

Deborah Harty

Fig.1 *drawing i*
Charcoal and graphite on paper
10.5 x 14.8 cm

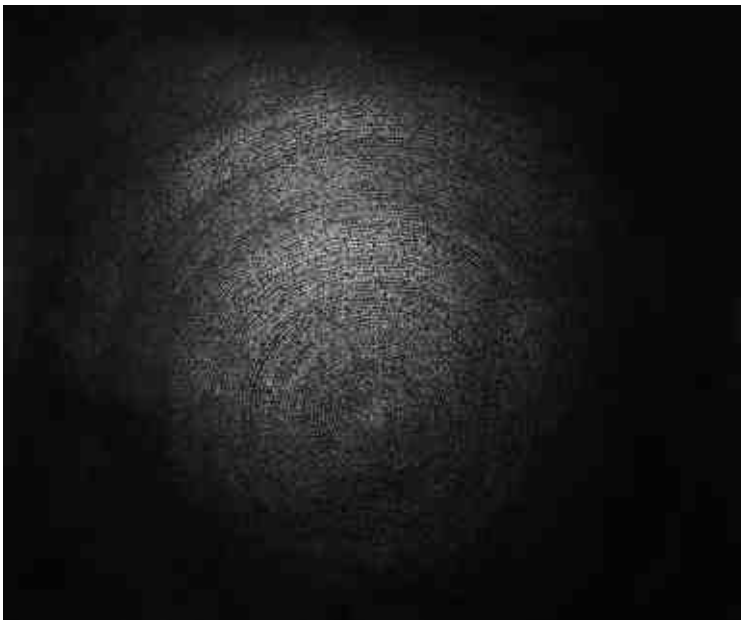
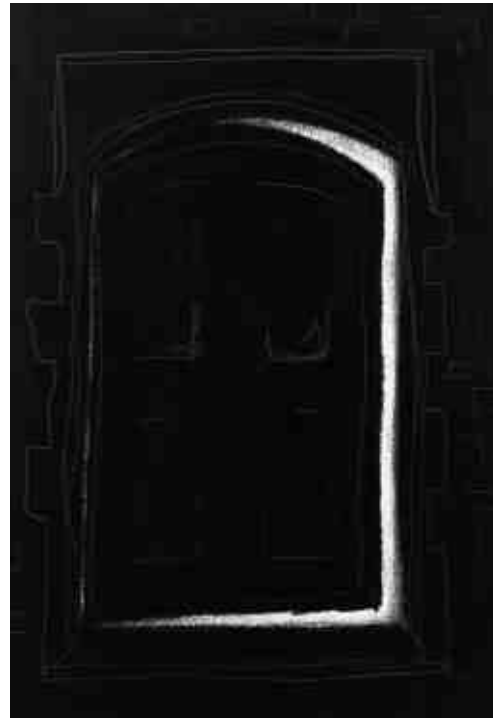


