

The Productive Inadequacy of Image for Contemporary Painting

Image Based Operations in the Work of Beth Harland, Jacqueline Humphries and R.H. Quaytman

Moyra Derby

University for the Creative Arts (UCA), UK

Abstract This article considers the productive inadequacy of image for contemporary painting. The mutability of image is tested against the material, spatial and durational conditions of painting, and the attentional attachments it might mobilize through an examination of the working methods of Beth Harland, Jacqueline Humphries and R.H. Quaytman. Painting is not positioned as image, but as a processor of image information, able to prompt an image response. A resistance to image is framed by the art historical and philosophical legacy of image expectations and preclusions that each artist feels compelled to work against, and the expanding opticality of our contemporary social, cultural and economic interactions.

Keywords Contemporary painting. Image. Beth Harland. Jacqueline Humphries. R.H. Quaytman.



Edizioni
Ca' Foscari

Peer review

Submitted	2021-03-16
Accepted	2021-06-01
Published	2021-06-30

Open access

© 2021 | Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License



Citation Derby, M. (2021). "The Productive Inadequacy of Image for Contemporary Painting. Image Based Operations in the Work of Beth Harland, Jacqueline Humphries and R.H. Quaytman". *JoLMA. The Journal for the Philosophy of Language, Mind and the Arts*, 2(1), 205-220.

DOI 10.30687/Jolma/2723-9640/2021/01/012

The productive inadequacy of image is a painter's response to the evanescence and mutability of images. Painting has been used as an exemplar of image, but material dependencies and objecthood, and a factious history of self definition and reappraisal can give it an unhelpful opt out when the term image is put under any pressure. Painting's image status seems increasingly awkward in the slipstream of expanding optical consumption that marks our contemporary condition, yet I propose that contemporary painting is ideally placed to open up an account of images. Through a consideration of works by painters Beth Harland, Jacqueline Humphries and R.H. Quaytman, I do not position painting as image, rather it is approached as a processor of image information, producing and prompting an image response, and modifying the attentional deployment of a viewer.

I argue that the paintings of Harland, Humphries and Quaytman utilise image based operations which are cognitively conditioned and art historically determined, and are responsive to an exponential expansion of visual pulls on our attention. The image based operations identified are activated to combat the subsuming of painting into the category of image while simultaneously harnessing image and imaging potential, with painting considered a modifier of the attentional deployment and experience of a viewer. The methodologies of Harland, Humphries and Quaytman enable the intangibility of image to be filtered through material and process, and image response becomes dependent on surface, viscosity, and method of application. Additionally, image tangibility is resisted by strategies of visual instability and displaced through layering, repetition and opticality, snagging our attentional processing in complex ways.

Painting's early immersion in depictive motivations countered by a radical rejection of a representational function makes image a heightened term for painting. Painting as image is encountered at the point of upload, archive or visual analysis. At each of these moments image acts as a limitation or dilution of painting's objectness, material particularities and its spatial and durational positioning. Art historian David Joselit points to some of the consequences of "painting's entry into the world as an image in circulation". In the context of a scroll past apprehension, "The question has become, not where to deposit a quantum of paint on its support, but rather, where will the painting - or the image - go. How will it behave?" (Joselit 2016, 17). This prefiguring of the future moment of a painting's reception informs the practices of Harland, Humphries and Quaytman. For each artist, complicating the spatial and durational circumstances of painting's reception are productively at odds with its condition as an image in circulation.

In discussing works by Harland, Humphries and Quaytman, produced over the last decade, I will concentrate on interviews and transcribed conversations with the artists and their own writing. The directness of these sources identify strategies that negotiate painting's

complex relationship with image through the observations of painters; strategies that demonstrate a multiple and intersecting resistance to image while still processing, producing and prompting images. With all quoted commentary on the work and working methods from the artists themselves, we see that this resistance is framed by the art historical and philosophical legacy of image expectations and preclusions that each artist individually feels compelled to work against, in particular a critical engagement with the legacy of modernism. For each artist this resistance to image is also conditioned by the prevalence of the screen as the dominant interface in our social, cultural and economic interactions. More intrinsically, this resistance intersects with a question about the processes of vision, and the imaging making conditions of perception.

