

Re-imagining Artists' Relationships with the Past: Recreation, Attention, Transformation

EMILY POTT

The Kings Foundation, School
of Traditional Arts, University
of Wales Trinity St David, UK

emily.pott@kings-foundation.org

KEYWORDS

Artistic research; Gadamer; aes-
thetic hermeneutics; materiality;
aesthetic experience.

DOI

[10.54916/rae.142572](https://doi.org/10.54916/rae.142572)

DATE OF PUBLICATION

03/05/2024

ABSTRACT

This article explores the potentialities of relationships between artist-researchers and the artworks/artists that inform their research. Seeking approaches to optimize artists' engagement with works from the past, including recreative practice, it considers experiences of researchers in relation to emerging patterns and themes. The challenges and joys of engaging with the work of previous artists are illustrated. Finally, researchers' approaches to artworks are considered in relation to aesthetic attentiveness in Hans-Georg Gadamer's aesthetic hermeneutics to suggest synchronicities. When considered as examples of aesthetic hermeneutics, these experiences may prompt, illuminate, and enrich practices of future artist-researchers and further understanding of Gadamer's aesthetics.

Introduction

This article draws on experiences of supervising artist-researchers over the past seventeen years. During this time, in a look back, researchers “reimagined” artistic research to include creative and attentive engagement with artworks from the past. Many of the approaches referenced here were developed while working with artist-researchers to reconsider the conventional search and review phase through integration of familiar aspects of arts practice. Researchers continued to draw on these approaches throughout their research developing ‘dialogues’ with works of art through recreative practice (School of Fashion & Textiles and the Photographic History Research Centre, 2022). What was understood through practical engagement with historic artwork was often unexpected and transformational (Pott, 2021). This article takes a second look at recreative practice in relation to artistic research with a broader lens, the benefit of further experience, and a particular interest in placing artist-researchers’ experiences of extended engagement with the work of other artists alongside the writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer on aesthetics and the work of art (Gadamer, 1975, 1976, 1986, 2001, 2007). In addition, related writings of researchers from other institutions, who also reflected on the processes and implications of using previous bodies of work within artistic practice, suggested several common themes that arise in engaging with historical artwork.

Threading through thought and discussion will be consideration of researchers’ experiences, arising themes, and issues in relation to Gadamer’s aesthetic hermeneutics with an attempt to look more closely at his notions of aesthetic *participation* with the work of art. Although many may be perhaps familiar with Gadamer’s writings on the “hermeneutic circle” (1975, pp. 167-169 and pp. 235-236) and literary/historical hermeneutics, and while these writings are not unrelated to what is presented here, they are not discussed (although they do provide an important foundation). Instead, the aim is to bring Gadamer’s thinking on aesthetic hermeneutics to the fore, and to look at it in relation to researcher’s experiences. This is in keeping with philosopher Nicholas Davey’s prompt that “Gadamer’s approach to art is primarily known for its rehabilitation of tradition but it merits philosophical attention for so much more” (Davey, 2013, p. 13).

Throughout, Gadamer’s work has been explained through reading the work of Davey, who

devotes several texts to Gadamer’s aesthetics. I draw particularly on his book, *Unfinished worlds: Hermeneutics, aesthetics and Gadamer* (2013), where Davey suggests that Gadamer develops a notion of aesthetic attentiveness which is not an “unthinking receptiveness” but, instead, “a complex reflective practice capable of transforming understanding” (Davey, 2013, p. 16). While I will not set out the logical steps that Gadamer takes to underpin and reveal his aesthetic hermeneutics, as Davey (2013, p. 85) has done this thoroughly and creatively already in his aim to “‘think’ (along) with” Gadamer, instead I envision a movement through Gadamer’s thought to see how Gadamer’s ideas might synchronize with, and support approaches used by artist-researchers in their engagement with works from the past. By relating aesthetic attentiveness and hermeneutics to experiences of artists dealing with previous bodies of work, I consider how artists’ practices and experiences might further illuminate what is described by Gadamer. This is a small step in developing understanding of what Gadamer saw in aesthetics and art which allowed him to describe the experience of a work of art as “*experience* in a real sense” or as “a disclosure of something previously concealed ... not something one knows in any other way” (Gadamer, 2007, p. 129). In the first steps of weaving a dialogue between, on the one hand, this abstract experience which Gadamer describes as both absolutely particular and experience in a “real sense,” and, on the other hand, the experiences of artists engaging with the work of other artists, I hope to uncover a bit about how aesthetic experience might be transformational and about the movement of coming to know through arts practice.

Recreative Practice: Seeking an Aesthetics

First, a few words to describe the reasons why the artist-researchers I supervise engage in recreative practice. The purpose of the institution, the School of Traditional Arts, is to rediscover and research historical art, craft and architectural practices which have often either disappeared (apart from surviving artworks) or survive in a diminished state. Recreative practice, alongside experimentation with historic materials and processes, are central to research. The intention of looking back is to integrate understanding into current practice so that forgotten practices, materials, techniques, and the knowledge systems that underpin them might be considered in relation to contemporary issues

and opportunities. Thus, for artist-researchers at the School recreating is very often a feature of their practice and a research method.

