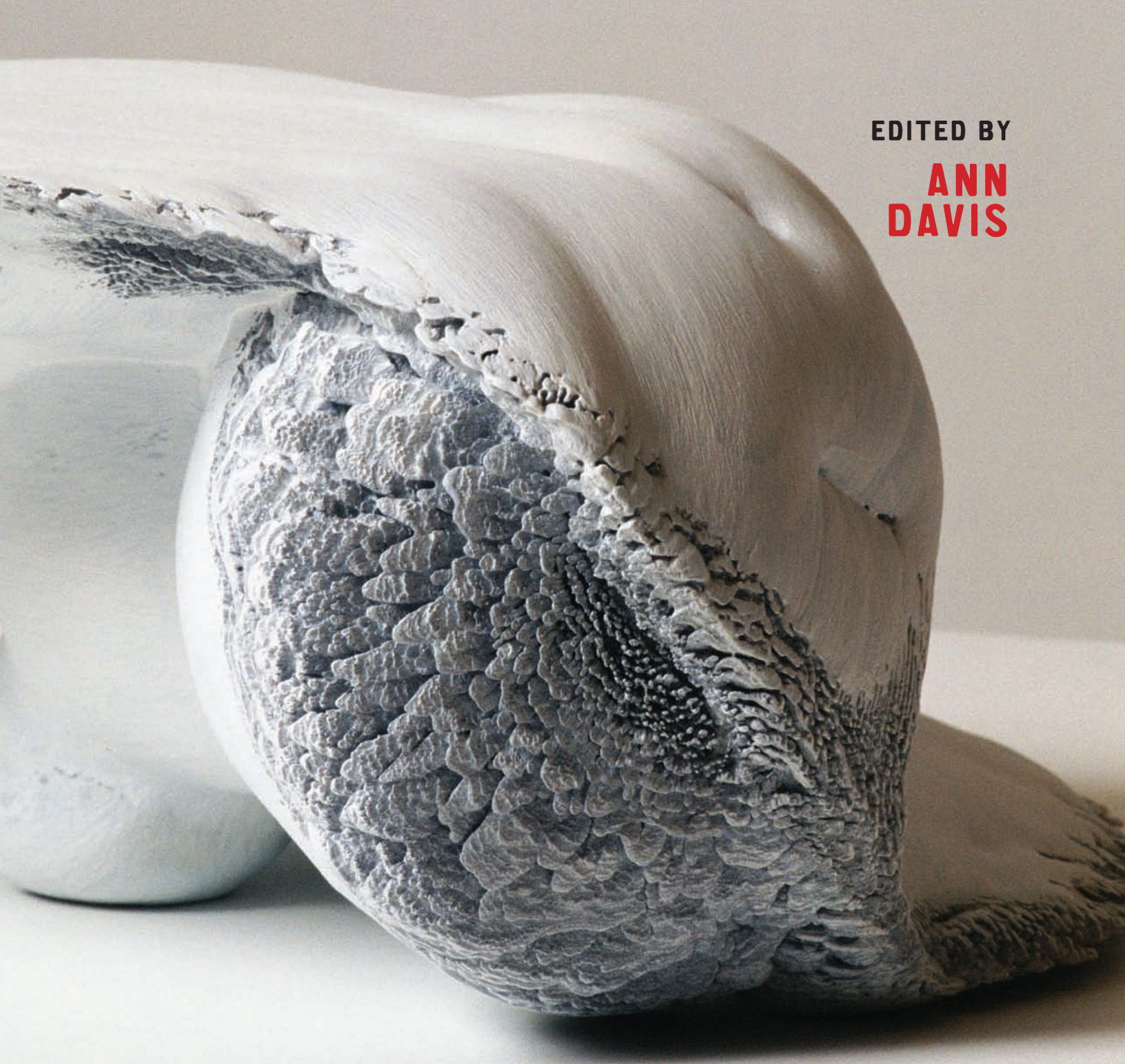

EDITED BY

ANN DAVIS

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2011

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COVER AND UNCOVER

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Geoffrey Simmins, General Editor

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As part of the University of Calgary Press's focus on the contemporary arts in Canada, the Art in Profile series is designed to showcase the meaningful contributions of Canadian artists and architects, both emerging and established. Each book provides insight into the life and work of an artist or architect who asserts creativity, individuality, and cultural identity.

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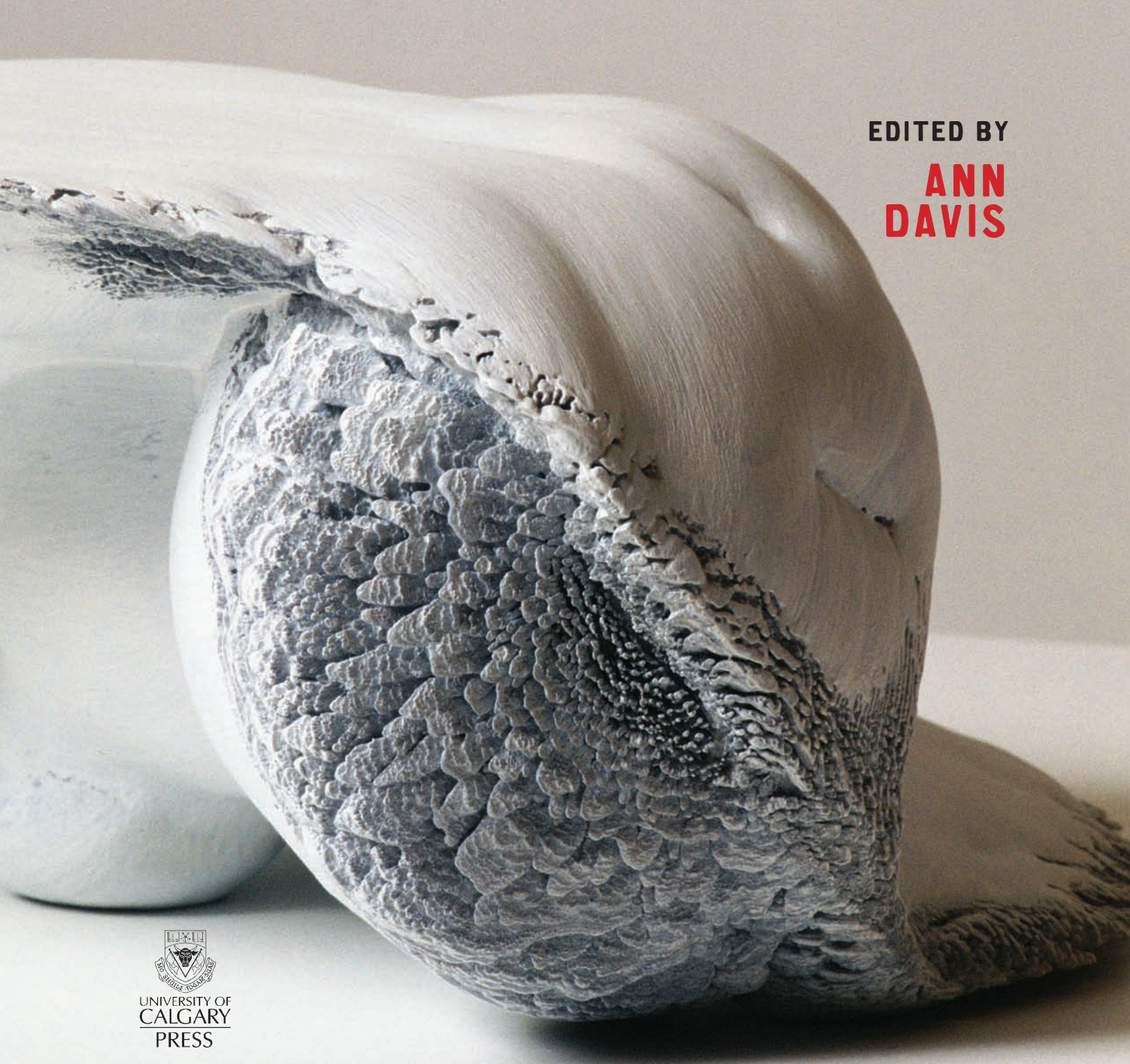

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Cover image: *Slouching Lobster (3044)*(detail), begun 1992, acrylic gesso and acrylic paint on lobster, 15.2 x 43.0 x 51.0 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Alberta, gift of the artist. Photo: Douglas Sharpe.

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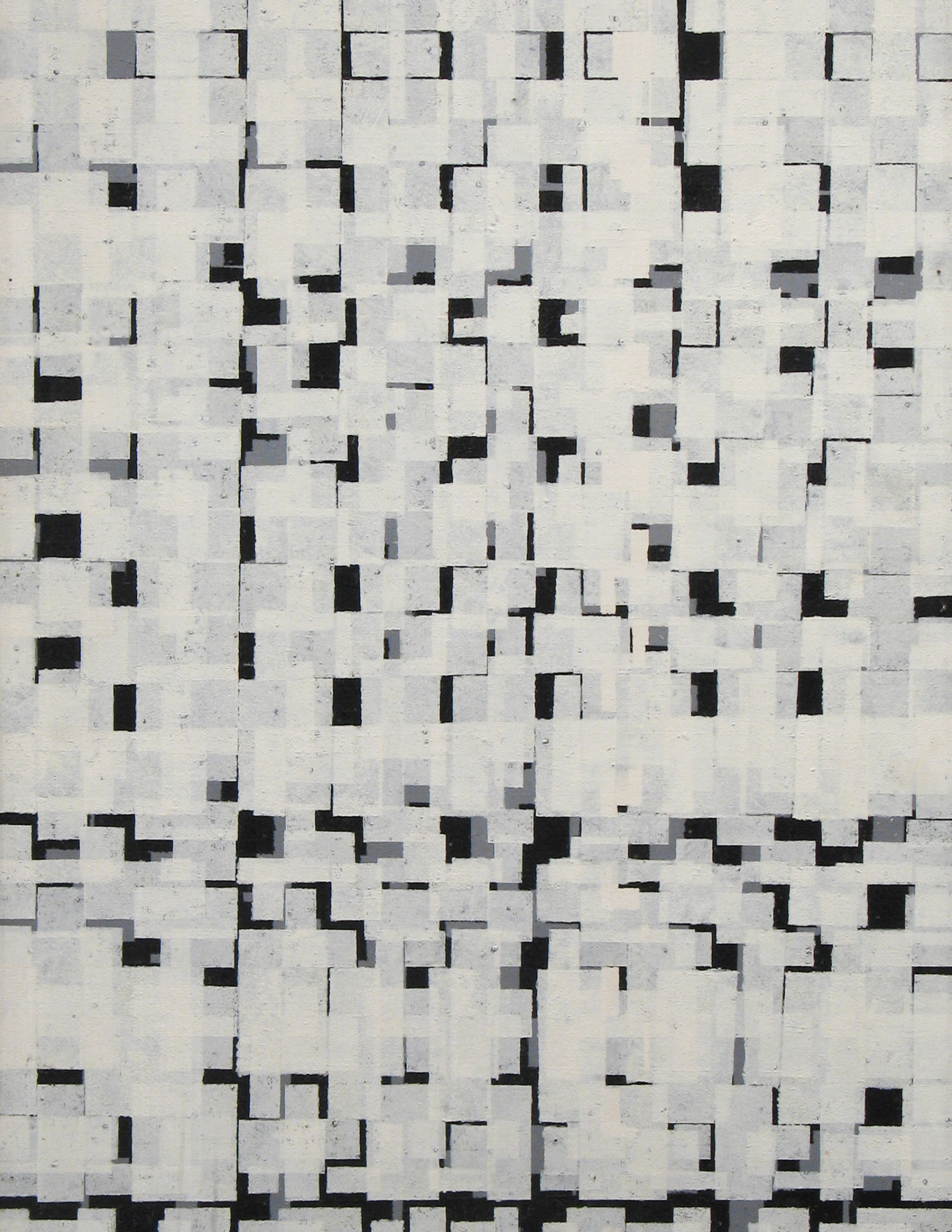

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A book such as this relies heavily on the kindness of the subject and his willingness to answer a seemingly endless series of questions. Each author individually expressed many thanks to Eric Cameron. Peggy Gale thanks Eric particularly for his friendship over many years, and for his thoughtful response to her critical writing in this and previous instances. Diana Nemiroff explained that she "would like to acknowledge Eric Cameron for offering me this opportunity to write about his experimental video work. I especially wish to recognize the integrity and courage he showed in giving me the freedom to write candidly about some of the more difficult aspects of his oeuvre, which I have long admired for its theoretical rigour, its struggles against human limits, and for the astonishing metaphors for the human condition that he has given us." Thierry de Duve also recorded his long friendship with Eric, noting with much pleasure their special freedom to disagree. Finally Ann Davis thanks Eric for his unfailing readiness to probe every dark corner to get this project just right. It has been an unexpectedly long process, made quite wonderful by everyone's sustained efforts to produce the very best book that can be done.

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Sellotape Painting #2 (detail), 1963, oil on canvas-covered board, 76.2 x 52.5 cm.
Collection of the artist. Photo: Kevin Baer, TrépanierBaer Gallery.

Getting quality images is always a challenge. David H. Brown of the University of Calgary Imaging Services took many of the wonderful photographs reproduced here. We thank him so much for his patient and conscientious work. The TrépanierBaer Gallery, and especially Judy Ciccaglione, have been most helpful. We gratefully acknowledge additional photographs taken by Kevin Baer, Eric Cameron, John Dean, Judy Cheung, Douglas Sharpe, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the National Gallery of Canada, Médiathèque/MACM, Denis Farley, and Arthur Nishimura.

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Ann Davis
April 2011

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TO UNCOVER: AN INTRODUCTION

Ann Davis

In his 1995 novel, *Blindness*, José Saramago concluded with a provocative definition of blindness: the doctor's wife says "I don't think we did go blind, I think we are blind, Blind but seeing, Blind people who can see, but do not see."[1] The distinction between ability and will is what is important. Eric Cameron, trying to see, covers his objects to expose the experience visible in the spaces around the objects. To see, Cameron covers, like the Buddhist artificer in Michael Ondaatje's novel *Anil's Ghost*. His activity of painting, with all its unpredictability and surprises, mirrors and reveals his life.

Cameron's oeuvre seeks to eliminate the distinction between art and life. His immense contribution not merely consists of the act of painting objects, but, more importantly, includes concomitant analysis, which has led him to embrace and reveal the mysteries of life. Well known in Canada, and now gaining increasing attention internationally, Cameron is one of Canada's great artists. His early work, his perceptive writings, his videos, and his Thick Paintings – very tangible objects, or more accurately objects made into new objects – demonstrate his extraordinary creativity, persistence, and sensitive analysis.

This is a book about the work of Eric Cameron, painter, author, teacher, and videographer. Perforce it is also about the life of Eric Cameron and how that life informed his art. The emphasis is very much on the work, Cameron's rich production over almost fifty years, but the relationship between the life and the work inevitably creeps in, drawing attention to the author's background, ideas, ideals, location, and even feelings.

Eric Cameron was born in Leicester, England, in 1935. He turned to art, he declared in his self-deprecating way, after failing Greek at grammar school in Durham. From 1953 to 1957 he studied art at King's College, Durham University, in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, under Lawrence Gowing, Victor Pasmore, and Richard Hamilton. Gowing in particular taught the "Euston Road" method, deliberate and painstaking, demanding impersonal figures and still lifes painted in tones and relationships. Upon graduation with his coveted first-class honours degree, Cameron went to the Courtauld Institute in London, studying Renaissance and

nineteenth-century European art history from 1957 to 1959, graduating with an Academic Diploma in History of Art.

In 1959 the newly graduated artist accepted a position teaching at the University of Leeds, where Quentin Bell was Head of the Art Department. (Lawrence Gowing would later take over from Bell.) Cameron spent ten years at Leeds, teaching art history and producing his Process Paintings, those carefully executed conceptual works made by applying paint through a grid of one-inch masking tape. These were given the first and only solo exhibition in 1967 at the Queen's Square Gallery in Leeds.

After a decade at Leeds, in 1969, Cameron moved to Canada, where he was appointed Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Fine Art at the University of Guelph in Ontario. There he embarked on video as the second phase of his oeuvre – short, time-based essays on the desires, absurdity, and, sometimes painfulness of everyday life. Seven years later, in 1976, he moved to Halifax to teach at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD), staying for eleven years, before moving to Calgary in 1987. In Halifax, in the spring of 1979, he initiated his Thick Paintings (to be continued), the constant application of gesso on ordinary objects – an egg, an alarm clock – the work he continues to this day. Like the Process Paintings before them, the Thick Paintings developed from an interest in materials and a belief that, with sufficient hard work and precision, he could manipulate and control those materials to execute his idea. Despite his strenuous efforts, his self-denial and self-criticism, small imperfections in the results confounded him. Much of his voluminous writing has focused on exploring and explaining these imperfections and analyzing his changing responses. Cameron continues to teach at the University of Calgary, where he was Head of the Department of Art from 1987 to 1997, and was appointed University Professor in 2004, one of the highest honours a university can bestow.

He has participated in numerous exhibitions, both in Canada and abroad, starting in 1953. Solo shows include *Bent Axis Approach* (1984) at The Nickle Arts Museum, Calgary, Alberta, *Squareness:* (1989 at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, Alberta, *Divine Comedy* (1990), a joint production of the National Gallery of Canada and the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and *The Shadow of Self* (1992) at the Art Museum of the Americas, Washington, D.C. His international activities include *English Roots*, at the Tate Gallery St. Ives, England, *Kaleidoscope*, Amsterdam, *Voici*, Palais des beaux-arts, Brussels, *L'oeuvre en programme* in Bordeaux, France, and *Eric Cameron – Record of Work* in Paris in 2008.

In addition to his exhibitions, his writings, sales, and awards are impressive. Cameron had published extensively, including the books *Bent Axis Approach*, *Divine Comedy*, and, recently, *English Roots*. His works are held in major collections such as the National Gallery of Canada, the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, as well as at the University of East Anglia and Leeds University. Cameron's considerable accomplishments, both his inspired teaching and his unusual art, have been recognized with major awards: the Victor Lynch-Staunton Award (1992), the Gershorn Iskowitz Prize (1994), and the Governor General's Award (2004). He has also been honoured by his peers, being elected a fellow of both the Royal Society of Arts and the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts.

This book comprises four essays, each exploring one aspect of Cameron's creativity: his writings, the Process Paintings, the videos, and the Thick Paintings. Together, these essays produce the only concentrated analysis of all periods of Cameron's work. Detailing both the development of his creativity and the important changes in his art and in his philosophy, the authors also clearly adumbrate the principal thinkers Cameron has sought and explores how they have influenced him and his work.

The first essay is Peggy Gale's "Eric Cameron: Author, Author!" Gale looks at six of Cameron's strikingly honest autobiographical texts, starting with the most expansive one, *English Roots*, using this to give us an abbreviated biography of his obsession with a deep and detailed examination of every aspect of his life and creative endeavours. Interested in Cameron's "visual Freudian slips" and the engagement she sees in his Thick Paintings, Gale argues that the mechanical covering of objects releases the artist from self-conscious artistry, from aesthetic decisions. Here Gale refers to Marcel Duchamp's map of unfulfilled sexual consummation, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, suggesting that since the Thick Paintings are to be continued, perpetually unfinished, similarly Cameron's sexual desires can never be satisfied. Throughout these writings, Gale notes a tone of regret, the suffering of loss, a sense of disappointment, in this a confession on the order of St. Augustine.

In the next essay, departing from Cameron's early works, his Process Paintings, I examine how these conceptual pieces forecast both his videos and his Thick Paintings in their covering and imperfect materialism. Cameron's frustration, his constant search for the inevitability of form, led him, through Clement Greenberg, to Aristotle. It is with an understanding of Aristotelian form that one can apprehend Cameron's conviction of perfection, of the unavoidable. Then I turn to Cameron's oft-stated conclusion that his practice can be labelled "material

mysticism," a term that seems almost to be an oxymoron. Again Aristotle, with his concept of one world, both real and eternal, provides the bridge necessary to accommodate both matter and mystic, a spiritual possibility, itness.

The third essay, by Diana Nemiroff, examines Cameron's videotapes, produced between 1972 and 1981. Initially Cameron began by formulating a conceptual program for the work he was to undertake, probing the difference between video as document and video as art. Each of his resulting videos made the camera an actor in the end production rather than just a passive means of recording an act. In these works Cameron's struggles are most evident; the passions that nourish his art are close to the surface. By considering seven tapes, Nemiroff exposes the artist's ongoing battle with imperfection and incompetence, recording his failure to conceal the irrepressibility of everyday life and the sexual desires that are a part of it. This trope then is identified as a characteristic not simply of the videotapes but of each phase of his work, such that concealment and exposure taken together form parts of a single whole.

The final essay, written by Thierry de Duve, considers the Thick Paintings, those enigmatic ghost objects started in 1979 to be continued. De Duve probes Cameron's insistence on an art that justifies "the inevitability of its particular form," the blind rejection of chance, of accident, by examining Kant and the problem of freedom to respond to ethical imperatives. Rejecting or deferring the aesthetic decision, Cameron contends that he is the instrument of a mechanical process beyond his control and that his role is to induce his materials to fulfill their own nature. De Duve argues otherwise – and here Cameron and de Duve agree to differ. By bringing Kant up to date and supposing him to be familiar with today's science, de Duve suggests that Cameron has created a new interpretation of Kant's theory of genius wherein the antinomy between nature and freedom has been eliminated and has become a domain beyond nature (science) and freedom (art), yet contains both. De Duve concludes that Cameron's program is determined by an aesthetic idea, or taste, and renames Cameron's material mysticism, "transcendental materialism."

These essays uncover the mystery that is Eric Cameron's art and expose his probing analysis, his personal honesty, his persistent dedication, and his extensive knowledge. To see, Cameron covers. His activity of creating, filled with struggle and passion, mirrors and reveals life. Eric Cameron's writings, Process Paintings, videos and Thick Paintings all defend the usefulness of space around and beyond objects. His works are eyes that have been blinded and can now see. They are the indefinable defined, the experience of life brought to mysterious, intangible reality.

Photo of Eric Cameron, 2010. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

ERIC CAMERON: AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

Peggy Gale

Though now best known as the author of the Thick Paintings (to be continued), in progress since 1979, Eric Cameron has also made important contributions to contemporary art through his video and installation works, his earlier, more traditional paintings, and in his ongoing production of critical, historical, theoretical, and autobiographical texts. In this essay, I consider his major self-reflective writings since 1984, tracing a trajectory of development and revelation through the long years of their publication.

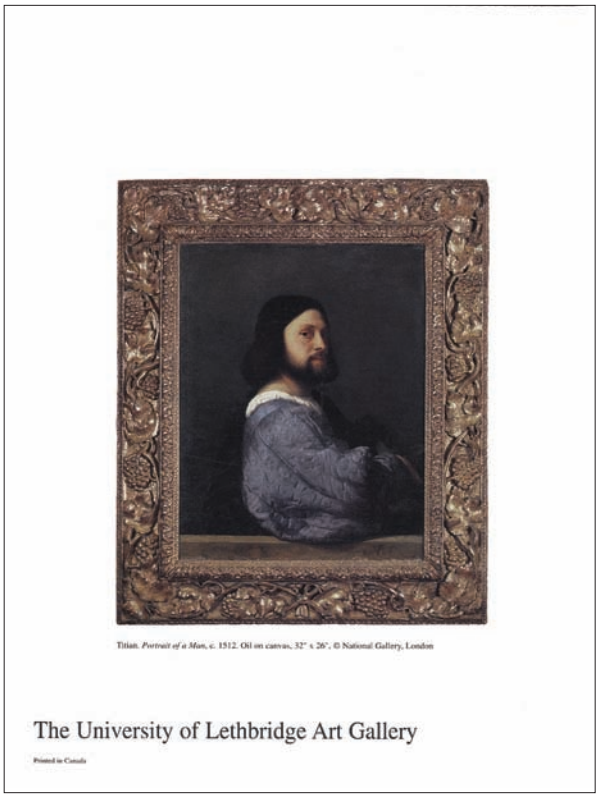
Aligning his texts chronologically, one moves from the artist's origins and sources for work, towards the present: a demarcation of thought and achievement, a move from inside to out. Ironically, the essays themselves mark Cameron's trajectory from exterior to interior, a revelation of self and psyche that is all the more admirable for its sometimes difficult content and relentless, insistent honesty. I deal here with each of the texts in turn, beginning with the book that brings together many of the threads initiated along the way. This is a tracing of Eric Cameron as literary and critical author.

English Roots[1] is Cameron's most comprehensive single piece of writing about his work: both exhibition companion and a memoir of his origins and growth as an artist. These elements are interleaved throughout with an attempt to decipher and explain his actions and concerns: an apologia, as well as narrative history and commentary.

Beginning with his parents' lives and his own memories of childhood and early education, there are class issues raised, as well as those of talent, education, ambition, personal focus, and work ethic. He underlines the difficult lives of his parents, who had little but hard work to see them through; Eric Cameron is the first of his family to have a higher education. Though born in Leicester, where his parents had moved during the Depression to find work, most of his youth was spent in Newcastle and Durham in the north of England. He grew up at Brandon Colliery near Durham, studied at Newcastle (an hour away by bus), and completed graduate

Exposed/Concealed: Salima Halladj (1452) (detail).
Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

English Roots, front (Lethbridge: University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, 2001). Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.



English Roots, back (Lethbridge: University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, 2001). Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

work in art history at the Courtauld Institute, University of London. His first teaching post was at Leeds University in Yorkshire.

Newcastle, his parents' birthplace, was always "home" to the Camerons, but that home has been elusive and distant for Eric Cameron, even while he lived in England.

The text of *English Roots* is eloquent and deeply felt, impressive in its recollection and insights. It is also a record of the obsession marking many aspects of Cameron's life: his will to persevere, and his insistence on looking behind and underneath every action. Each chapter is headed by the same quotation from *Little Gidding* (1942, from *Four Quartets*) by T.S. Eliot, its repetition an indication that we are intended to read them for their literal sense, though he refers differently to the lines' possible meanings with each reiteration:

> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.

These words contain Cameron's fond desire. To come to terms with his lived life and accomplishments and to confront and accept his origins and his potential legacy are central to this book. He has written in depth about certain works and exhibitions and keeps meticulous records of his activities. Indeed, he has assessed himself relentlessly over the years, *English Roots* being his summa. It suggests Cameron's determination to make a "final" overview, pulling together strands or themes introduced in the earlier texts, and may also be intended as hail and farewell for his native English soil.

Abbreviated History

Eric Cameron's artistic production divides unevenly into a series of single-minded projects. His early studies and student production in still life, landscape, portraits – drawings, watercolours, and oil paintings – are carefully documented, moving from realism towards abstraction. This work was influenced most particularly by Lawrence Gowing, his undergraduate teacher at King's College in Newcastle and by others there, including Victor Pasmore and Richard

Hamilton. Gowing was subsequently his department head at Leeds University, replacing Quentin Bell there.[2]

English Roots traces Cameron's first mature works, the Sellotape Paintings[3] beginning in 1959, followed by the Process Paintings in 1964[4] – a strict, geometric application of the tape and paint system, with grids of different colours overlaid in large rectangular format, leading to his first public exhibition at Queen Square Gallery in Leeds (January 1967).

Moving to Canada in 1969 as Chairman of the Department of Fine Art, University of Guelph, he began working with video in 1972. The following year, he organised *Video Circuits* at the university library, including tapes by Vito Acconci (*Waterways*) and Peter Campus (*Three Transitions*), with installations by Noel Harding (*Three Pieces for Circuits*) and himself. Two of Cameron's video works were included in *Videoscape* at the Art Gallery of Ontario (November 1974–April 1975), with a notable accompanying text in the catalogue, an important early statement for the field:

> The day-to-day answer to the question, "What can you do with a television camera?" is that you can use it to make television programmes. To speak of the television medium's potential for recording and transmitting information, of visual effects and feedback loops is only to expand the same reply. If in the context of art I give a different sort of answer, this is precisely because it places the decision at an altogether more fundamental level. What then can you do with a television camera? For one thing one might run it over a model's skin. Or one might put it in one's own mouth or someone else's. The tubular form of the lens fitting more resembles a finger (or a penis) than the eye which its function seems to duplicate.[5]

Cameron saw these queries and answers as following directly on his decisions underlying the Process Paintings: question your tools and assumptions, then proceed with logic and care until a satisfactory result is achieved.

Developing Ideas

I first met Eric Cameron in the early 1970s, when he was becoming interested in video at the University of Guelph. As with the earlier Process Paintings, his video works of the time were compatible with the now-familiar principles of conceptual art laid out by Sol LeWitt in *Artforum*:

> In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. (In other forms of art the concept may be changed in the process of execution.) When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.[6]

Cameron's insistence on their rule-based "conceptual" character required that the tapes admit no narrative or emotional content. Nonetheless, with the performative *Insertion: a mouth* (1974) and *Numb Bares* (1975–76), I saw substantial "other" content inherent in the work. I invariably imagined fellatio with *Insertion*, just as *Numb Bares* – slapping letters rhythmically into place on a female posterior – suggested playful spanking or some other sexual game, indicating both "learning" and keeping score. With *Keeping Marlene Out of the Picture* (1975), the title suggested a removal and denial far more complex than a mere editing plan for on-screen imagery. Cameron rejected my opinions out of hand.

However, it appears I was not entirely wrong; in *English Roots* (note, p. 161), Cameron acknowledges his inflexibility in the mid-1970s, now replaced by recognition of his unconscious motivations.

His titles invite speculation, such as *Keeping Marlene Out of the Picture – and Lawn* (1980), where he included a pot of living lawn grass in the installation. The lawn grass continued to appear in installations until 1993,[7] and, at the time, he linked the pots of grass with long hours spent watering his lawn at home. (One thinks also of Marcel Duchamp's "Waterfall" in *Etant Donnés*, 1946–66). A different idea is put forward in an article by Cliff Eyland from *Arts Atlantic* in 1984, linking Cameron's work with the biblical dictum that "Flesh is grass." Logically, grass is flesh, then, and the body is on view here even when one's object of attention

(Marlene, perhaps) has been removed. This dictum comes from the Old Testament (*Isaiah* 40: 6) but is echoed in the New, in *The First Epistle General of Peter* I: 24–25:

> All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:
> But the word of the Lord endureth for ever.

Both versions emphasize the fleeting and corruptible nature of the physical body and invite further wordplay.

The relationship of artist and model – two protagonists – offers tempting ground for investigation; there is both opportunity for collaboration and potential for exploitation. An interesting alternative is played out in *Thin Air – and Lawn* (1980), a videotape made with his wife, Margaret Cameron. As he had noted in another context altogether, "Through the objective discipline of Lawrence [Gowing]'s painting method I had always sensed I detected traces of the human interaction of artist and model facing each other in the studio."[8] And as he has written elsewhere of *Thin Air – and Lawn*, "This represents a self-conscious attempt to return to the procedural premises of my earliest videotapes, while consciously avoiding the initially unconscious sexual innuendo that had subsumed them almost from the start. For me, the result seems forced, sterile and dull."[9] The grass in this case appears to have withered after all – a victim of over-determination.

Other models have engendered different results. As Cameron describes his videotape *Ha-ha* in a lecture of 2000 (Glenbow Museum, Calgary):

> … a two-minute tape from 1976 in which erotic suggestions are allowed to build up through the superimposition of images from two studio cameras in front of which Marlene Hoff and I sat, several feet apart, with small wide-angle lenses stuck in our mouths. No chocolate was ground and neither illuminating gas nor love gasoline were expended. We just laughed.…[10]

This "laugh" is entirely mirthless and moves quickly to suggest sounds of sexual exchange and then exhaustion. Cameron's lecture was intended to approach Duchamp from a personal perspective, although much of the talk concerns Richard Hamilton. If "the bachelor grinds his

own chocolate" is unavoidably sexual, the illuminating gas and love gasoline refer us directly to the *Large Glass* and the *Bride Stripped Bare*. We begin to see each denial as affirmation, and explore further.

Laughter appears elsewhere in Cameron's works and is never simple. In his exhibition and publication, *Divine Comedy* (1990), women's recorded laughter is combined with an installation of Thick Paintings and intermittent slide projection. The laughter begins as one opens the door to enter the gallery; simultaneously, the light goes out and slides appear. When the door closes, the slides and laughter cease but the light returns. Damned either way: one's arrival (curiosity, desire to learn) seems to be mocked, with tactile three-dimensionality (Thick Paintings) replaced by mere image-projections (slides). The Thick Paintings thus may be seen in the light and in silence, while darkness brings ridicule and a loss of physicality.[11] This is not a comforting picture. In *English Roots* the installation (otherwise unremarked, except as photo-captions) appears as a pair of illustrations alongside Cameron's description of his somewhat mysterious extended illness of 1998 and a discussion of suicide by Albert Camus from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, where "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living."[12]

For Eric Cameron, laughter does not seem to coincide with happy pleasure. To this comment, one might compare Cameron's earlier note[13] that Duchamp is on record as affirming: "The only thing I can consider seriously is eroticism."[14]

Slippage and Revelation

Cameron shows growing fascination with what he calls "visual Freudian slips," most often in connection with the Thick Paintings (to be continued). These were begun in Halifax while teaching at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD), toward the end of the period (1976–79) when his family had returned to live in England. He recalls:

> … visual Freudian slips that came as a shock on first revelation and continued to occur even after I was fully alerted to be on my guard against them. At one time I was embarrassingly aware how much the supports I built up by adding hardened drips of paint underneath *Crouching Lobster* were developing into forms like

> women's breasts, but it was an even greater shock when someone pointed out to me how much the photograph of this same piece on the poster of my Divine Comedy installation looked like a woman bending over with skirts thrown up over her head. In the privacy of the studio there were occasions when some forms of some pieces would present themselves to me as women's body parts with an intensity that approached hallucination. It is perhaps understandable that such experiences should occur in the context of the obsessively repetitive activity of brushing out the gesso on piece after piece, over and over again, hour after hour, till my involvement with the task reached the point of self-hypnosis.[15]

One might suspect in Eric Cameron a secret (unacknowledged) pleasure in being "bad" after a life of strict intellectual focus and correct attitude, always under tight rein. He has become accustomed to pointing out these "slips" to others and mentions the issue more than once in *English Roots*. These suggested references are far more evident to some viewers than to others. He continues,

> As an observer of the unfolding transformations of my work more completely informed than any gallery-goer could possibly be, I felt an obligation not only to follow the truth wherever it might lead, but also to make known what I (and others) had observed through verbal and visual commentary.… Each time it is necessary to go over much of the same material again, because much of it is essential to the understanding of what is going on and needs to be made available to every new reader on every new occasion. The texts become as layered as the works, but going over everything in a new context is a useful exercise, because new understandings do emerge.[16]

Illumination and explication are always at the fore. Writing is a way of learning, and thus an agent of change and development. In this sense, *English Roots* is the most complete record of what writing has taught him and evidence of Cameron's new willingness and ability to reveal and discuss motives and desires. The writing is an elaboration in different terms of his incessant brushing-out of gesso – a stroking of surfaces – with their attendant internal monologues. The choice of gesso itself – which in Cameron's case is an acrylic polymer-based medium and

not the traditional plaster of Paris and glue mix used as a ground for painting or bas-reliefs – is interesting, given its normally hidden role *beneath* a finished surface. Further, Cameron has noted that his main reason for using gesso rather than white acrylic always has been that it produces crisper surfaces with a more precise registration of small details. It is also true that gesso is less expensive than oil or acrylic paint, and maybe its use is simply practical. As Freud himself pointed out, "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar." However, Cameron continues:

> It has slowly dawned on me, as I write, that the "Freudian slips," of which I have made so much in other essays, may be of secondary significance: that they come about – as verbal Freudian slips also tend to – when one is trying hardest to avoid them, and that what is most clearly expressed in my Thick Paintings is the only half-conscious endeavour to avoid emotional exposure of myself. This interpretation, which is not altogether new to me, also requires my acknowledgement that my work on my Thick Paintings is repressive. I can only say it was not my intention at the outset; I had no idea back in 1979 of any kind of rôle in relation to my personal psychology the project I was undertaking might fulfil, but it is consistent in relation to my circumstances at that time that some such aid to repression might be called for, whether consciously or unconsciously.[17]

These interpretations by now may be obtrusive to or even hinder an assessment of the work. One might say with conviction that the Thick Paintings no longer have anything to do with repression, if that indeed were ever the case. Today, they signal patience and dogged perseverance, with their hidden cores as talismans. On one level they are mementos from their moment of inception, that charmed three-year period when Cameron lived alone amidst intellectual challenge at NSCAD and could ignore the daily intrusion of everyday duty that came with being husband and father. His family was safe in England, and he was free in Halifax. Nonetheless, the Thick Paintings do harbour secrets of a sort, with their "casual" selection of innocuous fragments from his three-year bachelor life before wife and children rejoined him in Canada. As he writes,

> … the fact that they were things that had accumulated over the last three years, tokens of a life that was about to change beyond recognition, has seemed increasingly

> significant to me. Covering them with paint might be construed ambivalently as preserving while also burying. As the gesso accumulated and the shape of the original objects was submerged and eventually lost entirely, the visual evidence of my former life was obliterated, though the titles of the pieces (which were usually just the name of the objects at the core) provided verbal reminders of what was buried and denied.[18]

From the start, Cameron has seen his Thick Paintings as a central and ongoing concern, to be worked on daily "until I die." They have always been designated "(to be continued)"; the work would grow with time and application, open to changes in circumstance. Originally he had assumed that as the objects accumulated layers of paint their edges would soften until finally each form would become a perfect sphere,[19] but very soon that proved not to be the case. Yet the phrase "(to be continued)" has an interesting corollary. Some years ago, a reviewer wrote that in his titling, Cameron had "stumbled on a foolproof method for holding at bay any critical analysis of his work."[20] Of course there has been a great deal of critical response. Cameron sees that refusal to "finish" as rooted in his undergraduate training in the tradition of the Euston Road school and the teaching of Lawrence Gowing.

At the same time, Cameron has specified his interest in "deferring the aesthetic decision," a phrase that puts new light on the issue of "finishing." Inklings of this idea were established early by William Lynn Miller, Cameron's high school art teacher in Durham, who insisted on "the notion that artists must avoid the pursuit of 'effect.' … We had to draw what we saw and do it with long rhythmical lines and forget about 'effect.'"[21] This has indeed become Cameron's regular procedure with the Thick Paintings, using "long rhythmical" strokes repeated as consistently as possible, without nuance or emphasis. Results in this way were both unpredictable and literally unavoidable, unless he "withheld the paint" (Cameron's term)[22] altogether. He continues,

> It was many years later that Quentin Bell brought up the notion of "deferring the aesthetic decision," attributing both phrase and concept to Richard Hamilton during the years he was teaching (and I was studying) at King's. When I was doing preliminary work for this project, I mentioned this to Lawrence Gowing's widow,

> Jenny. She was sure the idea was Lawrence's. On the face of it, that would seem to make more sense.…
>
> Almost all the art I have produced since graduating from King's defers the aesthetic decision and guards against preoccupation with effect in one way or another: at first, by using grids of masking tape that will not allow me to see the effect until the final grid of tape is peeled off; then, by working with a video-camera in ways that do not involve my looking through the viewfinder; and finally, by applying layers upon layers of gesso that are so thin I can have only the vaguest idea, while I am working, how each layer will contribute to the build-up of sculptural form.[23]

Ever the diligent student, Cameron learned his lessons well. It may be that Cameron's desire to guard against "effect" follows early instructions, but it is also a means of self-effacement. Such deferral may signal a curious lack of engagement or commitment to results, but from another point of view such conscious deferral actually *permits* engagement by releasing one from responsibility at that moment. The object produced in this straightforward, work-like manner becomes its own evidence and "truth," without self-conscious artistry. This implies that the Thick Paintings are produced by rote, a product of the pure unconscious. No decisions are to be made after the original object is selected and the procedure of gesso layers is initiated. There is no "taste" involved, and no talent. As Sol LeWitt had proposed, "The idea becomes a machine that makes the art." Cameron has largely maintained his standards in this regard, except for such "corrections" as adding paint supports and the like.[24]

It is instructive to compare this deferral of the aesthetic decision with Marcel Duchamp's celebrated "delay in glass." In *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–23), also known as the *Large Glass*, the upper section, part cubist, represents the realm of the Bride, the "ideal," with the *pendue femelle* representing the uterus (introverted) and with large stripes as the vaginal membrane.

The lower half is the realm of the bachelors, or the "real," and is meant to be projected in two-point perspective *into* the gallery, being thus a precursor to Readymades. Like Richard Hamilton's elaborate exhibition on *Man, Machine & Motion*, mounted at King's College in 1955[25] when Cameron was a student there, the *Large Glass* is a real machine in a real space.