Before turning to the specific artists' works, I need to lay out a series of functional sub categories of image that are pertinent to the discussion and emerge in the artists descriptions of working processes and responses: image as visual artefact, image as data, and image as visualisation. I say functional because I can put them to work to map the image field contemporary painting finds itself negotiating and because they are certainly not exhaustive. The issue of definition, edge cases, and taxonomy, can stall an analysis of image as the terms of reference are under dispute (Elkins, Naef 2011). Within each of my functional sub categories, the physical requirements of painting hits up against the mutable and intangible potential of images, articulating a point of access and avoidance of image for the artists, and providing a juncture that captures image's productive inadequacy in their practices.

Firstly, I refer to image as visual artefact when image is used interchangeably with painting, or image is used as a catch all term for the visual outputs of a culture. Painting enters art history most easily under the conditions of image, as the comparative and categorising impulses of art history run parallel to visual capture and storage facilitated by the invention of photography. Image in this sense readily gets stretched to 'image of...', foregrounding a representational function for painting whilst demoting other characteristics. Here image is allied with language and can imply a sort of material transparency that a naming response to image relies on. It might also act as a reminder of an optical emphasis that was a factor of modernism, in which the material properties of painting are just a circumstance of process to be looked past in the service of visual effect. Jacqueline Humphries describes her frustration with this emphasis on the visual for painting; "sometimes the difficulty for me is simply the 'given' of the visual aspect and how that seems to ignore the physicality of painting which differentiates it from other kinds of images [...]. The term 'visual' does not adequately describe the procedural and perceptible physics of painting in all its aspects" (Ryan 2018, 15)

Secondly, image as data. For contemporary painting, participating in the digital slipstream is to enter into the potential of image as commodity, and image as data is painting at the point of upload, circulation and exchange. Painting enters art history most easily under the conditions of image, as the comparative and categorising impulses of art history run parallel to visual capture and storage facilitated by the invention of photography. For contemporary painting, participating in the digital slipstream is to enter into the potential of image as commodity. Image as data and the reproducibility and shareability it infers also captures the sense of image information imported into or onto painting. It zooms into the unit by unit marking of a surface, or zooms out to the overlay of an appropriated schema or an already imaged source material. For R.H. Quaytman image as data enables image to be included in the space of painting, when direct depiction or gestural response have been excluded by the artist. Quaytman's use of reprographic processes helps her bypass an art historically conditioned "horror of the representational". As she outlines, "you could say that the paintings are elaborate exercises of avoiding that fundamental mimetic gesture" (Joselit 2011).

Finally, image as visualisation is the sense of image as a consequence of our perceptual modelling of the world, connecting to the anticipatory and reflective processes of imagination and memory. Image as visualisation tilts between image as an objective record of perception, and image as subjective, biased, and predictively coded. This is where painting might act as a prompt for an image response in a viewer or might be considered as material evidence of the perceptual engagements of its maker. It might also signal image perceptually detached from the concrete support of the painting, image that can't be located on or in the painting, but is producible by the painting under viewing conditions or positions. It captures image as internal picturing, the anticipatory and reflective responses of imagination and memory. Image as visualisation positions painting as a compelling example for philosophies of perception, but it also opens up a critical obstacle for evaluating a cognitive response to painting that is particular to art discourse. The thrust of recent radical art practices towards participation, envisaged as a direct physical or collective interaction, has for many devalued the internalised cognitive engagement and attentional attachment painting might prompt, characterising it as privileged, individualistic and removed from any urgent social and political context. The works of Harland, Humphries and Quaytman each make a claim for the complexity of cognitive participation, and the modes of attention painting facilitates, while also introducing methods of displacement that avoid a singular encounter. Beth Harland points to "strategies of interruption, shifts in expectation through subtle in-congruity, something repeated (but perhaps with slight variation) that you remember seeing at an earlier point"

that engage memory processes and increase the duration of our attentional attachment (Thomas 2018, 118).

Importantly, all three serviceable categories, image as visual artefact, image as data, and image as visualisation, highlight painting's misalignments with image, but also position painting's material, durational and spatial decisions within the context of image processing and production. Contemporary painting's resistance to the category image gives some traction for considering the ubiquity and elusiveness of image, and its pertinence in a consideration of the visuality of our contemporary experience.

