

**The Sentient Body: An Exploration of the Body's  
Intimate Connection to the Environment.**

by

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Submitted in the fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy



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## Abstract

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### **The Sentient Body: An Exploration of the Body's Intimate Connection to the Environment.**

Doctor of Philosophy

This project investigates methodologies within the practice of oil painting in order to conceptualise perceptions about the intimate connection between the body and the environment.

Today the notion of the integrity of the body as complete and separate is actively fostered by the virtual, which delivers knowledge without the smell and touch of reality. Increasingly insulated from the actual experiences of nature, our biological selves are nonetheless in a state of constant material exchange with the environment. Beyond this functionality, there are those who cultivate a deeper sensory connection with the land. They regard themselves as being at one with the environment and sense within their bodies the rhythms and pulse of the cosmos. It is these internal indicators, felt rather than seen, which form the subject of this project and the investigation has sought the means through painting to successfully conceptualise these feelings of connection.

The issue of visually representing sensory responses which do not manifest themselves in pragmatic vision requires the invention of new and effective signifiers. Various methods based upon the fluid applications of oil on canvas have been investigated. Of course visual language cannot be expected to function completely outside the field of metaphor. Here the segments of the process, the actions of painter and paint, form the metaphors for flow and rhythm, and for the bindings which wrap the body into its surroundings.

Throughout the project, the subjects of each painting have been the feelings referenced within my own bodily experience. Every work represents a new exploration of the metaphoric process yet, in terms of the investigation, each is an echo of the last and a foretaste of the next.

The specific thematic connection of the body and the environment lifts the project clear of the wider evocative intent present in aspects of the Abstract Expressionist movement, although both similarities and dissimilarities with painterly processes employed by artists such as Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis are recognised. The precursors within the thematic of this project are particular works by the artists Helen Chadwick, Ana Mendieta, Mona Hatoum, Terry Winters, Georgia O'Keeffe, Moira Dryer and Ian McKeever.

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