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Attending to the Stories of Displaced Women:
A Portrait Painter's Perspective

Hannah Rose Thomas

Submitted in fulfilment of requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

School of Education

College of Social Sciences

University of Glasgow

2024

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Hannah Rose Thomas

Signature:

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In memory of my brother
Morgan James Dante Thomas
(1993-2023)



Abstract

This thesis traces the ethical and conceptual connections between Simone Weil's account of attention and my artistic practice of attention through portrait paintings of displaced women. I have adopted a practice-led approach whereby the philosophical reflections are intricately informed by the contemplative, prayerful traditional painting methods that I have embraced. The research journey has been inductive, and the key themes have emerged gradually, mirroring the painting process itself. Alongside Simone Weil, I draw upon Adriana Cavarero's concept of inclination and narratability and Luce Irigaray's luminous writings on the phenomenology of art, silence, listening and prayer.

The thesis begins with an in-depth analysis of the ethics of representation. I begin with considering the dominant tropes in contemporary portrayal of refugees in the media and the history of portraiture painting and iconography. Drawing insights from figures including Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion and Weil I consider the transformative potential of portrait painting as an ethical practice, transcending tendencies to reify or reduce 'the other' and cultivating a culture of encounter and ethical engagement. These ethical concerns situate the research and foreground the relational approach that I embrace to both my portraiture painting practice and to the participatory art workshops with women from displaced and asylum-seeking communities. I gently seek to offer an approach to arts practice with and by women from displaced communities, that offers a space of care, reverent time-taking, deep listening and attention-giving.

The exegetical chapter shines a light upon the traditional, prayerful painting methods and techniques that I have embraced, drawn from iconography and early Renaissance sacred art. Painting a portrait is a gesture of inclined attention towards the irreducible mystery of the other, in solidarity, mutual respect and love. The thesis concludes with a reflection upon the value of the exhibitions of the portraits, specifically in political contexts, in creating the space for what Weil describes as an 'interval of hesitation'. The work of art is a sacralising act that makes possible a more expansive encounter with the other and offers itself as an interval of wonder and transcendence, gesturing towards something of enduring significance. As such, this thesis endeavours to shine a light upon the reparative, restorative and mystical potential of a work of art. I contend that a reverential, relational approach to the portrait encounter as a gift of attention is possible.

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Introduction

In this thesis I reflect upon my portrait painting process of women from migratory and marginalised communities in the light of Simone Weil's philosophy of *attention*. I reflect upon the painting process as an invitation to an ethics of attention, inclination and care. In his Bampton Lectures Rowan Williams articulated the 'profoundly damaged and fractured solidarity' in the world in which we live. In conclusion he affirmed the need 'with some considerable urgency,' for 'programmes and practices which increasingly impel us to the spending of time and the giving of attention.'¹ In this thesis I posit that portraiture is an example of such a practice.

There are three aspects of my artistic process that relate to 'the spending of time and the giving of attention'² – firstly the act of being present through *attentive listening* to the stories of the women; secondly the prayerful absorption that the portrait painting process entails; thirdly I consider the work of art as an attention-inviting object, 'that which we can contemplate [...] A picture which we can gaze at for hours [...] on which we can fix our attention.'³ It is my hope that these paintings create space for an 'interval of hesitation'⁴ to attend to subjects that are difficult to approach, namely conflict, persecution and displacement. In approaching the rigorous and delicate commitment to make art in response to suffering, perhaps these portraits can offer a different perspective from the war-exhausted narratives dominating news cycles.

In this thesis I endeavour to shine a light upon the attention inherent in the portraiture painting process itself: I consider the artistic methods and materials that I have chosen to use, the rigour of traditional painting techniques with natural pigments, as a key facet of my methodology of attention. The ritualistic early Renaissance painting methods, and in some instances the use of gold leaf, are evocative of iconography and sacred art. These gentle gestures communicate attentive care and embody how I seek to bear witness to, honour and revere the stories that I have heard. It also shines a light upon the value of silence. To learn the habits of unhurried time-taking, attention-giving and silent listening is to approach the irreducible, mysterious threshold of the other with the openness and respect that makes an ethical relation possible. Simone Weil writes that genuine attention is 'a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it *is* a miracle.'⁵

While my methodology outlines portraiture as a fundamentally relational practice; my painting process tends to be a silent, contemplative – one might say prayerful – expression of attention. Part III attends to the painting process itself and Part IV considers the therapeutic value of attention through a community-based self-portraiture workshop with asylum-seeking women in Glasgow. In part V I reflect upon the exhibitions of the portraits in places of influence in the Global North, such as the UK Houses of Parliament, and the 'attention-inviting' work of art as creating space, in the words of Weil, for an

¹ Rowan Williams. "Solidarity, Rights and the Image of God: Ethics and Christian Anthropology." The Bampton Lectures 2024. The University Church, Oxford. March 5, 2024, video, 42:30-44: 30.
<https://www.universitychurch.ox.ac.uk/content/bampton-lectures>

² Ibid.

³ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002), 149

⁴ Simone Weil. "The Iliad; or the Poem of Force." In *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, ed. Sian Miles. (London: Penguin Classics 2005), 194.

⁵ Simone Weil. *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 64.

‘interval of hesitation, wherein lies all our consideration for our [sisters] in humanity.’⁶ These disparate parts are interwoven and interconnected through the luminous philosophical threads of Weil’s philosophy of *attention* and Adriana Cavarero’s *inclination*.

My research is invariably different from what had been initially projected, on account of embarking upon this work in the midst of a global pandemic. However, it has evolved into an enriching ethical, theoretical and philosophical foray into the precepts underpinning my artistic practice and problematising the *value* of art. This thesis is drawn from a rather unusual interdisciplinary mixture, derived from the fields of Philosophy, Phenomenology, Psychology, Theology, Aesthetics, Art History and a Feminist Ethics of Care. The persistent and predictable critique pertaining to positionality, privilege and power has provoked profound analysis and resistance, contending with contentious issues surrounding the ethics of representation. I am grateful for the rigorous searching that the critique provoked, enabling me to move from apology to an apprehension of the potentiality of an ethical approach to portraiture.

My artistic work has expanded and deepened as a result of this philosophical and intellectual inquiry. The trajectory began a decade ago while living in Jordan as an Arabic student in 2014. I was offered an opportunity to organise art projects with Syrian refugees through the UN Refugee Agency – an experience which opened my eyes to the magnitude of the refugee crisis confronting our world today. I began to paint the portraits of some of the refugees I had met, to show the people behind the global crisis, whose personal stories are otherwise obscured by statistics. According to the UNHCR Global Trends report, the number of displaced people now exceeds 100 million.⁷ The sheer scale of these statistics is overwhelming and does not illuminate the unique lived realities of individuals fleeing war and persecution. As a result of my experience in Jordan, I became interested in both the healing potential of the arts and its role as a tool for advocacy and awareness-raising.

Since Jordan, I have had the privilege of organising art projects with Yazidi women who escaped ISIS captivity in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq; Rohingya refugees in Bangladeshi camps and survivors of sexual violence at the hands of Boko Haram and Fulani militants in Northern Nigeria, and more recently with women from the asylum-seeking community in Glasgow and Ukrainian refugees in Romania. For the art workshops in Kurdistan and Nigeria I taught the women how to paint their self-portraits as a way to communicate their stories; many of the women painted themselves with shimmering tears of gold.⁸ It was after learning to draw and paint for the very first time, the women asked whether I would consider painting their portraits.⁹ It felt a privilege to be entrusted with sharing their stories in this way: ‘I am honoured to have been able to exhibit these paintings in places of influence in the Global North, alongside the women’s self-portraits, to enable their voices to be heard and to advocate on their behalf.’¹⁰

Paintings from *Tears of Gold* have been exhibited at places including the UK Houses of Parliament, European Parliament, Scottish Parliament, the FCDO, GCHQ, Buckingham Palace, Lambeth Palace, Westminster Abbey, Southwark Cathedral and the International Peace Institute in New York. The exhibition was featured in the Google Arts virtual exhibition for the UN’s

⁶ Weil, *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, 194.

⁷ UNHCR. “Global Trends Report 2022”, UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2022>, 7.

⁸ Hannah Rose Thomas. *Tears of Gold: Portraits of Yazidi, Rohingya and Nigerian Women*. (Walden: Plough, 2024), 3-4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

Official 75th Anniversary, 'The Future is Unwritten: Artists for Tomorrow.' The portraits collected in this thesis comprise the final chapter for my debut art book *Tears of Gold: Portraits of Yazidi, Rohingya and Nigerian Women*, with a foreword by His Majesty King Charles III written prior to his ascension:

*"One of Hannah's aims is to capture not only the courage and stoicism of the women who have suffered so much, but also the nobility, dignity, and extraordinary compassion that many of them manage to retain, despite their traumatic experiences. Her use of traditional painting techniques along with gold leaf (learned at my School of Traditional Arts), together with her spiritual outlook and intention, elevates the portraits to almost the status of icons."*¹¹

¹¹ HRH The Prince Charles, Former Prince of Wales. Foreword. In *Ibid.*, ix.



Against positionality towards *Inclination*

'[The] self located in a slightly different position, neither vertical nor horizontal, yet given over, exposed, offered, inclined to the other. Within feminist theory this unbalancing gesture nestles, more or less explicitly, in the imaginary of the ethics of care.'

- Adriana Cavarero¹²

To begin, I gently resist colluding with the expectation to apologise for my positionality and privilege as white, female, educated and Anglophone. While I agree that reflexivity offers a vital tool to interrogate one's attitude and inclinations, especially within the complex field of research with marginalised and migratory communities. Nevertheless, the 'new orthodoxy'¹³ of positionality declarations often simply reifies problematic power dynamics.¹⁴ Such statements can be complicit in '(re)centring whiteness', lingering on white researcher's 'unease' ostensibly to absolve guilt, pre-empt critique and achieve 'redemption' through 'confessional declarations,' allegedly in order to restore 'authority, reliability, and an air of objectivity.'¹⁵ I suggest that such 'performative reflexivity'¹⁶ has the potential to exacerbate divisions and entrench defensive postures. Therefore, since it does not enable one to transcend embedded systems of power or the prevailing climate of disconnection and distrust, the value of positionality statements is nebulous.

We are witnessing a time of perilously eroded and fractured solidarity, increasingly polarized according to (but not limited to) the entrenched lines of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religion.¹⁷ Our defended, differentiated identities restrict us from truly encountering, seeing and listening to one another, or to opening up to 'multiple other forms of being in the world'.¹⁸ What would a 'reparative scholarship'¹⁹ look like? How can we learn to turn and to *incline* towards one another in unprecedented ways?

¹² Adriana Cavarero, "Inclining the Subject: Ethics, Alterity and Natality" in *Theory After 'Theory'*, eds. Jane Elliott, and Derek Attridge, (London: Routledge, 2011), 195.

¹³ Daniel O'Neill, "Complicated shadows: a discussion of positionality within educational research." *Oxford Review of Education* (2024), 1–16.

¹⁴ Jasmine K Gani, Rabea M Khan, "Positionality Statements as a Function of Coloniality: Interrogating Reflexive Methodologies", *International Studies Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (June 2024), sqae038.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ John a. powell and Stephen Menendian, *Belonging Without Othering: How We Save Ourselves and the World*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024), 3.

¹⁸ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality." Foundation Frantz Fanon, 2016. <https://fondation-frantzfanon.com/outline-of-ten-theses-on-coloniality-and-decoloniality/>, 10.

¹⁹ Gani and Khan, "Positionality Statements as a Function of Coloniality", 1.

Alison Phipps reminds us, 'There is no pure place to stand.'²⁰ As such, how do we 'stay with the trouble'²¹ and engage authentically with how chosen and un-chosen aspects of ourselves affect our encounters, aware that we are intricately 'embodied by our relationships with our shadows'?²² How can we communicate meaningfully and authentically across difference? Can art offer a way to challenge the restricted, fractured and 'weaponised togetherness' which afflicts and divides society?²³

I would like to gently suggest that there is another way; an alternative, beyond apology, self-protection, justification, isolation and division. It is an invitation to move away from a defensive posture towards *inclination*.

Nevertheless I acknowledge that rage regarding historical (and current) injustice perpetrated by white, imperialist, Anglo-hegemonic agendas is valid and vital. Indeed, the wounds of the long legacies of slavery and colonialism weigh heavily upon the communities in which we dwell.²⁴ Nelson Maldonado-Torres writes of the centring place being love and rage. Not apology: 'Love and rage are possible in spite of the profound wounds created by modernity / coloniality.'²⁵ Indeed, Gloria Anzaldúa writes: 'We are all wounded, but we can connect through the wound that alienated us from others. When the wound forms a *cicatriz*, the scar can become a bridge linking people who have been split apart.'²⁶ It is this transformative process that enables love and understanding to flourish.²⁷ The concept of the role of art as a *bridge* – one that sometimes even emerges from one's woundedness – is a thread that runs through this thesis.

At times it seems the balance in the world tends towards fury and fear. Nonetheless, we as individuals can choose to act to tip the balance towards love and hope. Therefore, I offer a scholarly and artistic contribution that, I hope, attends to love, however partial and fraught with complexity. Love encompasses an embrace of the body of knowledges, arts, ethical practices, and a politics of relationality grounded in vulnerability, humility, and attentive care. In love, we build bridges that reach towards the other, but in other contexts we are perilously susceptible to erecting defences, burning bridges, and closing down dialogue.²⁸ In the words of Luce Irigaray: 'Love has to deal with

²⁰ Alison Phipps, *Decolonising Multilingualism: Struggles to Decreate*, (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2019), 4.

²¹ Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

²² Báýò Akómoláfé, "I, Coronavirus. Mother. Monster. Activist," personal website, May 15, 2020, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/i-coronavirus-mother-monster-activist>

²³ Rowan Williams, "Creating an Ideal: Solidarity and Catholic Social Thought." The Bampton Lectures 2024. The University Church, Oxford. February 27, 2024, 55:51 <https://www.universitychurch.ox.ac.uk/content/bampton-lectures>

²⁴ Rowan Williams, "Solidarity, Rights and the Image of God: Ethics and Christian Anthropology." The Bampton Lectures 2024. The University Church, Oxford. March 5, 2024, video, 50:47 <https://www.universitychurch.ox.ac.uk/content/bampton-lectures>

²⁵ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality." Foundation Frantz Fanon., 2016. <https://fondation-frantzfanon.com/outline-of-ten-theses-on-coloniality-and-decoloniality/>

²⁶ Anzaldúa, Gloria, "Let us be the healing of the wound." In *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 313. Quoted in Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Emma Reed Jones, "Politics of Relation, Politics of Love." In *Towards a new human being*, eds. Luce Irigaray, Mahon O'Brien & Christos Hadjioannou, (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 121.

the courage and the patience of the experience of fire or of the dazzling light which happens, affects, shakes and transforms us. Love agrees to welcome what touches us, to endure, even to suffer, it by opening up to it.’²⁹

What does it mean to embrace ‘practices of becoming-with’ in these precarious times.³⁰ Where can we share commonalities, stories that disrupt rigid identities and boundary lines and fling wide the horizon to welcome the other whom I can never fully know?³¹ How do we contribute to ‘building a bigger and more inclusive ‘we’’³² that enables love and understanding to flourish? What alternative postures or gestures are available for us to embrace? I offer these artistic and attentive gestures that, I believe, can contribute, albeit in a small way, to a ‘culture of life and love.’³³

Feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero substitutes the dominant political posture of *homo erectus*, with that of *inclination*, of leaning towards the other in an open, relational, vulnerable gesture of care.³⁴ Cavarero’s relational ontology and postural ethics of ‘inclination’ provides a counter-narrative to Kant’s sovereign subject, the ‘vertical axis’ of rectilinearity, invulnerability and self-sufficiency.³⁵ For Cavarero, Feminist theories that insist on ‘an embodied, relational, and vulnerable subjectivity’ and gesture towards a more peaceful politics, present an alternative to ‘the warrior paradigm’ that has dominated for thousands of years.³⁶ This requires a shift in attention from the universal, individualistic subject that, in Judith Butler’s words, ‘shores itself up, seeks to reconstitute its imagined wholeness [...] at the price of denying own vulnerability, its dependency, its exposure’.³⁷

Cavarero identifies the role of the ‘inclined’ mother in Davinci’s painting *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne* (1503-19) as an embodiment of her alternative, subversive ethics of altruism and human interdependency.³⁸ Whilst the Kantian imaginary conceives the ideal human individual as erect, autonomous and dominant; the tender gesture of the mother is that of bending, attending to her child, thereby enshrining the interdependence, ethical relationality, and vulnerability of life.³⁹ Indeed, Cavarero reminds us that from birth, we are marked ‘by asymmetric and uneven dependences’ and ‘vulnerable insofar as we are irremediably exposed to others;’⁴⁰ a reality that ‘philosophy has

²⁹ Luce Irigaray, *To Be Born: Genesis of a New Human Being*. (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 78.

³⁰ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 55.

³¹ Reed Jones, “Politics of Relation, Politics of Love,” 120.

³² Powell and Menendian, *Belonging Without Othering*, 10.

³³ Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*, trans. Stephen Pluháček. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 91.

³⁴ Maria Grazia Imperiale, Alison Phipps, Giovanna Fassetta, “On Online Practices of Hospitality in Higher Education,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 40 (2021): 636.

³⁵ Lucy Benjamin, “Ethical inclinations: Relational ontologies in Cavarero, Benjamin, And Arendt.” *Philosophy Today*, 64, 3, (2020), 671.

³⁶ Adriana Cavarero quoted in Roncalli, Elvira, *The Future of the World Is Open: Encounters with Lea Melandri, Luisa Muraro, Adriana Cavarero, and Rossana Rossanda*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2022), 127.

³⁷ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. (Verso: London, 2004), 41.

³⁸ Bonnie Honig, “How to Do Things with Inclination: Antigones, with Cavarero”, in *Toward a Feminist Ethics of Nonviolence*, eds. Timothy J. Huzar, and Clare Woodford (New York: Fordham University Press. 2021), 63.

³⁹ Seitz, Sergej. “Affirmative Refusals: Reclaiming Political Imagination with Bonnie Honig and Lola Olufemi.” *Genealogy+Critique* 8, no. 1 (2022): 7-8.

⁴⁰ Cavarero quoted in Roncalli, *The Future of the World Is Open*, 127.

obstinately denied.’⁴¹ The image of maternal inclination offers an ontology liberated from the centrality of the self and focused upon the other,⁴² ‘conspicuously abandoning its own balance.’⁴³ Cavarero draws upon Arendt’s notion that ‘every inclination turns outwards, it leans out of the self.’⁴⁴ Inclination has an effect of leaning; also of reverence.

The term *inclination* derives from the Latin *inclinare*, which in turn is a derivative of the Greek *klinein*: to bend, to be sloped, to lean. The Italian words for *decline* [*declivio*] and bow [*inchino*] share the same root, denoting a bending or curvature.⁴⁵ The geometrical imaginary of *inclination* denotes humility, vulnerability and receptivity, qualities that are often misconstrued as subservience, and therefore conceal ‘the secret peace that gift carries’⁴⁶ (and it’s subversive power). In the words of contemporary artist Celia Paul, referring to the ‘subdued palette’ and portraits by Gwen John ‘imbued with a serene tenderness’⁴⁷ ‘I’ve learned from John that you don’t need to shout to have an impact.’⁴⁸

The posture of inclination is vital for artistic work. For Irigaray, representation in a painting is not ‘a means of seizing and mastering, thus reproducing’ but more ‘a sense which can be touched and moved.’⁴⁹ This implies an intuitive openness, receptivity and a predisposition to respond, for ‘seeing amounts to being touched – by light, by colours and, in a way, by the world and by the things.’⁵⁰ Art is birthed from a place of sensitive attunement to the profoundly beautiful and, at times, distressing and overwhelming, capacity to be moved by the world. Donna Haraway calls this ‘cultivating response-ability.’⁵¹ This response-ability is especially important when working with vulnerable communities.

Creativity, whether in artistic or academic work, requires vulnerability. Vulnerability is the wellspring of art; and, in the words of Simone Weil, ‘a mark of existence.’⁵² Creating a work of art alludes to the metaphor of the generative maternal act of giving birth or bringing into being, as well as taking care of. The etymology of the word vulnerability is derived from the Latin *vulnus*, ‘wound’. Its root *vel* indicates pure nakedness, and skin that is exposed, defenceless to the highest degree.⁵³ One is mindful of the potential for wounding in the vulnerable work of art-making; to do

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Cavarero, “Inclining the Subject,” in *Theory After 'Theory'*, 202.

⁴³ Ibid., 203.

⁴⁴ Hannah Arendt, ‘Some Questions of Moral Philosophy’, in *Responsibility and Judgment*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 82. Cited in Ibid., 198.

⁴⁵ Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 91 -92.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 174-75.

⁴⁷ Katy Hessel, *The Story of Art Without Men*. (Penguin: London, 2022), 122.

⁴⁸ Cecilia Paul, “Cecilia on the Restraint and Freedom in Gwen John’s Self-Portrait,” *Frieze*, 30 August 2018. Quoted in Ibid., 123.

⁴⁹ Luce Irigaray, “To paint the invisible.” *Continental Philosophy Review* 37, (2004). 390-91.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 399.

⁵¹ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 131.

⁵² Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 108.

⁵³ Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 158-60.

harm or even to be harmed in the process. And yet we must risk this for the sake of cultivating what Cavarero calls an ‘imaginary of hope.’⁵⁴

For artistic researchers, an honest exploration of vulnerability and the unknown is expressed in our creative practice. To borrow Audre Lorde’s description of poetry, artistic research offers ‘a revelatory distillation of experience,’⁵⁵ allowing ourselves and others permission to touch emotions that perhaps even we were unaware of. Indeed, we learn ‘to cherish our feelings, and to respect these hidden sources of our power.’⁵⁶ The art that emerges, whatever the medium, can bring us to the threshold of the liminal spaces between the analytic mind and the heart.⁵⁷ This work can be uncomfortably vulnerable, honest and raw. Such art has potential to cultivate empathy and build a bridge across racial, socioeconomic, and cultural divides.⁵⁸ Art possesses a critical potential to ‘pierce us’ in order to grasp the reality of others.⁵⁹ Weil observes: ‘The vulnerability of precious things is beautiful because it is a sign of existence.’⁶⁰

The ‘new postural geometry’⁶¹ of inclination is not possible when we are isolated in our defended identities, vigilant and poised against attack. Such a ‘positionality’ impedes the ‘beautiful’ vulnerability that is a hallmark of ethical relations. Cavarero’s notion of *inclination* is suggestive of Simone Weil’s *attention* – derived from the Latin *ad* ‘to, toward’ and *tendere* ‘stretch.’ The gesture of *stretching toward* constructs a bridge between self and other, a point of connection and possibility.⁶² This offers a link to Simone Weil’s notion of *metaxu*,⁶³ which she draws from Plato, as ‘the in-betweenness’ of things; ‘a bridge, an intermediary.’⁶⁴

Works of art can be *metaxu*. Weil writes that: ‘All created things refuse to be for me as ends [...] This world is the closed door. It is a barrier. And at the same time it is the way through. [...] The essence of created things is to be intermediaries. They are intermediaries leading from one to the other and there is no end to this.’⁶⁵ Art as *metaxu* offers a moment of rupture and rapture in a world of hardened borders and identities. Together with John A. Powell I seek to understand how we can ‘move from a world built on breaking and othering to one built on bridging and belonging?’⁶⁶

⁵⁴ Adriana Cavarero, “Coda”, in *Toward a Feminist Ethics of Nonviolence*, eds. Timothy J. Huzar, and Clare Woodford, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 179.

⁵⁵ Audre Lorde, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury.” In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*. (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 37.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Kristina Jacobson, “Songwriting As Ethnographic Practice: How Stories Humanise.” *Arts-Based Research in Education: Foundations for Practice*, 2nd edition, eds. M. Cahnmann-Taylor & R. Siegesmund, (London: Routledge, 2017), 125.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Victoria Foster, *Collaborative Arts-based Research for Social Justice*. (London: Routledge, 2015), 124-25.

⁶⁰ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002), 108.

⁶¹ Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 129.

⁶² Andrea Timár, “Critiques of Violence: Arendt, Sedgwick, and Cavarero Respond to Billy Budd’s Stutter”, *Critical Horizons*, 24, no. 2 (2023), 173.

⁶³ Simone Weil, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. by D.K. Levy and M. Barabas, (London: Routledge, 2024), 318.

⁶⁴ Kit Fan, “Between the blank page and the poem: reading Simone Weil in contemporary American poets.” *The Cambridge Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (2007): 129.

⁶⁵ Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 145-6.

⁶⁶ John A. Powell, *The Power of Bridging: How to Build a World Where We All Belong*. (Colorado: Sounds True, 2024), 17.

Powell and Menendian affirm that 'We need bridge-builders, weavers, and social connectors in every community.'⁶⁷ Artists can be bridge-builders; helping connect individuals across identity categories and social divides, creating 'collective projects that open minds and enlarge our hearts,'⁶⁸ in order to transcend 'the walls that separate us'⁶⁹ and enable a 'softer, more porous movement within and boundary between us and others.'⁷⁰ The cultural practice of 'bridging' is key to cultivating a 'culture of belonging.'⁷¹ For Powell, bridging is 'both a practice and a position'⁷² and 'more of an orientation and compass than a destination.'⁷³

Cavarero's postural orientation *inclination* offers an artistic methodology in which vulnerability and presence become the starting point for encountering the other. What if we could reorient the normativity of the academy toward a renewed, or previously denigrated, posture of *inclination*?⁷⁴ It is in defiance of the erect, rational subject that Cavarero positions the figure of inclination; one who leans precariously into the unknown, the end destination indiscernible.⁷⁵

There is a risk involved in following the silent pull of artistic *inclination*. Cavarero writes: 'This is why the usual firmness of vertical posture has no part in the experience of those who bend to art's pull;'⁷⁶ artists are seemingly 'moved by an external power, something that resides outside but is nonetheless irresistible.'⁷⁷ For Cavarero, Artemisia Gentileschi's painting, *Allegory of Inclination*, in which a young woman holding a compass leans towards a small star, represents this irresistible pull. Wassily Kandinsky described this in his manifesto as 'inner necessity.'⁷⁸ Cavarero's claim is that inclination is the very essence of creativity.⁷⁹ The elusive notion of 'art's pull' defies definition, absolutisation or rationalisation.

My art has been motivated, for the past decade, to share the stories of displaced women through my portrait paintings, *irresistibly* compelled by the stories that I have heard. Can a work of art invite us to 'incline' our attention towards marginalised and migratory communities? I have tended to eschew acknowledging how my experiences, emotions and struggles are, in part, reflected in these paintings. My desire was to use them to amplify the stories of the women; I did not want my story - or positionality - to get in the way, to distract or detract.

I consider *inclination* to be an invitation to abandon erect certitudes and defensive postures bequeathed by habit, culture and circumstance. As such, the penchant for guilt-layered positionality in social science research is counter-

⁶⁷ Powell and Menendian, *Belonging Without Othering*, 261-2.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 190.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 175-6.

⁷² Powell, *The Power of Bridging*, 16.

⁷³ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁴ Honig, "How to Do Things with Inclination", in *Toward a Feminist Ethics of Nonviolence*, 63-90.

⁷⁵ Benjamin, "Ethical inclinations", 684.

⁷⁶ Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 89-91.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 91.

⁷⁸ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Modern Art and Painting in Particular*. First edition 1947. (Connecticut: Martino Fine Books, 2014), 51.

⁷⁹ Willow Verkerk, "Fall of philosophicus erectus", *Radical Philosophy* 202, (June 2018), 108-110.

productive. An ethics and ontology of *inclination* perhaps begins by way of *refusal*.⁸⁰ Caorle McGranahan conceptualizes *refusal* as a 'generative act,'⁸¹ and Bonnie Honig as 'a world-building practice.'⁸² 'Even when refusal *seems* to reject the world,' Honig writes, 'it betrays a deep attachment to it, if not the world as it is, then surely to a more just world that is not yet.'⁸³ For Cavarero this is 'to not think *against* but rather *for* something,' through resisting the '*critique-only* temptation of the philosopher' one can dare to 'imagine even the impossible.'⁸⁴ For, acknowledging the strong 'utopian vein'⁸⁵ in her position, Cavarero nonetheless reminds us of the vital need to nourish 'an imaginary of hope that is affirmative and generative' and 'postcritical.'⁸⁶ It is a rigorous choice, to keep one's internal disposition inclined towards hope-full 'world-building' practices. It is an invitation, in the words of Jacqueline Rose, to move 'against the grain' and follow 'the most sinuous, risky and creative pathways of the mind.'⁸⁷

Indeed, what is the relation of *inclination* to an ethical approach to portraiture? My approach to portraiture is informed by the subtlety of Cavarero's 'altruistic ethics of relation' that enshrines profound respect for the other in her uniqueness and distinction. Emmanuel Levinas reminds us that an 'ethic of responsibility' is to be aware of and humbled by the 'other's irreducible alterity.'⁸⁸ Indeed, as a portrait painter, one cannot presume to capture such 'irreducible otherness.'⁸⁹ As Irigaray reminds us, the other is recognised as 'transcendent to my own and to my world, forever unknowable to myself,'⁹⁰ beyond fabrication or mastery. As such, portrait painting entails reverent time-taking and attention-giving,⁹¹ and humility to acknowledge the limitations of our knowledge. Cavarero's *Inclination* offers an approach to artistic research that neither conforms to shame-induced apology nor naively denies oblivious to differentials or privilege. It is a process that is open ended and continually unfolding, permeated with contradictions and complexity, and nonetheless generative and profound.

Our greatest ethical and aesthetic task is *to pay attention*—a lesson learned from Simone Weil. This research considers an approach to portraiture paintings of women from displaced communities, illumined by a Weil's ethics of attention.

⁸⁰ Karin van Marle, "Responsibility, refusal, and return: Thoughts on an ethics of inclination." *Acta Theologica*, 42, no. 2 (2022), 116.

⁸¹ Carla McGranahan, "Theorizing Refusal: An Introduction." *Cultural Anthropology*, 31, no. 3 (2016): 323.

⁸² Bonnie Honig, *A Feminist Politics of Refusal*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021), 104.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁴ Cavarero, "Coda," In *Toward a Feminist Ethics of Nonviolence*. 179.

⁸⁵ Cavarero quoted in Roncalli, *The Future of the World Is Open*, 127.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Jacqueline Rose, *The Plague* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions: 2023), 9-10.

⁸⁸ Nathalie Piquemal, "Teachers' ethical responsibilities in a diverse society," *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy* 32, (July 2004): 4.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder. *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives*, (Colombia: Columbia University Press, 2016), 49-50.

⁹¹ Williams. "Solidarity, Rights and the Image of God." Bampton Lecture 2024.

Representation, Gift, Aura, Icon.

A Fragment of a Fragment

The commencement of my research coincided with the first wave of a global pandemic. Covid-19 dramatically altered my research trajectory, which gradually evolved into a philosophical reflection upon my own artistic practice as a portrait painter. The ensuing disruptive periods of lockdown had a catastrophic impact upon many involved in the arts.⁹² In the midst of a global crisis, climate devastation and escalating conflicts, it is perhaps inevitable that the value of art would be called into question.⁹³ In this context, Jacqueline Rose invites us to consider whether art can create space to grieve ‘not just for those who have been lost, but for the shards, the broken pieces and muddled fragments of the human heart that make us who we are?’⁹⁴

As a result of the challenges and restrictions of lockdown, the paintings created for this thesis are a somewhat disparate collection of portraits of women whom I’ve had the privilege of meeting, whether in person or virtually (in the case of Zainab from the Gaza Strip) over the course of 2021 and 2022. Successive factors, compounded by Covid-19, impeded the research, including UKRI funding cuts, strikes and the laborious university ethics clearance process. The reflections in this thesis have emerged from this fecund, albeit uncomfortable and unsettled space. This thesis is therefore a testament to the unexpected gift that comes from choosing embrace one’s limits. Indeed, the task of art-making is situated in the ‘already-not yet’ of reality;⁹⁵ a vulnerable willingness to enter into an endeavour beyond the horizon of our understanding, where we inevitably encounter our own limitations. For Jean-Luc Marion: ‘The painter adds to the visible new visibles’ because he or she is willing to advance ‘imprudently to the extreme edge of the area of uncertainty.’⁹⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the artistic endeavour as ‘a step taken in the fog—no one can say where, if anywhere, it will lead.’⁹⁷ And, as Walter Benjamin notes, the art of getting lost is an increasingly scarce skill.⁹⁸

⁹² Jeremy S. Begbie, *Abundantly more: The theological promise of the arts in a reductionist world*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2023), 15-16.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Tish Harrison Warren. “Making as an Act of Longing and Lament.” In *God and Wonder: Theology, Imagination, and the Arts*, eds. Jeffrey W. Barbeau and Emily Hunter McGowin. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Press, 2022), 59.

⁹⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, “The Idol or the Radiance of the Painting”, in *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 68.

⁹⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Sense and Non-Sense*. Trans. Hubert L Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 3.

⁹⁸ Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*. Translated by Howard Eiland, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 53–54. Referenced in Aaron Rosen, *Brushes with Faith: Reflections and Conversations on Contemporary Art*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019), 14.

Artistic research diverges from traditional views of research that depend upon scientific objectivity.⁹⁹ Stephen Scrivener upholds that the ‘proper goal of visual arts research is visual art;’¹⁰⁰ the work of art endows unique ‘insights into emotions, human nature and relationships, and our place in the World.’¹⁰¹ My academic research is profoundly illuminated and enriched by and inextricably intertwined with my practice as a painter. A painting offers a glimpse of what Gilles Deleuze considers a certain ‘image of thought.’¹⁰² Karen Sullivan considers an artists’ description of their work *ekphrasis*, namely ‘the verbal representation of art;’¹⁰³ a delicate rendering of a visual image in verbal form. This verbal rendering is at times more challenging and elusive than the painting process itself. The verbal rendering can be as intricate and attentive as the painting itself. This illuminates the mysterious quality of a portrait; it is not easily understood even by the artist herself. In this regard, portrait paintings resemble the people that they purport to portray.¹⁰⁴

The portrait itself is a *fragment*. According to Cavarero, the post-modern preoccupation questions whether there really is an ‘I’ or indeed, ‘are there not rather its many fragments?’¹⁰⁵ Human personhood is often delineated as elusive, irreducibly exceeding comprehension or reason. Therefore one cannot possibly grasp the uniqueness or ‘essence’ of an individual in a portrait painting. Irigaray reminds us that ‘a living being is never static.’¹⁰⁶ Indeed, identity is continually ‘in flux,’ flowing like a river ‘without fixed banks’ or ‘fixed boundaries,’¹⁰⁷ and thus cannot be contained or fixed in a work of art. There is a dissonance between the fleeting emotions that dance on the surface and the hidden depths of an individual’s innermost self. Is it even possible for such complex subtlety to be made visible in an image? Some cultures would denounce such a notion as sacrilegious.¹⁰⁸ A portrait offers but a glimpse, a fragment, of the sacredness of the *I-Thou* encounter,¹⁰⁹ and of one’s attention to the other captured in a more enduring form.¹¹⁰

⁹⁹ See Barone, T. and Eisner, E. W., *Arts Based Research*, (Los Angeles, Sage Publications Inc, 2011); Knowles, J. G. and Cole, A. L.(eds), *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*, (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008); McNiff, S., “Opportunities and challenges in art-based research”, *Journal of Applied Arts & Health*, 3: no. 1 (2012), 5–12.

¹⁰⁰ Stephen Scrivener. “The art object does not embody a form of knowledge Revisited.” In *The Routledge International Handbook of Practice-Based Research*, ed. Vear, C. (Routledge: 2021), 277.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). 129.

¹⁰³ Karen Sullivan, “The Languages of Art: How Representational and Abstract Painters Conceptualize Their Work in Terms of Language.” *Poetics Today* 30, no. 3 (2009): 521.

¹⁰⁴ Cynthia Freeland, “Portraits in Painting and Photography.” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 135, no. 1 (2007): 108.

¹⁰⁵ Adriana Cavarero, in Elvira Roncalli, *The Future of the World Is Open: Encounters with Lea Melandri, Luisa Muraro, Adriana Cavarero, and Rossana Rossanda* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2022), 130.

¹⁰⁶ Luce Irigaray, “God becoming flesh, flesh becoming divine.” *Continental Philosophy Review* 56 (2023), 510.

¹⁰⁷ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 215.

¹⁰⁸ Freeland, Portraits in Painting and Photography, 106-7.

¹⁰⁹ Buber, Martin. 1992. *I and Thou. Dialogue. Eclipse of God*. Translated by Radosveta Teoharova, and Vladimir Teoharov. Varna: Steno.

¹¹⁰ Paul Crowther, *What Drawing and Painting Really Mean: The Phenomenology of Image and Gesture* (London: Routledge, 2017), 75

The *portrait as fragment* is a metaphor for the ‘fractured mosaic,’¹¹¹ that denotes refugees’ social, material and cultural existence, which can be plural, fragmentary and contradictory; uprooted into complex, ever-changing contexts.¹¹² It is impossible to comprehend the fragmentary experience of trauma that many refugees have endured or the reality of navigating the precarious uncertainty of ‘refuge.’¹¹³ John Berger writes that ‘to emigrate is always to dismantle the centre of the world, and so move into a lost, disorientated one of fragments.’¹¹⁴ However, the stories told in these portrait fragments also problematise the reductive notion of their ‘fragmentation.’ The paintings offer a glimpse into the strength, dignity, resistance and resilience of women from displaced and marginalised communities.¹¹⁵ These individuals are not reified or immobilised by their ‘fractured’ circumstances. Indeed, I approach each portrait painting with reverence, and aspire to reflect a glimpse – a *fragment* of a fragment – of the ‘the invisible light’ that radiates irrepressibly from these remarkable women.¹¹⁶

The *painting as fragment* endures outside of time. The painted figure exists within the two-dimensional plane of the panel or canvas, inside which the ephemeral appearance of the represented subject is eternalised, frozen in time.¹¹⁷ John Berger describes drawing as an act of defiance against disappearance: ‘What you are drawing will never be seen again, by you or by anybody else. In the whole course of time past and time to come, this moment is unique: the last opportunity to draw what will never again be visible, which has occurred once and will never recur.’¹¹⁸ The drawing therefore becomes an inscribed form of resistance and a record of a particular kind of *attention*. In that fleeting moment, what mattered was ‘the mystical project of capturing a person, a personality.’¹¹⁹ Indeed, Berger continues: ‘A few decades on, and the drawing would not be answerable. There would be no one to testify to the presence or absence of a likeness.’¹²⁰ There would be no one to compare the representation to (‘nor even necessarily their memory’).¹²¹

The issue of finitude permeates all aspects of drawing and painting.¹²² An artwork is vulnerable to physical deterioration and will not last forever.¹²³ The frailty of human life is subject to movement and the passage of time; as is a work of art. There is a metaphor to be found in the journeys that my paintings have undertaken for exhibitions in various locations, and the damage sustained along the way. The scuffs, chipped paint and marks

¹¹¹ Diedre Conlon, “A fractured mosaic: Encounters with the everyday amongst refugee and asylum seeker women.” *Popul. Space Place*, 17 (2011): 714-726.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Catherine Besteman, “Refuge fragments, fragmentary refuge.” *Ethnography*, 15, no. 4 (2014), 426–445.

¹¹⁴ John Berger, *and our faces, my heart, brief as photos*, (London / New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 57.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Luce Irigaray, “To paint the invisible.” *Continental Philosophy Review* 37 (2004): 399.

¹¹⁷ Crowther, *What Drawing and Painting Really Mean*, 75.

¹¹⁸ John Berger, “Drawn to That Moment.” *New Society* magazine (1976). Collected in *The White Bird: Writings*. (London: Chatto & Windus: 1985). Quoted in Anna Hartford, ‘To Save a Likeness’: Berger on Drawing & Resemblance.” *Critical Quarterly*, 65 (2023): 47.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Crowther, *What Drawing and Painting Really Mean*, 75.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

have become an integral part of the story of the portraits. Walter Benjamin reminds us that a work of art is unparalleled for 'its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. This includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years.'¹²⁴ The fragile vulnerability of a work of art is part of its beauty. For J.M. Baker, this is why a work of art, insofar as it embodies a 'permanent record of the contingent and vulnerable,' gives an 'illusion of a timelessness within time.'¹²⁵

In this thesis I also touch upon the therapeutic value of art. As Eleanor Sanderson writes, I have found painting to be a 'grace-filled language' and a way to acknowledge my own vulnerability.¹²⁶ The journey of the thesis has coincided with my personal journey of fragmentation, navigating the grief of my brothers decade-long struggle with mental illness and sudden death. The contemplative, prayerful painting process that I have embraced has become a gentle gesture that simultaneously acknowledges my grief, as well as the grief of the women whom I have painted, inseparable from their strength and resilience. As such, these paintings have become both a 'posture and pathway of grace'¹²⁷ to attend to and 'transform the fragmentation of our lives and world.'¹²⁸

Contending with Contemporary Representations of Refugees

I will endeavour to situate my artistic practise within the context of contemporary visual representations of migration, and the concomitant ethical complexity. The question pertains to what artists' achieve by employing a mimetic form such as portraiture, and iconographic symbolism, in representations of individuals from refugee communities? How can a painter presume to convey a subject's subjectivity, especially without personal experience of displacement? As such, do my paintings simply reproduce stereotypes and dominant forms of representation of refugees or subvert them?

Julie Salverson maintains that we need a language to bring together 'questions of ethics, mimesis, and testimony' in order to understand the potential of the arts to 'educate, to envision, to relieve pain, or simply to reinscribe stories

¹²⁴ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 214.

¹²⁵ J.M. Baker, "Nostalgia of the Everyday: Earthly Things as Poetic Criteria in Weil and Jacottet." *Christianity and Literature* 55, no. 1 (2005): 74.

¹²⁶ Marcella Althaus-Reid. "In the Centre There Are No Fragments: *Teologias Descejadas* (Reflections from Unfitting Theologies)", in *Public Theology for the 21st Century: Essays in Honour of Duncan B. Forrester*, eds. Storrar, W. and Morton, A., (London / New York: T & T Clarke LTD a Continuum Imprint, 2004), 365-83. Referenced in Eleanor Ruth Sanderson, "Embodying Freedom and Truth within the Compass Rose: Spiritual Leadership within the Revolution of Love." In *Shame, Gender Violence, and Ethics: Terrors of Injustice*, eds. L. Škof, and M. Shé Hawke, (London: Lexington Books, 2021), 181-82.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 180.

¹²⁸ Newell, J. Philip, *A New Harmony: The Spirit, the Earth, and the Human Soul*. (Edinburgh: Saint Andrews Press, 2012), xxx. Quoted in Ibid., 177.

of victimisation.¹²⁹ For 'when artists eagerly 'give voice' to an imagined other, we allow neither the other nor ourselves to approach the encounter.'¹³⁰ Gayatri Spivak articulates how attempts to speak on behalf of the 'subaltern,' however well-intentioned, can perpetuate 'the homogenisation and silencing of the other.'¹³¹ In my portrait painting process of women from displaced communities I adopt a relational approach, informed by feminist 'ethics of care,' in order to mitigate against the potential to dehumanise or objectify. I reflect upon whether it is possible to move beyond a reductive 'politics of sympathy'¹³² and challenge the abject portrayal of refugees as either a 'mute and faceless physical mass'¹³³ or feminised images of victimhood, vulnerability and distress.¹³⁴

Contemporary visual portrayal of refugees ostensibly aligns itself with humanist discourse triumphing the 'humanity' of displaced people around the world.¹³⁵ However, as Anna Szörényi reminds us, although these images seemingly promote intimacy and empathy, ultimately visual representations reinforce the *distance* between the viewer (usually from western nations) and those depicted (in photographs specifically).¹³⁶ Fuyuki Kurasawa describes visual representations of refugees as 'icons of distant suffering.'¹³⁷ For Szörényi these images 'propagate a world view divided along imperialist lines, in which the audience is expected to occupy the position of privileged viewing agent while refugees are positioned as viewed objects.'¹³⁸ Thereby contributing to dehumanizing and objectifying refugees; erasing their humanity, silencing their voices,¹³⁹ abstracting them from specific political contexts and individual identities and denying the plurality of 'refugee experiences.'¹⁴⁰ Such images serve to 'reiterate, rather than challenge, 'the uneven distribution of suffering across the globe.'"¹⁴¹

¹²⁹ Julie Salverson, "Change on Whose Terms? Testimony and an Erotics of Injury," *Theater* 31, no. 3: 119-120.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹³¹ Eleana Yalouri, "'Difficult' representations. Visual art engaging with the refugee crisis," *Visual Studies* 34, no. 3 (2019): 228.

¹³² Anna Szörényi, "The images speak for themselves? Reading refugee coffee-table books," *Visual Studies* 21, no. 1 (2006): 24.

¹³³ Prem Kumar Rajaram, "Humanitarianism and representations of the refugee," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 15, no. 3 (2002): 247. Quoted in Nando Sigona, "The politics of refugee voices: Representations, narratives and memories." In *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, eds. E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, G. Loescher, K. Long, & N. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 372.

¹³⁴ See Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1995); Terence Wright, "Moving images: The media representation of refugees," *Visual Studies* 17, no. 1 (2002): 58.

¹³⁵ Szörényi, "The images speak for themselves?," 24.

¹³⁶ Caroline Lenette, "Writing With Light: An Iconographic-Iconologic Approach to Refugee Photography." *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 17, no. 2 (2016).

¹³⁷ Fuyuki Kurasawa, "The making of humanitarian visual icons: On the 1921-1923 Russian famine as foundational event," in *Iconic power: Materiality and meaning in social life*, eds. J. C. Alexander, D. Bartmansk, & B. Giesen (Eds (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 69.

¹³⁸ Szörényi, "The images speak for themselves?," 24-41.

¹³⁹ Liisa H. Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization." *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (1996): 398.

¹⁴⁰ Nevzat Soguk, *States and Strangers: Refugees and Displacements of Statecraft*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). 4. Quoted in David Turton, "Conceptualising Forced Migration". RSC Working Paper No. 12. Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre, 7.

¹⁴¹ Szörényi, "The images speak for themselves?," 24.

My portrait paintings of displaced women are created using traditional early Renaissance and iconography painting methods and allude to sacred imagery of the Virgin Mary. As such, do these portrayals subvert or reinforce stereotypical visual representations of refugees? For, as Liisa Malkki contends: 'Having looked at photographs of refugees over several years, one becomes aware of the perennial resonance of the woman with her child. This is not just any woman; she is composed as an almost Madonna-like figure.'¹⁴² These allusions to an iconographical religious past politicises the sacred subject matter, while maintaining the symbolic power of the imagery of the grieving mother.¹⁴³ Terrence Wright suggests that the Christian iconographic symbolism behind these compositions validates discourses of destitution, vulnerability and victimhood.¹⁴⁴ This reinforces stereotypical gendered portrayals of refugees as female, depoliticised, voiceless, deprived of agency and in need of protection.¹⁴⁵ The victimisation frame is found to be more effective in eliciting viewers' sympathy by emotionally engaging viewers in distant human suffering.¹⁴⁶ Women and children have become 'humanitarian icons';¹⁴⁷ globally identifiable symbols, often pictured up close and in acute distress.¹⁴⁸ However, this expression of sympathy does not denote solidarity or equality, but ascribes a relationship of dependency, emphasising refugees' helpless reliance upon others for rescue and assistance.¹⁴⁹ Such images, for Lucien van Lier, tap into 'a deeply rooted rescue-narrative that may be linked to Christian soteriological trajectories of suffering, guilt, and moral response.'¹⁵⁰

Instead of victimhood, I use the symbolism and painting techniques of traditional sacred art to convey dignity, strength and the inherent value of displaced women. Nonetheless, it is important to question whether the allusion to Madonna imagery in my paintings transposes the portrait sitters from their diverse historical, material contexts, rendering them 'saintly' even. Susan Sontag implies that beauty is inappropriate in representations of human suffering, since it conspires to create an 'aesthetic response in place of a moral or political one.'¹⁵¹ Wright disparages

¹⁴² Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995) 11. Quoted in Wright, "Moving images", 58.

¹⁴³ David Areford, *The Art of Empathy: The Mother of Sorrows in Northern Renaissance Art and Devotion*. (Jacksonville: The Cummer Museum of Art & Galleries, 2013), 12.

¹⁴⁴ Wright, "Moving images", 57-8.

¹⁴⁵ Heather L. Johnson, "Click to Donate: Visual Images, Constructing Victims and Imagining the Female Refugee." *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 6 (2011): 1028-9.

¹⁴⁶ X. Zhang, and L. Hellmueller, "Visual Framing of the European Refugee Crisis in Der Spiegel and CNN International: Global Journalism in News Photographs." *International Communication Gazette* 79, no.5 (2017), 502. Quoted in Jelena Jović, "Images of crisis and the crisis of images". In *Refugees and the Violence of Welfare Bureaucracies in Northern Europe*. (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2020), 107.

¹⁴⁷ Kurasawa, "The making of humanitarian visual icons," 67–84. Quoted in Werner Binder, Bernadette Nadya Jaworsky. "Refugees as icons: Culture and iconic representation." *Sociology Compass*. 2018; 12:e12568.

¹⁴⁸ Roland Bleiker, Emma Hutchison. "Art and Aesthetics," In *Gender Matters in Global Politics: A Feminist Introduction to International Relations*, 3rd edition. Eds. Laura J. Shepherd & Caitlin Hamilton (London: Routledge, 2022), 96-7.

¹⁴⁹ Roland Bleiker, David Campbell, and Emma Hutchison, "Visual cultures of inhospitality." *Peace Review* 26, no. 2 (2014): 194.

¹⁵⁰ Lucien van Lier, "What's in That Picture?: Humanitarian Photographs and the Christian Iconography of Suffering and Violence". In *Material Perspectives on Religion, Conflict, and Violence*, eds. van Lier, L., and E. Meinema (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022), 136.

¹⁵¹ Sontag, Susan. 2004. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. London: Penguin. Referenced in Szörényi, "The images speak for themselves?" 29.

the iconographic pictorial framing and subject matter, on the basis that it has historically and systematically been used to elicit certain humanistic, sympathetic emotions.¹⁵² In Malliki's words, 'This sentimentalized, composite figure – at once feminine and maternal, childlike and innocent – is an image that we use to cut across cultural and political difference, when our intent is to address the very heart of our humanity.'¹⁵³ However, Maria Flood notes that 'the association of the woman in the picture with a Christian imaginary of suffering points not only to the Eurocentrism of Western viewers, but also highlights a certain Occidental gaze on non-Western suffering, embodied, in this case, in the figure of the passive female victim.'¹⁵⁴

Images of migration which conform to established tropes in the Christian imaginary arguably make them more palatable to Western viewers. Such photographs evoke an 'iconic consciousness'¹⁵⁵ already embedded in cultural-religious trajectories. In addition to well-known Christian iconography of the Madonna and child, other Biblical themes identified by Wright include: 'The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden,' 'Exodus,' and 'The Flight into Egypt'¹⁵⁶ to escape the tyranny of Herod. The iconic power of these images of migration resides in their allusion to Biblical repertoires of meaningful suffering.¹⁵⁷ For Susanna Snyder, unsurprisingly, many religious human rights groups emphasise that migrants are 'created in the *imago dei* – the image of God – and movement (as well as dwelling) is part of that divine image (Genesis 1.26).'¹⁵⁸ As such, possessed with equal worth every migrant is 'equally entitled as those currently settled and living in stability to a level of rights and responsibilities that recognises their human dignity.'¹⁵⁹

Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh writes that efforts to 'humanise' refugees by centralising 'the human face' and focusing upon narratives of 'lived experiences' are lauded as effective ways to cultivate public understanding, empathy and solidarity.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, in the current 'era of hostility towards refugees' she asks whether it is 'counter-productive – unethical even? – to interrogate the foundations, nature and implications of such approaches.'¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, as Rey Chow makes clear, 'sanctifying' the image of the other can be equally as reductive as demeaning or maligning

¹⁵² Wright, "Moving images," 58.

¹⁵³ Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries," 388.

¹⁵⁴ Maria Flood, "Women Resisting Terror: Imaginaries of Violence in Algeria (1966–2002)." *Journal of North African Studies* 22, no.1 (2017): 116. Quoted in van Liere, "What's in That Picture?," 152.

¹⁵⁵ Dominik Bartmansi and Jeffrey C. Alexander. "Introduction. Materiality and Meaning in Social Life. Toward an Iconic Turn in Cultural Sociology." In *Iconic Power. Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*, eds. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Dominik Bartmansi, and Bernhard Geisen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1–14. Quoted in van Liere, "What's in That Picture?" 158.

¹⁵⁶ Wright, "Moving images," 54.

¹⁵⁷ van Liere, "What's in That Picture?" 136.

¹⁵⁸ Susanna Snyder, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Migration." in *Fortress Britain?: Ethical Approaches to Immigration Policy for a Post-Brexit Britain*, ed. Ben Ryan (London/Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2018), 99.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, "Disrupting Humanitarian Narratives?: Introduction to the Representations of Displacement Series." *Refugee Hosts*, 2018. <https://refugeehosts.org/representations-of-displacement-series/>

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

it.¹⁶² This reifies refugees as 'timeless, archetypal images,'¹⁶³ symbolic of the 'inevitability and spirituality of human suffering'¹⁶⁴ and thereby displaced from geo-political realities. Such images lean precariously towards 'sensationalistic titillation,'¹⁶⁵ or the fetishisation of traumatic memory, oscillating between compassion and condescension.¹⁶⁶ Susan Sontag warns us of 'the issue of exploitation of sentiment – such as pity, despair, compassion, indignation.'¹⁶⁷ Whereby, Szörényi writes, the 'surplus value' of 'their' suffering becomes 'our' meaningful experience.'¹⁶⁸

Szörényi decries 'the politics of sympathy' in coffee table books, whereby images of the suffering 'other' become an 'aesthetic object' for public consumption.¹⁶⁹ Sontag similarly declares it 'exploitative to look at harrowing photographs of other people's pain in an art gallery.'¹⁷⁰ Such photographs are neither passive nor neutral,¹⁷¹ and can be emotionally manipulative and self-serving, 'vaunting the artists' sensitivity.'¹⁷² What is achieved by an invocation of sympathy or compassion in the viewer? Berlant, referring to images of sweatshop workers, suggests that proliferation of such images is presumed 'to be a good thing, because it produces *feeling* and with it something at least akin to *consciousness* that can lead to *action*'.¹⁷³ By comparison, John Berger offers a withering critique of 'photographs of agony,' images of suffering and pain that 'bring us up short.'¹⁷⁴ Such images are 'arresting' because the viewer is engulfed by 'the other's suffering;' however, they can simultaneously induce hopeless despair,¹⁷⁵ and, in Sontag's words, ultimately 'anesthetise' and normalise indignity and suffering.¹⁷⁶

Kurasawa describes the two predominant iconographic representations of humanitarian crises as 'personification' and 'massification;' the representation of either an 'individualized victim' or 'an undifferentiated mass of victims.'¹⁷⁷ Public discourse positions refugees either as feminised victims or conversely as a threat jeopardising national

¹⁶² Rey Chow, *Writing diaspora: Tactics of intervention in contemporary cultural studies*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 53. Quoted in Szörényi, "The images speak for themselves?" 38.

¹⁶³ Szörényi, "The images speak for themselves?" 30.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁶⁵ Kurasawa, "The making of humanitarian visual icons," 71.

¹⁶⁶ Yalouri, "'Difficult' representations," 228.

¹⁶⁷ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*. (London: Penguin, 2004), 69.

¹⁶⁸ Chow, *Writing diaspora*, 30. Quoted in Szörényi, "The images speak for themselves?" 31.

¹⁶⁹ Szörényi, "The images speak for themselves?" 24.

¹⁷⁰ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain*, 105.

¹⁷¹ Susan D. Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 51.

¹⁷² Yalouri, "'Difficult' representations," 228.

¹⁷³ Lauren Berlant, "The subject of true feeling: Pain, privacy and politics." In *Cultural pluralism, identity politics, and the law*, eds. A. Sarat and Ann Arbor Kearns, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press 1999), 49, emphases in the original. Quoted in Szörényi, "The images speak for themselves?" 30.

¹⁷⁴ John Berger, "Photographs of Agony" in *About Looking*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 42.

¹⁷⁵ Berger, "Photographs of Agony" referenced in James Johnson, "The Arithmetic of Compassion': Rethinking the Politics of Photography." *British Journal of Political Science* 41, no. 3 (2011), 623-4.

¹⁷⁶ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*. (London: Penguin, 2008). Quoted in Jovičić, "Images of crisis and the crisis of images". 107.

¹⁷⁷ Kurasawa, "The making of humanitarian visual icons," 69.

sovereignty,¹⁷⁸ portrayed as an 'anonymous corporeality,'¹⁷⁹ or 'sea of humanity.'¹⁸⁰ This perpetuates binary depictions of refugees as either 'worthy' victims or 'illegal' immigrants, highlighting a 'crisis of representation.'¹⁸¹ Illegality is typically denoted in racialised and gendered images portraying refugees as African and male.¹⁸² In light of this, since my portraits represent women from displaced communities, do these paintings unintentionally reinforce gendered representations of refugees? Visual representations in public discourse subtly serve to assign value or devalue. These frames of recognition determine whether or not refugees are acknowledged as individuals whose lives are deemed 'grievable'¹⁸³ or worthy of compassion.

'Visual conventions,' according to Malkki, construct refugees as 'bare humanity - even as a merely biological or demographic presence.'¹⁸⁴ Adopting Giorgio Agamben's concept of the *homo sacer* who inhabits the 'bare life,'¹⁸⁵ Nikos Papastergiadis argues that there are parallels between the concentration camps and detained migrants today, suspended in limbo on the peripheries of society.¹⁸⁶ For Judith Butler, there is a 'hierarchy of grief'¹⁸⁷ that establishes 'what will and will not be human, what will be a liveable life, what will be a grievable death.'¹⁸⁸ As such it is difficult to recognise, not to mention empathise with, the precarity of individuals beyond the limits of our immediate lifeworld.¹⁸⁹ What is urgently required is 'insurrection at the level of ontology' whereby we critically address the question: 'What is real? Whose lives are real?'¹⁹⁰ *Whose lives are valuable?*

While visual representation can be objectifying, *invisibility* can be equally damaging. Individuals dwelling on the margins already struggle to be seen or heard, therefore 'the denial of representation' is tantamount to a 'damaging injustice in itself.'¹⁹¹ This leads us to ponder how, why, and with what consequences certain communities are rendered '(hyper)visible' while others remain 'invisible, inaudible, and silenced.'¹⁹² Butler warns of the danger of

¹⁷⁸ Caroline Lenette, "How Do We Influence Policy? Challenges to Knowledge Translation". Participatory Action Research: Ethics and Decolonization. (New York: Oxford Academic 2022), 127.

¹⁷⁹ Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries," 388.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Caroline "How Do We Influence Policy?" 127.

¹⁸² Francesca Falk, "Invasion, infection, invisibility: An iconology of illegalized immigration," in *Images of Illegalized Immigration. Towards a Critical Iconology of Politics*, eds. Bischoff C, Falk F, Kafehsy S (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2010), 90. Referenced in Lene Hansen, Rebecca Adler-Nissen, and Katrine Emilie Andersen, "The Visual International Politics of the European Refugee Crisis: Tragedy, Humanitarianism, Borders." *Cooperation and Conflict* 56, no. 4 (2021): 377.

¹⁸³ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009).

¹⁸⁴ Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries," 390.

¹⁸⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

¹⁸⁶ Nikos Papastergiadis, "Hospitality and the Zombification of the Other," in *The Conditions Of Hospitality: Ethics, Politics, And Aesthetics On The Threshold Of The Possible*, ed. T. Claviez (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 162.

¹⁸⁷ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Justice*. (London: Verso 2020), 32.

¹⁸⁸ Judith Butler, "Precarious Life," in *Radicalising Levinas*, eds. Peter Atterton & Matthew Calarco (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 15.

¹⁸⁹ Mari Rutí, "The Ethics Of Precarity: Judith Butler's Reluctant Universalism," in *Remains of the Social: Desiring the Post-Apartheid*, eds. Van Bever Donker M., Truscott R., Minkley G., & Lalu P. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017), 97.

¹⁹⁰ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 33.

¹⁹¹ Szörényi, "The images speak for themselves?" 25.

¹⁹² Mette Louise Berg, and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh. "Introduction to the Issue: Encountering Hospitality and Hostility", *Migration and Society* 1, no. 1 (2018): 2.

both 'an effacement through occlusion' and 'an effacement through representation itself.'¹⁹³ By determining whom will 'remain faceless' we are authorised to 'become senseless before the lives we have eradicated.'¹⁹⁴ There is danger in becoming inured to human suffering, whereby it scarcely touches our consciousness.¹⁹⁵ At the root of many of our social ills today is what and how we have been conditioned to see, or not to see. Butler advocates for the faces of those deemed '*ungrievable*' to be admitted into public view; for they 'must be seen and heard for some keener sense of the value of life, all life to take hold.'¹⁹⁶

Kurasawa contends that visual representation has an 'unprecedented constitutive power for the way that liberal democracy engages with alterity.'¹⁹⁷ Media images are often framed to intentionally enforce specific political ideologies.¹⁹⁸ Such imagery is manipulated and instrumentalised to support dominant narratives and policies that 'reproduce public fears and fantasies about outsiders'¹⁹⁹ and entrench division. Negative media portrayal of refugees has contributed to turning the tide of public opinion against refugee resettlement, with potentially violent consequences. The ubiquitous motif of the overcrowded boat has reinforced the narrative of refugees overwhelming 'our' societies, buttressing border-control discourses.²⁰⁰ Such representations are actively 'constitutive of culture' and as such 'create reality and normalize a specific worldview.'²⁰¹ This raises urgent ethical questions regarding the politics of representation. Images of refugees can be instrumentalised to inspire sympathy or to instil fear; nonetheless both serve to accentuate a 'them/us' dichotomy. The depictions of de-faced masses instil the 'positionality of 'us' here gazing in safety and 'them' out there in precarity.'²⁰² Such portrayals demonstrate how visual imagery can be wielded to 'distance, sensationalise and discriminate.'²⁰³

In their analysis of the visual representation of refugees in Australian newspapers, Roland Bleiker et al. found that only two percent comprise 'photographs of individual refugees with clearly recognisable facial features' and approximately half 'displayed no visual features at all.'²⁰⁴ This has significant implications: 'We see no faces, no real people. We see just anonymous masses. We see an abstract and dehumanised political problem.'²⁰⁵ Does the

¹⁹³ Butler, "Precarious Life," 16.

