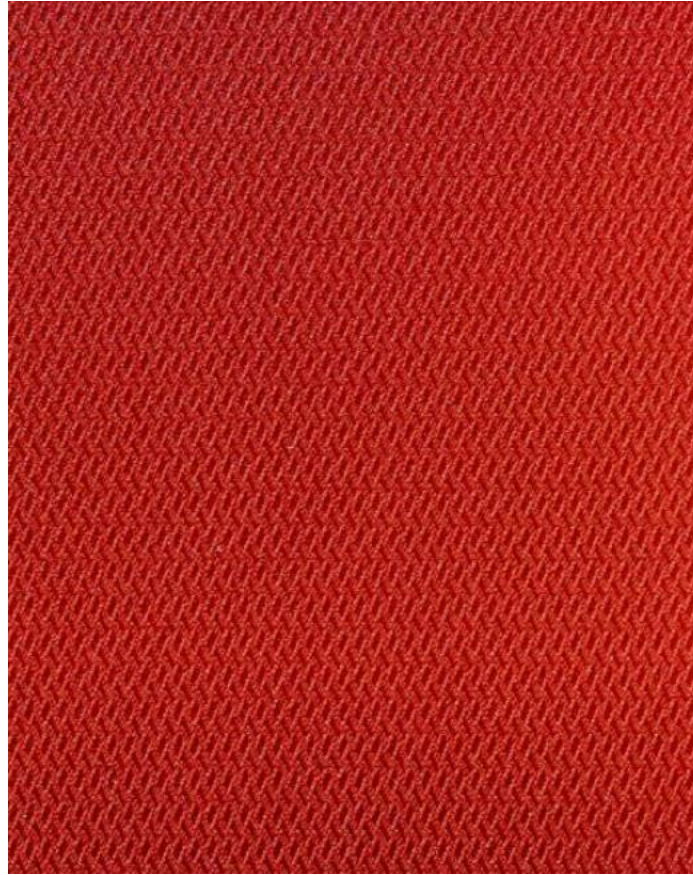


FrameWork 11/25

Brendan Flanagan on Scott Lyall

Neither Math nor Feeling:

I.



Up close, the surface becomes too present. What looked from a distance like a red haze turns crisp and unyielding: flat ink layered on aluminum, a grid like the world's most exacting tapestry, its warp and weft reveal no strain of materiality. There is no brushstroke, no friction. Step back and the grid dissolves again into atmosphere. Move forward and precision returns. The piece organizes a rhythm: approach, calibrate, recede, recalibrate.

That rhythm is the work's address. It insists on oscillation. As the exhibition text puts it: "the work is neither math nor feeling. It occurs as a kind of circulation, and a struggle to relate these diverging poles." From a distance we get Feeling: warm reds dissolve and melt. Up close, we see the structure of that dissolution: pixels printed on aluminum, pure Math. As viewers, we can't hold one without the other. The work suspends the relation between procedure and affect without resolving it.

The panel is not an image to decode but an apparatus to inhabit. As viewers we are pressed into service, actors playing gallery-goers. The work scripts distance, colour, and body into a loop. From afar, it reads as Rothko-soft; up close, it is a finely etched schematic. It suspends expression and replaces it with conditions.

II.



