

Oil Painting Class.

The 1990s – My Paintings

Hey Art Class, I'm going to talk to you today about the paintings that I did in the 1990s.

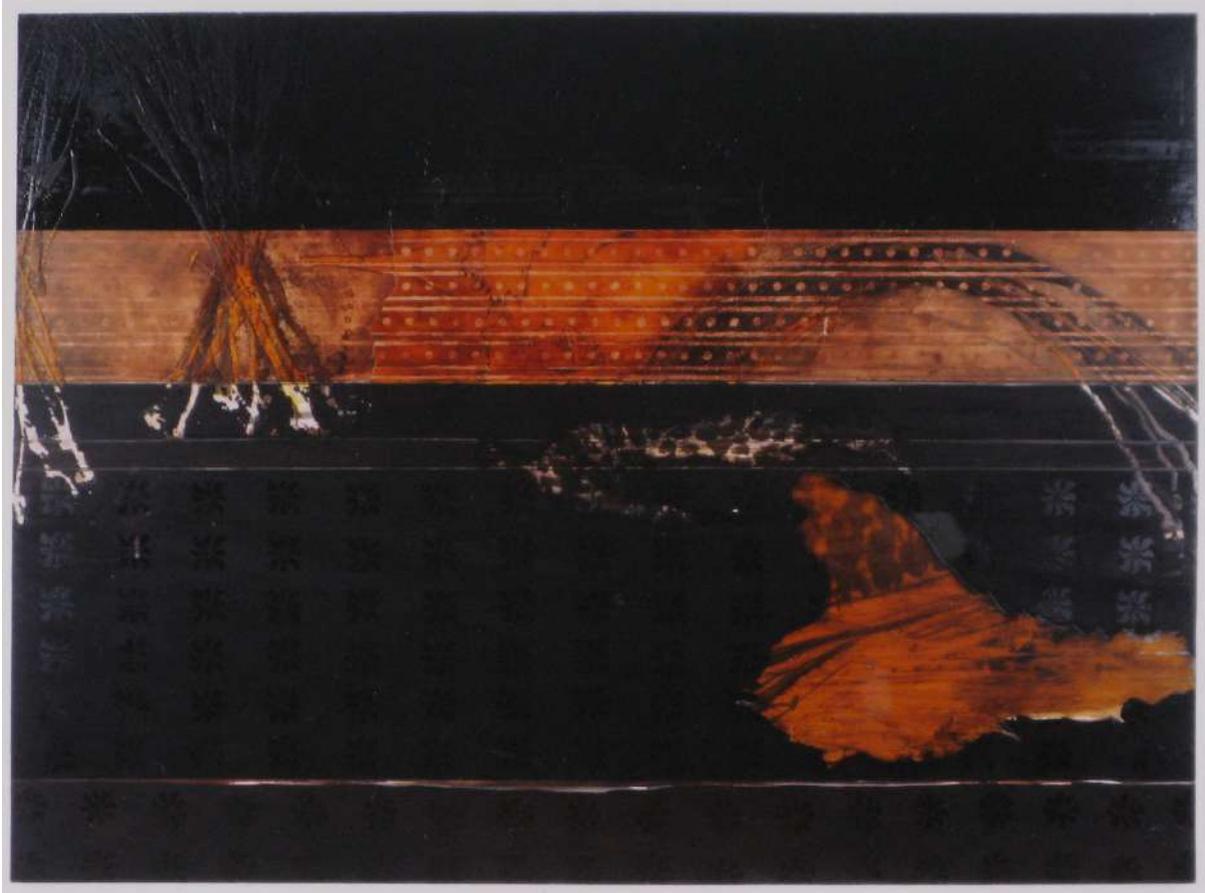
In 1989, I moved to London to do my MA in Painting at Chelsea School of Art. In those days Chelsea had a reputation for favouring non-representational art. Painting with imagery or worse, 'content' was deemed irrelevant and a bit embarrassing..

