

**School of Built Environment, Art and Design
Department of Art**

**Unlacing Carnal Margins:
Portraits by Angela Stewart**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:

Date:

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Abstract

In this body of work I examine artistic doubt as a way to unlace the becoming of a portrait. My interest is in the personal encounter between the painter and sitter, as a performance of making. I seek to unravel mistakes and interruptions that may be hidden in the matter of paint, blemishes or stumbling of marks, as indicators of the anxiety the artist may experience in the painting of a portrait. To do this I face my own moments of doubt. I have selected the feted sixteenth-century Italian portrait painter Sofonisba Anguissola to investigate our art practices by using an epistolary approach. I position us as malleable performing bodies, and together we inquire into the process, mistakes and interruptions of making that can impact on practice, and in this way position doubt as caches of ontological moments.

My challenge is to interpret the autonomous self of a woman who lived many centuries prior to mine. In a format of writing a series of letters, I correspond with Sofonisba on pertinent issues about the matter of painting. I seek notations of desire and doubt by unlacing the carefully finished and stylized composition of her portraits. I imagine her as a sexual subject, a corporeal body, in her studio, mixing her paints and building up the layers of a portrait. I examine the early aspects of making as a performance to engage in the strict structures of the Italian Renaissance *Paragone* debate between Tuscan and Venetian painters of the *Cinquecento*. I peel away layers of construction of the processes and theories of Renaissance painting and compare this with my own portrait practice to seek points of continuity and disparity. By examining her Renaissance period I look for signs of subliminal protest, by a woman painter, against the masculine construction of societal rules and etiquette that intervene in the difficult task of creating a work of art.

Acknowledgments

I thank my supervisors, Associate Professor Joan Wardrop and Dr Ann Schilo, for their steadfast support and suggestions. Ours has been a collaboration of creative research and the ‘matter’ of my words are insufficient to express the deep respect and gratitude I feel for each woman’s humanity and professionalism. During my studies I moved to South Africa and I am indebted to their perseverance in helping me overcome the hurdles of writing in a new environment.

I thank: Chris Malcolm, curator of my exhibition *Unlacing Carnal Margins*, for his sensitive interpretation of my work, and Dr Sally Quin, Dr Janice Baker, Dr John Barrett-Lennard, Marzena Topka and Alex Spremberg for their helpful critiques of my paintings. Margaret Vinciguerra, Eva Fernandez and Bo Wong for documenting my work. Annie English for encouraging me to apply for Doctoral Studies in Visual Art; and those who supported my application, which led to my receiving a recipient of an Australian Postgraduate Award. My colleague Bronwen Kamasz for modelling as my contemporary *Pittura*, and the “sitters” who allowed me to paint their portraits. I salute my daughter Alex Scott and my sons Heath, Dan and Will Stewart, my partner David Pheiffer and extended family for all their love and support.

And finally Sofonisba Anguissola: may the becoming of her paintings continue through future lifetimes.

For Lolah Grace Stewart

Introduction

In this body of work I examine artistic doubt as a way to unlace the becoming of a portrait. My interest is in the personal encounter between the painter and sitter, as a performance of making. I seek to unravel mistakes and interruptions that may be hidden in the matter of paint, blemishes or stumbling of marks, as indicators of the anxiety the artist may experience in the painting of a portrait. To do this I face my own moments of doubt. I have selected the famed sixteenth-century Italian portrait painter Sofonisba Anguissola to investigate our art practices by using an epistolary approach. I position us as malleable performing bodies, and together we inquire into the process, mistakes and interruptions of making that can impact on practice, and as such position doubts as caches of ontological moments.

Sofonisba Anguissola's life is a remarkable story. She was the eldest daughter of nobility, born in Cremona, Italy, in 1532. Feted as both a marvel and an anomaly, she, a woman painter, achieved fame in a time when women were rarely allowed a public audience for their work in patriarchal Italy and Spain. As a young woman, in 1559, she was invited to serve in Philip II's Spanish court as a lady in waiting to the young Queen Isabel de Valois. She married twice and lived until her early nineties.

Initially it was difficult for me to articulate theoretical and practical concerns surrounding the portrait encounter. I found I could position my practice with the language of paint, but I became paralyzed when contextualizing my concerns in writing. My own impasse was broken when my supervisor Associate Professor Joan Wardrop suggested I extend my investigation of Sofonisba Anguissola's portrait practice into a personal format by writing a series of letters to her as my muse. I felt a rush of relief and pleasure, because here in this more informal approach I could give myself permission to examine scholarship on selfhood, identity, sexuality and gender, as well as to discern signs of doubt and strength in the portrait encounter. My challenge became to introduce Sofonisba Anguissola's life and painting to my reader and uncover points of connection or disparity between her practice and my own.

A short time ago I acquired a book by Alison Rowley (2007) theorizing about the life and work of American painter Helen Frankenthaler. Rowley was proposing a

complex layering of feminist links between the painter's life story and paintings while interlacing important cultural and historical events. Initially when I read the text I was bewildered by a number of different voice registers and had to retrace my steps to understand who was talking to whom. Slowly, I came to the realization that Rowley was talking through the text to her colleague Pollock. The passivity of the first person speaking and the second person listening was interrupted. I felt the flash of embarrassment, because here I was entering into a seemingly private debate. I, we, the readers, had unwittingly been drawn in as outsiders to listen to an earnest feminist argument about oedipal relationships that can be cast over feminist scholars who are vying for their voice as well as positions of power. What impressed me was the strength of Rowley's voice. With the weight and passion of her words in communicating woman's scholarship, her text encouraged me with my own approach to this exegetical writing by offering a series of letters to run alongside my paintings. Although Rowley did not present her argument in letter form, she entered into a direct conversation with another who was not present. Hers was a deliberate inquiry addressed to a specific person.

Where, I thought, is my voice? What is the relevance of my investigation into Renaissance art in relation to my own practice?

In the beginning there was a temptation to write to Sofonisba by email, as an important signifier of the speed of the twenty-first century's information technology for women, as suggested by Dale Spender (1995). However, I chose instead a slower, meditative approach, envisaging the letters arriving by post or courier, of time stretched spatially within and between each letter. I imagined them as vignettes, where I could bring together an assortment of people significant to the epistemology of Sofonisba's and my periods and, in dialogue, I could articulate concerns about how we as artists consider the theories of art that impact on practice.

Elizabeth Grosz's (1994) text helped me to negotiate important factors: the concept of time with the formation of identity and the sexual body. I chose to deal with an historical figure, but of course Sofonisba, my muse, was essentially an "absent body", a subject, and to a large extent a figment of my imagination. I was entering into a virtual argument that by necessity had to be grounded in theoretical research.

My challenge became to interpret the autonomous self of a woman who lived many centuries prior to mine. Grosz's scholarship of the underlying premise of humanity as a sexual subject caused me to consider Sofonisba as a sexual body, a body with desire, with the love of life and paint; not from an essentialist biological viewpoint but as a woman, personalized, with libidinal bodily flows, signs of which I could seek out, or invent, in her paintings. I imagined her as the painter, a corporeal body, in her studio, mixing her paints and building up the layers, painting significant people in her life. I sought notations of desire by unlacing the carefully finished and stylized composition of her portraits.

The nature of portraiture, historically, is to focus on a person, or a group of people, and intensely examine their identity (Brilliant 1991). In an attempt to reconstruct Sofonisba's identity, I probed aspects of her painting as a forensic exercise. To do this I gave myself the task of producing a series of paintings in traditional materials using oil, wood and canvas, as I wanted to imbue the paint with indexical markings of gesture and texture as a sign of authorial presence. I transcribed Sofonisba's paintings, adding drips and blemishes to negotiate the theoretical foundations of Renaissance underpainting. This method highlighted the pressures and expectations that are placed on an artist in the portrait encounter, because in these early washes mistakes can be buried. Here, in the accidents, could be important signs of interruption in the fluidity of making. It is within this slippage I am influenced also by Grosz's (2004) writing.

In her philosophy of the disparity of time and materials, Grosz argues for the phenomenon of temporality as a source of social and political disruption to epistemological belief systems. With the spill and drip of paint, I engage Grosz's arguments on temporality as a "... continuous becoming" (2005, 5), slipping into the paint, enveloping the carnality of body and escaping patriarchal confinement in the Renaissance era. These signs of subliminal protest, by a woman painter, against the masculine construction of societal rules and etiquette, intervene in the difficult task of creating a work of art.

My engagement with Sofonisba has made me aware of the materials needed to make our work. Phillip Sohm's linguistic analysis (1991, 1995) of paint pigment and brush

marks allowed me to consider the signification of the tools of the trade in the *Cinquecento*: the viscosity of paints and mediums, the wet and dry materials for drawing. My challenge was to bring the Renaissance painter into a contemporary context of understanding of the plasticity of material. To do this, not as an historian but as a painter, has meant I have had to invest in a contemporary understanding of materiality, the inter-connectedness with the materials in creative practice. Paul Carter (2004) describes collaboration as an essential part of making, and it is in working with one's materials that the materials allow themselves to be malleable and give to each other and to the creative process. "Materials become material signs when, in the process of creative collaboration, they hand themselves over to each other" (183). For Carter the construction of an artwork requires a yielding of the maker to acquiesce with, and facilitate between, the materials of choice. With this insight I began a dance of connection and making with Sofonisba.

Barbara Bolt's (2004) writing *Beyond Representation, the performative power of the image*, allowed me to conceive an aspect of making as a performance, which in turn helped me to reconstruct and enact the strict structures of the Italian Renaissance *Paragone* debate with the looser free-flowing concepts found in postmodernism. The *Paragone* between the personification of painting and sculpture in *Cinquecento* was the contest for supremacy in the liberal arts (painting, sculpture and architecture), a model where the Renaissance artist extolled the virtue of the intellect over the manual task of labour. *Disegno* was the Father of the Arts.

I focused on the debate in aesthetics between Tuscan and Venetian painters, in which painting had the core requirement of *disegno*, where artists were to strive for intellectual and creative excellence and to place intellectual vigour above the signs of manual labour. This required that the artist, besides being learned in letters and the classics of antiquity, also had to have a facility for strong design, that is, skills of drawing as a fluid ability for observation and imitation, a flare for invention with composition and refined sensibility to draw line, shape, tone, perspective and balance. For example, in the Tuscan model the painters adhered to the conception of drawing with cartoons as a way to transfer an image to a support, whereas the Venetians placed the importance on colour, *colorito*, over design and began a painting directly onto the canvas or panels. In *disegno* the signs of labour were to be

hidden; hence the early stages of making – the sketches and initial drawings – were not thought of as important to the finished work. Completion pertained to the high standard of excellence required by an artist.

Herein lay for me a point of significance, that is, of the practical and theoretical discussions on the validity of the drawn and painted mark: the indexical marks of painters that build and shape a painting. Fundamental to my practice is the significance of the preliminary marks as *pentimenti*, in both metaphoric and concrete terms. In the performance of making, of drawing and painting in the early stages, I could follow and imitate Renaissance styles and metaphorically penetrate layers of social behaviour as a way to integrate it with the marks of paint. The strict requirements of a finished work by *Cinquecento* painters suggested by Sohm (1991, 1995) brought awareness of the gendered bias of language involved in the ways of making and working with materials. Each process of painting was embedded with patriarchal masculine and feminine coding. By penetrating through the gendered layers of Sofonisba's painting processes, I stretched time and visualized the unfinished work, where I could position her as a subject in motion surrounded by the ideologies and rhetoric of codes of behaviour. Bolt, in a similar way to Carter, helped me to manoeuvre a way metaphorically to break open the paradigms of making a portrait into "a materialist ontology of a work of art" (Heidegger in Bolt 2004, 189), a kinaesthetic force wherein the uncertainty of making could be laid bare.

Art historians Mary D. Garrard (1994), Joanna Woods-Marsden (1998) and Liana De Girolami Cheney et al. (2000) interrogate the sexualisation of painting practice and iconographic meanings of motifs in *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola* (see Fig. 3, page 17) and *The Chess Game* (see Fig. 17, page 45). From a position as a practising artist I give my own analysis. *The Chess Game* is read as symbolic of sartorial relationships and the nuances of competition, and it is here I introduce the personification of the *Paragone* sisters of the liberal arts. I stretch metaphors by including into the correspondence *Pittura*, the personification of painting, with the practice of making, *Prattica*, and the practice of theorising, *Teoria*, as a symbolic tug of war between the joy and doubt in the painting process. I position *Poesia*, the personification of poetry, as representing the poetics of

language, as a personal voice, making light and hushing the disquiet of makers. The inclusion of the practice of sculpture, *Sculttura*, signifies the tension between painting and sculpture, and finally, the practice of architecture, *Architettura*, becomes a place of shelter.

The camera obscura as a site of shelter allows me to imagine Sofonisba as an “observing subject”, to enter a model of vision, a site of significance, because I can position her, the subject, between the Renaissance classical perspectival model of vision and the future complexities of multifocal viewing of photography and digital manipulation. Jonathon Crary (1992) argues that the importance of the camera obscura was not just that it was an instrument of vision but that it caused a profound shift for the participating viewer *and* in the knowing of the world. As a historical construction it stood for the viewing subject becoming increasingly aware of being connected to operational devices of vision. “For what constitutes the camera obscura is precisely its multiple identity, its ‘mixed’ status as an epistemological within a discursive order and object within an arrangement of cultural practice” (30). The subject became part of an evolving shift of human awareness of social and ideological consciousness. With the camera obscura as a base of security, Sofonisba’s sense of subjectivity is challenged as she travels back and forth through the centuries.

Continuing this line of thought, I place Sofonisba in front of a *tavolleta* and a stereoscope to be a participant in an empirical vision. Metaphorically no longer in the confinement of the camera obscura, she has to embrace the profound shifts of image-making with the advent of photography and evolving technology of cultural, social and scientific understanding of the human subject. Jonathan Crary (1992) suggests these mechanical models of vision are important components in an evolution of power and spectatorship from the early sixteenth to the nineteenth century. I imagined the “optical lens” (metaphorically) of the camera obscura, camera lucida, *tavolleta* and stereoscope as important signifiers for Sofonisba to realize image-making and the illusion of verisimilitude in portraiture.

By stepping with her through technological shifts of spectatorship I unravel my own art practice in relation to imitation and parody. I introduce the notion of

verisimilitude and copying, which has haunted my practice. I grapple to understand my relationship with the photographic image and trace the camera's influence on my art practice as a way of discovering an identity as a painter. I clothe myself in various facades of paint. Within the eerie construct of a simulacrum, I question if we as contemporary artists in portraiture can find moments of stability to find a voice of self in paint and to accommodate the incomplete self that shifts and continually remodels itself.

So, having laid out the basis for my discussion, I invite you to enter into my conversation with Sofonisba Anguissola. As argued by Paul James Elkin (1999), through narrative we join and share our stories of social and sexual constraints, love and loss. In marginality, the discursive voice is hushed, but we listen. The paintings are in wait for their becoming.

1. Beginning

Perth,

Western Australia.

January, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,¹



Fig. 1. Sofonisba Anguissola, *Self-Portrait*, 1554, oil on panel, 19.5 x 2.5 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Let us paint. I begin with figure and ground. You are the figure and what surrounds you is the ground. I position you in my picture plane (Fig. 1) and metaphorically hold a concave mirror up to the painting and examine the composition of what we have become. You are a young woman staring at the viewer holding a small book of letters. I too am a younger age and there are markings of paint and makeup on my face (see Fig. 2, page 15). The sunlight dances across your painting creating a kaleidoscope of artistic movements. Temporality shifts between past and present and in the *here and now* I peer closely and with a rag rub the grimy surface. I have

¹ Sofonisba Anguissola, also known as Anguisciola, (1532–1624) was born in Cremona, Lombardy, and died in Palermo, Sicily. She was the eldest of six sisters Sofonisba, Elena, Lucia, Europa, Minerva and Anna Maria, and one brother, Asdrubale. Her father, Amilcare Anguissola, and mother, Bianca Ponzzone, were of the nobility. All the sisters, with the exception of Minerva, became artists. In her lifetime, Sofonisba became a renowned portrait painter and joined the Spanish Court in the winter of 1559–1560. She arrived in Madrid to serve as a court painter and lady-in-waiting to the new Queen, Isabel del Valois, the third wife of King Philip II, and was thus presented with the opportunity to cement her career as a successful painter. For more extensive background information on Sofonisba Anguissola, refer to Cheney, Faxon and Russo 2000, 46–56, and Woods-Marsden 1998, 189–213.

difficulty seeing as a light beam has caught on the painting and the surface glaze has become sharp and shiny. I scrape off the residue of a sticky patina of varnish and examine the layers of what lies beneath. There is a meshing of time and space that is confusing, for what is the present but an ongoing reconstruction of the past? As we both work in portraiture, my quest is to seek out what is relevant in my chosen themes of sibling relationships, gender and aging.



Fig. 2. Angela Stewart, *Woman and Madness No. 3*, 1992, Ilford photograph, 19.5 x 25 cm. Personal collection of the artist.

Recently, a colleague queried me on why I do not examine portraits of someone born in or near my own time. I can only answer by stepping sideways, as I cannot easily explain my reticence. I acknowledge that my choice of you, as a sixteenth-century woman artist from the Italian Renaissance, allows me a safe place for reflection and reverie.² I deliberately turn away from the twenty-first century and engross myself in your world. Perhaps it is because the model of portrait practice entails an intensity of relationships, which is private and immediate. The encounter is noisy and multi-layered, noisy since I need to constantly converse to understand, to probe and to capture the nuances of my sitter's personality and also capture verisimilitude and

² Sofonisba Anguissola was of noble birth and had an enterprising father; she was versed in letters and had an apt skill for writing, as shown in her letters. See Perlingieri 1992, 170–171, 173–174. This, however, was not the norm. For literacy of early modern women see Crabb 2007, 1170–1206, and King 1991, 157–240.

likeness. It is not easy. But there is also a privacy that must be maintained, a confidentiality of conversations spoken, which must always be respected ... I hold up the mirror to reflect back the images of your life and work, but, if the mirror is close, the images are too magnified. If it is held beyond the focal point, all becomes inverted. Thus, in the nature of inversion and magnification comes an understanding there is not truth per se. It is liberating here. We can find a freedom to tease the complexities and unravel the importance of painting and photography in your and my portrait practice. You are my muse and I look back into history to formulate my ideas and arguments. I prefer to listen rather than to speak in contemporary art debates. Here, I learn to find my voice.

I reach across and take your maulstick and onto the sand draw a game of noughts and crosses, a line of patriarchy, a line of familial relationships, a line of theory and a line of practice. Let us play before the book of sand sweeps it away ...³

Yours sincerely,

Angela

³ Here I am referring to one of my favourite books: Jorge Luis Borges, *The Book of Sands*, 1979.

2. Figure and Ground

Perth,

Western Australia.

February, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

I was first introduced to your work when I saw *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola*, 1559, hanging in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Sienna (Fig. 3).⁴ It is the only original piece I have seen of your oeuvre and I noted that it had all the ingredients I relish in my own work: portraiture, self-portraiture, gender struggle, and the act of painting. It suggested a clever perception of the role a woman painter played in the particular patriarchal world of Renaissance Italy.⁵



Fig. 3. Sofonisba Anguissola, *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola*, oil on canvas, 111 x 109.5 cm. Pinacoteca Nazionale, Sienna.

⁴ Renaissance scholar Dr Sally Quin introduced me to this painting. She aroused my interest through her questioning of the marginality of women in Giorgio Vasari's *Vitae* in her unpublished thesis "The identity of the female artist in early modern Italy: a study of the reception and practice of Properzia de' Rossi, Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana within contemporary discourses on art, women and class", University of Western Australia, 2004. While acknowledging the exclusory and discriminatory impulse of the *Lives* in relation to women, her thesis focuses on the more positive and complex aspects of Vasari's criticism of female artists.

⁵ Garrard (1994) places Sofonisba as very aware of her political position, which challenges the masculine canon of sixteenth-century scholarship. She gives a feminist slant to Sofonisba's painting in her essay "Here's looking at me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the problem of the woman artist", 556–622. To read more on Sofonisba Anguissola's fame, refer to Cheney et al. 2000, 45–56. To look at Sofonisba in relation to other female artists of her time, refer to King 1995, 381–406 and Jacobs 1994, 74–100.

In this painting two figures stand in the picture plane. One is Bernardino Campi,⁶ your ex-tutor, and the other is yourself, enclosed in a painting on an easel. He has his arm stretched across your body and is depicted in the act of painting you while his turned gaze pointedly fixes the audience. Your proportions dominate the picture and this demands the viewer's attention, yet your own painter's hands remain passive and demure. At first glance, the composition appears self-explanatory he is painting you until I realise the contradiction: *you* are the author of the work. There are three actions involved, "a painter painting a portrait, a painter painting a self-portrait, and a painter painting another painter painting what is in fact her self-portrait" (Cheney et al. 2000, 54).

This is an interesting dilemma of "self". My assertion is that the painter "self" slips between you and him, as both a man and a woman, in two separate pictorial spaces. One is free standing and the other is inside a canvas. Although you are painting him as him/self, you are painting him as a significant other, as your painter self. It is the morphing of his Renaissance creative self into your self, the Renaissance woman painter. As such, the painting is cleverly interlaced under the mantle of portraiture and self-portraiture. It tells the story of a woman's rise to power,⁷ with two essential iconographical references, the painter's brush and easel.⁸



Fig. 4. Angela Stewart, *Punctum and Punctate*, 2001, oil on C-photograph, 91 x 204 cm [2 images]. Private collection.

⁶ Bernardino Campi, 1522–1591, Renaissance painter. He worked in Cremona. See Freedberg 1993, 583; 590–591.

⁷ In joining the Spanish court, Sofonisba was in her lifetime to achieve higher status than did her former tutor. See the letter she wrote to her former tutor in Perlingieri 1992, 126. The practice of women needing support from male artists, known in the Renaissance, continues into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Uta Grosenick makes an important point in highlighting how many women had to use a successful male artist's influence to support their practice in the twentieth century. She believes that the question about whether "... women artists will continue to stake their positions in a world still dominated by men and insist that art be seen as the distinctive statement of a unique individual, regardless of gender – remains open. Let us hope they will succeed in their effort." Grosenick 2001, 16–17.

⁸ The painter's hand holding a paint-laden brush is a constant motif in my artwork as will be explained in follow-up letters.

Your age differs from mine in how it sees the role of self.⁹ My artistic self-awareness, as shown in my painted photographs *Punctum and Punctate*, is a compilation of ideological and social formations of many art movements, published books and art education (see Fig. 4, page 18). My autonomy is being shaped, slowly, by a growing awareness of the matriarchal heritage of women painters, whereas your rise of artistic self began through male diligence and promotion.

Your father, Amilcare Anguissola, enrolled support for your practice from Michelangelo's and Papal patronage. In a few short years, you gained the support of art critics and theorists such as Giorgio Vasari, Annibale Caro and Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, to name but a few. In addition, the invitation of King Philip II of Spain to reside in his court as a maid in waiting to his young wife, Isabel de Valois, was a great honour.

To see your painting in the flesh was important. As painters realise, there is nothing better than experiencing the tactility of paint, to stand in front of a work of art and sense its size, ambience and textures. With its smooth surface, a reproduction does not have the same presence. It offers an entirely different way of knowing and understanding. I mention it only briefly here and will expand on this concern in greater detail in subsequent letters. It involves a delicious conversation about paint application and the photograph ...

Yours sincerely,

Angela

⁹ The role of self is a particular issue in cultural theories. See Benveniste in Silverman 1983, 43–53.

3. *Tabula Rasa*

Perth,

Western Australia.

February, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

It is curious how at times I have a murmur in the background of my thoughts, perhaps a lyric of a song I find myself humming absentmindedly with annoying consistency. I have a recurring itch of thought, one that I'm not able to reach and satisfy, a confused, jumbled shape concerning a passage quoted by an artist featured in an old art magazine. It began when, searching through my messy papers, I stumbled across a photocopied section of a 2001 edition of *Contemporary* magazine. This specific issue celebrated the works of twenty-one contemporary painters and the trends displayed within the field of painting at the turn of the century. It was an edition my colleagues and I welcomed, because it gave balance to the proliferation in recent publications of coverage about conceptual art, video and installation. With a contented sigh, I curled up in a chair and flicked through the pages, and for some reason, out of all that I read and studied that morning, a particular passage remained, bumping against me. It read as follows: "One of my favourite realisations came to me recently when I had to give a lecture about my work to all these rather terrifying ladies at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. I was very embarrassed and nervous, and I said that the first thing you have to remember is that they all start off with nothing on them at all – and that seemed to me like the real point, that seemed to me to be all they really needed to know. It sounds obvious, but one of them came up to me afterwards, I remember, and she said she wanted to thank me. She said she felt very stupid, but she had got so used to thinking about art in critical, intellectual terms that she had actually forgotten that the pictures start off empty. For me, that, basically, is the process, at all times. You start off with nothing and you try not to ruin it" (Gary Hume, painter, quoted in Graham-Dixon 2003, 65).

When I first read this particular passage I chuckled. I imagined myself in the male painter's position addressing a group of elegantly dressed society women and felt sympathy. I loved the idea of the humility of the blank canvas, the concept of the

open door, which brings the artist to his or her knees and in so doing allows the audience to revel in the space of an empty surface. My first impression, because the whole timbre of the article implied sympathy and fellowship with the painter (who portrayed himself as laconic, humorous and self-deprecating), was the obvious love of paint.¹⁰ However the more I contemplated the story, the deeper became the resonance of the issues implied in the paragraph.

Albeit awkwardly, the painter had given his audience “all they needed to know” (Graham-Dixon 2003, 65), an essence of his own profound understanding of a process in art making and illustrated it through the story of the woman in the audience who felt able to acknowledge he had enabled her to recover her own understanding of the importance of the empty surface. The passage could also be read as a woman’s apology to a male authority delivering knowledge and understanding to a female audience. So within this little story are several pertinent points: a *tabula rasa*, an implicit apology from the woman in the audience, a subtle hint of gender bias and the notion of openness. And I add, generosity: the artist sharing his tale and a woman sharing the insight of understanding.

“You start with nothing and you try not to ruin it” (Graham-Dixon 2003, 65) reverberates through a window of a gallery in a noisy city, against the walls of your studio and into mine. With a smile we shield ourselves from its echo ... ruin it ... ruin it ... ruin it ...

I lay the foundation. The *tabula rasa* is a blank slate, the material beginning of the painting process. Today, instead of canvas or photographic paper, I choose a firm surface (MDF).¹¹ I see you have a stretched canvas, which allows for easy transport by simply rolling it off its frame and binding it to send to one of your patrons. Our first layer is size, with an animal-hide glue solution to seal my wooden surface and, in your case, to protect the weave of cloth. Next comes the ground as a gesso: a creamy mix of gypsum, white lead or titanium, chalk powder as whitening and the

¹⁰ See the section describing Gary Hume’s earlier door paintings. My understanding of the sheen is the light reflecting back as the *illusion* of the history of painting. I feel sympathy with this comment because of my earlier difficulty in theorizing the creative act of beginning a work.

¹¹ MDF is medium density fibreboard used as a building material. It is commonly used in contemporary painting practice in place of wood panels.

heated skin glue, applied thinly and in layers. We paint one layer of gesso on another, sanding in between, to create a beautiful smooth porcelain surface. I may also work with acrylic gesso, or coloured enamel house paint, or raw canvas. You may have included china clay, raw umber, white lead dry pigment and raw linseed oil in your ground to colour the white surface into a transparent *imprimatur*.¹² Ideally, we would allow enough time to pass for the surfaces to cure. You have egg, resin and oil emulsion prepared for the first layers of underpainting.

We are almost ready to begin, but I hesitate ...

It is about a blank surface and the mark that follows the first. The first mark sets a dynamic on the surface, and those that follow change the universe. The process itself can have its own rhythm and energy but along with it can trail an artist's doubt. "Try not to ruin it" sits on the edge of consciousness and hovers between the brush and the surface.

It is far from uncommon for us as art practitioners to speak of a painting telling the painter what it wants. By such a remark it could appear that we give over responsibility of what is happening on the surface by seemingly imbuing the inanimate object of a painting surface with supernatural abilities. By this argument I could claim that when a painting is not working it is not because of my lack of skill but because of an inherent quality lying in waiting within the painting itself yet refusing to appear. Over the ages many scholars, painters and philosophers have questioned the shamanistic quality in artworks. My colleague, artist and scholar Barbara Bolt (2004), by her investigation of philosopher Martin Heidegger, gave an opening for me to process *The Performative Power of the Image*, an appropriate subtitle of her book *Art Beyond Representation*. Heidegger believed the artistic process didn't belong to the artist's ability as such or the *techne*¹³ to be a good or bad practitioner of working with materials. Nor was it about the materials, or the

¹² Massey 1967, 16–17: 23. 36, Vasari 1960, 205–239, Van Hout 1998, 199–216.

¹³ I am aware of the danger, by barely mentioning it in a letter, in making Martin Heidegger's assertion on technique too simplistic. As Bolt (2004) explains in her chapter "Contingency and the emergence of art", Heidegger seriously questions the notion of technology and technique and their influence on mankind (52–86).

‘heroic’ artist being in control of the painting process.¹⁴ Instead, for him it was about the purity of what lies inherent in art itself which allowed “[t]he *work* of the work of art” (108) to be revealed. Bolt is respectful of the processes of technique, but to my delight brings alive the tangibility of both the materiality and the concepts, and in so doing allows the work to speak to us. Following his argument, she also claims: “If we are open, then we may find ourselves in a position where the art work speaks to us, rather than remaining in a place where we are always calling the tune, always being masterful” (104).

In contrast with Heidegger, Bolt gives us an artist’s freedom of movement and sensuality of play and desire by placing emphasis on the action of a *lived body* and the *performativity* of making.¹⁵

Let us consider you and me as the *lived body* – we meld as one into the performance of making with gesso and the paint materials about us. We are invited by Bolt to bring the conceptualization and the making of our art into our everyday life, which in this instance is the ebb and flow of bodies, objects, the chatter of conversations. We invest not simply in the ‘representations’¹⁶ of the sitter before us, but the concept of us participating as a *body of painting*. We are part of a whole, a metamorphosis of making, thinking, conversing, doing.

In the motion of making human and non-human ‘breathe’ life into the work of art, what is without becomes within. As Barbara Bolt reminds me, it is in this moment that the work of art casts its power and physically and emotionally impacts upon us. Or, as she declares, “Through process, the outside world enters the work and the

¹⁴ Bolt 2004 paraphrasing Heidegger as allowing the creative processes of the work to emerge: “art is a *poietic* revealing” (9) and “the artist remains inconsequential as compared to the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge” (105).

¹⁵ I consider the concept of desire an important component in the lived body. See, for example, Elizabeth Grosz’s (1994) concept of “desire”: “Instead of aligning desire with fantasy and opposing to the real, instead of seeing it as a yearning, desire is an actualization, a series of practices, bringing things together or separating them, making machines, making reality. Desire does not take for itself a particular object whose attainment it requires; rather it aims at nothing above its own proliferation or self-expansion. It assembles things out of singularities and breaks things, assemblages, down into their singularities. It moves; it does” (quoted in Bolt 2004, 199 n8). See also differing versions of desire in Grosz 1994, 160–183.

