

**FRANK AND JO MAKE SPACE  
AT CASTLEFIELD GALLERY**

Griselda Pollock



Printed on the occasion of  
40 Years of the Future: Jo McGonigal x Frank Bowling  
20 October 2024 - 02 February 2025

## Frank and Jo Make Space at Castlefield Gallery, 2024

*Griselda Pollock*

When I encounter paintings by Frank Bowling, I ask: “What is the painting *doing*?”  
Encountering work by Jo McGonigal, I ponder: “What is painting *being*”?

To celebrate 40 years of Castlefield Gallery, I have been invited—and I am as honoured as I am a little intimidated—to write about an exhibition which brings together two remarkable artists, from different generations, backgrounds, histories, the London- and formerly also New York-based Frank Bowling—who exhibited in this gallery in 1988—and Manchester-based Jo McGonigal. Both are painters but they also make objects some of which might be classified as sculptures such as the three, free-standing objects by Frank Bowling in welded steel and found, discarded scrap metal titled *What Else Can You Put in a Judd Box* (2022), *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (1988) and *Bulbul* (1988). The deconstructed, expanded painting exhibited here by Jo McGonigal might look like sculpture with its use of physical elements—rods, strings, earth, hanging in real space—but it is as deeply about painting as are the works on canvas by Frank Bowling. Painting has been his primary preoccupation over 6 decades.

My preparation for writing starts with studio visits. In the place and space of making, and with the artist, where convenient or possible, I move from being consumer or spectator in a gallery, to being a joyously *ignorant* witness of the traces and processes of the making. That ignorance is an opening. I ask myself: What is going on here? What am I seeing?

I also ask myself why *do* painters paint? The end of a day's work or a month's work may be a painting that is carried off to an exhibition or to languish in a dealer's storeroom, seen or unseen—the work has, apparently, been done. That work is not, however, just an object. It has 'bottled' time. It registers (and stores in every gesture of its very making) a period out of a life that has been spent doing the strangest thing: *seeing* something *becoming* through an action—painting. Painting is an act of *willing something new into being*, and thus making such new *being* become *visible* through tangible materiality that creates wonderful sights for our eyes to explore. What has *become*—the painting—is then encountered with the perceptions and mobility of a living body-psyche. We experience painting or sculpture not only through our eyes but with our entire phenomenological body—for we are also part of the same world of space, field, vision. As philosopher Merleau-Ponty argued, we are one with 'the flesh of the world'. Our sensations are remembered, felt and then shown to us, in new but still material forms by paintings and sculptures, that also have the capacity to affect us.

Art is an event in time, several times, in fact: the time of the making and the time of the encountering. Painting is, I suggest, not the making of an object. It is an activity that the object we encounter remembers. It is an encoded event before which we, viewers, become belated as well

as constantly first witnesses to its becoming. Tracing surfaces with our eyes and thus with our imaginary hands, haptically exploring relations between vibrating fields or stains of colour, materialities, marks, traces of movements that both made materials do things and discovered the extraordinary things that materials and movements create—this means that meeting a painting is never about just looking and asking: What is this saying? What does it mean? What is the artist intending? The necessary question is: ‘What is this *doing*?’ ... and how, and then for whom? The artist? For me, now, in this moment? For a future the work imagines and helps to bring into possibility?

Artists have companions while they are making art. They create in conversation with other artists’ works in their heads, in their own conscious memories of certain works, as well as unconscious intuitions in their arms and hands with which they have ‘seen’ these other works. They have noticed things and drawn ideas from all that they have ever seen. They may be interested in that move or this mark in this or that work, that surface, that effect, the challenge of discerning complexity beneath the final unity, the shock of the unexpected event: *Where did that* come from? This is not influence and not even conversation. It is the remarkable sense of shared joy, and indeed pain and struggle sometimes, in doing this strange thing called painting (and the same is true for sculpture that I shall discuss in a moment). Making art is about wanting to see something that never existed before, yet making it in the presence of all the others that have also been *making*.