The term “recreative practice” in this context is used to describe artists’ research of the work of another artist through (often) long-term engagement with the chosen work, including (sometimes repetitive) copying of the whole or aspects of an artwork. This regularly takes place alongside recreation of past material, practical, and technical, aspects of the body of work, and rediscovering and recreating past methods and materials for contemporary use. In addition, there is a less tangible aspect of engagement whereby the researcher, through extended attentive practice, hopes to gain some sense of why the chosen artwork ‘works’, what comes together to make it stand out from others of its period, or even across time. In terms of this final aim, this would relate to the personal research project and area of inquiry which led the artist-researcher to engage with the work of another artist. The words recreative practice are used instead of the more common verb “copying” as this is not only a matter of copying appearance but, instead, of enquiring more deeply into the *relationship* between the sensible appearance and the ‘world’ or atmosphere created through the artist’s use of materials. Thus, it is not a process of reconstruction but a response to, and a participation in, in order to dialogue with, the work of a past artist and thereby also, tangentially, with its creator.

The process often begins from an initial attraction to a single piece, or to a body of work. Approaches focus on periods of deep and close engagement with selected existing artworks through looking and making (Pott, 2021, pp. 377-379), and are intended to provide a starting point for gaining an understanding of how aesthetic experience, close engagement with the artwork, and practice including the material processes involved in the creation of an artwork, might encourage new insights. This eventually developed into a way of ‘reviewing’ the images or objects that were most important to researchers’ inquiries (Pott, 2021) and a way for researchers to understand their “lineage” (Nelson, 2013, p. 35), particularly in cases where their research centred on the work of artists who were no longer alive and often remained anonymous. Recreative practice was also a way of *participating* in the doing within a research context, which allowed an experience of the motion of coming to know in and through practice. I contend that integrating practice into the search and review phase

allows artist-researchers to come to understand by doing how practice might be used in, and motivate their research projects at an early phase in the process (Pott, 2021). In relation to this, approaches also initially developed in response to the observation that many artist-researchers struggled with a conventional search and review model at the beginning of the research process (Pott, 2021, p. 377; see also Korolainen, 2022, p. 27), often due to the overwhelming and wide range of sources. While researchers focused on recreative practice initially, this ‘review’ of the work of others sometimes led to unexpected results and often informed and reinvigorated their practice in unforeseen ways (Pott, 2021, p. 383).

Alongside this, most researchers are engaged in processes of making the materials and tools needed for their work. They learn techniques to create natural pigments and dyes, binders, sizes, glazes, to prepare paper, gesso, etc. Although difficult and time-consuming, preparing materials facilitates another way of understanding material properties while also encouraging a slower pace, a break from more intense or demanding creative engagement. For many, the practices involved in creating materials are a contemplative practical practice (see Figure 1). These experiences are also valuable as often the historical images that are central to researchers’ inquiries are those used in ritual or meditative practices.

An issue faced in considering these images in a research context, is that the prevailing conception of aesthetics, based on a disinterested distance between a spectator and a work of art, is not sufficient to account for these images and their function. In approaching devotional or sacred art, the understanding of a distant, disinterested subjectivity that supports this prevailing aesthetics is also insufficient. In dealing with these images, it is often more apt to speak of a user rather than a viewer or spectator, and the user’s relationship with the work of art is not predicated on taste but on the ability of the work to ‘function’ in relation to the practices it supports and facilitates. It may be an extremely intimate relationship wherein the well-used image or object becomes intrinsic to ritual or practice over time. It was clear that to deal with these relationships, aesthetics required reconsideration. This is where the work of Gadamer was of interest. Davey’s unpacking of “Gadamer’s reconstruction of aesthetic experience as a participatory act” (Davey, 2013, p. 114) acknowledged a different type of relationship. Gadamer’s reconstruction required



Figure 1. Grinding and purifying chrysocolla stones to make pigment. Photo: School of Traditional Arts.

initially a rearticulation of classical and Kantian aesthetics and an acknowledgement that art and the experience of it required grounding in something other than personal preference or subjective consciousness (Davey, 2013, p. 166). This was relevant as, instead of distanced and analytical, the approach was participatory and dialogical, mirroring an aspect of the function of the images and objects themselves in the contexts described above.

In his text, Davey elaborates Gadamer's motives for this reconstruction and the full consequences of Gadamer's reconsideration are discussed (Davey, 2013, *passim*, for a summary see pp. 166-169). Davey summarizes the result writing,

Gadamer initiates a phenomenological re-description of aesthetic experience so that the discipline can be established as a cognitively significant mode of a subject's being-in-the-world. Aesthetic experience is redeemed as a form of hermeneutical engagement with the world, that is, it gives expression not to a subject's feeling but a subject's being. (Davey, 2013, p. 169)

Gadamer's rehabilitation of aesthetics, of which the association with hermeneutics is an aspect (whereby also the understanding of hermeneutics

is enhanced) is beyond the scope of this article and has been well addressed by Davey. However, while retracing the logical steps of Gadamer's argument is beyond the scope of this article the examples discussed here are an attempt to penetrate further into the meaning of Gadamer's idea of a practical, participatory, aesthetic hermeneutics.