¹⁶ Bolt’s (2004) publication challenges the paradigm of representation in art and writing and argues for a space beyond representation by the performative power of the body.

work casts effects back into the world. We are literally moved” (190).¹⁷

I wonder if this is foreign to you, whether you could be aware of the essence of your body and your materials blending in unison as a vital component in the making of a painting. Dare I add your *female* body? – surely the nature of painting is such that, as a woman painter, you needed a niche of shelter away from the superstition and confusion of the gendered language of brush marks and paint?¹⁸ By focusing on and being with the inherent quality in the artwork itself, you could – as I can – shed everything unnecessary and be present and alone in the act of painting, alone with oneself, in spite of the company about us. It is the same mystical quality I believe John Berger (2001) understood as he wrote this to his friend Miquel Barceló: “Working alone, the painter knows that far from being able to control the painting from the outside, he has to inhabit it and find shelter in it ...” (31). I know that what must emerge in the act of painting is a self that metaphorically somersaults backwards on itself and within this movement a shadowed twilight self appears that can live in a quiet space – a shadow self that ignores the doubting self and works alone. I realize this sounds oblique, but I sense that you and I as painters know that we need to trust in our process, be in its truth, and achieve quietness and confidence, which can be a difficult thing to do. We find a quiet place of working even if we have the sound of music and ambient noise all about us. It is not about sound, it is about quiet, even when it is a shout.

We know of one woman in the audience sitting listening to our speaker in the New York Guggenheim Museum who hushed her inner voice. Perhaps in their own way many present at that talk were striving for a quiet space to understand the process of making a work of art, beyond the prestige and the excess of the art world cliché. As I watch her approaching the painter with her gift of openness I have to admit I feel a mix of affection and annoyance. I appreciate her gift of gratitude and the generosity it implies by acknowledging the toil and profundity of making.

But we as women through the ages have demeaned our worth so frequently. I am

¹⁷ To unravel the complexities of gendering language of brush marks in this era see Sohm 1991 25–53; 1995, 759–808.

¹⁸ See Sohm 1991, 25–53; 1995, 759–808.

disturbed that she may have approached the artist as the “heroic” one, the one who knows. For all her intellect this woman is denying her own participation, which is a necessary component in the dynamic between the work, the artist and the spectator (Bolt 2004, 107). She joins us as doubting creative art makers and thinkers by the admission of her ‘mistake’ of forgetting where one needs to begin.

An image keeps coming into my thoughts as I write. It is of an early work I did many years ago in my “Degas and I” series (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Angela Stewart, *Degas and I, No. 1, 2 & 3*, 1993, acrylic on C-photograph, 18.5 x 25 cm. Personal collection of the artist.

These images belong to the notion of anonymity. On a photograph of myself I painted the *Woman with the Lorgnette*, a famous drawing by Edgar Degas of a woman at the racetrack in the late nineteenth century. Much commentary has been made of Degas’s image of a woman who dared to look, in a public place, shielded by her binoculars. But my interest was the idea that we, the audience, were being magnified. I did a small series of three works, each image showing her becoming larger and more confronting behind me. At this moment I can feel the anonymous woman standing in the racetrack gazing through her glasses at me, and her challenge to me is to question a woman’s anonymity and apology a century or more later in a public place, recorded, not through a visual image, but by gendered language.

In this instance I think it is important for us to realize that our anonymous woman almost became lost in the subtle mockery and wonderment of the passage quoted by our male artist. Even though she had the generosity of thanking the artist for the insight he gave her, by giving her no name he allows her to slip, into a canon of historical, nameless, clever women. He may not have intended it to be a slight but it has come to pass; the language of paint and the camaraderie of fellow painters can allow us to be seduced and overlook the subtle gender blindness. A shared experience of the aura of a blank canvas, a *tabula rasa*, and laughter, can

momentarily allow us to forget our conceits.

For you there was protocol to obey in social grace as an artist and as a young noble woman. A slight such as this may well have passed unnoticed. Reading your letters to Pope Pius IV¹⁹ and your past tutor Bernardino Campi I note you apologized so beautifully. It is an art to apologize graciously, is it not? Do we mean it when we apologize? Our anonymous woman may well not have been apologizing for her lack of insight (because she also claimed her intelligence); it might instead have been a coquettish dance of etiquette and she may well have simply wanted to celebrate the creativity and charm of a painter. Where is our grace? Where is mine?

Enough of words, of speculation, of conjecture; I am avoiding beginning my new surface. I was going to begin painting but now I am feeling unsettled. I will draw instead.

I love the immediacy that drawing brings. I pick up a stick of willow charcoal and paper. I break my stick. To work with a blunt end gives a very different mark to using a pointed one ... but you know this: you illustrate it so brilliantly with your drawing of the *Boy Bitten by a Crayfish* (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Sofonisba Anguissola, *Boy Bitten by a Crayfish*, c.1554, charcoal on oxidized cerulean paper, watermark, 33.3 x 38.5 cm. Museo di Capodimonte, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Museo di Campodimonte, Naples.

Yours sincerely,

Angela

¹⁹ See the eloquent and touching letters Sofonisba Anguissola wrote to Pope Pius IV in Vasari 1996, 467.

4. *La Pittura*

Johannesburg.

South Africa.

February, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

In some of my earlier work I wove together photography and painting. I would photograph my models after painting their faces, not with makeup but with acrylic paint, and on the resulting photograph I would continue imbuing details of an historic painting in further layers of acrylic or oil. Unrealized by me, my models were re-enacting an allegory of the painting *La Pittura* (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Giorgio Vasari, *La Pittura*, 1554.
Arezzo, Casa Vasari.

It was when I began to research your life and work that I realised the motif of a woman painting, or being photographed holding a paintbrush in the act of portraiture or self-portraiture, was in fact a quest to understand the historical and contemporary *La Pittura* in photography and paint.²⁰

²⁰ I saw Giorgio Vasari's *La Pittura*, 1542, in Arezzo, on the same art tour during which I saw Sofonisba's painting. It had a strong impact on me, although at that time I was not aware of the significance the figure would have for my practice. For a description of *La Pittura* in context with Sofonisba, refer to Woods-Marsden 1998, 206–210. Mary D. Garrard (2001) brought to my attention the evolution of *La Pittura* as a masculine figure from the Middle Ages to female personification in the mid sixteenth century in her chapter entitled “The allegory of painting”, 337–372. With the realization of the various ways of reading gender connotations in *La Pittura* I revisited the *Paragone* debate and the positioning of painting in the liberal arts. The *Paragone* between the personification of painting and sculpture in *Cinquecento* was the contest for supremacy in the Liberal Arts (Painting, Sculpture and Architecture), a model where the Renaissance artist extolled the virtue of the intellect

In 2005 I came across *La Pittura*, Giorgio Vasari's fresco in his villa in Arezzo. I was enchanted by this image of a woman painting her self-portrait and drawn to the painting on the easel. Her self-portrait was raw without her makeup of beauty on, so to speak masculine looking and incomplete. Its crudeness made the drawing all the more fascinating as it was created at a time when a beautiful woman was the idealization of painting. Here, the *pentimento* was exposed with all the awkwardness and movement of the early stages of making a portrait.

I enjoy the tug of war between painting and photography.²¹ For instance, in the artwork I have included here is a painted photograph, "*Earth*" Meets "*Air*" (Fig. 9). I placed inside the picture plane two figures, who are depicted painting one another. Read as a photograph, it would depict two partially naked women. They face each other and they mirror each other's actions. Each woman reaches across and paints the other.²² The lighting highlights the rich warmth of skin tones against a background of a shiny darkness. It has the quality of polished glamour and the sexual undertones one expects in an *Elle* or *Playboy* magazine.



Fig. 8. Guiseppe Arcimboldo, *Earth*, c.1570, oil on wood. 70.2 x 48.7 cm. Private collection, Germany.



Fig. 10. Guiseppe Arcimboldo, *Air*, c.1556, oil on canvas, 75 x 56 cm. Private collection, Basel, Switzerland.

Fig. 9. Angela Stewart, "*Earth*" Meets "*Air*," 2004, oil on C-photograph, 30 x 45 cm. Private collection.



over the manual task of labour. *Disegno* was the Father of the Arts. See Tinagli Baxter 1981, 24–36.

²¹ Mitchell (1996) allowed me to see beyond the photograph and painting divide and to consider the position of the images being animate in "What Do Pictures 'Really' Want? 71–82. This shift in thinking allowed me to contextualise *Pittura* as a moving visual image with the capacity to disrobe painting concepts, for example, Abstract Expressionism. I have often questioned my choice to paint in a naturalistic style instead of embracing abstraction. By letting the figure move through paint movements between the middle ages and the twenty-first century, I could shed influences that were not appropriate.

²² See Broude and Garrard, eds 1982, 15: 19.

If we suspend the images of the two women momentarily we see a partially painted plastic surface. We are asked to consider the significance of a photograph before it is acknowledged as a painting.²³ The photograph becomes the canvas of the painting, with the paint covering the photograph's surface and the nakedness of the photographed bodies. It suggests an intimate performance of the women because the two women, instead of looking past a canvas at their own reflections, here acquiesce and look only at each other. Each woman, I now suggest, is a contemporary *Pittura* and, as such, we are watching paint painting. Each model is being painted by the other into Giuseppe Arcimboldo's sixteenth-century paintings, *Earth* (see Fig. 8, page 28) and *Air* (see Fig. 10, page 28). One model is clothed as *Earth* and the other as *Air*. They meet at the point of the paintbrush.²⁴

What I did not recognise until recently was that, by the use of the film of paint covering the photograph as a fine layer, I was dressing the models metaphorically with the skin of cloth. If we pause for a minute, I am saying that we could peel off the layer of paint sitting on the photographic surface and suspend it. It could be thought of as a thin sheaf of stocking or lace.

The paint layer is a sliver of abstracted paint. To consider a skin of paint *on* the photographic surface as nonfigurative allows me to consider this paint layer as also *pentimento* representing the alterations and preliminary decisions to blot out the photograph with paint.²⁵

²³ Benjamin 2009. For discussion on photography see chapter entitled "Brief history of photography".

²⁴ The paintbrush loaded with paint is a repeated motif in my work. The amalgamation of photograph and painting is what drives my practice. I cannot imagine one without the other. I paint my portraits on canvas, board or photographic paper but always the photograph, be it a photographic reproduction of an historical painting or a family snapshot, is resting in the background of my thoughts. The self-awareness of being observed by a painter or photographer sits inside this paradigm. To me, *La Pittura* represents this awareness of self as the painter.

²⁵ The extent of *pentimenti* and their influences on my practice will be discussed in the following letters. I use the term metaphorically as well as practically. A *pentimento* (plural *pentimenti*) is an alteration in a painting, evidenced by traces of previous work, showing that the artist has changed his or her mind as to the composition during the process of painting. The basic meaning (or root meaning) behind the Italian word is that of repentance. What I am suggesting here is that, as well as that under a painting surface, the fine film of paint on top of the photographic surface can also be considered *pentimento*.



Fig. 11. Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Spring*, 1573, oil on canvas, 76 x 63.5 cm. Louvre Museum, Paris.



Fig. 13. Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Summer*, c. 1573, oil on canvas, 67 x 81 cm. Louvre Museum, Paris.

Fig. 12. Angela Stewart "*Summer*" meets "*Spring*," 2004, oil on C-photograph, 30 x 45 cm. Personal collection of the artist.



I am inviting you to reconsider the layers of paint on the photograph of Arcimboldo-like images (see Fig. 9, page 28, and Fig. 12), *and* on the women immersed in the beautiful paintings of Arcimboldo (see Figs 8 and 10, page 28) and (Figs 11 and 13), to be palimpsest that dresses and covers the naked vulnerability of the woman painters.

You may challenge me in that this leap is too far, too high, or we may arrive in the ground of painting.

Let us follow the slithering line of paint across a surface to a place waiting to be discovered, as a five-year-old friend of mine said ... over the hills to a faraway land ...

Yours sincerely,

Angela

5. Gender

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

March, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

Let us stain our canvases with gender. The early afternoon's light filters into the room. I am in my century and you are in yours.²⁶ You are in your studio, with paints and brushes in order, and pose in front of the mirror to position yourself for a self-portrait. You sketch with paint the layout of the composition and choose oil colours, embedded in coding of masculinity and femininity.²⁷



Fig. 14. Sofonisba Anguissola, *Self-Portrait at the Easel*, c.1556, oil on canvas, 66 x 57 cm. Muzeum-Zamek, Lancut.

²⁶ Today in western culture the representation of male and female social and sexual identity in visual art is in a constant state of flux. See Grosz's (1994) chapter entitled "Refiguring bodies", in which she examines subordinate dichotomous thought and lack of tolerance in recognizing sexual difference, with sex/gender as a site for social, political and cultural struggle. "The specificity of bodies must be understood in its historical rather than simply its biological concreteness. Indeed, there is no body as such: there are only *bodies* – male or female, black, brown, white, large or small – and the gradations in between (19)".

²⁷ For coding of painting practices as masculine and feminine according to the style of brush strokes and choice of colour in art practice of this period see Sohm 1991, 59, 174–175.

Paint, delicious oil paint. I reach for a tube of chemically synthesized paint, alizarin crimson to join the lemon yellow resting on my palette. The colour I mix is sweet, a warm fleshy colour. It is curious to describe it as “sweet”, *dolce* in your place.

I study your palette from a reproduction of *Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-Portrait at the Easel* (see Fig. 14 page 31). I note you were using scarlet red, raw umber, ivory black, Prussian blue and lead white, while on my palette are cadmium red, phthallo blue, lemon yellow and titanium white. It is strange there is no yellow on your palette, for mixing the subtleties of Italian skin tones ... and ultramarine blue would have been a more pertinent choice for the devotional painting of the Virgin Mary, though it was a precious (and expensive) pigment.²⁷ Perhaps you allowed the pigments to be ground in your studio, and supervised the “filtering, baking and distilling” (Walden 1985, 29) whereas I, in this instance, bought oil paint in tubes from the local art shop. Your alchemy of making and mixing colours came about through processing organic “resins, dyes, insects, flowers or leaves or inorganic glass, stone, ochres and minerals” (30). The mediums added allowed the paint to slide easily over the ground of the panel. The ingredient may have changed but it is the same today: the thin medium loaded with less oil and more turpentine modifies viscosity to allow the first washes of paint to move fluidly and then a thicker medium causes the paint to be more opaque and slow drying.

In an earlier work, a self-portrait painted photograph *Degas and I at the Ballet* (see Fig. 15, page 33),²⁸ I placed my colour on the baseline. Prior to being photographed I painted my face with acrylic paint, and continued the process on the photographic surface, immersing myself in a painting of nineteenth-century French Impressionist Edgar Degas. My interest was the representation of women as the object of gaze and desire. I, however, looked sideways, lowered my eyes and avoided the viewer, and in so doing disengaged with Degas, the original artist of the image. The inclusion of the palette and paint in *Self-Portrait at the Easel, Painting a Devotional Panel* and

²⁷ See Walden 1985, 31, for discussion on the pigment. Ultramarine blue was so expensive it was restricted for use only on images of the Virgin Mary.

²⁸ The image was part of my Masters of Art creative work *Scrutinizing Representation*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, January 1993, which was influenced by feminist scholarship. See Broude and Garrard, eds, 1982, 246–269, and Kendall and Pollock, eds, 1992, 95–105: 106–130. For the question of private spaces as a woman’s perspective, see Pollock 1988, 248–269.

Degas and I at the Ballet was significant. For you to include a representation of your palette was a declaration as a woman artist in a male domain, while I was teasing the premises of photography.



Fig. 15. Angela Stewart, *Degas and I at the Ballet, No. 1 & 2*, 1992, acrylic on Ilford photograph [2 images], 18.5 x 25 cm. Personal collection of the artist.

Our first stain of paint examines masculinity and femininity in your century. I know you were familiar with the work of Michelangelo, because of the correspondence he engaged in with your father and his critique of your drawing. Your advocate, Vasari, who admired your work, extolled the brilliance of Michelangelo's ability to work with fresco, which required mastery of "masculine" skills, whereas both he and Michelangelo deemed oil paint "easily malleable", "feminine" and "inferior".²⁹

The feminine and masculine division advocated by Michelangelo was inherent in the Aristotelian tradition: "... that man as the embodiment of reason was superior to woman who had no reason" (Sohm 1995, 768). It illustrated a table of oppositions, where woman as other was deemed fickle and evil, whereas man was stable and good. Within this conceptual paradigm the qualities of feminine were gendered, unreliable and poor in physical and intellectual strength, while masculinity was favoured with boldness, clarity of mind and dexterity. The masculine attribute was particularly necessary in sustaining the strength and skill necessary to perform hard manual tasks. The technique of fresco demanded physical skill and the ability to work under difficult conditions, and this was deemed a province of male artistic practice. For example, a section of fresco would be worked on daily with the wet plaster, *intonaco*, with all mistakes and alterations having to be corrected before the

²⁹ Sohm 1995. See outline of the gender division, 759–858.

plaster dried. Speed and dexterity were therefore of the essence. Such attributes were considered prerequisites for the (male) artist in this medium, whereas Michelangelo declared painting with oil was “for women and slow and slovenly people”, an engendered slur on all who ventured into the dubious domain of oil painting.³⁰

It could be likened to a tailor brushing off the dust of what was thought as pertaining culturally to what was “man” or “woman”. The dust could be enveloped into the style of brush marks or density of colour. In the paintings a style or hue was culturally determined by the Aristotelian definition of feminine as passive or masculine as active. Phillip Sohm (1995) suggests Vasari couched ‘femininity’ in elements of oil paints by the subtle use of language. The art of fresco painting was ‘masculine’ and required strength and vigour to achieve, whereas ... “[o]il paint called upon the artist to be obedient and compliant (*diligente, con amore*). Oil allows the artist to adopt a more passive role since the oil, as it were, speaks for itself.” Sohm adds, “In terms of techniques themselves this is *mostly* nonsense” (790).

Here in my studio I am interested in the confounding of gender, a blurring of sexist divisions and debunking of sexual bias. Today, paint is not categorised under a feminine/masculine construct, unless specified by the artist or the viewer. I speculate, however, about how it must have been for you, stepping into an arena where oil paint itself was supposedly feminine, and accordingly maligned by many. Michelangelo, although encouraging of your drawing, was not a supporter of what was deemed womanly or feminine. You were a woman painter, in oils, who specialised in portraiture, elements he is known to have disapproved of.

In his essay, Sohm (1995) is particular in unravelling the misogynous stain conferred on woman by the gendered rhetoric in language; however, I find the “mostly nonsense” statement curious. It *is* mostly nonsense to imbue painting with weakness, but what is of interest is the part left over. The bit that isn’t nonsense ...

³⁰ Proccacci 1969. See essay entitled “The technique of mural paintings and their detachment”, 22.

I consider Vasari's quote a slippage spoken as a painter and not as a scholar. What isn't nonsensical? What is sensible? As a painter, I love the idea of paint being wilful, feminine and tricky, but without the stain of woman as being less-than. My interest is in the alchemy and materiality of paint, because oil paint has its own mystery, and is capricious. You and I, as painters, have had moments of passivity, when the paint's chemistry in combinations of pigment creates effects that can be wondrous and pass way beyond our known skill. Your colleague Vasari, I assert, was an artist versed in both oil paint and fresco, and would also have known the intangibility of oil paint. His oil-painter self differed from the one who worked in fresco and similarly from the scholar-self who wrote his *Vitae*. And in this space, I would like to believe, lay dormant a genderless sensibility. I find it both horrifying and interesting that the technique and materiality of paint were considered stained with femininity. Oil paint as feminine, couched in poetic language, was sought, hungered for, desired and vilified as weak and mercurial. Remember, though, Vasari also located femininity as *vaghezza*.³¹ He considered it to contain the "ambivalence of feminine beauty" (Sohm 1995, 768), and beauty was the most-sought-after ambition in art practice. Sohm, however, emphasises that even this was "[t]hought to be a superficial quality, [and] was often represented in art criticism as clothing or colour that was either devoid of inner meaning or actively concealed meaning ..." (768). So the qualities of beauty in light and shade, and in colour, are again designated into their gender division.³²

For you to paint the Virgin Mary with the soft feminine qualities of colour gives me the impression that at this early stage of your career the politics of the day were of little interest. You acknowledged and were compliant with the rhetoric of paint, colouring and design but remained steadfast in your task, proving yourself as a worthwhile and ambitious painter.

Back in my studio, I wonder about the femininity of oil paint, "a metaphor of artistic inferiority", and the masculinity of the paintbrush. I now borrow from Sohm's

³¹ *Vaghezza* is a quality of vagueness and uncertainty. In the Renaissance period it was an elusive quality pertaining to women's beauty. See Sohm 1995 for his discussion of Renaissance scholar Firenzuola's interpretation of *vaghezza* as becoming a feminine virtue, 761–773.

³² A shift occurs by the late nineteenth century, when oil becomes the province of the masculine and women are restricted to watercolour. My adoption of oil and watercolour speaks of both gender shifts.

scholarship a new awareness in reading my Degas work. I had not, prior to this, considered the actual paint covering my face was gendered in the inheritance of Renaissance rhetoric and art theory. Onto the palette I now add a mash of colour, a dash of misogyny, a sliver of Titian darkness, the powder of Degas pastel, and a blob of raw thick creamy Auerbach.³³

Yours sincerely,

Angela

³³ Frank Auerbach, 1931, German-born Expressionist painter known for his excessive use of thick impasto paint. It is interesting to note the British painter Glen Brown's appropriation of Auerbach's fleshy paintings with an exact replica but a pristine smooth surface, debunking the master's stroke of a paintbrush.

6. Anna

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

March, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

I pour tea into your cup and invite you to see my latest painting. It is not resolved. I have spent hours painting a small portrait of Anna Gray on a circular canvas, here in my studio in South Africa. I study sketches and photographs from a portrait session I had taken in Fremantle, Western Australia.

When I drew Anna³⁴ it was our first sitting, and as always there was a particular tension in the first encounter, a shuffling of personalities bumping together, getting used to each other. I carefully watched the slide of facial expressions and bodily gestures that punctuated our conversation. Anna, with her acute interest in the meta-history of painting, interrupted my concentration and probed my opinions of speakers at a conference in Melbourne we had recently attended.³⁵ I mumbled lacklustre opinions in answer. I was bemused as I sensed we mirrored each other's discomfort. For Anna it was being visually scrutinized; mine was triple-fold – a reluctance to articulate opinions on topics I had not yet brought to verbal focus; my inclination to listen more than to speak; and my need to concentrate on the portrait process.

It is always a balance of manoeuvring between parties that involves etiquette of manners in a portrait sitting, a dance of *sprezzatura*, or nonchalance about the

³⁴ Anne Gray (her professional name, Anna to friends and colleagues) is now Head and Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture before 1920, National Gallery of Australia.

³⁵ Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration, Convergence – the 32nd Conference of the International Committee of the History of Art (CIHA) 13–18 January 2008. The conference challenged meta-history and globalization. The abstract reads as:

The first meeting of an international congress of the history of art in the southern hemisphere epitomizes the expansion of the field throughout the globe. The history of the International Committee of the History of Art suggests what many people throughout the world have recognized: art and the discourses around it are increasingly global. Art and its history are not only created, but discussed in one form or another on all the inhabited continents of the earth. Globalism has thus also assumed an art historical aspect: indeed it has been described as art history's most pressing issue. But how can global issues in art history take form in theory or practice? What are the possibilities for a world art history?

formalities of ceremony. In postmodernity it is unspoken, individualized without the constrictions of style and idealism that was espoused by the sixteenth-century scholar Baldassare Castiglione.³⁶ I would like to think I dissolve politeness by encouraging or provoking my sitter into conversations about earnest interests and passions, that I reach and go beyond superficiality in conversation and I rumple any equanimity of posture, theirs or mine, and ingest the experience ... If only it was that straightforward ...

In her absence, Anna remains unknown to me. I nearly find her and she is gone. I study the sketches closely. Hers is a strong face of crevices, laughter lines, seriousness, fleshy bits and a beautiful mouth. The left side of her face is elusive today; the eye is hidden in folds of a smile and refuses to reveal its colour. My brush responds and flickers between the palette and the canvas. It paints a kaleidoscope of facial expressions belonging to a gallery of faces, but not to Anna.

At the time of my first meeting with Anna she was the Director of the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery at the University of Western Australia. An exhibition, *Generations: The Stolen Years of Fighters and Singers*,³⁷ was running alongside my solo exhibition *Three Women*, curated by Helen Carroll.

Three Women was a homage to and celebration of the lives of three aged matriarchs of white Australian and Hungarian descent in their late eighties and early nineties.³⁸ *Generations* was a homage to Indigenous communities of Aboriginal women of similar age and younger who, with their men and children, experienced the forced removal of their children and siblings, from the end of the nineteenth century until the early seventies in Australia.

When the *Three Women* exhibition opened, one of the women I painted told me she had had a young Aboriginal girl on their family farm who lived as part of her family and had helped her with her small children. For many years, she was unaware that

³⁶ For examination of the dance of etiquette and social structures in being a 'noble' painter of this era see Castiglione 2003, 35.

³⁷ *Generations: The Stolen Years of Fighters and Singers*, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western Australia, 18–22 July 1999, curated by T. Mia, Centre for Indigenous History, University of Western Australia.

³⁸ Stewart, A., *Three Women: Portraits, a Conversation in Paint and Charcoal*, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western Australia, 28 May – 27 June 1999, curated by H. Carroll. See also essays critiquing and supporting the exhibition by Cook 1999, Hinchliffe 1999 and Carroll 1999.

the young girl had been deliberately separated from her Aboriginal family and it was with a sense of *memento mori* and sorrow that she experienced *Generations: The Stolen Years of Fighters and Singers*. Similarly, before her death, my mother, Beryl, spoke of her own ignorance as a young mother of the tragedy happening in her own country, of the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents. She shared her dismay and shame at the fact that it was not an issue known or discussed amongst her peers, and we speculated about the nature of this racial social divide of how she had so blindly followed the racial stigma society had conferred on Aboriginal people. In turn, I shared my own moments of confusion with her, remembering when I, as a young child, was reprimanded for playing with my friends, the Aboriginal girls who lived up the road at Sister Kate's Children's Home.

Anna and I shared an encounter of mothers: two groups of women, whose synchronicity in both time and place of life stories was beyond representation in gallery exhibitions, a pairing of events whose entrances opened to each other in a university gallery at the end of the twentieth century. Both exhibitions brought a focus to women who had experienced love and tragedy in their own lifetimes interrupted by the blindness of world wars, refugee status, migration, post colonial politics, class distinction, racism and the brutal cruelty of national and local governmental social policies.

I turn towards you and place my empty cup into the saucer. We smile at each other absent-mindedly. In my mind's eye I watch a beautiful moment: Anna Gray in my Fremantle studio stretching with laughter and the flash of a red shawl sailing into the air. I remember the poetry written by Miriam Wei Wei Lo, the granddaughter of Sounness,³⁹ one of the matriarchs I painted in the *Three Women* exhibition:⁴⁰ I look sideways and see the face of a young Zimbabwean boy begging at the *robot*, the traffic light, up the road, here in South Africa ...

Yours sincerely,

Angela

³⁹ Eva Sounness was one of the three matriarchs I painted for *Three Women: Portraits, a Conversation in Paint and Charcoal*, 1990. See essays by Carroll and Hinchliffe in the accompanying catalogue, Stewart 1997.

⁴⁰ For a poignant reading of the mixed inherited cultures of grandmothers see Lo 2000, 106–109.

7. The Lick

Underberg,

South Africa.

April, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

Recently a four-year-old friend of mine offered to give me a kiss. His solemn instruction was it was to be a “tongue kiss” in the sense that we had to open our mouths and only our tongues were to touch. What resulted was a very funny encounter: the act of two tongues meeting. It was a tender but odd sensation. We both laughed, he mischievously and I with bemusement because for me it was an abject sensation, a meeting without the sensuousness of lips. To my adult self it felt invasive and bordered on unpleasantness, but here, in this instance, all was softened by the wondrous innocence of a young child, and the compliment of being allowed to “lick” with him. This encounter was much in my mind as I read Phillip Sohm’s (1995) essay, which coloured my responses to the derogative Renaissance term “Licked (*Leccato*)” (795).

There existed much rivalry between the Venetian and Florentine Schools during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴¹ The Florentine and Roman painting influences of Michelangelo and Vasari were heavily biased to support their own regional styles. The inference of *Leccato* was the Venetian smooth style, in which emphasis was placed on colour more than design. The desire was for a painting surface of slick, smooth, satin or heavily varnished veneer, which allowed no trace of brush marks to remain. Within the oppositional Florentine school, this concept of *Leccato* came to be understood as a slanderous suggestion that an artist debased and licked the paint to create such a finish. By implication it became “other”, lowly, feminine. By contrast, a richly painted surface of bold strong impasto paint marks was deemed masculine. Hence the visibility of brush marks became important: it denoted masculine vigour and strength.⁴²

⁴¹ Jacobs 1984, see discussion of origins of painting, 399–416.

⁴² For discussion and bias on technique of brushwork see Sohm 1995, 795 n102; 798.

With the former approach, the viscosity of the medium was such that the brush marks retracted into the paint as soon as it was applied, leaving a smooth patina on the surface. Alternatively, the paint was applied in several fine layers building up into a ‘sweet’ veneer and smooth “self-effacing brushwork...” (Sohm 1995, 798) was seen as weaker, imbued with femininity. The visibility of brush marks, or lack thereof, and obviousness of direction and texture became vital elements in the attribution of the masculine and feminine qualities.

When I stood in front of your painting *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola* in Sienna (see Fig. 3, page 17), I studied the fine web of slightly raised square brush marks covering the dark ground, and sensed the tangibility of your absence, the invisibility of your presence. I was tantalized. The indexical marks were such a powerful reminder of a painter painting.⁴³ It conjured up another painting, one near my own time: I found myself pondering *Interior in Yellow* (see Fig. 16, page 42) by twentieth-century Australian Modernist painter Grace Cossington Smith. Her work captures the colourful blaze of Australian light, yet the repetitive square brush marks have a subtle similarity to yours.

As a young woman painter you might not have been under pressure to have your own style. So much of what you painted in your early career would have been credited to your tutors, praise being allocated to the male influence, be it father, tutor, patron. For a woman to handle paint in your misogynist society was loaded with gender connotation. What I have learnt is that paint pigment was gendered as female to pair with male, the paintbrush that moves and can shift paint. The woman was passive and the man was active. This for a woman painter was a creative path to be trodden carefully.

⁴³ This reminds me of the term *pittoresco*, meaning painterly brushwork – a significant cause of debate concerning the visible brush mark which is unusual in Sofonisba Anguissola’s time.



Fig. 16. Grace Cossington Smith, *Interior in Yellow*, 1962/64, oil on composition board, 121.7 x 90.2 cm. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

If I consider your painting in the context of the power structures of the painted mark, you painted your tutor, Bernardino Campi, stretching his right hand across the painted body in the canvas on the easel. You, as the painted portrait body on the canvas are positioned hiding your own working hand, disguising your strength. To my twenty-first century eye you are caricaturing masculinity by heralding the male artist, your tutor, as the one holding the paintbrush. You, as a woman artist, appear to be personifying Vasari's description of you as "diligent".⁴⁴ Your creative self, your action hand, is lying passively behind the paternal Campi. You have allowed him to hold the brush. Are you, or he, using the bold, manly brush strokes? Allowing Campi to paint is curious considering the rhetoric of style would have allowed his masculine brush strokes to morph into the feminine domain, as it is you who after all is the painter *and* the paint. I suggest you are teasing the construction of painting, *La Pittura*.

The painting is a construction of two selves dancing the act of painting together by two brushes and, as in the case of my little friend and me, two tongues meeting, yours and Bernardino's. How interesting that you painted the point of Campi's

⁴⁴ Diligence (*diligenza*) would result in work with the desired finish, achieved by careful control of brush marks, not the unfinished work that is my interest. For Vasari to attach such a term to Sofonisba would have been to praise her on her skills, execution and *completion* of her pieces. I enjoy this irony, as I am attempting to interrogate what lies beneath her finished works. For further discussion of diligence see Sohm 1991, 31–32.

paintbrush hovering over your breast or is it close to your shoulder? I suggest the painting speaks of memory, of time past, when you were once given paternal guidance by your tutor, but now you metaphorically reach out from the canvas with your hidden arm and whirl him round, bringing him into a historical moment. As Garrard (1994, 556–622) suggests, by your fame you have inadvertently carried him through history, beyond his own merit and into yours. You own the fashioning of self with the generosity of including your teacher and mentor.