Most of us on the MA course understood that abstraction or non-figurative art meant 'seriousness'. We had a bunch of tutors who thought painting was a purely visual experience, and that figurative imagery was seen as a bit unsophisticated. Narrative, or story-telling was seen as completely unimportant..!. This position is what is now called 'formalist' and is now often used as an insult. By the end of the first term I began to tire of the mystification of oil painting. People used to say "Yeah man, that really 'works'", and there was talk of some painters being geniuses. Some students were in search of 'beauty'; some students lived in their studio in romantic squalor; neither of these activities are really allowed now in art schools.



Mattress II 1990. Wood-dye, wax, Brasso, bleach and house-paint on canvas. 167 x 167cms

I developed a strong urge to throw a spanner in the type of painting for which Chelsea was famous, and decided to make some abstract paintings to prove my point. I wanted them to be deliberately ugly, and to not 'work'. This was one of the first paintings I made - Mattress II from 1990. In the end, they sort of created another category of the beautiful - if beauty is the thing that makes you want to look again and keep looking. I divided the surface up into layers like a cake, and used colours that were murky and faded looking.

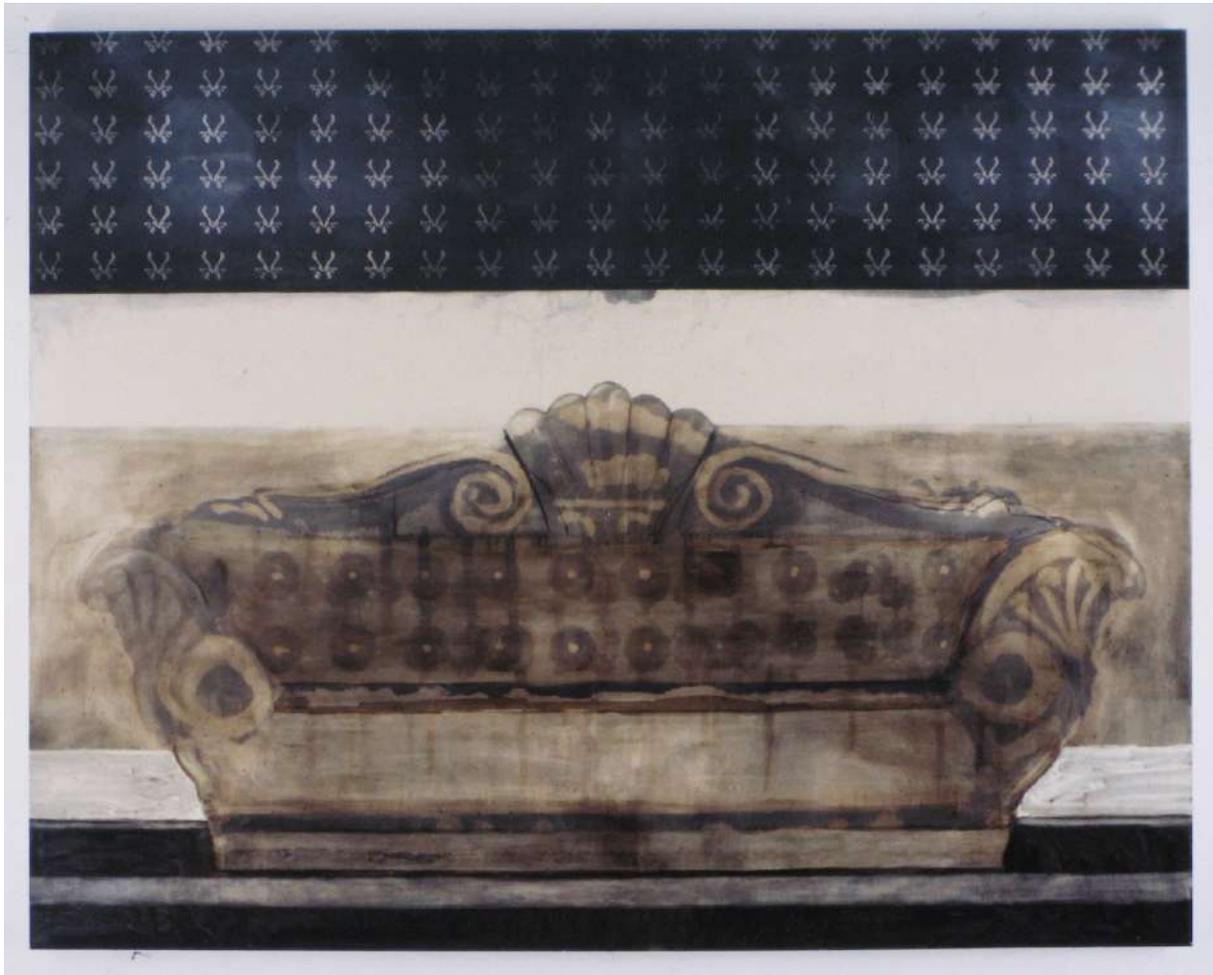


Siesta 1990. House paint, varnish, wood-dye and wax on canvas. 260 x 187cms

Some of these paintings look like a slice through geological strata, like this one entitled "Siesta". The other thing that I did at this time was to ditch oil paint altogether. I went to the local builder's merchants and bought up their discontinued lines of house paint. I particularly liked gloss enamel paints, as when you mix them together, they formed psychedelic whirlpools and behaved in unforeseen ways. Along with house-paint I used melted wax, commercial dyes, and household cleaning products, like bleach. The colour that appears in the painting was basically what 'came in