After *Pictures,* I stopped taking photographs and began instead to collect them. I built my second exhibition around found pictures.[[1]](#footnote-1)17 It was an untitled exhibition of two pieces, each of 14 parts, shown at Artspace in 1987. Through this work I wanted to allow for a complexity of readings between the images which made up each of the two pieces, between the pieces and scale, and between the work and the viewer.

1. The first piece was a set of seven large pictures including:

1. painted details copied from a painting by Andre Derain photographed beside details from finger paintings I made
2. a blurred and grainy photograph of a female flamenco dancer reproduced life-size as a transparency
3. a rough acrylic painting of colours mixed wet on the canvas to achieve photographic mid-grey while revealing flashes of colour (the only colour in this set)
4. a large photograph of a section of hessian next to another detail reproduced from the Derain painting
5. a side-on, fuzzy photograph of a bird in flight with wings blurred by frozen movement, reproduced as a spray painting on canvas
6. a photograph of two printed letters on a page abstracted at great magnification by the paper texture
7. a white spray painting on black acrylic of an enlarged section of a newspaper screen dot image. The individual pictures varied between 85cms and 200cms in height and width - roughly body scale. The three large paper photographs were mounted on wooden box-like frames jutting out from the wall without glass. This was to emphasise the photographs as objects. They were framed without glass to avoid creating barriers between themselves and the viewer, and to avoid obstructing vision. From a distance the photographs of the painted details looked to some people like canvases.

I chose Derain's paintings because he was an eclectic artist who painted in many different styles, constantly changing his approach to painting and therefore difficult to define as belonging to a single style. In my photograph, my own rough finger painting details butted up next to the Derain reproduction. In the photograph these two different details appeared continuous and unable to be separated from one another. I wanted to paint like Derain, and to be part of that art history of which he was part.

The images of the flamenco figure and the bird were intended to refer to one another as being dynamic, and in full flight, and therefore in contrast to the other static images. The dancer, with her strong back to the viewer, represented defiance and passion and hinted at a choreography of pictures.

The woman in this transparency, which hung freely away from the wall, is unable to be confronted from either side. She has 'two backs'[[2]](#footnote-2)18. She is self contained and inaccessible, and anonymous. Anonymity is both a haven and an invisibility. So many women have been (and still are) the faceless supports and functionaries of men who are at the centre stages of history and culture. I did not want this kind of anonymity, nor did I want to be the object of male gaze or power - to be seen but not heard. Nor did I want to be seen but not known on my own terms.

I saw this set of seven pictures as one piece of work.

2. The second piece was reproduced to a scale relating to the human head or hand, with each of its images measuring 25 x 25 cm and made in different materials. This second piece was intended to highlight the different values placed on an artwork depending on its size or material. This piece was meant to suggest the possibility of multiple reproductions, materials, contexts and interpretations that a single image might have.

My access to the images was made possible by forms of mechanical reproduction mediating between myself and the original images. In highly magnified images, or those taken from outer space, technology is more than a mediator, it is also a translator of visual representation. It shows us its views of the world as abstract images that do not match our own experiences of it, such as in a satellite image of the earth taken far above it, or the electron-micrographic views of cells deep inside our bodies.

These are views necessarily mediated through imaging technology in order to be made visible to us. The technology produces the image as fragments - grains, dots, pixels. With increased magnification the picture plane is no longer continuous but made up of little blank spaces between dots or grains, fragmented and unrecognisable as a representation of its subject. This suggests that no single view of something can be the only correct one, but that there exist many different views, and potentially many more that challenge our perception. When we are unable to recognise an image, our imagination and memory fill in the blanks. From the electron microscope to the satellite camera, technology is able to give us ever new, multiple, abstracted visual fragments of the world for us to interpret, giving the impression that all things are always in flux - in processes of transition and transformation.

The following word construction accompanied this exhibition. It can be read in any direction, forming phrases in free association. This text, and its form, were intended to provide clues to elements in this, and on-going, work.

manifold

generic visual history

aspects dilate detail

record parallel congruity

graph painting photography

compose object possibilities

movement choreograph change

lateral oblique matter

1. 1I had stopped taking pictures, because I realised that those I was taking were formally similar to many taken before mine, or just clichéd, and also because there were already so many pictures in the world that had not been used to their full potential, as I saw it - in a sense they would be new pictures if given a new context. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2Dr Susan Best, Continuum, Spring refers to the two backs in a later piece entitled, *Vault*. "Bette Mifsud and the Matter of Photography”*, Continuum, Vol. 6 #2.* p72. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)