

An abstract painting featuring a rich palette of warm colors like orange, yellow, and red, contrasted with cooler tones of blue, purple, and white. The composition is dominated by thick, expressive brushstrokes that create a sense of movement and depth. Swirling, organic shapes in shades of purple and blue emerge from the darker background, while a bright, glowing area in the upper left suggests a light source. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and emotional intensity.

Ideal Worlds

An investigation into the role fantasy plays in constructing imagery for visual practitioners within the context of contemporary painting.

MYAH FLYNN

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design
Unitec New Zealand, 2010*

DECLARATION

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This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project entitled *Ideal Worlds* is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of Design.

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I confirm that:

This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;

The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies. Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

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TITLE**IDEAL WORLDS**

An investigation into the role fantasy plays in constructing imagery for visual practitioners within the context of contemporary painting.

AIM:

This research aims to investigate how archetypal imagery, as seen in the literature of fantasy and mythology, can inform procedures for constructing contemporary painting within the figurative and abstract elements.

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SECTION ONE : BACKGROUND

1.1: Introduction

The foundation of this practice is formed through an interest in the idea of eroticism and the application/ understanding of tacit knowledge. These concepts are expressed through the physical and emotional processes of making the painting. This project is intended to extend my understanding of the processes and methods by which I operate. This was accomplished through a conceptual and aesthetic interest in the Baroque and Rococo art of the 17th century, which led to a consideration of archetypes, narratives and myths. What eventuated was a series of painting strategies that endeavoured to refine the painting process in order to give the paintings a greater sense of spatiality and a wider emotional variety.



Figure 1. *Intoxication*,
Myah Flynn (2006).
150x250cm acrylic on canvas

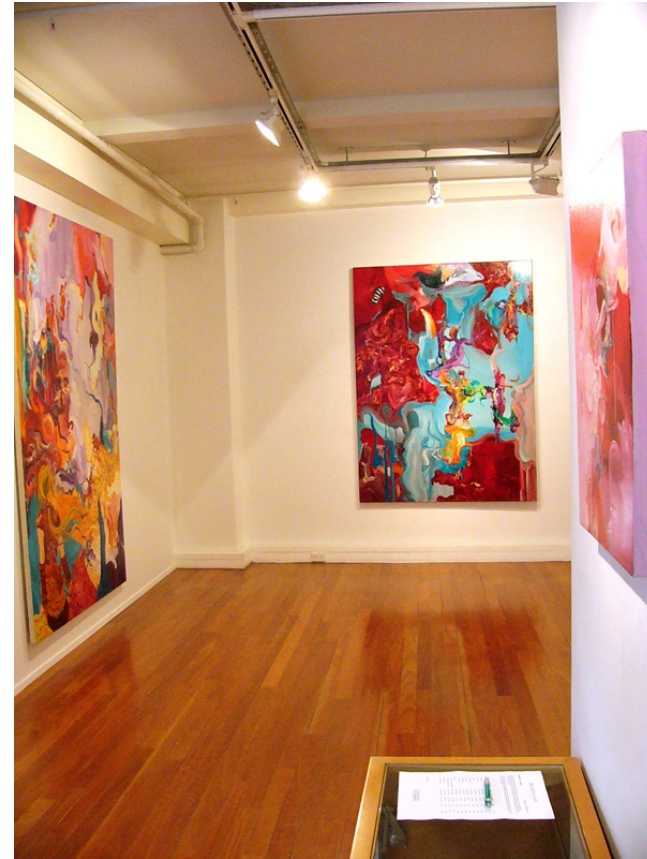


Figure 2. *Cocktail*, Myah Flynn, Exhibition at McPherson Gallery (2007)

SECTION TWO: CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1: 'Wallpaper' and the Baroque

The first series of paintings produced at the outset of this project were in fact a refinement and realisation of a style developed prior to this project. The general structure of these paintings, composed of a relatively flat, 'figure-on-field' composition. This meant the imagery, figurative and abstract, occupied the foreground territory while the background usually consisted of a mostly flat field of colour. The decorative detailing evenly distributed across the image (Figure 1) contributed to an all-over compositional structure.

For purposes of this text, the figurative imagery refers to imagery that takes on a representation form (Figure 3), while the abstract qualities refer to more ambiguous and gestural representations of form (Figure 4).

