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**Incredulity in Practice:
Sculptural Investigations into Faith and Doubt**

By

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Abstract

My research considers one way in which contemporary sculptural art practice might reinterpret sculpture and painting, primarily from Catholicism as represented in Italian and Spanish Renaissance and Baroque art. The themes that are explored include: faith and doubt, divinity and human nature, miracles and materials.

How can sculptural practice delve into the nature of faith and doubt through materials and processes, interpretative strategies, and a consideration of contexts? Can any sense of faith or belief in the unphysical be evoked in audiences through this practice-led research?

The research employs inductive means and methodologies that are fundamentally practice-led and iterative. Rather than starting with a problem-based enquiry, a careful analysis of existing artworks, primarily by the painter Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio and the sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini, was undertaken. This study has led to the production of creative work that in turn has initiated further questions and more sculptural objects. The production of sculptural artefacts creates a snowballing effect that is a self-reflective, investigative cycle. This method draws upon the sculptural process itself and takes into account external and contextual considerations. My studio-based investigations have given rise to the sculptural work. These case studies reinforce an understanding that methods that are primarily based on the assessment of haptic means relating to touch, sight and other sensory perceptions can contribute to knowledge in meaningful and unique ways.

The iterative process used in this research has thematic and metaphoric parallels to the ways in which Catholic stories are retold, interpreted, and examined – narratives that have themselves been continuously readapted to suit changing contexts and intended audiences. Such narratives have been disseminated throughout the history of Christianity, and continue to be circulated in modern-day Christianity. In our post-enlightenment world, the core theme of incredulity, as imagined through art, is explored. To this end, and to make wider connections with this enquiry, philosophical writings regarding ideas of truth and subjectivity, particularly the work of Søren Kierkegaard, are investigated.

The historical sculpture and painting referenced and utilised as source material are themselves reinterpretations of pre-existing narratives and stories. This research strives to explore and expose the correlative relationship that exists between understandings of *past* and *present* day contexts and employs an examination of both historical and contemporary art works and practitioners. Rather than perceiving this research project primarily in the context of other contemporary art practices, the main focus is on how European artists from the early 17th century wrestled with imagining and imaging these stories and, in that context, how the same narratives might be reinterpreted today. A selection of contemporary artists has been used throughout the research in order to help situate this work within a contemporary cultural context.

The primary output from the research is a selection of three sculptural groupings, referred to as case studies, presented in chronological order, taken from the larger body of sculptural artefacts created over

the course of the entire research project. The three selected case studies encapsulate the key findings and principle discoveries. The case studies are supplemented by photographs of installed site-specific work, as well as the contextual and critical analysis contained in this thesis.

***In memory
of my friend
Paul Carter***

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my friends, supervisors, editors and all those whom have helped me along the way to completion.

I would like to acknowledge the love and support of my parents, Rosemary & John, as well as my brothers and sister, Michael, Joseph & Leeanne, who have put up with me during this journey. Without your patience and kindness, I would not have reached the end, thank you for having *faith* in me.

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Introduction

My research exemplifies one manner in which contemporary sculptural practice might reinterpret sculpture and painting primarily taken from Roman Catholicism of the late 16th and 17th centuries, as expressed in Italian and Spanish art. My research is propelled by my sculptural practice, and endeavours to explore themes such as faith and doubt, with reference to specific European late 16th and 17th century painting and sculpture from a contemporary cultural perspective.

I investigate how sculptural practice might reach an understanding of the nature of faith and doubt through materials and processes, interpretative strategies and a consideration of both historical and contemporary contexts. This is accomplished through my sculptural practice and is exemplified in the sculptural groupings, as well as the photographic documentation of site-specific work, and illustrative material that together constitute the creative output part of my research. The sculptural work embodies my re-interpretation of specific stories derived from exploring works of art made predominantly in Italy and Spain during what is commonly referred to as the Baroque period (approximately 1590 – 1700 AD). The specific Baroque works of art that I examine are creative interpretations of Catholic biblical narratives. The term Baroque denotes both a period and a style that is characterized by use of exaggerated motion and realistically interpreted detail. The overall effect is to generate drama, tension and splendour in various forms of artistic practice, including sculpture and painting. This style was initially developed in Italy around 1600 and soon spread across Europe. The Roman Catholic Church embraced and encouraged its dissemination, using this art form as a method to communicate religious themes and messages in a direct and expressive manner to the viewer.

My practice-led exploration is fundamentally iterative. It does not begin with a problem-based enquiry, but is instead a careful examination of existing works, drawn from artists who were active during the late 16th and 17th centuries, such as Michael Michelangelo di Merisi (commonly referred to as Caravaggio), Gian Lorenzo Bernini and Francesco de Zurbaran. This inspection ultimately leads to the production of creative works that in turn initiate further questions and subsequent sculptural output. This iterative investigation was sparked from the outset by my own personal and passionate response to Caravaggio's *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*, 1608. Throughout my research, I have strived to understand and articulate the emotional response that this painting initially evoked within me. I have endeavoured to understand my specific reactions to this initial experience within my studio-based practice, as expressed through my sculptural body of work. My reactions during this first viewing of the painting involved a deeply thoughtful experience, which induced within me a desire to comprehend my emotional response. My means to understand this response have been to engage in an artistic practice, specifically sculptural explorations and practice-led investigations. My practice is experimentally based, relying on the attainment of my own personal experience in order to gain any meaningful knowledge. This incredulous approach focuses on finding out through doing, rather than being told. The process of my investigation has become my mechanism of discovery.

For this reason, I present a critical analysis of my practice-led research, in part by recounting certain sequential events that led to the creation of the sculptural case studies that make up this submission. I analyse elements of my personal profound experience by describing the chronological nature of the conception, and subsequent realisation, of each of the case studies. Furthermore, I consider themes that link the work together. I aim to

demonstrate the cumulative nature of the individual case studies in relation to my research project as a whole coherent body of work. A sequential evaluation of the case studies allows for a description to be made of how each case study influenced the direction of further investigations. This format allows me to articulate a coherent methodology and creative process, encompassing pertinent theoretical and methodological influences and illustrative material.

Reinterpretation of narratives is a method used in other contemporary creative practices. I identify common modes of expression used by other contemporary artists who rely on reiterative narratives. In order to contextualise my research within a wider contemporary cultural framework, I aim to establish an understanding of the similarities and differences between studio practice, visual aesthetic and critical framework. As I partake in case studies of my work, I have endeavoured to make wider connections by comparing and contrasting my research with the work of such contemporary visual artists as Alison Watt, Jake and Dinos Chapman and Paul Carter. The selected contemporary artists and their artistic output, which I use in order to help situate my research, are relevant to my research project for a number of reasons that I discuss in more detail throughout the case studies. The strategies of re-appropriation of iconic works of art involve a desire to explore a sense of existential awareness and perspective through artistic exploration, as well as to gain insight regarding material, scale and space. The selected contemporary artists and examination of their various approaches to production through visual language has been both insightful and beneficial to my research by allowing me to situate my practice in relation to theirs, and to learn from the discussions and debates that they have generated. By comparing and assessing my research in relation to

other contemporary artists, I hope to provide insight into how this research is situated within a contemporary cultural context.

My profound response and subsequent artistic investigations into Caravaggio's *The Beheading of St John the Baptist* prompted my investigations and creative sculpture. These were in themselves reliant on the knowledge that I had accumulated during preceding investigations. As my research progressed, I endeavoured to continuously explore the idea of a profound response. Initially the profound emotional response that I had experienced whilst viewing this painting filled me with insatiable curiosity about both the artwork and the artist himself and the environment in which he existed. These feelings were followed by strategizing ways in which to poke and prod at my interest in the artist and the work of art, which in turn led to my own visual sculptural responses. As I shall discuss in more detail in Chapter: Strategizing Profundity, the strategic approach that I developed, including the development and use of a specific visual language, identification of motif and conceptual and aesthetic interaction acts as the basic overarching methodological armature throughout the case studies. My methods have been adapted continuously, elaborated on and modified in the progression of my research. Nevertheless, I have sustained the same basic visual vernacular and concentration on exploring the relationship between past and present throughout, which altogether was prompted by my first viewing of Caravaggio's four-hundred-year-old painting in the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Malta. The necessity to explore the dynamics of this correlative relationship has maintained a constant relevance throughout my entire research.

My desire to interact with a painting that was created over four centuries ago, exploring the intricacies of the powerful emotional response that it had

evoked within me, became the starting point from which I have developed my overarching strategy of addressing the relationship between a specific time and place, namely Italy and Spain during the late 16th and 17th centuries and the present. As contemporary art historian, Mieke Bal, briefly describes, 'I propose to read these pictorial elements as replete with meaning, and specifically with contemporary conceptions of correlative point of view'.¹ The intention of this work is to delve into this core understanding throughout my thesis. The correlative relationship that I strive to explore in my thesis exists between the present and the Baroque period, paying particular attention to perspective, point of view, gesture, surface, texture, light and shadow.

My research has been expressed through the creative works that I have produced in my studio, as well as within particular site locations. As such, the written element is largely reliant on a reflective deconstruction of this creative body of work, coupled with an analysis of how and with whom this work is contextualised, in order to demonstrate a sense of contemporary cultural contextualisation. To this end, I investigate the connections between my research and other contemporary artists that share a connection with visual arts from a specific time and place in the past, namely Italy and Spain during the Baroque period. By contextualising my research output with other contemporary artists 'my interest herein using cultural memory as a function of the subject is motivated by the need to provide a basis, on the side of the subject, for the connection between subject and the object of historical knowledge'.² The case studies provide the means by which I explore this correlative relationship that exists between the present and an understanding of the past that comes from examining thematic

¹ Bal, Mieke. Quoting Caravaggio p.53

² Bal, Mieke. Quoting Caravaggio p.53

elements, motifs and aesthetic concerns that are relevant within contemporary art making practices.

It is through this reflective analysis that I have been able to unfold and deconstruct various aspects of my creative process. This reflective aspect of my research project allows me to explore notions of *past* and *present*, not only based on an art-historical analysis of different epochs, but also as a continuous flow of artistic evolution, where styles, techniques and approaches bleed into one another. As contemporary French philosopher Giles Deleuze describes, 'the division of the continuous must not be taken as that of dividing into grains, but as that of a sheet of paper or of a tunic in folds, in such a way that an infinite number of folds can be produced, some smaller than others, but without the body ever dissolving into points or minima'.³ Deleuze's poetic description of different epochs of art history being linked together similar as a folded cloth, as opposed to separate and distinct periods, represents the entanglement that I have discovered through the conception and realisation of my own sculptural body of work. This discovery was gradual and not explicit from the outset of my research, brought about through haptic means. My studio-based investigations begat the sculptural works that comprise my case studies and these works help this manner help to reinforce an understanding that methods that are primarily based on the assessment carried out by haptic means relating to touch, sight and other sensory perceptions can contribute to knowledge in meaningful and unique ways.

The case studies are fundamentally linked to one another. Each piece developed from the previous work, ultimately forming an accretive body. For this reason, I feel it beneficial to 'unfold' the case studies in a

³ Deleuze, Giles. *The Fold*. p.6

chronological manner, allowing for the reader to gain an understanding of the development and progression that has occurred during the course of my research.

The chapter entitled **Strategizing Profundity** primarily deals with outlining and describing the development of the methods and tactics that I have employed throughout research project. I discuss the more acute and finite elements of my methodologies within the development of the individual case studies. This chapter outlines the ways in which the case studies have acted as sculptural and textual vehicles for exploration, the correlative entanglement between garnering an understanding of a specific time and place, namely the Baroque period, and an awareness of contemporary contextualisation. Mieke Bal describes one of the characteristics of visual language and the production of meaning through the use of signs, 'time and its diverse constructions, including the possibility of reversing it, may be the primary characteristic of semiosis as a cultural process, the one that makes semiotics the theory of the presentness and past'.⁴ Bal describes time as the primary characteristic that transcends a cultural process based on signs and meaning. This idea stresses the understanding of a link between past and present when referring to visual articulation of signs, symbols, meaning and association. The intertwined link between past and present that I explore through my sculptural works deals with thematic concerns that are relevant to both past and present. Elements such as, surface, texture, gesture and perspective are exemplified in the referenced historical visual source material and are likewise relevant in the present.

My sculptural case studies and written thesis strive to visually and textually highlight a correlative relationship by identifying and deconstructing

⁴ Bal, Mieke. *Quoting Caravaggio* p.105

particular elements and motifs that are relevant to both past and present examples of artistic manifestation whilst contextualising the meaning that is produced when comparing and contrasting how certain semiotic elements are understood differently for the present and for the past.

The chapter entitled **Negotiating Between Faith and Doubt** primarily deals with the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of my research project. In this chapter, I explore the philosophical and theoretical rationale of my work and define the primary themes of faith and doubt. I examine how faith and doubt have been utilised within my artistic practice and the ways in which this understanding apply to my awareness of self, subjectivity, responsibility and accountability. Moreover, I explore faith and doubt in the context of the Roman Catholic religion, placing particular emphasise on how the visual arts have been employed to disseminate the Catholic Church's views of faith and doubt.

The importance of the studio-driven incredulous approach to my practice is highlighted. I concentrate on how this approach has affected my acquisition of knowledge and determined the unfolding aspects of my research project. I also explore the concepts of perspective and point of view, specifically how this revolutionary understanding of the individual's place within the surrounding world flourished during the Baroque period. I examine the historical and visual developments of perspective, emphasising how awareness of the subjective self in relation to one's surroundings had both revolutionary artistic ramifications, as well as philosophical and spiritual implications.

I consult with selected written works by the Danish philosopher and writer Soren Kierkegaard in order to develop my understanding of responsibility and accountability and to procure an awareness of subjectivity as truth. I

concentrate on how knowledge of self within the wider theoretical framework of existentialism has led me to continuously negotiate between ideas of faith and doubt in my own practice. I draw upon the entangled writings of contemporary writer Giles Deleuze and 17th century philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz for textual examples of the correlative relationship that exists between subject and historical object.

Furthermore, I strive to illuminate the philosophical importance of my own re-discovery of perspective and point of view through my studio practice. In this context, I focus on thematic concerns, the use of motifs, methods, materials and process, which in my case have been propelled by incredulous means. This approach is distinct from a more didactic approach to generating knowledge. I discuss how my incredulous strategy has allowed me to gain an understanding of how and why this approach differs from a more didactic, text based approach to knowledge acquisition and why this approach is significant to visual artists.

The chapter entitled **Refining the Sculptural Vernacular** deals primarily with the pragmatic development of the visual language that I have developed and used throughout my research and case studies. Specifically, I focus on the practical aspects of how the visual dialect was developed and explore the contemporary and historical implications of this development. I strive to gain and impart an understanding of how this specific visual language is contextualised within contemporary culture. I also investigate how certain elements of this artistic vernacular have been used and understood in the past, and furthermore explore their relevance within contemporary culture. Key elements of this visual language include the appropriation and use of the reduced human skeleton figure, site specificity and awareness, and the relationship between Catholic sacred spaces and

devotional art. I also discuss how the specific sites I have chosen are related to the historical sacred spaces within Roman Catholicism. The practical implications and metaphorical applications of certain processes that I have utilized within my research project, such as lost wax casting, found object appropriation and manipulation, wood working techniques and installation are considered.

The main body of my thesis consists of the **Story of the Case Studies**.

I have selected three case studies as examples of the nine case studies that encompass the entire body of research that I have created over the course of my practice led research. Through these three case studies, I highlight the salient aspects of my research. In this section, I describe the chronological development of my practice led sculptural investigations as the sculptural works were realised in reality. I illustrate the impetus and evolution of the investigations into my research projects. The evolution of my case studies express the development and growth of the sculptural vernacular that I have conceived in my research. I feel it prudent to describe the development of the case studies in a sequential manner because a chronological reading shows the particular linkage between the case studies. Chronology describes a structure and an order. An analysis of the case studies in chronological order illustrates a sequence of events that stresses the importance of process and how I have learned through doing. By describing the sequential connection between the case studies, I aim to highlight the importance that each case study had on the following sculptural investigations. This is important because it is analogous to the manner in which I conceived and realised the sculptural works and encapsulates one of the main characteristics of my research, describing an incredulous approach to learning through doing, rather than by being told. A practice-led haptic approach to an art historical study can inform a visual artist's studio practice.

I have selected a number of sculptural works from the entire body of work associated with my research project that I feel best articulates my self-developed pedagogy and the salient points that my research has exposed. The selected art works encapsulate the key discoveries, developments and changes that occurred during the realisation of my research project. This selection of sculptural works allows me to present a reflective account that situates my sculptural work explicitly in contemporary culture, theory and practice. Likewise in this account, I explore the correlative relationship between 16th century baroque art and the present. Throughout the case studies, I contextualise my practice within current visual culture and theory by discussing a the work of a number of contemporary artists, including Allison Watt, Jake & Dinos Chapman and Paul Carter.

A chronological reading of the case studies makes explicitly clear the importance of the incredulous practice-led approach that my research project has taken. Recounting the development of the sculptural work portrays the theoretical and thematic relevance of using sculptural practice to explore an understanding of the past within the present. The arrangement of the case studies is analogous to their realisation within the studio environment.

In the **Conclusion**, I summarise the findings and insights from my research and reiterate the core strategies and tactics of my methodology, along with the theoretical implications. This reiteration includes a summation of my developed understanding of faith and doubt, as applied to my studio practice and awareness of self, as well as how the terms faith and doubt are applied to the narratives in the Catholic religion. I summarize the development of the strategies that I have used within the studio and the methods that I

have employed throughout the development of the case studies. I reiterate the importance that semiotics as a cultural process has played within my research and how this effects my understanding of the relationship between the past and present in terms of developing a mobile correlative engagement between subject (self) and object (Baroque) situated in a contemporary cultural context.

By reiterating the salient points that have been realised through the course of my research, I hope to exemplify one way in which contemporary sculptural practice can re-interpret historical iconographical works of art using haptic methods.

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Chapter: Strategizing Profundity

My overarching methodology can be characterised as iterative and accretive investigations, propelled by a scrupulous strategy of self-reflection and examination of source material with specific reference to painting and sculpture from the Baroque period of the 16th and 17th centuries within Italy and Spain. Besides examining artists from the Baroque period, I investigate certain contemporary artists that help to provide insight into parallel areas of interest and have aided in contextualising my practice within the present.

The visual experience that sparked my interest and initiated this research project crystallized the moment I stood in front of Caravaggio's painting entitled *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*, located in St John's Co-Cathedral in the city of Valletta on the Mediterranean island of Malta.



Fig 1
Valletta, Malta. Grand Harbour



Fig 2
Valletta, Malta



Fig 3
Dingli Cliffs, Malta

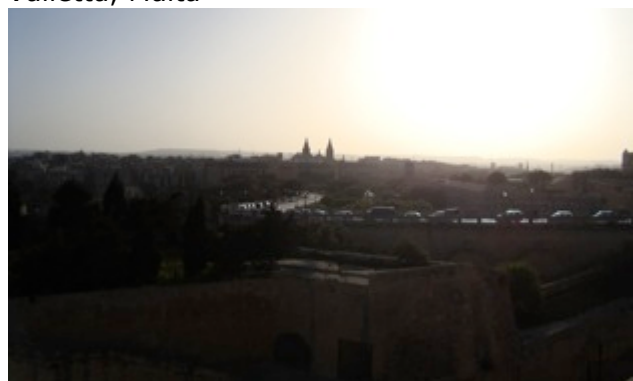


Fig 4
Valletta, Malta



Fig 5
St John's Co Cathedral. Valletta, Malta.



Fig 6
St John's Co Cathedral. Valletta, Malta



Fig 7
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Beheading of St John the Baptist*, 1608

The painting depicts a grizzly scene of calculated death and control, taken from the story found in the beginning of the New Testament in the Holy Bible. After initially viewing this painting *in situ* (in this case, a work of art made specifically for the host site), I was captivated by the work and could not ignore the feelings it evoked in me. I became interested in trying to uncover why this early 17th century oil painting had produced such an effect on me. From the outset, I realised that it was not solely the painting and its subject matter that contributed to this profound response, but also the location, architectural surroundings, and awareness the site's spiritual purpose that fed into this profound emotional response.

Throughout the progression and evolution of the case studies, I became more consciously aware of my desire to explore this profound response that

I had initially experienced whilst viewing Caravaggio's painting in situ. Why and how had the act of viewing this painting generated such a profound response within me? At the outset, I was aware that the response that I experienced when viewing Caravaggio's painting was not solely based on one single element of the painting, but rather on a number of contributing factors that lay beyond the canvas, including the site specificity of the painting and how this contributed to its designation as being devotional in nature. Although I was consciously aware of the fact that there were many possible-contributing factors that affected my profound experience of initially viewing this painting, I initially wanted to focus my attention on certain elements or features of the painting. In retrospect, when I reflect on why I chose to single out particular elements or motifs of the painting, I attribute it to a strategy that enabled me to not become overwhelmed by the multifaceted profound experience upon examination. The ability to isolate certain motifs and areas of interest has enabled me to manageably engage with the painting.

Initially my strategy, based on my interaction with this profound experience, was to distil this profundity down to a finite number of compositional elements that I found central to the experience. The concerns that I wanted to initially explore included the figurative gestures and postures that the characters in the painted narrative depicted. The motif of this particular painting and the realistic figurative representation that Caravaggio pioneered captivated me with its staged theatrical presentation. Throughout the case studies, I have continued to elaborate on the visual development of the sculptural vernacular that provides the basic tools and instruments I have utilised throughout my research project. As my research project progressed, I became more competent with the basic fundamentals of my sculptural

vernacular and was able to add more complex and ornate aspects to this sculptural language.

Caravaggio's *The Beheading of St John the Baptist* has a stillness about it. The painting is made up of surfaces and textures that are depicted in vivid detail. The artist's use of dramatic lighting effects help direct and focuses the viewers eye on the almost tangible fabrics, leathery skin and cold stone surfaces. Caravaggio's painting appeals to the viewer's eye because of the ability to relate to the way in which the subject matter is represented in a natural manner.

The scene that it depicts is fraught with contrasting characteristics, including clinical and brutal violence, coupled with emotional restraint and control. It seems that the painter has achieved a balance of organised chaos that seduces the eye of the viewer into the drama simply by observing. As a result, the viewer becomes a witness to the events that are unfolding on the canvas. There is a both a realistic nature to the scene, as well as a staged quality in which Caravaggio had painted this biblical narrative. As my research progressed, I continued to explore particular devices that Caravaggio developed and employed in order to achieve particular lighting effects and theatrical qualities, such as the use of chiaroscuro and unnatural lighting properties. The products of my experiments are illustrated through photographic documentation throughout the case studies.



Fig 8
Deposition 2006



Fig 9
Deposition Detail 2006

My initial interest was centred on the idea of addressing the figurative elements within composition. The drama unfolding in the visual narrative relates directly to the human characters. There exists a range of emotions on the canvas: empathy, violence, anguish, pain, obedience and domination, all playing vital roles within the narrative of this painted dramatization.

'Religious emotion must always call forth strong feeling, but the strength is sometimes shown in terms of apparent restraint, at others it shows itself in violent action.'⁵ Richard Norton's analysis of depicting religious emotion is consistent with the atmosphere and the emotional conviction that Caravaggio communicates to the viewer by painting this scene of violence and control in an extremely cold and calculated manner.

Through recognition of the profound effect this painting had on me, I endeavoured to come up with a strategy in which to interact with, explore and investigate the painting. I spent a significant amount of time visiting the Co Cathedral in order to view the painting in person. After my initial visit, I became aware that each time I visited the painting again, I would sit in a different location in order to view the work of art from a different perspective. It also became clear to me that, although the angle at which I viewed the painting changed with each visit, the perspective within the painting remained the same, unaffected by my mobility. This reflective process highlighted an understanding of perspective that, up until that point, I had taken for granted, and had not often thought about consciously. This realization led me to investigate the development of an understanding of single point perspective, both historically, through the study of how artist wrestled with perspective in the 14th and 15th century, and also through an awareness of how perspective is applied to human life. The term *point of view* is relevant within current historiography and contemporary art, as well

⁵ Norton, Richard. *Bernini and Other Studies in the History of Art*. p. 17

as baroque art, and is most often contextualised within narrative. 'We tell stories from a specific point of view. The point of view from which the elements of the plot, or *fibula* are presented is often of decisive importance for the meaning the reader will assign to the fibula.'⁶ With this, Bal touches on an aspect of perspective that is of vital importance in relation to my research. This painting depicts a particular point of view, the point of view of a witness to the actions of the painted characters. Caravaggio painted this image from single point perspective. This knowledge of individual perspective allowed me to carefully investigate the concept of point of view in terms of how it developed within philosophy, as well as within the visual arts in the 15th and 16th centuries. My awareness of the characteristics of fixed perspective that are intrinsic to a two-dimensional painting were made explicitly clear as I moved myself into different positions when viewing this painting. Although I changed my perspective, the point of view remained the same.

As I continued to reflect on and investigate perspective and point of view and to explore ideas of perspective that applied to the formal elements of the composition, I also became interested in my perspective in relation to this painting as an object from a specific time and place within the past. This idea of perspective touches upon my interest and awareness of the correlative relationship that exists between subject and object, between past and present. And more acutely how we understand and define the past within the present, and how the present is directed by the past.

'We cannot crawl out from underneath the burden of what came before us. But going for the ride in this rollercoaster vision transforms both parties into

⁶ Bal, Mieke. *Quoting Caravaggio*. p.27

ever more layers of depth, or clothes them in ever more folds.⁷ Bal describes an aspect of perspective and the relationship that exists between the past and present, which I initially understood in fairly linear terms. The discipline of historiography is primarily textual and the history of art is traditionally presented and examined in linear terms, starting from the past and moving forward towards the present. Whilst strategizing ways in which to interact with and explore Caravaggio painting, I was initially tethered to an understanding of the Baroque period in fairly historical terms. I visualised the various epochs of art history butting up against one another in a carefully delineated fashion, progressing through time from past to present. As my research progressed, this linear understanding of past and present has given way to 'the possibilities of an alternative temporality in which the past is subsumed but *not* lost in the present, because the present itself, *its* pace and instantaneity, is called to a halt, slowed down and made an object of reflection.⁸ The understanding that the past is continuously defined in the present whilst at the same time the present is directed by the past has become more prominent during the progression of my research. This ever growing awareness of the correlation between cultural memory of the baroque (object), as presented through disciplines such as historiography, and myself (subject) as the creator of sculptural exegesis, contained within my case studies, has led to an recognition of the mobility of two ever changing positions. A relationship based on 'the correlation that entails the transformation of both subject and object which characterizes baroque point of view and in which, I contend, characterizes us as we re-vision the Baroque, in its wake, or rather, folded within it.'⁹

⁷ Bal, Mieke. *Quoting Caravaggio*. p.43

⁸ Bal, Mieke. *Quoting Caravaggio*. p.65

⁹ Bal, Mieke. *Quoting Caravaggio*. p.39

I have investigated this shifting relationship through the development of a specific sculptural vernacular and intuitive formal exploration. This exploration encompasses an analysis of particular works of art drawn from the Baroque period, as well as from selected contemporary artistic practices, and has resulted in a number of case studies that are presented in the main body of my thesis. I discuss in further detail the formal development of my particular sculptural *lingua franca* within Chapter: Refining the Vernacular.

When discussing the term subjective truths, I am referring to an internal decision-making process that I have arrived at based on subjective reflection and a passionate response to the source material that initiated my enquiry. This inward-looking decision-making process, which I challenged myself with during the realisation of a work of art, has propelled my investigations further. 'To subjective reflection, truth becomes appropriation, inwardness, subjectivity, and the point is to immerse oneself, existing, in subjectivity.'¹⁰ Such immersion into an inward looking subjective reflective process was the beating heart of my studio practice, propelled forward by subjectivity and an awareness of my relationship to the subject matter.

I have endeavoured to develop a visual language in which to continuously refer to in order to experiment with particular source material. Using a reduced human skeleton form as the basic vocabulary of this visual language, I have attempted to model, cast and install my cast bronze skeletons in such a way to re-interpret, in three dimensional space, the stories depicted in the source material, which are in themselves 16th and 17th century re-interpretations of the original biblical stories.

¹⁰ Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Essential Kierkegaard: Unscientific Postscript*. p. 200-201

The visual language that I have developed has been accomplished by metaphorically inserting myself into the gestures, poses and posturing of the art historical source material in order to learn and study these canonical works of art. My corporeal experimentation has allowed for me to act as the incredulous protagonist by using my own physical frame in order to insert my body both figuratively and literally into that of another in order to attain knowledge that is specifically gained through haptic modes of operation. As the early 20th century art historian Richard Norton states, 'for the art is a language, the works but the expression of single ideas; the one is a perpetual and constantly varying power, the other but separate thoughts expressed.'¹¹ In the initial stages of my research, I set about establishing the basic elements of this visual language that I would then use throughout my practice led research.

The 16th century narratives that I have drawn inspiration from are in themselves visual interpretations (paintings and sculptures) of stories that are rooted in the Holy Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. I have primarily utilised 16th century painting and sculpture as visual source materials in relation to my sculptural investigations. I have also drawn insight into the particular biblical narratives through the descriptions of these stories from the Bible. I acknowledge that there are differing versions of the Bible with vastly different imagistic qualities. For the purposes of readability and accessibility of text, I have used the Good New Translation of the Holy Bible (Catholic Edition) as my main reference. 'In Sept 1966 the American Bible Society published *The New Testament in Today's English Version*, the first publication of the new Bible translation intended for people everywhere for whom English is either their mother tongue or an acquired language. Shortly thereafter the United Bible

¹¹ Norton, Richard. *Bernini and Other Studies in the History of Art*. p.53

Societies (UBS) requested the American Bible Society (ABS) to undertake on its behalf a translation of the Old Testament following the same principles. Accordingly the American Bible Society appointed a group of translators to prepare the translation. In 1971 this group added a British consultant recommended by the British and Foreign Bible Society. The translation of the Old Testament, which was completed in 1976, was joined to the fourth edition New Testament, thus completing the first edition of the translation, which came to be known as the *Good New Translation*. Though previously known as Today's English Version (TEV) and commonly known as the *Good New Bible* (GNB), the translation is now called the Good News Translation.¹² The criteria that I used when selecting a particular translation was rooted in accessibility and readability. I wanted to use a translation that I was familiar with and that provided the greatest degree of imagery that would augment the 16th century visual re-interpretations that are my primary source material.

Much of the art produced in Italy and Spain during the 16th and 17th centuries was commissioned and funded by the Roman Catholic Church. As a result, the stories that were depicted were chosen in order to propagate the messages and sentiments that were important to the Catholic Church at that time in history. During the early 16th century, the Catholic Church set a mandate that promoted a bold new way to communicate its message. The Catholic Church desired to have its commissioned artists re-invigorate biblical canonical stories so that the largely illiterate masses could relate to the teachings through painting, sculpture and the visual arts. This mandate was issued and put into practice in the face of the threat that the Catholic Church felt from the Protestant movement within Christendom. Artists told these stories by depicting them in bold news. Stories were (in the case of

¹² *Holy Bible: Good News Translation* (Catholic Edition) Preface. p.4

Caravaggio and his followers) illustrated with an everyday vividness that had not been seen previously in painting. In Caravaggio's case the characters in his paintings were drawn from real-life models. He would gather material from prostitutes, street people, lovers and studio assistants, which he painted with vivid reality, including their individual characteristics. This inevitably contributed to the way people identified with the characters in the painting. Viewers of these paintings related to them through association. They recognized and related to the way in which the artists had depicted characters of the dramatizations. The biblical characters were suddenly identified as being people similar to themselves. This mandate effectively brought the Catholic Church's stories and messages closer to the common people through a form of artistic practice that used imagery that was bold and easily recognised and relatable by the viewer.

My studio experimentation initially took flight with the idea that a painting or sculpture could describe a whole story in a snap shot, frozen in time. The character's existence within each story, in particular the choices that they have made, precedes them and describes their individual essence, who and what they are and who they are meant to represent within the source material. For example, in Caravaggio's painting *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*, the character of Salome has been depicted in a particular manner based on the decisions she has made preceding the moment the artist captures. This freeze frame is what I refer to as source material. Salome's essence is based on her existence and her existence is based on choices and decisions she has made.

As a result of examination of particular source material, I have been able to establish subjective truths for myself in relation to the artists and their artistic output. These investigations, along with the subjective truths that I

have recognised, instil a sense of faith or doubt in relation to my decision making process, allowing for progression or regression to occur throughout my art practice. These steps then often lead to my next point of inspiration.

The subjective truths that I have uncovered have helped to navigate the direction of my next investigation, in the same way that a snowball gathers more snow and becomes bigger as it is rolled, but never loses its hard packed core. In other words, my practice never loses the subjective truths that were discovered in previous investigations, but rather takes these subjective truths forward, all the while helping to steer and dictate the origin of the next investigation. My understanding of subjective truths is discussed in Chapter: Negotiating Faith and Doubt.

The influence that Caravaggio's painting had on my initial experiments initiated my desire to understand the relationship between past and present. My studio investigations focus on exploring this correlative relationship. As opposed to examining my sculptural investigations, and the ideas contained within, through a historiographical lens, I propose to look at them as a way of recycling of ideas. This recycling of visually embodied ideas involves response, dialogue, appropriating gestures, and reaffirming so as to generate ramifications of the past – without continuity – in the present.¹³ I explore these visually embodied ideas through a critically reflective analysis of my sculptural work, while probing other contemporary artists that use notions of re-iteration, re-enactment and re-appropriation of seminal or iconic works of art. By considering and contextualising my work in relation to other contemporary artists, I explore the relevance of this research within the broader artistic community.

¹³ Bal, Mieke. *Quoting Caravaggio*. p.22

I explore the correlative relationship between past and present through an understanding which entails 'all self conscious historical re-vision of the Baroque as a historical epoch in which a particular style took hold and a set of motifs and figures came to represent a particular aesthetic will recognize that the "thing" we "see" as a remote historical object is moulded within our present being.' This manner of interacting with the past is not an attempt to negate the validity of any particular events or styles in the past, styles or happenings but rather 'it comes to life – or rather to light, to visibility – for us through our point of view, which itself is moulded by *it* folded *in* it. "It" cannot exist outside of 'us', so we become, to some extent, baroque people as a consequence.'¹⁴

In addition to contextualising my work within the wider contemporary artistic community, I have relied on the feedback gathered from viewers of my sculptural works. Such interactions have occurred on an informal basis during periods in which my sculptural work has been continuously in motion, so to speak. Throughout the realisation of my research, I continually encouraged studio visits from artists, artisans, students and the general public both while the work both was in progress, as well as finished installed pieces. The location of the work often dictated the demographic of the viewers. Throughout the realisation of this body of sculptural work, I have exhibited and installed the work in various spaces, environments and contexts. I have travelled to various countries in order to visit cities, churches and a wide range of sacred spaces that are of particular interest to my research. I have collected various artefacts that that are particularly important to my research. I have found it important to continuously explore a variety of exhibition locations for my sculptural investigations in order to generate feedback and critical discourse, such as traditional gallery spaces,

¹⁴ Bal, Mieke. *Quoting Caravaggio*. p.27

group exhibitions and site-specific locations. I have endeavoured to engage my audience both visually and verbally, whenever possible. Over the course of my entire research project, I have gathered a sufficient amount of verbal feedback from open studio visits, gallery exhibitions and formal and informal presentations of my sculptural artefacts. The feedback and criticism that I have gathered from audience of my work in the form of discussions, dialogue and conversations can be classified as non-catalogued-personal-archives. Of particular interest to my study is how these various situations for the viewer relate to specific art works throughout the case studies. The importance of this critical feedback from the audience is paramount for me to understand the contextualisation of my work.

