

Painted Pools:
a lens into subjectivity

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Fine Art

University of Tasmania
September 2008

Declaration of Originality

The material in this exegesis is original, except where due acknowledgement is given, and has not been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The encouragement, support and guidance I have been given, over the lengthy duration of this project, came in varied and unexpected ways from many people from different walks of life in both Tasmania and Canada. They are too numerous to mention but nevertheless they will not be forgotten.

However, I would like to mention and express my gratitude to the library and administration staff at the University of Tasmania School of Art; to Diane Smith, Mary Pridmore and Jane Quon for being there for me; to Patricia Scott for her keen editorial eye; and to Richard Hale, who was kind and generous in providing me with accommodation while researching at Lake St. Clair. And to Gary Pearson, at the University of British Columbia Okanagan campus, who offered useful suggestions, just at the right time.

I have had four supervisors throughout this project: Raymond Arnold, Lindsay Broughton, Milan Milojevic and Professor Noel Frankham. They have all greatly contributed to my growth as an artist and academic, and to this project by continually offering their individual insights and by helping me to open my eyes and mind to new ways of seeing and thinking. I am grateful to each of them. A special acknowledgement goes to Lindsay for his excellence in assisting me through to the first round; and to Professor Frankham, who encouraged me to continue when I didn't know if I had the strength to carry on, for being patient with me until I was able to do so and for being there at the end with his expertise in helping me clarify my writing further and in keeping me from wandering from my purpose while doing it.

A heartfelt thanks goes to my parents and siblings who have always stood by me. Dana you are a treasure and Jacqui, Vonna and Scott of Hobart – you have been such good-mates.

And lastly, this project is dedicated to my precious teenagers, Tekarra and James; without their blessing, I would not have been able to live in Tasmania while actualising this dream. My love, hope and desire for them is that they too, will discover, have faith and not give up on the journey of living out the dreams they have for their lives. Anything is possible!

ABSTRACT

painted pools: a lens into subjectivity

This project is an investigation of visual metaphor: specifically, the metaphorical potential of images of water, from evocations of tranquil river pools to those of open sea. With imagery that fluctuates and moves from abstraction into representation, the project aims to present painted images of water that may induce a reflective or meditative frame of mind in the viewer, one that is akin to a common response to water itself.

Within this framework the project seeks to convey the relationship between images of the particular with the universal: how the specificity of place can possess a universality of meaning and how one's own personal history can oscillate within this framework.

It is posited that an artist's art practice is driven by a search for meaning, and in this instance it has been a *rite of passage*. Paradoxically, however, this research does not realize solutions to various challenges but is an expression of these challenges. Such a motivation – this search for meaning – is essentially subjective.

Since the exegesis necessarily includes a description of the candidate's own artistic process and interpretation of the work, a commensurately subjective style of writing has been adopted, one that utilizes the methodology of hermeneutics. Thus, the project has been directed by a phenomenological way of knowing.

The project has been shaped by research into other disciplines, such as anthropology, literature, psychology, philosophy, theology/spirituality and science. The main art-theoretical context for this project is Romanticism,

as both an historical movement and a persistent contemporary orientation. However, other artists not necessarily aligned to the romantic tradition have been referenced. Relevant artists are Caspar David Friedrich, J.M.W. Turner, Edvard Munch, Peter Booth, Jennifer Bartlett, William Robinson, Pat Steir, and Mark Rothko, while Impressionist Claude Monet's late images of water have been important references.

Commonly seen to co-exist on the surface of water are reflections of light from above and beyond, and embedded forms below and within the water. This dichotomous simultaneity may, it is suggested, be an allegory of our existence – of love and loss, of life and death. The concept of ocean waves is a metaphor for consciousness and experience. The body and the painted object are virtual pools. Thus it is an aim of the research that the painted images may serve as more than representations of water per se, that they may be considered to be a result of and as a representation of memory, experience and consciousness.

The investigation has striven for such a synthesis of surface representation and inner *felt* complexity. It has frequently involved thinking *in* paint as distinguished from thinking *about* painting. Using the traditional field of oil painting and landscape painting, the project has yet sought to challenge perspectives, serving as a vehicle for stimulating dialogue on the issues of ecological awareness, interconnectedness and wholeness, even equating to James Elkins' concept of art-as-alchemy in its power to effect transformation.

PREFACE

The nature of artistic inquiry and processes is bound, at some level, to personal expression and experience. The question is, though, can the exploration of the personal be elevated into the public arena of shared experiences? If we recognize our commonalities rather than our differences and realize that each of us lives in relation to each other throughout our unique journey in this life, we see at the heart of it all is love. Love assumes many forms, expressions and meanings, and is synonymous with life. Indeed, love is an embodied experience and a mystery. My MFA project, *painted pools: a lens into subjectivity*, explores water as a metaphor for life. The abstract and representational paintings of images of water are the symbolizing and metamorphosing of my direct experiences of life and love.

My earliest memories of a love of water are lucid. As a child it was the call of water that drew me to play and swim for endless hours in nearby lakes and rivers. In my adolescence and as an adult, wherever I lived I would find my way to the water. One of the first large paintings I made in art school in 1985 was a picture of a joyful young child dancing on the shoreline in shallow water. There was an unnerving edge to this painting - an ominous, fiery shape pierced the darkened sky and pointed towards the unsuspecting toddler. I entitled this mysterious painting, *Electrogenesis*. In 1987 I graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours degree and over the next eight years there was little time for painting while I was raising three young children and managing a cabin resort with my husband in the Rocky Mountains in Jasper National Park, Canada.

It was in 1995 that I was able to fully comprehend the painting, *Electrogenesis*' relationship to my life when my one and a half year old daughter, Leah, who actually looked like the child in the painting, drowned in a river on a spring evening. There were, in fact, five other premonitory paintings that I had made prior to Leah's birth that referenced water, a

toddler, a nursing mother and the physical location of her death. In commemoration of Leah, on the first anniversary of her passing, I presented an exhibition entitled, *Leah's Gift*, which featured the six portent paintings and six new pieces I painted during that ensuing year.

Consequently, I resigned from cabin resort management to focus my energy on landscape painting. It was in nature and wilderness areas that I felt most alive and connected to the creative source. Within five years of painting landscapes I was represented by three commercial galleries that spanned three different provinces: British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan; I had become a juried member of the Alberta Society of Artists and I had a painting selected for a touring exhibition that was organized in collaboration with the Edmonton Art Gallery; I had paintings purchased by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the Consulate General of Japan, other corporations and numerous private collectors. However, it was because of my desire to expand and contextualize my practice within my field, and to engage in contemporary discourse, that I applied and was accepted into the Master of Fine Art degree program at the University of Tasmania. Natural Environment and Wilderness studies were one of the four research strengths at the University and it was this strength that had become well established in the Tasmanian School of Art.

In early January 2003, I flew with my husband, daughter and son, approximately 7000 miles across the Pacific Ocean to the shores of the Tasman Sea to live in Hobart, Tasmania to undertake this MFA project. I landed and, surrounded by water, I felt an immediate connection and love for this ancient island in the southern hemisphere. It was a place I had never been but only visited in my imagination and dreams long since I had discovered a catalogue about the University of Tasmania in 1987. My original project proposal was to make a visual investigation into relationships between objective and subjective landscapes. I was unable to solidify this idea further until I made a journey into some the state's natural environments. It was on my second excursion, a trip to Waddamana, located in the Central Highlands, that my project focus

became apparent. During a walk up the Ouse River, I rested on the rocky banks and drew the surface reflections on the water and the mesmerizing circular black shadows morphing beneath the surface (Fig. 1). At the same time as I was gazing outwards I was reflecting on the past and the memory of losing Leah through water.

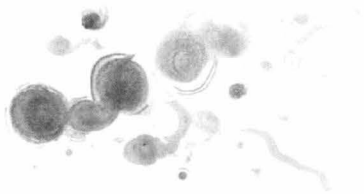


Fig. 1 Destanne Norris, from sketchbook, 2003, graphite on paper, 21 x 26 cm

Water, this pool, this river, was speaking to me. Water was to be the subject of my project.

I didn't know just how significant it would be to focus on my sense of water as a metaphor for my life, and life generally. The events that were to disrupt and enrich my candidature added *fresh* wounds and great challenges, and rewards, to the project.

During the course of the project I would make three return flights over the ocean and experience three more major losses. The first was to accompany my son and daughter who wanted to return with their father to live in Canada. I spent a month and a half helping to settle them into a new life before returning to resume my studies. One week after I arrived back in Hobart, without my children, and without my marriage, I learned that my maternal grandmother had passed away. The second trip, that I took eight months later, was to reconnect with my son and daughter for four weeks during their summer holidays. I returned to my work again at the University and it was only four months after that that I took leave of absence to fly home, once more, to be with my family and to help care for

my mother who was dying from cancer. It was a period of five months that elapsed before I could fly back to Hobart and resume my project. A mere ten months later, I bid farewell to my beloved Tasmania, and flew for the last time, back to Canada to live.

While it is not generally accepted practice in academia to include such personal experiences in a preface, it is pertinent in this project. It enables the reader to have a more transparent view of the factors that contributed to the undulating nature in the paintings and in the way that they can be seen to oscillate between abstraction and representation, light and dark, and in the rise and fall of the wave. It was for the love of painting and a dream of a Masters Degree at the University of Tasmania, fifteen years prior, that I found my way to the banks of the Tasman Sea. It was for the love of the three generations of females on my mother's side – my daughter, grandmother and mother – through which the project was delivered. It was for maternal love that I chose to return to the country of my birth to live, paint and complete the project. And this has all been conceived through water as a subject, a conduit, and a metaphor for this love – this love of life, in which the mystery of it all continues...

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Investigation Question and Aim

Water is a conduit. The surface of water is like a membrane, similar to the skin that covers our bodies: our flesh and bones. Likewise, the material substance of paint forms a virtual skin on the painted surface. The surfaces of water, the body and a painting form a site for exchange. It begins at the surface, where we touch and are touched. There is an exchange of information that opens a passage to new possibilities and deeper realizations. In addition, on the surface of water the reflection of light and the ability to see in depth coexist. This confluence is an allegory of our existence – of love and loss, of life and death. Water is a metaphor for life.

We engage with a painting through its material image, *through* the surface. However, in order to have a deeper understanding and appreciation of an image we need to penetrate and look beyond its surface appearance. The fact that it is possible to have an in-depth experience *at* the surface is paradoxical. Surface appearances are intriguing and may be considered to be the blurred line of distinction between the seen and the unseen forces in nature, between illusion and reality, between representation and abstraction. Painting, in large part, is an argument about surface.

This exegesis has involved a hermeneutical approach. The Oxford English Dictionary definition of hermeneutics is the science of interpretation especially of the scriptures.¹ Hermeneutics has been widely applied over the past two centuries in the interpretation of literary works, sacred stories and human behaviour generally. In contemporary terms, the meaning of hermeneutics includes an holistic interpretation of experience and penetration beneath the surface of appearances in search of underlying

¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Volume V, H–K. Great Britain: Clarendon Press, 1933, p 243

meaning. An holistic interpretation is multi-layered and multi-faceted. It looks at things deeply, from multiple points of view or perspectives. It is inclusive rather than exclusive; it includes the literal and the metaphorical, the rational and the emotional. Wholeness (holism) is created through balancing opposites and in complementary relationships.

Hermeneutical investigation in the field of visuality has become a popular practice in contemporary art theory. Nicholas Davey (b.1950) in his essay, 'The Hermeneutics of Seeing', seeks to broaden the linguistic approach by fostering a more varied, open and dialogical dimension. One of the ways is to be particularly sensitive to how words are used to reveal what is present within an image.² In the conclusion of his essay, Davey states, 'hermeneutical aesthetics contends that art achieve its proper provenance in the metaphoric translation and cross-wiring of ideas and sensible particulars'.³ Hermeneutical interpretation is exemplified through the exploration of the factual and metaphorical, and thus interdisciplinary diversity and the in-depth investigation into various relative ideas and perspectives in the research are interlaced in the exegesis.

The project explores the relationships between fact and metaphor, representation and abstraction through the materiality of paint and painted images of water. Encompassing this investigation is Romanticism in art, James Elkin's theory of painting as alchemy, landscape and place, and the issue of embodiment. While the primary question posed is: *Can the material substance of paint and visual language be used to explore the notion of water as a metaphor for life?* In undertaking this MFA project, it was my aim and intention to explore if there was a way I could use paint and imagery to portray the concept of water as a metaphor for life, while

² Davey, N., 'The Hermeneutics of Seeing' in Heywood, I. & Sandywell, B. (Ed.), *Interpreting Visual Culture Explorations in the Hermeneutics of the Visual*. London: Routledge, 1999, p. 10.

³ *Ibid.* p. 23.

being directed by my lived occurrences of life itself.⁴

In this project, the pool is conceived in three ways: as a reservoir in nature, as the image enshrined in the painted object, and as the human body (which itself actually comprises approximately 70% water). The abstract and representational painted images of water are embodied, a mirror of my phenomenological body. My paintings, alchemically speaking, are my body's gestures and marks, involving thin, transparent glazes and thick impasto paint, brilliant colour, symbolic lines, shapes, light and dark as it sought to find and express the perfect form. This is in reference to art historian, James Elkins, who in his book, *What Painting Is*, writes 'painting is alchemy'.⁵

Alchemy is the art of transmutation (or transformation). In alchemy – water and stones, fluid and pigment, liquid and solid – are mixed together over the heat of the fire in search of a pure substance, the Philosopher's Stone. The alchemist, turned painter, experiments and is imbued in his/her substance working feverishly in his/her laboratory turned studio. This painter's quest is to transform the material substance of paint, using the flame from his/her passions, into a painting that is authentic and is of some value. Inherent in this work, though, is a considerable degree of variables and change. According to Elkins', the language of alchemy is the most developed for thinking *in* substances and processes.⁶

The project is about thinking and feeling *in* paint as distinguished from thinking *about* painting. For instance there has been a high degree of experimentation with paint and methods of paint application; the paintings have been made using an intuitive approach – the discoveries made while *in* the painting led the process and determined the next step; the painted

⁴ These lived occurrences, which are paralleled to a *rite of passage* have been outlined in the Preface. This connection is discussed in footnote 44 on p. 32 in Chapter Two and in Chapter Three at the beginning of each of the three sub-headings.

⁵ Elkins, J., *What Painting Is*. London. Routledge, 2000, p. 9.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 4.

images continued to change and they shift from abstraction into representation.

As a traveller who ventures into natural environments and places for inspiration and recreation, my actions, perceptions and sensations are functions of my body's orientation in the world. Christopher Tilley (b.1955) in *Metaphor and Material Culture*, claims that places or locales is one of the two most important sources of landscape metaphors. 'Knowledge and the metaphorical understanding of landscape is thus intimately bound up with the experience of the human body in place, and in movement between places.'⁷

The body, as a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual entity, has its own way of knowing. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908 - 1961) in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, proposes that a body is inseparable from its consciousness and, in turn, its consciousness is a product of perception.⁸ However, to take it one step further, perceptions and sensations - thoughts and feelings - are derived from a certain perspective – a way of seeing, a particular lens.

