

FRAGMENTS WITHIN FRAGMENTS: DISTANCING THROUGH THE *PANGLINGAN* PRINCIPLE IN PAINTING PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

The creation of "Fragments within Fragments" originates from an analysis of the *Mooi Indie* phenomenon, which perceives the East Indies from a perspective of distance. This phenomenon illustrates how artworks from that era established a disparity between reality and its representation. In an era of easy and ubiquitous image production, manipulation that results in the alienation of experience frequently transpires unconsciously. Real objects and experiences are supplanted by images regarded as representations of reality. In this setting, art serves as a medium to depict images and their forms that are perceived illusorily. Through the *panglingan* (Sudjoko, 1992) of initially representative photographic images, blurring is created to distinguish the image from its representative elements. This process establishes a distance between subject and object, intensifying a sense of alienation between the image and its observer. This work fosters reflection on individuals' perceptions and experiences of objects in a digital era saturated with images that merely represent fragments of authentic experience by positioning the subject at a distance and inducing a sense of alienation through blurring.

Keywords: distance; fragment; form; image; perception; *panglingan* principle

ABSTRAK

Penciptaan "Fragmen dalam Fragmen" bermula dari pengkajian fenomena *Mooi Indie*, yang dalam paradigmanya memandang Hindia Timur melalui rasa jarak. Fenomena ini menggambarkan bagaimana karya seni pada era tersebut menciptakan kesenjangan antara realitas dan representasinya. Di era di mana produksi gambar semakin mudah dan meluas, manipulasi yang mengarah pada penjarahan pengalaman seringkali terjadi tanpa disadari. Objek dan pengalaman nyata digantikan oleh gambar yang dianggap sebagai representasi realitas. Dalam konteks ini, seni digunakan sebagai sarana untuk menghadirkan gambar dan bentuk di dalamnya yang dikenali secara ilusi. Melalui *panglingan* (Sudjoko, 1992) pada gambar-gambar fotografis yang awalnya representatif, keburaman diciptakan untuk memisahkan gambar dari elemen-elemen representatifnya. Proses ini menciptakan jarak antara subjek dan objek, memperkuat rasa keterasingan antara gambar dan penikmatnya. Dengan menempatkan subjek pada jarak yang jauh dan menciptakan rasa keterasingan melalui keburaman, karya ini mendorong

refleksi tentang bagaimana orang memandang dan mengalami objek di era digital yang dibanjiri gambar, yang hanyalah fragmen dari pengalaman nyata.

Kata kunci: jarak; fragmen; bentuk; citra; persepsi; prinsip Panglingan

1. Introduction

The creation of this project stems from my suspicion that technology—particularly in the production of digital images—has paradoxically created a sense of distance from the objects it represents. While it is commonly understood that technology serves to bridge and bring humans closer to things beyond their immediate reach, I argue that this perceived closeness is merely an illusion. The ease with which we see everything through representations offered by digital media gives the impression of accessibility, yet the experience formed through such representations becomes shallow and disconnected from a complete reality.

Digital representations are nothing more than fragments of reality—selected, cropped, and manipulated pieces. Although technology appears to expand human access to the world, it also introduces a widening non-physical gap: an emotional and intellectual distance from objects that may appear familiar but remain essentially alien. The objects we encounter visually are thus reduced, and the experiences they offer are mediated by technological layers that construct a new perception—one built from deliberately selected and fragmented information.

This illusion of proximity encourages the subject to idealize the object, forming narratives of supposed understanding toward something that is, in truth, not fully grasped. It results in an alternative reality in which the object appears more familiar and comprehensible than it actually is. Perception and experience become distorted; what is perceived and experienced are blurred, fragmented representations rather than the objects themselves.

