Light Collective

How might the sensory and embodied experience of light, as linked to place and belonging, be explored and expanded in painting?

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Bachelor of Fine Art with Honours

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This is to certify that Light Collective has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this research paper contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made within the research paper itself.

Signed
Helle Cook 25 October 2019

ABSTRACT

In this project, I examine the qualities of light and how this affects our sensory and embodied perception of ourselves, our sense of place and belonging.

Since moving to Queensland from Denmark a decade ago, I have become increasingly aware of the sensory experience of light as linked to place and it is this experience I reflect on in painting. Aspects of sensory perception and engagement are examined in the work of artists exploring similar themes either conceptually or formally. Light and perception are fundamental to Olafur Eliasson's practice, while Do Ho Suh questions the idea of home in translucent installations. Malene Landgreen and Lara Merrett extend the realm of painting in large-scale interactive installations. These artists encourage audience engagement through enhanced perception of light and place.

The concept of home shapes the foundation of this project. Migrating has blurred the boundaries of how I think of home and has resulted in a sense of lingering in a liminal threshold. The migration process has brought challenges but also possibilities and a new awareness of light and place. Most relevant to my research are theorists who address home, liminality and phenomenological perception. These theorists include Gregor Arnold on the concept of home and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Juhani Pallasmaa and Gaston Bachelard on the phenomenology of perception. More broadly, Monika Basse and Paul Crowther provide a useful perspective on phenomenology and art. Their writing has in common aspects of liminality, heightened awareness, engagement and perception which has enhanced and inspired my studio practice.

Through the medium of painting, I make tactile, illuminated and abstract works on canvas and sheer textile that offer an affective, immersive and sensory experience. I paint the works in the studio and then install them outside so as to enact and examine a response to light and place. Painting is an optimal medium for this exploration of embodied and sensory perception. It has the potential to add new perspectives to our sense of place, connection and belonging.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I moved to the other side of the world in late 2007, it was with my Australian husband and our three boys. It was not an easy choice whether to move or to stay and I think of what and who we left behind daily. Yet the duality has filled our life with richness. And light. My connection to, and awareness of, each place has increased. Home is liminal, everywhere and somewhere in-between.

My husband makes things. He built me an art studio under the house and is now working on the outdoor area that surrounds it. I am grateful for all his support. Thank you, Ian. My boys and their partners they listen, make jokes, love a debate and they come to my openings. You are the dearest, wisest and most funny guys I know, thank you. I am supported by beautiful friends and my overseas family and friends too.

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On reflection, had I not moved across the world to Australia; I doubt I would had embarked on studies in Fine Art; with first a diploma, then QCA, Griffith University with a Bachelor and now Honours. Change surely creates not only challenges but also opportunities and new perspectives.

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INTRODUCTION

> Light clarifies. It makes a clearing, and it clears a space in which objects can appear distinctly, but it can do this only if, at the same time, it withdraws, disappears, or remains invisible, nothing itself.[1]

The sensory and embodied experience of light and its impact on our sense of home, place and belonging is the central theme of my Honours Project. I ask the question: *How might the sensory and embodied experience of light, as linked to place and belonging, be explored and expanded in painting?*

Change creates challenges but also opportunities – new perspectives arise. Moving across the world or simply around the corner, our inner map is disrupted, and we become more aware of differences, and of our attachment to the home we left behind.[2] We enter an uncertain space, neither here nor there, and become sensitive to our spatial connection and the surrounding world.[3] This uncertain sensitivity leads to an increased personal awareness and curiosity of the perceived difference in light and place. It has resulted in an in-depth research and examination from personal and emphatic perspectives and hence I have engaged with introspective and experimental research methods.

As a means to undertake and unravel the research, I have built a metaphoric structure – an imagined 'home', that metaphorically establishes the idea of home as its foundation, before constructing an entire house by adding levels of liminality and light. As the project examines home connection following migration, the notion of home is explored from the lens of a migrant. When moving on to include liminality and light perception, the lens widens to include

[1] Monika Basse, "Light and Space As Experience: A Study of the Work of James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson, and Perceptual Phenomenology" (Dissertation/Thesis University of Southern California, 2016), http://search.proquest.com.libraryproxy.griffith.edu.au/docview/2158002511?accountid=14543; Basse, "Light and Space As Experience: A Study of the Work of James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson, and Perceptual Phenomenology, 23."
[2] Yi-Fu Tuan, "Space and place: humanistic perspective," *Progress in Geography* 6 (1979), http://geog.uoregon.edu/amarcus/geog620/Readings/Tuan_1979_space-place.pdf, 411.
[3] T. J. Demos, *The migrant image: the art and politics of documentary during global crisis* (Durham;London;: Duke University Press, 2013), 3.

phenomenological connotations. Accordingly, research includes art historical, sociological, psychological and philosophical perspectives in a visual art context.

The themes of home, liminality and light are examined through employing practice-led research methods. Autobiographical and intuitive processes in painting have been explored to arrive at a series of work that expand on the topic in abstract painting.