For Duchamp, his "delay in glass" represented a map of sexual consummation never fulfilled. And as Eric Cameron has stated: "The ultimate rewards are sexual rewards."[26] But

since "the work is never finished" on the Thick Paintings, Cameron, presumably, can never be rewarded. He is working "blind" so he cannot maintain control, although otherwise he is obsessively controlling; hence, his need to explain, define, defend, and insist on the work remaining "to be continued."

In *English Roots*, it is notable how very seldom Marcel Duchamp appears. When Cameron spoke on Duchamp at the Glenbow Museum in 2000, he dwelt at length (instead) on Richard Hamilton, later reproducing much of the lecture verbatim in the book.[27] When he writes of Hamilton's 1953/4 talk on Duchamp at King's College, "the only thing I remember about it now is that the so-called *Large Glass* of 1915–1923 featured prominently.…"[28] He mentions a conference soon after arriving in Canada where he told a colleague "that I thought Duchamp was mainly important because he had influenced Richard Hamilton."[29] and credits his much later conversations at NSCAD with Dennis Young and Thierry de Duve for an interest in Duchamp's legacy. Cameron reiterates:

> My own art has a superficial kinship with Duchamp to the extent that I have used everyday objects as the basis for my Thick Paintings; they might have been considered Readymades had I not covered them with paint. My art practice is also like Duchamp's in that I have accompanied my production with written texts, but there is a world of difference. My Process Paintings of the 60s and the Thick Paintings I have been working on since 1979 … became what they are for reasons totally outside my control. Duchamp's notes were written in the planning of the *Large Glass*, which was mapped out in advance down to the last detail; the intervention of chance was tightly controlled and as tightly circumscribed. With one notable exception, my texts have come after the work to which they refer and have been an attempt to explain (to myself in the first instance) what had happened.
>
> The one exception was my "Notes for Video Art," which was written in a self-conscious attempt to find an equivalent in the medium of video for the way materials were allowed to determine form and content in my Process Paintings.[30]

Yet the unforeseen or accidental *was* accepted by Duchamp; when the *Large Glass* was badly cracked, for example, the artist readily accepted its new form in spite of the enormous change it made to the appearance and stability of his original conception. Dust was permitted to

accumulate on the work during the years it was kept under his bed, then incorporated into the work. There are other instances.

I propose that Cameron's "deferral of the aesthetic decision" bears a rather more intimate relationship to Duchamp's "delay in glass."[31]

Other Revelations

Related to (and continuing aspects of) the Thick Paintings, Cameron's later series titled *Exposer/Cacher* or *Exposed/Concealed* is also remarkable. As he describes the first of these, *Exposer/Cacher: Salima Halladj*, was

> … built up of almost a thousand coats of gesso applied over an undeveloped canister of film on which I photographed every orifice in the body of a woman, a professional model who posed for me in Arles, France, while I was visiting artist at the National School of Photography in the spring of 1993. The images of her most intimate parts will have long since faded from the film, but the sensual innuendo of her presence seems to have been reinvested, by some process I cannot pretend to understand, in the emerging form of the Thick Painting.[32]

One might wonder at the choice of *this* model, likely an immigrant to southern France and, possibly, vulnerable to financial or family pressures in her choice of modelling as a profession. With her name included in the title of the work, her identity is made specific. One recognizes that the photo images chosen for reproduction in their various views are inevitably suggestive of breasts, rumps, and vaginas.[33] The "undeveloped images" on the hidden film evoke Cameron's yearning for sensual life as well as for permanence, for *presence* in his art: a worthy desire. However, like bodies entombed in Egyptian pyramids, along with paintings, furniture, and food in bowls in readiness for their next life, the photo-images in their gesso casings *may not* in fact have faded or ceased to exist. One imagines Cameron happy to have captured and kept these hidden memories, unknown or invisible to all but himself.

There is a further subtext to these works. Whether *Exposer/Cacher* suggests being trapped in negative darkness, or encased in a brilliant white shell, Cameron reminds us of references to

Exposed/Concealed: Salima Halladj (1452), 1993–present (to be continued). Acrylic gesso and acrylic on undeveloped canister of film, 12.7 x 20.32 x 6.35 cm, as of January 17, 1996. Collection of the artist. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

Exposed/Concealed: Salima Halladj (1452), another view. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

> … Baudelaire's "darkness where temptation breeds," and Shakespeare's "light and lust are deadly enemies: Shame folded up in blind-concealing night."
> There are things most of us would rather not admit about ourselves, the trivial embarrassments as much as the less-than-monumental guilt. To paint them as pure as the driven snow is to beg for sublimation of regret as art.[34]

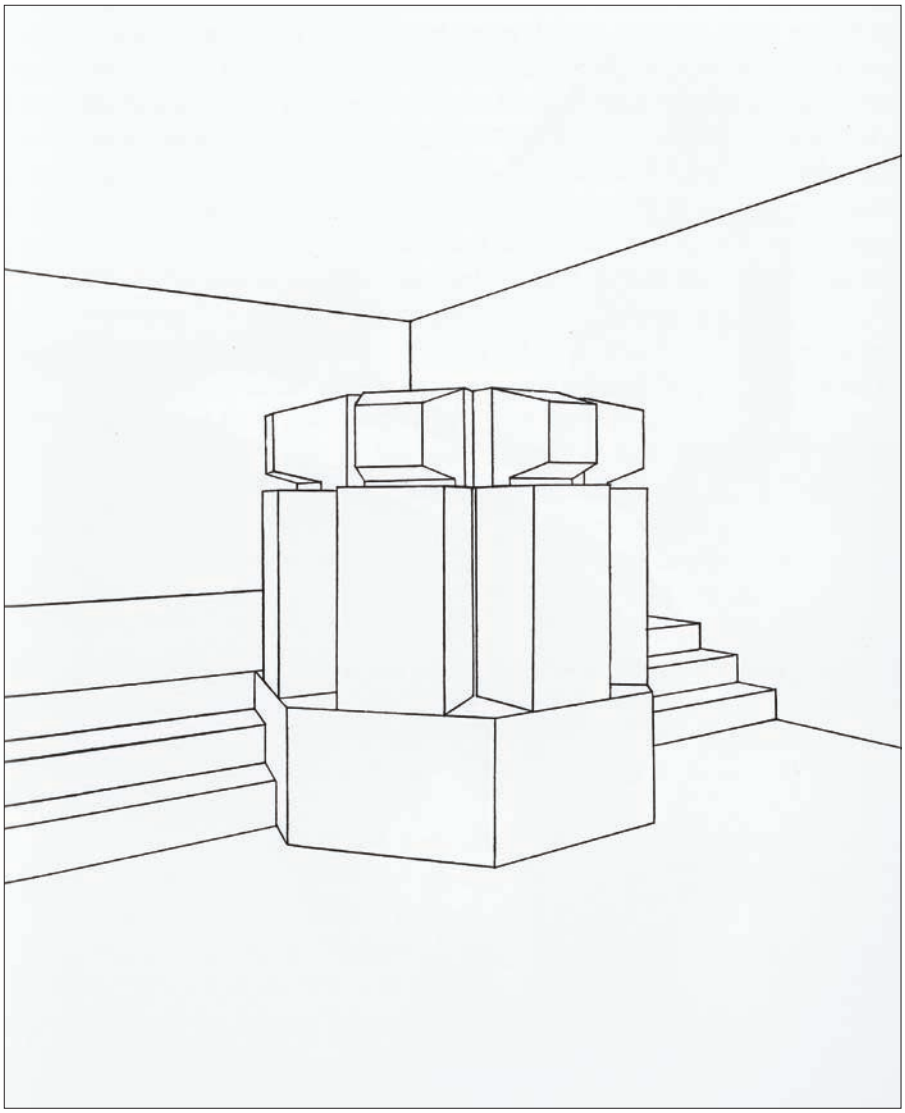
Light and white continue to appear. Memories return: clouded images. A cool and luminous surface had been mentioned earlier, in a teacher's description of the "ice-cold eroticism" of such neo-classical painters as Ingres. Cameron would later expand on the term, applying it to Canova's *Venus* (1818–20) at Leeds City Art Gallery.

> For myself, I have never yielded to the temptation to walk round to the back of the statue without feeling intensely embarrassed; I immediately look the other way when someone else enters the room. The marble remains as chillingly cold as only neoclassicism could make it.[35]

Later, he recalls "the thick, repressive shell of cold opalescent gesso"[36] of his Thick Paintings. Lustrous flesh and smooth surfaces hold mixed messages. As he later comments: "The opalescent chill and the ever thickening shell convey together an effect of emotional numbness, an absence of feeling which may yet be a more authentic expression of feeling than any of the particular emotional shocks that continue to blunt the capacity to feel even that numbness itself."[37]

What is remarkable is Cameron's desire not to hide or deny his "Freudian slips," but to investigate, elucidate, and open up to all for assessment through his writings. Further, his selection of photographic angles for documentation and publication of both Thick Paintings and *Exposer/Cacher* has repeatedly emphasized the works' physicality, their luminous surfaces, and the pleasure of tactile bodily associations.

By contrast, or perhaps for emphasis, consider Cameron's perspective studies, including those prepared for the *Exposer/Cacher* exhibition at Arles in 1993.[38] These elegant drawings offer the clarity of perfection, spare and beautiful in their intellectual and physical precision. Cameron may have begun these drawings as a descriptive tool in planning the layout of his gallery installations, whether video (*and Lawn*) or arrangements of the Thick Paintings on



Perspective study for “Exposer/Cacher,” 1993, pencil on paper, 66 x 50.8 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Eric Cameron.

their tall plexiglass-covered plinths, but he has continued with them for their elegant beauty. Characteristically self-deprecating, he also comments that their use of ruler and straight lines permitted him to overcome his shaky hands and allowed at last a demonstration to his classes of a "mastery" of "something artistic."

Tangentially, Marcel Duchamp's appreciation of chess as "a visual and plastic thing" may be recalled here as well, "and if it isn't geometric in the static sense of the word, it is mechanical, since it moves; it's a drawing, it's a mechanical reality."[39] Cameron notes that these words "were precisely the same terms in which Duchamp perceived erotic experience in the *Large Glass*. If his interest in chess had little to do with its emotional aggressive aspects, so his interest in eroticism is greatly distanced from any hint of sensuality – just as any lingering interest in painting is distanced from its optically sensuous aspect.… [I]t is essentially the enclosed sense of order that engages Duchamp's serious attention."[40]

Having Delayed …

At many junctures in the *English Roots* text, Eric Cameron hovers at the brink of regret. He suffers loss – of home and his sense of place, of parents and family members, of friends and colleagues – and dwells on gaps, lacks, and inadequacies of his own making. That he has, despite these undermining sensations and his own glowering dismay, continued to write, to teach, and to make art, every day, year after year, is humbling and admirable. Yet as he comments in reference to not attending a lecture by T.S. Eliot at Leeds in 1961,

> Perhaps I can allow my mind to return again and again to the regret at missing it precisely because it does not give reason for great grief; and perhaps I choose to linger over a little grief because indulging the little grief bars the way to greater griefs that I cannot even begin to fully admit to the level of conscious awareness – cannot even fully admit that they exist, let alone that they are still capable of causing pain and that there is absolutely nothing I can do about them.[41]

It was when he remarked, almost casually, that he would continue to work on the newly initiated Thick Paintings "until I die" that I was first alerted to his apocalyptic sense of the

abyss confronting him. To be sure, that intention has been softened in other phrasings, that is, "until I am prevented to continue for whatever reason," including sales of individual pieces, but the original term remains central. Eric Cameron faces the abyss, consciously and resolutely, and is determined to leave his mark on the world in the interim. Not only his work as an artist, but also as author, critic, and teacher, are his constant demands for himself. That his art be seen in the light of his own intentions and his sources has been central to his critical writing. That the work – painting, video, installation – be seen widely has been the spring for his seeking out exhibitions and project residencies. This is ambition, but not simply so. His readings in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, in T.S. Eliot, Clement Greenberg, art history, and the Greek philosophers are pivotal to his critical self-assessments.

Cameron claims that he reads little: that he has neither the time nor the good eyesight to permit long hours with books. Yet at one time, he read T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* every night before going to bed,[42] and re-read Clement Greenberg's essays annually before teaching his ideas in class.

He cherishes his early training and his oldest friends and mentors. Lawrence Gowing's importance is emphasized repeatedly in *English Roots*, not least by providing the book's cover illustration, *Miss S of Winlaton Mill* (1952), and Cameron's insistent homage to his teacher, colleague, and old friend. Delineated in particular detail is Cameron's commentary on Gowing's study of the Dutch painter Jan Vermeer, and his public lecture at the Slade School (London), where Gowing was then director. As Cameron spoke in connection with his then-current installation at Canada House in London, he used a slide of *Miss S* on one screen as leitmotif throughout the discussion of his own work. And as he writes in *English Roots*, "Our conversation after my lecture at the Slade could leave no doubt he was pleased by my acknowledgement of indebtedness … but that still leaves open the central question: Did he approve?"[43] Even then, even now, he was trying to right the record and to write the evidence and proof.

English Roots in some measure is a litany of loss and displacement, keening for home and family despite the profound and ongoing disappointment they afford. Cameron's sense of self-worth is shaky, but determined: committed to work harder, longer, be more patient, insistent, and so to succeed. He is discreet about the failings of others, continuing instead to emphasize what he sees as his own flaws:

> I do not think I do regret coming to Canada, though I would now very dearly like to return to England. There are personal as well as professional roots and the older I get, the more intense does nostalgia become for the places I left behind. But the yearnings of nostalgia are still not quite the same thing as regrets. Raising the possibility may only be a further way of avoiding those deeper regrets that are so very difficult to confront and which have to do with people, not with places.[44]

Bent Axis Approach

(Calgary: The Nickle Arts Museum, 1984).

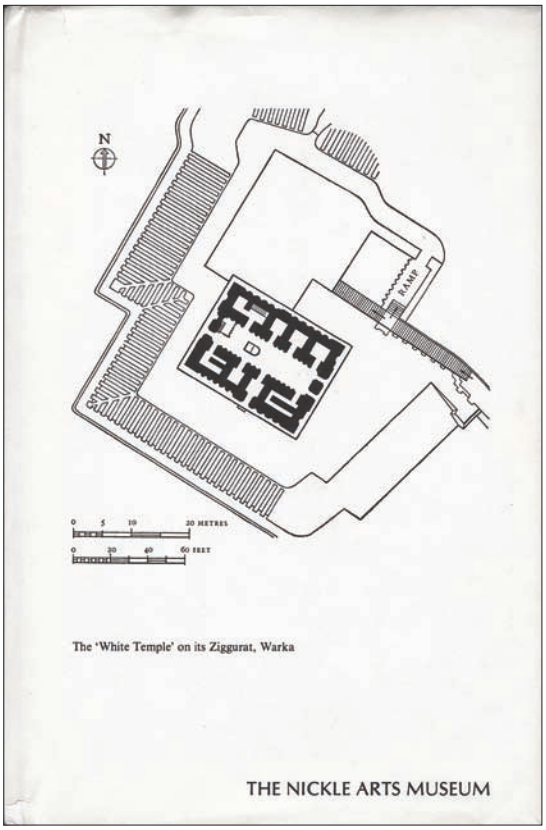
Some seventeen years before the appearance of *English Roots* and while he was still living in Halifax, Cameron published *Bent Axis Approach* – his first book-length statement about his work – as "an essay" to accompany his exhibition at The Nickle Arts Museum in Calgary.

The book's title is unexplained in the text, but the cover illustration – both front and back, and appearing also inside as Plate 1 – indicates its significance. We see a diagram of the plan for the White Temple on its raised ziggurat at Warka (Uruk, the Biblical Erech), first published in Berlin in 1936 and repeated in the English Pelican edition of *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (1954), described in the English edition as revealing

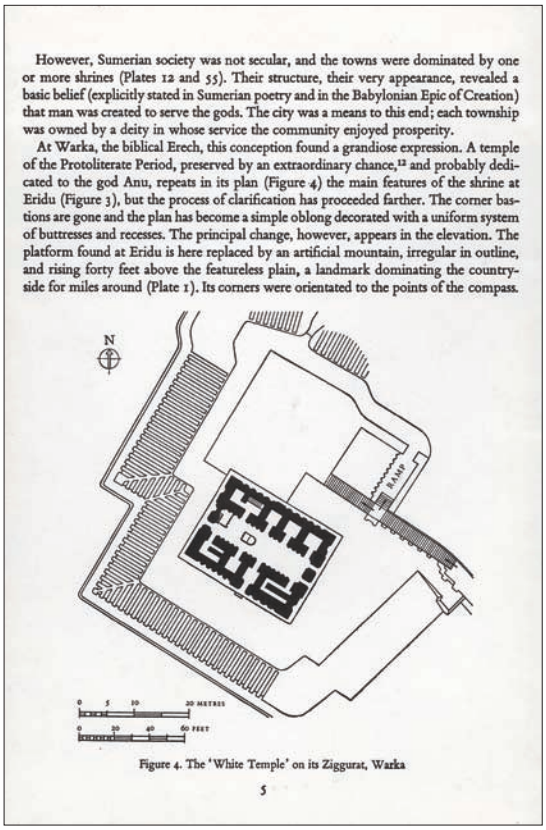
> … a basic belief (explicitly stated in Sumerian poetry and in the Babylonian Epic of Creation) that man was created to serve the gods. The city was a means to this end.… [T]he plan has become a simple oblong decorated with a uniform system of buttresses and recesses.… Its corners were oriented to the points of the compass.

What to make of this? Cameron's opening statement offers a summary in upper case print:

> A FACT OF HISTORY.



Bent Axis Approach, front cover (Calgary: The Nickle Arts Museum, 1984). Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.



Bent Axis Approach, back cover (Calgary: The Nickle Arts Museum, 1984). Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

THE DESCRIPTION OF AN INSTALLATION OF THICK PAINTINGS (TO BE CONTINUED) AT THE NICKLE ARTS MUSEUM FROM JUNE 1 TO JULY 15, 1984.

A WAY OF ARRIVING AT A THEORY OF ART.

A WAY OF PROVIDING FOR (HOPING FOR) THE CONCENTRATION OF LIVED EXPERIENCE INTO A WORK OF ART.[45]

As with the repetition of T.S. Eliot's fragment from *Little Gidding* (*Four Quartets*) in *English Roots*, we are meant to pay close attention to the temple plan and to these opening statements, for they are Cameron's revelation of intention. Metaphorically, he has taken a "bent axis approach" to discussing his work, approaching the deity's home obliquely from below and the side. In developing a theory of art from his readings and experience, Cameron presents his works within a larger context of history and the authors most central to the development of his ideas (theory) and practice.

Clement Greenberg takes pride of place. The first chapter is titled "To Justify the Inevitability of its Particular Forms" and establishes Greenberg's essay on "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939)[46] as generating the phrase that, for Cameron,

> has become a maxim, a highly effective rule-of-thumb for testing the substance of any work of art, and a more complete expression of my ambition for my own art than any set of words of any length I have encountered anywhere else.

As he continues,

> To demand of a painting or a poem that it justify the inevitability of its particular forms is to ask that it reveal the grounding of art in the larger world of not-art, and to compare the way different works propose that justification is to uncover the planes on which they operate and hence open up the possibility of reestablishing a hierarchy of values that may claim to be the intrinsic values of art and not merely the incidental values of some dubious social or psychological good.[47]

As statement of belief and manifesto for action, he could hardly be more clear. The text locates Greenberg's sources in Aristotle's *Poetics* and in Leon Trotsky, then moves to a consideration of Ad Reinhardt, Marcel Duchamp, and Jackson Pollock as exemplifying "an ascending hierarchy of values according to the level of implications against which their art operates: art; society; and nature."[48] Each artist is tested against the measure of "the inevitability" of their particular forms.

The genesis and development of the Thick Paintings is rehearsed, five years having elapsed since their beginnings in Halifax.

> Bottles and books are artifacts of our society – of our 'culture' in the broadest sense. My Thick Paintings, I dared to hope, were probing a deeper level of reality beyond culture, the residue of nature in the materials of art.[49]

He underlines the "visual logic" of his process of working as one of "crucial significance." As he sums up,

> Art is finally not private. It belongs in the public sphere. Art fulfills its highest level of significance as the object of public contemplation, which necessarily justifies the inevitability of its particular forms within the sensory responses of the individual – and within his or her reflecting upon those responses – but which also entails the public recognition of the validity of that experience within a social context.[50]

Continuing, he turns to *On Sculpture* and *On Painting*, by Renaissance architect and author Leon Battista Alberti, proposing Alberti's discussion of planar and solid geometry as analogous to "the superimposition of plane upon plane" of his own Thick Paintings.[51] Discussing Pythagorean numbers and proportions, Cameron calls on "the timeless music of the heavens" to be revealed with the passing of years.[52]

Cameron's forty-three-page essay is followed by three substantial appendices and four illustrations. Following the diagram of the White Temple plan are photographs of *Beer Bottle (1,889), Brushstroke (2,365)*, and *Book of Matches (2,821)*, all Thick Paintings (to be continued)

photographed on 10 March 1984, where the bracketed numbers indicate the number of half-coats of gesso applied at the time of recording.

Appendix A, "Greenberg and Kant," discusses the genesis of Greenberg's theory of modernism as self-critical, seeking entrenchment "in its area of competence,"[53] as inspired by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* of 1781, and subsequent writings. He faults Greenberg's emphasis on personal taste over "reality" and "process," as resulting in merely pleasing "effect."[54]

Appendix B, "Greenberg, Eliot and Bell," moves from painting to criticism and literature. Clement Greenberg's early Marxism is contrasted with T.S. Eliot's study of nineteenth-century poetry and his nostalgia for "the Greece of Pindar, Sophocles and Aristotle."[55] For Eliot, Dante and *The Divine Comedy* represented the epitome of achievement, yet Cameron points out slips in his attention to detail. References move from Giotto and Alberti to Shakespeare and to English Romantic literature. Yet he quotes from Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent,"

> … the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.[56]

It is a passage repeated many years later in *English Roots*, where he notes (as he does here) that Marcel Duchamp quoted the same passage verbatim in his own writing. Cameron adds,

> What I understand Eliot to be saying, essentially, is that the artist is not required to understand and explain the content of his or her art, but only to present it so that it can be experienced as art (which I would understand to mean: so that it can be experienced in the aspect of its inevitability).[57]

He recognizes that his parenthesis was not Eliot's but proposes the comment as an updating of Eliot's statement. Eliot described the critic's role as one of "elucidation" and Cameron notes with interest the archeological aspect of critical reading. While Eliot had striven to suppress information about his private life, scholars were later to discover many personal biographical details along with the original manuscript for *The Waste Land*. As Cameron points out, we

may now see how Eliot was referencing "the sexual problems of his own difficult marriage in relation to the condition of Europe in the years that followed the First World War."[58] Much later, Cameron was to allude to similar personal problems in his *English Roots* text, again referring to Eliot.

Cameron goes on to discuss the place of Eliot's extensive notes to his works, and the criticism of many (including Greenberg) for this "offstage manipulation." However,

> … I would assert, from my own experience, that the work (which must, surely, be virtually incomprehensible to anyone on an innocent first reading) grows immensely in the process of elucidation, until it really does deserve a place alongside Dante's masterpiece.… Indeed, Eliot believed at one time that poets made the best critics, precisely because they were better able to distinguish the functions of poetry and criticism.[59]

Eric Cameron's own "elucidation" and critical comment on and around his artistic production have equally benefited the novice's understanding and evaluation of his art.

The final appendix addresses Clement Greenberg's "Towards a Newer Laocoon" (1940), reviewing the comparison of painting and poetry, where poetry was consistently favoured in part, no doubt, because poets use words, as do critics and commentators. Cameron moves from Simonides and Socrates to Aristotle (*The Poetics*) and Horace (*Ars Poetica*), whose "Ut pictura poesis" was used in the Renaissance "to claim parity of social and intellectual status"[60] of painters with poets.

"Towards a Newer Laocoon," Greenberg's second major published essay, cites Gothold Lessing's "Laocoon: an essay on the limits of painting and poetry" (1766), Irving Babbitt's "The New Laocoon" (1910), and Walter Pater's essay on "The School of Giorgione" (1877) as sources – all discussed briefly in Cameron's text. Cameron moves quickly to central issues:

> At the extreme which I like least, his formalism degenerates into mere sensationism.… [T]he Greenberg I find most valuable points towards the reality which fills out and justifies form.[61]

> … but his insight remains of great value to someone like myself who looks to art for a mode of access to reality.[62]

He notes that to the Renaissance artist, *Ars est artem celare*, while in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" the original is exchanged for *Ars est artem demonstrare*. As Cameron points out, in "Modernist Painting" twenty years later, Greenberg restates the formula in English to clarify the role of visual arts where "Realistic, illusionist art has dissembled the medium, *using art to conceal art*. Modernism *used art to call attention to art*."[63]

Looking forward to many additional years of work on the Thick Paintings (to be continued*)* and the related series *Exposer/Cacher (Exposed/Concealed)*, one is tempted to consider that, while Cameron has hardly dissembled his medium, he has nonetheless hesitated in transparency of message. As revealed in *English Roots*, the Thick Paintings have complex layerings of both intention and execution, and "reality" comes in several forms.

In 1984, Eric Cameron was concerned to establish his credentials as a modernist. He underlines that

> … "reality" within the visual arts is pulled back into the physical stuff of the medium itself.… The task is only to discover and implement a mode of working that will allow the reality of art to manifest itself in the full authenticity of its inevitability. (I would not wish to make this task sound too easy.)[64]

Without rehearsing Cameron's eloquent and detailed points of discussion, I point out that this argument makes clear the depth of his reading and thought, while showing him still happy to be standing on the shoulders of giants. From particular artists and traditions, he has built a composite structure and general theory. He has singled out "the best" in some cases and pointed out failings and flaws elsewhere. He has made clear his desire to justify the inevitability of his particular forms and the centrality of his intent to scale the heights, despite the "bent axis" of his approach.

Divine Comedy

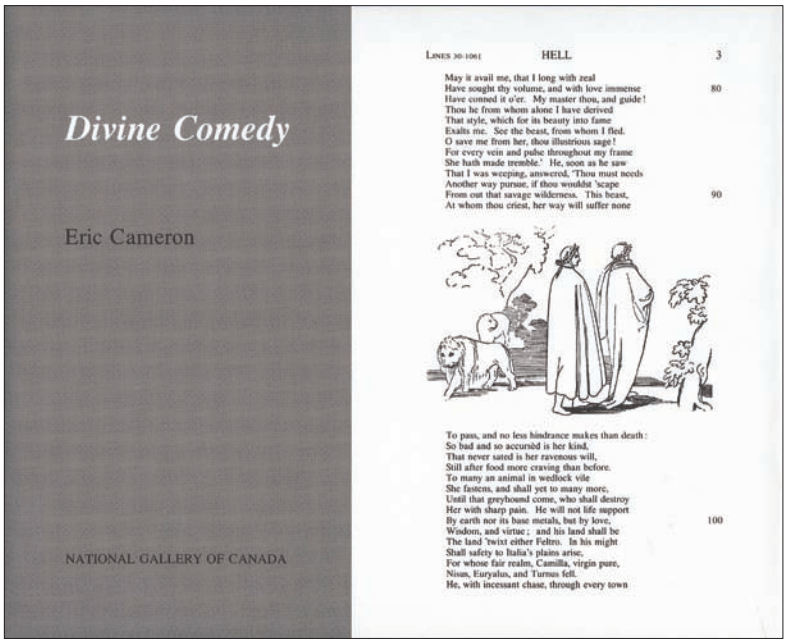
(Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1990)

This substantial book was published to accompany Cameron's installation, *Divine Comedy*, a national touring exhibition organized by the National Gallery of Canada and the Winnipeg Art Gallery in 1990. The book comprises two lengthy essays, "Oedipus and Sol LeWitt," a lecture given at the Ontario College of Art in January 1986, and "12. What I Want To Do —," reproducing thirty-eight closely written pages from his application to the Canada Council some months earlier, detailing the development of each of his Thick Paintings (to be continued). *Divine Comedy* includes no discussion of the exhibition contents or themes, though there are twenty-seven full-page photographs of Thick Paintings in black and white, dating from 1988. As with *Bent Axis Approach* (1984), the exhibition title is evocative but unexplained, evidently referring to Dante's epic poem and, implicitly, to the laughter triggered by a viewer's opening of the entrance door to the gallery.[65]

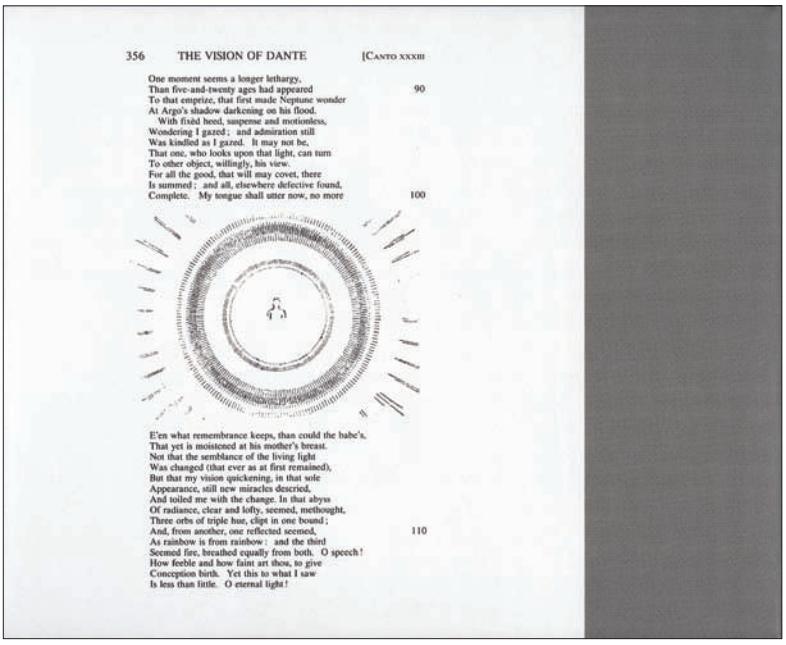
"Oedipus and Sol LeWitt" is measured in tone, perhaps reflecting its original oral presentation. As he begins, "My theme is the pursuit of conviction." Referring to the title of *Bent Axis Approach*, he explains that "the task of locating conviction in art may best, perhaps, not be approached directly."[66] The genesis of Cameron's desire that his art "justify the inevitability of its particular forms" is discussed, as are the origins of "my final project of the Thick Paintings." He notes:

> I had intended not only that it should be "final" but also that it should draw together the diverse strands of my art-related activities. What I had in mind was that my writing and the various elements in my installations would be redirected to give support to the presentation of the Thick Paintings.[67]

This statement is new and revelatory. While Cameron reiterates the moment "on a sunny afternoon (which may have been in later April, or perhaps early May), I began to apply coats of gesso to some objects that just happened to be available to me in my apartment"[68] in his customary words, he goes on to reveal underlying aspects of his thinking not mentioned anywhere else. In "12. What I Want To Do —," he notes that he chose a book of matches "because



Divine Comedy, front cover (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1990). Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.



Divine Comedy, back cover (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1990). Photo David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

of the idea of containment of fire,"[69] and that using an alarm clock was appropriate "since the incorporation of time into the spatial act of painting was so important an aspect of the project on which I was embarking." Further, "the idea of painting a machine was also in my mind, and I liked the idea of potential movement still locked up inside the painting."[70] In choosing an apple he was thinking of "the biblical tradition of the fruit of 'The Fall' – or, more precisely, the Renaissance tradition of rendering the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil as an apple."[71] The egg was selected for its "regularity of form, as much as the fact of potential life and all of the symbolism that follows from that,"[72] while with cup, saucer, and spoon "I may have had some idea of imputing a connotation of Englishness to this piece"[73] in view of all the tea he had been drinking.

In 1985 he had been working on the Thick Paintings for six years, and his writing had indeed come to focus on the genesis, development, and implications of those works. At this point one must – again – acknowledge the signal role of Canada Council grant applications as a unique written record of contemporary artists' concerns and effectively the central repository for contemporary art history in Canada.

In his discussion of ἰχθύς (ichthus), he goes much further in laying out background and intent:

> The reason I wanted to call it that was because the use of the Greek word for fish provided the initial letters, in Greek, of "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Saviour." I hoped to indicate through the use of this title that higher levels of significance should be sought in my work than the identity of the core object (or subject) within the domestic context from which I had taken it.[74]

To make the reference even more clear, he took to drawing "the simple outline of a fish over the area containing the actual body of the mackerel."[75] In doing so he was also making "the sign of the fish" – as if to bless it – to enhance its religious connotations and underline his intention. Cameron reiterates that "I do not want to make religious art; I do not have religious faith … but I do wish to indicate that a desire to 'know' the material world is an objective as elevated as the religious quest for enlightenment in the past."[76]

In this we see the central role of authorship to Cameron's ongoing production of visual art objects. Having invested enormously in the layers of reference and of intention in his work, he

is further at pains to confirm and exemplify those meanings by putting them into words. The roles of artist and writer are inextricably entwined. This writer is also concerned to inform, to teach.

None of this is to deny Cameron's otherwise mundane sources, or the seriousness of that material connection. As he writes:

> That domestic context is important to me, and I want it to be part of the meaning of my work, along with the string of associations that necessarily attach to each particular object. If the whole adds up to a sort of still-life group, I want that too. I am aware how much of the achievement of modern art has come about within the genre of still-life and I feel very positively about being associated with the tradition of the modern.… I also want to make it as clear as possible that it is the aspect of Modern Art that probes the structure of reality with which I wish to be associated; the aspect, therefore, that seeks to draw from the special resources of art and the personal resources of the artist some intimation of the containing framework of existence.[77]

Cameron's writing is closely argued and densely referenced, bringing scholarly aspects and readings easily into play. At the same time, it suggests something of the musing, intimate quality of a diary, daily reflections of thoughts and their implications.

Cameron's eloquence is matched only by his compulsive attention to detail. Over the many years of work on the Thick Paintings, Eric Cameron has insisted on understanding his production in the most complex and intimate terms. As a "final project," they have become his *tombeau*, that wonderful French word embodying both tomb and epitaph: honouring and remembrance. Cameron as author supports and expands the monumental work of painting: confirming and revealing, revisiting and revising, dissecting, explaining, a work of piety and scholarship, a gift.

Squareness:

(Lethbridge: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1993)

This publication comes with a matching companion volume, *An Open Letter to Pamela King*, published simultaneously by Cameron himself in 1993. I treat them separately here, bearing in mind a letter to me from Cameron (7 September 1993), which I discovered tucked into my copy of *Squareness:*, which reads in part,

> Two new books, or to be more precise, two new half-books. I am sure you remember how this started out as a joint exhibition of Pamela King's work and my own. When she dropped out, I edited out (literally blanked out) the sections relating to her and reformulated the installation entirely round my own art. When she then showed renewed interest in the project, it was too late to revive the idea of a joint exhibition, but I decided to publish the deleted sections of the book separately. The book *Squareness* [*sic*] will accompany my forthcoming exhibition at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery; *An Open Letter to Pamela King* will be used by Pamela King in conjunction with an exhibition of her work, when she feels it to be appropriate.

I sense an aura of accusation lingering in that letter, a subtle residue of sharp words. The "blanking out" implies a determination not to back down from or disavow a project with personal significance.

As promised, it is an extended text (including notes) of fifty-five pages with blanks, some the size of a single word, others extending over a page or more. Remarkably, the narrative is clear and cogent, and while at first one mentally reinserts the missing elements (and missing person), soon Cameron's words take over and the blank spots become a "design" decision of sorts, an artist's book as exhibition catalogue.

Written a full decade before *English Roots* and marking many of the same themes (though rather more dispassionate), *Squareness:* is an evocative outline of Cameron's artistic sources and influences, his inspirations and responses to works and individuals. It is also a tour through recent art history, beginning with an epigraph by Ad Reinhardt. Checking the references,

Squareness:, cover portrait (Lethbridge: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1993). Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

however, one finds that only twelve of the sixty-one endnotes include text, though all the numbers appeared in Cameron's essay. In a play on Reinhardt's essay, "From 'Twelve Rules for a New Academy'" in an anthology by Gregory Battcock, Cameron states under References and Notes, "Sources of [mis]quotations from the ancients will be supplied by the author upon written request."[78]

This is a curious book. One suspects an importance given to absence and rejection that is well beyond Cameron's comments on recent painting. I address only the most notable (or new) elements being considered here, conscious of the issues from other writings already discussed.

Having come to read T.S. Eliot through Clement Greenberg's noting of him as "the best of all literary critics,"[79] Cameron reveals that "I stayed with Eliot because he seemed to be able to define a relationship between art and life that was never firmly grasped by Greenberg."[80] He goes on to discuss "what seems to be the crucial point of elucidation at which Eliot can only allow himself to hint: the desolation of the Waste Land results from the afflictions of the Fisher King. As with the Fisher King, so with T.S. Eliot."[81] He then quotes St. Paul, that "Charity never faileth" but takes charity further as *love*, in modern translations, adding:

> If it is right to "love thy neighbour as thyself," is it consistent to deny (except under the most stringently prescribed circumstances) the supreme solace of compassionate sexual sharing to self and others equally?[82]

A substantial blank space follows, then rumination on pictorial proportions and preferences, field of vision, and properties of the square. "The outermost limits of containment suddenly become the central focus of aesthetic content."[83]

We return to Eliot and *The Waste Land*, with the Hanged Man[84] as reference to crucifixion and thus, death. The pages become fragmented, with big blank spaces, as Cameron turns to a consideration of faith and religion.

> By comparison with [ ] Eliot [ ] I must consider myself more fortunate. If I too can claim a protestant background, it was a faith whose grip on my parents was already weakening. In my own life there has been a separation from belief. And if life has given me other reasons to suffer, I am at least spared the ordeal of [ ] tormented belief.[85]

Eric Cameron has turned somewhere in every long text to the question of faith and religion. Despite his "separation from belief," he cannot ignore its central relevance to his life and work. He writes here of his Process Paintings as a "wall of squares" or "barriers," as if "haunted" by the ghost of religion.[86] He mentions the narrower tape used in Process Paintings "that resulted in an increased number of squares, a more insistent repetition of their cruelly pious message of squareness."[87] He describes the "ritual" aspect of his habitual kneeling or crouching stance for working on the Thick Paintings, stripped to the waist "in that fetal position"[88] – a position that could also be seen as supplicant or penitent.

When St Paul writes that "now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known," Cameron recognizes that

> Through belief in God we may be absolved of the subjective responsibility for the burden of our own existence, because we already exist objectively for God. If God may be defined as love, the greatest gift of love may be the sense that our being is acknowledged and enhanced and affirmed within the gaze and in the embrace of a caring other.[89]

He speculates on replacing Nietzsche's dictum that "God is Dead" with "Dead is God," understanding the switch as a means of "designating the unknowable 'itness' of the universe God." That is,

> … the creative power that had once been attributed to a personal God had been reattributed to the dark otherness of dead matter in the universe.
>
> … when I set the basis of my art outside the world of appearances in that realm of the unknowable unperceivable forces of nature, I had also intended that my art should speak, not with the human voice of self, but with the non-voice of Its unknowingness and uncaringness, Its indifference not only to beauty but to every human desire and dread.[90]

These words are those of an individual alone before the void, but they are neither distressed nor alienated. There is instead a majestic tranquillity. The "materials of art" themselves give comfort, as do ritual, repetition, simplicity of form, and relentless perseverance.

An Open Letter to Pamela King

(Eric Cameron, 1993)

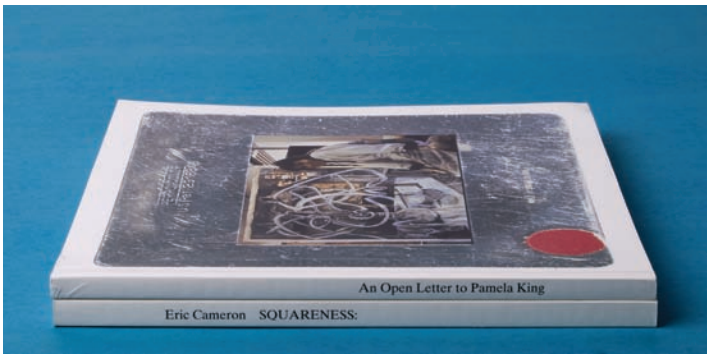
The companion volume to *Squareness:*, originally integrated as a single text, *An Open Letter to Pamela King*, surprises first by being fuller than anticipated, and its text as coherent as its partner's. Though the blanks in *Squareness:* were substantial, those in the present volume are similar in size. The sentences in the two volumes fit together precisely, should one care to flip back and forth between them, and their measurements are identical. Page 1 complements page 1, page 9 to page 9, and so on. The illustrations in Cameron's text are replaced here by King's paintings represented in full-page reproductions: in colour, a frontispiece and six plates (between pages 22 and 23), with seven half-tones between pages 38 and 39. The front cover is a photograph of Pamela King in a slide from 1987, seated with a broad smile on a bench in three-quarter view, in a studio interior, before a painting of that year. The back cover is plain white.

