School of Design and Art

Negotiating a Personal Vocabulary of Abstraction:
Representing an Artist's sense of Place

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Author's Declaration

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

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Abstract

This exegesis is concerned with connections between abstraction, materiality, and landscape in the representation of a sense of place in art practice. The intent is to address what it means to represent a sense of place within an Australian context. As such this exegesis explores ways in which Australian artists have engaged with varying concepts of place or landscape, from their own experiences and memories, to cultural references and mythologies.

Through studio practice and exegesis, the research as a whole seeks ways to address the difficulties inherent in reconciling personal experiences with cultural expectations or representations of places. It focusses on studio methods using abstraction and the found object in the development of a personal vocabulary of practice. Of additional interest are artworks which use a sense of unresolved tension to examine landscape conventions and notions of place-specificity, as a critique of national narratives or imagery.

It explores methods in art practice of embedding sense of place in abstraction as a way to invoke dialogue between non-figurative art process and the concept of place specificity. This occurs in three key ways. Firstly, materiality can embed in an artwork a sense of that material or the artist's presence in place. Secondly, artists render memories, haptic experiences, or imagined aspects of places within the structures of abstract works. Finally, works are situated by personal and place-contexts in which abstraction is made. The studio practice considers these three methods as a means of examining my own sense of place in Wellard/Casuarina, and in a wider Australian context. By using place specific materials and referring to stories of living and being in place, the practice explores a personal narrative of belonging and identity.

The exegesis proposes that art practice as a method of expressing sense of presence within and belonging in place can address or make visible aspects of the complexities inherent in the relationship between Australian landscape and national identity. By examining this relationship from the position of a personal narrative, a more critically engaged personal sense of place can comment on the idea of a specifically Australian sense of place.

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I wish to acknowledge the opportunities provided by the staff at PS Art Space and Turner Galleries for the exhibition of my work. My thanks also go to Melanie McKee and Sheridan Coleman for their companionship and support as co-exhibitors at Turner Galleries, and to Melanie for her expertise in photographing my work.

To my partner, and family: thank you for your love and support.

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Note on Images

Throughout the exegesis are pictures of places which impact on my practice, beginning with the images of Wellard/Casuarina included in this introduction. These images contribute to grounding the exegesis in the studio processes undergone during the research period. All photographs of landscapes within the text of the exegesis are for documentary purposes and are not works of art. I have included details such as location, month, and year. Accompanying the exegesis is a separate file containing documentation of all works produced during the research, presented as one part of the submission for a PhD by practice-led research, the other being this exegesis. This includes two exhibitions of the creative practice component - photographs taken by me at Packenham Street Art Space for the exhibition in September 2015 and professional photography of the second exhibition of works at Turner Galleries in February 2017. These images in the separate file are referred to in-text in this exegesis using the form "figure A1, figure A2" etc. to distinguish them from figures included in the exegesis, and so the reader knows to consult the attached file for the images.

Introduction

The central question in this exegesis is: what potential does a personal vocabulary of abstraction have for representing a sense of place? It is important therefore to start by answering the question:

 What is a sense of place?

A sense of place is not a landscape, and it is more than an image. It is also not a description of a place but can include descriptions of how a place looks and feels. It is a complex interrelation between haptic, emotional, and intellectual experiences of place, and can be intensely personal and culturally driven in equal measure.

A sense of place for me is the smell of smoke lingering for weeks after a nature reserve finishes burning. It is seeing that halfway across the reserve, blackened trunks abruptly meet a wall of untouched green where fire-fighters have cut a break in the underbrush to halt the fire's spread. It is knowing that while some signs of fire will remain for years, such as black marks on trunks and limbs, ash feeds the soil and smoke releases seeds from the banksia pods (mostly *banksia menziesii* and *banksia attenuata*) which will, in turn, reinvigorate the area in only a short time. I have seen four major fires in nineteen years in Wellard/Casuarina. Figure 1 shows the local bushland in which these fires have occurred.

Figure 1 Aerial view of Wellard/Casuarina, showing Banksia Road Reserve on the bottom of the image, taken facing west toward the City of Kwinana and the coast, April 2017. Photograph by the artist.

A sense of place is also knowing that fires like these occur frequently across the Australian continent and bring people together in shared experiences. Memories, experiences, and visual records such as these build into both personal and national senses of place. They include any number of observations, experiences, representations, attachments, and histories. There can be no one concrete representation of a sense of place, as the boundaries and content of places are variable. Further, they are subject to individual and cultural meaning.

Making artwork about place is an act of stating 'I am here,' where both the 'I' and the 'here' are negotiated during the making. In this exegesis I investigate the creative component of my practice-led research to look at where I am as an artist who is interested in place in both local and wider Australian geographical contexts. The aim of the research is to explore methods of embedding a sense of place in artwork using abstraction and materiality in my art practice. The exegesis correspondingly examines how belonging and a sense of presence in place is represented, and examined, in wider Australian art practice.

Lived experiences and our projections or expectations of places make for senses of place which are an amalgamation between the haptic and the imagined. This is how places can paradoxically seem to change in an instant, or linger seemingly unchanging, from day to day and in memories. Transient phenomena such as the colour of an opening flower, or ripples of light on the surface of a river, can become persistent markers for places, or stretches of time spent within them. Art practice responds to or finds markers for these fluctuations, allowing for fleeting aspects of places to be captured in time, or using ambiguous brushstrokes, shapes, and colours to make suggestions about places or landscapes.

I have chosen to engage in practice-led research because it makes use of contingencies, memories, and uncertainties to delve deeply into the contexts in which practice develops. It entwines real and imagined aspects of experience with history and art discourse by combining exegetical writing and art practice. Practice-led research offers a self-reflexive methodology in which the artist's motivations, chosen subject, studio methods, and understanding of relevant contexts and literature are examined in parallel, but driven by the practice. For this reason, this exegesis is not structured around separate chapters for literature review, research findings, or methodology, but rather looks to the fluidity of

narrative or autobiographical writing. All five chapters are intended to contribute to an overall literature review grounded in my own understanding, allowing for the creative practice component of the research to be examined concurrently. Beginning by contemplating what a sense of place is and what has developed into my own, it works toward an examination of how (and why) as an artist I make sense of it the way I do.

A self-reflexive mode of enquiry is essential for understanding sense of place, because as contemporary place theorists such as Jeff Malpas or David Seamon claim, the concept of place is intertwined with a sense of self (Seamon 2012, 4 and Malpas 2014, 11-12). This exegesis is guided by the concept of emplacement, which I define as an embedded sense of place, within an art practice or individual work for potentially both the artist and the viewer. Emplacement occurs in many different forms, from a sense of inclusion within community narratives of place (such as national imagery or metaphor) to records of being in place, such as materials from those places, traces of the physical presence of an artist, or stories about living and belonging in places.

This exegesis focuses on three key themes.

The first investigates how personal identity is connected to place, and how a sense of place and sense of self are entangled.

The second addresses the importance of places and landscapes to a national Australian sense of self as explored through art practice.

The third poses the question: how can abstraction and materiality be used by artists to emplace personal and national narratives of place within their artwork? In answering this question, I will analyse the work of other Australian artists as well as my own.

At first glance, abstraction would seem to be incompatible with a sense of place. The history of abstraction demonstrates a progressive reduction of figurative references to nature, driving toward universal forms and total non-objectivity (the case of Piet Mondrian is the most obvious example of this). With this history in mind, a sense of place would seem to be more appropriately represented by a landscape than an abstract painting. However, I argue that figurative imagery such

as landscapes are an inadequate representation of the sense of place this exegesis and my practice is concerned with. Landscapes are only part of how places are imaged and defined. Additionally, while "representation tends to be conflated with realism or figuration" it is in practice more nuanced and "cannot be conceived so literally" (Bolt 2004, 12). In order to represent the wide range of experiences, memories, and imagined dimensions of my sense of place, I have searched for alternate means of embedding place in my practice. This is the question that this combination of exegesis and practice seeks to ask; can the negotiation of a personal vocabulary of abstraction be used as a meaningful method of representing and understanding the complex dimensions of a sense of place. The practice has been a process of 'thinking about place through abstraction.'

Chapter Summaries

In chapter one, "Place and Phenomenology," I explore definitions of place by authors such as Jeff Malpas, Lucy Lippard, Liz Wells, and Edward Casey. Particular attention is given to the distinctions made by these authors in regard to notions of place, space, and landscape. From this discussion, I develop my own working definition of the relationships between these terms. I discuss the roots of contemporary place theory in phenomenology, particularly in the writings of Malpas, Casey, and David Seamon, with a focus on how phenomenology argues that people and their environments are intertwined.

Personal and cultural descriptions and representations of places are entangled with one another and complex. They often fluctuate with changes in circumstances. As such the everyday realities of living and being in places do not just impact on personal senses of place, but also contribute to the communal understandings of place which form national narratives and imagery. The observations and experiences of an individual are as important to understanding what is meant by a national sense of place as they are to a personal sense of place. From chapter one onwards in this exegesis I am building a narrative of place within which to locate my own practice, and perhaps through the practice itself discover new ways of representing the complexity of this entanglement.

In chapter one the concept of landscape provides frameworks and conventions for representing or conceptualising the combination of real and imagined aspects of

places. These refer to contributions to a sense of place such as expectations of certain types and conventions of landscapes, and ways in which representations of landscapes provide cultural meaning. Chapter two "Place and Studio" introduces the places and landscapes involved in my art practice, and their relationship to the location of my studio. In this chapter, I make the key argument that memories and a sense of belonging construct and direct place-narratives. I introduce my practice, outlining connections between materials used and personal stories, which will be developed further in chapters four and five.

A desire to engage with the felt, lived, or imagined circumstances of being present within places drives artists such as myself to represent our senses of place, even though complex histories are not always foregrounded or outwardly acknowledged in works. My own circumstances have established a conceptual base on which the inhabitation of certain stretches of land is expected and familiar to me: I occupy a privileged, white European-Australian position that has historically allowed me to pre-suppose my presence not only in Wellard/Casuarina, but also more widely. However, I posit that a personal sense of place equally has the potential to comment self-reflexively on questions about landscape and identity in Australian practice. One of the aims of this research is to identify where I, as an artist, stand in relation to an Australian sense of place.

In chapter three, "Australian Landscape," I discuss landscape and sense of place as formative in Australia's historical and imaginary narrative of national identity. Using art critic David Bromfield's claim for the centrality of landscape to Australian imagery and metaphor as a guiding framework, the chapter outlines important aspects of landscape representation in Australian art history. Discussing artworks by painters such as John Glover, Frederick McCubbin, Russel Drysdale, and Sidney Nolan, the chapter establishes a history of representation of place in which issues of land ownership, belonging, and national identity are implied. I argue that the ongoing legacy of colonialism in landscape representation has entered into Australian mythology and become a narrative trope – one that is engaged with in critical ways by contemporary artists. I argue that when inherent tensions and contradictions of a national identity and sense of belonging are made explicit in art practice, such as in the art works of Christopher Pease or Joan Ross, representations of landscape become a form of personal and national self-criticism. In the latter half of the chapter, I briefly touch on the Indigenous notion of Country and its differences with landscape, as argued by contemporary place-theorists John

Bradley and Jeff Malpas. Peter Read in *Belonging: Australians, Place, and Aboriginal Ownership* notes that scrutiny of European Australian attachments to place is accompanied by the sense of something unresolved or contested (2000, 2). Many of the historical foundations on which contemporary European-Australian senses of belonging in place are built are problematic, such as settler family ownership and inhabitation of land, which were dependent on the original claim of *terra nullius* on which British settlement was justified.[1]

In chapter four, "Materiality," I argue for the importance of materiality to my practice and how it reflects and creates relationships with the places important to me. The chapter explores the conceptual use of materials, and of the found object, as a 'fragment of place' in works by artists such as Brian Blanchflower, Janine Mackintosh, and Rosalie Gascoigne. I consider the authoritative status given to personal engagements with places, as evidenced by traces of being in place such as materials, photographs, and anecdotal narratives. I argue that materials in art practice are not passive but have their own agency and history. They come from one place, end up in another, and in a sense 'remember' the places they have been to. The physical and conceptual place-contexts of materials are carried over into artworks via found objects or ready-mades and their capacity to create meaning. Understanding how materiality can embed a sense of place offers insight into how an artist's presence within place can be signalled by various other markers of that presence.

In chapter five, "Abstraction," I argue that emplacement of the artist or artwork within a geographically, culturally, or personally defined place can be conveyed by abstraction. The works examined include non-objective paintings as well as those which have been developed from external sources or influences, as well as my own. I propose that late-modernist abstraction has its own 'sense of place' due to the contexts of its emergence in Australia, particularly an uncertainty around where it fits in the Australian art scene's self-image.

In this chapter, negotiations between abstract stylistic choices and the conventions of landscape painting form the beginning of what I propose to be a vocabulary of methods in art practice for non-figuratively rendering the experience of place. The

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[1] *Terra nullius* is a Latin term referring to land which is uninhabited and belongs to no-one under the definition of international law. British settlement in Australia beginning in the 1800s was claimed to be legal under *terra nullius* but this claim has since been highly contested due to the long history of occupation by Indigenous Australians prior to British arrival.

chapter discusses how a synthesis between figurative and abstract ways of working, such as seen in the work of Fred Williams or Howard Taylor, has been seen as a means to engage with the particularities of Australian landscape and sense of place. For example, Patrick McCaughey suggests that the combination of abstract and figurative elements represents a more responsive mode of expressing Australian experience of landscape than traditional conventions of landscape painting (2014, 277).

As the final chapter, "Abstraction" also involves an in-depth analysis of the abstraction in my practice and how it has developed in response to my sense of place, building on the discussion of my work in previous chapters. I propose that a dynamic relationship between simplicity and complexity is common within many works influential on my practice, such as in the work of Robert Hunter, Trevor Vickers, Brian McKay, or Jeremy Kirwan-Ward. I discuss works by artists which are non-objective yet have had considerable impact on how I think about and represent my sense of place. I make associations between technical aspects of abstract painting and the language contemporary place theorists use to describe and define place. These include boundaries formed in the creation of fields or zones of colour, geometric shapes, grids, series, and repetition. These are ways to reorganise and reconstruct aspects of my sense of place which I feel are difficult to otherwise represent.

Chapter One

Place and Phenomenology

Definitions and assumptions: place

There are many different types of places and ways of speaking about or defining them in Western thought. The term place can mean many different things to different people, such as where they live, work, and visit. Places range in scale from the smallest and most intimate of private places to regional, state, or national geography. The places with which my creative practice engages include state and national parks, reserves, or private properties, but also ideas about Western Australia or Australia as a communal sense of place. Places exist in ideas, memories, and the imagination, as well as in geographic or social terms.

My use of the phrase "sense of place" in this exegesis is intended to reflect the range of perspectives on place with which it will engage. Of particular importance are the interrelationships among cultural, physical, and imagined dimensions of places. Lucy Lippard (1997, 33) describes "sense of place" in *The Lure of the Local* as sometimes considered as a simple descriptor of felt experience, and sometimes as a naïve or cliché way of approaching the perception of place in all its cultural, physical, and imagined dimensions. However even as a cliché, sense of place remains a powerful imaginative construct. Lippard (1997, 33) suggests that the phrase has its roots in the mythical and romantic aspects of place, most often expressed through creative mediums such as narrative, poetry, or art.

I am interested in notions of intimacy and distance when engaging with places, especially in the formation of a sense of place that arises through abstract art practice. Liz Wells in *Land Matters* (2011, 20) claims that the very designation of places "inserts a sense of distance" and that the act of describing place also positions the self as "somehow outside of our environment." In contrast I align myself with Lippard (1997, 33) who, despite claiming the phrase "sense of place" can be used as a way for "nonbelongers to belong" to a particular place, argues that an authentic sense of place involves an immersion in the lived experience of and topographical intimacy with place. A sense of place can reflect both intimacy and distance, depending on how it is defined and understood. The perceived

authenticity of any representation of a sense of place, as Lippard describes, lies in immersion, lived experience, and intimacy, as well as in methods and modes of presentation, materialisation, and codification, which will be examined with reference to abstract art practice in later chapters.

The wide range of descriptions, analyses, and definitions of place also involve different modes of writing or presentation. As Jeff Malpas (1999, 5) explains, part of the difficulty in considering place within an academic context is that "the term may well be thought so commonplace and so much a part of our everyday discourse that its transfer to more theoretical contexts is likely to present an immediate problem." While no individual sense of place is identical to another, they are communicable by virtue of having a shared reference to particular contents or characteristics of place. However, the ambiguity of what is meant by a sense of place can cause inconsistencies in how the phrase is used across theoretical contexts. I consider that there could be a possible difference between what is meant by place, and how place is represented, in contemporary place theory and art practice. Therefore, I will now discuss the related terms 'place,' 'space,' 'landscape,' and 'nature' to establish the parameters of their use in this exegesis.

This discussion of place would be incomplete without discussing the related term space. One cannot be adequately examined without considering the other – for Malpas (2012, 227), "place, as opposed to space, has a content and character that belongs to it" and this "is at the heart of the commonplace idea of a 'sense of place'" which contains difference and is, therefore, essentially heterogeneous. Some authors consider place and space as distinct concepts which are related yet independent, and others describe them as aspects of one another. For example, Lippard (1997, 9) writes that "space combined with memory defines place," and for Wells (2011, 19), "history turns space into place." Peter Read (1996, 2) in *Returning to Nothing* writes that "humans … are able and feel the need to turn space into place, to identify a site as in some way different from other sites, [and] to erect mental boundaries around it …" In each of these examples, place is assumed to encompass the experience of space, and builds upon it with the factor of human involvement via memory and history, or through the mental and physical delineation of boundaries. Malpas (2013) criticises this characterisation of place as a "subjective overlay on the reality of materialized spatiality" because, for him, place is a reality both subjectively and materially experienced. He had written earlier (Malpas 1999, 25) that "consideration of the vocabulary of place and space

alone is indicative of the way these are part of a network in which each term is inextricably embedded."

The way Malpas distinguishes between space and place has been useful for developing my own working definition of place. For him, space is the experience of a sense of duration and expanse which may be endless, and any boundary set around an interval of space may be imagined to repeat or change size and shape (Malpas 1999, 23). In contrast, place must always be contained within a perceptual or mental boundary, although it may move and contain many other boundaries of places within it (Malpas 1999, 22). The difference seems to be that places are contained within their boundaries while bounded spaces are divisions of a larger space. The important aspect of identifying place is therefore the nature of the boundaries which contain it. As these divisions are encountered, imagined, and constructed by the person within place, this aligns with Read's argument (1996, 2) that places are surrounded by "mental boundaries."

The concept of place as bounded (distinct from space as endless) returns me to Wells' suggestion that the designation of boundaries around places creates a distance between that place and the self. However, for Malpas, place must always contain the presence of the viewer/self, regardless of whether it is as an immediate, imagined, or remembered presence, for the boundary to exist.

When I began writing this exegesis, I agreed with Lippard, Wells, and Read that a sense of place involves the experience of space combined with an aspect of human involvement, such as memory. However, as Malpas (2006, 9) insists in his admonishment of an academic laziness on the part of many authors writing on place and space, the relationship between space, place, and landscape has been shown to be more complex, historically dependent, and significant for critical discourse. Due to the interrelationship of these terms, in this exegesis space and landscape are inferred to be involved in the formation of a sense of place.

Landscape

I propose that it is insufficient to characterise landscape only as a subjective or aesthetic overlay on the experience of aspects of place. A landscape is always a place, real or imagined, but a place is not always a landscape. Landscapes are codified by and presuppose visual structural concepts and conventions which

create meaning. Roberta Falcone (2009, 124) describes landscape as "both a represented and presented space, a real place and its simulacrum, a symbolic form, a semiotic device, and a cognitive and perceptive screen." Falcone's description suggests that landscape extends both beyond and parallel to definitions of place. It also recognises that structural concepts and conventions contribute to places being read as landscapes. Lippard (1997, 20) explains that place can be formalised as landscape by modes of working and seeing, but I argue that this occurs both ways; landscapes can be read or understood as places by the way we interact with and see them. In comparison, Edward Casey (2002, xiii) writes that landscape "suffices unto itself as a scene of perception, as something to behold on its own terms," with a character of its own distinct from that of place. While I agree with Lippard (1997, 23) that generalisations about land and landscape are rooted in place, I think that care needs to be taken not to use place and landscape interchangeably.

I propose that landscapes refer to and show syntheses between people and environments just as representations of place do, but that the way the term 'landscape' communicates the presence of the viewing subject establishes this viewing as the central organising principle. Landscapes are something primarily seen, which is evident in the language used by Falcone, Lippard, and Casey. Place includes this viewing as part of its wider set of experiential and imagined aspects. Weng Choy Lee (2004, 16) writes that these conventions of presenting nature as landscape through the agency of a viewer function to "give the viewer not an image but a *sense* of rootedness," where that sense is understood as a sense of place, "an embodiment of memory; landscapes are psychological constructions of a certain duration or permanence." Lee's definition of landscape emphasises the importance of the presence of a viewer, whether physical or imagined, within landscape. Landscapes are made, in part, through memory and the projection of memory into the imagination, which means that any landscape contains the experience of that viewer (past, present, or imagined). Landscape therefore conveys an aspect of a sense of place which is focussed on the perspective of a viewing subject.

Representations of places in art practice demonstrate an artist's intent to invoke related discourses, but not necessarily the intent to present the work as a landscape. I acknowledge that 'landscape' may be a shallow descriptor for the complex thematic interests, subjects, and contexts of artists I discuss in later chapters such as Brian Blanchflower, Howard Taylor, or Rosalie Gascoigne, who variously

engage with notions of nature, place, land, perception, and haptic experience. Regarding the representation of landscapes, Casey (2002, xiii) asks, "why re-present what is already presented so effectively and thoroughly in ordinary direct experience?" Two reasons I suggest are: the desire to manifest or demonstrate a connection with place, and the desire to engage with how landscapes are seen or encountered. In both these cases, the experience of landscape becomes the subject, and the focus is not necessarily on presenting a representational image of the landscape itself.

While representing landscape can be part of the representation of an artists' sense of place, so too is representing the experiences, assumptions, and cultural or social factors at work in that sense of place. The formation of place relies on the inclusion of these dimensions which encompass more than the visual conventions implied by landscape. At the heart of places are their histories, which are constructs of collective memories, imagination, and artefacts. As Read (1996, 2) argues, "anything that individuals recognise as 'a place' has been in part constructed to suit them and in part has been created by wider issues of power, group dynamics, conflicting ideologies and institutions." Our ideas, expectations, and assumptions about places are irrevocably constructed by these factors, which can in turn be revealed, examined, and critiqued through representations of place.

In addition to landscape, nature forms part of how these power dynamics and ideologies are encoded into descriptions and representations of place. Lippard (1997, 11) writes that nature is an "all-pervasive structure that lies beneath scenery, landscape, place, and human history." I would add that expectations and assumptions also lie beneath what we call nature. Culture is always implicated within our idea of nature. Histories of and cultural attitudes toward land use serve to distinguish scenery from domestic space, and what is considered to be natural, urban, suburban, or industrial land (Schama 1995). I argue that our concept of nature is a symbolic form and semiotic device, just as landscape is for Falcone. While a distinction between nature and culture is part of how different places are described, such as 'wilderness' or gardens, these descriptions are predicated on cultural histories and attitudes. Since nature itself is culturally defined, so too are these so-called wild or natural places. This calls into question the binary opposition between nature and culture which "has been a matter of dispute since eighteenth-century so-called 'Enlightenment' debates," and remains unresolved (Wells 2011, 20).

This dispute is ongoing because a perceived division between nature and culture is an essential part of narratives of place and place-belonging. I would argue, however, that this division is fictional because an essential part of the conceptual basis of identifying places and landscapes can be found in romanticised ideas about nature and their influence on our memories, longing, and nostalgia (Schama 1995). The concept of nature, I argue, is both a product of culture and an essential part of how culture is defined. Marking divisions between landscape, place, and nature suddenly appears less essential than understanding how these terms are constructed and how they construct one another. At the heart of all three is the interaction between an experiencing subject, or 'self,' and the world.

The Self

Before returning to place I will briefly discuss what it is I refer to when I use 'self' in this chapter. In his *Psychoanalytic Theory: An Introduction*, Anthony Elliott explains that while a definition of a sense of self may appear obvious, psychoanalysis shows that it is more complex than is often assumed (2002, 9). The Cartesian understanding of the self as stable or fixed has given way to a "*split* at the centre of the psyche between *consciousness of self* and that which is *unconscious*" (Elliott 2002, 10). This split can also be characterised as self-knowledge and the hidden self (Elliott 2002, 10). A sense of self is determined by the relationship between the two in the "day-to-day fashioning of self-identity," and the influence on both by emotional, social and physical experiences (Elliott 2002, 10).

Therefore, when the self is mentioned in references earlier in this chapter to Malpas and Wells, it is not a fixed or constant self being described. The self as contained within place or as separate from place is constantly emergent and formed by social relationships. Modern psychoanalysis focusses on "relations between self and other" to produce a metaphorical image of selfhood (Elliott 2002, 25). The Other is a philosophical construct used to describe that which is set in opposition to or outside of the self, which can also be used more generally outside of psychoanalysis. For example, Lippard (1997, 11) writes that the concept of nature provides "a place where we are not," an Other which can then be idealised and romanticised.

Place as orientation of sense of self and experience

The increase in research since the 1970s into what constitutes place and how it is experienced has resulted in multiple ontologies and epistemologies. As mentioned previously, place for different authors can be part of or distinct from the experience of space. The language and examples used to examine our experience of place varies. However, the significance of place to the human experience of world in this literature remains comparatively constant. The contemporary place theory of Casey and Malpas, in particular, attributes the origins of this significance to the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Malpas 2014, 11). However, to keep the discussion in this exegesis as concise and specific to my practice as possible, I am only engaging with authors and artists who have directly influenced my own thinking. Many of these authors have been heavily influenced by phenomenology, and so an understanding of some aspects of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological thought is essential to this exegesis.

A simple summary of the arguments of phenomenology and contemporary place theory such as in Malpas' writing is that the body's observation of the world determines the essential properties and structures of experience. Observation in this sense occurs before reflection on what is being observed. Paul Crowther summarises Merleau-Ponty's central premiss as "our basic contact with the world is pre-reflective" (1993, 102). It is pre-reflective because experience of the world occurs through the unified function of "all our sensory, motor, and affective capacities operating as a unified field," not just intellectually (Crowther 1993, 103). Crowther describes this unified field as a "primordial awareness of our body's positioning" which organises the world into an "intelligible schema" based on "proximity and accessibility in relation to the body" (1993, 103). The physiological context of the self directly determines the structure and content of its experience of the world. The importance Merleau-Ponty places on the haptic aspects of experience and the positioning of the body supports the argument that physically being in place is an essential part of developing a sense of that place.

However, Malpas raises the issue that despite Merleau-Ponty's interest in the positioning of the body, many phenomenologists primarily consider the concept of place (as distinct from world) through the perceptions and experiences of consciousness, whereas his own place theory considers place to be part of a more complex interrelationship between subjective and objective realities. Malpas (1999,

30) does this by highlighting humanistic approaches to place in other contemporary place theory, particularly geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's 1977 *Place and Space: the Perspective of Experience*, by claiming Tuan "tends to treat place in a way that is suggestive of the concept as a purely psychological or experiential 'construct,'" and that "his work still largely operates within a view of place as essentially a psychological or affective notion." While I agree that a sense of place is a "psychological or experiential 'construct,'" (Malpas 1999, 30) I would argue that there must be something inherent to the place itself for a sense of that place to be at all communicable across different cultural and ideological attitudes toward place. Malpas (1999, 30) claims that Tuan's writing "treats place as derivative" and fails to address the fact that place has an independent character of its own. I find Tuan's writing in *Place and Space* to be a highly evocative exploration of themes of place experience, but I appreciate the importance of the distinction Malpas is trying to delineate. Read's (1996, 2) description of the *recognition* of place as constructed, which I referenced previously, is useful in this case. I argue that Read does not mean that place *itself* is constructed, but that how we *communicate* and *identify* places are. Additionally, an independent character for place is necessary for Malpas' (1999, 30) claim for an interrelationship between objective and subjective realities. If the experience of the self or subject is situated within such an interrelationship, the definition of place must be something both constructed and encountered.

Phenomenology prioritises the experience and perception of the person/subject as the most accurate and significant factor in the encounter with and representation of the world. The prioritisation of experience is, as Casey (2002, xvi) writes, the "definite gain in a phenomenological approach, which at the least (and if skilfully done) provides descriptive detail and at the most offers a suggested resolution of certain traditional philosophical quandaries." As long as Malpas' distinction between places themselves and the experience of them is kept in mind, phenomenology offers a methodology which emplaces the subject and has potential for examining what is meant by a personal sense of place. The quandaries Casey refers to include how a sense of self can be determined from the encounter of its surroundings, and how those surroundings themselves presuppose any determination of self.

In phenomenological thinking, the term 'description' refers to the apprehension of phenomena as they appear to the subject pre-reflectively. However, description

does not necessarily entail a total summary of the phenomena because "the world recedes beyond and transcends our body's immediate grasp of it" (Crowther 1993, 104). Casey (2002, xvi) asserts that "*every* phenomenon shows itself upon detailed examination to be far more intricate (and often more fascinating) than appears at first blush." A subject is obliged to "constantly change its perceptual positioning in relation to the world" in order to engage with the worlds' transcendence (Crowther 1993, 104). Phenomenological description is therefore not a shallow or one-dimensional understanding.

