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STILL NOT GAME

EXPERIENCING A GAME ENGINE WORLD
AS AN ARTISTIC STUDIO SPACE

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Abstract

Still Not Game reflects on the use of an Unreal Engine “world” as a visual artist’s studio space. The artist presents her personal journey of learning and making with the software, never having played a computer game. Determined to create abstract work unrelated to games or simulation, she built a virtual realm more concerned with non-worldly experience. That world formed into a sublime landscape, a timeless space that might transport visitors to altered states. Years later, after many software updates, the artist still feels like a beginner, using only fragments of UE’s vast potential. Through experimentation and accretion, that original world had morphed into an overwhelming space, full of strange objects, overgrown like a crazy garden. A revelation, a shift in the artist’s mindset, suddenly turned it into an artist studio: a site where iteration, what-if scenarios and serendipitous insights give rise to an endless flow of new works, exploring luminosity and transcendent spaces afforded by the new form of the world and the software.

This paper originated from the artist talk *This is not a Game*, delivered at the International Symposium of Electronic Art (2025) in Seoul, South Korea.

Keywords: *Virtual reality, experimental art, 3D, abstraction, game engine, visual art, digital art, artist studio*

Introduction

Unreal Engine (UE), developed by Epic Games, is among the most advanced real-time 3D creation tools available, widely recognised for its application in the design and production of video games such as Fortnite. Publicly available and largely free, UE's technical capacity and its relentless pace of development have made it a staple within the video game industry and entertainment media more broadly. However, its utility extends well beyond these domains.

In this position paper, I provide an account of my adaptation of UE as an artistic medium, from my viewpoint as a visual artist who uses various digital tools, such as video editors, photo software, 3D modelling software, TouchDesigner software, Processing (a programming language for artists), scanning, and more. I have an experimental, process-oriented digital arts practice. I often use photos and videos of light-based phenomena, transforming and distorting them beyond recognition, resulting in abstract digital works of indeterminate form. These are invariably slow moving, colourful, and usually retaining their inherent luminosity. Little is obvious for the rational mind to grasp.

Artwork formats include video, still image, prints, projections, 3D scanning, 3D model "sculptures" as augmented reality pieces, and so on. UE was yet another platform of interest, with its potential to integrate all facets of my work, given its spatial 3d world building capacity.

Without going into the technical vagaries of UE in this paper, I explore how I eventually realised, via my artistic process,

that I was using the 3D world I created *inside* UE as an artist's studio space rather than thinking of UE as an instrument for gameplay or narrative simulation.

In this paper, I will briefly present a lineage of theoretical frameworks and historical references that inform and give context to my artistic practice. I will then outline the journey towards the pivot point of recognising my new studio "head-space". Finally, I will reflect on the meaning of this artistic turn, in the context of various conceptual discussions around studio, post-studio and making.

This paper originated from the artist talk *This is not a Game*, delivered at the International Symposium of Electronic Art (2025) in Seoul, South Korea.

My art framework

Theoretically, my abstract practice and interest in light is aligned with a Neoplatonic framework, particularly as articulated by Plotinus (c. 270 CE) and Iamblichus (c. 245-325 CE), who emphasised the role of light and the intelligible realm in accessing immaterial, transcendent realities (Iamblichus, 2003, Plotinus, c. 270 CE, Shaw, 1995). For Iamblichus, certain visual experiences could serve as vehicles for theurgy, the practice of ascending to higher states of consciousness through ritual and contemplation. I am interested in the potential for my luminous, abstract digital spaces to function similarly as possible sites for transcendence, inviting viewers to apprehend states that might be beyond ordinary perception.

My attraction to luminosity, then, has a philosophical basis: light as both aesthetic phenomenon and metaphysical principle.

While Neoplatonism frames light as a metaphysical conduit to the intelligible realm, Kant offers a complementary aesthetic account of transcendence. His conception of the mathematical sublime in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790/2000), evokes awe through the encounter with vastness and infinity. The sublime gestures toward the formless, the infinite, the boundless. My desire to create transcendent spaces, in as abstract a form as possible, directly engages this Kantian framework, along with the artists of the Romantic Sublime period, such as Caspar David Friedrich (Duffy, 2023).

Modernist abstraction, particularly in its spiritual dimensions, provides further contextual background. Early and explicit expressions can be found in Wassily Kandinsky's aspirations towards spiritual ideas (Kandinsky, 1911/1977). Similarly, Kazimir Malevich's Suprematism sought to liberate art from the world of appearances, aspiring toward pure feeling and non-objective representation (Malevich, 1927/2003). In a later context, Mark Rothko's color field paintings, with their luminous, hovering rectangles of color, aimed to evoke emotional and spiritual responses. James Turrell's light installations go further to manipulate perception itself, creating spaces where light becomes tangible, volumetric, and phenomenologically transformative (Adcock, 1990). These artists form a lineage of abstraction concerned not with formal experimentation for its own sake, but with accessing altered states of consciousness and using luminosity, colour and ethereal spatial experience to create conditions for transcendence.

