

Susan Gunn

BORN: Lancashire, 1965

ART EDUCATION

2000-2004 Norwich School of Art and Design



SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2008 Salthouse 2008 North Norfolk UK - selected & curated By Ian Collins
- 2008 Eastern Open Exhibition, Kings Lynn Art Centre, Kings Lynn
- 2008 London Art Fair, The Fine Art Society, London
- 2007 Johnathan Clark Gallery, Fulham, London
Art For Life, Chelsea & Westminster Hospital Exhibition
- 2007 Eyestorm Gallery
27-9 St Nicholas Street, Ipswich, Suffolk
- 2007 Salthouse 07 North Norfolk - selected and curated by James Colman
- 2007 Open Studios: Norfolk & Norwich Festival, Norfolk
- 2007 The Gulf Art Fair, Fine Art Society, Dubai, UAE
- 2007 London Art Fair, Fine Art Society, Business Design Centre, London
- 2006 *Monochromed*, Fine Art Society, Bond Street, London
- 2006 Sovereign Select, City Hotel Westminster, London
- 2006 Croxton Park, English Heritage Estate, Croxton, West Norfolk
- 2006 Kings Lynn Open Exhibition, Kings Lynn Art Centre, Kings Lynn
- 2006 Sovereign European Painting Prize Exhibition, Bonhams, New Bond St. London
- 2005 Salthouse 2005, Salthouse, North Norfolk
- 2005 *Stay*, Great Eastern Hotel, Liverpool Street, London
- 2005 RA Selected Norwich Castle Open Art Show, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery
- 2005 Art Frankfurt, Philips Gallery, Frankfurt, Germany
- 2005 Philips Gallery, Lever Street, Manchester
- 2004 Norwich Fringe Festival, Factory, Hall Road, Norwich
- 2004 Salthouse 2004, Salthouse, North Norfolk

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2007 Studio NR14 - Open Studio Exhibition In Conjunction With The Norfolk & Norwich Festival, Norwich
- 2006 Cotman Rd Space, curated by Ethna Dillon, Norwich
Axis Open Frequency, Featured Artist Of The Month, Worldwide Web
- 2006 *Sacro Terra*, Solo Nu Mu, Norwich
- 2004 Rotunda, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery
- 2003 Gesso, Dark Mirror Gallery, King Street, Norwich

- 2002 Contemporary Paintings, St Giles Gallery, St Giles, Norwich
- 2001 Norwich School of Art & Design

PRIZES/AWARDS

- 2006 Celeste Painting Prize, Short-Listed. In Conjunction With MA Curatorial Committee, Goldsmiths, London, UK
- 2006 Sovereign European Painting Prize, Winner
Nominated by Cherry Smyth & Colin Self, selected by a team of international curators, artists & gallerists, chaired by Sir Peter Blake
- 2005 Archant Prize, Award Winner
RA Selected Norwich Castle Open Art Show, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery
- 2005 Escalator Grant For The Arts, ACEE Award
Nominated by the Sainsbury Centre For Visual Arts, Norwich.
Arts Council England, East initiative to support artists in the East of England, facilitated by Commissions East, UK
- 2003 The Bishops Art Prize, Winner
In conjunction with Norwich Cathedral and Norwich School Of Art & Design, UK

