



# The Circle and the Abyss

JG HAMPTON



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NEUTRAL GROUND || REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN

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In this new body of work, *The Circle and the Abyss* from Regina-based, JG Hampton, the artist engages conceptual and post-minimalist strategies in a sculptural installation to reclaim theoretical and aesthetic spaces displaced by a derridian and postmodernist narrative. The post-minimalist strategy in the sculptures and works on paper also engage a relational dynamic whereby elements of the installation encourage interactivity in a way that references a didactic display but where the point of engagement for the viewer is neither key to the works' completion nor resolution.

In this published, collaborative text between Dr. Randal Rogers and the artist, the conversation accesses the white cube gallery and the neutrality it claims as a framework for contemplating the complexities of pure form and democratic universality. Rather than challenge the white cube as a failed Modernist ideal and the neutral space as a delusional, utopian fantasy, Hampton seeks to find new utility for the functioning space while juggling the difficulties and complexities of the artist-run paradigm as an ambiguous "subversive but imitative" institution. Confronting the challenges of global-local inertia compounded by shifting values ensconced in the economy of collapse, the artist proposes a deeper and more insightful engagement with a quantum mechanics that is unbound.

For an interview between JG Hampton and B Cleniuk, please go to:  
[neutralground.sk.ca/hampton](http://neutralground.sk.ca/hampton)

Brenda Cleniuk  
*Director*

The circle and the abyss, that would be the title...