Previously in this chapter I mentioned the contested binary relationship between nature and culture as part of the determination of self against the Other. However, another phenomenological influence on contemporary place theorists is the reference to a wholeness of the people–place relationship which calls this duality into question (Malpas 2014, 11). Malpas' was influenced by Merleau-Ponty's argument that pre-reflective experience of world does not consciously differentiate between "ourselves as the subject of experience, and the world as the object of it" (Crowther 1993, 103). At this fundamental level, the self which is experiencing, and the world being experienced, are the same thing. In opposition to the argument that a sense of differentiation between self and place is part of how place is encountered, Malpas uses this theory to explore how that encounter informs both sense of self and sense of place concurrently. Another contemporary writer on phenomenology and place, David Seamon, also argues that phenomenology shows that a dualistic characterisation is inadequate. He writes that "a relationship that is assumed *conceptually* to be two (people/environment) is lived *existentially* as one (people–environment intertwinement)" (Seamon 2012, 4). The phenomenological perspective for Seamon, therefore, cannot "assign specific phenomena to either self or world alone" but relates to experiences as self and world enmeshed (2012, 4). The distinction Seamon makes here between assuming conceptual relationships and actually living in place is interesting. I suggest that both duality and intertwinement have their role to play in understanding a sense of place (since places are both conceptual and existential in nature). That is, it is significant if a duality between people and environment is part of a sense of place.

I argue that place should not be considered either objective phenomenon or subjective construction, but rather an amalgamation of both – interrelational and necessary for experiential knowledge as well as personal and communal senses of belonging. Seamon (2012, 3) suggests a phenomenological way of researching

place is productive because it identifies these "foundational structures through which human life is given coherence and continuity" – that is, an examination of the people–place relationship through phenomenological description suggests that place itself is a foundational structure that gives coherence and continuity to a sense of self.

Place is essential and foundational to human sense of being expressly because place is also part of individual experience. Seamon (2012, 5) writes that "human connections with place are not contingent, accidental, or nostalgic remnants of an outmoded past" but an essential part of understanding humanity and its environments in the current day. However, I would argue that on the contrary "human connections with place" (Seamon 2012, 5) *are* contingent, often intensely personal and subjective, at times accidental, and tied up with nostalgic remnants of what has been (the past) in negotiation with what is or could be within the imagination. As phenomenologists and contemporary place theorists like Seamon and Malpas claim, the human condition is predicated on being in place, that to be human is always already to be emplaced.

Place theory and art practice

Although the notion of place is the primary point of focus for contemporary place theory, in art, places and our relationships with them is only one possible subject of inquiry. Arts practice is a different mode of thinking, a different set of established processes, concepts, and also possibilities for subversion and criticism, compared to philosophy, or geography, or phenomenology. As well as making them visible, arts practice and its written forms and supporting writings question established understandings of what constitutes Read's "wider issues," and their related human perspectives, memories, and histories. While art practice takes places and examines them as sites of intervention, performance, or inspiration, dealing with the ambiguous and contradictory in our relationships with them, place theory such as that of Malpas' asks what place itself *is*, and *how* and *why* it is fundamental to our being in the world. This is why place theorists such as Malpas are essential to this exegesis. Examining what a personal and Australian sense of place is and how it can be represented requires an understanding of how place itself has been examined before.

In many cases, the places that directly impact on a work have boundaries that are

slippery and transient. While references to place, such as in writing, photographs, or in the form of the work, at times point definitively toward an empirical location (say, through the use of maps, named locations, or recognisable landmarks), they often point towards a place that may be inherently subjective, imagined, or only present under specific circumstances (such as regional place narratives, myths, or anecdote). The boundaries of place can be so contingent on circumstances such as mental states, or the weather, that they could be said to have only existed for that one moment.

At the heart of both phenomenological thinking and arts practice is reflection on the experience of the moment. Max Van Manen (2007, 11) writes that, for phenomenology, "reflecting on experience must be thoughtful, and as much as possible, free from theoretical, prejudicial and suppositional intoxications." However, artists are in a position where the negotiations between reflecting on experience, on theory, on the assumptions and prejudices of our own and others' positions in the world, on our projections and imaginations, are essential to developing practice. But this does not imply that the reflection on experience within arts practice cannot be phenomenological. Van Manen (2007, 17) qualifies his statement by saying that "phenomenology is also a project that is driven by fascination … a fascination with meaning." Artists are also driven by fascination with meaning, but also the possibility of a lack of meaning, or contradictions in meaning's construction and communication. This makes for a potentially significant difference in how art practice works to represent place. Although place theory provides valuable insights and frameworks for engaging with place, the sheer variety and complexity of engagements with place, landscape, and environment in arts practice cannot be reduced to one philosophical model. However, the way place theory and phenomenology consider place as foundational to our sense of being present within the world makes it a significant framework through which to look at how sense of place may be internalised in abstract practice.

Chapter Two

Place and Studio

Place is the foundation of my practice. The main focus is on knowing place and the sense and feelings of being present within place. By knowing, I am referring to a spectrum of ways of seeing, recognizing, understanding, and responding to place. Because place itself is a concept that is changeable, subjective, inherently complex and difficult to define, in turn so is knowledge of place. I use the term knowing in particular because it helps establish a performative or active tense in forming a sense of place. A sense of place is not passive and does not simply occur to a subject, but rather builds over time with experience. At other times the feeling of a sense of place can be sudden (and perhaps fleeting), but there is a wealth of objects, moments, imagery, sensations, and contextual entanglements which create it. What knowledge of a place does is work to position the subject within that place. If I know certain things about a place, particularly if they are ephemeral, haptic things, it in a way 'secures a place' for me within that place, it 'makes space' for me to be there and have those experiences.

This kind of knowledge of place can then in inform other aspects of my practice. This statement returns me to the central question of my research - How can abstract practice represent sense of place? I have established in the previous chapter what I mean by sense of place, and what theoretical questions and narratives are involved in identifying or explaining sense of place. In this chapter I will start to review my own practice and its (my) relationship with certain places.

Home

Places are not just defined by their geography, geology, and biodiversity, but also by ephemeral and imagined boundaries, such as the path an individual takes to cross or walk around a place, memories of events or encounters within place, or socially determined areas of access. The artworks of my practice focus in particular on Wellard/Casuarina (see figure 1), because the process of defining its boundaries has been one of constructing a sense of dwelling and belonging in place. It is the one place where I feel my own presence the strongest. It is that intensely personal sense of place known as 'home.'

My home is the family property and local surrounds of Mortimer Road, in Wellard/Casuarina, Perth, Western Australia. This is where my studio is located. It is a small, separate building at the centre of the property, surrounded by the semi-rural activity and green paddocks typical of the area. The place that is Wellard/Casuarina is, for me, emotionally and physically linked with the studio. The wind brings in the scent of flowering eucalypts and damp soil through the windows, and the small studio garden with its native plantings blends in with the property's remnant bushland and kikuyu pastures. The flora is mostly banksia woodland and sandy grasstree scrub, with some tuart, rose gum, and wattle, as well as non-native plantings and pasture on private land. My time in this place has always been split between working in the studio, walking on foot or horseback riding in the local area, and the regular outdoor labour and management of a small semi-rural property. Mortimer Road has been home for some eighteen years, an intimately familiar bulwark of green against the encroaching Kwinana Freeway and suburbia some 3 km distant. The area includes a large collection of private and public land, bordered by a predominantly banksia woodland (mostly *banksia menzeisii* and *banksia attenuata*) reserve on one side and on the other by native Christmas trees (*nuytsia floribunda*), Spearwood bushes (*kunzea glabrescens*) and native grasses (mostly *ficinia nodosa* and *baumea juncea)* growing in grey Bassendean sand, which give way to the encroaching residential development of the City of Kwinana. Beyond the city, to the west, a strip of industrial land hugs the coast, and to the east the sandy soils give way to the clay and pea gravel of the Darling Scarp.

I use personal anecdotes of living in Wellard/Casuarina as prompts when making work. Using narratives of my lived environments to make decisions about colour and form means that I feel a sense of myself in the work, and that the work operates on a personal level as a marker of my presence within those places. As I argued in chapter one, representing an artist's sense of place portrays a sense of their being present within place, which encompasses conceptions and memories of the everyday. That a sense of presence in place is often based on quotidian, intensely personal encounters and engagements means that the multiplicity of different senses tend to be rich with hidden or obscured meanings fully accessible only to the artists themselves. For example, as I child I made soft day-beds from woolly bush branches (*adenanthus sericeus*) (see figure 2) and harvested charcoal from burnt stumps (see figure 3). I associate summer heat with the yellowing stalks and pink seeds of African Veldt grass (*erharta longiflora*), in my work

Figure 2 Woolly bush (Adenanthos sericeus) in Wellard/Casuarina, September 2013. Photograph by the artist.

Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses) (2015) (see figure A1) and I have early memories of my mother digging out clumps of this grass to make way for post-holes while fencing. I have a clear image of the cross-cut pieces of timber revealing a soft green/yellow wood fading to an almost pink in the centre with radiating darker markings visually reminiscent of Veldt grass, but the specific memories of summer and outdoor work are less accessible. Tracking these personal meanings and histories can be difficult, but their preservation (even in accompanying texts such as this exegesis) can be rewarding for both artist and viewer. Dylan Trigg (2012, 88) posits that, as memories are built within places, they become embodied within them; they have their own presence in place. They serve as authentic commentary on specific places or localities, because they are directly implicated in awareness of being-in-place.

Despite the familiarity of habitual places, home environments which are infused with personal narratives need to be recognised as partly fictional constructs subject to personal and cultural bias. This is true for my own narratives of home, where the value I place in personal anecdotes or memories reflect contexts such as my upbringing in rural/semi-rural environments, or my heritage as a European-Australian. The idealised images we have of landscapes and places create a shell around cultural and everyday realities, supplanting what is seen and lived with what is imagined. These perceptions of landscapes and places can obscure the

social and cultural circumstances in which personal relationships with places are involved. The desire for home could be seen as a form of sanctuary from difficult and destabilising questions about land use, ownership, and history. However, these circumstances are always present within place narratives of home and implicated in the desire for such narratives. Each level of place identifier – local, regional, national – is an expanded, more inclusive version of 'home.'

Figure 3 The remains of a burnt stump in Wellard/Casuarina, November 2013. Photograph by the artist.

Studio

The studio is more than just a physical site where research activities happen; it is a place with its own complexities and relationships. It is inevitable that these have an impact on creative production. For example, changing qualities of light over the course of the day, collections of objects, artworks, and materials, ambient noise or music are an ever-present part of the perceptions made in the studio. Additionally, the habits, duties, and socialisations of the everyday all interact with and interrupt the processes of making and reflection. More than any of the other places considered as part of the research, being in Wellard/Casuarina breeds the kind of familiarity that both obscures and reveals intimate details.

Making art within a studio environment that engages with landscapes or places raises the question of how the experiential differences between the studio and places reflect on the work. For landscape painter Philip Wolfhagen, the studio acts

as a central repository for thoughts, colours, and even musical cues that anchor him over time to paintings, allowing the often-ephemeral inspirations from the Tasmanian landscape to be revisited and built with paint (see figure 4) (Kelly 2010). Wolfhagen's paintings refer to regions in Tasmania where he has either visited or in which he has dwelled. His painterly description of Tasmania demonstrates Lippard's (1997, 33) argument for individual immersion in place – immersion within cloudscapes and wide, sweeping views of mountains and their hinterlands.

Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 4 [Philip Wolfhagen shown in his studio in Tasmania]. Accessed 30 March 2016, http://www.australianoftheday.com.au/philip-wolfhagen.html.

According to Leslie Duxbury (2008, 17-27) and Graeme Sullivan (2009, 41-65) studio and exhibition as research methods offer a means of engaging in a productive material process for the purposes of critical judgement. The triadic relationship between places (research sites), the studio, and exhibition, creates layers of experiences and memories that are literally re-forged together in a material sense. Just as developing work in the studio is an ongoing material process, so too is memory "a material process of putting back together scattered pieces," as described by Paul Carter (2004, 95) in *Material Thinking*. Reconstructing experiences and memories from the research sites within the studio, therefore, by necessity happens in a fragmented fashion, allowing for the influence of the studio site on the results of the practice as well as that of the memories and documentation of experiences themselves.

The works that I created as part of this research are constituent parts of a period of

productivity, in which they were always intended to be developed and in time exhibited together. During the course of the research they have been exhibited twice; first, at Packenham Street Art Space (PSAS) in Fremantle in 2015, and second at Turner Galleries in Perth in 2017. To separate them out from one another completely is to separate the places they are connected to. The character and dimension of each place is determined by the boundaries between them and the subject at their centre. The composition of many of the pieces is directly determined by those which have come before and the materials available, including those which are 'offcuts' from previous works. I am using what I have of the places, which includes memories, feelings, materials and found objects to remake them.

What happened between the two exhibitions was a considerable length of time living with the works and writing about them. They had to become part of those places, they had to be absorbed by them, and remake them in turn. They needed to enter into memory and become almost indistinguishable from what I thought of as that place. Without the process of exegetical writing between 2015 and 2017, the way I feel about the works would be very different. To that degree, the 2017 show felt like a completely new undertaking; I made the concerted decision to exclude some works, rearrange others, and discovered relationships between works previously hidden.

The process of learning relationship to place through studio practice, as artist Simryn Gill describes it, is "almost like a regular talking of oneself into existence in a place" (De Zegher 2013, 69). While our very sense of self and existence is, according to place theory, already predicated on our emplacement within the world, practice as a "talking of oneself into existence" is a method of identifying, affirming, and learning the character and dimensions of that emplacement. Gill speaks of her transition to living in Adelaide from Port Dickson, Malaysia, as feeling out of place, as the tensions between citizenship and non-citizenship "incarnat[ing] in its very structure the gap between being in a place and being of a place, between living there and belonging there" (Massumi 2013, 187). In the process of learning how to be herself within Australia's unfamiliar places, Gill began collecting local materials and including them into her practice. Brian Massumi (2013, 189) writes that "the artist thought she was looking for her place in Australia. But what she has found … is a *way*." That way is a process of learning what her relationship to place may mean through practice, "a way of moving in

place, looking, seeing, nosing along with a calmly expectant openness to what might fall into her path" (Massumi 2013, 189). Her work examines systems and structures through which people create knowledge of the world, particularly of places, using creative practice as both example and method of investigation.

Places as sites for practice-led research function in the same way as any other research subject – namely, as a source of data and theoretical or material context. For example, the Australian Antarctic Division through its Australian Antarctic Arts Fellowship sends artists on scientific research vessels to research stations in

Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 5 David Burrows, *MIRAGE PROJECT___[iceberg]*. 2012, installation flyer with photograph of the iceberg and map of the installation at Federation Square, Melbourne. Accessed 30 March 2016, http://davidburrows.info/iceberg.html

Antarctica in order to engage with the phenomena and realities of living in and studying the frozen southern continent. The length of the visit varies, but is usually several weeks or more, allowing artists the unique opportunity to experience a place that at times can be both environmentally inhospitable and visually stunning. Artists interact with the Antarctic (and Antarctic research) environment differently as is appropriate for their practice. Sound and installation artist David Burrows received the fellowship in 2010, which resulted in a stereoscopic photography installation in 2012 at Federation Square in Melbourne. The installation titled *MIRAGE PROJECT_____[iceberg]* (see figure 5) recreated the spatial experience of a specific iceberg by using 3D photographs arranged within the Square, which Burrows (2012) claims "[broke] free from the confines of the gallery and open[ed] the spatial relationship to larger issues of landscape, environment and architecture." The intention of the installation was to communicate the "extraordinary experience, sense of wonder and discovery inspired by 'getting up close' to an iceberg," (Burrows 2012) which suggests the desire on the part of Burrows to express his sense of Antarctica more generally as well as the specific dimensions of the iceberg photographed.

Burrows engaged with four other places as part of the Mirage Project series of works. His characterisation of the series as a 'project' itself suggests his consideration of the places involved went beyond momentary inspiration to a more considered, intentional engagement. *MIRAGE PROJECT_____[salt]* (2013) was a continuation or re-contextualisation of *MIRAGE PROJECT_____[iceberg]* where the installation of photographs of the iceberg was relocated to a salt pan called Lake Ranfurly in Mildura, Victoria. While the original installation contrasted the iceberg with the inner urban environment of Melbourne, the 2013 production contrasted the iceberg with a hot, dry expanse of salt in inland Australia. By linking the history of Lake Ranfurly as a previously productive lake system 30,000 years ago, to Mildura's current status as irrigation town reliant on the flow of the Murray River, Burrows reveals an underlying narrative connecting the two works that is focused on the importance of water and its various physical forms and histories in different places. The solid ice of the iceberg is equally alien to Federation Square on the banks of the Yarra River and to Lake Ranfurly in the arid heat of the Australian outback. In treating all three places as inter-related research sites this artwork sets up a series of correspondences and interrogations not only of them as historical and geological phenomena, but also of them as evidence of the delicate balance of the environmental ecosystem.

The studio acts as a transitional zone in which the irregular, haptic, contingent aspects of experiential discovery and knowledge – Carter's "scattered pieces" (2004, 95) – coalesce and interact transforming them through material processes into different configurations. For example, my memories of the heat of the Murchison River gorge at midday and the crisp morning fog at dawn on the Margaret River reflect off one another. The two works which relate directly with these experiences – *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)* (see figure A2) for the heat and *Margaret River* (*upriver)* (see figure A3) for the cold – share a structural design based on material resemblance and emotive colour, which developed in conjunction with one another. The memory of the cold of the river became a foil for the heat of the gorge. Within my creative practice, works are designed to be both 'whole' within themselves and 'fragments' of their gallery installations. The move from the studio environment to the gallery redistributes pieces of experience and memory, bringing places together and producing new relational meanings. This three-part locational identity for the artworks, from research site to studio to gallery, echoes interrelationships among the research sites.

The studio sits at the centre of a creative praxis that reaches outward as it searches within. It provides a conceptual and physical place of return, however broadly the research discussion engages with regional and national practices, or however widely I travel within Western Australia. As a transitional zone between the distinct sites and the gallery, the studio is where engagements with places as physical locations and historical, emotional, and sensorial entanglements are managed.

Away

Helping to define the boundary of 'home' are places which are considered 'away' – places where I was a visitor, and where the experiential encounter was distanced from the familiarity of dwelling. Two journeys to Leonora and Meekatharra in 2008 and 2009 mark the first time I began to engage with 'away' places as distinct sites of inquiry in my art practice. They formed the backbone of a resulting honours thesis investigating methods of practice as ways of interpreting experiential discovery. Since then, other places in Western Australia have provided further contexts and materials for the development of studio work. Each of the places listed below have been visited during the period of the PhD candidacy, sometimes on several occasions. The sites include state and national parks, reserves, and private properties. Some were chosen for their family ties or accessibility, while others were selected for their specific botanical or visual characteristics. These are all personal motivations, which are reflected in my record of each site that contains information, memories, photographs, and drawings, often descriptive or personal in character. The forms, histories, and processes of engagement with these places have generated changes in my studio practice. The following places distinct from Wellard/Casuarina were visited during the research period, in no particular order:

Kalbarri (see figure 6); the Irwin River in Coalseam Conservation Park and surrounding grasslands; the mouth and upper stretches of the Margaret River (see figure 7 and 8); Jarrahdale (see figure 9); Point Geographe; Lake Preston; Port Gregory; Preston Beach; Quairading; Alexandra Bridge; Beekeeper's Nature Reserve; Mundijong; and the road between Mullewa and Morawa.

These places retain various personal significances as revisitations of childhood holiday sites, journeys past extended family dwellings, and reserves visited with family members.

Figure 6 Cliffs of the Murchison River gorge in Kalbarri, Western Australia, January 2013. Photograph by the artist.

When recalled, even from photographs, they have a ghostlier and less determinate presence than Wellard/Casuarina, more easily manipulated by cultural imagery. Walking again through any of these places I would find it difficult to relocate the place represented in the relevant work. Places become more than the sum of their remembered or geographic features. They gain subjective, imagined, and personal dimensions. When combined they form a generalised sense of 'Western Australia,' emblematic of my sense of the state. This folds them within broader narratives of 'home' through senses of belonging to region and/or nation.

However, such places still act in my practice as counterpoints to the familiarity of Wellard/Casuarina; they feel distant and only partially known in comparison. They represent times when I was 'away' from home. A sense of presence in place in these cases is coupled with that of the visitor – or even 'interloper' in less hospitable environments, as in the heat and geological drama of Kalbarri. Works which refer to these places feel more like an attempt at learning a relationship to place than demonstrating one. Nevertheless, this also carries latent potential for more engagement, or for the 'unknown' in comparison to the comforting knowledge of 'home.' Differences between works that relate to the experience of 'home' or 'away' show the influence of familiarity and belonging on the sense of place.

These sites represent trajectories of incursion into places and landscapes based on and extending from the studio location. The one constant of the studio provides a sense of orientation to these incursions; the dynamic of travel from a 'here' to a 'there' is ever present.

Figure 7 Margaret River (upriver section) showing reflections, February 2014. Photograph by the artist.

The form of engagement with the sites, therefore, always reflects both the act of moving from one place to another and the notion of contrasting 'home' landscapes with unfamiliar ones. In *The Intelligence of Place,* Malpas (2015, 4) refers to representations of places (through memory, photographs, pattern recognition or visual association, but not strictly figurative rendering) as a kind of return. An integral part of the notion of home, each return is a reaffirmation of home's physical location and emotional dimensions. There has been a lot of variation between places visited during the research, with some impacting more strongly as either strange or familiar – at times a sense of 'home' was found in places very far from Wellard/Casuarina and very different by botanical and geological comparison. For example, returning to the Margaret River region over two years made it more familiar than a single visit to Lake Preston, but something about the

low, sandy scrubland at the lake resonated more strongly with my experiences in Wellard/Casuarina.

Figure 8 Tuart and jarrah forest in Margaret River, February 2014. Photograph by the artist.

Memory, Connection

Place narratives hold within them the traces of social and cultural contexts, but also the poignancies of memory: half-forgotten familiarities, absences, and revisitations. When Malpas (2011, 18) speaks of the "way[s] in which landscape is brought into salience through journey and return," he is referring to the importance of dwelling and memory in the recognition of that landscape, "both for the European experience of landscape and also the indigenous." Memory however holds imperfect recreations of individual and collective encounters with land, contributing to the imagined component of our sense of places, but also creating space for us to see ourselves within them. As Lippard (1997, 57) writes in *The Lure of the Local*, our own memories of places often interfere with our present experiences of them, resulting in multi-layered readings that often contradict.

Revisiting the site of my mother's first home as a child in the rural pastoral and Bush area of Alexandra Bridge provided a clear opportunity to see how often "our memories are so strong we can't believe our eyes when confronted by our own pictured pasts" (Lippard 1997, 57). Returning to Alexandra Bridge was a return to

a place that barely existed outside my mother's faint memories. The solidity of the earth leading down to the Blackwood River both shocked her remembrances and brought them clearer to the surface. There were Plane trees (*Platanus L.*) smothering the rotted shell of the humpy, later additions to the surrounding flora, as were the current farmer's Eucalyptus plantation (assumed *Eucalyptus grandis*). These remembrances were coupled with a sense of uncertainty, as she was a very young child living here until approximately 1966. She commented repeatedly on the familiar dandelions growing on the slope to the river, but also on her surprise at the length of that slope, which had become truncated and condensed in her memory. At the time, I wondered how much of her recognition was accurate, and how much could be suggestion fuelled by imagination. Although, as explained by Dylan Trigg (2012, 46) there is "clearly a difference between being in a place and remembering that place," a sense of being in place is preserved in its recollection. Trigg (2012, 46) speaks of returning to places in memories as "a concurrent blending of presence and absence." A sense of being in place, reworked through memory and remembering associated with photography, can be represented by artists as being both present and absent in that place. The power of recreating experiences of places lies in the virtual felt experience which can, in certain situations, produce such a strong sensation of personal engagement that the spectator feels they were/are present within the experience even though they know they are/were not.

Figure 9 Moss and lichen strewn rock outcropping, Jarrahdale National Park, October 2013. Photograph by the artist.

My mother and I took a large number of photographs while we were there with the intention to look over them together. Lippard (1997, 58) likens such activity to how "family connections and memory draw us into the photographed spaces rather than leaving us gawking at the window." We "read into" those spaces with "vocabularies based in our own lives" (Lippard 1997, 58). Through my mother, I developed my own budding sense of familiarity with the site, as it was, though not so much in terms of how she remembered and recounted it to me. Her language memory settled over the yellow grassed clearing like a comforting blanket. This was another home, one I'd never get to truly visit, but pieced together from my Nanna's and Aunt's remembrances to connect with my mother's. One of my Aunts and my Nanna visited without me some months later but were disillusioned by the increased river traffic and eroded banks of what once had been a remote area. As both were several years older than my mother when they left, I imagine their memories to be crisper and less easily reconciled with the ruins that remained, a less enjoyable and fulfilling reunion than my mother's. However, they were nonetheless buoyed by happy memories. Remembered personal connections with pastoral land and the Bush have become essential markers of time, youth, and identity in Australian landscape and place narratives. Like the memories of many urban or suburban Australians who had previously lived elsewhere, or who would visit family or leisure sites outside of their current urban/suburban landscapes, there is an intimate romanticism to the idea (realised or not) of the return.

In *The Lure of the Local*, Lippard (1997, 57) relates Daniel Thomas' anecdotal tale of bushwalking in his youth and the attachment "wholly unlike that of someone whose life was deeply invested in the land," depending not on "intimate relation with the land but on our radical distance, our alienation," as a pleasurable activity of escape from urban life. In contrast to Thomas' felt visitor status within the Bush, my mother's return to Alexandra Bridge felt sufficiently intimate to escape this alienation. Bushwalking or travelling by foot around places such as Alexandra Bridge works to emplace the subject. I argue that the combination of being present within the place in that moment, and absent from the sense of place which only exists in memory, emplaces the individual particularly strongly because it synthesises the imagined and material aspects of sense of place. Despite admittedly being temporary visitors on that afternoon in Alexandra Bridge, we also visited memories of her own and her family's past presences, which by persisting beyond the physical changes preserved the place as intimate and familiar.

I contend that representation of a sense of place is as much about gaps in memory and accidental connections as it is about confident rendering or retelling. In *Place Attachment*, Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low (1992, 20) wonder if it is possible "that the greater power of place lies not in inhabiting it but in remembering it?" They argue that a subject's "essential attachment is not to the landscape itself, but to its memory and the relived experience" (Altman and Low 1992, 20). It is, perhaps, even necessary to have the contingency and unreliability of memory as part of a truly personally invested sense of a place, a 'gap' where the subject can be let in. Altman and Low (1992, 18) argue that such attachments are not as simple as they may feel, but rather are built from "a complex set of threads" including biology, culture, and individual experiences which are a necessary part of "an ever changing interior drama within the human psyche." It is the memory of places which makes for an emplacing sense of place and not "a simple stimulus response phenomenon" (Altman and Low 1992, 18).

Malpas (2015, 4) explores such an interior drama further in terms of the process of remembering and forgetting place as "a constant turning in which place appears and disappears," a return to a place that is never completed, never finished, never satisfactory. I contend that within that dissatisfaction is a sense of something lacking, a loss, or wistfulness, which assists in the attachment to or yearning for places which is essential to a sense of place. Additionally, there is a potential for change or reflexivity, for the subject's sense of place to evolve and change with the passage of time. A good example in practice is John Wolseley's scribbles, scratchings, sketches, and rubbings of natural environments and places. His varied and unmannered mark makings invest his work not only with a sense of his presence within a place, but also his time and effort taken to learn a way of rendering the ephemeral, imagined, and uncertain aspects of his experience within that place. Works such as *Murray-Sunset refugia with 14 ventifacts* (2008–10) (see figure 10) whispers and suggests connections with landscape phenomena beyond what is easily seen. His works offer insight into a personal process of learning the material realities and opportunities of a relationship with place – in particular, the idea that this relationship is constantly evolving and difficult to express without loss of detail due to the fragmentation of memory.

Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 10 John Wolseley, *Murray-Sunset refugia with 14 ventifacts.* 2008-10, carbonised wood, watercolour and graphite on 15 sheets of paper, dimensions variable. Accessed 21 January 2019, https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/113828/

Wolseley's mark making draws on memory and the imperfection of the fragment. His drawings and paintings show an openness, a willingness to allow the place itself to dictate the form and content of the work, even if this acts to obscure or obfuscate recognizable imagery. The result is an intensely personal study of phenomena through which Wolseley has managed to find a way to represent the specificity of a particular place through anecdotal, incomplete, and obscure references and renderings.

Similar to Wolseley, over time my studio work became more and more preoccupied with the subjective peculiarities of belonging. I kept returning to a question which seemed to have no clear answer. Why do I feel that my connection to place is most poignant, a representation of my sense of place most accurate, when invoking the unsettled or incomplete? Herbert George writes that "the illustration of familiar narratives is a way of making them seem more real, vivid and tangible" (2014, 168). In my case, the more closely I look at the familiar narratives which underlie the places I know (both as Home, and Away) the more intangible they are revealed to be. The act of trying to recreate a sense of connection with place both obscures and produces emplacement within it. Nick Kaye (2000, 1) suggests that work with this kind of focus on place "articulate[s] exchanges between the work of art and the places in which its meanings are

defined." In the following chapter, I address wider place contexts in which meaning in my work is also defined. Within the broader conception of Australian place, there are narratives which provide insight into my motivations for exploring sense of place and the form they take.

