

## 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Seconds lapse before paint hits the canvas – the point at which an arm concludes its arc, the moment when the stick is withdrawn.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.  
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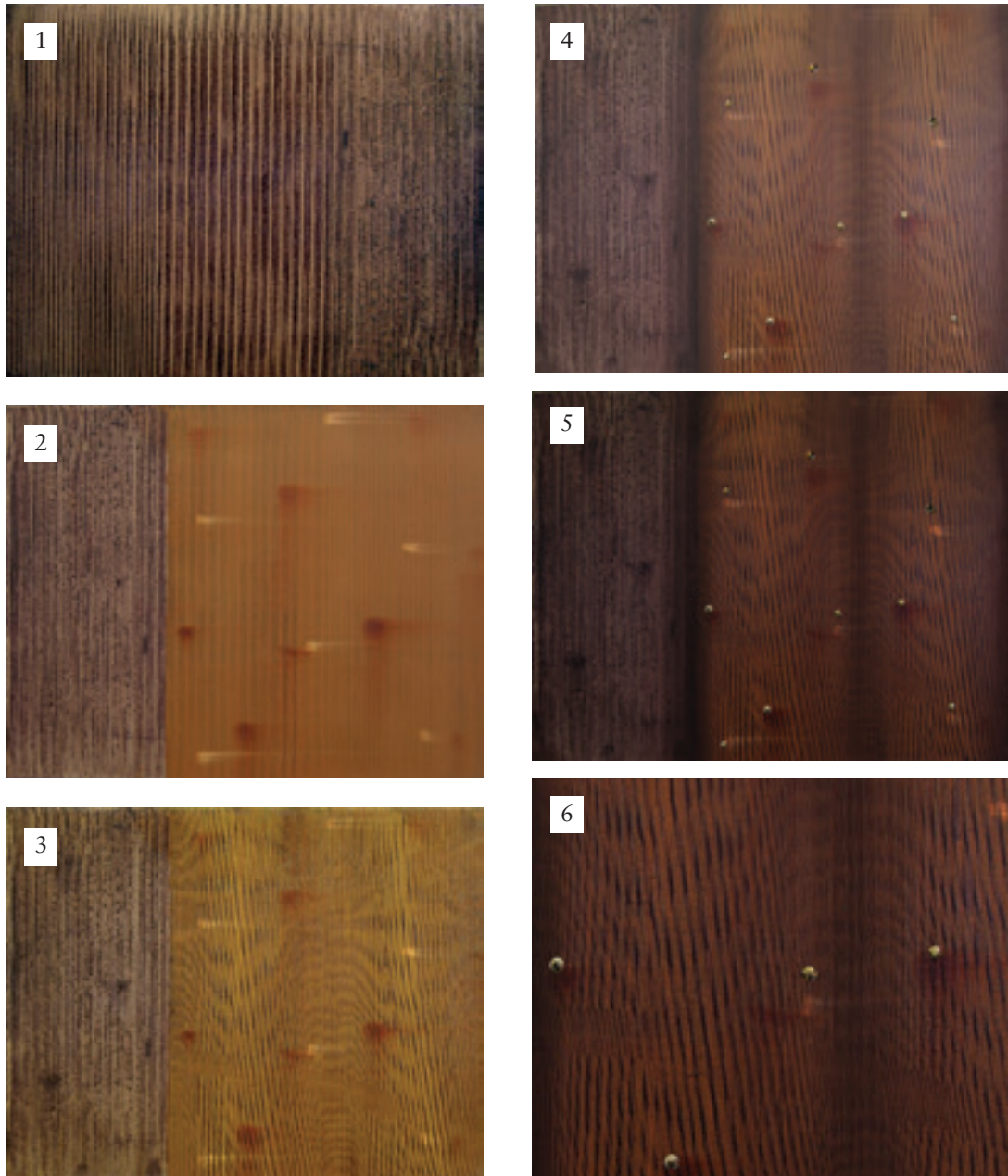


Figure 5.3 Dickens, *Shibusa series – Composition #2*, 2011, 51.5 × 66 cm: sequential development of the painting (left column) 1, 2 and 3, (right column) 4, 5 and detail from the finished work.  
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Whether, ultimately, a dysfunctional brush was used 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, *bade*, ‘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 TREVILLE, © 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.  
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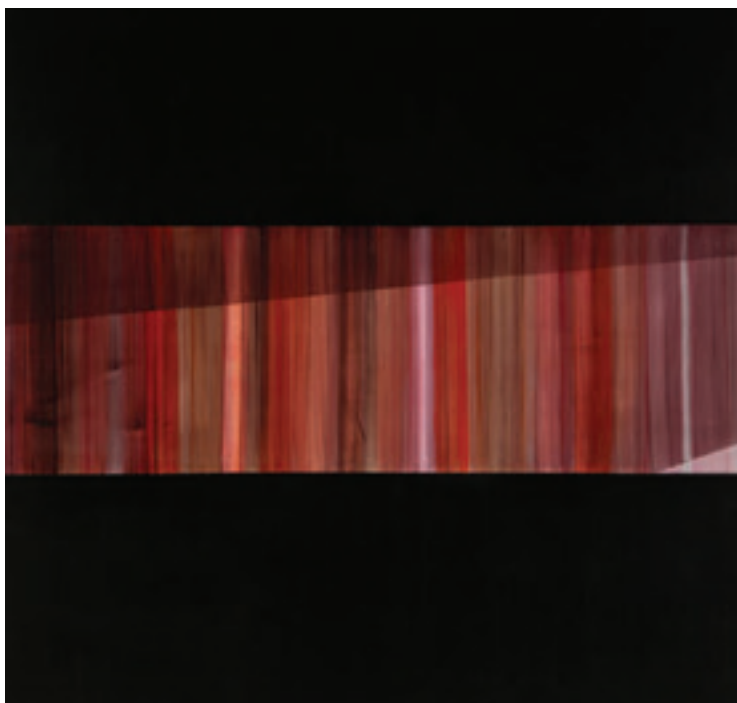