If *Squareness:* and *An Open Letter to Pamela King* were placed together as a single book, King's image would be on the front cover and Cameron's on the back, with the blank white versos facing each other on the interior, as shown in the photograph here and as Cameron "had always envisaged them"[91] Alternatively, one could have a glossy, white, unmarked volume on the exterior – in the pure "conceptual" mode – with the two artists' portraits and paintings face-to-face inside. For me, aligning the text on the spines as "Eric Cameron SQUARENESS: An Open Letter to Pamela King" makes better sense, with the portraits facing each other at centrefold and plain white covers outside.

Very quickly, Cameron's text assumes a tone different from that in *Squareness:*. Where in *Squareness:*, the author speaks with authority about his own history and development, the move to second-person speech introduces a sense of control both on the part of the writer (careful in his choice of words) and *for his subject*, as if he is conscious of being more teacher than colleague. His text begins precisely:

> The purpose of this open letter is to reflect on the relationship between your art and my art. It grows out of our brief exchanges on the subject of each other's work late in 1987 and early 1988.[92]

An Open letter to Pamela King, cover portrait (self-published, 1993). Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.



Squareness and *An Open Letter to Pamela King* aligned as one publication. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

Ad Reinhardt is not mentioned, as apparently not "related" to King. Cameron notes almost immediately:

> I am more surprised than I realised at the time how consistently your work was able to provide enlightening juxtapositions with my own through all the changes it has undergone in all those years.[93]

The "letter" discusses early influences on King as a painter, as if analogous to Cameron's own history of his development, but suddenly invites checking with *Squareness:* when the text moves to *The Waste Land* and Cameron notes, "And as with the Fisher King, so with Pamela King."[94] We recall the reference to Eliot's (and by implication, Cameron's) sexual troubles mentioned in the earlier text. Cameron continues:

> In your case, I would point to the influence of your protestant background, and I would equate this imprinted constraint in your life with the containing fact of squareness in your art. [ ] and you have spoken often enough and openly enough of the impact the moral strictures of your family background has had on you. I remember there was one occasion at an opening of an exhibition in the Little Gallery when you thought John Will and I were ridiculing you because of it. If we did laugh, we should rather have wept. Nowhere is the cruel streak in Christianity more apparent than in its codes of sexual prohibition.[95]

A lengthy blank space follows. *Open Letter* and *Squareness:* seem to have diverged, though when the two texts are reunited by comparing their pages, a coherent thread is being developed. The text for the two books was composed originally as a single essay, after all. Read separately, however, *Open Letter* quietly builds on the "control" sensed earlier; he is writing, and she is not. He is exhibiting, and now she is not – or at least not at the time the two volumes were published. Was King's decision to withdraw from the joint exhibition somehow connected to her sense of his presumption in discussing her work in public in this way? It is difficult to imagine *An Open Letter to Pamela King* being "used by Pamela King in conjunction with an exhibition of her work, when she feels it to be appropriate."[96]

After four nearly-all-blank pages (indicating text removed to *Squareness:*), he notes briefly:

> … my favorite Pam King quote is: "Ad Reinhardt's black paintings are kind of black."[97]

Read baldly like this, without the relevant Cameron-related material as balance, she might possibly feel demeaned, understanding Cameron's own deep study of Reinhardt. At the same time, "kind of" is an accurate description of Reinhardt's dense near-black surfaces. Moving right along, Cameron comments that he has found "only two" references in King's writing to "desire": the desire to paint, and through painting and the use of the square, "a desire for order and consistency."[98] She is being accused somehow of her desire or need for control, as if her words and ideas are being twisted in on themselves, out of context. Her paintings are analyzed in this regard; her images of scaffolding or the human figure (some with the proportions of her own body), her internal divisions and references to framing within the paintings, are all pointed out and then referred to Eliot's Hanged Man in *The Waste Land*.[99] He points out:

> The private world of thoughts and feelings and of images that we conjure up to ourselves needs to be separated again from the world of external sensation, of appearances that we also construct for ourselves but on the basis of such external stimuli as we are capable of assimilating through the organs of perception. One of the first results of our exchanges for me was [ ] in the sense I have attributed to you, [ ] we and our [ ] are [ ] to each other.[100]

The accumulating text of *An Open Letter to Pamela King* begins to take on the tenor of a very post-modern courtship, where a visit to an exhibition including works by both Cameron and King "brought our exchanges to their very rapid climax."[101] She writes her response to his work, and Cameron states:

> That painting and that letter of yours may have done more to transform my perception of my work and its place in my life than almost anything else that has happened [ ][102]

These issues are developed more fully in following pages and, perhaps even more conscious of the lengthy, eloquent blank spaces, the reader feels somehow privy to significant personal revelation.

King had written: "My present work is based on secrets" and Cameron affirms that "you had already gone a good deal further than Eliot ever did in declaring your private life to be the subject of your art."[103] He acknowledges "that I might inadvertently have transgressed the domain of that aura in a way that might make publication problematic for you."[104]

He quotes at length from her letter, the "private place" evoked by his work and her own memories of childhood. It is clear he is deeply touched, as she had been, by work and by words. The text – and the gaps – are poignant, and a current of carnal love is mentioned then passed by. As he comes to the end of his essay, however, he notes:

> I find the joy your letter continues to give me every time I read it suddenly undercut by a self-conscious awareness that I am Head of the Art Department and that, at the time you wrote it, you were a graduate student in our M.F.A. programme.[105]

There's the rub. Universities require acknowledgment of rank and position; inevitably, a certain distance must be maintained. While Cameron's letter continues further, he remembers with regret their later conversations and growing estrangement, ending simply with "… both, in our different ways [ ] we [ ] that we [ ]"[106]

"Why I was so pleased …"

In *Desire and Dread* (Calgary: Muttart Public Art Gallery, 1998)

While not as substantial as a book, "Why I was so pleased …" is interesting for the specificity of its comments, made in response to "Pleasures of Paradox," a paper by Leslie Dawn, presented originally in 1997 at a seminar in Canadian Art and Conceptualism at the University of British Columbia, where he was a doctoral candidate. Dawn's eleven-page essay was invited for inclusion in the catalogue for Cameron's retrospective exhibition at the Muttart Public Art Gallery in Calgary, but it was apparently revised upon the receipt of Cameron's comments.

Cameron's own eleven-page essay makes note of the exchange of views, regretting the loss of some material excised by Dawn before the catalogue was published.

Cameron begins mildly, with comments on how pleased he was that Dawn opened by comparing the Thick Paintings with pearls in their appearance and process of formation, despite the qualification of such "jewels" as "outrageously oversized baroque" pearls. His corrections are modest, pointing out, for example, that his references to "the order of things" did not refer to Michel Foucault's book, which in any case was titled *Les mots et les choses* in French, "Words and Things," rather than the familiar English title, *The Order of Things*.[107] He mentions that his "own interest in language was of a different kind, having more in common with pre-structuralist ideas going back to the ancient Greeks." In reference to Greenbergian modernism, he points out that his Thick Paintings

> … could be seen as setting aside the social conventions of flatness and the rectangular shape of the easel painting and taking their point of departure from the third of his three characteristics of painting, the properties of pigment, about which Greenberg himself has least to say. Pigment is not a social convention but a material substance with physical and chemical properties.[108]

He feels his concerns for "the realm of material forces" puts him further at odds with Greenberg's affirmation of the painter's "deliberate choice and creation of limits" since, in Cameron's case, the material properties of his medium took over control from the outset,

> and persisted in spite of my best efforts to deny them, until I eventually accepted and adjusted. To the extent that I (and others) eventually found the imprint of myself as a biological and psychological being in my Thick Paintings, I would hold they are a lot more "human" than anything that has come out of Greenberg's Modernism. In this, I think I was probably a lot more like the best of Modern artists than his prescription for Modernism allows.[109]

Cameron's articulate text betrays a certain defensiveness as it rights the perceived inaccuracies of Dawn's essay. He begins his comments by mention of Leslie Dawn's authorship, but usually calls him Les Dawn subsequently, when making additional points, as if Dawn has not been

sufficiently illuminating. Given Cameron's penchant for puns and wordplay, one might not consider such a delicate (unconscious) putdown impossible.

(This Gale might be now be considered a blowhard, or merely a passing bit of air …)

Words are tricky, often revelatory. Dawn, for example, considers Cameron's series of *Exposed/Concealed* works. For my part, I have found it interesting that the *Exposer/Cacher* series of works, made and presented originally in France (1993), is *Exposed/Concealed* in English, for *exposer* in French would normally be translated "to exhibit," an inconvenient word as a title. *Revealed/Concealed* might work. To expose, however, suggests something out in the open, open to or unprotected from the elements, in plain view. To expose can be to lay open to criticism, to expose oneself (to scorn or censure), to present to view by baring, or to make known. It may imply "exposing" the hidden or shameful. The word is not an inaccurate choice for the situation of *exposer/cacher*, but may all the same reveal more than intended, when one considers the content of the undeveloped photographs at the interior of the works. Elsewhere,[110] tellingly, Cameron has quoted T.S. Eliot, for whom words

> … slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still[111]

Words are difficult, and published words have a life more extended than those spoken. In discussing his preoccupation with brushwork, which "conceals from me as I work the emerging sculptural form,"[112] Cameron broaches the issue of unintended revelation as evidenced in some photographs of the Thick Paintings.

Some statements by Leslie Dawn have cut deep. Cameron reproduces in full the passage from his 1993 text, "On Killing Two Birds with One Stone," with its story of the poster for his *Divine Comedy* exhibition (1990), which Leslie Dawn had quoted in fragments. The Dean's secretary in Calgary had commented that that she always saw "a figure kneeling down" in the image. With that statement, everything becomes complicated. Cameron is mortified, and reveals to us that he took this as "a woman [kneeling down and] bent right over, bottom in the air." He mentions this notion to exhibition curator Diana Nemiroff, who was unconvinced, and who "thought the kneeling figure could be that of a penitent." But sex, having been introduced, is insisted upon – *punishment* rather than contrition is what the figure reveals (never

mind a selected, particular view of a painted lobster) – and Cameron goes further, into even more detail about personal needs and preferences. He notes his "horror" at Leslie Dawn's use of the term "sado-masochism"[113] and its implications, then segues into a discussion of surveillance and of Foucault's book *Discipline and Punish*, of which he says he was only vaguely aware at the time, and which recalled discussions at NSCAD that were "excruciatingly tedious."[114]

There is more. As he commented earlier in his essay, on another issue altogether (the relation and timing of his work vis-à-vis conceptual art issues): "There are times when you just can't win! I may be digging myself in deeper as I write."[115]

As I have stated above, Cameron's unflinching willingness – or need – to face himself at his suspected worst, is admirable. For sheer wear and tear, however, this insistent probing of sexual anxiety and apparent shame can overtake the impact of larger issues and his discussion of the work itself.

Eric Cameron proves himself a relentless task-master.

With *Why I was so pleased …* we come full circle, *English Roots* following in its wake some five years later. As indicated above, the sequence of essays marks Cameron's trajectory from exterior to interior, a revelation of self and psyche that is all the more admirable for its sometimes difficult content and for the author's probing, insistent honesty.

Beginning with a definition of terms and references for his artistic output, his philosophical and ideological roots, Cameron comes to admit to and explore his innermost private anxieties, understood now as also a source for his art. He comes to confront the void, and know the dark places always immanent. His self-discovery offers a larger knowledge as Cameron shares hopes and fears, evokes his long and difficult journey. This is a confession on the order of St. Augustine. And a gift to us, his readers.

> … the role of the artist has always entailed a mystical revelation beyond the logic of argument, albeit, in the present, this must imply a material mysticism.[116]

Notes

1 Eric Cameron, *English Roots* (Lethbridge: University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, 2001). Foreword by Jeffrey Spalding.

2 John Pasmore (1908–1998) pioneered the development of abstract art in Britain in the 1940s and 1950s, and was associated with the formation of the Euston Road School, lead a reform of the fine art education system. Pasmore was included in documenta II (1959) in Kassel and represented Britain at the 1961 Venice Biennale.

Quentin Bell (1910–1996) was the son of art critic Clive Bell and artist Vanessa Stephen and nephew of Virginia Woolf; his two-volume *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (1972) from Hogarth Press is his most noted publication. After teaching at King's College, University of Durham and Leeds University, he was appointed Slade professor of fine art at Oxford University in 1964, and professor of art history and theory at the University of Sussex 1967–1975.

Sir Lawrence Gowing (1918–91) was a prominent artist, writer, curator and teacher. An early member of the Euston Road School, he was highly esteemed for his portraits and landscapes. Gowing's remarkable academic career included professorships at King's College, Durham at Newcastle upon Tyne (1948-58), Chelsea School of Art (1958-65) and Leeds University. He was principal of the Slade School of Fine Art at University College, London (1975-85), and authored monographs and catalogues on Jan Vermeer, William Hogarth, J.M.W. Turner, Cézanne, Matisse, and Lucian Freud, while organizing major exhibitions for New York, London, and Paris.

Richard Hamilton, (1922–2011) is known first for his 1956 collage, *Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*, now an icon of British Pop Art. He taught at Newcastle and in the 1960s was associated with the Pop music scene. During the 1970s, Hamilton's projects increasingly blurred the boundaries between artwork and product design and challenged the notion of artist as single author of an artwork. The Tate Gallery in London organized a major retrospective of his work in 1992, and the following year he represented Great Britain at the Venice Biennale, winning the Golden Lion.

3 *English Roots*, pp. 10–12.

4 Ibid., pp. 14–16.

5 Eric Cameron, in *Videoscape* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1974), n.p. These comments, originally written in 1972, were greatly expanded and reprinted in *Sex, Lies, and Lawn Grass/Notes for Video Art* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1994), reprinted in *Video re/View: The (best) Source for Critical Writings on Canadian Artists' Video*, ed. Peggy Gale and Lisa Steele (Toronto: Art Metropole and Vtape, 1995), pp. 106–113.

6 Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (1967): 56–57. Cameron's text accompanying his Queen Square exhibition anticipated the concerns and assertions of LeWitt's formulation by about six months.

7 Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 100n43.

8 Ibid., p. 90.

9 Eric Cameron, in correspondence with Diana Nemiroff, 11 November 2005.

10 Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 81. Includes an illustration.

11 Ibid., illustration, p. 131.

12 Albert Camus, "Absurdity and Suicide," *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 11–17, quoted in Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 131.

13 Eric Cameron, "Given," in *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry de Duve (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 14.

14 Duchamp's words were quoted from their original appearance in Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Marcel Duchamp: Eros, c'est la vie* (Troy, NY: Whitston, 1981), p. 308.

15 Cameron, *English Roots* p. 122.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., p. 123.

19 Ibid., p. 84.

20 Paula Gustafson, "Ritualistic, Baroque, Nacreous Turds: Eric Cameron's 'Thick Paintings' threaten to insult everyone." *Calgary Straight* 1, no. 12 (17–24 September 1998). Quoted in Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 117.

21 Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 68.

22 Cameron notes that Louis Capsan (in "The Culture Vulture," *The Halifax Loyalist*, November 26, 1977) observed that "withholding paint" was as much a part of Cameron's creative process as applying paint. Cameron has made the term his own, however, through repeated usage.

23 Cameron, *English Roots*., p. 69.

24 Ibid., p. 122.

25 Ibid., pp. 76–78.

26 Eric Cameron, in conversation, Toronto, November 2005.

27 Cameron, *English Roots*, pp. 74–81.

28 Ibid., p. 75.

29 Ibid., p. 80.

30 Ibid.

31 It is further interesting that Cameron is surprised in turn that Thierry de Duve mentions T.S. Eliot nowhere in his remarkable *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), since "Marcel Duchamp's most complete formulation of his theoretical position, 'The Creative Act,' is based to a certain extent on T.S. Eliot's theory of poetry, while Clement Greenberg, whom Thierry de Duve treats extensively and with astute sensitivity, looked largely to Eliot as the model of his critical method, suggesting Eliot might be 'the best of all literary critics'" (*English Roots*, p. 150). Comparative quotations for Eliot and Duchamp are included in Cameron's footnotes (p. 159). Links and correspondences abound in Cameron's text, with unexpected new relevance at each return.

32 Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 174.

33 Ibid., illustrated, pp. 172, 175.

34 Ibid., p. 174.

35 Ibid., p. 71, illustrated, p. 72.

36 Ibid., p. 93.

37 Ibid., p. 123.

38 Ibid., illustrated, p. 147.

39 Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Viking Press, 1971), p. 89. Quoted in Cameron, "Given," p. 16.

40 Cameron, "Given," pp. 16–17.

41 Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 109.

42 Titian's *Portrait of a Man*, 1512, is reproduced on the back cover, its place in Cameron's pantheon eloquently evoked as the "one work that made it impossible for me to deny the validity of art as a whole." Ibid., p. 125.

43 Ibid., p. 115.

44 Ibid., p. 111.

45 Eric Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach* (Calgary: Nickle Arts Museum, 1984), vii.

46 "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" was re-published as the opening essay in Greenberg's first collection of critical writings, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

47 Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach*, p. 1.

48 Ibid., p. 9.

49 Ibid., p. 27.

50 Ibid., p. 34.

51 Ibid., p. 39.

52 Ibid., p. 40.

53 Ibid., p. 45.

54 Ibid., p. 50.

55 Ibid., p. 56.

56 Ibid., p. 65.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., p. 67.

59 Ibid., p. 68.

60 Ibid., p. 74.

61 Ibid., p. 75.

62 Ibid., p. 76.

63 Ibid. Cameron's emphasis.

64 Ibid., p. 78.

65 See Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 131, discussed above.

66 Eric Cameron, "Oedipus and Sol LeWitt" (January 1986). In *Divine Comedy* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1990), p. 3.

67 Ibid., p. 6.

68 Ibid., p. 4.

69 Eric Cameron, "12. What I Want to Do —, " (1985). In *Divine Comedy* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1990), pp. 37–38.

70 Ibid., p. 41.

71 Ibid., p. 44.

72 Ibid., p. 46.

73 Ibid., p. 48.

74 Ibid., p. 49.

75 Ibid., p. 56.

76 Ibid., p. 50.

77 Ibid., p. 49.

78 Eric Cameron, *Squareness:* (Lethbridge: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1993), p. 50. The copyright date for Cameron's essay is noted as 1989 on the book's title page.

79 Ibid., p. 8.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid., p. 9.

82 Ibid., p. 10.

83 Ibid., p. 15.

84 Ibid., p. 18.

85 The bracketed spaces indicate blanks present in the *Squareness:* layout. These correspond with text in *Open Letter* and vice versa, so that the two books, when placed together, constitute a single essay that reads smoothly, the two books equal in scale and layout.

The bracketed spaces are not exactly an ellipsis, as the words are placed in the "other" book and the blanks draw attention to words now found elsewhere. Ibid., p. 19.

86 Ibid., p. 28.

87 Ibid., p. 30.

88 Ibid., p. 24.

89 Ibid., p. 41.

90 Ibid., p. 42.

91 Personal correspondence, 9 November 2010.

92 Eric Cameron, *An Open Letter to Pamela King* (self-published, 1993), p. 1. The original essay from 1989 was separated into two and published as matching "half-books" in 1993, *Squareness:* by the Southern Alberta Art Gallery and *Open Letter … by* Eric Cameron with assistance from the Canada Council for the Arts. In the colophon at the back of *Open Letter …* he appends the phrase, *Et in Arcadia Id*, a reference to an earlier project.

93 Ibid., p. 1.

94 Ibid., p. 9.

95 Ibid.

96 Cameron's letter (7 September 1993) to author.

97 Ibid., p. 15.

98 Ibid., p. 16.

99 Ibid., pp. 16–19.

100 Ibid., p. 21.

101 Ibid., p. 22.

102 Ibid., p. 23.

103 Ibid., p. 32.

104 Ibid., p. 34.

105 Ibid., p. 45.

106 Ibid., p. 49.

107 Eric Cameron, "Why I was so pleased …," *Desire and Dread* (Calgary: Muttart Public Art Gallery, 1998), p. 17.

108 Ibid., p. 18.

109 Ibid.

110 See Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 152, and *Bent Axis Approach*, p. 81.

111 T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," 1935, from *Four Quartets*.

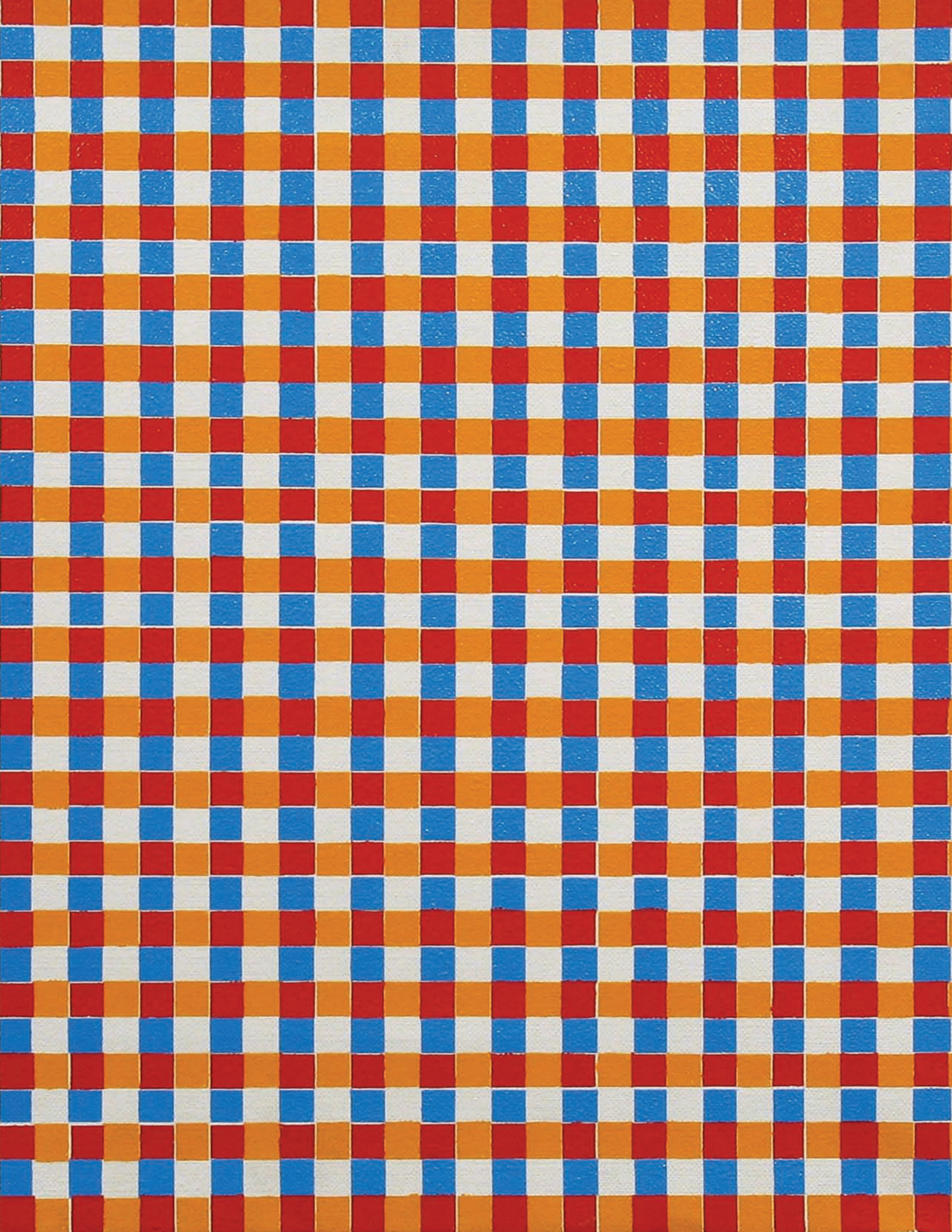
112 "Why I was so pleased …," p. 22.

113 Ibid., p. 24.

114 Ibid., p. 25.

115 Ibid., p. 18.

116 Cameron, "Given," p. 26.



ARISTOTLE AND MATERIAL MYSTICISM: PROCESS PAINTINGS AND BEYOND

Ann Davis

> The idea of mystical communion with the stuff of matter beyond the surface of appearances seemed exciting intellectually and the idea of aesthetic reconciliation with that realm of the real beyond our construct of the real brought satisfaction at a more deeply human level. – Eric Cameron[1]

Although Cameron's Process Paintings are not as well known as his Thick Paintings, they are important works of art in their own right. The Process Paintings come in two sizes. The first, squares usually of 48" x 48", were produced between 1963 and 1968. The second, mostly rectangles, date from 1968 to 1972. They reveal a considerable amount, not only about Cameron's methods of production and materials, but also about his philosophy. I will suggest that the Thick Paintings, which followed the Process Paintings, draw a great deal from the very methods and theories developed from the experimentation and production of the earlier works. Each group of works was conceptual in that, as Sol LeWitt explained, the piece was planned out before its execution and was not modified, except minutely, during production. This production, highly ritualized and based on precision and repetition, focused on materials rather than on image. The resulting object emerged, having been hidden, to surprise and perhaps confound its creator.

Cameron initiated his Process Paintings after graduating from both King's College at Durham University with a bachelor's degree in art and the Courtauld Institute with an academic diploma in the History of Art. At his parents' house in Brandon Colliery, County Durham, probably in 1959, he returned to attempting to paint still lifes, despairing of being able to produce anything that would meet the exacting standards and examples he had discovered as an art history student. Like Zeuxis and Parrhasius, he sought perfection.[2] Frustrated, one day, he decided to erase his most recent effort.

Red, Yellow, Blue on White (type IIK, 1/2" tape) (detail), 1968, oil on canvas, 45.75 x 45.75 cm.
Collection of the artist. Photo: Kevin Baer, TrépanierBaer Gallery.

> I had been working in oils, and had not spent more that a couple of days on the piece, so was able to wipe it down quite satisfactorily with a cloth. Some underdrawing and preliminary colour still remained, but I was able to obscure it fairly completely by rubbing white paint over the still partially damp surface. What suddenly struck me was the strange effect of bluish opalescence that resulted from the interaction of the smeared paint, somewhat tinted by colours it had picked up, and the fragments of darker, drier colour underneath. I was so taken with the effect, I decided to experiment. I laid out some pieces of Sellotape (English for Scotch Tape) criss-crossing over the surface and rubbed on more paint. I stripped off the tape and continued to be intrigued by the results. Two days later, when the paint was quite dry, I applied a third layer of white paint through another grid of Sellotape.[3]

In his *English Roots* book, Cameron records his aspirations for his still lifes and why what came to be known as his Process Paintings so appealed to him. "Clear, precise, crisp and fresh" were the exacting qualities Cameron demanded of his art. While his still lifes had seemed to him to be fussy, messy and indecisive, the Sellotape paintings were the opposite, "betray[ing] no amateurish incompetence or fussy indecisiveness."[4] Furthermore, and this is important, the qualities of the Sellotape paint surface were very clearly the result of the process Cameron had used and thus acted as a strong disincentive to him to tinker with the results, reducing one of his problems in painting still lifes, where he was inclined to meddle and correct constantly.

Cameron had become fascinated with the artistic potential of manipulating materials in about 1954, when he was a first-year student in Newcastle. Here it was an exercise in accidents that turned him towards this emphasis. After having dripped coloured ink onto paper and blowing it across the surface to form interlocking spiders' webs of varied hues in a design class led by Miss Dalby, he heard talk of an American artist, Jackson Pollock, who "was throwing paint at the canvas." Cameron was greatly moved by this unexpected assertive statement, although he had never seen the original of any of Pollock's paintings and did not until he went to London as a graduate student four years later. Although he came to admire Pollock's painting, as he attests, it was the oral account not the physical actuality of Pollock's art that made such a cataclysmic impact on his understanding of the creative process.[5] From this minimal verbal description rather than from a studied visual understanding of Pollock's

Installation, *Eric Cameron: Works from 1963 to 2008*, April 2008 at TrépanierBaer Gallery, Calgary, Alberta. Photo: John Dean.

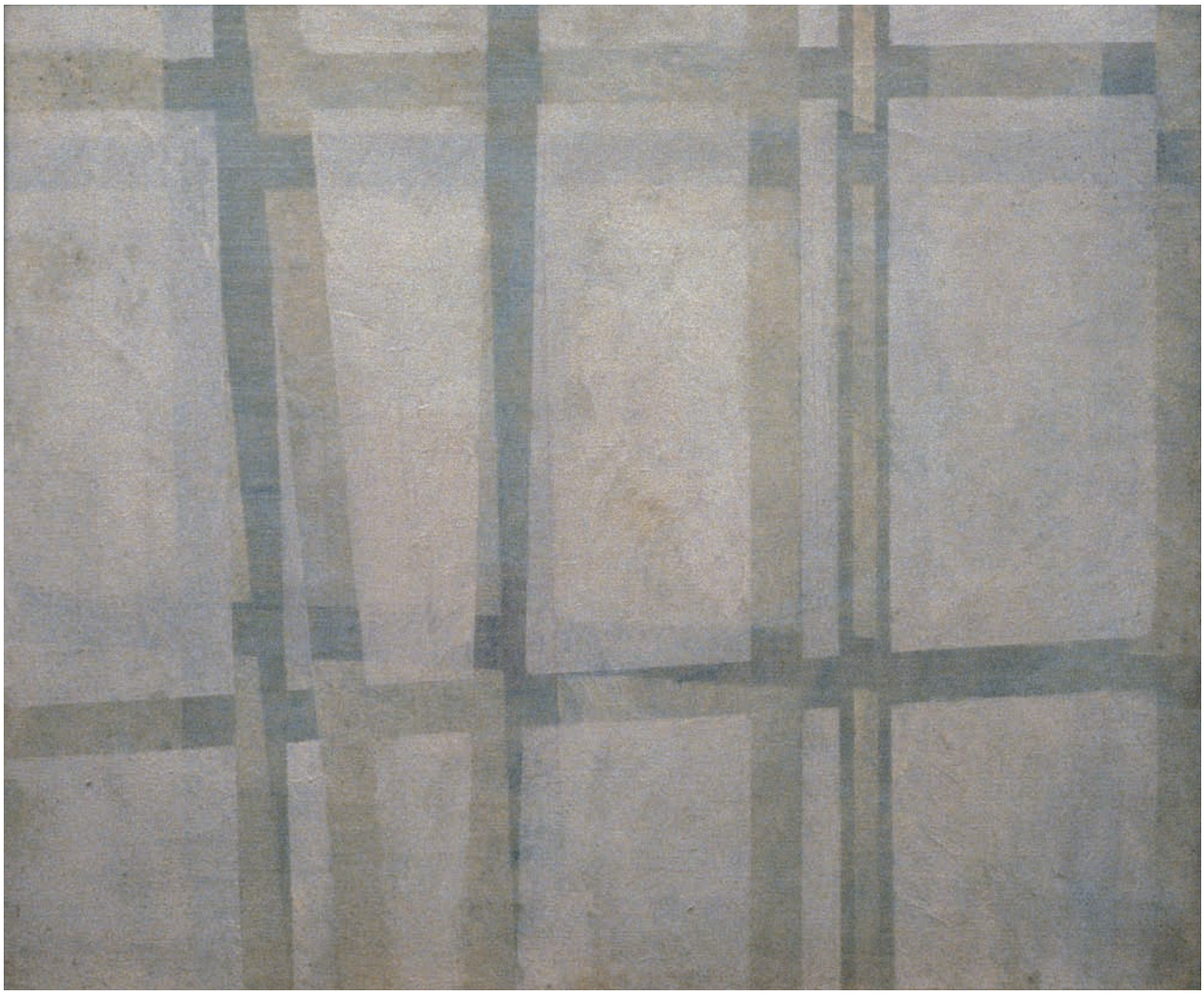
radical methodology, Cameron allowed himself to believe "that art could be created simply by manipulating the materials of art in a particular way."[6]

The first Sellotape painting, modest as it was, suggested an avenue of pursuit. Practical considerations soon came into play in the production of further Sellotape works. As the shapes between the Sellotape became smaller in subsequent pieces, Cameron found that there was an increasing tendency for the paint to run under the tape, which diluted the crisp, clean look he so admired. To counter this intrusion, he worked with a stiffer paint and stamped it on with a more tightly rolled up cloth, pounding the paint into the canvas, which soon had to be reinforced to sustain tautness. It was physically demanding work. Eventually he painted on canvas-covered panels of wood and chipboard to address this problem.[7]

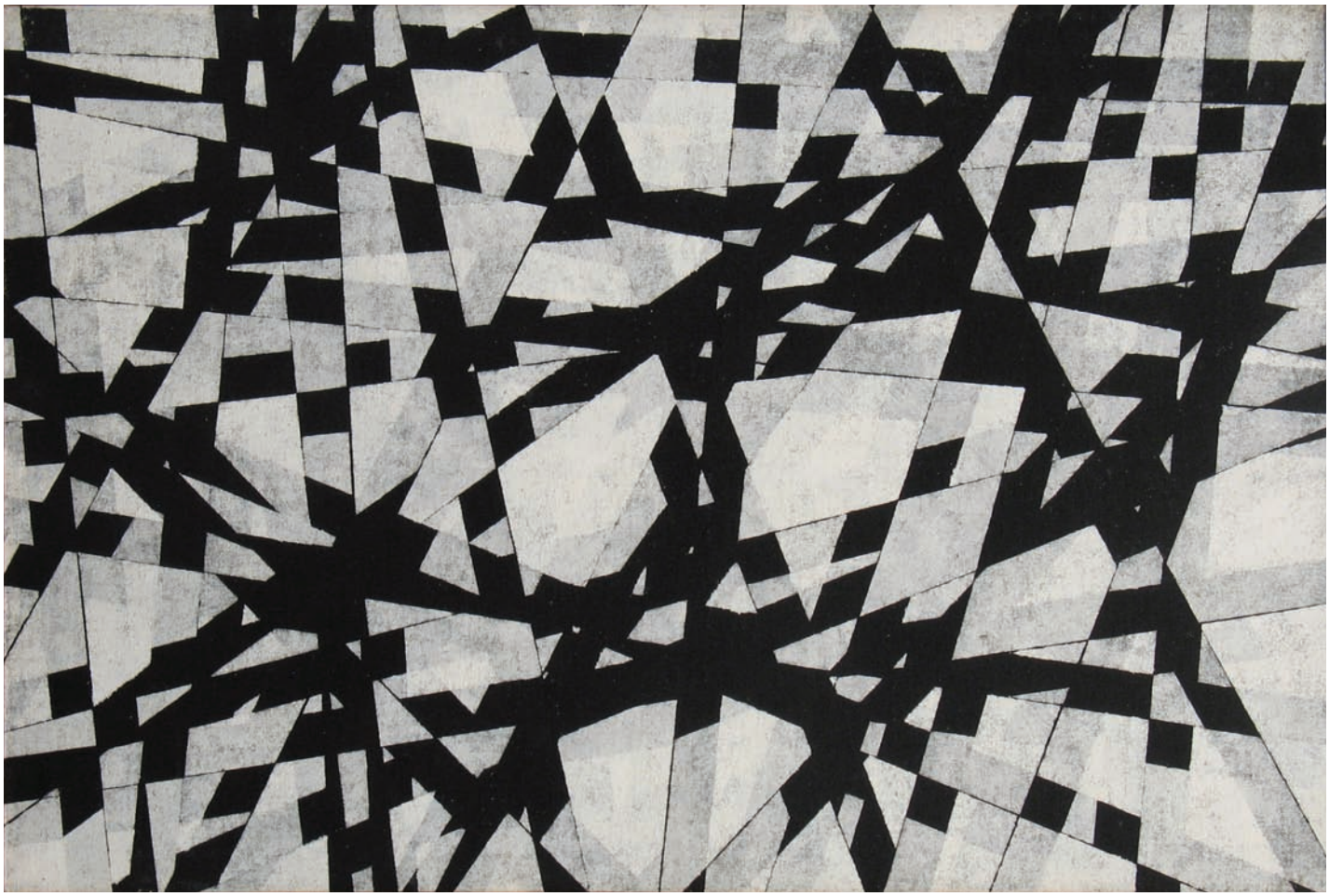
By 1964 he refined his working methods to lay strips of tape horizontally and vertically over the surface of a square canvas at intervals equal to the width of the tape. Again it was the unseen work of another albeit very different abstract expressionist, Ad Reinhardt, that influenced the shape of his support, the square canvas. Cameron records that he had Reinhardt's "late square canvases very much in mind, but they were again only known to me through friends' description."[8] Sixteen of the square canvases, now called Process Paintings, were exhibited in Cameron's first solo exhibition held at the Queen Square Gallery in Leeds in January 1967. The catalogue explained:

> All paintings are produced by applying paint through a grid of 1" wide adhesive tape fixed at 2" intervals horizontally and vertically over the canvas. The minimum number of maskings required to produce a complete reticulation of the picture-surface is two; the maximum possible without duplication is four. The range of types of colour combinations is thus limited, and the paintings may be classified accordingly.[9]

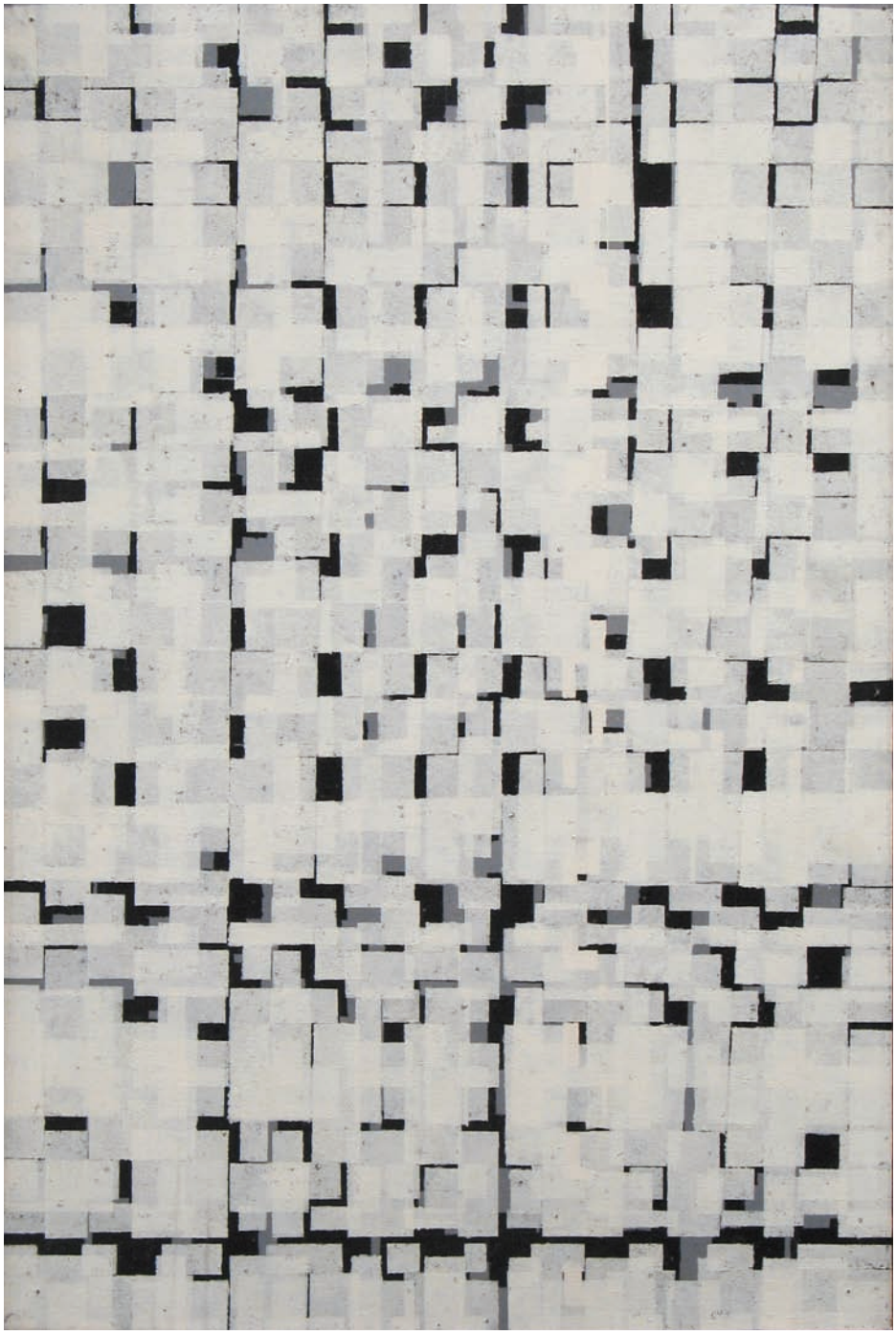
M.G. McNay reviewed the show for *The Guardian* on January 21, asking: "What happens if you remove the intuitive altogether from painting and replace it with a closely analytical approach, almost a dryly academic one?" Answering his own question, he replied that the canvases themselves "range between a black-on-black surface frankly imitative of Ad Reinhardt to a jazzy reminder of Mondrian's 'Broadway Boogie Woogie.' Oddly enough, chance plays a tiny but decisive part: the qualities of the adhesive tape mean that the 'squares' are not all regular,



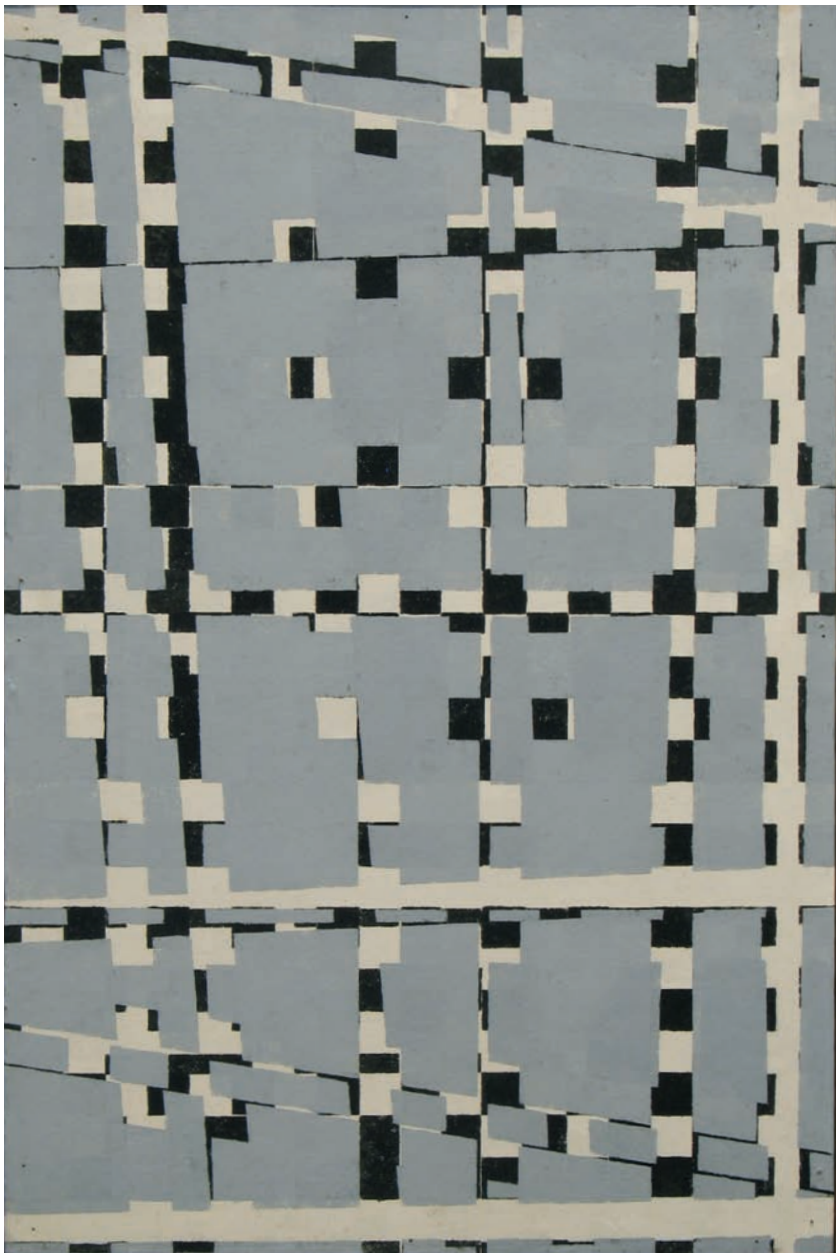
First Sellotape Painting, ca. 1959, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 60.96 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Judy Cheung.



