

Dissertation Proposal

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How evolved

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Research in Practice

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My subject area is the impasto technique used in painting; I would like to investigate the importance of this technique for the painter and the viewer, also how impasto has evolved through time. In my practice, I am interested in the relationship between technology and painting methods, and in this essay, I will attempt to investigate that concerning impasto painting particularly. My research will be built around these three keywords: why impasto, How evolved, and Technological influence.

the word impasto originated from the Italian language and means "dough. Traditionally oil paint is used for impasto because of its thickness, either by taking it directly from the tube; or by adding a thickening medium. Heavy body acrylic paint can also be used for impasto by adding gel agents (Sidaway, 2014, p76). The purpose of impasto is to emphasize some elements of the painting in contrast with the other parts that have thinner paint, otherwise, the whole surface could be covered with a thick layer that has peaks of paints, to produce a relief painting (Akib et al, 2016, p 246).



(Llewellyn, n. d)

Why Impasto

The process of impasto is to apply thick paint by a brush or a painting knife to create very apparent strokes, giving the surface of the painting a high texture (Akib et al, 2016, p 246), which reveal the speed and the strength in which the artist applied the paint, reflecting the artists' emotion and feelings concerning his subject, thus becoming defining elements and a unique

signature of the artist that bears his identity and carry his soul. Many believe that impasto inspires spontaneity and freedom and has a magical effect with the illusion of details that is creating.

Impasto also could be achieved by layering the paint in large amounts to add a sculptural quality to the painting, which holds a grand presence and strong physical statement, and create instinctive and expressive works (Lyle Millard, 1987, p 24). Paint has a body, and it is itself a matter that could be modelled and become connected to the senses of the viewer and using thick paint can reflect reality with sensuality and emotional charge, the artist is making the fullest use of the sensual property of the paint and reveals his inner side with the manipulation of his medium (Rubin, 1999, P32,34). After all, Impasto is not just a technique, it is a method for transforming a painting from a flat surface to a sensual object that holds the personality of the creator, and this is why many contemporary artists are using it, they are placing paint at the centre of their attention and the “truth to material” became central to contemporary art, making impasto a sort of compulsory (Tate, n.d).

“As far as I am concerned the paint is the person, I want it to work for me just as flesh does” – Lucien Freud. (Boyce, 2012)

The view is to present works reflecting the raw perception of mind and eye of the viewer so a painting should have its reality rather than just being an optimal and perfectly imagined smooth surface (Pool, 1991, P19,20).

Furthermore, the relief of impasto reflects light in the same way when intense light falls on an object’s surface, increasing the reflectivity of the paint, so artists have more opportunities to manipulate the quality of light in their works (Lyle Millard, 1987, p46).

How evolved

This light effect of impasto was used to paint the jewellery or folds in clothes, by the old masters such as Tiziano Vecellio Titian the renaissance painter, and the Baroque artists such as Rembrandt Van Rijn (Britanica,2012).

Even though the impasto technique is not a newly invented method, for a long time the goal was to hide the idea that something is painted, and artists eliminated the brushstrokes or any evidence of the artist’s hand, and perfectly finished work with precise lines, carefully blended

brushstrokes was the olden tradition (Pool, 1991, P10-12). Impasto started first with the renaissance artists, Leonardo da Vinci who tried to change this artificial slickness through a uniform soft-focus blurring of the paint.

Then Titian thought that It was good to show the brush strokes, for that they could make a true representation, this is evident in an area of very visible brush strokes in early Titian portraits "Man with a Quilted Sleeve".



(Titian, 1510)



(Titian, 1576)

There is a shifting balance between the paint itself and what it represents all along with Titian's practice. this balance became equal when he reached success in the 1540s, his painting strokes became very visible, but they first served the subjects of his painting. In his famous "Danae", he reveals a very effective correlation between the visual and the physical. which was expressed by a lightly loaded brush. This balance shifted more in favour of the paint, toward the end of his work, and at the very end, the "Flaying of Marsyas." Was a highly textured painting to the extent that experts thought it might not have been finished, although it was signed (Gopnick, 2003)

With the Baroque painter Rembrandt, impasto came into light. Rembrandt was brilliantly able to reflect emotions, with his use of texture and light since he began painting and through all his works. He was successful in adding a third dimension to the painting making a true innovation in the method of working (Gonzalez et al, 2019, p5619-5622). He made dramatic-looking portraits by using thick strokes of paint that are rising from the painting surface (Galton, 1991, p40).



(Rembrandt, 1658)

Impasto became increasingly notable in nineteenth-century landscapes of the Naturalists and Romantics, such as John Constable, also Joseph Mallord William Turner with his pioneering spontaneous, free application of gestural, near-abstract rough brushstrokes, with hazy boundaries between the subject and the background, a practice was taken up and developed by the impressionist (Irish Times, 2004).