Here in my studio I relish the notion of licking the paint. In my earlier paintings I used a strong *impasto* method, influenced by the paternal style of my tutors, Douglas Chambers and John Beard. I learnt to love the crustiness of paint and to twist and roll my brush through one colour into the next and then twist my wrist and allow the brush to unravel onto the painted surface, a rainbow flicker of paint. These two men taught me there was a freedom and lushness in paint's worth. In Renaissance times this embodied movement might have been considered masculine. Some years ago I had my paintings critiqued by the late Arthur Russell, and his distaste for the roughed, raised surface of bulky paint caused me to change my style, as I held him in high esteem. I proceeded to paint smoother surfaces, conscious that I had been indulging in texture for texture's sake, not because it was necessary but out of habit.

I consider there is always the erotic in paint – between the sexes or within the sexes, under the surface, hidden in gender. “Licking” is an interesting word because it involves the body: to lick with the tongue, or metaphorically the surface of a painting with a brush, is to lick the *body of painting*. It is a precursor of intimacy, a sensual or sexual act. Applying paint is a sensual act, be it with the point of a brush, fine or square, or applying it with licking, rubbing, stumbling, dabbing or splashing.

I acknowledge that my emphasis may be aberrant to your taste, taking away the purity of intention. I come from a different ideology and culture. I can remember being told by a lecturer: “Paint what turns you on! Paint with abandonment, paint the sensation of a tongue in your ear”, instructions that brought a particular late-twentieth-century “taste” into the classroom.

With a wave of the maulstick my young child friend is now a youth ... and I use an

analogy to close our missive with a beautiful scene of what I consider a paintbrush “licking”. It is from the Korean film *Bom yeoreum gaeul gyeoul geurigo bom*, “Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter ... and Spring,” by director Ki-duk Kim. An old Buddhist monk is teaching his young apprentice patience and forbearance by means of a soft, pointed calligraphy brush, dipped in water and then used to paint a message on a smooth stone. The heat of the sun has warmed the stone. The stone has previously been carried in the story as a labour of repentance. As he scribes a message with clear water, each mark evaporates with the steaming heat. The boy, the viewer and we can only watch in awe and humility as the lesson unfolds and disappears too soon to be caught ...

Yours sincerely,

Angela

8. Verso Drawing

Perth,

Western Australia.

April, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

You are sitting where you had painted *The Chess Game* (Fig. 17), in a sunroom in your father's villa. Your chalk is sharpened and your drawing board rests against a tabletop. You appear composed, *diligent*. I balance my board and *Fabriano* drawing paper precariously on my knee and against the back of a chair. I hurriedly check about me for my black *conti* chalk, a kneadable eraser and a Stanley knife. We smooth our skirts in anticipation; we are ready.



Fig. 17. Sofonisba Anguissola, *The Chess Game*, 1555, oil on canvas, 72 x 97cm. Muzeum Narodowe, Poznan.

You wait and watch your younger siblings play. Somehow you have to manage to get your little brother to cry. It is easy today, as he is being querulous and difficult.

Quickly, you sketch the composition and position the two figures. You place emphasis on the little boy's face. The small girl's expression is more idealized, forced into sweetness by the pucker of her lips, whereas the little boy's distress is shown by the dark tonal mark of his mouth and the sculpting of his bulging cheeks (see Fig. 6, page 26).

My mother, absorbed in a television program, sits a short distance away. It is rare for her to allow me to draw her, as she is insistent on being wrinkle free. She is in discomfort; her face shows her exhaustion. I draw rapidly with fine lines tracing the hollows of her eyes, the fall of her lips and the slight gape of her mouth. I draw lightly to express her frailty, tracing outwardly the feeling of longing and disquiet inside me. For some reason I know she will not ask to see the finished drawing. It is not a sweet drawing; she is not being humoured or flattered, which is why she has rarely allowed me to draw her in the past. My drawing is too harsh for her (Fig. 18).



Fig. 18. Angela Stewart, *Beryl*, 2000, 66.5 x 48 cm, black *conti* chalk on *Fabriano* paper. Personal collection of the artist.

In our two drawings we both look for *disegno*,⁴⁵ proportion, the manner of movement.

Our eyes fall across the geometric grid taught to us by our tutors and passed down from manual, documents and books, by old masters such as Albrecht Dürer and Leonardo Da Vinci.⁴⁶ In our manner of studying the human form we acquiesce. I see my mother before me with clarity, as you see your siblings. We each have to silence the abundance of information about us and about art theories and movements – to simply look with the honesty of looking. To join in drawing we each take up a certain position and barely move our heads. In unison we stare, then drop our eyes. We scribble and look again, scribble, and look again, and again.

Let us return to the simplicity (and complexity) of drawing. In collusion, we place our drawings together, the *Boy Bitten by a Crayfish* (see Fig. 6, page 26) and *Beryl* (see Fig. 18, page 46).

The sizes may be different but, in our carefree manner, we deliberately usurp historical prestige, monetary value and restorers' concerns by gluing them together – *verso*, back to back, so that the underbellies rub against one another, finding points in common and difference.

We suspend the drawings and they swirl in the wind. They swivel, and flash, your time, my time, my time, your time. I deliberately chose a drawing to complement yours, a similar ilk of “representation”, a joining across many years of two figurative works, of family members, drawn from life, capturing the form of pathos in the expression of pain and tenderness: a crying brother and a beloved mother.⁴⁷

Yours sincerely,

Angela

⁴⁵ See Rosand 1982, 15–16, for the model of where *disegno* fitted into the liberal arts, and Sohm 1991, 35, for further discussion on Giorgio Vasari's differentiation between *disegno* and colour.

⁴⁶ Maloon and Raissis, eds, 1999. See letters Amilcare Anguissola wrote to Michelangelo promoting his daughter Sofonisba, 1557, 1558, in Perlingieri 1989, 10–14, 13. Also refer to Cheney 2007, 127–145 for Vasari's conception of *disegno* as “intellect” and “doing”; and Leonardo da Vinci 1970, vols 1 and 2.

⁴⁷ See Brilliant 1991 on “Fabricated identities” (89–140) and quoting Rainer Maria Rilke (113–115).

9. My Sketchbook

Perth,

Western Australia.

April, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

In one of my sketchbooks I have comical drawings I made when I sat in a café and sketched the body language of people about me – noting the innumerable ways hands communicate with a head, noses are scratched, strands of hair are played with, teeth are picked.

We, as artists, fictionalize the characters in front of us.

When I read fiction I enjoy the characterization. Characters become intimate companions. To paint a portrait is to create a character. A character, my sitter, takes part in life, has an inner dialogue and secrets, and converses with utterances, sighs, scratches and twists of the nose ... wriggles and shifts under surveillance ... begins with pleasantries and may dissolve into boredom. For an extended period, my sitter puts his or her best self forward, relaxes and slips away into a meditative state, only to return with a sneeze or cough.

I was fascinated when reading *Letters of Marcel Proust*⁴⁸ to see his frustration with some of his contemporaries' assumptions that characters in his novels were aliases of themselves. We assume familiarity, a sense of self. We identify with a character, be it in paint or letters, and slide into its clothing. As I sat in the café watching and sketching those present they were unaware of my gaze, but if they had been, I am sure they would have wanted to look over my shoulder and say, "Oh no, *that* is not me".

Vanita gloria is innate.

Yours sincerely,

Angela

⁴⁸ Proust 2006, 468–469.

10. Zulu Drawing

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

A Zulu friend of mine is learning how to read and write English. As a mature woman, she finds it no easy task and I am full of admiration for her tenacity. During a conversation I had with her tutor, a warm, well-meaning woman, she spoke of my friend's progress and added how she was also teaching her rudimentary drawing as a way of helping her to absorb the new language. She contentiously added how she (my friend) "hadn't as yet mastered [what] something looked like".

I felt a sense of dismay about what she might be encouraging my friend to *see* and whether it was steeped in an empirical colonialist representation.⁴⁹ It made me remember an awkward experience I had when teaching at tertiary level:⁵⁰ through my own sense of knowing, I blundered against a student's innocence.

You and I both know that, as teachers, there are times to be tough and other times to be soft and encouraging. On this occasion a student took umbrage at what she thought was a personal criticism of her drawing. She had not yet learnt to separate criticism of the artwork from criticism of the artist. I, as the lecturer, had the responsibility of realizing the varying standards in the class, and where to level criticism. As it happened, this student had rarely drawn prior to enrolling in the class.

I have (nobly) believed anyone can draw, if directed with skill to gain confidence in their drawing ability – provided they can dismantle preconceived ideas of what

49 The basis of the comment 'empirical colonialist representation' comes from my own experience of art education as a high school student in Western Australia in the sixties. In my research I have relied on unfolding the biases found in both the English and Italian models. The critical analyses by Ann Bermingham (2000) especially struck a chord with my own experience of learning to draw. I am aware I am taking artistic licence with my assumptions of post apartheid art practice in South Africa, a society new to me and rich with complexities and diversity.

⁵⁰ I taught as a part-time lecturer in Drawing and Painting at the Central Institute of Technology, Perth, Western Australia, 1995–2009.

drawing is and how they expect to perform. I directed the students to follow an exercise of night drawing as homework. The instructions were that it was to be a tonal drawing of nightlight, with no use of line. The students were to go out in the early evening and remain drawing until the night sky had erased the light of day. They were to chase the falling light with their chalk and block out detail as the darkness deepened. Ideally, the drawings would simplify into strong or misty shapes with various gradations of nightlight, which to me would have entailed smoky greys or intense blacks.

Alas, the students drew only the obvious. The drawing of my irate student was a line drawing with a tree positioned quintessentially in the bottom left foreground, a simple fence, a horizon line and a streetlight. There was a naivety in its style indicative of a particular way of seeing, which, had I not been unsettled by the general lack of vigour in the group, would have been endearing. But the iconography of the drawing was learnt: it denoted a particular way of seeing. Instead of taking the challenge of not knowing, the student had used a tool from her childhood memory of how it was to draw – this is a tree; this is a house – not allowing the child self to express his or her haptic self, drawing with loose fresh marks, capturing the wonder of discovery.

I considered many of the drawings produced by my class denoted an early stage of seeing, a social way of seeing, of believing that what was seen as nature could be copied as a symbol, a signifier of “tree”. They appeared to have a similarity with the drawings in a how-to-draw manual.⁵¹ If I were to see the student’s drawing today I might well be able to appreciate it for what it was – the innocent expression of an experience – and then encourage her not to be self-conscious about style but to do multiples of memory and observational drawings, however awkward. But, at the time of the lesson, one of my challenges was to motivate the students to push the *disegno*, the technique of chalk on paper as a discipline, to achieve a line, to go in a direction

⁵¹ *Disegno* has a particular significance in the Italian Renaissance, as suggested by Ann Bermingham (2000) in her discussion of Castiglione’s rigour in art. The dance between desire to capture an ideal of nature and beauty and the codes of behaviour for achieving this created artifice. “It is a community divided in its desire between wanting to see and wanting not to see, between wanting to be simultaneously knowing and unknowing. It is a community that embraces illusion as the best reality” (12).

wanted, to find the appropriate angle of erasure to allow a particular tone. And to be in the nightscape. Simply be.

As time has passed with the shifting of movements I have ambivalent feelings towards people who want to draw as a pastime. On one hand, I love the fact that drawing is a release of emotion and can be thought of lightly, but on the other hand, I, like Emma Dexter, believe now that drawing in whatever form “offers us the most extraordinary range of possibilities: it is a map of time recording the actions of the maker”.⁵² Importantly it slips between the multi-disciplines of modern art practice: it is the underbelly of expression. But it is also the conduit of systems of knowledge, perhaps learnt in an educational establishment with particular models of art academia, or gained by the bombardment of cultural practice, be it doodling on a telephone pad or with a mouse on a keyboard.

It is difficult to locate what is and is not achievable for a group or for individuals. We can unwittingly place a mantle over students such that they are led to see in a particular way. In your era you were instructed by a strong ethos of belief systems. Religious and secular instruction was entrenched in the way you practised. Social distinctions gave value to objects and artefacts, so that what was placed in a composition told stories within stories of social structure. The theorizing of the liberal arts as signifiers of difference deepened and widened. Ann Bermingham (2000) illustrates this well by harking back to E. H. Gombrich’s argument that much of the way of learning to draw has been coded in learning manuals: “What cannot be rendered by a particular book’s formula cannot be rendered at all and it literally falls out of the picture. In their reliance on formulas the manuals teach their blindness as ways of seeing. The manuals’ techniques of representation are thus the means whereby social values become inscribed in art and since the art they teach is illusionistic, they also become the ways in which social values become naturalized as images of nature” (35). I think this is the core of my frustration with those who wish to learn to draw or are being taught: what is left out is overwhelmed by what there is to see. And our seeing is a construct as told to us by many.⁵³

⁵² Dexter, 2005, 005–010.

⁵³ Foster, ed. 1988; see essays by Crary 29–100, Krauss 51–86, Bryson 87–114, and Rose 115–130.

My Zulu friend does not need to see my doubt. It is mine, not hers; she is multilingual and savvy. It is my preciousness about drawing, as a wonderment of seeing. I will show her Emma Dexter's *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing* (our latest manual of drawing), *Banksy: Wall and Piece*⁵⁴ and, to be subversive, the latest edition of *Art South Africa*⁵⁵ ...

Yours sincerely,

Angela

⁵⁴ Banksy 2006.

⁵⁵ Stephen 2009, 45–50.

11. *Arvo Pärt*

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

The light in the studio is beautiful and clear, and there is a faint scent of pure oil of turpentine in the air. I lay out the brushes and tubes of paint. The canvas is oval and the surface smooth and wanting. I am preparing to paint a portrait of my daughter from a photograph of her as a woman in her mid-twenties.

She has the beauty of a Renaissance *Botticelli*: a fair complexion, long curly hair and fine features and bone structure. The camera has caught her poised in time, captured in a moment of the shutter's action. She is looking down away from the viewer, her left cheek forward. I begin. On the oval frame I position her head in a slight diagonal; however, I had left the canvas flat on the table instead of placing it upright on a support, and now, when I lift it vertically, the head is distorted, anamorphic. The light enters the face with a thin viscosity of transparent raw umber; but in other parts, with titanium white, it is milky. I add an infinitesimal amount of black to darken and define her form. In my mind's eye, I am standing in front of my daughter, chasing the grid depicted in the engraving of Albrecht Dürer⁵⁶ that is eluding me and the work feels opaque and inconsequential. I still my disquiet, and the doubts slip through the paint ...⁵⁷

What if I did not want to paint in a naturalistic mode but in the ilk of medieval imagery? My modelling of the human form has been based on the naturalistic model of the Renaissance, caught in the strain of humanism, though I now have come to

⁵⁶ The grid I am referring to is the famous Albrecht Dürer *Draftman Drawing a Reclining Woman*, woodcut, 1525, Graphische Sammlung Albertina Vienna. For a Dadaist take on perspective see Ades, Cox, and Hopkins, eds. 1999, 84–121, 111.

⁵⁷ Catholic Encyclopedia: Doubt (Latin *dubium*, Greek *apori*, French *doute*, German *Zweifel*). The Catholic dictionary equates different forms of doubt, but what I found especially relevant was "... prudent doubts are distinguished from imprudent, according to the reasonableness or unreasonableness of the considerations on which doubt is based ..."
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05141a.htm> (accessed 11 February 2009). See also Hecht 2003.

enjoy the imaginative, playful and grotesque imagery of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century medieval manuscripts, the imagery of the sacred and profane underlying a clever manipulation of storytelling. Of particular interest is the imagery relegated to the sidelines, resting on the very edge of the page or slivering up and down and interlacing with the inscriptions in the text. I love the images denoting the abjectness of genitalia and bestiality, of bottoms, faecal droppings, copulations, bodiless heads and arms, and the cornucopia of insects, birds and animals of many descriptions. They indicate the dilemma between text and imagery, of the dance between images that can appear to have a story within a story, either supportive to the main text or as a cheeky defiance.⁵⁸

Our eye goes between the text and the illustrations seeking out connections. Within this push and pull, the peripheral imagery is as important as the centre stage of each leaf of the manuscript.

There was an enactment of power play in the motifs of the margins. Here the illuminators appear to have more freedom to voice their own thoughts and usurp the formality of the text. Michael Camille (1992) suggests the marginal images were cross-referencing and teasing commentaries all through the manuscripts, by chains of linked motifs and signifiers. However, Camille (1992) quotes Bakhtin as saying that “... in medieval art a strict dividing line is drawn between the pious and the grotesque; they exist side by side but never merge” (11). For all this irreverence of imagery in the margins, the religious text in the centre of the leaf keeps its purity. The margins signal a particular “anxiety” (48) because the centre was the site of

⁵⁸ My idea here is doubt as a notion of seeming “cheeky” where key players are positioned in the picture plane. The margins are indicators of subversive acts, but so too can the central axis of the picture plane be depending on what is happening around the margins. It is a push-pull of what is the most important position in the picture plane and can tease the notion of absurdity. Therefore there is no repentance! See medieval notions of repentance or irreverence (a complicity with local knowledge and interpretations) echoing centuries later in the hybrid as absurd, as parody and plagiarism, manifested in the political artwork and writings of the French Situationist Guy Debord (1994). Debord investigated Hegel and Kierkegaard’s *detournement* as to what remains hidden, and subversive. Debord argues:

The device of *detournement* restores all their subversive qualities to critical judgements that have congealed into respectable truths or, in other words, that have been transformed into lies ... and ... ideas improve. The meaning of words has a part in the improvement. Plagiarism is necessary. Progress demands it. Staying close to the author’s phrasing, plagiarism exploits his expressions, erases false ideas, and replaces them with correct ideas (144–145).

See also Camille 1992 and Manion 2005.

learning for both the secular and the religious audiences and on the sides could be the place of dissent or comedy.

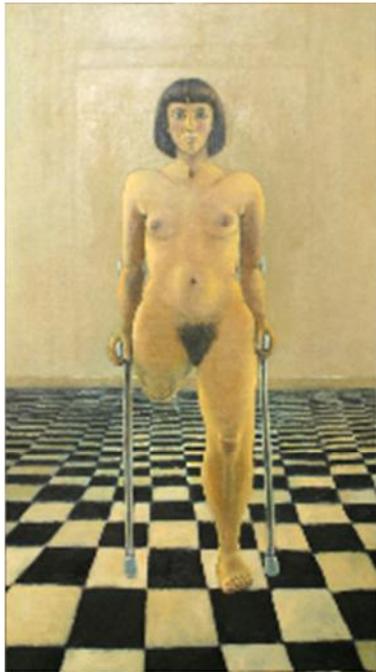
I am interested here in the sexual body as a place of carnal desires and woman as “suspect” to defy the purity of godliness, and the euphemisms of certain animals that signalled sexual needs and acts. Human sexuality was deemed as a sign of decadence and of the flesh. It was because sex was marginalized in medieval experience that it so often became an image on the edge. “Woman” was shown in an assortment of actions the act of sexual intercourse, prayer and various stages of pregnancy, to name but a few however, Camille (1992) suggested they were mostly depicted as powerless and at points of ridicule “... which seals them into oppressive simulations of their social position” (127). Women were generally demeaned and encased in an Aristotelian abhorrence of the abject body or, as Camille (1992) quotes Bakhtin: In sexual intercourse, pregnancy and menstruation, women broke out of their boundaries. Theirs became the Bakhtinian body that is “never finished, never completed: it is continually built, created and builds and creates another body” (54).

In this, though, from a twenty-first century perspective there lies a particular freedom. These playful, reverent or irreverent, maimed or grotesque images of women were painted without the constraints of proportion and idealized beauty. Can an illustration express the want and hunger of a woman or man? Clearly it is shown in a medieval manuscript depiction. It is hard to overlook the human and animal frailty and vulnerability when I look at a manuscript illustration depicting a torsoless woman frowning or an animal defecating. There is a bubble of laughter and an aftertaste of concern. They are delightful haunting images. The argument that there was no ‘self’ separate from a divinity in the thirteenth and fourteenth century appears ironic when illuminators left their self-portraits and scribes tell of their annoyance in the margins. As, for example, when two *scriptores* notated while they fulfilled their task: “Three fingers write, but the body toils. Just as the sailor yearns for port, the writer longs for the last line ... this page was not copied slowly” (Bologna 1998, 37).

Jennifer Michael Hecht (2003) equated the concept of self at a movement in time with the birth of humanism when, in 1345, Francesco Petrarca’s discovery of Ciceronian manuscripts gave rise to a new sensibility. Here was a revered scholar

who embraced the impact of culture on the individual: “that culture made all the difference in understanding a life and that culture changes”.⁵⁹ In the visual representation this foretold the birth of the Renaissance man and woman.

We shuffle our skirts and reposition ourselves in front of our paintings. You pick up your maulstick and brushes; I wipe off part of my painting.



I am thinking of an example of a postmodernist mix, *misto*, of the early modern period with Renaissance humanism in painting. It is not uncommon in postmodernist contemporary practice that we mix different periods to create what could be called a baroque sensibility.⁶⁰ Allow me to tell you about the paintings of the contemporary Finnish painter, Viggo Wallensköld.⁶¹ His paintings contain the ribaldry and pathos of the disfranchised, echoing back to the playfulness and irony of the early modern imagery, and the eloquence and beauty of the Renaissance ideal of woman (Fig. 19).

Fig. 19. Viggo Wallensköld, *The Standing Woman: Afternoon*, 1997, oil on canvas, 140 x 75 cm. Personal collection.

His and my friendship began when we shared international studios in Basel, Switzerland, when we were part of the Christophe Merian Stiftung (Foundation) at the end of the twentieth century. I found his notion of marginality and the solitary body exciting. His oeuvre of painting and drawing involves mostly singular figures in an interior space, always with a sense of emotional or physical impediment. And of even greater interest is a strong sexual element, which challenged the viewer to

⁵⁹ Hecht 2003, 263.

⁶⁰ Bal 1999. Although Mieke Bal is writing of the work and life of seventeenth century Caravaggio, I see a link in the multiplicities of how contemporary artists work with Baroque 27–45: 231–262.

⁶¹ Viggo Wallensköld, <http://www.wallenskold.fi/introduction.html> and <http://www.wallenskold.fi/publications.html> & www.wallenskold.fi

the innumerable implications of aberration and normality of a twenty-first century sexual body.

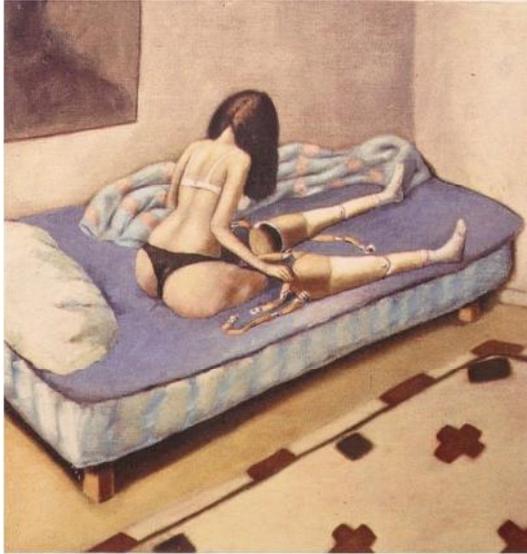


Fig. 20. Viggo Wallensköld, *The Sitting Woman: Evening*, 1997, oil on canvas, 63 x 63 cm. Christoph Merian Stiftung, Basel, Switzerland.

I found a connection here with the medieval sexual body. The twelfth- and thirteenth-century illuminators deliberately placed their commentaries on daily life and sexual activity in the margins; Viggo, instead, places his figures central and confronting, but with an equivalent rawness of imagery. He paints the (sometimes prepubescent) figure centre stage and alone in a still empty Bachelardian room.⁶² There is no abject body fluid but they are paintings of the unspeakable with an abandonment of pretence and artifice (Fig. 20).

When I first encountered Viggo's work my reaction was a combination of admiration for the quality of his paintings and confusion with the seemingly boundaryless sexual portrayal of women. On the one hand I found the content of his work achingly poignant, with its depiction of the disenfranchised, of the maimed and sexual otherness, the hermaphrodite or the prepubescent girl, but on the other hand I had come from a feminist stance and questioned if his work had originated from a misogynous platform. In his studio would be a painting of a woman sitting with her legs apart with a large sanitary napkin between her legs, or a beautiful young woman, naked, with her leg amputated and on crutches.⁶³

⁶² See Bachelard's (1969) discussion of phenomenal and poetic concepts of shelter.

⁶³ See the discussion on the Renaissance understanding of prudence by Cheney (2007, 177–186).



Fig. 21. Angela Stewart, *Hey Prudence! No. 1*, 2006, oil on photograph, digital ink on Guigi paper, 42 x 25 cm. Personal collection of the artist.



Fig. 22. Angela Stewart, *Hey Prudence! No. 2*, 2006, oil on photograph, digital ink on Guigi paper, 42 x 25 cm. Personal collection of the artist.

It was confronting and in that time period in Basel a small cache of prudence rested inside me. My artworks *Hey Prudence No. 1* and *2* are a result of this experience (Figs. 21 & 22). They are based on a small painting I saw in Giorgio Vasari's villa where a young woman gazed into a mirror at her own reflection with the mask of old age looking behind her in the opposite direction. It occurred to me the disparities of age, of an open-mindedness we expect to remain with us when we are young, can wither with time.

It is curious to consider what is prudent from one age to another. My understanding of Viggo Wallensköld's paintings is that they challenged society on all levels: a domestic space seemingly shelters a young woman/man, but she/he is stripped bare with her/his sex organs displayed, if for us to bring to the image our own particular fears and prejudices perhaps we can or cannot appreciate Marlene Dumas's *Pissing Woman* and *Defenceless*,⁶⁴ but with Viggo's painting the abject is present only by suggestion. He empowers his figures even as they blatantly expose their sexuality by the softness of colour on his palette, the careful, particular way he places the figures in their ground and the delicate balance of how far positioned they are away from us the viewer. I am invited to be a voyeur but the dignity of each solitary figure makes me be discreet and polite in my looking.

⁶⁴ Marlene Dumas, *Pissing Woman*, 1997 [image], and *Defenceless*, 2001 [image], illustration 5, 84, in Dexter, 2005, 83–84.

I want to suggest that the exposure of his figures in our post-humanistic era is similar to that of the early modern period. The graphic depiction of his painted bodies and the unselfconscious poses of the figures hark back to the comic imagery of the medieval images. There is a freedom of sexuality without the constrictions of proper or righteous sensibilities. With his blatant sexual innuendos and emphasis on genitalia and sexual mutation, his work has been challenged as being pornographic and has created intense controversy in his Finnish homeland.⁶⁵ My position on his work, however, is that it is not pornographic or fetish-like, but instead contains integrity of making and content. He is intensely empathetic with his figures. They are, he says, an extension of him, illustrating his quiriness and vulnerabilities. As he explains: “I try to tell in my paintings about such little things as home, safety, longing for love, which can also be the most important things in life. The room-spaces in the paintings are often created by the memories of my own life. They are changed in paintings as a part of a new story. In place of the portrayed persons I can imagine myself, because I handle them through my own feelings of life”.⁶⁶

I find it of interest when we as artists share our ideas, hungers and fears. By listening we can get a deeper insight into the other’s reasons for making. He and I “cooked” many cups of coffee as, with our third friend and colleague, Canadian photographer Christiane Desjardine, we talked long into the night.

While Viggo and Christiane worked in their studios, I, in mine, teased the concept of marginality, with self-portraiture and the “memories” of Alzheimer’s disease. I drew large drawings on wallpaper and painted on vinyl an incomplete image of Emily, an aged woman I once nursed, incompleteness of the image denoting her dementia. My painting *Emily* is now a photograph: the ephemeral nature of the paint on vinyl is such that it has scattered, as once did her mind.

I wash my brush and wipe it on a rag. My thoughts, like my paintbrush persistently work the eye socket, slip into your time period. I leave the margins and tease the notion of sixteenth century *boustrophedon*, the heraldic way of reading a painting in

⁶⁵ http://www.helsinki.fi/jarj/sqs/sqs2_08/sqs2_2008vanska.pdf

⁶⁶ Viggo Wallensköld in correspondence with me on 10 July 2010.

reverse as mirror images, of a God behind the canvas, directing the brush ... and clothe the naked body of an early modern period, yours and mine (Hall 2008, 36).

My daughter's image calls me back into focus. Her eyes are downcast, and her being is turned inward, away from me, as is her presence. She is in Australia and I am in South Africa. There is something missing from my brush. The nose disappears, the lips are plucked, and my daughter appears and is gone in the next movement of the brush. No one is behind my canvas today. I sigh. I am sad. I put my brush down. "Alina" by *Arvo Pärt*⁶⁷ is playing ... Your skirt rustles on the floor as your footsteps soften into the distance.

Yours sincerely,

Angela

⁶⁷ Alina, Arvo Pärt, Vladimir Spivakov, Sergej Bezrodny, Dietmar Schwalke, Alexander Malter, Arvo Pärt, Sergei Bezrodny, Format: Audio CD.

12. Three Coloured Balls

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

I look out of my studio window and find you juggling three exquisitely coloured balls.⁶⁸ One is a brilliant ultramarine blue with *copia dal vero* scripted in gold about its circumference, the second is a deep warm maroon with the silver *giudizio* infused over its surface and the third is a golden yellow with minute markings in bronze of *imitare se stessi*⁶⁹ placed randomly on the surface. There are flashes of light and colour as round and round they go ... You explain the game to me. It is about copying, *imitazione*, and the blue ball is symbolic of the process of copying from nature, the maroon symbolizes the replication of artistic work and the yellow of one's own work.

I smile.

As much as it would be delightful to watch you play, I suggest we must be sensible, diligent and draw. Between us there is laughter as we precariously balance the three balls on the table at a forty-five degree angle from a camera lucida,⁷⁰ which is anchored firmly at the table's edge. Neither of us is familiar with this instrument, but with amusement you agree to try first and carefully adjust the prism to gain a reflection of the balls onto the white paper lying horizontally before you.

The camera lucida is an optical device that can duplicate an image from any object onto your drawing paper. You will be able to see both the balls and the drawing surface simultaneously, as in a photographic double exposure. This allows you to trace the image to help with perspective. It is particularly useful for exact drawing, in

⁶⁸ For scholarship on games in the Renaissance, reference can be made to McClure 2008, 750–791.

⁶⁹ Cheney (2007, 143) outlines three types of imitation: copying from nature (*copia dal vero*), selecting from artistic works (*giudizio*) and selecting from one's own work (*imitare se stessi*).

⁷⁰ The camera lucida was patented in 1807 by William Hyde Wollaston. The name is Latin for "light room", whereas the camera obscura is a "dark room". See Hockney 2001, 203–204; 215–216.

geometric or architectural design. The shadow of *La Architettura* falls across the page ...⁷¹

I sit with my sketchbook on my lap and together we begin. It is beautiful here in the sunshine of Milan and we draw quietly in companionable silence.

After a short while, I break into conversation about the making of your painting *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola*. I am interested in how you planned and created the work (see Fig. 3, page 17). Woods-Marsden (1998, 208) suggested that it could have been painted in 1559 when you stayed in Milan on your way to the Spanish court. It would have been ten years after Campi gave you and your sister tutorship in Cremona. The question that has arisen is how you could have painted Campi from life. Garrard (1994) suggests Campi left Cremona in 1549 at the end of your three-year apprenticeship, and he was away until 1562, by which time you were in the Spanish court of Philip II. The painting, she then suggests, was a manipulation of one or two older self-portraits, dual portraits, by both you and Campi.⁷²

... our basic composition of the ball drawing is on the page and you are intently focused on capturing with line and cross-hatching the modelling of the beautiful blue ball ... the blue ball is symbolic of copying from nature. It is not an easy task tracing the soft shadows of the balls on the paper.