I ask the question: *How might the sensory and embodied experience of light, as linked to place and belonging, be explored and expanded in painting?*

I use the gestural and embodied process of painting as a means to ignite senses. The gestural traces have the potential to result in a heightened consciousness that goes beyond the work itself and bestows upon us a sense of being part of a whole.[4]

The project arguably offers a new perspective to the migration discourse in exploring the phenomenological perception of light and place in an installation based in painting. It offers an experience that has the potential to awaken our senses and make us more connected, both individually and collectively.

This exegesis is divided into four chapters:

Chapter One discusses the theoretical framework used to define the idea of home, liminal space and light. The findings are further explored in contemporary art, contextualising my project within visual art discourse. I engage with the writing of Gregor Arnold on the concept of home as well as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Juhani Pallasmaa and Gaston Bachelard on phenomenology and Monika Basse and Paul Crowther on the phenomenology of art.

[4] Basse, "Light and Space As Experience: A Study of the Work of James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson, and Perceptual Phenomenology."; Basse, "Light and Space As Experience: A Study of the Work of James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson, and Perceptual Phenomenology, 26."

In Chapter Two I place the research project within a contemporary visual art context by identifying artists who make art that either conceptually and/or formally explores home, liminality, light and viewer engagement. Their work has inspired and guided my research.

I argue painting to be an optimal medium for my exploration of home, liminality and light in Chapter Three. I review the art historical and contemporary context of painting, in particular abstract painting. Likewise, I briefly address expanded painting and introduce my studio-based research which culminates in an installation of paintings titled *Light Collective.* I discuss my studio research and experimentation while engaging in a comparison that establishes a link between visual exemplars and my work.

In Chapter Four I evaluate the outcome of my studio process. I reflect on my chosen medium of painting on linen and translucent textile, and how effectively it communicates different light qualities and their effect on our embodied and sensory experience. Moreover, I forecast the possibilities arising out of this project and its potential for further development.

Keywords: Home, liminality, light, senses, phenomenology, perception, painting, awareness and experience.

Research Question: *How might the sensory and embodied experience of light, as linked to place and belonging, be explored and expanded in painting?*

CHAPTER ONE - HOME, LIMINALITY AND LIGHT

> Home is to some extent a location that provides an individual with a sense of security and acknowledgment, a place, region or state to which one properly belongs, one in which one's affections centre rests, or where one finds refuge, rest or satisfaction.[5]

The concept of home shapes the foundation of this project. Along with the effects of globalisation, migration and rapidly changing technology the way we think about home is changing.[6] Gregor Arnold formulates a home with dual connotations; we have roots deeply embedded in the place of birth and childhood, yet we may grow new strings of attachment to a new home; accordingly, we develop strings of attachment to multiple places. Home becomes a plural entity carried through space and time.[7] Bachelard regards the house as our first universe. He argues that while all spaces that we live in bear the essence of a home,[8] it is the house we were born in that remains inscribed in us, it is an embodiment that is both psychological and physical.[9] Home is essentially a sensory and embodied memory and experience.[10] It is feasible that our first home is inscribed and embodied, yet it is possible to develop new home connections in all places we inhabit. Our attachment is either spatial or emotional, or presumably both, and home provides a sense of belonging that rests in our affections centre.[11] Subsequently, while it is possible to consider multiple places our home – it is essentially an inner connection and affection.

Leaving one's home country fosters a transitional sense of belonging nowhere. We enter an uncertain space, neither here nor there, and become more aware of our spatial connection and

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[5] Gregor Arnold, "Place and space in home-making processes and the construction of identities in transnational migration," *Transnational Social Review* 6, no. 1-2 (2016), https://doi.org/10.1080/21931674.2016.1178877, 16.
[6] Arnold, "Place and space in home-making processes and the construction of identities in transnational migration, 161."
[7] Arnold, "Place and space in home-making processes and the construction of identities in transnational migration, 162."
[8] Gaston Bachelard, *The poetics of space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 5.
[9] Bachelard, *The poetics of space*, 14.
[10] Juhani Pallasmaa, *The eyes of the skin: architecture and the senses* (Chichester;Hoboken, NJ;: Wiley-Academy, 2005), 58.
[11] Arnold, "Place and space in home-making processes and the construction of identities in transnational migration, 161."

the world around us.[12] We exist in a liminal space. Liminality is a "betwixt and between" situation, that constitutes how humans deal with change when finding themselves in an in-between threshold. It is considered fundamental during the migration process and beyond, it aids us in understanding cultural shifts and enables new meaning.[13] The liminal, can be regarded from a sensory and a spatial context, in the latter, liminality refers to the threshold of a passageway, void or opening e.g. a door or window,[14] it lets the light in. Liminality is arguable a threshold of heightened sensory and spatial awareness; "what is liminal is situated at a sensory threshold and barely perceptible."[15] The liminal threshold offers an analogy to my experience of living betwixt and between multiple cultures and enables a sensory threshold of artistic practice which I draw upon.[16] Sensory or spatial, a threshold enables light to enter and to display itself.

