

Locating the border: the development of the framing device in Western art.

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Art at Rhodes
University.

26 February 2008

Abstract

A frame can be understood to act as something both complementary and even intrinsic to the work it houses. But the frame also acts as more than just a physical object. It serves as a guiding principle, perhaps even a controlling device, in the sense that it provides a context for the work as well as informing the way in which a work is read. Acting with the image it surrounds, it links the artwork to the surrounding space as well as the viewer.

In this study, I explore these various functions and effects by providing an overview of framing devices that have been used by artists in the West as well as referring to guiding principles that some museums in South Africa have used when making choices about the ways in which they frame works in their collections. This examination provides a context for my paintings. Based on photographs of the walls of various small galleries in the Eastern Cape, my works take as their subject the notion of the ‘frame’ as both a physical object and the marker of a historically contextualized viewpoint.

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete references. This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for Master of Fine Art at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before any degree or examination at another university.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Mark Hipper, Professor Brenda Schmahmann and Jordan Tryon for all the help and support they have given me throughout the last two years. I would also like to thank all the South African galleries and museum staff mentioned in this thesis.

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Introduction

Picture frames as we recognize them have existed since pictures became portable, and acted to support and protect the artworks they surrounded. The device of framing, however, is far older. Historically, and well before the development of transportable images, many wall paintings and frescoes employing painted borders or architectural frameworks existed. Jacob Simon states in his book *The Art of the Picture Frame* that, although frames may have started out as protective devices, their visual and symbolic purposes soon came to be regarded as being equally important. These purposes in themselves, however, varied through time as well as place (Simons 1996: 13). My study is concerned with the frame as both a physical device and as a set of systems which direct the manner in which works of art are viewed and understood.

A great deal has been written about the frame as it operates in both of the abovementioned capacities. Whilst I have found this literature to be informative, there appear to be several aspects of the dialogue of the frame as yet unexplored within a South African context. In this study, I have attempted to address this absence by including consideration of South African examples.

My first chapter is concerned primarily with the framing device and its history. As I will make clear, the development of the frame has been significant both in its practical and sociological applications. In order to better understand these applications, my investigation in this chapter is indebted to three texts. In *The Art of the Picture Frame*, Jacob Simon deals with the historical developments of the frame and its consequences. So too does *The Rhetoric of the Frame*, a useful compilation of essays edited by Paul Duro. Mieke Bal's *Looking In: The Art of Viewing* has also been

helpful in its focus on the notion of ‘framing’ in a more conceptual sense. For Bal, ‘meaning’ in art is a consequence of the relationship that exists between visual signs and the viewer. Signs act to direct a viewer towards a fragile point of certitude. As Bal notes, “interpretive behaviour is socially framed and any interpretive practice has to deal with that framing on the basis of the fundamental polysemy of signs...” (Bal 2001: 73). Every image can be considered a complex framework of signs, constructed by the artist, who in turn appeals to the public to generate their own individual interpretations of that construct. Each viewer brings to the interactive experience of viewing an artwork a frame of their own. This frame determines the manner in which a picture will be read and understood, although it is always framed within the constructed parameters designated by the artist who executed it.

Similarly, the way that one views the world is in effect always a way of framing. In much the same way as one would attempt to isolate and capture a specific and chosen area through the lens of a camera, so one is constantly involved in a selective process of cropping and editing when considering the world around us. As Dorothy Kay evidently commented, “Everything we do is a self portrait,” acknowledging perhaps how an artist’s translation of what is seen into a representation may have much to do with individual leanings and inclinations. By extension, one might argue that everything we see is also a self-portrait; an edited and selective composition of personality and ideals.

In my second chapter, I develop this idea by focusing on museums and galleries, arguing that they are constantly editing not only the aesthetic and visual aspects of images but also the way in which those images are presented. Comparatively, the

notions of selection and editing from a photographic perspective are discussed, with reference to the work of Edward Degas, who made use of the photographic experience to illustrate the fragmentary nature of artworks. I will argue that the idea of cropping, and thus selection, extends to the practices of institutions such as museums and galleries, which are constantly editing not only the aesthetic and visual aspects of images, but the way in which these images are presented with the intention of either neglecting or enforcing the sociological and political climates which gave rise to them. In addition to investigating the work of Degas, my second chapter affords a closer inspection of the ways in which other Impressionist artists dealt with, and made use of, the frame in accentuating various elements of their works. This line of argument permits a more thorough investigation of the frame in relation to developments in awareness and socio-political necessity on the parts of museums and galleries. To this end, I have chosen to discuss a text entitled ‘Death in the Museum; Where Art Thou, Sweet Muse?’ by Alan Kaprow from a book titled *The meaning of things : domestic symbols and the self*. In this essay, Kaprow investigates the role of the museum in shaping the experience of the viewing public.¹

Frames constitute those systems and constructs within which particular social and ideological notions become attached to the artworks themselves. These constructs or frames naturally influence the way that artworks are interpreted and experienced. Frames and their implications are reliant, to a large extent, on social and cultural systems. Although not central to this study, this thesis does explore the types of, and reasons for the existence of, such frameworks, and the influence they have on gallery and museum collections in a South African context.

¹ This notion is looked at further in both my second and third chapters, attempting a visual examination of the way in which presentation can shape the museum experience.

Drawing from all the points discussed throughout this thesis, my third chapter affords a discussion of my own paintings, and how they function to explore the frame in art, and in museum displays. My paintings were derived from photographs taken at several small galleries and museums in the Eastern Cape. I have not focused on these museums in this study, however, as it was not their specific histories and framing practices that interested me. The role of the frame as it pertains to the enhancement of an image is a subject with which my work is fundamentally concerned. In addition to the visual and artistically historic function of this device, my images attempt to explore the manner in which institutions concerned with the portrayal of history metaphorically frame and thus invariably limit a collective perception of past events. I have therefore used a wide range of examples from different geographical locations and time frames, selecting those which best lend themselves to an exploration of the ways in which a use of different framing devices has been linked to shifting objectives on the part of artists as well as curators.

Chapter 1

A brief history of the developing relationship between frame and image

Simon indicates that, when the framing device was first initiated, it was intended to situate a given work of art in a particular architectural space, and thus provide for that work a context. Essentially, those frames operated as a “transition” or a “link” to other works, or to wider architectural surroundings (Simon 1997: 13). By way of example, one might view the *Tabernacle Frame*, otherwise known as the *Renaissance Cassetta Frame*, prominent in the fourteenth and fifteenth century for its religious connotations, as it represented the inside cross-section of a Medieval cathedral (Figure 1). This particular framing device can be understood to typify that period’s desire to integrate a painting or relief sculpture into the architectural structure for which it was created. These frames were no longer merely decorative boundaries; rather, they came to protect and emphasise the work they held, often having symbolic connection to the work. This was made possible through the use of frames which imitated various elements of the surrounding architectural scheme, most often religious architecture. In the case of the *Tabernacle Frame*, the medieval cathedral appeared in cross-section, displaying the nave, the aisles and the crypt, each holding a painted section of the artwork in its entirety (Simon 1997: 430).

This type of frame was a device that the artist Giovanni Bellini made use of in many of his works. Of particular interest to this thesis is the frame designed for the iconic painting entitled *The Madonna and Child enthroned with Saint Peter and Saint Paul and a Donor* (1505: figure 2). The work was executed in oil and painted on a panel of poplar wood. The work depicts the Madonna and the Christ child enthroned between

two Saints, and a kneeling Donor. Although no longer in existence the work was originally housed in a three-dimensional frame, with three-dimensional freestanding columns. The painting and frame illustrates Bellini's concern with, and attempts to negotiate, the 'edges' or 'borders' of the canvas. For this work Bellini adopted a compositional scheme in which the architectural structure of the frame is a rational extension of the painted space.² Also illustrated in this work is the way in which Bellini was reconciling a demand that he use an 'old-fashioned' tabernacle frame more typical of fourteenth-century art with ideas of illusionism that were becoming a norm in sixteenth-century Florentine painting. By not only employing linear perspective but also allowing the architectural elements of the frame to cast a shadow within the painting itself, Bellini was thus making a virtue out of what might have been an encumbrance.