In response to this, I approach the creative process as both a form of critique and visual exploration. I begin by photographing representational objects and then digitally manipulate them by applying blur to their forms. This blurring process serves as a strategy to detach the images from their original representational meanings. Through digital transformation, the images shift toward a more non-representational form, opening up new interpretive possibilities unbound from the

context of the original object. When these images are transferred onto canvas, they undergo a final transformation into standalone visual entities. The focus shifts to formal elements—such as form, color, composition, and texture—which reinforce the abstract character of the work. Thus, this creative process not only results in visual artworks but also functions as a reflection on how we experience, understand, and interpret the visual world in the digital age. Painting is an expression of a person's aesthetic experience (Kartika, 2017; Hamzah et al., 2025).

The title of this project, *Fragments Within Fragments*, draws on the definition of the word “fragment” as both an excerpt and a broken or incomplete part. Within the context of this painting work, the term denotes a depiction of something that is already partial—a representation of an already fractured reality. My interpretation and expression of reality are framed through these dispersed and disconnected fragments. Each visual fragment in the work arises from my observation of digital images, which have become an integral part of everyday life. Photography, as a medium, allows us to capture and freeze specific moments in time. However, this process also involves significant acts of selection and omission. The resulting images are, in essence, fragments of reality—yet due to their ubiquitous nature, they are often mistakenly perceived as complete depictions of that reality.

Through my work, I respond to the pervasive culture of digital image-making, especially photography, which is now massively produced and consumed. Technology tends to enable manipulation and presents an illusion of immediacy between the subject and the observed object. It is generally assumed that technology functions to bridge distances, enabling users to see, interact with, and observe objects and events in distant places with ease. However, I argue that these technologically produced images are nothing more than illusions—a constructed appearance that imitates the real. Photography, in particular, is a subtractive medium; as Hollaus (2016) notes, it tends to reduce or eliminate information during its production process.

This project responds to the conceptual void created by the distance inherent in digitally mediated experiences. The instant processes of selecting, cropping, and capturing images not only reduce the visual forms produced but also diminish the

fullness of the reality they attempt to portray. As a result, objects are reduced to mere formal qualities, and what is perceived becomes a fragmented, illusory experience—cut off from its natural, continuous context.

2. Literature Review

In earlier studies, I developed an interest in the *Mooi Indie* period, which was marked by the proliferation of landscape paintings of the Dutch East Indies, particularly by colonial Dutch painters. In conceptualizing this current body of work, I revisit that earlier study with a different focus. *Mooi Indie* is referenced and involved in the conceptual framework of this project not for its artworks or aesthetic values per se, but for the underlying paradigm that shaped them. In my previous research, I examined how traces of *Mooi Indie* persisted in contemporary visual art during that period. Through case studies, I identified the implicit presence of the classic *Mooi Indie* paradigm, which at its core is defined by a sense of detachment from lived experience.

This distance manifests both physically and non-physically. Physically, *Mooi Indie* paintings often depict landscapes viewed through a window, thus presenting a scenic view rather than an immersive experience. Non-physical distance refers to the detachment between the painter and the subject; in the context of *Mooi Indie*, as Sudjojono argues, this can be seen in the way painters perceived the East Indies landscape as a mere visual delight, rather than as part of their daily reality (Siregar, 2010).

Although these phenomena occur in different temporal contexts, I perceive a resemblance in the nature of this experiential detachment: objects are shifted from their real, value-laden contexts into isolated realms and entirely new media. In *Mooi Indie*, this realm was the canvas; in today's context, it is the digital medium—photography, videography, and social media. I have come to realize that the images circulating within my environment are merely fragments or manipulations of actual objects. This creates an unconscious detachment from the experience of those objects, as what is ultimately seen and experienced is only a fragment of a fragment—a representation of the real object. Yet paradoxically, the observer often perceives this as a complete experience. This tendency is tied to the

contemporary condition in which subjects feel they can easily know and feel close to objects through digital media.

Many everyday objects are thus severed from their actual existence to become more readily consumable. Observing subjects who perceive only these fragments tend to feel a sense of closeness to the objects, even though what they are engaging with is merely a fragment of reality. In this process, digital media plays a significant role. By its very nature, digital media aims to bridge the gap between individuals and the objects it captures.