Would you, I ask, have worked from life and placed Campi in front of a new canvas? I turn a page in my sketchbook and hastily scribble a sketch to demonstrate my idea (Fig. 23). Then, later, in the space of his absence you would

Fig.23. Angela Stewart, *Sketch 1, Campi with empty canvas*, 2010, visual diary. Personal collection of the artist.

⁷¹ *La Architettura* is the personification of architecture.

⁷² Bambach 1999 for further information the tradition of copying paintings and drawing as a way of satisfying patrons and producing several copies of the same work on – which was prevalent in this time period, 53–136.

have painted your self-portrait under his outstretched hand so it appeared his arm was hovering over your breast.

Woods-Marsden (1998, 208–210) gives attention to Campi's hand poised over your heart, which would give a suggestion of sentiment and piety. The decorum of a virginal woman painter was of great importance. It is a very different reading from one in which he seems to be pointing to your breast. I do not suggest it is a sign of impropriety, as there is no record of scandal and you obviously hold your former tutor in high regard as expressed in your letter to him, but his hand is not hovering over your face or hair ... In Renaissance terms the heart could be associated with the Virgin Mary and a form of adoration and piety. Nevertheless, it is a pose I find tantalizing.

Would you have worked from life and placed him in front of an already completed painting of yourself, such as in my *Sketch Campi Free Standing*. I am not sure you would have done this. In the painting you have positioned yourself as larger than Campi and dominate the picture plane (Fig. 24).



In my sketchbook I roughly draw a line tracing the *pentimenti* of the painting to illustrate my argument. If you were working from life and placed yourself in the picture plane at the same time as Campi, you would have had to use your skills in *disegno* to balance both selves at the same interval (see Fig. 25, page 64).

Fig. 24. Angela Stewart, *Sketch 2, Campi free standing*, 2010, visual diary. Personal collection of the artist.



Fig. 25. Angela Stewart, *Sketch 3, Drawing Sofonisba and Campi*, 2010, visual diary. Personal collection of the artist.

You would have had to sketch in Campi and yourself as a cartoon and trace it onto the canvas following the Tuscan tradition of *disegno*, or used the Venetian approach and painted the outline of Campi directly onto the canvas – first him and then yourself next to him, juggling the composition to accommodate you both. It is interesting to consider, because the dynamic between you would have been alive and difficult, as both your creative selves would have been invested in the outcome. You each would have wanted to have a dominant position, and I am not sure he would have been impressed by you painting yourself larger than him.

I sigh ... your chalk is now working between the shapes of the luminous blue and golden yellow balls mapping in tonal shifts the intensity of light ... the yellow from one's own work. I pause and look about to see who is present to fetch a mirror. The Grand Master Leonardo Da Vinci encouraged artists to use the mirror as a device to correct errors and see nature as its true self. He declared: "I say that when you paint you should have a flat mirror and often look at your work as reflected in it, when you will see it reversed, and it will appear to you like some other painter's work, so you will be better able to judge of its faults than in any other way" (Da Vinci 1970, Vol. 2, 265).

I love this phenomenon. It enables us to see with fresh eyes the mistakes we make ... But my reason for the mirror is to work through a puzzle. On reflection I realize you

have used a mirror for all your self-portraits⁷³ and that you are right handed, as is shown in *Self Portrait at the Easel* (see Fig. 14, page 31). You also have shown your sisters' actions as right handed in *The Chess Game* (see Fig. 17, page 45).

I look at you to see if you are listening. You have an enigmatic expression on your face that I find difficult to read. You are now engrossed in deepening the highlights of the blue ball and working into the surrounding negative spaces ... copying from nature.

A study of Renaissance and contemporary portraits by Nicholls and others (1999) has revealed the tendency of a three-quarter positioning of the head, with the left cheek forward, to be most common in a portrait. When posing for the painter, the sitter turns towards the painter in such a way that the left side of the face will be shown in the painting. The centrality of the eye is suggested as balancing the overall composition of the portrait and the directionality of the facial pose towards the left as an emotional index of familiarity by the sitter. The prominence of the left cheek was considered suitable for emotive family portraits and the right cheek for the more impassive formal portrait. In contemporary portraits there was no difference discovered in the turning bias, neither between the genders nor in the interaction of their emotional condition.

If this is innate behaviour, you, as a Renaissance painter, might have intuitively understood this premise. Let us consider what you might have done in this painting. Perhaps you pose in front of a mirror to help position yourself inside the picture plane. To begin, you place your right eye central to the picture plane on a horizon level in the upper third of the painting.

Your face in the painting has your left cheek forward towards the viewer. You have teased the viewer by positioning your figure at an angle turned slightly away from the left cheek to allow us to believe your right hand is hidden behind Campi.

⁷³ See Hockney (2001, 205) for a description of mirrors. For more on this subject see chapters "Handed" and "Making and Using Mirrors" in Gregory 2001, 153–192; 193–206.

This makes you seem the passive receiver of his formation of self, which is a double illusion, as you are painting the painting. If I look in the mirror and mimic the pose I find I actually have my right hand forefront in the picture plane as a working hand nearest the viewer (Fig. 26).



Fig. 26. *Sketch 4 Sofonisba*, 2010, Angela Stewart, visual diary. Personal collection of the artist.

You are now focused on drawing the deep warm maroon ball, fitting it in an unusual balance of the composition. The maroon symbolizes artistic work. I see the angles of diagonals enter the negative space on the edges of the picture plane and the line of the ball goes away from it, imitating part of a composition from a book of Bonnard's paintings I have resting, open, on a chair nearby ... I suppress a smile; we are, after all, a product of our influences ...

If, as suggested by Garrard, the Campi image is from a previous painting, you might have borrowed the pose from your previous mentor, for it is also an illusion that it is Campi's right hand, that is, his working hand. I am making the assumption that he is right-handed. If I place myself as Campi on the left-hand side of the picture plane, with his right cheek facing the viewer, my mirror shows my right hand is hidden, as my body has turned away from the viewer to achieve this pose (Fig. 27). What I find of interest is that you have included Campi with his right cheek forward, in the pose of patriarchy, the male teacher and painter, and your left-cheek self as the woman painter. Similarly the hands themselves in the middle axis echo the left and right: the motif of the same hand is repeated. Who is making? Who is resting?



Fig. 27. Angela Stewart, *Sketch 5 Campi* 2010, visual diary. Personal collection of the artist.

You smile, and the shadow of our friend *Vanitus* falls across the drawing momentarily, blocking the light ...

Let us discern the ramifications of whether Campi was physically absent during the portrait encounter. Koral Ward suggests, “If it were the same time frame he would be painting you, not just posing. It is not the same time *in* the painting as the making of the painting itself.” That is, you are not painting each other at the same moment you are instead painting the memory of him painting you.⁷⁴ I find that temporality stretches here and emphasizes a further play in the painting. It speaks of time present and past. The bustle of activity in the initial formation of the painting if you were both present is a very different time span than if you are in solitude, working alone in your studio.

You are erasing much of what you have done ...

If he were not present you would have had the space to consider the implications of such a portrait, the physical and mental space. Perhaps within the early stages of making the *pentimento* there was an interval for a moment of *augenblick*,⁷⁵ as a flash of insight that allowed you to realize your own audacity. It is unusual, as you have allowed him to hold a baton, suggesting he may doubt the steadiness of his hand. However, he is your creation and I suggest you are allowed a subtle suggestion that there is *always* doubt in the creative act: the painter’s doubt, yours and mine.

I attended a play at the Festival of Perth in early 2009. It was a play titled *Come and Go* by the playwright and novelist Samuel Beckett. The actor, alone on the edge of the stage, spoke continually to the audience in a mantra of the same line. The same worry again and again with different intonations. It resounded in me, for it was my creative voice doubting, the one that sits on my shoulder and tells me what isn’t

⁷⁴ I thank philosopher Koral Ward for her suggestion.

⁷⁵ See Ward 2008:

In its most basic interpretation Augenblick describes an experience of a fleeting but momentous event, an occurrence usually accompanied by an altered perception of time, either as condensed and swiftly passing, or slow and drawn out. At its extreme, we might experience something like an arresting of time itself, an experience that seems to stand out from time, though in actuality time moves on taking these moments with it. This itself is necessary to the moment: that it must pass (xi).

working. For us artists our monologue of doubt is continuous. Our moments of insight, if and when they come, can play an important role in the painting, bringing light metaphorically into the work and interrupting the anxiety of making.

I stop my monologue and in unison we put down our chalk and each chooses a ball. You choose the golden yellow and I choose the deep maroon. Together we throw the balls as high as we can into the air, each trying to go higher than the other ... we stand here in helpless laughter watching the sky, waiting ...

... our balls have yet to come down ...

Yours sincerely,

Angela

13. Cézanne's Breath

Perth,

Western Australia.

May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

I am holding my grandchild, my first, and I put my ear to her mouth and listen to her breathe. Her breath is soft, a hush of air on my cheek, persistent and fragile.

How do you draw the *air* as lightness, the breath of a child, the breath of innocence?⁷⁶ A few years ago, at Monash University in Melbourne, I attended a drawing marathon where we were asked to draw the air between the installation and ourselves.⁷⁷ I now think of the event as *Cézanne's breath* because the exercise was strongly influenced by Paul Cézanne's painting and drawings. My interpretation of the task was not to conflate and collapse shapes of colour but to draw with paper onto a ground of charcoal, paper, glue and masking tape. I began to comprehend how difficult it was to push in and about the air around me, of what Paul Cézanne spoke of as being "that one must *penetrate* what is before oneself" (Cézanne 1904, 304) [emphasis my own].⁷⁸ Or, as Yve-Alain Bois wrote of Cézanne, he had "a tactile vision", a reaching of seeing and touching of the space (Bois and Krauss 1998, 37).⁷⁹

My drawing felt weighty, *impasto* and deadened. I use the words deliberately, because in hindsight it did not seem the appropriate material for playing with a concept so potentially ephemeral and exquisite. In 1999, I experienced two extraordinary installations by two women artists who interwove air, light and the mystical with profound statements of historical periods.⁸⁰ American Ann Hamilton's beautifully cascading red powder, spilling down the walls of an historic building,

⁷⁶ The concept of writing this letter unfolded as a result of the birth of my first grandchild and reading "Merleau-Ponty, who asserts that Cézanne wanted to see a newborn in order to paint perception itself" (Bolt 2004, 161).

⁷⁷ Monash University Drawing Workshop by artists Geoffrey Dupree and Mary Tonkin 2001. Drawing exercise given by Mary Tonkin, winner of the Dobell Prize for Drawing 2002.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of Cézanne's practice see Silverman 1982 and Brodsky 1981.

⁷⁹ See also "Cézanne's Doubt" in Merleau-Ponty 1964.

⁸⁰ Ann Hamilton, visual artist, American Pavillion, La Biennale di Venezia XLVII, Venice.

was a statement of the United States' history of slavery, giving voice to the silence of racism and oppression by inscribing Braille text punctuated by powder caught in intervals on the walls of the room. The viewer had to experience the oxymoron of tactility by looking. The dust caught by the Braille, the language of the blind.⁷⁷ The other work, *Domestic Vapours* (Anne Vallayer-Coster and Jean Simeon), 1997, (Fig. 28) was an installation by Hungarian Judit Hersko, which had the paintings of Jean Simeon Chardin projected through the steam arising from a bronze cauldron, which was a replication of the one depicted in the Anne Vallayer-Coster painting *The White Soup Bowl*, 1771. It spoke of the flickering and unreliability of memory, of woman's domestic cooking, medicinal potions and the persecution of witchcraft.⁸¹ The silence of one, the persecution of the other, and the doubt of Cézanne were about me in the process of drawing.



Fig. 28. Judit Hersko, *Domestic Vapours* (Anne Vallayer-Coster and Jean Simeon), 1997, installation, bronze, wood, steam, projection, variable dimensions. Venice.

I positioned myself alongside a wall with large sheets of paper and studied the vastness of the room. It was cold, the light was ... why do I not remember? Was it neon light or natural lighting? I tore paper and used the tactility of paper and glue as

<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/hamilton/index.html> (accessed 27 April 2010).

⁸¹ Judit Hersko, <http://www.judithersko.com/> and <http://www.judithersko.com/jhindex0.html>.

I thank Judit Hersko for providing extra details in describing her installation in correspondence dating 10 August 2010.

collage to overlay previous forms and shapes as a way to navigate and ease my anxiety. I did not achieve “... the fuzziness of practice [in which] there is the potential for a *mutual* reflection and transmutation between imaging and reality” as argued by Bolt (2004, 149). Instead, the invisibility of the air became heavy in matter. Each shred of paper I tore vibrated with irregular shapes. Each had an individual weight, time, edge, concentration, distraction and size, but the result was raw and indifferent.

Bolt (2004) aptly termed Cézanne’s work and his profound experience of the visual as “a visual stutter”, and this brought me to recognizing the staccato movement I used in ripping and shredding the paper that day, but I was the grandchild in Cézanne’s shadow and my lack of understanding was vast. Bolt explains that, “[w]hen Deleuze talks of stuttering as the limit of language he evokes an outside, not of something external to language, but rather as the possibility of an *outside of* language” (160). It is difficult to move outside of linguistic parameters, if not indeed impossible; similarly with art. My art practices are entrenched in codes and systems of influences of language and visual signs all about me, of other artists’ practices and concepts. Just as Bolt (2004), echoing Deleuze, says “writers paint with words whilst the words themselves paint and sing” (160), my drawings escape confinement with the drawing marks stuttering their own verse. As my hands tore the paper I shredded *good* drawing practices because I no longer knew what good drawing was. If anything I gained a sense of masochistic pleasure in shredding the systems of knowledge, the conventions of drawing: Renaissance, Expressionist, Neo-Expressionist, Anti-Aesthetic ...

I am so aware, as I write to you, of how I forget to see. I am bombarded with visual information that I scan rather than look at. Ironically, though, I love Cézanne’s painting *Rocks at L’Estaque*, 1879–82. What I have is a monochrome photocopy, with everything rendered in a series of greys. The bulk of the mountains gives me comfort. I cannot experience *air* but I can sense space and I can travel towards these rolling hills without the fractiousness I experience when I look at the painted version. In this slippage there may be the discretion that Yve-Alain Bois (1998) articulated: “... [Cézanne’s] works are themselves lungs ... they breathe. And if the Cézannean stroke permits this respiration, this is above all because it is discrete, discontinuous,

and because it presupposes a void ...” (39). Perhaps in the photocopied version I experience the depth of the anguished sigh of breath, Cézanne’s doubt.

To step back in time to experience Cézanne’s reality is as difficult as stepping into my grandchild’s future life and experiencing her virtual, future world. As Jorge Luis Borges’ man in “The Other” asks of his younger and older selves, sitting on the park bench, how do they recognize each other (1979, 3–10)? I may not recognize the creative self of my grandchild as she need not recognize mine. For Cézanne, his driving force was to reach towards his next painting, and his Achilles heel was the constant doubt of his own ability to express what he saw and felt. He had to live to be the man called “Cézanne”, as Merleau-Ponty (1964) poignantly expressed it: “... the truth is that *this work to be done called for this life*” (20).

Andreas Scholl is singing Handel’s Saul: *Oh Lord, Whose Mercies*.⁸² My grandchild is waking: her *air* has sound. She lives with her mother and father in “... a sort of airy structure that moves about on the breath of time...” (Bachelard 1969, 54).

Yours sincerely,

Angela

⁸² Handel, S. *Saul: Oh Lord, Whose Mercies Numberless*. From CD: *The Lute is a Song*, Andreas Scholl, ct; Edin Karamazov, L’Oiseau-Lyre 478 1077 5’56.

14. Messy Costumes

Perth,

Western Australia.

May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

I have a curious relationship with the costume or clothing of my sitters. My brush is more interested in the face and facial expression. It has until recently ignored the importance of dress as signifier of status in reading the body.

What was your technique for representing textiles with such precision? It allowed you to display your skill in an intimate attention to detail. You might have brought the elaborate garments into your studio and slowly, painfully replicated the cloth on canvas. Your detail for costume is your penchant for fashion and your prowess as a painter honours the seamstresses and tailors who partook in the making of those magnificent, elaborate garments. Surely you were closely involved in the making and shaping of the garments with the tailors and seamstresses. Did a nobleman of the King's court choose the cloth, as was customary?



Fig. 29. Sofonisba Anguissola, *Portrait of Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia*, c. 1578, oil on canvas, 116 x 102 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid.

I can imagine candlelight illuminating the beading, the beauty of the embroidery varying in magnificence with the differing light of day and night. And I can only suppose you painted at the same time each day or night when you were at an exacting point of the composition. Imagine matching the hues of the garments, chasing the paint on your palette to find the correct tone and colour. What is so enjoyable is that the paint reflects the tailor's cut of diverse colour. The painting of the young Isabella Clara Eugenia in white silk with gold- and white-banded sleeves is beautiful (Fig. 29).

The extravagance of the court fashion depicted is an indicator of the social and cultural significance you held – a noblewoman painter, acclaimed by royalty and enjoying papal patronage.

It is interesting to consider what you wore when painting: clothing of comfort or stiffness, which helped or hindered progress. Were you messy? I cannot imagine so, with such finesse in your work.

I am different from you. I do not have your patience or skill to mimic such detail in cloth and garments in tight precision on so small a scale. Instead I penetrate the surface of your painting, and read backwards the marks and stitches. I trace your *pentimento*, awkwardly removing with my sander the criteria of Renaissance methodology. My detail belongs to imaginary paintings whose entirety may never be realized.

Yours sincerely,

Angela

15. The Young Sisters

Perth,

Western Australia.

May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

In your painting of the two royal sisters, the stillness of the pose is broken by the inclusion of a small dog (Fig. 30). Two beautiful young girls in triangular bell skirts gaze back at the viewer. Yours was a hard task, portraying childhood. Each sister's expression had to be formal, idealized, and yet you have allowed the innocence of childhood to slip into the paint. I wonder if you thought you had achieved it. In your *Portrait of Don Carlos* as a young man, the placement of his upper lip shows a subtle sneer (see Fig. 31, page 76).⁸³



Fig. 30. Sofonisba Anguissola, *Portrait of Infantas Isabella Clara Eugenia and Catalina Micaela*, c. 1569–70, oil on canvas, 133.5 x 145 cm. Royal Collection, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Buckingham Palace, London.

⁸³ Don Carlos Infante of Spain. He was noted for his cruelty, the subject of tragedy by Frederick Schiller, published in London, 1798.

In contrast your sister exudes mischief in *The Chess Game* (see Fig. 17, page 45). I find this very telling because you are very exact in the facial expressions you allow your sisters.



Fig. 31. Sofonisba Anguissola, *Portrait of Don Carlos*, c. 1560, oil on canvas, 109 x 95 cm. Prado Museum, Madrid.

The interchange between painter and sitter, which can unwittingly be a transference of emotion (couched as it is today in psychoanalytic theorems about bodies) may well be known to you intuitively, as an observer of humanity.⁸⁴ Your portraits do not show a wide range of adverse emotions, with the exception of your young brother crying, perhaps, because in drawing the conventions were more lenient, as with Michelangelo's expressive drawing, and here you allowed that knowing, the understanding of your sitter, to escape easily into the markings of your chalk.

Yours sincerely,

Angela

⁸⁴ I am not asserting a portrait artist has to be an analyst but for insightful understanding of transference between people see Orbach 2001.

16. Blemish

Johannesburg,
South Africa.
May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

Writing of the act of painting ... writing of memory ... writing of mistakes ... I am reading a beautiful story by John Berger and the protagonist is writing to her imprisoned lover.

“No method is perfect,” she writes, “but perfection is always unlovable. What we love are blemishes” (Berger 2008, 48).

In drawing and painting, the blemish *can* enhance the work.⁸⁵ A stain of tea on a drawing embedded in the paper catches the moment between looking intensely and absentmindedly reaching for the cup of tea. The sip, a drop, falls from what has been hovering under the cup itself, a circle of moisture, spilt into the saucer from a previous sip. Splash. The suggestion of a beloved older woman, my mother Beryl, my grandmother Len, Eveline’s mother Julia, Michele’s mother Muriel.

A mother: a pot of dusty face powder, the lid open, fine flakes spilt over and onto the dressing table. Her elusive scent on the page, once there, imagined now.

Blemishes: mistakes, interruptions, stains of life. A forensic stain which will place the painting in a scene of a crime, an archaic act of painting and drawing in the twenty-first century ...

Yours sincerely,

Angela

⁸⁵ For an interesting interpretation of blemishes or stains (*macchie*) as virtuous or abhorrent in the early stages of drawing in *Cinquecento* painting, see Sohm 1991, 36–43.

17. Sisters

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

We are in a dream state and enter a darkened room. It is a camera obscura. The door closes behind us and we are in total darkness. From a small aperture in one wall a beam of light hits the opposite wall and the inverted images of three young women appear, moving silkily in and out of the frame. They are your sisters Lucia, Minerva, and Europa, preparing for a sitting of the painting *The Chess Game* in the sunlight at your father's villa in Cremona (see Fig. 17, page 45).



Fig. 32. Marco Boschini, *Allegory of Painting*, engraved frontispiece, Venice.

All is quiet until I hear inside the darkness of the room the soft tread of footsteps; two sisters from the liberal arts have joined us. *La Poeisa* touches me and carries my hand to feel *La Pittura's* palette and brushes (Fig. 32). I am encouraged to run my fingers over her face and feel her bound mouth and shift them down her arm to the hand that is grasping the mask of imitation. She, *La Poesia* as poetry, is “the speaking sister”, and *La Pittura* as painting is “mute poetry”.⁸⁶ We are a band of sisters, a sororal relationship of a kind.

You and I both belong to a family of women, so we know the rivalry that can underlie the love, laughter and arguments of sister siblings. For women of your period it was not unusual to play the popular game of chess in the privacy of your home, especially for you and your sisters, as you each had a lively intelligence

⁸⁶ See discussion of the *Paragone* sisters; Painting is *La Pittura*, Poetry is *La Poesia*, Theory is *La Teoria*, Practice is *La Prattica* in Garrard 2004, 340-361.

and ability of logical strategy. In fact it is a clever take on sibling relationships, especially with your choice to paint your sisters playing without a male companion.

It is our first time together inside a camera obscura, and I guide you to pin canvas to the wall. You are intrigued and nervous, as your high standard of *disegno*⁸⁷ in drawing may be challenged because here is not the dynamic of being outside in the *plein air* with your sisters, where you can observe intensely and sketch from life. Instead you are separated from them in a darkened chamber, and your methods of drawing are now being turned on their head as literally as the image you watch.

The girls position themselves outside in the direct line of the aperture. Now the image on the wall of the three sisters standing around the chessboard is so clear that, in my era, it would be thought of as an inverted photographic image. You are not required to chase the proportion, balance or measurement of perspective, as the image is complete. Your task will be to trace the composition with chalk. Instead of envisaging the image from a beginning, all that is involved is *imitazione*.

La Pittura taps you on the shoulder and mutters in annoyance about her parent *Disegno* who is whispering a mantra to the interloper Giorgio Vasari, who has slipped into the room. He is known to declare that the importance of being able to replicate “... a mental image of anything, is that the hand, through the study and practice of many years, may be free and apt to draw and express correctly ...” (Vasari 1960, 206). Memory, she urges, is not vital at this stage of the composition. Simply follow the shimmering movement of the image on the wall with your chalk.

We witness a play of glances between Lucia, Minerva and Europa, seeking your approval. They are used to you giving instructions. You are poised here with your canvas and chalk. As always it is an intensely personal encounter. The power play appears equal: Lucia pauses in movement, Minerva is gesticulating and Europa holds a pawn. There is no father or suitor present for your sisters to defer and, because of this, the game is a playful and serious venture without any compromising of the status of women. As suggested by Simons (1993), it is a clever play, because sexual teasing and political undertones were often associated with the game of chess. A man

⁸⁷ For the technical process of making see Vasari 1960, 206–217.

may win the right to tussle with a lady or gamble between two opposing parties for economic or political reasons. Instead, here it will be a painting symbolizing the intelligence and sibling rivalry of early modern virtuous women,⁸⁸ whose nobility and beauty are understated but carefully orchestrated by their attire and the sumptuary laws that surround them.⁸⁹

You work quickly, and I watch you sketch the halo of jewelled adornment in Lucia's hair, which complements the intricate patterned gowns sewn by your *Sartesse*, female tailors.⁹⁰ Your detail for costume is intense and you appear very aware of the importance of fashion as a sign of social and cultural standing.

However, I am interested in your opinion of the camera obscura. As a technical device, is it to your liking? From our position in the twenty-first century it is a historically significant invention that shifted mankind into a profound and different realization of experiencing the world. It was to exemplify the ability to go beyond a two-point perspective, as the person inside the camera was able to move about and experience a temporality of time and space, with the marvel of being separate from an exterior world. In the next two centuries our understanding of how we experienced the world was fundamentally affected (Crary 1992). The invention of the camera obscura altered our sense of the "truth" in that it redefined the way in which the world was both separate from, and part of, a particular way of seeing (30). The visual temporal shifts created by the camera obscura allowed you, the viewer, to forget you were using a machine to see the image. Drawing as you knew it through hard labour and skill could now be achieved relatively easily, to render any form as a form of realism. The fiction of seeing "truth" had thus arrived (32–33).

The images that appeared on canvas would appear beautiful and surreal. As Crary (1992) tells us: "The phenomenological differences between the experience of a perspectival construction and the projection of the camera obscura are not even comparable ... The movement and temporality so evident in the camera obscura were always prior to the act of representation; movement and time could be seen and experienced, *but never represented*" (34) [emphasis my own].

⁸⁸ For a discussion on this point see Woods-Marsden 1988, 199.

⁸⁹ For discussion of sumptuary laws see King 1991.

⁹⁰ See "Categories of Clothiers" in Frick 2002, 228–230.

With the camera obscura the phenomena of movement could be traced and represented in drawing and painting. In recent years, there has been much controversy surrounding the use of “optics and realism”, in particular whether lenses and mirrors were used as early as in the fifteenth century. David Hockney (2001) released a large, elaborate book and video to explain his theory of the use of a concave mirror to reflect an image of a person standing outside the camera obscura onto a screen in the camera’s interior as early as 1425. Scientists were quick to react and showed, with the aid of computer technology, that there was a lack of evidence to prove such early usage. Similarly, art historians and academics considered that there was no archival proof for his argument.⁹¹ At the time of the release of the video I was intrigued, because as drawer and painter I had long been puzzled over the realism achieved in that period of art without the use of photographic imagery. It was hard for me to imagine a world not filtered through a camera lens. “[P]hotography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera recorded it” (Sontag 1977, 23). But for you the ability to remember and draw well was an expectation – understanding the discipline of intense observation of all about you and drawing fluidly to capture moments of interest in the day. There are no surviving sketchbooks for me to examine.

The shift of light and shadow on the canvas allows us to draw at such unexpected entry points; we do not necessarily draw in contours and hence the marks may be more mechanical than intuitive. We do not draw as Vasari asks of us, with a variety of tints and shading and with the outline carefully delineated; instead, we are blocking out the light as soon as our pen hits the surface. We chase the figure objectified; it is inverted and so we cannot identify as easily with its signification. In covering the shadowed patches we can traverse the space with sometimes insensitive mark making. In our concentration, we can unwittingly place emphasis on one part more than another with a weighted line or tone, with the result of an unusual composition.

I note your quiet frustration; the play of light is confusing, and elusive. As the writer Paul Carter (2004) suggests, there is a core of silence in the making of art. It is as if

⁹¹ David G. Stork (2004) contesting Hockney (76–83).

the materials have their own essence and here it is contained in the flickering of patterns on the wall, imitating the figures outside the room, the stony stillness of the paper and the dancing light that caresses. You scratch on the canvas, breaking the silence inside our darkened room.

Over the next centuries the camera obscura will be declared by some to be a precursor of photography, and of a vast epistemological shift between private and public selves. Discussion of “phenomenal”, “physiological”, “psychological” and “social” selfhood will become a roar of challenges and counter challenges framed and reframed in the rhetoric of vision and perception.⁹²

La Poesia quietly watches you mark out a composition that has the three sisters in perfect balance, but I remember in the finished painting there is an older woman, awkwardly placed in the upper right quadrant, a marginal inclusion of an attentive other. I wonder who she could be. I surmise she is an afterthought; perhaps it is a gesture of loss, of *memento mori*.

Naomi Yavneh (2006) argues that the older woman personifies the physiognomic difference that comes with aging, a contrast to the sisters’ youthful appearance. She claims as well that it could have been a signifier of class distinction. The older woman is dressed plainly in comparison to your more elaborately gowned sisters.

⁹² Crary (1992) argues that the camera obscura was a historically significant invention that shifted mankind into a profound experience of the world. It was to exemplify the ability to go beyond two-point perspective with the person inside the camera moving about and experiencing a temporality of time and space, with the marvel of being separate from an exterior world. It was to become in the next two centuries a mechanical apparatus “... of both rationalist and empiricist thought, of how observation leads to truthful inferences of the world ...” (29). He describes the camera obscura as a way of experiencing the world by the Deleuzian term *assemblage*, an enmeshed configuration of both being separate and part of a way of being in the world. The visual temporal shifts created by the camera obscura allowed the subject to see the image. The fiction of seeing “truth” had arrived. He places emphasis, not to simplify the importance of the camera obscura as a way to perceive perspective, but to give credence to the emotive register of being inside the camera. He writes:

Thus the phenomenological differences between the experience of a perspectival construction and the projection of the camera obscura are not even comparable. What is crucial about the camera obscura is its relation of the observer to the undemarcated, undifferentiated expanse of the world outside, and how its apparatus makes an orderly cut or delimitation of that field allowing it to be viewed, without sacrificing the vitality of its being. But the movement and temporality so evident in the camera obscura were always prior to the act of representation; movement and time could be seen and experienced, but never represented (34).

Yavneh considers the inclusion of an older servant woman as “a sign of the labour of embroidery and tailoring of your sisters’ costumes ... ‘women’s work ...’ juxtaposing chess, painting, embroidery and care giving” (Yavneh 2006, 173). Your painting of garment and cloth pays homage to their tasks.

You touch me with a sharp tap and a clicking of the tongue. On the one hand you are pleased to be acknowledged for your interest in cloth but on the other you do not delegate it as “women’s work”, because artisans in the making of your garments were both male and female. I shrug. You were among the nobility. Working-class women took most of the toll of making and cleaning garments.

I am interested in this woman because she has been relegated to the edge and there is a mismatch of proportion, with the position of her head teasing the spatial balance between Minerva and herself. It is painted so that it comes forward, whereas it should be receding to be behind the back of Minerva’s head. It reminds me of a strange play in Picasso’s etchings, where the space is continually interrupted by one line overtaking another. Here I suggest you have placed her into the work after its completion; without her the work would be in perfect balance. Notwithstanding this inclusion, there is a beautiful dynamic of warmth and intimacy in the painting.

You had remarkable success with *The Chess Game* (see Fig. 17, page 45) and other works so early in your career. Vasari (1960) extolled its virtues in his mention of you in his *Vitae*: “I must relate that I saw this year in the house of her father at Cremona, in a picture executed with great diligence by her hand, portraits of her three sisters in the act of playing chess, and with them an old woman of the household, all done with great care and such spirit, that they have the appearance of life, and are wanting nothing save speech” (466).

La Poesia nods her head in agreement. The aperture has been closed. We are in darkness. Quiet descends ...