Jacqueline Humphries, interviewed by the artist David Ryan in 2018, proposes painting as a sort of meme (Ryan 2018, 47). Painting is envisaged in adaptive and recurring circulation but also as a reiteration of itself. Humphries has long made a correspondence between the space of painting and screen based space, but the correspondence is made in terms of process and interaction rather than as a purely visual reference. As she outlines, "by equating a canvas with a screen (common in my work through many different iterations), I can play out behaviours that I think are ever more present and common in our culture. I can transform those behaviours into painting" (Ryan 2018, 55). Gaming space in particular provides an equivalence for Humphries to the moves and counter moves of processed paint that the work is immersed in for both maker and viewer. The direct gaming references Humphries uses in the 2018 interview are Pong, Minecraft and Dwarf Fortress, all exemplifying a logic that compounds look with function. In Dwarf Fortress the game space is depthless in the sense of an overhead view, and built only out of text and symbols. It is reiterative of its own programming logics. As Humphries asserts the visual output of the game "is instrumental to the needs of the game" (Ryan 2018, 54). Taking that thought back into painting connects with some wryness to the modernist demand that painting should be only itself. Stripped back of any rendered graphic interface. Humphries identifies strongly with what she calls "the purist, fetishistic aesthetic" of a game space made solely out of data. This seems to me where Humphries painting practice productively bounces against a determining tendency in painting's art history. The user interface a painting might present to a viewer can be generated by the logics and consequences of its own making, the procedural behaviours and processes of "dismantling and rebuilding" (Ryan 2018, 50). In this sense Humphries's work meets a modernist requirement set for painting in the twentieth century, avoiding a resemblance based category of image, while also working with an accumulative process of image data and image output.

This resistance to being categorised as image is highlighted by the destination of painting as part of a screen formatted visual feed. As Humphries describes, "What's striking in today's screen culture

is how one image is so rapidly replaced by another which doesn't relate to it in any way: there's no definitive image, nothing which synthesizes or sums up, just an endless torrent. The screen itself is the unifying element, and compresses within itself this multitude. I can't look at an image on a screen any more without sensing another one or another billion images lurking just behind it ready to push it off-screen" (Ryan 2018, 56). This multiplicity can be seen as a modification of our attention capacity and mode of deployment. Jonathan Cray has argued, "part of the cultural logic of capitalism demands that we accept as natural switching our attention rapidly from thing to another" and that "the rhythms, speeds, and formats of accelerated and intensified consumption are reshaping experience and perception" (Crary 1999, 29-30; 2013, 39-40).

Humphries sees her work within the logics of screen culture but as offering a counter measure of compressed material processing. The painting as a single frame of material information is primed for visual consumption but can displace a sense of unity with a visual hum of layered materiality that requires variable viewing distances that are perceptually irreconcilable. The abstract rebuff to representation and illusion shimmers elusively in Humphries practice. In an earlier interview with artist Cecily Brown, it is clear Humphries values how the paintings cannot be captured as a single image, either perceptually or as a document. Working at the time with metallic paint and its changeability under varying light conditions, Humphries recounts how "the paintings change as your physical relationship to them changes. I like the unstable situation that depends on the light and the viewer both moving around; the painting changes before your eyes. They're impossible to photograph - there's no 'accurate' image" (Brown 2009).

The analogy to the screen at this point for Humphries was predominantly cinema, partly as a question about the attentional capture that cinema space demands of an audience, and partly in relation to the optical flicker that her multi-layered processes can produce. As Humphries notes, "there's no protocol for making people look at paintings", and certainly nothing equivalent to the durational and collective viewing experience framed by cinematic space. For Humphries the work of the painting to capture attention is certainly facilitated by a perceptual instability as "light moves across the surface and makes new images before your eyes" (Brown 2009). This perceptual instability links to recent writing on aesthetic experience that draws on current cognitive and neuro psychological research, particularly the distinction between focused and distributed or focal and diffuse attention. Whether aesthetic experience is supported by distributed attention (Nanay 2016) or the sequential reallocation of attention (Fazekas 2016) across the various properties of a single painting is a live discussion. Contemporary painting's reaction to

