

**Science and Mathematics Education Centre**

**iDiscover - The Transforming of an Analogue Art Teacher in a  
Digital Classroom**

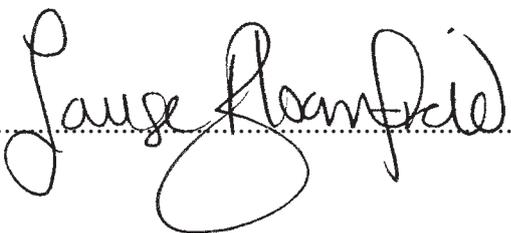
**Louise Bloomfield**

**This thesis is presented for the Degree of  
Master of Philosophy  
of  
Curtin University of Technology**

**April 2011**

## Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

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## ABSTRACT

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This interpretive inquiry takes place within the field of Human Science Research in Art Education. It addresses the place that digital technology is claiming in schools in the new years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through tracing the learning journey of an art and photography teacher whose artistic teaching life has been expressed through analogical theory and method, and who comes to terms with both the seductive quality of digital technology and its power to deeply engage and reward students and teachers, the inquiry aims to gain deep understandings of the ways art teachers and educators might meet the challenges posed by digital technology as it metamorphoses in the art classroom.

The inquiry is re-presented as a personal narrative of this art educator's experiences during one year with Year 11 and 12 students in an all girls' school. The narrative reveals an understanding of her pedagogical practices about which she has been previously unclear as the inquiry interprets the practical and theoretical work of her students and reveals some habits of thinking that students adopt and develop as the year progresses. The teacher's design is to work in synergy with her students toward exhibiting her own collection of images.

As the narrative unfolds, questions about pedagogical practice and the theory of art teaching mature until finally the teacher, as the main protagonist of the narrative, conceives of the significance of her inquiry for other art educators: were they also to inquire, research, and develop narrative that occurs in multi-media equipped classrooms, they too might enrich their own and their students' experience of art making using digital technology.

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## PROLOGUE

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### *The beginning of questioning*

I was walking home one day from school and took the scenic route up the Rivulet Track. I wandered up the dirt path listening to the water flowing down the stream from the mountain behind. As I walked, questions that I often ask myself after a day of teaching came rushing through my mind. I am not sure why, my day had been good – a full day in the classroom, cross-country training at lunch, staff meeting – the usual stuff. The girls in my classes seemed engaged in most cases, yet a nagging sense of frustration persisted in my mind. Eventually the problem manifested itself as a question, ‘Why and what was I doing in my profession as a visual art educator?’

I was pushing myself to make meaning from the work that I undertake as a teacher of young minds. The questions kept trickling over my subconscious mind: am I having an impact on these students; are they really learning new ways of thinking and seeing; what can I do better to get them to truly appreciate the world around them; how can I assist them to think in different paradigms of art making and challenge them to see the intrinsic value of the visual arts? I have some great students; some who come from a background of rich experiences, like travel – opportunities for looking at art and design

in museums and exhibitions. They have homes that provide a great environment for learning, and it is precisely these students who are hungry for more artwork and critical conversation. Perhaps such students are rare, like gems, but they do make the day more interesting. Is this cohort of students enough, though, to make it all worthwhile?

I think back to my class, to my ‘other’ students, those who seem less ready to learn. Does my frustration lie in the context of my teaching or my pedagogical practices?

Sometimes, I have to admit, I feel frustrated when I see the students enrolled in my class. I wonder at times why students choose to study Art. Are they searching for an ‘easy option’? With the preponderance of technology readily available for students perhaps they feel they have at their fingertips a means to ‘do’ art. They can bypass drawing class and move straight into a digital studio and workplace to create art. How do the students perceive my subject? I ask myself if there will be a place for art teachers in education in secondary school settings in the near future.

I think a great deal about such things on a regular basis and in particular what we, as a profession, are doing as visual arts teachers. I continue to wander towards my home but my mind keeps ticking over; I am relaxed and the thoughts and feelings just seem to keep on coming. I wonder why art is important and how can we develop and make ourselves, as a group of specialist teachers, feel more valued? On a personal level, what can I do to improve my teaching? What do the students want from art in the school setting these days? So many students just seem to want the quick fix – they do not seem to understand that they have to explore and delve and work with discipline! I keep sending these thoughts outwards into my consciousness.

My students, I muse, appear too busy to dedicate the required time and energy to work in depth on their art; they do not want to work to a timetable, they want to do ‘stuff’ when it is right for them; they cannot seem to even cope with the rigidity of a TV schedule and being held down to prescriptive times and days to watch TV, so they download on demand. Quietly, I suppose, I admire aspects of such a way of living but this is not helping my quest for finding the most positive teaching and learning environment that will help them. Perhaps I need to tap more into their thinking and challenge myself to meet their emerging needs.

But then the other side of my brain reacts and comments: do not pander to these students – teach them the basic skills that they need as artists, make them sit still and see the world from your perspective.

After my twenty-minute reflection I arrive at the bottom of the track. I have reached the cross point where the track meets the road. I leave behind me the sounds of running water, the light dappled track, the smell of the trees and bush. I leave the tranquility. I wander up past a local primary school and stand outside a modern, newly designed structure and wonder about the young minds who learn within the confines of this building. How do they fit into the puzzle I am forming in my mind? Little ones are so free with their thinking and yet, as they grow, they become more and more self-conscious in their art making, it is almost as though a spell is cast upon them at about the Year 7 mark. It’s another facet to my problem, but one that I will tackle another day. I walk up the road and finally I arrive at home. My mind seems to say, ‘Okay, what is next?’

This thesis is the accretion of an active personal journey undertaken over a twelve-month period and emerges from the ongoing reflection of my role as a visual arts educator and practising artist. It has grown from a series of questions that have continued to haunt me in my quest for personal development.

Many questions started to present themselves to me, perhaps catalysed by my awareness of the infiltration of digital media into the visual art curriculum and into the mindset of my students. Questions about the role and value of art, given the increased prominence and the infiltration of digital media into the landscape of my classroom, were also part of my primary concerns. As an educator of fifteen years standing I am also questioning who I am and what role I have to play in teaching and mentoring students in art education. Do I still possess the passion, desire and drive to ignite artistic thinking? Do I still have the energy to explore and coach my students in identifying their strengths and to make art – particularly art that is embracing digital technology – in a digital realm that is second nature to this generation?

Initially this thinking is my guide and a springboard for further questioning and investigation of the visual arts in today's educational landscape. Allied to this concern is the impact that this has for me as an educator and as an artist. As time passes, I observe myself, and my students, I interview and gather notes from interviews with my students as a way to articulate and record our discourse. I gather examples of student images from different occasions throughout the year as visual representations for my inquiry. These occasions are an active part of my research and have been established in my classes to provide me with the means to explore some of my questions. I have been able to watch and reflect on the happenings that present themselves on these occasions,

as well as observe and reflect on the day-to-day interactions between students, students and teacher, students and the environment, and students and their art making. I watch my students learn, engage, disengage, become frustrated and question their self and their identity.

Over the time of writing my questions evolve, change and unfold deeper questions for consideration. This occurs to me as I continue to observe and connect with happenings in my classes and illuminates that my concerns are not only linked to the power of technology: they are also about the characteristics of the relationships that develop in a learning environment and those generated in art making.

This thesis is about being interpretative, being culturally aware, presenting self to other and exploring with others a voice of power and intent. It arises from observing and reflecting on my students' personal experiences of art making, how they embody voice, and how their images become narratives of identity and self-expression.

As I think and read, I am drawn to the scholarly writing of Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell (2004) on identity and the self in the book *Not just any dress* where they address the role of identity and self-expression in their research about interpretative dress. From their investigation they explore how as individuals we reveal ourselves, our desire to express ourselves, or how we think we should present and appear to others (pp. 251–269). My connection to this thinking relates back to the artist and the student and how we might choose to reveal ourselves through the art that we make. It makes me start to consider how the students wish to be perceived, how they present themselves to others and how others link this to the uncertainty of judgment.

Interpreting artwork, stories and others is neither an exact nor an easy venture which is why this thesis and my methodology has presented many challenges and layering as I have delved further into my inquiry. Weber and Mitchell recall the writing of Fred Davis (1992), who writes,

Does the image I think I convey of myself reflect my true and innermost self or some specious version thereof? Do I wish to conceal or reveal? ... We are all too familiar with the oscillations and disease these identity uncertainties evoke on one's life. (Davis in Weber & Mitchell, 2004, p. 252)

Like Weber, Mitchell and Davis's thinking, this thesis has become my voice, and the narrative of my inquiry. It has become a narrative, autobiographical and ethnographic work that has been born from reflecting, questioning and experiencing occasions that have evolved in the workings of my educational environment.

As an art teacher and artist my work revolves around stories and connections, which is why I chose to build the framework of my thesis on narrative and qualitative research methodology. This field of methodology or inquiry appeals to me in my quest for understanding as it allows for the gathering of data and culminates in an interpretative representation of lived experiences. It engages in case studies, personal experiences, introspection, life story, interviews and visual texts. In the book *The landscape of qualitative research*, (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) Deena Weinstein and Michael Weinstein refer to this field of research as 'bricoleur'. They suggest that qualitative research '... is a pieced-together close knit set of practices', (1988, p. 3) that engages and allows for choice and the interconnection of methods and research practices. This methodology 'connects the parts to a whole, stressing the meaningful relationships that operate in the situations and social worlds studied' (p. 164). My narrative explores relationships that

developed between the researcher and the social experience, the same elements that are important and reflected on in art making.

The thesis is limited by my role as educator, my personal biography as a researcher and artist, the students' work, observation, reflection, interviews, interpretation and the gathering of images. In light of this I have not endeavoured to measure my research in an empirical framework and the thesis does not follow the tradition of quantitative methodology. My decision to work in a qualitative field of methodology came to me because art is about communicating, and just as Weinstein and Weinstein propose, the connecting of parts to a whole or the interconnection of methods in a quest for understanding. Art has the capacity to tell a story, to evoke emotion and to engage, challenge and communicate with an individual at different levels. Art does not possess a definitive answer. What has become clearer for me is that, like art, there is no one conclusion or response to my thesis, no one interpretation. My questions and ideas will continue to evolve and grow, leading to new and other avenues of investigation. Nel Noddings in *Philosophy of education* finds wisdom in John Dewey's (1859–1952) thinking that education is about growth and the notion that 'the aim of education is about more education' (Dewey in Noddings 1998, p.5).

For me, art making is about setting a scene and leading the viewer to question and wonder what and how the work has been made and what concept has been explored during its compositional construction. In other words, a colourful question in the texture of this thesis is: What is my story and what message is being communicated? I find myself leaving behind my fear of technology as seductive in art, which originally sparked my inquiry. I come to explore more deeply layers of communication, relationships

and narratives that have become more integral to my understanding as this year has progressed.

Throughout the writing process I become more engaged with the use of words and invest more time in reading and exploring stories and ethnographic methods of research. I needed to know more about the role of the narrative and how it is used as a form of ethnographic inquiry. In light of this I engage with the writing of Roland Barthes (1915–1980), Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (1996). Their ideas, style and thinking resonated with me and guide the form and direction of my thesis.

Narrative provides me with an effective platform to analyse and construct my inquiry to create and delineate a meaningful pattern for my findings. Through the collection of qualitative data I build on the role of narrative as a valid form of an ethnographic study. Roland Barthes validates the role of the narrative and storytelling in Riessman's *Narrative methods of human science* (2008). He notes the universality of the narrative form and reveals where it can be located:

Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, painting ... conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. (Barthes in Riessman, p. 4)

To this list of diverse sources that Barthes cites I add my own memoirs, observational studies in the classroom, personal reflection, student writing and conversations with my current cohort of students as part of my storytelling. These elements have been the focus for my research and data collection.

Another influence is ethnographic forms and styles of writing as a means to record and analyse qualitative data. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner in their book *Composing ethnography* provide an insight into this mode of working. Using a conversational discourse, they say,

Art: ... Our main problem is how to reach people who are looking for alternatives, who want to write differently, and who see an opportunity to expand boundaries of ethnographic research. What is ethnography anyway? It's not the name of a discipline.

Carolyn: Ethnography is what ethnographers do. It's an activity. Ethnographers inscribe patterns of cultural experience; they give perspectives on life. They interact, they take notes, they photograph, moralise and write. (Ellis & Bochner, 1996, p. 16)

This idea of 'inscribing patterns of cultural experience' and providing different 'perspectives on life' again reflects art making.

Thus I have located this thesis in the field of qualitative research and embedded within it many different narratives that have emerged as a result of experiences and imagery that have come into being in my classroom and my professional artistic practice.

The role of metaphor and the prominence of images is an important aspect of my research. To reflect again on my understanding of qualitative research it could be interpreted as endlessly creative as well as interpretative. Metaphor is important as a framework for my inquiry. The word metaphor as I understand it is a symbol or representative, and if we look to its origins we see that the word stems from the word 'transfer' (*The New Oxford Dictionary*, 1998). Art making is indeed about transferring

ideas and is based on layers of interpretations and different personal experiences. It is through making art that we can express ideas and thinking.

I wish to connect this notion of metaphor to a frame of elements, similar to those Ken Robinson proposes in *Out of our minds, learning to be creative*. He says,

Creativity is possible in any activity in which human intelligence is actively engaged. The distinctive feature of human intelligence is imagination and the power of symbolic thought. Our lives are shaped by the ideas we have and beliefs we hold. New ways of thinking can transform us. To promote creativity it is essential to understand the main elements and phases of the creative process including:

- the importance of medium;
- the need to be in control of the medium;
- the need to play and take risks; and
- the need for critical judgment. (Robinson, 2001, p. 111)

Robinson goes on to systematically expand these main elements in his book. Beginning with the importance of the medium, he suggests that finding a successful medium is about connecting with particular materials that enable the artist to successfully express their ideas. This could be through drawing, painting, photography or digital technology. Robinson suggests that if we have not connected with a medium, we have not yet found ourselves – our voice.

Once the medium is selected then there is a need to control it. Developing skills in the chosen medium takes time and persistence. The students need to learn to control the medium so that they can understand and see other possibilities. With understanding comes a command of the materials, but as Robinson claims, ‘Technical control is necessary for creative work but it’s not enough’ (2001, p. 132).

Therefore the next element suggests that freedom is needed for experimentation to happen – to take risks and play. Creativity as Robinson sees it is a ‘sophisticated process’ (p.132). There must be a balance between learning skills and stimulating the imagination and exploration. This occurs through play and taking risks so that new horizons emerge.

Finally, in Robinson’s expansion of his elements he suggests that creativity ‘involves a dynamic interplay between generating ideas and making judgments’ (p. 133). He continues to say that creativity is enriched through the ability to make judgments about art works, by deciding what is valuable, what ideas work and what areas need enrichment. There is a place in art making for reflecting and for pausing, or as he says, the need for ‘waking and sleeping moments’ (p. 133). He concludes his explanation of his elements by suggesting that, ‘... creative activity involves a combination of control and freedom, conscious and unconscious thought, intuition and rational analysis’ (p. 135).

From Robinson’s elements of creativity, I decide, in designing the contours of my inquiry within the landscape of the learning of a 2010 class of senior art students, to focus upon three art making elements: *exploring*, *crafting* and *refining*. I decide to relate these three elements to the project of making artwork that has purpose and integrity. This I hope makes it possible for my inquiry to transpose into a thesis which is in itself a metaphor for art making; for *exploring*, for *crafting* and for *refining*. This metaphor acts as an organising structure for the presentation of both the inquiry and the thesis. The formatting of the page of contents represents this metaphorical structure.

In my thesis I narrate how I come to an understanding that *exploring*, *crafting* and *refining* are integral parts of art making and appreciating. For me, this thesis resembles

an artwork structured in a framework used in the world of art. I consider the different art principles that are part of the creation of an artwork – the different aspects that evolve as an idea is conceived and then transformed into reality. I take my three key elements of art as *exploring*, *crafting* and *refining* and I play and toy with these concepts until I determine for each a further refinement and understanding of each concept. The three main elements break into three further layers, which I feel are intrinsically connected to art making. I determine that each element would have a three-part elaboration that each in turn become a theme for each chapter.

An artist has to *explore*: to question, to challenge, to connect.

An artist has to *craft*: to discover, to construct and to persevere.

An artist has to *refine*: to resolve, to know, and to understand.

**Element one** concerns itself with the exploring – travelling through unfamiliar territory. Through the work of my students, Brooke and Bec as well as whole class experiences, I am able to share a deeper understanding of the way the students travel through uncertain territory. This element of art making is all about discovering how, as an artist, to connect both with the medium and the concept.

**Element two** in the art process involves crafting – making things by hand. The work of Lizzie, Jenn, Ellen, Kate, Karen and other art students provide an insight into the element of crafting – the making of things by hand. This combined with the students’ desire for discovery, ability to construct and to persevere are important for art making. This element of art is essential to an artist’s development and integrity.

**Element three** in art making is all about refining – removing impurities. One of the major challenges for the artist is resolving their art making and having confidence in that resolution. Casey and Adelle are two students who illuminate for me the removing of impurities. They reveal through their art making the act of resolving, knowing and understanding. Perhaps no artist will ever say they have gained mastery, but through knowing more, can move forward with understanding.

Early in the year, I determined that my learning would occur in parallel with that of the students. I decided to undertake a personal challenge, one that I would share as it evolved with my students' own unfolding experiences of art making with digital technology. My challenge was to create a body of images for exhibition, as part of my learning and connecting with my theory of the three elements of art making based on Robinson's elements of creativity. This became a critical part of my learning, as I began my own educational journey and it has acted as a visual constituent.

The *motif* for my images eventually became encapsulated for me in the word *Findings* because it provides a dual and compelling meaning – actual findings, found objects, from my daily walks photographed digitally in my art making for the exhibition and findings that resulted from long thinking and research with my students. For an initial examination of this word I went to the *The New Oxford Dictionary* (1998) where synonyms such as 'answer', 'result' and 'conclusion' came forward. My coupling of the meanings of 'finding' will convey a similar yet divergent interpretation throughout my inquiry. One way in which I use the word 'finding' is to associate it with the analytical data collected and interpreted from observations and questions during my inquiry. And finding in its alternative definition, is associated with my own artistic investigation and

engagement with the landscape: the small fragments that I gather for inspiration and research as part of my own art making practice.

Finding, gathering, and interpreting formed a collection of paintings by the end of the year. Nine works emerged for an exhibition entitled ‘Glow’. This body of work personified a critical friend for me and worked in synergy with the writing of my inquiry and narrative of my thesis. I found my voice embodied in the act of inquiry about and interpretively narrating my lived experience of art making during this year. Each chapter of the thesis starts with one of the nine paintings – one of my findings – and introduces the reader to the collection of the paintings that I created through this inquiry. The image acts as an aesthetic reference to the logos of my thesis and to my role as a visual artist. In the Epilogue, I uncover for the reader my artistic references and provide a deeper insight into the works and their meaning.

My Prologue initiates the reader to the landscape within which the inquiry and narrative of my study takes place. I introduce my readers to the Rivulet Track where I walk daily. There I find solace and time to ponder my questions, and the stimulus for my own image making. As an art practitioner I connect to the landscape and use aspects of it as inspiration and as a guide for my work. From the many shapes and elegant forms at my feet as I walk, the small twigs that have been discarded from the natural flora, or small rocks that have washed themselves up onto higher ground from the stream, I find inspiration and beauty. It is these small objects left behind by nature, and the rich colours that intrigue me. And each finding has a story of its own – a connection to the land.

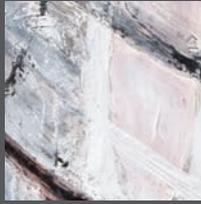
I have gathered the physical objects, the leaves and rocks, and photographic images to use as the grounding or exploration for my own practical inquiry. My

investigation into the landscape allows me to make time to stand still and compose an image before finally releasing the shutter on the camera, embedding the object in the digital film roll. My exploration allows me to experiment with the image, change filters and effects, or keep it as true record of my own experience at that single moment.

As I related earlier the metaphor and the prominence of imagery is vital to my inquiry. I wish to impress on my reader the power of the image to convey meaning and understanding and as well explain why using metaphor is a compelling part of this work. Weber and Mitchell (2004) write about how visual representations can lead to further investigations of broader questions. They suggest that individuals have a ‘desire to express themselves personally, to be true to who they felt they really are inside ...’ (p. 252). For my inquiry the role of the image acts as a mirror to the self, to the students’ self and to the relationships that develop and reveal themselves.

This thesis is a reflection or a mirror into my thinking and how my inquiry and engagement with my students over the past year has enabled me to enrich my sense of self, reflect on my professional place and purpose as educator and artist. It is the springboard of self-reflection and the beginning of new approaches and thinking about art and art education. The landscape of the art classroom is becoming a place where the digital lives of students present themselves. As a teacher I am no longer able to ignore technology in the classroom but rather I am encouraged by its potential as a vehicle for self-expression and learning. The digital revolution has become the potential digital revelation.

Let us begin ...



# ELEMENT one



*Exploring: questioning, challenging, connecting*

Details from: *Finding I, II and III, 'Glow'*, exhibition of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010

The background is a close-up detail of an abstract painting. It features thick, layered brushstrokes in various colors including white, light pink, pale blue, and dark charcoal. The texture is highly tactile, with visible ridges and valleys in the paint. The composition is dominated by diagonal and curved lines, creating a sense of movement and depth.

# CHAPTER

# 1

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Detail from: *Finding I, 'Glow'*, exhibition  
of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010



*Finding I, 'Glow'*, exhibition of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010

## CHAPTER

# 1

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***Questioning: in which an inquiry about technology takes place as it attempts to storm the classroom***

So what is art? This is a question that I struggle with when I see my students unload their books, computers, iPods and mobile phones onto the desks in the art studio. Students cascade into class, arriving for their art sessions chatting, organising social engagements, discussing Twitter and Facebook conversations. I stand and observe them as they arrive in the art studio. I have been teaching for fifteen years, so why am I even pondering the question of what constitutes art? Why do I constantly reassess my role as

an art educator? I believe I know what is ‘good’; I know what will get students over the line in formal assessment. What am I fearful of, why do I at times feel intimidated by the students’ attitudes and their way of perceiving the world and art? Sometimes I feel uneasy and I cannot seem to define clearly the cause of my disquiet.

I welcome the students as they arrive – monitoring their attitudes and body language. As we gather for the lesson I remind them of the task ahead before they all move towards their own spaces and creative arenas. The questions that run through my mind are: What will be today’s outcome? Which students will require guidance? Which students will be responsive and which ones will need help to settle into the day ahead? I check my teaching chronicle for scheduled dates and notes. I mentally run through my students to see what they are up to, what they are doing, what guidance they need and how I can help them to continue to move forward with ideas and thoughts. In readiness for the lesson, I channel my vision and focus my mind on the mission ahead of creative problem solving, to listening and facilitating possible opportunities.

This question of ‘what is art’ is essential and central in my thinking, and I continue to struggle with this as I am confronted with students creating work drawing from many different avenues and modes of thought. They are using so many creative areas, mediums, ideas and skill levels. How am I going to meet the needs of all these students and provide them with the best opportunities?

I contemplate this problem, breathe and tell myself that it is all about problem solving, coaching and providing a strong and ethical framework for them to learn from. It is about giving them the skills to question, challenge and connect the different

principles that are pivotal, in my opinion, to the creation of good artwork. I need to frame my questions to help them in turn ask themselves the right questions. What do you like about your work? What are your strengths? What can you do better?

After a five-minute interval of settling into work, I start my rounds to engage with each student individually with the purpose of facilitating new ideas to develop their work and thinking. Each student has a different approach, a different concept and a different attitude to what they see as their creative purpose.

Sophia sits quietly in the art room conjuring up scenarios for her illustrated picture book. She occupies the same place each lesson, looking out into the garden of the school grounds. Her place in the room is well lit with natural light and she appears comfortable and at ease in the environment. Her imagination conjures curious scenarios that unfold into different plots and characters for her to explore. She sits and develops her characters in the hope of creating an illustrated book of ten stories. Her main character is called X, which she elicits from her love of Latin. Sophia considers each mark that she makes. Each line that forms her characters is deliberate and crafted. Her drawing skills are amazing, so accurate, so detailed and so refined. She spends hours in and out of class drawing, writing, reading and creating stories. She wants to be an illustrator so she is a passionate and committed student.

Another student, Lizzie, who is always late for class, has a good skill level. Her style and approach is so different from Sophia's. Like Sophia, she is interested in telling a story but she does this by studying and creating portraits. Her style is quick, expressive and free. She works from a photograph of a friend to create a preliminary plan and

sketch. Another time she will draw from life. Lizzie is able to capture the essence of her sitter in a few strokes – sometimes successfully – but at other times the image is not in proportion and the lines are too carefree. This only seems to fuel Lizzie’s frustration and these attempts are quickly discarded. Lizzie is equally at home with traditional mark making as well as using a digital drawing tablet to craft an image. When she creates a successful drawn image her lines reflect the sitter, smooth, velvety or staccato-like dots: quick, detached, scratchy and wiry. Lizzie’s skills have been developing for some time as she is an avid art student, but she is afraid to experiment with other materials or even the scale of her portraits just in case they do not work. My students each bring with them a unique skill-set and mind-set. They can range from confident and purposeful to apprehensive and indecisive. But these students also seem to be comfortable and aligned with digital technology as a way of interpreting the world.

I walk around the room, pausing to work with students. I ask: ‘Are you communicating your ideas, is your technique strong enough to convey these ideas well, what do we need to do better, what is next?’ But I wonder if they understand that they keep me awake at night as I try and resolve to my own satisfaction their design problems. And do they really worry as much as I do over their lack of work. I suppose to them I sound like a broken record but they need to understand that for me it is not just about colouring in a picture, taking a photo or fumbling around the toolbar of the software package Photoshop. It is about exploring, experimenting, questioning; it is about the failures and happy accidents; and above all, it is about understanding and appreciating how to create an aesthetically sound image.

I take a moment to stand back and observe the class, to reframe the situation before I continue on my course around the room to discuss ideas and possibilities. I walk downstairs to the doorway of our digital lab. This is an environment that both excites me but also frustrates me - the world of digital technology and digital 'attitudes'. As I arrive I have to walk past the door that leads to the photographic darkroom. This is a room where a different type of magic takes place; a place where students once used to flock to revel in the mysteries of the analogue photo – a place of discovery of a different sort. This room is dark and quiet and has not been ventured into for some time and this saddens me. This is an area that is very much part of my own personal art making practice. I sigh, I remember the good old days and walk into the 'digitopia', iPods ablaze, students staring at screens with energy oozing from technology. Suddenly it occurs to me that this whole scene worries me. I have to admit that I have arrived in the place that is fuelling my frustrations as a teacher. I have come to the epicenter of my concern. I see the invasion of technology into the art class. Is this art? I keep chanting to myself. Do these students think that snapping away with a camera and downloading it to a Mac is art? Is this purposeful art making or a mighty con-job? I stand back and watch.

I think about how I can continue to influence and help my students to want to engage with some aspects of traditional art practice. How can I get them to acknowledge that there is a more complex world at play? I know that in my heart I worry that technology is challenging the tradition of photography and art making including the very way an image is created. It threatens the aesthetics of the handcrafted piece. It diminishes the decision-making that takes place in the darkroom. There's no cropping, no playing with exposure. And I feel that technology erodes work ethic; it's just too easy to get a quick fix.

I have watched the invasion; the assault of the digital world has created a new approach and attitude to art making where students leap to computers, the Internet, digital cameras and drawing tablets as their first response to any problem or question. Where is the paint, the mess, and the intuitive energy that comes with each hand-created mark that is transferred to the page?