This lineage of spiritually and phenomenologically oriented abstraction finds a direct continuation in the Californian Light and Space movement of the 1960s and 1970s, including artists such as Robert Irwin, and Doug Wheeler and the above-mentioned Turrell, explored phenomenological perception through carefully orchestrated light, space, and materiality (Butterfield, 1993).

Beyond art history, these concerns resonate strongly with the field of 'transpersonal psychology' (sometimes discussed as "consciousness studies"), which informs much of my thinking, and effectively embraces the above ideas, along with Buddhism and other mystical traditions (Daniels, 2024; Friedman & Hartelius, 2013; Grof, 2000; Wilber, 2000).

I hope to extend this lineage into digital space, where the affordances of real-time rendering engines create possibilities for luminosity and spatial immersion that might contrast with physical media. Of course, not all my work aligns fully with the above interests, but it is always my lofty ideal.

As a result, I share a language with certain visual affinities with computer graphics pioneers like Kawaguchi (1982), whose evolutionary morphological algorithms produced organic, shimmering forms. However, while the interest of artists like Kawaguchi's lay predominately in the formal possibilities of algorithmic generation, and I am drawn to formalism too, my preponderance for colour and luminosity stems from experiential and phenomenological concerns. I am less interested in the technical achievement of graphics than in immersion and experience as extensions of states of mind and consciousness. Where Kawaguchi's work demonstrates

computational process, much of mine seeks to dissolve awareness of process entirely, creating spaces for contemplative absorption.

My attraction to luminosity, color, translucency, and ethereal forms might seem to romanticise the digital's supposed immateriality. The fantasy of pure information unencumbered by physical infrastructure has been critiqued by media theorists who remind us of the material realities of digital technologies: the servers, cables, electricity, minerals, labor, and the environmental impacts that make "virtual" worlds possible (Parikka, 2015; Gabrys, 2011). As a digital artist, it is impossible not to be fully aware of these facts and I acknowledge this reality as a given. However, the primary focus of my practice and inquiry is on the interior experience of the mind.

First encounters with UE

When I embarked on learning the software, I had never played a video game in my life. The culture was entirely new to me and the learning curve proved to be steep. Anyone who has worked with UE will have endured a high volume of tutorial videos that involve producing game assets: guns, animated characters, idealised male and female forms, shooters running around, stereotyped fantasy landscape and architecture, and fantastical explosions. Very few of the online resources showed any diversity among the presenters, panelists and forums. Of course, I now know that games and game culture are much more expansive and sophisticated than this, but first impressions, and ongoing experiences, hold true for much of this context.

This initial encounter represents what Shklovsky (1917/2015) might identify as a moment of defamiliarisation, but in reverse. Rather than making the familiar strange, I found myself, as an artist, made strange within a familiar creative impulse transplanted into foreign soil. The software's assumed user, the implied creative subject (game developer) in its tutorials and interface, bore no resemblance to my aesthetic concerns or conceptual frameworks. As Vilém Flusser argues, every technical apparatus contains embedded programs that channel and constrain creative possibility (Flusser, 1983/2000). In UE, the apparatus was programmed for narrative, action, and simulation; for worldbuilding in the context of gameplay, not for the exploration of non-representational form or transcendent experience.

What brought me to UE was that I dreamed of making a 3D space, potentially in virtual reality (VR), that had nothing to do with games or simulating 'reality', and everything to do with non-worldly experience. I wanted to explore luminosity, and transcendent spaces, in as abstract a form as possible. I approached UE as a generative space in which possibilities could unfold outside the paradigms of established game-making genres and expectations.

This aspiration connects somehow to Malevich's (1959) suprematism, which sought "the supremacy of pure feeling in creative art" (p. 68) through geometric abstraction untethered from representation. In a similar way, I sought to create digital spaces that accessed pure aesthetic experience, unmediated by narrative or simulation. Clearly, I saw possibilities for creating what Turrell describes as "spaces that engage celestial events" (Adcock, 1990, p. 35); environments concerned with

perception, light, and transcendence rather than action and achievement.

Thus, I embarked on making my first VR experience, a world of its own, a finished artwork for the viewer to explore, and my own line in the sand at that time.