Themes, Experiences, Tensions

In reading the work of others who have written about engaging with previous bodies of artistic work in the context of research projects, I found that several common themes, experiences, and tensions arose. Thus, alongside the experiences of artist-researchers I have supervised I draw on the recent work of Katva-Kaisa Kontturi (2018) and Hanna-Kaisa Korolainen (2022). Both reveal ways in which artists use previous bodies of work in their practice. In her research, Kontturi collaborates with artist Susana Nevado and aims, through "following" Nevado's creative and material engagement, to attend to artmaking more closely by "stepping into the processes by which art emerges" and focusing on the intricacies of "making and sensing". She acknowledges "art's perpetual movement . . . and the connections it

fosters” and argues that these support its “potential to make a difference” (Kontturi, 2018, p. 9). In following Nevado she hopes also to understand more about this. It is within this context that she describes Nevado’s particular use of the work of other makers. Korolainen’s study is focused on the relationship between “consciously selected sources” (the work of other artists) and inspiration, looking particularly at their influence on “the creative process and its outcomes” (Korolainen, 2022, p. 4). In three case-studies, which evolve from one another, she reflects on her work in relation to sources she has chosen to inspire her. Although Korolainen engages with the work of historical artists, neither she nor Nevado engaged in the type of recreative practice used by our artist-researchers, which initially focuses on careful ‘review’ and subsequent transcription of chosen works of art from the past that are exemplars for their contemporary practice. However, this did not prevent commonalities of experience, arising themes, and tensions, which are explored below. The themes are: Attentive practice;

Dialogue; Collaboration: materials and the artist; Unforced practice, unbidden changes, unexpected outcomes; Attraction, love, empathy. In addition, arising tensions will be discussed.

Attentive Practice

Developing the capacity to pay close attention to the material aspects of painting takes time. Aspects of paying attention employed by artist-researchers included deliberately slowing down in their choice of sources (see Pott 2021, p. 378). Korolainen (2023, p. 78) suggests something similar when she explains that over time a source “haunts my imagination and requires my attention.” Painter Yuliya Lennon describes her process of collecting sources,

I was looking for artworks that gave a feeling of stillness and liveliness at the same time. They also somehow suggested something beyond the physical ... Initially my collection included



Figure 2. Yuliya Lennon’s moveable and changeable wall of images set up in the studio at the School of Traditional Arts. Photo: Y. Lennon.

drawings, illuminations, fresco paintings, stained glass and sculpture. Images spanned a large geographical area. I grouped the images [see Figure 2] and regrouped them ... I wanted to see if I could find similarities in their visual language. I would return to consider the images every day ... taking some out, adding others and moving groups around. Some days I could see nothing and some days the images would reveal to me something that was present ... These days of revelation felt very special (Lennon, 2023, p. 16 and p. 18)

Similarly, Korolainen (2022, pp. 35-36) talks about an “intense way of looking at some things [which] helps me to comprehend them, the more I pay attention to them, the more vivid the memory becomes.” She compares this to the time she might take to read “an old and heavy classic.” She is fascinated by light, color gradations, space, and while “it takes effort to look at things with intensity”, and she speaks about becoming “obsessed with looking and trying to create and collect visual memories of things”, these practices seem to bear fruit.

These sorts of practices support the development of artist-researchers' focus on attention which then feeds into repetitive practice of recreating a chosen image over again as desired. This attentiveness is exemplified in artist Robert Irwin's work in the 1960's when he was repeatedly attending to just three lines. At the time, Irwin describes, he was concerned with moving away from imagery which could be recognized towards an image with pure “presence ... an energy field in its own right” (Irwin as cited in Weschler 2008, p. 65). Nevertheless, he looked to Morandi's still lifes to develop his own practice. In observing repeated painting of the same bottles in Morandi's work, Irwin realized that this repetition over time meant that, on a conceptual level, the subject (bottles) remained constant. Irwin speculated that, as a result, subjects lost their identification as “ideas or topics” and “became open elements” in the artist's “dialogue” through painting. Irwin saw a “radical” transformation in Morandi's paintings through this practice (Weschler, 2008, p. 72; see also Pott, 2021, p. 378) and subsequently employed this approach in his practice so that for two years he painted the same painting of three lines “over and over again” (Weschler, 2008, p. 71). Irwin described how he found “strength in sustaining over a period of time my attention on a single point”. He reflected, “Those lines; that was where, at age thirty-five, I finally grew up and became an artist” (Weschler, 2008, p. 85).

Korolainen also speaks about repetition and how her understanding of it developed. In finishing a glass project, she reflected that initially seeing all the repeated shapes caused “a feeling of emptiness—there was no ending, no beginning” (2023, p. 156). On further reflection she realized how repetition fit into her practice and eventually it became “a working mode that enabled my thinking to ‘switch off’ and made me feel more connected to being in the present moment”. It also allowed her to “find moments of flow and fluidity” (2023, p. 157).