Sellotape Painting #1, 1963, oil on canvas-covered board, 52.5 x 76.2 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Kevin Baer, TrépanierBaer Gallery.



Sellotape Painting #2, 1963, oil on canvas-covered board, 76.2 x 52.5 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Kevin Baer, TrépanierBaer Gallery.



Sellotape Painting #3, 1963, oil on canvas-covered board, 76.2 x 52.5 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Kevin Baer, TrépanierBaer Gallery.

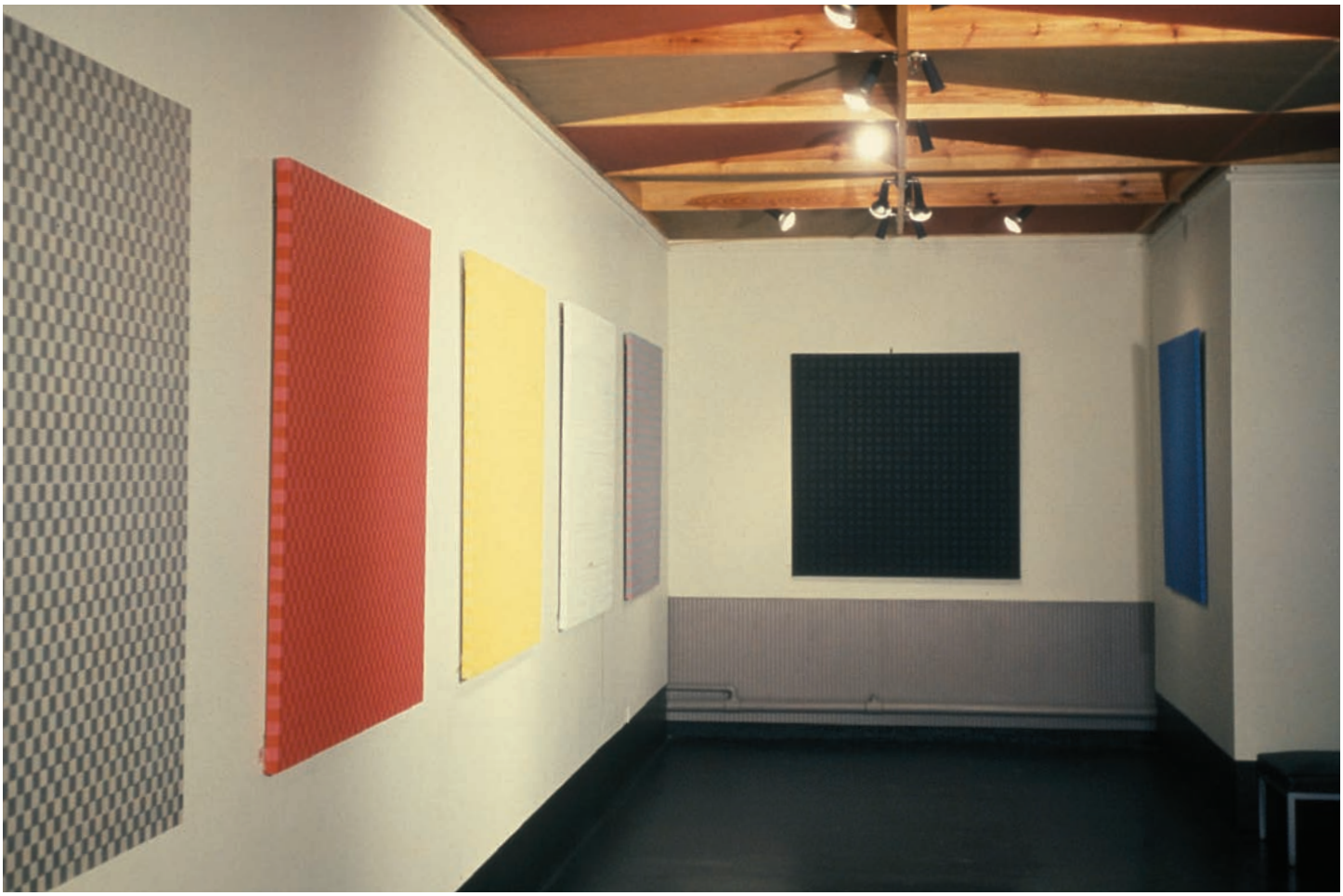
so that extraordinary internal rhythms are created." McNay concluded that the paintings were very beautiful, a sentiment Cameron definitely appreciated.[10]

This January 1967 Leeds exhibition clearly enunciated Cameron's approach to art-making, one very close to what became known as conceptual art. But it was well after Cameron had initiated and refined his processes that, in the summer 1967 issue of *Artforum*, Sol LeWitt published his "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art":

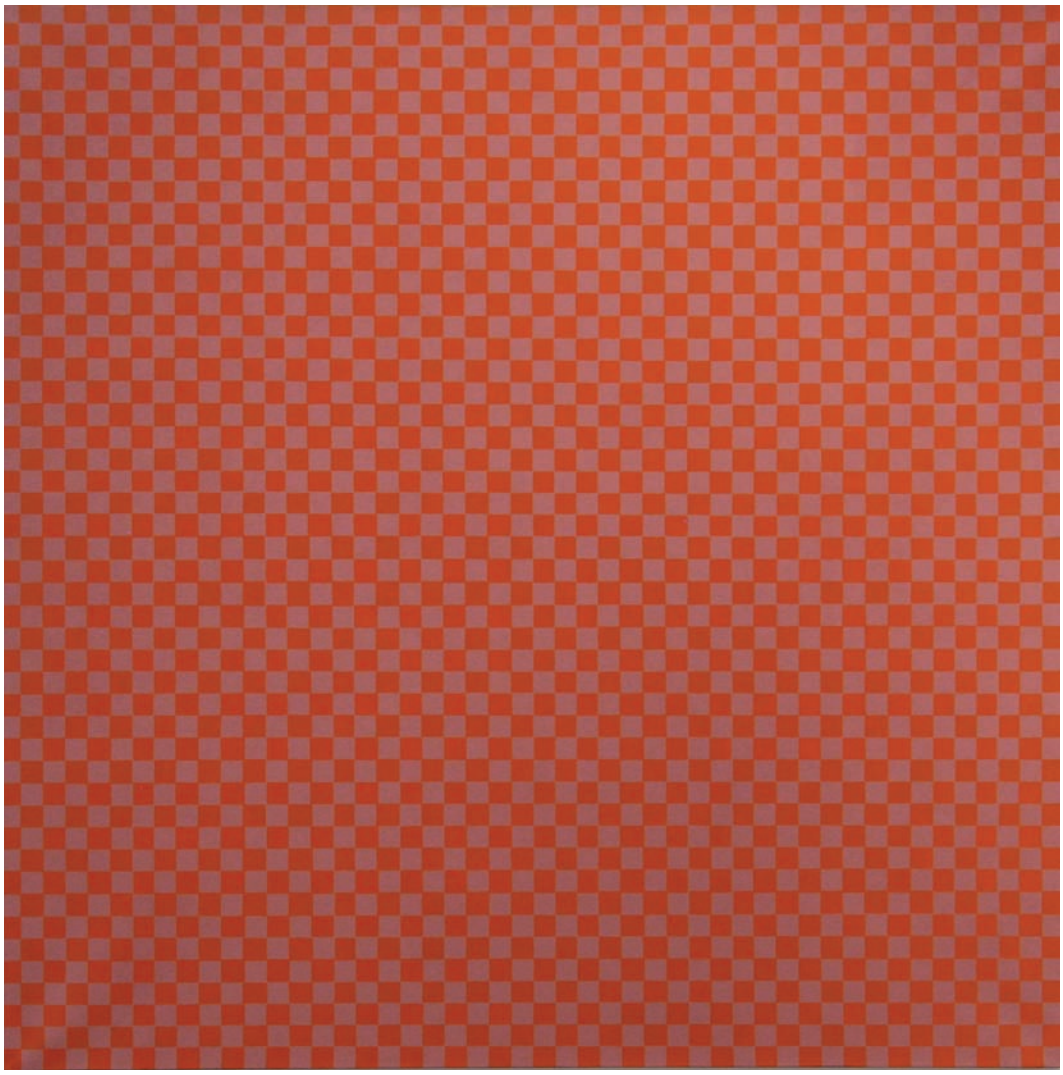
> In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. (In other forms of art the concept may be changed in the process of execution.) When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means all the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.[11]

Certainly, much of what LeWitt defined is applicable to the Process Paintings, although Cameron carps mightily at any suggestion that the execution of his work, be that the Process Paintings or the subsequent Thick Paintings, is a merely perfunctory affair. In the Process Paintings his execution was mechanical to the extent that the paint application was predetermined and he strove to keep the application of paint absolutely even and invariable over all, but to do so required a great deal of concentration and even hard labour. However, all the decisions about colour and number of tapings were made before beginning the piece, and the very nature of the work negated the possibility of decisions of taste and touch being made during execution.

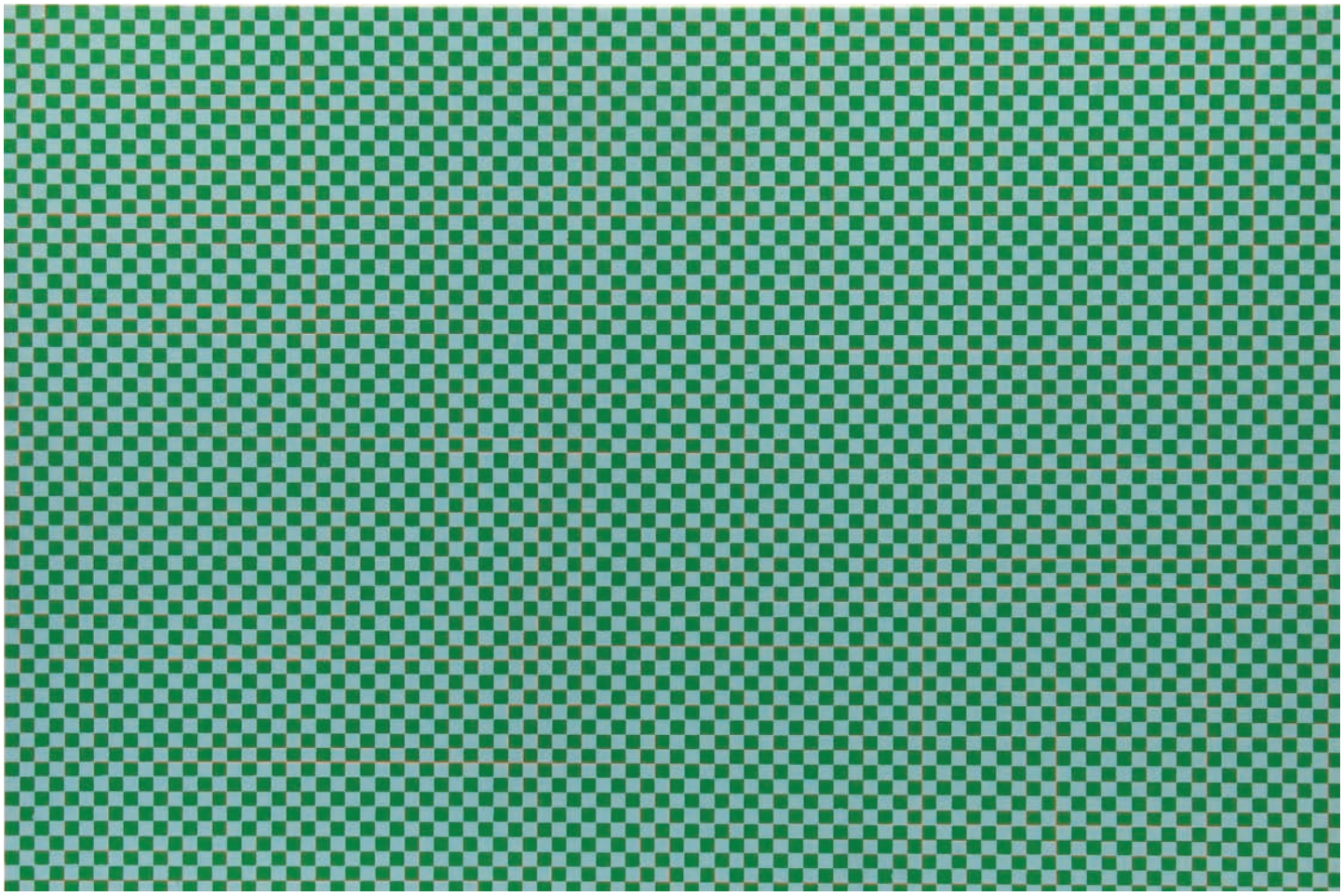
Although the canvases were built on this very limited and rigid methodology, that does not mean that Cameron rejected aesthetic decisions, although he preferred to think that his concentration on material and methods superseded aesthetic concerns. He explained that these works told him, in the clearest possible terms, to "take it or leave it"[12] That of course is relative. He did leave some, rejecting them entirely. But all that was obvious was not automatic. Cameron certainly was able to choose his colours and he experimented with them, noticing that different hues and values in the vertical and horizontal produced forces of differing strength, which upset the neutrality of the square. In response he changed format from a square to a rectangle, going as far once to attempt to estimate the "relative impact when a combination of alternating light and dark in one direction and warm and cool in the other was turned on its side." Painting two rectangular canvases of the same size and shape with the same colours,



Installation, *Process Paintings*, January 1967,
Queen Square Gallery, Leeds.



III(i) IC – 1, 1964, oil on canvas, 122 x 122 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Kevin Baer, TrépanierBaer Gallery.



Green and Green on Pink (type IIIn, 3/4" tape), 1969, oil on canvas-covered panel, 114.3 x 172.7 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Kevin Baer, TrépanierBaer Gallery.

simply turning one on its side, he found the visual differences interesting. "The result was a long comparatively narrow horizontal rectangle in one case and an upright but much more stocky rectangle in the other."[13]

He also observed other effects. Like Pollock and Reinhardt he painted his canvases lying flat on the horizontal plane; in this case, on a table. Cameron remembers thinking that the shifting of Pollock's canvases from the horizontal to the vertical was one of what he called "the great acts of transcendence in art," for the energies of the thrown paint were "mysteriously resurrected into an optical space where the laws of gravity were as mysteriously suspended."[14] He knew he aspired to a comparable transcendence, but rather than Pollock's open optical space, his idea and ideal for his paintings when positioned in the vertical plane was a solid wall. This wall, however, turned out not to be as strong and impenetrable as he had expected and hoped. Rather it "heaved and strained to break free of its flatness, and chinks appeared between the bricks."[15] When he started his Process Paintings, he thought he knew his materials and thought he could measure and control them completely to produce cleanly the precise order that he had predetermined for them in his mind.

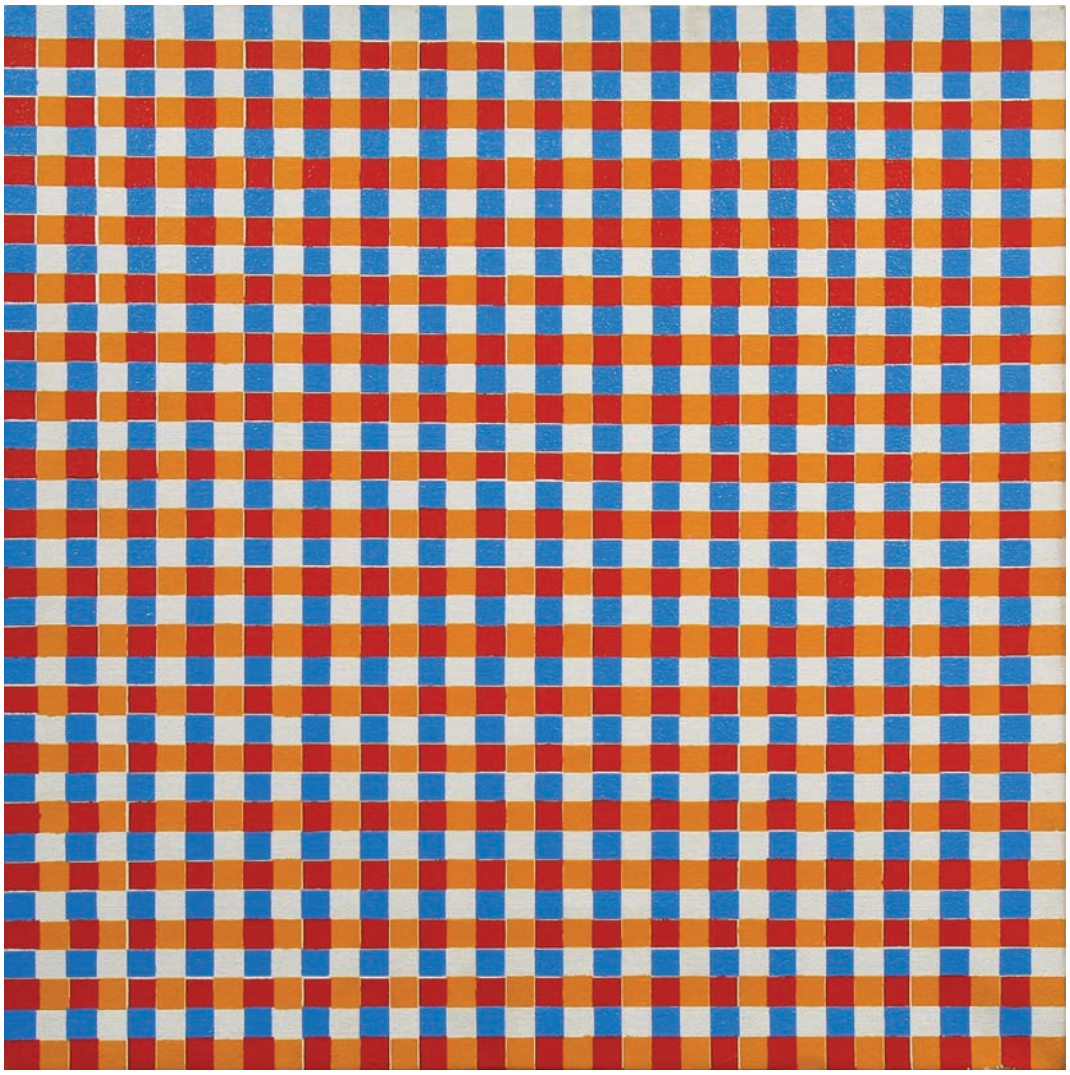
Here, then, Cameron was reacting as a traditional materialist, one who believed "we exist as material beings in a material world, all of whose phenomena are the consequence of physical relations among material entities."[16] Of particular importance in the development of this belief has been post-Darwinian science, which seemed to suggest an impersonal ordering of all that exists, overarching all space and time. There is something of the stance of human maturity and courage in this scientific materialism. For example, the appeal of science for John Stuart Mill was that of "good downright hard logic, with a minimum of sentimentality"; it enables you to "look facts in the face."[17] However, Charles Taylor, in his impressive book, *A Secular Age*, suggests that such materialism often promotes a feeling of dislocation and despair when we are denied fulfillment and meaning by an indifferent universe, a theme explored by the French existentialist Albert C. Camus.[18]

Cameron's best efforts, both physically and intellectually, did not permit him to continue with this philosophy of muscular materialism. Despite his use of very dry paint, despite his drawing lines with a ruler to guide his placement of tape, and especially despite his application of paint by incessant pounding, the tape refused to lie in mathematically straight lines and the paint continued to creep under its block, leaving imperfect splatter and less than sharp edges. While Cameron was pleased to experiment within the rigid material limits he had defined for

himself, he was less pleased with the imperfections that continued to mar and frustrate his vision. "I had supposed, when I started," he declared, "that I was working with things I knew, which were as they appeared to be, and were measurable and controllable."[19] It was as if, while shaving conscientiously, he always missed a few stray hairs. Eventually, his ideas underwent an important change. Retaining the word "matter," he shifted its meaning and expanded its scope, coming to see his work as "a mediation between material stuffs whose essential materiality was outside the world of seeming-to-be appearances" and "envisaged principles of order for them that existed only in my mind."[20]

This change, this pairing of material stuffs and principles of order outside the world of appearances is based on his reading of Aristotle. Cameron had a considerable background in classics. He told me that "I don't think there ever has been a time since grade school when I did not know the names of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle and have a vague idea what they stood for."[21] Then, probably when he was an undergraduate at Newcastle in the 1950s, he first read Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*, which, though "a very uneven work, … is very good on Aristotle."[22] Some time after, perhaps when studying art history at the Courtauld, he first read Gilbert and Kuhn's *History of Esthetics*, "which is very good indeed on Aristotle's aesthetics; so good that reading the original does not add much of substance."[23] When he initially explored the "Poetics," he was so impressed that he photocopied the whole thing in a version with English on one side and Greek on the other, wanting to be sure he would be able to get as close to Aristotle's meaning as possible. For Cameron, "[t]here is no text in the whole history of thought about art that carries more significance for me, even in relation to contemporary art, than Aristotle's 'Poetics.'"[24]

Crucial in understanding Cameron's maturing beliefs and his art is an important Aristotelian concept, the phrase he adopted from Clement Greenberg and deemed central to his practice: "to justify the inevitability of its particular forms."[25] Cameron readily admits that he took Greenberg's expression, his words, but emphasizes that he did not accommodate his meaning, for Greenberg, a Marxist, was interested in the social, while Cameron, a humanist, was fascinated by the broader concept of structure of the cosmos and how his art might fit into a Platonic-Aristotelian concept of form.[26] As documented, Cameron went directly to Aristotle in his "quest for conviction."[27] Unlike Plato, who divided the world into form and Form, or matter and idea, immanence and transcendence, Aristotle conceived of form as a particular thing that is not separate from the thing itself, and determined that form is always paired with



Red, Yellow, Blue on White (type IIK, 1/2" tape), 1968, oil on canvas, 45.75 x 45.75 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Kevin Baer, TrépanierBaer Gallery.

matter. That which combines with matter as a shaping, purposive element and lifts it out of its state of non-being Aristotle calls form. It is real and eternal and very much part of every object, always there. It is inseparable from matter, making the world *be*, giving it life. Form in nature is that which gives pattern and character to everything. Marble, matter, has the potential to become a statue, form, but a human hand must seize it and put form into it before it can realize that potential and become an actual sculpture.

Aristotle divides form into two, distinguishing between "substantial" and "accidental" forms, each of which is universal. Substantial forms corresponds to the category of substance; accidental forms correspond to categories other than substance. Accidental forms may undergo change, or be gained or lost, without changing the nature of the first substance. In saying, for example, that Socrates is a wise human, human is the substantial form, from which Socrates would not survive if it were changed; while wise is the accidental form for Socrates could survive being foolish.

Cameron soon met Aristotle's concept of "modality," the difference between possibility and inevitability, or potentiality and actuality. The universe, the Greek postulated, was a dynamic one, constantly changing, the opposite of Plato's static view. "Matter," Aristotle says, "exists in a *potential* state because it may come to its form, and when it *actually* exists, then it is in its form." All objects, then, even before they come into full being, are *potentially* what they have the capacity of becoming. The acorn may become the oak. The timber of the oak may be shaped to make a boat. But a kernel of corn may not produce an oak, nor a rock be hewn into a boat. Furthermore, just because an acorn may become an oak, it does not follow that it will inevitably do so. External conditions may prevent it. The acorn may fall in a place too dry to nourish it, or it may be eaten by a pig. So potentiality does not ensure a thing becoming actual.[28] In the "Poetics," Aristotle proposed that the function of art is to imitate, not the particular but the universal aspect of life, form, essence and idea, impressed on a mind by observation of real life. From this Cameron concluded:

> High art is an intimation of the inevitable state of things beyond our specific experience of the world, and we receive this intimation from the way in which a particular poem or painting or piece of music convinces us of the possibilities it raises. Not just that it convinces us intellectually of the plausibility of its plot or design, but that it engulfs us in the lived experience of the workings of inexorable law.[29]

Recognizing that the search for artistic intimation must be done not just intellectually, Cameron quotes Sol LeWitt's urging that "Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically."[30]

"Lived experiences" were also very important to Aristotle, the son of a doctor who, although from an Athenian family, was brought up in the relative wilds of Macedonia. Unlike Plato, whose general preference was for mechanical imagery, Aristotle favoured a more biological basis. He believed that bodily attributes are primary and that humans are just a part of nature. For example, following a relatively scientific method of observation, he divided animals into social and dispersed types, with mankind joining wasps, bees, and cranes in the former grouping. The variety and directness of his experiences led him to believe that it is inherent in our nature that our mental apparatus be shaped by our experiences,[31] a belief Cameron shared.

By 1988, well after he had transferred his attentions to his Thick Paintings and abandoned his Process Paintings, Cameron determined that "the anchorage of my art is neither in idea or image but in the materials of art."[32] But it was those very materials that were not acting and reacting the way he thought they would or should. Frustrated, he might have been a child who was not able to keep his colours within the lines. He then concluded in a very Aristotelian manner that this external material activity was beyond his own internal subjective experience, "that its forms are generated outside the realm that embraces external and internal sensations alike."[33] Cameron structured his world in three interconnecting realms: external, internal, and "the world of appearances."[34] He was setting the meaning of his art, not in the internal, personal world of desire and dread, nor in the material world of appearances, but in the external unknowable world.

> [W]hen I set the basis of my art outside the world of appearances in that realm of the unknowable unperceivable forces of nature, I had also intended that my art should speak, not with the human voice of self, but with the non-voice of Its unknowingness and uncaringness, Its indifference not only to beauty but to every human desire and dread.[35]

French painter and performance artist Yves Klein, in the 1950s, was also visually and intellectually probing the unknowable, the immaterial as well as the material. Klein made his leap off

Beer Can-can (724), begun 1997, acrylic gesso and acrylic on can of Japanese beer: 724 half-coats as of July 27, 2004, 19.05 x 8.89 x 8.89 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

the edge of the flat world by adopting the monochrome, particularly blue, and by rejecting the internal pictorial divisions of line and multiple colours. Klein likened his monochrome painting to an "open window to freedom, as the possibility of being immersed in the immeasurable existence of color."[36] For Klein, monochrome blue was a means of evoking the immateriality and boundlessness of his own particular utopian vision of the world. At the same time, he was keenly aware that pigment is a substance of the earth and devised methods of making paintings of the other three elements: air, water, and fire. Continuing his search "for the realization of matter," he decided "to end the battle" and declared his paintings to be invisible. At the Galerie Iris Clert in April 1958, he devised Le Vide, painting the inside of the gallery white and leaving it empty. He felt that only when given space would "the invisible become effective through the perceptible."[37] Seeking the unknowable, Klein dematerialized his paintings while Cameron rematerialized them.

Robert Rauschenberg's iconic performative art, which proved so decisive for conceptual art, is also germane to an understanding of Cameron's unknowable world, opening spaces beyond existing realms. In 1953 Rauschenberg acquired a drawing from Willem de Kooning, informing him of his intention to erase the drawing and make it into a piece of his own. De Kooning agreed but did not make the task easy, for the piece selected was done in ink and crayon. It took Rauschenberg a month to erase it. Once carefully erased, leaving only vestiges of ink, crayon and imprint, Rauschenberg put the piece in a gold frame and attached an engraved metal label, with lettering by Jasper Johns, identifying the work as *Erased de Kooning Drawing, Robert Rauschenberg*, 1953. While Cameron's hiding more fully parallels Rauschenberg's activity in his Thick Paintings, in his Process Paintings he establishes a similar relationship between the object and the event with the creation of his third space or realm.[38] John Cage explains Rauschenberg's thoughts. Cage, an important friend of Rauschenberg's, composed for a reading performance, using a mixture of quotes from the artist, daily episodes from when they met, talked, or worked, capturing life in its intensity or banality.

> There is Rauschenberg, between him and what he picks up to use, the quality of the encounter.… Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two.) The nothingness in between is where for no reason at all every practical thing that one actually takes the time to do so stirs up the dregs that they are no longer sitting at the bottom.[39]

Both Rauschenberg and Cameron then were interested in the gap between the two, in stirring up dregs.

By not setting his art in the "internal, personal world of desire and dread," Cameron was very much a conceptualist, one who adopted a predetermined schema in order to ensure as much as possible that subjectivity and personal expression would play little role in his artistic production. Like other early conceptualists, he turned the conventional understanding of art as subjective visual expression into what he thought would be coldly utilitarian categories of information. To achieve artistic work in his third realm, Cameron, like many conceptualists, adopted a modified form of self-effacement, more pronounced with the Process Paintings than with the Thick Paintings. By 1984, well after he had stopped making Process Paintings, he insisted on recognizing a distance between himself and his product, explaining that "I do not conceive of my work … as personal activity, but as impersonal objects of the materials of art, in which traces of my humanity may be discovered as the agency of *its* production."[40] Part of the problem, for Cameron, was his belief that "the more intense the effort to impose the ideal of order on the stuff of life, the more cruel and catastrophic the outcome."[41] This, then, exposed one of the fundamental contradictions in his contemporary philosophy: his ordered, predetermined concept was at war with the unknowable, unperceivable forces of nature. This problem, as we will see, Cameron solved by becoming more Aristotelian in his eventual acceptance of a broad, impersonal, predetermined goal of perfection and goodness in this world.

Cameron's recalling of the "cruel and catastrophic outcome" brings to mind Aristotle's contention that the high gifts of philosophers and poets are traceable to their melancholic temperament. Unlike Plato, who enlarged on the distance separating philosophers and imitative artists, Aristotle groups them together, claiming that universals are the concern of both, and malleability a characteristic of both. For Aristotle, to be highly intelligent is to adapt oneself gradually to the particular character of the stimuli. This adaptability is due to the presence of wine-like black bile in one's system, for, according to Aristotle "Black bile is erotic and unbalancing in tendency, but it is also … the fire that warms the genius of all gifted souls."[42]

In 1992, in an artist's statement published in the catalogue *The Shadow of Self*, Cameron explained that, for him, the discrepancy between anticipation and actuality is shown in the behaviour of matter.[43] The behaviour was unanticipated, uncontrollable, and mysterious. He therefore called his art practice "mystical materialism."[44] Perhaps Cameron here meant mystical in the sense of spiritual apprehension of knowledge, or information inaccessible to

the intellect. His analysis is similar to that of the nineteenth-century American poet Emily Dickinson (1830–1886). In poem 668, Dickinson, like Cameron, is starting off with nature, not with art, and concludes that nature is way ahead of us in knowledge and understanding.

> "Nature" is what we see –
> The Hill – the Afternoon –
> Squirrel – Eclipse – the Bumble bee –
> Nay – Nature is Heaven –
> Nature is what we hear –
> The Bobolink – the Sea –
> Thunder – The Cricket –
> Nay – Nature is Harmony –
> Nature is what we know –
> Yet have no art to say –
> So impotent Our Wisdom is
> To her Simplicity.

Both Dickinson and Cameron dismiss quite quickly a total reliance on the visual. Dickinson then goes on to dismiss the auditory as being completely sufficient as well and concludes that nature is harmony, a combination of what we see, hear, and know, a concept close to Cameron's unknowable nature and close to mysticism but opposite conventional materialism.

Referring to the Italian Renaissance painter and architect Leone Battista Alberti, Cameron noted that painters are concerned only with things that are visible.[45] But, following Dickinson's poem and his own recognition of the imperceivable forces of nature, the ability to see, the very concept that artists only depict what they see, is then challenged. This question of what is visibility has been thoroughly examined recently by the Nobel-Prize-winning Portuguese writer José Saramago. In his 1995 novel, *Blindness*, Saramago tells of an incident in which the only sighted person discovered that all the statues in the church have had their eyes covered. This caused considerable distress to the viewer and to her husband, whom she told, as well as to others who overheard their discussion. The sighted woman proposed that the local priest had done this, thinking that perhaps, "when the blind people could no longer see the images, the images should not be able to see the blind either."[46] Her husband, an oculist

and blind, disputed that notion. But she continued, "You're wrong, images see with the eyes of those who see them."[47] And she concluded that she herself, the only sighted person, would become more and more blind because there was no one to see her. This event caused a great deal of unreasoned concern among the listeners.

If Saramago writes about the statues that are made blind, the Canadian novelist Michael Ondaatje talks about statues that are made to see. In *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje's first novel after *The English Patient*, we learn of the Buddhist practice of a painter or artificer painting in the eyes of the Buddha to bring "to life sight and truth and presence."[48] This activity is highly ritualized, requiring the painter to stand with his back to the statue and colour in the eyes by putting his brush over his shoulder and paint without looking directly at the Buddha's face, but rather seeing the face in a mirror held for him. The painter uses just the reflection to guide him. Only the mirror receives the direct image of the glance being created. Seeing and not seeing are problematic, multi-cultural concerns.

Blindness concludes with a provocative definition of blindness: the doctor's wife says: "I don't think we did go blind, I think we are blind, Blind but seeing, Blind people who can see, but do not see."[49] The distinction between ability and will or Aristotle's difference between actual and potential is what is important. Cameron, trying to see, covers his Process Paintings with tape and paint, and then *uncovers* them to expose the experience visible in the spaces around life. To see, Cameron both covers and exposes, unlike the Buddhist artificer who simply covers the original material of the statue with paint. His activity of painting, with all its unpredictability and surprises, he feels, mirrors and reveals his life.

This revelation is very much, I think, what Cameron aspires for art. In distinguishing between science and art, he declares: "Science is concerned with explaining the world, art with experiencing it in the aspect of its inevitability,"[50] a very Aristotelian concept. In detailing this further in 1984, he notes that all other human activities, apart from science and art, are or should be directed toward the attainment of specific and immediate good, some way of making the world a better place.

> Compared with all of these, science and art are both more far-reaching in their implications and more disinterested. Everything is available potentially to the explanations of scientific enquiry, and everything is available likewise to experience

> within the longer perspective of inevitability. Science and art mutually embrace each other and everything else.[51]

Science and art, seeking knowledge and working for good, are the foundation of his experiential belief.

Cameron's emphasis on experience is important and similar to that of American philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952). Influenced by Darwinian biology and William James's pragmatism, which accounts for his conception of experience as an interaction with and a reconstruction of the environment, Dewey believed that the interests and habits of people, their situations, influenced how they chose to live.

> For many years, I have thought and taught that experience is an interaction between the self and some aspect of its environment. Purposeful, intelligent action is the means by which this interaction is rendered significant. In the course of such action, objects acquire meaning and the self becomes aware of its own powers, since, by intelligent control of the environment, it directs and consolidates its own capacities.[52]

Dewey suggested intelligent living involved three components: action, emotion, and understanding. When the self is intelligently adapted to his or her surroundings, these three are in balance. But, too often, actions are divorced from purpose or meaning; the acquisition of knowledge is transformed into the amassing of mere information. On the other hand, in intelligent living, facts and principles are so intricately connected with one another that they become active agents for grasping meaning and enhancing values. Dewey, an educator, was always incensed that school children were not taught practical skills or presented with practical applications.

Dewey was bringing together things long treated as separate: the mind and body, cognition and viscera. He was particularly interested in reintegrating people with nature, and reason with emotion and instinct. Convinced that "esthetic understanding … must start from the soil, air and light out of which things esthetically admirable arise,"[53] he gave evidence of his integrative approach: "The existence of art is the concrete proof … that man uses the materials and energies of nature with intent to expand his life, and … does so in accord with the

structure of his organism – brain, sense organs, and musculature system."[54] Dewey's theory of the natural roots of art, the integration of art and science, come out in a chapter entitled "The Natural History of Form" in his seminal book *Art as Experience*. There, describing the natural origin of our interest in rhythm, and linking works of art, the subconscious, and the environment, he explained, "Underneath the rhythm of every art and of every work of art there lies, as a substratum in the depths of the subconsciousness, the basic pattern of the relations of the live creature to its environment."[55] And this link of science and art created a climate more favourable for art, for the better we understand nature, the more we understand art.[56]

Again, it is important to see the mature Cameron as an Aristotelian rather than a strict twentieth-century materialist. As early as his initial Process Paintings he recognized that he had little control of the end results of his art. By 1984 he concluded, "it is simply a matter of resigning oneself to the inevitable and letting the work take its course." And, in fully analytic mode – even to the extent of using the passive voice – "No longer is my activity perceived to be limited by the properties of the materials with which I am working, but their capacity to fulfill their own nature is seen to be constrained by my human limitations."[57] Now, like Dewey and Aristotle, Cameron declares:

> My methods of painting may be said to continue the processes of nature, in that it engages with the actual stuff of the world and uses it to make material objects in the world, subject to the same forces that operate on physical reality at large. However, my interaction with those forces of nature I encounter in my art is also *like* (and to that extent, may be considered to imitate) my encounters with the world at large. If it is no longer possible to create a picture that can encompass satisfactorily a meaningful section of life, it may yet be possible for the experience of painting to be like the experience of life and for that life-likeness to be communicated in the work.[58]

In discussing his square Process Paintings, and very much on his Aristotelian horse, Cameron tries again to decipher just what art is. Disagreeing with Greenberg's contention that art's area of competence is the professionalism of the creator, he posited that the competence of the artist resides in the "fact of materially being and behaving in a material world (remembering that the reality of the material realm is ultimately unknowable)."[59] Recognizing the

Installation, *Eric Cameron: Works from 1963 to 2008*, April 2008 at TrépanierBaer Gallery, Calgary, Alberta. Photo: John Dean.

dilemma in which he finds himself, he goes on to say that the challenge for artists today is to reveal "that unknowingness which is equally beyond the processes and the object of thought." Furthermore, he acknowledges that the square shape of his canvases, an example of "repressive secular or spiritual conformity," is an attempt to impose intellectual order, but such order can only ever apply to that which can be perceived and grasped. "Beneath the ordered surface of appearances the rest behaves according to its own necessities within the darkness."[60]

Rejecting formal religion, Cameron accepts that the Process Paintings were built with the "bricks of religion," for the square of his paintings signified moral strictures, even if he had abandoned his parents' Protestantism.[61] He also recognizes the ritualistic nature of the processes he employed for both his Process Paintings and his Thick Paintings. In *English Roots* he goes further, acknowledging that he calls himself an atheist and a materialist to underline that he disbelieves the tenets of every known religion, but that he sees in himself "the needs which religions serve. The questions that trouble me are of a religious order…. In engaging, as a material being, with the stuff of matter in art, I find a kind of reconciliation to that which is, albeit that which ultimately is remains utterly unknown to me and utterly beyond my capacity to grasp in reasoned understanding."[62]

It is helpful to return to Aristotle and to remember how different his world was from Plato's. "Plato posited two worlds in conflict, the terrestrial world of visible but unreal, transitory objects, and the celestial world of invisible but real and immortal spiritual existences."[63] Aristotle, on the other hand, felt that there is only one world, our present, visible one, which is both real and eternal, a permanent combination of matter and form. There is no evidence, in fact, to show that a separate spiritual realm exists.

