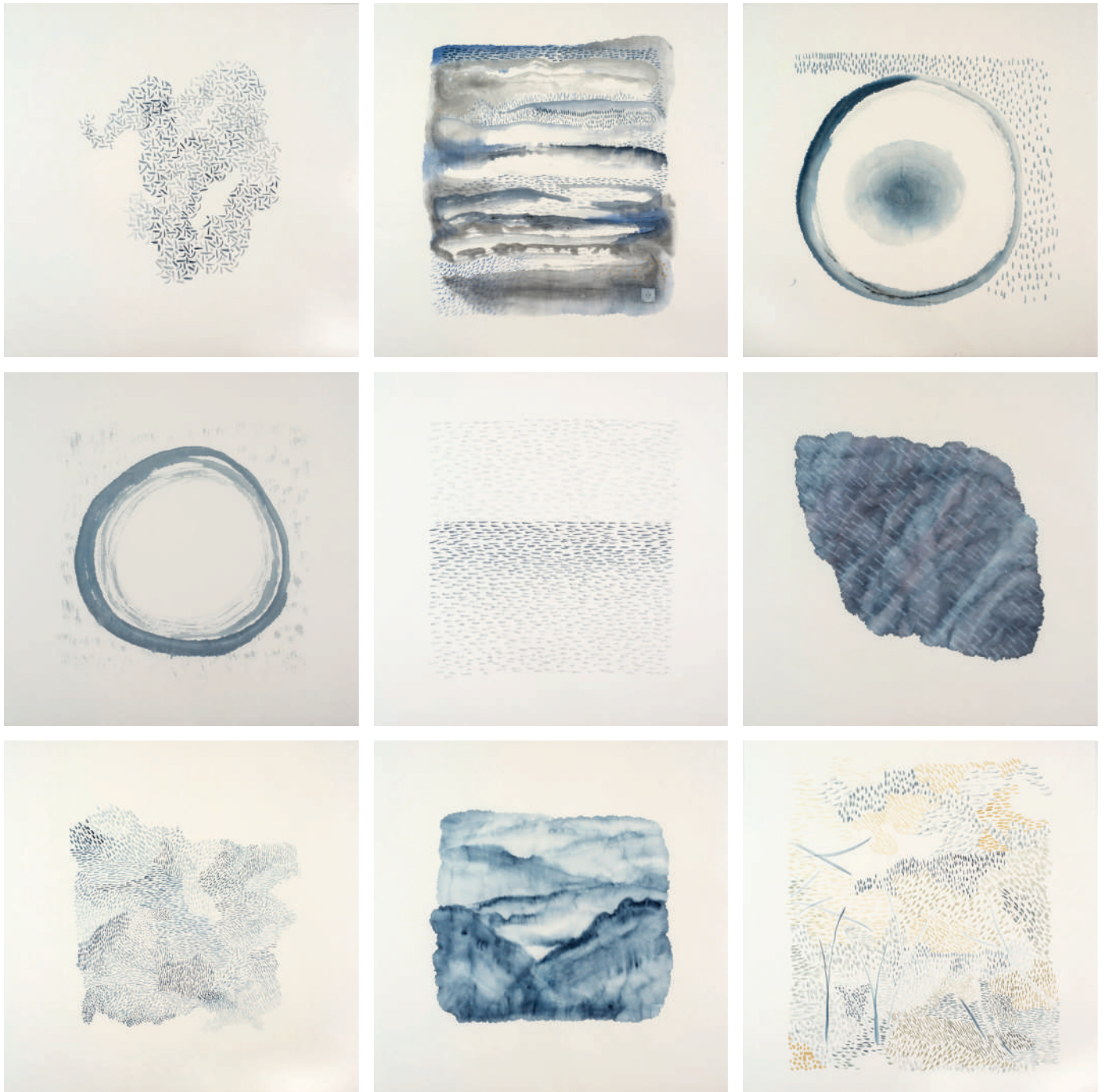


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Georgina Hooper, 1-9 'Untitled', ink and watercolour on rice paper, 50x50cm, 2017 (Artworks 1-9, left to right and top to bottom)
Photo credit: Carl Warner

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GEORGINA HOOPER | LIMINAL SPACE

25 - 28 OCTOBER 2017

GEORGINA HOOPER | LIMINAL SPACE

THE CONDITIONS FOR PRODUCTION

Liminal Space is the culmination of my visual arts practice-led research at the University of Canberra, wherein I explored the concept of the sublime. The resulting body of ethereal paintings are creative artefacts reflective of my search for an experience of the sublime, and represent the findings and evidence of new knowledge that emerged from this work.