Related to these experiences of attentiveness, Kontturi describes Nevado's experience “that ‘doing’ ideas consciously and intentionally will not lead anywhere. It is the process, the work of painting that becomes the idea” (Kontturi, 2018, p. 94). This relates to what Irwin is saying about repetition in relation to moving beyond conceptual aspects. It made me wonder if long-standing arts pedagogies based on recreating exemplary past works as a starting point, such as Orthodox Christian iconography (Van Taak, 2006), developed early on an awareness of the realizations expressed by Nevado, Irwin and Korolainen. Perhaps this is why teaching in these contexts often begins with recreating images which does not require the practitioner to have an “idea”. In this way, a novice practitioner comes to various understandings without the distraction of having to ‘do’ ideas. I suggest that the practice of recreating past works that our researchers have adopted encourages the same freedom from distraction allowing development of attentive capabilities and leading to insights.

Dialogue

Deepening the experiences of researchers, attentive practice and associated recreative practices seem to support a shift in experience from viewing sources as distant objects for analysis (aesthetic disinterestedness) to instead seeing them in more intimate relationship. This may develop into a dialogue, a sort of communion (in/through creative processes) among subjects (an artist, their work of art, a visual source, relevant materials). Artists who use bodies of previous work often speak about feeling as if they are in “dialogue” with the artist/artwork they are attending to, as Irwin observed when speaking about Morandi and his bottles. Korolainen (2022, p. 59) points out that this is the case even if the artist is dead. Painter-printmaker Rosalind Whitman reflected on a similar experience when she engaged in *imitatio*, a form of recreative practice based on

aspects of Medieval pedagogy. She describes, “The image embodied through the process of bringing it to life in a physical form becomes profoundly and utterly ‘real’ for the practitioner” (see Figures 3 and 4). She refers to the experience as both “a direct encounter” and “an internalisation” wherein the work is eventually “committed to memory, as when a poem is learned by heart” (Whitman, 2017, p. 35). Elaborating further she recognizes this practice as “entirely absorbing of my attention, as if I were in dialogue, or performing a dance with an invisible companion” (Whitman, 2017, p. 34).

Korolainen (2022, p. 5) echoes these observations when describing her experience of developing “an inner dialogue” with sources, which are like “family” or “friends”. Elsewhere she describes, “During the creative process, instead of ‘using’ sources of inspiration, I collaborate with them. The imaginary conversation between me and the sources directs the creative process” (Korolainen, 2022, p. 84). The

processes described in this section and the section on attentive practice relate to Davey’s unfolding of an “aesthetic attentiveness” in Gadamer’s aesthetic hermeneutics (Davey, 2013, p. 16 and pp. 79-86). Gadamer’s hermeneutic dialogue is both attentive and participatory. Davey (2013, p. 6) writes, “For Gadamer, remaining aesthetically neutral achieves nothing: what is key is participation, participating in the movement of experience and reflection.” The way that the artists describe dialoguing with the artworks and their creators seems to exemplify this participatory experience and suggests the potential for transformations in the ways that the artists see the images, their work, and contexts beyond.

Collaboration: Materials and the Artist

As mentioned above, collaboration or “dialogue” also includes the relationship with materials. Whitman explains,



Figure 3. The imitatio approach. Images of work in progress. Left, underpainting, right, hues are introduced. Photo: R. Whitman.

There is a sense in which the materials I work with have their own 'lived identity', for example, my pigments: some of these will grind and release their colour easily, while others require laborious effort on my part, to enable that transformation. Not only do substances vary in their capacity to be tempered in some mediums rather than others, there are even some pigments which refuse physically to be partnered with others, such as verdigris. (Whitman, 2018, p. 33)
See Figure 5

This relates to Kontturi's idea of "relinquishing painterly will" (2018, p. 91). She conveys Nevado's words describing that Nevado does not see herself as "the fully volitional agent of the process"; she does not 'determine, master it.'" Based on this, Kontturi observes, "The process of art-making is a joint, and, as such, an unpredictable co-composition" (2018, p. 94). Here I believe that Kontturi is referring to artist, materials, and process as co-composers and supporting her earlier claim, "Artists do not make art of materials but *with* them." (2018, p. 11).

While engaging in recreative practice, Whitman was also working alongside an expert in the use of materials and processes from the past. Her experience resulted in "a fundamental appreciation of the *process* involved." It also prompted awareness of the type of "relationship" she seeks to cultivate with materials. As she describes, "There is the need for absolute sensitivity, attunement, and *alignment* with them, as they precisely reflect one's inner sense of wellbeing, or its lack." Reflecting further she writes,

Through this involvement with matter a deeper knowledge of the masterwork is revealed than that which relates simply to surface appearance. The transformation, which takes place visibly, both in the painstaking preparation and application of traditional materials and in the protracted evolution of the image itself from shadowy beginnings towards a focused likeness of the original, I experienced as deeply absorbing and ultimately rewarding. (Whitman, 2017, p. 33)

Unforced Practice, Unbidden Changes, Unexpected Outcomes

As with materials, artists engaging with the work of others noted the need for and benefits of



Figure 4. Rosalind Whitman, *The Magdalen Reading*, after Rogier van der Weyden, detail, tempera and oil on panel. Photo: R. Whitman.