the tin'. I liked not having to make decision about colour, and enjoyed the unpredictable and accidental things that happened. (Some of you in the art class might have used water based inks and bleach to make drawings - this is a fun thing to do as you never know exactly what the result will be. Take care if using bleach though, as it can burn the skin)..

I also created stencils with which to add the type of repetitive patterns that you might find on curtain wallpaper. If you've watched the previous video or been sent the

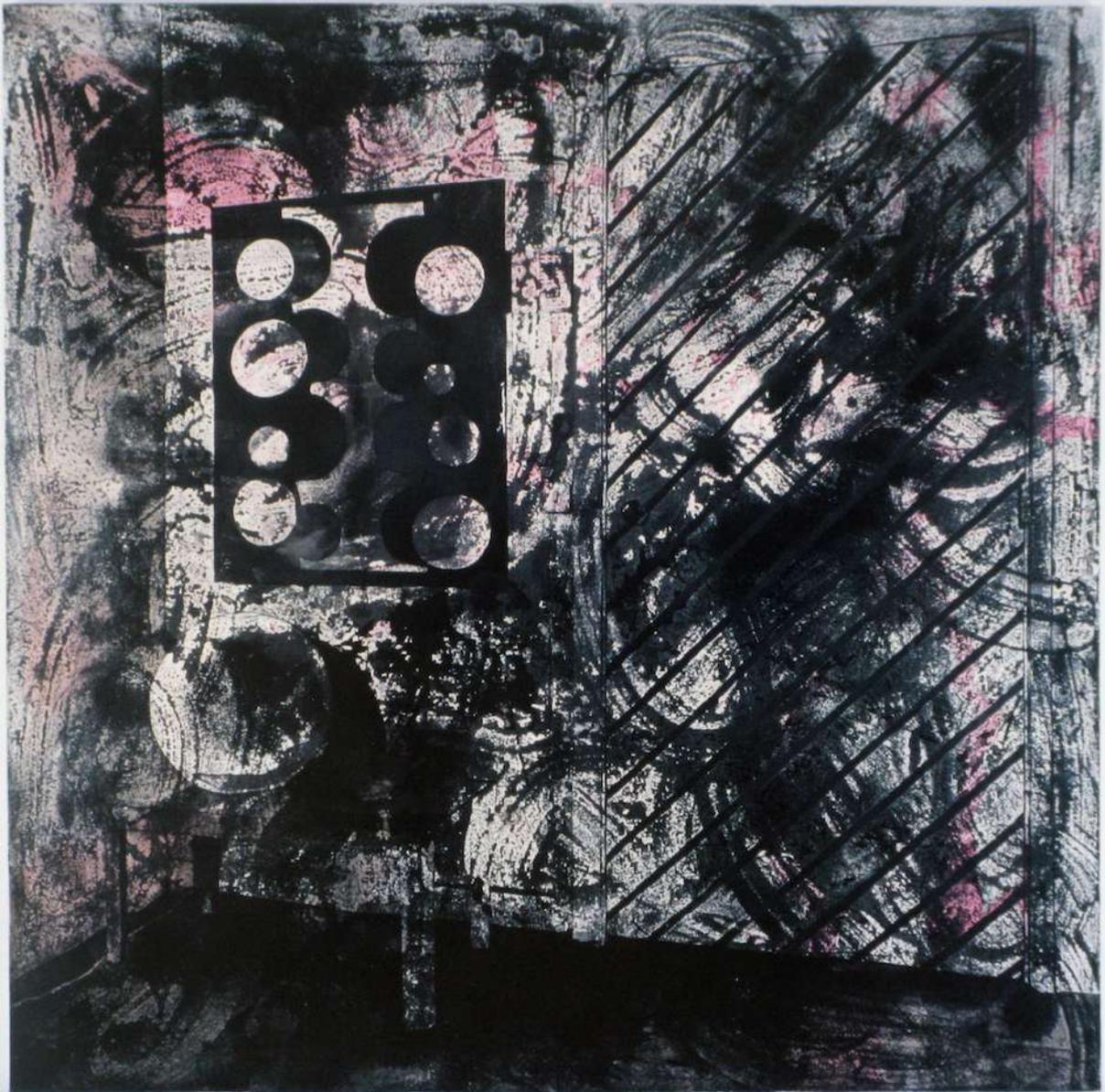
Class Handout where I talk about my oil paintings made in Leeds in the 1980s, you'll remember that I was deliberately using decorative motifs and references to textiles, as a way of reclaiming a visual form that'd been denigrated as 'feminine' and associated with domesticity. My use of pattern in this instance is similar, but I thought now that pattern had a kind of dumb visual 'insistence', which I liked. Decoration has 'nothing to say', and likes it that way!