Yours sincerely,

Angela

18. Loss

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

Within the varnished layer of beauty lies the treachery of your time, the religious wars, the Counter Reformation. Closer to you, you experienced the loss of the young wife of Phillip II, Isobel de Valois (Fig. 33).

She and Anne of Austria each had several miscarriages and children were born and died in your time at the Spanish court.⁹³ And in your lifetime there was bubonic plague about the edges. You suffered your first husband dying and at a later age you met your second husband. You outlived all your family. I wonder if it was your habit to create a beautiful votive image and give thanks to ward off disease and misfortune?⁹⁴ There is no archival material to indicate this may be so, but I find solace that you, a religious woman, might have done so.

Yours sincerely,

Angela



Fig. 33. Sofonisba Anguissola. *Portrait of Queen Isabel de Valois*, 1563–65. Oil on Panel, 119 x 84cm. Prado Museum, Madrid.

⁹³ Records show the pregnancies of Isabelle de Valois: unnamed daughter 1, Hadsburg, b. 1564; unnamed daughter 2; Isabella Clara Eugenia von Habsburg, + b. 1566, d. 1633; Catalina Micaela von Hadsburg, + b. 10 Oct. 1567, d. 6 Nov. 1597; unnamed daughter 3, Habsburg b. 1568, d. 1568. http://www.google.com/images?hl=en&q=elizabeth+of+valois&um=1&ie=UFT-8&source=univ&ei=4yU7TKCFmzW10wSvn7nzA&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ct=title&resnum=4&ved+OCDoQsAQw

⁹⁴ See Freedberg D. 1989, 136–160.

19. Old Age

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

In our darkened chamber the door opened, allowing me to catch a glimpse of you. You have aged a little, your sight is weaker and you are peering closely at the painted image on the wall that has momentarily dissolved in the splash of light. The door has closed and the image solidifies. It is one of the two surviving paintings of the *Portrait of Sofonisba Anguissola* (see Fig. 34, page 86) by Anthony Van Dyck. In a notebook is a sketch and notation of his meeting with you. He writes:

Portrait of Signora Sofonisba Anguissola, painter, done from life at Palermo on July 12, 1624, when she was 96 [sic] years old, still with a good memory, quick spirit and kind. Although her eyesight was *weakened* [italics added] through age, it was a great pleasure for her to have pictures placed in front of her, and while she then placed her nose very close to the painting with a lot of effort, she managed to recognize some of it. She enjoyed that very much. When I drew her portrait, she gave me several hints: not to get too close, too high or too low so the shadows in her wrinkles would not show too much. She also talked to me about her life and that she was a wonderful painter of nature. Her greatest sorrow was not to be able to paint anymore because of her failing eyesight. Her hand was steady, without trembling (Perlingieri 1992, 204).



Fig. 34. Anthony Van Dyck, *Portrait of Sofonisba Anguissola*, 1624. Lord Sackfield Collection, Knole, Kent.

I am glad you are still susceptible to flattery. I enjoy the fact *Vanitus* never leaves us at any age. Van Dyck's painting has simplicity in composition that I do not see in his general oeuvre of work. More often I find the position of his subjects too fluid and limp for my taste. It is a striking portrait, but not as confronting as the self-portrait you painted in your seventies, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1610 (see Fig. 35, page 87). In it you have presented yourself as stern and formidable, without the idealization of your youthful portraits. You have stripped yourself bare of the fineries of your early years. Your face is dour and serious. It was not an expression that suggests vanity; instead it is introspective. You appear to be just slightly avoiding our gaze; your challenge is with yourself, not with the viewer's contemplation.



Fig. 35. Sofonisba Anguissola. *Self-Portrait*, c. 1610. 94 x 75cm. Gottfried Keller Collection, Bern, Switzerland.

Aging for a creative woman is not without its difficulty. Lynn A. Botelho (2005) classified man and woman in the early seventeenth century based on ‘humours’ and ‘elements’ in comprising the four ages of man (126). People could be placed under the following psychological characteristics “phlegmatic, sanguine, choleric or melancholic, *the distinct feature of the aged*” [emphasis my own] (127). These qualities harkened to undermine the aged. Old age, from sixty years on, brought with it superstition, and especially when associated with the post-menopausal woman: the lack of menstrual flow meant poisonous fluids were trapped in the body, which then was deemed the carrier of evil. Witchcraft was associated with the aging of woman as was the notion of the “evil eye”⁹⁵ – that is, to be looked at in a particular way by a post-menopausal woman meant that you could be cursed. What an alarming stigma to carry. This was especially applicable to women of the lower classes, but you were

⁹⁵ For further discussion on witchcraft Jonathan Seitz “‘The Root is Hidded and the Material Uncertain’: The Challenges of Prosecuting Witchcraft in Early Modern Venice”, *Renaissance Quarterly* 62 (2009): 102–33. Also see Judit Hersko, *Witch Hunt* series, 1990, in essay entitled Eva Forgács “Time Reclaimed”, *Judit Hersko*, Catalogue La Biennale de Venezia 1997, Hungarian Pavillion 12–17.

of nobility, married and beloved by your second husband, so there was little risk of being accused in such a way. Instead you were feted and honoured for an exemplary life. Ilya Sandra Perlingieri (1992) reminds us that, when Van Dyck painted your portrait, bubonic plague was sweeping around you. This might have contributed to the cleanness of his composition. Scarcity of the layout might have been because he did not want to dwell on elaborate time-consuming painterly detail of costumes and interiors, or perhaps the shocking reality of death all about made such details extraneous. Simplicity in life and hence in the composition was an essence he sought. It is strange, as he is noted for his beautiful depiction of clothing and a lavish opulent style of paint quality, but here, in your portrait, he has chosen a limited warm palette with a clear, uncluttered composition.

Watching you slowly settle in your chair makes me think of the susceptible younger bodies in your early portraits during the time you were in the Spanish court – your self-portrait as a young woman and portraits of Philip the second, of the beautiful young Queen Isabel de Valois, who was to lose her life in childbirth, and of her two surviving children, the Infantas Isabella Clara Eugenia and Catalina Micaela. I see beautifully adorned, regally posed, individuals who would have been special in your life. The formality of the poses belies the intimacies involved in painting them and your knowledge of the intimate details of their health and the conditions in which you all lived. Mortality was high for women in childbirth, so it is a blessing that you did not marry until your late thirties. You never had to risk birthing a child and would remain devoted to your practice.

As I grow older I am learning to appreciate how time becomes distilled and, with the maturity of years, we learn to see our own truth. I like to think we pare away the extraneous things and see simplicity. I saw a retrospective exhibition by the twentieth-century painter Edward Hopper at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2009.⁹⁶ I was drawn to a most exquisite work, *Sun in an Empty Room*, 1963. It was full of light; I felt I stood in a field of illumination.⁹⁷ The figure was absent and I experienced an intense sense of solitude. This is one of the last paintings he made

⁹⁶ Edward Hopper, 1882–1967.

⁹⁷ Edward Hopper, *Sun in an Empty Room*, 1963 [image], oil on canvas, 73 x 100.3 cm. Private collection.

before he died, where he stripped back what he painted to the barest essentials. Jean Baudrillard (2001) wrote of the light in Hopper's painting as evoking a similar sense to photography in that there was starkness in the contrast between the light and dark of the composition. His impression was that the painting "... reveals a ruthless exteriority, a brilliant materiality of objects and of their immediate fulfillment, a revelation through emptiness" (2). It took years and years of painting to be able to achieve that emptiness. I was humbled ...

At the time of the exhibition, there were in another room two pastel drawings by French artist Jean Siméon Chardin of himself and his wife, Madame Chardin.⁹⁸ They were head studies of the two of them in their old age and I did not want to leave them. It was as if time had dissolved. Perhaps it was a moment of *augenblick*, a blink of an eye, of timelessness; a concept beautifully articulated by my colleague Koral Ward (2008) in her book of the same name.

You mentioned to Van Dyck that you did not like losing your sight. It is a dilemma of old age. Once I picked up a little book of letters written by Henri Matisse and Pierre Bonnard in their later years. Among them I found letters between the two famous old painters lamenting their state of health and general problems with exhibitions and dealers. Matisse was worried about losing his sight ...

Dear Bonnard, Nice, April 1, 1943

Do you think your dealer would be interested in showing one of my canvases or drawings, not for sale? I would show only to cooperate with you.

My eyes are clouding over in a troublesome way. Would you kindly send me a copy of your prescription, so I can show it to my oculist (doctor).

A thousand thanks.

Cordially,

H. Matisse

⁹⁸ Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, 1699–1779, *Self-Portrait with a Visor* c. 1776 [image] and *Portrait of Madame Chardin*, 1776 [image].
http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/search/citi/artist_id:533

My dear Matisse, May, 1946

Your two pictures decorate (that's the word) my dining room, against an ocher background that becomes them. Especially the woman with the necklace – the red there is wonderful late in the afternoon. By day it is the blue that takes the lead. What an intense life the colors have, and how they vary with the light! I make discoveries every day, and I have you to thank for this pleasure and this instruction.

Yours,

*Bonnard*⁹⁹

I leave you here reflecting on the mishmash of aging bodies and painting and on the lives of these painters – one, my favourite Post-Impressionist, Pierre Bonnard, and the other a Modernist, Henri Matisse, who were writing missives to each other in the last few years of their lives during the time of the disruption in France in and after the Second World War. I have wanted to tell you of Henri Cartier-Bresson,¹⁰⁰ whose photographs of his friends rest alongside the letters, but each time I go to bring my thoughts of the photographic medium onto paper, my scribing hand mutinies and instead prefers the paintbrush. It is ironic because I love the meshing of the two: paint and photography. I confess I am experiencing *attritio*¹⁰¹ between painting and photography and I am not sure where it will take us ...

Sincerely,

Stewart

⁹⁹ Bonnard/Matisse 1992, 117; 126–127.

¹⁰⁰ Cartier-Bresson, H. 1908–2004. See Cartier-Bresson 1952.

¹⁰¹ *Attritio* – a rubbing against.

20. *Tavoletta*

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

We move and you place me in front of the aperture. It is transformed into a *tavoletta* within a small peephole in the back of a painting.¹⁰² I keep my focal point steady. I am blind to all about me except for what is in the angle of my vision. I am “a bonded cyclops” (Desbiens 2009, 2). I stand very still. The line of perspective is exact and I watch the image of the mirror reflected back at me. As Jacques Desbiens (2009) reminds me, “the *tavoletta* is a device eliminating all variations, choices and freedom for the observer. Classical linear perspective is a focalized projection of space in which the visible has to go through a single point” (2). Through the aperture I carefully watch the vista before me; through a mirrored reflection, all else is extraneous.

I have chosen a disciplined structure to engage in a conversation about photography. It can be overwhelming to discuss such a subject with someone like you, who has never seen a portable camera, the apparatus that has been developed over the centuries. My way is to place small vignettes of historical moments in my angle of vision, as images reflect back to us in the opposite mirror. It is a personal journey, smattered at times with conjecture, but I want to lead you to where photography has played a significant role in my art practice. Remember, I am looking through the hole in my *tavoletta*, I cannot move my head but I can slide my eyes as far right and left as possible.

You are watching me closely and beckon me aside to take a turn at looking into the aperture ...

¹⁰² The *tavoletta* is a simple apparatus to find correct perspectival vision by looking through a small hole or aperture into a mirror reflection of something in the distance. The angle of vision is limited. The idea for this letter came from Bovell (1999). Although her essay was about clouds, I loved the notion of seeing through a peephole of the back of a painting into a mirror reflection of perspective distance based on Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446).

Two figures come into focus. It is 1944 and the painter Pierre Bonnard is in his studio in war-torn France being photographed by Henri Cartier-Bresson with a Leica camera. Bonnard already has gained fame as a Post-Impressionist painter of hauntingly beautiful compositions and Cartier-Bresson will become legendary in capturing unmediated pivotal moments in photography and photojournalism. At the time of this photographic session, Bonnard's wife, Marthe, the muse of many of his paintings, had died two years prior.¹⁰³ He lives alone. Henri Cartier-Bresson, thirty-six years of age, a French army conscript, had in the previous year, escaped from a German work camp. He is here to create a body of photographs of fellow creative artists and writers in Europe, an assignment suggested by his colleague, Pierre Braun.



Fig. 36. Pierre Bonnard, *Siesta*, 1900, oil on canvas, 109 x 132 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.

Pierre Bonnard's paintings are a bountiful tease that can give rise to a moment of breathlessness such as the one I experienced when I came across *Siesta* (painted in 1900) in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (Fig. 36).

It is a sultry, erotic painting of a young woman lying supine on her belly stretched across a bed on a slight diagonal, which tips the body towards us. Our eye is drawn towards the girl's buttocks, painted in thick tones of warm cream colour. The light arrow shape between her legs becomes a focal point, emphasizing her languid sex.

¹⁰³ Frankel and Rosefky 1992. See poignant letter Bonnard wrote to Matisse (100–101).

Bonnard here places the girl's buttocks in the middle of the composition, which is interesting because in many of his paintings he plays with the balance of composition by appearing disrespectful to the notion of having a central position as the main focal point. For example, in some of his paintings there can be a main protagonist off centre, whose position teases the importance of placement in muted shapes adjacent, vertically or horizontally, towards the central axis on the picture plane. Surrounding the main shape can be a secondary player, in this case a small white dog resting along the base of the painting. The figures are never anatomically correct. They are, for me, reminiscent of the early modern period of medieval painting, with whimsical shapes and movement.

You also are conscious of the middle axis: you always paint the right eye centrally in your portraits. By placing this central eye in the mid-upper third, the painted structure of the head and body and the surrounding negative shapes unfold from it to the edges (Nicholls et al. 1999, 1517–1522). It appears to me that you drew an Albrecht Dürer grid onto the rectangular frame of the painting to position the figure (Bambach 1999, 186–189). This grid is not unlike a camera lens, simplistically speaking, because, seen through the rectangle of the viewfinder, the world is viewed in the order of horizontals and verticals, and as painters we are always conscious of the central point of our composition and the relationship to and from the edges.

By studying Cartier-Bresson's photography I learnt to appreciate the quality of the silence contained within a sitter's space during a photographic encounter. He was deliberate and selective with what he chose to print. In my earlier portrait paintings my backgrounds were often bare, as a form of space and emptiness. I deliberately left out extraneous information. I did not put icons or symbols inside the frame or place my sitter in an obvious environment. However, I learnt to love the nuances of space and light surrounding my sitters. What was once absent I now paint and photograph as small details of imaginary or perceptual moments, close studies of detail that belong to a bigger picture. I absorb imperceptibly the influences of those whose work I admire such as Cartier-Bresson and Bonnard.

I move aside and allow you to rest your eye against the aperture to watch the two French men, one man the lover of the medium of paint and the other of photography,

taken with his legendary Leica camera.

Let us return to Bonnard and further examine how he structures his canvases. He is discourteous to the straight line and instead paints in coloured shapes and patterns in major or minor diagonals, which tease the vertical and horizontal edges of his paintings. He butts shapes and lines into the margins and in so doing takes us, the viewers, outside his painting to what he hints could continue beyond the frame. It takes our eye in and out of the picture plane at different intervals where we might stumble upon what John Elderfield (1998) considered is hiding in the picture plane: “The strict cropping of the visual field nearly always produces something false”, Bonnard wrote in his diary. “The second stage of composition consists of bringing back certain elements which lie outside the rectangle” (40).

What is hidden in *Siesta*? We as spectators are voyeurs by implication as we watch a slumbering woman. In painting a defenceless sleeping young woman, Bonnard has invited us to observe a private and vulnerable moment. By his quiet positioning of abandoned clothes dropped at the base of the frame, and two empty cups of coffee resting on the bedside table in the right margin, he is quietly reminding us the painter is hidden and we are the intruders.

It is my turn and I am back looking into the peephole of the *tavoletta*. My head moves imperceptibly and the visual fields shift.¹⁰⁴ I have a moment of vertigo, the image finally settles and I am looking at a photograph, the result of the encounter between Cartier-Bresson and Bonnard (see Fig. 37, page 95). And, as before, everything else is extraneous.

¹⁰⁴ This moment reminds me of Marzena Topka’s evocative installation *On Level Ground*, 2003, installation and video projection, dimensions variable, School of Art Design and Media, Central TAFE, Perth, Western Australia. It featured a vinyl chair in a doctor’s waiting room, which was overlaid by a photographic projection of the same chair in the actual chair with the same scale and colour, just slightly off kilter, giving the viewer a sense of unease and distrust.

Bonnard is in profile, gazing out of the picture frame and clasping his hands in a self-reflective gesture. Cartier-Bresson has emphasized a sense of geometry by capturing Bonnard with the edges of the paintings behind him and the silhouette of his pose repeating the vertical lines in the composition (Cartier-Bresson 1999, 32–34). Bonnard is just off centre with the edge of the painting pinned on the wall behind him, and because the pinned painting is central, from my finite position, I give it my total attention.



Fig. 37. Henri Cartier-Bresson. *Pierre Bonnard*, 1994, in H. Cartier-Bresson, *Tête à Tête: Portraits by Henri Cartier-Bresson*.

It is a shallow distance between Bonnard and us, the viewers, but behind Bonnard the spatial arrangement is ambiguous. If it were not for Bonnard's hands and hat, the painting could hover in front of him. In this way Cartier-Bresson is echoing some of Bonnard's strategies of tipping the picture plane and bringing what is not initially obvious forward to be found. The motifs of the canvas on the wall are fuzzy, a muted tonal range of patina, but there is just enough to see to make it tantalizing; they are small pricks of what Roland Barthes defines as *punctum*.¹⁰⁵ Parts of the picture plane that linger, pricks or interruptions, such as a necklace or a sharp shift in colour, remain in memory whereas the rest of the work can become a blur, out of focus, forgotten.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Barthes 1993, descriptions of *studium* and *punctum*, 26–27; 43–60.

As with Bonnard, Cartier-Bresson's photographs suggest what is beyond the picture plane by the way he borders his images in the viewfinder. He was known never to crop his images in the darkroom. He intuitively frames a picture allowing for the tension of expectation. This is the beauty of his work. He brings us to a suspended moment and we are allowed to look around but, as with Bonnard's painting, we want to move our sight beyond the visual plane given to us. We are the absence, what is missing, and we are teased by the implication that we would or would not like to be present at the time of the photograph being taken: the delight of being in Bonnard's studio or the fear of being in a war-torn land.

I keep asking myself why I am so haunted by this particular period in time. Bonnard painted *Siesta* before the destruction of the First and the Second World Wars. It is a painting humming with sensuality and safety. But what of the two wars he was then to live through? In his later work he consistently focused on the wonder of colour. I suggest Bonnard was sensitive to the horror, and by painting in a hauntingly beautiful, picturesque fashion he kept at bay the deprivation and destruction about him (Hyman 1998, 200–209). I suggest that he deliberately ignored the world as much as possible because in his paintings reside ideal spaces – rooms or landscapes where there is no carnage or destruction. They appear a refuge, filled with colour and light, an escape from the mayhem of occupied France (Frankel and Rosefky 1992, 78; 80; 114). I like to think it was the dance and sparkle of colour on his canvas that gave him solace and that he dreamt of “seeking the absolute” (Elderfield 1998, 73).

By contrast Cartier-Bresson's scrapbook reveals a multitude of poignant images of men and women displaced by war (Cartier-Bresson 2007, 200–257). The Leica camera gave him the freedom to traverse private spaces with a subtlety that was unobtrusive. He and his photographic colleagues would construct a new genre of photography, which he aptly named “photojournalism”.

You are restless by my side. You did not expect to look through the *tavoletta* and see the images I have shown you. We did not see a clear delineation of perspective; instead we saw a photographic display with a play of space beyond your understanding. But it is like that with the photographic image: what we see we want to believe is *real* when, in fact, it is but a moment, a blink of the eye, a distortion of reality snapped by the shutter of a camera.



Fig. 38. Angela Stewart, *Bonnard's Tea Party and I*, 1996, acrylic on Fuji photographic paper, 18.7 x 25 cm [3 images]. Private collection.

In the past I have tried to make sense of this. On one occasion I dressed myself in paint and placed myself in a Bonnard painting (Fig. 38). On another, with the help of two colleagues, I painted myself as Marthe into Bonnard's bathroom, but as I stood under the shower the different colours of paint blended into a muddy brown. So with a twist of a brush and a shift of the camera lens, *puff*, I morphed into Camille Claudel washing off Rodin's clay (Fig. 39).¹⁰⁶



Fig. 39. Angela Stewart, *Camille*, 2002, C-photograph, 124 x 120 cm [6 images]. Personal collection of the artist.

¹⁰⁶ Camille Claudel 1864–1943. The making of this work was influenced by feminist scholarship and the visiting of an exhibition on Augustus Rodin at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in 2004 at the time of doing the Bonnard pieces. The few works of Claudel on display had a particular delicacy and were exemplary in their skill. See also Ryan 2006.

It is like that: the camera allows us to be fickle. What once was the aura is now a *simulacra* and as creative artists we are chameleons in the process. We have learnt to acknowledge and celebrate the camera's flexibility, but as Walter Benjamin warned us, a few years prior to the photographic session between Cartier-Bresson and Bonnard, with the advent of technology the illusion of the image will come at a cost.¹⁰⁷

You sigh and look about restlessly. The spectacle in the *tavoletta* appears to your eye to be a ridiculous *extravaganza*. The Spanish Royal Princess Clara Catalina is calling for you and, with a polite smile, you bow and graciously take your leave ...

Yours sincerely,

Angela

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin 2009, 172–192, 228–260.

21. Sloppy Postures

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

I am a hoarder. I keep scraps of information, photographs, postcards, photocopies and newspaper articles in my visual diaries ... I was thinking about the dilemma of having a sitter pose ... I found it! It is an interesting article by Sebastian Smee¹⁰⁸ about the boredom of sitters and the fatigue that overcomes the body when required to remain still. The point I most enjoyed was his reference to Chekhov: “Literary critic James Wood has pointed out that Chekhov ... shows his characters being disappointed by the stories they tell – and, by extension, by the stories Chekhov has given them. By allowing his characters to be disappointed by the stories he constructs about them, Wood argues, Chekhov bestows on them a special kind of freedom. They are given room to wriggle out of the straightjacket of fiction and into what Wood, conjuring a beautiful phrase, calls “the bottomless freedom of disappointment”.

As portrait painters we both know the tension of pleasing our patrons, but by Chekhov’s model we can allow our sitters the bottomless freedom of disappointment – how delicious and liberating! So often the stiffness of posing is simply the result of the monotony of keeping still: the face drops, the muscles slowly relax and amusement lines fall away. Our bodies are in constant movement, and we substitute for the breathing body a two-dimensional statue.

Would others stand in for the modelling of your royal sitters, especially the *infantas* Isabella Clara Eugenia and Catalina Micaela (see Fig. 30, page 75)? Your royal portraits show an idealized body, indifferent to the constraints of posing. The body is upright, stiff and regal, the pose is formalized. It reminds me of the stiffness seen in nineteenth-century photographs, where those being photographed needed to be propped with supports in order to remain stiff and still for the long exposure needed.

Yours sincerely,

Angela

¹⁰⁸ In an article titled “Masters of Disguise”, *Weekend Australian*, 9–10 July 2005.

22. The Card Game

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

Let us play a game of chance. I beckon you to come with me into the sunlight. We close the door of the camera obscura and, outside, we find a Holmes stereoscope and a stack of stereoscopic cards on a table. The year is 1870 and stereoscopes are very popular with the middle classes, especially with the followers of Queen Victoria of England, who greatly admired and used the machine. I present you with a pack of Holmes stereo cards that you cup in your hands. On each card are two printed images.

I will begin by explaining the simple basic principle of the stereoscope to you. Our brain receives two slightly different perspectives from each eye: close one eye and what you see with the other is different from when you reverse things and look with the other eye. When one places the card in the stereoscope and looks through its twin lenses, the images blend and this gives the illusion of three dimensions.¹⁰⁹ I throw the dice. Each of us will draw one card at a time and place it in the stereoscope. Some cards will contain identical images, which means they will not line up with perspective clarity.¹¹⁰ This will be interesting because, by blurring of focus, a variety of interpretations can happen.

You have won the opening gambit and sit at the table elaborately fussing and spreading your skirts. Your face sinks into the frame of the stereoscope and you slowly slide your card into the machine.

¹⁰⁹ The stereoscope is introduced to allow Sofonisba to see a three-dimensional illusion by the blending of the two images. It takes her away from the “free subject of the camera obscura” towards photography. See Crary 1992, 119–136, 133.

¹¹⁰ I am working here with an illusion for stereoscopic vision to work. The images must be slightly different to create a three-dimensional effect in the stereoscope. I am asking the reader to *imagine* a three-dimensional image by mimicking two images that are actually the same. None of my painted photographs shown in this letter are duplicated. I am illustrating a point of duplicity to create an illusion of depth.

With a muffled cry of delight you experience the effect produced by viewing the two drawings of a young boy by Jacopo Chimenti da Empoli: there is an element of the supernatural, the phantasmagorical (Fig. 40).¹¹¹ He was said to have drawn with the right eye and then the left. You now have a comprehension of stereoscopic vision. The secret is to have a slight variation in perspective in each image so that when viewing an object or person the eye realigns the image and gives the impression of spatial depth.

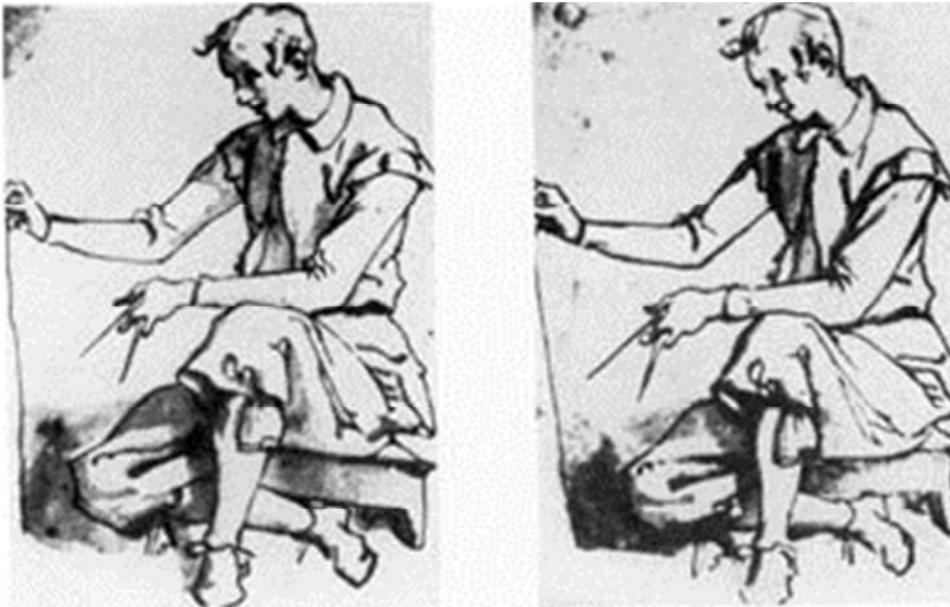


Fig. 40. Jacopo Chimenti da Empoli, stereoscopic drawing, 13th century.

We are now in the spirit of the game. In quick succession, we pull out cards and place them in the stereoscope.¹¹² I pick up a card. It is Michelangelo's drawing *A Flying Angel and Other Studies* (see Fig. 41, page 102). It is a study of the anatomy of a male body lying face down, characteristic of what Michelangelo and Vasari deemed strong *disegno*: the anatomical body drawn with skill, proportionally correct, with the addition of an emotional content, a pose of anguish.

¹¹¹ By looking through a stereoscope I am suggesting the viewing subject has a private space to comprehend phantasmagorical images in close physical proximity to the body. It is important to note the physical movement of inserting the card reminded the subject it was an illusionistic experience, unlike film or digital imagery of the twenty-first century. The stereoscope was very popular in the late nineteenth century. For a Marxian perspective on the passivity of man in relation to the stereoscope, see Crary 1992, 128–133.

¹¹² For an investigation into subjective vision and the stereoscope, see Crary 1992, 118–136.



Fig. 41. Michelangelo, *A Flying Angel and Other Studies*, black chalk, 40.7 x 27.2 cm. British Museum, London.

Now you are looking at a drawing by Jacopo Pontormo, *Nude Figure Seen from Behind, Leaning on a Parapet* (Fig. 42). He is my favourite male painter of the *Cinquecento*, as his Mannerist drawing and paintings have a particular pathos. The drawing does not share the correct proportions of Michelangelo's study, but the lines are sensuous.



Fig. 42. Jacopo Pontormo, *Nude Figure Seen from Behind, Leaning on a Parapet*, black chalk, 27.6 x 16.7 cm. Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Florence.

Pontormo distorts and extends limbs to emphasize a pose. With the man's back to us and slightly slumped over, it portrays what I consider to be quintessential to Pontormo's art. There can be both an innocence and a world-weariness in his figures, and his rendering of the colour pink is something to behold. But what I particularly love are his lips, the way they are painted with a constant pucker, a succulent budding cherub shape. My affection for him is strong, especially for his reported eccentricities: he would board himself up in his atelier so no one could see his work (a sentiment I appreciate) and record in his diary everything he ate and each resulting bowel action.

We pause, and laugh ...

La Poesia has arrived and is declaring what delight it is to look into the stereoscope. She is in awe of the illusion; a three-dimensional image of a fine drawing of the male nude.

She is extolling the importance of the figure, how it is esteemed and influenced by Leon Battista Alberti's Treatise (1547), *Della Pittura*, to which we are indebted, as the drawing from anatomy is a basic requirement of artists (Maloon 1999, 17–19; 40–44).¹¹³

At my retort that women were not being taught life drawing then, she pauses momentarily, and frowns, and ignores my remark.

Drawing, she continues, is part of the gentlemanly protocol of behaviour of Renaissance nobility espoused by Baldassare Castiglione in his 1528 publication, *Book of the Courtier* (Castiglione 2003).¹¹⁴ It is a pursuit for both professional artists and noblemen. It epitomizes a particular style of decorum and skill and elevates painting and sculpture in the liberal arts. This of course reflects back on the nobility,

¹¹³ For skills required in *disegno* see also catalogue Bromford, D., ed., 2002, *Underdrawings in Renaissance Paintings*, London: National Gallery Company and Bambach 1999, 186.

¹¹⁴ For a discussion of the *Book of the Courtier* see Woods-Marsden 1998, 189 and Garrard 1994, 570.

suggesting they are astute and learned in the classics of antiquity. Pontormo, sadly, finds its contents on decorum, sublimated love and ideal beauty of little interest, as he is presently preoccupied with his bodily functions.

From inside the capsule of the head support of the stereoscope is heard a chortle of laughter. We stop for coffee ... We are back, the noon sun high in the sky, and it is time to approach issues I consider important.

Where, I ask you, are the naked bodies for women to draw? It is known that women were often the objects of desire, and were the nude models for male artists.¹¹⁵ The formation of the *Accademia del Disegno* would happen in your lifetime but life drawing classes and academic traditions belonged only to male artists.¹¹⁶ The hierarchical, patriarchal tradition of painting and sculpture prevented the inclusion of women. Yet you and Lucia do not appear unduly disadvantaged. Each of you displays a very clear and confident ability to draw the human figure, and seems to flourish under the private tuition of Bernardino Gatti and Bernardino Campi. On the other hand isolation and private tutorship would act as protection from the competition and jealousies of male artists and apprentices in the workshops.¹¹⁷ Do I detect a certain pride in your ability to draw and copy? And yet there are no surviving loose drawings of *nude* studies by you, nor sketchbooks to peruse. So a private self, a sexual body of Sofonisba Anguissola I can only imagine. What of woman's desire?

The symbol of *Virgo* is placed in several of your self-portraits as a young woman, heralding to all that you were a young noble woman of integrity and religious purity. Garrard (1994) states that it would be seen as a symbol of the "the implication of the independence and self possession" (580, n47).