the limitations and possibilities of an aesthetically framed response needs to navigate some critical quicksand, but it is clear that shifting attentional modes are activated in the live encounter with a work, whether a returning gaze or a gaze scattered by oscillating layers of paint application. Research into the connection between focused and distributed attention and mood brings an emotional cadence to the attentional capture and modulation that Humphries' paintings prompt (Srinivasan et al. 2009). Humphries has used the term activation to express her desire for the paintings to do something, "to intensify the sense of one's own interaction with it" (Ryan 2018, 53). This motivation for activation was a driving factor in the black light series, in which the paintings take on illuminating and illuminated properties of the screen. These were paintings as a light source "activating their environment rather than the other way around. The painting isn't just on the wall with you looking into it, the painting is really in the room" (Ryan 2018, 54).

There is a balance Humphries seems to be trying to strike, between the optical charge of a work into the space of its reception and a pull back to the work's surface conditions. In this way the work also rewards a moving viewer in physical space and disappoints as an on screen capture as image. In a recent group of works stencils are used to transfer a mesh of small emoticon motifs across the painting, the perceptual permutations shifting radically between a close up or distanced viewing, The emoticon reference allows Humphries to riff on expressionist and gestural precedents for painting at arm's length, imported as a repeated signifier of mood or attitude. As Humphries states, "It seemed a funny idea that a painting could come with its own expression, for instance in the case of :), which is a blue painting, I layered the emoticons vertically but upside down, so then it appears to frown. That way the painting becomes, on its face, 'a blue painting that is sad'". This balance gets articulated in the optical and material consequence of this mesh, where the decisions of material thickness, pressure, speed and direction of application bump up productively against the mechanism of image transfer. Humphries alerts us to her procedural observations at that micro level of making, that "by forcing the paint through the stencils very gesturally, I could make the gesture register in the pattern, and that's primarily what you see - a kind of fragmented mechanized gestural haze - until you get very close to the painting, and only then can you see the tiny emoticons" (Ryan 2018, 54). Here painting contains image, produces images, while still avoiding becoming image.

Beth Harland's work also takes on the consequences of the screen and digitization for painting's ingrained materiality. Like the seemingly contradictory values of abstraction and image processing seen in Jacqueline Humphries work. Beth Harland's paintings are a complex response to art historical precedents and a contemporary con-

text of extreme visuality. This is steered by the commitment to the experience of viewing in space and over time, and the fascination with the processing of image information through and into the material of paint. I will draw predominantly from a transcript of a panel discussion at ICA Singapore in 2016 during an iteration of the exhibition project *Impermanent Durations: On Painting and Time* and two descriptions by Harland of the process of making work (Harland 2011; 2019; Thomas 2018).

Paraphrasing John Berger, Harland expresses the sense that painting “addresses all sorts of future moments in which it will be looked at – a kind of premonition” (Thomas 2018, 108). Looking forward and looking back is part of the durational scope that Harland has mapped for painting. Harland’s recent work *Methods of Modern Construction* returns the artist to a pivotal moment in painting’s history, early modernism, with ways of seeing upended by visual invention (Thomas 2018, 112). This recognition of a radical perceptual model but one housed in an art historical past, instigates a sort of improvisation loop for the artist, building an iterative set of remakings and returns. In a visual essay in the *Journal of Contemporary Painting* in 2019, Harland lays out this methodology in 3 parts. As Harland describes, “Part 1 is a large wall collage, built up through small varied elements. These are made with exuberance, both in their use of colour, eclectic materials and motifs” and as a direct response to painting precedents, particularly Henri Matisse, engaging with painting “as a way of looking” rather than a vehicle for depiction (Harland 2019, 213-14). This approach frees the work to engage speculatively and as Harland says ‘exuberantly’ with painting’s art history, but generating fragments or moments that don’t build to a stable and resolved whole. Rather they act as a resource to be endlessly resorted and reordered. Each collage element can sit as a component within a larger grid format of shifting adjacencies or can be detached from the grid as a single work. Calling the collage “a generative form, an archive of sorts from which the act of remaking can take place”, image as visual artefact and image as data are both deconstructed and become pliable under Harland’s methodology (Harland 2019, 215).