Jacques Derrida<sup>1</sup>

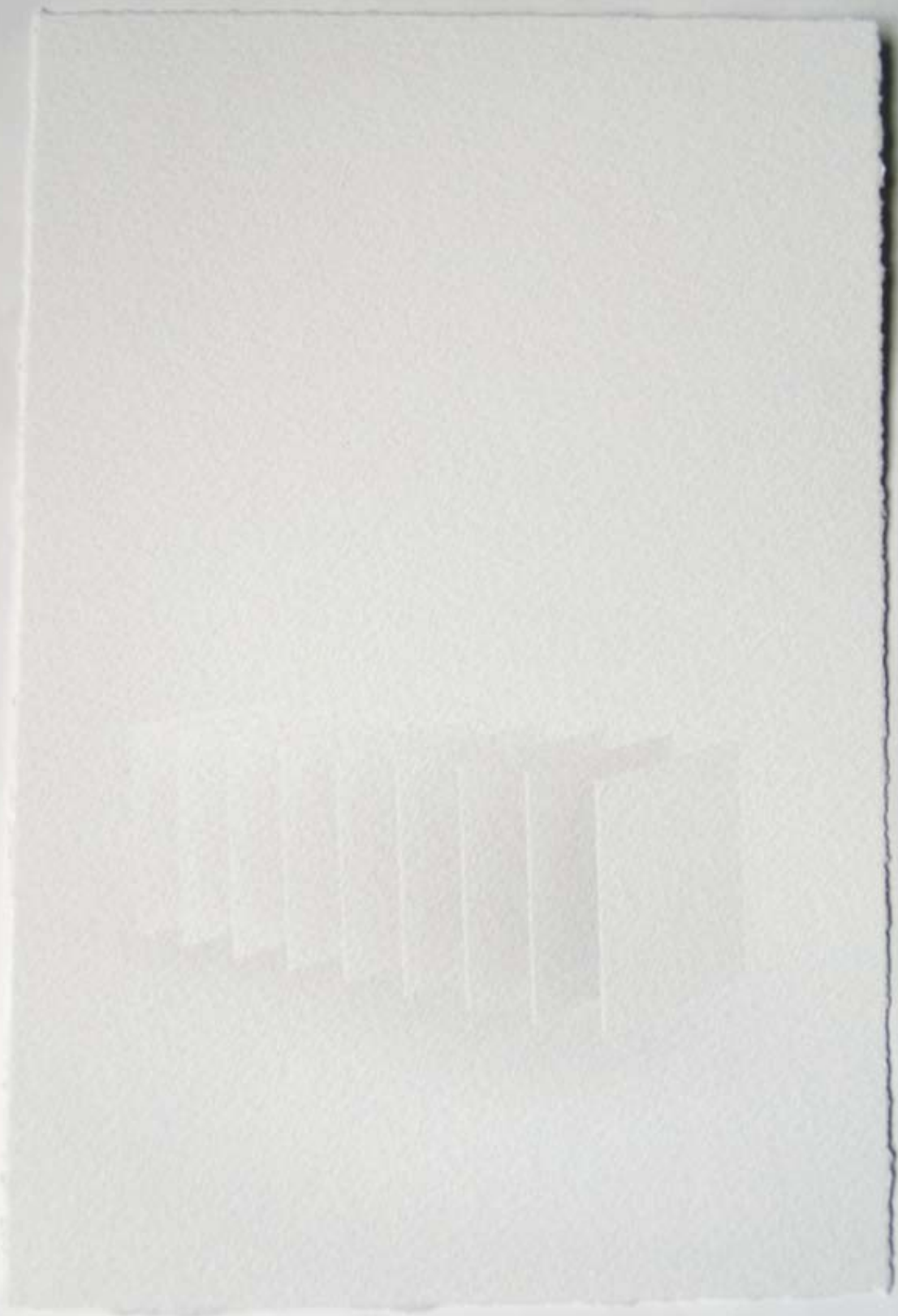
...if it were

the title

that is...

JG Hapton  
Randall Rogers

<sup>1</sup>Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (1978)



me/me:

A 'unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation'. Here we wish to build upon Richard Dawkins' definition of meme while also thinking about it otherwise. me/me is how we have imagined this work of writing, preferring to disrupt the relation between me, Randal, a professor and sort of critic among other things, and me, JG, a former student of Randal's, embarking (having embarked already) on "being" an artist among other things. Rather than an artist statement by JG and an overview of the body of work by Randal, we have chosen to write through the works of art and work of writing as a contagious or promiscuous condition. me/me refuses to separate this work into neatly packaged units, to align with the classic binary of me/you, self/not, artist/critic, etc. It is not a simplifying gesture, but such is the thing itself. And, please don't misunderstand, art precedes writing here and it is JG's work that drives this endeavor... even if the concepts contained herein have also played their role in driving the production of work

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L A unit of imitation can wait for now, but is equally important (see: White). The works in this exhibition might be defined in this most simple form: a unit of cultural transmission. Defined through movements between registers these works articulate a relation between fragments and totalities, but not in a facile manner. One might think of them as fragments or nodes or (choose so-called postmodern term and insert here) that are arranged in assemblages – parts of things or beings or reorganized entities or non-linearity itself, which connect but somehow don't add up. Just like this writing itself, the attempt here is to de-cohere certain systems like circuits, portraiture, social life, art, classical philosophy. You think of other examples. The Circle and the Abyss. Circles that recede just as they touch in space but, unlike a mise en abyme, not a self-reflection into infinity, but an infinite recession, regression. A certain grammar remains to be found perhaps. Assemblage without totality but with a desire for responses aesthetic. Focus upon the interpunct, circle but avoid the centre.

## The Circle and the Abyss

A hindrance of theory is its topographical impossibility, engaged as it is in the production of its own referents. The paradox of the circle and the abyss: a series of circular self-referential systems cast into infinity each circumscribing - and circumscribed by - the last.

The circle and the abyss requires concepts to always be in motion while it also has them frozen in a crystalline cycle. It necessitates a symbiosis between elements and retains a separation between binary relationships; the possibility of the co-evolutionary sits just at its horizon - within sight but out of reach. It is very much a theoretical abyss which assumes nothing can escape and everything will fall into it. 7

L Missing are the events that escape the abyss. These philosophical and narratological systems are not isolated perfect circles infinitely repeating themselves in différance, but are navigated by readers who travel from one t(r)opic to the next. As soon as one introduces a subject - a person - into these models, the infinite abyss narrows into perception and intent is reintroduced into this realm of abandon and chance.

Here, the circle and the abyss is used as a component within an assemblage of structures. When navigating these informational geometries, changes in perceptual or linguistic definitions shift an object to different truths, realities.



Interpunct I:

See: Latin: the middle dot (·);  
Mathematics: operators (/ \* ^);  
Common practice: the space ( ).

A grammatical device - existing between words - operating both as and around punctuation.

The interpunct presents to us words as we know them - for how else would we (know them). The space(s) (before and after) physically frame the words and concepts contained within. The space as it functions interpunctually is not an absence, or a site without meaning, but it is a site of potential, giving contextual (see: Framing) information to words/concepts.

