

"Forgetting is rarely complete."

"We cannot measure everything."

[1]

Nostalgia is yearning for the happiness of a former place or time. "I paint the paintings of all the times I lack the language to describe. For one single moment I can recall, I feel a dull sadness for the thousands I have forgotten." [2] George Shaw paints with the nostalgic hopefulness of holding on to a memory. His landscapes are humanless leaving behind a mute witness. I am interested in the idea of landscapes as all seeing and silent and in how they can be a pictorial substitute for non-physical states of emotion. Evoking a dull sadness, the places depicted in Shaw's paintings seem to allude to what is left behind: "an awareness that



[3]

most likely emerged at the very moment we realised we were soon going to leave this place, probably forever." [2] The morbidity of Shaw's paintings shows the reality of nostalgia: what we yearn to return to not necessarily being the same. They evoke the dissatisfaction that our memories can only exist in the past and replace the happiness of a former place with the emptiness of loss. Working with personal memories Shaw creates a process, which moves into the generic when the work is realised. His paintings achieve their own identity and remove Shaw's personal involvement when they are released into the public. The process, from collecting source imagery to painting, is Shaw's own unravelling of these memories, a state of therapy through which he frees his past.

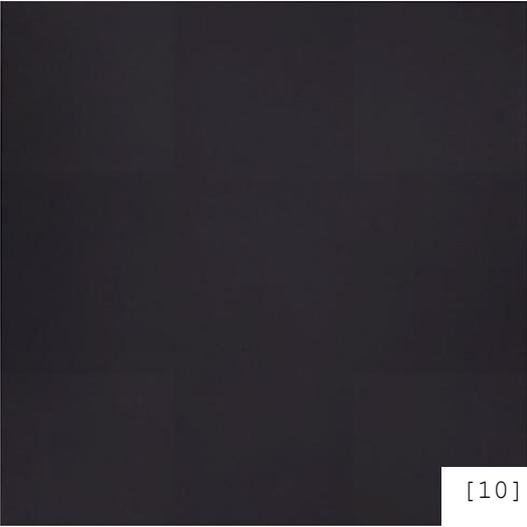
The Northumberland based artist James Hugonin uses the removal that occurs through the physical process of painting, stating there is an "element of detachment which comes from going over surfaces... analogous to meditation." [4] Hugonin is interested in the light of the Northumberland landscape but works within a structured grid, removing the freedom of expressiveness through the process, but creating the "fleeting light in things" [4] when appreciated as a whole.



[5]

John Cage discusses the idea of nothingness in his *Lecture on Nothing*. Suggesting "we possess nothing- *our poetry is now the realisation that we possess nothing-* anything therefore is a delight and thus need not fear its loss- we need not destroy the past: it is gone; at any moment, it might reappear" [6] The lecture in itself seems like the recalling of memories, a disjointed thought process becoming conscious before an audience. The idea that *our poetry is the realisation that we possess nothing* comes into play when thinking about my process as a form of recognising that in some cases we don't have the language to comprehend our state of mind. John Berger stated, "Seeing comes before words... when we 'see' a landscape, we situate ourselves in it." [7] We are content with the familiar, because we understand it. What becomes more curious are the spaces we cannot comprehend. Within painting it is the physicality of the

paint that creates meaning. James Elkin suggests this connection in *What Painting Is*. "Painting is water and stone, and it is also liquid and thought... whatever happens in the furnace is an allegory of what takes place in the alchemists mind or soul." [8] The physical act of painting allows the "sum of ideas and blurry memory" [8] to be actualised. Through creating the abstract, the expressiveness is grasped in the colour and approach to laying paint on the surface. Each mark made communicates the makers mind.



