

THE ALLEGORICAL FOLD

**Evoking Physical and Psychological Presence and
Absence in the Painting of Folded Fabric.**

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**BA Hons. Fine Art, Painting; Diploma of Education;
BA Ceramic Design**

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**Design and Social Context Portfolio
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to the following people for their guidance and support throughout this project:

Godwin Bradbeer, Leslie Duxbury, Irene Barbaris, Joy Hirst, Liz Colbert, Zach Oakes, Kerry Winchester, Joan Eddy, Tash Prendergast and Ian Hill.

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INTRODUCTION

PROJECT PROPOSAL

Title

The Allegorical Fold: Evoking physical and psychological presence and absence in the painting of folded fabric.

Summary of Project

In this project notions of presence and absence will be explored through a study of '*the fold*'. I will closely examine a number of paintings that depict folded drapery or cloth and from this examination I will select examples that evoke a response in me to these fundamental states of being. My objective is to produce a body of paintings that explore the structure of the fold and its expression through light, shadow and darkness to develop a range of images that metaphorically represent these phenomena and the possibility of a relational field between the two. This examination will re-present, reinterpret, fragment and transform the selected images using the materials of oil painting and drawing to visualize my response to the changing perceptions of this phenomenon.

This investigation is informed by philosophic and psychoanalytic writings that explore the phenomenology of states of presence and absence. In part, these states are suggested by other terminologies, for example, form and space or volume and void. The project draws on the work of writers who have examined and changed perceptions of this phenomenon, particularly where they attribute the structure of absence to contribute to an understanding of subjectivity, question the favouring of presence in Western thought and explore the relationship between the two.

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Brief Description

My objective is to visualize the nature of presences and absences by investigating past images of folded drapery. This project will be informed by theoretical frameworks in order to produce a body of paintings that represent these aspects of being. I aim to metaphorically re-present the fold from historical references to further the fold's resonances in a contemporary context.

Folded fabric has been used in painting throughout history as an expressive device. Its form of representation has changed according to the influences of its time and context of its era. In her book *Fabric of Vision. Dress and Drapery in Painting*, Anne Hollander suggests that "up until the fifteenth century no drapery or representations of cloth appear illogical" (1), but that later, "painted drapery came to stand for emotional impact and psychological effect... it was painted floating, falling or looped without any visible means of support" (2). My contention is that images of folded fabric have shown a capacity to respond both formally and conceptually to technical, philosophical and emotional contexts.

"Fold" is both noun and verb and can be interpreted in a number of ways. As a noun it represents an image of folded cloth and as a verb it may indicate movement such as that of bending one's body or the folding of the arms. This project seeks to explore the image of the fold as it may be found in painted representations of drapery, but other interpretations of 'fold' may be implicit in the finished artwork.

Absence will be explored through my responses to images of the fold in historic paintings. My sense of absence may be a feeling, a sensation, a mood or a memory evoked by the visual experience. A sense of absence will engage with emotional states associated with desire, memory, anxiety, pain, and longing. Representations of these states draw from personal and theoretical frameworks that explore and question the traditional positioning of absence in the realm of the feminine and presence as masculine.

Presence will be explored through the lines of construction - the armature that holds the fold together, compositional elements and the clarity of a painted detail. There will be a play between realism and abstracted forms, figure and ground and spatial ambiguities to represent and critique how the experience of absence and presence may interact and inform each other. An exploration of presence will be guided by terms used by Patrick Furey in *The Theory of Absence* where he considers presence to hold a privileged position with that which connects, constructs, is held up and invested with power. (3)

From our earliest moments of being wrapped and swaddled to an ongoing relationship between the body and clothing there may be said to appear a psychological connection between the cloth and the feelings or memories it evokes. Theorists such as Roland Barthes and J.C. Fleugal explore in their writings connections between clothes and emotional phenomena. Artist and writer, Joan Key, in her essay, *Imprecations of Obscenity in the Fold*, describes the fold as a possible space for fantasy. She discusses the hidden pleasure, fascination and passion associated with cloth in the photographic work of Gaetan de Clerambault, a psychiatrist who also taught a course in drapery at the Ecole des Beux Arts between 1923 and 1926. Key

writes, “His passion was strictly limited to the very surface of the cloth, the twisting, tying, wrapping, draping actions and to scientific record-making”. (4) Key asserts the perpetual sense of movement in the fold, parallels the structure of the space of fantasy. Drawing on a painting by Bridgit Riley, *Arrest 11*, 1965, and a sculpture by Rachael Whiteread, *Untitled (Airbed)*, 1992, whose examples both share a reference to the mobile surface of cloth, Key describes the imaginary/absent realm and the symbolic/present realm of the fold as “a continuous folding and unfolding that is out of the spectators control: a simultaneous play of two positions”. (5) Patrick Fuery further situates fantasy as an aspect of the uncanny and states, “as Freud pointed out, the uncanny – *das Unheimlich* – contains the sense of the familiar and the no-longer hidden. It is the making present of uncomfortable absences.” (6).

In this study of the fold, the realm of absence will be imaginatively explored through aspects of fantasy: the concealed or censored voice of desire, memory or anxiety and seeks to represent these identifications in relation to presences to represent the tensions that characterise a relational, transitional, negotiated or intersubjective field between the two.

An artistic reference for this project is the surrealist painter Kay Sage who used folded fabric as part of the iconography of her work. In her book *Kay Sage, A House of Her Own*, Judith Suther writes, “she painted a tenuous fantasy world of half collapsed or half completed architectural structures set in deep vistas or floating with no scale or moorings ... (she) painted swirls and scraps of drapery that seemed to mark the absence of the human.” (7) Contemporary artistic references situating this investigation include the work by photographer Anne Ferran. Her photograms record ghostly apparitions of clothing and may suggest an absent presence. She says, “I am interested in clothing because there is that very strong association with human presence and absence. There is a space where the body would be rendered in the photogram...left with these objects, the people disappear and the object endures in museum collections.” (8) Further references are paintings by Wendy Stavrianos, Rosslynd Piggot, Adrienne Strampp and drawings by Judith Wright. While these artists often image the dress with the body in absentia to express hidden worlds, I will explore fragments of folded cloth to express experiences of absence that explore the depth in a void, not just an emptiness, the assertion of presence through the structural form of the fold and the tension of interacting fields through an exploration of composition and spatial design such as shape and interval relationships.

The project will choose examples of painted drapery that offer sites to explore the physical (structural, formal) and psychological (mood, memory, feeling,) themes of presence and absence. The features considered in this choice are the fabric’s structural undulations, how paint describes the fold to reveal its contours through light, shadow or darkness, the way the fold alludes to sensations of cloaking and disclosure, movement and stillness and the revealing and concealing of an object through the folds formal properties of shape, line, repetition, texture, volume, pattern and colour.

Examples include:

The Death of the Virgin, Michelangelo Caravaggio, 1606
Annunciation, Orazio Gentileschi, 1623
La Malinconia, Domenico Fetti, 1622

Madonna of the Rocks, Leonardo da Vinci, 1483-85, Paris, Louvre
Madonna of the Rocks, Leonardo da Vinci, 1506-08, London,
 National Gallery
The Persian Sibyl, Domenico Zampieri, Domenichino, 1623-25
Judith and her Maid Servant, Artemisia Gentileschi, 1612-18
The Paele Madonna, Jan van Eyke, 1463
Man in a red Turban, Jan van Eyke
The Art of Painting, Johannes Vermeer, 1662-5
Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window, Johannes Vermeer, 1659
Bacchus and Ariadne, Titian, 1520-3
Adoration of the Magi, Francisco de Zurbarán, 1639-40

From the National Gallery of Victoria, I will study the original paintings to observe the fold's structure, texture, brushwork, gestures and surfaces.

Madonna and Child, in the manner of Jan van Eyke, late 15th century;
Two Old Men Disputing, Rembrandt Harmensz Van Rijn, 1628;
Miss Susanna Gale, Joshua Reynolds, 1763-64;
Study from the Human Body, Francis Bacon, 1949;
Nude with Cat, Balthus, 1949

These examples may be extended through my research.

Research Questions

- How can selected fragments of past images of folded fabric be re-presented to develop iconography that expresses the textures of movement woven by the interactions of absence and presence?
- How can the mediums of oil painting and drawing express the moods and feelings associated with absence, the structures of form and volume associated with presence and the tensions of a relational field between the two?
- In what ways can a contemporary study of historic paintings metaphorically re-present the fold to create symbols that describe perceptions of presence and absence?

Rationale

It is the aim of this project to develop iconography that explores the possibilities and potential for folded fabric to represent the textures of movement woven by the interactions of absence and presence.

It will develop new representations of the fold influenced by images from the past, and in this sense, the project will contribute to an ongoing transformation of this representational device. In the examples chosen for examination, the patterns created by the fold can be said to infer different emotional states, from flowing, energetic and calm, to enigmatic or frenzied. As a way of visualizing aspects of absence and presence, I will draw upon the patterns expressed by the form of the fold to explore the rhythms, contrasts, harmonies, chaos or tensions of these states of being. In using past images of the fold the project proposes a continuum with historic painting to influence and have resonance in a contemporary context.

This investigation seeks to contribute to an understanding of subjectivity, perception and identity. It seeks to develop representations which can account for experiences of presence and absence, structure and void, and the factors or forces which contribute to a relational field between the two states. Just as the surface of the fold is continuous, even though parts of it may be absent from view, the project seeks to illuminate how these aspects operate in relation to each other, how one aspect may be part of, inform, or intersect the other, or how these two states may at times be continuous.