This process of distilling colour, mark, motif and shape from an art historical source is then reformatted by Harland. Part 2 of the work consists of a digital picture of the wall collage as it was set up in the studio, a momentary fixing of a work that by its nature feeds off realignments and shifting placements. This image capture is the work as a gridded block, small and flattened but exquisitely high resolution and chromatically brilliant on the back lit surface of a tablet. The screen size is a close approximation of the individual collage elements and “the re-presentation of it as a screen image is an action of removal from the origin and also introduces another form of attention and temporarily, that of the digital realm” (Harland 2019).

It embraces both the seductiveness and the inadequacy of image as data, and screen based destination of painting as an image in digital circulation. In part 3 of this sequential but looped system a series of small paintings transcribe aspects of the original collage through a filter of pixel-like blocks of colour or tone. Carefully and precisely reworked via the conventions of easel painting, “they each focus on separate aspects of the original: one painting takes up only the colour information and distills it into a grid of the most dominant chromas and tones; others are rendered first as pencil drawings, removing the colour and surface variations, and then painted in monochrome” (Harland 2019, 115). Like Hito Steyerl’s ‘poor image’ these works connect with a loss of visual information but these inadequacies or limitations are meticulously and labour intensively rendered in paint (Steyerl 2019). The exuberance of the collage working is countered and also refined by this slow extraction. Harland has described these works as becoming documentary, and “as a kind of aside from the main story – of life, of history and their forceful narratives – that can perhaps only be dealt with as small steps, negotiations that relate to individual moments of *sensation*: touch and colour, space and time” (Harland 2019, 214).

The component nature of Harland’s practice in *Methods of Modern Construction* mirrors the selective function of attention, identifying targets for the artist’s attentional focus and peripheral pulls that tug in the making and then are played out in the dispersal of those components when installed on space. Each reworking trails the logics of its imaging potentials and histories with it, and shifts between the digital realm and material reworkings are asked to account for each other, but also to modulate the attentional attachments of a viewer. In recent exhibition projects, the set ups of work are clearly provisional, the work describing its own potential to be repositioned, reworked and reimaged. As Harland recounts, “This comparison of formats asks: How is the viewer’s experience of looking and time altered in the shift from the complexity of the unruly collage to the distilled precision of the small monochromes? Might both formats provide a rhythmic structure for viewing, affecting the pace of the act of looking?” (Harland 2019, 114). The extended and dispersed durations of looking that the works ask for are more poignant because of the awareness of an inherent time limit of a particular configuration, a moment of address with an individual viewer in a specific space and context. The interdependencies in process, between collage, digital rendering and transcribed painting, are redistributed when the work is installed. Sequencing and spacing decisions provide “cues for looking” (Thomas 2018, 110), directing the movement of a viewer and duration of their attention within the architecture of the gallery space.

Beth Harland’s engagement with early modernist motifs in *Methods of Modern Construction* signals a long investment in working

with source material. Unlike Jacqueline Humphries working against painting re-presenting something already seen in the world, Harland's work engages with processes of repicturing. Thinking about painting in terms of a negotiation between illusion and materiality, Harland wrote in 2011 about the interplay between an image source and material handling, "when sight and touch open the same space in the painting, when visual resemblance and affect combine; when I internalise the experience of looking" (Harland 2011, 11). Harland conveys the combination of looseness and control that an external source can facilitate, that the concentration on something external to the painting attaches and detaches the application of both material and image to the painting surface so that neither fully settles or resolves; "There's a photograph as reference, the colours of nature removed, and an oscillation in my attention between the 'image' and the application of 'material'. There are times when these positions of attention seem to coalesce, and eye and hand execute one singular action" (Harland 2011, 11). This oscillation evokes and values a sense of tactile verification for painting, the conferring modalities of sight and touch (Olin 1989, 294-6).

