

# SHIBUSA — EXTRACTING BEAUTY

*Edited by*

**Monty Adkins and Pip Dickens**

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*Shibusa* series – *Katagami Sketch 32*  
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Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

T.S. Eliot, *The Rock*



## About this volume

This volume celebrates a number of artistic endeavours: music, painting, the skill of making in general, and Japanese kimono design and related crafts. The book is designed not only to accompany the exhibition *Shibusa – Extracting Beauty* by Pip Dickens (visual artist) and Monty Adkins (composer) but also to document the creative journey from its inception to the making of the final works. As such, the book is a rich repository of ideas and discusses a wide range of topics both directly related and occasionally tangential to the project – though all the ideas, concepts and research presented in the book fed into the final exhibition. The book thus provides a unique glimpse into the creative process of the artist and musician, and also into how their accumulated collaborative ideas and investigation into Japanese aesthetics and katagami stencils resulted in the works presented in the final exhibition.

The book is split into three parts. The first part, by Monty Adkins, discusses the relationship between painting and music from both historical and contemporary angles and uses this as a foundation to outline his own creative practice. The second part comprises four chapters by Pip Dickens investigating notions of artistic practice – methodology, pattern, colour and rhythm, and the materials used in the making of her paintings. The third part of the book contains three contextual chapters, by Roy Exley, Pip Dickens and Makoto Mori. The first of these, by Roy Exley, provides an analysis and critique of collaborative practice in the arts. The remaining chapters will be of special interest to those wishing to understand more about historical and contemporary Japanese textile design.

## About the editors

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**Pip Dickens** was the Leverhulme Trust Award Artist in Residence in the Department of Music at the University of Huddersfield, 2010–11. She has a Masters in Fine Art, Slade School of Fine Art (UCL). She was shortlisted for the NatWest Art Prize in 1997; was the recipient of the Jeremy Cubitt Prize (Slade School of Fine Art); won the Edna Lumb Art Travel Prize in 1995, where she undertook research in Iceland; was a nominee for the Jerwood Contemporary Painters in 2009; and was shortlisted for the Celeste Painting Prize in 2009. She is an independent professional artist.

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**Makoto Mori** is a kimono designer based in Kyoto, Japan. Born in 1986, he studied at Kyoto City University of Arts. He inherited his family business and fuses traditional kimono design knowledge and skills inherited from his father with state-of-the-art computer graphics technologies. He also studied at Doshisha Business School under Professor Yuzo Murayama, where he completed a thesis on the relationship between Japan's heritage industries and the 'Cool Japan' movement. He is currently working on designing new-style kimonos incorporating 'Cool Japan' elements.

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advice along the way. We extend special thanks to the Kyoto designers for allowing us to interview them and discuss, candidly, transitions taking place in the kimono industry: Yunosuke Kawabe, Taro Matsumara, and most of all Makoto Mori for his in-depth essay on the history of kimono and contemporary design and production. We wish them every success in the future with their practices.

This book is enriched by many artists' images that contributed useful references to themes examined in the project. We would like to thank the Naruyama Gallery, Tokyo (Matsui Fuyuko); Purdy Hicks Gallery, London (Estelle Thompson); and Karsten Schubert Gallery, London (Bridget Riley) for their images and permissions; and also artists Paddy Hartley and Liz Rideal, for providing information and images of their work.

*Monty Adkins and Pip Dickens*

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*Pip Dickens*



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*Part One*

**Shibusa: a musician's perspective**



### Introduction

The *Shibusu* exhibition is a collaboration between the painter Pip Dickens and myself that has developed through a kindred approach to thinking about our respective art forms and the influence Japanese culture has on our work. Dickens' fascination with

Japanese *katagami* stencils was the starting point for the collaboration. These fragile and intricate mulberry-paper stencils have been used for centuries in Japan in the dyeing of textiles (see Figure 1.1). The stencils themselves often feature much repetition of either geometric or figurative design. However, as the stencils are handmade, this repetition is never exact. The stencil betrays the humanity of the artisan – the physical trace of cutting and crafting the patterns. Through an in-depth study of the methods of creation and use of *katagami* stencils, a core set of concepts has emerged in our thinking: the inexactitude of a hand-crafted repetitive physical process, a physical trace, noise (the interruption of a process), colour, pattern, repetition, layering, counterpoint and texture. This shared vocabulary and terminology have provided a starting point from which we have developed our individual practice.

As the project has developed, the collaboration has become one in which the resulting work is a refraction of multiple layers of influences: my music and Dickens' paintings, while based on the original *katagami*, have assumed their own influence. This is to be expected of such a process. However, for me as a composer and an academic, the interesting issue has been to ascertain the sometimes startling differences in perception we have of each other's work: examining how the painter hears music through visual metaphors, and how the composer looks at paintings as if every brushstroke is a sound suspended in a virtual space kinetically interacting with other sounds

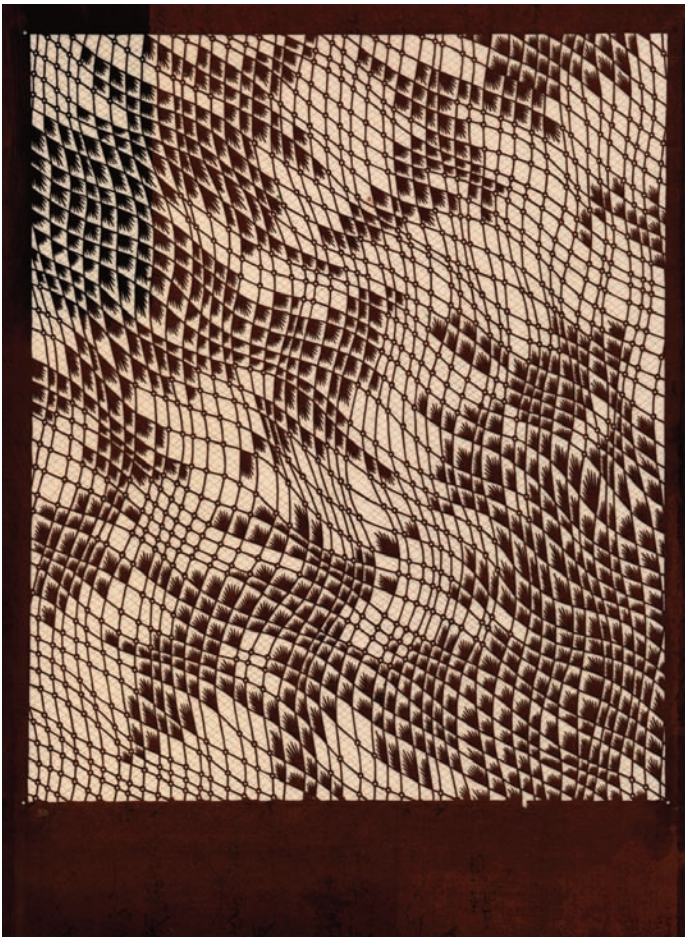


Figure 1.1 *Katagami* stencil: Japanese hand-cut stencil for printing on to kimono fabric. Collection of Pip Dickens, © Pip Dickens

around it. These differences in perception are worthy of further examination, for though a kinship between music and painting has been the subject of many writings throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many of these writings consider aspects of rhythm, colour-timbre and harmony, which, while valid in the construction of music and art, do not examine our perception of the resulting artefact.

### Sound and image: an historical perspective

The association of sound and image has been a subject that has fascinated composers and artists for centuries, and can be traced back as far as the investigations of Aristotile and Pythagoras into the correlation between the light spectrum and musical tones. Although the main theoretical texts that discuss the relation between music and painting emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century, most notably centred around those artists associated with the Bauhaus and the famous meeting in 1911 of Arnold Schoenberg and Wassily Kandinsky, practical investigation and experimentation between colour and sound has its origins further back in instruments often termed ‘colour organs’, such as the clavecin oculaire constructed by Louis Bertrand Castel in 1734. In 1720, some 14 years prior to the construction of the clavecin oculaire, Castel wrote, ‘Can anyone imagine anything in the arts that would surpass the visible rendering of sound, which would enable the eyes to partake of all the pleasures which music gives to the ears?’<sup>21</sup> The clavecin oculaire was a device that used 500 candles, 240 levers and pulleys, and 60 reflecting mirrors to illuminate a 2-metre-square frame with 60 coloured windows (5 octaves of 12 tones, each with a specific hue), each with a curtain that was automatically raised when the corresponding key on the harpsichord was struck. Many such instruments were developed throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – Kaster’s pyrophone, Vietinghoff-Scheel’s chromatophon and Thomas Wilfred’s clavilux are but a few examples of instruments that all worked on a similar premise. All these instruments were based around the keyboard

as a means of triggering colour–pitch combinations. In the twentieth century this tradition of using a physical mechanism to produce an association of sound and colour continued with experiments using film to combine sound and image, particularly in the work of Norman McClaren, Oskar Fischinger (who created his own colour organ – the lumigraph – in the late 1940s) and Walter Ruttmann.

Aside from these mechanical devices aimed at multisensory stimulation, conceptually the most coherent approach is found in Richard Wagner’s notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, expounded in his essay ‘The artwork of the future’ of 1849, and which he defined as a unification of music, song, dance, poetry, visual arts and stagecraft.<sup>2</sup> Although Wagner’s influence on future generations of composers is often discussed in terms of his advancements in harmonic thinking and the emancipation of the dissonance, the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* can be traced through Schoenberg’s opera *Die Glückliche Hand* (1910–13) and Scriabin’s *Prometheus* (1911) – both of which were accompanied by carefully choreographed coloured lights – and Ives’ unfinished *Universe Symphony* (1911–28), as well as countless contemporary multimedia spectacles.

At the same time as Wagner’s development of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a shared vocabulary emerged between painting and music that extended beyond mere metaphor – works in both creative disciplines were discussed as compositions, panels or improvisations that have a form. James Whistler went further and titled his paintings with musical terms such as ‘nocturne’, ‘harmony’ or ‘study’, and most famously the *Symphony in White* series (1862–7). The purpose of such titles was to emphasise the tonal qualities of the composition and to reduce the emphasis on narrative content.

In Karl Gerstner’s book *The Forms of Color*, he observes that:

Each musical tone can be defined by three parameters: 1) frequency (pitch), 2) amplitude (volume), and 3) overtones (tone color). Each color can likewise be defined

by three parameters: 1) color tone (or hue, according to Munsell), 2) lightness (or value), and 3) purity (or chroma).<sup>3</sup>

In the early part of the twentieth century the mapping of colour to musical pitches was the principal preoccupation of Roy de Maistre, a contemporary of Klee and Kandinsky. De Maistre's 1935 painting *Colour Composition Derived from Three Bars of Music in the Key of Green (Colour Scale on a Musical Theme from Beethoven)* is typical of his work and is based on a system the painter developed from Sir Isaac Newton's theories of colour, expounded in the latter's treatise *Opticks* of 1704. De Maistre believed that 'a mathematical relationship of frequencies ... united the physical phenomenon of light and sound'.<sup>4</sup>

During the first part of the twentieth century a number of composers were also active as painters. Schoenberg painted a number of expressionist works and maintained close contact with Wassily Kandinsky and Der Blaue Reiter group. Schoenberg's pupil John Cage created drawings and paintings that often used similar chance techniques to those employed in his compositions; indeed Sharon Kennedy maintains that 'Cage's awareness of silence in music can be seen through its abundance of white space in his piece called *Stones 2* (1989)'.<sup>5</sup> While only Kandinsky purported to experience an intense synesthetic bond between sound and image, it is clear that the visual work of both Schoenberg and Cage were informed by their musical aesthetic.

As digital technologies proliferated during the second part of the twentieth century, it might be assumed that the connection between music and painting would become lessened in favour of music in conjunction with the moving image. Yet despite the propensity of visual music in our contemporary culture, painting is still a significant source of inspiration for contemporary sound artists and composers. The influence of painting on music comes in many forms: the initial structural model of Kaija Saariaho's *Verblendungen* (1982) was a brushstroke from which the composer abstracts simple geometric shapes that control parameters such as tessitura,

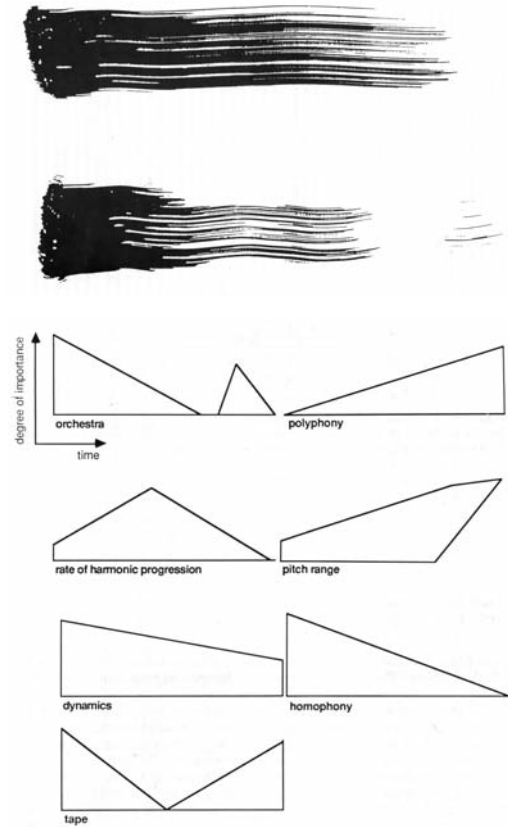


Figure 1.2 Saariaho, *Verblendungen* sketches: shapes for musical parameters derived from the initial brushstroke.

harmonic and polyphony, and the relationship between the orchestra and the electronics (see Figure 1.2).

Richard Barrett's *Ne Sonje plus à fuir* (1986) is influenced by a painting by the Chilean surrealist Roberto Matta; while more recently Liza Lim's *The Four Seasons* for solo piano is subtitled 'after Cy Twombly', demonstrating a kinship with Twombly in the way in which Lim handled her sonic material. In electronic music Richard Chartier's *decisive forms* is derived from and takes its title from the biomorphic forms of Jean Arp's early work, while his collaboration with Taylor Deupree on *Specification.Fifteen* (2006) was inspired by the *Seascapes* series of the Japanese photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto. Bernhard Günter's *brown, blue, brown on blue (for Mark Rothko)* clearly states its inspiration in the title. Morton Feldman was also influenced conceptually by the work of Mark Rothko,

writing in all but name Rothko's requiem in his *Rothko Chapel* (1972). Dore Ashton writes on Feldman that:

His music – hesitant, reticent, disembodied and non-symbolic in the sense that the sounds have no reference to anything but themselves – refuses the architectural tradition of music and aligns itself with the expansive space of contemporary painting ... he himself described the effect of one of his pieces 'as if you're not listening but looking at something in nature'.<sup>6</sup>

One of the reasons why many composers are drawn to the still image rather than the moving image is to do with the nature of our perception of the static image as opposed to the moving image and sound. Many musicians revel in using their imagination to explode the stillness of painting into musical time, rather than following the implied narrative (no matter how abstract) of a moving image. Through placing one temporal medium in conjunction with a non-temporal one, the artists leave much interpretation open to the viewer. However, as soon as one temporal medium is combined with another temporal one, in this case music and image, a hierarchy is established – often to the detriment of sound. The visual component of any film dominates the senses, with the majority of sensory information being received through the eye. Regarding the connection of artistic practices and temporality, Hugo Garcia writes that:

One of the most important paradigms in the audiovisual field is rooted in the different nature of the musical and visual domains. The musical language is developed over time, while the graphical expression is created over space. Metaphors, abstract relationships, and even methodic mappings have been developed in order to merge both domains. In the case of music and static images, the relationships tend to be more subjective, but at the same time they possess a subtlety that is lost with the use of dynamic graphics. On the other hand, in the case of dynamic graphics, the

music and image share the same time element, which makes them more related.<sup>7</sup>

Though superficially lacking a temporal dimension, a painting nevertheless displays evidence of the work's creation. Whereas music necessitates an experiential temporality (the perception of the work through time), painting demonstrates a witnessed temporality (the perception of a past process of creation). The muscular 'memory' of a physical gesture is important as it always carries the trace of human action and betrays its emotive force in the spectral or paint density. The physicality of an instrumentalist's performance or the recording of a ball rolling around a jar has a counterpart in the gesture of a painter's brushstrokes. A simple analogy is between the note or sound object that can be split into intensity, duration, pitch, timbre and shape, with elements such as form, colour, texture, location and light. Rudolf Arnheim, in *Art and Visual Perception*, describes high-level structures of the visual domain.<sup>8</sup> For example, shapes have weight and direction, and these two elements generate balance. Hugo Garcia notes that:

Arnheim also analyzes the concept of movement in two different contexts: first as the physical displacement of objects in time, considering speed and direction; and also as an illusion in static works, produced by the 'simulation of gravitatory effects' and the direction of the shapes. Finally Arnheim analyzes tension as another perceptual element that is associated with the movement and the illusion of movement without motion.<sup>9</sup>

In the latter part of the twentieth century there were numerous attempts to marry the physical visual gesture and sonification within the musical domain itself. Max Mathews and Lawrence Rosler's *Graphic 1* (1968) and Iannis Xenakis' *UPIC* system (1977) both translate images made by the composer into sound. In the *UPIC* system composers can map their physical gestures to waveforms for synthesis, volume envelopes and larger scale form – the composer can literally draw the



composition. One of the first examples of such a sonification of visual data was Xenakis' electronic work *Mycenean Alpha* (1978). In this work the 'score' comprises drawings of interlocking aborescent structures that determine pitch direction, volume and timbre.<sup>10</sup>

Further software developments that continue in this vein of converting image to sound are *Metasynth* by Eric Wenger and *Iannix* by La Kitchen. Arguably, much contemporary electronic music is primarily composed through reliance on the visual and *Shibusu* is no exception. Unlike analogue studios, in which there was little correlation between eye and ear in the treatment of sound (the process was more of a physical one, very much reliant on the ears to adjust parameters), many digital studios are now based around the computer, with each piece of software having its own graphic user interface (GUI). Such is the influence of such GUIs that Oval (Markus Popp) talks about his work visually – the layout of sound files in a sequencer window is important aesthetically to him.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the sonification of images enabled by music software, this does not guarantee that the listener will perceptually make the connection between the two explicitly. The neurobiologist Jean-Pierre Ternaux maintains that:

Transferring structural or numerical features from one domain to another may in many cases result in some quite bad category mistakes, i.e. mistaking principles of organization in one domain as valid for another, totally different domain.<sup>12</sup>

### Synesthesia and perception

While the *Shibusu* project does not attempt to translate music into the visual or the visual directly into music, it is nevertheless important to establish how certain audio-visual correlations have been scientifically tested. One such example is the association of low frequency with dark colours. We all generally make the assumption that there is a relationship between the two and that it *feels* right. However, explaining why this is the case

is more difficult. In his article 'Synesthesia-like mappings of lightness, pitch and melodic interval', Tim Hubbard writes that scientific tests as early as the 1940s demonstrated that 'auditory stimuli that are lower in frequency typically evoke visual sensations of stimuli that are darker, and auditory stimuli that are higher in frequency typically evoke visual sensations of stimuli that are lighter.'<sup>13</sup> Hubbard goes on to demonstrate that:

A clear relationship was seen between the direction and size of an auditory melodic interval and the visual luminosity judged as best fitting with that interval. Lighter visual stimuli were judged to fit best with descending intervals. Additionally, the size of melodic intervals ... led to preferences for more extreme levels of lightness or darkness; specifically, visually lighter stimuli were preferred for larger ascending intervals than for smaller ascending intervals, and visually darker stimuli were preferred for larger descending intervals than for smaller descending intervals.<sup>14</sup>

This correlation was further refined in the work of Roy D'Andrade and Michael Egan, who demonstrated that 'colour-emotion associations were not due predominantly to hue ... but to the degree of saturation and brightness of the colour'.<sup>15</sup> This difference between the saturation of a colour and its brightness can be seen in the emotional intensity that is inherent in the three paintings Mark Rothko produced in 1955–6, each comprising yellow, orange and gold. Although all three paintings comprise the same colours, the saturation of each differs radically. As a result, the paintings create a perceived intensity that ranges from a distant, almost transparent afterglow, to scorched desert sands in the heat of the midday sun.

Hubbard's use of the term 'synesthesia-like' is an interesting one. It can be suggested that much of our everyday experience results from the synchronous perception of the audio and the visual. The scientist and painter Bulat Galejev maintains that 'synesthesia is an essential aspect of language and, more

generally, of all figurative thinking, including all imaginative thinking for all kinds of art, including music.<sup>16</sup> Daniel Levitin goes further, maintaining that:

At a very early age, babies are thought to be synesthetic, to be unable to differentiate the input from the different senses, and to experience life and the world as a sort of psychedelic union of everything sensory ... the process of maturation creates distinction in the neural pathways ... what may have started out as a neuron cluster that responded equally to sights, sound, taste, touch and smell becomes a specialised network.<sup>17</sup>

If we all, as is suggested, start out as being in some way synesthetic, why is it that in some of us this remains into adulthood while in others there is a clear separation between the senses? Ani Patel, in his ‘shared syntactic integration resource hypothesis’, demonstrates that an infant eventually creates dedicated neural pathways, but that these pathways in maturity may share some common resources.<sup>18</sup> The different ways in which these neural pathways mature in each individual accounts for the differing colour associations of similar phenomena. One such example is in the association of musical keys with colours.

Although there have been numerous such tables produced over the past 300 years (Newton, 1704; Castel, 1734; Jameson, 1844; Bishop, 1893; von Helmholtz, 1910; Klein, 1930; and Belmont, 1944), many of which informed the production of colour organs and other such instruments, the comparison of two Russian composers, Alexander Scriabin and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, working in the same cultural milieu at the turn of the twentieth century, will provide a useful example (see Figure 1.3).

It is conjectured that Scriabin was as much influenced by theosophist readings of colour as he was by any truly synesthetic perception of music and colour, while Rimsky-Korsakov is acknowledged as a synesthete. Another composer who was a synesthete is Olivier Messiaen (1908–92). Messiaen wrote ‘I see colours when I hear sounds, but I don’t see colours with my eyes. I see colours intellectually, in my head’. In the *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d’ornithologie* the composer describes the colours of certain chords from ‘gold and brown’ to the more elaborate ‘blue-violet rocks, speckled with little grey cubes, cobalt blue, deep Prussian blue, highlighted by a bit of violet-purple, gold, red, ruby, and stars of mauve, black and white. Blue-violet is dominant.’<sup>19</sup>

Key	Alexander Scriabin	Rimsky-Korsakov
B major	Mid-blue/pearl	Dark blue
B $\flat$ major	Dull deep pink	Darkish
A major	Green	Rose/pink
A $\flat$ major	Lilac/light violet	Grey/violet
G major	Orange	Brown/gold
F $\sharp$ major	Bright blue/violet	Grey/green
F major	Deep red	Green
E major	Sky blue	Sapphire blue
E $\flat$ major	Crimson	Grey/blue
D major	Yellow/golden	Golden/yellow
D $\flat$ major	Intense violet/purple	Dusky
C major	Intense red	White

Figure 1.3 Scriabin and Rimsky-Korsakov: mappings of musical keys to colour.

As is clear from the differing colour charts of Scriabin and Rimsky-Korsakov and the writings of Messiaen, there is no single mapping of colour to sound that is universally agreed upon. While each composer is consistent to their own mapping, these mappings are highly individual. Such individuality does not invalidate the impact on the composer's work. Indeed it may even explain why certain composers create the work they do. The fact that each composer holds strongly to their own particular pairing of colour and key demonstrates Patel's shared syntactic integration resource hypothesis at work.

Messiaen's limited modes of transposition (essentially a series of uniquely constructed scales) and the predominance of symmetry in his work often eschew traditional notions of Western teleology. This allows the establishment of fields or chords of harmonic colour around which the other musical materials radiate or emanate. This formal application of the synesthetic correlation of colour/music is seen even more overtly in the work of the American composer Michael Torke. Torke, in an interview with Geoff Smith, says:

I had always had a synaesthetic reaction to music which I felt was a personal and maybe even dangerously indulgent thing even to talk about: someone taught me that to create a form you have to establish a frame of reference like establishing a room, and then you move out of the room and return to it somehow ... then I thought if you're in a room and there's a party going on, why would you want to leave it? Couldn't you create some kind of form where you never leave? And then the idea that, if you found a harmony that associated with a colour, you could never choose to leave that harmony; the piece would then be about that colour, or the colour would identify the building block I decided to use.<sup>20</sup>

In the work of Torke we find synesthesia not merely informing the particular harmonic makeup of chords (as in Messiaen) or in keys

(as in Rimsky-Korsakov) but determining formal aspects of the work. If harmony – traditionally the structural driving force of a work – remains static, then other parameters must be brought into service to propel the logic/fabric of the music.

In the *Shibusu* collaboration there are harmonic centres at work that are derived from Dickens' sketches and paintings as well as traditional Japanese objects. *Shibusu* is a Japanese word that defies simple translation into English. *Shibusu* is a positivist universal beauty; it is a term that refers to a particular aesthetic of simple and understated beauty, which nevertheless is sophisticated and somewhat austere – a 'concept [that] revolves around the skillful blending of restraint and spontaneity'.<sup>21</sup> Harada writes that *shibusu* 'is that quality which is quiet and subdued. It is natural and has depth, but avoids being too apparent, or ostentatious. It is simple without being crude, austere without being severe. It is that refinement that gives spiritual joy.'<sup>22</sup> Within this aesthetic, particularly in Japanese crafts, *shibui* objects appear initially to be simple but on further inspection reveal a wealth of detail that balances overall simplicity with more detailed inner complexity. It is this carefully designed balance of simplicity and complexity that enables the continued appreciation of the *shibui* object.

In an interview for the magazine *House Beautiful* in 1960, Yanagi S etsu, late director of the Museum of Folk Crafts in Tokyo, defined *shibusu* in terms of seven attributes:

- simplicity;
- implicitness (the intrinsic meaningfulness of the *shibui* object to avoid it being superficial);
- modesty;
- tranquillity;
- naturalness (if too much self-consciousness or artificiality is displayed then the object cannot be *shibui*; David and Michiko Young write that: 'some of the best ceramic artists in Japan create pots that look uneven. They have an "imperfect" quality that results from allowing the clay to grow spontaneously on the wheel instead of

forcing it to conform completely to the hands<sup>23</sup>);  
 normalcy (*shibui* art is a positivist art that does not countenance deformation and abnormality);  
 imperfection (David and Michiko Young write that ‘because *shibui* objects are natural they often have irregular textures. Bizen pottery provides a good example. The Bizen potter often leaves irregularities in the clay, such as small stones, that project from the sides of the pot or leave small pits on its surface<sup>24</sup>).

*Shibui* objects may include various textile products whose design is the result of using *katagami* stencils in the printing process. The colours of *shibusa* are often muted, earthen or dark. For example, in interior decorating and painting, grey is added to primary colours to create a silvery effect that ties the different colours together into a coordinated scheme. *Shibui* colours range from pastels to dark hues, depending on how much grey is added. After much experimentation with sounds from a broken piano – initially an important conceptual link with Dickens’ ‘destroyed’ brushes – I returned to my original instrument, the clarinet. The timbral similarity of all the final compositions, achieved through using the clarinet as a source for further electronic processing, acts as the grey that ties the different colours together. Even though some of the processed sonic material ends up quite different from the original clarinet sounds, there is still the spectral trace of the original. This trace comes about from the acoustics of the clarinet itself. By developing a binding family of processed sounds from clarinet samples, this provides a ‘bed’ for the real clarinet to produce different contrasting timbral colours around it.

The clarinet itself has a particularly mellow, deep, chalumeau register, a rounded mid-register and a bright upper register. For me, the clarinet creates a range of colours: the lower chalumeau register is purple, the mid-range clarino register is green and the high altissimo register is yellow. The reason I perceive these ranges as having different

colours, rather than the clarinet per se as having a particular tonal colour, is in part due to the harmonics that the instrument produces in each of the registers. In the lower register the fundamental tone and odd harmonics are emphasised, with the even harmonics being weak. Moving into the mid-range of the instrument, the even harmonics start to become stronger – changing the tone of the instrument. In the upper register the strength of the even and odd harmonics is virtually equal.

Like Rothko’s use of colour saturation in the trilogy of yellow, orange and gold paintings of 1955–6, so in *Shibusa* changes in the intensity of breath pressure when playing the clarinet can alter the sound significantly. The instrumentation, pitch range, dynamic range and textural counterpoint are all thus derived from visual stimuli. What is not derived from Dickens’ paintings is the form of the work. This is due to the fact that musical time implies very different formal considerations from those that determine the construction of paintings. Here Jean-Pierre Ternaux’s words echo loudly – the mechanisms for creating a visual formal balance in a two-dimensional a-temporal artwork cannot simply be transplanted to a temporal medium such as music. This does not mean, however, that the painting cannot stimulate the composer to rethink musical form in the light of the processes at work in a painting.

### Formal considerations

Although not a result or synesthesia, there are a number of composers who have also developed different approaches to form as a result of the engagement with painting. The American composer Morton Feldman and the English composer Bryn Harrison both view their manuscript paper as a frame to be subdivided in time, just as a painter will subdivide the canvas. Feldman’s late works (in their original form) all use the same format of nine bars to a page – in some instances using a symmetrical layout of repeat marks from page to page and never letting a repeated section spread across a page. Similarly, Harrison divides his page into irregular-length bars

and continues this same page layout for the whole composition. The manuscript page becomes a visual means of organising sound in time. Harrison has said that:

I treat a bar not as a unit of emphasis but as a space in which to contain the musical material. It is a visual space, really. There is a visual identity to the music that is not directly heard but has an implicit effect on what you hear.<sup>25</sup>

A number of painters and techniques have influenced Harrison's compositional thinking, including Robert Rauschenberg, Agnes Martin, Brice Marden and Bridget Riley. For Harrison, the work of the latter two painters in particular conveys an allusion to nature and natural forms, but nature presented in an abstract manner – the essence of nature rather than trying to depict something from nature itself. Harrison comments that:

I've always been interested in what a still image can convey in the way certain painters have sought to encapsulate a sense of movement in stasis. I'm interested conversely in what you can do with sound in that there is always getting from one point to the next in music, but how you can nonetheless convey a sense of stasis or rested motion through music almost to

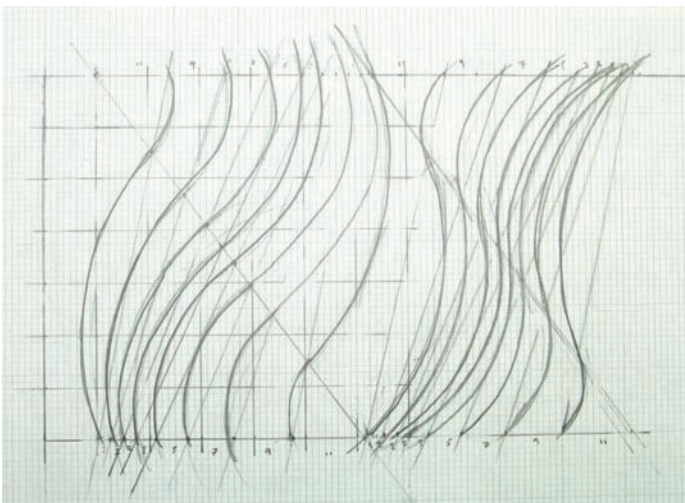


Figure 1.4. Harrison, *Six Symmetries*: sketches for 'Riley' curves. Reproduced with permission, © Bryn Harrison

present music that steps outside of time as a conscious linear progressive construct.<sup>26</sup>

In Harrison's *Surface forms (repeating)* (2010) there is a conscious attempt to convey a sense of structural stasis through a density of surface detail. Shards of melodic figuration surface momentarily but are reabsorbed into the interwoven musical fabric, before then become perceptually individuated. There is little sense of evolution of the material in any traditional sense; rather, the compositional structure is constructed from temporally asynchronous instrumental 'loops' (with subtle alterations between each instance of the loop) – for example, the vibraphone and harp repeat a 40-second passage whereas the vocal loop spans over a third of the piece. This approach stimulates a sensation in the listener similar to that of looking at a monochromatic painting. Harrison's influence for this method of working is the series of *White Paintings* (1951) by Robert Rauschenberg. Harrison, like Rauschenberg, is aiming to express pure experience rather than figuration.

Such an approach prompted fellow composer Nicholas Williams to comment that 'I like what I hear, but I am not sure what I am listening to'.<sup>27</sup> For Harrison, this is an interesting response. He comments:

I think more texturally – if texture is the main thing you're listening to and a fluidity of cycles that continually return, then what are we listening to? It is about experiencing that sense of stasis, the sense of suspended motion – a state of flux.<sup>28</sup>

In his *Six Symmetries* (2004) for large ensemble, Harrison draws directly on the structures of Bridget Riley. In the second movement of the work Harrison uses a curvilinear grid derived from Riley's use of arcs on a sixth of a circle to determine the entry of the instruments (see Figures 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6). Harrison, in a discussion of the influence of Riley on his work, has said:

What you see is beautiful and organic despite its detailed construction. They [Riley's paintings] seem quite simple,

but when you start to break them down and go in you find all sorts of relationships between things within them. It's work that warrants a long time of looking ... The way colours converge along narrower lines creating the sensation of a third colour that hasn't been painted but is nevertheless perceivable is something that interests me. This concept comes through in the music in the way in which pitches converge to produce an incidental harmony.<sup>29</sup>

Although Harrison is strongly influenced by painting, *Six Symmetries* is the first piece in which he consciously tried to recreate the technique used in a painting in one of his compositions. Harrison comments that:

I was interested in seeing what kind of harmonic correlation it would produce through sound, the way the curves bunch up and separate in places. It is another way of working with rhythmic placement that allows me to step back from the process. Up to that point I had used a lot of number sequences to determine duration – using rhythmic points that get closer and move away from each other, then superimposing those to create different levels of density. Using Riley's techniques was another way of creating a canonic rhythmic form that was out of my control. I like the way that the canonic lines would get ahead of each other, sometimes behind, sometimes converge. I've since absorbed this elongation and contraction of rhythmic material from Riley as another technique into my working method – I don't need to use number systems to do that any more.<sup>30</sup>

In Harrison's work, painting is thus a stimulus to think about musical materials in new and novel ways. His concern to create the sensation of stasis in a time-based medium, the density of his orchestration to create a kaleidoscopic surface layer of instrumental detail and his use of rhythmic canons all stem from his consideration of painting techniques – not solely the resulting image, but the process that is used to create that image.

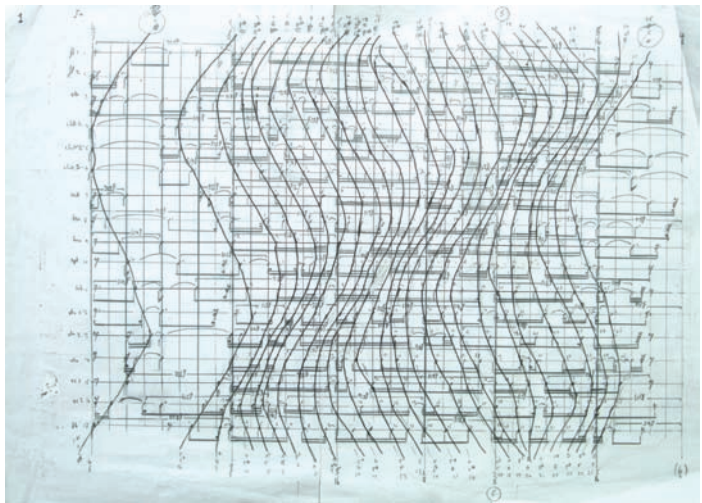


Figure 1.5 Harrison, *Six Symmetries*: 'Riley' curves on rhythmic grids. Reproduced with permission, © Bryn Harrison



Figure 1.6 Harrison *Six Symmetries*, movement 2, page 17: 'Riley' curves as they appear in the completed score. Reproduced with permission, © Bryn Harrison

The American composer Aaron Cassidy is another for whom painting suggests not merely a prompt for different ways of thinking about music but a complete re-evaluation of the nature of composition and the relationship between the composer, performer and audience. Cassidy's recent work has been profoundly influenced by the work of Francis Bacon, particularly when refracted through Gilles Deleuze's text *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Bacon's unconditioned, unfiltered pure physicality and Deleuze's exquisitely written philosophical critique of the paintings are both reflected in Cassidy's music – a multilayered, highly intellectualised complex music that celebrates the raw animality of the human condition. As such, it is a resurgence and development of expressionism. The music is not trying to express emotive states, but rather it is trying to perform sensation:

Bacon constantly says that sensation is what passes from one 'order' to another, from one 'level' to another, from one 'area' to another. This is why sensation is the master of deformations, the agent of bodily deformations ... The violence of sensation is opposed to the violence of the represented.<sup>31</sup>

This desire for the artwork itself to be the object of sensation rather than the conveyor of sensation is fundamental to Cassidy's work and is implicit in the manner in which he chooses to 'notate' his music in the score. In Cassidy's scores there are no traditional 'notes' – no specific denominators of frequency. In his compositions the score assumes a role very unlike that in traditional classical music. In traditional scores there are indications of pitch, rhythm and dynamics conveyed through a symbolic notation that has been codified and refined for centuries. Practised musicians can 'read' a score and form an impression of the music. In such scores the physical actions of the performers are rarely specified – though we have become used to view the expressive movements of a concert pianist as cues for our emotional understanding of the music. Cassidy's scores propose these physical gestures as the starting point for the music

itself. Instead of taking a rhythm or a set of pitches and subjecting them to developmental transformations, in Cassidy's scores there is a notation for physical gestures that decouples the mouth, the fingers and other means of sonic production, resulting in a series of bodily actions that can be isolated as units of performative action and deformed – just as Bacon deforms his material through the process of smearing. The score thus presents not a traditional notated score for performance but rather a call for choreographed actions from which the sound will result. Cassidy has commented that:

The original materials of my compositions are bodily and gestural. I see those gestures as already being musical – not just having a musical significance, but as physical actions that have a musical identity. I take those gestures and map them on to different surfaces, instruments and different kinds of resistance, so they generate different kinds of sonic results.<sup>32</sup>

Cassidy's ensemble piece *And the scream, Bacon's scream, is the operation through which the entire body escapes through the mouth* (2010) takes Bacon's *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944) and subjects it to structural, figural and philosophical analysis to inform all aspects of the composition. In the composition there is a specific seating plan that is influenced by Bacon's treatment of perspectival depth in his triptych. The trumpet–trombone and oboe–clarinet duos form an inner ring. A secondary ring is formed from a trio of violin, viola and contrabass. The third outer ring comprises harp and percussion. This arrangement is directly drawn from the planar arrangement of elements in the paintings. Deleuze writes:

A round area often delimits the place where the person – that is to say, the Figure – is seated, lying down, doubled over, or in some other position. This round or oval area takes up more or less space: it can extend beyond the edges of the painting or occupy the center of a triptych.<sup>33</sup>

Bacon isolates the Figure, often by placing it inside a cube or precipitously perching it on a curved bar. In *And the scream*, Cassidy has two instrumental duos that act as soloists, essentially as the Figure. Although there is a clear hierarchy between these ‘solo’ and the ‘hyper-instrument’ lines in the ensemble, there is always a sense of fluidity or flux between these layers. As gestures are deformed and weave through the ensemble parts, so the relationship between the solo and hyper-instrument lines is constantly being reconstituted. Deleuze discusses the planar non-perspectival aspect of Bacon’s painting, writing that:

The rest of the painting is systematically occupied by large fields of bright, uniform, and motionless color. Thin and hard, these fields have a structuring and spatializing function. They are not beneath, behind, or beyond the Figure, but are strictly to the side of it, or rather, all around it, and are thus grasped in a close view, a tactile or ‘haptic’ view, just as the Figure itself is. At this stage, when one moves from the Figure to the fields of color, there is no relation of depth or distance, no incertitude of light and shadow. If the fields function as a background, they do so by virtue of their strict correlation with the Figures. *It is the correlation of two sectors on a single plane, equally close ...* He distinguishes three fundamental elements in his painting, which are the material structure, the round contour, and the raised image.<sup>34</sup>

In a discussion of the formal arrangement of the ensemble and how this affects the material of the piece, Cassidy has stated that:

One of the ideas for the piece from the very beginning was the instability between foreground and background – each of the three layers has a different function and relation to material types. The first layer of soloistic material has largest dynamic range. The second layer has a lesser dynamic range and all the materials in this middle realm are recombining physical gestures from the foreground layer – so

material from trumpet and slide [trombone] might now appear in the left-hand motion of one of the strings, or fingering patterns in the clarinet end up as fingering patterns in the contrabass. The middle layer instruments are doing this modelling of gestures that have appeared before but now with different articulating layers. The background layer is a stretched version of materials that have appeared before. On top of this physical layout each player has their own set of foreground/background roles – the use of mutes on strings and brass provide additional layers of compression of sound independent of their foreground–background role in the ensemble.<sup>35</sup>

Cassidy’s treatment of his musical material is clearly derived from Deleuze’s discussion of the Figure – the Figure that is ‘contracted and aspirated, sometimes stretched and dilated’.<sup>36</sup> This treatment of materials can be seen in the examples from Cassidy’s own analysis of his work below. What is important to emphasise is that this manner of treating material – the deformation of physical gestures that act upon an instrument – often results in a radically different sonic outcome from the original.

