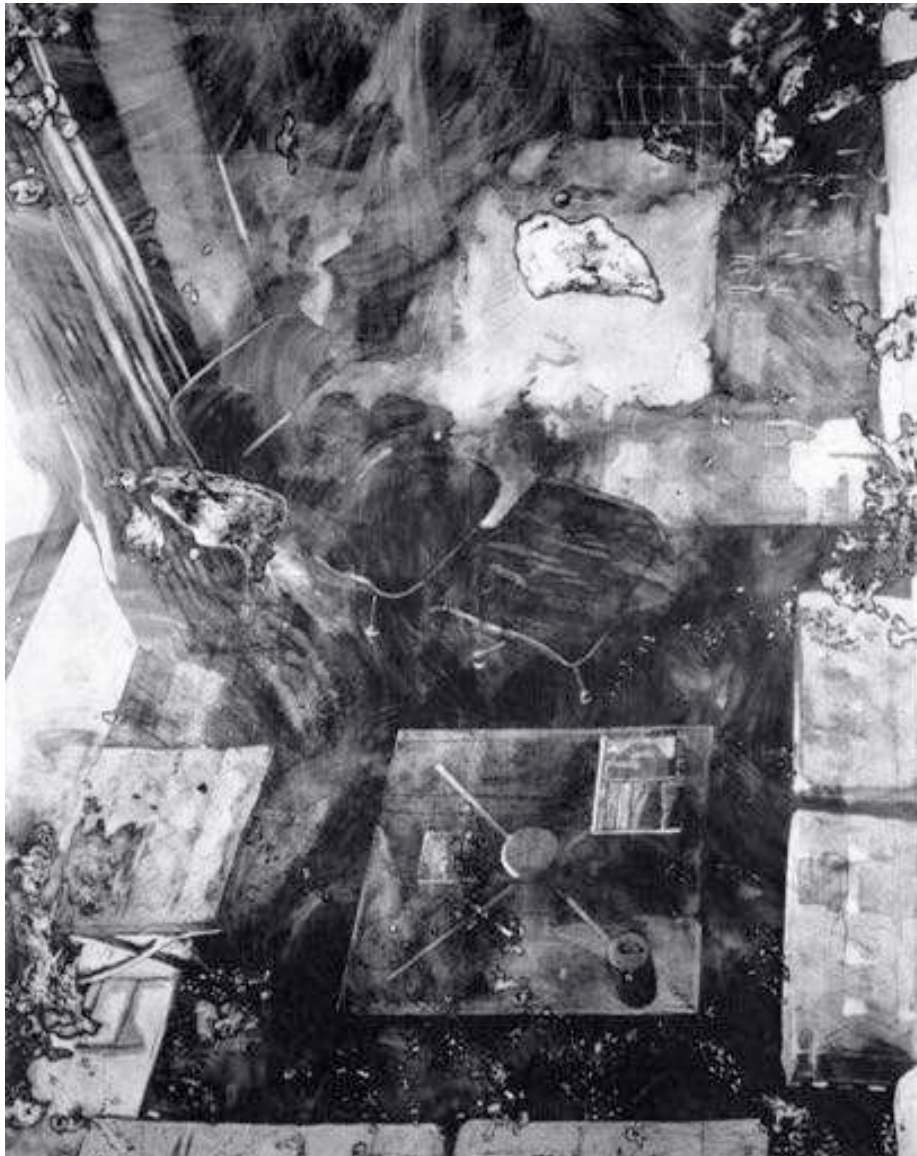


Oil Painting Class – The 21st century, Part 1

Sadie Murdoch

This week, I am going to show you some paintings that I made at the beginning of the 21st Century. It was a time when I was trying to question what I was doing as a painter. The answer to the question was more paintings, as it always is really!

At the end of the 1990s I was making work which took the form of large-scale paintings rendered in black ink, detergent and house-paint. I selected photographic images of domestic interiors that often contained Modernist paintings, sculptures or furniture and then projected them onto the surfaces of blank white canvas. This was done using a photograph printed onto acetate then placed on an overhead projector. The images were then drawn, poured and wiped onto the surface of the picture. I was both adding and 'cleaning away' the image at the same time.

