

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

SOUND FOSSILS:

Constrained Randomness Art
and the Contemporary Christian Sublime.

A Dissertation submitted by

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Table of Contents

- i. Certificate of Dissertation
- ii. Acknowledgements
- iii. Abstract
- iv. List of Illustrations

Chapters:

- 1. Introduction: Methodology, theoretical underpinning & justification of project
- 2. Survey of the Field: Matisse, Malevich, Rothko, Fujimura
 - 2.1 Henri Matisse
 - 2.2 Kazimir Malevich
 - 2.3 Mark Rothko
 - 2.4 More on the Christian sublime
 - 2.5 Makoto Fujimura
- 3. Conclusion: Studio research in context

Appendix 1 – *Progression and development*

Appendix 2 – *The Exhibition*

References/works Cited

Certification of Dissertation

The work contained in this dissertation is of my own activity, except where acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award.

Signature of Candidate Stephen T. Moore. Date October 2014

Endorsement

Signature of Supervisor _____ Date _____

Signature of Supervisor _____ Date _____

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Abstract

This project explores and further develops sound painting as a technique and practice; it also examines the practice in the context of theories of the sublime, tying together the aesthetic traditions of the Christian sublime and the contemporary sublime.

This project further develops 'wave painting' as a technique and practice in which canvas paintings are reflexively painted using resonance (rather than a paintbrush) to manipulate paint pigment, and form compositions. The primary product of this project is the painting and exhibition of a series of wave paintings, mono-prints and photographs. Part of this investigation has been developing new methods to fix the materials as a painting rather than photographing them for showing.

Secondarily is a written exegesis examining this practice through aesthetic theories of the sublime, setting it within a contemporary context, that is, one that challenges both the place of the artist and of the audience in relationship to this sublime phenomenon made art. In particular, is a union of the Christian sublime and the contemporary sublime, rejoining some of the unfulfilled aspects in the art of each. The Christian sublime stems from awe at Christ, who himself was the original collapse of the distance between the real and the representational. Christian art, almost ironically, has often been representational and rational, and in some ways distancing Christ and the beyond from people. This distancing is reconsidered here. Some of the solutions to this lie in the thinking that has led to contemporary art and how these relate to my studio research. There is also an emphasis on the feeling of longing that accompanies the sublime and its use in contemporary art. The wave paintings are contextualized in relation to artists such as Henri Matisse, Kazimir Malevich, Mark Rothko, Makoto Fujimura. Theoretical underpinnings survey the writings of Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, Rudolph Otto, Slavoj Žižek, Makoto Fujimura, Philip Shaw, and others discussing the numinous, faith, art and the sublime.

List of Illustrations

Main Text

- Figure 1. Henri Matisse in *la chapelle du rosarie du vence*, (1951)
Figure 2. Kazimir Malevich, *Black Square* (1915)
Figure 3. Mark Rothko, *Chapel*, (painted from 1964 to 1967, built 1971)
Figure 4. Makoto Fujimura, *Charis-Kairos (The Tears of Christ)* (2010)
Figure 5. Stephen T. Moore, *Superposition of Christ* (2014)
Figure 6. Stephen T. Moore, *How sweet the sound* (2014)
Figure 7. Stephen T. Moore, *Shakespeare, infinite monkeys, and the creative patience of God* (2014)

Appendix 1- progression and development

- Figure A. Stephen T. Moore, *Chladni Sketches*, (2014)
Figure B. Second 'sound paintbrush' made from a 30 watt electric guitar amplifier. (2014)
Figure C. "Sound paintbrush" number 3 – 50 watt bass amp. (2014)
Figure D. The first successful large scale composition. (2014)
Figure E. Friends, (2014)
Figure F. Tea Experiments (2014)
Figure G. The first successful attempt at painting using ink-stained sand. (2014)
Figure H. Stephen T. Moore, *Bone*, work in progress (2014)
Figure I. Stephen T. Moore, *Bone* (2014)
Figure J. Powdered dry pastel experiment. (2014)
Figure K. image or works in progress (2014)
Figure L. Painting with wet media, (2014)
Figure M. successful composition in progress (2014)
Figure N. Stephen T. Moore, *Salt and Light*, in progress (2014)
Figure O. Stephen T. Moore, *Salt and light*, (2014)
Figure P. Stephen T. Moore, *How sweet the sound* (2014)
Figure Q. Stephen T. Moore, *Symmetry*, (2014)
Figure R. Stephen T. Moore, *Trace of a line*, (2014)
Figure S. Stephen T. Moore, *Trace of a line*, (2014) Post humidity condensation/ copper oxidation.
Figure T. Stephen T. Moore, *Shakespeare, infinite monkeys and the creative patience of God*, (2014)
Figure U. Stephen T. Moore, *Sound Fossil- Familiar Curves*, (2014)
Figure V. Stephen T. Moore, *Sound Fossil- Fish Song*, (2014)
Figure W. Stephen T. Moore, *Sound Fossil- Heart*, (2014)
Figure X. Stephen T. Moore, *Sound Fossil – Stem*, (2014)
Figure Y. Stephen T. Moore, *Sound Fossil – Column*, (2014)
Figure Z. Stephen T. Moore, *Face of the Deep*, (2014).
Figure A.2. Stephen T. Moore, *Superposition of Christ*, 2014.
Figure B.2. Stephen T. Moore, *Tell of Proof*, (2014)
Figure C.2. Stephen T. Moore, *Fraction of Theory*, (2014)
Figure D.2. Stephen T. Moore, *Reflection*, (2014)

Appendix 2 – The Exhibition

- Figure i. Traditional invitation.
Figure ii. Facebook Event invitation for the reception, October 25, 2014.
Figure iii. Statistics on the Google invitation for the reception, October 25, 2014.
Figure iv. Students interacting with work.
Figure v. www.stephentmoore.weebly.com
Figure vi. The Exhibition night

Chapter 1

Introduction: Methodology, theoretical underpinning & justification of project

The major interest of this project is in creating works of the modern, contemporary and Christian sublime, on the stage set by the modern, postmodern and contemporary artists - their traditions, conclusions, understandings of the sublime and associated developments in visual-linguistics. This exegesis discusses different theories of the sublime, artists in this field and my art in the context of these. This project concludes with a series of works using sound, a demonstration of sound and structure, in an artistic context – leaving the viewer with something to contemplate of the nature of creation and the creative process in which we all live and move and have our being. The research examines some of the strengths of contemporary sublime and concludes with a full circle return to the Christian sublime in art, but changed. A synthesis of the two can answer many of the problems of each in art.

In early sublime art, space and rational understanding were placed, by means of the artwork, between the viewer and the real. Art worked as mediation or even to distance the audience from that which is sublime. Modern and postmodern artists made moves to collapse distance by making art not a copy, but part of the real non-rational itself. While the old mechanisms of representational art still functioned to some extent, a new tool emerged as art acts were acknowledged as acts in themselves. It was important for the creative process to become *something* in itself – and this came by its deconstruction.

My paintings are created under certain technological mediations, limiting my ability to assert complete intention. For example, I did not use a paintbrush to move paint. I

avoided touching the canvases. This is counter-tradition to painting handed down by so many artists in the past couple of millennia. Instead, I sought an appeal to what is beyond me, to *what is* as art, in the artistic tradition of so many from the past century. I did this using sound waves. These paintings use sound waves, instead of more traditional painting tools, to push around pigment and form compositions.

Sound is a physical phenomenon in which the artist may act but also find himself acted upon in ways beyond his control; this is sublime by the definitions of many aesthetic theorists. Kant's mathematical sublime¹ for example, which summons its energy from the mind's ability to comprehend, as a vast unfathomable totality, something that is actually beyond its grasp. Sound and structure throughout the universe, in its creation sustenance and destruction, is a bigger than fathomable phenomenon. Science, for all its rational precision, can only translate the numinous into language. As Werner Heisenberg, one of the primary inventors of quantum mechanics, counsels us, "We have to remember that what we observe is not nature in itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning".² At the subatomic level, the real, or Kantian 'thing in itself' is sublime *par excellence*, being nothing but potential. These works will place the phenomenon of sound and structure neatly within the confines of a canvas, but as is the tradition of contemporary art, it will subvert those borders and reflect to the viewer that there is no escape from what surrounds and penetrates them. In this, it will be sublime at least by one measurement. In much of the artistic progression or regression of the past century or so, there has been an anti-aesthetic movement towards an amorphous sublime. Many artists have moved beyond self-expression, sometimes beyond expression of what they can even understand, and towards expression of, or participation in, something bigger and sometimes beyond words. This is truly as remarkable as it was inevitable. Modern (or some would say

¹ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Walter S. Pluhar, Indianapolis and Cambridge, Mass.: Hackett Publishing Company. 1987 pp 103

² Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 58.

post-modern)³ painters like Henri Matisse, Mark Rothko, Kazimir Malevich, Yves Klein, Jackson Pollock, and Barnett Newman, to name a few, or the ever-growing list of contemporary digital glitch-artists, technology-driven information artists of today, and so on, seem to seek or have sought a connection with something bigger, something sacred, something powerful, something sublime.⁴ Some of these may be of the material sublime, void of something beyond with feeling of the beyond caught up in structures of language, information and modes of perception. Others seek the spiritual sublime beyond material (beyond even the postmodern concept of spiritual material), of a sacred other or personality, God for example. All of these artists seem to share a feeling of some sublime experience, and a longing for more than the corporeal.

Peter Burger presents the development of western art in three steps: first coming from a sacred place, purposed, produced and received communally in a sacred sense, second shifting to a place as non-sacred but still praxis of life functional (courtly art - socially serving the courtiers), and thirdly to aestheticism in bourgeois art, where the content and purpose of art *is* art – created and received individually – outside the praxis of life, fully alone and ‘autonomous’.⁵ This shift from sacred content, purpose and public reception, to secular, singular and outside of life praxis, left something to be desired.

Avant-garde artists sensed this. They longed for art to return to a sacred place in the

³ It's complex, but essentially Burger's anti-aesthetic avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes, including minimalism, installation and site-specific art, and social participation, is sublime in a material sense, whereas Klein, Malevich, Rothko, Newman, Fujimura etc., are proponents of the feeling of the immaterial or spiritual sublime. The postmodern sublime is usually associated with installation and site-specific, and technology-driven art. Installation and site-specific art are material, the techno-sublime (see Jeremy Gilbert-Rolf) is usually considered immaterial or virtual. Thanks to Dr. David Akenson for the wording on this!

⁴ While the innovations of these, and many other artists, are stunning, and their common thread is the sublime, this paper will limit its contextualization to four artists: Matisse, Malevich, Rothko, Fujimura. Still, it would be as much a shame not to mention the flamboyant escapism of Yves Klein as it would be to overlook the seriousness of his longing for beauty as a foretaste of beyond demonstrated in that escapism. James Turrell, and the serious reverence of his minimal works are also inspiring and informative stylistically; yet even in the nuclear mysticism of Salvador Dali's surrealism, or the great longing of the Romantics in all their representational realism/surrealism there is a common thread of sublime longing that tie them all together. It is this longing, and expression in ‘heavenly language’ that this paper is about.

⁵ Burger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, page 255

praxis of life and shifted their focus towards the way that art functions in society (rather than focusing on content). They tried to move their art, which had often become void of content (other than that of being art), into that sacred place. There was a kind of an eclipse of ethereal light, and in that eclipse, man-made lights came on. Newman said, of his own work and that of his contemporaries,

“We are reasserting man’s natural desire for the exalted... instead of making cathedrals out of Christ, man or “life,” we are making it out of our own selves, out of our own feelings.”⁶ Those feelings may have been sublime for him. Ever looking only forward, the ‘light’ he was marveling at was limited, running on human batteries. This is the light by which many modern and post-modern artists have worked out their sublime feelings.

“Take for instance the work of Kazimir Malevich.” Makoto Fujimura said in an interview, “He was painting abstract... images partly because creating Icons was forbidden in the Stalin/Lenin era Russia. In this case, he positioned abstraction as a way to convey transcendence when Christianity was banned.”⁷ Malevich said of his black square, “I have only a single bare and frameless icon of our times.”⁸ When Malevich painted his black square in the place of an icon⁹ (normally a painting in the front of a Church building physically, but structurally speaking of God and the beyond) or when Rothko created his ‘Chapel,’ they were not canceling out Christ or even the concept of the divine, as some would suppose. Instead, by placing their voids in that place, they were confessing a locus they could not ignore. They were confessing the existence of a sacred

⁶ Newman, Barnett. Barnett Newman, ‘The Sublime is Now’, *Tiger’s Eye*, vol.1, no.6, 1948, pp.52–53.

⁷ Sklundy, *The Gospel according to Makoto Fujimura*, interview on January 25, 2010.

<http://www.patrolmag.com/2010/01/25/sklundy/makoto-fujimura-interview/>

⁸ Graham-Dixon, Andrew. ITP 97: Suprematist Painting: Eight Red Rectangles, by Kazimir Malevich, 24-02-2002, viewed May 29, 2014 at <http://www.andrewgrahamdixon.com/archive/readArticle/252>

⁹ Seidell, Daniel A., *God in the Gallery: A Christian Embrace of Modern Art*, Baker academic, 2008, pp 32

or holy place. Art critic Philip Shaw makes the point that the postmodern sublime is based on a something unfulfilled and paradoxical.¹⁰ The decisions of these artists to allude to something beyond reach through something within reach, was a decision to use a kind of *language* that speaks of something hallowed; though they may or may not have known who or what was there, or belonged there, they recognized the *there* as an important place. These artists exemplify this. Slavoj Žižek elaborates on this using something even more base than an inky black canvas.

“Along the same lines, the first reaction to seeing faeces in the sublime place is to ask indignantly: ‘Is *this* art?’ – but it is precisely this negative reaction, this experience of the radical incongruity between the object and the place it occupies, that makes us aware of the specificity of this place”.¹¹

Žižek goes on to explain, “this recourse to excrement, rather, bears witness to a desperate strategy to ascertain that the Sacred Place is still there.” For the linguistic structuralist’s sublime, that ‘sacred place’ is a mechanism of language and human perception. Within that category, the ‘thing’ being signified is either something ‘real,’ or it is simply the concept or idea or potential beyond the signifier. For the Christian sublime, the ‘sacred place’ refers to the place occupied by the Spirit of God.¹²

Shaw makes a distinction between the postmodern sublime and the Christian sublime.

The Christian sublime and its aesthetics are motivated by love for God. Shaw notes that

¹⁰ Shaw, Philip. *The Sublime (the New Critical Idiom)*, Routledge, New York, USA, 2006. Page 8.

¹¹ S. Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), p. 28-31.

¹² Interestingly, because of the indwelling of the Spirit of God, (1 Corinthians 3:16 – “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the *Spirit* of God dwells in you?”) the ‘sacred place’ becomes incarnational in the Christian sublime. An argument can be made for Christ in *action through* his people that mimics the structural collapse of God in the flesh from John 1 – and is similar to the collapse of the postmodernist. The idea of somehow containing God in a piece of artwork is not the Christian sublime, but the idea of God indwelling the artist and working redemptively in the artist’s work most certainly is.

it is through the selfless love demonstrated in Christ, that “the love of Christianity, and hence the aesthetics of the Christian sublime ... becomes in this sense an act of self-abnegation that springs from the soul rather than from the body.”¹³ That is to say, the aesthetics of the Christian sublime have always been founded in something, or rather *someone*, above and beyond the material –paradoxically opposing and sustaining material. It has also been grounded in an act of love both beautiful and abject beyond understanding. It remains stereoscopic in response to Christ’s actions.