In addition, photography has been a central part of my process of gathering information that feeds into my sculptural investigations. The ability of a photograph to communicate directly has allowed me to document various stages, explorations and has provided me with a means of experimentation at various stages. I have utilised photography like sketching or drawing. Photography has allowed me to explore the process of translating two-dimensional images into three-dimensional forms, as well as translating three-dimensional sculptural forms into two-dimensional photographic imagery. Photography has provided me with a means to investigate painterly effects and techniques, such as perspective, point of view, chiaroscuro lighting effects and teneberism.



Fig 10
Condemnation 2006



Fig 11
Beheading 2005



Fig 12
Incredulity 2006

The nature of the development of my methodology has motivated me to write the body of this thesis in chronological order. Essentially, since one investigation has led me to the next, I arrived at the second painting that I chose as my new source material, and then subsequent investigations, because of my initial experiments and explorations with my core source material, Caravaggio's painting of the *Beheading of St John the Baptist*. The subjective truths that I discovered by re-interpreting the painting using my art making practice helped to focus my awareness and interest in the next piece of source material that I became concerned with. I then delved into investigating and re-interpreting this new source material through my studio experimentation whilst building onto the insights that were unearthed during the preceding investigations. For example, one of the truths that I deduced

from experimenting with Caravaggio's painting was the effectiveness of triangulation in relation to three-dimensional spaces. Placing skeletal figures in such configurations has taught me to consider how each character relates to the other. I concentrate my definition of effectiveness on the successful compositional relationship between the figures in the group, along with the viewer, as well as the degree to which the viewer feels engaged with the overarching narrative and what is happening within the sculptural group as a whole. The realisation of the effectiveness of triangulation was reached through my own observations, as well as in the course of audience feedback.

I strive to create work that engages with the viewer on some profound level. I do not feel that I am trying to impart a didactic pathos or a specific message, but rather I strive to induce engagement and reflection within the viewer, as Caravaggio's painting did for me. I was profoundly engaged and emotionally affected by viewing and experiencing this painting in its intended environment, which enticed in me a desire to understand the devotional nature of this particular work of art. I am fascinated with the intellectual ramifications of trying to deduce meaning from this experience.

While pondering the formal characteristics of how the artist painted this composition, I was simultaneously keenly aware of my surroundings. The physical location of the painting contributed significantly to the power that this painting had over me from the first moment that I witnessed it. To this day, the painting is hung in the space that Caravaggio originally designed and created it for. It is hung in St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta, Malta, a uniquely sacred space for the Roman Catholics, where a large concentration of the faithful regularly gathered together. Caravaggio's *The Beheading of St John the Baptist* had a specific purpose in regards to how it operated as a single element of a greater whole. I was ultimately led to consider the

nature of 16th century Catholic sacred spaces in a theatrical context. I focused my attention on the many devices that are employed and incorporated within these theatres of sacred spaces. The notion of sacred spaces and the various artistic devices that are often implemented within such spaces is a line of inquiry that I have explored in detail in the second half of my case studies.

My investigations into the nature of 16th century Catholic sacred spaces were facilitated by visits to specific churches and devotional spaces of the Catholic faithful across a number of different countries. I have further experimented with the concept of space by interacting with a specific space within the present, namely the 19th century wooden and stone barn on my farm in Canada. I discuss these sites in relation to one another with regards to devotional and secular modes of artistic practice.

What began as an involuntary response to a single painting became my motivation to explore the details of this particular painting using my art making practice, in order to gain a better understanding of why and how this painting was capable of producing such an effect on me. This was the initial core to the snowball, and my desire to deduce the sources of its effectiveness became the investigation. These iterative investigations make up my methodology. Because of the nature of how my investigations came about, I feel it is relevant to present my research project in a sequential manner. The impetus of my research methodologies began with the effective power that a particular work of art had on me. This painting's innate ability to evoke a profound emotional response within me became the seed that started my growing investigations, and gave rise to a thorough, iterative line of enquiry.

A chronological presentation of the written thesis reinforces my understanding of what is meant by practice-lead research. This thesis illustrates one example of how practice lead research could be used to interact with art historical source material in order to inform studio practice.

Chapter: Negotiating Between Faith and Doubt

Throughout the process of reflection and contemplation of my research output, I have attempted to deconstruct very basic and elemental processes that I have developed throughout the realization of the sculptural artefacts as well as the textual component. I have taken this approach in order to make wider philosophical connections with this enquiry. I began this process by trying to understand a very basic, almost subconscious, aspect of my studio practice and in the process have endeavoured to grasp the fundamental idea of decision making within the studio. The decision making process encompasses the fundamental mechanism of how an artist can make choices based on faith and doubt. The concepts of faith and doubt lie at the centre of my understanding of how the individual understands and positions himself within the world around him. The path that led me to comprehend and appreciate this understanding has helped me to gain an awareness of subjectivity, responsibility, faith and doubt.

At a very basic level my method of operation in the studio is fraught with the realisation that I must make decisions in order for progress (or regression) to occur. Clearly, not every single decision that I have made has been correct or even produced a positive result. But, nevertheless, every decision has been an important part of defining the overall direction that I have taken. I have been keenly aware that the sole responsibility for choices and decisions made is mine alone. This basic decision making process lies at the heart of my understanding of how my practice operates by negotiating between *faith* and *doubt*. Ultimately, my awareness of the decision making process of navigating between faith and doubt has allowed me to gain an understanding of *self* within the world. As I understand, it is through haptic approaches to an art historical study that an artist's studio practice can

develop and inform. I have strived to gain an understanding of how and why the decisions that I have made in regards to aesthetics, themes and concepts have been important in fostering an awareness of why this research and the knowledge it has garnered is relevant and significant beyond myself.

In order to discuss individual perspective and an awareness of self within the world, I draw upon ideas revolving around an understanding of existentialism that emphasise the existence of the individual human being as a free and responsible being. Rooted in my understanding of existential thought is an awareness of how faith and doubt influence the decision making process, which in turn makes the individual accountable and responsible for choices made. This recognition of individual awareness of self and responsibility and decisions that are essentially a negotiation between faith and doubt, allows for me to discuss perspective and point of view in this context. By understanding why I have made certain decisions within the studio that are based on having either faith or doubt in the choices made, I can gain an awareness of how the decision making process helps facilitate a clarity of individual responsibility, accountability and awareness of self. This awareness is internal. It applies to the subjective self, which in turn places the responsibility for decisions made by an individual upon the individual alone, which in turn again makes the individual responsible for their own decisions. This process allows the individual to gain an understanding of their relationship to the surrounding world and to understand why they have made one choice over another, providing clarity of perspective. The philosophical underpinnings of existential thought that support my research give insight to the thought process that I have employed when operating within the studio. My decisions based on faith and doubt pertains to why and how I conceived and created my sculptural work.

This discussion of my internal subjective faith and doubt is not based on a religious belief system or creed. Instead, decisions in this context, based on faith and doubt are based on visual assessment and instinct, which come from experience.

The terms faith and doubt are metaphorically two sides of the same coin. A conviction can be described as a firm belief or opinion. Faith is a type of conviction. The term faith can be used to describe a system of religious beliefs, or a belief in God or religious doctrines. It can also be defined more generally as a firm belief, without logical proof. Basically faith can be described as having complete trust or confidence. Doubt, on the other hand, can be defined as a feeling of uncertainty, or as an undecided state of mind. It is a term that describes a feeling of hesitation and indecision, often rooted in a sense of lack of full proof or clear indication of what choice should be made.

I shall discuss how the terms faith and doubt can be applied within the context of a specific religious belief system, namely Roman Catholicism, in the sense that to have faith in a particular religion is to refer to an individual person's belief that the tenets of that particular religion are true, without having logical proof. Conversely, an individual person experiencing doubt within the context of a specific religion refers to the individual's disbelief or distrust in the doctrines, dogma and tenets of the religious belief system. The sixteenth-century art historical source material that I use throughout my research deals with visually imbuing a sense of faith in the principles of the Catholic religion through the use of various artistic mediums in order to translate the biblical narratives into both two dimensional and three dimensional re-interpretations. Throughout, this thesis discusses how faith and doubt are understood within this religious context whilst also making a

distinction between a religious application of the terms faith and doubt and a more secular existential use of the terminology.

Although the terms faith and doubt have often been used within the context of describing an individual's relationship with a religion, this is not the sole use or application of these terms. I understand and recognize the long history of association between the terms faith and doubt and their widespread use within a religious context. However I hope to show how faith and doubt can be understood and utilized in a more secular manner by looking at their wider philosophical and theoretical contextualization and application. I shall explore this wider contextualization and specifically how I have used these terms to describe an aspect of my haptic methodology. This aspect relates to the subconscious decision-making that occurs in the studio that is based on type of visual intuition and instinct that I will argue is an internal/personal type of faith that can lead to an awareness of subjective truths that help steer and guide the choices that are made throughout my art-making practice. Within this chapter on negotiating between faith and doubt I shall try to unfold their meaning in relation to my art-making practice, specifically within the decision-making processes associated with the realization of sculptural artefact. By discussing the terms faith and doubt, as I have understood them in a secular/personal context, I hope to highlight the fluidity and mutability of these two opposing terms that were constantly switching places and reversing positions as my research progressed. As opposed to understanding faith in relation to religion, which is based on a canonical core principle of the individual's belief in the tenets of the specific religion, my understanding of faith and doubt in a personal/secular context is ever changing. Where once I had faith that the decisions I was making in relation to an aspect of my sculptural practice were correct, over time what I once had faith in could change to doubt as my practice-led research

progressed. The same dynamic is applied in reverse in that where once I doubted particular choices, tangents or options that are ever present throughout the decision-making process of studio practice, I, over time, could begin to have faith in these decisions.

This mutability and unstable positioning of faith and doubt in a personal secular context is analogous to the creation of mobile unstable perspective that is intrinsic in sculpture, as opposed to the fixed perspective that is innate within a two dimensional image.

Although my use of the terms faith and doubt in a secular context primarily deal with a subjective understanding and definition, I feel it prudent to explore how these terms are used out with a personal context and as such I shall look at how these terms are used within various contexts, including science/medicine & political discourse, in order to show their usage out with a strictly religious contextualization. I would like to explore the use of the terms faith and doubt in a wider contextual reading than solely within a framework because it will help provide precedent and understanding of how these terms are used throughout various fields of study and discourse that do not refer to a religious contextualization. I hope to explore this wider theoretical and philosophical application of the terms faith and doubt because it shall help to show examples of how and why these terms are felt to be relevant and applicable to the various disciplines in which they are utilized.

Medicine and the wider field of science is understood to be a systematic way in which knowledge is gathered through testable explanations and descriptions regarding how various aspects of the universe function and operate. Scientific knowledge is both logical and rational and it came to

fruition in the age of the Enlightenment during the 17th and 18th centuries. Modern western medicine is based on the principles of logic, testable explanations and scientific rationale. As Dr Joel M Geiderman states in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*: 'Today we speak of evidence-based medicine and have developed a hierarchical order to the weight of the evidence that supports our "beliefs"'.¹⁵ This hierarchical order of assessing the evidence within western medicine and by extension science in general is further expanded upon: 'Prospective randomized trials hold greater weight than retrospective studies, and retrospective studies are more reliable than consensus opinions. Random observation is unreliable, and instinct is extinct'.¹⁶ However, Dr Geiderman also gives examples of experience based observational assessments and explanations: 'didn't Gottlieb empirically observe an increased number of immune-suppressed men with Kaposi sarcoma and go on to describe AIDS? And didn't Heimlich have faith that a thrust to the upper epigastrium could successfully dislodge a foreign body in the trachea?'¹⁷ How are we to deal with this paradox? How can medicine be simultaneously grounded in evidence-based testable experimentation as well as empirical based observations? As Geiderman explains: 'Faith and doubt are two sides of the same coin. Faith is only possible when there is doubt. If something were truly known, without question, then believing it would not be an act of faith but rather an act of knowing. Faith is knowing in your heart what the mind cannot know. And if something could truly be proved wrong or non-existent, doubt would not be part of the question. One would know that the held belief is wrong rather than doubt it. Doubt is the triumph of reason over emotion.'¹⁸ One can understand the discontinuity and disjointedness that occurs when we hear or read the terms faith and doubt with respect to a scientific discipline that is founded in logic & reason such as

¹⁵ Geiderman, Joel. *Journal of American Medical Association: Faith and Doubt*. p.1661

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 1661

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 1661

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 1661

medicine. However, incoherence does not negate the two terms from its relevance and its use within such contexts: it simply makes us re-evaluate both the terminology and its application.

Dr Geiderman goes on to give an example of the contradictory duality that exists within the medical discipline in relation to using the terms faith and doubt within a scientific context by recounting a story that he was involved in within the hospital environment. Dr Giederman explains that issues were raised by the paediatric neurologist Dr Smith at a hospital in which a child with unspecified head injuries did not receive the osmotic diuretic, mannitol. Dr Smith explained that: 'all children with head trauma should receive this osmotic diuretic'.¹⁹ Dr Giederman explains that he was a bit surprised by such a broad sweeping assessment, as he states: 'Some neurosurgeons I knew reserved mannitol for patients with signs of imminent brain-stem herniation. Was this his opinion? Was this an article of faith or was there literature to back it up?'²⁰ At Dr Giederman's request a task force was set up to investigate the research and information available to address these questions. This task force included medical practitioners from various fields (Neurology, Paediatrics, Emergency physician) as well as Dr Giederman & Dr Smith. Upon the first meeting of the task force a 'supposedly authoritative article and several review articles were distributed'.²¹ The debate that ensued delivered lots of beliefs, impassioned opinions and an abundance of arguments, but no consensus. The task force set out more concrete & rigorous guidelines regarding the gathering and reviewing of available information and evidence that was available and review it. Upon meeting for a second time the task force were informed that the supposedly authoritative article was weak. 'The poor methodological quality appeared in

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 1661

²⁰ Ibid. p. 1661

²¹ Ibid. p. 1662

part to reflect the absence in the literature of randomized controlled trials'.²² Based on the lack of evidence to support any conclusive protocol in relation to the administering of mannitol to all paediatric head injuries, the task force suggested that there were grounds to initiate a countrywide clinical study on the subject. 'Finally the minutes, that were recorded by Dr Smith, conclude with this rather astonishing statement, set in bold type: "the group reached consensus that even if further investigation fails to disclose a strong evidence basis, a guideline for mannitol use in paediatric head trauma should still be developed in an effort to reduce variation in care."²³

Dr Giederman continues to explain that a few days after the task force had concluded, as he was about to leave work, he was informed of a paediatric arrest in the emergency department. Dr Giederman went to the emergency department to see if he could help. 'When I got there, I immediately recognized one of the "the rabbis" as the father of the child, a 12-year-old for whom I had provided care on dozens of occasions. I sized up the situation and then looked into the kind blue eyes of the father. "He's dead," he told me. "This time we couldn't save him". As I reached to comfort him, the man stopped me and rather thanked me for all the care we had provided his son over the years.'²⁴ Dr Giederman goes on to explain that the child had had a catalogue of respiratory issues throughout his short life and had been regularly brought into the emergency department where he had been seen by various physicians, including Dr Giederman himself. He also explains that he was not able to attend the funeral of the young boy, but wished that he had.

²² Ibid. p. 1662

²³ Ibid. p. 1662

²⁴ Ibid. p. 1662

Shortly after the task force that was set up to investigate the evidence to support the administration of mannitol to all paediatric head trauma cases met for its final time. 'What was brought forth by Dr Smith, the "true believer" of the group, was a proposal that began with the preamble that no randomized controlled trial existed to support or refute the value of mannitol in adults or children with head trauma. However because of several "physiological truths", which were enumerated, a protocol for administering mannitol in certain circumstances was proposed. (This despite the three meetings and an exhaustive review of the literature that failed to support this approach.) I was, to say the least, somewhat disappointed over my attempt at shedding scientific light on this subject.'²⁵ Upon leaving the meeting Dr Giederman and Dr Smith found themselves in the same room and, knowing that Dr Smith had dealt with the young boy that had recently died, Dr Geiderman asked Dr Smith if he had attended the funeral. Dr Geiderman explains what happened next:

"Oh yes, I was there" he replied.

"I heard it was incredibly moving, I couldn't be there."

"You know", he said, looking at me intensely, "I couldn't figure it out. The father was going on about what a gift God had given this family. I mean, I don't get it. I used to watch this family when they were in and out of the hospital with this boy, and he was just suffering, and they kept talking about God. I mean, in what kind of God can people possibly believe?"

I just stared at him. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. When it came to a therapeutic modality, the efficacy of which could not be proved or disproved, he absolutely and firmly believed in one, despite the fact that there was no evidence to support it. Yet when it came to a subject that could

²⁵ Ibid. p.1662

not be proved one way or the other – namely, the existence of God – he required proof, or so it seemed to me.²⁶

Dr Giederman concludes by explaining that he walked away and was consumed by his thoughts: 'To this day I have never confronted this physician with these issues. For when it comes to faith and doubt, it is clear that there is little one can do or say to change what dwells in another person's mind or heart.'²⁷

Dr Giederman's story provides an example of the terms faith and doubt being used within the context of science/medicine and they are indeed used out with a strictly religious contextualization. The story provides an insight into a discipline that is based on deductive methodologies and logical systematic ways in which knowledge is gathered through testable explanations and descriptions. However, Dr Giederman's story touches upon an aspect of medicinal practice that does indeed involve instinct and intuition, those often maligned terms that seem to have been squeezed out of the official dictum of medical practice.

Another non-religious context in which the terms faith and doubt are often used is within political discourse and dialogue. Politicians and those campaigning on their behalf often use terms such as *faith* to describe the trust and belief that they hope the voting electorate will show towards them. During any campaign proceedings politicians are actively trying to solicit a type of faith from within the voting electorate in hopes that they will believe in both what the politician says he/she will do as well as their overall platform and agenda. A politician's success is ultimately determined at the ballot box and is in direct relation to how convincing and successful they are

²⁶ Ibid. p. 1662

¹³ Ibid. p. 1662

during the campaign and run up to the voting process. A politician is able to impart a sense of conviction through rhetoric and oration. The politician is ultimately asking the electorate to show a sign of faith in what they are proposing and campaigning for, by asking the electorate to believe in what the politicians are proposing to be right and just and ultimately to show a sign of faith at the ballot box by voting for the politician that will be able to deliver on the platform from which they campaign. Once elected, politicians strive to garner a strong sense of faith amongst those that surround and follow them. The creation of a resilient sense of faith amongst those that follow and surround politicians is very evident when one looks at certain aspects of the presidency of the United States of America during the office of the 43rd presidency held by George W Bush. Domestic policy advisor Bruce Bartlett describes an aspect of faith that the George W. Bush administration strived to instil in the voting electorate when he states: 'The whole thing about faith is to believe things for which there is no empirical evidence'. George W Bush's choices and decisions have been described as being influenced to a large extent by his "instincts" and "gut feelings", to which one opponent, Democratic congressman Joe Bidden, is reported to have commented: 'Mr President, your instincts aren't good enough'. Bush's reliance on his instincts and intuition when faced with choices is often said to have been a primary factor in regards to the decisions that he made. When asked for further explanations as to why certain decisions were made and not others, Bush replied: 'that he relied on his gut or his instinct to help guide the ship of state'.²⁸The *New York Times* political affairs writer Ron Suskind describes the duality of faith that existed within George W Bush's presidency in regards to both his own personal conviction and belief within the Christian faith as well as the faith that he demanded in those that surrounded him. Suskind goes on to explain that: 'all of this – the "gut" and

²⁸ Suskind, Ron. *The New York Times: Without a Doubt*. p.2

“instincts”, the certainty and religiosity – connects to a single word, “faith”, and faith asserts its hold ever more on debates in this country and abroad. That deep Christian faith illuminated the personal journey of George W Bush is common knowledge. But faith has also shaped his presidency in profound non-religious ways. The president has demanded unquestioning faith from his followers, his staff, his senior aides and his kindred in the Republican Party. Once he makes a decision – often swiftly, based on a creed or moral position – he expects complete faith in its rightness.²⁹

It is evident that within a public sphere, such as politics and public governance, the solicitation of the electorate’s belief and trust is an ever-present aspect of this vocation. In a sense someone seeking to successfully become elected will always need to appear to be trustworthy and instil a sense of conviction and hope in what they are proposing and their ability to realize their proposed ideas.

I have wanted to show examples of how the terms faith and doubt are used within disciplines and fields of knowledge that are not commonly associated with utilizing such terminology in order to describe an aspect of methodology and function. I hope to achieve this by exploring how these terms function within fields of study and knowledge out with a religious context. In doing so, qualifying the use of the terms faith & doubt within a secular context assists in showing precedent in regards to how and why these terms are appropriate and applicable when describing a non-religious secular understanding of conviction and disbelief.

Within my studio practice instinct and intuition are ever present and a key aspect of my decision-making process. I have chosen to use words that are

²⁹ Suskind, Ron. *The New York Times: Without a Doubt*. p. 2

commonly, but not exclusively, used within a religious context to describe a non-religiously motivated aspect of my art making practice. Faith and doubt are terms that describe a belief, or alternatively a disbelief, that is not grounded in a qualifiable or quantifiable explanation. I have chosen to use the words faith and doubt to help describe the non-quantifiable aspects of decision making that occur within my art-making practice. These decisions are largely based on instinct, visual and spatial sensitivity, intuition and perception. I recognize that there are many choices & decisions that are primarily informed by the pragmatic aspects of the choices that are available and the perceived/desired outcome at any given time, but there are also decisions that are solely based on what *feels right* at the moment of decision. This is what I refer to as having faith in choices that I have made within my studio practice and which help provide me with what I refer to as subjective truths. These truths are fluid and interchangeable which allows for positions to be mutable and ultimately subjective, in the sense that they can alter over time and space. Faith and doubt can change positions within my studio practice and are constantly at play over the course of time and space. The change that occurs in relation to decisions that I once had faith in which over the course of time could transform into doubt allows me to reflect on the possible rationale behind the change of *heart*. This ultimately allows me to gain some understanding and awareness of why I had made certain choices and not others, and allows me to reflect on the motivation for such changes between faith and doubt.

Although the terms faith and doubt are often associated with a religious belief system, I would like to make explicitly clear that my research has not been motivated with the intent of promoting any particular religious belief system. It is prudent though to discuss how the terms faith and doubt are understood in relation to the Catholic Religion, especially within the

particular period of history corresponding to the Roman Catholic Church's use of visual arts to propagate its message and instil its particular beliefs and doctrine.

Religious faith is based on a belief in a particular religious dogma and doctrine. The 16th century saw an escalation and reinvigoration in the employment of artistic practice by the Catholic Church in order to instil this sense of faith. The church encouraged and commissioned artists to visualise and realise new ways of depicting and translating biblical narratives to the viewer. These new ways of depicting biblical narratives were ultimately designed to strengthen religious conviction and faith within the viewer. Caravaggio's paintings are an example of this new way of depicting biblical narratives.

Throughout this thesis, I refer to faith and doubt in two different frameworks. Firstly, I allude to an understanding of faith and doubt that deals with how these two terms are applied to my own internal decision making process within the studio. My awareness of this internal negotiating between faith and doubt, as it applies to aesthetic, thematic and conceptual choices, has allowed me to comprehend a philosophical awareness and understanding of perspective and point of view. Secondly, I discuss faith and doubt pertaining to the Catholic religious belief system, specifically how 16th and 17th century artists conveyed ideas of faith within the Catholic religion. Understanding faith and doubt in this external sense, as it applies to a religious belief system, provides context to the subject matter of the source material that I draw upon. An understanding of how visual arts were utilised by the Catholic church in the 16th and 17th centuries, as well as how they are used within a present day contextualisation, enables me to consider how certain works of art can be deemed devotional, as opposed to secular.

To summarise, faith is a conviction that stresses a firm belief or opinion that does not depend on logical proof to qualify its worth and value. Doubt in its most basic mode is a feeling of disbelief and uncertainty.

In my attempts to deconstruct my decision making processes, leading to the root of why I have faith in certain choices and doubt in others, I have endeavoured to appreciate an idea of truth as it applies to the subjective individual. This enquiry has led me to the poetic philosophical writings of the 19th century Danish Philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855). These writings facilitate the outline of the critical framework of my research project. I was initially drawn towards Kierkegaard because of his imaginative and creative writing style and his use of artistic approaches to express his opinion and outlook.

Kierkegaard's writing style favours subjective dialectics over theoretical rhetoric. Kierkegaard's approach to dialectical discourse is executed by his many uses of different pseudonyms in order to facilitate and explore various points of view and perspectives. 'These pseudonymous writings often took positions that were later explained by Kierkegaard himself as being contrary to his personal belief. He did this in order to expose the fallacy of these viewpoints.'³⁰ Kierkegaard takes a poetic and imaginative approach in the use of pseudonyms in order to explore different viewpoints. The form of Kierkegaard's writings and his use of differing viewpoints are harmonious with the idea of expression through narrative. By creating various, often opposing, viewpoints that are embodied within different characters, Kierkegaard creates scenarios that illustrate particular opposing perspectives and opinions. Differing beliefs can then be investigated and

³⁰ Johnson, Daniel. *On Truth As Subjectivity In Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/johnson-truth.shtml>

ultimately negated or confirmed throughout the dialectical discourse. This manner of internally constructing distinct viewpoints allows for exploration of different points of view, and therefore any fallacies within a particular argument can be exposed.

Kierkegaard's philosophical writings address how the individual lives their life, concentrating on tangible human reality above abstract thinking, whilst emphasising the significance of personal choice and obligation. Kierkegaard 'was an Existentialist, although that description was applied to his thought posthumously. Existentialism can best be described as a mood within philosophy that emphasizes the concrete and particular existence of man in the world.'³¹

Because of their direct relevance to my practice-led research, I have concentrated particularly on gaining an understanding of Kierkegaard's ideas about truth as subjectivity through his work entitled *Concluding Postscript To Philosophical Fragments. A Mimetical-Pathetical-Dialectical Compilation, An Existential Contribution*, written under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus and edited by Soren Kierkegaard, published on February 28th, 1846. This piece, along with his subsequent publication, is one of three works that Kierkegaard penned under the pseudonym of the self-proclaimed humourist. I have explored how Kierkegaard's notion of truth as subjectivity might be applied my artistic practice. Referring to Kierkegaard has helped me to explore the idea of perspective and to understand the idea of a single point of view. The Danish philosopher's argument that 'the individual is solely responsible for giving one's own life meaning and living that life passionately and sincerely'³² carries insight into the ways in which I have understood the

³¹ Johnson, Daniel. *On Truth As Subjectivity In Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/johnson-truth.shtml>

³² Watts, Michael. *Kierkegaard* p.4-6

basic decision-making mechanics of my studio practice. In particular, exploring the writings of Kierkegaard has helped me garner an awareness of how negotiating between faith and doubt can have an effect on the decision making process within the studio. A philosophical standpoint stresses the individual's sole responsibility for actions taken and for the subsequent consequences, both negative and positive. This theoretical standpoint, as it applies to my research project, ultimately embodies the methods that I have been exercising through my sculptural art making practice. It is this understanding of the fundamental decision making process that is rooted in both faith and doubt, conviction and disbelief, that helps lay the foundation for my understanding of truth, as applied to subjectivity. Primarily, I have found it necessary to gain an understanding of Kierkegaard's discussion and understanding of truth. In elemental terms, the idea of truth can be looked at as both objective and subjective in nature, ' a sort of split personality. The term 'objective' signifies the dispassionate and theoretical knowledge that one can attain about the world. To be objective is to employ empirical, rational, and scientific methods of inquiry to the topic of discussion. The term 'subjective' signifies the personal, passionate, and practical approach to knowledge.'³³ I have found that it is the idea of the individual's passionate and practical approach towards inward-looking subjective truth that is vital to understanding how and why I have made certain choices within my studio practice that are based on visual assessment and reflection. Such choices and decision are made through the inward looking reflection and contemplation of subjectivity, related to having faith or doubt in each case. Ultimately, any written explanation of why certain choices were made, based on an internal compass negotiating between faith and doubt, tends get lost in translation to some degree. This is because the nature of how I develop

³³ Johnson, Daniel. *On Truth As Subjectivity In Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/johnson-truth.shtml>

sculpture within my studio environment is based on visual characteristics, physical appearance and physiognomy of the work, not on my ability to adhere to any particular aesthetic agenda, which could be more easily transferred into text. At best, I hope to outline the schema and reflective assessment of how I have carried out my research and why a critical assessment of this research is important. In the process of my research, I have found myself rallying against decision-making processes that are based on objective approaches that are based on empirical, rational or scientific knowledge. Instead, I have found solace in understanding that my own decision-making process is reliant on a personal and passionate response that depends on an inward looking subjective approach to knowledge and understanding. 'To objective reflection, truth becomes something objective, an object, and the point is to disregard the subject. To subjective reflection, truth becomes appropriation, inwardness, subjectivity, and the point is to immerse oneself, existing, in subjectivity.'³⁴ Immersing myself in analytically subjective reflections allows for me to develop a single point of view and individual perspective. Choices made in relation to aesthetics of a sculpture are reached through internal dialogue and negotiation. This does not imply that all work should be made in a cave, never to be shown to others until the artist feels it is complete, but rather to emphasize that the choices an artist makes, no matter how they are influenced by others, are in the end realised and implemented by the artist alone. The individual must take responsibility for the choices made, and through reflective analysis, such choices situate the individual in relation to their surrounding environment. Such concepts deal with an aspect of art production that is ultimately incommunicable in words or text. As an artist therefore, I cannot communicate why I have faith in certain decisions based on the creation of a work of art and why I have doubts in others. At its most basic level, the

³⁴ Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Essential Kierkegaard: Unscientific Postscript*. p.200-201

manner in which I have operated within the studio is ultimately based on a visual assessment and evaluation, rather than a textual one. Textual resources and information have been key in my historiographical research, along with the referenced artists and their work that I taken as source material. Nonetheless, the methods that I have employed within the studio whilst creating the sculptures has been based on visual assessment and evaluation. Seventeenth century art historian, Giovanni Arpino, asserts that '... it is impossible, perhaps even blasphemous, to comment upon a work of art. Only the eyes and a certain mental approach can give us a correct position with regard to a canvas.'³⁵

Visual and textual languages are two different and dissimilar ways of communicating. Attempts to translate visuals through textual means and vice versa maintain an inherent struggle. The creation and evaluation of my sculptural body of work has relied on an awareness of visual and spatial instincts and evaluations that occur on an almost subconscious level within the studio.

I am not arguing that assessment and critique should not be conducted regarding works of art, rather I am highlighting the fundamental difference between visual and textual modes of expression in relation to conception this sculptural body of work. For this reason, when I discuss having faith or doubt in certain choices that I have made within the studio environment, whilst creating my sculptural work, these decisions are based on internal subjective visual evaluations that I have acted upon to guide my artistic creations. In this textual thesis, I shall strive to contextualise the resulting sculptural exegeses that are a direct result of decisions that I have made in the studio. Included in this exegesis is an evaluation of audience interaction

³⁵ Arpino, Giovanni. *Rembrandt*. p.7

and critical feedback. The textual assessment follows the creation of the sculptures.

I have come to realize that the decision-making processes within my studio practice formed how I interacted with and related to the subject matter. I have also drawn upon certain biblical text that relates to my source material. Specifically, I refer to the Good New Translation: Catholic Edition. I have selected this specific translation of the Holy Bible because I am familiar with this version's biblical stories and narratives. This translation is most commonly used in Catholic Churches in the West. The vernacular used in this translation is most useful to augment the primary source material, namely 16th century paintings and sculptures of reinterpretations of biblical narratives. In researching the history of biblical translations over the centuries from oral traditions to written texts and vernacular translations, I became very aware of the continued re-evaluation and contextualisation that has occurred in the process of translation from Hebrew to Aramaic to Greek. This history of continuous biblical re-translation, which continues to this day, is an attempt to communicate the messages of the original traditions in a manner and language that is most commonly used and familiar to the masses. Ultimately, my reasons for using this specific translation are rooted in its widespread acceptance and usage within present day Catholicism, as well as my own familiarity with this text and stories contained within.

Throughout the Case Studies Chapters, I contextualise my sculptural work by evaluating it in relation to the work a number of other contemporary artists. In doing so, I strive to give a reflective account meant to situate my work in contemporary culture, theory and practice. The artists that I have chosen to help position my practice include Jake and Dinos Chapman, Alison Watt and Paul Carter. Through this contemporary peer contextualization, I

hope to illuminate common themes that are prevalent within not only my practice, but also the wider sculptural community. The common themes that I endeavour to shed light upon deal primarily with how visual artists understand and interact with the relationship that exists between the present and the past, specifically the Baroque period. Through discussion and evaluation of my sculptural work compared to the work of other contemporary artists who use source material drawn from the Baroque period as well, I attempt to make explicit the entangled connection that exists between an understanding of both past and present.

The pursuit of irony or creating sculptural works that are consciously created with the intent of being ironic has not been a central motivating factor for me in the conception and realization of the sculptural output associated with my research. I do, however recognize to varying degrees the use of irony within some of the works of art by the contemporary artists that I look at throughout my case studies. These artists have helped me situate my practice/research within a contemporary cultural context and by exploring particular works of art, with an emphasis on exploring the differing ways in which irony is used by each of the artists, I hope to shed light on the implications this has on my own research.

Firstly I shall explore a broad understanding of the term *irony*. The word irony can be summated in general terms as the expression of meaning using language that normally expresses the opposite and is synonymous with terms such as satire, sarcasm, dryness, mockery, and humour. The use of irony is not exclusive to literature or restricted to rhetoric but can be seen in various mediums within the visual arts. One perspective involving irony and visual arts is that all modern art is ironic to some degree because the audience/viewer is compelled to compare modern art to previous works,

which creates a dialectical discourse between the two. Although this does not conform exactly to the broader definition of irony it does however touch upon a widely used strategy or tactic utilized by modern artists. This tactic is prevalent in a wide range of modern artistic disciplines, as can be seen in sample-based music production that relies on using existing samples of recorded sound (music, noise, spoken word, etc.) and in the art historical regurgitations of the Chapman Bros and their reliance on pillaging the work of the nineteenth-century Spaniard, Francisco de Goya. The works of art created by the contemporary artists I discuss throughout the case studies, namely Alison Watt, Paul Carter and the Chapman Bros, all use some form of irony within their artistic practice although to varying degrees and uses.

I shall investigate how Paul Carter uses a sense of irony by looking at his work entitled *Awaiting Further Instructions, Mount Sinai*. 1999.



Fig. 13
Paul Carter. *Awaiting Further Instructions, Mount Sinai*. 1999
Photograph. Private Collection

Carter's work consists of a colour photograph and title. The image depicts what I assume to be the artist standing at top of Mount Sinai in Egypt.

Mount Sinai is described in the Bible, particularly in the books of the Old Testament. It is the supposed location whereby Moses conversed with God and was instructed by God that all should live a life in adherence to the laws given to him, which became commonly known as the Ten Commandments. The Old Testament narrative describes how Moses was then instructed to go down from atop Mount Sinai and to impart these laws upon the people of Israel. Carter's photograph explores the idea of this particular sight/location and its use within the Old Testament narrative as a locale whereby humankind is purported to have communicated with God. Carter's work interacts and engages this narrative and its meaning by inserting himself into the physical space and sight of this supposed miracle, although separated by over 2,500 years from when Moses is said to have spoken with God atop of Mount Sinai. The title of Carter's work is integral and central to the effect of irony within this work of art. The title draws the past into the present by engaging with the events that are claimed to have taken place in the distant past at a specific location and drawing them into the present by capturing an image of the artist occupying a physical presence at the same location, only separated by time. Central to much of Carter's work is the exploration of the idea of spirituality and how we might reach out, engage and contact *other* spiritual beings and dimensions. Carter's practice involves predominantly DIY aesthetics to achieve the look' and finish of much of his art works. This lo-fi look and feel of much of Carter's work is accomplished by using a large degree of readymade and found objects within his art-making practice.

