

I have developed processes for working motivated by aesthetic needs which offer me the flexibility to reinvent myself and maintain the originality of my work. I have no rules, just the fundamental principles of painting, and my experience of what is good.



My Painting Process: 1982 – 2006

Technical procedures and working practice

Custom Acrylic Paint Mediums

Upon my arrival in Edmonton in 1969, I started to look for sources for materials. I had made some of my own paints in England and Italy and had begun to work with acrylic mediums. I made the acquaintance of the St. Laurent family, owners of Tower Paint, a commercial paint manufacturer. Over the next ten years I worked with them to learn more about paint and formulate the acrylic gel mediums I required; acrylic gel is a clear, thickened acrylic solution that provides paint with thick body and transparency. This material was starting to become available as an artist medium, but in mainly in small quantities from the United States, and it was quite expensive. I did not have the funds to buy the quantities I needed, plus I really wanted to know how to make my own, hoping that this might bring me the freedom to improvise and discover a new form of painting.

Gradually over the years, my process was refined and by 1981, I had developed a medium custom-made for my own aesthetic purposes. I was able to create some new possibilities with paint by inducing 'crazing', promoting separations in the paint's surface to allow one colour to be seen through the colour below. Using this process, I could initiate

fresh drawing, colour, and surface, combining the all-over freedom of painting that had inspired me in the work of Jackson Pollock and Larry Poons, with the contrast of colours I admired in the work of Henri Matisse and Kenneth Noland.

I now make these formulations of gel mediums in large drums, and 5 gallon pails to the desired consistencies. I mix 20 or 30 pails at a time which are poured on 30 foot lengths of canvas, in layers, over a period of a week or more. I do not make colours but buy premixed acrylic colours that are then added to my gels. I purchase paint from several manufacturers, including Golden Artists Colors®, Tri Art Colours®, and Stevenson and Sons®. Making colours is a highly specialized process because each pigment has its own physical characteristics, and while I understand the principles involved I do not see any benefit in my making colour. The difference has been that with acrylic mediums I have seen this as an area where it is possible for me to innovate.





Pouring and drying the paint to form ‘crazing’

I work flat on long lengths of canvas placed on a raised bed that has openings to allow air to accelerate the drying of the acrylic paint. The formulated paint is poured together in coloured layers across the canvas in directional movements of vertical, horizontal, circular, and diagonal (the compositional synthesis of Cézanne). Paint, which is formulated to shrink during the drying process, creates separations or ‘crazing’ in the surface. These separations then allow colours to be revealed from the underlying layers. This ‘crazing’ forms an all-over patterning which is revealed by bold colour contrasts. I may also collage, or drop into the pouring, painted canvas or nodules of styrene, paint skins and gel castings. These additions punctuate the all-over patterning, and when dry, will emerge from within, or sit on top of the paint surface.

During the drying process, I manipulate the paint by lifting, stirring and drying with high power air fans to induce whatever composition of colour appears and offers a pictorial potential of goodness. Layers of colour are added until a composition arises in which I sense an interaction of optical life. If the colour is good and there are some compositional dynamics, contrast of shape and movement in the crazed formations, I stop and allow this to dry. During the drying process, I become involved in making adjustments to the paint flow in order to promote the forming of the crazed patterning and the colour interactions. From the initial pourings until the final drying of the length of canvas can take between 12 to 18 days, depending on the quantity of paint used and the outside temperature, humidity, and heat of the studio.

“The unique properties of acrylics have turned out to be especially suited to a direct, spontaneous, lyrical art, which is why almost all of today’s leading abstract painters use acrylics. This could be called the biggest change in the medium of Western Painting since oil replaced tempera in the early 16th century.”

Kenworth W. Moffett, *The New Acrylic Painting*, Nice, France



“There is a master plan to this process. Before the troughs were filled with litres of paint, the artist charted out the stages of its evolution, stages in which amazingly intense pools of color are made to interact with other pools, pools within pools.”