So, an exhibition is a *moment* of encounter with a collection of events created by artists negotiating the *time* of making something new

through their internal dialogue with *memories* of long histories of their medium.

**Frank Bowling** is an artist of staggering creative invention and imagination. His work from the mid-60s begins with his exploration of the discoveries by the mid-20th century Abstract Expressionists—an international community notably in New York—that the core elements of painting: support, medium, colour and gesture were sufficient to create works offering perpetual visual fascination and resonance. But he also began his studies amidst the daring challenges to modernism that artists in London joyously proposed in the early 1960s. Arriving in London in 1953 from Guyana—meaning ‘Land of many waters’ in the language of its first people—which was, in his childhood, British Guiana, a colony on the Latin American continent whose economy had been built on the labour of enslaved African people. With a scholarship, in 1959 he entered the Royal College of Art where he studied alongside the later labelled Pop Artists R.B Kitaj, Pauline Boty, Allen Jones, David Hockney, Peter Phillips, later moving to New York in 1966 to learn more about the new debates and the abstract painters there. Colour was Frank Bowling’s area of fascination and his painterly language. Yet, by the early 1960s, the encroachment of the world, not only its fun and its new commodities but also its historic traumas, not only cultural memories but personal histories, all demanded a place in the world of art. This led to an expansion and complication of painting and sculpture, a daring combination of modernist insights and the new image cultures and commodities of the changing world.

For Frank Bowling, I think, this meant the transformation of disciplined purity into a kind of painting that embeds traces of the world

and lived experience into composite, created landscapes made on canvases, sometimes already touching personal memory through imprinting found images on the canvases on which he would then paint. He worked with paint, some spread or stained as colour fields, some poured, increasingly layered, with translucent gel that flows but hardens to hold, suspended in the fields of colour, embedded objects from daily living, even as the whole work is always making us experience colour in and for itself. Being *with* his paintings is a phenomenal (in both senses) experience that takes time to travel into their depth of embedded time. Time of making. Time of his own life. Time as history.

How do paintings get made: this can be explained technically. But that does not help us. When I visited Frank Bowling's studio, a work in progress was on the walls. I learned from his team what had been happening over the days since it began...each day leading to new events, each setting off new questions and generating other events occurring between periods of sitting, looking, learning, deciding. They called this his 'thinking the painting into existence' as each stage was absorbed by his *slow seeing*, and each move was felt, before the new 'encounter' and 'intervention' took the work along its journey to a *becoming* that would finally allow it to *be*. Making seemed to be a dialogue with what had happened and where this might then go.

Creation involves such long, slow looking at each stage to find what it could be or will be at its end through decisions and actions in dialogue with what has happened, planned, unexpected, exciting, or disconcerting. Abstraction is so poorly named since abstract painting is never about taking anything away; it concerns deep discovery, which has been going on since the first adoption of oil paint, by each painter,

and in each generation, of what this curious combination of materiality can be and do.

Yet each painting becomes an archaeology of moment in a lifetime. Frank Bowling has said that his titles are *aide-mémoires*. They hold, for him, 'a tremor of experience' in his own lived time as he made the work. The match of title to painting is not a key to meaning; it is a time-stamp of lived life whose singularity opens to an experience each of us can have once we tune into the dialectical relation between *how* the painting was physically made and the *what* of its materiality, scale, and the space created by colour relations and tensions, their pushing and pulling, interrupted or redirected by physical additions, that make the plane of each painting a landscape of memories.

Yet, we gallery visitors, never see what his team see in the studio, the process, the stages, the changes. If we imagine that embedded time of becoming, we might make our own journeys around and into the 'field of dreams' we meet in the materiality of his works in paint on canvas or drawn in humorous delight and deep seriousness in welded, found steel.

