

# Seeking theory-practice relations between humanities and fine-arts through practice of painting

Asmita Sarkar

PhD Candidate, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Email: [asmita.sarkar@srishti.ac.in](mailto:asmita.sarkar@srishti.ac.in),

ORCID ID [0000-0002-2024-5553](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2024-5553)

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## Abstract

In recent years different art and design institutions around the world are increasingly looking at developing programs that are research intensive. Along with this trend, doctoral programs that are art and design practice based are becoming progressively common. There are several debates around the nature and significance of art and design practice as research (Sullivan 2005 Borgdorff, 2010, Eriksson 2010). Many have doubts about the exact nature of knowledge contribution made by these PhD theses. One distinct aspect common to all these programs is that these consider creation of art or design artefacts a part of the research process. This paper will discuss some theoretical view-points and philosophical speculations such as discourse on material of art, performance embodiment, cultural-scientific knowledge behind creation of artefact. The aim is to show that the process oriented and performative aspects of art-practice can come into a meaningful dialogue with traditional humanities. In the present article the author/artist has drawn from the writings of art-historian James Elkins (2000) and philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1964,1993,2008) to analyze her own work and devise a methodology of artistic research. The proposed methodology consists of two theoretical lens that are used to contextualize artist's work: phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 1993, 2008) and elements of auto-ethnography (Alvesson 2003). Thus, this paper develops a methodology that contextualizes artist's intensely personal process of creation and critically evaluate this process. The result is a methodology of artistic research that can be a bridge between creative performance and critical research.

**Keywords:** phenomenological research, process and performance in humanities research, methodologies of practice-based research.

## Art and design Practice as research:

Academic doctoral degrees at large consist of a written thesis. This thesis is thought to add to the existing institutional knowledge-base. On the contrary in case of practice-based research in art and design, most existing degree-granting institutions throughout the world accept artifacts (be it an art-work, design prototype, music score) as part of the research output. Thus, studio-based research differs from other disciplinary inquiries such as those in art history, cultural studies, or anthropology. In these disciplines the end product of an artist's creation is the object of analysis. In contrast, for practice-based research, creating an artefact is an important methodology. Practice based artistic research can generate crucial knowledge about the process, materials, and the artist's body, that can complement the semiotic readings of works of art.

Julia Marshal (2007) voiced a similar opinion in her research paper "Image as Insight: Visual Images in Practice-Based Research". She cites Sullivan (2005) stating that the main focus of studio-based research ought to be the process of making. At present diverse and contradictory

discourses exists around the nature and significance of artistic research. Scholars are yet to agree on many crucial points. For example, Borgdorff (2010) holds that production of a successful work of art at the end of the research is one parameter against which the success of the research should be measured. And this is a valid point, but the term “successful” works of art needs considerably more unpacking. Critics of practice-based art-research often argue that art as a concept is subjective hence should not be included in the framework of scientific research aiming to gather objective truth. But in humanities and social sciences, the method of research is more exploratory and process-oriented. One can argue that artist’s and designer’s works have always been judged, evaluated, and put in the framework of different theoretical and applied discourses. Craftsmanship of the artist, contextual-historical awareness expressed in the art-work, artist’s ability to bring forward new relationships and ideas are some of the parameters that are regularly employed in different art-schools and institutions to evaluate works of art. Thus, artefacts from creative projects can definitely be integrated within the framework of knowledge production. Concepts born out of the practice-based inquiry can be exported into scholarly and curatorial writing, building new conceptual frameworks with which to interpret or write about art. This trend in thinking is supported by many emerging artistic research centres and journals. A few of them are *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, *Studies in Material Thinking*, research activities in the Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies, Auckland University of Technology, *Journal for Artistic Research* and many more.