I am by no means a luddite, but for many years I have resisted the digital world's intrusion into the art classroom hoping that it would not take away from the traditional principles and practices of art. I particularly love analogue photograph, and vainly I hope that my senior art students will continue to love to draw, love to paint and explore the rich history that has developed and shaped new movements and ways of assessing and appreciation of art. I want them to question and use their art to explore what it is that makes art meaningful. Thomas Alexander (1995) writes about the 'human eros', the desire to exist meaningfully through action, and how Plato aligns art as part of the human condition – an innate and inseparable part of what makes us human. Both scholars explore the role of art and how it connects us to the world. It is this nexus between art and the world that I believe is important for my students to understand and appreciate.

But this digital world that my students inhabit appears to weaken their desire to explore deeply. I conjure up the image of my student Katie, staying up all night to build a body of digital images for her final assessment. Where is the authentic exploration, inquiry, questioning and ultimately the integrity in this art making? Alas, Katie failed her art examination because she disconnected herself from the key principles that are needed for art to have veracity. And at this point she ought to acknowledge that there

is more to making art than the push of a button, a download and a fumble with some filters on the computer – creating art is not just a cosmetic endeavour. What is it that is going to help students like Katie see and understand that art is about communicating and making meaning?

Okay. So it is time for me to do what I am always challenging my students to do. I need to explore the problem in all of its complexity. I want to put aside my safety net, be brave and start to discover. I steel myself: essentially what I must provide for my students is a sound platform for learning that encourages questioning, and making meaning in a digital world.

It is time to explore the ‘dark side’ for myself. It comes to me quite clearly. I wish to transport my own art practice into the arena of digital art making. I want to explore digital photography to truly understand the complexity of image making. Digital photography, for me, is sullied with my prejudice of ‘ease’, ‘immediacy’ and ‘slickness’, and by my recollections of students like Katie. But I know that I need to experience the frustrations that Katie did in order to understand it better by delving into the practice of digital art myself.

I have reached a decision! I am embarking on a journey, a learning journey. I am not sure where it will take me but I am starting with the first step. These notions are pivotal to my journey, and I will also need to build a connection to this generation of learners who are clever, but who seem to listen and understand differently from me.

But in the classroom, I notice that the lesson is nearly over; the students have been challenged and questioned. As they make their way to their next class, I await the

arrival of next cohort of learners. As I do I contemplate, as always, ideas such as what needs to be understood, what needs to be taught, and what can I bring to these students' next lesson?

So, by the end of the day I have made a decision about my journey and where this year will lead me. I have not mapped out the whole plan yet, but I do know the following: I am going to explore at first hand digital media, in particular, how digital images can be used to create artwork. I have decided to embrace technology, to let it engulf me, so that I can understand its capability and its potential. I have set myself a particular challenge, so that I know that I have a goal to aim for. I am going to hold an art exhibition at the end of the year using digital photography as my initial inspiration. I know that to hold an exhibition I will have to create a body of work that shows a refinement of ideas and skills and a sound concept. And I know I will need up to a dozen or so pieces of work to make the exhibition work. So there is my challenge. I will explore, create and make art; and during this process I hope I will connect with my audience. I will do it in the year that it will take me to write my thesis, reflecting on my own personal artistic journey so this syncopates with my other intellectual and pedagogical journey.

I begin to explore using my digital camera and my iPhone. The project excites me and allows me to see the world in new ways. My advantage over my students, in art making, is that I am already well versed in visual literacy, having an understanding of the artistic principles of design, composition and technique hardwired into my system. Because I am competent as a photographer I often see the world through the eye of a camera, always looking and considering the world in a variety of ways, seeking out

details and exploring new angles and ways of viewing our world. My studies and passion for making and appreciating art, if anything, has given me the power and skills to interpret the world in an exciting way. So I start to explore using the digital media. Using my iPhone and its applications allows me to experience the instantaneous mode of taking images, playing with filters and using different applications – it is all quite a liberating experience.

To illuminate my point I put forward these small images as part of my on-going exploration of the Rivulet Track that leads to where I live. This is the track that I traverse daily to and from school. It winds along the foothills of West Hobart, ever changing as the weather and seasons dictate. It is, in many ways, my solace as I prepare for and reflect on the day's events. The landscape has always been the catalyst for my artistic expression so it is significant that I continue on with this concept for the purpose of revealing my findings, and my exploration into the world of the digital photograph. This is where my creative journey and investigation – of what I call the Leaf Litter Project – begins and where it continues.



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**Leaf litter on the Rivulet Track:** Technology transforms nature. My exploration of one space and one moment taken out of reality and placed into a new form of interpretation and context.

My original findings – leaf litter, the leaf tucked away, hidden, anonymous and seemingly insignificant, yet for me beautiful and noteworthy in my world – is the starting point for a series of photographs. It is a way to compose, create and express my connection to the landscape in so many new ways. Taking this small object – the leaf – and then transferring this into an artwork is what I encourage my students to do – to tap into an aspect of interest and then to use that as the catalyst for expression, exploration and appreciation.

My exploration of one space and one moment taken out of reality and placed into a new form of interpretation and context is beginning to emerge. This new context is laden with filters, exaggerated colour and in many ways conveys a sense of nostalgia that returns and connects it to the old idiosyncratic, aesthetic qualities of the first photographs, that although vignetted and lacking complete clarity, were powerful in their aesthetic nature and beauty. In many ways there is a sense of irony at play here as I seek to create photographic images in the modern world that are created devoid from the traditional technique and aesthetic nature, and yet deliver the inherent qualities derived from the traditional process. We can use digital phone cameras, seek to add ‘noise’ (digital grain), light leaks and more – a relationship and connection to the old that brings this sense of nostalgia to the image through using modern-day technology. I am having fun, and I amuse myself by thinking that if only the students could engage with the traditional aspects of art making, they could have so much more insight and power. I determine that I will continue to infiltrate this connection to the traditional photography into their worlds!

My own exploration of space, angle, composition and design are essential and

this planning and thinking really engages most of my time as I begin work on my academic writing task. Once happy with the image before me, I am able to then fire the shutter, to imprint my image to the digital world, where permanence is not ensured, and where, if I am unhappy with the outcome I can erase any trace of my findings and all points of reference. For my students this ability to erase and redo their work at the push of a button has much appeal and reflects their perception of an ever changing and ephemeral world. Nothing is permanent, move it, change it, put it up for consideration, and take it down. Things change.

My art making, like the art making of my students, is not linear. I am often frustrated, for example, when I am confronted with a raft of images, using different filters that alter my reality. My understanding of what I see before me is transported into another realm; distortion, manipulation and interpretation allow for choice and new ideas. At this point I am convinced that what sets the 'snapshot' apart from the art image is control and a conscious decision-making ability. And another revelation occurs to me – I have gained a new addiction. I want my camera with me all the time and I cannot stop looking and thinking in this new way.

I continue to traverse the Rivulet Track on my way to and from school, gathering more images that are to fuel my art practice and my digital learning. Each day I show the class my new images and share with them my new ideas and thinking.

My purpose is to create an understanding amongst these digital art making students of mine that there is more to creating a photo than the simple release of the shutter; that it is not that easy and that you need to understand the workings of the

camera, the technology and what the tools do. ‘You need to control and understand the media you are working with,’ I tell my students. ‘Once there is control then the artistic stupefaction can begin. Art creation is not just about getting a formula and repeating it, it is about an internal struggle, about the ability to think clearly and to struggle with ideas and interpretation.’ They look at me as they work away on their own art making. ‘It is these principles that are inherent within art making, and once this journey has been explored the clarity and consolidation takes shape,’ I opine. Some of them clearly see what I am on about. As one student, Jenn wrote in an art essay,

Anyone can take a photo, people do it every day, but the photos that are allowed to be classified as artwork are the ones that have a concept behind them. It takes less than a second to take a photo, but much longer to plan the picture. (Working paper: Senior Art Student, May, 2010)

It is this integral thinking that I believe makes art challenging and makes creative problem solvers and with luck provides a greater appreciation of the aesthetic nature of art.

Art requires an inherent appreciation and understanding of art principles like composition, technique, use of light, tone and contrast. It is a conscious questioning of these principles that resonates with traditional art making and provides students with a rite of passage to move forward in their creative learning and endeavours. I think back to another written reflection from Annie, a student nearing the end of the year of her art studies, who comments in her written portfolio,

I have ultimately needed to explore and develop certain skills such as composition, subject placement, the use of positive and negative space and the exploration into expression, creativity, the total encompassment of an emotion and strong colour palettes. Overall presentation is also very important so that the initial and conceptual

(deeper) appearances are visually powerful and appealing ... Therefore what I need to develop, in its most simple and essential form is: technique, expression, knowledge of interested medium and art process, conceptual ideas – stronger foundations and ... (Working paper: Senior Art Student, May, 2010)

It makes for a good feeling to read comments like this. I sigh with relief. It is a sign that what I am undertaking in class is filtering through. Such comments provide me with some further understandings and insight into my initial question – What is Art? This now leads me into the next chapter – Challenging.

The background is a highly textured abstract painting. It features dark, almost black, layered brushstrokes that create a sense of depth and movement. Interspersed within these dark areas are lighter, more vibrant colors, including shades of red, white, and grey. The overall effect is one of raw, expressive energy. The text 'CHAPTER 2' is centered in a clean, white, serif font. A thin, white, horizontal brushstroke is positioned below the number '2'.

CHAPTER

2

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Detail from: *Finding II, 'Glow'*, exhibition  
of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010



*Finding II, 'Glow', exhibition of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010*

## CHAPTER

# 2

### ***Challenging: the marriage of making and viewing***

So many issues pertaining to the role and value of the visual arts in education abound, that it is challenging to find an entry point into the discussion. The debates range through competing orthodoxies, discipline based art education, the place of aesthetics and art, the changing skill base and the transformation that is currently underway because of technology and its impact on art production. Frequently the discussions focus on the complex and critical interaction between making and viewing that is at the

root of learning in and through the visual arts.

I choose initially to explore this complex and critical interaction between making and viewing by drawing on an occasion from my classroom. Earlier in the year I instigated a class project to see how my photography students were progressing in thinking and developing their art practice and to gauge both their technical and image making abilities. To keep the theme of my findings on the Rivulet Track alive, I presented each student with a finding – leaf litter – from the track. My brief to them was to create a photographic image that included the leaf. I gave them this challenge: to create an image in one week. The choice of medium was at their own artistic discretion and they had all the technical resources they needed for the making: digital SLR cameras, computers, analogue cameras and a darkroom, scanners and photocopiers, as well as the full array of practical materials from the art studio. They also had, I believed, the technical understanding, the imagination to develop a concept, and the aesthetic knowledge to solve this creative puzzle. I sat back and observed them scribble in journals, research on the Internet and confront their frustrations. Some took to the scanners, others to digital cameras, but none took up the traditional analogue option. One hundred and ten minutes passed and the lesson concluded. I had witnessed some sound concept development and some great nascent ideas. It was now a waiting game to see the production of the work and later to appreciate and explore its purpose.

One week later we gathered in the class – the students had had some lesson time to complete the task, and this was to be followed by a critiquing session to present their finished image and to further explore the viewing, the understanding and the appreciating, in other words, the other side of the complex interaction of art making.

They all surrender their images to the class for appreciation and each student spoke of the image they had created – they had to address their idea, their technique and how they had made and created the work.

Most of the students used digital cameras without any further manipulation to the piece via the Photoshop. In other words they had composed and created the image through the camera and presumably they had felt that using digital manipulation was not going to enhance their image any further. Together we started to explore the strengths and the weaknesses of the work before us. Students spoke of the angles, the light, the viewpoint, the use of technical and creative controls of the camera – all words that are essential to the making, the appreciating and the understanding of the image as a piece of fine art. I then asked them to choose the one image out of the full collection that they felt was the most successful and then to share their thinking about this image.



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**Leaf in a construction site:**

This image with its strong concept was considered by the students as one of the most successful.

This image was considered by the group as one of the most successful, given that it had a strong concept, it was well composed, engaging and technically well handled. In this image the student has deliberately positioned a leaf into a building construction site. It is a digital black and white image with a focal point of the leaf. The leaf sits in the middle third of the portrait shaped image. The leaf is balanced on a scrap of iron that enters the frame on a diagonal from the lower left-hand corner. The piece of ironwork is mid-tones of grey and its smooth surface contrasts against the roughness of the surrounding rubble and landfill. The background is predominantly of sky with an impression of a galvanised fence imprinted, out of focus, over the skyscraper. The top frame of the fence provides a strong diagonal line that runs parallel with the iron strut. The delicate leaf shape sits vulnerably in this construction site, with the filigree outline of the leaf contrasting with the strong man-made aspects of the construction site.

The success of this image was highlighted by the students as they engaged with the image and started to break down how it was crafted. Comments that referenced the use of depth of field, focus, light and the angle of view were prevalent within the group and showed that the students were looking past the initial image to find a deeper meaning and intent. From these comments emanated a discussion about the juxtaposition of the leaf and the construction site and how that challenged the relationship of the leaf to the natural world. The students all spoke confidently about their appreciation of the image. I felt that they were able to comment, appreciate and express their interpretation of the work before them fairly competently given that they had also been performing as image-makers themselves. Some commented that they felt that technical knowledge had been essential for them to be able to competently convey their experiences as well as understand and appreciate art making.

This exploration of meaning with the students provides me with an insight into student thinking and confirms for me the importance for students of having a set of understandings, experience with the media, and a language to express and articulate their thinking about these principles. This vignette also sets the scene for me, as the students and I start to engage in exploring the role of the visual arts in the current educational climate. This example of the photography lesson highlights the importance of students' exploring and challenging their ideas, and concepts, and it illustrates part of the learning that is intrinsic to the exploring, crafting and refining of artwork. They are inherent in creating 'meaningful' imagery. For 'meaning' in artwork to be made, in my opinion, there needs to be a connection to art making as a form of expression. This idea is related to the 'human eros' (Alexander, 1995) and our desire to find meaning in our lives; a desire that is passionate and intentional.

In my pedagogical journey as I examine the role of the visual arts in education, I have been contemplating two interlinked key questions: 'Do the visual arts in their traditional form have a place in the contemporary curriculum?', and 'What impact is digital technology having on secondary students' art education and their preferred form of expression?'

With these two questions at the forefront of my thinking other important notions surface; they are linked to the role and value of art education and the impact of technology on art teaching. Observational evidence from all fields of human activity shows that today's technology and digital media provide a rich addition to the fabric of western culture. But as an art educator, committed to providing a sound education, I have to question whether such advances in technology and digital media are eroding

visual arts traditions, or if indeed, they enhance art education opportunities by adding another layer to the options that students might choose for their learning. Elliot Eisner in *Educating artistic vision* (1972) suggests that traditional skills, aesthetic understanding and self-expression are equally important for intellectual nourishment and authenticity in art making.

Earlier I touched on the work of Alexander (1995) whose writing concerns the human eros, an idea centered on the exploration of the human condition and our desire for meaning. Alexander continues on to comment that the loss of all meaning for the individual may generate a hopeless feeling leading to confusion and despair. The desire for purpose is an integral part of being human and one that provides, to my way of thinking, many challenges as we strive for direction and intention.

Art is about exploring, crafting and refining but it has a deeper purpose, it is the notion of art and its relationship with the human condition that is a fundamental precept of art making for me. In my own teaching practice creating a meaningful and ethical educational environment provides my students with an opportunity to engage with the purpose and meaning inherent in the art tradition. It cannot just be about making and viewing as the description of the leaf litter sessions with my students revealed.

It seems important to clarify at this point a number of the key aspects that support my philosophical understanding which includes some discussion about the human condition, possible interpretations of 'art' and how art making is connected to creativity and appreciation. What is also important to me is to investigate the ways that the role of technology in the art classroom has changed the human landscape forever.

To explore these key aspects I draw on my students' work and conversations, as well as academic literature.

I begin by exploring some of the key philosophical issues surrounding the role of art and its link to the human condition. The particular aspect of the human condition that interests me is the desire that human beings have to describe their lived experiences and express their ideas, feelings and understandings – a core part of art making. Thomas Alexander (1995) explores the idea of the human condition when he writes about the human eros. He says: 'My thesis is simple: we are erotic beings. Our Eros, however, is neither divine nor animal. It is distinctively human: we are beings who seek meaning imaginatively...' (p. 203). He explores the desire an individual has to live in a meaningful manner through the nature of action, culture, knowing ourselves, how we learn and grow, our relationship to experiences through aesthetics and finally our desire to exist in a world which has meaning and value. Alexander claims that words such as 'meaning' and 'value' are difficult to define precisely, but he believes that we seek fulfillment in order to have a rich existence and visual art is one central way to access value and richness. Alexander supports John Dewey's assertion that the fine arts, 'merely raise this dimension of experience to full consciousness ... human experience engages world and self primarily in the complexity of a pervasive aesthetic awareness: at each moment we are attuned to the world' (Dewey in Noddings, 1998, p. 206).

As Alexander reminds us, definitions are not always precise and when we attempt to define what art is we come up against similar tribulations. Thus to define art in its truest sense is difficult. My students struggle for clarity as they explore what art might be. They write in their journals comments such as 'Is art a form of escape that we use

to express ourselves creatively?’ and, ‘Must it incorporate a design, or artistic process?’ and, ‘Do we define art by the context of the artist or does it have to be beautiful and aesthetically pleasing to our eye?’ One student writes,

Art for me is a way of life, where beauty and thoughts intertwine in the mind and in artistic production. Art in this sense is truly inspirational; when a person loves art, breathes art and also creates their own art, they develop their own style. Art is something that makes some people more thoughtful and well-rounded human beings. (Working paper: Senior Art student, May, 2010)

I often turn to the *The New Oxford Dictionary* (1998) for definitions. One interpretation of art found in the dictionary is ‘the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power’ (p. 93). For me, the key words here are skill, imagination, and expression – words that are meaningful for art making and for art appreciation. Art making is about experiencing and understanding the relationships between colour, form, composition and rhythm. There is a key inter-relationship between skills, creativity and our human desire to express lived experiences and ideas. These key words might help to explain art in a social and a cultural context. At the same time we must also acknowledge and recognise that art making requires a command of technical skills and practical application as a means to enhance creative expression.

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in their most recent publication of the draft paper, ‘Shape of the Australian curriculum: The Arts’ (ACARA October 2010), provides a description of how we experience, engage or make sense of ‘The Arts’ overall. The paper posits,

We experience and engage in the Arts through sensory, cognitive and affective dimensions of perception. We make sense of the Arts within our three realms of experience which are, the realm of personal experience, the realm of our relation to other and the society we experience and, the realm of people, places, and objects that lie beyond our direct experiences. (ACARA, 2010, p. 4)

Like Alexander, ACARA suggests that ‘The Arts’ help us to interpret and make our life and experiences meaningful. One role of art is to make meaning of our lives, but a further role concerns art as a moral obligation. The late Susan Sontag refers to a shift in the role art plays in society and comments on the moral obligation of the artist. She refers to artists creating works and the need to consider the moral and ethical nature of what they produce as a social obligation to society. In her writing, *Against interpretation* (1966), Sontag also suggests that we look for meaning in art making and that art is not just something, but rather is something based on experiences. For me this resonates with the ideas of Alexander and Dewey. In the same way for most educators, I believe, teaching has a sense of moral obligation that carries with it the need to construct and teach a curriculum that is sound, considered and meaningful.

Stephen Law (2003) in *The philosophy gym*, discusses how to define art, by referencing Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) whom he quotes: ‘We should in principle be able to construct a formula that captures a more complex set of rules determining what is and isn’t art’ (p. 98). Law goes on to state that art is not necessarily defined by one common feature that is found in everything that is called art. There are two critical qualities that are required if something is to qualify as art. First, the piece must be an artifact – something that has been made and ‘worked on’. Wittgenstein used the term ‘worked on’ quite loosely and suggests that placing something into a gallery context

allows it to be considered as ‘worked on’. For example, take two objects such as a bucket and mop. In itself neither object can be considered to be art, but to place a bucket and mop into a gallery can transform them as artifacts according to Wittgenstein’s definition. Secondly, the artifact needs to be deemed by a member of the ‘art world’ as a piece of art where the ‘art world’ might include a person such as a gallery director, art writer, artist or collector. By way of example, Law describes a situation where a cleaner, in a modern gallery, had left a bucket and mop in a gallery space. Visitors to the gallery considered this art because it was in the gallery context. It would not, according to Law, qualify as an artifact for Wittgenstein as in this case it had not been verified by a member of the art world. Yet if an installation artist had left the bucket and mop in the gallery intentionally then the visitors would have been correct in considering it an artwork because the two key aspects of ‘worked on’ and validation by the ‘art world’ had been satisfied (Law, 2003, p. 101).

Law continues with this interpretation of Wittgenstein’s ideas and comments on the difficulty of defining art, saying

We have failed to capture what essentially is produced in part by the assumption that our ordinary everyday explanations of what we mean by ‘art’ are somehow inadequate, that they fail to penetrate to the essence of the phenomenon. (Law, 2003, p. 98)

To penetrate the phenomenon of art, and to unearth a richer understanding of what art might be, one needs to have knowledge and understanding of the different principles that constitute an artwork. These are naturally aligned to principles such as form, harmony, line and rhythm – principles that can most readily be understood through a sound art education. Law’s interpretation of Wittgenstein suggests that to understand art it is

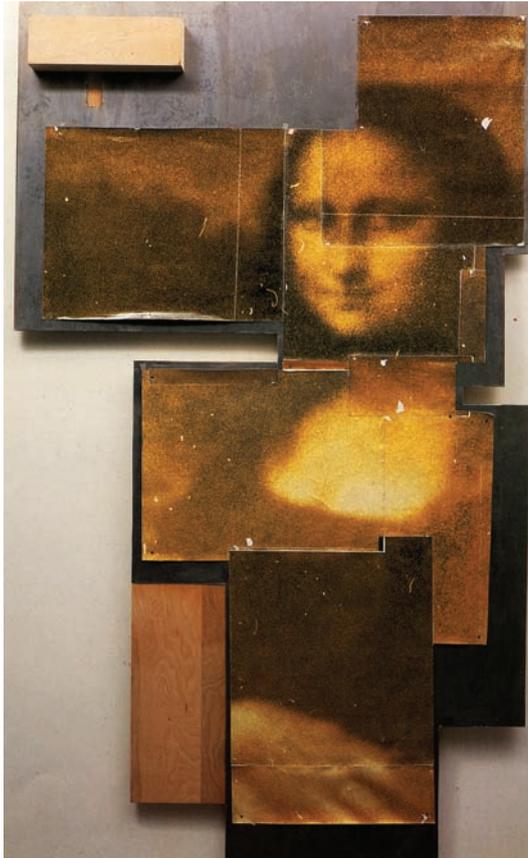
essential to be aware of the background, knowledge and history of art (Law, 2003, p. 98). It reminds us that to understand art it is essential to understand something of the history of art. Appreciation of art is derived from both the historical context of art and the ways that art movements have emerged and how these have in turn been influenced and are shaping new ways of thinking and seeing (Gombrich, 1996; Greenberg 2006). However, I suspect that *The New Oxford Dictionary* (1998) definition of art as ‘the expression and application of human creative skill’ approximates the layman’s idea of an interpretation art.

To explore the idea of creative expression I reflect again on my photography class and the Leaf Litter Project. At the conclusion of the discussion about the leaf litter images and what was good, what had worked and which images had weaknesses and so on, I proposed a challenge for the students. I asked them to provide me with the key words that they felt enhanced creative expression. I suggested to them that I wanted them to think about the words that married the making and the expressive characteristics. The words they came up with were: passion, originality, imagination, quality, composition, design and the ability to evoke emotions or to engage the viewer. These words affirm that at the forefront of a student’s mind, when they are creating an image, is their desire to creatively communicate an idea. This aspiration to communicate is then mediated through the student’s understanding and level of technique, in other words, the inter-relationship between skills, creativity and our human desire to express.

I explored these words and definitions further with my students. The students use the words quality, composition and design to evoke the idea of quality; the words imagination, passion and originality to express the notion of creativity and of evoking

emotions. These words are also connected to the concept of engaging the viewer and what I have referred to as our human desire to express. So my students, by talking about their art, are able to define the essence of art making. They also identify the importance of making meaning.

My teaching experiences have highlighted the necessity of the principles of technique and an understanding of aesthetics in creating an image that is engaging and purposeful. Recalling Eisner (1972), creativity is often seen as an innate part of the human condition and a precondition for art making; for students to make purposeful artwork they need to develop aesthetic understanding that enables intellectual nourishment and authenticity. This learning occurs through the students' exploration and art making experiences. This is then enriched as they become more conscious of these characteristics through self-reflection combined with purposeful teaching. This connection between the making and appreciating relates again to human eros – our desire, and the search for meaning which is intrinsic to the human condition. For me, a moral and ethical education is one that teaches the elements of art making and with that comes an appreciation of what constitutes goodness and meaning in art. This is achieved through learning and by understanding and appreciating the principles of aesthetics as a means to successfully capture an individual's changing sensibilities.




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The *Jagged Mona*: Mike and Doug Starn's iconic image of Mona Lisa. Aspects of the traditional image are placed into a new way of seeing and interpreting via digital technology.

How is technology having an impact on the art world more widely? An excellent example of the marriage of technology and art is seen in the work pictured here of the American photographers Mike and Doug Starn. Immediately we recognise the iconic image of the Mona Lisa. The piece is titled *Jagged Mona*, 1985–88 (Grunberg, 1990, p. 87). The Starn twins photographed parts of a reproduction of the image and deconstructed and reconstructed it into a modern construct. Essentially they have taken aspects of the traditional image and placed them into a new way of seeing and interpreting via digital technology. Through careful scrutiny of the image we can see that it seems that the image has been replicated and then torn and recreated to produce a very tactile and raw image. This new interpretation and appropriation of the painting changes the way that we see and interpret the da Vinci painting of Mona Lisa. The Starn brothers'

work allows for the image to be viewed in a new and contemporary context. One could well ask whether the Starns are actually challenging the high status of the painting or if they are indeed making the image more accessible to the everyday/contemporary viewer. This contemporary interpretation has enhanced the tactile qualities of the image by using glue, gaffer tape and a variety of different papers to rebuild the image. It is almost as though the precious Mona has been stripped bare of her perfection to allow us to appreciate her in another mode. The Starn interpretation of the painting is influenced by art history and is but one illustration that the relationship and connection to our Western art history allows for deeper consideration about meaning and art making.

Mike and Doug Starn have used technology and blended it with the most readily identifiable image in Western art history to create a challenging image. Historians such as Gombrich (1996), and Greenberg (2006) provide evidence that technology has always been present in the art world; art has evolved as artists are influenced by new technologies, skills, new concepts and different ways of interpreting the visual world and their lived experiences. In an historical context, art was a socio-cultural construct and embraced key studio areas such as painting, sculpture and ceramics. Traditionally art making shaped the visual arts historical narrative dependent on the market place and the intention and moral obligation of the artist. These purposes included art as storyteller, documenter, recorder, as well as means of capturing beauty for the mind's eye and to respond to the individual's lived experiences. Art was a means for the artist to capture beauty and truthfulness as well as being a sign of social class and distinction. As art making has evolved over time, so too has the way in which the work is viewed, experienced, created and changed.

Technology provides new ways for contemporary art practice to develop and to reflect modern ideas in ways that are more elusive than prescriptive. The Starn rendition of da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, requires the viewer to engage with the work on different levels and asks the audience to acquire the appropriate skills to seek interpretation and meaning: it requires the viewer to interpret symbols and experiences.