It is within this world, then, that Aristotle finds his God. He is not, like Plato's or the Christian's God, the creator of the universe. Rather, He is the first principle and final cause of the universe, motionless, unaffected by anything outside itself, calm, pure form and intelligence, with no mixture of matter, for where there is matter there is change. One of Aristotle's firmest convictions is that nothing can be produced from nothing, that since matter and form now exist, and are in constant motion, they must have always existed. Nevertheless, there has to be some first cause of all this activity, and that is God, who does not aspire, for He is that state of contemplative life that is serene and most pleasant. Aristotle explained that "The actuality is life most good and eternal. We may say that God is a living being, eternal and most good, so that life and duration, unbroken and eternal, belong to God for this *is* God."[64]

Cameron never acknowledges that he accepts Aristotle's concept of God, but that concept is certainly close to what Cameron calls "itness." "What I believe I experienced in the progress of my Thick Paintings is an intimation of the 'itness' of the existence of the world, and that intimation is mystical, albeit of a material nature: a material mysticism."[65] Cameron draws attention to Aristotle's "pivotal opening sentence of the *Metaphysics*," the assertion that "all people *desire* to *know*."[66] Such a desire to know is central to mysticism, a difficult concept, especially when paired with materialism. The two are usually considered to be mutually exclusive. But it is important to remember that Aristotle, no materialist, only used the word "material" in conjunction with form, and it is surely this meaning that Cameron takes. Aristotle, like Plato, is keen to disprove the materialists' contention that the world is a product of blind, mechanical force or necessity. Obviously, the world is faulty because matter, which constitutes such a large part of it, is unstable and imperfect. But Aristotle saw evidence everywhere of something working diligently toward predetermined goodness and perfection.[67]

Mysticism, centred on that very desire to know goodness and perfection, is a slippery concept. It is not something superstitious or supernatural in the sense of the occult. Rather, as the great analyst of mysticism Evelyn Underhill explains, mystics refuse to be satisfied with the world of experience and appearance and seek absolute truth. Mystics, she claims,

> … have succeeded where all … others have failed, in establishing immediate communication between the spirit of man, entangled as they declare amongst material things, and that "only Reality," that immaterial and final Being, which some philosophers call the Absolute, and most theologians call God.[68]

The mystic, then, rejects Materialism, the total acceptance of material things as the only reality, Idealism, the concept that the universe is really just a collection of ideas, and Philosophic Skepticism, the belief that there is no riddle of reality to solve. People with a certain type of mind, those interested in religion, pain, and beauty, seem particularly open to the search for a reality beyond the senses, the physical, and the intellectual. Mystics find their independent spiritual world, not in logic or sensation, but in life, in the existence of a discoverable real, in unity and inevitability.

Union is the ultimate goal of the mystic quest. With union, the self is in a state of equilibrium, in pure spiritual life, characterized by peaceful joy, enhanced powers, and intense

certitude, a being at *one*.[69] Unity too was important for Aristotle. In "Politics" he explains: "An artistic representation differs from ordinary reality in that elements which are elsewhere scattered and separate are here combined into a unity."[70] Considering the character of God, he remarks that in nature all things are ordered and combined in some manner, though not all in the same manner. There is a connection. "For all are ordered together to one end." "Then how numbers, or soul or body, or, in general form and the object are one, this no one tells us … unless he says, as we do, that the mover makes them one."[71] In the *Poetics* he praised Homer for discerning the truth that the best is one, a unity. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Aristotle claimed, "center around an action that in our sense of the word is one, … the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed."[72] Cameron studied and agreed with this section of the *Poetics*, referring to it in his article "Oedipus and Sol LeWitt," published in the *Divine Comedy* catalogue.[73] He goes on to explain that high art "must present a wholeness that meets us in the fullness of our humanity in the process of its making."[74] "Once accepted that mystical reconciliation with itness carries no promise of an afterlife or any of the other all-too-personal inducements of traditional religions it is a question only of semantics if we should call that itness God."[75]

For Cameron, this fullness of humanity was crucial in defining, not just the scope of his art production, but also the execution of his diurnal life. Increasingly self-analytic, he writes copiously about his art and about the particular reach of his experiences that touch on the rich tapestry of his influences and interests. His range is broad, like a university professor with the world as his specialty, for he not only conceives his work – he deems his practice a contemplative one – but he also fabricates his pieces, unlike some conceptual artists. In fact, the production is arduous and protracted, limited only, in respect to the Thick Paintings, by the length of the artist's life. Rejecting a formal religion and almost despite himself, he nonetheless increasingly recognized and accommodated a spiritual possibility, itness.[76]

Although we might find the terminology initially surprising, even contradictory, Cameron can legitimately call his practice "material mysticism." Philosophically, he travelled far from narrow materialism and the attendant frustrations evident in the Process Paintings, although these gave him his initial interest in materials, his methodology of hiding, and his first efforts at objectivity. The Process Paintings also exposed the weakness of an approach that denied the validity of the "other," or "itness," or transcendence approachable, not through the intellect or the senses, but through intuition. Cameron's continuing close reading of Aristotle changed

all this, shifting and broadening his definition of material and allowing the addition of the external unknowable world. His touchstone, the inevitability of form, now has substantial and understandable meaning. Through Aristotle, Cameron developed a unitive philosophy that accommodated both the visible world of the senses and the invisible world of itness.

Notes

1 Eric Cameron, *English Roots* (Lethbridge: University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, 2001), p. 121.

2 Zeuxis and Parrhasius were ancient Greek painters who competed for the title of best painter. Zeuxis painted grapes so perfectly that birds came to peck at them. Then he asked his rival to take the curtain off his painting. Parrhasius replied that the curtain had already been removed. Zeuxis conceded the competition.

3 Cameron, *English Roots*, pp. 10–11, quoting *In Retrospect …* (exhibition catalogue, Calgary, Stride Gallery, 1988), n.p.

4 Ibid., p. 12.

5 Ibid., p. 8.

6 Eric Cameron, *Squareness:* (Lethbridge: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1989), p. 4.

7 Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 12.

8 Ibid., p. 14.

9 Quoted in Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 16.

10 Review reproduced in Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 177.

11 Quoted in Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 12, from Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 28.

12 Ibid.

13 Cameron, *Squareness:*, p. 26.

14 Ibid., p. 29.

15 Ibid.

16 Richard Lewontin, *New York Review of Books*, 9 January 1997, p. 28, quoted in Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 561.

17 Quoted in Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 364–65.

18 Ibid., p. 583.

19 Cameron, *Squareness:*, p. 27.

20 Ibid.

21 Eric Cameron e-mail to author, 2 April 2008.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid. See Katherine Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, *History of Esthetics* (New York: Macmillan, 1939).

24 Ibid.

25 See initial discussion in Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach* (Calgary: The Nickle Arts Museum, 1984) and further elucidation in *Divine Comedy* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1990).

26 Cameron, *Divine Comedy*, p. 10.

27 Ibid., p. 16.

28 "Introduction," by Louise Ropes Loomis, in *Aristotle: On Man in the Universe* (Roslyn, NY: Walter J. Black for the Classics Club, 1943), pp. xviii–xix.

29 Cameron, *Divine Comedy*, pp. 18–19.

30 Ibid., p. 21.

31 John Onians, *Neuroarthistory: From Aristotle and Pliny to Baxandall and Zeki* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press: 2007), pp. 21–29.

32 Cameron, *Squareness*, p. 21.

33 Ibid., p. 20.

34 Ibid., p. 21.

35 Ibid., p. 42.

36 www.moma.ogr/collection/brouse concerning *Blue Monochrome*, 1961, accessed 1 May 2008.

37 Wikipedia, "Yves Klein," accessed 1 May 2008.

38 Rauschenberg's White Paintings are also germane for an understanding of Cameron's art. As well, it is helpful to remember that Rauschenberg, in the early 1950s, was a student of Joseph Albers at Black Mountain College. Albers taught that art came not from self-expression but from an understanding of materials and colour weight.

39 John Cage, "On Robert Rauschenberg, artist, and his work," 1961, in *Silence* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), pp. 98–108.

40 Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach*, p. 34.

41 Cameron, *Squareness:*, p. 17.

42 Katherine Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics*, p. 84.

43 *The Shadow of Self*, n.p.solo exhibition, Art Museum of the Americas, Washington, DC, 1992

44 Usually Cameron referred to material mysticism, but occasionally, as here, he got the terms the wrong way around. In his 1998 catalogue, *Desire and Dread* (Calgary: Muttart Public Art Gallery), p. 27, he explained: "'mystical materialism' is the theory that underpins the practice. In speaking of mysticism in relation to my art I think of mysticism in the sense in which the old kinds of mystics might aspire to an intimate union with the godhead though [*sic*] mystic rites and rituals. I see my incessant work on my Thick paintings [*sic*] as leading to a comparably intimate union with the stuff of matter that I hope may be shared vicariously by viewers in a gallery or museum."

45 Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach*, p. 38.

46 Jose Saramago, *Blindness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997), trans. Giovanni Pontiero, p. 284.

47 Ibid.

48 Michael Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2000), p. 99.

49 Saramago, *Blindness*, p. 292.

50 Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach*, p. 13.

51 Ibid.

52 "Foreword," *Art and Education* (Merion, PA: Barnes Foundation Press, 1929), p. 3.

53 Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch, 1934), p. 12.

54 Ibid., p. 25.

55 Ibid., p. 150.

56 An interesting discussion and analysis of Dewey, along with important other art historians, is in John Onians' *Neuroarthistory*.

57 Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach*, p. 32.

58 Ibid., pp. 33–34.

59 Cameron, *Squareness:*, p. 46.

60 Ibid., p. 47.

61 Ibid., p. 28.

62 Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 175.

63 Loomis, *Aristotle*, p. xxi.

64 Ibid.

65 Cameron, *Divine Comedy*, p. 30.

66 Ibid., p. 32, emphasis in *Divine Comedy* but not in original.

67 Loomis, *Aristotle*, pp. xxi–xxi, xxxvi.

68 Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: New American Library, 1955), p. 4.

69 Ibid., p. 170.

70 "Politics," chap. 3.11.4.

71 "Metaphysics," chap. 10, p. 37, in Loomis, *Aristotle*.

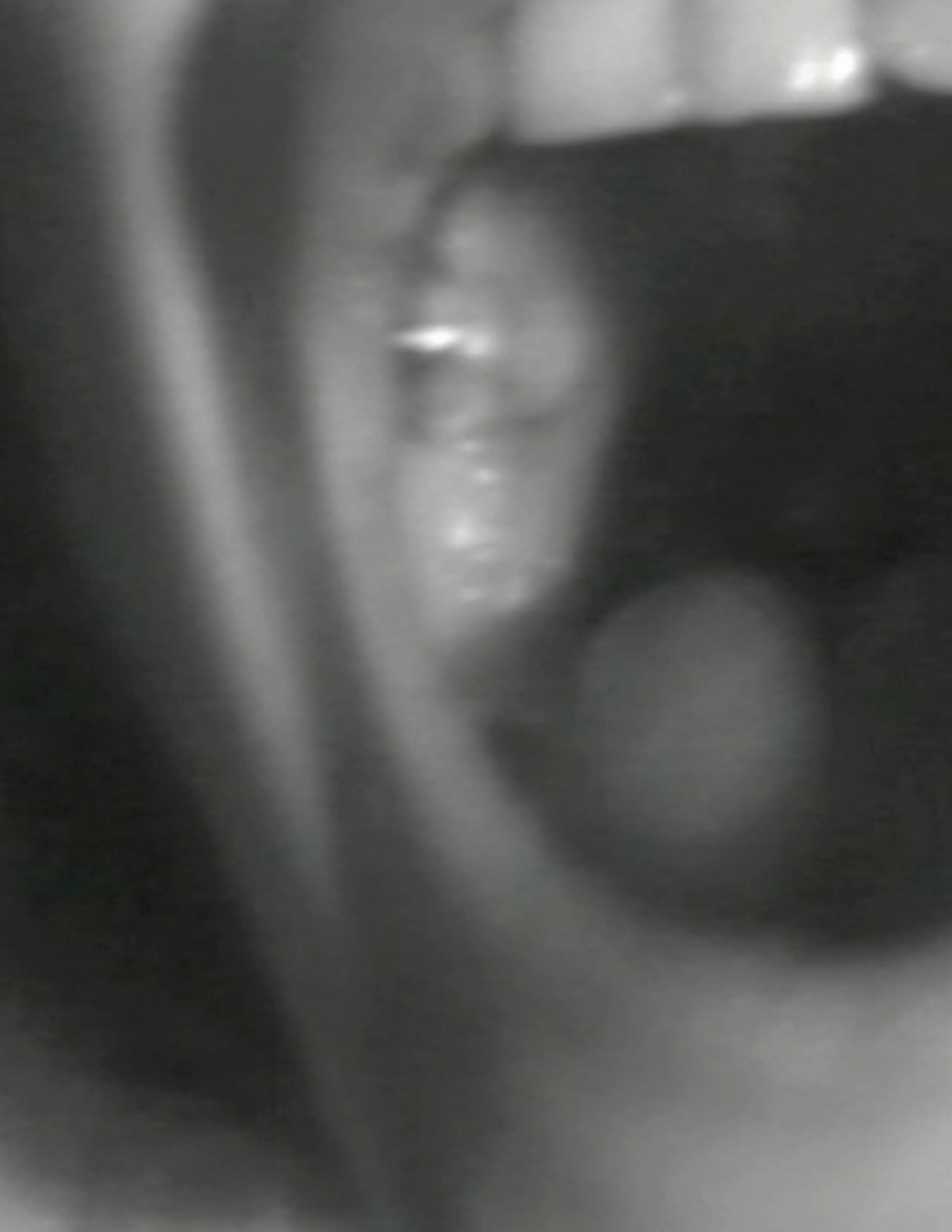
72 "Poetics," VIII, on p. 427, in Loomis, *Aristotle*.

73 p. 31.

74 Ibid.

75 Eric Cameron, "Oedipus and Sol LeWitt," in *Divine Comedy* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992), p. 33, originally given in January 1986 at the Ontario College of Art. The punctuation I have used here is the version corrected by Eric Cameron. Copies of the catalogue in The Nickle Arts Museum have been corrected by Eric in red ink and initialled "E.C." The way the sentence was published, with a comma after "accepted" and a semicolon after "religions," changes the meaning considerably.

76 In the catalogue *Desire and Dread*, p. 27, Cameron acknowledges his religious needs: " although not a believer, I consider myself an intensely religious person. I meant that I felt the needs previously answered by religion to set the events of my life and eventual death in relation to the longer perspective (or non-perspective) of the ultimate order of things."



THE "IMPERFECT" ARTIST: ERIC CAMERON'S VIDEO WORK

Diana Nemiroff

> The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and translate the passions which are its material. – T. S. Eliot[1]

More than once in his voluminous writings Eric Cameron has quoted these lines from T. S. Eliot; the theme of perfection – and its implicit corollary, imperfection – is a recurring trope in his writings, as he examines his own achievement. Imperfection, as he encounters and acknowledges it in his art, is, first and foremost, a matter of technical shortcomings: his inability to apply the grids of tape to the surface of his early Process Paintings in perfectly straight lines, or his inability to brush out the gesso onto his Thick Paintings evenly so as to control their eventual form. But the spectre of imperfection haunts much of what he has to say about his own art, and for that reason it is worth attending to. His self-confessed failure – if that is what it should be called – to achieve the perfection he has aimed for in his art is not one of ambition. His artistic goals are serious and even lofty: the extent to which the art of his maturity – the Thick Paintings – embodies Eliot's ideal separation of "the man who suffers and the mind which creates" is clear in the later writings, as he confronts his struggles with the "passions which are its material" as bravely and as honestly as he did earlier the impossibility of mastering the physical stuff of which it is made.

This essay focuses on the decade from the end of the 1960s to the end of the 1970s when Cameron began to explore the new, time-based medium of video. Other than its specific formal potentialities, the medium also offered opportunities for self-reflection and interaction with other human actors that had not previously been addressed in his art, at least not as its principle subject. Outside of his writings, his struggles to address, yet separate, lived reality

Ha-ha (with Donna Perrin) (detail), ca. 1973–74. Black and white videotape with sound, 3 minutes (two views). Collection of the artist. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

and objective, creative truths are nowhere more evident than in his videotapes. Here, in this experimental new medium, in which he began his immersion by making a list of projects derived from an analysis of its structural properties, the passions that nourish his art lie close to the surface, raw and undigested. Taking the time to understand the forces that briefly erupted in his video work is well worthwhile, for the videotapes provide the only direct expression of the forces contained within the closed, opalescent exteriors of the Thick Paintings, to which Cameron alludes poignantly in his autobiographical essay *English Roots*: "The thickening crust around the core of my Thick Paintings is the objectification of the shell of numbness I have tried to avoid building up around myself. It follows that the life I have lived in my art may, in some ways … have been more real than the life I have lived in the world."[2]

Eric Cameron's videotape production lies – now almost completely obscured – between two bodies of painting: the analytical Process Paintings, which he started before coming to Canada in 1969, and the eccentric and original Thick Paintings he began in Halifax in 1979, which have since become the sole focus of his artistic work. Video at the time was an experimental medium for artists, fostered by the introduction of cheap, portable video recording systems such as the Sony Portapak in the late 1960s. As Beryl Korot and Ira Schneider observed in *Video Art*, an early anthology of artists' statements on the medium, "Artists … for the most part came to work with video as a natural outgrowth of their work with other media," seeing it "as a way to extend the spatial and temporal parameters of their work."[3] This is true also of Cameron's introduction to the medium. In his early published statements on his videotapes, he emphasizes their relationship to his earlier work: "The roots lay in painting and I consciously attempted to formulate an art that would respond to the same strategy and make itself available under the same conditions. I looked for ways of using the camera to generate as a by-product a structure of sound and vision, which might be highly emotive, but would be anchored by the fact of the activity that gave rise to it."[4] He also stressed the theoretical foundations of his work in video: "Everything was worked out in words first, and the words were important." Reflecting on his videotapes much later, Cameron elaborates on this statement: "All of my videotapes at that time, like my earlier Process Paintings, were intended to be 'allographic' in Nelson Goodman's sense, implying a clear distinction between formulated concept and potentially multiple realisations."[5] This principle can perhaps be understood as a variation on Sol LeWitt's now famous observation that, "when all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand…the idea becomes the machine that makes the art."[6] The concept not only

contests received notions of authorship and the uniqueness of the object but also implies an impersonal art. Yet for all the conceptual links between the paintings and the videotapes, in many respects, the video work is the antithesis of what came later. For where the paintings hide, the videotapes reveal, and it is difficult now to see them only as the purely analytical, structural investigations of the medium that Cameron initially intended.

Cameron came to video through teaching. An American colleague at the University of Guelph, where Cameron was the chair of the art department, had introduced a highly successful course in video production to the art students in 1971, and when he returned to the States the following year, Cameron took over the course. His first tapes were made to teach himself the basics of the new medium (he had never used a camera before), and he began by formulating a conceptual program for the work he was about to undertake in a short text, written in August 1972, entitled "Notes for Video Art."[7] Here he posed the question "What can you do with a television camera?" in the context of art-making, rather than television production, and listed several potential projects under such headings as "Contacts," "Insertions," and "Rewinds." Each of these projects had in common with the others that it made the video camera itself an integral actor in the videotape that would result, rather than a passive means of recording an act, and indeed it was this turning the medium upon itself that made the crucial distinction between video as document and video as art for Cameron. The theoretical background that Cameron provided here for these projects – nothing less than an analysis of the condition of modern art and the relationship of video to painting – is also noteworthy. The ideas with the most important implications for his own work that Cameron advanced in this short essay were his emphasis on what he called modern art's "externalization of content," which suggested that his videos would aspire to be self-referential (about the medium) rather than narrative (about people and things), and the various structural prescriptions he introduced with the aim of "deferring the aesthetic decision" as he had in his Process Paintings. The final section of the Notes was headed, with tongue in cheek, "What I Read on my Summer Vacation," reminding the reader of the academic context in which Cameron's video work was born and developed. The back-to-school echoes of the title were amplified by the list that followed, which, apart from a few works on video and Conceptual art, exemplified his interest in structuralist and analytical "language" philosophers such as A. J. Ayer, Noam Chomsky, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. However, while the intellectual atmosphere of the Notes was rarefied, the factual evidence of the videotapes they generated is

all too human in what it betrays about the man who made them. The underlying content of the tapes is sexual desire, although their structure invariably involves mechanisms of containment and control.

The value of Cameron's refusal to separate process and subject, as he has recounted in *Desire and Dread* in relation to his Thick Paintings, was the overcoming of inhibition.[8] Yet, translated from paint into the time- and space-based medium of video, where an awareness of the human actor is a primary aspect of both the artist's and the spectator's experience, the emotional substratum of Cameron's work is communicated clearly, though in ways that are sometimes unresolved and occasionally disturbing. If his artistic production has been structured by "periods of repression and periods of release," as he observed in his 1991 text on the video work, "Sex, Lies, and Lawn Grass," then his view that "the years between 1972 and 1976, during which I produced most of my videotapes, were the only time of unequivocal release I can discern in my art,"[9] would still have to be qualified. Though their erotic content is evident, the videotapes are characterized by an intense struggle between exposure and concealment. The ensuing Thick Paintings also partake of this dynamic but transcend it to communicate something of the universal human condition through their fully embodied objecthood. The video work is more provisional, although his critical engagement with the new medium, both in his art and in his writings, earned Cameron wide recognition in the 1970s. In retrospect, the issues he explored in his videotapes seem a necessary step towards the resolution of the Thick Paintings.

Cameron's extensive, unpublished curriculum vitae contains no videography, and because his "allographic" approach allowed him to return to the same subject several times, essentially remaking a tape with a different protagonist at different moments, or to combine short subjects in longer, quasi-narrative formats, it is difficult to define the corpus of his video work exactly. In addition, the same version of a tape may have different titles. The most complete public collection of his video work, seventeen videotapes dating from 1973[10] to 1981, is held at the National Gallery of Canada, as a result of the transfer of the Art Metropole collection in 1997.[11] Most of the half-hour tapes derived from the projects outlined in his "*Notes for Video Art*" are included (half-an-hour was the standard length of a reel of tape), as well as longer compilations in various alternative groupings of some of his experimental short pieces. Consistent with his desire to approach video in the same way as he had painting, the earlier tapes were not meant to be viewed from beginning to end, but rather as one might look at a painting

in a gallery. Cameron was confident that their "structural basis would become evident in a few seconds, no matter at what point in the tape the viewer came upon it."[12] However, the videotapes do reward the viewer who decides to stay, revealing a unique performance sensibility in which artist, model, camera, and words come together as actors in a laboratory that is part studio – where desire is set aside in the interest of art – and part stage for the unconscious.

The very first videotape Cameron made (in 1972) falls into the category of "Contact" projects listed in "Notes for Video Art," although it was made before the Notes were written. He titled it playfully *Et in Arcadia Id: Sue I, Sue II, Sue III*, substituting the "id" of Freudian psychoanalysis for the "ego" in the inscription on the tombstone depicted in Poussin's famous painting. The piece was made for two monitors. In one tape, he moves the video camera over the model's naked body. The video lasts for a half-hour with no establishing shots to situate the viewer. What one sees is limited to extreme close-ups: bare skin, underarm and pubic hair all confirm the model's nudity but voyeurism is frustrated by the lack of detail. The camera is literally too close. Although the sounds of the lens mount rubbing against the girl's body and the artist's breathing leads to a strongly sexual atmosphere, the viewer is excluded. The video on the other monitor is a companion "Contact" piece subtitled "Titles." In it Cameron circles the perimeter of a room in his house over and over, holding the camera in contact with the walls. Little is revealed, other than a bit of window curtain from time to time and the recurring words *Et in Arcadia Id* stuck to the wall. Indeed, the visual elements of both tapes are so unrevealing they might well be the work of a blind man obliged to explore his world through touch alone! Yet if the work is not about seeing, what is it about? Writing about this work and others made around the same time, Cameron noted, "When the equipment is forced to this extreme, it does not cease to convey information, but it does so in a way that makes the nature of its own intervention the central focus of attention."[13] Thus the camera is effectively blinded, losing its voyeuristic transparency. Unlike Kate Craig's videotape *Delicate Issue*, a work made a few years later in 1979, in which she directs the progress of the camera over her nude body, moving from the relatively public orifices of eye, nose, and ear to her nipples and finally her vagina and anus, deliberately confronting the voyeurism of the spectator, Cameron's camera moves randomly, denying any visual climax – denying, in fact, the desire to see, caress, and hold that would be implied in the situation were it not an artwork. Although the artist claimed at the time that "as primary information these pieces declare no more than the physical structure and context of the apparatus which creates the message it records,"[14] one can

Et in Arcadia Id: Sue I, Sue II and Sue III (Figure) (with Sue Sterling), 1972. Black and white videotape with sound, approx. 30 minutes. Collection of the artist. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

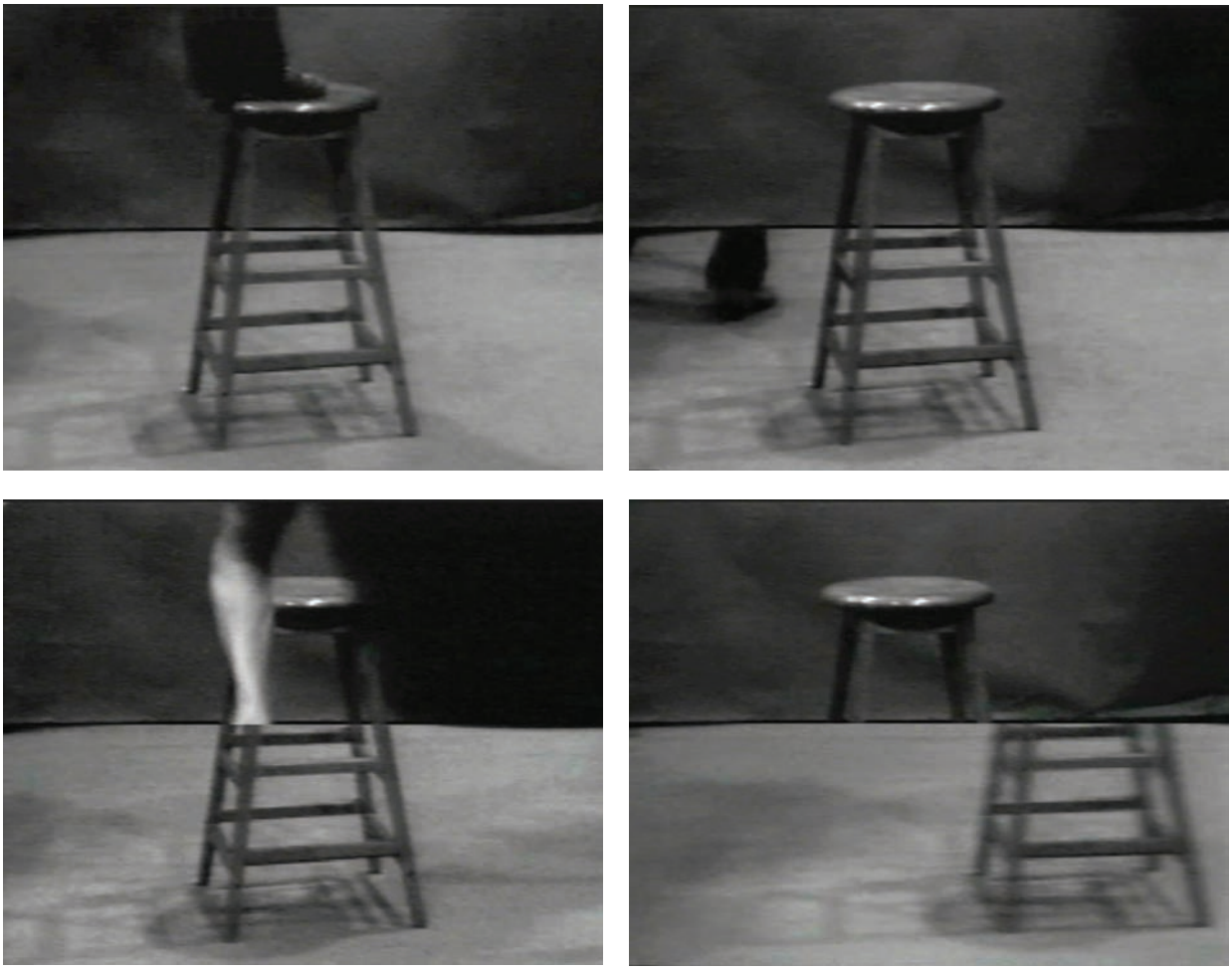
Et in Arcadia Id: Sue I, Sue II and Sue III (Titles), 1972. Black and white videotape, approx. 30 minutes. Collection of the artist. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

also read this work as a demonstration of the sublimation of desire required in the traditional artist/model relationship of the studio. (Sue was a life model in the drawing classes at Guelph.) In this piece the effort is palpable.

The title also demands that we consider the meaning of Arcadia. In Western culture, Arcadia implies a certain sadness; it is a place where life is lived in harmony with nature and its forces which is abandoned with the advent of civilization, and thus the recollection of its pleasures is always tinged with regret. Pinning the words *Et in Arcadia Id* on the bare wall of a child's bedroom (the room is identified in a later tape as his daughter Matilda's) could allude to the Arcadian state of childhood – and the sexual urges that bring it to an end – but it also suggests that the primitive forces of desire that Cameron contacts in this work are locked inside himself, as he is enclosed within the walls of his respectable suburban existence – a life that would be shattered were they to be unleashed.

In the tapes he was making by the mid-1970s, Cameron's domestic circumstances – suburban house, wife, dog, children – intrude regularly into his art activity, which in the videotapes is always figured in terms of the artist and model, but they do so only as a background or an ironic aside, never as the subject of his art. In this, as in other areas of his art, his approach is indirect. A year after the *Arcadia* tapes, Cameron made *Contact Piece: Moving the Camera Against the Inside of a Windowpane*, bringing his home environment into the foreground, but even here the declared subject is the camera's movements. Because the camera lens is focussed on the windowpane itself, not the view outside, the visual information is limited. Instead, sounds capture our attention: a radio playing a popular tune, squabbling children, a baby crying – the world behind the camera – punctuate the relentless scraping of the rubber lens hood against the glass. Did Monet or Velazquez hear something like this as they painted? If so, they would have heard it while painting the view out the window, so to speak, whereas it is the surface of the window and the envelope of the room that capture Cameron's attention. Surface will be just as important years later when the Thick Paintings become his focus, but instead of being imprisoned by his everyday world as this video poignantly implies, he will be able to go down to his basement studio when his calm is threatened, strip to the waist and listen to Schoenberg while applying half-coats of gesso to the steadily growing shell of paint around the ordinary things inside.

It would be wrong to suggest that there is anything escapist or passive about Cameron's art, however, be it the videotapes or the Thick Paintings. In both, he puts himself to the test



Sto/ol, 1974. Black and white videotape with sound, 10 seconds (four views). Collection of the artist. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

– human tests for the most part in the case of the video work. The intensive, physical element of performance, which is important but for the most part hidden in the case of the paintings, comes to the fore in the video work, where it is frequently paired with his manipulation of specific structural aspects of the medium. A good example may be found in the short tape titled *Sto / ol* (1974), in which the artist experiments with a split-screen effect, shooting a single stool with two cameras located on opposite sides of a room. He has expertly masked the seam where the two images joined in the resulting video image, disguising it at the juncture of the wall and the floor, halfway up the height of the stool, so as to merge the two points of view in a single image. Originally conceiving the ten-second tape as a demonstration of the gap between the world as we know it and as it is seen, Cameron planned to jump over the stool, appearing to split himself in half in the process. Instead, he ran into one of the cameras on the way back, crying out in pain, and causing the top half of the stool to swing away from the bottom. Still, he recognized with satisfaction that this unintended result allowed the visual "irrationality of the action," as he put it, to "interlock … with that of the image structure,"[15] but it took him many months of presumably painful practice to reproduce the effect he sought.

The performance element is more explicit in two "Insertion" pieces. The earlier tape is *Insertion (My Mouth)*, which the critic Peggy Gale considered "quintessential for the moment" of early video in Canada in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the influence of Conceptual art was predominant.[16] In the final, thirty-minute version from 1973, the artist inserts the video camera lens into his mouth, then removes it, repeating this action until the tape runs out, in accordance with his decision to "defer the determination of the length of my tapes" to the standard length of a reel of tape.[17] Gale aptly describes the work as "a sexual metaphor without erotic content,"[18] but the orality of the video medium, which erases the distance between spectator and performer, is vividly demonstrated by the repeated plunges into the darkness of the oral cavity recorded by the camera, alternating with the image of the artist's drool glistening on its lens.

The quasi-infantile sexuality of these images of the artist swallowing the camera lens is fully eroticized in *Ha-Ha*, a short piece performed by Cameron and a female model that concludes *Numb Bares I* (1976), perhaps the most successful of several of compilation tapes made in the mid-1970s in which he experimented with narrative structure. *Numb Bares* aims for an "aesthetic/expressive and also 'technological' unity,"[19] bringing an impressive array of technical effects to the service of the twenty short videos (each with its own title) that together cast

Ha-ha (with Donna Perrin), ca. 1973–74. Black and white videotape with sound, 3 minutes (two views). Collection of the artist. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

an ironic glance at his sexual fantasies while demonstrating his growing virtuosity with the medium to those familiar with its challenges. In his article "Structural Videotape in Canada," written around the time he shot *Numb Bares I*, Cameron discusses the ramifications of the "pervasive dualism of video" and concludes that, while the work coming out of Toronto at the time "always leans toward the side of inner experience," his own "aims to resolve the dualism in favour of reasonable understanding."[20] However, the detached stance of his process-oriented video works was already crumbling when he wrote these words. *Numb Bares* reveals a dualism that is as much psychological – evident in the tension between sexual desire and repressive control that characterizes it – as it is structural.

The breakdown of the vaunted structural lock on the real-life issues that Cameron was grappling with can already be seen in the opening chapter of this pivotal work, *Behind Bars*, in which a split-second image of the artist slapping a girl's bare bottom followed by her cry of "Ouch!" is inserted into the test image. By convention the bars are the video medium's equivalent of a picture frame – not part of the artwork itself – but here they are drawn into the narrative, briefly introducing the repressed sexual content that threatens to force its way into the open and metaphorically screening it from our eyes. The title *Numb Bares* (a saucy double entendre for "numbers" in a counting rhyme that two bare-bottomed models recite at different points in the tape) alerts us to the punning structure of the entire video, which pairs various technical effects and procedures such as mixed images, split screen, false continuity, and editing with sexual fantasies fleetingly alluded to under the cover of childhood games. However, as much as it points to the confessional nature of the subject matter, the title can also be understood as a comment – perhaps unintended – on the emotional tone of the piece. Whether or not numbness was the defining emotion of the twentieth century, as Cameron has speculated,[21] it is certainly characteristic of the repressed desire whose signs we see clearly in the narrative tapes.

Ha Ha is the only one of the short videos in *Numb Bares I* in which sexual suggestion goes beyond the one-sided, masculine fantasy of the "what I would like to do to her" type and begins to convey something of the erotic mutuality of sexual intercourse. Ironically, it involves no contact. To make it, Cameron and his female model sat in front of two video cameras about five feet apart, facing the same way so that they could both look at a single video monitor. Each had the small, wide-angle lens of the camera in his/her mouth and as the tape begins the screen is blank. Then she pulls back and begins laughing and he follows suit. As they

laugh, the images of their open mouths overlap. Eventually, their forced laughter degenerates into loud, rhythmically alternating cries of "Ha!" as each pulls back, then lunges forward to swallow the lens. Suddenly but briefly their voices blend in an orgasmic climax, echoing the unmistakeably sexual thrusting movement recorded by the two cameras. Yet, as Cameron notes, their union is an illusion: "The sense of lustful frenzy is very strong indeed, but what we are doing in the studio involves no contact between us and not the slightest smidgen of sexual arousal. It is all generated by the process, by the manipulation of the technology."[22]

Ha Ha is the concluding sequence in *Numb Bares I*, and this position gives it weight. But the structural dynamic to which Cameron alludes when he wrote, "If powerful real-life issues impinge, the tape also locks back more determinedly on its own structure,"[23] is most perfectly balanced in an earlier chapter, about three-quarters of the way through *Numb Bares*. In *Keeping Marlene out of the Picture*, the psychological taboo against expressing his sexual attraction to the young women who worked as models in the art classes is paired with the artistic taboo (in early video) against editing. Cameron consciously gets around the latter (while giving unconscious expression to the former) by making the editing process itself the subject of the tape, achieving a hilarious, and quite brilliant, fusion of technical effect and content. Having set his camera up in the lobby of the library at the University of Guelph, a banal public space with a potted plant, a door, and a chair, he had a young woman walk around for a long while, entering and exiting through the door and occasionally sitting in the chair. In the studio he then attempted to edit out her image. The result is not an empty room but a playful game of hide and seek, full of glimpsed shadows, slamming doors and echoing footsteps. The more the artist tries to repress her, the more Marlene eludes him, flitting around the room with the hapless editor, as it were, in close pursuit. Cameron acknowledges the humour of the situation with the closing title, its initial "K" askew, superimposed on an empty room: suddenly Marlene walks in front of the camera, brushing all but two "O"s away. They hover like a voyeur's eyes over the empty room; then a single "O" and a "K" come together in silent acknowledgment of defeat.