¹⁹⁴ Butler, *Precarious Life*, xviii.

¹⁹⁵ Snyder, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Migration," 99-100.

¹⁹⁶ Butler, *Precarious Life*, xviii.

¹⁹⁷ Fuyuki Kurasawa, "Humanitarianism and the representation of alterity: The aporias and prospects of cosmopolitan visibility," in *Democracy in crisis: Violence, alterity, community*, ed. S. Gaon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 134.

¹⁹⁸ Judith Butler, "Photography, war, outrage." *Theories and Methodologies* 20, no. 3 (2005): 824. Quoted in Lynda Mannik "Public and private photographs of refugees: the problem of representation", *Visual Studies* 27, no. 3 (2012), 262.

¹⁹⁹ Janice K. Haaken & Maggie O'Neill, "Moving images: Psychoanalytically informed visual methods in documenting the lives of women migrants and asylum seekers." *Journal of Health Psychology*, 19, no. 1 (2014), 83.

²⁰⁰ Roland Bleiker, David Campbell, Emma Hutchison, and Xzarina Nicholson, "The visual dehumanization of refugees," *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 4 (2013), 400.

²⁰¹ Elfriede Fürsich, "Media and the representation of others", *International Social Science Journal* 61, no. 199 (2010), 115

²⁰² Jovičić, "Images of crisis and the crisis of images," 107.

²⁰³ Mannik, "Public and private photographs of refugees," 265.

²⁰⁴ Bleiker et al. "The visual dehumanisation of refugees," 413.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 411.

absence of ‘the face of the other’ in visual representations of refugees demonstrate a failure to resist a rhetoric of dehumanisation? According to Emmanuel Levinas, violence originates from ignoring the face of the other, avoiding the gaze: ‘The face is what forbids us to kill.’²⁰⁶ Cavarero affirms that in the ‘face-to face’ encounter, the self is ‘dispossessed by the ‘thou shalt not kill’ that is expressed by the face of the other.’²⁰⁷ The vulnerability of the face-to-face encounter calls for ethical responsibility to and for that person. However, we live in a world ‘where no being looks at the face of the other.’²⁰⁸ At the root of so much violence is our inability, or refusal, to incline our attention to the full humanity of the other.²⁰⁹

Butler questions whether violence can indeed be ‘prohibited through a binding insight into a primary dispossession in and through ethical relationality,’²¹⁰ whether through an encounter in person or mediated by a work of art. Mark Freeman also expresses doubt whether this encounter automatically translates into inter-human care and responsibility.²¹¹ While the potential may be there, it is by no means guaranteed.²¹² Indeed, some works of art ‘far from leading to reverence, may lead instead to violence, to the negation or annihilation of the Other.’²¹³ Freeman therefore urges caution with regard to sweeping ‘generalities in this context.’²¹⁴ In this thesis I address the core research question pertaining to Simone Weil’s philosophy of attention as a method and a means of understanding my portrait paintings of women from displaced and marginalised communities. I seek to understand the extent to which Weil’s attention, a cornerstone of her ‘decreative’ ethics, can find a practical expression through artistic practice. Additionally, to what extent can a work of art serve as a stimulus to Weilian attention in the viewer? This relates to one’s inward attitude and orientation to the other (whether as the artist or the viewer) – specifically to a quality of reverent, attentive beholding.²¹⁵ As such, a work of art – perceived through the lens of Weil’s elliptical and demanding thought – invites one into a transformative attentive ethical engagement with the surrounding world. I agree with Freeman that, ‘there is actually a closer relationship between art and the ethical realm than meets the eye.’²¹⁶

First and foremost, it is important to acknowledge the difference between painting and photography. Sontag expresses concern at the potential for photographs to ‘objectify’ historical events or people as something that can

²⁰⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. Trans. R. A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 85-86, 89.

²⁰⁷ Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*, (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2016), 163.

²⁰⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality And Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 302.

²⁰⁹ Pádraig O’Tuama and Glenn Jordan. *Borders and Belonging: The Book of Ruth: A Story for our Times*. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2020), 34-35.

²¹⁰ Judith Butler, “Leaning Out, Caught in the Fall: Interdependency and Ethics in Cavarero”, in *Toward a Feminist Ethics of Nonviolence*, eds. Timothy J. Huzar, and Clare Woodford, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 57.

²¹¹ Mark Freeman, “Beholding and Being Beheld: Simone Weil, Iris Murdoch, and the Ethics of Attention”, *The Humanistic Psychologist* 43, no. 2 (2015), 169.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 161.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 168

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 160-1.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

be symbolically ‘possessed.’²¹⁷ Sontag compares the camera to a weapon: we ‘load’ the camera and ‘aim’ it to focus upon our ‘targets;’ we ‘shoot’ to ‘capture’ the image.²¹⁸ Berger reflects that the word ‘*trigger*,’ applied to both rifle and camera, ‘reflects a correspondence which does not stop at the purely mechanical.’²¹⁹ Ariella Azoulay suggests that the process of ‘unlearning imperialism becomes a commitment to reversing the shutter’s work.’²²⁰ There are sensitive issues pertaining to representation and complex power dynamics implicated in interactions between photographer or artist and subject, which could easily be construed as colonial othering. Since I use photography as an integral part of my artistic practice, I seek to navigate these complexities and counteract the potential to reify and objectify, through a relational and dialogic approach informed by an ‘ethics of care’ and attentive listening, which I elucidate in the following chapter.

Didier Maleuvre compares the camera – dismissed as a ‘hunter, not an interlocutor’ – to a painting that requires ‘the soft-footed work of acquaintance’ and considerable patience required to ‘wait on a face.’²²¹ Photography, for Maleuvre, is *reductive* since the ‘vast and fluid presence that is a human being’ is crammed into a ‘split second snatched out of the air.’²²² A portrait painting, by contrast, can be a relational process that is collaborative, rather than possessive, and entails considerable time as opposed to a mere ‘split second’. Maleuvre juxtaposes the ‘long, drawn-out painterly labour’²²³ of portraiture with photography, implying that the former provides a ‘vehicle for the sustained care of the other’ as a ‘modality of human solidarity.’²²⁴ The time-consuming ‘creative attention’²²⁵ of painting is a symbolic gesture of inclination and acknowledgment. However, I suggest that it is not so much the instrument (paintbrush or camera) that is important, but the attention and intention underlying the portrayal.

Nonetheless, the issue of representation, regardless of the medium, is riddled with complexity. Edward Said’s exposition of the objectification of the other precipitated a ‘crisis in representation.’²²⁶ To represent someone, Said declares, has become an ‘endeavour as complex and as problematic as an asymptote, with consequences for certainty and decidability as fraught with difficulties as can be imagined.’²²⁷ Representation can no longer be considered a neutral endeavour pertaining to verisimilitude; it has political potency. Indeed, for Said, all representations are ‘implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven’ in the ‘language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer.’²²⁸ As a result of this ‘crisis’ only the ‘interlocutor-as-internal-

²¹⁷ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain*, 70.

²¹⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 5th edition (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2011), 14. Quoted in Nico Epstein, *An Analysis of Susan Sontag’s On Photography*. (London: Macat International, 2018), 42.

²¹⁹ Berger, *About Looking*, 43.

²²⁰ Ariella Aïsha Azoulay. *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*. (London and New York: Verso, 2019), 79.

²²¹ Didier Maleuvre, “Rembrandt, or the portrait as encounter,” in *Imaging Identity: Media, Memory and Portraiture in the Digital Age*, ed. by Melinda Hinkson (ANU Press: 2016), 32.

²²² Maleuvre “Rembrandt, or the portrait as encounter”, 32.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Melinda Hinkson, “Introduction: The time of the portrait is now,” in *Imaging Identity: Media, Memory and Portraiture in the Digital Age*, ed. Melinda Hinkson (ANU Press: 2016), 6.

²²⁵ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. By Emma Craufurd (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001), 92.

²²⁶ Edward W. Said, “Representing the Colonized: Anthropology’s Interlocutors.” *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (1989), 205.

²²⁷ Ibid., 206.

²²⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 272.

subject' is permitted to represent or speak about the 'other' and 'any interpretation of the 'other' selfhood by someone who does not share this 'subaltern' identity'²²⁹ inevitably comes under fire.

Ethical questions with regard to representation, responsibility, privilege and power are especially acute in contexts where research participants are traumatised or have been violated. In light of this, should endeavour to represent migratory and marginalised communities be entirely abandoned (especially if one is not an 'interlocutor-as-internal-subject')? Or does this serve to condone refugees' relative invisibility and reinforce the silencing of their voices? Should one accept that only 'the subaltern can speak about what it means to be a subaltern'?²³⁰ On the one hand, Christopher Thomas suggests, to be silent implies complicity in structural racism, whilst, on the other, an active self-silencing of oneself is expected in order to foreground contemporary and historic colonial injustice.²³¹ Indeed, these contradictory demands seem to 'represent an impossible bind.'²³² Contemporary artist Daniel Connell remarks that in order to avoid accusations of perpetrating exploitation, 'artists today may opt for a self-censoring when it comes to cross-cultural representation due to the burden of colonial histories.'²³³ However, I do not believe that this is the answer. Linda Alcoff asks: 'if I don't speak for those less privileged than myself, am I abandoning my political responsibility to speak out against oppression, a responsibility incurred by the very fact of my privilege?'²³⁴

Indeed, is it possible to move beyond the apparent impasse of identity politics and the polarising and essentialising views that widen the gulf between self and other? ²³⁵ Maria Lugones asks, whether it is possible to cross this gulf 'without taking over' and engage 'in dialogue at the colonial difference?'²³⁶ The risk is far greater, however, if we do not seek to 'cross' over, and offer an artistic counterpoint to the reification of 'us' and 'them.' For Irigaray, '[t]he problem is thus, at each crossroads, of encountering the other as other while remaining two.'²³⁷ How can we establish a bridge, a porous boundary between-two, instead of a wall? We diminish ourselves and one another when we reduce reality to simplistic binaries and shore ourselves up in defensive isolation.²³⁸ However, as Pope Francis avows, 'It is hard to build a culture of encounter, in which we meet as people with a shared dignity.'²³⁹ According to Irigaray, the ethical relation-of-two entails an embrace of the other's incomprehensibility and eschews any

²²⁹ Tom Brass, "Transitions: Methods, Theory, Politics." (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022), 13-14.

²³⁰ Ibid., 9.

²³¹ Christopher Thomas, "'Silence is Violence': Simone Weil on the Impossible Demands of Justice." *The Philosophical Salon*. August 31 2020. <https://www.thephilosophicalsalon.larbpublishingworkshop.org/silence-is-violence-simone-weil-on-the-impossible-demands-of-justice/>

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Daniel Connell, "Encounter and Obligation: Repositioning the portrait as socially engaged practice" (PhD thesis, University of South Australia, 2019), 35.

²³⁴ Linda Alcoff, "The problem of speaking for others." *Cultural Critique*, no. 20 (1991): 8.

²³⁵ Emma Reed Jones, "Politics of Relation, Politics of Love." In *Towards a new human being*, eds. Luce Irigaray, Mahon O'Brien & Christos Hadjioannou, (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 121.

²³⁶ Maria Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism", *Hypatia* 25, no. 4, (2011): 753.

²³⁷ Luce Irigaray, "Listening, Thinking, Teaching." In *Luce Irigaray: Teaching*, eds. Luce Irigaray and Mary Green, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2008), 232.

²³⁸ See Howard Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 96-98, 101-104.

²³⁹ Pope Francis, *Let us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*. (London: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 69.

appropriation or domination, thereby opening a 'space for the poëtic to take place'²⁴⁰ where 'philosophy, art and prayer'²⁴¹ may meet. Is it possible for a work of art to embody such a poëtic gesture of life-giving intention?²⁴² Indeed, Alison Phipps describes this as 'the risk of love.'²⁴³ For this risk, the work of prayerful attention and recognition is vital.²⁴⁴

I contend that it is possible to create ethical representations of migratory and marginalised communities. Isobel Blomfield and Caroline Lenette emphasise that 'A critical challenge artists face in relation to refugee representations concerns breaking down an artificial artist/'subject' dynamic or dichotomy, and presenting a multifaceted and empowering narrative rather than focusing only on the theme of suffering.'²⁴⁵ This requires *attentive listening*, a concept that I develop in Part II, to the individuals whose unique lived experiences artists endeavour to represent. This is essential in order to move beyond reductive narratives of victimhood, or what Eve Tuck describes as 'damage-centred research.'²⁴⁶ As such, artists move away from the notion of a scientific 'object of study' and embrace what Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh describe as a 'relational way of seeing', which involves thinking *with*, and not simply *about*.²⁴⁷

The delicate power dynamics at play in the interpretation of another's story inevitably raises ethical alarms with regard to privacy and exploitation. All too often, refugees and asylum seekers are engaged superficially as 'the 'story to be told' rather than the story-tellers.'²⁴⁸ As an artist researcher I endeavour to approach the work of narrative and representation with attentive care.²⁴⁹ For Kurasawa, a 'critical mode of visual engagement' is 'grounded on a dialogical ethic that decentres the self in order to observe, listen to, and learn from others with humility and attentiveness',²⁵⁰ in order to obviate the potential for exploitation. The relationality at the heart of the portrait painting process is key in this sensitive cultural moment, where these portraits may easily be misconstrued as objectifying.

²⁴⁰ Helen A. Fielding. "Touching Hands, Cultivating Dwelling." In *Luce Irigaray : Teaching*, eds. Luce Irigaray and Mary Green, (Lodnon: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2008), 76.

²⁴¹ Luce Irigaray, R. M. Miles and M. L. Harrington, "A Feminine Figure in Christian Tradition", in *Conversations*, eds. Luce Irigaray and Stephen Pluháček, (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 99.

²⁴² Eleanor Sanderson, "The Prayers We Breathe: Embodying the Gift of Life in the Maternal Feminine." In *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁴³ Alison Phipps, "A Tale of Humanity, Love and Reaching out to Refugees." *Refugee Hosts* (2017).
<https://refugeehosts.org/2017/11/10/a-tale-of-humanity-love-and-reaching-out-to-refugees/>

²⁴⁴ Norman Wirzba, "Attention and Responsibility: The Work of Prayer", in *The Phenomenology of Prayer: Perspectives in Continental Philosophy*, eds. Bruce Ellis Benson, and Norman Wirzba, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 100.

²⁴⁵ Isobel Blomfield & Caroline Lenette, "Artistic Representations of Refugees: What Is the Role of the Artist?", *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 39, no. 3 (2018): 32.

²⁴⁶ Eve Tuck, "Suspending damage: A letter to communities." *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009), 413-414.

²⁴⁷ Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On decoloniality: concepts, analytics, and praxis*. (Duke University Press, 2018), 17.

²⁴⁸ Peter Teo, (2000). "Racism in the News: A Critical Discourse Analysis of News Reporting in Two Australian Newspapers". *Discourse & Society* 11, no. 1 (2000), 40. Quoted in Caitlin Nunn, "Spaces to Speak: Challenging Representations of Sudanese-Australians." *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 31, no. 2 (2000), 189.

²⁴⁹ Emma Cox, Sam Durrant, David Farrier, Lyndsey Stonebridge and Agnes Woolley, "Introduction," in *Refugee Imaginaries*, eds. Emma Cox, et al., (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 2.

²⁵⁰ Kurasawa, "Humanitarianism and the representation of alterity," 146.

For Jane Blocker ‘representation is inherently a form of witness’.²⁵¹ In bearing witness to atrocities, art can ‘speak truth to power’ and mobilise ‘new affective communities of sense’.²⁵² A work of art may not evoke the exact immediacy of a face-to-face encounter, nonetheless it can bring the voice of the other into political contexts that the human other may be unable to access.²⁵³ Berger writes: ‘Art’s other, transcendental face, raises the question of man’s ontological right,’²⁵⁴ and therefore ought to be judged ‘according to whether or not it helped men in the modern world claim their social rights.’²⁵⁵ As such, to what extent can these works of art help to bring attention to topics that are difficult to approach, namely conflict, human rights and forced displacement? Before I address my portrait painting process and methods, I will turn my attention to briefly sketch an overview of the history of portraiture. I question whether it is possible for a portrait to challenge Western art’s enduring legacy of objectifying difference and to be re-imagined as *gift*.

Portrait as Gift

The one-dimensional interpretation of art as mimesis has, as Susan Sontag surmises, dominated Western philosophy of art since Plato:²⁵⁶ ‘The earliest experience of art must have been that it was incantatory, magical; art was an instrument of ritual. (Cf. the paintings in the caves at Lascaux, Altamira, Niaux, La Pasiega, etc.) The earliest theory of art, that of the Greek philosophers, proposed that art was mimesis, imitation of reality. It is at this point that the peculiar question of the value of art arose.’²⁵⁷ Michael Taussig understands mimesis as the possession of something (or someone) by means of its likeness.²⁵⁸ For Irigaray, ‘the diabolical-in mimesis’ is this ‘appropriation’ whereby ‘the living person is caught and deadened.’²⁵⁹ By contrast, in this thesis, I seek to understand whether mimetic representation in a portrait painting can be a life-giving, generative gift.

For Elisabetta Toreno portraiture is a ‘liminal platform’ of impressions built over time ‘upon the first-person sensory and cognitive awareness of what it means to be and to experience a person.’²⁶⁰ As such, rather than a ‘diabolical’

²⁵¹ Jane Blocker, *Seeing witness : Visuality and the ethics of testimony*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 128.

²⁵² William A. Callahan, “Visual Art, Ethical Witnessing, and Resistance”, *Sensible Politics: Visualizing International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 123.

²⁵³ Lana Parker, “Pursuing freedom, making strange: Pedagogical considerations for art as an other,” *Brock Education: A Journal of Educational Research and Practice* 28, no. 1 (2018): 22.

²⁵⁴ John Berger, ‘The White Bird,’ *Selected Essays*, 364. Quoted in Joshua Craze, “Learning to Look: Berger’s Lessons.” *Critical Quarterly*, 65 (2023): 17.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, (London: Penguin, 2009), 2.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁵⁸ Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 21.

²⁵⁹ Luce Irigaray, *Elemental passions*. Trans. Joanne Collie and Judith Still. (London: Athlone; New York: Routledge, 1992). Quoted in Susan Kozel, “The Diabolical Strategy of Mimesis: Luce Irigaray’s Reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty” *Hypatia* 11, no. 3 (1996), 114.

²⁶⁰ Elisabetta Toreno, *Netherlandish and Italian Female Portraiture in the Fifteenth Century: Gender, Identity, and the Tradition of Power*, (Amsterdam University Press, 2022), 200.

attempt to dominate or objectify an individual, painting a portrait requires an attentive openness, that allows space for co-creation and for the painting itself to embody a testament to the mystery of encounter. As Irigaray writes, 'The respect for the irreducible otherness of the other must keep alive a mystery, and even a doubt, in our thinking,' which 'implies a culture of wonder, of questioning, of astonishment.'²⁶¹ Indeed, wonder, mystery, astonishment and doubt are, I suggest, integral to the portrait painting process.

'I've never known what likeness consists of in a portrait,' Berger writes. 'One can see whether it's there or not, but it remains a mystery.'²⁶² The elusive quest to capture a subject's 'essence' has been an essential preoccupation in portraiture, influenced by Renaissance and early modern conceptions of individuality.²⁶³ Advances in psychology and the emergence of photography informed portraiture's inclination to evoke a subject's emotional complexity, personality and interiority.²⁶⁴ Portraiture poses an intriguing philosophical and ethical challenge, confronting Cartesian divides of body and mind; matter and essence; physical and spiritual; visible and invisible and presence and absence.²⁶⁵ Cynthia Freeland suggests that portraits reveal a subject's essence in four ways: accurate resemblance; testimonies of presence; evocations of personality; or presentations of uniqueness.²⁶⁶ Marsha Meskimmon unceremoniously rejects the notion of 'essence', asserting that 'individuals are formed through their encounters with the world [...] by an elaborate interweaving of identifications with socially defined roles and expectations.'²⁶⁷

The portrait itself is a story; 'a visualized narrative and a narrativized visual.'²⁶⁸ Even Emmanuel Levinas concedes that '[a]n artist—even a painter, even a musician—tells. He writes of the ineffable'.²⁶⁹ Virginia Woolf described the artist Sickert as among 'the best of biographers,'²⁷⁰ for no one will be able to 'write a life' as he does:²⁷¹ 'When he paints a portrait: I read a life.'²⁷² In Part II I consider the importance of attentive listening in the relational portrait painting process. Maggie O'Neill developed a conceptual framework of ethno-mimesis as a dialogical 'potential space' that unfolds in the dynamic intersection of narrative testimony (ethnography) and art (mimesis).²⁷³ A portrait story is embedded within a particular socio-historical context and as such embodies cultural discourses and visual

²⁶¹ Luce Irigaray, "Remembering Humanity," in *Building a New World*, eds. Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder. (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 295.

²⁶² John Berger, "Young Woman With Hand to her Chin," first published in *Photocopies* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996). Quoted in Hartford, "'To Save a Likeness,'" 45.

²⁶³ Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," 106-7.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁶⁵ Jaireth Subhash, "What Is There in a Portrait? Adami's Benjamin, Seliverstov's Bakhtin and the Aura of Seeing and Showing," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 33, No. 1 (2003): 38.

²⁶⁶ Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," 100.

²⁶⁷ Marsha Meskimmon, *The art of reflection: women artists' self-portraiture in the twentieth century*, (London: Scarlet Press, 1996), 13.

²⁶⁸ Jaireth, "What Is There in a Portrait?" 45.

²⁶⁹ Emmanuel Lévinas, "Reality and its shadow," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 130.

²⁷⁰ Virginia Woolf, *O, to Be a Painter!* (David Zwirner Books, 2021), 70.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² *Ibid.* 68-9.

²⁷³ Maggie O'Neill, "Transnational Refugees: The Transformative Role of Art?" *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 9, no. 2 (2008).

expressions and interpretations of self-identity, and subjectivity; ways of seeing and being seen.²⁷⁴ However, it also transcends its specific context, with inherent, latent potential 'for after life, for re-interpretation, for continual translation.'²⁷⁵ Walter Benjamin writes that a story 'does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time.'²⁷⁶

Portraiture as a research methodology brings complex philosophical and ethical challenges to the fore, in particular 'the relation of viewer and viewed.'²⁷⁷ There is a tension between the conflicting aims of 'the subject's depicted individuality' and 'the artist's expressed individuality.'²⁷⁸ Historically portraiture has been transactional,²⁷⁹ therefore the portraitist is considerably constrained in the second aim, with limited scope for individual expression. Indeed, even the greatest artists of the Renaissance worked at the behest of their patron, expected to flatter, beguile and enchant.²⁸⁰ Portraits were generally commissioned to delineate social status or memorialise historical significance; to display power, wealth, authority and idealised beauty.²⁸¹ Portraits fulfilled multiple functions, whether religious, familial, and civic;²⁸² art was wielded as a political instrument to reveal the powerful as powerful and thereby 'increase their power.'²⁸³ For Michael Foucault, 'The more one possesses power or privilege, the more one is marked as an individual, by rituals, written accounts or visual reproductions.'²⁸⁴ Deleuze and Guattari concede that '*Certain assemblages of power (pouvoir) require the production of a face*, others do not.'²⁸⁵ Indeed, the genre of portraiture in Western culture as a whole has traditionally been reserved for the wealthy, powerful elite. However, in my portraiture practice I offer representations of women from migratory and marginalised communities whom all too often remain unseen.

The notion of the socio-political 'production' of the face²⁸⁶ contradicts Fenwick English's critique of the portraitist's a 'totalizing power' and 'omniscience' and arrogant imposition of their 'authentic view of reality.'²⁸⁷ However, the portraitist's 'power' is by no means omniscient, since he or she must defer to the expectations of the painting's

²⁷⁴ Jaireth, "What Is There in a Portrait", 37.

²⁷⁵ Andrew Benjamin, "The Decline of Art: Benjamin's Aura." *Oxford Art Journal* 9, no. 2 (1986): 34.

²⁷⁶ Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations*, 90.

²⁷⁷ Michael Podro, *Depiction*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 106). Quoted in Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," 98.

²⁷⁸ Patrick Maynard, "Portraits as Displays." *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 135, no. 1 (2007): 111.

²⁷⁹ Shearer West, *Portraiture*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2004), 41.

²⁸⁰ Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," 97.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Chloë Reddaway, *Transformations in Persons and Paint: Visual Theology, Historical Images, and the Modern Viewer*, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2016), 196.

²⁸³ Maynard, "Portraits as displays," 111-121.

²⁸⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1995), 192. Quoted in Claudio Celis Bueno, "The Face Revisited: Using Deleuze and Guattari to Explore the Politics of Algorithmic Face Recognition." *Theory, Culture & Society* 37, no. 1 (2020): 78.

²⁸⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 195. Emphasis in original.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 167-8.

²⁸⁷ Fenwick W. English, "A Critical Appraisal of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's "Portraiture" as a Method of Educational Research," *Educational Researcher* 29, No. 7 (Oct., 2000): 23.

commissioner. Nonetheless, a portrait artist possesses a different kind of power to the fee-paying customer; namely, 'the spiritual power of recognition.'²⁸⁸ The portraitist was expected to flatter and allay a sitter's anxieties pertaining to social appearance and craft an image aligned with their ideal aesthetic representation, rather than authentic reality.²⁸⁹ Thus a portrait was essentially a 'collusion between artist and subject.'²⁹⁰ the subject is captured actively, self-consciously displaying themselves for the portrayal.²⁹¹ Mark Rothko reminds us that 'the artists lot is the same today' for, although artists may no longer rely upon patronage, the contemporary art market 'exerts the same compulsion' through 'its denial or affording the means of sustenance.'²⁹²

Strikingly, the earliest examples of portraiture were not an ostensible display of power, prestige or a plea for recognition. The intimate, ethereal funerary portraits, discovered in the oasis of Fayum in Egypt are considered the artistic predecessors of icon painting.²⁹³ These ancient portraits [dated from the first century BC to the middle of the third century AD], although marked by the passage of time, compellingly address us presently and immediately. Berger reflects that the Fayoum portraits are markedly different from anything in the history of portraiture.²⁹⁴ The difference is owing to the reversal of the subject-object position between the sitter and the painter: It was the artist 'who submitted to be looked at. Each portrait he made began with this act of submission.'²⁹⁵ Therefore, curiously these paintings are 'about the experience of being looked at.'²⁹⁶ The gaze is otherworldly and serene, as opposed to expectant, anxiously awaiting external affirmation of their significance. The Fayoum portraits were 'destined to be buried, without a visible future;'²⁹⁷ therefore since these paintings were not predestined for posterity they do not demand attention or flattery. In the words of Jean-Luc Marion, often portraiture is a means to achieve 'the satisfaction of...[one's] desire, thus of himself [/herself].'²⁹⁸ By contrast, the Fayoum portraits enthrall us with their 'special contractual intimacy' and the incarnation of a 'forgotten self-respect;' a tangible reminder that life and art are gifts, rather than commodities to be consumed.²⁹⁹

With regard to the portraits painted and included in this PhD thesis, there was no financial transaction involved, either for the artist or the subjects. Does a relational model, traced from the Fayoum portraits, provide a way to situate portraiture within the *gift economy*? Lewis Hyde writes that 'a work of art is a gift, not a commodity. Or, to state the modern case with more precision, that works of art consist in two 'economies,' a market economy and a gift economy. Only one of these is essential, however: a work of art can survive without the market, but where there

²⁸⁸ Maleuvre, "Rembrandt, or the portrait as encounter," 27.

²⁸⁹ Torenó, *Netherlandish and Italian Female Portraiture*, 29.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Mark Rothko, *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*, ed. Rothko Christopher. (New Haven: Yale University Press. 2023), 3.

²⁹³ Gogvadze, Tamar (2016) *A Critical Study of Modern Orthodox Scholarly Criticism of Western Art*. Doctoral thesis, Durham University. 143

²⁹⁴ John Berger. *Portraits: John Berger on Artists*, ed. Tom Overton (London: Verso, 2017), 10-11.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 9.

²⁹⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. James K. A. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 51.

²⁹⁹ Berger, *Portraits*, 10-11.

is no gift, there is no art.’³⁰⁰ My research seeks to challenge the assumption of the commercial nature of art by re-defining a portrait painting as a space of hospitality, and of Weilian attention-giving and receiving.³⁰¹ Artistic research is oriented toward an ethics of being-with.³⁰² It is an invitation to re-envision the role of art as a socially engaged practice that prioritises relationships above and beyond commercial expectations,³⁰³ thereby questioning our understanding of the *value* of art. I propose that the relational, attentive listening and reciprocal exchange at the heart of my portraiture practice can be considered a form of ‘alternative economics.’³⁰⁴

Nonetheless, I acknowledge that there is a balance to be found. Mark Rothko ironically remarks that the ‘privilege’ of non-compliant artists of ‘conscience’³⁰⁵ is the ‘freedom to starve!’³⁰⁶ I have, on the contrary, been a privileged recipient of familial support for the past decade, ensuring that I did not have to confront such a choice. For artists working on human rights issues or alongside displaced communities, there is an added complexity of guilt with regard to profiting from another’s pain. However, even within the gift economy, an artist has to find a way to sustain herself.

The notion of the gift as part of a process of exchange, rather than ‘fixed and icy utilitarian calculation,’³⁰⁷ was endowed by Marcel Mauss in his *Essai sur le don* in 1923. Mauss traces the ‘spirit of the gift’ that served to nourish social bonds and honour obligations of reciprocity and hospitality ‘without guarantee of restitution.’³⁰⁸ Roger Sansi acknowledges the influence of Mauss upon contemporary art, placing the ‘pure gift’ at the heart of social exchange and opening ‘a field of new possibilities in art theory and practice.’³⁰⁹ A painting can be perceived as a gift, for in Mauss’ words it involves ‘mak[ing] a present of some part of oneself,’³¹⁰ that is imbued with ‘spiritual essence or soul,’³¹¹ and ‘invested with life, often possessing individuality.’³¹² The gift given (in this case a work of art) possesses a *mana* ‘a magical, religious, spiritual force,’³¹³ that remains intimately connected to the giver. For Ann Carson ‘the beauty of an art object is part of the gift that you give to the receiver, the listener, the observer, to make it worthwhile for them to spend whatever time of their life they spend trying to understand it.’³¹⁴ Art as *gift* possesses ‘value over

³⁰⁰ Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*, (New York: Vintage, 2007), xvi.

³⁰¹ Connell, “Encounter and Obligation,” 66.

³⁰² Lisa La Jevic, & Stephanie Springgay, “A/r/tography as an Ethics of Embodiment: Visual Journals in Preservice Education,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 14, no. 1, (2008), 69.

³⁰³ Connell, “Encounter and Obligation,” 66.

³⁰⁴ Lucy Caroline Woollett, “The Value of Portraiture: Painting as a Social Practice,” (PhD Thesis: University of Southampton, 2022), 132.

³⁰⁵ Rothko, *The Artist's Reality*, 4.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁰⁷ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Expanded edition*. Trans. Jane I. Guyer (Chicago: Hau Books, 2016), 190.

³⁰⁸ Jacques T. Godbout and Alain Caillé, *The World of the Gift*, (Montreal-Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998), 20. Quoted in Antonio Somaini, “Visibility and Invisibility of the Gift,” in *Generous Offerings, Threatening Hospitality*, eds. Gianfranco Maraniello Sergio Risaliti, Antonio Somaini (Milan: Charta, 2001), 25–53.

³⁰⁹ Roger Sansi, “The pleasure of expense: Mauss and The Gift in contemporary art.” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 14, no. 1 (2014): 91–3.

³¹⁰ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 2002), 16.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 13

³¹⁴ Kevin McNeilly and Anne Carson. “Gifts and Questions: An Interview with Anne Carson,” *Canadian Literature* 176 (2003), 19.

and above monetary exchange,' especially significant since 'the gift-exchange circuit is more or less broken down in our culture.'³¹⁵ Portraiture as gift has the potential to illuminate art as a space of hospitality, if it is created in a spirit of reverent attention-giving. Catherine Craig and Sara MacDonald suggest that art can help to 'habituate people to the virtue of hospitality.'³¹⁶

In considering portraiture as a 'socially engaged practice,'³¹⁷ I reflect upon the unique role of the portrait to document the society in which it was made.³¹⁸ Richard Brilliant affirms that portraits 'reflect social realities. Their imagery combines the conventions of behaviour and appearance appropriate to the members of society at a particular time, as defined by categories of age, gender, race, physical beauty, occupation, social and civic status, and class.'³¹⁹ As an artist trained in early Renaissance tempera and oil painting techniques, I consider the portrayal of women in Renaissance art as an example. Renaissance portraiture idealised a compliant, chaste and passive femininity; as such these paintings obfuscate the diversity, individuality and complexity of the personhood of women.³²⁰ The identity of the female subject is overshadowed by the classical conventions of beauty and virtue according to which she was painted. Paola Tinagli writes that in these paintings women appear 'to the viewer through the screen of the ideals of the society in which they were produced: ideals of beauty, of behaviour, of display. In them we still see not an individual, but a cypher.'³²¹ Leonardo DaVinci famously declared that 'women must be rendered in shy acts, their legs and arms firmly gathered with their heads down and askew.'³²² Davinci's comment reminds us that 'It is common knowledge that most artistic representations of women been not been created by women,'³²³ depicted from a male perspective. Indeed, as Peg Brand observes, the representation of women by men has 'constituted the predominant, nearly uninterrupted two-thousand-year continuum of historical 'masterpieces ' known as the artworld canon.'³²⁴

John Berger famously describes the 'surveyed female,'³²⁵ whereby 'painters and spectator-owners were usually men and the persons treated as objects, usually women.'³²⁶ Western art predominantly portrayed the female body as

³¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

³¹⁶ Catherine Craig & Sara MacDonald, "Beauty as the Beginning and End of Justice: Aesthetic Politics in Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil," in *Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil: Unprecedented Conversations*, eds. K. Lawson & J. Livingstone (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), 201.

³¹⁷ Connell, "Encounter and Obligation," 20.

³¹⁸ Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern*, (Duke University Press, 2006), 29-30.

³¹⁹ Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 11.

³²⁰ Siobhán Jolley, *Reimagining the Magdalene: Feminism, Art, and the Counter-Reformation*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2025), 48-9.

³²¹ Paola Tinagli, *Women In Italian Renaissance Art : Gender Representation And Identity*. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 4.

³²² "le donne si debeno figurare con atti vergognosi le gambe insieme strette le braccia raccolte insieme con teste basse et piegare intraverso." Leonardo da Vinci. *Il Libro della Pittura*. Created sixteenth cent., Urb.lat.1270, (The Vatican Library, DigitalVaticana), 51v. Quoted in Toreno, *Netherlandish and Italian Female Portraiture*, 156.

³²³ Peg Brand, "Feminist Art Epistemologies: Understanding Feminist Art," *Hypatia* 21, no. 3 (2006): 166-7.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 47.

³²⁶ Ibid., 63.

titillation for the male viewer.³²⁷ Women are generally represented as either an idealised object of virtue or an erotised object of desire.³²⁸ Patricia simons asks, 'why else paint a woman except as an object of display within male discourse?'³²⁹ Irigaray seeks to unsettle the dominant 'phallogentric foundations' of Western culture and thereby unleash a new female imaginary.³³⁰ She bluntly declares that 'as women, we have thus been enclosed in an order of forms inappropriate to us.'³³¹ However, figurative representations of women by female artists risk conforming to the predominant masculinist tradition that preceded and shaped them.³³² Helen Robinson asks, how can women artists articulate their experience 'if the symbolic means available and comprehensible to them are not fully appropriate?'³³³ Irigaray contends: 'Don't restrict yourself to describing, reproducing, and repeating what exists, but know how to invent or imagine what hasn't yet taken place.'³³⁴ As such, 'to play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it.'³³⁵ The artistic incarnation of the female imaginary needs to discover a new 'symbolic means' to affirm the specificity, subjectivity and significance of women, that is actively opposed to hegemonic, phallogentric modes of representation.³³⁶ For Rosi Braidotti this 'amounts to a collective repossession by women of the images and representations of 'Woman' as they have been coded in language, culture, science, knowledge, and discourse and consequently internalized in the heart, mind, body, and lived experience of women.'³³⁷ It is not simply reactive, but encompasses a creative, generative striving toward a new and better horizon.³³⁸

Another example of women's 'exploitation by discourse' is nineteenth century Orientalist art. Orientalist art, as John Mackenzie observes, was 'inexorably rooted in racism,'³³⁹ especially with regard to the erotised representation of women. Edward Said describes the 'widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her. [...] It fairly stands for the

³²⁷ Wendy Steiner, *Venus in Exile: The Rejection of Beauty in Twentieth Century Art*, (New York: The Free Press, 2001).

³²⁸ Alison Conway, *Private Interests: Women, Portraiture, and the Visual Culture of the English Novel, 1709-1791*, (University of Toronto Press, 2001), 15.

³²⁹ Patricia simons, "Women in Frames, the gaze, the eye, the profile in Renaissance portraiture," *History Workshop Journal* 25, no 1 (1988): 8.

³³⁰ Miri Rozmarin, "Living Politically: An Irigarayan Notion of Agency as a Way of Life." *Hypatia* 28, no. 3 (2013): 471.

³³¹ Luce Irigaray, 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?' in *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. Alison Martin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 109-110. Quoted in Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: the politics of art by women*. (London and New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006), 151.

³³² Elaine Miller, "Beyond the Madonna: Revisiting Luce Irigaray's Aesthetics," in *Thinking with Irigaray*, eds. Mary C. Rawlinson, et al., (State University of New York Press, 2011), 52.

³³³ Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray*, 57.

³³⁴ Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. Alison Martin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 49. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 93.

³³⁵ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 1985), 76. Quoted in Rozmarin, "Living Politically," 471.

³³⁶ Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1998). Referenced in Heather Walton, *Literature, theology and feminism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 134-5.

³³⁷ Rosi Braidotti, "Of Bugs and Women: Irigaray and Deleuze on the Becoming-Woman", in Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (eds), *Engaging with Irigaray - Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 120-21. Quoted in Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray*, 62.

³³⁸ Rozmarin, "Living Politically," 476.

³³⁹ John M. Mackenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1995), 45, 46.

pattern of relative strength between East and West, and the discourse about the Orient that it enabled.’³⁴⁰ As such, Orientalist art offers a pertinent example of Susan Sered’s distinction between women as agents and Woman as archetype; a ‘symbolic construct conflating gender, sex and sexuality’ that is ‘compromised of allegory, ideology, metaphor, fantasy’ and ‘men’s psychological projections.’³⁴¹ In Orientalist art the Western voyeur gazes upon the otherwise veiled ‘Oriental’ female, symptomatic of colonisation and subjugation.³⁴² These images implicitly express Western man’s power over women as well as moral superiority to the colonised other.³⁴³ Orientalist paintings consolidated the putative dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and essentialised the resultant ‘other’ as an object of the ‘voyeuristic colonizing gaze.’³⁴⁴ However, these images arguably represent a ‘convex mirror’ which reflects the Occident rather than the ‘imaginary ‘Orient.’³⁴⁵ For Siobhán Jolley, artistic portrayal ‘cannot be detached from the epistemology of the matrices of power’³⁴⁶ indelibly permeating cultural consciousness.

Images are always linked to gazes, to ways of seeing,³⁴⁷ embedded in social, cultural and institutionalised power structures and relations. As such, works of art are implicated in debates concerning feminism and decolonisation; the privilege and power pertaining to whom is allowed to look, and questions regarding cultural and patriarchal domination, appropriation or control.³⁴⁸ The objectifying, possessive, demeaning gaze famously articulated by Jean-Paul Satre, Frantz Fanon and Simone de Beauvoir denies space for genuine encounter. Since representation has been revealed to be intertwined with power, it has been fiercely reclaimed as ‘a terrain of resistance;’³⁴⁹ bell hooks terms this the ‘oppositional gaze.’³⁵⁰ As such, is it possible to consider new ways of seeing and approaching the portrait encounter, grounded in an attentive ethics, that transcends tendencies to reify certain subjects and ossify others? In the words of Irigaray, such a gaze is ‘not an inattentive or predatory gaze [...] It is both material and spiritual contemplation, furnishing thought with an already sublimated energy.’³⁵¹

³⁴⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 6.

³⁴¹ Susan Starr Sered, “‘Woman’ as Symbol and Women as Agents – Gendered Religious Discourses and Practices’, in *Revisioning Gender*, edited by Myra Marx Ferree, Judith Lorber, and Beth B. Hess (Lanham: Rowman Altamira, 1999), 194. Quoted in Jolley, *Reimagining the Magdalene*, 48-9.

³⁴² Rana Kabbani “Regarding Orientalist Painting Today,” in *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Paintings*, ed. Nicholas Tromans (Yale University Press 2008), 42.

³⁴³ Linda Nochlin, “‘The Imaginary Orient’, *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper Row, 1989), 45.

³⁴⁴ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, (New York: Routledge, 2015) 130.

³⁴⁵ Rana Kabbani, *Europe’s Myths of the Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: Palgrave MacMillan 1986), 85. Quoted in MacKenzie, *Orientalism*, 64.

³⁴⁶ Jolley, *Reimagining the Magdalene*, 25.

³⁴⁷ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*.

³⁴⁸ Catherine McCormack, *Women in the Picture: Women, Art and the Power of Looking* (London: Icon Books, 2021), 223.

³⁴⁹ Anna Carastathis and Myrto Tsilimpounidi, “‘Through the Lens of a Refugee’: Disrupting Visual Narratives of Displacement,” In *The Routledge Handbook of Refugee Narratives*, eds. Lê Espiritu Gandhi, E., & Nguyen, V. (London: Routledge, 2023), 117.

³⁵⁰ bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators.” In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 116.

³⁵¹ Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch for a Felicity within History*, trans. Alison Martin (New York: Routledge, 1996), 25. Quoted in Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: the politics of art by women*. (London and New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006), 92.

Indeed, in the portrait we witness an encounter between two subjectivities. Irigaray, in her phenomenology of painting, describes this as, 'a crossing of looks, notably in their tactile dimension. A crossing not only of looks, 'but also of lives, of breaths, of energies. In this sense, a painting becomes a transmission of truth, a message of love, a work that is always already common, a creation of world, a manner of saying that which words and musical notes would have been unable to express.'³⁵² The perception of the portraitist 'is modified because it is shared with the other.'³⁵³ Therefore 'I co-look,'³⁵⁴ my vision interlaced with others as a body-soul that is 'essentially relation-with.'³⁵⁵ Such an encounter implies reaching 'another subjectivity where friendship with nature prevails over its domination, and being-with over being-above or below.'³⁵⁶ Irigaray invites us to move beyond dualistic, oppositional being and knowing, and provides a framework for a relational approach to portraiture that eludes an appropriative, exploitative grasp. She asks: 'How might painting open up or provide for a sharing of vision between two who are different, and in doing so, modify perception while preserving difference?'³⁵⁷

For Weil, perception is a dance:³⁵⁸ 'The elementary perception of nature is a sort of dance; this dance is the source of our perceiving.'³⁵⁹ The *dance* of perception is an intuitive, interactive, reciprocal encounter.³⁶⁰ Weil's *dance* is echoed in Irigaray's metaphor of streams 'without fixed banks'³⁶¹ which cannot be forced to flow into a 'single, definitive sea.'³⁶² This way of looking does not invite 'fusion or confusion,' compared to Merleau-Ponty's *chiasmic* perception with 'the intertwining of my life with the other lives, of my body with the visible things, by the intersection of my perceptual field with that of the others,'³⁶³ whereby 'we no longer know which sees and which is seen.'³⁶⁴ Eleanor Sanderson reflects upon Irigaray's dual 'movement of fidelity,'³⁶⁵ faithfulness to the other with whom we cultivate being-with and faithfulness to the boundaries of the self, 'to this unique existence that we are, that is ours,' in order to 'blossom'.³⁶⁶ This respectful way of looking and seeing resists 'any sort of appropriation, domination,

³⁵² Luce Irigaray, "To paint the invisible," *Continental Philosophy Review* 37 (2004): 403.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 391-92.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 394, 403.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 403.

³⁵⁶ Luce Irigaray, *Prières quotidiennes/Everyday Prayers*, bilingual edition with English version by Luce Irigaray and Timothy Mathews (Paris: Mame/Seuil; Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 2004), 35.

³⁵⁷ Irigaray, "To paint the invisible," 392.

³⁵⁸ Warren Heiti (2020). "The Dance of Perception: The Rôle of the Imagination in Simone Weil's Early Epistemology," in *Imagination and Art: Explorations in Contemporary Theory*, eds. Moser, Keith, and Ananta Ch. Sukla, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2020), 304.

³⁵⁹ Simone Weil, *Simone Weil: "The Just Balance,"* Trans. by Peter Winch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 41.

³⁶⁰ Warren Heiti (2021). The Dance of Perception. In *Attending: An Ethical Art*, Vol. 82. (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021), 214-5.

³⁶¹ Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 215.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 49.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

³⁶⁵ Eleanor Sanderson, "Emotional engagement in the context of development and spirituality research" in *Emotion, Space and Society* 5, no. 2 (2012): 127.

³⁶⁶ Irigaray, "Remembering Humanity," 291.

subjection or submission,³⁶⁷ or indeed fusion or confusion, and offers the possibility of life-giving encounters with both individuals and works of art.³⁶⁸

An artist whose approach defies the reductive, objectifying masculine tradition was Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945). Kollwitz's art elevates the plight of women in the urban working class. In her words, 'when I became acquainted with the women [...] Unresolved problems like prostitution, unemployment, tormented and worried me.'³⁶⁹ Kollwitz's work dignified and made visible those who were often rendered invisible in society, shining a light on the 'many silent and noisy tragedies of big city life.'³⁷⁰ In the wake of the death of her eighteen-year-old son Peter in World War One, Kollwitz's prints and sculptures grapple with a mother's grief and bear witness to the horrors of war.³⁷¹ Kollwitz's raw and yet profoundly beautiful works of art invite us to see others, as she puts it, as 'unhiddenly' as possible.³⁷² Her representation of women offer a critique on the wider social system of oppression and suffering,³⁷³ and a compassionate and intimate glimpse into sorrow and pain. As such, Kollwitz's art demands compassionate attention from the viewer.³⁷⁴ Her art, in the words of Irigaray, offers a means by which women can 'recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it'³⁷⁵ and 'convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it.'³⁷⁶

Nonetheless, Kollwitz's work is perhaps an exception in the twentieth century. Hans Sedlmayr reproaches the masters of modern art, such as Picasso, who 'do not understand the dignity of the human face-or do not wish to understand it. 'Love's first success' says Pascal. 'is that it inspires great respect.' Modern painting shows no sign of any respect for man.'³⁷⁷ I suggest that this lack of respect is most apparent in representations of *women*. According to Irigaray, Pablo Picasso's women are 'violated, tortured,'³⁷⁸ evident in the distorted, fractured planes of his cubist portraiture of lovers. Christina Ananias draws our attention to Picasso's *The Painter and His Model* (1927) whereby the artist's paintbrush is 'transformed into a weapon,' explicitly implying that in painting the female model, 'the

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ David Michael Levin, *The Philosopher's Gaze*. Modernity in the Shadows of Enlightenment. (University of California Press, 1999), 201-2.

³⁶⁹ Käthe Kollwitz, "Rückblick auf frühere Zeit," in *Die Tagebücher*, ed. Jutta Bohnke-Kollwitz (Berlin: Wolf Jobst Siedler Verlag, 1989), 741. Quoted in Maggie Hire, "Käthe Kollwitz's Working Class Women," *MoMA Magazine* (Mar 24, 2024). Excerpt from the exhibition catalogue for Käthe Kollwitz at MoMA March 31–July 20, 2024. Accessed July 8, 2024. <https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/1051>

³⁷⁰ Käthe Kollwitz, letter to Beate Bonus-Jeep, October 13, 1910, quoted in *Die Tagebücher*, 755. Quoted in Ibid.

³⁷¹ Angela Moorjani, "Käthe Kollwitz on Sacrifice, Mourning, and Reparation: An Essay in Psychoaesthetics." *MLN* 101, no. 5 (1986), 1110.

³⁷² Stephanie Gehring, "Attention to Suffering in the Work of Simone Weil and Käthe Kollwitz," (PhD Thesis: Duke University, 2018), 20.

³⁷³ Ibid., 43.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 76.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Hans Sedlmayr. *Art in Crisis: The Lost Centre*. 3rd edition. Translated by Brian Battershaw (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers 2007), 156-7.

³⁷⁸ Irigaray, "To Paint the Invisible," 353.

depicted artist mutilates her.’³⁷⁹ For Russian Theologian Nikolai Berdyaev, Picasso’s dismembering of mimetic portraiture is emblematic of a ‘process of dehumanization.’³⁸⁰ However, we must not forget that the art of antiquity and images of virtue or beauty could also incite violence.³⁸¹ For John Welchman, under the conditions of twentieth-century modernity, the face ‘with its ceaseless implications of previous symbolic orders—imperial, religious, bourgeois—has been more or less effaced.’³⁸² However, I contend that a restorative, attentive, sincere and sacred approach to ‘the face of the other’ in portraiture is possible.

In this thesis, I explore the possibility of a reemergence of a theological dimension to contemporary artistic practice. Mark Taylor describes this as a ‘theoaesthetic’ whereby ‘art and religion join to lead individuals and society from fragmentation and opposition to integration and unification.’³⁸³ However, this is in contrast to what Rosalind Kraus describes as the ‘absolute rift’ that emerged between the sacred and secular in contemporary art discourse in the twentieth century.³⁸⁴ For Nicoletta Isar, the ‘modern notion of art’³⁸⁵ and the concomitant diminution of the of ‘the power of the sacred image’³⁸⁶ emanated from the iconoclasm of the Reformation and its secular and materialist moral nexus. Modern art, according to Isar, ‘has ceased to contain the presence and has come to be a representation, a fragment of the religious discourse, a reminiscence of it, a ‘split.’’³⁸⁷ However, one must also acknowledge that the sacred art of our times is ‘correspondingly weak’ in light of the absence of patronage from the Church.³⁸⁸ Indeed, there are ‘no Sistine ceilings to decorate and few significant public commissions of sacred art.’³⁸⁹ Nonetheless, many contemporary artists continue to turn to Christian iconography and religious symbolism in order to find a coherent visual vocabulary to communicate effectively with others. In my artistic practice I endeavour to embrace an iconological moral geometry of artist and sitter, as I elucidate in the following chapter, and the use of sacred and traditional painting techniques. The iconic tradition is deliberate choice; an attempt to counteract the tendencies towards dehumanisation, objectification and commoditisation outlined above.

³⁷⁹ T. J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013). Referenced in Christina C. Ananias, “Making Pain Incarnate: An Iconophilic Interpretation of Pablo Picasso’s Guernica,” in *Theology, Modernity, and the Visual Arts*, eds. Ben Quash and Chloë Reddaway (Turnhout: Brepols, 2024), 38.

³⁸⁰ Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*. (London: Routledge, 2006). Quoted in Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 156-7.

³⁸¹ Marie-José Mondzain and Sally Shafto, “Can Images Kill?” *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 1 (2009), 25.

³⁸² John Welchman, “Face(t)s: Notes on Faciality”, *Artforum* (November 1988). Accessed September 14, 2022.

<https://www.artforum.com/features/facets-notes-on-faciality-206094/>

³⁸³ Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture and Religion*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 46. Quoted in Ronald R. Bernier and Rachel Hostetter Smith, “Introduction”, in *Religion and Contemporary Art: A Curious Accord*, eds. R. R. Bernier and R. H. Smith, (Routledge, 2023), 2.

³⁸⁴ Rosalind Krauss, “Grids,” October 9 (Summer 1979): 54. Quoted in Jonathan A. Anderson, *The Invisibility of Religion in Contemporary Art* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2025), 6.

³⁸⁵ Nicoletta Isar, “The Broken Image Of Splits and Cuttings: Modern Representation and its Beginnings.” In *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and their Representation in the Arts, 1000-2000*, eds. N Isar, NH Petersen, C Cluver, N Bell (Amsterdam: Brill, 2004), 122.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁸⁸ Bruce Herman, *Makers by Nature: Letters from a Master Painter on Faith, Hope, and Art*, (InterVarsity Press, 2025), 95-6.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Towards a Reclamation of Art's 'Aura'

In light of the ascendance of modernity's notion(s) of art, the elimination of its sacred power and 'magical properties',³⁹⁰ is it possible to move towards a reclamation of art's 'aura'? Indeed, what constitutes 'the metaphysics of presence'³⁹¹ of a work of art and has this been rendered redundant, neutralised by a reductive utilitarian approach? I contend that this cultural moment, perceived by Belting as 'the end of the age of art',³⁹² can be revived by an approach to artistic practice underpinned by Weil's philosophy of attention and iconistic contemplation, and thereby re-orient one's awareness of the sanctity of the world.

Walter Benjamin notoriously declared that art's mysterious 'aura' had been rendered obsolete, as first photography, and then cinema, transformed art works into endlessly reproducible commodities.³⁹³ Benjamin seems to celebrate the 'withering' of aura; namely, the sentimental, bourgeois attitude to art, and its 'cult' status.³⁹⁴ For Benjamin, this 'liquidation of the traditional value of cultural heritage'³⁹⁵ apparently 'emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual.'³⁹⁶ Jacques Derrida declares that for Benjamin, his theory of the portrait 'played a transition role, on the frontier between 'ritual religious art' and 'technical reproducibility.'³⁹⁷ Indeed, 'the human countenance' was the definitive site of the 'ultimate retrenchment' of 'ritual value' within the technologies and materials of mechanical (now digital) reproduction.³⁹⁸ For Derrida, the aura emanates 'for the last time' from the 'fleeting expression of the human face'³⁹⁹ in early photographic portraits, emblematic of 'the last resistance of ritual.'⁴⁰⁰ Whereby in the 'fugitive expression of a human face [here the barely human, barely living face of a refugee, a fugitive crossing the line, all lines] the first photographs make room for the aura for the last time'⁴⁰¹ But now, even 'the face begins to disappear.'⁴⁰²

'During the course of a day,' Guattari muses, 'I travel from one faciality to another'⁴⁰³ resulting in a 'general flattening of the world [...] onto a signifying screen.'⁴⁰⁴ Berger declares that, for the first time, 'images of art have become

³⁹⁰ Isar, "The Broken Image Of Splits and Cuttings," 113.

³⁹¹ Derrida, Jacques, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", in *Writing and Difference*, trans., with an introduction and notes, by Alan Bass, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 280-1. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 133.

³⁹² Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Quoted in *Ibid.*, 132.

³⁹³ Benjamin, "The Work of Art," in *Illuminations*, 228.

³⁹⁴ Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. 2 (2008): 351.

³⁹⁵ Benjamin, "The Work of Art," in *Illuminations*, 221.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 224.

³⁹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 178.

³⁹⁸ Benjamin, "The Work of Art," in *Illuminations*, 225-26.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴⁰⁰ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 178.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 178-9.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.* 178.

⁴⁰³ Félix Guattari. *The Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2011), 81.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

ephemeral, ubiquitous, insubstantial, available, valueless, free,' whereby, caught up the consumerist mainstream and dislodged from their spatio-temporal context, 'they no longer, in themselves, have power.'⁴⁰⁵ Traditional art forms accordingly retreated into the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art* – in Benjamin's estimation the 'negative theology' of art.⁴⁰⁶ The disappearance of the elusive phenomenon of *aura* is synonymous with a cultural shift from authenticity to multiplicity; from an artwork's unique 'presence in time and space'⁴⁰⁷ to its 'soulless' mechanical copy.'⁴⁰⁸ As Isar remarks, a re-presentation or duplication 'inserts layer upon layer of separation' and accordingly diminishes its proximity to that which it signifies, resulting in 'an effacement of presence.'⁴⁰⁹ Theodore Adorno criticised Benjamin's exultation of technological progress for 'exaggerating the progressive aspects of mass culture while denying its reactionary ones.'⁴¹⁰ The revolutionary potential of technology and media is by no means guaranteed. Indeed, on the contrary, it is often manipulated by the very traditional institutions that Benjamin proclaims it's liberation from.⁴¹¹ Indeed, photography, cinema and contemporary art could be conceptualised as a mere re-incarnation of the elitist, materialistic commodification of the cult image.⁴¹²

While the de-materialisation, desacralization of art displaced the remoteness and elite specialisation of traditional art, the concomitant sense of reverence, ritual and *attention* was lost.⁴¹³ For Roger Scruton, 'the art of desecration represents a new departure'⁴¹⁴ that lies at the heart of the post-modern experience. For 'the relentless pursuit of artistic innovation leads to a cult of nihilism' and 'sacrilege,' ultimately 'reducing and demeaning our humanity.'⁴¹⁵ Benjamin shines a light on the root of the *aura*'s decline—or rather its active dismantling and destruction—whereby the commodification, technological mastery and democratisation of art, has rendered the auratic archaic and redundant.⁴¹⁶ *Aura*'s 'contemporary decay'⁴¹⁷ reduces 'the work of art and the face of the other, to a mere contextual presence;'⁴¹⁸ deprived of its ability to look back, stripped of the presence, authenticity and mystery of auratic semblance.

⁴⁰⁵ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 32.

⁴⁰⁶ Vassilev, K. "The Aura of the Object and the Work of Art: A Critical Analysis of Walter Benjamin's Theory in the Context of Contemporary Art and Culture." *Arts* 12, no. 2 (2023): 59.

⁴⁰⁷ Benjamin, "The Work of Art," in *Illuminations*, 220.

⁴⁰⁸ Carolin Duttlinger; "Imaginary Encounters: Walter Benjamin and the Aura of Photography." *Poetics Today* 29, no.1 (2008): 80.

⁴⁰⁹ Isar, "The Broken Image Of Splits and Cuttings," 127-8.

⁴¹⁰ Adorno to Benjamin, March 18th, 1936. In Charlie Bertsch, "The Aura and its Simulacral Double: Reconsidering Walter Benjamin's "Work of Art,"" *Critical Sense* 4, no. 2 (1996): 22. Quoted in Arianne Conty, "They Have Eyes That They Might not See: Walter Benjamin's Aura and the Optical Unconscious," *Literature and Theology* 27, no. 4, (December 2013): 474.

⁴¹¹ Conty, "They Have Eyes That They Might not See," 474.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Genese Grill, "Re-Materialization, Remoteness, and Reverence: A Critique of De-Materialization in Art." *The Georgia Review* 70, no. 3 (2016): 564.

⁴¹⁴ Roger Scruton, *Beauty: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford University Press, 2011), 147.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 160.

⁴¹⁶ Andrew Benjamin, "The Decline of Art: Benjamin's Aura," *Oxford Art Journal* 9, no. 2 (1986): 32.

⁴¹⁷ Benjamin, "The Work of Art," in *Illuminations*, 222-3.

⁴¹⁸ Benjamin, "The Decline of Art: Benjamin's Aura," 32-3.

Is the reclamation of the auratic function of art even feasible? For Benjamin, the aura is a perceptual experience of phenomenal distance between the self and the object of contemplative attention. However, in this 'age of decline,'⁴¹⁹ contemplation has been supplanted by distraction, and 'the need to possess the object in close-up in the form of a picture, or rather a copy, becomes more imperative.'⁴²⁰ With the ascent of modern media technology we are carried along by the relentless 'current of objects,'⁴²¹ addicted to the 'cult of the ephemeral.'⁴²² The proliferation of data, images, media, advancements in Artificial Intelligence and so forth has exacerbated sensorial stimulation far beyond Benjamin's prognosis. Aura is antithetical to the technological advances that have rendered it obsolete.⁴²³ Indeed, bombarded with a relentless influx of stimuli, 'In place of aura, there is *buzz*.'⁴²⁴ Sontag laments that this has precipitated 'a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience,' since all the conditions of modernity 'conjoin to dull our sensory faculties'⁴²⁵ and truncated modes of experience predominate. Therefore Sontag insists that we must 'recover our senses' and 'learn to *see* more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more;'⁴²⁶ therein lies the value of art. Since a painting is born of contemplation, of intense concentration and attention, it can create the space for others to contemplate: 'all great art induces contemplation, a dynamic contemplation.'⁴²⁷

Jeremy Begbie contends that artistic practices possess the potential to counteract such reductive tendencies.⁴²⁸ Art requires an effort anathema to our contemporary culture.⁴²⁹ The aura of a work emerges from a particular 'kind of attentiveness,' in Benjamin's words, with reference to the poet Novalis.⁴³⁰ Such time-consuming attention can help one to transcend one's limited perspective and pave the way for a more expansive consciousness of ourselves, others and the wider world. As Franz Kafka once wrote, 'art breaks the sea that's frozen inside us',⁴³¹ reawakening sensitivities that we have become numb to. Louis Dupré laments that '[w]e seldom encounter the sacred in an objectively given, universally attainable reality, as the miraculous statue or the rustling of leaves in an oak forest were

⁴¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," in *Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934*, trans. R. Livingstone, eds. M. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 518.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 519.

⁴²¹ Louis Aragon, *Paysan de Paris*, 2nd Edition, (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), 47; Quoted in Howard Eiland, "Reception in Distraction", in *Walter Benjamin and Art*, ed. A. Benjamin, (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2005), 21.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, in Eiland, "Reception in Distraction", 14.

⁴²³ Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," 336.