The central idea in the conception of this work is to estrange the object from the observing subject. Regular, familiar, everyday objects are stripped of their original forms and, consequently, their original meanings. The transformation of these objects into blurred images on canvas recontextualizes them as new objects within a new realm. This work is intended as a response that critically questions the nature of perception and experience, which has increasingly become blurred as we continuously consume visual images that are, in essence, mere fragments.

In this body of work, the most prominent visual characteristic is the presence of blur. The images that emerge in the paintings are abstractions derived from originally representational photographs. Rather than generating the illusion of proximity between the subject and the object—an effect commonly associated with digital media—I deliberately establish a distance between the subject in the image and the viewer. The visualization of blur in this context plays a significant conceptual and formal role in depicting the complex relationship between technology and distorted reality. While blur is typically perceived as a technical flaw in photography, here it is employed strategically to introduce an experiential and perceptual gap between the viewer and the depicted image.

To articulate this visual approach, particularly the application of blur in painting, I borrow a term coined by Sudjoko (1992) in his discussion of visual transformation within the medium: *panglingan*. The word *panglingan* comes from Javanese, the basic word 'pangling' with the addition of the suffix 'an'. The Indonesian Sanskrit Dictionary defines the word '*pangling*' as forgetting one's appearance (Purwadi & Purnomo, 2008). The Indonesian Etymology Dictionary defines the word '*pangling*' as forgetting or no longer recognizing (Adiwimarta et

al., 1987). In his writings, Sudjoko introduces the notion of *malihan*, a transformation in form that retains a traceable resemblance to its referent, thus rendering the image *lirada*—"as if present"—and preserving representational value. *Malihan* allows images to become visual representations or manifestations that still echo their original forms.

In contrast, my practice of fragmenting and blurring objects in this work aligns more closely with the concept of *panglingan*. This term suggests a shift beyond *malihan*, referring to a condition wherein one no longer recognizes the origin or identity of a subject. It marks a transition from representational to non-representational qualities, where the transformation is so profound that the original referent is no longer discernible. Within this framework, blur functions not merely as a technical tool but as an integral conceptual device. It introduces a perceptual barrier that distances the viewer from the object, encouraging an encounter that extends beyond surface appearances to reach into the essence or subjective experience of the image.

In this way, *panglingan* serves to disrupt conventional visual experiences, shifting emphasis from what is seen to how something is felt. The painting becomes less about mimetic representation and more about engaging with the formal elements—color, shape, and spatial arrangement—which must be actively perceived and interpreted by the viewer. Crucially, *panglingan* does not aim to erase the identity of the object entirely. Rather, it opens a space for the object to exist in a more essential form, inviting viewers to engage with aspects often overlooked in direct representation. For instance, the everyday objects in my paintings are transformed into blurred fields of color and shape that leave only faint traces of their original appearances. Viewers no longer perceive them as concrete physical entities, but as distant visual impressions. Thus, the painting becomes a portal to a rich and complex subjective experience mediated through the visual mechanism of *panglingan*.

The type of blur adopted in this work is specifically drawn from the characteristics of lens blur. Unlike Gaussian blur, which results in an even, homogeneous diffusion of detail, lens blur possesses a more nuanced and optical quality—closely tied to perception. This type of blur often gives rise to simplified,

abstract forms such as bokeh, where unfocused light sources are rendered as circular shapes. These effects lend a heightened sense of abstraction to the image, reinforcing the distance and unfamiliarity between viewer and subject. This visual ambiguity becomes a metaphorical inquiry into the tension between the visible and the concealed, the known and the alien. Through this strategy, the work critiques how technological mediation distorts reality, creating an illusion of proximity while actually distancing us from a fuller truth.