Cameron made three *Numb Bares* tapes before he left the University of Guelph for Halifax, where he began teaching at NSCAD in 1976, and it may have been his imminent departure that allowed him to contemplate making *Numb Bares III*, the last of his videos with explicit sexual content.[24] To my knowledge, it has never been publicly shown. In a letter, he wrote:

Keeping Marlene out of the Picture (with Marlene Hoff), ca. 1975. Black and white videotape with sound, 3 minutes (three views). Collection of the artist. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

> It represents the final bursting through of obsession, utterly contradicting the detached (as I thought at the time) formal, technical, procedural, structural, semiological stance of my earliest video production, though it too is still locked into the video process, but in a way that seems to give even more sinister force to its explosive psychological tensions. I can understand very well why you and others should find it repellent, but for anyone interested in understanding the psychological base out of which my whole art production is born it is absolutely required reading, as I think you realised.[25]

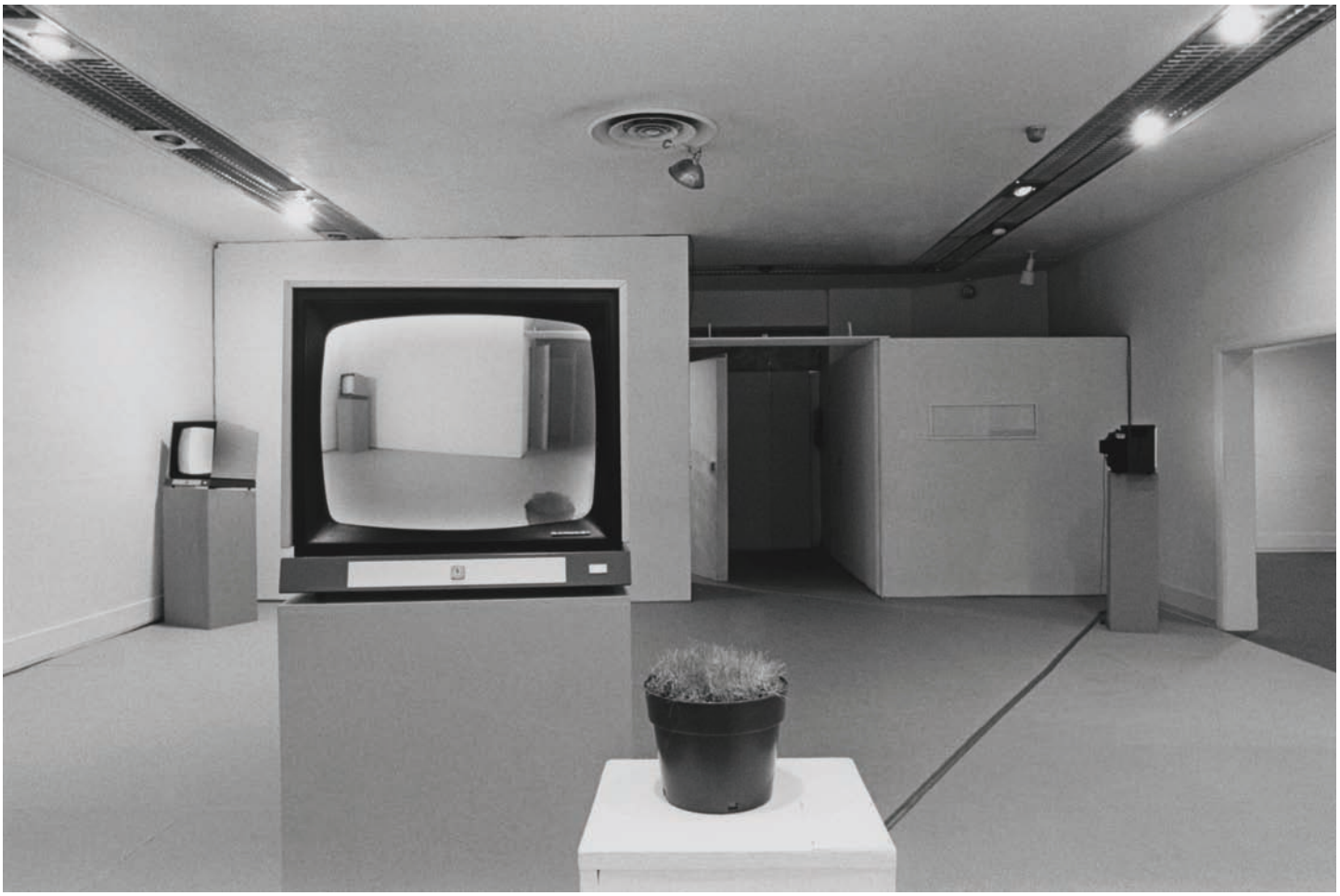
The tape lasts twenty minutes and, in a single, repeated sequence, determinedly unveils what the other two works try to hide: the artist's sexual obsession with spanking. Unlike *Numb Bares I* and *II*, in which the model seems to have the upper hand or is at least playfully complicit in the suggestively sexual scenarios, here it is the artist who assumes control. The cold, methodical deliberateness with which he readies the recording equipment and calls out instructions to an unseen technician and, later, the compulsive violence of his slaps to the model's bare bottom, which continue even after she cries out to him to stop, do indeed repel. If the work stops short of pornography, it is only because it (paradoxically) takes account of the model's humanity. The tape opens with her recollections of being punished by spanking as a child and concludes with her talking about the humiliation, pain, and confusion she feels, while the camera shows the angry imprint of Cameron's hand on her naked bottom – an emblem of mortification and guilt, not sexual pleasure.

After the move to Halifax, Cameron made only two independent videotapes and neither is sexual in nature. He has said that the atmosphere at NSCAD was far too puritan to tolerate such goings-on, and it is likely too that the rise of feminist consciousness, well developed at the college, intimidated him. On a deeper level, the detached, self-reflexive art he had aimed for in his experiments with video had been overwhelmed by the intensity of the emotions, as the final version of *Numb Bares* proves, and he began to search for a more indirect form of expression. Looking back on his videotapes and the beginnings of his Thick Paintings in 1979, he would later admit, "there was certainly a more rigorously repressive intention to put all that behind me when I committed myself to my final project."[26] Video continued to play a more or less prominent role in his installations through the late 1970s and early 1980s, but

the confessional element that had become so significant in the Guelph tapes was increasingly shifted to his writing, which now focussed primarily on his own work.

The first of the installations, an expanded version for three monitors of *Keeping Marlene Out of the Picture*, was shown at the Vancouver Art Gallery and the National Gallery of Canada in 1978 as *Keeping Marlene Out of the Picture – and Lawn*. Cameron re-shot the original video in the gallery space in which the work was to be presented, thus setting up a window or mirror effect in the gallery. The monitors were placed facing away from one another and from the centre of the room, obliging spectators to walk about the space to view the individual screens, echoing as they did so the movements of the model, whose footsteps could be heard, although her image – edited out of the tapes as in the original single-channel video – remained elusive. The pot of lawn grass acted as a decoy, something to attend to in the absence of the object (Marlene) sought by the viewer. In his talk at the opening of the exhibition, Cameron described the activity of watering the lawn as a zone of freedom from domestic interruptions that permitted him to reflect upon his art while appearing to be occupied. In the installations that followed, up until *Divine Comedy*, the pot of lawn grass remained – an oblique symbol of the obsessions he wished to put behind him (in his talk at the art gallery he observed cryptically, "There are certain exclusions that take place within one's way of life, if one is a respectable academic."[27]) – but the human presence was edited out entirely. Only in the *Divine Comedy* installation does it make a brief return, in the sounds of women laughing that filled the gallery where the Thick Paintings were exhibited, each time a visitor opened the door to the room. Nancy Tousley wrote a short but insightful review of this installation, in which she observed, "Mocking, unsettling, veering toward pain, the dark laughter has a visceral effect.… It was absurd, uncomfortable, abstract laughter that in some of the tapes sounds most like dry racking sobs."[28] She linked the laughter to the disorder of lived experience, periodically intruding on the ordered installation of the Thick Paintings – white, frozen objects mysteriously poised between the organic and inorganic worlds – and saw the installation as "a meeting place [enjoining] acceptance of the forces that circumscribe our lives and compassion for the shared suffering that the laughter implicates in the equation."[29]

To many viewers, however, the complex installation framing the Thick Paintings in *Divine Comedy* (which in addition to the periodic eruptions of laughter involved projected slides of earlier versions of the objects, visible in the darkness that engulfed the gallery each time a visitor opened the door to enter) was at best a bewildering distraction, interfering with their



Keeping Marlene out of the Picture – and Lawn, 1978. Installation view; *Eric Cameron/ Noel Harding: Two Audio-Visual Constructs*, Vancouver Art Gallery, January 15 – February 12, 1978. Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery.

contemplation of the Thick Paintings in their cases. Another critic writing about the exhibition referred with irritation to the "infernal, uncontrollable mechanism" that viewers set in action on opening the door to the installation and speculated that the artist was afraid to surrender his "mute but highly significant objects" to the "uncontrolled interpretation of the profane spectator."[30] Olivier Asselin was right to place the emphasis in his interpretation on control and its lack, though his implied opposition of sacred and profane seems misdirected. It is surely not the visitor Cameron fears, for he has made us integral to his installation and left many clues to his meaning, albeit obscured by the indirect manner of their delivery, as is usual in his work. One of these may be found on the dust jacket of the book that accompanied the exhibition. There, in guise of illustration are two pages taken from an old edition of Dante Alighieri's first and last cantos of *The Divine Comedy*. On the front cover we can read these lines from Hell:

> …. See the beast, from whom I fled.
> O save me from her, thou illustrious sage!
> For every vein and pulse throughout my frame
> She hath made tremble.…

On the back, from Paradise, these are written:

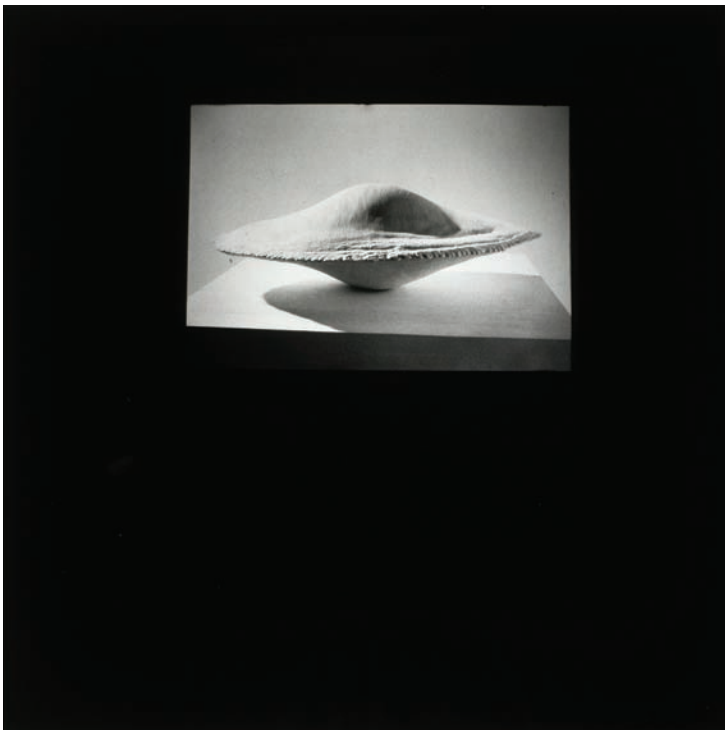
> Wondering I gazed; and admiration still
> Was kindled as I gazed. It may not be,
> That one, who looks upon that light, can turn
> To other object, willingly, his view.[31]

Could this be the artist, who having repressed the sexual urges to which he had given expression in the videos now bathes his Thick Paintings in blinding light? If so, the women's laughter breaking the contemplative silence of the installation is truly both mocking and suffering, and the periodic plunges into darkness a sign of the irrepressibility of the everyday world and the desires that are part of it.

Cameron returned to the subject of women in a later installation, tellingly named *Exposer/Cacher*[32] or, in English, *Exposed/Concealed*, in which he laid bare the dynamic at the

Eric Cameron: Divine Comedy. View of the entrance to the exhibition. National Gallery of Canada, January 5 – February 25, 1990. Photo: National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Eric Cameron: Divine Comedy. Installation view with *Light* in the foreground, National Gallery of Canada, January 5 – February 25, 1990. Photo: National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



Eric Cameron: Divine Comedy. Installation view with slide-projection of *Brushstroke*, National Gallery of Canada, January 5 – February 25, 1990. Photo: National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Eric Cameron: Divine Comedy. View of the exhibition exit, National Gallery of Canada, January 5 – February 25, 1990. Photo: National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Eric Cameron: Exposer/Cacher (Exposed/Concealed). Installation view with circle of seven monitors, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, October 22 – December 5, 1993. Courtesy Médiathèque/MACM. Photo: Denis Farley.

core of his work as an artist. Once again, he worked with a paid model, recalling the studio relationship of his videotapes. In a conversation with a model in one of the early compilation videos, he suggests a connection between modelling and prostitution – a notion that some might find quaintly old-fashioned – and he does so again in the essay that accompanied the initial installation of *Exposer/Cacher*, where he wonders in advance of hiring her, what sort of woman would agree to expose herself to the sort of scrutiny he had in mind. The project would recall the licentiousness traditionally associated with the studio,[33] were it not for the scruples Cameron expresses regarding both her physical exposure and the corresponding psychological exposure he expects to feel. He planned to photograph every orifice of her body, in black and white and in colour, and then cover the unexposed rolls of film with layers of paint. The progress of the paintings – but not the photo session – was documented on video, and these were later shown, together with the paintings (one was designated a Thin Painting (Having Been Discontinued) and left behind at Arles, while the other, a Thick Painting, he later took home with him) in an exhibition whose structural details were all carefully worked out in advance and therefore were part of the concept of the work. On the evening of the opening, there were to be seven monitors, all facing inward, in a circle around the pedestals on which the paintings sat. Visitors who wanted to view their screens – and perhaps catch a glimpse of the model's orifices themselves (although in this they were bound to be disappointed!) – were thus obliged to bob and crane and generally make a spectacle of themselves, while for his part the artist planned to expose himself to similar scrutiny by inexpertly riding his bicycle in and around the stands on which the monitors were placed.

The inadvertently slapstick aspect of this installation is consistent with the theme of incompetence (or imperfection) that runs through so much of Cameron's writing on his work. In his essay he tells us that he is not certain of getting a decent image (not that he ever plans to develop the film, but there is a possibility that someone else might, and he takes precautions to protect the canister of unexposed film from the dampness of the paint he covers it with) because he has no confidence in his ability to operate the camera. Similarly, he says he is afraid he will not be able to ride the bicycle around the installation and may end up having to walk it, and, although he fears his French is far from adequate, he is studying the language in Calgary so as to be able to answer questions from the visitors at Arles. Even so, he misunderstands the artist Sylvie Blocher when she observes, rightly, that far more important than what his paintings conceal is what they reveal about him. Looking back, one finds similar confessions

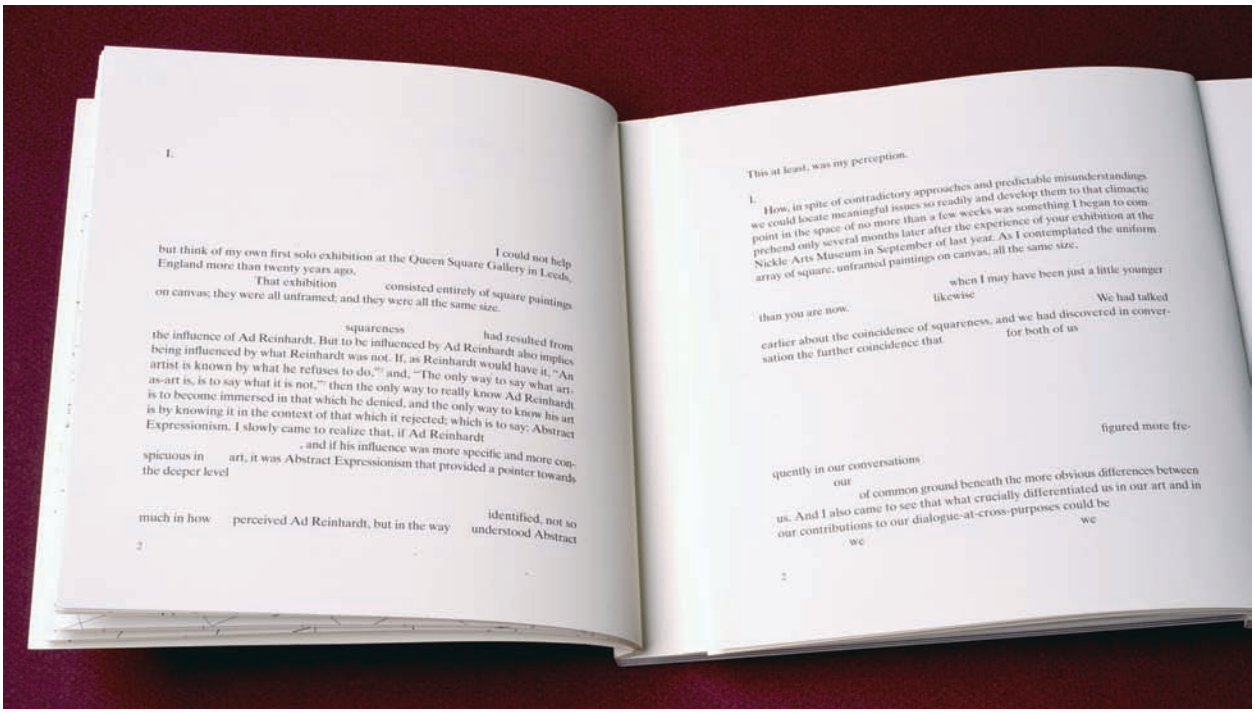
Eric Cameron: Exposer/Cacher (Exposed/Concealed). Installation view with Eric Cameron in the act of painting (on monitor) and thick painting (foreground), Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, October 22 – December 5, 1993. Courtesy Médiathèque/MACM. Photo: Denis Farley.

Exposed/Concealed: Salima Halladj (1452). 1993 – present (to be continued). Acrylic gesso and acrylic on undeveloped roll of film, 12.7 x 20.3 x 6.4 cm, as of January 17, 1995. Collection of the artist. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

of inadequacy in the earlier writings, going back to his art school days. Of the artists he most admires, he lacks Pollock's ability to harness the viscerally expressive physical qualities of paint, or the capacity for denial that informs Reinhardt's radically reductive canvases, and, while he shares Duchamp's recognition of eroticism as the central motivation of his art, he lacks the cerebral detachment that informs the French artist's work. In part, Cameron's catalogue of inadequacies may be a reflection of his self-conscious immersion in an academic environment for most of his life. But as he has acknowledged, it is also a defensive and thus a concealing device.[34]

And here is the paradox of Eric Cameron's art, of which I have traced only the threads that run through his video and installation works: every gesture of concealment, whether the coded structure of his videotapes or the oblique access he offers to his installations, is equalled and arguably exceeded by the intimate revelations offered up elsewhere in his art and his writings. It is made clear, for instance, by any attempt to read the twin volumes published as *Squareness:* and *An Open Letter to Pamela King* (issued separately in 1993 but originally written as a single essay) in which the words missing from the blank, censored sections on the pages of one volume are to be found in the exact same location in the other, that concealment and exposure must be taken together as parts of a single whole.

In his essay on "Tradition and Individual Talent" from which both Marcel Duchamp and Cameron have quoted what he had to say about the sources of art, T.S. Eliot expounds his 'impersonal' theory of poetry, dealing with the poem's relation to both tradition and to its author. For Eliot, the mind of the poet is a catalyst, in which the various emotions of lived experience are combined and transmuted, when the right moment comes, into a new compound. What matters, he argues, is not "the intensity of the emotions … but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place."[35] "The emotion of art is impersonal," according to Eliot; "it has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet."[36] In most of his art, especially the Thick Paintings, Cameron has suppressed personal emotion or approached it indirectly. Impersonality is also a value he uses to measure the artists he admires, as his comment on the painter Lawrence Gowing suggests: "It is precisely because of the rigour of this self-imposed detachment that indications of his complex feelings for the subject before him come through with such authentic power."[37] And yet, as he observes of his own work, he had "stumbled on a way of art-making that made a virtue of hiding, of concealment, only to realise the urge to reveal was too strong."[38]



The matching pages from *Squareness* and *An Open Letter to Pamela King* aligned. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

In the video work in particular, personal feelings, especially sexual desire, though ostensibly controlled by Cameron's structural approach to the medium, constantly threaten to replace his avowed impersonal subject, whilst the meanings contained in the seemingly unemotional Thick Paintings are illuminated by the deeply personal confessions of his later writing.

Earlier I noted that for Cameron one of the key developments of modern art is "the externalization of content – the inversion of art's traditional frame of reference,"[39] and, indeed, much of his own art derives its conviction from its acknowledgment of and dialogue with the external forces that shape the material with which he is working, whether videotape and recording equipment, or brush and paint. Eventually, he became reconciled to the fact that it also drew, with equal power, on inner forces of desire and dread. I think it is through the oft-lamented 'imperfections', the artist's inability to exert perfect control over these forces – most visible in the video work – that one understands "the pressure … under which the fusion takes place" between personal feeling and aesthetic emotion in Cameron's art. As the video work makes abundantly evident, it owes as much of its meaningfulness to its eloquent revelations of the limits of power and the deceptions of desire that are part of the human condition.

Notes

1 T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and Individual Talent," in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen,1957), p. 54, cited in Eric Cameron, *Squareness:* (Lethbridge: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1993), p. 40.

2 Eric Cameron, *English Roots* (Lethbridge: University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, 2001), p. 125.

3 Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot, eds., *Video Art: An Anthology* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), p. 3.

4 Eric Cameron, untitled statement, in Schneider and Korot, *Video Art*, p. 26.

5 Eric Cameron, letter to the author, 11 November 2005.

6 Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford, U.K., and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), p. 834.

7 Eric Cameron, *Sex, Lies, and Lawn Grass & Notes for Video Art* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1991).

8 Eric Cameron, "Why I Was So Pleased," in *Desire and Dread* (Calgary: Muttart Public Art Gallery, 1998), p. 22.

9 Cameron, *Sex, Lies, and Lawn Grass and Notes for Video Art*, p. 1.

10 According to the videography that Cameron compiled at my request late in 2005, the earliest tapes – *Et in Arcadia Id: Sue I, Sue II and Sue III (Figure)* and the companion *Titles* tape, meant to play on a separate monitor, were made in 1972, not 1973 as is indicated in the National Gallery's records. Cameron's date is based on his recollection that these tapes were already in existence when he wrote his "Notes for Video Art" on 14 August 1972.

11 Cameron recounts the story of how his tapes came to be in the Art Metropole collection as follows: "Susan Watterson, who was at Art Metropole then, explained that Art Metropole could get money from the Ontario Arts Council for every tape donated. They apparently needed money pretty badly as she asked me to help. I suppose I must have just parcelled up everything I could find and sent it off" (letter to the author, 7 September 2007). The transfer was a deposit rather than a transfer of title in order to respect the original contract between the artists and Art Metropole. Media Arts curator Jean Gagnon subsequently contacted each of the artists represented in order to obtain the title and the play rights. The correspondence between Gagnon and Cameron constituted the first steps towards a videography of Cameron's work in the medium.

12 Cameron, in Schneider and Korot,*Video Art*, p. 26.

13 Eric Cameron, "Videotape, & the University Art Programme," *Studio International* 187, no. 967 (June 1974): 290.

14 Ibid.

15 Cameron, in Schneider and Korot, *Video Art*, p. 27.

16 Peggy Gale, "A History in Four Moments," in Janine Marchessault, ed., *Mirror Machine: Video and Identity*, p. 57 (Toronto: YYZ Books & The Centre for Research on Canadian Cultural Industries and Institutions, 1995).

17 Cameron, "Notes for Video Art," p. 19.

18 Gale, "A History in Four Moments," p. 58.

19 Eric Cameron, "Videography," letter to the author, 11 November 2005, p. 7.

20 Eric Cameron, "Structural Videotape in Canada," in Schneider and Korot, *Video Art*, p. 195.

21 Cameron, "Videography," pp. 13–14.

22 Unpublished annotated videography, 2005.

23 Eric Cameron in Schneider and Korot, *Video Art*, p. 26.

24 In 1998 he made *Touching Ronya* for an exhibition of a group of recent Thick Paintings, titled *Eric*

Cameron: Exposed/Concealed, curated by Christina Ritchie at the Art Gallery of Ontario. However, this is essentially a remake of an earlier video, *Contact Piece: A Nude Model (Donna)*.

25 Eric Cameron, letter to the author, 11 November 2005.

26 Eric Cameron, "Oedipus and Sol LeWitt," in *Divine Comedy* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1990), p. 32.

27 Eric Cameron, "Keeping Marlene Out of the Picture – and Lawn," Ted Lindberg, *Eric Cameron / Noel Harding: Two Audio-Visual Constructs* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1978), n.p.

28 Nancy Tousley, "Divine Comedy," *Canadian Art*, 8, no. 1 (1991): 60. As one of the curators of the exhibition (Shirley Madill was the other), I was one of the first women whose laughter Cameron recorded. I still remember the torturous effort of laughing at nothing for ten straight minutes. I suppose the laughter could have been recorded in several takes, but Cameron insisted that the recording be uninterrupted, perhaps to force the sounds emitted away from the mimetic into the purely abstract.

29 Ibid.

30 Olivier Asselin, "Eric Cameron," *Parachute* 59 (1990): 30; author's translation.

31 Eric Cameron, *Divine Comedy* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1990).

32 The initial installation, realized as part of an artist's residency at the École Nationale de la Photographie (please note that this name is capitalized according to the punctuation rules used in France; the name of the school is always written this way and not without capitals as it would be in Canada) at Arles in 1993 was shown later the same year, with slight modifications, at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Five years later, another version of the exhibition, with an English title, took place at the Art Gallery of Ontario. His last video, *Touching Ronya*, was included in the latter presentation.

33 A well-known example of the theme of the licentiousness of the studio may be found in the etchings that comprise Picasso's *Vollard Suite*.

34 Eric Cameron, *EXPOSED/CONCEALED: (Notes for a project and installation at the École Nationale de la Photographie, Arles)*, unpublished English manuscript, 1992, p. 18.

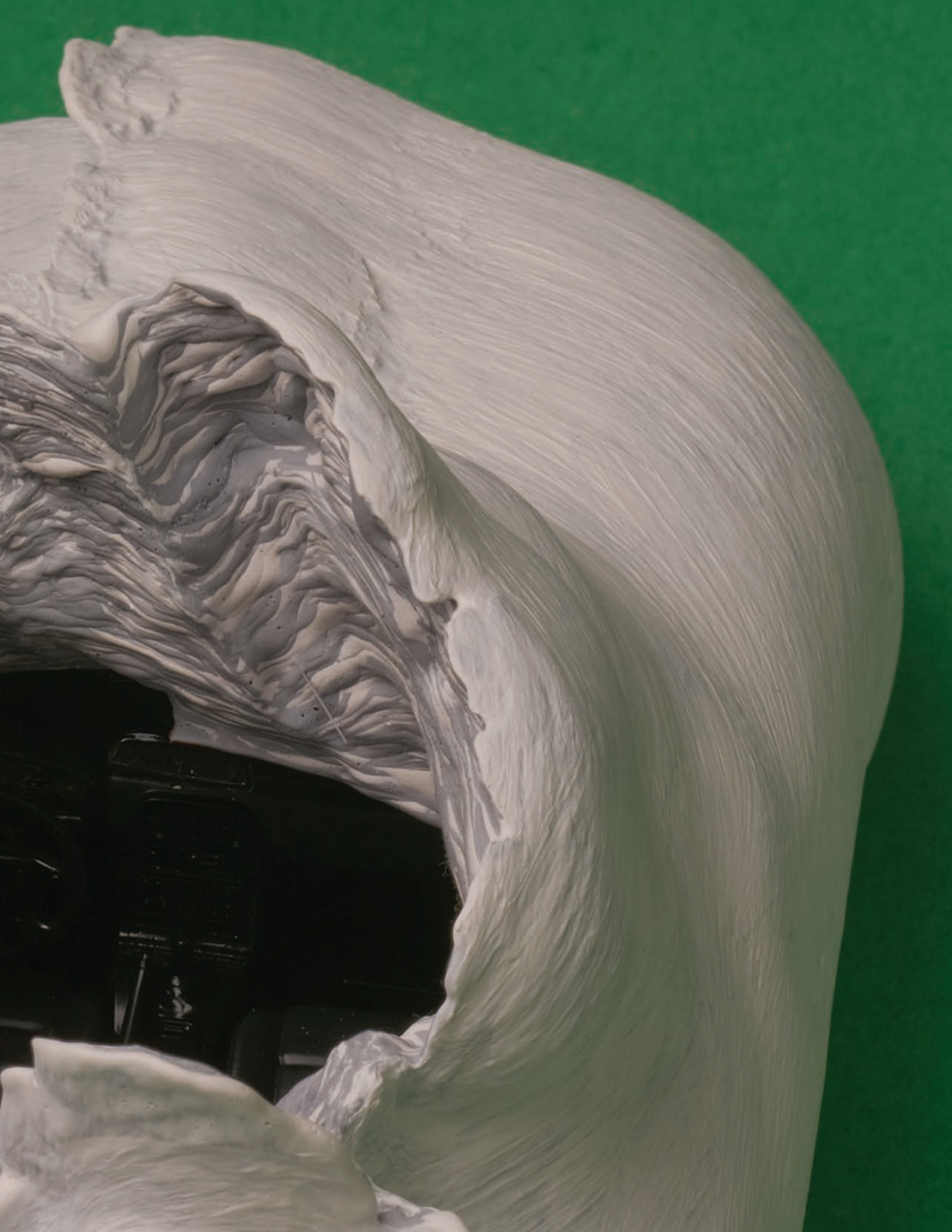
35 Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, p. 55.

36 Ibid., p. 59.

37 Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 89.

38 Ibid., p. 5.

39 Cameron, "Notes for Video Art," p. 18.



SOME PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ERIC CAMERON'S "ROUTINE EXTREMISM"

Thierry de Duve

> Pension, income, *when finally one has absolutely no reason not to work, is the exact time to begin*
> ideal
> finished
> One lives after one is through painting what one is painting
> After one
> *One lives after there is no more painting to be done*
> one has been painted out
> after the paintings have been painted out
>
> – Ad Reinhardt, "Routine Extremism"

According to Eric Cameron, first comes Pollock, then Duchamp, and then Reinhardt. These are the three artists of the twentieth century he singles out because they have best shown how art may come "to justify the inevitability of its particular forms."[1] This phrase, quoted out of context from Clement Greenberg, sums up the maxim that Cameron has given himself for his own art and by which he assesses the art of others: a work of art worthy of the name *must* be such as it *is* effectively; its form is only justified if it is felt to be inevitable. Of the three artists, Ad Reinhardt stands on the lowest rung of the ladder as the one who brings to bear the test of inevitability vis-à-vis the tradition of art and does not step outside it; Duchamp outstrips him for broadening the criterion to society; and Pollock is superior to both because he extends it still further to nature.[2] One can approve this hierarchical ranking of the artists and still find enigmatic the precedence granted to nature over society and art, more especially as, in

M'sMMM for TdeD – for Thierry de Duve (700) (detail), 2005–2009, acrylic gesso and acrylic on model car, 700 half-coats as of August 23, 2007, 8.89 x 19.05 x 8.26 cm. Collection of Thierry de Duve. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

the final analysis, this precedence must be credited to art. Cameron's thesis is that Pollock is superior because his drip reveals the physical forces that have determined *inevitably* the form of the work in the smallest detail of its interlaces and spatters, and because that is *justified*.

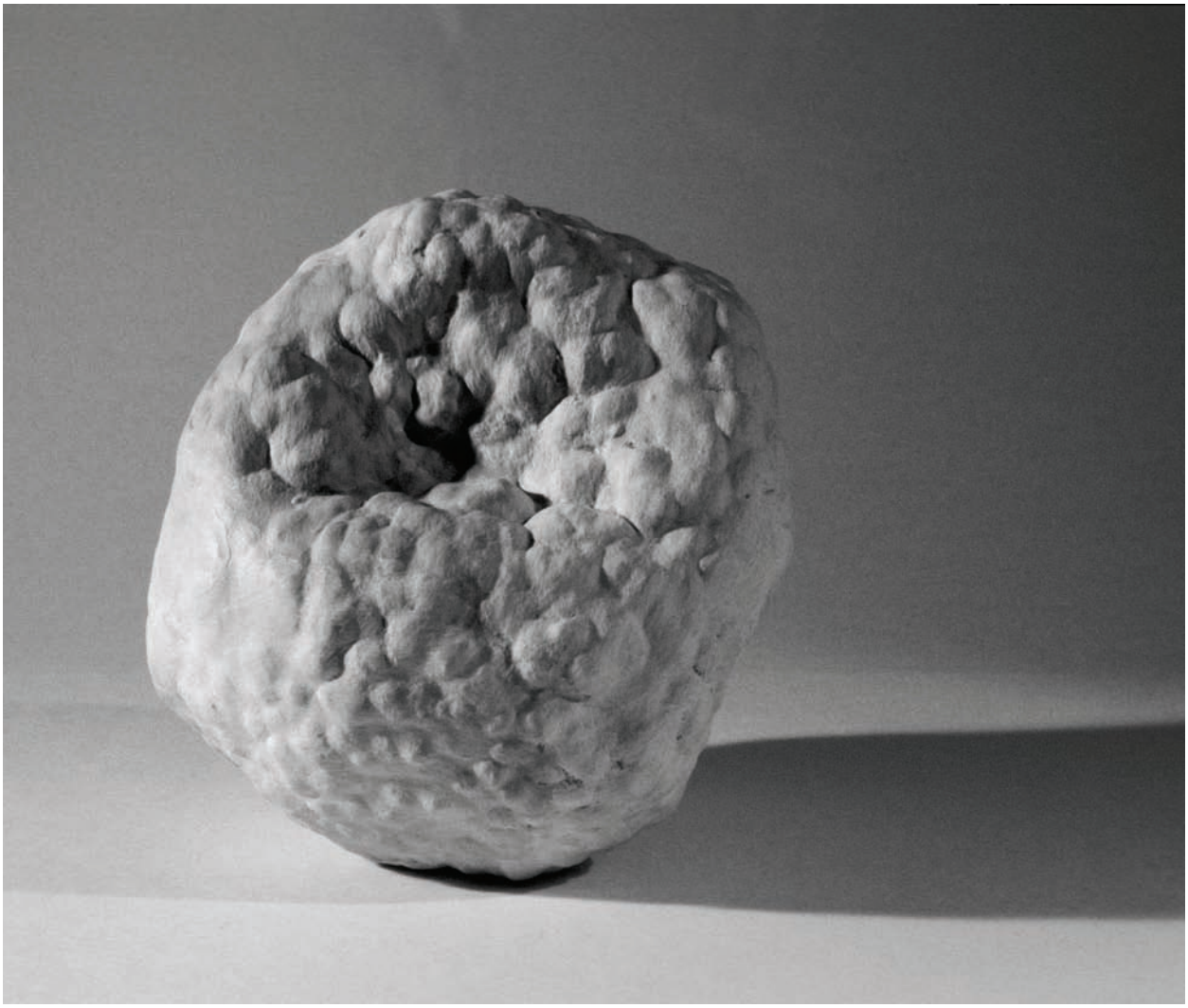
Let us underline the strangeness of such a conception of art. It runs counter to practically all aesthetic thinking, and certainly to modernist art criticism. Others might have celebrated in Pollock his "exuberance and vitality" (Robert Coates), the "restless complexity" of "an art of impulse and chance" (Meyer Schapiro), the "rythms that dance in disturbing degrees of intensity, ecstatically energizing the powerful image in an almost hypnotic way" (Robert Goodnough), or, again, the "pure calligraphic metaphor for a ravaging aggressive virility" (Sam Hunter).[3] All these comments refer Pollock's art to his personality and, insofar as they invoke inevitability, locate it in the overwhelming demands of the artist's subjectivity. The inevitability that Cameron admires in Pollock is the trivial determinism resulting from the laws of physics. It would be trivial, indeed, to point out that, given the kinetic energy of Pollock's arm, the orientation of his movement, the distance between his hand and the canvas laid out on the floor, the viscosity of the pigment, and the law of gravity, it was inevitable, in hindsight, that a particular arabesque in *Autumn Rhythm* should have taken exactly the form it did. Why is that trace alone of the arabesque justified, when it would have been just as inevitable, though quite different, if a single one of these parameters had shifted a mere iota? Moreover, why is the inevitable in need of justification? Why is it the task of art to provide it? To whom or to what – to the artist, to his work, to his "philosophy" – does it fall to justify the inevitable? One cannot take Cameron's maxim seriously without raising questions of this kind, or suspecting that they address aesthetics with still larger and deeper ones.

One

Eric Cameron tells us that the origins of his Thick Paintings (to be continued*)* can be traced back to a sunny afternoon in the spring of 1979, when he started applying successive coats of white acrylic gesso to a book of matches, a telephone directory, and a pair of shoes. To these objects, chosen "with a deliberate casualness,"[4] others, drawn from his everyday environment, were added in the following weeks: an alarm clock, an apple, a beer bottle, a cup with saucer and spoon, a paper bag, an empty box of soap pads, an ice tray, an egg and then another, a

horse chestnut, a Maynards Wine Gums box with two wine gums still in it, a rose, a chair, a desk lamp, two small lobsters, a mackerel and a lettuce. This uncanny inventory soon comprised twenty-seven objects (if a dead fish or an iceberg lettuce can be thought of as objects), including a single shoe encased in some fifty coats of gesso, and just left like that. As for the twenty-six others, the artist decided to continue applying coat after coat on them, on a daily basis as far as possible, until one of the three following outcomes occurred: 1) a museum decided to acquire a piece;[5] 2) a piece was weakened by the weight of the gesso with which it was covered; 3) the artist died, or became too handicapped by age to carry on working.

This program, as simple as it is rigorous, has been pursued for the last thirty-odd years, with a total of some five thousand half-coats being applied to thirty or so objects each year. (It is the number of half-coats that is recorded because the artist has to let an object dry after painting one side before turning it over to paint the other.) The decision was quickly made to alternate coats of grey and white, so that the working process would be more readily visible. The object returns to its initial whiteness at the end of each cycle of four half-coats, and no object is ever allowed to leave the studio in the middle of a cycle. Over the course of time, some pieces have been sold or donated to museums, making room for new ones; and work on a number of others has been spaced out in order to slow down the rate of growth. One piece was radically modified, partly due to a problem of fragility, but also because it was taking on "a gratuitous complexity" that no longer justified its form.[6] This was *Light*, the desk lamp, from which the gesso that had previously covered the light bulb, the lampshade, the goose-neck and part of the square base was removed. The cut-away gesso and the penknife that was used to carve it away gave rise to a new piece called *Residue Plus Penknife*. Do I need to point out that the penknife in question had belonged to the artist's father? Or that the lamp in question was that of the artist's son Edwin, for whom he started painting the second egg the day he made off with his lamp? Or that a number of pieces (for example, *Gregory's Present* and *Chloë's Brown Sugar*) made use of gifts received from relatives? Or that the identity of the object contained in *Identified Object* will never be revealed to the audience it addresses? All of these pieces find an echo in the final line of T.S. Eliot's final poem: "These are private words addressed to you in public."[7] Whether or not motivated by "deliberate casualness" (note the oxymoron), the reasons for selecting a given object to make a Thick Painting are always intensely subjective and personal – off-program, one might say.



Lettuce (1076), begun 1979, acrylic gesso and acrylic on lettuce, 1076 half-coats as of November 25, 1979, 20.32 x 20.32 x 20.32 cm approximately. Collection of the artist. Photo: Eric Cameron.

Lettuce (10,196), begun 1979, acrylic gesso and acrylic on lettuce, 10,196 half-coats as of April 18, 2008. 44.45 x 44.45 x 44.45 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Kevin Baer, TrépanierBaer Gallery.

What is of the nature of a program is the discipline Cameron has imposed on himself, and the decision to pursue a single activity throughout his life. He shares this trait with a number of artists who, like him, squat on the borderline between painting and conceptual art. On Kawara, Niele Toroni, and Roman Opalka, for example, have also devoted themselves to repetitive projects that will come to an end only with their deaths. Beyond this common passion for "routine extremism" (to quote Ad Reinhardt's epigraph), the singularity of Cameron's project can be seen, first of all, in his commitment to the chosen objects. To execute a *Date Painting* each day (Kawara), to force oneself never to produce anything other than the prints of a No. 50 brush, in staggered rows with thirty-centimetre spacing (Toroni), or to set out the computation of passing time on ever whiter canvases (Opalka) – these are decisions by which artists lock themselves into programs, but which also free them up with regard to particular pieces once they are completed. Cameron made a lifelong commitment not only to his program but also to each core object, hoping that the desire of a museum to acquire the piece will release him from his commitment, but knowing very well where, in the end, deliverance will come from: "In the meantime, every brushstroke is referenced to the ultimate constraint on experience, the fact of my own mortality."[8] The end of the program is inherent in the program, consciously accompanying it all the way through its execution, and watching over its every step. Like the initial choice, however, it is off-program: no one knows the hour of his death; yet that does not make it any less certain. In other words: my death is programmed, but I am not its programmer.[9] I only hope it will let me know in time, so that I can put a last coat of white on all the pieces in my studio, with a gesture that is steady enough to be free of pathos, and in no way different from any of those that preceded it. This pre-emption, both of the "final touch" and of the "definitively unfinished" work,[10] complicates the notion of a program by ruling out the possibility of its finding any teleological support in the intentionality of the subject. If *telos* there be, it coincides with the life expectancy of the artist, which has only to do with the entropic wear and tear of time. As if to paraphrase Kant in reverse, Cameron warns us that his aesthetic program brings us up against purpose without purposiveness rather than purposiveness without purpose.

Two

For the human being and the art lover in me, Eric Cameron's Thick Paintings – with their common symbolism, and each in its uncompromising individuality, its elegance, its singular form and rhythm, the mood that permeates it, the secret it encloses, and the surprises it holds in store – are objects of incredible, poignant beauty. For the theorist of aesthetics that I also try to be, they are an inexhaustible source of meditation because they prompt me once again to put Kant's aesthetics on the block. In this respect, Eric offers me the rare pleasure of a true philosophical dialogue. He is among those artists (and they can be numbered on the fingers of one hand) who are capable of philosophizing about their work without reducing it, betraying it, or taking anything whatever away from its enigmatic nature. Reading him and listening to him deepens the aesthetic experience provided by his work and gives a glimpse of the man behind the work, in the full complexity of his intelligence, sensibility, and worldview. One does not have to approve of the latter or draw from his practice as an artist the same consequences for thought that he himself draws. But given that he writes magnificently in a style nurtured by the poets, and that he handles concepts rigorously, I see no reason not to follow in his footsteps as far as I can, if only to try and find out where our paths diverge, if indeed they do so.