However, there is a blurred line between the ambiguous experience of sensory perceptions and feelings and landscape. David Abrams (b.1957) in *The Spell of the Sensuous*, echoes this thought of an interchange with the landscape:

*The world and I reciprocate one another. The landscape as I directly experience it is hardly a determinate object; it is an ambiguous realm that responds to my emotions and calls forth feelings from me in turn.*⁹

⁷ Tilley, C., *Metaphor and Material Culture*. Oxford. Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999 p. 173.

⁸ Merleau-Ponty, M., (Trans. Smith, C.), *The Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1962.

⁹ Abrams, D., *The Spell of the Sensuous* New York: Random House, 1996, p. 33.

The interplay between the representational and the more abstracted paintings of water mirrors shifting perspectives of perceptions and sensations. In alchemical language this project is about change and transformation. And, it is about how it can be synonymous with the nature of water and, phenomenologically speaking, the fluid body as it experiences universal feelings of love and loss, life and death as it flows through life.

The Relationship of Previous Work to the Project



Fig. 2 Destanne Norris, *Climb to Woolley's Shoulder*, 2000, oil on canvas, 105.6 x 52.8 cm

*If ever the search for a tranquil belief should end,
The future might stop emerging out of the past
Out of what is full of us; yet the search
And the future emerging out of us seem to be one...
The way through the world
is more difficult to find than the way beyond it¹⁰*

Journeys. We are all on a journey finding, as poet Wallace Stevens (1879 - 1955) writes, our *way through the world*.

In 1987 I graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours Degree in painting and drawing from the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. The main focus of my studies was to experiment and explore my chosen media, methods and techniques. I made both representational and abstract paintings, but did not settle on a specific subject, theme or genre.

In 1997 my work and practice became based upon my direct experiences in nature while on various adventures and trips into wilderness and natural

¹⁰ From a poem by Stevens, W. cited in McEvelley, T. 'On the Manner of Addressing Clouds', *Art News*, Vol. 22, No. 10, 1984, p. 70.

environment areas.¹¹ I painted on location and from drawings and photographs in my studio, reliving the memory of the experiences. Although my landscape paintings were representational and were more aligned to the picturesque, scenic tradition, my practice was founded on being present in nature and attempting to connect to the forces that create. Being in nature is akin to a spiritual retreat for me.



Fig. 3 Destanne Norris, *Three Larches*, 2000, oil on canvas, 105.6 x 96.8 cm

During this time I was also influenced by my research into the iconic Canadian Group of Seven painters. In the 1920's this group sought, through their vibrant work, to challenge the established notion of art making, by calling for the Canadian people to look to their own land. Several of the group, responsive to their environment and in pursuit of a new artistic nationalism, ventured to the Rocky Mountains to paint in their fresh and vibrant style.¹²

After five years of painting, I wanted to develop my practice further by undertaking a post-graduate research project. In 2003, after being accepted into the Master of Fine Arts program at the University of

¹¹ I was very fortunate to have Doris McCarthy (b.1910), one of Canada's highly regarded landscape painters as a mentor, who followed in the tradition of the Group of Seven painters, and also contemporary landscape painter, David Alexander (b.1947).

¹² Christensen, L., *A Hiker's Guide To Art of the Canadian Rockies*. Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1999, p. 4.

Tasmania, I moved from Jasper, a National Park in the Canadian Rocky Mountains, to Hobart, Tasmania.



Fig. 4 Destanne Norris, *October Storm over Bow Glacier*, 2000, oil on canvas, 105.6 x 96.8 cm

It is important to mention my previous work, as it is the root of this Masters project in Tasmania. Besides my love of water, nature and the environment, my fascination is with the mystery of what lies beneath and beyond surface appearances. In this instance, it is what lies beneath the surface appearance of Tasmania – what is seen and what is not seen. How I felt directed in my quest to experience and paint the landscape in Tasmania. How, when I arrived, I felt a powerful connection to the place, like I had *come home* to a place I had never been. As well, I am fascinated with the mystery of the creative process, which like the play of water, mediates between the conscious and unconscious mind.

It was my experience of moving through space and resting in a particular place on the Ouse River, in the heartland of Tasmania, that I realized water was to be the focus of my project. Geographer, Yi Fu Tuan (b.1930) states, 'the idea of "space" and "place" require each other for definition'.¹³ Also, place can be seen to frame and, in part, determine the experiential nature of events. Tasmanian writer Margaret Scott (1934 - 2005) makes

¹³ Tuan, Y., *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p. 6.



Fig. 5 Destanne Norris, from sketchbook, 2003, graphite on paper, 21 x 26 cm

reference to Wordsworth's *inward eye* and how *place* and artistic creation are integral to artists in Tasmania.

*The Tasmanian solitude assists in the focusing of what Wordsworth called the 'inward eye' not simply because physical isolation is a form of paradigm or mimetic invocation of an internal creative process in which something in the psyche is revealed and a new vision or a new voice comes to life.*¹⁴

As with a new vision or a new voice, so a new beginning follows the end, the death, the passing away of the old.



Fig. 6 Destanne Norris, *Embodied Pool 1*, 2004, oil on board, 47 x 110 cm

¹⁴ Scott, M., 'The Artist in Tasmania', in Holmes, J. (Ed.), *Brushing the Dark; Recent Art in Tasmania*. Hobart: CAST, 1996, p. 49.

'Inland, source, centre or core - these symbols of the exploration mystique all convey the idea of beginning and of past time.'¹⁵ I was here as an artist, walking and researching upstream in Tasmania on a *mythic exploration*, of the kind which Tuan describes as a journey 'into the heart of a continent as a return to ancient roots, to a country known but long since forgotten'.¹⁶ John Dominic Crossan (b.1934) refers to this mythic dimension in *The Dark Interval*. He suggests that myth functions to mediate between and reconcile opposites.¹⁷ In the project, it is this mediation and relationship between fact and metaphor, representation and abstraction, and landscape and place.

¹⁵ Tuan, Y., *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p. 125 - 126.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Anderson, H. & Foley, E., *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 1998, p. 13.

Parameters and Limitations

The project is based on a journey and the methodological approach to painting is intuitive. As highlighted in the Preface, it uses direct experiences in life. Within these parameters there exist a readiness and openness to possibilities, change and new directions, albeit tempered by the need to be discriminating and discerning in making choices. The shifting perspectives and experiences of ambiguity that result from this openness is challenging to work with.

The artistic research in this project has been practice-based research. For the most part, I did not research artists in advance of making my paintings. In most instances, I would make a painting or a few paintings and then I would research the artist whose work and concerns would help me describe and define what I was doing. Notwithstanding the significance of research into visual artists and art theory, there has been an inquiry into other disciplines as well, such as anthropology, psychology, philosophy, theology, science and literature.

In the course of my research, I discovered that most artists' visual work makes reference to and can be discussed in terms of how their work has a relationship to another discipline or disciplines. For example, Caspar David Friedrich (1774 - 1840) and iconic symbols (Christianity/Theology); Edvard Munch (1863 - 1944) and his examination into the ranges of human emotion (Psychology/Philosophy); Mark Rothko (1903 - 1970) and his colour-field paintings (Spirituality/Mysticism); Pat Steir (b.1938) and her exploration into different painterly styles and cultural traditions (Art History/Philosophy). There appears to be a natural cross over between the study of art and other disciplines. To this end, a more interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary approach has been applied, which is in keeping with hermeneutics identified in the Investigation Question and Aim.

It was not my intention to necessarily choose artists who used water as a subject in art. I was not investigating artists by the way they painted water to solely assist and inform me while I was making my own formal decisions in the painting process. Instead, I have chosen to investigate and discuss artists I found interesting in other ways. They have been relevant for various reasons. For example, the artist's concepts and cross-disciplinary influences, motivations, the story of their life history, and an artist's reported statements in their own words.

The project is largely experimental and employs various techniques and approaches to painting. Undertaking such an extensive experimental approach, as described in detail in Chapter Three, requires considerable time and there are many aborted attempts and ideas, which is costly because a lot of materials are used. However, this factor is not negative. It is understood that this is the nature of the experimental process and that the many aborted attempts do contribute to what eventually becomes the final body of paintings. The MFA thesis, for me, is not just the end product, but it is the journey, it is the process and the progress, which culminates in the final body of paintings.

The project involves the substance of oil paint and particular elements of visual language – texture, colour, line, shape and light – to realize images of the kind envisioned. Except for the large-scale drawings on paper, which were made using a combination of acrylic wash, graphite and charcoal, all the paintings in the project were painted using oil paint. As a practicing oil painter who had not explored or mastered all the possibilities within the substance of oil paint it was a conscious decision to use this medium in my investigation of water. I did not consider using water-colour or acrylic paint, even though the subject was water. Oil paint was the medium of choice over synthetic, water-soluble acrylic because of its sensuous qualities of smell, touch and appearance.

The project focuses on relationships between what can be seen as representation and what may be considered abstraction and of realizing

works that are seen to situate representation and abstraction cohesively. The concept in the project was not to necessarily have a series of paintings that pulled representation and abstraction together into one work. It was my intention that the final body of paintings oscillate between abstract and representational paintings. I argue that a painted image of water may be interpreted to be water as a metaphor for life, regardless of whether the image of water is a representational painting or an abstract painting. Paradoxically, water is literally a metaphor for life.

Significance

The significance of this project may be evaluated from two standpoints: significance for the field of landscape painting in contemporary art and culture; and significance for me as a post-graduate academic candidate and artist. In terms of the world's entire stock of artistic knowledge, this project has not set out to produce *new* knowledge, as such. It has sought, however, to draw attention and to help bring to contemporary discourse the essential, life-sustaining relationship human beings have with water. From an academic and an artistic standpoint this research is highly significant in terms of the development of my knowledge and practice. In turn, this increases my ability in being able to contribute.

Water, as a subject in art in the context of this project may be considered to be part of a cultural and ecological consciousness raising that exists along side political and social perspectives; the belief in our ability to effect cultural and ecological change and to create positive transformation. In addition to environmental concerns over water, two other topical issues in this past decade have been consciousness and emotional intelligence, for example the theme and title of the Sydney Biennale 2004, *Emotion and Reason*. Landscape painting can be considered to have a part to play in relaying this heightened consciousness, which is awareness, of our *felt*, sensuous, relationship to nature and water. Furthermore, this relationship can be considered to be *embodied*.

Another significant aspect is that the project seeks to explore the relationships between the literal and metaphorical, and representational and abstracted interpretations of water; and universal meaning within the specificity of place.

Lastly, of significance, is the project seeks to illuminate, through painted images of water, recognition of shared experiences. How individual, personal experiences of love and loss, and life and death – experiences

that are known and common to all individuals – can be evoked in, even stimulated by paintings in a universal, transpersonal way.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTEXT

This chapter, contextualizing the project, is an integration of visual artistic research into an elaboration into key concepts in the project: Metaphor; Romanticism; Landscape and Place; Water, the Pool and Waves; and Representation and Abstraction. To begin, the meaning of metaphor and metaphor in painting, as an over-arching thematic, is highlighted.

Metaphor

Painted pools: a lens into subjectivity is an investigation into water as a subject in art, one that is presented as serving two functions: as an objective fact, on the one hand, and as a universal metaphor on the other.

According to Tilley, many contemporary linguistic theorists see metaphor as the key trope of classical rhetoric. Although, metaphor is generally considered the domain of the literary arts, it can be applied to the visual arts as well. In simple terms, metaphor (metaphora: carrying over) is 'an illustrative device in which a term or frame of reference is used within a different level or referential frame'.¹⁸ It involves, as does hermeneutics, 'comprehending some entity from the point of view, or perspective, of another'.¹⁹ Metaphor is linked with the imaginative faculties, and the power of metaphor aids in 'producing insights into the nature of human lived realities'.²⁰

Tilley makes the point that metaphors provide a means by which we can make linkages between what otherwise seems to be disparate. As an example he cites how one may conceive of the human body as a

¹⁸ Tilley, C. *Metaphor and Material Culture*. Oxford: BlackWell Publishers Ltd., 1999, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 7.

container (of fluids and substances – with orifices) and how this may correlate to other types of containers, such as pots or baskets.²¹ In extending Tilley's thinking in terms of this project, the body may be viewed to have a symbolic linkage to the pool. Tilley explains that metaphorizing is a matter of thought, and is 'grounded in non-metaphorical pre-conceptual structures arising from everyday bodily experiences (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1987; Johnson 1987)'.²² He goes so far as to say that, 'we do not just employ and construct metaphors but we live through them'.²³

The question that remains is how may painting be conceived as metaphorical? Canadian painter David Urban (b.1966) describes painting's nature as metaphorical in the manner in which painting exists as a contradiction.

*It always signifies another space although it only and necessarily occupies a two-dimensional one. Amazingly, any mark on a blank canvas will begin to enact this process; once a sign is paced on paper or canvas, it paradoxically enters into a realm that is neither real nor fully imaginary.*²⁴

It is this paradox that is the quality of metaphor and how meaning, through metaphor, is created through the *carrying over* or the relationship that the attributes of one thing have to another. An image of a thing can be a metaphor for another thing, the illusion of space or not in the picture plane can be metaphorical, and the materiality of the paint, itself, can be a metaphor.

In reference to the materiality of paint, water, as a metaphor for life, may be alluded to through the qualities of water as depicted through painted surfaces that are transparent and have been glazed. Or it can be the way the paint has retained fluidity in its flowing movement, its pools and in its splashes, drips and dribbles. Conversely, an image of water that is

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 8.

²² *Ibid.* p. 16.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Urban, D., 'Paintings Radiant Array', *Border Crossings*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 2004, p. 45.

textured – that is constructed in opaque, impasto paint – may be a metaphor for something that is heavy, weighty, that is being contained and carried along. Or a shiny, reflective, mirror-like paint surface may be a metaphor for being pensive about something. Dynamic or regulated brush marks, or the more smoothly brushed, blurring and blending of paint may act metaphorically as well. A brush mark can shout out and demand attention or it can be shy and tender, quietly waiting to be noticed; while blurring and blending of paint may metaphorically apply to the interrelated connections between things.

Colour, complementary colour relationships and light/dark contrasts may be interpreted as metaphors. The colour red, for instance, may draw an association to the power of anger, as in *seeing red*, or to associations with love in the qualities of the warmth and richness found in the deep, penetrating red colour of a rose, or even with blood – birth and death. The tension between two complementary colours or the harmonious associations with analogous colour relationships can be metaphorical for different kinds of human relationships and for moods. As for light and dark, 'light, both represented and real, still serves as a potent symbol of the divine and sacred, and the contrast between light and darkness expresses the ideas of polarity, paradox and mystery'.²⁵

In terms of metaphorical meaning and usage in this project, I am also drawing upon the thoughts of writer, Jan Zwicky (b.1955), who writes in *Metaphor and Wisdom*, 'similes and analogies, too, are metaphorical in the sense I am concerned with. The *like* in such figures is merely a nod in the direction of the strict metaphor's implicit *is not*'.²⁶ Simply put, metaphor is an inquiry into the relationships between things.

²⁵ Oxford Press 2008: www.groveart.com/grove-owned/art/spirituality_public.html

²⁶ Zwicky, J., *Wisdom & Metaphor*, Kentville: Gaspereau Press, 2003, p. 5.

