

RM: *Hardly any of the traditional materials of the painter – paint, canvas, probably even paintbrushes – are used in your work. Read as a materials list alone, one would be forgiven for mistaking your work for sculpture. How important to you and your work is the moniker of painter/painting?*

DT: It varies. I tend to refer to some of the works I produce as paintings and I have long considered myself coming from a background of painting. I seldom mind people suggesting I am something else, provided it is relatively inoffensive. I have quibbled at the epithet ‘painter’s painter’ on the rare occasions it has been suggested: I would equally like to be a film-maker’s, sculptor’s, gardener’s – perhaps a curator’s – painter. Possibly a viewer’s.

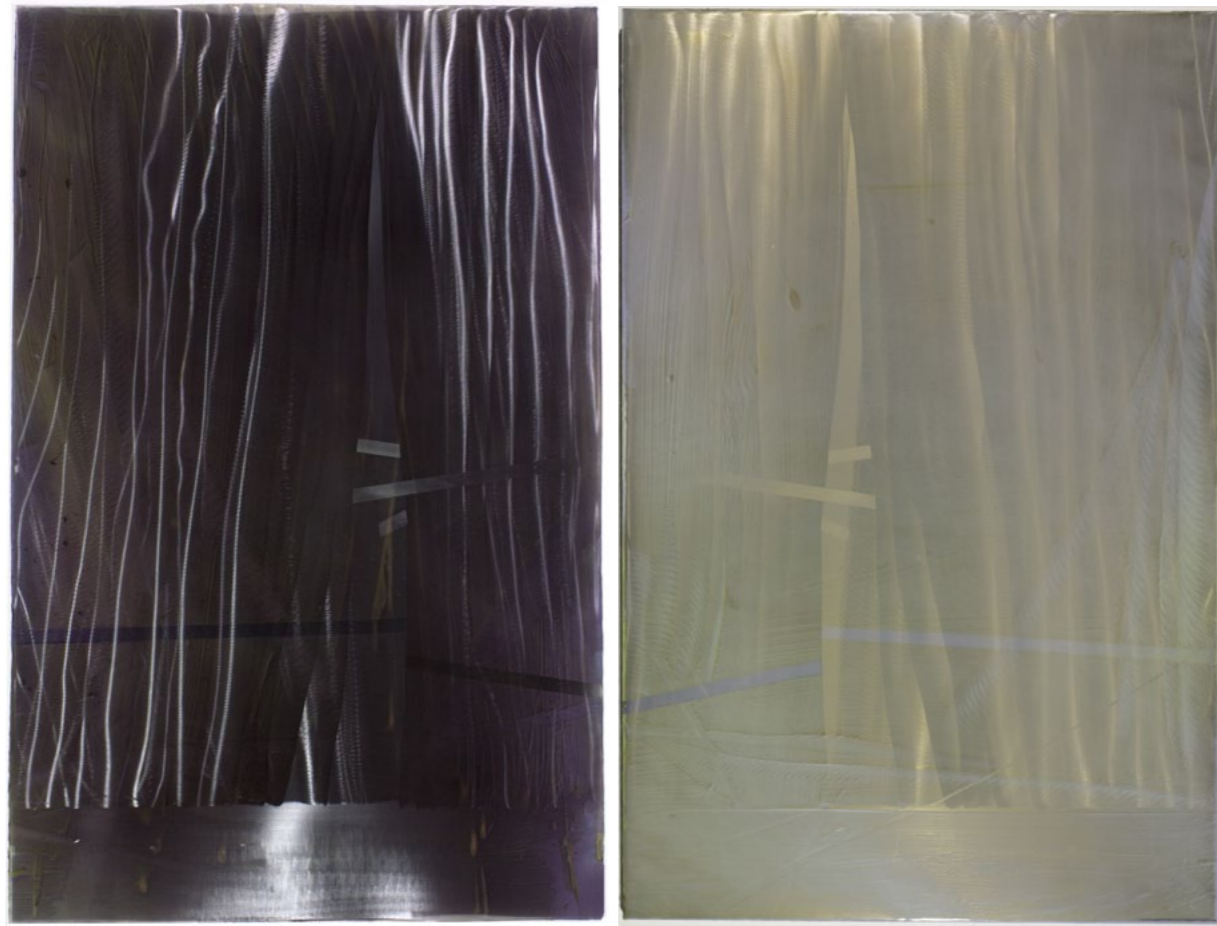
When I think about my practice in relation to works I see being produced at the moment, I seldom turn to painting. I return to painting as a personal canon of works I esteem (typically quite predictable and existential...), which form no clear historical passage, or suggest direction, but which evoke a sense of their uncompromising absoluteness and necessity, and which force me – painfully, unremittingly – to question the quality of my work. I then start questioning the need of these qualities, and life gets easier, but the work possibly gets worse.