This repicturing process is enabled because image as outcome has already been secured by the image source, in this case a reference photograph. The responsibility to be image is therefore displaced from the painting, while carrying a response to image data, built mark by mark, moment by moment. As an instance of the productive inadequacy of image for painting, Harland articulates this interplay in relation to Jacques Rancière's writing on image, "Rancière has much to tell about the complexities of image, and he is clear about the fact that in art the question is one of alteration of resemblance: 'the images of art are operations that produce a discrepancy, a dissemblance'" (Rancière 2007, 6; Harland 2011, 13). What is clear in Harland's engagement with source material is the discontinuities that open up between what can be pictured and what can be named, or between image and material, offer a productive space for the artist. The art historically fraught aspect of painting and imitation or likeness is tackled by Rancière in *The Future of the Image* when he makes a distinction between mimesis and resemblance, "the antimimetic revolution never signified renunciation of resemblance. Mimesis was the principle not of resemblance, but of a certain codification and distribution of resemblances" (Rancière 2007, 104-5). In Harland's work, the attentional capture triggered by resemblance is internalised for both artist and viewer, and also scattered between works, and between the processes of observation and the processes of memory.

Scattering the viewer's attention is a strategy also used by R.H. Quaytman. Quaytman's shift from the restriction and convention of single paintings to using a serial structure, binds individual works

into a set of dependencies within a collection of works, or chapters as Quaytman terms them. This strategy is tightly co-ordinated by a set of rules established by Quaytman that draws every work into an overarching system. This was partly motivated by the desire “to shift the most intense focus off the individual painting and into the situation of the painting – to its neighbors and context” and “to create a lateral reading as opposed to one that was primarily about depth or surface” (Bessa 2014). The stretch and temporality of attentional possibilities this accommodates is partly an acknowledgment of conditions of viewing work that are often far from the ideals imagined by art history or by artists. Quaytman has stated, “I actively try to make paintings for passive, distracted, foreign, and even disinterested audiences” (Kreber 2016). For Quaytman paintings are objects that are changed by and dependent on location, placement, sequence and of course other paintings rather than self contained and autonomous within a framed limit. Here Quaytman unsettles painting as visual artefact by making works that already predict their destination as objects stored as much as pictures displayed. Shelving and storage structures used by Quaytman imagine the work under the conditions of a physical archive, and complicate its ability to be archived as image or as visual artifact.

In acknowledging these conditions of display, storage and circulation, Quaytman recognises that the works “have to be open to disruption and shifts in legibility” (Joselit 2011). This issue of legibility is carefully calibrated through her procedural entanglement of image and material, using silkscreen to bypass an art historically conditioned aversion to representation and as Quaytmans says giving access to content “without my having to paint it with a brush” (Joselit 2011). Image as data opens a dense archive of photographic and printed material for Quaytman, supporting a research process that is site responsive. Image is translated through the liquidity and mesh of the silkscreen process, making photographic information materially contingent, and also inextricable from the absorbent chalk ground of the panels Quaytman uses. As she remarks “silkscreening abstracts the photograph, materializes it and snaps attention back to the picture plane” (Stillman 2010). Screen printing for Quaytman imports images onto painting while absorbency provides image into painting, providing procedural negotiation between image and its material carrier that synthesizes access to pictorial content and the properties of abstraction, This calibration of image and material connects to an early motivation for works to be directly handled, as objects and as surfaces (Kreber 2016). The bevelled edges of Quaytman’s panels, slanting back from the front face of the work, might heighten a sense of surface facing, but they also increase their potential to be lifted, overlapped, and slotted as objects. The holdability of the work, and a viewer’s awareness of their surface tactility, is now deferred by the

requirements of museum and gallery installations, and is left to invite an imaginative and optical experience of its materiality.

Quaytman's engagement with the optical has also connected with the perceptual effect of the after image, recalling Wladyslaw Strzeminski's avant garde experiments with perception in the thirties. Quaytman underlines her position, "unlike '60s Op, my pattern paintings do not convey a future of freedom and fun, but call attention - as Strzeminski's work did - to vision itself" (Stillman 2010). In discussing the optical charge she has utilised across various chapters of work, Quaytman notes how they are hard to look at, and simulate for Quaytman the experience of a monitor image. For the viewer "it feels like zzz, like electricity in your vision" (Bessa 2014). Quaytman also comments on what she sees as a positive instability in reproducing this aspect of the work as image, "when it's reproduced it's always different, because the pixilation never gets it right. I kind of like that aspect of its resistance to be documented" (Bessa 2014). By harnessing opticality and simulating pixelation Quaytman future proofs the painting from being adequate to a pixel based image of itself.