A Romantic Project – A Process in Becoming

The relationship between metaphor and symbol, man and nature and spirit, the heritage of myth and memory, are all contributing fragments in the historical movement of Romanticism. Friedrich Schlegel (1772 - 1829), one of the movement's key figures in Germany in 1800, called Romanticism a *project*; he referred to the *project* as a process in *becoming*. He proposed that the project would never be completed in a finite sense.²⁷ Romanticism as a process is circular: it is in a never-ending state of becoming, it is based upon the relationships that fragments or parts have to a whole, and it is founded on the relationship that man has to nature, the sublime, the mystery and our mortal journey. Romanticism is as contemporary as it is historic.²⁸

Also, it was Immanuel Kant's (1724 - 1804) subjective aesthetic philosophy, in conjunction with Edmund Burke's (1729 - 1797) inquiry into the sublime that laid part of the foundation for the German Romantic

²⁷ Schlegel and his contemporary, Novalis, (pseudonym of Georg Phillip Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg) (1772 - 1801), described Romantic attitudes and ideals in their literary texts, the *Athenaeum Fragments* and the *Logologische Fragmente*, in terms of fragments. The fragment is a part to a greater whole and therefore it is the never-ending interplay between the part and the whole that sets up the theoretical context for their Romantic project. Koerner, J., *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*. London: Reaktion Books, 1990, p. 23 - 25.

²⁸ Thomas McEvilley perceives painting to be lying in a stream of history. (And, I believe, he infers it to be a cyclical stream). Since the end of the 1980s, over a wide spectrum of art making, there has been a paradigm shift that includes all three 'Kantian' faculties in roughly equal measures. These three faculties are defined as aesthetic, cognitive and ethical. In short, these aspects concern form, concept and cultural and/or political significance. The current trend is a synthesis of these aspects, viewed as equal and separate, yet shifting in complexity. McEvilley, T., *The Exiles Return: Toward a Redefinition of Painting for the Post-Modern Era*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 205 - 206.

movement at the end of the 18th century. From their reflections on aesthetics, a differentiation was perceived to exist between the beautiful and the sublime, a differentiation that powerfully influenced directions in landscape painting and in art as a whole. An individual's direct experience in the natural world became a way to experience the sublime, the transcendent.

The thrust behind my own landscape paintings, my practice generally and the inception and development of this project comes from my direct experiences in nature – particularly in wilderness environments. These direct experiences are about being present and being open to the energy that creates while trying to connect to the forces in nature - and in some way relaying this in paint, whether on location or in my studio. Energy and force defy definitive description; they are the spiritual dimensions - the mysterious unknown. Painting landscapes is my attempt at being present and being able to tap into and describe the indescribable.

Through his representational landscape paintings, German Romantic painter, Caspar David Friedrich, exhibits the same sensibilities. There are three paintings by Friedrich to which I refer. One of them has been chosen because of its autobiographical nature, while the actual subject matter of the other two, a *man of passage* and a *wanderer* respectively, parallels the content of my project.

The Sea of Ice (1824 - 25) (Fig.7) is of interest because of the assumed autobiographical content that lay beneath the surface of the image. It seems unsure, looking into the space of the picture, whether the viewer is standing on solid ground on the shore, or whether the viewer is in the midst of the breaking surface of ice and rocks. This is a picture of no-man's land – frozen, harsh and impenetrable. The light in the painting is directed at the geometric hard-edged wedges of ice and rock that thrust up in the shape of a pyramid in the centre and middle ground of the picture. This ice block formation commands our attention and dwarfs the ship

locked into the ice sheets beside it. The ship, a vessel, is a symbol of the fragility of human beings in relation to the elements – man versus nature.



Fig. 7 Caspar David Friedrich, *The Sea of Ice*, 1823 - 25, oil on canvas, 96.7 x 126.9 cm

It has been documented that this painting is a memorial to Caspar's brother, who drowned while trying to save Caspar who fell first into the ice when they were skating as children.²⁹ Friedrich reached beyond the visible to represent our mortal journey and, knowing his personal tragedy, the painting takes on a double meaning. This painting can be interpreted to represent his internal world of feelings. It is an allegory of life and death framed, quite possibly, within an autobiographical context.

Some romantic individuals appear to have a nomadic spirit. They are travellers, wanderers who journey through nature, seeking communion with the elemental forces. Some endeavour to transcend space and time in order to experience invisible dimensions and other levels of consciousness. From the wanderer's perspective life is about direct experience. The wanderer (in German, the *Rückenfigur*) can be interpreted as 'site of identification or mediation between painting and viewer, nature and consciousness, finite and infinite'.³⁰ Friedrich employs the *Rückenfigur* as a subject who seeks union with nature, as well, in

²⁹ Koerner, J., *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*. London: Reaktion Books, 1990, p. 170.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 211.

some of his paintings, as one who represents the political aspirations of the early 19th century in German history.

Friedrich's landscape paintings are complex and they have been interpreted as political statements and also, as conveying sublime or spiritual content in their use of natural elements as religious icons. 'The break away from generally accepted Christian iconography and academic rules appears distinctly just after 1800, for example, in Friedrich's landscape paintings.'³¹ Friedrich's landscape subjects were mainly those of sea, mountains, rocks, snow, trees, mist and night. He used these themes, instead of the more historically accepted Christian icons and allegories, together with traditional symbols, such as crosses, to communicate his religious or, in other words, his spiritual sensibilities and to evoke a mode of *being* rather than simply to record a certain time place in nature. Spruce trees on a rocky slope, for instance, were symbolic of deeply rooted Christian faith.³²

More gloomy paintings of pictures of monks and ruins portrayed the theme of the spiritual seeker or hermit. In Friedrich's painting, *Dolmen in the Snow* (1807), three oak trees surround a rock outcrop on a knoll covered with snow, where the light of day is seen to be diminishing in the background. This painting has been conceptualised to have both political and religious overtones. 'This virtually universal picture of winter with the heathen tomb surrounded by oaks in the middle of nature – still and frozen, but eagerly awaiting the awakening of spring – could equally well suggest allusions to the awakening of Christian faith, or to a new *nationalistic* consciousness in an anti-Napoleonic spirit.'³³

³¹ Hipp, E., 'Paintings from the Galerie Neue Meister at the J. Paul Getty Museum' in *From Caspar David Friedrich to Gerhard Richter: German Paintings from Dresden*. Cat. Los Angeles: The J Paul Getty Museum, 2006, p. 19.

³² Spitzer, G., 'View from the Elbe Valley' in *From Caspar David Friedrich to Gerhard Richter: German Paintings from Dresden*. Cat. Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, p. 38.

³³ Spitzer, G., 'Dolmen in the Snow' in *From Caspar David Friedrich to Gerhard Richter: German Paintings from Dresden*. Cat. Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, p. 36.

It is in the intense experience of an individual human being's spiritual union with nature, a pantheistic celebration of divine presence, that Friedrich's Ruckenfigur asks us, as viewers, to consider. *Monk by the Sea* (1809 - 10) and *The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818), both in different ways, make use of the Ruckenfigur. In some previous work and in the painting, *Current* (Fig.33), in the project, I also included a Ruckenfigur image in attempt to encourage a dialogue on the unification of man with nature and spirit. Friedrich challenges the viewers to identify with the figure and contemplate the image in such subjective terms. It is interesting how his paintings convey his ideas symbolically, how he creates a sense of vastness in his landscapes, how he uses light, and how he contrasts soft, blurred edges with more delineated edges. Friedrich's brush strokes show little sign of gesture or reveal a personalized mark. His paintings are still and quiet. The surface of his paintings, for the most part, appears smooth and finished. In some ways, this lends itself to a sense of detachment that the use of the Ruckenfigur tends to counteract.



Fig. 8 Caspar David Friedrich, *Monk by the Sea*, 1809 - 10, oil on canvas, 110 x 171.5 cm

The *man of passage* in *Monk by the Sea* (Fig.8) is a minute, solitary, vertical figure that stands out in an immense, horizontal landscape. A luminous light that seems to come from within the painting highlights the brooding band of clouds that rest on the sea's horizon line. This light shimmers on part of the foreground shore. The cloaked monk is partly obscured near the edge of the sea. He is not in shadow, but he seems indistinct as he blends into his surroundings through the artist's use of

analogous tones. The monk's head, which he holds in his hands, becomes a small point of light in the opaque sea hovering between the land and the sky. A few seagulls are the only other sign of life in the scene.

Built with transparent glazes, this painting projects an ominous atmosphere, where a lone figure is enveloped in space. It is not too difficult to sense what this religious man might be feeling. The landscape and figure have a reciprocal relationship. The human spirit is challenged at times, overwhelmed and overpowered by the incomprehensible and by the mysteries of life as reflected and experienced in nature. Yet there is hope in the light that illuminates the dark.

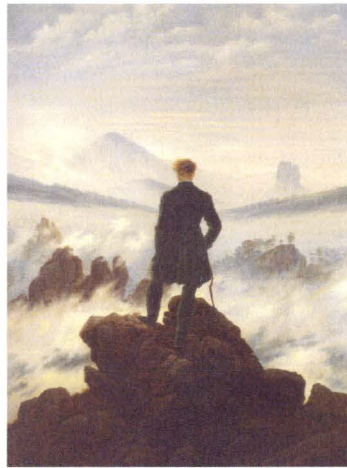


Fig. 9 Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1818, oil on canvas, 94.8 x 74.8 cm

With the pinnacle ascended and the wind blowing through his hair, the *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818) (Fig.9) surveys and contemplates the scene before him. The glowing mist is lifting but, besides the few rocky crags in sight, what lies beneath the sea of fog is obscured. The edges of the distant mountains melt into the sky. Our focus, as spectators, is on the well-defined, dark triangular shape of the figure on land that dominates the foreground. This triangular shape is repeated in the mountain in the background. The foothills serve as directional arrows pointing back to the hazy middle ground, through which we, like the man before us, are unable to see.

The view is both concealed and revealed. Are we gazing out through the traveller's eyes, our own, or both? By looking out to what lies ahead, we consider where we have been and where we are going, invoking what Wordsworth called the *inward eye*. Friedrich 'aspires to invoke the sublime of a thoroughly subjectified aesthetic, in which the painted world turns inward on the beholder'.³⁴

For the Romantic painter nature presented itself as a work of art and artists were intent on describing natural phenomena and their sensuous response to nature. Imagination, not reason, was the core of Romantic quality and, therefore, Romantic artwork is characterized by a highly imaginative and subjective approach. Although, there has been no definitive Romantic style or technique identified, major elements in Romantic artwork may include the use of dramatic rich colour, powerful brushwork and light and dark contrasts. It is the energy and emotion that is manifested in vivid colour and brush marks, and it is the contrasts between light and dark that represents the struggle between good and evil.

One of Friedrich's English contemporaries, J.M.W. Turner (1775 - 1851), has been classified as the painter of light. Kenneth Clark (1903 - 1983) in *Landscape into Art*, states, 'it was Turner who raised the whole key of colour so that his pictures not only represented light, but were symbolical of its nature'.³⁵ It was Turner's expression and use of painterly light that was his contribution to the development of art. Landscape paintings as representations of the sublime in nature altered under Turner's brush when he began to concern himself with the experience of the play of natural forces and then paint the sensuous experience he felt and observed. One of the best examples of this is Turner's painting, *Snow Storm* (1842) (Fig.10), where reportedly his inspiration and the image of

³⁴ Koerner, J , *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*. London: Reaktion Books, 1990, p. 181.

³⁵ Clark, K , *Landscape Into Art*. London. John Murray Publishers Ltd, 1949, p 181.

this work was derived from his experience of braving the elements while being tied to a ship's mast in a snow storm at sea for four hours.

In this abstracted painting the sky, water and snow meld into each other, there is no horizon line only a ship's mast demarcates any sense of orientation. What is apparent in the image of the painting is the textured surface and staccato-like brush marks. It seems as if, through the brush, Turner is finding and feeling his way to the light in the stormy night. The interweaving of the brush stroke creates the shapes that fluctuate in a tonal range of about five values. The rhythmic motion of the water melds with the wind, which describes the active and powerful forces in nature. In this painting it appears that Turner is not thinking about the snowstorm at sea, he is literally in the snowstorm at sea and is painting himself through it.



Fig. 10 J.M.W. Turner, *Snow Storm*, 1842,
oil on canvas, 91.4 x 121.9 cm

There is emotional intensity in Turner's physically painted surface. This is witnessed, also, in the dramatic paintings of contemporary Australian artist Peter Booth (1942). When I first encountered Peter Booth's paintings in the catalogue to his 2003 exhibition, *Human/Nature*, held at the National Gallery of Victoria, I was ushered into a new world. These loomed as visceral places and spaces, carved out of impasto paint that teemed with life energy. There was an emotional intensity that held me under a spell: the physically painted surface assumed sculptural proportions. Booth has

been associated with the Romantics.³⁶ The same motivation that prompted Mark Rothko is possibly similar to the impulse felt by Booth, even though they differ in their imagery and paint application. For each, the two-dimensional surface of the canvas is a screen where he can imagine and play out his personal myths that nevertheless reverberate universally.

For Booth art is:

*My journey through life. Tragedy, humour, violence, peace, chaos, light and darkness, the earth, the elements, animals and insects that share the earth with us. I have no theories, no systematic way of producing my work. It is made from intuition and experience.*³⁷

I was investigating Booth because of the strong affinity I felt to his *raison d'être* – his life as a journey through an unknown world; his *modus operandi* – working from intuition and experience without prescribed theories; and his use of paint, how he created space through the textured, felt surfaces of his canvases and his dramatic use of colour which I observed when I studied his paintings in the catalogue.

A reason why I refer particularly to *Painting (Mountain Landscape with Snow)* (1989) (Fig.11) is because of its ambiguity and how it relates to Romantic painting, to Turner's, *Snow Storm*, where the painting depicts natural elements fusing, rather indistinctly, together. Except for the white markings indicating snowflakes and the horizontality of the background denoting sky, the image is quite indeterminate. The gestural swaths of heavily laden, luscious paint that intermingle in the fore-ground and middle-ground challenge the traditional view of a figure ground relationship.

³⁶ Nelson, R., *The Age*,
www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/12/30/1072546518799.html

³⁷ Smith, J., 'Peter Booth: Human Nature' in *Peter Booth: Human/Nature* Cat. Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2003, p. 7.



Fig. 11 Peter Booth, *Painting (Mountain Landscape with Snow)*, 1989, oil on canvas, 167.5 x 304.5 cm

Booth does not use his paint to describe the natural elements. The overall effect of the dark and light paint becomes the all-consuming image. Rather than being a painting about a mountain landscape with snow, this painting elicits the sensation of directly experiencing these phenomena.

Booth's sentiments align with Romantic artists and this is furthermore evidenced in Booth's own words as previously cited. Characteristics of Romanticism can be identified in studying Booth's other paintings in the exhibition catalogue, *Human/Nature*. Romantics investigated human nature and personality, the remote, the gothic, and they were fascinated by their individual passions and struggles. In a review of this exhibition in the newspaper, *The Age*, Robert Nelson (b.1957) writes that these predominately figurative paintings are, 'a kind of apostasy, a return to the most expressive kind of image, featuring soulless people in savage congregations and alienating cities, painted with flagrant expressionism, hot colour and livid brushstrokes'.³⁸ Imagination galore. The sheer terror in Booth's paintings of figures in imagined, gothic-like environs – landscapes – evoke the sublime.