Chapter Three

Australian Landscape

After defining place in chapter one and exploring my own places in chapter two, it follows that I need to discuss some of the broader contexts within which my sense of place has developed. Concepts of place, identity, landscape, and nature in the Australian context contain histories which speak of communal senses of belonging, violence, and dispossession. It is important to address these histories when writing about place, because the moments which build into memories, and eventually both personal and national histories, are the "all-pervasive structure," (Lippard 1998, 11) which lies beneath longing and belonging in place. These histories have shaped my experiences in both explicit and unseen ways, influencing decisions made both in the studio and out of it in all the places which concern my practice. Most importantly, I must understand how they do so in order to engage fully, within my practice, with what a sense of place is for an artist in the Australian context.

Personal and intimate experiences of places are the building blocks on which national identities are built. To approach these in art practice concerns belonging in place and is the way Australian identity is tied to its landscapes. It must be understood that, as Nicholas Smith (2011, 14) writes "the search for a national identity is the search for an intimate history." He expands on the paradoxical nature of this search – "although national myths about nature appear central to the comprehension of essential national characteristics, settler Australians seem discursively locked in to a constant embryonic state of becoming" (Smith 2011, 14). Relationships with place are always being negotiated, and a sense of belonging in place always being sought, rather than seen in terms of being established a priori.

History and Narratives

David Bromfield (1993, 29) claims that "the landscape has always been central to any debate about Australian identity. Proposed redefinition of Australian identity has always included a redefinition of the source of its principal grounding imagery and metaphor, the landscape." While in this exegesis I do not seek to redefine contemporary Australian identity, the understanding that landscape as pivotal to what is known as 'Australia' and what it is to be 'Australian,' is significant. My definition of what is contemporary is necessarily tied to my own context as practitioner, as is my understanding of what it is to be Australian. In this chapter I review how closely landscape and place in art practice is bound to national and regional sense of identity and belonging. I will examine the Australian preoccupation with landscape through what Jeff Malpas (2011, viii), characterises as a "conceptual topography" a usually geographic term describing how concepts can be mapped to show their relationships, rather than addressed in a linear fashion. Recreating a detailed historical timeline of landscape in creative practice would be beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, my approach focuses on connections between ideas which are significant to my practice. I will outline major themes of Australian landscape and place narratives to demonstrate the contextual base on which my personal sense of Australian place and landscape has been built.

I agree with Bromfield's assertion that landscape has been and continues to be Australia's principal grounding imagery and metaphor. However, because Australian landscape is "tied to a colonialist past that is an ongoing source of negotiation and often conflict," (Malpas 2011, 9) this grounding is unsettled. Contemporary personal and national narratives of engagement with landscape remain tied to colonial histories. I argue that because of this, Australian representations of place often incorporate a kind of persistent sense of contradiction, or an underlying problematic. This stems from two aspects of Australia's colonisation. First, there was a dissociation between early settlers' expectations of a romanticised Christian 'wilderness' and the perceived harsh barren expanse of the continent's geography, which led to loneliness and disillusionment. Second, the legitimacy of British colonisation has been undermined by the challenge through law and Australian culture of the claim of *terra nullius*. Recognition that the land was inhabited, and that the Indigenous

peoples had sophisticated cultures and strategies of land management, has destabilised this aspect of the foundation of European Australian occupancy of the continent.

Representations of that occupancy during the colonial period were heavily constructed to legitimize the presence of the colonists and emphasize the primitivism of Indigenous populations. Jeff Malpas points to John Glover's painting *Mount Wellington and Hobart Town from Kangaroo Point* (1834) (see figure 11), as a clear example of the manipulation of topographical features and historical events common to colonial landscape paintings. The sunlit town at the base of a looming, grandiose Mt Wellington shown much larger than its reality is foregrounded by a shadowed scene of heavily romanticised Indigenous life.

Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 11 John Glover, *Mount Wellington and Hobart Town from Kangaroo Point.* 1834, oil on canvas, 7.62 x 15.24 cm. (National Gallery of Australia, Canberra). Accessed 2 August 2017, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/46/John_Glover__Mount_Wellington_and_Hobart_Town_from_Kangaroo_Point_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg.

However, Glover's landscape was painted at a time when to be Indigenous in Tasmania was to be displaced, hunted, and killed. There would not have been an Indigenous group living by the river, so close to Hobart Town, as depicted. Malpas argues that the work presents a juxtaposition of past and present, with the scene representing the 'savage wilderness' that came before the town, the play of sunlight across the town "an indicator of the hopes and aspirations of both town and painter" (Malpas 2011, 5). Glover's landscape is an imagined place which "enables the assertion of relations of power and subjectification" (Malpas 2011, 4). Representations of landscape such as Glover's show a relationship with Australian place which reflects the contexts of the time, including use and ownership of land and associated structures of power.

Indigenous figures in paintings and drawings such as Glover's, rather than serving to make visible the Indigenous presence within the landscape, reaffirm colonial power over land by perpetuating imagery of Aborigines as uncivilised and without agency, aspects of wilderness landscape against which the colonial struggle can – and will (by example of the flourishing town in the middle distance) – prevail. This characterisation shows that *terra nullius* was never a claim that the land itself was truly empty of people, but that the people were not seen as owners or occupiers of land; they were subsumed into the colonial appetite for visions of romanticised wilderness or arcadias in which 'noble savages' appeared as curiosities or features.[2]

Historical representations of landscape in paintings such as Glover's are for Malpas (2011, 6) "already seen as 'views,' so they are separated from us, and our involvement with them is based purely in the spectatorial". If the relationship with landscape is that of a spectator, then that landscape is conceptualised as inherently separate from a sense of self. This separation even affects the national sense of identity. However, it is important to note that the separation between people-place that a spectatorial view implies is a contemporary perspective on colonial identity. Expectations of landscape representation were different in the colonial context.

Often, paintings by colonial artists were designed "to emphasize the natural to the exclusion of the human, and thereby to stress the apartness of wilderness landscapes, and sometimes, even, their apparently timeless (if nonetheless vulnerable) character" (Malpas 2011, 16) – for example, the picturesque and sublime paintings of Eugene von Guerard (1811-1901). The construction of wilderness and nature as Other, which is "so prevalent within much contemporary Australian and North American engagement with landscape," (Malpas 2011, 15) reveals preoccupations with mythologised or idealised relationships with place where modes of involvement which don't fit the rhetoric are lost. In particular paintings of wilderness such as those by von Guerard and Glover (1767-1849) catered to appetites among colonial audiences for the sublime and picturesque. Heavily idealised perspectives on nature and landscapes were a symptom of growing urbanisation and industrialisation in Britain, as they were often more commonly seen in paintings than in person. Paintings, engravings, and prints by artists such as von Guerard or Glover tied in with British imperial projections of

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[2] For more on this see McLean, Ian, 1998, *White Aborigines: identity politics in Australian art,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Australia as an untouched biblical Eden, offering untouched beauty and economic opportunity, forming a large part of the rhetoric on which young colonists were sold to venture across the world and confront the unknown. These works were missing domestic narratives that might have contradicted the paradigm of presenting nature as an Other against which the heroic explorer/colonist struggles.

In later works, such as the well-known Frederick McCubbin triptych *The Pioneer* (1904), (see figure 12) the domestic intimacy of a young colonial family is shown set amongst a landscape portrayed as a dense screen. Shown through the triptych format, over time a domesticated agrarian landscape shows through, and eventually a young town emerges in the middle distance. The heavily romanticised paintings of the bush in which settlers are set typically show a vaguely threatening or harsh environment against which the familiar and domestic is juxtaposed. Nature persists as that which the family (a metaphor for a young colony) struggles against. The settler clearing a place for his family in the wilderness becomes a mythic hero, a David versus Goliath. Bill Ashcroft argues that this shows a "radical transformation of the sacred," which is "most clearly indicated in painting[s]" but also in narrative fiction and letters sent 'home,' which "originated squarely in the colonial encounter with a new and threatening land" (2005, 141). In later art practice, this threatening land would become familiar, and eventually there would be a "post-colonial transformation of that encounter" (2005, 141).

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Figure 12 Frederick McCubbin, *The Pioneer.* 1904, oil on canvas, 225.0 x 295.7 cm. (National Gallery of Victoria). Accessed 2 August 2017, https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/5990/

Juliana Engberg writes in her introduction to *Colonial post colonial* that "the sublime and picturesque attitudes established by painters such as von Guerard gave way to the new picturing of Australia via the realism of Roberts, Streeton, McCubbin, Davies, Withers, and others" (1996, 21-22). As colonists became accustomed to the climates as well as flora and fauna of Australia, and adapted farming/gardening methodologies and social uses of land for recreation, familiarity bred appreciation. Aspects of (particularly agrarian) engagements with land entered popular culture and mythology, sprouting the oft-recited and still contemporaneous affection for 'the bush'. These images of landscape were stylised, agrarian idylls of golden fields of wheat, stock in pasture, or rolling hills of partly cleared bush, within which the Australian observer could create a sense of belonging. A national sense of place developed from these landscape images, which could be participated in from afar and were therefore both nonthreatening and familiar. However, as Ian McLean argues these images showed "not a real place for dwelling and thinking … but a redemptive space that simulates a sense of place" (2001, 14). The sublime and the picturesque had given way to a "realism" (Smith 2001, 566) which was as much cultural artefact and myth as the paintings of von Guerard.

'The bush' was however also represented by McCubbin as a source of fear (of loneliness and of being lost in the landscape) as much as enjoyment. The familiarity of Heidelberg pastorals and the bush gave way, as the relationship between national identity and landscape evolved, to less controlled and comfortable visions. For example, in the 1940s, Russel Drysdale's depictions of Australia's landscapes as inhospitable and drought stricken, such as *Western Landscape* (1945) (see figure 13) or Sidney Nolan's scenes of melancholic bush figures, such as *Pretty Polly Mine* (1948) (see figure 14) show that social commentary on place and landscape narratives played more central roles. Representations of natural disasters such as drought or bushfire from this time are constitutive of a transition from seeing the landscape as offering opportunity or leisure, to a site of dispossession, loss, and economic upheaval.[3] Australian art practice then "moved on from the desert landscapes of the post-war period," (Smith 2001, 566) while still engaging explicitly with social and moral themes. Although "there was an impatience with views of the interior as a wasteland" (Smith 2001, 566), the landscape remained a theatre for fears and desires in a flawed wilderness

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[3] For more on this subject see Catalano, Gary, 1985, *An intimate Australia: the landscape & recent Australian art*, Sydney NSW: Southwood Press.

Eden, such as in the paintings, drawings, and ceramics of Arthur Boyd. Landscape painting was increasingly becoming a more self-aware vehicle for examining the social and cultural aspects of landscape as a marker of national identity or belonging.

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Figure 13 Russel Drysdale, *Western Landscape.* 1945, oil on composition board, 30.5 x 40.5 cm. Accessed 18 April 2019, https://www.deutscherandhackett.com/auction/26-important-australian-international-art-auction/lot/western-landscape-1945.

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Figure 14 Sidney Nolan, *Pretty Polly Mine*. 1948, Ripolin enamel on hardboard, 91.0 x 122.2 cm board; 107.2 x 137.9 x 5.2 cm frame. (Art Gallery of NSW). Accessed 18 April 2019, https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/8169/

The visual trope of bushfire embodies historical duality between landscapes as nation making and alienating, because it is both personally and nationally familiar. The violence and disaster of bushfire, but also its association with rebirth, have become markers of Australian nationality (West and Smith 1997, 210). With experience of bushfire comes a familiarity with the aesthetics of both fire itself and its aftermath, but also the knowledge and confidence that the bush-land, and people persist after fire has passed. The cycle of vegetation burning and growing from the ashes becomes part of the identity of the community – at the local level, where people come together to commiserate lost fences around pasture, livestock, buildings, and bushland and on the national scale, where people empathically respond to media reports via their own experiences (Read 1996, 200). William Strutt's *Black Thursday, February 6th, 1851* (1864) (see figure 15) has become not just a work which records a historical event, but also an icon with which more recent catastrophic fires, such as those in Yarloop, Western Australia, and the World Heritage forests in Tasmania's central plateau can be related or compared. Bushfires erase and reconfigure the land; they are remembered on both local and national community scales, becoming myth and legend for both Indigenous and European Australians. Through representation in news and social media, bushfires construct a national sense of empathy and therefore community towards a town or region that viewers elsewhere may never experience themselves. The shared experience of bushfire creates a national inclusivity for communities often isolated from one another.

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Figure 15 William Strutt, *Black Thursday, February 6th 1851*. 1864, oil on canvas, 106.5 x 343 cm. Accessed 2 August 2017, http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/imagecache/zoom_thumb/b28579_0.jpg.

The sharing of experience encodes a phenomenon such as bushfire into a national sense of place. Similar to the vastness and emptiness of the outback, Bill Ashcroft (1994, 144) writes that bushfire "has been dystopian and terrifying because a

purely visual phenomenon," but becomes metaphor and an "engagement with possibility because it becomes a cultural trope." The visual aesthetics of bushfire and its remnants are examined in works by Howard Taylor such as *Bushfire sun* (1996) (see figure 16), or in contemporary works such as Tim Storrier's *Reflected Waterline (Empire Of The Coals)* (2008) (see figure 17). In the work by Taylor, aspects of bushfire such as atmospheric smoke are transformed into a motif. Storrier's *Reflected waterline (empire of the coals)* is one of a series of works where a landscape is divided horizontally by a carefully, almost reverently, rendered line of fire. The imagery of fire in the landscape becomes transformative, almost sacred.

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Figure 16 Howard Taylor, *Bushfire sun.* 1996, oil on canvas, 122 x 152 cm. Accessed 2 August 2017, http://www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/exhibitions/images/H-Taylor--bush-fire-sun.jpg.

In *An intimate Australia*, Gary Catalano writes that a growing awareness of Indigenous culture and environmental concerns, such as drought and bushfire, has gradually evolved since the 1940s. This awareness has encouraged "a more genuine national identity," because place and its representation through landscape "is also the most accurate image of what we imagine our own selves to be" (Catalano 1985, 9). While I am wary of invoking the notion of the genuine without a critical frame, Catalano's optimism reflects an improvement in the inclusivity of perspectives within which Australian place is viewed. The influx of new ideas, from Indigenous practice and social environmentalism to international influences, has steered landscape representation away from the Othering and ownership of the colonial period toward a more reciprocal vision of the people-place relationship. However, although artists in the 1940s began to represent landscapes less in terms of British or European sensibilities, and more in terms of a uniquely Australian

vision, the legacies of colonisation continue to inform attitudes to land. Val Plumwood's question of why "people from a settler culture who make such claims to love their lands have been engaged in destroying so much of it" (2005, 371) remains pertinent today.

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Figure 17 Tim Storrier, *Reflected Waterline (Empire Of The Coals).* 2008, acrylic on canvas, 106.5 x 305 cm. Accessed 2 August 2017, https://storrier.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/test-30.jpg.

Mapping Place

From colonial times the Outback has often been written and mapped by European-Australians as interminable distances between places, defined by its great scale (Plumwood 2005, 371). Difficulties in comprehending Australian geography led to what Ashcroft calls the "'placelessness' that overwhelmed the colonial imagination" (2005, 144). Representations in either visual or written media of Australian landscapes as endless or placeless reflect both the difficulties faced by colonial settlers in seeing themselves within landscapes, and the embedding of this difficulty within further romanticisation of the Australian landscape. Ashcroft argues that this "sense of the infinity of visual space becomes domesticated in many works of painting and writing later in the [twentieth] century" and "its sublime implications remain a powerful substratum of Australian representations of place" (2005, 144). The continuing association of landscape and placelessness in contemporary practice is shown, for example, in Shaun Gladwell's *Apologies 1–6* (2007-2009), (see figure 18), a film of himself riding a motorbike along an outback road. He takes the trope of the endless road through the endless outback and presents himself as an anonymous figure that rides the artificial lines of European mapping that crosses the landscape. When he pauses his journey to investigate some roadkill, for the first time he seems to interact with the place in which he finds himself, rather than simply travelling through it. His tenderness and compassion during the encounter displays acknowledgement of the conflicts

inherent in travelling along roads in the outback environment, built to make that environment accessible. The interlude in the anonymous figure's journey engages with the placelessness of distance as a real, tangible aspect of Australian sense of place.

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Figure 18 Shaun Gladwell, *Apologies 1-6* (2007-2009), single-channel digital video, colour, sound, 27:10 minutes. Image of film still accessed 2 August 2017, https://www.mca.com.au/media/thumbs/uploads/images/2011.1208.jpg.850x439_q85.jpg.

The placelessness of the Australian bush or outback has become a persistent trope. Paul Genoni argues this is due to the "capacity [of nothingness] to be internalised" (2007, 36) and therefore become embedded within the encounter of landscape and place. Endless expanses of land "come to represent something intrinsic about the *way* in which that space is occupied," (Genoni 2007, 36) thereby suggesting that the sense of placelessness has more to do with the nature of contemporary belonging in Australian place than any feature of the locations themselves. Reflecting on narrative author Thea Astley's representation of "the power of the empty inland spaces over the lives of even those who cling to the continental margins," (2007, 38) Genoni posits that "the characteristic of nothingness has frequently been used metaphorically to express the manner in which Australians relate to their world and to each other" (2007, 38). Metaphorical connections between nothingness and the large geographical distances of Australian landscapes become a trope for artists to tap into in order to access a recognizable communal sense of Australian place.

Mapping as a form of encoding land into a managed form invokes the Cartesian faith in sight and perspective as a primary means of understanding place and

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landscape. Contemporary artists often reveal tensions between colonial desire for paradise or utopia and late twentieth century postmodern ideas of nature by playing with conventions of mapping. Works such as Susanna Castleden's *Building the World (Mark II)* (2013), (see figure 19) which folds a screen-printed map in on itself, destabilises these mapping structures and the authority of maps over experience of place. Juxtapositions or contrasts are often made by using quotations or appropriations of older works, such as Imants Tiller's *Mount Analogue* (1985), (see figure 20), which quotes a painting by Eugene von Guerard. The way places are delineated and defined by their mapping stages an authoritative voice for the artist or viewer, but this authority is, as John Bradley (2011, 48) claims, "too often considered fixed and given."

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Figure 19 Susanna Castleden, *Building the World (Mark II).* 2013, screen print, water colour and gesso on rag paper, approx. 70 x 60 x 60 cm. Accessed 19 April 2019, https://artguide.com.au/assets/files/2017/05/Web-Building-The-World-MarkTwo.jpg

Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 20 Imants Tillers, *Mount Analogue.* 1985, oil, oil stick and synthetic polymer paint, 165 canvas boards, nos. 7416-7580, overall 279 x 571 cm. (National Gallery of Australia). Accessed 2 August 2017, https://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/TILLERS/Images/LRG/68991.jpg.

I argue that ownership of knowledge of place, and by extension a sense of authority over that knowledge, is subjective and subject to change. For example, Bea Maddock's *TERRA SPIRITUS...with a darker shade of pale* (1993-98), (see figure 21 and 22), widely considered her masterwork, reclaims Aboriginal place names and overlays them on a circumlittoral drawing of Tasmania which also marked in blind letterpress with European names. An exquisite visual working of the Tasmanian coastline, Maddock's painstakingly handwritten overlay reinvests the landscape with Indigenous knowledge of place.

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Figure 21 Bea Maddock, *TERRA SPIRITUS ... with a darker shade of pale* (detail). 1993-98, incised drawings, worked with hand-ground natural pigments over letterpress and finished with hand-drawn script on Magnani paper. (National Gallery of Australia). Accessed 18 April 2019, https://blog.qagoma.qld.gov.au/inge-king-and-bea-maddock/

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Figure 22 Bea Maddock, *TERRA SPIRITUS ... with a darker shade of pale* (installation view). 1993–98, on display at QAGOMA, 2014. https://blog.qagoma.qld.gov.au/experience-the-journey-bea-maddocks-terra-spiritus/

Postcolonialism and Landscape

The Australian landscape and how it has been represented historically in art practice reveal dark aspects of our nation's history. The way art practice has naturalised European presence, and appealed to European standards of beauty,

agrarian comfort, or wilderness, denies the trauma of Australia's landscapes' colonial history. This history is rendered visible by artists such as Leah King-Smith or Anne Ferran who direct their attention toward untold or discomforting stories of past trauma, dispossession, or discrimination. Rendering visible contested histories and landscapes, however, can be a difficult task, often undertaken by artists as the reflection of a tension or uneasiness within place. Ferran's *Lost to Worlds* (2008) (see figure 23), provides an evocative example, showing the grassed field where a factory once stood, and women worked as part of Tasmania's probation system, under terrible conditions, having had their children stolen from them (Jackett 2014). All that is left to be seen is the grassed field, but Ferran's revisitation of its history reinscribes it with the ghostly presences of those women and their enforced relationship with that place.

Through this revisitation, a desire to reconfigure landscape as theme and subject in creative practice has developed in response to its contested nature and thereby more accurately reflect new-found complexities of emplacement. Anne Stephen (2006, 14) argues that "to acknowledge dispossession implies a reconception of Australian landscape around loss for, post terra nullius, all land is inhabited by histories of prior occupation". The metaphorical empty heart/centre is no longer empty; the myth has been proven false through the acknowledgement of prior

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Figure 23 Anne Ferran, *Lost to Worlds.* 2008, 30 digital prints on aluminium, each 120 x 120 cm. Accessed 2 August 2017, https://anneferran.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/19_c1_01.jpg?w=450&h=450.

occupancy. Consequently, the emplacement of previously hidden or absent figures within landscape and place has been of great interest to artists. In work such as Leah King-Smith's series *Patterns of Connection* (1991), (see figure 24) the medium of photography, which has been the source of "so much misinformation about her culture and her experience" (Engberg, 46), is turned around to re-present nineteenth century portraits of Aboriginal people with dignity, authority, and empowered placement in landscape.

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Figure 24 Leah King-Smith, *Untitled.* 1991, printed (1993), from the *Patterns of Connection* series (1991), cibachrome photograph, 96.2 x 102.8 cm. Accessed 2 August 2017,
https://content.ngv.vic.gov.au/retrieve.php?size=1280&type=image&vernonID=13390.

If artists are to engage meaningfully with European landscape painting's "complicity in exclusion and oppression," they must acknowledge how figurative representation "construct[s] the landscape that it presents in ways that reinforce the relations of power and authority that hold sway within it" (Malpas 2011, 6). Conventions of structuring landscape images such as the use of foreground, middle ground, and background reflect choices and assumptions made about inclusion, exclusion, and priorities for display. Inherent to the representational gaze are decisions by the artist in what to include and how. In Australian colonial contexts these decisions reveal inherent racism and Indigenous dispossession.

While colonial attitudes, assumptions, and structures of ownership and power are identified by contemporary audiences in historical Australian landscape painting, they also persist in contemporary works, in the forms and conventions of visual representation of landscape. Malpas (2011, 8) asserts that the use of landscape's "visual-representational character" throughout colonial and late eighteenth to early twentieth century depictions of Australia constructed and perpetuated power relationships and authority, particularly ownership. He argues that as a result, contemporary representational landscape and landscape art are "inevitably tied" to commodification and "forms of land ownership and economic usage based on … the dispossession and oppression of indigenous populations" (Malpas 2011, 8). Using traditional European painting techniques and visual conventions to represent Australian landscape without addressing this history suggests either naivety or wilful ignorance about their contexts.

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Figure 25 Joan Ross, *The Claiming of Things.* 2012, digital animation, 3 minutes 47 seconds. Accessed 14 July 2017, https://artwrite58.wordpress.com/2015/06/01/prepare-to-merge-expect-delays/.

For some artists, the uncomfortable realities underlying figurative representation are the medium and message with which their work is concerned. Joan Ross takes colonial representations of landscape and subverts them in order to bring attention to the persistence of colonial attitudes and structures of control (such as fences) in contemporary settings. Her digital animation *The Claiming of Things* (2012) (see figure 25), recreates imagery overlaid with obvious, jarring icons of both colonial times and contemporary place construction and materialism. The Aboriginal artist Christopher Pease in *Open Plan Living II* (2014) (see figure 26), recreates a

colonial painting of a landscape, where Indigenous people's continued dispossession is represented by a house plan overlay which contrasts *terra nullius* with contemporary suburban Australian occupancy.

Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 26 Christopher Pease, *Open Plan Living II.* 2014, oil on canvas, 40 x 65 cm. Accessed 14 July 2016, http://michaelreid.com.au/art_artist/christopher-pease/.

Paintings of landscapes which do not engage with these histories are "symbolic of an outmoded cultural paradigm" which are for Malpas (2011, 21) "no longer adequate to describe the complexity of relationships that people have with place in Australia." This complexity refers in part to the contradiction based on the falsity of *terra nullius* and colonial expectations I raised at the beginning of the chapter. Critical approaches to landscape should question the nature of landscape images and their presupposed representational authority. For example, Vivienne Webb (2005, 6) argues that Rosemary Laing's art practice "developed from a sense of the inability of simply imaging the landscape to address the present social and cultural situation in Australia." Through interventions recorded in photographs such as *Angelos* (2010-12) (see figure 27), Laing confounds our expectations of what we find in rural settings. Removing the conceptual and physical distance between romanticised agrarian landscapes and the suburbs, Laing's photograph shows that the landscape is as much an armature on which place narratives are built as the iconic Australian suburban house is.

Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 27 Rosemary Laing, *Angelos.* 2010-12, archival inkjet pigment print, 31.5 x 60in, Edition of 8 + 2APs. Accessed 18 April 2018, https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.collageplatform.com.prod/image_cache/enlarge/57eac8ed87aa2 c6e4b7d0574/770dfe697827edd5cddc2b964e98b903.jpeg

Malpas (2011, 21) goes on to suggest that "if we treat landscape purely in terms of the narrowly spectatorial and the detached (or as associated with a single historical formation or artistic genre)," then the term is inadequate; however, he persists in his pursuit of an understanding of landscape that transcends this narrowness. His belief, that "through landscape … our relationship with place is articulated and represented, and the problematic character of that relationship made evident", provides an interesting point of departure for a new way of engaging critically with Australian landscape (Malpas 2011, 21). Referring to the seventeenth and eighteenth century social dislocation from landscape more generally, he claims that "only when our relation to landscape comes into question … does landscape come to be an explicit artistic theme" (Malpas 2011, 10).

How can artists then acknowledge art practices' past constructions, and complicities of power in landscape such as those that Malpas sees in its visual-representational character? Damien Riggs (2007, 5) argues that it is the responsibility of the individual to explore their complicity. Lippard's claim (1997, 19) that "as envisionaries, artists should be able to provide a way to work against the dominant culture's rapacious view of nature," while also becoming "conscious of the ideological relationships and historical constructions of place," suggests that within art practice lies the means to acknowledge and question that which underlies the artists' perceptions of place.

One way that artists do so is in works that juxtapose or contrast colonial imageries with postcolonial or contemporary attitudes or images, such as Ross or Pease. In a different use of contrast as a technique, Ben Quilty's *Fairy Bower Rorschach*

(2012), (see figure 28), an oil painting of a waterfall in New South Wales, splits what might otherwise have been a representational depiction into a damaged mirror-image that recalls the psychological investigation and profiling technique of the Rorschach test. The painting seems to ask the viewer, what does this landscape make you think of? What other things can you see in the abstract shapes made by the mirroring? What do you bring with you to the landscape image, and does making the structure of the image explicit help you to see what you brought? The location of the painting carries its own uncomfortable duality as a site for both colonial and contemporary recreation and tourism, as well as reputedly a massacre of Indigenous people in the 19thC. If Quilty's reference to the Rorschach test asks questions of the viewer about how they relate to the landscape image, the addition of this place context points a finger at what this relationship might be. Quilty reconstructs the theme of landscape into a critical mode, achieving Malpas' conditions (2011, 10) for contemporary landscape to be an "explicit artistic theme."

Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 28 Ben Quilty, *Fairy Bower Rorschach.* 2012, oil on linen, 120.0 x 130.0 cm each panel; 240.0 x 550.0 cm overall. Accessed 2 August 2017. https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/media/thumbnails/collection_images/3/360.2012.ah%23%23 S.jpg.505x234_q85.jpg.

Malpas also claims (2011, 9) that "while any account that takes our relation to landscape as a significant one must also be committed to the necessarily *political* character of landscape … such politicization cannot be taken to undermine the viability or significance of the idea of landscape, or of the practices associated with it." It would be inappropriate to frame all discussion of practice that deals with Australian landscape within colonial or postcolonial identity and ownership politics, as it is possible to misrepresent artists' intentions, influences, and personal contexts. While all Australian work that engages with landscape is by necessity subject to this dialogue, the work itself or the practice itself may not necessarily engage with it explicitly. However, identity politics remain integral to any

discussion of landscape in practice, contemporary or otherwise. In my own practice, any method of embedding consciousness of "ideological relationships and historical constructions of place" must work in junction with the practical and conceptual components of the practice itself (Malpas 2011, 9). In particular, I am aware my own practice displaces through omission Indigenous perspectives; but I also recognize the dangers of projecting my own assumptions or fantasies about Indigenous experience, of which I have had little contact, within my practice.

Country and Abstraction

In *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership,* Peter Read (2000, 4) suggests there is a problem of "self-perception, of whether, as non-indigenous, one *should* paint landscape well," because European-Australian belonging in landscapes and places is made complex by acknowledging these histories and the ongoing legacies of colonialism. One of Read's provisional answers (2000, 204) is that "Aboriginal belonging neither diminishes nor enlarges [non-Aboriginal]" belonging, and that, in turn, it is possible for European-Australians to "intuit … attachments to country independently" without marginalising or diminishing those of indigenous people. I agree with Read, and believe it is possible to represent personal, European-Australian sense of or belonging in place without further displacing Indigenous belonging. However, it is necessary to acknowledge our troubled past and carefully negotiate the future of European-Australian place narratives. Personal intuitions, experiences, memories, and imaginings of place, however, are essential for that acknowledgement to not only occur but be significant. My practice engages with the personal in order to engage with national narratives in a meaningful way. I need to be careful when discussing the limited connections between my practice and Indigenous practice. Cultural aspects of the concept of place frame individual artworks and experiences, but this frame does not always accurately represent personal interests or intentions. For this reason, my discussion of Indigenous practice will be framed by the notion of Country, but I do not intend to argue its relevance to individual works. The relevance of Indigenous Country for this exegesis lies in the manner it describes the sense of self in terms of emplacement, which for me is consistent with the conceptualisation of place by Malpas and Seamon. Indigenous Australian landscape depiction "involves a mode of representing that derives from a particular mode of emplacement in 'country', in the landscape" (Malpas 2011, 19), but one that offers alternate methods of embedding knowledge and familiarity to European-Australian senses of place

premised on colonial legacies.