Art and design practice are always situated within a network of social, political and philosophical landscape. These are the contexts of practice. Artist-researchers who are aware of the different contextual elements can choose these as part of their research projects. Interaction between and fusion with different disciplines is a distinctive characteristic of the methodologies of practice-based research and it is also one of its advantages over many other disciplines. There are continuously emerging new discussions around research in the field of art and design in university context. During SHARE Conference, a conference for artistic research in London, New-York based philosopher John Rajchman (2012), articulates his concern about “a sense of crisis for traditional humanities, traditional book culture, the tradition of literary culture.” He continues to state that engagement with lived realities, performance, and methods of art-making can take traditional humanities into new directions. In the same conference Steven Henry Madoff (2012) talks about his experience as a research advisor of College Art Association. Several economic and administrative factors plague artistic research in the academic context. He expressed his concern about artistic research being a part of neoliberal economies, when too much abstraction of knowledge (theories) leading to an advanced degree may ultimately fail to bring any new valuable insights to the art and design practice. Daunting as these barriers may seem to be, these can be eased if evaluators pay particular attention to the process of creation as well as the context of creation. Concepts born out of the practice-based inquiry can be exported into scholarly and curatorial writing, building new conceptual frameworks with which to interpret or write about art.

### **Material of painting and research in phenomenology:**

Contemporary painting is a very diverse field, frequently incorporating digital, sculptural, and photographic components (See for example works by Gerald Richter incorporating photographs into painted canvas, El Anatsui integrating painting and sculpture within the same art-work, Ghada Amer employing embroidery to create painterly canvas). Critic and curator Barry Schwabsky (2004) writes that contemporary painting is a non-essentialist pursuit. As a genre it is very much alive even in the age of post-medium conceptual art. The history and ideas behind

conceptual art can be found in the writing of Lucy Lippard (1976), Rosalind Krauss (2000) and Benjamin Buchloh (2006). These and other theorists who put forth the idea of conceptual art tend to downplay the importance of material and sensual dimension of artist's practice. But contemporary painters have realized that material and conceptual are two aspects of artistic practice that are interdependent and complementary. Embodied material manipulation and conscious inclusion of different art-historical and scientific themes are part of many painter's process.

At this juncture some points concerning the importance of the material dimension of art-practice need elaboration. Artists possess some unique knowledge regarding material of painting. Material manipulation is an important part of artistic research and artists have an exceptional insight into this process. Noted anthropologist Tim Ingold (2007) in his article "Materials against Materiality" critiques the current trend in fields related to material culture that posit the idea of materiality of objects as an abstraction. This is done at the expense of looking at each material in its uniqueness. There exists an anxiety among scholars about theorizing the sensory properties of materials. They would rather theorize the idea of materiality as one distinct concept that exists solely to exemplify the flip side of the world of immaterial ideas. The same binary mode of thinking about material exists in contemporary art discourses. Paying close attention to the process of painting may be one of the ways of studying how material and conceptual aspects come together in creation of an art work. Since painting captures the direct relation of simple gestures and their outcomes, it is one of the oldest forms of artistic expression. Drawing and painting theorist Catherine de Zegher (2003) states that painting, along with drawing incorporates the maker's intentionality very intimately though the material used. The shape of the marks that are being made and the choice of material being used are linked inextricably to the bodily senses of the artist, including visual and tactile ones.

One of the most respected and prolific art-historian James Elkins (2000) in his book *What Painting Is* writes that art historians and theorists start theorizing painting only as a finished work. Theorization starts when these are displayed in galleries and museums. Scholars generally leave out the messy part of the creation of painting in the studio. Elkins talks about painters' labour in minute details. According to him, artist's studio is perceived either as a space of sombre underpaid work, or a space where magical self-expression happens (depending on how successful the artist is.) Artists who are engaged in material-exploration also engage in tedious and long periods of making and unmaking. This unique nature of artistic labour has seldom received scholarly attention. Very often scholarly studies analyse the social and economic condition of artistic labour. For example, the anthology; *Work, Work, Work: A Reader on Art and Labour* edited by Pierre Bal-Blanc, combines essays on artistic labour as it exists in the context of artist's communities, residencies, curatorial and museum work. Within this network artist's labour sometimes is being commodified and sometimes the labour can be utilized in social transformation. Social transformation can happen when artists consciously move away from this process of commodification. Alberto López Cuenca (2012), in his article "Artistic Labour, Enclosure and the New Economy" analyses the artists' studio work within the context of contemporary capitalism.