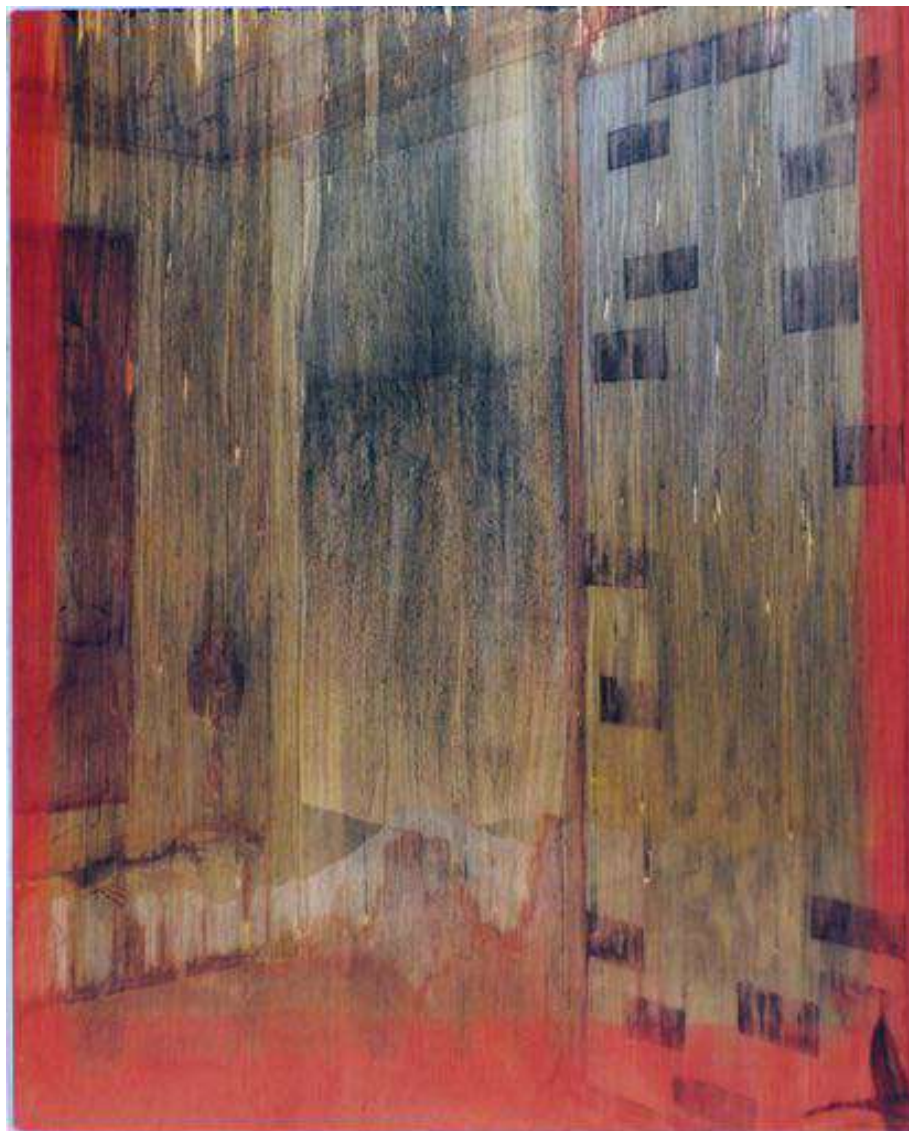


Sadie Murdoch. Foreign Bodies, black ink, detergent and House paint on canvas 1999

At some point, I started to become more interested in images that had become iconic examples of Modernist art and design. Modernism is really a 'catch-all' term for a range of styles and ideas in art, design, music and literature in the first half of the 20th Century. I was interested in the formal 'framing' of the photograph and what this said, or seemed to be trying to say about the kind of spaces that were depicted.