In both European Australian and Indigenous practice, place lies at the heart of sense of self, which leads John Bradley (2011, 47) to posit the concept of place as a common ground between landscape and Country, a way to try and transcend landscape's "western epistemological view of the world." Bradley's point that "the very elements that a structural reading of subjective inquiry may render as inconsequential are in fact integral components of indigenous ways of knowing" (2011, 48) articulates the difficulty of discussing Country within current academic research paradigms. It appears insufficient to attempt an understanding of Country from a position that remains embedded in what Malpas calls the spectatorial landscape tradition. Bradley's analysis (2011, 51) of Country versus landscape concludes with the statement that "Country is different from the way landscape is presented in normative Western education, where there is an acceptance that knowledge is abstract, the metaphysical axiomatic; and therefore landscape is not tied to place experience to nearly the same extent." Country, therefore, lends itself to be a potential means of discussing Australian place without being limited to the conceptual structuring of landscape.

Because of this difference between landscape and Country, it can be difficult to draw close relationships between traditional Indigenous painting and western landscape painting. However, Malpas (2011, 19) suggests that a "distinctive indigenous practice of landscape art" must have been influenced by "interaction with European art practice, materials [and] styles," making for a closer relationship than may be clear in passing. This relationship may also have developed over time "perhaps, because of the challenge to indigenous conceptions and culture that European culture brings," (2011, 19) with its colonial attitudes to land and landscape's radical differences in what constitutes knowledge and connection to place.

I agree with Bradley (2011, 49) that "any accounting of indigenous views of knowledge must go beyond specifying geological form and ecological processes" as prioritised by colonial landscape construction "and examine the subjective and emotional interactions with the concrete and (in our 'scientific' observer terms) the 'imagined phenomena.'" It is my argument that this premise must be true also for contemporary non-Indigenous practice that engages with place, where subjective and emotional interactions are (and must be) as significant for a contemporary

European-Australian account of a sense of place. That is not to suggest that contemporary European-Australian artists are or are not attending to the notion of Country, but that within a socio-cultural milieu caught up historically with issues of place and landscape, the understanding of what knowledge of landscape is and what engagements with it may be like must be expanded.

When European-Australian artists do attend to the notion of Country, Indigenous and European-Australian works on place or landscape are exhibited together, or discussions are had which chart their contemporaneity in relation to one another, it does not necessarily mean that they are being treated equally or that cross-cultural assumptions are not being made. Nicholas Thomas (1999, 8) writes that there is a naivety in believing "that colonial inequalities and asymmetrical relations … are somehow being dissolved through cosmopolitanism." Additionally, interest in and celebration of 'traditional' Indigenous practices over contemporary, modern, or postmodern ones may lead to a kind of prioritising of aspects of Indigenous experience over others, which can at times seem suspiciously like "Western fantasies" (Thomas 1999, 8). For example, traditional totems, mark making, or iconographies are often worked by European-Australian art criticism into narratives of European-Australian abstract painting. Thomas (1999, 15) argues that "if settler culture is destabilized by the 'and/or' of native and/or national reference, contemporary indigenous culture is fractured and strained by its groundings in tradition and/or modernity."

Descriptions of Indigenous paintings of Country and Dreaming as abstract practice, however, can be compelling. Terry Smith's words on Emily Kame Kngwarreye in *Contemporary art: world currents* craft a rich tapestry of abstract painting methods and spiritual connections. In works such as *Untitled (Alhalker)* (1992) (see figure 29), he suggests Kngwarreye's "vibrant fields of densely variegated color … m-atched in subtlety the best abstract painting then being made anywhere in the world," a manner of painting developed in part "to obscure what she felt might be too explicit a representation of this sacred knowledge" (Smith 2011, 207). Smith's short account manages a description of Indigenous painting as abstract, but also as both personal and cultural encodings of experience. Rather than drawing distinctions between European-Australian abstract practice and the aesthetics of Kngwarreye's paintings, he considers the contexts of each and addresses them on

equal terms.[4]

Figure 29 Emily Kame Kngwarreye, *Untitled (Alhalker).* 1992, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 165.0 x 480.0 x 4 cm. Accessed 2 August 2017, https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/media/thumbnails/collection_images/2/229.1992%23%23S.jpg.505x177_q85.jpg.

Malpas (2011, 19) also draws out a salient point about Indigenous practice's relationship with abstraction. While he reports that Kathleen Petyarre's work is "often compared to that of abstractionist painters such as Mark Rothko," he finds more interesting "the way the work derives from a particular way of experiencing and understanding the landscape as such." Indigenous paintings of Country at face value share simple forms or colours with abstraction, however, they are not equivalent to European or European-Australian vocabularies of abstract painting. He explains that if Petyarre's use of "totemic figures" and representations of "fundamental elements of landscape" in works such as *Untitled* (2007) (see figure 30) considered from a perspective of European painting tradition "gives rise to a mode of abstraction, it is a mode of abstraction based in the concrete" (Malpas 2011, 19). Indigenous knowledge of Country is bound to "subjective and emotional interactions with the concrete," which are themselves key signifiers of place and place belonging (Malpas 2011, 19).

The association of abstract visual qualities of Indigenous painting with the material physicality of Country and its experience has interesting similarities with my own ideas regarding abstraction as a method of engaging with the relationship between self and place. However, to draw out in detail the complex relationships between traditional Indigenous practice and contemporary Australian abstraction would be beyond the scope of this exegesis. The possibility remains for research into the

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[4] For more on this subject than I can cover here, also see Ryan, Judith, 1996, "The raw and the cooked: the aesthetic principle in aboriginal art," *Art bulletin of Victoria,* (36), pp. 37-50, which offers a comprehensive discussion on the aesthetics and criticism of Indigenous art practice from 1996.

similarities and differences, and also influences of Indigenous practice on Australian abstraction, a field of inquiry that may be underdeveloped in part due to a hesitation by artists with European-Australian heritages to engage with practices and ontologies to which they feel they don't belong.[5] In any case, given that belonging is a central aspect of place experience and its expression, it is appropriate for my practice-led research methodology to focus on the manner of encountering and representing place that most accurately reflects my personal construction of a sense of belonging.

Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 30 Kathleen Petyarre, *Untitled*. 2007, acrylic on linen, 90 x 90cm. Accessed 30 May 2018 https://delmoregallery.com.au/collections/kathleen-petyarre/products/07c06-kathleen-petyarre

Chapter Four

The Materiality of Place

Sarah Menin (2003, 1) writes that "the making of place is simultaneously a material construct and a construct of the mind." The haptically experienced materiality of a place contributes equally to its formation as its conceptualisation. Place narratives are dependent on an interrelationship between both constructs, because, as Menin continues, "we invest material phenomena with meaning by engaging with them, and there can be little, if any, material that has no meaning" (2003,1). The central premise of this chapter is that materiality generates meaning by providing links to places, either the origins of the objects/material in question, or to other places with which associations can be made. These links can be both physical and metaphorical, intensely personal, and culturally informed. They refer

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[5] See McLean, White Aborigines.

to an expression of a connection between people and place, and so are negotiations of interrelationships between simple felt experiences and cultural/social entanglements.

Therefore, in the search for a way to represent a contextually engaged, personally significant sense of place, the materiality of the places relevant to my research and the meaning attached to them is of high importance. In addition, the cultural importance of certain plants and animals to Australian identity at state and national levels cannot be overstated. A challenge for contemporary artists making work about places and landscape in a postcolonial Australia is to represent belonging while acknowledging, or at minimum remaining aware, of the differing European-Australian and Indigenous Australian histories of being in place. To do this, the associations made in art practice between belonging and place materiality must be examined.

I would argue that a connection between the object/material and its place context becomes even stronger if the found objects and materials preserve aspects of their prior contexts as part of the artwork. When I refer to found objects/materials, I mean media used in art practice which retains characteristics of some previous place or use context. These characteristics can be used to make statements that the place associated with the material is essential to the work, or that either the artist or the material in question was there at that place. My practice has followed two key studio processes relating to materiality: using materials that were from a specific place to refer to that place and using timber or painted surfaces that have a visual, textural, or other subjective association with a place to which it otherwise has no connection.

I have used these two key processes as a way of systematically engaging with visual, textural, and conceptual aspects of Wellard/Casuarina, and the other places important to my research. By preserving physical characteristics of materials taken from place in my works, I attempted to introduce a situation in which the place itself could 'speak'. If some aspect of the place maintains agency within the work, it feels more like I am developing a relationship with place, rather than providing a limited, one-dimensional perspective.

Figure 31 Simryn Gill, *Blue*. 2013, paintings made from the stain of the flowers of the clitoria vine grown from a seed inadvertently carried in the artist's pocket from Port Dickson to Sydney. Approximately 5 3/4 x 8 1/8 inches, each. Overall dimensions variable. Photo: Jean Vong. Accessed 9 November 2018, http://www.tracywilliamsltd.com/simryn-gill/2014/Blue/Blue.jpg

In an interview with Catherine De Zegher (2013, 69) Simryn Gill describes the process of learning her relationship with place as "almost like a regular talking of oneself into existence in a place." While our very sense of self and existence is, according to place theory, already predicated on our emplacement within the world, practice as a "talking of oneself into existence" (De Zegher 2013, 69) is a method of identifying, affirming, and learning the character and dimensions of that emplacement. Gill speaks of her transition to living in Adelaide from Port Dickson, Malaysia, as feeling out of place, because the tensions between citizenship and non-citizenship "incarnat[ing] in its very structure the gap between being in a place and being of a place, between living there and belonging there" (Massumi 2013, 187). In the process of learning how to be herself within Australia's unfamiliar places, and in the transfer between places, Gill began collecting local materials and including them into her practice. Massumi (2013, 189) writes that "the artist thought she was looking for her place in Australia. But what she has found … is a *way*." That way is a process of learning what her relationship to place may mean through practice, "a way of moving in place, looking, seeing, nosing along with a calmly expectant openness to what might fall into her path" (Massumi 2013, 189). This is exemplified in simple, poetic works such as *Blue* (2013), (see figure 31) where Gill uses a stain from the flower of a plant accidentally brought to Australia as a seed from Port Dickson. Her work examines systems and structures through

which people create knowledge of the world, particularly of places, using creative practice as both example and method of investigation.

Australian materiality

The strategic use of media as method to engage with place narratives is another way practice is emplaced, not just within personal experience, but also within a wider Australian context. Although Bromfield (1993, 157) argues it is a "tedious and absurd claim that human values are inherent in any physical medium," these readings are nonetheless so tied up in senses of place and notions of identity and belonging in Australia that it is difficult to use such materials in non-referential ways. The context of a work's materiality impacts on how it is read and encountered, particularly when there are connections to culturally shared or national narratives. As with the names of places, when artists include the names of materials in an artwork it increases the likelihood of a viewer making meaningful connections. Explicitly naming materials in the title, or in accompanying documentation such as didactic panels, can suggest a range of personal or cultural associations, expectations, and place narratives. These are communicated predominantly through cultural familiarity, or a kind of shared knowledge of the kind of materials expected to be present in places or landscapes.

Bromfield's disavowal that human values are "inherent" however offers an interesting point of discussion. It is true that such values and meanings are not "inherent" in the nature of the material, but they nevertheless become attached to it because of cultural context, and the personal experience of place. Are there meaningful, *a priori* connections between, say, the distinct botanical attributes of Australia and the notion of Australian identity? Would Australian identity be radically different if the plants which have become iconic were different? At a smaller scale, there are clearly identifiable and direct relationships between geographic or environmental conditions and the formation of sense of place. But at a national scale, is there something significant about the Golden Wattle (*acacia pycnantha*) which has influenced Australian sense of place, or is it just one of many possible plants which could have become the floral emblem? There are innumerable Australian plants which have become embedded in collective cultural consciousness, even thousands of miles across the country in vastly different geographic and climatic zones.

For example, the use of the word 'Jarrah' as opposed to the more generic term 'timber' increases the likelihood of the viewer connecting the work with the south-west of Western Australia, the only place where Jarrah is found in commercial and native forests. The jarrah in my works *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)* (2015) (figure A2) and *Wellard/Casuarina (reconstructing memories – 23 years in the family)* (2015) (see figure A4) is charged with historical and autobiographical meaning, having been in the family for most of my personal life. I saved it from becoming firewood after it was ripped out of the family horse float to make way for a new, structurally sound jarrah floor. The old floor is estimated to have been in place for roughly 30 years, in the family for 23, and bears old marks of use and of decay from water, rot, and acidic urea. The numbers painted on the front ends were used as templates for marking out new lengths of jarrah, and residual maroon paint from the metal shell of the float is still visible. The ends of the planks experienced the worst of the damage and were trimmed to make useful lengths of the less damaged timber. The front of the planks, shaped in an arch to fit the metal frame of the float, and a set of discarded pieces from two-thirds of the way down the planks (cut in the studio to mirror the curve of the front-most pieces) are used in *Wellard/Casuarina (reconstructing memories – 23 years in the family)* while the end pieces from the back of the float form the top line of *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)*. The horse float is a powerful personal symbol for travel and the return to the familiarity of home. The Jarrah in this work serves a dual function: it bears the marks of use for 23 years as a horse float floor, representing long distances travelled across the south-west region of Western Australia, and as icon for the region's botanical identity. The aged appearance of the jarrah embodies years of living in Wellard/Casuarina, and the gradual decay of memories over time in domestic settings, where the particularity of the everyday merges into the sameness of long habitation in place. By using the reclaimed jarrah pieces, I was able to make the original floor persist as an object with personal physical and emotional agency.

Materials such as jarrah or other regional flora, and exhibited within an Australian context, encourage readings of Australian landscape narratives. These narratives are not necessarily inherent to such material *a priori* but are invested through representations of places and expressions of belonging. For example, Janine Mackintosh makes collages of locally sourced or gathered materials, like eucalyptus leaves, grasses, and paper bark, which relate to her experiences of Kangaroo Island in South Australia. Her works take advantage of Kangaroo

Island's large variety of plant life, which includes varieties specific to the island. Using techniques borrowed from museum or botanical collections, Mackintosh preserves fragments of plant life in abstract patterns on paper and behind glass. These objects are invested with a connection to Kangaroo Island through Mackintosh's collection process and through her inclusion of their botanical names in materials lists. The leaves from the Kangaroo Island Narrow-leaved Mallee (*eucalyptus cneorifolia*) in *Proof of Presence* (2014) (see figure 32) are part of a specific botanical identity for the island. However, it is Mackintosh's collection and arrangement of them that invests the work with dual narratives of personal and regional senses of place identity.

Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 32 Janine Mackintosh *Proof of Presence*. 2014, Kangaroo Island Narrow-leaved Mallee (Eucalyptus cneorifolia) leaves, chewed by nocturnal scarab beetles, linen thread and bookbinder's gum on canvas, 100 x 100 cm framed. Accessed 23 November 2016, https://janinemackintosh.com/2014/04/17/proof-of-presence/

Many contemporary Australian artists such as Mackintosh describe the materials used in their practice with precision to draw attention to political and ecological concerns, historical land use, or local and/or national identity. In *Hard Yacca III* (2015), (see figure 33) Mackintosh makes a pun on the Yacca (*Xanthorrhoea semiplana ssp. tateana*) leaf and the Australian slang word for hard work. She uses remnants of human presence, such as the saw blade in *Terra Australis* (2012) (see figure 34) to bring together her everyday experiences of Kangaroo Island with a reference to the history of Australian land use. Brian Blanchflower similarly uses a

saw blade in *In two parts – life edge* (1995), (see figure 35) coupled in his case with a red monochrome. The intense red of the canvas symbolises life through the traditional concept of life-blood while the saw makes reference to life as work. Both works reference the importance of timber and the logging industry to Australian history by using a found object as a fragment of an event or past encounter between people and place. The repurposed material traces of that history continue to speak about the ecological threats from industry and urban development facing bushland and forests nationwide.

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Figure 33 Janine Mackintosh, *Hard Yacca III*. 2015, Yacca (Xanthorrhoea semiplana ssp. tateana) leaf tips and gum, found metal ring, linen thread and bookbinder's gum on canvas 75 x 75 cm framed, image diameter 47cm. Framed in white moulding, with a white circular cut matt, internal side spacers, glass and hangers. Accessed 9 November 2018, https://janinemackintosh.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/janine-mackintosh_hard-yacca-iii.jpg?w=800&h=810

The act of arranging or collecting materials influences the possible readings of the artists' connection to place as much as the materials themselves. The frames through which we view materials, such as that of the museum, national, and/or regional histories, and land use (such as forestry, agriculture, and mining), are usually invisible until they appear inappropriate, at which point their authority is destabilised or undermined. These interpretive frames affirm established modes of encounter which influence in turn the response of a viewer to a material, or the way it has been displayed or engaged with. For example, arrangements like Mackintosh's can either destroy or preserve these indexical relationships, making the fact of either visible in the work for conceptual effect.

Figure 34 Janine Mackintosh, *Terra Australis*. 2012, Kingscote Mallee (eucalyptus rugosa) leaves, chewed by beetles, rusted circular saw blade, linen thread and bookbinder's gum on canvas, 150 x 150 cm framed. Accessed 23 November 2016. https://janinemackintosh.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/janine-mackintosh_terraaustralis.jpg?w=978&h=985.

Figure 35 Brian Blanchflower, *In two parts — life edge.* 1995, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, steel saw blade synthetic polymer paint on canvas, steel saw blade, 183.3 x 134.5 cm. Accessed 14 September 2016, http://cs.nga.gov.au/Detail-LRG.cfm?IRN=212863.

The processes and aesthetics of collecting, cataloguing, and museum display are used by artists to make visible and critique their underlying conceptual frameworks, particularly historical implication of colonial knowledge structures. In *Terra Nullius* (1989) (image not available), Nicolaus Lang arranges ancient Indigenous stone tools to spell out the work's namesake phrase. By using literal material evidence of the lie that was *terra nullius* Lang's work manifests the absurdity of the claim that Australia was empty land when the colonists arrived. The combination of reference to place through material and text in both Lang's and Mackintosh's artworks allows for a dual thread of narratives in each, with stones, soil and leaves standing in for individual presence or a personal narrative, and the titles helping to situate those narratives within wider Australian cultural contexts.

Fiona Hall's *Cash crop* (1998) (see figure 36) and Janet Lawrence's *The matter of nature* (2000) (see figure 37) use our familiarity with forms such as the cabinet of curiosity, or other methods of museum display, to question how the objects of landscape and nature are valued and determined, and therefore preserved (or not). Juliana Engberg (1996, 21) writes that Hall's collection and manipulation of objects in her practice references "the completion of the conversion of the indigenous as generic motif." The manufactured triviality of Indigenous objects and imagery extended to all manner of fauna or flora which might be marketed as

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Figure 36 Fiona Hall, *Cash crop* (detail). 1998/99, carved soap, painted banknotes, vitrine, 115 x 130 x 55 cm. Accessed 2 August 2017.
http://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/images/galleries/Fiona%20Hall%201999Fieldwork/004.jpg.

the kind of 'native' curio for consumption. Works such as these that engage with ownership and land politics demonstrate and subvert the power relations of landscape.

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Figure 37 Janet Laurence, *The matter of nature* (detail). 2005, 110 x 110 x 40 cm. Accessed 2 August 2017, http://www.janetlaurence.com/wp-content/uploads/matterofnature2-672x284.jpg.

However, the archaeological/anthropological form of this evidence also acts as a reminder of the possibility of being complicit in the colonial history of use and naming of materials. This reading is helped by Lang's own status as visitor to Australia, through which he is linked to colonial narratives of the European encounter with its landscape. However, he shows sensitivity to and interest in the dual importance of land physically and spiritually to Australian Indigenous peoples in his works, such as *Terra nullius* (1989) or *Earth colours and paintings* (1978-79) (see figure 38) which demonstrates that the structures of collection and display can be employed to speak on their histories from more contemporary positions. The simple concept and form of these works by Lang assists in their sense of self-awareness.

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Figure 38 Nikolaus Lang, *Earth colours and paintings*. 1978-79, Sculptures, installation, earth pigment, grey paper, synthetic polymer paint, muslin, and brushwood, overall 243.8 h x 553.7 w x 391.2 d cm, floor piece 5.0 h x 317.5 w x 391.2 d cm, panel (each) 243.8 h x 142.2 w cm. Accessed 9.11.18, https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/images/lrg/62440.jpg.

How to embody a similar self-awareness of Australian place-narrative history in my own practice is a difficult question, particularly when the works themselves are deeply embedded in the personal stories and experiences of relatively small places (either home or away). A provisional answer the works explore is to respond to problematic historical national place narratives with a radical focus on intensely personal meaning in materiality. Many of the objects/materials used in my works have come from the property where I live, or neighbouring properties in the area. They are infused with personal connections bound to the place-narratives of home and dwelling. Familiar species of flora or fauna, or materials like timber, have the capacity to return me to a sense of Wellard/Casuarina, even far from the government-defined boundaries of the suburbs of Wellard and Casuarina, on the boundaries between which the property sits. The timber involved in my practice is mostly 'found' or recycled, salvaged from the local area or purchased from a timber merchant (who specialises in recycling local verge tree cuttings and timber sourced from private properties). The found nature of much of the timber used in my practice is a significant means of connecting the works with both the physical and emotional dimensions of Wellard/Casuarina.

Although it is illegal to remove materials such as fallen timber, plants, or soil from reserve bushland or council verges, agreements with private property owners in the area have provided access to a range of environments of natural bushland and bushland degradation, and possible material discoveries within them. *Wellard/Casuarina (canopy)* (2015) (see figure A5) is entirely made from woody pear seed pods (*xylomelum occidentale*) harvested from a grove which spans several neighbouring properties (see image 39). Hung from three large metal frames, the seedpods were collected from what I suspect to be the one extended grove or family of trees, which extend across the property line between the immediate neighbours to the south and mine. These seedpods, which fall seasonally and slowly rot on the ground, are familiar objects of play from my childhood. As they ripen on the tree, their woody flesh splits open, exposing winged seeds to the breeze. The woody pear tree is found in an area loosely bound by the Bassendean Sands geological region, within the Perth metropolitan area and surrounds, and is endemic to Wellard/Casuarina. They have become a personal icon for the scrubby, grey sand bushland in which I grew up, which highlights the way habitation in place develops familiarity. I assembled several hundred seedpods in the gallery approximating where they would sit in the shape of the foliage of one of the trees (see figure 40). As only fragments of what constitutes the whole tree,

they are also an incomplete return to my memories. This was an exercise in demonstrating a relationship to place by recognising and re-investing personal, local significance in objects/material.

Figure 39 Seed pods from the Woody Pear (xylomelum occidentale) in the artists' studio, testing hanging mechanisms. Photograph by the artist.
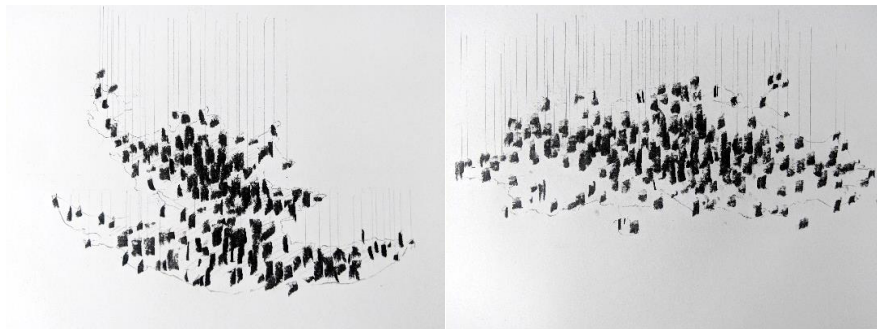

Figure 40 Compositional drawings for *Wellard/Casuarina (canopy)* (2015). Photograph by the artist.

The large area taken up by *Wellard/Casuarina (canopy)* is human in scale, mimicking the canopy of the tree without trunk, branches, or leaves, making for an uncluttered space which, at its fringes, is navigable to allow viewers to look closely at individual seed-pods. The work's use of space constructs a representation of Australian landscape where passage through is a given; it is open and welcoming space. While these attributes of the works relate directly to my own senses of Wellard/Casuarina, they appear as an idyllic look into a relationship with place that seems unconcerned or unaffected by the problematic history of representations of landscape in Australian history and practice. For example, the repetition of small, tactile squares of timber with subtle coloration in *Wellard/Casuarina (summer*

grasses) (2015) (figure A1) presents a harmonious image of my youthful memories of summer and the seasonal changes in colour of Veldt grass seed pods. The simple form of the work follows the uncomplicated sense of connection I had with Wellard/Casuarina at the time, unaware of the serious ecological threat posed by this invasive plant species introduced from overseas for livestock consumption. To fully understand my sense of place in Wellard/Casuarina, both the personal idyll of home and its inclusion in national narratives must be negotiated.

My sense of belonging in Wellard/Casuarina as represented by *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* (2015), *Wellard/Casuarina (reconstructing memories – 23 years in the family)* (2015), and *Wellard/Casuarina (canopy)* (2015) seem on reflection to be sheltered from the contested narratives of the Australian context. I see these works projecting a sense of complacency at odds with the embedded contradictions of belonging to Australian place. However, I would argue that such omission is an inevitable consequence of the sourcing of the emotional depth of such connections in a childhood in which awareness of such problematics was naturally missing. The comforting familiarity associated with 'home' promotes idyllic perspectives which are removed from the often-violent histories of European-Australian occupation of place. I argue that the drive for artists to embed their presence in place and refer to either specific places or a specifically Australian sense of place stems from the inclusion of a problematic national relationship with place-narratives in felt place-belonging. Kimberley Dovey (1986, 47) explains that "the search for authenticity stems from a serious disconnectedness in the ecology of person-environment relationships that one might call homelessness." While Dovey is referring to changes in relationships with land such as industrialisation or technology, her explanation also suits a felt cultural or social need to seek out belonging in place when the foundations of past European-Australian belonging have been proven problematic.

Authenticity and place

To fulfil this cultural and personal need for a sense of belonging in place, or reinvestment of certainty in the rightness of being present in place, it is possible to appeal to the authority implied by 'evidence' from place, such as anecdotes, resemblance, or materials. However, the expression of an individual's sense of place does not necessarily indicate an authentic rendering of the place itself, because any sense of place is dependent on contingent experiences. While

materials and objects are useful for artists when embedding a work amongst regions, cultures, or landscapes, they also contain the potential for vastly different meaning for different people, even from the same cultural background. Despite this, there are strong Australian cultural associations between authenticity and demonstrations of past presence within or knowledge of place through references to materiality. The notion of something being 'true' or 'reliable' because it has a material trace underlies the importance of material iconographies to what is considered authentic Australian national identity. Charles Green (2002, 13) explains that after faith in modernist certainty was lost, "the illusion or fabrication of transparency and immediacy" has been "the source of the authenticity upon which the quotidian was fetishized as somehow truthful." The unaltered presentation by an artist of something as simple and everyday as a gum leaf, therefore, gains conceptual power beyond the individual object's humble beginnings. A representation of an artist's personal experience of or presence (often a past, remembered presence) becomes an assumed source of authenticity, even though any one place could relate to a seemingly endless variety of different ways of encountering, perceiving, and remembering it.

For Dovey, a sense of authenticity is derived from the connection between everyday experiences of place, the past processes of constructing sense of place, and the future consequences of engaging with place (1986, 33). Despite the apparent usefulness of appealing to presence within place as an authentic representation of a sense of that place, the notion of what is 'authentic' is ambiguous. Dovey argues that the authenticity ascribed to expressions of belonging and presence within places is dependent on a temporal relationship, or "authentic dwelling practices" (1986, 47). As with Lucy Lippard's argument for a sense of place to require immersion, lived experience, and topographical intimacy, this significantly limits the participants in an 'authentic' sense of any given place. Such details as long-term habitation in place, or cultural connections, are often not immediately available in the form of the artwork. This is particularly true in abstract painting where common identifying place markers such as topography are absent and leads me to the following questions. Through what means can we discuss the authenticity of an artist's presence in place within the artwork when there seems to be little empirical evidence that could certify artists' claims to have been there, or that they have engaged meaningfully with the full aspects of a place, in comparison to having passed through and only accessing a shallow or basic experience? Is empirical evidence even necessary for a representation of place or

landscape to seem authentic to a viewer? I argue that since there is no way of determining what immersion in place is sufficient (is 21 years living in Wellard/Casuarina sufficient? Would a neighbour who has lived in the area for 30 years have a more 'authentic' sense of place?) the notion of an authentic sense of place seems to become meaningless. However, Dovey allows that despite its ambiguity, the concept of authenticity is useful because it describes a connectedness between people and place (Dovey 1986, 33).

Resemblance and memory

In the studio, I considered if the concept of authenticity gained meaning with different methods used by artists to embed their experience of, or records of their presence in place, through materiality. Do the origins of material offer a 'more authentic' pathway to representing a personal sense of place than forms of representation? Dovey (1986, 47) argues that "the problem lies not in the searching" for authenticity but "in the misplaced belief that authenticity can be generated through the manipulation of appearance." It was my instinct that pieces of wood which came directly from a place were well positioned to be made into a work about that place. But in contrast to Dovey, I also found that the mnemonic potential of resemblance seemed to offer different – but equally valid - points of entry.