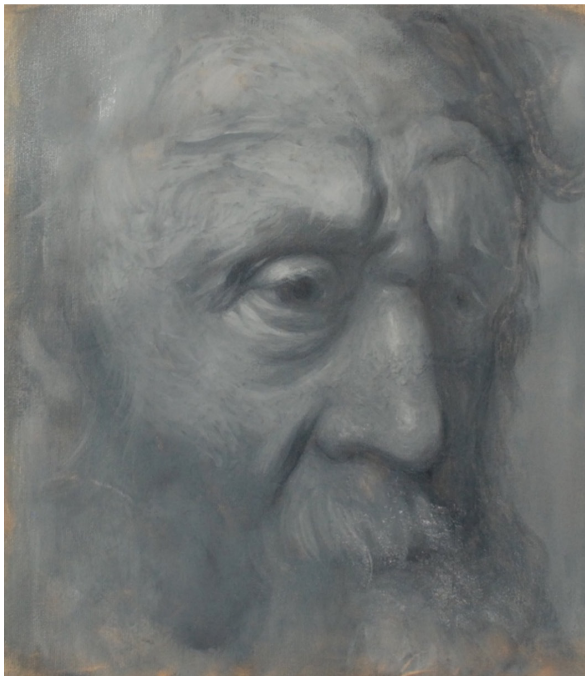


Figure 5 Copper suspended over vinegar in a sealed container to create verdigris. The verdigris pigment is applied over Naples Yellow to achieve the green of the Magdalen's dress seen in Figure 4. Photo: R. Whitman

“relinquishing will”. Korolainen describes “letting go of conscious thinking or strict guidelines” (2022, p. 91; see also Lennon, 2023, p. 45). Even if things were planned, they most often did not go to plan. Korolainen (2022, p. 60) observes that sources often seemed to “act unconsciously as part of my creative process” changing its direction. Lennon had similar experiences engaging in repetitive, recreative practice. She reflects,

Over time, and really without my noticing, my practice began to change because of looking at and painting these images. My palette reduced dramatically ... figures began to be less life-like ... I began to dilute my oil to make it move and slip. I was pleasantly surprised with ... the subtle changes I could see. Although I had to adapt to a new way of working ... this seemed more natural and over the course of about a year, it started to replace completely my old way of working. (Lennon, 2023, pp. 57-58)

Korolainen (2022, p. 70) summarizes, “The result is always uncertain, as it happens in action, and it is different every time depending on my state, the sources, and the very moment.” Fresco iconographer and contemporary painter Adrian Iurco also used recreative practice with unexpected results.



In the early 21st century, he was painting frescos in newly built, Orthodox churches. Finding contemporary Orthodox Christian iconography sometimes “stale” and lacking in “vitality” in comparison to works from the past, he speculated there may be something to learn from looking at naturalistic portraiture. He recognized and was interested in the ability of some artists to convey the relationship “between those elements of the person that can be seen with the eye, and those that are invisible but nevertheless real,” of connecting “the facts of the person’s existence with his countenance.” To explore this, he began painting naturalistic portraits alongside iconography (see Figure 6). While he found that this resulted in an increased ability to bring vitality into iconography, he also saw that the experience of working back and forth could potentially “refresh contemporary art” outside an iconographic context (Iurco, 2015, pp. 43-44).

These experiences bring to mind the play between spontaneity and method which infuses Gadamer’s discussion of aesthetic hermeneutics. Davey describes how Gadamer considers the pair as reflections of one another rather than polarities. He describes that Gadamer in his aesthetic hermeneutics brings the “argument for method and the case for spontaneity into mutual dialectical reflection”



Figure 6 Experimental studies by Adrian Iurco, Left, Portrait of an old man in a naturalistic style, oil on canvas. Right, The face of Jesus Christ in the Byzantine style, egg tempera on canvas. Photo: A. Iurco.

(Davey, 2013, p. 7). This reluctance to proscribe method is present in all the writings around aesthetic hermeneutics where Gadamer never speaks about a particular approach to the work and instead, through brief descriptions, seemingly encourages further inquiry or reflection on and around an encounter that has already taken place or one that might be developed. It is difficult to say exactly what he means when he encourages attentive aesthetic encounter, and it is quite possible that this is deliberate. Thinking along these lines, might some balance be found between method and spontaneity for researchers who already know through practice that there is a level of control which if employed may well spoil the outcome? Or perhaps there is something to be learned from our observations of the way artists work and the way they enact the relationship between method and spontaneity which can further develop understanding of Gadamer's writings, and potentially be considered in our approach to other things, even more conventional research.

Attraction, Love, Empathy

When speaking about her choice of sources, Korolainen (2023, p. 13) describes being attracted to images from an early age, mentioning a remembered "profound desire" to possess a statue she saw. Eventually, this "attraction motivated my practice". These feelings of attraction, or even love (Whitman, 2017, p. 62; Van Taak, 2006, p. 58), seem to permeate the process of engaging with prior bodies of work. Although Korolainen suggests that there are also images she chooses for their capacity to prompt other emotions (2022, p. 59), she notes that they all "manage to touch something inside" (2022, p. 47). In some cases, she feels as if the source finds her rather than the other way around (2022, p. 70). This is something I often hear from other artists. Feelings of attraction, love, empathy, these strong connections when it comes to sources, seem to relate to Kontturi's notion of "following" where "to follow is to become with" (2018, p. 13). There is a sense of connection or relationship that develops here but also a sense of potential mutual transformation. Whitman reflects,

In practising I imagine myself as the subject I am responding to. There is a sense in which subject and object become fully identified and unified so that the creative process is one that seems to be participatory: through my work I participate in the enterprise and process taking

place outside the experience of my own situation within the universe we all inhabit. (Whitman, 2017, p. 34)

These sorts of experiences show what might be possible if researchers are "attending to art as a parallel body, being open to its offerings" (Kontturi, 2018, p. 202), or if, drawing on Gadamer's thinking, a capacity for aesthetic attentiveness develops.