For the most part, postmodern and contemporary art has broken from this tradition – shifting the focus towards things like human perception, language, material, and so on. Interestingly, despite this shift in motivation, there is a remarkable turn towards a sublime self-abnegation that has still found a way into ‘secular’ art of the past century. For example, many have broken away from a structural relationship of the artist/art/audience being categorically separate, and have moved towards a blurring, or a leveling as we have seen in Dadaists like Marcel Duchamp , in so much pop and industrial art like that of Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, and again in the shift away from representation in land and installation artists like Andy Goldsworthy or in Robert Smithson’s Spiral Jetty. In many cases it is merely the social place of art that is in question, but in others creativity and creator-authority have also been brought into question, such as Duchamp’s infamous urinal signed R. Mutt, or more recently, Warhol’s factory. The individual, Kantian genius of the past has waned. These artists move towards a dialectic collapse of self, and in that, an inclusiveness, when all highs and lows are made flat. It is a movement in entropy. It is a movement towards a kind of an ideal in which the self is threatened until it disappears (an ideal quite equally-opposite to the

¹³ Page 22-23

Kantian ideal). In that sense it can be considered sublime, but the really interesting thing is that this sense of the sublime, through a kind of minimizing or death of *self*, is common in both Christian and secular approaches. This is a most important similarity between the Christian and post-modern sublimities that my work takes advantage of. These paintings, while composed under my care and through my direction, are also the products of randomness, chance events and sound physics, which are all beyond me – yielding to what is much bigger than me.

In the Christian Sublime, there is a self-abnegation which comes either willingly in generous agape self-sacrificial giving in to response Christ and hope in life beyond, or defiantly in rejection through judgment. In the contemporary sublime, the self-abnegation comes, whether in acceptance or defiance, under the huge wave of material, information, technology and society. The contemporary artist Ai Weiwei has made this second sublime explicitly known in his Sunflower seeds installation in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall (discussed later in footnotes). The sublime feeling of the smallness and fragility of man contrasts with something innate in the individual that speaks of human worth, and this creates a feeling of longing for something that is beyond. This same feeling of smallness before greatness beyond control or composition is something I have sought in these works.

It is as though modern and postmodern artists, like Solomon of old, have explored all that they could lay their hands on – have denied themselves no desire and reached their end and the same conclusion: that it is all vanity, especially when we consider that aesthetic judgment and the pursuit of excellence has also been critiqued and sometimes rejected by the aforementioned artists. This is not a place to live, but to die; to stay in

such a place is impossible for the living soul and knowing this, it senses a yearning. This situation which leads to yearning is common in all of the art works the survey of the field will later explore, and is especially useful in religious art. It is an situation I have experienced in working on these works, that I believe translates.

Rudolph Otto explains that the sublime is a feeling - one that arises when we come into the domain of the non-rational. He asserts that this feeling is common to all people and religions. He makes the distinction in that the sublime, while similar to the numinous (divine presence), is only an analogy for it.¹⁴ It is a feeling; it is an *aesthetic*, not a *religious* term. It is a feeling that can be as much a part of contemporary art as it has been with any. He makes the analogy of a woven fabric, where the rational (all that we know or can measure or comprehend) is the warp and the non-rational (all that we cannot fully know or measure or comprehend) is the woof; one horizontal and one vertical. Paradoxically both understandings, rational and non-rational, speak to a fuller vision, but neither is independently complete.¹⁵ Though the epicenter of sublime feeling may be found in sacred, Spiritual or even linguistic sources, and I hope in my work to awaken along with this feeling a sense of Christ's presence, it is important to remember that the sublime feeling is a *feeling*. Much of modern and postmodern art has been about that sublime feeling, a feeling *like* the presence of the Divine. It is non-rational, or beyond the abilities of the finite rational mind. It is an act of faith.¹⁶

¹⁴ R. Otto, location 977

¹⁵ Otto R., *The Idea of the holy: an inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*, Oxford University Press, London, 1923, location 176

¹⁶ There have been some really good arguments made for how every action is an act of faith, even "reason is an act of a kind of faith", including ration. See G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, The Bodley Head, U.K., 1908 pp.19

There is more to this sublime experience than feeling, and while this humbling feeling and the experience of longing it instigates is deeply important to me, it is not entirely the thrust of this project. The seminal point the project engages is the pursuit of an incarnational, relational, “heavenly language” which evidences this desire. My hope is, that my art will ignite in others a sublime feeling that comes from Christ. Fujimura explains the same thing,

“In the works of many abstract expressionists I see not only abstract paintings but a yearning and groping for the heavenly language. They were convinced that earth and history did not contain the language to capture the fear and power of the age... I see abstraction as a potential language to speak to today's world about the hope of things to come. ... I interpret them in a way, hopefully, that would increase the viewer's passion for seeing the physical reality and heavenly reality. To me the weakness of abstraction does not lie in its denial of the spiritual: the weakness of abstraction lies in its Platonic, Gnostic denial of the physical.. I want to affirm and celebrate the physical... This sacramental language must address reality and confront what we see, but must transcend it to grasp what we can't see yet ... to affirm and celebrate the physical.”¹⁷

This heavenly language Fujimura is talking about is closer than the division or lack of division between spirit and flesh. There is something in there about an experience of desire for some kind of transition beyond and including both spirit and flesh.

An understanding of the word ‘liminal’¹⁸ will help explain what some artists of the Christian sublime are attempting, myself included. Liminal refers to a transitional state,

¹⁷ Fujimura, M., *Abstraction and the Christian Faith*, CIVA (Christians in the Visual Arts) newsletter, Nov.1997

¹⁸ Definition of *LIMINAL* 1. *Of or relating to a sensory threshold* 2: *barely perceptible* 3: of, relating to, or being an intermediate state, phase, or condition : *in-between, transitional* <in the *liminal* state between life and death — Deborah Jowitt> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liminal> viewed June 2014

as in the initiates of a ritual, neither in the state they were before the rite, and not the same as they will be after. For example, when my wife and I were exchanging our wedding vows, we were neither married nor unmarried, but were dwelling in that momentary liminal space in between marriage and singleness. The Christian artist works in that liminal space that is neither heaven to come, not fully earth – but something incarnationally both and neither. That space is the relational place of longing for that which *is being* revealed in Christ. In some ways this is not unlike Merleau-Ponty's claim that painting is about seeing 'the invisible of the visible,' or that which the visible covers, the heart of things beyond material, but (in a Hegelian sense) also in the material.¹⁹

The art of the Christian sublime can use the non-rational language of the contemporary sublime. "Religious exhibitions of truth in language tend to express the *rational*" says Otto.²⁰ Religious exhibitions in visual language have also had a historical tendency to appeal to the rational mind. Images of the cross or body of Christ abound to the point that they lose their effect, if not from becoming uber-common, then simply by their lack of ability to represent such magnitude of power because they are only *rational* representations. Therefore, there remains, in Christian art, a need for the sublime breakdown that some postmodern painters were quick to find; there is a need for the *non-rational* of Christian art to appear and narrow the gap put there by the representational aspect of old Christian art; this way it might become an art action that presents non-rational facets of the Christian faith. The collapse of inside and outside, or

¹⁹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and mind*, in SD Ross (ed.), *Art and its significance an anthology of aesthetic theory*, 3rd edn, State university of New York Press, Albany, New York, pp. 287

²⁰ Otto location 977

spiritual and material, art and non-art, that marks the premise of so much postmodern and contemporary art, leaves the audience in a surprising place of contemplating whether or not there is something more here and now. That has long been the question of Christianity which Christ addressed relationally²¹ though it has not often been a part of Christian painting.²² Contemporary artists have an opportunity to work in the space of that collapse, to point to what is beyond the spiritual or material through the instant longing created. There is an absence in the field of Christian art for more artists to enter into that liminal space with visual eyes open in stereoscope.²³ The art of the Christian sublime has a lot to glean from the longing expressed in postmodern art, but it is not a one sided exchange, and there is much that the contemporary artist can gain from the Christian. The same 'unfulfilled' hunger found in the postmodern sublime that Shaw talks about²⁴ may be just what the Christian sublime addresses. Modern art is inseparably linked with its historical Christian heritage, and leaps to solve some of the problems of art in that context.²⁵

While minimal, and post minimal art, installation and land art, the artists of modernist formalism have been making movements away from the Platonic idealism of the past (exemplified in the idealized representational art of the Renaissance artists for example -the artist genius and the ideal beyond) they have been (ironically) moving towards

²¹ Matthew 3:2

²² Art historian Andrew Graham-Dixon puts forth an argument that the earliest few centuries of Christian paintings foreshadowed much of the aesthetic style of 20th century painters, such as shallow depth of field, primarily attributed to an intentional limitation of the surface due to a longing for what was beyond material. *The Art of Eternity*, BBC four, 2007.

²³ Dr. David Akenson asked a great question about the limitations of such an endeavor. 'Only Christ could 'lose the gap', and to do so, he had to die. Humans also die when they try to lose the gap. Think of suicide, and terrorist suicides closing the gap.' How could any painting do this for us? – Thanks! It is not that this is suicidal in Christian art, though it is self-sacrificial in its generous giving. Suicide would be the logical conclusion for one attempting to close the gap through human effort, perhaps this is why some artists have come to this conclusion in actuality. It is certainly not to imply that any art could somehow bridge the distance between God and man – only Christ could do that. Instead, *because* He did, there is an opportunity to dwell there – and to respond to that love in creative acts.

²⁴ P. Shaw, pp 9

²⁵ Daniel Seidell has written a book that goes into this in greater detail, especially in Chapter 2 (*God in the Gallery: A Christian Embrace of Modern Art*, Baker Academic, 2008.) so I will not labor this history here.

another, opposite 'ideal' – their anti-aesthetic minimization. They have sought to bring heaven down, as it were, to rationalize something bigger into a facile, material package as though the unfathomable is fathomable once it is named. This sublime leans on human communication, idea, or concept, or language alone. Turning a critical eye to common art practice and the stuff of language, concept breaks down the distance between ideas and nature. Much in the spirit of Hegel, they have been applying the spiritual above to the physical below all at once with an eye only to the human mind. 'True sublime' says Francis Reynolds, is unreachable, between polar extremes at the limits of human conception and beyond. It is at the point of breakdown between word and object,²⁶ or in the case of painting, image and object. Contemporary painters have the good fortune of inheriting that linguistic breakdown in painting, the minimization of beyond and material. My work seeks to continue that trajectory, in and beyond human ideas, both rational and non-rational, but as a language that returns to sublime reverence. "Creature consciousness"²⁷ or a feeling of individual nothingness in the face of supreme power, as Otto put it, cannot be taught, only awakened.²⁸ My own practice would be placed in a kind of super-position between and including both the ideals of minimization of the distance between 'spirit and bone', and consciousness towards God, who is Holy and completely other.

²⁶ P Shaw pp 76

²⁷ R. Otto location 392

²⁸ R. Otto location 355

Chapter 2

Survey of the field: Matisse, Malevich, Rothko, Fujimura

This survey looks at four artists of the past 100 years, and discusses some of their major works using various theories of the sublime. These works are also used to help contextualize my current work. These artists are primarily painters (in chronological order): Henri Matisse, Kazimir Malevich, Mark Rothko, and Makoto Fujimura. This paper explores the ways in which these artists have been instrumental in developing a 21st century visual language for religious or transcendent painting, and how that language may be engaged in my own work as a painter and evangelist. The survey discusses these works in the context of the sublime²⁹. There is a particular focus on the Christian sublime, as well as the sublime of 21st Century art. It draws the main conclusion that, given the materialist bent of modern art being the most visible and discussed, there is another tradition, a 'longing' for the beyond material that lends great strength to the works, which is not entirely unlike the Christian sublime. In conclusion there is a particular interest in the sublime feeling and the longing evoked in both traditions: a 'heavenly language' that communicates that which passes understanding through the experience of longing.

²⁹ The sublime is loosely defined as a feeling of individual minimization in the face of something vast, great, fearful, or excessive beyond comprehension.

2.1 Henri Matisse



Figure 1. Henri Matisse in *la chapelle du rosarie du vence*, completed in 1951

Henri Matisse was an artist whose work can be characterized by minimized aesthetics, simplicity of form, clean line, and reference to a sublime feeling that may be invoked in the viewer. The reductive simplicity in his works emphasized both the splendor of the material elements he was working with as well the illusiveness beyond them. This was most obvious in the work of his last decade, which Matisse called his crowning achievement³⁰, *La chapelle du rosarie du vence*, completed in 1951 in his old age [Figure 1]. This work can certainly weigh in as a piece of 20th C sublime art for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is in a sublime location, a chapel. Secondly, because of the subject matter, the depiction of the suffering body of Christ on one wall, and opposite, the

³⁰ H. Williams, *Henri Matisse and the nun: Why did the artist create a masterpiece for Sister Jacques-Marie?*, The Independent, Sunday, March 30, 2014

colored light passing through stained glass in shapes resembling seaweed or spring leaves reaching upward through a yellow and blue sky. Thirdly because of the sublime feeling that it produces, but perhaps it is more sublime in this: it is a work which submits to something greater than material on a chapel wall. Before discussing this work in detail, I will raise the question of the sublime through the philosophy of Edmund Burke who contrasted the beautiful against the sublime. Beauty is said to be that which we can control, possess, can conceptualize, that which submits to us; the sublime is that which we must submit to.³¹ The beautiful and the sublime may share many characteristics, but where the sublime ultimately eludes the mind's ability to comprehend there is an accompanying feeling of individual smallness, weakness, awe and perhaps even terror; whereas beauty, through a conceptual acceptance, produces a feeling of ownership, of reception, of the achievement of discovery in the viewer. Matisse's Chapel does both.

Despite the fact that the Chapel he built grew out of the tradition of Christian architecture, used amongst the repertoire of materials, stained glass, the choice media for Gothic Cathedrals, and despite the blatantly Biblical Christian imagery of Christ's suffering on the rear wall of the Chapel, there is question as to whether this can be considered a work of the Christian sublime.³² This sublime (a self-giving sacrificial work, motivated by reciprocal love for Christ) is different from a work of the modern-sublime (in which the sublime feeling is derived from the formalities of the materials themselves, in this case the sheer beauty and fierce stillness of the light and color and of

³¹ P. Shaw, *The Sublime (the New Critical Idiom)*, Routledge, USA, 2006. pp 59-61.