Blur, in this context, becomes a tool to generate visual disturbance. By rejecting clarity and pushing images toward perceptual ambiguity, the work challenges the viewer to confront bias and uncertainty simultaneously, compelling them to look beyond the limits of conventional perception. In a world saturated with rapid information and ceaseless image production, blur mirrors the human inability to fully grasp or process the entirety of visual reality. It reminds me that what I see through technology is often fragmented, manipulated, and distant from authentic experience.

This conceptual framework also extends into the compositional strategies of the work. The selection and arrangement of imagery are grounded in formal considerations, where the use of images is primarily informed by visual elements rather than representational fidelity. The final images presented in the work are collaged fragments that coalesce into entirely new compositions. Each image is chosen for its potential to generate visual tension, such as stark color contrasts or striking form. These visual components are then arranged into varied compositional structures that require the viewer's active participation in interpreting and reconstructing the imagery.

There are three primary compositional approaches explored in this work. The first features square-format images arranged side by side in a linear sequence. This composition emphasizes balance and order through its minimalist configuration, which is contrasted by the visual tension arising from the juxtaposition of color and form. The second arrangement retains a uniform format but shifts the alignment to a diagonal pairing, where the midpoint of one image aligns with the top of another. This layout introduces a more dynamic rhythm. The third composition adopts

images of varying formats and arranges them asymmetrically, further amplifying the sense of unpredictability and spontaneity.

Each configuration invites different perceptual experiences and embodies the complexity of human perception, which is rarely uniform. These fragmented arrangements reflect the way information is received in the digital age—dispersed, incomplete, and requiring reconstruction. Through these compositional experiments, I aim to construct a visual experience that demands the viewer's interpretive agency. Every fragment interacts with the others to create a network of visual relationships, echoing the interconnectedness characteristic of contemporary digital culture. The cutting and recombining of visual material in this work reflect our cognitive tendencies to assemble discrete nodes of perception in an effort to form a coherent understanding of experience.

Yet ultimately, in this work, such efforts remain unresolved. What is offered to the viewer is a series of blurred fragments—partial, obscured, and impossible to fully complete. This serves as both a commentary and a reflection on the limits of perception in a hyper-mediated world, where clarity is elusive and reality is often experienced in fragments rather than wholes.

3. Methodology

In the creation of this work, photography is utilized as a sketch. I first captured images that were already fragments of objects I encountered. I realized that the images I selected as sketches shared several uniform tendencies, namely, they contained different shapes within a single frame and had colors that contrasted with the surrounding environment. Below are some examples of the initial photographs I took for comparison.

These photographic results were then manipulated with a blur effect. The degree of blur I applied was not always the same; however, the decision regarding the level of blurriness was based on a common necessity, which was to obscure the representation and detach it from the values previously inherent in the objects. The degree of blurriness was not made excessively high because my intention was to preserve some of the form qualities that would give the audience a disrupted

experience—between recognition and unfamiliarity, between the concrete and the abstract.



Figure 1. Selected photographic results used as sketch references

After being blurred, each image was paired with another to form a composition. The pairing of one image with another was based on formal decisions, including the similarity of certain formal elements between one image and another. In some parts of the work, images were even rotated to fulfill this requirement. The presence of a gap between images has the potential to lead the audience to bias in connecting the two images, creating the illusion that they originate from the same source. Below is an example of the image composition. In the example, it can be observed that the element being paired is the white field that cuts across the middle horizontally of the left image, with the white field that cuts across the middle vertically of the right image.

