

1. Description

For my degree show (June 2023) I created *The Primordial Series*, a selection of paintings that combined geometric grids, and abstraction with references to drawings, photographs, and spontaneous mark-making of five children aged between four and eight. I facilitated informal workshops, emphasising curiosity, and freedom of expression. Their contributions became material I brought into my paintings, not just as 'influence' but as a resource that disrupted my control and brought unpredictability into the work. At the time, I described this in relation to Jungian psychology, a search for balance between instinct and reason, the unconscious and the structured.

2. Feelings

I was fascinated by the children's raw creativity and how easily they moved into play and experimentation, free of self-consciousness. Their spontaneity felt like access to something I no longer had. As a single mother, I was surrounded by children in my daily life, so this way of working felt natural to me, though it contrasted with many of my peers whose practices were shaped by more independent student lifestyles. At the same time, I wasn't thinking about collaboration or shared authorship. My focus was on reconnecting with my own 'inner child,' and in that sense the project was more self-directed than participatory.

3. Evaluation

Positive: The children's involvement brought freshness and unpredictability into the process. Their drawings broke through the rigidity of my grids and encouraged me to loosen control. The project opened up new ways of working and hinted at the potential of involving others.

Negative: Looking back, their participation was instrumental rather than collaborative. I was 'using' their creativity to fuel my own rather than making space for their voices.

4. Analysis

This project was not socially engaged in the way I now understand that term. It emerged from my personal circumstances, being immersed in the lives of children as a parent, and from an interest in exploring depth psychological concepts through my art. My intention was self-focused: I saw the children's uninhibited expression as a way to access something instinctive within myself. Still, this experimentation planted an idea. It revealed that involving others could open my work, even if my understanding of what that meant was underdeveloped.

5. Conclusion

The degree show was an early but limited step toward socially engaged practice. My use of children's work reflected my circumstances and my interests at the time, but my aim was not collaborative. I now recognise that while the process offered energy and disruption, it also lacked ethical consideration and critical awareness. Nevertheless, it marked the point where my practice began to turn outward, even if imperfectly.