³² Shaw, P. pp 25. When referring to the Christian Sublime I will be referring to the definition put forth by Phillip Shaw, which is one in which the motivations and aesthetics, stemming from reaction to the selfless agape love demonstrated in Christ, seek to overcome origins in the flesh. It is a sublime brought on by the dualism of Christianity (death in life & life in death – God and man, unity and fragmentation). It ultimately comes from acknowledgement of Christ as Savior, fully God and fully man.

the place, etc.).³³ It is also different from the post-modern-sublime (where the feeling of sublime is discovered in the human perception of the self-voiding unreachableness of what is; where the work and audience relationship becomes the subject)³⁴. The Christian sublime stems from both the reverent fear of, and the ultimate beyond-rational peace in the love of God.³⁵ Ultimately, the question of Matisse's motivation is somewhat beyond our ability to answer. It seems that Matisse did not fully answer this question for himself or his audience. Matisse wrote in his book *Jazz*,

“Do I believe in God? Yes, when I am working. When I am submissive and modest, I feel myself to be greatly helped by someone who causes me to do things that exceed my capabilities. However, I cannot acknowledge him because it is as if I were to find myself before a conjuror whose sleight of hand eludes me.”³⁶

If we dissect his above statement, we find it is very much a statement of the sublime – in at least two ways. First, he speaks of being submissive and modest, and submitted to a ‘someone’ who is of help beyond Matisse's own capabilities. This is the kind of sublime that Rudolph Otto calls ‘creature-consciousness’ – the feeling of being small and created and in submission, of ‘individual nothingness in the face of supreme power’.³⁷ This shares with the Christian sublime the submission to One unseen and what is greater than one's own capabilities. The second part defers determination; in a self-contradictory way, he acknowledges He whom he ‘cannot acknowledge’. Thus, it may be considered an instance of the modern sublime in that Matisse retreats to look for what

³³ This turn in modernism towards the material as material itself, and within the painting discipline to look at paint as paint, has some connection with the Kantian self-criticism Clement Greenberg described “characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself”. See, . Greenberg, “*Modernist Painting*” in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, edited by John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 85–94.

³⁴ S. Best, *Aesthetics – rethinking the anti-aesthetic tradition in late-modern art* in the *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, vol. 5, no. 3. Pp127-142

³⁵ Shaw, P. pp 25.

³⁶ H. Matisse, *Jazz*, Teriade, USA, 1983 pp. 80

³⁷ R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: an inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*, 1889, Kindle location 392

can be seen alone – and in so doing, opens a way for his work to be considered in the variety of the material sublime of modern art.³⁸ Yet, it may also be considered in the Christian sublime, because in the context, whether or not Matisse can ‘acknowledge Him’, it is apparent that it is to Christ that Matisse is referring. The mixture of these seems to be the potency, and producer of the sense of longing, of seeking that Matisse was able to achieve. This turn toward the material, in this context, only seems to work to emphasize the sublime nature of what is beyond the material. As the light that comes through the colored glass of the window, there is both the material reality of transcendence as well as the metaphysical metaphor of something in, beyond, and through the surface.

In the manner of Barthes statement: ‘a texts unity lies in its destination, not it’s origin’³⁹ one can take this work a step further and consider that, regardless of what Matisse may have intended, it is the experience of the audience (of which Matisse himself was also a part) that matters most. This presents his work through a different lens, and towards the relational, social, site-specific aspect of the post-modern sublime in which it is the audience relationship in the moment of reception that is the essential minimizing factor. Matisse’s Chapel is definitely site specific; it is likely that the audience inclusion that continues to this day was anticipated here in this work of modern art.

Matisse’s work on the Chapel leaves us with questions. It certainly is a modern work insofar as it is not representational in a conventional or realist sense. It is materially exquisite, and the unanswered questions of Matisse and the beyond are a part of the reason why it can be considered both modern *and* sublime. It’s context and subject

³⁸ B. Newman, *The Sublime is now*, pp 4.

³⁹ Barthes, R. *The Death of the Author*, in *Image music text*, Hill and Wang, London, pp. 142-148

matter would suggest religious considerations – sublime in themselves. Still - whether or not it falls into the Christian Sublime (whether or not Matisse's act of art was one of Christian worship and evangelism or merely modern formalism employing the Christian traditions of the past he had inherited) is debatable – and *is* debated. Matthew Collings, British artist and art critic, noted for example, that Matisse's friend Pablo Picasso called the Chapel a fraud because "he said Matisse was a non-believer. What was the point of him decorating a Chapel?"⁴⁰ He suggested that, for Matisse, the work was not necessarily one of spiritual fervor or feeling, but perhaps one of material universalization in the place and in the art itself. "When you think about what art was for Matisse, that it was about beauty and simplicity and inner truth, then this place does make sense. It's a simplification. The religiosity taken out; the feeling left in. The feeling of what a Chapel is for: the feeling of being purified. You come there to have, as Matisse said, 'your burdens lightened.'" ⁴¹ Maybe Collings was right, maybe not. Matisse gave of himself for this major project, investing much of himself in it. He dedicated it to a Christian religious order, and to a religious friend Sister Jacques-Marie. His turn to religion at the end of his life is not unlike that of other artists like Ludwig Van Beethoven or Salvador Dali, but even a turn to religion may not determine that which one cannot judge for another: the faith essential to determine whether or not the experience, for him, was of the Christian Sublime. Critic, Gregory E. Reynolds, would maintain quite the opposite about the qualification of this work, whether or not Matisse had this faith. "A lack of faith is not the only ingredient in the creativity of unbelievers, although unbelief sometimes expresses itself in ugly and even reprehensible ways. True beauty may be created by the non-Christian artist or poet made in God's image. General

⁴⁰ *This is Modern Art: Nothing Matters, part 3 of 6*, BBC, UK. 1999 (viewed May, 2014 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jS9ku07gFbA>)

⁴¹ *This is Modern Art: Nothing Matters, part 3 of 6*, BBC, UK. 1999

revelation is no less God's revelation.”⁴² This theory of Christian sublime would mean that *anything* can be used to point to the Glory of God, regardless of authorial intention. It also echoes the later theories of Jaques Lacan⁴³, which this paper briefly touches on later. The faith of the artist may be as mysterious as the feeling of sublime the artist was exploring. Perhaps it is even this mysterious feeling that compels such questions. Perhaps those questions are just the point. Both Collings (who said “in all his earthly agony, Matisse thought modern art and the Bible made sense”)⁴⁴ and Reynolds (who wrote about ‘the common grace gifts of the Spirit in common culture’)⁴⁵ could agree that there is a transcendent quality of Matisse’s work that begs a sublime question of the audience. That question asks us, through this modern art, to consider our own experience. This is the spiritual muscle of his work that I work to employ in my studio research.

⁴² Reynold, . G.E., *Fractured Light: A review article*, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Ordained Servant Online, November 2011, viewed May, 2014 at http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=281

⁴³ S. Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), p. 28-31.

⁴⁴ *This is Modern Art: Nothing Matters*, part 3 of 6, BBC, UK. 1999 .

⁴⁵ Reynold, . G.E., *Fractured Light: A review article*, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Ordained Servant Online, November 2011, viewed May, 2014 at http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=281

2.2 Kazimir Malevich

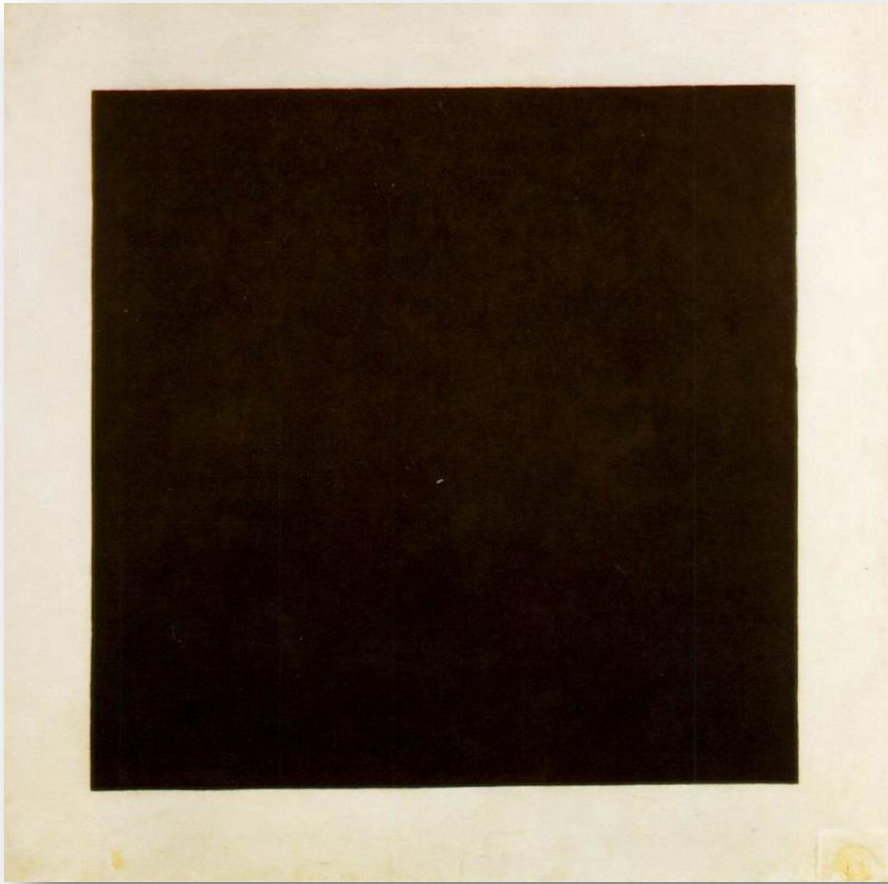


Figure 2. Kazimir Malevich, *Black Square*, 1915

Russian artist Kazimir Malevich, working in a time and place where Government fashioned by communist ideology had made Christian expression illegal, painted instead, a canvas black with a white border. Whether the color black was used to acknowledge a loss in society brought about by modern ideology, or black represented emptiness, or black as in mourning, or black to create depth, or black as in total consumption and destruction, or black in all its limited-dimensional flatness, his 'Icon of the age' as he called it, was painted black. It can be considered a most sublime piece because it speaks of limitation, of a void, like a gaping black hole, a vacuous longing.

Makoto Fujimura, the contemporary artist and Christian writer who this paper will discuss further soon, called Malevich's work the "still point of the turning [Guggenheim] world" contrasting it with the de-humanizing, 'post-human' work of another artist, Matthew Barney, exhibited concurrently in the MOMA. Fujimura praised Malevich for his engagement with the eternal. He says,

"Malevich, whom I see as a window into the soul of modern art, captures the resonance and transcendence of his time. His abstract paintings were intended to be modern icon images. ... Malevich's works created dynamism out of the window/icon space. ...Ours is a culture easily swayed by facile explanations and cunning manipulation. Malevich portrays a face of the world, and a city, lasting beyond such superficiality." ⁴⁶

Collings explains of Malevich,

"He wanted it to be spiritual. It was revolutionary, futuristic, spiritual abstraction. For Malevich, suprematism was like Russian Icons, with all the ecstatic super-religious mind-blowing power of a picture of Jesus, but only with the light coming off of a square instead of the face of the redeemer." ⁴⁷

The profundity of Malevich's work can be considered a work of modern, critical sublime - the conceptual sublime that Immanuel Kant was talking about, when the mind can comprehend that there is something it cannot comprehend.⁴⁸ This sublime is the pain and then relief of facing and then overcoming the unfathomable by conceptualizing it. It is a mechanism, a mode of consciousness, the mind taking a place over the real.⁴⁹ It *refers* to a beyond that *is* there, but this modern sublime starts and ends with the ability of the rational mind to imagine and intellectualize it, even *that* which it cannot

⁴⁶ J. Geddes, *Interview with Makoto Fujimura*, The Hedgehog Review, Summer '04, pp. 88

⁴⁷ *This is Modern Art: Nothing Matters*, part 3 of 6, BBC, UK. 1999

⁴⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Walter S. Pluhar (Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1987), pp. 114-15

⁴⁹ Shaw, P. pp 7

intellectualize. It is like the 1st century rhetorical sublime of Cassius Longinus, in which rhetoric, rather than an object in nature, is the primary determinate of the sublime.⁵⁰

The mechanism of the modern sublime is concept and language. This language however, is not without its counterpart outside of language. Shaw writes,

“When Longinus is taken up in the Christian tradition, attention shifts from nature to the divine. Mountains, for example, are sublime because their grandeur manifests the glory of God. But whether the origins of sublimity are located in the external world or in the divine, the desire for origins is significant in itself.”⁵¹

Malevich, coming from a culture once rich in Christian iconography, suddenly prohibited in his age, may have sensed the sudden void and painted his black square in response.⁵² The sublime was not located in an object that was there, but perhaps in language, concept, or perhaps even more shocking, a feeling that there is something not there. “Malevich himself regarded his minimalistic geometrical forms as the secular equivalents of Russian icons, a form of painting which aspires to present the divine as pure or unmediated reality.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Shaw, P. pp 28

⁵¹ Shaw, P. pp 28

⁵² Another artist raised in a similarly prohibitive communist government is Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. He is noteworthy – especially his work *Sunflower Seeds* recently at the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall (2010). Ai seems to derive a sense of the sublime in this piece from the dwarfing of the individual amidst the vastness of consumerism and it's relationship with the export of all things 'made in China'. A uniquely contemporary take on the centuries old sublime aesthetic of empty space, and the dwarfing of man, found in Chinese brush painting. Rudolph Otto expands on this aesthetic in his book referenced elsewhere in this paper. Only for Ai, it is not the vastness of the natural world, but of the global market that is the beautiful and threatening excess. His one million 'made in China' by hand, sunflower seeds, exported to the west to be ogled and walked over speaks, among other things, to the 'contemporary consumer sublime' which blankets the individual under the vast reach of capital into nearly all areas of life. A similar comparison can be made of Damien Hirst's shark, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* 1991, described as nothing 'exemplary... but rather symptomatic, telling much about our time' by Damien White in Damien Hirst's Shark: Nature, Capitalism and the Sublime published in *Tate Papers* 14 (Oct/Nov 2010) <<http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/10autumn/white02.shtm>>. His is a move in western culture from the romantic natural sublime to the contemporary consumer sublime. Actually, both works speak of a global culture in which the individual is dwarfed, and threatened to becoming nothing. A very interesting paper could speak more of this sublime, but not this one. For the purposes of this paper, it suffices to say that, whatever the threat or vastness that stimulates the terror of the sublime feeling, the aesthetics of the Christian sublime that I seek in my work subvert that by looking to an enduring Kingdom not of this world, seeing both it's pre-figurement and antithesis in all aspects of this.

The question in regards to the extent to which this was a matter of faith for Malevich is, once again, not ours to answer. It may or may not have been faith, but it was clearly a belief.⁵⁴ Whether or not it is of the Christian Sublime for the audience may be a determination of audience's reception, but his placement and designation of the work as 'equivalent' to the Russian Christian Orthodox Icons signals his efforts at something sublime, and something related to Christ. He did say,

"This was no "empty square" which I had exhibited but rather the feeling of non-objectivity. ...Art no longer cares to serve the state and religion, it no longer wishes to illustrate the history of manners, it wants to have nothing further to do with the object, as such, and believes that it can exist, in and for itself, without "things" ...The public is still, indeed, as much convinced as ever that the artist creates superfluous, impractical things. It never considers that these superfluous things endure and retain their vitality for thousands of years, whereas necessary, practical things survive only briefly."⁵⁵

This sublime feeling of non-objectivity seems to have come from a belief in a kind of transcendence, of what remains after destruction.⁵⁶ It is sublime in the sense that it looks to what is beyond, but ironic and paradoxical in that it looks to what is beyond by looking at what is *not* beyond. His painting 'believes in itself'. It looks at what is here, and that here is feeling or subjectivity.

⁵³ Shaw, P. Kasimir Malevich's *Black Square*, from the TATE online research library, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/philip-shaw-kasimir-malevichs-black-square-r1141459>, viewed June 6, 2014.