Figure 1.7 clearly shows the decoupling of physical gestures. In this example the bowing indications appear on the upper stave and the position on the fingerboard in the lower stave.

In Figure 1.8 each line of the upper and lower stave are assigned to a finger hole or key on the oboe – the different blocks indicating fully closed/open finger holes and a number of stages in between.

In Figure 1.9 the gestural material in the contrabass comprises a stretched version of the viola’s bowing figuration: a deformed version of the viola’s fingerboard material from Figure 1.7 and a stretched and deformed version of the oboe’s fingering patterns from Figure 1.8.

In *And the scream*, as in Harrison’s *Surface forms (repeating)*, there is an intentional self-similarity in the timbral palette across the whole duration of the piece. Despite the radical aural difference, both works are deliberately amorphous and formless. In



Figure 1.7 shows the musical score for the Viola solo in Cassidy's *And the scream*, bars 46-8. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 46-50) features dynamics of *ppp*, *pp*, *ff*, *p*, *ff*, *p*, and *ff*. The second system (measures 51-55) features dynamics of *ff*, *p*, *ppp*, *p*, *p*, *ff*, *p*, and *f*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. A blue shaded area below the staff indicates fingerings and bowings.

Figure 1.7. Cassidy, *And the scream*, viola (solo), bars 46–8.

Figure 1.8 shows the musical score for the Oboe solo in Cassidy's *And the scream*, bar 50. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 50-51) features dynamics of *ppp*, *p*, and *pp*. The second system (measures 52-53) features dynamics of *ppp*, *mp*, *mf*, *pp*, and *mf*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. A pink shaded area highlights the upper staves, and a blue shaded area highlights the lower staves.

Figure 1.8 Cassidy, *And the scream*, oboe (solo) bar 50.

Figure 1.9 shows the musical score for the Contrabass ensemble 'hyper-instrument' material in Cassidy's *And the scream*, bars 52-4. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 52-54) features dynamics of *ppp*, *pp*, *p*, and *pp*. The second system (measures 55-57) features dynamics of *ppp*, *mp*, *mf*, *pp*, and *mf*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. A blue shaded area below the staff indicates fingerings and bowings.

Figure 1.9 Cassidy, *And the scream*, contrabass (ensemble 'hyper-instrument' material), bars 52–4.

Harrison's work the asynchronous loops create a constantly shifting surface texture that 'hovers'. In Cassidy's work the multiple layers of physical action interact with one another in different ways at different times. The sonic result is the violent collision of independent layers of activity. Cassidy states that in *And the scream*:

This happens across nine instruments that are structurally not aligned – you get these constant fluttering shifts of timbre and gesture. This is happening in Bacon's work too – the sense of two or even four physical motions attempting to happen simultaneously and the smearing is the result.<sup>37</sup>

Cassidy's re-evaluation of musical material, notation, structure, physical gesture and stage presentation extends far beyond any previous consideration of the relationship between music and painting. In combining the intellectual critique of Deleuze and the treatment of the body from Bacon, Cassidy has developed a startling and unique musical approach that would be impossible without Bacon's original paintings.

While *Shibusa* does not present such a radical re-evaluation of musical materials as Cassidy's compositions (such a re-evaluation would not be appropriate for a work informed the aesthetics of *shibusa*), nevertheless, the music is aesthetically and materially governed by the concepts and processes that underpin the creation of *shibui* objects. Following an examination of *katagami* stencils and the manner in which they were used to produce certain effects when printing on textiles, Dickens and I arrived at four fundamental models on which to base our work:

- the smudging and blushing of colours and motifs into one another – something that is drawn predominantly from Japanese kimono designs;
- the layering of different patterns on top of one another and allowing certain aspects of one or another layer to come to the fore at determined points;

repetitive patterns that are imperfect and are interrupted – the idea of lines breaking and reforming to give gestalt good continuation; the repetition here is not always exact, reflecting the human hand rather than the use of the machine to create repetitive patterns (there is a peripheral analogy here to the inexact grids in the paintings of Agnes Martin); interlocking linear motifs that are clear in their group trajectory but remain independent lines.

The resulting music of *Shibusa* is thus the result of reflection on the inherent qualities of *shibui* objects; the pastel-dark hues predominant in *shibusa* mixed with a binding grey; the four models outlined above; and finally the sketches and paintings of Dickens.

Although our conceptual starting point is similar, it is clear that the processes that Dickens and I initially go through to develop work is different. Dickens' approach is to explore through countless sketches the ideas and concepts around which the work is based, often superimposing computer drawings and painted fragments to create hybrid digital sketches. It is upon reflection of these sketches that certain ideas and concepts come to the fore and can then be reviewed to be explored further in numerous complementary ways. These sketches form the foundation from which to generate further ideas for paintings in the studio. None of these sketches is simply replicated, as the process of painting itself suggests new alternative possibilities. For me, compositional sketches are never merely ideas for something else, but rather they become more and more refined until they are integrated into the final composition. Finding the correct instrumentation is essential to the compositional process and itself informs the way in which the material is developed.

Another difference in our working method concerns the framing of time or the picture. When I first showed Dickens the temporal framework at play in the first part of the work there was an initial shock at the means by which this was arrived. Whereas Dickens develops her paintings intuitively from a pool

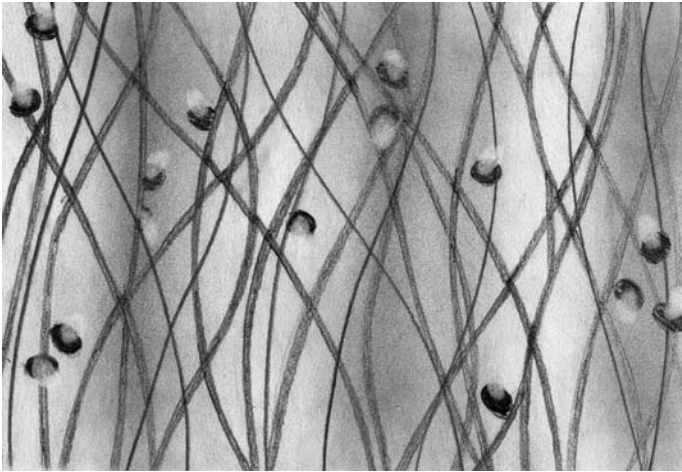


Figure 1.10 Dickens, example pencil sketch towards *Shibusu* paintings.

of initial ideas, the four compositions that make up *Shibusu* work have a simple but predetermined temporal frame. The term ‘frame’ is important. In *Shibusu* timings are used in a manner akin to Harrison’s and Feldman’s framing of the page by a certain number of bars. In painting there are some pre-considerations given to the size of the painting even before a single brushstroke has been made, involving the stretching and priming of the canvas itself. Similarly for me the way in which I start a composition is to establish limits – essentially a frame. These limits are often to do with the overall balance and shape of the composition rather than specific details. In an interview in 1997 I likened my process of composition to a puzzle – one in which the overall shape of the pieces was determined but the details of the picture itself was not preconceived.<sup>38</sup> The important thing to note in this process is that I do not simply inject my materials into this a priori structure. The final musical composition is arrived at via empirical means. Adjustments to structure, flow and internal balance are continually made as the details of the composition unfold.

For me, the seven attributes of *shibusu* can be split into two, reflecting the more tangible and less tangible concepts at work. The first group comprises *simplicity*, *implicitness*, *modesty* and *tranquillity*. The second group comprises *naturalness*, *normalcy* and

*imperfection*. The concept of seven-ness and its split into groups of three and four is fundamental to the temporal and structural parameters of *Shibusu*, both on a macro and micro level. The lengths of the four pieces are derived from the lowest whole number ratio of the 3:4 ratio (9:12), resulting in pairs of movements with lengths of 9 and 12 minutes.

In *shibusu I – (sendai threnody)* the interweaving ribbon-like motif that occurs frequently in Dickens’ paintings and sketches was taken as a starting point (see Figure 1.10). Unlike Harrison, who took the arcs in Bridget Riley’s paintings to configure strict points of rhythmic entry, I took the encircling of one line by another to express long melodic lines, each following their own trajectory. At points they cross and coincide. At other points the trajectory of the lines is momentarily interrupted. Rather than create a composition within a strict tempo scheme with contrapuntal lines, numerous improvisations were recorded on clarinet in the studio. These free asynchronous lines were then reassembled and edited in a multi-track editor. As a result, the lines hopefully convey a sense of naturalness, normalcy and imperfection, rather than being too self-consciously crafted. All the melodic material is also governed by the intervals of the third and the fourth, as well as their inversions – the fifth and the sixth. As a result of focusing on only four main intervals, the melodic line continually reorders and reworks this small pool of material to create a strong sense of unity that is both intrinsically simple but complex in its multiple possible outcomes.

In *shibusu II – (entangled symmetries)* the concept of seven-ness is again structurally important. The overall structure of the work was derived from a two-stage process. The first stage was to develop a foundation in which the relationship of 3:4 is fundamental. It was decided to have three sections of material with a fourth as a coda. The interval ratio of 4:3 is that of a fourth. So each of the three sections rise a fourth, using the same sonic materials as their foundation. As a result of each section rising a fourth, the temporal relationship between each section can be expressed in compound 4:3 ratios – 16:12:9. Each section also divides internally

by the ratio of 4:3, as there are two iterations of related material in each section. The density of material also increases throughout the sections from roughly 9:12:16 sonic layers, although this was eventually determined more intuitively. Thus the most complex sonic interaction occurs in the third of the four sections of the composition. In this composition the principal concepts at work are those of irregular repetition, interrupted trajectories, the seeping of one sonic layer into another and the occlusion of layers of material.

*shibusu III – (kyoto roughcut)* has a structure that is split into two main sections with the ratio 4:3 – the first section is characterised by interruptions of linear trajectories and the continual ‘smudging’ or ‘blushing’ of one gesture into another. The latter section is characterised by noise-based looping figurations.

The final part of the work, *shibusu IV – (permutations)*, again draws on the interlocking ribbon motif from Dickens’ paintings, but does so on a more conceptual level. I wanted the final part of the work to be as simple as possible – essentially a melodic figure that repeats over and over, with each repetition being subtly different. Having tried and rejected a microtonal melody for being too ‘affected’, I recalled the change ringing techniques I had heard so often as a boy chorister. Change ringing differs from other forms of bell ringing in that there is no attempt to make a melody – merely the ringing of the bells in a preordained mathematical permutation. This technique is inherently simple, beautiful, rigorous and without affectation. I chose to use the simplest pattern ‘Plain Hunt’, using six tones (two sets of three). The resulting permutation is shown in Figure 1.11 (the ‘1’ is shown in bold to demonstrate the weaving ribbon effect).

1 2 3 4 5 6  
 2 1 4 3 5 6  
 2 4 1 6 3 5  
 4 2 6 1 5 3  
 4 6 2 5 1 3  
 6 4 5 2 3 1  
 6 5 4 3 2 1

5 6 3 4 1 2  
 5 3 6 1 4 2  
 3 5 1 6 2 4  
 3 1 5 2 6 4  
 1 3 2 5 4 6  
 1 2 3 4 5 6

Figure 1.11 Change ringing permutations for ‘Plain Hunt’.

This technique resulted in 12 permutations of the basic sequence. This was split into two groups, one comprising five permutations and the second comprising seven permutations (this is almost equivalent to a 3:4 ratio). Each permutation was then written so that ‘1’ started each permutation and wrapped around back to the beginning to finish the sequence –

Figure 1.12 Permutations of the initial six-note cell used in *shibusu IV – (permutations)*.

so [3 5 1 6 2 4] became [1 6 2 4 3 5] and so on (see Figure 1.12). The first set of five permutations is presented exactly. The second group is presented with occasional changes of phrasing; for example, instead of two groups of three notes, the phrasing is sometimes changed to a group of three and a group of four notes. As a result, the phrasing ends up crossing from one permutation to another.

The changes in the second set of permutations reflect both the idea of ‘imperfection’ in *shibui* objects and also the notion of complexity in simplicity – a simple idea becomes more complex in its presentation through subtle shifts of phrasing, even though the ‘object’ (in this case a permutation of notes) has not changed at all.

### Temporality in *Shibusa*

In this last section of the work, the listener first attends to the shape of the melodic phrase and perceives a sense of closure after each of the first few occurrences. However, as the figuration is repeated over and over, this sense of closure is lost. The experience becomes one of stasis, of viewing the same object over and over from different perspectives. The sonic material essentially becomes directionless, devoid of predictable change, and creates an auditory aura perceived as continuing ‘present’. This sensation of directionlessness in music is what the philosopher Don Ihde terms ‘surroundability’. Gordon Fitzell, discussing Ihde’s concept, writes that:

The concept refers to an enveloping sensation or ‘auditory aura’ that emanates an ‘ambiguous richness of sound’ ... From the perspective of temporal experience, surroundability constitutes the opposite of directionality. Whereas directionality refers to a perception of predictable change along a particular dimension, surroundability refers to an experience devoid of predictable change. Within such a perception, the onset of each event is ‘enriched by the depth of those [perceived events] which have just preceded it “equally” present’.<sup>39</sup>

Prior to the emergence of the Darmstadt avant-garde in the late 1940s and early 1950s, musical time was considered to be primarily linear, centred on the teleology of tonal structures. Many electronic and instrumental works still follow this notion of musical linearity, defined by Bob Snyder as ‘a metaphor of physical causation ... an attempt to make musical events seem to cause each other’.<sup>40</sup> In the post-war era there have been numerous composers who have considered alternative modes of temporality in their work. Pierre Boulez wrote that:

A composition is no longer a consciously directed construction moving from a ‘beginning’ to an ‘end’ and passing from one to another. Frontiers have been deliberately ‘anesthetized’. Listening time is no longer directional but time-bubbles, as it were.<sup>41</sup>

Stockhausen formalised this thinking further in his concept of ‘moment form’,<sup>42</sup> while Morton Feldman aimed at a disorientation of memory through constant changes in short fragments of material. To understand how compositions such as *Specification.Fifteen* (2006) by Richard Chartier and Taylor Deupree, the *monochromes* series (2009) by the electronic music duo Tu M’, and the works of Eliane Radigue and Bryn Harrison extend the traditional linear concepts of temporality, it is useful to consider them in relation to Edmund Husserl’s exploration of experiential time.<sup>43</sup> In his theorising on the structure of consciousness, Husserl developed the notion of a subjective time-consciousness that is distinct from objective time. Within this framework, Husserl developed the notion of ‘inner time-consciousness’, the main focus of this being an individual’s ‘temporal span’ – essentially how one’s memory stores information through time. Husserl maintained that the temporal span comprises three main parts that are inseparable: primal impression, retention, and protention. Fitzell writes that:

Devoid of substantial directionality, a nonlinear temporal experience permits

no protentions of closure, only nondirectional protentions of continuance. Unlike linear music, which features readily apparent and often predictable temporal trajectories, nonlinear music curtails a listener's ability to anticipate conclusion. The effect is one of enduring present awareness.<sup>44</sup>

What the last movement of the work, *shibusa IV – (permutations)*, presents is an extreme case of perceived parametric consistency; continuity that Thomas Clifton refers to as 'sameness succeeding itself'.<sup>45</sup> This sensation of stasis is perceived because of the repetition of small melodic phrases. In the second part of the composition, *shibusa II – (entangled symmetries)*, there is a local sense of moment-to-moment progression. Due to the large-scale tripartite repetition of the opening material the listener is unaware of the remaining duration – the repetition of material that rises a fourth at each occurrence could continue indefinitely. However, in this process, the listener remains aware of local duration, sensing no protentions of closure but instead a continuity of 'phases' rather than a teleological progression.

In choosing to present the music in this atemporal manner, allied to the focus on irregular repeating patterns, the 3:4 ratio and concept of seven-ness, imperfection, simplicity and asymmetric forms, there is a suggestion of what Yanagi S etsu terms 'scars and spontaneous irregularities'<sup>46</sup> and 'beauty with inner implications. It is not a beauty displayed before the viewer by its creator; creation here means making a piece that will lead the viewer to draw beauty out of it for oneself.'<sup>47</sup>

## Notes

- 1 D. Conrad, 'The dichromaccord: reinventing the elusive color organ', *Leonardo* 32:5 (1999), 393.
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*Part Two*

**Shibusa: an artist's perspective**

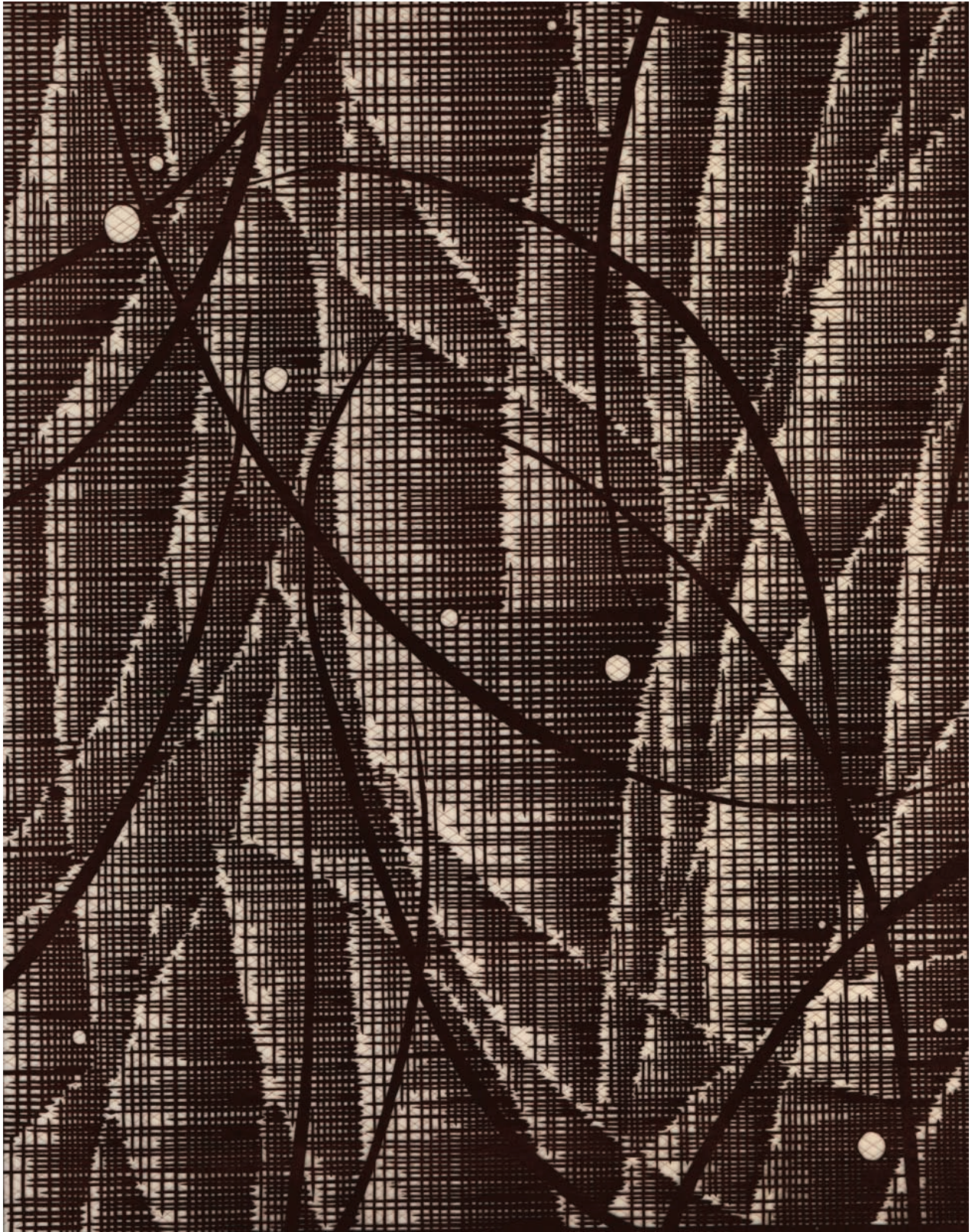


Figure 2.1 *Katagami stencil*: Japanese hand-cut stencil for printing on to kimono fabric.  
Collection of Pip Dickens, © Pip Dickens

Chapter Two

**The katagami stencil: handmade machine**

Pip Dickens

We have trained our hands in repetition; we are alert rather than bored because we have developed the skill of anticipation. But equally, the person able to perform a duty again and again has acquired a technical skill, the rhythmic skill of a craftsman, whatever the god or gods to which he or she subscribes.

(Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*)

*The Craftsman* is the first of Richard Sennett's three volumes on material culture, with particular scrutiny of 'the skill of making things well'.<sup>1</sup> He refers to many areas of craftsmanship, including that of arts and crafts, as well as music, architecture, social use of buildings, psychology and interaction within the workplace. Frequent reference is made in his thorough and enlightening investigations of oriental methods of working: in the industrial context of companies such as Nokia, or in his discussion of 'the lesson of minimum force' – understanding and controlling muscles in order to master the skill of using knives well.

Rhythm, ritual and respect for the sharp knife are key to becoming expert at controlling the tool. Most important of all is time. In what Sennett calls the 'rhythm of concentration', the commitment of practice to become expert at anything (to gain tacit knowledge) requires the investment of 10,000 hours. Sennett converts these hours into practising 3 hours a day for 10 years. This is a rule of thumb, but he points out that compressed apprenticeships – for example that of a goldsmith, or the intensive training undergone in a doctor's internship – while taking fewer years, equates to roughly the same amount of time. His reference is to

psychologist Daniel Levitin's *This is Your Brain on Music*, where this magic number keeps cropping up in the context of how long it takes composers, athletes and authors to become expert.<sup>2</sup>

It comes as no surprise to have found this same period of time – 10 years – quoted in research into how long it takes a cutter of *katagami* stencils to become expert. Moreover, the Japanese fully understand, and celebrate, the 'rhythm of concentration'<sup>3</sup>, their artists and artisans have dedicated their lives to in order to become expert – many being honoured as Living National Treasures. The way in which these individuals are of significant cultural importance reveals just how significant physical skills are to the Japanese in general.

Japan has an international reputation for its technological sophistication, for embracing machine production and for pioneering innovation. But there is something else, too – a qualitative approach that harks back to the fundamental elements of craft: of making things well and investing time in learning (research). Research results in innovation and this, in turn, also throws up failed attempts along the way. Failures, therefore, are as useful as the successes if they are appreciated within the context of learning. Some failures result in new innovations and inventions. Failures offer three choices: exploit them in the current work, acknowledge them and use them as a positive approach in future works, or acknowledge they are redundant – aesthetically and practicably never going to work. Thus a 'no go' area is as useful as a 'green light' when investing time and materials into an artist's practice.

*Ise katagami* is a Japanese method of making stencils with fine and elaborate patterns, which can be used to print on to a variety of substrates (this is called *katazome*). The *katagami* stencil is a sophisticated paper stencil created with a variety of sharp knives or specially shaped punches (see Figure 2.1).

The history of the *katagami* stencil can be traced back to stencilling patterns on samurai warriors' armour (leather helmets and stirrups, for example) in the Nara period (710–794).<sup>4</sup> Some sources state that *katagami* already existed by the late Muromachi period (around 570).<sup>5</sup> *The Book of Delightful and Strange Designs, Being One Hundred Facsimile Illustrations of the Art of the Japanese Stencil-Cutter*, published in 1893 by Andrew White Tuer, suggests that the use of the *katagami* stencil flourished in the seventeenth century (Edo period 1603–1868). Miyazaki Yuzen (referred to as Someya Yuzen by Tuer)<sup>6</sup> is identified as an artist of great significance in popularising the development of *yuzen-zome* – hand-painted designs on silk using resist-paste techniques and, most importantly, dye-fast techniques. Miyazaki Yuzen was originally a painter of Japanese fans. His artworks were very popular and he was persuaded to produce works on kimono fabric, which, in turn, resulted in a unique style of hand-painting becoming highly popular in the Meiji period (from 1868). His new innovations proliferated across the textiles industry during this time, and so began a boom in designing, printing and painting on fabric – examples being the kimono and polychromatic suspended pictures called *kakemonos*. It is interesting to note how an artist working in a specialised area can bring new innovations to another quite distinct practice.

Subsequently, Kyoto-born artisan Jisuke Hirose<sup>7</sup> further developed techniques in *yuzen-zome* (or *katazome*): printing pattern using paper stencils and chemical dye, which further popularised these associated techniques on a range of textile substrates. *Yuzen* technique employs two methods of approach: *tegaki* (hand-dyeing/painting) using brushes (painting); and *kata* (stencil-dyeing), a technique to dye silk using a cut-out paper template (printing).

Tuer introduces the reader to the subject of *katagami* stencils with immense curiosity and excitement, having discovered a collection of them, which he then secured for the South Kensington Museum (which opened in 1857 and was renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1899).<sup>8</sup> Tuer was 'one of the most active and innovative printers and publishers of the late nineteenth century'.<sup>9</sup> He set up the Leadenhall Press with his partner, Abraham Field, and they printed many books about many curious things – from *Luxurious Bathing: A Sketch* (a review of the latest bathing apparatus and accessories such as sponges) to *Old London Street Cries* (a record of street vendor's calls). Tuer was evidently a publisher keen to introduce his readers to new innovations, yet he was also concerned to record and preserve, as with the London cries, behaviours and sounds under threat from the rapid changes of industrial growth in the capital. He also believed in upholding quality in printing and publishing, so it is not hard to see why he was captivated by the stencils. He states 'It is surmised that the collection was sent to this country by some European who was struck by the marvellous beauty of the designs and the wonderful skill displayed in the cutting out'.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 2.2 Detail of a *katagami* stencil showing *itoire* work (silk meshing) for structural support and resilience. This image represents about 2.5 × 2.5 cm of the cut stencil. Collection of Pip Dickens, © Pip Dickens

*Katagami* paper is hand made from the bark of the mulberry tree (*Broussonetia papyrifera*). The paper is infused with *kakishibu* (dye made of persimmon juice), which has preservative and adhesive qualities, and is waterproofed with a hard-drying oil, promoting durability. A skilled pattern craftsman then cuts a design into the paper. Where a large proportion of the paper has to be cut away, strength is given to the stencil by cutting two stencils simultaneously and sandwiching a mesh of silk threads between them (originally human hair was used). This specialised process is called *itoire* (meaning thread insertion).<sup>11</sup> The stencils are dampened, the mesh inserted and the papers fixed and dried (see Figure 2.2). The registration of the two stencils must be absolutely perfect.

A sticky paste mixture made from rice flour and rice bran is then forced through a *katagami* paper stencil on to a piece of fabric; the stencil is then removed and the paste on the fabric is allowed to dry. Next, the fabric is coated by brushing on a sizing solution of soybean liquid. When the fabric is completely dry, the dye colour is applied by brush. The sticky paste is washed away and what remains is the stencil pattern in the fabric's original colour, with the surrounding area absorbing the dye colour. Japan is credited with developing this dyeing technique to a level of unparalleled sophistication.

*Katazome* pattern can be extremely fine – a samurai's *kamishimo* had extremely small, fine patterns.<sup>12</sup> The overall appearance (on a monochromatic ground) is subtle and understated, so that the intricate pattern can only be discerned at very close quarters. *Katagami* artisans competed to produce the finest designs; today, this type of design is better known as *kyo-komon*.

The stencils are cut using a variety of sharp knives and punches. Some of these tools are passed down from master to apprentice, others are fashioned by the artisans themselves to obtain the exact shape of cut. There are four carving techniques, and artisans tend to specialise in one of these. The four techniques are (*bori* means to carve):

- hima-bori* (or *hiki-bori*) – producing a stripe pattern;
- kiri-bori* (drill) – producing circles;
- dogu-bori* – using various blades to make various patterns (great skill is needed in making the right tool for the pattern required);
- tsuki-bori* (prod or thrust) – using a small straight blade to create a wide variety of complex patterns through a pushing technique.

A *katagami* stencil cutter must sometimes complete their stencil in that one sitting, due to the rigour of the design (see Figures 2.3 and 2.4). Once the cutter has achieved concentration and rhythm in the cutting process, breaking off mid-way and restarting would result in a change in the flow of pattern or, worse, an error in the pattern cut. This imperative to protect performance time is equally vital for elements of other forms of art and craft, especially where continuity of a handmade mark, or continuity of a musician's performance with an instrument, for example, is of paramount importance. Therefore, the idea of rhythm and repetition is important both in practice and in performance.

*Katagami* stencils were designated by the Japanese Agency of Cultural Affairs as an Intangible Cultural Treasure in 1952 and in 1955 six *katagami* artists were designated Living National Treasures. In 1983 *katagami* stencils were designated as Traditional Handicraft Equipment by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, and *ise katagami* was acknowledged as an Important Intangible Cultural Property.

Few artists remain today, so we remain indebted to the care and dedication Tuer took in presenting these facsimile stencils in published form. He published his book in English, German and French, and editions were printed in London, Paris and Yokohama by Liberty & Co, in New York by Charles Scribner's Sons, and also in Leipzig. Moreover, each book contains an original *katagami* stencil fragment pasted into the frontispiece.

In my first-edition copy of this book I found the name of the original owner: 'Chas. Oppenheimer 1897'. Research has revealed



Figure 2.3 *Katagami* stencil illustrating the many fine details achievable, together with impressive optical effects.  
Collection of Pip Dickens, © Pip Dickens



Figure 2.4 *Katagami* stencil evidencing the rigour and discipline of the cutter.  
These astonishing effects pre-date Western notions of Op Art. Collection of Pip Dickens, © Pip Dickens

that he was probably the Manchester-born painter Charles Oppenheimer (b. 1875). He studied design at the Manchester School of Art under the famous Walter Crane (1845–1915), a leading artist, teacher, art theorist and member of the Arts and Crafts movement, which revived medieval and Gothic styles, especially that of the medieval craftspeople. Ruskin, Pugin and Morris were key figures of this movement, which rejected industrialised processes and embraced equity of status to artists and craftspeople, emphasising honesty in craftsmanship and truth in materials. Japanese woodcuts strongly influenced Crane's work (as indeed they influenced many artists in the West). Crane studied engraving under William James Linton and he was also a pupil of Ruskin. Ruskin, in turn, knew the publisher Tuer, the former supporting the latter's campaign to maintain standards in book-making materials and processes.

It is useful to consider the access to books such as those by Tuer. The Public Libraries Act became law in 1850 and Manchester was one of the first locations to establish a public library, appointing one of the main campaigners for this reform, Edward Edwards, as its first Chief Librarian. By 1900 there were 295 public libraries in Britain. Within the context of the Arts and Crafts movement, Tuer must have seen the value (and market for) publishing books relating to the arts – either for purchase, or lending through libraries – and broadcasting this newly discovered collection to artists and craftspeople across Europe.

Tuer's Japanese stencil book, then, is totemic in that he published this newly discovered collection at the height of Britain's Arts and Crafts movement – a period in which the skills of making were enjoying a renaissance. The Arts and Craft movement was never going to quash the rapidly developing machine age, but there was, and still is, a place for the skill of the artisan and of making things well.

The importance of the stencils (and recent research in Kyoto) lies not only in their aesthetic value – although there is no doubt about their beauty and seductive optical effects (see Figure 2.5) – but what these qualities

reveal about how they are made and the skills required to produce them. The stencil as a single utilitarian object belies a whole community of skilled people: the paper makers, the *itoire* artisan, the *katagami* artists who cut the designs and the artisans who print with them. As Sennett states, there are three criteria required to become an expert at one's craft (whatever that craft is): skill, commitment and judgement.

Every good craftsman conducts a dialogue between concrete practices and thinking; this dialogue evolves into sustaining habits, and these habits establish a rhythm between problem solving and problem finding ... Western civilization has had a deep-rooted trouble in making connections between head and hand, in recognizing and encouraging the impulse of craftsmanship.<sup>13</sup>

In the following chapters I examine skills of making within the context of rehearsal and repetition, and also introduce other qualities that *katagami* stencil technology has produced within kimono design that share parallels within music and fine art: pattern, rhythm, vibration, colour and other optical effects.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I introduce contemporary Japanese artisans who are now facing significant changes (and challenges) in their industry – seeking how to protect, or adapt, Japan's kimono making and associated skill base. The imminent demise of the last generation of traditional kimono makers and associated skilled artisans is reflected in a dwindling kimono economy. What is the fate of the kimono and that of the younger generation of artisans?

## Notes

- 1 R. Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Penguin, 2009), 172.
- 2 D. Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music: Understanding a Human Obsession* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006).
- 3 R. Sennett, *The Craftsman*, (London: Penguin, 2009), 171
- 4 *Kateigaho International Edition*, <http://int.kateigaho.com/spr05/katagami.html>



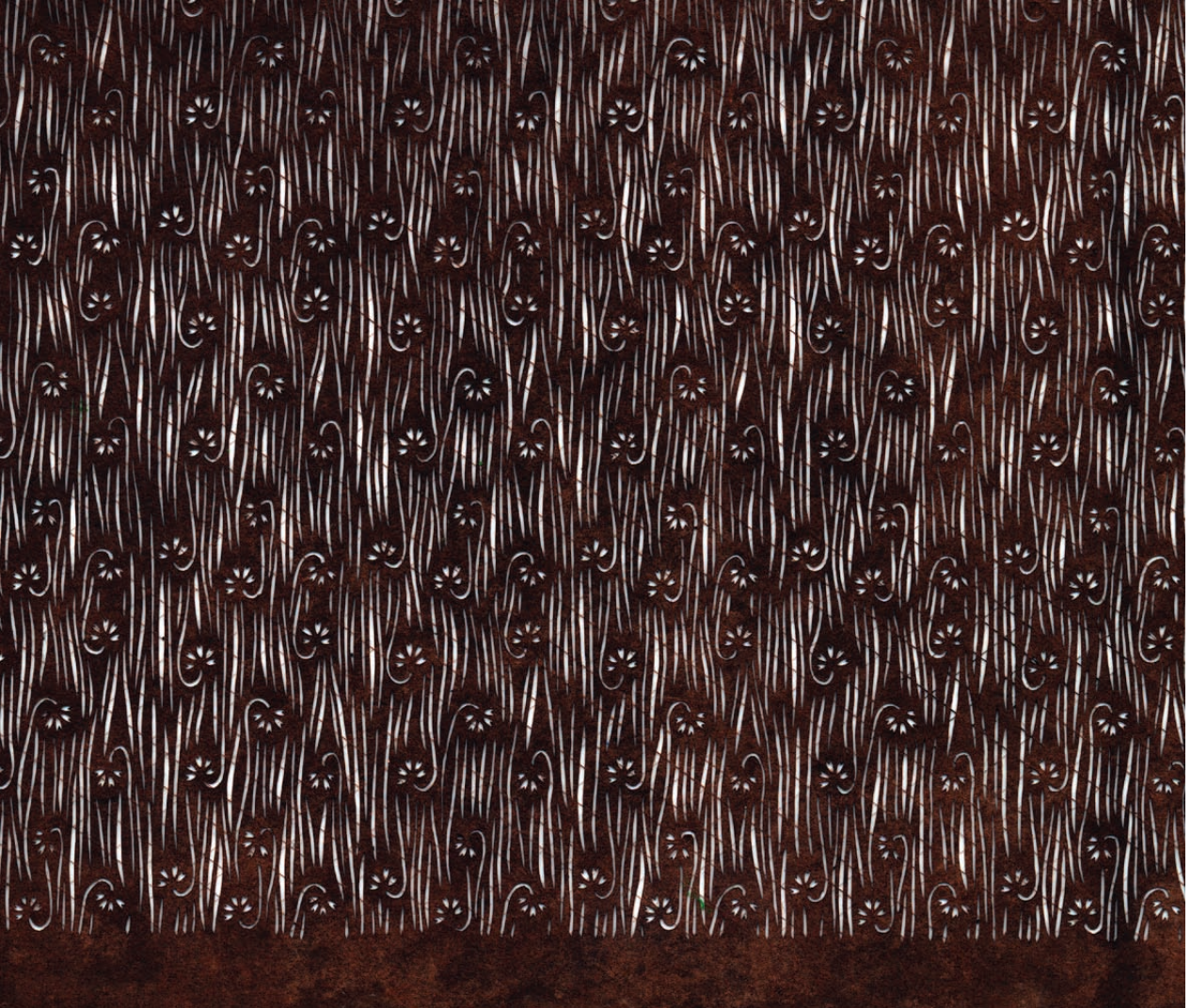


Figure 2.5 *Katagami* stencil with a delicate floral design, demonstrating a variety of cutting techniques.  
Collection of Pip Dickens, © Pip Dickens

- 5 Nippon-Kichi, [http://nippon-kichi.jp/article\\_list.do?kwd=218&ml\\_lang=en](http://nippon-kichi.jp/article_list.do?kwd=218&ml_lang=en)
- 6 The name Someya Yuzen (as opposed to Miyazaki Yuzen) is also referenced in C. Hopf, *Papercutting: Tips, Tools, and Techniques for Learning the Craft* (Mechansicburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2007), 11.
- 7 [www.pref.kyoto.jp/en/01-02-01.html](http://www.pref.kyoto.jp/en/01-02-01.html) and Yuzen Museum, Kyoto.
- 8 A. Tuer, *The Book of Delightful and Strange Designs, Being One Hundred Facsimile Illustrations of the Art of the Japanese Stencil-Cutter* (London: Leadenhall, 1893), 8.
- 9 M. Young, *Field & Tuer, the Leadenhall Press: A Checklist* (London: Oaknoll Press and British Library, 2010), 1.
- 10 Tuer, *Book of Delightful and Strange Designs*, 9.
- 11 Itoire craftsperson Mie Jonokuchi was designated as a Living National Treasure, together with five other Ise-katagami craftspeople in 1955; regrettably all have now passed away ([http://nippon-kichi.jp/article\\_list.do?kwd=218&ml\\_lang=en](http://nippon-kichi.jp/article_list.do?kwd=218&ml_lang=en)).
- 12 A *kamishimo* is a two-piece samurai costume. The upper piece (*katagimu*) is a sleeveless jacket or vest with exaggerated shoulders. The lower piece (*bakama*) consists of dramatic, wide, flowing trousers. Both items would normally be of the same material, and the quality and design of the fabric reflected the status of its wearer. The *kamishimo* was normally worn outside the house, or when expecting visitors. The more senior or aged the samurai, the more restrained the colour – greys and browns were common colours.
- 13 Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 9.