As the way art is experienced changes, there may be some potential ramifications for education, and how art is taught, seen and appreciated. I see negative possibilities that may include a loss of traditional skill and appreciation for the history and context of art, but on the other hand, it could open up new possibilities that will add a rich layer to art education if it is taught in a purposeful manner that embraces these potential new methods of making and viewing art. As an educator I am influenced by the way that my students crave technology; their yearning to be part of the technological world is exposing them to new possibilities and styles of art making. It is precisely these very aspects that are potentially the most relevant to the students' ways of seeing, understanding and learning. One student, Sophia, comments in her research paper that

As digital art advances and becomes more accessible to more people, so does the importance of Photoshop and its equivalents increase in the art world. There is, however, debate over the value of forfeiting traditional skills to this new format, with its comprehensive and versatile functions. (Working paper: Senior Art Student, November, 2010)

Sophia's young and passionate opinion, one that I believe she has developed from her desire to make meaningful art, says

The value of art that does not actually exist outside of a computer is questionable, as is the risk of losing precious technical skills to customised brushes. There is something profoundly different about

sitting and drawing and watching a computer screen, and while the nature of digital art is bright and exciting, it will never undermine the importance of ‘traditional’ methods. (Working paper: Senior Art Student, November, 2010)

For Sophia, the skilled manual practitioner, the art of handmade drawing is essential to her artistic practice. She acknowledges that technology is exciting, bright and interesting, but for her it will never undermine her attachment to the traditional methods.

As noted, developments in both the philosophy and production of art have historically led to diverse and new ways of approaching and experiencing visual media. Art by its very nature is about growth, and offering new directions for exploration. Caroline Derry (2005) in Mitchell, Weber & Reilly-Scanlon, quotes the writing of Williams and Bendelow (1998). They suggest,

Art, in its manifold forms, opens up wider possibilities for a critical celebration of embodied sensuality – one in which reason is no longer prioritized over emotion, and new ways of ‘being’, ‘seeing’ and ‘relating to the world ... can freely evolve. (Williams and Bendelow, in Mitchell et al., 2005).

These wider possibilities are perhaps illustrated in the way that artists have challenged new ideas and ways of working to develop new movements, styles and thinking. This was evident in the earlier example of the Starn reinterpretation of da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*. In this case, they embraced new modes of making art but still connected to historical content. This shows that the artist has the power to transform and be challenged by new technologies and possibilities. Likewise, the Impressionist painter Monét (1840–1926) was influenced by the ideas of the realists. Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) was influenced by the work of the Fauves. The timeline of art is about

developments, change and challenges and this is still a relevant part of art making today. Not only have these changes composed the history of art over time, but they have also led to a division between the fine arts and craft, or between art and non-art (Ruskin, in Kemp, 1992).

This distinction between art and non-art is always contentious and relates to the role that art plays in society depending on the time of its production and its intent. Martin Irvine (2011) writes about this distinction between art and its position against non-art. He posits the idea that all art media are subject to a value system from high art using oil paint through to modern materials such as acrylic paint and technology. He refers to this distinction as a complex and challenging nexus.

Traditionally, art was used as a way to render reality and held an elite place in society often being used as a means of indicating social status as well as being created for decorative or generic purposes (Gombrich, 1996). Even today, for some, art is merely a mode of entertainment or a 'pretty picture' thus reducing art back to a decorative functional form.

This distinction is relevant to this research as some earlier art forms were not considered 'fine art' if they were not linked to moral goodness or had artistic integrity. Essentially, if the work had a functional role to play, like creating a vessel for water, or a plate to hold fruit, it was not necessarily considered to be fine art, as it did not necessarily adhere to the principles of aesthetics, beauty or moral goodness (Irvine, 2011). This contest is contextual and still debated in contemporary art today with the resurgence of the craft market and with the development of technological and conceptual

based art. As traditions and values change so too do perceptions of the visual mode of communicating and how it is appreciated.

For the contemporary educator, new developments and challenges in art making, particularly through digital technology, and its production are of critical relevance in visual art education. The essence of art making in my opinion is to create strong and engaging work that is meaningful. For this to happen I believe that students need to be introduced to the method of questioning, challenging and connecting to their ideas, art history and the principles of art making. I want to be able to assist students to make distinctions between art that has aesthetic and artistic properties and art that has not. I believe these factors are essential if a well-rounded and informed art education is to be created and taught.

In my thinking and reading about the role and value of the visual arts in education I have wrestled with the various debates and challenging orthodoxies of how we understand art and the various art principles inherent in art making. I have gained a richer understanding of technology and how it is used as a means to make art. I have reached this point by engaging with my students, their challenges and their thinking, and by reflecting on this in the broader art context with work like the Starn brothers'. Now I need to consider the third aspect of what I have called the exploratory element of connecting. It is about connecting creativity, meaning and making art.

An abstract painting detail featuring a complex interplay of black, white, and red. The composition is dominated by dark, textured areas of black and charcoal grey, which are punctuated by bright, expressive strokes of white and vibrant red. The brushwork is visible, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is one of dramatic contrast and emotional intensity.

CHAPTER

3

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Detail from: *Finding III*, 'Glow', exhibition  
of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010



*Finding III, 'Glow', exhibition of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010*

## CHAPTER

# 3

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### *Connecting: in which understanding art occurs inside and outside the classroom*

The Rivulet Track has become a place where I instinctively let my thoughts run freely. Because of the on-going nature of my work, I find myself thinking about new ways of broadening my own understanding of the complex issues that surround my inquiry. I know that from my own perspective as an art educator I want everyone to have an art education, to be involved in the practical act of making and creating as I believe that the production of artworks allows individuals to gain a unique perspective and begin

to gain an aesthetic understanding, but I want to know more about what others think. I decided to turn to the writing of Plato, Tolstoy and other philosophers to consolidate my knowledge. This search for clarity provokes me to gain some philosophical insights pertaining to the role of art and its connection to the human condition. I want to know what makes art extraordinary. I need to explore the capacity of art to unleash emotion, its ability to connect to beauty, its power to illuminate the world from different perspectives and its unique capacity to evoke a response and make meaning. I want to consider why creativity is so closely aligned to art making. These musings provide an impetus for further inquiry into the relationship between creating and making meaning, which is my intention in this third chapter. The autumn is upon us, the track is preparing for winter, and it seems like a good time for me to begin some serious reading as the days become shorter and the nights longer, providing time for reading and reflection. I am going to get connected to some of the other writers who have wondered about the same problems.

But for the moment, in the art classroom I am sitting and waiting for my senior art class to arrive. I have planned the beginning of the lesson as a time for a discussion about some artists' work. I want to engage their minds by looking at how other artists develop ideas, skills, exist meaningfully and how they are influenced by the world around them.

Alexander (1995, p. 203) suggests that we seek to exist meaningfully and to 'find meaning imaginatively' and that this is an essential part of human nature and central to human existence. Thinkers throughout the generations have expressed similar views, for example, the relationship between art and the human condition is

illuminated in a translation of Leo Tolstoy writing by Almyer Maude in an excerpt from *What is art?* (1930),

We cannot fail to observe that art is one of the means of intercourse between man and man. Art essentially asks the receiver to enter into a certain kind of relationship both with the artists, the art, and with all those who, simultaneously, previously, or subsequently, receive the same artistic impression. Tolstoy (in Maude, 1930, p. 47)

Many stakeholders in the literature of art essays, amongst them Plato and Tolstoy, propose that art is linked to the human condition, moral goodness, beauty and freedom of expression. These words for me suggest that there is an unspoken dialogue in art making that engages and creates an experience for the viewer. This engagement is a connection between artwork and personal experience. For art to exist as Tolstoy suggests, there needs to be more than the marriage of colour and pattern to make an artwork meaningful for the audience.

Plato (sited in Alexander, 1995), investigating the relationship between art and the human condition, implied that art is entwined with human existence and that the role and value of art is more than a practical expressive act, indeed, that it is an essential and innate part of what it is to be human.

In the *Handbook of research and policy in art education*, Adam Smith (2004) guides us through an interpretation of Plato's theory about moral virtue or goodness. Smith's interpretation discusses Plato's idea about patterns being associated with the structure of the physical universe has a significant contribution to make to the creation and appreciation of art, which have identified certain laws of the physical universe such as harmony, proportion, balance, and rhythm; attributes that are also key conventions

connected with the making of art. These principles are linked, in turn, to the physical universe and to the human condition. Smith's interpretation affirms Plato's position that these laws are exemplified not only in the phenomena of nature but in all living things and thus recommends art as a fundamental element of teaching for the young (Smith, 2004, p. 165).

Any contemporary discussion about art education will undoubtedly have some association with the notion of creativity (Eisner, 1972; Robinson, 2001). It is difficult to conceive of art without linking it to the idea of creativity in some respect and yet it appears that this notion of creativity is something of a modern construct. In my readings of Plato, I note his philosophical position about 'new ideas' but I am somewhat intrigued to find no mention of 'creativity' used by Plato in any of his writings on education. I do a search on the Internet to see if my hunch is right. While the Internet may not be infallible the search confirms my view.

The word 'creativity' and its meaning appears to have evolved as time has passed. The word appears to have numerous interpretations. There are many synonyms for the word 'creative': ingenious, clever, prolific, innovative, gifted, inspired, inventive, original, stimulating (*The Oxford Thesaurus*, 2000, p. 202). But what does this word mean in our common usage? We might often find the word 'creativity' associated with ways to activate our own creativity through problem solving, to think differently rather than relying on old ideas, and to 'think outside the square'. For example, authors such as Edward De Bono (2010) and Ken Robinson have written on interpreting and acting on creativity. I found the following comment from Robinson on the Internet, a contemporary resource for educators and researchers as well as for my students. Robinson references this when he asserts,

Encouraging creativity means encouraging departure from society's existing norms and values. Creativity's main goal is to question old ways and to find new and better ones, which is not always fitting to the world we live in; Conformity and creativity run in separate directions. (Robinson, 2010)

For me creativity leads an individual to think differently, to see the world through different lenses, to become innovative, to become a problem solver, make connections and indeed to create new perceptions of the world.

Peter Abbs (1989) says that creativity is the condition of our existence in that it is an everyday and common possession even at its highest level and at the same time it is an extraordinary attribute (Abbs, 1989, p. 20). 'Extraordinary' is not an exclusive domain, for as he suggests, creativity is 'not an esoteric power belonging only to exceptional individuals, but an innate power, part of our biological inheritance, part of what it is to be human' (p. 4).

Considering these insights, creativity in essence, for me, is about deciphering codes and natural symbols in the world and the relationship that exists in the conscious, preconscious and the unconscious. The ways in which some individuals think, sequence and connect information, are part of our primitive and habitual nature and constitutes some features of innate creativity. To enable creativity there needs to be a constant seeking of possibilities and thoughts so that new ideas can be developed and brought into play.

Abbs (1989) says that everyone is innately creative and many of my students have the creative capacity to use materials and tools to make art, but I love to push the

idea of encouraging lateral thinking. Avery McNiff (1992) in Catherine Derry's (2005) chapter 'Self-study, through memory and body', also resonates with my thinking. McNiff 'believes that artistic images can expand communication and offer insight outside the scope of reasonable thinking' (p. 27). My students are deadened with, and by, logic it seems to me. In class I give them two minutes of creative thinking time. 'I want to hear three creative solutions to this problem. You have twenty-four hours to get a piece of your art work into The Louvre.' Sometimes they just look at me, and too often they do not want to make suggestions in case they are 'wrong'. But some enjoy the game and the creative procedure. I want them to truly capitalise on their innate creativity. The nurturing of creativity provides one of the real challenges for me as an art teacher.

I am sitting in the photography studio briefing the students on the leaf litter project. I take some time to sit back and watch them explore and develop ideas and to develop some connections. First, we talk about brainstorming and mind mapping to bring alive initial thoughts and concepts – to take the smallest kernel of an idea and to build on it, pushing it past the preliminary stages.

The most interesting aspect of my observation for me is to consider the differences between students with some background in art making compared with the novice students. I watch the students who have an art background start to immediately discuss and explore options. For others, who are new to the study of the visual arts, it is a struggle to gather any immediate thought patterns. This leads to comments like – 'This is hard', 'I can't do this', and 'What can I do?' One student, Brooke, who has long been making art and appreciating it at home and at school, starts immediately exploring options. There is a great energy to her thinking and a desire to start exploring

and responding to the task. She shows confidence and develops thumbnail sketches that represent ideas; she considers compositional aspects that allow for further experimenting. Another student, Bec, really struggles to build any initial ideas, but once shown some simple techniques including scanning and other basic camera skills, her confidence starts to build, and she can see some possibilities emerging for her. Her exploration is tentative but with a few further creative guidelines her ideas start to formulate. Her tentative behaviour, she acknowledges, comes from her inability to understand the principles of art and how to use materials and the technology to get results. Her lack of knowledge about technology and technique are a significant barrier for her at this stage, but with some basic understanding of the scanners, cameras and software, I know that Bec will gain some skills to start to explore her creativity – and the freedom which might allow her to see other opportunities and ideas. Initially, her results are primarily executed purely on chance and random art making but it allows her the opportunity to develop her thoughts and her conscious behaviour.

And so my class continues their art exploration, and I continue my inner exploration. The influence and appreciation of using technology in art production has increased the number of students using technology as a vehicle for art expression. I often hear students comment and say, ‘I can’t draw’, ‘I don’t want to make a mess’, and ‘Digital photography is easy’, as rationales for them adopting technology as their primary creative medium. This is particularly evident with the rising popularity and use of digital photography as an art form. Christopher Allen (2010) writes in an article ‘Through the lens darkly’ that,

The practical making or use of materials to create art is decreasing  
... devices can now take digital images capable of transmitting them

instantly. Young people, especially, mimic the larger economy of the image that surrounds them on every side. (Allen, 2010, p.11)

Technology seems to be facilitating a new way for students to be creative, providing new possibilities to capture images and the students are grasping these opportunities in an unprecedented rush. From my own experiences in the classroom, digital cameras, the computer and manipulation software are becoming the dominant art making tools.

I am concerned that creativity might be a casualty in the front line of technology, particularly in the art classroom where students are seduced by a ‘click and use’ mentality. I fear that technology can provide students with an impression that they are being ‘creative’, but really, capturing imagery via digital means allows for a vicarious use of an image with little consideration by the student of the moral, ethical and aesthetic dimensions in art making. This is a challenge for me as I want my students to understand that for art to be ‘good’ there needs to be some evidence or demonstration of an understanding of different art principles. It is important for me to ascertain if my students have deciphered the codes of practice of their chosen art medium for their idea and skill level to be developed and explored.

I feel my concerns are reflected in the Tasmanian Qualification Authority Chief Examiner’s Assessment Report of 2010. This report pertains to the assessment of the course that my students have been undertaking this year. Dr Wayne Brookes, Chief Examiner, comments that, ‘Photography’s domination appears to be supported by the belief that success is ‘easier’ to achieve digitally due to the so-called technical ‘ease’ that the digital age affords.’ He continues, ‘traditional compositional and technical dynamics have faded into mere mediocrity’, and that ‘... the “art content” in some cases has

been eliminated’, and that ‘... darkroom [analogue] photography has almost passed into mythology’ (Tasmanian Qualification Authority, 2010).

Brooke and Bec are both interested in expression and creating meaning. Bec is a dancer and her interest in photography comes from her exposure to dance photography and theatre. Brooke is confident, shows an understanding of art terms and I sense, from our discussions, that there are many ideas developing in her mind; other ideas are bouncing around arising from her initial investigation that provide other possible ways for her to produce more work based on this theme. Bec on the other hand has just started to develop her art vocabulary and is more comfortable with using basic techniques. She is reluctant to engage with the group about her work and not yet ready to participate in the discussion at any higher level. She lacks confidence because of her basic level of technical knowledge and she is not yet able to explore creative possibilities because of her limited background in the area. This will inevitably change as her knowledge base strengthens and she gains experience in the understanding and possible meanings of art.

I worry, too, that creativity is not the only casualty of the digital invasion into the art classroom. Is it a coincidence, or is technology a cause of what I observe as a shift in the students’ attitude away from engaging with the traditional language and vocabulary that underpins the visual arts foundation? Is it just me or is there an estrangement of students from art history, language and foundational principles? Do they see these elements as relevant to their contemporary practice? I am buoyed by the engaged and thoughtful students who develop their own work to a high standard, where it is both competent and conceptually sound, and where there exists an awareness that a

connection to these principles does, in fact, allow them to create cohesive and successful works. I have watched students connect to aesthetic understandings as part of their learning perform markedly better in external examinations than students who choose to remain dispassionate about this area of knowledge. The students who connect with, and reflect on, their artistic practices are those who succeed. I have watched them develop a desire to explore and question the ideas and technical aspects of art making. This allows for an aesthetic attitude to be acquired, one that underpins the creation of work and suggests understandings of why the work has been created.

Understandings of aesthetics have long been essential parts of what was once considered a ‘good’ art education. Acknowledgement of aesthetics is part of critical analysis, reflective judgment based on experience, or as Noddings suggests from Dewey’s knowledge, it is important because of its ‘pervasive quality’ (Dewey in Noddings, 1998, p. 162). I like to work with my students to explore the field of aesthetics from both a philosophical and educational perspective to create awareness in them of art making that connects the visual arts to its *raison d’être*. I find this helps them to develop a positive attitude to art while at the same time creating some guidelines to assist in understanding the visual arts. I am not alone in making the assertion that the formal study of aesthetics is important. Harry Broudy (1988) suggests,

... It must be shown that aesthetic experience needs formal study for its development and refinement, and that such study has to take place in the school rather than through attendance at artistic events. In addition, if art education is to have membership in the required list of subjects it must be shown that a sequential curriculum can be constructed and that it is teachable to the normal range of intelligence, and finally, that it can be evaluated, even if not measurable by standard instruments. (Broudy, 1988, p. 173)

Knowledge of aesthetics enables a learner to see value in and understand art making, giving them some authority to discern between good and bad practice. I know that it is my own prejudiced position which causes me to rail against teachers who allow students to create artworks purely on inherent creativity without any knowledge of the key principles, such as design, composition, appreciation of beauty and form. It is in these arenas that the credibility and integrity of the subject is compromised. I am a strong believer in teaching technique and context to my students. I think it is part of my moral obligation as an art educator to provide an awareness of aesthetics that is essential so that my students understand and develop appropriate skills to fully express their ideas.

I arrange a visit to a nearby artist's studio. I want them to experience how an artist works. I want them to observe at first hand that this contemporary visual artist who may appear at first to work directly and intuitively will in fact demonstrate some point of reference to the tradition of the chosen medium. I hope they will recognise without too much input from me that essentially there is some connection to the artist's creative achievements that reflect learning and identification with art making.

We arrive and the artist talks to the students about his work. He pulls out a range of work that spans the last ten years. He describes to them his artistic journey and comments on how his ideas have evolved and grown. His work is beautiful; it is detailed, realistic, ironic, humorous. I watch the students interact with him, starting to be comfortable enough to ask questions and delve into his life and work. I can see they are making a connection, however big or small, and recognising that through the artist's journey he has continued to explore, and refining how he can continue to illuminate his

ideas in paint. I am pleased too, that providing this experience has helped my students and allowed them to see at first hand that understanding the history of the work can bring it into a new and more referential context. This relationship can make for a richer learning experience. In many ways this correlation makes the appreciation of the work more convincing and purposeful.

It is important for me that my students have an appreciation of and see the importance and value of research to provide a background to art making. It provides for a potentially richer experience for learning. It is my role to provide opportunities to deeper understanding and to help my students make connections that will lead to innovation and transformation. This idea is reinforced by Abbs (1989) who writes, ‘... creativity is about the transformation between innovation, creation and recreation and the received and the renewed’ (p. 20).

Exploring an artist’s journey and their premise for making art is enriched by a referential context. The students are encouraged to establish connections with artists’ work, to show researching and the gathering of information as a way to understand how an artist develops and expresses ideas. In my recent experience the ability to educate the students in the art principles from an artist’s perspective has cross benefits.

I have worried myself with the concern that the development of technology and its impact on the art curriculum has the potential to erode the traditional skill and knowledge base. At the same time, I am beginning to take a more optimistic stance and see that there is enormous promise for a potentially new set of skills, appreciation, and understandings of art to develop.

I work on my own art practice, sometimes alone in the art studio, or at home, and it is providing me with an opportunity to explore new technology. It is opening up so many new ideas and ways of applying new skills to my own practice both to create photographs and to gather images to use for inspiration.

Technology is providing me with a set of new tools, skills and devices that allow new possibilities to be explored, and I am seeing my students express themselves as creative young artists. I am beginning to see that at the heart of this new contemporary art culture there is an awareness and connection with new ways of seeing and expressing. Technology has so many roles in today's learning institutions and it plays a pivotal part in the fabric of society. It appears to be becoming a more widely accepted and often a preferred medium for learning and creative expression in visual arts education, particularly with my senior secondary students. I am beginning to finally 'get it'. But using technology in art production will undoubtedly present me with a set of ethical questions about the role of traditional learning and the teaching of artistic conventions that shape and frame different studio areas of art learning.

Technology is providing me with many new challenges about how I define what art actually is and how it is utilised meaningfully by my students in their everyday culture and in their learning. My exploration has led me to see that technology provides a new vehicle for innovation, liberation and expression. I remember Alexander and Dewey's notion of education as a means for growth and innovative thinking.

I have been hard at work building the skill set of my students in the art classroom as the basis for competence and understanding. I want them to gain refinement and

understanding of technique and it worries me that it is these very aspects in the traditional art forms that are diminishing. I am not certain whether it is the rise of technology or the view that self-expression takes prominence over skills and the study of aesthetics that is to blame. I will keep pondering this and doing my part to stem the skills flow. But what seems undeniable is that this current trend is indicative of the cultural climate, which this generation inhabits. What also seems undeniable is the need for me to assess, review and evaluate the value of what I teach, to make it as relevant and meaningful an experience as I can. The ability to immerse students in the skills required to create art and make meaningful work comes from my ability to build sound connections and relationships at two levels – the art making and art appreciating.

I have done my best to create a relationship with my students, and I have given them many opportunities to explore, challenge, question and connect. I am working on my preparations for my own set of paintings, and now the stage is set for the full exploration of the second element of art making – the crafting of the work.

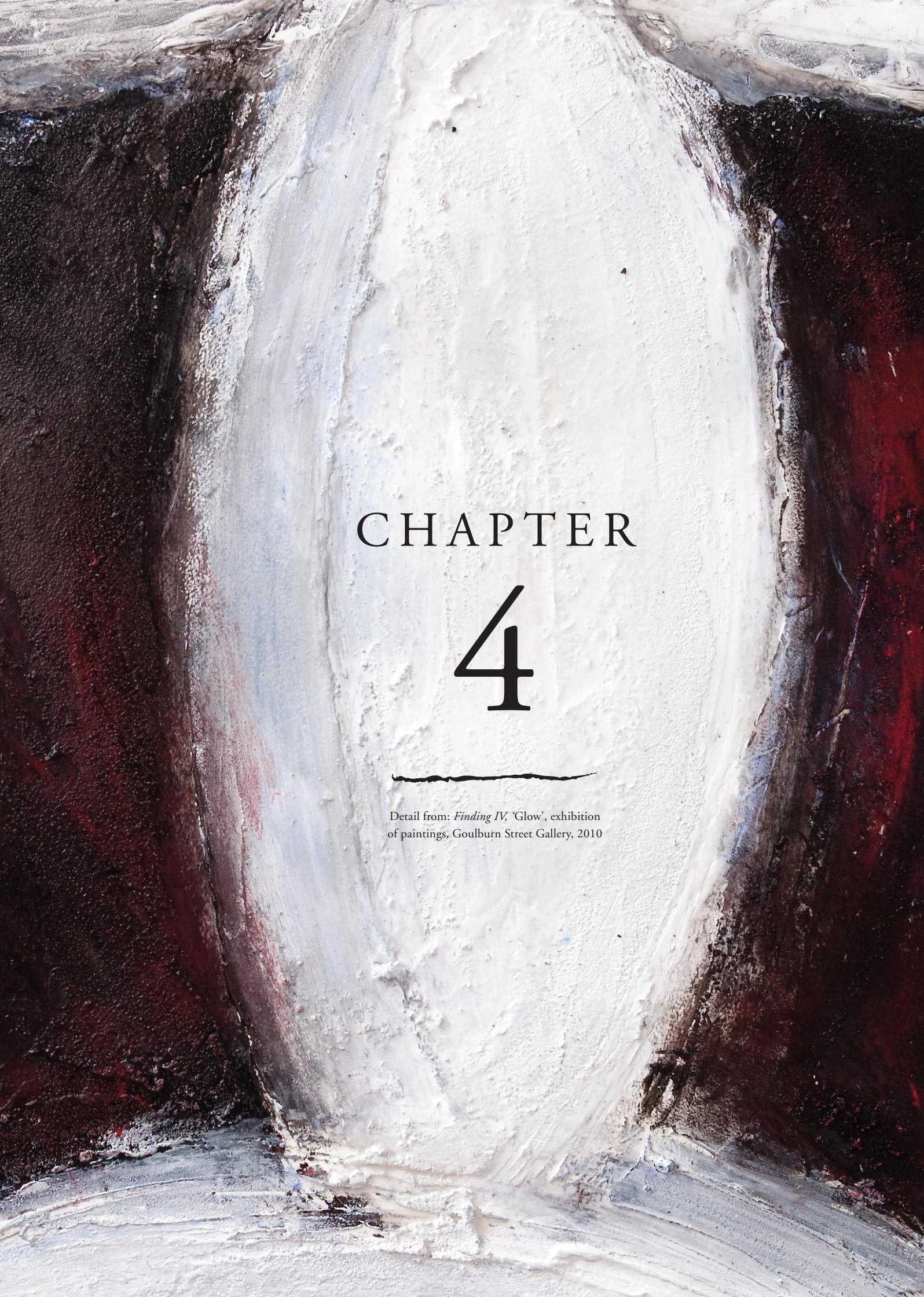


ELEMENT  
two



*Crafting: discovering, constructing, persevering*

Details from: *Finding IV, V and VI, 'Glow'*, exhibition of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010



CHAPTER

4

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Detail from: *Finding IV*, 'Glow', exhibition  
of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010



*Finding IV, 'Glow', exhibition of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010*

## CHAPTER

# 4

### *Discovering: in which students see the light*

It is three-thirty in the afternoon and it has been another busy day in the classroom. The final bell has gone and there is tranquility – the radio is off and the constant hum of chatter has dissipated. Before I begin my walk home I take a seat in the classroom and focus on the surroundings out the window – leaves are beginning to settle on the lawn and the sun beams into the art room, it really is delightful! As I am predisposed to do, I start to reflect on my preparation for tomorrow – I reach for my pad of green sticky

notes and embark on my list of tasks: mark essays, respond to emails, organise supplies and clean up ready for tomorrow.

While I am deliberating about these things, out of the corner of my eye a piece of work distracts me by demanding my attention. The digital image, created by one of my more capable art students, has just come off the Designjet photo printer and has been hung in the studio space. I have watched this image change and evolve on the computer screen over the last few weeks – watching the original photograph reinterpreted into a digital painting. The student, Lizzie, and I have talked about this image in class, looking at options and creative possibilities. Lizzie has reflected on our conversations and made changes that she felt enhanced her concept and intent.