⁴²⁴ David Joselit, *After Art*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2013), 16.

⁴²⁵ Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 9.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴²⁸ Jeremy S. Begbie, *Abundantly More: The Theological Promise of the Arts in a Reductionist World*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), 40.

⁴²⁹ Jeanette Winterson, "Art Objects," in *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery* (London: Vintage Random House, 1996), 16.

⁴³⁰ Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." In *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Random House, 1999), 184. Quoted in Chiel van den Akker, "Benjamin, the Image and the End of History," *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 3, no. 1 (2016): 48.

⁴³¹ Franz Kafka. November 1903 Letter. In *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*, translated by Richard and Clara Winston (London: Calder, 1978). Quoted in Paul Holdengraber, "Adam Phillips, The Art of Nonfiction No. 7," *The Paris Review* 208 (Spring 2014). Accessed on September 18 2022. <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6286/the-art-of-nonfiction-no-7-adam-phillips>

to our ancestors;⁴³² as a consequence, ‘almost nothing appears directly sacred to us.’⁴³³ However, the revelation of the sacred, ‘the aura’, is not something that we have irrevocably lost, but an anamnesis, an un-forgetting.⁴³⁴ For Mircea Eliade, ‘the sacred is an element in the structure of (human) consciousness.’⁴³⁵ As such, our deliberate attention can make places, people and works of art ‘loci of hierophany.’⁴³⁶

Aura can refer to a psychological state or quasi-religious contemplation that envelops the viewer in the presence of a work of art, or natural phenomena.⁴³⁷ Aura’s ‘transcendent immanence’⁴³⁸ is defined by Benjamin as ‘the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be.’⁴³⁹ For Bratu Hansen the aura is a mode of experience that ‘envelops and physically connects—and thus blurs the boundaries between—subject and object, suggesting a sensory, embodied mode of perception.’⁴⁴⁰ On the ‘temporal axis,’ aura suggests ‘a kind of reverie in which time expands’ and ‘one is contemplatively immersed in - or absorbed by - the object of one’s perception.’⁴⁴¹ In this ‘strange weave of space and time,’⁴⁴² one cannot remain unchanged. The experience of seeing and being seen is what brings a painting within the realm of the sacred and mystical, dismissed by Benjamin as ritualistic.⁴⁴³ Jean-Luc Nancy elaborates that an art work opens up ‘a world we enter while remaining before it.’⁴⁴⁴ For Martin Heidegger, ‘In the vicinity of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be.’⁴⁴⁵ The auratic and mystical function of art has parallels with Weil’s notion of *metaxu*. As Weil writes: ‘Man cannot get over regretting that he has not been given the infinite, and he has more than one way of fabricating, with the finite, an equivalent of the infinite for himself – which is perhaps the definition of art.’⁴⁴⁶ Eric Springsted suggests that

⁴³² Louis K. Dupré, *Transcendent Selfhood: The Rediscovery Of The Inner Life*. (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 28. Quoted in Mark Freeman, “Listening to the Claims of Experience: Psychology and the Question of Transcendence.” *Pastoral Psychol* 63, 324.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Bryan S. Rennie, “Mircea Eliade and the Perception of the Sacred in the Profane: Intention, Reduction, and Cognitive Theory.” *Temenos - Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 43, no. 1 (2007) 85.

⁴³⁵ Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion*, (London: University of Chicago Press, 1969), i; Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*. Vol. I. From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), xiii. Quoted in Brian S. Rennie, “Mircea Eliade and the Perception of the Sacred in the Profane: Intention, Reduction, and Cognitive Theory,” *Temenos* Vol. 43 No. 1 (2007): 76.

⁴³⁶ Chloë Reddaway, *Transformations in Persons and Paint: Visual Theology, Historical Images, and the Modern Viewer*, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2016), 215.

⁴³⁷ Jay David Bolter, Blair MacIntyre, Maribeth Gandy, and Petra Schweitzer. “New Media and the Permanent Crisis of Aura,” *Convergence* 12, no. 1 (2006): 26.

⁴³⁸ Conty, “They Have Eyes That They Might not See,” 475.

⁴³⁹ Benjamin, “Little History of Photography”, in *Selected Writings*, 518–19.

⁴⁴⁰ Hansen: “Benjamin’s Aura,” 351.

⁴⁴¹ Benjamin, “Little History of Photography”, in *Selected Writings*, 518–19.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Jaireth, “What Is There in a Portrait?” 43–4.

⁴⁴⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground Of The Image*, trans. Jeff Fort, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 5. Quoted in Hinkson, “Introduction: The time of the portrait is now,” 11–12.

⁴⁴⁵ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 35.

⁴⁴⁶ Simone Weil, *Formative Writings 1929–1941*, ed. and trans. Dorothy Tuck McFarland and Wilhelmina Van Ness. (London: Routledge, 1987), 243. Quoted in J. M. Baker, “Nostalgia of the Everyday: Earthly Things as Poetic Criteria in Weil and Jacotet.” *Christianity and Literature* 55, no. 1 (2005): 74.

metaxu in Weil as the links between the quotidian and finite with the divine and infinite.⁴⁴⁷ *Metaxu* therefore correlates with Irigaray's notion of 'sensible transcendence.'⁴⁴⁸ For Irigaray, the divine is revealed not only as the 'celestial [that] lies above our head but also as that which can occur between us';⁴⁴⁹ or in the encounter with a work of art.

Specifically with regard to portraiture, Chiel van den Akker posits that the aura is the ability of the artwork 'to look back at us.'⁴⁵⁰ Paintings, Adorno remarks, 'open their eyes,'⁴⁵¹ and for Merleau-Ponty, 'hold our gaze.'⁴⁵² Benjamin attributes the experience of aura 'in all its fullness'⁴⁵³ to the disarming intimacy of returning one's gaze: 'To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return.'⁴⁵⁴ Benjamin's latter description of the aura introduces 'the possibility of an ethical dimension'.⁴⁵⁵ The aura is not a tangible, material quality but a phenomenon formed in the exchange between subject and object of contemplation. Bertolt Brecht described it thus in his diary: '[Benjamin] says: when you feel someone's gaze alight upon you, even on your back, you respond. The expectation that whatever you look at is looking at you creates aura.'⁴⁵⁶ This exchange opens up a moment of transcendence, of encounter; a 'strange weave of space and time.'⁴⁵⁷

Nancy considers the portrait as 'first and foremost an encounter.'⁴⁵⁸ There is the encounter between the viewer and the represented subject, and the intimacy of the encounter between artist and sitter. Nancy writes:

'A portrait touches, or else it is only an identification photo, a descriptive record, not an image. What touches is something that is borne to the surface from out of an intimacy. But here the portrait is only an example. Every image is in some way a 'portrait', not in that it would reproduce the traits of a person, but in that it pulls and draws [...] in that it extracts something, an intimacy, a force. And, to extract it, it subtracts or removes it from homogeneity, it distracts it from it, distinguishes it and casts it forth. It throws it in front of us and this throwing, this

⁴⁴⁷ Eric O. Springsted, *Christus Mediator: Platonic Mediation in the Thought of Simone Weil*, (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), 198. Referenced in Kathryn Lawson, *Ecological Ethics and the Philosophy of Simone Weil: Decreation for the Anthropocene* (London: Routledge 2024), 53-4.

⁴⁴⁸ Matthew James Godfrey, *The Lost Futures of Simone Weil: Metaxu, Decreation, and the Spectres of Myth*. (York University: Toronto, 2021), 32-33.

⁴⁴⁹ Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, trans. by Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 147.

⁴⁵⁰ van den Akker "Benjamin, the Image and the End of History," 49.

⁴⁵¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 66.

⁴⁵² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, trans O. Davis, (London and New York: Routledge, 2009) 69-70.

⁴⁵³ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 188. Quoted in Conty, "They Have Eyes That They Might not See," 476.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Benjamin, "The Decline of Art," 32.

⁴⁵⁶ Coetzee, J. M. "The Marvels of Walter Benjamin." *New York Review of Books*, January 11 (2001): 3. Quoted in Jaireth, "What Is There in a Portrait?" 43-4.

⁴⁵⁷ Benjamin "Little History of Photography", in *Selected Writings*, 518.

⁴⁵⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006.) Quoted in Jennifer Derger, "BarkTV: Portrait of an innovator." In *Imaging Identity: Media, Memory and Portraiture in the Digital Age*, ed. Melinda Hinkson (ANU Press, 2016), 117.

*projection, makes its mark, its very trait and its stigma: its tracing, its lines, its style, its incision,
its scar, its signature, all of this at once.*⁴⁵⁹

The attentive care and respect with which an artist approaches the ‘intimacy’ of encounter is at the heart of the portrait’s capacity to ‘touch’ a viewer. In Nancy’s words: “‘Art’ is the name of this fragile other encounter.”⁴⁶⁰ The portrait-as-encounter seems to hold the presence, ‘force’, or aura, of a person. This is reminiscent of Mauss’s interpretation of the Māori concept of *hau* – the ‘spirit’⁴⁶¹ or ‘aura’⁴⁶² – of the gift, that carries with it something of the ‘soul’ of the giver,⁴⁶³ imbued with invisible power and significance. James Elkins posits that a work of art ‘has a presence—a being and face of its own.’⁴⁶⁴

This illuminates the transformative encounter of a work of art. Esther Lightcap Meek reminds us that: ‘[w]orks of art that are encounters repeatedly become encounters for the viewers.’⁴⁶⁵ For Nicholas Bourriaud the work of art represents a ‘social interstice’⁴⁶⁶ and a ‘state of encounter.’⁴⁶⁷ He defined ‘relational aesthetics’ as ‘an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context.’⁴⁶⁸ It is art that is intimately engaged in the wider world and the result of a reciprocal process of exchange. Pope Francis’s encyclical *Fratelli tutti* highlights the ‘urgent need to promote a culture of encounter,’ and for all men and women to be ‘passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges.’⁴⁶⁹ He calls for new and creative ‘paths of hope’ to create this culture of encounter, for the sake of future generations.⁴⁷⁰ However, even while eulogising the potential role of the arts in cultivating a ‘culture of encounter,’ it is important to remember their role in sowing the opposite. The arts have, at times, both historically and contemporarily, perpetuated division and hatred. Indeed, Irigaray reminds us that the ‘transcendence of the other with respect to ourselves and our world’ is not yet part of our culture.⁴⁷¹ However, a work of art characterised by what Eleanor Sanderson describes as a ‘generous posture of grace’ has the potential to carve new pathways of peace and teach respect for the other in the name of tolerance or common

⁴⁵⁹ Nancy, *The Ground Of The Image*, 4.

⁴⁶⁰ Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, Quoted in Derger, “BarkTV,” 118.

⁴⁶¹ Mauss, *The Gift*, 14.

⁴⁶² Campbell, Te Poihi, 2016. Personal kōrero, 26 July. Quoted in Nicholson, A. (2019). *Hau: Giving Voices To The Ancestors. The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 128(2): 148.

⁴⁶³ David Graeber. *Towards an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams*. (Palgrave. New York, 2002), 179.

⁴⁶⁴ James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing*. (New York: Harvest Books, 1996), 12.

⁴⁶⁵ Esther Lightcap Meek, *A Little Manual for Knowing* (Cascade Books 2014), 76.

⁴⁶⁶ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*. (Dijon: Les Presses 14. Du Réel, 2002), 16.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁶⁹ His Holiness Pope Francis, “Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Fellowship,” Encyclical Letter, Encyclical Letter. The Holy See, October 3, 2020. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷¹ Luce Irigaray, “Ethical Gestures Towards the Other,” In *Building a New World*, eds. Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder, (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 266.

humanity.⁴⁷² For Rochlitz Rainer the encounter of 'aura' in a work of art is a 'moving experience' and an 'appeal to solidarity';⁴⁷³ a poignant reminder 'that we share a fragile humanity surrounded by a fleeting halo of light.'⁴⁷⁴

The reclamation of art's 'aura' entails the restoration of ritual, reverence and re-materialisation.⁴⁷⁵ The value of art – as a source of 'wonder, sacredness, imagination, harmony, aura, inspiration'⁴⁷⁶ — can be reinstated; and the ritualistic, attentive, prayerful approach to the painting process can be embraced once again. For Cesar Aira, an 'expanded concept of 'aura' would 'include the story that arises from the work' – the materiality of the artistic process and 'the time involved in its conception and execution.'⁴⁷⁷ Aira regards time as an 'historical unfolding, of which each aspect is unique and unrepeatable, and therefore irreproducible.'⁴⁷⁸ In this thesis I consider how the time-consuming traditional early Renaissance and Byzantine icon painting techniques that I use for my portraits of displaced women enable me, in the words of the poet John O'Donohue, to 'rediscover the art of reverence.'⁴⁷⁹ While Benjamin seemingly exalted in the demise of aura, I contend that it is vital, now more than ever, to restore a reverence for the mystical depth of auratic encounter within contemporary art and society at large.

Benjamin's philosophy of aura can be illuminated by Martin Buber's definition of two contrasting relations or postures towards the world: I-Thou and I-It.⁴⁸⁰ Kiril Vassilev suggests that *Aura* pertains to an *I-Thou* encounter.⁴⁸¹ Artists can help to encourage such a reverential inclination towards reality. Indeed, a portrait painting could be considered sacred, a reminder that 'in each Thou we address the eternal Thou.'⁴⁸² Andrew Benjamin describes the experience of the aura as 'the experience of an expectation or a possibility'⁴⁸³ that is understood in relation to the primordial: 'The primordial is the potential inherent in the face of the other. The other's face is an open field; open to the possibility of a continual and unending face to face encounter.'⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁷² Eleanor Ruth Sanderson, "Embodying Freedom and Truth within the Compass Rose: Spiritual Leadership within the Revolution of Love." In *Shame, Gender Violence, and Ethics: Terrors of Injustice*, ed. Lenart Škof and Shé M. Hawke, (Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2021), 185-6.

⁴⁷³ Rochlitz Rainer. *The Disenchantment of Art: The Philosophy of Walter Benjamin*, trans. Jane Marie Todd. (The Guilford Press: New York, 1996), 166.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Grill, "Re-Materialization, Remoteness, and Reverence," 564.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 579.

⁴⁷⁷ Cesar Aira, *On Contemporary Art*. (David Zwirner Books, 2018), 22.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ John O'Donohue, *Divine Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*. (London: Bantam Press, 2003), 41.

⁴⁸⁰ Martin Buber, *I and Thou. Dialogue. Eclipse of God*. Translated by Radosveta Teoharova, and Vladimir Teoharov. (Varna: Steno, 1992)

⁴⁸¹ Kiril Vassilev, "The Aura of the Object and the Work of Art: A Critical Analysis of Walter Benjamin's Theory in the Context of Contemporary Art and Culture." *Arts* 12, no. 59 (2023): 10.

⁴⁸² Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith. 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1958), 130.

⁴⁸³ Benjamin, "The Decline of Art: Benjamin's Aura," 33.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

To Behold the Face of the Other as Icon

To recover an ‘art of reverence’, I draw some reflections from the tradition of iconography, the sacred origins of Western mimetic art. Traditionally ‘icon’ is associated with the religious images venerated by the Eastern Christian Orthodox tradition,⁴⁸⁵ endowed with liturgical significance. In the words of John Damascene: ‘Since the creation of the world the invisible things of God are clearly seen by means of images.’⁴⁸⁶ As such, the icon represents an aid to prayer and a vehicle for the perception of the sacred and spiritual revelation.⁴⁸⁷ The icon brings the viewer to the threshold of invisibility and the mystery of existence.⁴⁸⁸

The icon’s mystical combination of transcendence and immanence, is evident in the everyday materials – such as egg yolk and natural pigments – that are transformed ‘to give suitable form to what is formless, and make visible what cannot be depicted.’⁴⁸⁹ Adrienne von Speyer writes that the ‘ephemeral is so ephemeral only because it is a reflection of eternity. Form is so fragile because it strives after eternity, the limits are so hard because they stand over against the limitless.’⁴⁹⁰ For Weil, the ‘complete permanence and the extreme frailty of things will equally provide the sense of eternity.’⁴⁹¹ Indeed, icons could be considered tangible examples of Weil’s *metaxu*, by establishing a bridge between material reality and the supernatural, a portal to the divine,⁴⁹² ‘bringing within our reach that for which we long but are unable to see.’⁴⁹³ Thus the icon offers a tangible, material means of grace, an ‘embodiment (or incarnation) of the sacred,’⁴⁹⁴ through which an experience of the transcendent is rendered realisable. The symbolic use of gold and of light is suggestive of a ‘Spirit-bathed immanence.’⁴⁹⁵

The icons were venerated as ‘prototypes of the saints they represent,’⁴⁹⁶ not merely representations but embodiments of their Real Presence.⁴⁹⁷ Titus Burckhardt reminds us that the ‘doctrinal foundation’ is that these icons are ‘indirectly icons of the Christ.’⁴⁹⁸ For Guattari, icons ‘are centred upon a mystic, almost sacramental,

⁴⁸⁵ Stephanie Rumpza, “Crossing the Visible or Crossing it Out? Jean-Luc Marion’s Icon as Window into Heaven.” *Horizons* 49, no.1 (2022): 22.

⁴⁸⁶ John Damascene, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies Against Those Who Attack the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), Oration III.21; PG 1341a-b. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁸⁷ Richard Temple, *Icons, Divine Beauty*, (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 9.

⁴⁸⁸ Maximos Constas, *The Art of Seeing: Paradox and Perception in Orthodox Iconography* (Los Angeles: Sebastian Press, 2014), 21.

⁴⁸⁹ John Damascene, *On the Divine Images*. Quoted in Rumpza, “Crossing the Visible”, 21.

⁴⁹⁰ Adrienne von Speyer, *Light and Images: Elements of Contemplation*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 115.

⁴⁹¹ Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, trans. Richard Rees. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970), 108. Quoted in Baker, “Nostalgia of the Everyday,” 74.

⁴⁹² Lawson, *Ecological Ethics and the Philosophy of Simone Weil*, 104.

⁴⁹³ John Damascene, *On the Divine Images*, Quoted in Rumpza, “Crossing the Visible or Crossing it Out?”, 21.

⁴⁹⁴ Eyolf Østrem, “The Ineffable”: Affinities between Christian and Secular Concepts of Art,” In *Signs of Change*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2004), 276.

⁴⁹⁵ Katie Kresser, “Iconic: Contemporary Portraiture and Sacred Personhood,” in *Religion and Contemporary Art: A Curious Accord*, eds. R. R. Bernier and R. H. Smith, (Routledge, 2023), 128-9.

⁴⁹⁶ Peter Murray and Linda Murray. *Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004), 255.

⁴⁹⁷ Rina Arya, “Contemplations of the Spiritual in Visual Art.” *Journal for the Study of Spirituality* 1, no. 1 (February 2011): 80-81.

⁴⁹⁸ Titus Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West*. (Kentucky: Fons Vitae 1967), 99.

faciality.⁴⁹⁹ According to Jean-Luc Marion the icon 'always shows a gaze belonging to a human face'⁵⁰⁰ and 'every face is given as an icon.'⁵⁰¹ Beholding and being beheld is at the heart of the aesthetic and religious experience of art. Indeed, for Marion: 'Before the icon, if I continue to look, I feel myself seen. (I must feel myself thus in order for it to function effectively as an icon).'⁵⁰²

The icon is a 'site of reciprocal transition,' an 'instrument of communion,'⁵⁰³ and as a result disrupts 'habituated ways of seeing.'⁵⁰⁴ Marion describes the mystical experience of the gaze ascribed to a saint, the Virgin or Christ that looks 'outside of the icon and in front of it, the believer who is taken through the icon to the saint, the Virgin or Christ.'⁵⁰⁵ The icon's 'painted gaze invisibly responds to the invisible gaze of the one in prayer' and transfigures it in the mysterious 'commerce of two invisible gazes.'⁵⁰⁶ As such, the gaze of the one in prayer beholds the 'invisible saint' and the benevolent 'gaze of the invisible saint,' made 'visible through the painted icon,' looks upon the one in prayer.⁵⁰⁷ Therefore, whoever sees the icon is seen.⁵⁰⁸ Isar describes the sacred image as one that 'invites and insists on participation;' this is achieved by the icon's inverse perspective that enables the viewer to 'achieve contiguity and proximity with the image.'⁵⁰⁹ As such, the icon does not represent a 'delimited space', but a 'place of encounter for gazes: of the icon and the eye of the participating beholder.'⁵¹⁰

The concept of an icon can be expanded to encompass the secular portrait, with caution.⁵¹¹ The tentative reticence is in acknowledgement of the icon's liturgical significance. Nonetheless, the word icon is derived from the Greek εἰκών (eikon) which means image, likeness or portrait. Katherine Marsengill surmises that, on the basis of the shared etymology, the two artistic genres can be considered 'conceptually the same.'⁵¹² Isar suggests that there should be 'something divine' in the act of making an icon – and by extension, painting a portrait – in light of the verses in Genesis pertaining to the *imago Dei*.⁵¹³ Moreover, 'through the Incarnation, logos became flesh, revealing

⁴⁹⁹ Félix Guattari, "Ritornellos and Existential Affects," in *The Guattari Reader*, ed. Gary Genosko, trans. Juliana Schiesari and Georges Van Den Abbeele (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), note 20, 171.

⁵⁰⁰ Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 20.

⁵⁰¹ Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 19.

⁵⁰² Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 59-60.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵⁰⁴ Constanas, *The Art of Seeing*, 22.

⁵⁰⁵ Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 20.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁸ Marie-José Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, trans. Rico Franes, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 91.

⁵⁰⁹ Isar, "The Broken Image Of Splits and Cuttings," 125-6.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹¹ Maximos Constanas, "Book Review. Portraits and Icons: Between Reality and Spirituality in Byzantine Art, by Marsengill, Katherine," *Religion and the Arts* 21, no. 5 (Brill: 2017): 676.

⁵¹² Katherine Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons: Between Reality and Spirituality in Byzantine Art*. Byzantios: Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization 5. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols 2013), 5.

⁵¹³ Nicoletta Isar, "The Vision and its 'Excessively Blessed Beholder': Of Desire and Participation in the Icon", *RES: The Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 38 (2000): 58.

His image, painting His picture for us.’⁵¹⁴ Katie Kresser reflects that the very notion of ‘transcendent Personhood’ that is affirmed in portraiture has its roots in a distinctly theological anthropology: ‘At the same time that Christianity extended portrait-worthy significance to everyone, it elevated a second-class artform to first-class status.’⁵¹⁵ Nonetheless, the icon does not represent an illusionistic likeness and is a deliberately stylised image,⁵¹⁶ additionally, unlike a portrait painting in an art gallery, it is not contained within a frame.⁵¹⁷ For Freeland, while different in form, both an icon and a portrait are ‘testimonies of presence,’ bringing the person represented into close proximity: ‘The image becomes a stand-in for the person [...] functioning like a relic, magically.’⁵¹⁸ While contemporary portraiture has departed far from the traditional icon form, Kresser suggests that it nonetheless ‘pulses with a sacred meaning’ and an affirmation of the rich complexity and dignity of our humanity, albeit in ‘playfully or challengingly unorthodox ways.’⁵¹⁹

As illuminated by Marion, a portrait could be considered an icon on account of the compelling presence of the counter-gaze. This reciprocal exchange is enabled by the ‘kenotic’ nature of the iconic image ‘transpierced’ by the ‘crossing of gazes.’⁵²⁰ The portrait, like the icon, also represents ‘the most powerful exercise possible of the look.’⁵²¹ The ‘nearly perfect inversion’⁵²² of the gaze is not limited to icons of the Eastern Orthodox church.⁵²³ Portraiture could be perceived as an example of this particular experience of seeing and being seen. For example, consider the painting of Zainab from the Gaza Strip in this thesis. Zainab’s portrait is not merely a flat, inanimate surface but a gaze which resolutely and defiantly meets our own.⁵²⁴ The portrait as an iconistic ‘phenomenon’ invites a two-way ‘looking’ that refuses the possibility of reification.⁵²⁵ The gaze of the other is an invisible visibility that exceeds my capacity to control, define, manipulate or objectify.⁵²⁶ In Marion’s own words, ‘far from being able to keep the phenomenon under my sight as my object, I receive its gaze, which faces me [...] Such a counter gaze and facing require of my gaze that it bear the gaze of the Other.’⁵²⁷ As subjects, we are situated and summoned by the face, whether in an icon or a portrait painting, and become ‘the gazed-upon.’⁵²⁸ We have the option to either avert our

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Kresser, “Iconic: Contemporary Portraiture,” 121.

⁵¹⁶ Herman. *Makers by Nature*, 154-5.

⁵¹⁷ Isar, “The Broken Image Of Splits and Cuttings,” 125-6.

⁵¹⁸ Freeland, “Portraits in Painting and Photography,” 101.

⁵¹⁹ Kresser, “Iconic: Contemporary Portraiture,” 130.

⁵²⁰ Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 60-61.

⁵²¹ Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Towards a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 74.

⁵²² Marion, *God without Being*, 19. Quoted in Shane Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics*, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 168.

⁵²³ Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 63.

⁵²⁴ Brett David Potter, “Image and kenosis: assessing Jean-Luc Marion’s contribution to a postmetaphysical theological aesthetics”, *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 79, no. 1-2 (2018): 61.

⁵²⁵ Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 86.

⁵²⁶ Brian Robinette, “A Gift To Theology? Jean-Luc Marion’s ‘Saturated Phenomenon, in Christological Perspective,” *The Heythrop Journal* 48 (2007): 97.

⁵²⁷ Marion, *Being Given*, 318.

⁵²⁸ B.M. Mason, “Saturated Phenomena, the Icon, and Revelation: A Critique of Marion’s Account of Revelation and the “Redoubling of Saturation.” *Aporia* 24, no. 1 (2014): 31.

eyes or embrace a new way of 'seeing' and to welcome the gift of the irreducible other.⁵²⁹ Marion writes: 'For as face, he faces me, imposes on me to face up to him as he for whom I must respond [...] I have therefore received (and suffered) a call. The face makes an appeal; it therefore calls me forth as gifted.'⁵³⁰ Brian Robinette writes, 'The face is infinite, reversing my gaze in a 'counter-experience', so that I am now a 'witness'' and I am called upon to show 'hospitality to the Other, who is gift.'⁵³¹

Marion's understanding of the ethical demands of the face of the other (or icon) is distinctly Levinasian. According to Levinas, the 'epiphany of the face' is ultimately that which 'calls me into question.'⁵³² The face of the other offers a moment of 'revelation'⁵³³ and encounter with the 'absolutely transcendent.'⁵³⁴ Levinas located the 'Infinite,'⁵³⁵ not in a distant divine dimension, but in the 'incomprehensible nature of the presence of the other.'⁵³⁶ He writes that '[t]he dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face.'⁵³⁷ Thus for Levinas, the face-to-face encounter represents the ethical call of the other; an invitation to a radical praxis of hospitality:⁵³⁸ 'This is the situation we call the welcome of the face.'⁵³⁹ Levinas's ethical stance towards the other has subtly infused and shaped my approach to portrait painting. In Levinasian terms, perhaps the portrait has the potential to mediate an encounter with the 'Infinite' in the face of the other. However, is it possible to claim that a work of art can grant access to the ethical, as Levinas understands it?⁵⁴⁰

Levinas was sharply critical of the visual arts. For Levinas, the visual arts create ethical distance, detachment and evasion⁵⁴¹ by 'substituting image for being.'⁵⁴² A comparison can be drawn with Benjamin's repudiation of the 'aura' of sacral art for establishing an 'irreducible distance' between the spectator and the work.⁵⁴³ Levinas's philosophy suggests an undeniable hostility to art.⁵⁴⁴ Levinas denounces art as 'essentially disengaged,'⁵⁴⁵ 'without the slightest sense of utility,'⁵⁴⁶ a deceptive 'disincarnation of reality,'⁵⁴⁷ tantamount to idolatry.⁵⁴⁸ His essay 'Reality and Its

⁵²⁹ Potter, "Image and kenosis," 74.

⁵³⁰ Marion, *Being Given*, 267. Quoted in Robinette, "A Gift To Theology?", 91.

⁵³¹ Robinette, "A Gift To Theology?" 91.

⁵³² Levinas, *Totality And Infinity*, 197.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 172.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 197.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 195.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 78.

⁵³⁸ Robinette, "A Gift To Theology?" 92.

⁵³⁹ Levinas, *Totality And Infinity*, 197

⁵⁴⁰ J. Robbins, "Aesthetic Totality and Ethical Infinity: Levinas on Art." *L'Esprit Créateur* 35, no. 3 (1995), 72.

⁵⁴¹ Emmanuel Levinas, "Reality and its Shadow" in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. S. Hand (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), 141.

⁵⁴² Ibid. 134.

⁵⁴³ Benjamin, "The Work of Art" in *Illuminations*, 223–5.

⁵⁴⁴ Robert Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 7.

⁵⁴⁵ Levinas, "Reality and its Shadow" in *The Levinas Reader*, 141.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 133.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 134.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 137.

Shadow' embraces Platonic poetic language, alluding to his allegory of the cave.⁵⁴⁹ For Plato, paintings 'create phantasms not reality.'⁵⁵⁰ Levinas, along a similar vein, argues that art is 'the very event of obscuring, a descent of the night, an invasion of shadow,'⁵⁵¹ and elsewhere that 'its 'lightness and grace'⁵⁵² is a distraction and casts an illusory spell of 'magic, an enchantment, the lure of the surreal.'⁵⁵³ In Levinas' eyes, art is irredeemably disengaged from the real world of authentic ethical encounter and obligation to the other.⁵⁵⁴ The 'most elementary procedure of art'⁵⁵⁵ - namely, the substitution of image for object⁵⁵⁶ - is denounced as idolatrous.⁵⁵⁷ A work of art is therefore as close to reality as the human face is to caricature.⁵⁵⁸

For Levinas, the irreducible depths of the face of the other cannot be contained in a 'plastic'⁵⁵⁹ form, obscuring their alterity of the other. To reduce the other to an image is to subsume him or her within a 'totality' – a fundamentally violent act.⁵⁶⁰ An image is 'eternally suspended';⁵⁶¹ implying that time is immobilised and the natural flow of becoming distorted. Even Leonardo DaVinci's Mona Lisa is dismissed as 'the petrification of the instant in the heart of duration'⁵⁶² for, '[e]ternally, the smile of the Mona Lisa about to broaden will not broaden.'⁵⁶³ Levinas suggests that ultimately 'what is immoral in the Mona Lisa [...] would be its perfection in a world of suffering and evil.'⁵⁶⁴ Levinas revisits this theme in his later work: 'The Beautiful is not the ultimate. The Beautiful can be discussed as a Face. But in it there is also the possibility of enchantment, and, that moment, a lack of concern or ethical cruelty.'⁵⁶⁵ However, is there also the possibility for a portrait to be *ethical*, to embody *care* and *concern*? I contend that, while not every experience of a work of art will open up to alterity, the possibility remains for a genuine encounter with the face of the other.⁵⁶⁶ What if, instead of alluring us away from reality, a work of art could offer an invitation to hesitate, to incline our attention, to the reality of another. Indeed, perhaps a work of art could even

⁵⁴⁹ K. Newman, "'Feasting During a Plague": Levinas and the Ethical Possibilities of Art." *Levinas Studies* 13 (2019): 193.

⁵⁵⁰ Plato Republic 599a; Sophist 234, 266c7–9. Quoted in Anne Carson, *Economy of the Unlost: (Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan)*, (Princeton University Press, 1999) 50.

⁵⁵¹ Levinas, "Reality and its Shadow" in *The Levinas Reader*, 132

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 141.

⁵⁵³ R.A. Cohen, "Levinas on Art and Aestheticism: Getting "Reality and Its Shadow" Right," *Levinas Studies* 11 (2016): 173-4.

⁵⁵⁴ Aaron Rosen, "Emmanuel Levinas and the Hospitality of Images: in *Literature and Theology* 25. no. 4 (December 2011), 367-8.

⁵⁵⁵ Levinas, "Reality and its Shadow" in *The Levinas Reader*, 132.

⁵⁵⁶ Robbins, "Aesthetic Totality and Ethical Infinity" 66.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁵⁵⁸ Levinas, "Reality and its Shadow" in *The Levinas Reader*, 138.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 137

⁵⁶⁰ Robinette, "A Gift To Theology?" 91.

⁵⁶¹ Levinas, "Reality and its Shadow" in *The Levinas Reader*, 138.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 140.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁵⁶⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *On Obliteration: An Interview with Françoise Armengaud Concerning the Work of Sacha Sosno*. Translated by Brian Alkire. (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2018), 36.

⁵⁶⁵ Emmanuel Levinas Quoted in Robert Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 113, 127n25.

⁵⁶⁶ Newman, "Feasting During a Plague", 202.

make possible a discourse with alterity.⁵⁶⁷ For, while a portrait does not speak, it elicits a posture of inclined and attentive listening in both the artist and the viewer.⁵⁶⁸

For Levinas, 'the face of the Other' approaches one as an immediate demand referred to as 'proximity' (*proximité*). This 'proximity' suggests a phenomenological 'experienced closeness'⁵⁶⁹ that presents us with an ethical obligation to respond. Levinas writes that, 'in the call of the face of the other [...] there appears, as an order, an inscription, a prescription, an awakening (as if it were a 'me'), responsibility—mine, for the other human being.'⁵⁷⁰ For Levinas, the encounter with the Other is disruptive to my being; I am accosted by the unavoidable proximity of the Divine trace to whom the human face bears witness.⁵⁷¹ I am therefore curious whether a work of art has the potential to meet the stringent demands of Levinas' ethical vision.⁵⁷² While Levinas' defence of the face's irreducibility to an image is undeniable, the transformative experience of the encounter with the 'face of the other' in a work of art remains tantalisingly possible. I tentatively propose the potential for a portrait painting to offer a 'visual mediation' of an ethics of responsibility.⁵⁷³ Is there something in the habitation of this portraiture practice that 'bridges' (Weilian *metaxu*) the incommensurability of this gap, to meet the inordinate Levinasian responsibility to respond to the address of the face of the other? Does a work of art possess the potential to offer a viable moral philosophy and ethical agenda that can sincerely alter the terms of reference with which we see and respond to the other? Even Levinas concedes that 'ethics is an optics'.⁵⁷⁴

For Aaron Rosen, a work of art can encourage 'genuinely new ways of seeing the Other.'⁵⁷⁵ Rosen recounts Levinas' description of a visit to the church of Saint Augustine in Paris: 'There, in a little corner of the church, I found myself placed beside a picture representing Hannah bringing Samuel to the Temple. I can still recall the feeling of momentarily returning to something human, to the very possibility of speaking and being heard, which seized me at that moment.'⁵⁷⁶ Some thirty years later Levinas revisits this experience concluding that, in the painting he beheld a glimpse of: 'authentic relation, concreteness of soul, the very personification of the relation. [...] That closeness remained within me.'⁵⁷⁷ Thus the chance encounter with the painting made possible an experienced closeness and connection – or in Levinasian terms *proximity*⁵⁷⁸ – albeit 'momentarily.'⁵⁷⁹ Even Levinas concedes that art had some value in communicating inclined, attentive love, with the restorative potential to return one 'to something human,'

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 205.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ Levin, *The Philosopher's Gaze*, 265.

⁵⁷⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *In the Time of the Nations*, translated by M. B. Smith (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 110.

⁵⁷¹ Robbins, "Aesthetic Totality and Ethical Infinity," 72.

⁵⁷² Rosen, "Emmanuel Levinas and the Hospitality of Images," 364.

⁵⁷³ Kurasawa, "Humanitarianism and the representation of alterity," 146-7.

⁵⁷⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 23.

⁵⁷⁵ Rosen, "Emmanuel Levinas and the Hospitality of Images," 364.

⁵⁷⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, "A Religion for Adults", *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 13. Quoted in Ibid., 373.

⁵⁷⁷ Levinas, *In the Time of the Nations*, 163.

⁵⁷⁸ Rosen, "Emmanuel Levinas and the Hospitality of Images," 367.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 373.

and build a bridge to the other. While both Marion and Levinas agree that not every work of art opens the passageway to ethical encounter, somehow the painting as icon can present the face without danger or ethical evasion. The painting as icon enables space for the counter-gaze to shine forth from the depths,⁵⁸⁰ through 'the pure sincerity'⁵⁸¹ of its expression.

Marion offers a comparison between a work of art as 'icon' or 'idol.' 'In the idol,' Marion writes, 'the gaze of man is frozen in its mirror; in the icon, the gaze of man is lost in the invisible gaze that visibly envisages him.'⁵⁸² As such, the painting as 'idol' is where the gaze stops; a mirror-like reflection of one's own self and desires,⁵⁸³ a depthless 'façade.'⁵⁸⁴ Whereas, by contrast, the 'icon can be seen and refers beyond itself.'⁵⁸⁵ In Nicoletta Isar's words, iconic vision refers to 'the transgression of the surface.'⁵⁸⁶ The transformative exchange of gazes is what enables this transcendent transgression: 'The icon lays out the material of wood and paint in such a way that there appears in them the intention of a transpiercing gaze emanating from them [...] If man, by his gaze, renders the idol possible, in revert contemplation of the icon, on the contrary, the gaze of the invisible, in person, aims at man. The icon regards us, it concerns us.'⁵⁸⁷ As such the viewer finds himself envisaged by the irresistible, intentional gaze of the other.⁵⁸⁸ This is evocative of Levinas' inescapable, unconditional ethical appeal of the face of the other as a soliciting force.⁵⁸⁹ The encounter with the face of the other in the portrait-as-icon suggests a mystical, silent intimacy and ineffable presence where, in the words of Levinas, 'discourse becomes incantation as prayer becomes rite and liturgy'⁵⁹⁰ and the beholder is actually seen.⁵⁹¹

I am intrigued by Marion's notion of the icon as an ethical, loving encounter.⁵⁹² He writes that, '[e]xperiencing the infinite in the face of the other cannot be expressed in a formula.'⁵⁹³ Indeed, 'to see this invisible face, I must *love* it' for, '[w]ithout the revelation of the transcendence of love, the phenomenon of the face, and thus of the other, simply cannot be seen.'⁵⁹⁴ Therefore, an artist has a responsibility to inscribe the face of the other with love and tenderness, in order to elevate the viewer's gaze beyond him or herself to encounter the other. Arguably any encounter which

⁵⁸⁰ Mark McInroy, "Beholding the Radiant Invisible: The Incarnate Image in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Jean-Luc Marion," in *Image As Theology: The Power of Art in Shaping Christian Thought, Devotion, and Imagination*, eds. C.A. Strine, Mark McInroy, Alexis Torrance (Turnhout: Brepols 2022), 175.

⁵⁸¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 202-3.

⁵⁸² Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 20.

⁵⁸³ Ronald R. Bernier, "Bill Viola, the Icon, and the Apophatic Sublime," in *Religion and Contemporary Art: A Curious Accord*, eds. R. R. Bernier and R. H. Smith, (Routledge, 2023), 237-8.

⁵⁸⁴ Marion. *In Excess*, 76-77.

⁵⁸⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*. Trans. T. Carlson. (Fordham University Press, 2001), 158. Quoted in Bernier, "Bill Viola, the Icon, and the Apophatic Sublime", 238.

⁵⁸⁶ Isar, "The Vision and its 'Excessively Blessed Beholder'", 71.

⁵⁸⁷ Marion, *God Without Being*, 19. Quoted in Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ Bernier, "Bill Viola, the Icon, and the Apophatic Sublime", 238-40.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 202-3.

⁵⁹¹ Isar, "The Vision and its 'Excessively Blessed Beholder'", 71.

⁵⁹² Mason, "Saturated Phenomena, the Icon, and Revelation," 25.

⁵⁹³ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*. Trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press 2008), 74.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

ruptures the boundaries of the self's totalizing view of the world is *iconistic*: I contend that such an encounter is possible through a portrait painting. The portrait-as-icon offers a shared sacred moment of encounter, where the spiritual, emotional, ethical and psychological meet. The portrait-as-icon represents a genuine, mystical encounter with the face of the other, the trace of the divine other:⁵⁹⁵ 'The icon shows us a face that opens on to the infinite.'⁵⁹⁶

Marion acknowledges that a phenomenon can only appear as an icon if it is approached in a spirit of reverence.⁵⁹⁷ Indeed, he suggests that the icon has a permeable threshold 'changing in status only when venerated, [...] the manner of seeing decides what can be seen.'⁵⁹⁸ An icon's appearing is not only a matter of givenness, but also a reflection of the manner of approach.⁵⁹⁹ One can only truly behold the face of another, or hear an individual's story, provided that one approaches the encounter with a posture of openness and attentiveness. The same could be said of a portrait painting: an inclined reverent attention towards a subject (or its lack thereof) permeates the painting itself. A portrait painting is not merely an object of mimetic observation; the painting serves to gently commend a face for our attention. This thesis explores the role of portraiture in helping to cultivate a 'culture of iconic seeing,'⁶⁰⁰ shining a light on ethically responsible engagement through artistic practice.

In this chapter I have carefully considered some of the challenges and critiques pertaining to contemporary representations of refugees, sacred art and historical portraiture. I have endeavoured to convey that an ethical approach to painting the portraits of displaced women is possible, when approached with reverence and love (as an icon). In the following chapter I seek to elucidate the relationality that informs the ethics of my approach, in particular *attentive listening*⁶⁰¹ and what Sontag calls an 'aesthetics of silence.'⁶⁰² My portraits are underpinned by the intention to give a gift of time and love through the creative labour of the painting process, and a rigorous commitment to Simone Weil's philosophy of attention and an ethics of care.

⁵⁹⁵ Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas*, 118.

⁵⁹⁶ Marion, *God Without Being*, 19.

⁵⁹⁷ Shane Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics*, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (New York: Fordham University Press 2009), 169.

⁵⁹⁸ Marion, *God without Being*, 8–9.

⁵⁹⁹ Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess*, 169.

⁶⁰⁰ Thomas Pfau, 'Foreword,' in *Image as Theology: The Power of Art in Shaping Christian Thought, Devotion, and Imagination*, eds. C.A. Strine, Mark McNroy, Alexis Torrance (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022) 10.

⁶⁰¹ Sophie M. Bourgault, "Attentive listening and care in a neoliberal era: Weilian insights for hurried times." *Ethics & Politics* 18, no. 3 (2016): 321.

⁶⁰² Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence" in *Styles of Radical Will*, (London: Penguin, 2009), 3–4.

Part II: The Art of Attentive Listening

An Ethics of Care and Attention to Displaced Women

In this chapter I consider the most ethical commitment at the heart of my approach to portrait painting; that of attending to the stories of women from migratory and marginalised communities. Painting a portrait is an intimate, relational and reciprocal process. A portrait demands time, dedicated attention and care. It is through this process that a space of hospitality unfolds.⁶⁰³ This requires sustained *attentive listening* with the whole of one's being, and embracing a posture of inclination, vulnerability and openness to the other. Painting-as-listening does not, in the words of Irigaray, 'amount to grasping something in order to integrate and order it into our own world, but to opening one's own world to something or someone external and strange to it. Listening-to is a way of opening ourselves to the other and of welcoming this other, its truth and its world as different from us, from ours.'⁶⁰⁴ The posture of *attentive listening* is also at the heart of the painting process itself, as I elucidate in the exegetical chapter (Part III).

My approach to portraiture is founded upon building relationships of trust and mutual respect. For artist Daniel Connell, 'obligation was the deeper, invisible material of the portrait,'⁶⁰⁵ in particular the obligation to honour the experience of the other. The relationship with each of the subjects can be compared to the hidden underpainting that shimmers through the layers of paint: It is this that brings depth, resonance and beauty to a work of art. In this chapter I outline my methodology, informed by Simone Weil's philosophy of attention, as a commitment to relationship, reciprocity, and to respecting each individual's story (whether spoken or unspoken). In this chapter I foreground listening and silence as a profound expression of *attention* and care to others.⁶⁰⁶ For Sophie Bourgault, 'attentive listening' is a 'deeply relational and intersubjective practice.'⁶⁰⁷

A decade ago, my art projects and portrait paintings of migratory and marginalised communities began as an attempt to pay attention to the unique stories of refugees as individuals whom are frequently spoken of and rarely listened

⁶⁰³ Hannah R. Thomas, "Seeing God Through Portrait Paintings of Displaced Women: An Aesthetics of Hospitality." In *Holman Hunt and the Light of the World in Oxford*, (Routledge, 2024), 153.

⁶⁰⁴ Luce Irigaray, "Listening, Thinking, Teaching " in *Luce Irigaray: Teaching*, eds. in Luce Irigaray and Mary Green (London: Continuum, 2008), 232.

⁶⁰⁵ Daniel Connell, "Encounter and Obligation: Repositioning the portrait as socially engaged practice" (PhD thesis, University of South Australia, 2019), 19-20.

⁶⁰⁶ Miranda Fricker, "Silence and Institutional Prejudice", in *Out from the Shadows: Analytical Feminist Contributions to Traditional Philosophy*, eds. Sharon L. Crasnow, and Anita M. Superson (eds), *Studies in Feminist Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 295.

⁶⁰⁷ Sophie M. Bourgault, "Attentive listening and care in a neoliberal era: Weilian insights for hurried times." *Ethics & Politics* 18, no. 3 (2016): 321.

to, or allowed to speak.⁶⁰⁸ According to Weil, what the ‘afflicted’ need most of all is ‘people capable of giving them their attention,’⁶⁰⁹ referring to individuals who have experienced suffering, social degradation and exclusion.⁶¹⁰ Attention, Weil implies, is how we grant someone being and inattention is tantamount to denying their being.⁶¹¹ Therefore, an aptitude for attending is integral to ethical agency.⁶¹² This is especially important for an ethics of engagement with displaced and marginalised communities, whose cumulative experiences may have eroded a fundamental sense of human dignity.

In her essay ‘Human Personality,’ Simone Weil describes how art can give the gift of recognition.⁶¹³ One of the gifts an artist can offer is a proclivity to bear witness – or, one might say, *with-ness*. There are three aspects of my artistic process that relate to Weilian attention, namely first and foremost the act of being present through *attentive listening* to the stories of the women. Secondly, the contemplative attention that the portrait painting process requires, reflecting upon the iconography and early Renaissance painting methods that I have embraced. Thirdly I will consider to what extent art can serve as a stimulus to Weilian attention in the viewer. In this chapter I will address the preliminary, relational aspect of the portrait painting process, specifically the concept of *attentive listening*. I will also consider the value of silence, comparing the silence that is *imposed* by way of an injustice, with what Miranda Fricker describes as a generative, ‘active, attentive silence’ of someone who is *listening*, endeavouring to ‘make out a voice that is seldom heard.’⁶¹⁴

The portrait painting process proceeds from a rigorous commitment to attend to the stories of displaced women. Weil writes that ‘love of one’s neighbour is simply this one question: ‘*what are you going through?*’ It is a recognition that the sufferer exists, not only as a unit in a collection, or a specimen from the social category labelled ‘unfortunate,’ but as a man, exactly like us, who was one day stamped with a special mark by affliction.’⁶¹⁵ Weil’s understanding of suffering, usually translated as ‘affliction’ (‘malheur’), suggests an anguish so profound as to obliterate the sufferer’s sense of self.⁶¹⁶ While it is important to problematise Weil’s notion of those ‘in affliction,’ which suggests a disquieting dichotomy between them / us, Weil’s insight with regard the healing potential of ‘intense, pure, generous attention’⁶¹⁷ as a rare gift of ‘recognition’⁶¹⁸ is nonetheless profound. For Weil, attention, a form of love,⁶¹⁹ tenderly

⁶⁰⁸ Anna Rowlands, *For our welfare and not for our harm: a faith-based report on the experience of the refugee and refugee support community* (London: Jesuit Refugee Service UK, 2017–2019), 8. <https://www.jrsuk.net/for-our-welfare-and-not-for-our-harm/>

⁶⁰⁹ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. By Emma Craufurd (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001), 64.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 92–3.

⁶¹¹ Rowlands. *For our welfare and not for our harm*, 8.

⁶¹² Warren Heiti, “Further Reflections on an Ethics of Attending.” In *Attending: An Ethical Art* (Vol. 82). (McGill-Queen’s University Press 2021), 49.

⁶¹³ Stephanie Gehring, “Attention to Suffering in the Work of Simone Weil and Käthe Kollwitz.” (PhD Thesis, Duke University, 2018), 163–4.

⁶¹⁴ Fricker, “Silence and Institutional Prejudice”, 287.

⁶¹⁵ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 64.

⁶¹⁶ Simone Weil, “Human Personality, in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, ed. Siân Miles (London: Penguin, 2005), 91.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁶¹⁸ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 64.

⁶¹⁹ Weil, “Human Personality,” in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, 92.

beholds individuals whom suffering has rendered invisible, reduced to the status of objects, and can even restore a sense of their human value and dignity.⁶²⁰ The attention tenderly expressed by this question - '*what are you going through?*' - is at the heart of ethical responsibility. In this chapter I reflect upon the painting process as an invitation to an ethics of attention, inclination and care. Weil's question *what are you going through?* is the starting point for these paintings.

According to Weil, as individuals we instinctively deflect or shrink from another's affliction ('malheur') and our own. This is on account of an ingrained fear and reluctance to engage with reality.⁶²¹ Therefore, in her words, the 'capacity to give one's attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing,' indeed, 'it is a miracle.'⁶²² Attention, a form of love, is able to see individuals whom suffering has rendered invisible, reduced to the status of objects, and can even restore 'his or her humanity.'⁶²³ I seek to understand to what extent art can be a vehicle for this 'intense, pure, generous attention.'⁶²⁴

For Cavarero, the inability to listen attentively has many 'pernicious consequences.'⁶²⁵ John Paul Lederach reminds us that, 'Many victims of violence experience a profound sense of powerlessness, an overwhelming and deeply rooted feeling that they do not have a voice.'⁶²⁶ When a person no longer has a sense of voice they 'experience a loss of humanity' and 'the disappearance of significance.'⁶²⁷ Similarly, Cavarero is clear that 'violence dehumanises the victim's voice' and, at its most extreme, transforms it into 'muteness.'⁶²⁸ Weil laments that these voices 'sink into impotence in the use of language, because of the certainty of not being heard.'⁶²⁹ Listening to the voices of those 'in affliction' is incredibly difficult, nonetheless, according to Arthur Frank it is a human duty: 'These voices bespeak conditions of embodiment that most of us would rather forget our own vulnerability to.'⁶³⁰

Decolonial, critical theory and feminist philosophical critiques have highlighted the necessity of being attentive to marginalised voices and to acts of silencing.⁶³¹ Voice has become a common goal of pedagogical practices aimed at equity and social justice;⁶³² this necessitates privileging historically omitted perspectives in order to expand the

⁶²⁰ Gehring, "Attention to Suffering," 235.

⁶²¹ S. Jesson, "Compassion, Consolation, and the Sharing of Attention." In *Simone Weil and Continental Philosophy*, ed. R. Rozelle-Stone (London, NY: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 123.

⁶²² Simone Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies," in *Waiting for God*. Translated by Emma Craufurd. (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 62.

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ Simone Weil, "Human Personality," in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, 92.

⁶²⁵ Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. P. A. Kottman, P. A.) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 16.

⁶²⁶ John Paul Lederach and Angela Jill Lederach, *When Blood and Bones Cry Out: Journeys Through The Soundscape Of Healing And Reconciliation* (Queensland, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2010), 65-66.

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

⁶²⁸ Adriana Cavarero, Konstantinos Thomaidis and Ilaria Pinna, "Towards a hopeful plurality of democracy: An interview on vocal ontology with Adriana Cavarero," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies* 3, no. 1 (2018): 93.

⁶²⁹ Weil, "Human Personality," in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, 91.

⁶³⁰ Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness And Ethics*. (University of Chicago Press, 1997), 25.

⁶³¹ Vered Lev Kenaan, "Preface: Vocal Turns," *American Imago* 79, no. 3 (2022): 374.

⁶³² Michelle, Powell, "Doing 'Voice' Differently: Adriana Cavarero on Narrative as Ethical Encounter," *Philosophical Studies in Education* 51 (2020): 71.

canon of knowledge.⁶³³ Spivak claims that ‘the question ‘Who should speak?’ is less crucial than ‘Who will listen?’’⁶³⁴ *Attentive listening* is therefore a vital prerequisite to recognising and valorising suppressed and silenced realities in the public sphere.⁶³⁵ These voices are to be listened to *seriously*.⁶³⁶ While Weil preceded the advent of feminist and decolonial epistemologies; her ethics of attention offers a framework to challenge boundaries and norms within academic communities, pave the way for epistemic justice and a more intuitive, engaged response-ability to the challenges confronting the world today.⁶³⁷ Sophie Bourgault suggests that for Weil, ‘attentive listening is perhaps the most fundamental moral commitment that one can make—it is the very basis of ethics.’⁶³⁸

Attention is intrinsically relational and therefore one of the touchstones of a feminist ethics of care.⁶³⁹ Undertaking artistic research with care evokes the Cambridge Dictionary definition of the word, namely to work with serious, considered attention. This involves ‘paying attention with our eyes,’⁶⁴⁰ attending to nonverbal emotional and relational cues, such as facial expressions and posture;⁶⁴¹ and to listening; and giving the individual ‘the gift of quiet, time, and space.’⁶⁴² Many care theorists have highlighted the profound significance of the *way* that one cares for another individual,⁶⁴³ and, by extension, the way that one approaches painting a portrait. According to care ethicist Joan Tronto, Weil considered the capacity for attention ‘crucial for any genuinely human interaction’ since it forms ‘the basis for true relationships among people.’⁶⁴⁴

Bourgault considers Weil’s philosophy of attention an invaluable resource for feminist theorists of care: ‘By attaching so much importance to the existence of universal and concrete political obligations to care for all those who suffer or who have needs in a community, Weil offered a theory that is, in my view, feminist.’⁶⁴⁵ Attentiveness to relationship building that is non-hierarchical and mutually beneficial is at the core of artistic research. This is especially important when working with communities situated at the margins of the margins.⁶⁴⁶ At the heart of an ethics of care is what Benjamin Barbar describes as the ‘mutualistic art’ of *attentive listening* that ‘by its very practice

⁶³³ Kanaan, “Preface: Vocal Turns,” 374.

⁶³⁴ Gayatri C. Spivak, *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, (New York: Routledge 1990), 59-60. Quoted in Sophie Bourgault, “Epistemic injustice, face-to-face encounters and caring institutions,” *International Journal of Care and Caring* 4, no. 1 (2020): 102.

⁶³⁵ Kanaan, “Preface: Vocal Turns,” 374.

⁶³⁶ Spivak, *The Post-colonial Critic*, 59-60.

⁶³⁷ Shari Stone-Mediatore, “Attending to Others: Simone Weil and Epistemic Pluralism,” *Philosophical Topics* 41, no. 2 (2013): 80.

⁶³⁸ Bourgault, “Attentive listening and care in a neoliberal era,” 323.

⁶³⁹ Jean-Michel Ganteau, *The Poetics and Ethics of Attention in Contemporary British Narrative*, (London: Routledge, 2022), 17.

⁶⁴⁰ Bourgault, “Attentive listening and care in a neoliberal era,” 317.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

⁶⁴² Deborah Way & Sarah Tracy, “Conceptualizing compassion as recognizing, relating and (re)acting: A qualitative study of compassionate communication at Hospice,” *Communication Monographs*, 79, no. 3 (2012), 306.

⁶⁴³ Sophie Bourgault. “Beyond the Saint and the Red Virgin: Simone Weil as Feminist Theorist of Care,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 35, no. 2 (2014): 11.

⁶⁴⁴ Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 127-128.

⁶⁴⁵ Bourgault, “Beyond the Saint and the Red Virgin,” 20.

⁶⁴⁶ See Maggie O'Neill, “Walking, Well-being and Community: Racialized mothers building cultural citizenship using participatory arts and participatory action research,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 1 (2018): 73–97.

enhances equality' and builds bridges to transcend difference.⁶⁴⁷ Therefore, the 'difficult, intersubjective practice' of listening is vital for social justice and the essence care ethicists' ideal.⁶⁴⁸ Carol Gilligan's affirms the delicate balance of taking care to listen to women's voices while not assimilating them into the existing framework.⁶⁴⁹ Indeed, without *attentive listening*, there can be 'no such thing as 'voice.'"⁶⁵⁰

Attentive Listening

Irigaray asks the question, 'how am I to listen to you?'⁶⁵¹ Indeed, to listen to the story of another is a profound privilege. I sought to listen in a manner that was generous, open and receptive to each of the women whom I have had the privilege of portraying. On the whole I did not record our conversations, in order to allow space for uninterrupted and unselfconscious communication and for the friendship to unfold naturally. As an integral part of my research and portrait painting process, listening encompasses an aesthetic and a care-based practice of *attention*.⁶⁵² Bourgault reminds us that an attentive listener aspires to adopt certain body 'signals' which indicate to the listened-to that she has the listener's full attention; this is communicated by one's warm and open facial expression, making meaningful eye contact and 'a type of inquisitive, receptive posture.'⁶⁵³ 'Care-full' listening conveys an affirmative and affective engagement with the subjects and their stories.⁶⁵⁴

Listening is an embodied demonstration of caring, and care is present in the experience of being heard.⁶⁵⁵ Nell Noddings affirms that researchers must be 'present' and engaged in an attentive form of 'listening, watching, feeling, contributing.'⁶⁵⁶ It is a 'certain way of being present'⁶⁵⁷ and engaging with the whole human being before us, in her

⁶⁴⁷ Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy*, (UCP, Berkeley, 2003), 174. Quoted in Bourgault, "Attentive listening and care in a neoliberal era," 326.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., 314.

⁶⁴⁹ Carol Gilligan, "Hearing the Difference: Theorizing Connection" *Hypatia* 10, no. 2 (1995): 120.

⁶⁵⁰ Sophie Bourgault, "Democratic Practice and 'Caring to Deliberate': A Gadamerian Account of Conversation and Listening." In *Care Ethics, Democratic Citizenship and the State*, eds. Petr Urban, Lizzie Ward (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2020), 32-33.

⁶⁵¹ Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch for a Felicity Within History*, trans. A. Martin (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 115. Quoted in Silvia Stoller, "Silent love: On Irigaray's suggestion of cultivating sexual difference," in (2018). *Feminism and the Power of Love: Interdisciplinary Interventions*, eds. A. García-Andrade, L. Gunnarsson, & A. Jónasdóttir (Routledge, 2018), 156.

⁶⁵² Sylvan Baker & Maggie Inchley, "Verbatim pactice as research with care-experienced young people: an 'aesthetics of care' through aural attention," in *Performing Care: New perspectives on socially engaged performance*, eds. Stuart A. Fisher & j. Thompson (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2020), 174-75.

⁶⁵³ Bourgault, "Attentive listening and care in a neoliberal era," 318.

⁶⁵⁴ Baker & Inchley "Verbatim pactice as research with care-experienced young people," 182.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., 174-75.

⁶⁵⁶ Nell Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press 2013), 22.

⁶⁵⁷ Galen A. Johnson, "Listening in Depth: Reading Merleau-Ponty Alongside Nancy." In *Merleau-Ponty and the Art of Perception*, ed. Duane H. Davis, and William S. Hamrick (State University of New York Press, 2016), 227.

strength, vulnerability, complexity and irreducible uniqueness. The practice of attentive listening is to offer friendship, patience and understanding; to intuitively discern when to ask questions and when to remain silent.⁶⁵⁸ For Irigaray, listening is 'being attentive to what the other says, or wants to say, including in his, or her, silences.'⁶⁵⁹

Galen Johnson ponders, 'What is this deep listening that can heal and cure? Why is it that simply being listened to deeply, patiently, and silently, without judgment or interruption, is therapeutic?'⁶⁶⁰ Listening to the other is transformative for the both the recipient and giver of attention.⁶⁶¹ The concept of *Dadirri* has been described by Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr as a 'special quality, a unique gift of the Aboriginal people. It is inner deep listening and quiet, still awareness - something like what you call contemplation.'⁶⁶² For Judy Atkinson *Dadirri* 'is a process of listening, reflecting, observing the feelings and actions, reflecting and learning, and in the cyclic process, re-listening at deeper and deeper levels of understanding and knowledge-building' in order to create community.⁶⁶³ For powell and Menendian, listening to someone perceived as different or 'other' is fundamental to the practice of 'bridging'⁶⁶⁴ (or Weil's *metaxu*). 'Bridging' is critical to 'reducing othering and promoting belonging' and compelling individuals to 'extend their attention and build connections across the boundaries of difference.'⁶⁶⁵ Indeed, 'Active and empathetic listening' affirms another's humanity since it is 'perceived and felt as a form of caring and regard, and it builds trust.'⁶⁶⁶ It is a way of demonstrating that 'all people matter – all persons belong' and is at its deepest level a 'search for understanding and meaning.'⁶⁶⁷

The value of attentive listening poses a gentle challenge to the Western philosophical and political tradition that valorises *logos* – the mastery of the external world by rational speech.⁶⁶⁸ For Irigaray, it is only by substituting the 'grasp' of *logos* for 'listening-to' in any dialogue, that we will imperceptibly dismantle 'our pyramid of values' and elaborate 'another relation to truth in which the two worlds intertwine.'⁶⁶⁹ I suggest that such an approach to dialogue is also essential for ethical portraiture of displaced women. As Irigaray expresses in lyrical prose: 'Listening, then, does not amount to grasping something in order to integrate and order it into our own world, but to opening

⁶⁵⁸ Alexandra Fidyk "Attuned to Silence: A Pedagogy of Presence," in *Silence, Feminism, Power*, eds. Malhotra S., Rowe A.C. (Palgrave Macmillan, London 2013), 118.

⁶⁵⁹ Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, trans. Heidi Bosticand Stephen Pluháček, (London: Continuum, 2002), 161-2. Quoted in Michelle Boulous Walker, *Slow Philosophy: Reading Against the Institution*. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, Plc., 2017), 118-9.

⁶⁶⁰ Johnson, "Listening in Depth," 227.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 229.