The space as we know it was not always present in western written languages; it was abandoned by the Greeks because it served no oral function. But between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries a shift towards more intellectual pursuits occurred. The interpunct found new use-value in silent reading. Interpunctual operators allowed for an organizational model that translated knowledge at a purely informational level - without ties to the physical world of speech. ¶

L In the pages of *The Circle and the Abyss*, the space is given privilege. Words recede into the interpunctual, providing an imaginary framework onto which the structure of physical space (here the physical space of the space) can be laid. ¶

L When the interpunct is travelling from information to physical space and back again, it enters the social realm; it becomes an interaction between bodies, social and otherwise.

Framing:

Frame, the object, the concept, framing, to frame or to be framed, the parergon - maybe, but also something *else*. The frame comes from disparate elements fitted and joined together into the fluid space of potential contexts surrounding any object...

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Bal, *Travelling Concepts*  
2004

L Theorist Mieke Bal's explanation of framing is important for how it shifts subject-object relations. This framing steers away from context as a "self-evident, non-conceptual kind of data" questioning the "object" status of art-ifacts and repositions them as alive.

Here the different elements surrounding an image, such as the white walls, the other images in the gallery, the film one saw the night before, all work together in a social manner to dictate the frames through which an object is seen. To an artist considering the context in which art will be seen this creates an interesting dilemma. If the context is unstable, then it cannot be known beforehand. So should it be abandoned as a consideration? Naive postmodernists may say yes, but this is the realm of the social. One must be an accommodating host!

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L The attempt here is to acknowledge the disparate - and yes even the unknown - frames surrounding the objects, and to structure the chaos. Balance between these frames would allow for a pure unbiased experience in subjectivity for the viewer, but this is not possible. Balance in the realm of social and quantum philosophies is something that can only be achieved at the site of collapse.

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└ Provide hints. Mute the frames, concealing them in a realm of potentiality, waiting for a prod or a poke to let one or two burst through. There is delicacy in this seduction however. On a canvas of subtly vacillating meanings, to attract the right viewers to the right readings, it requires the right wink here, and the coy smile there, a carefully choreographed dance that must be adaptable to the whims of the unknown partner. And viewers are not always amenable to rules, find their own or simply reject the path chosen in advance.

┌ The dance is the act of coding/decoding, both of which are engaged by the viewer, the artist, the curator, etc. ┘

In the structuring of this seduction the artist creates a painterly diagram, one which works against the concrete synthesis of perception and strives for a set of a-signifying signs which make up a "genetic" model for the pictorial order represented. The painterly diagram is a map of the potentiality inherent in an artwork via pluralistic, social frames.