It is these conversations with students that really engage and excite me as they illuminate for me that artistic thinking is in place and that the students are transitioning their thoughts into making ‘art’ and not just ‘colouring in’; it signifies to me that each one is beginning the discovering, the constructing and persevering of their artistic practice. We find that the origin of the word *discover* suggests that we ‘make something known’. For my students the active role of discovering is to seek out and explore ideas as part of discovering. From this sense of discovery my students can start making decisions and thinking about what looks ‘good’ considering how to enhance their own practice.

As we approach the second half of the school year, I start to see my students move beyond their basic learning and application of skills. Most of them are now crafting and discovering what will give their work aesthetic integrity and purpose – I do love this time of the year when their folios start to consolidate. I begin to witness the hard work,

the questioning and the challenging of ideas starting to accrue rewards and personal achievement. It is these moments that punctuate my day and energise me. It is a time when the self-questioning of my place in art education momentarily dissolves. Oh, but I digress into my head again – back to Lizzie’s image.




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**Lizzie’s digital painting:** The portrait is no longer on the computer screen as a bunch of lines, marks, digital bits and bytes, but rather the portrait exists in an ingenuous form.

I can hear you ask: ‘What is it a picture of?’ It is a digital portrait painting that represents one of Lizzie’s peers. She has rendered her friend in loose digital paint strokes. Half the face is lighter and less detailed while the other half is realistic and has more form. This image haunts me, seducing me to engage with the different idiosyncrasies of the person. The portrait is no longer on the computer screen as a bunch of lines, marks, digital bits and bytes, but rather the portrait exists in an ingenuous form – it has finally become an artifact, a tangible piece of art that hangs on the wall waiting for a reaction and response.

I spoke about Lizzie in Chapter 1. At that time she was at a crossroad in her artistic practice. She had spent time experimenting and exploring drawing and rendering portraits in chalk but equally, skilled with digital tools, she is now considering digital drawing as her primary medium for her art making. Lizzie has made that transition and is now channelling her energy to discover and to gain a richer understanding of this artistic area.

I continue to be enthralled by Lizzie's digital image and its ability to resonate with me. The face emerges from a pristine white, almost clinical, background with a small yet not insignificant barcode located at the bottom of the half-drawn shoulder. The A1 size face, set in the middle of this stark white chasm of paper is larger than life. It scrutinises me, as I ponder my list of jobs and the day past.

The photograph of Lizzie's friend has been transmogrified past a mere copy of a photograph, as it now has features that allow for further discernment. It invites questions like: 'Why the barcode?' and 'Why is only half the face present and complete?' or 'Why is one eye clear and the other one a dark hole that hides behind her spectacles?' and allows for further questioning about the making of the image and the artist's intent.

I continue to be completely distracted by the face that is surrounded by white space. I have to admit that I admire Lizzie and her work. I think back to the beginning of the year and remember her first handmade drawing marks on the 200gsm brown paper; the way she worked with her pencils and her hesitancy and reluctance to take any risks for fear of failure or mucking it up. She has certainly come a long way throughout

the year. Through discovery Lizzie has now become an adept digital painter and handles the drawing tablet and Photoshop as if by second nature. She started the year creating images via traditional image making techniques including drawing; struggling with paint and the inability to control the canvas space. She was really frustrated and this was becoming evident by the marks that she made, her easily distracted nature in class and her desire to leave work unresolved. Lizzie then turned to her passion for technology and started digital drawing – inspired by and connected to numerous illustrators and graphic artwork on the Internet and by the world of visual culture. At the beginning of Lizzie’s digital art making period I was concerned that her images might become superficial and a mere copy of the original photograph that she used as her reference. I was hoping that her images and skills would not waste away into a world of shallow digital art making and become digital printouts with no artistic soul, meaning or integrity. I was concerned that digital technology was just seducing her or perhaps allowing her to take an easy way out.

Gosh, I look at the clock face on the wall – is it really four forty-five? Time has continued to fly and I struggle to refocus on my list making, but I keep asking myself, ‘What is it that makes digital technology so appealing to these young learners?’ ‘Are they just being seduced by this digital phenomenon?’ After all it is easy, no mess to clean up; mistakes are easily erased with the click of a button. It is a special way to make art when they can just download an image and then draw over the top. But what is the special appeal, particularly to a student who has amazing drawing skills, like Lizzie? Initially I had thought it was a waste of her natural ability and that she was not being true to herself and her artistic sensibilities and I feared that she would not investigate and explore other artists and their work and develop her natural talent because she was

using this media. Today, several months since Lizzie made this strong transition to the digital realm, I must say, I do now respect and appreciate her skills and ability. This transition has transpired following a period of questioning and realisation. However, not all students are like Lizzie, passionate about her art making and the quality of her images, keen to master the composition, the purpose and the technical proficiency. Lizzie possesses skill and ability so she can take risks and explore the ideas open to her. Her ability to make, question and appreciate is evident in her work.

At this juncture, I start to mentally scroll through the students in my class who work in the digital workspace. I create a visual image of their work and I consider their individual approaches and their attitude to their art making. Yes, some are just seduced by the application, the apparent ease, the cosmetic applications, while others are embracing and struggling with making art that surpasses the application of filters and snapshot photography. I continue to visualise the students' work and conjecture what they would have done before the advent of technology with its inherent capabilities. Would they be studying Art as a subject at all, or has the rise of technology given a 'free pass' to some students who want to take some 'snaps' and download them onto the computer. My students fall into a continuum of success, on one end Lizzie, and perhaps at the binary end, someone like Jane.

I think of Jane, who has done next to nothing all year. When I reiterated today that she was not going to pass her art examination due to lack of work and commented that her ability to connect to iPhoto, download images and print them out was not really going to 'cut the mustard' – not make the required standard – she seemed somewhat confused and muddled. Her direction was lost; she had no real idea of what

was happening. Right, I thought, we need a plan and one that will sneak her over the line at the time of assessment – fingers crossed. A crash course in technique, focus, discipline and artistic direction was needed. My words of concern suddenly had more impact for Jane with the recognition that failure was imminent. I was not told to ‘stop stressing’ – I think that the tide had turned! Jane had been lured by the idea of digital photography but the work that she produced had no integrity, there was no craft, no risk taking, no sense of connection, no meaning, no sense of self, no desire to find out more, and certainly no creativity in her practice.

At the heart of Jane’s dilemma was that she had not taken the time to discover and connect with her idea, nor any immediate influences. Unfortunately, she had not developed a passion for her art making, not connected with her chosen medium, and her crafting skills were not strong. Jane’s images were executed quickly and they had no consistent sense of design or technical proficiency. At the end of the year examination, she received a borderline pass that was reflective of my ongoing concerns.

So what is this technology and digital art making all about? Throughout this inquiry I have come to acknowledge, through my own artistic explorations, that I have been somewhat seduced by its artistic and creative potential. My experimenting with technology is gaining proficiency and suddenly there are more aspects at play, more things for me to consider, including the role of manipulation, how my images are crafted, as well as my decision-making. It is these facets that I will continue to challenge as I construct my own images. Producing art for exhibition is a vexing yet liberating experience. There is a feeling of vulnerability, when you are learning and discovering – a nervous and anxious feeling that is at times overwhelming. By putting myself on the

metaphorical ground level with my students, one of the valuable realisations I have made through my artistic journey is understanding more clearly some of their frustrations and the pleasure they feel when they discover new techniques. I am loving what I am doing and want to find out more. I am being seduced too!

As part of my inquiry I am currently working on a body of work for exhibition. This exhibition is born from my experiments with digital photography. I have spent many hours wandering the track investigating and gathering objects or findings and taking photographs to launch my creative development. These initial findings have been my guide and inspiration. These photographic images are pinned to the little notice board in my office; the board is full of ideas, artists' names, scribbles and my photos. Having them there reminds me of my constant questions around technology and art making.

To begin my art making using technology I explore, investigate and begin to discover why I am intrigued by these snippets that I have captured from the track. My initial ideas are starting to translate into a host of scribbles in my journal using the digital images as my catalyst.

Like Lizzie, I had taken the photographs and started to reinterpret the images into another realm of thinking. I acknowledge that I need to take some risks, make mistakes, rework areas, seek further guidance and inspiration from artists as well as meet my frustrations both technically and conceptually. This is what making art is all about – it is the hard work, the risks, the reinterpretation of, and connection to imagery, combined with the extension of ideas and skills that makes art for me.




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**Digital image for inspiration:** This particular digital image appealed to me, as the leaves and sticks appear to be inlaid into the earth.

I have taken ideas from the digital image and used them as the foundation for my work. This particular digital image appealed to me as the leaves and sticks appear to be inlaid into the earth. They are connected to the surface of the Rivulet Track like jewels embedded in a crown. The dark edge around the image leads the viewer's attention to the small fragments captured in the image. The stick serves as an arrow guiding the eye toward the leaves. My exploration with the digital camera is the inspiration for my work and my paintings evolve as I evaluate and connect with different parts of the landscape. I am engrossed with different aspects of the landscape; miniscule fragments like rocks, and leaves that evolve into metaphors and symbols of my artistic impression. This allows me to interrogate what these shapes mean to me. I recall the words of Christopher Allen who maintains, 'Artists look for truth in different places ... for some it is found in the minutiae of the everyday or the nuances of everyday experiences' (Allen, 2010d, p. 11). It is these inconsequential nuances, or subtle differences, that I find in the landscape that engage and allow me to critique and expand on my artistic concepts.

The problem solving and further discovery continues for me when the initial preparatory drawing and the thin glazing of pigments start to be applied to the paper. Initially, I consider the surface of the shapes and how that can be translated into the paintings. I ruminate how to best apply the powdered natural ground colours with mediums, how to rub them back so that the forms emerge from the paper. It was now my time to forge creative decisions about where to place objects, what to bring forward, what to make recede, how to incorporate the horizon line and what feelings I can evoke through my mark making and design. These aspects are all imperative for me at this stage before I can start constructing my images.

When I initially took the photographs I crafted the composition through the viewfinder. I considered the relationship within the digital canvas and then allowed the camera and its filters do the rest – in many ways I accredited the camera to provide me with pre-ordained options. But with my paintings it is me who has paramount control and I am responsible for the outcomes, enabling me to take that so-called ‘reality’ or what Allen refers to as the ‘truth’ of the natural world and reconstruct it into a new realm. I know that I hold the power to deconstruct it and reconstruct it as a recollection in time and space.

The creation of art permits me to discover, interpret, question and engage with my own ideas, about how I muse about art and how I teach. In many ways it is a sounding board for frustrations and discoveries. It allows me to challenge my thinking about my own artistic practice. I grapple with the meaning I want to convey and share through my artwork.

My students are part of my art making journey as they watch me confront my own artistic frustrations. It is nice, at times, to work alongside them rather than just talk to them about ideas. They can appreciate that artists constantly grapple with image making – that it is a constant desire, exploration and thinking to find meaning for self-expression.

When I think about the journey of art making and the idea of recreating reality and manipulating space and time I return to my conundrum with technology. I cannot help but muse over Photoshop, and other such software, that through its language holds onto its connection to traditional conventions of art making and photography. Tools have been placed into the toolbar of these programs that allow you to paint, draw, dodge and burn, and these are all references and links to traditional painting and the old conventions of the photographic mode of working. It is in many ways a nice link to the art tradition and the analogue photographic style of working, providing a tenuous connection to art making and its history. In many ways Photoshop gives an instant yet insipid understanding of these traditional methods without the connection to the darkroom or the application of paint to a tangible surface. Heaven forbid my students might want to experience the real thing! This digital art making becomes a simulated experience of the darkroom and artist's studio and their magical offerings.

As I ponder and continue to think about the class and their use of technology I am reminded of the occasion when I gave my students a theoretical brief as part of their skill development in critical analysis. I asked my students to write a critique on ArtRage, an exhibition of student work curated by the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston. It contains some of the strongest student artwork in the State that has

been submitted for external assessment at the conclusion of the academic school year. The exhibition tours the State and, I believe, it endows students with the opportunity to experience and view what their peers are creating, what ideas they are expressing and what mediums are being explored. It is a great way for the students to reflect on their own work, their sense of identity, and gauge the standard and different approaches to art making. It always leads to comments such as – ‘I could do that’, ‘How come that is good?’, ‘I don’t understand ...’ to more positive comments like, ‘Wow that is terrific!’, ‘How did they do that?’, ‘I want to make work like that’. I asked each of my students to write a personal reflection on the exhibition.

I move over to my bookshelf and take out a file of students’ writing. As I re-read some of their comments the same theme that resounds within me echoes through their thinking and writing. Everything is digital! My students are also starting to consider the influence of technology on their art making.

Jenn, one my graphic design and photography students summarises what others have also observed, by writing:

I found that the artworks on show did not exhibit a large range of different mediums, but rather gravitated towards mixed media, photography or digital design. As I was walking through the hallways of the Art School it became evident that Tasmanian art students are prominently influenced by the power of technology. The artwork is very modern and I saw very few traditional art pieces such as painting and drawing. Photoshop has become the hands of the modern artist, instead of spending hours in an art studio experimenting with different paints, pencils and dyes. Photoshop allows you to experiment at the click of a button, then if you don’t like it, simply edit undo. Personally I feel that art has become less about talent and skill of the painter or drawer and more about the ability to create the in-depth concept. Anyone can take a photo, people do it every day, but the photos

that are allowed to be classified as artwork are the ones that have a concept behind them. It takes less than a second to take a photo, but much longer to plan the picture. The influence of technology on art students is not necessarily a bad thing, as long as the standard of work remains high. It is sad that people who have real talent when it comes to painting and drawing are being overlooked for people who know their way around Photoshop, but nevertheless I still believe these two mediums should be considered equal. (Working paper: Interview with Senior Art Students, July, 2010)

Another student, Emma, makes a similar comment in her essay by claiming,

The majority of the selected art works consisted of media work, making media the principal trend throughout the exhibition. This was quite a surprising response compared to the Art Express Exhibition held in Sydney, which allowed a more diverse response in the use of mediums throughout NSW. Based on students' response to mixed media and photography, it is noticeable that the vast majority of young artists around the state preferred to work in the mediums. (Working paper: Interview with Senior Art Students, July, 2010)

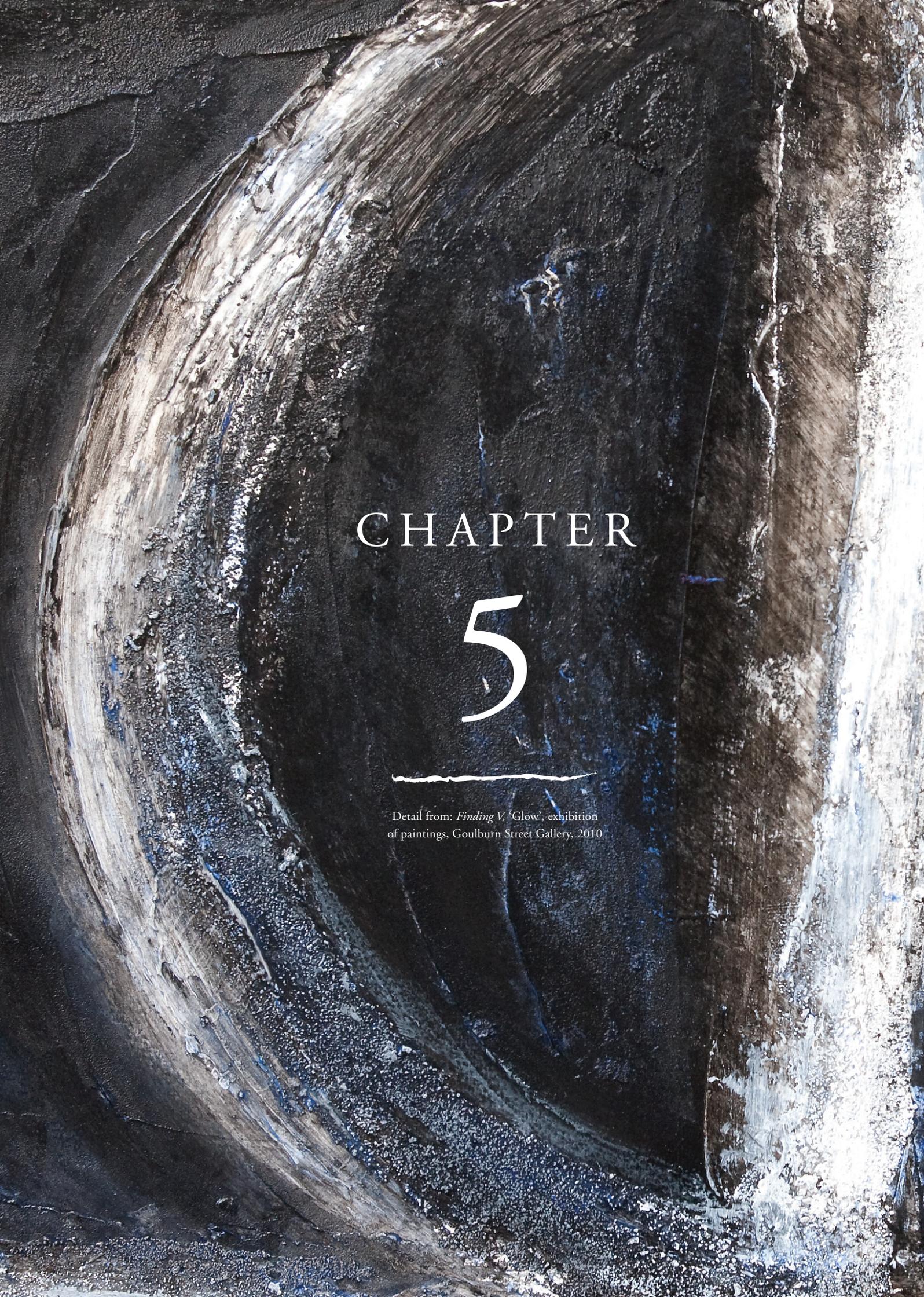
These two excerpts from students' writings illustrate, and in many ways confirm for me, that some of my students are also questioning the impact of technology on art making among their peers. I start to speculate if my students will consider themselves to be disadvantaged if they actually choose to paint and draw rather than make art via technology. Is this a concern for them or do they understand that the work is assessed on aesthetic qualities, ideas and competency and not just the media chosen?

With this realisation in mind I return to my preparations for my lessons tomorrow. I complete a few jobs and pack up my bag and start to head for home. My afternoon musings stay with me, and I continue to think about technology, the importance of discovery, and its impact on students in my academic care, as I walk.

As part of my discovery I collect and explore my ideas further and in many ways my art making has become a ‘critical friend’. I will continue to delve deeper into my own pedagogy and art practice as this provides me with an internal voice to really examine what my values in art teaching are. It also reminds me how important this preliminary crafting is to the creation of artwork.

This thesis has as its framework the three elements of art making: *exploring*, then *crafting* and then *refining*. This chapter begins the first element of *crafting*: discovering – to find out something, or as its origins may suggest, to ‘make known’. I am now ready to move forward in my crafting and so Chapters 5 and 6 consider the importance of constructing and persevering as parts of the crafting in art making. I look to my students for support in my inquiry and consider the writing of Joel Eslinger (1995), Clive Hamilton (2008), and Susan Sontag (1977) and my own lived experiences to support the next stages in my journey.

It is also important for me to investigate photography as art and what I might discover about truth and reality. My exploration has opened for me the central dilemma of technology and its seductive powers in art, and I wonder if it is a power for good or ill. I am on the crafting phase of my journey and I need to learn by doing, crafting as a way of exposing meaning.



# CHAPTER

# 5

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Detail from: *Finding V. Glow*, exhibition  
of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010



*Finding V, 'Glow', exhibition of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010*

## CHAPTER

# 5

### *Constructing: where creating is in the eyes of the beholder*

Have you ever stood at the top of a hill, arms outstretched, released the brakes and flown to the bottom? Can you remember the buzz and the feeling of freedom as you travelled down the hillside? Can you remember the excitement that prevailed? For me this is what art making is like – the decision making, the desire to take a risk, the feeling of intuitive connection to your soul and then the explosive moment when the energy has been released. For me the construction of art is about taking an idea and having

the ability to represent it, and it stems from your experiences – experiences that arise from lived experiences and from your ‘reality’. It is this connection between a concept, lived experience and technique that allows you to develop fully an idea. As I have been constructing my thesis I have used key elements like *exploring*, *crafting* and *refining* as the framework. These elements modelled on Robinson’s four elements (2001) for me, are important parts of my personal narrative as an artist and as an educator. At this point in my thesis I am ready to construct. I have explored by questioning, by challenging, and by connecting. My crafting has begun by discovering, and with this behind me I am ready to begin constructing, to start to take some risks in the second part of crafting.

Earlier I explored the term creativity and I provided some different interpretations of what this word might mean and how the word has evolved over time. Robinson (2001) asserted that there were four important elements to creativity: the importance of medium, the need for control of the medium, the need to play and take risks, and the ability to make critical judgments. His four elements help my own understanding of how the creativity evolves. The medium is crucial, the skill base essential, the willingness to explore and make mistakes is pivotal for new directions to evolve, and of course, in the end, the art making must have some reflective analysis and judgment. It is the risk taking that interests me. My pedagogical approach is always to challenge my students to take risks. For me, risk taking is an important part of crafting and almost as important as having the skills, the confidence, the control and the personal desire to explore art making. But often, taking risks within the creative course of action is really a difficult part of making art, particularly for my students who seem petrified about doing something wrong. I recall Lizzie who was too worried about

making mistakes in her art making. Once she was able to take some risks, she came to see so many new possibilities opening up for her in her image making.

I like to see how my students respond to risks. On one occasion in my art room, as a way of meeting some of the purposes of my research, I set up a lesson based on observational drawing and exploration. It went like this: I give each of my students a different collection of objects. I give to one a spanner, another a hammer, a third a broken tap, and to the others another found object. I then arm each of them with a pencil and a piece of paper. I ask them to examine closely and explore the object for one minute. I invite them to look at the object from different angles, to try to work out how it is engineered, to look at its nuances, to try and gain a sense of its history, to consider how the light falls on the object, to look at the textures of the object, the surfaces; in other words to fully explore and embrace the possibilities that the object reveals. ‘Now,’ I say to them, ‘close your eyes and without taking your pencil off the paper, draw me the object that you see in your mind’s eye. Imagine you are an ant walking all over the object. Let your pencil follow the line.’ Well, a look of horror transposes their faces but they begin work and at the end of the exercise these students are amazed at what they have achieved. The drawings are not perfect, they are free flowing, intuitively driven lines that wander over the page but the experience shows them how concentration, living in the moment, taking a risk, trusting, and exploring can allow them to achieve something new. Once the feelings and comments of ‘I can’t do this’ and ‘My drawing will look terrible’ dissolve they allow themselves permission to engage with the project. Providing this experience for them is about creating a risk and working differently. This made them feel uncomfortable, at least initially. At the end of the lesson the students comment that they are surprised with their drawings and agree with me that

it has given them another way of seeing the object. Comments from the class included, ‘That was not so bad’ and ‘My drawing actually looks a bit like the object’, and even, ‘That was kind of fun’ are made. This helps me to see that the exercise was in fact valuable and from this experience I continue to punctuate the curriculum with other similar occasions.

One of the things I value as a teacher is encouraging students to challenge themselves: to defy the way they view and experience the world. The way they see and perceive the world is important if they are to grow as creative artists, and learning occasions like this, represent one of the kind of building blocks that permit such growth. In the end, my students all created an image drawn from a real object but their interpretation and construction of the object came down to their individual connection to reality based on their experiences and interpretation.

This kind of occasion also highlights for me the way that students perceive reality. The idea of recreating reality is a notion that I often think about particularly in my own art making. I explore this notion more readily when I am in class teaching my students, and when I am thinking about photography and technology. My students of 2010 are particularly engaged with the exploration of photography and technology and so this provides me with an opportunity to focus my research on photography.

Traditionally one of the attributes of photography has been its capacity to capture reality. The influential 20th century French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson in his art practice recognised the camera for its ability to capture a slice of reality. He suggests, ‘I want only to capture a minute part of reality’ (photo quotes, 2011). Cartier-

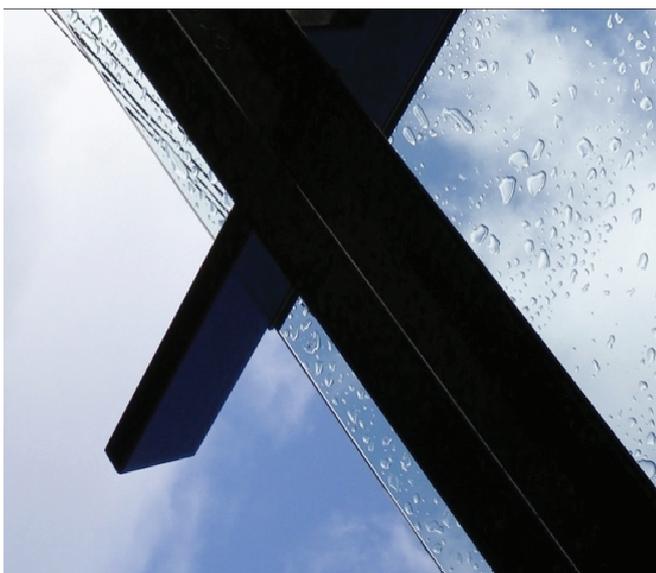
Bresson never cropped or otherwise manipulated his photographs in the studio and so they might be perceived as producing an unedited, nonstylised version of reality. Similarly Sontag (1977) affirms, ‘Photographs ... are a neat slice of time’ (p. 17).

The approach by Cartier-Bresson and Sontag reiterate for me the notion that the camera is a means to capture reality or a moment in time and in my own practice I use the camera both as a way to create art and as a way to investigate and freeze a moment in time. The camera has the power of capturing spontaneous moments at the click of a button – snap – done – next! In Chapter 4, I noted my student’s assertion that anyone can take a photo and that people do it every day. We think that we are capturing the world in front of us as a truthful record, but are we? Are we recreating a place or creating an allegory through our own eyes? What is real and what is a reconstruction of reality, and what and when is it considered art? I interrogate these questions in my teaching because of the nature of technology and the attitudes that are attributed to it by some of the students I teach. Ellen, my photography student, writes in her art essay about the nature of art:

When art was once used to record images of objects, people, living things, places and spaces, events, issues and themes, it was very representational. Whereas now days, art has transformed into having abstract and conceptual qualities; however, it still contains representational, realistic and naturalistic virtues too. Because of these changes in the creation of art and the processes involved, its roles and values are forced to alter and transform too. (Working paper: Interview with Senior Art Students, June, 2010)

Ellen acknowledges the different interpretations of photography and this understanding arises from her own practice. Ellen explores the urban landscape from different views and perspectives recording these with her camera. At the beginning of her exploration

Ellen considered herself a documentary-style photographer capturing the reality of her objects, however, as time has passed Ellen has started to investigate other ways of seeing the world and her images have assumed a new meaning.



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**Ellen's digital photograph:** Ellen has explored the urban landscape from different views and perspectives, recording these with her camera.

This image of Ellen's illustrates her ability to transform the urban landscape into an abstract form that allows the viewer to question the image. Ellen uses the digital camera to take a photograph of a building that is under construction in the school grounds. The rain hits the glass leaving a textured pattern. The metal struts of the building are black and glisten from the recent rainfall. The image has strong diagonal lines and the dark shapes contrast against the blue backdrop. These lines create a cross formation that anchor the viewer's eye to the middle of the image and the water drops on the glass add another dimension to the image and become a textural element in the overall design of the photograph. The angle of view plays with the viewer's eye as we try to decipher the shapes to find meaning and a connection to reality.