This is possible, but it does not answer my curiosity about how you managed the

¹¹⁵ Milam (1999) briefly charts the question of immorality and the nude model in academia. See also Maloon 1999, 45–48.

¹¹⁶ For a detailed description of the formation and aims of the *Accademia del Disegno* in 1562 see Cheney 2007, 127–130.

¹¹⁷ For a discussion on competition in the Renaissance workshop environment see Clifton 1996, 23–41.

sexually laden allegorical/mythological paintings of your time. In your century or mine, young virginal women can still have curiosity in seeing semi naked bodies of men and women caressing with abandoned poses. For instance, when you arrived as a virtuous woman at the Spanish court and came across the luscious paintings of Titian,¹¹⁸ did you stand in front of them for hours to examine the paint quality *and* the content? He was thought to have the ability to create the impression of succulent flesh in his paintings¹¹⁹ and his admirers claimed for him artistic supremacy.

So alone in front of Titian's paintings, how did you feel? Was there privacy in the hustle and bustle of the activity about you? In contrast our twenty-first century bodies' privacy can be invaded by many means. Medically, sexually and socially our bodies are penetrated and examined in minute detail. Sexuality is read as multi-coded and smouldering. I consider my "flesh" as different from yours; in fact, Michel Foucault (1977) tells me the term "sexuality" was not used until the early nineteenth century and connected to the slow evolution of relationships between "sexual behaviour, normality and health" (3). Our gender roles are a site for intense scrutiny and controversy.¹²⁰ It is an intense debate, the tension of which I can only release with laughter. It makes me think of a very funny yet serious article by Regina Lynn, "The Toy Will Bring You Joy" (2005), which explores her narrative while she plays with her latest sex toy ...¹²¹

Alas, looking at the rigidity of your posture I see it is not the time or place for such a discussion, and with a sigh I reach for another card. For a short while there is only the squeaking of the cards as they are moved in and out of the stereoscope.

Incapable of resisting, I approach the subject again. In Van Dyck's sketchbook of his Italian travels he included you as an honoured aged woman. He shows his interest in a woman's sexual body. There is a sweet little connotation amongst the many transcriptions of Titian's paintings and prints. Van Dyck "points to '*quell admirabile*

¹¹⁸ See the sumptuous allegorical paintings by Titian in Humfrey 2007, 167–191.

¹¹⁹ On this point see Garrard 1994, 572.

¹²⁰ I find parallels with Viggo Wallenschöld's painting and with Bennett, J's (1997) essay based on Michel Foucault in *Kama and Eroticism*: 129–139.

¹²¹ Regina Lynn. <http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/commentary/sexdrive/2005/11/69637> (accessed 6 August 2010)

petto’ a foreshortened breast in Titian’s Borghese *Venus Binding Cupid*” (Jaffe 2001, 617). He was a young man at the time of this drawing and it makes me think of you as a young woman and your reaction to the latent sexuality in Titian’s paintings.

Forgive my presumption but I suspect you would have experienced an ambivalence of emotions. You married late in your thirties for the first time, and I wonder if it was your wish to remain celibate so you would not lose your creativity. You used your virtue as a shield to remain autonomous and thus able to paint for as long as possible without the responsibilities of a husband and household. First and foremost you were driven to excel as a painter to your utmost ability and you would have realized that pregnancy would almost certainly follow marriage. Also you lived through the loss of your liege lady, Isabel de Valois, in childbirth – that must have been devastating.

You are very still for an indefinite time. The clock ticks by ... I see you so beautifully adorned in the etching *Self-portrait at Three Quarter Length*, 1560s, and I sense a hint of yearning to be an object of desire, or a muse for a painter you may admire ...

The mood has changed and the card you hold is unusual. Instead of an image, it has italic writing: *imitazione* and *invenzione*, side-by-side.¹²² *La Poesia* is laughing and it is my turn to shrug and raise my right hand, a gesture not dissimilar to young Minerva’s in *The Chess Game* (see Fig. 17, page 45). Of course it is confusing; there is no three-dimensionality of images overlapping here, no illusion of perspectival depth. You were enjoying the passivity of slipping a card into a machine to create an image of verisimilitude with three-dimensional depth. Here, it seems so easy, so different from the toil of painting. And now, by the inclusion of this strange card, you are feeling unsettled, discontented.

The cards have presented us with a dilemma. What I have inadvertently given you is a tease of the postmodern condition. What once was very clear to you about the two distinct roles of *imitazione* and *invenzione* is now imploded. I have used an image of

¹²² For further discussion on *imitazione* and *invenzione* and the vigour of copying in *disegno* see Rensselaer 1940, 197–269.

Anti-Aesthetics¹²³ to usurp and abandon the disciplines you obey. The use of text as a descriptor brings into focus something that is prevalent in my era, a myth of hyper-reality, not with the cloth of paint, but with photography or film, to destabilize beauty and idealism of the Humanism of your Enlightenment period. We are now postmodern and [in]human. From the use of photography and digital imagery, we now have the virtual in motion, gesture, touch, gaze and manipulation, to haptics ...

You are not listening. I sigh and wait. If we attempt to make sense of these two images together in stereoscopic sight, do we see a three-dimensional image stretching back into a recognizable reality that both you and I join in some order of understanding? I, like you, am not sure of the answer, and it would be too easy to just dismiss this image as confusing and visually impractical, but let us follow the element of chance.

I stall, it is my cue and I pick up a card; it reads *imitazione* and *imitazione*. I return your card, *imitazione* and *inventione*, to the pack. I am allowed an extra turn. The card I choose is of my own work, *Flora* (see Fig. 43, page 108). It is a painted photograph, a self-portrait where I am depicted semi-naked and have become an objectified “woman,” covered in paint by an anonymous hand. I double the images to mimic the stereogram. There is paint on my body and on the photographic surface. I am adorned in the clothing of the sixteenth century, masquerading the Italian Giuseppe Arcimboldo’s painting, *Flora*. Dressed in the clothing of pastiche, Flora, (I), stares past us to look for her own enlightenment of the human condition in the twenty-first century. She ignores your gaze of sixteenth-century humanism, Goethe’s and Turner’s joy in the camera obscura,¹²⁴ the admirers of stereoscopes (Crary 1992, 123), Walter Benjamin’s gaze of modernity.¹²⁵ Her interest is not how mechanical viewing instruments changed the “historical construction of vision”. She has become a replay of a cartoon to be re-dressed, like a cut-out doll of my childhood – we would re-dress the same model with different clothing – or the replication of cartoons or

¹²³ For outlines on the complexity of the Anti-Aesthetic movement, see Heartney 2001, 27–40.

¹²⁴ For discussions of models of subjective vision and Goethe’s comprehension of colour and vision and the physiology of the eye, also the influence of Goethe’s discovery on J. M. Turner’s painting, see Crary 1992, 67–96, 137–150.

¹²⁵ For the complexity of the observer in a world that has the still and moving images of photography, see Benjamin 2009, 228–260. Also Benjamin 2008, 19–55.

stencils from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, where the same drawing or painting poses would be copied, replicated and re-contextualized into new paintings.



Fig. 43. Angela Stewart, *Flora*, 2005, oil on C-photograph, 91 x 121 cm.
Personal collection of the artist.

It is your turn. The card is the same model, though her garment has changed and she is *Vaghezza* (Fig 44).

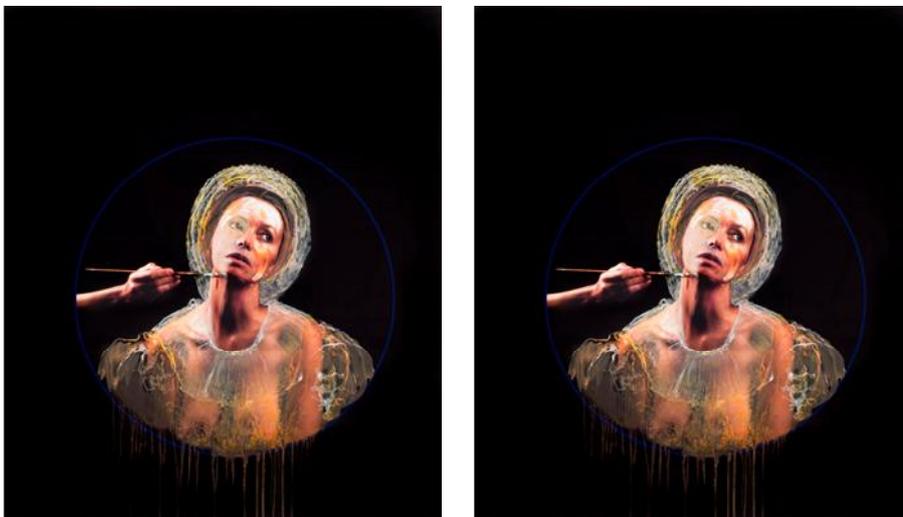


Fig. 44. Angela Stewart, *Vaghezza*, 2010, oil on C-photograph, 91 x 121 cm.
Personal collection of the artist.

My turn, and yet again it is the same pose, only this time she is painted to become Pontormo's *Madonna*, an echo of one of my favourite paintings by Pontormo, *Transportation of Christ*. The repetition used here is not achieved through an etching

and printing press, but through a mix of analog and digital representation, interrupted by the hand-held loaded paintbrush (Fig. 45).



Fig. 45. Angela Stewart, *Pontormo's Madonna*, 2008, oil on C-photograph, 91 x 121 cm. Private collection.

As we pull cards one by one I continue speaking ... You sigh ...

As a privileged young woman you would have been able to closely observe the erotically charged paintings of Titian in the private palaces and rooms of the nobility. Here, with the invention of the stereoscope and the photograph, our experience of an intimacy in the viewing of images changes. As Walter Benjamin stressed, the nineteenth- and twenty-century viewer would become hungry to own an image. Today we become a *flâneur* or *flâneuse* who can restlessly roam the streets to find stimulation, from images to photographs. The fact that the stereoscopes became popular and affordable for the middle classes opened a market in which images could be fetishized and viewed in private spaces. The stereoscopic image was also important because it disrupted emotional spaces and, as Crary (1992) suggests: "... it signals the eradication of "the point of view" around which, for several centuries, meaning had been assigned reciprocally to an observer and the object of his or her vision" (128).

As you are realizing now, by holding an instrument to your body the illusion is mystical. The immediacy and proximity of the image to your person allows for an imaginative space, a place of fantasy and sexual desire.

What can I say to make you understand? Yours, Arcimoldo's and Pontormo's understanding of the body is now inter-spliced by a nineteenth-century invention and comes closer to mine.



Fig. 46. Angela Stewart, *Betwixt between, Michele and Vermeer Nos. 1 & 2*, 1995 [4 images], 42 x 30 cm, acrylic on C-photograph. Private collection.

Throughout the years of my art practice I too have been preoccupied with the notion of *imitazione* and *inventione*¹²⁶ with desire, love and loss. It has not always been easy to articulate it, and only recently am I finding some understanding with this particular obsession. It began years ago when I was a young girl and my father came across me painting a rendition of Johannes Vermeer's servant woman in *Mistress and*

Maid, c.1666–1667. I can remember that day and the moment he asked me “Why do you copy?” and my puzzlement and shame. It is strange that my studying erotically beautiful paintings of the old masters did not fill me with mortification, yet the need for originality in my own work did. My father unwittingly echoed the belief of Vasari (1960) when the sixteenth-century writer claimed: “Design cannot have a good origin if it has not come from continual practice in copying natural objects, and from the study of pictures by excellent masters and of ancient statues in relief, as has been said many times” (210).

But even then, as a young girl who played with cut-out cardboard dolls, dressed them in costumes of paint and led them into imaginary lives, I knew it was not copying as such that interested me. I was, many years later, to use the same image in painting a portrait of a colleague (Fig. 46). I interlaced her in and around the earlier rendition I had done in my own formative years. The things we do unconsciously that slip through the veils of memory ...

I glance up from my hands in my lap. We stand and straighten our skirts; I tidy the cards and we leave for the day ...

Yours sincerely,

Angela

¹²⁶ Bambach 1999, 296–333.

23. The Auditorium

Johannesburg,
South Africa.
May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

You tighten your *corpetti*, it is cold.¹²⁷ I tuck my hands into the woollen scarf around my neck. It is intermission.

The auditorium is filling with spectacular groupings of people, representatives of the seasons of your life.¹²⁸ Near the front stands a group of elegantly dressed sixteenth-century Italian noblemen. They are bedecked in finery befitting your era and station. Much discussion about art criticism can be heard. Occasionally we hear *leggiadria*, *vaghezza* or *sprezzatura* exclaimed, and we assume they are discussing the idealization of beauty in Florentine and Venetian painting.

People keep passing, so it is difficult for us to hear and realize time and place. The three sisters, noting my disappointment, slip past those in our row and position themselves quietly between the noblemen. They listen attentively to the arguments.

The artist and theorist Giorgio Vasari is speaking with the Abbot of San Salvatore, Agnolo Firenzuola,¹²⁹ his publisher, Pietro Bembo,¹³⁰ the intellectual Lodovico Dolce¹³¹ and Alessandro Contarini.¹³² The discussion is focused on the treatise of beauty in *Dialogo della bellezza delle donne* (Sohm 1995, 765), completed by Agnolo Firenzuola, in 1542.¹³³ Vasari is praising Tuscan artists in comparison to

¹²⁷ For jacket as *corpetti* see Garrard 1994, 583.

¹²⁸ This idea came from witnessing the *Ages of Life* or *Seasons* in the Chamber of Fortune of Vasari's home, Arezzo, in 2007. I decided to allow prominent scholars and painters from the late 15th to the 17th century to be present in my correspondence. See Cheney 2007, 100–108.

¹²⁹ Agnolo Firenzuola (1493–1545) was an Italian poet and writer.

¹³⁰ Pietro Bembo (1470–1547) was a Venetian scholar, poet, literary theorist and cardinal.

¹³¹ Lodovico Dolce (1508/10–1568) was an Italian theorist of painting. He was a broadly based Venetian humanist and prolific author, translator and editor, remembered for his *Dialogue on Painting*, 1870.

¹³² Alessandro Contarini in 1537 became Provveditore of the fleet for the Venice dominions.

¹³³ See the description of “female beauty” in Sohms 1995, 763–764, and Firenzuola, 765–777. Also

those in Venice. In the *Quattrocento*, he claims, the importance of beauty was equated to good rule, order, proportion and design but lacked quality of measurement. In the *Cinquecento*, the expression of beauty became more stylized, with a sublime grace. However, Vasari is insisting that the Florentine artists must guard against the inclusion of the elusive qualities of the feminine, as both he and the Maestro Michelangelo consider it to be a weakness and an excuse to escape the confines and rigour of *disegno* in oil painting and sculpture. *Disegno*, he continues, is essential in painting to ensure the correct measurements of the human body. Because of these skills, Tuscan artists are considered superior to Venetian artists, who would forego design in favour of working immediately on the canvas.

The Venetians did not follow the same procedures of underpainting. They did not use chalk to mark the composition and then wash with monochromatic colour; instead, they stained and created highlights in the composition with brushes of colour.¹³⁴ Lodovico Dolce exclaimed, with an expansive gesture, that this was the *significant* difference. For example, the painting by the Venetian Titian could glow and replicate nature with a soft edge of blurring shape and outline without the sharper edges of Tuscan paintings such as Michelangelo's compositions (Sorabella 2000).

Firenzuola, however, is quietly bringing the discussion back to his position that "love, beauty and style". (Cropper 1976, 374) are now synonymous in the process of making an artwork. A woman's charm, grace and vagueness, or *vaghezza*, are ineffable qualities to be captured, especially when painting a beautiful woman. The shape and colour of the eyes, flowing long tresses and long limbs were vital aspects of beauty as seen in Parmigianino's *Madonna of the Long Neck*.¹³⁵

This particular point fuels the conversation and their gestures become animated. What *is* the exemplum in painting of a feminine quality of style? A voice is heard claiming it is the composite of the most alluring of women's features that together

Garrard 1994, 26: 570 n28, and Cropper, 1976, 374–394 on Castiglione's elusive beauty; Jacobs 1994, 74–102.

¹³⁴ For discussion of Venetian in comparison to Florentine painterly style, see Rosand 1982, 22–28.

¹³⁵ Parmigianino's *Madonna of the Long Neck*. 1534–40, oil on wood, 216 x 132 cm. Uffizi, Florence. See also Firenzuola's description of love in Sohm 1995, 772 n. 36

create the ideal portrait of a beautiful woman.

And what, *La Pittura* gesticulates, is the quality of *leggiadria*?

In answer, Firenzuola smiles and leads her by the arm to survey the audience in order to find a suitable example. His eyes fall on the beautiful Isabella Clara Eugenia, Archduchess of Austria, who is sitting in the front row with her husband, Archduke Albert VII of the Spanish Netherlands. Firenzuola beckons *La Pittura* and she raises her maulstick by way of acknowledgement. She listens to him place *leggiadria* with the five other qualities of female beauty: *grazia*, *vaghezza*, *venusta*, *aria* and *maestà* (Sohm 1995, 765; Cropper 1976, 380 n34). Eloquently he declares: Grace and charm (*leggiadria*) are nothing other than ... an observation of a silent law, as others have said and according to the intent of the word itself, given and promulgated by nature to you women in your movement, comportment and use of the body as a whole and its particular members, moving with grace, modesty, nobility, measure and good manners so that no movement and no action would be without rule, mode, measure or design [*regola, modo, misura, disegno*] (Firenzuola quoted in Sohm 1995, 764).

The sisters turn and glance at each other. They whisper, thank goodness for *vaghezza*, for the vague feminine quality of *leggiadria* felt truly suffocating with all the restrictions on movement, proportion and joy of living.¹³⁶

The group of men, however, have differing opinions about *vaghezza*'s role in art. Vasari reiterates Michelangelo's opinion that *vaghezza* had a superficial charm, which in his opinion illustrated an avoidance of structure and design. Firenzuola explains to those who have not read his treatises that *vaghezza* is a positive and elusive quality of woman that defies definition and creates desire in all who observe and recognize it.

Unlike his colleagues, Firenzuola generously acknowledges an equality of gender roles, each sex bequeathed with idealist beauty, yet it is the love and beauty of women that is foremost in his thoughts, and by way of example he tells again of the

¹³⁶ For discussion of proportion, see Sohm 1995, 771.

beautiful woman depicted in the paintings of Parmigianino. Both he and Parmigianino are influenced by the “classical Tuscan vernacular tradition of the poets, Petrarch and Boccaccio” (Cropper 1976, 375).

At this point *La Poesia* sighs with pleasure. She is an admirer of Petrarchean verse.

La Pittura turns and listens attentively to hear if Vasari was influenced in his writing by Firenzuola’s text. We do not hear the reply, as the conversation becomes muffled by an anonymous male voice suddenly, and loudly, exclaiming the wondrous qualities of an ideal woman’s beauty, exemplifying woman to be desirous and desired. Another, equally loud, is denigrating woman as “inconstant, vacillating, and unstable” (Sohm 1995, 767). It appears as though the beauty of woman was the expression of the perfection of *nature* and the soul of the *Cinquecentro* humanist. Mary D. Garrard (1994) suggests beautiful women epitomize “art itself”, an instability portrayed either as “an idea or in image”. She expands to include “[B]oth were created through the perfection of the incomplete, fragmentary, and perishable elements found in nature” (570).

We look at each other and smile. The question of beauty still envelops conversation in your day and mine. It is interesting because I come from a family of women where beauty, fashion and decorum were important. I now have three tall handsome sons and a daughter. They too love fashion and the adornment of popular culture. One son is now interested in tattooing and my daughter is a Firenzuolan beauty who follows my sisters’ intrinsic qualities of *non so che* ... “and so it has, as things we cannot explain, an ‘I don’t know what’ [*non so che*]” (Firenzuola quoted by Sohm, 1997, 766).

La Scultura is nudging me. Another is talking and I have to listen.

In Venice in 1557 Ludovico Dolce published his *Dialogo della Pittura*, which explores the *Paragone* debate. He is extolling the virtues of the paintings that Titian had made for Philip II showing the different positions of a beautiful female body. *Danaë* is a painting in which the female nude can be viewed from the front. In *Venus and Adonis* he has positioned Venus’s back to the viewer to show another angle of

woman's body, and with following paintings he intends showing further angles to imitate sculpture. Dolce is now ardently telling Alessandro Contarini of Titian's *Venus and Adonis* (Tinagli 1997, 135–154).¹³⁷ The painting, he declares, is laced with eroticism. To him, Venus appears intense and “alive”, and by this particular movement and positioning of the body it epitomized all the qualities painting could hold over sculpture (Sohm 1991, 137). “What else can I say? Only that every stroke of the brush is such as Nature herself can apply. Venus looks as she would have been if she really existed” (Tinagli 1997, 141).

His is the humanist zeal, to equate and surpass nature, by means of projecting onto the painting the *simulacra* of the aliveness of the female body.

The sisters have returned and you are curious to know more about Giorgio Vasari, as you were already in Philip II's Spanish court when he visited your family home in Cremona. *La Pittura* stands up suddenly, removes her mask, and with a flourish addresses all those about us with a rendition of what Vasari wrote about you in his first edition of the *Lives*:

... But Sofonisba of Cremona, the daughter of Messer Amilcaro Anguisciuola, has laboured at the difficulties of design with greater study and better grace than any other woman of our time, and she has not only succeeded in drawing, colouring, and copying from nature, and in making excellent copies of works by other hands, but has also executed by herself alone some very choice and beautiful works of painting. Wherefore she well deserved that King Philip of Spain, having heard of her merits and abilities from the Lord Duke of Alba, should have sent for her and caused her to be escorted in great honour to Spain, where he keeps her with a rich allowance about the person of the Queen, to the admiration of all that court, which reveres the excellence of Sofonisba as a miracle. And it is no long time since Messer Tommaso Cavalieri, a Roman gentleman, sent to the Lord Duke Cosimo in addition to a drawing by the hand of the divine

¹³⁷ For further discussion on Lodovico Dolce's views on Titian see Sohm 1995, 772. See also Barocchi 1960, 1:195.

Michelagnolo, wherein is a Cleopatra (another drawing) by the hand of Sofonisba, containing a little girl laughing at a boy who is weeping because one of the crayfish out of a basket full of them, which she has placed in front of him, is biting his finger, and there is nothing more graceful to be seen than that drawing, or more true to nature. Wherefore, in memory of the talent of Sofonisba, who lives in Spain, so that Italy has no abundance of her work, I have placed it in my book of drawings. We may truly say, then, with the divine Ariosto, that –

Le donne son venute in eccellenza

Di ciascun' arte ov' hanno posto cura (Vasari 1998, vol. 1, 860).

You smile in spite of yourself. We break into applause. Did it matter, I ask you, that you did not have a section of your own but were mentioned in the epilogue of the famous Madonna Properzia de Rossi, Sculptor of Bologna? With an impatient flick of your wrist, you suggest it is more important to be one of the few women featured in the two editions of the *Vitae*, and have fame that spreads across Europe. Our sisters nod in agreement.

We turn and Francesco de' Rossi¹³⁸ sitting next to Bernardino Campi, is expressing admiration for Campi's mentoring, fashioning and tutoring of his protégée, you, Sofonisba Anguissola.

La Pittura groans at the effusive way the man is impressing Bernardino with your painting skills. I smile. It makes me think of a remark by the late contemporary sculptor Louise Bourgeois: "Women had to work like slaves in the art world, but a lot of men got to the top by charm. And it hurt them. To be young and pretty didn't help a woman in the art world, because the social scene was in the hands of women who had money. They wanted male artists who could come alone and be charming guests. Rothko could be very charming. It was a court. The artist buffoons came to court to entertain, to charm" (Searle, 2010).¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Francesco de' Rossi (1510–1563).

¹³⁹ Searle (2010) quoting Louise Bourgeois in "You gotta watch that woman". *The Guardian Weekly* 11.06.10

From one century to the next the game is played ...

Behind us we overhear Alonso Ciacón, the Spanish prelate, antiquarian and collector, discuss with the famous Bologna painter Lavinia Fontana¹⁴⁰ and her husband, Paolo Zappi, the possibility of her inclusion in a publication by him representing women artists. Lavinia has not met you and declares that she is unworthy to be “amongst so many illustrious persons” such as yourself (Murphy 2003).¹⁴¹ We surreptitiously look at each other. Although we are united in great admiration of her paintings, and love her *Self Portrait in the Studiolo* (Murphy 2003, 74), we, like Caroline P. Murphy (2003), recognize hers as a false modesty (73–76), a gracious act of charm and *vaghezza*.

There is movement on the stage. People are moving back to their seats. There is a stir of excitement about us. We are awaiting an announcement; the importance of the aesthetics of beauty and decorum now seems immaterial ...

We shuffle in our seats. *La Pittura*, her hair a mass of agitated curls, is studying her feet ...

We are waiting ...

Yours sincerely,

Angela

¹⁴⁰ Lavinia Fontana from Bologna followed Sofonisba in being acclaimed for her painting in her lifetime.

¹⁴¹ See Ciacón’s letter to Lavinia Fontana, 203 n1.

24. *Karabo*

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

We are sitting in a crowded auditorium. *La Poesia* is on my left and *La Pittura* on your right; *La Scultura* is standing, intense. The occasion is the common naming of a new humanoid species, the juvenile hominid skeleton *Australopithecus sediba*, dating from between 1.78 and 1.97 million years ago and recently found in a cave on the outskirts of Johannesburg.¹⁴² It is a miraculous discovery that has created great interest all around the world, as there is now a strong possibility of establishing a link between contemporary humans and the Southern African ape-men *Australithecus africanus* and *Homo habilis* – or even *Homo erectus* – in the evolutionary chain. There is a rustle of skirts, the shuffle of *veldskoene*,¹⁴³ the elaborate shake of head beads, the occasional muffled laughter, a bout of coughing, and all present slowly become quiet and still. We are waiting.

On the large screen is a revolving image of the three-dimensional skull encased in a rock over a million years ago, digitally enhanced by nanotechnology. It has been explained to us that scientists around the world were examining the fossil remains with infinite precision using augmented reality and data visualization in an attempt to unlock the complex nature of the evolutionary chain of humanity.

I am reminded of the cluster of Michelangelo's unfinished sculptures of platonic beauty and proportion in the *Galleria dell'Accademia* in Florence.¹⁴⁴ I had walked around them affected by the stillness and majesty of the poses and the contortions of

¹⁴² Berger, P. 2010. 7th Annual Standard Bank PAST Keynote Lecture "A Child from the Cradle: The recent discovery of what are arguably two of the most complete skeletons ever found of an early human ancestor in the Cradle of Humankind may change the way we view human Evolution forever," Institute for Human Evolution, University of Witwatersrand (Wits), South Africa, 31 May 2010.

¹⁴³ Afrikaans for leather shoes.

¹⁴⁴ Michelangelo, *Cross Leg Slave, Beardless Slave, Bearded Slave and Blockhead Slave, 1520–30*, Galleria dell' Accademia, Florence.
<http://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/arts/artwork/michelangelo-sculptures.htm>

limbs. They were larger-than-life male figures of slaves for the tomb of Pope Julius II. I was in awe of the statues and their execution. Each sculpture was incomplete, not fully realized, suspended, and seeming to mystically emerge from the marble. The carved marks left by Michelangelo made a track of *pentimenti* scratched into the surface of the marble, the incisions rough and coarse in contrast to the smooth relief of the finished shapes.

The image on the screen is also encrusted in stone. It is the skull of a male humanoid from a time far beyond antiquity. It is rough, crusty and abject. As the image circulates I feel a rush of excitement. It is like my painting of a portrait, a forensic find, to be piecemealed, layer by layer, and then eroded, left incomplete, stripped of artifice and suspended in time. This is an important moment in history. School children across South Africa have entered a competition to name the skeleton of the young boy, a name that will be on children's lips for centuries to come.

We watch five young Africans walk up to the podium. The audience becomes silent and, after a dramatic pause, a name is chosen. The name chosen is the one sent in by seventeen-year-old Omphemetse Keepile. The audience breaks into rapturous applause. The answer is present; she has said in a clear voice, *Karabo*. It is Setswana for *answer*. The fossil represents a solution to understanding the origins of humanity.¹⁴⁵ There is a cry from the back of the amphitheatre and an *Imbongi*, a Zulu praise singer, rushes past us and, leaping onto the stage in full ceremonial costume, cries an ancient sound of Africa. *Karabo, Karabo, Karabo, Karabo ...*

Beautiful Creatures is playing, the children's song of Africa.¹⁴⁶

Yours sincerely,

Angela

¹⁴⁵ "A fossil named Karabo", *Wits Review* 11, July 2010.

¹⁴⁶ "Beautiful Creatures", lyrics and music by A. Glass and E. Jordan, 2003, *Children's Songs of Africa*, No. 1 in the collection, BCCD001.

25. Archaic Cameras

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

May, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

The lecture is over and we file out of the auditorium. With the support of your brother, Asdrubale, and your husband, Orazio Lomellino, you graciously allow yourself to be manoeuvred, greeting those who have paused to meet you. All about us are people representative of many epochs and outside is the hubbub of many languages ... Our sisters, *La Poesia*, *La Pittura* and *La Scultura*, are behind us, and are joined by *La Architettura*, *La Prattica* and *La Teoria*¹⁴⁷ (Fig. 47).



Fig. 47. Cesare Ripa, “*Theory*” and “*Practice*” in *Iconologia* (Padua, 1625).

We stand beside the entrance doors and observe the panorama. What a spectacle! Our attention focuses on the men and women dressed in the sumptuous, rich costumes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Men dressed in embroidered shirts, elaborate doublets, overlapping skirts, hose and codpieces, short gowns decorated with fur and exaggerated shoulders, and bonnets of all sorts. And the

¹⁴⁷ Garrard 1994, 358 discusses the inclusion of Ripa *Iconologia* in 1618 and the inclusion of *La Prattica* (practice) and *La Teoria* (theory). Cesare Ripa (c. 1560–c. 1622), an Italian aesthetician, wrote *Iconologia*.

women in deep colour, lush gowns, designed by the *Sarti*, with tight fitting embroidered bodices and sweeping skirts that swell from the waistline. The necklines are hugged with double-layered ruffs and exquisite accessories of enamelled gold jewellery pinned to their bosoms. The *Zibellini*, the jewelled pelts of sable, are adorned and worn by certain women and men of the most elegant taste. The jewel-encrusted heads of the animals are casually held in a hand or draped over a shoulder, proudly displayed as an elitist symbol by those who permit themselves to bypass the sumptuary laws of the day.¹⁴⁸

La Pittura taps *La Scultura* on the shoulder; she glimpses the delicate slippers, made by the *pianellai*, beneath the woman's skirts. She removes her mask and whispers to the *calzolari*, the shoemakers. We smile: she has a secret obsession with shoes.¹⁴⁹ She is determined to keep up with the latest fashion in spite of Ripa's prohibition of feet being exposed in painting (Garrard 1989, 356).

The Grand Duke Cosimo de Medici and his friend Giorgio Vasari are speaking with the eccentric Pontormo. Philip II of Spain is represented by his eldest daughter, Isabella Clara Eugenia of the Netherlands. He has sent his apologies, as he is embroiled in the religious heresies and continual warring that plague his realm. Isobella Clara Eugenia strolls about, speaking in low tones to Giorgione. She politely acknowledges the curious glance of Agnolo Firenzolla and, as he passes with the flourish of a deep bow, Alonso Sanchez Coello. The long shadow of the Dominican priest Girolamo Savonarola has passed over them, momentarily muting the vibrancy of colour. He is watching the nineteenth-century Charles Darwin talk excitedly with Thomas Henry Huxley about the barnacle and evolutionary science.¹⁵⁰

We turn and wait impatiently. *La Pittura* is twitchy. A flicker of emotion passes over

¹⁴⁸ Although I am using artistic licence to dress the crowd, my knowledge is grounded in the works of Ribeiro and Cumming (1989), Sherrill (2006) and Frick (2002).