THE SUBJECT

For 2,000 years, the sublime has been a source of fascination and inspiration for many, appearing in religious texts, works of art, poetry, music, and some of the oldest written works.¹ Despite its pervading presence across time and culture, the sublime remains an elusive concept and how it is to be interpreted is a subject of debate and contention.

Of the extensive literature on the sublime, the theories of G. W. F. Hegel and Edmund Burke have emerged as crucial to shaping this research. Concisely, the sublime can be defined as a human experience that leads to self-realisation or transformation brought about by a suspension of the mental faculty in the face of awe-inspiring vastness, infinity, magnitude, power, and abundance. The subjects thought to bring about an experience of the sublime are nature² and the 'One Absolute Source' or 'God'.³

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT THE WORK?

What is rare about my exploration of the sublime through painting is that it has drawn from a cross-cultural fertilisation with the East. The Chinese landscape painting tradition and its philosophy have been part of my practice since travelling to China as a research scholar seven years ago. Training at Tianjin University under artist and Professor Dong Ya provided me with a strong foundation of artistic practice, which this research has built upon.

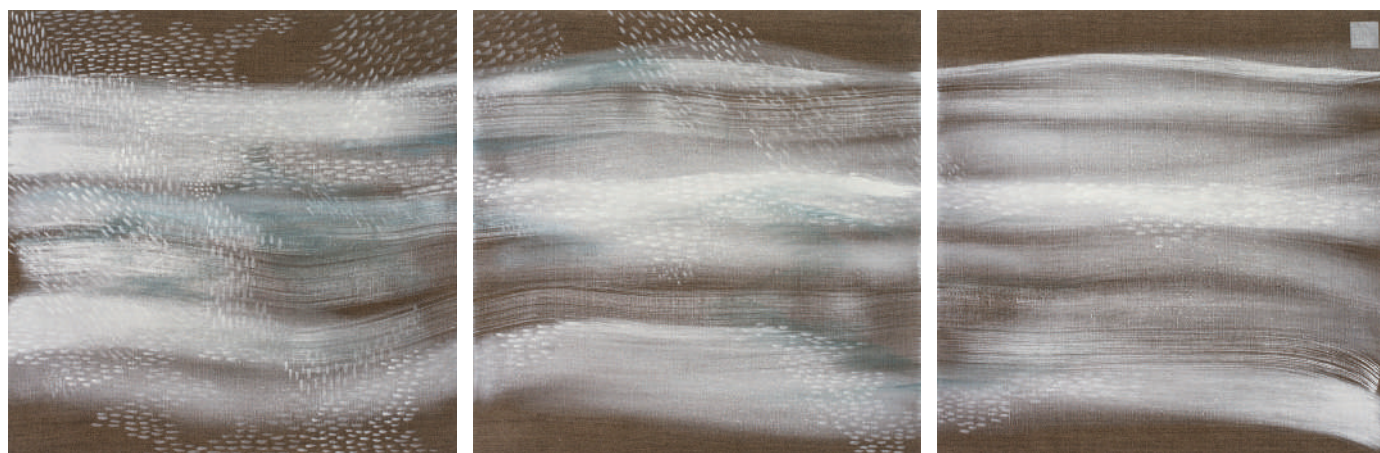
My work challenges the Eurocentric tradition of the sublime, which pits humankind against nature in a battle where one emerges either as victorious or defeated.⁴ Rather, I explore the sublime through an Eastern perspective, which places us in harmony with nature instead of 'Othered' from it.

My research has followed a path leading in the same direction as the ideals of the Ch'an Buddhist painters from the Sung period. By employing meditation in the creative process, I aim to suspend the cognitive faculty. By keeping the mind free of matters of the world, I work towards freeing the intuitive faculty and move towards an understanding of the true nature of self.