*Chapter Three*  
**Pattern, rhythm, vibration and colour**  
*Pip Dickens*

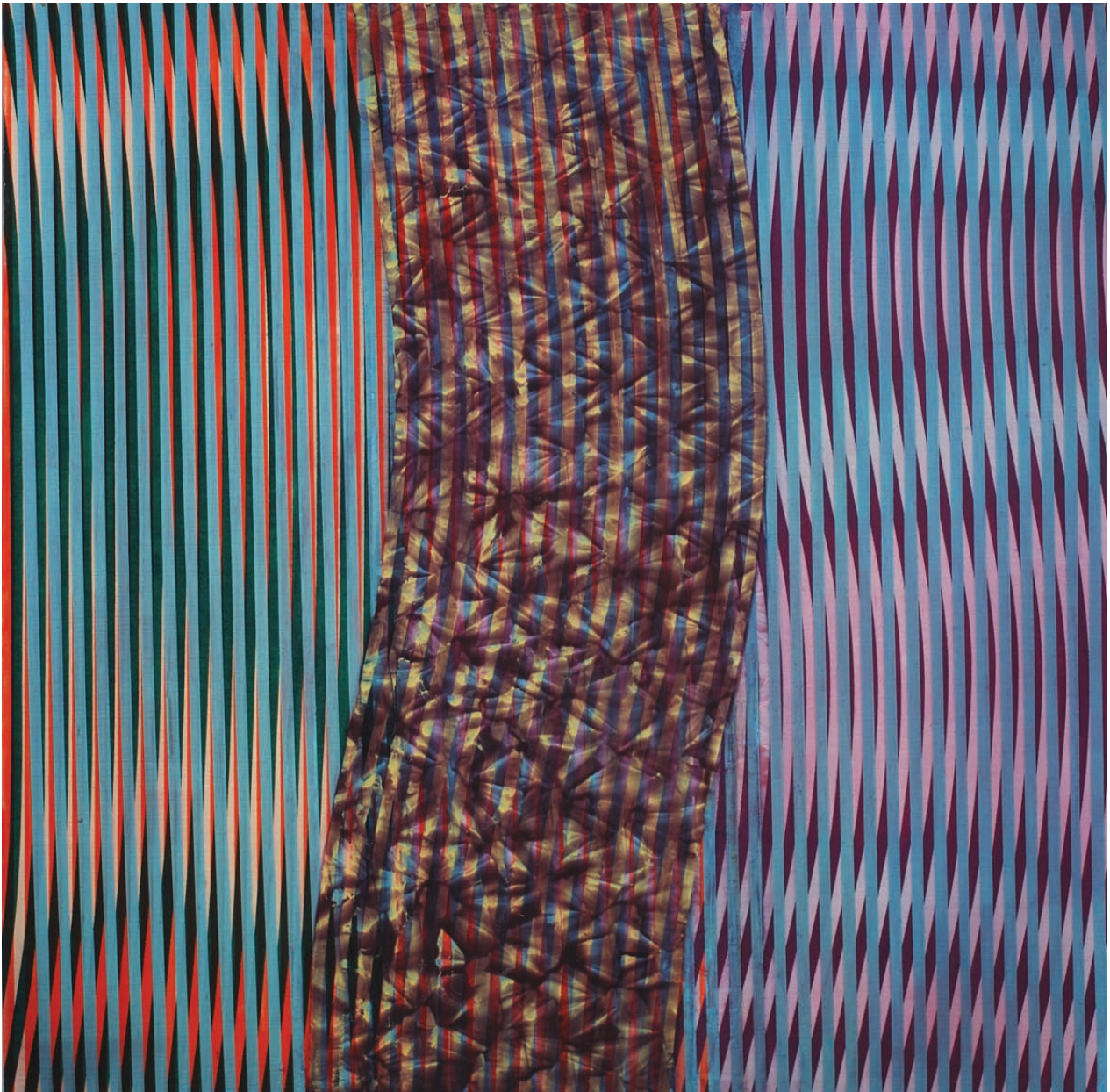


Figure 3.1 Dickens, *Moiré series – Venus Freak*, 2003, oil on canvas, 122 × 122 cm.  
© Pip Dickens

The *katagami* stencil, while evidently a practical tool for the purpose of colouring and patterning a variety of substrates, including kimono fabric, has recently found itself an object of desire in the West. Collectors, including myself, are attracted by its many startling qualities: intricate, delicate and complex designs, many of which convey optically vibrant arrangements. Given the use of the stencils in busy textile workshops, where dyes and resist materials are pressed through them again and again, it is not surprising that few of them survive in good condition today. However, whatever the aesthetic or design quality of the stencil, its most valuable asset is the evidence it provides of the virtuosity of the craftsperson – the hand skills of the artisan.

The Leverhulme Trust Award collaboration with Monty Adkins has used the *katagami* stencil as a symbol of how we can best investigate the synergy between music and painting. By drawing on the stencil's qualities (and that of the stencil's maker), themes emerged that directed us towards specific approaches in developing new works and the elements contained in those works.

It is important to emphasise how the stencil has developed a symbolic role (and why I have linked it directly to Richard Sennett's writing on craftsmanship) because elements of the stencil's aesthetic properties have also been absorbed and explored within preliminary works. The stencil, therefore, has played two distinct roles in this project: an important *visual reference*, and a symbol of *good making skills*.

It is also useful to reiterate the 'imperative to protect performance' mentioned in the previous chapter, because continuity – skill of control – of the handmade mark is an important component within painting: be it through rehearsal (repeated many times), through experimentation (trial and error) or through the action of painting where a skill of rhythmic control may be called into play. The same is true of musical performance and composition.

In this chapter I introduce three series of visual artworks: my own *Moiré* series, paintings by Bridget Riley<sup>1</sup> and photo-booth

collages by Liz Rideal.<sup>2</sup> All these works evidence these skills consciously, without relegating repetition to the banality of design or 'wallpaper'. Rather, these are highly original approaches due to the physical engagement of the artist through innovation; the skill of repetition and rehearsal; and the 'X' factor which, ultimately, is the role that an artwork plays *while in production*: the work creates a 'dialogue', or response to, actions imposed upon it during its development. Each of these artists demonstrates a very distinct and individual approach to pattern, rhythm, vibration and colour. Moreover, each evidences different levels of use of technology and hand skills.

In Chapter 2, I introduced Sennett's comments about skills and the corollary between those of the Japanese *katagami* cutter, revealing the importance of time, physical coordination and ritual in order to hone skills. In the nineteenth century the publisher Andrew White Tuer also signified the importance of practice and repetition in Japanese skills in order to become expert:

The Japanese, who has naturally a fine sense of colour and form, is taught draftsmanship in the same manner as he is taught writing – that is, copies are 'set' which are laboriously transcribed over and over again until the pupil can draw, say, a chrysanthemum of conventional shape, almost as easily as you and I ... can scribble *a b c*.<sup>3</sup>

### Pip Dickens: *Moiré* series of paintings

In my *Moiré* series of works (2001–3), formal aspects of Op Art – colour and movement – are given an uncomfortable 'nudge' in order to produce paintings that are not quite the perfect geometrical constructs demanded of the genre (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2). These constructs are in the process of shifting, or rearranging themselves. They teeter on the verge of a satisfactory final visual 'conclusion', or appear interrupted – frozen in motion and not quite at their optimum position. Elements are discordant, which, in turn, suggests motion

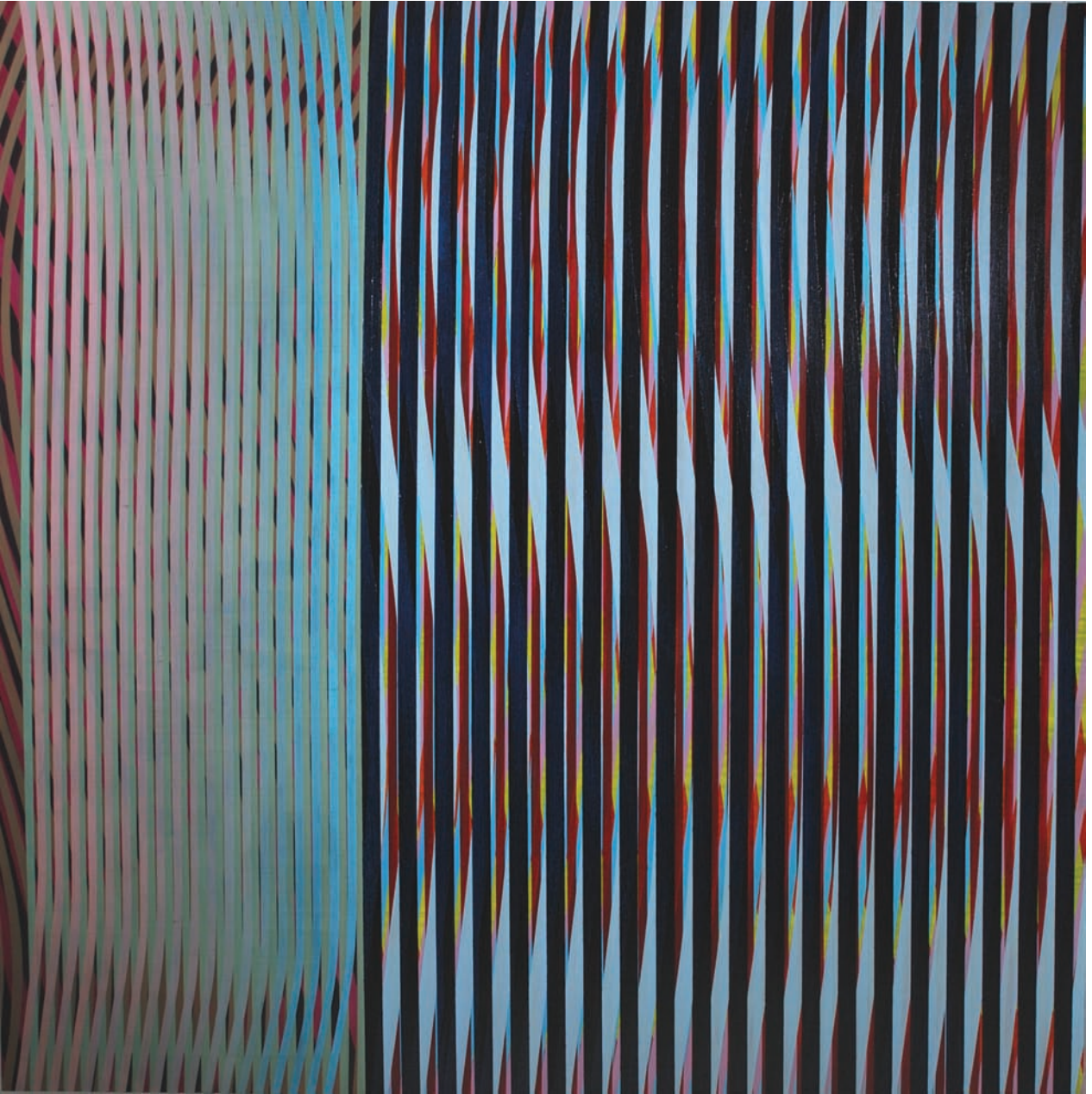


Figure 3.2 Dickens, *Moiré* series – *Blue Caribbean Vibration*, 2003, oil on canvas, 152 × 152 cm.  
Collection of artist, © Pip Dickens

and vibration. The emphasis is put on the viewer to be compelled to have ‘closure’ – to want, or try to, ‘rectify’ the image or imagine the image completing its cycle.

These oil paintings are made up of layers of individual ‘sets’ of colour stripes – a slow process requiring drying time between each layer, with one layer being painted over the other. As a result, each layer negates, or enhances, the colour or shapes that precede it. Even though there is the possibility to predict what might happen between each layer during the painting’s facture, in reality the slightest differentiation of a line’s articulation or hue results in a quite marked shift. In short, this was an exercise in negotiation: individual layers reacting harmoniously or discordantly with historical layers.

The notion of prescribed, predetermined outcomes was negated in favour of exploiting a process that would reveal its own surprises, dependent on what lay beneath it. The *Moiré* series of paintings is a comment about how contemporary perceptions can never quite divorce themselves from, or override history. Elements of history may be overwritten, but shifts in perception often bring them back to the surface at different times and in different ways.

In contrast, to ‘infer’ multiple layers but, in fact, produce a single design on the surface of the canvas suggesting layers beneath would have involved less time, less risk and less paint. But this would have missed altogether the point about the very specific methodology of approach – paint and how it is applied and manipulated is paramount within my practice. It is the qualities within paint, the mediums and methods of application (brushes, tools, fingers, etc.) that drive my practice – it is a physical ‘contact’ process. The aim is to achieve – as with any artist – an object of desire. Moreover, the qualities of paint, the mark, texture, translucence, brilliance of colour, weight, refraction and so on play a crucial part in what the painting is seeking to convey to an audience. As the painter Hans Hofmann wrote:

In the process of colouring (painting) the surface of the canvas (the picture plane)

should receive the greatest possible richness in light-emanation-effect and, at the same time, it should retain the transparency of a jewel. The light and form should control illusory oscillation into space and out of space ... The pictorially decorative effect is achieved through musical contrasts and rhythmic relations conditioned in space ... for every medium contains its own rhythmic laws and thus its strict limitations through which it is distinguished as the specific way of expression that it is.<sup>4</sup>

The significance of the *Moiré* series, therefore is two-fold. First, there is the overall impression of a painting as an optical puzzle, revealing rhythm and movement in the (static) second dimension. Second, it shows how a painting also contains its own history of facture – much resides beneath the surface; although obscured, the history of the painting is still discernable.

Other artists who use optical illusions embrace a wide range of methodologies – from kinetic sculptures or mobiles to paintings that are flat – with colour and line being highly significant. Many celebrated Op Art paintings have been produced in a ‘flattened’ illusory manner; for example, the paintings of Victor Vasarely or Bridget Riley. However, there is more to this prescriptive (designed) approach than can really be appreciated when standing in front of the completed works, which are optically demanding in themselves. The purity of visual drama presented belies a huge methodology and dialogue by the artist – of rehearsal and rhythm of enquiry in order to produce the works. The important point is that this takes place *outside* the resultant painting.

### Bridget Riley: paintings

In Will Self’s article ‘Read between the lines: are Bridget Riley’s paintings really fine art?’ (a response to Riley’s *Circles Colour Structure: Studies 1970/71* exhibition at Karsten Schubert Gallery, London, 2008/9), he posits that Riley’s paintings are ‘beautiful creations, but should they be regarded as fine

art – or merely framed wallpaper?’ The title of the article is provocative, but Self (himself a collector of Riley’s paper works) makes a valid point about Riley departing from the physical ritual and manipulation of paint. Self writes:

Riley’s theory throttled her practice. Consider Riley’s use of assistants to paint her canvases ... In a conversation with Lynne Cooke in 2005, she reiterates the well-known riffs: how from the get-go, in 1961, she provocatively turned away from the handmade aesthetic of the American Abstract Expressionists, enlisting assistants to paint for her, and enacting a ‘little rebellion’ against ‘handling’ by using household paint and washing the paintings with bleach.<sup>5</sup>

He continues:

Because the truth about Bridget Riley is that she’s a decorative artist masquerading as a fine artist, and her paintings are the perfect decorations for Modernist habitations and workspaces. Far from Blake or Turner being the English painters with which she stands comparison, she’s really the 20th-century counterpart to William Morris. In a curious inversion of Morris’s own creative and political trajectory, instead of trying to elevate artisans to the status of artists, Riley has simply elevated her own craft work to the status of fine art.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever your opinion of Self’s article, the point he makes about Riley’s relationship with painting (as a painter) is undeniable: once the painter stops interacting with the process of making, the nature of the work is entirely changed.

This departure from intimacy with the canvas did, indeed, make way for a dramatic shift in Riley’s methods of research and production. Riley, over many years, has developed an approach to creating paintings that involves many stages of enquiry and rehearsal. She uses, for example, collages – pre-emptive paper cuts and shapes made with scissors – which she then takes to her studio

where she works, alone, making tracings as she goes:

Now those [paper cuts] are done for me, to my instructions you know, as to how many I need and which types of forms and so on. So I then set off to my East End studio with those, and work by myself in relating them. Then I may find that a number of images come up, and I make tracings of them as I go, so that I have actual recall, so at the end of say three days or something I may have, if it’s gone well, four separate tracings which tell me various points and stages that I have reached. Those are painted out for me. And I look at those, and I maybe go on again, or maybe I work on one of them further. That gives me a wider range of possibilities.<sup>7</sup>

She does not hand them over to assistants, saying ‘Paint that, deliver that’. As she tells her interviewer, John Tusa, on BBC Radio 3:

No, no, it’s enormously to do with stages. In fact I’m sometimes teased by them [assistants] when they find that it’s revision C of revision A of a revision of a drawing from the previous year, and this little trail of revisions are all noted down. They give me a body of work which I can explore.<sup>8</sup>

Her assistants do not volunteer suggestions, so the decision process is wholly Riley’s. It seems that the structure of Riley’s practice is more akin to an architect’s office where ‘revision numbers’ are how developing and past works are referred to. Perhaps it is what Riley describes as her ‘straightforward and logical’ methodology that can sometimes be misconstrued as somewhat distant from the canvas – an almost ‘surgical’ approach to the paint’s application, with assistants completing the operation once Riley has worked her magic.

Michael Brady, in a 1998 article for *Critique* magazine, comments on the distinction between art and design:

In a 1974 interview, Milton Glaser noted that whereas a design must convey a given

body of information, the ‘essential function’ of art is to ‘intensify one’s perception of reality’. Sometimes, he said, these functions coincide, as in a medieval stained glass window, but in modern times they have diverged ... Art is judged in terms of beauty and truth, of insight and revelation, of almost prophetic clairvoyance – when it isn’t being judged as text, subtexts, and social constructs. Utility doesn’t fit this mindset. Practical success is not the hallmark of art ... Ultimately, a design must fulfil its primary job of packaging or illustration or instruction, and no amount of aesthetic glamour will substitute for its failure to do so.<sup>9</sup>

Riley’s work clearly sits in the definition of ‘beauty, truth, insight and revelation’. She says of her methodology:

Well, I think I work on two levels. That is to say that I occupy my conscious mind with things to do – lines to draw, movements to organise, rhythms to invent. In fact I keep myself occupied. But that allows other things to happen which I’m not controlling, and I think that the more that I exercise my conscious mind, the more open the other things may find that they can come through ... My rejection rate as it were is huge ... I have to proceed by trial and error – there’s no other way – so that of course I have to throw away a lot. Or I don’t throw it away because sometimes I find that if I look at it again I may find there is something – not that I can do with that, but that it will open another little bit of thought.<sup>10</sup>

Sennett’s assessment – ‘the importance of time, physical coordination and ritual in order to hone skills’ – is very relevant here. Riley’s studio practice upholds all these values: they are undertaken behind the scenes out of the view of the audience.

Conversely, in my *Moiré* series the quintessential value of why the works were painted the way they were was because risk takes place in the action of the one painting – there is no rehearsal. This is a matter of

personal choice – where the history of its making is something I wish to be present. The paintings’ illusory qualities appear to be sitting on the surface, yet the structure is fully open. Each painting is a physical structure of layer upon layer of physical processes, decisions, negations, articulations: ‘If you cut me I bleed’ – I have substance, depth and a physical presence, I am not merely ‘surface’. The sum of its parts is discernible, if not overtly observed. This is what gives the works a physical sense of ‘being’ – a phenomenon in itself. Through repetitious variation of curved lines and colour variation, the vibration and rhythm of each painting have a physical ‘weight’ and structural presence.

In contrast, Riley wishes her optically resonant works to be viewed unfettered by process – she wishes the audience to experience the end result. Through forethought and testing, her drive is toward clarity and precision. The history (production) of her paintings does not exist on the canvas but in separate objects – those earlier collages, arrangements, and the many preceding variations and revisions.

Riley’s paintings are studies in colour, line, rhythm and space (see Figure 3.3), wrought via a ritual of organisational stages – what Sennett described as ‘the imperative to protect performance’.

### Liz Rideal: photo-booth collages

Rideal is an artist who, since 1985, has ‘painted’ with a commercial photo-booth that is no different to its ubiquitous, utilitarian cousins found in urban shopping centres around the world. Invented by Russian-born Anatol Josepho and first seen in the streets of New York in 1925, the photo-booth automatically delivers strips of multiple snapshots in minutes, for a nominal fee. Rideal’s long-term relationship with this most cumbersome of cameras has developed into the creation of remarkable and beautiful photographic works (see Figures 3.4 and 3.5). What is significant about Rideal’s work for this study is that her work reveals a craft and skill in understanding – and developing – a methodology of exploiting both the obvious and hidden qualities of the photo-booth.



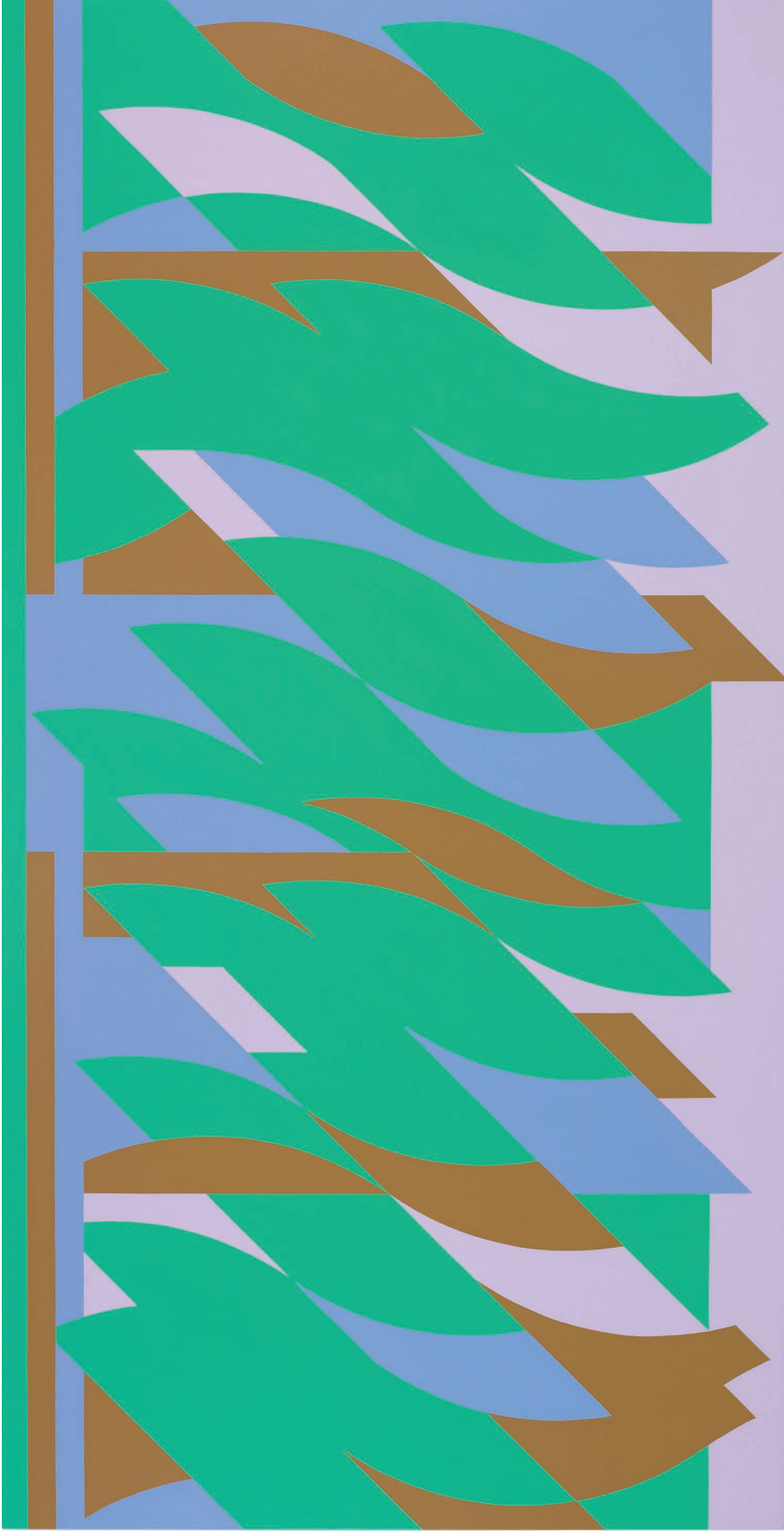


Figure 3.3 Riley, *Rhythm in Green*, 2009, oil on linen, 177 x 344 cm.  
All rights reserved, courtesy Karsten Schubert, London, © Bridget Riley

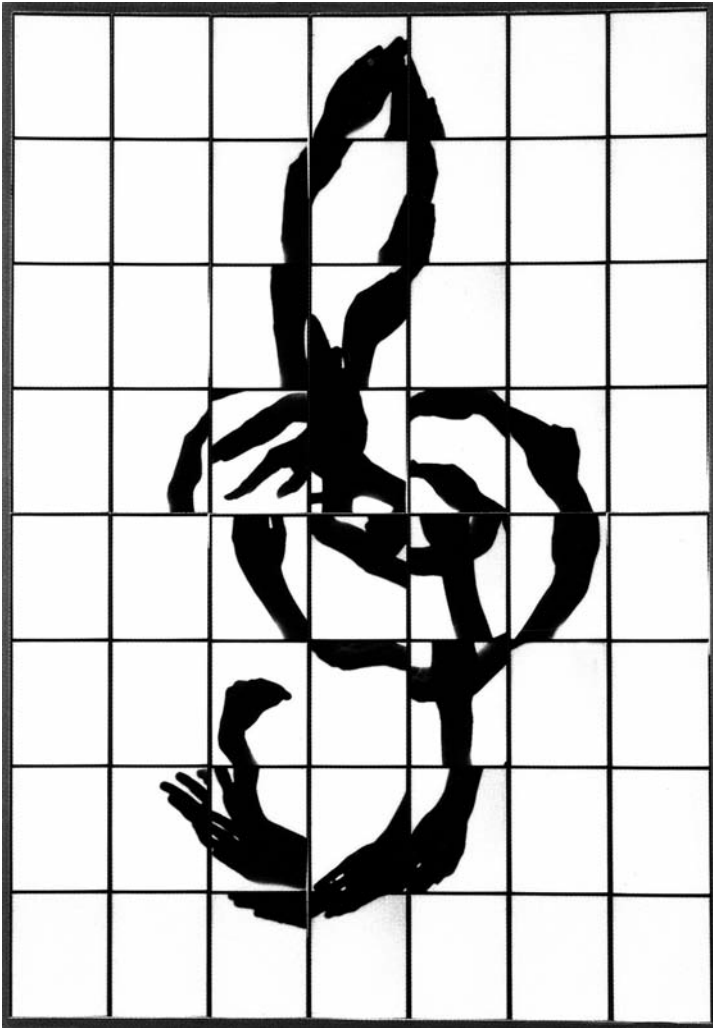


Figure 3.4 Rideal, *Treble Clef*, 1990, 14 strips of 4 uncut photo-booth photographs: cover image for The Photographers' Gallery exhibition catalogue.



Figure 3.5 Rideal, *Winter – the score*, 1990, photo-booth collage, 102.5 x 300 cm.  
© Liz Rideal All rights reserved, courtesy Gallery 339, Philadelphia.

Cheap, easy and instant, the photo-booth – in Rideal’s hands – belies a much greater sophistication. Rideal uses the interior space of the photo-booth as her studio, making all the work in this finite space. It is a performance whereby she must create the desired result for each snapshot within a series of four, on cue to the buzzer or warning light. Each artwork is made up of very many other series of similar yet individual shots and thus there is the discipline of maintaining continuity, depending on the number of shots required to produce the final work.

Just as the Japanese *shima-bori* cutters prime and prepare themselves for the rigour of cutting huge sections of stripes into the *katagami* paper, so too Rideal must imagine, rehearse and prepare her next ‘performance’ on cue, once the machine is primed for action.

In David Chandler’s article ‘Simply a matter of complexity’ he correctly relates Rideal’s commitment to learning the skill of using a photo-booth to the very title of his article:

One of Rideal’s underlying concerns has been to explore the mechanics of picture making. Much of her work makes reference, or is analogous to elementary

drawing ... Although the subject matter for Liz Rideal’s photo-booth work has been intentionally simple and traditional; she has consistently chosen to exploit lyrical treatment of these subjects and the mechanical, utilitarian character of her raw material.<sup>11</sup>

In a review of an exhibition of Rideal’s work inspired by Purcell’s *The Fairy Queen*, Hilary Robinson writes:

In the works on show at Portfolio [Gallery, Edinburgh], she uses photos of her hands and arms which, when stuck into a huge collage, make up a drawing of another object. She does this by making careful plans of the object she wishes to create, charting out what she needs to do in each frame on the four photo-strips ... here the hands dance a steady but idiosyncratic rhythm across the image in response to Purcell’s music playing in the background. Rideal’s hands shape themselves into a score written by Purcell’s hand and, as in music, passages of the image form complex patterns when studied closely.<sup>12</sup>

Those ‘usual suspects’ – pattern, rhythm and rehearsal – are ever-present in Rideal’s work. It seems to come as little surprise that her chosen subject matter – the fluid, hand-written score of Purcell (see Figure 3.6) – finds lyricism in another artist’s creative process. It is also evident that Rideal has a peculiar relationship with controlling and manipulating both machine and body in order to capture movement in a series of sequential, static photos, collaging them into series of even greater sequentiality and magnitude, like some gargantuan puzzle. This further stage requires the skills of scrutiny, editing, selection and further arrangement with hand and eye. The result is an artwork that heightens the viewer’s experience of rhythm and movement. These carefully choreographed snapshots – like notes when selected and skilfully combined in the correct way – confound any preconceptions about the limitations of a utilitarian device (a machine). It is just the same as the Japanese artisan and their knife.



Figure 3.6 One of two pages of original manuscript by Purcell, from the Royal College of Music, which Rideal re-interpreted in the *Score* series of photo-booth compositions.

Over the years, Rideal's photo-booth works have maintained this original rhythm and beautiful fluidity in the choice of other subject matter, which has been crammed into, and manipulated in her tiny 'studio' capsule: diaphanous fabrics, self-portraits of heads of billowing hair, plants and roots (see Figure 3.7). These transient performances, captured in what seems a series of spontaneous seconds, belie a craftsperson's knowledge of her subject, materials and processes that spans many years. She has rehearsed, she has an aim, but this is not design. Moreover, there is no safety net of a 'held' negative, only the machine-delivered photo-strips themselves.

Through the rhythm of movement–stasis–movement–stasis of their production, the resultant works become 'compositions' in their own right. Their huge significance and quality, however, is that the completed works reveal much, much more. They allow us to see through to the history of the entire act of making: the process, the performance and the instrument itself.

### The elements of craftsmanship

By comparing three artist's works, it is clear that each has a very distinct approach to innovating, testing and actual production of works. Moreover the skills employed evidence a broad spectrum of approach – through direct-handed execution (Dickens), low 'technology' rehearsal (the paper collage revisions of Riley) through to high technology (Rideal utilising and manipulating a photo-booth and photo-strips). Each artist relies on skills to problem-solve and/or innovate methods, procedures and techniques that are fundamental elements of craftsmanship.

The artist Grayson Perry, in conversation with Richard Sennett and Laurie Taylor in a BBC Radio 4 discussion about craftsmanship, said he had to 'come out' as a craftsman because:

There was a slight taboo about it. There is still a frisson in the art world about craftsmanship, I think because so many artists lack it because of the over-privileging of 'the idea' in the art world ... I think they

are neglecting a large part of the vocabulary of a maker, of developing a skill ... my ideas come on the hoof whilst I am working, the actual physicality of working with something throws up ideas all the time.<sup>13</sup>

In the next chapter the balance between high technology and the artist's control over it is discussed in more detail, with an introduction to Adkins's practice as a composer, and our collaborative exchanges, which exploited technological sketches of intent or possibility. In addition, the importance of research within art practice to test and understand materials is illustrated through the work of the artist Paddy Hartley, whose practice incorporates both hands-on manipulation of fabric (and other materials) with controlled and knowledgeable exploitation of technology processes.

### Notes

- 1 Bridget Riley was born in London in 1931 and spent most of her childhood in Cornwall. She studied at Goldsmiths College, 1949–52, and the Royal College of Art, 1952–5. In 1969 she was the first woman to win the International Prize for Painting, while representing Britain at the 34th Venice Biennale.
- 2 Liz Rideal (born 1954, England) is an artist who uses film and photography in her installations and is known for her photo-booth work.
- 3 A. Tuer, *The Book of Delightful and Strange Designs, Being One Hundred Facsimile Illustrations of the Art of the Japanese Stencil-Cutter* (London: Leadenhall, 1893), 20.
- 4 H. Hofmann, 'On the aims of art', trans. Ernst Stolz and Glenn Wessels, *The Fortnightly* 1:13 (26 February 1932), 7–11.
- 5 W. Self, 'Read between the lines: are Bridget Riley's paintings really fine art?' *The Independent*, 29 November 2008.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Bridget Riley, interview by John Tusa, *The John Tusa Interviews*, BBC Radio 3, 5 January 2003, [www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/johntusainterview/riley\\_transcript.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/johntusainterview/riley_transcript.shtml).
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 M. Brady, 'Eyesite: art and design: what's the big difference?' *Critique Magazine* (1998), [www.unc.edu/~jbrady/Essays/Art\\_Design.html](http://www.unc.edu/~jbrady/Essays/Art_Design.html)

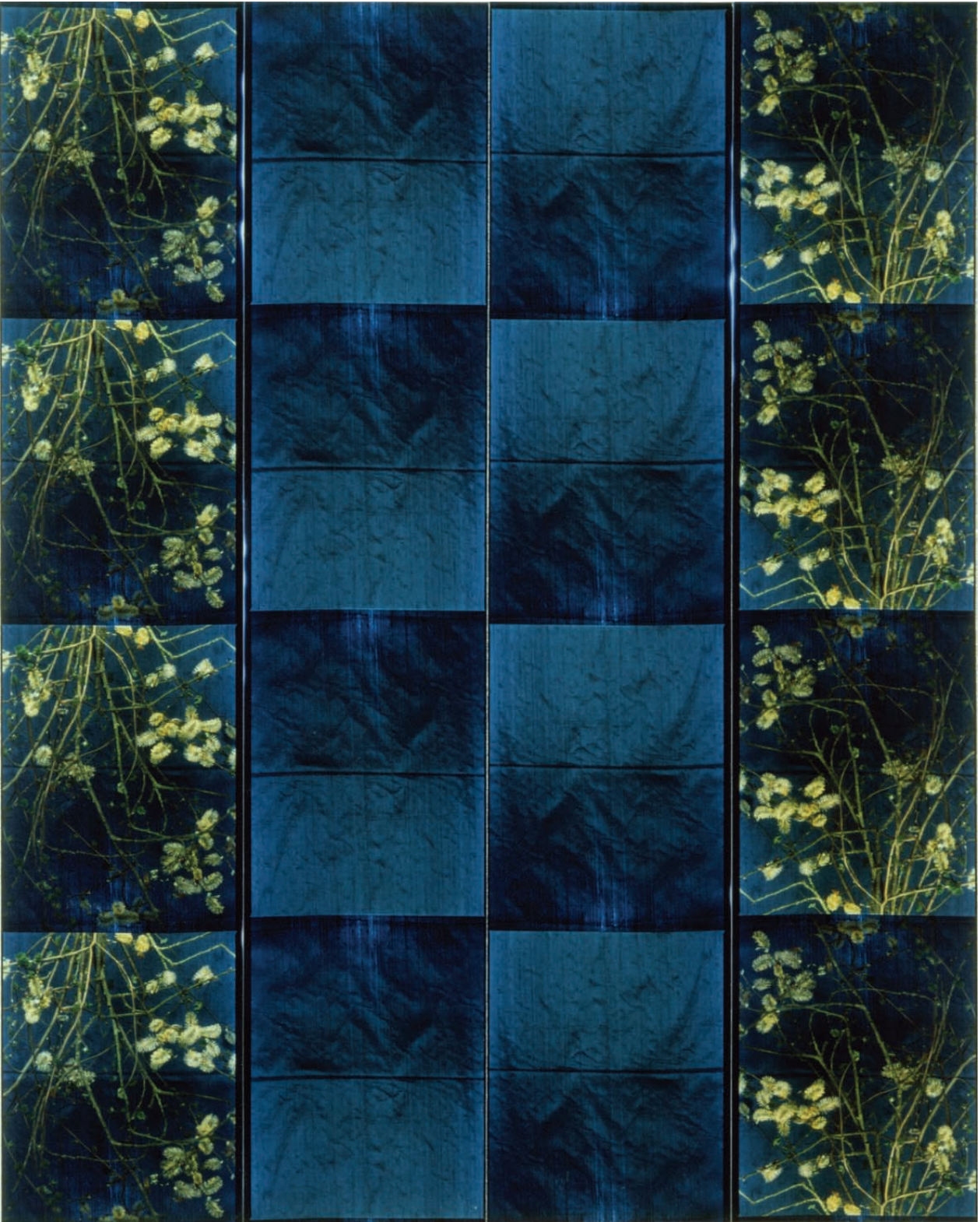


Figure 3.7 Rideal, *Kimono (Pussy Willow)*, 1999, C-type print, 130 × 100 cm, edition of three; from a series of photo-booth works influenced by Rideal's research trip to Japan in April 2000.

- 10 Bridget Riley, interview by John Tusa.
- 11 D. Chandler, 'Simply a matter of complexity', in Liz Rideal: Photo-booth Collages (London: Photographers' Gallery, 1990).
- 12 H. Robinson, The List, Art & Exhibitions, 22 February–7 March 1991.
- 13 Laurie Taylor, Grayson Perry and Richard Sennett, Thinking Allowed, BBC Radio 4, 6 February 2008.

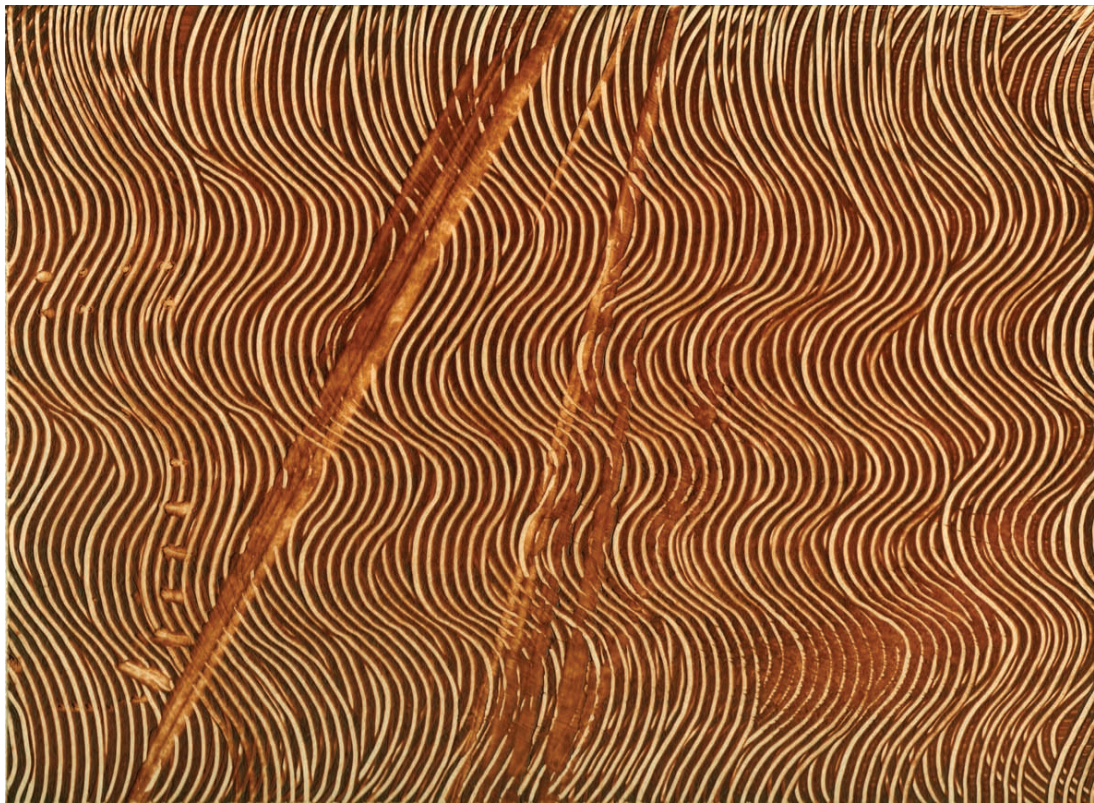


Figure 4.1 Dickens, *Katagami 6*, 2009, oil on paper, sketch.  
© Pip Dickens

Most painters start a new series of works with the harrowing ‘whiteness of the whale’ that is the blank canvas. Anna Jackson, in *Kimono Patterns*, describes the format of the T-shaped kimono as a ‘blank canvas, or scroll, for the kimono designer’.<sup>1</sup> As the kimono has developed, so has the design evolved across more of the garment in more ‘painterly’ ways, using multiple techniques, colours, motifs and patterns. This has resulted in

greater dynamism – whether from abstract or more representational arrangements. However, wherever there is design, then prescriptive methods, tactics and processes are not far behind.

In the precarious field of painting there is the ever-present risk of error, correction, or even total destruction. Painting’s excitement resides on the razor’s edge between success and failure: of knowing when to stop and

determining when to risk all. This is not the case for artists using technology, where a master or copy is protected, or where variations on an original may be formulated and appraised with no jeopardy to the original work. Simply put, if the painting fails, the artist must start again.

Therefore, there is little point in painting if the risk of error, correction or overkill upsets you. The ritual of painting builds ‘muscles’ and techniques, empirically, through trial and error over many years and through an endless variety of approaches. Habits are formed, techniques are developed, processes are explored. Making mistakes is a big part of innovation. How much to force oneself through a planned approach (imagined or prescribed) and when to adapt, or jettison, that approach is a real-time negotiation between the painting and the painter.

We return to the ‘X’ factor – the painting itself – and the role it plays in ‘suggesting’ to the artist what moves to make next.

The pendulum swings between intent and adaptation throughout a painting’s progress.