⁶⁶² Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, "Dadirri: Listening to One Another" in *A Spirituality of Catholic Aborigines and the Struggle for Justice*, eds. J. Hendricks and G. Hefferan (Brisbane: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Apostolate, Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, 1993), 34-7. Quoted Judy Atkinson, *Trauma trails, recreating song lines: The transgenerational effects of trauma in Indigenous Australia*. (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2002), 16.

⁶⁶³ Atkinson, *Trauma trails, recreating song lines*, 19.

⁶⁶⁴ John a. powell and Stephen Menendian, *Belonging Without Othering: How We Save Ourselves and the World*. (Stanford University Press, 2024), 174-5.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁷ Ungunmerr, "Dadirri: Listening to One Another" 34-7. Quoted in Atkinson, *Trauma trails, recreating song lines*, 18-19.

⁶⁶⁸ Irigaray, "Listening, Thinking, Teaching," 231.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., 232.

one's own world to something or someone external and strange to it. Listening-to is a way of opening ourselves to the other and of welcoming this other, its truth and its world as different from us, from ours.'⁶⁷⁰ Therefore, in order to truly listen to this other, one has to relinquish a 'manner of reasoning' which 'corresponds to an appropriation'⁶⁷¹ and the desire to control and actively master as opposed to welcome, respect and receive the otherness of the other.⁶⁷² Bourgault reminds us that for Weil, a 'refusal to listen can, in itself, constitute oppression' whereas 'being listened to can be profoundly empowering.'⁶⁷³

Attentive listening to the stories of displaced women is especially important, considering the contexts of conflict, violence and oppressive silencing that many have experienced. In *Relating Narratives*, Cavarero writes: 'It is politically significant not only because women started to tell their own stories, but also because storytelling stemmed from of a relational space in which women began to perceive their experiences as not only worth telling but also worth listening to and worth retelling: In this narrative space of reciprocal storytelling, women discover their own unconfessable desire to perceive themselves as unique and therefore narratable,' in other words 'to think that my 'I' exists.'⁶⁷⁴ Cavarero suggests that the activity of narration gives voice to the otherwise inexplicable, inviable need for one's story to be validated as worth-telling and for it to be shared with others.⁶⁷⁵ This reveals that selfhood is relational, and is affirmed through the world-building and potentially empowering experience of the narration of one's life-story.⁶⁷⁶ Cavarero celebrates the 'antipatriarchal valence of the vocalic'⁶⁷⁷ and a 'vocal phenomenology of uniqueness.'⁶⁷⁸ Irigaray similarly elucidates the systematic silencing of women within culture and language from the beginning of philosophical discourse.⁶⁷⁹ Indeed, consider Aristotle's infamous dictum 'silence is a woman's glory.'⁶⁸⁰ However, as I propose at the end of this chapter, for life-stories and experiences that are unspeakable, portraiture can also express a silent witnessing to a silence made visible.

Listening is essentially about the gift of time, about taking time to welcome the other. Listening, for Rowan Williams, is integral to solidarity; it entails valuing individuals as 'speaking collaborators' or 'inter-agents' who can 'legitimately

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁷¹ Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: from Singularity to Community*, (Columbia University Press, New York 2002), 121–2. Quoted in Eleanor Sanderson, "A Future Shaped by Love: Towards a Feminist Geography of Development and Spirituality," in *Luce Irigaray : Teaching*, eds. Luce Irigaray and Mary Green (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2008), 158.

⁶⁷² Irigaray, "Listening, Thinking, Teaching," 235.

⁶⁷³ Bourgault, "Attentive listening and care in a neoliberal era." 321.

⁶⁷⁴ Adriana Cavarero, *Relating narratives: Storytelling and selfhood*, trans. P. Kottman, (New York, NY: Routledge 2000), 56. Quoted in Olivia Guaraldo, "To the narrative turn and back: The political impact of storytelling in feminism," in *Travelling concepts of narrative*, eds. Hatavara, M., Hydén, L., & Hyvärinen, M. (John Benjamins Publishing Company 2013), 77–8.

⁶⁷⁵ Guaraldo, "To the narrative turn and back," 76.

⁶⁷⁶ Olivia Guaraldo, "Thinkers that matter: On the thought of Judith Butler and Adriana Cavarero." *Revista Estudos Feministas*, 15 (2007): 663–677.

⁶⁷⁷ Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 207.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁷⁹ Heather Walton, *Literature, theology and feminism* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2019), 136–7.

⁶⁸⁰ Aristotle. *Politics* 1.1260a. Quoted in Bourgault, "Attentive listening and care in a neoliberal era". 313.

expect time taken and attention giving in the process of social interaction.’⁶⁸¹ For, he continues, solidarity is ‘involved with and embodied in linguistic exchange and the shared labour of constructing culture.’⁶⁸² As such, human solidarity is a ‘solidarity in conversation, not static, but a matter of mutual exchange,’ which invariably involves ‘difficulty, resolution, new perspective’ and ‘taking the risk of recognition.’⁶⁸³ As Bourgault reminds us, this is increasingly vital in a political climate of ‘growing legitimization and normalization of careless (and hateful) talk and inability to listen.’⁶⁸⁴ Time and attentiveness are at the heart of building solidarity and trust, which is ‘critical for decreasing socio-political marginalisation.’⁶⁸⁵

For Bourgault, the reason that attentive listening is ‘so arduous and so rare’ is it requires the risk of vulnerability from both listeners and listened-to.⁶⁸⁶ A conversation is inherently unpredictable, for we cannot possibly control or anticipate where it will lead or how it may affect us.⁶⁸⁷ ‘A dialogue is always a creation which takes place in a meeting between two persons; it cannot be reduced to a repetition of something already said in another time, another context.’⁶⁸⁸ The art of listening is one that requires courage, tenacity and humility.⁶⁸⁹ Similarly, the painting process is unpredictable and invariably entails vulnerability and self-doubt. In Irigaray’s words, entering into dialogue – and, I suggest, painting a portrait – requires one to ‘use a language which touches, which involves sensibility, which preserves the role of the other in the constitution of meaning.’⁶⁹⁰ This involves not just our mind but ‘all that we are,’ in order to ‘invent, create a new way of talking together.’⁶⁹¹ For Martin Buber, an approach to genuine dialogue as prayer, involves mutual openness, reciprocity, attentive listening and presentness in relationship.⁶⁹² Indeed, the Latin word *oratio* means both ‘discourse’ and ‘prayer.’⁶⁹³ Dialogue, prayer and a work of art can teach one ‘how to respect and contemplate the world.’⁶⁹⁴ These practices are embodied in an ethico-political posture of ‘*inclination*,’ evident in the empathic attunement to the other when in dialogue or prayer, and the attentive posture of an artist inclined over the panel or canvas when absorbed in painting.

⁶⁸¹ Rowan Williams. “Solidarity, Rights and the Image of God: Ethics and Christian Anthropology.” The Bampton Lectures 2024. The University Church, Oxford. March 5, 2024, video, 50:47.

⁶⁸² <https://www.universitychurch.ox.ac.uk/content/bampton-lectures>

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴ Rowan Williams, “Solidarity Against Tribalism: the Contemporary Challenge.” The Bampton Lectures 2024. The University Church, Oxford. March 5, 2024, video, 52:19. <https://www.universitychurch.ox.ac.uk/content/bampton-lectures>

⁶⁸⁵ Bourgault, “Democratic Practice and ‘Caring to Deliberate,’” 32-33.

⁶⁸⁶ Joan C. Tronto, *Caring democracy: Markets, equality and justice* (New York: New York Press, 2013), 112. Quoted in Bourgault, “Epistemic injustice, face-to-face encounters and caring institutions,” 95.

⁶⁸⁷ Bourgault, “Attentive listening and care in a neoliberal era,” 322.

⁶⁸⁸ Bourgault, “Democratic Practice and ‘Caring to Deliberate,’” 41.

⁶⁸⁹ Luce Irigaray and Judith Still, “Towards a Wisdom of Love,” in *Conversations*, eds. Luce Irigaray and Stephen Pluháček, (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 33.

⁶⁹⁰ Bourgault, “Democratic Practice and ‘Caring to Deliberate,’” 41.

⁶⁹¹ Irigaray and Still, “Towards a Wisdom of Love,” 33.

⁶⁹² Ibid.

⁶⁹³ Kenneth Paul Kramer, *Martin Buber's Spirituality : Hasidic Wisdom for Everyday Life*, (Rowman & Littlefield Unlimited Model, 2011), 120.

⁶⁹⁴ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Human Rights,” *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 114, no. 1 (2017): 120-1.

⁶⁹⁵ Irigaray, “Listening, Thinking, Teaching,” 234.

Illuminated-Illuminating

Berger reflects that if a painting seems 'lifeless' it is the result of the painter 'not having the nerve to get close enough for a collaboration to start;' instead the artist remains aloof and 'at a copying distance.'⁶⁹⁵ By comparison, an 'authentic painting' is always the result of 'a collaboration' and a willingness to 'go in close' and thereby forget 'convention, reputation, reasoning, hierarchies and self.'⁶⁹⁶ For Irigaray, this proximity is explained as a 'communion with the real presence of the living.'⁶⁹⁷ Berger's notion of going 'in close' evokes Cavarero's *inclination*, as the essential core of an 'authentic painting.' Berger disparages the 'modern illusion' that the artist is the 'creator' of a painting: 'Rather he is a receiver. What seems like creation is the act of giving form to what he has received.'⁶⁹⁸ It is to exercise that which Weil described as 'negative effort.'⁶⁹⁹ For Weil, we only 'obtain the most precious gifts' by patiently 'waiting for them,'⁷⁰⁰ rather than actively going in search of them.

It is the encounter with each of the women; the vulnerability shared; the tears and the laughter; the emotion that lingered after hearing their stories, that subtly infuse each painting. The painting emerges as an intuitive response to the encounter with each of the women, as well as the art materials used, and the interplay of light and colour. The inspiration for these paintings is the indescribable experience of being deeply touched by another and being given the gift of a glimpse into their life-world and story. In the words of Berger: 'The impulse to paint comes neither from observation nor from the soul (which is probably blind) but from an encounter.'⁷⁰¹ The presence of a portrait painting unfolds in the relational space between painter and subject. The unrestricted time-based practice of attention is at the heart of genuine relationship and the painting of a portrait. Indeed, 'only there can we really enter into presence.'⁷⁰²

It is the honour of being trusted with another's story that, in the words of Cavarero, 'irresistibly compels'⁷⁰³ my 'genuine inclination'⁷⁰⁴ and impulse to paint. It is a very different quality of artistic inclination to that of a portrait commission which tends to be transactional by nature. It is to be 'moved by an external power,'⁷⁰⁵ which is something that cannot be forced. In Cavarero's words 'the usual firmness of vertical posture has no part in the experience of those who bend to art's pull.'⁷⁰⁶ It is an invitation to consider 'the pure art of *idein*' – Greek 'to see' or 'the idea to

⁶⁹⁵ John Berger, *Steps Towards a Small Theory of the Visible*, (Penguin, 2020), 81-2.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁷ Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, (London/New York: Continuum, 2008), 42.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶⁹⁹ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, 61.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷⁰¹ Berger. *Steps Towards a Small Theory*, 81-2.

⁷⁰² Luce Irigaray, *To Be Born: Genesis of a New Human Being*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 96.

⁷⁰³ Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*, (Stanford University Press: California, 2016), 92.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

be made seen' – art as a gift, and not a commodity.'⁷⁰⁷ Irigaray reminds us that in the Western tradition 'sensible perception is removed from a philosophical path' and 'art in general, is considered secondary with respect to a training towards wisdom.'⁷⁰⁸ Therefore, together with Irigaray, I hope to shine a light upon the 'crucial role' of art in 'accomplishing being and thinking,'⁷⁰⁹ and that 'thought is not separate from art and prayer.'⁷¹⁰

Deference to the ethical demand of the face-to-face encounter remains at the heart of my approach, even when following the 'irresistible' pull of artistic inclination. As Cavarero reminds us: 'The protagonist of ethics, in my view, is not the self but the other. Ethics is about the responsibility toward the other.'⁷¹¹ My gesture as an artist is an intuitive response to and respect for the other, and the invisible relational 'space opened between us.'⁷¹² This, in the words of Irigaray, 'is not without the mystery, the enthusiasm and the reserve, but also the risk, that inspire such a human, and more than human, gesture. We were, we are, two.'⁷¹³

For Cavarero, to tell another's story, in this instance through a portrait painting, is to gift them their uniqueness.⁷¹⁴ This implies a unique relay and bond that is shared 'between the one gifting a sense of another's uniqueness and the one gifted this sense.'⁷¹⁵ There is a mysterious, reciprocal pathos and connection that is opened by the gift of the relating of another's story;⁷¹⁶ it is to touch the mystery of who they are 'and mimetically to be ineluctably touched in return.'⁷¹⁷ Irigaray writes that 'It is important to feel and listen with the whole of who we are there where we have been reached by the appeal [from the other], and to how we should respond to this being touched.'⁷¹⁸ My portrait paintings are my tender response to this 'being touched' by the other. This unique experience of reciprocal witnessing is what I attempt to communicate when words fall short and I describe this work as enriching and a profound honour.

Irigaray's description of touch in terms of a giving and receiving of illumination shines a light upon the painting process: 'Touch which allows turning back to oneself, in the dwelling of an intimate light. But which also goes to encounter the other, illuminated-illuminating, overflowing one's own world in order to taste another brightness.'⁷¹⁹ The contemplative nature of my studio-practice is 'a turning back to oneself,' whereby, having been touched by the

⁷⁰⁷ Makoto Fujimura, "Afterword: Mark Rothko, A Painter of Idea." In Mark Rothko, *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*, ed. Christopher Rothko (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023), 134.

⁷⁰⁸ Luce Irigaray and Michael Stone, "'Oneness' and 'Being-Two' in the Practice and Culture of Yoga," in *Conversations*, eds. Luce Irigaray and Stephen Pluháček, (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 50.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹¹ Adriana Cavarero in Elvira Roncalli, *The Future of the World Is Open: Encounters with Lea Melandri, Luisa Muraro, Adriana Cavarero, and Rossana Rossanda*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2022), 135.

⁷¹² Irigaray, *To Be Born*, 95.

⁷¹³ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 43.

⁷¹⁴ Timothy J. Huzar, "Mimetic Apprehension: Care, Inclination and the Weather of Antiracism," *Critical Horizons* 24 no. 2 (2023): 182.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., 191.

⁷¹⁸ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 22.

⁷¹⁹ Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 174.

‘light’ of the other and the ‘taste’ of their brightness, the painting is softly imbued with a glimpse of this reflected light. This touch is not a matter of ‘capturing and appropriating’ or ‘seizing’ that, according to Irigaray, is ‘favoured in our tradition;’ rather, it is a means of a reciprocal sharing; a communication or a communion.⁷²⁰ Indeed, in order to ‘recover touch as a receptor or receiver and a mediator of grace’, we must abandon the subject-object relation.⁷²¹ Indeed, it is only ‘when we accept that the other remains unknowable to us, that the other illuminates us in some way, but with a light that enlightens us without our being able to comprehend it, to analyse it, to make it ours.’⁷²² The reciprocity of touch in a painting and the reflected illumination of a different reality, proceeds from the elusive ‘grace which springs from an encounter.’⁷²³

For Sontag, ‘Transparence is the highest, most liberating value in art;’ transparence ‘means experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself, of things being what they are.’⁷²⁴ A luminousness is something that I hope to evoke through an embrace of iconography symbolism and painting techniques in portraiture. In icons, the translucent layers of pigment and the use of gold leaf create an impression as though the individuals represented are penetrated by a mysterious light.⁷²⁵ However, I suggest that above all it is the ethical, vulnerable relation at the heart of a portrait painting that brings an elusive luminosity to a work of art. This luminosity is evocative of what Adrienne von Speyor describes as a ‘love-filled radiance.’⁷²⁶

The Invisible Light of the Other

For psychologist Curt Thompson, ‘Every interpersonal interaction, no matter how small or great, is an opportunity to create an artifact of beauty.’⁷²⁷ He continues that, ‘These relational acts of creativity are intended to be imagined in the same way Michelangelo imagined the *Pieta* [...] Who would we become if we could see the moments we occupy as opportunities to create beauty, not least on our relational canvases?’⁷²⁸ Indeed, the figurative beauty of the ‘relational canvases’ should always be prioritised over that of the actual canvas (or panel). The quality of relationships is more important than the creative output: artistic research serves relationships, not the other way around.⁷²⁹ The

⁷²⁰ Luce Irigaray, *The Mediation of Touch*. (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2024), 239.

⁷²¹ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁷²² Irigaray, *Between East and West*, 123-4. Quoted in Stephen Pluhacek. “To the Other as Other—Hearing, Listening, Understanding.” *Paragraph* 25, no. 3 (2002): 45-6.

⁷²³ Irigaray, *The Mediation of Touch*, 242.

⁷²⁴ Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, (London: Penguin 2009), 13.

⁷²⁵ Titus Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West*, (Kentucky: Fons Vitae 1967), 97.

⁷²⁶ Adrienne von Speyor, *Light and Images: Elements of Contemplation*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 96.

⁷²⁷ Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Desire: Discovering the Neuroscience of Longing, Beauty, and Community*. (Inter Varsity Press, 2021), 49.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷²⁹ Helen Kara, *Creative Research Methods: A Practical Guide*, (Bristol: Policy Press, 2020), 55.

aesthetic value is therefore that which is invisible and difficult to quantify; located in-between people in moments of solidarity and life-giving intention, collaborative creation,⁷³⁰ conversation, friendship, shared laughter and tears.

Building trust is slow and patient work, therefore entails a commitment to decelerate the pace of one's social life.⁷³¹ An attentive, relational ethic of care is aligned with the feminist concept of 'slow scholarship.'⁷³² Slow scholarship 'privileges the invisible work of relationships.' Portraiture is slow scholarship, work that takes time. Jessica Hoffman Davis affirms that a 'trusting relationship between research participant and researcher allows for the constructing of a story that extends beyond the limits of the portrait.'⁷³³ This relationship is cultivated throughout 'every stage of the research process' and assures the participant that the artist researcher deeply cares about 'the integrity of the story being told.'⁷³⁴ For example, it was an honour for Maria, Nadiia and Allia and Ferozan to be present for the exhibition opening at the UK Houses of Parliament on World Refugee Day in June 2022 and the book launch for *Tears of Gold* in March 2024.

The relationship between the painter and sitter is an integral part of the process, indeed, the relationship is what imbues the portrait with authenticity. Artistic research, specifically portraiture, involves creating safe spaces for encounters of listening and hospitality. The value of the work, at its heart, is the relationships built with the sitters, and the time, care and attention that this requires. Ernst Gombrich describes 'the correct portrait' as 'the faithful construction of a relational model.'⁷³⁵ Cavarero uses the expression 'relational model' to reconceptualise the notion of subjectivity as one that marked by exposure, vulnerability, and dependence; an integral part of her 'altruistic ethics.'⁷³⁶ The relationship is like the underpainting, an invisible and yet integral part of the painting process.

Irigaray writes that the 'invisible takes part in our everyday relations with the world, with the other(s) [...] If we can perceive something of our interiority and our relations with the world or the other(s) through their expression or their effects, they remain invisible as such. How could a painter express them?'⁷³⁷ Irigaray references Paul Klee's dictum: *the painter's task is not to render the visible as rather render visible*.⁷³⁸ Is it possible to express the invisible

⁷³⁰ James Thompson, "Towards an aesthetics of care." *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 20, no. 4 (2015): 438.

⁷³¹ Brooks, *How to Know a Person*, 46.

⁷³² Alison Mountz, Anne Bonds, Becky Mansfield, Jenna Lloyd, Jennifer Hyndman, Margaret Walton-Roberts, Ranu Basu, Risa Whitson, Roberta Hawkins, Trina Hamilton, and Winifred Curran, "For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 14, no. 4 (2015): 1235–1259.

⁷³³ Jessica Hoffman Davis, "Balancing the Whole: Portraiture as Methodology." In *Qualitative Research in Psychology: Expanding Perspectives in Arts and Design*, eds. P. M. Camie, J. E. Rhodes, & L. Yardley, (Washington DC: American Psychology Association, 2003), 210.

⁷³⁴ Ibid.

⁷³⁵ Ernst, H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*. First edition published 1960. (London: Phaidon, 1996) 78.

⁷³⁶ Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 11.

⁷³⁷ Luce Irigaray, "To paint the invisible." *Continental Philosophy Review* 37 (2004): 395.

⁷³⁸ Paul Klee, "Schöpferische Konfession," in *Tribune der Kunst und Zeit*, ed. K. Edschmid, (Berlin: Erich Reiss, 1920), 13. Trans. N. Guterman, "Creative Credo," in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. H. B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 182.

nature of our relations or the 'invisible light that radiates from the other'⁷³⁹ in a painting? Indeed, we 'are not capable of seeing the intimate core of the other, at least not directly';⁷⁴⁰ we can only perceive a glimpse of this intimacy through 'the light that the gestures, the words, the presence of the other radiates.'⁷⁴¹ Nonetheless, if one approaches each individual whom one paints with humility, then perhaps a reflection of that 'invisible light' will illuminate the portrait. For Irigaray, it is the sharing of vision between-two (as opposed to the narcissistic imposition of one's vision) that safeguards the invisible, and creates space 'to share, to communicate, to commune.'⁷⁴² In light of this understanding of the portrait as a shared collaboration, I generally do not sign my portraits. Similarly, icon paintings are 'anonymous,' and iconographers refrain from expressing their individuality or signing them.⁷⁴³

Maria Tamboukou considers that the painting of a portrait is a 'relational narrative par excellence.'⁷⁴⁴ whereby, narrative and image, silence and speech are interwoven in 'the same semiotic fabric of meaning.'⁷⁴⁵ The painting's pictorial depth becomes 'an inexhaustible reality full of reserves'⁷⁴⁶ that opens up an ever-unfolding dialogue between the sitter, painter and viewer. This defies Levinas's declaration that art 'does not give itself out as the beginning of a dialogue.'⁷⁴⁷ The portrait painting process begins with dialogue and relaxed conversation with the individual whom I am painting. We discuss together how they would like to be portrayed; how to honour their unique perspective and experiences; whether there may be a specific message that they would like to communicate through the painting. Dialogue and conversation confer dignity, equality and respect.⁷⁴⁸ Vincent Crapanzano suggests that dialogue 'is conceived as a crossing, a reaching across, a sharing if not a common ground of understanding';⁷⁴⁹ this aligns with Weil's concepts of attention and *metaxu*. The art of dialogue is a turning toward the other, listening attentively and responding responsively that opens a portal to the present; an invitation to face one another and the world anew.⁷⁵⁰

⁷³⁹ Irigaray, "To paint the invisible," 399.

⁷⁴⁰ Luce Irigaray, "Ethical Gestures Towards the Other," In *Building a New World*, eds. Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder. (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 265.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid.

⁷⁴² Irigaray, *Between East and West*, 86.

⁷⁴³ Rebecca Rozelle-Stone, *Simone Weil: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions (Oxford University Press, 2024), 97-8.

⁷⁴⁴ Maria Tamboukou, "Relational narratives: Auto/biography and the portrait," *Women's Studies International Forum* 33, no. 3 (2010): 176.

⁷⁴⁵ Jens Brockmeier, "From the end to the beginning" In *Narrative and Identity Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*, ed. Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh, (University of Toronto & Freie Universität Berlin, University of Massachusetts at Amherst 2001), 255. Quoted in Ibid.

⁷⁴⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 65.

⁷⁴⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, "Reality and its Shadow" in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. S. Hand (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), 131.

⁷⁴⁸ Margaret Ledwith & Jane Springett, *J. Participatory Practice: Community-Based Action for Transformative Change*. (Bristol: Policy Press 2010), 135.

⁷⁴⁹ Vincent Crapanzano, "On Dialogue," In *The interpretation of dialogue*, ed. T. Maranhão (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 277. Quoted in Kathryn Sorrells. "The Art and Discipline of Nonviolence: An Intercultural Praxis Approach to Conflict in the Neoliberal Global Context.," in *Conflict Management and Intercultural Communication: The Art of Intercultural Harmony*, 2nd ed., eds. Dai, X., & Chen, G.-M. (London: Routledge, 2022), 122.

⁷⁵⁰ Kramer, *Martin Buber's Spirituality*, 13-14.

Indeed, Jean-Luc Nancy considers that the function of portrait is to illuminate the relational structure of the self.⁷⁵¹ It offers a glimpse of the restoration of the 'relational dimension' of our humanity that Irigaray laments 'is forgotten' in Western culture.⁷⁵² This relational approach is at the heart of my painting practice, and to the work of 'aesthetic wit(h)ness.'⁷⁵³ Báýò Akómoláfé asks us 'to listen, to witness, to 'with-ness.'⁷⁵⁴ For it is the act of 'with-nessing' that allows us 'to penetrate into different kinds of realities—other worlds.'⁷⁵⁵

Aesthetic 'With-ness'

The notion of 'aesthetic wit(h)nessing' was coined by artist and psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger.⁷⁵⁶ Giselda Pollock offers the following definition: 'Beyond art as testimony (given by the witness), Ettinger is proposing an aesthetic wit(h)nessing: a means of being with and remembering for the other through the artistic act and through an aesthetic encounter.'⁷⁵⁷ Such a gesture is 'much more than mere ethical solidarity. There is risk; but there is also a sharing.'⁷⁵⁸ This aligns with Gilbert Rose's declaration of the 'welcoming and witnessing'⁷⁵⁹ role of art: 'The sense of an emotionally responsive presence, illusional or not, is 'witness' to an existential necessity: I am I.' This attests to 'ultimately, the restoration of the 'I' through art.'⁷⁶⁰ Rose quotes Holocaust survivor Aharon Appelfeld, who writes that art has the power: 'to rescue the suffering from [...] anonymity, and to rescue the person's [...] name, to give [...] back his human form.'⁷⁶¹ The work of art that silently creates space to bear witness to another's suffering opens up a 'window onto ethics.'⁷⁶² Such attention has value for those who receive it because it confers acknowledgment – a

⁷⁵¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Portrait*, (New York, USA: Fordham University Press, 2018). Referenced in Shouta Brown, "Portrait." *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 5 no. 2 (2018): 175–77.

⁷⁵² Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 89.

⁷⁵³ Pollock, *Aesthetic Wit(h)nessing in the Era of Trauma*. 831.

⁷⁵⁴ "Dr Báýò Akómoláfé on Slowing Down in Urgent Times", interview by Ayana Young. *Atmos*. January 24 2023. Accessed 20 October 2023. <https://atmos.earth/dr-bayo-akomolafe-on-slowing-down-in-urgent-times/>

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁶ Bracha. Ettinger, "Weaving a Woman Artist with-in the Matrixial Encounter-Event." *Theory, Culture, and Society* 21, no. 1 (2004): 69. Quoted in Louise Boscacci; Wit(h)nessing. *Environmental Humanities* 10, no. 1 (May 2018): 343.

⁷⁵⁷ Griselda Pollock, "Aesthetic Wit(h)nessing in the Era of Trauma." *EurAmerica: A Journal of European and American Studies* 40, no. 4 (2010): 831.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹ Gilbert J. Rose, *Necessary illusion: Art as witness*. (Madison, Conn: International Universities Press, 1996), 112.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., 100.

⁷⁶¹ Aharon Appelfeld in Gila Ramras-Rauch, *Aharon Appelfeld: The Holocaust and Beyond*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 39. Quoted in Ibid., 110.

⁷⁶² Emmanuel Levinas. *On Obliteration: An Interview with Françoise Armengaud Concerning the Work of Sacha Sosno*. Trans. Brian Alkire. (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2018), 38. Quoted in K. Newman, "'Feasting During a Plague': Levinas and the Ethical Possibilities of Art." *Levinas Studies* 13 (2019), 201.

movement to recognise and respond to the pain of another.⁷⁶³ I posit that the portrait paintings in this thesis offer a small yet tangible example of such an acknowledgement.

Cavarero suggests, on the basis of Arendt, that the retrospective narration of one's story by another (compared to auto-biographic self-narration), reveals and fulfils one's innate desire for unity and meaning.⁷⁶⁴ The desire to have a story and to hear it voiced by somebody else, or perhaps expressed silently in the form of a portrait, is seen as a crucial component of being human.⁷⁶⁵ For Hannah Arendt, 'acting and speaking men need the help [...] of the artist, of poets and historiographers, of monument-builders or writers.'⁷⁶⁶ The narratable self emerges in the relationality and reciprocity of the giving and receiving one's story from another, and I posit that this can be offered in the form of a portrait painting.⁷⁶⁷ For centuries portraits have been used to communicate, not merely the mimetic likeness, but the voices and stories of individuals portrayed.⁷⁶⁸ We can never underestimate the power of attending to, and witnessing another's story. It is a form of hospitality and makes room for their voices and experiences to be acknowledged and valued. This generosity of posture holds space for lament – 'the unseen and unsaid experience of suffering'⁷⁶⁹ – without needing to fully understand or 'solve' it. Gershom Scholem writes that: 'lament can be expressed as poetry,' and I suggest also as painting, on account of its 'liminality between the linguistic realms,'⁷⁷⁰ residing in 'the two bordering lands of the revealed and the silenced.'⁷⁷¹

Catherine Moon implies that portraiture is a profound method for art therapists to 'witness' their clients. While the therapeutic role of portraiture is generally under-researched, various art therapists have explored how painting portraits of clients can help to build a therapeutic relationship and an empathic connection.⁷⁷² Through the portraits painted individuals had a phenomenological experience of being witnessed by the art therapist, of affirmative acknowledgment rather than judgement. Indeed, Moon affirms that 'taking the time to do someone's portrait is perceived as taking the time to notice and, at some level, to care.'⁷⁷³ Michael Franklin describes the 'unique, aesthetic forms of empathic resonance,' which facilitates a process of 'visual empathy,' thereby enabling subjects to feel

⁷⁶³ Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (New York: Scribner, 1969), 237. Referenced in Christina C. Ananias, "Making Pain Incarnate: An Iconophilic Interpretation of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*." In *Theology, Modernity, and the Visual Arts*, eds. Ben Quash and Chloë Reddaway (Turnhout: Brepols, 2024), 45.

⁷⁶⁴ Olivia Guaraldo, "To the narrative turn and back: The political impact of storytelling in feminism," in *Travelling concepts of narrative*, eds. Hatavara, M., Hydén, L., & Hyvärinen, M. (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2013), 78.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., 77.

⁷⁶⁶ Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 178.

⁷⁶⁷ Laurie Naranch, "The Narratable Self: Adriana Cavarero with Sojourner Truth," *Hypatia* 34, no. 3 (2019), 425.

⁷⁶⁸ M. Pointon, *Portrayal and The Search For Identity*, (Reaktion Books 2013). Referenced in Susan M. D. Carr, "Portrait Therapy: Supporting Client Voices of Self-Identity," *Art Therapy* 37, no. 4 (2020): 177.

⁷⁶⁹ Anna Westin, *Embodied Trauma and Healing: Critical Conversations on the Concept of Health* (Routledge 2022), 152-3.

⁷⁷⁰ Gershom Scholem. "On Lament and Lamentation," trans. Lina Barouch and Paula Schwebel, in *Lament in Jewish Thought*, eds. Ferber, I. & Schwebel, P. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter Lament in Jewish Thought, 2017), 313.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷⁷² Susan M. D. Carr, "Revisioning Self-identity: The role of portraits, neuroscience and the art therapist's 'third hand,'" *International Journal of Art Therapy* 19 no. 2 (2014): 54-70.

⁷⁷³ C. Moon, *Studio art therapy: Cultivating the artist identity in the art therapist*. (London & Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley, 2002), 214-15. Quoted in Ibid., 58.

‘deeply seen.’⁷⁷⁴ The women whose portraits are represented in this thesis responded positively to their experience of being painted, which appeared to have therapeutic resonance.⁷⁷⁵ In Allia’s gracious words, ‘your hands work magic;’⁷⁷⁶ and Maria described the experience as ‘equal to being seen and heard’ and ‘deeply healing and supportive.’⁷⁷⁷

Through my portraits I seek to subtly allude to the strength of character that shines through the stories of how each of the women navigate, and overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges. As Gemma Cruz affirms, refugees ‘are not just victims, but also subjects and agents of their own destiny.’⁷⁷⁸ Indeed, the myriad of ways whereby individuals who have endured conflict and displacement develop resilience and sustain hope is often an untold story. I witnessed the women whom I was privileged to paint, live with a grace and generosity that belied the circumstances they had each endured, and the struggles that they continued to face. A portrait offers a unique testament to the women’s fierce tenacity, dignity and resistance, which is seldom acknowledged or taken seriously.⁷⁷⁹ It also offers a counterpoint to the generalised representation of refugees as passive objects of pity or fear and counteracts the violence of a truncated view of humanity.⁷⁸⁰ In the words of Deborah Rose, ‘at the very least, we who have not yet been drawn into the vortex of violence are called to recognize it, name it, and resist it; we are called to bear witness and to offer care.’⁷⁸¹

David Brooks reminds us that ‘the ability to see someone else deeply and make them feel seen’ is ‘the ultimate gift you can give.’⁷⁸² The arts can offer a unique expression of this ‘ultimate gift’ through embracing minority and marginalised voices, allowing them to truly emerge and be heard, valued and acknowledged.⁷⁸³ For Miranda Fricker, the capacity for attention – ‘the ability to see through prejudice to real human individuals’ – is ‘indispensable in ethical life.’⁷⁸⁴ I seek to embody this attention both through *attentive listening* and through the painting process

⁷⁷⁴ Michael Franklin, “Affect regulation, mirror neurons, and the third hand: Formulating mindful empathic art interventions,” *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association* 27, no. 4 (2010), 166.

⁷⁷⁵ Virginia Aita, William Lydiatt & Mark Gilbert, “Portraits of care: Medical research through portraiture,” *Medical humanities* 36 (2010): 6.

⁷⁷⁶ Allia, personal correspondence, 23 February 2022.

⁷⁷⁷ Maria, personal correspondence, 11 December 2022.

⁷⁷⁸ Gemma Tulud Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration: Social Justice and Religious Experience*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 151.

⁷⁷⁹ James Thompson, *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009), 2.

⁷⁸⁰ Agnes Woolley. “Re-Orienting the Gaze: Visualising Refugees in Recent Film,” In *The Routledge Handbook of Refugee Narratives*, eds. Lê Espiritu Gandhi, E., & Nguyen, V. (Routledge, 2023), 78.

⁷⁸¹ Deborah B. Rose, “Shimmer: When all you love is being trashed,” in *Arts of living on a damaged planet: Ghosts and monsters of the Anthropocene*, eds. A. L. Tsing, N. Bubandt, E. Gan, & H. A. Swanson (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 56.

⁷⁸² Brooks, *How to Know a Person*, 10-11.

⁷⁸³ UNESCO Art-Lab, *Key Recommendations from the Art-Lab Review* for the “Art-Lab #4-The imperative of cultural justice: arts for inclusion, equity and human rights,” December 10, 2020, 8.
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375117?fbclid=IwAR2Z6ffZDYrEy6y1qJMasAl3RrYTvOFLvZrlolhGQwZoiumRByjO8hKOKmA>

⁷⁸⁴ Miranda Fricker, “Silence and Institutional Prejudice”, in *Out from the Shadows: Analytical Feminist Contributions to Traditional Philosophy*, eds. Sharon L. Crasnow, and Anita M. Superson, *Studies in Feminist Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press 2012), 296.

itself. Silvia Caprioglio Panizza reminds us that: ‘Attention is a way, perhaps the first way, of acknowledging another’s existence. Everything follows from that.’⁷⁸⁵

Contemplative Reflexivity

For artistic researchers working with marginalised and displaced communities, while a joy and a privilege, the work is invariably complex. In recognition of this complexity, I eschew valorising the relational exchanges at the heart of my research. Endeavouring to bring portraiture into a framework of Weilian attention, does not sidestep decades of critique with regard to the ethical challenges of representation.⁷⁸⁶

Ethical praxis entails a rigorous commitment to reflexivity, integral to an ‘ethics of care’. This is especially critical for artistic research which centralises the researcher’s interpretive lens in negotiating meaning and representation, such as portraiture.⁷⁸⁷ There is an inherently autobiographical element to all artistic practice. A work of art originates, in part, from the artist’s life experiences and embodied ways of seeing the world. Griselda Pollock, drawing from Ettinger, reminds us that the artist is ‘a site interwoven with the world, others, her own and her unknown others’;⁷⁸⁸ therefore the ‘aesthetic event’ is a liminal ‘borderspace’ where past and present meet.⁷⁸⁹ A work of art cannot reflect objective reality; one’s subjective position as an artist inevitably informs one’s observations and representations. Nonetheless, in order to be attentive to ethics, one must dare to be as honest, vulnerable as possible and sensitive to the power dynamics within artistic creation. In Iris Murdoch’s words, ‘we have to try to see justly.’⁷⁹⁰

Rowan Williams reminds us of our responsibility to ‘interrogate, as sharply and clearly as we can, various kinds of spoken and unspoken, unrealised, unthought imbalances of power in which we are involved.’⁷⁹¹ In the words of Alison Phipps, this is a vital ‘attempt to break with colonial, epistemic ways of seeing.’⁷⁹² Taking an ethical approach is a constantly attentive, reflexive praxis,⁷⁹³ whereby one interrogates one’s limits and frontiers as well as one’s

⁷⁸⁵ Sylvia Caprioglio Panizza, *The Ethics of Attention: Engaging the Real with Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil* (London: Routledge, 2021), 1.

⁷⁸⁶ Eleanor Sanderson, “Emotional engagement in the context of development and spirituality research” in *Emotion space and Society* 5, no. 2 (2012): 128.

⁷⁸⁷ See F. W. English, “A Critical Appraisal of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s Portraiture as a Method of Educational Research.” *Educational Researcher* 29, no. 7 (2000): 21-26.

⁷⁸⁸ Pollock, *Aesthetic Wit(h)nessing in the Era of Trauma*, 859-60.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁰ Iris Murdoch, “On ‘God’ and ‘Good’” in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter Conradi. (New York: Penguin, 1999), 332.

⁷⁹¹ Rowan Williams, “Solidarity Against Tribalism: the Contemporary Challenge.” The Bampton Lectures 2024. The University Church, Oxford. March 5, 2024, video, 52.18 <https://www.universitychurch.ox.ac.uk/content/bampton-lectures>

⁷⁹² Alison Phipps, *Decolonising Multilingualism: Struggles to Decreate*, (Channel View Publications, 2019), 4.

⁷⁹³ A. Bellinger and D. Ford, “A strengths approach to research,” in *The Strengths Approach in Practice: How It Changes Lives* (Bristol University Press, 2022), 127.

privilege.⁷⁹⁴ For Williams, 'it's to be committed to a constantly self-critical and self-reforming process of releasing in the other the resource that is to be shared.'⁷⁹⁵ He reminds us that we perform this task '*for* one another' and not '*by* one superior class for another – the 'liberators' and the 'liberated', the 'actors' and the 'acted upon.'⁷⁹⁶ It is about a meeting and a sharing of humanities where the barrier between 'giver' and 'recipient,' or indeed 'artist' and 'subject,' is eroded. In order to realise this, an artist researcher cannot cease to be attentive to representational complexities, ambiguities and contradictions,⁷⁹⁷ and to navigating these tenderly with care.

Nonetheless, one's approach to reflexivity is important. For example, consider the 'performative action of reflexivity' in positionality declarations, which Jasmine Gani and Rabea Khan identify as a 'self-defence mechanism'⁷⁹⁸ that often merely upholds the 'existing academic culture of narcissism.'⁷⁹⁹ For Butler, there is the potential for violence to emerge when the 'hegemonic rule of egology' prioritises self-preservation and self-justification over the relational.⁸⁰⁰ Therefore, I advocate for a re-centring of humility.⁸⁰¹ Indeed, reflexivity is meant to entail a humble acknowledgement of one's limitations, feelings and underlying motivations, and the embrace of an uncomfortable posture of vulnerability, introspective intentionality and authentic action. Therefore, Daniel O'Neill proposes the need to 'pry positionality from institutional petrification,' rather than unreservedly accepting this new 'orthodoxy,' seeing it as simply part of a wider 'ongoing methodological discussion.'⁸⁰² Thus there is the opportunity for new, generative approaches to research to emerge.

However, there is a balance to be found. Indeed, Weil's self-abnegating ethics of decreation represents the other extreme. Decreation is at the heart of the key to Weil's other-oriented account of the self.⁸⁰³ However, the decentring of one's subjectivity is in many ways antimonious to the process of artistic creation. Anne Carson writes that it is 'a dream of distance in which the self is displaced from the centre of the work and the teller disappears into the telling.'⁸⁰⁴ Can a poetics of self-dispossession coexist with creativity? Indeed, is this even possible or desirable?⁸⁰⁵

⁷⁹⁴ Rowan Williams, "Solidarity Against Tribalism: the Contemporary Challenge." The Bampton Lectures 2024.

⁷⁹⁵ Rowan Williams. "Solidarity, Rights and the Image of God: Ethics and Christian Anthropology." The Bampton Lectures 2024. The University Church, Oxford. March 5, 2024, video, 50:47.
<https://www.universitychurch.ox.ac.uk/content/bampton-lectures>

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁷ F. Kurasawa, "Humanitarianism and the representation of alterity: The aporias and prospects of cosmopolitan visuality," in *Democracy in crisis: Violence, alterity, community*, ed. S. Gaon (Manchester University Press, 2010), 146, 150-1.

⁷⁹⁸ Jasmine K Gani, Rabea M Khan, "Positionality Statements as a Function of Coloniality: Interrogating Reflexive Methodologies", *International Studies Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (June 2024) sqae038.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁰ Judith Butler, "Leaning Out, Caught in the Fall: Interdependency and Ethics in Cavarero", in *Toward a Feminist Ethics of Nonviolence*, eds. Timothy J. Huzar, and Clare Woodford, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 57.

⁸⁰¹ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2013).

⁸⁰² Daniel O'Neill, "Complicated shadows: a discussion of positionality within educational research," in *Oxford Review of Education* (2024): 13.

⁸⁰³ Clark J. Elliston, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self: Christology, Ethics, and Formation*. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: 1517 Media, 2016), 109-110.

⁸⁰⁴ Anne Carson. "Decreation: How Women Like Sappho, Marguerite Porete, and Simone Weil Tell God." In *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera*. (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group 2006), 173.

⁸⁰⁵ Bourgault, "Democratic Practice and 'Caring to Deliberate,'" 37-8.

Instead, together with Irigaray, I seek to encounter the other as other 'while remaining two,'⁸⁰⁶ rather than denying or despising the difference between-two,⁸⁰⁷ or even decentering the 'I' in its entirety.

Eleanor Sanderson describes the 'three-fold pattern' within Irigaray's 'spatiality of subjectivity': Namely, 'approaching the other, finding a place of being with the other and then returning to the self.'⁸⁰⁸ However, the self to which one returns is invariably different, for in any genuine encounter it is impossible to remain unchanged.⁸⁰⁹ I have found myself to be irrefutably changed by each of the women whom I have had the privilege of painting. The time-consuming early Renaissance painting methods that I use mean that I tend to paint my portraits from photographs and pencil sketches, rather than painting from life. Thus the periods of withdrawal in contemplative, prayerful painting, are vital in order to keep the thresholds of the 'border of my world'⁸¹⁰ open to the other, while respecting the boundaries between us. In the words of Irigaray: 'dwelling within oneself and one's own world is essential for respecting the otherness of the other'⁸¹¹ who remains transcendent to the self.

Indeed, in the words of Sanderson, Irigaray's work foregrounds the vitality of a 'connected coherency between interiority and exteriority.'⁸¹² Attention, the posture Weil considers fundamental to ethics, requires outward directedness to the other. However, as Silvia Caprioglio Panizza writes, one also 'needs to direct one's focus inward, to obtain knowledge about oneself,' which may seem a 'paradox.'⁸¹³ Weil herself alludes to the idea that harmony is 'the union of contraries.'⁸¹⁴ Indeed, in my artistic research journey, the regular rhythms of painting and writing are nourishing and sustaining ways to cultivate interiority, clarity and harmony – 'a gathering of self in oneself.'⁸¹⁵ This is a vital part of the 'three-fold' pattern in my work: the meeting with the women and listening to their stories; withdrawing to paint and to write; and then sharing the paintings and stories with others through the exhibitions. The cultivation of interiority invites a rhythm whereby we, in the words of Irigaray: 'communicate with the soul of the world [...] with the soul of others, and afterwards return to the solitude of the own soul.'⁸¹⁶

An 'altruistic ethics of relation'⁸¹⁷ requires attending to *both* the individuals from migratory and marginalised communities engaged in the research process, and an awareness of the emotional toll that this work can take personally. There are risks for researchers exposed to testimonies shared by participants who have experienced

⁸⁰⁶ Irigaray, "Listening, Thinking, Teaching," 232.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid., 236-7.

⁸⁰⁸ Sanderson, "Emotional engagement in the context of development and spirituality research," 126.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁸¹⁰ Luce Irigaray, "Ethical Gestures Toward the Other," *Poligraf* 57, No. 15 (2010): 7-8.

⁸¹¹ Ibid.

⁸¹² Sanderson, "A Future Shaped by Love," 164.

⁸¹³ Silvia Caprioglio Panizza, "Attention" In *The Murdochian Mind*, eds. S. Caprioglio Panizza & M. Hopwood (Routledge, 2022), 164.

⁸¹⁴ Simone Weil, *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks*, (London: Ark Paper Backs, 1957), 168.

⁸¹⁵ Luce Irigaray, "Introduction: On Old And New Tablets," trans. H. Bostic, in *French Feminist Thought: Critical Perspectives*, eds. M. Joy, K. O'Grady and J. L. Poxon (London: Routledge, 2003), 7.

⁸¹⁶ Luce Irigaray, *Key Writings*. (London/New York: Continuum, 2004), 167. Quoted in Eleanor Sanderson, "The Prayers We Breathe: Embodying the Gift of Life in the Maternal Feminine." In *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, ed. Emily A. Holmes and Lenart Škof (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 64.

⁸¹⁷ Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 92.

trauma, conflict and displacement.⁸¹⁸ It is important to remain attentive to the 'emotional geographies' of the artistic and research practice.⁸¹⁹ This attentiveness takes into account the emotions and feelings of distress that may arise for both participants and researchers.⁸²⁰ From experience, I have found that the contemplative, prayerful painting process helps me to process all that I may have seen and heard. It is important for one's research praxis to be extended generously, tenderly, to researchers too, as we negotiate the emotions and responses to difficult stories and experiences of conflict, displacement, and torture.⁸²¹ It is to enact the same kindness and care to ourselves that we seek to show to others.

Indeed, allowing space for reflexivity and to accepting one's emotional responses can also engender more nuanced insights and creativity. Audre Lorde reminds us that 'As they become known to and accepted by us, our feelings and the honest exploration of them become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas,'⁸²² and, I suggest, works of art. In Sanderson's words, a fidelity to an ethic of reciprocity 'requires that equal attention be given to the relationships which surround both the emotional exchanges within research and the sharing and creativity of knowledge.'⁸²³ The vulnerability of encounter and the emotions negotiated as a consequence are to be embraced and validated,⁸²⁴ for these are integral to one's artistic practice. Therefore, both the researcher's emotions and our participants' require attention, acceptance and care.⁸²⁵

The six paintings that I created in 2022 were the result of encounters (both in person and virtually) with women from migratory and marginalised communities from around the world. These are, in effect, a visual testament to some of the wars, human rights violations and refugee movements in recent years. The women represented are survivors of conflict and oppression in Afghanistan, Ukraine, the Gaza Strip and Xinjiang. For the remainder of this chapter I will describe the first stage of the 'three-fold' pattern described above, namely the individual encounters with each of these women. In Part III I will focus upon the second movement; the withdrawal to one's studio to paint.

However, I acknowledge the limits of these relationships, constrained by time, physical distance, the busyness of our respective lives, the impact of personal grief and my subsequent withdrawal for several months. However, perhaps the paintings and exhibitions serve to bridge the gap afforded by my human limitations. A portrait painting as *metaxu* extends across space and time and serves as a luminous testament to the gift and grace of genuine encounter.

⁸¹⁸ Charishma Ratnam & Danielle Drozdewski, "Research ethics with vulnerable groups: ethics in practice and procedure", *Gender, Place & Culture* 29, no. 7 (2021): 1009–30.

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1015.

⁸²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1015–16.

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*, 1016.

⁸²² Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury." In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*. (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 36–9.

⁸²³ Sanderson, "Emotional engagement in the context of development and spirituality research," 123.

⁸²⁴ Bryan C. Clift, Ioannis Costas Batlle, Kia Banks, Josie Rodohan, Sheree Bekker, and Katharina Chudzikowski, "Introduction: The relevance and importance of researcher vulnerability in qualitative research." In *Qualitative Researcher Vulnerability: Negotiating, Experiencing and Embracing*, eds. Clift, B.C., Costas Batlle, I., Bekker, S., & Chudzikowski, K. (Routledge, 2023), 1.

⁸²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

Maria and Nadiia

My portrait painting of Maria and Nadiia, an image of a daughter embracing her mother, evokes something of Cavarero's *inclination*. We met a month after their arrival from Kyiv. I remember sitting together on a bench sheltered by a horse chestnut tree in Embankment Gardens in London. They spoke of how grateful they were to be safe, although their hearts were still in Ukraine. They were living together in Kyiv when the war began on February 24 2022. Maria awoke to her mother screaming: 'Masha, wake up! The war has started. They are bombing Boryspil.' Initially they experienced denial and disbelief. After twelve sleepless days haunted by fear, hiding in the basement, they decided to join the six-hour queue at the train station, to escape via Poland.

When we met, mother and daughter were somewhat disorientated, the trauma still fresh. After recounting their story, Nadiia embraced me with tears in her eyes saying *thank you for listening*. I gently asked whether they may be happy for me to paint their portrait together. After they agreed, I suggested that perhaps we take the photograph in that moment, beneath the horse chestnut tree. I usually take countless photos, in order to have many options from which to select the precise image, gesture, expression that resonates. However, my camera battery died almost immediately. The image that I managed to hastily photograph offers a glimpse of that sacred moment of shared vulnerability. The gesture is profoundly tender; the daughter Maria's arms protectively around her mother, her head resting upon her shoulder. There was no international posing involved, it was spontaneous and natural. It is an image of *inclination*, their faces turned subtly to one another, attentive and supportive of each other. The strength of their bond deepened by the experience that they shared in Kyiv. By contrast to the 'archetypal posture'⁸²⁶ of traditional Madonna and Child images popularized in religious art; the child embraces her mother.

Cavarero considers how the image of Madonna and child – specifically the painting by Leonardo da Vinci, *Sant'Anna, Madonna con bambino* (1503–1519) – depicts a relational ontology of *inclination* and vulnerability 'par excellence.'⁸²⁷ Cavarero writes: 'The figure of the Madonna and Child, portrayed by innumerable artists and disseminated in thousands of churches, museums, and streets, is not just a Christian icon that melts the hearts of the faithful; it is, above all, a popular and hyper-represented image of maternity that no relational ontology can put aside with impunity.'⁸²⁸ Maternal inclination is 'understood as a primary instance of *care* for the *other*.'⁸²⁹ Cavarero suggests that the child-mother relation can offer an altruistic and relational model for subjectivity and 'more importantly, provides for originary bending.'⁸³⁰ By *inclination*, Cavarero refers to both a bodily postural geometry and an ethical position that embraces the notion of human beings as primarily relational and irrefutably defined by

⁸²⁶ Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*. (California: Stanford University Press 2016), 10.

⁸²⁷ Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 14.

⁸²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁸²⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁸³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

their relation to others.⁸³¹ Thus challenging the autonomous, individualistic masculine 'paradigm of the vertical axis.'⁸³² In images of the Virgin Mary, Annemarie Carr writes that she is 'rarely reduced to a mere face';⁸³³ she is always depicted in relation to her son. In the depiction of the inclination of Mary's head, gesture of her hands, tenderness of her gaze, we find an embodiment of attentive listening and maternal responsivity to her child.⁸³⁴ As such, for Irigaray, the figure of Mary can be considered 'a temporal bridge between the past, the present and of the future, and a spatial bridge between all the cultures of the world.'⁸³⁵

The notion of a 'spatial bridge between all the cultures of the world' presents a stark contrast to state-imposed and arbitrary (b)ordering policies. In the immediate aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, there was an unprecedented outpouring of support for displaced Ukrainians. However, this simultaneously exposes the politicised, and often discriminatory, nature of refugee protection.⁸³⁶ Consider the 'border violence,'⁸³⁷ detention and drawn out asylum procedures that await refugees arriving to the UK from the Middle East, Asia and Africa.⁸³⁸ Baroness Kennedy affirms: 'The bespoke schemes for Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine have their merits. In their differences they create challenges, a sense of 'hierarchy of pain,' or hierarchy of risk, that is hard to justify.'⁸³⁹ This 'hierarchisation of humanity' results in 'the subsequent racialisation and dehumanisation of certain groups,' and therefore we need to produce 'counter-discourses' and 'counter-creative acts.'⁸⁴⁰ In the words of Maria herself: 'It does not matter what nationality you are, what matters is what you are doing in this present moment. For humanity has no geography and kindness has no nationality.'⁸⁴¹

⁸³¹ Andrea Timár, "Critiques of Violence: Arendt, Sedgwick, and Cavarero Respond to Billy Budd's Stutter," *Critical Horizons* 24, no. 2 (2023): 165.

⁸³² Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 10.

⁸³³ Annemarie Weyl Carr, "Thoughts on the Economy of the Image of Mary," *Theology Today* 56, no. 3 (1999): 359. Quoted in Jane Heath, "Mary's Image as Theology," In *Image As Theology: The Power of Art in Shaping Christian Thought, Devotion, and Imagination*, eds. C.A. Strine, Mark McInroy, Alexis Torrance (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), 72.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸³⁵ Luce Irigaray, *Il Mistero di Maria*, (Milan: Paolines, 2010). Quoted in Zeena Elton, "Sensible Transcendental: Recovering the Flesh and Spirit of Our Mother(s)," *Building a New World*, eds. In L. Irigaray, L., M. Marder, Palgrave Studies in Postmetaphysical Thought (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 115-6.

⁸³⁶ Emily Venturi, Anna Iasmi Vallianatou. "Ukraine exposes Europe's double standards for refugees." Chatham House. March 30, 2022. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/03/ukraine-exposes-europes-double-standards-refugees>

⁸³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸³⁹ Baroness Helena Kennedy, "Foreword," *Independent Commission of Inquiry into Asylum Provision in Scotland: with particular reference to failings in the provision of care to New Scots during the Covid pandemic*, Part Two (November 2022), 9.

⁸⁴⁰ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality," (Frantz Fanon Foundation Paris, 2016), 10. Quoted in Hyab Teklehaimanot Yohannes, "Autobiographic reflections on loss, longing, and recovery," in *Handbook on Border Criminology*, eds. Mary Bosworth, Katja Franko, Maggy Lee, and Rimple Mehta, (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024), 314.

⁸⁴¹ Maria, personal correspondence, 11 June 2022.

Female Judges of Afghanistan

Ferozan, Allia and I met soon after their arrival in London in November 2021, I remember being struck by their grace and dignity. They invited me to tea with them at the hotel that became their home for well over a year. I remember the countless cups of tea that we shared in the hotel and their generous hospitality even within such a limited space. I brought a small offering of homemade cakes and biscuits and they shared Afghan sweets, nuts and seeds liberally, reminders of home. This was just as Covid-19 restrictions were lifting and it became a precious, life-giving friendship. I tentatively raised the idea of painting their portraits, and they responded with warmth. With their permission, I brought my camera for our next tea together. Ferozan and Allia's sisters and friends helped to arrange their hijabs for the portrait photo shoot; their pride in having their portraits taken was evident. The memory is one suffused in shared laughter. I later returned to take further photographs of their hands, as I subsequently decided to include clasped hands in the portrait paintings, to denote a sense of authority.

While the photograph is integral to the painting, it is only the beginning of the relational portrait painting process. I sought to be in communication and shared images via WhatsApp of the painting in progress throughout, receiving and responding to the feedback from the judges. For example, when I sent a photograph of the preliminary portrait drawing to Allia, she accurately commented that 'my hand looks so small and arms look so fat.'⁸⁴² Therefore, accordingly I restarted the drawing, and did not embark upon the painting until the preliminary sketch had been approved.

Ferozan and Allia subsequently introduced me to their colleague from Kabul, Zuhail, who was visiting her sister in London. Zuhail graciously agreed for her portrait to also be painted; therefore I painted the three judges in the form of a triptych. I painted a fourth portrait of Deeba a year later. Deeba was working as an Appeal Court Judge in the Elimination of Violence Against Women Court in Afghanistan, when Kabul fell back into the hands of the Taliban late August 2021. As women working in prominent positions in Afghan society, Allia, Ferozan, Zuhail and Deeba were at risk of retaliatory attacks. Under Taliban rule female judges and others who have stood up for women's rights have been threatened with persecution and forced into hiding. In Deeba's own words: 'I am deeply honoured to have served my country as a Judge. At the same time, my career placed my family and I at great risk of serious injury or death. That risk is amplified because I was a woman. The Taliban does not believe and does not accept that women should hold positions of authority. [...] They punish females who step out from and transgress their proscribed roles.'⁸⁴³

The Judges expressed, with great sadness, that their life's work has also been reduced 'to zero' having had to flee to a foreign country, leaving their homes and loved ones behind, as well as their professional identity. For, in the words of Berger, '[e]migration does not only involve leaving behind, crossing water, living amongst strangers, but, also,

⁸⁴² Allia, personal correspondence, 4 February 2022.

⁸⁴³ Deeba, personal correspondence, 14 April 2023.

undoing the very meaning of the world.’⁸⁴⁴ For as women in Afghanistan they had been an integral part of the progress in their country. The message that the judges wanted to convey through these portraits was as follows: ‘Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice anywhere.’⁸⁴⁵

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres noted that despite ‘evidence that gender equality offers a path to sustainable peace and conflict prevention, we are moving in the opposite direction. Today, the world is experiencing a reversal of generational gains in women’s rights while violent conflicts, military expenditures, military coups, displacements and hunger continue to increase.’⁸⁴⁶ Reports indicate that the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan is one of the worst globally:⁸⁴⁷ ‘nowhere else in the world has there been an attack as widespread, systematic and all-encompassing on the rights of women and girls as in Afghanistan. Every aspect of their lives is being restricted under the guise of morality and through the instrumentalisation of religion.’⁸⁴⁸ Special Rapporteur Richard Bennett concluded that the Taliban’s systematic discrimination against women is ‘tantamount to gender apartheid.’⁸⁴⁹ Indeed, women are denied full participation in their society; deprived of freedom of speech, freedom of movement, the right to work, an education or to culture, access to justice or to power in the decision-making process.⁸⁵⁰ Malala declares that: ‘If we, as a global community, fail to stand in opposition to gender apartheid in Afghanistan, we send a devastating message to girls and women everywhere: That you are less than human. That your basic rights are up for debate. That we are willing to look away.’⁸⁵¹

In light of the sensitivity of the situation in Afghanistan and the judges’ prominent positions in society, there were ethical challenges to negotiate regarding the painting and exhibiting of their portraits. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis clarify that: ‘The drawing of the portrait is placed in social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image.’⁸⁵² Ferozan, Allia and I discussed this security concern at length and decided that it was necessary to ensure that no images were taken of the photographs for the media or to be displayed online. We had to negotiate the tension between the

⁸⁴⁴ John Berger, *and our faces, my heart, brief as photos*, (London / New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 56.

⁸⁴⁵ Allia, personal correspondence, 5 February 2022.

⁸⁴⁶ United Nations Security Council. *Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General. S/2022/740*. October 5, 2022. I.2. Accessed on 5 November 2022.

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un_documents_type/secretary-generals-reports/?ctype=Women%2C%20Peace%20and%20Security&cbtype=women-peace-and-security

⁸⁴⁷ World Economic Forum. *Global Gender Gap Report 2023*. Available at: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2023.pdf. Quoted in the Gender Apartheid Inquiry. *Shattering Women’s Rights, Shattering Lives: Parliamentary Ad-Hoc Inquiry Into The Situation Of Women And Girls In Afghanistan And Iran*, (March 2024), 26. Accessed 5 May, 2024. <https://www.ibanet.org/document?id=Gender-Apartheid-Inquiry-Report-March-2024>

⁸⁴⁸ Joint report to the UN Human Rights Council, Special Rapporteur Richard Bennett and Dorothy Estrada-Tanck, Chair of the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, July 2023. Quoted in Ibid., 14.

⁸⁴⁹ Special Rapporteur Richard Bennett, 6 March 2023. Quoted in Ibid., 14.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid., 7, 30.

⁸⁵¹ Malala Yousafzai, written submission. Quoted in Ibid.

⁸⁵² Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffmann Davis. *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 1997), xv.

desire to share their stories for advocacy and real concerns for the safety of their loved ones, friends and colleagues in Afghanistan. I was keenly aware of the responsibility of their trust and the desire to honour this above all else.

Zainab

The encounter with Zainab was mediated virtually in March 2022. The initial intention had been to visit the UNESCO Culture for Sustainable and Inclusive Peace initiative (CUSP) partners in the Gaza Strip and collaborate for an art workshop with Palestinian women. However, I was denied permission to travel due to security reasons. Therefore, I was introduced to Zainab via Zoom as a young artist who might be open to the possibility of having her portrait painted. Zainab later told me that she agreed because I share the name of her sister Hana. There was a depth of encounter as painter to painter: She shared some of her paintings with me and I showed her mine. Her paintings offer a glimpse of her unspeakable grief, expressed more eloquently and devastatingly than words.