⁵⁴ In an interview with Makoto Fujimura, poet Christian Wimin asserts that belief is something connected with an object, but faith is something bigger, more elusive and non-rational (even though belief may be the substance of faith). <http://vimeo.com/91108914>, published April, 2014, viewed June 2014.

⁵⁵ Malevich, K. "Suprematism", in *Art and its Significance – An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Ross, S. ' University of New York, USA 1984 pp. 543-544

⁵⁶ Boris Groys reasons in his article, *Becoming Revolutionary: On Kazimir Malevich: "The image that survives the work of destruction is the image of destruction. Malevich undertakes the most radical reduction of the image (to a black square), thus anticipating the most radical destruction of the traditional image by material forces, by the power of time."* Seen at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/becoming-revolutionary-on-kazimir-malevich/> June 6, 2014.

“Objectivity, in itself, is meaningless to him; the concepts of the conscious mind are worthless. Feeling is the determining factor ... and thus art arrives at nonobjective representation. It reaches a "desert" in which nothing can be perceived but feeling.”⁵⁷

It is as though he took to the extreme of Edmund Burke’s thesis that what ‘really is’ is not the concern of the theory of the sublime – affections (or feelings) are.⁵⁸ Malevich was not alone in looking for the spark of sublime feeling beyond material, in material, or “presenting the unrepresentable in presentation itself” as Lyotard put it. Mark Rothko, seemed to speak in the same dialect, and we will look at him next. Before that, it will be useful to briefly discuss what this language is, and how it works in modern art, and how it can be used in a 21st century language in Christian work, my own included.

2.3 More about the Christian Sublime

This dialect is dialectic, in the sense that Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Jaques Lacan understood it, which are nicely summed up by Slavoj Žižek here:

“We have here the structure of the Möbius strip: the subject is correlative to the object, but in a negative way – the subject and object can never ‘meet’; they are in the same place, but on opposite sides of the Möbius strip.”⁵⁹

His argument, that there must be a thesis for there to be antithesis, is applied to corporeal and incorporeal. “There is a spirit (subject) only in so far as there is some bone (some inert material, non-spiritual remainder/leftover) that resists its spiritual sublation – appropriation – mediation.”⁶⁰ In other words, there is a mirror opposite in the material language and something beyond it; there are two sides of every coin, or the

⁵⁷ K. Malevich, pp. 544

⁵⁸ P. Shaw, pp 50

⁵⁹ S. Žižek, pp. 28-31

⁶⁰ S. Žižek, pp. 28-29

one coin of subject/object relations. The choice of a Möbius strip as an illustration of two-sidedness is an interesting one that does not completely maintain the two-sidedness, because in a Möbius strip (which is essentially a belt, unbuckled and given half a twist causing the inside to flip to the outside halfway around the loop, and the outside to the inside, and refastened such that) the two opposite planes of inside and outside are constantly the same path with an opposite side. This is an important understanding about the collapse between the 'spirit and bone' of this dialectic, which seemed as though it was revolutionary to Malevich, disheartening to Rothko, and incidental to Matisse. In this illustration, there is no difference in the difference between one side and the other, inside and outside, or material and spirit.

The most pertinent question about exact opposites is whether or not they are exactly *different*, or exactly *alike*. Some of the best works in the visual dialect of Malevich and Rothko leave us with a feeling of longing for something more than what it gives us. "You're forced to think, 'well... what else is there here?'"⁶¹ That may be just the point. The feeling that there must be something more is the strength of this language. Almost completely robbed of vocabulary, it creates a longing. It draws like salt draws water. Christ called his followers to be the 'salt and light' of the world (Matthew 5:13-16), and to do this through Spirit indwelt material action. It makes sense that if His followers are artists, they should produce art that causes thirst and illuminates. The art we have looked at so far at least expresses longing very well. The dialectic of figure-ground or positive-negative space relationship of the material and the spiritual seems to naturally speak to the incompleteness of one side of the perspective alone; the material beauty speaks to the numinous beyond, as the sublime gives spiritual substance and even a

⁶¹ *This is Modern Art: Nothing Matters*, part 3 of 6, BBC, UK. 1999

kind of beauty to material. It also speaks well to the lack of difference between the physical and the material, inside and outside action. This is a good place to start.

There is more for the contemporary painter about this dialectic, or as G.K. Chesterton calls it, this “stereoscopic” view (seeing both the material and the ethereal).⁶² One of Christ’s followers, Paul, said similarly and that Christ is in *and* above all things⁶³. The Old Testament also settled on the duality of God’s omnipresence and omnipotence over ‘both sides of any outcome,’⁶⁴ while maintaining God’s Holiness and His complete otherness⁶⁵. The Christian Sublime and its aesthetics can be defined by this paradox... best exemplified in Christ the fully-God fully-man.⁶⁶ The aesthetics of the Christian sublime in painting and the dialectic of these painters seems to fit together well, because they start with the genuine acknowledgement of at least one side of the ‘Möbius strip’ – and thus elude to another.

The Christian sublime differs from this dialectic, however, in that it is not binary; it is not merely *two* sided (even if that two sidedness is in constant collapse). There is at least one third element that makes the Christian sublime uniquely incarnational. In the

⁶² G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, The Bodley Head, U.K., 1908. pp. 15

⁶³ Acts 17:28, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.” Also, John’s testimony in John 3:30-31, “*He [Christ] must increase, but I must decrease. He that comes from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaks of the earth: he that comes from heaven is above all.*” Hebrews 2:10 also describes Christ as *He “for whom are all things, and through whom are all things”*. Colossians 1:16–17 “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

⁶⁴ Proverbs 16:33, “*The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.*”

⁶⁵ Amongst scores of other passages about the Holiness, or set-apart and completely other-ness of God, are most notably, the first two of the 10 commandments found in Exodus 20:2-7, commanding not to idolatrously worship materials, because God is Spirit. Jesus echoes this in John 4:24, “*God is Spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.*”

⁶⁶ John 1:1–5, 14, 16-18 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.” Here we not only see Jesus as fully God and fully man (which is in itself, the most sublime dialectic relationship of all time), we also see the ‘common grace’ of God for all people that ‘we have all received’. This is the overarching ‘common grace’ that Gregory Reynolds argued for earlier, allowing anything to be usable to discuss God’s glory – regardless of the intention of the artist or authorial.

Christian sublime, there is the perspective which maintains that God divides both spiritual and material sides again *relationally*. The Möbius strip illustration may speak well to the collapse of distance between inside and outside, or the realm of material and spirit, but it does little to speak of *relationship* to God, because it is a purely mechanical illustration, void of anything beyond. Žižek's illustration of the Möbius strip is as an outer line drawing or technical illustration, it is a concept void of any light source from the outside, because it rejects anything outside of the human mind. When there is an acknowledgement of an outside light source, God in the Christian sublime, this Möbius strip becomes illuminated, and shadows also appear on the strip. The inside and outside are both divided by a relationship to light, not just to each other; both are found to be partly in light and partly in darkness. The dialectic view remains intact and material, because it subsumes spirit into material – the dialectical material-spirit collapse of postmodernism. When seen through the perspective of a Christian worldview, this collapse is accepted as it is, but is either dignified or demolished in relationship to the judgment of God, which is sublime and beyond humanity.

Relationship to God is the third mediation that is essential to the Christian sublime. These glimpses of both the beyond *and* the not beyond are outside of human ability – and therefore completely sublime – but it is the 'perspective of God' and not of man that make it of the Christian sublime. Žižek claims that Christ functions only as any 'transitional object' both marking and bridging the distance between the inside and outside worlds (inside and outside are as close as Žižek gets to spiritual and material, because his perspective is that it all falls *only* under the realm of the human mind). Further, he sees Christ as a 'vanishing mediator' that loses value once the two concepts have been established in the subjects mind, and a sense of 'self' has taken the highest

place. This is his form of 'Christian Atheism' that may relate to Malevich's art. "There is no God, and the 'Holy Spirit' is 'virtual' being, existing only insofar as we act as though it exists."⁶⁷ For him, the sublime can only be immanent rather than transcendent, and its 'sublime' is immanent as well. This may be the sublime of postmodern thought, but not of the Christian sublime because it is *only* human, *self* and alone, where the Christian sublime is relational.⁶⁸ Milbank argues against Žižek, and for something beyond a dialectic in their co-authored book *The Monstrosity of Christ*. Marika Rose of Durham University summarizes:

"Phenomenal reality does contain dialectical elements, and elements of monstrous conflict, but these are subsumed within the larger and more fundamental category of the metaxological⁶⁹. ... the Holy Spirit, lying between the two 'poles' of Father and Son, constitutes an 'extra' third, mediating between the two, allowing dialectical difference to remain unresolved, and ensuring that Being is not nothingness but participation in the plenitude of God, and that peace, not conflict, is the ultimate ontological reality. The Holy Spirit is not a vanishing but a remaining mediator, holding together identity and difference, reason and faith."⁷⁰

⁶⁷Rose, M. *A modest plea for a Chestertonian reading of The Monstrosity of Christ*, International Journal of Žižek Studies, Volume Four, Number Four, pp. 2

⁶⁸ In an email from Pastor Dave Sweet, June 12, 2014: "In my opinion postmodernism is an attempt to live life without living life! It's a self-centred, me first life. Like a black hole it sucks the life of everything around into it! It's organized disorganization reflected in addictions of all sorts, a narchy ending in both social and personal suicide! As someone has said, "suicide is the ultimate expression of self. The total denial of "other" to the assertion of self." I kill myself so I don't have to be bothered by those who don't live for my happiness. A martyr dies for something they believe in greater than themselves. Suicide declares that there is nothing greater than self. (Postmodernism isn't new. It's found in Judges 21:25). It is the complete opposite of the Gospel of Christ! It is life lived without regard to God or man!" Žižek's 'Christian Atheism' echoes this, "The true formula of atheism is "there is no big Other"" (Žižek, S. & Milbank J. *The Monstrosity of Christ Paradox or Dialectic?* edited by Creston Davis, MIT Press, 2009, pp 297). His "ethical vision reinforces this thought in his revulsion for the 'disgusting proximity' of other human beings. (Rose, M. pp 5) This lonely, immanent postmodern worldview may have been a motivating factor for Rothko leading to both his work and suicide, which I will only briefly discuss later.

⁶⁹ *Metaxological* can be loosely defined as the ongoing levels of expression of relationship between self and Other... the constantly defining relationship 'always in between', an 'undying hope and perpetual disappointment'. It is a paradoxical word which has all kinds of sublime connotations! For more, see *Desire, Dialectics and Otherness: an Essay on Origins* by William Desmond.

⁷⁰ Rose, M. Pp 3.

The Holy Spirit as mediator between God the Father and flesh is the ‘sanctifying work of the Spirit’ that is indicative of the Christian sublime... this determination of Holy identity ascribed to material or non-material by God *relationally*. It is beyond reason in many ways, and therefore sublime – though it is not entirely non-rational, however, the rational aspects to the Christian faith are not the issue of this paper, though the history of Christian art is filled with both rational and non-rational images of the here and beyond.⁷¹ The focus of this paper is on the longing or sense of desire that the sublime feeling (of any category) leaves, and how that may be connected with my practice. Rose concludes that “Milbank’s argument would be stronger if he, like Chesterton, were to enthusiastically embrace the earthier elements of human life as the locus of the divine.”

⁷² There is something to this final evaluation that I can take away, and that something is *relationship*, which this paper will discuss further.

In a lecture at La Tourneau University entitled, *Art, Worship, Creation, and Imaginative Engagement*, Ken Myers, host and producer of the MARS HILL AUDIO *Journal*, says:

“faith integrates spirit and body... Christian worship has always been involved imaginatively with the stuff of creation. The poetry of the Psalms was recited by our Lord and his disciples so that he was engaged with the sound of words as well as the meaning of words... Artful expressions and worship have been present in less obvious ways. It is notable that the communion table contains bread and wine, not wheat and grapes. It is not organic material in its most natural state that serves as a memorial meal that unites

⁷¹ Another interesting paper could be written comparing and contrasting rational, representational religious art of various world religions with the non-representational art of various world religions – and comparing and contrasting those with the images of Christian art. One example is the geometric, strictly non-representational art of Islam, stemming from the concept of the unfathomableness of God and the prohibition of images entirely, so that they may not be worshipped – a slightly different interpretation of the 10 commandments. Another would be to consider the Taoist concepts of Yin and Yang which have already viewed the structural collapse between inside and outside, material and spiritual much in the same way as Žižek’s Möbius strip. The early Taoists confessed in their worldview, a longing. The dreamtime art of the Australian Aboriginal and the view of that time as a participation in the creation of the world is also an interesting art theory. It would be interesting to discuss the sublime in the representational and the non-representational religious art, and their relationship with the material, the beyond, and with God who is viewed by the Christian as in, beyond and above the material and the spiritual. Alas, sorry, this is not the paper for that.

⁷² Rose, M. Pp 5

us with God, bread and wine are the products of human creativity. They are not simply of the natural blessing of God's harvest, even grain and grapes require attention and care to bring them to fruition. Wine is an even more artful product and bread demands attentiveness to the details of creation. Bakers and vintners are not people we usually think of as artists, but what they do has a lot in common with what artists do: they take the stuff of creation and transform it into something newly delightful and beautiful. Bread, wine, and art all serve practical purposes, but they often go beyond necessity toward delight."⁷³

There is something there that is *relational*, that deals with human interaction and artistic endeavor as a part of communion with the Divine. It is as though Christ, when he shared and sanctified the elements of bread and wine, was also alluding to the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially on a mental or spiritual level, with the Creator through the products of artistic investment on a creative or artistic level. This communion, as both Myers and Fujimura also note, comes with added value of "peace" and "delight". Makoto Fujimura explains this language of breaking down concept to feeling as a calling for the arts. Quoting Leo Tolstoy he writes,

"The destiny of art in our time is to transmit from the realm of reason to the realm of feeling the truth." In other words, the language of the arts translates this universal longing for peace into the tangible *experience* of the desire for peace. The arts provide us with language for mediating the broken relational and cultural divides: the arts can model for us how we need to value each person as created in the image of God. This context of rehumanization provided via the arts is essential for communication of the good news.

⁷³ Myers, K. *Art, Worship, Creation, and Imaginative Engagement*, lecture at La Tourneau University, Oct, 15, 2011 <http://biologos.org/blog/art-worship-creation-and-imaginative-engagement>

Jesus desires to create in us “the peace of God, which transcends understanding” (Philippians 4:7), so that we can communicate the ultimate message of hope found in the gospel, the story of Jesus, who bridged the gap between God and humanity to a cynical, distrustful world. The arts provide a necessary backdrop for such an enduring conversation.”⁷⁴

Fujimura means that this sublime, non-rational peace, which passes the mind's ability to understand, is made a perceptible experience of *longing* in this language of art. This language of art makes us thirst for what is beyond language. Later this paper discusses how Fujimura does that in his painting. As I also show, that is also the purpose of my own painting.

⁷⁴ Fujimura, M. *Refractions: a journey of faith, art and culture*, Navpress, Colorado Springs, USA 2009 pp.11, with quote from Tolstoy, L, *What is Art and Essays on Art*, Oxford: Oxford Press, 1930, pp 286

2.4 Mark Rothko



Figure 3. Mark Rothko, *Chapel*, painted from 1964 to 1967, built 1971.