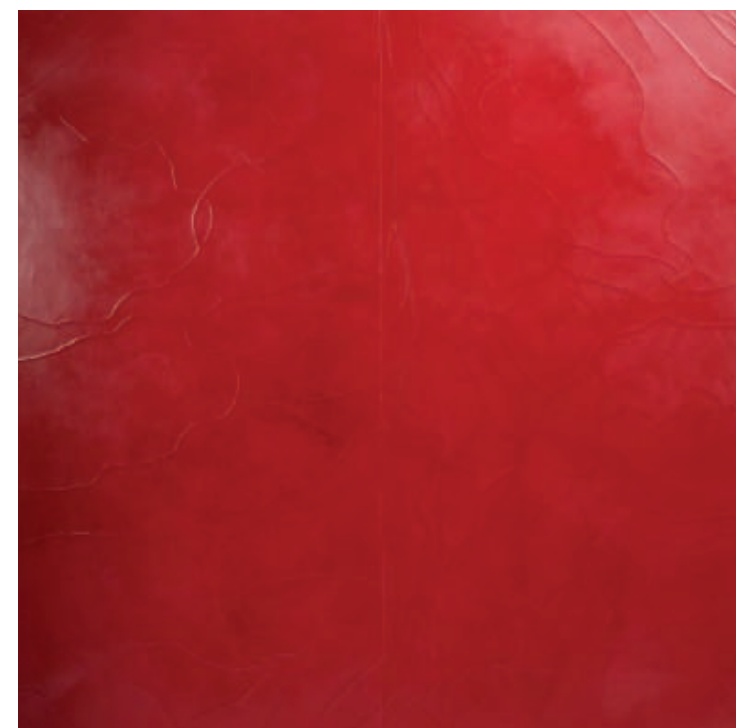
COMMISSIONS

- 2008 Public Art Elephant Project - in conjunction with Wild At Heart & The Forum Trust, Elephant for public display, Norwich

WORK IN PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

The Archant Collection; Arts Council England, East Collection;
The Sovereign Art Foundation, Hong Kong

Divided Ground: Red 2008



Unless stated otherwise, all images © Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery

List of works: a chronology

1. 2. 3. *Ground Formation I, II, & III 2008*

Encaustic, oils, wax, pigment & gesso on canvas and aluminium
214 x 214 x 3.5cm each

4. *Ground Formation Study Series I 2008*

Encaustic, oils, wax & gesso on canvas & board, 52 x 55.5 x 4cm

5. 6. *Ground Formation Study Series III & V 2008*

Encaustic, oils, wax & gesso on canvas & board
55.5 x 52 x 4cm each

7. 8. *Dark Matter I & II 2007*

Encaustic, wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & aluminium
183 x 183 x 3.5cm each

9. *Black Divided Ground 2008*

Oils, wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 76.5 x 76.5 x 4cm

10. *Black Wide Straits 2008*

Oils, wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 76.5 x 76.5 x 4cm

11. *Black Straits 2008*

Oils, wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 76.5 x 76.5 x 4cm

12. 13. *Gesso Study - Black Straits I & II 2007*

Wax, gesso & pigment on canvas & board, 23.5 x 23 x 4cm each

14. *Dark Ground II 2007*

Encaustic, wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board
122 x 122 x 3.5cm

15. 16. *Ground II & IV 2004*

Wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board
153 x 245 x 10cm each

17. 18. *i & iii Monochrome Series - Black 00 2007*

Oils, wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 107 x 107 x 4cm each

19. *ii Monochrome Series - Black & Gold Ground 2008*

Genuine 22 carat gold leaf, oils, wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 107 x 107 x 4cm

20. *Sacro Terra 2007 [Salthouse Bell Tower Project]*

Genuine 22 carat gold leaf, encaustic waxes, pigment & gesso on finest linen and board, 244 x 183 x 4cm

21. *Sacro Terra: Study 2007 [Salthouse Bell Tower Project]*

Genuine 22 carat gold leaf, encaustic, waxes, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 61 x 61 x 4cm

22. 23. *Divided Ground - Black & Gold Leaf : Study I & II 2007*

Genuine 22 carat gold leaf, encaustic wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 30.5 x 30.5 x 7cm each

24. 25. *Gesso Study: Black Space & Space II 2007*

Pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 30.5 x 30.5 x 4.7cm each

26. *Black Gesso Study : Space III 2007*

Wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 35.5 x 35.5 x 5cm

27. 28. *Divided Ground: Orange I & II 2007/8*

Wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 122 x 122 x 4cm each

29. 30. *Scarred Ground & Orange Ground 2008*

Oils, wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 52 x 56 x 3.5cm each