For Bellini, the buildings in which works were housed were treated as equally important as the framing device. This is evident when one considers that the column of the lost frame casts a double shadow across the painted pavement, indicating two well-defined specific light sources outside of the altarpiece if the painted shadows are to make rational sense. Such an observation suggests that the altarpiece was intrinsically connected to the frame for which it was originally painted (Simon 1997: 430). As a religiously motivated artwork painted for a place of worship, the frame thus served to incorporate the work into its surroundings, actively allowing the work

² It is, however, also possible that the painted surface was developed as a rational extension of the frame. This view is supported by the fact that during the Renaissance, frames of this magnitude and elaboration were most often commissioned before the painter was even chosen, and patrons often paid more for these elaborate frames, than for the paintings themselves. Unfortunately by 1878 various elements of the work had been dismembered, the front panel ended up in the collection of the 4th Earl of Ashburnham, where a new seemingly "more appropriate" frame was provided for its display in Ashburnham House in London.

the same religious significance as that of the architectural space that framed or incorporated it. ³It is also important to note another more subtle framing device as used by Bellini, this time contained within the painting itself. Here the artist makes use of the throne to create a dark rectangle which he uses as a frame to isolate and elevate the Madonna and the Christ child, thereby doubling their significance as central characters in the painting. ⁴ Even perspective is used in this instance as all lines of perspective lead the viewers eyes straight toward the Madonna and Christ child, thereby elevating their presence once again.

As artists became increasingly concerned with representing nature rather than religious and iconographic imagery, frames, no longer bound to either a specific religious or physical architecture, came to serve a very different function. The heavy architectural moulding of these frames came to provide a visual boundary, allowing artists to separate the artworks from the spaces which surrounded them. One of the reasons for this employment of the frame resulted from the fact that the overtly decorative interiors of the architecture in which artworks were situated often proved to be distracting, and thus detracted from the painted images. In establishing such a boundary, the frame began to assert that a work of art was there to be admired in and of itself - as something separated from, and not reliant upon, its environment. The outside was to be kept out of the picture. By extension, all of an image's meaning was thus suggested to emanate from within the work itself. Essentially, then, neither the

³ This point is of some significance, as it appears to be reinterpreted in some ways in the ideologies of Modernism many years later. Allusions to divinity and the role that architecture (the "white cube") plays in that dynamic will be explored further in this chapter.

⁴ Interestingly the framing device in this instance can be said to serve the opposite function to that of the outer frame which incorporates the work within its surroundings, as apposed to the inner frame which isolates.

work's environment nor the viewer who approached it had any bearing on an image's meaning.

Prior to the work of Bellini, the concept of the 'framing window' was developed. In 1436 Leon Battista Alberti, the Italian humanist and theoretician, published his work entitled *Della Pittura*. In this publication he declared the picture field to be as "an open window through which I see what I want to paint" (Bisacca and Kanter 1990: 7). Alberti's insistence on the picture plane as a window suggested that some element, whether painted or carved, delineated its edges. This delineation would act to distinguish the work from the physical world around it, essentially acting as what we know as a framing device.⁵ In the same book, Alberti discussed a scheme for depicting objects in a unified space, in what is known as the system of linear perspective. Linear perspective was a significant development for realist and illusionist artists. The scheme of perspective meant that the three-dimensional qualities of nature could now be rendered upon a two-dimensional canvas surface in a supposedly scientific and accurate manner. Simply put, perspective functions to position everything along a visual cone of space. This cone opens at the eye, and vanishes into a distant point. Represented objects get smaller as they recede into this 'conal space', mirroring the manner in which, in nature, spatial distance causes the illusion of diminishment in object size. In order for painted perspective to make visual sense, however, it must insist upon a single viewpoint. As a result, when viewing a picture rendered in perspective, viewers are forced to position themselves in relation to that perspective. The frame and the system of perspective can therefore be

⁵ Interestingly, the conceptualization of the frame as a window had little or no effect on the size and shape of the frame. Essentially, then, although the role of the frame changed, its form did not.

considered controlling elements, operating to direct the way in which the subject and the artwork is viewed and consequently interpreted.

The frame's ability to dictate, to some extent, the manner in which a viewer interacted with an image became more widespread with the rise of easel painting. No longer restricted to immobile formats such as the wall of a building for example, easily transported paintings such as those executed on canvas demanded that the frame become increasingly important. As easel paintings were generally small enough to be moved around freely, they were becoming subject to contingent damage, particularly at the corners and edges of the canvas. Thus frames came to serve as a form of protection from physical damage. Regardless of the manner in which frames at this historical juncture operated as practical devices, their visual and symbolic functions could not be avoided. As has been suggested, the frame now served to separate a work of art from its surroundings. In addition, it acted to guide and focus particular attention for the viewer who was central to this view of the world.

During the Renaissance, the artist who was able to understand and make use of perspective was considered to have an intellectual advantage. At the time artistic ability was measured by an artist's willingness to embrace the new technology of perspective, and thus artists who refused to work within this developing system soon fell out of favour with the public. According to Paul Duro:

...this suited the seventeenth-century construction of knowledge, which mounted a massive and concerted attack on the 'unscientific' arts, seeing in them a throwback to an age when science and speculation mixed incontinently (Duro 1996: 47).

Around about this time artworks were becoming smaller and more easily movable, so their commodity status rose. Art became affordable to a growing mercantile class whereas, in the past, it was only the church or aristocracy who had financial access to such objects. Similarly, the demand for protective frames increased, thereby opening the market for commercial framing. The frame thus came to both represent and enhance the aesthetic and economic value of art. The financial value of frames became an indicator of personal wealth and affluence, and works that were framed in expensive, elaborate frames were considered to be of a higher artistic and economic standard. During the Renaissance, frames such as tabernacle frames were so intricate and elaborate that they were often viewed as works of art in their own right and economically were priced as such, and popular architects and sculptors were often used in the design and fabrication of these frames. Often frames were commissioned before an artist was selected to complete the painting for that particular frame and there are many examples of frame makers being paid more for the frame than the painter.⁶

Up until the Impressionist movement, the frame functioned primarily as a decorative and elaborate border for the artwork, with the intention of keeping the outside world at bay, as well as enhancing the perceived value and veneration of the work. It was most notably Edward Degas and Georges Seurat who started to work with the boundaries of the canvas, and experiment in novel ways with the effects and uses of the frame. As the movement progressed, the trend became to border works in natural wood, white, pink, green and jonquil-yellow frames (Duro 1996: 128). As Jean-

⁶ “The high altarpiece of Santissima Annunziata was designed and made by Baccio d’ Agnolo in 1500 to be painted by Fillippino Lippi (after whose death it was finished by Perugino in 1506). Baccio d’ Anola was paid 250 gold scudi for his work, Fillippino 200 for his. Another 200 were paid for the gilding.” (Laing, M.E.D. 1990: 22)

Claude Levensztejn has written, “The shiny gold frame overburdened with moulding was rejected [by the Impressionists] not only because of its nouveau-riche pretentiousness but also because the shine of the gold would kill the tonalities rendered by the brightness and nuances of light” (Duro 1996: 128). By contrasting starkly with the heavy, dated frames surrounding them, those impressionist paintings drew attention to the burdensome weight of older framing practices.

Impressionism was concerned, in part, with the effects of light in nature, and therefore with illumination. In the third Impressionist exhibition Edward Degas and Georges Seurat mounted their pictures in pure white frames. Below is a description from an essay by Leo Carey of the painting by Degas titled *Resting Dancer* (1879), on the effects of a white frame:

The picture shows a ballerina in a moment of repose, her foot on a bench and her white skirt forming an almost perfect circle around her. The white frame, rather than harmonizing with the white of the skirt, seems to project the entire image forward, giving greater definition to the muted tones of the painting.” (Carey 2006: 1).

Carey insists that white frames fast became associated with Impressionism, which at the time was a radical shift from the stipulations set out by the Salon. Although many of the Impressionists used white frames at some point in their careers, there are very few left today.