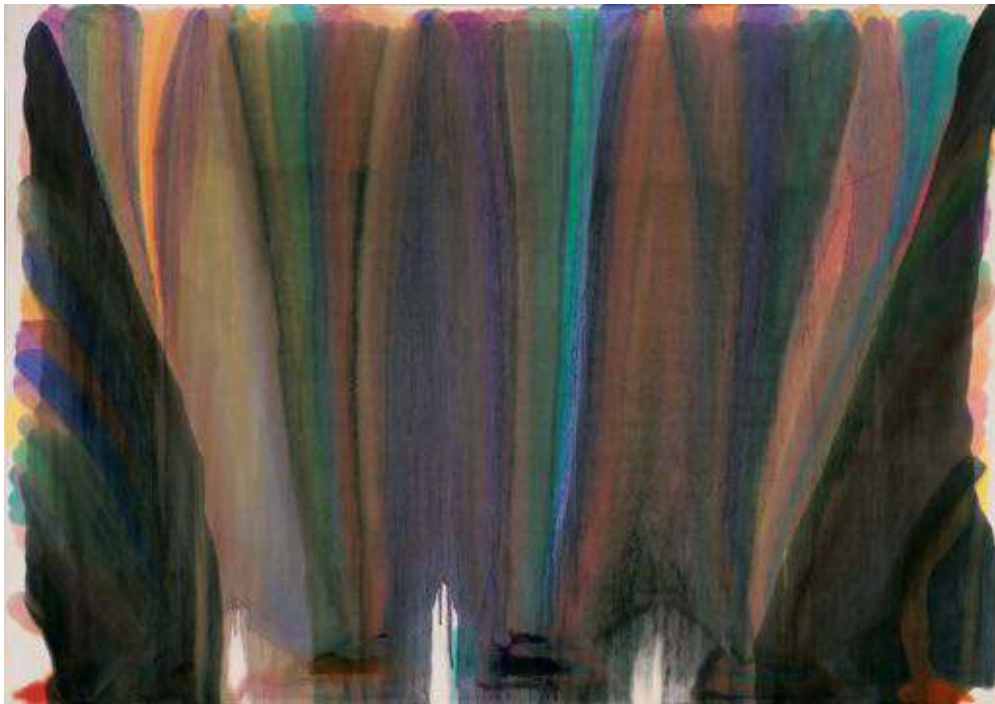
"Foreign Bodies" from 1999 includes a Charles and Ray Eames chair. The work is quite large, about 3 metres high. The original 'source' photo was taken from above, which sort of flattens the pictorial space. I made a number of experiments, splattering gloss house paint on top of the image so that the shapes formed became like floating blobs on top of the surface of the painting - like the floaters you get in your eyes sometimes when you look at a bright sky. The title "foreign bodies" refers to this.

Another painting, one of a series called "Modernist Space", was made with oil on linen. I wanted to see if I could translate the effects of my pouring/cleaning/ wiping back into oil paint. I was also looking at the work of American painter Morris Louis..