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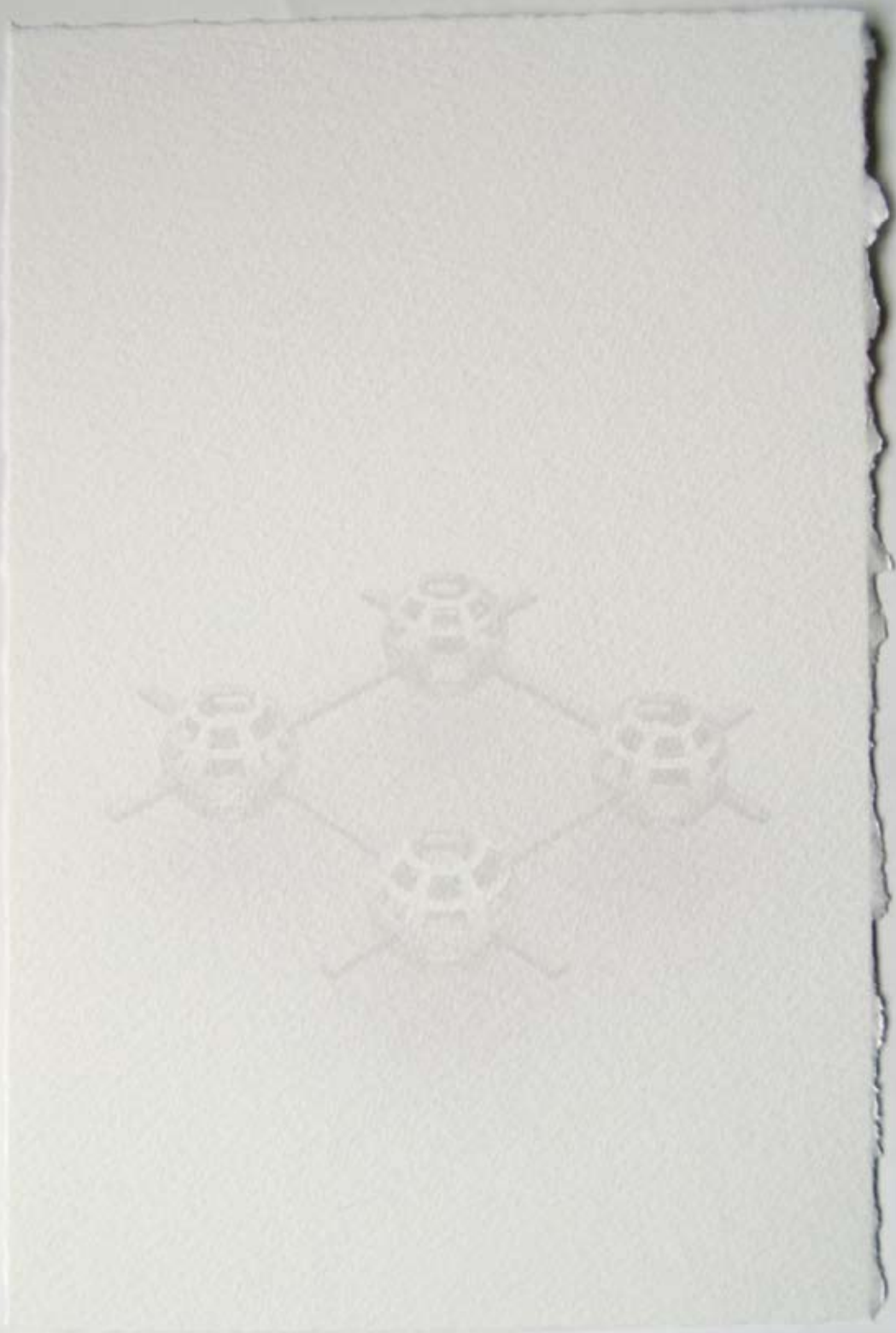
## Interpunct II:

Amidst compound forms the interpunct here is also technology, the body, perhaps even sociality itself. The space that is not, portraits that ultimately must formulate a character, conjunctions as words, and circuits/diagrams as systems. Between these registers lies a practice in translation from physical bodies to thought and back, or elsewhere. Technology as medium that supports, relays, frames, communicates and technology as thing itself, as body somehow within the system but lightly so, touching its contours like the circle and the abyss itself, signified yes but not bound trussed lashed. Software maybe. Hints of things beyond, both below and outside, referenced and affirmed through a wraithlike presence, but refused entry to a system in translation formation. Self-organizing, sure, but into what? Two technologies that intersect to form a faltering and hesitant frame, a t(r)opos. The hazard of an even wavering + denying portrait that still points to a being, floating above its foundations. Fuzzy surfaces, conjunction inscribed, backlit in boxes of wood with burdensome umbilical cords threatening collapse as they unite bond fix their solemn materiality each to the next. A diagram. White gloves of care, and of death. Punctuated by the deception of a-materiality that is plexiglass, here a simple pamphlet holder, containing prints. Materiality once more denied. Overcast papers and leaden vaporous prints. Hinting presences begging reorganization. Brazil-ian ducts here pipes translated from diagram to sculpture. Cubes in tight patterns reaching out from the surface. Again bodies, somehow self-possessed...and yet so very delicately and demurely rendered. Body thing, body of work. Locate coherence then reject it. But not as adolescence. Emergence rather. Uncertain beautiful emergence. But – again – into what? Tropos of topos.

Information:

Γ(Im)material. (In)formation. Constant yet discrete movement between disciplines, between bodies. At its origin it is the act of in-forming: giving shape to the mind. In communication it is equated with data. In physics, information consists of all the properties (always physical, always measurable) that make up an object, that make it real and distinct. Information: the complete coherent collection of which, is an object's pure platonic form. But this is unknowable. Information is always in motion, in formation literally. Redactions and additions, citations and omissions, all take place within the discourse surrounding an object, constantly changing its (in)formation, molding this unknowable, omniscient, pure form. ┘

ΓPotentiality. (In)finite (in)formational realities. In physics: quantum information; but for our purposes, informational-geometry. Coexisting alongside the one temporal and three spatial dimensions, informational geometry is an unambitious explanation of the extra dimensions predicted in contemporary physical theories. Thought, perception, ontology and quantum phenomena: all effects or affects of information, the movement of which can be seen shifting in images traveling from one frame to the next, in the glowing tabula rasa, or in the partially formed specter of figurality, (de)materialized in a textured sea of white. ┘