With roots in the Romantic tradition one hundred years earlier, Edvard Munch is an exponent of the first phase of Northern Symbolist painters

³⁸ Nelson, R., *The Age*,
www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/12/30/1072546518799.html

who were centred in Europe between 1890 and 1910.³⁹ Symbolists were intent on rediscovering the expressive, moody quality of an intimate and transcendental connection to nature. For Munch, though, nature lay in the inner being – in the soul, as much as it did in the natural environment. And this had to do with the *art of memory* as captured in 'Munch's proclamation of 1890: *I paint not what I see but what I saw.*'⁴⁰ His landscapes became settings for universal themes that exist in the psyche, heart and soul to be explored and enacted. What has been accepted by most critical and art historical evaluations of his art today, is that Munch's imagery and his biography have a transparent symbiotic relationship.⁴¹ In terms of this project, which is most clear in the paintings where I have mapped and painted my body as posture, for instance (Fig.6,13,14,41,42) my biography and my imagery overlap. It for this reason that Munch and one of Munch's paintings are discussed.

The painting, *Melancholy, The Yellow Boat* (1891 - 92) (Fig.12), is representative of his mature style and has been regarded as Munch's first realized Symbolist landscape painting. He accomplishes an intriguing symbiosis of mood and physic tension and expression in the figure and landscape.⁴² In this painting, the black, curvilinear shapes of the head and shoulders of the figure in the lower right of the painting are repeated in the shoreline that directs the eye to the lay of the land at the horizon. Water and sky are melded together into one main shape of dusty blue and pink where wisps of flowing brush marks pass through this space. The shore is more loosely constructed. Rocks are rather flat lines and shapes, rather than three- dimensional forms. In fact, the shape of the protagonist

³⁹ Nasgaard, R., *The Mystic North: Symbolist Landscape Paintings in Northern Europe and North America 1890 - 1940*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984, p. 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 9.

⁴¹ Heller, R., 'Could Only Have Been Painted by a Madman – Or Could It?' in McShine, K. (Ed.), *Edvard Munch: The Modern Life of the Soul*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2006, p. 17.

⁴² Nasgaard, R., *The Mystic North: Symbolist Landscape Paintings in Northern Europe and North America 1890 - 1940*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984, p. 10.

himself is similar to the repeated rock forms and this seems to integrate the figure into the landscape.

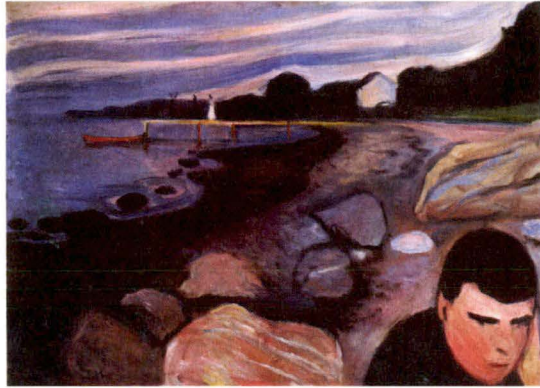


Fig. 12 Edvard Munch, *Melancholy, The Yellow Boat*, 1891 - 92, Oil on canvas, 65.5 x 96 cm

The tension is obvious, it is seen in the expression on the face of the solitary figure, in contrast to the group of three figures on the yellow line of a pier in the distance. 'We become fused with the protagonist and stand, without an intermediary, face to face with a structure of tensions, formal and psychological, that strikes us with the force of a personal and mental projection.'⁴³ Munch also draws the viewer's attention to the red boat on the water and the white house enveloped in the dark middle ground land form, which makes the viewer consider that both these objects are symbolic and relevant to the rather sad tale unfolding. Munch's Symbolist painting is a good example of how representational space is transferred into symbolic.

Freidrich's landscape paintings, based upon his native Germanic countryside, allude to the universal themes of spirituality and the sublime in nature, as well as political ideologies; Turner's direct experience of his environment, which coalesce in his abstracted landscape paintings, portray the environment as natural forces that live and breathe, and are resplendent with energy, movement and change; Booth's painted environments are fantastical, imaginative places where dramatic events

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 13.

are being played out; and for Munch, landscape in his paintings is used primarily as a setting for the enactment of psychic moods and dramas, for example melancholy, sadness, jealousy, despair.

For each of these four artists landscape and place are essential to the actualisation of their work. Landscape and place theorists have analysed landscape art using different lens and perspectives. The theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of landscape and place within the project follow.

Landscape and Place

Simon Schama (b.1945) in his book, *Landscape and Memory*, compels us to rethink our relationship to nature through myth. He shows how the tradition of landscape is built upon a heritage of myth and memory. Like what I referred to on page 10 in the Introduction, this project began like a *mythic exploration* into the Tasmanian landscape. The journey becomes a *rite of passage* where the act of painting becomes a ritual in the process.⁴⁴ Rituals and ceremonies are inherent in the creation and in the telling and enactment of myths. Rituals help define and give meaning to our lives. According to Jungian analyst, Elizabeth Cain (b.1935), in her essay, 'To Sacred Origins – Through Symbol and Story' in *Creation Spirituality and The Dreamtime*, we are all mythmakers.⁴⁵ I conceive of the sequence of the final body of paintings in the project to be a narrative; in the way abstracted and representational images of waterscapes metaphorically can refer to the notion of the pre-formal states of birth and death, and of life lived while between those states

This project incorporates the basic argument on landscape aesthetics discussed by W.J.T. Mitchell (b.1942) and other writers, in his edited book, *Landscape and Power*. Mitchell's central premise is that, 'landscape is a

⁴⁴ A *rite of passage* basically refers to major changes that happen in a person's life, at one time or another, and this may be caused by various reasons. A rite of passage may be initiated by entering a new stage in life; for instance, the entry from childhood into puberty or the passage from being a student candidate into a graduate. To include a few more examples, it may result from the experience of a death, separation from loved ones, unrequited love or a divorce. This can be symbolically viewed as a passage through life, death and then a renewed life or rebirth.

Arnold van Gennep, a French anthropologist, is famous for his study of rites of passage in his book, *Le Rites de Passage* (1909). He argues that rites of passage have three ritual phases: separation, transition (or limen) and incorporation (or communitas). Numerous aboriginal cultures in the world recognize rites of passage and the rituals that are integral to the process. Scottish born anthropologist, Victor Turner, who studied rituals and rites of passage in a tribe from Central Africa, describes a person's altered states in the process of achieving communitas as *flow experiences*. Turner, V., *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. New York Aldine de Gruyter, 1995, p. ix.

⁴⁵ Cain, E., 'To Sacred Origins – Through Symbol and Story' in Hammon, C. (Ed.), *Creation Spirituality and The Dreamtime*. Newtown. Millennium Books, 1991, p. 79.

dynamic medium, in which *we live and move and have our being*, but also a medium that is itself in motion from one place or time to another'.⁴⁶ And the project also incorporates the argument, which has been most associated with post-modernism that has, 'tended to decentre the role of painting and pure formal visuality in favour of a semiotic and hermeneutic approach that treated landscape as an allegory of psychological or ideological themes'.⁴⁷

The new perspective offered in the essays in *Landscape and Power*, 'examine the way landscape circulates as a medium of *exchange*, a site of visual appropriation, a focus for the formation of identity'.⁴⁸ In terms of this project it was the engagement that occurred between the Tasmanian landscape and myself.

In the section on The Relationship of Previous Work to the Project in Chapter One, I questioned how could I feel an immediate connection to place, that I had *come home*, when I arrived in Tasmania. When I read the conclusion in *Heidegger's Topology*, by Tasmanian philosopher Jeff Malpas (b.1958), I realized I had a philosophical construct, which provided credence to what I had experienced.

*The 'homecoming' of which Heidegger speaks is a return to the nearness of being. That nearness is not a matter of coming into the vicinity of some single, unique place, but rather of coming to recognize the placed character of being as such.*⁴⁹

According to Malpas, Heidegger's *homecoming* is not necessarily connected to the physical place where one lives or one's homeland, in my case, Canada. My experience of the Tasmanian landscape and particular places in Tasmania was the catalyst that allowed me to be aware and conscious of *being* in a way that I had never experienced before. It was if I

⁴⁶ Mitchell, W.J.T., *Landscape and Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 2.

⁴⁹ Malpas, J., *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2006, p. 309.

had returned to something so elemental that I knew, but that I had lost and forgotten.

It was like how, as previously stated in the Introduction, Tuan describes the mythic journey *to a country known but long since forgotten*. Malpas too, writes that this returning to place, 'stands in an essential relation to *journeying*. Only in so far as we journey – and such journeying need not always be the journeying of physical distancing – do we come into the nearness of the place in which we already are and which we never properly leave'.⁵⁰

Heidegger's premise has universal appeal in the sense that any of us can be home, if we choose, in whatever place we may physically find ourselves to be on the planet, in the world. This universal sense of place is not dependant upon the specificity of locality.

*Heidegger's homecoming is thus something that is undertaken rather than completed; a return, not to what is certain and stable, but to the original question of being, and to the questionability of our own being; a turn back, not to what is familiar, in the ordinary sense, but to that which is essentially 'uncanny', inexplicable, wondrous.*⁵¹

Malpas' last three words – *uncanny, inexplicable and wondrous* – sound like descriptive words for the sublime, and sum up what it was like to return to place that is essentially that of *being, or rather a process of becoming*. Much like Romanticism was perceived to be a project – a *process of becoming*. It describes experiences of *being* in Tasmania and how these direct experiences of this specific place led to paintings that became less about the specifics of a place to be more about the universality of being, being human, as seen through the sequence of paintings of water as a metaphor for life.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 310.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 311.

In addition, this relationship to landscape and place, and to acknowledging the importance of seeing the universal in the particular in this project can be perceived in an ecological or environmentally conscious manner. Ecological philosopher, David Abram in *The Spell of the Sensuous*, and scientist David Suzuki (b.1936) in *The Sacred Balance*, both examine mankind's relationship to nature and the environment through embodied perspectives. They purport that to rediscover balance on the planet mankind needs to renew its sacred (spiritual) and sensuous connection to nature – to the elements, animals and plants – by recognizing this reciprocal relationship. As Suzuki states, 'we are water – the oceans flow through our veins'.⁵²

⁵² Suzuki D., *The Sacred Balance*. Vancouver: Greystone Books, 1997, p. 112.

Water, the Pool and Waves

To elaborate further on the meaning of water, the pool and waves in the project, I begin with Gaston Bachelard (1884 - 1962), in *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Material Imagination*, who links the element of water with his study on the imagination.⁵³ He invokes us to look to water with our hearts as a means of seeing in depth and beyond. A perspective that is essentially subjective.

Imagination and creativity are linked to water and our psyches. In modern psychology water is the symbol of the unconscious and water imagery is linked to dreams. It is a feminine principle – emotive, receptive and



Fig. 13 Destanne Norris, *Embodied Pool 2*, 2004, oil on board, 82 x 71 cm

endowed with characteristics of the mother – a symbol of fertility.⁵⁴ The painting entitled, *Embodied Pool 2* (Fig.13), tea-coloured like many Tasmanian waters are by tannin, signifies this idea of the female and her inner waters of fertility and intuitive knowing.

⁵³ Bachelard, G. *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. Trans Farrell, E. Ann Arbor: Braun-Brumfield, Ind., 1983, p. 1.

⁵⁴ www.cite_sciences.fr/english/ala_cite/expositions/eau_pour-tous/symbolique-eau.php?html=ok&dossier=inspiration

Water is the element used in purification rituals and in Christian baptisms. To be immersed in water signifies a return to the pre-formal state – birth on the one hand, death on the other. Water symbolizes potential, which precedes all creation and form.

Water: this 'creative force flows over the terrain of our psyches looking for the natural hollows, the arroyos, the channels that exist in us. We become its tributaries, its basins; we are its pools...' writes Jungian psychologist, Clarissa Pinkola Estes (b.1945), in her book, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*.⁵⁵ Bachelard contends that 'the lake or pool or stagnant water stops us near its bank. It says to our will: you shall go no further; you should go back to looking at distant things...' ⁵⁶ For Estes the pool is who we are, our body is the agent which manifests this creative force into the physical; for Bachelard the pool, as seen in nature, is a portal into a deeper way of seeing and knowing; for me they are both.



Fig. 14 Destanne Norris, *Embodied Pool 3*, 2004, oil on board, 72 x 125 cm

In this project, the pool is seen as a repository for water, and for the human body, which is home to memory, experience and consciousness. The painting, *Embodied Pool 3* (Fig.14), is a literal and metaphorical example of the body as a pool. My body shapes were traced on board, then cut out and painted with colorful impasto paint into an image of water pooling.

⁵⁵ Estes, C. P, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*. London: Rider, 1992, p. 298.

⁵⁶ Bachelard, G., *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Material Imagination*. (Trans. Farrell, E.) Ann Arbor: Braun-Brumfield Inc., 1983, p. 145.

Of significance are the paintings of contemporary American artist, Jennifer Bartlett (b.1941), who painted a number of artworks that contained and incorporated an elliptical shape. Swimmers and water, the lake and the sea, became the dominant subject in Bartlett's work in the late 1970's and early 1980's. This elliptical shape, also classified as a lozenge form, is a major element in a transition in Bartlett's work.⁵⁷ This shape appeared in, *Termino Avenue* (1977), which was her last painting of houses in her house series, before it enters her water/lake/sea series. What is significant is that the title of this painting is the name of the street where her father was hospitalized and passed away. After this event the shape is cast from the house into the sea and is intended, by Bartlett, to be read as a swimmer.⁵⁸

Bartlett approached the water/lake/sea theme with a concern for the passage of time and how it equates with the shifts in moods and physical positioning of the swimmer in and on the canvas. For instance, *Swimmers at Dawn, Noon and Dusk* (1979), which is made of a combination of materials: oil on canvas, baked enamel and silkscreen grid and enamel on steel plates, may be interpreted as a metaphor for life in the way the swimmer in the water is experiencing the passage of time through the cycle of the day – a day which could be a metaphor a lifetime. These are abstracted paintings, where the regulated brush marks move vertically, horizontally and diagonally across the picture plane. The image has been made of half oil on canvas and half enamel on plates. Bartlett sets up a dialogue between her use of materials which questions the dual nature of the artwork. Although, the brush marks are loose and layered, they are controlled in the same way the grid is a controlled form. There is a sense of containment, a more collected and rationalized approach to the structure and the painted surface, rather than a more liberated, expressive feeling.

⁵⁷ Goldwater, M., 'Jennifer Bartlett: On Land and at Sea' in *Jennifer Bartlett*. New York: Abbeville Press, Inc , 1990, p. 54.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 55.

In the three *At the Lake* paintings of 1979 Bartlett leads us into a more literal scene where the swimmers are submerged and then surface in the organic, womb-shaped lake, which is surrounded by natural growth on one side. *At the Lake, Morning* (Fig.15), one of these three paintings, portrays this idea.



Fig. 15 Jennifer Bartlett, *At the Lake, Morning*, 1979, baked enamel and silkscreen grid, enamel on steel plates; oil on canvas
45 plates, 2 canvases, 77 x 188 overall

Her brush strokes are more varied in size, more gestural and painterly, than in *Swimmers at Dawn, Noon and Dusk*. Colour is less about pattern and is more haphazard. Again she uses the passage of time in a day as a thematic in each of the three lake paintings, but there is more tension in her organization of her canvases and plates as compared to *Swimmers at Dawn, Noon and Dusk*.

In *At Sea* (Fig.16) Bartlett's swimmer has moved out of the water as an integrated image and is a physical elliptical shape made out of canvas that has been placed on the surface of the enamel plates. The watery painted surface is metaphorical in its fluid quality – the paint has been left to flow naturally and drip in places – and the brush marks are made up of patches of colour, dots and dashes. The blue-gray colour palette is suggestive of water as it is observed in the day and night.