On 16th May 2021 Zainab lost 22 members of her family – including her mother Amal, her only sister Hana and two brothers – following an Israeli airstrike that devastated a densely populated residential buildings on al-Wahda Street in the centre of Gaza City. Zainab was trapped under the rubble for 12 hours.⁸⁵³

*“The passing of days and the sun rising each morning troubles me, I am still hoping to open my eyes, as I used to, to my mother’s smile and affection. I am still longing for one hug from Hana. [...] Wherever I look, I cannot help but remember one of them. My soul has perished from longing. The pain of loss grows inside me, intensifies with time.”*⁸⁵⁴

Zainab devoted herself to processing her grief through her art: ‘Through painting, I was able to express a small part of what I lived on that day and after.’⁸⁵⁵ Her exhibition in Gaza, supported by Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor and UN Women Palestine, was entitled:

‘عمري ٢٢ عامًا وفقدت ٢٢ شخصًا’

‘I’m 22, I lost 22 people.’ Her powerful paintings depict her pain and trauma: ‘Each of these paintings portrays moments and situations that words cannot express. They are things that are difficult to describe or even imagine.’⁸⁵⁶ In the words of Cavarero, such creative work is ‘opposing the work of destruction that has devoured life itself. It is

⁸⁵³ Zainab al-Qolaq, *“I am 22, I lost 22 people:” Zainab al-Qolaq tells her story of (not) surviving an Israeli airstrike on Gaza*, painting booklet (New York: UN Women, 2022), 3 <https://palestine.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Booklet-EN.pdf>

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁵⁵ Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, “Euro-Med Monitor, UN Women Palestine organize exhibition of paintings of Israeli airstrike survivor in Gaza,” May 24, 2022. Accessed 14 June 2022 <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/5133/Euro-Med-Monitor,-UN-Women-Palestine-organize-exhibition-of-paintings-of-Israeli-airstrike-survivor-in-Gaza>

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid.,

ultimately a making against destroying, a creating against demolishing, a doing against undoing.’⁸⁵⁷ Zainab says that she used the universal language of art to convey her voice and feelings, in order that others might fathom the unfathomable depths of grief she carries. She writes, ‘They may have removed the rubble above me, but who will remove the scattered rubble from my heart?’⁸⁵⁸



Zainab’s self-portrait, ‘A Corpse in a Graduation Gown,’ included in this thesis with Zainab’s permission, evokes her visceral experience graduating from college, haunted and hollowed by grief, lifeless and bereft at being unable to celebrate with her loved ones. Zainab writes: ‘I never imagined a cemetery being the place where I tell my family that I have finally graduated.’⁸⁵⁹

The portrait that I painted of Zainab offers an encounter within absence; an evocation of presence. This is all the more poignant as I write these words after October 7 2023. Zainab’s family home was bombed again and all of her paintings reduced to rubble. Yet another loss. For, in Zainab’s

words, these paintings, now destroyed, represented an ‘expression of my silence’⁸⁶⁰ and of ‘my voice that I seek to be heard by everyone.’⁸⁶¹

How can I begin to comprehend the anguish of Zainab and all those dwelling in the open-air prison and besieged enclave of the Gaza Strip?⁸⁶² Jihad Abusalim writes of a ‘barrier of understanding and imagination between Gaza and the outside world. This intangible barrier becomes an extension of the physical barriers surrounding Gaza.’⁸⁶³ Academic and poet Rafeet Alreer, wrote: ‘When will this pass? When will it be enough? How many dead Palestinians are enough? How many massacres are enough? [...] Does a single Palestinian life matter? Does it?’⁸⁶⁴ Dr Rafeet Alreer

⁸⁵⁷ Adriana Cavarero and Elvira Roncalli, “Narrative against Destruction,” *New Literary History* 46, no. 1 (2015), 14. Quoted in Pascale Devette, “Paying Attention to Affliction: Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil on Tragic Storytelling,” in *Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil: Unprecedented Conversations*, eds. In K. Lawson & J. Livingstone (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), 165.

⁸⁵⁸ Zainab al-Qolaq, “I am 22, I lost 22 people,” 13.

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁸⁶¹ Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, “Euro-Med Monitor, UN Women Palestine organize exhibition.”

⁸⁶² Jihad Abusalim, “Introduction,” in *Light in Gaza: Writings Born of Fire*, eds. J. Abusalim, J. Bing and Michael Merryman-Lotze (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022), 1.

⁸⁶³ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁴ Refaat Alreer, “Gaza Asks: When Shall this Pass?” In Ibid., 25.

was killed by an airstrike on December 6th 2023.⁸⁶⁵ Cavarero coined 'horrorism' to draw attention to a distinct dimension of violence, that targets 'the human condition itself, as incarnated in the singularity of vulnerable bodies.'⁸⁶⁶ It is to commit the 'ontological crime'⁸⁶⁷ of obliterating human uniqueness.⁸⁶⁸

Butler affirms that: 'A life has to be considered grievable, that is its loss has to be conceptualizable as a loss, for an interdiction against violence and destruction to include that life among those to be safeguarded from violence.'⁸⁶⁹ As such, 'Individuals deemed unworthy of grief exist outside this ethical calculus.'⁸⁷⁰ Butler considers that our role 'as scholars, activists, people in journalism' is to counteract 'all kinds of ways of minimizing and derealizing' the deaths of Palestinians, who 'are treated as less than human' to the extent that 'the loss of those lives is not marked and acknowledged as a loss;' to defy the denial of 'the equal grievability of lives.'⁸⁷¹ For Pascale Devette, it is creation that can fight the derealization⁸⁷² and 'fight against the indifference toward anonymity that threatens the memory.'⁸⁷³ Indeed, Butler reminds us of our moral duty to resist the dominant forms of representation which determine 'whom will 'remain faceless'' and thereby render us 'senseless before the lives we have eradicated.'⁸⁷⁴ In the words of Jacques Derrida: 'In short, in a world where the face is fully respected (a post-eschatological world) there can, by definition, be no war, and, in a world where there is no other, no epiphany of the face, there can be no war.'⁸⁷⁵

In the words of Alreer: 'It shall pass, I keep hoping. It shall pass, I keep saying. Sometimes I mean it. Sometimes I don't. And as Gaza keeps gasping for life, we struggle for it to pass, we have no choice but to fight back and to tell her stories. For Palestine.'⁸⁷⁶ In Phipps' *Prayers in Genocidal Times*, poems written in profound grief: 'Bless those who do not look away. / Bless those who look us in the eye.'⁸⁷⁷ An invocation that echoes silently as we meet the gaze of Zainab in this portrait.

⁸⁶⁵ UNESCO Chair Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts. Obituary: Dr Refaat Alareer. University of Glasgow. 8 December 2023.

https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/unesco/resources/statements/headline_1028970_en.html

⁸⁶⁶ Adriana Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, trans. William McCuaig (Columbia UP, 2008), 8.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸⁶⁸ Jishnu Guha-Majumdar, "Can The Human Speak? Voicing Vulnerability in Kafka and Cavarero." *Angelaki* 28, no. 5 (2023): 85.

⁸⁶⁹ Judith Butler. "My Life, Your Life: Equality and the Philosophy of Non-Violence." (The Gifford lecture at Glasgow University, October 1-3 2018.). Accessed 21 January 2021:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/events/lectures/gifford/previouslectures/judithbutler/>

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷¹ Judith Butler, "Judith Butler on Hamas, Israel's Collective Punishment of Gaza & Why Biden Must Push for Ceasefire." Interviewed by Amy Goodman with Nermeen Shaikh for Democracy Now. October 26, 2023.

https://www.democracynow.org/2023/10/26/judith_butler_on_hamas_israels_collective

⁸⁷² Devette, "Paying Attention to Affliction," 166.

⁸⁷³ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁸⁷⁴ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Justice*. (London: Verso: 2004), xviii.

⁸⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 106ff. Quoted in E. Wyschogrod, "Derrida, Levinas and Violence," in *Derrida and Deconstruction*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman, (Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1989), 190.

⁸⁷⁶ Alreer, "Gaza Asks: When Shall this Pass?" 26.

⁸⁷⁷ Alison Phipps, *Call and No Response: 30 prayers in genocidal times*. (Wild Goose Publications, 2024), 27.

Tursunay

Zainab's portrait was unveiled at my exhibition at the International Peace Institute in New York's inaugural 'Art for Peace' event in September 2022, where I met Tursunay. I was initially introduced to Tursunay by Rahima Mahmut, UK project director of the World Uyghur Congress and the chair of Stop Uyghur Genocide, whom I met at my exhibition at the UK Government Ministerial on Freedom of Religion and Belief in July 2022. One chance encounter or exhibition can often lead to a myriad of unexpected encounters. Rahima introduced me to Tursunay virtually, and we were fortunate to be able to meet in person when I travelled to New York that Autumn. Tursunay, accompanied by her friend and translator, travelled hours by bus to attend the exhibition and graciously agreed for me to paint her portrait.

The photograph that I painted Tursunay's portrait from was taken in the New York Public Library, bathed in the natural light of a large window. It felt like a sanctuary in the midst of the frenetic pace of the city outside. I did not ask her any questions about her ordeal, as her emotion was palpable. Since my visit to the US was fleeting and we did not have the leisure of time to build relationship, and we were in a public place, I refrained from any questions that might bring her distress to the surface. Additionally, Tursunay has been interviewed and had to recount her experiences for news outlets, including the BBC,⁸⁷⁸ on innumerable occasions.

This experience led me to reflect on questions pertaining to the somewhat contentious nature of silence. I posit that dominant Western perceptions of silence as passive, non-participatory and disengaged, do not necessarily always hold true.⁸⁷⁹ A silence can be 'fertile' rather than merely an arid emptiness or absence of communication.⁸⁸⁰ As Robert Weller writes silence is 'never simply the absence of speech that the logocentric paradigm sees as a problem. It comprises its own rich world of hopes and yearnings, some unsayable and others unthinkable. It is never simply non-speech, nor can it ever be reduced to speech.'⁸⁸¹ Annemarie Samuels considers silence to be on 'a continuum between articulation and non-articulation.'⁸⁸² As an artist researcher, I am curious how to acknowledge and respect the unspoken in conversation; to gently attend to the stories that are withheld; attune to the slightly longer pauses; hesitant, faltering words and fragmented, ambiguous gestures and embodied communication.⁸⁸³ Ana Dragojlovic

⁸⁷⁸ Matthew Hill, David Campanale and Joel Gunter. "'Their goal is to destroy everyone': Uighur camp detainees allege systematic rape." BBC News. February 2, 2021. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-55794071>

⁸⁷⁹ Feng Su, Margaret Wood & Robert Tribe, "'Dare to be silent': Re-conceptualising silence as a positive pedagogical approach in schools." *Research in Education* 116, no. 1, (2023): 29.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁸¹ Robert P. Weller, "Respecting silence: Longing, rhythm, and Chinese temples in an age of bulldozers," *History and Anthropology* 32, no. 4 (2021): 485.

⁸⁸² Annemarie Samuels, "Strategies of silence in an age of transparency: Navigating HIV and visibility in Aceh, Indonesia." *History and Anthropology* 32, no. 4 (2021): 500.

⁸⁸³ Merav Shohet and Annemarie Samuels, "Revisioning and Revisiting Silence and Narrative in Psychological Anthropology," In *Innovations in Psychological Anthropology*, ed. R. Lester (London: Routledge, 2024), 104.

and Annemarie Samuels term this ‘silent reverberations.’⁸⁸⁴ Creating space for silence can also be a gesture of care,⁸⁸⁵ a gentle expression of ‘respect; a quiet empathy; letting the other be.’⁸⁸⁶ This is especially important considering that silence can be indicative of a ‘haunting’ from the past uncannily, tangibly and irremediably present;⁸⁸⁷ alluding to an experience of unspeakable suffering that exceeds articulation.⁸⁸⁸ Indeed, narratives suffused by silences ‘can be as intriguing and telling, perhaps, as are the stories in which they are embedded or around which they circulate.’⁸⁸⁹ How do we attend to silences, resisting the need to fill them in, and at the same time ‘increase space for the ephemeral or marginalized stories we may hear when tracing silences.’⁸⁹⁰ Zehra Mehdi describes the importance of *listening to refusal* without reducing an individual to the ‘suffering subject’⁸⁹¹ whose subjectivity is ‘defined by the language of trauma and its silences.’⁸⁹²

Dragojlovic and Samuels remind us to ‘situate individuals and silences within historical contexts, as we continuously navigate the tension between inquiring into the social situation of intersubjective silence and letting the other’s silence be.’⁸⁹³ Indeed, the crimes against the Uyghur community are considered ‘among the most glaring, state-authorized atrocities in recent history,’⁸⁹⁴ as well as the most systematically silenced. The Uyghur minority have endured systematic suppression of their language, religion and culture; aerial photographs show clearly the destruction of mosques and other religious sites.⁸⁹⁵ Since 2018 there have been reports of an oppressive system of high-tech mass surveillance; slave labour; mass incarceration; forced organ harvesting, sexual torture, and Uyghur women have been sterilised or forced to terminate pregnancies.⁸⁹⁶ There are the stories of the few escapees from the ‘re-education’ camps, such as Tursunay, who have risked their lives to break the silence.⁸⁹⁷ Among the testimonials reported by the BBC,⁸⁹⁸ Tursunay testified that ‘women were removed from the cells ‘every night’ and raped by one or more masked Chinese men.’⁸⁹⁹ Tursunay added that she was subject to public humiliation, brutal

⁸⁸⁴ Ana Dragojlovic and Annemarie Samuels, “Introduction: Silent Reverberations: Potentialities of Attuned Listening.” *American Anthropologist* 125 (2023): 880.

⁸⁸⁵ Shohet and Samuels, “Revisioning and Revisiting Silence and Narrative,” 104.

⁸⁸⁶ Ana Dragojlovic & Annemarie Samuels, “Tracing silences: Towards an anthropology of the unspoken and unspeakable,” *History and Anthropology*, (2021): 1.

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁸ See Weller, “Respecting Silence: Longing, Rhythm, and Chinese Temples in an Age of Bulldozers,” 481–497.

⁸⁸⁹ Shohet and Samuels, “Revisioning and Revisiting Silence and Narrative,” 104.

⁸⁹⁰ Dragojlovic & Samuels, “Tracing silences,” 7.

⁸⁹¹ Joel Robbins, “Beyond the Suffering Subject: Towards an Anthropology of the Good.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 19, no. 3 (2013): 447–462.

⁸⁹² Zehra Mehdi, “Listening to Refusal: Exploring the Political in Psychological Anthropology,” in *Innovations in Psychological Anthropology*, ed. R. Lester, R (London: Routledge, 2024), 91.

⁸⁹³ Dragojlovic & Samuels, “Introduction: Silent Reverberations,” 882.

⁸⁹⁴ Ewelina U. Ochab, David Alton. *State Responses to Crimes of Genocide: What Went Wrong and How to Change It*. (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2022), 58.

⁸⁹⁵ Baroness Helena Kennedy. “Foreword,” in Ibid., ix – x.

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁷ Hill, Campanale and Gunter, ““Their goal is to destroy everyone.”

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid.

sexual violence and rape.⁹⁰⁰ Tursunay's story offers a glimpse into the tightly controlled and secretive world of Xinjiang, where an estimated one million Uyghur are interned against their will.⁹⁰¹

The Uyghur community have endured the silence of systematic oppression, shrouded in secrecy 'by the forces that exclude certain ideas, people and words from being spoken, visible, attended to, or even thought about.'⁹⁰² Such an experience of collective silencing can be suffocating, violent and a source of unimaginable existential pain.⁹⁰³ However, as Cheryl Glenn discusses 'Silence can deploy power; it can defer to power. It all depends'.⁹⁰⁴ Drawing upon this, Alexandra Fidyk suggests that 'it all depends' is a reminder to distinguish between different forms of silence,⁹⁰⁵ specifically between silence that is imposed and silence that is chosen.⁹⁰⁶ Indeed, 'silences that enable rhythm and ritual'⁹⁰⁷ can offer vital ways of coping with traumatic loss. In Part III I will reflect upon the 'rhythm and ritual' of the painting process as a contemplative, prayerful expression of silence. I consider the unique value of art in attending to and responding to silences and unspeakability; the experiences that underlie these preclude any adequate immediate verbal response.⁹⁰⁸ I will also reflect upon how the painting itself can silently evoke unspeakable and unspoken stories of longing and loss.⁹⁰⁹ A painting as such could be considered a 'silence made visible';⁹¹⁰ an 'affective witnessing' that refuses possession.⁹¹¹ Painting is a search for a way of speaking and responding that does not require words.

Silence Made Visible

*'Silence is not just the absence of noise, but a quietness that allows people
to open their eyes and ears for another world.'*⁹¹²

Serge Poliakoff

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid. Quoted in Ochab & Alton, *State Responses to Crimes of Genocide*, 71-2.

⁹⁰¹ Ibid., 66.

⁹⁰² Dragojlovic & Samuels, "Tracing silences," 417-25.

⁹⁰³ Ana Dragojlovic and Annemarie Samuels. "Silence". In *The Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. Felix Stein (2023). Available online <http://doi.org/10.29164/23silence>

⁹⁰⁴ Cheryl Glenn, *A Rhetoric of Silence* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 18.

⁹⁰⁵ Fidyk, "Attuned to silence: A pedagogy of presence," 116.

⁹⁰⁶ Su, Wood, & Tribe, "'Dare to be silent,'" 29-30.

⁹⁰⁷ Dragojlovic & Samuels, "Silence."

⁹⁰⁸ N. Slee, "Theological reflection *in extremis*: remembering Srebrenica," *Practical Theology* 12, no. 1 (2019): 31.

⁹⁰⁹ Dragojlovic & Samuels, "Silence."

⁹¹⁰ Teju Cole and Fazal Sheikh. *The Human Archipelago*. (Gottingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2018), 10.

⁹¹¹ Nicholas Chare, "In Her Hands: Affect, Encounter and Gestures of Wit(h)nessing in Shanawdithit's Drawings." *Parallax*, 26, no. 3 (2020): 287-90.

⁹¹² Serge Poliakoff Quoted in Stoller, "Silent love," 155.

Portraiture is in many ways a way of expressing silent, almost reverential, attention to the *unspeakable*. As written in *The Human Archipelago*: 'When confronted with the unspeakable, I desire the inability to speak. In the places where speech is the only option, all things appear speakable and something must be said. But must something be said?'⁹¹³ My attentive response to the unspeakable stories of the women I've had the privilege of working with is the tender process of portraiture painting. For Cavarero, 'The problem is always the one already identified by Arendt and Levi: how to speak of the unspeakable, how to express the horror that exceeds our categories of understanding and our standards of judgment?'⁹¹⁴

Irigaray affirms that, in the Western tradition, all too often we favour 'speaking to the detriment of keeping silent.'⁹¹⁵ Irigaray adopts an unusual stance on silence, and seeks to imbue it with a new, feminist meaning and resonance.⁹¹⁶ She writes that: 'silence is crucial for a being-with, without domination or subjection. It is the first dwelling for coexisting in difference. It is, or it creates, a place where we finally can listen to the other.'⁹¹⁷ The reclamation of the power of silence as a way to show respect for the other and to honour the 'unspeakability' of experiences that defy verbalisation and deny sense-making. An 'attentive silence' is a kind of absence that allows for the creation of a space whereby experiences are acknowledged,⁹¹⁸ resisting the temptation to try to fix, control or resolve.⁹¹⁹ Silence is an ethical gesture of hospitality and utmost respect. It is an invitation to embrace the discomfort of uncertainty and unknowability.⁹²⁰ Irigaray writes that 'silence safeguards things and the other in their withdrawal' which shields them in a 'veil of mystery.'⁹²¹ I contend that a portrait painted in a spirit of attentive silence similarly safeguards the mystery of the threshold of the other.

There is considerable emphasis in social justice oriented research on 'giving voice to' the 'voiceless', whereby giving voice to 'silent or silenced pasts' is deemed to be individually empowering as well as 'socio-politically redemptive for the ethnic/national collective.'⁹²² As such, perceived failure 'to give voice to' the subjugated and silenced is a charged and contested tension within research.⁹²³ Baroness Lister offered a critique to this effect in her book review for *Tears of Gold*: 'Given that the central "thread of intention" of [Hannah's] projects has been "the restoration of these women's voices", I did wonder why she did not use more of the words of the women themselves in the commentary

⁹¹³ Cole and Sheikh, *The Human Archipelago*, 86.

⁹¹⁴ Cavarero & Roncalli, "Narrative Against Destruction," 8.

⁹¹⁵ Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder. *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives*, (Colombia: Columbia University Press, 2016), 49-50.

⁹¹⁶ Stoller, "Silent love," 156.

⁹¹⁷ Irigaray & Marder. *Through Vegetal Being*, 49-50.

⁹¹⁸ Christopher Thomas, "Simone Weil: The Ethics of Affliction and the Aesthetics of Attention", *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 28, no. 2 (2020): 154.

⁹¹⁹ Chare, "In Her Hands: Affect, Encounter and Gestures of Wit(h)nessing," 289.

⁹²⁰ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, (London: Routledge, 2004). Referenced in Dragojlovic, & Samuels, "Introduction: Silent Reverberations," 882.

⁹²¹ Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 32. Quoted in Jessica Murray, "Reborn from Silence and Touch: Gender Violence in Southern Africa," In *Luce Irigaray: Teaching*, ed. Luce Irigaray and Mary Green, (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2008), 6.

⁹²² C. A. Kidron, "Emancipatory voice and the recursivity of authentic silence: Holocaust descendant accounts of the dialectic between silence and voice," *History and Anthropology* 32, no.4 (2021): 444.

⁹²³ *Ibid.*, 445-6.

that accompanies the portraits describing the women's situation.⁹²⁴ However, what of a notion of a 'restoration of voice' that creates space for silence? Indeed, 'giving voice' does not mean a requirement to speak, as Paulo Freire affirms: 'In dialogue one has the right to be silent.'⁹²⁵ I posit that it is important to question the assumed emancipatory practice and power of 'giving voice' in Western discourse,⁹²⁶ and to contemplate the liberatory possibilities of inhabiting silence. Mary Steedly suggests, 'we can look for other ways of telling a woman's story.'⁹²⁷

These portraits represent a gentle challenge to the logocentric nature of storytelling, and an invitation to *incline* towards the unspeakable. This reflects what Sontag calls the 'aesthetics of silence;' observing that 'the artist who creates silence or emptiness must produce something dialectical: a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or eloquent silence.'⁹²⁸ Dragojlovic and Samuels also affirm that artistic forms and visual expressions may 'articulate that which resists articulation in language.'⁹²⁹ A work of art can touch the viewer 'in a way that exceeds discourse'⁹³⁰ and 'may speak in ways that words cannot.'⁹³¹ Therefore, in order to be able to appreciate how visual art can communicate the unsayable, we need to move beyond dualisms of silence and speech.⁹³² A work of art gestures towards what Marjolein Oele calls 'silence as a transformative practice'⁹³³ that transcends the 'anthropocentric noise and violence characterized by institutional silencing.'⁹³⁴ In Sontag's words, 'as the prestige of language fails, that of silence rises.'⁹³⁵ Indeed, art is 'itself a form of mystification';⁹³⁶ an embrace of the mystery that shimmers beyond rationalism or articulation.

Silence is nonetheless a fraught, conflicted topic in contemporary culture. On the one hand there is the cultural mantra that, when faced with the facts of oppression, *silence is violence*; while on the other an active self-silencing

⁹²⁴ Baroness Ruth Lister. "A testimony to our shared humanity: Baroness Lister reviews 'Tears of Gold,'" *The House Magazine*. May 7, 2024. <https://www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/baroness-lister-reviews-tears-gold>

⁹²⁵ Paulo Freire in Ira Shor and Paulo Freire, *A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming Education* (London: Bergin & Garvey, 1987), 102. Quoted in Ledwith & Springett, *Participatory Practice: Community-Based Action for Transformative Change*, 135.

⁹²⁶ Byron J. Good, "Afterword: Haunted histories and the silences of everyday life," *History and Anthropology* 32, no. 4 (2021): 518-20.

⁹²⁷ Mary Steedly, *Hanging Without a Rope: Narrative Experience in Colonial and Postcolonial Karoland*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 177. Quoted in Dragojlovic & Samuels, "Tracing silences," 2.

⁹²⁸ Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence," in *Styles of Radical Will*, (London: Penguin, 2013), 10-11. Quoted in Elke D'hoker, "The Irish Short Story and the Aesthetics of Silence," in *Narratives of the Unspoken in Contemporary Irish Fiction*, eds. Caneda-Cabrera, M.T., Carregal-Romero, J. *New Directions in Irish and Irish American Literature*. (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2023), 90.

⁹²⁹ Dragojlovic & Samuels, "Silence."

⁹³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹³¹ *Ibid.*

⁹³² *Ibid.*

⁹³³ Marjolein Oele, "Dialectics of Silence for a Time of Crisis: Rethinking the Visionary Insights of Michel Serres and Simone Weil", *Research in Phenomenology* 52, no. 2 (2022): 192.

⁹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁹³⁵ Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence," in *Styles of Radical Will*, 21.

⁹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

is considered a pre-requisite for epistemic justice.⁹³⁷ Who has the right to speak, to tell these stories?⁹³⁸ Is it possible to find an alternative pathway between the ‘violence of silence’ and the ‘violence of speech’?⁹³⁹ Emmanuel Katongole suggests that silence can be ‘dynamic’ and a ‘form of agency’⁹⁴⁰ through which a prayer of lament can be ‘expressed in the ruins of shattered existence.’⁹⁴¹ Katongole describes the poetry of lament written by survivors in the wake of violence and devastation in the Congo as a form of resistance to ‘paralysing silence.’⁹⁴² For Hyab Yohannes, prayer, poetry and music are ‘ruderal epistemologies’⁹⁴³ that enable refugees to communicate their near-life experiences and to ‘call attention to their human dignity,’⁹⁴⁴ beyond the violence of the imposed silence of coloniality. A work of art – whether a poem, painting or piece of music – has the potential to embody a prayerful invitation to attend to the dignity of individuals who are subjected to epistemic and political muteness and to listen to their cry for justice.⁹⁴⁵

Silence as an intentional practice has been cherished in the contemplative Christianity, Zen Buddhism, Sufi Mysticism, and other religious traditions, drawing the practitioner towards a deeper place of silence beyond the limitations of logocentrism.⁹⁴⁶ The practice of silent, contemplative prayer is akin to the relational postures and attentive-listening outlined in this chapter. Sanderson offers a definition of prayer as ‘being with;’ namely, being with the Divine Other, with the other for whom one prays, and with oneself.⁹⁴⁷ In the following chapter I will consider my painting process in light of Simone Weil’s philosophy of attention – for Weil, ‘absolutely unmixed attention is prayer.’⁹⁴⁸ Through the attentive, careful brush strokes the stories of the women gradually emerge in these portraits, dignified through the silence of art.⁹⁴⁹ The portrait painting techniques that I have embraced have their origins in the prayerful traditions of iconography and early Renaissance sacred art. According to Natalie Carnes, in the icon there is a ‘word of silence

⁹³⁷ Christopher Thomas, “‘Silence is Violence’: Simone Weil on the Impossible Demands of Justice.” *The Philosophical Salon*. August 31 2020. <https://www.thephilosophicalsalon.larbpublishingworkshop.org/silence-is-violence-simone-weil-on-the-impossible-demands-of-justice/>

⁹³⁸ Rebecca Solnit, *Recollections of My Non-Existence*. (Granta Books: 2020), 78.

⁹³⁹ Eleanor Ruth Sanderson, *Embodying Freedom and Truth within the Compass Rose: Spiritual Leadership within the Revolution of Love*. In *Shame, Gender Violence, and Ethics : Terrors of Injustice*, ed. Lenart Škof,, and Shé M. Hawke, (Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2021), 175.

⁹⁴⁰ Emmanuel Katongole, *Born from Lament : The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa*, (Chicago: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 54.

⁹⁴¹ Ibid., 55.

⁹⁴² Ibid., 54.

⁹⁴³ Yohannes, “Autobiographic reflections on loss, longing, and recovery,” 325.

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid., 324.

⁹⁴⁵ Hyab Teklehaimanot Yohannes and Alison Phipps, “What Does it Mean to Move? Joy and Resistance Through Cultural Work in South–South Migration,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of South–South Migration and Inequality*, eds. Heaven Crawley and Joseph Kofi Teye (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2024), 143.

⁹⁴⁶ Cleo McNelly Kearns, “Irigaray’s Between East and West: Breath, Pranayama, and the Phenomenology of Prayer”, in *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, eds. Bruce Ellis Benson, and Norman Wirzba, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005; online edition, 2011), 104.

⁹⁴⁷ Sanderson, “The Prayers We Breathe,” 67.

⁹⁴⁸ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002), 117.

⁹⁴⁹ Yohannes & Phipps, “What Does it Mean to Move?,” 133.

– a negation of itself as visual form – built into its pictorial rhetoric.⁹⁵⁰ When I paint I tend to be absorbed in contemplative silence and prayerful longing that a ‘word of silence’ might imbue the painting. Robin Clair considers silence to be ‘restorative,’ a ‘sanctuary,’ ‘liberating,’ a sign of ‘respect,’ and a ‘sacred way of being.’⁹⁵¹ While for Iain McGilchrist, silence is nourishing ‘like water,’ and ‘the bedrock of creativity.’⁹⁵² Creativity, deep attendance, meditative stopping and reflection are concepts that characterize the spiritual gesture of ‘generative silence’⁹⁵³ and contemplative prayer. For Cleo McNelly Kearns, contemplative prayer is ‘communicative, intentional, embodied’ and yet, ‘grounded in silence, in expectation, and in openness to the coming of the other.’⁹⁵⁴ This silence creates the space into which ‘another voice may move.’⁹⁵⁵

In this chapter I have endeavoured to shine a light upon silent, attentive listening as a valuable way of thinking about portraiture painting in a more ethical, relational mode.⁹⁵⁶ Philosopher and theologian Josef Pieper asks: ‘Should there not be in silence, in listening silence, a drop of hope?’⁹⁵⁷ Painting-as-listening, in the words of Irigaray, ‘is a way of opening ourselves to the other and of welcoming this other, its truth and its world as different from us, from ours.’⁹⁵⁸ As such, it offers a bridge – or Weil’s *metaxu*, a concept that I will return to in the conclusion – to the threshold of ethical encounter with the other, that is that is ‘[n]ever fulfilled, always becoming.’⁹⁵⁹

⁹⁵⁰ Natalie Carnes, “How Love for the Image Cast out Fear of It in Early Christianity,” *Religions* 8, no. 20 (2017): 12.

Quoted in Christina C. Ananias, “Making Pain Incarnate: An Iconophilic Interpretation of Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*,” in *Theology, Modernity, and the Visual Arts*, eds. Ben Quash and Chloë Reddaway (Turnhout: Brepols, 2024), 42.

⁹⁵¹ Robin Clair, “Imposed Silence and the Story of the Warramunga Woman: Alternative Interpretations and Possibilities,” in eds. Malhotra S., Rowe A.C., *Silence, Feminism, Power*, (Palgrave Macmillan, London 2013), 85-93.

⁹⁵² Iain McGilchrist, “Theology, Art, and the Whole Brain: A Conversation with Dr. Jeremy Begbie and Dr. Iain McGilchrist,” Duke University, April 3, 2024, video 1:02:23 <https://divinity.duke.edu/media/theology-art-and-whole-brain>

⁹⁵³ Fidyk, “Attuned to Silence: A Pedagogy of Presence,” 117.

⁹⁵⁴ Kearns, “Irigaray’s Between East and West,” 116.

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁵⁶ Walker, *Slow philosophy: Reading Against the Institution*, 115.

⁹⁵⁷ Josef Pieper, *A Brief Reader on the Virtues of the Human Heart*, trans. Paul C. Duggan (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Books, 1994). 14.

⁹⁵⁸ Irigaray, “Listening, Thinking, Teaching,” 232.

⁹⁵⁹ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 21. Quoted in Walker, *Slow philosophy: Reading Against the Institution*, 80.

PART III: Attending to the Painting Process

Painting as Prayerful Attention

In the previous chapter I attended to the relational foundation of portraiture painting, specifically *attentive listening* and *aesthetic silence*. This exegetical chapter is a reflection upon the materiality of the painting process. The painting process itself could be considered a facet of attentive listening. Painting entails a responsiveness to the materials, the methods and to a certain extent a '*letting the painting speak*.' There is a delicate balance between structure and discipline, and creative freedom and spontaneity in painting. This entails a certain relinquishing of control, a humble searching and receptive openness; a vulnerability before the unknown.

To begin, I consider my painting process illuminated by Simone Weil's philosophy of *attention*. Attention is a generative, creative act; Indeed, when I am painting, generally speaking, I am absorbed in a highly attentive state, akin to prayer. Norman Wirzba considers the goal of prayer to be an 'attentive and faithful response to the world' and 'non-evasive and just regard for others.'⁹⁶⁰ I posit that the process of painting, specifically the practice of portraiture, helps one to cultivate an attentive disposition towards the world and a more sympathetic and authentic embrace of reality. Specifically, in this context, to encounter and engage with the reality and experiences of women from migratory and marginalised communities.

I have come to perceive portrait painting as a *gift of attention*, a way for the subjects to feel 'seen' and heard, that they may have never experienced before.⁹⁶¹ 'What is indispensable for this task,' Weil asserts, 'is a passionate interest in human beings, whoever they may be, and in their minds and souls; the ability to place oneself in their position and to recognize by signs thoughts which go unexpressed; a certain intuitive sense of history in process of being enacted; and the faculty of expressing in writing delicate shades of meaning and complex relationships.'⁹⁶² To paint a portrait requires an attempt to attune to the 'delicate shades of meaning' and complex reality beyond one's limited perspective. Weil writes that this involves putting oneself 'in [her] place while [s]he is speaking,'⁹⁶³ and therefore a certain 'holding-in-abeyance'⁹⁶⁴ of the self.⁹⁶⁵ Rowan Williams affirms that, an artist 'withdraws in the process of making' so that this 'complex interaction of presences can occur' in the work of art. This withdrawing is a

⁹⁶⁰ Norman Wirzba, "Attention and Responsibility: The Work of Prayer", in *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, eds. Bruce Ellis Benson, and Norman Wirzba, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2005; online edition, 2011), 89.

⁹⁶¹ Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, *The good high school: Portraits of character and culture*. (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 5.

⁹⁶² Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, trans. Arthur F. Wills (New York: Routledge, 1952), 190-192.

⁹⁶³ Simone Weil, "Human Personality, in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, ed. Siân Miles (London: Penguin, 2005), 91.

⁹⁶⁴ Mark Freeman, "Beholding and Being Beheld: Simone Weil, Iris Murdoch, and the Ethics of Attention," *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 43,no. 2 (2015): 165.

⁹⁶⁵ Stephanie Gehring, "Attention to Suffering in the Work of Simone Weil and Käthe Kollwitz," (PhD Thesis: Duke University, 2018), 2-3.

‘serious and costly dispossession of the artist in the work’⁹⁶⁶ and involves a ‘dual act of respect or reverence’ towards the subject.⁹⁶⁷ Artistic engagement with marginalised and migratory communities can be understood as a gesture of care, and inclination, the carving out of a space to aesthetically attend to another’s story.

The time taken with the women from migratory and marginalised communities whom I have painted, listening to their stories and cultivating relationship, is extended through the time spent painting their portraits, in the same spirit of attention and care. According to Anthony Gormley: ‘Time is the most precious, fugitive material.’⁹⁶⁸ Derrida’s words resonate; ‘the gift is not a gift, the gift only gives to the extent it gives time.’⁹⁶⁹ As such, ‘where there is gift, there is time.’⁹⁷⁰ The painstaking, time-consuming early Renaissance egg tempera and oil painting methods, and in some of the paintings the use of gold leaf, is integral to my ethics and aesthetics. These techniques are how I seek to respond to, honour and revere the stories I have heard.

The patience, receptivity and unrestricted attentiveness cultivated through making art invite us to embrace a different approach to time, one that is difficult to quantify. Williams affirms that learning the ‘habits of taking time and giving attention to other human subjects is, to put it ambitiously, a kind of love.’⁹⁷¹ He acknowledges that the term ‘love’ is ‘ambitious’ since it does not generally work particularly well in the field of political thought,⁹⁷² and is certainly rarely alluded to in academic contexts or considered a facet of rigorous research praxis. Love and the artistic creation that love inspires is seldom acknowledged in rational thought. Nonetheless, I posit that artistic and scholarly work, marked by attentive love, can contribute to establishing vibrant materialities of care. This encompasses the concept of caring and creative practices; the taking of time to listen, learn, and focus a prayer-like attention on the suffering of others. Murdoch writes: ‘I have used the word ‘attention’, which I borrow from Simone Weil, to express the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality.’⁹⁷³

An ethics of attention in portraiture of women from displaced communities, entails a commitment to a certain quality of ‘attentive beholding’⁹⁷⁴ of the other, as well as attentive listening. To *behold* is ‘a liminal word’, as Maggie Ross puts it, that gestures towards the ‘threshold of contemplation.’⁹⁷⁵ David Brooks considers this posture of beholding

⁹⁶⁶ Rowan Williams, “God and the Artist,” in *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love*, (London: Morehouse, 2005), 150.

⁹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁹⁶⁸ Anthony Gormley quoted by Kirsty Lang, “Antony Gormley: ‘I’ve got a sixth of my life left. I don’t want to waste it.’” *The Sunday Times*, April 7, 2024.

⁹⁶⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Kamuf, Peggy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, , 1992), 41. Quoted in Ryan Trimm, “Bestowing Past and Future: The Given as Foreclosure in Marion, Derrida, and Nancy.” *Poetics Today* 37, no. 2 (2016), 310.

⁹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷¹ Rowan Williams, “Solidarity, Rights and the Image of God: Ethics and Christian Anthropology.” *The Bampton Lectures* 2024. The University Church, Oxford. March 5, 2024, video, 50:47. <https://www.universitychurch.ox.ac.uk/content/bampton-lectures>

⁹⁷² *Ibid.*

⁹⁷³ Iris Murdoch, “The Idea of Perfection,” in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter Conradi. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), 327.

⁹⁷⁴ Freeman. “Beholding and Being Beheld” 160.

⁹⁷⁵ Maggie Ross, “Behold Not the Cloud of Experience,” in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition VIII*, ed. E. A. Jones (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013), 29-30.

a 'craft, a set of skills, a way of life;' and those who cultivate this craft as 'illuminators.'⁹⁷⁶ Illuminators, according to Brooks, 'shine the brightness of their care on people'⁹⁷⁷ and to offer a 'glowing gaze that is tender, generous, and receptive'⁹⁷⁸ and 'radiates respect.'⁹⁷⁹ The call to practice the 'ethical ideal' of 'Illuminationism'⁹⁸⁰ is resonant, in light of the parallel with the art of *illumination*, namely the use of gold leaf in manuscripts. For some of my portraits, such as of Zainab, I have tenderly applied gold leaf for this very reason; to shine or 'illumine' a respectful gaze upon the dignity of the other and to symbolise the sacredness of each and every life. However, together with Irigaray, I acknowledge that as artists, our manner of beholding the other is 'accompanied by a nocturnal luminosity.' For we are incapable 'of seeing the intimate core of the other, at least not directly. We can perceive something of this intimacy only through the light that the gestures, the words, the presence of the other radiates.'⁹⁸¹ Similarly, the portrait offers a partial glimpse of the 'nocturnal' reflected light of the other that is by no means comparable to the original source, like the moon that reflects the blinding radiance of the sun.

The word 'attention' is derived from Latin *ad-tendere*, and it means 'to stretch' (*tendere*) + 'towards' (*ad*); to lean towards, to reach out towards.⁹⁸² Attention, is emblematic of a posture toward the world.⁹⁸³ Ingold defines this attention as '*the stretch of life*' which encompasses: caring, waiting, being present, or coming into presence; and going along with others, or accompanying.⁹⁸⁴ In addition to these, he introduces the term 'longing'⁹⁸⁵ as 'imaginative remembering, or mnemonic imagining'⁹⁸⁶ and a way of presencing. Susan Cain writes that the word 'longing' is derived from 'the Old English *langian*, meaning 'to grow long,' and the German *langen* - to reach, to extend.'⁹⁸⁷ The etymology of the word 'portrait' is interesting in light of this, in Latin 'protrahere' and old French 'pourtraire' meaning to draw forth.⁹⁸⁸ This also evokes a sense of longing and yearning. The Bishop of Clogher described my portraits thus: 'Hannah brings across the women's undeniable beauty. She brings out their sense of *yearning*, I think, as you look and also their strength and their dignity in the midst of what can only be described as inhuman and terrifying ordeals.'⁹⁸⁹ This work of yearning, stretching towards another is also integral to the portrait painting process itself.

⁹⁷⁶ David Brooks, *How to Know a Person: The Art of Seeing Others Deeply and Being Deeply Seen* (Penguin: London, 2023), 31.

⁹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹⁸¹ Luce Irigaray, "Ethical Gestures Towards the Other," in *Building a New World*, ed. Luce Irigaray, and Michael Marder (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 265.

⁹⁸² Tim Ingold, *Anthropology and/as Education: Anthropology, Art, Architecture and Design* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 20.

⁹⁸³ Brooks, *How to Know a Person*, 33.

⁹⁸⁴ Ingold, *Anthropology and/as Education*, 21.

⁹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸⁷ Susan Cain, *Bittersweet: How Sorrow and Longing Make Us Whole*, (Penguin Random House, 2022), xxv.

⁹⁸⁸ Edmund Heier, "'The Literary Portrait' as a Device of Characterization", *Neophilologus* 60 (1976), 321. Quoted in Hans Maes, "What Is a Portrait?" *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 55, no. 3 (July 2015), 304.

⁹⁸⁹ Jessica Campbell, "Rotary-sponsored show of art by Hannah Rose Thomas helped share refugees's stories." *The Impartial Reporter*. July 1, 2021. <https://www.impartialreporter.com/news/19413053.enniskillen-rotary-sponsored-show-art-shares-refugeeess-stories/>

As such, Weil's attention is intimately connected with Cavarero's valorisation of *inclination*; the art of leaning towards the other in an attitude of care.⁹⁹⁰

Attention in the painting process requires a delicate balance of activity and passivity, in Weil's words 'a way of waiting.'⁹⁹¹ In French, *l'attente* (wait) and *l'attention* (attention) share the same etymology.⁹⁹² Edward Adamson echoes this sentiment, 'The artist is uniquely placed to embrace the enigma of commencing a journey to an unknown destination [...] He must have the patience to wait and contain the paradox that one must be passive, while at the same time being actively vigilant.'⁹⁹³ Stephanie Gehring describes the 'delicate balance' between a 'deliberate, active search, and a quiet receptive openness,'⁹⁹⁴ between 'artistic mastery' and a 'humble searching and receiving.'⁹⁹⁵ In this respect, the painting of a portrait is comparable to prayer. Weil concisely distils it: 'Attention is an effort, the greatest of all efforts perhaps, but it is a negative effort.'⁹⁹⁶ Indeed, a work of art gradually takes shape in the light of our patient receptivity, rather than muscular effort.⁹⁹⁷ Rowan Williams' description of prayer has parallels to the frame of mind and inner disposition that facilitates the unexpected convergence of a painting: 'You have to still your body and your imagination and let something flower [...] prayer is communion, it's that allowing the depth within and the depth outside to come together.'⁹⁹⁸ Therefore, the extent to which prayer is a 'welling-up of life and love directed towards that mysterious source' whereby one is almost 'carried on that 'rising water,' parallels can also be drawn to the intuitive, intimate and elusive painting process.

Marc Chagall often mused, 'When I paint, I pray;' and Henri Matisse considered his mindset 'close to that of prayer' when he created certain works of art.⁹⁹⁹ Indeed, according to Jonathan Anderson, scholars are increasingly interpreting the heightened attention and sensitivity inherent in the production or performance of art as subtly derived from 'long religious traditions of production, performance, and display, including contemplative prayer, liturgy, pilgrimage, penitence, and the presentational culture of relics and icons.'¹⁰⁰⁰ In the second half of this chapter, I will illuminate the prayerful and attentive materiality of my artistic process, in particular the repetitious, meditative, meticulous practice of egg tempera painting. Additionally, I reflect upon the portrait painting process as a resolute act of lamentation and remembering; a generative means to affirm the inherent dignity and intricate humanity of all persons, stand against violence and hold space for hope for a future of mutual respect, harmony and

⁹⁹⁰ Imperiale, Phipps & Fassetta, "On Online Practices of Hospitality in Higher Education," 636.

⁹⁹¹ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 113.

⁹⁹² Jacques Delaruelle, "Attention As Prayer: Simone Weil," *Literature Aesthetics* 13, no. 2 (2011): 20.

⁹⁹³ Edward Adamson and John Timlin, *Art as healing*. (London: Coventure, 1984), 4.

⁹⁹⁴ Stephanie Gehring, "Attention to Suffering in the Work of Simone Weil and Käthe Kollwitz," (PhD Thesis: Duke University, 2018), 46-7.

⁹⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁹⁶ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 61.

⁹⁹⁷ Cynthia R. Wallace, *The Literary Afterlives of Simone Weil: Feminism, Justice, and the Challenge of Religion*. (New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2024), 1.

⁹⁹⁸ Rowan Williams, "The Archbishop on Understanding Prayer," interview by Mark Tully for Something Understood on Radio 4, 13 September, 2009.

⁹⁹⁹ Aaron Rosen, *What Would Jesus See: Ways of Looking at a Disorienting World*, (1517 Media, 2023), 60.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Jonathan A. Anderson, *The Invisibility of Religion in Contemporary Art* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2025), 123.

justice.¹⁰⁰¹ At first, I will delve deeper into a rigorous approach to artistic research underpinned by Simone Weil's philosophy of attention.

Creative Rigour

Rigour is enshrined as one of the cornerstones of high-quality academic research. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the etymology of 'rigour' derives from the Latin *rigor* meaning rigid, unbending, inflexible, stiffly erect and frozen.¹⁰⁰² 'Rigour' in its research context finds its roots in Old French *rigueur*, meaning 'harshness' or 'severity';¹⁰⁰³ synonymous with an uncompromising systematic process that yields valid, objective conclusions.¹⁰⁰⁴ However, the rigorous evaluation criteria of traditional research notion jars with the sensitivity, creativity and versatility that mark artistic research of distinction.¹⁰⁰⁵ As such, artistic research is often at odds with the evaluation criteria of traditional academic research, with its quality metrics generally preferencing the Sciences.¹⁰⁰⁶ In the words of Jeremy Begbie, this means that the arts are required to be 'ceaselessly justified' and forever 'overshadowed by those mighty, titanic twins, science and technology.'¹⁰⁰⁷ Thus I propose that the concepts of 'attention,' 'care' and 'inclination' may be more appropriate to an understanding of *rigour* in artistic research. Artistic research holds its own *creative rigour*, that, in the words of Tim Ingold, can help to moderate the 'detached objectivity, cold logic and analytic rigour of science with something more subjective, attuned to feeling, empathy and holistic understanding.'¹⁰⁰⁸

Weil's concept of attention helps us to move beyond dualistic ways of perceiving the world enshrined in Western philosophy. Iain McGilchrist asserts that in the West, owing to Descartes' legacy, we have ended up 'prisoners'¹⁰⁰⁹ of the narrowly focussed, fixed, target-driven left hemisphere of the brain.¹⁰¹⁰ By contrast, the right hemisphere 'is turned outwards, attentive to whatever comes to it'¹⁰¹¹ and 'plays a significant part in imagination, creativity, the capacity for religious awe, music, dance, poetry, art, love of nature, a moral sense, a sense of humour and the ability

¹⁰⁰¹ Ibid., 123-4.

¹⁰⁰² Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "rigour | rigor (n.), Etymology," (Oxford University Press online edition, 2024).

¹⁰⁰³ John Wood, "The Culture of Academic Rigour: Does Design Research Really Need It?" *The Design Journal* 3, no. 1 (2000): 44-57.

¹⁰⁰⁴ M. Sandelowski, "Rigor or rigor mortis," *Advances in Nursing Science* 16, no. 2, (1993): 1.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁶ See Elliot Eisner, "The Lowenfeld Lecture 2008: What Education Can Learn from the Arts." *Art Education* 62, no. 2 (2009): 6-9.

¹⁰⁰⁷ J. S. Begbie, *Abundantly More: The Theological Promise of the Arts in a Reductionist World*. (Baker Academic, 2023), 16.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Tim Ingold, "Introduction: Knowing from the Inside," In *Knowing from the Inside: Cross-Disciplinary Experiments with Matters of Pedagogy*, ed. T. Ingold (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 13-14.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Iain McGilchrist, *Ways of Attending: How our Divided Brain Constructs the World* (Routledge 2018), 27.

¹⁰¹⁰ Iain McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions and Unmasking the World. Volume Two: What Then Is True?* (Perspectiva Press, 2021), 1285.

¹⁰¹¹ Ibid., 1196.

to change our minds' and our 'capacity for empathy.'¹⁰¹² The cultivation of the right hemisphere, through art for example, entails 'entering into an 'I-Thou', not just an 'I-It' relationship, with its subject; [...] valuing active receptivity, as well as not doing and not knowing. It involves sustaining attention, and stilling the inner voice, as in prayer and meditation.'¹⁰¹³ Indeed, the words 'prayer' and 'gaze,' are scattered throughout Socrates' *Phaedrus*, indicating his regard for their importance in his philosophy of education,¹⁰¹⁴ prior to the hegemony of Cartesian rationalism. For Weil, 'Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love.'¹⁰¹⁵

I posit that the arts can offer the opportunity to cultivate the kind of attention vital to both ethical and intellectual life.¹⁰¹⁶ Iris Murdoch acknowledges that art 'demands moral effort and teaches quiet attention (as any serious study can do).'¹⁰¹⁷ For Martha Nussbaum 'the artist's fine-tuned attention and responsiveness to human life is paradigmatic of a kind of precision of feeling and thought that a human being can cultivate, though most do not.'¹⁰¹⁸ Such works of art have the potential to offer their viewers 'a glimpse of a more compassionate, subtler, more responsive, more richly human world.'¹⁰¹⁹ Thus we begin to see that the artistic process provides a profound example of how to understand Weilian attention.¹⁰²⁰

Weil considers attention the 'real object' and 'sole interest' of studies.¹⁰²¹ This is an astonishing claim, that the value of all artistic and scholarly endeavours is how it trains us to attend, to be inclined to one another and the wider world. Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross affirm that in order to learn anything at all, 'one of the most important cognitive states' has to be present: attention.¹⁰²² Ingold posits that education is 'the practice of attention' rather than mere transmission of knowledge.¹⁰²³ Attention is a discipline that can be learned, fine-tuned and cultivated through practice. For Weil, the quotidian, mundane nature of schoolwork (such as solving a problem of geometry¹⁰²⁴) therefore contains a 'precious treasure,'¹⁰²⁵ for one learns to 'contemplate attentively and slowly'¹⁰²⁶ the

¹⁰¹² McGilchrist, *Ways of Attending*, 15.

¹⁰¹³ McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things*. Volume Two, 1211.

¹⁰¹⁴ Angelo Caranfa, "The Aesthetic and the Spiritual Attitude in Learning: Lessons from Simone Weil," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44, no. 2 (2010): 63-64.

¹⁰¹⁵ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr, (London: Routledge, 2002), 117.

¹⁰¹⁶ Sylvia Caprioglio Panizza, *The Ethics of Attention: Engaging the Real with Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil* (Routledge: 2022), 10.

¹⁰¹⁷ Iris Murdoch, "The Fire and The Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 453-4.

¹⁰¹⁸ Martha Nussbaum, *Love's knowledge: Essays on philosophy and literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 379. Quoted in Mark Freeman, "Listening to the Claims of Experience: Psychology and the Question of Transcendence," *Pastoral Psychol* 63 (2015): 329.

¹⁰¹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰²⁰ Thomas Pfau, "The Art and Ethics of Attention," *The Hedgehog Review* 16, no. 2. (2014), 34-42.

¹⁰²¹ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 57.

¹⁰²² Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross, *Your Brain On Art: How The Arts Transform Us* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2023), 138.

¹⁰²³ Ingold, *Anthropology and/as education*, 17.

¹⁰²⁴ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 58.

¹⁰²⁵ Ibid., 60.

¹⁰²⁶ Ibid., 59.

phenomena before one.¹⁰²⁷ Therefore, no matter the outcome, ‘a genuine effort of the attention’ is never wasted.¹⁰²⁸ The value of attention as an artistic discipline, I will consider with regards to the rigour of traditional painting techniques in the second half of this chapter.

First and foremost, attention is a precondition for seeing – and drawing or painting - people well.¹⁰²⁹ Indeed, as Josef Pieper writes ‘Before you can express anything in tangible form, you first need eyes to see.’¹⁰³⁰ The mere attempt to create an artistic form, such as a painting, requires the artist to attain a ‘more intimate achievement’ that of a ‘more receptive vision, a more intense awareness, a sharper and more discerning understanding, a more patient openness for all things quiet and inconspicuous, an eye for things previously overlooked.’¹⁰³¹ While perception has long been dismissed as an unreliable means through which to attain knowledge, for phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty and Marion, perception is endowed with especial importance.¹⁰³² Merleau-Ponty writes that not only does ‘perception awaken attention,’ indeed, ‘attention develops and enriches this perception.’¹⁰³³ Attention is actively creative; the type of attention we pay determines what it is we see.¹⁰³⁴ Attention (or its lack thereof) generates the basis of all thought and action. It relates to how we encounter the world. ‘Attention,’ for McGilchrist, ‘is a moral act: it creates, brings aspects of things into being.’¹⁰³⁵ Indeed, the quality of one’s artistic and scholarly work is intimately connected to the quality of one’s attention; attention is a way of conferring value.¹⁰³⁶

Weil, according to Joan Tronto, believed that an aptitude for attending is crucial for ethical agency.¹⁰³⁷ Attention is construed as a ‘difficult task, and indeed, a moral achievement.’¹⁰³⁸ The ‘task’ and ‘effort’ entails training our perception to focus outward in a movement towards reality,¹⁰³⁹ an inclination towards the other. A ‘background attitude of *attentiveness*’¹⁰⁴⁰ is cultivated by repeated acts of attention (such as the practice of art) and is a lifelong

¹⁰²⁷ S. Stone-Mediatore, “Attending to Others: Simone Weil and Epistemic Pluralism,” *Philosophical Topics* 41, no. 2 (2013): 81.

¹⁰²⁸ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 58.

¹⁰²⁹ Brooks, *How to Know a Person*, 33 .

¹⁰³⁰ Josef Pieper and Lothar Krauth, *Only the Lover Sings: Art and Contemplation*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 35-6.

¹⁰³¹ Ibid.,

¹⁰³² Mark McInroy, “Beholding the Radiant Invisible: The Incarnate Image in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Jean-Luc Marion,” in *Image As Theology: The Power Of Art In Shaping Christian Thought, Devotion, And Imagination*, eds. C.A. Strine, Mark McInroy, Alexis Torrance, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), 177.

¹⁰³³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes, (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 29.

¹⁰³⁴ McGilchrist, *Ways of Attending*, 16.

¹⁰³⁵ Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 133.

¹⁰³⁶ Caprioglio Panizza, *The Ethics of Attention: Engaging the Real with Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil*, 41.

¹⁰³⁷ Warren Heiti, “Further Reflections on an Ethics of Attending.” In *Attending: An Ethical Art*. Vol. 82. (McGill-Queen’s University Press 2021), 49.

¹⁰³⁸ Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries; A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1993] 2009), 17.

¹⁰³⁹ Silvia Caprioglio Panizza, “Attention,” in *The Murdochian Mind*, eds. S. Caprioglio Panizza & M. Hopwood (Routledge, 2022), 162.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Antony Fredriksson and Silvia Caprioglio Panizza, “Ethical Attention and the Self in Iris Murdoch and Maurice Merleau-Ponty,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 53, no. 1 (2022): 36.

endeavour,¹⁰⁴¹ and one that will influence how we relate to other people.¹⁰⁴² McGilchrist writes that attention is not simply another ‘cognitive function’ but it can be ‘[a]bsent, present, detached, engaged, alienated, empathic, broad or narrow, sustained or piecemeal.’¹⁰⁴³ Therefore, ‘how you attend to something — or don’t attend to it — matters a very great deal.’¹⁰⁴⁴

Ascendence of Distraction

As Benjamin identified, attention has become increasingly urgent and difficult in our ‘aesthetically saturated age’¹⁰⁴⁵ fraught with distraction and fragmentation. Weil’s philosophy of attention offers a luminous guide in an era replete with ‘attention deficits and surpluses, attention economies and attentional exhaustions.’¹⁰⁴⁶ Attention, according to Tim Wu has increasingly become a commodity,¹⁰⁴⁷ deliberately manipulated by market structures and technologies. Indeed, it was predicted that attention would become our most valuable resource¹⁰⁴⁸ and ‘the scarce commodity.’¹⁰⁴⁹ For Jonathan Crary, modernity is faced with ‘an ongoing crisis of attentiveness’¹⁰⁵⁰ in light of the ‘ascendence of distraction,’¹⁰⁵¹ precipitated by the meteoric rise of social media and digital technologies.¹⁰⁵² Joshua Cohen considers the cumulative, corrosive effect of pervasive distraction in our attentional environments to be the *fragmentation* of the contemporary subject.¹⁰⁵³

Can a painting offer a contemplative counterpoint to the so-called modern ‘tyranny of the image,’¹⁰⁵⁴ offering a moment of respite in a relentless sea of visual stimuli. We face a daily onslaught of images insinuated to manipulate us, hijack our attention and titillate our ‘inert, addicted gaze.’¹⁰⁵⁵ For Berger, our world is densely ‘saturated with

¹⁰⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴² Freeman, “Beholding and Being Beheld,” 161.

¹⁰⁴³ Iain McGilchrist, *Ways of Attending*, i.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴⁵ McInroy “Beholding the Radiant Invisible,” 177.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Cynthia R. Wallace. “Simone Weil’s Practice Of Attention” *Ploughshares*, November 18, 2021.

<https://Blog.Pshares.Org/Simone-Weils-Practice-Of-Attention/>

¹⁰⁴⁷ Tim Wu, *The Attention Merchants: How Our Time and Attention Are Gathered and Sold*. (New York: Knopf, 2016).

¹⁰⁴⁸ Michael H. Goldharbour. “The Attention Economy and the Net”. *First Monday* 2, no.4 (1997).

¹⁰⁴⁹ Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 287. Quoted in Jean-Michel Ganteau, *The Poetics and Ethics of Attention in Contemporary British Narrative* (Routledge, 2022), 6.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception/Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 13-14. Quoted in Ibid., 8.

¹⁰⁵¹ Ganteau, *The Poetics and Ethics of Attention*, 2-3.

¹⁰⁵² Thomas Pfau, “Foreword,” in *Image as Theology: The Power of Art in Shaping Christian Thought, Devotion, and Imagination*, eds. C.A. Strine, Mark McInroy, Alexis Torrance (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), 10.

¹⁰⁵³ Joshua Cohen, *Distracted: Dispatches from a Land of Distraction* (New York: Random House 2018). Quoted in Ganteau, *The Poetics and Ethics of Attention*, 6.

¹⁰⁵⁴ See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. James K. A. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 60–61.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Ibid.

images', social media and digital technologies 'feed' us visual stimulation with unprecedented efficiency and urgency, transmitted even from across the globe 'with lightning speed.'¹⁰⁵⁶ The inevitable exhaustion and anxiety perpetuated by the barrage of information from headlines, advertisements, television screens and the smart phones at our fingertips has been well documented. I suggest that art-making offers an opportunity to reclaim and re-habituate our capacity for attention. Indeed, the work of art serves to represent, in the words of T. S. Eliot, a 'still point of the turning world.'¹⁰⁵⁷

However, the contemporary art scene is not immune to the 'ascendance of distraction'¹⁰⁵⁸ and consumerism-driven visuals.¹⁰⁵⁹ Makoto Fujimura writes, 'On the whole, contemporary art does not encourage us to slow down, contemplate and consider the historical link beyond modernism.'¹⁰⁶⁰ Geoff Mulgan agrees that 'much contemporary art has become fast: it seeks to make an immediate impression, to grab the viewer in the intense competition for attention in a digital cornucopia.' Such art 'clamours for attention', seeking 'instant recognition and fame,'¹⁰⁶¹ offering entertainment and diversion rather than contemplative depth. Nonetheless, I suggest the practice of more traditional forms of art - such as painting - can offer a moment of repose from a densely-saturated present. Indeed, Mulgan writes that in order 'for new perspectives to have impact, we need time to absorb and digest. [...] This has to mean art that is slow.'¹⁰⁶²

Thomas Pfau asks what would it mean to revive a 'culture of iconic seeing,' that has been eclipsed in contemporary society by the ubiquitous and unavoidable presence of images.¹⁰⁶³ Can we reclaim the value of art from its status as 'a commercialized simulacrum?'¹⁰⁶⁴ I am curious whether a work of art can still offer 'a focus for humble, patient, and undesigning contemplation' and 'a creative focus for prayer and ethically responsible engagement of others.'¹⁰⁶⁵ In the words of Seamus Heaney, it amounts to a search for verbal (and visual) icons; 'symbols and images adequate to our predicament.'¹⁰⁶⁶ I contend that the painting process itself defies the frenetic consumption of images and engenders a stance of contemplative engagement.¹⁰⁶⁷

¹⁰⁵⁶ John Berger, *Steps Towards a Small Theory of the Visible* (Penguin: 2020) 76-77.

¹⁰⁵⁷ T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton (No. 1 Of 'Four Quartets') in *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909–1950*. (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1952) 119.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Ganteau, *The Poetics and Ethics of Attention*, 2-3.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Paul Crowther, *What Drawing and Painting Really Mean: The Phenomenology of Image and Gesture* (London: Routledge, 2017), 156.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Makoto Fujimura, *Refractions: A Journey of of Faith, Art and Culture*. (New York: Tyndale House Publishers Inc., 2009), 143.

¹⁰⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶² Ibid.

¹⁰⁶³ Pfau, "Foreword" in *Image as Theology*, 10.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Seamus Heaney, quoted in Ray Foster, *On Seamus Heaney* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 57. Quoted in Neil MacGregor, "A Search for Symbols and Images Adequate to Our Predicament," in *Theology, Modernity, and the Visual Arts*, eds. Ben Quash and Chloë Reddaway (Turnhout: Brepols, 2024), 191.