Early in this audio-visual collaboration, Monty Adkins and I exploited the low-risk use of high technology in order to communicate, quickly, possible approaches, or responses to one another’s ideas. The use of high technology was relegated to a tool for communication. This is not *art* but *thinking* through digital sketches (the recording of an idea in a rapid format), just as a sketch made with a pen on an envelope is *thinking* not *art*. The production of many sketches, both hand-drawn and digital (sound and visual), allowed us as collaborators, often geographically separated or busy working on other projects, to propel ourselves down lines of enquiry, and to develop an understanding of one another’s thinking and approach to individual practices. In essence, these visual and sound sketches were efficacious in working our way through a large learning curve and multiple approaches in a short period of time. The ritual of sketching, producing variations on a theme for comparison and debate, was critical, given that it takes time to compose sound works and time to make oil paintings. Moreover, the activity not only allows one to create but also to discard.

Adkins’s practice as a composer of electroacoustic music equips him with a vast array of high-technology sound equipment and state-of-the-art studio facilities. Because of the low-risk factor high technology offers compared to the high-risk, low technology of the painter’s studio, it is important to recontextualise the parallels between both in creating works. Success comes when the composer *commands* the high technology (sound equipment), not the other way round. In this regard, Adkins calls upon his own repertoire of skills, accrued over many years. These include his experience of state-of-the-art music and sound technology, as well as his skills as a musician – with in-depth knowledge of instruments and playing them, composition, theory and as an academic. Understanding the equipment and calling upon it to do what he wills it to do is distinct from merely asking a machine to undertake a task. In this regard, the equipment he uses to compose *is* an instrument – within which is contained a vast palette of sounds (pure and hybrid) that can be further manipulated at will. As with any instrument, it can only function under the direction of the brain and the hand, and what results from that instrument is dependent on the skill of the musician.

In Adkins’s compositions, methods of layering are set within ‘deep space’. The repetitions of motifs, series of notes and sounds are apparent, but their proximity and scale within that space seem to travel on their own trajectories and revolutions: sometimes they pass close by, sometimes they recede. There are differences in the ‘size’, ‘hue’, ‘temperature’ and ‘vibration’ of those motifs, dependent upon how close and insistent they call to us; or they may, like brief pyrotechnical bursts, taper off ... falling away in the darkness toward a more silent and distant horizon. Some have the crisp, clear quality of crystal or raindrops; they have an intimate proximity – a purity and clarity that appears to come from within the listener rather than any external source. Others are complex ‘choirs’ of amalgamated sounds that boom, flicker and vibrate – knocking against the senses, circling and wrapping around the listener.



Imagine your body travelling through a space made of pure sound. Imagine your skin did not just ‘feel’ but was a vast surface area of hearing sensors – not so ridiculous when you consider the sophistication of this organ, which uses neuronal afferents that send inwards the stimulants and sensations to the brain for interpretation. This is what experiencing Adkins’ compositions is like: particles, layers, surfaces, temperature, light, darkness and colour – all seem physically ‘excitant’, not just audible. There is even a ‘fourth dimension’, as he builds upon an ever-evolving history and richness with a light and supremely delicate touch. These are not linear or parallel histories; they are more like spatial echoes – active sonars – recognising and signalling to one another across vast spatial locations.

These astonishingly complex yet melodic electroacoustic compositions can only become what they do through the route of skilled processes and controls. Armoured with his controls and skills, Adkins can allow the composition to evolve into something wholly experimental and new. The issue of exploiting computer technology is really a question of *how* it is exploited and to what ends, for there are skills in using technology (as indeed with gaining expertise in anything). Richard Sennett states in a discussion with Grayson Perry and Laurie Taylor (*Thinking Allowed*, BBC Radio 4) that we need to be careful about assessing what skills stand for:

What tends to happen in Britain is that the word ‘skills’ stands for procedure – how to do ‘X’. It doesn’t stand for ongoing experience of doing ‘X’ better, so when we test young kids we test whether they can do a procedure or whether they are capable of learning from whatever baseline they start from them. It is tick-box learning.<sup>2</sup>

Sennett also defines the relationship between the artisan and technology:

The greatest dilemma faced by the modern artisan-craftsman is the machine. Is it a friendly tool or an enemy replacing work of the human hand? In the economic

history of skilled manual labour, machinery that began as a friend has often ended up as an enemy.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most significant elements of our collaboration was having to exchange concepts and developments with another person – things that are normally very private and difficult to articulate. The received image of a sketch does not always convey, wholly, what the artist is aiming to accomplish. Sketches are visual/audible notations for self-reference – shorthand solutions, or approaches, indicating processes that might be called into play in a painting or sound work. The sketch, be it hand-wrought, or digitally created, can be misleading, or mysterious, to anyone other than the artist, without some form of supplementary explanation – appraised only on its visual/audible merits, not for its hidden meaning or intent. Over a period of some months we exchanged numerous sketches (see Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5), before developing preliminary paintings and sound works. This process prompted valuable discussions of the sketches where both our interpretations and ideas could be shared. The sketches, then, are thoughts in their nascency – sometimes fixing only on a single aspect of a concept.

As a process, or ‘tool’, the sketch has four purposes: exploration, germination, filtration and design. Different artists’ ‘sketches’ filter and evolve concepts in different ways – that is the freedom artists have in developing skills independently of an external agency. It is research, and research is part and parcel of many artists’ practice. But the how, why and what of this research is individually determined.

#### **From Gillies to Gaga: the sculptures of Paddy Hartley**

Paddy Hartley’s *Project Façade* exemplifies how a dedicated and passionate interest in a subject matter can result in a body of artworks that develop a momentum of their own. Hartley believes in the skill of making – hands-on – but has also been shrewd in exploiting



Figure 4.2 Dickens, *Shibusu series – Katagami Sketch 36*, 2011. Many hybrid sketches were produced using photographs of works in progress (oil on canvas), which were then reworked in Adobe Photoshop.  
© Pip Dickens

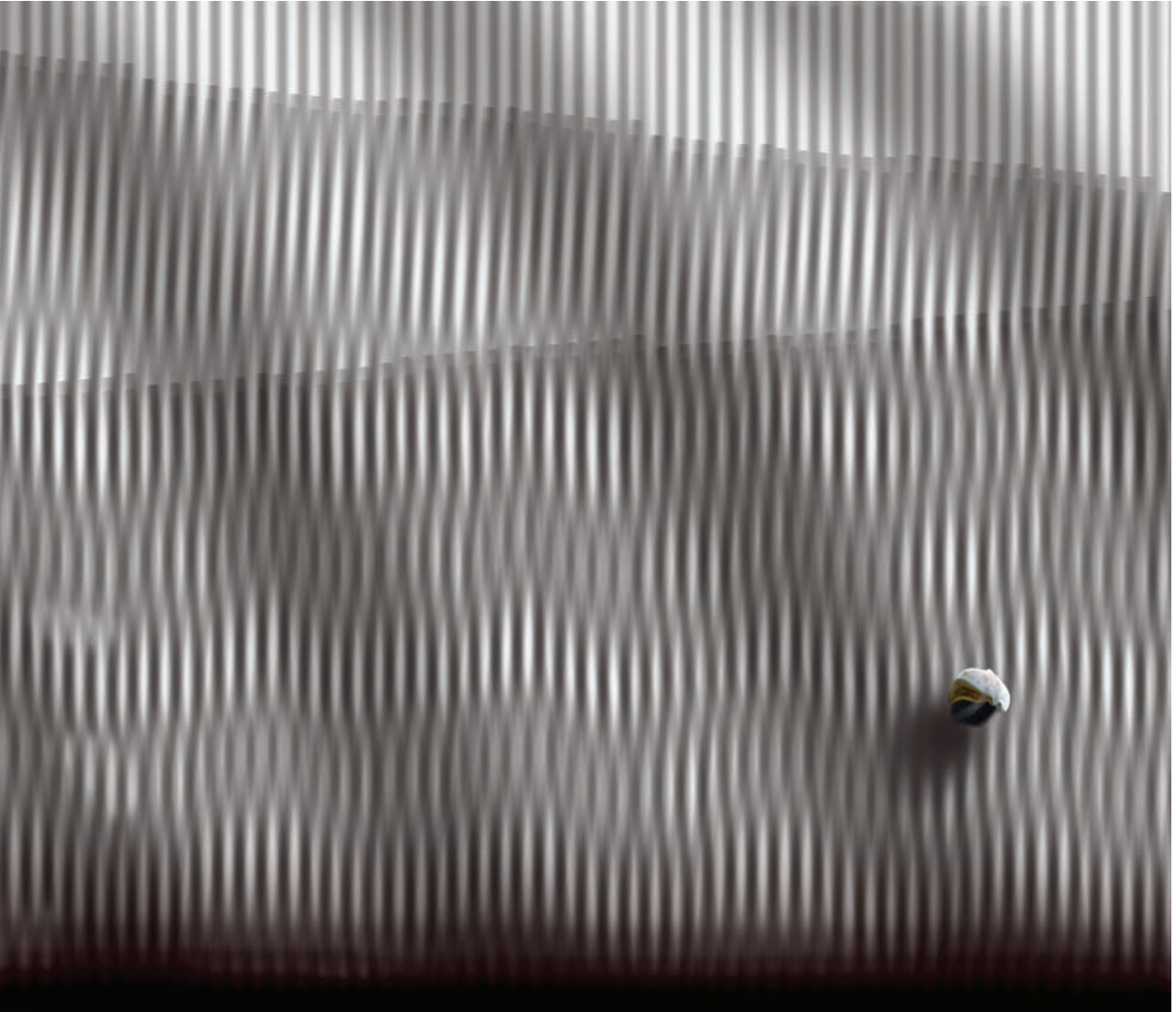


Figure 4.3 Dickens, *Shibusa* series – *Katagami Sketch 32*, 2011, digital and painting hybrid sketch.  
This study resulted in *The Offing* (see Figure 5.2).  
© Pip Dickens

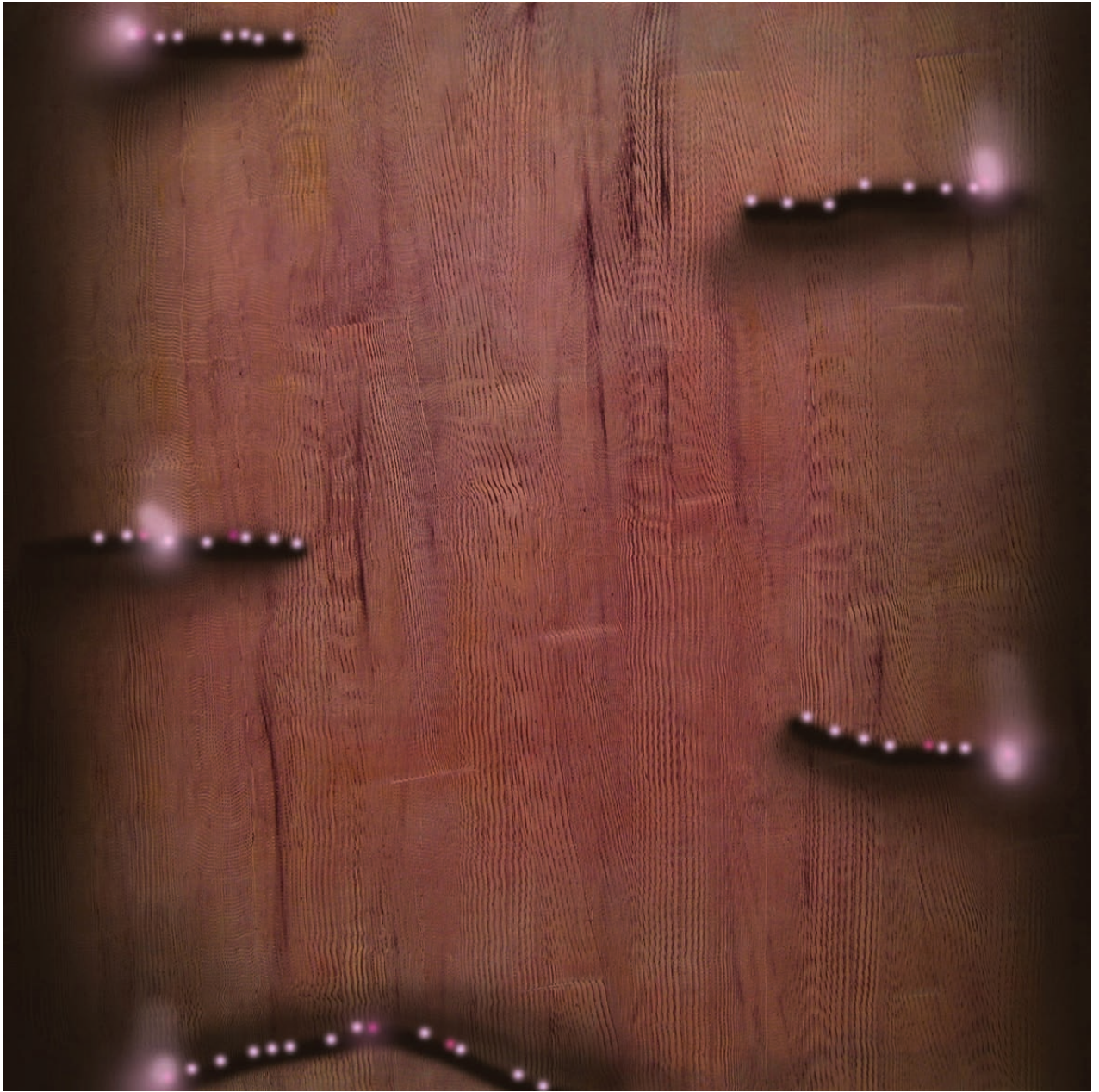


Figure 4.4 Dickens, *Shibusa* series – *Katagami Sketch 50*, 2011, digital and painting hybrid sketch.  
© Pip Dickens



Figure 4.5 Dickens, *Shibusa series – Katagami Sketch 51*, 2011, digital and painting hybrid sketch.  
© Pip Dickens

high technology in order to share the histories and research behind the work and so place his artworks in specific context.

*Project Façade* is a series of 16 sculpturally embroidered garments that interpret and symbolise personal histories of servicemen who suffered severe facial injuries during the First World War. Hartley's focus is on the New Zealand surgeon Sir Harold Delf Gillies, who developed crucial facial surgery techniques. Gillies worked with pioneering surgeon Hippolyte Morestin (dubbed the 'Father of the Mouths' for his innovative surgery in skin grafting), which Gillies observed during the First World War at the British General Hospital in Rouen. Gillies returned to England and began his own groundbreaking work in the field of maxillofacial surgery. His work predates that of his cousin Archibald McIndoe, and his equally extraordinary work (with Rainsford Mowlem and Tommy Kilner) with facially disfigured Second World War servicemen, which became known as the 'Guinea Pig Club':

Archibald McIndoe went to the Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead. Mowlem worked at St. Albans and Kilner at Roehampton, while Gillies established the army service at Rooksdown Hospital, near Basingstoke. All were involved in the treatment of facial casualties in the Second World War and McIndoe in particular was instrumental in the rehabilitation of his patients, the majority of whom were badly burned bomber crews and fighter pilots.<sup>4</sup>

The large proportion of serious injuries and disfigurement in the First World War was unprecedented, due to mass production and development of artillery. Guns, rifles, tanks, machine guns, gas and grenades bombarded and killed, injured and traumatised surviving servicemen. The first self-powered machine gun, the Maxim, was nicknamed the 'devil's paintbrush' because of the physical damage it wrought in the First World War. Such damage was graphically illustrated in François Dupeyron's 2001 film *La Chambre des officiers*, based on the book of the same name by Marc Dugain, which charts the experiences

of Adrien Fournier, a lieutenant in the Engineers during the First World War. Fournier was struck down in the field and was removed to a maxillofacial unit shared by similar victims, and spent the rest of the war undergoing experimental reconstructive surgery.

In an interview on National Public Radio, Caroline Alexander (author of an article on this subject in *Smithsonian* magazine) described two artists who made masks for victims of facial disfigurement during the First World War:

They lost their faces, I suppose is the bluntest way to describe what happened ... they lacked, eyes, noses and chins ... mirrors were banned. Doctors learned that when a man caught sight of his face he really was devastated – there was no preparation for this.<sup>5</sup>

Francis Derwent-Wood was an English sculptor who volunteered to be an orderly in the Third London General Hospital. He developed the idea of making masks that gave soldiers enough confidence to go out into the world. The British government supported his proposal and set up a workshop, which became informally known as the 'Tin Noses Shop'. The American sculptor Anna Coleman Ladd picked up on this concept, developing masks for servicemen in Paris. She made a plaster cast of the face and then from that squeeze she would make a metal mask of galvanised copper, and then experiment with paint to achieve the greatest likeness and compatibility with the rest of the face. The masks were carefully scrutinised by the victim, their family and friends, to make them look as good as possible.

Artillery used in the First World War was the product of technology and mass production. Hartley's work touches upon a number of issues relating to notions of low and high technology, both from the historical perspective of the subject matter and through the making of the resultant artworks. *Project Façade* is also an example of a series of works developing from an earlier related yet distinct project. In 2002 the Victoria and Albert

Museum invited Hartley to exhibit these earlier works at their *Short Cuts to Beauty* event, which examined attitudes toward the beauty and cosmetic surgery industries. Hartley questioned what it might mean if it were considered socially unacceptable to undergo facial surgery for cosmetic purposes alone. Could the appearance of a face be temporarily altered instead in non-invasive ways, using methods to shape the face, just as a corset has been traditionally used to shape the figure? The result was a series of works called *Face Corsets*. These pieces are mimetic in that they physically reshaped and contorted the wearer's face into forms that pronounced, uplifted or drew attention to lips, cheeks, chin and eyes.

This initial project was funded by the Wellcome Trust, and with further support from them Hartley expanded his research into the origins of modern facial reconstructive surgery. This led him to the Gillies Archive at Queen Mary's Hospital in Sidcup, which contains detailed written and photographic records of the evolution of facial surgery through the treatment of First World War servicemen in a unique period of social, military and medical adaptation.

Survivors of the First World War have spoken of psychological dislocation – that of being one person before the war and another during and after. This war was one of entrenchment:

creating a bewildering landscape of indistinguishable, shadowy shapes, illuminated by lightning flashes of blinding intensity and then obscured by phantasmagoric, often gas-induced haze. The effect was even more visually disorientating than those produced by such nineteenth-century technical innovations as the railroad, the camera, or the cinema. When all that soldiers could see was the sky above and the mud below, the traditional reliance on visual evidence for survival could no longer be easily maintained. The invention of camouflage and the disappearance of differences in uniform between men and officers added to the experience of war as at once a

frightening reality and a not so grand illusion.<sup>6</sup>

Expressing a similar sentiment, Eric J. Leed writes:

The expectation that men would return from the war to pick up their lives where they left off was, of course, impossible. Those who continued to be troubled physically by their war experience were troubled by the sense of having lived two lives and of being unable to resolve the contradictions between them.<sup>7</sup>

In *Project Façade*, military uniforms morph into outer 'skins' of human warfare: ripped, cut, resewn, grafted and surgically readjusted. Flaps reform, great holes appear in the fabric and gasmask-like headgear graft themselves on to jackets (see Figure 4.6). These carefully tailored constructions mirror attempts at corrective surgery of the time but, perhaps, more harrowing, register the wish of society to put servicemen back together again (like Humpty Dumpty) – to become 'normal':

The sense of difference and strangeness which marked the relations of the veteran with his social origins derived from a species of structural disjunction, an imprecise fit between distinct forms of social life, which imposed upon the combatant a contradictory sense of his own status and value. Thus the question of a 'change' of character necessarily became a question of how the distinctiveness of war experience and civilian experience was defined, comprehended and portrayed.<sup>8</sup>

Here the facial garments that form part of the embroidered uniform sculptures interpret patients' stories, illustrating how Gillies transplanted skin from one part of the face or body to another to repair injuries. Hartley's work is also mimetic in the sense that he 'operates' on authentic First World War uniforms through cutting, sewing and retailoring. The issue of touching and handling is important. Hartley writes:



Figure 4.6 Hartley, *Project Façade – Spreckley 1 & 2*, 2006–7, vintage officer uniforms, digital print on fabric, digital embroidery, vintage lace.

© Paddy Hartley



I feel that evidence of the maker's hand is crucial, not just in terms of authenticity but in the way in which the maker handles the material. I am often asked 'Did you make this artwork yourself?' This I find a bizarre and somewhat sad query – it being a recognition of the fact that many [contemporary] artists don't actually have a hand in the fabrication of their work. Would one ask a writer if they had written a piece themselves? Every artist brings their own skill set and knowledge base to a material and how they use it to describe an idea, be they trained in the use of the media or not.<sup>9</sup>

The wealth of Hartley's research, experimentation and interpretation through hand skills and technology has evolved into artworks responding to, and acknowledging, serious developments in reconstructive surgery and the bravery of servicemen in the First World War in general. Hartley says: 'If the work I make merely provokes viewers to want to find out more about these amazing heroic people and acknowledge their sacrifice, it has been successful'.<sup>10</sup>

In recent years, Hartley has 'liberated' elements of this research into a completely different sphere – fashion design. He has been professionally astute in distinguishing the discipline of art from that of design, in order to retain the sanctity, rigour and respect of *Project Façade* and its subject matter. Indeed, within the sphere of fashion he is not Paddy Hartley but Patrick Ian Hartley, and it is interesting to note the care he takes in ensuring that this distinction is made.

Two years after the conclusion of *Project Façade* the *Face Corset* project re-emerged, largely due to interest in those early works by the fashion industry. In 2009 I was contacted by iconic British fashion photographer, Nick Knight,<sup>11</sup> who wanted to shoot my work for a number of features for high fashion publications including *AnOther Magazine* – one garment was, interestingly, worn by Lady Gaga.<sup>12</sup>

From this point on Hartley's *Face Corsets* have taken on a theme of their own – they are less about manipulating the wearer's face and more about the spectacular shapes and forms that sculpt themselves around and interact with head, facial features, hair and neck. They are astonishingly innovative, dramatic and futuristic constructions that remind us – in terms of their design ambition – of the bizarre palisade wire scaffolds supporting ladies wigs (some up to 75 cm in height) that abounded in the eighteenth century, when nothing was too bold or fanciful. Moreover, as a case history for this book, there is no more apt demonstration of 'extracting beauty'. Looking at the face corset shown in Figure 4.7, it is hard to discern it originates from thoughts about cosmetic surgery and investigations into facial injuries suffered by servicemen in the First World War.

#### Notes

- 1 A. Jackson, *Kimono Patterns* (London: V&A Publishing, 2010).
- 2 Laurie Taylor, Grayson Perry and Richard Sennett, *Thinking Allowed*, BBC Radio 4, 6 February 2008.
- 3 R. Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Penguin, 2009), 81.
- 4 [www.projectfacade.com/index.php?/about/glossary\\_comments/guinea\\_pig\\_club](http://www.projectfacade.com/index.php?/about/glossary_comments/guinea_pig_club) (accessed 15 May 2011).
- 5 *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, USA, 24 February 2007, [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7556326](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7556326) (accessed 15 May 2011).
- 6 M. Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 212–13.
- 7 E. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 9 Communication with P. Dickens, 19 May 2011. Hartley worked in partnership with Gillies archive curator Dr Andrew Bamji at Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup, and biomaterial scientist Dr Ian Thompson in the Oral Maxillofacial Department, Guy's Hospital, London.

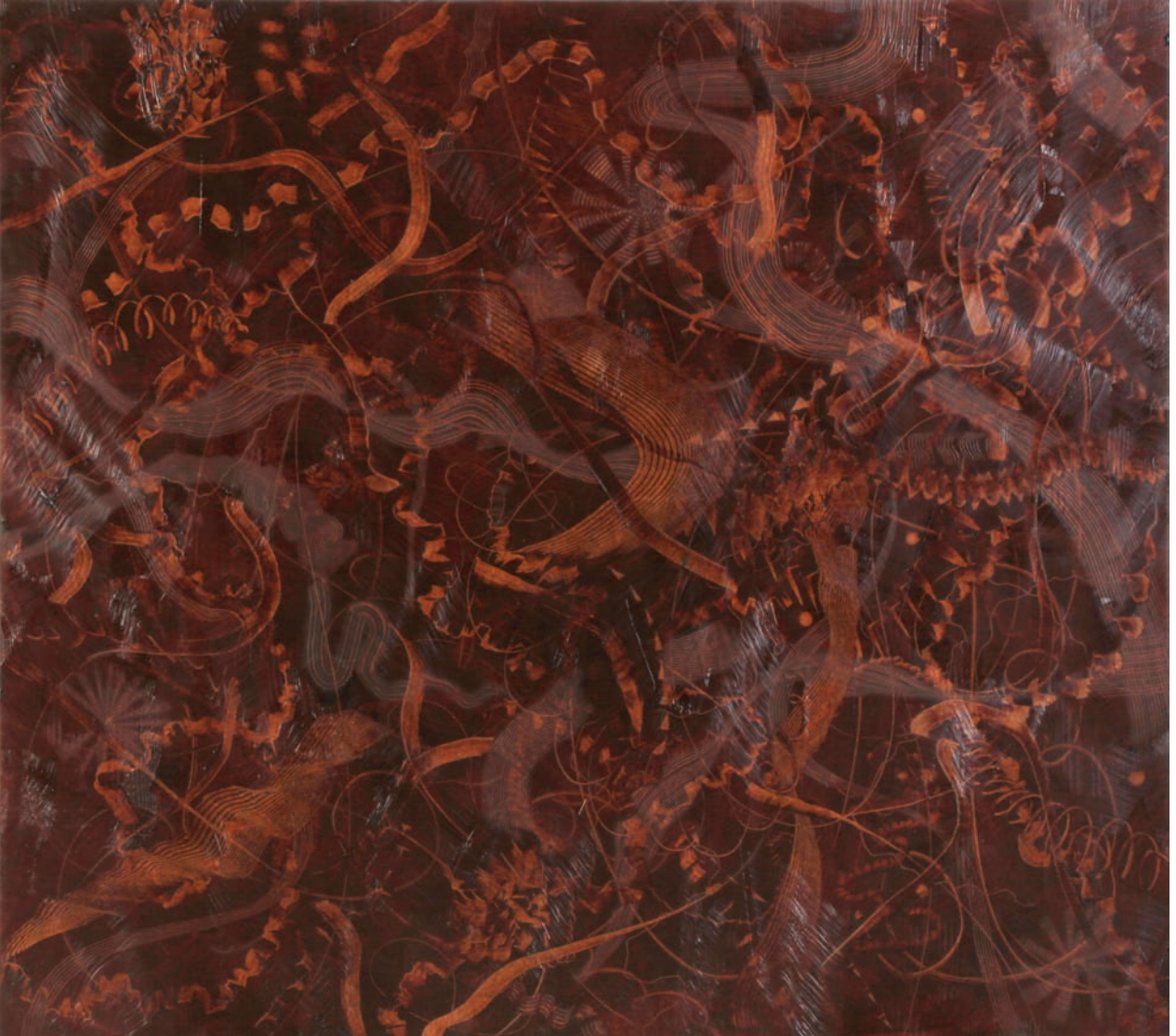


Figure 4.7 Patrick Ian Hartley, facial garment design, 2010.

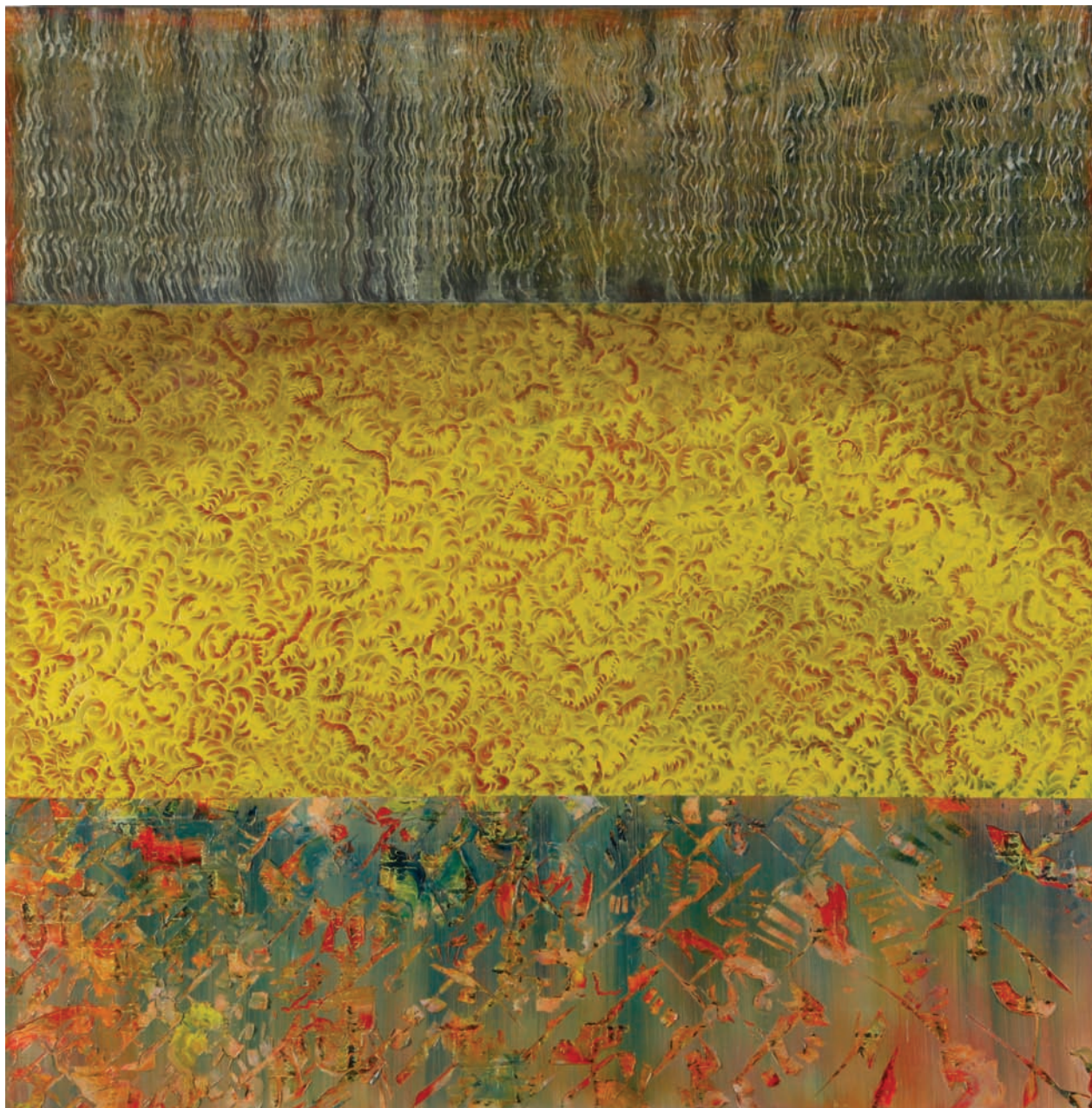
Photographer: Sophie Pycroft; styling: Ihunna; hair and make-up: Kenny Leung; model: Ruby Slate-Balthazaar; © Paddy Hartley

- 10 Paddy Hartley, interview with P. Dickens,  
19 May 2011.
- 11 Nick Knight OBE (b. 1958) has  
undertaken photography projects for  
clients including Alexander McQueen,  
Audi, Calvin Klein, Christian Dior,  
Lancôme, Levi Strauss, Mercedes-Benz,  
Royal Ballet, Royal Opera House,  
Swarovski and Yves Saint Laurent.  
He exhibited his work at the Victoria  
and Albert Museum, Saatchi Gallery,  
Photographers' Gallery and Hayward  
Gallery and recently Tate Modern.  
In 2011 he directed Lady Gaga's video  
*Born This Way*.
- 12 Paddy Hartley, interview with P. Dickens.





Dickens, Oriental series – *Auspicious Ribbon*, 2010, oil on MDF, 91.4 x 106.6 cm



Dickens, Oriental series – *Between Wu and Yu*, 2009, oil on canvas, 152.5 x 152.5 cm



Dickens, Film Forensic series – *Kan No Uchi* (The Cold Time), 2010, oil on canvas, 152.5 x 152.5 cm



Dickens, Film Forensic series – *Okii Nami* (after Hokusai), 2009, oil on canvas, 122 x 122 cm

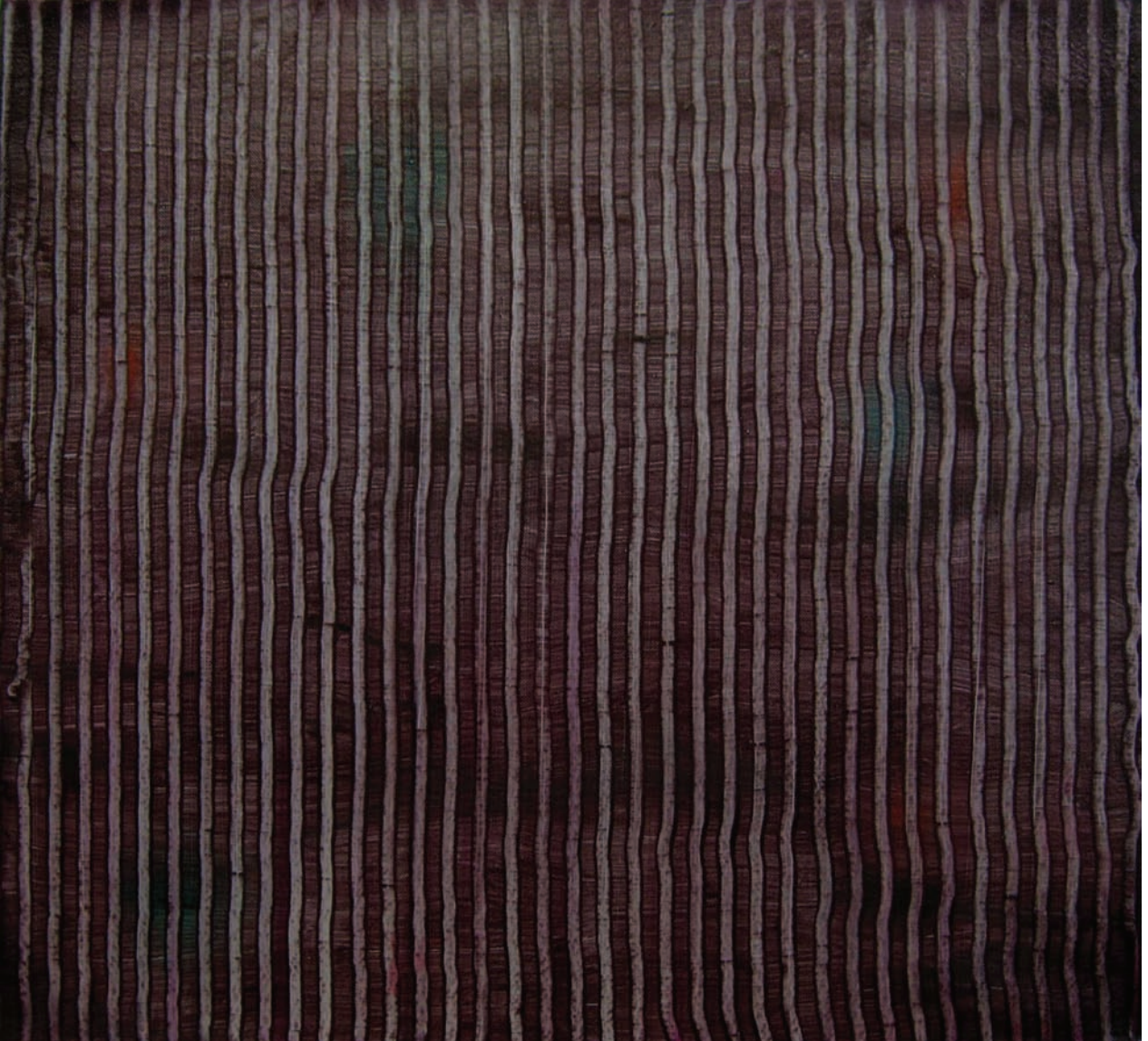




Dickens, Film Forensic series – *Hikari To kage* (Light and Shadow), 2009-10, oil on canvas, 152.5 x 152.5 cm



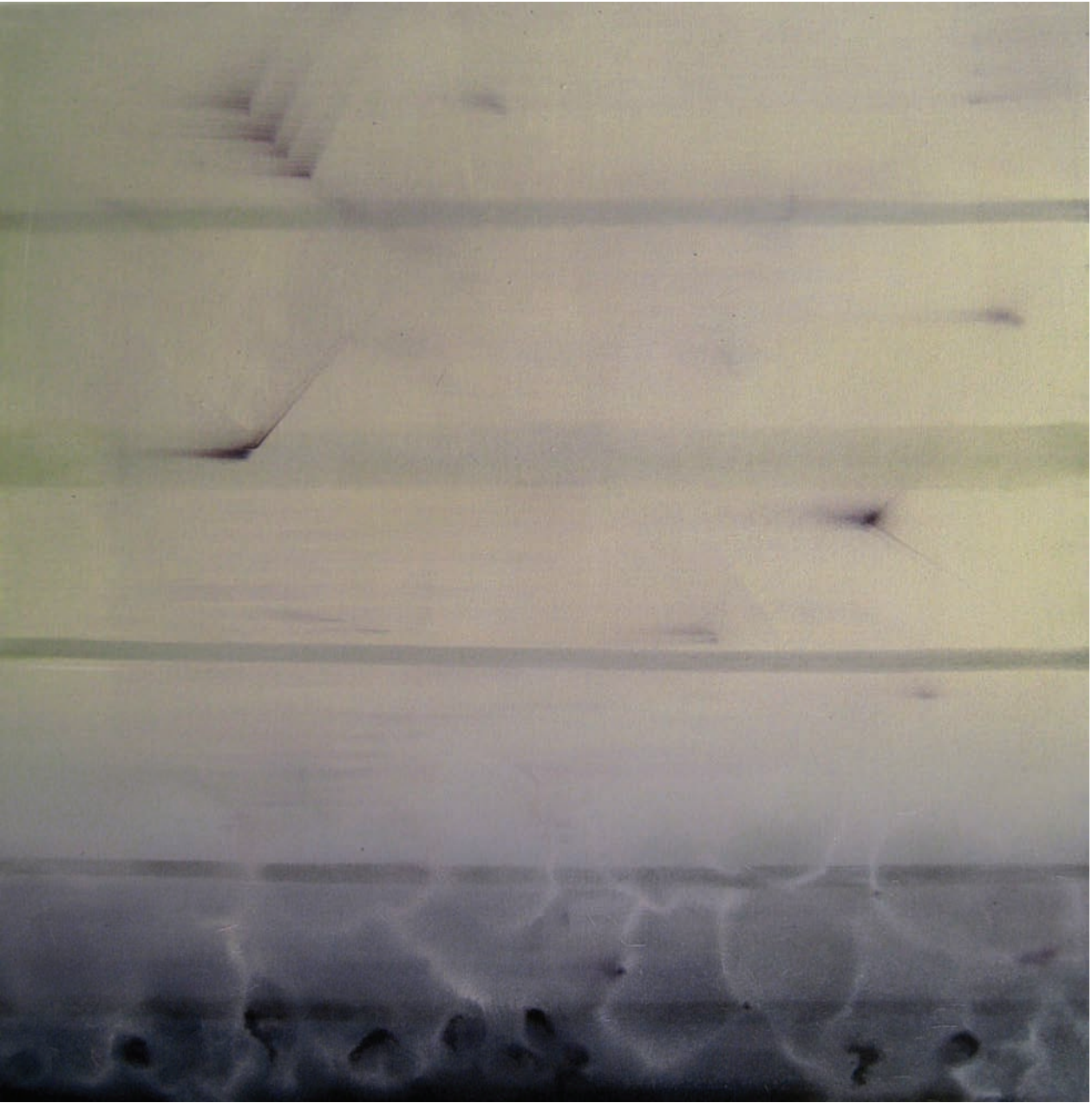
Dickens, Shibusu series – *Composition #8*, 2012, oil on hand-dyed and washed canvas, 41 x 45.8 cm



Dickens, Shibusa series – *Composition #4*, 2011, oil on hand-dyed and washed canvas, 51 x 56 cm



Dickens, Shibusa series – *Colour of a Clarinet*, 2011, oil on hand-dyed and washed canvas, 51.5 x 66 cm



Dickens, Shibusa series – *Five Kinds of Dusk*, 2012, oil on canvas, 89 x 86 cm



Dickens, Shibusa series – *Dusk – Vibration of Air*, 2012, oil on hand-dyed and washed canvas, 47 x 51 cm



Dickens, Shibusa series – *Composition #9*, 2012, oil on hand-dyed and washed canvas, 51 x 46 cm



Dickens, Shibusa series – *Composition #2*, 2012, oil on hand-dyed and washed canvas, 51.5 x 66 cm





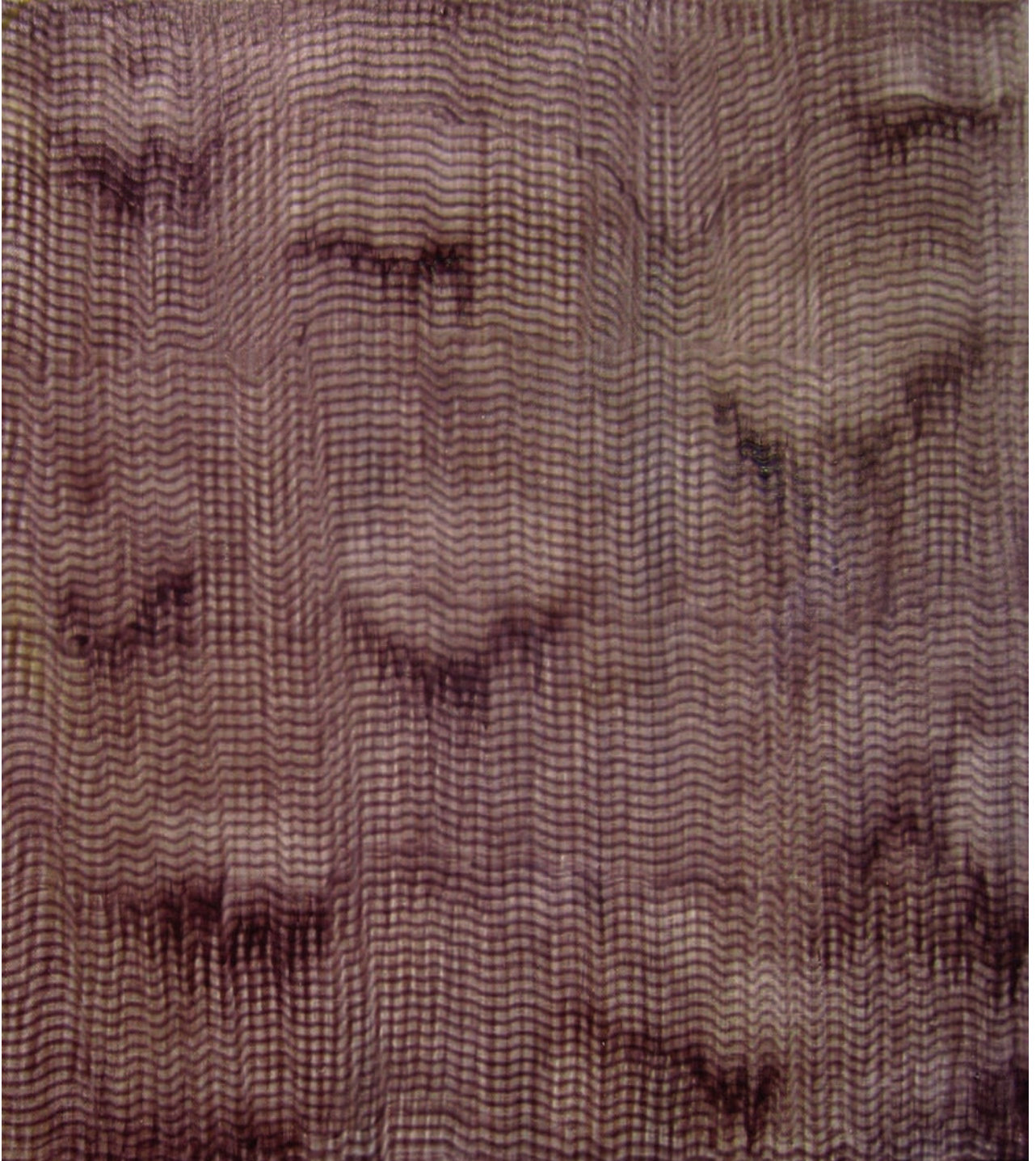


Figure 5.1 Dickens, *Shibusa* series – *Colours of a Clarinet* (detail), 2011, oil on canvas.  
© Pip Dickens

## Smashed pianos and dysfunctional brushes

Pip Dickens

Developing a new series of works can often present a ‘chicken and egg’ dilemma whereby which it is not clear whether it is the tools selected that will steer a work’s development or whether an imagined concept will suggest the choice of tools. One of the most graphic examples of how a tool might change – dramatically – an artist’s practice is the relationship of Jackson Pollock with a stick:

Sometimes I use a brush but often prefer using a stick. Sometimes I pour the paint straight out of the can. I like to use a dripping fluid paint. I also use sand, broken glass, pebbles, string, nails, or other foreign matter.<sup>1</sup>

In film footage of Pollock taken by Hans Namuth in the 1950s, he can be seen hovering over his large floor-based canvases like a bee over a flower. Neither hand, brush nor stick makes direct contact with the canvas, but the rhythmic relationship between painter and the terrain of the large canvas performs a powerful, magnetic choreography. Physically separate, the dynamic resides in the space between them. Seconds lapse before paint hits the canvas – the point at which an arm concludes its arc, the moment when the stick is withdrawn.