Many practicing painters would agree with Elkin's observation. His articulation closely approximates the first-hand experience of making. But when it comes to theorizing this very description and narrating the sensuous appeal of material, there exists road-block. Elkins himself acknowledges this problem in his paper (Elkins 2008): "On Some Limits of Materiality in Art History." Elkins rightly points out that phenomenological accounts of painting may not provide a

rich enough critical vocabulary needed to write an art theoretical or historical discourse. For instance, “Merleau-Ponty’s work involves words like “sensation,” “horizon,” “body,” “head,” “eye,” “touch,” “interior,” “exterior,” and “perspective” Art historical and art critical analyses tend to depend on much more specific things”(Elkins 2009, p.35). But as far as practice-based research in painting is concerned, the aim of such research is to focus on the meaningful nature of making. Narrating a firsthand account of the creative process of painting could be a complement to the historical analysis. Following discussion would attempt to resolve some problems faced by artists in general and painters in particular when they narrate their own experience of making. This paper will argue that one of the theoretical frame-work that is suited to be adopted into artistic research is that of phenomenology of embodiment proposed by French philosopher Merleau-Ponty.

### **Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and painting:**

Merleau-Ponty has an idea of interconnectivity between our body as an agent perceiving the world and things in the world that is being perceived (Merleau-Ponty 1993, 2002, 2008). When we touch something, we are being touched simultaneously. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of embodiment maps out a theory of reciprocity between the perceived and the perceiver (Merleau-Ponty 2008). He based his entire philosophy of perception on analysis of modernist paintings, especially painting of Cézanne (with some reference to Klee). His philosophy of embodiment has recently seen a surge in interest mainly because this has been proved to be a useful tool of research in many fields in social sciences, ecology, and cognitive sciences.

With regard to art theory and practice of painting Merleau-Ponty’s theory continues to be relevant. Painters still think with their embodied eye and through materials. Contemporary painters are highly innovative in incorporating elements from different media and new technologies. These new innovations in technology and materials have opened-up novel opportunities to expand and test Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology (Kelly 2011). Historian Robert Hobbs proposes that Merleau-Ponty’s theory can become a trans-historical mode of analysis of different genres of painting and visual arts in general (Hobbs 2001) and thus can be applied to contemporary painting practice. Merleau-Ponty’s theory of perception as it is delineated in his book *The Phenomenology of Perception* ([1945] 2008) connects perceptual faculties to bodily-kinesthetic processes and looks upon vision as a co-ordination of different senses. This sensory coordination takes place before or simultaneously when we come to a conceptual understanding of the world around us. This “pre-reflective” or “pre-conceptual” state is a breeding ground for creative/generative thought process. Fusion of the different senses (including kinesthetic senses) in our pre-conceptual bodily awareness is tinged with intentionality. Our sensual and bodily experiences of the world become a meaningful perceptual unity by virtue of the understanding of what we can or cannot do within the space we inhabit and the objects with which we come into contact. Perceptual encounter with the objects of our environment “arises as a kind of synesthetic cohesion” (Crowther 1993, p.103) between our intellect and body capacity. Thus Merleau-Ponty’s idea of perception is also a theory of perceptual embodiment. According to Merleau-Ponty’s idea the human body is not “the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement” Merleau-Ponty ([1960]1993, p.124). The next section of this article will explore how new developments in different disciplines-philosophy of new materialism, ecological psychology can come together to give significance to the experience and articulations of the artist. This section will also show that artist’s experience of making can come into an active dialogue with theories.

### **Practice of Painting and phenomenological method:**

Insight coming from author's own practice is an important element in this article and in this section first person pronoun is used occasionally. In many qualitative research papers, particularly ethnographic ones, use of first person is acceptable and even preferable when the subjective judgement is put forward within a specific context on the "basis of reasonable evidence" (Webb 1992). Ethnographic research is a common occurrence in design and architecture research. A central methodology of sociology, anthropology, and design, ethnographic research studies particular social groups, individuals belonging to these, and how they interact within and between different social and cultural groups. Traditionally, the research scholar does not belong to the group studied and there is a process of "breaking in" the group. In contrast in auto-ethnography the process is reversed. Research scholars study themselves and the group they belong to. And this inquiry necessitates a process of "breaking out" of the group (Alvesson 2003). In the context of scientific research, studying self poses some problems. Scientific convention demands that scientists should remain detached from the object being studied. This age-old doctrine comes from natural sciences and is applied in the social-sciences without much modification. But in some newer fields of social science, the limitation of the idea of a detached-impersonal researcher is being challenged (not without difficulty). First person self-reflective study and action research are developments in research methods of social sciences that sometimes incorporate the first-person pronoun 'I'. Many of these developments were facilitated by writings of iconic sociologists and anthropologists such as Gregory Bateson (1973) and Clifford Geertz (1998).