Untitled (2011), pigmented epoxy resin on mild steel, 122 × 80 cm

MH: You use a similar process (if not the same) for all of the works described as 'paintings'. Certain elements form a rigid structure for the works – they begin as a metal sheet, which is then ground to make texture and pattern, then built up and cut back in layers of paint and resin. Within this framework certain elements such as colour and pattern are allowed to stray. How independent do the individual works produced in this manner feel for you?

DT: It varies. Not so much due to the visual qualities of a work but because of what develops from it. There is a desire that as artworks seen in isolation each individual work convinces on its own terms. This quality is potentially undermined – which I hope results in it being sublated/re-affirmed – when it becomes apparent that it has a twin, or is one of eight identical works, or that a series of prints have been developed from the surface of each individual layer, etc. I think I am a rather extravagant system-builder, and though I like each work to have the right to exist independently, I see everything I have produced as productively and necessarily interrelated and wanting to remain in and be nourished by this nexus.



Untitled Pair (2011), pigmented resin; pigmented epoxy resin on mild steel, each 122 x 80 cm



Untitled (a'tishoo II), 2010, graphite and acrylic medium on 9 gsm lens tissue 190 x 120 cm



Untitled (a'tishoo VI), 2010, copper and acrylic medium on 9 gsm lens tissue 190 x 120 cm

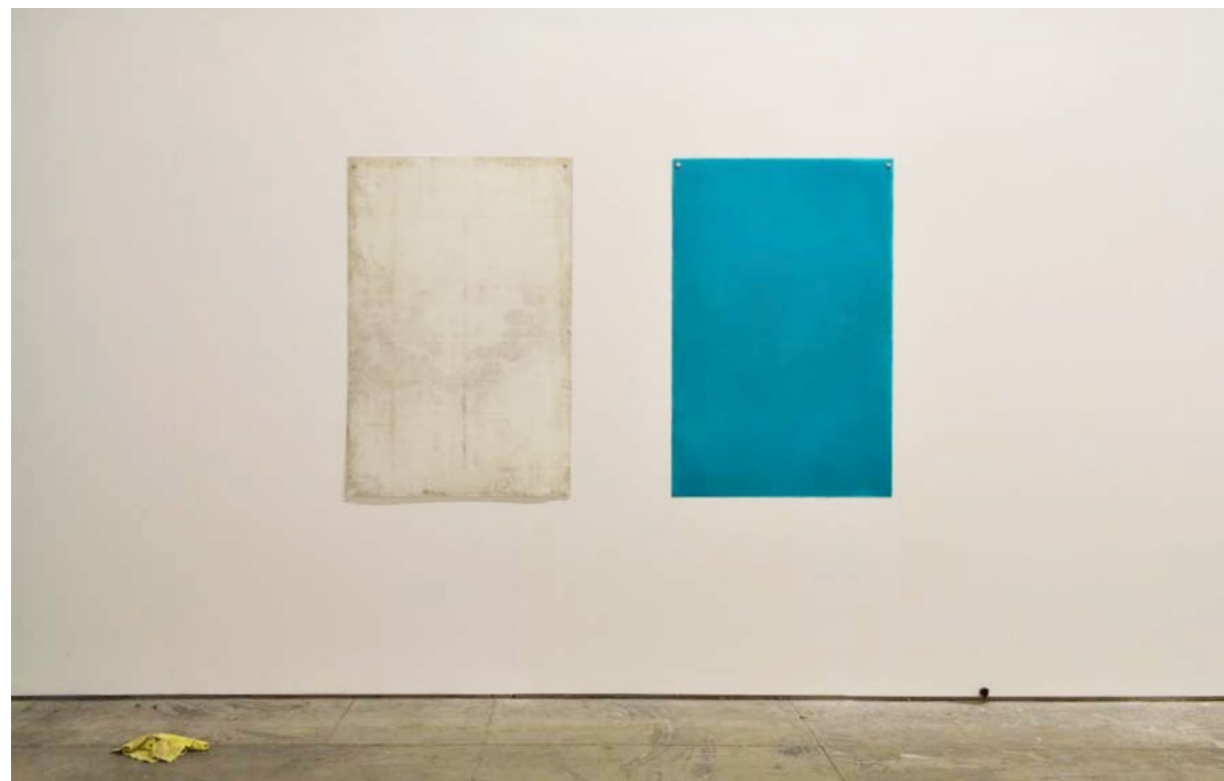
MH: For me the idea of your practice operating as a series of connections raises the question of where the more explicitly sculptural elements of your work reside within such a structure. Aside from a shared heritage of technique and material, your spherical sculptures seem to lie outside of a direct and 'productive' relationship with your paintings. In this way, they seem to perform the function of satellites works, both opening up and commanding physical space. What role do you see them performing within the nexus you described above?