31. *Divided Ground: Red 2008*

Wax, pigment & gesso on canvas, 153 x 153 x 5.5cms

32. *Wide Straits: Carmine Red & Unbleached Titanium White 2008*

Oils, wax, pigment & gesso on canvas, 119.5 x 119.5 x 5.7cm

33. *Wide Straits: Unbleached Titanium White & Lapis Lazuli White 2008*

Oils, wax, pigment & gesso on canvas, 119.5 x 119.5 x 5.7 cm

34. *Parallel Straits Grande: Rosa Antico 2008*

Oils, wax, pigment & gesso on canvas, 137 x 177 x 5.5cms

35. *Ground 00 : I Unicus Series 2003-8*

Wax, pigment & gesso on finest linen & board, 153 x 153 x 7.5

36. 37. *Ground - Times Two I & III 2008*

Encaustic, wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 46 x 76.5 x 4cm each

38. *Specto Specus I & II 2005*

Wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 245 x 306 x 10cm
Sovereign Art Foundation Collection

39. *Sacro Terra [Blanc] 2005*

Encaustic, waxes, pigment & gesso on canvas & board,
153 x 122 x 10cm, Private Collection

40. *Broken Ground 2006*

Encaustic, waxes, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 61 x 61 x 7.5cm
Private Collection

41. *Parallel Straits : Black/Ivory 2008*

Oils, wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 52 x 56 x 3.5cm
Private Collection

42. *'This Is My Body...' 2002-5 [Bishops Prize Study Series]*

Assemblage: genuine 22 carat gold leaf, metal, encaustic, waxes,
pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 30.5 x 30.5 x 1.5cm
Archant Art Collection

