

"Its inconspicuousness makes it suitable for meditation, for illustration, and in that way virtually as an illusion... And like no other colour it is suitable for illustrating 'nothing'."[1]

Grey signifies the absence of colour. Being tertiary, it is composed of primary colours, mixed to the point where clarity is lost. There is a satisfying contradiction in the way grey is connected with absence that interests me. It also teases the viewer with the reality of its makeup and in the way it hints at its component parts. Grey creates a situation which initially reflects simplicity, however, on closer inspection, the layers are revealed. It creates a blur, haze or mist and the anticipation of looking through; a mystical quality in which it both conceals and reveals. Its emptiness forces the viewer to confront what is not there, suggesting a process of removal and forgetting. David Batchelor's *Chromophobia* explains loathing colour as the fear of corruption, suggesting that colour is dangerous and loud. Grey is seen as the opposite to this fear; its achromatic nature means it has no hue or saturation, making it neutral. I disagree with grey being a safe colour, when it holds so much mystery; it is incomprehensible to the viewer because of the lack of anything real. We attempt to understand by relying on what we already know. Within its seemingly dull aesthetic lies its ability to deceive, creating an eerie uncertainty.

One person's perception of grey will never be the same as the next, which is always subject to what has gone before. How grey is perceived is dependent on how the viewers project their own minds, consuming its emptiness. It is also dependent on the surroundings. The impermanence of light and space constantly change its tone, never making it appear the same. The colour is fleeting, captured in a moment and quickly dispersed in time and place.

Painting with grey allows interpretation to be open, saying nothing whilst alluding to everything. It does not project, but absorbs, due to its penetrable surface. This penetrating quality allows the space the painting inhabits to lead somewhere else, to direct the mind in a transcendental way. Grey should not be understood. It is the lack of clarity which creates the feeling of uncertainty. Connecting with the senses we are compelled to rely on what we feel instead of what we know. The neutral nature of grey allows other aspects of the liquid medium to become important, relying on surface and the materiality of the paint to encompass meaning.

"To lose yourself: a voluptuous surrender... lost to the world, utterly immersed in what is present so that its surroundings fade away... to be lost is to be fully present and to be fully present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery."[2]

With the absence of colour comes the opportunity to explore loss, to become and ultimately to lose yourself. Becoming lost in the physical can allow the space to become lost mentally. To lose your mind does not mean misplacing it, but instead becoming immersed in ambiguity. In Rebecca Solnit's *A Field Guide To Getting Lost* she suggests there is a 'voluptuous surrender'[3] in losing yourself, making it a conscious decision. Pleasure is found in the uncertainty of the unknown, a considered act, in which we allow ourselves to be freed from the present-ness of the surrounding world, transcending into an intangible

space. There is a struggle between the mental and the physical being present whilst your mind is elsewhere, allowing a physical sense to trigger the emotional mind. When the real provides dissatisfaction we strive to escape, using the physical process of getting lost to allow removal from the banal present.

"The very materiality of place means that memory is not abandoned to the vagaries of mental processes and is inscribed in the landscape as public memory."[4]

The desire to become lost in a moment relates to the idea of becoming lost in time, somehow lost through nostalgia. The present physically grounds our ability to be nostalgic, "what nostalgia mainly suggests about the present is not that it is catastrophic or frightening, but that it is undistinguished, unexciting, blank." [5] The present is cemented between the illusion of the past and the unknown future. We can be physically present but mentally elsewhere, reminiscent in our unconscious past. I am curious about the qualities of place and the space these moments create. Referring to *Place: A Short Introduction* Tim Cresswell discusses the theme of the metaphysical place, "He has forgotten the qualities of life that made it a 'place' and replaced it in his mind with a landscape." [6] The landscape acts as what is left behind, the lasting impression of a moment. The momentary quality of viewing a painting allows the control to be handed over to the audience. The versatile physical and abstract nature of place allows a slippage between where the audience is mentally and actually when experiencing the paintings. "Space is a more abstract concept than place." [7] The physical place opens up the ability to access a mental space. Acting as a trigger we use the physical as a way of abandoning, leaving the space metaphysically but knowing we have the ability to return when we have found what we require from losing ourselves. Solnit said, "Of course to forget the past is to lose the sense of loss that is also memory of an absent richness and a set of clues to navigate the present by; the art is not one of forgetting but letting go. **And when everything else is gone, you can be rich in loss.**" [8]