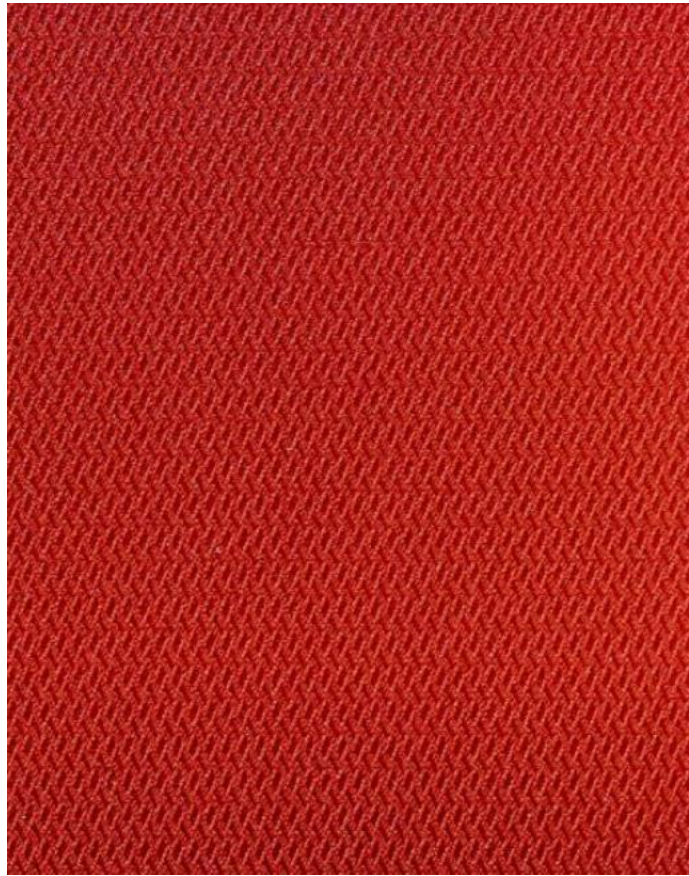
Do you feel something when you look at that colour? And would it be foolish to? It is often said, part art-historical fact and part myth, that more people have cried in front of the paintings of Mark Rothko than any modern painter. Traditional painting assumes both an expressive artist-subject and a receptive audience-subject: communication is a straight line, artist points and the audience sees. But what happens when the artist dissolves into mediation? When the audience is generated as a position within that mediation?

This work refuses the idea that an image is a fixed, transmissible unit of meaning. Instead, it sets a field of operations in which viewing happens. It is not so much an image as a stage.

Michael Fried famously criticized Minimalism for its theatricality: its dependence on the viewer's presence to complete the work. A Judd box or a Flavin light installation don't speak on their own; they wait for the audience to arrive, turning the gallery into a stage and the viewer into an actor. For Fried, this was a weakness, a failure to achieve the self-sufficient "presentness" he prized in modernist painting. Minimalist objects unfold like performances, structured not by what they contain but by the situations they create.

Lyall's surfaces inherit Minimalism's theatrical structure but internalize it. The choreography is no longer something to watch; it unfolds within the act of watching. The viewer's movements bend into the event, becoming one more variation in a distributed field of perception. The painting does not wait for the viewer to arrive; it generates the viewer as a temporary node within its field, a position produced rather than occupied. To look is not to see the painting from the outside but to be briefly instantiated within its logic. Feeling, math, feeling, math.

III.



Colour is often spoken of as if it were a universal language. Yellow is happy, blue is calming, red is passionate. These claims circulate with such confidence they seem to describe facts rather than tendencies. We're told that colour moves us directly, piercing emotion before thought. But standing before Lyall's red surfaces, I don't experience anything like that. There's no surge of emotion, no automatic reaction. Instead, there's a suspended pressure in the room—an atmosphere that holds the potential for feeling without tipping into it.

Colour does not dictate how we feel. It structures the conditions in which feeling may emerge. We often treat emotion as an arrow shot from artwork to viewer. But with these works, nothing pierces. Colour here is less a vector more a membrane. It envelops, sets a mood, but doesn't tell you what to do with it. The affect is latent, waiting.

This latency has a long and complicated history. In Western visual theory, colour has often been treated as volatile and secondary: something that affects the senses directly but without reason. Plato distrusted colour for exactly this reason, preferring geometric stability. Aristotle linked it to the sensuous world, closer to appetite than intellect. This suspicion endures in subtle ways: colour remains what makes an image seductive rather than intelligent.