Ellen scrutinises different ways of juxtaposing features of the buildings to create abstracted shapes and forms. Thus, her exploring has led to a new sense of reality. I note that my students are perceiving and acknowledging the distinction between photography and art. Additionally, I see that they are beginning to consider in their thinking minds some of the more philosophical possibilities that arise from art making.

What intrigues me about Ellen's observation is that through her learning she is acquiring different perspectives about how the photographic image can be utilised. What I hope to more fully understand is the different qualities of a photographic image that allow us to consider an image as art. I suppose it is to do with the notions of reality and truth and the recreation of time and place. I draw on the thinking of Joel Eslinger (1995), Clive Hamilton (2008) and Martin Sandler (2002) who speak about the photograph as art, reality, and the ability for an image to act as a symbol, to support my assertion.

Eslinger's writing provides some insight into this perplexing question of photography as art. He declares,

How is photography art at all? From the first time that question was asked (which was virtually at the same moment photography became known to the public), the possible answers were thought to lie in an examination of the relationship of photographs to the world they represent. If photographs were merely a mechanical trace of nature, the result of nature copying itself through optical and chemical processes of which human beings were more witnesses than creators, then photography could not be art, or at best it could be only an extremely limited one. But if photography could transform the visible world under the deliberate control of the photographer, and if it could respond to the subjective vision of the photographer, then it could be an art of considerable range and depth. This duality of trace and transformation lay at the core of photographic theory and criticism for over a century. (Eslinger, 1995, p. 2)

Central to Eslinger's discussion is the notion of essence and intention in photography. Eslinger suggests that for him 'essence' is what makes a work of art credible and valued as 'high art' capable of making a valuable contribution to the visual arts.

In their quest to create genuine art using digital media, my students need a creative decision-making method for them to compose and construct subject matter for the images they need to produce. Such a method requires each one to call upon their individual ability to express an idea through constructing an image. This reverts to Robinson's notion of artistic intent and the creative control of materials and media that the artist chooses to explore so that making art has integrity and reveals a deeper truth, (Robinson, 2001) or as Eslinger suggests, giving the work 'essence' (Eslinger, 1995, p. 2) or spirit. Robinson reminds us too that the creativity must have some reflective analysis and judgment. But more of that later.

Further to this discussion of photography as art, Clive Hamilton, in his chapter on aesthetics, asserts in *The freedom paradox* (2008),

A photograph that captures the world as the eye normally sees it can never be art: the photographer must create an image that reveals a deeper truth about the world and for this he or she must be able to see the world in a way only a few can. (Hamilton, 2008, p. 236)

Hamilton's words reflect my core intentions for my students to be empowered to interpret and to express ideas. Each student's development of their concept depends on creative ambition, skills and knowledge. For my students to create and use a photographic image that moves beyond the rudimentary principles of the technique they must challenge and investigate possibilities. This includes the probing of the innate nature of the

photographic device being used as a way to translate their concepts into a successful mode of communication.

Hamilton's idea that the photograph can never be art unless it emanates a deeper truth, or as Eslinger (1995, p. 2) suggests that the 'essence' is a central value in photography. This is relevant to the quest in my classroom and to the current discussion at the core of my inquiry.

The camera possesses the capacity to document the world from a realistic perspective and this is reinforced in the writing of Martin Sandler who professes, 'By the last quarter of the 19th century, photographers around the world had supplied ample proof of the camera's unique ability to record people and places' (2002, p. 57). But the camera, while primarily a means to record a moment in time, also allows for the existence of philosophical perspectives to be considered including the notion of manipulating reality. Indeed the camera has the capacity to capture reality and lived experiences in a manner that painting cannot. Capturing a real life reality in painting, in a still life or en plein air for example, is a different means from recording the same scene using a camera. The camera has the power to convert reality's third dimension into a two dimensional mode instantaneously, essentially flattening the world as we initially see it, empowering it to manipulate and change the way reality is perceived.

Sandler continues to elaborate on the idea of distortion of reality as used by the first photographic artists when he says that,

Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of this early artistic movement was the way in which many photographers manipulated their images. Working much like painters, they used various techniques

to alter their pictures so as to make them look as much as possible like paintings, pastel or charcoal drawings, etchings, or engravings. In the process they created entirely new printing techniques and new types of photographs that expanded the concept of what a photograph was. (Sandler, 2002, p. 57)

And now, in this digital age, photography provides new and almost infinite ways for this notion to be extended; and importantly, it leads to further inquiry about the power of manipulation controlled by the operator, a manipulation and interpretation that evolves at the artist's discretion.

This idea of reality and of capturing the truthfulness of a situation opens up an exploration of the philosophical dimensions of time, place and interpretation. As I contemplate the role and potential of the photographic procedure I think about the two inter-related ideas of reality and truthfulness. The concept of truthfulness in art is multi-layered and technology demands my consideration of what is possibly true and accurate.




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**Suite of three digital images:** With the assistance of technology these images taken at exactly the same time and place on the Rivulet Track enable me to explore and interpret this reality in different ways.

To expound on the notions of reality, truth and re-creation of time and space as Eslinger and Sandler suggest I return to the Rivulet Track and recall the intimacy of exploring the physical world. I scroll through my digital camera and I find this suite of three photographs. These images were taken at exactly the same time and place and they enable me to explore and interpret this reality in different ways. The original image captures the rivulet much as our human eye sees it, while the other two images, digitally manipulated, allow the viewer to engage on different levels by questioning what is real and truthful. These latter images may provoke comments about how and where the images are created and what they mean. The images have the potential to alter the viewer's perception of time and place providing a new construct in which to view and respond.

Changing the way we perceive a situation allows for new interpretation and questioning and acts as a memory device. This occurred in the drawing exercise, during the occasion and narrative I told to introduce Chapter 5 – Constructing. I recall too another occasion a few months ago where I gave to each of my students a small postage-stamp sized photograph of an image that I had taken on my walks.



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Digital Image taken in my amblings along the Rivulet Track: The image is taken looking through a branch of leaves towards the earth's surface.

The image is taken looking through a branch of leaves towards the earth's surface. The leaves closest to the lens are in soft focus which frames the dried up leaf litter scattered on the ground. While the focus is soft there is still sufficient evidence to explore the veins and characteristics of the leaves. However, the leaves slowly dissipate into shapes of tone rather than careful detail. The application of a soft focus filter elicits a feeling of nostalgia and references some attributes of early 19th century photographs to which Sandler refers. The photograph is enhanced with dark vignetting surrounding the frame of the image.

I print this image onto photographic paper. I photocopy it onto tracing paper and clear film and as well print it out digitally on high gloss paper. I give each student a copy of the image. Once they have had some time to investigate the image before

them, I ask them to respond verbally to the group about their understanding of the image: how it makes them feel and what they can see. Their stories reveal interpretations concerning mystery, darkness and intrigue and lead to further questioning about the reality of my picture.

It fascinates me that for the students the surface that the image is printed on has an impact on their responses to the photograph. For them the clear film and tracing paper engages them in a manner that differs from their response to the traditional photographic paper. The different papers with their different tactile dimensions open up other possible ways to create and present an image and thus evoke different responses. For the students this experience provides them with endless possibilities and ways to explore; to be creative, if you will. They suddenly see ways to layer images on top of each other, to overlay words and colour underneath the image and this opens up new potential for them as image-makers.

The students embark on making a postcard about the image weaving a narrative around it, each including the original photograph in some form in their artwork. As they work the students comment that the image itself is mysterious and allows for story telling and a degree of wonderment. The small shift in perception provided by the different tactile response activity allows for the reality and truth of the original image to open new avenues of seeing and interpreting for my students. What becomes apparent for me is how the students are no longer bound to the image as a photograph but rather engage and interact with the image as an aesthetic artifact. It had been transformed from a photograph to an artifact or object that allows for more freedom and opportunities for expression. Through this occasion my students show me that with a small shift in

their perception, and the way they engage with the initial photograph, they are able to establish new ways of perceiving reality. This imbues a sense of freedom in their respective approach to their work and to the way they interpret and see the world.

The following images are two of the finished works from our occasion for inquiry. Each work communicates a different idea and interpretation of the original photograph using layering, symbols and words to create an image. Both these students use the same image at the onset of their work but manipulate the image differently.




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**Sophie's digital image:** She enlarges the original image on the photocopier and then starts constructing, adding a word to make meaning.

Sophie enlarges the image on the photocopier and transfers it onto clear film. When thinking about the image and its intention she makes a conscious decision to create a negative of the image as her starting point. In her mind she allows for highlight

areas to be more evident. Sophie also layers two images together and decides not to align them perfectly to create a more enigmatic and out of focus effect. This also allows for the red underlay to be more prominent. The word 'imagination' is subsequently added to the image. For Sophie this adds further meaning to the work as well as a graphic element to the image design. It also acts as a focal point drawing the viewer's eye to the white leaf in the lower third of the image. Sophie additionally manipulates the edges of the image to echo an old style photograph. Sophie takes a literal approach to her thinking and to the way she constructs her image.




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**Caitlin's digital image:** She chooses to convey her idea in a more abstract manner, leading to questioning, mystery and uncertainty.

Caitlin, another student in the class, exhibits a different approach to her image making. I have watched her work and problem solve other projects. I have seen her struggle with ideas, experiment and rethink aspects of her work so that she extends her

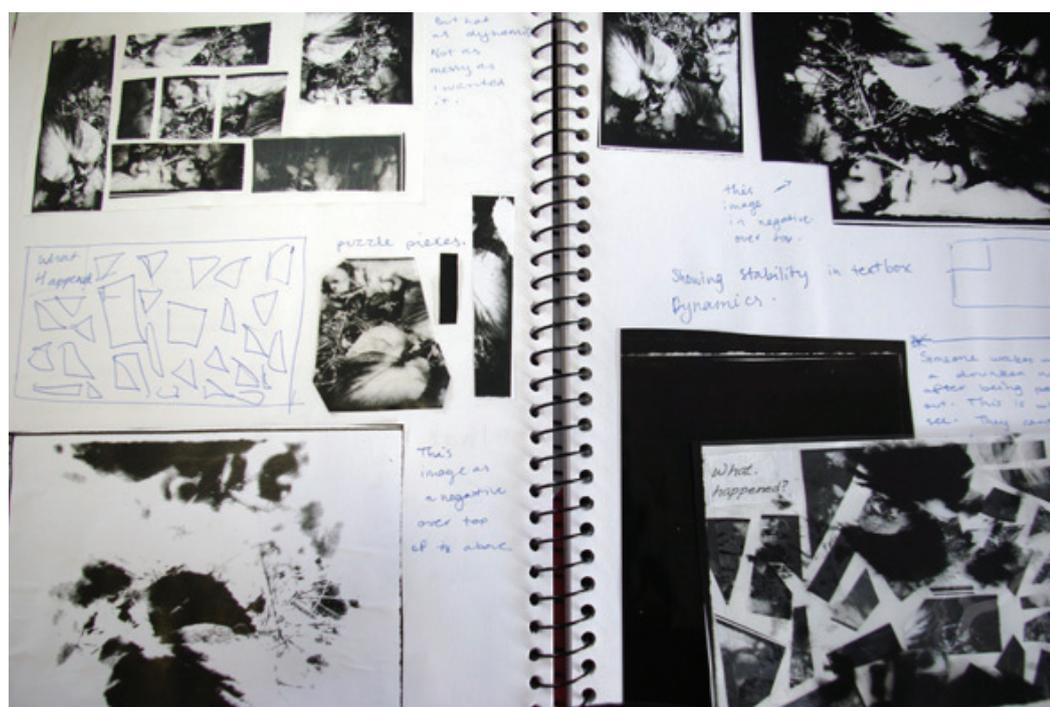
thinking. Caitlin is more willing to play and to experiment. She takes time to think in order to find a response that is more questioning and conceptual. The students have all been given the same brief and guidelines so it is exciting to see the different directions in which their minds lead them.

As Caitlin has repeatedly demonstrated in class, she has taken the manipulation of the original image further. In her planning and decision-making she chooses to convey her idea in a more abstract manner. She wants to convey the idea of questioning, mystery and uncertainty. Caitlin's approach is reflective of Robinson's (2001) four elements, which include the willingness to explore, play, take risks and apply reflective practice and analysis.

Thus Caitlin creates two shapes that resemble question marks, one in black and one in red. She layers them so that they join together creating an oval form. This represents the cycle of life as well as creating a compositionally sound image that allows the viewer's eye to tour around the image. The negative space that the two shapes evoke gives the image a focal point. Caitlin chooses a symbolic way to represent her idea; Sophie chooses a word to make meaning.

Whilst we can interpret the work of Sophie and Caitlin respectively we might never come to know how a student enters and develops her design. In many ways this preliminary working can be seen as a 'critical memoir' (Weber & Mitchell, 2004, p. 7), an autobiographical narrative that provides an insight into the students' experiences. This could be seen as the construction of meaning. Weber and Mitchell speak about the construction of meaning and the role of narrative and story. From my understanding of

their writing, I understand more profoundly the role of the author, which in this case is the student as the artist. Weber and Mitchell guide my thinking about the construction of art being partly influenced by personal experiences and how art making is exposing the author's 'background biases, vulnerabilities, silences, feelings and beliefs' (Weber, Mitchell, 2004, p. 6).



**Alice's thinking and preparatory planning:** The questioning, construction and deconstruction of the concept that occurs before the crafting can begin.

In this reproduction of Alice's journal I can start to observe how a student's artistic story commences. Alice sits quietly in class, drawing, making notes, doing sketches and research. Alice likes to ask inquiring questions and often wants to know if she can alter the guidelines I have given the group. She might ask: 'Can we use many images and can we cut them up?', 'Does the image size need to be that big or can I make it small and intimate?'... Alice wants to challenge the initial ideas. I say to her 'I am

not going to stop you showing creative initiative, let's look at your ideas and thoughts.' Students like Alice keep me thinking and challenging the projects that I design for their learning.

This reproduction of a page of notation and thinking by Alice illustrates the designing and the development of an idea – the questioning, constructing and deconstructing of the concept that occurs before the art-making can begin. Her notations reveal a story of creative thinking in action. It allows the reader to see the different approaches that my students take. For me it encapsulates graphically the evolutionary creative thinking that Robinson (2001) refers to.

In a world of modern technology my students have the potential to build new realities through their imagination and creative ideas. Some students will construct a photograph through the viewfinder and give little consideration to the relationships that exist between the objects and the existence of the foreground and background. Others will spend time crafting and engaging with the object in its environment. Are the different outcomes to capturing the image valid and real? Susan Sontag (1977) claims that such images are indeed able to usurp reality because a photograph is not only an image but also an interpretation of the real. Therefore she suggests that when a moment in time is captured it is assigned a new meaning as people interpret the image in their own manner. She claims that images desensitise reality, the way the photographer constructs; the image distorts people's perceptions of the image. So, I want my students to build new realities with their art making as they combine photography and technology.

I also aspire for my students to understand that a photograph can be a means for artistic self-expression. The students can play with Eslinger's (1995) 'essence' or

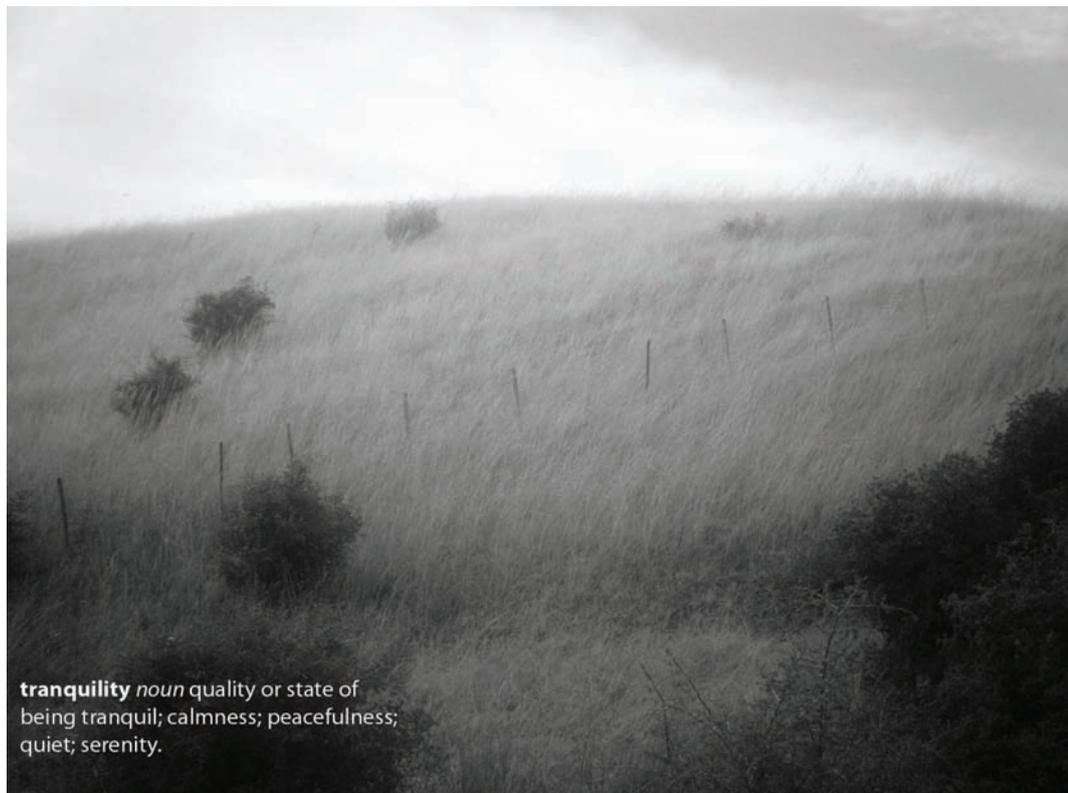
Hamilton's (2008) 'deeper truth' by developing a fine awareness of the camera's intent and of how the camera can represent reality or symbolise experience. Developing such awareness offers my students possibilities for questioning what constitute a 'good' and strong image and, as Robinson reminds us, awareness and questioning are critical parts of an artist's creative journey.

As an artist and teacher of art, I believe that all visual arts respond to change – sociologically, intellectually and technologically. A photographic image is a reflection and a response to a feeling, situation, thought, external and or internal influence, and it embraces reality and is a reflection or response to a real situation. Artists create work stimulated by their life, events or reality. The camera provides a means for social commentary by using symbols and codes for the viewer to interpret. Photographers document the world by creating an interpretation that allows the audience to respond and connect. Historical and contemporary photographers at times adopt abstract and/or surrealistic approaches providing unusual and un-real images for consideration. They tap into worlds of unconscious thought being conscious of their artistic intentions and manipulation at the same time. An image becomes a symbol and moves outside the mere realm of recording. As George Wingfield Digby in *Metaphor and symbol* explains 'Perhaps the encounter with a work of art is an end in itself and one should not look beyond it or attempt to elucidate or explain. And yet these encounters force us to ask questions, to enquire, to search' (Digby, 1960, p. 38).

There does, however, seem to be an expectation that when we create an image using the camera there will be some immediate interaction and connection to the subject matter because of the preconceived connection that we have toward the camera and its

role or function to capture reality. We have to also consider that the photograph can be manipulated and used as a symbol for individual interpretation and expression.

I look at two student images to see how they have recorded their reality through both analogue and digital technology. First Kate's work:



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**Kate's digital image 'Tranquility':** She explores the landscape, reflecting emotions and feelings.

Kate creates her image using digital technology. She explores the landscape and aspects of it that are relevant to her life and her daily travels. She investigates the landscape in its natural form, reflecting emotions and feelings. Interestingly, the subject matter she

chooses allows her to recreate a certain reality using filters that transmit her treatment of the light and dark areas in her picture. She feels her original un-manipulated image does not really capture her idea of tranquility so she explores the options in Photoshop. She is in essence redefining a landscape and constructing an image that she tailors to her ideal. Not patiently waiting for the natural world to provide her with the opportunity to capture this feeling, Kate uses her imagination and preconceived understanding to manifest her image – it is Kate’s way of constructing a metaphor for tranquility that is true to her understanding and meaning.



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**Karen’s analogue image:** Her interpretation of the restrictions placed on us by society.

Using traditional analogue photographic techniques, Karen creates an image that she uses to represent the restrictions placed on us by society’s mores and rules. She

wants to convey how society constantly regulates our actions with ongoing parameters about expected behaviour. Her approach is vastly different from Kate's. Karen uses analogue photography to capture her slice of reality but distorts the image by using a fish-eye lens. Karen feels that this allows for a new perspective and an opportunity to see the scene from a different viewpoint. The dark and melancholy atmosphere of the print accentuates the symbolism of the barbed wire and the high fence. The angle of view also strengthens the power and intent of the image as it emphasises the feeling of entrapment. The image quality also allows for imperfections, dust marks and scratches that illude to an imperfect physical world.

In relation to Hamilton's (2008) idea that the photograph is linked to a deeper reality, Blair French (2009) asserts,

Throughout its short history photography has been treated a matter-of-fact, 'realist' practice, in which the photograph and its subject are somehow physically bounded. Photography provided visual evidence of the condition of the physical world about us, witnessing and recognising its appearance as well as the events that take place within it. It surveys, records, classifies, and structures in accord with an empirical model of knowledge. The relationship between photography and world may appear transparent, but photography is an opaque medium with its own material qualities. It abstracts and distorts its source material. It is an art of fabrication and construction, producing visual forms that act as symbolic manifestations for the conscious. (French, 2009, p. 13)

Therefore, we have the power to interpret, to imagine and to recreate our world through different means. This allows us to question what is real and what is not.

I often reflect on this idea of what is real, particularly in a digital world. What can we believe as true? Creating art allows me to question this and it gives students a

voice to express and communicate their ideas – each to connect with her identity and sense of self. It provides layers to the way we see the world and in many ways challenges us to question what we see before us. It allows for imagination and possibilities to come to the fore. Digital technology allows for this reality to be taken to a new level with its immediacy and manipulation ability. From Sophia, a Year 11 drawing student, comes insight that I long to hear from any student,

After all, art is not bound to reflect reality exactly but can instead reflect deeper truths and ideas through allegory and symbolism. This method of communication is often more effective and more truthful. (Working paper: Interview with Senior Art Students, October, 2010)

What is next in this artistic journey? I have pondered and worked with the students to help them understand the value of constructing an image. I have watched my students struggle and build confidence in their ideas and skills. It is students like Lizzie, Sophia, Karen, Kate, Alice and Caitlin who seem committed to develop their art learning. I ask myself what these students have in common apart from a personal desire to express themselves and their ideas. It appears to me that these students persevere with their ideas – they are committed to learn, to explore, challenge, take risks, and to ask questions. The third and final part of this element – *crafting* – is my thinking behind the value of persevering with the crafting of their images.

An abstract painting detail featuring thick, layered brushstrokes. The colors range from dark charcoal and black to light grays, off-whites, and muted reds. The texture is highly tactile, with visible ridges and valleys in the paint. The composition is dominated by curved, organic shapes that suggest a sense of depth and movement.

# CHAPTER

# 6

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Detail from: *Finding VI*, 'Glow', exhibition  
of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010



*Finding VI, 'Glow', exhibition of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010*

## CHAPTER

# 6

*Persevering: where dedication brings its own reward*

About ten years ago I was in Paris: it was my first time in this remarkable city. I was overwhelmed by the history, the architecture, the culture and, of course, the art that I witnessed. How vividly I remember the moment of going into the Paris Opera House and looking up at the ceiling and seeing the most wondrous vision of colour and movement – a precious moment that remains with me to this day. I still feel the energy as I recall this moment! I see the free brush marks, the flying figures, the glowing red

and green pigments that sing out in contrast against the gold and the once pristine white background now fading and wearing with time. Enthralling me still is my memory of a Marc Chagall ceiling painting – an absolute delight. It has such an impact on me to this day. I remember when I first caught sight of it. I cried out loud: ‘My God, it is a Marc Chagall!’

This is the feeling that I thought I would have felt when I viewed the Sistine Chapel ceiling; its different biblical stories transcribed through the hand of the immortal Michelangelo. I remember making an early morning walk to the Vatican City, scrambling along the corridors to make my way to the Chapel entrance. Climbing up the final staircase and facing the little doorway being more overwhelmed by the people who were crowding into the space than by the space itself: the buzz, the murmur of bestilled voices, and the click of cameras. But, I was not emotionally moved or charged as I raised my head to see Michelangelo’s painting, revealed in all its beauty. Yes, it was amazing that I was present in the chapel, and yes, I was privileged to bear witness to one of the most acclaimed works in the history of art, but I was not seduced by what was in front of me.

Yet, as I write, recalling that moment at the Paris Opera House I must record that the Chagall ceiling painting held more significance for me than the splendour of the Sistine Chapel. Maybe this happened because it took me by surprise: silence was present for that spontaneous moment when looking upwards I was welcomed by the work of one of my favourite painters. Chagall’s painting, its history, its imagining, its crafting, its beautiful surface, seduced me. Even if I were feeling bold enough, I could not transgress the etiquette of art appreciation: I could not reach out and touch Chagall’s

lustrous surface at my initial viewing. I just had to imagine how it must feel, remain as the painting's voyeur and revel in the glory I saw before me.

Being in the presence of great art is akin to running down that hill I referred to earlier, or being overwhelmed by a fantastic piece of music or opera that is rich with colour and feeling. I was being seduced by technique, by the purpose, the beauty and the expression encapsulated in the work.

So what has my experience of Paris and Marc Chagall got to do with Chapter 6: Persevering, as part of crafting in art making? Persevering could be interpreted as taking hold of something, taking it with a conscientious effort to pursue it, to persevere with the chase until the conquest has been made. It has to do with the power of seduction, being passionate and embracing crafting. One possible interpretation of seduction is 'to win someone over'. I had been won over by the beauty and the experience of seeing this great and wondrous sight of Chagall's ceiling – the emotional feeling and the engagement made me shed a quiet tear. And for me Chapter 6 represents an inquiry into the seductive nature of making art that is achieved when there is total engagement, aspiration, desire and perseverance: the human desire (Alexander, 1995) to connect, to chase and to embrace art making to achieve meaning.

When I have been totally engaged and have persevered with my own art making I meet with a passion that keeps me working, learning and finding out more about my craft. The digital photograph grips my students in a similar way that fascinates me. I watch them as they sit and totally engage with this technology, come back to this mode of working time and time again, persevere with the medium long after I would have given up. I need to understand what the new media does to the students in their art making,

how it is winning them over and why they are so determined to use it as a vehicle for expression. I have to know what makes technology so appealing, so important for them. I noted earlier that this form of expression is often connected to an attitude of ‘ease’ and ‘immediacy’, but when pondering on and thinking over and over to come up with other rationales, I cannot help but consider that there must be something about digital technology that particularly resonates with my students’ intentions; something that provides them with the power, determination and desire to make art using technology. What is it that makes them passionate and move toward making meaning by exploring the digital world? I reflect back on the work of Thomas Alexander (1995, p. 203) and eros – the desire to create meaning, to ‘know thyself’ to have values and for the student to connect with art making and their ideas. It is about the desire to find purpose, to tell a story that is reflective of the students’ intentions.

When I began this research and inquiry, as I disclosed in Chapter 1: Questioning, I was worried that using digital media for appreciating and creating art might degrade traditional values held in teaching art. I was very skeptical about digital media and worried about how it would demean the traditional values of making and appreciating art. I was dubious about claims that students would learn art making through technology. My questions are changing as my inquiry proceeds.

What makes technology both appealing and important for them? There must be something that resonates with their intentions, something that empowers their desire and determination to make art with technology. Might Alexander’s (1995) notion of eros as the desire for meaning help me to comprehend what compels my students to immerse themselves in a digital world?