Mark Rothko also notes a longing expressed in the artist, suggesting that art surpasses the material and physical. “For the man who develops his art [the artist] does make adjustments to his physical needs. He understands that man must have bread to live, while the other [the non-artist] cannot understand that you cannot live by bread alone.”⁷⁵ Mark Rothko was quoting, or rather *almost* quoting Jesus in this passage. The difference between the two statements, besides the speaker of course, is that Jesus finished the statement, “Man shall not live on bread alone, *but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*”⁷⁶ Rothko implies not that it is God’s Word, but man’s *art* that can sustain beyond physical bread. It seems a substitution not equal to the task, but there may be something nuanced that this raw comparison passes too quickly. In light of this, we will look at Rothko’s own ecumenical work titled *Chapel*. “Rothko is

⁷⁵ M. Rothko, *M. Art as a form of Action – the Artists reality*, Christopher Rothko, USA, 2004. pp. 11

⁷⁶ Matthew 4:4

appreciated only as somehow beyond reasonable understanding.”⁷⁷ Mathew Collings quotes Rothko, ““There is no such thing as a painting about nothing. The subject is crucial.”” Collings says “for him the only subject was one that was tragic and timeless”.⁷⁸ The timelessness of his Chapel invokes a sense of unfathomable beyond; the tragedy invites a shocking doorway into that timelessness. Rothko manages to evoke these feelings of the non-material, or beyond-material *with* the materials of his painting. The recognition of the materials as just that, physical, makes way for something beyond that. Referring to the art of the American Avant-Garde, of which Rothko was a part, Clement Greenberg wrote, “To restore the identity of an art, the opacity of its medium must be emphasized... For the visual arts, the medium is discovered to be physical; hence pure painting and pure sculpture seek above all else to affect the spectator physically.”⁷⁹ This is the first step in the incarnational strength of Rothko’s language that endures – acknowledging the material as material. Artist, art critic, and Associate Professor of Art at Biola University, Jon Anderson clarifies, “What Rothko was saying is... what we’re after is truth, and we only think that you can get to the truth by destroying the illusions, the sort of mirror-maze that painting has become.”⁸⁰ This must be the start of any religious or spiritual art. If one is not to acknowledge the materials and their limitations, one is not able to acknowledge anything beyond them.

Rothko was not a mere materialist, not by any means. He is noted as having referred to his work as religious. His Chapel is his religious masterpiece. Rothko said of his work, “The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I

⁷⁷ This is Modern Art: Nothing Matters, part 3 of 6, BBC, UK. 1999

⁷⁸ This is Modern Art: Nothing Matters, part 3 of 6, BBC, UK. 1999

⁷⁹ C. Greenberg, *Towards a Newer Laocoon*, in *The Partisan Review*, July 1940. pp. 296-310

⁸⁰ J. Anderson, *Contemporary Art Trends: The (Spiritual) Crisis of Abstract Expressionism: Mark Rothko*, lecture September 2, 2011 Biola University, USA **Published on Apr 5, 2012** <http://youtu.be/3V1SLKsF0BE>

had when I painted them. And if you, as you say, are moved only by their color relationship, then you miss the point.”⁸¹ He was not interested in depictions, especially in a time when religious language and symbolism was in default. Anderson expounds,

“Do you get where Rothko is coming from? He has this strong sense of the dark, the absent, the place where God used to be and He is no longer there, and somehow encountering that absence leads us to the kind of religious experience, the longing for God to come back... to show up again. ... that yearning, that longing for God to appear.... If you feel yearning when you look at these paintings, and a sense of absence and void, then you’re having the experience that he had when he painted them.”⁸²

Though Rothko’s Chapel is clearly in the Christian tradition of religious art making, it is unclear to human judgment, what of the beyond Rothko found. What is clear is that he was seeking it, and doing so with a stunningly vibrant visual vocabulary, as limited as it was stunning. It is precisely the limitation of the vocabulary, and the expression of the artist despite that, which works like a sigh. It works as an expression of an experience of longing.

⁸¹ J. Baal-Teschuva, *Rothko*, Taschen, Germany 2003 pp. 57

⁸² J. Anderson, *Contemporary Art Trends: The (Spiritual) Crisis of Abstract Expressionism: Mark Rothko*, lecture September 2, 2011 Biola University, USA Published on Apr 5, 2012 <http://youtu.be/3V1SLKsF0BE>

2.5 Makoto Fujimura

Artist Makoto Fujimura makes this non-rational art language work to evangelistic ends. It has been said that Fujimura's work is like Rothko's, similar to the way the New Testament is like to Old Testament: a fulfilment. Artist, writer, and professor of computer science at Yale University, David Gelernter, wrote in a review of Fujimura's work comparing Rothko and Fujimura.

"Rothko painted a fascinating series, for an ecumenical chapel. Those brooding dark chapel paintings came at the end of his career (they were painted from 1964 to 1967); he was tired and depressed, and three years later he died a suicide. The light that made his paintings glow from inside was failing—although he also made brightly-colored paintings in his final years, paintings on paper that seem to hark forward to Fujimura's work. Rothko's chapel paintings speak of tragedy—as though we were reaching a low point in American history with our national will to live scraping bottom. Abstract expressionism seemed to be reaching the end of its life. But now comes Makoto Fujimura, whose spiritually eloquent paintings might almost have been kindled from the embers of Rothko's art. Rothko was an agnostic Jew, and Fujimura is a Christian. But Fujimura's religious art gains depth from Rothko's. The darkness of Rothko's late works makes Fujimura's new paintings burn brighter."⁸³

Though both artists managed to render works that are both sublime and beautiful, the parallels in their methods work to emphasize the differences in their sublimity.

⁸³ Gelernter, D. *A Faithful Art - Makoto Fujimura and the redemption of abstract expressionism*. In *The Weekly Standard*, Mar 7, 2005, Vol. 10, No. 23 seen online June 2014, at <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Protected/Articles/000/000/005/287xttfk.asp>

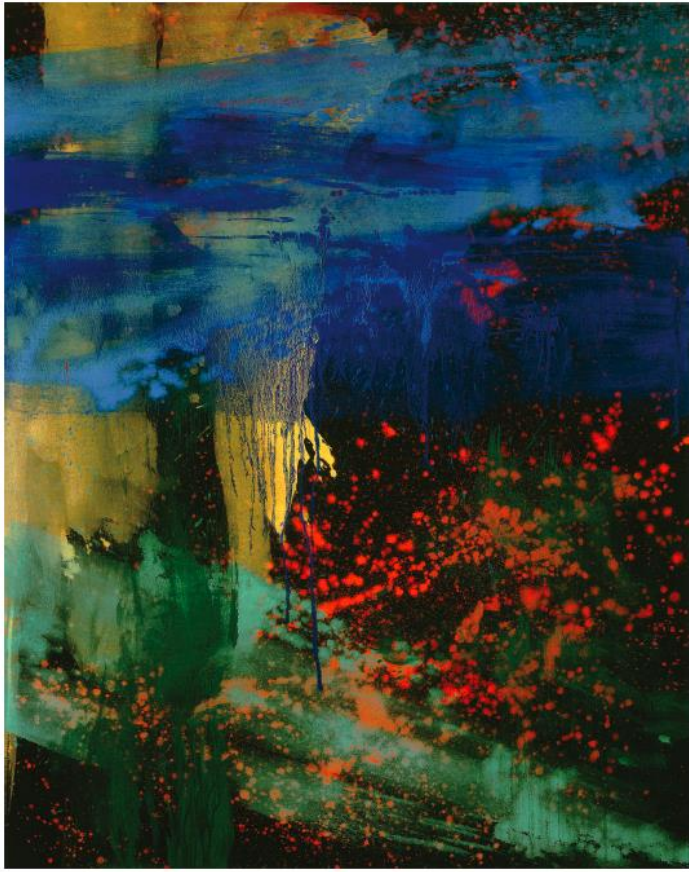


Figure 4. Makoto Fujimura, *Charis-Kairos (The Tears of Christ)*

80x64", Mineral Pigments, Gold on Belgium Linen

Technically, one thing that Rothko and Fujimura share in common is the intensely layered surface of their paintings, allowing light to penetrate the surface and bounce around inside the painting before returning to the surface changed. This alone works as a metaphor signaling the superficiality of surface, and the illusiveness of what is past the surface – and that there is, indeed, something beyond the surface and inciting a longing for that. Rothko and Fujimura share a preference for the use of a variety of materials in their work and layering them, one on top of another. Both achieve a kind of hidden depth of color. Rothko used oil and thinner, like many painters, but also included ground pigments, glue, eggs, and wax. Trained in the methods of Nihonga (literally

Japanese painting) Fujimura paints with ground mineral pigments such as azurite, malachite and cinnabar, bound with animal skin glue, and incorporates gold and silver leaf in his works. He explains,

“the minerals I use are like prisms, they refract light rather than just reflect it. The color spectrum and her subtle hues take a while to get used to, to truly see. The layering of these minerals reveals a mystery hidden beneath the surface reality, a world full of life and enchantment.”⁸⁴

These minerals he chooses to use not only create a sublime feeling of something beyond the surface by visually capturing and releasing light, but also in the potential for meaning already ascribed to many these materials in the Bible. For example, his use of gold leaf, which is a metal that does not tarnish. He reflects on the teachings of his Professor, Kayama-sensei, who guided him through his Masters of Fine Arts Thesis Painting in Tokyo National University (during that time, Fujimura came to his faith in Christ and this greatly affected his work).

“In my mind, Kayama-sensei’s vision for earthly materials began to tap into the greater reality of what Revelation passages describe [of the City of God]: “The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.” ... It is remarkable to me that someone who does not share my faith can speak so clearly into the material reality of the City of God.”⁸⁵

The language Fujimura chooses here defies a divided view of the material and the Spiritual. It seems that Fujimura is able to understand that invisible line very well, but not without much searching. He explains elsewhere that when he first entered the MFA program, he considered art to be a sort of religion, much like Rothko seemed to.

⁸⁴ M. Fujimura, M. pp 17

⁸⁵ M. Fujimura, M. pp. 23

“The problem that I could not overcome with Art being religion is that the more I focused on myself, the less I could find myself. A schism grew inside between who I wanted to be and what I did. I wanted to love my wife, but I saw, more and more, the distance between us. Art as self-expression became a wedge in our relationship. Meanwhile, every day, I sought higher transcendence through the extravagant materials. I found success and expression through Nihonga materials. And yet the very weight of beauty I saw in the materials began to crush my own heart. I could not justify the use of extravagance if I found my heart unable to contain their glory. The more I used them, the moodier and more restless I became. Finding beauty in nature and art, I did not have a “shelf” to place that beauty inside my heart.”⁸⁶

It seems that for Fujimura, and any contemporary artist working within the contemporary Christian sublime, maintaining the closeness of this duality is fundamental – but it is the *relational* aspect that makes it Christian. A Christian worldview maintains antitheses and distinction while also wildly maintaining the paradoxical duality; in painting, the artist emphasizes both the material *and* non-material or beyond-material together without losing sight of either. G.K. Chesterton talks about this distinction using the Biblical symbols of the lion and the lamb, which never lose their nature (ferocious or tender) though in heaven they may lie down together. “The real problem is – can the lion lie down with the lamb and still retain his royal fierceness? *That* is the problem the Church has attempted; *that* is the miracle she achieved.”⁸⁷ The meaning of this is that, as in the Christian teaching, the indwelling of the Spirit in the flesh, does not make the flesh into deity – though it does dignify it through relationship. This is as in our earlier metaphor, where the two sided one sidedness of the Möbius strip remain, but are dignified through relationship with an

⁸⁶ Fujimura, M., *River Grace*, Poiema Press, International Arts Movement publication, 2007. pp. 6

⁸⁷ Chesterton, G.K. pp 55

outside light. The lion and the lamb do not lack potential for conflict, but because, like the dog and cat that may rest together in a human's home, their Master is there and so they are dignified. Rather than sacredness in art being a matter of visible and invisible, material and immaterial, ideal and actual, etc. it is first a question of what is God and what is not. Then comes the indwelling rupture of the Creator and the created.⁸⁸ Work that speaks the 'heavenly language' of the sublime non-rational does not mean that the rational must be excluded, just as work that is spiritual does not exclude its physicality, rather, it is the relational aspect which ties both together. That is also the power of Fujimura's work. He has managed to reference God and the beyond-physical, physically, without either deifying the beauty of the materials he does this with or looking only to those materials. He succeeds in doing this though both the conceptual and relational mechanism of the modern and post-modern materialist sublime, and a love for his Creator. He demonstrates contemporary Christian sublime, through a strong sublime feeling of longing or desire. It is not a one sided denial of the physical or of the spiritual, but a relational view of both that epitomizes his work. In Fujimura's words:

"...intuitive, subjective insight can connect the ephemeral with the rational, objective and concrete... to dismiss Jesus' tears ... is to miss Jesus entirely. ... Without Jesus' full humanity, coupled with his Divinity, we do not have a Savior... If the dead are to live, we will require a Miracle Worker to show us that the world is cohesive, and rational, but only when seen through a veil of tears."⁸⁹

That 'veil of tears' is about longing. For Fujimura, the 'broken and fragmented' assumptions of modernity (the break between physical and metaphysical) cannot be

⁸⁸ J.S. Begbie, *The Future of Theology amid the Arts*, Duke Divinity, 2011, pp 14

⁸⁹ Fujimura, M. *Jefferson's Bible and the Tears of Christ*, March 31, 2012.

<http://biologos.org/blog/jeffersons-bible-and-the-tears-of-christ>

but structurally unsatisfying. He uses that deprivation to suggest a system which includes a fulfilling other both in and beyond that structure.

Chapter 3

Conclusion: Studio research in context



Figure 5. Stephen T. Moore, *Superposition of Christ*, 2014. Chinese ink, pthalocyanine watercolor, salt, sound waves.

101cmx153cm

My current work draws from each of these four painters to varying degrees. The main thing that I want to glean from them is the feeling of longing or desire that appears through the sublime unanswered questions of non-representational art in a religious context. This is a powerful tool for drawing an audience to look *beyond* the art while looking *at* it. Though it is not my place to judge what Matisse, Malevich, Rothko know of the Spiritual and the transcendent, I can draw from their searching, the mechanisms of

simplicity, and deep richness of color, mystery, and a feeling of longing that marks their work, both beyond and on the surface. I admire Makoto Fujimura for his ability to also employ the same elements of profundity and enigmatic feeling, and yearning for the transcendent (though for him it is not for an unknown, or a transcendence as the void of an object, but seated in the unfolding revelation of Christ). Jesus himself often spoke in parables, so that those who seek can find. This is the strength of the unanswered questions of the sublime feeling. Like the star missing from the map in the Jedi library, pointed to by the gravitational pull of every other star and planet on the map⁹⁰, and more so, there is something missing in contemporary thinking. Someone who says that *nothing* is what is doing the pulling could call themselves an atheist, though it is God who is still there, a Christian would say. The immanent, rational domain and the transcendent, non-rational, uncoupled from Judeo-Christian concept of the divine, leaves only the domain of human thought, discovered or yet to be discovered, and still immanent and yet void.⁹¹ We are left with a lack of transcendence typical of post-modernism. Philip Shaw, reflecting on Žižek, says,

“If there is a spiritual dimension to the postmodern sublime, it resides in the ability of contemporary culture to negate the material inertia of things in such a way that it allows it to come alive to the feeling of something beyond the merely functional of utilitarian.”⁹²

It seems that these works share this pause in the material, but the sublime feeling does not let the sensitive soul rest there long. Like salt that draws water to it, the longing for the beyond is a powerful machine that all of these artists work employ. These paintings draw out spiritual questions about divinity, partly because of richness and physicality of

⁹⁰ *StarWars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*, DVD, 20th Century Fox, USA, 2002.