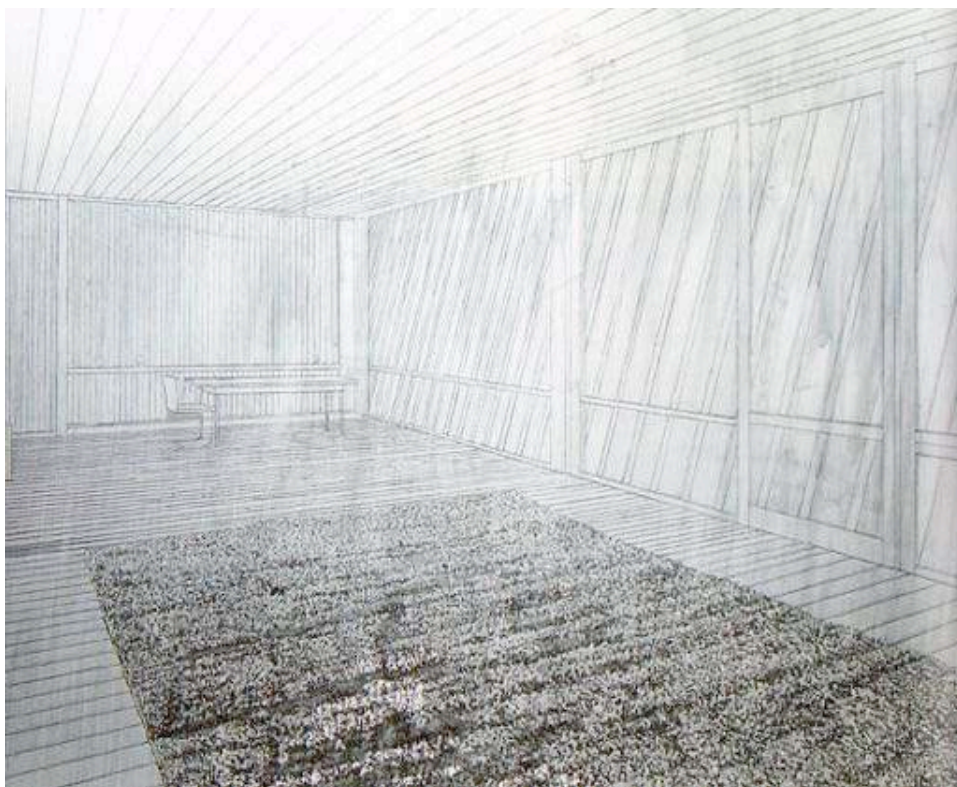


Sadie Murdoch. Modernist space. 2 1999 Oil and turpentine on linen, 259 x 203 cms

Louis used a 'stain and soak' technique, pouring thinned acrylic resin paint onto raw canvas. The canvases are like giant watercolours in a way, and the effect when you stand in front of them, is that of a brilliantly coloured waterfall.



Morris Louis, Dalet Kaf (1959), acrylic resin on canvas



Sadie Murdoch. Modernist Space 7. black ink, detergent, house paint on canvas 1999 285 x 280 cms

This painting from 1999 is entitled modernist Space no 7. It was based on a photograph I had, (now mislaid!) of Philip Johnson's Glass House in the United States I removed all the furniture and sculptures apart from a chair and a table, and the carpet.. The house was built in 1949, and is emblematic of the post WW II Modernist movement. It contains a number of classic examples of Modernist furniture by Ludwig Mies Van De Rohe and Lilly Reich. The house is very serene and entirely encased by glass windows, located in a private estate in Connecticut. It exudes luxury and privilege. Let's take a look!



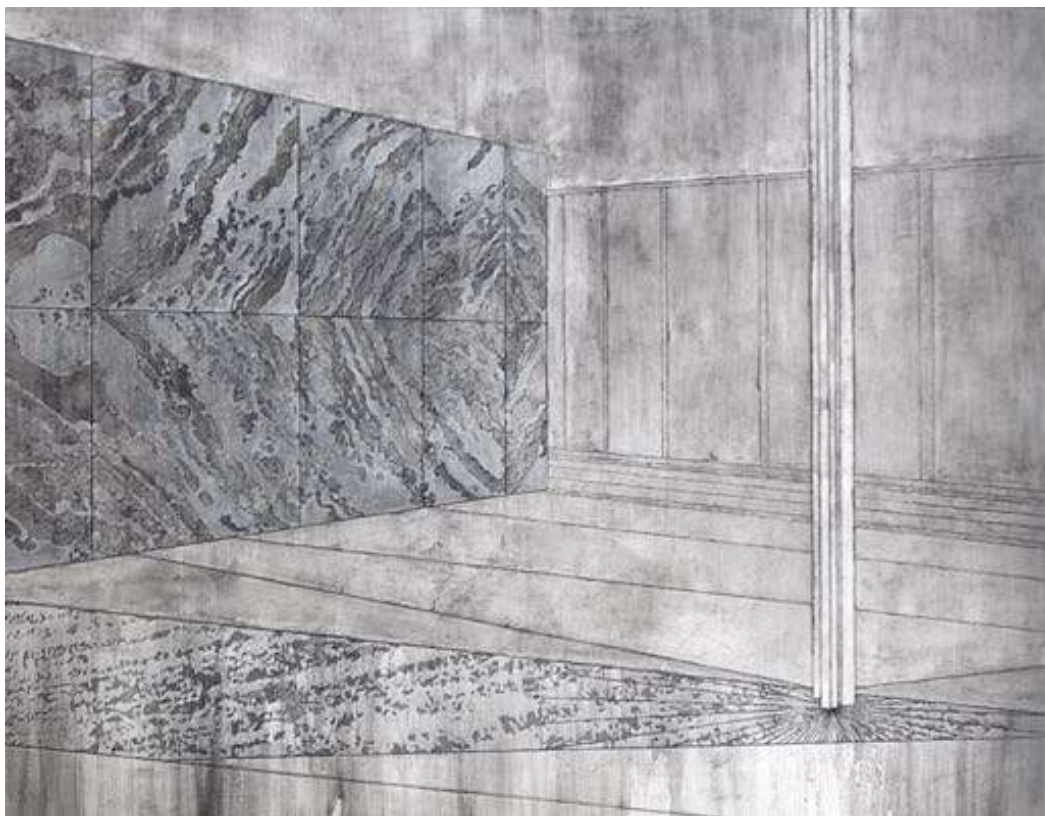
Philip Johnson, Glass House, Interior, Connecticut 1949