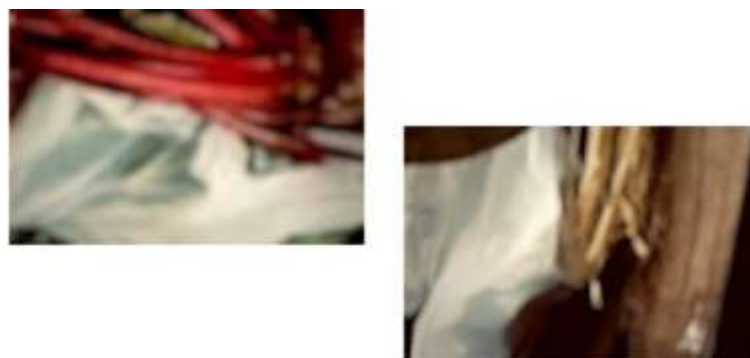


Figure 2. Composition of images after blur manipulation

Table 1. Characteristics of each paint color

Paint Color	Consistency	Transparenc y	Drying Time	Remarks
Naples Yellow Hue	Dense	Opaque	8-10 hours	No medium added
Titanium White	Dense	Opaque	More than 12 hours	Liquin Original medium added to accelerate drying time
Chrome Yellow Hue	Fluid	Moderate	More than 12 hours	No medium added
Cadmium Red Hue	Fluid	Thin	4-6 hours	No medium added
Yellow Ochre	Moderate	Moderate	6-8 hours	No medium added
Lamp Black	Dense	Opaque	2-4 hours	Refined Linseed Oil added to slow down drying time
Sap Green	Moderate	Thin	4-6 hours	No medium added
Cerulean Blue Hue	Moderate	Moderate	6-8 hours	No medium added

In the creation of this artwork, I utilized oil paint to bring images to life on canvas. The choice of oil paint as the primary medium was based on its characteristic thickness and relatively longer drying time compared to other types of paint. The colors used in this work include Cadmium Red Hue, Yellow Ochre, Naples Yellow Hue, Titanium White, Chrome Yellow Hue, Lamp Black, Sap Green, and Cerulean Blue Hue. The brand of oil paint I used is Winton Oil by Winsor & Newton.

To achieve the desired visual quality, the paint must have a thick consistency and remain wet. Each paint color has different consistencies and drying times, which means that not all paints are treated with the same medium mixture. Below is a table that outlines the characteristics of each paint color. It is important to note that the treatment of the paint depends on the location where the artwork is being created. The table contains results of personal experiments conducted under the climate and weather conditions in Lebakgede, Coblong District, Bandung City, West Java, Indonesia, between February and April 2024.

The addition of medium can alter the consistency of the paint and modify its drying time. Therefore, the paint colors chosen to be mixed with a medium were those that were already thick but had significantly different drying times compared to the others, in order to facilitate color blending and achieve the desired visual form. The brand of all the mediums used is Winsor & Newton. The Liquin Original medium accelerates the drying time of the paint, while the Refined Linseed Oil medium slows down the drying time. Below is a table that shows the changes in the characteristics of the paint after the medium was added. All the paint colors used in this work have a drying time of 4-8 hours. Therefore, to achieve the desired visual quality, the duration of each painting session must fall within this time frame.

The canvas used in this artwork follows the common rectangular format found in traditional paintings. However, the size of the canvas is intentionally smaller. This choice was made to create a sense of distance between the artwork and the audience. Larger canvases tend to create an immersive experience, which contrasts with the intended feeling of detachment in this piece. Instead of aiming to create a large image, I opted to present many smaller images. In my view, this

approach reflects the reality of the contemporary era, where the number of images is increasingly abundant, yet the portrayal of objects can be limited or fragmented.

In the creation process, I also utilized the painting medium as a response to the culture of digital image-making, which is characterized by its immediacy and mass production. In the midst of an ever-flowing stream of information and constant visual consumption, the painting medium offers a space for deeper reflection and a slower process. The blurred photographic images I used as sketches in this work were transformed into paintings, allowing me to experience a sense of alienation from the digital images through the medium of painting. Therefore, the use of painting in the creation of this work is not just an attempt to produce new images, but also a reflection on and consideration of the cultural changes and the dynamics of images that continue to evolve.