The question of the subjectivity of the researcher becomes prominent in the field of art and design. Many artist-researchers actively engage in making art or design objects and the resulting artefact is considered a part of new-knowledge. Designer-scholar Thommy Eriksson (2010) writes that in art and design research maintaining complete detachment is almost impossible, unnecessary, and can even be harmful. According to him in many branches of social-sciences and humanities complete detachment from the human participants can lead to missing out of important information regarding their subjectivity. In design many processual elements can only be studied by taking part in making process. In auto-ethnographic study when researchers turn the analytic gaze towards themselves, they often become vulnerable and reveals aspects of themselves that are otherwise inaccessible. This self-revelation can be a central component in artistic research. Eriksson admits that the danger of being too personal and narcissistic is always present in auto-ethnographic research and there must be some checks in correcting this. He gives example of using hermeneutic tools borrowed from Habermas and Gadamer's theory to analyse subjective narrative of designers. In a similar way the present article contains tools borrowed from phenomenological theories that map the connection between conceptual and embodied processes. The following quote is an excerpt from author's journal:

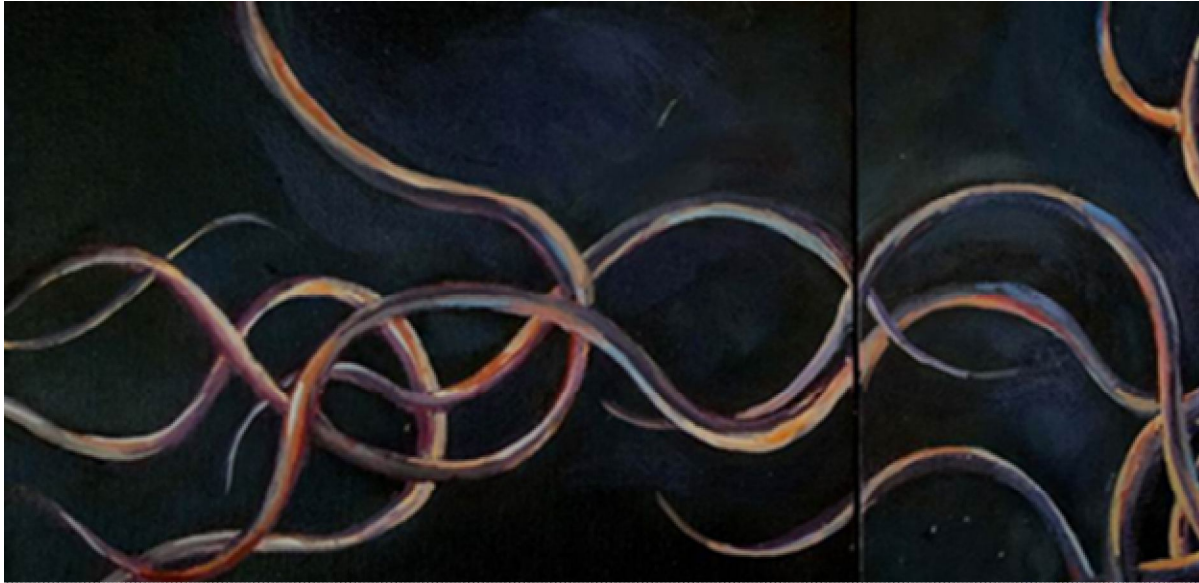


Figure 1: Author Untitled 2017 Mixed media on Canvas

As a practicing painter I have been fascinated by the way paint spreads across surface. My paintings are fantastic representation of neurons and brain images, emerging from dark backgrounds. These spread across the canvas in a chaotic manner while different shades of fluorescent lights glisten on the tentacles. These tentacles could be branches of trees and blood veins, but it is arranged in a manner that it invites the viewer's eye to move with it, and induces a tactile sensation. (2017)

This narrative is an artist's reflection. Since it is about the author's own practice, it can be considered a subjective narrative. However, the significance of this interpretation of the narrative and the visual document (figure 1) can be arrived at by locating them within the framework of an already established discipline, i.e. phenomenological embodiment. The artist's narrative from the notebook can have analytical support from Paul Klee's idea of embodiment. Mark Wrathall, (2011) writes that Paul Klee had a thesis that human body is attuned to the features of the environment and that art's highest purpose is to help one with this attunement (Wrathall 2011, p.25). The poetic use of the expression "attuning the body" communicates a phenomenological truth; our body's ideal relationship with the world is one of harmonious reciprocity. Following is another excerpt from author's notebook.