Absence is often thought of as “a negativity of presence” and yet essential to this investigation is the recognition that absence can have a status outside this. Elizabeth Grosz writes in *Volatile Bodies*, “women have been the traditional repositories and guardians of the lack constitutive of desire, and insofar as the opposition between presence and absence, reality and fantasy, has traditionally defined and constrained woman to inhabit the place of man’s other...Any model of desire that dispenses with the primacy of lack in conceiving desire seems to be a positive step forward and...worthy of careful investigation...Presence and absence are coupled in and to the same framework. In place of plenitude, being, fullness or self-identity is not lack, absence, rupture, but rather becoming.”(9)

While the research draws on theoretical, psychological and philosophical frameworks, the traditional positioning of absence in the realm of the feminine and presence as masculine is considered in this project and as a researcher, I recognise my own gendered voice formed by my socio-cultural background to be implicit in the outcomes. As representations of the fold have reacted to changing contexts throughout history, the importance of this project is to re-present the fold and offer new readings that react to notions of feminine subjectivity as an absence, that unravel notions of mind/body dualism and develop ways of metaphorically conceiving the fold as a space of “becoming”, an interaction between two subjects. The rhythms of the fold become a dance of transformation for both.

The photographs of Deborah Paawue and Pat Brassington explore emotional states of desire and anxiety. In her essay *Damaged*, Karen Burns observes Brassingtons work

is tacked to this elemental structure -“ how to speak what cannot be spoken.” (10) This investigation will further encounters with the hidden, the unknown and the unspoken realms of subjective experience within the body and psyche. While the wrapped packages of Christo and Jeanne Claude change objects into “disquieting, ambivalent presences” (11), it is the aim of this project to metaphorically develop representations of the fold that imaginatively explore the sites and relational spaces of absence and presence.

Methods

I will conduct a number of projects that explore the anatomy of the fold. Through drawing and gouache studies I will observe and examine the structure of folded drapery. Different types of cloth will be investigated – muslin, silk, taffeta and patterned cotton and heavy drapery to see how the fold’s contours, shape and angles vary with these contrasting cloths. The purpose of these explorations is to study how the materials of drawing and painting can represent the form of the fold, the textures of various cloths, how light responds to different surfaces of the fold and to different types of material. It also seeks to understand the structure of the fold- the surface directions, how the form radiates from points and the nature of undercuts under the edge of the fold so that I can interpret the nature of volume and void, form and space. I will draw on the writings and observations of drapery studies from Leonardo da Vinci, Edward Lanteri and Kimon Nicolaides to further this understanding. In addition to these observational studies I will create plaster casts of various types of folds in muslin - from twisted, looped and knotted to loosely draped folds and extend these three dimensional studies into drawing and sketching under various light conditions.

In the historic examples chosen for close examination I will be looking for contrasts and harmonies in rhythm, patterns, colours, shapes, textures, brushwork, lines and spatial ambiguities that evoke an emotional response in me. I will explore the relationship between these states by creating and playing with a juxtaposition of painted fragments in the composition. There may be aspects of the examples that I will paint realistically, or float in an enlarged aspect of another fragment or the experience may be transformed and embodied through the rhythms and pressure of a line. I may erase sections, blur layers or reinstate them. I am trying to find connections with the sensations of the looped, falling, flying or static states of drapery to create a field of sensations that have emerged in response to the image. The painted response will seek to visualize absence as different moods and feelings associated with states of desire, memory or anxiety and presence as a structure that exists in isolation or in tension. As the fold is often represented in forms of triangles this may suggest the possibility of a dialectical schema to represent a relationship that is both formal and conceptual.

The nature of absence will be explored by investigating spatial atmospheric qualities of shadows, the nature of transparencies in paint and the structure of repetition in the fold, a feature that is attributed to the structure of absence by Fuery. (12) The nature of presence will be explored by analysing the opacity and texture of paint and the

mapping of the shape of the fold: curved / angular as revealed through the presence of light. The interplay of these positions will be explored through the composition, layering, and juxtaposition of elements from the selected examples of folds.

I will explore compositional arrangements and pictorial devices such as shape and interval relationships, positive and negative space, directional forces such as the placement and weight of a line, shape or colour to suggest the tensions and interplay between absence and presence. I will explore how different types of tensions may be achieved by examining the dynamics of positional and directional composition. This will investigate relationships between form and space, directional forces that may imply expansion or contraction, and compositions that may include a juxtaposition of movement, action or chaos with harmony, calm or quiet elements. An investigation into discordant colour schemes will also support the examination of the tensions in the relational field between absence and presence.

Footnotes

(1) Hollander, A. *Fabric of Vision. Dress and Drapery in Painting*. Yale University Press, 2002. Pg 35.

(2) Ibid, Pg 45.

(3) Fuery, P. *The Theory of Absence. Subjectivity, Signification and Desire*. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 1995. Pg 7.

(4) Key, J. *Unfold: Imprecations of Obscenity in the Fold. Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics and Art*. Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1997. Pg 192.

(5) Ibid, Pg 192.

(6) Opcit. Fuery. Pg 57.

(7) Suther J.D. *A House of Her Own. Kay Sage, Solitary Surrealist*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London. 1997. Pg xvi.

(8) www.abc.net.au/arts/visual/stories

(9) Grosz, E. *Volatile Bodies. Towards a Corporeal Feminism*. Allen and Unwin, NSW, 1994, Pg 165.

(10) Burns, K. Catalogue Essay: *Damaged*. Exhibition: Pat Brassington. Work in Progress. The Ian Potter Museum of Art, The University of Melbourne, 2002. Pg 13.

(11) Bourdon, D. *Christo*. Harry MN. Abrams, Inc Publishers, New York, Pg 11.

(12) Opcit, Fuery, Pg 25.

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 Below left – detail. Oil on linen, 1220 x 1220 cm. 2008
 Below right – detail. Oil on linen, 1220 x 1220 cm. 2008
- Fig. 85 Night Talisman. Oil on linen, 1220 x 1220 cm. 2008
- Figs. 86 What Angel would hear me?
 Above - Digital photo, 10 x 15 cm

Below left – Digital photo, 10 x 15 cm
Below right – Digital photo, 10 x 15 cm

Figs. 87 What Angel would hear me? Oil on linen, 1220 x 1220 cm. 2008

Figs. 88 This is not a Fold

Above left – Digital photo, 10 x 15 cm
Above right – Digital photo, 10 x 15 cm
Below left – Initial painting, 1220 x 1220 cm. 2008
Below right – painting development, 1220 x 1220 cm. 2008

Fig. 89 This is not a Fold. Oil on linen, 1220 x 1220 cm. 2008

Figs. 90 Between the Creases

Above left – digital photo, 10 x 15 cm
Above right – drawing, charcoal and photocopy
Middle left – Photocopy trial, studio
Middle right – Photocopy trial
Below left – Painting Detail, oil on linen, 1680 x 1980, 2008
Below right – Painting detail, oil on linen, 1680 x 1980, 2008