There is a humble almost child-like honesty about his approach to such grand ontological questions and I feel this adds gravitas and effect to his art. This approach could also be said to be ironic in the way it attempts to explore such ambitious questions in such a lo-fi manner. I feel Carter's use

of irony is evident and effective without being didactic or obvious. It poses questions through the use of ironic juxtapositions of time and place, language and imagery, materials and spirituality. The degree to which Carter's work relies on irony is not static and fixed, but rather is particular to each work of art, but one could argue that there is a commonality amongst his works of art that relies on establishing a juxtaposition of materials/processes and ontological queries.

Alison Watt's practice involves painting and the creation of original two-dimensional imagery. Watt's latest exhibition was entitled *Hiding in Full View* and was held in 2012 at the Ingelby Gallery in Edinburgh. The exhibition featured paintings by Alison Watt and poetry by Don Paterson. Art writer and critic Robert Clark describes Watt's work from this exhibition in his review: 'Appropriately titled *Hiding In Full View*, Alison Watt's recent paintings focus on swathes of lyrically convoluted fabrics that appear to screen unseen depths of melancholic reverie. As seen in previous prestigious shows, Watt is known for monumentalizing fabric in the Renaissance style, depicting the folds and flow of clothing in such a way as to externalize the turmoil of internal passion. In full-scale view, as here, her images can be seen as a subtle amplification of unstated intimacies.'³⁶ Clark describes the use of cloth and fabric, which has been the principle subject matter in relation to Watt's art-making practice for over a decade. Clark's description of Watt's painting in her recent exhibition touches upon the use of irony when he employs the phrase: 'depicting the folds and flow of clothing in such a way as to externalize the turmoil of internal passion'.³⁷ Clark describes the way in which she uses painted depictions of folded fabric to address or externalise the internal turmoil of passion. There is a play between the internal and

³⁶ Clark, Robert. *This Week's Exhibitions: Alison Watt*.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/nov/05/this-weeks-new-exhibitions>

³⁷ Ibid.

external, inside and outside, which Clark is attempting to address. Watt's painting help: 'remind us that fluidity and complexity, excess and redundancy, contradiction and enigma are everywhere'.³⁸



Fig 14
Alison Watt. *Fount*. 2011
Oil on canvas, 61 x 122cm
Courtesy of Ingelby Gallery (Edinburgh)

Although the scale and size of the painting in this most recent exhibition is much smaller than her previous exhibitions, such as *Phantom*, 2008 held within the National Gallery in London, the subject matter is similar. From a distance Watt's paintings appear to be close up images of white fabric contorted and twisted in various shapes, swathes and folds. However, as one approaches closer to the canvas, the perspective and straightforwardness of what the viewer thinks they are seeing vanishes. Once the viewer is up close and personal with these paintings, the eye is able to discern brush strokes, and subtle colour differentiation that was not immediately apparent from a distance. As writer Gen Doy explains: 'Watt's aim is to undermine the hierarchy of *genres* of painting and in doing so she turns drapery into what is almost a living mass'.³⁹ Watt's ability to undermine the hierarchy of

³⁸ Calvocoressi, Richard. *Shift: New Works by Alison Watt*. p. 10

³⁹ Goy, Gen. *Drapery*. P. 70

genres of painting is facilitated by her use of iconic visual symbols and signs within her paintings. Her paintings incorporate extremely close up images of what initially appears to be cloth or folded drapery. The use of painted depictions of drapery is abundant and ever present in the paintings by artists such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (b.1780 d.1867) & Francisco de Zurbaran (b.1589 d.1664), that Watt has described as being influential and significant as both source material and research in relation to her art-making practice. Watt uses a similar language of symbols and signs to that of the Old Masters, which she readily acknowledges as being significant. Although she uses a similar language she employs this visual dialect in order to destabilize the viewer's understanding of genre painting and initiates a reassessment of view, perspective and understanding the longer the viewer spends looking and negotiating her paintings. In this sense one could argue that Watt is using a subtle form of irony and or deception within her art.

In this sense her work could be viewed as ironic, in the way in which its (painting) appearance shifts as the viewer's perspective changes in relation to the painting. From a distance it appears to be paintings of close imagery of folded white fabric, but viewed close up the image appears much more abstract and unstable to the viewer. This form of visual irony is subtle and relies on the gaze of the viewer. As opposed to Paul Carter's work, which uses a form of irony that is more literal and direct in his use of photographic imagery and text, Watt relies on the viewer negotiating the space between themselves and the painting in order to evoke readings and tendencies within her paintings. Watt's use of irony within her paintings is subtle and understated and requires the viewer to spend time with her paintings...looking, gazing and reflecting.

The most obvious use of irony found amongst the contemporary artists that I look at throughout my case studies is found within the sculptures and two-dimensional work of the Chapman Brothers. The Chapman Brothers' artwork is laden with irony and saturated with sardonic quips. From their work *Great Deeds Against the Dead*, 1994 in which they have substituted rotting clown faces in place of decapitated Spanish soldiers found in their re-interpretations of Goya's etchings, to their genetically modified childlike mannequins entitled *Fuck Face*, 1994 whereby the children's noses and mouths have been replaced with penises and anuses: 'best known for sculptures that multiply, fuse and rearrange the bodies of sneaker wearing children, they have a particular habit of adding or subtracting sex organs.'⁴⁰



Fig 15
Chapman Bros. *Fuck Face*, 1994
Fiberglass, resin, paint, fabric, wig and trainers
103 x 56 x 25cm
Private Collection

⁴⁰ Swartz, Mark. *Disasters of War*. P.13

The Chapman Brothers are well versed in the language and humour that is based on opposites and are often quoted in such a manner to the discontent of journalists and art critics. The Chapman Bros strategy of using language steeped in irony is evident in many of the interviews, as noted by art writer Stuart Jefferies reflects on remarks on an interview he had with Dinos Chapman: 'I don't think artists can do anything. An artist can only add shit to shit. Dinos once said, "Our art is potty-training for adults." He got that about right.' The Chapman Brothers are trying to help grown-ups be more civilized? "We're not here to help," he [Dinos Chapman] giggles. "We certainly don't care about moral instruction. Our interest in morality is not in being moralists, but in how morality works as a functional pacifier."⁴¹ It is apparent even from this short between journalist Stuart Jefferies and Dinos Chapman that irony transcends to both the art that they produce as well as how they speak about the work and their overall approach to their art-making practice.



Fig. 16
Jake & Dinos Chapman, *Great Deeds Against the Dead*, 1994
Mixed Media 277 x 244 x 152.5cm.
Courtesy of White Cube (London).

⁴¹ Jefferies, Stuart. *How the Chapman Brothers became the brothers grim.*
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2010/aug/03/jake-dinos-chapman-childrens-art>

I shall look at how irony is used within the Chapman Bros sculptural work entitled *Great Deeds Against the Dead*, 1994 and explore the use of irony as it relates to materials and processes within this particular work of art. The Chapman Bros take their starting point from the nineteenth-century Spaniard Francisco de Goya's series of etchings that depict the horrors and atrocities carried out as a result of the war between French and Spanish forces during the 19th century. Goya's prints show humans engaged within an array of horrific acts against fellow human beings. The Chapman Brothers use one particular Goya print as their starting point for their sculpture. This particular print comes from an etching entitled *The Disaster of War, Grande hazana! Con Meutros! Great Deeds Against the Dead*. 1810 (fig 58). The etching portrays three mutilated and decapitated human corpses that are hung, skewered and strung up on a tree. The Chapman Bros, created an ironic sculptural re-interpretation of Goya's two-dimensional image using highly plasticised storefront mannequins, faux grass and wigs. The extremely synthetic appearance of the mannequins and the fake foliage contribute to a sense of detachment between the viewer and the sculpture. Although Goya's etchings are monochromatic and two-dimensional, they are vivid and graphic in their depiction of the cruelties and carnage that is a result of war, whereas the Chapman Bros' polychromatic three-dimensional sculpture on the same subject matter seems distanced and un-relatable in relation to the viewer. The Chapman Bros' sculpture ironically nullifies the effect that Goya's etching has. In this sense the Chapman Bros' work uses methods and material to address the art historical subject matter in an ironic manner.

I understand and appreciate the tactic that the Chapman Bros take within their art-making practice but also find that their use of irony and its application to everything that they create, coupled with the hyper

craftsmanship and highly fabricated plasticised look and feel of their sculptural work is to such a high degree of detail that I feel it is sometimes hard to get beyond the aesthetics of their work and reflect on some of the conceptual underpinnings. I feel that irony overpowers and overshadows a lot of the Chapman Bros' work and in doing so does not allow the viewer to reflect or ever get beyond the ironic *punch line*.

What are the implications on my art-making practice of looking at contemporary artists that use irony within their work? By looking at how Watt, Carter and the Chapman Bros all use irony in different, unique ways, it has allowed me to explore the effect and consequence of using a language of opposites and the paradoxes that it can create. As I have previously stated, I did not select the contemporary artists that I look at during my case studies based on their use of irony within their art-making practice. This is an aspect or commonality amongst their individual practices that I recognized and appreciated after having selected them for other reasons of relevance which I discuss in more detail during the individual case studies. Having sequentially arrived at this point of recognizing the use of irony within the art-making practices of the contemporary artists after I had completed the making of the entirety of sculptural work related to my research, this allows me to discuss the ways in which my work could be interpreted as ironic or how my work might be read within the paradox of a double meaning. But from the point of conception and intent, in regards to when I was making my sculptural work, I never attempted to imbue my work with a sense of irony. That being said, it is possible to reflect on aspects of my work that suggest a paradox, which speaks in a language of opposites. The most obvious aspect would be in the use of skeleton figures acting out narratives. If one reads the skeleton figures as representing the dead, there becomes a paradox of the dead living. My work could be

interpreted as dead human skeleton figures acting out the deeds of living human beings. The image of the human skeleton figure has been used for centuries within various different cultures and with an abundance of different readings and meanings. I discuss in more detail the particular uses and areas of relevance in relation to my research within Chapter: Refining the Sculptural Vernacular. However the use of the skeleton to suggest the macabre and the living dead within contemporary culture is commonly used within film, print imagery and text based mediums. This can be seen in acute detail by strolling through the horror section at a video store or costume stores around Halloween time. Skeletons have been used within contemporary culture to depict a kitsch-esque reading of the dead living.

Through the incorporation of contemporary artists that use varying degrees of irony within their practice in relation to my thesis, I have been able to reflect on ways in which my work could possibly be read through the lens of irony and satire. This does not change the reasons, rationale or impetus of why I choose to use the skeleton figures, which are rooted in a pragmatic solution to a problem, namely arriving at a solution that was both effective and practical in order to address the gestures, poses and postures of individual characters and figures found in the art historical source material that I was researching. However it does allow me to reflect and think about the implications of how my work might be read in this manner. Although I have clearly stated the reasons and rationale for how and why I arrived at using a reduced skeleton figure as the primary component within my self-developed sculptural language, inasmuch as it allowed me to address the gestural elements of how figures/characters appear in the source material I have used as research material, by means of stripping away everything except the basic skeletal structure of the human body, I am aware and recognize the wider cultural resonance that the skeleton image has within

both ancient and contemporary contexts. The human skeleton has long been a powerful symbol within many diverse societies throughout time: 'from Goth rings and Mexican Day of the Dead paraphernalia to artist Damien Hirst's diamond-studded platinum cast skulls are stark and emptied reminders of morality and meaning'.⁴² The human skeleton has had an abundance of differing meanings and significance throughout time and space. So prevalent is the image of the human skeleton throughout history that it would be impossible to try to give an overview within this thesis of all these different understandings and of how the image of the human skeleton has been understood within each individual society. However, I have outlined how the skeleton has been understood and its wider cultural resonance within a contemporary cultural context, as well as how the skeleton image was understood within the context of seventeenth-century Europe in Chapter: Refining the Sculptural Vernacular.

As described in my discussion on my methodology and technical strategies, my practice-led research is inductive in nature and employs a haptic approach to dealing with art history, in order to inform my studio practice. I have looked at other contemporary artists in order to help contextualise my research within the wider contemporary visual context. Throughout my research, I have endeavoured to explore particular works of art drawn mainly from 16th and 17th century Spanish and Italian artists. Through the exploration of these works, I have investigated various aspects of the works of art by abstracting certain features or facets of a particular composition that are present in both painting and sculptural mediums. I have explored particular aspects of each work of art by utilising particular sculptural processes, such as modelling, casting, and fabrication, in order to gain a

⁴² Abbot, Alison. *Centuries of Skulls*.
http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v478/n7368/full/478186a.html?WT.ec_id=NATURE-20111013

deeper understanding of the particular intricacies that I have found to be interesting within the composition. Furthermore, I have examined the manner of expression in each of the corresponding narratives. I have concentrated on the ways in which 16th and 17th century artists wrestled with imagining and imaging these stories and the techniques they used to communicate particular narratives. Although there is a great deal of historical analysis and understanding that is intrinsic in working with subject matter drawn mainly from European artists operating 400 years ago, I have focused mainly on the exploration of how contemporary sculptural practice might reach a deeper understanding of the nature of faith and doubt. Such an exploration has led me to consider a definition of truth that is based on a subjective negotiation between conviction of faith and the uncertainty of doubt. 'At its maximum this *how* is the passion of the infinite, and the passion of the infinite is the very truth. But the passion of the infinite is precisely subjectivity, and thus subjectivity is truth.'⁴³

An understanding and recognition of this idea of subjectivity as truth has anchored my decision making process to an understanding of how faith and doubt has effected the directions that I have taken within my studio practice. It is the singularity of the individual, and one's own subjective understanding, that contributes so greatly to works of art that project an authentic unique expression of creativity. 'Subjective reflection turns inward toward subjectivity and in this inward deepening will be of the truth, and in such a way, that just as in the preceding, when objectivity was advanced, subjectivity vanished, here subjectivity as such becomes the final factor and objectivity the vanishing.'⁴⁴

⁴³ Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Essential Kierkegaard: Unscientific Postscript*. p.206

⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Essential Kierkegaard: Unscientific Postscript*. p.204

The cyclically iterative nature of continuous choices and decisions were constantly at play throughout my research project, most noticeably within the studio. These series of decisions are intrinsically related to one another. When faced with decisions regarding the appearance, fabrication and technique of each sculptural investigation, I relied on my subjective understanding of my connection with the subject matter. Once a decision was made, it in turn affected the consequent direction and progress of my research, ultimately contributing to the iterative nature of my research project. Truth, as defined by Climacus in 'an objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, is the truth.'⁴⁵

Through an inward looking reflective process and a subjective understanding of truth, based on both faith and doubt, I have been able to make decisions that have had an effect on my studio practice by highlighting my own responsibility and accountability. I have linked this idea with the iterative strategy, as outlined in Chapter: Strategizing Profundity, which has continuously led me to explore new subject matter and source material. In this manner, I have explored, through haptic means, the visual responses of the biblical stories that have been drawn from Catholic narratives, as expressed by 16th and 17th Century European artists. Such expressions are likewise an individual's subjective understanding of the same stories that I analyse.

⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Essential Kierkegaard: Unscientific Postscript*. p.206-207

Chapter: Refining the Sculptural Vernacular

At the outset of this research, upon encountering Caravaggio's *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*, I endeavoured to develop a strategy that would allow me to explore facets of this particular painting that had evoked such a profound response within me. My strategy has been driven by an incredulous and curiosity-driven approach to focusing and distilling particular gestural elements of the painting. This approach led me to develop a specific visual sculptural language, which I then used throughout all of the case studies as an instrument that would allow me to explore source material drawn from the baroque period.

This approach led me to develop the basic elements of a specific visual language in which I have attempted strip away the skin, flesh and clothes of the characters depicted in various narratives, exposing only the geometry of their postures and the basic elements of the gestural movements. The abstract result of these formal shapes can evoke a compelling emotional response. I have reinterpreted the narratives using one-third life size skeleton figures cast in bronze. In this chapter, I deconstruct and unfold the development and reasoning regarding my use of the specific visual dialect of a reduced human skeletal, as the main ingredient within my sculptural vernacular. Although the cast bronze skeleton figure has acted as the principal symbol that I have used within my developed sculptural language, in the later investigations, my research begins to encompass other materials, techniques and processes in order to realise and widen the scope of my exploratory methods. This embellishment of materials and processes occurred once I began to install my sculptural artefacts within the barn/studio space in Canada. As well as discussing my use of lost wax casting as the primary means in which to realise my ideas, I examine at the metaphorical parallels throughout the case studies that exist between the

lost wax process and my desire to interact with historical canonical works of art, concentrating on the process where the original wax model is lost (burnt out) so that a bronze version can be substituted in its place. In my work, I metaphorically try to replace, or reinterpret, canonical works of art that are not widely accessible and available to the public, due to their devotional status and locale. The original wax is no longer in existence once the final metal casting is made. Many of the works of art that I reference are either no longer in existence or are not available to the public for a number of reasons including, contemporary secular cultural context and devotional status, e.g., located in a place that is not available to the public. In my work, I analyse how historical work might be made fully available to contemporary artists, who are separated from their historical peers in a number of different ways.

Although my reasons for using the skeleton figure as the main component of my sculptural vernacular are rooted in pragmatic strategy, which is centred around the reduced human skeleton form as a means to address the figurative gestural poses and postures, I recognise that the skeleton image has a long history of use in artistic imagery, especially associated with the Catholic religion, as well as within a wider contemporary cultural context. The use of the human skeleton in my practice-led research has iconographic connotations and multi-faceted symbolic relevance. In this chapter, I outline the reasons for my use of a reduced version of the human skeleton as the main component within my sculptural language. In the first instance, I recognise that the use of the human skeleton has been instrumental within the pedagogy of medicine and art as an anatomical reference tool and a means of learning and teaching about the structure, function and purpose of the human body. I chose to use a plastic prefabricated skeleton, commonly used by students of medicine and fine arts, as a means to develop my

bronze figures. I deconstructed this ready-made object into its individual parts (bones) and proceeded to make silicon rubber moulds of each of the individual bones, so that I could then create wax duplicates of the various bones for use in the assembly of particular poses and postures.

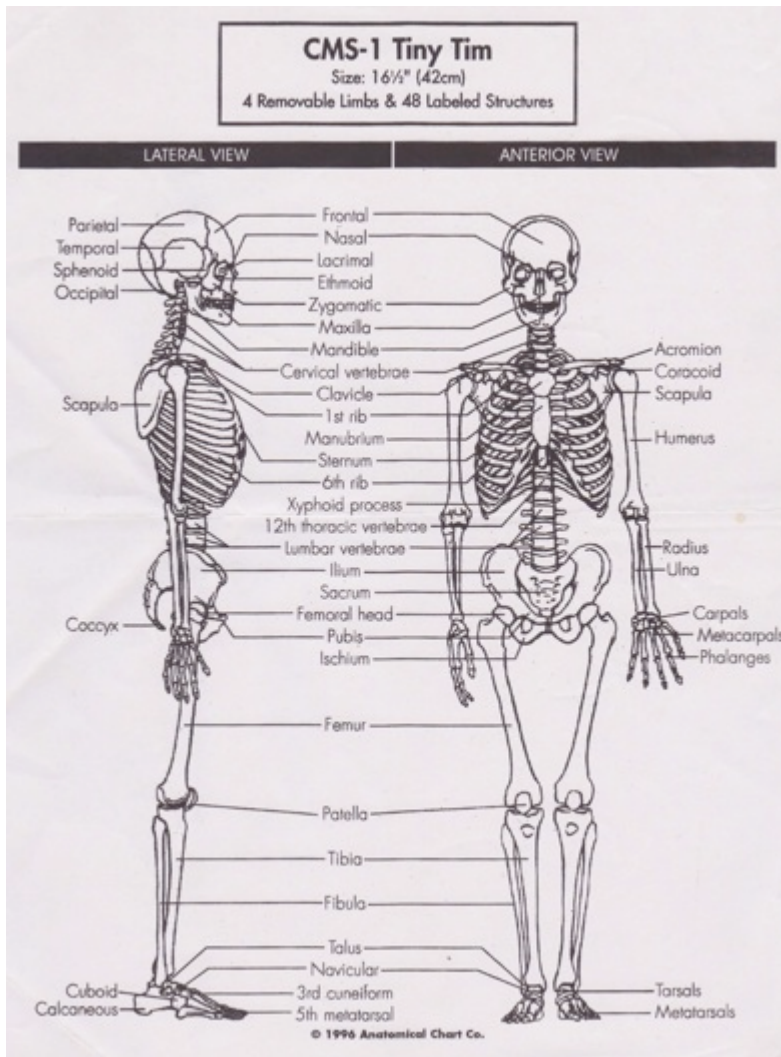


Fig 17
CMS - 1 Tiny Tim. 2005
 Plastic skeleton anatomical chart.
 Commonly used by medical students to study human anatomy.

This plastic anatomical skeletal figure provided a means for me to manipulate and interact with the action, emotion and compositional elements of a specific story. Besides addressing the individual poses and postures of the figures, I focused on the composition as a whole. The

conceptual and practical development of this sculptural dialect both informed my decision-making. The pragmatic physicality of developing this unique sculptural language involves the use of found objects, site specificity and site awareness, as well as experimentation with lost wax bronze casting methods. Altogether, this language is a combination of contemporary and traditional elements, situating my art making practice within the present. Specifically, my practice is situated within a contemporary context that stresses a correlative relationship with the past.

Although my reasons and rationale for choosing to use the reduced human skeleton figure as the principle component within my developed sculptural language, it has been important to try to gain an understanding of the wider cultural resonances of the skeleton image, both in the context of the past as well as within a contemporary context. In doing so, I quickly became cognizant of the varied and diverse meanings and significance the skeleton image has had amongst various cultures throughout time. Researching various meanings and implications that the skeleton image has had helps me to situate my practice within a contemporary context as well as helping me understand both the similarities and differences that exist between the rationale that I have used to justify my use of the skeleton image and that of various different cultural contexts. The many ways in which the skeleton image has been understood by divergent cultures throughout time is extremely diverse, but one commonality exists, one common element transcends both time and cultural contextualization. The basic common element relates to the way in which the skeleton image, whether in two-dimensional or three-dimensional representation, refers to the human being. When an individual human being sees the image/representation of a human skeleton, they will consciously/subconsciously understand that the skeleton is something that they possess, that is part of them. The human being

viewing an image (2D/3D) of a human skeleton references themselves and understands that they too possess a similar skeletal armature that supports their skin, flesh and bones. This is the most basic and also the principal commonality that I strive to make between my research and the wide and various human cultures that have existed throughout time within the context of how the image (2D/3D) of the human skeleton has been and is understood.

Within the Catholic religion, the use of the skeletal image is iconographic, with various meanings and significance throughout the history of the church. During the 16th century, human bones were often considered in a devotional contextual setting. The bones of saints were often venerated and embellished in lavishly decorated reliquaries, which were constructed specifically to house the bones and remains of saints and martyrs.



Fig 18
Marble skeleton sculptural font
St Johns Co Cathedral
Valletta, Malta



Fig 19
Inlaid skeleton imagery
St Johns Co Cathedral
Valletta, Malta

There are many symbolic meanings associated with the skeleton figure that can be read with various semiotic connotations within contemporary culture. The use of the skeleton figure is as popular today as it has ever been, often with similar, but at times different, meanings and relevance to how they were viewed historically.



Fig 20
Gian Lorenzo Bernini. St Peters Basilica. Rome, Italy 1678
Winged skeleton figure of death holding an hourglass.
Papal Tomb of Alexander VII



Fig 21
Skeletal remains.
Reliquary in Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence, Italy.

The skeleton figure is often associated with macabre undertones. It has been used within a popular cultural context to personify death and evil, as is evidenced in the abundance of films, photography, books and printed material that use the skeleton image. The animated skeleton figure symbolises death living. During the 20th century, the image of the skeleton figure has been widely used in both still imagery and moving filmic modes of expression. Both the wider contemporary and historical cultural resonance of the human skeleton image is expansive and detailed depending on both the particular time & place. However one commonality between all of these uses of the human skeleton is that it references the human being. Whether we are speaking of South African tribes whom are of the belief `that the power of their slain enemies lived on in their skulls, made musical instruments from them for use in battle or to weaken hostile neighbour's⁴⁶To the contemporary kitsch skeleton Halloween costumes worn by children throughout North America every October 31st, there is a common element amongst these varied meanings and connotations that people from different historical periods and civilizations would have understood, and that is the reference that the skeleton image has in relation to themselves. The image of the skeleton whether painted or sculpted, allows the viewer to reference the skeleton image to themselves. When a human being sees a skeleton image, there is an automatic association that will occur between an understanding of what they are seeing (skeleton) and their own internal skeletal structure. This self-referential association between skeleton image and human viewer occurs on a subconscious level in its most basic reading. This commonality of interpretation and meaning that transcends both time, space & cultural diversity is the also one of the basic reasons for why I have used the skeleton image as the principle component within my self-

⁴⁶ Abbott, Alison. *Centuries of Skulls*.
http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v478/n7368/full/478186a.html?WT.ec_id=NATURE-20111013

developed sculptural vernacular. As opposed to an understanding of the cast bronze skeletons that I use within my sculptural case studies with morbid and macabre undertones that are rooted in a contemporary reading of how skeletons are commonly depicted and imbued with grisly ghoulishness, my use of the skeleton image is anchored to the most basic understanding that occurs within the human mind when they see the image of a human skeleton, and that understanding revolves around the idea of self reference. One when sees an image of the human skeleton, mind can do nothing other than to associate and understand the human skeleton as a representation of their own internal structural make-up. Although this self referential reading of the skeleton image will always occur at its most basic level within the subconscious, it can also be something that is consciously explored and investigated as is the case with my self developed sculptural language that incorporates a cast bronze representation of a reduced human skeleton figure as its principal element.

I am keenly familiar with the technical details of the processes that are instrumental to my art making practice. However, this chapter is not meant to delve deeply into a diagrammatical explanation of the various steps and stages that are involved with these techniques. My research methods have not relied on quantitative or qualitative objective analysis, but rather have been rooted in my personal involvement within all aspects of my studio practice. I feel that I have developed an understanding and awareness of the existential responsibility that is rooted in a notion of subjectivity as truth, applying this understanding to convictions of faith or feelings of doubt in relation to the decisions I make when realising a work of art. I have gained knowledge of the technical aspects that are related to the art making process. My knowledge and ability regarding the technical aspects of three-dimensional art making has been acquired through empirical experimental

means, as well as by visiting artists studios, workshops, museums, galleries, sacred spaces, artisans and craftsman's shops. All the while, my goal being to collect and absorb information and experience that would inform my sculptural work, and provide insight into lost wax casting through recognising a lineage of tradition in regards to the development of lost wax casting techniques. I have developed, adapted and appropriated techniques in order to best realise my ideas. Furthermore, I discuss artistic developments made in bronze casting, focusing on particular artists whose bodies of work I have drawn upon to make comparisons to contemporary culture.

This overview serves multiple purposes. One of which is to demystify the process and explain the technical and practical details of my art making practice. In this explanation, I will touch on aspects of modelling, mould making, lost wax, foundry work, casting and finishing. I also consider the way in which the body of knowledge that I have garnered in relation to lost wax casting has been continuously discovered, refined, lost, and rediscovered. It is interesting to note that if a technique, such as lost wax casting, is not practiced, then there is a chance for that knowledge to be lost. The intricate processes and techniques that are required to produce a successful result, using the lost wax method of bronze casting, are such that it is important to continuously strive to improve and master the multitude of various intricate steps and stages in order to optimise the results. Virtuoso casting is extremely technical; the process is filled with many subtle and involved steps. The practitioner must work with a higher level of competence than many other processes. In my research practice, I have attempted to use the lost wax technique to cast complicated shapes, such as a reduced human skeleton figure. I have found that in order to be successful, it was imperative that I have both a competent handle on the

various processes and techniques, as well as be willing to experiment with the process and proficient enough with the process to be able to push the boundaries of possibility in order to achieve truly unique results. In the case of lost wax casting, my own direct physical involvement has been integral in mastering the technique. I have realised that this direct physical participation with the processes is as much an integral part of my art making practice as the broader relevance to my understanding of subjectivity as truth and my recognition of the constant negotiating that occurs between having either faith or doubt in the choices I have made. My art making practice has exemplified this concept metaphorically. Having been directly involved with the process has allowed me to build a greater understanding of the choices and decisions that must be made during such procedures as I strive to reach a desired outcome. This awareness allows for a greater understanding of how I have personally related to such choices and decisions. This progression then facilitates inward subjective reflection and acts as the foundation of my understanding of subjective truths. Although there is an emphasis on the technical procurement and refinement of skill throughout my research, it is done so for the celebration of ideas realised through technique, not merely for the celebration of the expansion of skills.

All of the sculptural investigations associated with my research project came into existence through utilising the process of lost wax bronze casting. Lost wax bronze casting is an ancient technique of casting metals. Throughout time, the technical knowledge and the associated skills have been periodically lost and rediscovered and have often been appropriated and adapted by various civilizations in order to best exercise their unique visual and sculptural desires. National Gallery curator, Nicholas Penny, expands on this idea, 'admiration for the art of ancient Rome also led to the revival of bronze statues, the casting of which was greatly facilitated by the

rediscovery of the technique of making a hollow wax cast from a piece mould.⁴⁷ This trend of loss and rediscovery of the knowledge associated with lost wax casting and foundry practice throughout mankind's foray into pouring metals is evident throughout the past 3000 years. Early advancements were made in bronze casting in Greece in the 8th century BC. Progress continued to the height of the Greek classical period, which then became a template from which the Roman Empire would appropriate the knowledge. However, as the dark ages fell on Europe, after the decline of the Roman Empire, much of the knowledge of lost wax casting bronze was essentially lost and not passed on. Following the decline of the Roman Empire in the 5th century, much of the knowledge associated with casting bronze for the purposes of sculptural endeavours was lost for almost 1000 years. However in the 15th century, 'Florence saw the first true flowering of bronze sculpture.'⁴⁸ Bronze is a copper alloy that is primarily made up of copper and tin, with smaller amounts of various other metals. The idea that throughout the past 3000 years, mankind has continued to lose and rediscover the techniques to successfully cast bronze using the lost wax method speaks to one of the core principles of my art making practice. My personal involvement in the process of my art making practice is the factor that propels forward the knowledge that I have been able to acquire. Without this involvement in the process, my practice would not have advanced. The idea that knowledge is gained by being involved in the process until the realisation of a work of art is heavily reliant on the understanding of subjectivity as truth and the awareness and understanding of having to negotiate between faith and doubt when faced with decisions (refer to Chapter: Negotiating Between Faith and Doubt). In this way, the act of striving to exercise a sculptural idea by using techniques, such as lost

⁴⁷ Penny, Nicholas. *The Materials of Sculpture*. p.245-246

⁴⁸ Draper, James David. *Bronze Sculpture in the Renaissance*
www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/scbz/hd_scbz.htm

wax casting, will inevitably be affected by the choices and decisions that are made during the process of realisation. Decisions that I have made, based on aesthetic and compositional value judgments, are intrinsic to my own understanding of the source material and my own technical ability to realise my ideas using various studio based techniques and processes.



Fig 22
Beheading Lost wax process
Assembling wax copy of skeleton



Fig 23
Beheading (detail) Lost wax process
Assembling wax copy of skeleton



Fig 24
Beheading (detail) Lost wax process
Supporting the plaster moulds



Fig 25
Beheading (detail) Lost wax process
Melting the bronze



Fig 26
Beheading (detail) Lost wax process
Removing the crucible



Fig 27
Beheading (detail) Lost wax process
Pouring the bronze

Throughout my research project, I have chosen to use cast bronze as a core component of my sculptures simply because I have felt that I could best exercise my ideas using and adapting the lost wax bronze casting method. I do not adhere to a doctrine of *truth to material*, which encapsulates a 'belief that the form of a work of art should be inseparably related to the material in which it is made.'⁴⁹ Nor do I harbour an internal hierarchy of sculptural material. I have found that modelling my figures in wax gives me the control and adaptability needed in order to reinterpret two-dimensional images into three-dimensional forms that include working with figurative posturing and intricate poses. The lost wax method of casting allows the artist the malleability and flexibility in sculpting and modelling because of wax's naturally soft characteristics and pliable constitution. While modelling a wax figure, one often imagines how it shall be transformed into a completely different material. 'Perhaps the greatest sculpture has been created by artists thinking not only about the materials they were employing, but about those which they were not employing.'⁵⁰

I have gained much of my knowledge about lost wax casting through conversations with other artists and artisans, as well as through apprenticeship programs. I have gathered experience working at various foundries and teaching experimental foundry practice and metal casting at Edinburgh College of Art. Much of my initial knowledge about bronze casting was acquired through work experience, apprenticing with masters of the technique. The empirical knowledge that I have built up over time is a combination of the knowledge that I have gained through learning about other's experimentations, successes and failures, as well as mine own.

⁴⁹ Chilvers, Ian. *Concise Dictionary of Art & Artists*. p.600

⁵⁰ Penny, Nicholas. *Materials of Sculpture*. p.270

Haptic generated thought lies at the heart of my methods for gathering information and insight into particular techniques and process.

There is an historical aspect to the way I have learned to adapt the basic process of lost wax casting in order to suit my research project's unique characteristics. I became interested in how I might be able to incorporate and utilise techniques associated with foundry work and lost wax casting as I studied the work of Renaissance and Baroque era artists, primarily from Europe, who used casting techniques in order to realise their ideas. Much of the sculptural source material and imagery that I have found to be influential to my studio practice has been gathered through visiting countries that house works of art by artists that were known to be involved in all the technical aspects of their art making practice. I feel that being involved in all aspects of the realisation of an idea has best enabled me to achieve particular desired results and, more importantly, has allows me to have insight, understanding and awareness of why certain choices were made and why others were not. I find that having an understanding of how decisions were carried out and acted upon is invaluable. Being involved in the process, and thus gaining insight into why and how decisions are reached and acted upon, lies at the heart of knowing through doing, as opposed to knowing by simply being told. The vast majority of artists today, as well as those from the Renaissance and Baroque periods, who work with cast bronze are not personally involved in the majority of the process. 'Historians of European sculpture almost always assume that sculptors were responsible for the casting and finishing of their models, but the evidence, when it exists, suggests that the casting was rarely performed by the modeller nor, often, were the finishing and gilding.'⁵¹

⁵¹ Penny, Nicholas. *The Materials of Sculpture*. p.253

Throughout my research I have been drawn towards artists that are involved in both the conceptual and practical aspects of their respective art making practices. Author and historian, Rita Scotti, sheds light on one example of the way this knowledge was passed from one artist to another in her book *Basilica: The Splendour and the Scandal*. 'Bernini followed the ancient lost-wax process of casting. Bernini made his own wax moulds, not only of the columns but also of the detailed ornamentation – every leaf, bee, and lizard'.⁵² The idea that Bernini re-iterated the knowledge of lost wax casting that was passed onto him resonated with me. I find an affinity to these types of artists because of our similar methodologies. In general, the more one knows about the intricate details of a process, the better one is able to utilize the process in order express one's ideas, resulting in a celebration of ideas realised through process and not simply a celebration of an expanded set of skills. On the other hand, I am aware that many of the works of art that were created during the Renaissance and Baroque periods were only possible because of the involvement of many people and assistants, due to the sheer scale of the projects. This fact became apparent when I began to investigate Bernini's massive civic and religious works. I learned that one of Bernini's papal patrons, Pope Urban II, felt it apt that Bernini should learn all he could about the process of casting bronze. Bernini was encouraged to be personally involved in the process of running and operating a foundry. 'He needed to become an artist who had a broader mechanical and technical expertise than sculpture had given him so far.' Urban appointed Bernini to be the *soprastante*, or overseer, of the Vatican foundry'.⁵³ The fact that Bernini was put in charge of a foundry, in order to gain a real understanding and awareness of how a foundry operates, resonated with my personal experience. With this insight, the Bernini seemed to gain more of an awareness of the potential possibilities in relation to his own art making

⁵² Scotti, Rita. A. *Basilica, The Splendour and the Scandal: Building St. Peters*. p.250

⁵³ Morrissey, Jake. *The Genius in the Design*. p.73

practice. Much of Bernini's work, located in the interior of St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, is experimental in nature in comparison to what had come before. The artist must have relied heavily on his knowledge of the intricacies of process. I firmly believe that the knowledge that Bernini gained from being involved with the actual mechanics of the foundry and the various stages of the lost wax process enabled him to experiment with and push the limitations of this process. He clearly knew the process so well that he was able to push, poke and prod the assumed limitations, ultimately achieving the realisation of his unique artistic expression.