Figure 1 shows a snapshot from my first hour learning UE; the beginning of many experiments before my final project emerged, but a marker in time I remain fond of, for its dreamy evocation. The composition reveals an exploration of spatial

depth through layered translucent planes, creating an atmospheric perspective. Its luminous quality, achieved through UE's real-time lighting calculations, suggests an immaterial space, more concerned with visual sensation than physical presence.

Invariably, my work evolved into a sublime landscape, despite my abstract intentions. It provided an open and timeless space where a visitor could teleport around in VR, exploring the weird forms, and following their own curiosity. There were no set paths and there were many areas to encounter, often by surprise as the nooks and crannies revealed themselves

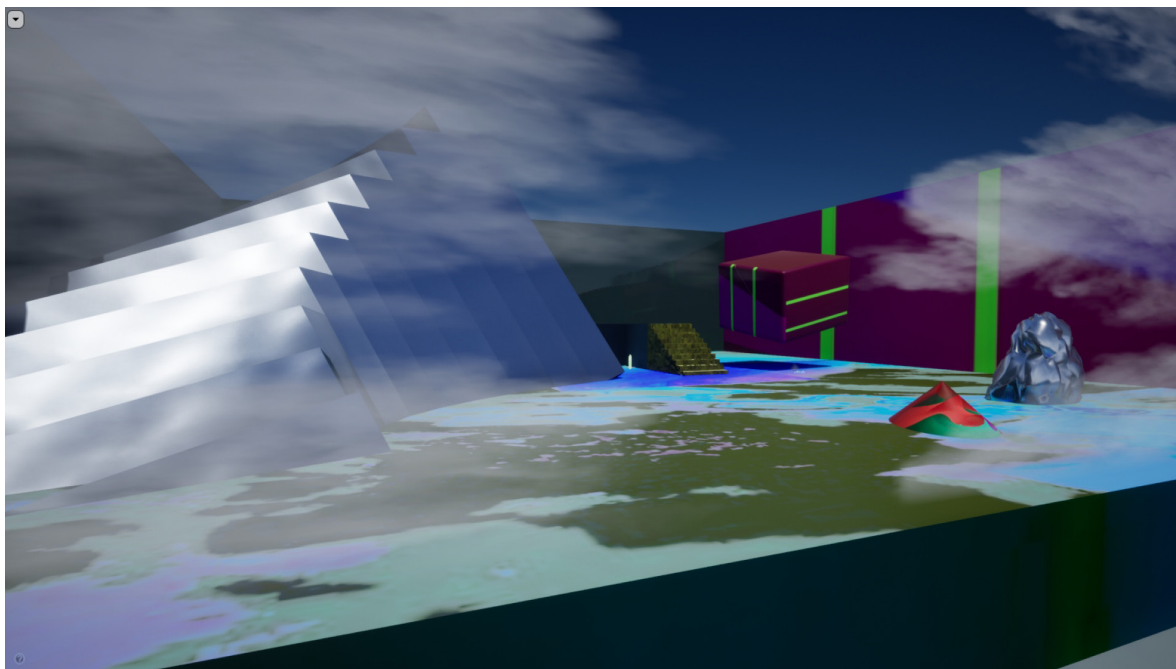


Figure 1 Snapshot view of author's first hour learning UE. © Linda Loh/Licensed by Copyright Agency.

unexpectedly. I equate it with the experience of going for a 'hike', in a place where the explorer can be immersed in a space of awe and wonder, surrounded by colour and transported to an altered state. Multiple drone sounds I created were placed in specific locations. One visitor exclaimed the experience was "like being on another planet". This 'world', made in 2021, was called *Agog*, and a video made within it is *Beyond Agog* (2021). It was a finished artwork. One of the features of this world was the use of moving images as textures applied on multiple surfaces; I used videos as variables, so that I had the flexibility to change them as desired.

In formal terms, this composition presents a layering of semi-transparent geometric and organic forms. The color palette, dominated by luminous purples, blues, and magentas, creates an ethereal atmosphere enhanced by volumetric fog and particle effects. The spatial composition extends both horizontally and vertically, inviting exploration in multiple dimensions and directions. There were hidden platforms and surfaces to navigate, below and behind the first visible starting space, affording vast views and totally different perspectives.



Figure 2 *Agog* (2021) VR scene view. © Linda Loh/ Licensed by Copyright Agency.

This composition of hidden spaces and unexpected vistas relates to the Japanese aesthetic concept of “ma”, a negative space or interval, which emphasizes what is not immediately visible, inviting contemplative discovery (Pilgrim, 1995). It also connects to the phenomenological theory articulated by Merleau-Ponty (1962), who emphasised embodied perception and the body’s active role in experiencing space. In the VR experience, the visitor’s embodied movement through space becomes essential to the work’s unfolding.