Fig. 16 Jennifer Bartlett, *At Sea*, 1979, baked enamel and silkscreen grid, enamel on steel plates; oil on canvas, 112 plates, 2 canvases, overall dimensions variable

Bartlett continued with her bold experimental methodology and her installation, *To the Island* (1981 - 82) was composed of 10 parts of abstract and representational artworks that were made from a combination of materials, such as: collage, casein on paper on canvas; oil pastel on paper; prismacolor pencil on paper; oil on mirror; oil on canvas; enamel on glass. The artworks were motifs, based on photographs, of ten different views from ten different perspectives of an island tropical paradise. Marge Goldwater writes that this body of work does not come together as a unit, that the problem has been a separation from the site that inspired these works and an increased reliance on the photograph.⁵⁹ This work, and another similar installation, *Up the Creek* (1981 - 82), reflects, Goldwater says, that by 'habitually touching on a range of styles and systems of depiction, Bartlett always calls into question the idea of personal style, implying in the process that she herself has none...but she also proves inadvertently how distinct and personal, at its best, her non-style really is'.⁶⁰ Bartlett is significant to my work as I have incorporated different styles and perspectives, and have relied on the photograph to extrapolate memories from the direct experience.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 120.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 124.

In 1983 Bartlett painted a triptych entitled *Pool*, which was a consequence of her studies of the pool in the garden of a villa in Nice that she rented in the winter of 1979 - 80. The three painted images of the pool all share a similar perspective, but what differs is that the shapes and colorations that are painted on the bottom of the tiled pool floor and how the water appears to have risen in the third painting of the triptych. 'The pool takes on its strongest metaphorical significance as a container for feelings, as a stage for the drama of life', according to Goldwater.⁶¹ As reiterated previously the pool, in this project, is conceived to have a metaphorical meaning as the painted object and the human body, and a literal meaning as a reservoir in nature that receives and circulates water, as it continues in its flowing movement. Moreover, the pool signifies transition, movement, change, flow, and circulation.

For Claude Monet (1840 - 1926) the pond in his garden at Giverny was relatively still and reflective. The pond for Monet, more specifically in his Water Lily paintings, was a source for his studies of reflections on the water surface. His interest lay, not in the movement and flow of the water, but in the way the transitory effects of light played on the water surface and how this light could be captured in colour and brushwork that could give the painting an overall unity. This atmosphere of light was the *enveloppe*, where everything is seen to bathe in this ether. In a description of his Water Lily paintings, Monet said, 'the essence of the motif is the mirror of water whose appearance alters at every moment, thanks to the patches of sky which are reflected in it, and which give it its light and movement'.⁶²

Monet had been influenced by *Japonisme*, which is also reflected in the conception of his garden, complete with the arching bridge. In Japanese prints Monet observed the pictorial possibilities of simplified forms, the

⁶¹ *Ibid* p. 66.

⁶² Monet is quoted in: Thiebault-Sisson, *Benue de l'art*, 1927, p.44 - 45; the context of this quotation in Thiebault-Sisson's account suggests that it refers to the Water Lily series of 1903 - 09 in House, J., *Monet: Nature into Art* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986, p. 221.

relationships between the vertical (Yang) and the horizontal (Ying), and the calligraphic use of the line and brushwork. Virginia Spate comments in *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet* that this went deeper than any question of style or detail.⁶³ This depth underscored Monet's life as an artist as he continually sought, through paint, to give form to his communion with nature. In essence, as I have stated earlier, this communion and connection with nature and the ideal of oneness are the motivating factors in my own work.

Monet declined, for the most part, to speak or write symbolically, metaphorically or metaphysically about his work, however, these associations are perceived and discussed in studying his paintings. In *Monet and Modernism*, an eloquent quote by Monet himself certainly alludes to the ideal that it was through the mindfulness of focused observation that the universe dictated appearances to him. He merely recorded this with his paint brush. Through this quote, Monet implies that unknown realities *correspond*, or in other words *communicate*, through reality – as it appears in nature.

*'Whereas you search philosophically for the world in itself...' Monet told Clemenceau, 'my efforts are directed purely and simply at a maximum of appearance, closely linked with unknown realities. When you find yourself at the level of corresponding appearances, you cannot be far from reality, or at least what we are capable of perceiving. I have done nothing but observe what the universe showed me, in order to bear witness to it with my brush...'*⁶⁴

With this statement in mind, it is easy to see how Monet's direct engagement with nature, where he depended upon the physical sensations of perceiving effects of colour, light and movement, resulted in

⁶³ Spate, V., *The Colour of Time: Claude Monet*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1992, p. 232.

⁶⁴ Monet is quoted in. Clemenceau, Georges. *Les Nymphéas*, Paris, 1926, p. 145 - 146 in Sagner-Duchting, K. (Ed.), *Monet and Modernism*. Munich: Kunstalle der Hypo-kulturstiftung, 2001, p. 25.

paintings that oscillated between naturalism (representation) and abstraction.

Although, Monet is classified as an Impressionist concerned with naturalism and direct experience in nature, in the 1890's with the emergence of Symbolism, there was a theoretical debate over whether or not Monet's late work from the 1890's onwards, could be defined within this new conceptual framework. The Impressionists, 'subjectified the objective, whereas the symbolists aim was to objectify the subjective (the externalisation of the Idea)'.⁶⁵ Art theorist, Richard Shiff (b.1943) has 'emphasised that much critical vocabulary is common to the two movements, treating the subjectivity of the Impressionist sensation as a bridge to the inner world which Symbolism sought to reveal'.⁶⁶ However, the classic concept of Symbolism was a rejection of the Impressionist methods of depending upon direct experience in nature as a starting point.

In time, Monet's interests became more about expressing his experience of nature in an overall pictorial unity, of texture and colour, in the finished picture in the studio, rather than capturing the immediacy and the fleeting effects of light that he sought in his earlier *plein air* paintings. In short, the developments and changes in Monet's paintings, where he is seen to focus on abstracting the essence of things, was the result of a combination of characteristics. Although, Monet may be seen to have associations with the Symbolist formulations, John House, in *Monet: Nature into Art*, states that 'to talk of a Symbolist approach replacing an Impressionist one is greatly to over-simplify the changes in his art, and ignores the complexity of his methods throughout his career'.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ House, J., *Monet: Nature into Art* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986, p. 225

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 220.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 225.



Fig. 17 Claude Monet, *The Waterlily Pond*, 1899, oil on canvas, 81 x 100 cm

I have chosen two of Monet's paintings, both of which feature the water lily pond spanned by the Japanese bridge. Through a comparison of these two works, completed approximately twenty years apart, I am making a link to my own paintings and how they fluctuate between representation and abstraction.

The same motif, the Japanese garden, in both *The Waterlily Pond* (1899) (Fig.17) and *The Japanese Bridge* (1918 - 24) (Fig.18) forms a point of departure for Monet. The former representational work and the latter more abstracted painting both exemplify not only Monet's reference to the ever-changing natural world but also to *how* a lens into this world alters through time. (Monet's deteriorating eyesight being a factor of time, too.) It is through his investigations, via the act of painting, that Monet's more literal representational forms begin to dissolve. His concentration in *The Japanese Bridge* is on the autonomy of the brushstroke the calligraphic use of line, and the reduction of colour to near monochromatism. Moreover, there is a shift in the way he uses pictorial space, from linear perspective to an overall evocation of space that is somewhat indeterminate.

This simplification of means is reminiscent of the Japanese painting tradition and philosophy where the emphasis is on the attainment of

oneness. From one viewpoint, the surfaces of Monet's canvases in both these paintings are dense and opaque and do not give an immediate



Fig. 18 Claude Monet, *The Japanese Bridge*, 1918 - 24, oil on canvas, 89 x 115 cm

sense of expansiveness, openness or oneness. Yet from another viewpoint, Monet's activated surface composed of myriad tense and loose brushstrokes in varying lengths, configurations and directions captivates the eye and arrests the viewer's attention. The spectator is pulled in and can become mesmerized in the details but at some point is pushed back in order to see how the parts combine to make a whole.

The Japanese bridge that Monet built in his garden spans the water pool and connects two banks in *The Waterlily Pond* and in *The Japanese Bridge*. This arc formation is an organic shape and a geometric construct that forms a strong visual element in both compositions. On a metaphorical level this arc may be what Merleau-Ponty calls an intentional arc, one that subtends human consciousness and the body's orientation towards the world.⁶⁸ Putting it in symbolic language, the arc-shaped bridge operates like Siddhartha, who is the ferryman in Herman Hesse's (1877 - 1962) classic book. Siddhartha ferries people across the river, he is a link between the two worlds – that of nature and spirit.⁶⁹ These two worlds that

⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty's intentional arc is discussed further in Chapter Three.

⁶⁹ Hesse, H., (Trans.), *Siddhartha*. London: Picador, 1998.

are seen as neither separate nor whole are the worlds in which we, as humans, exist and that form the basis for the relationships and the life that we experience. It appears for Monet, who reportedly was an atheist, the world was one and found in the painting of the *enveloppe*, which is seen, for example, in the transitory way light reflects and plays on the surface of water.

From the water surface to the water within – human bodies are composed mostly of water. ‘The salt solution of the sea flows in man’s veins, and – is it coincidence or part of nature’s master plan? – 70 percent of man’s body is water, the same proportion as the surface of the earth’, writes scientist Jacques Cousteau (1910 - 1997).⁷⁰ This aqueous element needs to be flowing, moving and changing in our bodies to keep us invigorated, fresh and alive. Water circulates in our bodies, as it does around the globe in the ebb and flow of the wave.

The wave develops into a central idea at the end of the second phase in the project. As a start, the embodied pool paintings from this period called, *A Lens into An Inscape*, were hung in an exhibition entitled, *The Feeling of What Happens* (Fig.45), at Entrepot Gallery, like particles in the formation of a wave. In modern physics, the wave properties of light can be viewed as either a wave in an abstract electromagnetic field or as a particle.

In the abstract painting, *Pool 2* (Fig.47) a wave-like symbol was used. Much later in my research I discovered this symbol was the ancient Phoenician hieroglyphic for water and it is called, Mem, which means water.⁷¹ It is uncanny how the ancient word for water, Mem, is found in the words *memory* and *remember*. Relatively, there has been an interesting investigation into the nature of water by Dr. Masaru Emoto (b.1943). He has studied water molecules and suggests that water is affected by our

⁷⁰ Cousteau, Jacques - Yves. ‘The Ocean – A Perspective: Jacques - Yves Cousteau’, *National Geographic*, Vol. 160, No. 6, 1981, p. 782.

⁷¹ www.ancientscripts.com/alphabet.html and www.ancientscripts.com/phoenician.html

thoughts, words and feelings in his book *The Hidden Messages in Water* (2004). In addition, he proposes that water is able to memorize and transport information. This idea of a connection between water (Mem) and memory was the basis for a project by contemporary artist, Shelley Sacks.

Sacks used her participant's thoughts and images in a project with water called *Thought Bank 2* (1994 - 95) suggestive of the belief that water can carry non-material information.⁷² As a social sculptor and Reader at Oxford Brookes University in the United Kingdom, who studied under Joseph Beuys (1921 -1986), Sacks aimed, through her project, to bring awareness to our ability to effect change when we are conscious of our thoughts.

Not only are the tides of our emotions like the waves, but the concepts of mind central to the Buddhist tradition equates consciousness and waves. 'The indissociability of waves and water pertains to the maze of our mind...where consciousness, like waves to the ocean, rise in conjunction with mind. The implied ideal here is that the mental activities should be ceased so that mind, as it were, can be turned into a calm sea.'⁷³

The abstract painting entitled, *Waves in Mind* (Fig.48) refers to the concept of consciousness as waves. The painting itself is like a conception of this concept – it was thinking about waves. This painting is composed of analogous blue, green, yellow shapes and rather haphazard brush marks, and the paint has been left to drip and dribble where it may. The next painting entitled, *Schouten Passage* (Fig.49), is the only painting in the final works, which is a more traditional landscape with a horizon line. The viewer is thrust onto the heavy, tumultuous waves on a stormy sea, indicative of the reality of living in the physical world and meeting difficult challenges on the sea of life. The six paintings that follow the textured

⁷² www.greenmuseum.org/c/enterchange/artists/sacks

⁷³ Lai, W., 'Ch'an Buddhism and Metaphors – Waves, Water, Mirror Lamp', *Philosophy East & West*, Vol.27, no. 3, July 1979, p. 245 - 253.
<http://thezenfrog.wordpress.com/2007/10/30/chan-buddhism-and-metaphors-waves-water-mirror-lamp/>

painting, *Schouten Passage*, all feature images of waves that have been constructed using thin glazes of semi – transparent and opaque paint. Here light and dark act and play in the water and on the surface of the water.

Metaphorical associations in the contrasts between light and dark are articulated in the paintings of contemporary Australian painter, William Robinson (b.1936). The title of his first major retrospective at the Queensland Art Gallery in 2001 was *Darkness and Light, The Art of William Robinson*. Robinson's artwork is drawn from memory as much as it is created from his intimate experiences and reflections on his environment. Through ambiguity in perspective and juxtapositions on the picture plane, Robinson paints himself, and thereby the viewer, into the Australian landscapes he knows and loves, although, his paintings illuminate a more universal theme of mankind's origins.

Robinson's painting, *Dark tide, Bogangar* (1994), purchased by the Queensland Art Gallery, depicts a moody seascape where the rising and falling tide demarcates the curvature of the earth's surface. The painted shapes in the water are repeated in the sky, and here both sea and sky seem interdependent. The ocean tide in the form of a huge wave responds to the passage of time as the painting records, from left to right across the picture plane, the movement of daylight to nightfall. These paintings and others from this series were created after Robinson was inspired by his move to a town on the Australian coast. This painting can be interpreted as an example of how the specificity of place, can possess a universality of meaning.

Darkness and light, interpreted to be the origin of all creation, are at the heart of Robinson's art. Essentially it is spiritual faith, more than religion, per se, that underpins his investigations. His subjects are more specifically the elements in nature that are found in the creation story in Genesis. Hannah Fink, in her essay, *Light Years: William Robinson and the Creation Story*, writes, 'Robinson's art has always been about finding and

painting a home – both literally and metaphorically – in the landscape he inhabits'.⁷⁴ And that home, in terms of these oceanic creation story paintings, seems to be synonymous with the meeting of the waters – the physical and the spiritual.

Another recent exhibition about water, relative to this project, was held at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D. C. in 2005 - 2006, entitled *The Water Remembers: Paintings and Works on Paper by May Stevens 1990 - 2005*. Acclaimed American artist, May Stevens' (b.1924) paintings, prints and drawings of water are images that reveal a 'spiritual connection with water and hint at times and places past, and speak of people and loved ones lost to time and death'.⁷⁵

In this chapter, the key concepts of metaphor, Romanticism, landscape and place, and water, the pool and waves have been discussed. Simultaneously, within this discussion there have been references to visual artists – Freidrich, Turner, Booth, Munch, Bartlett, Monet, Robinson – whose practice and paintings are relevant to the concepts and the primary question in the project. To conclude an examination into abstraction and representation is presented, along with the research into specific paintings by Pat Steir and Mark Rothko.