*Full Fathom Five* (1947, oil on canvas with nails, tacks, buttons, key, coins, cigarettes and matches) seems to signal Pollock’s breakthrough into action painting, although *Free Form* (1946, oil on canvas) with its liquid splatters, and even earlier engravings such as *Untitled #11* (1944–5) suggest that a new route of expression through physical gesture and articulation was already in place albeit

germinating. *Untitled #11* comprises bold, sweeping networks of scribbled, visceral lines – informal irregular ‘grids’ that suggest natural structures, for example a spider’s web. This irregular ‘membrane’ carves through and across other more solid and coherent shapes and forms within the work. It appears, therefore, that the quintessential component – the trigger – that would jettison these existing qualities into a new and very dramatic methodology was the taking up of the stick as the conveyor of viscous paint, via the element of air and marked by Pollock’s personal rhythm of time, creating the action paintings for which he is renowned. As Pollock stated, ‘A method of painting is a natural growth out of a need. I want to express my feelings rather than illustrate them’.<sup>2</sup>

A great shift takes place at the moment when Pollock departs from the artistic conventions of transformation techniques; where drawing (pattern and line) is ‘freed from the function of bounding shape ... thereby creating a new kind of space’.<sup>3</sup> Philip Leider discusses Pollock’s process in relation to how it influenced artists such as Stella (although through substantially different methodologies):

You could visualize the picture being made – there were just no secrets. It was amazing how much energy was freed by this bluntness, this honesty, this complete obviousness of the process by which the picture was made.<sup>4</sup>

In these ‘all-over’ paintings, line is no longer outline: ‘It did not mark contours or define edges’ states art critic Robert Hughes.<sup>5</sup> Pollock was conscious about

getting away from conventions of drawing and painting, describing how his paintings had no beginning and no end and that ‘they have a life of their own’.

Pollock’s relationship with stick, paint and canvas frees itself from historical and theoretical boundaries. His paintings place him as man in a moment of time – like a dancing shaman with his rattle, he steps out of the rational and distanced observer-maker role of artist into a world where the physical, demonstrative, atavistic life force dances to its own rhythm.

On their short flight to the canvas, the skeins and spatters of paint acquired a singular grace. The paint laid itself in arcs and loops, as tight as the curve of a trout-cast. What Pollock’s hand did not know, the laws of fluid motion made up for.<sup>6</sup>

In Chapter 1 Adkins introduced the fundamental models on which our work developed:

research of Japanese objects (kimonos, *katagami* stencils, dysfunctional tools and instruments);  
philosophy (*shibui*);  
process (the skills of repetition and rehearsal of the artisan and colour perceptions and use).

Each of these three models offered, individually, a vast array of possibilities and approaches.

## Objects

Two surprising areas of commonality in our research revealed themselves: first, a shared yet unplanned decision to experiment with broken or damaged objects; and second, a coincidence of colour attribution. In terms of the former, Adkins had acquired a piano with substantial damage, and in the winter months of 2010 plucked and preserved its tremulous euphonics. At the same time, dysfunctional and damaged brushes were put to use in my painting studio, to investigate quintessential qualities they might reveal when

applying paint to canvas. The likelihood that hardened, damaged and distorted brushes may refuse ‘take up’ of a reasonable ‘load’ of paint would seem a negative trait, yet, in reality, the result was a series of lines yielded through the unforgiving nature of hardened brush hairs that forced separation of paint into a series of parallel lines of uneven width. The same was true of not loading the brush at all but allowing it to plough its way through a painted surface. The effect of ‘cutting through’ and dispersing paint into parallel lines nods in the direction of linear *katagami* stencil formats. Moreover, while traversing the painting, occasional nodules of built-up paint collect and drop along these lines. Again, this is reminiscent of the strange cut effects made by stencil artisans, which, through an overall linear pattern, may introduce optical contrast through circular ‘blobs’ left uncut.

Adkins states that although the sounds wrought from the broken piano were of value, these initial forays in distorted piano sounds directed him, ultimately, towards the clarinet, which, he determined ‘acts as the grey that ties the different colours together’, and he characterises the three registers of the instrument into (lower) purple, (mid) green and (high) yellow.

Two aspects emerge from this. First, that it is unlikely Adkins would have ultimately selected the clarinet for this series of works had he not identified earlier with the broken piano and perceived qualities in it that led him to think about those of the clarinet. At the same time, my experimentation with what may be considered redundant brushes – seemingly useless objects – created a general awareness of what traits they were still able to offer and led to their reassignment as ‘useful’ tools. This, in turn led to looking at other seemingly useless objects; for example, a piece of plastic from some discarded computer packaging that had comb-like qualities. By manufacturing clones of this object, each with varying arrangements of ‘teeth’, it changed the way paint was applied to canvas – the process of drawing slowed down. I spent many hours pulling brushes and combs across surfaces, through a range of different paint mediums of varying consistency and viscosity.

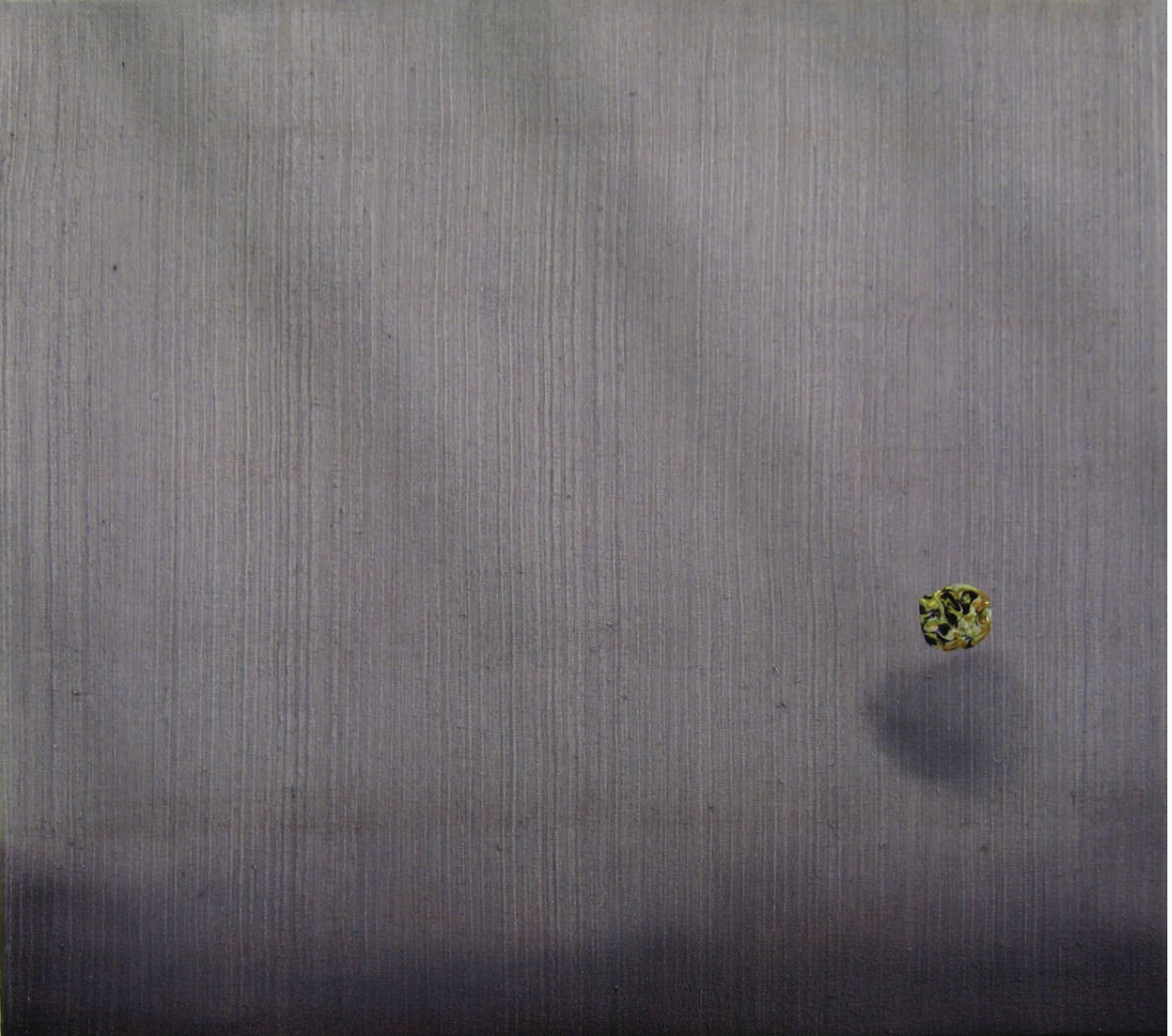


Figure 5.2 Dickens, *Shibusa* series – *The Offing*, 2011, oil on canvas, 41 × 46 cm.  
© Pip Dickens

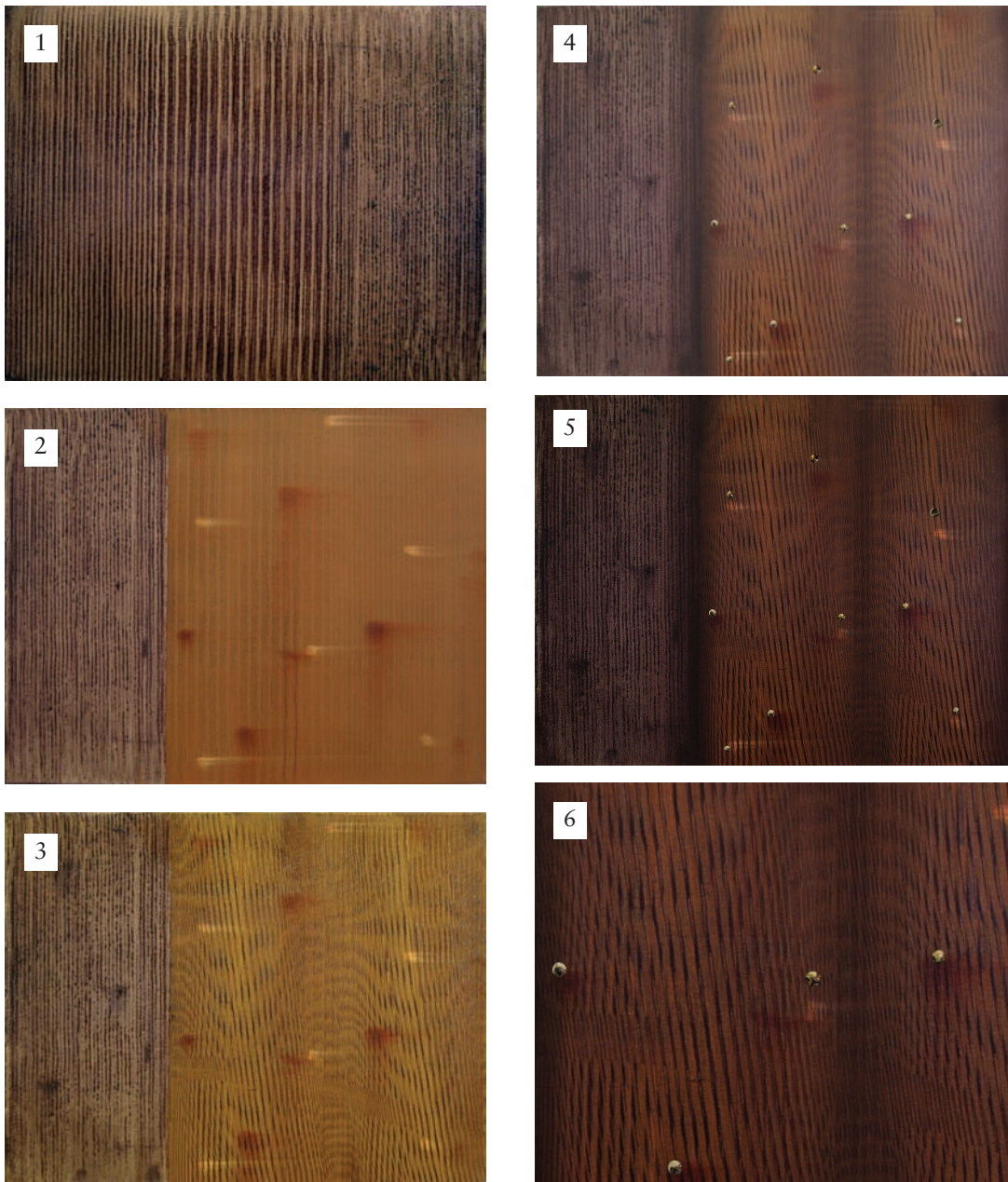


Figure 5.3 Dickens, *Shibusa* series – *Composition #2*, 2011, 51.5 × 66 cm: sequential development of the painting (left column) 1, 2 and 3, (right column) 4, 5 and detail from the finished work.  
© Pip Dickens

Whether, ultimately, a dysfunctional brush was used for a particular painting or not, the value was in the slowing down of time and reappraising (and appreciating) what can be done with very little. The results were forays into works whose linear qualities are extraordinarily subtle, barely perceptible (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3). Days spent slowly

pulling these tools across the ground of the painting were periods of calm and quiet exploration – often mesmeric. It would be easy to make comparisons with the repeated raking of sand and stone in the Japanese rock (zen) garden, although in fact the comparison has been made in hindsight.

The second, exciting, coincidence was in colour palette. Adkins described that it suggested itself when considering the different registers of the clarinet (purple, green, yellow, and most importantly ‘greyness’). Quite independently, my new experimental paintings were evolving using a very limited palette of greys, Indian yellow (and other yellows), dark, translucent purple and purple-blacks, allowing a variety of resultant tones between them – lilacs, pinks, lemon, warm greys, and so on (see Figure 5.1).

The complementary values of purple and yellow are well known, but in these new works there is a concentration on qualities of saturation, tonal values and gradation. Transparency and contrasts of opacity negotiate, through hard and soft edges, to find points at which interplay of light and shadow start and finish – not a horizon but more an ‘offing’. The intention was to produce heightened visual experience presented in the space of the picture plane to reveal values innate within, say, a bright colourful translucency, or a subtle shift of a grey towards a barely perceived yet present hue. Paintings that embed such subtleties may flirt with our visual perception – for thinking we *perceive* a colour is quite distinct from the colour actually *being* there.

In addition to unconventional tools, I experimented with equally strange and exotic Japanese brushes, traditionally used in *yuzen* and *katagami* stencil dyeing. Some of these brushes, made from the fine hair of deer and fixed in place in strange constructions of circular bamboo, are packed (at one end) with fine particles of sand in order to keep the hairs separate, such is their fineness. These large brushes are round in shape, with a subtle domed head – not unlike powder puffs of old. Others are smaller – tiny, in fact: the bristles tightly packed and uniformly blunt-ended, allowing seamless blushing and gradating techniques.

#### Philosophy: *shibui/shibusa*

Jiro Harada describes the philosophy of *shibusa* as the ‘skilful blending of restraint and spontaneity’, adding that this is a ‘quality

which is quiet and subdued’.<sup>7</sup> *Shibusa*, as Adkins summarises, is a balance of simplicity and complexity.

As a philosophy, *shibusa* is really quite complex because it may even include the more exotic and decorative. This is most clearly described by Takie Sugiyama Lebra:

Japanese words expressing esthetic properties are typically diffuse and undefinable. *Shibui* is an example. Kawakita tries to define it in terms of mutual opposites: *shibui* can refer to *jimi*, ‘plain, quiet, restrained and introvert’, but does not exclude its opposite, *hade*, ‘gay, showy’. Further, *shibui* is a combination of *iki*, ‘stylish, urbane, polished, sophisticated’, and its opposite, *yabo*, ‘awkward, naïve, uncouth, rustically artless’.<sup>8</sup>

Michiaki Kawakita uses the example of a baseball player to express the philosophy:

In baseball, neither the spectacular home-run batter nor the brilliant infielder can really become valuable players unless they acquire this *shibui* quality. Unless the spectacular and the brilliant include in themselves this element of the *shibui*, the technique can never really be called mature. The ever-available ability to go concisely and simply to the heart of what is required ... the pursuit of high efficiency, shorn of excessive individual technique, neither flashy nor yet dull ... It is in such qualities that one finds the *shibui*.<sup>9</sup>

For the baseball player, then, it is neither about the courage and energy of youth, nor is it exclusively about mature and skilful judgement. *Shibusa* is an aesthetic that pervades Japanese society as a whole, not just in culture and art. However small the task, whatever the activity, it may reveal itself in the task or object produced. For example, mundane and everyday tasks that Westerners might undertake in a hasty or distracted manner are little pieces of poetry in the hands of the Japanese. An elaborately folded yet practical paper wrapping of a cheap item

bought at a Kyoto market stall would not look out of place in a Mayfair boutique. Perhaps the most obvious and well-known example is the tea ceremony – the elevation of the mundane to a highly ritualistic art form, but one that gives a clue to why *shibui* is innate within Japanese society. The Japanese think of the group first and the individual second; thus doing things well benefits everybody. It is suggested by Hayao Kawai, the Japanese Jungian psychologist, that the Japanese ego is a ‘dynamic interplay between intuition and sensation, whereas that for Westerners is built upon the dynamic interrelation between thought and emotion’.<sup>10</sup>

Natural phenomena also play a huge role in Japanese life – appreciating cherry blossoms, moon gazing and the Japanese garden are but three examples that show a strong interaction and affinity with nature. Junichiro Tanizaki’s *In Praise of Shadows* is a brief yet rich and illuminating, personal reflection on Japanese aesthetics of light and shadow, observed in a range of social contexts – space, women, food and objects. This book has been highly influential in my recent works and has resurfaced yet again during this project for a variety of reasons. On the subject of music, for example, Tanizaki writes:

Japanese music is above all a music of reticence, of atmosphere. When recorded, or amplified by a loudspeaker, the greater part of its charm is lost. In conversation, too, we prefer the soft voice, the understatement. Most important of all are the pauses.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, Tanizaki discusses at great length the importance of light in rooms and the distinction of the play of light on Japanese skin compared with Western skin (a philosophy intrinsic to *yuzen* artist Yunosuke Kawabe’s practice, which is discussed in Chapter 7). Tanizaki’s elegiac observations reveal the dramatic relationship between a flickering candle and ever-present shadows as he reminisces on the spectre-like character of women in interior spaces:

I have spoken of the practice of [women] blackening the teeth, but was not shaving

the eyebrows also a device to make the white face stand out? What fascinates me most of all, however, is that green, iridescent lipstick, so rarely used today even by Kyoto geisha. One can guess nothing of its power unless one imagines it in the low, unsteady light of a candle. The woman of old was made to hide the red of her mouth under green-black lipstick, to put shimmering ornaments in her hair; and so the last trace of colour was taken from her rich skin. I know of nothing whiter than the face of a young girl in the wavering shadow of a lantern, her teeth now and then as she smiles shining in lacquered black through lips like elfin fires.<sup>12</sup>

And also:

The man of today, long used to electric light, has forgotten that such a darkness existed. It must have been simple for spectres to appear in the ‘visible darkness’, where always something seemed to be flickering and shimmering, a darkness that on occasion held great terrors ... this was the darkness in which ghosts and monsters were active, and indeed was not the woman who lived in it, behind thick curtains, behind layer after layer of screens and doors – was she not of a kind with them? The darkness wrapped her round tenfold, twenty-fold, it filled the collar, the sleeves of her kimono, the folds of her skirts, wherever a hollow invited. Further yet: might it not have been the reverse, might not the darkness have emerged from her mouth and those black teeth, from the black of her hair, like the thread from the great earth spider?<sup>13</sup>

The works of contemporary Japanese painter Fuyuko Matsui are based on in-depth research into self-psychoanalysis, resulting in disturbing yet anatomically beautiful works that are both metaphoric contrasts of darkness, light and shadow. These contrasts permeate her painting methodology, fusing traditional Japanese systems and structures in a contemporary yet very surreal context.





Figure 5.4 Fuyuko Matsui, *Light Indentations Mingle and Run in All Directions*, 2008, powdered mineral pigments on silk, 190 × 78 cm. Published by Éditions T Neville, © Fuyuko Matsui

Many of her works evoke the ghostly whiteness of skin pallor alluded to by Tanizaki – a ghostly white-faced figure seems decapitated by a ‘floating world’ of black hair; a *yuzen*-like treatment blushing darkly and poisonous like fog, choking the head from which it emanates. This can be seen specifically in her work entitled *Light Indentations Mingle and Run in All Directions* (see Figure 5.4).

Fuyuko’s use of blurring effect seems fit for purpose in these deeply psychological works. Perhaps it acknowledges a dream-like state – an internal vision – or perhaps the physiological truth that movement is essential to seeing clearly. Ann Marie Seward Barry explains how our eyes are always moving: recording and absorbing data in short jerks called ‘saccades’.<sup>14</sup> She writes:

Even when we fixate on an object, our eyes are subject to ‘drift’ and ‘flicker’ movements and a superimposed tremor. If the eye is temporarily fixed under experimental conditions, as the eye of the ox in Descartes’ experiment, the retinal image fades.<sup>15</sup>

We do not, however, see things in a blur, because through constant movement and brain activity what we receive is in fact a ‘stable mental configuration’.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, the blurring of images within an artistic context can produce interesting optical effects, or visual ‘gear shifts’, that mark a change in the psychodrama of the picture. For the blurring of an image signals a reduction of clarity in what is being presented. It is as if the artist is pulling down a veil between the audience and the subject matter, suggesting a subtle transition of something just out of focus but perceptible, and thus it has to do with control by the artist over the viewer. Haziness and confusion are both physically and psychologically experienced.

Such phenomena have been used as literary and visual devices (in painting, photography and film) to blur the edges between a world of light – that of scientific clarity and reason – and the darker realm of the mystical and psychological. For example, fog confuses, conceals and distorts; vision is impaired.

Figures, real and imaginary, materialise and dematerialise through it. Truths are hidden and identities appear to change. Space and time is disorientated.

Thus the idea of *shibusa*, the reflections on light and shadow by Tanizaki, and the examples of painter Fuyuko Matsui, all emphasise the notion of ‘shadow lands’ – places between lightness and darkness, of quietness, of melodramatic shading and blurring. Moreover, given their penumbral qualities, they also assert the importance of the colour grey for these new works.

### About grey

In the *Shibusa* series of works, references of blurring and shadow evolve from darker realms contained within earlier series of works into ‘lighter’ forms. Blending and gradation of paint create quiet spatial transitions against which entities that traverse across it are thrown dramatically into sharp focus, like particles of dust passing in front of the eye in a half-lit room (see Figure 5.5). The aim is towards the sensorial rather than the drama of my previous works, (*Film Forensic* paintings – see Figure 5.6; *Space Race*; *Elephant Man* (*Cloud Drawings*) and *Femme Fatale* series of drawings. In these earlier works a sense of disaster, danger or extinction pervaded, both through the subject matter and the use of phenomenological entities such as fog, cloud, blurring and evaporation.

The inclusion of greys in recent works – the colour of limbo, neither darkness nor light, and so a floating colour – also aligns with some aspects of *shibui* and, perhaps, ideas about restraint and also reflection. Tanizaki’s memories of childhood are a paradox of light and shadow – a compelling dramatic greyness when reminiscing on how women dressed in those days (1890 Tokyo):

For a woman of the past did indeed exist only from the collar up and the sleeves out; the rest of her remained hidden in darkness ... Most of her life was spent in the twilight of a single house, her body shrouded day and night in gloom, her face the only sign of her existence. Though the men dressed



Figure 5.5 Dickens, *Shibusa* series – *Composition #7*, 2011, oil on canvas, 66.5 × 66 cm.  
© Pip Dickens

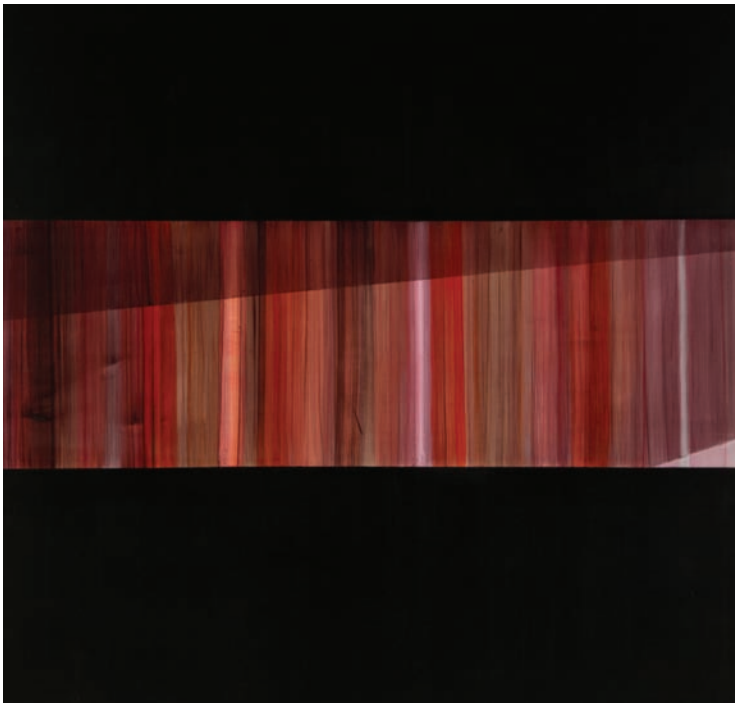


Figure 5.6 Dickens, *Film Forensic* series – *Hikari to Kage (Light and Shadow)*, 2009–10, oil on canvas, 152.5 × 152.5 cm.  
© Pip Dickens

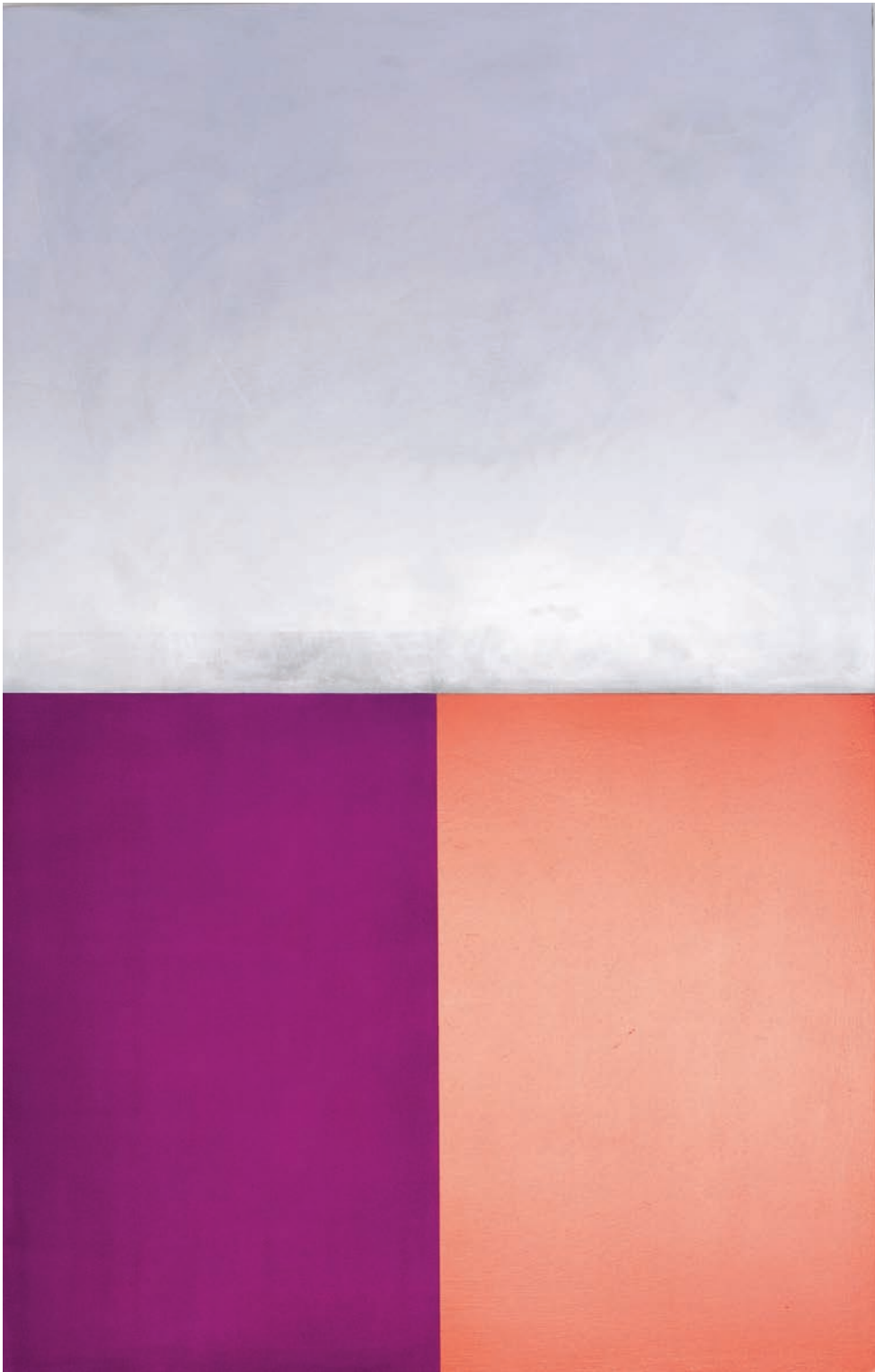


Figure 5.7 Thompson, *Head in Hand*, 2007–9, oil on panel, 110 × 70 cm.  
© Estelle Thompson

more colourfully than they do today, the women dressed more sombrely ... their clothing was in effect no more than a part of the darkness, the transition between darkness and face ... the Tokyo townswoman still lived in a dusky house ... when they went out it was often in a gray kimono with a small, modest pattern.<sup>17</sup>

Grey is often perceived as neutral, dead, old and unemotional, yet it is a colour mix that can produce endless tones and hues. It can be warm, cool, hard or soft. Grey acts like a 'switch', illuminating the quality of brighter colours placed in its vicinity. It is probably the most useful of all colours, because it is comprised of many. It is a colour of transition – a facilitator.

Recent works by British painter Estelle Thompson utilise grey and its relationship with other colours to astonishing effect. The works Thompson exhibited at Purdy Hicks Gallery in October–November 2009 were substantial objects constructed from MDF and paint. The picture plane is divided horizontally and vertically to produce rectangular sections of independent colour fields. Such compositions are not new in abstract painting, but in Thompsons' works the mind of an illusionist is at work. The grey (silver in fact) sections have a bright burnished, metallic quality – their surface showing signs of abrasion-like brushed aluminium. This is not a mixed grey, rather, silver pigment combined with wax. The painting *Head in Hand* (see Figure 5.7) comprises a silver upper panel and a lower panel divided vertically, producing two coloured panels: to the left a Cobalt Violet, the other a modulated Chinese Vermillion of soft gradation that is at its most intense at the top and bottom – the middle section 'bleeds' into the lightest pinks of a young rose.

The overall impression is one of quiet activity – the secret life of colours – with each panel creating its own atmosphere through weight, brilliance and saturation. The panels are rigidly demarcated yet actively conversing with one other – quietly 'on the move' within their own boundaries. Though the sections of the painting are hard and exacting, their confluence creates exciting contrasts and

lyrical exchanges. These qualities exist both when standing in close proximity to the surface of the works and at a distance, yet they are experienced in different ways. The blended Chinese Vermillion panel appears to articulate, as if it were made of card bending outwards at the centre to catch the light. The upper grey is more akin to architectural, polished aluminium sheets, blended by light and surface-scratched, yet is curiously lightweight and exudes the shimmer of a summer's day by the sea. The equatorial line in the centre of the painting, though precisely engineered and exacting, somehow emits a contradictory haziness.

The resultant series of works is a successful paradigm shift between the convention of hard edges in abstract painting and a softness that articulates – the antithesis. The panels appear contained in their own 'atmospheres' of colour, calling to mind a natural landscape and the joy of colour expressed – not a traditional solidity of even-handedness and sameness, but the endless tonal and chromatic capabilities of colour. The use of blurring here is less about concealing or restricting vision but rather revealing what colour is.

The abraded surface of shimmering silver shows traces of a human presence, like a skater on ice, coursing over the surface again and again, testing space and boundaries. So, too, the cosmetic 'blushes' of pink and other colours are used in this series to 'breathe' in unregulated temperature and rhythm. Ultimately these works redefine colour field painting. They are at once hard and demarcated in composition, yet simultaneously atmospheric, changeable and meteoric. Their compartmentalised atmosphere recalls individual characteristics of planets: for example, silver Mercury or pink Mars. Even a work such as *Untitled* (see Figure 5.8) contradicts the physical hardness of its nature, which is very evident in the weight of the MDF structure and the exacting hard-edge composition. *Untitled* is comprised of three sections – an upper, grey section, and two lower panels: one black, the other a pale duck-egg blue. Despite the hardness, the black, grey and blue utterly defy gravity. The overall impression of these paintings is celebratory – a lightness of being that is alchemical.

They are a homage to colour's brilliance, with a transmutative, spectral flexibility that defies constraints or boundaries.

The colour grey also has its supporters in literature – much time and many lines have been dedicated to its qualities and context within fiction. The novelist Thomas Hardy took great care with colour use in general, both in terms of description and symbolism. He was a great admirer of the painter J.M.W. Turner, and went so far as to mention him in his novel *Far From the Madding Crowd*, when attempting to describe, precisely, the colour of the coat of Gabriel's old sheep dog:<sup>18</sup>

marked in random splotches approximating in colour to white and slaty grey: but the grey, after years of sun and rain, had been scorched and washed out ... leaving them reddish brown, as if the blue component of the grey had faded, like the indigo from the same kind of colour in Turner's pictures. In substance it had originally been hair, but long contact with sheep seemed to be turning it by degrees into wool of a poor quality and staple.<sup>19</sup>

Evelyn Hardy, Hardy's biographer, also suggests that *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* contains his most atmospheric depiction of contrasts between light and darkness. In this novel, Hardy compares the strange limbo of twilight and its counterpart, daybreak:

The grey half-tones of daybreak are not the grey half-tones of the day's close, though the degree of their shade may be the same. In the twilight of the morning light seems active, darkness passive; in the twilight of evening it is the darkness which is active and crescent, and the light which is the drowsy reverse.<sup>20</sup>

The relationship between grey (and its demise as a palette 'standard' in favour of a brighter, more extensive palette) in European landscape painting is discussed in great detail in David Crouch's *Visual Culture and Tourism*.<sup>21</sup> Crouch examines parallels and distinctions in social perception of the ideal vacation locations and also conventions of

painting *en plein air* that dictated location due to the qualities of light.

Crouch's investigation is an expansive and fascinating topic and fills in much needed gaps in the context of visual art and historical attitudes to landscape painting in general. It has probably always been the case that artists painting outside have sought spots away from the crowds and the general interfering curiosity of tourists, and Crouch distinguishes between holiday crowds and artists' ideas of 'the perfect location'. However, Crouch also discusses the shift from 'grey' light conditions (stable) to 'sunny' conditions (fluctuating), which became most notable towards the end of the nineteenth century. Locations such as the Netherlands, Brittany, Cornwall and north Germany were rural and coastal regions that offered a stability of light – a general greyness – that was sought after by artists, as opposed to locations where sun and clouds fluctuated in unpredictable binary form. This makes sense when one considers painters with their paraphernalia travelling to their chosen location and settling down to make their work – not only sketches, but paintings that might be worked on for many days. Thus the requirement for constancy is evident.