In my work the idea of reciprocity can be extended to the inside of the body and its relationship to the outside world. "Paul Klee's idea resonates in my painting. When I paint the tentacles, I aim to communicate with the viewers by inviting them to be in tune with the rhythm in our body. (2017)

Other contemporary painters have also played with the idea of the inside and outside of the body. Artist- scholar Sarah Nind likens her paintings to fleshly membranes that externalize the internal experience of the artist (Nind 2019). This is also the surface which is a zone of encounter between external and internal world. Nind terms this surface "flesh". The term is reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty's (1964) concept of flesh as it was drawn out in his essay "The Intertwining". Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception proposes that our perceptual understanding of the world entails an understanding and realization of the phenomena that as we are perceiving

the world our body is also part of the visible field. This realization is of the shared materiality of our body and objects in the world. In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception body is a site of reciprocity with the materials in the environment. This condition of reciprocity is also named as "flesh" by Merleau-Ponty. Noted author Elizabeth Grosz (1993) states that the concept of flesh as it is proposed by Merleau-Ponty takes a step toward dissolving the strict binary of subject and object. This attempted dissolution of binaries is also a central theme of philosophy of new materialism.

Coming back to author's artistic research, one more concept needs further discussion. The art-works discussed in this article are created within the context of research and the author has studied relevant textual works on phenomenology and embodiment while producing art works. Reading has influenced author's practice and outcome. In the beginning of the article it was acknowledged that artistic practice always take place within a back-drop of theoretical discourses and often artists are aware of and influenced by these discourses. Hence the influence can become a part of critical analysis. The next narrative by author illustrates this.

Reading about phenomenological embodiment and sensory processes does have an effect on my creative work. I am more conscious about material and my own body. As I engage with the theories and discussions elaborated in the previous section, aspects of my practice become more relevant to me. The subtle gradation of light in my painting deserves more ways of theorizing by coupling it with my own experiences and explorations. I control the viscosity and tinges of colour to bring out light in the canvas. The traces of my hand gesture are etched on the canvas. (2018)

Creating light is an important part of traditional oil-painting. It's a process of using dark, muddy colour to bring out luminosity. James Elkins (2009) compares this process with explorations undertaken by medieval alchemists. They used dirt and other mundane substances in search of elusive gold. Most modernist paintings can create illusion of movements on the static surface of the canvas though painted light, shapes, and textures. Different cognitive studies of moving eyes attest to this phenomenon. Thus, ideas of Merleau-Ponty that see the body as an ontological condition of entanglement of movement and vision, play out in these paintings. The light depicted in Author's painting resonates with this notion of ontological entanglement. The following narrative by author continues to describe the process of painting.

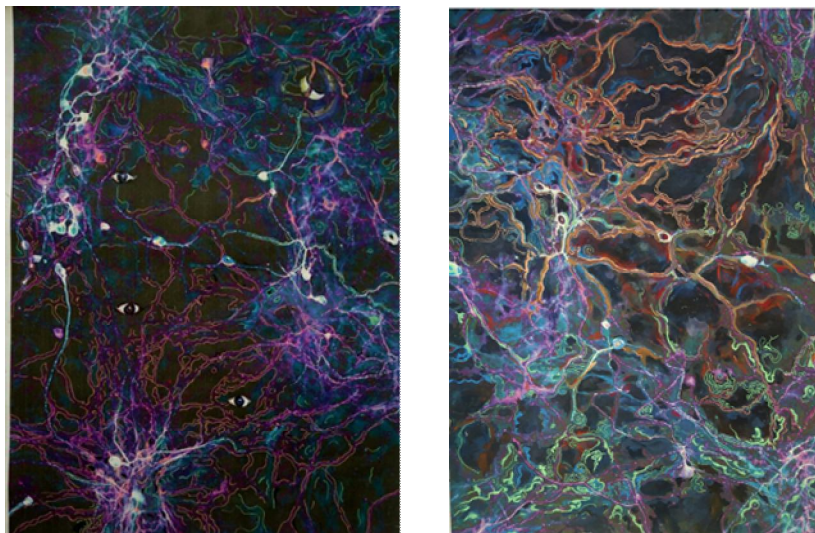


Figure 2, 3: Author Inside I and II 2019 Mixed Media on Printed found Image.