The emergence of the landscape from the initial abstract intention became what Kant (1790/2000) identified as the mathematical sublime: the aesthetic experience that occurs when we encounter something so vast, so powerful, that our imagination fails to comprehend it fully, resulting in a mixture of pleasure and terror. The embodied VR experience of the virtual landscape operated within this sublime register: the immersed perception of a vast, boundless territory characterised by luminous forms that exceed ordinary visual comprehension. The teleportation mechanic reinforces this sublime discontinuity. Rather than walking through space in a measured, rational manner, visitors jump between locations, disrupting conventional spatial logic and emphasising the space’s otherworldly nature.

Figure 2 is just one sample view within the world of *Agog* (2021); the views were many and varied, too much to encapsulate here, with a variety of small and large 3D abstract sculptures and models made by myself, placed at eye level in the virtual world, as well as above and below the “terrain” where the viewer finds themselves. Ostensibly, the viewer

explored around the obvious “walkable” area - the “land”, for lack of a better term.

This VR world was a finished artwork at the time (2021), and while bringing additional images would help illustrate it, it is not entirely necessary for the essence of this paper, since my focus is more about the effect of what the follow up “duplicate” version became over time and how THAT became the crucial space.

After Agog (2021)

Years have passed since 2021, and UE has been updating relentlessly fast. Some incredible features have been introduced since I first made my initial world, mainly to do with film production, animation and the emergent *Metahumans*; hyper-realistic digital humans. As an artist who rarely includes the figure in my work, at least overtly, much of this technological expansion passes me by. However, the development and flexibility of lighting systems, materiality tools, 3D modeling, visual detail, volumetric effects, real-time rendering, and the camera sequencer affords great potential for experimental and novel possibilities within my practice.

My artistic work since 2021 has included other software and methods, such as phone scanning, 3D sculpture creation with Gravity Sketch, (using a VR headset), videos with Davinci Resolve, and 3D in Blender. I would often import the results into a version of my UE *Agog* world, trying out textures on the scans, adding to the models, exporting again. I had no real intention of maintaining this version of *Agog*, it rather became

a temporary space, even a dumping ground, for the current pieces I was focusing on, and their versions. Eventually there were so many objects in the new *Agog*, large and small, that it became crowded and messy, like a crazy overgrown garden. It was now unrecognisable from its original version; a sprawling, unruly environment, with no sense of composition, sometimes chaotic, always expanding (Figure 3).

Figure 3 reveals the space's transformation into what might appear as visual cacophony, or the previously mentioned strange overgrown garden: dozens of forms overlap,

intersect, and compete for attention. The composition lacks the careful balance of Figure 2; instead, it embodies accumulation, process, and the detritus of experimentation. Textures range from highly reflective metallic surfaces to translucent organic forms, creating complex patterns of light interaction. This accumulation somehow recalls Schwitters' "Merzbau" (1923-1937), his legendary environment constructed from found materials that gradually consumed his entire studio, transforming his living space into an artwork (Elderfield, 1985).



Figure 3 Screenshot view of the evolving, uncontrolled 3d space. © Linda Loh/ Licensed by Copyright Agency.

Virtual studio as a state of mind

However, eventually, during my work with these items, and despite the apparent disorder, fresh new views of the space formed, almost as a chance shift in perspective. I discovered, with creative excitement, that I could encounter the space from many new angles and new sightlines, creating a multitude of new (sometimes accidental) compositions from which to make new videos, images, and 3D forms.

Although it seems unremarkable, it formed a new headspace; a paradigm shift.

A revelation!

I then saw that this was a place that afforded a framework for iterative experimentation, one that diverged significantly from typical game development pipelines. Unintentionally, it had become like a living artist studio space, with the concomitant curious mindset and the activity of creative process. That messy world almost echoed the atmosphere of a (clichéd) traditional artist's studio, full of possibilities. The world was certainly no longer recognisable as the single artwork that was finished in 2021. Although similar to Schwitters' blurring boundaries between studio, sculpture, and environment, gradually expanding to encompass entire rooms in an obsessive accretion of form, I did not consider *this* an artwork in itself.

This UE world shares that expansive, accumulative logic. It is a working space for making art, for seeing new angles and possibilities, but it is not itself an artwork for others to experience in its raw form. The distinction matters to me: the studio

is a space of production, privacy, and process; the artwork is what emerges from that space, refined and presented for public encounter.