White:

L Black. Between. But white, primarily. A unit of imitation (see: me/me). Tractatus Logico Catalogicus - Art or the Art of Selling; White on White; White Flag; Composition with Yellow, Blue, and Red. They are all here, present if not quite accounted for. Broodthaers, Malevich, Johns, and yes, Mondrian too – perhaps Mondrian most of all. Choose others and forgive me for having not. Light and God naturally stereotypically. Also the book, so Diderot amongst others, many. Racine and Maranda to begin with. White Black White Black alternating to reveal and confirm all of history, with this circle and abyss at the end. Too declarative to be sure but don't worry. To place within history. To acknowledge a past and work within it, from portrait to code via the grid or vice versa.

A unit of imitation. Not copy but citation. Almost the same but not quite. Copy and menace at the same time. Then digital from analog too. A copy that is not one but a movement. A technology of reproduction that eliminates its own materiality. Wood. Code. But presence nonetheless. Genre refigured and searching for indeterminate presence. Code refusing to let go of its histories. Books still demanding place. The portrait here ephemeral pointing to its own death. But not quite. White.

White as the summation of all, the final point made before black, or just after. The presence of all. Black recedes. White refuses to go. But white is a pretender. White encapsulates to control. It's light is of pride not love. White overwhelms. Blue red yellow are all glimpsed in white's shadowed folds even as they are subsumed to white's pre-eminence. But its control cannot obtain.