Here, in this exhibition space, we encounter four large paintings by Frank Bowling, the earliest of which, dated 1976 is a tall, vertical painting in acrylic that looks like an ancient monument, a monolith in colour. It is titled *Sentinel*. Yet it was created by pouring paint in several colours down a canvas manipulated to allow the paint to form its own interplay of colour in the gravity-directed flow of the medium doing its own fluid thing. Some works made this way are then hung with the source of the pour at the base so that the 'flows' of paint rise to form a coloured cliff face. Axis changes everything. In *Sasha's Green Bag*,



1988, acrylic paint, acrylic gel, polyurethane foam and found objects meet on a visually complex canvas divided into 12 compartments created by embedded bars of found material that mimic a Minimalist grid while, technically, preventing the objects suspended in gel from slithering down under their own weight. The canvas becomes a play of forces as well as echoing an urban grid.

This work is itself a combination of canvases since strips of coloured canvas has been added to its edges. The technique is known as *marouflage*. *Marouflage* was a traditional method for attaching paintings on canvas to walls by gluing them to another canvas or here by adding to strips, also painted, to create a border that, however, emerges like a backing and adds another dimension of colour to the overall 'field' of this composite work. Frank Bowling introduces these strips of added canvas, at certain stages, to enable his painting to reach its own edge, which becomes visible not as an edge, but a line, a limit of one field, through the added 'frame' and extended ground of coloured strips of canvas. His paintings can then be stretched even as the *marouflage* additions make the 'painting' itself self-framing and yet also unframed. His arena of action as the painter then floats in a space of otherness, marked off from the added strips that simply 'say' *colour* and *canvas*—the modernist elements—against which his miraculous, troubled, embedded, layered surfaces demand long, slow, exploration and hence time. Faithful to the crossing of Abstraction and Pop Art's embrace of the lived world, Frank Bowling's paintings then become archaeologies found only in the repeated act of making paintings.

In *Brooklyn III* dated 1993 /2004 acrylic paint meets acrylic gel on a canvas full of surface eruptions or excrescences. These assert and

refuse the flatness of the overall layer and colour, creating their own bodily patterns or shadows across the monochrome surface. In *Nessie*, 2002, marouflaged canvas is supplemented by collage, strips added to a surface variously worked in laid-down colour fields and worked surfaces. Geometry is being asserted and floating on colour fields at the same time.

Dating from 2019, roses, letters, plastic strips and those in canvas, paper umbrellas and sundry medical supplies share space on the multi-canvas-ed painting, *Mummybelli*, with its own frames painted within and around. Redness demands attention across the top, coming forward while graduated tones of pale blue along the right edge fade into space. Three circles define the surface. They are superimposed radiating geometric paper objects asymmetrically centred. In their flatness they re-assert a surface plane. Yet their own kaleidoscopic illusionism created by a radiating arrow pattern opens three tiny, red holes, or eyes, in the painting. Then we notice another circular, or rather a failed, wobbly circle made by a line of thread encircling the central area. It counters the rectangularity of the canvas, its marouflaged additions, and collaged strips within. This circularity is battled by the green square that our eyes finally begin to see painted on, but not exactly repeating, the edge of the original canvas where this work probably began. Hours of looking will never fully grasp the worlds within this painting, and the whole universe that the painter has found a way to hold together. Now still, it is monument to the time of making and the orchestration of multiple spaces incited into visibility even as they are being buried.

In the exhibition, we shall also meet a series of small-scale works, paint on paper, by Jo McGonigal. She is also present with an installation of suspended elements traversing two storeys of the building itself and a 'structure'. Jo McGonigal's work is defined as painting, but this 'painting' is made of brass with 'geological elements' lying along a suspended bar. There is also 'structure'—set against a wall re-surfaced with gesso (white mineral gypsum once used to be the ground for fresco painting)—including ceramic, marble, steel also classified as *painting*. Is it also sculpture? Or are Frank Bowling's metal works hard drawing in space, structures, or paintings in metal that incorporate the real space of the gallery as their 'ground' even as they sit on and affirm the real ground, a horizontal plane?