In 1887, Camille Pissarro designed a type of frame for the Exposition International which did not allow white frames, which later became known as his ‘compromise’ frame. He described this frame in a letter to his son, also a painter, Lucien Pissarro as: “a white margin of three centimetres around the painting, a flat surface of nine

centimetres in oak, and to finish, a three-centimetre band of gilded laurel leaf.”

Expressing his concern with the way his works would react to the surrounding images on display, this frame would, for Pissarro, “create harmony between other framings and my own, without destroying the harmony of my own paintings.” The inner edge or the sight edge would thus give Pissarro the white border he originally wanted, while the gilding would please the dealers and also allow the work to fit comfortably with the rest of the collection. Unfortunately, after handing over the work, the dealer gilded the sight edge three days before the exhibition (Carey 2006: 1).

By surrounding an image in white, which is a mixture of all colours, the intention was that the colours within the image would be enhanced, significantly increasing the work’s luminosity. By extension, one might consider such a framing practice to be linked with notions of insight and re-evaluation both artistically and socially.

Although attempting to break away from the restrictions of framing, the Impressionist frame was nonetheless asserting the artistic value and power of the work. In so doing, the frame was supporting the artistic endeavour by becoming a valuable tool for the artist.

In an attempt to bring the work out of the frame, or use the frame as a tool towards enhancement, artists such as Degas and Seurat incorporated the device as a necessary element of the work. For Degas, the frame became a useful cropping mechanism. By means of cropping figures in the image so that they appeared closer to the viewer, Degas was essentially employing the newly developed language of photography rather than the ideas of perspective. Photographs framed an aspect or fragment of reality rather than an entire scene. This applied process of selection allowed Degas to

essentially bring the picture forward, allowing the image to appear more in connection with the space the viewer inhabited. In this way, one might consider Degas' work to be a critique of the manner in which frames operated historically to enhance the illusionism of an image. Rather than portraying a scene in its entirety, Degas' works acted to crop and edit the image displayed. In this way, it is possible to understand his use of the frame as insisting on the fragmentary nature of the image.

Other methods used by the Impressionist to frame their works were based in a scientific approach to colour. An alternative to gold or white was the use of 'complementary colours'. It is known that Mary Cassatt mounted many of her paintings in red or green frames although, unfortunately, none survive today (figure 3). Pissaro was also known to have explored this idea in 1880, which has been described by critic George Lecomte, "... a predominantly red sunset had a green frame, a violet canvas had a matte yellow frame, a greenish spring was mounted in pink; the light gleamed, making everything more correct and harmonious" (Carey 2006: 2). Thus one can observe the manner in which several prominent Impressionists were concerned with the way in which mounting devices affected the works within. The manipulation of colour relationships within their works allowed that certain elements be highlighted or emphasized, resulting in a greater emotional response to the work through the pure relationship of the colours, even before the subject matter could necessarily be identified.

The Post-Impressionist Seurat experimented with the frame in an even more dynamic way. By extending the painted surface over the edge of the canvas and onto the frame,

his paintings rendered the edge of the work indeterminate.⁷ In this sense, Seurat's painted frames became lost to the work of art, or were swallowed by it (figure 4). Through the obliteration of the physical boundary of the frame, Seurat's images entered with greater ease into the physical and visual space of the viewer.

This notion was developed further by abstract artists such as Piet Mondrian and later by Abstract Expressionists such as Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock. Meyer Schapiro has written in an essay entitled *On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs*:

The frame was dispensable when the painting ceased to represent deep space and became more concerned with the expressive and formal qualities of the non-mimetic marks than with their elaboration into signs. If the painting once receded within the framed space, the canvas now stands out from the wall as an object in its own right, with a tangibly painted surface whether of abstract themes or with a representation which is predominantly flat and shows the activity of the artist in the pronounced lines and strokes of the selective forms and colours (Schapiro 1969: 228).

The frames for many Abstract Expressionist works were often omitted altogether, or were otherwise very thin and unobtrusive. The logic behind such decisions lay in the attempt to allow the image to move forward into space, thereby asserting its ethereal presence, and the boundlessness of the work. Mondrian went so far as to mount several of his works on top of frames, rendering the frame's edge barely visible. After a fashion, such works literally dominated the frame into submission. The physical presence of an artwork was also promoted through its size. Abstract Expressionist works were often so large, that if one stood close enough to the image, one would be

⁷ According to Ellen Wardwell Lee, chief curator at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Seurat often painted his own frames and had very specific views on how his works should be mounted. Unfortunately, scholars maintain, fewer than five of Seurat's frames exist as originals (Zorpette 1992: 98).

unable to see the edges. In many instances, just a few works could occupy an entire gallery space. The scale of these works recalls the effect of looking, where the eye becomes the framing device, and where the gaze (as opposed to the frame) becomes the edge or the limit of experience.

The paintings of contemporary British artist Sir Howard Hodgkin can also be admired for their critique of the framing device (figures 5 and 6). His paintings seem to swallow the frames that attempt to contain them, and are painted and treated with the same veracity and care as the images they surround. The frames the artist uses are drawn from a wide selection of personally collected frames, which he then attaches to the wooden board or surface to be painted (wood panels being the artist's medium of choice), before the painting is begun. Here one can argue a connection with those paintings produced prior to the fifteenth century, where the frame was carved from the same wood panel as the surface to be painted, and where both surfaces were treated with equal care. Hodgkin often paints thick borders within the painted frame itself, emphasizing the overall effect of the framing device. Through this device, the traditional effect of looking into or through the image is achieved, and the pictures become almost theatrical, noticeable in his work titled *Hopes at Home* (1973-77).

In an extension of this notion of theatrics in art, Hodgkin's painted frames can also make the viewer aware of something being deliberately hidden from view, or being intentionally cut out of the image by the artist. This editorial process permits a viewer to consider the very act of representation, drawing into focus the various reasons why an artist might elect to include some aspects of an image whilst discarding others.

This notion of selection and editing could be understood to correlate with the manner

in which museums present or re-present works of art. Oftentimes, a viewer might be completely unaware of the way in which a collection or exhibition is framed in order that a particular notion or ideology might be asserted.⁸

Frames of the sort employed by Hodgkin allow for the paintings they surround to appear more intimate, as though the viewer were being allowed a special (albeit limited and controlled) glimpse into the world of the artist. For the artist the frames act as buffers or borders keeping the outside world at bay, whilst shielding the chaotic and fragile interior from exploding into the real world beyond. It is possible to read these paintings through the way in which the eye moves into and through the image, wherein it is confronted with a scene which does not entirely reveal itself. This action of the eye can be paralleled with the artist's own struggle in attempting to represent past events, or memories of those events. Such a struggle is, by the artist's own admission, at the heart of all his pictures (Dixon 1994: 79). For the viewer, however, these recalled events can never be fully recognized due to the abstraction such portrayals arguably require. Engaging with one of Hodgkin's paintings might well result in an emotional response, but that response is the viewer's alone. It is reasonable to suggest then that in the act of looking, Hodgkin's paintings have less and less to do with the artist and more to do with those who view them. Essentially, this transference of roles enables Hodgkin's paintings, and indeed many other paintings, to break free from the boundaries of the frame as a device of restriction.

It was during the seventies that Hodgkin came upon the frame as a means of isolating his images, in his words, as "domestic views". *Hopes at home* is a very interesting

⁸ As will be discussed in Chapter 3, this is a subject pivotal to my own paintings. My works attempt to explore the ways in which small museums present the viewer with a restrictive lens through which they are forced to engage with the popular ideologies of a specific era.

work when one considers the manner in which the painted black border seems to be obliterating or masking most of the interior imagery, in an action very much in opposition to the traditional role of the frame. On the deliberate heavy-handed use of such frames in his work, Hodgkin insists:

My pictures often include a frame which I paint on as part of the painting. I sometimes go to immense lengths to, as it were, fortify them before they leave the studio. The more evanescent the emotion I want to convey, the thicker the panel, the heavier the framing, the more elaborate the border, so that this delicate thing will remain protected and intact (Auping 1995: 20).