Rosalind Krauss's notion of the "expanded field" (Krauss, 1979), is pertinent here, extending to the digital realm her reconceptualisation of sculpture: the studio itself expands beyond physical boundaries into virtual territories. It must be noted that Gene Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema* (1970) precedes Krauss' thinking, where he describes moving-image practices that go beyond traditional narrative screen formats into interactive video, computer environments, holography, multiple screens and networks. He linked these expanded new digital media to the shifts in human consciousness and vision of the time.

In this instance, the distinction above connects to what Krauss (1979) identified in the expanded field of sculpture: not all spatial interventions or constructions are intended as artworks. Some function as infrastructure, as conditions of possibility, operating as frames rather than pictures. My approach in my UE studio functions this way, grounded in practice-led methodologies, where the studio, in this case a virtual one, becomes a site of theoretical investigation, a state of mind, a mode of engagement as much as material. It forms a generative matrix from which artworks emerge rather than being the artwork itself.

We can see that this might be considered a form of "expanded studio", a conception of studio practice that includes virtual spaces, networked collaborations, and digitally native processes. Jacob (2009) notes that many contemporary artists



Figure 4 A second screenshot view of the space. © Linda Loh/ Licensed by Copyright Agency.

have abandoned the studio entirely, working in situ or through delegation. However, I find that the studio model retains relevance precisely because it names a particular mode of working: private, experimental, iterative, and generative.

Through this perceptual shift, what had been merely a cluttered workspace suddenly revealed itself as a rich field of aesthetic possibility. This also aligns with theories of creativity that emphasize the role of incubation and insight; the “aha moment” that reorganises existing information into new patterns (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). My accumulated digital

objects, previously seen as clutter, became resources for future work.

Now, new 3D objects and videos come in and out of the world as they form within my artistic process, and the space, or “the world”, continues to be a playspace for testing out new features of UE, creating new items of interest in the space, and new spaces around them, without having to be concerned about formal compositions. Existing works spawned new variants; experiments with one technology fed the evolution of others. A vast sense of possibility had suddenly opened up.

As inferred above, the knowledge I generate through this practice is experiential and phenomenological rather than purely technical. Working in UE, designed for game development, I defamiliarise its intended purpose, transforming game space into contemplative space, narrative structure into abstract experience, and achievement-oriented interaction into immersive being. This process generates new knowledge about what digital space can afford beyond its designed intentions.

The metaphor of the “overgrown garden” captures something essential about the creative process that more orderly accounts may obscure. Gardens, even cultivated ones, possess their own generative agency; plants grow beyond their assigned boundaries, seeds scatter unpredictably, organic forms resist geometric containment. The garden, especially the overgrown garden, becomes a space where human intention and organic process, control and wildness, planning and accident, exist in productive tension. This metaphor resonates with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of the rhizome, a non-hierarchical, multi-faceted structure of growth and connection (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). Unlike tree-like structures with clear origins and linear development, rhizomatic growth spreads horizontally, making unexpected connections, generating new nodes and pathways. My UE environment had become rhizomatic; a tangle of forms and possibilities without clear genealogy or hierarchical organization.

Figure 4 presents a sample image of one of the views of the crowded world, albeit composed more formally, offering a different experience of space due to a wide and distant camera view. The composition demonstrates greater spatial



Figure 5 3D digital sculpture Grand Design Iridescent (2024) viewed in augmented reality. © Linda Loh/ Licensed by Copyright Agency.

coherence than Figure 3, with forms arranged to create depth through overlapping layers. Again, the distant viewpoint evokes the sublime's relationship to vastness. The color harmonies, warm oranges and yellows against cool blues and purples, create atmospheric depth enhanced by what appears to be volumetric lighting or fog effects. This formal organisation suggests a transition point: the studio space revealing its potential for curated aesthetic experience.

Figure 5 shows an example of a 3D digital sculpture when viewed via a mobile phone in augmented reality. This was

part of the original world, modelled with some simple UE methods, and subsequently extracted as a separate work from the "studio" space. The iridescent colouring originates from a video also from that period, but the ideas to export the inworld items were a more recent outcome allowed by the shift in perspective mentioned earlier. The iridescent surfaces are enhanced in natural light, emphasising the luminosity of the virtual and non-real, slightly weird, object.