I hope that one of the outcomes of my research project will be to shed new light on one way in which contemporary sculptural art making practice can incorporate what is commonly referred to as 'traditional' ways of working. For example, incorporating the lost wax process of casting metals should not necessarily define the work. I do not feel that materials possess an innate truth within that the artist is somehow propelled to adhere to. Rather, I have chosen to use specific processes, materials and techniques because these materials have best suited my ability to achieve a particular desired outcome.

The Story of the Case Studies:

Case Study 1: Inspire – Investigate – Reflect



Fig 28
Beheading (alluminum version), 2005

'So he had John beheaded in prison. The head was brought in on a plate and given to the girl, who took it to her mother.'⁵⁴



Fig 29
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Beheading of St John the Baptist*, 1608

The first time I saw this painting, I was deeply affected by it. I found myself going to the Oratory at St. Johns Co Cathedral in Valletta, Malta day after day. I had not previously seen a Caravaggio painting *in situ*. My awareness and understanding of how particular spaces function in relation to works of art has continuously evolved throughout the evolution of my research project. The setting for Caravaggio's painting, namely a Catholic Cathedral, functions as a devotional and sacred space for members of the Roman Catholic faith. This painting was made specifically for this space, with the function of instilling and strengthening a sense of faith in the dogma and

⁵⁴ Mathew 14: 10 -11. *Holy Bible, Good News Translation*

doctrine of the Catholic religious belief system. As such, this work of art is devotional in nature.

As I gazed at this painting for the first time, I concentrated on what was so enthralling to me about this two-dimensional painted image and the drama of the story unfolding on the canvas. It kept me staring, searching deeply into it, attempting to deduce some sort of meaning from it. What were the themes and motifs that were being transmitted from the canvas to me the viewer? It struck me immediately that the narrative being played out on the canvas was very dark and violent in nature. It occurred to me that the thematically macabre characteristic of the narrative, a violent beheading, was akin to the tonally dark chiaroscuro technique the artist used to depicted this scene of a calculated slaying. The human characters are depicted in an exceptionally realistic environment, accentuated by the low, authentic lighting. The focus of the scene is a calculated execution by beheading. The characters are concentrating on the logistics of carrying out the task at hand, even the witness's gawk, engrossed by the intense moment of the scene. At my first viewing, I was engulfed by the drama that was unfolding on the canvas. I felt privy and vulnerable to what was unfolding on the canvas. Why did it affect me so? Was it the fact that the painting is located within a religious setting? Was it the formal qualities innate within the painting, such as the scale, the placement, the lighting? Was it the composition itself? Was it the way the characters interact with each other? Was it their posturing? I became completely captivated by and drawn to this painting, unlike any other painting I had seen prior. In retrospect, it was most likely a combination of many of these factors that consciously and subconsciously influenced me.

I use this experience to highlight the relationship between subject and object. My initial understanding of this relationship was that I (subject) was being affected by the painting (object). As my research progressed, I began to understand that this relationship is not necessarily static, but rather dynamic and correlative. It is this dynamic correlative relationship between myself, existing in the present, and a work of art created in over 400 years ago in Italy, that has become the focus of my research. The primary goal being to explore the nature of this relationship between past and present. `If baroque past and baroque present are studied in terms of this co-dependency, it makes sense that any appeal to knowledge by either of the two will in turn be based on an awareness of a similar co-dependency between sources of insights in this matter.⁵⁵ I have strived to explore how an understanding of my sculptural practice can provide insight into ways in which we understand the past from the point of view of the present. Moreover, I have investigated how the present is moulded by our understanding of the past. To this end, I concentrate on certain themes and motifs that are relevant within historical works of art, as well as with selected works of contemporary art.

Recalling and describing my first experience with Caravaggio's painting has been of utmost importance to my research because this particular moment marked the beginning of the overall line of investigation of my art making practice. This practice begat the body of work that encompasses the development of my sculptural visual language for investigating my concerns related to this painting, and subsequently others. My studio-based technical development of this language, in conjunction with source material, facilitated through investigating of themes such as faith and doubt form the crux of my research.

⁵⁵Bal, Mieke. *Quoting Caravaggio*. p.29

After returning from Malta, I began to research the Lombardy born artist, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. I became interested in the life and times of this artist. My initial curiosity about this particular painting soon widened into an insatiable desire to learn more about his life and the contributing factors to the manner in which he painted. In order for me to gain an understanding of how this particular painting was conceived and designed for this particular location, I researched the artist through art historical means, consulting textual and visual references, as well as visiting and exploring the island of Malta and many of its Catholic sacred spaces. There is an abundance of art historical information available about Caravaggio. I continuously tried to balance text-based research with visits to churches, Cathedrals, museums and galleries. I visited areas of interest such, as Italy, Malta and Spain in order to gain first-hand experience viewing works of art, buildings, sites and cities that I deemed relevant. I felt that in order to gain an understanding of his painting and its setting, I needed to gain insight into what had led him to the Island of Malta and the commissioning of this painting. As writer Francine Prose explains, 'in 1606 he fled Rome, apparently after killing another man in a dispute. He spent his last years in exile, in Naples and Malta and Sicily, as once celebrated for his art and tormented by his enemies.'⁵⁶

It was in this latter part of Caravaggio's life that he found himself on the island of Malta, running from the law and under the protection of the Holy Order of the Knights of St John, who had been given sovereignty over the small Mediterranean island by the Pope. Malta was, at the time, the Order's base and headquarters. Caravaggio was commissioned by the Order to complete a painting for the Knight's Oratory, which was located within the recently completed Cathedral dedicated to St John the Baptist. Caravaggio

⁵⁶ Prose, Francine. *Caravaggio: Painter of Miracles*. p.109

would ultimately receive enrolment into this noble Order, which he hoped would expedite a papal pardon for the crimes he had committed in Rome and ultimately allow him to return to the Eternal city. Contemporary author and Caravaggio scholar, Helen Langdon, describes his induction into the Order of St John in her book *Caravaggio: A Life*, '...in the summer of 1608, Caravaggio was received into the Order. The Bull of reception makes it clear that this was done through a special papal authorization, and that it was a reward for artistic genius and for the splendour that this brought to Malta.'⁵⁷

It was in the Knight's Oratory at St John Co Cathedral that Caravaggio was commissioned to paint his version of the Old Testament biblical narrative describing the beheading of St John the Baptist. As Caravaggio and Baroque scholars, Keith Sciberras and M.M Stone, explain, 'in addition to hosting elections, installation ceremonies, tribunals, and defrocking, the knights Oratory was also used for the training and devotions of the novices, who had their own special commissioner and theologian.'⁵⁸ The knights Oratory is connected to the Cathedral, situated to the right of the main nave. It is rectangular with a window on the left hand side. Caravaggio's painting fills almost the entire eastern wall of the Oratory. The knights Oratory was very important to the members of the Order. A commission of this size and nature would have only been entrusted to an artist held in the highest regard. Caravaggio's reputation, largely garnered based on works he had completed in Rome and Naples preceded him.

When I initially viewed Caravaggio's painting in the Oratory of St John's Co Cathedral, I was aware of its designation of sacred space. In particular, I was aware that the Knights Oratory was a sacred space with a specific purpose within the wider consecrated spatial context of the Cathedral. I

⁵⁷ Langdon, Helen. *Caravaggio: A Life*. p.355-356

⁵⁸ Sciberras & Stone. *Caravaggio: Art, Knighthood and Malta*. p.93

focused on garnering an understanding of sacred space and the devotional nature of such places in my later case studies. Initially though, I attempted to focus on particular figurative and gestural elements of the painting as a starting point for my studio-based experiments. My goal, upon returning to Scotland from Malta, was to develop a strategy that would allow me to identify and focus on particular elements or motifs within the painting. Ultimately, I wanted to expose what had sparked my profound reaction to this particular painting. As the 17th century Italian biographer, Bellori, describes in one of the first written accounts of this painting, 'The Saint has fallen to the ground while the executioner is taking his knife from the sheath at his side, as if he had not quite killed him at once with his sword; he grasps the Saint by the hair to cut his head from his body. Salome watches intently and an old woman with her is horror stricken at the spectacle, while the warden of the prison, in Turkish garb, points to the atrocious massacre.'⁵⁹ As evidenced in Bellori's description of the painting, the power and intensity of emotional response that Caravaggio was able to evoke in his audience was intense from the outset. I too experienced a sense of empathy with the various characters within the painted narrative. 'Each figure is utterly real, full of individual character, but seems also invested with a universal meaning, symbolizing man's tragic fate, while the geometric clarity of the composition conveys a sense of preordained order.'⁶⁰ Caravaggio is often described as a realist, but as contemporary art theorist, Françoise Bardon, asserts, 'Caravaggio is neither a realist nor a populist because he represents ordinary people, but he is a realist because he depicts them in a relationship that belongs to them.'⁶¹ He possesses an ability to depict painted figures in such a way that the viewer relates themselves to the characters on the canvas. The viewer is able to engage with the theme

⁵⁹ Friedlander, Walter. *Caravaggio Studies*. p.211. (Bellori. p.209)

⁶⁰ Langdon, Helen. *Caravaggio: A Life*. p.358

⁶¹ Bal, Mieke. *Quoting Caravaggio*. p.31

and subject matter of the painting, as it relates to their individual perspective. The viewer's individual conscious and perspective can be placed within the realms of the narrative.



Fig 30
Beheading. 2005



Fig 31
Beheading. 2005



Fig 32
Beheading. 2005



Fig 33
Beheading. 2005



Fig 34
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio.
Beheading of St John, 1608
Detail of Salome



Fig 35
Beheading (detail), 2005



Fig 36
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio.
Beheading of St John, 1608
Detail of the Governor



Fig 37
Beheading (detail), 2005

The Governor exudes the role of taskmaster. His function is to order the execution of a grizzly deed, without showing any visible remorse. I thought about whether he had any desire to kill this man he was ordered to kill. He

may have felt that killing him was a wrong thing to do, even though his sense of obedience would ultimately decide the outcome. The executioner simply had to carry out the Governor's orders. 'The blood streams from the John the Baptist's neck, the executioner reaches behind his own impressively muscular back for the dagger which he will complete the tough part of the beheading.'⁶² The old maid is holding her hands to her head in shock and horror in reaction to the terrible act unfolding before her. She looks as if she is trying to block her ears from this horrific event. 'No one – except an old woman who puts her hands to her face in horror – seems to mind terribly much.'⁶³ Caravaggio's decision to paint the old maid blocking her ears creates an effective and powerful sense of quietness within the painting. 'Only one figure in this picture is demonstrably horrified by what she witnesses. The old woman, perhaps a companion to the girl or a prison nurse, uniquely displays the signs of compassion and grief such a scene would elicit. With her closed eyes and stopped ears, she reaffirms our inability to prevent this atrocity, to change the course of divinely ordered history.'⁶⁴



Fig. 38
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio.
Beheading of St John, 1608
Detail of Old Maid



Fig. 39
Beheading (detail), 2005

⁶² Prose, Francine. *Caravaggio: Painter of Miracles*. p.129-130

⁶³ Prose, Francine. *Caravaggio: Painter of Miracles*. p.129-130

⁶⁴ Skiberras & Stone. *Caravaggio: Art, Knighthood & Malta*. p.94-95



Fig. 40
Beheading (detail) 2005



Fig. 41
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. *Beheading of St John*, 1608
Detail of executioner and St John

The actual act of beheading may not offer a noisy scene, as far as audible noise is concerned, but nonetheless it is visually very loud. The projected atmosphere is intensely loud. The biblical character of Salome is depicted bending down to collect the head of John the Baptist in a bronze platter, to be brought back to the banquet, where the narrative continues to unravel. Before the moment captured in Caravaggio's painting, John the Baptist has chastised Herod for his incestuous behaviour with Herodias (his sister-in-law). Because of this, St John is put in prison. Later, Herodias's daughter, Salome, who danced so persuasively before the gathered banquet guests in Herod's palace that Herod promised her anything she would desire. Her mother, seeing an opportunity to get rid of the chastising Baptist, whispers in her daughter's ear to ask for the head of the Baptist on a platter. Herod is reluctant, but ultimately orders the execution by beheading of St John the Baptist, not wanting to go back on his word in front of all the gathered banquet guests. 'The story of Herod's beheading of St John at the frivolous request of Salome is told with extreme simplicity in Matthew and Mark; Matthew wrote (14: 10-11): 'And he sent, and beheaded John in prison. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother.'⁶⁵

The manner in which Caravaggio portrays the scene greatly motivated me to learn more about the details of the story of each of these characters. I referred primarily to the account of this story found in the Holy Bible (Good New Translation). Since I am most familiar with the Good New Translation of the Holy Bible, I found it to be the most beneficial to learn the sequence of events of the story. I am aware that the Holy Bible is an amalgam of various writers and editors that has been continuously edited and retranslated throughout its existence. My principal criteria in selecting the

⁶⁵ Langdon, Helen. *Caravaggio: A Life*. p.357

Good New translation was that it is written in a language and style that I could most effectively relate to. So that I could most thoroughly understand Caravaggio's painting, I referred to the translation that was written in a dialect that I was most familiar and understandable to me.

The style in which in which Caravaggio painted this narrative is very severe and intense, and relies heavily on high contrasts and chiaroscuro lighting effects. Most of the painting is cloaked in darkness although, upon closer inspection, more detail emerges from the shadows and dark spaces that cover the majority of canvas. One particular aspect of my profound experience with this painting had to do with my physical perspective in the space. Intrinsic to all two-dimensional canvases, the perspective in which the painted image is depicted remained unaffected by my mobility. It did not change depending on what angle or at what distance I viewed the painting. This aspect of my initial experience with Caravaggio's realistically rendered painting of the biblical narrative depicting the Beheading St John the Baptist was a central stimuli for the development of my specific sculptural language. My awareness of a fixed perspective in relation to this painting brought my awareness to the relationship between myself as the as the viewer and the painting itself. I became aware of my physical body, my position in relation to the painting and in relation to the space that we both occupied. 'During the Baroque, the awareness of point of view led, for the first time in Western History, to something we now call self-reflection, a self-consciousness of the human individual. The primary characteristic of a baroque point of view is that the subject becomes vulnerable to the impact of the object.'⁶⁶ I (subject) am vulnerable and effected by the painting (object). I am made aware of myself in relation to this painting, through ways in which the scene is depicted from my particular perspective. The

⁶⁶ Bal, Mieke. *Quoting Caravaggio*. p.28

perspective qualities of the painting gave me the sense that I was a witness to the scene unfolding on the canvas. My desire was then to explore the possibility of translating certain figurative elements of the painting and its intrinsic two-dimensional perspective into a three-dimensional reinterpretation that embodied the idea of a changing perspective, based on the mobility of the viewer. This strategy led me to explore point of view and perspective.

The details of this story formed my primary source material, the core of my research practice that ultimately resulted in the development of the basic sculptural vernacular that I utilised through out my case studies, specifically the use of the cast bronze skeleton figure. The skeleton figure has two main areas of historical significance in relation to my research project, namely its use a pedagogical tool within science, medicine & fine art, as well as its historical and contemporary iconographic cultural significance.

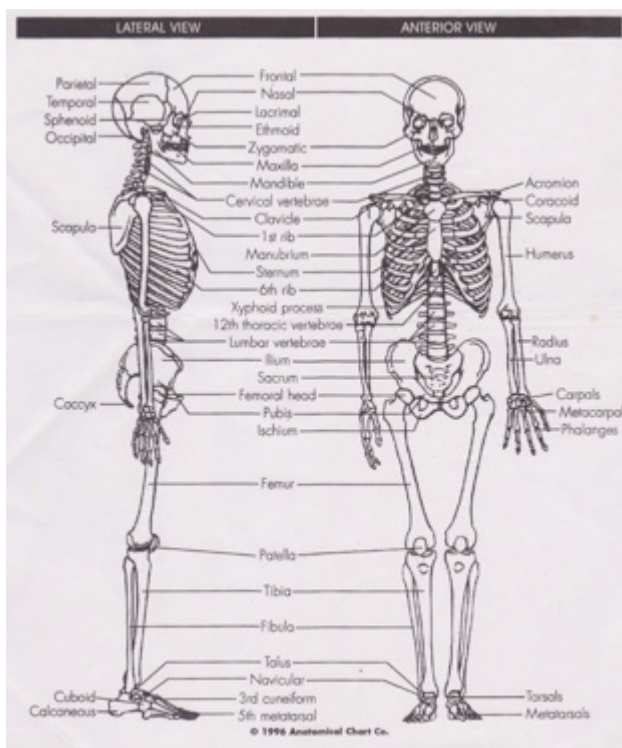


Fig. 42
 CMS – 1 *Tiny Tim*. 2005
 Plastic skeleton & anatomical chart.



Fig. 43
Skeleton of St Pancratius. 17th Century
Church of St Nikolaus. Will Switzerland

I arrived at the decision to appropriate the skeleton form in order to examine Caravaggio's painting with x-ray eyes, so to speak. I was determined to work with the figurative gestures of the characters represented in the painting. By using the skeleton form, I was able to strip away the skin, flesh and clothing, the very elements that help characterize the various figures. This skeleton form became my basic visual vocabulary. I maintained use of the skeleton throughout my entire research project. In doing so, I had to strip away the character of the figures, nullifying any

sense of divine status that is manifest in the two-dimensional source material. I proceeded to unearth the basic structural gestural elements of the characters, making each equal in appearance and instantly relatable for the viewer. We all relate to the human skeleton because we all share the same basic structure. Contemporary Canadian sculptor, Brandon Vickerd, provides a simple and poignant reason for using the human figure within his sculptural practice, 'the great thing about working in the genre of figurative sculpture is that the viewer instantly has a point of reference: their own body.'⁶⁷ Use of the skeleton allows the viewer to reflect on hidden structural commonalities between human beings, in particular mortality, life and death. In my work, I situate the skeleton figure in life-like situations, acting out deeds and actions that are influenced by both historical and contemporary uses of the skeleton form. The aspect of travel to sacred spaces in the course of my research directed my influences to 16th century ossuary's and charnel houses. The use of the skeleton form in these circumstances particularly informed my practice. Painted depictions and sculpted representations of the skeleton figure within the context of 16th century sacred spaces are vibrant and plentiful, especially in reliquaries and small chapels dedicated to particular co-fraternities and orders within the Catholic Religion.

⁶⁷ Pump, Rethchin. *Brandon Vickerd: Tales to Astonish*. p.13



Fig. 44
Chapel of Skulls. 15th century. Czerma, Poland.



Fig. 45
Crypt of the Monastery of Santa Maria Della Page. 16th century. Palermo, Italy

The skeleton figure carries an iconographic status within the history of the Catholic Religion with varied symbolic meanings and associations that have been changed and adapted to suit specific places. I acknowledge the multi-layered references that the skeleton figure conveys within this context. However, I have used the skeleton figure merely as a way to strip away clothing, skin, and individuality, simply addressing the gestural elements of the narrative.

In addition, I acknowledge the long and storied use of the skeleton figure in the pedagogy of learning science and medicine and for visual artistic disciplines. Depicting the anatomical human skeletal figure has been for centuries, and still is, a primary tool used for teaching the fundamental skills associated with sculpture and painting. I have endeavoured to explore this tradition by researching how the skeleton figure is utilised within the medical field, as well as the visual arts, by visiting various medical museums (Royal College of Surgeons), medical teaching institutions (University College Dublin, School of Medicine), and arts schools, universities and workshops that specialise in sculpture, drawing and painting.

Imagery of the skeleton in the context of contemporary culture incorporates an abundance of connotations. The skeleton image has been used for decades within the film industry and in printed mediums, in order to depict the ghoulish and macabre. This contemporary cultural rendering of the skeleton figure is typically employed as a lo fi macabre strategy to depict the dead, as in the stop motion animation by Ray Harryhausen in the 1963 film, entitled *Jason and The Argonauts*, the living dead.



Fig. 46
Still frame of skeletons.
Jason & the Argonaut's, 1963



Fig. 47
Still frame of skeletons.
Jason & the Argonaut's, 1963

Although I recognise this wide spread use of the skeleton figure within contemporary visual culture, my reasons for using the skeleton figure are not primarily rooted in this contemporary popular cultural tradition. Rather, my impetus for using the skeleton figure is rooted in a more pragmatic justification. The use of the skeleton figure provided for me a flexible means to address the poses and postures of particular figurative compositions, initially grounded in particular source material, and later based on compositions taken from my imagination, with loose association to a specific poses and postures taken from source material.

The incorporation of these cast skeletons into my practice began with my desire to use the figure in conjunction with casting. At first, I considered taking moulds from an actual human figure, but decided against this idea since the process would be extremely time-consuming, hindering the pace of the flow between my research ideas and my studio practice. In my experience, everything has an optimum pace at which it operates at a given time, especially considering my art practice. The use of 1/3-scale skeletons has allowed me to operate at a pace that constitutes a good balance between inspiration, investigation and research of the source material and my ability to deal with these concepts within my studio practice. Using the 1/3-scale skeletons has allowed me to follow through with my ideas from start to finish within a reasonable time frame at a pace that has allowed for conception, realisation and reflection. If I had used a larger human figure for the work, the time need to make moulds and finally produce a cast metal object by means of the lost wax process would have hindered the flow of my ideas. I would have easily become frustrated and my ideas turned stagnant. My use of a smaller than life size scale set a pace at which I could execute these sculptural groupings that is akin to a notion of sketching, giving me the ability to realise, relatively quickly, my research ideas.

Additionally, use of the 1/3 scale skeleton permitted me to focus on a particular compositional element from the source material. One of the most striking aspects of Caravaggio's painting is the posture that the figures are depicted in. I found these poses to be very convincing and powerful, from the dominating dictating stance of the governor to the horrified old maid. The abstract geometrical shape that is created by the nearly dead, or already dead, body of St John the Baptist lying on the ground with the large powerful shape of the executioner looming over his body is visually strong. The particular way that Salome bends over her platter, ready to receive the decapitated head of St John, is particularly acute in its ability to produce an emotional response in the viewer. Each time I visited the Co Cathedral in Malta, I would strike up conversation with other audience members, in order to discover if others felt similarly effected by the figurative gesture of the composition. Much of the feedback related to the drama and severity of the narrative, as interpreted by the artist. Maltese Baroque scholar, Dr Keith Scibberas, articulates the intense and dark nature of the composition.

'The drama takes place wholly on the left side of the composition where a human arch of four figures, mocked by the titanic architecture behind it, presides over the slaughter of John, the Holy Precursor, who is placed flat on the floor like a sacrificial lamb. Caravaggio situates the woolly hooves of John's garment strategically near the saint's head to reinforce this idea of the Baptist's martyrdom paving the way for Christ's own sacrifice on the cross. The executioner, whom Herod has appointed to cut off the Baptist's head, is terrifying in the way he stands astride his prey, grasping John's hair so that he can gain better access to the neck. He steps on a strip of John's blood red drapery, a seemingly arbitrary act that reinforces the realism of the scene. The brute has already killed John with his sword, but now reaches back for a small knife, the misericordia to cleave off the head from the body. Dressed in dark turquoise (not Turkish) jacket and weighed down by a set of huge keys, the jailer points impassively to the basin as if to hurry the executioner along.'⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Sciberras & Stone. *Caravaggio: Art, Knighthood and Malta*. p.94-95

The geometry of the assorted poses, stances and postures that the figures animate were the initial elements that I interacted with in my studio practice. By using the human skeleton form, I was able to strip away clothes, skin and muscle. All I was left with were bones and the basic mechanics of the way in which the human frame is held together. It was this stripping away and simplifying that gave me a chance to single out certain aspects of the composition, which has aided in increasing the speed at which I could comfortably operate. In the end, I had decided to cast a human skeleton to represent every figure in Caravaggio's painting.



Fig. 48
Beheading. 2005
Wax skeleton figure



Fig. 49
Beheading. 2005
Wax skeleton figure



Fig. 50
Beheading. 2005
Wax skeleton figure

I have never relied on drawing as a tool to work through the initial stages of developing my sculptural works. I tend to feel more comfortable working with malleable materials in three dimensions as I create. My objective was to take images from a flat two-dimensional canvas and translate them through the specific methods of my studio practice into three-dimensional entities. This tactic allowed me to explore the idea of creating an unstable perspective. 'Any treatment can be reduced to the point of view from which the image of the fibula and the (fictitious) world in which it takes place are constructed. In this context, narrative "perspective" is a technical aspect, attributing of the point of view to a specific agent.'⁶⁹ My motivation was to create a mobile perspective dictated by the location of a particular viewer as they negotiated the region around the sculpture. This mobile perspective is analogous to the emergence of single point perspective that was re-discovered in the 15th century by Florentine artists and humanists, such as Leon Battista Alberti & Filippo Bruschenelli. They stressed that perspective should entail the ability to see all the relevant data in a meaningful relationship. In painting, perspective compels a visible scene to show a distinctive impression of distance, so that the vista illustrates the appearance of objects in respect to their relative distance and positions.

⁶⁹ Bal, Mieke. *Quoting Caravaggio*. p.27

linear perspective and the associated principles and presuppositions have become the touchstones of the entire edifice of higher education up to the late 20th century. 'The very words 'perspective' and 'point of view', used to denote and intellectual opinion in almost every undergraduate essay, are witnesses to the success of the artistic metaphor as applied to philosophy, theology and political theory in the Baroque age.'⁷⁰ The use of single point perspective in Caravaggio's painting engages the viewer by stressing a point of view that is in correlation with the narrative painted on the two-dimensional canvas and the viewer, who exists in three-dimensional space. The perspective of the viewer in relation to the painting is not a position outside of the work of art, but rather the correlation that is established between subject (viewer) and object (painting) becomes less and less stable, as the viewer becomes more aware of their own individuality and involvement in the experience of viewing.

The two most profound factors that I achieved by undertaking the process of creating sculptural artefacts based on the figures in Caravaggio's painting were that I proceeded to demystify, for myself, particular elements of the painting, specifically the painterly techniques of perspective and effect, and by experimenting with the positioning of my sculpted figures, I was able to reconcile the focalised nature of each element. By experimenting with subtracting and repositioning certain figures, I found that I could reflect on the optimal three-dimensional form that could be realised from two-dimensional source material.

Beyond considering of the relative locations of each skeletal figure, it was imperative that I consider the overall setting for the scene. The dark regions are key features of the painting. Out of these seemingly void zones, subtle

⁷⁰ Goering, Joseph. *Point of View. An Intellectual Revolution. Going for Baroque: Cultural Transformations 1550 -1650.* p.67

tonal differences take shape that define lines and carve out large swaths of space. As Sciberras and Stone describe, 'Caravaggio's *Beheading* is a theatre of voids, displacements, and arrested actions.'⁷¹ The more time I spent studying these spaces, the more I felt I understood them. The arch and wall directly behind the governor is depicted as large brown cut stone blocks. One gets a sense of the civic planning and architecture of Rome and Valletta, as well as other cities, in Caravaggio's time. For this reason, I decided to cut stone blocks into basic rectangular shapes in order to assemble them into a larger rectangular platform. These sand stones acted plinths for my sculpted scenes. Eventually, I decided to raise the whole piece, cast skeletons and sand stone structure, off the floor using wood frame construction (based on a design offered to me by Paul Carter). The use of cut stone alludes to a translation of the two-dimensional representation of civic-minded architecture that was depicted by Caravaggio. It is noteworthy that at these initial stages of my research, my adherence to a literal translation from a two-dimensional source to three-dimensional reinterpretation was more verbatim than it was during the later investigations, as can be seen in the proceeding case studies.

⁷¹ Sciberras & Stone. *Caravaggio: Art, Knighthood & Malta*. p.93



Fig. 52
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Beheading of St John*, 1608
Detail of central grouping of figures.



Fig. 53
Beheading, 2005
Skeletons on stone base



Fig. 54
Beheading. 2005
Skeletons on stone base



Fig. 55
Beheading. 2005
Detail of skeletons



Fig. 56
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio.
Beheading of St John, 1608
Detail of executioner & St John

Once the figures were grouped on a stone base, I focused on the relative arrangement between each figure. The governor's shoulders are squared towards the viewer. The executioner is bent over at almost a 90-degree angle. The executioner and St John are at a right angle to the governor's left. The old maid stands on the right-hand side of the governor, turned slightly inwards, staring with an expression of horror at the scene of the execution. To her right, Salome bends over a bronze platter, awaiting the soon to be severed head of St John. I ultimately decided to omit the two figures in the background of Caravaggio's painting. These two characters are depicted peering out through the caged prison window, watching the event on their right. I decided not to include these two figures in my experiments of adaptation because they were not within the immediate grouping of figures, the object of my sculptural focalisation. At these initial stages of developing of my sculptural language, I was tethered to the concept of a more literal reinterpretation and so relied on the depictions of full-bodied figures within Caravaggio's painting. 'The huge rectangle framing the low prison window challenges the quoined arch at the left for prominence. Two forlorn prisoners watch with quiet sadness. They have seen this act from their front-row seats many times before. Perhaps they know this is a rehearsal for their own punishment.'⁷² By not including these two half length figures, I do not intend to ignore them, but instead, I meant to metaphorically substitute their roles as witnesses to the event of the beheading, evoking the audience to take their place.

These two peripheral figures may well be of equal importance to the paintings overall effect, but my goal was not to merely replicate this painting. The strategy that I developed relied on focusing on specific aspects of the painting in a semi-literal sense, in the case of the five figures to the left of

⁷² Sciberras & Stone. *Caravaggio: Art, Knighthood and Malta*. p.94-95

the painting, by reinterpreting their poses and postures in three-dimensional space with cast 1/3 scaled skeleton figures, and by metaphorically replacing the half length figures of the witnessing prisoners with the role of the audience in their mobile perspective. By reinterpreting the painting, rather than reproducing it, I encouraged the next direction of my studio practice.

Considering that a prescribed perspective for the viewer is intrinsic to two-dimensional painting, I experimented with positioning the skeletons. Looking at the painting from various points of view does not significantly change my perspective. The concept that a fixed-perspective is innate within a painting intrigues me. This prescribed viewpoint seems to be a compositional element that is fundamental and unchangeable within two-dimensional images, such as Caravaggio's painting of *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*. When I initially finished setting up the figures in a similar configuration to that which is depicted in the painting, the scene seemed to me to be very contained, closed and stagnant. As a viewer I did not feel I was involved or engaged with what was happening in front of me. The action and intimacy between the figures was not apparent to me as the viewer. This is an example of a feeling of uncertainty within my studio practice that denotes a sense of doubt in regards to choices and decisions I have made. In this case, due to the sculptural composition, I felt that, as the viewer, I was not privy to or involved with the drama of the story. I did not have faith that this configuration with five figures facilitated a sense of involvement with the audience.

Because of this feeling of doubt, I continued to experiment with subtracting and repositioning the skeleton figures. As I repositioned certain figures, I recognised inconsistencies regarding scale and perspective in Caravaggio's painting. The figures, as they are depicted, could not be translated directly

from two-dimensions to three-dimensions. This negotiating between faith and doubt lead me towards certain truths that are rooted in my studio practice and are at the heart of what I understand as developed subjective truths, based on visual confirmation through studio experimentation.

It is the concept of an unstable perspective, dictated by the movements and position of the viewer in relation to the sculpture, intrigued me as I began to experiment with the positioning of the figures within the grouping. When I arranged the figures in approximately the same postures that Caravaggio had used in his painting, I felt that the end result did not have the same effect as the painting's overall effect. The three-dimensional cast skeleton grouping seemed very insular and inward looking, not inviting to the viewer. When I initially experienced the painting, all the figures seemed to be more or less the same size, even though some of the figures were obviously standing further back in the depth of field. When I positioned the cast skeleton figures, I found this not to be the case. I realised that the figures standing at the back of the group should have appeared smaller than the figures standing in the foreground. I was able to internalise this basic visual principle once I had set up the cast skeletons figures in a three-dimensional space. This led me to the conclusion that Caravaggio was able to mask his deficiencies, such as depicting figures in space and depth of field, since he was so competent with other painterly attributes such as composition, chiaroscuro and realism. When I realised that the three-dimensional scene was insular in nature, I went about experimenting with the arrangement, all the while trying to keep the general position the same. The group of five skeletons formed what can be described as a 'closed box' formation.

x ←--Governor
x ←-Executioner
Old maid--→x x ←--St John
Salome→ x

The success of this piece is dependent on the ability of the viewer to engage with the work. My goal has been for the audience to feel involved with the interactions amongst the skeleton figures. In the process, I would invite individuals into my studio to experience my sculptures. I would initially set up the figures in a similar format and arrangement to how their depiction in the painting. Then, after getting feedback from the audience, I would subtract figures, invite the audience back, and discuss the new arrangement of figures. Through this process, I collected critical feedback and critique that effected my decision making process.

Besides these one on one discussions, I arranged informal presentations for small groups, usually followed by discussion and critique. I have gathered audience feedback and critique through various informal means. Throughout the course of my research, I have never relied on qualitative or quantitative methods. Instead, I have relied on feedback from conversations with individuals. The most commonly used ambient information gathering method that I have employed throughout the entirety of my research project involves candid discussions with individuals, as well as groups of people.



Fig. 57
Beheading. 2005
Perspective from above



Fig. 58
Beheading. 2005
Perspective from above (close up)



Fig. 59
Beheading. 2005
Images showing 360-degree mobile perspective

At this point in my practice I was spending two thirds of the year in Scotland, where I had access to a foundry, workshop and casting facilities. When I had completed my next three sculptures, entitled *Incredulity*, *Deposition* and

Condemnation, I initiated a gallery based show to formally present this work, which took place in Edinburgh in 2007.

The majority of the feedback I gathered from informal conversations with audience members confirmed my own feelings concerning the 'closed box' formation. This configuration did not allow for the viewer to be privy to the scene. I note that this piece was not an attempt to replicate or reproduce Caravaggio's painting; this was never my agenda. My strategy was designed to help me understand what it was about this painting that had captivated me. Experimentation with subtraction of individual cast skeleton figures ultimately produced a more interesting and visually inviting result. I removed the figure of Salome, who's right hand side and back were positioned towards the viewer. Consequently, the remaining figures formed an abstract triangle. Once I had removed the figure of Salome, it became evident that this configuration was much more inviting for the viewer, allowing the viewer to feel a sense of engagement and involvement with the scene. This notion of triangulation was a key discovery that I took from my experiments.