Figure 3. Figurative Details,
Myah Flynn
Acrylic on canvas



Figure 4. Abstract Details,
Myah Flynn Acrylic on
canvas

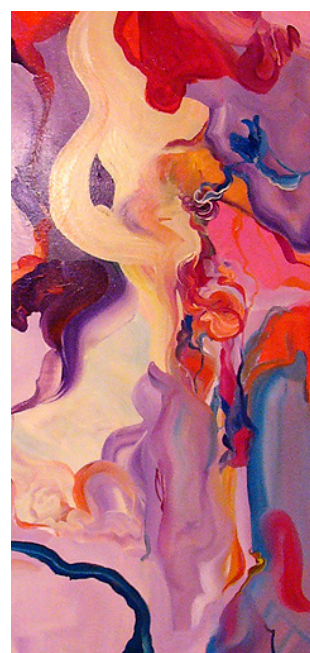




Figure 5. *Arabian Nights*,
Myah Flynn (2006)
200x150cm Acrylic on
canvas



Figure 6. *Heaven Can Wait*, Myah Flynn (2007) 250x150cm
Acrylic on canvas

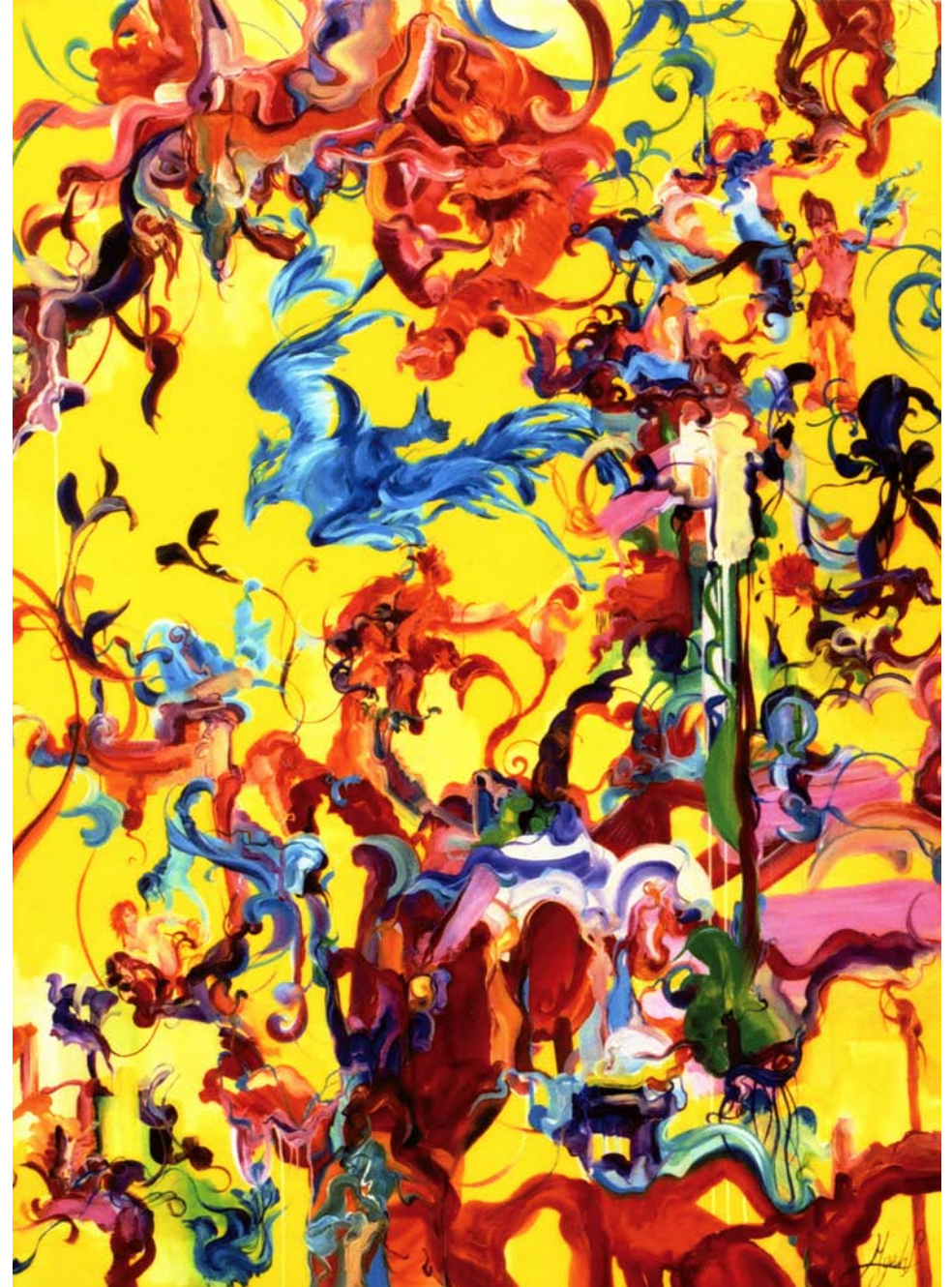


Figure 7. *Felis Deityus*, Myah Flynn (2007) 200x150cm Acrylic on canvas

Figure 8. *Nefarious Weather*, Myah Flynn (2007) 91x61cm Acrylic on canvas

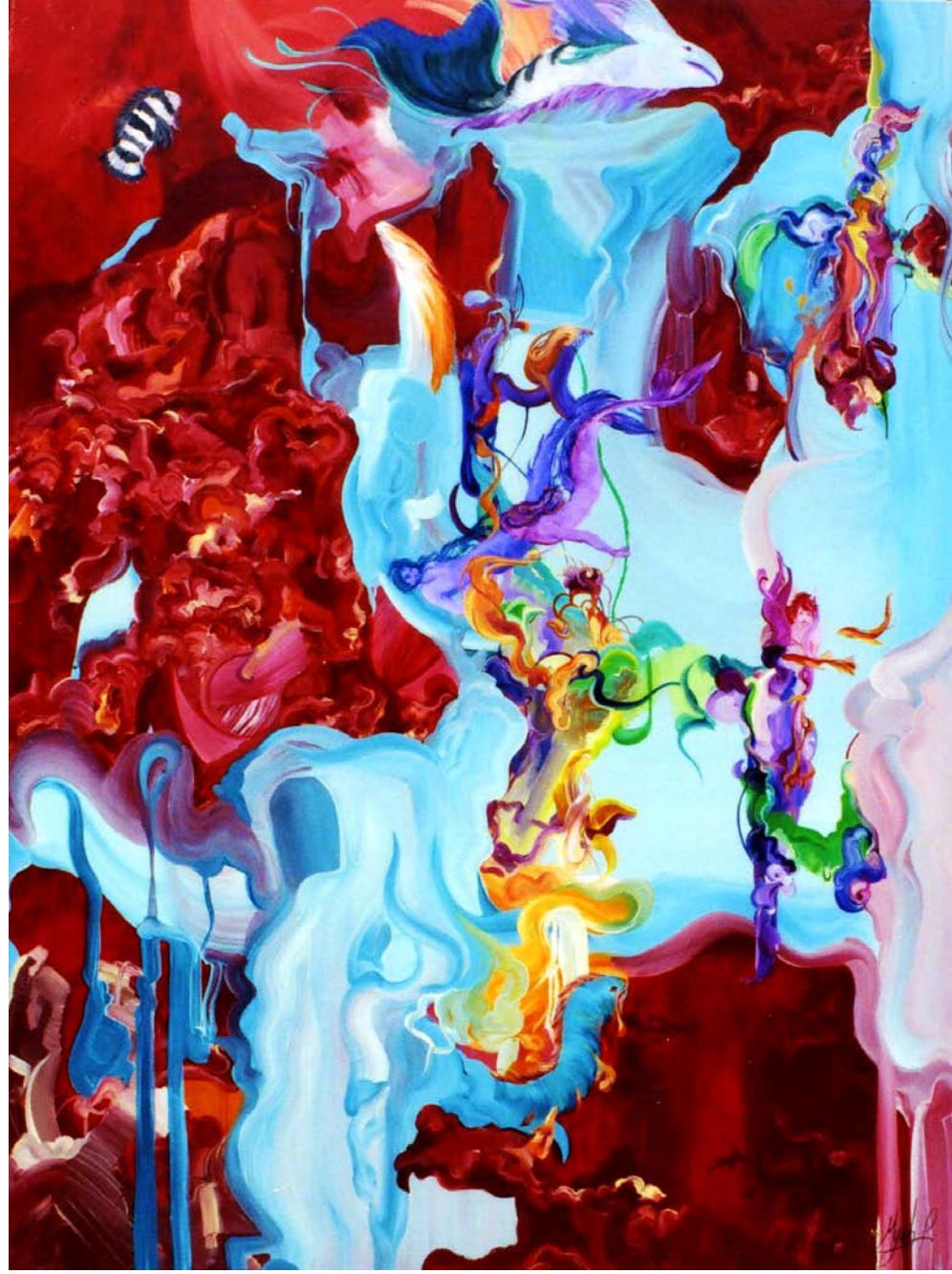


Figure 9. *Kir Royale*, Myah Flynn (2007) 200x150cm Acrylic on canvas

The appearance of this work was likened to Baroque ‘wallpaper’, and the label has since remained (Figure 5-9). The Baroque was a direct influence on the paintings. The historical association of the Baroque movement and emotion and narrative wove its way into how the paintings were constructed.

Figure 10. *The Tiger Hunt*, Peter Paul Rubens (c1616)



The Baroque period is identified by historians as beginning in the early 17th century and lasting through to the early 18th century. It was an aesthetic movement that translated into painting, architecture and music. The emotional and sensuous movement gave the Baroque its distinguishing aesthetic features which translated in all forms of art. Well known for being visually opulent, Baroque was often grandiose and theatrical, visually dominating the space it flourished in.

The Baroque transcended the artificiality of preceding movements like Mannerism. An

example is 17th century Flemish painter, Peter Paul Rubens' *The Tiger Hunt*, displaying the dramatic confrontation of fear and anger between man and animals, reason and passion. (Clark 158)

It spread from Europe to the Middle-East and eventually America. There were regional variations of the Baroque, Dutch Baroque, Ukrainian Baroque, Italian Baroque and Russian Baroque, each identifiable stylistically, but all having in common the one feature of being excessively ornate.

Professor Robert Harbison, noted that the further that the Baroque travelled geographically, the more transmogrified it became, like in a game of Chinese whispers. In talking about contemporary context, Harbison mentions that Baroque as a style has experienced constant referencing and copying and turned up in so many unlikely new guises. (Harbison 192)

This project is grounded both aesthetically and conceptually on the eclectic nature of the Baroque as it existed historically as well as its more contemporary references.

2.2: The Rococo

The decorative imagery within these paintings (Figure 11) is closely related to a late Baroque style that was visually more decadent than the earlier Baroque.

Figure 11. Details of *Felis Deityus*, Myah Flynn (2007)
Acrylic on canvas



These two examples of painting (Figure 13) and sculpture (Figure 12) are what art historians later referred to as the Rococo style.

The Rococo, most prominent around 1730-1765, came from a desire to create objects that were visually pleasing. It rejected regimented order and mere intellect, much like the Baroque, in favour of embracing pure, uninhibited aesthetic pleasure. The Rococo primarily sourced its sensuous S-like curves from nature, giving Rococo visuals an alluring softness that appealed to the viewer's senses.

The Baroque was a grand display of triumphant movement and emotion, the Rococo was an excessive extreme of sinuous curves and elegant motions (Figures 13 to 16).



Figure 12. Jean-Joseph de Saint-Germain, (c.1750)



Figure 13. *The Swing*, Jean-Honore Fragonard (1767)



Figure 14. *The Stolen Shift*,
Fragonard (c.1760)

Two acclaimed painters of the Rococo style were French artists Jean-Honore Fragonard and Francois Boucher. Fragonard often painted idealised romantic scenes of the French aristocracy flirting in the gardens or lovers sprawled over the ruffled duvets of unmade beds in the boudoir. Boucher, much the same, was renowned for his amorous classical themes and eroticised Odalisque portraits. Fragonard and Boucher overtly conveyed associated sexual activity, not with the function of procreation, but with the pursuit of pure hedonistic pleasure.

The aesthetics of their Rococo paintings were laced with intimacies of the boudoir. The imagery existed within close proximity to one another, as if confined to the privacy of a bedroom space. In other cases, figures were often embedded within nature's lavish undergrowth, or engulfed in layers of drapery. It was deeply voyeuristic how the viewer's eye was led through the visual



Figure 15. *Dark Odalisque*, Francois Boucher (1745)

foliage, towards a central attraction – usually a provocative figure.

The way the eye is pulled into the flow of the gentle curves, effortlessly gliding to and fro and sometimes lingering for but a moment, is a pleasing sort of visual sensation – elegant and sensual. The viewer is absorbed into a kind of visual foreplay, by having their eyes led around the object or scene.

Garden Romance, (Figure 17) was produced under the direct influence of the Rococo movement. It was like my very own interpretation of a Fragonard painting absorbed into my eclectic imagination.