In some of my paintings I digitally manipulate found images of neurons and brain-cells and print them out in textured paper. I paint over these. In my painting and in my imagination the light captured in these digital images transforms into moon-light, the nerve cells transform into branches of trees, roots, blood-vein, or tentacles of some alien from outer space. (2019)

These images (Figure 2 and 3) are inspired by the current trend in contemporary art that sees artists engaging with world of science and scientific visualization. Young Indian artist Rohini Devasher transforms scientific images from biology and botany to paintings of fantastical creatures. Both in the works of Devasher (Rohini Devasher, 2012) and the author this transformation comes through artistic process; mixing colour, spreading it, creating or diluting forms and shape. This is an embodied process but conceptual elements are intimately linked with this embodied action. These paintings keep on generating new meaning, the moonlight becomes internal light of our body cavity. Strategically painted eyes and lips coming out from dark background and catching moon-light reverse the conventional frame of inside-outside (in this case inside and outside of the human body). The surface of the painting evokes tactile sensation without any need of the viewers touching it.

The narrative is a personal utterance by the artist. Traditionally this would not be considered as a critical reflection. This is a creative judgement of the artist speculating on how these images would be perceived by the audience. Audience is an art-historically loaded term. In contemporary context the term audience-participation is one of the most ubiquitous and forms parts of the majority of grant applications for public art-projects. The term has been a part of art-historians' and critics' vocabulary for a long time. In art history the meaning of the term audience has a wide range. This can indicate one who is commissioning the art-works or a hypothetical individual who visits a gallery or some-one chancing upon an art-work in a public space. But philosophers have long been arguing that the primary audience for art-works are the artists themselves. Nick Zangwill (1999) quotes Richard Wollheim's influential paper "Seeing-As, Seeing In, and Pictorial Representation," to make this point. The artist's narratives included in this article are simultaneously that of a hypothetical audience. In this article the focus of the analysis is the painting process and artists' creative judgement, hence no further audience interview was included. Figure 2 and 3 depict artist's creative exploration of different forms and shapes. In these images a connection was made between moon-light and light coming out from the MRI machine. The connection was made more explicit with the depiction of a crescent moon. Most of the phenomenological theories iterate that in the realm of experience conceptual and embodied processes are inseparable. The idea of the pre-conceptual have been put forward by Merleau-Ponty ([1945]2008) in his book *Phenomenology of Perception* where he theorized body capacity as a con-cognitive, pre-conscious, habitual state. Conscious reflection arises out of this state. This is different than the popular idea of subconscious in traditional psychology. Experimental psychology of Merleau-Ponty's time theorized sub-conscious as a distinct mental state separate from conscious state of mind. According to Merleau-Ponty's idea: Pre-conceptual (the space where different sensory substrates fuse together and form new concepts) is a breeding ground for generating new meaning and concept ([1960] 1993, 124).

The present art-works display author's knowledge of visual culture and art history. These are the conceptual parts of the creative process. The drawn tentacles are arranged in a visually engaging way and these open up visually stimulating spaces in the canvas. In a similar way many modernist paintings create space through arrangement of forms and shapes. Cézanne and other modernist painters created embodied experiences where visual and bodily-tactile senses fuse.



Two of many inspirations that have shaped the painting practice of the author are Bengali Modernists Gopal Ghose and Somnath Hore. Ethereal light captured through calligraphy inspired crayon marks is a distinct style of Gopal Ghose (Nair 2015). Somnath Hore's textural drawings and print-making in his *Wound* series, capturing bodily and psychic pain are few of the elements of his works that have also inspired the author.