At the same time, there's a counter-current that treats colour as profoundly expressive. Goethe's *Theory of Colours* is emblematic: for him, colour doesn't decorate form; it is a language of feeling, "a degree of darkness." He attributes to colours their own emotional characters: red as "gravity and dignity," blue as "contemplative," yellow as "cheerful." These poetic projections have proven extraordinarily durable.

These two attitudes—colour as irrational seduction and colour as universal expressivity—form an unstable foundation for how we talk about visual experience. Lyall's work refuses both. It does not seduce and it does not emote. It does not command anything of me. Instead, it constructs conditions in which perception is heightened and affect flickers into being, contingent on movement, position, and time in the room.

The affective charge comes as much from hue as from how the hue is delivered—through the inkjet printer, the aluminum surface, the lighting conditions, the absence of gestural trace. The result is a surface that both is, and is not, emotional. Math, feeling, math, feeling.



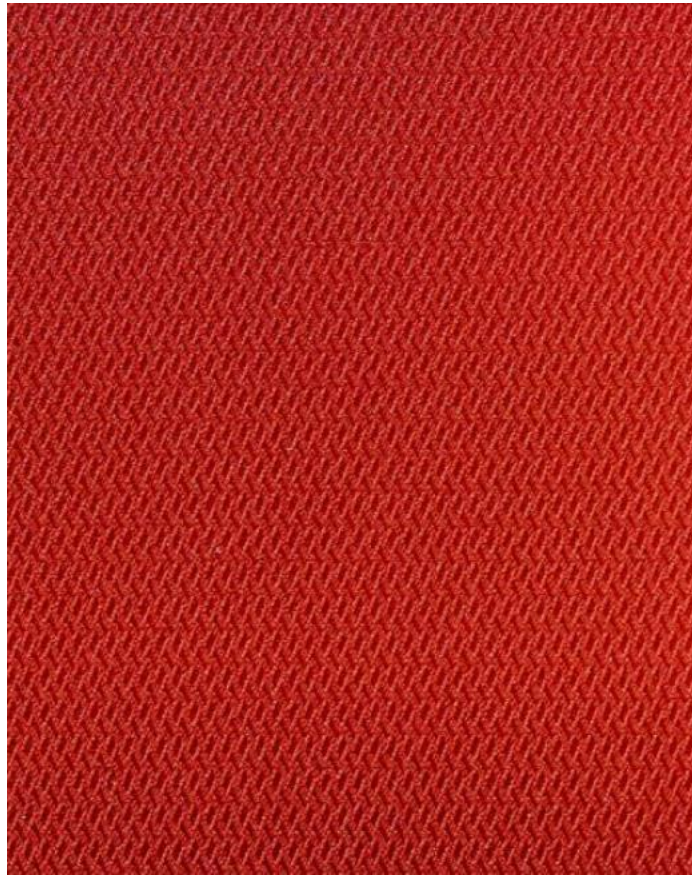
IV.

Procedures produce moods. Anyone who has scrolled too long knows this: no single post matters; the platform's rhythm—its pacing, its loops—creates that special feeling of boredom and overstimulation. Infrastructures shape feelings from the background.

Traditional painting's infrastructure is built from gestures. Even in the most minimal monochromes, some trace of the hand usually remains: a drag of pigment, a seam, a mark. Gesture carries intention—even when ambiguous. Lyall's works evacuate gesture. The inkjet prints not through expression but through code, making minute decisions at the scale of microseconds and micrometers. The field of red is so evenly laid that human intention dissolves.

This is not pure machinic anonymity. The work is not indifferent. The procedure has been authored, though not by a single visible hand. It's an authored atmosphere, an operation that carries affective temperature even as it withholds the traditional signs of expression.

V.



Vilém Flusser, writing on the “technical image,” noted that images produced through apparatuses no longer behave like paintings or early photographs. They operate according to a program. These programs may be invisible, but they shape what the image is and how it works on us. Platforms like Instagram or TikTok don’t tell you how to feel; they engineer conditions for feeling to arise.