Many of the works presented so far have been frames from video screen captures of fly-through views, accentuating the

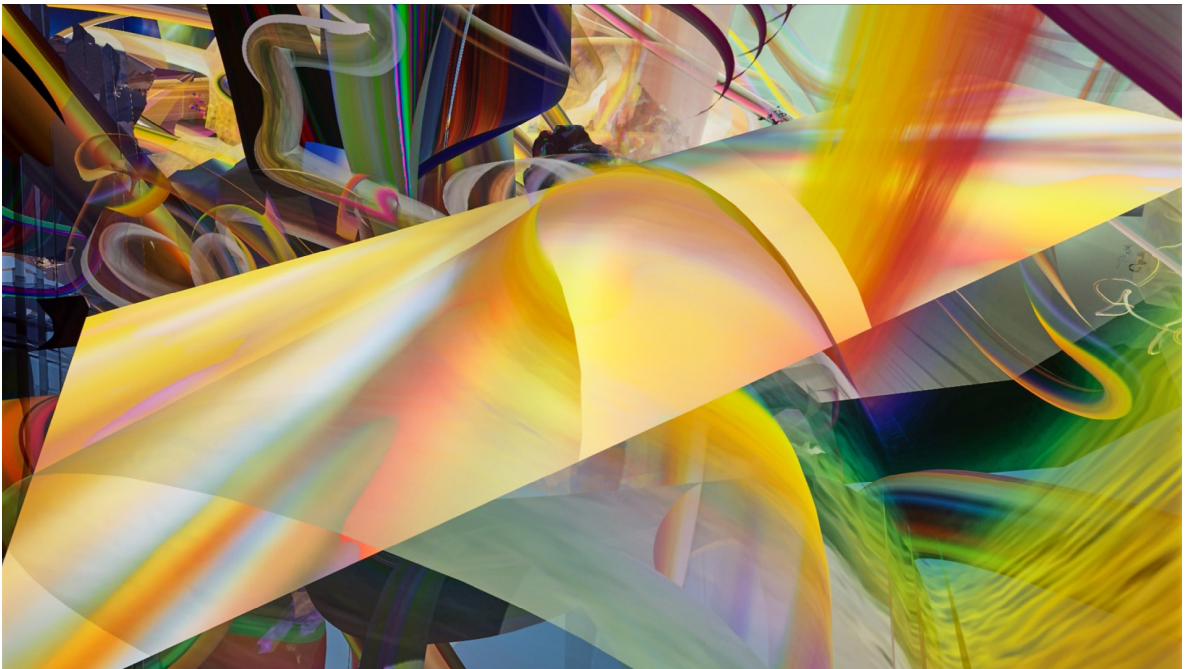


Figure 6 Golden Mist (2024), video still. © Linda Loh/ Licensed by Copyright Agency.

luminous translucent and glassy textures of the 3d objects as the camera zooms through and past. These could be considered prototypical video samples, or works in progress, and the next phase will involve formal camera set ups in-world, using rig rails and other methods for animating the cameras for optimal and novel viewing of the world. The capacity for UE to render high resolution video is one of its most desirable features, and the potential for doing this within my world is exciting.

Figure 6 is a still image from a series of videos that was made in the world, using some of the previously mentioned methods. Sometimes a fixed camera with a composed view captures a subtle contemplative video, where the only movement is produced by the animated materials used in the scene. It is static yet surrounded by perpetual motion, an unreal space, perhaps magical and contemplative.

Other works are videos capturing the visual experience of slowly flying the camera past and through the shimmering and translucent forms. In slowing down the capture journey I am interested in evoking a poetic sense of elusive form and materiality, highlighting the intangible nature of digital space. They present a journey through an unreal space, with views obscured by forms that are luminous and unable to be grasped. Dreamy and mesmerising, we are just passing through; nothing stays the same, but eventually the obstacles dissipate.

Unlike traditional cinema where the camera records a pre-existing reality, in UE the camera generates the image in real-time through computational rendering. The camera is not passive but constitutive; without it, the image does not exist.

This somehow aligns with quantum physics' observer effect, where the act of observation affects what is observed, and suggests interesting parallels between digital rendering and consciousness itself (Hoorn & Ho, 2024). Such reflections might not have been made without the process of being "in the studio".

In turn, this can be thought of as a metaphor for the illusory nature of our own interior lives. The entangled clutter and mess of the objects the camera must fly through before it reaches open space seem to be in parallel with the obstacles of our own minds, obscuring the clear space of awareness that is always there, an abiding sense of infinity enabled by the enormous sense of vast 3D space and luminosity that UE affords. Here my practice engages with Buddhist and other mystical traditions, particularly the notion of *sunyata* or emptiness, not as nihilistic void but as luminous spaciousness beyond concept (Nāgārjuna, 2nd century CE/1995). The Tibetan Buddhist concept of *rigpa*, pristine awareness, points to a fundamental clarity obscured by discursive thought (Norbu, 1989). My videos aim to evoke this progression from obstruction to openness, from multiplicity to spaciousness.