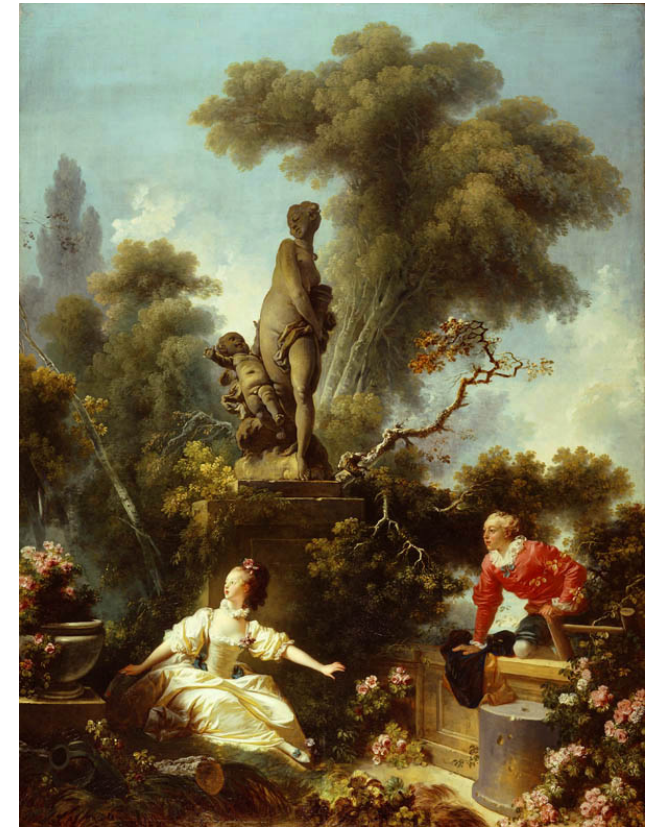


Figure 16. *The Meeting*,
Fragonard (1771-72)



Figure 17. *Garden Romance*,
Myah Flynn (2008) 51x45cm
Acrylic on canvas

2.3: Mythology and Fantasy: A Re-interpretation of the Baroque

These paintings (Figures 18 to 21) included figurative elements that were drawn from Greek mythology, Asian and Middle-Eastern tales in a manner that invoked the thematic aspirations of Baroque and Rococo art; adventures, battles, exotic journeys, intimacies of the boudoir and divine tales of love. Setting them amongst the visceral, womb-like elements of abstraction (Figure 18) distorted the myths, giving them an even more fantastical quality. As if the myths and tales had been uprooted from one location and transplanted into an altogether different context, a private fantasy.

This particular painting, showing only the abstract elements' more ambiguous and gestural representations of form, evokes the concept of a private fantasy in more than one way. It evokes the congested space of a rococo boudoir, where the notion of 'boudoir' itself suggests a private space one might retire to or receive intimate friends in. The literal representation of the womb-like forms was also evocative of cloud-like imagery from painted ceilings, often depicting mythological heavens.

Painting motifs associated with the mythological and fantastical tales of ancient Greece and Asia, like pillars, horses, drapery, etc., comes from a desire to prolong the inevitable ending of these tales. Dr. Rosemary Jackson, author of *Fantastic: Literature of the Subversive*, "desire cannot exist without lack, without a gap between satisfaction sought and satisfaction obtained." (Jackson 75) Fantasy is a literature of desire; compensating for that which lacks or is absent. The repetitive imagery of figurative and abstract swirls seemed to court the 'gap' between desire and fulfilment. This epic exoticness of these tales from Europe and Asia were foreign to a small town New Zealand girl. It was an innocent fascination for distant vistas in the earlier works that served to entertain the mysterious, unusual and unknown. It was through these desires that an ideal world was imagined and a private fantasy for my own personal engagement was created.



Figure 18. *Untitled Abstraction*, Myah Flynn (2008)
130x80cm Acrylic on canvas



Figure 19. *Euphoria*,
Myah Flynn (2008)
90x90cm

Figure 20. *Acropolis*, Myah Flynn (2008) 200x150cm

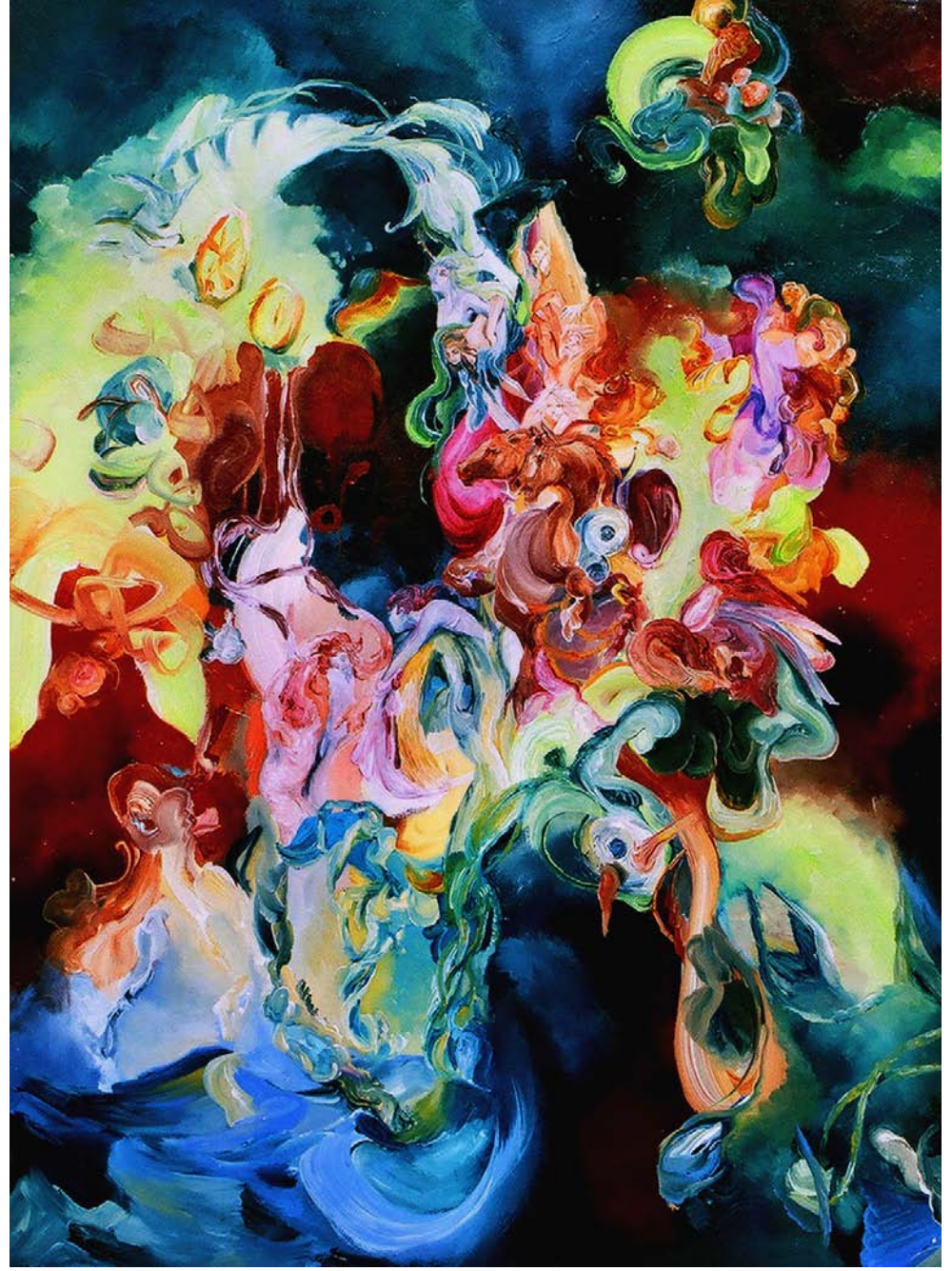


Figure 21. *Necropolis*, Myah Flynn (2008) 120x80cm



Figure 22. *The Death of Sardanapalus*, Eugene Delacroix (c1828)

of false romanticism. For Said “The Orient was almost European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes...” (Said 1) The Europeans were imposing romanticised Western ideals onto foreign countries. Western depictions of the ‘Orient’ were not accurate representations of these foreign countries even though they alluded to it.

The unknown, unfamiliar and mysterious qualities were the exotic’s drawing point. It is a curious adventure of the mind. Within the fantasies, both the male nobility from the East and West appeared effeminate and often with long hair. Their attire was visually excessive, adorning themselves with jewellery, expensive fabrics, lace, frills and other decorative materials (Figures 23-24).

2.4: ‘Orientalism’

‘Orientalism’ was an aesthetic movement that mainly consisted of the imitation and depiction of Eastern cultures, like Asia and the Middle-East, grouped together under a unified label, people of the ‘Orient’. European painters like Eugène Delacroix and Théodore Géricault contributed to the ‘Orientalist’ movement in painting, which was an off-shoot of Bourgeois Realism of the 19th century.

Géricault and Delacroix painted romanticised scenes of harems, exotic clothes and equally exotic jewellery. Both artists also shared a fascination for painting the Arabian horse. However, post-colonial theorist Edward Said, criticised the West for its depictions of ‘Orientalism’ as a Eurocentric prejudice



Figure 24. *The Maharaja Duleep Singh*, Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1854)



Figure 23. *William Thomas Coke, The First Earl of Leicester*, Pompeo Batoni (1744)



Figure 25. *Acropolis*, Myah Flynn (2008) 200x150cm

Because of New Zealand's distance from the rest of the world, the countries of Europe, Asia and the Middle-East carried an exotic charm. Europe's treatment of Asia and the Middle-East within the Orientalist movement was not a part of New Zealand's art tradition. So, to someone whose upbringing could only experience European conventions in a second hand manner, via books and internet sources, the result was a naive interpretation of foreign cultures that fed into a distorted private fantasy.