Marshall McLuhan’s reminder that “the medium is the message” lands cleanly here. The content is “red,” but the medium—file → printhead → aluminum → light → eye—is what shapes perception. In Lyall’s work, mediation is the voice.



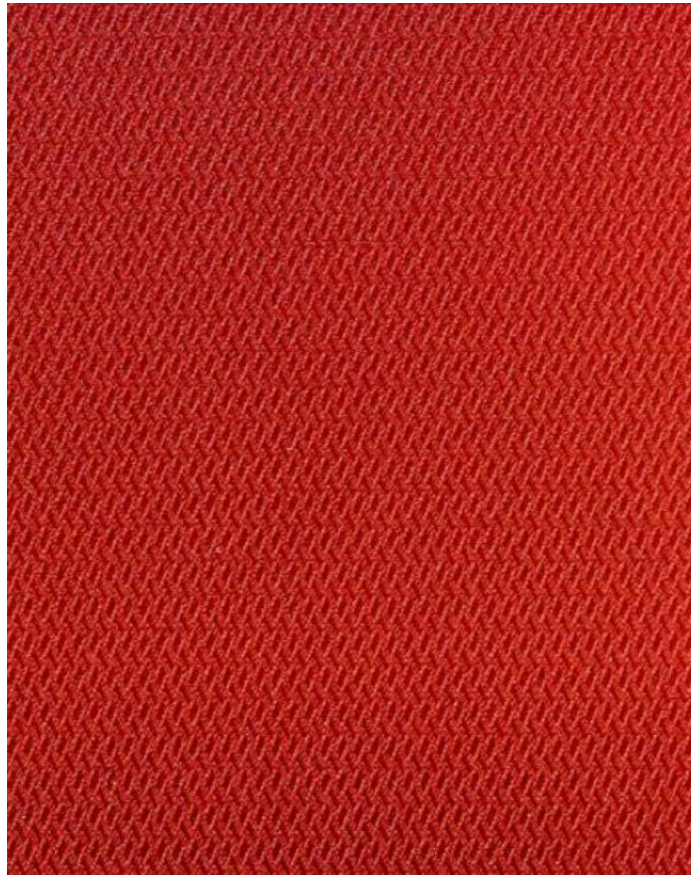
VI.

In much of art history, authorship is framed as expression: an interior subject externalizing emotion or thought through a medium. The artist acts; the work records; the viewer receives. Even in modernist attempts to purify form, this expressive chain persists. The artist-subject precedes the work, and the work transmits the artist-subject.

Lyall's procedure inverts that sequence. The artist-subject doesn't precede the work; the artist-subject emerges within it. The printer doesn't merely reproduce intention; it conditions it. The ink, the algorithm, the substrate, and the viewer's perception all participate in a distributed act of authorship. The voice that seems to speak is the echo of that distribution.

This is what I mean by mediation: not the transfer of content through a channel, but the way an apparatus actively shapes what can be seen, felt, or thought. Mediation is creative. It doesn't carry meaning from one place to another; it creates the very space in which meaning can occur.

VII.



Both Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes understood this before the digital. In *What Is an Author?*, Foucault argued that the “author” is not an origin but a function of discourse, a way of organizing statements and attributing coherence and ownership to a field of language. Barthes, writing around the same time, declared the “death of the author,” insisting that meaning arises not from the writer’s intention but from the reader’s encounter.

Lyall’s works perform a similar decentering at the level of visual mediation. The author-function still exists; his name anchors the work in a gallery, in discourse, yet within the image that function dissolves. What remains is a field of operations in which authorship is enacted by the interaction of technical and perceptual systems. The work’s “voice” is neither singular nor silent. It is procedurally plural, an emergent property of circulation.

But unlike Barthes’s reader, Lyall’s viewer does not stand outside the text to decode it. The viewer is embedded in the same circuitry that produces the work—another signal in the network of perception and process. Meaning is not recovered through interpretation but distributed through participation.