Either the classic terms of *sculpture*—objects in space—and *painting*—materials laid on a flat surface—are being wilfully misused, or the artists who have created these works are knowingly, seriously, redefining, if not exploding, these categories. They do so, I suggest, with profound intent to expand their artistic fields of painting and sculpture while, at the same time, showing deep knowledge, and indeed engagement with now-historic Modernism whose protocols they are redefining in acts of both conscious fidelity and boundary-pushing creativity.

Modernism is a shorthand for the 20<sup>th</sup> century artistic revolution in which the *medium* of each artform was 'liberated' from servitude to subject matter (history, theology, image-making). Misdemeanor as abstraction, modernist art was, in effect, bringing to the surface, enjoying and extending the always present and fundamental character, and incompletely harvested potentials, of each art form's *medium* and

resulting field of operation. Expressed as *medium-specificity*, modernist theory defined painting as material applied to a flat surface. Thus, using paint to produce an illusion of three-dimensionality betrays the essential two-dimensionality—flatness—of painting. In practice, modernism discovered, however, that fidelity to the surface, respect for the physical components, exploration of the elements—colour, fluidity, gesture, texture, scale—could themselves produce infinitely complex works of art. By the same logic, sculpture's specificity lies in three dimensionality, scale and axis, producing objects situated in but actively engaging with real space and viewers' body-space, something we then learn to see and experience while also 'seeing' and haptically feeling materials—stone, iron, steel, wood, etc., once they are freed from service to representation.

Modernist theory thus declared a law: each art practice must honour and be faithful to the properties of each medium. Far from being limitation, these principles generated, and still incite, enormous diversity and creativity. No artist working after the modernist revolution can abandon these insights, even as they push them to their limits, and beyond, while they also feel free to draw on every era and resource in the history of painting or sculpture as well. There, with modernist eyes, they discover the deep logics already at work even in what appear to be representational art. Making art becomes a wager, work by work. How to be both faithful to a generative discovery that led in its purist form to modernist medium specificity and even abstraction while also, in a postmodern consciousness, being loyal to the world of lived experience, its social urgencies, including climate emergencies, human violence and violation of others and the earth, and acknowledgement or shared

inhabitation of a material world, to new discoveries of what art needs to be exploring on our behalf, while staying true to the deep logics of all forms of making.

**Jo McGonigal** is a painter, yet she does not put paint on canvas. Artistic conversations with her tradition have taken her not only deep into modernist structuralism but also back to a specific moment in the history of the use of oil painting in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. What made possible the works of artists such as Johannes Vermeer (Dutch, 1632-1675) or Nicolas Poussin (French, 1594-1665), two artists of special interest to Jo McGonigal, was deeply rooted in the social, economic, colonial, enslaving and gendered structures of European society when science, as the discovery of the laws of process and structures, initiated a modern mentality. This was translated into a technology of image making that became fascinated with constructing pictorial space at the intersection of geometry(order) and colour (affect). Through oil paint, colour had already been brilliantly explored by artists such as Titian in the sixteenth century but not yet in the terms that Poussin and Vermeer revealed, when they deployed colour to compose *space* while compositionally invoking geometry. Poussin made us see space through landscape while Vermeer mobilized the architectonics of the domestic interior to *make* space. I mention these names not because of any line of descent, or influence. Jo McGonigal's radical work now makes us see those older painters differently, both structurally, and psychologically. She does this by going through abstraction into a new kind of materialism. Let me explain by repeating my opening sentence:

When I stand before paintings by Frank Bowling, I ask: “what is the painting doing?”. Encountering work by Jo McGonigal, I ask: “what is painting being”?

Not *the* or *a*, but painting. When I visited Jo McGonigal’s Manchester studio, the new work for this show was in progress in one section of the studio where a space was set aside for exploring the composition of elements *in real space*. What I encountered did not look like *a painting*. Yet, it is *painting*. The road to my understanding this proposition involves radically expanding beyond the confines of frame and support.