⁹¹ Shaw, P. pp 5

⁹² Shaw, P, pp. 8

their beauty, and partly because of the lack of fulfilment in that beauty. Viewed in a context of Christian religion, earthly beauty shares a prefigurement beauty of the risen Christ.⁹³ If for no other reason, their work is powerful because of its religious context. I use these elements in my own work.

Greenberg said that we should look to music for how painting should work: feeling from structure and formal properties of the material. One could compare Rothko's painting to chords in music. "This [Rothko's art] is similar to [chords in music], not so that it's mimicking music, but that it's operating analogously to music. A pure and powerful form."⁹⁴

Musician and Research Professor at Duke Divinity School Jeremy Begbie wrote in similar tones,

"We can look at one further form of musical tension with strong gospel overtones: delay — when an expected or desired fulfillment is held up, either in whole or in part. Indeed, maintaining the "not yet" of resolution through deferred gratification is generally reckoned to be one of the most important things to be learned by any composer, and among the most critical features of musical structure."⁹⁵

For this Master project I created a series of photographs, mono prints and paintings through the manipulation of materials by means of sound waves. These works are created in a manner vaguely analogous to the creation method described in the Biblical account. They refer to a causal phenomenon of structure that is vastly beyond comprehension, and yet as intimately close as our own bodies. In this way they are

⁹³ Begbie, J. pp. 7

⁹⁴ J. Anderson, *Contemporary Art Trends: The (Spiritual) Crisis of Abstract Expressionism: Mark Rothko*, lecture September 2, 2011 Biola University, USA **Published on Apr 5, 2012** <http://youtu.be/3V1SLKsF0BE>

⁹⁵ Begbie, J, *Meaning in Music: Sound Theology*, CHRISTIAN CENTURY November 13, 2007, pp. 22

sublime by both traditional Christian and contemporary standards of sublime. In my own wave-paintings, I am using musical spaces, chords, and pauses to create, destroy and recreate structure. Mine is not analogous to music, but is structured *through* music. For example, a recent composition, *How sweet the sound* [Fig. 5], ground earth, charcoal and pulverized copper danced across the canvas, self-organizing and re-organizing several times over within the spaces of sound waves allowed by the song *Amazing Grace* as I played it on the bass. I become aware of feeling small as I struggle and am amazed at structure forming amidst what appears as chaos.

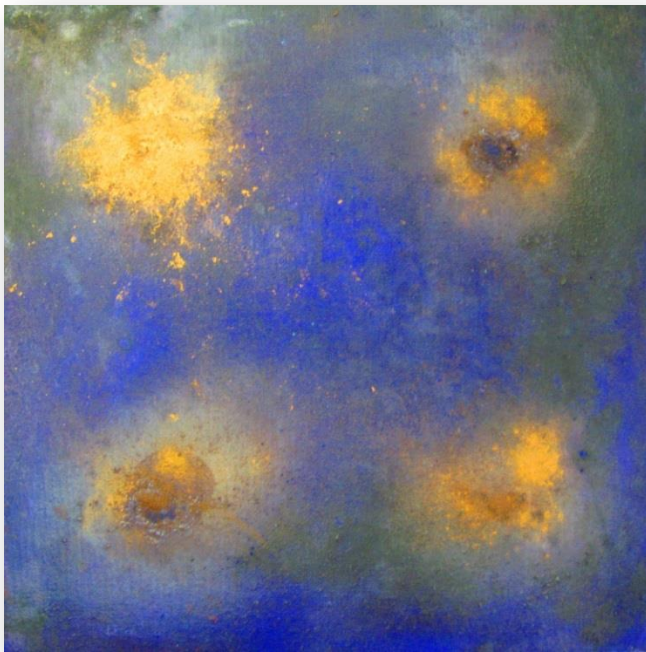


Figure 6. Stephen T. Moore, *How sweet the sound*, Gaksuyo ink, ground pastel, pulverized copper red dirt, acrylic and enamel medium on canvas; , sound waves (*Amazing Grace* played on the bass), 2014.

There is perhaps nothing more exalting or terrifying than a story of creation or destruction, nothing more likely to excite feelings of the sublime, except perhaps re-creation, redemption, resurrection; this is what I am painting. This process visualizes

creation and destruction and the organizing principles behind it, and implies the Creative God behind all of this. There is a childlike mimesis of technique. The Bible books of Genesis and John say that God spoke the world into existence and Colossians explains that He continues to hold it together. If this speaking is akin to sound, then this painting process is analogous to a greater ontology. At a lecture Rothko delivered at the Pratt Institute in 1958, he said that in his works there was 'a clear preoccupation with death'⁹⁶ He may have seen death as a resolution to the many deferred questions of the beyond that we may feel in his work. This 'resolution' could even be seen as analogous to music too in that it is a release of tension or catharsis. I treasure resolution too, not in death but in life. My paintings do not show merely destruction of a material order, but of organization and a reorganization. For example, in another recent piece, *Shakespeare, infinite monkeys, creativity and the patience of God* [Figure 6] I address a supposed conflict of evolution theory and the creation story of the Bible. In harmony with *Theistic Evolutionary theories* and concepts of Divine sovereignty amidst 'randomness' the infinite monkeys argument⁹⁷ is subsumed in a set of boundary conditions not unlike the boundary conditions set by sound waves in my paintings. Because of the physics of the sound waves, there are only certain places that the material can possibly 'fit'. Directly challenging an atheistic view of the infinite monkeys theory, and also challenging the

⁹⁶ Taken from notes made at a lecture by Rothko at the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, in 1958, and published by Dore Ashton in an *New York Times*, 31 October 1958 and reprinted in 'The New York School', Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1965 exhibit p.142. online through the National Gallery of Australia <http://www.nga.gov.au/International/Catalogue/Detail.cfm?IRN=110506&BioArtistIRN=20312&MnuID=SRCH&GalID=ALL>

⁹⁷ The argument is that if there was a monkey typing randomly at a typewriter for an *infinite* amount of time, it would eventually, randomly type the complete works of William Shakespeare without error. This would take some time (try infinity) since, the chance of the first six letters successfully spelling *banana* is $(1/50) \times (1/50) \times (1/50) \times (1/50) \times (1/50) \times (1/50) = (1/50)^6 = 1/15\,625\,000\,000$, less than one in 15 billion (about 500 years at one key per second). It is not zero, and so theoretically a possible outcome given an infinity of time, or alternatively, this speeds up with an infinity of monkeys – neither of which we have. When certain boundary conditions are placed on random outcomes, the likelihood of success greatly increases, however, the wisdom to know how to apply these parameters to produce life implies someone or something outside of creation but changing it. Theistic evolution would suggest that God created everything living through evolutionary biological process, forming it by imposing certain boundary conditions on the material disorder (not at all unlike my wave paintings). There are very good arguments for how this makes sense both Scripturally and scientifically. So, in a sense, I am demonstrating in my paintings, a creative process that apes the creative process of God according to Theistic Evolutionary Creation theory.

neigh-sayers of the possibility of evolutionary creative process, I took a wonderful bit of text from a William Shakespeare play, and cut each word out individually and placed it on a canvas inked black. When the sounds waves were applied, the page of words briefly fell apart into a randomized chaos, but quickly reorganized into a new structure. They conformed to the image of the sound waves I had chosen that they were being shaped with. The order of words did not match the original text anymore, and that is interesting in it's own way; however, there was a clear new construction that had taken shape. This reconstructive, or re-creation process is what interests me most about this! There may be few subjects more sublime than looking into the possible methods for our own creation.



Figure 7. Stephen T. Moore, *Shakespeare, infinite monkeys, and the creative patience of God*, Quink ink, ground pastel, pulverized red dirt, Shakespeare's *As you like it* Act II, scene 1, first page, acrylic medium on canvas; sound waves 2014.

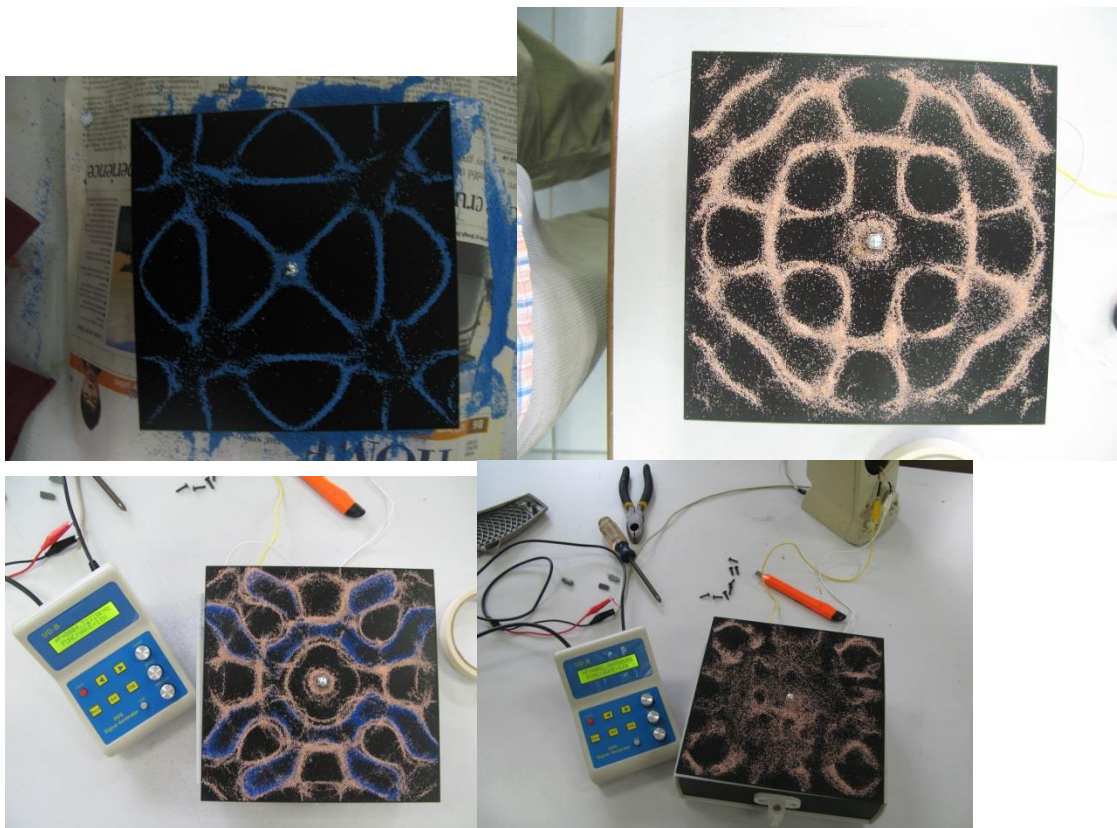
The process of sound painting is, to me, a most sublime method. It makes use of an invisible phenomenon that is materially measurable. The invisible aspect, sound, is something that is malleable by the will of the artist yet it is also something that is elusive. It is something powerful that causes feelings in the artist – physical, bodily sensations if not other responses as well – turning the artist into audience and material. I am affected by the sounds that I am choosing, as well as the compositions that these sounds are forming as they relate to the materials, and they work reflexively. There is a visible collapse of the inside and outside in this method of manufacture that reflects the artists that I have been mentioning, and the variety of sublime they exhibit, that of a longing for a ‘heavenly language’ a longing for transcendence beyond material. There is a material celebration of the beauty in a longing for beauty beyond it. There have also been all kinds of ideas and meditations that I have had as I work on them with curiosity and prayer and the sometimes uplifting, sometimes humiliating surprise of answers. These cause in me a sense of meekness as I tinker with a mechanism that is far more advanced than I can yet fathom: vibration and structure, randomness and indeterminate ends, the creative, artistic will to use sound to cause shape, and shape to cause sound. I feel a sense of thankful meekness before my Maker, and to me that is good. Speaking of such questions as of the sacred and sublime, Collings said, “certainly, this is a place where Modern art has a definite use”.⁹⁸ This is the place I too work to put it to use.

This Masters project has involved a concentrated study into the aesthetic theories of the contemporary sublime and the Christian sublime, with a particular emphasis on painting. An attempt has been made to synthesize the strengths of each, though often it is the greatest strength of either that is only found in weakness. As a painter, I have

⁹⁸ *This is Modern Art: Nothing Matters*, part 3 of 6, BBC, UK. 1999

been challenged to work in ways that have questioned my authority and role as a creator, resulting in works that I can step away from in sublime surprise. This project has also been beneficial in developing techniques for sound painting and mono-print making. I pray that these works will resonate my awe at creation and my Creator to my audience.

Appendix 1 – *Progression and development*



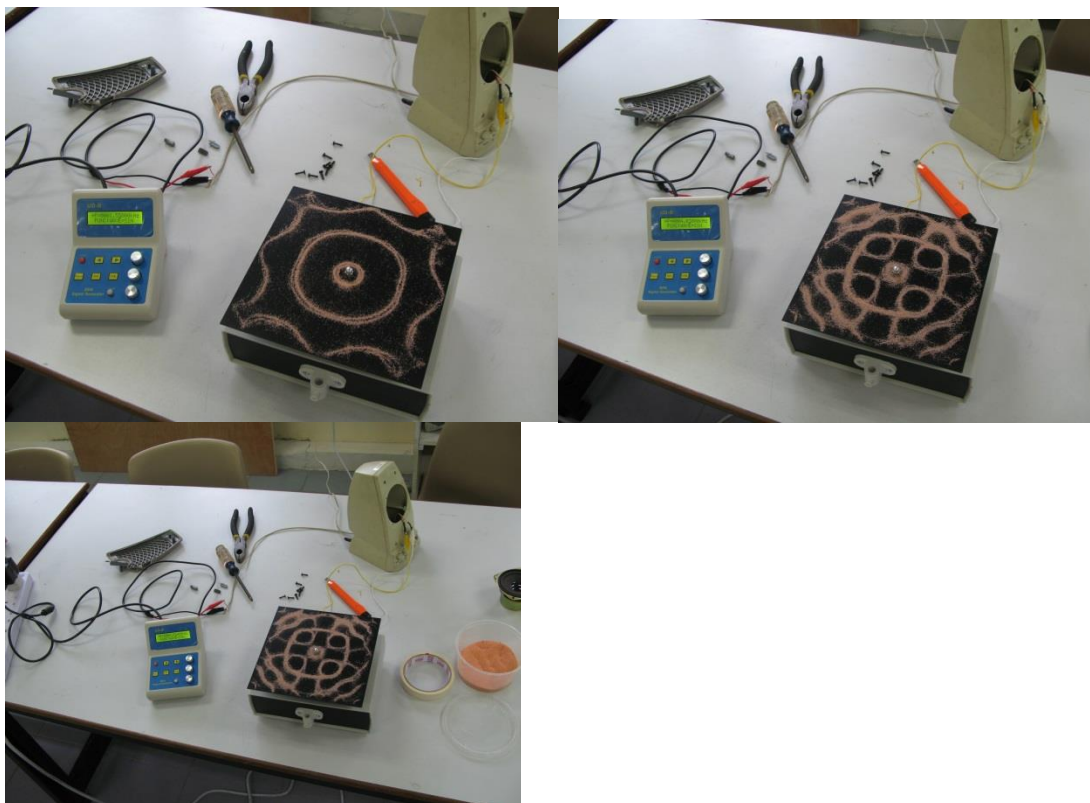


Figure A. Several sketches after 18th century physicist and musician Ernst Chladni, using my first “sound paintbrush” – a function wave generator, vibration generator and steel plate (purchased from a scientific supply company), and improvised amplifier. These sketches were mostly photographed, though some efforts to capture the materials as prints or paintings were made. Complex compositions, bit this ‘paintbrush’ did not have the power to work much larger.