Moving and travelling between the Southern and Northern hemisphere, more specifically Denmark and Australia, has intensified my observation of cultural and environmental differences, particularly pertaining to the quality of light. Natural light is an integral and treasured aspect of Nordic living, it is abundant in summer and during winter when it is sparse, it is recreated by atmospheric lamps and candles. Light, natural or created, is a key element of *hygge* provided it is subtle and atmospheric. *Hygge* is a Danish phenomenon, similar but not equal to the word cosy, it is not easily translated.[17] Concurrently, there is a Nordic emphasis on light filtering through thresholds before displaying itself across a surface.[18] In fact, there is a word for the fall of light in Danish; *lysindfald*, it is frequently used to articulate home-atmosphere however, parallel to *hygge,* it is an idiom that is not easily translated. As a

[12] Tuan, "Space and place: humanistic perspective, 411."
[13] Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra, *Breaking boundaries: Varieties of liminality* (Berghahn Books, 2015, 36
[14] Subha Mukherji, *Thinking on thresholds: the poetics of transitive spaces* (London: Anthem Press, 2011), ProQuest Ebook Central, 21.
[15] Mukherji, *Thinking on thresholds: the poetics of transitive spaces*, 1.
[16] Horvath, Thomassen, and Wydra, *Breaking boundaries: Varieties of liminality*, 50.
[17] Hannah Baker, "The art of hygge " *Director* 70, no. 4 (2016). http://search.proquest.com.libraryproxy.griffith.edu.au/docview/1858858041?accountid=14543.
[18] Mikkel Bille, "Lighting up cosy atmospheres in Denmark," *Emotion, Space and Society* 15 (2015), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2013.12.008.

threshold, the window acts as a mediator between two worlds.[19] *Hygge* and *lysindfald* are closely related to the notion of home, connection and to sensory experience.

Colonies of artists have sought and painted the special Nordic light, especially that of Skagen, Denmark, for centuries.[20] I have not come across the same general focus on light in Australia, presumably due to its abundancy. To illustrate the perceived difference, I point to Christopher Allen who considers the art of early European settler artists as less than successful. They were unfamiliar with the environment and the glare of the brilliant sunlight, yet they attempted to apply their European style and sense of light when painting the Australian landscape. They were costumed to paint Northern European, not bold Australian, light.[21] The quality of natural light in Australia is reasonably experienced as bold compared to the filtered rays of Northern European light.

It has become apparent to me that the cultural and environmental shift I encounter, is a sensory and embodied experience; it is *felt*. Juhani Pallasmaa submits that bright light dulls the imagination, reduces the experience of being and invalidates our sense of place. He argues "that the human eye is most perfectly tuned for twilight rather than bright daylight."[22] While it is debatable that bright light weakens our experience and sense of place, I certainly have found twilight in the Northern and Southern Hemisphere to be at its most similar quality, and atmospheric and affecting as such. Light blurs boundaries, it shapes an affective presence and creates a sense of community.[23] It is plausible to determine that the difference in light ignites our sense modalities, it affects our perception.

[19] Pallasmaa, *The eyes of the skin: architecture and the senses*, 47.
[20] DeNeen L. Brown, "'A World Apart: Anna Ancher and the Skagen Art Colony' opens at Museum of Women in the Arts (Posted 2013-02-22 19:25:12): "World Apart" Exhibit Features," *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C) 2013, http://search.proquest.com.libraryproxy.griffith.edu.au/docview/1296189856?accountid=14543.
[21] Christopher Allen, *Art in Australia: from colonization to postmodernism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 9.
[22] Pallasmaa, *The eyes of the skin: architecture and the senses*, 46.
[23] Bille, "Lighting up cosy atmospheres in Denmark."

> The phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but like art, the act of bringing truth into being.[24]

Maurice Merleau-Ponty is a key theorist on the concept of phenomenology. In his book; *The Phenomenology of Perception*[25] he asks: "What is phenomenology?" He determines that it is a question that has not yet been answered[26] yet gives examples of what it may be. He suggests that it is an essence which does not arrive at an understanding, an 'as is' experience and a presence. According to Merleau-Ponty, the true meaning of phenomenology can be found within ourselves, nowhere else, and in aiming to describe it, we fail. Through a phenomenological method, we return to a direct and primitive contact with the world, to "the things themselves."[27]

Although primitive, one's initial contact and experience with the world cannot be entirely 'pure' - it is affected by past experiences and our interaction with other people.[28] Without previous experiences, it would arguably not be possible to perceive, as perception requires 'things' to relate the impression to. The phenomenological perception is the interrelated essence of all of it.[29] Therefore, what we perceive must be tangible in order to arrive at a sensation. "We make perception out of things perceived."[30] Phenomenological perception can reasonably be regarded a sensory and embodied experience, where we in ourselves explore an affect as a means to understand our experience.

> Migration identifies something uncapturable and unmeasurable, something ever mobile and unfamiliar, it takes on a certain agency and potentiality, and art is exactly where the unleashing of imagination unfolds.[31]

[24] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), xxiii.
[25] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception*.
[26] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception*, xx.
[27] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception*, viii.
[28] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception*, 5.
[29] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception*, xxii.
[30] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception*, 5.
[31] Demos, *The migrant image: the art and politics of documentary during global crisis*, 19.