Sadness in absence and loss is an important aspect to consider. The qualities of sadness in art could be seen as merely weak and awkward. However, I am interested in sadness when it is innate, when it occurs seemingly without cause because of previously repressed emotions. This does not necessarily mean I am representing personal sadness. Instead, I am interested in discovering an emotion that is not easy to place or explain, forcing it to be evoked in an audience. In creating paintings which openly suggest sadness, there is an uncomfortable moment in which the audience are forced to confront this physical representation of emotion, unearthing repressed feelings. Sadness creates this reaction when it is not easy to understand where the feeling has come from. It seems to evoke a discomfort we try to shy away from. In this way grey acts as denial too, representing something it fundamentally is not. Sadness is an overlooked emotion because of its solitary nature; it can only be expressed individually and therefore inhibits empathy. I am also interested in the conflicting pleasure of sadness. Psychology suggests, "Sadness is a natural feeling which, if unfelt, just stays in our array of unresolved knots. As with other emotions, feel it and it will go away." [9] Pleasure is felt in revelling in sadness but also in relieving it, letting it go. Corruption occurs when the sadness is repressed, a physical representation allows these feelings to surface when the

physical teeters between uncertainty and revealing. In contrast happiness acts as a mundane emotion, common and easy. The pull of sadness seems less common and less open, an intimate emotion we react to alone. The tension and struggle between these two emotions allows the formation of an in-between state, which seems impossible. Finding the balance and feeling normal seems unfeasible, unreal.

The honesty in representing emotion has allowed my paintings to be caught up in thought, representing a process of working towards resolution. Walter Benjamin spoke about the idea of thought, "**Everything Is Thought**. The task is to make a stopover at every one of these many little thoughts. To spend the night in a thought. Once I have done that I know something about it that its originator never dreamed of." [10] I aim to create a place where thought happens, where I become lost in the making. The work has become more about the process than the outcome for me as the artist. I have to give over control to the expressiveness of the medium, which allows the outcome to be relatively unknown. Each time the grey is mixed it takes on a different hue and texture, making it unreliable and unique. The perpetual finality of the process means that there is a point at which I hand over control to the audience. When I am satisfied with a painting I have resolved a conflict in my thought process. I then encourage the same to happen for the audience. The finality of the piece is never ending. Instead, the 'place' of the painting changes, creating dispersing moments, fragmented from an original thought and power is passed on. The transition of thought occurs between artist and audience. My motive is never to shock or provoke, instead I strive for the intensity, to create a moment in which an audience can allow themselves to feel.

As a painter I continuously question what it is to paint. The process of painting, from preparing the surface to the application of paint, creates a nullifying space in which I can become lost in the making, and immerse myself trying to understand the inconceivable. Preparing the surface is always more laborious than painting. This does not make the act of painting less valuable; it is the memory of all that has gone before. A build up of thought occurs in the preparation and each mark made is a release through the liquidity and drag of the paint.

Abstract painting recognises the futility of trying to recreate the physical world and so we strive to represent something that is elusive. The language of painting allows it to say what can't be put into words, "Seeing comes before words." [11] John Berger discusses the original in *Ways of Seeing*, "Original paintings are silent and still in a sense that information never is, in the original the silence and stillness permeates the actual material, the paint, in which one follows the traces of the painters' immediate gestures." [12] Paintings, which do not depict and therefore do not prescribe, allow the expressiveness of the medium to form the representation. Interacting with the materiality of the marks made, the painter instructs the viewer through the movement and texture of paint.

"Painting has been continued by being continuously corrupted, by being made impure rather than pure, by being made ambiguous, uncertain and unstable and not limiting its own competences. Painting has been kept going by embracing rather than resisting that which might extinguish it." [13]

Purity in painting suggests abiding by traditional techniques to document the world. Removing anything recognisable from paintings, any logical mark or anything that refers to the present, rejects traditional painting as an obsolete process. Representing the real in painting is to attempt a greater perfection, how can a perfect copy be made? There is an impossibility in trying to capture moments which are fleeting, trying to make physical the past when it only exists as memory. Therefore, as painting has moved towards a more abstract approach, it has been used to depict what is not there: the intangible. Instead of using paint to depict, I am interrogating its materiality and how the physicality of paint can create meaning. Surface and texture can allude to a grander state beyond reality. Its materiality forces the senses to be heightened and we rely on what we have felt before to try and place feeling. Memory is important in the ambiguous nature of abstract paintings, as we feel compelled to place our reactions somewhere in our conscious past. It is when the unconscious is stirred transcends our usual emotional understanding. We are content with the familiar, but its comprehensible nature means we understand it to the point that it becomes unreal. Not being able to place senses in our schemas, we strive to unravel their origin, creating a fragmented narratives between the visually physical and mental thought processes. John Baldessari asked, "How reductive can you be without losing your audience?"[14] I believe the fragments that exist from the reduction of the physical create new significances in the metaphysical and perhaps new memories.

The concept of loss in time and place seems so intangible that it should not be possible to represent it through the materiality of paint. It is the innateness of unravelling which occurs in the moment an abstract painting is experienced that allows it to be personal and therefore does not have to be explained. We sense in order to feel so that we do not have to understand.

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1728 Words (excluding quotations)