Tensions

Although the experiences described here are mainly positive—developing understanding of materiality and process, exploring art's capacity to communicate, opening new pathways in practice and beyond—tensions also arise. These mostly centered around two related areas. First, around the idea of 'copying' the work of another artist in relation to originality and creativity and, second, around the 'closeness' of the artist-researcher to the source which is problematized. Reflections from Whitman and Korolainen exemplify the first 'tension'. Whitman shares that she was "initially prejudiced against the process of working from a prototypical model." She speculates that this was perhaps a result of her previous arts education where she developed "a fear that my powers of imagination might be somehow diminished as a result" (Whitman, 2017, p. 62). Whitman describes that her desire "to begin to understand through hands-on experience" the differences between the practices she was taught at arts college and those in the Medieval images that were influencing her research eventually overruled her fears, and she began the "radically different" work required to engage through the *imitatio* method. As she puts it, she had to "surrender her entitlement to an individualized interpretation" to engage with the masterwork and let it "speak for itself" (2017, p. 37). Korolainen (2022, p. 40) suggests "there may be a fear that if an artist reveals that she was inspired by another artist of the same field, her works might be considered to be lacking originality." She goes on to suggest that for an artwork to be authentic, it requires, amongst other things, "'interiority of creative inspiration' which is linked to originality of the artwork, where not too many external influences should be visible" (Korolainen, 2022, p. 68, here drawing on Heinich, 1996, pp. 25–27). Similarly, Kontturi (2018, p. 78) describes Nevado's work in relation to collaborations saying that "nothing recognisable is directly extended to another work of art", which is presumably desirable from her point of view.

In Korolainen's descriptions of her experience working with Monet, there is a further ongoing tension between retaining distance and feeling that she "needed to be in one way or another 'close'" (Korolainen, 2022, p. 138). Reflecting on her experience in relation to this she sees the attainment of a state of "feeling simultaneously distanced and close to my artworks" as an "impossible" challenge. While this relates to the question of how objectivity and subjectivity might be considered in relation to experiences of art within the context of research, which can only be touched on in this article, this comment led me to wonder whether we are asking too much of artist-researchers and if their practice should be encumbered by such thoughts? If demands of a supervisor, examiner, institution, or discipline in relation to so-called objectivity result in practice that feels unnatural, it seems important that the place of objectivity and subjectivity within research be reconsidered in the context of practice. Otherwise, we risk inhibiting potential contributions of artist-researchers. It seems fundamental to artistic research as an academic approach that practice's contribution to knowing be unencumbered so that both what practitioner-researchers come to know through practice, as well as *how* they come to know, the movement of this, can add to understanding of whatever is being researched in ways not otherwise possible. This also relates to Gadamer's suggestion discussed above of aesthetic experience as absolutely particular in some sense (Gadamer, 2007, p. 129). Davey expresses a similar tension when describing Gadamer's struggle with subjectivity in relation to a participatory aesthetics. However, he concludes, "Aesthetic subjectivity is of enormous importance for what it reveals of its objective ground" (Davey, 2013, p. 5). To lay the foundations for his aesthetic hermeneutics, Gadamer had to reconsider aesthetic subjectivity (Davey, 2013, p. 65) and this reconsideration is relevant to the challenges faced by Korolainen. In addition, the tensions around copying are addressed elsewhere in Gadamer's work. Both are discussed below.

Gadamer

For Gadamer, Kant's subjectivist aestheticism was insufficient as it failed to take the hermeneutical process of experience into account (Davey, 2013, p. 71). At the same time, Gadamer recognized the need for objectivity in encounters with art. Otherwise hermeneutic potentialities would not be realized. Davey explains how Gadamer was able

to re-envision "the subjective experience of art within the objective horizons and mechanisms of dialogical exchange" such that it would achieve "an objective, ontologically based account of what takes place within subjectivity" (Davey, 2013, p. 14). It is through a hermeneutical aesthetic attentiveness that a "reconciliation of the interested and the disinterested" in aesthetics is facilitated. Davey sees this as "one of [Gadamer's] greatest unremarked contributions to contemporary aesthetics" (Davey, 2013, p. 65). Using the Greek idea of the *theoros*, or active, sharing, transformed participant (see Gadamer, 1975, 111, see also Pott, 2024, p. 100), Gadamer provides a starting point for participatory aesthetic engagement (which, as seen in the descriptions of practical engagement above, some artists seem to naturally adopt to a greater or lesser extent). The maker/viewer as *theoros* is no longer a single spectator with taste but a participant in the rich 'event' of the art object which facilitates a participatory aesthetic experience. Thus, Gadamer redefines the subject in this context, not as disinterested spectator but as engaged, active participant with experience to reflect on. As Davey (2013, p. 105) describes, aesthetic attentiveness develops "the distance necessary for seeing and thus makes it possible for a comprehensive *participation* in what is presented before us."