Our sense of space is viably defined by our senses, experience, movement and thought.[32] Likewise, our sense of place is an awareness attached to our senses, memories and experiences and can be regarded as geographical.[33] Ever since arriving in Australia for the first time, and when moving and travelling between the two countries, I have grabbled with the decision-making of choosing *the* place to live. With roots and strong family connections in both places, the implications of choosing are becoming increasingly complicated; although having a choice as a migrant undoubtedly is a privilege. The insights gained during this project have assisted me in arriving at a non-decision; choosing a permanent home is not a requirement. Similarly to phenomenology resting in its own foundation and never knowing where it is going," [34] I remain restful in an unresolved liminal threshold from where my artistic practice unfolds.

Experience ties in closely with phenomenological perception and are subject to both past and immediate experience.[35] Experience is a broad phenomenon; I discuss experience as a lived, personal encounter, that is immediate and embodied.[36] We all experience however when we become more aware, we rise up to be more conscious of our experiences. In an embodied, gestural practice like painting, the awareness can be regarded an inner affection, yet it is proposedly also a liminal, mindful observation of oneself in the act. It becomes richer with heightened awareness which again can lead to change, a sense of responsibility and of being part of a whole.[37] Appropriately, there is a strong link between; heightened awareness, liminality, sensory and embodied experience, phenomenological perception and the gestures of painting. It is the essence of this link that I tap into, it is of personal interest and it has the potential to be explored much more deeply beyond the scope of this project.

[32] Tuan, "Space and place: humanistic perspective, 390."
[33] Tuan, "Space and place: humanistic perspective, 411."
[34] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception*, xxiii.
[35] Nathalie Depraz, Francisco J. Varela, and Pierre Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware : A pragmatics of experiencing* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2000). http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/griffith/detail.action?docID=622928, 3.
[36] Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware : A pragmatics of experiencing*, 2.
[37] Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware : A pragmatics of experiencing*, 234.

CHAPTER TWO - EXPANDED PAINTING, PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERCEPTION AND THE ENGAGEMENT OF THE SENSES

I have identified multiple artists who engage with phenomenological perception of home, liminality and light in painting and/or installation. The following artists are fundamental in inspiring and challenging my practice beyond what I already know. Their practice equally focuses on interactive, tangible work that captivates the senses.

Olafur Eliasson, a Danish-Icelandic artist, experiments with perception of light, space and colour in large architectural art installations. Inspired by the California Light and Space movement, he engages with the light, space and perception. He is intrigued by the viewer's experience and interaction.[38] Eliasson regards his strong connection with light as a unique physical relationship that offers insight into his own body. Monika Basse describes it as "a very symbiotic relationship between light and space and how the two elements lead us to understand our own physical bodies in the world and how our perception of them can be altered. Eliasson points the viewers back to their own senses."[39]

Eliasson has a social emphasis on critical perception and how this can change when influenced by other viewers – it becomes a shared phenomenological experience.[40] When Merleau-Ponty affirms that one's individual perception intersects with others and engage like gears,[41] it can be directly linked to Basse's statement: "the presence of others is an affect that cannot be ignored. Space can give us the sense of responsibility and make us acknowledge that fact that we are a small part of a whole."[42] It is plausible that we become more aware of our perception and what triggers it, when our senses are activated. We ripen to a critical perception which leads to new perspectives and a higher sense of responsibility for ourselves and others.

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[38] Basse, "Light and Space As Experience: A Study of the Work of James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson, and Perceptual Phenomenology, 5."
[39] Basse, "Light and Space As Experience: A Study of the Work of James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson, and Perceptual Phenomenology, 12."
[40] Basse, "Light and Space As Experience: A Study of the Work of James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson, and Perceptual Phenomenology, 17."
[41] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception*, xxii.
[42] Basse, "Light and Space As Experience: A Study of the Work of James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson, and Perceptual Phenomenology, 26."

Eliasson's work has been exhibited globally and I recently re-experienced *Your Rainbow Panorama* (2011) (Figure 1) in Denmark. The work prompts the viewer to engage with light, colour and space, and movement is the only way to experience the work as it entails walking/moving through a circular walkway. In this way, the viewer is pointed back to their senses; you become aware of your own interaction. Although my work is visually contrasting from Eliasson's, his engagement with light and space is an inspiration. There is imaginably a shared embodied memory and Nordic appreciation of light and a strong attentiveness to the viewer's engagement.

Do Ho Suh is a South Korean artist who explores the idea of home from a migrant's lens. He re-creates versions of home in which he has lived, to convey memory and belonging. He invites the viewer 'home' while seeking to blur the boundaries of geographic distance. He is interested in the in-between and states: "We tend to focus on the destination and forget about the in-between spaces."[43] His work *Seoul Home* (2012) (Figure 2) illuminates memory of home in an ethereal, immersive and translucent installation where scale and light are paramount. The viewer is encouraged to enter and choose their own path and perception. Formally, although Suh's work is more literal in its illustration, I identify with the immersive scale, light and the translucent quality of textiles. Conceptually, we similarly explore the notion of home and the in-between space.