Why is the landscape of the visual arts classroom changing so fast? How well and in what ways can students understand the full potential of technological media tools for making images that are well-crafted and have strong aesthetic appeal? What are the essentials of technology that insist that students persevere with exploring such potential?

I reflect on my own exploration into the digital world, my attempt to be in tune with my students' thinking. I remember that technology has had an impact on my own art practice and my understanding of what makes it intriguing and valued. I am enthusiastic about the options of digital manipulation, and the creative possibilities it offers to present new ways of seeing, to display new aesthetic possibilities, to solve problems with a new set of tools. Like all things that you aspire to do well and with integrity I need to take time, and persist. These are traits that I would like to demonstrate to students as we explore digital possibilities and potential together.

As my year progresses I observe that the students in my classes are forming changed attitudes to art making; at last, I accept that technology is fuelling this change. Technology is transforming the art studio into a digital workspace where students embrace digital media including digital painting and digital photography and ignore other art practices.

In a quest to take my inquiry closer to my questions I noted above and to reveal understanding about my teaching experience and practice, I follow the progress of my twenty-seven students who are determined that the digital workspace would be the landscape within which they would create their artwork. This includes students doing photography, graphic design and digital painting.

Amongst these twenty-seven digital learners and art makers, forms of photography and digital painting dominate the fields that they are exploring.

To explore and come to Chapter 6, I will illuminate some approaches to making and manipulating that the students explored. As well, I will attempt to interpret and give some evidence of changing patterns in the students' attitudes as they relate to creating art using a metaphorical digital toolbox, which contains materials for making art in the digital realm, such as Photoshop, drawing tablets, pens and invisible erasers. Contemplating student interviews, which I held during this year, helps me to interpret their values of art as I explore understandings that emerge from discussion, research and questioning.

The study of photography has proven to be a popular medium for artistic expression for senior secondary art students over the past few decades. Until quite recently traditional darkroom-based photography was the primary method for making images, but as technology evolved the digital camera and accompanying software for making contemporary photographic images replace the darkroom. Traditional photography has its own idiosyncrasies and aesthetic facets that make the silver gelatine print, the traditional style of black and white image, a beautiful artifact in its own right.

I bring to mind an interesting article, which resonates with me and helps me to understand this changing attitude to the digital realm. This desire to engage with digital technology is occurring in the wider world and influencing my digital learners. In an article titled 'Trend tracker: iPhoneography', Ross Bilton (2011) says that 'Serious photographers used to be easy to spot: they were the ones groaning under the weight

of SLR's, lenses and tripods. Now days it's not so obvious. Anyone with an iPhone, [digital device] and a good eye, can claim to be a good photographer' (p. 7). Bilton's sentiments are reminiscent of the words of Miranda Douglas who co-hosted a recent iPhoneography exhibition at the Apple Store in Sydney. Douglas comments that the ready availability of digital technology and photo applications from the Internet have 'taken away the elitism of serious photography, because it shortcuts skills that in the old days would have taken years of studio time to learn' (Douglas in Bilton, 2011, p. 7). It is such thinking that accentuates for me the changing approaches to traditional photographic image making in visual culture.

In the past I have always enjoyed introducing the skills and the mystery of photography to my students. For my students this mystery appears to be centred on the actual making of the image in the darkroom. In the past, when my students have their first experience of being in a darkroom, and seeing the image emerge from the chemical trays they often make comments such as: 'Wow ... That is magic ... It is just like being in the movies', as they marvel at the images.

The darkroom environment itself can hypnotise students. It is as though they have stumbled across a whole new world. In the darkroom, students meet what is unfamiliar to them. This kind of quest to understand some of the technical and scientific methods of photography is gratifying for a teacher who responds to the student's desire to gain some understanding and appreciation of the tactile and aesthetic qualities of photography. This was my experience – up until a few years ago.

With the advent of the digital camera it seems suddenly that students produce photographic imagery in ways that radically transform the art of photography – to create

a photograph as a work of art, as a way of collecting images and resources for painting. Digital media is readily accessible to students as they have access to computer software, applications for mobile phones, creative modes and filters. Such a new direction in the visual arts is becoming a dominant force in senior secondary education. In my classroom, with each class of young learners this force becomes more prevalent and stronger.

Early in 2010, I set up a workshop for students of mine who were interested in learning about some specific creative tools connected to the craft of photography. Awareness of these tools is important for both the digital and analogue camera operator, particularly two key areas: aperture and shutter speed. The aperture controls how much of the image is in focus and the shutter speed allows the operator to capture motion, fast or slow. Knowing about and understanding these tools is important, leading to an awareness of the camera's potential. With this awareness and understanding comes the confidence to explore the creative opportunities available in photography. Both these tools have specific creative and technical offering that allows for further exploration.

I then decide to give the students an opportunity to experience working in a darkroom to see how photographic images are made in the traditional manner. Some of the group are keen to take on the experience, and others somewhat hesitant initially, but after some discussion, they all decide to give the process a chance, if only to experience being in a darkroom.

When I teach traditional analogue photography skills I often use a technique based on the pinhole camera as it is quite a dramatic way of introducing students to the basic concepts of the camera and the magic of being in, and working in, a darkroom.

Pinhole cameras are modelled on the first camera invented, called the *camera obscura*. In the classroom you can create a similar effect using a tin can or a cardboard box where the principles that allow the pinhole camera to work are in place but exist in a much more rudimentary manner. My objectives for this project are to see whether using these simple cameras enhance students' understanding of the basic principles of photography, and whether this experience will elicit any inspiration for their own work and artistic development.

I conduct a guided tour of the darkroom and explain the process they are about to undertake. I grasp the basic apparatus in my hand, place it in a sturdy position, aim it at my subject and release the shutter. It is important that the camera is positioned in a sturdy place so that the camera does not move at the time the shutter is released as the image that is created requires a longer exposure time to produce a clear and well-exposed photograph.

I demonstrate with my hand-made camera that this box can in fact capture a slice of reality, or as Sontag (1977) suggests: a slice of time. And as I anticipate, during the developing procedure, the students are surprised and intrigued that you can indeed capture photographic images using this strange box. The students at first are cautious about the technique, perhaps unable to see any correlation between their own experiences with digital photography and the foreign and unknown world of the darkroom. They are naturally unaware of the possibilities inherent in this style of photography having only experienced it before, perhaps vicariously, by watching movies or television.

Later, I speak with the students about their experience to gauge reactions.

During this discussion I invite them to talk to me about the two different styles of photography – analogue and digital. They comment on what the camera means for them. Two students, Liv and Esther are both in Year 12 and have studied art throughout their senior school education. I take notes and annotate their responses for my research. I am trying to evaluate two inter-related questions – is it worth my time persisting with teaching analogue and darkroom methods of photography to my students and will they be sufficiently captivated by it that they might want to persevere with it? Is it the chicken or the egg that comes first?

Here I re-visit my interviews with students and select notes from them to reveal the progress of my inquiry. Liv comments, ‘For me the camera is a modern day tool’, and Esther comments that

Having any understanding about the camera allows us to learn and use the tools to go out and take the photograph for our own work rather than take an image off the Internet. So knowing how to use the controls is good. (Working paper: Interviews with Senior Art Students, April, 2010)

These two very pragmatic responses made early in the 2010 school year indicate that Esther and Liv feel that the camera is a tool for gathering documentation. For my part, I see they are not yet able to consider the idea of the camera as a means of achieving an aesthetic outcome.

Another of my objectives for this darkroom occasion for learning is to see whether an experience in the darkroom helps to solidify student knowledge and understanding of the key controls of the camera and whether the experience affords them some understanding of the context or tradition of photography. I ask them ‘Did

you see any benefits in the pinhole camera activity using a method that is a completely analogue and a traditional way of working?’ and ‘What were some of the good things about learning or using this method to create a picture?’ They respond with comments such as ‘The good part was seeing the chemicals – seeing it coming to life: the magic and the mystery’ (Liv, April, 2010). They also indicated they like the tactile response to the analogue technique. ‘You made the photo – you cut the paper so you have the ownership and control’ (Lizzie, April, 2010). There are negative comments about the length of time you need to achieve one image and the patience required to fully engage and explore. I feel them measuring the method against the digital camera with its instantaneous response, where the results are at fingertips in less than a flash.

Notwithstanding some perceived benefits the students note, overall they felt that the power and immediacy of the digital camera is better and more helpful for their learning. Esther comments that,

The digital was more helpful in understanding the creative results, I found if you wanted to learn what shutter speed and aperture were about then you should use a digital camera ... Digital brings out more detail, not that you can't get that from the other one. It is more about the product that you can get and how you can use it. Analogue photography is an art form in itself, a bit like drawing and painting, but it is all a bit of a slow process... (Working paper: Interview with Senior Art Students, April, 2010)

It is evident that students gravitate toward the instant result factor of digital photography. While they see something interesting in the analogue technique they view it as quaint, something that requires discipline and time to discover, time they are not yet prepared to invest or preserve within their art making. And, in some ways, who could blame them? To them it was an unfair contest: a model T Ford versus a brand new Falcon?

Esther, Liv and the others reveal from this occasion that they feel more confident and aligned to the use of the digital camera: seeing the results appear immediately with the digital camera allows them to interpret their images, see diverse possibilities directly responding to their learning.

The occasion for darkroom learning assumes that my current generation of visual art learners have had very little experience with the traditional or analogue styles of photography. This is seen in some of the answers that the students gave in the interview and the fact that clarification was needed to understand the different qualities of the two different modes of working. This is possibly due to the fact that contemporary art practice is embracing digital technology more readily, rather than making art using traditional darkroom processes. This is understandable as visual and popular culture continues to exert a major force in society and contemporary art making. Kerry Freedman (2003) proposes that 'learning about the complexities of visual culture is becoming ever more critical to human development necessitating changes in art and education' (p. xii). She continues by suggesting that global culture is rapidly evolving from text based communication to image saturation. This is also evident when I look through the individual students' research journals used to support their art making. There I see more evidence of contemporary influences such as Deviant Art, Frankie Magazine and YouTube rather than traditional artistic forms. Deviant Art is a contemporary art resource found on the Internet as is YouTube. My students not only use these resources as artistic references but some of them actively post their artwork onto these sites for worldwide viewing consumption. Similarly, Australian magazine *Frankie* is a popular resource for my students, as it supports visual popular culture and

the latest design trends. This magazine is compiled by young designers and supports cutting edge illustrations and concepts.

So many new directions exist in which my inquiry can take me. How do I connect my darkroom traditions to new forms of art making? One way is to examine the language of software applications. The language of Photoshop, for example, mirrors the language of my world of painting and drawing. The tools on offer mimic traditional techniques, methods and terms. For example, Photoshop utilises features and terms such as brushes, palettes, pencils, and it makes reference to film grain. I can even add dust and scratches to the image: the new arising out of the old.

In my students' use of language, I seek some understanding of their appreciation of differences and similarities between digital and analogue realms. When they create a digital image, can I perceive links between traditional and digital approaches to crafting photographic images?

For students wholly seduced by digital technology they demonstrate a link to the traditional realm when using these Photoshop tools and the terminology associated with it. For me it is important to know if it is worth pursuing the idea of teaching old knowledge in a digital world. Should I promote this idea, or leave it for them to discover only if they are interested?

When students create a digital image and manipulate an image on the computer screen, they navigate consciously or unconsciously as they use the tools in Photoshop. One of my students, Lizzie, comments in an exploratory discourse she writes to support her practical inquiry:

As technology progresses through the years, new forms of art continually progress to be technologically modern. Traditional portraiture is still important but so are fresh, new forms of digital Art. Modern artists can find new forms of originality throughout digital art. I personally attempted to start out painting portraits traditionally, but I then found that digital art was more of a highlight knowing that a mistake can be easily fixed digitally as opposed to a traditional painting. Many artists like to mix both traditional and digital together, another style I attempted by drawing my pictures in biro and then scanning them into the computer to colour digitally. (Working paper: Interviews with Senior Art students, October, 2010)

Lizzie acknowledges the dominance of the digital in her world. At the same time her research suggests to her that there can be a marriage between the two worlds, one that she might be willing to explore. But for Lizzie, the digital realm has a strong pull and she wants to explore and persevere in this world first. She did explore the 'old world' but her passion turns forward irrevocably to the digital.

In the classroom, I watch my students carefully to see how they learn using new technology. For most students there is a conscious or unconscious negotiation around the toolbar exploring the possibilities of these manipulation tools. As in learning any new skill they need to experiment, explore, advance and retreat. Often their first period of play on the new equipment leads to frustration and I hear comments like 'It is too hard ... I can't use these computers'. I see that for some it is not intuitive and easy to develop technological skills to a high level of understanding quickly. Others do not seem as deterred. Willing, driven ones insistent on learning soon begin to feel empowered: they persevere in their learning.

When my students show determination with their crafting I watch their images transform into art making. Perseverance ... aesthetic decisions ... hard work ... considered judgement ... time ... they are all factors in their crafting. Look at Lizzie's work.



**Lizzie's digital portrait:** During the image making process she considers the relationships between the face and the background, the use of the brush marks, the opacity of each line, the contrast and use of light to give form and shape.

As Lizzie explores and moves forward in her learning she starts to make conscious decisions about the tools and the effects that she requires and desires to create a strong and engaging piece of work. During image making she considers the relationships between the face and the background, the use of the brush marks, the opacity of each line, the contrast and use of light to give form and shape. The Metro

bus tickets surrounding the figure are part of the image and provide a story, a narrative, identity to the person – she has created a modern day portrait using technology.

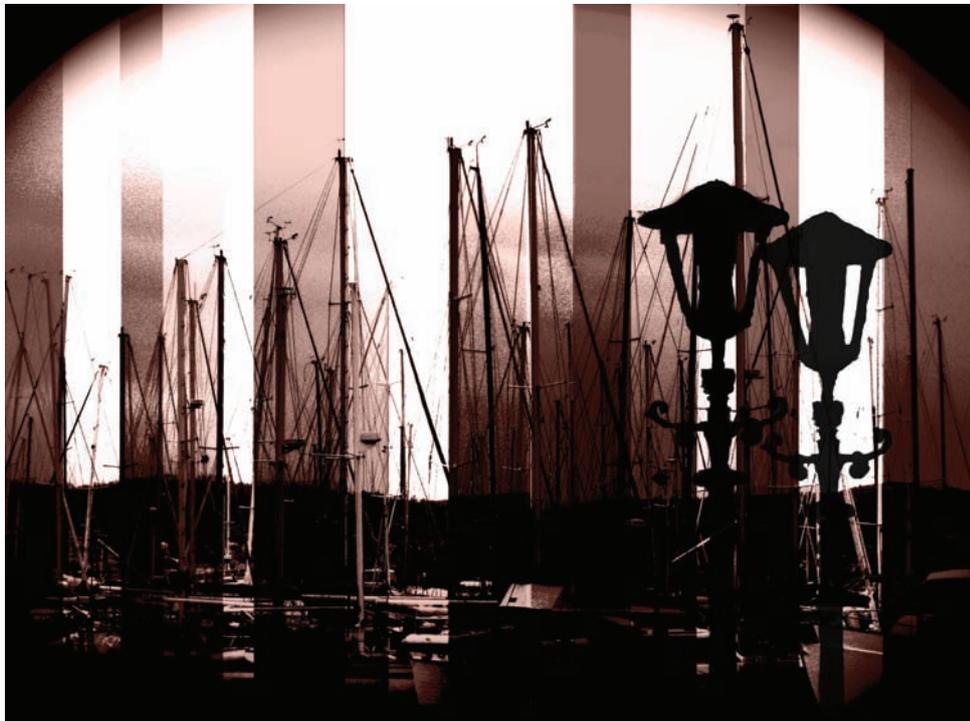
This particular image is a digital portrait originally derived from hand drawn sketches scanned into the computer. These drawings are derived from an initial photograph used as a base for the image and developed further through digital manipulation. Lizzie has then crafted the image by deciding on aesthetic decisions in order to resolve it. In this work she reveals control and skill transporting the image beyond cosmetic and superficial ‘manipulation’.

With constancy of approach Lizzie has been resolute in her art making, developing a highly competent set of skills to make and appreciate art. Other students have not been as committed and not persevered to master and build on their understanding. I mentioned Jane in Chapter 4: Discovering. The difficulty Jane had with her work was her lack of conceptual clarity linked to her inconsistent skills and the absence of a desire to find meaning to express her own personal narrative. This shortage of perseverance led to her personal frustration and Jane was not able to meet her full learning potential in art.

I scroll mentally through my class list and come to another student who has had rich experiences in the art world. She travels widely with her family overseas both for their work and for family reasons and she is exposed to art through local, national and international galleries as well as her school studies in art.

Amy is a Year 12 student and like Liv and Esther she has studied art through her senior years at school. Amy is exploring the urban and natural landscape and is

creating a series of works based on an overseas trip she enjoyed earlier this year where she travelled to Holland to visit her father's family. For her, the ability to see her images immediately in the camera is definitely one of the highlights and drawcards of the digital world. Amy uses the digital camera to capture a moment in time, her reality, or Sontag's (1977) notion of 'a slice of time' – a memory of her travels. This notion of time and reality again relates back to the term coined by Cartier-Bresson capturing a 'minute part of reality'. When Amy and I talk about image making together we spend time exploring how the image is crafted and why she chooses to use digital technology. Technology is offering her more possibilities to change and recreate the meaning of her work. The digital camera allows a candid and liberating approach to capturing lived experiences, and is how Amy starts to gather her images for her art making.



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**Amy's digital image of the boatyard:** She takes on aspects of the image and repeats them to accentuate the strong lines found in the urban landscape. Amy captures moments in time based on her travels.

The completed work by Amy centres on the linear qualities of the landscape. She takes on aspects of the image and repeats them to accentuate the strong lines found in the urban landscape. She deliberately manipulates her photographs to emphasise this characteristic. She reflects on her work by saying,

A thousand people can stand in the same location in front of a building and photograph it; maybe only one of the photographs would be more than the memory of a moment, and might be able to be called 'art'. The difference between art and photography might be in the eye of the beholder, or it might be in the extent to which artistic expression has created a work of diversity and individuality. ... I aim for focus on the repetition of line and I can do this successfully using digital technology... (Working paper: Interview with Senior Art Students, October, 2010)

As we can see from Amy's image of the boatyard she uses strong linear lines to accentuate the masts and streetlights. Amy feels connected to the piece and indicates that her key idea is to show her interpretation of different places and memories of her travels. She wants to create art that has a connection to memories so that she can share her experiences with the viewer. She refers to this as we talk,

I prefer to use photography as my basis for making art because it's the best way to capture a memory and I have all my photos from Europe. I remember certain things about this boat yard and I remembered the lines and how they stood out all through Holland. So for me it was a really good chance to take photos and twist them so that what I remember about them stands out for me. I like that, I am able to share my memory with photography. (Working paper: Interview with Senior Art Students, October, 2010)

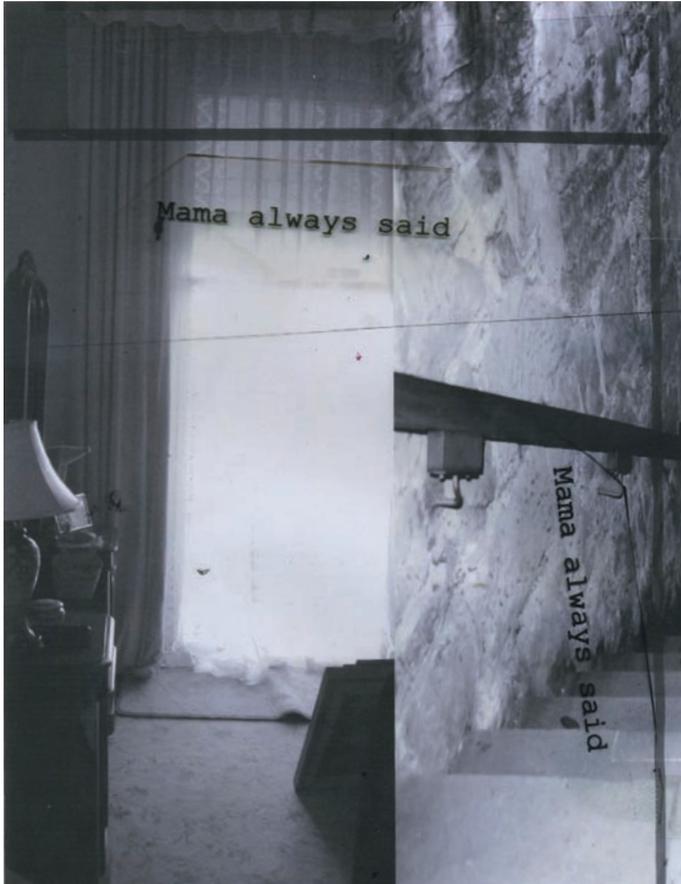
For me the opacity of each line varies to give a feeling of translucency and impermanence. Her use of sepia tones adds a sense of history and suggests a moment in time taken and placed into a modern day context. It seems that for Amy the use of

digital technology has liberated her and allowed her to explore in a free manner. Earlier in the year Amy took the time to explore the traditional photographic making process but found more propinquity and enjoyment using digital technology. She reveals in one of our conversations,

Everything I do is digital, I did have a go at analogue a while ago but I really like the process of digital – it is easier and it suits me better ... I like computers, and I like being able to delete and control everything. Being able to create and manipulate the image at the time of creating is essential so that I can go back and work things differently – this is important to me. (Working paper: Interview with Senior Art Students, March, 2010)

Amy has strong ideas for her work and she is intent on creating them using digital media; she is determined and willing to explore so that she creates work that has meaning. She has reached a level of competency because of her desire to do well in this subject, but she just does not seem to want to challenge herself or take any risks to take her work to the next level.

On the other hand, Jenn's images stem from a real passion to explore the urban landscape and human environments using a digital camera. Her work encapsulates memories and stories from her childhood. Jenn's approach is different from Amy's on various levels. First, she considers the composition of the image at the time of taking the photo. Amy responds directly to a situation as a memory of travel and then manipulates the image in Photoshop to accentuate the line and structure of the environment. But Jenn has a clear objective in her mind and she takes time to compose and consider the concept that she wants to convey – she searches for the right place, venue and situation to express her idea.




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**Jenn's digital image:** She considers the relationships in the environment, considering space, colour and viewpoints. The use of the words, 'Mama always said', embedded into the image, adds to the narrative and story through the use of poetry and symbolism.

Jenn also gives careful consideration to the relationships in the environment considering space, colour and viewpoints. The image that Jenn has created explores different viewpoints. She captures an interior of a bedroom in her grandmother's house and juxtaposes it with an old stone staircase that appears to be leading the viewer down below or into another part of the house. The staircase is fading out to give the impression of the two images joining together and also to give the feeling of decay as the image starts to take on a translucent feel. Jenn uses the computer to meld the images together to create a new environment – the juxtaposition of two worlds to create a further question and level of interpretation for the viewer. Jenn also adds text into her images. The use of the words, 'Mama always said', embedded into the image, adds to

the narrative and story through the use of poetry and symbolism. Her manipulation is not as obvious as Amy's but reveals a rather more subtle part of her imaging. The second way that she differs from Amy is in the extent to which she perseveres to craft her work. She perseveres more in class, engages further with her ideas and has a stronger aspiration to share her personal story.

Lizzie, Amy and Jenn approach their artwork from a variety of different perspectives but embrace technology as a primary art making method; each engaging in technology as a means of creating an artwork that moves beyond the preliminary level of understanding. Ultimately, the technology behind the crafting of the artwork becomes the secondary tool to convey the idea. They each make very considered decisions in their art making, but this has only happened after they achieve an understanding of what this medium can do – technology is becoming the workhorse or the vehicle for their artistic meaning and for self-expression. These students may have been initially seduced by technology but now they are fully in control due to their exploring, crafting and persevering.

One question still lingers in my mind. What makes these three students' work meaningful and powerful, and what is it about their crafting that differs from other students who subscribe that art is an easy option and are seduced purely by the cosmetic features of the digital camera and filters on Photoshop. When I consider this idea I again consider what Lizzie, Amy and Jenn have in common; what makes them stand out in a class of twenty-seven students. On reflection it is that these students who may have been seduced initially by the technology have been exploring, developing and engaging with the attributes of digital media. They delve deeply into the possibilities and make

conscious aesthetic decisions. They use the technology to make art rather than relying on the technology and its basic functions to produce superficial imagery. The success of these images comes from the culmination of a sound understanding of their chosen medium, a sound skill base, risk taking and the ability to make considered aesthetic judgments about their work, the elements that Robinson (2001) considers as essential to creativity. And they persevere. They keep on with their crafting, they connect to their own desire to make meaning when others give up or are satisfied with their outcome earlier. Yes, they achieve at different levels and gain different levels of outcomes, but it is evident to me that they persevere.

On the occasions I have described in this Chapter it has become apparent to me also that while traditional and contemporary art making have some key differences in approach and appeal there are aspects that are inter-related. They share some commonalities for the purpose of creating and crafting an image.

I start to appreciate why the digital creative method seduces these students. It allows important opportunities for 'play' as Robinson (2001) suggests and the combination of a variety of techniques to be explored. The students can use and make new connections and relationships to create art. I have observed the development of my students as they move past the initial notion of 'ease' and develop a command of the technology. Like a proficient painter they are now able to create art rather than just take a snapshot of reality. They take an idea, exploring and crafting to make their concepts into meaningful and purposeful work. It is at this stage that I feel that the students are understanding, responding to their learning and making art that has integrity and an 'essence' that Eslinger refers to as important (1995, p. 7).

I recall Robinson's perspective on creativity where he comments that there needs to be artistic intent and creative control of materials and medium to make art that has integrity. These particular students are also embracing Robinson's view that for the creativity to be complete there must be a level of reflective analysis and judgment. And they are reflecting a key finding from my inquiry.

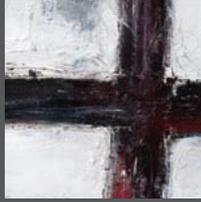
Drawn to the digital realm of photography and digital painting I find that while one can perceive links between traditional art forms and contemporary digital art making, such links are not particularly relevant to my young learners. My students have shown me that digital technology holds aesthetic, seductive and creative potential and that when these attributes are combined with context they can, with perseverance, produce a very satisfying image.

In my first experience with the Marc Chagall painting in the Paris Opera House ceiling I was seduced by the end product and the impact that it had on me. Digital art can also seduce but, when crafted, through discovering, constructing, and persevering, the 'easy' and immediate aspects are superseded by its ability as a tool for making art that has meaning.

I have come a long way. I am jumping over the 'purist' hurdle that I was so determined to hold onto. Now I have a greater understanding about this medium: if students can embrace the possibilities that either traditional or contemporary art practice offers, they can become absorbed with making and meaning. Technique becomes secondary to their intentions and their need to produce purposeful images.

In light of this, what is the next step for me? Where do I go from here with my exploration of pedagogy and values in teaching art?

With special references to the illuminative work of my students, I have explored in this element the areas of discovering, constructing and persevering. The next step is to enter the third element. The element of *refining*: resolving, knowing and understanding.



ELEMENT  
three



*Refining: resolving, knowing, understanding*

Details from: *Finding VII, VIII and IX, 'Glow'*, exhibition of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010

An abstract painting detail featuring thick, expressive brushstrokes. The composition is dominated by a central vertical band of dark, almost black, textured paint. This band is flanked by large areas of white and light grey paint, which are heavily layered and textured. The overall effect is one of raw, gestural energy and complex tonal values.