Similarly, from a Neoplatonic perspective, for Iamblichus, the ascension out of the fragmented world towards the unified transcendent cosmos, from matter to intellect to unity, affords an experience of oneness that surpasses rational thought (Tummers, 2025). While - of course - this is not the practice of theurgy, when seen from Iamblichus' lens, the digital process can be read as being transformed from mere technical operation into a metaphysical exploration (Iamblichus, 2003).

When I have shared various works with people it is pleasing that some have remarked that they do not “look like Unreal”. I agree with them that many mainstream UE projects indeed bear some of the hallmark features of the software, and that one of the considerations in producing work in this kind of “studio” space is to be cognisant of the stereotypical aspects of the medium. This observation stirs thoughts of medium specificity and digital materiality. Every medium develops its own recognisable visual clichés, its signature look. The challenge is to work within and against these conventions simultaneously, exploiting the medium’s affordances while

resisting its default aesthetics. My success in creating work that “doesn’t look like Unreal” suggests that the software’s constraints are not absolute. Yet it might be reasonable not to escape the software’s visual signatures entirely. Flusser argues that working “against” the apparatus, finding what it doesn’t want you to do, exploiting its glitches and limitations, constitutes the primary site of freedom within technical media (Flusser, 1983/2000). This concern with transcending medium conventions recalls modernist debates about aesthetic autonomy and medium specificity (Greenberg, 1960, Manovich, 2001). Manovich (2001) points out that the notion

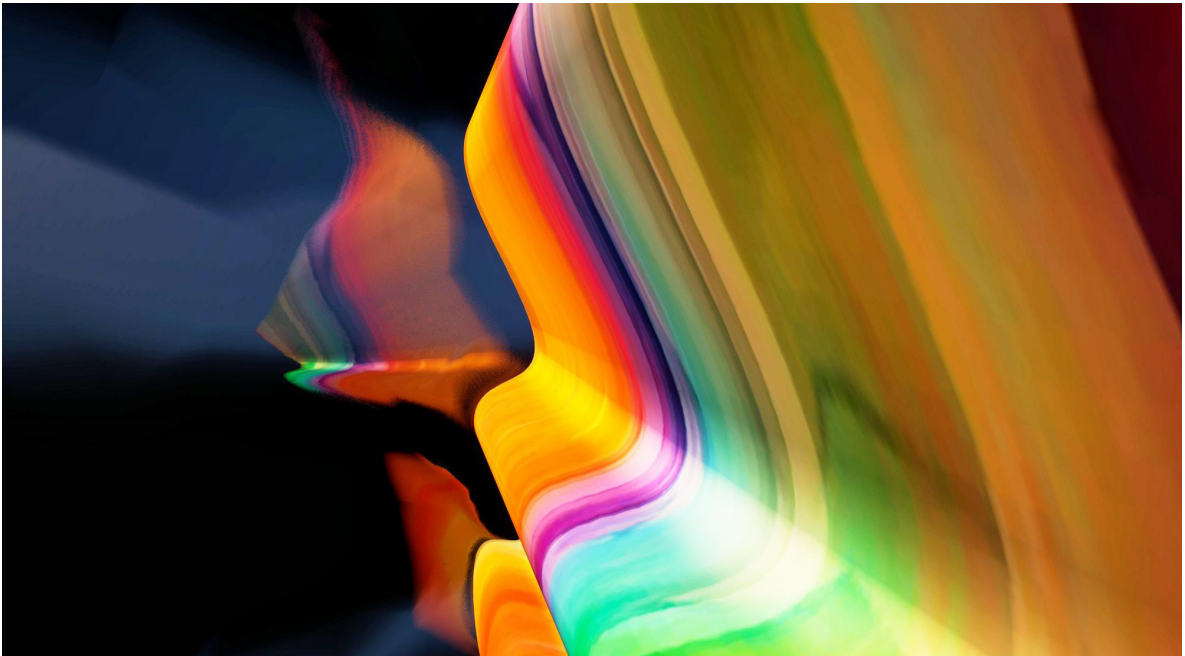


Figure 7 Still image from an untitled video (work in progress). © Linda Loh/ Licensed by Copyright Agency.

of medium specificity is obsolete in “new media” times, due to the inevitable mixing, yet he acknowledges that new aesthetic possibilities arise from new tools. Just as Rothko sought to transcend the materiality of paint while remaining committed to painting, I seek to transcend UE’s game-oriented aesthetics while exploiting its unique capacity for real-time luminous rendering. Perhaps my challenge now is not to try to disguise the medium but to reveal and emphasise it in unexpected ways.