¹⁰⁶⁷ C.A. Strine, Mark McInroy, Alexis Torrance. "The Place of the Image," in *Image As Theology: The Power of Art in Shaping Christian Thought, Devotion and Imagination*, eds. C.A. Strine, Mark McInroy, Alexis Torrance (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), 15.

Slowing Down and Making Sanctuary

In light of this, I consider my painting practice a response to Báyo Akómoláfé's appeal: 'The Times are Urgent. Let's Slow Down'¹⁰⁶⁸ and his reminder that 'our work is to make sanctuary.'¹⁰⁶⁹ It is an acknowledgement that the way we respond often merely entrenches the problem, reinforcing the same realities and rationalities that we are frantically trying to escape;¹⁰⁷⁰ in Irigaray's words we 're-produce the same story.'¹⁰⁷¹ It is by slowing down that we might notice a new pathway hidden in 'the obviousness of the familiar.'¹⁰⁷² Akómoláfé invites us to listen deeply and to allow space to meet one another 'in the ecstasy of encounter.'¹⁰⁷³ In the words of Karen Barad, 'there are no solutions; there is only the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly.'¹⁰⁷⁴ If we want to learn to live 'justly' and to cultivate our 'response-ability,'¹⁰⁷⁵ we are invited to slow our pace and alter our relationship to time.¹⁰⁷⁶

Slowing down is paradoxically the most effective way to address today's most urgent crises.¹⁰⁷⁷ Indeed, 'a different kind of posture or gesture is required if peace is at stake.'¹⁰⁷⁸ It is what Akómoláfé calls 'post-activism,'¹⁰⁷⁹ an

¹⁰⁶⁸ Báyo Akómoláfé and M. Benavides, "The Times are Urgent: Let's Slow Down," *The Times are Urgent: Let's Slow Down*. Retrieved from *Bayo Akomolafe* (personal website), 2022. <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/the-times-are-urgent-lets-slow-down>

¹⁰⁶⁹ Báyo Akómoláfé, "Why I Sang in the Dungeons: A Prophecy to End the Year 2023," Retrieved from Ibid., December 28, 2023. <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/why-i-sang-in-the-dungeons-a-prophecy-to-end-the-year-2023>

¹⁰⁷⁰ Báyo Akómoláfé, "Coming to the Edges. Keynote Speech at the 55th Convocation Ceremony of the California Institute for Integral Studies," California Institute of Integral Studies, June 6, 2023. <https://www.ciis.edu/news/bayo-akomolafe-addresses-class-2023-coming-edges>

¹⁰⁷¹ Irigaray, Luce, and Carolyn Burke. "When Our Lips Speak Together." *Signs* 6, no. 1 (1980): 69.

¹⁰⁷² Báyo Akómoláfé, "Let us slow down: Acting in turbulent times," Retrieved from *Bayo Akomolafe* (personal website), November 9, 2018. <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/let-us-slow-down-acting-in-turbulent-times>

¹⁰⁷³ Báyo Akómoláfé with Cecilie Surasky and Professor Sa'ed Atshan, "Across lines: Grief. A LAMENTATION." A virtual event hosted by the Othering and Belonging Institute and the Democracy and Belonging Forum. November 16, 2023.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Karen Barad, *Meeting The Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. (Duke University Press, 2007. Quoted in Báyo Akómoláfé, "What would a Mountain do? Activism in an Age of Entanglement," Retrieved from *Bayo Akomolafe* (personal website), November 5, 2015 <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/what-would-a-mountain-do-activism-in-an-age-of-entanglement>

¹⁰⁷⁵ Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the trouble*. (Duke University Press, 2016), 131.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Jacqueline Rose. *The Plague* (Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2023), 62.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Brooks, *How to Know a Person*, 12.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Akómoláfé with Surasky and Atshan, "Across lines: Grief. A LAMENTATION."

¹⁰⁷⁹ Báyo Akómoláfé "What I mean by Post-activism," November 13, 2020. Retrieved from *Bayo Akomolafe* (personal website), <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/what-i-mean-by-postactivism>

invitation to making sanctuary ‘as an artistic vocation,’¹⁰⁸⁰ which involves ‘pouring libations’¹⁰⁸¹ and ‘making kin with the world.’¹⁰⁸² Artists working to attentively engage with others and with the complexity of the world actively contribute to ‘making sanctuary.’ Norman Wirzba reflects on the Benedictine maxim ‘to work is to pray,’ whereby a care-full approach to one’s artistic work can increase an awareness of the ‘sanctity’ of the world and enable ethical engagement with others.¹⁰⁸³ The creation of art is an example of what Irigaray describes as a spiritual gesture, that leads to ‘concentration, to communication with the world, to gratitude and to beatitude.’¹⁰⁸⁴ Catherine Moon describes art-making as having parallels to prayer.¹⁰⁸⁵ In this thesis I contend that painting *is* prayer. From personal experience, painting opens a space for ‘receptiveness to grace,’¹⁰⁸⁶ especially during periods of grief or distress.

Friedrich Nietzsche invites us to take a step back from the frenetic pace of this ‘age of “work”’ and to embrace the ‘venerable art’ that asks us to ‘take time’ and ‘become still’ in order to ‘become slow’. ‘This art,’ Nietzsche reminds us, ‘does not so easily get anything done’ and teaches us to listen, to attend ‘slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers.’¹⁰⁸⁷ Indeed, the slow practice of art-making ‘with delicate eyes and fingers’ offers a gentle yet effective resistance to the economy of attention.¹⁰⁸⁸ The materials that I choose intentionally require me to slow down, to attend. I use traditional early Renaissance egg tempera and oil painting techniques on gesso panels, and occasionally gilding with gold leaf. The attention is evident in the time-consuming preparation of the paint itself, using natural mineral, organic and earth pigments. These are pulverized by hand and mixed with the traditional binder of egg yolk or oil. In Derrida’s words painting offers the ‘resistance of ritual.’¹⁰⁸⁹ Suzi Gablik laments that ‘[w]e live in a culture that has little capacity or appreciation for

¹⁰⁸⁰ Báýò Akómoláfé, “The Children of the Minotaur: Democracy & Belonging at the End of the World.” *The Othering and Belonging Institute’s Democracy and Belonging Forum*. February 7, 2024.

<https://www.democracyandbelongingforum.org/forum-blog/the-children-of-the-minotaur>

¹⁰⁸¹ Báýò Akómoláfé, “Coming Down to Earth,” March 11 2020 Retrieved from *Bayo Akomolafe* (personal website), <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/coming-down-to-earth>

¹⁰⁸² Báýò Akómoláfé, “Making Sanctuary: Hope, Companionship, Race and Emergence in the Anthropocene.” Keynote Speech, March 15, 2019. Retrieved from *Ibid.*, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/making-sanctuary-hope-companionship-race-and-emergence-in-the-anthropocene>

¹⁰⁸³ Wirzba, “Attention and Responsibility: The Work of Prayer”, 97-99.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Luce Irigaray, “Introduction: On Old And New Tablets,” trans. H. Bostic, in *French Feminist Thought: Critical Perspectives*, eds. M. Joy, K. O’Grady and J. L. Poxon (London: Routledge, 2003), 2.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Catherine H. Moon, “Prayer, sacrament and grace,” In *Spirituality and art therapy: Living the Connection*, eds. M. F. Hansen (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2001), 32.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Irigaray, “Introduction: On Old And New Tablets,” 3.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 5. Quoted in Michelle Boulous Walker, *Slow Philosophy: Reading Against the Institution*. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, Plc., 2017), 77.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Ganteau, *The Poetics and Ethics of Attention*, 169.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 178.

meaningful ritual'¹⁰⁹⁰ and appeals for a 'reenchantment of art.'¹⁰⁹¹ Rowan Williams reminds us that ritual 'anchors, [...] aligns, harmonises, relates.'¹⁰⁹²

Painting is a meditative, contemplative practice involving innumerable translucent layers of paint to build up the finished portrait, which can take weeks to complete. The tiny particles of the hand-ground pigments capture, reflect and refract light, yielding subtle iridescent effects and mesmeric depth to the painting's surface.¹⁰⁹³ It is a process that cannot be rushed and requires patience, allowing the painting to evolve gradually; building up translucent layers of egg tempera to model light and shadow before adding glazes of colour. The attentive repetitiousness of the brushstrokes imbues the painting with a prayerful and ritualistic quality. As a medium, tempera is ideally suited to portraiture; the innumerable translucent layers of paint lend itself to conveying the subtle nuances of colour in the human face. Each cumulative layer of paint is affected and modified by the underlying tones, evoking a luminosity, depth and sense of mystery. There is a sense of renewed awareness and clarity afforded by this meditative approach; one is compelled to slow down and tune into deeper, quieter rhythms of existence. For Irigaray this time-consuming process is 'a sort of insurrection against compulsory culture'¹⁰⁹⁴ that allows space for wonder, grace and re-enchantment.¹⁰⁹⁵

The practice of artistic creation can be considered a profound expression of undivided, disciplined, intentional *attention*. Weil writes that this '*attention*, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer.'¹⁰⁹⁶ I posit that the attention painting requires is akin to a spiritual discipline, it involves a 'a ritual preparedness, a call to attendance and reverence.'¹⁰⁹⁷ Prayer and contemplation are woven into the work. The transparent tempera layers have to be applied delicately, the brushstrokes gently alighting the panel. If applied harshly or hastily, the underlying layers can easily lift off. As such the time-consuming methods and gestures are emblematic of a gentle resistance. Indeed, the economy of attention that prioritises efficiency, utility, and speed,¹⁰⁹⁸ no longer takes precedent. The sustained attention that a painting requires is deliberate and focused, and is difficult to maintain under conditions of acceleration, urgency and distraction. Patient attention is key to resisting the fractured attention prevalent in contemporary society and to responding with care, fortitude and grace, especially when ambushed by the incomprehensible.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 2.

¹⁰⁹¹ Ibid., 11. Quoted in Ronald R. Bernier and Rachel Hostetter Smith, "Introduction", in *Religion and Contemporary Art: A Curious Accord*, eds. R. R. Bernier and R. H. Smith, (Routledge, 2023), 1-2.

¹⁰⁹² Rowan Williams, "The Archbishop on Understanding Prayer," 13 September, 2009, interview by Mark Tully for Something Understood on Radio 4.

¹⁰⁹³ Fujimura, *Refractions: A Journey of Faith, Art and Culture*, 167.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Luce Irigaray, *To Be Born* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 59.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 49. Quoted Sophie M. Bourgault, "Attentive listening and care in a neoliberal era: Weilian insights for hurried times." *Ethics & Politics* 18, no. 3 (2016): 311.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002), 117.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Genese Grill, "Re-Materialization, Remoteness, and Reverence: A Critique of De-Materialization in Art." *The Georgia Review* 70, no. 3 (2016): 580.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Crary, *Suspensions of Perception/Attention*, 88.

Attending to Grief

There are times when one has no choice but to slow down. There are times when the world one once knew begins to unravel, and time is brought to a shuddering halt.¹⁰⁹⁹

As I write these words, with the Gaza Strip reduced to rubble, I often lose sight of whether or why this work is meaningful or has value. I have often turned to painting as the only way that I know how to express that which is too sacred, too raw for words to embrace. I question the value of art in times like these - where there is rage; hatred; destruction; claims and counter claims; the senseless loss of life; the hopelessness and despair. Indeed, can art offer a space for contemplation of the face of the other; to behold the other in her humanity, in all her complexity, subtlety and beauty?

It is not the first time that I have felt this way. I remember it from the first time I returned from Jordan, at the height of the Syrian refugee crisis; from hearing the stories of Yazidi, Rohingya and Nigerian women, survivors of conflict related sexual violence; in the wake of the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan and systematic erosion of the rights of women and girls; the shock of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. And now, along with so many people around the world, I have been grappling with helpless, inexpressible grief for the incalculable losses since October 7 2023, as Israel continues its relentless bombardment of Gaza. Yet again I question *why make art*. I struggle to shake off the doubt that these gentle, attentive gestures make even the slightest difference. In the wake of incomprehensible violence and suffering the slow work of art-making often seems unforgivably futile and asthenic.

All the more so when, only a few weeks later, the geopolitical grief was compounded by debilitating private pain following the suicide of my younger brother.

In the words of Akómoláfé, 'we need room to grieve today.'¹¹⁰⁰ For months I had no choice but to surrender to the nonlinear, liminal territory of grief; journeying into what it is like to glimpse at the world dimly through tears.¹¹⁰¹ I was thrust into a visceral awareness of the reality of loss that so many of the women whom I have painted know all too well. As Akómoláfé acknowledges: 'We are exposed: we are no longer alone. Our shared kinship is grief, our ground is tears.'¹¹⁰² Perhaps an embrace of the raw honesty of grief will generate perceptual shifts and to see the world differently, and to remember that 'loss exceeds us all, and loss has touched every one of us.'¹¹⁰³ In honouring each other's grief - and our own - we may illuminate a path forward.¹¹⁰⁴ As Donna Haraway writes, 'renewed

¹⁰⁹⁹ Jacqueline Rose. *The Plague*, 63-4.

¹¹⁰⁰ Báyo Akómoláfé, "Coming Down to Earth," March 11, 2020. Retrieved from *Bayo Akomolafe* (personal website), <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/coming-down-to-earth>

¹¹⁰¹ Akómoláfé with Surasky and Professor Sa'ed Atshan, "Across lines: Grief. A LAMENTATION."

¹¹⁰² Ibid.

¹¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

generative flourishing’ and ‘biological-cultural-political-technological recuperation and recomposition’ is only possible through ‘mourning irreversible losses.’¹¹⁰⁵ This moment calls for tender, generous formulations of grief.

Akómoláfé observes that grief ‘forces new postures of reverence and irreverence,’¹¹⁰⁶ beyond a rectilinear stance; whereby, with heads bowed and bodies heavy with sorrow, we are compelled to surrender to the vulnerable posture of Cavarero’s *inclination*.¹¹⁰⁷ For perhaps there is a gift hidden in grief; an invitation to learn new, generous choreographies of possibility, carve pathways of solidarity, and move away from seemingly endless cycles of violence, trauma, and dehumanisation.¹¹⁰⁸

There is potential for art to reveal a sense of common vulnerability and shared humanity that allows for healing and hope. It is this possibility that ‘something different, something even beautiful, can be born in the midst of the fires,’¹¹⁰⁹ that encouraged me to pick up my paintbrush again. Painting became the process whereby I gradually began to reconstruct a world of meaning that had been irrevocably shattered by loss.¹¹¹⁰ The ritualistic, rhythmic brushstrokes allow space for kindness; imperceptibly the cold and harsh inner terrain of my heart and mind slowly softened and thawed. Tentatively I began to hope again. Painting became a prayer when I was unable to pray in words.

Eleanor Sanderson’s expression ‘writing as weeping’ honours the personal embodiment of her research; acknowledges the tears shed while writing.¹¹¹¹ These tears affirm the profound experience of ‘being-with’ the community members who shared the ‘considerable grief and joys in their lives.’¹¹¹² Similarly, to return to the concept of my painting as prayer, I consider this closer to a prayer of *lamentation*. Anna Westin writes that lament can be experienced as a ‘phenomenological moment’ that facilitates transformation.¹¹¹³ I can testify to the tears that sometimes fell while painting. Tears for the transformative encounters with the women and the privilege of bearing witness to their stories, intermingled with tears of personal pain. This does not mean that the paintings are to be perceived as self-portraits nor are they a projection of my pain onto the women whom I have painted. However, I consider that my grief has almost served as a bridge – or in Weilian terms, *metaxu*. My personal experience of the loneliness of loss has led to an inexplicable desire to *incline*, stretch, reach towards the other. I attempt to bear witness to the incomprehensibility of their grief in the midst of the incomprehensibility of my own. Westin writes: ‘Lament, in this way, verbalises the unsayability of suffering, placing it exterior to the self. As the ‘language of silence’,

¹¹⁰⁵ Donna Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making kin.” *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2015): 159.

¹¹⁰⁶ Akómoláfé with Surasky and Atshan, “Across lines: Grief. A LAMENTATION.”

¹¹⁰⁷ Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*. (California: Stanford University Press 2016).

¹¹⁰⁸ Akómoláfé with Surasky and Atshan, “Across lines: Grief. A LAMENTATION.”

¹¹⁰⁹ Báýò Akómoláfé, “When the world becomes solid: To be correct is to lost the plot,” October 18, 2023. Retrieved from Bayo Akomolafe (personal website), <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/when-the-world-becomes-solid>

¹¹¹⁰ Robert A. Neimeyer & Barbara E. Thompson, “Meaning making and the art of grief therapy,” in *Grief and the expressive arts: Practices for creating meaning*, eds. B. E. Thompson & R. A. Neimeyer, (London: Routledge, 2014), 4.

¹¹¹¹ Eleanor Sanderson, “Emotional engagement in the context of development and spirituality research,” *Emotion space and Society* 5, no. 2 (2012): 128.

¹¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹¹³ Anna Westin, *Embodied Trauma and Healing: Critical Conversations on the Concept of Health*, (Routledge, 2022), 148.

lament enables consolation.’¹¹¹⁴ As such, in the portrait painting process there is a dual witnessing and perhaps even a shared consolation.

Witnessing the resilience and strength of these women gave me the courage to face my own grief, and the fear that I would be utterly debilitated by sorrow. Indeed, I learned to allow this sorrow to carve out a deeper capacity for vulnerability and sensitivity, that I hope will softly illuminate my paintings in the years to come. From experience, I attest that art can help one to move beyond an internalised preoccupation with private pain, to connect with others and the wider world. We cannot know the ripples that will emanate from a work of art created from raw vulnerability; nor the lasting imprint that each tender brushstroke might leave upon another’s heart. Leon Battista Alberti wrote in his treatise *On Painting* that a ‘painting will move the soul of the beholder’ when the painting ‘clearly shows the movement of his own soul [...] we weep with the weeping, laugh with the laughing, and grieve with the grieving.’¹¹¹⁵

We do not know how to begin to resolve current crises, whether personal or global, or how to bring about a more beautiful and just world.¹¹¹⁶ Rebecca Solnit explains that: ‘Hope locates itself in the premises that we don’t know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act.’¹¹¹⁷ Indeed, for Berger, painting is ‘an act of resistance instigating hope.’¹¹¹⁸ Research suggests that grief, when used as a generative catalyst for art, can provide moments of clarity, consolation and a connection to common human truths to help with navigating the liminal landscape of loss.¹¹¹⁹ Through this process one learns how to hold grief and grace; sorrow and joy together.

Perhaps one’s attentive artistic practice can help to illuminate, however falteringly, what Weil describes as the ‘darkest paths’¹¹²⁰ and Wittgenstein the ‘darkness of this time.’¹¹²¹ We need gold that shimmers in dark places.

¹¹¹⁴ Ibid., 152.

¹¹¹⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and Sculpture: the Latin Texts of De Pictura and De Statua*, ed. And trans. Grayson, C. (Phaidon Press, 1972), 80. Quoted in David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese, “Motion, emotion and empathy in esthetic experience,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 11, no. 5 (2007). 197.

¹¹¹⁶ Báýò Akómoláfé, “An Oríkì for Our Time: Reflections on Activism, Change and Wonder,” February 27, 2015. Retrieved from Bayo Akomolafe (personal website) <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/an-oriki-for-our-time-reflections-on-activism-change-and-wonder>

¹¹¹⁷ Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*, (Edinburgh and London: Canongate, 2016) xii.

¹¹¹⁸ John Berger, *Steps Towards a Small Theory of the Visible* (Penguin, 2020), 89.

¹¹¹⁹ Rebecca Arnold, “Grieving artists: Influences of loss and bereavement on visual art making,” *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 82, (February 2023) 102001.

¹¹²⁰ Simone Weil, *Seventy Letters*, trans. by Rush Rhees (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 131. Quoted in Philip Wilson, “Learning to Look,” in *Between Wittgenstein and Weil: Comparisons in Philosophy, Religion, and Ethics*, ed. J. Manzi, (London: Routledge, 2023), 57-9.

¹¹²¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 4. Quoted in Ibid.

A Homage to Dust

Is there a generativity in grief and a gift to be unearthed in hopelessness? Akómoláfé describes 'hopelessness' as the place of 'surrender and deep humility: the point of descent where we come down to earth.'¹¹²² The etymology of the word humility is the Latin *humus* meaning 'earth' or 'soil'; and also *humanity*. It brings to mind the Biblical creation story, reminding us that 'we are of the soil';¹¹²³ "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shall return."¹¹²⁴ The experience of grief and loss also remind us of this shared human experience – that we are of the soil and return to it.¹¹²⁵ For the tempera underpainting for my portrait paintings, I grind pigments that are literally taken from the earth, from *dust*. This ritualistic process is one of grounding, of coming 'down to earth.' Akómoláfé pays 'homage to dust,'¹¹²⁶ invoking dust's 'invitation to us to learn alongside the many others how to live in the midst of the fade.'¹¹²⁷ It could even be considered symbolic of a commitment to co-creating a 'commons marked by grief.'¹¹²⁸ The 'dust' that forms the pigment that I paint with comprises of 'roving communities of remnants of human and animal hair, grains, pollen, pulverized stars, fibres, minerals, pollen, and dust mites' and 'unsettles' superficial boundaries, borders or essentialised identities.¹¹²⁹ Such is the 'generativity of dust.'¹¹³⁰

It was only the chemical revolution of the nineteenth century that led to synthetic colours being readily available.¹¹³¹ At this time the artist's palette expanded exponentially, each decade bringing new synthetic colours; cobalt blue, lemon yellow, artificial ultramarine, and so forth. However, the quality significantly decreased as a result of the proliferation of reproducible, artificial colours.¹¹³² Pre-Raphaelite painter William Holman Hunt lamented, 'In the old days the secrets were the artist's; now he is the first to be kept in ignorance of what he is using.'¹¹³³ Indeed, before there were tubes of paint, there was the earth, there was *dust*, 'muddy and rich with promise.'¹¹³⁴ For tens of thousands of years, artists have manipulated minerals and sourced soil to compose their palettes, and were personally responsible (or their apprentices) for preparing their paint.¹¹³⁵ Artists have 'dug and extracted, ground

¹¹²² Akómoláfé, "Coming Down to Earth."

¹¹²³ Báýò Akómoláfé, *These Wilds Beyond our Fences: Letters to my Daughter on Humanity's Search for Home*. (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2017), 28.

¹¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹¹²⁶ Ibid., 21-2.

¹¹²⁷ Ibid., 22.

¹¹²⁸ Akómoláfé with Surasky and Atshan, "Across lines: Grief. A LAMENTATION."

¹¹²⁹ Akómoláfé, *These Wilds Beyond our Fences*, 20-21.

¹¹³⁰ Ibid., 22.

¹¹³¹ Michael Taussig, *What color is the sacred?* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 48.

¹¹³² Ibid.

¹¹³³ William Holman Hunt, "The Present System of Obtaining Materials In Use By Artist Painters, As Compared With That of the Old Masters," *Journal of the Society of Arts* 28 (23 April 1880), 492. Quoted in Melissa R. Katz, "William Holman Hunt and the 'Pre-Raphaelite Technique'", in *Historical Painting Techniques, Materials, and Studio Practice: Preprints of a Symposium University of Leiden, The Netherlands, 26–29 June 1995*, eds. Arie Wallert, Erma Hermens, and Marja F. J. Peck (Marina Del Rey, Calif.: Getty Conservation Institute), 160.

¹¹³⁴ Chloe Ashby, *Colours of Art: The Story of Art in 80 Palettes*, (Frances Lincoln Publishing, 2022), 15.

¹¹³⁵ Ibid., 40.

and bound, and the resulting fiery ochres, dusty coals, dark taupes and bright whites are the foundational colours of all art.’¹¹³⁶ The lumps of raw material have to be, in some cases, cleaned, cooked and purified; finely ground to lose their grittiness and mixed with resins, egg or oil, to be made into paint.¹¹³⁷ It is a laborious, time-consuming process.¹¹³⁸

There is something grounding and yet mysterious in the ritual of traditional artistic practices and the alchemical process of making paint from raw materials of the earth – plants, rocks, soil, eggs and oil. The painting literally becomes a site of what Akómoláfé describes as ‘emergent transformation.’¹¹³⁹ George Steiner reminds us that, ‘the arts are wonderfully rooted in substance, in the human body, in stone, in pigment, in the twanging of gut or the weight of wind on reeds. All good art and literature begin in immanence. But they do not stop there;’¹¹⁴⁰ they also open onto transcendence. This is a reminder of ‘continuum between temporality and eternity, between matter and spirit, between ‘man’ and ‘the other.’’¹¹⁴¹ Some have interpreted the alchemical aspiration of transfiguring a base metal into gold as symbolic of a mystical desire to cultivate a transcendental mode of being.¹¹⁴² Carl Jung, in describing the journey of the soul, drew parallels between human minds and the alchemical transformation of base metals: ‘everything is caught in the trance of becoming.’¹¹⁴³ Similarly that transmutation of natural pigments into works of art is a reminder both of our connection to the earth and also that alchemical transformation is possible. The process of painting is one of metamorphosis where colours are alchemically combined layer by layer. For James Elkins, ‘alchemy is the best and most eloquent way to understand how paint can mean: how it can be so entrancing, so utterly addictive, so replete with expressive force, that it can keep hold of an artist’s attention for an entire lifetime.’¹¹⁴⁴

As an artist working with the raw, natural materials from the earth, it is a reminder that the sacred is not that distant after all. These methods offer an invitation to cultivate a respect for the earth and to uncover the sacredness that imbues even the ordinary and unremarkable (such as the soil beneath our feet).¹¹⁴⁵ This work is ‘sacramental in nature’¹¹⁴⁶ and offers a tangible example of what Martin Buber describes as ‘hallowing the everyday.’¹¹⁴⁷ According to Buber, ‘everything wants to be hallowed— to be brought into holiness.’¹¹⁴⁸ The term ‘hallowing’ suggests a

¹¹³⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹¹³⁷ Ibid., 40.

¹¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹¹³⁹ Akómoláfé, “Coming Down to Earth.”

¹¹⁴⁰ George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 227.

¹¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹¹⁴² Thomas J. J. Altizer, “Mircea Eliade and the Recovery of the Sacred.” *The Christian Scholar* 45, no.(1962): 286.

¹¹⁴³ Akómoláfé, *These Wilds Beyond our Fences*, 20.

¹¹⁴⁴ James Elkins. *What Painting Is* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 6-7.

¹¹⁴⁵ Akómoláfé, *These Wilds Beyond our Fences*, 33.

¹¹⁴⁶ Rachel Hostetter Smith, “Rogue Priests: Ritual, Sacrament, and Witness in Contemporary Art”, in *Religion and Contemporary Art: A Curious Accord*, eds. R. R. Bernier and R. H. Smith, (Routledge, 2023), 175-6.

¹¹⁴⁷ Kenneth Paul Kramer, *Martin Buber’s Spirituality: Hasidic Wisdom for Everyday Life*, (Rowman & Littlefield Unlimited Model, 2011), 51.

¹¹⁴⁸ Martin Buber, *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism*, trans. Maurice Friedman (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 148. Quoted in Ibid., 110.

profound shift in one's orientation and inclination towards reality, that reveals a reverence for everything and everyone whom one encounters.¹¹⁴⁹ These methods of making therefore constitute a 'bridge' between the 'immanent experience of life' and the transcendent; revealing its inherent value and significance.¹¹⁵⁰ In Samuel Coleridge's words, it is to learn to awaken 'the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom', and direct it to 'the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure.'¹¹⁵¹ Perhaps we might even chance upon colours never seen before as the 'whole thus suddenly takes on a new hue.'¹¹⁵²

Daniel Thompson writes that, in medieval painting, for example, the palette was treated 'almost like a collection of precious stones, to be grouped in the painting with as much regard for their intrinsic beauty as possible.'¹¹⁵³ The medieval painter, was acutely 'aware of the special qualities of his particular colours as a musician of the special qualities of instruments and voices'¹¹⁵⁴ and 'the separate pigments tend to be exhibited with emphasis, almost like jewels in a complicated setting.'¹¹⁵⁵ The Italian Renaissance artist Cennino D'Andrea Cennini considered it advisable for an artist to be generous with raw materials of intrinsic worth, as it is good for one's business, as well as befitting for the sacred and devotional purposes that the paintings served.¹¹⁵⁶ I suggest that the use of valuable materials – gold leaf and semi-precious stones such as lapis lazuli – is to attribute value to one's work as a painter, and also to the subject.

My background in iconography painting has influenced my approach and method. Orthodox Christians also treat the very process of making an icon with weighty reverence, as a sacred process in itself. Indeed, this is evident in the ritual preparation of the paint itself; serving to prepare and still one's mind and heart to begin the painting. The medium of egg tempera was first used in the Byzantine icon tradition, originating from the 5th and 6th century AD. The Byzantine icon is a profound aesthetic tradition imbued with meaning, significance and prayer at every stage of the painting process.¹¹⁵⁷ The iconographer was expected to prepare himself spiritually for painting an icon, through prayer and meditation upon the subject to be portrayed in canonical texts.¹¹⁵⁸ Icons are painted in strict accordance to established principles, methods, and stylistic conventions, in obedience to the Orthodox tradition handed down in a master-apprentice relationship over the centuries.¹¹⁵⁹ Every brushstroke and each choice of colour is imbued

¹¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 56.

¹¹⁵⁰ Hostetter Smith, "Rogue Priests," 175-6.

¹¹⁵¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (Salt Lake City: Project Gutenberg, 2004) Non-paginated. Quoted in Ganteau, *The Poetics and Ethics of Attention*, 27-8.

¹¹⁵² Adrienne von Speyor, *Light and Images: Elements of Contemplation*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 40.

¹¹⁵³ Daniel V. Thompson, Jr. *The Practice of Tempera Paintings: Materials and Methods*. (Dover Publications Inc: New York 1962), 76-77.

¹¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁵⁶ Cennino D'Andrea Cennini, "Chapter LXXXVI," in *The Craftsman's Handbook "Il Libro dell'Arte,"* trans. Daniel V. Thompson, Jr. (New York: Dover Publications. 1954), 60. Referenced in Ibid., 84.

¹¹⁵⁷ Stephanie Rumpza, "Crossing the Visible or Crossing it Out? Jean-Luc Marion's Icon as Window into Heaven." *Horizons* 49, no.1 (2022): 23.

¹¹⁵⁸ Titus Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West*. (Kentucky: Fons Vitae 1967), 98.

¹¹⁵⁹ Lisa J. Deboer, *Visual Arts in the Worshipping Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 48.

with significance and is emblematic of what Andrew Chignell characterizes as a 'liturgical attitude.'¹¹⁶⁰ The ritualistic, prayerful practice of iconography invites a stance of humble contemplation and ethically responsible engagement with others.¹¹⁶¹

In the early Italian Renaissance, egg tempura continued to be used by artists including Sandro Botticelli, Fra Angelico and Fra Lippo Lippi. However, by the fifteenth century it had been superseded by oil painting. A significant shift in occurred in the Renaissance from an understanding of the icon as an embodiment of the sacred whereby no attention is bestowed upon the traditional artisan, to a notion of art as 'primarily the embodiment of the creative idea of an artist' – or 'inspired genius' – who now signs his work.¹¹⁶²

In contemporary art, portraiture as a genre has evolved and changed over the centuries and therefore there is no strict formula for portrait artists to adhere to.¹¹⁶³ Portraits have been created in various media from painting to sculpture, photography or film, and even materials as Marc Quinn's self-portrait in blood.¹¹⁶⁴ I contend that attending with care to the materials and methods used, and taking the time to prepare the paints and pigments, is a tangible way of ascribing value, for time and attentiveness are finite resources.¹¹⁶⁵ In other words, the value of a painting is not simply found in the technical or aesthetic quality of the artistic end product, but in the process and the attitude whereby it was made.¹¹⁶⁶

Underpainting and Overpainting

The materials and the traditional methods embraced in my painting process are evocative of my commitment to 'reverent time-taking' and 'attention-giving.'¹¹⁶⁷ For the majority of these portraits I combined an underpainting in egg tempera and overpainting in oil, known as the 'Flemish mixed technique'.

¹¹⁶⁰ Andrew Chignell referenced in Hostetter Smith, "Rogue Priests", 172-3.

¹¹⁶¹ Thomas Pfau, "Preface" in *Image as Theology*, 11.

¹¹⁶² Eyolf Østrem, "The Ineffable": Affinities between Christian and Secular Concepts of Art," In *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and Their Representation in the Arts, 1000-2000*, eds. Nicoletta Isar, Niels Henrik Petersen, Christian Cluver, and Nick Bell, (Brill, 2004), 276.

¹¹⁶³ Hans Maes, What Is a Portrait?, *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 55, no. 3 (July 2015): 303-6.

¹¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁶⁵ Sophie Bourgault, "Epistemic injustice, face-to-face encounters and caring institutions," *International Journal of Care and Caring* 4, no. 1(2020): 95.

¹¹⁶⁶ Bruno Trentini, "Institutionalization and autonomy of art: Can socially engaged art be institutionalized?" *Labyrinth* 22, No. 2 (2020): 26.

¹¹⁶⁷ Rowan Williams. "Solidarity, Rights and the Image of God: Ethics and Christian Anthropology." The Bampton Lectures 2024. The University Church, Oxford. March 5, 2024, video, 50:47.
<https://www.universitychurch.ox.ac.uk/content/bampton-lectures>

The painting process invariably begins with the preparation of the panels. I apply between eight to ten layers of traditional 'gesso' made from rabbit skin glue carefully mixed with whiting to the MDF panels. The panels are then sanded down to create a smooth, white and absorbent surface. This serves to both seal the surface of the panel prior to painting and produce a luminous effect. For the rays of light penetrate the substratum of the paint layers and reflect the white gesso surface, creating a sense of light emanating from within.¹¹⁶⁸ According to Leonardo DaVinci a 'pure white ground' is essential to enhance the beauty of colours; he draws a comparison with a 'coloured pieces of glass [...] interposed between the eye and the luminous air' only visible without 'shadowy air or other darkness.'¹¹⁶⁹ When we see a colour we are actually seeing the dance of light and whether a surface is refracting, reflecting, and absorbing light.

Once the gesso panel is ready, the next stage is to transfer the pre-prepared linear portrait drawing onto the panel, before beginning the egg tempera underpainting. For the portrait drawing I work from photographs and preliminary sketches rather than from life, since the tempera painting process is painstakingly slow a subject would be required to sit for innumerable hours.



In order to make egg tempera, the ground mineral or vegetal pigment is mixed fresh each day with egg yolk - carefully squeezed out of the sac - and combined with white vinegar as a preservative. The egg is then watered down, in order for the preliminary layers tempera to be applied as thin and translucent as possible. Tempera as a painting medium is relatively unusual, having been generally eclipsed by modern oil painting.¹¹⁷⁰ Tempera can only be laid on in thin layers, and has a very fast drying time, therefore, it is not a spontaneous medium and requires a more methodical and craftsman-like approach.¹¹⁷¹ Any attempt to speed up the process and hastily apply thicker, fewer layers of paint, make it impossible to realise harmonious tonal transitions and or the unique opalescence and luminosity the result of repeated translucent layers of a single tone.¹¹⁷² Tempera is considered, in the words of Vytlačil and Turnbill a 'strict discipline,'¹¹⁷³ and, as such, it is a technique 'closely resembling' the Old Masters.¹¹⁷⁴ As Albus writes, the layer

¹¹⁶⁸ Aidan Hart, *Techniques Of Icon And Wall Painting: Egg Tempera, Fresco, Secco*, second edition (Gracewing, 2015) 130-3, 143.

¹¹⁶⁹ Leonardo DaVinci, *Leonardo On Painting*, ed. and trans. by Martin Kemp and Margaret Walker, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 71.

¹¹⁷⁰ Thompson, *The Practice of Tempera Paintings*, 1-3.

¹¹⁷¹ Ibid., 2-3.

¹¹⁷² Ibid., 107.

¹¹⁷³ Ibid., 1-3.

¹¹⁷⁴ Vaclav Vytlačil and Rupert Davidson Turnbill, *Egg Tempera Painting, Tempera Underpainting, Oil Emulsion Painting – A Manual of Technique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), 2-3.

technique of the Old Masters, ‘allows the maximum of detail to be depicted within suspended time.’¹¹⁷⁵ The multilayering created a ‘crystalline, transparent density’¹¹⁷⁶ evident in enlargements of cross sections from paintings made this way which ‘look like a landscape of geological layers of different shapes and colours.’¹¹⁷⁷ Therefore, I suggest that tempera painting is peculiarly suited to a methodology underpinned by Simone Weil’s philosophy of attention.



In early Renaissance tempera painting, the first layers of the underpainting are in *verdaccio* (a mixture of yellow ochre, raw sienna, ivory black and zinc white). The greenish colour is evocative of olives or a dry Tuscan riverbed. The colour was chosen to evoke the subtle undertones of the skin, darkest in the shadows. The painting is built up gradually in multiple layers using a ‘dry brush’ technique. Once the *verdaccio* underpainting is established, one can begin to model the highlights, delicately stippling over the surface with thin semi-transparent layers of white mixed with a touch of yellow ochre. As Cennini writes, ‘pick out the forms of the face, making it gradually lighter, in a careful way,’ with a touch of pure white ‘any little relief more pronounced than all of the rest, such as there would be over the eyebrow, or the tip of the nose.’¹¹⁷⁸ Looking closely, you can see the *verdaccio* underpainting shimmering through the layers along the contours of forms.¹¹⁷⁹ Then a dark tone with a touch of black is used

to ‘outline the upper edge of the eyes,’ the lashes, nostrils, brows, the hair, to accentuate these features.¹¹⁸⁰ Once the tonal underpainting is refined, it is time to begin applying glazes of colour. I tend to begin with a limited palette of primarily earth colours, and then expand this to subtly introduce more vibrant mineral colours such as lapis lazuli, azurite, malachite, lead tin yellow, Naples yellow, lead red and vermillion. Delicate half-tones and fine nuances are reserved for the final stage of the painting.¹¹⁸¹

In the under- and over-painting process, I generally adhere to the principles of the progression of dark to light (also key to iconography and the Fayoum portraits) and the interplay of translucency in the shadows and opacity in the highlights. The beauty of the overpainting is dependent upon the supporting contrast in the underpainting, in

¹¹⁷⁵ Anita Albus, *Art of Arts* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 286.

¹¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹¹⁷⁸ Cennini, *The Craftsman's Handbook*, 94.

¹¹⁷⁹ Melanie E. Gifford, Dina Anchin, Alexandra Libby, Marjorie E. Wieseman, Kathryn A. Dooley, Lisha Deming Glinsman, John K. Delaney, "First Steps in Vermeer's Creative Process: New Findings from the National Gallery of Art," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 14, no. 2 (2022):): n.p.

¹¹⁸⁰ Cennini, *The Craftsman's Handbook*, 94.

¹¹⁸¹ Vytlačil and Turnbull, *Egg Tempera Painting*, 15-16.

accordance to the principle of opposites.¹¹⁸² For example, the contrast of applying a warm final glaze over a cool colour, or cool over warm.¹¹⁸³ The dark colours, such as the shadowy contours of the face, are rendered more transparent; whereas the pastose effects are reserved for the highlights. This contrast of thick and thin paint avoids the monotony of a uniform surface to the painting.¹¹⁸⁴

Colour is all about relationships; a colour is influenced by the other colours around it and subtly shifts and changes according to the tone and hue beneath.¹¹⁸⁵ DaVinci writes that 'When a transparent colour lies over another colour differing from it a compound colour is composed which differs from each of the simple colours from which it is compounded.'¹¹⁸⁶ Each and every pigment has a different body and hue, therefore it 'refracts reflects, and absorbs light in a different way.'¹¹⁸⁷ There is a dynamism in the interaction between the tonal underpainting beneath and the glazes of colour above. The interplay of light and shadow is a dance, and seems to emanate from within the layers of paint itself. I suggest that depth of presence of the painting is accentuated by the continuous layering of glazes and colours.¹¹⁸⁸ The art of medieval and early Renaissance Europe is distinctly characterized by minute attention to detail and striking luminosity of colour, achieved by the use of traditional materials and laboriously layering brushstrokes of transparent and semi-transparent paint.¹¹⁸⁹

Paul Crowther reminds us that 'This layering itself is meaningful—both for the artist's sense of evolving the painted image, and for the spectator, who knows that the picture has such origins. For both parties, painting evokes the plenitude of Being in its many-layered aspects.'¹¹⁹⁰ I have found the rhythm of the repetitive brushstrokes soothing, for it encourages a detached and contemplative approach and helps me to enter into a flow state of 'deep but effortless involvement'¹¹⁹¹ while painting. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi characterizes his theory of flow as one whereby 'people become so involved in what they are doing that the activity becomes spontaneous, almost automatic; they stop being aware of themselves as separate from the actions they are performing.'¹¹⁹² However, one must remain attentive to the quantity, viscosity, texture, and transparency of the paints.¹¹⁹³ At the latter stage of the painting process, one's attention is more engaged and vigilant, as even the smallest brush stroke can alter the entire expression in the face, or the emotion in the eyes.

¹¹⁸² Ibid.

¹¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹¹⁸⁵ Helen A Fielding, "This Body of Art: The Singular Plural of the Feminine," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 36, no. 3 (2005): 277-292.

¹¹⁸⁶ Leonardo DaVinci. *On Painting*, 71.

¹¹⁸⁷ Albus, *Art of Arts*, 65.

¹¹⁸⁸ Crowther, *What Drawing and Painting Really Mean*, 66-7.

¹¹⁸⁹ Katz, "William Holman Hunt and the 'Pre-Raphaelite Technique,'" 161.

¹¹⁹⁰ Crowther, *What Drawing and Painting Really Mean*, 66-7.

¹¹⁹¹ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 49. Quoted in Heiti, *Attending: An Ethical Art*, 56.

¹¹⁹² Ibid.

¹¹⁹³ Crowther, *What Drawing and Painting Really Mean*, 63-4.

The stippling motion of the searching, overlapping brushstrokes and innumerable small touches gradually build the image; in Irigaray's words, 'urging it to unfold without a show of force.'¹¹⁹⁴ Contemporary artist Aliza Nissenbaum says: 'A lot of painting, because of its materiality and because of its gesture and texture, almost feels like the presence of another person.'¹¹⁹⁵ The painting process is akin to a process of 'approaching' and 'the work of acquaintance'¹¹⁹⁶ that builds towards 'a climax of recognition'¹¹⁹⁷ one brushstroke at a time. The gesture and character of the brush strokes bring energy to a painting, and are in part determined by the brush selected, the nature of the pigment, the chosen medium, and the physicality of the pictorial ground and surface.¹¹⁹⁸ Choices made with regard to medium—whether tempera, oil, acrylic or watercolour for example—acts as a 'horizon of being,'¹¹⁹⁹ each artistic medium creating a 'universe of its own.'¹²⁰⁰ As such, the way the work is made becomes the focus of meaning.¹²⁰¹ Irigaray contemplates the 'specific materials and gestures'¹²⁰² of painters and the 'different use of vision, in particular in relation to touch and the nature of touch.'¹²⁰³

The medium of oil paint has a distinctly different character to tempera, due to its slow-drying properties that made possible the addition and blending of colours.¹²⁰⁴ Tempera as a medium dries fairly quickly, and once laid down, it cannot be altered except by over-painting. The oil medium, by contrast, has a protracted drying time that allows paint to be applied in glazes. The paint can be removed, softened, blended and refined to a degree of subtle tonal gradation and visual illusion unprecedented in tempera.¹²⁰⁵ It is a more malleable, spontaneous medium and the artist is able to blend tonal contrasts more easily and thereby achieve greater naturalism and 'quasi-photographic effects.'¹²⁰⁶ Thompson concedes that egg tempera painting cannot accomplish a comparable 'depth of finish, immediacy, realism or the dramatic possibilities of contrast available to an artist working in oil paint.'¹²⁰⁷ However, the successive layers of paint, if applied thickly, have a tendency to sink into one another, resulting in a surface that is somewhat 'greasy or clogged up with pigment' and a quality of 'muddiness' in the darker tones.¹²⁰⁸

¹¹⁹⁴ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 214. Quoted in Hilary Robinson, "Approaching Painting through Feminine Morphology." *Paragraph* 25, no. 3 (2002): 98.

¹¹⁹⁵ Aliza Nissenbaum in "Painting from Life," Art21 Extended Play series, August 2, 2023, video 13:58 <https://art21.org/series/extended-play/>

¹¹⁹⁶ Didier Maleuvre, "Rembrandt, or the portrait as encounter," in *Imaging Identity: Media, Memory and Portraiture in the Digital Age*, ed Melinda Hinkson (ANU Press: 2016), 31-32.

¹¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹⁹⁸ Crowther, *What Drawing and Painting Really Mean*, 56-7.

¹¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²⁰² Luce Irigaray, "To paint the invisible," *Continental Philosophy Review* 37 (2004): 403.

¹²⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰⁴ Elisabetta Toreno, *Netherlandish and Italian Female Portraiture in the Fifteenth Century: Gender, Identity, and the Tradition of Power*, (Amsterdam University Press, 2022), 145.

¹²⁰⁵ Crowther, *What Drawing and Painting Really Mean*, 58-9.

¹²⁰⁶ Toreno, *Netherlandish and Italian Female Portraiture*, 119.

¹²⁰⁷ Thompson, *The Practice of Tempera Paintings: Materials and Methods*, 2-3.

¹²⁰⁸ Vytlačil and Turnbull, *Egg Tempera Painting, Tempera Underpainting*, 11.

The discovery of oil painting is generally attributed to the Flemish artist and alchemist Jan van Eyck in the fifteenth century.¹²⁰⁹ According to the Tuscan art historian Giorgio Vasari, van Eyck stumbled upon the 'secret' while dabbling in alchemy, and a visiting Sicilian subsequently brought the formula back to Italy and it rapidly spread throughout Europe, supplanting tempera.¹²¹⁰ As such, the Renaissance witnessed unprecedented advances in verisimilitude. However, one of the distinct disadvantages of oil is the darkening, yellowing or cracking of the painted surface with time.¹²¹¹

For the portraits painted for this thesis, I've experimented with combining the advantages of both mediums - tempera and oil - for the first time, known as the 'Flemish technique.' In this method egg tempera is used for the tonal underpainting, and glazes of colour in oil for the over-painting, in order to achieve a more naturalistic finish. Once the underpainting is established in tempera, it must be sealed with shellac – resin secreted by a female lac bug from the forests of India and Thailand – before beginning with oil. Once the shellac sealant has been left to dry for several days, the veils of coloured glazes in oil can be applied on to the underpainting. The natural pigments are hand ground and mixed with linseed, walnut or poppy oil, using a drop or two of cobalt siccative to speed up the drying process. The technique of combining the transparent layers of the egg tempera underpainting with the rich depth of oil paints creates a jewel-like quality to the colours. The interplay of the different mediums evokes a sense of elusive mystery and depth.

For Vaclav Vytlacil and Rupert Turnbull the 'ideal medium' would 'possess the freedom and ease of handling of tempera, the richness and softness of oil, the precision of detail of tempera, the blending and luminosity of oil, the airy transparency of tempera, the pastose solidity of oil, the permanence of tempera, the clean surface of tempera, the personal temperamental quality of oil, and last, but not least, the cheapness of tempera.'¹²¹² Therefore, the closest one can come to this imaginary 'ideal' medium is the process of combining tempera with oil: This means to complete 'the major part of the painting in the tempera underpainting' and to reserve the oil paints for the 'final effects only,'¹²¹³ thereby preserving the luminosity and chromatic quality of the materials.¹²¹⁴

After shining a light upon these traditional materials and techniques, I will delve into describing the painting process for each of the individual portraits in detail. I will endeavour to elucidate the 'liquid complexity of thoughts that accompany painting' inscribed 'in, and of, and through the paint.'¹²¹⁵

¹²⁰⁹ Ashby, *Colours of Art: The Story of Art in 80 Palettes*, 29.

¹²¹⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹¹ Vytlacil and Turnbull, *Egg Tempera Painting, Tempera Underpainting*, 6.

¹²¹² Ibid.

¹²¹³ Ibid.

¹²¹⁴ Ibid., 66.

¹²¹⁵ Elkins, *What Painting Is*, 74.

Maria and Nadiia

(Tempera on panel, 2022)

My portrait painting of Maria and Nadiia, a mother and daughter from Ukraine, is intentionally evocative of the symbolism and painting techniques used in Byzantine iconography and the early Renaissance. I chose to embrace the soft delicacy of the tempera palette used by the Renaissance artists Fra Angelico, Fra Lippo Lippi and Botticelli.



Indeed, Irigaray articulated the need for visible representations of the mother-daughter bond in the Western Imaginary, as ‘the most ancient and current relationship we know – the relationship to the mother’s body, to our body.’¹²¹⁶ In the painting it is almost the mother Nadiia who seems more vulnerable. Maria later reflected that, as time passes, the more love she feels for this portrait that, ‘will always remind [her] of her [mother’s] endless warmth and care.’¹²¹⁷ I hoped that the painting would be a distillation of a shared sacred moment: a pictorial space where the sacred, the spiritual, and emotional commune together.¹²¹⁸

I have questioned whether my choice of iconographic imagery merely makes the images and stories of displaced women more legible or palatable for a European audience,

or whether it renders the artistic process more meaningful for the sitters as well. In this instance, Maria and Nadiia said that they found beauty and meaning in this symbolism, which reminded them, in their words, of the icons of their Ukrainian Orthodox Church which aim ‘to deliver simple truth and highest values.’¹²¹⁹ Therefore, for Maria and Nadiia this iconographic representation resonated with their faith tradition. It offers a tender testament to the humanity retained while experiencing forced migration. I sought to bring the sacred subject matter into the present

¹²¹⁶ Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. G. Gill. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 18. Quoted in Walton, Heather. *Literature, theology and feminism*, (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2019), 133.

¹²¹⁷ Personal communication with Maria, December 11, 2022.

¹²¹⁸ Sheona Beaumont And Madeleine Emerald Thiele, “Introduction: ‘All Great Art Is Praise’ John Ruskin.,” in *John Ruskin, The Pre-Raphaelites, And Religious Imagination: Sacre Conversazioni*, eds. Sheona Beaumont And Madeleine Emerald Thiele (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2023), 2.

¹²¹⁹ Maria, Personal correspondence, 11 December 2022.

while maintaining its elemental power and the universal themes of love, companionship, belonging, sacrifice and loss.¹²²⁰ In Cavarero's words, the imagery alludes to 'the persistence of a popular imaginary that imposes an emotional pause and a mute resistance against the long record of violence.'¹²²¹

The iconography symbolism is evident both in the imagery and the materials and techniques I chose to use. The background of the painting is painted with the 'liquid tempera technique,' or the Russian 'floating'¹²²² style. Whereby glazes of pigment in tempera are applied in a very diluted state or 'floated'.¹²²³ The beauty of 'liquid tempera' is that it is difficult to control. The paint gathers around the larger limonite stones that are combined with the pigment, creating mesmeric swirling patterns. The first paint layer was composed of indigo



pigment combined with limonite – one layers the paint in liquid form, gently moving the translucent paint with the brush so that the pigment gathers around the large limonite stones; this naturally, effortlessly creates a swirling pattern and a sense of movement. Once it has dried I gently removed the limonite stones with a palette knife and applied glazes of azurite and lapis lazuli. Mineral pigments such as lapis lazuli and azurite have larger and more irregular crystals of varying transparency, compared to the homogeneity of synthetic pigments; therefore these allow more light to enter.¹²²⁴ These crystals are clustered with particles of quartz and calcite, yielding a colour 'like the glittering firmament.'¹²²⁵ The calcite 'sparkle[s] like stars within the deep blue.'¹²²⁶ Contemporary artistic Makoto Fujimura reflects that, 'The layering of these minerals reveals a mystery hidden beneath the surface reality, a world full of life and enchantment.'¹²²⁷

The choice of the colour blue in the background is symbolic. In Kandinsky's words, '*Blue is the typically heavenly colour*' that creates a feeling of rest and tranquillity, like a 'high cerulean sky' it evokes a 'call to the infinite, a desire

¹²²⁰ David Areford. *The Art of Empathy: The Mother of Sorrows in Northern Renaissance Art and Devotion* (Jacksonville: The Cummer Museum of Art & Galleries, 2013), 12.

¹²²¹ Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 14.

¹²²² Sister Gabriela, *Painting as Prayer: The Art of A. Sophrony Sakharov*. (Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 2017), 179-80.

¹²²³ Ibid.

¹²²⁴ Aidan Hart quoted in Victoria Finlay, *Colour* (Hodder and Stoughton, 2002), 25.

¹²²⁵ Taussig, *What color is the sacred?* 30.

¹²²⁶ Albus, *Art of Arts*, 67.

¹²²⁷ Fujimura, *Refractions: A Journey of Faith, Art and Culture*, 17.

for purity and transcendence.’¹²²⁸ However, ‘when it sinks almost to black, it echoes a grief that is hardly human.’¹²²⁹ This symbolism is universal and yet personal and specific. For example, the subtle use of the blue background and yellow ochre of Nadiia’s sweater to allude to colours of the Ukrainian flag. This allusion moved Nadiia to tears when she attended the painting’s unveiling with her daughter at the UK Houses of Parliament.

I also used the ‘liquid tempera’ technique for the backgrounds of the paintings of the female judges of Afghanistan and Zainab. For these dark backgrounds I used indigo and ivory black pigments, combined with the limonite stones and a sample of gritty, glittering volcanic sand found on the Iranian Red Beach on Hormuz Island. However, for their faces and garments I adopted the ‘Flemish mixed technique’ described above.

Female Judges of Afghanistan

(Tempera and oil on panel, 2022)

The Christian iconography that I allude to in Maria and Nadiia’s portrait, did not hold the same cultural significance for the female judges from Afghanistan. However, I acknowledge that the use of the triptych itself is a structural form associated with altarpieces and devotional art, subtly alluding to visual-theological traditions.¹²³⁰ For the individual portraits of Ferozan, Alia and Zuhail, I drew inspiration from the Northern Renaissance portraiture tradition, emulating the Netherlandish painters who worked in tempera and oil on panel.



¹²²⁸ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Modern Art and Painting in Particular*. First edition 1947. (Connecticut: Martino Fine Books, 2014), 58-9.

¹²²⁹ Ibid.

¹²³⁰ Anderson, *The Invisibility of Religion in Contemporary Art*, 117.

There are examples of early Netherlandish portraits in the National Gallery that I sought out, such as the diptych 'A Man and A Woman' by Robert Campin (c. 1435). The woman has her hands nervously folded at the bottom of the panel and her expression is meek, uncertain, with an aura of solemnity. Typically for Netherlandish portraits, the woman is portrayed timidly as a carrier of a 'dowry of virtue.'¹²³¹ Torreno alludes to the 'stiffness' of Netherlandish female portraiture 'notwithstanding their quasi-photographic rendition,'¹²³² describing them as 'icons of humility'¹²³³ representing an ideal mature femininity.¹²³⁴ I consciously sought to eschew demure representation. By contrast I depicted the Afghan judges hands clasped as a mark of their judicial authority, and their expressions convey composure, determination and quiet defiance. In my portraiture representation I was consciously trying to refute gendered portrayals of refugees as victims, powerless and vulnerable.¹²³⁵

I aspired to avoid visual representations that reproduce negative tropes of suffering and feminised visions of abject victimhood, with more agency-focused representations. The intention was to communicate strength through adversity and to honour how the women wanted to be represented and remembered, thereby providing a space for 'the performance of identity'.¹²³⁶ I was determined that the portraits would be a decisive move away from representations that 'fashion the modern refugee as a passive and traumatised object of intervention.'¹²³⁷ I sought to ensure that each of the women had agency in their portrayals. At Ferozan and Allia's request I included a quote in Arabic from the Quran inscribed at the top of the panel: '*When you judge between people judge with justice.*' As Allia's explained, 'when I sit on the bench of judgement, I am not a man, I am not a woman, I am a judge.'¹²³⁸ Allia and Ferozan both chose to be painted in the black and emerald green robes, with ribbons of gold, that they wore as judges in Kabul: symbolic of their authority and prominent positions within Afghan society. Ferozan wanted to make sure that her wedding ring was visible. Together, Allia, Ferozan and Zuhail's hijabs reflect the colours of the Afghan flag. What is most important in artistic research of and with refugees, is how the refugees themselves perceive how they have been portrayed. How artists aspire, however imperfectly, to fulfil their ethical responsibilities to convey the perspectives of refugees is integral to any collaborative artistic endeavours.¹²³⁹ This requires ongoing and meaningful consultations with protagonists, in order to represent their individual stories and perspectives and refute reductive narratives of trauma and victimhood.¹²⁴⁰

¹²³¹ Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames, the gaze, the eye, the profile in Renaissance portraiture," *History Workshop Journal* 25, no. 1 (1988): 17,18.

¹²³² Torreno, *Netherlandish and Italian Female Portraiture*, 199.

¹²³³ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹²³⁵ Quoted in Jelena Jovičić, "Images of crisis and the crisis of images". In *Refugees and the Violence of Welfare Bureaucracies in Northern Europe*. (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2020), 111.

¹²³⁶ Lynda Mannik "Public and private photographs of refugees: the problem of representation", *Visual Studies* 27, no. 3 (2012), 262-276.

¹²³⁷ P. Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13. Quoted in Dalia Abdelhady, Nina Gren, and Martin Joormann, "Introduction," in *Refugees and the Violence of Welfare Bureaucracies in Northern Europe*. (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press 2020), 4.

¹²³⁸ Allia, personal correspondence, 4 February 2022.

¹²³⁹ Isobel Blomfield & Caroline Lenette, "Artistic Representations of Refugees: What Is the Role of the Artist?", *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 39, no. 3 (2018): 322.

¹²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 325.



Torreno remarks that, in Netherlandish portraiture, ‘female likenesses were routinely against dark, abstracted backgrounds that heightened their other-worldly concerns.’¹²⁴¹ The dark background for the portraits of the Allia and Ferozan, by contrast, is textured, the surface scratched and tarnished in places. This gives a visceral, yet subtle impression of the painting as, figuratively speaking, worn and damaged by the passage of time. However, this was an entirely accidental effect. I had combined too much undiluted egg yolk into the pigment when I applied the layer of liquid tempera to the background and robes. Therefore, I had to vigorously sand down and scrape the viscous, congealed layer of paint using a palette knife in order to remove as much as possible. I found that the unintended effect enhanced the story of the portraits, almost evoking a tangible sense of what the judges and their people in Afghanistan had endured.

This sheds light on the unpredictable and uncontrollable element of a painting, regardless of one’s careful choice of medium or methodical approach. It is a common experience in painting, the artist may embark upon an image with a certain preconceived idea, and invariably the final result diverges from the initial intention. In the words of Davide Pangia, ‘the painter handles the brush’ and ‘(most importantly) vice versa: the brush handles the painter.’¹²⁴² While unexpected, and somewhat disconcerting at times, this can make the end result more profound, and offers a valuable lesson in relinquishing the illusion of control. Perhaps it is a way of *letting the painting speak*. As such, the painting process could be considered an extension of the *attentive listening* that I discussed in part II. This attentive listening, extended to the materiality of the painting process, is an aesthetic embodiment of Cavarero’s *inclination*.

Indeed, sometimes mistakes occur after the painting is complete, similarly beyond one’s mastery or control. For example the portraits of Allia and Ferozan were damaged in transit for my exhibition in the UK Houses of Parliament in June 2022. As I unwrapped the portraits to set up the exhibition, after some considerable delay due to traffic and incorrect paperwork, to my dismay the non-stick paper was stuck to the surface. Holding my breath I gingerly peeled it off, lifting some of the paintwork with it. Fortunately, prior to the exhibition launch on World Refugee Day, I managed to smuggle a small jar of pre-prepared egg tempera through security for some hasty restoration work. All too often it is easy to become fixated on a mistake rather than to see the whole story of a work of art. It was only upon reflection that I could see poetry in the aesthetic effect. The damage sustained by the paintings in transit conveys a symbolic resonance with the lives of refugees, compelled to undertake precarious journeys to seek safety and welcome.

¹²⁴¹ Torreno, *Netherlandish and Italian Female Portraiture*, 199.

¹²⁴² Davide Pangia, “Thesis 5. On Handling,” *Ten Theses for an Aesthetics of Politics*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

Zainab

(Tempera, oil and 24ct gold leaf on panel, 2022)

For Zainab's portrait, while technically I adopted the 'Flemish Mixed Technique', stylistically, it is closer to an icon.

As I look back upon the portrait I painted, I wonder whether our physical distance is what endowed the portrait with a somewhat elusive quality. The shared name with her sister whom she lost, Hana, also connected us across space and time. Usually, I am unable to paint a portrait without a face-to-face encounter with the person. I have tried before and failed. However, with Zainab our conversations over Zoom – an amalgamation of English and my faltering Arabic – and her haunting paintings left an impression upon me that was profound. The distance and yet proximity seems to shimmer through the painted image. The portrait itself offers an encounter within absence; an evocation of presence.



For Zainab's portrait, I drew inspiration from the Fayoum portraits, widely considered to be precursors to icon painting. In the funerary portraits of Fayoum, the gaze is direct and yet seems to see beyond. Theis Vallø Madsen describes how the large eyes and elevated pupils of the funerary portraits create an impression that oscillates between 'an outward-looking and an inward-looking gaze;' 'motion and motion-lessness;' 'presence and absence, openness and withdrawing, and looking at the beholder and nowhere at all.'¹²⁴³ The artist of the Fayoum portraits (as well as icons) focuses upon the stylisation of the eyes; leaving a space between the eyeballs and the lower contour of the eye. This creates an ambiguous, perhaps disconcerting, vibration of liveliness and an impression of intensity. It is only afterwards, upon reflection, that I realised that this is how I chose to paint Zainab's eyes. Her eyes gaze into the distance and yet simultaneously appeal to the viewer intimately and directly, seemingly animate and present.¹²⁴⁴ This creates the impression of liminality; seemingly suspended between two realms, the material

¹²⁴³ Theis Vallø Madsen, "Moving Eyes: The Aesthetic Effect of Off-Centre Pupils in Portrait Paintings," *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 6, no. 1 (2019): 74.