43. 44. *Gesso Study : Black Space IV & V 2008*

Wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 40 x 40 x 2.5cm each

45. *Gesso Study: Black space VI 2008*

Wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 40 x 40 x 4cm

46. *Gesso Study: Black Space VII 2008*

Wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 30 x 30 x 7.5cm

47. 48. *Black Gesso Study: Space IV & V 2008*

Wax, pigment & gesso on canvas & board, 30 x 30 x 3.5cm each

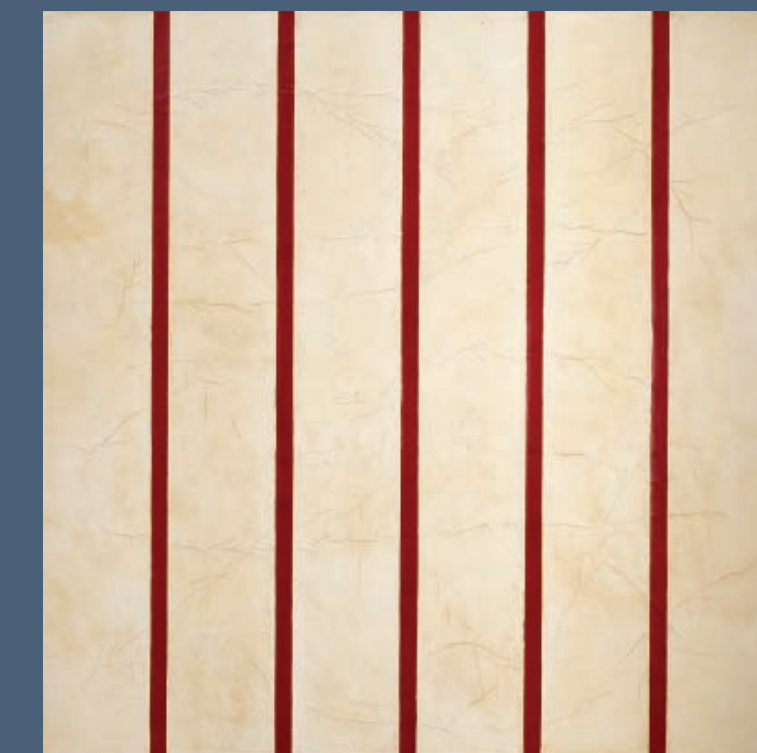


Norfolk Painters 2008

NORWICH
CASTLE
CELEBRATES

Susan Gunn

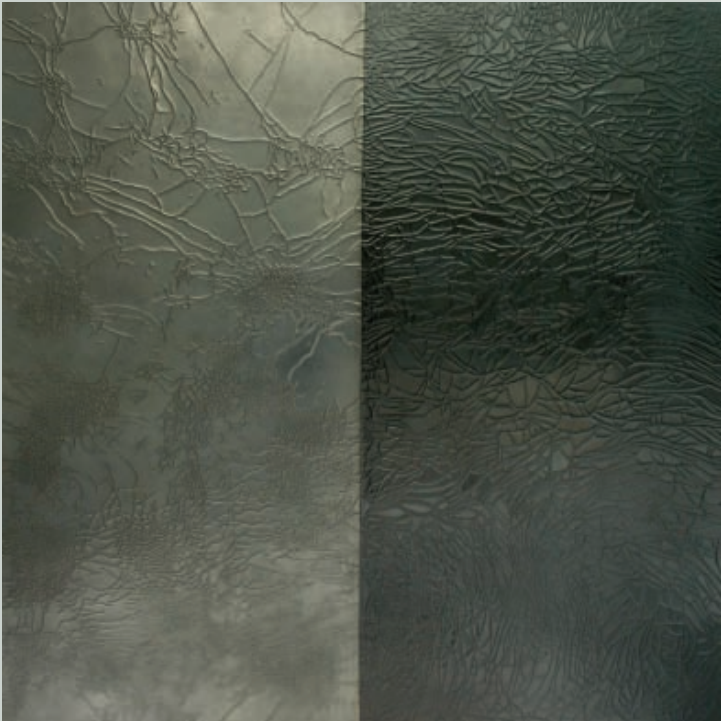
22 November 2008 - 4 January 2009



Wide Straits: Carmine Red & Unbleached Titanium White 2008

Gallery Guide





Dark Matter I 2007 © Susan Gunn

Introduction

Susan Gunn

Susan Gunn received international recognition when she was awarded the Sovereign European Painting Prize 2006. For her Norwich Castle solo exhibition she has created a contemplative atmosphere in the heart of the City, with work which nevertheless dazzles the eye with colour. Her beautiful, highly sought after, abstract paintings combine spiritual weight with surface incident.

To appreciate the work of Susan Gunn is to acknowledge her intimate accord with the materials of ancient techniques. Using size and gesso, pigment and wax, she creates works of art informed by the golden section, which invite the eye to wander over surface detail that is created as much by accident as within the grand design of the artist. Surface becomes paramount as the viewer succumbs to the pleasure of candy colours or cathartic blacks.

Gunn's control of monochrome is that of a colourist and her black spaces, white surfaces and colour planes of crimson, orange or gold leaf seduce the eye with a satisfying certainty, despite their deliberately random quality. The surface of a Gunn painting has a tectonic quality, the plates of colour having moved to create cracks and crevices, before coming to rest in a lasting ground, just as the earth has formed in moments of heat and cooling.

Andrew Moore

Keeper of Art

Interview

Q1 *When did you first discover that art would be an important part of your adult life?*

After A levels I went on to do an Art Foundation course at Bolton College of Art and Design in the early nineties. I gained a First Class BA Hons in Fine Art at Norwich University College of the Arts (formerly Norwich School of Art) in 2004.

Q2 *How has creating art shaped you professionally and personally?*

Art school was a massive personal journey for me. I found the excitement of creativity ...ideas, techniques, and processes - mind blowing. I believe that my work is informed by my life and experiences and art education. I wouldn't have been capable of making the work that I do now when I was in my twenties.

In 2004 I was successfully nominated by Amanda Geitner, Head of Collections and Exhibitions, at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, for an Arts Council Escalator Award. This was a pivotal moment at the start of my professional career and gave me a platform to establish my practice. The funding I received through Escalator Visual Arts facilitated my research and professional development for a year and I was fortunate to receive mentoring sessions with the world-renowned painter, Callum Innes.

Another professional milestone was winning the Sovereign European Painting Prize in 2006. I was nominated by artist Colin Self and curator, Cherry Smyth, alongside painters from over 22 European countries. The panel of judges was chaired by Sir Peter Blake and included eminent curators from Europe including Jorge Molder (director of the Gulbenkian Gallery in Lisbon), Charlotta Kotik (Brooklyn Museum of Contemporary Art and Associate of the National Gallery in Prague), Giorgio Bonomi (President of Zappettini Foundation), Jan Willem Schrofer (President of the Rijksacademie), Charles Esche (Director of the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven), Shaheen Mirali (Curator of the Berlin House of Culture) and Ami Barak (Head of Art, Ville de Paris).