Untitled (2010), pigmented epoxy resin on mild steel, 195 x 120 cm

DT: The first painted ball I produced was part of a work, complementing a painting. I'm not entirely sure (though surer than I'm admitting) why I came to the decision that I needed to have something spherical to the right-hand side of this particular painting, though it was fairly early in the process of making it – it was decided before any layers of paint had been applied. At that point it seemed as though it was a necessary part of the composition. When I had finished the painting, the painting seemed complete in itself without an odd supplement, yet the ball remained wedded to it in my imagination, and combined they still seemed to work successfully as one odd thing. With my subsequent balls, there isn't a logical connection with other works, but I find them useful compositional elements/tricks to have up the sleeve when trying to get a space to work successfully.

RM: *Your work is marked by its formal solemnity but it contains moments of simple, rather more quirky, pleasures. I'm thinking here of the contrast in the cluster of works you exhibited in Finger. Two panels of exquisite subtlety, one white and one blue, were shown alongside a little magnet covered in iron filings. Next to the austerity of these panels the small, fuzzy magnet seemed something of a curio; it had a sort of naïve appeal, evocative of early childhood brushes with science. I got the faint - and slightly unnerving - impression that you were feeding the audience these small tidbits to entice them into your work and keep them obedient, so that they may be trained to appreciate the more complex elements of your practice. Do you feel your work rewards the attention of the viewer? In some respects I felt as if the magnet was an attempt on your behalf to bridle your work, to tame it so that it might be more viewer friendly.*



Installation view, Finger, Hidde van Seggelen Gallery, 2012

DT: I'm not sure there was that much intention behind the filings – I like to imagine that I'm neither clever enough, nor devious enough, to use works so instrumentally. I would like people to spend time with the work, and I would hope the work can be in some sense 'giving' (I'm not sure in what sense), but I can't imagine wanting obedience, as I don't know what people could obey.

The ball is quite a confused little object: though quirky it has claim to being the most straightforward, pragmatic thing I've produced. The basic premise of the group of five objects displayed in Finger was to attend to and present stages in the production of one of my characteristic paintings. As noted above, these develop from abrading the surface of a sheet of mild steel. Though the waste from this process could have been displayed in other guises, the magnet was quite a sensible choice. It was displayed on the wall sitting on the shadow-gap. I'm not sure why, although your comment about 'naïve early childhood brushes with science' reminds me that I spent a very involved period (age 7-8?) collecting vacated snail-shells and learning (courtesy of a learned elderly neighbour) their latin names. I thought the work's position perhaps alluded to a full-stop, but maybe it was more that oddness of finding a snail crawling on an inside wall because a window had been left open on a damp night...



RM: *My reading of your attempting to ‘train’ the viewer runs the risk of sounding paranoid! Strategies and tactics not necessarily employed in the creation of an artwork can be read into the finished article, and while such readings may not relate to the cause of the work, they are testament to its effect. It is probably rather telling of my viewing habits- it certainly reveals the sense of power, and the mastery of materials, I discern in your painting.*

MH: *I found there to be a circularity to the works described above (exhibited in Finger). As well as the metal filings, you chose to display a cloth that had been used in the process of making the painting and casts. There seemed to be a reticence to discard any part of the work generated in its creation, including the remnants of paint, resin – even particles of skin from your hand – that had adhered to the fibres of the cloth. This operation on a microscopic level suggests a desire to control every molecule of the work – including those that may have transferred themselves to the cloth. At what point do you let go of this desire to control?*

DT: It’s interesting if it comes across as a desire to control. I’ve always – certainly for a long time – held a fascination for playing with materials and getting excited when they do something I wasn’t expecting. That’s what most stimulates in making art, and what seems to lead to the most formally convincing works; discovering something which seems essential to a medium, yet which is at odds – often fundamentally – with an initial expectation of what that material or set of conventions was or could be. By essential I mean both unduplicatable/untranslatable into another medium and, more vitally, the feeling that you are liberating something which has a genuine need, desire and will to emerge. I think that it is a mutual process, in that one identifies something unknown and apparently special in oneself through the material entity one has helped emerge – the knowledge that one has helped it emerge and that others wouldn’t. And then knowing exactly how it was made, but appreciating that there is so much more in it than you know. The Finger work/works were odd in that individual elements were clear and resolved, but still their relations seemed to undo this clarity.