Figure B. Second 'sound paintbrush' made from a 30 watt electric guitar amplifier. This 'paintbrush' did not last long as I had attempted some very large compositions that burned out the amp. Still, I was able to learn a lot, and practice working large.



Figure C. "Sound paintbrush" number 3 – this 50 watt bass amp worked very well, and had enough power to compose small or large images. The modifications needed to turn the amp into a painting tool mean that the amp will not be very useful for music.



Figure D. The first successful large scale composition was on stretched canvas. This composition in green sand, which was a great encouragement in the direction of working large scale, was ultimately lost. The canvas was reused.



Figure E. Friends who lent some encouragement through interest. Andrew Falcone (left) and Jesse Fields (right) are colleagues who teach Physics and Art International Community School, Singapore.



Figure F. These experiments used rice paper and tea leaves. The tea was vibrated into place atop a steel plate. After the composition was formed, wet rice paper was placed on the composition. The final tea-stained paper only left traces of the original composition.



Figure G. The first successful attempt at painting using ink-stained sand, vibrated into place and sprayed with water, I did not continue with this direction for many paintings or prints.

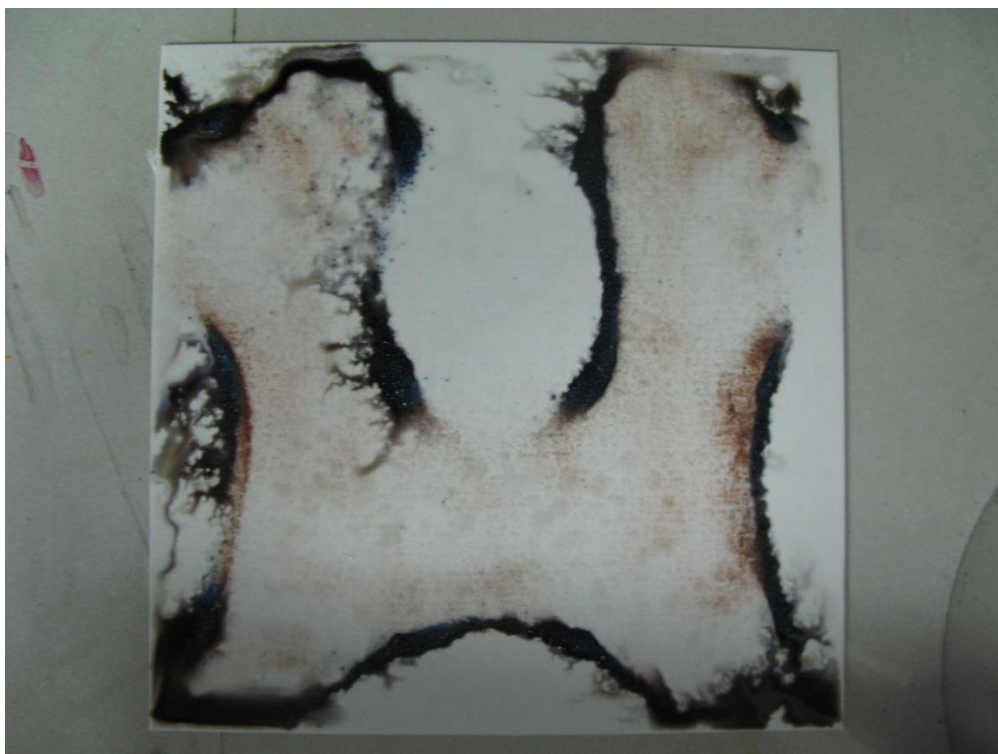


Figure H. Work in progress, *Bone*, used ink-stained sand and red earth, and later, phthalocyanine.



Figure I. *Bone*, 2014. Ink, earth, phthalocyanine on canvas. 25cmx25cm



Figure J. Powdered dry pastel on dry paper was vibrated across the surface, but was not easily captured. This direction was also abandoned.



Figure K. Early canvas paintings had a little peg attached to the back for connection to the vibration generator. Later this was not needed as the amp had a different attachment system.

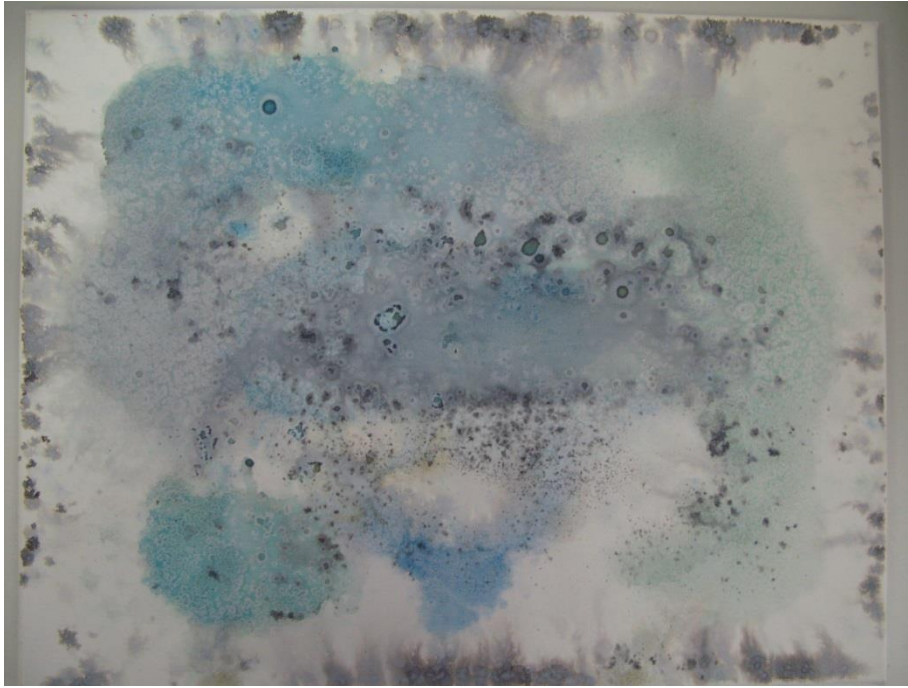


Figure L. Painting with wet media and sound was a lot of fun, but the density of liquid meant that the sound waves formed fine compositions within the puddles, that changed constantly as it dried, but did little to shape the overall composition. This technique is worth further investigation, but time constraints meant that I needed to look to other techniques for this project.



Figure M. Using the same canvas I'd attempted wet media, I began to vibrate sand into position. *This* is what I was looking for. The next step was deciding how to capture it, or permanently fix it to the surface of the canvas.



Figure N. Painting process for *Salt and Light*: a canvas board was inked with water soluble ink, and dried. Atop the dried canvas-board, salt was vibrated into position using sound waves. Then the salt and the ink was sprayed with a heavy mist of water and left to react. The salt drew the water and ink to mark the lines of the sound waves. This was a very successful technique which I employed often for the remained of the project.



Figure O. *Salt and light*, 2014. Ink, salt, sound waves on canvas. 25cmx25cm



Figure P. *How sweet the sound*, 2014. Ink, copper, pastel, resin, glue, sound waves on canvas. 25cmx25cm



Figure Q. *Symmetry*, 2014. Red earth, phthalocyanine watercolour, white glue solution. sound waves on canvas. 25cmx25cm



Figure R. *Trace of a line*, 2014. This was a difficult painting utilizing ink, powdered copper and salt. Hanging in the semi-outdoor gallery space in equatorial Singapore, the salt and local humidity did some surprising things, collecting moisture from the air and causing the painting to 'sweat' and drip, and the copper to rapidly oxidize.



Figure S. *Trace of a line*, 2014. Post humidity condensation and copper oxidation. Since this piece seemed to be more about the destructive erosion process than the constructive process of sound, I had no philosophical problems with this. Ironically, the lines caused by the sound wave became even more visible.

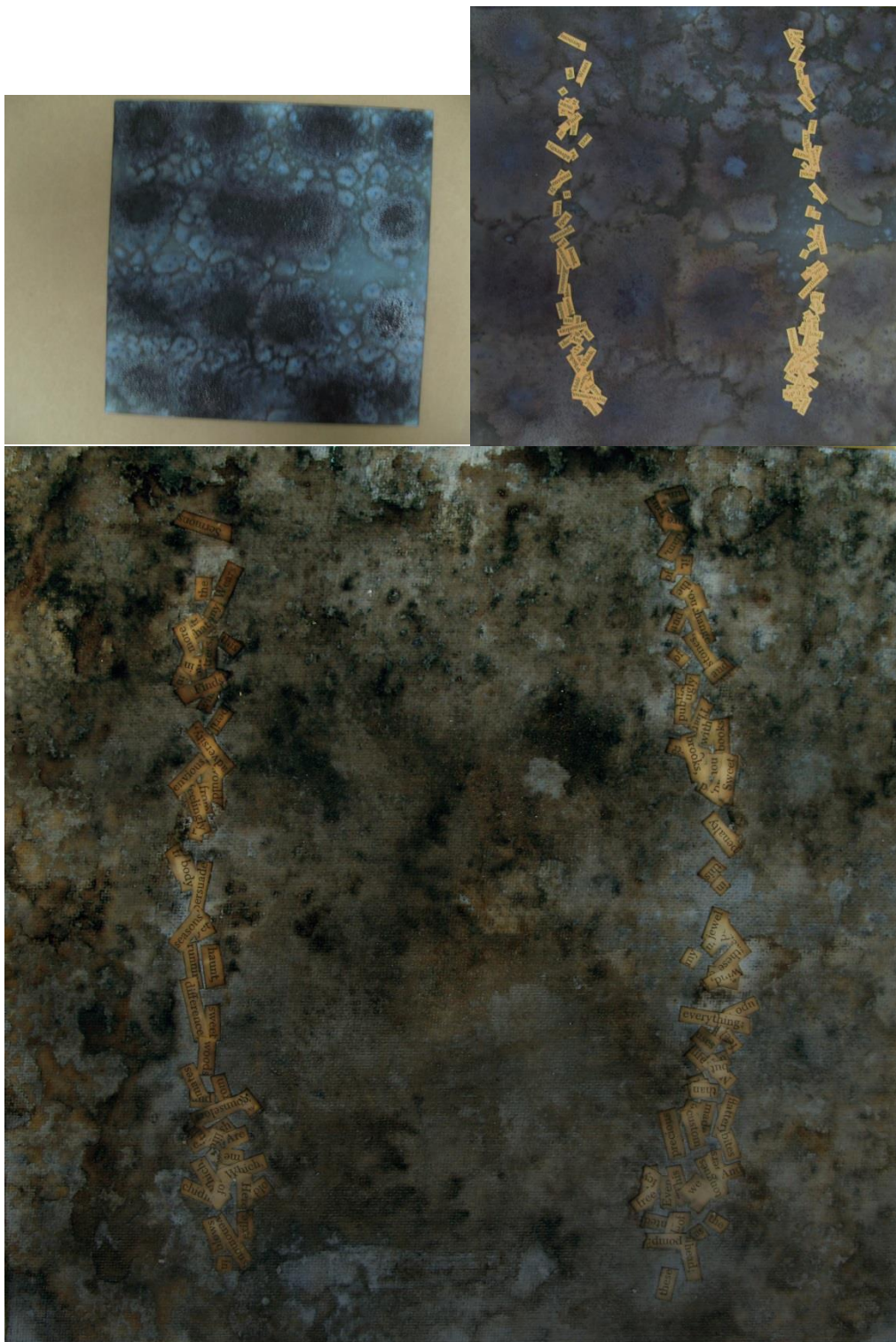


Figure T. Shakespeare, *infinite monkeys and the creative patience of God*, 2014. Painting process leading to final image. Cut text (Shakespeare) ink, glue, sound waves on canvas. 25cmx25cm



Figure U. *Sound Fossil - Familiar Curves*, 2014. Monoprint, copper, ink, white sand, rice paper. 25cm x 60 cm



Figure V. *Sound Fossil - Fish Song*, 2014. Monoprint, copper, phthalocyanine watercolour, rice paper. 25cm x 60 cm



Figure W. *Sound Fossil - Heart*, 2014. Monoprint, copper, watercolour, rice paper. 25cm x 60 cm



Figure X. *Sound Fossil – Stem*, 2014. Monoprint, copper, green Hawaiian sand, red earth, pthalocyanine watercolour, rice paper. 25cm x 60 cm

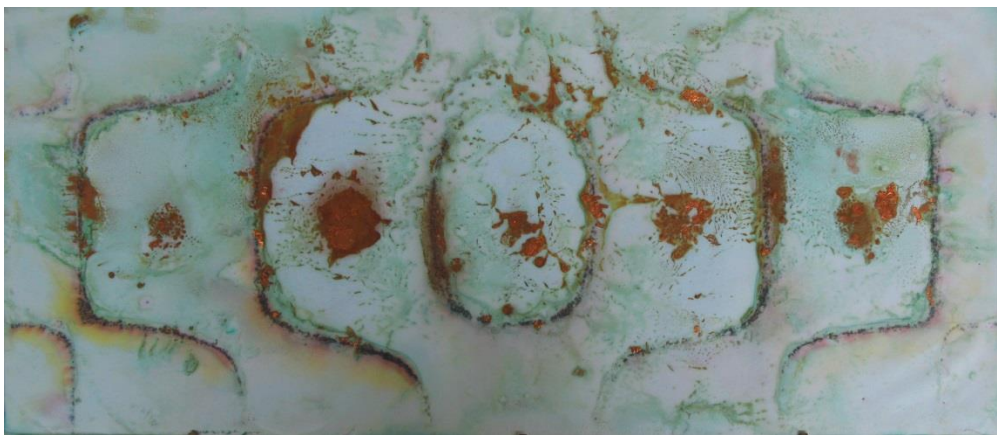


Figure Y. *Sound Fossil – Column*, 2014. Monoprint, copper, ink-stained sand, copper leaf, pthalocyanine, rice paper. 25cm x 60 cm



Figure Z. *Face of the Deep*, 2014. Layered watercolour, salt, copper, sound waves on stretched canvas. 102cmx102cm



Figure A.2. *Superposition of Christ*, 2014. Carbon, gelatine, salt, pthalocyanine watercolour. 102cm x 230cm



Figure B.2. *Tell of Proof*, 2014. Carbon, gelatine, salt, pthalocyanine watercolour. 102cm x 230cm



Figure C.2. *Fraction of Theory*, 2014. Carbon, gelatine, salt, phthalocyanine watercolour. 102cm x 230cm