Malene Landgreen is a Danish artist who expands the frame of painting into large-scale textile and architectural installations. Her work is colourful and geometric and she "explores how expanded painting can change the architectural space and create both voluminous and poetic adventures. The public is invited to sense and experience the site-specific works."[44] Landgreen's sheer textile works and how she combines convention painting supports with textiles into one immersive installation, are a definite inspiration for the inclusion of sheer textiles into my own

[43] Colin Martin and Thierry Bal, "Do Ho Suh: Passage/s," *Houses*, no. 116 (2017), https://search-informit-com-au.libraryproxy.griffith.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=816607042121809;res=IELHSS.
[44] "Malene Landgreen," Artistic Reality, Gl Strand Modern and Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Events, 2017, https://www.artforum.com/uploads/guide.004/id02683/press_release.pdf

practice. Her textile paintings explore light, colour and space and are often installed in front of windows where the natural 'fall in' of light (*lysindfald)* illuminates an atmospheric and ephemeral aspect (Figure 3). Her exploration of light, space and colour in abstract painting interconnects with my practice. Uniformly, she welcomes the viewer to engage with their sensory experience of her work.

Lara Merett is an Australian artist who equally expands painting into large interactive installations and explores sensed experience through abstract painting. Her large-scale paintings are not precious, in fact they are painted on drop sheets from Bunnings and the public is invited to re-create the way the painted fabrics are arranged.[45] Merrett's *High Stakes is* currently showing at UQ Art Museum.[46] It is a site-specific installation of paintings suspended between bamboo stakes. Merrett invited the public, in particular the UQ student community, to be part in the process of making. I participated for one day and hence contributed in painting the numerous drop-sheet paintings for the *High Stakes* exhibition (Figure 4). In this way, Merrett extends the conventions of painting and how we engage with it, her work remains an inspiration that challenges the expansiveness of my own practice.

[45] Lara Merrett, ""A place you go to daydream": Artist Lara Merrett ", 17 May 2018, 2018, https://www.mca.com.au/stories-and-ideas/place-you-go-daydream-lara-merrett/
[46] "Lara Merrett: High Stakes," Current exhibitions, The Univerisity of Queensland Australia, 2019, accessed 14 September 2019, https://art-museum.uq.edu.au/whats/current-exhibitions/lara-merrett-high-stakes.

CHAPTHER THREE – LAYERS OF PAINTING – STUDIO PROCESS AROUND THE WORLD

The slow and reflexive process of painting enables gestural embodiment and contemplation. Initiating with an idea and a desired outcome, the paint takes agency and intuition and imagination guide the process. Paul Crowther describes painting as having a "profoundly autographic nature – its consummation of a body of gestures in a physically singular body achieves a trace-gesture immenseness that is special to this medium."[47] He contends that the audience transcends into the painter's gestural presence and circumstances and states: "The gestural traces of the painter's presence take on enduring aesthetic importance."[48] The gestural traces are certainly evident in painting, it justifiably enables an embodiment that extends beyond the act and the work itself, it enables us to connect with our own perception and self-understanding.[49] It is fitting to consider painting as an optimal realm from where to explore sensory and embodied perception.

Although the painting process initiates with an idea, the intent is for the work to remain non-prescriptive. Comparably with the liminal threshold, my painting process suspends itself in the threshold between abstraction and figuration. When viewing abstract art, we inherently presume it is about something.[50] Yet **a**bstract art is invested with a positive ambiguity, it alludes to, rather than directly illustrate.[51] There is an aesthetic freedom and empathy in abstract art.[52] I emphatically consider the viewer as I imagine stepping into their shoes and thereby have them complete the picture. As Basse notes "The artist embodies in himself/herself the attitude of the perceiver while he/she works."[53] Abstract art alludes the presence of the artist but it does not instruct the interpretation of the work, rather it enhances our own self-understanding.[54]

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[47] Paul Crowther, *Phenomenology of the visual arts (even the frame)* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009), 83.
[48] Crowther, *Phenomenology of the visual arts (even the frame)*, 85.
[49] Crowther, *Phenomenology of the visual arts (even the frame)*, 85.
[50] Crowther, *Phenomenology of the visual arts (even the frame)*, 105.
[51] Crowther, *Phenomenology of the visual arts (even the frame)*, 114.
[52] Crowther, *Phenomenology of the visual arts (even the frame)*, 85.
[53] Basse, "Light and Space As Experience: A Study of the Work of James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson, and Perceptual Phenomenology, 22."
[54] Crowther, *Phenomenology of the visual arts (even the frame)*, 85.

An installation-based approach has been taken to amplify the tactile and immersive quality of the work and its relationship with space. The final work composes a painted installation titled *Light Collective* which welcomes the audience to engage with their own senses and perception. I submit that painting, it its expanded sphere, optimises the work's ability to affect and engage. In this way, when considering the experience of the work from a migration perspective, it offers a potential that goes beyond the work itself, it enables heightened awareness and a sense of connection. "Space can give us a sense of responsibility and make us acknowledge the fact that we are a small part of a whole."[55] This project arguable offers a different perspective to the migration discourse by opening up to a phenomenological perception that increases our sense of connection and belonging.