Perhaps I’m resorting to being too speculatively dialectical, however: in the work in question, might there be grounds to claim that mine is less a desire to control than a desire to be controlled, controlled by the work or way of working (the painting on metal), in which I am allowed very little agency? Only: Not to make the work. And when that’s resolved it often doesn’t succeed; compulsion or a sense of guilt over a betrayal of the work tends to make me return to projects I’d rather ignore.

MH: *I enjoy the idea of your role as a liberator of material properties. There is the suggestion that in building up a relationship with a medium, in knowing it better, that you can celebrate its idiosyncrasies. I wondered if you thought the same was true for working within a particular area of art making, i.e. abstract painting (for want of a better description). Might inhabiting a particular domain allow you to also create something unexpected within the territory you have mapped out for yourself?*



Portrait of the artist as a young, messy, potion-maker, 2012

DT: I think so. I'm always rather unsure where I stand on the issue of medium specificity and categorising things; in debates I generally argue strongly in favour of drawing boundaries, but often out of a sense of redressing an imbalance/wanting justice done to the issue's complexities/being annoying. I tend towards a rather basic belief that a framework of categories/concepts is necessary for anything to have meaning or to affect one – something to do both with anticipation and historical acuity – but that this develops readily from a deviation/deforming of conventions associated with the category, or the ability to connect or weave together disparate categories. That is: if works which seem most pertinent, affecting or successful are those which seem least tied to something defined in relation to a discipline, at heart it is probably that they most successfully exploit prior conventions (and can then themselves become paradigmatic) – but whether these conventions need ever have been ones defined explicitly in relation to art...

Someone clearer and more Austrian than me once wrote: 'When I say the orders "Bring me milk" and "Bring me sugar" make sense, but not the combination "Milk me sugar", that does not mean the utterance of this combination of words has no effect. And if the effect is that someone stares at me and gapes, I don't on that account call it the order to stare and gape, even if that was precisely the effect that I wanted to produce. To say "This combination of words makes no sense" excludes it from the sphere of language and thereby bounds the domain of language. But when one draws a boundary it may be for various kinds of reason. If I surround an area with a fence or line or otherwise, the purpose may be to prevent someone from getting in or out; but it may also be supposed to be part of a game and the players be supposed, say, to jump over the boundary'

RM: *Do you see the object of painting as a process of refinement?*

DT: No.

RM: *There is a paradox at the heart of your paintings. The processes involved in their production – the layering of materials, and the physical act of making – are simultaneously revealed and distanced. One is shown that something has been produced, but not shown how. It is a kind of supernatural twist on abstract expressionism; alongside documenting the act of making, you seal it, enshrine it, make it somehow inaccessible. Is there a conscious attempt in your work to distance the viewer from the production of the work, to mystify the process of making?*

DT: No. It isn't an attempt but a by-product. The works develop from a desire to engage with pictorial space, which aligns them with a long history of painting – and of technical exploration – in which how they were made is essential to their coming into existence, not how they are seen. However, I recognise that they 'mystify the process of making', but I think it goes against most feelings or desires I have on the matter. I like the idea of work which distances the viewer from the work's production by eliminating the question of its production: that it could be approached phenomenally, formally, without any question of how it was made. At the same time, the works promote questions of how relationships obtain between objects, and these relationships are often indexical, necessarily raising the question of how they are technically produced. One has to be quite a special viewer of my work not to question how they are made; either because one generally wouldn't question this about anything, or because it is already something one knows. I hope that the works open up something beyond this question.