Fig. 2 *Passage* (detail) 2014
Charcoal and graphite on paper
250 x1000 cm



Fig.3 *painting sketch ii*
Egg tempera on paper
10.5 x 14.8 cm



Fig.4 *painting sketch vi*
Egg tempera on paper
14.8 x 21 cm



Fig.5 *painting sketch xii*
Egg tempera on paper
14.8 x 21 cm

Fig.6 *sketch iv*
Egg tempera on paper
14.8 x 21 cm

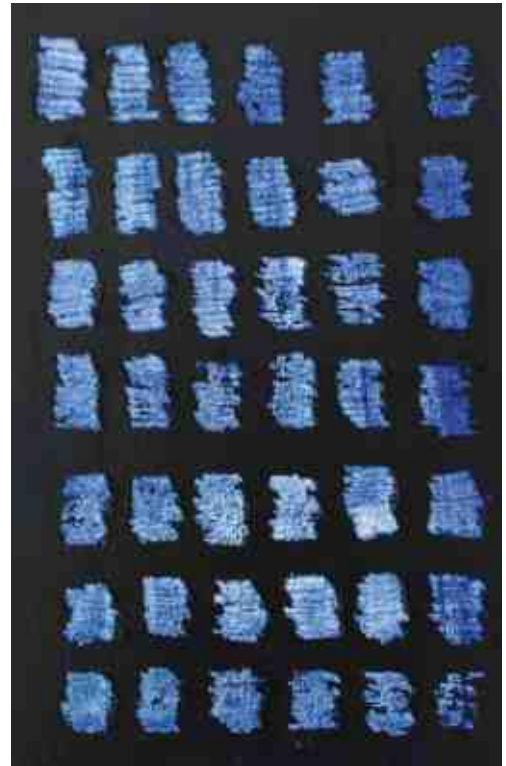
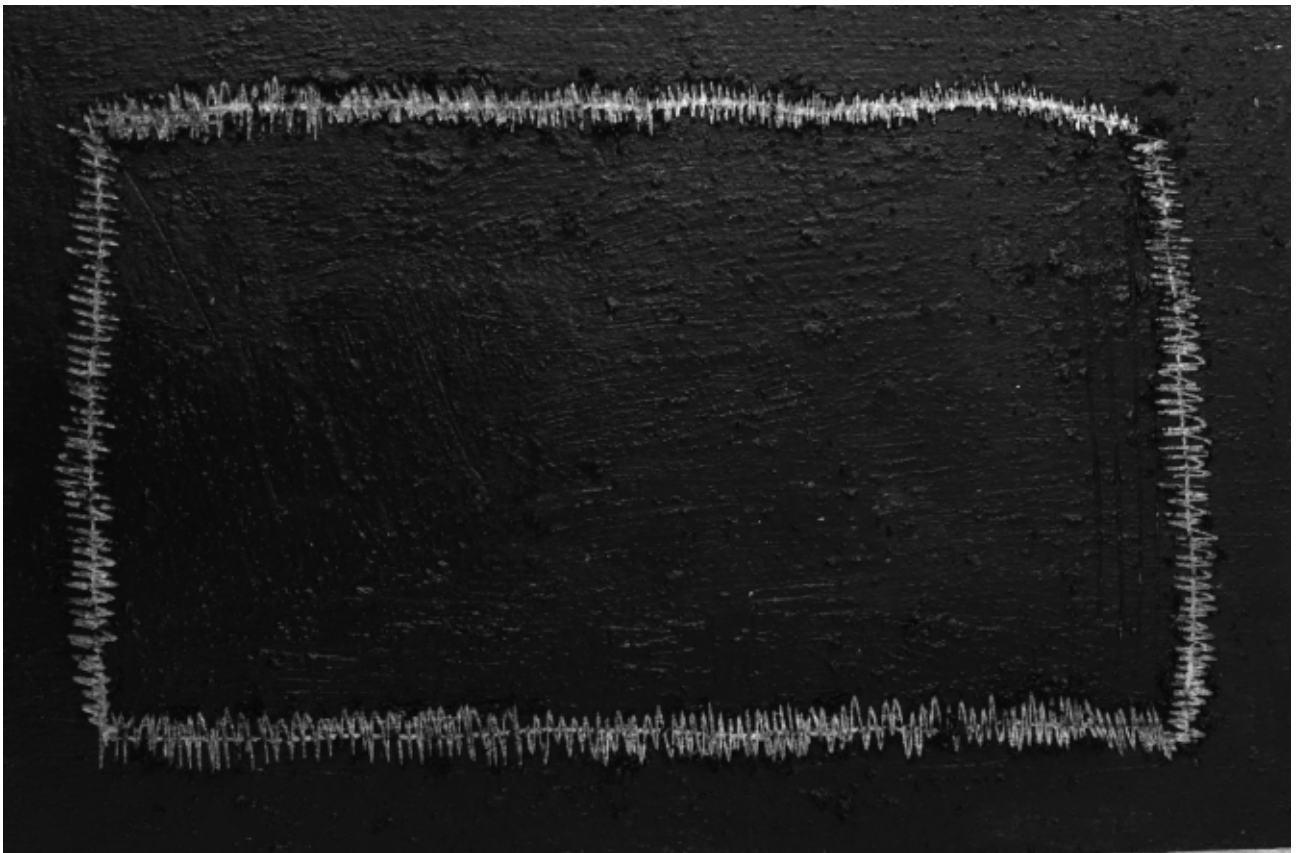