The painting *Acropolis* for example, blurred the lines between the East and West (Figure 26). It loosely sourced Greek mythology as a narrative influence while the figures (either nude or robed) appeared distinctively Eastern. The way in which imagery was borrowed from the East and West was an eclectic instinct, resourcing and reconfiguring imagery into my own imagination and private fantasy.

Due to the recurrence of certain motifs within the paintings, I began to question the possibility of a deeper set of motivations governing my selections. I could not be the only person charmed by particular imagery. This led to explorations around archetypes due to their positioning within psychoanalytic language, as a universally understood phenomena. Archetypes often manifested themselves in mythology, and it was possible that the fascination for such myths and tales were in some way related.



Figure 26. Details of *Acropolis*, Myah Flynn (2008)

2.5: Archetypes and Narrative

The interest in Baroque iconography, led to a consideration of classical myths and narratives. These universal images can be understood in relation to the archetype – a psychological construct to do with the collective unconscious. Drapery, pillars, horses and figures with long effeminate hair were images I extracted from classical mythology; ancient Greek, Asian or Middle-Eastern (Figure 27).

The archetype is an original model, prototype or idealised form. For Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, archetypes were a universal phenomenon; they embodied unlearned experience embedded within the human unconscious. Jung believed all humans shared universal knowledge and proposed a ‘collective unconscious’, a universal collection of deeper motivations underlying the human behaviour and characterized by archetypes.

Jung claimed : *“I have chosen the term ‘collective unconscious’ because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals — the contents of the “collective unconscious’ are known as archetypes.”* (Jung 3-4)

17th century Baroque sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini captured the drama and emotional essence of archetypal narratives in the *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa*. Theresa experiences religious ecstasy when her deep love of God is expressed through a mystical vision of an angel piercing her heart with a golden arrow. She is an archetype of ecstasy – intense emotional rapture.

Theresa’s euphoria is a mixture of pleasure, death and sensuality. Pierced by the angel’s arrow, she is momentarily suspended in a pure state of unfathomable bliss. Theresa’s religious ecstasy manifests itself through her languid pose set against the deep folds of turbulent drapery. The qualities of this emotional rapture underlined the



Figure 27. Details of pillars, drapery, figures and horses, Myah Flynn



Figure 28. *Ecstasy of St. Theresa*, Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1647-1652)

motivations for making previous series of works, (Figure 17-19). The intention was to make these attributes the central focus of subsequent explorations, a desire to assert the large scale, grandiose decorative schema, obsessive brush marks and repetitive energy of sensuous curves, all completely absorbed in the moment.

Before Jung, there was Sigmund Freud who believed in a type of ‘personal unconscious’ in opposition to Jung’s ‘collective unconscious’. Freud’s ‘personal unconscious’ was also used to understand an individual’s mind and/or behaviour, usually in order to identify trauma that had been pushed back from the conscious mind towards the unconscious. For example, an individual that had once experienced falling off a horse – which may have resulted in some broken bones – could stir up imagery and emotions representing fear for the individual whenever they saw a horse. Freud’s theory differed from Jung’s because it was individual (varied from person to person) and was not a collective experience.

Writer Angela Carter, author of *The Sadeian Woman*, on the other hand believes the notion of the archetype to be false and over simplified. Carter

argues the complexities of ‘real’ men and women are absent from their mythic archetypal representations.

“The nature of the individual is not resolved but is ignored by these archetypes, since the function of the archetype is to diminish the unique ‘I’ in favour of a collective, sexed being which cannot by reason of its very nature, exist as such because an archetype is only an image that has got too big for its boots and bears, at best, a fantasy relation to reality.” (Carter 7)

What I took from Carter, was the realisation that any understanding of an archetype, whether it is individual or collective, had to be acknowledged and understood through a personal subjectivity.



Figure 29. Detail of *Untitled*, Myah Flynn (2008)

Figure 30. Angels' Nocturne, Myah Flynn (2008) 120x100cm



Figure 31. Eden, Myah Flynn (2008) 130x100cm



2.6: Stereotypes and Clichés

In coming to this realisation, I embarked on the series of paintings, (Figures 30 -35). The literal representation of fantastical imagery depicted not so much imagery under the influence of archetypes but rather, imagery that was reminiscent of popular imagination. This included the use of wings, cat ears, butterflies, flying fish and flowers, (Figures 32-33). The oversimplification of the archetypal image caused the paintings to negotiate that fine line between the stereotypical cliché and revelations about basic human instincts.

The fantastical was a bountiful source of imagery. A part of my initial motivations stemmed from an intention to defend the undervalued fantasy genre, and re-evaluate its attributes in the guise of contemporary painting. The fantastical was often dismissed as merely escapist, naïve, irrational and/or the product of madness.

The paintings produced during this stage replaced the large, loose gestural imagery with smaller and tighter forms (Figure 33) that appeared illustrative, as opposed to painterly. The labour intensive floral motifs engulfing the figures were reminiscent of Rococo's own excessive floral decoration. These paintings managed to further the visual congestion already present in my previous series.



Figure 32. Details of wings and cat ears, Myah Flynn

It was as if there was a psychological imperative to indulge an excessive display of figuration before it was possible to move past the representational and into the physical and emotional qualities that imagery could suggest.

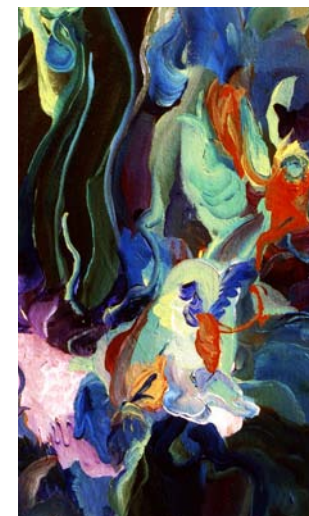


Figure 33. Details of Eden, Myah Flynn

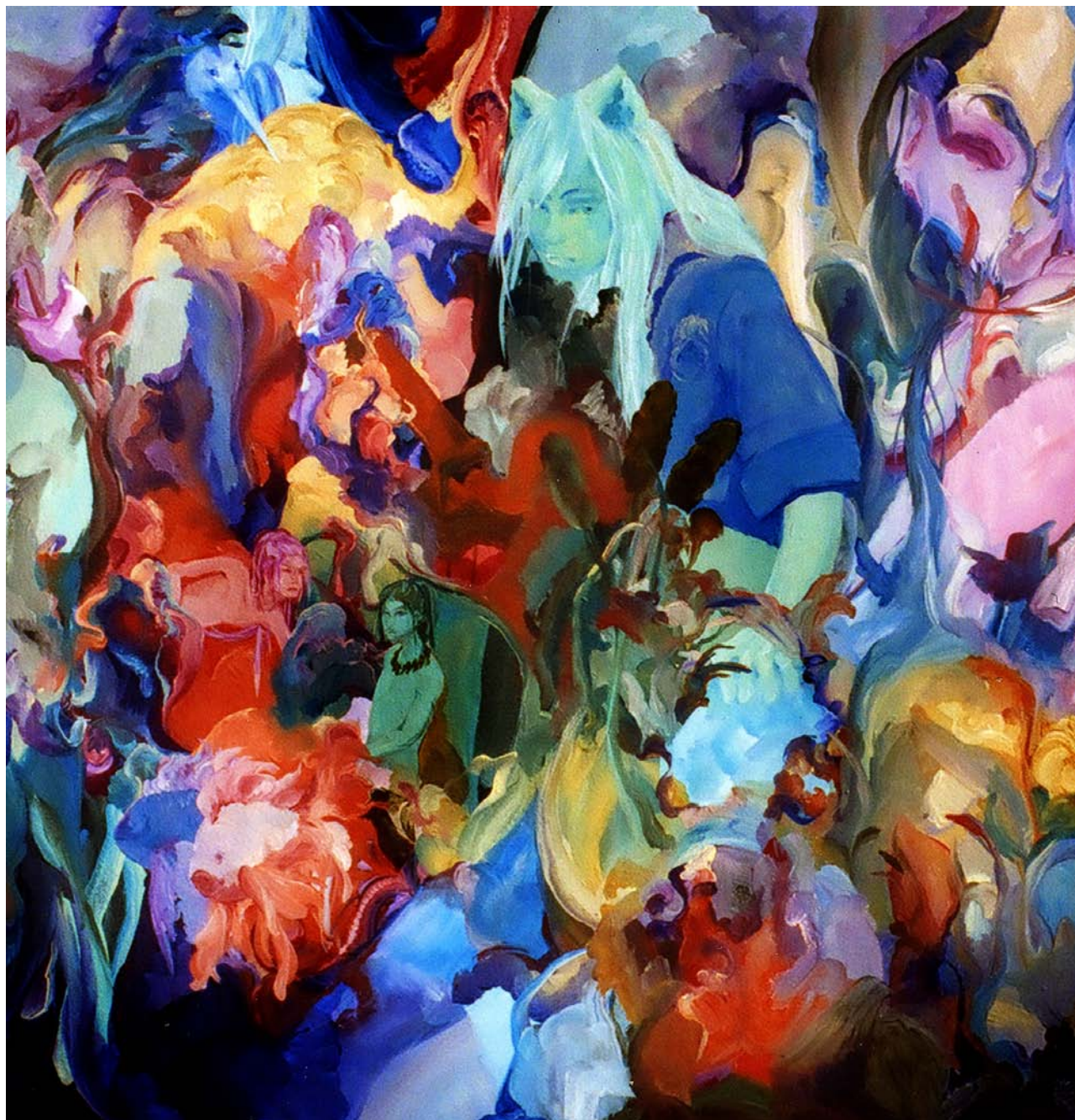
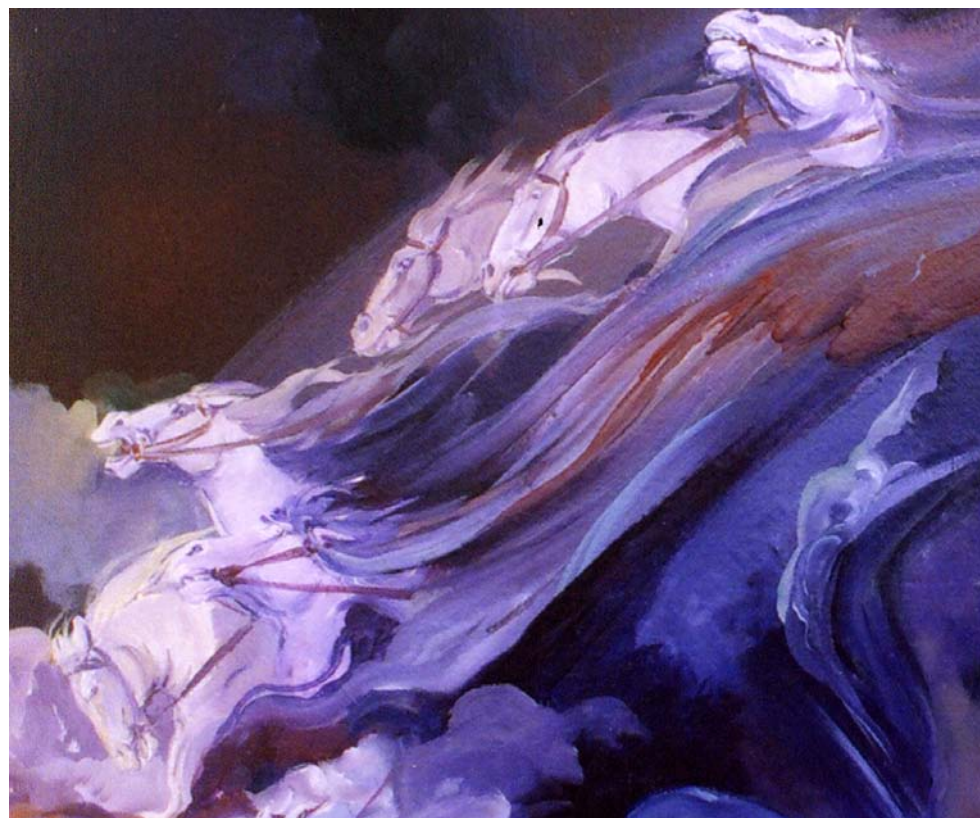