However, in the late 1890s there was a dramatic shift towards the colourful landscape and, as a result, palette. Many artists used to (and trained) in working with a grey, even, light, ventured south. Crouch makes use of a variety of notations by artists turning their attention away from grey, even, light toward experimentation with colour and luminosity:

Around 1900, 'grey' increasingly started to disappear from painters' palettes and critics' words of praise. The painter Paul Signac condemned the tone outright in 1898, adopting Delacroix's diary note 'The enemy of all painting is grey!' as his battle cry ... Five years later, the German art critic and champion of modernism, Julius Meier-Graefe, disparaged Georges Seurat as 'grey and motionless', compared with the 'luminosity of Signac's atmospheric pictures'. The tide had definitely turned. After 1900, the grey paradigm increasingly made way for the new sunny paradigm, which exemplified the generic south.<sup>22</sup>

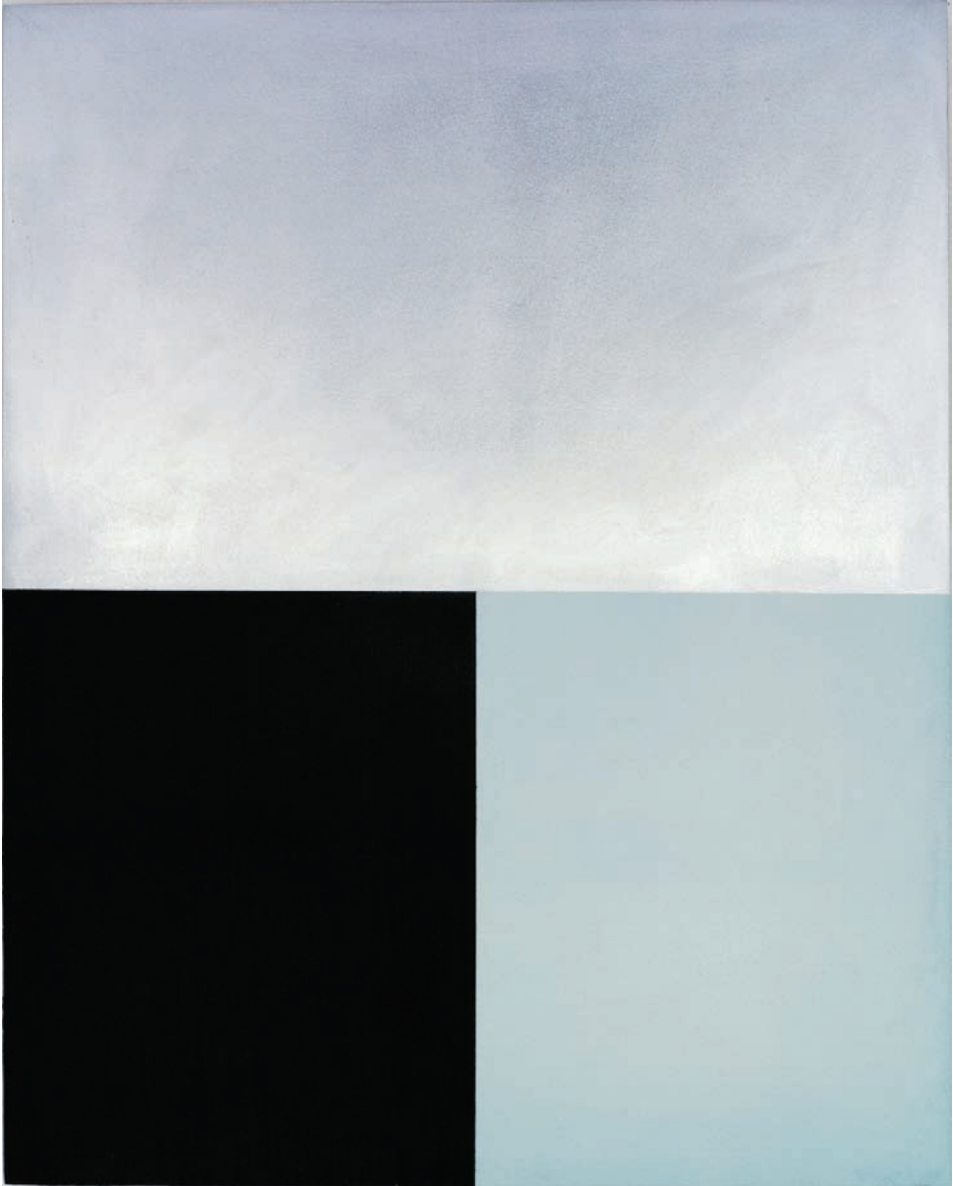


Figure 5.8 Thompson, *Untitled*, 2009, oil on panel, 50 × 40 cm.  
© Estelle Thompson

Crouch also makes the important point that in the mid-nineteenth century trips to the beach (and also inland locations) had been about health and hygiene – ‘surf and turf’ pleasure-beach holidays only became popular towards the close of the century:

The shift to the more active, sun-seeking and pleasure-oriented beach holiday of the twentieth century began slowly to take shape around the turn of the century. These were also the very years when artists shifted from the grey to the sunny paradigm.<sup>23</sup>

Monet’s *en plein air* painting *The Beach at Trouville* (1870) is a good example of the ‘health and hygiene’ holiday and the ‘grey paradigm’ described by Crouch. The work is a beach study of two women sitting under parasols, bonneted, gowned (foot to neck). One is sewing, the other is taking in the view. The painting is a study in light and shade – not colour. Black, grey, white and shades of blue are the principle colours in the work. Trouville-sur-Mer is in the Basse-Normandie region of northwest France – one of those ‘grey’ locations Crouch describes. Fast forward 20 years to summer 1890 and Monet is now producing his famous series of *en plein air* ‘haystack’ paintings – studies of light and colour transformation – produced in the fields around his home in Giverny, Upper Normandy. Despite Upper Normandy being one of those ‘grey locations’ identified by Crouch, a new colour vision has permeated Monet’s work. The haystack series is an explosive, exploration of colour, light, shadow and temperature. By 1891 Gauguin was heading to the ‘anti-tourist’ destination of Tahiti and all its technicolour glory.

The associations of grey versus colour landscape painting with the history of tourism (even if it directed artists away from popular tourist locations) may also be seen within the context of other huge changes taking place in the late nineteenth century – transport and clock time being two related factors. It is particularly useful to reflect upon grey historically in the context of having once been an ‘official’ palette – academically and critically applauded – and its temporary loss to the celebration of colour in general.

In contemporary terms, individual artists take up and use what they will, unpressured by external dictates. This means, in turn, that grey and greyness, with all its multiplicity of mixes, tones and hues, can symbolise and embody so much more.

## Notes

- 1 National Gallery of Art, Washington, podcast, [www.nga.gov/feature/pollock/process3qt.shtm](http://www.nga.gov/feature/pollock/process3qt.shtm)
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 P. Leider, ‘Literalism and abstraction: Frank Stella’s retrospective at the Modern’ in F. Frascina and J. Harris (eds), *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1992), 319–20.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 R. Hughes, *The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992) 154.
- 6 Ibid., 314.
- 7 J. Harada, *A Glimpse of Japanese Ideals* (Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shink kai, 1937).
- 8 T. Lebra, *Japanese Patterns of Behavior* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), 20.
- 9 Lebra’s reference is to M. Kawakita, ‘The world of Shibui’, *Japan Quarterly* 8 (1961), 33–42.
- 10 Lebra, *Japanese Patterns*, 19.
- 11 J. Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, trans. T. Harper and E. Seidensticker (London: Vintage Books, 2001), 17.
- 12 Ibid., 51.
- 13 Ibid., 53.
- 14 Ann Marie Seward Barry is Associate Professor of Communication at Boston College, MA.
- 15 A. Barry, *Visual Intelligence: Perception, Image and Manipulation in Visual Communication* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 32.
- 16 Ibid., 32.
- 17 Tanizaki, *In Praise*, 44.
- 18 E. Hardy, *Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography* (London: Hogarth Press, 1954), 21.
- 19 T. Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1918), 38.
- 20 Hardy, *Thomas Hardy*, 236.
- 21 D. Crouch, *Visual Culture and Tourism*, ed. N. Lubben (Oxford: Berg, 2003).
- 22 Ibid., 132.
- 23 Ibid., 134.



*Part Three*

**Contextual writings**



They said, 'You have a blue guitar / you do not play things as they are.'

The man replied, 'Things as they are / are changed upon the blue guitar.'

Wallace Stevens, *The Man with the Blue Guitar*

### The crossover as a breaching of (arbitrary) boundaries

Back in the eighteenth century, when Henry Fielding was inspired by the drawings of William Hogarth (such as the notorious image of *Gin Lane*) to embark upon his classic novel *Tom Jones*, the concept of 'crossover' did not even exist. Neither the hoi polloi nor the gentry could have possibly foreseen the unbridled hybridity that would permeate the arts two centuries later. Cross-fertilisations between the arts became commonplace, not only cross-genre, but also cross-cultural, and this sort of hybridisation took place in the work of such modernist artists as Pablo Picasso, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and Jacob Epstein, who all created work inspired by traditional African tribal masks. In the 1960s the American jazz saxophonist Joe Harriott and Indian violinist John Mayer collaborated to create a fusion of classical Indian music and modern jazz. This was all part of the ferment that included Ravi Shankar's tutelage of George Harrison on the sitar and the traditional Indian raga, which led to a change of direction in the music of Harrison and The Beatles, and all that followed under their influence.

As a parting gesture to accompany the final curtain on the currency of modernism, in the late 1960s the partitions between artistic disciplines were decisively torn apart along the seams of their increasingly brittle, perforated and sutured integuments. The manifestos of individual disciplines were turned into a miasmatic epilogue that succumbed to an unstoppable, burgeoning swell of hybridity – a hybridity that became the forerunner of the conceptual movement of the 1970s. The seeds of this disjunction had, of course, been sown long before, in the works of artists such as Marcel Broodthaers, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Daniel Buren, Bruce Nauman, *et al.*, whose work and ethos anarchically, and fatally, punctured the already decaying modernist edifice and its shrine, the white cube. They were precursors, preparing the way for the advent of events, performances and mixed media installations – the age of pluralism had not just arrived to besiege the citadel of modernism but had stormed its gates and broken through. Could the provocative and often visceral performance work of such artists as the Americans Adrian Piper and Carolee Schneemann, or the Austrian Hermann Nitsch, have prospered without the pioneering work of these forerunners?

Between 1956 and 1958 the French-based Greek architect/composer Iannis Xenakis collaborated with the French architect Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris) to create the Phillips Pavilion at the Brussels World Fair, the form of which was inspired by Xenakis' composition *Metastasis* and in which his composition *Concret PH* was performed, where an empathy between architectural space and sound dynamics was needed to achieve a

perfect realisation of the composition for an audience seated within its space. Le Corbusier had conceived the idea of an ‘electric poem’ to engage with that space and in turn be enhanced by it, in which, in his words: ‘Light, colour, image, rhythm and sound join together in an organic synthesis’. Xenakis’ *Concret PH* was performed at the Phillips Pavilion in 1958 alongside Edgard Varèse’s groundbreaking electronic composition, *La Poème Électronique*. The latter work was fed, with spectacular results, through 350 revolving speakers, giving the impression of sound moving through space, and creating the illusion of a tangible material entity. This calculated synthesis between architecture, lighting and electronic sound created a novel and spectacular holistic experience for the audience and was a prime example of successful cross-fertilisation of previously separate artistic genres.

In 1998 the contemporary dance company The Featherstonehaughs (pronounced Fanshaws) paid homage to the Austrian painter Egon Schiele in their performance *The Featherstonehaughs draw on the sketchbooks of Egon Schiele* (made into a film by the BBC in 2010). It included references to Schiele’s self-portraits, with all their straitened emotions, stiff gestures and sclerotic presence, in a performance choreographed by Lea Anderson, with costumes by Sandy Powell, and galvanised by an accompaniment of haunting and discordant electroacoustic music by the contemporary composer Steve Blake. Here, painting, modern dance, costume and contemporary music combined to create a dramatic, electrifying performance that toured the UK to great acclaim, becoming a legend in its time. A close and empathetic collaboration between disciplines like this creates something that is far greater than the sum of its parts. Around an armature of modernist painting, an energetic and contagious synergy had been generated that was truly postmodern and inspired all concerned, producing a vibrant and unforgettable spectacle, a notable work of art, now immortalised on film.

Crossovers and cross-fertilisations might be perceived as calculated risks. The elements of a symbiotic collaboration between artists using

different media should, of necessity, be equable; the creative energies involved should achieve an empathetic balance. In pushing boundaries, these crossovers perhaps resurrect the phenomenon of a now defunct avant-garde, bringing a revived sense of experimentation – a new, while retrospective, turn of an evolutionary spiral. Effie Paleologou, a Greek photographer living and working in London, has been inspired by literary references that drive the aesthetic of her images. In particular, the writings of Michel Leiris inspired such series as *24 Hours*, for which she photographed a different aspect of the ceiling and walls of her bedroom every hour through a period of 24 hours, mirroring the claustrophobic sequences from one of Leiris’s novels.

Why should artists and writers not cross the thresholds of their particular disciplines? The sources of creativity, their energy and passion, transcend what are, after all, arbitrary boundaries of convention. What is expedient for one generation is usually irrelevant for the next. The American female rock band Tilly and the Wall features the crossover skills of music and dance (a hybrid between traditional tap and flamenco dancing), as illustrated by their tracks, ‘Bad Education’ and ‘Rainbows in the Dark’. But let us look at the area where applied arts coincide with fine arts. The American artist Andrea Zittel, in her series *A to Z*, has undertaken to construct and aestheticise domestic, household items in a way that presents them in a new light, designed for a mobile lifestyle. Working through a series of fabricated artefacts and at the same time working through the alphabet, she creates installations that are both visually engaging and utilitarian, milking the everyday of its subliminal aesthetic pull. The German artist Isa Genzken has created dazzling glass maquettes: expository models of architectural designs that never existed – space-age high-rise edifices, fabricated on fantasy. This is work that combines applied-arts skills and architectural vision in a fine-art context. More recently, the Turner Prize winner Grayson Perry has combined the art of the ceramicist with that of the fine-art painter, with his jokey and often provocative pictorial pots.

The examples of such crossovers are too numerous, of course, to elaborate upon further. Plurality and hybridity have, without any doubt, provided both a powerful driving force and navigational aid in directing the course of contemporary art during the past 40 years. Right across the cultural spectrum, from pop music to opera, from commercial design to avant-garde artistic performance and installation, from popular theatre to contemporary dance, we have witnessed a dissolution of fixed boundaries – pigeonholes have been torn apart and trashed.

### The sharing of textures

The play of textures – whether they are visual, aural or haptic – is a prime concern of many artists, ranging across a diverse field of artistic genres. Our perception of and desire for textural stimulation, while often unsung or unacknowledged, is, nevertheless, boundless. Maybe it is this field of textures, and their elevation from the prosaic into the exotic, from the peripheral to the focal, through the attention of artists and the subject of their procedures, that connects many art forms across those artificial boundaries that otherwise strive to demarcate and preserve disciplinary structure. After all, exploration, of whatever persuasion, should be undertaken with an open mind that is not restricted by such concepts of boundary. Cross-fertilisation of the arts has become even more apparent and important in today's age of burgeoning plurality. The internet has been one of the greatest catalysts for the increasing ubiquity of 'crossover' between the arts and will become progressively more influential in this respect. A brief examination of the history of the crossover phenomenon, in terms of textural empathies, may give us an idea where we are currently positioned in its increasingly prominent evolution. To bring this examination right up to date, this chapter also surveys three contemporary arts (painting, textiles and music) that meet in the work of two artists in one exhibition.

Textures are very much to do with surfaces and their contrasts – whether they are contrasts in size, frequency of elements,

rhythm, orientation, or delineation of surface elements. Surfaces can be rough, smooth, regularly, evenly or randomly marked, undulating, corrugated, reticulated, muricate or pitted – the permutations are boundless. Painted surfaces are inherently textured, as are the three-dimensional surfaces of sculptures or of fabrics and textiles. The nature of these surface textures, along with their colour, are an integral part of their essential characteristics and their material sense of identity – the sign that becomes the signified when recorded or reproduced. The third area of this survey, however, that of electronic, electroacoustic or acousmatic music, is a different matter. Music can have only a metaphorical 'surface': music has an inherent depth, but as we perceive the sounds of music through our tympanum, our ear drum, surely this means that we actually, physically experience music through the way it acts upon the plain surface of the tympanum. It is only through cognisant perception that we afford music the depth that we experience it to have. So it is the way that music interacts with the plain surface of our tympanum that imbues it with a textural effect. Whether or not this is illusory is a moot point, but what is certain is that this planar perception or interception of a series of musical sounds (as interpreted by ear and brain) imparts it with an auditory quality that we experience as texture.

Music and painting share certain characteristics in the descriptive nomenclature that is used to convey their qualities to a reader. 'Pattern', 'repetition', 'colour', 'tone' and 'noise' are all terms that are used in addition to 'texture' to describe the nature of a particular painting or passage of music. A patterned fabric might be described as 'busy' or 'ordered', 'garish', or 'muted' – all qualities that could be shared by painting or music. According to the Canadian auditory scientist, Nicolas Saint-Arnaud:

There currently exists no meaningful way to describe a sound texture to someone other than have them listen to it. The vocabulary to qualify sound textures is imprecise and insufficient, so humans tend to identify them by comparison to a known



Figure 6.1 Dickens, *Harvest of the Bees*, 2009, oil on paper, 17.5 x 24 cm.  
© Pip Dickens

sound source ('it sounds like a motor, like a fan, like a group of people'). This method of qualification does not transpose easily to machine classification.<sup>1</sup>

This might raise the question, of course, as to whether a painting can offer us a more meaningful representation of a sound, or series of sounds, than a textual interpretation. Sounds have an emotive register as much as an acoustic one, where the acoustic triggers something in the human mind that transcends the mere registration of sound waves as neutral neural responses. The immediate retort might be that this is totally dependent upon the skill, sensitivity and subjective orientation of the painter who might undertake such an interpretation of sound. An interesting adjunct to this consideration is that many of Pip Dickens' paintings, such as *Harvest of the Bees* (2009), *Stripe 3* (2009) and *Block 1*

(2009), all have a visually musical quality: there is a sense of delicate rhythmic movement in their loosely patterned abstract forms, across the picture plane.

What if, however, we were to reverse the tables and consider how qualified a sound artist might be to interpret and transform a painting into sonic form? Monty Adkins, with his delicately chiming and metallically ringing sonorities on such tracks as 'Memory Box', 'Etched in Air' and 'Remnant' on his album *Fragile.Flicker.Fragment*, sensitively picks up the mood of Dickens' paintings – not in an attempt to emulate them, but to echo and reflect their moods through textural analogy. On both counts here, an intuitive approach to collaboration far outweighs any analytical approach when attempting to convey the mood and spirit of the work in these cross-genre interpretations.

### Visual and aural textures

Most definitions of our experience of texture describe it in terms of the haptic, or perhaps the oral – surface texture that relates to touch, the roughness or smoothness of texture, etc. When talking about visual or aural textures, the experiential responses have to be couched in terms of this relationship to the haptic. In the case of our experience of textiles we can, of course, describe both haptic and visual stimuli, and even, given the right textiles and circumstances, the aural. Catherine Vasseleu has examined the subtle relationships between vision and our bodily experiences: how vision and touch are interminably intertwined. She states that: ‘The body as a sensing and sensible thing – as always other or divergent in self – is the invisible structuring element that constitutes a common visible’.<sup>2</sup> In other words, self, or subject, can only connect with the world, or object, as ‘other’ to our senses. The structuring element is a combination of all our senses with the visible, so that the relationship between touch, taste, hearing and scent is indivisible in terms of our subjective relationship to that ‘other’. Since texture is a key element in the perceptible nature of the ‘world as other’, it can therefore be understood to cross the thresholds of our different modes of perception as they contribute to our sense of ‘self’ in opposition to that ‘other’.



Figure 6.2 Dickens, *Block 1*, 2009, oil on paper, 22.5 x 32.5 cm.  
© Pip Dickens

How do we approach any definitions of texture outside the realms of the haptic? Our haptic experiences are primal in our perceptual mapping of the world as ‘other’. Prior to developing our sense of sight fully, as a newborn we relied on the haptic for survival. We bonded with our mothers through our sense of touch, primarily to obtain sustenance. When our sense of sight was fully developed, after 14 days or so, we were then able to relate those initial haptic experiences to our visual perception of those objects beyond and outside us. Gradually we began to relate the visual stimuli from the outside world to those primal haptic experiences/perceptions, and thus build up a more complex and sophisticated visual repertoire. We could now ‘see’ textures; that is, we could relate our early haptic experiences of texture to the visual qualities of those textured surfaces we had come to know. This direct or ‘figurative’ translation of the haptic into optical perception of the exterior world, the ‘other’, has subsequently been adapted to translate more unfamiliar and novel visual environments and events through and into cross-sensory perceptions by relating back and comparing these to our rich visual repertoire. It is to this phenomenon that Maurice Merleau-Ponty refers when he states:

What we call a visible is a quality pregnant with a texture, the surface of a depth, a cross-section upon a massive being a grain or corpuscle borne on a wave of Being. Since the total visible is always behind, or after, or between the aspects we see of it, there is access to it only through an experience which, like it, is wholly outside of itself.<sup>3</sup>

In a similar way to how we grapple with the Gestalt effect, we have to examine things through a whole prism of sensory receptors, from as many angles as possible, in order to gain as full an impression of reality as is possible. Cross-referencing enhances this process. If sound, sight and touch coincide in this perceptual/conceptual process, then so much the better – and the richer are our impressions of the ‘other’. We are less likely to be deluded by illusions if our perceptions are

filtered through a whole panoply of sensory processes (but we are by no means immune from illusions – in fact Paul Virilio claims that ‘the world is an illusion and art is the representation of the illusion of the world’<sup>4</sup>). Stopping short of synesthetic perception (where sounds might be perceived as colours, colours as having flavours, or where sights spontaneously prompt sounds), a *mélange* of perceptual messages gives us the ability to obtain a richer impression of the world, getting as close to what we might call reality as possible, while minimising error.

One contrast between haptic and optical texture is that optical texture can be described not only in terms of individual, specific surfaces, but also in the way a series of surfaces might interrelate or the way in which a figure relates to the ground – the field of vision encompasses a field of textures. The world of touch is much more restricted, due to our limited capacity to explore our surroundings through the sense of touch (visually impaired people would of course experience the reverse). Similar sensitivities apply, perhaps even more emphatically, to the way in which we perceive our world aurally. We are able to pick out and separate different aural sources within the field of sound that surrounds us: this generally requires a more conscious effort on our parts, and can be and often is an extremely complex perceptual process.

The composer Pierre Schaeffer, in relationship to his work in electronic music, classifies qualities of sound production into six different categories: mass, dynamic, harmonic timbre, melodic profile, gain and inflection.<sup>5</sup> This very simplified key gives some idea of the complexities of sound production. We are able to distinguish different sound sources in a variety of ways: directionally, tonally, by pitch, by volume, and by the distinctive textures of contrasting sound envelopes and their patterns, in terms of their resonance, cadence, timbre, rhythm, etc. For instance, a sound with a high frequency would be experienced as having a ‘fine’ texture and low resonance, whereas a sound of low frequency would be experienced as ‘coarse’ in texture and having a high resonance. In this way sound might be

created to reflect visual experiences, with textures of sound being generated to mirror the textures of a particular visual experience. Alternatively, depending on the motivation of the composer, musician, sound artist, etc., sound could provide a contrapuntal or an oblique texture to the visual experience being addressed.

Synthesised or sampled sound textures, the stuff of sound art, can have as their subject either mimetic or abstract sounds. They may be generated digitally through the medium of digital synthesisers, using sampling techniques, or may be generated purely electronically. But even if they are abstract in their concept, they inevitably conjure up connotations of sounds from the real world. However obscure the sound, we always experience the desire to ‘make sense’ of what we hear – this is to do with our primitive survival strategy. Just as we always try to make sense of abstract images in terms of forms or patterns that already exist within our visual repertoire, based on our memories of previous experiences or through the synthesis of imagination, so we do the same with sounds that we hear – whether they be natural or synthetic, mimetic or abstract.

The origins of electroacoustic music lay in the industrial or urban sounds of early *musique concrète* by such composers as Pierre Schaeffer, François Bayle, Pierre Henry and İlhan Mimaroglu. It was created from the collated sound materials of recordings of the



Figure 6.3 Dickens, *Stripe 3*, 2009, oil on paper, 22.5 x 32.5 cm.  
© Pip Dickens



mechanical, machine-driven sonic panoramas of the late industrial revolution, using early reel-to-reel magnetic tape recorders. Sample sounds were serially fused or juxtaposed, coordinated in parallel, or manipulated into rhythmic patterns, looped or cut, to create complex soundscapes that echoed the harsh, strident sounds of industry and the urban scene. As the technology for sound production became more sophisticated, and sound generators and synthesisers were developed in the 1960s to facilitate the creation of wholly synthetic passages of music, the palette of the electronic music composer widened dramatically. Particularly notable was the invention of the Buchla synthesiser in the USA, which was the room-sized electronic behemoth on which Morton Subotnick composed some of his early works, including *Silver Apples of the Moon*, *Wild Bull* and *Touch*.

Today, of course, digital sound production and manipulation make almost anything possible. The infinite sonic capabilities of laptop software place the onus on the composer to use those possibilities inventively and creatively – be that the aleatory use of various sound combinations and patterns or the restructuring of pre-existing sounds or their effects – despite, rather than because of the wider but nevertheless formulaic parameters of that available digital technology. The technology should be a tool, or rather an instrument, to be used in the process of composition – not a component that shapes that process. It is an instrument played with consummate ease by Adkins in his sensitive and aurally seductive compositions, such as those on his albums *Five Panels* and *Fragile.Flicker.Fragment*.

The shapes of sound, its sound envelopes, shards, waves, walls, bubbles, sheets and caesuras, although creating different soundscapes for different listeners, ultimately offer sound textures that can be dramatically mood inducing. All music is, of course, to a greater or lesser extent, mood inducing. However, through electronic sound generation the possibilities are infinitely more diverse and expansive. When discussing his use of film sound as a refrain, the Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky explains that it does more

than just prop up the visual elements of a film, but opens up new possibilities for the ontology of the film: ‘Plunging into the musical element which the refrain brings into being, we return again and again to the emotions the film has given us, with our experience deepened each time with new impressions’.<sup>6</sup>

### Collaboration: textures across thresholds

Creative collaboration must, obviously, work through empathy, but does it have as the source of its process a dialectical or a catalytic basis? What is the difference? If a dialectical process operates, then surely each side of the dialectic duality act as a catalyst for the other – between these two operating modes. A catalyst is much more than just a mirror or an echo of the subject or object for which it acts as a catalyst: it acts as both a trigger and an enabler. A dialogue is undoubtedly and essentially the impetus for a meaningful relationship between the two partners in a working partnership. The reflections of the Japanese philosopher Keiji Nishitani are interesting in this respect, since he discusses the idea of the ‘home ground’ of a person, which closely resembles a sense of identity, a sense of ‘self’: it is through this sense of self and its interplay with the ‘other’ that we are able to orientate ourselves within the world. The meeting through this ‘home ground’ with that of another expresses a feeling of being at one with that other – the home ground is somewhere where ‘all things are assembled together into a “world” ... This must be a standpoint where one sees one’s own self in all things.’<sup>7</sup> To share, to empathise, to cross-fertilise, to reflect: these are all positive, creative acts underpinned by our own sense of self. They are firmly secured in Nishitani’s ‘home ground’ – a syncretistic response to a creative trigger.

Textures are all part of our sensual environment and can equally have connotations of the intimate, the homely and the secure, or of the alien, the sinister and the threatening. They are an integral part of our discrimination between what is of our ‘self’ or what is of the ‘other’. Jacques Lacan, the French theorist, also reflected on the theme

of the 'other': 'Man's desire finds its meaning in the desire of the other, not so much because the other holds the key to the object desired, as because the first object of desire is to be recognised by the other'.<sup>8</sup> In this sense the 'other' becomes a threshold that needs to be recognised, understood and then crossed in order for us to meet the world, and also, of course, across which we can be recognised and understood by that 'other'. Given the right circumstances, it is across this threshold that a meeting of minds might take place – such as occurs between Dickens and Adkins in their *Shibusawa* project.

We tend to envisage interior spaces as something we can move about in. We think of them as volumes, defined by their physical boundaries such as walls, doors, windows, floors and ceilings, whose very different qualities qualify the experiential opportunities offered by that space. Textures can, in turn, define the surfaces that characterise that space. Anything placed on those surfaces, interrupting them, can immediately transform them. Thus the French writer Georges Perec describes how his room is transformed when he hangs a picture there:

I put a picture up on a wall. Then I forget there is a wall, I no longer know what there is behind this wall, I no longer know there is a wall. I no longer know that in my apartment there are walls and if there weren't any walls there would be no apartment.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the hyperbole, this passage is instructive about how we experience, often subconsciously, interior spaces. Whereas in the West we experience light, its reflections, its radiance and its diffusion as an intrinsic index of interior space, the Japanese experience is very different, as indicated by Junichiro Tanizaki: 'And so it has come to be that the beauty of a Japanese room depends on a variation of shadows, heavy shadows against light shadows – it has nothing else'.<sup>10</sup>

The reverse side of the coin, however, is that space can also define and qualify the materiality of things that occupy that space, and also, just as importantly, the sounds that

enter, leave or reverberate in that space. Our perceptions of the relative masses or volumes of similar objects in different spaces change according to the varying proportions of these spaces. To an even greater extent, sound is shaped, transformed and distorted by the reflective surfaces, and their textures, that form the boundaries of a space, which in turn modify our perception of that space. In 1968 the American artist Michael Asher famously transformed the La Jolla Art Museum in California by adding thick carpeting on the floor and sound baffles on the ceiling, effectively damping any resonant sound in the space. He then played a simple electronically generated tone in the space, whose dynamic quality changed according to the position in which a listener stood in the space. Consequently, the varying interfaces between the space, a listener and the electronic sound offered an almost infinite range of dynamic permutations to the aural experience that Asher had presented.

Another American, Max Neuhaus, has worked for many years with the architecture of sound: the interplay between architectural spaces and both electronically generated sound and ambient urban sounds. He encourages audience participation in his works and installations, literally training people to *Listen* (the name of one of his best-known series of works, 1966–76). Describing his installation *Sound Work*, in a proposal to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 1978, Neuhaus stated:

The work occupies two extremes of the sound spectrum. The lows are composed of resonances of the space, and though loud, are hidden in their resemblance to the sounds of flowing air. The highs are soft lines that penetrate the space at various levels. Together they form a sonic structure both delicate and massive, which nevertheless remains more of a presence than a sound.<sup>11</sup>

So Neuhaus uses synthesised sounds to imitate, or replicate, the subtle ambient sounds one might anticipate in such a space. Going one stage further, the German sound artist

Rolf Julius set up an installation in the Goethe Institute, New York, in 1996, where he placed a combination of sensors, amplifiers and speakers around the gallery space so that visitors were able to interact with the soundscape of the space simply by moving around the room. This created infinite possibilities, whereby each visitor became a conductor for a serendipitous, aleatory soundscape. In the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, Julius stated that:

I'm interested in the surface of a sound. Is it round or angular; is it dragging and rough, or wet? I'm interested in the distance and direction of a sound: when it's from above does it sound different than when it's from below?<sup>12</sup>

So-called 'sound art' would seem to be a comparatively recent phenomenon, but this is far from the case. It is simply a new recognition and classification of a wide spectrum of work, involving sound, that has been around since at least the early 1900s – for example, Marcel Duchamp's *Musical Sculpture* (1912–21) and Kurt Schwitters' sound installation *Ursonate*, as part of his *Merzbau* installation (1922–32). So wide has the net been cast to categorise 'sound art' that Neuhaus has claimed that this appellation is totally arbitrary and inappropriate. He states that:

It's as if perfectly capable curators in the visual arts suddenly lose their equilibrium at the mention of the word sound. These same people, who would all ridicule a new art form called, say, 'Steel Art', which was composed of steel sculpture combined with steel guitar music along with anything else steel in it, somehow have no trouble at all swallowing 'Sound Art'.<sup>13</sup>

Here he seems to be corroborating the view put forward by Theodor Adorno:

The universal aesthetic genre concepts, which have ever and again established themselves as norms, were always marked by a didactic reflection that sought to

dispose over the quality, which was mediated by particularisation, by measuring them according to particular characteristics even though these common characteristics were not necessarily what was essential to the works.<sup>14</sup>

It is within this context that we should examine the nature and concept of 'texture' and its straddling of much of our sense-perceptible environment, regardless of any categorisation – experienced, in other words, as a unique cognitive phenomenon, and perceived syncretistically. The inescapable fact is that by using sound as either an accompaniment or an integral component of a work of art, an artist is able to alter our perception of that work in a way that radically shifts our initial visual perception of the work.

The use of sound in artworks lends them an immediacy that is missing in purely visual work. The texture that sound brings to a work is more transient – more a signifier of a moment than any visual texture that the work offers. As Salomé Voegelin points out: 'Sound ... is its immediate sensibility: unordered and purposeless, always now. The opaque and ambiguous process of living manifests itself in its sounds and appears in an engaged listening.'<sup>15</sup> The engaged listening that an audience of *Shibusa* might undergo effectively reduces any opacity in their experience of the total work (as Voegelin's statement might suggest), as a result of the temporal shift that the immediacy of the sound triggers. The texture of sound also has a temporal ingredient and this brings a linear element to what would otherwise be a series of singularities.

In general, the experience of texture is dependent upon a subjective, cognitive judgement – there is a certain degree of the arbitrary. According to *Grove Music Online*, the term 'texture' is used in music when referring to the vertical aspect of a musical structure – usually the way individual parts or voices are put together, and may be used in descriptions such as polyphonic, homophonic, etc.<sup>16</sup> The term can also be used of a melodic part, referring to its context, its level of activity, etc.

In the sciences, however, the denotation of texture is a far more empirical, quantified, calibrated and enumerated affair. For example, when qualifying the surface textures of sedimentary rocks, a petrologist breaks these down into three categories, depending upon size of particles of which a specimen is composed. These categories are: argillaceous ( $\frac{1}{250}$ – $1/16$  mm), arenaceous ( $\frac{1}{15}$ – $2$  mm) and rudaceous (over 2 mm). Thus argillaceous rocks are composed of very fine or fine particles, arenaceous rocks have fine or medium-coarse particles, and rudaceous rocks have medium to coarse or very coarse particles. These three classifications of rock also have different resonant frequencies when struck. Additionally, when in silt, sand or gravel form, in other words terminally eroded, they offer different angles of repose when formed into a cone: the coarsest rocks have the greatest angle of repose (or steepest, tallest cone) and the finest, the lesser (or shallowest, lowest cone), so the textures here have visual and physical consequences. This one example shows how there can be many connotations surrounding the discernment of texture – haptic, aural and visual.

Paintings have definitive surfaces; textiles have loose surfaces; sounds have metaphorical surfaces, or envelopes. These ‘surfaces’ of sounds are more ethereal, mutable and transient, but nevertheless they form an ephemeral carapace that acts as a threshold between the sound and its environment. This of course changes as a sound evolves through generation to dissolution, offering the listener an impression of texture that changes across the passage of time. This innate malleability of sounds, their variable volume, pitch, shape, timbre, duration, etc., gives them qualities that can bring an inherent dynamism that adds an extra dimension to artworks that include other media.

There are many instances of the combinations of kinetic and sound elements in art. Steve Reich’s 1968 composition *Pendulum Music* famously employs four microphones, each one swinging over a loudspeaker, where feedback is generated when each microphone passes directly over its speaker. The amplifiers

are set up so that the feedback noise from each microphone is of a different pitch. Gradually, as the microphone swings slow down, following the second law of thermodynamics, the sound element creates a contradictory effect as the sound increases – the microphones spending a relatively longer time over their loudspeakers. So, in inverse proportion, as the kinetic energy of the microphones decreases, the sonic energy created by the feedback increases. Finally, as each microphone comes to a halt over its speaker, a continual drone is produced, and that is how the piece ends – when the last microphone comes to a halt.

Another interesting piece that was both visual and ‘sonic’ was Stephen Vitiello’s installation *Fear of High Places and Natural Things*, which was exhibited at the Long Island City Sculpture Center in 2004. A semi-circular array of speakers was hung from the ceiling, and the cones of the speakers could be observed alternately bulging and relaxing as low frequency sound was relayed to them from a range of amplifiers. So low was the frequency of the sound that it was inaudible to the human ear, so the cones seemed to be performing a magical choreography whose accompaniment was inaudible. The only sensations, apart from the bizarre dance of the speaker cones, were the faint traces of air movement created by the pulsations of the woofers, as if they were huffing and puffing their way through their efforts. It is interesting to contrast the fine-grained subtlety of this, in some respects, theatrical piece, to Antonin Artaud’s proposals for his *Theatre of Cruelty* in 1931, in which, when interviewed in 1934, he stated his intention to install ‘bells ten metres high that would have surrounded the public in the middle of a swirl of vibration, and forced it to surrender’.<sup>17</sup> Artaud’s incarceration in the mental hospital at Rodez unfortunately meant that the piece was never realised – had it been, it might have proved to be an historic occasion. If theatricality has a texture, then this proposed cataclysmic performance might have been judged to be coarse-grained – rudaceous in the extreme!

### Crossovers in a pluralist culture

In 1957 the French avant-garde artist Yves Klein composed his *Symphonie Monoton-Silence*, as a sonic equivalent to his monochrome paintings. They were designed not necessarily to accompany but to complement his paintings. The first 20-minute movement of the piece consists of a sustained D-major chord, and the second movement offers 20 minutes of silence to allow the after-effects of that agonisingly monotonous first movement to melt away – like a cleansing process of the auditory organs, paralleling the visually cleansing effects of his minimal, monochrome *Klein Blue* paintings.

So, how do Adkins' compositions complement, bounce off or contrast with Dickens' paintings? First we must consider the textural connotations of both, and how their interplay works. Every crossover, every crossing has a finite meeting point, or intersection, whose spatio-temporal permutations offer more than the sum of their parts, often playing tricks with our perceptions. Think of the overtones in music where two discordant notes, or notes from different octaves, meet; think of the *moiré* effect where two grids with different linear intervals are superimposed; think how sweet and sour, or sweet and bitter combinations produce a totally unique flavour fundamentally different from its individual component flavours.

The Japanese musician Ryoji Ikeda composes his synthesised electronic music, then adds dynamic visuals to create spectacular aural and visual performances. Ostensibly he is collaborating with himself, but how does this crossover work? Do the sounds and the visuals evolve in tandem, or does one grow out of the other? In his own words:

My job as an artist is to compose elements. Composition is the key. So, any elements, which are brushed up carefully, are the subjects to be composed. I compose sounds. I compose visuals. I compose materials. I can't put, or analyse, myself in the context of something between art and music; I am naturally doing what I am doing.<sup>18</sup>

The first project in which Dickens and Adkins began to work together was *Toward the Light*, which was exhibited in the Cartwright Hall Art Gallery in Bradford in 2010. This was the result of a collaboration whereby Adkins responded to a series of paintings by Dickens that were in turn inspired by literary characters from the literary work of Charles Dickens, Gustave Flaubert and Bernard Pomerance. In many ways this project was the expression of a three-way crossover – between the visual, the written word and the acoustic. The term 'crossover' is, of course somewhat arbitrary and dependent upon outdated systems of genre classification – in a way it is iconoclastic. It is a term that attempts to undermine and subsume its obsolete predecessor the 'category'. According to the French theorist Jean-Luc Nancy, the category neutralises artworks, diminishes their significance and their specificity. The category is merely an expedient filing process and, as we know, what is filed disappears from view. Nancy elaborates upon this theme:

As soon as it takes place, 'art' vanishes, it is *an* art, the latter is *a* work, which is in *a* style, a manner, a mode of resonance with other sensuous registers, a rhythmic reference back through indefinite networks.<sup>19</sup>

This chapter is not the place for a philosophical discussion on the significance of texture for our perceptual processes – how our perception of texture plays a leading role in the way that we perceive the world. But we need to be aware how our perception of texture plays a vital role in our experience of the world through perceptual discernment. Along with perceptions of form, colour, luminance, distance and movement, texture plays an essential part in making sense of what we perceive visually. Furthermore, it frequently combines with those other perceptual indicators to provide a holistic impression of our environment, whether that is in real time or through the media of recordings.

Modernity, from its very beginnings, has been a predominantly visual culture – a phenomenon that has been commented upon

by many cultural theorists and historians, including Norman Bryson, Jonathan Crary, Martin Jay and Richard Wollheim. We have now moved into a more powerful and wide-ranging variant of that visual culture, the so-called 'screen culture'. Using smartphones, palmtops, laptops, Game Boys, Xboxes and 'home cinema', many of our negotiations with the world – with the 'other' – are made through the medium of digital screens with their digitally generated images. We must not forget, however, that sound is an integral part of this screen culture, most of whose images would be rendered totally meaningless, random and irrelevant without an audio component – and vice versa, since the sound is totally contextual with its accompanying images. This is a state of affairs that we not only take for granted but also find highly desirable, to the extent that newspaper sales have dropped dramatically during the past two decades as a direct result of this burgeoning screen culture.