After uncovering the effect of triangulation and, in turn, a greater understanding of an unstable mobile perspective, I did not take this sculpture any further until I was able to install it and experiment with it in my studio located in a barn in Canada. At this point in my research, I focused heavily on experimentation, negotiating between feelings of uncertainty and doubt and convictions of faith in the decisions that I was making within my studio. This continuous, almost subconscious, negotiation is rooted in visual and spatial assessments, leading to an understanding of subjective truths that I have used to progress from experiment to experiment. Upon arriving at the most effective configuration for the

skeleton figures (a loose triangle), I felt as though I had discovered a key element that I could experiment with further in my subsequent works. I felt that I had given myself a certain set of criteria and parameters that I would carry forth throughout my next sculptural investigations.

This line of investigation ultimately led me to the next three works. My development of this ability to negotiate visual and spatial subjective truths, such as creating an unstable mobile perspective and the effectiveness of figurative triangulation, coupled with my increasing snowballing interest in Italian and Spanish art of the 16th and 17th centuries, drove my research forward. To this end, I developed a clearer agenda with which to consider new source material. When looking at a painting, my eyes would isolate triangulation within groups of figures in the two-dimensional images. My intent was to focus on these particular figures and elements of the painting. This new criterion for examining paintings was developed from my practice led experiments with Caravaggio's painting. My focus on triangulation led me to the next subset of sculptural experiments. This subset is composed of three sculptures, each containing three figures, each of these sculptural groupings is loosely based on works by Caravaggio and his followers, commonly referred to as Caravaggisti. The sculptures are entitled *Deposition*, *Incredulity* and *Condemnation*. I have chosen to use my sculpture entitled *Incredulity* as the next case study because I feel it best articulates the salient points that are encapsulated in all three sculptural groupings.

I would like to reiterate that my goal has not been to replicate particular paintings, but rather to use the theme of the painting, considering only certain figures. In a sense, I was attempting to evoke the same emotional relationship that was depicted between the figures in the painting by

maximising the emotional effect and minimising the number of figures and other visual distractions. My initial interest in a single painting soon developed into an insatiable desire to understand other artists and their art works. This strategy, which initially came about in a fairly organic nature, soon became the template that propelled my investigations. One artist's work would lead me to investigate another artist due to various modes of association, which ranged from stylistic and technical similarities to master/apprenticeship relationships. I found other associations based on thematic and canonical groupings in Christian art of the 16th and 17th century in Italy and Spain.

Upon reflection of my initial sculptural investigations, I have discerned relationships between my work and contemporary culture, in both approach and context. I recognise a similar tactic of reinterpretation of two-dimensional images into three-dimensional forms. The Chapman brothers (Jake b1966 & Dinos b1962) have drawn from 19th century Spaniard, Francesco Goya (1746–1828), throughout their careers. I consider one of the Chapman brother's early works within this vein that stresses a reliance on strategies of reinterpretation in relation to my initial investigations. By doing so, I contextualise a principal aspect of my methodology that shares explicit similarities to other contemporary artistic practitioners. The Chapman brothers reinterpreted a two-dimensional image into a three-dimensional form in their early work, *Disasters of War* (fig 60). They took Goya's monochromatic etchings, also entitled *Disasters of War*, and interpreted them as in a full-bodied miniature format. 'Rather than somehow duplicating or realizing individual images, the Chapman's have built upon the basis of Goya's wiry etchings, inflating them uncomfortably into three dimensions and adding colour.'⁷³ The Chapman brothers returned

⁷³ Harris, Jonathan. *Inside the Death Drive*. p.30

to this composition in various forms and scales throughout their careers, each time playing with scale and composition. They focalise their attention on one of Goya's etchings in their life-size work, entitled *Great Deed against the Dead*, by reinterpreting Goya's etching using shop window style mannequins with faux wigs and polychromatic plasticised colouring. 'The Chapman's thus reconstruct this particularly striking scene twice at this stage in their career, once in miniature and once life size; although any added realism that might have resulted from the inflated scale is undermined by the deliberately ersatz finish: the mannequins retain the joins in their torsos and sport ludicrous synthetic wigs, while the tree to which they are attached, is to all intents and purposes, an enlarged piece of Hornby shrubbery.'⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Harris, Jonathan. *Inside the Death Drive*. p.31



Fig. 60
Jake & Dinos Chapman, *Disaster of War*. 1993
Mixed Media. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of White Cube (London).



Fig. 61
Jake & Dinos Chapman, *Disaster of War*. (Detail) 1993
Mixed Media. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of White Cube (London).



Fig.62
Francisco de Goya, 1810
The Disasters of War, Grande hazana! Con Meutros! Great deeds Against the Dead (No. 39) Etching. 15.2 x 21cm. Courtesy of White Cube (London).



Fig. 63
Jake & Dinos Chapman, 2003
Insult to Injury. Great Deeds Against the Dead (No.39).
Re worked and improved etching from Francisco de Goya's *The Disasters of War*,
44.8 x 37.2cm. Courtesy of White Cube (London).



Fig. 64
Jake & Dinos Chapman, *Great Deeds Against the Dead*, 1994
Mixed Media 277 x 244 x 152.5cm.
Courtesy of White Cube (London).



Fig. 65
Jake & Dinos Chapman. *Sex*. 2004
Painted bronze. 246 x 244 x 125cm
Courtesy of White Cube (London).

By reflecting on the Chapman brothers reinterpretation of works by Francesco Goya, I hope to help situate my practice amongst my peers and the wider contemporary cultural context. This tactic of appropriation and reinterpretation is a strategy that is commonly used within contemporary visual practices, carried out with a wide variation of usage and adherence. This tactic allows one to evaluate the relationship between past and the present and facilitates an understanding that is not merely linear, but correlative. My understanding of the past is moulded and continuously reshaped within the present, constantly being redefined by the sculptural experiments and the discoveries made.

The Chapman Bros reliance on their continuous revisiting of Goya's works has carried on in their artistic work well into the 21st century. This tethering to the Spanish 19th century artist has allowed the Chapman brothers to continuously revisit and reinterpret works by Goya, contextualising his etchings within a contemporary context. The Chapman brothers comment on the original image by transforming it.

Situating my practice within a wider contemporary cultural framework by studying other contemporary artists, not solely for reasons of comparison, but also for reasons rooted in contextualisation, has been a useful exercise within my research, leading to potential applications to a wider artistic field. The artists I have chosen to help situate my practice have been selected for a wide range of criteria, such as motif, strategy and articulation. I have employed the Chapman brothers work *Disasters of War* at this initial stage within the case studies, in order to emphasise the use of art historical material as an impetus for a continued body of iterative explorations and investigations, resulting in a number of reiterated works. In a similar fashion, I have continuously returned to the work of Caravaggio as a source. The relationship between an artwork from the past (object) and my research (subject) in the present is continuously in flux, facilitated by practice-led explorations within the studio. Through studio-based investigations, I have discovered that this correlation becomes less stable with each iteration and experiment. Just as translating a two-dimensional image into three dimensions created an unstable perspective, so to has my understanding of the past become unhinged from the neatly arranged epochs presented in most art historical studies. Each haptic sculptural investigation has informed my perception of the past. My understanding of the past is moulded and shaped within the present through physical sculptural experimentation.

To conclude this first case study, I shall summarise the key points. The initial group of sculptures illustrates the importance of the profound experience I had that motivated me to develop a particular sculptural language with which to conduct my explorations. Based on this profound experience of viewing Caravaggio's painting, *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*, located in St John Co-Cathedral in the Maltese city of Valetta, I have endeavoured to develop and strategize a way of interacting with and exploring elements of the causation of such an experience. The tactic that I took was to focus on particular elements of the composition, which allowed me to identify specific aspects of the painting, namely the figurative gestures, poses and postures.

During this process, I was aware of the multi-faceted function of the sacred space of the Cathedral, including the use of artistic and architectural ornamentation, sculptural elements, architecture, and the interaction between two-dimensional aspects in order to inspire and instil a sense of religious faith. By focalising on one particular element, namely figurative aspects within the two-dimensional composition, I was able to initially interact with a particular aspect of the painting without getting overwhelmed by the abundance of visual stimuli housed within the Cathedral. This elemental pairing down was a tactic that I employed in order to identify particular figurative elements of the painting. The gestures, poses and postures are intrinsic to the figurative characters depicted in the narrative. This focus on the individual figurative gestures aided an investigation into ideas of perspective and individual point of view. I was able to investigate this idea of individual perspective, both formally as it applies to the painting and through my experiments, translating two-dimensional perspective into a mobile individual three-dimensional perspective. This investigation was

accomplished through the sculptural process of creating bronze skeleton figures in a three-dimensional space.

I was interested in creating a mobile perspective dictated by the viewer as they negotiate the space around the sculpture. I was also interested in the philosophical ideas surrounding the development of the individual perspective that began in the early 15th century with artists in Florence involved with the humanists who were interested in the thought and art of the ancient Greeks. This was the beginning of what is now commonly referred to as the Renaissance. As humanist and philosophers were developing ideas of individual opinions and perspectives, painters were experimenting with mathematical based ideas of depicting realistic narratives, addressing linear perspective and depth of field in a two-dimensional plane from a single point of view. By the 17th century, artists like Caravaggio had ushered in a new realistic way of painting that embraced this idea of a particular point of view that the audience could engage.

Translating a two-dimensional image into three-dimensional form rely on experiments concerning a mobile perspective. Understanding perspective and point of view requires meditating on how one relates to the world around them. Single point perspective and individual point of view are concepts that are often taken for granted within the post enlightenment, present-day context. However, this general awareness has not always been the case. Through haptic modes of gathering knowledge, I was able to explore the development of the individual's relationship to and perspective of the surrounding world.

I reiterate my awareness of the devotional nature of artworks within the sacred spaces of the Catholic Religion. My decision to focus on one

particular element for my initial investigations was a tactic centred on the idea of identifying a particular focalisation. My aim was not to negate or be oblivious to the ornate theatre of visual, sculptural and architectural devices at play in St John Co Cathedral. Rather, the decision to focus on a haptic strategy allowed me to interact with a unique aspect of this experience and not become overwhelmed by the abundance of visual devices at play within this sacred space. I note that in my final case study, I further explore the multi-faceted nature of sacred spaces, devotional art and haptic modes of exploration.

Case Study 2: Inserting Incredulity



Fig. 66
Incredulity, 2007



Fig. 67
Incredulity, 2007

‘Then he said to Thomas, “put your finger here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!” Thomas answered him, “my lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those how believe without seeing me!”⁷⁵

My sculptural grouping entitled *Incredulity* is taken from a subset of sculptural case studies that includes *Deposition* and *Condemnation*. I feel that *Incredulity* best articulates the key discoveries made within this subset. Moreover, it illustrates the salient points that I was able to glean from my initial experiments and investigations involving my reinterpretation of Caravaggio’s two-dimensional image depicting the beheading of St John the

⁷⁵ John 20: 27–29. *Holy Bible, Good News Translation*

Baptist. The result of my interpretation is a realisation of a three-dimensional work using the reduced human skeleton form as the basic element of this developed sculptural language. The key points that I uncovered during my initial case study include a heightened awareness of point of view and the ability to create an unstable, or mobile, perspective. As well, I became aware of the effectiveness of particular geometrical configurations within the three-dimensional compositions, namely the efficiency of triangulation for instilling a sense of involvement between the audience and sculpture. In effect, a sensation of destabilisation occurs between object and subject when the viewer is drawn in and made to feel involved with the narrative unfolding before them. This destabilising between object and subject touches upon a key theoretical aspect of my research, exploration of the correlation between two seemingly distinct points: object and subject, as well as past and present. As my tactile investigations continued, my previous understanding of the relationship between past and present became less stable, less linear and more correlative. As I continued to discover insight through haptic research within the present, all the while dealing with Baroque traits, such as form, surface, gesture and drama, that are drawn primarily from source material taken from the Baroque period, my understanding of the past (Baroque era) continually morphed into new knowledge. I continued to look outside of my own practice, within the present, in order to contextualise my practice in contemporary culture and theory. I examined the works and motivations of particular artists, such as the Chapman brothers, Alison Watt and Paul Carter.

After completing my initial investigations into Caravaggio's *Beheading of St John the Baptist*, certain elements of a particular sculptural visual language emerged. This visual language is based on use of a reduced human skeleton

figure. I continued to explore Caravaggio's interpretations of biblical narratives, as well as his influence on other artist in Italy an elsewhere. The subset of sculptural case studies, including *Deposition*, *Condemnation* and *Incredulity*, encompass a similar agenda regarding my focus on criteria carried forth from my initial case study, *Beheading*. This focused criteria involved searching 16th century paintings for elements in the composition that could be reinterpreted. In particular, I looked for figurative elements within the composition of a painting that could be reinterpreted using the effective strategy of triangulating. In a sense, my examination of paintings became to find a schema in relation to elements of the painting. My gaze, as a viewer, had become more prescriptive. This focalisation is based on how I could translate what I was seeing in a two-dimensional image into a three-dimensional form.

My continued interest in Caravaggio, and the effect he had on other artists, led to an awareness of how wide spread his influence was on other painters and the powerful impact that his approach to visual imagery had on the development of visual arts for centuries to come. Upon completing the sculptural grouping entitled *Condemnation*, I investigated New Testament narratives in textual formats from the canonical gospels, as well as visual examples of the same stories from paintings and sculpture made by 16th and 17th century Italian and Spanish artists. My sculptural grouping, *Condemnation*, allowed me to investigate the vast influence and wide spread effect Caravaggio had on artist both in his native Italy, as well as Spain and the northern parts of Europe, such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. In *Condemnation*, I explored how Caravaggio's style and techniques were mimicked by artists, such as Gerrit Van Honthorst and Matthias Stom. Caravaggio's paintings were powerfully influential to artists who admired his skill and the new bold ways in which he approached the

mechanics of imaging biblical narratives. In the sculptural grouping, *Deposition*, I explored the similarities and differences between Caravaggio and one of his early masters, Simone Peterzano. I concentrated on comparing and contrasting their interpretations of the same biblical story of Jesus's deposition, and specifically on the advancements made by Caravaggio's discoveries.

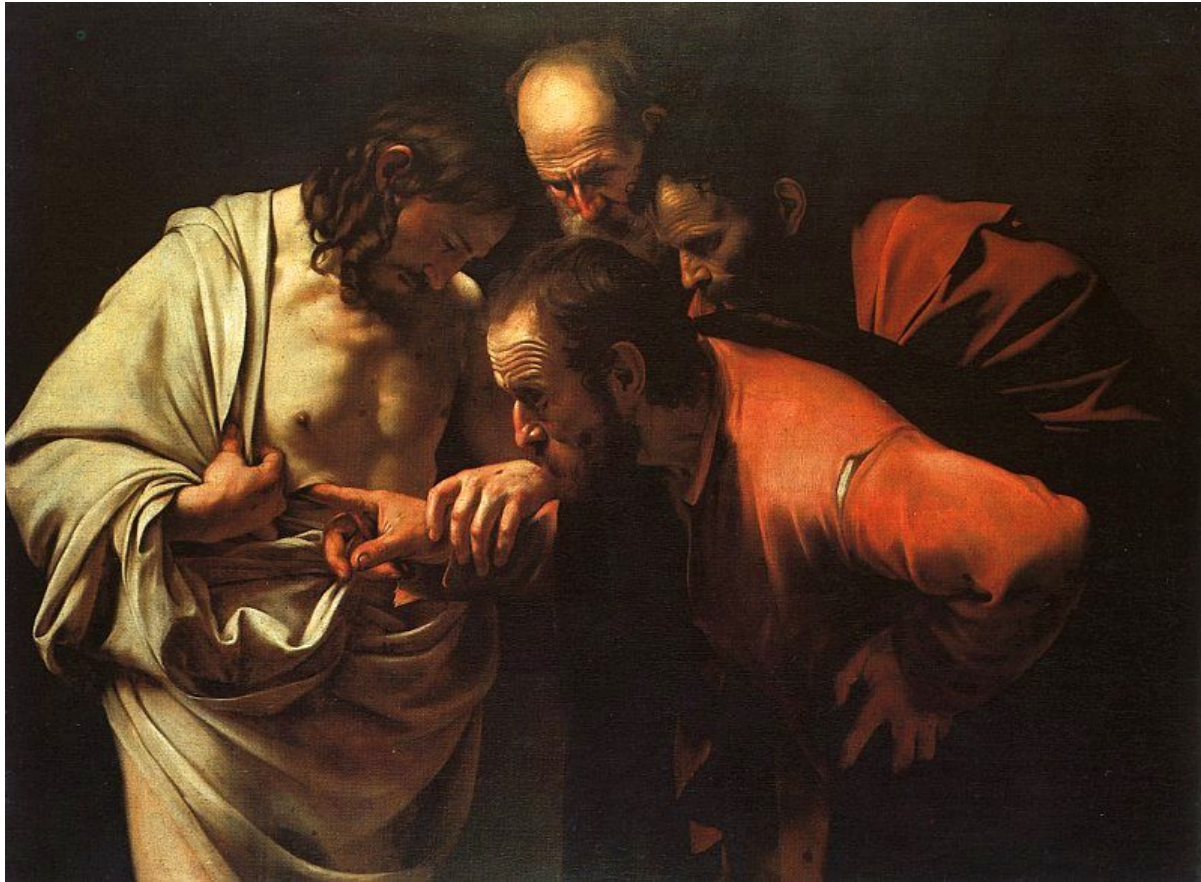


Fig. 68
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. *Doubting Thomas*, 1603
Schloss Sanssouci, Brandenburg, Germany
Oil on Canvas 107 x 146cm

One of Caravaggio's most powerfully evocative paintings is entitled the *Incredulity of Thomas*. I have loosely relied on this painting as a primary source material for my case study *Incredulity*. Besides Caravaggio's painted visual image, I have explored the textual description of this New Testament story found in the Gospel of John, in order to develop and inform this

sculptural grouping. I continued to refer to the Good New Translation of the Holy Bible because it is written in a language and style that are relatable and comprehensible. My choice of biblical translation, throughout my research, has been primarily based on the criteria of readability and understandability. The written words of the Gospel of John, along with the painted work of Caravaggio, provided me with key reference points for my sculptural investigations that led to the creation of the sculptural grouping *Incredulity*.

According to John's gospel, Thomas had not been present when the resurrected Jesus Christ had appeared to a number of his disciples. Having missed this earlier opportunity to see the recently crucified Jesus, Thomas would not believe the claims of the other disciples. 'But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when he came.'⁷⁶ These previous appearances are not mentioned in the other three gospels, although in John's Gospel, Thomas would not believe that Jesus had really visited until he had physically seen for himself by touching the body of Jesus and inspecting the wounds that had been inflicted at the crucifixion. Thomas questioned his faith and could not overcome his scepticism as he allowed his doubts to overwhelm him. The description of the story of Thomas given in the gospel of John is the most detailed account of the four gospels. It describes how Jesus had already appeared to some of the other disciples when Thomas was not with them. Thomas refused to believe his fellow disciples unless he himself could see and touch the lord, by thrusting his fingers into the wound that was inflicted by the spear of the Roman soldier Cassius upon Jesus' right hand side whilst he hung on the cross. Later, Jesus appeared to Thomas, along with some of the other disciples, and told Thomas to put his finger in to the wound on his side. The overt physicality

⁷⁶ John 20: 24-25. *Holy Bible, Good News Translation*

and abundance of visual imagery that this story generates proved to be very attractive source material for my studio practice.

The textual descriptions found in the Gospel of John, as well as in Caravaggio's painting, the *Incredulity of Thomas*, formed my key reference points and source material for this case study. The thematic context of incredulity suggests an idea of knowing or believing based only on physical evidence; to comprehend and understand through one's own physical senses, and not solely dependent on someone else's evidence. The theme of incredulity corresponds to tangible and tactile validation through tactile sense perception. In regards to my studio-based investigations, I felt that this story was ripe for exploration. The biblical story of Thomas's doubts and his insistence on physical validation through his senses or touch and sight correspond to my choice of methodological approaches. This correlation metaphorically encompasses my overall approach to learning through haptic modes of operating. The story of Thomas's doubt as to whether or not Christ had truly been brought back to life and his insistence on physically validating this claim is metaphorically similar to the continuous incredulous approach I have taken in exploring canonical historical artworks by artists, such as Caravaggio. In a sense, I have physically inserted myself into the gestures, poses and postures by developing a sculptural language, which allows me to poke and prod at aspects of the source material.



Fig. 69
'Inserting' myself into poses of iconographical historical art works.

I have managed to insert myself into the study by using the reduced skeleton figure as way to touch historical artworks and learn through haptic methodologies. The idea of inserting myself into my sculptural groupings in order to touch and interact with canonical historical artworks is grounded in the use of my own body for modelling the skeleton figures. I have relied solely on a mirror and my own body as a means to model gestures, poses and postures in the studio. I have not relied on drawing or painting as a means to articulate various gestures. Instead, I continuously utilised the reflective study of my own figure in a mirror as a means to accomplish the desired poses and postures. I likewise employed this technique during my initial investigations into Caravaggio's painting *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*, although the poses, postures and gestures of this initial grouping were more of a figuratively literal reinterpretation of the characters in Caravaggio's painting.

Although this biblical story already had a very old tradition of being depicted by artists, it experienced resurgence in popularity amongst artist during the Counter Reformation, due to its emphasis on faith over scepticism. The story of Thomas and his doubts, beliefs and validation through touch proved to be a very popular theme for painters in the 16th and 17th century, who were commissioned by the Catholic Church in a time when the church was trying to stem the spread of Protestantism from the north. Helen Langdon expands on this point, 'The shocking realism of Thomas's probing hand heightens the mystery of a man-God who alone could conquer death, and no painting more movingly conveys the era's renewed sacramental confidence, and passionate belief in the Real Presence of Christ, 'true God and man', in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. For Catholics it was a story that refuted Protestant heresy, and suggested the certainty of resurrection, and faith in

the life to come.⁷⁷ The story's moral and spiritual message was well suited for the agenda of the Catholic Church in its attempts to reinvigorate a sense of religious faith within the Roman Catholic doctrine. Although Caravaggio's painting of the Incredulity of Thomas was my principal reference point, I also investigated other examples of artist's depictions of this story from other parts of Europe. Caravaggio scholar and writer, Walter Friedlander, explains the historical popularity of this story and Caravaggio's use of pictorial realism within this painting, 'The realistic motif of Christ himself guiding the hand of Thomas as he feels the wound is based on a very old tradition. But we find parallels to Caravaggio's emphasis on the finger thrust into the wound only in Northern representations, especially in Durer. Caravaggio is, as far as we know, the first painter to show the scene in half-figures.'⁷⁸ Caravaggio's reliance on depicting a scene that is often described as having a high degree of realism, strikes me two fold, not only does he imagine the characters of Jesus, Thomas and the other two disciples in a manner that the common layperson could relate to, but also he depicts these characters in a way in which they are real to themselves, to their described profession and essence, as described in the Bible. Thomas and the other two disciples are portrayed as old, weathered men. They are wrinkled and sun burnt. Caravaggio's manner of depicting these characters, especially the protagonist Christ, is instantly relatable. The viewer is drawn into the narrative, and has the chance to insert themselves into the theme and subject of the narrative. 'The viewer becomes entangled in the imaginary of the representation.'⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Langdon, Helen. *Caravaggio: A Life*. p.236-237

⁷⁸ Langdon, Helen. *Caravaggio: A Life*. p.237

⁷⁹ Bal, Mieke. *Quoting Caravaggio*. p.41

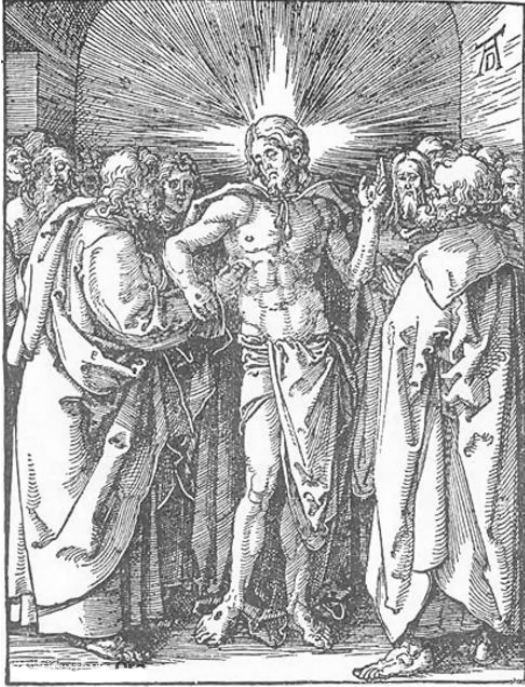


Fig. 70
Albrecht Durer, 1511
Small Passion 33. Incredulity of Thomas

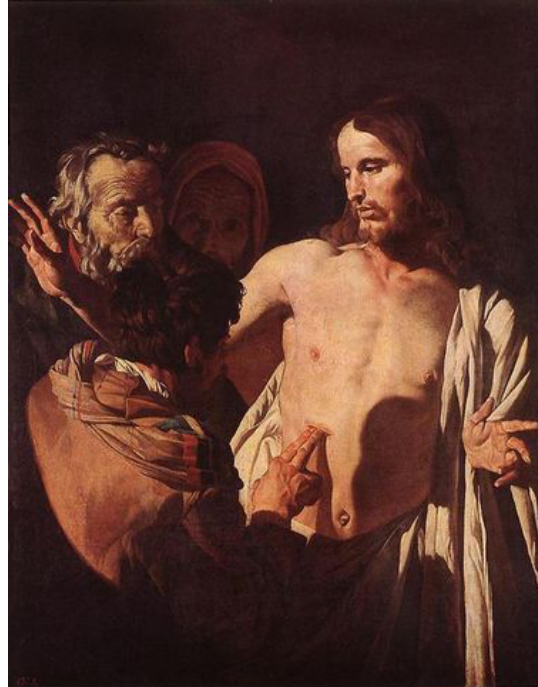


Fig. 71
Gerrit Van Honthorst, 1620
Incredulity of St Thomas,

As part of the criteria for the subset of sculptural investigations that followed from my initial investigations, I explored Caravaggio's influence and effect on other artists throughout Europe, which exposed me to members of the Utrecht Carravagisti. In particular, I became aware of Gerrit Van Honthorst's interpretation of this biblical account, captured in his painting *The Incredulity of St Thomas*, as well as Albert Durer's woodcut etching of the same biblical motif. All three artists employ a similar motif of Thomas either inserting his fingers into the wound or having his fingers guided by Jesus into the wound on the side of Christ's body. Although the perspective of and points of view in these depictions varies, the theme remains the same.

In the case of Caravaggio's painting, 'Thomas's finger is (already) poking inside the hole, the issue of rivalry involves not only physical but also visual

access to it.⁸⁰ The difficult visual admittance acts as an enticement and stimulates desire within the viewer; it helps command the viewer's attention. Dramatic stories of unequivocally faith in the unseen are vital components that fed into the power, appeal and effectiveness of this story. In this context, I built upon what I had learnt about the effectiveness of the triangulation of figures and the creation of a mobile perspective. I concentrated on the figures of Thomas, Jesus and a second disciple. The interaction between Thomas and Jesus would be the focal point and the third figure would expose the sense of amazement, baring witness to this physical confirmation that Jesus had in fact risen from the dead. Caravaggio's painting *The Incredulity of St Thomas* depicts this scene with vivid detail and dramatic effect, 'Caravaggio creates a tautly constructed semi-circular arch of figures, with the four heads patterned in a diamond around the central axis, and the light falling on Thomas's wrinkled brow. Christ guides Thomas's hand to the wound in his side, which he explores with a shocking intensity. It stresses the humanity of Christ, and reawakens a medieval sense of encountering divinity through His wounds.'⁸¹

Thomas thrusts his finger into the side of Jesus, still in disbelief as he puts his finger into the wound. Only by inserting his own finger into Jesus' wound, does Thomas finally believe that this is, in fact, the same man who had been crucified and had died on the cross just days before. How could this be the same man actually standing in front of him?

⁸⁰ Bal, Mieke. *Quoting Caravaggio*. p.37

⁸¹ Langdon, Helen. *Caravaggio: A Life*. p.235-236



Fig. 72
Incredulity (detail), 2007



Fig. 73
Incredulity (detail), 2007



Fig. 74
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. *Doubting Thomas*, 1603
Detail of Jesus guiding Thomas's hand into wound



Fig. 75
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio.
Doubting Thomas, 1603
Detail of Jesus' hand drawing back clothe



Fig. 76
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio.
Doubting Thomas, 1603
Detail of finger and wound

The physically literal and immediate corporeal nature of the story of doubting Thomas attracted me because I felt an affinity to learning through physical validation; similar to the way Thomas needs to validate the existence of a risen Christ by confirming it with his own physical sensory perceptions. The reliance on touch, a human sense, as a criterion for belief was intriguing to me both in a metaphorical sense, as well as thematically, as I searched for source material for my studio practice. Seventeenth century Caravaggio biographer, Bellori, gives one of the first known accounts of the palpable physicality of this painting. 'Caravaggio, commissioned by Vincenzo Giustiniani, made a picture of Saint Thomas thrusting his finger into the wound of the Saviour, who guides his hand removing the shroud to reveal his chest.'⁸² This early 17th century description of Caravaggio's composition testifies to the effectiveness of the painting and to its powerful message of faith over scepticism. I found that this painting metaphorically embodied my research as a whole, due to its motif and focus on incredulity and validation of faith, based on sense perception.



Fig. 77
Incredulity. 2007

⁸² Friedlander, Walter. (Bellori). *Caravaggio Studies*. p.161



Fig. 78
Incredulity. 2007

Using lessons learnt from the previous sculptures *Beheading*, *Condemnation* and *Deposition*, I investigated this story with more focus and direction in relation to interacting with historical source material. My principal criteria, gleaned from previous sculptural investigations, included an awareness of the effect of triangulation and direct physical human contact between the figures. These basic compositional aspects, coupled with the dramatic nature of the textual description, acted as reference points for working in the studio and developing this sculptural grouping. With these criteria in mind, I modelled each skeleton standing upright, and altogether in a roughly formed isosceles triangle.

X ←--disciple

Jesus →X X←Thomas

The skeleton figure of Thomas thrusts his finger into the wound in Jesus' side. Jesus helps to guide Thomas's forearm into his own wound, using his own left hand, whilst drawing back his robe with his right hand. The postures of the two figures are both an interpretation of the story from the Gospel of John, as well as abstractions from various painting's interpretations. The third figure that completes this triangular formation is of one of Jesus' disciples, there to bare witness.



Fig. 79
Incredulity. 2007

Although Caravaggio's painting acted as a key reference point for this sculptural grouping, I would like to articulate that as my sculptural

investigations had continued on from the *Beheading*, to *Deposition* to *Condemnation* onto *Incredulity*, I gradually became less literal in regards to appropriating the exact gestures, poses and postures from a specific painting. Instead, I would allow the theme of the painting to transcend the modelling of the figures. I used the 16th century two-dimensional composition as a reference point, but not in as much of a literal way as I had with the initial painting of the beheading. By using the theme of the painting, I was able to investigate how other artists had interpreted the same story by exploring the differences and similarities between various versions of the same story. This trend of becoming more independent from adhering to a literal reinterpretation of the figurative gesturing gave me the opportunity to progressively abstractly interpret the theme of the painting, throughout course of my research. I recognise a similar trend and approach towards iterative art making practices in the work of the contemporary Scottish painter, Alison Watt. I consider this work in order to contextualise my research and sculptural practice within a wider contemporary visual cultural context, as well as to exploring some of the common theoretical underpinnings.

Alison Watt was born in Greenock, in the UK, and graduated from Glasgow School of Art in 1988. She quickly found renown for her figurative, fabric swathed paintings that were exhibited both locally and internationally within a few years of completing her postgraduate studies. 'In *Sleeping Nude* of 1988 the model's pearly white skin is immediately arresting while swathes of the fabric on which she rests are there to contrast her form.'⁸³

⁸³ Wiggin, Colin. *Alison Watt – Phantom*. p.15



Fig. 80
Alison Watt. *Sleeping Nude*, 1988
Oil on canvas, 91.5 x 122cm.
Private collection

I am interested in a particular aspect of Watt's mode of operation that I feel I share a similarity with, even though our chosen mediums and subject matter vary to a large degree. The similarities, in terms of methodological influences, are not uncommon within visual artistic practices encompassing various mediums and artistic disciplines. One particular aspect that my research shares with Watt's practice involves the iterative nature of an artistic practice that initially relies on a fairly literal reinterpretation of source material, and continues to progress towards a looser, more abstracted mode of operation and reinterpretation. Within my own practice, and in relation to the case studies presented within my thesis, I refer to the literal reinterpretation of the figurative gestural elements in Case Study: *Beheading*, sourced from viewing and reinterpreting Caravaggio's painting

and progressing towards the more abstracted reinterpretation of the thematic elements and motifs of Case Study: *Incredulity*. Watt's early work falls within the traditionally academic genre of figurative painting, including a large body of work centred on the study and depiction of the nude model, for which she often used herself as the model. 'For several centuries the academic study of the nude was seen as the root of all artistic excellence, with drapery only ever given a supporting role. Indeed, early in her career Watt was producing pictures firmly within this tradition. Working extensively with life models and images of herself, the fabrics and draperies in her painting originally had a more subordinate role.'⁸⁴ Watt has expressed her interest in and admiration of the paintings of the old masters, including Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and Francesco de Zurbaran.

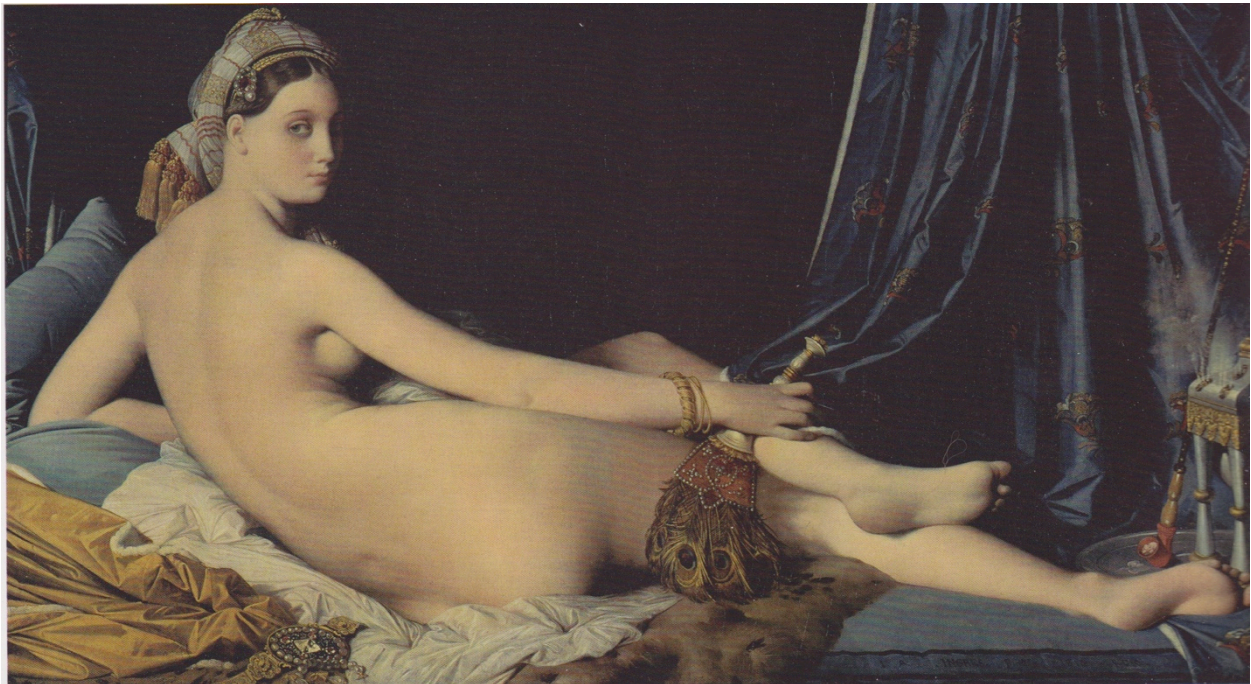


Fig. 81
Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres. *La Grande Odalisque*, 1814
Oil on Canvas. 88.9 x 162.56
Louvre, Paris.