Figure 34. *Reservoir Chronicle*, Myah Flynn (2008) 90x90cm



Figure 35. *Freefall Romance*,
Myah Flynn (2008) 120x91cm

Figure 36. Detail of *Acropolis*, Myah Flynn (2008)



2.7: The Horse as Archetype

The most frequently repeated motif in these earlier paintings was the horse. The horse was a sensuous creature to paint, sexually charged with eroticism as an archetype. The horse became influential towards understanding how the archetypes could be conceived beyond a simple figurative representation.

The horse offers associations beyond the simple image of an animal with four legs. It has been closely linked with our instinctive, primal drives. Jung thought the horse's appearance could signify instincts out of control, as the horse evokes intense feelings of passion instead of cool, collected thought. (Osborne 172)

Writer Tamsin Pickeral takes this idea further by suggesting the horse represents an almost divine experience;

“The horse embodies the magical and the mystical, its path interwoven with the gods and goddesses of ancient times, and it endures as a symbol of something greater, something intangible that stirs the human soul.” (Pickeral 110)

In Delacroix's *The Death of Sardanapalus* (Figure 22), historian's Rose-Marie and Rainer Hagen describe Delacroix's attraction to the horse as an association with uninhibited passion;

“Like other Romantics, he saw in the horse an embodiment of his longings...The horse of the Romantics...was unbridled impetuosity, a rearing beast, all movement, the incarnation of power and passion.” (Hagen and Hagen 384)



Figure 37. *Battle of the Amazons*, Rubens (1617)

Rubens exaggerated the archetypal symbolism of the horse. His grandiose portrayals of epic battles are charged with an overwhelming energy due in part to the presence of the horse (Figure 10 and Figure 37). Powerful, provocative, his horses captured the essence of eroticism – a fusion of instincts, passion, anger and desire. Art historian Kenneth Clark understood the horses' charm, writing,

“No wonder artists have been inspired by horses. The splendid curves of energy – the neck and the rump, united by the passive curve of the belly, and capable of infinite variation, from calm to furious strength – are without question the most satisfying piece of formal relationship in nature...” (Clark 36)

Through viewing Delacroix and Rubens' horses, awareness for a greater emotional life within the paintings began to establish itself without the literal use of the horse motif. My attention instead shifted towards the gestural qualities of the paint, where brush strokes could suggest an equally provocative sensuality (Figure 38).



Figure 38. Detail of *Acropolis*, Myah Flynn

Up until this point, the figurative imagery determined the outcome of the paintings, as they were painted first and the abstract imagery tended to fill in the rest of the painting's surface.

Marie-Louise von Franz, a student of Carl Jung, described it best when she said “an archetypal image is not only a thought pattern; it is also an emotional experience – an emotional experience of an individual” (Franz 10). Franz's description of the archetypal as an emotional experience signified the possibility that the archetype could be embedded in the process of painting. Sensuous swirls, dashing swoops and fluid knots of painterly vigour could express the same energy received from viewing a Rubens' horse. This led to a departure from the literalism of figurative representation within the paintings.

In this way, I was able to depart from my reliance on figurative imagery to determine the paintings' course of action and could begin to reconsider the processes and procedures by which the paintings were constructed.

SECTION THREE: TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENTS

3.1: A Reconsideration of the Processes by Which Imagery Can Be Reconstructed.

Fish Tale (Figure 39), was a painting that I consciously used to understand in a formal sense, the characteristics, processes and procedures of making a painting. It was an exercise to expose the technical qualities of the paint – the composition, scale and brush mark – all of which were implicated in the spatial construction of the painting.

Using fish as the primary form to paint was a way in which to avoid contemplating narrative concepts in favour of simply understanding the physical processes of painting. Fish were also flexible imagery in that the image could be modified and made up along with the rest of the painting, while still retaining an organic quality that mimicked the sensuous Baroque and Rococo aesthetics.

Figure 39. *Fish Tale*, Myah Flynn (2008) 200x150cm



In making *Fish Tale* it was important to consciously observe and note the steps undertaken in the construction of the image as well as identifying the distinctive visual attributes.

- A light on dark colour combination – where the lighter figurative imagery often sat in the foreground against the darker gradient of the background.
- The use of a same scale brush mark to paint the fish, regardless of whether they were large or small scale.
- The fish imagery all existed within a mid-ground dimension. There was no allusion to foreground, mid-ground or background.
- The brush marks were illustrative, governed by a desire to show the figurative representation of fish.
- There was a strong emphasis on the curvaceous ‘S’ shaped movement, in that the imagery was in a constant state of motion.

An analysis of *Fish Tale* revealed this compositional structure of the ‘wallpaper’ style.

Where the paintings were essentially flat, with a figure-on-field arrangement and inclined to appear quite decorative. I wanted instead to create a three-dimensional spatial dynamic, reminiscent of the Baroque bravado that Ruben’s paintings emitted.

Addressing this challenge would involve the re-evaluation of the size and scale of brush marks, the structuring of the composition and the inclusion of a wider variety of images. The combination of these elements is what alludes to the overall spatial reading of the paintings.

3.2: Departure from the Figurative Representation

With the previous figurative paintings, there was no particular method followed in terms of constructing a painting other than the figurative imagery determining the painting’s course of action. The tendency was to paint the entire work in response to the figurative elements, that is, painting the figures first, then filling in the remainder of the painting. By removing the figures in the early stages, I would have to reconfigure the usual approaches for how the painting was constructed. This experience was to identify a series of processes for laying down the structural foundations of the painting, ideally creating more options in the initial stages, instead of just covering the surface area and filling in the background to the figures.

Figure 40. Scorpiis Veneris, Myah Flynn (2009) 150x200cm



These works were examples of having removed the figurative imagery from the process, and were the result of exploring the different material qualities of paint: transparency, opacity and fluidity. An appreciation of these qualities was influential in the processes of building up the background, mid-ground and foreground.



