

# ARTEFACT

## *THE 51 PAINTINGS SUITE: A LONG TERM STUDY OF TRAUMA MEMORY AND METAMODERN AFFECT IN SLOW FILMS*

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Video still, *The Tailor of Autumn*, 2014, HD, sound, duration: 63 mins.

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### STATEMENT

The *51 Paintings Suite* (2006 - 2024) was an eighteen year, long-term practice-based study that produced a suite of nine long-form slow films addressing trauma memory through metamodern affect. The developmental phase of the study occurred between 2006-2012 and the application phase occurred between 2012-2024. The project recontextualised poses of characters from medieval German plague era paintings into new locations and contexts through slow films. The nature of these artefacts have sought to digress trauma memory through metamodernism that led to the discovery of an affectual working model which established a new way to comprehend metamodern film. The context of such lends an epistemological reading of affect embodied in a structure of reason. This differs from what current scholarship determines as a structure of feeling since challenged by applying epistemological modelling through the oscillation between modernism as a singularity and postmodernism as a relativism. Each of the nine films address an aspect about trauma memory, from the affect of an event to false memories to the triggering of memory from signs and signals not unlike the work of Baudrillard as a way to reconcile the affectual nature of heightened memory through the moving image. By using slowness as a condition of memory,

the films then engaged trauma studies within slow cinema to explore yet to be defined philosophical approaches in film as it derives through an epistemological reading of affect. In doing so, it challenges existing metamodern theory especially from the Nordic and Dutch schools to propose how slow films can be inclusive of untested approaches to metamodern theory.

The significance of the study is attested to four indicators. First, there is no known long term slow film investigation of equivalence addressing trauma memory through episodic artefacts; second, no known existing film series is dedicated to nine long form films in support of such research; third, that the study discovered a new innovative way to model epistemological readings of metamodern film; and fourth that the films were published in peer review at the Melbourne Arts Precinct at Federation Square Melbourne, the Adelaide Festival Centre Adelaide, the European Film Market at Berlinale Berlin, the Venice Production Bridge at the Venice Film Festival, video commissions by the GBIennale 2021 and 2022, Venice Contemporary at the Palazzo Ca'Zanardi Venice, Dallas Medinale at the Dallas Videofest, Venice Contemporary Art Fair, Sawtooth ARI Launceston, Cube 37 in Melbourne, the Adelaide College of the Arts, FKI Research Centre for Art Berlin, Academy Gallery at the University of Tasmania, Meinblue House Berlin, and at the Directors Lounge at the Scala Theatre Berlin.

The individual films are:

*51 Paintings*, (2012) HD, sound, 71 mins  
*The Tailor of Autumn*, (2014) HD, sound, 63 mins  
*Indigo Rising*, (2017) HD, sound, 48 mins  
*Winter Orbit*, (2020) HD, sound, 60 mins  
*In The Journey of Midnight*, (2021) HD, sound, 50 mins  
*The Black Period*, (2022) HD, sound, 59 mins  
*Fading Light*, (2023) HD, sound, 52 mins  
*Northern Light*, (2024) HD, sound, 51 mins  
*Everything*, (2024) HD, sound, 80 mins

## PEER REVIEW 1

The video artefacts of *The 51 Paintings Suite* are a significant body of slow cinema work carried over an 18 year period that have defined a novel approach to contemporary slow films. Much in the way of slow cinema scholarship points to film philosophy, especially the work of Deleuze, yet this study took a different approach to define slow cinema through the lens of a metamodern film. I was not familiar with this type of analysis and found that it provided a fresh take on explaining slow films in a contemporary manner. The aspects of trauma memory revealed through each film was of particular interest as I found the works themselves to be quite solid, especially the later works in the series that responded to a visual reconstruction of what trauma memory might look like. There was an uncomfortableness in watching these films which are at times painful to experience due to their tedious slowed reduction of motion so much so that I found it created its own sense of affect through boredom that was quite interesting. I literally was ill at ease in parts of the countless hours I spent watching the films although I took it on board early that this is what the researcher was trying to do. The films were at times brilliant and at other times mundane and somewhat