Fig. 91 Between the Creases. Oil on linen, 1680 x 1980 cm. 2008

DOCUMENTATION OF PROJECT

Visual Background Research Images of Selected Old Master Paintings



Fig 1 *Judith and her Maid Servant*, Artemisia Gentileschi, 1612-18

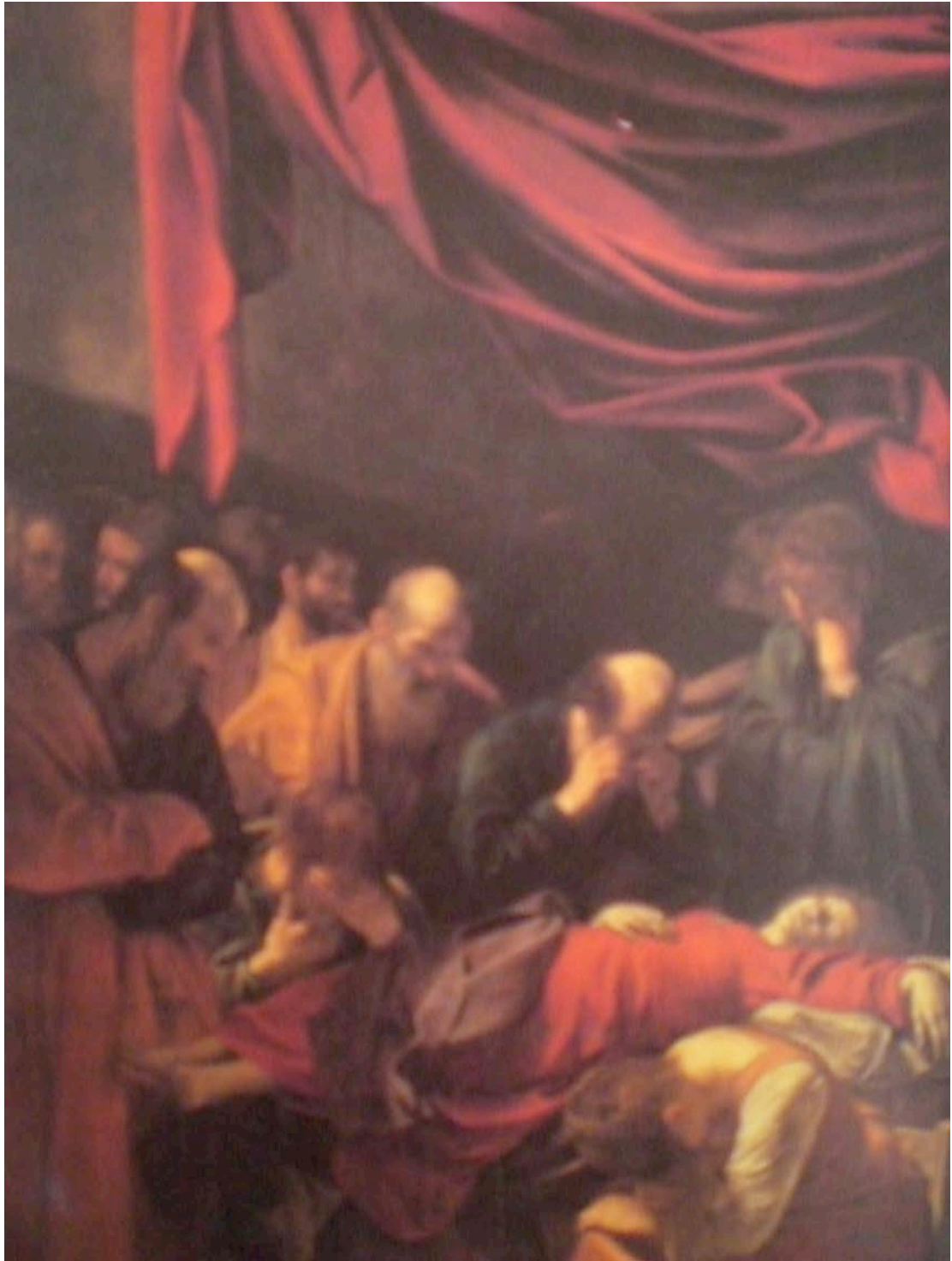


Fig 2 *The Death of the Virgin*, by Michelangelo Caravaggio, 1606



Fig 3 *La Malinconia*, Domenico Fetti, 1622



Fig 4 *Madonna with the Carnation*, Leonardo da Vinci, 1475



Fig 5
Virgin of the Rocks
Leonardo da Vinci, 1483
Paris, Louvre



Fig 6
Virgin of the Rocks
Leonardo da Vinci, 1506- 8
London, National Gallery



Fig 7 *St Matthew and the Angel*
Michelangelo Caravaggio, 1599-1602



Fig 8 *Portrait of a white haired man*
Rembrandt Harmensz Van Rijn, 1667



Fig 9 *Portrait of a white haired man*, Detail
Rembrandt Harmensz Van Rijn, 1667

Initial Drawing Studies

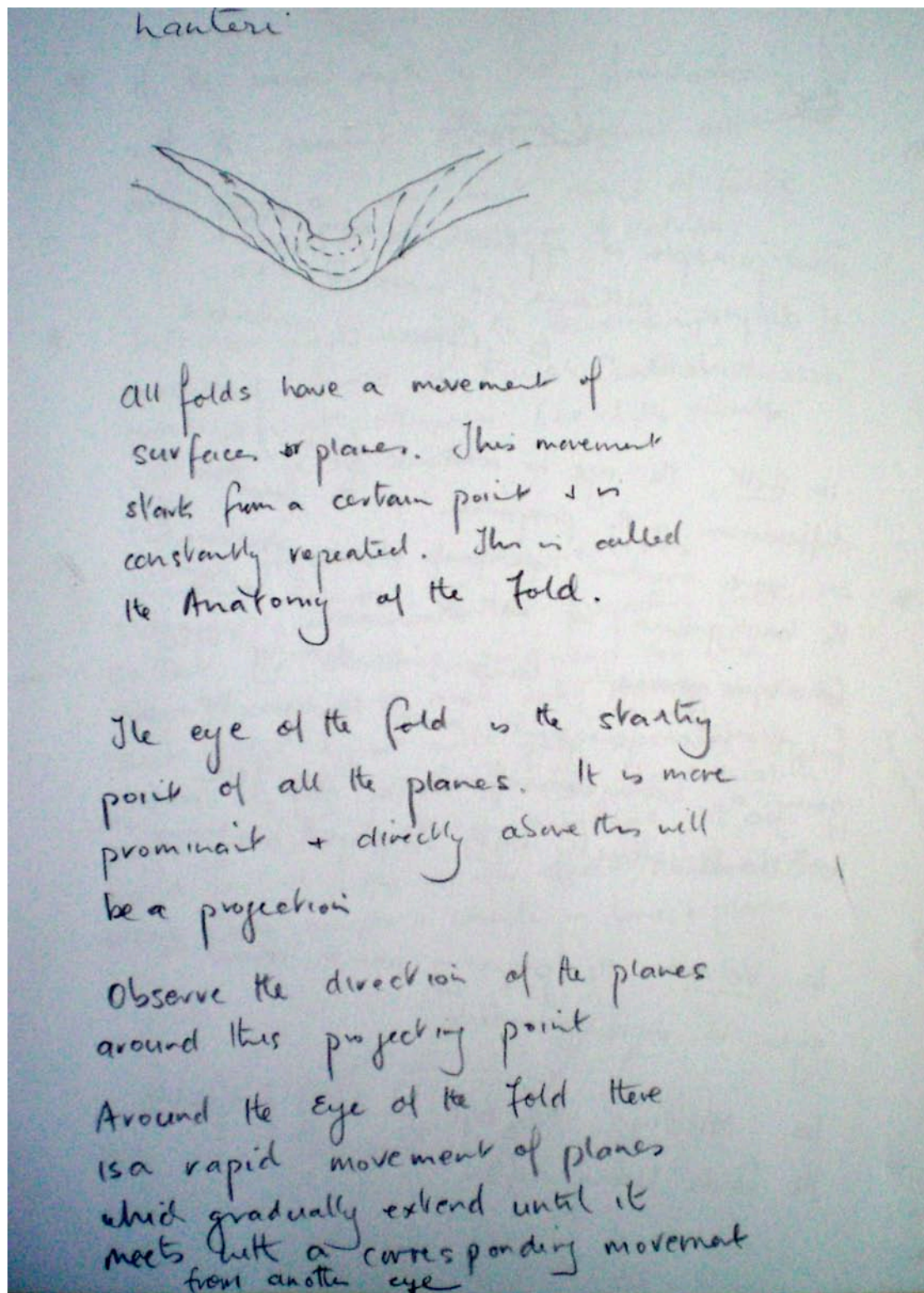


Fig 10



This principle is applied to any kind of drapery, although in more or less accentuated in the different materials

In Silk, the eye is more angular; the differences in the proportion of the fold are more marked than any other material; the background, or rather interior of the folds, is generally larger, the drawing of the folds less elegant, more broken up, giving a 'baroque' effect - May give brilliant effect, but a slight vulgar one.

In Velvet, the projecting point about the eye is more rounded

In Muslin, the eye is less palpable,

Fig 11

In sculpture the Greeks combined this +
other materials for contrast, richness.

Two
combined

- * If the inner depth is not finished
with the greatest of care, you will
only produce an inert mass of folds.
(back of ears, interior of nostrils).

depth

- * Interior parts need to be drawn +
modelled first + Finish exterior
parts first, otherwise life-like effect
will not be achieved.

Gothic figures / drapery extends
sideways, underneath the projecting folds
so that the shadows produced by the
deep-lying parts are not HARD shadows,
- but after light will get upon them +
cause - transparent shadow from which the
outer fold is strongly detached. It acts
as a foil + gives a rich effect, whilst at the
same time simple + chaste in line + planes.