¹²⁴⁴ Richard Temple. *Icons and the Mystical Origins of Christianity*. (Luzac Oriental Limited, 2001), 108.

and transcendent. The funerary portraits were symbolic of an individual's presence whom no longer is physically present. Indeed, Zainab herself described feeling like a 'corpse in a gown' at her graduation without her mother and siblings, months after the airstrike.¹²⁴⁵

In Zainab's penetrative, direct and yet unfocused gaze, there is almost an elusive quality of seeing and being seen, for the beholder.¹²⁴⁶ Eyes in portraits are arguably the most important aspect of the painting. St Jerome affirms, 'the face is the mirror of the mind, and eyes without speaking confess the secrets of the heart.'¹²⁴⁷ The 'two dots of basically black paint'¹²⁴⁸ are a recurring theme in Marion's phenomenology of the iconistic encounter. The black pigment at the centre of the eyes 'irrupts' the visible¹²⁴⁹ and addresses the 'gazing spectator'¹²⁵⁰ with an opposing, irreducible gaze. Thus 'I discover myself visible and seen by a gaze that, though present in the sensible, remains invisible, remains invisible.'¹²⁵¹ Beholders returning the direct gaze of a portrait or icon painting sustain a mutual reciprocity of gazes.¹²⁵² This challenges the passive 'to be looked upon' position of the female as an object of the male gaze,¹²⁵³ and denotes intimacy, reciprocity, and respect. The unflinching gaze is almost accusatory, implicating the viewer. In retrospect this is especially haunting in light of the most recent iteration of the conflict in the Gaza Strip.

The gold leaf in Zainab's portrait illuminates the beautiful traditional Palestinian embroidery, *tatreez*, that embellished the dress that Zainab wore for her exhibition in the Gaza Strip 2022. *Tatreez* is a recognisable symbol of Palestinian culture and identity, passed down over generations mother to daughter as a means of preserving heritage and therefore one of the most prevalent forms of female resistance.¹²⁵⁴ In 2021, UNESCO added the art of Palestinian embroidery, or *tatreez* in Arabic, to its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The use of gold leaf creates subtle meanings related to concepts of time as well as the sacred. Gold has traditionally been a symbol of the divine because it does not change or tarnish with age. Even without the allusion to iconographic imagery or painting techniques, the use of gold leaf 'strongly evokes traditional visual vernaculars of the holy.'¹²⁵⁵ Gold reflects light which gives it an almost insistent presence, especially in contrast to Zainab's black robe that almost

¹²⁴⁵ Zainab al-Qolaq, "I am 22, I lost 22 people:" Zainab al-Qolaq tells her story of (not) surviving an Israeli airstrike on Gaza, painting booklet (New York: UN Women, 2022) <https://palestine.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Booklet-EN.pdf>

¹²⁴⁶ Madsen, "Moving Eyes," 73.

¹²⁴⁷ St Jerome, 'Letters 54', quoted in Robert Sobieszek, *Ghost in the Shell, Photography and the Human Soul 1850- 2000* (LA and Cambridge: Los Angeles County Museum of Arts, 1999), 16.

¹²⁴⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. James K. A. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 62.

¹²⁴⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Horner, R. and Berraud, V. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002) 115-6.

¹²⁵⁰ Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 59.

¹²⁵¹ Ibid., 62.

¹²⁵² Madsen, "Moving Eyes," 74.

¹²⁵³ simons, "Women in Frames," 8-9.

¹²⁵⁴ Erin Quinn, "This is Artful Resistance: The Power of Tatreez," *SOAS Centre for Gender Studies*, November 5, 2019. <https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/gender-studies/2019/11/05/this-is-artful-resistance-the-power-of-tatreez/>

¹²⁵⁵ Anderson, *The Invisibility of Religion in Contemporary Art*, 122.

fades into the background. The two opposing effects create a vibration, a dynamism in the painting. To apply the loose-leaf gold I use the traditional method of water-gilding, which requires one's breath in order for the gold leaf to stick to the brick-red water-based mordant known as 'bole'. As I breathe gently on the painting to lay down the gold, I think of Zainab trapped beneath the rubble, struggling to breathe.

Tursunay

(Tempera and oil on panel, 2022)



Tursunay's choice of dress is of symbolic significance for the Uyghur. In her portrait she wears a beautiful, traditional Atlas silk scarf. The exquisite fabric is known as Atlas (or *etles*) after the Atlas moth and silk worm. The name, Atlas also refers to the distinctive technique of resist dyeing the silk yarn prior to weaving. I tried to do justice to the shimmering play of light over the delicate folds of silk. I carefully painted it first in a tonal tempera underpainting, then in a limited colour palette in oil using only ivory black and zinc white, and finally adding glazes of indigo, lapis lazuli and hints of yellow ochre to bring tonal harmony with the background.

For Tursunay's portrait. I drew inspiration from the paintings of 17th century Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer. Vermeer's paintings evoke stillness and are imbued with a sense of gentleness and of reverence. Åsa Regnér, former Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, offered the following reflection at my exhibition for the International Peace Institute inaugural

'Art for Peace' event: 'You play with history of art in a very graceful way' and that this approach shows that women whom I paint are 'leaders and not just victims.'¹²⁵⁶ Tursunay was present in the audience and visibly touched.

In my portrait of Tursunay, I was influenced by the colour palette characteristic of Vermeer's paintings; particularly hushed harmony of muted ochres with warm greys, lapis lazuli and accents of white. Additionally, an unseen light

¹²⁵⁶ "IPI's Art for Peace Series Presents "Tears of Gold" by Hannah Rose Thomas," September 7, 2022, video recording 43:03. <https://www.ipinst.org/2022/09/ipis-art-for-peace-series-presents-tears-of-gold-by-hannah-rose-thomas#8>

source seems to suffuse the scenes Vermeer renders with precise, refined brushwork and slow, patient discipline.¹²⁵⁷ I was struck by the sense of interiority, composure and self-possession of his subjects, typically women. As Merleau-Ponty suggests: 'The psyche of another appears radically inaccessible [...] I cannot reach other lives, other thought processes.'¹²⁵⁸ Vermeer conveys the impression that his figures have a rich inner life, that is 'inaccessible' and eludes our interpretation. As a viewer, we silently bear witness to a tantalising glimpse of the mystery of their inner worlds from a distance.¹²⁵⁹ Vermeer's paintings are therefore, 'metaphors of silence, markers that indicate the gap, the incommensurability between the sitter's inner life and her external world.'¹²⁶⁰ And while I do not for a moment consider my work comparable to Vermeer; this was the impression I hoped would shimmer through Tursunay's portrait. Tursunay's lips are partially open, as though she is about to address the viewer, but she looks away and tears seem to glisten in her eyes. Her inwardly-turned gaze seems to see something that the viewer cannot. It is an acknowledgement that one cannot for a moment fathom what Tursunay, or anyone for that matter, has endured. The painting preserves a space of silence that, in the words of Irigaray, 'safeguards [...] the other in their withdrawal.'¹²⁶¹

In this chapter I have reflected upon painting as a sanctuary, a space of silence, for contemplative withdrawal into myself while simultaneously holding a space to acknowledge the other. A painting represents a form of recognition distinct from that which is realised through words.¹²⁶² Portrait painting is the language I have found to communicate with the other 'in an artistic way,'¹²⁶³ and to reclaim silence's regenerative potential as a creative threshold to listen attentively to the other's mystery (and to one's own).¹²⁶⁴ Art is a profound way to lament, to pray, to remember, to love, to listen, to communicate, to commune.¹²⁶⁵ For Pascale Devette, it is only artworks that 'leave room for silence' which are 'capable of communicating affliction without consolation and without justification,'¹²⁶⁶ eschewing any attempt to explain, grasp, reconcile, or appease. Such works of art evoke what is referred to in the Orthodox tradition

¹²⁵⁷ Gifford, Anchin, Libby, Wieseman, Dooley, Glinsman, Delaney, "First Steps in Vermeer's Creative Process: New Findings."

¹²⁵⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The child's relations with others," in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James Edie, trans. William Cobb, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1964), 114. Quoted in Joel Krueger, "Merleau-Ponty on shared emotions and the joint ownership thesis," *Continental Philosophy Review* 46, no. 4 (2013): 511.

¹²⁵⁹ Mary B. Wiseman, "Vermeer and the Art of Silence.," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, no. 3 (2006): 323.

¹²⁶⁰ Brian Jay Wolf, *Vermeer and the Invention of Seeing* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), 163. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 322.

¹²⁶¹ Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, trans. Heidi Bosticand Stephen Pluháček, (London: Continuum, 2002), 32. Jessica Murray, "Reborn from Silence and Touch: Gender Violence in Southern Africa," In *Luce Irigaray: Teaching*, ed. Luce Irigaray and Mary Green, (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2008), 6.

¹²⁶² Strine, McInroy & Torrance, "The Place of the Image," in *Image As Theology*, 16.

¹²⁶³ Luce Irigaray, Personal communication 10. Quoted in Sanderson, Eleanor Sanderson, "Emotional engagement," 128.

¹²⁶⁴ Caroline Godart. "Silence and Sexual Difference: Reading Silence in Luce Irigaray." *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* 3, no. 2 (2016): 19.

¹²⁶⁵ Kathryn Lawson, *Ecological Ethics and the Philosophy of Simone Weil: Decreation for the Anthropocene* (London: Routledge 2024), 170.

¹²⁶⁶ Pascale Devette, "Paying Attention to Affliction: Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil on Tragic Storytelling," in *Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil: Unprecedented Conversations*, eds. In K. Lawson & J. Livingstone (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), 165.

as ‘bright sadness,’ a term often used to describe icons.¹²⁶⁷ Alison Phipps considers ‘bright sadness’ to be expressive of a ‘peace, bright with the sadness of so much loss and violence, but able to hold, and to weave containers strong enough to sustain the peace and the loss that was and is and is to come.’¹²⁶⁸ I posit that a portrait painting can hold and contain the seeming paradox of the weightiness of sorrow and the bright serenity of strength, dignity and grace. As such it represents a gentle invitation to acknowledge the reality of violence, pain and loss while also holding space for hope.

¹²⁶⁷ Hart, Aidan. The Icon and Art. A talk given at the School of Economic Science, Waterperry, Oxford, 7 March, 2000. <https://aidanharticons.com/the-icon-and-art-by-aidan-hart/>

¹²⁶⁸ Alison Phipps, “The Many Twists and Turns in the Pathways to Peace: Reflections on the Bright Sadness of Decolonising and Structuring Cultural Work,” in *Cultures of Sustainable Peace: Conflict Transformation, Gender-Based Violence, Decolonial Praxes*. eds. Hyab Teklehaimanot Yohannes, Alison Phipps, Tawona Sitholé. (Multilingual Matters, 2024), 274-5.

PART IV: The Therapeutic Value of Attention

Self-Portraiture Painting in Glasgow

In the previous chapter I reflected upon my portrait painting process as a practice of prayerful, reverential attention and a personal expression of grief. In this chapter I will consider the therapeutic value of attention in a communal context, drawing upon insights from the participatory art workshop that I facilitated with asylum-seeking women in Glasgow. Community art workshops offer a glimpse into ‘making sanctuary’ and the cultivation of what Sarah Willen calls ‘inhabitable spaces of welcome,’¹²⁶⁹ however fleeting. These workshops invite a posture of attention and inclination to the other in an open, relational gesture of care, thus shaping my understanding of the ‘welcoming, witnessing’¹²⁷⁰ value of art. As Báýò Akómoláfé reminds us, ‘sanctuaries are not committed to reinforcing rectitude;’ they are ‘invested in touching *inclinations*.’¹²⁷¹

This chapter attends to the self-portraits drawn, painted and embroidered by women from asylum-seeking communities in Govanhill, Glasgow in May 2022. The art workshop was modelled upon previous workshops facilitated in Iraqi Kurdistan and Northern Nigeria. In 2017 I taught a group of Yazidi women who had escaped ISIS captivity to paint their self-portraits, in a rehabilitation facility in Dohuk, Iraqi Kurdistan. In September 2018 I taught a similar workshop to Nigerian women, survivors of sexual violence at the hands of Boko Haram or Fulani militants, at a retreat centre in Northern Nigeria. Prior to COVID-19, my research was projected to involve travelling for participatory art workshops with migratory and marginalised communities, in partnership with local partners through UNESCO and MiDEQ. Nonetheless, while my research trajectory was indelibly affected by the limitations of a global pandemic, I am sincerely grateful to have had the privilege of partnering with Unity Sisters and UNESCO RILA for a self-portraiture workshop in Glasgow. Together with Prue Holmes and John Corbett, I found that the Covid-19 pandemic taught me to ‘live more comfortably with partial success.’¹²⁷² I have learned to embrace externally imposed limits and the secret gifts and opportunities that these can contain.

¹²⁶⁹ Sarah Willen, *Fighting for Dignity: Migrant Lives at Israel's Margins*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2019), 21.

¹²⁷⁰ Gilbert J. Rose, *Necessary Illusion: Art as Witness*. (Madison, Conn: International Universities Press, 1996), 112.

¹²⁷¹ Báýò Akómoláfé, “Making Sanctuary: Hope, Companionship, Race and Emergence in the Anthropocene.” Keynote Speech, March 15, 2019. Retrieved from *Bayo Akomolafe* (personal website), <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/making-sanctuary-hope-companionship-race-and-emergence-in-the-anthropocene>

¹²⁷² Prue Holmes and John Corbett, “Introduction: Critical intercultural pedagogies in contexts of conflict and crises” in Prue Holmes John Corbett (Eds.), *Critical Intercultural Pedagogy for Difficult Times: Conflict, Crisis, and Creativity* (London: Routledge, 2022), 11.

It was in Northern Nigeria that the idea of sewing vibrant fabric sourced locally onto the canvas of the women's self-portrait paintings first materialised. This concept was carried into the art workshop with Unity Sisters, through the invaluable support of textile designer and researcher Naa Densua Tordzro, in a spacious studio in the heart of Glasgow City Centre. The women had the opportunity to design a multi-textured inter-disciplinary artwork combining paint, vibrant fabric and sparkling bead stickers for jewellery and embellishment. One participant Beatrice - whom everyone referred to as 'Mama' - explained that through her self-portrait she 'wanted to bring the African in me out. That's why I put headgear on it, and the draped scarf.'¹²⁷³ Some of the headdresses were especially elaborate with large bows flowing over the side of the canvas. The process of adornment offered a unique way for each participant to playfully express her creativity and individuality. It encouraged an atmosphere of mutual support and collaboration, as the women helped one another in the design and sewing of the headdresses, absorbed in the process. Indeed, research has shown that embroidery has therapeutic benefits, intended to relieve anxiety and stress, enhance social connection and built self-esteem.¹²⁷⁴ The slow and tactile process of painting and sewing self-portraits together is expressive of the need to be seen and witnessed, which is neglected in the asylum system.



Prior to the textile work on canvas, the women first drew their self-portrait somewhat tentatively with a pencil and paper. The first step was drawing the outline of the face, and then the facial features. Initially there was uncertainty, ambivalence and some resistance. However, with gentle and persistent encouragement and as the women became absorbed in the process, comments of 'I do not know how to draw' subsided. The hope was to help foster an atmosphere of lightness, freedom and encouragement conducive to creativity. Beatrice said to me, 'I have never done any painting before, and I thought it was a difficult thing, putting pencil to paper and drawing something. And now, I can't believe it, it's awesome and I felt so great. Now I feel, maybe, I'm willing to try again and do something. I want to learn basic things – maybe if you want to draw an eye, how to go about it. I'd like to take it up as a hobby.'¹²⁷⁵

There are many reasons to not even *start* making art. Indeed after our first day drawing together I was unsure whether any of the women would return. However, to my surprise all but one of the women came back. In crossing the threshold and willingly embracing something entirely new, a new field of potentiality opens up, whereby that

¹²⁷³ Interview with Beatrice, conducted on the final day of the art workshop in Glasgow, May 11, 2022.

¹²⁷⁴ Ardiana Bytyçi, Malisa Zymberi, Besnik Rustemi, Ejona Miraka Icka, Feride Rushiti (2022) "The Art of Healing in a Transitory Context: Groupwork with people seeking asylum in asylum centres in Kosovo," in *Groupwork with Refugees and Survivors of Human Rights Abuses: The Power of Togetherness*, eds. Boyles, J., Ewart-Biggs, R., Horn, R., & Lamb, K. (Routledge, 2022), 145.

¹²⁷⁵ Interview with Beatrice.

which was previously perceived as unattainable becomes possible.¹²⁷⁶ There were moments of frustration, Beatrice reflected, when she said to herself, 'I want to rip it off,' but 'it turned out well at last.' Having overcome these challenges, Beatrice remarked: 'Looking at what everyone has painted, I couldn't believe it. There's nothing anyone cannot do, if you put your mind to it.'¹²⁷⁷

Another participant named Kidistri explained that the process of painting made her feel 'happy' as it helped to take her mind off her daily struggles and pain. Shaun McNiff points out 'how emotional states profoundly influence expression, how art may be an expressive lifeline in periods of crisis, and how difficult times and emotional upheaval offer a gate of access to the archetypal flow of artistic expression and its medicines.'¹²⁷⁸ Kidistri explained that trauma is a daily part of her life. She has been waiting for seven years for her asylum



claim to be processed. Additionally, Kidistri bears physical pain from being beaten by police in the Calais Jungle and emotional anguish not knowing whether any of her brothers or sisters in Eritrea are still alive. She does not sleep well and faces debilitating anxiety, depression, grief, loneliness and destitution. However, our few days together for the art workshop helped her to 'see a little light in the darkness.'¹²⁷⁹

Willen warns that the experience of 'illegality' and other 'related forms of sociopolitical abjection' can become 'embodied through chronic stress pathways' that accentuate 'physiological wear and tear' and 'hasten sickness and death.'¹²⁸⁰ The internalisation of the experience of *not being welcome* and therefore 'undeserving of care' can also become embodied,¹²⁸¹ and consequently diminish the capacity to live a meaningful, dignified life. Willen suggests that stories such as Kidistri's 'help us understand that feeling welcome, at least sometimes and in some places, is indispensable to a flourishing life.'¹²⁸² However, a limitation of the art workshop was its brevity. It offered but a fleeting space of sanctuary and welcome. Many participants requested additional sessions over a longer period and expressed disappointment when the programme finished. As Kidistri said, 'for three days I feel happy and I feel proud. I need more than just three days.'¹²⁸³ Although the scope of the workshop was constrained by funding, witnessing

¹²⁷⁶ Jan van Boeckel, "A Pedagogy of Attention to the Light in the Eyes," in *Knowing from the Inside: Cross-Disciplinary Experiments with Matters of Pedagogy*, ed. T. Ingold (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 45.

¹²⁷⁷ Interview with Beatrice.

¹²⁷⁸ Shaun McNiff, *Art heals: How Creativity Heals the Soul* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 2004), 47.

¹²⁷⁹ Interview with Kidistri, conducted on the final day of the art workshop in Glasgow, May 11, 2022.

¹²⁸⁰ Willen, *Fighting for Dignity*, 197-8.

¹²⁸¹ Ibid.

¹²⁸² Ibid., 199.

¹²⁸³ Interview with Kidistri.

Kidistri and Beatrice fully immersed in the painting process and their pride and joy in what they created in a short space of time, reaffirmed the value of this work.

Susan Carr suggests that drawing a self-portrait can be an effective way of strengthening an individual's sense of identity.¹²⁸⁴ For Simone Muri it has the potential to help to promote self-reflection and emotional healing.¹²⁸⁵ The face is intricately connected with an individual's sense of identity. Beatrice explained that, 'I hope that my portrait will show that I am myself.' She paused, 'I am myself [...] what is myself? I'm a determined person, very assertive. I would like my painting to show that.' In self-portraiture, Beatrice explains, 'the way people look, the way they sit, their expression, their body language, communicates a lot.'¹²⁸⁶

In the self-portraiture art workshops that I previously facilitated in Northern Nigeria and Iraq for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, the focus was the 'creation of a *safe space* for the *sharing of stories*.'¹²⁸⁷ However, for the art workshop with Unity Sisters in Glasgow, a space of hospitality, safety and care for these women meant, in most cases, *not* being required to share their stories. Many of the women whom I worked with in Glasgow are trapped in a transitional state, facing the cumulative impact of delays in processing asylum claims, increasing levels of asylum destitution, and the ever-present threat of potential counter-claim, rejection and deportation.¹²⁸⁸ Anna Rowlands describes the distress of inhabiting an open-ended, unpredictable period of waiting and, unable to work, and the agonising awareness of the passing of time.¹²⁸⁹ For individuals who have travelled to the United Kingdom via irregular routes, such as Kidistri, many have been exposed to traumatic events during their respective journeys, in addition to the traumatic circumstances that compelled them to flee.¹²⁹⁰

The art workshop offered a space of freedom away from everyday pressures and constraints, and some respite from chronic stress, anxiety and depression, however fleeting. It offered a framework for individuals to engage in making sense-of and contribute freely to the sense-making around them, whether spoken or unspoken. Beatrice affirmed that, 'Art speaks, it communicates, it's a way to express yourself, even if you can't say the words. But when you look at a piece of work you can send messages across. Sometimes you can use an artwork to unite a community.' Beatrice continues, 'Art can be used to tell stories, of the past and present, especially of the past.'¹²⁹¹ Indeed, stories and feelings can be communicated through art, that perhaps cannot be expressed through words. For, as Sandra Bloom

¹²⁸⁴ Susan M. D. Carr, "Revisioning self-identity: The role of portraits, neuroscience and the art therapist's 'third hand,'" *International Journal of Art Therapy* 19, no. 2 (2014): 57.

¹²⁸⁵ Simone A. Muri, "Beyond the face: Art therapy and self-portraiture." *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 34, no. 4 (2007): 338.

¹²⁸⁶ Interview with Beatrice.

¹²⁸⁷ Hannah R. Thomas, *Tears of Gold: Portraits of Yazidi, Rohingya, and Nigerian Women*. (Walden, New York: Plough Publishing House, 2024), 4.

¹²⁸⁸ Anna Rowlands, "On the Promise and Limits of Politics: Faith-based Responses to Asylum Seeking," in *Fortress Britain?: Ethical Approaches to Immigration Policy for a Post-Brexit Britain*, ed. Ben Ryan, (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018), 73.

¹²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹²⁹⁰ Ardiana Bytyçi, Malisa Zymberi, Besnik Rustemi, Ejona Miraka Icka, Feride Rushiti, "The Art of Healing in a Transitory Context: Groupwork with people seeking asylum in asylum centres in Kosovo," eds. in Boyles, J., Ewart-Biggs, R., Horn, R., & Lamb, K. *Groupwork with Refugees and Survivors of Human Rights Abuses: The Power of Togetherness* (Routledge, 2022), 140.

¹²⁹¹ Interview with Beatrice.

explains, trauma is ‘articulated’ in an entirely different language; the language of the nonverbal.¹²⁹² Art therefore can allow for non-verbal, affective communication of emotionally laden experiences, and transcend the linguistic and cultural barriers often experienced by individuals from displaced communities. The hope is that these art workshops create a space that values and acknowledges the unique presence and voice of each individual,¹²⁹³ which also means to respect the desire to remain silent.

This respect underlies what James Thompson has described as an ‘aesthetic of care’.¹²⁹⁴ A community arts project with a well-developed *aesthetic of care* relies upon ‘building mutual activities of sharing, support, co-working and relational solidarity within a framework of artistry or creative endeavour.’¹²⁹⁵ The aesthetic value is therefore ultimately not found in the quality of the artistic product, but is ‘located in-between people in moments of collaborative creation, conjoined effort and intimate exchange.’¹²⁹⁶ According to Eva Kittay, these projects can become ‘a source of connection’ – or indeed Weil’s *metaxu* – and a chance for ‘developing our capacities for thought, empathy, sensitivity, trust, ingenuity, and creativity; in short, as providing for us the conditions of our distinct human dignity.’¹²⁹⁷

An Ethic of Hospitality

Caroline Lenette affirms that artistic research can actively counter the ‘culture of *inhospitality*’¹²⁹⁸ towards refugees and migrants and supplant this with ‘a sense of sanctuary through ethical, meaningful research.’¹²⁹⁹ This work gently counteracts the existential trauma and ‘dispossessive negativity’ that comes from the experience, in the words of Rowlands, of being ‘rendered superfluous selves, negated in basic humanness’¹³⁰⁰ which ultimately compounds a ‘loss of a sense of selfhood – a permanent form of dispossession.’¹³⁰¹ Migratory communities face the

¹²⁹² Sandra L. Bloom, “Bridging the black hole of trauma: the evolutionary significance of the art,” *Psychotherapy and Politics International* 8 (2010): 207.

¹²⁹³ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as Practice of Freedom*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 8. Quoted in Catrin Evans, “The practice of solidarity through the arts: inter-relations and shared moments of creation in Share My Table,” *Scottish Journal of Performance* 6, no. 1 (2019): 45.

¹²⁹⁴ James Thompson, “Towards an aesthetics of care,” *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 20, no. 4 (2015): 438.

¹²⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁹⁷ Eva. F. Kittay, “A theory of justice as fair terms of social life given our inevitable dependency and our inextricable interdependency,” in *Care Ethics and Political Theory*, eds. D. Engster and M. Hamington, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 67.

¹²⁹⁸ See Roland Bleiker, David Campbell, and Emma Hutchison, “Visual cultures of inhospitality,” *Peace Review* 26, no. 2 (2014): 192–200.

¹²⁹⁹ Caroline Lenette, *Arts-Based Methods in Refugee Research: Creating Sanctuary* (Springer Singapore, 2019), 41–42.

¹³⁰⁰ Anna Rowlands, “On apophatic political theology,” *Critical Research on Religion* 9, no.3 (2021): 335.

¹³⁰¹ Rowlands, “On the Promise and Limits of Politics,” 81.

inhospitality of increasingly stringent laws which do not attend to the dignity of the forcibly displaced, but privilege the security and integrity of national boundaries. In *On Violence*, Hannah Arendt describes ‘the faceless administrative enactment of violence’ whereby this ‘manufactured bureaucratic facelessness ensures the erasure of the face of the other’ and ‘indicate signs of a crisis of judgment and responsibility with roots in a much deeper crisis of human value.’¹³⁰² In the words of Henry Giroux, it is to ‘become more attentive to the ways in which institutional forces and cultural power are tangled up with everyday experience.’¹³⁰³

The asylum system in the UK erodes human autonomy, enforces dependency¹³⁰⁴ and generates hopelessness, due to its stasis and non-responsiveness.¹³⁰⁵ Baroness Helena Kennedy declares the asylum support system ‘shambolic,’¹³⁰⁶ even ‘to the point of being manifest as cruelty.’¹³⁰⁷ For, ‘it places people into marginalised social and economic situations, without adequate support, and leaves them there with ever-diminishing hope for the future. For those who have experienced trauma, this same system can compound the problem.’¹³⁰⁸ There are countless stories of re-traumatisation and additional existential harms and indignities that are the direct result of the treatment of refugees in the UK.¹³⁰⁹ Baroness Kennedy writes that what she could offer was to ‘listen, and give the dignity of being heard, to those who have been systemically ignored and marginalised. Listening is a form of justice but we must do better, to honour those who have been harmed, who have died, been traumatised and hurt.’¹³¹⁰ Attentive listening to the experiences of individuals seeking safety is a gesture of care that can help to acknowledge and alleviate the emotional implications of sociopolitical abjection and exclusion. Indeed, Willen asks, how do individuals ‘find ways to reclaim or remake their worlds— even, perhaps, to flourish— despite these incursions?’¹³¹¹

The embodied *ethics* and *aesthetics of care* enact a mode of resistance to ‘care-less’ bureaucratised form of state care that refugees and asylum seekers are routinely subjected to.¹³¹² The art studio space emerges, in the words of

¹³⁰² Anna Rowlands, “Against the Manichees: Immigration Detention and the Shaping of the Theo-political Imagination,” *Religion in the European Refugee Crisis. Religion and Global Migrations*, in eds. U. Schmiedel, G. Smith (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2018), 170.

¹³⁰³ Henry A. Giroux, *On critical pedagogy* (Bloomsbury, 2020), 143. Quoted in Prue Holmes and John Corbett, “Afterward,” in *Critical Intercultural Pedagogy for Difficult Times: Conflict, Crisis, and Creativity*, eds. P. Holmes and J. Corbett, (Routledge, 2022), 253.

¹³⁰⁴ Victoria Canning, “Corrosive Control: State-Corporate and Gendered Harm in Bordered Britain” *Critical Criminology* 28, no. 4 (2020): 272.

¹³⁰⁵ Rowlands, “On the Promise and Limits of Politics,” 82.

¹³⁰⁶ Baroness Helena Kennedy, *Independent Commission of Inquiry into Asylum Provision in Scotland: with particular reference to failings in the provision of care to New Scots during the Covid pandemic*. Part Two, November 2022, 7. <https://indylibrary.scot/independent-commission-of-inquiry-into-asylum-provision-in-scotland-with-particular-reference-to>

¹³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³¹¹ Willen, *Fighting for Dignity*, 22.

¹³¹² Amanda Stuart Fisher, (2020). Introduction: caring performance, performing care” in *Performing Care: New perspectives on socially engaged performance*, eds. In A. Stuart Fisher & J. Thompson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 3.

bell hooks, as a 'a counter-hegemonic act' and a 'way to resist'¹³¹³ everyday state-imposed hostile strategies and to mitigate the deficits of care in contemporary societies. 'Hospitality in action,' with regard to the art-making process, involves creating a space which allows individuals to feel meaningfully connected to their host communities and also, crucially, among themselves.¹³¹⁴ Although it cannot entirely compensate for the exclusions and alienating reality of the asylum process,¹³¹⁵ identifying hospitable spaces that provide respect, recognition and 'a sense of dignified kinship' are invaluable.¹³¹⁶ Nick Gill defines 'feeling welcome' as a 'perception that your presence brings about joy or satisfaction in someone else' and that refugees' accounts of welcome 'often emphasise these inter-personal aspects.'¹³¹⁷ Community art workshops are conducive for facilitating environments of welcome, joy and the satisfaction of 'time well spent' in the face of the degrading of time.¹³¹⁸ Michael Jackson writes that a meaningful, dignified life 'is never simply bare survival, but rather a matter of realising one's humanity in relation to others.'¹³¹⁹

Individuals experiencing *dis-placement* are both physically and culturally uprooted from their place of origin. As such, Willen invites us to consider the 'gestures, imperatives, and projects that make it possible to anchor, or re-anchor, individual and common lifeworlds when they have become untethered.'¹³²⁰ Community-based art workshops help to break through isolation through providing a shared experience of hospitality and welcome that can cultivate a sense of rootedness, dignity and hope for the future. According to Weil, art and culture are vital social binders which can cultivate and strengthen a sense of belonging and recognition within a community.¹³²¹ As such, alienation from culture is both 'a cause and consequence of uprootedness.'¹³²² The word 'culture' carries the sense of the verb 'to culture;' Weil envisions culture as essential and sustaining spiritual nourishment and human flourishing.¹³²³ 'Flourishing' also has botanical, biblical and philosophical connotations,¹³²⁴ and is both a process and an accomplishment.¹³²⁵ The World Health Organisation attests that the arts and culture have a vital role to play 'in the well-being and social cohesion of both forcibly displaced people and their host communities.'¹³²⁶ Hyab Yohannes

¹³¹³ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 2. Quoted in Evans, "The practice of solidarity through the arts," 45.

¹³¹⁴ Deogratias M. Rwezaura, "Hospitality and Solidarity: Virtues Integral to a Humane Refugee Policy," in *Living With(out) Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics on the Migrations of Peoples*, eds. Agnes M. Brazal and Maria Teresa Davila, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2016), 159.

¹³¹⁵ Rowlands, "On the Promise and Limits of Politics," 87.

¹³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹³¹⁷ Nick Gill, "The suppression of welcome" *Fennia* 196, no. 1 (2018): 90.

¹³¹⁸ Rowlands, "On the Promise and Limits of Politics," 83.

¹³¹⁹ Michael Jackson, *The Wherewithal of Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 228. Quoted in Willen, *Fighting for Dignity*, 194.

¹³²⁰ Willen, *Fighting for Dignity*, 23.

¹³²¹ Maggie Sava, "To Send a Kite: Simone Weil's Lessons in Ethical Attention for the Curator" *Philosophies* 5, no. 4 (2020): 32.

¹³²² Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties towards Mankind*, trans. Ros Schwartz (Penguin, 2023), 66. Referenced in *Ibid.*

¹³²³ Eric O. Springstead, "Rootedness: Culture and Value," in *Simone Weil's Philosophy of Culture: Readings Toward a Divine Humanity*, ed. R. H. Bell (Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 177.

¹³²⁴ John Kleinig, and Nicholas G. Evans, "Human Flourishing, Human Dignity, and Human Rights." *Law and Philosophy* 32 (2013): 540. Referenced in Willen, *Fighting for Dignity*, 198-9.

¹³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 541-2.

¹³²⁶ World Health Organisation, *Arts and health: supporting the mental well-being of forcibly displaced people*, July 2022, https://www.cultureforhealth.eu/app/uploads/2022/07/WHO_Arts-and-Health-forcibly-displaced-people-final-2.pdf

describes how necessary it was, from his own experience as a refugee, to find and create ‘ruderal spaces’¹³²⁷ through meditative prayer, music and poetry. Yohannes writes: “The worlds I inhabited as a refugee contained no spaces free of spatio-temporal violence’; therefore comparatively safe ‘ruderal spaces’¹³²⁸ were vital for survival. The unmooring, uprooting experience of displacement disrupts individual and societal capacity for flourishing, therefore I will turn to consider the therapeutic value of art. As Yohannes attests, the arts enable refugees ‘to sustain joy in life amidst difficulties, and to communicate these difficulties, revolt against them, and overcome suffering.’¹³²⁹

The Arts of Trauma Integration

Research suggests that art can help to reintegrate the right and left brain after the fragmentary experience of trauma. The *bridging* of the disconnection between the hemispheres precipitated by a traumatic experience, offers yet another link to Simone Weil’s *metaxu*. Bessel van der Kolk describes dissociation as ‘the essence of trauma,’ whereby the ‘overwhelming experience is split off and fragmented, so that the emotions, sounds, images, thoughts, and physical sensations related to the trauma take on a life of their own.’¹³³⁰ And as a result the psyche, Bloom attests, is ‘like a broken phonograph player’ and keeps ‘replaying the same fragments of a post-traumatic tune, unconnected to a melody line.’¹³³¹ The inner and outer fragmentation that individuals experience as a result of exposure to conflict, communal atrocity, violence, persecution or torture and of leaving and losing home, is impossible to comprehend.¹³³² Traumatic experience shatters fundamental personal and cultural assumptions about the primary ways that one orders reality: Suddenly, the future no longer feels safe and predictable, and the past is haunted and no longer known.¹³³³ Cathy Caruth describes trauma as an ‘unclaimed experience,’¹³³⁴ one that cannot be forgotten nor fully remembered, and therefore cannot be easily expressed in words.¹³³⁵

¹³²⁷ Hyab Teklehaimanot Yohannes, “Autobiographic reflections on loss, longing, and recovery,” in *Handbook on Border Criminology*, eds. Mary Bosworth, Katja Franko, Maggy Lee, and Rimple Mehta, (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024), 323.

¹³²⁸ Ibid.

¹³²⁹ Ibid., 324.

¹³³⁰ Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 66.

¹³³¹ Bloom, “Bridging the black hole of trauma,” 206-7.

¹³³² Enda Moclair, “Adversity, Therapeutic Witnessing and the Arts,” in *Groupwork with Refugees and Survivors of Human Rights Abuses: The Power of Togetherness*, eds. Boyles, J., Ewart-Biggs, R., Horn, R., & Lamb, K. (Routledge, 2022), 106.

¹³³³ R. Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma*. (New York: The FreePress, 1992). Referenced in Bloom, “Bridging the black hole of trauma,” 207.

¹³³⁴ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative and history*. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) Quoted in Zehra Mehdi, “Listening to Refusal: Exploring the Political in Psychological Anthropology,” in *Innovations in Psychological Anthropology*, ed. R. Lester, R (London: Routledge, 2024), 91.

¹³³⁵ Ibid.

The elevated levels of fear and uncertainty that refugees and asylum seekers experience prior to migration and after resettlement can result in complex trauma.¹³³⁶ Individuals displaced due to persecution, conflict, generalized violence or human rights violations have invariably endured significant loss that can cause psychological distress.¹³³⁷ The trauma of exile is ‘a rupture’ that profoundly violates ‘the boundaries of the self’ and shatters ‘core conceptions about one’s place in the world’¹³³⁸ as well as the frame of reference inscribed by one’s cultural codes and close relationships.¹³³⁹ The immigration process compounds additional layers of trauma. Individuals often encounter socioeconomic disadvantage, employment obstacles, linguistic barriers, social isolation, in addition to experiences of precarity and delay pertaining to the asylum application process and concomitant risk of repatriation.¹³⁴⁰ In light of this, the breadth and depth of trauma exceeds that which is traditionally regarded as a traumatic event, and often renders refugees and asylum-seekers susceptible to mental health challenges.¹³⁴¹ The most challenging symptoms of which include a diminished capacity to trust, withdrawal, depression and anxiety, making it profoundly difficult to connect.¹³⁴²

The World Health Organisation advises that ‘arts activities can be one of the relevant activities to improve health and well-being.’¹³⁴³ ‘Well-being’ is defined as the interplay between personal aspects, such as resilience and self-esteem, as well as the social, namely close relationships, trust and acceptance.¹³⁴⁴ Community arts activities provide opportunities for social connection and inclusion, countering loneliness and improving mood and self-confidence.¹³⁴⁵ Melinda Meyer DeMott affirms that the ‘arts create a bridge between the participants,’ and individuals are able to connect and engage through ‘the third,’ namely, art.¹³⁴⁶ As well as a *bridge* to connect with others, engaging with the arts also can become a bridge to connecting with oneself, enhancing emotional well-being and one’s sense of identity and belonging.¹³⁴⁷

¹³³⁶ Sabine C. Koch, Beatrix Weidinger-von der Recke, “Traumatised refugees: An integrated dance and verbal therapy approach,” *Arts in Psychotherapy* 36, no. 5 (2009): 289.

¹³³⁷ WHO, *Arts and health*.

¹³³⁸ J. Brunner, “Trauma and Justice: The Moral Grammar of Trauma Discourse from Wilhelmine Germany to Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *Trauma and Memory: Reading, Healing and Making Law*, eds. A. Sarat, N. Davidovitch & M. Alberstein (Stanford: SUP, 2007), 98-99. Quoted in Anna Westin, *Embodied Trauma and Healing: Critical Conversations on the Concept of Health*, (Routledge, 2022), 132.

¹³³⁹ Melinda Meyer DeMott, “Expressive Arts: A group Intervention for Unaccompanied Minor Asylum Seekers and Young Adults,” in *Reconstructing Meaning After Trauma: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Elizabeth M. Altmaier (Academic Press, 2017), 157.

¹³⁴⁰ Clelia Clini, Linda J M Thomson, Helen J Chatterjee “Assessing the impact of artistic and cultural activities on the health and well-being of forcibly displaced people using participatory action research,” *BMJ Open* 9, no. 2 (2019): e025465.

¹³⁴¹ Katy Robjant, Ian Robbins, Victoria Senior, Psychological distress amongst immigration detainees: a cross-sectional questionnaire study,” *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 48: 275-286.

¹³⁴² Meyer DeMott, “Expressive Arts,” 160.

¹³⁴³ WHO, *Arts and health*.

¹³⁴⁴ Clini, Thomson, Chatterjee “Assessing the impact of artistic and cultural activities,” 1.

¹³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³⁴⁶ Meyer DeMott, “Expressive Arts,” 160.

¹³⁴⁷ WHO, *Arts and health*.

John Paul Lederach attests that the chronic insecurity of displacement makes it difficult for individuals to ‘recover a basic sense of trust in the outer social landscape and the inner personal journey,’ and as a result, ‘people suspend, or outright lose a capacity to feel *at home*.’¹³⁴⁸ *Home* is, for Lederach, ‘a relational metaphor of feeling *surrounded* by love, a sense of wellbeing, shelter and unconditional acceptance.’¹³⁴⁹ Anna Westin examines trauma through the metaphors of ‘home and homelessness’.¹³⁵⁰ Trauma disrupts one’s capacity to feel ‘at home’ in the familiarity of one’s world, in ‘the body itself as the first site of origin and welcome,’¹³⁵¹ which can further compound mental distress.¹³⁵² Westin writes that the affect of trauma is intimately connected to the literal experience of displacement and exile, whereby an individual is often violently removed from their place of origin and from the relationships that contextualised their experience of home.¹³⁵³ Therefore, a process whereby one can restore one’s *at-home-ness* and relatedness to others and to self is a vital prerequisite for recovery. I am curious about the restorative value of art-making in such a complex context.¹³⁵⁴ The shared experience of creating art within a community group, can nurture a sense of safety and facilitate relational healing.¹³⁵⁵

The arts can help create a nurturing environment where individuals feel valued and a sense of safety. Gilbert Rose connects Donald Winnicott’s idea of the ‘holding environment of the infant / caretaker environment’¹³⁵⁶ with the ‘welcoming and witnessing presence’¹³⁵⁷ of art. The art workshop can function as a bridge to the world, from social disconnection towards a sense of being witnessed and touched by others.¹³⁵⁸ Westin suggests that the group container of the workshop enables a ‘supporting presence and space in which gentle reconnection with others is made possible in a safe space.’¹³⁵⁹ Olivia Sagan describes how Arendt’s notion of the ‘loss of world’¹³⁶⁰ – the acute experience of displaced communities and those in psychological distress – may gradually shift to a subtle ‘finding of world’ through art,¹³⁶¹ enabling a (re)newed sense of ‘home-coming,’ belonging and a revitalised connection to the

¹³⁴⁸ John Paul Lederach and Angela Jill Lederach, *When Blood and Bones Cry Out: Journeys Through The Soundscape Of Healing And Reconciliation* (Queensland, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2010), 63.

¹³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵⁰ Westin, *Embodied Trauma and Healing*, 100.

¹³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵² Olivia Sagan, “The Intersubjectivity of Spiritual Experience in the Art Practice of People with Histories of Mental Distress: A Phenomenological Study.” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 19, no. 2 (2016): 143-44.

¹³⁵³ Westin, *Embodied Trauma and Healing*, 101, 108.

¹³⁵⁴ Sagan, “The Intersubjectivity of Spiritual Experience, 143-44.

¹³⁵⁵ Bruce L. Moon, *Art-based group therapy: Theory and practice* (Charles C Thomas Publisher, 2010). Referenced in Beatrice Wharldall, “Toward Multispecies Mourning: Imagining an Art Therapy for Ecological Grief.” *Art Therapy* (July 2024): 3.

¹³⁵⁶ Rose, *Necessary illusion*, 28.

¹³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹³⁵⁸ Meyer DeMott, “Expressive Arts,” 158.

¹³⁵⁹ Anna Westin, “Imagining Otherwise: Creative Arts as a Tool for Recovery,” in *Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking: The Victim Journey*, eds. Runa Lazzarino and Carole Murphy. (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022), 225.

¹³⁶⁰ See Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968).

¹³⁶¹ Olivia Sagan, “The Legacy of Art Making: Agency, Activism and Finding the World,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Innovative Community and Clinical Psychologies*, eds. Walker, C., Zlotowitz, S., Zoli, A. (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2022), 599.

relational and sensory life.¹³⁶² The arts can offer a pathway for individuals to begin to heal from violations that ruptured their sense of dignity, safety and life itself.¹³⁶³

By focussing on a manual gesture such as drawing, painting and sewing, individuals gently begin to reconnect with their own bodies.¹³⁶⁴ Art-making is an invitation to silence, slowing down and embracing the experience of absorption in a practical task – in essence, a simple practice of ritual.¹³⁶⁵ Art-making enlivens the senses and gives an affective experience of being engaged in the present moment, and therefore prevents disassociation.¹³⁶⁶ Csikszentmihalyi presents evidence for the benefits of ‘flow time’¹³⁶⁷ absorption in an activity such as painting. Even Winston Churchill attested to painting’s value thus: ‘All one’s mental light, such as it is, becomes concentrated on the task.’¹³⁶⁸ Indeed, from personal experience, the meditative absorption of the painting process can bring respite and even offer glimpses of ‘light’ in times of pain and grief. Art-making is temporal, but it also encompasses a release of sorts from the confines of time, comparable to meditation or prayer.¹³⁶⁹ The self re-learns that she can be present to her experience, however painful it may be, and discover a new way of relating to others and to the wider world.¹³⁷⁰ As such, in the words of Irigaray, therapeutic aesthetic experiences often involve: ‘recalling a past, opening a future, remaining in the present or trying to arrive in it, to dwell in it,’ which ultimately ‘serves to build bridges between different moments, inside a single subjectivity or between two subjects.’¹³⁷¹

The arts have been interwoven into the fabric of human existence for as long as civilizations have been recorded. Jeremy Begbie suggests that the ‘urge to make and enjoy art seems to be universal,’¹³⁷² whether the impulse to paint on stone walls, to delight in dance and music and the cadence of poetic language.¹³⁷³ The search for the restoration of well-being through art is a well-worn path;¹³⁷⁴ art also has long been associated with spiritual regeneration.¹³⁷⁵ Lederach affirms the significance of rituals and indigenous traditions as tools of ‘social healing’¹³⁷⁶ within a community context.¹³⁷⁷ Indeed, even the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts Health and Well-being Inquiry Report acknowledged the impact of the arts, stating ‘arts engagement has a beneficial effect upon health and

¹³⁶² Sagan, “The Intersubjectivity of Spiritual Experience,” 146.

¹³⁶³ Lederach and Lederach *When Blood and Bones Cry Out*, 63.

¹³⁶⁴ Koch & Recke, “Traumatised refugees,” 289.

¹³⁶⁵ Westin, “Imagining Otherwise,” 230.

¹³⁶⁶ Westin, *Embodied Trauma and Healing*, 146-7

¹³⁶⁷ See Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience* (London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008).

¹³⁶⁸ Winston S. Churchill, *Painting as a Pastime* (London: Unicorn Press, 2013), 85-6.

¹³⁶⁹ Crowther, *What Drawing and Painting Really Mean*, 77.

¹³⁷⁰ Sagan, “The Intersubjectivity of Spiritual Experience,” 146.

¹³⁷¹ Luce Irigaray, Luce. *The Way of Love*, trans. by Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 59.

¹³⁷² Jeremy Begbie, “Introduction,” in *Beholding the Glory*, ed. J. Begbie (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001), xi.

¹³⁷³ Ibid.

¹³⁷⁴ Georgiana Jungels, “The Art of Healing: The Work of Edward Adamson,” *Art Therapy* 2, no. 2 (1985): 73.

¹³⁷⁵ Edward Adamson, *Art as healing* (London: Coventure, 1984), 5.

¹³⁷⁶ Lederach and Lederach *When Blood and Bones Cry Out*, 101.

¹³⁷⁷ Ibid.

wellbeing and therefore has a vital part to play in the public health arena'¹³⁷⁸ and boldly declares that 'policy should work towards creative activity being part of all our lives.'¹³⁷⁹ This explicit and high-level endorsement of the value of the arts suggests a growing orthodoxy. However, the value of artistic pursuits in enhancing mental well-being is difficult to quantify, with outcomes slow to emerge, nuanced, elusive, and reluctantly articulated.¹³⁸⁰

Since the beginning of the twenty first century there has been increasing attention bestowed on the wide range of art therapies, whether art, music, writing or movement. It is important to note that the art workshops that I have facilitated with refugee and asylum-seeking communities are within the remit of participatory arts and not art therapy. Nonetheless, the art-making process, even if not in an art therapy context, can be considered therapeutic, specifically in light of Weil's philosophy of attention. One of the earliest theories of art therapy originates with Edith Kramer, a painter who conducted art classes with Friedl Dicker-Brandeis in Terezin concentration camp in order to equip children to psychologically survive the war.¹³⁸¹ Linney Wix underlies the importance of *attention* in Dicker-Brandeis's practice 'aesthetic empathy':¹³⁸² 'Attention was the act of empathetically holding the space for the emerging artists.'¹³⁸³ Her instinctive practice of teaching art in adverse circumstances establishes an 'aesthetic past for art therapy'¹³⁸⁴ and its role in bearing witness, or Ettingerian *with-ness*.

Edward Adamson's pioneering work is also pivotal to the emergence of art therapy. Adamson's art studio at Netherne Hospital in Surrey was amongst the first located within a psychiatric unit. In *Art as Healing* Adamson writes that 'the studio gradually became an oasis for each person to express that individuality which had suffered such erosion in this desert of sameness. Painting gave expression to the uniqueness of each human being. Many people said how they appreciated the natural silence of the studio, with its atmosphere of quiet concentration.'¹³⁸⁵ The British psychiatrist Anthony Stevens writes that intuitively Adamson 'knew there to be a connection between creativity and healing, and he understood the importance of providing a sanctuary – a space, a *temenos* – in which this connection could be made. His genius lies in his ability to create the *enabling space*.'¹³⁸⁶ Nonetheless, as Akómoláfé reminds us, 'making sanctuary is always partial, modest and emergent.'¹³⁸⁷

Adamson believed that the artist's role 'is to be a catalyst who allows the healing art to emerge.'¹³⁸⁸ He emphasises the relationship between time and healing in his work: 'There seems to be a natural 'fullness of time' which occurs

¹³⁷⁸ All Party Parliamentary Group on Arts Health Wellbeing. *Creative health: The arts for health and wellbeing*. London: APPG, July 2017, 11. <https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/>

¹³⁷⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹³⁸⁰ Sagan, "The Intersubjectivity of Spiritual Experience," 147.

¹³⁸¹ Linney Wix, "Aesthetic empathy in teaching art to children: The work of Friedl Dicker-brandeis in Terezin," *Art Therapy* 26, no. 4 (2009): 158.

¹³⁸² Ibid.

¹³⁸³ Ibid.

¹³⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁸⁵ Edward Adamson, *Art as healing*. (London: Coventure, 1984), 2-3.

¹³⁸⁶ Anthony Stevens, "Foreword" in Ibid, xii.

¹³⁸⁷ Báýò Akómoláfé, "I, Coronavirus. Mother. Monster. Activist," personal website, May 15, 2020, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/i-coronavirus-mother-monster-activist>

¹³⁸⁸ Adamson, *Art as healing*, 4.

in both art and healing. Just as a painting cannot be forced, healing must proceed at its own pace. [...] All I can do is to try and create a permissive atmosphere and have the necessary paint and paper on hand. If the person is prepared to come and spend his time with me, then I must be prepared to join in the vigil.¹³⁸⁹ He adds that this process 'demands a considerable amount of patience.'¹³⁹⁰ Adamson's approach aligns with the notion of Weilian *attention* that is also at the heart of Dicker-Brandeis's 'aesthetic empathy.' This attention is integral to curating an 'enabling space' for healing. Stevens attributes Adamson's success to the 'absolute respect – one might say reverence – he has for the individual, and for the value that he creates out of that experience.'¹³⁹¹ The notion of reverence, patience and time-taking is integral to both the art workshops I have facilitated with displaced and asylum-seeking women and my portraiture practice. Weil's philosophy of attention offers a framework for artistic practices rooted in dignity, respect, and solidarity that incline tenderly to the unseen, unspoken stories of communities on the margins.¹³⁹²

This chapter has addressed the vital need for individuals from migratory and marginalised communities to find meaningful, if fleeting, 'inhabitable spaces of welcome.'¹³⁹³ While small in scale, community art workshops – such as the project with Unity Sisters in Glasgow – have the potential to open up something wider and to encourage gentler, kinder forms of inter-human relations.¹³⁹⁴ These glimpses of an 'aesthetics of care' offer 'hints of a more hopeful, equitable way of being together.'¹³⁹⁵ On a micro level, community art projects are an expression of 'beautiful attentiveness'¹³⁹⁶ and provide 'glimpses of more mutually sustaining social relations,'¹³⁹⁷ highlighting connection, care, deep listening as essential for ethical engagement, acknowledging the inherent dignity of each and every life.¹³⁹⁸ In the following chapter I will shine a light upon the art exhibitions that have been underpinned by the same thread of intention. Thus contributing to painting a picture of the artistic process, in the words of Lederach, as a 'wellspring that feeds the building of peace,'¹³⁹⁹ and a 'peaceful politics' founded upon respectful relations with the other.¹⁴⁰⁰

¹³⁸⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹³⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹³⁹¹ Stevens, "Foreword," in Ibid, xii.

¹³⁹² Craig T. Maier, "Attentive Waiting in an Uprooted Age: Simone Weil's Response in an Age of Precarity," *Review of Communication* 13, no. 3 (2013): 235.

¹³⁹³ Willen, *Fighting for Dignity*, 200.

¹³⁹⁴ James Thompson, "Performing the 'aesthetics of care,'" in *Performing Care: New perspectives on socially engaged performance*, eds. Stuart Fisher, A. & Thompson, J. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 219.

¹³⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁹⁶ James Thompson, *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009), 119.

¹³⁹⁷ Thompson, "Performing the 'aesthetics of care,'" 229.

¹³⁹⁸ Maier, "Attentive Waiting in an Uprooted Age," 235.

¹³⁹⁹ John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), ix.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Laura Roberts, Lenart Škof, "Thinking Politically with Luce Irigaray," *SOPHIA* 61 (2022): 96.

PART V: The Work of Art as an Interval of Hesitation

On Hesitation

In the preceding chapters I have reflected upon the value of *making* art, whether individually or in a community-based art workshop. I have conceptualised this value in terms of attention, inclination, sanctuary, silence, listening, prayer and hospitality. In this penultimate chapter I will consider to what extent art can serve as a stimulus to Weilian attention in the viewer. Therefore, drawing upon my experience from exhibitions of my portraits of displaced women in places of influence in the Global North, such as the UK Houses of Parliament, I consider the attention-inviting value of a work of art. As such, how far can these works of art help go to bring attention to topics that are difficult to approach, namely conflict, sexual violence and forced displacement? Do these paintings invite individuals to create space for, in the words of Weil, that ‘interval of hesitation,’¹⁴⁰¹ and what Irigaray refers to as a ‘silent constituting pause’?¹⁴⁰²

In this thesis I suggest that a work of art offers a profound insight into Weilian attention. Attentiveness is both at the heart of the artistic process, and the outcome of it: there is the artist’s attention in creating the work of art and the viewer’s attention in contemplating it.¹⁴⁰³ One can learn an ethics of attention through the contemplation of works of art as well as the practice of art. Intervals of contemplative hesitation are especially valuable and rare considering the fracturing of attention accepted as endemic to modern life. In a fast-paced world which demands increasingly immediate, reactive responses to the daily events taking place around us, these intervals are few and far between.¹⁴⁰⁴ Hesitation implies a patience, an open process of thought and a willingness to suspend certainty and to create space for wonder. Michelle Boulous Walker writes that work of art urges one ‘to stop, to reconsider, to rethink everything we think we know’¹⁴⁰⁵ and reveals the importance of a contemplative, ‘open relation to the complexity of the world we inhabit.’¹⁴⁰⁶ In the words of Martin Heidegger: ‘art breaks open an open space, in whose openness everything is other than usual.’¹⁴⁰⁷

¹⁴⁰¹ Simone Weil. “The Iliad; or the Poem of Force.” In *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, ed. Sian Miles. (London: Penguin Classics 2005), 194.

¹⁴⁰² Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*. trans. Heidi Bostic and Steven Pluhacek (London: Continuum, 2002), 22.

¹⁴⁰³ Stephanie Gehring, “Attention to Suffering in the Work of Simone Weil and Käthe Kollwitz,” (PhD Thesis: Duke University, 2018), 44.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Richard Kyte, *Intervals of Hesitation: Essays on the Ethical Life 2013-2017* (Piscator Books, 2022), xii-xiii.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Michelle Boulous Walker, *Slow philosophy: reading against the institution*, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, Plc, 2017), 8-9.

¹⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row 1971), 75. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 8-9.

The danger, according to Weil, is that: ‘Since other people do not impose on their movements that halt, that interval of hesitation, wherein lies all our consideration for our brothers in humanity, they conclude that destiny has given complete license to them, and none at all to their inferiors.’¹⁴⁰⁸ This suggests that hesitation is the foundation of ethics, at the heart of our consideration for the other.¹⁴⁰⁹ A Weilian *interval of hesitation* sits at the cross-roads of the aesthetic, ethical, epistemic and political. For Peter Winch, Weilian hesitation ‘imports a set of attitudes and establishes a notion of a human being as one to whom respect is due.’¹⁴¹⁰ Hesitation is therefore a ‘moral necessity,’¹⁴¹¹ since it allows for a respectful engagement with the world to emerge. Thus a new ethical constellation of *being-in-the-world-with-others*¹⁴¹² becomes possible; a posture of attentive inclination to the other that preserves the silent space between-two.

Weil expresses the importance of hesitation in an illuminating way that has substantive implications.¹⁴¹³ This ‘hesitation’ implies an appropriate caution and respect, almost shyness, with which we approach the mysterious threshold of the sanctuary of the other.¹⁴¹⁴ Rebecca Hill conceives of Irigaray’s notion of the interval as a threshold of open potential ‘for the theorization of different relations of alterity and different becomings.’¹⁴¹⁵ As such, a work of art can illuminate an Irigarayan politics based upon prayer, compassion and silence.¹⁴¹⁶ Art can reveal an awareness of the ‘transcendence of the other’¹⁴¹⁷ as something that demands reverence and attention.¹⁴¹⁸ A painting as prayer can become an iconistic encounter for the viewer, imbued with transformative potential. Therefore, a seemingly passive, personal encounter with a work of art has the potential to provoke change (albeit in a small way) in the public realm of politics. ‘With quiet and silence as dynamic poetic resources, it is possible,’ Benjamin Tausig reminds us, that ‘silence achieved a political mobility that no sound could have matched.’¹⁴¹⁹

¹⁴⁰⁸ Weil, *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, 194.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Kyte, *Intervals of Hesitation*, xii-xiii.

¹⁴¹⁰ Colin Lyas, *Peter Winch*, (Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1999), 177.

¹⁴¹¹ Peter Winch, “Peter Winch in India 1986 Lecture on Simone Weil,” *Philosophical Investigations: Special Issue on Simone Weil (1909-1943)* 43, no. 1-2. (2020): 46.

¹⁴¹² Lenart Škof and Emily A. Holmes, “Towards Breathing With Luce Irigaray,” in *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, eds. Škof, Lenart, and Holmes, Emily A. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013), 18.

¹⁴¹³ Lyas, *Peter Winch*, 164.

¹⁴¹⁴ Rowan Williams, “An Ambivalent Ideal: Challenges to an Ethic of Solidarity,” The Bampton Lectures 2024. The University Church, Oxford. February, 27, 2024, video, 50:41, <https://www.universitychurch.ox.ac.uk/content/bampton-lectures>

¹⁴¹⁵ Rebecca Hill, *The Interval: Relation and Becoming in Irigaray, Aristotle, and Bergson* (Fordham University Press, 2014), 2-3.

¹⁴¹⁶ Lenart Škof, “Democracy of Breath and Fire: Irigarayan Meditations,” *SOPHIA* 61 (2022): 127.

¹⁴¹⁷ Luce Irigaray, “How Can We Achieve Women’s Liberation?” In *Thinking Life with Luce Irigaray: Language, Origin, Art, Love*, ed. Gail M. Schwab, (State University of New York Press, 2020), 29.

¹⁴¹⁸ Rowan Williams. *Being Human: Bodies, Minds Persons*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2018), 38.

¹⁴¹⁹ Benjamin Tausig, *Bangkok Is Ringing: Sound, Protest, and Constraint*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 91. Quoted in Julia Cassaniti, “The sounds of silence: Thai meditative practice for personal and political change,” *American Anthropologist* 125 (2023): 888.

The Ethical Value of Aesthetic Contemplation

Through the contemplation of works of art one can learn the art of perception and Weilian attention. Jennifer Roberts believes that attention is essential in order to perceive what is in a painting: ‘in any work of art there are details and orders and relationships that take time to perceive.’¹⁴²⁰ This suggests that perceptive vision is not immediate. As Weil writes, ‘I must pay attention to in order to notice, just as I need to pay attention to see glazes of red or yellow pigment on the canvas that portrays the Gioconda (Mona Lisa), instead of seeing the skin of a woman.’¹⁴²¹ One must allow time for a work of art to gradually reveal its multiple aspects and subtle nuances, this is also true for one’s ethical relations in the wider world. Anthony Rudd illuminates: ‘The notions of presence and of attention are closely bound up with each other.’¹⁴²² Indeed, as in the case of intersubjectivity, ‘for a painting to be present to me, I need to attend to it. And in the case of painting too, such attention demands an effort.’¹⁴²³ As such, this requires relinquishing control: ‘I am surrendering myself, giving myself to the painting.’¹⁴²⁴ Rudd reflects that when he consciously attends to a painting ‘it is as if a gestalt shift has taken place; the object of my perception remains the same, but it also becomes quite different. But sometimes there is no decision and no option. The painting forces itself on me.’¹⁴²⁵

In Weil’s ‘Method for understanding images’ she instructs us to relinquish any attempt to interpret a work of art, and instead to look until the ‘light suddenly dawns’¹⁴²⁶ and ‘illusions are scattered and the real becomes visible.’¹⁴²⁷ This attentive receptive openness is another way of *letting the painting speak*, whereby one’s senses, emotions and perceptual faculties are touched and one intuitively understands the paintings’ message silently communicated via colour, light, texture and gesture. For Merleau-Ponty, rather than seeing a painting, ‘I see according to, or with it.’¹⁴²⁸ Neil MacGregor asserts that the greatest works of art are those that communicate a direct message to the viewer, for example the torso fragment in Rilke’s famous poem *Archaic Torso of Apollo*, which appears to address him thus: ‘You

¹⁴²⁰ Jennifer L. Roberts, “The Power of Patience: Teaching students the value of deceleration and immersive attention,” *Harvard Magazine*, November-December 2013 <https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2013/11/the-power-of-patience> Quoted in Silvia Caprioglio Panizza, *The Ethics of Attention: Engaging the Real with Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil*, (Routledge, 2022), 10.