(Turner, 1841)

The Impressionists produced a surge of new techniques (Rubin, 1999, p24) They created forms with the immediate use of paint, completing a painting quickly without preparatory sketching, opposing the traditional practice, such as “La Grenouille” painting of Pierre-Auguste Renoir (Wallis, 2002, P32). They used visible, spontaneous, free, and fragmented brushstrokes to reflect movement. All these impasto methods were used previously by painters in the past, but what was revolutionary about this movement is the use of all these methods together and on regular basis, they created works by covering entire canvases with impasto textures in an almost sculptural approach. Building layer upon layer Monet attempted to reflect the effect of the shifting light with time, also the atmosphere, by producing series of paintings, such as the Rouen Cathedral series (Wallis, 2002, P34).



(Renoir, 1869)

Post-impressionist, Vincent Van Gogh made remarkable use of heavy impasto, with sensuous love of material, and immediate use of thick, bustling, spontaneous, and expressive brushstrokes, with this he was able to express movement, hustle, and his inner turmoil (Elger et al, 2016, p 54, 56).



(1889, Van Gogh)

Abstract Expressionist artists in the (1900-1980) also made extensive use of impasto, they valued spontaneity and considered the creative process of the paintings as the most important aspect, and considered the visible signs of the working process, as a lasting mark of existence and a signature reflecting

the artist's identity (Paul, 2004) such as Jackson Pollock who discovered the most innovative way of executing impasto, in series of large drip paintings, with pouring the paint directly on a surface laid on the floor, and layering hundreds of lines of paint ((Elger et al, 2016, p424). His painting process was named "action painting" because he applied impasto in a dynamic and energetic way. Since that time, applying thick paint became essential in modern abstract and semi-figurative work.

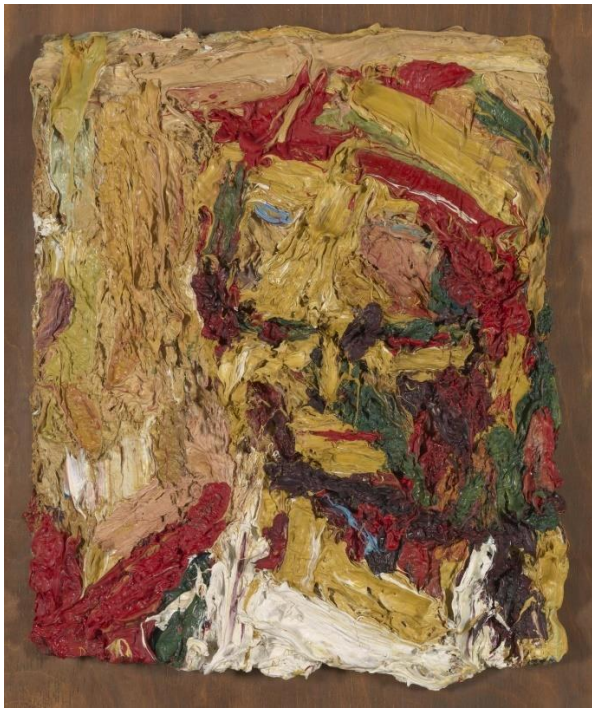


(Pollock, 1950)

Figurative artists from the school of London (1976-1990) tried to find new ways of seeing the self and the other, and many used Impasto to express that, like Frank Auerbach which impasto meant for him not only a different way of seeing because it offers tactility and proximity but also, the not seeing clearly, via the messy brushstrokes (Lampert, 2015, p16). Also, Leon Kossoff worked with very thick paint, building muddy geological surfaces, with his heads' paintings looking like mummified flesh (Perl, 2000, p79). Both artists unique traits are the excessive thickness of paint, they took impasto to the extreme, resulting in nearly three-dimensional surface, and very heavy paintings (Riggs, 1998)



(Kossouf, 1962)



(Auerbach, 1960)

Contemporary figurative artists were influenced by the School of London, such as Jenny Saville, who is interested in painting the real forms. She uses impasto to reflect the heavyweight of female's body and the broad, thick, and harsh brushstrokes to reveal the body marks and a

variable skin texture, showing the imperfections of the body as if the surface of the canvas is the flesh itself (Nead, 1994, pp18-19).



(Saville, 1992)

Technological influence

Technological development had a considerable influence on painting methods long ago. Past time artists made use of optical and mechanical tools such as the camera obscura by artists Gaspare Vanvitelli (1652-1736), which led him to the formation of the genre Italian view painting with a new method of executing a painting, Vanvitelli's kind of views also resulted from his interest in city life and anticipated the wide applications of photography, this method was taken by many painters until the invention of photography (Roderick, 2003)

Similarly, impressionists were interested in painting daily life, and under the influence of photography with the snapshots the camera can produce, they made paintings without a prior compositional arrangement, and they painted subjects with blurring edges reflecting the captured momentary movement just like a camera, (Boulevard des Capucines) work by Monet show the

similarity with photographs (Katz and Dars, 2016, P103).