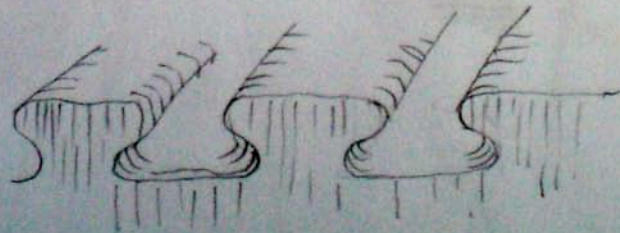


Fig 12

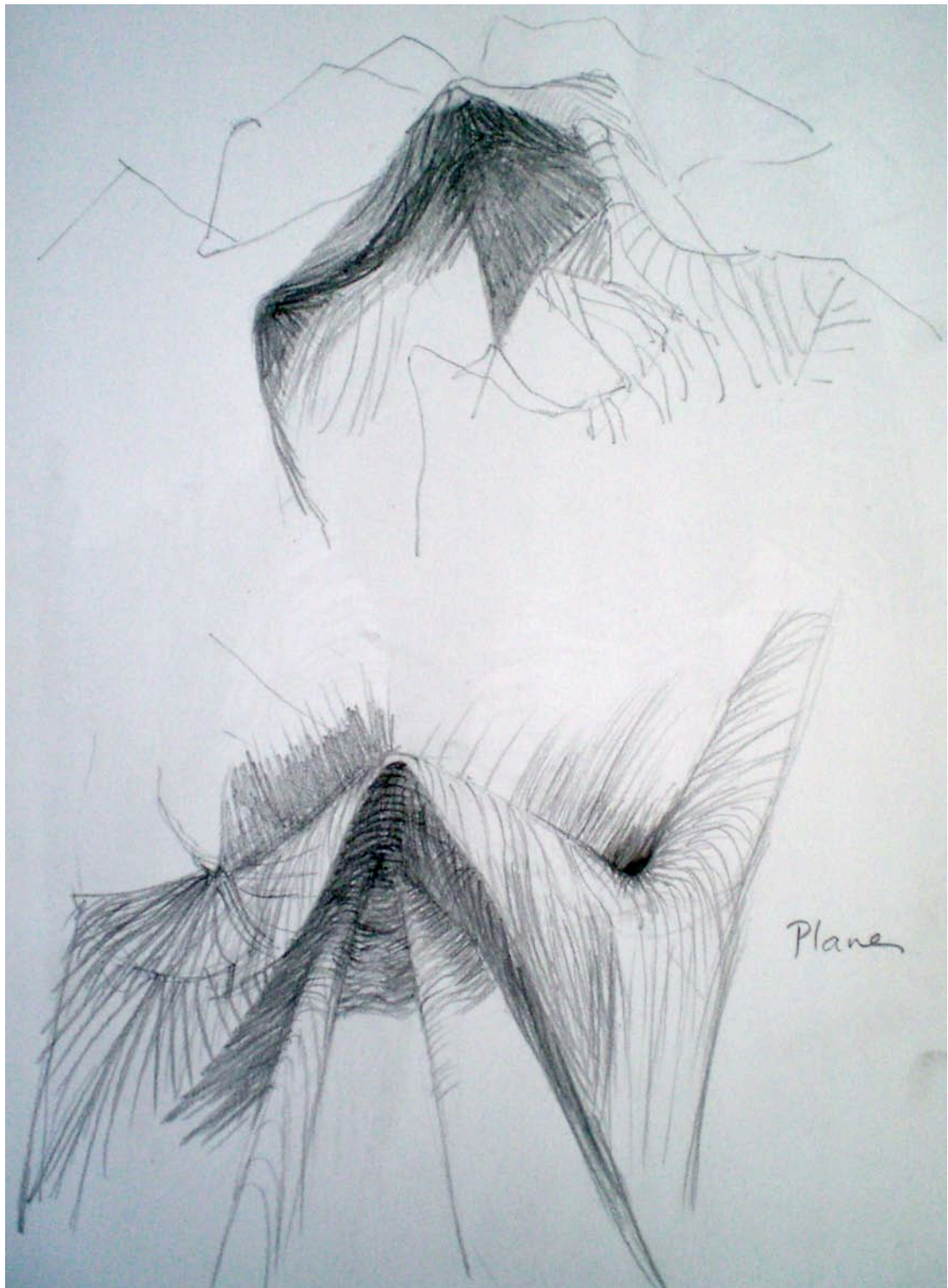


Fig 13



Fig 14



Fig 15



Fig 16



Fig 17



Fig 18



Fig 19

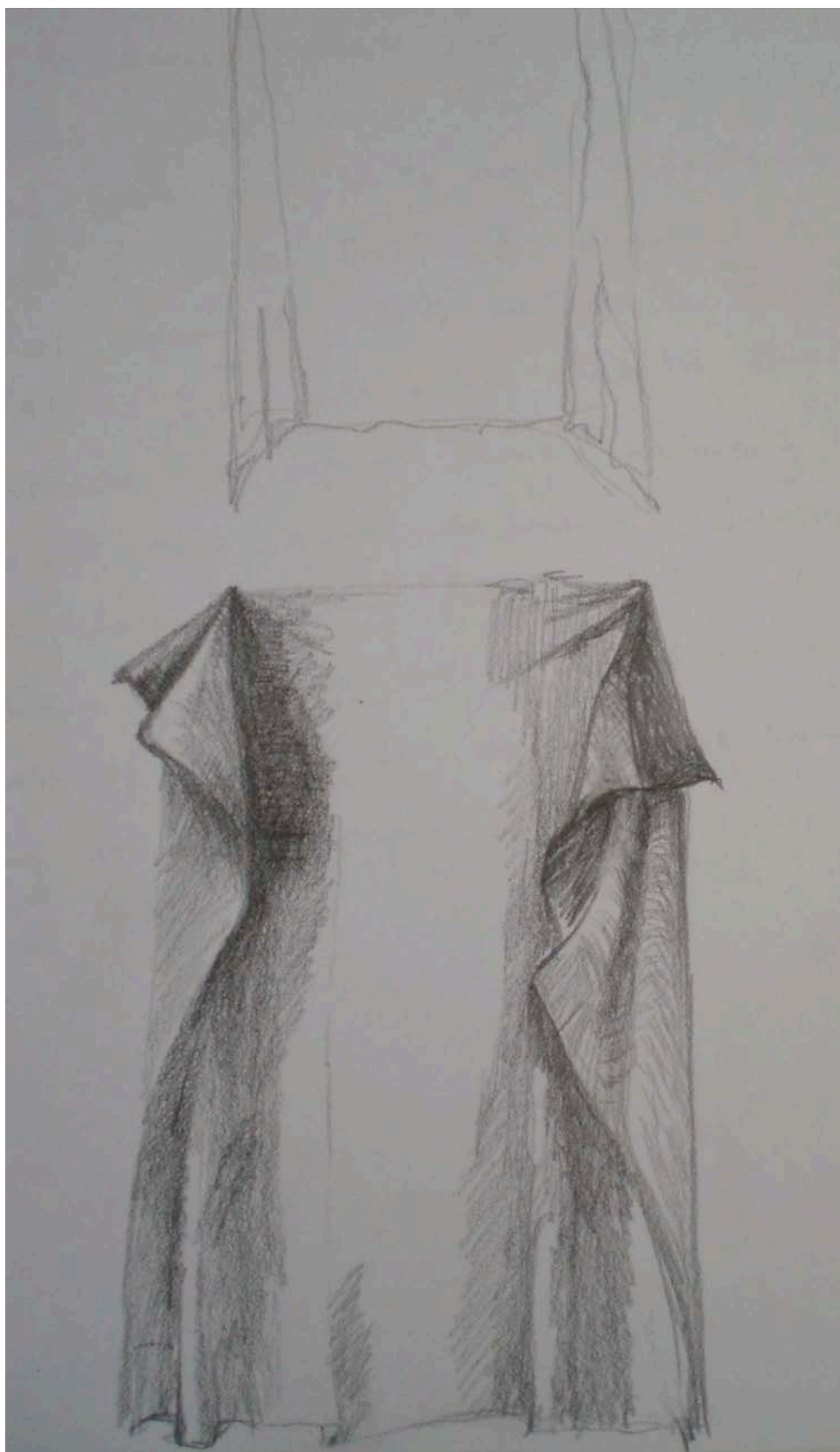


Fig 20



Fig 21

Observational Drawing Studies



Fig 22



Fig 23



Fig 24



Fig 25



Fig 26

Explorations with Gouache



Fig 27



Figs 28 & 29 After Michelangelo Caravaggio.

