

After Life (1996) was prompted by a need to find my place as a female artist working with the medium of photography burdened by the historical weight of painting. Furthermore, men had dominated both media.

After Life is a set of close-up photographs of paintings I made from reproductions in a book entitled, *'Techniques of the Great Masters of Art'*. I painted details from reproductions of paintings by Van Gogh, the Giotto School, Jasper Johns and Jackson Pollock using similar materials, colours and techniques as those artists had used originally. I then photographed my painted copies in extreme close-up, resulting in exaggerated abstractions. I see these abstracted reproductions as the 'offspring' of the original paintings that possess an identity of their own.

My use of magnification here recalled my earlier works that dealt with the way micrography and other imaging technologies fragment, abstract and transform the appearance of things. These technologies are able to infinitely reproduce vestiges of things, such a pollen or human cells, (existent and no longer existent) in ways utterly different from our direct experience of them.

Photographs have complex relationships with life, being, time and space. All photographs could be interpreted as reproductions of things that were already there before the photograph was taken¹. A similar interpretation could be applied to art generally—as a reflection of the past, present or as yet-to-be-seen aspects of life and being. According to Walter Benjamin, *'even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space ... technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself.'*²

Reproduction plays a large part in the preservation of artworks, the dissemination of culture and the documentation of art history. Those master painters and their artworks are out of my physical and cultural reach. However, by making my painting reproductions *after* theirs in this way, I felt I could make a tangible connection and generational link with those artists. My reproductions symbolically link me to these, my creative forerunners.

Dr Bette Mifsud

1996

¹ Crimp, D., 1993, *On the Museum's Ruins*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, p.119

² Arendt, H., 1969, *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, New York. p.221