Figure 41. Details of figureless paintings, Myah Flynn (2009)



Figure 42. *Omega Mix*,
Myah Flynn (2009)
130x120cm

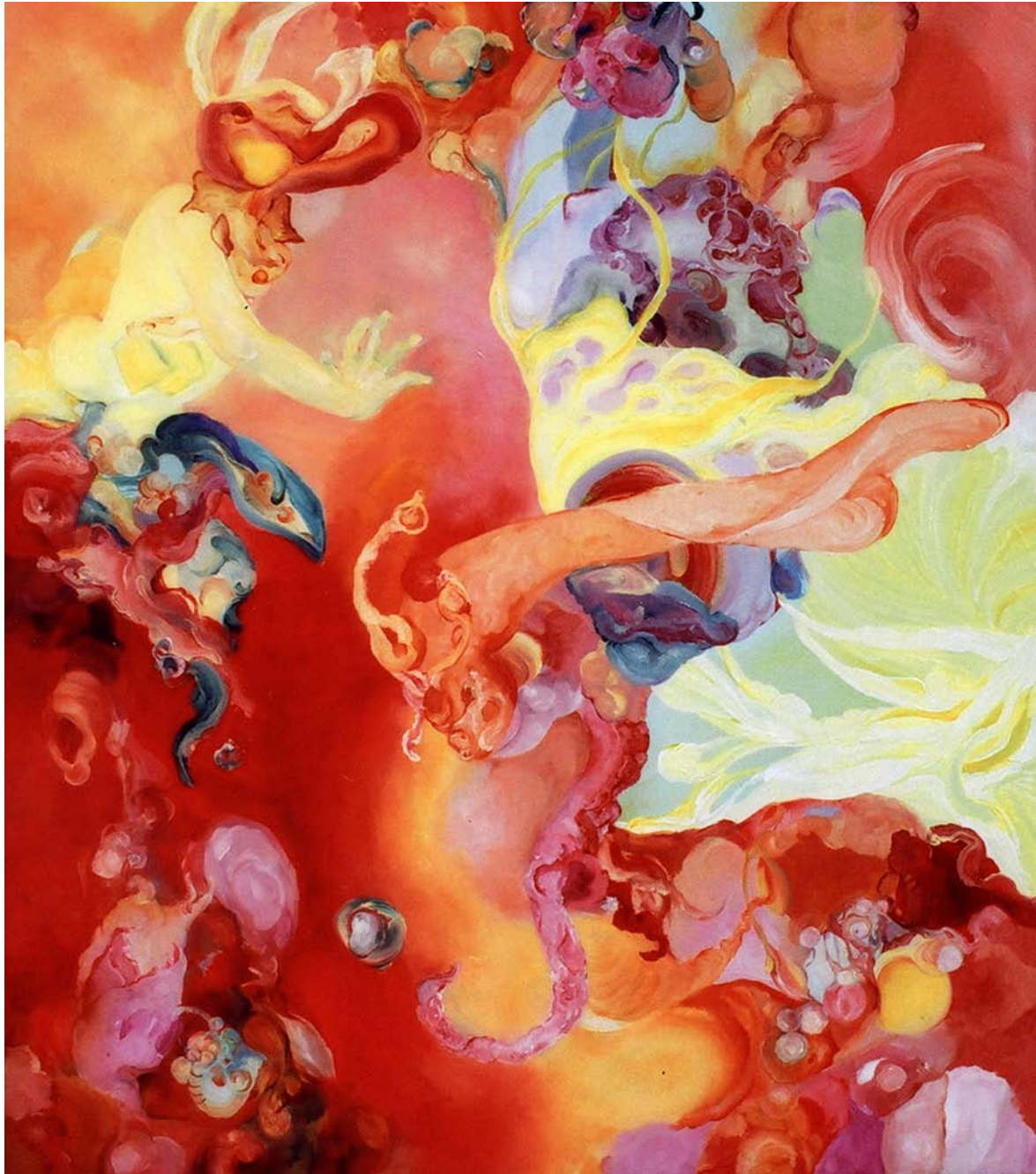


Figure 43. *Wonderland*,
Myah Flynn (2009)
130x120cm



Figure 44. Detail of *Wonderland*, Myah Flynn (2009)

3.3. A Conscious Undertaking to Expand the Visual Repertoire

During the various stages of the project, I would intentionally go about increasing the memory bank of images so as to have more of a visual repertoire to draw from. As part of the reconsideration for constructing the paintings, the process was slowed by having more than one painting on the go at any one time. This resulted in a breeding ground for new imagery as more time was given to the discovery of fresh painting techniques. (Figure 44)

To slow this process, the background, mid-ground and foreground layers were built up together, allowing for the continual experimenting of new techniques and imagery to be repeated across a number of works. Because of the biomorphic qualities of the forms, the imagery could be constructed in different combinations, like a tentacle with an oyster or an oyster with some drapery-like form etc (Figure 45). Within this process, forms began to hybridise and create new imagery.

In this way, I was able to re-create visceral forms from my imagination that were still embedded within the sensual curvature associated with the visual aesthetics of the Baroque and Rococo genre.

This also gave the repetitive forms, repeated (Figure 46) in different paintings, a greater compositional variety and greater confidence in how the forms were configured and composed.

Figure 45. Detail of *Omega Mix*, Myah Flynn (2009)



The other strategy that helped to expand the visual repertoire was to swap the small sized brushes with larger ones. Larger brushes temporarily inhibited the use of decorative detail and the bigger brush marks offered a new appreciation for the raw and ‘unrefined’ appearance of a brush stroke that the tidy little swirls could not. A greater sense of movement and a more tangible physicality associated with the bigger scale enabled a greater sense of confidence. As I became confident with the use of larger brushes, I would build the foundations using bigger brushes and only allow the return of the smaller brushes towards the finishing touches of the painting (Figure 47).

Figure 46. Details of oyster-like forms, some large and some small scale, Myah Flynn (2009)





Figure 47. *Nyxphinea*, Myah Flynn (2009). 130x110cm

SECTION FOUR: DEEPER UNDERSTANDINGS AND REVELATIONS

4.1: *Eroticism Implied Through the Physicality of Paint*

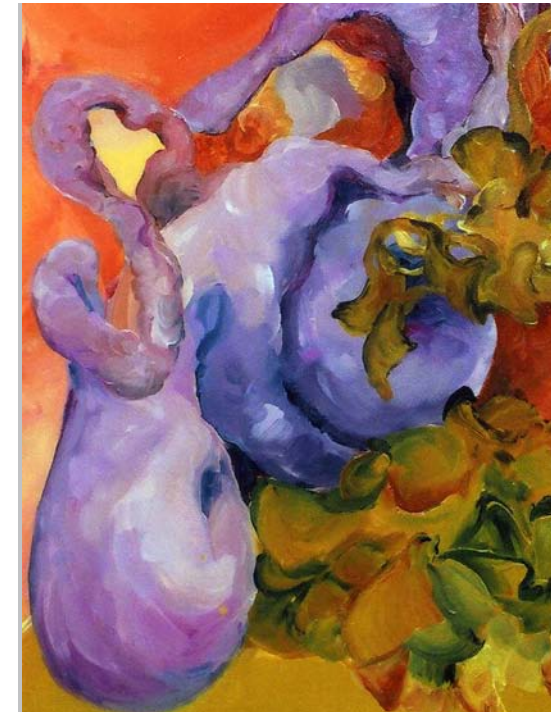
A heightened sense of the liquid, material qualities of paint drew attention to the (eroticised) physicality of painting. The paint's fluid characteristics emphasised the sensual associations of movement and were guided by the sinuous deviations of the wrist. It captured a direct commentary between me and the painting. For example, the way in which the physical processes of manipulating the paint on the canvas surface, expressed an emotional life reminiscent of the eroticised horse archetype. The dramatic gestures, emphasized by bold bright colours, created a spatial dynamism evocative of the horses' powerful display of vitality. In this way, the physical application of paint, expresses a language of its own, catering to and reflecting different emotional responses engaged in the process of making the painting. This also meant the eroticised associations were not dependent on figurative imagery. Instead, the fluid sensuality of the paint's characteristics invoked von Franz's description of the archetype as an emotional experience. In this way, the archetype could become the process.

According to French philosopher, Georges Bataille, "eroticism, unlike simple sexual activity, is a psychological quest independent of the natural goal: reproduction and the desire for children." (Bataille 11) Eroticism is an experience that freed itself from the limitations of moral restrictions and challenges what is conventionally understood as ideal, often expressing itself through the concepts of attraction and repulsion.

In Philippe Sollers' essay *The Roof: Essay in Systematic Reading*, he quotes the Marquis de Sade on a description of eroticism:

"The essence of eroticism is the inextricable association of pleasure and prohibition. In human terms, prohibition never appears without the disclosure of pleasure, nor does pleasure ever appear without the feeling of prohibition." (Sollers 87)

Eroticism as extreme contradiction offered new and exciting possibilities for the work, such as attraction and repulsion, which could address the practical and conceptual concerns of the paintings.



4.2: Transgression in Imagery

What were once diminutive provocative figures had now become large bulbous and smouldering masses of globular paint in a raw and unrefined state.