Of course, the notion of Hodgkin's "delicate" images remaining intact is obliterated by the necessary personalization of his images by engaging viewers, and the individualized alterations and interpretations which they effect in the act of looking. It is, however, the conflicting desire to protect the sanctity of the artist's creation, whilst the deconstructive effects of public viewing are at play, which draws this discussion towards the dialogue of Modernism. As I will make clear, the manner in which Modernism functioned as an intellectual and sociological frame through which images and their significance were determined at the time of their production is of some significance to this study. Incorporated into this dynamic is the effect that Modernist discourse had on the way in which art was shown, and the manner in which it was intended to be experienced and engaged with.

For the Modernists, the ideal space in which artworks were to be viewed was the 'white cube'. This was a clean, minimalistic space designed with the intention of

elevating the works to a semi religious status through dramatic contrast.⁹ In so doing, the works themselves, and the artists who generated them, were transformed into iconic figures worthy of awe and veneration. The idea of the ‘white cube’ was to create a contemplative, unattached and meditative gallery space, in which there could be no distractions for the viewer. The gallery would thereby act as a sort of shrine for the artworks it contained, not dissimilar to a church housing religious relics. Similarly, when one entered this type of gallery, one expected to enter into the world of the artist and experience the artist’s message through his or her works. As such, this ideal art space operated as a place separate from the realities of daily life, and set apart from the world outside. As Alan Kaprow has articulated in his essay titled, ‘Death in the Museum: Where Art Thou, Sweet Muse’?:

The modern museum... still has not been able to shake off this aura of quasi religion and high rank. It still enshrines its contents, still demands a worshipful attitude that reflects benignly on the spectators growing cultivation and status. By seeming to wish only to offset and enframe pictures... from the rest of nature... the museum environment... transforms everything into a true *nature morte* because of the kind of history evoked. Initially, it was an appropriate reflection of an aesthetics of detachment... The artist, artwork, and house of art grew to share a positive commitment to the notion of separating high culture from low life. The museum-as-temple spoke of special sufferings and rare gratifications to a small band of Israelites lost in the wilderness (McShine 1991: 213).

Once again the surrounding architecture of the gallery space provides a frame for the artwork contained within it, adding to the works meaning as was the case in pre-Renaissance.

⁹ Arguably here, the white, clean and uncontaminated cube of the Modernist gallery has replaced the white frame of Impressionism.

Considering this, it seems of some importance to regard more closely the ways in which galleries and museums operate contemporarily to frame works of art, both literally and figuratively. My discussion will touch upon the manner in which such institutions subscribe to shifting cultural standards when constructing these types of frames and frameworks. This is particularly the case in South Africa. These notions will form the basis for my next chapter, in which I investigate the framing policies and histories of South African museums, concentrating particularly on the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum in the city of Port Elizabeth, and the South African National Gallery in Cape Town.

Chapter 2

Framing in South Africa

The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum (NMMM) was first opened in Port Elizabeth in 1956 as The King George VI Art Gallery. The founding of the museum was initiated by a conditional bequest in 1946 by the late Victor Jones, who was, at that time, a leading architect in the Port Elizabeth area. The original name of the museum was conceived to commemorate a Royal visit to South Africa, and it was decided by the City Council to name it after the then recently deceased king. Under the direction of the first director of the museum, Ms Eleanor Lorimer, and a newly elected Selection Committee, a collection policy was initiated.

Due to both the close association between the Eastern Province and Britain, and Ms Lorimer's wish to emulate the collections of British art and international graphics in the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the collection contained very little South African art. As Dr. Melanie Hillebrand has pointed out, "it was decided that, since Port Elizabeth is the scene of the first British settlement in South Africa, it would be appropriate for the city to adopt British Art as one of its major interests, and to attempt purchases within this field..." (Hillebrand 2004: 85). In considering this quotation, the effects that colonialist ideology and political sway had over both the collection policy and the collection itself can be easily recognized, as well as the gallery's role in asserting these values through their collection policies and exhibitions.

The museum had however begun modestly collecting South African art in 1962, and it was decided in 1990 that, although Lorimer's original framework for the collection

policy would be kept in place, a new emphasis on South African art would be implemented. In addition, particular attention would be given to work produced within the Eastern Cape. With the initiation of a new democracy in South Africa, public opinion held that the name of the museum not only mirrored its contents, but also paid homage to South Africa's colonialist past. A new name was therefore proposed in 2002 by the staff of the gallery, which would be indicative of the "professional and geographic identity" of the museum (Hillebrand 2004: 84). It was decided that the institution's new name would be The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum.

The significant developments evident in this example make clear how the collection policies of museums are oftentimes framed and influenced by developments in politics and popular ideologies. For the viewer inside a gallery, each artwork is framed not only by the physical devices surrounding the images with which they engage, in addition to the gallery space itself (its walls, floor, lighting and every other aspect of that institution) but also by the issues that influence that gallery's decision to present their collection in a certain way, and with a specific intention or agenda. Of significance, too, is the way in which works within the collection are approached and viewed by the public, and how public opinion and ideology thus influence the manner in which works of art are interpreted and re-interpreted.

The NMMM has had several incidents involving interpretive differences over the years with regards to the framing of some of its own works (along with many other galleries and museums worldwide). The present director of the museum, Dr. Hillebrand, recalled in an interview a dilemma involving a work by Thomas Baines

entitled *The landing of the British in Algoa Bay in the year 1820* (figure 7), which was acquired by the museum under the directorship of the previous curator Clayton Holiday. That curator was of the opinion that it would be in the gallery's interest to take the picture out of its original frame, and re-hang it in an imitation tortoiseshell frame. Although very popular with commercial art venues at the time, such a frame was out of keeping with the old-style gilt frames that surrounded most of Baines' works held in other collections. When Dr. Hillebrand was appointed the new director some time later in 1987, she found the new frame to be in poor taste, and considered the work aesthetically compromised by it. Consequently, she had the frame replaced with the type more readily associated with Baines' work. I mention this incident here in order to suggest that the circumstances that affect the manner in which artworks are framed (and consequently portrayed) can extend beyond socio-political influences, and may be the result of taste or aesthetic preference. Mr. Holiday was thus attempting to make the Baines collection more contemporary, but thereby neglecting the historical accuracy in making an aesthetic decision.

The South African National Gallery (SANG) situated in Cape Town is South Africa's premier art museum, and houses a large collection of African, British, French, Dutch and Flemish art. Originating from an original bequest of forty-five paintings presented in 1871, the collection of Iziko: SANG has grown to that of international stature, the rich international collection being indebted largely to the donations of early patrons of the Gallery. The main building designed by F.K. Kendall and Clelland & Mullins (Public Works Department) was completed in 1930, with funds from the Government, the City Council and the Hyman Liberman Estate. In order to better discuss the effects of changing trends on framing policies, one might consider the SANG and its policies

on the subject. Significant to this dialogue is the notion that contemporary trends in framing are themselves framed and informed by the rhetorical ideologies of Modernist and Post-Modernist art theory. According to Hayden Proud, the curator of the historical collection in the SANG, the gallery has four different sizes of frames for the works on paper in its collection. This is due mostly to the fact that the majority of works on paper that the museum acquires such as those in ink, watercolour or charcoal, are not framed by the artists who produce them. It therefore falls to the gallery to frame these works. It would require a great deal of additional work and money for the institution to frame each work in a customized frame. The gallery has therefore opted to employ four different sizes of standardized frames, into which works are fitted, thus adding to the drawings a link to other neighbouring drawings, therefore unifying the collection. This example is significant in that through it, one may begin to consider the ways in which shifting ideologies can affect the framing of works within the gallery.

According to Proud, frames for newly acquired works on paper in the SANG used to be made out of thin strips of aluminium, silver in colour. Proud asserts that this was in accordance with the predominant trend in Modernist framing practice for galleries. However, as time progressed, the gallery wished to display an awareness of the shift towards a contemporary, Postmodernist way of thought. To realize this awareness in the presentation of its works, the SANG developed a new policy regarding the frames for its works on paper. A new thin, wooden type of frame was devised for these works, both less intrusive on the artwork, and devoid of overtly Modernist connotations. Through such a decision on the gallery's part, it becomes apparent that the effect that framing has on work and the way it is received is being taken into

account, indeed constructed by the gallery. It is also possible to see how the gallery operates within the framework of contemporary culture; these cultural and sociological circumstances then constitute the frameworks through which a viewer will ultimately experience the works.