¹⁴⁹ My description of *La Pittura*'s love of shoes follows his descriptions of allegorical figures with specifications of dress and symbolic paraphernalias supported by references to literature.

¹⁵⁰ See "Darwin and Feminism: Preliminary Investigations into a Possible Alliance" and "Darwin and the Ontology of Life" in Grosz 2005. She writes: Life becomes a complex concept which, through Darwin's intervention, becomes disconnected from a given essence, form, or function and newly related to, bringing into its orbit, touching upon and sharing borders with a number of other concepts: life informs and is informed by matter, time, becoming, difference, and repetition (37).

her face. She is jealous, staring intently across the courtyard at Artemisia Gentileschi, who is absentmindedly playing with the portrait medallion hanging between her breasts, “a pendant mask, which stands for imitation” (Garrard 1989, 337). Her reverie is interrupted by flashes of light from the analog and digital cameras, recording many of those present. Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre is under the hood of his camera, aligning small groups of people, positioning them against the architectural backdrop. Displayed behind him are examples of his work, photographs of a “unique, direct positive image made on a copper plate coated with silver” (Bermingham 2000, 237). A competitive colleague, William Henry Fox Talbot, and his servant, Nicholaas Henneman, are setting up their camera, a calotype, to show those drawing about him that photography in fact is “a new form of drawing, a process whereby nature itself becomes an artist” (Bermingham 2000, 238). Some, unimpressed by the technology, are sketching quickly in visual diaries. Others with cameras are encouraging those about them to pose elaborately.¹⁵¹

You shrug and shake your head ... It is the beginning of the demise of the portrait, in the way that you have known it. Nature drawn and painted by *repetizione* and *invenzione* is now being captured in a form of realism that is creating a self-awareness never previously achieved.

We are beckoned and stand staring into the lens of the daguerreotype camera. It is as J. M. Coetzee (2001, 334–351) suggested when he perused an album of photographs taken in South Africa in the late eighteenth century: there is “stillness” in our stance. We are imprisoned by metal or wooden frames and cages, designed to ensure stillness, encasing our backs and the backs of our necks and heads, invisible to the

¹⁵¹ I introduce particular individuals, early inventors of photography in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to bring an awareness of a new way of perception and a change in materializing imagery that had a profound impact of drawing. For further reading see Bermingham 2000, 229–246. British William Fox Talbot (1800–1877) pioneered photomechanical reproduction and discovered the calotype processes in the early 1830s. His negative/positive processes became the basis for much of nineteenth and twentieth century photography. Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre (1787–1851) in 1839 rivaled Fox Talbot and invented the latest perfection of the daguerreotype where a single image could be fixed in reverse. This process was particularly good for portraits; however this required the sitters to be absolutely still for several minutes. British photographer Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879) used a particular technique of soft focus with long exposures and subtle movement. She is known for her portraits pertaining to idealized beauty and illustrative allegories influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites.

lens. We pose, mimicking the formulae of historical paintings, not looking at the portrait painter at his easel but rather into the cool lens of a camera, and a man beneath its cape is giving muffled instructions to remain still for as long as possible.

La Teoria has an irresistible urge to rub her eyes ...

Your look represents what Cathryn Vasseleu (1998) might describe as the ungraspability of the photographic face, for now the auratic image that once belonged to the original artwork is transferred to the photographic object. It is reproduced many times. We have learnt to look at a photograph and equate the representation of the now absent human image, the *simulacrum*, as real. When we look at this image, we seek the original – the faces of those about us or the one that is in our mirror. It is an “auratic vision”, suggests Vasseleu, that “is theorized as a delay in memory; a delay which is never experienced but always, already past” (95). The image in the photograph is now a symbolic representation of a remembrance of time past. We are attached to the photographic print, perversely, since the nonhuman photographic image, unlike the mirror image, or the painter of a portrait, does not return our gaze, although we deceptively believe it does.

And what we also realize, as we become more sophisticated viewers of photography, is that to see a photograph is to be associated with its making. James Elkins (1999, 99) expressed awareness, when seeing the photographs of Ansel Adams or Edward Weston, of having the feeling of the camera in his hand or smelling the fumes in the photographic darkroom seemingly ingested by the photograph. I, too, love that experience: watching an image on the photographic sheet emerge in the fixative solution, pinning the photographs up to dry. It is literally the performative power of the image that Bolt suggests while exploring Heidegger in her research. “As a mode of revealing, *Poiēsis*, like enframing, is a mode of being’s coming into presence” (Bolt 2004, 120). For a span of time the photograph is metaphorically “the being” coming into its essence, which is why my preference would be to use an analog camera, which requires the physical emerging of an image before my eyes. Ann Bermingham (2000), as with Elkins (1999), draws our awareness to the sign of making in photographic images. She claims: “Despite Talbot’s claims, photography’s realism was not entirely self-evident. To accept the photograph as

realistic, one had to overlook the fact that the early photographs had some visual characteristics that were decidedly unnatural. Photographs were monochromatic, they could not capture the appearance of moving objects, their focus was either uniformly sharp or grainy, they exaggerated light and darkness and were insensitive to the colour green, and they presented extensive natural views as miniaturized, framed and cropped images. To find the photograph a mirror of nature, one had to imagine pictorial realism in terms of the photograph being rendered” (241).

It is interesting to note how quickly people accept the photographic representation as reminiscent of what they see in “nature”. In the early nineteenth century, realism was encouraged in drawing done by amateurs, which could explain an acceptance of this particular imagery. It is a new frontier, and amateur photographers do not yet know what is possible in mastering these techniques. Just as with my mother’s need to draw “nice” art, a drawing has to be of a recognizable object, and, for these early photographers, representation followed the lines of similar drawing exercises. Our attention is in containing and archiving memorable events in an accessible fashion. And “nature” represented by the photographic image has a particular beauty. For me it is not important that the colour green does not equate to the landscape. I borrow a phrase from Paul Eakin (1999): “[W]hat goes unrepresented in culture is difficult to recognize in one’s own experience” (57). The novelties of the new allow those about us to be enchanted by the experience of making.

La Pratica reaches up and impulsively balances precariously on her divider. She stands transfixed by the activity about her, to witness the excitement of mechanical making, the creation of mass images of humanity of the like she has never witnessed before ...

You sigh. You are tired. We move aside and sit in the foyer and watch the hustle and bustle outside through the long windows. The English woman, Julia Margaret Cameron, has positioned her camera in front of our *Paragone* sisters, who immediately assume the elaborate poses of their favourite paintings. She has placed examples of her work about the foyer to allow those present to witness the creative and inventive uses of photography, which, with time, will have a resounding effect on figurative painting. Through her inventive practice she has created her own

oeuvre by mimicking painterly practices in her compositions. Instead of the “naturalism” sought by the photographic founders around her, she has posed her subjects and blurred her images with clever exploration and developmental techniques to create a style echoing romantic allegorical paintings. Hers are moody compositions, with atmospheric lighting of languid, beautiful men and women.

It is interesting to consider photography’s influence in relation to the interpretation of paintings. Roland Barthes argues that within every photograph resides a *studium*. “The *studium* is that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: *I like/ I don’t like*” (Barthes 1993, 27). He relates his opinion to the proliferation of photographs we observed in the twentieth century, for the points of interest that catch attention in a photograph or prick the surface he calls the *punctum*.

The *punctum* is the part we remember in detail and in absence. It is that speckle of memory that remains once the photograph has been removed. I now read paintings as photographs. I know they are not photographs but I seek the *punctum* in the work: the nuance, be it a lump of raised paint or a switch of a colour. I am like Barthes’s *studium* and can dismiss paintings readily also: they can be ordinary. But I am unlike Barthes in that I want mystery and texture, not finite detail. The painting can be as smooth as a Gerhard Richter¹⁵² or as creamy as a Kathryn Haug,¹⁵³ but I seek that infinitesimal quality of a something that can be subtle or bold to take away with me in my memory.

The sisters are smitten but you are unimpressed. I note that there isn’t sufficient skill for your taste. Not when you can use the “meat” of oil paint to capture such exquisite detail of cloth, and texture of brocade in your painting *Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia* (see Fig. 29, page 73), or the ruffle of fur in the *Portrait of Don Carlos* (see Fig. 31, page 76).

Yours sincerely,

Angela

¹⁵² See Storr 2002.

¹⁵³ Kathryn Haug is a recent art graduate from Curtin University. Her quality of paint is confident, lush and thick. See Kathryn Haug, *Electric Mixer*, 2009, oil on wood, 44 x 44 cm. Private collection.

26. Imaginary Images

Dear Sofonisba,
Perth,
Western Australia.
June, 2010.

I am always fascinated by the detail in art reproductions, how they can be so illusory and sometimes larger than or smaller than the original. I make details of an imaginary narrative, like a forensic trail leading to you (Figs. 48 and 49) ...



Fig. 48. Angela Stewart, *Poesis No. 2*, 2007, oil, acrylic on wood, 75 cm diameter. Personal collection of the artist.



Fig. 49. Angela Stewart, *Poesis No. Ixxx*, 2007, oil, acrylic on wood, 90 x 75 cm. Oval. Personal collection of the artist

Yours sincerely,

Angela

27. The Skull

Perth,

Western Australia.

June, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

Let us hold a skull. How do you structure a head? I remember years ago the Australian painter Margaret Woodward asked me this question when viewing a drawing I had done of a friend. It was a “sweet”¹⁵⁴ drawing, influenced by Degas, a head study of multiple colours in soft pastel.¹⁵⁵ I have since thought much about this question, one of those remarks by a tutor that ricochets throughout one’s art journey.

My understanding of her question, her implied comment, was that the drawing of the head needed a firmer skeletal structure. I needed to trace the eye sockets, run my fingers above the eye socket to securely locate the eyebrow. To realize that the cartilage ended midway down the ridge of the nose, and about the nostrils was flexible tissue. The cheekbones, which help to define the face, began at the edge of the eye socket and met at the edge of the jawbone. The lips sat above the teeth, protecting the mouth as the eye sockets shelter the eyeballs. The centre line of the body was pivotal from the apex of the skull and ran over the hair line down between the eyes, and passed over the cusp of the upper lip down the middle of the chin to the centre point between the clavicles of the lower neck.

I love the way eyes are so particular to identity: the fullness or thinness of the upper lid and the distance from the eyebrow; the weight of the eyebrow, whether light or thick. I observe the swell of the lower eyelid, the mould that joins the upper eyelid, blinks, closes and protects the eye. I examine the size of the ear and how far it may sit from the skull and the length of the forehead, its width and breadth. I draw a line running up the gully from the inner canthus of the eye, the eye duct, up over the

¹⁵⁴ See ‘Sweet’ (*Dolce*) for describing paint colouring with gender connotations in Sohm 1995, 789. A sweet drawing in my mother’s terms could be a ‘nice’ drawing, a polite drawing. It is a concept I am particularly interested in for a future body of painting. It can be a provocative feminist approach, particularly working with the colour pink.

¹⁵⁵ Painting Workshop, Albany Summer School, Margaret Woodward, January 1983.

ridge of the nose and down the other side to the valley below.

I visualize blind construction of lines that are not descriptive, drawn from random spots on the face that pierce inward through the tissue and reach the skull on the other side, to get a sense of the bulk mass of the head. I imagine being a fly randomly moving over the surface, abstractly sensing the surface, the pores, the hair follicles, the moisture in the eyes and nose.

But why have I stayed with a form of representation that coats and covers the body in simulacra and not drawn more like Paul Klee? Is mine a “literal trace of nature’s hand” (Bermingham 2000, 238)? Paul Klee chose not to represent himself in any form of likeness. For him the self was a mask “for concealment and revelation” (Brilliant 1999, 145–88).¹⁵⁶ His self-images were metaphoric and abstract.

I cannot give an answer.

Yours sincerely,

Angela

¹⁵⁶ See Brilliant 1999, chapter “Fashioning the Self”. See also Paul Klee in *Senecio*, 1922, [image] 66.

28. Skeletal Drawings

Perth,
Western Australia.
July, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

In 2005, I began my skeletal drawings in *pentimenti*. I come from a line of women where physical beauty was important. One greeted the other with both a compliment and a critical eye to makeup and dress. A youthful appearance was desired. Perhaps that is why I am attracted to your time, when physical beauty was important to the noble classes and artistic ability mirrored beauty. I have always reacted to this sensibility. It was with this in mind that I began a series of drawings with a harsh light against my face and traced the wrinkles and crevices as a self-portrait (Fig. 50).

I used black, shiny analogue photographic paper previously darkened by being exposed to the light. With a flesh-coloured oil paint I thought of the translucent quality of filmic X-ray sheets. I was probing into the body beyond the superficial confinement of beauty to a layering of bone and mass.



Fig. 50. Angela Stewart, *Self Portrait as Pentimenti*, 2005. Personal collection of the artist.

When I began to delve deeper I became fascinated by the mistakes and corrections. The *pentimenti* became layers of discovery, and I began to look at X-rays of paintings of the past. My interest was not so much in the authoring of a work but in mapping the possible time line of the painting process by uncovering the layers of certain paints that are sensitive to the radiographic rays. The ghost image appealed to me. I have had to ask myself what it is that lay beneath the painting that was more interesting than the finished veneer on the outside.

Yours sincerely,

Angela

29. A Roll of Brown Paper

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

August, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

In my studio I have unrolled brown paper and I'm measuring the sizes of your paintings to understand the scale in which you worked. Cutting up the replicas is meditative. I fantasize an imagined time line, the palette of colour, its execution, the finish, and the patron. But in the absence of the painting artifact I have at my disposal only reproductions in books and on the world wide web. There is a seduction in the reproduction that lulls me into an unrealistic comprehension of the complexities of each work. It is similar to what scholars Kirsch and Levenson (2000) emphasize: "... the finish, texture, scale of a painting: the colors may be distorted and the borders cropped. Reproductions are unlikely even to raise the questions that might help the viewer understand the painter's technique or condition, much less point to the answers" (xi).

The scale is magnified or reduced depending on the needs of the editors. Therefore as I trace and cut each measurement onto paper and pin it onto the wall of my studio I touch and understand the physical height and width of each painting. I visualize you working on the easel and gauge the effort of your body as it reaches up to scrub an area or run wash over a panel or canvas.



Fig 51. Sofonisba Anguisola, 1550s, *Self-Portrait*, oil on copper miniature, 8.2 x 6.3 cm. Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA.

The scale of the work does not equate with the intensity of effort or time. Each size has its own demands: a miniature must have its vellum or card and fine brushes, shown in the precision of Nicholas Hillard's limning of Tudor paintings. I can imagine the time you spent on your small self-portrait *Self-Portrait Holding a Medallion Inscribed with the Letters of her Father's Name*, on vellum, in the early 1550s (see Fig. 51, page 130). You must have had a magnifying glass anchored to a ribbon around your head and a steady hand for such detail.

My eye wanders across a larger sheet of paper imagining the scale adjustments of paint marks, the motifs with shape and composition expanded, and the crucial balance of figure with ground in relationship to the size and edge of the support, be it canvas, panel or paper.

Yours sincerely,

Angela

30. Heath and Tony

Perth,

Western Australia.

August, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

With *La Prattica* I have drawn magnified faces in charcoal and paint on paper and canvas working from photographs. I love the freedom this gives me, that is, to work on a large scale. I find it is a release of the frustration I can feel from visualizing a body image being contained in a small sliver of plastic paper (a photograph) held in my hand.

I also made a large drawing, from life, of my colleague Tony Jones sitting in close proximity to me, in charcoal with sheets pieced together, reminiscent of the patching of historical paintings like those of the Spanish artist Diego de Velázquez, who extended his painting surfaces to balance his compositions. I then photographed it and reduced the scale, pressing it onto aluminium (Fig 52).¹⁵⁷



Fig. 52. Angela Stewart, *Studio photograph of drawing and C-photograph, Tony Jones, 2004*, Ilford photograph, 14 x 21 cm, from visual diary. Personal collection of the artist.

¹⁵⁷ Original drawing, *Tony Jones*, 223 x 252 cm, reduced and narrowed in size for photographed version, 121 x 99 cm.



Fig. 53. Angela Stewart, *Heath*, oil on C-photograph on aluminium, 110 x 200 cm. Private collection.

I drew my eldest son cantering on horseback, chasing a steer in what we call in Australia camp-drafting,¹⁵⁸ on a large format of patched paper in charcoal and, again, photographed and reduced it, then printed it in both gloss and matt (Fig. 53).¹⁵⁹ I painted on the photograph of the drawing, redefining it as unique, denying the possibility of replication of the reproduced image. Ironically the photograph of the drawing contained the weathered floor of my studio and my son seems to be riding over the ochre earth of the *Pilbara* in Australia, riding towards me, from a place he had spent years breaking in horses ... riding towards the death of his father.

Yours sincerely,

Angela

¹⁵⁸ Camp-drafting is a popular Australian sport where the rider must cut out a beast from a mob of cattle and herd it into a yard within a specified time period. This act requires skill and judgement in horsemanship.

¹⁵⁹ Original drawing, *Heath*, 200 x 185 cm; photographed version 170 x 200 cm.

31. Joan London

Perth,
Western Australia.
August, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

There is a time to listen and a time of solitude in the painting procedure. With my portrait of Joan London, I ruined the painting by working too long and not listening to my inner voice. At my invitation, a colleague called in and gave me suggestions. It threw me off balance: I listened to a voice that was not my own. At the moment before the interruption I had photographed the work. The painting is now discarded and the photograph has become the exhibited work (Fig. 54). What is one's own truth?

Yours sincerely,

Angela



Fig. 54. Angela Stewart, *Joan London*, 2004, C-photograph on aluminium, 80 x 52 cm. Private collection.

32. The Medallion

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

September, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,



Fig. 55. Felice Antonio Casoni, *Portrait Medal of Lavinia Fontana*, verso, 1611. Biblioteca Comunale, Imola, Italy.

I hold a medallion. On one side is the painter in profile; her mouth is bound and she is painting, her hair blazing about her. Let us examine it closely (Fig. 55).¹⁶⁰

Under the *pentimento* I unravel and unlace the artistic body of a painter and painting as artifact. Under the surface of the medallion are caches of blindness, blind spots,

¹⁶⁰ My use of the medal is as a descriptor for *La Pittura*, and not necessarily pertaining to Lavinia Fontana. For more information on Lavinia Fontana see Murphy 2003.

non-feeling zones. Here, nostalgia is absent. The mimetic quality of the painting with the subject by X-ray is shattered; here there is no resemblance with its exterior. Ironically, the X-ray takes the place of the camera, seeking the auratic gaze that is now absent. The imagery shreds the original painting and shifts time lines. The temporality of the work is now sought in lead-laden paint that permeates the film or computer image. In this darkened space I seek to find a trace of the woman whose image this profile image resembles. It is as Cathryn Vasseleu eloquently describes: “The trace is the manifestation of closeness however distanced it may be. The aura is the manifestation of a distance however close it may be. In trace we enter into the possession of the thing, in the aura the thing overpowers us” (Benjamin 1982, 560, quoted in Vasseleu 1997).

The light in the infrared reflectogram penetrated the darkness and allowed ghostlike shapes to appear, a patchwork of multiple details to be discovered (Kirsch 2000, 314). The machine scans imperviously, seeking shifts and alterations in the artist’s process. It is indifferent to our expectations. The effect it creates in me is intense. My emotions are hidden, I speak in a soft monotone, my face is lifeless, I stand immobile. There is no excitement here.

I flip the coin, *verso*, and examine the shadows, the underbelly of the image, and in this space I feel jubilation, hope – not an emotion I would usually linger on in the portrait process but let us see where it could lead us. In the experience of the broken lines of *pentimento* I place Mary Zournazi’s (2002) notion of hope. In her conversation with Alphonso Lingis, they speak together of the importance of laughter and relief, of hope to overcome suffering in times of angst or adversity, as a dialogue of hope in individual experience and political life.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Zournazi 2002, see *Murmer from Life*, 22–41. I speak of hope here as a release from the doubt. I find this statement by Lingis on the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s writing pertinent in considering my own subjective response to worry:

I think one of the most important things there is – I would almost say one could make this a kind of maxim for life – is to always make every important decision in a state of joy. It’s an insight I got from Friedrich Nietzsche. For Nietzsche a resentful state of mind is one that rejects a great deal of what there is, whereas a joyous state of mind is able to affirm and accept even the painful, destructive and absurd things. One can conclude from that that a joyous state of mind is open to much more than a resentful state of mind, since it can accept suffering, frustration and grief (Hope 2002, 25).

See also an analysis of Nietzsche’s writing on *augenblick* in Ward 2008, 35–68.

It is strange to look in the darkened shapes of the medallion and consider that therein can lie hope, but this has also been my experience in shifting, altering and re-creating a painting. There can be alight-heartedness, a relief from the pressure of making, a bubble of laughter. I stop. It is the pause between the strokes, which Bolt (2004) reminds me of in her analysis of Heidegger: “In order to stay with the truth that is happening in the work, we must restrain ourselves. We must let it be. We are reminded that preservation requires great restraint. In order to let the work be work, we must preserve it. Preservation opens up the human being to the openness of Being. It enables us to step outside the noise of everyday existence and reflect on what it is to be” (108).

It is temporarily in between the marks where it tells me what it wants that I wait. It is such a relief when this happens: no longer is there anxiety of ruining the work. Hélène Cixous (1998) expresses this moment so well: “And repentance? No repentance. We who draw are innocent. Our mistakes are our leaps in the night. Error is not lie: it is approximation. Sign that we are on track” (28–29).

Yours sincerely,

Angela.

33. Varnish

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

September, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

There has been so much discussion on glazing and varnish by restorers of art attempting to understand and preserve historical painting. The glazing of the painting is the last act of caress, but it is fraught with many problems. Glazing and varnish *can* seal and protect the paint layers beneath it, but can also tarnish and change colour with age (Kirsch and Levenson 2000, 214–241). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries many artists and conservators spurned varnish as inappropriate glug covering the work. I also do not like varnishes, but in my last body of work I deliberately played with different glosses of matt and shine. I was not being careless; rather I was regarding the glazed surface as a beacon that could attract or repel the viewer. It is a reminder of the visceral touch, of satin on body, sometimes alluring, and at other times literally repulsive.

Yours sincerely,

Angela

34. Beryl

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

September, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

Who is the third who walks always beside you?

When I count, there are only you and I together

But when I look ahead up the white road

There is always another one walking beside you ...

(Eliot, 1922, lines 359-362).

Just like T.S Eliot, I am finding near the end of my story another has walked beside me, silent, occasionally nudging me. It is my mother, who died at the turn of the twenty-first century. All her life my mother dabbled in watercolour. She painted scenes of nature: boats, flowers and landscapes. Hers were wispy watercolour paintings that were hidden in sketchbooks, never shown to the public, only to close friends and family members. Of course as a daughter I was not always appreciative of her interest and her views of what made “nice art”. And I would be especially irritated when I had had a day of painting or teaching and while visiting her, inevitably, a painting would be pulled out and she would ask me what to do next, how to finish it? I would become so exasperated because I would want her to commit to her own outcome, no matter how good or bad. I wanted her to realize her own solution. Oh, the arrogance of a daughter.¹⁶⁷ I believed that inside my mother there dwelt an incomplete creative self that constantly asked for confirmation in any art she made: a self which I did not want to acknowledge as my own. And in her asking she was connecting with me in a way that she was able to; it was our common denominator.¹⁶⁸ Her mother, a centurion, showed artistic ability from an early age,

¹⁶⁷ See Bruzelius 1999, 215–233.

¹⁶⁸ I found a parallel of my mother’s request to talk to me about her painting with Art Spiegelman encouraging his father to talk to him long after the completion of his cartoon-illustrated book in *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*. Eakin 1999, 59–60.

but because of the circumstances of living in the goldfields of Western Australia she channeled her creative abilities into dressmaking and cooking. She married her husband, a storekeeper, in Ora Banda in outback Western Australia, and had a large family. Her eldest daughter, my mother, was channelled into the worthy occupation of office and administrative duties.

Since she has died I have left my paintings and drawing in suspension, incomplete, as *memento mori*, and I can comprehend *pentimento* as an emotional decision, a salute to my mother as seen in the incomplete study. A regret, that I was not more patient with her. *Pentimento* means “repent” in Italian, and now following the trail of repentance metaphorically it has become an important component of my practice, or, as Paul John Eakin (1999) reminds me, it is how our lives become stories ...¹⁷⁰

Your mother, Bianca Ponzoni Anguissola,¹⁶⁹ remains elusive to me. History contains only her image in a painting. With the passing of time I am indebted to the maternal drive, made from unfulfilled dreams of mothers who have resided on the margins of our art practice ...

Yours sincerely,

Angela

¹⁷⁰ See Eakin [1999] on the importance of narrative as a way of finding a voice in political and social domains.

¹⁶⁹ Anguissola, S. *Portrait of Bianca Ponzoni Anguissola, the artist's mother*, 1557. Staatliche Museen, Berlin.

35. Farewell

Johannesburg,

South Africa.

September, 2010.

Dear Sofonisba,

You are old and frail and we talk quietly. I draw your portrait as a gesture of intimacy. I have a need for your companionship. I am living away from my homeland and I miss the intimate conversations I had with my colleagues. It is amazing who comes to mind: images of their artwork, laughter, critiques and angst, a sharing of each other's life stories. From this subjective filter, let me, with you as my sitter, unravel some issues that have been troubling me. Instead of discussing my latest paintings, I will speak of the issues that run parallel to them. As is my way, it will be a rambling conversation and I am not sure of the outcome ...

My journey through *pentimenti* has taken me both towards and away from the portrait. But what has been and does remain important to me are the meetings of the people during these encounters. It is an intimate experience. The portrait artifact, as a painting, photograph or drawing, remains the re-remembrance, the re-enactment of a sharing of stories both spoken and written. And as I tear away the veils, I arrive at the source, the heartbeat of all the stories spoken of in the portrait meeting. I relinquish my art into the body of the story, the bodies of the people I meet, the bodies of my paintings.

I have always had an interest in the human body. My mother had the most wonderful ideas of her interior being. She believed, for example, that her kidneys floated somewhere between her belly button and her bottom and all reproductive organs lived somewhere "down below". Perhaps the frustrations of being her daughter led me to the nursing training that for many years I interlaced with my art practice. Hence I remain amused when I pick up the book I am now reading, *Letters between Matisse and Bonnard*. I was seeking great insights into their work practices, meditations, thoughts, and to my frustration the correspondence was mostly about

their health and declining bodies.

During my portrait sessions with the author Joan London, she would often read aloud to me, as I painted, short stories by her favourite authors, such as Alice Munro and Chekhov. It was she who brought to life for me Chekhov's great short stories, and among other things I learnt that the reason doctors occur often, and naturally, in his work is that he himself was a medical practitioner. One vignette about the author was the story of his death: when there was nothing more to be done for him, the German doctor called for champagne. Chekhov drank it, turned on his left side and died.¹⁶² Here are moments of magic in a portrait encounter: two women sitting in a studio, one with her paintbrush poised, the other with a book resting on her lap. Quiet moments of drama, equal to being in a performance, where, in a momentary silence, we salute the memory of a great author.

Which brings me to thinking of my youngest son. In the course of my writing and our conversing he has had two industrial accidents, both life-threatening. His body now contains a series of prostheses and metal plates replicating the original bone, to give him back his mobility. It is a miracle of modern medicine. It is here where the replicated skeletal base can protect the body and restore movement. However, the body is not the same as it was before; the body image is altered. The fragility of our exterior joins its interior and we can have a body in pain, emotionally and physically. He has recovered, but these instances bring to the fore my respect for life and the human drive to survive.

You stir ... There is a story haunting me. I see you are tired but I urge you to stay awake, although my intention is not clear. Be patient with me.

I recently read a speculative fiction novel, *Never Let me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro (2005). It is the story of a group of young men and women living on a farm in "dystopian Britain". As the story unfolds it becomes obvious that their lifetime will be shortened by a series of serious operations, as their body parts are to be harvested to keep the "real" humans alive. It is a ghoulish story of cloning, a false copy, the

¹⁶² I thank Joan London for her suggestion that I read Chekhov's plays, e.g. *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, and his short story *Ward 6*.

simulacrum,¹⁶³ of splicing and replication of body parts. It echoed for me another epic futuristic novel, Audous Huxley's *Brave New World*. Ishiguro's story reverberates with the ethical dilemmas facing us in the twenty-first century: Who are we if one's reflection in the mirror is a machine? It makes me reflect on a passage I read by Rosalind Krauss writing about the vulnerability and transience of representation. She wrote: "The false copy takes the idea of difference or nonresemblance and internalizes it, setting it up within the given object as its very condition of being. If the simulacrum resembles anything, it is the Idea of nonresemblance. Thus a labyrinth is erected, a hall of mirrors within which to make distinction – because the reality has now internalized those distinctions. The labyrinth, the hall of mirrors, is, in short, a cave" (Krauss 1984, 62).

I live in a society where the human body can be examined by an expansive array of scanning machinery that penetrates its interior. Vast advances in the industries of scientific and technical research beget and prolong life and ward off death.¹⁶⁴ We can now "record a real human body in three dimensional, living colour, capturing these bodies in digital images through the technology of MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) and CT (Computed Tomography) scans, as well as cadaverous dissection with high-resolution digital colour photography" (Murray 2000, 1). Many of our discoveries are marvellous, such as the engineering and implantation of the prostheses that helped my son and are beneficial to mankind. But of concern to me is the nonreflexive pushing of the medico-technical systems that could, with time, override my grandchild's ontological knowing and understanding of the world. Mine is a speculative, futuristic dilemma filled with an unreal world of cyborgs, which may very well become real. I hark back to Donna Haraway's (1991) prescient essay a "cyborg" is a creature without boundaries and without gender: "The 'eyes' made available in modern technological sciences shatter any idea of passive vision: These prosthetic devices show us all eyes, including our own organic eyes, are active perceptual systems, building in translations and specific *ways* of seeing, that is, ways of life (190)".

¹⁶³ See Krauss 1981 for a discussion of Nietzsche's argument about Plato's cave (47–66, 62–63).

¹⁶⁴ See Catalogue *Art, Medicine and the Body*, 1 August – 1 September 1996. Perth Institute of Contemporary Art. 3–7. It is an exhibition in which I participated, where several artists and medical personnel collaborated across a range of practices. See also Theunissen, *Artlink* Vol. 17, No. 2, 57. See also Waldby 2000a.

Virtual imaging invades the body, creating “reproductions” in such a way as to upturn the humanist understanding of your day and to take my father’s simple query about copying beyond territories I cannot fully comprehend: a space where virtual bodies are suspended, non-human, disembodied, where selfhood is denied. Or worse, as in Ishiguro’s story, we may confront the semblance of human beings that are Other, a concept of alterity beyond my present understanding of the cultural and ideological Western world in which I live. The technical apparatuses and medical practices make it appear “there is no a *priori stability* of the body’s existence”. Rather it is as Catherine Waldby argues, the body’s “ontological status – its material and subjective conditions of being – is necessarily contingent and mutable, changing in interaction with a sociotechnical milieu” (Waldby 2000b, 465).

As science continues to leap from one discovery to another, vigorous debate about the ethical, theological and economic issues that result from them continues. This easily slips by laypeople until our body becomes ill or injured and we place ourselves in an industry we hope will do right by us. We have recently witnessed an “original”, a partial humanoid skeleton that was presented to us, the audience, as a three-dimensional virtual body. In its re-presentation it is not dissimilar to Waldby’s research findings in the Visible Human Project at the beginning of the twenty-first century, where Magnetic Resonance Imaging and Computed Tomography recorded living bodies and cadavers in three-dimensional “living” colour. She used the example of a condemned criminal who had bequeathed his body to science. After his execution his body was frozen and scanned.