Although Gadamer does not specifically refer to recreative practice, he touches on this concept in his thinking. He (Gadamer, 1975, p. 106) recognized that recreations were not "blind imitations" but might instead stimulate "the creative interpretive powers of an artist," as has been shown in our experience of recreative practice. He observed a "special quality" of theatre wherein, through *repetitive* "re-creation," the production "visibly opened the identity and continuity of the work of art towards its future" (1975, p. 106). While for him this quality of *opening to the future* is potentially applicable in relation to "any work of art" which might be "raised to a new understanding" with transformational results (1975, p. 511, n. 27, see also p. 126), his observation of the potentialities of repetition in the reproductive arts is notable. As shown, in the examples of working "with" images through recreative practice discussed above, those important for researcher's inquiries were identified, worked with repeatedly, and absorbed so that they were known intimately. In fact, observing the arc of artist-researchers' experience, from an initial phase of review and analysis, through dwelling with and recreating, seems to mirror movement that Gadamer saw as a movement *beyond* an aesthetic

“blindness” (Davey, 2013, p. 75), a blindness which prevented a more developed hermeneutic approach. Davey suggests that for Gadamer this relates to a shift from viewing the work in relation to “the world in which it was produced” to that of seeing it as presenting (or, it could be said, making present) “a world from within itself” (Davey, 2013, pp. 75-76). This arc is exemplified in the practice of Whitman (2017, p. 35) who through engaging in recreative practice eventually describes “a kind of identification” with the other, the world of the painting. This allows the artist to come to understand that it is not their world, nor the world of the previous artist, but something both of *and* beyond both. Developing the capacity to engage in this way potentially opens new worlds and transforms the worlds we know.

Gadamer’s observation of the quality of eternal contemporaneity in the work of art (Gadamer, 1976, p. 100) also underpins the development of recreative practices. Kontturi recognizes something similar when she suggests that once the artwork leaves the maker, it continues in its “movement” which does not “solidify” and “in every encounter” becomes “something more.” Interestingly, she relates this to a material-relational quality, the quality given by material that means that the artwork might “reach beyond its object quality” to affect (Kontturi, 2018, p. 15). As noted above, she also relates “movement” to “fostering connections” and transformation (Kontturi, 2018, p. 9). Davey (2013, p. 88) notes that movement is also a feature in Gadamer’s descriptions of a “contemplative openness” required of the participant in productive aesthetic engagement. This openness is described by Davey as neither still nor “fixed upon a static object” but an openness “to the movement” of contemplation itself, the participation in what is “set into play” through the experience. For Gadamer, to better comprehend this openness and movement, the work of art must be approached appropriately (Gadamer, 1976, p. 100).

When a work of art truly takes hold of us, it is not an object that stands opposite us which we look at in hope of seeing through it to an intended conceptual meaning ... The work is ... an event that ‘appropriates us’ to itself. It jolts us, it knocks us over and sets up a world of its own, into which we are drawn. (Gadamer, 2001, p. 71)

Davey (2013, p. 13) explains that the approach to artworks advocated by Gadamer was not intended

to reconstruct the thoughts or intentions of an original artist but instead to open to unforeseen outcomes through “thinking with” the artist. And here I would add seeing/doing with, and perhaps Kontturi would say “following with”. As discussed above, keeping an artwork they are interested in at a distance is a challenge for artists, “an impossible task” to use Korolainen’s words. They are more likely to describe a close relationship, one which they see as nurturing (see e.g., Korolainen, 2022, p. 58). I see this type of intimate engagement as relating to artists’ seemingly natural ways of working and engaging closely with sources and with materials, and with their attentive acts of embodiment/instantiation through creative processes.

Another aspect of Gadamer’s approach, relating to aesthetic attentiveness is “dwelling” or “tarrying”. He writes,

In the experience of art, we must learn how to dwell upon the work in a specific way. When we dwell upon the work, there is no tedium involved for the longer we allow ourselves, the more it displays its manifold riches to us. The essence of our temporal experience of art is in learning how to tarry in this way. (Gadamer, 1986, p. 45)

Furthermore, he gives examples of tarrying as “seeing and having seen” or “considering something and having thought about it” so there is a sense of process, a reflection and a movement here. He further describes this as an experience of being “totally immersed in the matter” and “completely there in it” (Gadamer, 2007, p. 210-211), words that could easily be applied to describe Irwin’s experience with the three lines and could almost be Irwin’s. Could Irwin’s engagement be referred to as an aesthetic hermeneutic employing aesthetic attentiveness in a Gadamerian sense? As Gadamer writes, in a reference to artists/makers, “It is almost superfluous to say that what is true of the experiencing of an artwork is also true of its creation: it is not merely production” (Gadamer, 2007, p. 211).