There were primarily two artists that were influential during this process, American painter George Condo and German painter Georg Baselitz. Both artists' brush strokes had a somewhat seductively aggressive quality. The physicality of their oil paint was large and bold, a quality I wanted to my own paintings to share. Condo's cartoonish portrait deformations allowed me to recognise that enlarging the biomorphic blobs gave them a sort of figurative presence, without being altogether literal.

Baselitz on the other hand, whose 1960s works were known for their provocative, sexual innuendo helped to challenge my own aesthetic preferences and step outside processes I was too comfortable with executing. There was a 'repulsive' charm to Baselitz's paintings. Bold, vulgar yet exquisitely executed. They encouraged further contemplation without relying on being decorative.

Figure 48. Details of unfinished paintings, Myah Flynn (2009)



Figure 49. *Octopus Vulgaris*,
Myah Flynn (2008) 1.3x1.3m

My own version, *Octopus Vulgaris* (Figure 49) attempted to capture a vulgar yet seductive quality. It was a painting that bridged the archetypal and the erotic. It was an amalgamation of the physical and emotional, the practical and the conceptual, the figurative and the abstract. *Octopus Vulgaris* expressed eroticised archetypal imagery with the most overt associations within the physical sensuality of paint. The twists and turns of intestinal tentacles entwined in a rather orgiastic fashion. It also walked a fine line between death and sensuality, reminding us of our own mortality through exposing that which is internal.

Instead of sourcing primarily romantic figurative imagery,

I sought out imagery that offered a compulsive attraction. This included imagery like eyeballs, tentacles, oysters, intestines and diseases (Figure 50). Imagery that is not usually associated with conventional understandings and depictions of beauty. That which has been distinguished as the grotesque, but whose qualities could be just as sinuous as the Baroque and Rococo-esque forms.



Figure 50. Details of intestinal tentacles, Myah Flynn

Surrealist painter James Gleeson wrote “The line between the ugly and the beautiful is, like the equator, an imaginary line.” (Gleeson 41) While floral motifs appear to differ greatly from emaciated intestines, they were fundamentally quite similar in visual characteristic.

Through these paintings the pleasure sensation is found within repetitious rhythmic quality. Sigmund Freud suggested experiences characterised by a rhythmic quality were considered to be an important factor in identifying eroticised stimuli. This was the case with the biomorphic forms (Figures 42-51). They seemed to create a sort of visceral and comforting quality. Their repetitive, entwining characteristics were primarily soft and sensual. Being in close proximity of one another, they emitted a womb-like world of their own. For some reason our mind seems to need or want us to see patterns. Repetition itself is a pattern, and in terms of behaviour, it is one that helps create a sense of spatial familiarity, discouraging feelings of insecurity by creating a routine. The sensual, yet congested, repetition was also orgiastic by nature. The figurative and abstract become hybridised, visually expressing the erotic qualities of paint through its fluid movement and muscular presence.

4.3: Towards a Finish, Over-Thinking the Process of Painting

This project started with issues around visually overworking the paintings (Figures 1-7, 30-34), only to understand that just as you can overwork a painting, you can also over-think a painting. Quite often when trying to consciously achieve an ambition for a painting, be it a greater sense of spatiality or a desire to channel sexually charged imagery, the ambition never seems to truly reach the goal unless one is not trying to achieve it.

Over-thinking and overworking a painting is altogether linked to a conscious awareness. Determining when a painting is complete is a consequence of knowing there is not much more to contribute – nothing ‘new’ in the way of imagery or painterly technique. Hesitation in those final moments however, is the least desirable mindset. One becomes more cautious when approaching completion, like a predator stalking its prey. It is in approaching the final move where I need to know I can make the last decisions calmly and swiftly – like a quick, clean kill.

Designer Paul Renner, who wrote the book *Colour Order and Harmony*, felt that the conscious effort always seemed to appear considered and unnatural – or ‘cheap’ according to Renner (Renner 72). ‘Considered’ makes a painting sound like an equation, like something carefully calculated. The notion of ‘calculations’ brings to the imagination, something stiff and inflexible, quite the opposite of the fluidity that is desired. The overly constructed quality lacks a “special degree of maturity” (Renner) that comes with the more naturally resolved approach, demonstrative of experience.

Applying a final varnish is another device used in order to prevent over working a painting. It is a way of signalling completion. It is also a technique to help the process move on and move beyond the emotional roller-coaster ride. The technical advantage of varnishing, resides in acrylic’s inability to maintain its colour intensity when dried. Acrylic can sometimes appear washed out and dull in different parts of a painting, creating a visually uneven surface of luscious vibrant patches in contrast with washed out dry areas. Using a finishing varnish restores the acrylic colour to the vibrancy of its former freshly squeezed self, unifying the surface with an even-handed moist-like glaze.

Towards the end of a painting, there are however, moments of emotional rapture where moments of anticipation to finish the painting conflict with a desire to prolong the experience. It is an exciting mix of pleasure and pain. Unlike a sense of achievement, it was not reaching the end point that gave a sense of pleasure, but probably more the anticipation right before the end that was addictive. It was frustrating knowing how rare and short-lived the sensation for being completely absorbed would emerge. So I wondered if the experience could be prolonged, or dragged out some way through the process. This is where the real delayed gratification was always a real pleasure for me.

The ambiguous imagery I paint is a deliberate attempt to capture the unfinished moment between this beginning and ending. In the pursuit of pleasure, there is no sense of time or obligation towards function, other than to simply enjoy oneself – an end in itself. It exists for no clear purpose other than to satisfy the enjoyment of doing it. This was probably why I chose to challenge the processes of the maker. For if a lot of developing awareness towards the negotiation of forms and processes of a painting is somewhat internal to its creation – both visually and instinctively – then re-training the processes that govern my preferences towards certain forms, scale of brush marks and sense of spatiality etc may well be the key towards pushing the reconfigured habits deep into the consciousness in order to encourage a more natural and fluid reaction during the process of painting. It is a continuous learning experience; one of which can only become more internally aware.

Figure 51. *Virtuososa*, Myah Flynn (2009) 1.5 x 2m



4.4: Tacit Knowledge and the Physicality of Paint

At this point within the project, I had come to a realisation that a truer understanding of the archetype lay with understanding painting as a process.

This understanding of making paintings is not easily translated into language, most likely because it is an experience – a process that is felt, not spoken. The methods, ambitions and even techniques can be mapped out in a detailed account, but what drives the movement and development from one idea or one brush stroke to the next is not consciously dictated to by a set of explicit instruction. Instead, it is knowledge through action. Through the process of making the paintings, knowledge that has been pushed back beyond the consciousness, autonomously operates without critical effort. This is essentially what Michael Polanyi's tacit knowledge is – the theory of how we know more than we can tell. (Smith)

According to Polanyi:

“Our body is the ultimate instrument of all our external knowledge, whether intellectual or practical. In all our waking moments we are relying on our awareness of contacts of our body with things outside for attending to these things. Our own body is the only thing in the world which we normally never experience as an object, but experience always in terms of the world to which we are attending from our body. It is by making this intelligent use of our body that we feel it to be our body, and not a thing outside.” (Polanyi 15-16)

In other words, Polanyi's tacit knowledge is knowledge strongly influenced by the bodily awareness of a tacit immersion within the subject. This was reflected in the process I undertook in re-configuring the procedures by which I constructed the making of images.

This resulted in the painterly gestures used in the paintings' physical construction, responding to the temperamental demands of the human psyche in tune with the bodily orchestrations. For example, forms that were obsessive and intricate were for moments of indulging in wet on wet paint, tentatively sculpting the paint within a confined surface area (Figure 52).

Loose clumsy gestures on the other hand, tended to enjoy the fluid physicality of paint and catered to moments bursting with energy (Figure 52a/b). While at other times, an almost thoughtless and monotonous repetition was desired, blanketing the surface of the canvas (Figure 52c). There were also examples of where destructive pleasure was taken from demolishing previous areas of intricacy and detail with large scale reworking of 'wet into wet' paint (Figure 53). When it came to cases of uncertainty, there was an inherent understanding that the best course of action was to simply 'trust' oneself; that 'trust' itself is an accumulation of knowledge and experience gained.



Figure 52. Details of
Painterly Gestures, Myah
Flynn (2009)

Figure 53. Rapture, Myah Flynn (2009) 1.5x2m



SECTION FIVE: SUMMARY

In recent years, a small group of contemporary artists have been referred to as New Romantics. These painters share a common interest in reviving the emotional within art. Max Hollein, editor of the book *Ideal Worlds: New Romanticism in Contemporary Art* summarised this interest in contemporary practice.

“These works do not focus on nostalgia, kitsch, or pure beauty, and likewise they do not set out to revise painting, but concern themselves with a different world, a new individual sensibility – oscillating between yearning and discomfort – without an actual place or a definite time, but nevertheless firmly in the here and now. The young artists are well aware of the development inside art and the debates of recent years, as they are of their predecessors in art history. Their purportedly revisionist path back to emotional expression does not take place outside but firmly in the midst of the current discourse on art.” (Hollein and Weinhart 19)

The aesthetic sensibilities of the New Romantics expressed a quietly seductive quality, and as Hollein describes “they develop provocative poetic counter-worlds; devise a new relationship between the individual and nature; and take up the yearning for a paradisiacal, beautiful, and fairy-tale-like state; without, however, forgetting the abysmal, the uncanny, and the mysterious that is always lurking behind such idylls.” (Hollein and Weinhart 17)

The paintings, illustrated on Figures 42-5, 49, 53 and 56, constitute the main outcomes of this research project. The original aim, outlined in my research proposal, called for an investigation into archetypal imagery. My subsequent research into the archetype revealed the value of the archetype, not as a narrative device, but as an emotional experience inherently subjective in nature. It was through this understanding that I was able to reconfigure the means by which I constructed the paintings.