> Thierry de Duve and I have agreed to differ on the Kantian problem of freedom to respond to ethical imperatives, though what separates us may only be the way in which we construe the question. I always think of my art as tending to reconciliation with the inevitabilities of life, but John Bentley Mays, in what may be the most sympathetically insightful review my Thick Paintings have ever received, wrote of "a *liberating* acceptance of the limits of matter and life," [my emphasis] suggesting that, beyond the level of the most obvious tyrannical oppression, emancipation and acceptance of its impossibility may actually amount to just about the same thing.[11]

Eric Cameron and I part company, then, on "the Kantian problem of freedom," unless we differ only in "the way in which we construe the question." In speaking of "a *liberating* acceptance of the limits of matter and life," John Bentley Mays, then the art critic of the Toronto newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, suggests a way of construing the question that does not

remove the philosophical dispute I might have with Cameron but does empirically suit the manner in which the artist describes how he realized that, in spite of his deliberate, painstaking efforts to apply the pigment as uniformly and mechanically as possible, his objects evade him and insist on confronting him with – how shall I put it? – their freedom:

> As the layers of "paint" accumulated, the identity of the core object slowly gave way to a new character of form, which was not only utterly unlike that of the object at the centre, but also unlike anything I might have anticipated in advance. The brushing out of the paint had evidently activated forces that had caused the resulting object to develop systems of protrusions and indentations and, sometimes, huge encircling ridges, all displaying their own consistency of rhythmical character and their own evident logic of material growth.[12]

I talk about freedom where the artist talks about "evident logic." At first sight we are both wrong: an inert object is clearly not endowed with freedom, but neither is it endowed with logic, if by logic one understands a certain capacity for reasoning. Kant would have said that only human understanding could endow an inert object with logic because it alone is capable of recognizing lawful regularities in the productions of nature. The "consistency of rhythmical character" displayed by the "protrusions and indentations" of the Thick Paintings can be explained by the laws that govern the viscosity of pigments and the mechanics of levers, and this is what Cameron means when he talks about logic. So he is right, whereas I am wrong in lending freedom to the *inevitable* laws of nature. Yet if I am wrong, why is he surprised by the emergence of forms that are out of line with his intentions and anticipations, seemingly answering him on a strictly aesthetic plane, and changing the object's identity while sending him back to his own? He admits to having perceived, in some of his pieces, female curves that reproduce his own fantasies "with an intensity approaching hallucination," though he attributes them to unpredicted but still thoroughly physical forces born out of the resistance of the object and the materials to his handling of the brush.[13] This is obviously what fascinates him: he does not recognize himself in the object that holds up to him the mirror of his own activity when he considers himself as an intentional subject, and he recognizes himself in it only too clearly when he considers himself as a mechanical agent of the causal forces he activates:

> As I continued to paint, I could trace the movements of my arm within the gesso and the evidence of my own earlier decisions beneath the surface, but the seeming order of the brushstrokes with which I endeavoured to grasp the emerging forms was always, later, superseded by a different kind of orderliness that I had neither intended nor envisaged.[14]

"The artist's intention" is a topic of which any *au courant* art critic will long since have learned to be wary.[15] It is rarer among artists, naturally. Less talented artists want to see their intentions in the finished product at all costs, whereas the better ones trust the work in progress to tell them whether or not the aesthetic decisions they have taken were in accordance with their intentions. Like Duchamp, they know that the "personal art coefficient" of their work is "like an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed."[16] Shrewd student of Duchamp, Cameron knows this better than anyone and, like Duchamp, guards against committing his art to intentions that are too explicit – witness the "deliberate casualness" of his choices. But there is something more, and more distinctive, in the Thick Paintings. Their "personal art coefficient" is not the outcome of the intention-expression but rather of the intention-impression ratio – "impression" in the sense of "imprinting":

> In my art I have been aware of avoiding certain kinds of emotion, preferring the greater authenticity of imprinted feeling to calculatedly expressed feeling, even if that means the emotions conveyed are sometimes much weaker.[17]

Over the expressiveness of his emotions, in other words their effect on the viewer, Eric Cameron prefers the indexical marks they imprint on the surface of the object, which he observes after the fact. He is acutely sensitive to the involuntary, passive (or, better still, receptive) dimension of aesthetic judgments in general, and his own in particular. He knows the part played by the inadvertent and the maladroit in a successful work of art, and the extent to which, for any artist worthy of the name, this determines the "final touch," or its equivalent – I mean the moment when the artist decides that the work is finished, that it holds up, that it is showable, that he can step aside and allow it to express itself – and to express him, the artist – on its own. In Cameron's work, the pre-emption of the "final touch" short-circuits expression in favour of impression-imprint. He puts this down to the training he received from Lawrence Gowing,

and the influence of a method he picked up from the Euston Road painters, who raised the principle of "deferring the aesthetic decision" to the status of a dogma.[18] This modesty does him credit, but I am not sure it does justice to the singularity of his program, which appears at first sight to involve deferring the aesthetic decision right up to the moment when the "final touch" will no longer depend on him, but only on the benevolence, or malevolence, of the Grim Reaper – or, in scientific terms devoid of pathos, on the second law of thermodynamics, which has nothing to do with the intention or volition of anyone whomsoever.

It remains to be seen in what way Cameron is justified in his claim to be making art if he sees himself as the instrument of a mechanical process outside his control, to which he is deferring the aesthetic decision. Who – or what – has the responsibility "to justify the inevitability of [the] particular forms" of this or that piece if the artist apparently takes refuge in "deliberate casualness" the way Duchamp did in "freedom of indifference"? Oxymorons have their limits. It is not true that Cameron sees himself as being without artistic intentions or expectations, any more than it is true that he abstains from making aesthetic decisions. His method is not at all Duchamp's freedom of indifference, but rather the reverse: far from being indifferent, he grants the object a careful attention full of eager anticipation yet accompanied by a feeling of total lack of freedom to determine the outcome. At the outset, he says (not without a certain ingenuousness), he thought that if he was sufficiently skilful, technically speaking, to apply gesso to objects in perfectly regular layers, the geometry of expanding curves would ensure that, whatever their initial forms, all the objects would gradually approach that of a perfect sphere.[19] Faced with reality's disavowal, there are cases in which he happily adapts his approach to the suggestions of the object, as though to come to the assistance of its immanent logic, and other cases in which the result appears to him to be aesthetically unfortunate, so that he does everything he can to oppose the logic and regain control of the process. In both instances, such willful determination denotes an undeniably decisive spirit – and one that is definitely "aesthetic," for what else could it be? Let us not imagine that Cameron defers his verdicts as a way of holding in check the moment of the "final touch." When this moment arrives, we will not be faced with a reincarnation of Duchamp's "delay in glass," taunting us: "*D'ailleurs c'est toujours les autres qui meurent*."[20] It is not for nothing that the Thick Paintings are *already* tombs, and that their titles are epitaphs *in advance*. I called this the pre-emption of the "final touch" *and* of the "definitively unfinished" work, both at once; which situates the singularity of Eric Cameron's program somewhere off the beaten track of modernist painting

(à la Greenberg or Euston Road, it matters little here), and very far from Duchamp's posterity. Pre-emption, what does that mean? It means that Cameron's unusual program has forced him to hand over responsibility for what will effectively be the last touch – or, in his case, coat – to that which he calls, with resignation, the order of things, and meanwhile to treat each one *as if* it were the last. In dying, he will not be leaving behind a definitively unfinished oeuvre; in living, he is constructing an oeuvre that is in a constant state of readiness for the fatal moment. One does not produce such art without a commensurate ethic of life, and this is not something one meets with every day, especially in a man so deeply convinced that he has nothing either to hope or fear from the judgment of God.

Of all the Thick Paintings – those little tombs – the most mysterious, the most poignant, the most beautiful and moving, to my eyes, are *Alice's Rose* and *Alice's Rose-is-a-rose-is-a-rose*. The former, buried under more than three thousand half-coats of gesso, was acquired by the Glenbow Museum in Calgary and replaced (if it is true that one can replace a rose) by *Alice's Second Rose*, which in turn made way for *Alice's Rose-is-a-rose-is-a-rose* when the second rose was acquired by the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery. With all due respect to Gertrude Stein, these roses recall the Petit Prince's unique rose rather than tautology. They also, irresistibly, bring to mind Malherbe's verse: "*Et rose elle a vécu ce que vivent les roses, l'espace d'un matin*."[21] To cover the softness of a rose petal, so ephemeral and delicate, in milky whiteness – what a crazy idea! How much desire, how many desires, are invested and displaced in that idea? The inveterate sentimentalist that I affect not to be is seduced; but then, what holds back the theorist in me? Two things: like some of the other *Thick Paintings*, but much more visibly, these roses make manifest the stratification of the layers of gesso that blot them out; and they are the only Thick Paintings that (timidly, it has to be admitted) show how, somewhere along the way, the artist, momentarily casting restraint to the wind, replaced the puritanical alternation of grey and white layers by a bright red-yellow-blue worthy of Mondrian.[22] I shall never know whether or not this is the case for any of the other *Thick Paintings*, which have the modesty not to show their sections; but what the theorist in me notices is that, yielding to the colour impulse for a few half-coats in a piece that explicitly counts them, the artist wants to give me the sense that it is between the different coats that the mystery of his aesthetic decisions is to be sought. One of the things Eric Cameron never ceases to point out – and he always seems to be amazed by it, or even to marvel at it – is that on account of the high water content of gesso, a given coat, once dry, is so thin that he cannot discern any increase in

Alice's Rose-is-a-rose-is-a-rose (500) (detail), 1996–2000, acrylic gesso and acrylic on rose, 500 half-coats as of February 11, 1997, 12.7 x 64.77 x 19.05 cm. Collection of The Nickle Arts Museum. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

Alice's Rose-is-a-rose-is-a-rose (1000), 1996–2000, acrylic gesso and acrylic on rose, 1,000 half-coats as of March 27, 1998, 12.7 x 64.77 x 21.59 cm. Collection of The Nickle Arts Museum. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

the size of the object from one coat to another, and even less so the point of no return where its form changes and takes a new direction. The conscious aesthetic decisions are necessarily taken between two coats, for example when the artist decides to change the orientation of his brush so as to accentuate, or indeed to counter, the whims of the form. But what, then, of the *unconscious* decisions? The real moment of acquiescence in the new form that the object has taken, is taking, or will take? The moment to recognize in it its own becoming, its "desire," what Spinoza would have called its *conatus*? Sometimes, says Cameron, he finds himself thrown into confusion when the movements of the arm holding the brush, adaptable as they have proved to be, are suddenly powerless to respect this immanent "will" of his materials:

> No longer is my activity perceived to be limited by the properties of the materials with which I am working, but their capacity to fulfill their own nature is seen to be constrained by my human limitations. In the period while a new accommodation is being sought, the sense of loss can be acute.[23]

In spite of everything that Cameron the rational being knows, or wants to know, about the determinism of matter, he cannot refrain from attributing a fate or destiny to his materials, as if they were alive, born with the intention to "fulfill their own nature." The moments of confusion when intentional logic is inverted are perhaps the real moments of aesthetic decision-making. The mystery is that Cameron does not know when those moments will arrive, or have arrived. Like us, he contemplates the growth rings of his two roses – or, in an exemplary instance, those of *Chloë's Brown Sugar* – as though they were those of a tree that he cannot quite get over having planted. It is almost regretfully that he admits to the organic aspect of his work. It is as though here, between two rings, between two coats of gesso, in an infra-thin spatio-temporal interval impossible to locate empirically, lay hidden the entelechy of the work in progress, and the mainspring of Cameron's art: its teleonomy and, whatever he might think, its purposiveness without purpose. At this point of inflection where the artist feels strongly that the piece under his brush knows what it wants, and is making demands on him to go beyond the limits of his program, it is as though the matter the piece is made of were demonstrating its freedom – there is no other word for it.

Three

> As I contemplated what was happening beneath my hands, I came to see the Thick Paintings as a demonstration of the way the world of my perceptions and intentions was repeatedly subsumed by a realm of material forces beyond my understanding and control. Because this experience has transcended the constructed veil of appearances, I would have to call it mystical, albeit the mysticism is of a material kind: a material mysticism.[24]

An artist has every right to call himself a mystic, and to be one. The art lover can follow him onto this terrain if he has some leaning towards mystical ecstasy. This is not the case with me. Never have I had an aesthetic experience that gave me the feeling of seeing rent apart before my eyes the veil of appearances. Religious art, even the most spiritual and sublime – and particularly the most sublime – has never made me feel that I was outside of myself, in direct contact with the supersensible. I would sooner tend to think true mystics have aesthetic experiences that they mis-identify and that only their faith leads them to interpret as direct access to transcendence. In any case, the theorist does not have the luxury of being a mystic. His enterprise is bounded by the limits of human understanding, much as philosophical rationality and scientific method have defined them at least since the *Critique of Pure Reason*. I do not have access to Cameron's material mysticism, though thanks to him I have learned of a new category of experience, which is mystical because "it has transcended the constructed veil of appearances," but also material because the transcendent supersensible realm in which it takes place is one of exclusively physical forces. I am thus dealing with a new theoretical object – which Cameron, in fact, has helped me to theorize:

> Other people who have questioned me about the notion of material mysticism have told me I sometimes also use "mystical materialism.'" I was unaware of the reversal of terms and yet its implication would seem clear enough: "mystical materialism" is the theory that underpins the practice.[25]

Does the fact that an artist has a theory mean he has ventured onto the terrain of the theorist? Not always. Rarely. Perhaps never. The fact does not even guarantee that they are speaking to each other in the same language across the fence that separates their respective terrains. The language I speak is, as far as possible, that of verifiable (or, in Popper's terms, falsifiable) theory. That which Eric Cameron speaks is the language of a sage translating his vast philosophical culture into a vision of the world and a conception of existence. He is a materialist in the same sense as the materialists of antiquity, and he is a consequential materialist in that he professes to be a monist and a determinist.[26] His vision of the world has an entire tradition behind it: Cynics, Stoics, Epicureans, Pyrrhonians, Spinozans, and all the moralists of ataraxy history has produced. Highly conscious of his contradictions – "I don't vote because I'm free but because I'm obliged to, it is my responsibility," he told me, adding with a sigh, when I pointed out that this did not prevent him from voting freely, "I want to be relieved of responsibility"[27] – he maintains that the grandeur of humanity, like that of art, rests in voluntary acquiescence in the inevitable. *Amor fati*. In the last resort he does not believe in human freedom, or at any rate only with tragico-ironic pirouettes such as the Heraclitean version of the Sisyphus myth to which he gladly compares the enterprise of the Thick Paintings: "You are never the same person who rolls what is never the same rock up what is never the same hill twice."[28] I am surprised by the fact that (as far as I know) he has never cited Lucretius.[29] Indeed, the *clinamen* that deflects the fall of atoms by a hairbreadth may be the concept that gets closest to the emancipation of matter he ends up conceding when he is pushed to the limits: "I grant material a kind of freedom."[30] This was said grudgingly, and was never set down in writing.

The inclination to grant freedom to matter is characteristic of those philosophers who deny freedom to man, but who, faced with the undeniable fact of their own free will, appeal to some physical amalgam of fatalism and finalism to resolve the contradiction. The Stoics' *fatum*, Lucretius's *clinamen*, and Spinoza's *conatus* are amalgams of this kind. In reality, Cameron does not sanction any such surreptitious revenge of the finalist doctrine; he does not seek to resolve the contradiction, which is why his mysticism is material, and why his mystical materialism is philosophically new. He lives in the scientific age, unlike the materialists of antiquity. As a living organism made of flesh and blood, he knows he belongs to a nature that is disenchanted, defined in mathematical terms, wholly subject to efficient cause, and that knows of neither prime nor final cause. He lives in a post-Galilean and post-Newtonian epistemological universe, in which "forces beyond my understanding and control" cannot

but be material. His work as an artist "frees" them, the way a dam frees the water that drives the turbines. To claim, as he does, that the contemplation of the Thick Paintings makes him feel his phenomenal world has been entirely absorbed into these forces – "subsumed," he says (in a strange use of the Kantian term) – is a profession of mystical faith rooted exclusively in the execution of his artistic program. Many mystics (one might think of the Stylites, or the Flagellants) need to practice some sort of "routine extremism" in order to attain ecstasy. And Cameron, if he is a mystic, is one of their kind. This is what clearly sets him apart from his colleague Sol LeWitt, who also called himself a mystic, but for whom the execution of an artistic program, however routine, had nothing extreme about it: "When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means all the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art."[31] Cameron does not see himself as a conceptual artist, and as far as he is concerned execution follows the idea to such a minor extent that it would be more accurate to think of the idea as being born out of execution. But what he rejects first and foremost – as a consequence of his monism – is the notion of a program as implying a division of the artist into a programming or "programmer" entity and a programmed or executive entity. LeWitt may hold that "Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists,"[32] but as a good Cartesian he places ideas, will, and intention on the side of the *res cogitans*, whereas the executive machine is on the side of the *res extensa*. For Cameron, who in this respect is closer to the anti-Cartesian La Mettrie, it is the machine that is intentional and willful. He sees the body at work as a system of levers whose automatisms are under the control of will, or at least tend, as far as possible, to be so. The material, on the other hand, on which that willful effort is exerted governs the execution of the program, which yields a blind result, intentionless or purposeless, purely causal, inexorable and, *for these reasons*, in his view, justified.[33] Covering the Thick Paintings with gesso, coat after coat, he listens in on "the voice of that order of things beyond human perception and control" that he hears springing forth from every great work of poetry, art, or music.[34] This is the voice that is obeyed by the material world, and the latter includes the artist's inner, subjective world, his perceptions and intentions, all his biological and psychological being. This impersonal voice is the one that science listens to, and the one that, in the end, "justifies the inevitability of [the] particular forms" of every great *modern* work. Cameron expresses this clearly, with regard to T.S. Eliot's poetry:

Shoe (58), begun 1979, acrylic gesso and acrylic on shoe, 58 half-coats as of July 12, 1986, 12.7 x 33.02 x 13.97 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Eric Cameron.

Stacking Chair (420), begun 1992, acrylic gesso and acrylic on stacking chair, 420 half-coats as of July 13, 1998, 77.47 x 49.53 x 47.63 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

> Although Eliot may present his impersonal theory as an explanation of poetry through the ages, the impersonality of his own work gains its poetic justification in relation to the impersonal order of things presented by the world of science. That, too, is why the impersonal forms of Pollock's dripped paint and of Duchamp's Ready-mades … carry such enormous authority.[35]

Cameron does not say so explicitly, but one might suppose that what makes Pollock and Duchamp stand out also applies to Reinhardt. And it goes without saying that none of these artists practices a "scientific" form of art, or illustrates the progress of science. The artists who indulge in this kind of fantasy produce art without truth that has to do with applied science at best. Those that Cameron admires, on the other hand, assume their subjective truth because they know they are subjected to laws that go beyond them: those of art (Reinhardt), society (Duchamp), or nature (Pollock). Cameron's family of artists, united by "the poetic justification in relation to the impersonal order of things presented by the world of science" that he lends them, composes, in fact, a highly distinctive form of philosophical self-portrait: that of an artist who sees himself as a voluntaristic yet purely mechanical agent of physical forces inducing his materials to "fulfill their own nature," who expects the result to "justify the inevitability of its particular forms," and for whom this expectation has the rare ambition of bringing to the light of day the "intrinsic values of art":

> To demand of a painting or a poem that it justify the inevitability of its particular forms is to ask that it reveal the grounding of art in the larger world of not-art, and to compare the way different works propose that justification is to uncover the planes on which they operate and hence open up the possibility of reestablishing a hierarchy of values that may claim to be the intrinsic values of art and not merely the incidental values of some dubious social or psychological good.[36]

One of the singularities of the maxim of inevitability is precisely that it is a maxim (i.e., an ethical motto for personal use), and that it seems to serve as an aesthetic criterion. It happens to all of us to recognize a great work of art by the feeling of its inevitability, in other words, the

feeling that nothing is to be changed, and even – and this is where the ethical aspect comes in – that it would be a crime to change anything. We say to ourselves, in such cases, that the work is just what it ought to be. But for Cameron, this is not enough: the work ought to be what it is. Giving him the feeling that its particular forms are inevitable is insufficient. It must also make him feel that their inevitability is justified, as if the physical laws that govern the viscosity of pigments and the mechanics of levers were in need of moral legitimacy. To furnish them with it is the function of art. To legitimize the laws of nature *ethically* is then the operation at the origin of the "intrinsic values" of art. And to show that this is the case is the achievement of some of the finest *modern* artists, like Eliot in poetry and Reinhardt, Duchamp, and Pollock in the visual arts. Such is Cameron's claim.

Thus one comes to understand the kinship he feels with Reinhardt, whose "Twelve Rules for a New Academy" are also ethical maxims that stand for aesthetic criteria.[37] Kinship with Duchamp is summoned by Cameron's implementation, brush in hand, of the maxim of inevitability, and by the judgment deciding whether it has been followed – an aesthetic judgment, of course, not a moral or ethical one. When the artist exerts it, he occupies the position of the viewer, contemplating some literal thing, which, even though an indeterminate number of coats of gesso are to cover it in the future, is an object that has pre-empted its end, an object that is already finished; in sum, a readymade – the type of object with respect to which there is no difference between making art and judging it. Cameron finds himself looking at something that is momentarily but radically strange to him, despite its being the product of his hands. When he checks out the inevitability of the particular forms of the thing in question – whether between two coats of gesso or, more mysteriously, in those moments of disarray when he senses that his human limitations thwart the volition of his materials – he is looking at this product of his hands as though it were a fruit of nature. And this time it is kinship with Pollock that comes to mind, Pollock exclaiming, "I am nature!"[38] Like the arabesques of *Autumn Rhythm*, the hollows and protuberances of the Thick Paintings are the result, both subjective *and* inevitable, intentional *and* without purpose, willed *and* inexorable, of purely physical forces identified with an artistic program.

Four

Kant provides a formula for expressing this identity: "Genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art."[39] Genius: in Kant's Latin, *ingenium*, technical skill, ingenuity, fertile imagination, artifice, a channeling of the forces of nature, intentional ruse; and in Kant's German, *angeborene Gemütsanlage*: an innate aptitude of the soul as it is bound to, and affects, the body. Genius, according to Kant, is at once calculation, engineering, skilful manipulation, deliberate astuteness, self-conscious expertise, *and* natural gift, innate spontaneity, ingenuous talent, automatic and involuntary instinct, unconscious drive ignorant of its source. The young poets and philosophers who were poring over Kant's work at the turn of the nineteenth century in Jena, Tübingen, and Dresden, all perceived the contradiction between the voluntary and the involuntary, the conscious and the unconscious, the intentional and the impulsive, that rested in Kant's theory of genius. This contradiction proved one of the most powerful driving forces behind the speculative passion of the *Frühromantik*. Schelling, in particular, interpreted it as an infinite antinomy between nature and freedom (the respective domains of the first two *Critiques*), an antinomy that he deemed resolved by the notion of genius and abolished by the man of genius through his work. The price the *Frühromantiker* had to pay for this "miracle of art" (which they took to be free of charge until Hegel presented them with the bill) was to deify not only the person of the genius but nature as a whole, to re-enchant her, to read the natural world as "a poem marvelously sealed in secret writing," the substrate of a "new mythology" – to my mind, a serious regression from Kant.[40]

Kant, no doubt, conceived of genius as nature-the-artist, but how much more "secularly" than his romantic readers! To begin with, genius ought to be an expression of nature *tout court*, and by "nature *tout court*" we may be sure that Kant, ever faithful to Newton, had in mind forces entirely subject to the realm of physical causality. However, genius is *living* nature, a nature which, in Kant's view, human understanding (in reality the Newtonian science of his time) cannot explain through causality alone, while knowing that it must do so: living nature is organized according to ends that are *ends* only for our cognitive faculties. Hence the mystery that finally defines genius as living nature embodied in an organism endowed with reason and imagination: a genius is a *man* in whom natural causality instills aesthetic ideas, and these are the organic fruits of the "animating principle in the mind" that drives him.[41]

Through the man of genius, nature thus receives the faculty of bringing forth aesthetic ideas while, conversely, he receives from nature the program of his art. When Kant upholds that, through the mediation of genius, nature sets the rules for art, he is suggesting (but never saying) that the man of genius accomplishes, within his person, the transcendental synthesis of what the philosopher calls the "supersensible substrate" 1) of nature, 2) of the purposiveness of nature for our faculty of cognition, and 3) of the principle of the ends of freedom.[42] It is as if, via the man of genius, organic nature mysteriously acquired the ability to give itself moral ends – as mysteriously as it *appears* to give itself functional and aesthetic ends when it lives, grows, reproduces, adapts, and evolves. Kant barely fails to make the connection. Throughout both parts of the *Critique of Judgment* (the Critique of the *aesthetic* and that of the *teleological* judgment), he is on the brink of acknowledging what Schelling, who has read him well, takes as self-evident, namely that the mystery of genius and the mystery of life, i.e., of living matter, are one. The mystic union of artistic genius and life principle is the romantic intuition *par excellence*: the one Friedrich Schlegel expresses when he says that genius is "the organic spirit" of the age to come, or his brother August when he states that "man, in art, is the norm of nature," or, still, Novalis when he professes, with an enthusiastic vitalism that amalgamates art and science: "Life is rather like colours, sounds and force. The Romantic studies life, just as the painter, musician and mechanic study colour, sound and force."[43] The Romantic, one might say, is a biologist ignorant of biological science – and it is barely an anachronism to say so.[44]

As diverse as they were, the German *Frühromantiker*, who had read Kant's third *Critique* avidly, all shared a contradictory temptation: they wanted art to have the inevitability of science, and science to have the unpredictable freedom of art. As Friedrich Schlegel put it, "All art must become science, and all science art; poetry and philosophy must be unified."[45] They were joined by a number of *Naturphilosophen* and scientists, also bred on the third *Critique*, who would not dissociate empirical research into the secrets of nature from speculative philosophy. All were intensely reflecting on the mystery of what could be a specific science of *life*. And most were fascinated by the desire to reconcile romantic vitalism with the driest reductionism. In the last years of the eighteenth century, the finest minds, like Kant and Goethe a little before, found themselves frustrated by Newtonian science when it had to deal with the living, and, in spite of their efforts in that direction, unable to imagine that organized nature could be reduced to the chemical and the physical. How to do away with final causes? Or, inversely, how to breathe them into matter without calling on a transcendent principle? Such

were the dilemma and the obsession of the times. Hypotheses ranged from the most prosaic to the most fantastic. Sometimes they invoked a "life principle" conceived as an emergent yet inexplicable property of matter, sometimes a "vital force" infused into inorganic matter from the outside, a force which Cartesian mechanicism was at a loss to explain, whose origin was as mysterious as Newton's universal gravity, but whose presence in every living organism had to be postulated because it could not fail to be. Examples of such principles and forces are the "power of life" (*Lebenskraft*) in Brandis, the "formative drive" (*Bildungstrieb*) in Blumenbach, the collaboration of "organic forces" (*organische Kräfte*) in Kielmeyer, the "shaping force" (*Gestaltungskraft*) in von Baer, and in Schelling, the most philosophically inclined of all *Naturphilosophie* thinkers, no special vital force at all but, instead, the "free play" of existing physical forces (the borrowing from Kant is obvious).[46]

Schelling occupies an interesting position in this constellation because, like Blumenbach or Kielmeyer and unlike Stahl or Haller, who were staunch vitalists, he held a reductionist view.[47] It is thus all the more surprising that, after having called the vital force an empty concept, he ends up borrowing from the Ancients the notion of a "common soul of nature" (*gemeinschaftliche Seele der Natur*), when he is forced to admit that it is unthinkable to account for the specificity of living matter without some – still unknown – principle giving the inert natural forces their *direction*.[48] Although Schelling's thought evolves rapidly, there is a strong continuity between his scientific writings and his *System of Transcendantal Idealism*, all published in his youth within four years.[49] When the *System*'s last chapter presents a theory of artistic genius, it should therefore be understood in reference to his theory of life, and both in reference to Kant's third *Critique*. The same reflexive judgment which, facing a product of living nature, lends it teleological meaning all the while knowing that it objectively lacks it, when facing a product of artistic genius, denies it any teleological significance and considers it as if it were the objective yet incomprehensible product of natural forces.[50] Schelling sees the artist as under the spell of some obscure unconscious power, at once miraculous and natural, which "forces him to proclaim or represent things that he himself does not completely fathom and whose meaning is infinite."[51] A whole intellectual and artistic tradition, which ran from Schopenhauer to Hartmann to Freud, and from Rudolf Steiner to Joseph Beuys, saw in Schelling's notion of genius a source of creativity all the more spontaneous and exuberant as it was unconscious. But Schelling himself, so it seems, did not emphasize the source so much as the after-the-fact effect of its product on the individual genius who claims authorship of

it. Indeed, Schelling conceived the man of genius as an intelligent being who, contemplating his work, discovers himself surprised to have been but the unconscious and involuntary instrument of the resolution of an infinite antinomy between his own freedom and the laws of nature, and delighted *because* the resolution occurred without the agency of a conscious free act. The analogy with Cameron's philosophical attitude is blatant.

What is also blatant is the difference: Cameron does not live around 1800. Schelling, Blumenbach, and Kielmeyer, as well as Novalis or the Schlegel brothers (i.e., both the thinkers of *Naturphilosophie* and the poets of *Frühromantik*), all were strongly motivated by the desire for science, but the desire for science is not science. Cameron, who sees science as the relevant plane of reference for the poetry of Eliot and the art of Reinhardt, Duchamp, and Pollock, is obviously ahead of the scientists of the romantic period in his understanding of life and the living, whereas they were not more advanced than Kant. "No human reason," Kant wrote, "can ever hope to understand the generation of even a little blade of grass from merely mechanical causes."[52] And again: "Strictly speaking, the organization of nature is therefore not analogous with any causality that we know."[53] The "we" in the last sentence would of course make any modern biologist smile, given that life, which was such an absolute mystery for Kant and his romantic readers, has ceased to be one for us, today. Granted, we still know nothing about the origin of life, as such. But we have dated its beginnings (life appeared on earth more than 3.5 billion years ago); we have a fair appreciation of its evolution, which we traced back to the "last universal common ancestor" (LUCA); we know that, beyond LUCA, natural selection, the *sine qua non* condition of evolution, began to be effective as soon as RNA had appeared; and, above all, we now have a scientific definition of life: we call *living* every biochemical entity that is constituted of cell(s) built from universal molecular bricks assembled into lipids, proteins, and carbohydrates, and that is capable of reproducing and of passing information, stocked under a replicable form in DNA, to its offspring. This dry reductionist definition of life would have satisfied none of the *Naturphilosophen* and other upholders of "romantic science," who, even when they scrupulously practised observation and experimentation, expected scientific explanation to give *meaning* to life. And it would probably satisfy very few of today's philosophers, for whom life, even stripped bare of its human attributes and reduced to what all living beings have in common – e.g., the concept of "bare life" for Giorgio Agamben – remains caught up in an anthropocentric world view.[54]

Gregory's Wine Gums (1344), begun 2004, acrylic gesso and acrylic on a tube of Maynards Wine Gums, 1344 half-coats as of April 18, 2008, 7.62 x 17.78 x 8.89 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Kevin Baer, TrépanierBaer Gallery.

Morgane's White Sugar (1456), begun 2004, acrylic gesso and acrylic on packet of white sugar, 1456 half-coats as of April 18, 2008, 7.62 x 39.37 x 36.2 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Kevin Baer, TrépanierBaer Gallery.

Would this reductionist definition of life have satisfied Kant? It would certainly not have met his existential expectations, but I think he would have adopted it because his ambition was to philosophize in accordance with the epistemological conditions set by the most advanced sciences of his time. One thus falls to musing about an updated Kant – a Kant knowledgeable of the enormous progress of the life sciences since his own time, and aware of the epistemological consequences; a Kant who would at the very least have read, say, Charles Darwin and Norbert Wiener. This is a Kant who would (or so I believe) suit the mystic Cameron, as seen from the skeptic's observatory I occupy on my side of the fence that separates us. The artist makes an indirect allusion when he reminds us that in 1892 a certain Kirchmann invoked the survival of the fittest in order to criticize the teleological judgment.[55] If Kant had known about the concepts of natural selection (Darwin) and feedback loops (Wiener) – and for good measure let me throw in Mendel's laws and genetic mutation – he might never have written the *Critique of Judgment*. Or he would not have written its second part. At any rate he would not have had to deal with the antinomy of teleological judgment, whose thesis holds that the material world can be entirely explained by mere mechanical laws, while its antithesis holds that certain productions of the material world (living beings) require an explanation in terms of purpose.[56] Already an adversary *avant la lettre* of "intelligent design,"[57] the historical Kant was nonetheless unable to conceive of living nature without assigning purposiveness to it, even if it was only as a maxim for reflection. Our updated Kant would understand, as we do, that the apparent purpose that orients the living, although entirely objective, is scarcely more "purposive" than that which guides a robot capable of autonomous movement.

What, then, becomes of genius, that natural programmer of art, for our updated Kant?

Genius descends from its divine pedestal. It is no longer the genie in the bottle the Romantics conjured up. It is, so to speak, the *natura naturans* of the Spinozans, finally theorized under a name other than God; it is the "ghost in the machine" posited by the Cartesians, which even La Mettrie was unable to avoid;[58] it is Maxwell's demon, creator of complexity and negentropy, revised by Brillouin;[59] it is the automatic pilot of today's cyberneticians, the natural or mechanical *kubernétès* that every self-regulated system presupposes. It is all of that, of course not for its own sake or for the benefit of science or technology, but *credited to art* – otherwise Kant's theory of genius would make no sense and should be thrown out on the ash heap of history. And why, after all, shouldn't it be?

One great artist to make us think twice is enough. I see Eric Cameron — a conceptual painter, a self-proclaimed mystic and materialist — as the one present-day artist (whom I know) whose work and thought suggest a renewed and fruitful interpretation of Kant's theory of genius. It is as though he had read our updated Kant the way Schelling read the historical Kant, and, like Schelling, had understood that in the person of the genius – in the body of the artist at work, as Cameron would more prosaically have it – the antinomy between nature and freedom had been abolished and had opened onto a realm beyond nature and freedom yet encompassing both. Schelling has read between Kant's lines something Kant did not see: that the idea of genius is the non-thematized link between the two parts of the *Critique of Judgment*. It resolves the antinomy of the *teleological* judgment from within the Critique of the *aesthetic* judgment – in Schelling's opinion, miraculously, that is, divinely and yet really, not just for the faculty of reflexive judgment. "Really, yes, but not divinely at all; both mystically and materially," would be the way Cameron, having read the updated version of Kant, translates Schelling's insight. The man of genius is an artist. He destines the product of his hands to pure aesthetic delectation, and thus addresses it to the man of taste. The historical Kant saw the allocation of tasks between both men as being regulated by the reciprocal implication of genius and natural beauty in the theory of the fine arts, deemed arts of genius: "Nature was beautiful, if at the same time it looked like art; and art can only be called beautiful if we are aware that it is art and yet it looks to us like nature."[60] The maxim that activates this double implication is the "as if" that is common to the aesthetic and the teleological judgments. It is because I (must) judge natural beauty *as if* it were the creation of an artist that I (can) judge a work of art *as if* it were a fruit of nature. What, then, of our updated Kant? Having had it explained to him by a Darwinian botanist that natural selection was the "artist" responsible for the beauty of wild flora, our updated Kant would give up the first "as if" – there would no longer be any question of seeing in the beauty of nature an analogon of art – and would immediately draw the consequence: it is done with natural beauty as a *symbol* of the morally good. This is a loss of tremendous consequence, for if we leave the sublime aside, that symbolism was the only link (and a merely analogical one) that articulated the laws of nature to the moral law and brought the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* to a close.[61] Nature's beauty may have lost none of its aesthetic appeal, but it has lost its status as a mediator in the question of man's moral destination. The naturally beautiful is no longer the necessary site of purposiveness without purpose; it is

M'sMMM for TdeD – for Thierry de Duve (300), begun 2005, acrylic gesso and acrylic on model car, 300 half-coats as of October 12, 2005, 7.62 x 17.78 x 7.62 cm. Collection of Thierry de Duve. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

M'sMMM for TdeD – for Thierry de Duve (700) (detail), 2005–2009, acrylic gesso and acrylic on model car, 700 half-coats as of August 23, 2007, 8.89 x 19.05 x 8.26 cm. Collection of Thierry de Duve. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

henceforth but one of the sites, all desperately contingent, of the adaptive plasticity of nature, definitively orphaned from all purposiveness, albeit simply reflexive.

What is to be concluded? And what is to be done, if one does not wish to celebrate in dour jubilation the funeral of genius, of the fine arts, or indeed of art as such – that old never-ending refrain of late Romanticism? What is to be done if one no more wishes to seek refuge in a vague and bourgeois vitalist aesthetic that takes the edge off the question of biology opened up by the Romantic reading of Kant?[62] There are two possibilities, it seems to me. Like a certain lineage that goes from the *Frühromantiker* to Nietzsche and beyond (say, to Bergson and Deleuze), one could refuse point blank to admit that the great Pan is dead, even if this meant depriving artists of their intentionality and transferring it all the more furiously to the agency of nature. In Schlegel's words: "And even if Homer himself had no intention, his poetry, and nature, which is its veritable author, has one."[63] Alternatively, and with the same single-mindedness, one could invert the operation, transfer to art the non-purposiveness of nature, and have art compensate for man's not having been naturally destined for ethics. If Schelling's insight is pertinent, if it is true that Kant failed by a hair's breadth to conclude from his reflections in the third *Critique* that the function of artistic genius was to make nature access the sphere of morality, then someone must seek to make up for Kant's failure. I believe this is the task Cameron set himself. Why, otherwise, would he consider that the laws of nature are in need of moral legitimacy and that the function of art is to provide them with it? Both the need and the function are quite specific: the laws of nature being devoid of all objective and subjective teleology (purposiveness, intentionality), it is up to art to legitimate them. But only the art wherein the intentionality of the artist is found lacking succeeds in legitimating the laws of nature ethically because only that art justifies its particular forms to be inevitable. If "genius" there is, it resides where the artist's ethic lies: in his identification with the physical process that generates the work and in his forsaking all intentional claim over it. Such is the materialist path chosen by Cameron.

I want to emphasize how much this path differs from other modern materialisms, which it returns, not without irony, to the camp of the Romantics and their posterity. The two main currents of modern materialism, namely the Marxist and the Freudian, are most keen on stripping individual genius of its prerogatives over intentionality and giving them back to "matter" – which the Marxists call "infrastructure" and the Freudians "the id." For the Marxists, the man of genius is an individual who epitomizes the class relationships that produced him, and which he expresses better than the common man because he finds himself at the point

of convergence of their productive contradictions. For the Freudians, genius is the element of *Witz* that exists in every individual, but which, in the common man, is able to express itself only through slips of the tongue and parapraxes. Cameron knows the score. His wariness about Marxism and the Marxist history of art derives from the fact that they confine determinism to social humanity and fail to extend it to natural, animal humanity. As for psychoanalysis, his interest in it is distant but real, and if he were asked whether he takes the unconscious to be matter or mind, it is not difficult to guess what his reply would be. He is not ignorant of the fact that sublimation, which he is perfectly aware of practising in his art, originally signifies a direct transition from the solid to the gaseous state. The gesso that dries out before his eyes is practically a physical metaphor of this. Where his materialism differs radically from that of the Marxists and the Freudians is that he draws conclusions diametrically opposed to theirs with regard to aesthetics. They tend to see materialism as demystifying art's claim to functions that are not derivative, secondary, compensatory, epiphenomenal. For them, art dissolves in the external determinations that are supposed to explain it. Paradoxically, Cameron grounds in these same external determinations his conviction that art has its own intrinsic, inalienable values. I often ponder over the fact that the threesome with whom he claims kin is "Reinhardt, Duchamp and Pollock in an ascending hierarchy of values according to the level of implications against which their art operates: art; society; and nature."[64] And I also ponder over the fact that he credits this ranking to art, whereas it favours increasing exteriority with regard to art. In my view, he has successfully pulled off the tour de force that consists in acknowledging receipt of the reciprocal implication of natural beauty and genius in Kant's theory of the fine arts, while bringing it up to date for an age that is done with the fine arts system, an age that is philosophically indifferent to beauty, whether artistic or natural.[65] The result is a true historical transfer, articulated around the replacement of those values associated with the *beautiful in nature* by the supreme *artistic* value Cameron attaches to the *inevitable*. It is a long time since I reached the conclusion that an updating of Kantian aesthetics, and in particular of its opening-up to ethics, necessitated such a transfer from nature to art, and some time since I have glimpsed the historical cost of the operation.[66] However, Cameron is the first artist (and the only one so far) who has made me aware that this transfer will sooner or later force us to think about the equivalence of the beautiful and the inevitable (of which the Romantic *beauté fatale* is merely the tritest symptom), and that this transfer hinges on Kant's conception of genius, on its reception by the Romantics, and on its reinterpretation in the light of scientific progress since Kant's day. I am grateful to him for the impeccable rigour of his demonstration.