This contextual interrelationship between sound and the moving image is a sympathetic and sequential one, which ordinarily serves to inform the audience through commentary or narrative. But what if sound is used as a counterpoint to an image, not to inform about or corroborate the image, but to give it a new slant – creating a message, in that image, that its visuality alone does not convey? This might suggest a change in the nature of this relationship from parasitic (where the sound feeds upon the visual to give it meaning, and vice versa, in order to inform) to symbiotic (where sound and vision work empathetically together in order to entertain and where the result is greater than the sum of its parts). These are the workings of two radically different types of synergy: one creative and the other informative; one documentary, the other fictional – in terms, that is, of imaginative input.

The relationship between sound and image in the work of Dickens and Adkins falls very much into this latter category. Just as every painting has a history, starting with its imprimatura and ending with the final layer of impasto, which has its inevitable but unpredictable final brushstroke, so too

digitally synthesised sound is composed of the superimposition of layers, envelopes, blocks, wedges or veils of sound. Just as with the imprimatura of a painting, the first layers or traces of sound in an electronic composition rarely, if ever, indicate what is to come further on, or in subsequent layers of the piece, and it is impossible to forecast the complexity of the final result. Commenting upon this process in an interview with Bruno Lasnier of *themilkfactory*, Adkins has stated, with reference to his album *Five Panels*:

What I took from [the artist] Rothko is the idea of working in layers, building a piece up by superimposing one layer on another. The pieces immediately stop working in a teleological manner (building up to a climactic point). What I was interested in is how Rothko let layers show through by thinning his paint whilst others are thick and opaque. In *Five Panels* this is the main way of working. Anywhere between five and twelve layers of material were created and put into the computer. The compositional process then became one of mixing and balancing these layers – allowing some to show through, some to disappear, others to take over completely.<sup>20</sup>

So, when using painting as an inspiration for his work, it is not necessarily the final visual presence of the painting with which Adkins works, perhaps to suggest sonic parallels. Rather, he is interested in the way in which the painting arrived in its final guise, not just physically, but conceptually and philosophically – exploring all the nascent forces that brought it into being.

So where does a collaboration such as that between Dickens and Adkins begin? Could it be with the metaphysical? While the main inspiration behind *Shibusa* is *katagami* stencils, used traditionally in the Japanese textile industry as components in the development of fabric decoration, most notably for kimono fabrics, Dickens' paintings have always had a metaphysical aura around them. It is perhaps the relationship between the physical and the metaphysical that we should examine when exploring the nature of

her paintings. Like many traditional Japanese crafts, the creation of *katagami* stencils has a certain degree of the esoteric about it. The media description of one particular panel is: ‘White ground *jishiro* Japanese stencil on mulberry paper treated with persimmon juice and smoked. Silk thread insertion reinforcement. Carved with *tsukibori* or pushed cut technique.’<sup>21</sup> The perfecting of this process was obviously the result of many years of experimentation and trading of ideas.

*Shibusa*, then, has a triadic foundation: the interplay of electronic sound, painting and its relationship to traditional Japanese fabric stencils. But, to revisit our question, how does this crossover of media and ideas actually work – how does the process operate? Adkins gives us a clear insight into the motivation and process behind this collaborative work in the interview he gave to *themilkfactory* in 2011. Referring to his collaboration with Dickens, he states:

The important thing about these works is that they are not just illustrative of the paintings. Just like *Five Panels*, I am more interested in understanding the technique and motivations of the painter/artist in order to develop a sound-world and structure that really reflect the artwork. In some cases this produces a way of approaching sound that is rather different – for me, part of the collaborative process is precisely this type of challenge ... One of the important things about our collaboration is that the art and music both come from the same wellspring but remain independent artworks. The audience can look at the paintings or listen to the music and they make sense on their own. However, when you bring them together there is an amplification of certain themes, ideas and techniques – the result is more than a sum of its parts.<sup>22</sup>

Given the metaphysical overtones of Dickens’ paintings, we should not look for rational, sequential or deliberated processes in their creation, but rather the working of intuitive, numinous or reflexive processes – the sort of creative energies that inform works of

‘process painting’. However, we should not mistake the whole Victorian panoply of plasma apparitions, of ethereal voices from beyond, or magically shifting ouija boards for the nature of the metaphysical. The fatal error made by the charlatan practitioners involved in such sham events was to claim that the metaphysical could be drawn down into the physical world if only the right (esoteric) techniques were used. This was rapidly shown to be patently untrue and, and even downright bogus. The metaphysical can only be hinted at – conceived hypothetically through the interplay of intuition and imagination. It is a mood, suggesting, rather than demonstrating, the possible existence of levels of reality other than those that we are able to perceive through our senses, or by the use of scientific instruments.

Dickens and Adkins are able to weave ethereal spells through their combination of the visual and the aural, and such spells – the stuff of reverie and daydreams – might be seen to be important distractions in our world of screen culture, where our perception and awareness of our immediate environment begin to play second-fiddle to our awareness and desire for the omnipresence of digitised information systems, and their irresistible and relentless streams of information. Our imaginations begin to atrophy, as we use them less and less. We avoid encouraging any vague and unpredictable meanderings: we want raw information, we want real-time facts and figures, and we want them now. After all, the realms of the imagination have received a very mixed press. According to Canadian psychologist Edwin Hersch:

*Imagination* is sometimes seen positively, as in ‘creative imagination’, and sometimes negatively as in ‘It’s only in your imagination’. Likewise it can be seen as describing a particular *domain* or zone of our experience characterised, primarily, as one of unreality, fiction and falsehood, or, alternatively as an existential *dimension* of our being, namely an essential aspect inherent to all of human reality.<sup>23</sup>

Here are two diametrically opposed philosophical edifices, each with its own

supporting but contradictory foundations. Each is fundamentally sound, but absolutely incompatible with the other. Each is composed of a different system of parts that will fit its own edifice, but not the other. We cannot rationally establish whether or not the metaphysical ‘exists’, but, according to our philosophical position, we can either accept or refute its credence. If we accept its credence, then the idea of the metaphysical can add a richness to the textures and to the depth of our imaginations, and consequently flesh out and revivify the dry, bare bones of the raw, rational information that increasingly occupies our minds.

Such is the artistry of traditional Japanese craftwork that objects whose decoration was peripheral to their purpose are now sold and collected as ‘art objects’ for the aesthetic richness of that decoration. Such objects include *katagami* stencils, *netsuke* (decorated or sculptural purse-string toggles) and *inro* (lacquered boxes made to hold wax seals). The designs on these objects often depict mythological or folkloric scenes or characters; or they might be natural scenes showing flowers, fish, birds or insects. These designs can be very elaborate, with a strong element of the imaginative that conveys a sense of romantic ‘other-worldliness’. It would seem to be this quality of traditional Japanese design, along with its labour-intensive intricacy, that attracted Dickens to these *katagami* stencils. If we were to replace the description ‘metaphysical’ with another word, with reference to Dickens’ paintings, it might well be ‘dreamlike’. Significantly, in another part of the above interview with Adkins, the interviewer Bruno Lasnier says: ‘The music on your latest album [*Fragile.Flicker.Fragment*] often has quite a dreamy feel, which comes through the music itself but also through the sound you use’.<sup>24</sup>

By working on the peripheries of reality, at its threshold with the world of imagination and our world of dreams, the possibilities for creative expression are enhanced. It is from this region that the collaborative work of Dickens and Adkins would appear to grow and evolve. While the inspirations behind *Shibusa* are probably multivalent and wide

ranging, it is clear that Adkins and Dickens share an interest in and an empathy with many of those sources of inspiration – if not their specifics, then those more intangible elements of feel and quality. They also share an interest in textures. When they employ aural and visual textures alongside each other, an holistic ambience is clearly present in their work: there is a powerful impression of two like minds combining to create a tangibly empathetic whole.

The art critic and writer Andrew Benjamin, writing about the work of the German artist Anselm Kiefer, sums up concisely how the painter calls upon different resources and transforms them to inspire the creative act of painting:

It is not as though the paintings of Anselm Kiefer turn around the interplay of history, memory and representation. It is, rather that these three topics provide what comes to be framed within the paintings as their own proper topos; and within that topos their presence is complicated.<sup>25</sup>

Benjamin might also have mentioned, of course, that Kiefer’s imagination offers a unifying thread that connects those three topics, so that reality and its ‘other’ become unified in a newly configured creation. How, then, do the different histories that inform the work of Dickens and Adkins conspire to create a work equally inspired by both?

Ludwig Wittgenstein, examining the aesthetics of genre paintings, wrote: ‘I should like to say “What the picture tells me is itself”. That is, its telling me something, consists in its own structure, in *its* own lines and colours.’<sup>26</sup> In a similar vein, the renowned American minimalist painter Ad Reinhardt explained that:

The painting, which is a negative thing, is the statement, and the words I’ve used about it have all been negative statements to keep the painting free. I never say anything *explicit* about my paintings. I never explain them or interpret them.<sup>27</sup>



Paintings, Reinhardt is saying, speak differently to each viewer, and to limit them to one explanation, to one interpretation, is to fix them artificially. They offer a different gift to each viewer – a unique message that transcends any single rational exegesis. In fact, the British painter Howard Hodgkin has been quoted as saying:

The only way an artist can communicate with the world at large is on the level of feeling. I think the function of the artist is to practice his art to such a level that like the soul leaving the body, it comes out into the world and affects other people.<sup>28</sup>

It has to be agreed that true art is essentially altruistic, a sharing by the artist of their passions with others. So in the *Shibusu* project it becomes evident that this process of sharing is two tier: first, Dickens and Adkins share the essences of their work with each other, before subsequently colluding and sharing their resulting creation with the world.

It is, therefore, useful to look at the *Shibusu* collaboration between Dickens and Adkins not merely in terms of its synergy, or its intentionalities, but in terms of its ontological presence: its unique being as an integral body of work. Again, we have to take one view or the other, either analytical or cognitive. But in order for this to be validated as a unique work, then it needs to be perceived cognitively – as ‘itself’, according to Wittgenstein. Knowing too much about the histories of the sources of this work would almost certainly compromise such a perception of the work. It is not the mode or manner of the synthesis that underpins this work that empowers it, but the intuitive sharing of passions and the empathetic act of artistic creation of these two artists.

A different take on this theme has been offered by the American abstract expressionist painter Franz Kline:

You don’t paint the way someone, by observing your life, thinks you have to paint – you paint the way you have to in order to give, that’s life itself, and someone will look and say it is the product of

knowing, but it has nothing to do with knowing, it has to do with giving.<sup>29</sup>

The philosopher Roland Barthes’ post-structuralist declaration of and writing about the ‘death of the author’ and the eclectic, coalescent nature of the art of literary creation can equally be transferred and applied to the visual or the aural arts. Any ‘creative’ work is in fact a ‘cumulative’ aggregation of previously experienced creations or scenarios, put together, uniquely ordered, and within a fresh context. It is part of a historical river of ideas, just like the sequential merging of confluent streams within a river system continually adds to and transforms the nature of the effluent river of which the streams are sources.

Although this river is unique in any one stretch, its uniqueness is a consequence of its multiple sources. Barthes explains that to use the name of an author (or artist) to qualify or characterise the work subjugates and ultimately stultifies that work. He expands on this when he writes:

We know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions in which are wedded, and contested, various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations resulting from the thousand sources of culture.<sup>30</sup>

This is equally true, often in a more transparent way, in the visual and aural arts. However, this of course diminishes the importance of our awareness of crossovers between different art forms: in terms of Barthes’ thesis, they become totally irrelevant and, what is more, obfuscatory. A crossover process is a ‘junction’, of sorts – an ontological moment in the history of the completed artwork, which we must negotiate to reach its ultimate destination. Like the ‘ferryman’ Vasudeva in Hermann Hesse’s story *Siddhartha*, who led Siddhartha to enlightenment and then departed,<sup>31</sup> it is a transient vehicle – an enabler, which, once its task is completed, becomes detached from its consequences.

Completed paintings are prone to assume a certain ‘thingness’ – to become objects that can be possessed. The process of their creation is halted and terminated, as ossification sets in, and their dynamic presence becomes progressively sapped, as the tag of temporality weighs them down. The inherent miscibility that they possessed during their creation has been irreversibly disabled. At best, paintings are open to an infinity of interpretations; at worst, they become marketable commodities whose fixed identity becomes a necessity in order to prop up, or massage, their market value. The very presence of Adkins’ sound works rescues Dickens’ paintings from this plight – their temporal fluidity imbues those paintings with an ability to shape-shift, and to metamorphose into the many apparitions that the complexities of those paintings invite.

If we examine the synergies that drive the genre of electroacoustic/visual performance, we become aware that they are part of a very wide spectrum of work. Where does the Adkins–Dickens collaboration lie on this spectrum? Near the summit of the high-energy end of the spectrum must come the Japanese artist mentioned above, Ryoji Ikeda. His *Test Pattern* series includes a restlessly shifting pattern of dry staccato clicks, bleeps and beats that assails the ear, while scrolling, flickering visuals of rapidly metamorphosing gridded black and white test patterns bombard the eye. Ikeda’s performances offer a legal substitute for the use of amphetamines, with their speedy, stuttering and clangorous, adrenaline-pumping spectacle. Near the other, gentler end of the spectrum are the more cerebral electronic compositions of Francois Bayle, particularly the opening sections of his 1997 dedication to Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Morceaux de ciel*. At this end of the spectrum, too, perhaps materialising those invisible pictures that Bayle’s work might suggest, is the collaborative work of Dickens and Adkins. In *Shibusu*, tranquil, languid and gently sonorous bell-like notes roll across the space, first advancing then retreating with a low-revving warble between the headphones. Sounds lap against your eardrums, alternately like viscous liquid crystal dripping on crisply resonant glass rods, and a gently fluctuating bagpipe

drone pressing down on the modest undulating hum of a freezer motor. This cool restraint is complemented by Dickens’ spatially expansive, delicately textured and enigmatically patterned paintings, spreading their precise abstraction across the walls with a slow-burning confidence. Here we find an empathy with the Japanese craft ethic that is their inspiration, affording them not only a loose, while sensitive, reference to their inspirational source material, but also a sensuous and imaginative extemporisation upon its classically honed thematic.

The overall effect is that of an audio-visual moiré, where colliding rhythms and patterns generate an interference pattern that in erasing its origins creates an entirely new entity. This is an entity that suggests a tranquillised world embedded in the muffled ambience of the chill-out room: we are lulled into the sense of a cosmic dusk that has a benign horizontality, in contrast to the brusque verticality that keeps Ikeda’s sounds breathlessly jumping about and leaping over the listener. With *Shibusu* we are not pinned back by such raw, manic energy, but we are seduced and drawn in by the intriguing possibilities, as, invitingly, it opens up its spaces for us to explore. *Shibusu* is just a wayside stop, from which we are relaunched on a long journey – reminiscent, perhaps, of the journeys that itinerant zen monks used to undertake, and exemplified by that documented in the journal of Basho, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*.<sup>32</sup> We are reminded, perhaps, of that old maxim, ‘still waters run deep’.

If the idea of crossover between disciplines or genres is ultimately exposed as an irrelevance, or essentially an artificial construct, for the exploration of this work, it has at least offered us a way to circumnavigate the essence and subsequently the uniqueness of this work as a ‘thing in itself’ – Heidegger’s ‘Ding an sich’. This process has allowed us to become familiar with the landmarks around which the landscape continually changes, evolves and revolves, transmutes and metamorphoses. Through the actions of mutation and miscibility, through the infinitely permutable receptions of *Shibusu* by diverse audiences, the work can never be halted.

So, as it changes from moment to moment, it must always necessarily be more than the sum of its parts.

## Notes

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- 32 M. Basho, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, trans. Noboyuki Yuasa, (London: Penguin Books, 1968).



Figure 7.1 Kimono designed by Zenji Kawabe, father of Yunosuke Kawabe.  
© Yunosuke Kawabe

Chapter Seven

**The craftsmen of Kyoto**

Pip Dickens

The decline of the *katagami* stencil and its symbolic use in this book for the *skill of making things well* can usefully be set within contemporary and economic contexts, in a review of the status of kimono making in Japan today. According to Danielle Demetriou: ‘The kimono industry, which produces one of the most enduring cultural symbols of Japan, is in crisis’.<sup>1</sup>

My research in Kyoto (April 2011) included meeting a young kimono designer, Makoto Mori, who writes about the history and current developments in kimono making in the next chapter. Mori and other young Kyoto designers are embracing technology – Illustrator and Photoshop being primary tools. To appreciate this move away from hand skills, it is important to understand how the traditional kimono is made and, ultimately, the cost to the customer (and the maker). As Demetriou states: ‘Most craftsmen today are over 80 and within the next 10 years many

will pass away. We are in real danger of losing thousands of years of kimono-making techniques.’<sup>2</sup>

To commission, or purchase, a kimono utilising traditional hand skills one should expect to pay, at a minimum, about ¥1 million (approximately £8,400). Some well-heeled Tokyo businessmen will spend double that on kimonos for their wives. Few people have that kind of money to spend on what is no longer considered regular attire – even in Kyoto, which is Japan’s capital of culture and tradition.

My research trip fell during the popular cherry blossom season when *hanami* (blossom appreciation) activities abound – stalls and vendors line the processional walks to favoured beauty spots containing the revered cherry trees. People reserve places for picnics under these trees, camping out well into the night and feasting on the delicacies provided by the street vendors. This is a time when Kyoto is usually very busy with overseas and Japanese visitors, and it is common to see kimonos being worn during the processional walks and celebrations. Since my visit followed the recent devastating earthquake and tsunami, there were few overseas tourists in Kyoto, but Japanese tourists still flocked to see the cherry blossom. The most impressive wearers of kimonos were mature ladies, who obviously revered both the custom of *hanami* and the opportunity to wear their high-quality kimonos, which they did with great grace and pride. Conversely, there were younger girls wearing what were obviously cheaper, printed kimonos – eager to be caught on camera by, they hoped, equally eager tourists.



Figure 7.2 Japanese women enjoying the cherry blossom along the Shirakawa river in Okazaki. © Jeffrey Friedl

For young or old, wearing a kimono is something special but also something of a spectacle these days (see Figure 7.3). The kimono is not a utility garment and, on a hot April day, wearing one with good grace is a skill in itself. Demetriou writes:

As kimonos have gone out of fashion, the number of companies making them in Tokyo has shrunk – dwindling from 217 to 24 over the past 30 years. Even in Kyoto, the historic centre for traditional Japanese culture, there are now just 64 kimono makers left.<sup>3</sup>

The art and craft of kimono making precedes the Western concept of haute couture (developed in mid-nineteenth century Paris by British designer Charles Worth), where many skilled people combine to produce specific elements of a bespoke garment. As outlined in Chapter 2, it takes many skilled artisans to make a *katagami* stencil and this, in turn, is but one element contributing to a kimono's fabrication and design. There are a very significant number of different, highly skilled, procedures and techniques employed at each stage. Dyeing, painting, embroidery, and silk making are fast disappearing in Japan. No computer can completely replace these skills and there is real danger of exchanging original skill for simulacrum effect – for example, a computer-generated pattern that replicates a *shibori* technique. However, computers are able to capture, record and archive a vast library of techniques as reference material.

The kimono industry is suffering a Janus-faced conundrum of transition versus tradition. It shares parallels with Western Art's recent history of reproduction in the mechanical age in that a computer-generated image of a painting is not an artwork – it is an image of an artwork. The painting becomes something different once it has been reproduced – colours change, spatial depth is lost, materiality is lost. Reproduction is only as good as the camera that has photographed the original work. As we move further and further away from the original, we move further away from the point of art itself – the object, how it is made and what it is made of.



Figure 7.3 A young couple in traditional dress head towards the hanami cherry viewing festivities in Kyoto, 2010.  
© Pip Dickens

The reason for this transition in the kimono industry is due in part to the decline of skilled artisans and a younger generation who cannot justify, economically, the time-investment in apprenticeships to learn these skills. The pressure on the industry to build a viable business practice has required it to explore and exploit other technologies. The alternative of hiring in traditional skill sets and expertise from a diverse yet ever-dwindling pool of resources is becoming less and less practicable.

Writing in 2007, Anthony Faiola from the *Washington Post* described the last generation of skilled artisans in the Nishijin district of Kyoto:

Yasujiro Yamaguchi worked the humming loom in his private workshop. Patiently lacing golden threads through a warp of auburn silk, he fashioned a bolt of kimono

fabric blooming with an autumn garden in shades of tea green, ginger and plum. But Yamaguchi, like Japan's signature kimono, is slipping into winter. At 102, he is among the last master weavers of Nishijin, the country's most celebrated kimono district, and his pace has slowed. He rubbed the morning chill from his knuckles, fitted his hunched shoulders deeper inside his indigo jacket and resolutely pushed on.<sup>4</sup>

At the time of the interview with Faiola, Yamaguchi was one of only three masters left who could actually create a kimono from scratch. All were over 70 years old and none had apprentices. Yamaguchi stated: 'It is a sign of the times ... I am not sure who will carry on this tradition for future generations. I no longer have the time or energy to teach someone now. Even if I did, where would they work?'<sup>5</sup> Faiola reports that sales of Nishijin kimonos and related products fell from US\$2.7 billion in 1990 to a record low of US\$477 million in 2006; production of kimonos in this region (which is known for its quality) dropped from 291,000 to just 87,382 garments.

In 2011, through an introduction from Professor Yuzo Murayama, Director of Innovative Globalization of Kyoto's Heritage Industries at Doshisha Business School in Kyoto, I met three designers who are bravely negotiating the chasm between tradition and transition, utilising kimonos (and kimono techniques) in different ways. For Murayama, these three designers exemplify new possibilities in Japan's cultural business sector:

Although Japanese culture is enjoying a worldwide boom, particularly in 'anime' and 'manga', Kyoto's heritage industries are mired in a slump. Some are even in danger of disappearing completely. One reason for this lies in the fact that heritage industries have lost their horizons for lateral development, particularly their motivation for entering the global marketplace. The only means of overcoming these difficulties are those of novel innovations and of going global. The concept that holds the key to its success is that of 'cultural businesses'.

The Kakushin Juku [a class being offered by Doshisha Business School] is leading the way along the path from heritage industries to cultural businesses.<sup>6</sup>

With the aid of a computer, the designers' artistic vision, or style, remains independent, which, in turn, means greater creative freedom, lower overheads and time-saving approaches. This is crucial, since few people are able to invest ¥1 million on a kimono. This is the reality. The designers' approach, therefore, has to be one that preserves what they perceive to be valued traditional elements and skills, and re-present, or incorporate them, into products for a contemporary market – be it through bespoke or multiple quality products at competitive cost.

The designers featured here are, literally, the children of kimono designers and so represent the departure point between traditional collaborative techniques and independence through contemporary technology. From a personal and professional perspective, the act of refocusing to meet the modern, more cut-throat economy leaves them caught between a rock and a hard place, since they are reminded, almost daily, of the magnitude of their cultural history (through their parents, relatives and community).<sup>7</sup> A great ocean of possibility awaits them through new innovation, but the problem for them is how, and what, to carry with them into the cultural industry of the future. They are only too aware that as they progress there is always the danger of leaving behind, perhaps forever, knowledge and skills that cannot be regained. These are three designers who are making a very bold step forward.

### **Yunosuke Kawabe: Japan Style System**

Yunosuke Kawabe launched his company, Japan Style System, in the late 1990s.<sup>8</sup> His professional development is significant in that he was the oldest son in the family's kimono workshop. His father, Zenji, is a traditional craftsman, and recognised as an Exceptional Artisan by the Governor of Kyoto Prefecture. Zenji's kimonos evidence huge complexity of design, intricacy and colour, with a



Figure 7.4 Kawabe's dramatic giant *yuzen* lanterns in Kyoto city, celebrating the millennium.  
© Yunosuke Kawabe

multiplicity of techniques applied to a single garment (see Figure 7.1).

Yunosuke studied graphic design at art school and, during this period, was captivated by the posters publicising the 1976 Montreal Olympics. He decided not to join his father's kimono and *yuzen* workshop after graduating, and instead entered the world of advertising. However, in 1988 he returned home to study with his father, thus beginning a fusion between the old and the new in *yuzen* design. Ten years later he began using computer technology to produce *yuzen* designs, and one of his first large projects was designing 250 large-scale freestanding silk lanterns for the Kyoto Lantern Festival to celebrate the new millennium (see Figure 7.4).

*Yuzen* is a method of hand painting, or printing, colour and pattern on to kimono fabric, usually silk. *Tegaki-yuzen* is hand painted, while *kata-yuzen* is printed with the *katagami* stencil. *Yuzen* dyeing techniques include painting directly on to silk and the use

of paste as the resist for maintaining clear areas (as outlined in Chapter 2). After the colours are fixed, the paste is removed by gently washing the cloth in running water. Fine lines between sections of design are produced by using special piping cones (like icing bags), separating one area of colour from another – this is called *tsutsugaki*. Many other procedures involve similar processes, using a range of different shaped brushes or mediums. It is a very complex and skilled area, so each process, however subtle, is given a specific name. *Yuzen* style varies from region to region – for example *Kyo-yuzen* (Kyoto), *Tokamachi-yuzen* (Tokamachi, Niigata). In Kyoto it has been traditional for *yuzen* artists to gently wash their fabric in the Kamo river every August.<sup>9</sup>

Yunosuke Kawabe has, through the push-me-pull-you experience of working in new industries and returning to old traditions, integrated what he feels is the best of both worlds: producing new products using the



traditions of *yuzen*, combined with computer-aided design. His products include swimsuits, interiors, theatrical backdrops, chairs, cushions, clocks, and even cars (see Figure 7.5).

The Kyoto car project, explains Professor Murayama, was:

sponsored by Venture Business Laboratory at Kyoto University and sought to mix Kyoto's high technology with Kyoto's traditional Yuzen designs. The result was eight conceptual models of electric cars (one-tenth of the actual sized-cars) which were presented at the G8 Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Kyoto in 2008. Tomotaka Takahashi, a famous robot creator from Kyoto, designed the car bodies and Yunosuke Kawabe made surface designs.<sup>10</sup>

This may seem little more than implanting historically derivative *yuzen* designs on to contemporary products, but Yunosuke Kawabe goes to great lengths to explain how

colour combinations in *yuzen* design are critical, together with his innate skills of draughtsmanship. As an inheritor of the techniques of Kyoto traditional crafts – through the training from his father – he is able to carry these important heritage skills forward. His home doubles as his studio: the walls are decorated with his father's extravagant kimonos, sofas are festooned with his contemporary yuzen silk cushion covers and computer equipment sits side by side with paint pots and brushes.

Kawabe also designed the official swimwear of the Japanese synchronised swimming team for the 2004 Athens Olympics (see Figure 7.6). His swimsuits were based on *kabuki*<sup>11</sup> and were launched by Mizuno (Speedo) under the slogan: 'This is the country of the kimono'. This commission resulted in him developing his own theory about colours that particularly suited Japanese skin colour; indeed his obsession with getting it just right led to him assessing and fine tuning the



Figure 7.5 Yunosuke Kawabe (left) pictured with one of his Yuzen cars he designed with Takahashi for the G8 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in 2008 (right). © Yunosuke Kawabe



Figure 7.6 Kawabe's successful 2004 Olympic swimsuit design. © Yunosuke Kawabe

'colour performance' of the suits against the team's skin under the specific lighting system of the building in Athens where the swimmers were competing.

This fastidious attention to detail harks back to the imperative *to protect performance* discussed in Chapter 2. Colour and design are unique to individual *yuzen* workshops – the style often 'absorbed' from one generation to the other. Kawabe's colour palettes, combinations and motifs are 'signatures', in just the same way as those in a painter's portfolio. This is what Professor Murayama describes as 'implicit knowledge': knowledge passed down through the generations. In Yunosuke Kawabe's case he has transferred this knowledge from dye pot and brush to computer brush and palette. Those with a discerning eye of *yuzen* techniques and styles may very well identify a contemporary work of his and see the influence of his father, Zenji.

Significantly, by developing his inherited *yuzen* style, Yunosuke Kawabe has successfully broadcast its potential beyond that which might be realised by, say, a few kimono commissions. His Olympic *kabuki* swimsuit design had a potential viewing audience of 3.9 billion people worldwide – the number of people reported to have watched the Athens Olympics in 2004.<sup>12</sup> His designs represented the Japanese nation, its athletes and Japanese *yuzen* innovation to a huge potential market – what Murayama describes as 'novel innovations and of going global'.<sup>13</sup>

### Taro Matsumara: Bon Kyoto

Recycling and re-forming the kimono is at the heart of Taro Matsumara's design retail outlet, Bon Kyoto, near Kitashirakawa-Bettocho.<sup>14</sup> Antique kimonos that are no longer in good enough condition to sell on to be worn are given a new lease of life as jewellery and hair pieces, purses, bags, accessories, 'cute' toys, dolls, and even teddy bears made out of white silk wedding kimonos. While Kyoto has many gift and souvenir shops selling all kinds of products to Japanese visitors and overseas tourists, it is not until you visit Matsumara's store that you are hit by a startling difference – the quality of material, design and hand-made construction. Every item is made from antique kimonos of incredible quality.

Matsumara, however, is not doing anything new. Kimono fabric no longer fit enough to wear had, until a few decades ago, been artfully pared down and made fit for another purpose – an *obi* (sash) perhaps, or child's clothes, or a newly-fashioned accessory. This was the practical solution to maximise the use of the kimono fabric. However, it seems that in recent decades many people have lost the art of recycling and refashioning using craft skills. This is a crucial gap in the market that Matsumara is filling.

The kimono is an expensive, beautiful and unique item. It comes as no surprise that discarding it, or giving it away, is therefore the very last option. The most treasured family kimonos are often well preserved and passed down through the generations. Unfortunately, not all kimonos survive so well. They may have been worn regularly until, literally, they are worn out, stained or have torn sections in the fabric. Perhaps, too, the younger generation no longer has the inclination to sew or refashion fabrics and materials, favouring instead Western fashion and off-the-peg solutions.

In a web blog entitled 'Kimonos: are they dying out?' changes in Japanese consumer trends are discussed. One entry states:

Kimonos have long been admired by the West for their luxurious fabric and exquisite designs. But the traditional

kimono-making industry in Japan is in peril. A lot of this is down to a decline in popularity. Previously the whole of Japan wore kimonos but this is no longer the case; now it's mostly worn for special occasions. [It] is feared that within the next 10 years the art of traditional kimono making will have died out. The industry is

having trouble passing on the skills needed to the next generation. There are very many stages involved in kimono creation and a whole host of different craftspeople are needed and they all possess different areas of expertise. It can take 10+ years to develop the expertise needed for a single stage. Many of the last remaining kimono artisans are now elderly and it is feared that the kimono industry will die with them.<sup>15</sup>

Another entry comments that:

This is all very disappointing especially as the Japanese economy is thriving. Sadly the new generation are more likely to purchase the latest Louis Vuitton or Chanel bag than a hand-crafted lovingly made traditional kimono. This lull in demand is forcing even some of the premier kimono artisans to use lower-quality foreign silk rather than the much more expensive but superior-quality Japanese silk. Now it's almost impossible to buy 100% Japanese kimonos.<sup>16</sup>

The change is a cultural and demographic one: fewer Japanese are marrying and many brides opt not for the traditional *uchikake* and *kakeshita* (or *furisode*) arrangement – exotic wedding kimonos worn in layers – but prefer instead Western-style dresses. The birth rate in Japan is also falling, which has reduced sales in children's kimonos used for celebrations.

Matsumara's passion and knowledge of kimonos is at the heart of his business. He combines his personal interest in kimonos with commerce. He is drawn to antique kimonos not only for their obvious beauty, but also for the social history that individual pieces reveal through their motifs, patterns, colours, techniques and materials. Matsumara's educated eye for a perfect kimono, therefore, has spawned an exceptional collection and is a valuable contribution to the preservation of Kyoto's social and artistic history (see Figure 7.7). Kimonos that do not pass the test of being of 'collectable' standard are earmarked for use as material for his new designs.

Matsumara employs four designers, who each bring their own individual flair to reconfiguring, by hand, new innovations.



Figure 7.7 One of Matsumara's 'perfect finds': this antique kimono is of the very finest quality. The many kimono-clad characters in the design have their own individual *kata-yuzen* and hand-painted kimono designs.

© Taro Matsumara

The result is a shop of wonders – a wide range of products that show off the qualities of each kimono remnant in innovative and pleasing ways. These items, constructed from fragments, reveal the ‘devil in the detail’ within the kimonos’ rich and extravagant designs. Small amounts of fabric are transformed into objects singing with colour and pattern – some as gifts or toys, others becoming utilitarian again as *obis*, shawls, stoles or bags.

A light-hearted yet illuminating example of how a kimono may evidence social history – including short-lived fads and fashions – is revealed in this excerpt from a newsletter of kimono sellers. Owner Ichiro Wada describes one of their most recent kimono ‘finds’ – a *meisen*<sup>17</sup> kimono from the mid-Showa period (1926–89) depicting the motif of a spitz dog:

The dog is Japanese spitz, which was the most popular dog in Showa in the 1920s and 1930s. When I was a boy, many neighbors had spitz! It is said that more than 40% of registered dogs ... were spitz. Japanese original dogs were Shiba Inu and similar, so Japanese at that time were fascinated by [the] white long hairs of [the] spitz. However, the boom quickly passed,

and recently we seldom see the spitz. Regrettably, spitz became [known as] the ‘dog who bark often in vain’ and popularity transfer[red] to the Maltese and Pomeranian. This *meisen* kimono must have been made when the spitz boom was at the peak. And with this piece, we can know how [the] spitz was once loved.<sup>18</sup>

#### Makoto Mori: kimono designer

Makoto Mori is a young kimono designer.<sup>19</sup> In Chapter 8 he outlines the division of labour (involving many artisans) within traditional kimono making, and compares this to contemporary approaches of working as an artisan (individual) in the industry. Makoto Mori is the son of a traditional kimono designer. However, with the demise of many skilled artisans and the fall in demand for kimonos, developing a successful practice within the industry has not been straightforward for him – or other contemporary designers. As with Kawabe’s practice, there is a fusion between old and new in Mori’s work: absorbing traditional techniques and rendering them in contemporary contexts (see Figure 7.8) using computer technology, combined with innovative approaches within the marketplace.



Figure 7.8 Makoto Mori with one of his designs (inset shows the detail of the design).  
© Makoto Mori



Figure 7.9 Examples of Mori's doll-size kimonos.  
© Makoto Mori

Makato Mori has had to use lateral thinking in his design, production and marketing strategies. For example, he capitalises on the popular tradition of the *hina matsuri* doll ceremony to promote his kimonos.<sup>20</sup> By creating doll-size kimonos, Mori catches the eye of potential clients who may wish to have the design (or similar) emulated as kimonos that they can wear (see Figure 7.9). Not only does this promote his designs to a wider audience, but by scaling down his kimono he can also economise on material and labour costs.

## Notes

- 1 D. Demetriou, 'Kimono making in Japan is a dying art', *The Telegraph*, 23 October 2010.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 A. Faiola, 'Twilight for the kimono', *Washington Post Foreign Service*, 13 December 2006.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Y. Murayama, *From Heritage Industries to Cultural Businesses: Innovative Globalization of Kyoto's Heritage Industries – The Kakushin Juku, Doshisha Business School, 2006\_2008* (Kyoto: Doshisha University, 2008).
- 7 It is very hard to find a parallel in Western culture that would equate to this predicament.

- 8 [www.jss-kyoto.jp/index.html](http://www.jss-kyoto.jp/index.html)
- 9 [www.ichiroya.com](http://www.ichiroya.com)
- 10 Murayama, *From Heritage Industries*.
- 11 Japanese theatre with a tradition of elaborate and dramatic costumes.
- 12 J. Swaine, 'Beijing Olympics: opening ceremony watched by 15 per cent of world's population', *The Telegraph*, 12 August 2008.
- 13 Murayama, *From Heritage Industries*.
- 14 [www.bon-kyoto.co.jp/en/index.html](http://www.bon-kyoto.co.jp/en/index.html)
- 15 <http://fuyume.net/2011/01/kimonosare-they-dying-out.html>
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 *Meisen* is woven fabric with blurred and colourful patterns, which is produced by using pre-dyed threads. The technique is related to earlier methods of *kasuri* (ikat), in which threads are resisted before dyeing and weaving, and *e-gasuri* ('picture-ikat') where motifs and patterns are 'drawn' on to groups of threads using resist paste through a stencil. *Meisen* was particularly popular following the First World War up to the mid-1950s.
- 18 I. Wada, *Ichiroya's Newsletter* 400, 5 June 2011.
- 19 [www.tocomarimo.com](http://www.tocomarimo.com)
- 20 *Hina matsuri* is a doll festival organised annually to pray for the growth and happiness of young girls. A hundred dolls are arranged in five or seven-tiered stands covered in red carpet. The dolls are called *hina-ningyo*.

### History of the kimono

The original meaning of the word ‘kimono’ is ‘clothing’, although today it is often translated as ‘something to wear’. In modern-day Japan the term also often refers to traditional Japanese clothing in general. Although the history of Japanese clothing prior to the Nara period (710–94) is not known in great detail, during the Heian period (794–1185) there are records that describe the clothing of the day. Here we find evidence of the origin of the contemporary kimono in the *kosode*, which was originally worn by the aristocracy as an undergarment.

The *kosode* is a garment with a body, sleeves and a pair of collars that drape from both shoulders and cross over each other in front of the chest. *Kosode* means ‘small cuffs’;<sup>1</sup> another type of clothing worn prior to the *kosode* had a larger cuff opening – as wide as the length of the sleeves – and was called *osode* (see Figures 8.1, 8.2). Clothes for the nobility during the Heian period had smaller cuffed openings in order to keep the body warm, so the *kosode* became a popular undergarment for the nobility from the end of the tenth century through to the beginning of the eleventh century.<sup>2</sup> The *kosode* became popular with aristocrats as an outer garment from the latter period of the Heian period to the beginning of the Kamakura period (1185–1333), and many nobles wore a *kosode* tailored from gorgeous cloth.

A samurai’s daily clothing (or formal public clothing) since the Heian period was a tube-shaped single costume called *teboso*, which was very similar in shape to the nobility’s *kosode* undergarment.<sup>3</sup> In the Kamakura

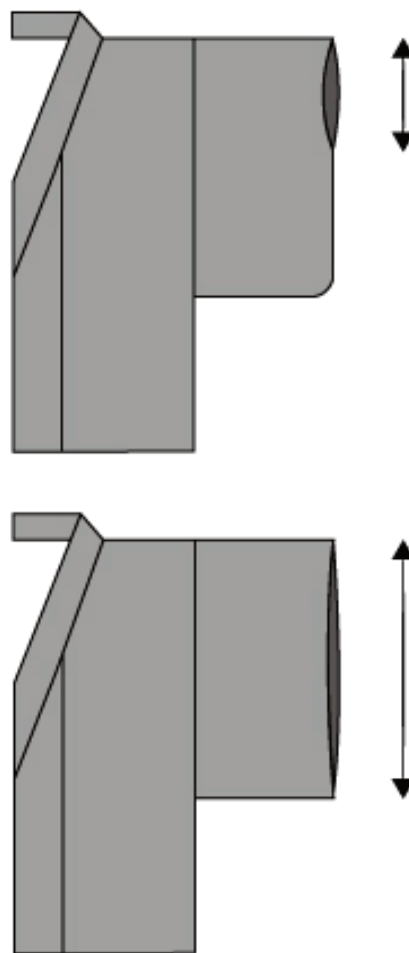


Figure 8.1 The *kosode* (top) and *osode* (bottom) were classified by the size of the cuff.

period (1185–1333) samurai began to call the *teboso* garment *kosode*. Later, kimonos worn by the general public also began to be referred



Figure 8.2 The figure on the left wears a *kosode*; the figure on the right wears an *osode*. The *kosode* is worn under the *osode*. Detail from *The Illustrated Tale of the Heiji Civil War*, 'The Imperial Visit to Rokuhara', Kamakura period (thirteenth century), © Tokyo National Museum

to as *kosode* because of the similarity of their shape. Ordinary people's *teboso* had a white ground without a pattern and were worn as outer garments. Occasionally, plain or easy tie-dyeing was applied, but there were often bans on decoration of any kind.