This approach to image processing and diverse image registers has been described by Quaytman in terms of pictorial events. For example the placement of a panel with an optically charged but abstract surface can manage or counter the narrative draw of a photography based panel, each offering "a different kind of time and appearance" (Bessa 2014). Pictorial event is a term associated with art historian Michael Baxandall writing about renaissance narrative painting. For Baxandall, and I think also for Quaytman, the issue is not what a medium can represent, "rather the nub is what a medium must explicitly discriminate. The things that language must be decisive about and pictures must be decisive about are different" (Baxandall 2011, 123). Baxandall defines pictorial events in a way that connects closely to Quaytman's thinking and the oscillations she orchestrates within and between the works. So for Baxandall they are "*pictorial* in that they are proper not just to seeing but to seeing a depiction on a plane surface; and *events* in the sense that one may be led to consider them as outcomes from conditions. These events must be part of a sense that the picture has a character beyond the sum of objects represented". (Baxandall 2011, 117)

In interviews, Quaytman has at various points identified the sense of painting having a posture, an attitude of address that the painting is configured by and potentially configures in its viewer. This mirroring folds compositional structure into a physical and psychological alignment to the work. One posture is figured as a profile stance, the other is figured as though turning towards the viewer with a face in 3/4 view. Both profile and 3/4 view seem to picture for Quaytman the attentional attachment of catching a viewer's eye, and then the slide sideways of a peripheral pull of an adjacent panel. Interviewed

in 2010, R.H. Quaytman describes how she conceptualises the profile. As a contemporary painter negotiating a somewhat problematic legacy of modernism, the trajectory indicated by the profile gives an alternative alignment to the work, both physically and conceptually. The profile is distinct from facing, facingness being a quality that modernism had promoted as a seemingly logical partner with flatness and instantaneousness for painting (Fried 1996, 266-70, 307). The profile facilitates a sideways move for Quaytman, away from a face to face encounter, while still retaining an exposure to surface, with surface experienced laterally rather than centrally. Quaytman says of the profile, "It seemed to refer to the viewer's movement past a painting. I began to think of paintings as objects that you passed by - as things that you saw not just head-on and isolated, but from the side, with your peripheral vision, and in the context of other paintings" (Stillman 2010).

The profile manages a double move for Quaytman; it pictures an absorbed attentiveness in the sense of an attitude of interiority and a gaze directed across the painting surface rather than outwards to the space of a viewer, while also providing an exit point or directional cue for the viewer to move on. This displacement of a central positioning of a viewer in front of a painting connects to Quaytman's intention to keep the gaze of a viewer mobile and contingent, rather than being fixated by an individual work. As Quaytman outlines, "I try to use images that are not too magnetic emotionally so that you won't be wanting to stare at it too much. It has to allow you to slide off it. It's sort of like a profile. Often if it's people [...] they look to the side. If she's looking to the side, you look to the side. It's like a directive or an arrow" (Bessa 2014). The directive function of image information within Quaytman's practice is a recurring strategy, arrow-like motifs and profiled figures share the same status.

The alternative to the profile for Quaytman is a 3/4 stance that both faces and turns away, equivalent to a compositional device snags our attention and acts as a pause or interruption within a sequence of works. In an interview in 2011 with art historian David Joselit, Quaytman singles out her attachment to a figure in a Marcantonio Raimondi print *The Judgement of Paris* (1517 ca.) that has this turning 3/4 stance. Identified as the source for a figure in Édouard Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* of 1863, its multiple recurrence in the archive of art history gives a resonance to Quaytman's claim, "If paintings could have a posture this would be it" (Joselit 2011). In the Raimondi example the sense of the figure turning its back to the viewer while also turning to face the viewer is more pronounced than in Manet's version. As a posture it articulates the distance and closeness that painting depends on, drawing a viewer in and holding a viewer back. These alignments or stances draw on and undercut the pull of image in our experience of the work, and a reciprocity between our looking and the characteristics of what is being looked at.