Q3 *How has society influenced your painting? Are there any social implications in your art?*

I try to place my practice within a global context. I do this through reading widely to keep abreast of current affairs and Art-world developments and by visiting significant exhibitions in the UK and beyond such as the Venice Biennale. I am not consciously aware of society's influence on my work other than I exist within this context. I think implication is down to the interpretation and reading of a work and that is dependent on personal associations and cognitive processes. I believe individual signification and expression is part of a whole society and differing aspects should be allowed to flourish simultaneously. Attempts to understand or interpret works of art might promote individual sensitivity, and challenge accepted modes of belief.

Q4 *What are your artistic influences? Has anyone inspired you?*

I find the work of Callum Innes inspirational. His work explores aspects of un-painting and the removal of areas of paint from the canvas, I admire the sheer meticulous power of his works; the ruthless abstraction and particular details that are self- betraying. I also admire the scale and dignity of Mark Rothko's works, the monochromatic discipline of Blinky Palermo and Robert Ryman and the quality of subliminal colour expressed through the paintings of Yves Klein. Lucio Fontana's transcendent, metallic, punctured surfaces are also a

favourite. I was fortunate to see a substantial exhibition of his work first hand at his New York retrospective at the Peggy Guggenheim Museum, Venice in 2007 when I was invited, as a judge, to the launch of the 2007 Sovereign European Painting Prize. This show provided inspiration for my Gold leaf paintings, particularly *Ground Sacro Terra 07* which was painted specifically for the Salthouse Church Bell Tower later that year.

Q5 *Can you say a little about your background? Are your past experiences reflected in the work you do today? If so, how?*

From primary school age my teachers told my parents that I had a special gift in this subject and later on at secondary school, that I would become an excellent artist. When you are young you just accept praise without question and the confidence it procreates is natural. Although I constantly question my judgement in a piece of work, I have never had any doubts about my ability. From an early age I would be constantly drawing, or making something from detritus or off-cuts of fabric from my mother's dressmaking scraps.

I believe my life experiences are reflected in my work, Lucien Freud once said that "every painting is a self-portrait" There is a dichotomy of restraint and vigour in my work that is reflected in my personality. The demonstration of control, and attention to detail, is in resistance to the resignation and chance of allowing the paintings to develop independently during the process. Once I complete the painting of the gesso onto the canvas I allow them to evolve through the drying process. During this time cracks and fissures appear in the surface, which renders each piece unique. Although I engineer to make this happen there is never any guarantee that they will turn out alright. Once dry the painting is recovered to completion by rubbing the gesso to achieve a smooth slab-like quality to the surface, and feeding the paint with natural waxes and oils. Some of my works go to the brink of abolition, and many are disregarded. The risk is that the gesso will dry too quickly or slowly and become unstable. The works that I retrieve from almost lost states are the most rewarding. I believe the imperfections; scratches and marks left behind on the surfaces betray their history and enhance the character of the work.

Q6 *How long have you been a working artist?*

I began exhibiting work in 1999 and I have been a full-time professional artist since 2004.

Q7 *If you could pinpoint the characteristics of people who collect your art, what would they be?*

My collectors are a varied group. Art buyers, professors, curators, established collectors and many first time collectors who have no previous experience of Contemporary Art have acquired my works. A high percentage of collectors return to add to their collection. I think a common characteristic is a respect for quality and clarity and a high regard for the understated complexity of my paintings. I like to think my paintings become more interesting over time as one observes the nuances inherent in the canvases - it is impossible to see all the work in one view, you have to invest time in observation. I have work in the Archant collection, Arts Council England, East Collection and the Sovereign Art Foundation, Hong Kong.