For instance, I usually encounter a painting in a gallery. The gallery is an architectural space with its floors, walls, ceiling, windows and doors. I hardly think about them. Yet they are actively shaping and defining the space of my experience and encounter with the things—the artworks—that act upon and are acted upon by the stairs, the windows, the desks, in this space. Castlefield Gallery is on two floors, with double height in some parts, more defined space on the lower floor, stairways on entry and for descent. What if the elements of a painting, understood as a thing in the world, decided *to converse* with the other things and elements of the space of the gallery so that we might see, if not feel, their interaction, or what Karen Barad (more shortly) terms *intra-action*. This is what Jo McGonigal is exploring. She draws on a form of storytelling from the 18th century called It-Narratives where writers playfully imagined *things* ‘telling’ their own stories and conversing with other *things*. Let us imagine a conversation between a wall and a painting. ‘I support you, but no one notices me’, says Wall. ‘I imitate

your geometry with my shape and lines, but people only see through my surface', says Painting, while adding, 'I need your flatness for support but try to look as if I am floating in space, opening a window into the world outside.'

What happens when painting also begins to question itself and when its elements and materials are given each their own narrative? Space, for a starter, becomes real. We might now notice the shared horizontals and verticals in both the architecture and an artwork. We might experience materials, some raw, reminding us of where they come from—the earth for the pigment in paint, animal skins for surfaces like gesso or fur for brushes. Landscape ceases to be a fabricated picture of the world. Art becomes part of and in the world of materials and things, with us, for we are also made up of materials.

The basis for this approach—New Materialism is the philosophical equivalent—to contemporary painting is rooted deep in the moments and practices that also shaped Frank Bowling's work. As a painter, he learnt from high abstraction and gestural expressionism but also participated in constant new discoveries about acknowledging the real dimension of a painting as a material thing, such as the frame reminds us how the US-American painter Frank Stella (1936-2024) encouraged us to treat the painting as object, and to see the 'working space' *in* painting. For instance, in his lectures on *Working Space* (Harvard University Press, 1986), Stella revisited 17<sup>th</sup> century Baroque painting, arguing that even Caravaggio's illusionism prompts us to recognize the *dynamic* of pictorial space. Stella encouraged painters to address 'the space all around us – the space behind us, next to us, below us, and above us – in addition of course, to the space in front of us, which we

have so often taken as being the only space available to us as viewers.’ (Jo McGonigal, *The Affect of Painting as a Physical Space* (University of Leeds, PhD, 2018: 22) Jo McGonigal explains her own practice as an ‘attempt to get “inside” these pictorial principles, to engage with real spatial ordering.’ By making paintings spatial, that is in real, rather than pictorial space, she also wants to disturb us and the space we inhabit and the architectural elements and spaces that structure it, so that we notice it:

I use this physical terminology as a poetic convention strategically to rethink how painting might *affectively disturb space*, by forcibly penetrating the wall, removing, cutting, etc., applying pressure on its stability and durability. In making a spatial painting how can one force an encounter that enables a *becoming* of architecture, making architecture think, behave differently – or make architecture tremble? This is not reducible to the physical world but also extends to a psychological interiority where the notion of a ‘disturbance’ or ‘interruption’ is a creative mutation or change of direction between oneself and the space ‘itself.’ (Jo McGonigal, *The Affect of Painting as a Physical Space* (University of Leeds, PhD, 2018: 81)

Tremble, disturb, affect—these link to Frank Bowling’s term ‘tremor of knowing’ that his titles hold before him to remind him of the real time of making his paintings. In an interview on the Tate website, Frank Bowling says: ‘it was a kind of diary that when I go back I can, not so much relive the experience, but have the tremor of knowing that that experience existed.’

I used the term *intra-act* above. Let me explain it more. New Materialist thinking—and hence new materialist painting—emerges as



an exciting encounter between the radical insights of quantum physics—how do the tiniest elements of which the universe is constituted operate on each other—and a new way of understanding ourselves as part of this *intra-acting* universe of material elements that are not just interacting but are entangled, shaping each other at a level of fundamental inseparability: ‘intra-acting’ is queer-feminist philosopher of science, Karen Barad’s terms explained in her book, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007). Such thinking challenges human superiority and distance from the world of things. Barad argues that we must imagine all things in the world as ‘agents’ acting on us, with us, all of our being of the world, and of its substances that take different forms and are never inert. We intra-act. So, what would new materialist art be like?