⁸⁴ Wiggin, Colin. *Alison Watt – Phantom*. p.15

Watt relies on the depiction of fabric and drapery, even in her earliest works. In 1997, Watt exhibited a new body of work in an exhibition at the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh, entitled *Fold*.

Watt's work for this exhibition was heavily reliant on the depiction of drapery and fabric. The human figure is present in many of the images, but is separated, distanced and detached from the fabric. She had begun to paint images of fabric alone. I am interested in the way in which Watt reacted to something that might seem meaningless and irrelevant within her studio practice, but which ultimately begat a new direction. The Head of Education at the National Gallery of London, Collin Wiggins, describes the event that sparked this new direction within Watt's studio practice. 'After her model had completed a sitting and left for the day, Watt noticed that the sheet bore the imprints of the woman's body and had in effect become a palimpsest, loaded with memories of the previous painting session. Subsequently the folds, shadows and patterns of the sheet itself, with their indications of the presence, and indeed absence, of the human figure gradually became of greater interest to the artist than the depiction of the model. During the 1990s, Watt produced painting where the model and the fabric became separated until she finally began to make paintings showing fabric alone.'⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Wiggins, Colin. *Alison Watt – Phantom*. p.15-16



Fig. 82
Alison Watt. *Odalisque* 1996
Oil on Canvas. 152 x 182.9cm
Private Collection

Watt's interest in the depiction of fabric culminated when she accepted an important public commission, which was unveiled in Old St Paul's Church, Edinburgh in 2004. Her work of art was entitled *Still*. This prodigious painting is composed of four canvases, each measuring approximately 6 square feet. The four separate canvases are closely butted up against one another, but not completely. Within the Memorial Chapel, 'the cross shape made by the shadows in the narrow gap between the canvases takes on a Christian symbolism in such a way that would not happen if the painting were exhibited in a more neutral gallery space.'⁸⁶ Watt's painting *Still* was specifically designed, dedicated and installed within the church's Memorial

⁸⁶ Wiggin, Colin. *Alison Watt – Phantom* p.16

Chapel, which is dedicated to the members of the church who had perished during World War One. In this environment, Watt's painting acts like a chameleon and takes on the features and characteristics of the environment in which it is displayed. This touches upon the idea of how a particular artwork can be understood to be devotional, and how site specificity affects such an interpretation. I further explore this idea in the last case study, entitled Sacred Spaces and Devotional Places.



Fig. 83
Old St Paul's Episcopal Church.
Edinburgh, Scotland



Fig. 84
Alison Watt, *Still*. 2004
Old St Pau's Episcopal Church, Memorial Chapel
Edinburgh, Scotland



Fig. 85
Alison Watt, *Still*. 2004
Old St Pau's Episcopal Church, Memorial Chapel
Edinburgh, Scotland
Oil on canvas, 366 x 366cm

My acknowledgment of the influence that Caravaggio's paintings had on my sculptural groupings is mirrored in a similar fashion by Watt's interest in Francesco de Zurbaran's painting of *Saint Serapion* when she created *Still*. Watt's interest in Zurbaran's painting helps to illuminate the meaning of her own work in the sense that they were both created to 'provoke contemplation and use fabric in a way that is at once emphatically physical

and yet also deeply spiritual.⁸⁷ The content of Watt's contemporary paintings draws reference from the past, through the influence of Zurbaran's painting. This influence does not manifest itself in a literal reinterpretation of the painting, but rather Watt focused on aspects of the spiritual asceticism of Zurbaran's painting as key visual reference points in creating a her painting that was destined to be installed in an environment specifically designed for religious contemplation.



Fig. 86
Francisco de Zurbarán, *The Martyrdom of St Serapion*. 1628
Oil on canvas 120.5 x 103.5cm
Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Connecticut

⁸⁷ Wiggin, Colin. *Allison Watt – Phantom*. p.17

As Watt's work has progressed over the past 15 years, she has moved away from the physical certainties of literal interpretations of modelled fabric models and towards paintings made from her imagination. Watt's use of Zurbaran is not literal and exact, but rather she uses the theme and mood of Zurbaran's painting in order to transcend her composition and help draw the past into the present through the influence and traces of the spiritual aesthesis pioneered by the likes of painters like Zurbaran. Watt's relationship with historically iconic works of art is correlative and ever changing as she renegotiates ideas of surface and texture through painterly modes of imaging and visualisation. Watt's present day focalisation on the motif of a painting from the past draws ideas of the past into the present and creates an unstable correlative relationship between the viewer's understanding of the object of the past and the subjective present. Analysis of aspects of Allison Watt's practice has helped contextualise my research, touching on key areas of interest that will become paramount within my final case study.

I have highlighted two key aspects of Allison Watt's practice and progression. Firstly, I have contextualised my research with another contemporary artistic practice by highlighting the tendency to initially reinterpret particular elements of iconic works of art in a literal sense, and then progressing to a more abstracted metaphorical interpretation. Secondly, I am interested in her use of site specificity and how her work is read within these spaces. I further explore ideas of site specificity in relation to devotional art and sacred spaces, as is exemplified Watt's site-specific painting, *Still* in Old St Paul's Church.

At this point within the chronological reading of my practice-based research, it is prudent to introduce another facet of my research that will be a focus of

the final case study, that of the relationship between sacred space and sight specificity. First, though, I shall motivate my final case study by articulating the path to its occurrence. I shall deconstruct the theoretical and contextual implications in more detail in the final case study, in the next chapter.

The concept of site specificity became important at this stage of the development of this body of work. At this point, I had the opportunity to install work in a specific outdoor environment in Ontario, Canada. Up until this point in time, I had been predominantly investigating and realising my sculptural groupings of skeletons in Scotland, with a non-specific installation destination. These works were not designed to be exhibited in a specific location. They were adaptable, created with this flexibility in mind. Over time, I exhibited these sculptural groupings in a number of different gallery settings. Up until this point, I had drawn feedback and critical discourse from audience through informal discussion, open studio visits and artist talks that were organised in the UK.

Furthermore, at this point in the timeline of my research, I had begun to spend an equal amount of time in Canada and Scotland. Knowing that I was to spend a greater deal of time in Canada, I created a second version of my sculptural grouping entitled *Incredulity* with in the intent to install this particular version in Canada. The gestural elements of the second version of *Incredulity* were generally the same as the first group. The principal difference between the two sculptural groupings was the material. The original grouping was cast in bronze whilst the second version was cast in aluminium. This detail is rooted in a pragmatic decision that I made when negotiating how to transport the sculptures from the UK to Canada. The aluminium version is less substantial in weight, compared to the bronze

version, which allowed for me to transport the sculptural grouping to Canada with relative ease.

Concerning the site specific location for the aluminium version of *Incredulity*, I wanted the scene to be secluded with only the three figures of Jesus, Thomas and a witnessing disciple privy to this miracle. Only these three figures were to be present to experience this event, which seemed to follow in accordance with the Gospel of John's account of this story. I was attracted to the ever-changing colour palette that the grey-brown rocks and the lush green foliage, that continually change with the seasons, provide for an outdoor location for this piece. The changing colour would certainly affect the reading of sculptural grouping. The decision to cast these figures in aluminium was not only to facilitate their shipment to Canada, but also for the aesthetic and compositional significance that included the contrast of the colour of the aluminium with the colours of the surrounding nature. In keeping with the optimal pace of my practice, to avoid a sense of stagnation in my studio practice, I felt that casting these figures in aluminium was the best choice. I began the installation process as soon as I arrived at Craganrock Farm in Canada.

In the aluminium version, I modelled the figure of the witnessing disciple to stand more or less erect with his arms at his sides, whereas for the bronze version, the figure is leaning further back with more of an exaggerated curvature in his back. His arms are bent at the elbow with his hands raised to almost the same level as his chin. The bronze figure is considerably more animated, adding a sense of wonderment to the story, in contrast to the sombre effect of the witness disciple portrayed in the aluminium version. The figures of Jesus and Thomas are almost identical in both the aluminium

and bronze versions of this sculptural interpretation of the story of Thomas's incredulous nature.



Fig. 87
Incredulity (aluminium version), 2007



Fig. 88
Incredulity, (aluminium version), 2007



Fig. 89
Incredulity (aluminium version), 2007



Fig. 90
Incredulity (aluminium version), 2007



Fig. 91
Incredulity (aluminium version), 2007

This second version of the *Incredulity* grouping allowed me to highlight the aspect of site specificity in relation to my research. I have been aware of the importance of exploring and understanding site specificity from the initial profound experience, as I have stated in my initial case study, when I first viewed Caravaggio's painting in St John Co Cathedral. I was aware then that it was not just simply the painting alone that contributed to the

profound experience. I was cognisant of the multitude of devices at play within the sacred space of the Cathedral, including the architecture of the Cathedral itself, the interior design, and other works of art. I was aware that these individual devices were working in tandem to project a holistic effect within an environment that is designated as sacred and devotional within the spirituality of the Catholic Religion.

In my final case study, I explore this idea of sacred space, devotional art and how my practice led research relates. Site specificity involves an understanding that the site is specific if it is able to facilitate a certain aspect or setting that is integral to the work of art in relation to the overall composition and/or narrative. The term *site-specific art* traditionally describes an artwork created to exist in a certain place. It is my personal awareness and knowledge of the particular spaces on my farm in Canada (farmland and specific buildings) that informed how this specific site would be able to add a dynamic element to the sculptural artefacts. My work on the second aluminium version of *Incredulity* led to explorations into site specificity. The path that was metaphorically forged by designing and installing the aluminium version of *Incredulity* in a particular locale has introduced the notion of site specificity into my practice. This progression in my practice-led research influenced the exploration of my next two sculptural groupings, entitled *Moses and the Bleeding Rock* and *Samson and the Philistine*.



Fig. 92
Moses & the Bleeding Rock, 2008



Fig. 93
Samson & a Philistine, 2008

As I became more proficient with the modelling, casting and fabricating of the skeletal figurative elements of my developed sculptural language, I began to concentrate on other aspects of composition in my sculptural investigations, such as my widened interest in the nature of sacred spaces and devotional art in the Catholic religion. Since many of the works of art that have been of particular interest throughout my research have been located within sacred spaces, I became more conscious of the abundance of different materials and mediums that constituted a work of art. I became more aware of the theatrical nature of many of Baroque art works. The multi-faceted approach to the theatre of sacred space came into full bloom during the 17th century, as exemplified by the Italian sculptor, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, who plays a significant role in my final case study. Bernini is my principal source for examining a multi-faceted approach to concept, design and ability to create multi-layered theatres of sacred spaces.

Before discussing my final case study, I briefly reiterate the salient points that my research has uncovered by chronologically recapping the prominent aspects of discovery and knowledge gained through haptic modes of operating. Beginning with my experiments with Caravaggio's *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*, I had developed a method of exploring historically iconic works of art, usually housed in sacred spaces and designated as devotional works of art within the Catholic religion. My developed methods involved reinterpreting a two-dimensional image into three-dimensional sculptural forms in order to create an unstable perspective. This line of enquiry, I explored aspects of single point perspective and point of view, both visually and philosophically. The rationality behind my understanding of *truth* as it applies to self (subject) is rooted in a continuous negotiation between faith and doubt, which occur whenever faced with choices and decision-making within my studio practice.

Next, I had discovered *subjective truths* within my initial sculptural explorations, such as the effectiveness of triangulation in relation to figurative elements brought about by creating a mobile and unstable perspective for the viewer. I continued to interact with historical iconic works of art by physically *inserting* (using my own body as the principal modelling device) myself into these compositions as a way in which to explore the correlative relationship between past and present that occurs when the past is brought forward into the present through this direct incredulous haptic mode of investigating.

I began to experiment with site specificity in relation to sacred space and devotional art within the Catholic Religion. This exploration was initiated through a second, reiteration of a key sculptural case study entitled *Incredulity* that was designed for and installed in a specific locale in Canada. By installing my second version of *Incredulity*, I initiated a tangential line of inquiry within my overall research that carries forward the knowledge and insights gathered through out the preceding case studies and continue through the exploration of sacred spaces and devotional places.



Fig. 94
Incredulity (bronze version), 2007



Fig. 95
Incredulity (bronze version), 2007

Case Study 3: Sacred Spaces and Devotional Places



Fig. 96
Sign located at the entrance to Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence, Italy

My final case study sequentially follows from the knowledge that I was able to glean from the sculptural investigations that were exemplified in the gallery-based sculptures, such as *Beheading of St John the Baptist*, as well as the aluminium site-specific sculptural grouping entitled *Incredulity*. Because my research is iterative in nature, I have continued to build upon the knowledge that I have developed and uncovered from previous case studies. For the final case study, I have selected one sculpture, entitled *Wee David*, as a means to discuss the key findings of a number of sculptural groupings. In my final case study, I further investigate the notion of using my own physical body as a means to model the gestural elements of skeletal

figure and metaphorically inserting myself into the 16th century iconographical artworks that I draw upon as source material. This allows me to continue to explore an understanding of point of view through the destabilisation of perspective that occurs when two-dimensional imagery is reinterpreted into three-dimensional forms. The second key development that I have carried forward from the preceding case studies deals with my explorations of the nature of Catholic sacred spaces in relation to my studio/barn space. This facet of my research deals with awareness of site specificity. My on going explorations into the relationship between studio/barn and Catholic sacred spaces have allowed me to widen the scope of my investigation regarding how these types of spaces function and operate in terms of interacting with the individual both physically and visually. These two key points of interest provide a framework to explore devotional art, as related to the historical iconographical works of art that I draw upon as source material, as well as to how my sculptural artefacts function within the barn/studio space.

I had been using my own body as a modelling tool within the studio from the outset of my research, but only became cognisant of its metaphorical importance during the preceding case study based on the story of doubting Thomas. I have become acutely aware that my practice depends upon the actual insertion of my own physicality into my sculptures that are based on the study of historically iconic works of art. This strategy came about because I do not readily use traditional modes of sketching and drawing a means to draft out ideas before committing to three-dimensional forms. Instead I have relied on the use of my own body and mirrors to model my reduced skeleton figures. This tactic is both metaphorically and literally exemplified in my sculptural investigations dealing with the biblical story of doubting Thomas.

The second key point that arose out of the preceding investigations involves site specificity. Within the chronology of my research, I had begun to spend equal amounts of time in Canada and Scotland, and subsequently began to design sculptures that were designed to be installed in a specific location in Canada.



Fig. 97
View from the entrance of barn.



Fig. 98
Barn/Studio space. Ontario, Canada

This insistence on and awareness of location allowed me to explore aspects of the initial profound experience that had initiated my research, namely the act of viewing Caravaggio's painting within the building that it was designed for. St John Co Cathedral is a sacred space within the Catholic religion, created in the 16th century. It houses many works of art that are deemed as devotional in the sense that they are understood as having a religious purpose. These works of art are designed to instil the faith of a particular

religious belief system, in this case the Roman Catholic religion. The nature of Baroque art often includes ornate architectural features, which employ a multitude of various artistic mediums in its attempts to connect with the viewer. Many of the churches that I visited during the course of my research display this multi-faceted approach to architecture, design and construction. This approach encompasses the intertwining roles of architecture, sculpture and painting. I was aware of the visually embellished nature of Catholic sacred spaces when I first viewed Caravaggio's painting in Malta, but had made a conscious tactical decision to try and distil my emotive, profound experience down to a particular aspect of this experience, namely the figurative gestures, poses and postures.



Fig. 99
Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore. Florence, Italy



Fig. 100
Basilica de Santa Maria del Fiore
(Interior)



Fig. 101
Basilica de Santa Maria del Fiore
(Main Portal to Cathedral)



Fig. 102
Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore. Florence, Italy



Fig. 103
Battistero di San Giovanni, Florence Italy



Fig. 104
Lorenzo Ghiberti,
Gates of Paradise 1425-51
Battistero di San Giovanni



Fig. 105
Vincenzo Dante.
Beheading of St John the Baptist. 1569-71
Battistero di San Giovanni

Various elements within 16th century sacred spaces, including artworks (painting/sculpture) are at play within the actual architecture, layout and articulation of space that defines the building. These elements were employed to instil a sense of faith in the particular religious belief system associated with the building. Of particularly interest to me was how the Baroque design of sacred spaces used many different mediums and materials to instil their particular (Catholic) message. I studied specific devices that were used in conjunction with figurative elements. These included the sculptural representation of the light of divine energy, as in Gloria's, Nimbus' and rays of light that flourished throughout the 16th century.



Fig. 106
Gian Lorenzo Bernini
St Peter's Cathedra & Gloria. 1666
Vatican

This line of inquiry led me to personally visit, in order to more deeply research, many of Catholic Churches Cathedrals in Italy and Malta, as well as in Canada and elsewhere. I have gathered insight into the design of these spaces through traditional text based research, as well as from informal discourse with architects and artists, parishioners and clergy that work with and utilise these buildings. I continued to use the reduced skeleton form within my sculptural investigations as the key component, whilst trying to develop a wider, more embellished and ornate composition. I used a specific building located in Canada for this purpose. The site is a 19th century wooden and stone barn located in southern Ontario. I have developed and adapted this space to act as a type of studio/installation site, so that I am able to explore ideas of ornamentation, site specificity and the nature of devotional art in relation to historically iconic works of art.



Fig. 107
Interior of Barn/studio. 2011



Fig. 108
Work in progress using wooden nimbus. 2011



Fig. 109
Work in progress using wooden nimbus (detail). 2011



Fig. 110
Constructing wooden nimbus. 2011



Fig. 111
Constructing wooden nimbus (detail). 2011

The subject matter and source material that I relied on for my final case study involved a single figure, as opposed to the triangulated three figure sculptural groupings that comprised the previous case study. As I have articulated in the previous case study, as my research progressed, I became less tethered to a literal reinterpretation of specific source material, but rather used the source material as a means of suggesting the motif or theme of the investigation. I have helped contextualise this strategy within a wider contemporary cultural context by looking at other contemporary artists such as Allison Watt and the Chapman brothers, who also employ a similar tactic of initially relying on a more literal interpretation of art historical source material progressing to a more abstracted, conceptualised interpretation of a particular theme/work of art.

The theme of my final case study revolves around the figure of the young David, drawn from the Biblical story of David and Goliath. I was fascinated with this popular iconic story of the future King of Israel's defeat over the physically superior Philistine warrior, Goliath.

'Goliath started walking toward David again, and David ran quickly toward the Philistine battle line to fight him. He reached into his bag and took out a stone, which he slung at Goliath. It hit him on the forehead and broke his skull, and Goliath fell face downward on the ground. And so, without a sword, David defeated and killed Goliath with a sling and a stone!'⁸⁸

After concluding the site-specific version of *Incredulity*, I developed and installed a number of other sculptural pieces within the outdoor environment in Canada, including *Samson and the Philistine* and a single figure sculpture of *Moses and the Bleeding Rock*. I reflected on the various aspects of this

⁸⁸ 2 Samuel 17 48 - 50. *Holy Bible. Good News Translation*

sculpture that allowed me to gather knowledge of some of the potential challenges that come with installing three-dimensional work in a site-specific environment. I developed a pragmatic approach in order to best utilise the site's particular characteristics to help facilitate the narrative.

I carried forth three aspects from my experience with *Moses and the Bleeding Rock* that helped to inform my next sculptural investigation. Firstly, I maintained an interest in Old Testament narratives as a textual reference point. Secondly, I wanted to continue to discover more possibilities in using a single figure to tell a story. And lastly, I began to particularly explore the work of the 16th century sculptor, Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Along with these iterative aspects that carried over from the previous sculpture, I began to investigate the notion of canonical sculptural subject matter by focusing on the story of David and Goliath, in particular the character of David.

By this time, I had become acutely aware that, what had begun with an initial interest in a single Baroque painting, Caravaggio's *Beheading of St John the Baptist*, had snowballed into a wider range of 16th century artistic output that included many other Baroque painters and sculptors.

Throughout my research, I have considered Caravaggio as a means of epitomising a particular style that was copied, reiterated and imitated by many artists after him. In a similar sense, I have looked towards Bernini as an exemplification of the Baroque sculptor. In this regard, Bernini exemplifies the styles, fashions and approaches to sculpture throughout the 17th century. 'A man of extraordinary ability, ambition, and charisma, he was sublimely in sync with the rhythms of his time, the seventeenth century.'⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Morrissey, Jake. *The Genius in the Design*. p.15

I have chosen to discuss a selected number of case studies that reflect the key discoveries that were made throughout the entirety of my research. As well as primarily using Bernini and Caravaggio as reference points, I have explored the art of many other 15th - 17th century artists as inspiration for my practice. The first half of my sculptural groupings was heavily influenced by the 16th century painter, Caravaggio, whilst the second half of my work became equally influenced by the 16th century sculptor, Bernini.

As opposed to Caravaggio's tumultuous life story, of which there is little first person archival material available, information regarding Bernini, and the plethora of commissions he was involved in, has been recorded in detail by various sources, both during his life time and there after. My research does not intend to map out a traditional linear art historical perspective, but rather I am interested in sculpturally exploring the relationship that exists between ideas of the past and the present, with reference to visual artistic modes of communication. How is the present informed by the past, and how is our understanding of the past moulded within the present? I have used my art practice as a means of inserting myself into these iconic works of art, which are drawn from the 16th century, in order to explore the implications in relation to art practice.

The sheer enormity of Bernini's artistic influence and output soon became very clear to me when I visited the Italian city of Rome. He seemed to be involved in almost every aspect of civic life, from architecture to urban planning. He was also a key contributor to the style and design that defined 17th century sacred spaces, such as Churches and Cathedrals.



Fig. 112
Cathedra. St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican



Fig. 113
Baldicchino. St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican



Fig. 114
Baldicchino (detail). St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican



Fig. 115
St Peters Basilica, Vatican



Fig. 116
St Peters Basilica, Vatican (façade)



Fig. 117
St Peters Basilica, Vatican (interior)



Fig. 118
Gian Lorenzo Bernini
Papal tomb of Alexander VII, 1678



Fig. 119
Gian Lorenzo Bernini
Papal Tomb of Alexander VII, 1678
Detail of winged skeleton figure

Accounts of Bernini's passionate personality drew my attention. There exists an enormous amount of writing about Bernini's life from his contemporaries, as well as from other art historical and critical analyses. I found many instances of authors drawing analogies between Bernini's studio work and his personal life outside of the studio. The character of the artist, as well as his art, intrigued me.

As I have already stated, I had become less tethered to a literal reinterpretation of a particular source material as my case studies progressed. Instead, I grew to rely on using my own imagination, as well as my own body, in order to develop my sculptural reinterpretation of particular

themes or motifs drawn from 17th century art. Of great interest to me is the idea of canonical genres and themes. Within a certain genre, such as religious painting or sculpture, a particular theme is conveyed in a lineage of artistic interpretations. This is the case for sculpted versions of the biblical character of David. The Old Testament story of David and Goliath is one of the most popular biblical narratives, having been depicted by artists in a multitude of mediums over the course of hundreds of years. The reiterated nature of this artistic lineage intrigued me. I inspected many different versions of the story of David, by visiting museums, galleries and sacred spaces, where they are predominantly housed.

The tale of the heroic King of the Jews is one that has been interpreted by many artists, especially in 16th and 17th century Italy and Spain. Artistic representations of this biblical story are particularly apparent in cities, such as Florence, which holds David as one of the patron Saints. The sculpted representation of David as a freestanding statue has acted as a foundational element within the sculptural tradition in Florence, where he was practically regarded as civic hero. Whilst exploring many 17th century examples of the story of David & Goliath, in both two- and three-dimensional formats, I discovered Donatello's second cast bronze version of the hero boy King of Israel. When I first saw this sculpture in the Bargello Museum in Florence, I was captivated by the evident balance between realism and idealism. Donatello had modelled his David with neoplatonic overtones, coupled with a true to life representation of 15th century dress and décor. Donatello portrays David as a youthful victorious figure with Goliath's severed head lying at his feet.



Fig. 120
Donatello. *David*, 1430
Florence, Italy

Donatello's *David* features an androgynous early renaissance bronze casting of the theme. As I continued to research other artist's interpretations of this theme, comparing and contrasting them to Bernini's *David*, I attempted to deduce for myself what Bernini had done differently. Comparing Donatello's freestanding bronze version to Bernini's marble version, the powerful effect of accurately sculpting a figure that appears to be in motion was unmistakable. Bernini's marble *David* almost looks alive, as though it has been frozen in time by the viewer's gaze. No other interpretation of this story is sculpted in such a manner. I felt that the element of depicting suggested movement within the human figure in such a convincingly realistic manner was the particular advancement that Bernini contributed to this tradition of depicting a representation of the biblical character of David.



Fig. 121
Gian Lorenzo Bernini. *David*, 1623-24
Rome, Italy.

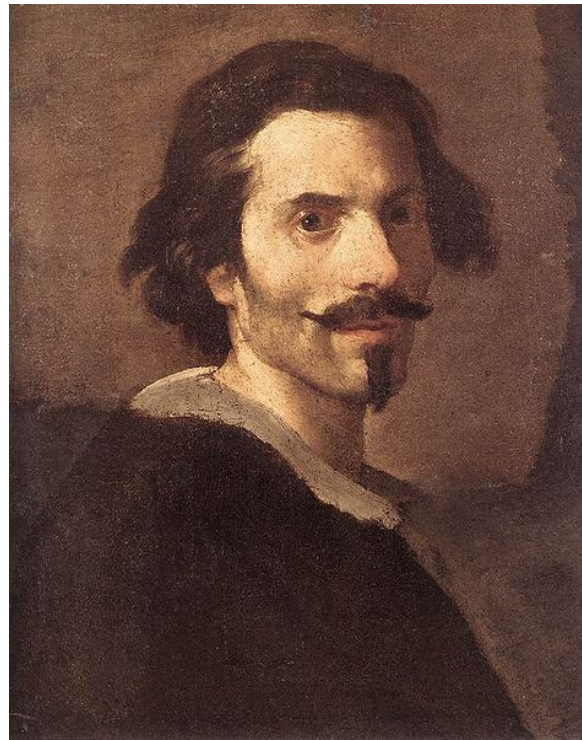


Fig. 122
Gian Lorenzo Bernini. *Self-portrait* 1630-35
Rome, Italy.

In Baldinucci's biography of the Bernini, published in the 17th century, he recounts the artist's creation and realisation of this marble sculpture. 'He

modelled the beautiful face of this figure after his own countenance. The powerful knitted brows, the terrible fixity of the eyes, and the upper jaw clamped tightly over the lower lip wonderfully express the rightful wrath of the young Israelite in the act of aiming his sling at the forehead of the giant Philistine. It is worth recording that while Bernini was working on the figure in his own likeness, Cardinal Maffeo Barberini came often to his studio and held the mirror for him with his own hand.⁹⁰ Baldinucci's description sheds light on particular aspects of how Bernini apparently created and modelled his statue. Baldinucci describes how the artist used his own features and likeness as a model for David. This fact was of great interest to me regarding my approaches to modelling my skeleton figures. Initially, I had subconsciously used my own body as a means to sketch out the poses and postures. During my sculptural investigations revolving around the *Incredulity of Thomas*, I became cognisant of this tactic, both in a practical sense and a metaphorical sense. Not only was I using my own body as a modelling device, but also I was metaphorically inserting myself into these iconic works of art and, in a way, touching them. By touching them, I was able to learn through my senses. This approach to knowledge relies on a haptic approach to learning through physically trying and experimenting, as opposed to instructional and didactic modes. I do not negate the importance of depending on literature and textual based information, but rather I display the key aspects of my research have relied on haptic modes of knowledge acquisition. Although I referred to the literature, my desire was to mainly garner an understanding of the advancements that artists had made in relation to the theme of David predominantly by my own experience. I felt that if I relied too heavily on the textual arguments about artistic accomplishments and distinctions, I could possibly fall prey to adopting the author's views, rather than simply seeing and experiencing the work for

⁹⁰ Baldinucci, Filippo . *The Life of Bernini*. p.66

myself. This statement is aligned with the core principal behind my research methodology. My research employs inductive means and methodologies that are fundamentally practice-led and iterative. Knowing through doing has allowed me to take responsibility for the decisions that I make, and has given me a greater understanding of why I made the particular choices and decisions that I have. This touches upon my understanding of establishing subjective truths, which are rooted in a constant negotiation between having faith and doubt in the choices that continuously arise when creating within the studio.

Bernini's *David* is twisted like a tornado, taunt and looking upwards, readying his sling and stone. I think that his greatest achievement, relative to other artist's interpretations of this theme, is not only his ability to convey a realistic representation, but also the energy and frozen motion that he is able to describe in marble. The free flowing movement of Bernini's *David* is unparalleled in its portrayal of forceful energetic motion. David's dynamic movement is captured in static marble form, frozen in space and time as the viewer's gaze catches sight of it. When the viewer frees it from their gaze, it seems as though it will continue twisting and turning with great fervour until he releases the stone from his sling. 'What Bernini has done, which few artists at the time had attempted, is to *involve* the observer in the event. Bernini's David gazes behind and beyond the viewer, to a Goliath in the distance. The space between the art and the observer has been physically charged: the observer is in the middle of the battle.'⁹¹ Bernini played with the sensation of movement and propulsion more than any artist had done before with the canonical theme of David and Goliath. Bernini did not necessarily draw all of his inspiration from within himself; on the contrary, Bernini relied heavily on the close appraisal of antiquity and awareness of

⁹¹ Morrissey, Jake. *The Genius in the Design*. p.34

work that had come before him. Charles Avery suggests that Bernini relied heavily on the study and knowledge that he gained through incorporating many of the poses and postures found in Giambologna's figures. 'What has not been appreciated previously is the fact that other works by Giambologna furnished Bernini with *all* the significant elements for his revised composition.'⁹² Another key reference point that has been attributed to the particular pose of Bernini's *David* is taken from the Roman statue *Borghese Gladiator*.



Fig. 123
Agasias of Ephesus. *Borghese Warrior*, 100 BC

This relationship is important for my own methodologies because it provides evidence that artists have often utilised elements from works of art that have come before them when devising their own creations. Building upon, overlapping and reiterating certain aspects of a particular work allows for a type of artistic cannibalisation that is integral within many different artistic disciplines. This is evident within contemporary artistic practice, for example in the work of the Chapman brothers. The Chapman brother's have

⁹²Avery, Charles. *Bernini: Genius of the Baroque*. p.52

continued to use Francesco Goya's work as a central rallying point from which to artistically depart. They continue to return to the old master, creating cyclical reiterations and regurgitations of certain aspects and themes.

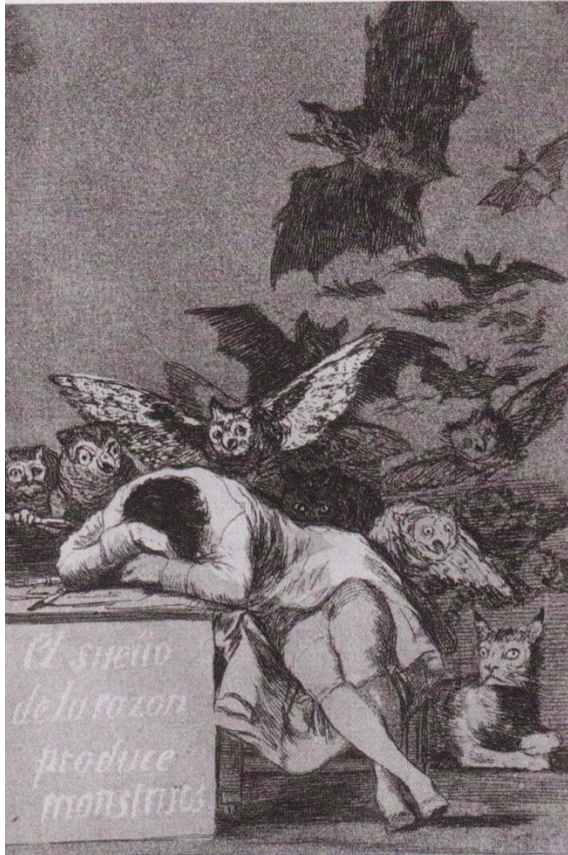


Fig. 124
Francesco de Goya, 1798
The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters
(No.43) Etching

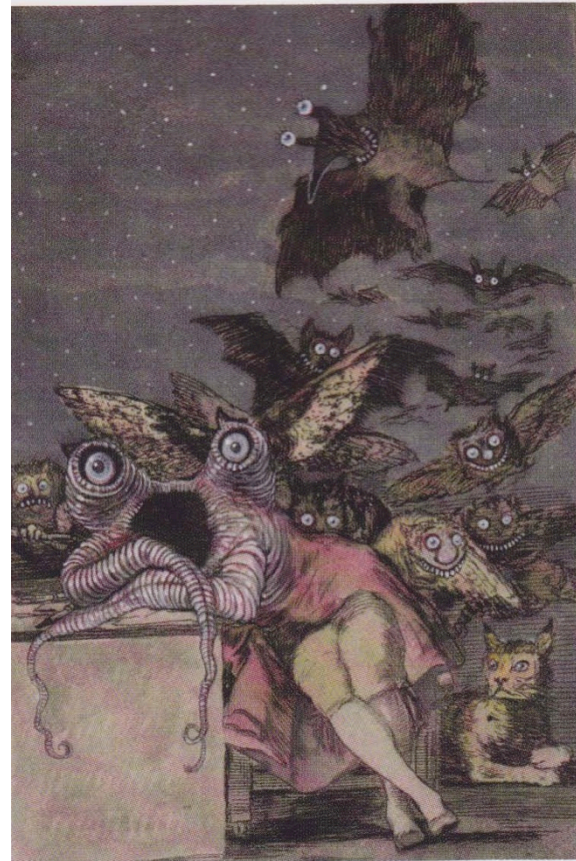


Fig. 125
Jake & Dinos Chapman, 2005
Like a Dog returns to its Vomit,
The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters
(No. 43), etching.

One commonality that ties Caravaggio and Bernini together is their tremendous technical ability to create work based on a realistic or natural manner. 'In attempting to define the essential characteristics of Baroque art we may convincingly begin with naturalism. Verisimilitude, though it takes varying forms, is a principle to which all Baroque artists adhere'⁹³

⁹³ Martin, John Rupert. *Baroque*. p.12-13

In the course of my practice, I have developed a visual language, specifically the use of 1/3 scale cast bronze skeleton figures, with which to poke and prod at specific source works of art, in order to learn truths for myself. These truths have allowed me to make decisions, based on knowledge gained through my practice, in order to progress. One such advancement has been my understanding of Caravaggio's strengths and weaknesses. I felt that his highly accomplished use of realistic naturalism often masked the inconsistencies of placing these figures in a realistic depth of field. Whether or not the artist did this intentionally is of no concern to me, as it would amount to conjecture and guesswork, at best. What is important in relation to my research is that my discovery of apparent inconsistencies between my observations and Caravaggio's painting was deduced through my own haptic means and methodologies. I have therefore learned through physically doing and gained a sense of validation through sensory perception.