(Monet, 1874).

The invention of photography had a big influence on Impressionists, they imitated its same techniques. Aaron Scharf research on painting and photograph revealed that the Impressionists based their work on photographs, because of that, Impressionists used the Halation effect between the subject and its background, which is the result of the movement of objects that cause haziness of the contour of the objects with the falling light (Pool, 1991, p15,16).

A photograph is produced directly by light without the drawing of a contour, painter Jean-Baptist Camille Corot observed the works of the photographers in The Fountain Bleu in Paris (Rubin, 1999, P32), and for that, he made paintings with hazy effects that were based on the blurring of the very first cameras, and this worked very well for producing the ambiance effect of the impressionists' paintings who draw on Corot paintings (Pickeral, 2018, P242). Also, the books of photographer Eadweard Muybridge's about animal and human movement were the basis of many of Edgar Degas's works (Wallis, 2002, P21).

Photography offered better reproduction methods and allowed a wide range of new creativities, painting movements either moved away from the pure representation which the camera was able to achieve with high quality (cubism, surrealism, and abstract for example) or tried to add a third dimension to the painting with the use of impasto or otherwise use the images and technology in the work of art itself (Pop art, digital art, etc..).

Most recently, the novel technological discovery, which is three-dimensional printing, succeeded in producing more authentic copies of the original artworks, and opened new possibilities of creativity, carrying a large influence on working methods. 3D printing can produce physical objects molded directly from a 3D model created on the computer, or by the scanning of an existing object (Hoskins, 2013). Thus, permitting a new way to reproduce an oil painting by being able to remake the embossing effect of brushstrokes, and correcting the shortage that 2D printing is missing (Chen, 2015, pp260-264).

A novel system is combining 3D printing with computer-based deep learning to reproduce authentic versions of historical paintings, allowing individuals, companies, and museums to produce copies of these works. In 2013, in Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum produced three-dimensional copies of some of Van Gogh's paintings. The copies possess the same size, color, thickness, and same direction of brushstrokes of the original paintings (New York times, 2013, Home page).

A short time ago, high-resolution 3D prints were made for Rembrandt and Van Gogh's works, which proved to be much more skillful than common posters. Yet, although these replicas have good matching depth and colors, they lacked some of the reflectivity and light transmission that the original paintings have (Zaman et al, 2014, pp1-10).

But more recent experiments revealed that the method is fast enough for reproduction purposes and that it can simultaneously reproduce the same colors, same topography, and especially same gloss information of an original painting (Elkhuizen et al, 2019).

Faithful reproduction of masterpieces with the advancement of 3D printing will completely transform the experience of the viewer and makes it possible for anyone to display exact copies. A video of High detailed copy of Van Gogh's painting shows an example of the authentic replicas that are already made (Cherevan, 2014).



(Jamie, 2017)

Visual artists starting to use the 3D printing reproduction methods, in San Diego, the artist Erin Hanson paints landscapes with a sculptural effect by the use of impasto. She pioneered the making of Limited-Edition 3D prints, her replicas bear the same brush strokes and colors as her original artwork. (Hanson, 2020).

Combining new technology with traditional tools is creating high-quality products, with impressive precision and efficiency, meantime maintaining the visual quality and tactility of the handmade (Johnson, 2017, p7).

The application of this system concerning painting is not limited to the reproduction, it is also capable of turning flat paintings into textured 3D works such as the Tactile Art for the Blind in Prado Museum, Madrid allowing the blind to enjoy artworks by touching and feeling these pieces (Bloom, 2015).



(Getty images, 2015)

Furthermore, using the 3D printing and computer data analysis of the entire work of Rembrandt, such as information on colour, depth, clothing..., allowed the experts to produce an original painting in his style and give it the same texture and same brushstrokes of the artist's paintings (Baraniuk, 2016).



(BBC, 2016)

Art is an ever-changing idea that makes use of novel technological methods and always sets new boundaries for revealing human expressions in new creations. With the use of 3D printing, objects could be molded by computer in a layering process, and this could free the artist from many of the limitations of traditional production processes, and at present visual artists are venturing into the creative possibilities of this new method (Hoskins, 2013, p6) Different production methods visualize different ideas and new ways of engagement leading to new art forms (Johnson, 2017, p8). There will be more improvement in 3D printing in the future, which will also make use of new materials, and that will certainly have further influence on the method of painting. The above examples are visions that give us a hint about the creative opportunities of the future. The question is, how the invention of 3D printing will influence painting methods in the future.

Will painters depend on the 3D printer to create the impasto effect on their paintings, thus simply producing flat paintings, leaving the rest for the machine, or they will be producing more sophisticated sculptural paintings challenging the ability of a machine to produce the skills and the soul of the handmade, or possibly future painters will just create the virtual model on the computer and rely completely on the 3D printer for making the physical body of the painting.

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