As an interesting example of the ways in which galleries and museums (and therefore the artworks in their collections) are framed by popular cultural ideologies, one might also consider Dorothy Kay's painting entitled *The Glue Pot* (1951: figure 8). In her book *Women and Art in Southern Africa* Marion Arnold (1996:126) asserts that this oil painting is about art and the artist. Compositionally, the work consists of an ornate, antique picture frame to the back right of the canvas. To the left is a portion of a recently acquired reproduction, with a contemporary white frame popular with the Impressionists. In the foreground she has painted a glue-pot with brushes, which signifies the beginning of a painting, priming and sizing of the canvas, its presence in this image seems to speak of the artists concern with the discourse of painting and its ability to frame the subject. Kay painted the image to fit a particular mirror frame, which on closer inspection is reminiscent of older style heavily gilt frames, often used in portraiture. Through her specific choice of frame, Kay was deliberately recalling the effects of the frame as employed by the illusionistic artists of the Renaissance, as discussed in Chapter one. As will be recalled, such frames helped to create a sense of the space, as though one were looking through a window. *The Glue Pot* was a self portrait, and as Arnold has written, that within that work, the allusion to looking through a window was also intended to reference the act of looking into a mirror, as though one's choice of looking at the picture would be an act of looking back at oneself. As Arnold has made clear, all of our choices about how and where we look

can be read as choices about ourselves (1996: 127). The frame which Kay selected would, according to the artist, draw the viewer's attention to the act or process of looking; an act which is itself a process of cropping and selection, and thus can be seen as an act of framing.

As Arnold (1996:126-7) argues in *Women and Art in South Africa*, the mirroring process, referring to the traditions and shortcomings inherent in self-portraiture, is not 'present' in the imagery of the work. It is, however, alluded to in the frame which surrounds it. For this work, the frame is alluded to within the image itself and thus begins to generate meaning, making the viewer aware of the framing processes in operation in the act of looking. In this work, the frame and the painted image are equally important, and one element is not separate from the other. When the work was purchased by the South African National Gallery, however, the director at the time, John Paris, wrote that he would not be using "heavy gold frames in the South African room and will most certainly have to re-frame it for hanging here" (Arnold 1996: 127). This was an action that was arguably a direct result of the intellectual undercurrents of Modernism's reluctance to accept the ability of art to reflect upon society. Although later rectified to some degree¹⁰, Paris' statement led to a large number of other highly valuable and original frames from the SANG collection being sandpapered down and re-painted.¹¹

The actions of John Paris are unfortunately not unique to the SANG or even to South Africa. In fact many European and American museums and galleries are suffering the consequences of careless and unthoughtful re-framing policies. However, some

¹⁰ The work has now been remounted in a frame similar to the one for which the painting was originally intended, which was intended as an explicit reference to a mirror frame (Arnold 1996: 127).

¹¹ This is taken from a personal online interview with Hayden Proud, 15 September 2006.

interesting and thorny curatorial issues have arisen from the increased attention to the frame and its visual impact on paintings. The two main issues in foreign galleries and museums are the problem of 'visual clutter' or non-conformity in the overall presentation of the works on display. This problem would arise when the works on display are framed in very different styles which often end up clashing with one another or detracting visually from neighbouring work. The second problem for such institutions is generated by the first; it is the problem of how to re-frame a work by an artist who had very specific intentions or ideas regarding the framing of his or her work. Does the curator re-create what is known as a 'period frame', either by using information left by the artist or any other available sources, or does the curator select a frame based on aesthetic judgment and practicality as well its relation to other works on display?

At the Art Institute of Chicago, the director James N. Wood favours the historical method of re-framing works. He says, "What we have tried to do is go back and find out what frame the artist intended for the work... Then we try to provide that frame, something similar from that period or a recreation" (Zorpette 1992: 98). In South Africa however, this approach is not always the most effective. In recreating an antique frame, or even purchasing an original, the final costs are not always worth the benefits. It takes incredibly skilled and highly trained craftsmen to recreate a period frame, and the costs would work out to be extremely high should frames be made up for individual works. Another problem that is faced in this country is the availability of original antique frames. Unlike in Europe and America, there are no auctions and large private collections which deal solely in these valuable frames. Additionally, such frames are far more readily accessible to institutions whose governments

facilitate both private and national funding. Both the SANG and the NMMM do however have substantial collections of antique picture frames at their disposal. These have been collected over the years and are now stored in their basements or storage facilities which they keep and use for appropriate paintings, often swapping the frames to new pictures, depending on which ones are on display at the time.

The Tatham Art Gallery, situated in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, is the oldest art gallery in South Africa and houses one of the most historically significant and important art collections in this country. Brendan Bell has been the director at this institution since 1992. The following statement by Bell is from a personal interview with regards to the position of the Tatham Art Gallery on how choices are made concerning the framing of contemporary and historical works where the artist's preferences are known. Bell has said:

The curator will always take the artist's preferences into consideration if they are known. Where possible we will leave the work framed as the artist has done - except if we feel a different frame would do better justice to the work. If possible, such a decision would be taken into consideration with the artist. In many cases artists are happy for us to suggest what we think would be most suitable. Sometimes artists can be too close to a work to be objective. There are also many times when a work will be acquired unframed if intended that way by the artist that is how we leave it.¹²

The reality of the situation is that, of course, it is not always possible to easily overcome the dilemma that effective framing presents. With older, more historical works, the preferences of the artist are often not known. In such a situation, the gallery or museum curators have to make decisions based on other imperatives such as aesthetic concerns. Bell's statement below indicates why, in his opinion,

¹² E-mail letter from Brendan Bell, 14 March 2007.

the unfortunately necessary framing policies of many South African institutions are sometimes less than satisfactory. He states:

The bottom line is how much money your institution has to spend. Yes, it would be great to be prissy and correct about period framing, but... aesthetic concerns are important, the most important being how best to show the work contained in the frame or mount. These days we would go for the simplest mount and moulding we could – and not try to recreate the original style – mainly because the commercial mouldings we have today are really quite brash and tasteless.¹³

Bell insists that in the Tatham Art Gallery there have been a number of attempts to re-gild frames, but he says that in most cases the workmanship was of poor quality and visually noticeably “off”. Indeed, until recently the need for frame restoration and conservation has generally not appeared as a prominent feature on the agendas of either gallery or funding institutions. For studies in this field an individual would most likely have to travel abroad, this proving extremely costly on a South African budget. It seems to follow that there are very few reputable antique frame restorers in this country. This is illustrated by the fact that when the NMMM in Port Elizabeth needs restoration work done on a particular frame, they have to send the damaged item off to Johannesburg over a thousand kilometres away, to a professional who deals solely in the restoration and conservation of antique picture frames. Again this is a costly ordeal, which begs the question: is it more important to spend capital on the framing and presentation of existing artworks than it is on the acquisition of new works?

On the historical context of an artwork and the problem of re- framing, Dr. Hillebrand agrees that the frame has a vital effect in the understanding and interpretation of an artwork, and is in support of the idea of period framing. She insists:

¹³ E-mail letter from Brendan Bell, 14 March 2007.

Obviously the viewer makes assumptions about an artwork according to the presentation... If the style of frame is not in keeping with the period of the artwork you will not be viewing it in the manner the artist intended or would have taken for granted... incorrect presentation can change the meaning of an artwork.¹⁴

Research suggests that the re-framing of large and small collections is by no means a new trend. Indeed, almost since the time of their popular inception, frames have been associated with particular tastes in design and decor.¹⁵ As Christopher Peter, curator of the Irma Stern Museum in Cape Town has noted, “Framing, like all design elements, is heavily subject to fashion and period - no matter how hard one tries.”¹⁶ That styles and trends still dictate the framing of artworks, however, is not of paramount significance here. More interesting to this dialogue, I think, is the relatively new degree of interest shown in the manner in which frames affect artworks and the way in which they are interpreted and received by the audience. It is this power that the frame wields over images, and the histories and ideologies that they either intentionally or inadvertently assert, which brings me to a discussion of my own work.