¹⁴²¹ Weil, Simone. “Science and Perception in Descartes.” In *Formative Writings 1929–1941*, ed. and trans. D. T. McFarland and W. Van Ness, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988) 79. Quoted in Warren Heiti, “The Dance of Perception: The Rôle of the Imagination in Simone Weil’s Early Epistemology,” in *Imagination and art : Explorations in contemporary theory*, ed. Moser, K., & Ch., S. A. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2020), 309.

¹⁴²² Anthony Rudd, “Painting and Presence”, in *Painting and Presence: Why Paintings Matter* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press 2022), 64-5.

¹⁴²³ Ibid., 65.

¹⁴²⁴ Ibid., 65-6.

¹⁴²⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴²⁶ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002), 120.

¹⁴²⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴²⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, trans. M. B. Smith, ed. G. A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 126.

must change your life.¹⁴²⁹ The work of art represents a meeting place of dialogue and communication; it communicates differently with different people, with whomsoever may choose to attune to it. In the words of Marcel Duchamp, 'The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.'¹⁴³⁰ Duchamp describes this 'transference from the artist to the spectator' as an 'aesthetic osmosis.'¹⁴³¹

A work of art can be considered an artefact or a vessel of Weilian attention, if approached in the right way.¹⁴³² For Stephanie Gehring, a work of art asks for a 'deliberate intellectual and emotional openness, a posture of receiving,' which she describes as 'compassionate attention,'¹⁴³³ in order to be seen. This is especially important for art that attends to suffering or human and personal vulnerability, opening our imaginations to what Cora Diamond refers to as the 'difficulty of reality,'¹⁴³⁴ resisting our ingrained tendency to turn away and deflect.¹⁴³⁵ Gehring writes that attention is the only way of 'getting past deflection'¹⁴³⁶ and 'engaging meaningfully with suffering.'¹⁴³⁷ Weil's new ethic is described by Jacqueline Rose as a 'form of magical thinking,' whereby instinctive, natural revulsion towards suffering is turned into a 'willing and tender embrace.'¹⁴³⁸ The challenge therefore, is to understand the conditions that enable a beholder to attend to a work of art that engages with difficult themes.¹⁴³⁹ For, to borrow T. S. Eliot's words, 'human kind, / cannot bear very much reality.'¹⁴⁴⁰ These paintings can therefore be seen as an invitation to hesitate, and perhaps even 'a companion in our hesitating,'¹⁴⁴¹ offering a silent, sensory, and epistemological tool

¹⁴²⁹ Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Poetry of Rilke*, ed. and trans. Edward Snow (New York: North Point Press, 2009), 223. Quoted in Neil MacGregor, "A Search for Symbols and Images Adequate to Our Predicament," in *Theology, Modernity, and the Visual Arts*, eds. Ben Quash and Chloë Reddaway (Turnhout: Brepols, 2024), 181.

¹⁴³⁰ R. Lebel. *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 77-8. Quoted in Nicoletta Isar, "Tropes and Tools of Creativity: The Ontology of Image and Its Unpredictable Operations." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Creativity and Culture Research*, ed. V.P. Glăveanu, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 707-8.

¹⁴³¹ Ibid.

¹⁴³² Hannah R. Thomas, *Tears of Gold: Portraits of Yazidi, Rohingya and Nigerian Women*. (New York, Walden: Plough Publishing House, 2024), 69.

¹⁴³³ Gehring, *Attention to Suffering*, 44.

¹⁴³⁴ Cora Diamond, "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy," in *Philosophy & Animal Life* (New York, Chichester and West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2008), 45–46. Quoted in Hannah Winther, "Will the Void: Wittgenstein and Weil on the Ethics of Attention" in *Between Wittgenstein and Weil: Comparisons in Philosophy, Religion, and Ethics*, ed. Manzi, J. (Routledge, 2023), 89.

¹⁴³⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴³⁶ Gehring, *Attention to Suffering*. 2-3.

¹⁴³⁷ Ibid., 17.

¹⁴³⁸ Jacqueline Rose, *The Plague* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2023), 84.

¹⁴³⁹ Pascale Devette, "Paying Attention to Affliction: Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil on Tragic Storytelling," in *Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil: Unprecedented Conversations*, eds. In K. Lawson & J. Livingstone (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), 168.

¹⁴⁴⁰ T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton (No. 1 Of 'Four Quartets')", in *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909–1950*. (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1952) 118-9.

¹⁴⁴¹ Gehring, *Attention to Suffering*, 4, 11.

for transformation and ‘a gesture of resistance.’¹⁴⁴² Portraiture of women from displaced communities can therefore be considered a tangible ‘vessel’ of Weilian attention.¹⁴⁴³

Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross present a compelling neurochemical and biological argument for the transformative potential of the arts: ‘You are literally changed, on a cellular level, by aesthetics.’¹⁴⁴⁴ The visual stimuli that we encounter fundamentally alters ‘the structure and function of cells within our brains and bodies;’¹⁴⁴⁵ this, in turn, affects physiology and behaviour.¹⁴⁴⁶ The Mauritshuis museum recently commissioned research exploring the neurological mechanisms and emotions underlying the perception of works of art.¹⁴⁴⁷ The research revealed that art stimulates various parts of the brain, in particular the frontal cortex which is ‘crucial for aesthetic appreciation and value judgements’ and the amygdala, which is ‘involved in emotional responses, allowing art to evoke a variety of emotions such as joy, sorrow, and a sense of calm.’¹⁴⁴⁸ The results show that original artworks, compared to their reproductions, evoke an emotional reaction that is ten times more powerful.¹⁴⁴⁹

Magsamen and Ross affirm that the arts ‘trigger the release of neurochemicals, hormones, and endorphins that offers you an emotional release. [...] There is a neurochemical exchange that can lead to what Aristotle called catharsis, or a release of emotion that leaves you feeling more connected to yourself and others afterward.’¹⁴⁵⁰ Thus visual art invigorates empathic engagement.¹⁴⁵¹ Indeed, neuroscientific research suggests that observing an individual in pain, whether in a work of art or in life, activates the same neural networks as if the viewer was experiencing the pain themselves.¹⁴⁵² According to the Mauritshuis research, it is ‘logically plausible’ that works of art, specifically paintings with a Marionian ‘counter-gaze’ such as portraiture or iconography, help to stimulate these mirror neurons which have an essential function in empathy.¹⁴⁵³ Therefore, while a work of art might not ultimately undermine embedded structures of power, oppression or indifference, it might create ruptures, cracks; challenge

¹⁴⁴² Elaine P. Miller. *Head Cases: Julia Kristeva on Philosophy and Art in Depressed Times* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 51.

¹⁴⁴³ Andrew Epstein, *Attention Equals Life. The Pursuit of the Everyday in Contemporary Poetry and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Quoted in Jean-Michel Ganteau, *The Poetics and Ethics of Attention in Contemporary British Narrative* (Routledge, 2022), 24.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross, *Your Brain On Art: How The Arts Transform Us* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2023), 88.

¹⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 28.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Neurensics, *The unconscious emotions that art evokes: Neuroscience research into the impact of a museum visit, Final Report*, (The Hague: Mauritshuis, 2024), 3. https://www.mauritshuis.nl/media/soukluyo/report-neuro-mauritshuis-02102024_en.pdf

¹⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross, *Your Brain On Art: How The Arts Transform Us* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2023), 28.

¹⁴⁵¹ David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese, “Motion, emotion and empathy in esthetic experience,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 11, no. 5 (2007). 197–203.

¹⁴⁵² Christian Keysers, Bruno Wicker, Valeria Gazzola, Jean-Luc Anton, Leonardo Fogassi, Vittorio Gallese, “A touching sight: SII/PV Activation during the observation and experience of touch,” *Neuron* 42, no. 2 (2004), 342-3.

¹⁴⁵³ Neurensics, *The unconscious emotions that art evokes*, 3.

dominant narratives and expand our capacity to care about others.¹⁴⁵⁴ As Elaine Scarry writes, ‘beautiful things [...] act like small tears in the surface of the world.’¹⁴⁵⁵

Experiencing a work of art can focus our attention and compel us to pause and to experience the slow delight of wonder. Roberts affirms the value of engaging with art as opportunities for ‘deceleration, patience, and immersive attention,’¹⁴⁵⁶ which can be an expansive experience. Erik Scherder, professor of neuropsychology at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, affirms that ‘watching art stimulates your brain on several levels. It evokes excitement, triggers imagination and makes you think about what you see. It’s an ultimate enrichment, activating your brain to the fullest.’¹⁴⁵⁷ Indeed, traditional, non-digital works of art offer ‘contained temporal experiences’¹⁴⁵⁸ and a temporary sanctuary from an over-saturated reality, where there is rarely the opportunity for silence or stillness. Therefore, creating space for silent contemplation may enable ‘renewed inhabitations of the present’, and a receptivity to a more expansive encounter with the other.¹⁴⁵⁹ Irigaray writes that, it is essential ‘to know how to stop in order to rest, to leave an interval between himself and the other, to look toward, to contemplate – to wonder.’¹⁴⁶⁰ Irigaray’s interval *between-two* resonates with Weil’s ‘Interval of hesitation;’ envisaging an open threshold onto new political, ethical, and cultural possibilities.

Weil and Iris Murdoch both highlight the close relationship between art and the ethical realm.¹⁴⁶¹ Murdoch acknowledges the encounter with art to be integral to the process of ‘unselfing.’¹⁴⁶² Indeed, the appreciation of a work of art is ‘the easiest available spiritual exercise.’¹⁴⁶³ According to George Steiner, a work of art ‘takes us outside of ourselves’ and instead of inviting us to consume it, ‘invites us to behold.’¹⁴⁶⁴ Thus art counterpoises tendencies toward self-absorption and brings us closer to a *metaxic* ‘border-crossing into ‘otherness;’ the ‘terra incognita of a humanity beyond itself.’¹⁴⁶⁵ For Scarry, it can be the spark that causes an increased attentiveness and engagement with the wider world; ‘a radical decentering.’¹⁴⁶⁶ According to Weil, when we ‘give up our imaginary position as the

¹⁴⁵⁴ bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 243.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 112.

¹⁴⁵⁶ Roberts, “The Power of Patience.”

¹⁴⁵⁷ Mauritshuis, “Girl with a Pearl Earring visually captivates the viewer: Mauritshuis presents results of neuro research,” 2 October 2024. <https://www.mauritshuis.nl/en/press-releases/girl-with-a-pearl-earring-visually-captivates-the-viewer/>

¹⁴⁵⁸ Jonathan Gross, “Holding Together Loss and Hope: Reflections on the Need for Art in Times of Crisis.” *Journal of Psychosocial Studies* 13, no. 2 (2020): 209-217.

¹⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 73.

¹⁴⁶¹ Mark Freeman, “Beholding and Being Beheld: Simone Weil, Iris Murdoch, and the Ethics of Attention,” *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 43, no. 2 (2015): 160-1.

¹⁴⁶² Ibid.

¹⁴⁶³ Iris Murdoch, “On ‘God’ and ‘Good’”, in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter Conradi. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), 352.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Catherine Craig & Sara MacDonald, “Beauty as the Beginning and End of Justice: Aesthetic Politics in Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil,” in *Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil: Unprecedented Conversations*, eds. K. Lawson & J. Livingstone (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), 211.

¹⁴⁶⁵ George Steiner, *Real presences* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 75. Quoted in Freeman, “Beholding and Being Beheld,” 171.

¹⁴⁶⁶ Scarry. *On Beauty*, 111-12.

centre,¹⁴⁶⁷ even if only momentarily, a 'transformation then takes place at the very roots of our sensibility.'¹⁴⁶⁸ This decentering allows for the perspectives and needs of others to be brought to the fore, so that these might be attended to with care.¹⁴⁶⁹ True attention, according to Weil, is decentered.¹⁴⁷⁰ Thus we can see the ethical value of giving attention to a work of art in opening up oneself to alterity.¹⁴⁷¹ Weil reminds us that the 'contemplation of authentic works of art [...] can sustain us in our effort to think continually about the human order which should be our first object.'¹⁴⁷²

In Murdoch's words, a great work of art 'invigorates our best faculties and, to use Platonic language, inspires love in the highest part of the soul.'¹⁴⁷³ For art 'provides a stirring image of a pure transcendent value, a steady visible enduring higher good, and perhaps provides for many people, in an unreligious age without prayer or sacraments, their clearest experience of something grasped as separate and precious and beneficial and held quietly and unpossessively in the attention. Good art which we love can seem holy and attending to it can be like praying.'¹⁴⁷⁴ Thus a work of art, if one attends to it with absolute attention and love, can be a *metaxic* bridge to revelation, illumination and what Weil describes as a 'more mysterious dimension.'¹⁴⁷⁵ A work of art can open a sacred, ethical and aesthetic space for others to contemplate. Perhaps the silent, reverential attention when standing before a work of art, the posture of stillness required to be receptive to its presence, is the *interval* that allows the revelatory and restorative possibilities of art to emerge. I posit that the portrait paintings in this thesis possess the potential to mediate a prayerful, iconistic encounter for the viewer.

For Norman Wizba, the 'goal' of prayer is an attentive response to the world that 'prepares us for a compassionate embrace of reality.'¹⁴⁷⁶ Maldonado-Torres writes that prayer is 'a humble recognition of something beyond.'¹⁴⁷⁷ A work of art can be a container for the sacred or a delineation of *hierotopy*¹⁴⁷⁸ ('sacred space'); therefore looking at art becomes a kind of liturgy and prayer.¹⁴⁷⁹ For Nicoletta Isar, the 'liturgical space' is 'fundamentally relational;' a 'ritual space of participation' in the act of veneration.¹⁴⁸⁰ Anton Houtepen explains that prayer, liturgy and iconistic

¹⁴⁶⁷ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 100.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Craig & MacDonald, "Beauty as the Beginning and End of Justice," 211.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Devette, "Paying Attention to Affliction," 170.

¹⁴⁷¹ Ganteau, *The Poetics and Ethics of Attention*, 166.

¹⁴⁷² Weil, *The Need for Roots*, 10.

¹⁴⁷³ Iris Murdoch, *The sovereignty of good* (London: Routledge, 1970), 83. Quoted in Freeman, "Beholding and Being Beheld," 168.

¹⁴⁷⁴ Iris Murdoch, "The Fire and The Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 453.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 58.

¹⁴⁷⁶ Norman Wirzba, "Attention and Responsibility: The Work of Prayer", in *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, eds. Bruce Ellis Benson, and Norman Wirzba, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2005; online edition, 2011), 89.

¹⁴⁷⁷ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Human Rights," *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 114, no. 1 (2017): 120-1.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Alexei Lidov, "Hierotopy. The creation of sacred space as a form of creativity and subject of cultural history," in *Hierotopy. Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*, ed. A. Lidov. (Moscow : INDRIK, 2006), 32.

¹⁴⁷⁹ Elissa Yukiko Weichbrodt, "A Loving Regard: Contemporary Art and Expanding the Archive," in *Religion and Contemporary Art: A Curious Accord*, eds. R. R. Bernier and R. H. Smith, (Routledge, 2023), 95-6.

¹⁴⁸⁰ Nicoletta Isar, "The Vision and its 'Excessively Blessed Beholder': Of Desire and Participation in the Icon", *RES: The Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 38 (2000): 70-1.

encounter aspire to evoke ‘a real ‘change of heart’ or *metanoia*,¹⁴⁸¹ whereby we come to know and perceive others and ourselves differently. A work of art that reveals an aesthetically embodied attention to the marginalised may move the viewer to respond with compassion.¹⁴⁸² Marion reminds us that: ‘Art bears the responsibility of what it gives to see and, even further, the responsibility of its power to make us look,’¹⁴⁸³ through creating a sacred space for the encounter of gazes.¹⁴⁸⁴

Weil’s attention therefore is profoundly illuminated in our encounter with a work of art, perhaps only eclipsed by an encounter with, in Levinasian terms, the *infinite* in ‘the face of the other.’¹⁴⁸⁵ Mark Freeman suggests the respectful attention that an encounter with a work of art elicits can subtly influence how we relate to people.¹⁴⁸⁶ However, he concedes that while the aesthetic encounter will not necessarily inculcate ‘an attentive, respectful regard and increased care for what is other – the potential is there.’¹⁴⁸⁷ Nonetheless, some artworks create the space for ‘unselfing, through both beholding and being beheld, as well as a kind of reselfing, such that a larger, more capacious mode of being’¹⁴⁸⁸ emerges. In the words of Irigaray, a work of art has the potential to ‘teach how to respect and contemplate the world, and not only how to grasp and master it, as has been too often the case in our Western culture.’¹⁴⁸⁹ There is potential that, on the contrary, we might be captured and captivated by a work of art and brought to a place of stillness, silence and self-forgetful reverence.

Towards an Irigayan Feminised Politics

We are witnessing escalating authoritarianism, nationalism and polarisation along the well-wrought lines of religion, race, ethnicity, gender.¹⁴⁹⁰ This is exacerbated by inflammatory political and media rhetoric that valorise identities

¹⁴⁸¹ Anton Houtepen, “The Dialectics of the Icon: A Reference to God?” In *Iconoclasm and Iconoclasm: Struggle for Religious Identity*, eds. W. Van Asselt, P. van Geest, D. Muller, and T. Saleminck, (Utrecht: University of Tilburg, Brill, 2007), 66-7. Quoted in Karen von Veh, “Performing Memory and Mourning: Diane Victor’s Martyred Women,” in *Religion and Contemporary Art: A Curious Accord*, eds. R. R. Bernier and R. H. Smith, (Routledge, 2023), 382-3.

¹⁴⁸² Ronald R. Bernier and Rachel Hostetter Smith, “Introduction”, in *Religion and Contemporary Art: A Curious Accord*, eds. R. R. Bernier and R. H. Smith, (Routledge, 2023), 13-14.

¹⁴⁸³ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), p. 87. Quoted in Fritz, P.J. “Black Holes And Revelations: Michel Henry And Jean-Luc Marion On The Aesthetics Of The Invisible.” *Modern Theology*, 25 (2009): 415-440.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Nicoletta Isar, “The Broken Image Of Splits and Cuttings: Modern Representation and its Beginnings.” In *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and their Representation in the Arts, 1000-2000*, eds. N Isar, NH Petersen, C Cluver, N Bell, (Amsterdam: Brill, 2004), 125-6.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Thomas Pfau, “The Art and Ethics of Attention,” *The Hedgehog Review* 16, no. 2 (2014), 34-42.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Freeman, “Beholding and Being Beheld,” 161.

¹⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 167-8.

¹⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 171-2.

¹⁴⁸⁹ Luce Irigaray, “Listening, Thinking, Teaching,” in *Luce Irigaray: Teaching*, ed. L. Irigaray and M. Green (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2008), 234.

¹⁴⁹⁰ John a., powell and Stephen Menendian, *Belonging Without Othering: How We Save Ourselves and the World* (Stanford University Press, 2024), 5, 126.

preserved at the expense of other identities, accentuating state and public hostility and in-hospitality towards migrants, refugees and anyone labelled as 'other'. In light of the concomitant damage to community and the possibilities for communion and hospitality, there is urgent need for restorative practices which impel us to the giving of care and attention.¹⁴⁹¹ As we have seen, a work of art has the potential to offer an expansive encounter and inspire sensitive consideration for other voices and subjectivities alongside our own, and thereby cultivate an 'ecology of attention' based on 'non-violent being-for- and with-the-other.'¹⁴⁹² Art can play a role in helping to shift dominant political narratives based upon violent logics towards embracing ethical co-existence with one another and a respect for difference.¹⁴⁹³ According to Irigaray, our task is 'to create a world in which we can live in peace.'¹⁴⁹⁴

Báyò Akómoláfé urges us that: 'We need a politics of tenderness now more than ever.'¹⁴⁹⁵ This echoes Pope Francis' call for a 'revolution of tenderness,'¹⁴⁹⁶ enjoining us to 'use our eyes to see the other, our ears to hear the other.'¹⁴⁹⁷ Tenderness suggests a sensitive care and concern for another; an intimacy, proximity and a bond of common vulnerability. Levinas writes that poetry (and I suggest, painting) 'is the proximity of things. [...] Tenderness extends itself to all things from the human face and skin; knowledge returns to proximity.'¹⁴⁹⁸ This invitation to tenderness and attentiveness is essential in order to overcome power struggles, combative discourse and conflict and embrace alternative ways of being-together that enable inclusivity, community and ethical affectivity to flourish.¹⁴⁹⁹

Irigaray's writings invite us to a new way of thinking and re-conceptualising a caring democracy-to-come: 'It is much more a case of reorganising the way that humanity lives and produces with a view to preserving the planet, and human life and culture. In other words, of awakening consciousness to another stage in its becoming, which will allow us to begin building new ways of existing and thinking.'¹⁵⁰⁰ This is especially important at a time when democracy is increasingly imperilled by anti-democratic, populist inclinations and regimes.¹⁵⁰¹ Our political structure is irrefutably constructed to inculcate competition and individualism as opposed to collaboration, horizontality,

¹⁴⁹¹ Rowan Williams. "Solidarity, Rights and the Image of God: Ethics and Christian Anthropology." The Bampton Lectures 2024. The University Church, Oxford. March 5, 2024, video, 42:30-44: 30.

<https://www.universitychurch.ox.ac.uk/content/bampton-lectures>

¹⁴⁹² Yves Citton, "Introduction: From Attention Economy to Attention Economy," *The Ecology of Attention*, trans Barnaby Norman (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016). Referenced in in Ganteau, *The Poetics and Ethics of Attention*, 27-8.

¹⁴⁹³ Laura Roberts, Lenart Škof, "Thinking Politically with Luce Irigaray," *SOPHIA* 61 (2022): 93.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the world* (London: Continuum 2008), 136.

¹⁴⁹⁵ Báyò Akómoláfé, "When the world becomes solid: To be correct is to lost the plot." October 18, 2023, , Retrieved from *Bayo Akomolafe* (personal website), <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/when-the-world-becomes-solid>

¹⁴⁹⁶ His Holiness Pope Francis, "Why the only future worth building includes everyone," TED Talk, April 2017, video, 17:41 https://www.ted.com/talks/his_holiness_pope_franis_why_the_only_future_worth_building_includes_everyone/transcript

¹⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, "Langage et proximité", in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (Paris: Vrin, 1974), 228. Translated from the French by Ashraf Noor. Quoted in Fabio Ciaramelli, "The Infinite Call to Interpretation. Remarks on Levinas and Art." *Naharaim* 6, no. 2 (2013): 357.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Lenart Škof, "Democracy of Breath and Fire: Irigarayan Meditations," *SOPHIA* 61, (2022): 118.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Luce Irigaray, *Democracy Begins Between Two*, transl. Kirsten Anderson (London: The Athlone Press, Irigaray, 2000), 4 (first published in Italian in 1994 as *La democrazia comincia a due*). Quoted in Ibid.

¹⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 125.

mutual understanding and relational belonging.¹⁵⁰² As such, Irigaray advocates for a return to 'political elements that belonged to ancient feminine rights.'¹⁵⁰³ For example: 'the respect for the earth, the concern for life and its environment, the search for peace, the sense of justice, in particular towards the weakest, the youngest, towards those who cannot yet speak, and those who are excluded from social power, are ancient feminine rights. I could add the sense of hospitality, of generosity, and of a priori respect for persons.'¹⁵⁰⁴

Lenart Škof, influenced by Irigaray, compellingly argues for a 'feminisation' of politics that is about new ways of imagining how politics is done. By contrast to masculinist political paradigms of authoritarianism, hierarchy and homogeneity, a feminised politics recognises the importance of relational gestures, dialogue, collaboration and participation.¹⁵⁰⁵ It is a new ethical rituality based upon '*mild gestures*' of tenderness, patience, care, attentive listening, prayer and silence,¹⁵⁰⁶ that bring us to the threshold of an 'Irigayan-based *quiet democracy*'¹⁵⁰⁷ and a 'peaceful politics' grounded in respectful relations with the other.¹⁵⁰⁸ Kate Shea Baird and Laura Roth affirm that promoting 'feminine' approaches to politics will ultimately be inclusive and beneficial for all marginalised groups irrespective of gender.¹⁵⁰⁹ For Irigaray, in order to promote a political philosophy 'more appropriate for humanity as formed by beings-in-relation, we must begin by transforming our energy through a continuous artistic process.'¹⁵¹⁰ Indeed, she suggests that art can 'express our whole being better than philosophy, and can more easily overcome the dichotomies of our past logic.'¹⁵¹¹

Art can play a valuable role in widening the 'aperture of our gaze'¹⁵¹² and expanding the 'circle of human concern.'¹⁵¹³ For Powell and Menéndez, expanding the circle of human concern entails deliberate efforts to humanise the other and to contest and resist negative representations and stereotypes of certain social groups.¹⁵¹⁴ Works of art can help to reclaim our collective humanity by embracing all people, including the most marginalised,

¹⁵⁰² Laura Roth and Kate Shea Baird, "Municipalism and the feminisation of politics." *Roar Magazine*, no. 6 (2017): n.p. <https://medium.com/@lauracroth/municipalism-and-the-feminisation-of-politics-with-kate-shea-baird-8571076d03e7>.

¹⁵⁰³ Luce Irigaray, "Speech to the XVIIIth Congress of the Italian Communist Party," *SOPHIA* 61 (2022): 100.

¹⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰⁵ Roberts, Škof, "Thinking Politically with Luce Irigaray," 94.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Lenart Škof, "Breath of Proximity: Intersubjectivity, Ethics and Peace," *Springer Dordrecht* (2015): 8.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Škof, "Democracy of Breath and Fire," 128.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Roberts, Škof, "Thinking Politically with Luce Irigaray," 96.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Roth and Shea Baird, "Municipalism and the feminisation of politics." Referenced in Laura Roberts. *Irigaray and Politics: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 154-5.

¹⁵¹⁰ Luce Irigaray, *In the Beginning, She Was*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 22. Rachel Jones, "Philosophical *Métissage* and the Decolonization of Difference: Luce Irigaray, Daniel Maximin, and the Elemental Sublime." *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 5, no. 2 (2018): 140.

¹⁵¹¹ Luce Irigaray. "How Could We Achieve Women's Liberation?" in *Thinking Life with Luce Irigaray: Language, Origin, Art, Love*, ed. Gail M. Schwab (State University of New York Press, 2020), 34-5.

¹⁵¹² David Farrier, *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones, and Extinction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 5. Quoted in Kathryn Lawson, *Ecological Ethics and the Philosophy of Simone Weil: Decreation for the Anthropocene* (Routledge, 2024), 168.

¹⁵¹³ Tom Rudd, "Marc Anthony and the Circles of Cognitive Caring," *Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity*, August 2, 2013, <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/marc-anthony-and-the-circles-of-cognitive-caring>. Quoted in Powell and Stephen Menéndez, *Belonging Without Othering*, 161.

¹⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

and searching for a deeper, common ground. Art can challenge reductive, essentialist narratives, systematising tendencies and the intolerant and sectarian thought processes and attitudes that facilitate conflict and division, whether explicitly or implicitly. As Helen Fielding writes, '[e]ncounters with artworks can cultivate perception by simply conditioning the ways we perceive; encounters can also motivate reflection on how we perceive what we perceive, revealing the possibilities of a more deeply relational world.'¹⁵¹⁵ There is a certain political potency and potential pertaining to the affective capacity of art and the subtly subversive, subconscious ways that art shifts the ways we perceive.¹⁵¹⁶ Even a work of art that does not overtly address politics can bring attention to imposed silences and marginalised communities, and to our relational interconnectedness and intersubjective being-in-the-world. For Leo Tolstoy, 'Art should eliminate violence. And only art can do that.'¹⁵¹⁷

Art helps to move beyond what Rowan Williams considers 'the abstractness of the human' that is pre-supposed by the language of human rights, and render elusive concepts such as human dignity and the sacred more tangible and visible.¹⁵¹⁸ Indeed, Irigaray criticizes the language of human rights – specifically '*La Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme*, that is, Declaration of the Rights of Man' – for not adequately addressing women's experiences.¹⁵¹⁹ She writes, 'For I am not 'born free and equal in dignity and rights' [to other men]' and acknowledges that she cannot 'forget all the women who do not enjoy the minimal civil liberties that I do'.¹⁵²⁰ Sarah Willen considers that the notion of dignity becomes visible and meaningful when considered in 'motion;' whether 'dignity harmed, denied, violated, or stripped away – or conversely, as dignity pursued, safeguarded, recuperated, reclaimed.'¹⁵²¹ I hope that these paintings offer a glimpse of the reclamation of dignity for women who have experienced its denial, violation and systematic stripping away. Irigaray argues for 'The right to human dignity' for women which means, among other things, 'valid representations of themselves in actions, words, and images in all public spaces.'¹⁵²² I will accordingly turn to address the value of exhibitions of these portraits of women from marginalised and migratory communities in public and political contexts.

Irigaray suggests that art offers a language whereby women's emancipation from Western tradition can be expressed, and an alternative culture and new way of being envisaged.¹⁵²³ Art, whatever the medium, is a means of 'discovering another manner of entering into communication that gives voice to our whole being in the present and

¹⁵¹⁵ Helen A. Fielding, *Cultivating Perception through Artworks: Phenomenological Enactments of Ethics, Politics, and Culture*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021), 15.

¹⁵¹⁶ Ekaterina Chertkovskaya, Karl Holmberg, Moa Petersén,, Johannes Strippel, & Sara Ullström, "Making visible, rendering obscure: Reading the plastic crisis through contemporary artistic visual representations," *Global Sustainability* 3 (2020): e14, 4.

¹⁵¹⁷ Leo Tolstoy. *What is Art?* (Penguin Books, 1995), 165-66.

¹⁵¹⁸ Williams. "Solidarity, Rights and the Image of God."

¹⁵¹⁹ Luce Irigaray, *Ethique de la différence sexuelle*. (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1984), ix. Quoted in Laura Roberts, *Irigaray and Politics: A Critical Introduction*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 81.

¹⁵²⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵²¹ Sarah Willen, *Fighting for Dignity: Migrant Lives at Israel's Margins*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2019), 25.

¹⁵²² Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Towards a Culture of Difference*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 86.

¹⁵²³ Irigaray, "How Can We Achieve Women's Liberation?" 26.

allows the respect for our differences.'¹⁵²⁴ Laura Roberts affirms that 'positive symbolic representations in various spheres of culture,'¹⁵²⁵ and the telling of new, inclusive stories, will enrich the western social imaginary and symbolic order. As Rosi Braidotti suggests, this enables women to 'revisit and repossess' the physical, discursive and representational sites where she has been 'essentialised, disqualified or quite simply excluded.'¹⁵²⁶ This will ultimately pave the way for the discovery a female subjectivity liberated from the one that has been imposed and 'a mode of representation that would take the fact of being a woman as a positive, self-affirming political force.'¹⁵²⁷ Braidotti describes this as the 'sensible transcendental foundation for a female process of becoming subject.'¹⁵²⁸ As such, these portraits are, in the words of Irigaray, 'a simple beacon or aid along our spiritual way'¹⁵²⁹ in our search for a 'cultural reserve yet to come.'¹⁵³⁰

The arts have the potential to offer modes of culture-making whereby occluded and silenced voices – specifically women from marginalised and migratory communities – can be recognised. Art can be used as a conduit to focus attention, elicit public discourse, and shape social imaginaries,¹⁵³¹ in order to 'attain greater cultural maturity, more social justice'.¹⁵³² A work of art can paradoxically embrace an aesthetics of *contemplative silence* and yet confront institutional and political issues regarding *silencing*.¹⁵³³ Art can facilitate contemplation and attentive listening; open a space for dialogue and overcome divisions; help make those rendered invisible visible and restore dignity; contend with legacies of violence, human rights and ecological issues; and articulate a renewed vision for our time.

¹⁵²⁴ Ibid., 35.

¹⁵²⁵ Roberts, *Irigaray and Politics*, 46.

¹⁵²⁶ Rosi Braidotti, "On the Female Feminist Subject, or: From "She-self" to "She-other"", in *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity*, eds. Gisela Bock and Susan James (London: Routledge, 1992), 187. Quoted in Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: the politics of art by women* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006), 43.

¹⁵²⁷ Braidotti, "On the Female Feminist Subject," 186. Quoted in Ibid.

¹⁵²⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 112. Quoted in Heather Walton, *Literature, theology and feminism*, (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2019), 137.

¹⁵²⁹ Luce Irigaray, "Beyond Totem and Idol: The Sexuate Other", tr. Karen I. Burke, *Continental Philosophy Review* 40 (2007): 356. Quoted in Zeena Elton, "Sensible Transcendental: Recovering the Flesh and Spirit of Our Mother(s)," in *Building a New World. Palgrave Studies in Postmetaphysical Thought*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 120.

¹⁵³⁰ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 1985), 138. Quoted in Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray*, 60.

¹⁵³¹ Natalie Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation*. (Duke University Press, 2019), 16.

¹⁵³² Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, 32. Quoted in Walton, *Literature, theology and feminism*, 132.

¹⁵³³ Marjolein Oele, "Dialectics of Silence for a Time of Crisis: Rethinking the Visionary Insights of Michel Serres and Simone Weil", *Research in Phenomenology* 52, 2 (2022): 195-6.

Exhibitions in Parliament and Beyond

In considering the political efficacy of art, I reflect upon the value of the exhibitions of my portraits of displaced women in places of influence in the Global North, such as the UK Houses of Parliament. In the fast-paced, frenetic realm of politics, these exhibitions potentially open a space for an *interval of hesitation*, enabling individuals to pause and contemplate the lived experiences of women whose lives had been indelibly marked by the legacies of violence, conflict and atrocity.

For Murdoch, art offers a the opportunity for ‘serious unforced reflection.’¹⁵³⁴ Weil shines a light on the importance of such reflection: ‘The man who is the possessor of force seems to walk through a non-resistant element; in the human substance that surrounds him nothing has the power to interpose between the impulse and the act, the tiny interval that is reflection.’¹⁵³⁵ The ‘tiny interval’ of reflection that can intervene between ‘the impulse and the act’ is especially important in bastions of power and at the heart of political decision-making. Art can offer such an infinitesimal interval. Nonetheless, there is no guarantee that such an interval will be welcomed. Indeed, in Parliament many politicians hurried past the portraits in the Upper Waiting Hall without even a sideways glance. However, for those who did pause to engage, such a ‘tiny interval’ has the potential to reveal the futility of violence and vitality of justice. Over time, this could give rise to a ‘politics of grace and wonder,’¹⁵³⁶ inviting us to reconfigure our relations with one another, defy institutional silencing, elevate the voices of marginalised groups, nurture empathy and restore human dignity.¹⁵³⁷

I will consider the value of such exhibitions by returning to the notion of *attentive listening*, or what Rebecca Fricker describes as ‘virtuous hearing,’¹⁵³⁸ at the heart of ethico-political practice. Indeed, Fricker considers what would it entail for a political institution to embrace this ‘virtue’ that is critical to epistemic justice.¹⁵³⁹ Fricker describes it as a ‘silent listening that endeavours to ‘make out a voice that is seldom heard. This kind of silence belongs with a moral attitude of attention to others.’¹⁵⁴⁰ Aboriginal activist Laura Holland contends, ‘we HAVE voice – you NEED to listen.’¹⁵⁴¹ As such, the women represented in these portraits are not ‘voiceless’ and do not need help to find their ‘voice;’ they already have one. Rather, the onus is on individuals in positions of power to attend to it.¹⁵⁴² Indeed, to

¹⁵³⁴ Murdoch, “Salvation by Words” in. *Existentialists and Mystics*, 235-243. Quoted In Ganteau, *The Poetics and Ethics of Attention*, 25.

¹⁵³⁵ Weil, *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, 194.

¹⁵³⁶ Roberts, *Irigaray and Politics*, 6.

¹⁵³⁷ Rachel Kerr, “Art and Reconciliation,” in *The Palgrave Encyclopaedia of Peace and Conflict Studies*, eds. Oliver P. Richmond and Gözüm Visoka (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 20.

¹⁵³⁸ Miranda Fricker, “Silence and Institutional Prejudice”, in *Out from the Shadows: Analytical Feminist Contributions to Traditional Philosophy*, eds. Sharon L. Crasnow, and Anita M. Superson (New York: Oxford University Press 2012), 287.

¹⁵³⁹ Sophie Bourgault, “Epistemic injustice, face-to-face encounters and caring institutions,” *International Journal of Care and Caring* 4, no. 1 (2020): 92.

¹⁵⁴⁰ Fricker, “Silence and Institutional Prejudice”, 287.

¹⁵⁴¹ Laura Holland quoted in “Honouring Indigenous Women, Heart of Nations,” vol.1 (2011). The capital letters are hers. Quoted in Sophie, M. Bourgault, “Attentive listening and care in a neoliberal era: Weilian insights for hurried times.” *Ethics & Politics* 18, no. 3 (2016): 313.

¹⁵⁴² Ibid.

speak 'for' the other is also to potentially silence the other.¹⁵⁴³ Art simply offers a unique and unusual invitation to, in the words of Weil, 'stop, attend, and listen.'¹⁵⁴⁴ Saiba Varma advocates for a 'politics of hearing'¹⁵⁴⁵ which requires listening beyond the dominant discourses that define the stories that are given attention. Indeed, according to Donald Galloway, there is an urgent need to foster 'the institutional will to listen'¹⁵⁴⁶ to refugee communities, which has been lost at significant cost.¹⁵⁴⁷ Indeed, art can play a role in promoting the aforementioned feminising of politics, which embraces dialogue, empathy, attentiveness and a capacity for listening.¹⁵⁴⁸ In the words of Irigaray paintings 'speak first of all to the ear,'¹⁵⁴⁹ attuned to the 'silent reverberations'¹⁵⁵⁰ that are often overlooked.

Portraits are powerful communicators that have been used for centuries to illumine, not merely mimetic likeness, but the voices and stories of the people portrayed.¹⁵⁵¹ Through my portrait paintings I hope to communicate the stories of women from marginalised and migratory communities through the advocacy exhibitions in locations including the UK Houses of Parliament. For the women whom I have had the honour of painting, the knowledge that their portraits were going to be seen by others in these contexts (and their voices heard as a result) was an important therapeutic aspect of the process. Stories and narratives play an important role in shaping identity, meaning-making, and future possibilities.¹⁵⁵² There is urgent need for stories that elevate marginalised voices in order to re-weave the fragmented social fabric, unsettle colonial and patriarchal legacies, and embrace difference.¹⁵⁵³ Such stories offer an invitation to a renewed attentive concern for those at the margins,¹⁵⁵⁴ whose lives are directly affected by the tragedies and conflicts unfolding in the shifting shadows of Realpolitik.¹⁵⁵⁵ By

¹⁵⁴³ Roberts, *Irigaray and Politics*, 128-9.

¹⁵⁴⁴ Simone Weil. *Oeuvres*, ed. Florence de Lussy, (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 762. Quoted in Bourgault, "Attentive listening and care in a neoliberal era," 329.

¹⁵⁴⁵ Saiba. Varma, *The Occupied Clinic: Militarism and Care in Kashmir*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 31. Quoted in Samuels, Annemarie. 2023. "Silence at the end of life: Multivocality at the edges of narrative possibility." *American Anthropologist* 125: 894.

¹⁵⁴⁶ Donald Galloway, "Proof and Narrative: Reproducing 'the Facts' in Refugee Claims," in *Storied Communities: Narratives of Contact and Arrival in Constituting Political Community*, eds. H. Lessard, R. Johnson, and J. Webber, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 327. Quoted in Carrie Dawson, "Flights of Fancy: Imagination, Audacity, and Refugee Storytelling," in *The Routledge Handbook of Refugee Narratives*, eds. E. Lê Espiritu Gandhi, & V. Nguyen (Routledge, 2023), 15.

¹⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴⁸ Roberts, *Irigaray and Politics*, 155.

¹⁵⁴⁹ Luce Irigaray, "To paint the invisible," *Continental Philosophy Review* 37 (2004): 403.

¹⁵⁵⁰ Cassaniti, Julia. 2023. "The sounds of silence: Thai meditative practice for personal and political change." *American Anthropologist* 125: 894.

¹⁵⁵¹ See Marcia Pointon, *Portrayal and the search for identity* (Reaktion Books, 2013). Referenced in Susan M. D. Carr, "Portrait Therapy: Supporting Client Voices of Self-Identity," *Art Therapy* 37, no. 4 (2020), 182.

¹⁵⁵² Powell and Menendian, *Belonging Without Othering*, 234.

¹⁵⁵³ J. Livingstone, & K. Lawson, "Introduction: Unprecedented Conversations in an Unprecedented Time," in *Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil: Unprecedented Conversations*, eds. K. Lawson & J. Livingstone (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), 13.

¹⁵⁵⁴ Devette, "Paying Attention to Affliction," 171.

¹⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

listening to and narrating stories that disrupt dominant narratives, Mary Steedly suggests, we can move '(slightly) against the grain of official discursive practices.'¹⁵⁵⁶

In public discourse visual representations of migration rarely include names or accompanying narratives of refugees' testimonies.¹⁵⁵⁷ Indeed, this is one of Sontag's main critiques with regard to photography.¹⁵⁵⁸ However, for my exhibition in the Houses of Parliament, the portraits were exhibited alongside accompanying texts with the women's stories. According to the UNESCO 'Art-Lab': 'Giving a voice and agency to first-person narratives and testimonies will promote the experience of minority ethnic marginalized communities to be embraced and not left behind.'¹⁵⁵⁹ This is especially important since, in Pope Francis' words, the 'globalization of indifference' makes us all "unnamed" [...] without names and without faces.'¹⁵⁶⁰ In my exhibitions, such as in the Houses of Parliament, I observed how people reacted to the portrait paintings. Occasionally I have glimpsed tears in people's eyes and a sombre reverence seemed to weigh on others, as they contemplate these contemporary 'icons' and their accompanying texts.



The first of my exhibitions, once Covid-19 restrictions had lifted, took place to mark World Refugee Day 2022 in the Houses of Parliament, sponsored by the UN Refugee Agency. The exhibition opened only days after the Johnson administration's aborted attempt to deport refugees to Rwanda. The exhibition was not a vociferous condemnation of the government's hostile policy, but a

gentle invitation to hesitate; to carve out a space for what Michael Shapiro refers to as 'slow looking',¹⁵⁶¹ and attend to the stories and portraits of individuals forcibly displaced from their homes. The exhibition served to bring the

¹⁵⁵⁶ Mary M. Steedly, *Hanging without a Rope: Narrative Experience in Colonial and Postcolonial Karoland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 31. Quoted in Annemarie Samuels, "Silence at the end of life: Multivocality at the edges of narrative possibility," *American Anthropologist* 125 (2023): 894.

¹⁵⁵⁷ Lynda Mannik, "Public and private photographs of refugees: the problem of representation", *Visual Studies* 27, no. 3 (2012), 262.

¹⁵⁵⁸ Lucien van Lier, "What's in That Picture?: Humanitarian Photographs and the Christian Iconography of Suffering and Violence". In *Material Perspectives on Religion, Conflict, and Violence*. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022), 140.

¹⁵⁵⁹ UNESCO Art-Lab, *Key Recommendations from the Art-Lab Review* for the "Art-Lab #4-The imperative of cultural justice: arts for inclusion, equity and human rights," December 10, 2020, 8. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375117?fbclid=IwAR2Z6ffZDYrEy6y1qJMasAl3RrYTvOFLvZrlolhGQwZoiumRByjO8hKOKmA>

¹⁵⁶⁰ Pope Francis, quoted in Anna Rowlands, *Towards a Politics of Communion: Catholic Social Teaching in Dark Times*. (London: T&T CLARK, 2021), 86.

¹⁵⁶¹ Michael Shapiro, "Slow Looking: The Ethics and Politics of Aesthetics," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 37, no. 1 (2008): 181–197.

fraught subjects of migration, gender-based violence and structural discrimination into the public realm in a dignifying way. For Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchison such artistic and aesthetic engagement ‘will not change things overnight,’ nonetheless it ‘offers the preconditions for eventual social transformation.’¹⁵⁶² Pascale Devette avows that if receptivity to issues such as forced migration has the hope of changing the course of things, then this will be ‘transmitted through storytelling.’¹⁵⁶³ In Arendt’s words, storytelling is something that ‘needs time.’¹⁵⁶⁴

While the exhibition of my portraits of displaced women in the Houses of Parliament did not result in any tangible policy change, it’s symbolic value had personal significance for the women themselves. The portraits of Allia, Ferozan and Zuhail, as well as the painting of Maria and Nadiia, were unveiled at this exhibition, with the women themselves in attendance. In Maria’s words, ‘It was absolutely unique to see our portrait among the others in the House of Parliament, as a place of meeting for the supreme legislative body of the United Kingdom - it gave a hope and believe in existence of a power, and which has an aim to hear people and to serve human rights, not to abuse it.’¹⁵⁶⁵ However, I am conscious that institutions such as Parliament have both historically, through empire, and in current post-colonial border regimes, contributed to the oppression of the communities that my portraits claim to represent. I question to what extent do the paintings symbolically disrupt these spaces of power? Indeed, what effect can so subtle a form of ‘institutional critique’ have if it is ‘sanctioned by the institution?’¹⁵⁶⁶ For Lucy Lippard, ‘[a]rt that is not confined to a single context under the control of market and ruling-class taste is much harder to neutralise. And it is often quite effective when seen within the very citadels of power it criticises.’¹⁵⁶⁷ It is nonetheless intriguing that establishment institutions historically hostile to women and to refugees have welcomed my paintings into their hallowed halls. Since the paintings have been shown in public places rather than art galleries or museums, which can impose a remoteness and self-conscious distancing, viewers can approach these paintings up close, allowing for a relational intimacy, proximity and encounter.¹⁵⁶⁸

Nonetheless it is difficult to evaluate the impact of such exhibitions and ascertain whether these instigate even negligible change at the political level.¹⁵⁶⁹ Gretchen Coombs asks, ‘How politically effective can art, especially the socially engaged kind, really be?’¹⁵⁷⁰ Maggie O’Neill suggests that such artistic endeavours ‘may help processes of social justice via a politics of recognition, thereby countering the mis-recognition of the asylum seeker, refugee,

¹⁵⁶² Roland Bleiker, Emma Hutchison, “Art and Aesthetics,” in *Gender Matters in Global Politics: A Feminist Introduction to International Relations* (3rd ed.), eds. Shepherd, L.J., & Hamilton, C. (Routledge, 2022), 102.

¹⁵⁶³ Devette, “Paying Attention to Affliction,” 171.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), 21. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁵⁶⁵ Maria, Personal correspondence, 11 December 2022.

¹⁵⁶⁶ Gretchen Coombs, *The Lure of the Social : Encounters with Contemporary Artists*, (Intellect Books, 2021), 8-9.

¹⁵⁶⁷ Lucy R. Lippard, “Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power,” in *Art after modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. B. Wallis, (New York: New Museum, 1984), 341-358.

¹⁵⁶⁸ Helen A. Fielding, “Touching Hands, Cultivating Dwelling,” in *Luce Irigaray: Teaching*, eds. L. Irigaray, M. Green (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2008), 77.

¹⁵⁶⁹ Lenette, Caroline “How Do We Influence Policy? Challenges to Knowledge Translation,” *Participatory Action Research: Ethics and Decolonization* (New York, Oxford Academic, 2022), 118.

¹⁵⁷⁰ Gretchen Coombs, *The Lure of the Social : Encounters with Contemporary Artists* (Intellect Books, 2021), 8-9.

migrant—the Other;’ opening up a potential dialogic space with ‘transformative possibilities.’¹⁵⁷¹ It is even more difficult to quantify the value or significance of a work of art in the decades, and perhaps even centuries to come. Indeed, many works of art gain renewed significance long after the death of the artist.¹⁵⁷² According to Hans-Georg Gadamer: ‘Temporal distance [...] lets the true meaning of the object emerge fully. But the discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished; it is, in fact, an infinite process.’¹⁵⁷³ A work of art therefore addresses the elusive question of meaning beyond the present time,¹⁵⁷⁴ generating fresh meanings in different contexts, changing with each successive generation of viewers, unforeseen at the time of its creation.¹⁵⁷⁵ In Merleau-Ponty’s words, paintings ‘have almost all their life still before them.’¹⁵⁷⁶

In the face of deepening division and escalating conflicts, this work often feels but a drop in the ocean. However, perhaps we may never understand the ripples that our gentle gestures and works of art may produce. I contend that a work of art can offer an unique invitation to hesitate, to incline our attention, to the reality of another. Art can help us to imagine different ways of seeing and dwelling in the world. The work of art that silently takes up the stance of attentive presence and witness to radical alterity opens up a ‘window onto ethics.’¹⁵⁷⁷ Indeed, a work of art can make possible a discourse with the other.¹⁵⁷⁸ For while a portrait does not speak, it inculcates a posture of inclined and attentive listening in the artist and the viewer.¹⁵⁷⁹ As such, the portrait encounter might constitute the basis for an Iragayan interval of wonder,¹⁵⁸⁰ safeguarding the ‘the irreducibility between the two, the transcendence between the two, the difference between the two.’¹⁵⁸¹ A portrait can offer a glimpse of what Gayatri Spivak calls ‘the impossible intimacy of the ethical.’¹⁵⁸²

¹⁵⁷¹ Maggie O’Neill, “Transnational Refugees: The Transformative Role of Art?” *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 9, no. 2 (2008).

¹⁵⁷² Devette, “Paying Attention to Affliction,” 161.

¹⁵⁷³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. Translated by Donald G. Marshall and Joel Weinsheimer, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 309. Quoted in Siobhán Jolley, *Reimagining the Magdalene: Feminism, Art, and the Counter-Reformation*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2025), 32.

¹⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁵⁷⁵ T. Eagleton, *Hope Without Optimism*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 32.

¹⁵⁷⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind” in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays*, trans. James Edie (Northwestern University Press, 1964), 190.

¹⁵⁷⁷ Emmanuel Levinas. *On Obliteration: An Interview with Françoise Armengaud Concerning the Work of Sacha Sosno*. Trans. Brian Alkire. (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2018), 38. Quoted in K. Newman, ““Feasting During a Plague”: Levinas and the Ethical Possibilities of Art.” *Levinas Studies* 13 (2019), 201.

¹⁵⁷⁸ Newman, ““Feasting During a Plague,” 205.

¹⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸⁰ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 73.

¹⁵⁸¹ Luce Irigaray, *In the Beginning, She Was* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 17. Quoted in Jean-Thomas Tremblay. “An Aesthetics and Ethics of Emergence, or Thinking with Luce Irigaray’s Interval of Difference.” *Criticism* 59, no. 2 (2017): 289.

¹⁵⁸² Gayatri C. Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 171. Quoted in Roberts. *Irigaray and Politics*, 128.

By Way of Conclusion: Art as *Metaxu*

‘It is the triumph of art to lead to something other than itself:
to a life which is fully conscious of the pact between the mind and the world.’¹⁵⁸³

— Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*

‘Love takes place in the opening to self that is the place of welcoming the transcendence of the other.’¹⁵⁸⁴

—Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West*

In this thesis I have endeavoured to trace the potential for ethical, attentive portraiture of women from displaced communities, drawing upon Simone Weil, Adriana Cavarero and Luce Irigaray. Weil’s philosophy of attention has comprised the primary conceptual framework for my approach to painting. I have also called upon various metaphors and images that I believe are key facets of Weilian attention, such as: prayer, listening-to, silence, proximity, authentic relation, gift, aura, care, receptivity, tenderness and grace. By way of conclusion I will return to Weil’s concept of *metaxu*, and consider the various ways that a work of art acts as a bridge, a threshold of becoming, and a pathway to an Irigayan ‘peaceful politics.’¹⁵⁸⁵ A work of art as *metaxu* serves to weaken the walls and borders that separate, enabling a ‘softer, more porous movement’ within and betwixt the boundary between-two.¹⁵⁸⁶ This is especially important in times replete with violent, dehumanising (b)ordering practices.¹⁵⁸⁷ In light of this, I hope to illuminate the political, ethical, spiritual, mystical and relational value of these portraits of displaced women.

The women honoured in these paintings have become for me icons. His Eminence the Coptic Archbishop of London expresses this beautifully: ‘In Orthodoxy there is a difference between a picture and an icon. An icon is ‘written’ because it includes thought, reflection and teaching with a depth of understanding, and in the same way Hannah’s portraits are very much written with an understanding and sensitivity that projects the courage and beauty of the

¹⁵⁸³ Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, trans. Richard Rees. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970). Quoted in Cynthia R. Wallace, *The Literary Afterlives of Simone Weil: Feminism, Justice, and the Challenge of Religion*. (New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2024), 1.

¹⁵⁸⁴ Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: from Singularity to Community*, (Columbia University Press, New York 2002), 115. Quoted in Eleanor Sanderson, “A Future Shaped by Love: Towards a Feminist Geography of Development and Spirituality,” in *Luce Irigaray : Teaching*, eds. Luce Irigaray and Mary Green (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2008), 158.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Laura Roberts, Lenart Škof, “Thinking Politically with Luce Irigaray,” *SOPHIA* 61 (2022): 96.

¹⁵⁸⁶ John A. Powell and Stephen Menéndez, *Belonging Without Othering: How We Save Ourselves and the World*. (Stanford University Press, 2024), 190.

¹⁵⁸⁷ Hyab Teklehaimanot Yohannes and Alison Phipps, “What Does it Mean to Move? Joy and Resistance Through Cultural Work in South–South Migration,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of South–South Migration and Inequality*, eds. Heaven Crawley and Joseph Kofi Teye (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2024), 133.

women she so graciously portrays from a depth that far exceeds the suffering that they have endured, and the trauma that some continue to endure.’¹⁵⁸⁸ If an icon is an encounter with the ‘face of the other’ that mediates the divine Other; these paintings might therefore be considered icons illuminated-by and illuminating the presence of the sacred in the women whom I encountered. The restoration of an awareness of ‘iconicity’ in our encounters with individuals and works of art can be a bridge to alter our way of seeing the world. As such, for Irigaray, ‘a painting becomes a transmission of truth, a message of love, a work that is always already common, a creation of world, a manner of saying that which words and musical notes would have been unable to express.’¹⁵⁸⁹

A painting can be regarded as sacred or ‘iconistic’, not simply on account of its subject matter, but according to the attention invested in it. The work of art can be considered a sacralisation and transformation of material, immanent reality, through the quality of prayerful attention. In Irigaray’s words, it accordingly becomes a ‘bridge between the instant and eternity’¹⁵⁹⁰ and ‘[t]he point of passage between two closed worlds.’¹⁵⁹¹ The sacred process encompasses the making of the art work, the relationship with the subject, and the auratic encounter viewers experience through the work of art itself. In the words of Nicoletta Isar: ‘The icon erases the gap between the one looking and the one looked at. They move together.’¹⁵⁹²

I suggest in this thesis that this *metaxic* bridge is first and foremost built through attentive listening to the other; embracing a posture of inclination and openness. Attentive listening creates space for the very possibility of an ethical relation between-two.¹⁵⁹³ It also entails a risk, a willingness to go beyond one’s limited understanding, and to silently bear witness to the other and their experiences, whether spoken or unspoken. Art is a way to pay close attention; a choice to engage and not to deflect. A work of art can bestow a recognition of loss, reflecting and touching another’s grief tenderly with love, expressed through painting, poetry, music, theatre or dance.¹⁵⁹⁴

I also propose that as well as a bridge to the other, art can help in the process of returning to oneself. From personal experience, I can attest to the value of art in navigating pain and loss, and to transcending it through awareness of the shared human experience of grief. Indeed, the immersive experience of painting, whereby one can be swept into a state of flow and complete absorption, helps with subtle integration and embrace of the self.¹⁵⁹⁵ I have witnessed this both in solitary withdrawal to my studio to paint and in the communal contexts of the community-based art

¹⁵⁸⁸ His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos OBE, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London and Papal Legate to the United Kingdom. Personal Correspondence, August 9, 2024.

¹⁵⁸⁹ Luce Irigaray, “To paint the invisible.” *Continental Philosophy Review*. 37 (2004): 403.

¹⁵⁹⁰ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 80.

¹⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁵⁹² Nicoletta Isar, “The Vision and its ‘Excessively Blessed Beholder’: Of Desire and Participation in the Icon”, *RES: The Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 38 (2000): 72.

¹⁵⁹³ Michelle Boulous Walker, *Slow philosophy: reading against the institution*, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, Plc, 2017), 119.

¹⁵⁹⁴ Kathryn Lawson, *Ecological Ethics and the Philosophy of Simone Weil: Decreation for the Anthropocene* (Routledge, 2024), 75.

¹⁵⁹⁵ Olivia Sagan, “The Intersubjectivity of Spiritual Experience in the Art Practice of People with Histories of Mental Distress: A Phenomenological Study.” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 19, no. 2 (2016): 146.

workshops. These communal contexts can offer a hospitable, welcoming space for individuals who have experienced trauma, to begin to reconnect with themselves and also with others in supportive social relationships. Art in this case embodies, in Irigaray's words, 'a bridge in the present between the past and the future.'

I suggest that the work of art can be a tangible expression of Irigaray's fourfold: 'to go towards the other, to welcome the other into oneself, open non-vertical dimensions in the relation to the human and to the divine.'¹⁵⁹⁶ The work of art as *metaxu* can be a bridge that extends vertically in an experience of transcendent sacrality, such as in the iconistic encounter. It is also a bridge that extends horizontally, in a relational, reverential encounter with the other, that also preserves the ethical space between-two. It is a touching and proximity that is never a fusion or the crystallisation of a desire to appropriate the other. In Irigaray's words, she understands a painting as a 'crossing not only of looks, but also of lives, of breaths, of energies.'¹⁵⁹⁷ A portrait painting represents a tangible experience of how to listen, approach, exchange with and enrich one another.¹⁵⁹⁸

Irigaray upholds the ethical encounter as a 'horizontal transcendence.'¹⁵⁹⁹ Horizontal transcendence is not in opposition to vertical transcendence, but to transcendence as 'ecstasy.'¹⁶⁰⁰ Rather than rapture or a desire to go beyond the self, transcendence aims at the transformative becoming of self and other.¹⁶⁰¹ The divine is revealed not only as the 'celestial [that] lies above our head, but also as that which can occur between us;'¹⁶⁰² spirituality is therefore grounded in one's interpersonal relationships and not limited to abstract, ecstatic, otherworldly experiences. As such, transcendence 'does not lead away from the self' but enables 'the self to return to itself' and to the other – 'enstasy instead of ecstasy.'¹⁶⁰³ The process of painting the portraits in this thesis has been akin to an experience of horizontal transcendence; and it is my prayer that this is shared by the viewer.

We discover the measure of our becoming not only in 'relation to the celestial but also in the respect of the terrestrial,'¹⁶⁰⁴ in and through one's relation with the other and with the earth. There is something alchemical, beautiful and mystical in a relational aesthetics and ethics of becoming.¹⁶⁰⁵ Perhaps this 'becoming towards transcendence' ¹⁶⁰⁶ teaches one to respect difference, rather than this being the source of ceaseless conflict and war. Therefore, we urgently need a culture that nurtures transcendent encounters with the other, and invites new 'ways to approach the other, to prepare a place of proximity: with the other in ourselves and between us.'¹⁶⁰⁷ I contend

¹⁵⁹⁶ Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*. trans. Heidi Bostic and Steven Pluhacek (London: Continuum, 2002), 149.

¹⁵⁹⁷ Irigaray, "To paint the invisible," 403.

¹⁵⁹⁸ Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 21.

¹⁵⁹⁹ Michelle Boulous Walker. "Nature, Obligation, and Transcendence: Reading Luce Irigaray with Mary Graham." *SOPHIA* 61 (2022): 197-8.

¹⁶⁰⁰ Annemie Halsema, *Luce Irigaray and horizontal transcendence* (Amsterdam: Humanistics University Press, 2010), 52.

¹⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁶⁰² Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 147.

¹⁶⁰³ Halsema, *Luce Irigaray and horizontal transcendence*, 58.

¹⁶⁰⁴ Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 147.

¹⁶⁰⁵ Tremblay, "An Aesthetics and Ethics of Emergence," 294.

¹⁶⁰⁶ Luce Irigaray, "Listening, Thinking, Teaching," in *Luce Irigaray: Teaching*, ed. L. Irigaray and M. Green (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2008), 240.

¹⁶⁰⁷ Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, ix.

that the arts can mediate an iconistic encounter with the other, an ethical transcendence, serving as a bridge between the present moment and what is beyond:¹⁶⁰⁸ ‘The path towards the other is first a path towards the infinite.’¹⁶⁰⁹

I propose that portraiture of displaced women can embody Irigaray horizontal transcendence and Weilian *metaxu* illuminating a respectful relationship to the irreducible, mysterious alterity of the other; a between-two, being-with and becoming-together.¹⁶¹⁰ It is my hope that these portraits offer a jewel-toned, silent invitation to attend to the transcendence in the face of the other and to the grace that awaits us in that encounter.



¹⁶⁰⁸ Halsema, *Luce Irigaray and horizontal transcendence*, 58-9.

¹⁶⁰⁹ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 2.

¹⁶¹⁰ Annemie Halsema, “Luce Irigaray’s Transcendence as Alterity,” in *Culture and Transcendence: A Typology of Transcendence*, *Studies in Philosophical Theology* 50, eds. W. L. van der Merwe, & W. Stoker (Leuven, NL and Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2012), 121-136.

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