VIII.

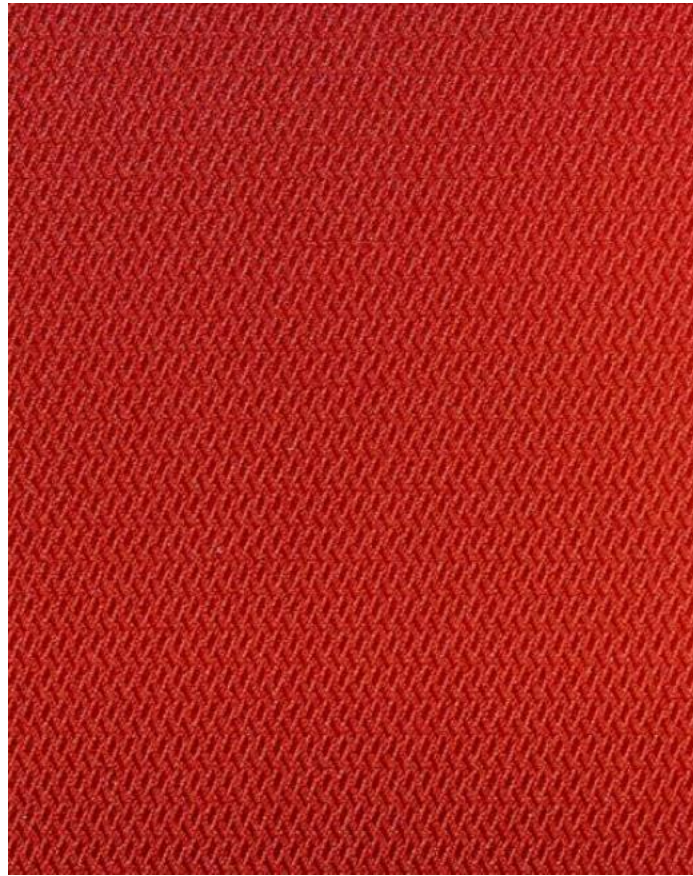


If Foucault and Barthes displaced the author into language, Vilém Flusser relocated authorship again, this time into the apparatus itself. In *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, he distinguishes between the traditional artist, who manipulates material directly, and the functionary, who operates a device according to a program. The apparatus produces technical images whose parameters are set by unseen structures: algorithms, codes, defaults. The functionary, Flusser writes, is “playing against the program.” Lyall’s role resembles this: he doesn’t express *through* the printer but collaborates with its logic, bending procedural parameters to produce something improbable within its system.

This is not mechanical reproduction but programmatic composition: the artist designs a situation in which the machine’s neutrality reveals its own aesthetic biases. The result is not the hand of the painter but the signature of mediation itself: a signature that looks like absence yet vibrates with procedural intensity.

Lyall shows that mediation can be voice: a voice built from the interplay of hardware, software, light, pigment, and perception.

IX.



Yet despite this talk of voice, the dominant experience of the work is silence. The red field does not call out; it waits. It is not emptiness but density.

In stillness, the work doesn't make declarations; it holds us in suspension. The artist's hand is absent, the machine's autonomy incomplete, the viewer's perception unresolved. Each component leans toward the others without fusing.

To stand before the work is to inhabit this suspended state—to listen to a voice that is not one's own, not the artist's, not the machine's, but something between.

X.



There is an ethical dimension to this suspension. In refusing to impose a singular voice, Lyall's work models a form of relational attention. It acknowledges that perception is shared, that meaning arises from encounter rather than command. The procedural apparatus, often accused of alienation, here becomes a site of mutual attunement.

In this sense, Lyall's mediation is not just technological but social. It reorients the viewer toward a sensitivity to the infrastructures and relations that sustain experience. The red plate doesn't demand recognition; it offers co-presence.