Undertaking the Honours studies over a two-year period has enabled extended time to experiment and develop the work. Initially, I painted on traditional canvas, often large scale to coax affection and immersion (Figure 5). Experimenting with multiple layers of paint thinned with oil medium; I found it to enable translucency, however the multiple layers resulted in overly glossy surfaces (Figure 6). I intended to convey light without necessary 'painting it' as I continuously consider the balance between abstraction and figuration.

When I began to incorporate not only translucent paints but also translucent textiles, I found their light sheerness an interesting contrast to more convention supports. The tactility of textiles alludes a homely, domestic intimacy that offers an analogy to thresholds of light as it falls upon and through the fabric (Figure 7). Landgreen's textile paintings share a similar approach in framing light as it traverses through thresholds. The use of translucent textiles is optimal in illuminating the intimacy of a home and provides an interesting dialogue with more traditional supports.

I have chosen to use oil paint for its abilities, viscosity, durability and because it contains simply oil and pigment. A sustainable practice is paramount for both personal and environmental

[55] Basse, "Light and Space As Experience: A Study of the Work of James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson, and Perceptual Phenomenology, 26."

reasons. Mediums serve to thin and layer paint however initially I was only familiar with mediums that made me uncomfortable when using them. I have now identified non/low toxic mediums and solvent; I am able to continue using oil paints. There is an art historical convention attached to oil painting, it has been regarded as unsurpassed for centuries.[56]

My studio space became a bedroom in a high-ceilinged, characteristic Queenslander home when I undertook an art residency at *House Conspiracy*, Brisbane, during October 2018. The domesticity persuaded me to experiment with textiles of different translucencies as well as with different modes of light; natural, electric and projection, then evaluating their combined appearance and affect (Figure 8, 9). I found each mode of light successful, yet a suspended textile painting with a projection of moving images, had an optimal evocative appeal (Figure 9). Accordingly, I have since extended on from this idea with video of and on painted textile works. The aim of the projection is to activate senses, incorporate space and to allow the viewer's silhouette and interaction to complete the work. A light and space relationship engage the viewer to occupy and interpret the work in a more tangible way.[57] Simultaneously, with the residency, my solo exhibition; *Blurred Boundaries* was shown at *Latrobe Regional Gallery*, Victoria. Seven of the eight works were painted during a 2017-residency in Denmark, and when reviewing the works in the gallery space, I imagined re-creating them. I was able to perceive the paintings in a new light and realised that they communicate place and belonging as a felt experience, rather than a thought illustration. This has since been a catalyst for the focus on perception.

Suspended Light was the title of my solo-exhibition at QCA Galleries during May 2019. With my Honours project in mind, I wished to exhibit work that explored a sense of home and connection as well as an ambiguity and disconnect. The exhibition consisted of paintings on textile and linen, with some works illuminated by natural light (*lysindfald*)**,** another had a video

[56] Laurence de Viguerie et al., "Historical evolution of oil painting media: A rheological study," *Comptes Rendus Physique* 10, no. 7 (2009), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crhy.2009.08.006.
[57] Basse, "Light and Space As Experience: A Study of the Work of James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson, and Perceptual Phenomenology, 25."

projected onto it. Multiple works were suspended from the ceiling and only one work was stretched/framed, and it was free-standing (Figure 12 - 15). Inspired by Landgreen and Merrett I wanted to eschew conventions and question the boundaries of painting, and to lure enquiry. I invited the public to engage with their own sensory perception and imagination, with an option to give feedback on little cards. In summary, the feedback entailed: "Feels welcoming, like home, sensory, there's an atmosphere, something is about to happen/take place. Subtle light, Nordic/European colours. Engaging imagery. The ephemeral, ethereal quality and raw linen" was highlighted**.** The feedback afforded an insight into how multiple viewers perceived the work.

When I arrived in Denmark in late May for a two-month European stay, I paid particularly attention to my own sensory and embodied experience of the quality of light and place. I observed endless days and brief nights that never subdued to real darkness and an ephemeral lightness and subtlety, that was felt rather than seen. I undertook an artist residency at *Hollufgård* and was invited to install a work within the *Hollufgård Art Residence and Sculpture Park* estate[58]. Adjacent to the heritage protected Castle and Manor house *Hollufgård* (1576-77), is a protected hill known as *Sneglehøjen ('Snail-hill'*) (1760). A track traverses its way to the top of the hill. This is where I installed *Veils of Trees* suspended between the six linden-trees that circle the top (Figure 16, 17). The site-specific work explores perceived quality of light, liminality and sense of place and I drew on Suh's translucent textile 'home' and selected sheer fabric from IKEA that is in fact ten curtains, displayed as 6 painted drapes or flags. They catch the light, wind and silhouettes of leaves and shadows. A platform on the top-middle of the hill lends itself as a meditative space where one can sit or lay down. The work was hung low enough for one to touch, walk through and in-between and to observe the world below through a veiled view. In this way it explores light, space and interaction similarly to Eliasson's installations. As the work moves in the breeze high on the hill, circled by old majestic trees, your eyes are coaxed to travel up to experience an almost subliminal light (Figure 18).