Couched, 1990 Wood-dye, bleach and house paint on canvas, 241 x 210 cms

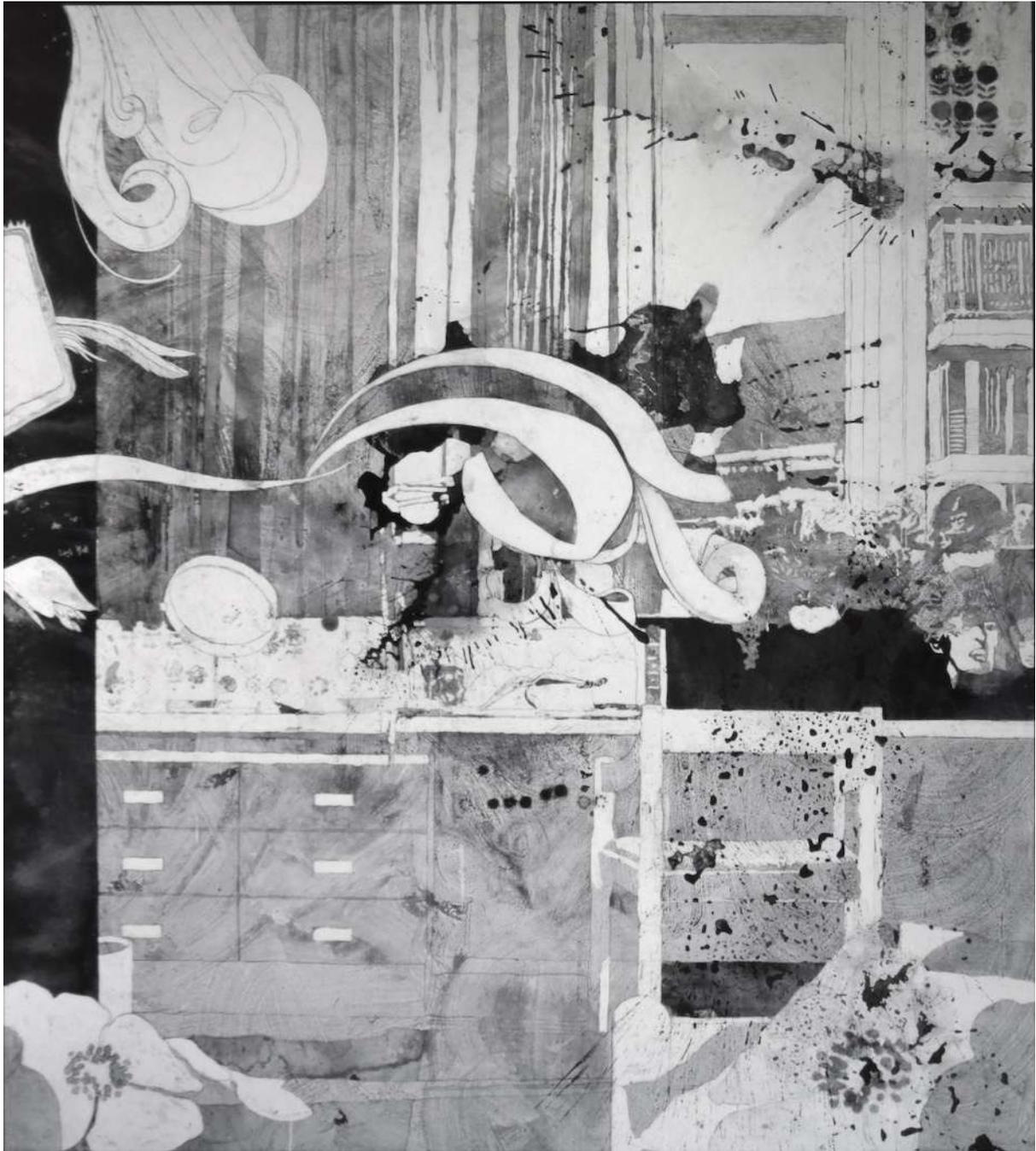
In this painting, "Couched", I added a sofa. Partly because of the domestic connotations, but also because as far as I knew, no one had ever made a sofa the subject of a painting. The blue area along the top was scrubbed with wood-dye over rows of little patterns which were painted with gloss house paint.