Ecological psychologist J. J. Gibson's (1973, 1979) theory has many overlaps with Merleau-Ponty's theory. Like Merleau-Ponty Gibson also theorized visual perception as an embodied process. Ecological psychologists continue to use Gibson's theory to analyse perception of art and use these insights to describe nature of perception in general. Kadar and Effkend (2008) in their paper on spatial perception draws from J.J Gibson's theory to analyze how Cezanne's canvases create an architectural space that visually engages the audience. Images produced by author fall in the same tradition, the colour gradients and the manner in which the tentacles have been shaped creates three-dimensional space. In the artwork printed images of nerve cells have been enhanced with acrylic, crayon, and ink. These paint marks are thick and uneven, displaying visually intimation of how these may feel if touched. In Merleau-Ponty's term painting can make tactile sensation visible- that is where its appeal rests. According to him, some paintings give a sensation of tactility not because these stimulate our sense of touch, but because painting "...gives visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible; thanks to it we do not need a 'muscular sense' in order to possess the voluminosity of the world" (Merleau-Ponty [1960] 1993, 127). The sensual-tactile nature of author's work has been achieved through extensive material exploration. This is the embodied element of art-making. The unison of embodied and conceptual process has been explored in this section. And this exploration warrants analysis of more visual documents and personal narrative of the author.



**Figure 4 : Author The Moon Down Bellow (details) 2019 Mixed Media on Printed found Image.**

As I paint one canvas after another the subject matter and the formal structures remain the same. My paintings became subtler and more layered. But when I paint, the painting as a sensory object occupies my mind and body. These images are not a means to an end; I do not want to depict any particular object in the word. When I am

creating an image, I am bringing change in my environment. When I am making these works the key point of concentration is on painterly gesture with a heightened potential to convey a sense of embodiment. (2019)

Long periods of training and immersion in practice equip an artist with the specific expertise to transform conceptual knowledge into visual and material experiences. Empirical studies show that trained painters do find it easier to detect meaningful visual patterns. For example, Schlewitt-Haynes et al study (2002) published in their essay “Seeing the World Differently: An Analysis of Descriptions of Visual Experiences Provided by Visual Artists and Non-artists”, found that visual artists tend to engage and spend more time with pattern seeking, reanalysis of existing visual forms, and visual games in general. This study is a psychological study and has been published in *Creative Research Journal*. The title indicates that seeing the world differently is an important part of the creative process. Argument from philosophy also support the idea that artistic expertise consists of both sensory-motor and conceptual skills to form new expressions and experience as Mag Uidhir and Buckner (2014) argue for the same in their essay “Portrait of the artist as an Aesthetic Expert”. Painters manipulate colours and bring out new version of reality that is not a one to one translation of the conceptual knowledge but new creative art-works. The process of creation often is left outside of the critical discourse of art-theory. In this section of the article an attempt has been made to interpret this process through the frame-work of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. The out-come of the research is both the verbal narratives and the visual documentation.

### **Endnote:**

This article attempts to bring artist’s experience and knowledge to the discourse of critical research. Narrative analysis has been incorporated into the reflective case-study of author’s own process of creation. The art-works produced by author employ different media and technological interventions. This article shows that practice-based research can effectively utilize methods such as: inclusion and analysis of written reflections by the artist researcher, description of each step involving conceptualization of work, and documentation of material manipulation that leads to the creation of the artwork. The first-person narrative captures the author’s inspiration, material engagement, and description of the techniques used. Materials and techniques were narrated within their historical context. The personal utterances and reflective narratives are auto-ethnographic in nature: in that these necessitate taking a step back from the intimate process of painting and contextualizing aspects of this process. As Alvesson (2003) have put it: in ethnographic research, researcher needs to break into a group of “others”. In contrast in auto-ethnographic research, researcher needs to break-out of his/her familiar domain. Author have taken a step back from the self-absorbing process of art-making and found theoretical significance of the same process within Merleau-Ponty’s theory of phenomenological embodiment. Thus, the present article takes a step toward building a channel of communication between artist’s creative practice that encompasses extensive material manipulation and visual thinking with humanities’ research that emphasizes textual content. This article demonstrates that conceptual-verbal and embodied-visual elements of art-making are not mutually exclusive. Painting practice, when situated within the frame-work of research can benefit from conversation with phenomenological and art-historical theories.

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Asmita Sarkar is faculty member at the Srishti Institute of Art. She is a practicing artist and her research interests include contemporary drawing & painting, art-science collaboration in art & design, and phenomenological aesthetics. She has published peer-reviewed articles in Tracey and Drawing Research Theory and Practice amongst other and currently working on her practice based PhD (registered in Manipal Academy of Higher Education,) thesis on phenomenology of contemporary painting.

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