[58] "About the Art Park," Hollufgaard Art Residence and Sculpture Park accessed 14 September 2019, http://gah.dk/about-artparken/?lang=en

Painted textiles exhibited on a hill in a forest, arguably push the boundaries of painting, similarly to the practice of Landgreen and Merrett, and evoke a sensory experience of light and environment. One becomes more aware of the light that enters from above and through the interstices of the denseness of the leaves, creating patterns. Pallusmaa writes that "the shadow gives shape and life to the object in light. It also provides the realm from which fantasies and dreams arise."[59] Nature ignites all our senses to wake up and collaborate.[60] Taking the work outside, away from a white cube gallery; the work exists in a free, affecting threshold with no boundaries. Allegorical to my own experience of living between dual cultures, it represents a liminal threshold of heightened awareness.

The following week, at an art residency in the Italian Alps; *RUC Rural Contemporary Art Residency*,[61] I extended the experimentation. From the shores of Lake Como and Lake Iseo, I collected fragments of terracotta tiles that represented the colours of the landscape and its old Roman villages, e.g. earthy reds, ochre, sienna, umber, emerald, turquoise, light blue, peach, white and ultramarine (Figure 19). I have since come to realise that these represent the colours of my palette. I installed and documented the work around the estate in different light and locations in- and outside, to capture their interaction to the light, space and environment (Figure 20, 21).

My experimentation went beyond planned residencies and I explored with ephemeral installations in different landscapes, one being the place of my birth, the other the place of our family's vacation house, both with embodied memories. The subtle light of long-lasting sunsets conveyed a special sensation, and twilight is when the quality light appears closest to that of Australia. As Pallusmaa states: "The human eye is most perfectly tuned for twilight."[62] The way the work responds to light and vice versa changes immensely at 8pm (Figure 22) and (Figure 23) at 10.30pm and our sensory experience changes accordingly.

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[59] Pallasmaa, *The eyes of the skin: architecture and the senses*, 47.
[60] Pallasmaa, *The eyes of the skin: architecture and the senses*, 47.
[61] RUC Rural Residency for Contemporary Art, 2018, accessed 12 October, 2019, https://www.ruralcontemporary.org/.
[62] Pallasmaa, *The eyes of the skin: architecture and the senses*, 46.

> Imagination unfolds in the very limit between representation and reflexivity, at a threshold wherein we confront the uncertain relation between the two.[63]

In common for the residencies and the studio process, is an engagement with the topics of home, light and liminality in expanded painting that encourages open-ended perception. Eliasson, Suh, Landgreen and Merrett similarly invite the viewer to interpret and interact in large-scale installations that engage with light, space and place. While Eliasson and Suh do not paint, their work is conceptually relevant and compelling. Landgreen and Merrett take painting to a new interactive scale that challenges the boundaries of painting.

The Honours project has culminated in an essence of research and experiences. The artistic outcome is a series of paintings titled *Light Collective* (Figure 24 - 31) consisting of 6 works on Belgian linen, 6 works on sheer textile and a video. The video showcases a montage of documentation of textile works across Australia, Denmark and Italy.

The texture of the paintings is tactile with painted panes of different density, translucency and brush marks layered one by one. The textile works have more linework and were painted overlaying one another, enabling the paint to transfer through and onto the layers behind it. Allegorical to a dual home connection, the Belgian linen was bought in Denmark before travelling with me to Australia and the textiles are curtains from Ikea. When painting the works, I embodied the perceiver in a boundary-free, liminal threshold.

Light Collective ambiguously suspends itself between abstraction, figuration, the notion of home, liminality and light while welcoming the viewer to engage with their own sensory and embodied imagination and perception.

[63] Demos, *The migrant image: the art and politics of documentary during global crisis*, 37.

CHAPTER FOUR – THE OUTCOME AND THE POTENTIAL

In this project, I set out to explore the liminal threshold and the perception of light and place, in painting. The exploration, experimentation and experience have been paramount to the project and the outcome evidences this. The paintings on Belgian linen are gestural and multilayered while the textile works are luminous and transparent. The video offers a non-prescriptive narrative that adds to the enquiry.

Parallel to the idea of home resting in one's affection centre,[64] the unstretched, non-framed works can easily be rolled, folded and carried through time and space. Unresolved, in-between matters are examined, and the work lingers in the threshold between abstraction and figuration. Installing the work outdoors instead of in a gallery enables a compelling experience of the work as it responds to natural light, space and environment. It allows a deeper spatial awareness and immersion; that is allegorical of the liminal threshold. There is arguably an ephemeral, ethereal and tactile curiosity to the work that makes it tangible and evocative. Combined, it illuminates the enquiry of the sensory and embodied experience and directs the viewer back to their senses.

While a variety of art practices have the means to ignite our senses, I propose the outcome of this project to bear evidence that the gestural and reflexive realm of painting is optimal for the task. It stimulates an affective and phenomenological experience that goes beyond the work itself. It makes us more aware of ourselves and of the world around us. The heightened awareness allows us a sense of responsibly and of being part of a whole**.**

Moving forward, this intercultural enquiry will continue by exploring and documenting the sensory and embodied experience of light and place, with the promise it has for us to become more aware not only of ourselves but of others. It empowers us as a collective.