clunky as found in the earlier works. I took it that they became more resolved as further installments were created. A stand out of the films is *The Black Period* which I found the most engaging simply because of the blocking out of models faces as if to dehumanise them. In terms of the discussions around affect, I found the epistemological approach challenging to accept given that metamodernism is about both ontological and epistemological mechanics however challenging existing theory is an important and necessary component to any major field of study. Even the acceptance of metamodernism in many arts based fields is hotly contested so I doubt that any agitation within the ranks of metamodern theory is going to be a tactical flaw. I for one am open to the idea of applying the researcher's strategy to understanding modern slow films. I had often wondered why films in general have become different to what they were even 15 years ago. Using the researcher's compass reading I can start to understand and comprehend the differences in a clearer way. I do though take issue with the middle films. I'm not convinced that I am watching films about trauma memory as much as I am about watching a slow film. *Winter Orbit* seemed more like a home diary of the pandemic as it did trauma but again, there would be more to say about that film I am sure if the researcher elaborated further on the aspects as to why I may be wrong. On the whole it was a remarkable and fascinating achievement to make nine feature films about a single subject for such a long period of time.

## PEER REVIEW 2

There is much to discuss about this project however I will consolidate my feedback into a condensed summary. My immediate response was that the films of the *51 Painting* series are an impressive and encouraging example of how a filmmaker can address issues of impactful memories through the lens and maintain a sense of originality in all of the editions without revaluing the nature of what each film is digressing. Although each film is not easy to sit through, I did manage to play all nine films over the span of a week despite the endurance issues each film presented. The poetic language of each film had a methodological linkage akin to other artists' work namely Mathew Barney and the segmented works of Bill Viola. While I consider metamodern theory a debatable premise especially in the arguments supporting postmodernism did not end despite the arguments that said it did, metamodernism as a set of theories remains to me as a suspect set of critical theory at odds with itself. I would say in this account that this film study certainly was a slow cinema investigation but I disagree that metamodernism should have been the focus of scholarship as more than just a way to reject postmodern film. In fact, every film that has been made since the 1990s is undeniably postmodern and a postmodernity as well centred on Deleuze's work that stemmed out of what Cinema 2 established. Much of metamodern scholarship is still profoundly unresponsive to cinema and in my opinion irrelevant when compared to the established functions of film philosophy begging the question, how can any contemporary film not be film philosophy or not be postmodern? The aims of the study seem to be supported through practice, I just can't quite see how metamodernism is justified to be an attributing theoretical or even legitimate theory. Perhaps I am showing my age but metamodernism seems to be a younger person's view of the world that negates what has already been established. Postmodernism was never focused on 'feelings' but metamodernism does mention a 'structure of feeling'. This I find strange to consider when assessing a film that many young people are distracted by instead of the formalism of the actual moving image work they are trying to assess. With this in mind, I disagree with the choice of metamodern film (in that there is no such thing as a metamodern film). Deleuze certainly took care of that argument

and I do not see any value in challenging what has already been proven to be an effective way to assess films, especially those from this study.

## RESPONSE STATEMENT

I thank both reviewers for their comments. I note that reviewer 1's comments acknowledges (1) that the film series was a significant study of slow films (2) that contextualising the films with metamodern theory instead of film philosophy, especially Deleuze, is a unique approach to solidifying slow cinema works and (3) that the films related aspects of trauma memory as an affectual study. I also note that the reviewer's comments about boredom as an affectual state is a valuable assessment I will further investigate in future works as a primordial study through practice. Reviewer 2's arguments raised are that (1) the study achieved a sizable volume of work, (2) that metamodernism is not a valid critical theory and (3) that postmodernism is the only way to access modern film. I challenge the second and third comments about the legitimacy of metamodernism and defend the authenticity and validity of metamodernism as a contemporary theory. I also challenge that metamodernism is a young person's view of the world and note that this argument is hollow as demographics are of no purpose or function in metamodern film nor do I find that constructing an argument about metamodernism based on a 'belief' rather than responding to the scholarship of current debate informs any credible assessment of this study. Given this, I refute the second and third claim made by reviewer 2 as their conclusion is prejudiced and misinformed.