When we encounter a *painting* by Jo McGonigal we may anticipate a thing hanging on the wall, and so we may not see what she has done, when we meet suspended lines in space, drawing our attention to the double height of the stairwell descending from upstairs to the main gallery : ‘a large wall surfaced in gesso with suspended brass, pigment and other materials’, and, in the lower gallery ‘a large open structure in brass, and a bamboo grid scaffolding structure with other geological elements’, or upstairs a ‘gesso prepared wall’ with ‘a structure composed of ceramic, marble and steel’. (Artist’s notes to me) Look again and you may see that ‘painting’ has been deconstructed into its component elements that were hitherto invisible for us as the active elements in all paintings. You will also see that the materials present

lines in real space that echo the architecture of the gallery that already shapes the space where the painting is 'acting' on it.

Jo McGonigal's painting acknowledges the gallery architecture, in which the work exists, as itself an active element of the work and our experience of both. Her painting is itself about the space that orthodoxies of modernism told artists to squeeze out as false, illusionistic by asserting the flatness of the canvas. Painting then had to become honest about the fact of its two-dimensionality. However wonderful its historical mastery of the illusion of space had been, painting can now also make us recognise that space is there; it is something we inhabit alongside all sorts of other things as well as other beings. Space is actively shaped by things put into it, but it is shaping them, too. Space is not passive, dead, empty, a mere container. Moreover, things are also agents. They affect us, as we register their phenomenal presence through our own physical senses and they incite psychological responses to what we encounter, verticals and horizontals, metals, animal residue, geological stuff. We not only see, but we also *feel* space and *react* to materials. Materialities, thus combined, induce both thought and feeling. This is what art is doing. For instance, the fundamental axis of bipedal human movement and passage through the world of space is verticality. We stand upright. Horizontality is associated with sleep, rest, death. Furthermore, the geometry of architectural space, plays between verticality and horizontality as do framed paintings and what is in the paintings on the real wall and via the representations of the world that we sometimes find within the rectangular or square objects termed painting. Frank Bowling's *Sentinel* or *Sasha's Green Bag* come to mind. Landscape

painting and indeed landscape as actual space when we perceive it as 'a view' relies on receding horizontal planes to produce a sense of depth or recession into space, an illusion enhanced by punctuating landscapes with verticals such as trees or buildings or figures subtle shifts of tone. If we abstract them and place a 'deconstructed' painting in the gallery, we might notice that system and not treat space as emptiness, but as real precisely because the elements Jo McGonigal assembles can be seen to be doing that work in real space.

Abstraction is not about removing but revealing deep structures formerly 'veiled' by illusionistic representation. New materialist painting is liberated to enact a play of its elements in real space where objects in their *thingness* work with each other, and *intra-act*, for real, and with us. As elements of the work in space, we are no longer outside the work, as viewers looking at its invented world, rich as it is. We become co-agents who bring the elements into co-working.

Jo McGonigal is, thus, interested in what used to be classified as landscape, a genre of art which examines our relation to the natural and the material world, mediated by medium and materials: canvas, wood, pigment, oil, animal glue, hair as in the case of brushes—and also by stories, legends, dreams, images. 'Landscape' now escapes the frame as do the materialities their function in servicing representation. So, if we find ourselves in this gallery with a structure such as those introduced and presented by Jo McGonigal, her structure/painting is still speaking the language of painting: horizontality, verticality, supports, space, earthly and animal-based materials, place, but what they do now is enact verbs: *hanging, touching, resting, being present, shaping, being solid or fine, carrying, drawing, remaking space.*