Q8 *Discuss one of your paintings. What were you thinking when you created it?*

Specto Specus was made as a site specific piece in response to a location at the Great Eastern Hotel, London. It was part of an Escalator Visual Arts exhibition funded by Arts Council England, East in



Parallel Straits Grande: Rosa Antico 2008

conjunction with Contemporary Art Norwich 2005. The Exhibition was situated in various areas of the hotel and the remit was to highlight the East of England's connection with the capital. The title of the show was *STAY*. I produced two large-scale monochrome canvases that hung as an installation with a zip-like gap between them. The divided spaces were emphasised with vertical divisions in the works. Their position in the hotel reception area next to the check-in desk and huge stainless steel lifts was pertinent. The vertical gap between the paintings echoed the opening and shutting of the lifts and the comings and goings of human traffic, residents and workers to the hotel. The large Carmine coloured pigment I used originates from the serum of the female cochineal beetle; a vibrant crimson red seen under direct light and a deep heavy maroon viewed in subdued lighting. Red is reminiscent of the cycle of life and renewal - regeneration and beginning, the ending of a cycle and the beginning of another.

Specto is from the Latin meaning to look at, gaze, watch, observe, regard, consider; to bear in mind, to meditate, incline, refer or have regard for a thing. And *Specus* denotes a cave, cavern, a cavity or chasm; a natural or artificial ditch, canal, channel, a hollow cavity of any kind such as a chora (womb).

Writer Ali Smith declared the canvases were "utterly arresting, the canvas savage and rich...and brilliantly shocking in its luxuriousness."

The painting was made using my signature technique of applying fine layers of pure pigment & gesso to the surface of the canvas. By using only pure pigment with the binding qualities of animal glue the colour is unusually powerful and concentrated.

Q9 *On average, how many hours a week do you spend working in your studio? Do you have any 'studio rituals'?*

I work 40-50 hours per week, sometimes less or more depending on what I am working towards. I begin each day with a cafetière of fresh coffee in my studio and like to listen to BBC Radio 4 whilst I am working.

Q10 *Where can we see more of your art?*

www.susangunn.co.uk

Q11 *What trends do you see in the contemporary 'art world'? Are they important to you?*

I keep abreast of current trends because I appreciate artwork other than my own and I like to know what's going on. However, trends are of little importance to me and my work. I think it is imperative to be true to your own pre-occupations and to be unique and original. Trends change and often go full circle so what is out of fashion now might be the hot property in five years time.

Q12 *Any tips for emerging artists?*

Work hard, be persistent, believe in yourself and your practice; maintain a degree of optimism and always document your work.

Q13 *What was the toughest point in your career as an artist? Have you ever hit rock-bottom?*

Sometimes situations have arisen where I realised that the art-world is just like any other career or business and art people are subject to the same human foibles as the rest of society. It's sounds daft but this was a real shock to me, I used to be quite idealistic in my associations. There are many knock-backs in this profession but I believe the trick is to maintain the right mixture of naivety and cynicism.

Q14 *Why do you create art?*

I find that ideas come to me when I am working and by the time I have finished a piece my mind is racing onto the next, sometimes it's difficult to keep up. I am always learning and there is always some new nuance that creeps in or avenue I want to explore. It's like climbing a mountain, when you get to the top and see the view you forget the hardship and fatigue along the way... then you forget the exhilaration of being at the summit and you have to climb another mountain only this time one that offers a greater challenge.

Q15 *What do you think about the art scene in Norfolk?*

I believe there are many opportunities for artists to develop and progress in the East of England. Norwich University College of the Arts has a worldwide reputation for excellence, East International and its director Lynda Morris is respected throughout the world, as is the reputation of the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts at University of East Anglia. Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery combines the prestige and heritage of the city together with a widening and ambitious contemporary presence. With Contemporary Art Norwich combining with East International and the Norfolk and Norwich Festival in 2009 this pool of resources must make Norfolk one of the most dynamic counties in the country. Outpost Gallery, The Kings Lynn Arts Centre, Norwich Arts Centre and Salthouse Church all have a lively presence in the contemporary art scene and the diversity of Artists who exhibit during Open Studios is prolific. I would like to see artists and organisations in the county work together and build on this success for the future; develop more art tourism to the county, and a wider cultural exchange internationally.

Q16 *Does religion, faith, or the lack thereof play a part in your painting?*

The repetition inherent in the process I use can be likened to a kind of ritual. When the fissures and cracks appear in my works, at that point, the work is beyond myself and they develop unique characteristics... to create but not control a work requires a certain faith. Artist Yves Klein said, "To sense the soul, without explanation, without words, and to depict this sensation - this is what led me to monochrome painting"