Fig.7 *sketch x*
Charcoal & egg tempera on paper
14.8 x 21 cm



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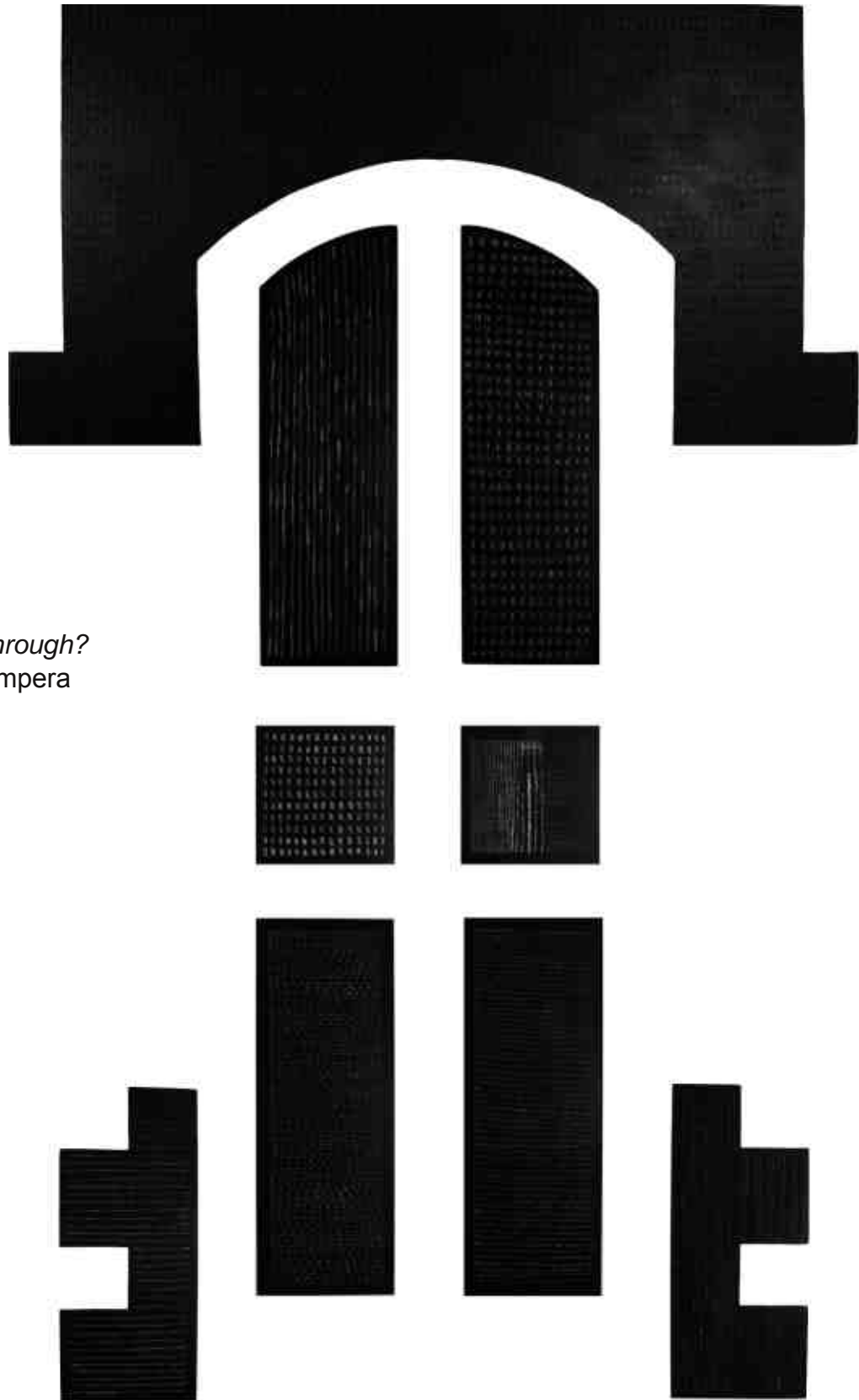


Fig.8 *on ... in ... through?*
Charcoal & egg tempera
on wood panel
222 x 135 cm

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Fig.9 detail of
on ... in ... through?
Charcoal & Egg tempera
on wood panel

Fig.10 detail of
on ... in ... through?
Charcoal & Egg tempera
on wood panel



Drawing on the Threshold

Deborah Harty

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to walk from here?
That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.
“I don't much care where--” said Alice.
“Then it doesn't much matter which way you walk,” said the Cat.
“--so long as I get *somewhere*,” Alice added as an explanation.
“Oh, you're sure to do that,” said the Cat, “if only you walk long enough.”
(Carroll, 1869:89-90)