⁷⁴ Fink, H., 'Light Years: William Robinson and the Creation Story', *Artlink*. Vol. 21, No. 4 www.artlink.com.au/articles.cfm?id=2555

⁷⁵ National Museum of Women in the Arts Releases: Water and Words Flow Through *The Water Remembers: Paintings and Works on Paper by May Stevens 1990-2005*.<http://www.nmwa.org/news/news.asp?newsid=192>

Representing Abstraction and Abstracting Representation



Fig. 19 Destanne Norris, *As Above So Below*, 2004,
oil on board, 30 x 44 cm

During the past century art movements and critics have engaged in the dialectic between representation and abstraction. The issue tends to be representation versus abstraction. Thomas McEvilley makes a claim that 'even when it is abstract the work is representational, because it represents abstraction rather than simply being it'.⁷⁶ I propose that abstraction is a synthesis of representation – in keeping with the literal meaning of the word *abstraction*. In situating representational paintings with abstract paintings in my project, I am not suggesting that a hierarchy exists, with one mode inherently superior to the other or that an abstract painting is metaphorical, while a representational painting is not. But rather that interpretations of water as a metaphor for life may be envisioned in both abstract and representational paintings.

Representational paintings can be abstracted conceptual ideas and embody noumenal thoughts and feelings, and that may be their content. Abstract paintings may represent their content in the very substance and structure of their form; as a way of giving shape to the noumenal. Both manners of painting contain elements of each other. In regard to the representation/abstraction argument, history and culture predispose and

⁷⁶ McEvilley, T., *The Exiles Return: Toward a Redefinition of Painting Post-Modern Era*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 146.

affect our views and tastes. Nonetheless, such views and tastes do shift and change and are often ambiguous, as they are also dependent upon individual perception.

McEvelley states, 'painterly abstraction, even in lush epiphanies, appears as an art-historical reference more than an appeal to the pleasure of pure form'.⁷⁷ By reducing paint to pure form, painters were stripping away and dissolving the illusory imitation of things to invoke the *essence* contained within and beyond the appearance of the so-called *real*. However, when we realize that the imitative or representational theory of art (originally advanced by Plato and Aristotle) is really about mimesis, which is the art of expressing *essential character* and *emotion* by gestures and bodily movements, it would seem, by this definition, that the *essence* of a thing could be encountered in representational works of art. I see this relationship between representation and abstraction as an *inter-relationship*.

American painter, Pat Steir, as quoted in an Arts article in the Boston University community weekly newspaper in March 2001, shares similar views on abstraction and representation.

*I don't see them as two separate things. Once something is a painting, it's abstract...Or you can see it as all realistic, line on a surface, and a line represents itself a line. They are not different things; they are all part of the same thing.*⁷⁸

McEvelley's concept of the element of water as an interface between representation and abstraction can be seen in Pat Steir's wave paintings, and in Monet's paintings of lily ponds and in some of Bartlett's work on water. Using the subject of the wave Steir produced a number of art-historical referenced works quoting other artists in the 1980s.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 145.

⁷⁸ McNeil, T, 'Open Sky, big splash: Pat Steir follows her muse', *B.U. Bridge*, Vol IV, No. 26, 2001. www.bu.edu/bridge/archive/2001/03-16/arts.html



Fig. 20 Pat Steir, *The Moon and the Wave Series: Japanese Moon Wheel*, 1986 - 87, oil on canvas, 213.4 diameter

In 1987, Steir's wave paintings culminated in a series of circular paintings based on a Japanese (Fig.20 & 21). The painted waves were an extension of her bodily actions and motions. It was as if she had merged with the materials and form and abandoned the self.

Reference is made to Pat Steir's wave painting because this work represents an artist who is attempting to fuse together her subject (wave of water), materials and the act of painting itself. I see Steir's process in painting the waves as a way of *being* and the result as a painting that is in a state of *becoming*. It was what I hoped to realize in my own paintings.

The Japanese painting tradition, which underlies this work by Steir, attempts to bring together and balance the yin, a feminine principle regarded as water, and the yang, a masculine principle represented by the mountain. It is important to note that even though it was the image of Hokusai's woodblock print, specifically, the *Underwave off Kanagawa* (1831), from his series *100 Views of Fuji*, that is the image that Steir refers to with 'multiple stylistic inflections' in her wave painting entitled, *The Wave after Hokusai* (1986), it was the Japanese painting philosophy that was at the root of these images. It was not the technique and processes used in Japanese woodblocks that Steir was attempting to emulate.



Fig. 21 Pat Steir, *The Moon and the Wave Series: Heart Wave, Heart Moon*, 1986 - 87, oil on canvas, 213.4 diameter

McEvelley comments that, 'Steir chose a stylistic sequence that combines nineteenth century proto-abstraction, japonisme, and action painting. This art historical investigation took form through a focus on the depiction of water in the Chinese, Japanese, and Westernly painterly traditions'.⁷⁹

The Taoist and Zen Buddhist discipline of meditation and contemplation are the nucleus in this painting tradition. The shape of the circle, the cycle of nature, unity and wholeness are implied. Technically, balance and oneness are achieved through brushwork as it relates to the calligraphic line.

McEvelley describes how, by the nature of her tumultuous brushwork, in these works:

*approached abstraction through attempts to represent natural forces so vast or so elemental that they innately hover on the edge of abstraction – the out-of scale reality that cannot be represented all at once, which Edmund Burke had called the sublime.*⁸⁰

⁷⁹ McEvelley, T., *The Exiles Return: Toward a Redefinition of Painting for the Post-Modern Era*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 153.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p. 154.

At the heart of Romanticism was the question of *how* to *represent* that which is *abstract*, the sublime, the essence, the spiritual, and the mysteries in nature and in life.

The legacy of Romanticism – the primacy of the individual's sensory experience, particularly experience of the sublime as a way to the transcendent unknown – is located in the Abstract Expressionist movement. Clement Greenberg's analysis of Modernism as a purely formalist consideration is antithetical to what many of the Abstract Expressionists, Rothko and Robert Motherwell (1915 - 1991) for instance, were attempting to *represent* in their *abstract* works. The Abstract Expressionist works, like those of many of their contemporaries, were painted revelations of spiritual sensibilities and a form of mysticism. These artists also identified with the Surrealists' intrigue with the unconscious and how chance and automatism, as a process, could unleash the creative spirit and tap into the mysteries of the unconscious.

Mark Rothko, one of the key artists in the Abstract Expressionist movement, is an important artist in this research. In the following two of his paintings are cited. The first was produced during what is labelled his surrealist years and was a precursor to the second painting, the latter representing his mature style, known as colour-field painting. Although familiar with Rothko's colour field paintings, it was only after I made the triptych *Pool 1, Pool 2 and Pool 3* (Fig.47) that I perceived a relationship to his work. I discovered Rothko's primordial-like surrealist paintings, a manner of working that he explored for approximately ten years. Coincidentally, the aim in one of my own paintings, a work entitled *Pool 2* (Fig.47), was precisely to evoke a 'primordial-like' state.

*In the spirituality which has accompanied much Modernist painting, the surface of the canvas is like this metaphysical membrane between being and nothingness, a surface which is not purely passive but, like the surface of the primal ocean, has the ability to yield up forms within itself when properly stimulated.*⁸¹

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 146.

How does something come from nothing? How did it all begin? Inspired by the primitive and myth, by biology and anthropology, Rothko sought to explore these fundamental questions of life. He was on an inward quest for archetypes and symbols that would express and help answer his search for truth and meaning.

Paint is an intermediary and the painted surface is a site. In the beginning there was a *primeval landscape*, to use Rothko's words. Primeval water contained all solid bodies before they acquired form and rigidity. *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea* (1944) (Fig.22) conjures up a watery primordial past, yet sky and land are now present in the horizon line that cuts across low on the picture plane.



Fig. 22 Mark Rothko, *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea*, 1944, oil on canvas, 165 x 184.8 cm

There are two figurative-like vertical shapes, almost the height of the canvas, that dominate the space. Life has moved out of the pool of consciousness and is interacting with its surroundings. There is movement, but it is not harmonious, it is more like a cacophony. Straight and curved lines, waves and ripples, the organic and the geometric all dance in and out of the surface on the canvas. There are traces of form and lines seen through transparent paint, and the work is loosely painted in some areas.



Fig. 23 Mark Rothko, *Red and Blue over Red*, 1959, oil on canvas, 194.6 x 178.2 cm

It is these loosely painted transparent areas of colour that become the subject for Rothko's classic work as he progresses in clarifying his ideas by simplification and subtraction. Rothko's reading of Burke's writings on the sublime and its connection to the experience of transcendence has been thought to inspire his colour-field paintings. *Red and Blue Over Red* (1959) (Fig.23) is an amorphous field of luminous paint in a warm red hue. This is an enigmatic, still, contemplative work that stimulates a subjective response. The horizontal rectangle hovering in the middle of this painting harkens back to the horizontal line and shape that is in *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea*.

This is like a stage set for the playing out of a drama, our human condition that is tragic and timeless and which Rothko has sought to expose. Although Rothko has been regarded as a great colourist, he refuted that categorization, maintaining that if one sees only colour, one misses the point. In a talk at Pratt University in 1958, Rothko has been recorded to have 'formulated his self-image as an artist...as a contemporary seer who, on the authority of an inner voice, envisions and reveals new truths about the human drama'.⁸²

⁸² Sandler, I., 'Mark Rothko: In Memory of Robert Goldwater' in Glimcher, M. (Ed.) *The art of Mark Rothko: into an unknown world*. London: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1992, p. 90.

This discussion on representation and abstraction in painting, citing particular examples of work by Steir and Rothko complete Chapter Two. In this examination of key concepts and relevant artists in this chapter, it has been suggested, using references, that paint and the visual language can be metaphorical; that water, the pool and waves can be a fact and metaphor; and that metaphor has a link to each concept discussed. Besides the metaphorical, there have been various other reasons why particular artists cited are relevant to the project and these have been documented. In conjunction, I have hoped to illuminate just how *wondrous* the relationships between things are – the relationship between the representational and the abstract, between the particular and the universal, and between the literal and the metaphorical. How, for example, the material substance of paint as a red brush mark on a canvas *is* a painted red brush mark on a canvas until we give it another meaning through it's relationship with something else that may or may not seem to be related. This very act of creating meaning becomes dependent upon our perspective – our lens – our way of seeing, feeling and thinking about things.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This following Chapter on Methodology is a descriptive explanation of my processes, and resultant paintings, that chart my journey of discovery in trying to find a way I could paint images that would reflect water as a metaphor for life. Included within this exposition are more contextual ideas.

The methodology is seen through two perspectives, suggested by Elkins, that 'a painter's or an alchemist's method can be an orderly progression from the prima materia up to the final crowning step – or it can be a constant thrashing-about in a ruleless place where history and scholarship are no help at all'.⁸³ While the concept of water as a metaphor for life is consistent, the methodological processes and the way in which the substance of paint is used to reflect this concept is seen to shift and change considerably. This way of working, envisioned in the paintings themselves, and the questionability of *steplessness* mirrors the concept of painting as an alchemical transformation.

The methodology developed into three phases: *A Lens into A Landscape*, *A Lens into an Inscape*, and *(After David Peat) Synchronicity: The Speculum of Inscape and Landscape*, and may be seen to parallel the phases in a *rite of passage*.⁸⁴

⁸³ Elkins, J., *What Painting Is*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 177.

⁸⁴ These three phases in a *rite of passage* are separation, liminal and communitas, which have been identified by Van Gennep in footnote 44, p. 32.

A Lens into A Landscape

This first phase marked a *separation* from my previous ways of viewing landscape. I was being exposed to new perspectives and ideas. I was experimenting with the way I would incorporate these thoughts into my visual work and which direction I would take in my project.

Bruny Island

While my project emerged out of my experiences at Waddamana, the initial exploration into my project was a three-day trip to Bruny Island in February 2003. I had thirteen sketches in my journal as well as photographs to use for painting references. A reassembled photograph of Adventure Bay became the subject of my first painting. On 12 canvas board panels, each 17.5 x 12 cm, I painted the scene in a direct manner – *alla prima* – with no drawing, no underpainting, and with one pass. This spontaneously executed oil painting, entitled *Passage* (Fig.24) with text – *pass, passé, passage* – was my attempt to reconcile my thoughts about the very validity of landscape painting. Was representational landscape painting *passé*? Was this the start of my passage to new ideas and work, a new life?



Fig. 24 Destanne Norris, *Passage*, 2003, oil on twelve canvas boards, 36 x 72 cm

The panels, like pages, ask to be read. Did the word inform the visual work or the does the visual work inform the word? Certainly, there is interplay between both. Words are signposts. I was looking at Colin McCahon's (1919 - 1987) work and how he incorporated image and text. I considered

his words, 'I aim at a very direct statement and ask for a direct response, any other way the message gets lost'.⁸⁵ My own painting was direct, an idea and a way for me to frame these questions. It was my starting point; I was at the trailhead.

In an effort to help liberate myself from literal representation I experimented by making oil monoprints before beginning my next painting.

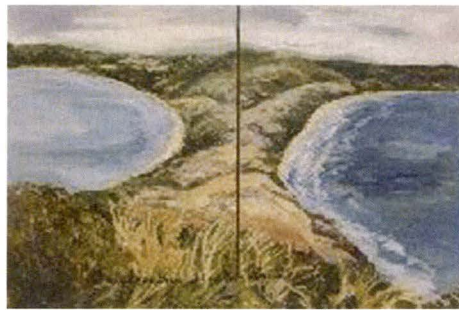


Fig. 25 Destanne Norris, *Breathe*, 2003, oil on canvas (diptych), 41 x 62 cm

This painting, a diptych called *Breathe* (Fig.25) incorporated the word woven in and out of the grassy bank in the foreground of the painting; it was painted from a pencil study sketched on top of the isthmus looking towards North Bruny Island. It still clung to my typical way of working – representational, and painted in local colour. However, the use of the diptych enabled 'a clear distinction between two halves – a chronological leap, a shift of meaning, a distinction of status'.⁸⁶

The shape of the isthmus, like the capital letter 'I', extended into the space and distance of the picture frame. Isthmus Bay, calm and sheltered, was to the west. The open wild Tasman Sea that washed on to the shore was to the east side of this narrow strip of land that held North Bruny to its twin, South Bruny. There was a split; two parts to a whole. I needed to consider the direction of both the external and internal forces acting both on the shape of the land and within myself. A shift was happening; there were

⁸⁵ Brown, G., *Colin McCahon: Artist*. Wellington: Reed, 1984, p. 153.

⁸⁶ Lampert, C. *McKeever*. Cat. London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1990, p. 68.

two landscapes. It was time to move on again, to new Tasmanian territory in the search for what my project focus might be.

Waddamana

On a field trip to Waddamana in March 2003 I was exposed to new ideas relating to my experience and understanding of wilderness and landscape in Tasmania. Now I was considering art, natural environment and history in Tasmania. Waddamana represented, to me, the collision of contradictory worlds between nature and the Aborigines who once inhabited this place on the one hand, and, big industry and European colonization, on the other. I set up my painting easel in full view of the



Fig. 26 Photograph of the book, *Considering Art in Tasmania*, on the easel in the landscape at Waddamana, 2003

penstocks nestled into the hillside. It was a contradiction how both the eucalyptus trees and the electrical towers seemed to grow out of the meadow below and how the penstocks seemed to fit into the bush as though they were a natural feature in the land. I fastened the book, *Considering Art in Tasmania*, which featured John Glover's painting of Aborigines dancing in the wilderness on the front cover, into the clamps, stepped back and took a sepia-toned photograph.⁸⁷ This photograph

⁸⁷ Lynne, E. & Murray, L. (Ed.), *Considering Art in Tasmania*. Sydney: Fine Art Press, 1985.