[64] Arnold, "Place and space in home-making processes and the construction of identities in transnational migration, 161."

CONCLUSION

During the migration process our home boundaries and sense of belonging become blurred. We enter a liminal threshold and home takes on an emotional connotation, resting in our affection centre.[65] The liminal threshold enables us to become more aware of our spatial connection and of our sensory and embodied experiences.

The quality of light in Queensland and Northern Europe is very different and the way we experience it is felt rather than thought. It is a phenomenological perception that ignites our senses. Eschewing the frame, both of the work and the white cube gallery, and instead taking the work outside, not only blurs the boundaries of painting; it illuminates a liminal threshold of heightened awareness. It makes us conscious of ourselves and of the world around us. In this way, we become more connected and aware, individually as well as collectively.

Light Collective is an installation of expanded paintings that invites the public to engage with the work and with their own sensory perception and imagination. The gestural, tactile and evocative quality makes it tangible; the work points us back to our own senses. The work has unlimited potential to be extended and exhibited in various interactive constellations across Australia and abroad. Moreover, the project offers intriguing and vital research that has just begun, I hope to continue the enquiry in post-graduate research.

[65] Arnold, "Place and space in home-making processes and the construction of identities in transnational migration, 161."

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Figure 2. Do Ho Suh, *Seoul Home.* 2012.

Figure 3. Malene Landgreen. *Liquid State.* 2018.

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Figure 5. *Void.* 2018. Oil on Canvas. H163 x W104 cm.

Figure 6. Helle Cook. *A Sound*. 2019. QCA Galleries Brisbane.

Figure 7. Helle Cook. *Sheer Light*. 2019. QCA Galleries, Brisbane.

Figure 8. Helle Cook. *InterScape.* 2018. Installation view. House Conspiracy, West End.

Figure 9. Helle Cook. *InterScape.* 2018. House Conspiracy. West End.

Figure 10. Helle Cook. *InterScape.* 2018. Projection. House Conspiracy. West End.

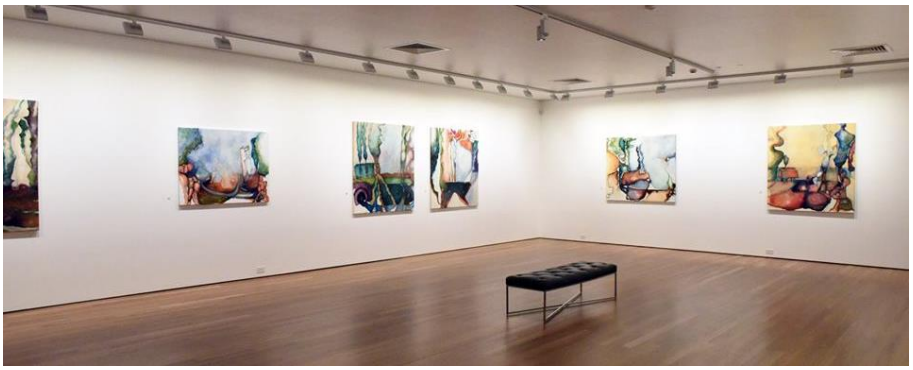

Figure 11. Helle Cook. *Blurred Boundaries.* 2018. Installation view. Latrobe Regional Gallery, Victoria.

Figure 12. Helle Cook**.** *Suspended Light.* 2019. Installation view. QCA Galleries, Brisbane.

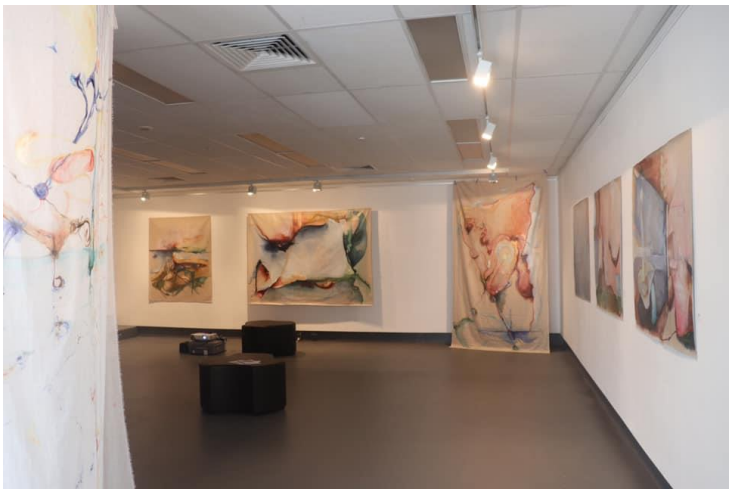

Figure 13. Helle Cook**.** *Suspended Light.* 2019. Installation view. QCA Galleries, Brisbane.

Figure 14. Helle Cook**.** *Suspended Light.* 2019. Installation view. QCA Galleries, Brisbane.

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Figure 30. Helle Cook. *Light Collective* 1 and 2. 2019.

Figure 31. Helle Cook. *Light Collective* 1, 3 and 2 and textiles. 2019. Studio install.

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