¹⁴ E-mail letter from Dr Melanie Hillebrand, 5 December 2006.

¹⁵ As Zorpette has observed, Napoleon re-framed all the works he had plundered before hanging them in the Louvre. Spanish kings were continuously re-framing their collections in keeping with popular tastes and fashions. In the 1920s everyone wanted frames to match their popular 18th-century French furniture, after which, in the 1930s (though much later in South Africa) gilt frames proved unfavourable in the eyes of many collectors, who began to remove the gilt by soaking the frames in water or sandpapering it off (Zorpette: 98).

¹⁶ E-mail letter from Christopher Peter, 5 April 2007.

Chapter 3

My work Framed

All of my paintings have been made from photographs taken in various small galleries in the Eastern Cape. The most important of these museums being the Fort Beaufort Historical Museum situated in Fort Beaufort, the Observatory Museum and Albany History Museum both in Grahamstown, and the Hester Rupert Art Museum as well as the Old House Museum which are situated in Graaff-Reinet. My paintings appear on two different formats, and all are executed in oil on canvas. The small pictures measure 50 x 70cm, the larger 160 x 250cm. I selected this particularly large format for the larger paintings so that when the photographic images were enlarged onto the canvas, the elements within the painting would appear to be life size, as well as in scale to the original photographs. In addition, those paintings would then begin to make reference to large photographs. The primary work I will be discussing, *The Hester Rupert Museum, Graaf-Reinet* (2006: Fig. 9) consists of an overtly decorative gilt frame that surrounds an essentially invisible picture. As the painted image and its frame extend to the edge of the canvas, the rest of the painting shows only the wall upon which the painted picture was hung. Here there is, as in most of the other smaller paintings, a nail left in the wall. This nail acts as a marker of a previously hung image, now absent. In other paintings I made, holes left by nails have a similar effect. My pictures are painted in a very realistic and illusionistic manner. In order to render the photographic images as faithfully as possible, I have attempted to omit all evidence of brushwork. All of the edges and lines have been as softly applied as possible, in order to provide the illusion of an enlarged photograph. All of my smaller

pictures naturally limit linear perspective, as they represent the two-dimensional quality of the photographic images from which they are drawn.

This point becomes of importance when one considers that linear perspective, in painting was a device employed to allow artists to represent nature in an innovative and more convincing fashion. As discussed in Chapter one, linear perspective in illusionistic painting, positioned everything along a “cone of space”. Within this dynamic, the frame acts as a grid, echoing those elements within the painting such as the divisions between foreground, middle-ground, and the distance. For the artist the frame was intended to enhance the illusion of space as it insisted on a world that the viewer was able to step into like a window, and the greater the illusion, the more it presented the viewer’s eye with an invitation to enter. Thus, for the artist, the frame had two main functions, the first being the separation of objects contained within from those not crucial to represent the natural world. The second function of the frame was to act as an aid to representation through its links to perspective.

The use of perspective as a device which allowed the artist to represent reality more closely demanded that there be a single viewpoint. Vision in the real world does not, however, conform to this restriction. Rather, it facilitates multiple viewpoints.

Following this, it thus becomes possible to allow the perspective in my works to offer a critique of looking via perspective. As there is very little depth found in my paintings, there are however many single viewpoints and each with their own points of perspective, found within each individual painting portrayed in my painting, namely “*this is not Paul Kruger.*” Rather than supporting the illusion of reality, the multiple points of perspective point towards the flaws and fraudulences of the image.

Here one can draw links to Cubism and its attempts to portray multiple viewpoints within a single image. Through this process, a viewer may be reminded that the image with which one interacts constitutes the viewpoint of a single person. From this it is possible to see how the frame, when linked to the system of perspective, functions in a similar fashion. When a viewer looks through 'Alberti's window', they are restricted to a single viewpoint. A frame attempts to direct the viewer by designating what they should look at and from what angle. That viewpoint is the artist's, and is one that has been selected over all others. The frame can therefore also be seen to critique both itself and the illusionistic work it surrounds. It is this idea that presents itself in my own works, particularly in the case of the smaller images, where the majority of the paintings contain elements of frames from other paintings. By choosing to paint, for example, only the corner of a frame, these paintings attempt to subvert the idea of the frame enhancing the illusionistic effect of the work. My paintings aim to expose both the frame and its function as being an illusion in itself. This concept is evident in the manner in which the painted frames are never whole or complete. As such, my works act to break the frame's illusory power. This process is further facilitated by the fact that the painted frames move off the edge of the unframed canvasses upon which they are rendered.

The frames in these paintings call to attention the fact that what the viewer is looking at is in fact a single point of view, that of the artist. Additionally, they are intended to make the viewer aware of the framing processes going on all around the painting. Frames are set up to represent a particular point of view. Through engaging with my works, a viewer is invited to consider both the restrictions and reasons for that point of view. Similarly, the vacant holes and nails protruding from the walls around the

painted frame, as evident in several of my paintings, point towards other frames, and therefore viewpoints, that have been selectively omitted.

The fact that the pictures are painted in an illusionistic manner calls into question the problematic ideologies inherent in the technique of illusionism. As I have already made clear, what is rendered on my canvasses has been copied directly from a photograph. Essentially, my paintings exist as a representation of another form of representation. This reiteration is again invoked through the inclusion of painted photographs, which existed upon the wall of the photographed image from which I worked. Thus it can be argued that in these pictures, there is no 'real'. What we are presented with is a representation of a representation, *ad infinitum*.

The painting "*This is not Paul Kruger*" pays reference in the title to Rene Magritte's painting "*La Trahison des Images*" more popularly known as "*This is not a pipe*". In this painting Magritte's intention is for the viewer to understand that no matter how realistically an object is painted it is never the object itself. The title for my painting came about after I was accused of painting racist paintings and hanging them up on the varsity campus. This is because one of the characters in the painting looks like Paul Kruger. By giving the painting the title I did, the intention was that the viewer would realise that what they were looking at was not the actual wall in the museum, but rather a painting of that wall, and hopefully they would have enough sense to realise that the painting was not a homage to Paul Kruger nor the apartheid but rather a questioning of such a wall in a museum in this country, and for the viewer to understand that what they are looking at is in fact a painting portraying somebody else's decisions.

Several of my works negotiate the concerns articulated above in what is perhaps a more subtle manner. For example, one of my smaller paintings, *The Observatory Museum, Trophy Art* (2006: figure 10) shows a picture rail (or dado rail) supporting a framed picture, which in itself is obscured by reflections from its glass pane. On the top right of the canvas rests a trophy head of an antelope. This juxtaposition of an artwork with a trophy provides an interesting correlation between the notion of physical dominance and subjugation with the manner in which the frame contains and dominates a viewer's perspective through the singular and predetermined perspective of the artist.

The two large paintings, *Fort Beaufort Historical Museum: "This is not Paul Kruger"* (2006-7: figure 11) and *Grahamstown Wall* (2006-7: figure 12) on the other hand represent entire gallery wall spaces. The two pictures differ in terms of visual content in that one shows a wall full of pictures (figure 11), some of which are artworks and reproductions, and other historic photographs, whereas the other painting (figure 12) depicts a wall space almost completely devoid of pictorial content. Despite this absence, however, several nails and nail-holes are represented, all of which point towards previously hung images. The Fort Beaufort Museum claims to represent artefacts that relate to the history of the town, which was geographically instrumental in the first and second South African Wars. The manner in which such a rich history is selectively represented forms the primary conceptual focus of my two large paintings. For example, one might consider the prominence of 'Western' portrait photographs in the museum as being in stark contrast with the comparative lack of

adequate representation devoted to cultures which existed in the area prior to and during 'Western' influence.

The painting crowded with images is reminiscent of the manner in which many galleries and museums used to structure their collections. Many of the works or images I have depicted have been elaborately framed, with the presumed intention of separating the works from one another. In my own painting, this concept has been subverted by representing the entire wall as a singular image. This process is arguably suggestive of the fact that, whilst frames are intended to separate individual works, they are essentially unable to do so. This is due, in part, to the fact that in viewing a particular image, any image displayed along side it is instantaneously altered or informed by it. In this way, the dialogue that exists between images renders the notion of absolute separation redundant.