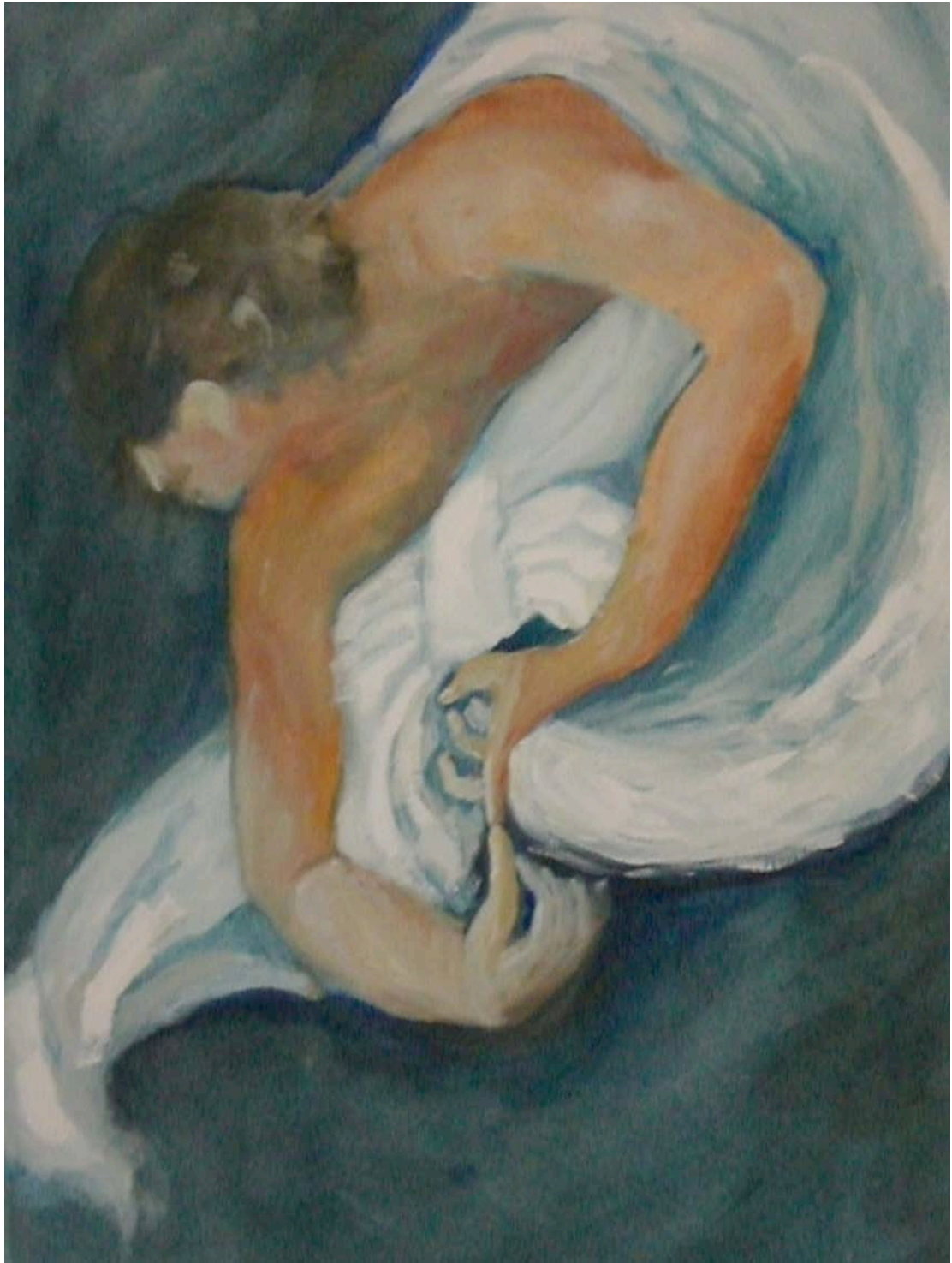


Fig 30 After Michelangelo Caravaggio

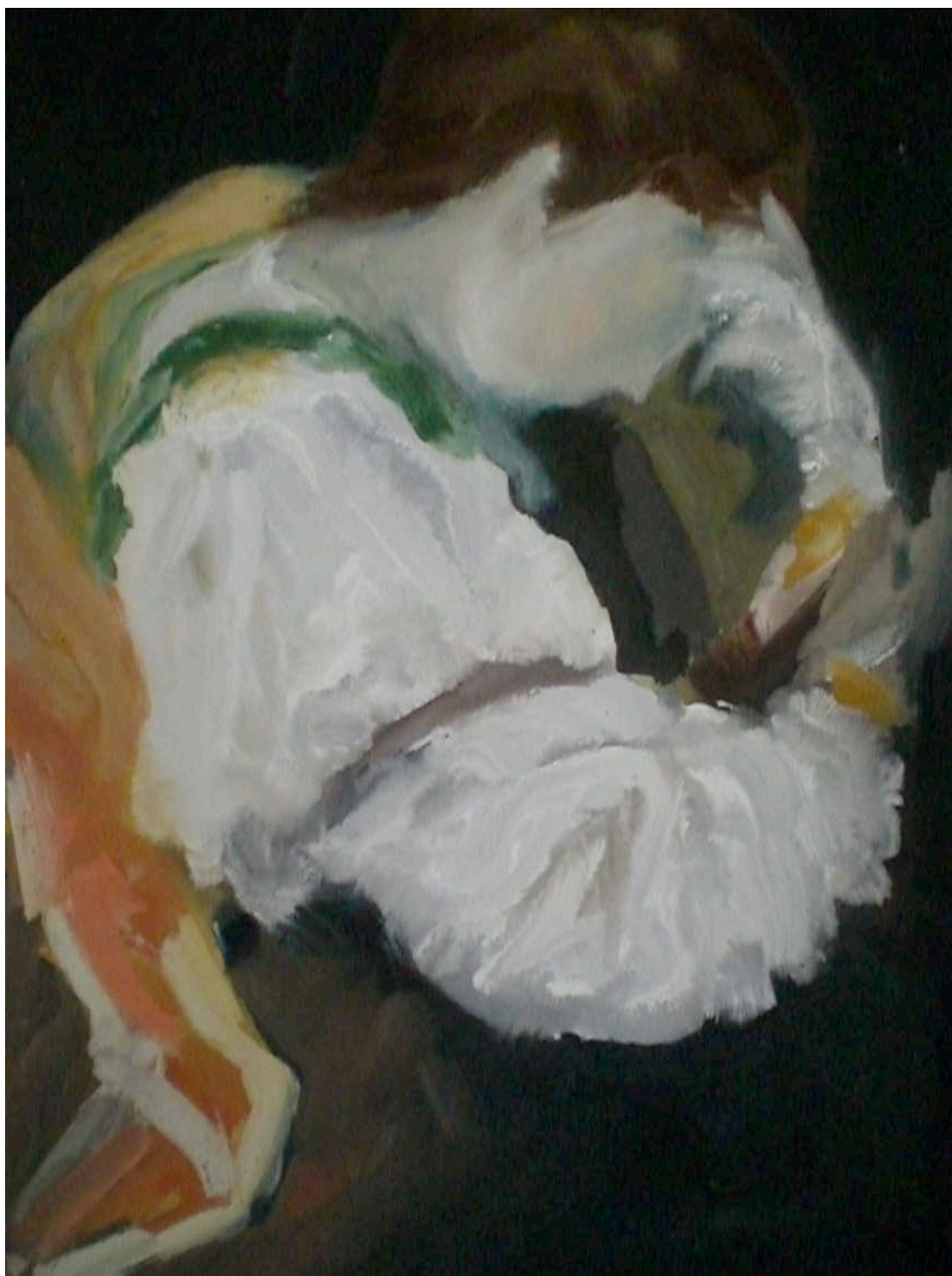


Fig 31 After Domenico Fetti



Fig 32 After Leonardo da Vinci



Fig 33 & 34 After Artemesia Gentileschi



Fig 35 After Domenico Zampieri, Domenichino

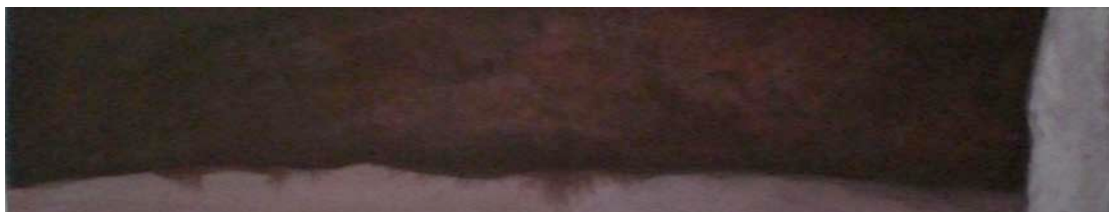


Fig 36 After Joshua Reynolds



Fig 37



Fig 38 Studies from photographed fabric



Fig 39 Studies of the 'eye' of the fold



Figs 40 & 41 Study for painting

Plaster Studies



Fig 42



Fig 43



Fig 44

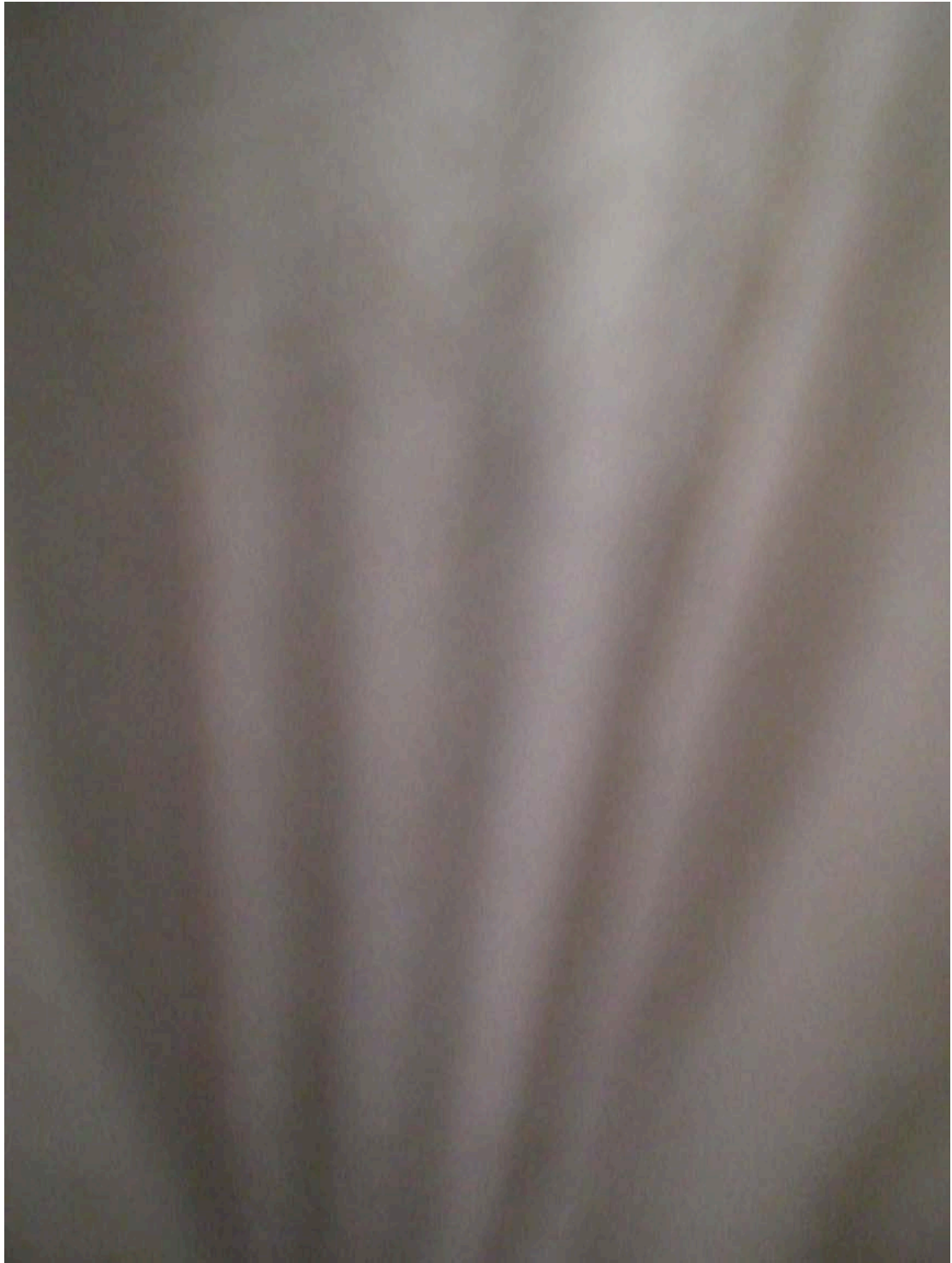


Fig 45

Photographic Studies

Patterned draped fabric

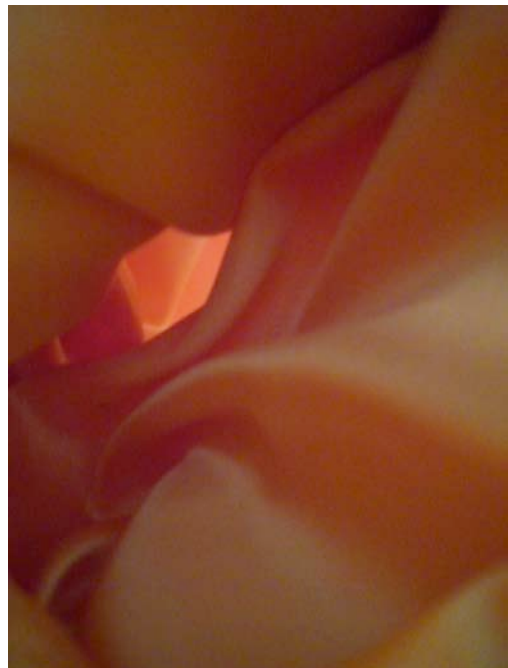
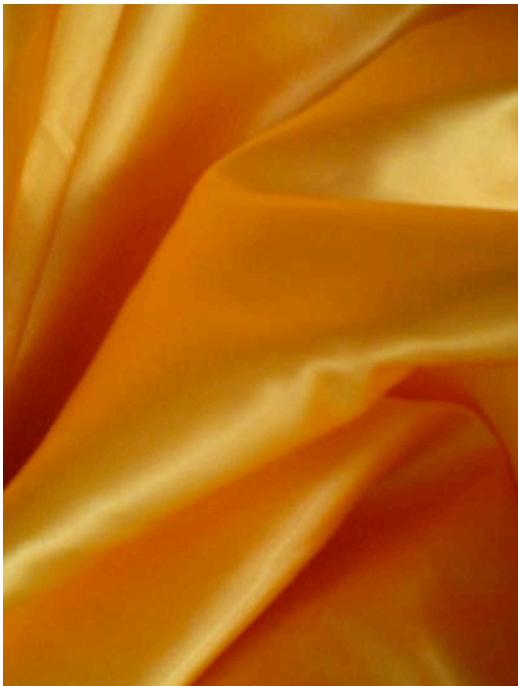
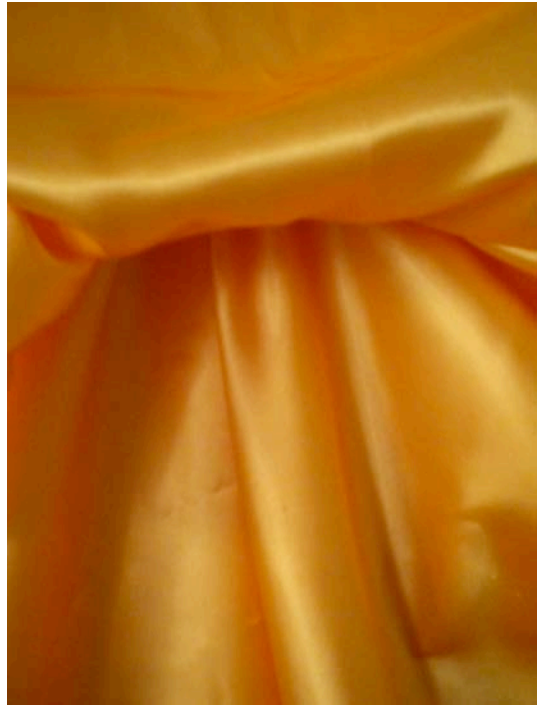