Figure 5.6 Dickens, *Film Forensic* series – *Hikari to Kage (Light and Shadow)*, 2009–10, oil on canvas, 152.5 × 152.5 cm.  
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Figure 5.7 Thompson, *Head in Hand*, 2007–9, oil on panel, 110 × 70 cm.  
© Estelle Thompson

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>

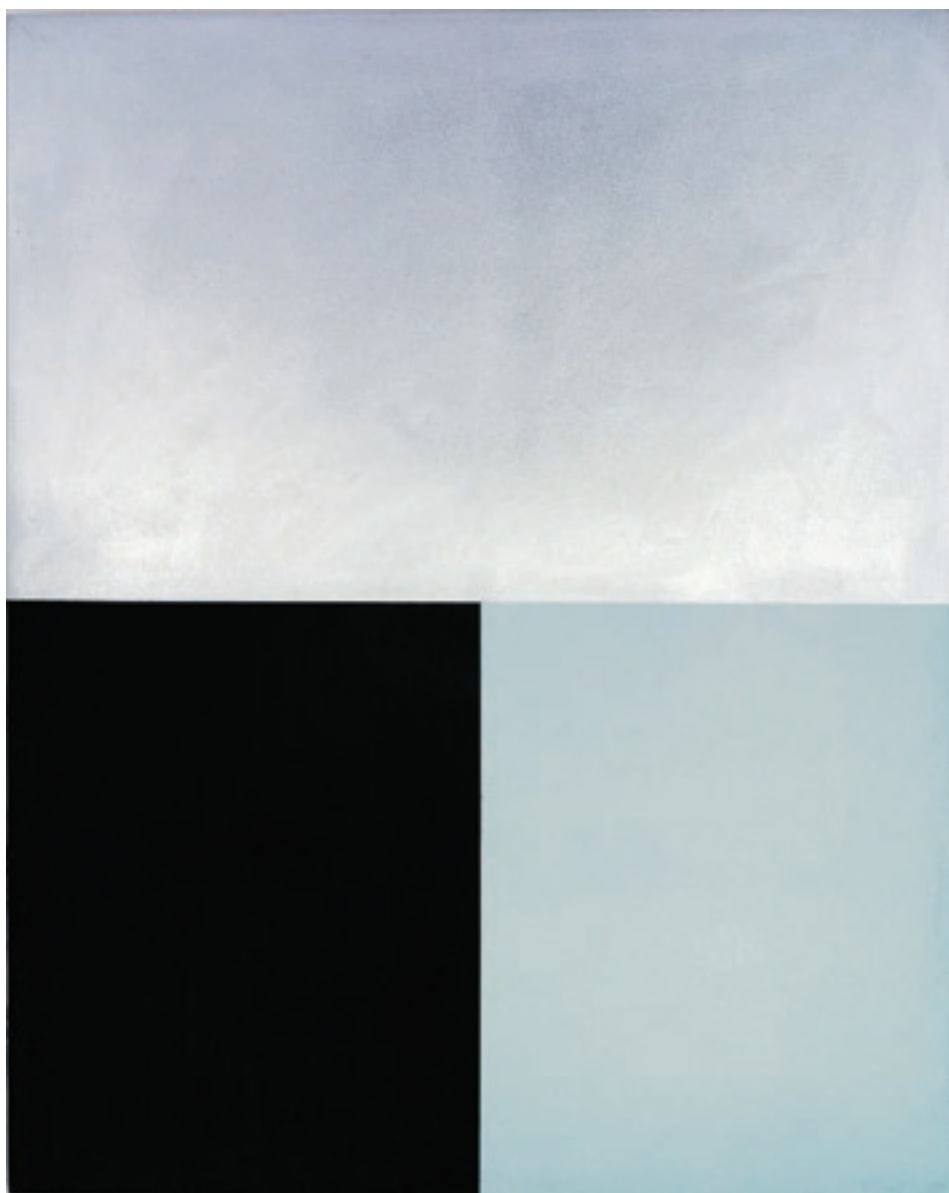


Figure 5.8 Thompson, *Untitled*, 2009, oil on panel, 50 × 40 cm.  
© Estelle Thompson



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.shtml](http://www.nga.gov/feature/pollock/process3qt.shtml)
- 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.