Developing artistic practice which encouraged attentiveness and moments of slower work, including engaging in recreative practice, was not seen as a challenge or task for our artist researchers, instead they note benefits as seen above. And materials themselves often demand this attentiveness, this tarrying. This also parallels Kontturi’s suggestion that a connection with the “movement” in art spoken of above can be gained “through

attentive participation *with* that relinquishes the hold of positionality in favour of openness and change" (Kontturi, 2018, p. 24). Davey develops this idea of "attentive participation" as a practice (2013, p. 16) arguing that when we "surrender to that which has won our attention we free ourselves from the selfishness of everyday consciousness" (2013, p. 84). It is connections and approaches such as these that allow Kontturi (2018, p. 24) to speak about an "ethics of attending to the work of artists and the art" and the potential for "art's subtleties . . . to change thinking-feeling," which relates to Gadamer's well known horizons of meaning (see e.g. Davey, 2013, p. 148). In concert with Kontturi (2018, p. 29), Gadamer argues for a shift away from approaching artworks through the lens of historical or other conceptual contexts, towards developing understanding of "the artistic nature of the work" through engaging with its being. This enables "preconceived attitudes" to be "shed" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 77). The insights of the writers quoted here, and the experiences shared by artist-researchers whose work is transformed through developing attentive awareness, suggest that it is possible to encourage seeing that is not focused on analyzing and interpreting but instead on attuning, participating, and doing with. It requires a gentle facilitation, patience, a developing closeness, an unfolding, but it is also closely related to artists' practice in my experience.

Conclusion

If Gadamer's aesthetic hermeneutics, underpinned by aesthetic attentiveness, was intended not as a way of knowing but instead as a way of coming to understand more of the ways that we know art, the ways that art addresses us, then artists' descriptions of their work, the themes that arise, and the way they describe their relationship with the work of others, suggest that their practices have a hermeneutic flavor that has its roots in their material engagement with the works. Shifts in practice and understanding seen when artist-researchers engage attentively with previous bodies of work reveal that the way we approach and choose to experience artworks changes what we find. By attending more carefully, or dwelling in our seeing/doing, or losing ourselves in what we often tend to overlook in our normal activities, it is possible that perceptions shift. We may even come to see that what we thought we knew was merely superficial. Davey has written that art's power to transform is not derived from the artwork "translating" the

common into images, but instead it is the artwork's use of "language" to transfigure "the ordinary so that we come to see it as extraordinary" (2013, p. 12). In dealing with art, the "language" that Davey refers to here, although he does not say so, can only be employed through the creative processes of making (see also Davey, 2013, p. 148). It is material, the outcomes sensible. The approaches which were touched on here aim to enhance engagement with the sensible and processual qualities of the artwork and to return them to the centre of our attention. For me, this is a key purpose of artistic research and, additionally, it may help to facilitate the creation of those artworks that are able to knock us over and draw us into their world. In the process, new horizons open, and new selves and new futures may come to be.

References

- Davey, N. (2013). *Unfinished worlds: Hermeneutics, aesthetics and Gadamer*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1975). *Truth and method*. (G. Barden & J. Cumming, Eds.). Sheed and Ward.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1976). *Aesthetics and hermeneutics. Philosophical hermeneutics*. (D. Linge, Ed.). University of California Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1986) The relevance of the beautiful. In N. Walker (Trans.), *The relevance of the beautiful and other essays* (pp. 4-53). Cambridge University Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (2001). *Gadamer in conversation: Reflections and commentary*. (R. E. Palmer, Ed.). Yale University Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (2007). *The Gadamer reader: A bouquet of later writings*. (R. E. Palmer, Ed.). Northwestern University Press.
- Heinich, N. (1996). *The glory of Van Gogh: An anthropology of admiration* (P. Leduc Browne, Trans.). Princeton University Press.
- Iurco, A. (2015). *Fresco iconography in our time: The nature and future of Byzantine fresco in XXI century Romania*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Wales.
- Kontturi, K-K. (2018). *Ways of following: Art, materiality, collaboration*. Open Humanities Press.
- Korolainen, H-K. (2022). *The making of inspiration: From Monet to Warhol and beyond*. Aalto University.
- Lennon, Y. (2023). *Unpublished papers for upgrade viva*. University of Wales Trinity St David.
- Nelson, R. (2013). *Practice as research in the arts: Principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Pott, E. (2021). The literature/practice review: Use of creative practice during the review period and its potential to reshape research projects. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 26(3), 368-386.
- Pott, E. (2024) The aesthetics of the mosque and its objects: Considering and developing modes of engagement with sensible objects and sensible spaces. In I. Trevathan (Ed.), *Mosque: Approaches to art and architecture* (pp. 95-106). Routledge.
- School of Fashion & Textiles and the Photographic History Research Centre (2022, June 15-16). *De Montfort University international workshop on recreative practices in the arts and humanities, Leicester, UK*. <https://recreativepractices.our.dmu.ac.uk/home/>
- Van Taak, E. (2006) Perspective and grace: Painting the likeness of Christ. *Road to Emmaus: A Journal of Orthodox Faith and Culture*. 7(2), 39-62.
- Weschler, L. (2008). *Seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees: Over thirty years of conversations with Robert Irwin*. University of California Press.
- Whitman, R. (2017). *The fire of the imagination: An artist's journey*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Wales.