Fig 46



Figs 47 - 50

Satin



Figs 51 – 54

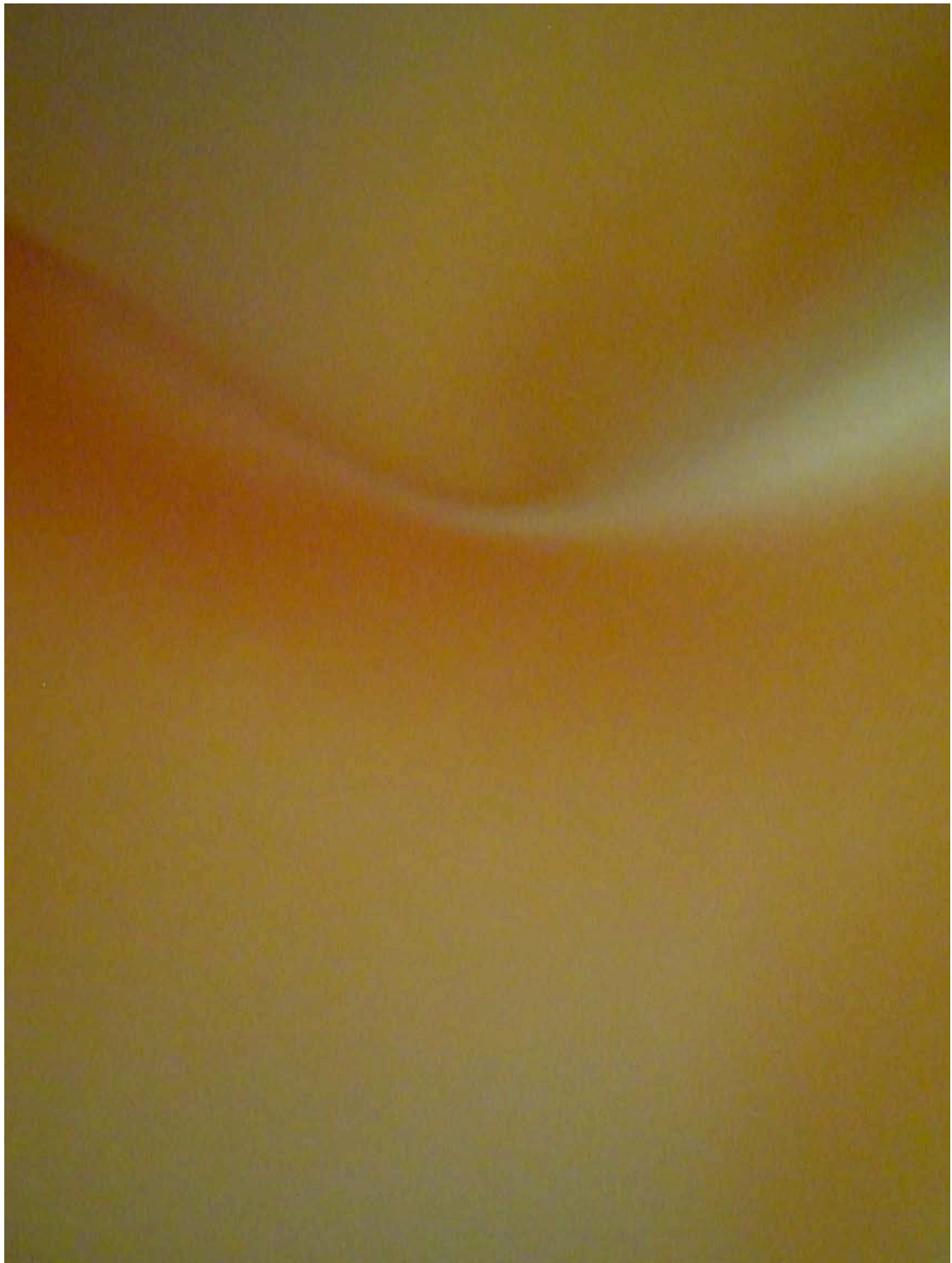


Fig 55

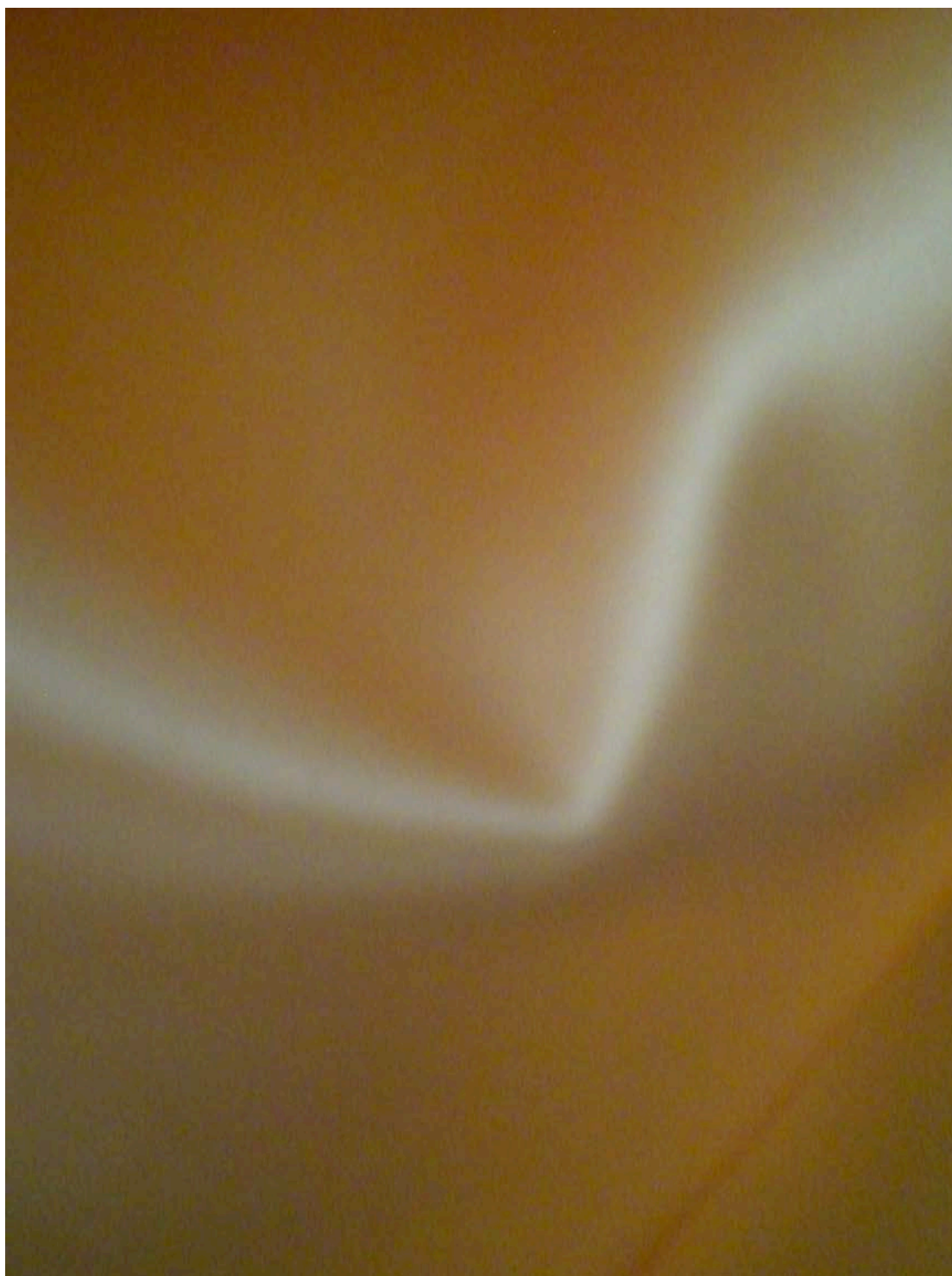


Fig 56

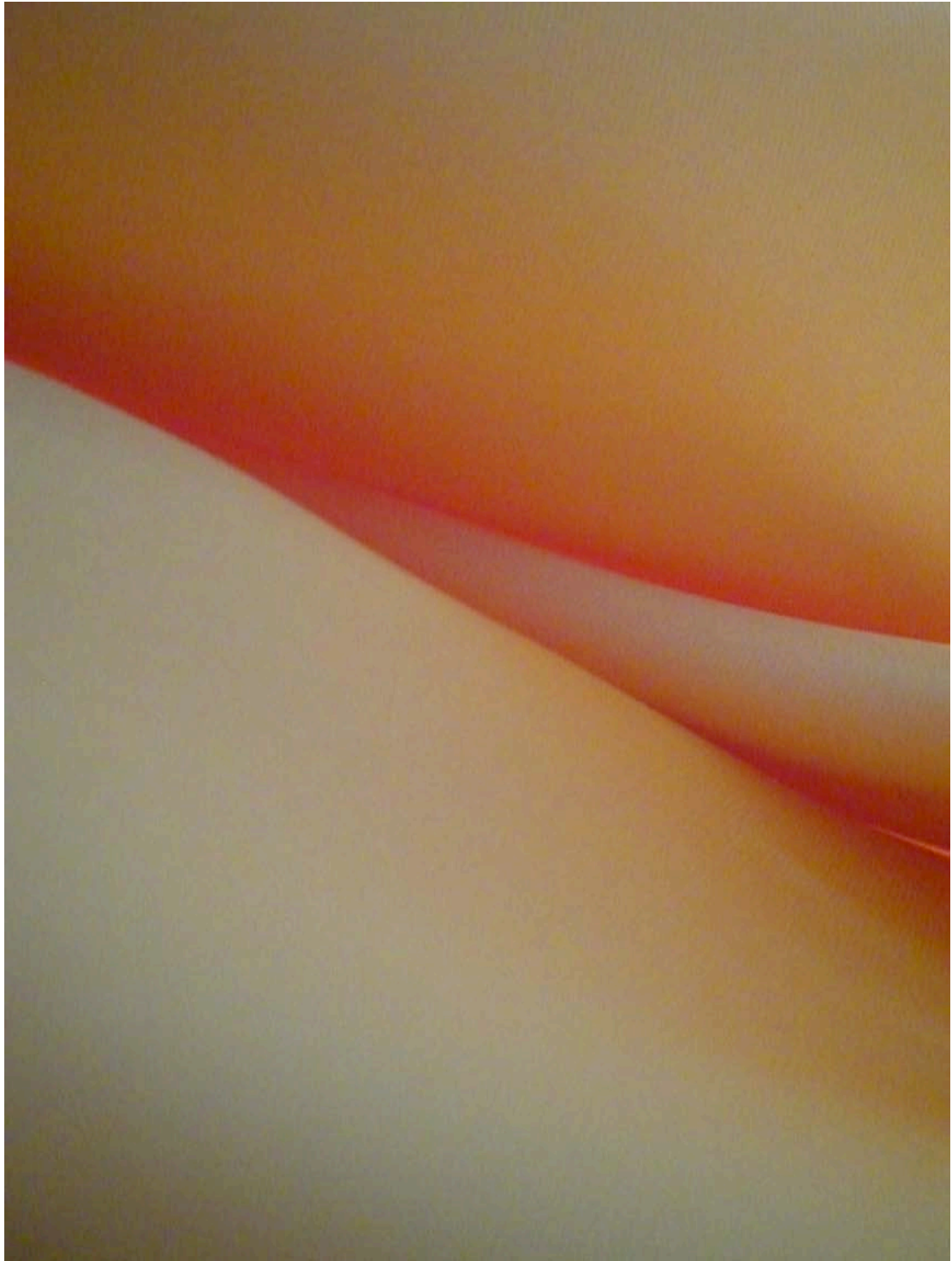


Fig 57



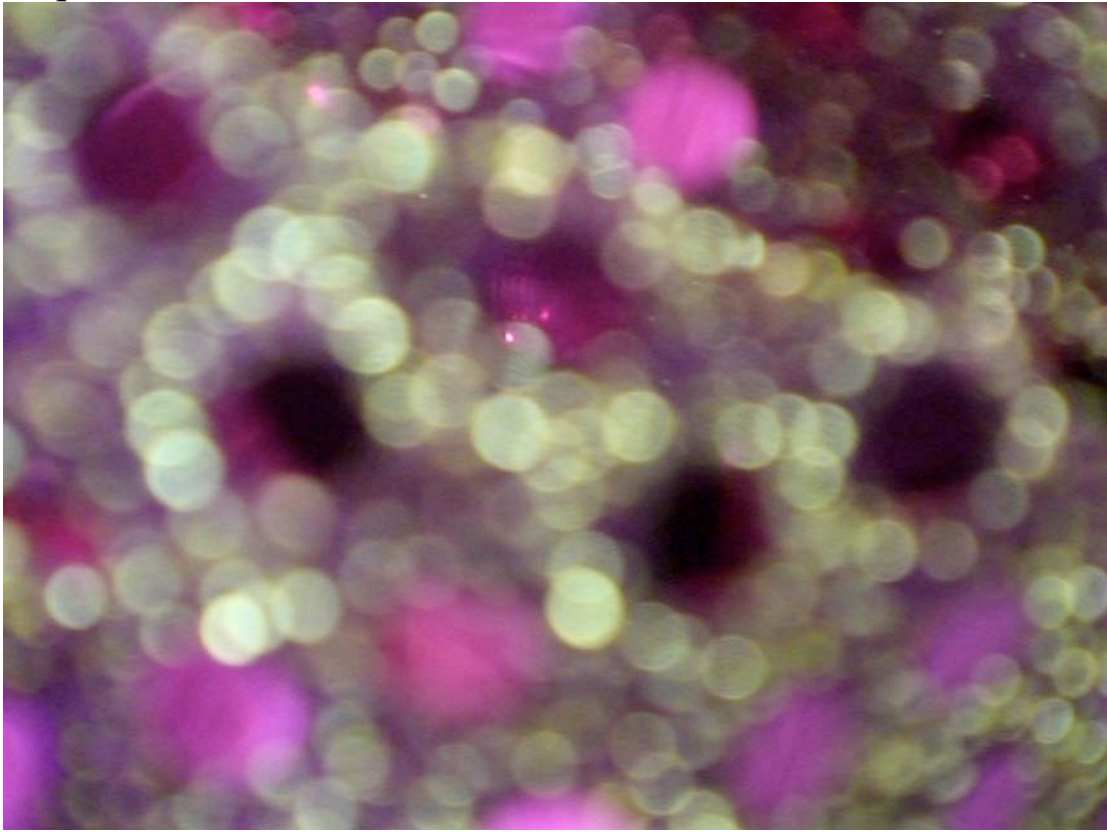
Fig 58

Gauze I



Figs 59 – 62

Sequined Fabric



Figs 63 & 64



Fig 65

Gauze II



Figs 66 – 69



Fig 70

Development of Paintings

Old Master Studies



Fig 71 After Leonardo da Vinci



Fig 72 After Leonardo da Vinci



Fig 73 After Leonardo da Vinci



Fig 74 After Michelangelo Caravaggio



Fig 75 After Michelangelo Caravaggio



Fig 76 After Domenico Fetti

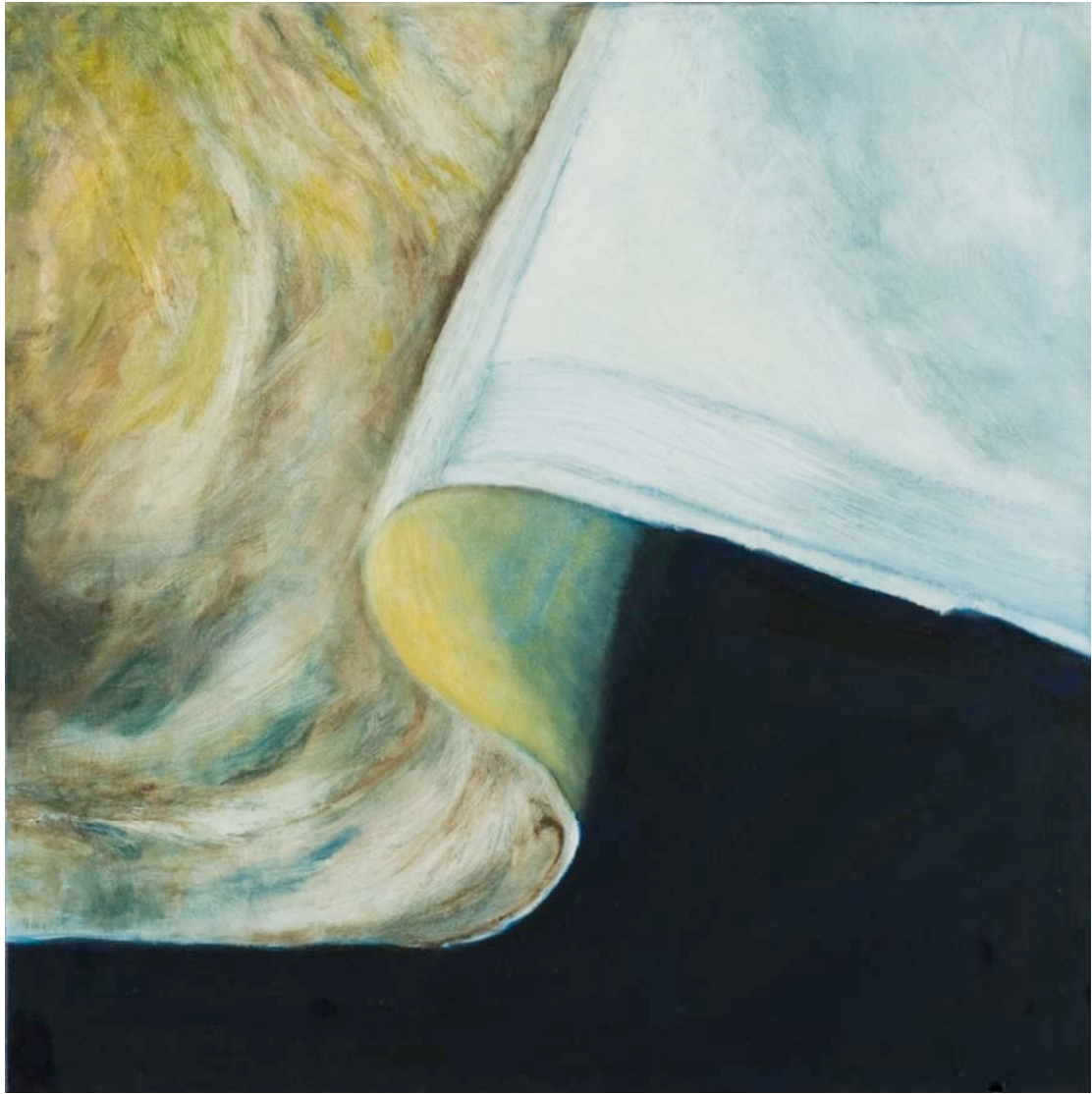
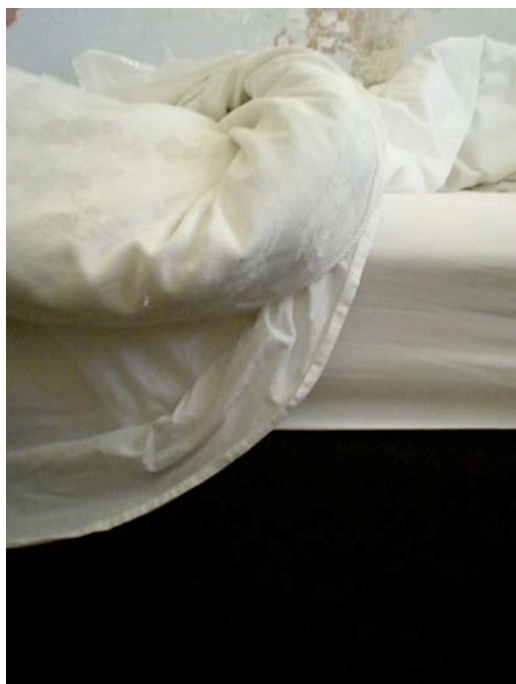


Fig 77 After Rembrandt Harmensz Van Rijn

The Allegorical Fold: Painting Development

Invitation to the Voyage

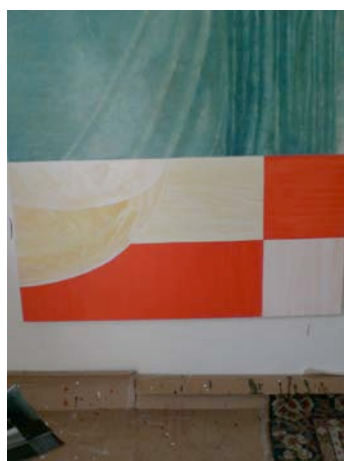
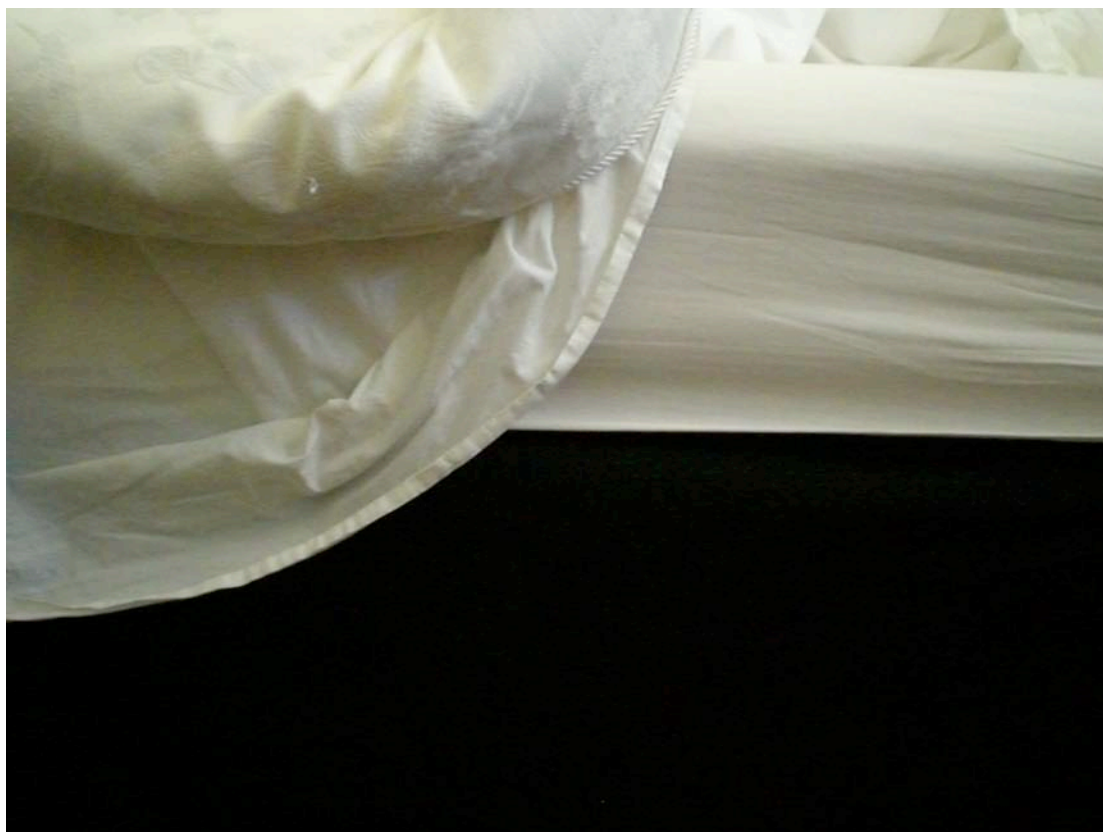


Figs 78



Fig 79 *Invitation to the Voyage*

Waiting / Delivery



Figs 80



Fig 81 *Waiting / Delivery*

An Unlikely Attachment



Figs 82