Roger H. Boulet, *Graham Peacock: Paint, Process and Spirit*

Cropping the painted canvas

When dry, the length of painted canvas is cut, sectioned into as few pieces as possible, and transferred to the wall. These first cuts will be made at the conclusion of the compositional movements of the colours, and the preferred formations will determine the choice of these initial cuts. A decision is made about which way up the canvas should go and once on the wall it is rotated to determine its potential and preferred orientation. Obvious excess canvas and superfluous colour is removed through a process of cropping (cutting away). The pictorial image is refined over a period of days, weeks or months, as the sustaining character of the work begins to unfold and is discovered. The act of painting will have begun the process of composition and it will have been guided to a conclusion during the drying process but the specific orientation will not be discoverable until the composition is selected (cut out) and rotated on the wall.

In my flat, geometrically shaped canvases from 1982 to 1988, the cropping was straight edged, but from 1989 on this edge shaping became more irregular. The undulation of the canvas, began in 1989 is made while the canvas is loosely hung on the wall. It is inserted with foam pads and temporarily stapled in place and adjusted as needed until the final idea for the work is realized. This undulation is to both to unite the pictorial relationships and bring out the desired imagery of the composition. Paint skins of various colours may also be added to enhance the characteristics of the work.

In 2000, I began to paint into the pictures with a brush adding to or subtracting from the dried formations. I may add collage of painted canvas cut from either that painting or another. This became more prevalent as I began to include illusionistic drawing and cut out shapes to which I have added fresh unpainted canvas and which I painted illusionistically (traditional shading to suggest dimension).

This described process is just the initial stage in the forming of the works, as the conclusions are gradually arrived at over many days, or even weeks. It is usually several months before the work is permanently assembled, and glued with gel medium to another canvas backing. Until this point, all of the collage additions and undulations in the surface have been held in place with staples, allowing me the maximum flexibility for any adjustments during period of prolonged viewing. Since I am often working on many works at one time, canvases develop over a period of months, and on the odd occasion over a period of year or more.

For a detailed description of the artistic development of my work please refer to "Artistic Development 1970 to 2008" on page 330.



Collected canvas cuttings.

Attaching the cropped canvas to a new canvas backing

When the shaping and undulation, if present, of the painted canvas is complete, it is carefully marked with tapes to record the positions of the under fillings and collage elements, that have been until this point, stapled in place. The painting is laid flat on a new piece of raw canvas, with the fillings in place and glued with acrylic gel medium, to the new canvas, forming it as it was on the wall. This is held in place by stapling through the canvas into the wood sheeting and left for 24 hrs. Following this, all the staples are removed and the canvas is allowed to dry sufficiently until it is possible to re-hang the canvas on the wall and allow it to dry completely over several days.



Back view of several paintings in the artist's studio showing the cut shapes of each support— each one tailored to suit the selected portion of the painted canvas.

Making the stretcher or wood support

The next stage involves laying the dried canvas on top of plywood sheeting material and drawing its outline on the board so that its shape can be cut out with a jigsaw. The stretcher edge is chosen to work with the painting's composition. Often, the edge is beveled and sanded with a power grinder to produce a curved edge, but occasionally this edge is a straight cut. The angle of the support's edge is chosen to enhance the internal movements or the illusionistic undulations in the work. The canvas is then hung on the stretcher support and stapled on the underside in the traditional manner. Any unpainted canvas edges, which remain visible, are painted to match the paintings colours.



Detail of *Immortal Memory* showing several areas of final editing including brush-painted illusions, fine-tuning and collage.

Final edits and collage

When mounted on the support stretcher the work the work has gained its real physical presence and is nearing completion. Tweaking and fine-tuning the work now becomes possible. Details involving collage, glass beads, edits with the brush, or paint skin collage, that have yet to be finalized, are attached. The work's orientation on the wall can be particularized, now that it is easily rotated on the stretcher. The preferred position is marked, a line is drawn on the back, and hooks are attached to insure the correct hanging orientation is maintained.

Titling, hanging instructions, varnishing, photography and cataloging

All works have the title written in permanent marker on the reverse, together with the date, size, and medium.

The distance apart of the hooks required to hang the work at the correct orientation is also provided. Two pins must be placed horizontally at the distance indicated. A line is drawn on the horizontal access of the work with 'HANG THIS LINE HORIZONTAL FROM HOOKS, WITH NO WIRE' written underneath.