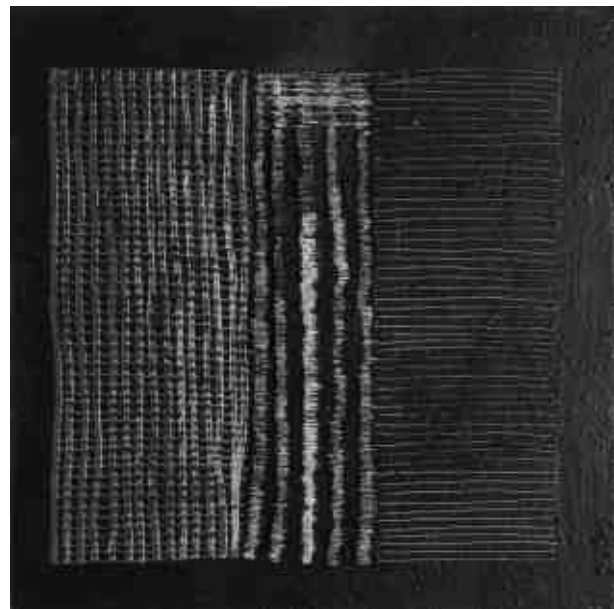
... Alice stands at a threshold of possibilities, faced with options, she wonders about the road forward, without plan or specific expectation her only criterion is to arrive *somewhere*. Convinced, is the Cat, if she walks for long enough she will indeed achieve *that* ...

... the drawer stands on the threshold of possibilities, faced, this time, with the ingredients for egg tempera, housed in a cardboard box, and a growing interest in the recollection of a partially open Almshouse door. Similarly, she has no plan of where she may arrive but equally she is convinced, if she *draws* for long enough she will arrive somewhere ...

From the first mark, I had anticipated traversing the threshold, entering into, and experiencing the private space. However, with this erased as a possibility I walked the outline looking for *somewhere* to go. Much like Alice's rabbit hole, a partially open door provided the unexpected opening into the project. Its glimpsed potential offering the direction to take: inciting a line to wander, a thought to trace. As is often the case the tone of this interest deepened as time extended the line.

Mukherji (2011:xxi) states, “Like glass the threshold itself, though not a material medium, has nevertheless that combination of porosity and resistance that creates pressure between which the imagination thrives.” Had the door been

Fig.11 detail of
on ... in ... through?
Charcoal & egg tempera
on wood panel



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closed, it is likely the line would have been drawn differently ... the rabbit would have continued unhindered on its way. Closed it would have offered a barrier, a mark of the frustrations of not being able to experience the inner space. Partially open, a visible threshold between exterior and interior, the public and the private, a liminal space as it was ... a charged surface on which to draw through mind and body.

The door as a “movable barrier” (Moore, 1981:203) its connotation and interpretation dependent on the perspective of those perceiving: frustrating to the person trying to enter, it provides safety and part of “the ceremony of arriving home” (Busch, 1999:33) to those behind its mark. The ambivalence of these transitory spaces of opposition, partially open, neither marked nor erased, offering opportunities for adventure and discovery: “Drink me” (Carroll, 1869:9). Mukherji (2011:xxi) writes, “That gap is a type of threshold, both physically and metaphorically, embodying the enticement of what lies just out of reach, the reality of the barrier as well as the possibility of stepping across, the permeable but nonetheless inalienable difference between inside and outside.”

It could be drawn that the body is the metaphorical wandering line between mind[mark] and world[background] tracing the surface with experience (Harty, 2015). Mukherji (2011:xix) suggests, “In physiology and psychology, *limen* is a threshold between psychological and physical experience.” Drawing alongside this Merleau-Ponty (1964, p.162) discusses the role of the body as mark between the world and self, he states, “It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings [...] that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement.”

With this trace of the threshold as a contradictory space, a liminal and bodily space between and through the exterior and the interior, the public and the private, the physical and the psychological, both concealing and revealing: the first marks were drawn (fig.1 p.21). Familiarity was the starting point using compressed charcoal and drawing ‘literally’ from the memory of the experience of wandering the Almshouses’ outline. Marks drawn prior to engagement with this experience were large-scale, black on black marked environments (fig.2 p.21).