RM: *Many painters ostensibly working in abstract territory – I'm thinking here particularly of Mark Rothko – resist classification of their work as abstract. To what extent do you see your work as abstract?*

DT: I've been known to say 'I make abstract paintings'. On the one hand, it is a very inexact way of conveying a general idea of an area of interest, which perhaps makes redundant through its breadth a quite specific and once useful designation of a group of early twentieth century painters, but for which, as a replacement, 'non-representational', 'presentational', 'non-figurative', etc., all seem problematic too. Really they are more concrete than abstract. On the other hand, that some of my works – casts, etc. – are abstract is a literal matter of etymology: ab(s)/trahere, to drag or draw from. In this sense they are an accumulation of abstract relationships between concrete elements.

MH: *To follow on from Rosanna's question, your works are more often than not Untitled, something that seems to direct the viewer away from an interaction with your work based around anything as concrete as language. An exception to this is a piece entitled Untitled (The American). Does this suggest that a definite subject is being depicted? What (or who) were you referring to?*



Untitled (The American), 2010, alkyd and pigmented resin on mild steel, 220 x 360 cm

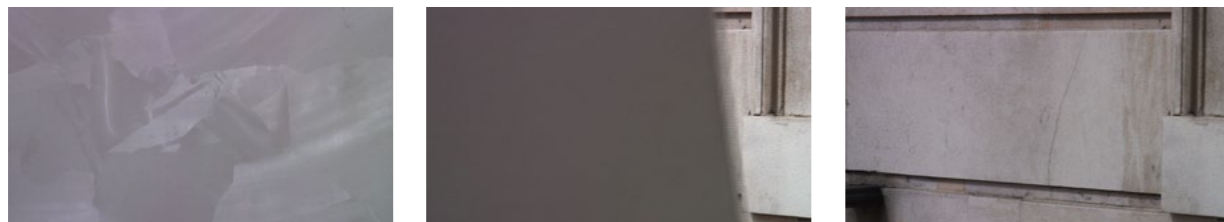
DT: Perhaps I retract that title... The work isn't really meant to be programmatic or depicting anything, though it developed a loose collage of imagery sketched from a train going up the Hudson River. In part the title alluded to it being quite big (360 x 220 cm), possibly in jest to an American friend.

MH: *Do you see the separation of material and subject as problematic?*

DT: I think I'd find the premiss of the separation problematic/untenable in anything, but I'll assume that you are limiting the issue to my own work. In the above mentioned painting (until very recently '(The American)') forms were permitted to crystallise which had more definite solidity or volume than previous work from that period, but it was a volume articulated very clearly through qualities which the material suggested and with which I had previously, unsuccessfully, toyed – as though a putative subject was necessary to permit me to distance myself somewhat from certain habits I'd formed with the materials. In more recent works the subject has become more hermetic and is more about the shift, genesis or translation of forms across materials – more about family relationships: kinship, incest, adultery, cross-breeding, family-values, values.

RM: *Harold Rosenberg, champion of Action Painting, famously said of post-war painting in the US that "what was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event." The surfaces of your paintings shift and change as they are hit by light, giving them an active presence in space. By nature your paintings are transient and cannot be appropriately represented by a fixed image. What is the importance for you of the work actively performing in space?*

DT: I'm a little confused about how the two halves of your question connect. I'm tempted to go along with Mary McCarthy's somewhat trite rejoinder to Rosenberg, that 'you can't hang an event on the wall' – but perhaps one can hang a protagonist instead? I don't think they perform, but perhaps they converse? Or mediate. Or look stropic and sulk when they don't like how they're lit. The closest I've ever come to catching them performing for their own sake has been the occasional suicide attempt and one murder/fratricide.



Three stills from video of falling painting, preparatory to Video of Heart of Untitled (Eight Grey VI), DV, 2009



Untitled (Eight Grey VI), 2009 (studio lighting)



Untitled (Eight Grey VI), 2009 (natural light)

RM: *I think what I was trying to get at is the link between the evidence of activity in the production of your work, left by visible gestural marks, and the activity of the work on display. What I meant by saying that your work performs in space is that it is something of a live event; it moves and changes in relation to light and the proximity of other objects, most importantly the body. For me, this really stresses the importance of the ‘presentness’ of the work, and because of this I would say that you are in the business of hanging events on walls! In this respect, it seems to build on Action Painting; not only does your work record – even celebrate – its physical, gestural production, it is also literally active, and activated by its audience, when on display. It is almost as if there are two events captured in your work, the event of making, and the event of the finished piece. What is the relationship for you between these two types of activity, the history of the work and its ‘presentness’? They seem to me somehow distinct.*