What is now of macabre interest is the condemned criminal’s body. It is de-personalized and the body images are now reassembled into a three-dimensional virtual body “whose surfaces, as well as depths, are now and forever open to the medical gaze ... although it was all together destroyed in the elaborate process of imaging, has been captured in recoverable data files, assembled digitally, and resurrected, as it were, as a three-dimensional virtual body whose surfaces, as well as depths, are now and forever open to the medical gaze” (Murray 2000,1). He continues by pondering on the ethical dilemmas of this modern phenomenon: “I wonder if we might not nourish this doubt for a moment, and find here in this troubled place of the body not just a refusal of technicity but a subjectivity

constituted by a *failure* to know and to control – a subject no longer swayed by humanism’s dreams. Here life opens onto possibilities for other forms of excessive embodied relationships – libidinal, hysterical, in joy, in illness and anxiety, unconfined to a particular space, unpredictable in their transformations (4)”.

The body becomes a site for the transference of pseudo, concrete and immaterial ideas. You may ask, what does this have to do with portraiture? And my answer is that I am not sure. I sense it belongs in the darkness of the *pentimento*. It is the doubt that has accompanied the expansion of technology, the engendering replication and reproduction of the body image that has allowed us to live in a world of subjective anxiety. We need the raw abject body. I need the body, the human body, and the face on the head of the body to keep me earthed. I need to paint and draw an element of naturalism, not an abstract, pseudo entity but a response to what I see visually, and touch physically, what I embrace with a kiss as the person leaves the portrait encounter. Although I am not comfortable with humanism and I have moments of great excitement with the advent of virtual technology, I seek comfort with the body, the body of my sitter being present before me or, paradoxically, the *simulacra* of the image, the photograph that reminds me of the encounter.

We have witnessed a humanoid skull and this now brings to mind another headless figure, a sculpture by Rodin, described in an essay by David Bromfield. In this remarkable piece of writing he captures an essence of the modern body and how it is portrayed in artistic practice. He discusses how we as artists dissect the body with fragmentation; of splicing and de-personalizing of the human form, for example by removing the head and/or face we separate ourselves from the vulnerability of the complete human form. Instead we shroud the body with the erotic but constantly alter the form and veneer in a ceaseless urge to capture immortality. The modern body is a complex entity that interrogates “the emptiness beyond it”, but the “new” body “can never be fully alienated from its origins”.¹⁶⁵

165 See Bromfield 1997:

The modern body is always on the edge of flight ... The modern body tends to lose its head. Decapitation, concealment or cancellation of the head and face offer themselves as the most logical artistic solution to the problems it presents ... The modern body is always caught up directly with the erotic as spectacle. The erotic forms the hinge between one pose and the next, the punctuation mark between absence and presence which allows the body’s constant re-formation. It is the erotic which enables the modern body to cover the abyss. Each new

In my constant re-formation, in my attempt to comprehend the body's erotic powers, I have copied from previous historical paintings. However, it has not been my intention to recall the heroic act of a painter from the past, nor by coating over the photograph with paint to bring about the nostalgic sentiment of making it an original. Maria Loh's (2004) scholarship of the Italian Baroque suggests that an artist who copied another's paintings could alternatively be heralded as a genius or be accused of being a thief. Each position was up for debate: the painter interpreted as a "thief" to one audience could be extolled by another as a clever inventor. Paintings with a repeated motif, she suggests, could be considered as a performance, teasing the viewer with the memory of another painting and time. Art practice from the mid sixteenth century and Baroque period was similar to postmodernism, with motifs recycled continually into paintings for a variety of reasons. What becomes the significant is how new audiences reconstruct meaning of each work. A painting could be a conglomeration of styles appropriated from different artists and stories within stories. The viewer is given clues, like a cryptic crossword puzzle, to help assimilate and unravel the meaning of the painting. Themes from one painting could be tipped upside down by the inclusion of a figure motif in another, inverted, reduced or enlarged in scale. From one painting, ideas and motifs could be re-contextualized into another, a new performance, the extension of the status quo of artistic licence, where motifs are copied and pasted together with the primary sources known to the literary and visual audiences. Repetition was seen as originality, with the vital inclusion of an *acutezza*, a witticism. In these instances Loh (2004) suggests: "... repetition is neither nostalgic nor bound by a morose alterity [and importantly] [a]n ambition to succeed and surpass one's predecessors is the driving force behind the emulative impulse of repetition as *paragone*" (492).

For example, in his sketchbook Anthony Van Dyck transcribed multiple figures and

construction, every new pose interrogates the emptiness beyond it. The modern body represents our century's best attempts at immortality. Its endless shifting poses seek to deny or rather ignore death. It "embodies" a dream of absolute alienation. Its fragmentary existence is closely related to the division of labour. It emerges with the advent of industrial production, technology and spectacular entertainment. It is endlessly re-assembled through a complex division of labour, produced and reproduced through cycles of fashion fetishism and style. It is negotiable in every sense but, unlike every other negotiable item, can never be fully alienated from its origins (144–145).

compositions by Titian (Loh 2004, 480).¹⁶⁶ He was famed for his paintings because of their resemblance of Titian. Just as Rodin in the future would create a “structural proliferation” of many limbs of the body to re-create his beautiful sculptures, Van Dyck and some of his contemporaries pieced their paintings together to create “a doublet, *originality/repetition*” (Krauss 1981, 58).

Loh (2004) reminds us that Rodin bequeathed his work to the French State after his death, and did not live to see the sequential casting of sculptures completed. When the late-twentieth-century audience saw the newly rendered sculptures, there was a *misto* (mixed) reception, not unlike like that for Waldby’s cadaver. Rodin as a heroic artist had not foreseen that the re-semblance of work in the following centuries would be out of kilter and out of context. In a *simulacrum*, yes, but made by an assortment of contemporary materials, and away from the auratic allure of Rodin’s presence, the absence of his body and his presence.

“Nothing”, Rosalind Krauss (1981) exclaims, “in the myth of Rodin as the prodigious form giver prepares us for the reality of these arrangements of multiple clones” (51). She suggests that, by Rodin giving his art to the “art of reproduction, of multiples without originals ...” (Krauss 1981, 52), it has lost its magnetism and the presence of the work he achieved in his lifetime. To be re-created and reciprocated in today’s era is for it to be in the wrong time, with no culture of origins, no cultural context, no matter how cleverly the artisans followed Rodin’s methodology of casting. “Fraud”, she cried ... (Krauss 1981, 53).

With fraudulence in mind I return to the photographic image. Krauss (1984) sharpens my understanding by suggesting photography is: “[m]erely quantitative array of differences as a series ... By exposing the multiplicity, the facticity, the repetition and stereotype at the heart of *every* aesthetic gesture, photography deconstructs the possibility of differentiating between the original and the copy, the first idea and its slavish imitators” (59).

What can I say as I snap with my digital camera? Do my paintings hold “the *acutezza* (witticism), *maneria* (imitation), *concetti* (themes), *figire* (figure) or *particolari*

¹⁶⁶ Loh 2004, 480. Also see Humfrey 2001.

(details) or a *misto* (mix)” of all? Am I a thief? I shrug. It is not relevant: just as there is a time and place for *La Teoria*, there is a time and place for *La Pratica*. Here are some of the conversations we have in our portrait encounters: of life, ethics, the dilemmas in representation of human and nonhuman bodies. What is important to me is that you are before me and with my brush I work quickly staining the wood panel. I do not like to draw a cartoon first and transfer it onto the panel or canvas. Mine is a Venetian approach, a flick of the brush and the moisture of paint on gesso. I am working the dead painting stage, blocking in parts as a monotone without the seduction of colour. All is in motion and I do not know the outcome. I watch you. I want to remember this specific movement, a gesture that is quintessentially yours. I snap a series of photographs in quick succession, trying to be as unobtrusive as possible. I place my camera down beside me and pick up my brush and rag ...

I sigh ... I have been teasing out the notion of the gaze and the body with the technical advances from mechanical apparatuses, from the camera obscura into the age of the microscope and telescope of the early Baroque. Here the microcosm of the body’s interior landscape of cellular structure evident in the microscope mirrored the vista beyond the body, towards the galaxies of multiple universes shown through the telescope. It gave an expansion of vision, with both the microscope and the telescope highlighting the complexities of how scientific information could be received.

Many of my art colleagues experience the body as a grid. Theirs is an ontological approach that considers a literal depiction of the body too restricting. In her visual diary my colleague Eveline Kotai wrote: “Meaning as a whole as well as the minute detail. Macro/micro. Timelessness, impermanence, interconnectness, expressions of curiosity manifested naturally, free of art dogmas or styles ...”¹⁶⁷

It is as Krauss (1981) suggests: “[T]he grid ... its lack of hierarchy, of centre, of inflection, emphasizes not only its anti-referential character, but – more importantly – its hostility to narrative. This structure, impervious both to time and to incident, will not permit the projection of language into the domain of the visual, and the result is silence” (54).

¹⁶⁷ Eveline Kotai in conversation, May 2010.

However, I have not wished to follow that path. I need the noise and the bustle of a portrait encounter. As I study my sitter in my mind's eye, I trace my hands over the skin and hair, and search the moisture of a tongue and the lightness of an eyelash. I may not draw it descriptively but as an abstract notation with a lightness of mark. I wait for the moment of the blink of an eye (Ward, 208, 149–174) or the purse of lips. I chase the physical body, beyond the grid, beyond the pull and shove for supremacy between repetition and originality, beyond the equations of mimesis or abstraction. “[T]he originary status of the pictorial surface” (Krauss 1981, 56) is not important to me when I am working. Though I realize that much of Vasari’s work is fictitious, it does not take away the pleasure of reading his elegant rhetoric.¹⁶⁸ Nor when I paint, draw or photograph a sitter does it worry me that the resemblance is fictitious. It is all a fiction. I withdraw, however, from the virtual or valorous in my portrait encounters. I love the age-old pigments, paint and charcoal, brush, rag and fingers.

Like thinking of Cézanne’s breath after listening to the whisper of my newly born granddaughter’s breathing, it has been by writing to you that the threads of lace are found in the margins. Beneath the pastiche and parody there is always something deeper and more mysterious, carnal with desire or whimsical with loss.

The day darkens and we enter a cocoon where time is suspended and all else is extraneous. You are slipping away from me and I feel deep regret. I make you as comfortable as possible and watch you, as I draw the slump of your body curled in foetal position on the couch. I hear and respond with marks to the gentle rhythmic snores that escape from your fallen mouth. Your face has become sunken. I listen and watch carefully the repetitive inspiration and expiration, the ebb and flow, the staccato sounds, until silence enters between the breaths; there is an occasional sigh, and then all is quiet, all is still and the breath ceases.

Yours truly,

Angela

¹⁶⁸ See Barolsky 2005. Also S. J. Campbell “Vasari’s Renaissance and its Renaissance Alternatives” and Farago, C. “The Concept of the Renaissance Today: What is at Stake?” in Elkins and Williams eds 2008, 47–67: 69–93.

36. The Red Shoes

Perth,

Western Australia.

September 16, 2010.

Dear *La Pittura*,

I take a deep breath and reach out to take your hand. I lead you into a darkened room. Hanging inside the room are my latest paintings. (Figs. 56 –61, pages 150 – 152.) They are my response to Sofonisba's and Portormo's paintings. The margins whisper of details barely remembered.

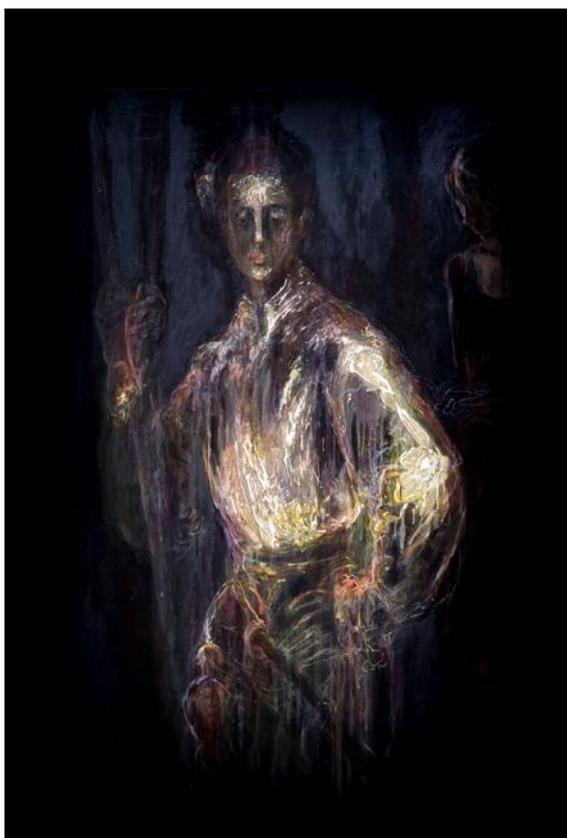


Fig. 56. Angela Stewart, *Furor*, 2007, oil, acrylic on wood, 129 x 90 cm. Installation photograph by Bo Wong. Personal collection of the artist.



Fig. 57. Angela Stewart, *Poesis No. 2*, 2007, oil, acrylic on wood, 129 x 90 cm. Installation photograph by Bo Wong. Personal collection of the artist.

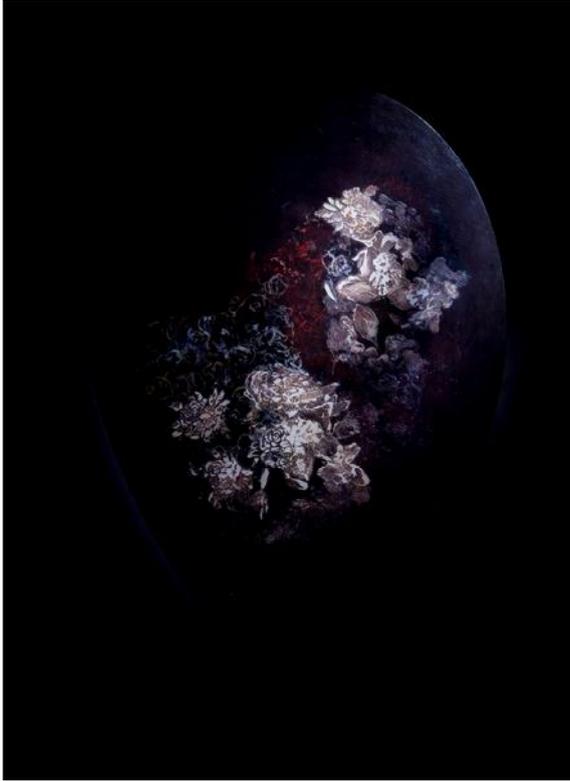


Fig. 58. Angela Stewart, *Poesis No. Ixxx*, 2007, oil, acrylic on wood, 90 x 75 cm, oval. Installation photograph by Bo Wong. Personal collection of the artist.



Fig. 59. Angela Stewart, *Poesis*, 2007, oil, acrylic on wood, 129 x 90 cm. Installation photograph by Bo Wong. Personal collection of the artist.



Fig. 60. Angela Stewart, *Claudia Luxe*, 2009, oil on canvas, 130 x 97 cm. Installation photograph by Bo Wong. Personal collection of the artist.

I leave you here and bid you farewell. The soft rustle of skirts and the clip clop of new shoes echo in the empty room ...¹⁶⁹

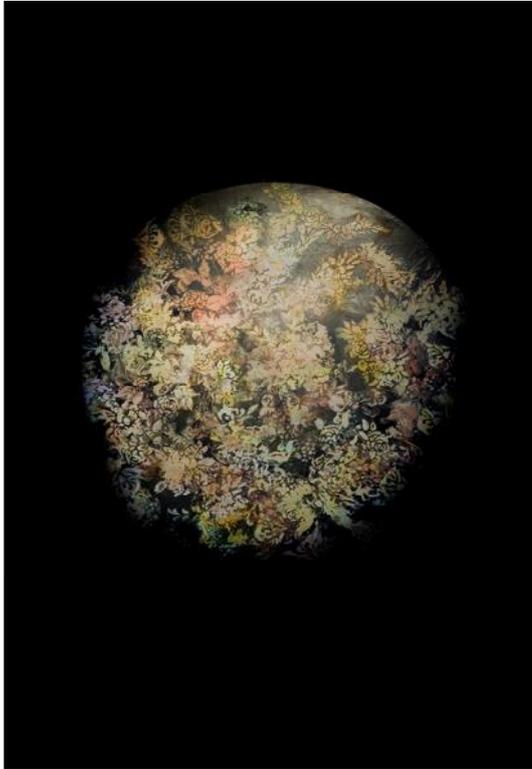


Fig. 61. Angela Stewart, *Blythe No. 1*, 2010, oil and acrylic on wood, 75 cm, circular. Installation photograph by Bo Wong. Personal collection of the artist.

¹⁶⁹ See Baker 2010.

Conclusion

In writing to a sixteenth-century painter, Sofonisba Anguissola, I have sought aspects of doubt as signs of the anxiety of making in between and around the commonalities and differences in painting portraits. In so doing I have learnt to articulate my concerns, not as an art historian or a philosopher, but as a maker of art, in terms of the material of painting and the performativity of making. The portrait encounter first and foremost is a collaboration between the painter and the sitter; it involves a personal dialogue of intimacy. Following this model I chose, as the painter, to use the first-person narrative to present this body of work.

Doubt, I discovered, defies a conclusion, because it is constantly in movement. It shifts and bounces from one moment to the next and from one individual to another. I visualize it as particles of dust that rest momentarily on my shoulders and then lift and fly with the movement of air, indiscriminately falling on virtual structures that I, and my contemporaries, construct about us. I suggest that we protect ourselves from the public's scrutiny with armour of seeming indifference. We adopt a manner of making and accept or reject influences of other artists and writers, but persistently we seek our own truth. These concerns are not static, because art itself keeps pushing and moving us on. Desire drives us to make better work, to express the inner hunger, releasing the intensity in a chosen medium. But the dust of doubt will always hint of other variables or horizons that are more suitable. As artists we are never quite satisfied. But I, standing in my studio, do not want to lose my doubt, because it lies between the moments of clarity and anarchy. It is an essential component of making.

I did not realize, when I began my research, that I would be articulating an affect of doubt. This awareness unfolded slowly during the process of making and writing. Initially I considered my incomplete paintings were an act of defiance provoked by the confusion of choices, the endless possibilities of visual images and information technology that we as contemporary artists experience. I thought by engaging in a dialogue with a Renaissance painter I would seek an understanding of the insatiable appetite for difference that the twenty-first century audience seems to want. I sensed, but could not articulate, that I must keep the studio door slightly ajar to overhear differing opinions of art and practice as I focused on the intimacy of the portrait

encounter. What surprised me, in writing the letters, was my journey of self-discovery: the tenor of my voice oscillated between displeasure, concern and longing as I wrote of my preoccupations. I became enchanted by Sofonisba Anguissola's paintings and the historical facts of her life and, just as I envisaged she and the *Paragone* sisters had to experience an inverted image in the camera obscura and distort their bodies to find a new comprehension of vision, I, too, had to contort and rethink my practice.

Pentimento, instead of being a ribald comment about artistic frustration, became a broader emotional register, an indicator of subjectivity, and the marks that represented the flow of emotions in the dynamic of making. Here, in the stutter of marks, the blemishes, the stumbling of grammar (because also I discovered *pentimento* resided in the text as I erased one sentence after another), I register doubt in material signs. As Paul Carter (2004) emphasized, “[C]reative research deals with matter that signifies. It is a discourse of material signs ... Matter ceases to be solid. Its *beau ideal* is no longer the marble from which the sculptor excavates an image. Instead, matter becomes mobile” (182). To follow his argument, I envisaged doubt in the signs of making in and between the paint and the words I write, because, as Carter points out, “[M]atter that signifies is matter capable of transforming itself. If matter that is solid cannot be transformed, then another kind must be at work” (182). As a way to traverse these signs, I painted portraits of a colleague, Bronwyn Kamas, as the model of my contemporary *Pittura*, and the Renaissance colleagues became symbols of the theoretical and practical constructs of painting. Inside this paradigm I embellished my paint and letters with punctuations of my sitter's social standing and latent desire.

To correspond with, and work with the paintings of, Sofonisba Anguissola, I dealt with a construct of a body with sexual needs and vulnerabilities. I suffused into her paintings a sense of the corporeal body, her body, the body of the maker, because my impression of her painting *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola* (see Fig. 3, page 17) was that it was *still* becoming. She, the artist, painted with materials and placed them on the canvas. Centuries later I stood in front of the painting and was moved: a moment of *augenblick*.

Phillip Sohm's (1991, 1995) and Koral Ward's (2005) analyses helped me to invest in this moment, the result being an appreciation of the temporality of making, which in turn gave me the insight into what was essentially important. I had been physically present to the painting. It was her *brush marks*, her presence, which I had witnessed years ago in Sienna, and the memory remained with me and drew me to begin this body of work. The painting itself was a sealed, finished work that gave no indications of the layers beneath, and yet it became important for me to get a sense of the actual making and drawing required to construct it. I peeled off the outer layer of her painting to look into the underbelly beneath because I had an uncanny wish to seek out what she might have been covering up: what wasn't working, her dissatisfaction.¹⁷⁰ The unlacing of the paint marks stood for peeling away layers of construction of the processes and theories of Renaissance painting practice and also the construction of spectatorship for the painter and subject.

All of my visual research on Sofonisba has been through reproduction, *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola* (see Fig. 3, page 17) being the only exception. I have long acknowledged the significance of photography in my practice as a way to assimilate the influence of the reproduction of art works. The geographical distance of living most of my life in the isolated city of Perth, Western Australia, meant that I could not access many paintings by historical artists in the 'flesh', especially in my formative painting years. Hence my desire to copy historical portraits had been to acknowledge an artist from another historical time period and draw similarities of their practice into my own. I was honouring a previous artist's work – a declaration, so to speak, that onto the photograph I was placing a memory of my absence *to* the painting and the painter who had inspired the work. It was an apology, my repentance for not having been present to the original painting.

My want has always been to invest in and acknowledge the performativity of materiality that has gone into the making. In the photograph this, of course, is lost. The aura, as lamented by Walter Benjamin (2009), is absent and the maker who made

¹⁷⁰ See also Hinchliffe, 1997 in catalogue essay *Three Women: Portraits, a Conversation in Paint and Charcoal*, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western Australia, 28 May – 27 June 1999:

The authorial gesture assuming the role of apology for her implied absence in the photograph – she said 'sorry' with a softness of a brush.

the work has vanished. Baudrillard's (1988) argument in a small way reflected the shame I felt with my father's query, "Why do you copy?"

Counterfeit and reproduction imply always an anguish, a disquieting foreignness: the uneasiness before the photograph. Considered like a witch's trick – and more generally before any technical apparatus, which is always an apparatus of reproduction, is related by Benjamin to the uneasiness before the mirror-image (184 n1).

I joined with the original painter as I re-interpreted the original historical painting with layers of *pentimenti* over a photograph. I reclaimed the indexical mark and recovered from my sense of loss with the performance of making. What I *now* realize is that doubt lay in the paint-loaded brush. I had reached in and removed the *pentimenti*, the mistakes and corrections, from the former painting (now a simulacrum in a photograph), and placed it onto the photograph, as I spoke of in my letter *The Card Game* (see page number 100). I can now shake off the dust of doubt (momentarily) from the layers of paint construction and, in the movement of *pentimenti*, realize a state of *becoming*. The experience of painting over the image was empowering because in the interruptions and mistakes lay signs of hope, of promise, *of a beginning*. I was revisiting the early structures of the design of drawing similar to *disegno*, and I could acknowledge and celebrate the haptic action of stumbling, and the awkwardness involved in bringing to resolution a composition of a portrait.

This awareness evolved slowly as I gave attention to the Renaissance preoccupation with realism in the performance of drawing and painting. And it was when I discovered that Paolo Pini in the *Dialogo of 1548* regarded the act of using an instrument to steady a painter's hand as one imbued with shame (Garrard, 564), that I decided the maulstick, instead of being a Renaissance symbol of anxiety, could be re-contextualized as a tool of liberation.

What has ensued is an appreciation of *disegno* as a particular construct that can inform contemporary practice. Giorgio Vasari and his Tuscan contemporaries espoused the importance of drawing as underpinning the aesthetic values of painting

and sculpture. I found this of great interest because of the resurgence of drawing today in the visual arts. Drawing is articulated by Grosenick (2001) as a quiet expression of anarchy, a form of expression that can slip boundaries and the confinements of paradigms of sculpture, painting, installation art and video. By examining and performing *disegno*, I broadened my understanding of formative drawing, with bemusement at the notion of *diligence* as a completion of a work, the Renaissance insistence the work had to be displayed, resolved and complete, during the period of Sofonisba's formative years. In the mid sixteenth century, as a Tuscan ideal of drawing, sketching was not given credence as a final solution, as a work to be shown to the public (Sohm 1991). However Pliny the Elder in years previously had been aware of the wonder of unfinished drawings:

[Sketches] are more admired than those which are finished, because in them are seen the preliminary drawings left visible and the artists' actual thoughts (*cogitationes*) and in the midst of approval's beguilement we feel regret that the artist's hand while engaged in work was removed by death (Pliny quoted by Sohm 1995, 772 n33).

I realized that in this unresolved state lay opportunities for openness and movement for creative thinking. Was the palimpsest of marks a death? I celebrated this notion because the movement of making can momentarily create small deaths of becoming, mini-explosions of matter being released into the materiality of making. In the matter of materials, the theoretical concerns and paint methodology implode into the mix of paint or the scrub of charcoal and the interstitial space between the sitter and the painter. It occurs in our dance as we, the painters, glance at the sitter and back to our canvas. It is in our ways of seeing and the movements of performance as we continually change our composition to catch an essence of the sitter.

It is a creative collaboration or, as Carter eloquently states in regard to this matter:

What counts is not their obvious sensory or cognitive heterogeneity but their predisposition to movement, change, inter-penetration and transformation. It is their capacity to disclose being as becoming at that place that makes them a material sign (Carter 2004, 187).

By allowed painting, *Pittura*, to enter the correspondence between the imaginary body of Sofonisba and myself, I was able to invest in the metaphor of *pentimenti* as a feminized space. It was interesting to think of the painting act as masculine and the paint as feminine. *Pentimenti* as the underbelly of process, as the changing of mind in artistic intentionality, became a privileged place, which allowed for the personal insight of story-telling, for considering the rhetoric of processes in the making of a portrait, and for surveying the stretches of time within the story of painting where patriarchal discourses reigned. At times it became an act of defiance, a metaphor as woman in flux (Best, 1995) not to allow “woman” to be the passive receptacle of male desire but to affirm woman’s awareness of the stakes involved in positioning her practice, as I have suggested in my letters *La Pittura* (see page 27), *Gender* (see page 31), *Tabula Rasa* (see page 20) and *The Auditorium* (see page 111).

Amongst these entanglements I placed slippages such as doubt and joy within the historical and contemporary debates surrounding the representation of a woman’s art practice, where the sexual divisions in artistic practice and the emphasis on beauty as an ideal of perfection (Cropper 1976, Garrard 1994) are still pertinent today. The notion of vanity slipped between the text and the mirror image in the margins, but was never really addressed except as a metaphor to bring to the reader the complexity and impossibility of doubt. Neither the portrait painting on canvas or panel nor the photograph will ever really satisfy one’s semblance of self.

I am now ready to begin a body of work that can build on the experience of researching for this Doctorate of Creative Arts. At the time of writing the letter *Cézanne’s Breath* (see page 69) I moved from Australia to settle in South Africa. My practice, temporarily, was a memory, and I was unsure where and how I was to proceed with my art in this new vibrant world. Doubt was all about me, and I sought philosophy for comfort. In her interpretation of a text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Elizabeth Grosz articulated what I was experiencing:

What Merleau Ponty grasped toward, throughout his writings, was a way of understanding our relation of the world, not as one of merger or oneness, or of control and mastery, but a relation of

belonging to and of not quite fitting, a never-easy kinship, a given tension that makes our relations to the world hungry, avid, desiring, needy, that makes us need a world as well as desire to make one, that makes us riven through with the very nature, materiality, worldliness that our conception of ourselves as pure consciousness, as a for-itself, daily belies (2005, 128).

As I was coming to terms with my own life experience, I perceived how both of these men, Cézanne and Merleau-Ponty, strove to be present to uncertainty and affirmed that the creative self “not quite fitting into” is part of relating to the world. I suggest we portrait painters have to let go and be open to change. We need to shift to a new trajectory and, when stumbling over the side of a face that refuses to resolve on the canvas or when conscious of the nebulous nature of the sitter’s identity, to be present to and appreciate the discomfort of painter’s doubt as discomfort of the body, as being relevant to portraiture. I, we, have to acknowledge our subjectivity, our anxieties *and* joy, and our own sense of becoming.

Living away from my home country, I have begun a series of portraits of colleagues from Australia. I hold their photographs in my hand and with them are the memories of confidences and laughter. I am not painting on these photographs, and the painted bodies on canvas sit in darkness. The camera obscura still surrounds me as a place of shelter. Here installation and lighting will be a vital component when eventually presenting my portraits: a darkened place where the margins can speak in whispers.

I will continue to play with the replication of an original, although, with the vast advances of technology, the simulacrum produces a hyper-reality that hovers about us. Yet the debate of *disegno*, I suggest, is still relevant today – in the skill of making, in the lived body that moves and absorbs, picks up a paintbrush, a pen and the mouse of a computer. Back in Fremantle, as I worked on the practical component of my thesis, I learnt to debunk *disegno* by working with an electric sander. I grew to love the dust that flew off the paint of my figures. The clouds became a veil, a mist of fine white pigment, which fell softly and lay quietly, covering all the work in the studio. It felt as if layers of time could be stirred and blown away when the studio door opened and a breeze entered. It was joyous. By working with the underbelly of

the process, placing light in the darkness, I felt I was surrounded by ghosts of the past who at times reluctantly allowed me to bring them into conversation with the present day by placing my contemporary *Pittura* indifferently going about her business. Twenty-first century painting feigns indifference to the past, but as shown in my letters this is not so.

Pentimenti are what have been before; they are, for me, the traces of time in waiting. If there were really repentance in *pentimenti*, what would it be? Would it be an allowance of one mark to be submissive to another, as an apology of hesitation? Would it allow us as painters to be flexible to difference, to acknowledge openly the influences of previous artists' work? Does this matter? The fact that *pentimenti* have to obliterate what has been before makes this a running action, a chasing of one's tail, so to speak.

I shut the door of my studio and the sound of rhetoric, of scholars' voices, becomes muffled. I still my anxiety, squelch the rumbles in my stomach, and sit you before me. I straighten my skirt and reach to for my paintbrush ... Let us *begin*.

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Furor, 2007, Angela Stewart, oil, acrylic on wood, 129 x 90 cm. Personal collection of the artist.

Poesis No. Ixxx, 2007, Angela Stewart, oil, acrylic on wood, 95 x 75 cm., oval. Personal collection of the artist.

Poesis, 2007, Angela Stewart, oil, acrylic on board, 129 x 90 cm. Personal collection of the artist.

Blythe no. 1, 2010, Angela Stewart, oil, acrylic on wood, 75 cm, circular. Personal collection of the artist.

Claudia Luxe, 2009, Angela Stewart, oil on canvas, 130 x 97 cm. Personal collection of the artist.

Appendix 3

The CD in this exegesis is supplied by Micro windows Data file format and contains the following directories:

1. Completed thesis artwork.
2. This directory contains 'JPEG' images of all the individual pieces of the artwork that was developed as part of Angela Stewart's Doctoral studies prior to their being displayed in John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, Bentley, Western Australia. 17 September – 10 December 2010.