Traversing from this position, egg tempera outlined its own threshold, erasing the familiar and intuitive responsive line: throwing a metaphorical mad hatter into the mix. “If a painter wants to paint large pictures, or dark pictures, or pictures with a rich, warm glow, he definitely does not want to paint in tempera” (Thompson, 1946:4). Colour, fluidity, architecture and egg not my usual ingredients for a successful teaparty (fig.3 p.22 & fig.4 p.23).

Thompson (1946:3) writes, “Whether it [egg tempera] is a useful system to a modern painter depends on what the painter wants to do. If he wants to sketch, and feel his way, and capitalize happy accidents, it will be no good to him. [...] It cannot adapt itself to any vagueness.” Far from wandering a line, adding a mark or deepening a tone I hesitated on the threshold: hovering between a commitment to tow the line of tradition – “This is not a medium for sketching, or for unconsidered work: it is a highly developed, permanent means for final, deliberate performance” (Thompson, 1946:4) – or to smudge the approach, to follow the trail to trace discovery.

Continuing to waver above the surface I was drawn on the line of colour, *painting* through the layers over a pre-determined drawing whilst considering entering the space of the threshold, allowing some transcending of the outline (fig.5 p.23)

The surface developed as the threshold was breached with a *drawn* and erased mark, blending the outline: a moment of clarity and intuitive response. Drawing away from the tradition to begin to glimpse the wonderland of the medium. Pigment, charcoal and graphite all contributed to the mix: each drawn, erased redrawn and layered combining opposing elements of: drawing and painting, pre-planned and responsive (fig.6 & fig.7 p.24).

Familiar marks and tones began to appear and draw alongside the unfamiliar consistency and fluidity of the tempera operating in the smudged threshold between drawing and painting. Benjamin (2004:83) suggests, “The graphic line marks out the area and so defines it by attaching itself to its background, so that a drawing that completely covered its background would cease to be a drawing.” Following this line, Van Alphen (2008:67) writes,

The difference between drawing and painting can now be understood as the difference between sign and mark. Whereas composition in drawing is a result of an intentionally creative agency (the person who draws), in painting composition is only indirectly created by the painter. It is primarily brought about by the differential qualities of colour. The painter, of

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course, applies the colours, but she does not create their differential values; she only utilizes them. They have to be accepted as they emerge or appear.

In this sense it may follow that egg tempera, in its traditional process does draw itself to the mark, the original composition is built on the foundational drawing that was developed during the first line. However, equally, the slow deliberate build up of layers allows the painting to emerge through the relationship of the colour. Breaching the threshold between and through during this project I would suggest that egg tempera could be approached from both sides of the threshold, entering or leaving, inside or outside, painting or drawing. It is a mark of approach, to *draw* with or *paint* with the medium. To paint in egg tempera requires a slow deliberate approach, a considered drawing - with clearly defined areas of colour (Thompson, 1946) - which patiently builds the thin transparent layers to create the luminous quality of the surface. To draw a more experimental and responsive approach can be traced: allowing the immediacy and spontaneity of drawing to come forth. Fisher (2002 in Newman & De Zegher 2003:222) states,

... the act of drawing makes possible the magical identity between thought and action because to draw is the quickest medium and can therefore protect the intensity of thought. To draw is never a transcript of thought (in the sense of writing) but rather a formulation or elaboration of the thought itself at the very moment it translates itself into an image.

A tracing of this approach to the egg tempera medium, grinding charcoal and graphite into the tempera mix began to lead me to the line out of the rabbit hole. To forget the rules of a read tradition and work intuitively with the medium, focus returned to the quality of mark and potential of the layered medium, a surface on which to begin to draw and make a mark. The process led to drawing through erasure the marks inscribed into the heavily layered and built up surface. Inscribing the marks, thoughts and movement of the embodied self.

Returning to the surface, the original partially open door of the Almshouse provided the composition and scale of the inscribed threshold. Each panel of the door recreated to suggest both a barrier through its solidity and an opening through the absence of the frame. The drawn and erased marks revealing a space beneath: a metaphorical history of the many lives lived and traversed through the threshold (fig.8 p.25, fig.9 & fig.10 p.26, fig.11 p.27).

Out of the rabbit hole, returning to the mark, lines and tones of my drawing reality: the tempera medium manipulated and drawn across the threshold into a drawing practice. The resulting drawing, recognisable and familiar yet retraced, altered and affected by the experience of the tempera. In the words of Alice ...

“... it’s no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then” (Carroll, 1869:155).

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