Figure 7, contrasts with Figure 4, also being a still image from a video, but recorded close to some of the objects in the scene. It encapsulates a different kind of work possible in the space, highlighting mood, shadow, and color amidst an ambiguous frame. The composition shows strong contrast between light and dark. The close cropping creates spatial ambiguity since we cannot determine the scale of objects or their relationship to a broader environment. The color palette, dominated by deep purples and browns with highlights of yellow, creates an intimate, almost nocturnal atmosphere, distinct from the more expansive compositions shown earlier. It has its own luminosity in a different context.

An Expanded Framework of Studio Practice

My experience in using UE as an artistic medium points towards a broader set of questions regarding the status of digital technology in contemporary art. What does it mean to construct a studio space, a zone of experimentation and thought, within a software application built for radically different purposes? How might the culture of game development itself be transformed, even if only temporarily, by the

presence of artists who value quietude, abstraction, and open-ended exploration?

Many artists now work in a post-studio context, where their studio is their computer rather than a physical space. This has long been my way of working, but my shift towards recognising my own 3D world in UE as a subset of this tendency, a microcosmic place of studio-like stimulation and thought, gives me opportunities to extend the general perception of how artists inhabit the world. This shift is in tension with McKewen (2016) who discusses post-studio theory in the context of digital practices in art education. He notes that the “laptop studio” might disrupt the processes of research and production in traditional studios. He prefers a mix of digital and analogue practices, enabling an integrated network of creative and critical activities. This feels somewhat separate from the artistic development and mindset that occurs entirely within a digital space, such as in my UE world. It is difficult to articulate the recursive, process-based methodology of creativity that emerges in this context, with the “studio headspace”. In the fluid matrix of UE, boundaries between virtual and actual production blur; the digital studio becomes both environment and collaborator, continually prompting the artist towards new insights and questions, new forms, and new affective states, producing outcomes previously unimagined.

This practice also contributes to ongoing expansions of what constitutes artistic studio space. From the traditional atelier through post-studio practices, to the computer-as-studio, to virtual environments like mine, the studio continues to evolve. Recognising virtual environments as legitimate studio spaces means recognising new ways of inhabiting creative process,

new relationships between artist and workspace, new possibilities for iterative, experimental, serendipitous making.

Finally, situating my practice within theoretical frameworks ranging from Neoplatonism to Kant's sublime, from modernist abstraction to contemporary transpersonal psychology, demonstrates that digital art practices need not be understood only through digital culture's own terms. Digital work can engage with, and contribute to, long-standing aesthetic and philosophical traditions. In the context of artificial intelligence, the digital realm, with its seemingly boundless potential and inhuman vastness, can be understood as the artificial sublime (Rini, 2024), or as I often place it, in the context of the "technological sublime" (Nye, 1994). I concur with Vassiliou (2017) who highlights that the sublime arises from inner imaginative and cognitive experience. He suggests that digital technologies expand the imagination's capacity and shift the boundaries between the natural and artificial. The virtual sublime is still a form of sublime; digitally produced light may still have the potential to evoke changes in states of mind. The digital represents not a break with aesthetic history but a continuation through new means, extending perennial questions about art, experience, consciousness, and transcendence into computational contexts.

Conclusion

When my view of the previously perfunctory, cluttered 3D space that was once *Agog (2021)* shifted to the unique headspace of being in an artist studio, I suddenly saw an expanded sense of possibility. It was a paradigm shift in my own mind that opened up an unexpected way of working as an artist in

that virtual space, even though it is a process similar to the way many artists in the physical space traditionally work. My overgrown garden inside of UE had transformed into an aesthetic resource, a place of constant rediscovery.

Engaging in the new evolved version of *Agog* involved setting up for moments of serendipity; playing with iteration, what-if scenarios, trial and error processes, and novel camera journeys, all initiating fertile new directions. With the potential for a seemingly endless series of new works, I was not making games, rather I was inhabiting a place for art to happen.

Encapsulating the recursive approach to my work, where existing work often feeds into new work, and slowly exploring the expanded features of UE, this space now exemplifies the artist's studio space as a state of mind. Continuing to be motivated by curiosity, and seeing the space with an artist's eye, I hope to transfer some of the awe and wonder I experience in that world into artworks that could transport a viewer outside of their own everyday default mode, nudging them into an enhanced level of awareness, even if only momentarily. I want to enable works that are more about being, rather than doing, continuing to resist the game formats of storytelling, action and achievement. I want people to be immersed in light, scale, texture, and space, forgetting their sense of self, not reinforcing it.

This shift in perception matters not only for my individual practice, but also as a provocation to how we think about digital tools themselves. UE, so closely tied to the culture and aesthetics of game-making, and because it is a game engine, it can become instead an artistic medium for contemplative

spaces, evoking awe and wonder in a poetic sense, amidst the infinite possibilities of creative play.

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