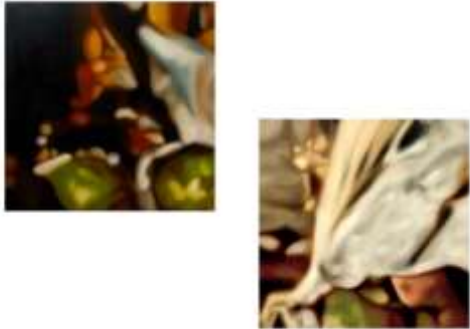
Oei Sian Yok (1957) once referred to traditional markets as a "feast of color" for painters, while a source of sickness for those who are less familiar. I interpret this quote as a statement that painting inherently tends to "cut" real-life experiences through aesthetic considerations—deciding what is worth showing. In the digital era, other media such as photography and video contribute to the "cutting" of experiences on a much larger scale. The images that humans now encounter are predominantly digital, representing fragmented versions of reality, produced in vast quantities, and rapidly changing. Graw (2018) argues that painting retains its distinctiveness as a unique source of images—special in the sense that it carries traces of the mundane—the marks of the hand—which are entirely different from digital images.

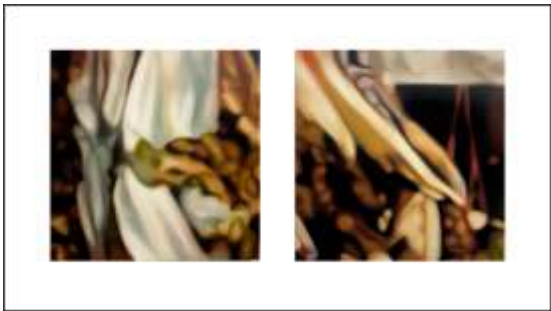
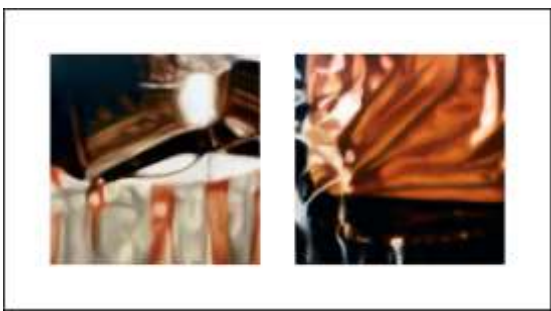
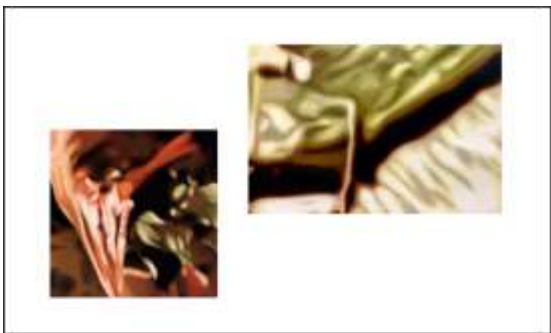
Painting remains significant in contemporary art because of its ability to reflect social issues, interact with the human condition, and evolve alongside technological advancements (Theodore, 2024). The uniqueness of painting allows it to respond to technological developments, which often lead to uniform and easily reproducible images that can be illusory. When an image is transferred into a painting, it becomes a singular thing. In an age where digital images are ubiquitous, the use of the painting medium in this work highlights the need to question and reinterpret digital images and the realities they represent.

4. Discussion

This project culminates in the production of eight artworks, each comprising a pair of paintings composed through formal explorations of visual fragmentation and juxtaposition. The possibility that the paintings in this project may be interpreted beyond their formal qualities does not negate the central emphasis on form itself—for indeed, the forms in the work are inseparable from myth, and formal analysis is merely the initial step toward interpretation (Braembusche, 2009). However, in this work, interpretation is not presented as absolute. What is offered is not direct meaning, but rather an effort to validate images that may lead to deeper interpretation. Images are made possible through the encounter between the observer and the paintings.

