas of the Other, (often spelt with a capital O,) as those from different cultures to one's own, rather it is found in our inability to know everything about an artwork. The otherness in my studio work is found in the embodied difference of beauty. The otherness of works of autonomous art, which today exist in new scenes of the social (for example my practice embodies an intervention in the urban environment) remain a powerful tool in which to provide social critique.

Secondly, in its engagement of decoration and intensity, movement and colour, my practice embodies Gilbert-Rolfe's theories of the power of prettiness in art. My studio research engages hallmarks of prettiness, which may be deemed frivolous, especially when artists engage prettiness in a field in which anti-aesthetic theory is dominant. As frivolity cannot be fully defined by the dictionary—the dictionary can only provide serious meanings— frivolous prettiness can be very powerful, instead of powerless. Prettiness in a work of art invites the viewer to remain focused on what they are experiencing in front of them—it does not lead the

viewer away to other thoughts. In celebrating colour and intensity I invite the viewer to engage sensory experience. Prettiness may suspend rationalisation and in this manner, prettiness can act as a challenge to the authority of the idea. Prettiness places us in the present moment, and we are returned to the pleasures of the body, which knows itself as complete in a continuum of space and time. This is in contrast with the deferred experience of accounting for the conventional sublime, which delays pleasure and is about using words to control what is uncontrollable and incomplete in aesthetic experience. Prettiness demands its own validity in the work of art and in valuing theoretical ideas that emanate from the sensory position in art.

Finally, in its relation to femininity, my practice engages conventional symbols for the feminine beauty: fluids, flowers, pretty colours and deployment of grid structures to prettify what normally goes undecorated, it is decorative. My studio research, in its strategies of disruption, for example, as an intervention in public space or in its juxtaposition of meanings for flowers, (femininity and religious) reflects the lapse or order and rationality of the carnivalesque, in which symbols are released from meanings and become genderless. My practice is feminine but has dimensions that also transgress gender, and therefore is not wholly dominated by the patriarchal system.

In these ways, my studio research and the underlying conceptual theoretical positioning, requests and promotes that we take seriously the provocative nature of beauty in art today, and thus, makes in my opinion, an original and valuable contribution to knowledge and cultural production today.

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