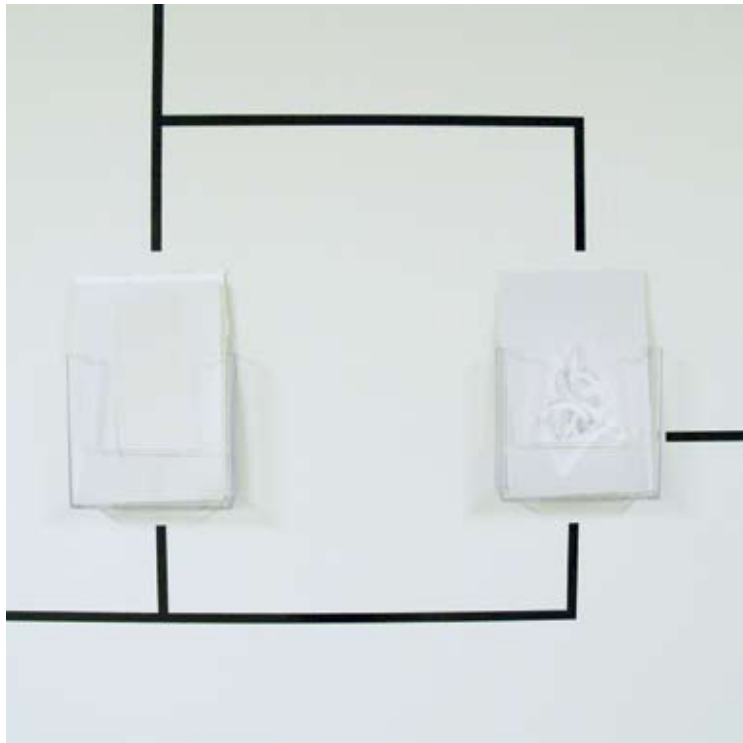
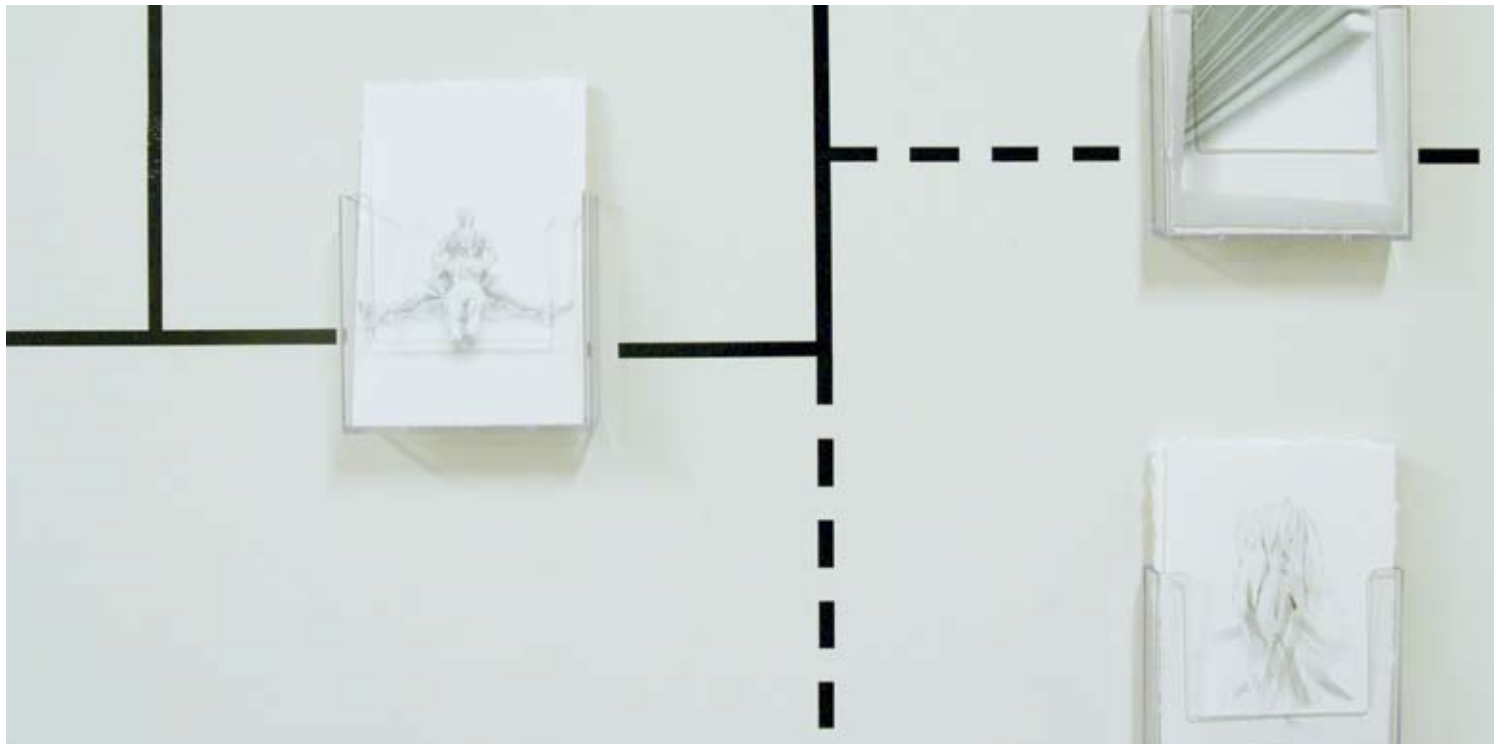
The (lack of) control sought in the subtle shimmering of baroque white. A white that draws inward, escaping the seemingly unified whole. Inwards again, into the reflection that is white, the infinite reflections of red, blue, yellow, pink, ultimately breaking off and reflecting back the gaze of the viewer. Not black and white but black to white: the active shift of an object's surface, its appearance altered through the reflection, refraction, and retention of the invisible visibilities of photons. Homogeneity contradicted by entropic luster. The folding tumultuous multiplicities of the visible spectrum. Pushing from every which way, striving for, but never achieving... pure. unified. white.

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The baroque white is a reference to Mieke Bal's concept as it was elaborated in Quoting Caravaggio (2001)

*Collaborative text: Randal Rogers and JG Hampton*







JG Hampton is a Canadian, American, mixed-blood Chickasaw interdisciplinary artist. Hampton has exhibited work in group exhibitions internationally, but is embarking on his first major solo exhibition in *The Circle and the Abyss*, premiering at Neutral Ground artist run center. Hampton has received a diploma in 3d Animation from New Media Campus, a B.A. in Visual Arts from the University of Regina

and currently resides in Regina, Saskatchewan, working with the artist collective "Turner Prize" and in solo work across multiple disciplines including video, installation, writing, print, and audio.

Hampton's work can be found at [turnerprize.ca](http://turnerprize.ca) and [jghampton.com](http://jghampton.com)

Piece information:

Model for Diagram 1 (9'x6' or 50 x 6"x9") 2009  
Diagram 1 (18'x6' or 150 x 6"x9") 2009

Portrait in Paper (1-5) (5 x 17"x24") 2008  
Circuit (1-5) (Variable Dimensions) 2009

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