DT: I see. It returns us to the answer I gave to your question about mystified processes: I want work to be appreciated formally as visually ambiguous explorations of pictorial space, but it is hard to imagine viewers not also being concerned with the process by which they were made. You are casting that as a potential strength and I would – hesitantly (and gratefully) – agree. My worry is that considerations of the technique can preclude any engagement beyond that – to really wanting to spend time with the works and just look at them – that they all too easily become slightly gimmicky. I find the question hard because I have quite strong prejudices about how words such as ‘active’ and ‘passive’ are often used, and that in this case the ostensibly active aspect of the work – that one is obliged to move around it, construct identity from varied instances – seems more facile and more passive than the engagement I would hope one would have when one has moved beyond an initial curiosity. I shalln’t claim it of my work, but it stands as an observation drawn from works (perhaps everything) about which I care a great deal, and also as an aspiration: that when an artistic or human engagement with something is at its most active – i.e.at its most vital/ capable of effecting growth – often coincides with when it most resolutely compels stillness, quiet, and a regrouping and reordering of oneself in relation to it, developed not from passivity but from patience, commitment and openness, openness to vulnerability.

RM: *I wanted to ask you about the spiritual context of your work. In their relationship with light and in their propensity to evoke wonderment in an observer, your paintings share a sense of dramatisation seen in religious art forms. Your semi-sculptural approach to the flat plane, for example, has a particular affinity with the stained glass window, where the artwork is witnessed as a kind of phenomena. How do you feel your work relates to the sublime?*

DT: I never quite understand the terms ‘sublime’ or ‘the sublime’. That said, I don’t really understand ‘beauty’ or ‘the beautiful’, yet I use those terms and often see them as aspirations. I think that beauty is a normal enough word, and that I would employ it unthinkingly – like ‘good’ or ‘stonking’. And as ‘sublime’ has no normal application for me, I’m left with a philosophical/art-philosophical one, which, whether Burke, Kant, Newman, Lyotard or Gilbert-Rolfe, doesn’t mean very much to me.

I don't think about the work in relation to religion. And I don't know very much about light and religion, but the obvious examples which come to mind are Vézelay and Stonehenge, both of which seem to serve the same purpose of ratifying harmony and regularity – some sense of permanence. This seems at odds with my works, which emphasise the singularity of an experience – that I can have something on the studio wall and get familiar with it, bored of it, then encounter it in an entirely new way when the light changes, be enthralled by it once more.

I baulk at the term 'spiritual', but yes. The sun – wonderment.



Installation of five Untitled (Eight Grey) paintings, 2009



Vézelay Abbey, midday, summer solstice, 1976

RM: *Another distinct strand of your practice is your work with coloured plastics, which sees you approaching colour like balancing an equation. The works we saw recently in your studio, for example, consisted of a number of small colour panels and one grey panel. The exact quantities of colour used to produce the colour panels had been blended together to create this single grey panel. Strict and carefully calculated, this work was neither as emotional nor as immediate as your paintings. Do you see these works as a more conceptual, theory driven branch of your practice?*

DT: I'm not placed to comment on matters of emotion or immediacy. Although potentially arid things in themselves (I'm fond of them – they have perplexing personalities), I feel these works cry out for a rather fun existence in how they get displayed. Outdoors: beaches, beeches. Fridges, obviously. Tessellated; single-line hang; dispersed; abutting between walls; etc. They are like mono-chromes for children – potentially very boring Mechano for budding curators.





And I don't see them as theory driven. They developed very fluidly from other works I was making, using similar processes, but pared of inscription and layering – these are just casts from the surfaces of various metals. These were initially grey: I'm not sure why, although it is a favourite colour and it also mimicks the original metal a little. I then made some brightly coloured ones as a way to offset the balance when the grey works were displayed en masse. Then I noticed that if one mixed the coloured panels – turquoise, cadmium orange, caput mortuum, ultramarine violet – they would approximate a grey. To formalise this into an explicit work seemed a little tedious as an artwork, and I avoided it for about a year, but I remained frustratingly curious to see how it would work and ended up feeling obliged to resolve it by doing it. Then it mutated whilst being made, and grew as a group, and took ages. – I remember reading that Ingmar Bergman claimed that for a year he couldn't get out of his head an image of three women dressed in white, in a red room. He had no desire to do anything with the image, but it wouldn't leave him. He ended up having to make *Cries and Whispers* as a way of exorcising it. I think this is what I mean by the work potentially dominating the artist, even though it is something the artist has initiated – i.e. Maxwell and Hugo in *Dead of Night*.