CHAPTER

7

Detail from: *Finding VII*, 'Glow', exhibition  
of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010



*Finding VII, 'Glow', exhibition of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010*

## CHAPTER

# 7

**Resolving:** *in which twenty-seven students look into their teacher's eyes*

Before starting on writing my final element of *refining*, which I explore in Chapters 7, 8, and 9, I take some time to reflect on what I have learned from my data and experiences. There has been a lot happening in the classroom as the academic year for my senior classes draws to a close. For the next two weeks the students and I will be editing, refining, resolving folios and working on support material for their internal and external examination in preparation for the hanging of their final exhibition. I hope by this stage

each student will be proud of what they have created, achieved and learned throughout the year. While the final part of the year is essentially the culmination of their learning, I cannot but feel that symbolically I am exhibiting my skills as a teacher with them. In some ways I am exposing my capacity as a teacher and mentor to my students; a symbolic assessment of the guidance and knowledge that has been transferred, shared and acted upon.

It is a Wednesday morning and my students and I are all gathered in the art studio. I spend the first ten minutes of the class sharing and reinforcing important dates, expectations and examination guidelines. The students, in theory, know what needs to be done for the final assessment so that they can gain clarity, and resolve final works. A certain energy is rising in the class as a result of the looming final year deadline. For some students, it is a time for tweaking and consolidating ideas, printing, trimming and collating journal and research work. For others, it is a reality hit – they realise that they do not have much to exhibit: they have not fully explored or connected with their artistic learning and have gone into ‘sleep mode’ a little too early in the year. Perhaps all those lessons gossiping, listening to iPods, only engaging with their own ideas and not extending their thinking with others have come back to haunt them. Those who have not been working assiduously are now reaching for any images that they can potentially include in their folios – madly flipping back through photographic contact sheets in the hope that an image will emerge from the page that might be considered as part of their folios for assessment. Others are splashing paint around in an abstracted manner in the hope of a happy accident.

Despite the energy that is emanating from the room, resulting from excitement, lethargy or panic, I find myself sitting back and considering my own learning and asking what it is that makes teaching art important in education and, critically, at this time, if I have I given the students in my care all that I could have. Have I provided them with enough resources and guidance to enable them to succeed – if they wish to, that is – and resolve both the production and appreciation of art? Will they leave the class with new and wondrous ways to look at the world? Will they be content with the concepts they have explored? Will this part of their educational experience be valued by them and will it allow for creativity and a capability for diverse thinking to be forever present in their lives and worlds? As educator and mentor, these are questions that have come to mean the most to my inquiry. As my research and experiences have evolved over this year, so have my initial questions and my concerns do not lie so much with the impact of technology in the art classroom. They have come into focus in the relationships that develop between the making, crafting and refining of art, by students of art and my own educational values, pedagogy and art making.

To consolidate my learning, researching and reflecting during the year I wish to find ways to fuse together my own values and pedagogy both as an educator and an artist. I need to find out what really matters to me, and fundamentally, what it is that really matters to my learners. Is it about hanging onto the traditional skills of art making? Is it about embracing the new technology and moving forward? Or is it about teaching students strong values about art and then providing them with an opportunity to explore and use media that suits their interests and skill base? I am beginning to shape my responses to these dilemmas.

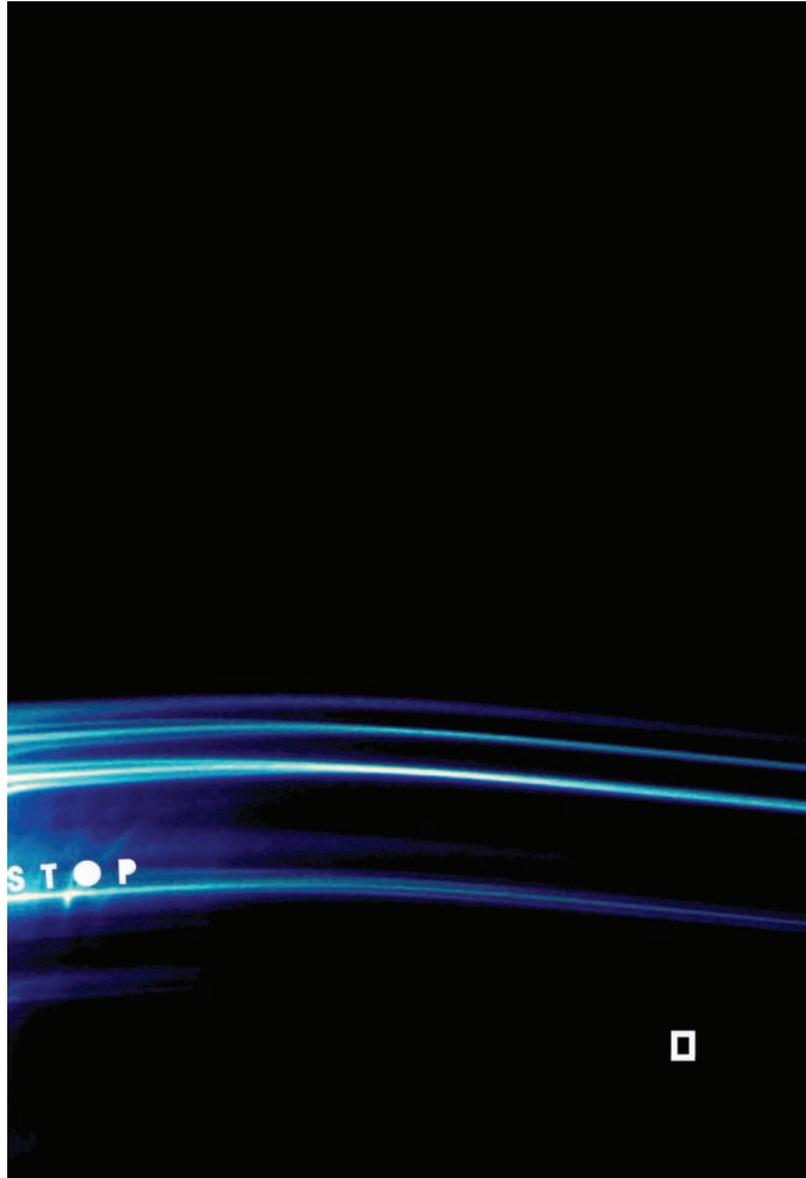
I look around the room on this Wednesday morning with my teaching notes in my hand. These notes include reminders for students and ideas that have come to me that might be relevant for them. In the final days of art classes for the year, it is my goal to hold interviews with each student so that we can continue to craft, and polish their work – to fill the gaps in their creative story. I remind each one of them that the examiners will be assessing five key areas: cohesion – which includes the development of a body of work that links together and shows development, refinement and resolution; technique – how well they have mastered the skills associated with their chosen medium; design – how well they have organised the aspects that constitute and craft the image; and how well they have addressed support material – the theory, exploration, experiments and journals that support their learning. The assessment of the fifth criterion is based around the student’s core concept or idea and their ability to communicate meaning and connect with the viewer. Lately I have been asking the class to sit and actively reflect for a moment and consider this question: What is it that you are communicating through your work and how successfully are you achieving this intention? This is a difficult question to answer but it provides a way for the students to assess and gain some clarification and self-reflection for their practice.

At the end of the examination procedure even though their work is assessed on these five criteria, I hope that they can also reflect on how they feel about what they have achieved and consider their growth as artists and communicators.

With my class list in hand I start my rounds. The students’ work is scattered over the floor; each student’s folio has become an overlaid jigsaw puzzle of images and ideas. I approach Casey, a Year 12 student who has worked diligently all year. Casey

studied art last year and has always been a keen and enthusiastic student, willing to experiment and explore – she has an inquiring mind, she asks for help and she wants to be challenged. When I look back to the beginning of the year and remember photos that she took at the beach to record moments of her surfing trips, I am elated at what she has achieved and how her work has developed and evolved during this year. Her initial idea has transformed from capturing surfing and the natural landscape to interpreting the fast paced world that envelops us all. She set out to communicate through her work two sides of the world in which we live – the world that is fast and demanding contrasted with the idea that we need to take time out to enjoy life and re-group: time to press the pause and reset button.

Casey's graphic imagery emerges as a response to this idea. The images are rich because of the strong colours and the layering of text, which act like a texture rather than just information to read. She has kept her connection to photography as her images are based on photos, but they have been cropped and digitally manipulated. Casey has played with the brightness and contrast levels and layered or combined her image to evoke a sense of the fast pace of life. Her image titled *Speed* is indicative of the style of images that Casey creates.



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Casey's digital image 'Speed': Through her works she communicates two sides of the world – the world that is fast and demanding contrasted with the need to take time out to enjoy life and re-group – time to press the pause and reset button.

This morning is very exciting for Casey. We arrived at class simultaneously and opened the door to find all her images printed out and amassed in the printing bay. These dark rich A1 size images are softly piled on top of each other as each one cascades into the

catchment tray of the photo printer. We had spent hours yesterday resizing each image in preparation for getting them ready for printing. We had sent them to the printer overnight and arrived this morning to find them there as a tangible artifact – she is excited. I am too.

During the year Casey and I have spent many hours sitting in front of a computer screen looking at layout, design, discussing options, ideas and new possibilities. These printed images can now be placed together as a collective to tell her story. Casey has now resolved her work and she is ready to refine her folio.

Casey and I scramble around on our knees, deciding on the order of images so that we can achieve the right balance and connection. I stop and watch as Casey engages with the images of which she is so proud. She proposes, ‘What if I put this here and move that there? ... How does that look? ... Does that work next to that? ... What if I moved that there – would that be better?’ Seeing Casey completely engaged and absorbed with her creative world, I feel somewhat humbled that she now has control over her final body of work. Casey is making decisions that are considered and relevant to her ultimate goal of producing a strong and engaging folio of work that has meaning and intent. It is such an occasion for learning, for teacher and student that make teaching worthwhile: you reflect back on the year and you see a student mature and become passionate about what they do. Casey looked up at me the other day and conspiratorially said, ‘I could do this all day.’

Achieving such connection with art making is what one desires for all students. At such moments, I often wonder what passes through the minds of those students

who are not ready to resolve their ideas and are faced with presenting their folio for assessment. Do they wonder what it would be like if they had worked hard and found a legitimate and true voice for their art making?

It is ten-twenty five in the morning and the lesson has ended. I have not engaged with all the students as I had hoped to but I will take time with them tomorrow. As the class disperses, some of the students still linger around in the recess break seeking help and guidance while others have departed swiftly.

After recess I have a free lesson and I take some time to think back over the year on times when I became frustrated and questioned my role and my values in relation to educational practice. I have been disturbed by the changing attitudes of today's contemporary students, the infiltration of technology in the classroom and the ongoing and constant need to give, and give to students, expecting no or little reward. Students like Casey and the relationships we can evolve with students are what make this work all worthwhile. It is these students who have enabled me to question and move forward in my own artistic learning and pedagogical approach.

This inquiry crystallises what matters for me; and the ways I see myself as teacher, mentor, coach and artist. My students enable me to focus and establish what is important to allow me to move forward in my teaching. During this year I have taught some of the largest classes in my teaching career, worked on my masters' thesis, and held an exhibition of my work inspired by my experimentation with the digital camera. As I listened to the speaker who opened my exhibition in October, I understood that without my current educational exploration and self-questioning I would not be exhibiting my

work that day nor would I have had the drive to create art and resolve a body of my own work. So that is a satisfying outcome for me.

My students of 2010 are a catalyst for my individual art practice and for re-assessing my values. The elements of *exploring*, *crafting* and *refining* of my own work have been linked together by my desire to tackle the so-called technological presence in the classroom. My students are my sounding board and my guide throughout this year. They participate in my inquiry as both active and silent partners.

When I sit back and reflect further on the students who I use as examples for this project I wonder what it is that they all have in common – what has drawn me to them and what has made their work resonate in my mind? Their personalities, their passion and desire to create art, to take an idea and express it in a way that they are excited about? They have told me about their struggles, shown me perseverance and set me the task of refining and consolidating for the purposes of assessment and self-satisfaction. Many of their ideas resonate with me: I owe most of the understandings I disclose in my inquiry to students like Lizzie, Adelle, Karen, Casey, Brooke and Emma.

The final two Chapters of this thesis – knowing and understanding – represent me as an educator and artist as I learn to appropriate what has been revealed and illuminated for me through this year of questioning, research and discovery. I focus my pedagogy, the practice and theory of my teaching, through building connections between artist and teacher as learner.

As the last two weeks of the academic year unfold, Year 11 and 12 students will embark on examinations and then move on to establish themselves in careers and

new pathways of life. At my school we have a tradition that the leavers are ‘rung out’ as they depart from their senior secondary studies – the school bell chimes in the central courtyard, tolling once for each student. When the eighty-ninth bell chimes, I too will also feel that I have achieved something special with them but my inquiry for this year will not necessarily be over: my inquiry has lead me to new questions and challenges. I draw to a close with some resolutions, I hope, as if I were resolving a work of art. John Donne the poet, says, ‘Therefore, send not to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.’ Too true, no man is an island. I have not been alone in my questions and struggles. I have been a co-learner with my students.

An abstract painting detail featuring a prominent diagonal band of vibrant red and maroon hues, set against a background of muted greys, tans, and off-whites. The texture is visible, with brushstrokes and some cracking in the paint.

# CHAPTER

# 8

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Detail from: *Finding VIII*, 'Glow', exhibition  
of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010



*Finding VIII, 'Glow', exhibition of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010*

## CHAPTER

# 8

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**Knowing:** *where lots of light bulbs click to the 'on' position*

It is Thursday afternoon and I have just returned to my teaching office from a meeting. I am sitting at my desk sorting out some papers and trying to finish the physical layout of the student art exhibition. Next week the class will hang their work for external assessment, a crucial part of the final examination procedure. Their folios will be exhibited in the School's Performing Arts Centre and how it is curated is very important; each portfolio requires enough space, and proper lighting and, of course, the exhibition as a whole

needs to work as a collection and collective. The purpose of a good exhibition design is to lead the viewer into a viewing experience, to create an ambience that is conducive and sympathetic to the work on display.

As I sit at my desk with the nearly completed floor plan for the exhibition – a work of art in itself consisting of scratchy red pen marks, pink highlighter daubs over students’ names that have been crossed out and then reinstated in different parts of the plan – I hear footsteps charging up the stairs. I call out ‘Hello’, but receive no reply. It is unusual for visitors to materialise at four in the afternoon as the staff are at meetings or off at sporting practice or engaged in their own work. I venture from my desk to see who has come into the classroom. ‘Hello’, I call again and I make my way towards a rustling noise behind one of the easels. At this point Emma, one of my Year 11 students greets me, ‘I am so excited, I have just come back from getting my images stitched by the sail maker and they are fantastic. This is so exciting. I can’t wait to see them up and hanging in the show.’ She rushes out, spent from such enthusiasm.

This is an iridescent moment for me, as it illuminates elation and feelings of accomplishment for both the student and teacher. Emma’s work is a suite of eight large-scale collaged dresses that take the form of banners eighty centimeters wide by one hundred and fifty centimeters long. The images of the dresses float on a white background so that the colours, textures and shapes sing boldly. You engage with the surface, the words and the tactile qualities of the work that are both bold and elegant. The bright red and complementary green colours resonate from the hospital white backdrops. The images are to hang in a row with a stitched line that starts on the first piece and winds its way over the eight works finally running off the last piece into

nowhere land. This line stitches her pieces into a unified whole.

These images have evolved from Emma's desire to research the history of dressmaking and fashion and in particular the significance of the Christening dress. Emma raided her grandma's sewing box to find old patterns, fabrics, threads, and cottons to bring together for her work. Assembling materials gave Grandma the excuse to help with Emma's art – sharing stories from the family's past. This in itself added to Emma's project: she stitched her work to family history and tradition. These were factors that Emma had not anticipated learning or knowing at the birth of her first idea, but the making, researching, questioning and inquiry helped Emma to formulate her ideas and concepts. They gave her work new dimension and significance, allowing her own story to be told, as she wove a fabric of different textures, papers, wax, varnish and layering of colours. Emma's work is one of the few folios that have embraced traditional art making techniques.

My inquiry connects me to my students: it allows me to explore with them and to learn about their sense of self, their interests and their desire. I can be with them as they engage fully with the curriculum. I witness their artistic and cultural backgrounds support their art making. Yes, these characteristics assist their artistic development and appeal to me. But, I know there is more to question and research about – really knowing the students and with such knowing, relationships form between the student, their work and my teaching in the classroom.

The rapport that grows between teacher and students nourishes the students' abilities to form personal, symbolic and metaphorical links to their individual art practice.

Their work evolves from sound research, competent skills and a deep connection with what they believe is important to them. They appear to reach a point where they are able to communicate what they want to achieve, what they feel is significant to them and they find themselves equipped to make decisions in a knowing way. Knowing is an important part of the students' artistic journey when they need to collaborate with the teacher in the final part of their crafting.

Thus I have become mindful of the question: How and why is an art education so valuable for Lizzie, Emma, Casey and Adelle? My inquiry so far has shown how digital media used with intelligence and understanding allows students to explore and challenge their creativity. I could choose at this stage of writing to theorise about this. To be true to my inquiry though, I aim rather to understand this combining in a pedagogic sense. I turn here to explore ways to strengthen my pedagogic understandings.

I aim to avoid what Van Manen refers to as a 'deadening to abstract' and 'the danger of forgetting [my] original ... vocation ...: to help educate my [students] in a pedagogically responsible manner' (1990, p. 139). This requires me to reflect on the way I teach students, relate to them and commit my practice to them.

What then are possible ways to reflect upon and interpret my teaching practice? This question is essential for me to write about because I am really interested to perceive how, as a result of my mentoring and coaching, students develop creative, artistic expression as my inquiry so far shows. At this point of my inquiry, I focus on the relationships that develop between teacher and students and attempt to understand them as pedagogical phenomena.

By focusing on how this relationship is enacted through curriculum and pedagogy I will call on the writing and thinking of Thomas Alexander (1995), Erica McWilliam (2010), John Dewey (1859–1952), and Christopher Allen (2010), as well as reference the work of my students to highlight the development of my educational thinking and pedagogy.

During this research I have considered different ways to understand education and most of my reading encourages me to suggest that the role of education is to encourage individual growth. Education is linked to the human condition as Alexander (1995, p. 205) reminds us. An etymological perspective of the word education might also be helpful.

*The New Oxford Dictionary* (1998) tells us that the word educate derives from the Latin *educat* ‘led out’, from the verb *educare*, which is related to *educere* ‘to lead’ (p. 589). This might suggest that educating is leading to prepare individuals for the demands that are placed on them to survive, connect with and to know the world around them. A core aim for education requires a moral obligation to prepare students for life as well as to impart sound knowledge and skills.

Erica McWilliam (2010) suggests to us that educators need to shift their thinking about education and teaching so that we can help our students become epistemologically agile, risk takers and creative learners. McWilliam desires teachers to assist students to depart from the ‘mode of truth’ to the ‘mode of design’, where teachers challenge students to become solution finders as well as engagers in systematic curiosity. In McWilliam’s ‘mode of design’ I find a means of purpose as I attempt to develop in my

learners a deep understanding of participation in art making as they immerse themselves in their work and, at the same time, to create space to reflect, think, and inquire. In the mode of design we can celebrate wonder, imagination and knowledge as well as what appears to us as factual and truthful.

Nel Noddings (1998) in relation to John Dewey's wisdom, also has views on education as both a means to an end and as a means for growth. Noddings reminds us of Dewey's advocacy: 'the aim of education is more education' (Dewey, in Noddings 1998, p. 5). Dewey does not deny that specific aims are appropriate within education. Indeed, he insists that educational activities by their very nature must have aims and outcomes. In an ideal educational endeavour teachers must try to create learning experiences that bring learners closer to new or different ways of thinking or a deeper understanding of particular concepts. It is useful for Noddings' purpose and helpful for mine to cite Dewey saying, 'our aims are not fixed, and there is no grand, ultimate aim beyond continued education' (p. 27).

As Noddings reveals, for Dewey education is inextricably linked to the human condition and to the way we experience the world. Therefore what we teach, and how we teach it, has central significance to the learner's growth and development. Alexander (1995) refers to our desire to exist meaningfully by saying that,

... we must recognise the fundamental nature of our existence as being living together in a community bound by meaning-giving traditions which must be taught and acquired; ... The way we inhabit this cultural world is one of constant learning and adaptation. Growth is a process of transformation. (Alexander, 1995, p. 205)

For Dewey and Alexander education pertains to growth, development and constant learning and to this McWilliam adds a desire for learners to share in systematic inquiry.

In a recent article cited in *The Australian Weekend Review* (2010 December) called ‘Learned behaviour’, art critic Christopher Allen explores and comments on a recent exhibition of work by the contemporary New Zealand painter Euan McCloud.

You don’t become an artist by applying a cool style or even by finding your own distinctive look: you must grow into being an artist, if at all, by acquiring a deep understanding of the craft you practise, looking at the world around you and eventually finding something that you really want to say and that cannot be said in any other way. (Allen, 2010c, p. 12)

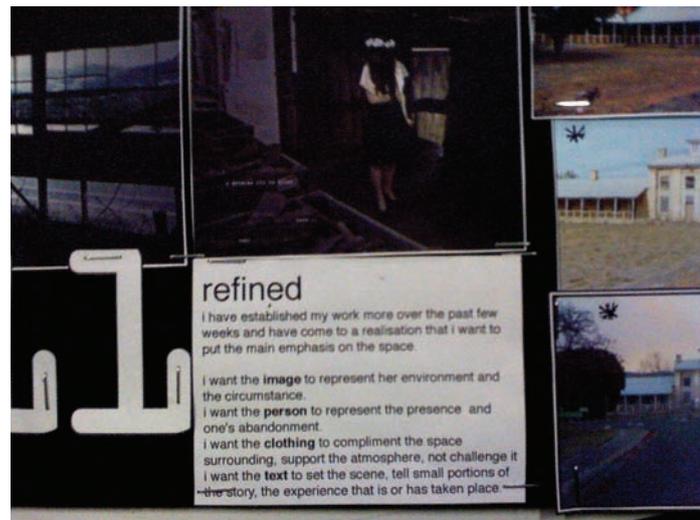
Allen, in common it seems, with Dewey, Alexander and McWilliam advocates that education is about providing students with the opportunity to inquire, to search for understanding, to seek knowledge, to come to know, and to find meaning. And my part in this is to provide meaningful learning opportunities for my students and for myself.

I try to establish ways for my students to take, in my experience, educated risks and to question what they are learning so that they can move forward. Developing this ethos in the classroom, based on a sound framework and curriculum, engineers a stronger level of inquiry or as McWilliam (2010) suggests ‘a systematical curiosity’. As Elliot Eisner (2002, pp. 70-92) asserts in chapter 4 of *The art and the creation of mind: ‘10 lessons that art teaches’*, words such as appreciation, creation, thinking, experiences and possibility are idiosyncratically linked to the visual arts and are the key principles at the core of art education. Students who are prepared to engage with all aspects of the

creative process, and who are prepared to engage in this 'systematic curiosity' are often very successful in their art making. They develop a meaningful platform on which to express and communicate ideas and concepts.

To illustrate this point I recall an occasion in the art room where Adelle, one of my talented and resolute Year 12 photography students, and I are discussing the way she approaches, makes and views her art and that of others. The conversation I recorded is characterised by an ardour that illustrates passion, understanding, knowing and confidence. To explore the idea in more detail I call on some of Adelle's works. Her artwork is based on the relationships that develop between people and places. She is exploring different artists who interpose people into different situations creating new and interesting scenarios. Adelle wants the viewer to challenge her images and to discover a link or story behind their meaning and purpose. Technology including the digital camera and her Macintosh computer are her chosen instruments to construct the images.

However, what is really interesting about Adelle as an art student is her ability to develop an idea, converse, take risks and engage in the development of a concept. It is her thinking that is fascinating to observe. She is systematically curious in all aspects of her art making. For my research, she has permitted me to extract from her Visual Schematic Organiser some images that illustrate her thinking and the relationships she has formed between her ideas, appreciation and making. By engaging with her planning I start to gain further insight into her thinking mind; to see how she maps out and develops her ideas so that she knows what she wants to convey and how to do it.



**Adelle's Visual Schematic Organiser:** These sections illustrate her thinking and the relationships that have formed between her ideas, appreciation and making.

On ebony coloured board Adelle uses the words 'refine', 'make' and 'create'. Interestingly these words reflect the descriptors in Eisner's (2002) '10 lessons that art teaches'. Adelle utilises and refines these words to make them more relevant to her artistic development. The words are clearly defined in her mind and the images bordering the text panels show her working, thinking and image making. Through our

dialogue, between student and art teacher and mentor, Adelle's art making becomes authentic and powerful. This level of thinking and understanding is not evident in all student development but from my observations, the capacity to think and the curiosity to understand distinguishes these students who move their art making to a new level and those who do not.

As part of Adelle's art making she writes an Artist Statement. This gives the viewer an insight into her ideas, the thinking behind her work and her artistic influences. This piece of writing accompanies her practical portfolio for examination. In this she writes,

My body of work is the story of one girl, one journey and one story. 'Person versus Place' is an amalgamation of emotion, reminiscence, past memories, relationships, disregarded places, personal analysis and reflection. The story is articulately illustrated throughout an extensive series of visually rich, images. (Working paper, Senior Art Student, October, 2010)

She continues,

Pictured throughout the series is a young girl; her character is portrayed as petite, vulnerable and rather troubled. As she wanders through a lost past life, she reflects on memories once gained and shared within. The work itself consists of four different places, each different in structure, composition, surrounding environments and meaning. The relevance of these spaces is particular to the character and her relationship with this space is demonstrated and displayed strongly, hence 'Person versus Place'. (Working paper, Senior Art Student, October, 2010)

The image is one of Adelle's photos for a series of thirty-two images. It illustrates her theme of 'Person versus Place.'




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**Adelle's digital image:** Placing the figure in this context, dressed in a young girl's finery, allows the viewer to question why the girl comes to be in this decaying environment.

The composition of her image is judicious; the light is refined by manipulation in Photoshop to lead the viewer to the focal point – the hands of an anonymous young girl whose identity remains central in all the images. We have no way of referencing the figure of the child and this supplements the mystery of the work. The image has been constructed and taken in an old psychiatric hospital that was part of a now disused and abandoned correctional facility. Placing the figure in this context, arraying her in a young girl's finery, allows the viewer to question why she comes to be in this dilapidated environment. The crumbling environment contrasts with the elegance of the young girl and leaves the viewer to establish the story or construct meaning that is, at best inferential. The relationship and images that have been established by Adelle are then

enhanced and accentuated by the text – *my hands are clammy as I clutch them tightly, just waiting* – as part of the design.

Examiners deem Adelle’s work to be of a high standard. She demonstrates an understanding of art history. She shows awareness of other artistic influences such as traditional painting and contemporary photography. She knows how to research and explore ideas deeply as evidenced in her choice of place and time for her image. She alludes to contemporary Australian photographers, like Pat Brassington’s (2010) juxtaposition of people and places, Bill Henson’s, (2005) dark and mysterious environments and Debra Pauwe’s (2010) anonymous figures dressed in luscious costumes, as well as to traditional painters such as the Flemish painter Vermeer. There are distinct aspects of Vermeer’s use of light and composition evident in her image. We can see a reflection of Vermeer if we compare her photographic composition with this painting by Vermeer – *A woman holding a balance*, (1662–1665) housed in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Like Vermeer, Adelle has taken an external viewpoint of a moment in time and enhanced it by compositional balance and poetic timelessness.




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*A woman holding a balance*, (1662– 1665): Like Vermeer, Adelle has taken an external viewpoint of a moment in time and enhanced it by compositional balance and poetic timelessness.

