

The black and white transparency reproduction of the Versailles Garden painting by Pierre Patel the Elder in 1668, was included as my symbol of culture and power in European history.⁶ It refers to the dominant and controlling position that humanity assumes for itself in the world.

The garden at the Versailles Palace no longer looks as it did in Patel the Elder's painting of 1668. Its framed scale is intended to approximate a portrait-sized window. Its mirror backing reflects the viewer's own silvery portrait: as the viewer looks 'out' into the visual perspective of the landscape, the viewer's face looks back at them from within that landscape. This is intended to refer to the inscription of the human upon the landscape, and that our perceptions of the world 'out there' perhaps largely exist within.

⁶ The symmetrical garden also represents for me a picture of material wealth and is symbolic of power. Empires rise and fall. Authority lasts only as long as its inevitable obsolescence or successor allows.

Mute (1990) was conceived in 1989, before the ubiquity of today's digital photography, however, its core tenets remain relevant.

The images of things hitherto unseen, or inaccessible to direct human vision, are created by electron-micrography, satellite photography, radiography, nuclear magnetic resonance, and cryo-electronic microscopy. Such images are abstracted, not self-evident and so, are not immediately recognisable.

The transparent images in *Mute* are suspended to give the impression that such images are free floating--without a solid backdrop, and unable to be pinned down in the immediate physical world. Their transparency also suggests that they are essentially immaterial and not to be confused with their material supports. This highlights the fact that a single image can exist with or without material supports.¹

Mute work does not sit passively on the gallery wall, complete unto itself and in a hierarchical relationship to the viewer. The three vertical colour transparent images touch the floor shared with the viewer. The suspended transparencies also move when air currents are disturbed by the viewer's movement in the room.

Mute's asymmetrical arrangement of images is intended to suggest neither a front nor a back view, nor a centre, or point of entry to the work, nor a departure point. Instead, it allows the viewer to move freely within and around it as part of the work. The work is complete when a viewer is interacting with it.

Mute's five transparent images are each made by different a different technique:

The original photogram was produced directly onto photographic paper, that is, without the use of a negative, or original visual referent. It took its colours and form from the photographic paper being first crushed by my hand before I exposed to coloured light in the darkroom. The light was refracted by the crushed paper, producing the colours and abstract shapes.

The 'boar whale' is Gesner's imaginative woodcut hybrid of boar and whale. It resembles the representations of ferocious whales seen on old sea charts. The 'boar whale' comes from a period in human history (mid 15 to mid 16th centuries) dominated by voyages of discovery.² At that time, Europeans had heard of strange animals that lurked in new lands and seas.

The fear of encountering such a whale at sea in this period is embodied in the exaggerated image, representing the nexus of an objective phenomenon with fear and human imagination.³

The AIDS virus was a much feared pandemic of the 1980s. The image used here is of a computer colour-coded micrograph of the AIDS virus attacking human blood cells. It is an image which we cannot possibly see with our naked eye.

In this sense, all of *Mute*'s images are all 'fanciful beasts' - representations without a referent, signifiers without signs, images without originals. Outside their original context and without a given caption, they may perhaps speak only to the viewer's imagination that is loaded with remembered images. The viewer's visual history is unable to assist with the interpretation of these images. Uncaptioned, these kinds of images are highly mediated and abstract. Therefore, they cannot speak directly to the viewer about the things they are intended to represent, hence the title.⁴ (Similar AIDS virus images are now sold as 'art stock'.⁵)

We come to such images 'blind' to them, or blinded by them, because they are outside our immediate visual experience.

¹ For an extensive discussion on this aspect of images, also see Broadfoot and Butler's related illuminating arguments on the Index and Icon, in pp. 54-56K. Broadfoot/R. Butler, 'The Abduction of Sight', *Tension* No. 16., *Photofile*, cover, Spring issue.

² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/European-exploration/The-Age-of-Discovery>.

³ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/the-enchanted-sea-monsters-on-medieval-maps-1805646/>

⁴ When *Mute* was exhibited in Gertrude Street Gallery in Melbourne, it was visible from the street and caught the eye of a window designer from a prestigious formal wear boutique in Collins Street. Without knowing where the image originated, she enthusiastically asked if she could hire it to use as a backdrop for wedding dresses in her front window. She never asked about the origin of the image nor what it was meant to represent, and nor did I tell her. I apologetically declined her offer. To this woman, the AIDS micrograph was simply a vividly beautiful image that did not nor need represent anything other than the colourful shapes it contained.

⁵ <https://www.art.com/products/p22108031650-sa-i7582954/false-colour-tem-of-aids-virus.htm>