The gallery ceases to be a container, a set of walls on which to hang an image that we visually scan as a sight. We are in a real space with real things. Frank Bowling's painting already talks about this in a richly materialist language of painting as it interrogated itself and allowed the imprint and even the things of the world and his life to find a 'space' in his paintings and activate or suspend the tremor of memories. As deeply engaged with her peers and indeed artistic ancestors, Jo McGonigal's painting expands the language for painting, just as profoundly involved with space and materiality as were Poussin and Vermeer, and is Frank Bowling now, especially in his three-dimensional works, typically termed sculptures, made with, rather than from, the materials of the cities he inhabits. He assembles their discarded limbs into a new 'composition in space', each curving form, support, grid or trellis becoming metal drawing in space while the combinations in playfully Baroque compositions make us see and feel the structural materiality of our vertical-horizontal cities.

Finally, also, using Wall (thank you, Wall), there are more 'things', works with colour by Jo McGonigal, which might more conventionally be called paintings. Using paint on paper which is itself an organic material, with brushes made of wood and fibre, these works may resemble pictures in an art gallery. Jo McGonigal's paper works, however, also make us see space and learn about framing.

Each work is a geometric square created on a rectangle of paper created by an area of paint that is the material trace of the physical movements of a brush moved by a hand. What we see is not a representation, but an indexical trace of the body at work, holding a brush, a thing with material elements, but making *movement* visible.

These works record, and convey, expended energy but become stilled movement, traced in time and registered in material on material, paint on paper. Each trace interacts with the other materialised traces on the paper to generate a tiny universe in motion, dynamic movement as a field of energies.

Before we are carried away in sheer wonder before her gestural abstraction, the artist lays over the field a grid of coloured line(s) or dots that *intra-act*, chromatically and compositionally. These engender yet another space that we optically experience. This has been called into existence between the painted recordings of human energy and the material 'surface', the paper on which they have been laid. It is as if an invisible depth opens up, a space being constantly incited before our eyes as a result of the vibrations of coloured light that the pigments create but which we cannot quite grasp. This is not illusionistic space. It is both an optical illusion and utterly real at the same time.

Between Frank Bowling's and Jo McGonigal's different moments of deep engagement with the materiality of painting and the world, we can track a cultural tendency to expand painting beyond the frame or to allow the world into the space of the painting. Earlier moves include Robert Rauschenberg's 'combines' where painting met real things or artists such as Jessica Stockholder who is associated with expanded painting, breaking out of or breaking down the frame.

I also think a work by sculptor Eva Hesse (1934-1970), *Hang Up*, (1966, Art Institute of Chicago) where the artist bandaged a stretcher with painted, very subtly modulated monochrome material, and then hung the object-thing, empty, but framing a space, on the wall. The It-Narrative goes like this: Work says to Wall: 'I am a painting, support

me, but I shall frame you a bit and become a painting of nothing.' Then, we notice a length of steel pipe, wrapped in painted cord that looks as if it is emerging out of the top left of the frame/painting to curve and touch the floor while returning to penetrate the lower right edge of the frame/painting. The Steel Pipe asks: 'Am I sculpture? Yet I am connected to a frame. Am I a line escaping from the painting to roam in real space? Am I a line drawn in space? Is my line making real the space defined by, and the space in front of, the non-painting object on the wall?' Labelled absurdist, eccentric abstraction, *Hang Up* makes new sense in retrospect through a materialist perspective.

Frank Bowling's vast paintings and metal sculptures and Jo McGonigal's structures and paper works require a lot of seeing. They destabilize our capacity to trust what our eyes tell us we are seeing. We yield, nonetheless, to pleasure, marvelling once again at what painting can still *do*, but also realizing how expanded and varied is what painting can now *be*.

40 Years of the Future: Jo McGonigal x Frank Bowling is generously supported by the Henry Moore Foundation and the University of Leeds.



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**



A special thank you to Ben Bowling, Frank Bowling, Sam Cornish, Griselda Pollock and Susi Sahmland.

Castlefield Gallery Funders and supporters:



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



**MANCHESTER  
CITY COUNCIL**