The idea of fearing loss and the promise of what is forgotten reappearing, suggests the idea of *reminiscence*; the remembering again of the forgotten without a gradual process of improvement in the capacity to revive past experiences. I am interested in the idea that forgetting is not absolute, and there is an in-between space, which is unclear, and beyond understanding. Ad Reinhardt proposed creating "the first paintings that could not be misunderstood." [9] Dealing with the oxymoronic he tried to conceive the paradox of "a sign refusing to signify." [9] Therefore creating work which cannot be misunderstood because in fact there is nothing to understand. Simon Callery proposed that he did not want the audience to be able to comprehend his paintings; he was more interested in sense and light that could be perceived. The momentary

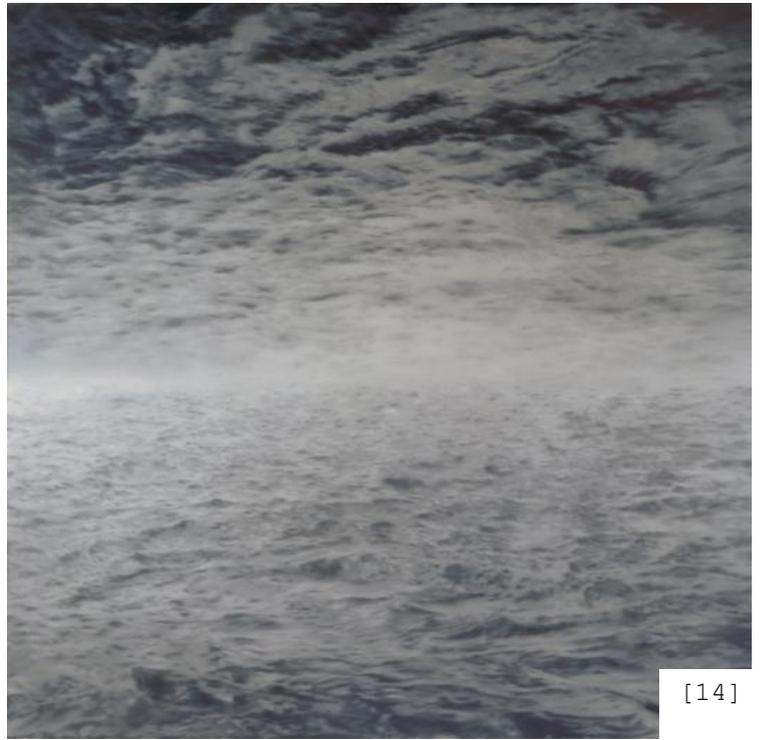
[10] experience in which the viewer attempts to penetrate the work is entirely dependent on the act of looking as a genuine physical response. By taking out the pictorial nature of the image Callery deals with what is not there. "When something becomes so well known as an image it becomes unreal." [11] We become immune to the norm, therefore when these images are abstracted we penetrate the incomprehensible.

Further exploring the idea of the inconceivable, landscapes can allude to the emptiness of the unknown. "Nature, which in all its forms is always against us because it knows no meaning, no pity, no sympathy, because it knows nothing and *is absolutely mindless*: the total antithesis of ourselves, it is inhuman." [13] The way Gerhard Richter describes the qualities of a landscape allows something intangible to become a physical state. Stating that the landscape *is absolutely mindless*, Richter separates landscapes from the people who inhabit them. Therefore when the human aspect of the landscape is removed, there is vastness in what is left behind which allows the viewer to be contemplative. *Seascape (Sea-Sea)* demonstrates Richter's understanding of manipulating what we think we know from our past experiences. By cropping out the sky and inverting the sea the illusion created compromises the viewer's expectations, allowing the unreal to be realised. The point where the two seas merge removes the horizon line and instead blurs together. This abstraction accentuates the vastness of the sea and creates an ungraspable point that can never be reached, metaphorically suggesting depths of the mind or the past and irretrievableness. Richter's appreciation for grey allows him to illustrate nothing, "grey is the epitome of the non statement." [13] The colour allows Richter the space to not know what he is trying to say with his painting and therefore permits the audience to create their own narrative within the work from their own schemas. Richter plays with the roles of audience and artist. "Accustomed to recognising something real in paintings we rightly refuse to consider colour as clarity" [13] Richter pushes the understanding of his paintings through the use of grey



allowing its lack of clarity to signify uncertainty. His abstract paintings leave the space to refer to the confused and incomprehensible, a form of representing the impalpable. From working with collected photographs Richter allows painting to disconnect from the perfect image creating a fractured narrative between the audience and work.

Abstraction allows the openness of an intangible subject matter to be experienced. The poetic process of painting allows personal removal for the maker, momentary experiences of reflection for both audience and artist.



"Life is good, or memory makes it so."

[15]

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