After I left Chelsea School of Art in 1990, I was given the Picker Fellowship in Painting at Kingston University, where I became more interested in the relationship between painting and photography...



Untitled. 1991. Black ink, fabric dye, detergent and house-paint.

I continued making large-scale paintings, but began to impose a bit more of an order on what I was doing. A kind of 'focus' if you like! This painting is from 1991 and was rendered in black ink, fabric dye, detergent and house-paint. Photographic images of domestic interiors found in late 60s/early 70s interior design catalogues were drawn out very carefully onto a blank white canvas covered with a layer of household primer. I used an overhead projector, to project a copy of the photograph onto the canvas, so that the image would be fairly true to the original printed one. I then painted layers of gloss and eggshell industrial paint onto the canvas to create a kind of resist effect, so that the more absorbent surfaces 'held' the ink that I poured and wiped onto surface of the canvases, and the glossier ones dispelled them. The paintings from this period often look like someone has tried to 'clean' them, but then stopped before the process was finished.



Untitled, 1994. Black ink, detergent and house-paint

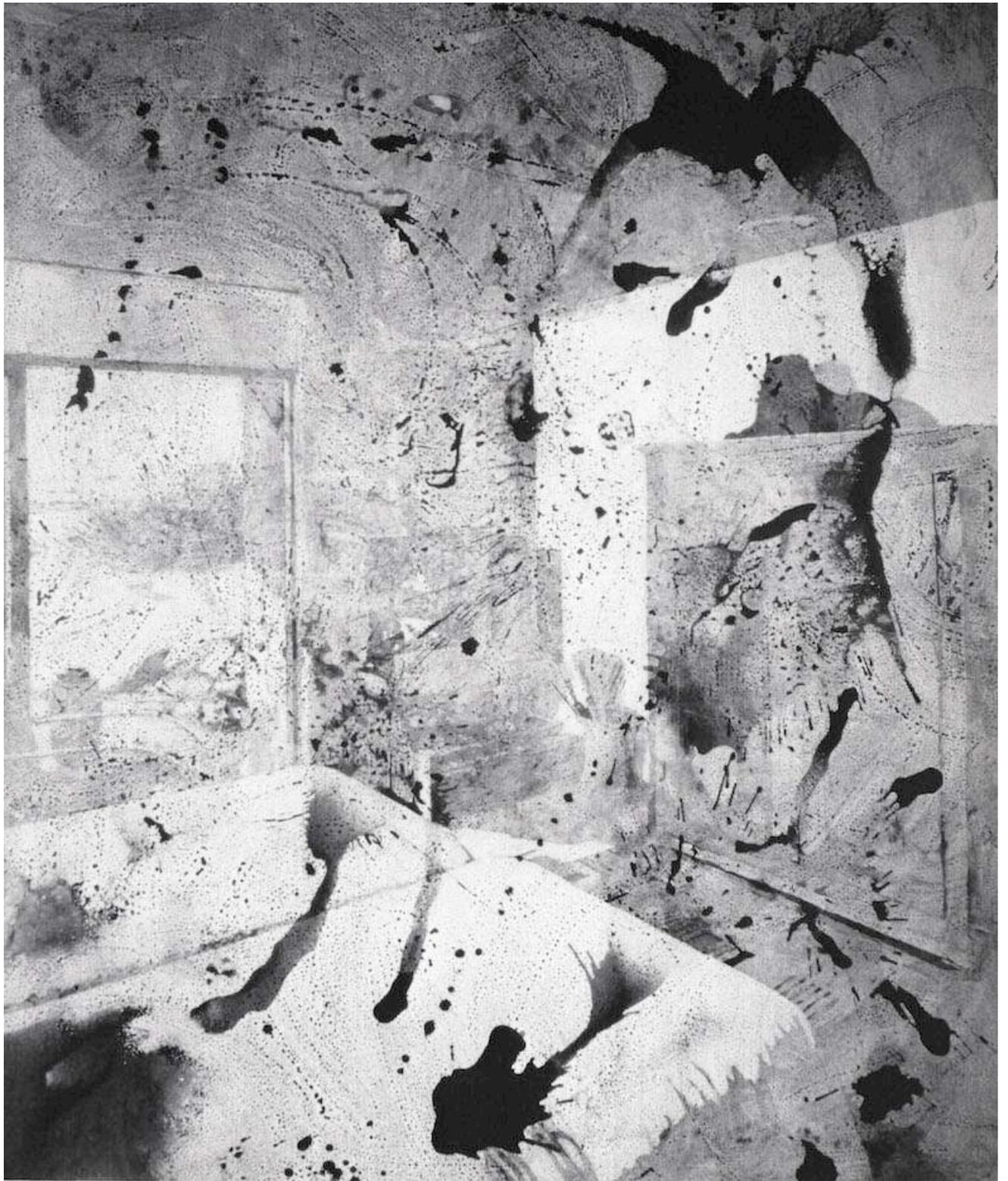
In the end colour disappeared altogether for a while. This one from around 1994 was from a series in which the paintings were about 2 to 3 metres high and the rooms and space appeared almost life size, when you stood in front of them. Patterns from curtain fabric float on the surface along with splashes of black ink. At the time, I was thinking about those photographs of Jackson Pollock, taken by Hans Namuth, where he is flinging black enamel paint across a canvas on the floor of his studio.