From the late Muromachi period (1336–1573) to the Momoyama period (1568–1603) the *kosode* developed further, with direct similarities to today's kimonos. During this time Japan was often engaged in intensive warfare (both feudal and with the Mongols), which led to a general shortage of textiles and clothing. As a result, the simple *kosode* was adopted as the formal outerwear among samurai in the ascending class. Its smaller sleeves were also more practicable for physical movement. Thus the *kosode* became common throughout society, and not merely the exclusive garment of the nobility.

During the Heian period (794–1185), the narrow tube-shaped sleeves of the *kosode*

became larger, although the cuff width remained almost the same. By the Momoyama period (1568–1603) the *kosode* shape had evolved into a configuration similar to the modern kimono. We also know that the word 'kimono' had become synonymous with *kosode*; for example, it is used in a report by the Portuguese missionary Joao Rodrigues, who came to Japan in around 1577.<sup>4</sup> We can assume, therefore, that people began to use the word 'kimono' to mean not only clothing in general, but to refer specifically to the *kosode*.

As economic prosperity increased during the Muromachi and Momoyama eras, and through to the Edo period (1603–1868), female apparel became more decorative, thanks to the relatively peaceful and prosperous social conditions. Patterns on clothes became larger, and loose clothes with longer sleeves, or length, became popular (see Figure 8.3). Despite the Edo shogunate often prohibiting the wearing of this kind of



clothing, the advent of bolder patterns and highly innovative *yuzen* techniques (hand-applied decoration of textiles, described below) heralded an explosion in kimono design. The Edo period represents the pinnacle of traditional kimono design (see Figures 8.4 and 8.5), and many modern designs are influenced by kimonos from this period.

From the Meiji period (1868–1912), Japanese leaders encouraged people to adopt Western style dress in order to demonstrate Japan's alignment with the modernising movement that was taking place in Europe and the USA. During this period, Japan's leaders were either nobility or *daimyo* (feudal lords) and still tended to wear the *osode*. However, the 'modernisation' policy impacted dramatically on Japanese dress and gradually the meaning of terms such as *osode* and *kosode* evaporated. It was from this period onwards that the most commonly used term to describe such clothing was generally acknowledged as 'kimono' (see Figure 8.6).

At the beginning of the Showa period (1926–89), both Western-style dress and traditional Japanese clothes were worn by the general public. The popularity of Western-style



Figure 8.3 *Kosode* from the sixteenth century, showing characteristic elements of the Momoyama period, both in the skilful manipulation of small-pattern repeats, and the wide body and narrow sleeve construction. Portraits and other paintings of the day provide evidence that *kosode* such as this were worn on formal occasions as the outermost robes of high-ranking warrior-class women. © Kyoto National Museum



Figure 8.4 Clothes worn at the beginning of the Edo period are evident in this picture. The *kosode* shape has evolved to what is very similar to the modern kimono. However, the *obi* is thinner and the sleeves are smaller. Detail from Kano Nagano, *Merrymaking Under the Cherry Blossoms*, Azuchi-Momoyama-Edo period (seventeenth century), © Tokyo National Museum



Figure 8.5 In the peaceful and economically stable social conditions of the Edo period, female apparel became more decorative. The *furi-sode* (long-sleeved kimono) is an example. It is thought that the purpose of its long, fully open sleeves was originally to regulate the temperature of children, but the flowing design also became popular with women for decorative rather than practical reasons. As a result, these long-sleeved characteristics have become associated with the expression of love by the female wearer. Hishikawa Moronobu, *Beauty Looking Back*, Edo period (seventeenth century), © Tokyo National Museum



Heian period: The *kosode* is worn under noblemen's clothes.



Late Muromachi period to Momoyama period: The *kosode* is adapted as the daily outerwear in the ascending class. It is designed to have smaller sleeves and to suit physical activity.



Early Edo period: The *kosode* is adopted as the daily formal outerwear in the ascending classes. The sleeve is round and the *obi* (sash) is thin. Garments of this period feature a bold pattern design.



Early mid-Edo period: The garment becomes more luxurious. The *obi* is wider and the sleeves are longer. The pattern is less bold, so that the wide *obi* breaks up the overall design. The sleeves become squarer in shape.



Late mid-Edo period: Female garments become more decorative. The patterns become larger and the garment is generally more loose fitting. The sleeves are also longer.



Late Edo period: The design of the *kosode* is much more understated and simple, whereas the undergarments are lavishly decorated.



Meiji period to Showa period: The design of the kimono becomes more spectacular, with a wider range and combination of colour made possible by the introduction of chemical dyes.



Contemporary: The kimono is now mostly worn at traditional events and as formal wear.

Figure 8.6 The transition from *kosode* to kimono. Illustrations © Misa Sato

dress increased in line with Japan's economic growth, and became the formal preference in the workplace. Fewer women were able to put on the kimono unassisted, and its appearance became rare by the mid-1950s. However, the kimono was still popular attire at traditional events, celebrations and as general leisure wear.

### History of *Kyo-yuzen*

Some of the most popular kimonos are those utilising *Kyo-yuzen* technique – a method of dyeing kimono, which developed in the Edo period (1603–1868). *Kyo-yuzen* means specifically *yuzen-zome* dyed in the city of Kyoto – a *yuzen* pattern for a kimono dyed in Kyoto. The production methods can be roughly classified into four types: *tegaki yuzen*, *katazome*, machine printing and inkjet textile printing. This section describes the development of the production methods of *Kyo-yuzen*.

*Yuzen* is named after the fan artist Miyazaki Yuzensai, who lived in Kyoto in the mid-Edo period. His designs became popular (see Figure 8.7) and were utilised for *kosode* as well as fans. His designs formed the basis of kimono designs that are still echoed in contemporary design.<sup>5</sup> The development of this technique was a consequence of a ban imposed in 1683 by the Edo shogunate on wearing (and making) luxurious costumes that used thin silk, crepe or embroidery. As a result, people sought methods of producing colourful kimonos that avoided traditional embellishments such as embroidery, pasting foil or tie-dyeing. These traditional decorations could stress and damage the texture of fine silks and other fabrics. In contrast, *yuzen-zome* was an innovative technology of dyeing patterns on to cloth as if painting a picture.

The splendid colours of *yuzen* were widely enjoyed by middle-class people – who were steadily gaining wealth and status – as well as the aristocracy and samurai. Its wide popularity paved the way for phenomenal advances in technology and application. One of the innovative aspects of the technique is that it prevented colour bleeding, which was

particularly important when using many colours or creating complicated patterns with many colours. While there was already a traditional practice of using glue as a resist-dyeing technique, *yuzen-zome* improved upon this and was seminal in the expansion of elaborate kimono design.<sup>6</sup>

No predetermined pattern was used when the process of *yuzen-zome* first began. Instead, the outline of a drawing on the fabric was made, using a piping implement and a starch called *itome nori*.<sup>7</sup> Colours were painted inside the *itome nori* outline with a brush, and were then fixed. The next step was to put a thick layer of starch called *fuse nori* on the coloured design to protect it from bleeding. Then the background colours were applied. After washing and drying to remove the starch, the *itome nori* outline was revealed as perfect white lines of regular width that separated individual elements of the drawing – for example, individual flower petals. The process amplified gestural and physical expression in the designs through the strength of the movement of the brush, coloured layers and colour gradation. *Yuzen-zome* is an important and flexible technology that has been passed down from generation to generation. It is now more commonly known as *tegaki yuzen* (meaning 'hand painted', see Figure 8.8).



Figure 8.7 Miyazaki Yuzensai's 1692 book of designs promoted the kimono across Japan, and was a major influence on the spread in popularity of *yuzen*-printed kimonos. Miyazaki Yuzensai, *Yosei Hinakata*, 1692, Wayo Women's University



Figure 8.8 *Tegaki yuzen*: First, an outline of the base drawing is overdrawn with *itome nori*; then dye is applied within the outline.

The *itome gata* technique was developed in the late Edo period by pasting *itome nori* on to the fabric using stencils,<sup>8</sup> as opposed to piping design outlines by hand. From very early times in the Ise district of Japan, stencils (*katagami*) were made from two or three pieces of Japanese paper glued together with persimmon tannin. Designs were created by cutting out the pattern, through which dye was applied on to the fabric. This method was frequently used for dyeing samurai clothes in the Edo period. The adoption of this technique resulted in *itome gata*, followed by *yuzen* (see Figure 8.9). *Kata itome* is a combination of techniques, in which two or more stencils are overlaid to produce more intricate designs. The *kata itome yuzen* process (a combination of stencil, starch paste and dyeing) evolved alongside production systems, as demand increased for the *kosode*. As a result, *yuzen* technology became a highly established and common practice.

In the Meiji period (1868–1912), a research and instruction organisation was established to protect and promote the value of craftwork production in Kyoto. The organisation sent artisans to study abroad and invited professionals from the West to introduce new techniques while also preserving traditions. In 1877 *utsushi nori* was invented – a process that uses dye, mordant and starch. Its importance was that it performed the function of both dyeing and resist-printing. *Yuzen* was put to practical use, with the application of *utsushi nori* and stencils. In 1890 Japan started to import chemical dyes and this, combined with these developed technologies, facilitated mass production. As a result, *yuzen* became affordable to the general public.

This methodology allows intricate and complex designs to be cut on several stencils, through which *iro nori* paste – a mixture of artificial dyes and sweet rice starch – is pushed, or brushed through onto the surface of the fabric (see Figure 8.10). The exact design appears when the stencils are removed. Next, steaming the fabric adds heat and moisture, and this enables the dyes of the *iro nori* to transfer on to the fabric. In cooperation with a business promotion policy by Kyoto Prefecture, this technique continued to develop

and contributed to the establishment and reconstruction of *Kyo-yuzen*.

### New technology after *kata yuzen*

From the Meiji to Showa period, many new techniques from the West were introduced. This included technology developed in England that allowed for six-colour printing (Adam Parkinson's 1785 improvement to Thomas Bell's roller printing device, which achieved printing of up to six colours on to calico) and also the silk-screen process. The silk-screen process did not require the same standard of skill as that of the *yuzen* artisan and designs could be as wide as the stencil itself, resulting in a greater area of printing in a single application. The process lent itself to the production of low-price products and products other than kimonos.

In roller-printing technology, the design is engraved on to a copper plate roll, and *nassen nori* (reactive dye) is applied along the engraved plate and then printed (see Figure 8.12). This system was perfect for printing fabric for kimonos that required repeat patterns.

The Showa period (1926–89) was one of rapid economic growth in Japan and *Kyo-yuzen* production peaked in 1976. However, a rapid decline followed, as the popularity of Western trends and fashions in clothing began to dominate Japanese culture. As a consequence, the number of *Kyo-yuzen* artisans declined. From 2000 inkjet print technology was exploited, taking advantage of its ability to dye without the requirement for physical patterns and also its Giclée (squirt or spray) technology of blowing fine particles of ink on to fabric (and other substrates). Since inkjet technology offers a more economical alternative to conventional *yuzen*, it is a production method that now dominates the contemporary kimono market.

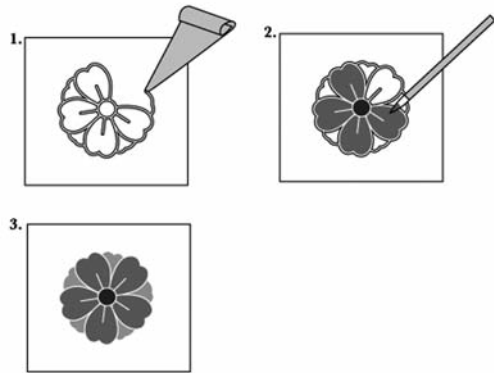
However, until the advent of inkjet printing technology, the *yuzen* technique remained the most refined method of printing on fabric. For example, the colour depth attainable in the silk-screen process is inferior to *yuzen*, and the completed design often lacks the sharpness of the outlines yielded through *yuzen* techniques.



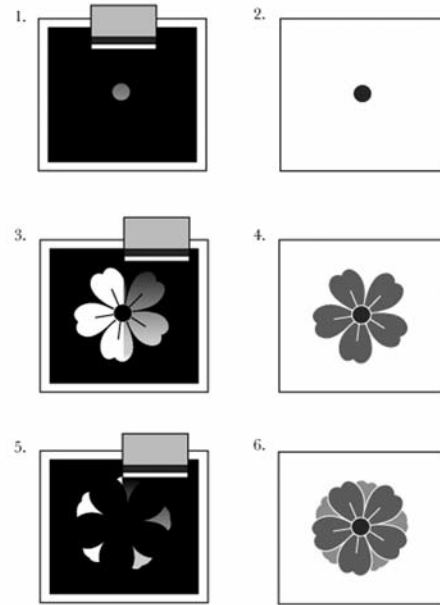
Figure 8.9 *Itome gata yuzen*: The outline of the base drawing is pasted on, using gum starch through a *katagami* stencil; it is the starch medium that is pasted on to the cloth.



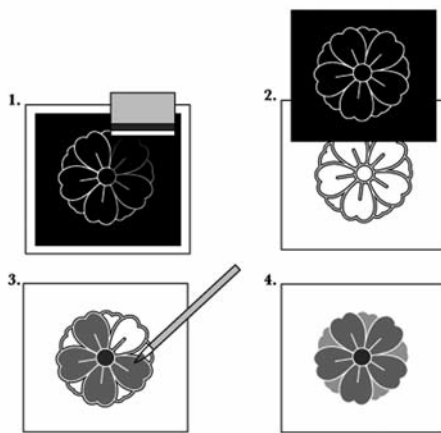
Figure 8.10 *Kata yuzen*: *iro nori* paste is brushed through the stencil on to the fabric



*Tegaki yuzen*: The outline of the base drawing is overdrawn with starch called *itome nori* – piped lines of starch. Dye is then applied within these lines.



*Kata yuzen*: The outline of the base drawing is pasted with starch using a stencil called *iro nori*. The stencil is then removed. The same work is repeated by using other stencils and other colours.



*Itome gata yuzen*: The outline of the base drawing is pasted with starch, using a stencil called *itome gata*. The stencil is then removed. A continuous pattern is produced by repeating the stencil process. The dye is applied within the designs, and different coloured dyes can be applied.

Figure 8.11 The art of *Yuzen* – the different effects achieved through a variety of techniques and processes.

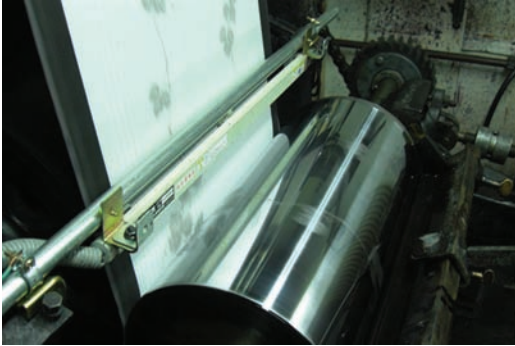


Figure 8.12 A roll-printing machine.

In addition, the roll-printing machine can print no more than 12 colours – it is, therefore, not possible to utilise large numbers of colours, or print connected designs, over seams. These new techniques cannot express the richness and complexity of designs to the same standard as *yuzen*; simply put, the *yuzen* technique produces a product of superior quality.

The use of inkjet printing in kimono production is the most radical change to occur in the field for centuries. Since 2000 it has become established as the alternative method of production to the *yuzen* technique (see Figure 8.13). Inkjet technology allows for an infinitely greater range of rich colour, expression and gesture than *yuzen*. It can dye more splendid and intricate designs, and can easily apply colour gradation effects. It has brought both efficacy and value to kimono production.

The rise of inkjet technology has also had a social impact on *yuzen* production. The process of *tegaki yuzen* (or *yuzen*) is based on a strict division of labour. The division of labour proceeded in tandem with industrial expansion, and contributed to a highly developed production technique. However, in the period of industrial decline, lower efficiency and high costs became factors, causing exhaustion. A boom in the price of kimonos started with rapid economic growth in the 1970s: prices for kimonos tripled from 1971 to 1981. Its growth equated to nearly ¥2 trillion, as production volume expanded and unit prices grew. But the revenue declined to ¥342 billion in 2009 (see Figure 8.14).

The production of *yuzen* fabric for kimonos decreased from its peak of 16.52 million pieces in 1971 to 850,000 pieces in 2003 (see Figure 8.15), and dropped even more thereafter. Due to this decline, both manufacturers and distributors have closed, are closing, or are facing bankruptcy (see Figure 8.16).

Figure 8.14 The kimono market, 1971–2001 and 2004–9, showing the continued decline in the twenty-first century.

In addition, the number of kimono manufacturers declined sharply between 1987 and 2004. The ageing (and demise) of the last generation of artisans, combined with a decrease in new artisans entering the industry, has had a detrimental impact. The problem is not only that fewer people want to become artisans, but also the length of the training.

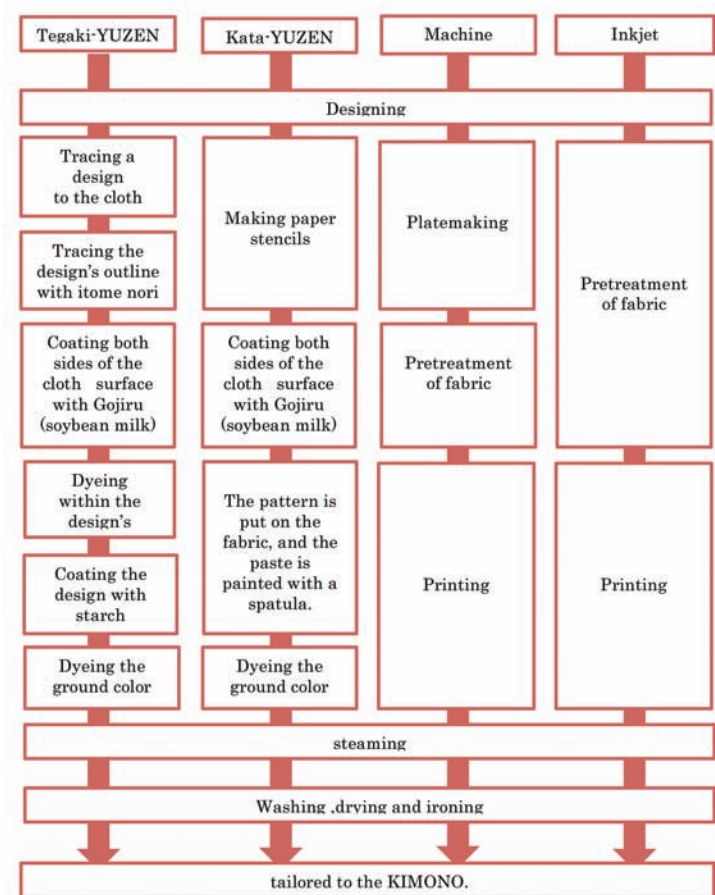


Figure 8.13 Production process according to production method.



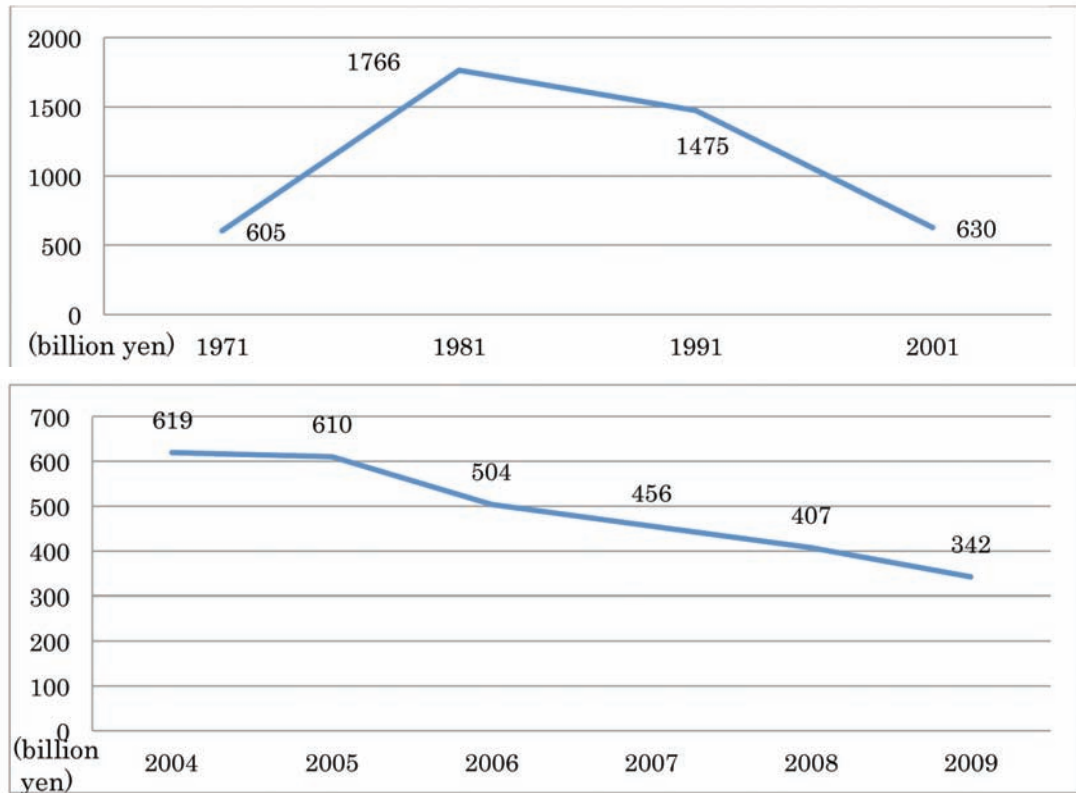


Figure 8.14 The kimono market, 1971–2001 and 2004–9, showing the continued decline in the twenty-first century. Yano Research Institute

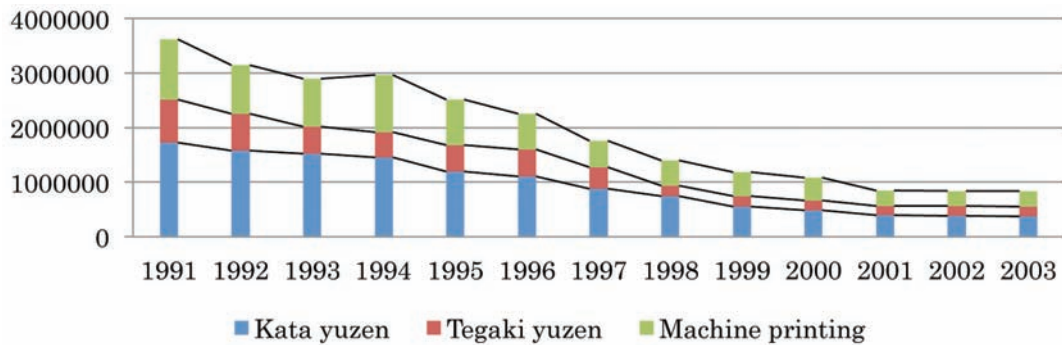


Figure 8.15 The production of yuzen for kimonos. Kyo-yuzen Kyoudou Kumiai

It takes 10 years of intense training to become a fully fledged artisan and during this period apprentices receive extremely low wages. Furthermore, once an apprentice has achieved the status of artisan, there is no guarantee of securing enough work, because of the current decline in demand for kimonos.

The distribution system for kimonos has also had a negative effect on artisans. As shown in Figure 8.17, this distribution system

	Manufacturing enterprises	Employees
1987	About 3320	About 25100
2001	About 1042	About 8000
2004	About 1300	About 5600

Figure 8.16 *Yuzen* manufacturing enterprises and employees, 1987–2004 (approximate numbers). Kyo-yuzen Kyoudou Kumiai

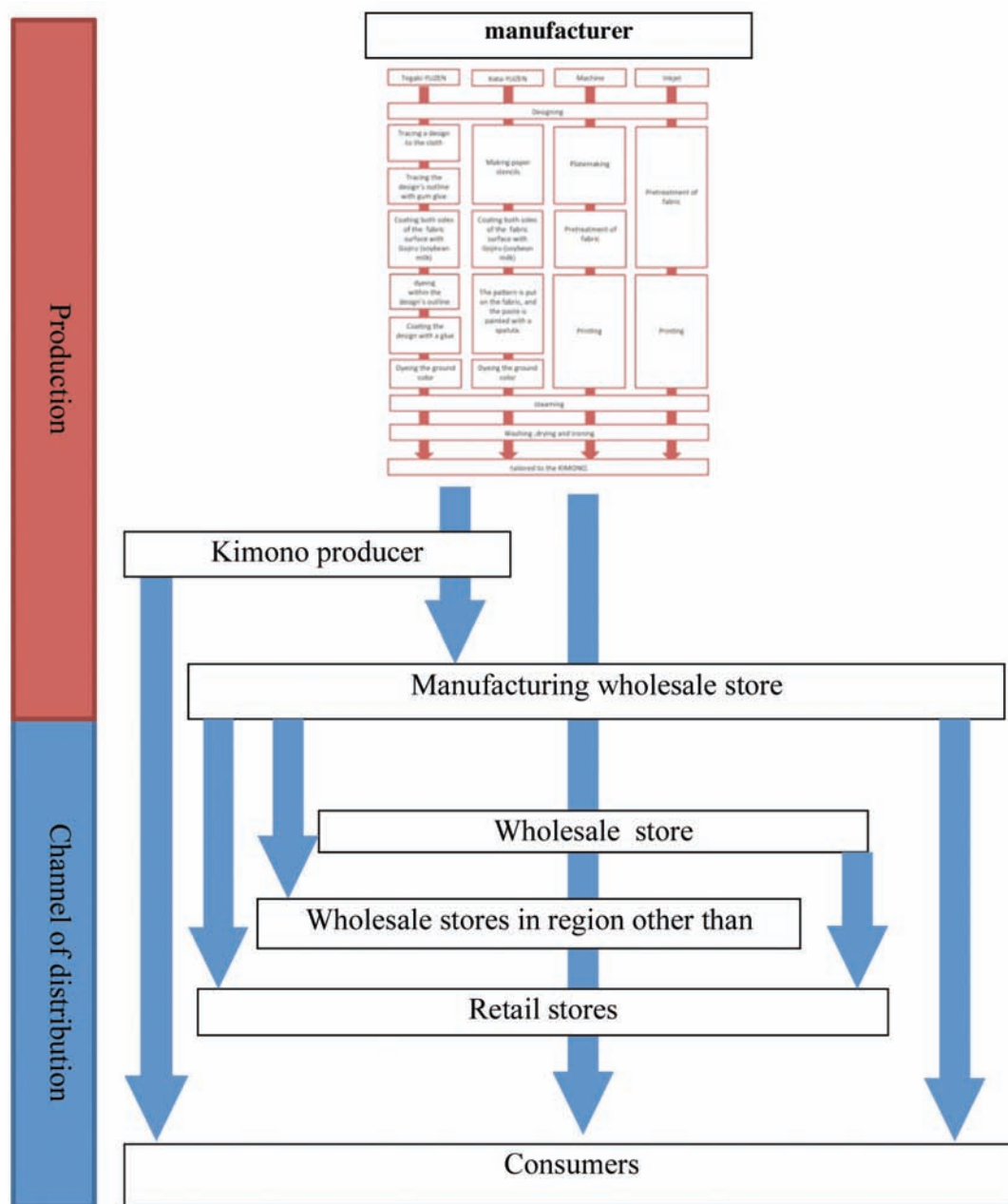


Figure 8.17 The distribution system for the kimono.

is very complicated and involves many commissioning agents. It consists of roughly three kinds of business categories: manufacture, wholesale and retail. With kimono demand falling, the kimono business has been trying to survive by cutting manufacturing costs. As a result, while artisans are expected to produce kimonos of ever higher quality, their wages have declined.

Management is finding that it is simply not financially viable to train new artisans. If there are no artisans, not only *Kyo-yuzen* but also the kimono culture itself is in danger of extinction. This is why inkjet technology has been widely accepted – as a means to facilitate cheaper production while retaining the culture of the kimono in Japan.

It is true, however, that new problems are emerging as the inkjet becomes a more common tool. First, the inkjet technique is challenging the traditional *yuzen* artisans. Because inkjet technology is superior to *yuzen* in terms of cost and speed, traditional *yuzen* production is vulnerable to price competition, which has resulted in artisans continually striving to improve their cost efficiency. Of course, economic factors that force artisans to accept impossible demands also existed prior to the adoption of inkjet technology. That is why the unique skill and technique of the traditional artisans have long been acknowledged and valued in the marketplace, even though the market is becoming dominated by kimonos produced using inkjet technology.

The biggest problem is in kimono design, which has deteriorated significantly. Why has design quality deteriorated? Is it because computer-based design allows anyone to design, which has led to a flood of designs that ignore the established rules of kimono? Certainly, computers do enable anyone, with even the most basic of skills, to design, whether they have knowledge of the history of the kimono and its production or not. Conventionally, kimonos were manufactured through a division of labour. Each worker had, and maintained, a high level of individual expertise. In contrast, inkjet printing can combine several processes of *yuzen*. Unfortunately many inkjet designers possess little knowledge about kimonos and this lack of knowledge is often apparent in the design – and can generally be discerned by consumers.

In the future, inkjet will play a significant role in *yuzen* and the tradition of Japan's kimono culture. Therefore, the fundamental question is: how does the current generation combine the inherited traditional techniques with contemporary technology without ending up with superficial designs?

### My own practice

In my practice I remain acutely aware of my heritage of kimono culture: its techniques and production methods. I believe that I am

pursuing a strategy that will facilitate the handing on of both traditional culture and contemporary techniques. What follows is an outline of the methodology I use for inkjet printing in my kimono design practice.

The production environment consists of:

operating systems: Microsoft  
Windows and Apple Macintosh;  
software: Adobe Photoshop;  
printers: Mimaki TX200 and  
Epson PM-10000.

The production steps are outlined in Figures 8.18, 8.19 and 8.20.

In the production process I pay great attention to incorporating key elements of traditional design while taking into account the characteristics of inkjet. Since inkjet printing sprays evenly on to fabric, it can tend to be impersonal and plain, which can produce a bland kimono. Conversely, *tegaki yuzen* (or *yuzen*) have high degrees of ink penetration. The control of a brush, by hand, can create even minute gradation. To recreate this quality of gradation through inkjet printing, it is necessary to include it in the design intentionally. For example, a pool of dyes on the edge of a design generates unique colour bleeding. Reproducing such bleeding makes it possible, therefore, to recreate these traditional effects in inkjet printing.

In addition, I emphasise traditional techniques, such as the use of traditional *yuzen* patterns (see Figure 8.21). *Yuzen* patterns contain a balance in their composition that flatters the female kimono wearer. This is the reason why *yuzen* patterns were inherited from the Edo period through to present times. Ignoring the inherited rules of kimono design will produce designs that lack traditional sensitivity. Of course, traditional and modern sensitivities are mutually exclusive in some aspects, which is why maintaining a balance between traditional and modern sensitivities is crucial. Not until the modern sensitivity has acknowledged the traditional can this accumulated knowledge of kimono design be passed on to the next generation.

However, it is difficult to know whether the balance between the old and the new is

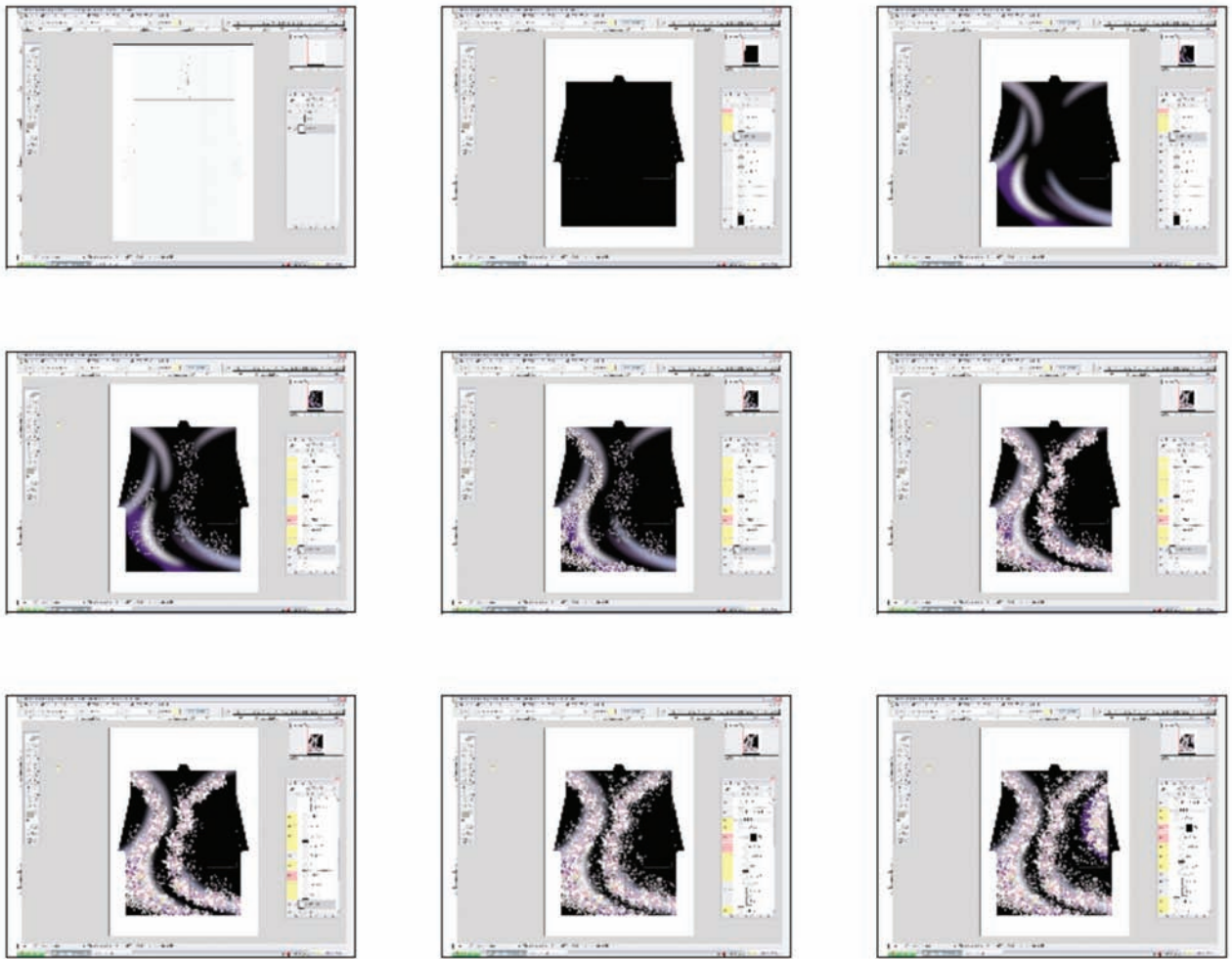


Fig 8.18 The design is created, using Adobe Photoshop. The size of the data when designing is equal to the actual size of the kimono, which is 164 × 189 cm.

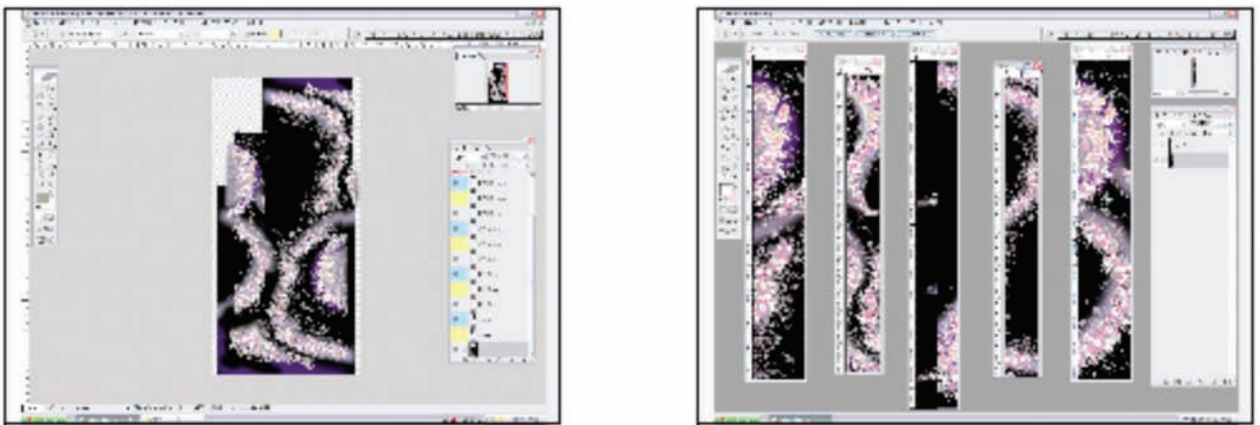


Figure 8.19 The complete design is converted into data that is suitable for printing. The data is divided into five sets of printing data.



Figure 8.20 The five sets of printing data are printed on to a piece of cloth. The cloth of the kimono is generally silk (but can be other materials). The length of a piece of cloth is between 13 and 17 metres, according to the type of kimono. Originally inkjet printers used acidic dyes, but today reactive dyes are most commonly used (the Mimaki TX200 printer uses reactive dye, while the Epson PM-10000 uses acidic dye).



Figure 8.21 Kimono designs by Makoto Mori, using computer graphics.  
© Makoto Mori

popular in today's market, since kimono manufacturers do not have much contact with consumers. To address this lack of data, I have been working on a project to find the critical point of balance between traditional and modern sensitivities. Essentially it is a method of ascertaining and recording public reception and responses to designs by producing doll costumes (see Figure 8.22). As the design is held on computer it is flexible – it can be enlarged, or reduced in size, to suit. Thus a kimono design can be used for either a doll or enlarged to fit a human being.

To manufacture a kimono design for a doll that appeals to ardent fans and then sell it online via internet auctions also allows me to gather and evaluate the potential quality of the design, by studying site visitor numbers and responses. My research indicates that 80 per cent of doll purchasers and collectors are women. This market sector is, therefore, an ideal platform for promoting my designs, since it is mainly women who wear kimonos today.

I came to realise through this strategy that it is crucial to narrow the distance between manufacturers and consumers. Because the kimono, in a contemporary context, is considered more as an art object, the range of people that appreciate its value is small.

In essence, only this small, discerning group understands and values the specific techniques of traditional and contemporary artisanship.

Unless we change our attitude to embrace new methods of creation and design, we may allow the tradition of the kimono to fade away altogether, along with many other traditional techniques. Ultimately, our knowledge of this industry might not survive. Therefore, it is time for both artisans and designers to think how they can use and celebrate traditional kimono culture, techniques and knowledge.

### The future of the kimono

Today the kimono market continues to shrink. Although it may be possible for traditional kimonos to survive as artistic and luxury items, for regular use (and wear) it is inkjet printing that may be able develop a traditional kimono culture in a contemporary atmosphere. For example, the potential value of such techniques is not limited to kimono fabric alone. To apply traditional *yuzen* techniques and know-how in new areas, such as interior decoration, will protect the heritage of traditional techniques.

It is important to appreciate that even though products that apply traditional



Figure 8.22 Doll-size kimono designs are an innovative method of researching the market.  
© Makoto Mori

techniques – such as kimonos printed by inkjet – are excellent, such traditions could still become obsolete if they are not valued. Only when it is relevant and alive in the present can tradition exist as it is. For the next generation to inherit culture and tradition, should we not also seek to meet the needs and desires of the contemporary consumer? Being willing to learn from consumers is what is needed, so that traditional culture and techniques can be absorbed into people's everyday lifestyle. In this way, both traditional and new techniques can evolve, be refined and redefined – succeeding in a contemporary context by mirroring modern life.

## Notes

- 1 S. Takata, *Fukushoku no rekishi* (History of clothes) (Tokyo: Chuoukouron-sha, 1995), 149.
- 2 S. Kawakami, *Kuge no Fukushoku* (Court noble's clothes) (Tokyo: Shiko-sha, 1994), 45.
- 3 Takata, *Fukushoku no rekishi*, 148.
- 4 J. Tcuzu, *Daikoukai-zidai sousho* (Age of discovery's library), (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970).
- 5 The design of the *yuzen* is called *yuzen* pattern today. The process was used to dye motifs such as flowers, animals and scenery with various colours.
- 6 Yoshio Igidani (2001) *Kyo-yuzen Suri-zome rekishi to gibo* (Kyo-yuzen suri-zome, history and technique'), (Kyoto: Kyoto yuzen kyodo kumiai, 2001).
- 7 *Itome* means 'thin line-like string'. The principal ingredient of a traditional *itome nori* is a glutinous rice powder, although today gum starch is a main ingredient.
- 8 *Gata* and *kata* mean 'stencil'.

## Further reading

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Information on Makoto Mori's designs is available at:

[www.tocomarimo.com](http://www.tocomarimo.com)  
[www.ian-kimono.com/](http://www.ian-kimono.com/) and <http://fotologue.jp/ian-kimono>