(Fig.26) is a visual collage of ideas between nature, cultural history and industrialization and it represented a question.

In this book, Jonathan Holmes (b.1947) writes an essay entitled, *resuming our journey into the landscape...* where he discusses the photo installation, *Place* (1983), by Geoff Parr (b.1933). Through his work, Parr deals with the questions relating to the colonization and settlement of Tasmania and the shaping of the political and cultural face of the State.⁸⁸

Geoff Parr has had a long and distinguished career as an artist-academic and environmental activist. Throughout his career Parr has used multi-media: photography, painting, computerized digital imagery and installation, to convey his thoughts on the collision of the two worlds of natural environment and humanity, and issues of conflict and conservation in Tasmania. For instance, the hydro-electric dam scheme, forestry practices, conservation of old growth forests, including finding inspiration from patterns found in the Tasmanian bush. Most recently, Parr's solo exhibition, *Periscope: a view from the original Lake Pedder*, at Carnegie Gallery in 2006 combined 25 years of work as seen through computer generated images, light box installations and photographs.⁸⁹

In his work Parr often collages and juxtaposes images, which is the process that underpins his investigations.

In his own words, Parr writes:

*The collage process holds a fascination for me. It's the drama of juxtaposition. The collision of binary oppositions at the fault line, the unexpected questions that arise from the gulf between.*⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Holmes, J. 'resuming our Journey into the landscape...' in Lynn, E. & Murray, L. (Ed), *Considering Art in Tasmania*. Sydney: The Fine Art Press, 1985, p 508

⁸⁹ Edwards, M & Kunda, M., *Periscope: a view from the original Lake Pedder*. Cat Hobart: Carnegie Gallery, 24 August - 24 September, 2006. (Exhibition also curated by Edwards & Kunda).

⁹⁰ Parr, G., 'Standing in a Lake with a G5 and 8 gigs of Random Access Memory' paper presented at ACUADS Conference Tasmania, 1 - 4 October, 2003. www.acuads.com.au/articles/2003/08/081049567679694.html

My photograph paid homage to Parr, stimulated my own thinking process and served as a question mark into the journey of the project. Our experience of nature and the land cannot be separated from the culture and politics that define and act upon it. Landscape is a cultural construct. W.J.T. Mitchell's fourth theses on landscape in, *Landscape and Power*, states:

*Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package.*⁹¹

Landscape paintings may also be considered to be constructs. They are re-orderings of objects, forms in space, driven by a relationship to a particular place – a place that, in these terms, is being constantly *re-created* by being there.

I folded my easel and wandered into the bush, setting it back up again to make *Waddamana Bush* (Fig.27) my first painting on location in Tasmania. I began to paint and was soon absorbed in the process. I had no preconceptions; I chose to be present, to respond openly and honestly to what I was seeing and feeling.

On my canvas-paper mounted to a board I lay brush strokes of colour beside each other and worked the surface, using my rag to blend and wipe the paint. In the painting the foreground becomes a coagulation of shapes and marks, which lead the eye on a path to the middle ground where an ochre swath in a grove of violet-blue and sap-hued eucalyptus trees arrest it. The painting invites the viewer into the illusion of space. There is a trace of a worn path, but this space closes in on itself when the path disappears and the eye meets the band of bush and scrub and can go no further. I was satisfied with the painting yet it was time to move on to find the focus in my project.

⁹¹ Mitchell, W.J.T., *Landscape and Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 5.



Fig. 27 Destanne Norris, *Waddamana Bush*, 2003, oil on paper, 54 x 44 cm

On the following day while contemplating and drawing the reflections on the surface and the movement beneath the surface at a pool on the Ouse River, I travelled back in time to a personal experience of loss through water. Distance and time had no bearing. The pool was a reservoir for this life-giving and life-taking element as it spiralled in front of me, and for the memory it delivered to my consciousness.

At the time, I wondered whether there was a contemporary context, as there was certainly an historical one - the Romantic Movement – for my project, that I became aware, would inevitably be bathed in personal experience, our mortal journey, nature and the spiritual. Like the painters of the sublime I wanted to go beyond surface appearances, lift the veil and touch the cosmos. This was my journey, my mythic exploration.

In *Taking the Waters: Spirit, Art, and Sensuality*, Alev Lytle Croutier (b.1944), notes:

In most mythologies female deities journey on the rivers searching for someone they have lost or a part of themselves they hope to retrieve. This is a quest not for self but for a missing part. Isis looking for Osiris, Psyche for Eros, and Ishatar for Tammuz

*represent the journey in search perfection, harmony, and wholeness on earth.*⁹²

Into the Studio

History – environmental, cultural and personal – flowed through Waddamana, which in Aboriginal language means *big river*. This place is a nexus of past and present.

When I returned to my studio I made an oil painting on nine found rusted metal plates, assembled like a grid, which I called *Mapping Waddamana* (Fig.28). I wrote an abridgement to accompany the piece:

Waddamana, located in the Central Highlands, was the first hydroelectric station to provide Hobart with electricity. The power station is now closed, the people have left and the houses are empty. Waddamana village is a Field Study Centre and the power station, a museum, which features original machinery, a photographic display, memorabilia and artefacts. But what of the lives of the people who lived here? Their echo, in this isolated bushland in the heart of Tasmania, is faintly heard and seen. There is the silence in the voiceless homes and playgrounds. There are the artefacts in the hardened leather boots, rusted remnants and aged photographs. These are like the lines, electric and alive, that intersect in this space, marking the land with their presence and carving the atmosphere with vibration – a steady low 'Om'.

⁹² Croutier, A L., *Taking the Waters: Spirit, Art, Sensuality*. New York: Abbeville Publishing Group, 1992, p. 51.



Fig. 28 Destanne Norris, *Mapping Waddamana*, 2003, oil on nine rusted metal plates, 28.5 x 28.5 cm

The image of the inverted trees painted with a grey-green and white palette on one of the square plates, along with the photograph upon which this piece was based, became the source for my next painting.



Fig. 29 Destanne Norris, *Ouse River Reflections*, 2003, oil on canvas, 51 x 61 cm

The ancient, dark Tasmanian bush reflected in the water pool on the Ouse River was both the *landscape* and my *inscape* that I experienced.⁹³ This

⁹³ I am using the term, *inscape*, to mean what physicist Dr. David Peat calls 'the authentic voice, or inner-dwellingness of things and of our experience of them.'
<http://www.f davidpeat.com/bibliography/essays/synch.html>

Further note: the word, *inscape*, according to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary means 'the inward, essential, unique quality of an observed object as embodied in literary, artistic (etc.) expression.'

painting, *Ouse River Reflections* (Fig.29) was representational, painted in earthy tones and there was a diagonal separation of dark from light across the space on the canvas. There was shifting movement in the painted water and light, bits of sky-blue and cloud-white reflected on its surface, but its depth was impenetrable.

I finished this painting and realized that I needed to go back to Waddamana by myself to conduct further research. I did not stay long. I could not hike up the Ouse River as I had done before. The rocks were too slippery and dangerous and I had to settle my sight on the pools in front of me. I made a couple of quick sketches in my journal and took digital photographs until it got dark. *Darkness is Falling* (Fig.30), the next oil on

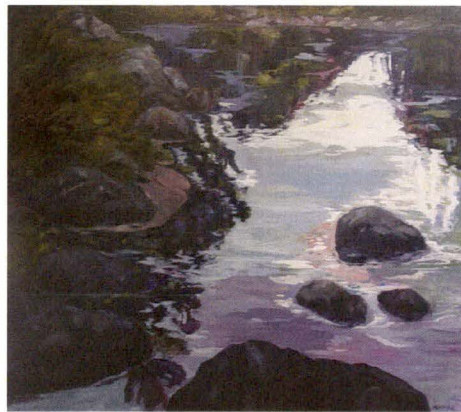


Fig. 30 Destanne Norris, *Darkness is Falling*, 2003, oil on canvas, 150 x 170 cm

canvas painting I made in the studio, is based on one of the digital images taken at the river. In this piece, the Ouse River pools among the rocks, reflecting the brush along the shoreline. In the work there is the illusion of deep space, use of transparent darks and a luminous quality in some areas. I took more liberty in the use of colour, introducing purple and touches of yellows and pinks, yet, like my previous painting, it was speaking more about light and dark, with the light taking on a triangular shape that extended from the base to the top of the canvas.

At this time I began working on another painting the same size; it was simply a depiction of water, not reflective, with no singular perspective. I was building up the surface with shapes and applications of paint. However, there were areas that were awkward, the shapes were more like jigsaw pieces. There was no flow, no fluidity. (This painting would be resolved, but not until eight months later.)

I was beginning to feel frustrated and discouraged. I was just over five months into my project and I wanted to have a clearer sense of direction. Nothing I had made to date had enough possibility in it for me to continue working in that particular manner. My landscape paintings had not moved far from representation. I had not determined if I would use paint fluidly in layers of dark, transparent colour glazes or whether I would use a thick, opaque surface, which would symbolize the weight of water - heavy water. I also started to think of the objective visual appearance of the pool and how I would artistically address this issue. I knew that I wanted to play representation against abstraction using water as a metaphor, pools as repositories, but I had not discovered or decided *how* I would accomplish this.

And Out Again

I made two further excursions into the environment to paint on location (before taking leave to return to Canada), thinking that my *plein air* and *alla prima* process might shed some new light on my inquiry.

While painting an oil-on-paper work at the Hobart waterworks my direct observations of the water's surface, and how it altered due to the atmospheric conditions, unconsciously predicated an abstract painting. This shift from a more representational manner of working into a more abstract manner unfolded as a natural consequence of my perceptions of the physical sensations of *plein air* painting. There was no fixed reflective image I could concentrate upon, as the breeze stroking the water's surface and the fluctuating light patterns continually altered the view in front of me.



Fig. 31 Destanne Norris, *Dancing the Reflected Light*, 2003, oil on paper, 61 x 96 cm

I realized that the resultant painting signalled a new development in my work. In it the space was depicted as shallow and a light, atmospheric, expansive quality pervaded the painting. This work I entitled, *Dancing the Reflected Light* (Fig.31).



Fig. 32 Destanne Norris, *Wave Watch*, 2003, oil on board, 60 x 60 cm

I still felt prompted to explore new territory. My last venture was to paint at the seaside. I made one traditional seascape, *Wave Watch* (Fig.32) in which I attempted to capture the movement the irregular pattern of the waves. The light shimmering on the waves and the alternating tones in the water held my gaze as they continuously changed in the rhythmic ebb and flow.

For my last experiment at this same beach, I set parameters and decided I would use small square boards, 14 x 14 cm, and make an oil painting of whatever I saw or was in my mind's eye while working by the sea. These paintings were to take no longer than thirty minutes each to complete. By the time I reached thirty small paintings I put my paints and brushes away.

It was only four of these small paintings, one of which was *Current* (Fig.33) that became important to me on my subsequent return from Canada. The camera lens was now pointing towards an *inscape*.

A Lens into an Inscape



Fig. 33 Destanne Norris, *Current*, 2003 oil on board, 14.5 x 14.5 cm

This second phase was equivalent to the process of being in an in-between or *liminal* state. My focus was directed on what was happening from an internal perspective and this is where the act of painting became like a ritual in the *rite of passage* process.

According to James Elkins'. The artist's studio is the laboratory and is 'nothing other than the inside of the body'.⁹⁴ Thus with a lens into an inscape, it was my body pouring, dripping, excreting, slashing, jabbing, stroking blood-thin and viscera-thick paint that coagulated and congealed into a skin on the gessoed surface.

Paint pooled and formed water symbols and images, which floated back and forth between abstraction and representation as my entire body sought for a new form, for truth and clarification as illustrated in the painting, *Pool of Deception* (Fig.34), and, *Truth is True* (Fig.36). This was a cathartic impulse in a rite of passage ritual. It was an intuitive and spontaneous response to paint.

⁹⁴ McEvilley, T., *The Exiles Return: Toward a Redefinition of Painting for the Post-Modern Era*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 167.



Fig. 34 Destanne Norris, *Pool of Deception*, 2004, oil on canvas, 61 x 51 cm

Beneath the Surface

October 31, 2003

*I awake. Pressure. I can hardly move my body. A current. I find an edge, emerge late and start my day reading my book, *The Seat of the Soul – An Inspiring Vision of Humanity's Spiritual Destiny* by Gary Zukav. He writes about the great cycles in the Universe that orbit within one another in relation to the journey of the soul, the evolution of the human species. I think about life as a cycle and how we are all ultimately connected. How there are cycles within cycles, orbits within orbits and about the pattern in the seemingly chaotic randomness of the Universe, embedded beyond our rational knowing yet seen and heard – observed in the physical world, in the seasons, the sky, the ripples in the water. I read, I write in my journal, I look into the screen on my digital camera at pictures of my family not yet downloaded. My Grandmother, in her bright red jacket, looks back at me and I wonder...will I ever see her again?*

It's quiet when I go to my studio to paint. I prepare and organize my materials. I adjust my headphones, turn on my music and begin, like never before, painting directly onto the board, squeezing the paint tubes, using them as a drawing tool. No brushes. Water is in my mind's eye. The thick, opaque paint pools, lines – concentric rings float in and out of space. My disc finishes but I cannot stop. I hear water music. Time stands still as I am lost in the process. My tempo slows and the painting completes itself. Paint, gobs of it, is everywhere. It is dark out...where had I been for three hours. I contemplate the painting and realize it had something for me.

Excited by new possibilities, I return home to tell my housemate about my difficult day and the painting that had come out of it. She, in turn, was happy for me and then she said:

'Now, I have some sad news for you, your Mom called, your Grandmother died tonight.

My painting...n's orbit (Fig.35).⁹⁵



Fig. 35 Destanne Norris, *n's orbit*, 2003, oil on board, 40 x 50 cm

I continued with more impasto paint, complementary colours, symbolic forms – elliptic shapes and lines, making new work. Heavy, energized paint congealed. These paintings were about texture, pure colour and



Fig. 36 Destanne Norris, *Truth Is True*, 2004, oil on board, 14.5 x 44.5 cm

expressive mark-making. No brushes, no mixing on a palette, oil paint straight from the tube to surface of the support. The work came fast and furious. I was not thinking about my project anymore, 'I' was it. I was thinking *in* paint, not *about* painting.

⁹⁵ Norris, D., *Untitled*. Unpublished musings, Hobart, Tasmania, 2004.

An example of these paintings is *Chaos* (Fig.37). In this painting the colourful textured shapes and marks congeal and coagulate, but do not exemplify any recognizable form. Chaos marks the beginning. The Bible begins with the void and formlessness before God created an expanse in the midst of the waters that separated the water from the waters (Genesis 1:2,6,7). After that there were waters above the expanse and waters below the expanse, see painting entitled, *As Above, So Below* (Fig.19). The yellow elliptical concentric rings symbolize the interconnectedness of water in the ripple effect.