My paintings, while sensual are not subtle expressions, they seek a level of emotional grandiosity reminiscent of the Baroque, wildly and passionately celebrating the sensuality of paint through a visual and sensorial excess. The compositional structures provide an infinite sense of spatial expansion. This dynamism and suggestion towards movement is activated within de-centred or shifting compositions. The paintings exude a return to the theatrical and sensuous expression of emotion in art through extravagance, pleasure, excess and artifice.

When referring to Neo-Baroque aesthetics in the film industry, Ndalians said

“The concern for evoking states of amazement goes hand in hand...with the crafted manipulation of spatial perceptions, and with the active negotiation of the spectator in relation to this environment.” (Ndalianis 214)

Inherent in Neo-Baroque is the increased illusion of new optical models of perception through a heightened sense of the viewer’s awareness of their own subjective responses.

Through books and television, I was introduced to the Baroque and Rococo imagery where my imagination latched onto the overwhelming aesthetics of movement and emotion. The monumental decadence of Baroque and Rococo art and architecture was embedded into European heritage, it was a cultural norm. However, I am not tied to European tradition, nor do I wish to paint misguided representations of another culture like in ‘Orientalism’. Being separated by distance allowed me to have my way with the Baroque and Rococo; they are a bountiful source of aesthetic pleasure, ripe with imagery to consume and transmogrify into my own private fantasies. The Baroque and Rococo has become a product of my overdeveloped imagination.

I would describe these paintings as having a Neo-Baroque aesthetic. This aesthetic I regard to be trans-historical, capable of being employed under different motivations and cultural circumstance. The monumental decadence of Baroque and Rococo art and architecture was something embedded within a European heritage alone. It was a cultural norm that had reached commonplace status within a European historical understanding and I would now possibly suggest, is undervalued and seen as something of a cliché.

The painting *Virtuosa* (Figure 51) responds best to the findings of this project. It demonstrates a success that can provide ongoing motivation for further investigations in painting.

Virtuosa displays a drama that is both calm and fierce. The figurative and abstract elements intertwine with a relaxed sense of naturalism, as if everything within the painting had simply fallen into place. While on the other hand, the sweeping brush strokes, epic sized forms in contrast with lavish decadence and theatrical colour, exude a grandiose presence. It is my very own misguided collusion of the Baroque with the Rococo. The Neo-Baroque serves as a synthesis of extremes. It helped to combine the decorativeness of Rococo with its sensuously textured surfaces and the grandiose bravado of Baroque aesthetics while in turn fusing this with imagery that exceeded the boundaries of social acceptability.

However, what truly makes *Virtuosa* so fantastical is that when viewing it, I feel as though I am looking at the very essence of Rubens' epic painting *The Tiger Hunt* – the summation of an intangible, extreme feeling, undiluted with sensuous pleasure, but doing so within the private and personal intimacies of the 'boudoir'.

Figure 54. *Virtuosa*, Myah Flynn, Exhibition at Oedipus Rex Gallery (2010)

The processes I developed during this project were a way in which to understand and express the implicit qualities of painting as pleasure.





Figure 55. Detail of *Virtuososa*, Myah Flynn, Exhibition at Oedipus Rex Gallery (2010)

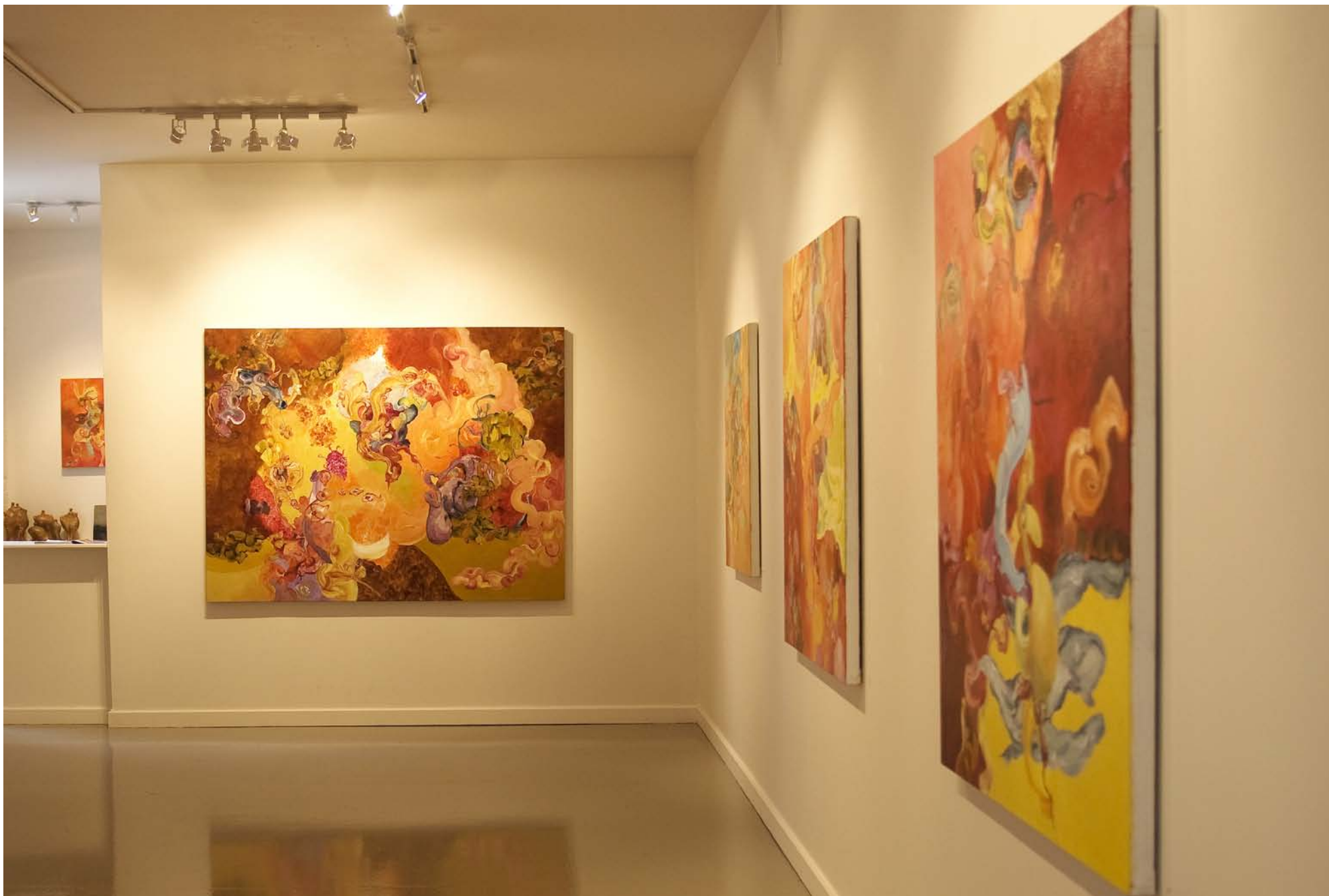


Figure 56. Detail of *Virtuosa*, Myah Flynn, Exhibition at Oedipus Rex Gallery (2010)



Figure 57. Detail of *Virtuosa*, Myah Flynn, Exhibition at Oedipus Rex Gallery (2010)

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Figure 12: Saint-Germain, Jean-Joseph de. Cartel Clock. c1750. Legs de madame Georges Lebey, Paris . 1st April. 2010. <http://www.insecula.com/PhotosNew/00/00/04/39/ME0000043922_3.JPG>

Figure 13: Fragonard, Jean-Honore. *The Swing*. 1767. Wallace Collection, London. *Fragonard*. By Marie-Anne Dupuy-Vachey. Paris: Terrail, 2006. 99

Figure 14: Fragonard, Jean-Honore. *The Stolen Shift*. c1760. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Fragonard's *Allegories of Love*. By Andrei Molotiu. Los Angeles: Paul Getty Trust, 2007. 63.

Figure 15: Boucher, Francois. *Dark Odalisque*. 1745. Musée du Louvre, Paris. *The Orient in Western Art*. By Genevieve Lacambre. UK: Konemann, 2005. 64-65.

Figure 16: Fragonard, Jean-Honore. *The Meeting*. 1771-72. The Frick Collection, New York. *Fragonard*. By Marie-Anne Dupuy-Vachey. Paris: Terrail, 2006. 110

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Figure 39: Rubens, Peter Paul. *Battle of the Amazons*. 1617. Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany. *The horse : 30,000 years of the horse in art*. By Tamsin Pickeral. London: Merrell, 2006. 126

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