Fig 83 *An Unlikely Attachment*

Night Talisman



Figs 84



Fig 85 Night Talisman

What Angel would hear me?



Figs 86



Fig 87 *What Angel would hear me?*

This is not a Fold

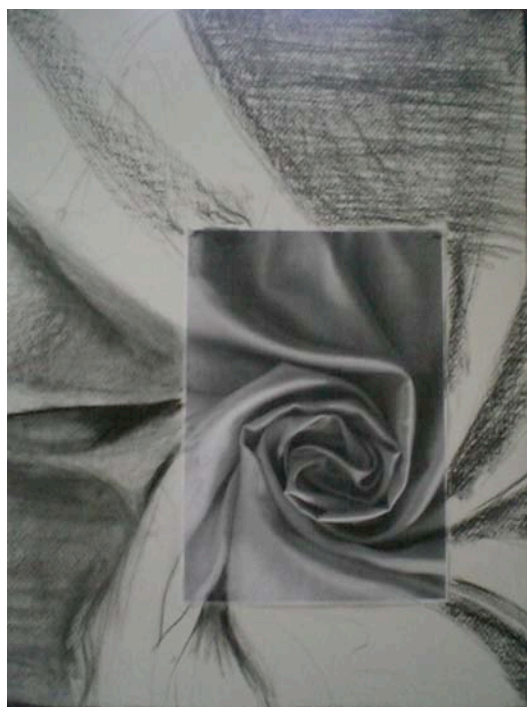


Figs 88



Fig 89 *This is not a Fold*

Between the Creases



Figs 90



Fig 91 *Between the Creases*

Conclusion / Reflection

The Allegorical Fold

Countless layers of ideas, images, feelings have fallen successively on your brain as softly as light. It seems that each has buried the preceding, but none has really perished. - Baudelaire

Absence and presence or structure and void have been explored in this project through the image of the fold and the mediums of photography, charcoal, pencil, gouache and oil paint. In the process of looking at many images of old Master paintings, I have chosen a small number for closer examination so that I could investigate the structure of the fold in these images, the presence or absence of light and the depth shadows.

The findings from these explorations have been further explored in a series of paintings that takes the fold as a metaphor for the weavings of absence and presence in a psychological or psychic sense. The body of work explores and draws on feeling states and the memories associated with the affects of different kinds of attachment – to people, objects or events.

At its heart the project and new body of paintings has explored attachment states by using the fold as a vehicle to stand in for the self. In various psychoanalytic theories from Freud to Klein to Winnicott the way in which attachments are formed early in life are crucial to the development of the subject. These new paintings, using the findings from preliminary examinations into the structure of the fold, the play of light, colour, texture and decoration in old Master Paintings, explore through the juxtaposition of image and void in the compositions, feeling states, moods and memories associated with lived experience. This research has drawn on the fold and theories of attachment to explore these states.