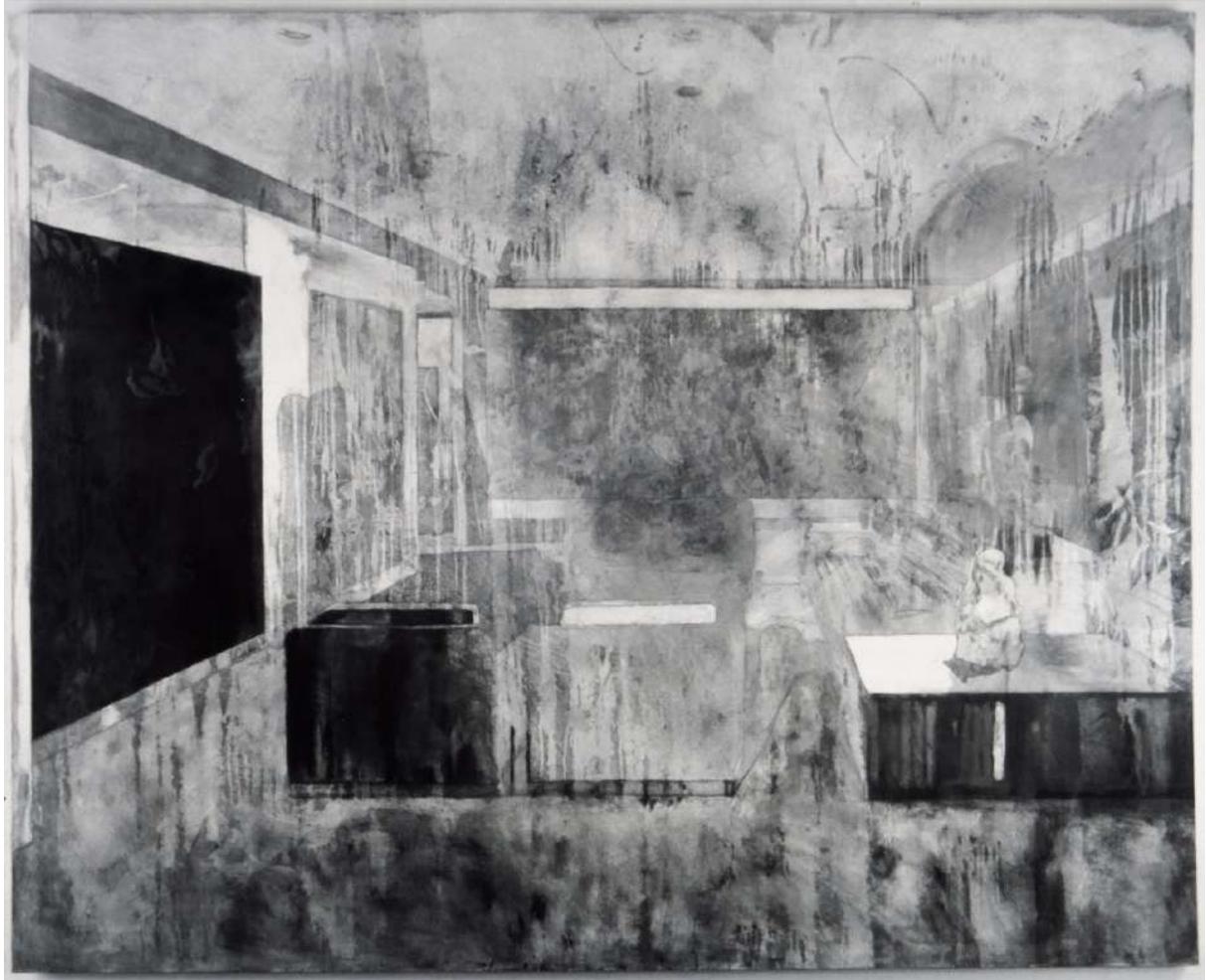
Jackson Pollock, Painting in studio. 1950. Hans Namuth Estate

These paintings were all made in a similar fashion in a way. Once all the layers of white house paint align had been applied, I then laid the canvas on the floor of my studio and then poured and splashed black ink onto the surface. I added detergent, washing-up liquid basically, to accentuate the effect of a cleaned surface.

At the end of the day I became more interred in the way modernist architecture and modernist paintings were often included in the same photographic image. By 'cleaning' the image, I was making it my own, sort of inhabiting it in a way. I was also drawing attention to two things; how empty and 'sanitised' and ordered these found photographs of modernist interiors were. In these photos there were no magazines on the table, no children, no pets. No dirt and disarray.



Interior Style, 1996. Black ink, detergent and house-paint. 253 x 225 cms



Modernist Space 1997. Black ink, detergent and house-paint.

I also became aware of how splashes and drips belonged to what is known as the gestural language of abstract painting, but in these paintings, I was making this reading ambivalent. Is that an expressive mark, or has someone spilled something?

In the next in this series about my work, I'll be talking more about the last paintings I made, before moving into photography and drawing, via architectural models.