In *Banksia, marri, christmas tree,* (2013) (see figure A6) marri and banksia timbers are paired with monochromatic areas of paint matched as closely as possible to the colour of native Christmas tree flowers (*nuytsia floribunda*). By naming the Christmas tree in the title, the colour of the paint becomes a reference to that tree, and anecdotally to my presence in the regions where it grows. In *Wellard/Casuarina (banksia study)* (2014) (see figure A7) monochromatic panels of yellow paint are paired with banksia, using colour in the same way to refer to the varieties of yellow found in the common Candlestick banksia (*banksia attenuata*). The colour matching in both artworks is achieved by recreating photographs taken in Wellard/Casuarina. Like photographs, the painted panels represent a desire for accurate representation of aspects of that place. I argue that the care taken in recreating the colour of the Christmas tree flowers in paint seems to have equal claim to the authority of being about place as the timber. However, while both marri and banksia timbers are local to the same area as the native Christmas trees, the panels in *Banksia, marri, christmas tree* were bought pre-milled from my

supplier in Naval Base. While still conceivably local, their actual heritage is unknown. This ostensibly would destabilise their expression of a sense of presence within Wellard/Casuarina and attached senses of belonging. In comparison, the banksia timber in *Wellard/Casuarina (banksia study)* is from my own property, the location of the studio. It seems that both the timber and the monochromatic panels are nominally from Wellard/Casuarina only through my actions as the artist, not through any inherent attributes of their own.

However, as with authenticity gained through lived experience in place, ascribing authenticity to the claim of accurate representation is problematic. Too many environmental and experiential factors impact on individual perception and expression. I argue it is the intent of the artist to communicate a specific aspect of a place that is the significant aspect, not necessarily the individual accuracy of the colours, textures, or shapes used. Additionally, while the presence of the artist within place is significant in any work about place, specific knowledge of a material's origins is not essential to it being associative of places or landscapes. Resemblance can be a useful mnemonic to refer to both specific places and generalised senses of landscape or place within which the viewer participates. As the cultural construct of landscape is bound to visual conventions, resemblance provides reference to these conventions – and offers putative commentary on their associated colonial narratives.

Connections between material objects/media and memories/places can be used by artists to explore experiences and memories of places without needing to use explicitly figurative or mimetic references. However, so can the potential for colours, textures, and form to resemble landscapes, be mnemonic of experiences, or metonymic of types of places. For example, Rosalie Gascoigne uses material that has been found in or recovered from places, leveraging both their contexts and visual attributes, but not necessarily in works that refer explicitly back to the specific locations in which the material was found. Gascoigne is not afraid to generalise her experiences of places to demonstrate how the visual and material characteristics of objects/materials can speak to us about how we encounter places and see landscapes. Her works develop out of her own experiences, and sometimes refer directly to places where she has been, such as a lake familiar to road travellers to Canberra in *Suddenly the Lake* (1995) (see figure 41). Gascoigne has captured the sense of how the lake emerges from the surrounding landscape by using formboard which resembles the mountains cradling the lake, building anticipation

of small glimpses and a sudden majestic reveal. *Suddenly the Lake* takes on a narrative form, providing a mnemonic story of spectatorship for travellers. The work is also metonymic in that it taps into the contiguity between a general shared idea of lake and the specificity of personal experiences, using found, generic formboard which has no stated origin to refer to a specific location.

Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 41 Rosalie Gascoigne, *Suddenly the Lake*. 1995, sculptures, formboard plywoods, galvanised iron sheeting, synthetic polymer paint on composition board; four panels, overall (approx.) 130.7 h x 361.2 w x 7.7 d cm. Accessed 9.11.18, https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?irn=8774.

Gascoigne's use of resemblance and metonymy taps into shared experiences of landscape and cultural motifs such as the horizon. Her *Scrub Country* (1981) (see figure 42) is constructed of a grid of horizontal bars, but as if the experience of the horizon has become further fragmented. As with Mackintosh's *Proof of Presence*, the places Gascoigne refers to in works like *Scrub Country* are represented by assemblages of material which use resemblance to connect with the viewer's memories of place. Unlike Mackintosh, however, Gascoigne's use of discarded cultural objects (soft-drink crates) taps into the contradictory communal understandings and expectations of landscape within a national vision, re-enacting the archetypes with which personal experiences engage.

Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 42 Rosalie Gascoigne, *Scrub Country*. 1981, weathered painted wood from discarded soft-drink crates, with aluminium strip supports, 144 x 376 cm. Accessed 14 September 2016, http://www.aasd.com.au/index.cfm/list-allworks/?concat=GascoigneRosal.

I also use timber's metonymic potential through resemblance in my practice to invoke places and landscapes. Early in the studio research, the plywood ground I had been using for abstract paintings began to assert itself as its own aesthetic component which offered resemblance without mimetic representation. Its colour and texture began to stand in for aspects of places, such as dense forests or fields of wheat in *Margaret River forest* (2012) (see figure A8) and *Untitled* (2012) (see figure A9). These are small, exploratory works which served as ways of learning how to represent my relationship to Margaret River and Quairading, where I carved into and tinted plywood with ink and wax to preserve some of the underlying structure and visual patterning. In *Margaret River forest*, the figure seen emerging from the vertical grooves and green ink is a structural flaw in the plywood which I emphasised, so it appears to sink back and surge forward amidst a dense forest. *Untitled*, in response to a trip east through the Wheatbelt to my uncle's farm in Quairading, comprises two square pieces of plywood back-framed and cut in one zone with horizontal grooves, where the division of horizontal zones and darker bottom third are similarly preserved structural flaws in the original plywood. These works develop three-dimensional structures in which the material nature of the structure is meant to be visible. I also used the compositional structure of the pair of panels with visible plywood surface in *Imagined landscape II* (2012) and *Imagined landscape III* (2012) (see figure A10), two more small works designed to test ideas for possible larger works, which also came after my visit to Quairading. They refer to the seasonal burning of wheat stubble and the boundary roads and fencing which stretch like scars across wide, flat landscapes, usually accompanied by thin stretches of scrubby native bush.

The timber in *Imagined landscape II* and *Imagined landscape III* operates simultaneously as resemblance and substitution. The viewer is presented with a material which holds a double identity: the plywood or timber is experienced both phenomenologically as itself, and as an indexical sign of place or landscape, through attributes like texture, colour, and shape. This doubling persists for natural timber I have used which refers to a place unrelated to that timber's actual origin, such as the unknown timber in *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* (2015) (figure A1), and spotted gum in *Passage north-east I-IV* (2015) (see figure A11) or *Margaret River (upriver)* (2015) (see figure A12). The physical characteristics of the unknown timber inspired the recollection of experiences in my studio surrounds in Wellard/Casuarina. The spotted gum (see figure 43) resembles the coloured cliffs sheltering the Lockyer River in Mingenew and light reflecting off ripples on

Figure 43 A piece of spotted gum prior to being set on its monochromatic panel for *Margaret River (upriver)* (2015) showing a rippling effect in the grain and the preserved insect damage. Photograph by the artist.

the Margaret River. In *Margaret River (upriver)*, individually unique blocks of spotted gum, cut from the one length of timber sit on top of uniform blue or blue/black columns, recreating the sense of stillness of the river beneath its sun-dappled surface (see figure 44). By using the timber as a reference to those isolated instances on the river's surface, *Margaret River (upriver)* takes the physical presence of a long period of time and contrasts it with the ephemerality of the moment. The timber stands in for the landscape, keeping mimetic reference accessible to the viewer as landscape, but also removed from the specific landscape which I have addressed in the work as it, unlike me, was never present there. This distinction is assisted by comparison with other works in where I have specified that the timber, or other materials, originated from the place with which the work is associated.

Figure 44 Spotted gum used in *Passage north-east I-IV* (2015) (detail). Photograph by the artist.

Readymades, found objects and fragments

My own use of found objects and materials may be thought to derive from the readymades of Marcel Duchamp. However, a closer examination of his stated objectives makes it clear that this is not the case. Duchamp did not choose his readymades on the basis of their aesthetic properties, clearly stating that "The choice of readymades is always based on visual indifference" (Cabanne 1971, 48). This can be contrasted with the objet trouvé or found object which is chosen either for its aesthetic properties or for its personal meaning. The found objects/materials in the practices I have discussed, as well as my own, are not the anti-art statements of Duchamp's readymades, which sought to question and destabilise the hegemonies of arts practice at the time. They follow more closely the tradition of the objet trouvé. I argue that none of the works mentioned in this chapter attempt the peculiar authorship and aesthetic indifference of the Duchampian anti-art statement; instead the aesthetic qualities of the materials are carefully considered and often autobiographically involved.

Despite the differences between them, the link between found objects, Duchampian readymades and material specificity is stronger than a simple recognition that the presentation of an object as art would necessarily involve understanding the physical or metaphorical realities of the object(s). The Duchampian readymade "ushered the forces of mass production into the realm of art" (Molesworth 2005. 193) and radically changed the way artists viewed the materials and mediums available to them. Its place in art history means it is implicated in the recognition of contexts for medium and material in practices from the industrial processes of minimalism to the high-tech multimedia or hand-made aesthetics of some contemporary postmodernism (Scheidemann 2005, 75-85). Although Gascoigne's objects/materials are visibly taken from prior industrial processes and mass production, similar to the Duchampian readymade, her treatment of them again sets them apart. She consciously removes her objects/materials from the means of their production by presenting them with a patina of age and nostalgia. They seem more like discarded objects that have been renewed to appreciate their unique aesthetics than an ecological commentary on industrial process and infrastructure. The found objects in my practice also have links to industrial processes, such as plywood, but my choice to use them is determined by aesthetics and personal meanings.

After considering the similarities between the physical construction methods of

Gascoigne's practice and my own, and the shared interest in finding the form of a work which suits the form of its materiality, I decided that the key to their conceptual framework was that these objects/materials were also fragments of something. I realised that found objects/materials for both Gascoigne and I are fragments of the 'event' or encounter that is the experience of place.

Found objects/materials invoke what Dylan Trigg (2012, 46) calls the "power of preservation: a power that continues to haunt both memory and place" because the fragment represents a flawed preservation of the whole. Memory and sense of place is haunted by the absence of the actual place itself. Like the ruins of buildings, found objects/materials represent residual traces of activity, a material presence which has been left behind. The memories of places we access in creative practice are "experience[s] preserved in time," (Trigg 2012, 46) or preservations of phenomenological moments. However, the form of this preservation is not necessarily through mimetic representation. For Trigg, ruins are a type of place where resemblance cannot traverse the distance between its present and its past. Found objects and materials act as mnemonics in the same way as ruins, reaching back imperfectly to place, offering only partial perspectives. The visual and textural variety in a found object or material remarks on the impact of its past environments, just as the complexities of mark making in a drawing or painting reflect the focussed attention and time invested by the artist. This makes assemblages such as those by Gascoigne, which combine resemblance of landscape features with the materiality of objects from place, residues of activity by both human hands and natural processes. Part of what is preserved in found materiality is a kind of remembrance of the object/material's own growth, destruction, and reformation.

Figure 45 The timber panels of *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)* being matched with plywood panels prior to painting.

Marks of these previous contexts when preserved contribute to their new identity, particularly in figured timbers such as spotted gum or banksia. Natural markings in the timber, and natural living edges in my works *Passage north-east I-IV*, (figure A11) or *Margaret River (upriver)* (see figure A3 and A12) operate, as drawing or painting does, as the reflection of invested time and action, just not by human hands. In *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)* (see figure A2 and A13) or *Wellard/Casuarina (reconstructing memories – 23 years in the family)* (see figure A4 and A14) this invested time includes that of human use of the jarrah. By choosing, cutting, assembling, and preserving pieces of these timbers in repeating geometric shapes, these readymade aspects of the work become a kind of collage, such as those by Rosalie Gascoigne. The simple, monochromatic panels were chosen to accompany the timber in *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)* in order to contrast and highlight their texture (see image 45). In *Margaret River (upriver)*, the timber was chosen based on visibly having several different timber characteristics – patterns of growth in the grain, destruction by insects, and the channels where bark once joined the tree's cambium. These would slowly degrade, if not for protective layers of varnish.

I propose that preservation of the natural attributes of an object/material could be an effective method of embedding traces or evidence of past contexts within the form and appearance of a work. I used a wax finish to preserve the surface of *After* (2015) (see figure A15) because its grid assemblage of local native timbers and plywood has been coated in layers of charcoal, harvested from bushfire sites around Wellard/Casuarina from 2010 to 2015. Despite its friability, I chose the natural charcoal to address not only the destructive capability of bushfire, and its influential status in national Australian landscape mythology, but also the familiar contrast of new growth and gradually decaying burnt trees, bushes and grasses which remain after the bushfire has passed. Wellard/Casuarina has seen several destructive fires in recent memory, and the cycle of native floral species rebirth after fire (particularly banksias, which release their seeds for germination after being bathed in smoke) has accompanied the usual seasonal cycles of growth, death, and decay. While the timber panels were taken from unburnt wood, the charcoal was collected directly from the aftermath of these fires, linking the ruins of trees or bushes with the clean wood.

Materials that are recognisably taken from a particular place, and minimally

impacted on in terms of material form, such as in *Wellard/Casuarina (canopy)* (see figure A5)*,* are conferred through gallery display as cultural artefacts. This means they are in a sense always removed from their place of origin, as their experience in the gallery setting is based on that act of removal; they are preserved as objects taken from place. In an analysis of sites of trauma, Trigg (2009, 89) argues that fragments "articulate memory … through refusing continuous narrative." Like memories, they are built from disjunctions and strange associations which are reassembled into an imperfect whole. When an object/material has been taken from place, the narrative of that place has been interrupted. For example, the incomplete circle made by *Wellard/Casuarina (reconstructing memories – 23 years in the family)* (see figure A4) shows an interruption of a cycle of familiarity, domesticity, and memory. The circle is split in two halves, referring to our inability to return to the place exactly as we remember it, and to the expectations we place on material mementos to capture the physical and imagined aspects of that remembered place.

Because place contains personal, cultural, ecological, and political investments, any sense of its 'wholeness' can only be temporary. In this way places themselves show a "radical indifference" to our sentiments and memories (Trigg 2012, 1-2). What is being represented in the expression of a sense of place therefore must be incomplete. The fragment of place which is the found object/material represents a failure to encompass all aspects of a place. I find the fragment paradoxically is a more 'authentic' representation of what a sense of place really is. This incompleteness also emplaces the work using found objects/materials within an Australian context a because it allows engagement with Australian preoccupation with landscape as a phenomenon with a difficult past and uneasy present. I argue that found objects/materials can be a critical mode of engagement with the way Australian landscape is envisaged in contemporary art practice as fragmented or unstable. This aligns with Trigg's concept that the fragment embodies a kind of critical remembering (2009, 89). Such a work operates as a kind of 'ruin' of a previous landscape tradition, becoming a critical act of remembering, allowing the artist to use the landscape genre to question the landscape genre itself. With this as a guiding concept, I arrive closer at a way of negotiating the complex interrelationship between simple, felt belonging in place and complex place narratives which determine the characteristics of my own sense of place.

Chapter Five

Abstraction

In contrast to the first expectations a viewer may have of an abstract work as an extraction of the universal from the particular, the abstraction with which my practice is concerned is interlinked with the particularity of my experiences of the world. The artists I have studied and the works which have made the biggest impact on my own practice maintain a dynamic balance between reductionist, non-representational forms and the intricate involvement with material and conceptual components of being in place. Lesley Duxbury (2008, 20) describes her "investigations into [her] own visual language [as] an attempt to generate an exchange between art and research in order to add to the means of making sense of and being in the world." My studio research, likewise, attempts to situate and understand abstraction as a visual language for positioning a personal sense of place. My methodology therefore has been to 'think about place through abstraction.'

Thinking about place through abstraction has been a way to examine how methods of learning and of demonstrating my relationship to place can occur through abstraction. However, I would also argue that it is only through abstraction that I can explore some aspects of relationship to place, specific to my personal contexts and to those of landscape, and nature in Australian practice. Within the reductive processes of abstraction and the stylistic devices artists use are opportunities to explore philosophical and conceptual aspects of place that may otherwise be difficult to grasp. In this chapter, I discuss place identity, iconography, the felt simplicity of being in place versus knowledge of its conceptual complexity, and the materiality of memory and place embodiment, all from the perspective of abstract practice.

Using abstraction as a lens has brought into focus three different aspects of Australian abstraction which I will address in this chapter. First, abstraction is emplaced by discussion surrounding its arrival and reception in Australia, which I describe as its own 'sense of place.' Second, there are artists for whom the processes and ideas of abstract painting have always been intertwined with the struggle to make meaningful representations of places and landscapes. Third, there are connections between geometric form or other abstract stylistic devices and the

phenomenological nature of place experience discussed in chapter one.

The problem of representation

The senses of place with which my work is concerned involve a series of interrupted narratives. From the nostalgia of childhood memories to the complex cultural web of Australian landscapes, my sense of place embraces fragmentation and tension. I realised that any representation of my sense of place therefore must contain some part of these characteristics. However, the word 'representation' itself poses a challenge. Barbara Bolt (2004, 12) argues that "Representationalism," her word for the paradigmatic dominance of representation in art, "is a system of thought that fixes the world as an object and resource for human subjects." The sense of place I wish to represent is not fixed, but always changing. Representation in the form Bolt examines therefore offers a restrictive way of seeing place, and my use of the term in my title would seem to be a flaw in my methodology of practice. However, it has never been my intent to represent my sense of place as fixed. Instead, my practice has always considered sense of place as fluctuating and significant in its multiple definitions and manifestations, which I have approached through abstract practice.

However, appealing to abstraction does not solve Bolt's problem of representation. As mentioned briefly in the introduction to this exegesis, Bolt (2004, 12) warns the reader not to make a direct correlation between representation and figuration or realistic imagery, a delineation of terms I find very useful. For Bolt, representation and abstraction are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as representation is "not an outcome, but rather a mode of thinking and a relationship to the world" (2014, 17). She argues that "representationalism…can be implicated in abstraction and conceptualism just as much as in realism" (Bolt 2014, 17).

My definition of representation and Bolt's is, however, not in as much conflict as it may appear. The intent with which I 'represent' my sense of place is to find a way to both embed and communicate it within practice, which in turn helps to construct and define what that sense of place is. A sense of place and a sense of self are mutually determined. Bolt (2014, 8) argues that "art is performative, rather than merely a representative practice." By representing my sense of place, I am performing the making of a sense of place, in both material and conceptual dimensions.

I propose that one of the strengths of abstraction is how it can contribute to that performativity which Bolt contrasts with representationalism. Using an experience of place as a prompt or origin for an abstract work can preserve a small part of that experience. That preservation is incomplete and "articulate[s] memory…through refusing continuous narrative" in the same way Trigg (2009, 89) argues is true of the fragment or a ruin. An abstract work which takes as its starting position a remembered colour, for example, and uses it to generate a reductive technical question based on the properties and characteristics of that colour, is progressively moving away from the initial experience. I argue that the result of that reductive process is a remnant in the same way as a found object. It can render the artist's previous experiences of world, not as a precise return or even re-presentation of memory, but as articulations of the dimensions of those experiences. This includes those which are imagined, projected, or pre-supposed, and highly contingent and transient experiences of place – such as colours, textures, or passing thoughts – without the need for mimetic representation.

Making a connection between found objects and abstraction was pivotal for what was emerging almost instinctually in my studio, and more slowly in the beginnings of the exegesis. Both found objects/materials and abstraction are devices for materialising a sense of reciprocity between myself as viewing subject and the world. In my practice, experiences of place are folded into abstract ways of structuring works, such as geometric form, seriality or repetition, simple divisional or contrasting compositions, and fields of colour, which are used as an alternative structure to the visual conventions of traditional landscape painting. On reflection, I knew that the approach I was taking to abstraction did not always follow standard institutional narratives of non-objectivity. However, there are many Australian artists for whom a relationship between their phenomenological experience of place or landscape and an abstract technical style is a major studio concern. Kobena Mercer explains that abstraction has "multiple and entangled histories," which broke "free from inherited rules and norms of picture making," and therefore its "defining quality lies in its *openness*" (2006, 7). In Australia, the history of abstraction is tied to that of place and encompasses a broad range of practices in which experience of place plays a variety of roles.

Abstraction's own 'sense of place'

Place-narratives permeate all of art practice and its reception by viewers. I would contend that this is true not just of works which directly reference places and landscapes in content or in title. I would further argue that abstract practice in Australia has its own 'sense of place' which like a personal sense of place is built from both conceptual and material realities. My approach to understanding abstraction in the Australian context is based on the argument that regional or local variations in practice emerge because of the significant impact place identity and experience has on visual expression. Sue Cramer (2012, 25) writes that "with all of art's big 'isms' – the movements that characterised modernism – local interpretations and variants have arisen as artists around the world interpret and reconfigure new ideas according to their own local contexts and individual sensibilities." In Australia, the development and interpretation of late modernist abstraction occurred within a dialogue which has questioned the relevance of these variations to the Australian context.

Historically there was uncertainty from critics about the 'Australian character' of abstraction, particularly hard-edge or minimalist works, due to the influence of international and particularly American painting in the mid-twentieth century (Pestorius, 1997). Reviews of the 1968 exhibition *The Field*, considered a seminal yet controversial exhibition of early Australian abstraction, included the opinion that the works seemed out of place. Grishin explains that many of the works in *The Field* referenced (2015, 399) "a specifically Anglo-American abstract style" and was criticised as a copy of the exhibition *Two Decades of American Painting* which had toured Australia in 1967. Grishin (2015, 399) related that multiple critics condemned the show as derivative, an imitation, and shallow, even referencing a "later mythology that the whole show was 'painted to order' according to an imposed template" despite there being significant stylistic variety.

Whether or not the artists in *The Field* were regarded as reflecting uniquely Australian ways of working or approaches to Australian conditions varies with different reviewers or critics of the work. John Stringer (2002, 19) writes that Robert Hunter and John Peart's works have "distinctive personalities that seem similarly rooted in the specific character of Australian light." Carolyn Barnes (1997, 25-26) writes that Dale Hickey's and Robert Rooney's works in *The Field* disturb the traditional "division between abstraction and figuration," and play with

the "friction between … local and international art trends." She proceeds to assert that their use of domestic imagery as motifs demonstrates that the "significance of the vernacular and the everyday extend[s] beyond simple emotional investment" (Barnes 1997, 27) and emplaces their work within domestic Australian place narratives. However, Daniel Thomas (2002, 64) argues that Rooney's *Kind-hearted kitchen-garden IV* (1968) (see figure 46) was "a tease" because although "the only painting in *The Field* with a title to raise hope of the natural world" the name was supposedly chosen by chance from the dictionary.

The transitional nature of many of the works in *The Field* contributes to viewing it as a phenomenon rather than simple survey of artists working in a particular style at the time. In addition to questioning the division between abstraction and figuration, many of the artists radically changed their style after the show (Grishin 2015, 399). Even as the conceptual statement that 'this is also Australian art' was being made, it was undercut by critics and the show's own uncertain contextual positioning. I argue that formal abstraction in Australia was never truly separate from questions about what a sense of Australian place is. Heather Barker and Charles Green (2011, 1) argue that even as international art centred on New York caught the eye of "young art historians" from the late 1960s, "this idea of world art did not, however, diminish the Australian preoccupation with nation, national identity and the position – and therefore the category – of Australian art." Kobena

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Figure 46 Rooney, Robert. *Kind-hearted kitchen-garden IV*. 1968, acrylic on canvas, 66 1/8 x 66 1/8 inches. Accessed 2 September 2018, http://www.pamelareid.biz/wp-content/uploads/Robert-Rooney-Kind-hearted-kitchen-garen-IV.jpg

Mercer (2006, 7) explains that, internationally, "abstract art has been widely understood to enjoy a special relationship with modernism and modernity," and it is no different in Australia. The 1960s and 1970s were a time of rapid cultural and social change. Only 4 years after *The Field*, the Aboriginal rights movement staged the *Aboriginal Tent Embassy* in front of Parliament House Canberra, which would galvanize artists of a variety of backgrounds to question their conditions of being in place and become more aware that "Australia's Indigenous people are estranged in their own land" (Lindsay 2002, 9). Narratives of belonging in or occupying place in Australia were changing, and it was not just through social realism and political posters that artists explored their sense of what kind of place Australia was or could become.

While large survey exhibitions such as *The Field* are not always the most accurate way of summarizing the zeitgeist of the time, I have found it to be a useful device for providing context for the abstraction which has been influential on my practice. While there is insufficient scope in this exegesis for a fully comprehensive analysis of 1960s and 1970s abstraction, or the controversial reception of *The Field*, there are aspects which assist in contextualising the work or artists which have been influential on my own practice. Of importance are some of the assumptions I made when first approaching abstract practice from the perspectives of place-narratives.

It would be inaccurate to claim that all abstract or minimalist art practice is locally invested simply because all artists inhabit some sort of locality as a function of everyday living. A more practical way of describing the significance of socio-cultural context would be to say that it reflects opportunities for discussion. Initially while writing this exegesis, I assumed that similarities between works and approaches to practice, along with participation in geo-political narratives, meant that there was a claim to be made for local paradigms in abstract art. I believed that part of determining my own 'sense of place' meant situating my practice within a paradigm of Western Australian abstraction. References to local 'collective perspectives' or 'understandings,' are still used as frames of reference for contemporary work, such as in the discussions I witnessed at *The undiscovered* symposium held at the University of Western Australia in 2014. The paradigm I envisaged and set out to examine included two strong influences on my practice, the well-known Western Australian painters, Howard Taylor and Brian Blanchflower. The first drafts of this exegesis were structured around comparative discussion of their work and the proposition that connections between their

practices supported the concept of a West Australian local paradigm. This paradigm referred to the way Western Australian painters (including but not limited to Blanchflower, Taylor, Brian McKay, Cathy Blanchflower, and Galliano Fardin) have taken their experiences of places and reconfigured them within reductive or geometric forms of abstraction.

However, I soon came to realise that there is an important difference between discussing similarities in how these artists have represented their experiences and arguing that there is a particular quality about this group which sets them apart from eastern states-based artists. John Mateer (2010, 21) states in his review of Blanchflower's *Space-matter-colour* exhibition that it is insufficient to "situate Blanchflower beside, or after, Howard Taylor, in an Australian art history," because this would oversimplify each artist's influences and technical interests. For example, while Blanchflower and Taylor were influenced by British landscape painting in contrast to the strong American influences on contemporaries such as John Nixon or Robert Hunter, this similarity alone is not enough to argue for further connections between their practices. Their shared interests in optical effects of colour and reduced form, in both cases emerging from being present within their own haptic experiences of place, resulted in different studio methods and approaches to art-making. Connections which can be drawn between Blanchflower, Taylor, and the other West Australian artists influential on my work are not as Mateer (2010, 21) states "cogent enough to try to create a local history of abstraction." What they do create is a kind of history of what has influenced my own work and my impressions of what a 'sense of place' for Australian abstraction could be.

Similarities between practices are not necessarily coincidental, but as my studio work progressed I began to see my early writing as a reduction of the complexities of each artist's relationships with place to a lowest common denominator. I realised that by over-simplifying relationships between works, practices, and communities, the aspects of works that truly interested me and inspired my own practice became less clear. The danger inherent in geo-politicising the abstraction I was studying was that seeking the features of regional paradigms came at the detriment of attending to the works themselves. Place-specificity and place-narratives in artists' works are not the same as geographically defined paradigms of practice, however attractive belonging to such a paradigm seems.

The concept of a regional paradigm is also undermined by multiple concepts of and connotations associated with the term. The label 'regional artist' in the artworld context is often derogatory, suggesting that the artists' practice lacks the sophistication of national or global standards. 'Regional art' is also often associated with imagined pastoral idylls typical of nationalist landscape painting traditions that abstract artists sought to leave behind (Short 1991, 41). However, an artist working with the specificity of a particular place or region does not necessarily fall under that category and may have exhibited their work widely and to high critical acclaim. The term 'regional' is imprecise as a descriptor because it is subject to assumptions and biases for both art practice and the experience of place. John Short (1991, 41) notes that while "the praise of small towns is a celebration of knowing one's place," where what constitutes place is an idealised harmony between dwelling and the landscape, "criticisms of small towns tend to centre on their supposed small mindedness, lack of culture and parochial viewpoint." While calling European-Australian cultural relationships between dwelling and the environment harmonious is questionable at best, dismissal of the regional runs the risk of devaluing the everyday personal experiences of artists within place and landscape, and their embedded knowledge of both. Dwelling and the everyday are an indispensable part of the construction of place-specificity, and therefore must be an integral part of contextualising abstract practice.

Figure and Ground

As discussed in chapter three, changing perceptions and representations of Australian places show the effects of different means of structuring images of landscape – from the augmented geography of Glover's *Mount Wellington and Hobart town from Kangaroo Point* (1834) (see chapter three, figure 11), to the more allegorical treatment of distance by Russell Drysdale or Sydney Nolan. For example, the treatment of the middle ground and horizon in Drysdale's *Western Landscape* (1945) (see chapter three, figure 13) or Nolan's *Pretty Polly Mine* (1948) (see chapter three, figure 14) creates a blurred, inaccessible zone which is always present but never real or inhabitable. As discussed in chapter three, an increasing awareness of the complication of Australian landscape narratives has changed the way artists represent landscapes and the people within them. The influence of abstraction on landscape painting indicates that artists were becoming interested in the underlying systems within which landscapes are made.