Table 2. Artwork results

Artwork Title	Dimension	Image
#1	Each 75 cm x 50 cm	
#2	Each 50 cm x 50 cm	

#3	Each 75 cm x 50 cm and 50 cm x 50 cm	
#4	Each 60 cm x 60 cm	
#5	Each 60 cm x 60 cm	
#6	Each 50 cm x 50 cm and 75 cm x 50 cm	

#7	Each 50 cm x 50 cm	
#8	Each 75 cm x 50 cm	

The visualization primarily directs the audience toward two focal points: visuals that resemble blurred images of objects, and the cutting and joining of two different visual fields. These fields are not clearly visible, making it difficult to associate the observed visuals with any specific imagery. The visuals presented ultimately consist of fragments of images that feel familiar yet alien when perceived as a whole.

The core of this work is to present images that create a sense of distance between the observer and the subject matter—an experience that has become increasingly rare in the digital era, which creates the illusion of constant proximity. This Final Project consists of eight pieces, each formed by the composition of two paintings. The pairing of these two paintings results from a formal exploration of cutting and combining images, as discussed in the previous chapter. In presenting the artworks, a space of 8 cm is maintained between each pair of paintings.

Each work is titled with specific numbers to fully present the image as an entity entirely detached from its representation. The images in the paintings are intended to exist within their own sphere—each as a standalone work and in relation to others. The composition of each painting is made to respond to the

adjacent piece. In this regard, the use of numerical titles also serves to indicate the intended sequence of display. For example, in an ideal exhibition, the image in painting #1 is meant to contain elements that connect with painting #2, creating continuity between each successive work.



Figure 3. An example of the ideal presentation of Work #1 and Work #2, which were created in relation to one another. The black area on the far right side of Work #1 can be visually connected to the black area on the far left side of Work #2.

The actions involved in the construction of this work—including rotating paintings, pairing canvases, and arranging them in non-aligned positions—are intended to treat the visual elements purely as forms. Conventional expectations and representational elements that typically give the image a fixed identity are deliberately suspended. All elements are fused into new forms, detached from their representational values. The configuration of paired canvases serves as a means of exploring the formal elements within the work. The non-aligned arrangement of some canvas pairs is not intended to imply any hierarchy between the images. On the contrary, this is part of the formal exploration to achieve visual harmony, aimed at increasing the complexity of the viewer's experience of the images. The complexity in the art world is largely focused on the potential of similar "spaces of possibility" (Wiesing, 2010; Rosen, 2022). Furthermore, the installation and placement of the paintings invite viewers to question their assumptions about structure, hierarchy, and relationships within images, as well as to explore new ways of fully engaging with visual content.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion of this Final Project can be approached from two perspectives: artistic experience and aesthetic experience. First, in terms of artistic experience, this work serves as a personal response to the normalization of manipulation in the digital era—an era that fosters a shift in experience toward fragmented and superficial knowledge. The transition from the digital domain to the medium of painting in my practice introduces a new layer of visual experience. Flat and orderly digital images are transformed into paintings that relinquish their perfection, resulting in a distinctly different visual experience. Digital images, bound by raster precision and easily duplicated, lose their uniqueness. In contrast, each of my paintings is a singular and original work, marked by spontaneous brushstrokes, textured lines, and color blends that cannot be exactly replicated.

In the process of making, I had the freedom to manipulate formal elements into a visual language with indeterminate interpretation—while remaining aware that the forms in my work are not autonomous and exist only through their perception. Referring to George Berkeley’s principle of *esse est percipi*—to be is to be perceived (2009), the forms in my work exist only insofar as they are perceived. This aligns with the perspective of phenomenalism, which emphasizes that reality, insofar as it is tied to thought and perception, holds primary significance—enriching our understanding of the fundamental nature of human observation of the world.

From the standpoint of aesthetic experience, this work presents visualizations that direct the audience toward two main focal points: visuals resembling blurred images of objects and the cutting and joining of two distinct visual fields. These fields are not clearly defined, making it difficult to associate them with particular imagery. As a result, the visuals presented consist of image fragments that appear familiar yet strange when perceived as a whole. The experience offered by this work is one in which the viewer feels distanced from what they are seeing—a condition that has become rare in the digital era, where everything seems within reach.

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