When viewing a collection of this type, it is important to once again consider the manner in which a viewer is constantly being presented with a specific viewpoint. Within my own work, this notion is reflected in my decision to photograph that specific wall above all others present within the Fort Beaufort Museum space.

My large pictures aim to pose questions regarding the way in which museums frame their collections. By extension, I hope to generate discussions surrounding the manner in which history and perceptions of past events are framed within the context of a museum. By constructing a visual comparison between a work that illustrates a crowded wall and another that shows a wall devoid of any works, I have attempted to prompt thought on the subject of omission in historical representation.

The role of the frame as it pertains to the enhancement of an image is a subject with which my work is fundamentally concerned. In addition to the visual and artistically historic function of this device, my images attempt to explore the manner in which institutions concerned with the portrayal of history metaphorically frame and thus invariably limit a collective perception of past events.

Conclusion

The history of the frame is a fascinating one, made more so by a relatively recent interest shown in the ways in which frames affect and alter the images they contain. It has been my intention to reveal something of the frame's developmental past, and to explore in some depth the effect that frames exert today, particularly in a South African context. Such an investigation has ultimately led to a discussion of my own works, informed as they are by various curatorial practices.

As made clear in Chapter one, the role of the frame varied significantly during the earlier years of its development. The shift in the frame's intended role, from an incorporating device to a tool of separation, drastically altered the manner in which artworks were viewed. As painters continued to intellectually negotiate the purpose and effects of the frame, so their employment of the device yielded the results we now associate as being intrinsic to many works by artists, from Seurat and Degas to Hodgkin. In fact, one can recognise the marked interest in the frame as a vital aesthetic and conceptual component of contemporary art as increasing significantly after the innovations of Impressionism. It is precisely this interest in the frame's potential that has rendered the work of later artists such as Hodgkin so effective. In a sense, it is also the willingness to explore the concept of framing in art which permits one to consider framing as a broader means of editing on the parts of institutions such as galleries and museums. This editorial process and the effects of housing (or framing) works in such a way as to alter their function is what permitted a brief investigation into the ideologies of Modernism. Through this exploration, a reader was invited to consider the broader, lasting implications of institutional practices.

The second chapter within this study concerned itself with framing policies in South Africa. As with many other countries, decisions made in the past on how pictures should be framed (and reframed) have not always been ideal. In an attempt to update the image of a gallery, curators have sometimes been noted to compromise historical authenticity for the sake of a then-current trend in style. Paintings such as Baines' *The landing of the British in Algoa Bay in the year 1820* have been almost recontextualised in the past by frames used to replace the originals.

It is the notion of context that allows one to begin to consider the role that institutions play in the portrayal of history. As my research has shown, efforts to rectify past mistakes are often hampered by financial restrictions in this country. In an attempt to simplify matters, many South African galleries have decided to adopt a standard mass-produced type of frame for new acquisitions, unless the work comes previously framed, or with specific input from the artist. By subscribing to current trends in framing however, galleries are unable to avoid asserting a specific context through which those works will be viewed both now and in the future. The significance of this point lies, I think, in the startling ability such institutions possess to significantly alter information through the manner in which it is presented.

It is the notion of altering information through specific means of representation that forms the basis for much of my own work, as discussed in Chapter three. By electing to paint images of absent histories, as with my small paintings, or selective histories in the large works, my images actively attempt to disrupt the contexts from which they were drawn. As I have made clear, my smaller paintings of frames also attempt to

remind the viewer of the fact that the image they are engaging with is very much of a singular and specific viewpoint. In such a way I hope to dispel the notion that much of the information presented to us by museums and galleries is somehow complete, whole or all-inclusive. In so doing, my paintings, large and small, invite viewers to consider the reasons behind various omissions and inclusions in museum exhibits.

A good deal of this study has been devoted to discussing the manner in which frames have operated in the past, and the function they serve today. My second chapter in particular has dealt with the complex issues which framing gives rise to, specifically in a South African context. To this end, I believe it would be of great interest to examine the ways in which other South African artists are negotiating the concept of the frame as an 'extension of [an] artwork'. In this study I have not paid particular attention to the ways in which South African artists have explored the frame as a theme as this would have broadened the scope of my investigation beyond a level that would have been possible to in a small study of this sort. Artists Willie Bester and Stanley Pinker, for example, construct many of their picture frames from found materials relating to the subjects they choose to paint. In this way, one might argue, Pinker and Bester are in fact deliberately choosing to utilise their frames in order to create and secure a particular context for their works. In an environment where the histories towards which so many older frames point can be associated with notions of elitism and separation, I feel it would prove useful as a development from this study to investigate how artists such as Bester and Pinker are framing contemporary circumstances through a less orthodox lens.

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Illustrations

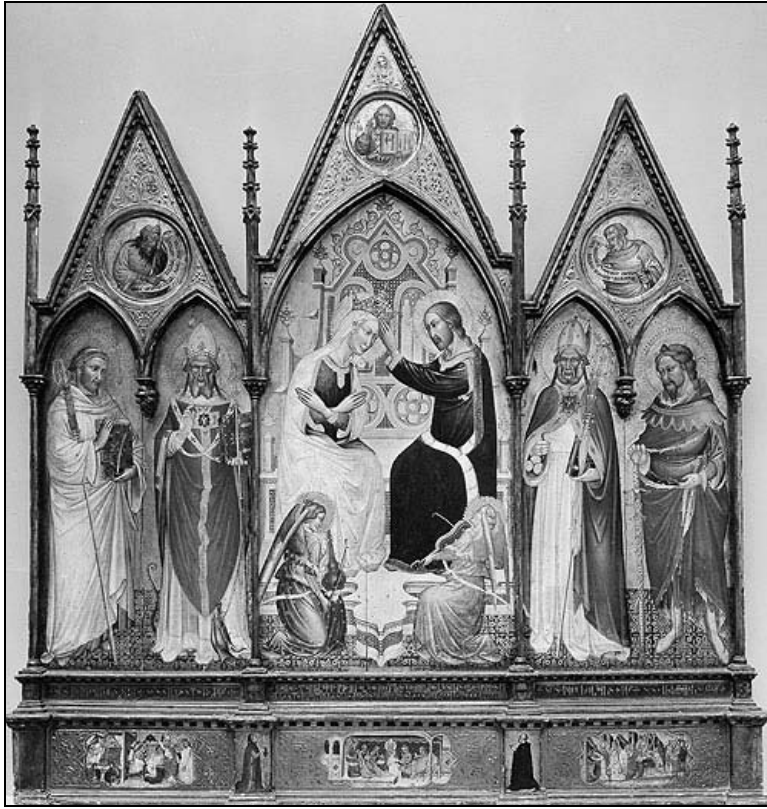


Figure 1 (a).

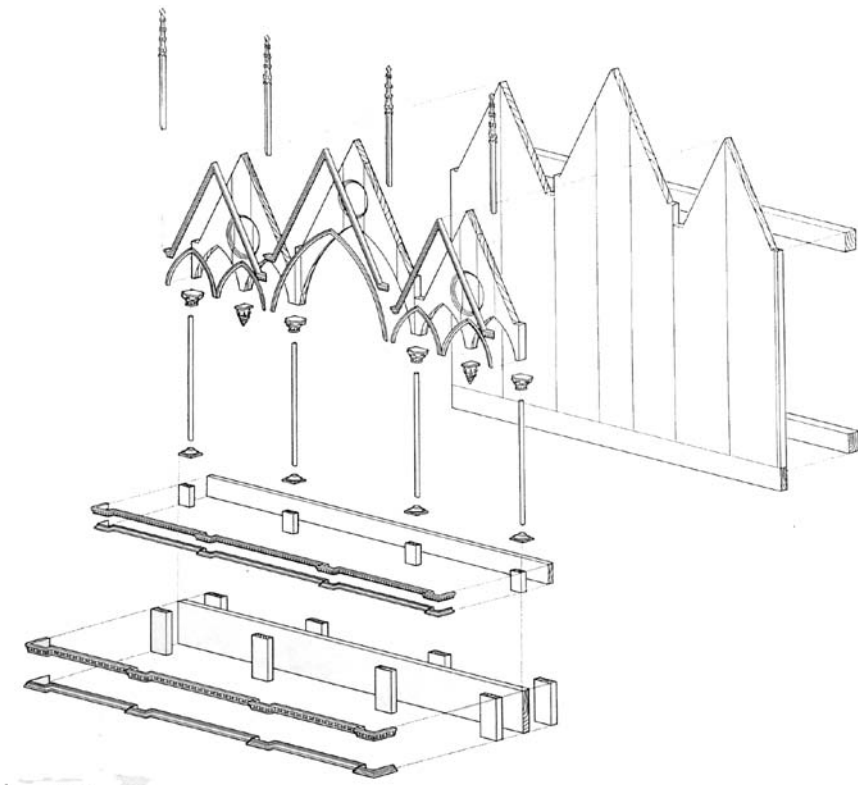


Figure 1 (b).