When landscape painting deliberately turns towards abstraction it often involves a negotiation between respective conventions, such as geometric forms, representational forms, and use of colour to create illusory space. Ted Snell (1995, 49) writes that Howard Taylor leaves behind forms which are recognisable, such as trees, in favour of optical devices in the treatment of the work's surface that reference "the sensory experiences of the natural world," rather than a visual rendering. Works such as *Landscape Emblem* (1984) (see figure 47) are still images of the landscape but ones that use a toolkit that seems sourced from both abstract (particularly minimalist) practice and carefully rendered perceptions of light. Taylor was also not afraid of distancing these works from the imagery of the forest before him in favour of shapes and forms that could better resolve formal problems. While other Western Australian artists were, according to Snell (1995, 49) "constructing modernist images of the landscape that emphasised colour and distortions of form," Taylor was distorting the types of forms associated with landscape imagery (such as the diamond shape in *Landscape Emblem*) and "pushing [his] visual language radically towards abstraction." However, Snell

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Figure 47 Howard Taylor, *Landscape Emblem.* 1984, oil on panel, 102 x 144.8 cm. Accessed 14 July 2016, http://artgallery.wa.gov.au/exhibitions/howardtaylor/popup.asp?id=42&sr=39.

(1995, 98) further asserts that "whatever the degree of abstraction, they are rooted in the artist's direct interaction with the landscape." Embedded within the forests of Northcliffe, Taylor's work was a process of sustained visual and structural experimentation to authentically render his experiential encounters.

Taylor's growing interest in geometric abstraction in the 1980s was a "unique

response to the Australian landscape," a way to reapproach visualising experience of land in response to earlier figurative representations of Australian landscape (Snell 1995, 62). His pursuit of a personal vocabulary of landscape iconography and abstract form offered, according to Snell (1995, 62) "a convincing synthesis"

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Figure 48 Fred Williams, *Sapling Forest* (1962), watercolour and gouache, 57 x 77.4 cm. Accessed 1 August 2017, https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/WA10.1964/.

in response to the "battle between figurative and non-figurative painting that was currently absorbing the Australian art community." Taylor's practice represents an approach in which both figurative and non-figurative methods and conventions are used to create the sense of place of interest to the artist.

Patrick McCaughey (2014, 273) argues that Fred Williams' *Sapling Forest* (1962) (see figure 48) also "at a stroke dissolve[d] the false and fatuous dichotomy between 'abstract' and 'figurative,'" leading Australian landscape practice "forward in a new direction." He also writes that Williams' *You Yangs landscape* (1963) (see figure 49) brought a "shock of recognition" to viewers sharing an interest, like Taylor, in the "universality of Australian landscape experience," which could be drawn out through working with individual reflections on place and abstract strategies of painting (McCaughey 2014, 277). The combination of recognisable landscape elements or iconographies with abstract painting strategies seen in Taylor's and Williams' paintings balanced a sense of what was knowable and unknowable about other people's experiences of landscape. Williams' works "realised in paint … a familiar – almost unconscious – part of the Australian experience," based on shared experiences with heat, vast distances, and scrubby

bush (McCaughey 2014, 273).

They bridged a duality of familiarity and strangeness in a way which was perhaps previously unrealised in representational landscape painting. McCaughey contends that Williams' synthesis of the abstract and figurative was uniquely positioned not to represent the Australian landscape but to articulate its experience, which in turn captured the imagination of his audience in drawing out experiences of their own. By collapsing the figure and ground together, these works subvert traditional roles of place and/or landscape as a ground on which figures act. Instead, they offer a perspective on how landscapes and places are experienced in a haptic sense. Williams' paintings typically employ mark making and an overall structure that seems more chaotic than ordered, although his process of simplifying trees, shrubs, and landmarks into short brushstrokes reflects the reconfiguration of experiential data into an artificially imposed system. After *You Yangs landscape*, his work increasingly explored the flattening of the picture plane and destabilisation of the relationship between figure and ground, creating a hybridised representational image of landscape that increasingly left behind representational methods of

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Figure 49 Fred Williams, *You Yangs landscape* (1963), oil on hardboard, 119.5 x 152 cm. Accessed 1 August 2017, https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/207.1980/.

distinguishing space and depth. I see in this merging of figure and ground a metaphor for the reciprocal relationship between Australian identity and the landscape, and more specifically the difficulty of conceptually separating one from the other.

Once the role of landscape or place as ground for a figure is undermined by abstraction, the work starts to become its own figure. Howard Taylor's later practice developed motifs into dynamic abstract figures described by Snell (1995, 37) as the "personification of elements within the landscape" which "have a convincing presence as characters acting out a part within an unexplained drama," constructing those natural forms as identities in themselves. As well as landscape constructing identity, these works show landscapes as identities within themselves. For example, *Green paddock illuminated* (1986) (see figure 50) sets a green rectangle centrally in the composition, where it seems to float above the canvas. Taylor's rendering of the paddock as a geometric shape presents it in a similar way to a portrait, constructing it as a figure. Taylor uses the rectangle as a strategy for drawing the viewer's attention toward the colour of the paddock and how it resonates against the darker bush which surrounds it, rather than the shape or location of the actual paddock itself. Despite the careful working of a colour

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Figure 50 (left) Howard Taylor, *Green paddock illuminated.* 1986, oil on canvas, 121.5 x 82.5 cm. Accessed 15 July 2015, http://www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/exhibitions/howardtaylor/artwork02a.asp.
Figure 51 (right) Howard Taylor, *At Shannon Dam.* 1998, oil on plywood, 183 x 91 cm. Accessed 14 July 2016, http://cs.nga.gov.au/Detail-LRG.cfm?IRN=166944.

relationship Taylor experienced in Northcliffe, the work itself could be any paddock contrasting with the blue/green/grey of native bush, such as the paddocks of my own home in Wellard/Casuarina. The abstract figure has the versatility to reflect a range of shared experiences.

The motivation behind Taylor's pursuit of a form that shows landscape as a figure could be related to a desire to affirm a sense of presence, either of himself within landscape, or of the landscape brought inside the gallery. His use of a reductive geometric figure is perhaps best seen in the previously mentioned *Landscape Emblem* (1984) (figure 47) and its maquette of the same name and year. In both, a diamond shape is painted with a soft green glow which, in the case of the maquette, sticks out almost sculpturally from the wall. *Landscape Emblem* is distinguished from *Green paddock illuminated* by the sculptural aspect of the maquette and the feeling of floating it creates, which Taylor recreates in oil for the later painting. Its

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Figure 52 Howard Taylor, *Light figure.* 1992, synthetic plymer paint on plywood, triptych: 199.7 x 269.5cm (overall). Accessed 12 February 2019. http://www.visualarts.qld.gov.au/content/apt2002_standard.asp?name=APT_Artists_Howard _Taylor

objectness gives this work a presence that seems to occupy space– it has a physical agency and integrity which seems to engage with its physical context in a more involved way.

The relationship between the maquette and the finished painting demonstrates something else Taylor had been preoccupied with over his career which is related to this three-dimensionality. Dominating his paintings and later sculptures is a sustained focus on the perception of light and experiences of ephemeral visual phenomena, such as light bouncing or trees reflecting on the surface of water in *At Shannon Dam* (1998) (see figure 51). Over time he developed an intimate familiarity with the light of the forest and ways to represent it in geometric form, such as in *Light figure* (1992) (figure 52) and *Divided Sphere* (2000) (figure 53). In *Light figure*, he divides a painting of the light from the sun across three panels, with the central circle of the sun itself closely bounded by where the panels meet, giving the optical suggestion of a three-dimensional effect, but without visual landmarks for the illusion of depth. In the later work *Divided Sphere* he continues his theme of natural light phenomena, but in a cleaner circular form with one

Figure 53 Howard Taylor, *Divided Sphere*. 2000, oil on marine ply structure, 99 x 94 x 9 cm. (Kerry Stokes Collection). Accessed 21 February 2019, https://www.galeriedusseldorf.com.au/GDArtists/Taylor/HT2000/HT2000Exh/HTWallSculptur es/HT05.jpg

central divide. The later painting's sophisticated rendering seems to open a portal into a world of which the artist seems more certain.

The experience of light in different places and from moment to moment is inherently personal, and contingent on specific conditions. It is also a universally recognized phenomenon, common to visual records of places and landscapes. The combination has led to artists searching for ways to express both the particularity and general nature of light and colour, which often results in a kind of 'field' which focusses on the light itself, rather than the conditions in which it is encountered. The following artists use visual systems that are inherently transferable or repeatable, such as geometric shape, lines, or grids, as frameworks and lattices.

Galliano Fardin's *After the Rain* (2006-7) (figure 54) and *Wetlands* (2007-11) (figure 55) use intricate systems of soft lines to layer subtle variations in colour which are evocative of rain and wetland regions. In comparison, Cathy Blanchflower's *Aster II* (2003) (figure 56) uses a more rigid geometric grid structure to scintillate light and/or colour across a flat plane. All three works play with the perception of light within the natural environment, without delineating a 'scene' or 'view.' Without a 'point of view' from which the viewer can enter a work with the illusion of depth, these works create a sense of presence in place that is divorced from Cartesian space. If a distinction between self and place implies distance between self and place, as discussed in chapter one, then an artist's use of non-Cartesian space supports their intertwinement. The systems by which artists re-contextualise experiential information are not necessarily intended to make understandable their personal experiences of phenomena but make aspects of them visible.

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Figure 54 Galliano Fardin, *After the Rain.* 2006-7, oil on canvas, 110 x 152 cm. Accessed 15 July 2016,
http://galeriedusseldorf.com.au/GDArtists/Fardin/GFExh2008/GFExh08/source/7_aftertherai n2006_07.html.

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Figure 55 Galliano Fardin, *Wetlands.* 2007-11, oil on canvas, 166 x 115 cm. Accessed 15 July 2015,
http://galeriedusseldorf.com.au/GDArtists/Fardin/GF2012/GF_ExhGD2012/source/gfexhgd2011 _4.html.

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Figure 56 Cathy Blanchflower, *Aster II.* 2003, oil on canvas, 167 x 167 cm. Accessed 15 July 2015, http://www.annandalegalleries.com.au/exhibition-enlargement.php?current=1&workID=2391&exhibitionID=225

In addition to fields, horizontal compositions and other suggestions of horizon lines in abstraction transfigure conventions of representing landscape, such as delineations between foreground, middle ground, and background. An artist's use of geometric composition can take significant cultural motifs of place, like the horizon, and examine how the division of perceptual zones operates. Brian McKay's *Horizons* (2000) (see figure 57) and Taylor's horizontal bars of colour in *Tree line with Green Paddock* (1993) (see figure 58) are examples of what David Bromfield (1993, 15) describes as "floating recessionals," in which the horizontal band of the horizon is abstracted to appear as endless demarcations of arbitrary sections of space. In Taylor's *Tree line with Green Paddock*, the image has been divided into bands of colour representing the sky, horizon, or foreground, which have similar surface treatment, thus denying any sense of distance. The relationship between figure and ground is again destabilised as each third abuts against the other, equidistant from the viewer, none dominant.

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Figure 57 Brian McKay, *Horizons.* 2000, oils on etched aluminium, 100 x 120 cm. Accessed 24 February 2019. https://www.galeriedusseldorf.com.au/GDArtists/McKay/BM2000/McKayExhWeb2000/BM01.jpg

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Figure 58 Howard Taylor, *Tree Line with Green Paddock.* 1993, oil on board, 61 x 122 cm. Accessed 25 February 2019. https://s3.amazonaws.com/img.aasd.com.au/26450652.jpg

A synthesis between the figure and ground in Australian work, in particular fields and horizontal compositions, has been perhaps the biggest single catalyst for my own works. For example, *Passage north-east* I-IV (see figure A11) is structured as a set of three or four panels, which are square monochromatic grounds on which a central spotted-gum length is vertically placed. The decision to place them vertically was made to contradict their reading as a horizon. The result was that each piece of spotted-gum (constructed of a matched pair) seemed to emerge as a figure or portrait. As with Taylor's *Landscape Emblem* (see figure 44) they are shapes which were chosen from or reminiscent of landscape form but driven closer to abstraction. The original inspiration for the work was the well-known geological striations in the ridgelines in Coalseam National Park.

The horizontal arrangement of *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* (see figure A1 and A16), *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)*, (figure A2) or *Wellard/Casuarina (banksia study)* (figure A7) divides the motif of the horizon into sections. These sections refer to either a horizon, or to a linear stretch of time drawn into its single moments. Each panel is at once an individual figure, separated by space from each other, and still part of the greater horizontal motif. The sculptural panels seem to 'float' off the wall, ungrounded, and therefore uncertainly placed in space except in relation to each other. The emplacing conventions of the figure/ground division are missing. Familiar groundings of distance and direction are missing, due to the lack of reference points against which the horizon could be measured. However, it would be too simplistic to argue the monochromatic painted panels in *Wellard/Casuarina (banksia study)* represent the 'ground' on which the 'figure' of the timber sits. Each of the pairs that make up the panels is their own figure, a conjunction of two parts. *Wellard/Casuarina (banksia study)* makes a kind of portrait of the banksia – the colour (painstakingly recreated, a representation of the flower) or the timber, which is from the tree itself. The candlestick banksia is symbolic of Wellard/Casuarina in general and in particular the bush surrounding the studio (see figure 59). This is one of the earliest finished works about Wellard/Casuarina.

Herbert George argues that volume "may be experienced in two ways, either as a visible solid presence…or as a quantifiable but invisible space" (2014, 116). The negative space between columns in *Margaret River (upriver)* is rightfully volume, the same as the pillars themselves. By placing the columns on the floor in the

centre of the space at Turner Galleries, I took a risk in the work being more likely to be disrupted and in *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* in the wall behind it being obscured. However, there was an idea I wished to test which had developed out of *Margaret River (upriver)*'s positioning at PSAS. At PSAS, I realised the sensitive arrangement of the gaps between columns was essential to their not interfering with one another. Grouped too closely together, they became jumbled, busy, and lost their sense of flow. At Turner Galleries, I wanted to encourage the viewer to walk around the arrangement and feel movement between the columns. What I discovered was that the volume of space between the columns became part of its oscillation between figure and ground. Rather than a contained volume, it was acting as a kind of "psychological protective space" which George, in explaining the nature of volume, "immediately surrounds our bodies" (2014, 121). I was thinking of the columns as a figure which has agency over the space in which it occupies.

Figure 59 Candlestick banksia (*banksia attenuata*) flower in Wellard/Casuarina, September 2011. Photograph by the artist.

In my practice the delineation of zones or fields celebrate the individuality of the moment. I use the composition of the grid in *Mingenew* (2014) (see figure A17) and *Margaret River (shallows)* (2015) (see figure A18) to set contrasting patterns of timber and plywood, and in the case of *Margaret River (shallows),* acrylic paint. The arrangement of these zones reflects a process of learning how to represent my relationship to place by separating experiences and remembrances into facets. In

Mingenew, these moments refer to natural grasslands and cropping paddocks. In *Margaret River (shallows)*, they refer to the liminal zone of the beach where the river seasonally meets with the ocean, crossing white sand and filling rocky pools with estuarine river water, in contrast to *Margaret River (upriver)* (see figure A3) which has a sharp transition alluding to shadows and pools of light between the river's surface and depths (see figure 60).
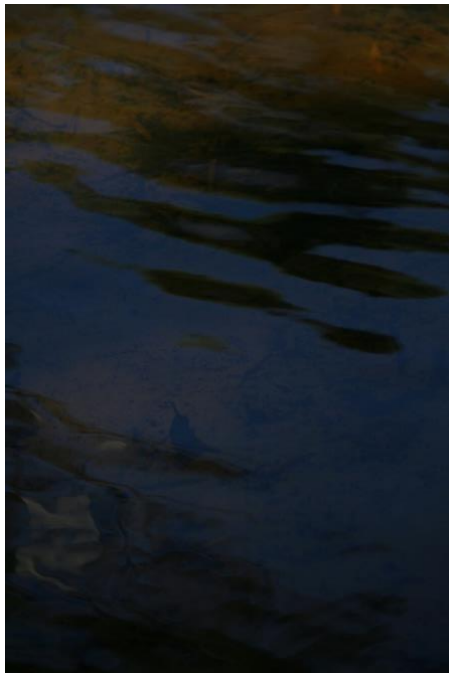

Figure 60 Margaret River (upriver section) showing deep blue-black colouring, February 2013. Photograph by the artist.

In several of the works, zones of colour or material delineate different ways of thinking, or perhaps different instances of thinking, about the same places. Colours, shapes, or textures which are inspired by sources outside of the work are then manipulated and developed further in the same way as those with origins only within the work. Early in the research process, I thought that an ongoing interest in dichotomies drove the feeling that the works must show clean divisions between zones of colour or material. I was at the time focused on navigating the historical and philosophical divisions between what was considered local/national, or national/global, or natural/artificial. Preliminary sketches of possible works show the repetition of two contrasting materials or colours and works split over paired panels. I was interested in how to construct a simple paired compositional structure, an idea to which my works would invariably return. I felt that the need to recognise these dichotomies, and the senses of place they reflected, was what was driving the work. This prompted the twin panel structure of *Imagined landscape II*

and *Imagined Landscape III* (see figure A10). Afterwards I began to question the relevance of framing them as dichotomies, rather than as complex, often reciprocal relationships. The simple compositional structure of two contrasting fields, zones, or panels persisted in the works, best shown in the abutting panels of paint and timber in *Margaret River (upriver)*, *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)* (figure A2), and *Wellard/Casuarina (banksia study)* (figure A7). The painted panels in each of these works are intended to resonate against the timber and draw attention to the sharp contrast between colours, shape, and texture.

In these works, I was trying to establish whether the reductive processes of minimalism offer a separation of experience of place from landscape by removing those visual conventions to which the cultural construct of landscape is bound. I argue that reductive strategies typical of minimalist works show that visual representation is not the only means to render sense of place. These strategies emphasise materiality, shape, form, dimension, scale, and physical interaction with spaces of display, over mimetic representation.

Series and Repetition

Another stylistic device found in abstraction is the use of a series or repetition of shapes, forms, colours, or other attributes. The significance of series and repetition for my practice lies in the way that repetition results in a series of boundaries. The concept of the boundary is essential to Malpas' definition of place, and distinction between space and place, discussed in chapter one. For Malpas, space is a duration which can be imagined to be endless and in which any divisions can repeat or change (1999, 23). These divisions are recognizably of a larger space. In contrast, place is contained within its boundaries, and the nature of those boundaries are essential to the character of the place (Malpas 1999, 23).

A parallel can be drawn between Malpas' definition of space, and the way repetition is used in minimalist painting or sculpture. As a compositional theme, the repetition of identical supports or forms is closely associated with minimalism. An obvious example would be Donald Judd's boxes or other geometric, three-dimensional forms. Judd's *Untitled* (1974), held by the National Gallery of Australia, demonstrates the clean, depersonalised surfaces and construction emblematic of minimalist sculpture of the 1960s and 1970s (see figure 61). In Judd's sculpture, there is little to suggest that the brass cubes could not have

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Figure 61 Donald Judd, *Untitled*. 1974, brass, each 101.6 x 101.6 x 101.6cm. (Collection of the National Gallery of Australia). Accessed 22 April 2019, https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?irn=14962

continued endlessly, if the artist had wished. Their dimensions and the number of times they are repeated seems completely arbitrary as they delineate and occupy space. It could be argued that the divisions between monochromatic panels in, for example, *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)* (figure A2) or *Wellard/Casuarina (banksia study)* (figure A7) are more aligned with Malpas' definition of space than place. If the timber top panels were removed from these two works, there would be no indication that the remaining panels could not continue endlessly, if they were not arbitrarily limited. The possible arbitrariness of that decision is an important point, because the limits of the two series of panels are in this case highly specific. They are determined by the availability, size, and shape of the timber panels they were made to accompany. *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)* and *Wellard/Casuarina (banksia study)* transgress against the expectations of minimalist repetition because they not just include but highlight the progressive degradation of the timber edge and its natural texture. The timber in all of the works are a 'limited run' constrained by in some cases by the practicalities and results of prior use, and in others by nature of being divided parts of a previous whole beam or from the same tree. Therefore *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)* and *Wellard/Casuarina (banksia study)* all contain divisions of something which is contained within its external boundaries. The sense of place that the timber represents (through personal mnemonic, resemblance, or prior contexts) is contained within the repetition of the timber panels, which could not repeat endlessly.

Another function of the works being hung as repetitions is the construction and subversion of scale. George (2014, 78) explains that there are two aspects to scale: first, the "relative physicality of the whole and the way the viewer understands that

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physicality" and second, "proportion – the relative size of parts to, and within, a whole." By dividing works into repetitions or a series of shapes, there is a tension created between the physicality of the work as a whole and the relative physicality of its individual parts. For example, *Wellard/Casuarina (canopy)* (figure A5) occupies a substantial quantity of space and presents as a large-scale work but is constructed from a collection of comparatively small seed pods. The impact the work has on the space in which it is exhibited, and on the viewer as they walk around, is that of a deceptively dense mass. *Wellard/Casuarina (canopy)* is a different way of approaching the 'pieces of a whole' concept which drives the form of works such as *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* (figure A1, A16) or *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)* (figure A2) and brought with it its own technical challenges. The time and endurance needed to hang so many seed pods from a framework installed in the ceiling of PSAS brought home how the performativity of making work also builds on that of making a relationship with place. The act of recreating the canopy of the Woody Pear trees was an exercise in remembering as much as it was a compositional problem.

Returning to the discussion on defining space and place in chapter 1, Peter Read argues that space is turned into place in part by erecting "mental boundaries" (1992, 2). Malpas, however, maintains that place is both subjectively and materially experienced (Malpas 2013) and so the boundaries between places must also be both subjective and material in form. As representations of my sense of place, the physical edges, planes, outlines, and perimeters created within my art works are all examples of the formation of material boundaries. An additional question, therefore, is how successfully do they also operate as the mental boundaries of my sense of place?

One of the most influential, but also inconsistent and destructive delineations of place boundaries is memory. Contingent aspects of places such as memory and imagination are essential to Read's "mental boundaries," but often offer incomplete, romanticised, and unstable platforms on which a sense of place is built. I argue that repetition as a compositional device can be used to represent the fragmentation of memory into moments or episodes. For example, *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* uses a simple composition of repeated squares which share superficial resemblance with minimalist sculpture but contain one of the strongest personal associations with material and emotional dimensions of place of all of my works. Originally envisaged as a single, square grid, (see
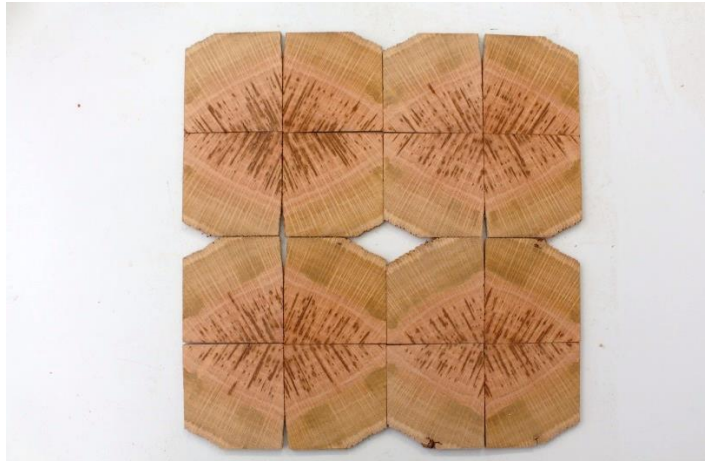
Figure 62 Grid pattern arrangement compositional test for *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* (2015).

figure 62) *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* developed into its horizontal progression in order to emphasise the repetition of its internal squares and the degradation in the timber (figure A1). Needing to give each quartet of panels stability and a structure possible to install, I developed an armature backing, mitred to minimize visual competition with the panels themselves (see image 63). This backing I then painted with a red acrylic paint which reflected off the white gallery walls, subtly assisting the visual strength of the pink and green tinges in the timber panels. These practical considerations did not emerge in isolation from the way the colour and pattern of the timber produced a mnemonic response, or my emotional response to those childhood memories. By grouping the slices of timber into mirrored quartets, and giving them a painted backing, I foregrounded the visual attributes which connected most strongly with my memories. The repetitive format of how they are installed echoes the episodic nature of those memories; summers
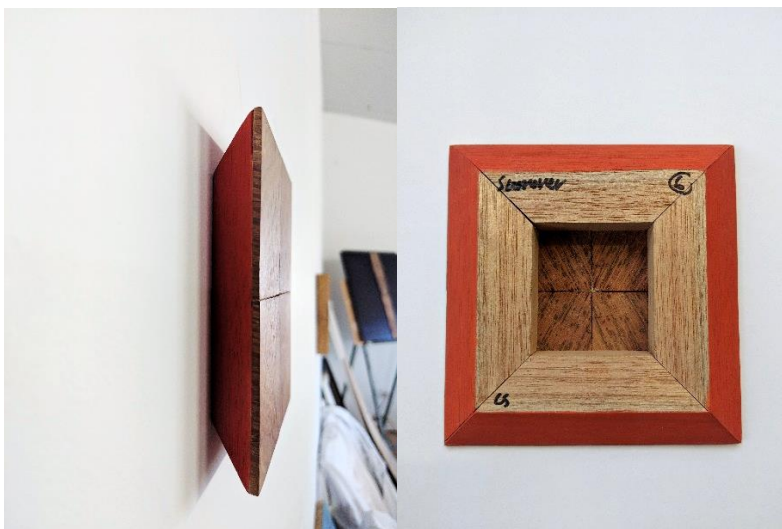

Figure 63 The armature backing for *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* (2015) showing mitred edges and red painted panels.

that seemed to go on forever, but which only remain as a series of distinct, not quite identical moments running my hands through veldt grass and listening to the buzzing of insects.

In the transition from the exhibition at PSAS to Turner Galleries, *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* underwent another compositional change. In Turner Galleries, the ability to see between both rooms of the exhibition made for dynamic relationships between works in the way they could be hung which had been otherwise hidden. This reflected a significant change in how I was thinking about space dynamics between the two exhibitions. From the first exhibition, I had learned that if the spaces between works were too large the works themselves became lost. Rather than the space allowing for the works to be considered without 'pollution' from other works in the exhibition, such as might be advisable in a group show, I wanted at Turner Galleries to install the works in a more intimate and relational way. In retrospect, this seemed to be a necessary, even obvious change – each work reflects memories and impressions of places, and contribute as a collection or collective to my sense of place. No sense of place can be truly isolated from one another as the boundaries between them contribute to how they are made and encountered (for photographs of the installations in both galleries, see figures A19, A20, A21, A22, A23, and A24). In particular, a closer relationship was revealed between *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* and *Margaret River (upriver)* (see figure A25). The choice to install these two works together in one room so that they impact on one another was made in response to the shape of the room and the view through its doorway from the room opposite, where the remainder of the works were installed. Increasing and randomizing the distances between panels in *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* spread them further across the gallery wall, including the space between them. Herbert George argues that space "is a material that can be manipulated and formed like any other sculptural material" and "although invisible… can be perceptually felt" (George 2014, 78). In the case of *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)*, the space between each quartet of panels represents the unremembered, unremarked times between summers, which form part of the mental boundaries delineating my sense of Wellard/Casuarina.

Another work in which the mental boundaries of place play a significant part is in *Wellard/Casuarina (reconstructing memories – 23 years in the family)* (figure A4), which was first imagined as a complete circle dissected vertically into the planks
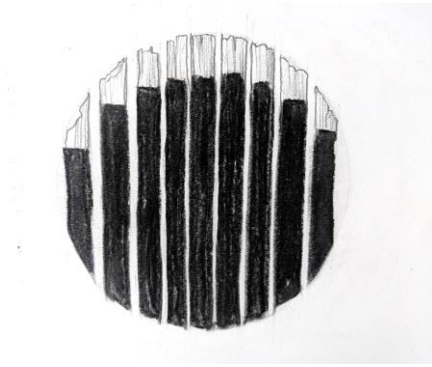
Figure 64 Initial compositional drawing for *Wellard/Casuarina (reconstructing memories - 23 years in the family)* (2015). Photograph by the artist.

which where salvaged from the horse float floor (see figure 64). The wear and damage to the timber planks bears direct witness to the time I have spent travelling to and from Wellard/Casuarina with the family horse float, a fixture of the kind of road trips which are preserved in memories from childhood. However, while I still have this material marker of that time and travel, the memories themselves are gradually unravelling, becoming lost. *Wellard/Casuarina (reconstructing memories – 23 years in the family)* was an effort of preservation but also symbolic acknowledgement of failure and loss. The two half circles of the final composition contrast the authentic, material trace of the past (upper half) against the imperfect recreation (lower half, which was made from the same timber lengths, but cut to roughly mirror the found shape of the upper). Despite or, perhaps, due to its poignancy the fragment (Trigg 2012, 46) generates the desire to reunite or reconstruct the whole. If the original design for the work had been kept, the only interruption to the aggregate memories of travel to and from Wellard/Casuarina would in that case be the format inherent to the material itself, the shape of the planks. I came to the realisation that this form of interruption was insufficient; I felt that it would not only be too heavy physically (jarrah is a dense, weighty wood) but

Figure 65 The initial half circle format of *Wellard/Casuarina (reconstructing memories - 23 years in the family)* (2015) before the armature was completed and the lower half of the circle added. Photograph by the artist.

also impart too solid a presence, and the reconstruction would, paradoxically, feel too complete. While the resulting work is still impactful, and its weight requires careful engineering for install, I find that its negative spaces better use repetition as a motif (figure 65). Using timber framing, I have traced the lines which the planks would have made, creating a procession of empty spaces. These empty spaces are the detail which is lost when, as in my title, I am 'reconstructing memories.' The return to place through memories offers a conjoined sense of both presence and absence (Trigg 2012, 46) which is in fragile balance.