Philip Johnson, Glass House, Connecticut 1949



Philip Johnson, Glass House, Interior, Connecticut 1949. Furniture by Ludwig Mies van Der Roe and Lilly Reich.



Sadie Murdoch. Modernist Space 6. Black ink, detergent, house paint on canvas. 1999 285 x 280 cms

Johnson, Reich and Mies van der Rohe created examples of Modernist design which are extraordinarily beautiful, but generally not designed for mass production or everyday use. In a way, they are like very large sculptures, but you can inhabit them.! Mies Van Der Rohe was director of the Bauhaus school in Germany and moved to the United States at the beginning of World War II. Reich, Mies van der Rohe's senior assistant, was also Director of the German Werkbund. My painting Modernist Space 6, from 2000 was based on a photograph of Mies van Der Roe and Reich's spectacular Barcelona Pavilion completed in 1929. This structure is another iconic example of modernist design. Again, it's all about glass and transparency - and luxury.



Ludwig Mies van der Roe and Lilly Reich, Barcelona Pavilion, Barcelona, Spain 1929. Rebuilt 1986

So, what's going on here? Essentially in my work, a photograph of a modernist interior is translated into a stripped-down diagram which then becomes a big painting. Black ink and detergent was used to 'reveal' the image, giving it depth and texture, but at the same time 'problematizing' the pictorial field. The residue of black ink evokes soiling and staining and processes more closely related to cleaning. A sense of entropy, decay and unquenchable seepage contests ideas which the original photographs were meant to project - ideas of rationalism, utilitarianism and progress.

My paintings from this time also occupy an 'intermediary zone' - a kind of no man's land. Here abstraction and representation co-exist, and a sense of domestic living, history and occupancy is introduced into the clean lines of modernist design.



Ludwig Mies van Der Roe and Lilly Reich, Barcelona Pavilion, Barcelona, Spain 1929. Rebuilt 1986

Back to the Barcelona Pavilion. For me the Pavilion is also extremely painterly. Set high on Montjuic overlooking the harbour of Barcelona, it contains water features and



is full of texture, reflections and imagery. It was commissioned by the Weimar Republic in Germany, to advertise a new, progressive, democratic and modern Germany, at the 1929 International Exposition in Barcelona, a decade on from the Treaty of Versailles and the carnage of World War I. It had stood for no more than a few months before it was pulled down. All that was left were drawings and photographs. It was constructed in four shades of tinted glass, marble, onyx, chromed steel and travertine. A perfect replica exists today. Go see it if you can! The sculptures by Georg Kolbe animate the cool clean lines of the architecture, creating a strange impression that the building is occupied, even when it is empty.