Love Sonnets from Shakespeare – for Margaret (500), begun 2002, acrylic gesso and acrylic on small book, 500 half-coats as of March 7, 2003. 4.45 x 8.89 x 10.16 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

Love Sonnets from Shakespeare - for Margaret (1032), begun 2002, acrylic gesso and acrylic on small book, 1032 half-coats as of November 16, 2006, 15.24 x 30.48 x 30.48 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

Five

Clement Greenberg held that for the ancients' motto "*ars est artem celare*" (art is to conceal the art), the moderns had substituted "*ars est artem demonstrare*" (art is to expose the art).[67] Cameron subscribes to the moderns' motto, and shares their passion for an art demonstrative of its own procedures. This is more visible in the Process Paintings that preceded the Thick Paintings – all the better for the latter because, what is it, after all, that they demonstrate? That the laws of physics need to be ethically legitimized by way of an art practice? That the best way of achieving this is to swear lifelong fidelity to some thirty inert objects chosen "with a deliberate casualness"? That one thereby gets to the source of the "intrinsic values of art"? Nothing of the kind is demonstrated. Let us not forget that Cameron and I "have agreed to differ on the Kantian problem of freedom to respond to ethical imperatives, though what separates us may only be the way in which we construe the question."[68] No doubt we construe it very differently. I do not share Cameron's philosophical quasi-fanaticism – monism, *amor fati*, a radical absence of faith in human freedom – which is the theoretical side of his "demonstration." And though I admire the "routine extremism," which is its practical side, it is not for its own sake. As always in art, the demonstration is aesthetic: it is the quality of the *Thick Paintings* that renders them absolutely convincing – touched by genius, I dare say. Of course, Eric would hate my dubbing him a genius, but this is because he has in mind the Romantic image of the divinely inspired man of exception, and not the Romantic-image-brought-up-to-date which his own practice conjures up: to be exact, the image of a *servo-mechanism* which, rather than being set to a conceptualizable end (like a homing missile), is activated by a regulative idea in the Kantian sense. The program Cameron gave himself when he decided to bury some thirty objects under a myriad of coats of gesso applied as mechanically as possible accounts for the *craftsmanship* in the Thick Paintings. The *genius* in them lies in the fact that the program is in reality determined by an aesthetic idea, in other words, by an ethical maxim whose application is verified by a judgment of taste. (Please note, in passing, this definition of the *aesthetic idea*, which does not actually occur in Kant, but which Cameron would have us read there.) Whether *Residue Plus Penknife*, *Chloë's Brown Sugar*, or *Identified Object*, it is the individual work that is required to be worthy of this idea, in other words, asked "to justify the inevitability of its particular forms." But the work justifies nothing, except through the aesthetic judgment that recognizes it as a work of artistic merit. The judgment of the artist

stands for a demonstration insofar as ours endorses it. Such is art: one conviction unwillingly approving another. There is *art* when the viewer cannot do other than bow to the self-evidence of the work – "surrender," would have said Greenberg, who, when he spoke of the passion for demonstration of the modernists, maintained that the purpose of modernism was "to entrench [art] more firmly in its area of competence."[69] He would have been surprised to see how far Cameron has been prepared to extend this area:

> For me, the proper area of competence of art is that which lies beyond all possibility of choice or change (which may mean the entire universe and everything in it viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*). I find neither conflict nor tension in the possibility that simple pleasure in the structure of form in art may deepen into an awareness of the tragic inevitability of those larger material forces circumscribing our very existence.[70]

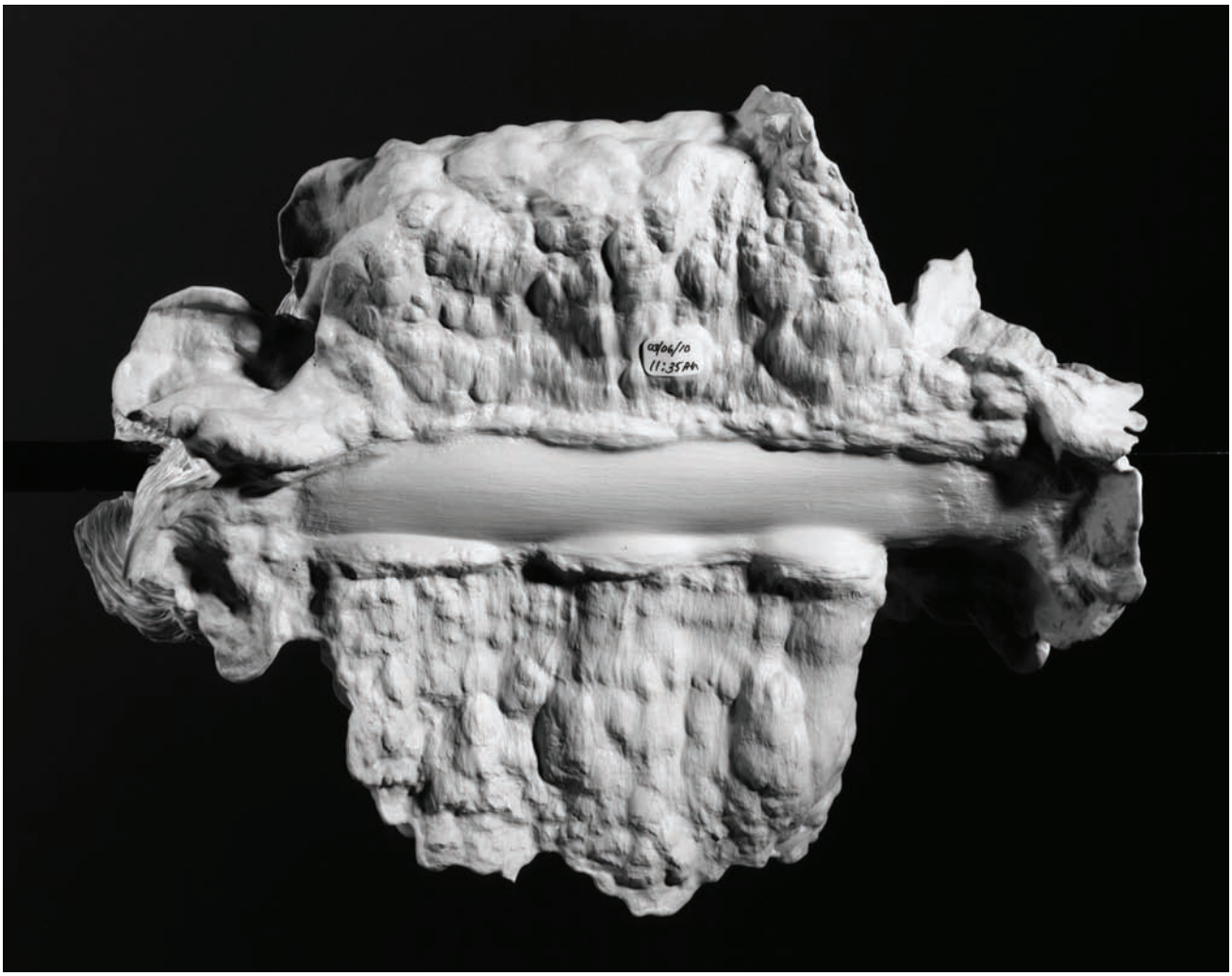
No one has ever surrendered to a work of art because it provided a demonstration of a theoretical or scientific order. The conviction engendered by an authentic work of art arises out of a fusion between the *formal* and the *existential* sides of the artist's practice, and Cameron is no exception to this rule. Behind "the inevitability of [the] particular forms" of the work lurks "the tragic inevitability of those larger material forces that circumscribe our very existences." For a living being, those forces entail that death is the end of the road – something that has always been known. But it has not always been known – Kant did not know it, and Laplace, a contemporary of the *Frühromantiker*, did not *care* to know it – that the entropic arrow of time orienting these forces toward the tragic inevitability of death is the toll living matter sooner or later pays to matter *tout court*. Cameron knows it. He makes it a point to translate his own existential fate in terms epistemologically compatible with the times he lives in, and this makes his enterprise a unique and quite peculiar one. To want aesthetic appreciation to bow or surrender before the inevitability of the laws of nature is as peculiar a *formal* tactic as to intimate, *existentially*, that the laws of nature suffer from a lack of moral legitimacy. Both are Cameron's unique way to cry out that death is a scandal, and an irredeemable one. The radically godless *episteme* the natural sciences brought about has found its most consequential artist. When Cameron admits, with false candour, "I always think of my art as tending to reconciliation with the inevitabilities of life," one does not hear the voice of wisdom that

Springs Eternal (500), begun 2001, acrylic gesso and acrylic on spring, 500 half-coat equivalents as of August 20, 2010, 38.1 x 5.08 x 4.45 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: David H. Brown, University of Calgary Imaging Services.

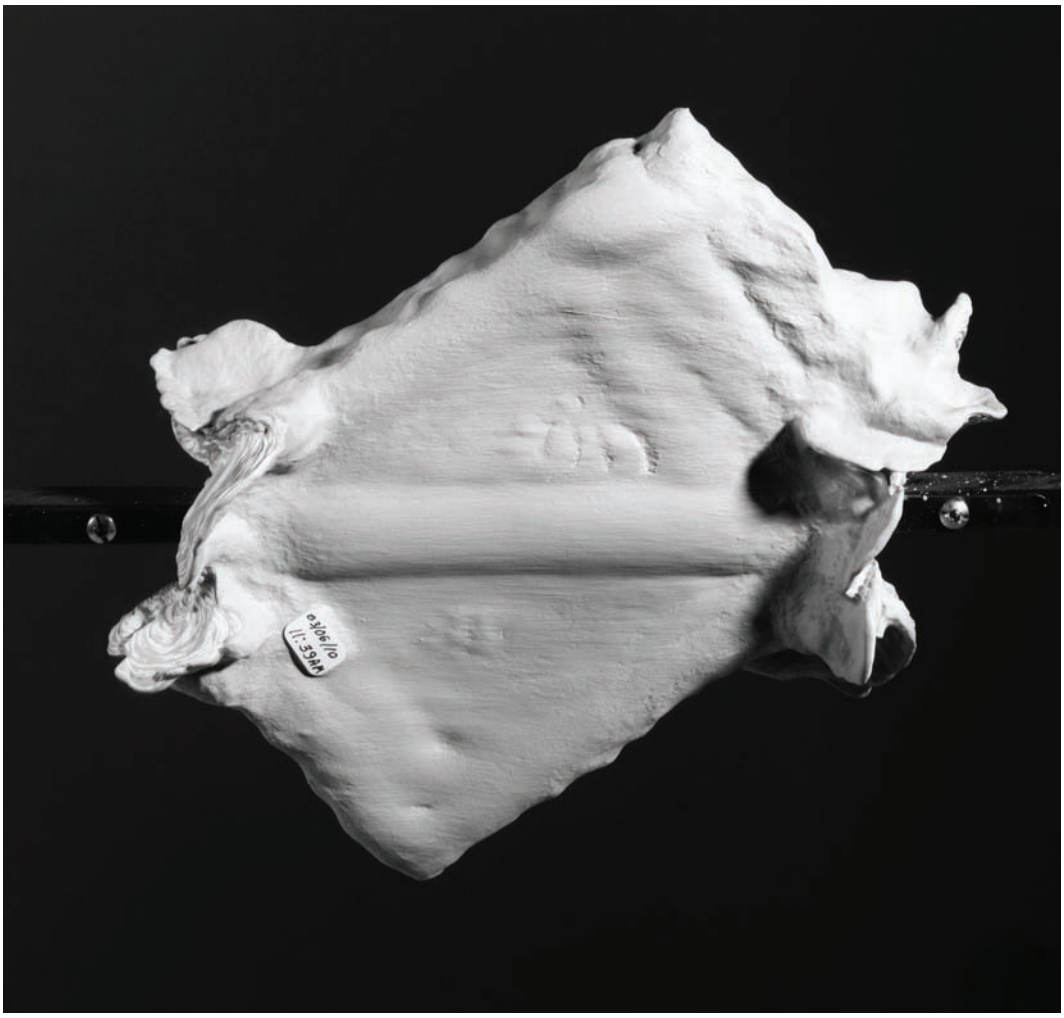
comes with age. Reconciliation is not resignation. Death is the scandal *par excellence* against which all human beings revolt, but which, *in the countdown*, they have to accept. *To make up the count* – thus may be expressed the program of mystical reconciliation with death Cameron has set himself when he embarked on the Thick Paintings, and which he deems to be the task of art. *Counted* are the myriad half-coats of gesso on the thirty-odd objects from his everyday life, and the purpose of the "routine extremism" to which they are submitted is to pre-empt *the countdown*. Cameron plays pre-emption against redemption – it is his way of denying the Grim Reaper the last word. More than Lucretius or Heraclitus, more than Spinoza, more than La Mettrie (too optimistic), there is something of Pascal in Cameron – a Pascal as mystical as the Pascal of the "night of fire," and whom the eternal silence of the infinite spaces scares just as much, but who would have wagered *against* the existence of God, and *on* that of art.

While Eric Cameron and I could trade readings and references *ad vitam aeternam*, evoking and invoking La Mettrie, Pascal, and all the ancient and modern materialists – and we do so from time to time, with great pleasure – neither of us can rally the other to his philosophy of existence. Situating the fence between us there would do little to advance the discussion. Putting it in Kant's backyard turned out to be more fruitful. Where Cameron speaks of material mysticism, I would prefer to say "transcendental materialism" – a way of showing my respect for the mystical practice of the artist, while translating it into a language that refers it to the Romantics' reception of Kant and in particular to Schelling's "transcendental idealism." This is also a way of suggesting that Cameron invites a reading of Kant that puts Schelling back on his feet, as Marx did for Hegel. And in the end, it is a way of placing us on either side of a fence which, while separating an atheist who believes in mysticism from an agnostic who believes in freedom, nonetheless sets the conditions authorizing us both to think, namely, the radical recognition of our finiteness. I know of no artist who leads us better than Eric Cameron to the threshold of a Kantianism which, though aberrant for anyone who seeks to immure Kant in philosophy textbooks, is more than plausible for someone who imagines a Kant brought up to date and familiar with contemporary science. This Kant is a fiction, of course, but the transcendental materialism he would profess is not. It is a working hypothesis. I do not think it would significantly affect the content of the first *Critique*, if applied retroactively. Nor would it change anything to ethics either, and thus to the content of the second *Critique*, contrary to what Cameron may think, convinced as he is that the advances of behaviourism and psychoanalysis have seriously compromised the possibility of a free human psyche.[71] Transcendental

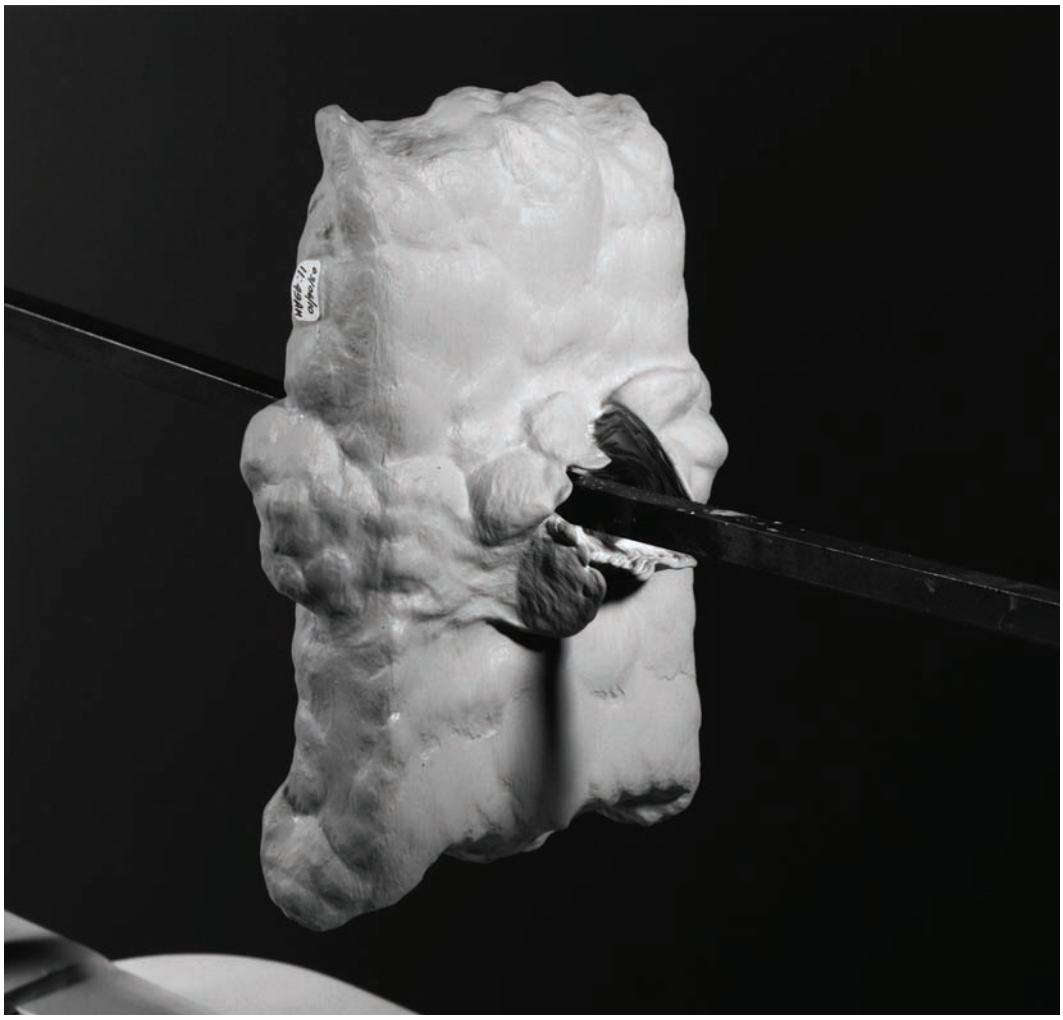
Arthur Nishimura and Eric Cameron, *Fidelity Élite* (collaborative installation), 2002–2003, The Nickle Arts Museum, Eric Cameron's painting in the foreground, Arthur Nishimura's photographs behind. Eric Cameron, *Fidelity Élite #1 (624)*, 2002–2003, acrylic gesso and acrylic on photograph by Arthur Nishimura, 624 half-coat equivalents as of June 12, 2003, 25.4 x 30.48 x 13.97 cm. Collection of The Nickle Arts Museum.



Arthur Nishimura, *Fidelity Élite*. Photograph, 27.94 x 35.56 cm. Eric Cameron, *Fidelity Élite #1 (624)*, 2002–2003, acrylic gesso and acrylic on photograph by Arthur Nishimura, 624 half-coat equivalents as of June 12, 2003, 25.4 x 30.48 x 13.97 cm. Collection of The Nickle Arts Museum.



Arthur Nishimura, *Fidelity Élite*. Photograph, 27.94 x 35.56 cm. Eric Cameron, *Fidelity Élite #2 (624)*, 2002–2003, acrylic gesso and acrylic on photograph by Arthur Nishimura, 624 half-coat equivalents as of June 12, 2003, 25.4 x 25.4 x 11.43 cm. Collection of The Nickle Arts Museum.



Arthur Nishimura, *Fidelity Élite*. Photograph, 27.94 x 35.56 cm. Eric Cameron, *Fidelity Élite #3 (624)*, 2002–2003, acrylic gesso and acrylic on photograph by Arthur Nishimura, 624 half-coat equivalents as of June 12, 2003, 26.67 x 20.32 x 11.43 cm. Collection of The Nickle Arts Museum.

materialism becomes an interesting, fruitful hypothesis only when one envisages its effects on the third *Critique*, the work Kant saw as forming a bridge between science and ethics, and reconciling humanity with the impossibility of knowing if it has a destiny. Among these effects, there is one about which Cameron and I would certainly agree, though without drawing the same conclusions:

> If there yet remains some semblance of a bridging role of the sort that Kant envisaged between the realm of ethical judgment and that of our understanding of the order of things, the supports of that bridge must be set farther apart than Kant ever set them, not merely an internal reconciliation of cognitive and imaginative spheres, but a bringing into relationship – or nonrelationship – of that reality beyond the realm of our experience, which Kant calls the "supersensible substrate," and that aspect of our humanity that can feel the chill of its indifference.[72]

It is a chill whose interpretation is the matter. Cameron seems to echo the biologist Jacques Monod, who expressed it thus: "Man knows at last that he is alone in the universe's unfeeling immensity, out of which he emerged only by chance. His destiny is nowhere spelled out, nor his duty."[73] One is not obliged to adhere to this lofty fatalism – I know at least one biologist who is no less qualified than Monod to philosophize on the basis of the achievements of contemporary biology, and who has countered Monod with sound arguments drawn from his discipline.[74] Whatever the case may be, I note that Cameron, who, like Monod, is aware that his destiny is nowhere written down, nonetheless acts as if his duty were written down somewhere. In the same way that the indifference of the universe did not persuade Monod simply to throw in the sponge, but led him to an ambitious "ethic of knowledge," the *amor fati* that Cameron professes, and his lack of faith in human freedom, have not led him to amoralism, either in life or in art. On the contrary, there is no one I know who is more alive to the categorical imperative. It is his sense of duty as much as his philosophical intelligence that has induced him to divide up the respective tasks of science and art in a way that echoes Schlegel's already quoted "All art must become science, and all science art":

> Science is concerned with explaining the world, art with experiencing it in the aspect of its inevitability.… Everything is available potentially to the explanations of scientific enquiry, and everything is available likewise to experience within the longer perspective of inevitability. Science and art mutually embrace each other and everything else.… Each may mutually contain the other within itself without contradiction.[75]

Really? Eric Cameron and I firmly hold on to our positions on the opposite sides of the fence that makes us talk, respectively, the language of material mysticism and that of transcendental materialism. That "everything is available potentially to the explanations of scientific enquiry" remains to be demonstrated and will always so remain. Men and women of science know the utility of this postulate: it allows them to pursue an enquiry indefinitely without repeatedly having to revisit its conditions of possibility. Kant has established these conditions for them, whether they know it or not. The postulate that "everything is available likewise to experience" is flatly an error – except for the mystic, who has access to the supersensible through revelation. Spiritual mystics were subjects subjected to the will of the Creator. They remained in the vicinity of artists as long as belief in a divine order of Creation enjoyed currency. Cameron the materialist mystic is in the vicinity of Cameron the artist and man: a subject who is aware of being subjected to natural causality alone, and who is thus preserved from confusion between art and religion.[76] He takes permission from this awareness when he applies coat after coat of gesso to the thirty or so Thick Paintings in his studio, and sets down, in text after splendid text nourished by the poets, a justification for the *inevitability* of the particular forms that the Thick Paintings took on quasi-*freely*. Straddling the fence between us, there is that little word: "quasi." Quasi-end or quasi-cause? "Is the world of art, strictly speaking, the domain of ends or the domain of causes?" wonders Cameron, as if he had to choose.[77] Should I reply to him from my side of the fence with an inversion of his own terms? Does he expect me to justify the *freedom* of the particular forms taken on quasi-*inevitably* by the Thick Paintings? He knows that they have no need of such justifications. Aesthetic judgment will suffice. His own, mine, that of people who look at his work, that of posterity and history – *to be continued*. It is for aesthetic judgment to build a bridge between the domain of ends and that of causes; a bridge whose arch is frail, and whose span is large. We both know that – which is why we have not ceased talking to each other across the fence that separates us.

Notes

1 Eric Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach* (Calgary: The Nickle Arts Museum, 1984), p. 1 and *passim* ; see also Eric Cameron, "Oedipus and Sol LeWitt," in his *Divine Comedy* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1990). The Greenberg quote is taken from "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 3.

2 "Other things being equal, we might set Reinhardt, Duchamp and Pollock in an ascending hierarchy of values according to the level of implications against which their art operates: art; society; and nature." Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach*, p. 9.

3 Robert Coates, "The Art Galleries: Extremists," *The New Yorker*, no. 26 (9 December 1950): 111; Meyer Schapiro, "The Younger American Painters of Today," *The Listener* (26 January 1956): 146; Robert Goodnough, "Reviews & Previews: Jackson Pollock," *Art News* 49, no. 8 (December 1950): 47; Sam Hunter, "Among the New Shows," *New York Times* (30 January 1949): 9. (Coates's, Goodnough's, and Hunter's pieces are reproduced in Pepe Karmel, ed., *Jackson Pollock, Interviews, Articles, and Reviews* [New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998], pp. 73, 74, and 61, respectively.)

4 "When I went round my apartment looking for things on which to apply gesso, I selected them with a deliberate casualness, hoping some unconscious significance would later become apparent to me if I did not preclude the possibility through overly self-conscious choices." Eric Cameron, *English Roots* (Lethbridge: University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, 2001), p. 123.

5 Eric Cameron's ambition is of a piece with his ethics. Being convinced that serious art is a public affair, he has long refused to sell to private collectors. This rule has in recent years been softened, as the artist realized that the public institutions his art addresses more often than not yield to market forces, while those collectors genuinely attracted to his work tend to appreciate it for its non-market-sensitive ethics.

6 "Oedipus and Sol LeWitt," in Cameron, *Divine Comedy*, p. 15.

7 Eric will certainly understand in what way this quotation he once made is addressed to him in return. I trust he will see in it my discreet and elliptical way of thanking him for having written "Looking Beyond" (*English Roots*, pp. 149–62).

8 "Oedipus and Sol LeWitt," in Cameron, *Divine Comedy*, p. 24. See also Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 24: "my decisions referenced the concept and the resulting works to the external reality of my own life and death."

9 Cameron is nonetheless alive to the possibility of being this programmer, as shown by his stated sympathy with Albert Camus's opinion that suicide is the only truly serious philosophical problem. See Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 131.

10 The expression was used by Marcel Duchamp to describe the *Large Glass*.

11 "Looking Beyond," in *English Roots*, p. 154. The emphasis and the remark in brakets are Cameron's.

12 Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 102.

13 Ibid., p. 61; see also p. 93.

14 Ibid., p. 102.

15 See William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *Sewanee Review* 54 (1946).

16 Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act," in *Salt Seller: The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, edited by Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, p. 139 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973).

17 *English Roots*, p. 99. And: "I have long felt … that the only material that lies within the area of competence of the artist to address in his or her art is his or her own lived experience and, even then, it is more authentically revealed by imprinting than in formulated expression." Eric Cameron, "Why I Was So Pleased…," in *Desire and Dread* (Calgary: Muttart Public Art Gallery, 1998), p. 25.

18 Eric Cameron describes in detail the methods taught by the Euston Road painters in *English Roots*, pp. 84–88. On the "effect," see ibid., p. 68; on the principle of "deferring the aesthetic decision" and the question of its origin, see ibid., p. 69. Eric pointed out to me that "to defer" has the double meaning of delaying and referring, and that he was convinced that, like himself, his mentors Lawrence Gowing and Quentin Bell

used the word in its second sense. They expected aesthetic decisions to be deferred (referred) to the mechanics of the process in order not to be too willed. I myself tend to think that both meanings of the word contaminate each other, both in language and in Eric's practice.

19 See "Oedipus and Sol LeWitt," p. 4. See also Eric Cameron, "Sapere Aude," in *Desire and Dread*, p. 32.

20 "Besides, it is always the others who die." This is the epitaph that is engraved on the tombstone of Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) in the Rouen cemetery. He said that "delay in glass" was "a kind of subtitle" for the *Large Glass*: "Use 'delay' instead of picture or painting; picture on glass becomes delay in glass – but delay in glass does not mean picture on glass", in Sanouillet and Peterson, *Salt Seller*, p. 26.

21 "And rose she has lived what roses live, the space of a morning."

22 Not all three roses, in fact, display red-yellow-blue layers, and you might want to see in this a relevant instance of "deferring the aesthetic decision." When painting *Alice's Rose*, the artist at some point ran out of gesso. Remembering that he had some acrylic colours given to him by John Elderfield after a term of teaching at the University of Guelph when he went on to New York and couldn't take them with him, Cameron simply decided to use them as a stand-in for the missing gesso. Because of Elderfield's choice of colours, the colours on *Alice's Rose* expressed a rather Greenbergian modernism, which however disappeared when the artist worked on *Alice's Second Rose*. There he used every colour he had in the studio. When the time came for *Alice's Rose-is-a-rose-is-a-rose*, aesthetic decision could no longer be deferred. The choice of red-yellow-blue was a deliberate reference to Mondrian and the tradition he launched, down to Gene Davis, an artist Cameron admires in spite of him having been neglected by Greenberg.

23 Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach*, p. 32.

24 Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 102.

25 "Why I Was So Pleased…," in *Desire and Dread*, p. 27.

26 "My view of the order of things is ultimately monistic, not dualistic: I see no reason to believe other than that matter, strange and complex as science shows it to be, is the one and only source of everything; that mind is a manifestation of matter and subordinate to matter; and that the end of material existence closes out the world and everything in it for each and every one of us." Ibid.

27 In conversation, 9 November 2004.

28 Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 131.

29 Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* (3 vols., comprehensive commentary by Cyril Bailey), Latin text Books I–VI (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947).

30 In conversation, 9 November 2004.

31 Sol LeWitt, *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*, quoted by Lucy Lippard in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 28. For Eric Cameron's comments, see *English Roots*, p. 16, and "Oedipus and Sol LeWitt," in *Divine Comedy*, pp. 21–22.

32 LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," in *Conceptual Art*, ed. Ursula Meyer, p. 174 (New York: Dutton, 1972).

33 Regarding La Mettrie, see Eric Cameron, "Given," in *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry de Duve, pp. 8ff. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

34 Ibid., p. 25.

35 Ibid., pp. 25–26.

36 Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach*, p. 1.

37 Ad Reinhardt, "Twelve Rules for a New Academy," in *Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. Barbara Rose, pp, 203–7 (New York: Viking Press, 1975).

38 Cameron inserted this well-known reply of Pollock to Hans Hoffman, who suggested that he draw from nature, into a passage of *Bent Axis Approach*, which clearly equated Pollock's unconscious (Freudian or Jungian) with the physical laws (gravity, the viscosity of pigments, the mechanics of levers), that account for the particular forms of his drips. Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach*, p. 19.

39 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 186. "Genie ist die angeborene Gemütsanlage (ingenium), durch welche die Natur der Kunst

die Regel gibt." *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 241–42.

40 Friedrich von Schelling, *Textes esthétiques*, trans. Alain Pernet (Paris: Klincksieck, 1978), pp. 11, 24, and 27.

41 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 192. I am sorry to have to stress that when Kant says "a man," he implies a *male*. I wish he hadn't. I nonetheless believe that a gender-blind reading of Kant is *provisonally* more fruitful than a gender-suspicious one, simply because it leaves more interpreative paths open.

42 This triple characterization of the supersensible substrate is given by Kant in the Remark II that follows the solution of the antinomy of taste. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, pp. 220–21.

43 Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum*, fragment 366; August W. Schlegel, "Lessons in art and literature"; Novalis, "Fragmenten," no. 1,073.

44 Gottfried Reinhold Treviranus published the first volume of his *Biologie oder die Philosophie der Lebenden Natur* in 1802, and Lorenz Oken his *Abriß des Systems der Biologie* in 1806. As for Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck, who is said to have coined the word "biologie," he used it for the first time in his *Hydrogéologie*, published in 1802.

45 Friedrich Schlegel, *Lyceum*, Fragment 115.

46 Joachim Dietrich Brandis, *Versuch über die Lebenskraft* (1795); Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Über den Bildungstrieb und das Zeugungsgeschäfte* (1781); Carl Friedrich Kielmeyer, *Über die Verhältnisse der organischen Kräfte untereinander* (1793); Karl Ernst von Baer, *Über die Entwicklunggeschichte der Thiere* (1828–37); Schelling, *Von der Weltseele* (1798). On these authors and others, like Johann Christian Reil, convinced that one had to give *force* a definition suitable to the organic as well as the inorganic world, or Franz Xaver von Baader, a philosopher and theologian whose mystic world view influenced Schelling, see: Timothy Lenoir, *The Strategy of Life: Teleology and Mechanics in Nineteenth Century German Biology* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1982); and: "Kant, Blumenbach, and Vital Materialism in German Biology," *Isis* 71 (1980): 77–108; Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (New York: Continuum, 2006); Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine, eds., *Romanticism and the Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

47 Albrecht von Haller was the main proponent of the *preformationist* theory in embryology, vis-à-vis which everybody had to take a stand, for it implied the Platonic primacy of "design" over mechanical forces. He also launched the search for the evasive "vital force" with his work on the irritability (*Reizbarkeit*) of the muscular fibres. Georg Ernst Stahl was the artisan of the theory of the "phlogistic" and a convinced animist in matters of physiology. Blumenbach and Kielmeyer, as well as Reil, were fostering *teleomechanism*, a dialectical reconciliation of mechanicism and teleology, also dubbed "vital materialism" by Lenoir (*The Strategy of Life*, pp. 17ff.).

48 Schelling, *Von der Weltseele* (*On the World Soul*), 1798. I used Stéphane Schmitt's French translation, *De l'âme du monde, une hypothèse de la physique supérieure pour l'explication de l'organisme général* (Paris: Éditions Rue d'Ulm, 2007). See pp. 182–85, in particular. See also Schmitt's postface, "Mécanisme ou organicisme? Schelling et la 'cause positive' de la vie," ibid., pp. 229–96.

49 Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797); *On the World Soul* (1798); *First Plan of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799); *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800).

50 I am paraphrasing Schelling in more explicitly Kantian words. Schelling wrote: "If the unconscious (blind) activity finds itself reflected upon as conscious in the case of an organic product, conversely, the conscious activity finds itself reflected upon as unconscious (objective) in the case of the product [of genius] that is discussed here." *Textes esthétiques*, p. 13.

51 Schelling, *Textes esthétiques*, p. 17.

52 *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 279.

53 Ibid., p. 246.

54 Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

55 Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach*, p. 47.

56 *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 259.

57 "Intelligent design" names the supposedly scientific theory behind which hides the Creationist doctrine held by certain

fundamentalist Protestants who read the Bible literally, and for whom Darwin is the devil. A "soft" version of the same theory finds favour with those (though they are admittedly less fanatical) who subscribe to the "anthropic principle," according to which the fundamental properties of the universe (the four constants) are so inexplicably adapted to the emergence of life, and thus of man, that one is entitled to conclude that they are and have been such all along *in order to* have generated our existence.

58 The expression "ghost in the machine" was coined by the philosopher Gilbert Ryle in *The Concept of Mind*, 1949, as an ironical designation of Cartesian dualism.

59 See Léon Brilloin, *La science et la théorie de l'information* (Paris: Masson, 1959).

60 *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 185.

61 See §59 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and the subsequent Appendix (§60), "On the Methodology of Taste," which conclude the first part of the third *Critique*.

62 Henri Focillon's *The Life of Forms*, 1943, is the epitome of this vitalism, which is as vague as it is enthusiastic. It seems to me significant that, despite the vagueness, Focillon talks about an "order of studies" that is still to be carried out, and which would be aimed at understanding "the sort of specific causality" that is to be found in works of art, "so that the concept of a world of forms should cease to appear as a metaphor, and that our sketch of a biological method should be justified in general terms." Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), (Henri Focillon, *Vie des formes*, Paris: PUF, 1970, p. 67).

63 Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum*, fragment no. 51.

64 Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach*, p. 9.

65 "Beauty has always been a matter of indifference to me in my art – not Duchamp's 'Beauty of indifference' but indifference to beauty." Eric Cameron, *Squareness:* (Lethbridge: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1993), p. 40.

66 Schelling attempted this transfer from nature to art without really having the means to it, and Hegel accomplished it at the cost of a violent *coup* from which art theory still suffers today. This misunderstood transfer is central to my reading of Kant, *after* Duchamp, as it is set out in the fifth chapter of my *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), and in the second chapter of *Au nom de l'art* (Paris: Minuit, 1989), which was already putting forward a "cybernetic" reading of reflexive judgment.

67 Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," *Partisan Review*, July–August 1940; repr. in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. I, *Perceptions and Judgments*, ed. John O'Brian, p. 34 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

68 Cameron, "Looking Beyond," in *English Roots*, p. 154 (see above).

69 "Modernist Painting," *Forum Lectures* (Washington: Voice of America, 1960), repr. in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. IV, *Modernism with a Vengeance*, ed. John O'Brian, p. 85 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

70 Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 103.

71 See Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach*, p. 48.

72 Cameron, "Given," in *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, p. 26. He added, as if to show me that he had not waited for me to arrive in order to translate his material mysticism into the language of transcendantal materialism himself: "I would not quarrel with the logic of Kant's arguments regarding the inaccessibility of the suprasensible substrate, but would rather assert that the role of the artist has always entailed a mystical revelation beyond the logic of argument, albeit, in the present, this must imply a material mysticism."

73 Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 180.

74 I refer to my dear father, Christian de Duve, who, like Monod, is a biologist and a Nobel laureate, and I am thinking specifically of one his recent books, *Singularities: Landmarks on the Pathways of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

75 Cameron, *Bent Axis Approach*, p. 13.

76 See Cameron, *English Roots*, p. 69.

77 "Art and History – ART and HISTORY," in *Desire and Dread*, p. 41.

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III(i) IC – 1, 1964, oil on canvas, 122 x 122 cm. Collection of the artist.
Photo: Kevin Baer, TrépanierBaer Gallery.

DIANA NEMIROFF has garnered an international reputation in the contemporary art world. Currently the Director of Carleton University's Art Gallery, she was a senior curator at the National Gallery of Canada from 1990 to 2005. She has organized many successful exhibitions, including her favourite, "Crossings," in 1988 and "Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada," (1992) with Charlotte Townsend-Gault and Robert Houle. Nemiroff has been an Adjunct Professor with the School for Studies in Art and Culture at Carleton University since 2000 and is also an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Ottawa. She holds an MA in art history from Concordia University.

THIERRY DE DUVE is an art theorist and historian whose best teachers are artists such as Duchamp and Manet. He has been a Professor at the Université de Lille 3, France, since 2002, a Getty fellow in 2008–2009; a Clark fellow in the Fall of 2009; in 2010, a Getty distinguished visiting professor at J. Nehru University, Delhi, India, and visiting professor at the Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil. De Duve is author of *Kant after Duchamp* and some ten other books on art, art history, art theory and art education.

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"These authors are among the smartest art writers around, and that's good, because Eric Cameron is one of Canada's most difficult – and most important – contemporary artists."

- Cliff Eyland, Director, Gallery One One One, University of Manitoba

"Cover and Uncover *is an extremely significant contribution…. Anyone either in Canada or elsewhere who researches and writes on Eric Cameron, or indeed on selective topics in contemporary Canadian art, will be required to cite the book and include it on relevant bibliographies."*

- Niamh O'Laoghaire, Director, University of Toronto Art Centre

This is the first in-depth exploration of Eric Cameron's art and philosophy. Editor Ann Davis joins three respected and renowned art scholars – Peggy Gale, Diana Nemiroff, and Thierry de Duve – to critically assess Cameron's work in all its glory and considerable enigma. The essays examine his early work, his perceptive writings, his videos, and his Thick Paintings – in which the artist coats objects with thousands of layers of gesso, transforming them into something else entirely. Expert commentary combined with rich illustrations of Cameron's work in multiple media, provide a vital and long overdue critical lens through which to view this important artist.

ANN DAVIS is Director of The Nickle Arts Museum at the University of Calgary and a prominent art critic, curator, and teacher. She is the author of *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting 1920–1940* and of numerous articles and essays on twentieth-century Canadian art.

PEGGY GALE is an independent curator and critic whose texts on contemporary art, and in particular video art, have become artistic benchmarks. A selection of her essays, *Videotexts*, was published in 1995. She was the winner of the 2006 Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts.

DIANA NEMIROFF is Director of the Carleton University Art Gallery in Ottawa and a former senior curator at the National Gallery of Canada. She is also an adjunct professor with the School for Studies in Art and Culture at Carleton University and in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Ottawa and has published extensively on contemporary Canadian and feminist art.

THIERRY DE DUVE is a historian, curator, teacher, and theorist of contemporary art. Born in Belgium, he has been a visiting professor at University of Lille III and the Sorbonne, among others, and has authored numerous books, including *Kant after Duchamp*.

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