The work is signed and a '©' placed before the signature reserving the copyright. When all is done, the painting receives a number of coats of gloss acrylic varnish. This produces a greater luminosity in the colour and pulls all of the varied surfaces together. It also acts as a protective ultraviolet coating, allowing the painting to be cleaned with warm water and a soft, lint-free cloth.

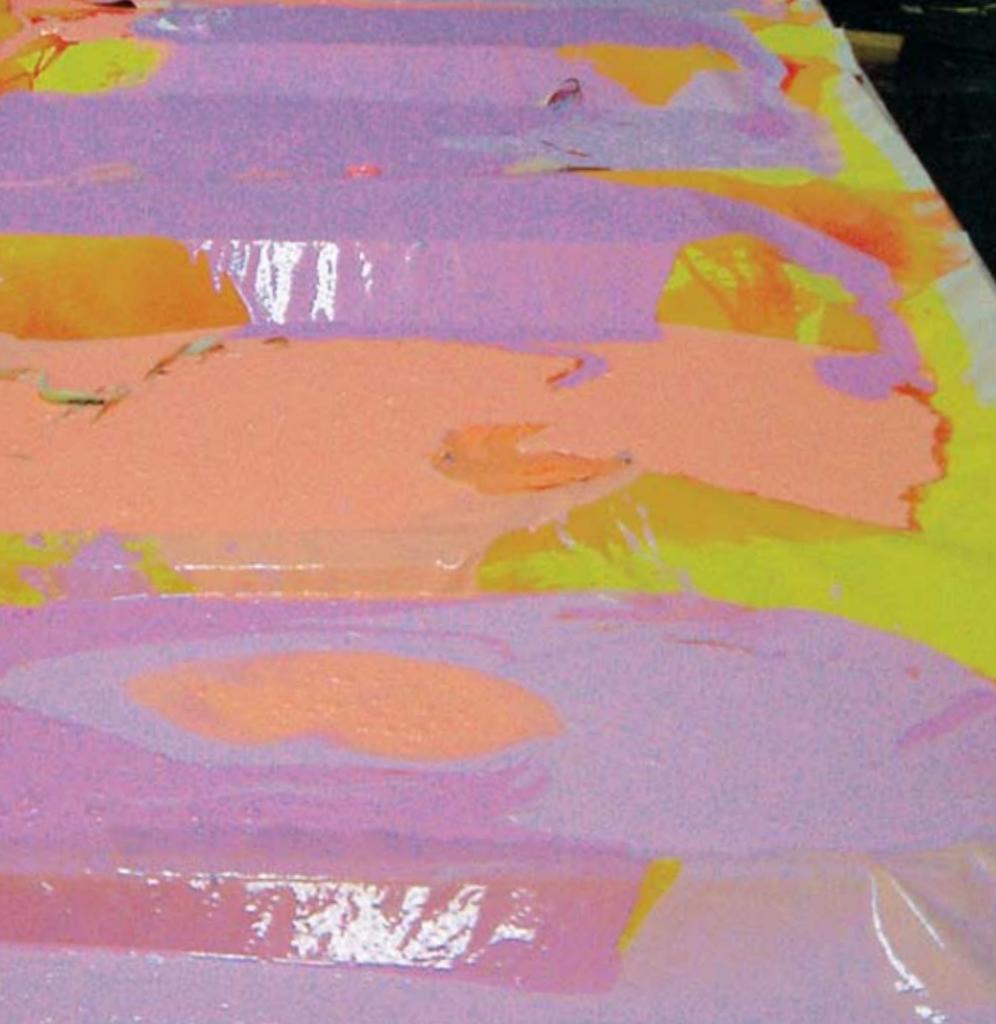
Up until 2000 the works have been photographed on 35mm colour slide film. Since then the photographic record has been kept on digital files. The work is then entered on the artist's inventory record. Over 350 images have been scanned in high resolution for this book and are now in the artist's archive.



Storage racks with finished paintings and rolled, unstretched work in Graham Peacock's Dorchester studio, Edmonton.



Graham Peacock's Kelly Ramsey studio, Edmonton in 2001. The artist in the area of his studio where final cropping and editing of the work is done. *The Magician* and *Montrose* are shown; in the space behind, areas of poured or drying painted canvas can be seen.





A work in progress, Kelly Ramsey studio, Edmonton in 2004.
Time of development for the painting *Scissor*.