Fig. 126
Wee David (wax modelling stage), 2008

I continued to use my own body and a single mirror in order to model my wax skeleton figure based on the theme of David. My awareness of how effectively convincing Bernini's marble figure of David was in conveying motion made me ultra analytical towards the appearance and the mechanics of the pose of my model. During the wax modelling phase, I employed a strategy that I had used since the beginning of my research, and that I later discovered, according to Bernini's 17th century biographer, Baldinucci, had also been used by Bernini when he created his marble statue of David. I used the reflected image of myself in the mirror in order to model the pose and posture of the skeleton figure. This approach involved setting up a large life-size mirror in my studio, beside the table where I modelled the wax figure, which allowed me to quickly refer to a particular area of the posture and translate it into the wax figure. As Bernini's diarist and biographer,

Chantalou, notes in his diary entry on 14th July 1665, 'Bernini said that to try and succeed [in giving expression] he had used an approach that he had invented all by himself: when he wanted to give expression to a figure that he wanted to represent, he posed in the same action that he intended the figure to make and had someone who was a good draughtsman do a drawing of him like that.'⁹⁴

Some of my initial experiments involved standing in a similar pose as Bernini's *David*, mimicking its twisted torso with my left arm drawn across my body with my right leg forward. Just as my eyes had gotten caught up in the tornado of movement of Bernini's *David*, so did my body feel twisted and contorted as I tried to imitate its stance. This raised a red flag within my critical mind-set. It was the use of the mirror, and the ability to use myself as a reference point and model, that allowed me to gain a greater understanding of Bernini's modelling strategy and technique. As I attempted to mimic the pose of Bernini's *David*, I became acutely aware of the unnaturalness of this pose. I tried to imagine what David was trying to accomplish at this point in the story, namely to ready his stance and fire his stone from his sling in order to strike down the Philistine giant, Goliath. My attempt to hold the pose of Bernini's *David* contrasted heavily with the pose that I would naturally take if I were to ready myself with sling and stone. I tried at great length to envision a moment in the preparing of sling and stone in which I might find myself in a position akin to the way Bernini had made his carving, but could not find any instance where my body took that twisted pose.

⁹⁴ Chantalou, Paul Freart du. *Journal Du Voyage Du Cavalier Bernin En France*. p.22



Fig. 127
Gian Lorenzo Bernini. *David*, 1623-24



Fig. 128
Wee David, 2008

My own interpretation of what a stance might realistically look like if I were to prepare my sling and stone, making ready to strike down a foe much greater than myself, was not nearly as twisted and contorted as Bernini's *David*. When I maneuvered my own body into the position of Bernini's marble *David*, I found that this twisting pose felt unstable and unbalanced. When I positioned myself in a more naturally comfortable position, according to what the character of David was trying to accomplish, I found myself positioned much lower, almost squatted with bended knee, whilst my upper and lower body remained in line with, not twisted about, my hips. My whole body was turned slightly to the right as my head bent to the left to look beyond my left shoulder with a clear intent and a direct line of sight forward and upward. This is the preparatory stance that I felt I would naturally take if I were in David's shoes. I proceeded to model my wax figure in this more realistic stance.

Upon completing the modelling stage of my sculpture entitled *Wee David*, I came across an early 20th century art historian who had reached the same conclusion that I had regarding the unrealistic stance of Bernini's *David*. Richard Norton explains that 'the figure is turned to the wrong side. As he stands, the right arm drawn back, the left hand holding the stone in the sling in front of the body, the sling must fall loose and dead, the body must again be flung forward and the right arm swung upwards before the youth can get the momentum to hurl the stone at his enemy. Had Bernini turned the figure the other way with the left hand behind and the right arm in front of the body, this sense of ineffectiveness in the pose would not have existed, and the whole body would have been tensely set at the moment of rest between the action of drawing back for the aim and the instantaneously following motion of the cast.'⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Norton, Richard. *Bernini and Other Studies in the History of Art*. p.13

Bernini's David is a twisting tornado of movement, ready to come to life with all the convincing contortions and bends of flesh and muscle. Gian Lorenzo Bernini's mastery of carving and his incredible ability to conceive and translate dynamic movement in static material helps to supersede any question of the reality of the pose and posture. However, through my own critical studio practice and a methodology of questioning initial perceptions, I was able to deduce certain debatable issues of composition that have been confirmed in Richard Norton's analysis.

The realisation of a more realistic posture was brought about through tactile experimentation within my studio practice. By examining myself in different poses in front of a mirror, I was able to model my wax figure, while visually confirming the positioning of the stance, and thereby metaphorically inserting my own body into the narrative. I used my own physical senses to negate (doubt) or confirm (faith) what felt comfortable, correct and appropriate in order to successfully accomplish the task at hand, in this case using a sling and a stone to strike down a foe much greater in size than myself. This negotiation between faith and doubt, in relation to the choices and decisions that must be made within the studio, is the basis of my understanding of subjective truths. These truths help situate myself in relation to the world around me, through an awareness of responsibility for the choices that I make. This haptic method of discovery is another example of the core principal of my research methodologies, which encompass an approach to learning through doing. By employing such scrupulous strategies, I gain insight and knowledge into other artist's work, as well as my own. The aim of these experiments has not been to confirm or negate the quality, value or ability of any work of art or particular artist, but rather it has allowed me to investigate iconic canonical works of art, comparing and contrasting with my own studio experiments and methods. In this way, I

can draw on the past from the present and destabilise the linear approach to history, specifically art history. The correlative entanglement that I hope to expose and explore by using my body as device in which to metaphorically insert myself into iconic works of art through my sculptural practice allows me to reach out and *touch* these predominantly inaccessible mementos of a particular time and place. Also, I have been able to situate my research within a contemporary context by exploring similar trends that rely on interacting in some way with iconic works of art through iteration and re-appropriation of motif.

When creating *Wee David*, I was able to build upon certain elements and aspects from my previous sculptures, namely the use of a single figure that had come about during my sculpture entitled *Moses and the Bleeding Rock*. The figure of Moses holds a wooden stick in his left hand, similar to the skeleton figure of David, who readies a cast bronze string and stone. I wove together a sling using string and modelled the stone using soft wax. Besides the use of my own body as a model, one of the most prominent aspects that proceeded from previous case studies was my intention to install this figure in a specific location within my barn/studio space in Canada. Although I concentrated on the gestural elements of the David figure, I constantly kept in mind the particular characteristics of the installation site in Canada. All the while, I continued to investigate sacred spaces by visiting particular sites of interest in Italy and abroad in order to experience the ornate nature of these spaces and the artistic devices used within these buildings. I paid particular attention to how various artistic elements worked in conjunction with figurative elements.



Fig. 129
Wee David, 2008



Fig. 130
Wee David, 2008



Fig. 131
Wee David, 2008



Fig. 132
Wee David, 2008

Using the studio/barn space to install and develop my sculpture, *Wee David*, I explored scale and volume, texture and surface, as well as architectural elements and materials intrinsic to the particular site. The most profound area of interest that I endeavoured to investigate by situating and developing my sculptural artefacts in a specific location was the idea of devotional art within both past and present day contexts. The 17th century art works that I have explored and referenced throughout my research are considered devotional, in the sense that they were produced to illustrate and supplement, in a tangible form, the principles of Christianity. The vast majority of large-scale artistic commissions, both two- and three-dimensional, were facilitated through commissions supported by the Roman

Catholic Church. At no point do I claim to be creating my sculptures with the intent that they serve any type of devotional or religious function. Rather, I have simply used my sculptural practice as a means to explore the entangled relationship between ideas of an objective past and the subjective present, through the use of Baroque characteristics, motifs and themes found in both contemporary artistic practice, as well as 17th century artistic practice. My motivation has not been to instil a particular belief system or to portray the principles of the Catholic religion, dogma or doctrine. I am interested understanding ways in which artists have used a multitude of visual mediums and devices within particular sacred spaces, in order to convey and transmit specific messages. In the case of the Catholic Church, the visual mechanics were at the servitude of the message. The messages were designed to instil and re-invigorate the viewer with a sense of faith in the Catholic belief system. My use of the barn/studio space for the installation of my sculpture work does not purport to support any particular belief system. I recognise that the function of the majority of the 16th century historical art works that I have used as source material is of a devotional nature. They are considered sacred works of art because they had been created to communicate the principles of the Catholic faith to the viewer. My practice led research has allowed me to investigate the nature of faith and doubt in relation to the purpose and function of 16th century sacred art works. Moreover, it has allowed me to comprehend the continuous internal negotiation that occurs when faced with choices within the process of realising an idea/artefact. The decisions that I have made when faced with choices throughout my practice are based on convictions of faith and feelings of doubt.

I was interested in the compartmentalised nature of the basic chapels within churches, as a means of creating a space within a space. I have explored

this idea of a compartmentalised space within the larger sacred space during my sculptural investigations entitled *Flagellation* and *Pieta*. My work towards realising *Wee David* addressed the same main concerns that I dealt with during my research towards *Flagellation* and *Pieta*.

The smaller peripheral spaces that line the main nave of many churches are taken from the traditional Latin cross design of Catholic churches. The popular Baroque design includes a central nave with adjoining chapels on the side. I experienced this basic layout in many of the Baroque era churches and cathedrals that I visited during the course of my research, including St John Co Cathedral in Malta, Santa Maria Della Vitoria and St Peter's Basilica in Rome. During the course of my research, I visited these types of sacred spaces to study how they functioned during liturgical services and how people occupied the spaces, how they operated during Mass and other religious services. This helped inform my understanding of the devotional status of these spaces, including the art works housed within.

At this point, I introduce another contemporary artist whose practice has helped me situate my own research within a contemporary cultural context. Paul Carter was a Scottish artist who tragically passed away in a car accident in 2006. Much of his work in the 10 years prior to his death dealt with a probing of the idea of devotional space and a search for spirituality. I have encouraged a contemporary cultural contextualisation of my research by exploring ways in which other artists have dealt with similar themes and concerns. I have similarities in the ways in which Carter reconnoitred ideas of devotion in relation to artistic practice. In particular, he investigates the nature of how space and place can be used in order to evoke a questioning of the relationship that exists between functionality and spirituality that are intertwined and embodied in Catholic sacred spaces.



Fig. 133
Paul Carter. *Awaiting Further Instructions, Mount Sinai*. 1999
Photograph. Private Collection

The first work of art by Paul Carter that I incorporate into my research is entitled *Awaiting Further Instructions, Mount Sinai*. This piece consists of a colour photograph and title. The photo depicts a silhouetted image of the artist himself sitting on what is presumably the summit of Mount Sinai. In the background, the Sinai range stretches into the distance.

Mount Sinai is mentioned many times in the Book of Exodus, in the Torah and the Bible, as well as the Quran. According to Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions, the biblical Mount Sinai was the place where Moses received the Ten Commandments. For Jews and Christians alike, Mount Sinai signifies the place where God passed His laws to the Israelites. It is considered to be one of the most sacred spaces within their religion. Paul Carter directly engages with and questions this belief by physically inserting himself into the biblical context. He becomes part of this particular place and situates himself to operate as a conduit between God and man by climbing to the top of the mountain to await further instructions from God. The title of this photograph is key in establishing a sense of context for the audience. The title relays the purpose and intention of the work of art. Paul uses the specific geographical site, along with its traditional biblical function, as a means to question the relationship between the divine and the earthly. He draws the ancient past forward into the present by using his own physical presence atop of this mountain as he awaits instructions from God.

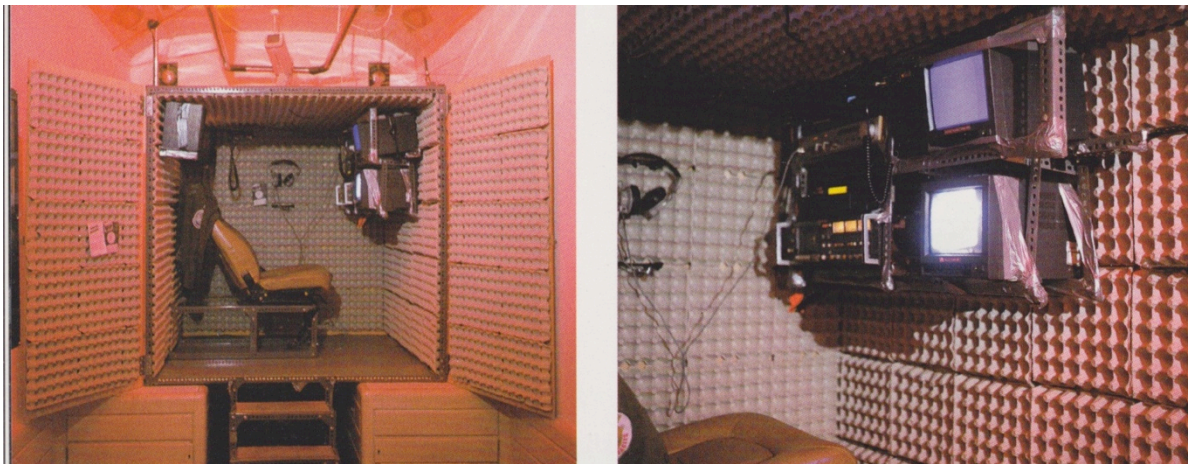


Fig. 134
Paul Carter. *Heaven Search Station* (interior) 2001
Fruitmarkert Gallery. (Edinburgh)



Fig. 135
Paul Carter. *Heaven Search Station*. 2001
Fruitmarket Gallery. (Edinburgh)

Another work of Carters that helps contextualise my research within a contemporary cultural context is entitled *Heaven Search Station, 2001*.

A description of this piece is presented in the book, *Bend Sinister*, which was published by the Fruitmarket Gallery to coincide with Carter's exhibition in 2002. Heaven Search Station is first 'installed on board the Travelling Gallery Bus and then modified as a trailer that can be towed behind any vehicle. The words SPEAK TO ME face skywards while a radio transmitter sends an excerpt of Simon and Garfunkel's *Mrs Robinson* repeatedly into space – heaven holds a place for...heaven holds a place for...heaven holds a place for...The scratched record sticks and the rest of the line never comes, like an answer to Paul Simon once thought he had, but can no longer be sure about. Radio receivers and video cameras check for responses to the visual and radio transmissions as the station travels on its search.'⁹⁶

Carter uses his practice to poke and prod at the relationship between the divine and human nature. He poses questions revolving around faith in or doubt of the existence of the divine. Carter's work does not attempt to answer these questions or present any conclusions to ancient uncertainties that have been ruminated by mankind for centuries. Rather, he uses his artistic practice to visually and spatially explore and contextualise these uncertainties that are rooted in Judeo-Christian biblical traditions, in order to make them relevant and meaningful within the present. He facilitates his "do-it-yourself" spiritual search by employing his visual artistic practice. I feel that my research has benefitted from a careful examination of Carter's work by acknowledging his continuous questioning of convictions of faith and the disbelief inherent in doubt.

It was during the later half of my research project that I began to focus on how particular elements of sacred Catholic spaces operate in order to facilitate the functions of the church and religious beliefs. Artistic expression

⁹⁶Carter, Paul. *Bend Sinister*. p.40

was used as a vehicle to deliver a particular message. Sixteenth century Catholic sacred spaces incorporated a multitude of devices and mediums in its endeavour to instil a sense of faith. I was interested in how artists and architects had used these spaces artistically in order to compliment a central narrative. They had used multiple devices to impart a sense of suspended reality within these partitioned spaces. For instance, Bernini's *Ecstasy of St Teresa*, located in the church of Santa Maria della Vitoria in Rome,



Fig. 136
Carlo Maderno
Santa Maria della Vittoria 1605-20
Rome, Italy

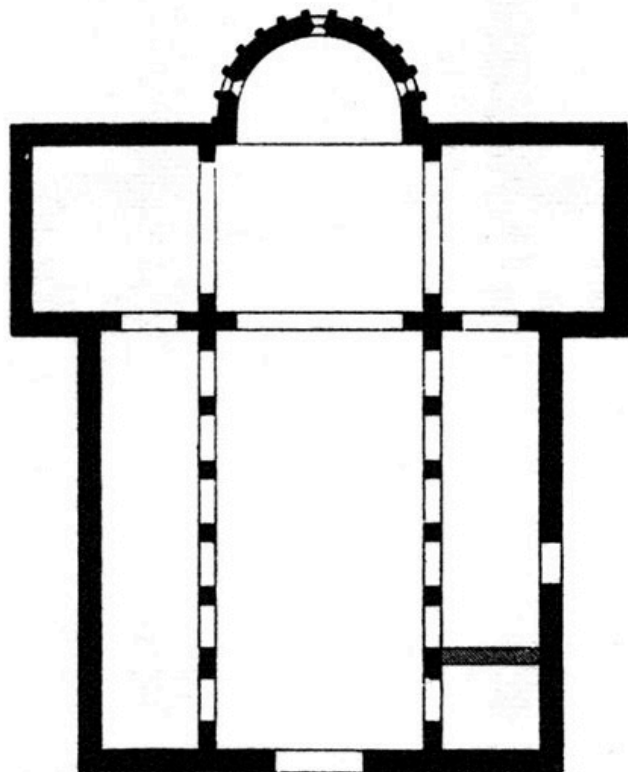


Fig. 137
Latin Cross floor plan
Santa Maria della Vittoria 1605-20
Rome, Italy

portrays a visual re-interpretation of the words of St Teresa's description of the miracle that she experienced, 'I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron's point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart, and to pierce my very entrails; when

he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also, and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great, that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it. The soul is satisfied now with nothing less than God. The pain is not bodily, but spiritual, though the body has its share in it. It is a caressing of love so sweet which now takes place between the soul and God, that I pray God of His goodness to make him experience it who may think that I am lying.⁹⁷



Fig. 138
Gian Lorenzo Bernini,
Ecstasy of St Teresa. 1647-52
Santa Maria della Vittoria
Rome, Italy

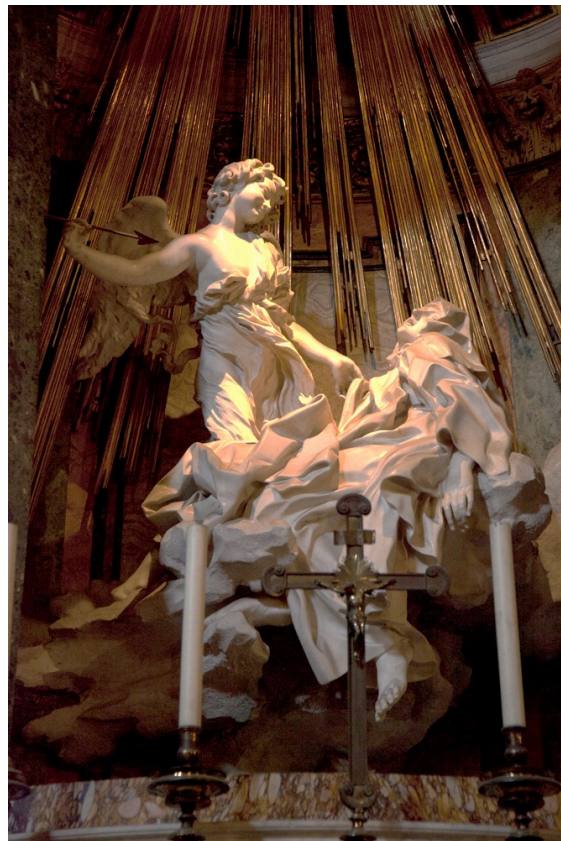


Fig. 139
Gian Lorenzo Bernini,
Ecstasy of St Teresa (Detail)
Santa Maria della Vittoria
Rome, Italy

⁹⁷ Avila, St Teresa. *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus of the order of Our Lady of Carmel.* p.235



Fig. 140
Domenico Guidi, *Vision of St Joseph*.
Santa Maria della Vittoria. 1694
Rome, Italy.



Fig. 141
Alter & Nimbus.
Santa Maria della Vittoria
Rome, Italy.

Bernini's sculptural interpretation brings to life St Teresa's miraculous experience. In this sense, the audience is able to visually comprehend the experience through Bernini's sculptural interpretation. This was my main motivation for my sculpture *Wee David*. I wanted to invigorate the story of the physically inferior, but spiritually superior, character of David. Using certain sculptural devices meant to create a grander scale of the overall composition, I incorporated a wooden nimbus, which directs the eye of the viewer towards the figurative focal point.

The radiating Gloria, or nimbus, is a particular religious iconographical device that is found in many of the churches, Cathedrals and sacred spaces

within the Catholic religion. The nimbus is prevalent in two-dimensional paintings, drawings and etchings, as well as in three-dimensional sculptural formats, from some of the earliest visual images in Christianity. The nimbus can be simply defined as a ring of light that surrounds a person. Within sacred art, associated with Christianity, sacred persons may be depicted with a halo, in the form of a circular glow. Caravaggio uses such iconographical devices in very minimal ways, as can be seen in his painting *The Calling of St Matthew*. Just above Christ's head, there is a faint golden outline of the halo, drawn in perspective.



Fig. 142
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio,
Calling of St Matthew. 1599-00
Oil on Canvas. 322 x 340cm
San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome



Fig. 143
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio
Calling of St Matthew. (Detail) 1599-00
Oil on Canvas. 322 x 340cm
San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome

The nimbus has also been widely used by sculptors, in order to indicate a holy person. Sculptors like Bernini used a similar device to suggest radiant light, or divine presence, as in his sculpture *The Ecstasy of St Teresa*. The sculpted rays of light descend from an unidentified source above. The sculpted depiction of rays of light were highly utilised by Baroque sculptors, especially within altar and chapel settings.

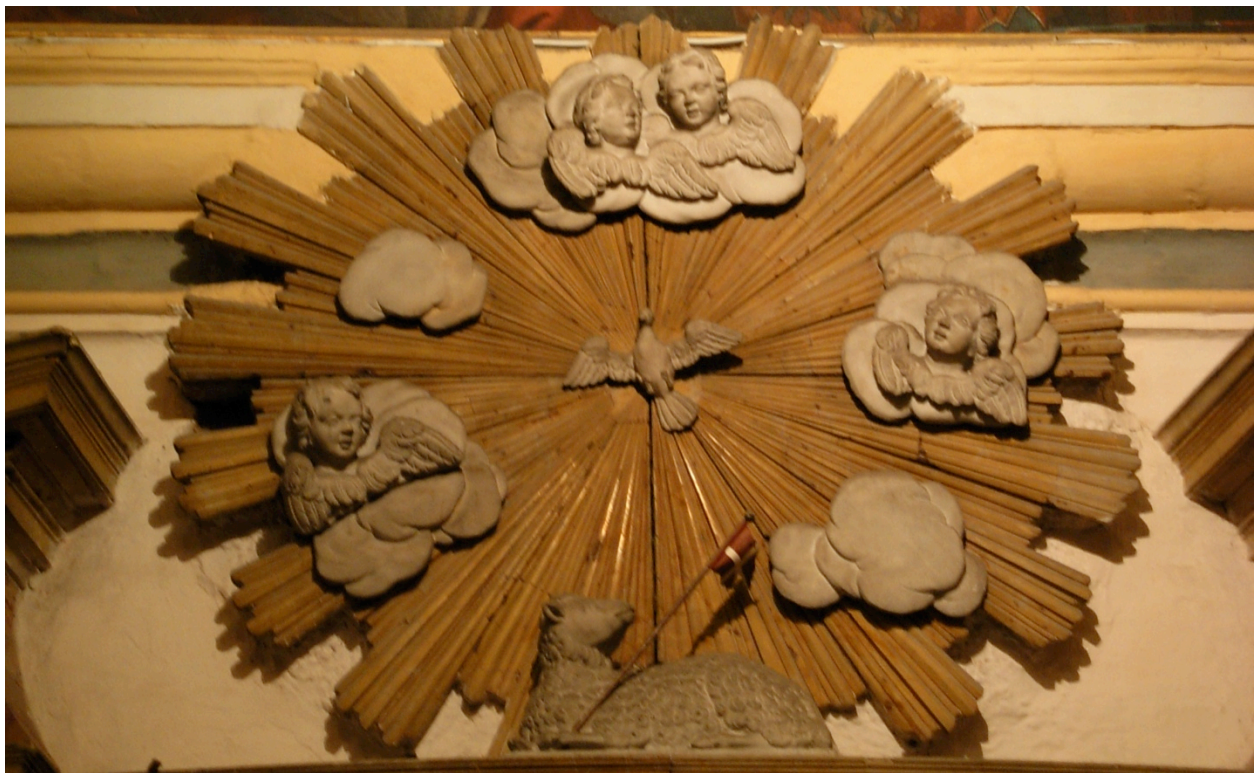


Fig. 144
Wooden Gloria/Nimbus above doorway to Oratory in St John's Co Cathedral,
Valetta, Malta.



Fig. 145
Wooden Gloria/Nimbus under restoration. Located in side Chapel in St John's Co Cathedral
Valetta, Malta.



Fig. 146
Giuseppe, Mazzuoli, *Baptism of Christ*. 1686
High altar of St John's Co Cathedral under restoration.
Valetta, Malta

I used the barn/studio space in Canada to install the bronze skeletons while appropriating and incorporating iconographical devices found in Catholic sacred spaces. I wanted to use devices, such as the nimbus, in conjunction with the skeleton figures. By constructing Gloria's with materials that correspond to the site, such as cedar wood, I hoped to focus the eye of the viewer towards the centre of the composition, towards the figurative elements. I experimented with the figure of *Wee David* in this configuration, mounted on a wooden pillar with hay pails for a plinth.



Fig. 147
Assembling the wooden Gloria/Nimbus. 2011

The barn/studio space became a primary means for me to investigate sacred spaces in relation to how biblical stories were told using visual imagery and devices. The art works housed in such sacred spaces are of a devotional nature according to how the art, the building and the various architectural devices are employed in order to communicate a particular religious message. Devotional art works suggest the idea of worship and adoration. Devotional art can be described as sacred art, produced in an attempt to illustrate and tangibly supplement the principles of Christianity. My intent has not been to imbue my sculptural works of art with a devotional status, rather my practice-led research questions how artistic practice in the past had dealt with this undertaking and how ideas taken from sacred spaces could be incorporated within my own practice.

The open space of the barn/studio allowed me to experiment with compartmentalising into smaller sections. I began with what was originally the grain room, and converted this space into smaller rectangular spaces, where the audience was guided in a particular direction. By manipulating aspects associated with the physical approach to the sculpture, I was able to visually explore ideas of controlled perspective and measured lighting effects. Furthermore, I explored the translation of light, shadow and drama into sculptural practice, specifically the use of constructed rays of light to signify light and energy. In addition to incorporating a sculpted interpretation of light and energy, I strived to control the natural lighting in the space in order to illuminate certain aspects of the two sculptural artefacts installed in the two smaller spaces, entitled *Flagellation* and *Pieta*. These two site-specific sculptural works are closely associated with development of the *Wee David* figure.



Fig. 148
Interior of barn/studio showing the compartmentalised grain room.



Fig. 149
Interior of barn/studio showing the compartmentalised grain room



Fig. 150
Flagellation. 2011



Fig. 151
Flagellation. 2011



Fig. 152
Flagellation, 2011



Fig. 153
Flagellation, (detail) 2011

By using Baroque devices, such as of the nimbus, smaller compartmentalised spaces and controlled lighting effects in my sculptural investigations, I explored the correlative relationship between an understanding of the past as related to the present. These practice-led investigations helped to continuously redefine my understanding of the past through the development of a visual language that shared similarities within the present.



Fig. 154
Pieta, 2011



Fig. 155
Pieta. 2011



Fig. 156
Pieta. 2011



Fig. 157
Pieta (detail). 2011



Fig. 158
Pieta (detail). 2011

Wee David and the other site-specific works within the old barn/studio have contributed to my understanding of the functioning elements and devices that were often incorporated into the design of 16th sacred spaces. An awareness of these devices has helped to inform my contemporary art practice. As my practice-led research has progressed, my spectrum of exploratory strategies has widened, so that I have gained knowledge of the correlative entanglement that exists between a past and a present understanding of the Baroque era. Use of the Gloria in my practice has been a manner of appropriating iconographical devices, in order to focus the viewer's gaze and to control various aspects of the composition. Although I was still interested in the idea of perspective, I no longer felt the need to explicitly create a mobile perspective, as I had in my initial investigations of *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*. Instead, I wanted to control the perspective of the viewer, forcing a particular approach and manipulating the effect of light and shadow.

One of the principle devices that I used was the constructed Gloria, which was comprised of splintered wood taken from cedar rails that I salvaged in the forested area of the farm. These cedar rails were originally used as split rail fencing by early 20th century farmers. The cedar tree is indigenous to and abundant in this region of southern Ontario. Cedar split rails are regularly found in the forest, originally used to mark old fence lines. I collected the cedar split rails from the forest, allowed them to dry for a few days, and then split the rails into various sizes using a hatchet.



Fig. 159
Constructing Gloria/Nimbus for *Pieta & Flagellation*. 2011

Once I had accumulated a large variety of differing sized splinters, I began the process of assembling the nimbus. I assembled the longest lengths of the nimbus, defining the maximum dimensions according to on the location of the installation and in relation to narrative of the skeleton figures.



Fig. 160
Initial stages of assembling Gloria/Nimbus. 2011



Fig. 161
Second phase of assembling Gloria/Nimbus. 2011



Fig. 162
Third phase of assembling Gloria/Nimbus. 2011



Fig. 163
Fourth Phase of assembling Gloria/Nimbus. 2011



Fig. 164
Final stage of assembling Gloria/Nimbus. 2011



Fig. 165
Installing Gloria/Nimbus in Grain Room in Barn/Studio. 2011

I continued to assemble the splintered cedar strips into my desired shape and size of nimbus. Ultimately, the incorporated sculptural devices gave me control over focal point of the viewer. In this way, I could imbue the basic elements of my developed sculptural language. In my final case studies, I continued to examine 16th century iconographical source material without literally interpreting the work. Rather, I appropriated certain devices and strategies that I experienced when visiting Catholic sacred spaces in a more ambient manner.

In this process, I strived to use materials that are indigenous to the region where this site-specific work is located. My choice of materials was informed by the time spent exploring the environment in and around the barn. My choice to incorporate specific materials touches upon an aspect of my research that stresses an understanding of practice-led initiatives. Such choices come from spending time in the studio environment, being involved with the processes and materials selection. It has been through this way of working that I have been able to intertwine my present day studio investigations with the historical iconography of 16th century sacred spaces. Without directly reproducing any particular sacred space or devotional setting, I found ways to reinterpret how these types of spaces functioned by appropriating certain strategies and tactics. With this understanding, I have been able to explore the idea of translating aspects of the functionality of sacred space into my studio/barn environment. In my final case study, I embody a sense of expanding the dimensionality of my research by advancing the visual language that I had developed with the reduced skeleton figure cast in bronze as the principal component.



Fig. 166
Barn/Studio and surrounding forests & countryside of Southern Ontario, Canada. 2011.



Fig. 167
Remnants of 19th century cedar split rail fencing found in Southern Ontario, Canada. 2011.



Fig. 168
19th century cedar split rail fencing that can still be found in the forests of Southern Ontario.

Catholic sacred spaces are designed to house devotional art works. My barn/studio is not a devotional space in the traditional religious sense. The barn does not serve a religious function. My sculptural investigations were not created for worshipping, prayerful or religious functionality. My research is influenced by devotional spaces, but does not share the same specific religious purpose or intent. The barn/studio space has allowed me to explore how sacred spaces can help inform contemporary sculptural practice that is interested in historical iconographical works of art that are primarily contained within sacred spaces due to the intent of instilling the principles of the Christian faith. Although, devotional works of art have heavily influenced my sculptural artefacts, I reiterate that they are not created with the same intent as the source material I have been exploring. My sculptural

research has not been created with the intent to represent the principles and beliefs of the Christian faith. They have simply allowed me to uncover my mode of understanding ideas of faith and feelings of doubt in relation to the choices that I make when conducting my practice-led research within the studio environment. These practice-led negotiations between faith and doubt are not rooted in a religious belief system, rather they are rooted in accountability and responsibility. Responsibility for the choices and decisions that I make, and awareness that the choices are based on having faith or doubt when faced with decisions. These negotiations allow me to situate myself in relation to the surrounding world. I can then become accountable for my successes, as well as my failures. Negotiating between faith and doubt is an intrinsic method to my practice.

The use of the human skeleton figure is, in one sense, an attempt to negate any sense of divine presence or devotional overtone. The common human skeleton nullifies any sense of divine presence by making all figures visually equal in appearance, with no obvious designation of the celestial. This is not a comment on my personal faith in a particular belief system, instead it is a comment on the nature and focus of my research, which is concerned with using haptic modes of operating in order to gain knowledge and insight in to how contemporary sculptural practice might reinterpret 16th century iconographical works of art. In particular, how this way of operating could act as an example of how contemporary artistic practice might act as a means in which to 'touch' canonical historical artworks, interact with them and learn through this interaction. In this sense, my research 'thinks'. By taking this schema to progress within the present, I am able to draw upon the past while steering the progression into the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I shall summarise the key impetus, development and outcomes of my practice-led research. I shall articulate the overarching methodology and creative process that I have developed over the course of my research project.

My overarching methodology is inductive in nature. I was initially inspired by a specific 16th century painting within a specific Roman Catholic sacred space, which led me to sculpturally investigate the source of inspiration, which, in turn, allowed me to reflect on this process. This written thesis is a summation and articulation of these processes, with discussion about the salient points that have been discovered. My research is practice-led, inductive and haptic in its approach to knowledge. It is iterative in nature.

This written thesis includes a number of case studies that are selected from the entirety of the sculptural exegeses that I have created over the course of my research project. I have included three principal sculptural works that I feel best articulate the key discoveries of my practice-led research.

Specifically, I discuss *Beheading, Incredulity and Wee David*. Although these case studies are primarily concerned with the specific sculptural artefacts relevant to each case study, they also act as examples of the key findings and developments that are relevant to a number of other case studies. In this way, the three selected case studies act as examples of the development of my entire body of work.

One of the most profound outcomes of my practice-led research envelops the way in which I understand the relationship between the past and present. My research has helped me to become aware of the correlative relationship between ideas of the past within the present that are continuously changing

and morphing. My practice has allowed me to destabilise my understanding of Baroque, allowing my understanding of a specific place and time to be influenced as much by haptic modes of learning as by more traditional text based art historical analyses. My research has relied on balancing text based art historical research as well as haptic sculptural investigations, which, when combined, can help provide a way in which to understand the Baroque period to be continuously adapting and changing, based on how we perceive and define it within the present. By creating sculptural artefacts that speak a similar sculptural vernacular, of surface, texture, light, shadow, gesture and drama, and that deal with many of the same aspects that were important during the 16th century, such as faith and doubt, I am able to contextualise their meaning within the present. How are these ideas of faith and doubt understood within a contemporary cultural context? In order to establish a contemporary cultural context within my own research, I have integrated a selection of contemporary artistic practitioners into this analysis to help situate my own practice and compare ways that contemporary artistic practice might work with art historical iconographical works of art. By comparing and contrasting my work with other contemporary artistic practitioners, such as the Jake & Dinos Chapman, Paul Carter and Alison Watt, I situate my research in the wider contemporary cultural context.