Figure 2.

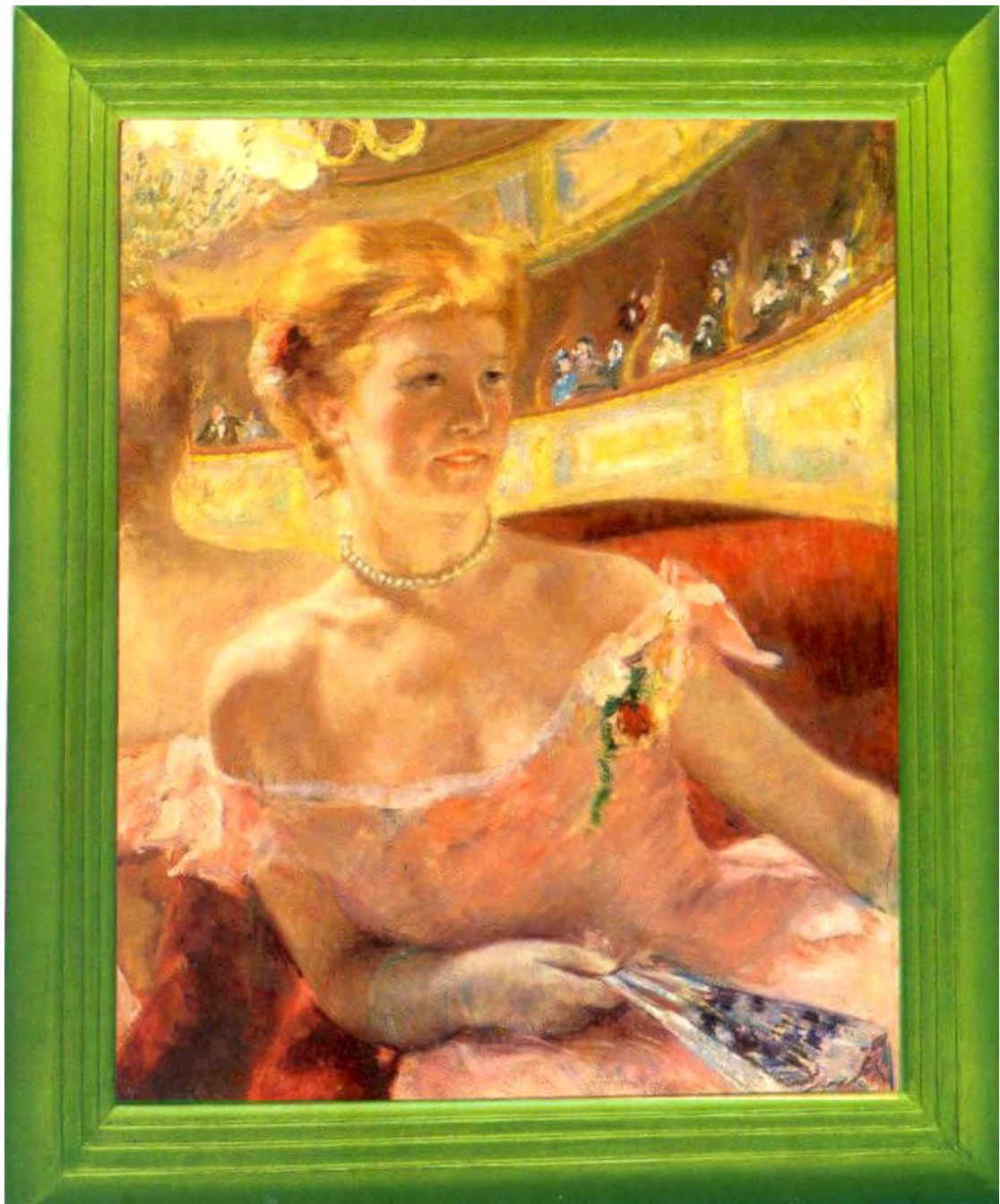


Figure 3.

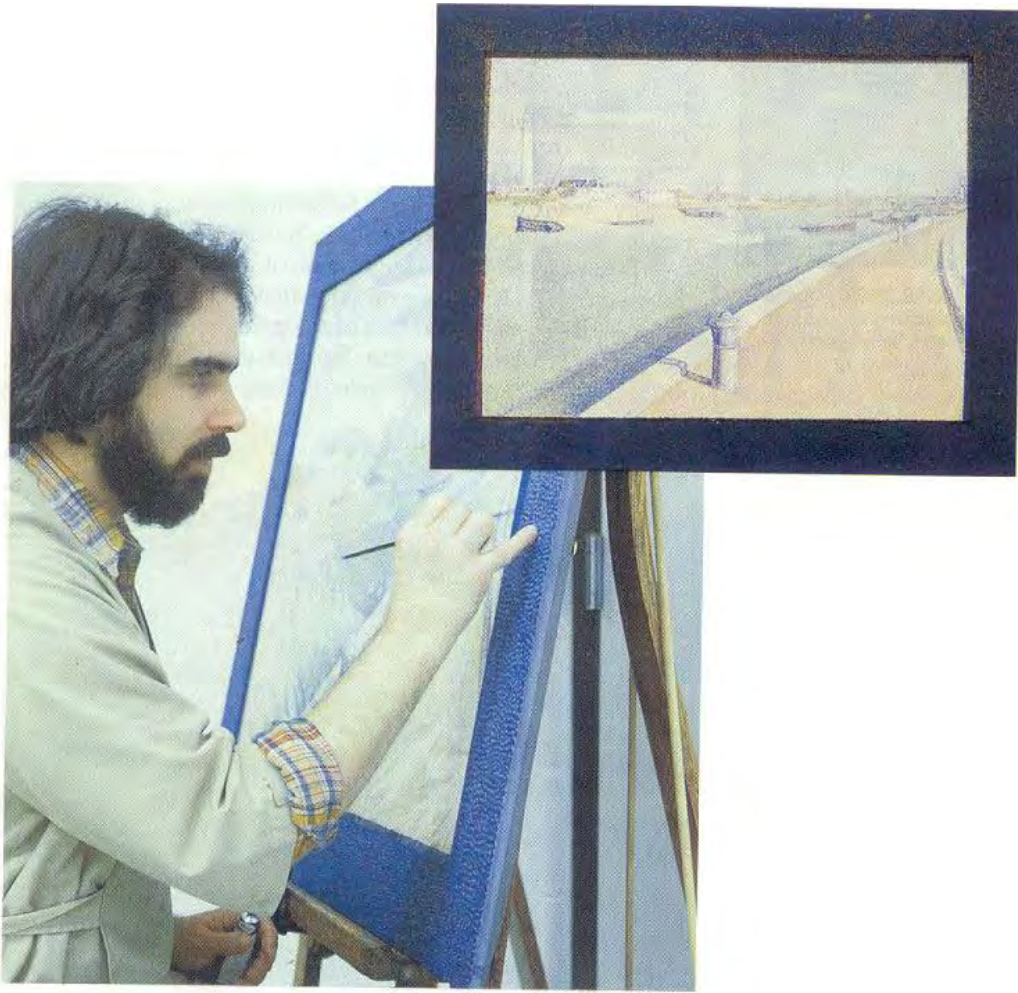


Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.



Figure 9.



Figure 10.



Figure 11.



Figure 12.