When considering the image saturated parameters of contemporary painting, image in all its guises provides a productive inadequacy to work into and against. The working methods of Jacqueline Humphries, Beth Harland and R.H. Quaytman all invest in image processing and image response while deferring image as an adequate category for painting. Jacqueline Humphries has expressed the need to acknowledge a new “regime of the image”, recalling Jacques Rancière again, and a “radically shifting landscape of knowledge and the massive social impact of that”. For Humphries “the library is no longer a gridded block but an unnavigable amoeba” (Ryan 2018, 57). Here image as data permeates everything, but “the procedural and perceptive physics of painting” provides some material adhesion (Ryan 2018, 51). Returning to Quaytman, we see image as visual artefact stymied by a set of rules that prefigure the archive. They function for Quaytman “to confront what seemed problematic to me about painting - the overbearing authority of its long history, its exhaustion, its capitulation to capital and power”, and as a sort fiction that enables making, “they continue to generate new possibilities” (Stillman 2010). Beth Harland has argued that “painting has the possibilities of multiplicity and of slowness on its side, a very particular kind of temporality; an accumulation of presents, all of which are there but not all seen, nor in any particular order” (Harland 2011, 13). Image as visualisation intersects with all other image possibilities for painting, observed, remembered, imagined. As Harland has expressed so persuasively, “we might say that a painting’s capacity to refer to the world in a convincing and evocative way, while keeping its distance, remaining ‘other’, sets up a complex space for the painter and the spectator in which to be” (Harland 2011, 13).

Bibliography

- Baxandall, M. (2011). *Words for Pictures*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press.
- Bessa, A.S. (2014). "R.H. Quaytman: On painting, Architecture, and Working in 'Chapters'". *Bomb magazine*, December 10. <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/r-h-quaytman/>.
- Brown, C. (2009). "Jacqueline Humphries by Cecily Brown". *Bomb magazine*, 107, Spring. <http://bombmagazine.org/article/3262/jacqueline-humphries>.
- Crary, J. (1999). *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*. Cambridge (MA); London: The MIT Press.
- Crary, J. (2013). *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*. London; New York: Verso.
- Elkins, J.; Naef, M. (2011). *What Is an Image*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Fried, M. (1996). *Manet's Modernism or The Face of Painting in the 1960s*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Harland, B. (2011). "Likeness and Presence: A Precise Complication". *A Sort of Night to the Mind, A Kind of Night for our Thoughts = Exhibition Catalogue*. Stuttgart: Artary Gallery, 10-14.
- Harland, B. (2019). "Methods of Modern Construction". *Journal of Contemporary Painting*, 5(2), 213-31.
- Joselit, D. (2011). "I Modi: R.H. Quaytman". *Mousse Magazine: CONVERSATIONS*, 29. <http://moussomagazine.it/r-h-quaytman-david-joselit-2011/>.
- Joselit, D. (2016). "Marking, Scoring, Storing, and Speculating (On Time)". Graw, I.; Lajer-Burcharth, E. (eds), *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post Medium Condition*. Frankfurt: Sternberg Press, 11-20.
- Olin, M. (1989). "Forms of Respect: Alois Riegl's Concept of Attentiveness". *Art Bulletin*, 71(2), 285-99.
- Rancière, J. (2007). *The Future of the Image*. London; New York: Verso.
- Ryan, D. (2018). "Painting as Event: An Interview with Jacqueline Humphries". *Journal of Contemporary Painting*, 4(1), 45-58.
- Srinivasan, N. et al. (2009). "Distributed and Focused Attention". *Progress in Brain Research*, 176, 87-100. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19733751>.
- Steyerl, H. (2009). "In Defense of the Poor Image". *e-flux Journal*, 10. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>.
- Stillman, S. (2010). "In the Studio: R.H. Quaytman". *Art News*, June 4 2010. <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/rh-quaytman-62848/>.
- Thomas, D. (2018). "Considering Impermanent Durations: On Painting and Time". *Journal of Contemporary Painting*, 4(1), 102-29.