Simplicity and Complexity

The apparent simplicity of many minimal works often belies the complexity of the choices made by the artist in their making. I argue that there is a dynamic relationship between simplicity and complexity in abstract practice, which recalls the personal and socio-cultural entanglements of the experience of being in place from which local, regional, and national identities are formed. The felt simplicity of belonging in place is lived existentially, whereas the complexity of social and cultural contexts of being in place is conceptually driven. The "totality of region," as Edward Casey (1993, 75) describes it, is at once a felt communality (simplicity) and a dense build-up of personal, contingent, and heterogeneous elements (complexity) of place. The relationship between such constitutive fragments and the whole or totality they approximate, mirrors how an abstract work is built on the coming together of distinct marks, textures, colours, and/or forms.

Representative of this dynamic between simplicity and complexity is the work of painter Robert Hunter, whose artworks were some of the earliest Australian minimalist or minimalism-inspired paintings I encountered in a gallery setting. His paintings have a delicate surface texture and subtle colouration. I was drawn to this apparent internal contradiction between simple shapes – and, from a distance, monochromatic, often white colour – and the density of visual and textural information, which only becomes apparent on close inspection of the painting. I started searching for points of connection among Australian artists which were based partly on shared interests in minimal painting practices and the nature of perception. It, then, occurred to me that this apparent contradiction between simplicity and complexity ran through the practice of most of the artists that have been influential, and that the very notion of 'totality' necessarily contains within

itself the complexity of all things brought together. The inevitable density of information this represents lends itself to the deceptive simplicity of works such as Hunter's, subtly transcending the expectations of minimalism by embedding within their structural simplicity suggestions of a complex internal logic.

Charles Green (2003, 13) writes that "Hunter's work had moved outside classic minimalism and its phenomenological territory" by involving itself with intimacy, because the syntax of minimalism refused this involvement. I have two paths of response to the assertion that minimalism – not so much as an historical movement, but as a way of working – does not concern itself with the intimacy of place-experience. First, minimalism in Australian practice was already a locally invested set of practices; self-aware of its similarities, influences, and differences from international minimalism. Second, Green's own use of the term phenomenological in connection with minimalism returns me to the intimacy of being in place I argued for in chapter one. While the term intimate infers a social aspect of being in place at odds with the pre-reflective experience examined by phenomenology, it aligns well with the contemporary place theory phenomenology has influenced. To be in place is to be intimately involved in the experience (and construction) of what or where that place is. I argue that although Robert Hunter's work did not move outside a stylistic hegemony, he used his own vocabulary of minimalist strategies from within a wider set which were applied differently to the various interests of other abstract artists. These interests may or may not fit within restrictive historical boundaries of the movements in which they participated or were influenced by.

This realisation was to have a profound effect on my engagement with individual abstract works. I could see in the careful tonal shifts in Hunter's Untitled (1984) (see figure 66) or delineation of white and cream zones in Vickers' Untitled (2009) (see figure 67) the desire to honour both the irreducible complexity of experience of the world, and the disciplined simplicity of minimalism. I saw each work as structured landscapes in themselves, with geometric shapes forming geographic zones, including mountains made from subtly raised edges of paint. They emerged as metaphors for the density of seemingly repetitive but subtly distinct moments of personal experience that make up a sense of place.

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Figure 67 Trevor Vickers, *Untitled.* 2009, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 111.5 x 121.5 cm. Accessed 14 July 2016, http://www.artcollectivewa.com.au/artists/trevor-vickers/.

Repetition, geometric shape and colour zones are used in Vickers' practice to reconsider previous structural arrangements with changes in colour, shape, or line. Works like *Untitled* (2009) (see figure 67) and *De Lacy* (2008) (figure 68) are closely related, part of a series of works in which a similar compositional theme is repeated. This repetition of a geometric composition is an arbitrary armature, situated within the paradigm of international minimalism, which Vickers is able to return to in order to examine subtly different combinations of colour and shape. Like the seeming repetition of moments in the everyday experience of dwelling in place, each is in fact constructed of distinct events. In the repetition of simple

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Figure 66 Robert Hunter, *Untitled.* 1984, synthetic polymer paint on plywood, 122.4 × 244.1 cm. Accessed 15 July 2015, https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/66007/.

geometry, Vickers creates arbitrary structures which act as frames for the particularity of each moment, represented by colour relationships. In *Untitled* (2009), he arranged three panels of cream alongside three of white and bordered them with a subtle yellow geometric cage. This creates an optical destabilisation where the cream panels travel left and the white travel to the right. The buttery yellow cage resonates against the white and cream panels. The suggestion of a shadow inside the bottom edge, which sits behind the cage but in front of the panels, tries to introduce depth to a surface that remains flat. This is my reading of problems with which Vickers seemed engaged when painting the work, which may or may not have been inspired by an experiential event. In my own apprehension of the work, the memory of overwhelmingly bright summer sunlight bleaching my field of vision and causing objects to dance informs my analysis of these formal elements.

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Figure 68 Trevor Vickers, *De Lacy.* 2008, acrylic on canvas, 101.5 x 101.5 cm. Accessed 15 July 2015, http://www.artcollectivewa.com.au/wp-content/gallery/trevor-vickers/trevorvickers-delacy-2008-101-5x101-5cm.jpg.

I was also intrigued to see these similarities developing between the found timber in my practice and abstract painting like that of Cathy Blanchflower and Fardin. It appeared in my reading of their work that both artists showed the complexity and felt the un-encompassable nature of experience through the arbitrariness of a

regulated structure. For Cathy Blanchflower and Fardin, these structures are colours, geometric shapes, and lines. In the case of the timber in my works, these structures are the markings from the tree's growth, medullary rays caused by damage from insects or drought, transitions between softer and denser woods, and the liminal edges where timber becomes bark and nutrients are passed along tree limbs and trunk. Unlike the careful paintwork of Blanchflower and Fardin, the timber is an imperfect balance where the underlying structure is difficult to grasp. In the panels of *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* (see figure A26), markings called medullary rays are mirrored, making for a naturally occurring but artificially arranged starburst pattern reminiscent of patterns like in Cathy Blanchflower's *Aster II* (figure 56). The use of these naturally occurring marks allows a level of visual complexity that contrasts with the simplicity of the work's construction: slices of one length of timber set in repeating panels of four. This contrast of simplicity and complexity is also found in Fardin's and Cathy Blanchflower's works which allows them to reference the contradictory simplicity and complexity of being-in-place, namely, the combination of felt unities or communities of place and those distinct personal and heterogeneous aspects from which these are built. This interrupts the figure/ground division by establishing that the figure (self) is intertwined with the ground (world) as argued in chapter one. In my own work both *Passage north-east I-IV* (see figure A11) and *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* (figure A1, A16 and A26) takes this intertwining one step further by showing the complexity of the experience of world through timber, a material from the world, although as mentioned previously in this chapter, not from the specific part of world to which the works now refer.

The changes in colour and pattern between each panel in *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* (figure A26) are gradual but are inherent to the timber and the way it was cut into slices across the grain. This draws attention to the highly individual characteristics of each, despite being arranged in a repeated pattern. I have used the same tactic in *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)* (figure A2 and A13) and *Wellard/Casuarina (banksia study)* (figure A7), allowing the individuality of the timber panels to create conflict with the homogenous shape of the monochromatic panels. Using the natural characteristics of the timber represents a step away from the minimalist practices which influenced all three works' early design and prototyping.

As discussed in the previous chapter, these markings represent time invested by

nature and not by human hands. As a found object, the timber retains most of its previous form and still shows much of its previous function. This is a regulated structure, just not one that I have imposed, like the straight cuts of each timber piece, or their horizontal arrangement, or mirroring. It is irreducibly complex and manages a sense of something about the chaotic and dense nature of the Australian landscape with which I was never satisfied in attempting to recreate in paint. The closest I have come to seeing this ambiguous relationship between complexity and simplicity in other work is how a synthesis of figurative and abstract conventions in the artworks of Howard Taylor or Fred Williams is able to articulate the 'unique experience' of Australian landscape. These readymade aspects of the timber became the necessary abstract structure through which my ephemeral and subjective experiences of place could be transformed.

Materiality and the Monochrome

Even the most avowedly formalist abstract work is a product of a reciprocal relationship between the artists' perceptions and experiences and the material practicalities of its production. Angeline Morrison (2006, 135) writes that monochromes "could be the most abstract, least legible and most non-representational" of the various forms of minimalism and abstraction. The monochrome has come to represent the epitome of the logic of late modernism – an icon of its reductive form and denial of external referentiality. Yet the reductive form of the monochrome is complicated by its physical, three-dimensional form and artists' choices of material. As conceptual emptiness or void, the black monochrome presents the viewer with only what they bring with them - their own presence.

Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 69 John Nixon, *Black square.* 1984, enamel paint on plywood, 65.8 x 66.0 cm. Accessed 26 March 2017, http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/73001/.

Monochromes that engage with the presence of the viewer through scale include John Nixon's *Black square* (1984) (see figure 69) which is structurally intimate rather than monumental in scale. This work is not only a contradiction of the scale of Abstract Expressionism but also suggests a moment's reflection rather than a grand expanse to be conquered. The effect, however, of *Black square* exhibited alone on a large wall creates its own expansive scale which is hard to capture in reproductions but creates a focus for the viewer that shows the high impact of fine and intimate detail on our perceptions of the world around us. The unexpectedness of the scale heightens the viewer's perspective and engagement with the work as a physical object. This physicality is also shown in shaped canvases like Trevor Vickers' *Untitled (Catalan series)* (1996), (see figure 70) which reflects a growing acknowledgement and exploration of how the physicality of works, not just their compositions or other formal attributes, contributes to their presence and agency. Andrew Gaynor (2016, 10) reports that while the Catalan series was a "breakthrough" in Vickers' "search for answers to the problems set by the undeniably strict boundaries set by the doctrine of formalist abstraction" since his inclusion in *The Field*, the artist himself always "maintains that his works have always been painterly." The way a kind of sculptural painterliness in formalist abstraction has been explored extends from subtle interruptions of the picture plane, such as in Robert Jack's *Cut Piece, Modular 2* (1969) (see figure 71) to drastic reconfigurations, such as Robert Morris' *Untitled* (1970) (see figure 72) where the canvas sags off the wall in ribbons.

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Figure 70 Trevor Vickers, *Untitled (Catalan)*. 1996, acrylic on gesso panel, 114 x 144cm. Accessed 6 March 2019. https://artcollectivewa.com.au/whats-on/trevor-vickers-catalan-series/#gallery-2

Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 71 Robert Jacks, *Cut Piece, Modular 2*. 1969, rubber, 120 x 80cm. Accessed 6th March 2019. https://collection.heide.com.au/objects/5206

Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 72 Robert Morris, *Untitled*. 1970, felt, 189 x 453.8 x 2.5cm. Accessed 6th March 2019. https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/4198/

The three-dimensionality of the monochrome is not restricted to its support but extends to its surface texture as well. Aida Tomescu's *Gloria* (2014) (see figure 73) and David Serisier's *untitled black vertical painting no.1* (2004) (see figure 74) all lack the flatness and uninflected paint application of other monochromes. They present dense and tactile surfaces wherein the traces of painterly application themselves are essential to the experience of the work. While Nixon's *Black square* (1984) and Booth's *Untitled* (1971) include surface variation from underlying plywood in the former and dribbles of paint in the latter, the materiality of the paint is not the focus of these pieces as it is for *Gloria*, or *Untitled black vertical painting no. 1*. Built layers of material imbue the simple geometry of these works with a surprising weight of presence as the paint application takes on a sculptural quality.

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Figure 73 Aida Tomescu, *Gloria.* 2014, oil on Belgian linen, 184 x 154 cm. Accessed 26 March 2017, http://aidatomescu.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/aida-tomescu-gloria-2014-oil-on-belgian-linen-184-x154cm.jpg.

When place-narratives inherent in certain materials are used to create this sculptural quality, the monochrome gains a further sense of depth. Standing in the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery for Brian Blanchflower's *space-matter-colour*, I found myself within an exhibition which seemed to transcend both monochromatic and landscape painting. The combination of both approaches in the show draws the audience "into searching for analogy, [and] metaphors," thereby creating opportunities for connections between the personal experiences of the artist and viewer (Mateer 2010, 21). Chris Malcolm writes that "Blanchflower's paintings often include references to specific worldly sites and to the experience of the sky's

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Figure 74 David Serisier, *untitled black vertical painting no.1.* 2004, oil on linen, 31 x 25.5 cm. Accessed 15 July 2016, http://www.liverpoolstgallery.com.au/public_panel/exhibition_info.php?id_EXH=23.

canopy," even when their form has much in common with that of hard edge, or non-objective painting. In his review of *space-matter-colour*, John Mateer (2010, 21) criticises internationalist readings of Blanchflower's work which liken his use of organic media to the broadening materialities of late-modernism, rather than the grounding of a practice within the physical phenomena and metaphor of the local or regional. While the materials in Blanchflower's practice are not as iconic as, for example, the eucalyptus leaves in Janine Mackintosh's circular arrangements, to overlook his use of ash would discount the rich historical and mythological narratives of bushfire in Australia.

Blanchflower's use of organic material to construct the thickness of his surface sets his work apart from other abstract artists I have discussed in this chapter so far. His paintings are predominantly formed by dense accumulations of paint and added media such as wax, pumice, and ash. Works such as *Scelsi II* (2001) (see figure 75) from the *Canopy* series point to the legacies of minimalism and abstract expressionism, but, I would argue, their materiality also positions them explicitly within themes of landscape and place-experience. Built layers of material imbue the simple geometry of these works with a surprising sense of presence. Their relationship with and reference to nature is supported by the artist's own written and spoken accompaniment to his practice. In Bromfield's (1989, 22) monograph of the artist, he quotes Blanchflower as saying: "my aim was to become saturated

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Figure 75 Brian Blanchflower, *Scelsi II* (Detail from *Canopy LI*). 2001, oil, wax medium, pumice powder, synthetic polymer paint on laminated hessian, 221 x 171 cm. Accessed 13 July 2016, http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/198.2013.a-d/.

in the atmospheres of the chosen places … then to allow these experiences to slowly become art." Blanchflower's interest in the experience of nature is combined with his use of highly specific materials from the natural world. These materials are significant because of where the materials may have been found, what they have been used for, and their cultural associations. Mateer (2010, 21) describes how Blanchflower's paintings acknowledge the necessity for matter, form, materials, and experience to combine in an internal relationship.

The tactility of Blanchflower's *Canopy* series points toward place-experience because the materials he chooses to use have specific connections to or connotations of places. The interrelationship between materiality and meaning is predicated on the artist's presence within places themselves or participation in wider place-constructs. While Blanchflower's use of ash may be assumed to situate the work within specific place-locations where this material may have come from, it also works to situate it within a more general sense of place in which ash may be found – that is, communal understandings of the types of things relating to places or landscapes. But it is his use of those materials in conjunction with paint and stylistic devices of colour-field painting that gives his works their conceptual and material density.

Another artist configuring very deliberate engagements with the materiality of place in abstract ways is Lauren Berkowitz. Her *Colourfield* (2002) (see figure 76) is described by Daniel Thomas (2002, 69) as a "white-bordered carpet of colour stripes, knowingly similar to American-style stripe paintings in *The Field*" although "unlike the bland impersonality of acrylic paint, her stripes were finely textured and radiant from within: the surprising materials turned out to be a white salt border and bands of dried leaves and flower petals, laboriously collected." The dried leaves and flower petals are exotic weeds which have become feral, choking native ecosystems and taking over Australian landscapes. I would contend that Berkowitz's choice in using exotic weeds is a metaphor for the arrival of Anglo-American painting in Australia and its Australian 'versions' shown at *The Field* in 1968. That would suggest that the material make-up of late modernist abstraction in Australia would always be like an invasive species, supplanting our native culture and not truly Australian at all. I argue, however, that by being questioned on whether it is Australian in nature, late modernist abstraction has become part of the story of a national sense of place, in particular the sense of unsettled European-Australian cultural identity I discussed in chapter three.

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Figure 76 Berkowitz, Lauren. *Colourfield*. 2002, salt and exotic weeds, 6 x 6 m.
(University of South Australia Art Museum, Adelaide). Photograph Grant Hancock.
Accessed 24 February 2019, http://shermangalleries.sherman-
scaf.org.au/artists/inartists/artist.asp%3Fartist=3&exhibition=5.html

So how is it that abstraction manages, without figurative rendering, to express such
a strong communication of an artist's sense of place? I argue it does so by
providing a personal vocabulary that is able to speak concurrently of both the
specific experiences and the general nature of the experience of places. Michael
Bell suggests (1997, 815) that "[w]e need a language for describing place, ineffable
and quasi-mystical as it may be, that is general enough to be worth speaking about,
but also provides a means for describing this particular and often peculiar,
experience." This prompted my thought that perhaps such language could be
developed out of abstract practice, even if it may not take the form that Bell may
have imagined. The devices of abstraction can be employed to engage with the
particularity of the experience of place. Chris Malcolm's description of
Blanchflower's practice offers insight. He writes that it is both "grounded in the
material world" and "open[s] a portal onto the infinite while leaving the nature of
the journey to the individual viewer" (Malcolm 2001, 9). There is room in his
abstraction for the viewer's past experiences of place. There is also room for felt
simplicity and conceptual complexity of belonging in place to become intertwined.
This open 'potential' or 'possibility' is there because Blanchflower's work appeals
to "the power which can be found to reside in places and things," and "creates for
us a residue of an encounter rather than a picture of the encountered" (Bromfield
1989, 22). The incompleteness of the fragment has an existential power – it taps
into the importance of memory in forming a sense of where we are in terms of

place, and in terms of time. It is not just about abstract painting. Bromfield (1989, 22) writes that "in Blanchflower's work the paint remains the vehicle for a meditation on the world rather than the repository of a series of finite technical problems peculiar only to the art of painting." This is the destination at which my practice has been striving to arrive.

Conclusion

Representing a sense of place is a more philosophically and conceptually involved undertaking than the familiarity of the phrase would first suggest. This was part of its appeal as a subject for a research question. The origin of this research was something as simple as a felt connection with and attachment to the places in which I lived throughout my childhood. And yet I understood that this simplicity was always accompanied by the complexities of wider culture, and an understanding that European-Australian belonging in place is historically and politically contested ground. A sense of place encompasses a broad range of encounters, observations, and attachments. These are rooted in personal experiences as well as the histories and representations of wider culture, including those of the past, present, and imagined futures. A sense of negotiation between my felt simplicity and lived complexity in place is a dominant theme driving my practice. My method of approaching this theme has been to 'think about place through abstraction.' However, abstraction is often thought of as a universalising practice, reducing the specificities of place to the generalities of abstract relationships. I have countered this possibility by the use of found materials taken from the places themselves and chosen for their potential to evoke specific memories. The abstraction I utilise therefore employs a very personal vocabulary.

The central question of the research has therefore been: what potential does a personal vocabulary of abstraction have for representing a sense of place?

I chose abstraction as my method because of a feeling that a representational image would be insufficient when addressing certain aspects of my sense of place. A sense of place involves haptic, emotional, and imagined dimensions which resist simple imaging. The works I had been making prior to the research had shown a

developing pattern – they tended toward landscape motifs from which something had been removed or were somehow incomplete. They were becoming more and more abstract. The choice was therefore initially practice-driven and was reinforced when I started conceptualising the research question in words. If the works are an exercise in belonging to Australian places, then what would that look like? What are the defining characteristics of my sense of place, driven by what happens in the studio and the literature I turn to in the attempt to understand? The answers all related to rendering and resolving seeming contradictions: A feeling of belonging which is unsettled and fragmented, and a relationship with place which is both simple and complex. These in turn became technical questions in the studio that abstraction is well positioned to apprehend.

Part of the choice of abstraction was an attempt to turn my practice away from the motif of landscape. However, despite attempts to distinguish between landscape and place, and find a way for my work to represent place in contrast to landscape, this very attempt placed landscape as a central concern. Malpas suggests that "only when our relation to landscape comes into question…does landscape come to be an explicit artistic theme" (2011, 10). The continuing importance of landscape as motif and genre within both my practice and exegesis is evidence of this in action.

However, the attempt to make work specifically about place through abstraction rather than about landscape through visual representation has further significance. Barbara Bolt (2004, 12) argues that figurative representation involves a way of thinking which assumes the work of art to be a preconceived outcome, and its subject to be fixed. How can I represent my experience of place as fixed when that experience is dependent on factors in constant flux? It is therefore an exercise in control or mastery of the subject, a concept in uncomfortable parallel to the legacy of the colonial gaze in representational Australian landscape paintings. If both landscape and representation itself are "imposed conceptual structures" (Bolt 2004, 55) then abstraction is my own choice of restructuring how I think of – and construct – my sense of place.

A question which could be addressed in future research is whether the representation of place-experience through abstraction offers a means to be non-complicit with the legacy of colonialism in figurative landscape representation, or if the intent to represent place through alternate means still reflects the embeddedness of that legacy.

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Through the combined exegesis and creative practice format, this research has answered the following two subsidiary questions: How does representing my sense of place through abstraction preserve its existential power, and how is using abstraction for this purpose significant for my relationships with places? The first question could only be answered via the technical and conceptual processes of creative practice. The second involved the interpretation and development of aspects of place from the close intimacies of childhood to the grand narratives of national identity. However, the answer to the first question also had to come from the second; it was important for the contexts of my sense of place to be a major determining factor for the methodology of the research.

When examining a sense of emplacement, it is useful to approach the concept of place from the perspective that it is always under construction. Just as a sense of self and sense of place cannot be completely disentangled, personal and national narratives intertwine to construct a sense of place. Malpas' (2014, 11) explains that at its foundation a sense of who and where we are is inexorably linked. The relationship between people and their environment is lived existentially as one, rather than as a duality. By representing their personal sense of place, artists also explore facets of broader cultural understandings and portrayals of places. In turn, understanding place contexts and histories is essential to the grounding or situated-ness of any art practice, which aims to explore the nexus of identity and place.

Additionally, cultural place-narratives are pervasive because they offer familiar frameworks for representing presence within and sense of belonging to place. I think it is important to note that Australia's history of place narratives, and connection between a sense of place and a sense of self, has an impact on most Australian art practice. That impact is expressed in various ways and to different degrees for each artist. Belonging is a simple felt descriptor of experience, but the complexity of belonging in a national sense of place can be confronting. The troubled history of Australian representations of place and landscape does not invalidate contemporary representations of personal European-Australian senses of place and belonging. As discussed in chapter three, European-Australian attachments to country do not necessarily downplay Australia's troubled past or diminish Indigenous belonging and art practice. A sense of attachment is a fundamental aspect of developing a sense of place. The exploration of history in art practice can, however, offer opportunities for the artist and viewer to engage with

dimensions of place-narratives which may be otherwise hidden. Attending to historical context also allows for the recognition of changes in national and personal senses of place over time, just as the places themselves and our attitudes towards them change.

The kind of knowledge of place represented by this exegesis and creative practice is dependent on the transformation of meaning by reconfiguring or reinterpreting sense of place materially and conceptually. For example, my use of the mimetic potential of the degraded edge of the jarrah in *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)*, or spotted gum in *Passage north-east I-IV*, demonstrates that figurative landscape conventions are still intrinsically involved in how I develop a sense of place (see figures A2 and A11). The nature of my encounter in Kalbarri is different from being present in Wellard/Casuarina. Feeling that the most appropriate form of representing Kalbarri is by retaining the timber's live edge as mimicry or echo of the way the gorge's cliff edges crumbles suggests that my sense of Kalbarri is dominated by its visual characteristics, rather than a synthesis of visual and haptic experiences, as is the case for the more familiar Wellard/Casuarina. *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)* offers a view of Kalbarri as a place to be visited, rather than a place for dwelling, framed by how it was seen, not how I felt present within it. My encounter with Kalbarri is similar to the way places marked for tourism are encountered and engaged with. In contrast, the way *Wellard/casuarina (reconstructing memories – 23 years in the family)* sat as centre-point in the two exhibitions of my work for this research suggests that personal histories and the passage of time can not only have material manifestations, but that these manifestations contribute to what I consider a deeper and more meaningful sense of place.

While according to Malpas (1999, 22) a place is bounded, those boundaries can also shift within memories and projections, becoming corrupted, disjointed, nostalgic, or uncertain. The poignancy of the fragmentation of memory is part of the powerful impact of work about place, because within the imperfection of a recollection there is room for the viewer to see themselves. Both remembering and forgetting is part of the formation of a sense of place, as a kind of 'imperfect return' which is never completely resolved. The stories of living within and visiting places I have shared within this exegesis are their own form of imperfect return, the representation of a trace or residue of my presence within them. The method I needed to use to represent my sense of place needed to acknowledge that it was

built on such traces of being present in place, rather than figurative images. A picture of a landscape would be insufficient, as to be emplaced is to be embedded, to be part of the place itself, rather than a spectator.

This is where 'thinking about place through abstraction' became a practical strategy for not only examining my sense of place but transforming it. The places themselves, both categories of 'Home' and 'Away' were changed by the making of the works, as their dimensions, boundaries, and character were mapped and reinscribed. Barbara Bolt explains that in "the dynamic productivity of the performative act, the work of art produces ontological effects" (2004, 10). The physical, material, at times mundane process of making is as much responsible for what these places are to me as the time I have spent within them, as the time spent working on this research has been in a very meaningful way more of that time.

The strategies, processes, and forms of abstract painting have provided a vocabulary for "a meditation on the world" (Bromfield 1989, 22). The generic structures and forms of late modernist painting offered a frame to structure representations of my experiences of place which have no established form of their own, and are by their very nature formless, allowing them to keep their transient qualities. Destabilisation of the figure/ground into fields and geometric shapes allowed for the free exploration of the physical and mental boundaries which define my significant places. I used simple, repeating visual and structural armatures to work on technical and conceptual questions of where my own smaller senses of place sit within broader designations of place. Malpas (1999, 23) explains that the difference between space and place lies in the type of boundaries that are used to define them. These armatures of mine on first impression meet his description of space, because they represent repeated delineations of intervals or expanse which could be imagined to repeat endlessly (Malpas 1999, 22). The horizontal stretch of multiple panels in *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* or *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)* are prime examples (see figures A1 and A2 respectively). However, the boundaries of these works (between and within each panel, and of the entire work itself) are not as arbitrary as the geometric shapes and monochromatic panels of the late modernist painting which inspired them. Instead, the construction method and number of panels relate directly to memories of being present in place and the availability of a material with strong personal place associations. They are contained within an additional perceptual or mental boundary, Malpas's (1999, 22) requirement for place. However, the provenance,

resemblance or cultural recognition of material does not guarantee the communication of a sense of place to a viewer. It is just one part of a vocabulary that can be used to represent place and, if that vocabulary has shared elements, give the viewer a sense of my relationship with place which can intertwine with their own.

A sense of place is both intimately familiar and, in a sense, cannot be completely known. It is the feeling of a trace, a fragment, an incomplete return, a negotiation between the simplicity of being and complexity of living in place which can have no fixed image. That is the potential of abstraction for representing a personal sense of place. This exegesis and the practice which has guided it have made an original contribution to understanding the ongoing complexity of these place narratives. This is both from the point of view of a greater understanding of the complex philosophical issues involved and also from my own point of view as producer of the artworks exhibited and presented as part of this research. The approach this research has taken is a large part of how it contributes new knowledge. Intertwining generalised theoretical writing about place, the very specific histories of Australian place, and childhood memories and experiences of place using abstraction has resulted in both a unique body of work, and a unique perspective on the difficulties of representing place narratives from within them. It has negotiated for me as the artist a personal vocabulary of practice with which to explore my own belonging and senses of place past, present, and emerging.

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Figure 39 Seed pods from the Woody Pear (xylomelum occidentale) in the artists' studio, testing hanging mechanisms. Photograph by the artist.

Figure 40 Compositional drawings for *Wellard/Casuarina (canopy)* (2015). Photograph by the artist.

Figure 41 Rosalie Gascoigne, *Suddenly the Lake*. 1995, sculptures, formboard plywoods, galvanised iron sheeting, synthetic polymer paint on composition board; four panels, overall (approx.) 130.7 h x 361.2 w x 7.7 d cm. Accessed 9.11.18, https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?irn=8774.

Figure 42 Rosalie Gascoigne, *Scrub Country.* 1981, weathered painted wood from discarded soft-drink crates, with aluminium strip supports, 144 x 376 cm. Accessed 14 September 2016, http://www.aasd.com.au/index.cfm/list-allworks/?concat=GascoigneRosal.

Figure 43 A piece of spotted gum prior to being set on its monochromatic panel for *Margaret River (upriver)* (2015) showing a rippling effect in the grain and the preserved insect damage. Photograph by the artist.

Figure 44 Spotted gum used in *Passage north-east I-IV* (2015) (detail). Photograph by the artist.

Figure 45 The timber panels of *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)* being matched with plywood panels prior to painting.

Figure 46 Rooney, Robert. *Kind-hearted kitchen-garden IV*. 1968, acrylic on canvas, 66 1/8 x 66 1/8 inches. Accessed 2 September 2018, http://www.pamelareid.biz/wp-content/uploads/Robert-Rooney-Kind-hearted-kitchen-garen-IV.jpg

Figure 47 Howard Taylor, *Landscape Emblem.* 1984, oil on panel, 102 x 144.8 cm. Accessed 14 July 2016, http://artgallery.wa.gov.au/exhibitions/howardtaylor/popup.asp?id=42&sr=39.