When I first began the progression of this work, I understood the past to be static. An event happened *some where* at *some* point in *time*, distanced and different from the present, and primarily accessible through text based art historical resources. My understanding of the past was linear, and accessible to me only through historiographical linear analyses that dominate the culture of textual based art historical studies. However, as my inductive practice-led research evolved, I began to understand the relationship between past and present differently. I viewed the relationship as being

much more dynamic, constantly changing. I began to appreciate the past and present as existing in an entangled correlative relationship. I began to recognise that ideas of the past are moulded within the present, as much as the present is dictated by our understanding of the past. My research has helped me to understand the past, in the sense that an understanding of the Baroque period is continuously being re-defined within the present day through haptic modes of operating and exploration. Our *idea* of the past is always changing and developing. The change in and development of this dynamic understanding of the past is not solely reliant on historical text based renderings of past events and happenings, but is equally influenced by ideas translated through the use of sculptural practice, which communicates through a language reliant on form, surface, texture, light, shadow, gesture and dramatization, as well as other visual dynamics that are integral to visual artistic practice. This fundamental change in my understanding of past and present, from a linear static perception to a more dynamic entangled correlative relationship, came about through my practice-led research and is embodied in the sculptural work that I have created, which is exemplified in the selected works of art that make up the case studies.

Although my research references 16th century iconographical art works that are devotional in nature, I have strived to continuously contextualise my practice-led research within a contemporary cultural context. To this end, I have looked at how other contemporary artists, such as Alison Watt, Jake and Dinos Chapman, and Paul Carter have dealt with similar themes, methods and strategies when exploring the relationship between an understanding of past and present contexts. The Chapman brothers have maintained a relationship with one of their most returned to iconic artists in a number of art works that encompass both two-dimensional re-workings of a number of Francesco de Goya's etchings, as well as three-dimensional re-

interpretations of the 19th century Spanish artist's work. A careful look at the work of Scottish painter Alison Watt has helped me to recognise similar ways of working and strategizing in relation to referencing, focalising and abstracting certain elements of historical iconographical artworks. Both Allison Watt and Paul Carter have provided my research with a contextualisation of my investigations into the nature of devotional art works and the nature of sacred spaces. They have helped provide divergent examples of how contemporary practice might generate an understanding of spirituality and how ideas that are commonly associated with traditional devotional art works might be interpreted within a contemporary cultural context.

The purpose of this submission has not been to deduce an answer to a singular over-arching question. Rather, insight into areas of interest have been garnered through inductive means of exercising of my ideas, which were themselves initiated by experiencing existing works of art from 16th and 17th century Spain and Italy. One of the pivotal questions that has come from my research revolves around understanding faith and doubt. I have had to gain an understanding of these terms, as they apply to a religious context, particularly within the 16th century historical iconographical works of art that I have referenced throughout my research. Secondly, I have established a secular understanding of the terms faith and doubt, as they apply to myself, the sole creator of the sculptural artefacts associated with my research project. A non-religious understanding of how convictions of faith have led me to believe, whilst uncertainties due to scepticism have led to me doubt, has been continuously at play within my studio practice. This understanding is omnipresent in my decision making process. Similarities between the religious and non-religious contexts of understanding faith and doubt are rooted in the idea that, in order to have

faith in something, you must believe it to be true. Correspondingly, in order to have doubts about something, you do not necessarily believe it to be true. My research is not concerned with establishing answers to personal questions of religious faith or trying to deduce an idea of personal religion. Instead, I have negotiated between ideas of faith and doubt whenever faced with a choice associated with the realisation of a work of art. This continuous negotiating between faith and doubt within my art making practice has facilitated my understanding of subjectivity as truth. In so much as, the decisions that I have faith in have led me to truths, which are applicable to myself. Within the context of my art making practice, I have had faith in certain decision and doubts in others. Based on how these decisions have helped or hindered the progression of my art making practice, I have been able to understand truths about the decisions I have made. The established truths are subjective, in the sense that they have applied to creation of singularly unique sculptural artefacts. Although the actual subjective truths that I have found are particular to my personal involvement in the creation of my sculptural investigations, an understanding of the methods and tactics that I have incorporated are relevant to a wider artistic community. An acute awareness of the decision making process, based on the individuals convictions (faith) and disbelief (doubt), is objective and relevant to the broader artistic community because it helps garner and awareness of how and why decisions are made. This attentiveness strengthens the sense of responsibility for decisions made and holds the creator accountable for such decisions. In this sense, my practice-led research has led me to two understandings of the nature of faith and doubt. For this reason, it has been important for me to be involved in every aspect of my art making practice. I consider my research to truly be practice-led in nature. Through process, choices, and subsequently decisions, arise.

The specific case studies included in the written component of my research are a summation and reflection of my sculptural research. The three case studies were selected to describe, in chronological order, the development of my particular sculptural language. Furthermore, they have portrayed the progress of this language and how it has been embellished throughout the course of my research project. I have felt it pertinent to structure the reading of my thesis in a chronological manner because it allows me to describe the process. Chronology implies a sequence of events, which is true to how my sculptural language developed. A chronological description gives me the means to articulate the importance of being involved in every aspect of process associated with my research, both technical and theoretical.

I shall summate the key findings from each of the three case studies. My initial case study *Beheading*, describes the initial profound experience that sparked my interest in a particular place and time. After viewing Caravaggio's painting, entitled *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*, located in St John's Co Cathedral, Malta, I endeavoured to develop a way in which to interact and explore the intense, thoughtful experience that occurred when I initially saw this painting. The desire to want to interact with this experience led to the identification and focalisation of certain elements of the composition, namely the figurative gesture, perspective and point of view. The decision to focus on specific elements of the painting, and not others, was a tactic that provided me with a way to initially establish the basic code that would allow me to not interact with only this experience and painting. Eventually, I applied this developed sculptural language to other iconographical works of art. When I first experienced this painting, I was intrigued by how deeply it affected me and how involved I felt with the

narrative that Caravaggio had painted on a two dimensional canvas. I was aware that the scene in front of me was merely a painted two-dimensional representation of an ancient biblical story, but still it evoked an emotional response within me. I felt empathy for the characters. By distilling this profound experience down to exploring ideas of perspective and gestures, poses and postures, I was able to develop a way of interacting with these aspects of the painting. I devised a way in which to translate the two-dimensional painting into a three-dimensional sculptural form by casting a reduced human skeleton form, modelled in the various poses and gestures of the characters in the painting. My rationale for using a reduced human skeleton as the principle component of this language are rooted in pragmatic issues. The reduced human skeleton form allowed me to directly address the gestural elements without the tendency of the characters be tethered to a specific time, place or context. By stripping away the clothing, skin and flesh of the characters, I was able to disassociate the figures from any specific time or place. I was able to negate any sense of divinity or individuality by representing all the sculpted figures in the same form. The only defining difference between the figures was dictated by poses, postures and gestures. By translating a two-dimensional painting into a three-dimensional form, I was able to explore the idea of perspective and point of view. I was intrigued by the idea that, although I could move and negotiate my position in front of Caravaggio's painting, the perspective never changed. The perspective in the painting appeared to be fixed, stable and unchanging. By translating the figurative elements of this painting into a three-dimensional form, I managed to destabilise this perspective and create a mobile point of view that was dependent on how the viewer negotiated the piece. It is important to note that my intent was not to reproduce this painting, but rather to reinterpret it. After having cast and installed the figures in a similar configuration to that of the painting, one of the first

issues that struck me was the discrepancy between my version of Caravaggio's two dimensional rendering and the original. The perspectives did not agree. This inconsistency of perspective led me to experiment with the positioning of figures, in relation to each other. I experimented with subtracting and repositioning the figures until I arrived at a composition that I felt visually engaging to the viewer. Throughout my work, I have encouraged others to view the work in both informal and formal exhibitions. I gathered feedback from my audience about their degree of involvement with the sculptural composition in various arrangements. Eventually, based on my own feeling, as well as taking into account other's opinions, I subtracted certain figures until I arrived at a configuration of the skeleton figures that I had faith in and felt to be engaging and effective. This final configuration included three figures and formed an abstracted triangular shaped composition. It was at this point that I had faith that the composition was most effective in conveying a sense of engagement with the figures, the narrative and the composition as a whole.

I applied these discoveries to my next sculptural investigations that begat a subset (*Deposition, Incredulity, Condemnation*) of sculptural works. Of these, I used an analysis of *Incredulity* to summate and encapsulate the principle findings this next stage of my research.

My second case study focuses on the sculptural artefact entitled *Incredulity*. *Incredulity* encapsulates a similar strategy and approach that was applied to all three artefacts. Carrying forth the key points that I had acquired through my initial sculptural investigations and experiments involving Caravaggio's painting *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*. I was interested in continuing to explore the idea of translating two-dimensional images into three-dimensional forms, as well as continuing to investigate the

effectiveness of triangulation. As my research progressed, I became less tethered to a literal reinterpretation of the gestures, poses and postures from a specific source material. My initial experiments with Caravaggio's painting had sparked a desire to research not only this one painter, but also many 16th and 17th century artists working in a multitude of disciplines. I became less tethered to a literal re-interpretation because I had become more competent at certain elements of my practice, such as the metal casting. Also, I came to rely on my imagination when modelling the figures, rather than solely relying on the source material. In a sense, I used the motifs and themes of the source material in conjunction with my imagination when conceiving of my sculptural compositions. I investigated various examples of a similar theme, referring to a multitude of artistic renderings, in order to inform my compositions. In addition to Caravaggio's painting *The Incredulity of Thomas*, which helped inform my sculptural artefact entitled *Incredulity*, I also researched other artists, such as Gerrit Van Honthorst and Albrecht Durer, for examples of a similar theme. In helping to situate my practice within a contemporary cultural context, I looked towards the contemporary Scottish painter, Alison Watt. I researched Watt's paintings by viewing her work in Galleries, her site-specific work, such as *Still*, located in Old St Paul Church, Edinburgh and text based research. By gaining insight into her mode of operation within her practice, I was able to draw similarities and differences between our practices. This helped inform my awareness of a contemporary contextual positioning of my practice. One key similarity in approach that I recognised between Watt and myself is exemplified in her series of paintings she created whilst she was artist in residence at the National Gallery of London. The residency culminated in a series of large-scale paintings depicting white fabric. The first painting is clearly realised by referring to a physical three-dimensional model of a knotted piece of white fabric. As the series evolved, she seemed to become

less reliant on using an actual piece of fabric as the model and instead relies on her imagination, in order to generate the visual image. In a similar way, I had become less dependent on a literal reinterpretation of source material and came to rely more on my imagination in order to conceive of the composition. Although I was not using the 16th iconographical works of art to provide the literal gestural elements, I continued to investigate 16th and 17th century art intensely.

I chose *Incredulity* for my second case study because of the metaphoric parallels it has with my methods of research as a whole. The story of Thomas's doubts are based on belief through the senses and confirmation through touch, in order to confirm or deny his doubts and beliefs. This story is analogous to the methods that I incorporated throughout my practice-led research. The analogy between doubting Thomas and my methodological approach is based on the way in which I insert myself into the process. Using my own body as a modelling device for the skeleton figures, I use my physicality to reference canonical works of art. In this way, I have been able to touch historic iconographical works of art that are largely unavailable and inaccessible to the wider public, due to their location or designation as devotional art works, housed in sacred spaces, such as churches, cathedrals, Basilicas and other Catholic holy places. Although I had employed this tactic of using my own body as a modelling device from the initial sculptural investigation *Beheading*, I became cognisant of the emblematic similarities that my over arching incredulous methods had with the narrative of doubting Thomas during my second case study.

The second case study *Incredulity* allowed me to further explore figurative configuration within a composition. I gained a strong sense of faith in the effectiveness of triangulating groups of three figures. This haptic approach

to interrelating the present with the past through tactile means gave me the opportunity to draw the past into the present and, in doing so, destabilising the idea of a strictly linear interpretation of past and present contexts.

Another key discovery that was made during the realisation of *Incredulity* was the introduction of sight specificity. This development came about upon creating an aluminium version of the sculptural grouping. I had created this second reinterpretation of the biblical narrative of Doubting Thomas so that I could transport it to my farm in Southern Ontario, Canada. The change from bronze to aluminium was rooted in pragmatic solutions to transporting the work from Scotland, where it had been made. The aluminium version was installed outdoors, which initiated a development within my research focusing on site specificity. I became interested in using a barn/studio space for my research in order to sculpturally investigate ideas associated with the functionality of works of art deemed to be devotional and the functionality of sacred spaces that house them. The barn/studio space allowed me to further explore ideas of scale, volume, lighting and installation within the overall development of my research's sculptural language.

My third and final case study has relied on an analysis of my sculptural artefact entitled *Wee David*. Although I predominantly focused on the inspiration, development and realisation of *Wee David* in this analysis, the third case study embodies a number of sculptural artefacts that involved site specificity with regards to the barn/studio space. In addition, I discussed the sculptural artefacts *Flagellation* and *Pieta*.

As my research progressed, I had become more competent with my developed sculptural vernacular, namely successfully casting the bronze skeletons. Meanwhile, I explored the nature of how sacred spaces visually

function and how these spaces house works of art deemed to be devotional. I experimented with embellishment of my sculptural investigations. Some of key elements that I explored during my final case study include a reduced number of figures in the overall composition. I began to primarily work with compositions with only one or two figures, (*Wee David, Flagellation & Pietà*). I navigated my research towards a specific site of installation through the development of my barn/studio space in Canada. This exploration of site specificity allowed me to further investigate an understanding of 16th century Catholic sacred spaces and how they traditionally functioned and operated visually in order to instil a sense of religious faith. The barn/studio shared many formal similarities with Catholic sacred spaces, such as scale and volume, yet was clearly very different in its purpose and function. Whilst exploring the nature of sacred spaces in relation to the barn/studio, I experimented with expanding my sculptural vernacular by incorporating controlled spaces that allowed me to manipulate more elements of the composition, specifically how the sculptural artefacts were approached by the viewer. The elements that I could control in the barn/studio space included light and shadow, dictation of approach and perspective in relation to how the viewer approaches the composition. Moreover, the barn provided the means to experiment with scale and volume in relation to my developed sculptural vernacular within a specific space that has a similar sense of scale and volume of a Church or Cathedral. The barn/studio space gave me a framework within which to embellish the sculptural compositions with additional visual devices, such as the nimbus and cast fabric/drapery in order to exaggerate a sense of movement and fluidity. My interest in exploring how sculptural practice might reinterpret 16th century historically iconographical works of art led to investigating the purpose and function of the sacred spaces that house such canonical works of art and the use of visual devices to instil a sense of faith in a particular religious belief system.

The artworks that are contained within these Catholic sacred spaces are considered to be devotional in nature.

I researched 16th century Roman Catholic sacred spaces, such as churches and cathedrals, reliquaries and chapels, by visiting the buildings and experiencing, first hand, how they affected me as a viewer. I was interested in how these spaces functioned and how they directed my eye to particular details associated with specific biblical narratives designed to help instil a sense of faith within the principles of the Catholic faith. These spaces incorporate many different devices that were intended to instil a sense of faith within the viewer, by helping to embellish a space that is specifically designed to help the viewer focus their attention on particular biblical narratives or possibly a reliquary associated with a particular Saint, translated through visual means. These spaces are designed for spiritual contemplation. The visual devices often employed in 16th century Catholic sacred spaces include sculptural elements, painting and architecture detailing. I had become interested in the ways that different devices were incorporated in contained space in order to maximize a particular effect. Bernini's *Ecstasy of St Teresa* is a principle example of my interest in the theatre of 16th Century Roman Catholic sacred spaces. My desire to create a more controlled and managed space was influenced by taking into consideration the various ways that the viewer can be visually and spatially influenced by the architecture of a building, as well as the ornate embellishments of 16th century Catholic sacred spaces. The barn/studio space allowed me to further investigate how 16th century historical iconographic works of art might be reinterpreted, whilst exploring themes such as faith and doubt through haptic modes of operating.

When modelling the figure of *Wee David*, I had continued to explore the idea

of metaphorically inserting myself into the iconographical historic works of art by using my own physicality to model the poses, postures and gestures of the skeleton figures. *Wee David* has reference points that are based on a careful observation of various 16th and 17th century sculptural examples of the Old Testament biblical figure of David. As my overall research had progressed from its initial explorations involving Caravaggio, it had become unfastened from literal interpretations of gestures and other compositional elements in source material. My later case studies were primarily concerned with the careful observation of examples of Baroque sculpture. *Wee David* has its roots in 17th century canonical subject matter. I carefully observed various sculptural examples of David, including Donatello's bronze freestanding sculpture and Gian Lorenzo Bernini's marble sculpture. I was heavily influenced by the exaggerated sense of movement and fluidity present in Bernini's iconographical work of art. Using the gesture and pose that Bernini had modelled his marble David in, I continued to use my own physicality as a sketching device, physically making the pose, while modelling the wax skeleton figure. By doing so, I was able to sense the reality of this position. Through this haptic method of exploring historical works of art, I discovered that the dynamic posture of Bernini's *David* was unrealistic. By simply observing the marble figure, I had not realised this discrepancy. It was only through my incredulous haptic approach to investigating iconographical works of art and using my own physicality that I was able to recognise, react to and articulate my discoveries. *Wee David* has been selected as my final case study because it carried forth the key points that I had discovered in previous case studies and builds upon them. *Wee David* exemplifies how tactile and haptic modes of operating can provide an insight and awareness in relation to art historical study.

In my final case study, I continued to position my research in relation to

other contemporary artistic theory and practice by examining the work of Paul Carter. This has assisted me in situating and contextualising my research within a contemporary cultural framework. Throughout my research, I have looked towards Carter's work for its success in exploring ideas of spirituality, site specificity and devotional and religious art. Carter uses a lo fi approach and DIY aesthetic in his work, investigating epistemological assumptions and spiritual awareness. At this stage in the chronology of my research project, I was heavily utilising the barn/studio space to explore the function of sacred spaces and how they operated visually and spatially. My research has employed particular sculptural works created by Carter to reference how site and location can be intertwined with devotion, worship and religion.

My research looks at one way in which contemporary sculptural art practice might reinterpret sculpture and painting primarily from Catholicism, as represented in Italian and Spanish Renaissance and Baroque art. The themes that are explored include: faith and doubt, divinity and human nature, miracles and materials.

Throughout my research I have strived to understand the ways in which I have comprehended the nature of faith and doubt. I have come to an understanding of the key similarities and differences that exist within the contextual environments of myself and other contemporary practitioners and artists, operating approximately four hundred years ago. The principle difference revolves around the idea intent and purpose. Much of the iconographical source material that I have used is considered sacred or devotional artworks. They were created with the specific purpose of instilling the principles of a particular religious belief system. Probably, the majority of art produced during the 16th and 17th centuries in Italy and Spain

was commissioned with the intent that the works of art would be read in a devotional manner. Although there are still patrons who commission works of art that are intended to serve a religious purpose, I would argue that the majority of art created within a contemporary cultural context is secular. Artists today are not tethered to depicting and upholding the tenants of specific religious belief systems. The 16th century iconographical art works that comprise my source material are considered religious or devotional art. The Roman Catholic Church commissioned Caravaggio, Bernini, and many others, to create works of art that would convey a particular message. Although these artists were able to exercise a certain degree of individual interpretation of the canonical Christian stories, much of the artists' compositional options were dictated to them from the outset. There were strict rules and regulations about how biblical narratives were to be depicted. In this context, themes of faith and doubt are associated with religious intention. The creation, purpose and function of these works of art are intertwined with the strengthening of faith in a particular belief system.

A fundamental difference between artists 400 hundred years ago and contemporary artists who deal with similar canonical Christian narratives is the intended audience. For many of the 16th and 17th century artists, there was an intended site and a very specific intended audience. Mainly, these works were created for churches, chapels and other sacred spaces. One such example is Caravaggio's *Beheading of St John the Baptist*, which, to this day, hangs in the Oratory of St John, the same building that it was commissioned for in Valetta, Malta. These works of art were created to instil and strengthen the principles of the Catholic faith through the transmission of biblical stories, by pictorial and sculptural modes of expression. Works of art created by 16th and 17th century artists are complex compositions, riddled with symbolism and layered with encrypted messages which are

aimed at strengthen the viewers conviction, belief and adherence to that of the Catholic faith. Regardless of the intellect and ability of the artist, the fact that each commission was intended to be didactic in its dissemination of biblical narratives provides a common aspect to all the work. Within the 16th century, these works of devotional art were most commonly located and installed in sacred spaces, spaces that were in themselves conceived and created with the intent of instilling and strengthening the belief and adherence to the principles of the Catholic religion. It is important to remember that these works of art were indeed commissioned with the sole intention of instilling faith, both in the unfaithful and in those who already believe in the Catholic doctrine .

How can sculptural practice delve into the nature of faith and doubt through materials and processes, interpretative strategies, and a consideration of contexts? Can any sense of faith or belief in the unphysical be evoked in audiences through this practice-led research?

My research has been concerned with the exploration of the nature of faith and doubt in the context of religion as well as in a more fundamental and existential understanding. In this context, faith and doubt have led to my awareness of the very basic decision making process that is intrinsic to every stage of my practice. Over the journey of my entire research project, I have been involved in the each and every aspect of my research. I have been in charge, from the most mundane decision making process, to the more complex problems that have arisen. This involvement in the various processes associated with my practice-led research project has allowed me to reflect on how and why choices are made and how an understanding of faith and doubt has fed into this decision making process. In this context, the terms faith and doubt are not associated with a specific religious belief

system. Instead, this secular definition of faith is rooted in the understanding that faith is a conviction, implying that the individual believes. A secular understanding of doubt suggests that the individual is hesitant, sceptical and uncertain. This secular understanding of faith and doubt has been an integral mechanism of my art making practice. I have constantly negotiated between faith and doubt when faced with decision-making process within my studio practice. Because my research is rooted in my practice, the decision making process is continuously present. Choices, both significant and minute, need to be made continually. For these reasons, it has been important to discuss the technical processes associated with my developed sculptural language. Becoming proficient with the technical aspect of my work has involved committing to many decisions. These decisions are based on the negotiating that occurs between convictions of faith and the uncertainty intrinsic in doubt. The decisions that I have made throughout my research are rooted in this negotiation, and have allowed me to understand the finite mechanisms of the decision making process innate to my research. Through this awareness of the decision making process, I have been able to articulate why and how I have carried out my practice-led research. In turn, I have garnered an awareness of the responsibility for the choices that I make. The awareness of my responsibility for the choices I have made holds me accountable and allows me to articulate to others how and why I have done what I have done, throughout the course of my practice-led research project. An awareness of the responsibility one has for the decisions one makes, not only holds them accountable for the decisions, but also allows the individual to have perspective and point of view, based on the choices and decisions one makes. This, in turn, provides a unique point of view and perspective in which the individual can position themselves in relation to the surrounding world.

Can any sense of faith or belief in the unphysical be evoked in audiences through this practice-led research? Yes I believe it can be. I feel that the sculptural art works that I have created, as part of my doctoral submission, have the ability to inspire and visually engage the viewer. This inspiration can provide the impetus for reflection and the evocation of faith or doubt. In this way, I was inspired when I first witnessed Caravaggio's painting *Beheading of St John the Baptist*, which led me to deeply explore these feelings. Although Caravaggio's painting is devotional in nature and was created to instil the principles of the Catholic belief system, it inspired me to explore not only its religious function, but also how it functioned as a two dimensional composition of a narrative. The profound experience of initially viewing this painting did not strengthen my faith in a particular belief system, but allowed me to explore and strengthen my faith in my abilities to learn through the choices and decisions I make. My practice-led research has the ability to evoke a sense of faith in the audience through its exemplification of one way in which contemporary sculptural practice can 'think' and 'learn' through inductive methods and iterative strategies.

This research employs inductive means and methodologies that are fundamentally practice-led and iterative. Rather than starting with a problem-based enquiry, a careful analysis of existing artworks, primarily by the painter, Michelangelo Merisi di Caravaggio, and the sculptor, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, was undertaken. This study has led to the production of creative work that, in turn, has initiated further questions and the creation of more sculptural objects. The inductive means and methodologies I have used to analyse existing 16th and 17th century art works have allowed me to explore the association that exists between past and present. My understanding of the relationship between past and present entails a point of view that has two mobile positions. This correlative relationship does not

entail absolutism or universalism to assert itself, but rather is based on entanglement. As one position (subject) shifts, so to does the other (object). In this sense, my understanding of the past is not fixed or static. This understanding, although informed by text based art historical studies, is not reliant on a linear art historical study. My understanding of the Baroque period is ever shifting, continually being informed by my haptic sculptural investigations. 'It is the correlation that entails the transformation of both subject and object which characterizes baroque point of view and which, I contend, characterizes us as we re-envision the Baroque in its wake, or rather, folded within it.'⁹⁸

The production of sculptural artefacts creates a snowballing effect that is a self-reflective, investigative cycle. This method draws upon the sculptural process itself, as well as taking into account external and contextual considerations. The iterative process used in this research has thematic and metaphoric parallels in the ways in which Catholic stories are retold, interpreted, and examined – narratives that have themselves been continuously readapted to suit changing contexts and intended audiences. Such narratives have been disseminated throughout the history of Christianity, as they continue to be circulated in modern-day Christianity. In our post-Enlightenment world, the core theme of incredulity, as imagined through art, is explored. To this end, and to make wider connections with this enquiry, I have investigated philosophical writings regarding ideas of truth and subjectivity, particularly the work of Søren Kierkegaard.

The historical sculpture and paintings, referenced as source material, are themselves reinterpretations of pre-existing narratives and stories. This research strives to expose the correlative relationship that exists between

⁹⁸ Bal, Mieke. *Quoting Caravaggio*. p.39

understandings of *past* and *present* day contexts, employing an examination of both historical and contemporary art works and practitioners. Rather than perceiving this research project primarily in the context of other contemporary arts practice, I have mainly focused on how European artists from the early 17th century wrestled with imagining and imaging these stories and, in that context, how the same narratives might be reinterpreted today. I have referred to a selection of contemporary artists throughout the research in order to help situate this research within a contemporary cultural context.

The primary output of this research project is embodied in the sculptural artefacts that I have created over the course of my research project. A selection of three case studies, taken from the larger body of work has been presented in chronological order. The three selected case studies encapsulate the principle discoveries made in this process. Photographs of installed and site-specific works have been included to supplement the case studies. The written thesis component of my research is a summation, reflection and articulation of the chronological journey of my research and its salient points.

My research has been concerned with re-interpreting canonical biblical stories. The fundamental difference between my own work and that of the artists four hundred years ago is the difference in the function, intention and role of art between now and then.

The intended audience in the 16th and 17th centuries was vastly different than my intended audience, clearly influenced by the fact that faith is understood differently in today's secular society than it was understood four hundred years ago. The mechanisms of communication, ideological

enforcement and dissemination of knowledge have changed. It is only through a subjective understanding of truth, as it applies to the individual, that the individual gains faith or doubt in the decisions made. This awareness of the choices one makes helps instill an understanding of the responsibility that one has for the decisions that one makes. This method of developing subjective truths is based on negotiating between faith and doubt, when faced with choices and ultimately stresses an awareness of the fact that I am accountable and responsible for the choices that I have made, which allows me to have an intimate knowledge of *how* and *why* I have made the choices that I have, which in turn helps me to situate myself in relation to the surrounding world. My original contribution of knowledge is contained in the ability of my research project to act as an example as one way in which sculptural practice might reinterpret historic iconographical works of art, drawn primarily from Catholicism of the 16th and 17th centuries in Italy and Spain. The original contribution to knowledge from this research is grounded in haptic means and methodologies.

Appendix

Exhibitions

- 2005 Shadow Cabinet. Embassy Gallery at ECA Sculpture Court, Edinburgh, UK
-performance (proto *Beheading*)
- 2007 PhD in Progress Exhibition. Edinburgh College of Art, Edinburgh, UK
-*Deposition, Condemnation, Incredulity, Wee David*
- 2008 New Works (Solo Exhibition) GRV Studios. Edinburgh, UK
-*Deposition, Condemnation, Incredulity*
- 2008 Lyon & Turnbull Contemporary Auction. London, UK
-Deposition
- 2009 Landinbleed. Holland, Netherlands
-*Deposition*
- 2009 The Dark Side & Snow. Headbones Gallery, Toronto, Canada
-*Wee David, Sword & Stone*
- 2010 The Barn. Alliston, Canada
-*Deposition, Condemnation, Incredulity, Flagellation I & II, Wee David*
- 2011 Dufferin County Scholarship Publication. Alliston, Canada
-*Deposition, Condemnation, Incredulity*
- 2012 – Cast Contemporaries. Edinburgh, UK
-*Shroud*

Sacred Spaces & Sites Visited

Florence, Italy

Basilica Cattedrale di Santa Maria Del Fiore (Duomo)

Basilica di Santa Giovanni.

Basilica di Santa Lorenzo.

Basilica di Santa Miniato al Monte.

Basilica di Santa Spirito.

Basilica di Santa. Trinita.

Basilica di Santa Marco.

Basilica Maria del Carmine.

Basilica di Santa Maria Novella.

Basilica di Santa Croce e S. Franceso.

Basilica di Santa Annunziata.

Baptistery dedicated to St John.

Rome, Italy

Santa Maria della Vittoria. (Ecstasy of St Teresa)

Papal Arch Basilica of the Most Holy Saviour, St. John Baptist and St. John Evangelist (Lateran Basilica).

Papal Basilica of St. Mary Major (Liberian Basilica)

Papal Basilica of St. Paul outside the walls (Ostian Basilica).

Papal Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican (Vatican Basilica) Vatican City.

Contarelli Chapel of San Luigi dei Franceschi (Caravaggio's: St Mathew)

Malta

St John's Co Cathedral.

St Paul's Cathedral.

The Visitation of Our Lady to St Elizabeth.

St Helen's Basilica.

The Nativity of Our Lady.

St. George's Basilica.

St Peter in Chains.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Our Lady of Carmelo.

Sacred Heart of Mary.

Church of the Resurrection.

St Gregory the Great.

Church of St Nicholas.

Immaculate Conception Church.

Our Lady of Fatima Church.

Corpus Christi Church.

Our Lady of Loreto Church.

St Leonard the Abbot Church.

St Andrew's Church.

United Kingdom

St Paul's Cathedral. London.

Old St Paul's Episcopal Church. Edinburgh.

St Albert's Church. Edinburgh.

Immaculate Conception Church. Edinburgh.

St Timothy's Church. Edinburgh.

St Patrick's Church. Edinburgh.

St Mary's Cathedral. Edinburgh.

St Cuthbert's Church. Edinburgh.

St John's Church. Edinburgh.

Canada

St Michael's Cathedral. Toronto, Ontario.

St Mary's Church. Toronto, Ontario.

St Patrick's Church. Toronto, Ontario.

St Paul's Basilica. Toronto, Ontario.

National Shrine of North American Martyrs. Midland, Ontario.

National Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. Toronto, Ontario.

St Cornelius Church. Caledon, Ontario

Immaculate Conception Church. Alliston, Ontario.

St Paul's Church. Alliston, Ontario.

St Francis Xavier Church. Tottenham, Ontario.

Exhibitions visited (selected)

Paul Carter

Visions for the Future (Bend Sinister), Fruitmarket Gallery. Edinburgh, UK. 2003

12XU, Embassy Gallery. Edinburgh UK. 2006

Alison Watt

Still. Old St Paul's Church. Edinburgh, UK. 2005-2012

Hiding in Full View. Ingelby Gallery. Edinburgh, UK. 2012

Phantom. National Gallery. London, UK. 2010

Brandon Vickerd

When All Our Hero's Turn To Ghosts. Embassy Gallery. Edinburgh, UK. 2007

Bone Works. Khyber Centre. Halifax, Canada. 2001

Champions of Entropy. Deleon White Gallery. Toronto, Canada. 2004

Chapman Brothers

The Chapman Brothers. White Cube. London, UK. 2011

Group Exhibitions

The Sacred Made Real: Spanish Painting & Sculpture 1600–1700
National Gallery. London, England.

The Art of Italy: The Baroque. Queen's Gallery. Edinburgh, UK 2009

The Northern Renaissance: Durer to Holbien. Queen's Gallery. Edinburgh, UK. 2011

The Discovery of Spain. National Gallery of Scotland. Edinburgh, UK. 2009

Raphael to Renoir. National Gallery of Scotland. Edinburgh, UK. 2009

Caravaggio and his Followers. National Gallery of Canada. Ottawa, Canada, 2011.

Galleries visited (selected)

Museum di Opera del Duomo. Florence, Italy. (2011)

National Gallery of Canada. Ottawa, Canada. (2007, 2011)

National Gallery of Scotland. Edinburgh, UK. (2005–2012)

Ontario Gallery of Art. Toronto, Canada. (2005–2012)

Nova Scotia Gallery of Art. Halifax, Canada. (2007)

National Gallery of Modern Art. Ottawa, Canada. (2005–2012)

Royal Scottish Academy. Edinburgh, UK. (2005–2012)

British Museum. London, UK. (2006, 2008, 2011)

National Gallery. London, UK (2006, 2008, 2011)

Bargello Gallery. Florence, Italy. (2011)

Uffizi Gallery. Florence, Italy (2011)

Borghese Gallery. Rome, Italy. (2011)

Headbones Gallery. Toronto, Canada. (2009)

Accademia. Florence, Italy (2011)

Vatican Museum Galleries. Rome, Italy (2011)

National Museum of Fine Arts. Valletta, Malta (2005, 2006, 2009)

Dufferin County Archives. Alliston, Canada. (2005–2012)

Fruitmarket Gallery. Edinburgh, UK. (2005 – 2012)

Royal College of Surgeons Museum. Edinburgh, UK. (2005 – 2011)

Apprenticeship & Workshops

2005 Artcast Sculpture Foundry. Georgetown, Canada.

2006–2010 Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop: Master Class Series

- Mould Making (2006)
- Casting (2008)
- Foundry Practice (2010)

2005–2007 Embassy Gallery: Co-Director. Edinburgh, UK

2009–2011 Edinburgh College of Art: Cast Committee. Edinburgh, UK.

-Involved in the restoration, research/education and conservation of ECA cast collection.

2005–2007 Apprenticeship with Aaron Juarros, Foundry man (U.S.A.)

Open Day Studio Visits to the Barn/Farm

During the periods of time that I have spent in Canada, I would organize and invite friends, family and members of the general public to view my sculptures that had been installed in the barn as well as within the surrounding area of Craganrock Farm, Ontario, Canada. These were informal events and attendances varied throughout. These open-day studio visits allowed me to discuss the work with audience members on an informal basis. This is a list of the dates and approximate number of people that attended.

July 13th 2007 (13 people visited)

August 23rd 2007 (23 people visited)

December 18th 2007 (11 people visited)

June 16th 2008 (18 people visited)

August 28th 2008 (23 people visited)

December 15th 2008 (12 people visited)

June 11th 2009 (26 people visited)

September 17th 2009 (38 people visited)

January 14th 2010 (21 people visited)

July 16th 2010 (9 people visited)

September 22nd 2010 (19 people visited)

December 18th 2010 (27 people visited)

July 12th 2011 (22 people visited)

Sept 9th 2011 (18 people visited)

January 5th 2012 (24 people visited)

July 21st 2012 (14 people visited)

Compact Disc (attached)

List of image folders on attached compact disc:

- PhD Exhibition-ECA 2012 (96 images)
- Barn Exhibition 2011 (123 images)
- Beheading of St John the Baptist (156 images)
- Deposition (111 images)
- Doubting Thomas (142 images)
- Condemnation (45 images)
- Samson (13 images)
- Moses & the Bleeding Rock (36 images)
- Wee David (97 images)
- Flagellation (92 images)
- Pieta (157 images)
- Split Rail Ascension (21 images)
- Chiaroscuro lighting experiments of barn/skeletons (166 images)
- Methods & Materials:
 - Foundry images and metal pouring (19 images)
 - Easdales Metal Scrapyard, Glasgow (15 images)
 - Images of waxwork and patina application (30 images)
 - Woodwork and barn images (173 images)

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