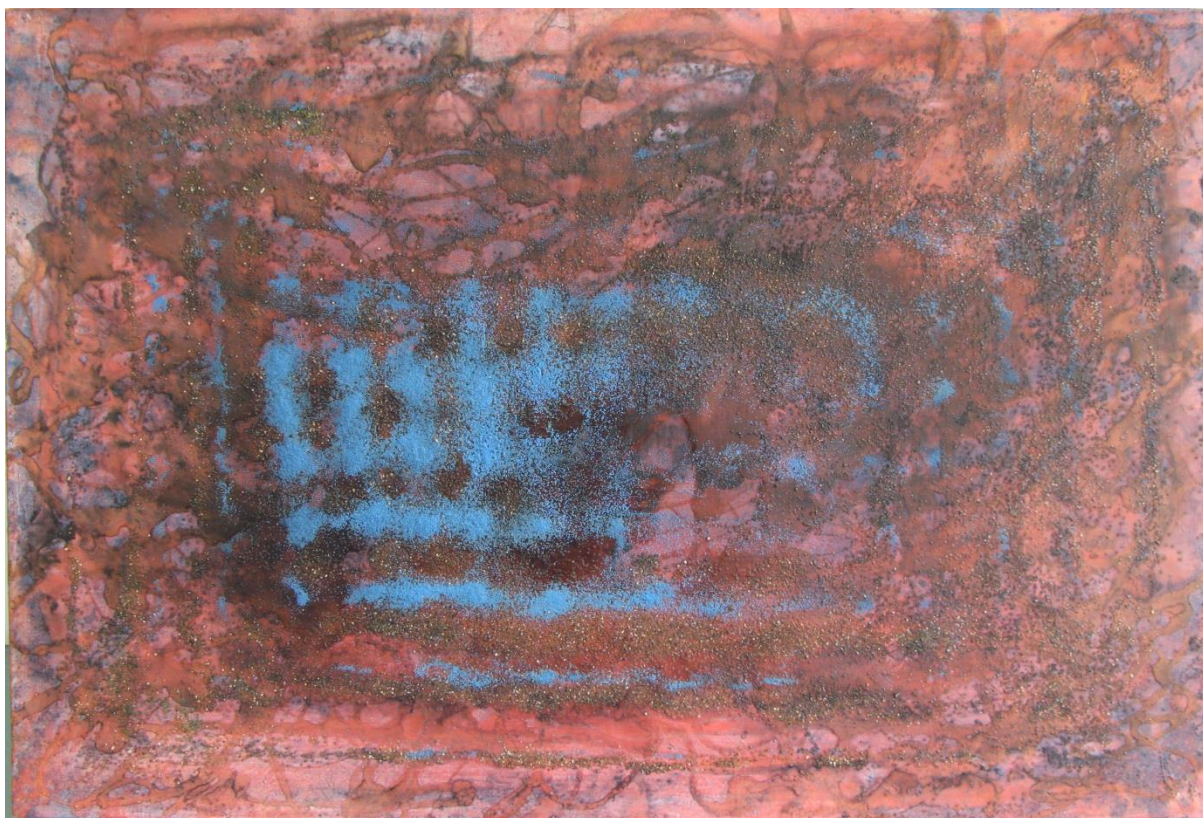


Figure D.2. *Reflection*, 2014. Watercolor, green Hawaiian sand, dyed blue sand, white glue, sound waves, ink on stretched canvas. 90cm x 60 cm

Appendix 2

The Exhibition –

SOUND FOSSILS - ICS Art gallery, Oct 18-25.

Reception October 25, 6:30-8 with screening of Sound Fossils Documentary.

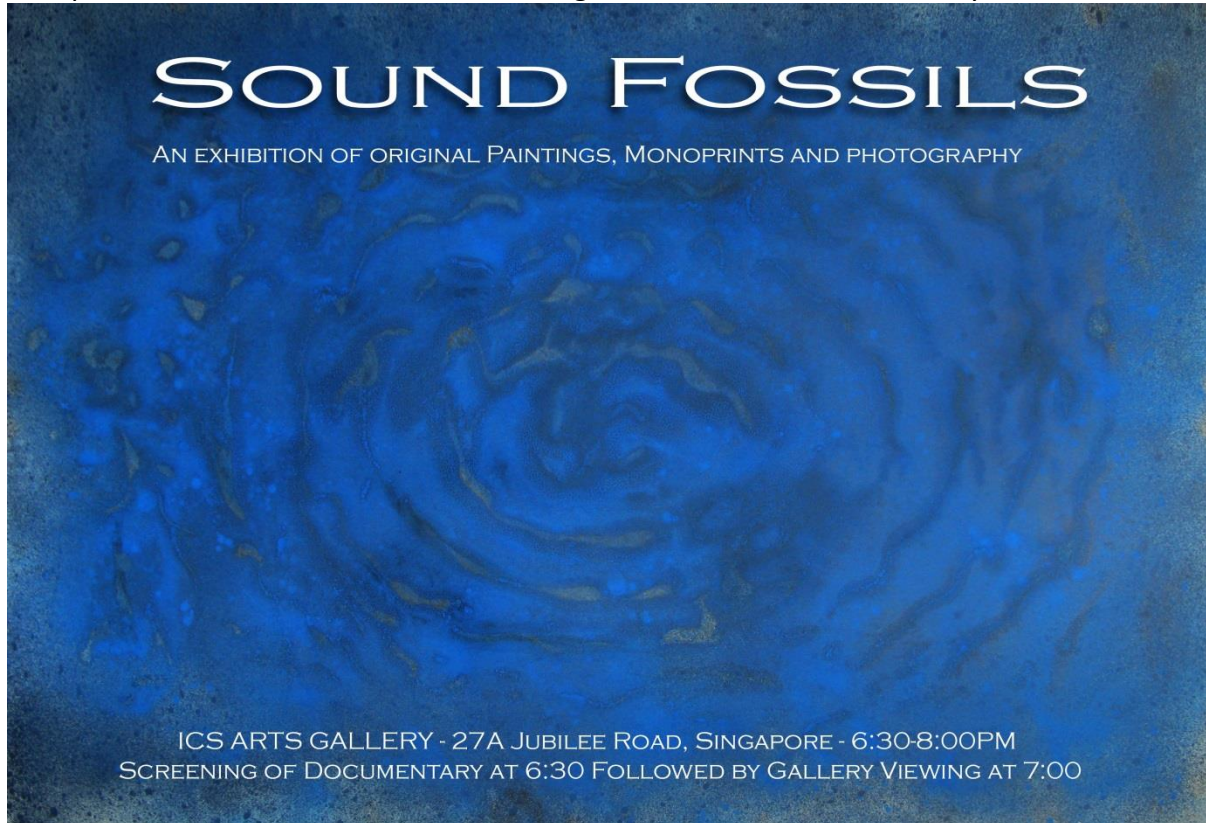


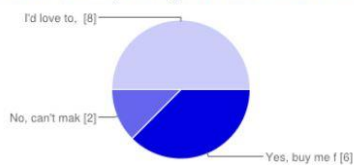
Figure i. Traditional invitation.



Figure ii. Facebook Event invitation for the reception, October 25, 2014.

Summary

You are invited, would you like to come? PLEASE RSVP by Wednesday!



Yes, buy me food, I'll be there.

6 38%

No, can't make it.

2 13%

I'd love to, but I'm doing something else on Saturday night. I'll come by during the week to have a look.

8 50%

Would you like to invite a friend?

2
1

Figure iii – statistics on the Google invitation for the reception, October 25, 2014.



Figure iv. I wanted to give my students an opportunity to interact with my work. This is the community I have the most interaction with and am most influenced by, and it is also where I feel I have my greatest influence. It was pretty humbling and encouraging to be vulnerable in front of such a great group of people!

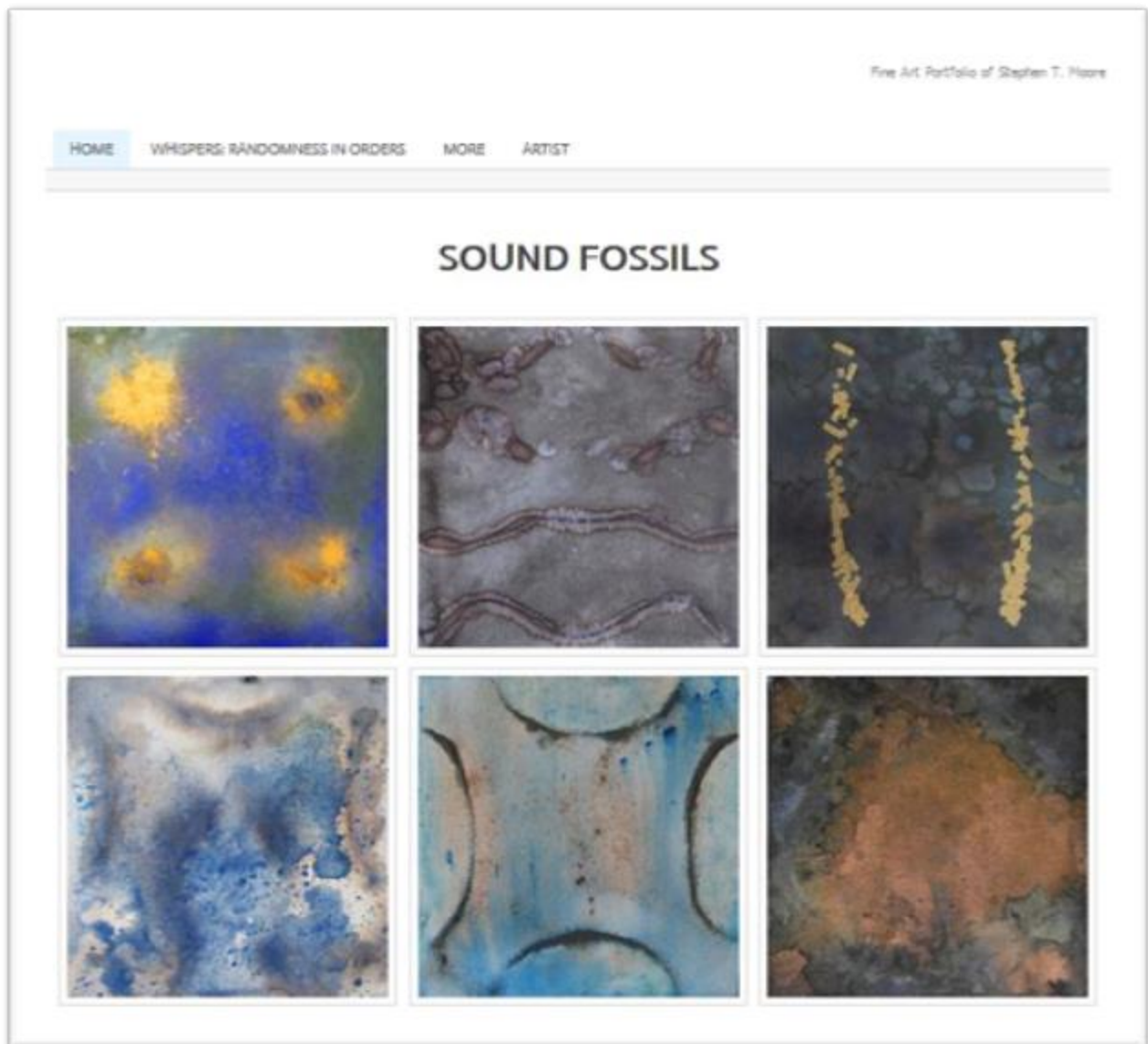


Figure v. Screenshot of my web-portfolio – www.stephentmoore.weebly.com. The homepage documents completed works, links to previous works (most importantly to this investigation is the tab leading to “whispers”) as well as an important link from the home page to the *Sound Fossils* video documentary.

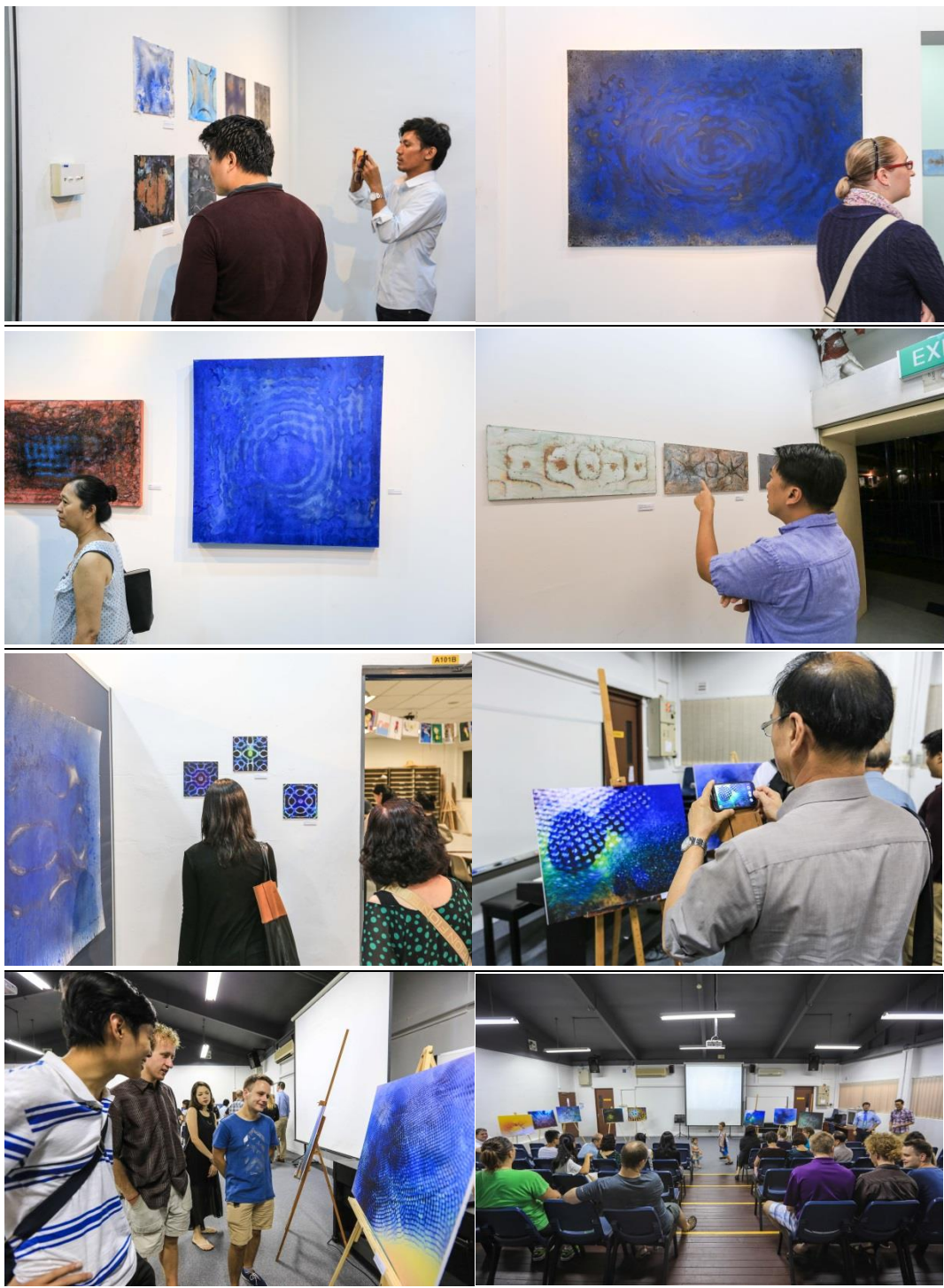


Figure vi. The Exhibition night: SOUND FOSSILS - ICS Art gallery, Singapore.
Reception October 25, 2014. 6:30-9PM with screening of Sound Fossils Documentary.

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