Figure 48 Fred Williams, *Sapling Forest* (1962), watercolour and gouache, 57 x 77.4 cm. Accessed 1 August 2017, https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/WA10.1964/.

Figure 49 Fred Williams, *You Yangs landscape* (1963), oil on hardboard, 119.5 x 152 cm. Accessed 1 August 2017, https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/207.1980/.

Figure 50 (left) Howard Taylor, *Green paddock illuminated.* 1986, oil on canvas, 121.5 x 82.5 cm. Accessed 15 July 2015, http://www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/exhibitions/howardtaylor/artwork02a.asp.

Figure 51 (right) Howard Taylor, *At Shannon Dam.* 1998, oil on plywood, 183 x

91 cm. Accessed 14 July 2016, http://cs.nga.gov.au/Detail-LRG.cfm?IRN=166944.

Figure 52 Howard Taylor, *Light figure.* 1992, synthetic plymer paint on plywood, triptych: 199.7 x 269.5cm (overall). Accessed 12 February 2019. http://www.visualarts.qld.gov.au/content/apt2002_standard.asp?name=APT_Artists_Howard_Taylor

Figure 53 Howard Taylor, *Divided Sphere*. 2000, oil on marine ply structure, 99 x 94 x 9 cm. (Kerry Stokes Collection). Accessed 21 February 2019, https://www.galeriedusseldorf.com.au/GDArtists/Taylor/HT2000/HT2000Exh/HTWallSculptures/HT05.jpg

Figure 54 Galliano Fardin, *After the Rain.* 2006-7, oil on canvas, 110 x 152 cm. Accessed 15 July 2016, http://galeriedusseldorf.com.au/GDArtists/Fardin/GFExh2008/GFExh08/source/7_aftertherain2006_07.html.

Figure 55 Galliano Fardin, *Wetlands.* 2007-11, oil on canvas, 166 x 115 cm. Accessed 15 July 2015, http://galeriedusseldorf.com.au/GDArtists/Fardin/GF2012/GF_ExhGD2012/source/gfexhgd2011_4.html.

Figure 56 Cathy Blanchflower, *Aster II.* 2003, oil on canvas, 167 x 167 cm. Accessed 15 July 2015, http://www.annandalegalleries.com.au/exhibition-enlargement.php?current=1&workID=2391&exhibitionID=225

Figure 57 Brian McKay, *Horizons.* 2000, oils on etched aluminium, 100 x 120 cm. Accessed 24 February 2019. https://www.galeriedusseldorf.com.au/GDArtists/McKay/BM2000/McKayExhWeb2000/BM01.jpg

Figure 58 Howard Taylor, *Tree Line with Green Paddock*. 1993, oil on board, 61 x 122 cm. Accessed 25 February 2019. https://s3.amazonaws.com/img.aasd.com.au/26450652.jpg

Figure 59 Candlestick banksia (*banksia attenuata*) flower in Wellard/Casuarina, September 2011. Photograph by the artist.

Figure 60 Margaret River (upriver section) showing deep blue-black colouring, February 2013. Photograph by the artist.

Figure 62 Donald Judd, *Untitled*. 1974, brass, each 101.6 x 101.6 x 101.6cm. (Collection of the National Gallery of Australia). Accessed 22 April 2019, https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?irn=14962

Figure 62 Grid pattern arrangement compositional test for *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* (2015).

Figure 63 The armature backing for *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* (2015) showing mitred edges and red painted panels.

Figure 64 Initial compositional drawing for *Wellard/Casuarina (reconstructing memories - 23 years in the family)* (2015). Photograph by the artist.

Figure 65 The initial half circle format of *Wellard/Casuarina (reconstructing memories - 23 years in the family)* (2015) before the armature was completed and the lower half of the circle added. Photograph by the artist.

Figure 66 Robert Hunter, *Untitled.* 1984, synthetic polymer paint on plywood, 122.4 × 244.1 cm. Accessed 15 July 2015, https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/66007/.

Figure 67 Trevor Vickers, *Untitled.* 2009, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 111.5 x 121.5 cm. Accessed 14 July 2016, http://www.artcollectivewa.com.au/artists/trevor-vickers/.

Figure 68 Trevor Vickers, *De Lacy.* 2008, acrylic on canvas, 101.5 x 101.5 cm. Accessed 15 July 2015, http://www.artcollectivewa.com.au/wp-content/gallery/trevor-vickers/trevorvickers-delacy-2008-101-5x101-5cm.jpg.

Figure 69 John Nixon, *Black square.* 1984, enamel paint on plywood, 65.8 x 66.0 cm. Accessed 26 March 2017, http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/73001/.

Figure 70 Trevor Vickers, *Untitled (Catalan)*. 1996, acrylic on gesso panel, 114 x 144cm. Accessed 6 March 2019. https://artcollectivewa.com.au/whats-on/trevor-vickers-catalan-series/#gallery-2

Figure 71 Robert Jacks, *Cut Piece, Modular 2*. 1969, rubber, 120 x 80cm. Accessed 6th March 2019. https://collection.heide.com.au/objects/5206

Figure 72 Robert Morris, *Untitled*. 1970, felt, 189 x 453.8 x 2.5cm. Accessed 6th March 2019. https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/4198/

Figure 73 Aida Tomescu, *Gloria*. 2014, oil on Belgian linen, 184 x 154 cm. Accessed 26 March 2017, http://aidatomescu.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/aida-tomescu-gloria-2014-oil-on-belgian-linen-184-x154cm.jpg.

Figure 74 David Serisier, *untitled black vertical painting no.1*. 2004, oil on linen, 31 x 25.5 cm. Accessed 15 July 2016, http://www.liverpoolstgallery.com.au/public_panel/exhibition_info.php?id_EXH=23.

Figure 75 Brian Blanchflower, *Scelsi II* (Detail from *Canopy LI*). 2001, oil, wax medium, pumice powder, synthetic polymer paint on laminated hessian, 221 x 171 cm. Accessed 13 July 2016, http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/198.2013.a-d/.

Figure 76 Berkowitz, Lauren. *Colourfield*. 2002, salt and exotic weeds, 6 x 6 m. (University of South Australia Art Museum, Adelaide). Photograph Grant Hancock. Accessed 24 February 2019, http://shermangalleries.sherman-scaf.org.au/artists/inartists/artist.asp%3Fartist=3&exhibition=5.html

Every reasonable effort has been made to acknowledge the owners of copyright material. I would be pleased to hear from any copyright owner who has been omitted or incorrectly acknowledged.

Appendix: Documentation of Exhibitions at Packenham Street Art Space (PSAS) and Turner Galleries

Exhibition flyer for *Place, timber, abstraction* at PS Art Space, produced by the artist, 2015.

Exhibition poster for *Place, timber, abstraction* at PS Art Space, produced by the artist in partnership with PS Art Space, 2015.
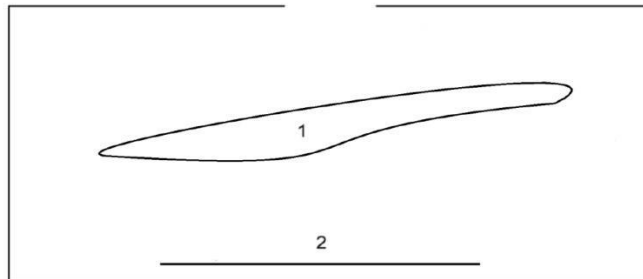
ENGINE
ROOMS
TURNER GALLERIES

Cassandra Sturm
Abstraction and sense of place
14th February – 25th February

The term 'a sense of place' refers to something which is both commonplace and inherently specific to personal experiences. This research is concerned with how to navigate a synthesis of these experiences and wider Australian contexts of place within a personal art practice. The concept of emplaced abstraction has offered a means by which to explore the haptic as well as the often ephemeral or imagined aspects of a sense of place, including belonging, cultural attitudes and ideologies, and the emplacement of a sense of self.

The project considers national and personal senses of belonging in place, and in landscape, within other Australian practices as well as my own. It does this by referencing investigations into place and landscape narratives by Peter Read, Bill Ashcroft, Ian McLean, and others, then exploring these narratives as they are engaged with in art practice. In particular by acknowledging the legacies of colonial narratives, and the troubled history of European-Australian identity and belonging in place and landscape, I negotiate between this as a trope in wider Australian practice and my own personal senses of belonging.

The research attempts to extend Jeff Malpas' notion that a sense of place is experienced both subjectively and through materiality. To do so the practice explores how a sense of place can be embedded in abstraction via the cultural and historical contexts of practice, the languaging of subjective relationships with places, and the use of materials such as timber as signifiers of place. These strategies are contextualised by drawing on Keith Broadfoot's notion that abstract ways of working, and particularly the monochrome, have become critical modes of examining Australian sense of place. I suggest that representing a sense of place through abstraction is able to make visible inherent tensions between personal and national concepts of place, identity, and landscape.

Malpas, Jeff.   2013. "Thinking topographically: place, space, and geography." http://jeffmalpas.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Thinking-Topographically-Place-Space-and-Geography.pdf

1. *Margaret River (Upriver)*, 2015, 42 elements, dimensions variable, $1500
spotted gum (corymbia maculata) and enamel on board

2. *Wellard/Casuarina (Summer Grasses)*, 2015, 16 elements, $1450
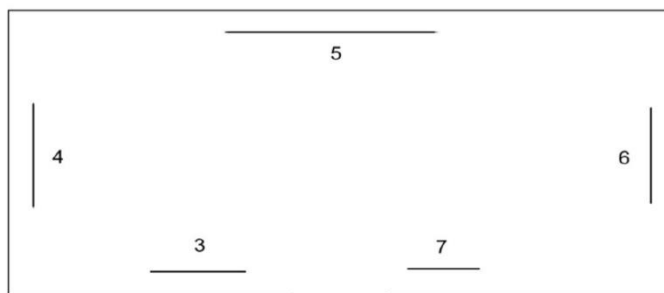dimensions variable, found timber, wax, and acrylic

TURNER GALLERIES, 470 William Street Northbridge WA 6003, open Tuesday to Saturday 11am – 5pm.

Floorsheets for *Abstraction and sense of place*, produced by the artist, 2017.

ENGINE ROOMS

TURNER GALLERIES

Cassandra Sturm
Abstraction and sense of place
14th February – 25th February

3. *After*, 2015, 47x76x3 cm, charcoal collected from local bushfires, $500
wax, marri (corymbia calophylla), and silky oak (grevillea robusta) on board

4. *Kalbarri (Shadow of the Gorge)*, 2015, 13 elements, 28x190x2.5 cm, $850
jarrah (eucalyptus marginata) and enamel on board

5. *Passage North-East I-III*, 2015, 81x84x2.5 cm each, marri (corymbia calophylla), $450 each
wax, and enamel on board

6. *Wellard/Casuarina (Reconstructing memories – 23 years in the family)*, 2015, $1700
150x150x4.5 cm, jarrah (eucalyptus marginata) recovered from flooring of the
family owned horse float owned for 23 years and estimated to be laid 30 years ago,
Tasmanian oak (eucalyptus delegatensis, eucalyptus obliqua or eucalyptus regnans),
and acrylic

7. *Mingenew*, 2014, 61x78x3 cm, acrylic and wax on plywood $350

TURNER GALLERIES, 470 William Street Northbridge WA 6003, open Tuesday to Saturday 11am – 5pm.

Floorsheets for *Abstraction and sense of place*, produced by the artist, 2017.

Documentation of Practice

Cassandra Ellen Sturm

Submitted as the Creative Practice Component for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Curtin University.

Figure A1 Cassandra Sturm, *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses).* 2015, found timber, wax and acrylic, 15 x 265 x 2.5 cm. Installation view, PS Art Space, 2015. Photograph by the artist.
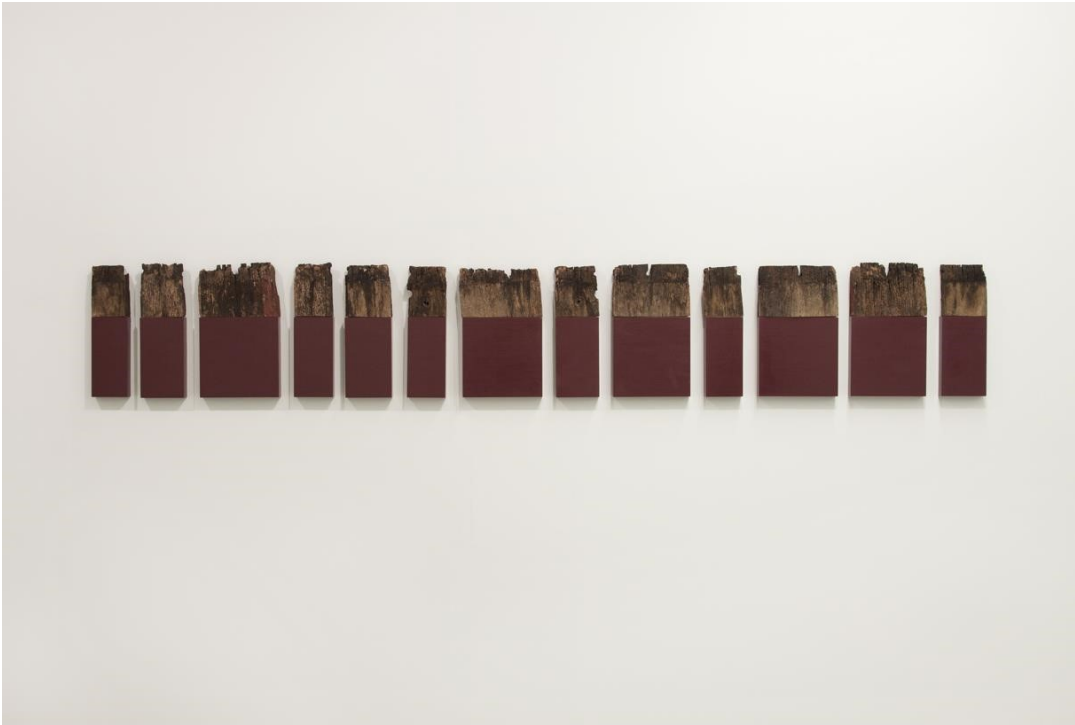
Figure A2 Cassandra Sturm, *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge)*. 2015, jarrah and enamel on board, 28 x 190 x 2.5 cm. Installation view, Turner Galleries, 2017. Photograph by Melanie McKee.

Figure A3 Cassandra Sturm, *Margaret River (upriver).* 2015, spotted gum (corymbia maculata) and enamel on board, 42 elements, dimensions variable. Installation view, PS Art Space, 2015. Photograph by the artist.
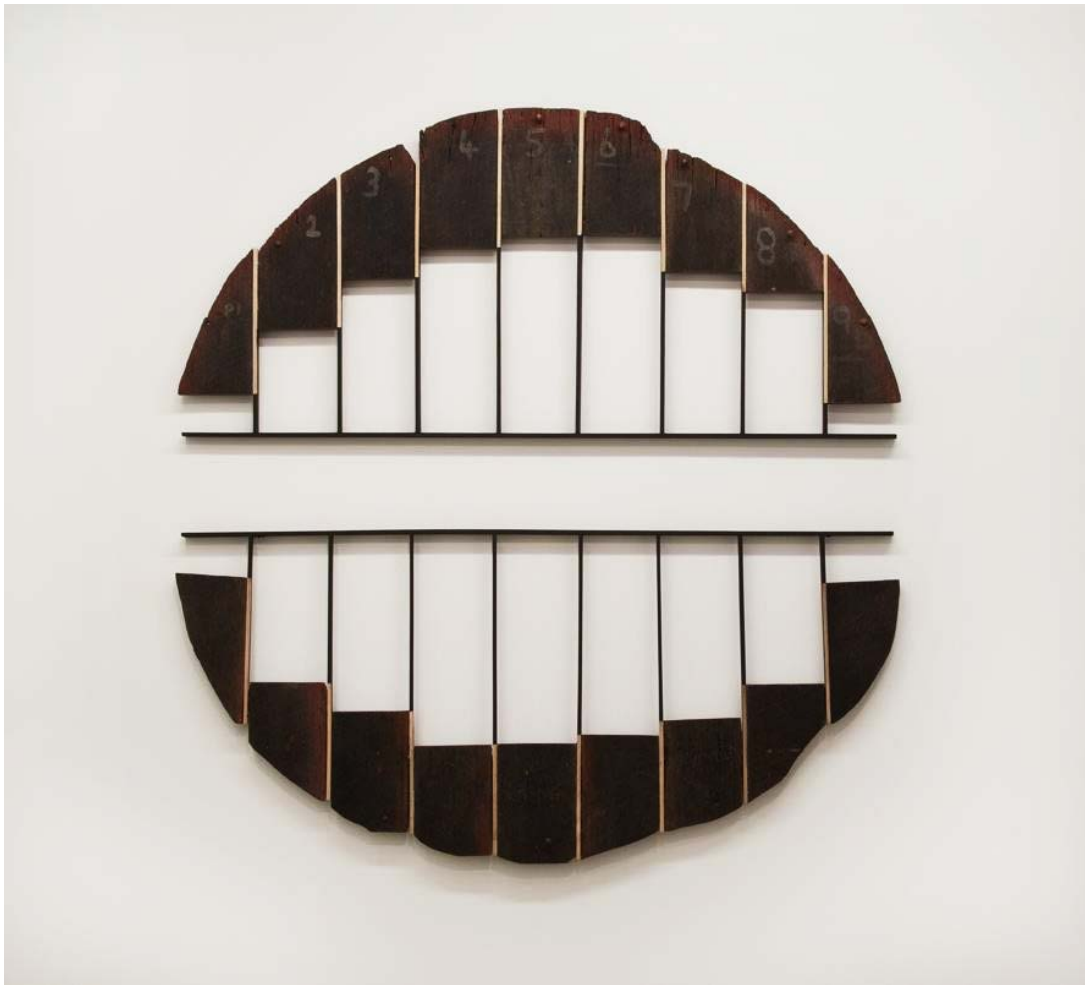
Figure A4 Cassandra Sturm, *Wellard/Casuarina (reconstructing memories - 23 years in the family).*
2015, jarrah, Tasmanian oak and acrylic paint, 150 x 150 x 4.5 cm. Installation view, Turner
Galleries, 2017. Photograph by Melanie McKee.

Figure A5 Cassandra Sturm, *Wellard/Casuarina (canopy).* 2015, woody pear nuts (*xylomelum occidentale*) suspended from three steel frames, dimensions variable. Installation view, PS Art Space, 2015. Photograph by the artist.

Figure A6 Cassandra Sturm, *Banksia, marri, christmas tree.* 2013, banksia, marri timber, oil on board, 30 x 30 cm each panel. Photograph by the artist.
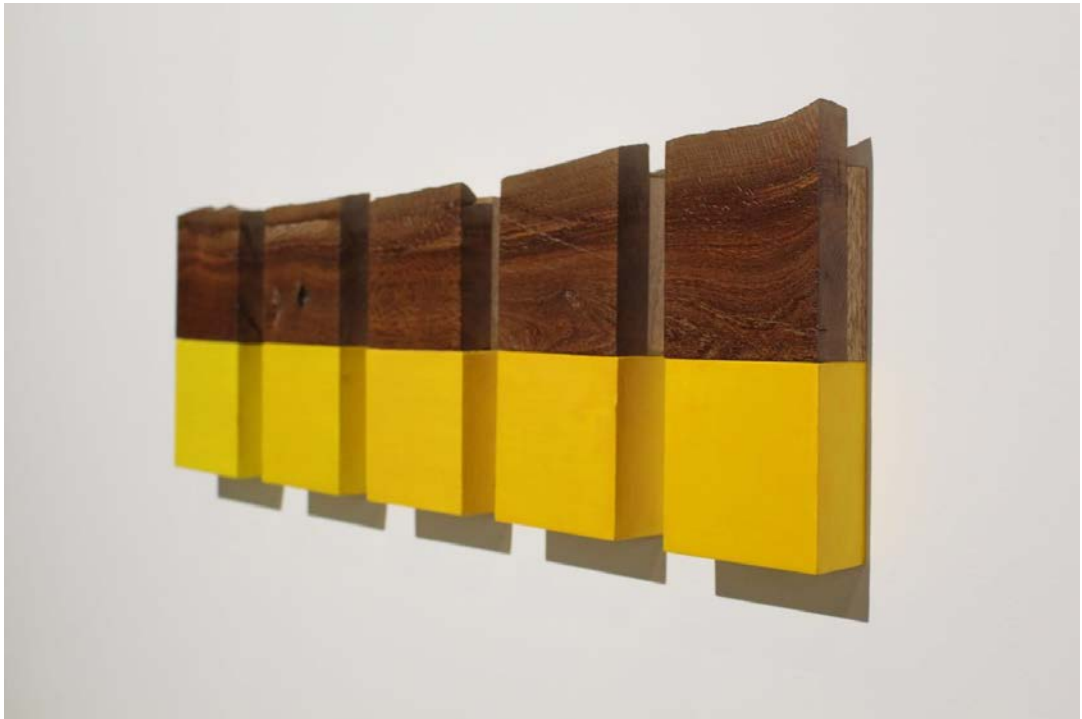
Figure A7 Cassandra Sturm, *Wellard/Casuarina (banksia study).* 2014, candlestick banksia (banksia attenuata), wax and oil on board, 24 x 65 x 4.5 cm. Installation view, PS Art Space, 2015. Photograph by the artist.

Figure A8 Cassandra Sturm, *Margaret River forest.* 2012, mixed media on plywood. Photograph by the artist.

Figure A9 Cassandra Sturm, *Untitled.* 2012, ink and varnish on plywood. Photograph by the artist.

Figure A10 Cassandra Sturm, *Imagined landscape II.* 2012, and *Imagined landscape III.* 2012, both acrylic on plywood. Photograph by the artist.

Figure A11 Cassandra Sturm, *Passage north-east I-IV*. 2015, marri, wax, and enamel on board, 81 x 84 x 2.5 cm each panel. Installation view, PS Art Space, 2015. Photograph by the artist.

Figure A12 Cassandra Sturm, *Margaret River (upriver).* 2015, detail, spotted gum (corymbia maculata) and enamel on board, 42 elements, dimensions variable. Installation view, Turner Galleries, 2017. Photograph by Melanie McKee.

Figure A13 Cassandra Sturm, *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge).* 2015, jarrah and enamel on board, 28 x 190 x 2.5 cm. Installation view, PS Art Space, 2015. Photograph by the artist.

Figure A14 Cassandra Sturm, *Wellard/Casuarina (reconstructing memories - 23 years in the family).* 2015, detail, jarrah, Tasmanian oak and acrylic paint, 150 x 150 x 4.5 cm. Installation view, PS Art Space, 2015. Photograph by the artist.

Figure A15 Cassandra Sturm, *After.* 2015, charcoal collected from local bushfires, wax, marri, silky oak (*grevillea robusta*) on board, 47 x 76 x 3 cm. Installation view, PS Art Space, 2015. Photograph by the artist.
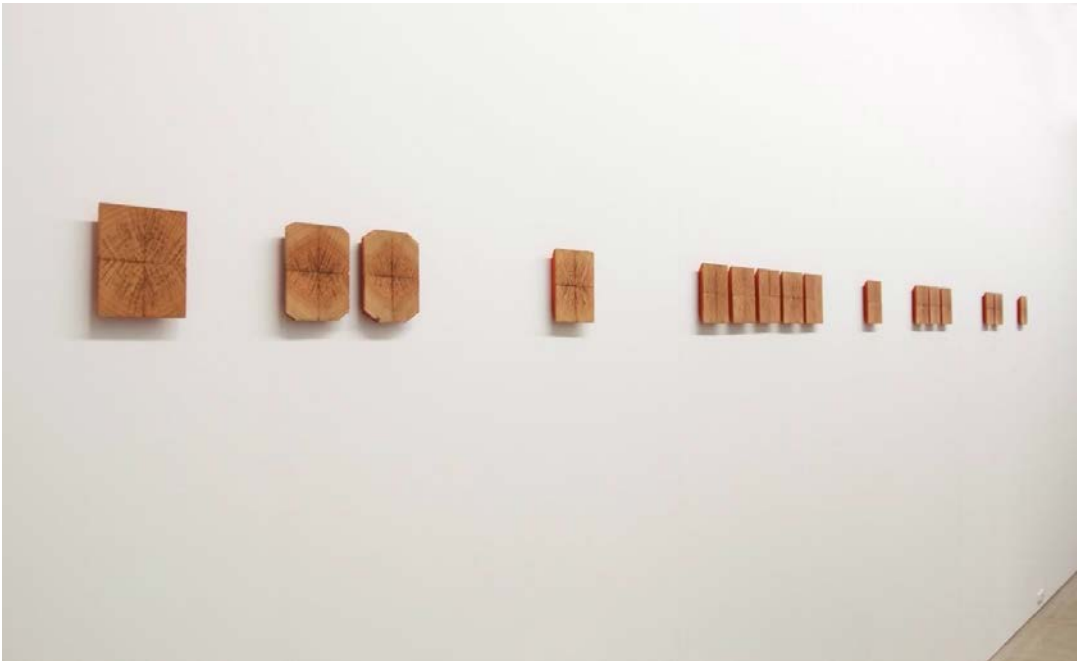
Figure A16 Cassandra Sturm, *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses).* 2015, detail, found timber, wax and acrylic, 15 x 265 x 2.5 cm. Installation view, Turner Galleries, 2017. Photograph by Melanie McKee.

 Figure A17 Cassandra Sturm, *Mingenew.* 2014, acrylic and wax on board, 61 x 78 x 3 cm.
Installation view, Turner Galleries, 2017. Photograph by Melanie McKee.

Figure A18 Cassandra Sturm, *Margaret River (shallows).* 2015, silky oak (grevillea robusta) and acrylic on board, 30 x 30 x 3 cm. Installation view, PS Art Space, 2015. Photograph by the artist.

Figure A19 View from Engine Room 1 to Engine Room 2 showing *Mingenew*, *After*, and obstructed view of *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses)* and *Margaret River (upriver)*. Turner Galleries, 2017. Photograph by Melanie McKee.

Figure A20 Installation view, PS Art Space, 2015. Photograph by the artist.

Figure A21 Installation view, PS Art Space, 2015. Photograph by the artist.

Figure A22 Installation view, showing *Wellard/Casuarina (reconstructing memories - 23 years in the family),* 2015, jarrah, Tasmanian oak and acrylic paint, 150 x 150 x 4.5 cm, and *Mingenew,* 2014, acrylic and wax on board, 61 x 78 x 3 cm. Installation view, Turner Galleries, 2017. Photograph by Melanie McKee.

Figure A23 Installation view, showing *Kalbarri (shadow of the gorge),* 2015, jarrah and enamel on board, 28 x 190 x 2.5 cm and *Passage north-east I-III,* 2015, marri, wax, and enamel on board, 81 x 84 x 2.5 cm each panel. Installation view, Turner Galleries, 2017. Photograph by Melanie McKee.

Figure A24 Cassandra Sturm, *Passage north-east I-III.* 2015, marri, wax, and enamel on board, 81 x 84 x 2.5 cm each panel. Installation view, Turner Galleries, 2017. Photograph by Melanie McKee.
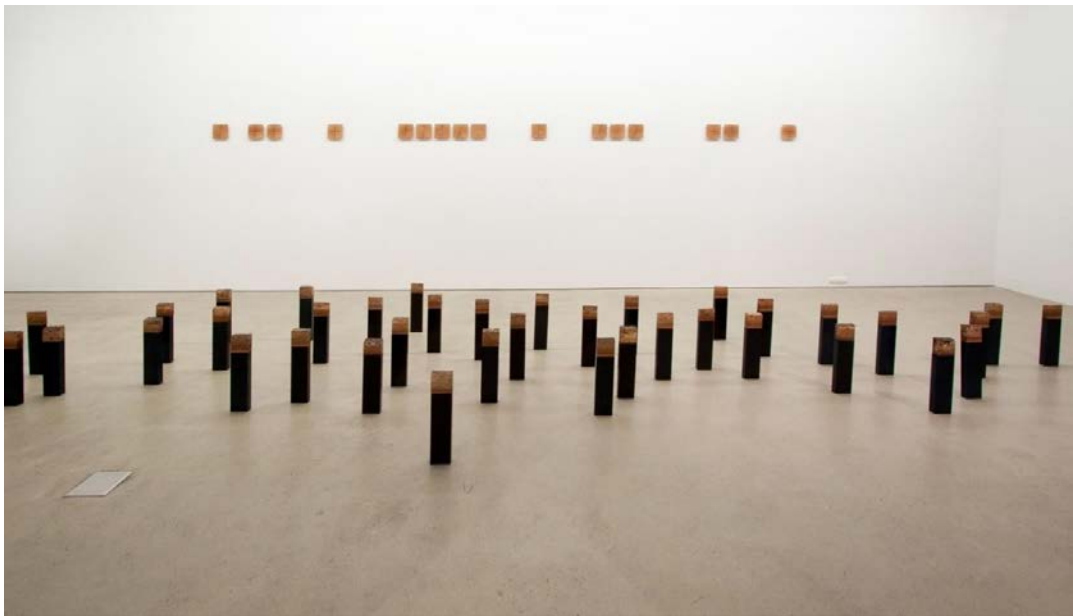
Figure A25 Installation view, *Margaret River (upriver),* 2015, spotted gum (*corymbia maculata*) and enamel on board, 42 elements, dimensions variable, and *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses),* 2015, found timber, wax and acrylic, 15 x 265 x 2.5 cm. Turner Galleries, 2017. Photograph by Melanie McKee.

Figure A26 Cassandra Sturm, *Wellard/Casuarina (summer grasses).* 2015, detail, found timber, wax and acrylic, 15 x 265 x 2.5 cm. Installation view, PS Art Space, 2015. Photograph by the artist.