The way Vermeer's image is composed is strong and creates a sense of story or narrative between the person and the environment. While Vermeer's work deals with a domestic situation, Adelle's images draw our awareness to places that people would perhaps not otherwise have experience with and thereby conveys to us a sense of the unknown. For Adelle, all of her references and allusions have been a deliberate part of the exploration and research. Her work surpasses taking a photograph using technology and undisputedly shows her achievement in connecting to art history. Interestingly, in terms of this exploration, Vermeer was an artist who used the *camera obscura* as a way of tracing the real world onto the canvas. The *camera obscura* was one of the first cameras used by artists to trace their world. It was essentially a dark chamber that projected the image of an object or scene on to a sheet of paper so that the outlines could be traced. The apparatus was a box with a small hole on one side. Light reflected from a scene entered the box and presented an inverted image. In this respect it is identical to the photographic camera. I mentioned in an earlier chapter, an occasion where some of my more curious art students had an experience with a pinhole camera as a means to develop an understanding of traditional photographic techniques and how the camera can be used to capture time and place. In the case of Vermeer he would set up a scene to paint and then use the *camera obscura* to project the scene onto his canvas and then trace the projected image.

I recall Sontag's (1977) reference to reality and how the camera is used for different purposes depending on the intention of the artist. Vermeer used this photographic technology to aide his 'drawing up' of a domestic situation. Adelle has employed photographic technology as her tracing instrument and like Vermeer operates it as a tool to increase creative possibilities. She is influenced by the social and cultural

construct of the current developments of technology yet extends it beyond the cosmetic rendering of an environment.

Adelle's body of technologically created work is rich. Adelle knows what she wishes to express. She is able to meld tradition and contemporary views together to develop her ideas. She is able to build strong relationships within her work. I am completely engaged by her work. As an educator, I am compelled to know and understand contemporary visual culture and to develop a curriculum that reflects this. McWilliam (2010), Eisner & Day (2004) and Doll (1993) write that curriculum in the 21st century permits an active amalgam of the current learners needs – environment and pedagogy. My learners are different from me. I need to understand them, and provide for them a curriculum suitable for their growth.

As I read about curriculum and attempt to refine my knowledge in this area, I find many differing definitions of what curriculum is. I could perhaps summarise that curriculum is what a teacher teaches or what teachers use to shape the knowledge and instruction that is to be shared and explored in a particular subject area. Yet, others enlighten me more, for example, William Doll (1993) posits on curriculum and the role of the teacher that, 'The teacher's role will ... be transformative. Curriculum will not be the racecourse, but the journey itself. And learning will be an adventure in meaning making' (p. xi).

I endorse Doll's notion that the curriculum constitutes an adventure that encourages in students a vibrant sense of inquiry as well as a thirst for the particular knowledge that is suitable, relevant and reflective of their learning (Doll, 1993, p.

xi). This kind of adventure is something that I desire. My task is to understand the possibilities for enabling students to venture into a rich learning environment.

In another sense, I read that curriculum is a framework for knowledge that is imparted in a learning environment, potentially embracing different principles that are appropriate to the key aspects of the discipline. This includes understandings and methods that challenge learning. Murphy in Moon, Ben-Peretz, & Brown, (2000) suggests that,

... theories of how students learn and develop help determine: what is selected for inclusion in the curriculum; how it is taught, including which classroom resources, organisation and pedagogical strategies are judged to be appropriate; and the nature of the teacher's role and relationship with learners. (Murphy 1990, in Moon, Ben-Peretz, & Brown, 2000, p. 205)

Glenyis Unruh (1975) reflects on learning and curriculum design in Hilda Taba's book *Responsive curriculum development: Theory in action*. Unruh proposes,

... in addition to the face-to-face experiences of teachers with students, teachers must know how to mobilize groups, initiate them into curriculum work, diagnose concerns, develop problems and plans from the concerns, formulate objectives, project hypotheses from local or general research, and translate these hypotheses into curriculum possibilities. (Unruh, 1975, p.106)

From my reading and exploration I see more clearly that curriculum is about the interaction of learning with culture, knowledge, assessment and pedagogy.

At this point of my own pedagogic journey I take time to reflect on the role of my curriculum and question its relevance and effectiveness. Unruh and Murphy help me to do this as they highlight the value of developing a curriculum that is not

prescriptive so much as reflective of student needs and interests. I try to weigh all this up in my own mind. Where will technology fit into how I am going to construct my curriculum in the future?

It is not exactly earth shattering, but I have come to a deeper understanding that when used well, and with authenticity of purpose, digital technology offers very exciting ways to make art and is an important part of the curriculum. Adelle's work epitomises this so well.

Further to this, I add the crucial importance of building strong interpersonal relationships in the classroom. It seems to me that these are nurtured particularly when the student and teacher learn together. As Erica McWilliam (2010) suggests, I find that both teachers and students learn best when they choose the means and the intended outcomes of their learning. From this educational scenario comes the development and integration of the individual into a network of learners. Nourishing my intention is my own vocational need to facilitate occasions for learning that are challenging and embedded in individual human life experience.

What now emerges for me – and for other art teachers who read my thesis – is the central importance of the way I teach and encourage student inquiry and the interpersonal relationships that develop to engage students in art learning. In light of this, the curriculum, my pedagogy and relationships are inextricably linked.

I have come to realise throughout this inquiry that an inherent overlap of technology by the world of art seems almost inevitable. Solso writes,

The realm of the visual arts inherently overlaps with other disciplinary domains. Artists and other cultural producers draw on all types of knowledge and cognitive processes to create. Recent research on cognition, and even predictions, suggests that learning in the future will have more to do with developing a range of knowledge that involves disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and interpersonal relationships than with the boundaries of professional disciplines'... Connecting content typically considered part of other school subjects in the curriculum helps students to understand the importance and power of the visual culture and their place in the world. (Solso, 1977, in Freedman & Stur, 2004, p. 819)

From inquiry, student engagement, reading and constantly questioning and self-questioning, from an extensive journey of reflection on the role of pedagogy, I have come to understand several aspects of curriculum that I can apply to my pedagogy in the future: understanding visual culture is an important part of the art learning for students as it builds and creates experiences for critical and creative inquiry. I reflect on the words of Solso and how connecting with their learning helps them to understand their place in the world. I have also considered that teaching visual arts is about achieving balance between the practical application of crafting art and understanding and appreciation of it. To teach adequately and appropriately, we need to be able to understand what students find relevant to their learning. Awareness of contemporary art practice establishes a relevant and reflective curriculum that inspires and engages with student learning.

I no longer doubt that current and ensuing learners are intrinsically and ineffably connected to the world of technology. This is a key area of exploration and inspiration: for them it is an area they know so well. This is clear in the way that my students participate and engage with technology for art making and undoubtedly this will continue to evolve over time as technology opportunities expand.

As I walk again on the Rivulet Track I can now comfortably acknowledge that I was feeling threatened by new technology before I began this inquiry. As time has passed, my inquiry becomes more satisfied: the students in my academic care have educated me to the possibilities that technology offers. John Rimmer (2010), chair of Federal Governments New Media Arts Fund 1997–2000, talks about technology as an exciting and integral part of the contemporary art scene in Australia. He indicates that a clear definition is difficult to ascertain as it means many things to many people, but he suggests that a definition should involve innovative work that uses new technologies. He suggests that genuine innovation requires taking risks and that the challenge is to keep alive experimentation, the pushing of boundaries into the future. He helps me clarify in my mind the notion that technology impacts on the curriculum, and how and why it is used. There is good reason for teachers to embrace and to know the way technology is used by today's generation, as it is relevant, engaging and exciting on many different levels; it is the vernacular of this generation providing new gateways and alternative means to experience the world. As it is part of the way that students communicate and navigate their way through society and life it needs to be evaluated as part of their education whether as a tool for research, or as a vehicle for expression and communication or as part of the visual art curriculum.

My underlying concern throughout this inquiry has been about the infiltration of technology into the visual arts curriculum and the classroom, but having worked with my students, for almost a year, I am no longer questioning the relevance of technology. I wonder what other perspectives of the 'unknown' will affect the visual arts in terms of learning and education. What has become transparent for me at this stage is that the reflective practitioner is one who engages with, rather than denies, new technologies.



CHAPTER

9

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Detail from: *Finding IX*, 'Glow', exhibition  
of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010



*Finding IX, 'Glow', exhibition of paintings, Goulburn Street Gallery, 2010*

## CHAPTER

# 9

### *Understanding: pausing to reflect on the ineffable*

It is exciting to be sitting here writing the last section of my thesis. This chapter acts as a pause, a time for reflection and understanding before the Epilogue. Robinson (2001) in his four elements of creativity suggested the importance of reflection by referring to 'the need for waking and sleeping moments' (p. 133). This chapter permits both the reader and myself to explore some summative reflections. I believe that both my personal philosophy about art education and my pedagogy have shifted, grown and developed

as a result of my research. I have come to some understandings about my professional career as an educator, the values that I support, and the importance of self-study and research. When I started my inquiry I was driven by the concern that technology was invading and eroding the visual arts in the school curriculum. I have to admit to even entertaining some hostility towards this onslaught. As I have worked with and deeply observed my students learn and create artwork, new views have evolved. This inquiry has also provided me with an opportunity to reflect on and assess where and who I am as both an educator and as an artist.

The exploration and self-study has given me the voice to become involved in my research in an embodied way. My own practical exploration has helped me to convey the full essence of my experience and to reflect on my understandings and knowledge. Caroline Derry (2005) views embodiment ‘as a way of knowing that goes beyond the intellectual, logical and rational mode of thinking that has traditionally been defined as knowledge. It includes emotions, culture, physical sensation and life experiences’ (Derry in Mitchell & Weber, 2005, p. 35). It is this interpretation that resonates with my thinking.

As part of my research and active learning I created a body of work for an exhibition and I have watched my students come to terms with their self-expression, their culture, their life experiences, and their sense of identity through the making of art. My personal body of paintings has become a self-study method for examining my perception of self. It has become a way for me to evaluate my dual roles as artist and educator. By making art I have a richer understanding of these two roles and how they work in parallel. This understanding has made my teaching stronger and more

purposeful. This research has been a critical friend and has facilitated what I have explored and learned as educator and artist.

As a result of all these experiences, this journey throughout the year, I understand that what takes prominence for me now is the establishment of a learning environment that encourages connections, risk taking, questioning and a desire to make art that has meaning. For me, the connections that are established are twofold. First, there are the relationships that develop between the student and the teacher. Secondly, the connections that the student develops with their chosen medium while *exploring*, *crafting* and *refining* their art work.

Writing narratives about my students' lived experiences has been a catalyst for the change in my inquiry providing a platform from which I explore and reflect on my own learning. The writing has made a valuable contribution to my professional practice as an artist and educator. The ramifications of this will, and have already, affected how I conduct my teaching, learning and self-reflection.

While there will be no definitive answers to questions posed in this thesis, I have been able to resolve, at least for me, some of the key issues that fuelled this investigation. Actually, what has become clear is that there are so many more questions and areas of engagement and wonderment – so many areas to explore and investigate. I have been able to articulate through my inquiry and research style, questions relevant for my quest for understanding. Max Van Manen reminds us that

When we articulate certain questions we identify with a certain research method ... So there exists a certain dialectic between question and method. Why then should one adopt one research approach over

another? The choice should reflect more than mere whim, preference, taste or fashion. Rather, the method one chooses ought to maintain a certain harmony with the deep interest that makes one an educator. (Van Manen, 1990, p. 2)

I have engaged in this method of research because I believe that it suited my purposes and allowed for a deeper and richer investigation into my own learning and philosophy; it has encouraged me to take on the role of learner and to investigate and experience the challenges of making artwork.

As an active learner in the classroom, whether student or teacher, how crucial it is to question, to search for guidance from past experiences and develop new ways to approach ideas for growth and learning. This manner of questioning and research has been one of the hallmarks of my self-study and importantly I have learned that it is the willingness to hold up our work for others to examine that makes us more confident learners. Hamilton and LaBoskey (2005) suggest in *Just who do we think we are?* that,

This, in a sense, is what makes self-study a specific area of teacher research. We both ‘do’ and ‘show’. Where we need to develop our expertise is in relation to representation and the ways in which we portray our work to others. (Hamilton & LaBoskey in Mitchell, Weber & O’Reilly-Scanlon, 2005, p. 59)

It is of course this very element of self-study that is difficult, as being placed into a vulnerable situation invites criticism, judgment and reflection. But for me, the invitation of reflection has become an important part of learning giving me many opportunities to explore ideas and to engage in conversation with students and artists. It is this role of the teacher as learner that has had a profound impact on my pedagogy.

The decision to embrace the ‘do and show’ idea meant that I had to take some risks. I remember the day I decided to tackle my own inhibitions and fears by leaving two of my paintings out overnight in the classroom. I had started working on them that afternoon after school and I had planned to work on them the next day at lunchtime, or if time permitted I might apply a layer of paint during my senior class time. As I left them on the wall to dry I walked out feeling apprehensive as I was allowing my students to view my work, my art making style and in a sense inviting them to judge me on my ability and mode of work. As Hamilton and LaBoskey in Mitchell, Weber & O’Reilly-Scanlon (2005) comment, ‘We are not yet ... expert at portraying [our work] to others, since it seems to require new ways of doing so.’ (p. 60). This illuminates for me that we are vulnerable but that risk-taking is needed to know ourselves and make changes and this is what I had decided to do!

Interestingly, the students responded to my work in a fascinated manner and began asking me questions about my practice and how I had achieved different effects and what materials I was using. This initial questioning provided me with a springboard for further conversation and opportunity to receive feedback and, at the same time, influence students’ learning in a practical way as they were able to see different ways of approaching art making. It allowed the students to engage in my work and for them to observe me question and reflect on my practice as an artist. At times, I asked for their feedback and comments to gain new perspectives. This role of teacher as learner was a very valuable part of my own art making and teaching practice, as the students and I shared in the creative dilemma of making meaning in art. They could see that, even for me, art making was difficult and a long and disciplined undertaking.

Students were able to critique and make suggestions for my art making. At one level this helps me develop my work but at a deeper level, what has become evident is the relationship that is being developed between us endows students with an opportunity to connect with me at a different level, more profoundly than simply as their teacher. This is an undertaking that I would not have necessarily given myself permission to do a year ago, but the questioning and reassessment of my teaching has given me the courage to act.

It may not be entirely novel, but the idea of the teacher and student learning together has become a very relevant and pertinent aspect of my continuing research. For me, good research requires researchers understanding themselves so that change and new ways of understanding emerge. As a result, I have found new ways to step beyond traditional teaching conventions to develop students' ideas and connections to both contemporary and traditional art making. The need to constantly question and develop new ways of thinking has been an integral part of my teaching and learning.

Being able to share this part of my creative journey in writing is empowering my research. As the students curate and build their final folios for assessment I marvel at the diversity of work that students present in the class, and how different the voices are that convey story and meaning. Some stories are stronger than others but for those who have delved deeper and found a richer understanding of art making, rewards are now present and open for scrutiny by their family, friends, general community and examiners.

My mind returns to an article that I read in *Australian Art Collector* where Andrew Frost (2009) suggests that today's artists create works that are not necessarily bound to a title or specific area but are driven by their ideas and expression. Frost claims

that the contemporary artist is not necessarily bound to one discipline area or given the title of digital artist, painter or printmaker. Rather, today, concept and communication are primary concerns for many artists. Opening myself to new possibilities and progressive approaches, such as we find in the digital world, is necessary, if I am to assist students to be open-minded, seek understanding and connect with art making. This requires me to embrace and engage with new technologies.

Through the life experiences of research in the classroom, narrated in my thesis, I have come to appreciate, rather than be anxious about, the seductiveness of technology. My narratives demonstrate that allurements can turn attention and energy into the kind of passion that eros, the desire to seek meaning, validates. Technology alters daily. New possibilities emerge and challenge the role of traditional art forms. My negative views and feelings disappear. I reform my thinking and questioning. I grow and move forward.

The narratives have shown many ways that new technologies present varieties of media, undreamed of before by art teachers who permit students to connect with their world and the social forces at play in it. I hope my rendering of such narratives will assist teachers of art to understand the relation between the personal, relational and social forces that impact on students and art education.

My stance on technology has mutated and I am excited about what new possibilities will be presented in the classroom as a result. Writer Italo L. De Francesco in a journal article entitled 'Art education, its means and ends' (1958) reminds us

A philosophy of art education for our time ... must take cognizance of social forces and beliefs in addition to marshalling its own special claims

and interests if it is to be educationally effective and of utmost worth for the individual and for contemporary society. (De Francesco, 1958)

By happy coincidence near to the time of closing my writing for this thesis – albeit temporarily – I found myself at an artists’ floor talk at a local gallery in Hobart where I listened to Indigenous and documentary photography artist Ricky Maynard, speak about his recent show titled ‘Returning to places that name us, portrait of a distant land’. He spoke passionately and eloquently, expressing the view that art is a vehicle for questioning, with a power to alter perceptions and a potential for progress. For him, art is about developing relationships and connections and this is at the heart of his imagery. A skilled practitioner, he underscored the need for art to create a visual history that can be continued for years to come. This is essential for him and his practice as an artist. Maynard’s views resonate with me. I feel supported and grateful that my inquiry has allowed me to inscribe and embody a philosophy of art education in my practice as educator, learner and artist.

My questioning of technology in the classroom and concern for the potential demise of traditional skill areas has illuminated for me that like any area of study once you have made a true connection to it you can reach a deeper understanding of its possibilities and application. It is the relationships and understandings that Maynard and De Francesco refer to that allow for ‘real’ art making to have meaning; and it is through good teaching that students find their own connection to their preferred medium and ideas.

As I close this chapter, the school year for my senior classes has concluded, the students have released their works for public view. And I continue the metaphorical journey I began on the Rivulet Track.

In this chapter I have summarised and elaborated multiple understandings that come from the duality of meanings I give to the word ‘finding’ – finding associated with element one, two and three:

An artist has to *explore*: to questions, to challenge, to connect

An artist has to *craft*: to discover, to construct, and to persevere.

An artist has to *refine*: to resolve, to know and to understand;

and my actual ‘findings’ – found objects that have inspired my images for exhibition.

In my final chapter, my exhibition images *Findings I to IX* take their place in the context of my thesis.

## EPILOGUE

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*In the mirror of her students' work a teacher sees her own*

*The New Oxford Dictionary's* etymology for the provenance of the word 'epilogue' is the French word *Epilogue* which comes via Latin from Greek '*epi logos*', from *epi* 'in addition', 'logos', 'speech'. My epilogue is the culmination of my journey through research and inquiry. The images I portray in the chapter add to the logos of my inquiry. My epilogue adds insight to the possible significance that my inquiry has for educators who embrace the e-media of technology.

My own practical inquiry in art making culminates in an exhibition of my own work. There are nine works in the exhibition born from digital photographs that I took as part of my exploration of the Rivulet Track. Different photographic aspects are taken from their natural surroundings, interpreted and reinterpreted through paint, and anchored back into an abstract landscape swathed with red and majestic blue; and at times using a restricted colour palette of black and white contrast. The images consist of personal symbols idiosyncratic to my practice such as leaves and rocks.

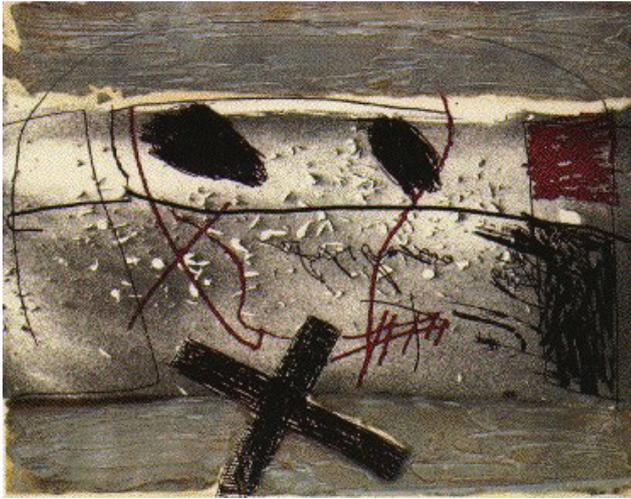
Receiving an invitation to exhibit my work in a local gallery prompted me to develop a body of work. As part of my research I decided to accept the challenge and in many ways the act of making art in parallel with my research allowed it to become a critical friend and companion to the research observations about which I inquired in the classroom.

There are two artists who have always inspired me and from whom I have learnt a great deal. The first is Antoni Tàpies, a Catalan artist whose rich paintings, laden with texture, are a response to the natural world. He is one of the most famous European artists of his generation and perhaps the best-known Catalan artist to emerge in the period since World War Two. The second is Edwin Parker (Cy) Twombly Jr., an American artist born in 1928, acclaimed for his large-scale, freely scribbled, calligraphic-style paintings, portrayed on solid fields of mostly grey, tan or off-white colors. Twombly's paintings blur the line between drawing and painting. Tàpies and Twombly are my artistic 'mentors' throughout my journey. Constant reflection and engagement enables me to explore some other aesthetic qualities of the art making practice.



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Cy Twombly, *Coronation of Sesostris* 2000 (panel 8): Calligraphic style paintings blur between painting and drawing.




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*Tàpies 1989*: Rich paintings, laden with texture, are a response to the natural world.

The culmination of my paintings and drawings from my year results in the title for my exhibition – ‘Glow’ – suggesting an illumination of my learning and development as an artist and educator. While I sought understanding from my students and their attraction to digital photography, the primary visual resource for my work is the Rivulet Track: the inspiration and spiritual home of my initial questioning. When not reading, researching, teaching and interpreting my data I have been exploring the natural world through paint and digital technology. The bringing together of these two media permits me to transform my ideas into visual representations.

The exhibition required me to write an artist statement in order to share the context of my work with viewers. I composed the following text to accompany my images.

My work has always had a connection to different aspects of the landscape; its colours, shapes and ever-changing nature. This body of images has been developed from a series of investigations into the landscape. With camera, pencil and paper in hand I started to capture small, yet not insignificant aspects of the environment that resonate with me. It is this initial exploration that allows me to transform the shapes into abstract forms and entwine them into a new reality and appreciation. The deconstruction of the natural landscape allows

me to interpret the natural forms, reconstructing the time and place where the findings were retrieved. ('Glow', Goulburn Street Gallery, October, 2010)

The nine images of the exhibition are entitled *Finding I* through to *Finding IX*. They each represent the landscape and my reinterpretation of photographs taken on my walks to and from work during the year. And it is these visual findings that have enabled me to form a frame for presenting my thesis.

The images are variations on a theme and use strong horizontal and vertical lines to reflect the changing perspectives of the landscape. In many of the images the connection of expressive lines creates a cross, becoming a personal symbol in my work. The centre of the cross symbolises both a point of stability as well as a point of departure. The shapes that I use as starting points for my findings – leaves, stones and twigs – are ambiguous shapes that emerge through earthy hues applied in thin layers leaving the underlying textures exposed. The shapes are inter-related to create various compositional designs.

The recurring motif is a circular shape that dominates each frame. The motif, its reference to the cycle of life reflects the logos of my inquiry. The tactile qualities of art making seduce me into capturing innate qualities of the landscape – with texture and colour that are present but not seen in our day-to-day travels.

The paints are raw pigments mixed with specific thinners and mediums to create glazes and then applied with palette knives, cloths and fingers. Mixing and applying of paint has become a new technique that I developed over the course of the year.

The power that an artist has to communicate is profound and it is this empowering feeling that my students and I have experienced during this year: it comes as a result of hard work and the desire for knowledge and growth.

Here I release the nine images – nine findings – for the reader of my inquiry.



*Finding I*

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The beginning of the series. The oval shapes settle into the pale and washed-out background. The shapes are symbolic of the rocks and trees found on the track. They are contrasted with the scratchy linear marks that form the cross shape.



*Finding II*

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The shapes symbolic of the rocks found on the track are left as white areas to contrast against the earthy colours of the landscape.



*Finding III*

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The horizon line is centered allowing for a balanced relationship to form between the land and the sky. The strong cross reaches into both areas to show a connecting force between the two hemispheres.



*Finding IV*

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The pale oval shape is balanced centrally within the image to give a focal point. The dark red and black background nestle in against the form to act as a support.



*Finding V*

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The dominant circular figure acts as a window leading the viewer's eye toward the background. This strong vertical line in the middle of the shape creates a sense of balance and harmony to the piece. The introduction of blue is reflective of the night time sky.



*Finding VI*

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The circle is repeated and layered to give a sense of movement. This image is more dynamic allowing the eye to rove around the work: the eye is not quite able to find a resting place. The high horizon line gives way to a rich blue-black background for contrast.



*Finding VII*

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The strong, bold cross floats against a sea of pale texture. These lines are powerful and divide the space into quarters. The eye is drawn to the colour red and finds rest at this point. Subtle shapes try to emerge from the pale background, never fully exposing themselves.



*Finding VIII*

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Strong panels of red and black surround the middle third of the image. The cross symbol invades the space and reaches for the edges of the work as it strives to break free.



*Finding IX*

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The final image uses repetition and scale to give a sense of depth. The leaves could be falling from the sky, or simply resting on the bed of the Rivulet Track.

Here the exhibition images close, and for the time being so too does my formal personal inquiry. My initial question, ‘Why and what was I doing in my profession as a visual art educator’ has been explored and I feel that I have reached some point of clarity. This clarity has been achieved as I have delved more deeply into the philosophy of art making and the philosophy and pedagogy of teaching. This thesis re-focuses my energy as I return to my art making and explore the changes that I am experiencing in my educational world.

As I conclude my writing I contemplate and consider the current work of Marc Prensky (2010), in *Teaching digital natives: Partnering for real learning*. I find a partnership with aspects of his thinking on education. There are parts of his work that resonate with my initial connection to the writing of Robinson (2001) and his elements for creativity. Through educational experience Prensky, has established his own set of ‘skills’, that he feels students need in preparation for the uncertainties they may face in the 21st century. His skills include – students following their own passions, encouraging students to think critically, setting goals, solving problems, communicating, finding a voice, taking prudent risks and to continue learning through reflection. For me there are characteristics of his list of skills that parallel and support my experiences and my coming to understand that art education offers even more when digital possibilities are embraced.

As I close my thesis I muse upon the significance of narrating my metaphorical journey through research and inquiry for other teachers and the future of art education. Narrating and portraying my struggle to understand the prominent influence of technology on the minds and practices of our students, I believe, might provide incentive

for other educators to research and develop multi-media narratives to enhance our understanding of pedagogy and curriculum in the landscape of today's classroom. Thus we might contribute to our knowledge and awareness of the ways in which our senior students use art to make meaning in our digital world, to express their personal identity – who they are – and to explain how they experience the world they live in socially.

To close my Epilogue – *epi logos* – I recall my student Casey and add to her story. Casey is a student who, over the course of her Year 12 art studies, not only gained an understanding about art making and technology but through her work expressed sense of self. She found inspirational guidance for parts of her life that are important and meaningful for her. She was influenced by the fast pace of life – the impact of society on her world. In many ways Casey's art making became a personal signature for what she believed in and what was meaningful for her. Like me, during art making Casey was able to explore not only the practical aspect of creating images but she also became in tune with her personal sense of identity – she too undertook a metaphorical journey of self expression.

The close of this inquiry opens up so many new pathways for me to follow so that I can continue to grow professionally, and, in turn I hope, provide new perspectives and possibilities about art making among my colleagues and other art educators. This narrative for now comes to a temporary close, but my questioning and journey will continue.

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