THE MOTIVATION BEHIND THE PRACTICE

As I am a member of an inter-cultural family, there is a personal significance to this research. But, more broadly, as a woman living in the culturally diverse context of Australia that still feels so steeped in a Eurocentric and postcolonial mind-set, I have sought understanding of myself, my country, and the people around me. There is little doubt among scholars that there are fundamental differences between postcolonial Western and Eastern thought: "Members of different cultures differ in their 'metaphysics,' or fundamental belief about the nature of the world."⁵ I have never felt a great affinity with the world view into which I was born as a white Australian from Rockhampton, and I gravitated to Eastern philosophy from a young age. The unrelenting propensity for categorisation and classification in Western thought has become even more foreign to me since meeting my Chinese husband, whose understandings seem to form more holistically. The unnecessary mental energy I expend trying to 'understand' everything through logic seems a fruitless and tiresome way of making meaning from the world around me. Despite my many years of learning Eastern philosophy, it has become apparent that my inculcated Western approach to logical thinking has been unconsciously working in conflict with my philosophical beliefs.

Learning and using another cultural language can help bridge the void of understanding that exists between different cultures and simultaneously enrich our understanding of ourselves.⁶ Traditional practices such as Chinese landscape painting are embedded with cultural knowledge. Through the practice of a tradition, elusive "interiorized knowledge" unique to that culture can be passed on.⁷ Through this research, I move from a place of "traditional" to "intercultural competence".⁸



Georgina Hooper, 'Untitled' (triptych), oil on linen, 216 x 72cm, 2017 | Photo credit: Carl Warner



Left: Georgina Hooper, 'Untitled', oil on linen, 48 x 48cm, 2017

Right: Georgina Hooper, 'Untitled', ink and watercolour on rice paper, 50cm x 50cm, 2017

Photo credit: Carl Warner



HOW IS MEANING COMMUNICATED?

At the heart of my creative work is an exploration of the natural world in a non-traditional Western sense. My portrayal of nature is not depicted figuratively as a landscape but rather abstractly as a felt experience. **Liminal Space** seeks to position the artist and the audience as one with nature, rather than outside of or separated from it.

The five fundamental calligraphic strokes of Chinese landscape painting have emerged as pivotal to this body of work. These five strokes form the essential elements of all Chinese written characters. Founded in a deep observation of nature, they were developed as a pictorial language that emerged out of painting thousands of years ago, yet remain current and still in use.

THE VALUE OF THE WORK

I have translated the spontaneous and intuitive mark making synonymous with ink on rice paper into the Western medium of oil on linen. My aesthetic sensibility, which values the quality of beautifully made things, has led me to work with the highest quality materials and conservation methods. The 700gsm linen has been sourced from one of Europe's oldest manufacturers, and rice paper and inks have been hand-picked from Hong Kong. All of the paintings on rice paper have been mounted by art conservator Jennifer Walker, who uses traditional Eastern methods to ensure the longevity and preservation of each work.

The metaphysical nature of my research seeks to make visible the invisible. The resulting work has emerged as ethereal paintings that allude to the metaphysical. All of the paintings are attributed as **Untitled** and stamped with a blank seal so as to not impose myself or my interpretation of the work on the viewer, allowing for unique and individual meanings to be formed by each person. The paintings are intentionally elusive, palpable spaces that can be entered as an escape from a busy mind. While they can be read analytically, they are intended as objects that draw consciousness towards the familiar but often unnoticed experience of nature.

Liminal Space marks a critical new stage for my creative work. It is the conclusion of a seven-year inquiry, but also a beginning. As the title of the exhibition suggests, this research has brought my practice to a space between East and West, which brings my visual language to a threshold of new territory and marks a clear and fecund artistic trajectory.

1 Erika Goble, *Visual Phenomenology: Encountering the Sublime through Images* (London: Routledge, 2016).

2 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: University of Notre Dame, 1968; orig. pub. 1757).

3 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. F. P. B. Osmaston (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1920; orig. pub. 1835).

4 Laura Gascoigne, "When Did the Sublime Become an Extended Environmental Guilt-Trip?" *Apollo Magazine*, 23 April 2016, www.apollo-magazine.com/when-did-the-sublime-become-an-extended-environmental-guilt-trip/.

5 Richard Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently — And Why* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 3.

6 Angela Scarino and Anthony J. Liddicoat, *Teaching and Learning Languages: A Guide* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), www.tlq.unisa.edu.au/lib_guide/gllt.pdf.

7 Walter Van Herck, "The Role of Tacit Knowledge in Religion," paper presented at Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, Boston, 10–15 August 1998, www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Reli/ReliVanh.htm.

8 Scarino and Liddicoat, *Teaching and Learning Languages*.