Fig. 37 Destanne Norris, *Chaos*, 2004, oil on four canvases, 26 x 82 cm

A more contemporary analysis is chaos theory, which is considered to be one of the twentieth century's three major scientific discoveries besides relativity theory and quantum physics. The theory postulates that chaos is a non-linear dynamical system, which has a sensitive dependence on initial conditions. Chaos theory is actually about 'finding the underlying order in apparently random data'.⁹⁶ Chaos, too, is the alchemists' starting point, it represents primal unity, and in Elkins view, 'just as the world began in a single chaos, so it will end in an impeccable perfection'.⁹⁷ In as much as it was the aim of the alchemist to create perfection out of what seemed to be undifferentiated form, so to the artist seeks to find order, a pattern, an image out of the randomness of the material substance of paint.

In the last of this series of works, I took a tube of deep cadmium red, mixed it with medium, poured it onto a canvas, then with a knife and slabs

⁹⁶ 'Chaos Theory': Brief Introduction www.imho.com/grae/chaos/chaos.html

⁹⁷ Elkins, J., *What Painting Is*. London: Routledge, 2000, p. 46.

of solid red and alizarin crimson pigment, I covered the surface, working it, incising it, scarring it. A leathery, scratched skin hardened like a scab. I took drops of mineral violet and touched lightly down on a few areas on the canvas. The shapes the mineral violet paint assumed to the left of the center of the painting were two miniscule shapes of *Embodied Pool 1* and the other of *Embodied Pool 2*.

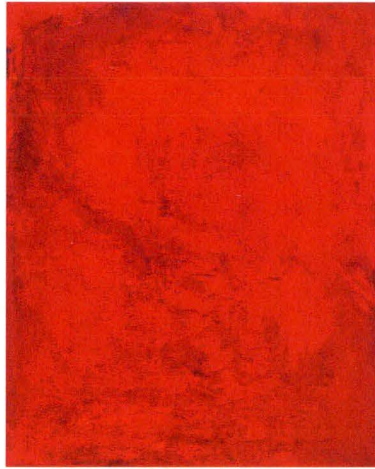


Fig. 38 Destanne Norris, *Emerge*, 2004, oil on canvas, 75 x 63 cm

This painting, *Emerge* (Fig.38) was a colour-field painting that was simple and complex. The physical surface of the painting was like a skin, the deep red colour was symbolic of the blood that flows through our veins underneath the skin and the shapes that emerged in mineral violet were the forms of a female figure and a cocoon shape. Ideas and thoughts that pooled and clotted beneath awareness in the unconscious were rising to the surface, to the skin. This was *the studio as a kind of psychosis*, which is what Elkins entitled his sixth Chapter. Here he concludes and reiterates that the alchemist or artist's work is *inside*, that liquids are life and how oil painting takes place in the viscous, between liquid and solid, and that the actual studio is nothing other than the inside of the body. Whereas, the painting, *Chaos*, represented an undifferentiated beginning, the painting, *Emerge*, represented the emergence of more solidified form.

Embodied Pools

It was time to be objective; to make the pool objective – as a form, a shape. I was feeling an affinity to Roland Barthes (1915 - 1980) who said, 'To tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis)'.⁹⁸

With Clarrisa Pinkola Estes, who states, 'we are it's pools', in mind, I envisioned my body as the pool and the pool as my body. I lay on a sheet of 6mm board and a colleague traced a loose outline of six different positions I formed without conscious intention. Then, with a jigsaw, I cut through the resultant curved lines on the board to create the shapes and I sanded the edges smooth.

Before preparing the surface with gesso for painting, I used the shapes as tracing templates, laying them on large sheets of paper. The drawings in black acrylic wash, graphite and charcoal had stains, drips, splashes and gestural marks that registered the immediacy and impact of the feeling of emotion that lies beyond reason.

One of these drawings, in particular *Untitled Drawing 3* (Fig.39), may stimulate thoughts about the image of Narcissus and the pool of reflection. The myth of Narcissus has been used throughout history as a subject in art. Narcissus, the son of a river god, was a beautiful lover who constantly rejected the nymphs who fell in love with him. He was fated to experience the repercussions of his actions. He was cursed and made to fall in love with his own reflection in the mirror like pool, so he could physically experience and know the pain he caused others by his unrequited love. Narcissus eventually dies by falling into the water himself. Conversely, the artworks, more specifically, in this phase of the project were made during an experience of unrequited love. An analysis of the myth of Narcissus

⁹⁸ Barthes, R. cited by Holmes, J. in *tell me a story*. Cat. Hobart: Monotone Art Printers, 1994, p. 9.

presents a study of self-narrative and collective myth and may symbolize not simply self-love, but the unfulfilled desire for unity with one self and one's beloved.



Fig. 39 Destanne Norris, *Untitled Drawing 3*, 2004, graphite, charcoal, black acrylic on paper, 150 x 130 cm

This suite of six drawings finished with a drawing of a body in flight in an arc formation over a bundle shape hovering underneath (Fig.40). Shortly after its completion, I was researching in the library and found an essay entitled, *Working out with Merleau-Ponty*, written by Jean Grimshaw and published in *Women's Bodies*. She writes on what Merleau-Ponty terms the *intentional arc* and how human consciousness is subtended by this arc:

*The arc is the span of our projects, past, present and future, the settings in which we live and are situated, and the integrated bodily orientations which we have towards the world. The body is a nexus of lived and related meanings, not only to present positions and intentions but to past and possible future ones as well. Merleau-Ponty's analysis is not restricted to actions, which consist merely of concrete physical tasks in relation to objects immediately to hand. Consciousness, he says, also projects itself into the cultural world.*⁹⁹

Once I finished preparing the surfaces of the body shapes for painting, I documented them in another fashion. I went to the photography studio and

⁹⁹ Grimshaw, J., 'Working out with Merleau-Ponty' in *Women's Bodies*. London: Wellington House, 1999, p. 103.

shot a series of photographs of body shadows, possibly to be used in my work at a later date.



Fig. 40 Destanne Norris, *Untitled Drawing 6*, 2004, graphite, charcoal, black acrylic on paper, 150 x 265 cm

Even unpainted the cut-out body shape contained powerful referential and associative meanings. The first cut-out was a like a bundle or a cocoon shape, the second took the form of a forlorn female figure, the third, fourth and fifth were foetal shapes, and the sixth was the shape of a body laid horizontal on it's stomach with arms extended over the head.

The cocoon and the foetal shapes symbolize incubation and gestation. It is out of the lifeless cocoon that the caterpillar transforms itself and emerges as the butterfly, which itself represents transformation. Furthermore, the foetal position is the position of the body of a pre-natal foetus, protected in the womb as it prepares for birth. These shapes are representative of being in an in between, liminal state and of the birth process. Also, it is commonly understood that when a person has suffered extreme physical or psychological stress their body can unconsciously assume a foetal position in self-protection.

These cut-out shapes of my body, were soft around the edges they had overall a somewhat cumbersome, clumsy appearance. I was meeting new waters, addressing these symbols, the cut-out and paint itself. I perused a few books on Henri Matisse (1869 - 1954), master of the cut-out, and Frank Stella (b.1936), but I wanted my relationship to the shapes – and my intuition – to guide me in the painting process without being overly influenced.

The process that I employed in painting each body shape was similar, even though each contained different imagery from the others. I had no sketch, pictorial or photographic reference to assist me. A few of these pieces took time to evolve while the others came relatively quickly. The painted body shapes became what I have dubbed *embodied pools*.

Lines, elliptical and circular, were prevalent, as was a variation of surface treatment from transparent, liquid glazes to opaque, impasto paint, from complementary colour to dark and light. Two of the embodied pools employed glazes that had a direct link to natural environment and place.



Fig. 41 Destanne Norris, *Embodied Pool 4*, 2004, oil on board, 65 x 155 cm

Embodied Pool 4 (Fig. 41) is a brooding, midnight blue landscape where the Tasmanian bush and starlight were mirrored on the water pool's surface. This was on one of the foetal forms. The second embodied pool (Fig.13) was painted in tea-colour – the colour of some Tasmanian waters – and the image suggests a dark, watery cave. Another foetal shaped embodied pool (Fig.14) evoked water – multi-coloured and mud-thick – with whirlpools, ripples and reflections folding in on each other. The first embodied pool (Fig.6) and the last two (see one of two Fig. 42) were painted in more abstract terms.



Fig. 42 Destanne Norris, *Embodied Pool 6*, 2004, oil on board, 38 x 196 cm

Reflecting on the shapes when I finished the sixth painting, I knew I had to make a seventh. I went back to the workshop and made three more cut-outs using three of the existing forms. I arranged the three embodied pools in a circular formation on the floor. I poured paint on the surfaces: first pink, then blood red, and once this paint was dry I outlined a reduced image of the bundle shape on top of the ruby surfaces and painted these smaller shapes in three varied ways but all in translucent indigo.

Embodied Pool 7 (Fig.43) completed this series.



Fig. 43 Destanne Norris, *Embodied Pool 7*, 2004, oil on board, 200 cm diameter

It was as if I was at a meeting of the waters, and I needed to decide on my future direction. I could continue in the same way and make new shapes on which to paint more embodied pools, or I could integrate the embodied pools back into the two-dimensional surface on the stretched canvas by employing the shapes as tracing templates. I made my decision when I looked at a large unresolved painting that I had set aside and that was resting against my studio wall. The textured surface of the canvas

appeared to be rippling in certain areas. This painting had a history; I would transform it into something new.

This painting, *Where Vestiges Surface and Emerge* (Fig.44) represents an integration of various ideas and methods of working that had been investigated in previous paintings. I used a transparent indigo glaze to cover the surface of the canvas that was textured with layers of dried paint. Into this surface was wove mostly warm colour – red, orange, yellow - dots, dashes, lines, shapes and traces of two of the embodied pools.



Fig. 44 Destanne Norris, *Where Vestiges Surface and Emerge*, 2003-04, oil on canvas, 170 x 150 cm

The two dominant outlines were the traced cut-out shape of the female form and the cocoon shape. They do not seem to reside in any distinct space. They are floating, ambivalent. There are hints and suggestions of light. The iridescent purple-blue dark glaze is subtle in places and nuances of colours and forms that lay beneath the surface in the history of the painting could be detected. The colourful painterly brush marks and notations of shapes and moving lines that lay on top of the glazed surface created a tension between what lay on the surface and what existed below the surface of the painting. There is an uncertainty in the painting. There is a sense this is a mysterious watery environment, where everything hovers and is in a pre-formal state of existence.

I held an exhibition of the paintings (Fig.45) that I made during the phase, *A Lens into an Inscape*, entitled, *The Feeling of What Happens*, named after the book that I was reading by neurologist, Antonio Damasio (b.1944).¹⁰⁰ He proposes that *emotion*, like the instinctual feeling of fight or flight, *precedes reason* and like consciousness, is aimed at the organism's survival; both emotion and consciousness is rooted in *representation* of the body.

I hung the embodied pools on the gallery wall and interspersed them with the other painted works from this series in a wave formation. The paintings hung as an installation, with the seventh embodied pool lying on the floor.



Fig. 45 Photograph of part of the exhibition, *The Feeling of What Happens*, Entrepot Gallery, August 2004

Seven of these works were also featured in a curated exhibition titled, *Propinquity and Distance: Self-portraiture in Contemporary Painting Practice*.¹⁰¹ The concept of the exhibition rested in the idea that 'the very substance of paint becomes a pool of reflection, allowing the painter to

¹⁰⁰ I was unaware at the time of referencing *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness* (1999) in my work that Antonio Damasio's earlier publication *Descartes' Error* (1995) was reflected in the premise of the Sydney Biennale 2004, *Emotion and Reason*, which focussed upon perception and its borders by considering our 'emotional' brain. Damasio, A. *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness*. London: Random House, 1999.

¹⁰¹ Pridmore, M. (Curator), *Propinquity and Distance: Self-portraiture in Contemporary Painting Practice*. Participating artists Brooks, Pridmore, Rickard, Young and Norris, Carnegie Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania, 18 November - 12 December, 2004.

drag out submerged issues about themselves and record them within the material'.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Quote by Brookes, W. in Pridmore, M. (Curator), *Propinquity and Distance: Self-portraiture in Contemporary Painting Practice*. Cat. Hobart: Monotone Art Printers, 2004 p. 2.

(After David Peat)
Synchronicity: The Speculum of Inscape and
Landscape

This third and final phase, which comprises the final body of paintings in the project, was an *incorporation* of the previous two phases – landscape and inscape. Communitas or incorporation, in a rite of passage, is the process whereby the person is being initiated back into the community that he/she was previously separated from. However, the person has changed and is being prepared to serve in a new way as a result of having integrated the experience and teachings from the previous two phases into his/her self and, in this case, graduate work.

My research began with a journey where, figuratively speaking, I focussed my wide-angle lens onto the Tasmanian landscape. The lens then changed to zoom, rotated 180 degrees and pointed towards an inscape. Now my lens revolved back into the natural environment – in a place where I am inspired and informed. I had not been to Lake St. Clair, the deepest fresh water lake in Australia. I knew I should experience this place. Within a week of knowing where I should go, I was kindly offered accommodation there. That was when I learned that the Aboriginal name of Lake St. Clair is *leeawuleena* and means *sleeping water*. The name of my young daughter in whose memory this project had its origins was *Leah*. Synchronicity.¹⁰³

Already occupied by my feelings about my daughter and the significance of water throughout the project, I was deeply moved by the coincidence between the lake's Aboriginal name and my daughter's name. My

¹⁰³ *Synchronicity*, a word coined by Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, is used to describe the coincident occurrences of acausal events. He believed that synchronicities are meaningful coincidences and were a principal that compassed his concept of the collective unconscious. See Jung, C.S. (Trans.), *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. London: Collins, 1967

response was renewed enthusiasm for the project and acceptance of Lake St. Clair as a key element in my work.

It was very wet and grey when I made the trip to Lake St. Clair. Although the short research expedition did not generate much work on location, it provided me with time to explore, take a good bush walk, read a book and reflect on some ideas that rolled back over and into my work in the studio.

Previous to my trip, I had made some definite decisions about what size and shape I would now use for the painted object, the *painted pool*. I had finished working with the shaped boards – my *embodied pools* – and I needed to give serious consideration to my new format. I was anticipating that this new series of work would constitute my final examination exhibition. I chose to use a square shape in part for its symbolic meaning. ‘The square, as the expression of the quaternity is a combination and regulation of...the four elements, the four seasons, the four stages of Man’s life, and specially the four points of the compass, are all sources of the order and stability of the world.’¹⁰⁴

In addition, I wanted to set up a contrast between the geometric, square shape of the object, and the organic, circular nature of the subjective content. I designed the custom stretcher bars to have a depth of 7cm and a height and width of 186 cm. I wanted them to project further than usual off the wall into the space of the gallery. This was intended to accentuate the painting as an object. I wanted not only the painting but also the painted object to elicit a physical presence in the space that it would inhabit. I determined that the works would be of roughly human scale to reference the physical body.

I had three of these paintings, *Pool 1*, *Pool 2*, and *Pool 3* (Fig.47) completed shortly before I went to Lake St. Clair. I worked on all three

¹⁰⁴ *A Dictionary of Symbols*, (Trans.) (2nd Ed) MA: Courier Dover Publications, 2002. p. 307.

concurrently. I wanted them to work together, like a triptych, yet, at the same time, exist and function separately.

The stretchers for these works were laid flat on the floor and I poured two medium diluted mixtures of red and yellow paint on their surfaces. By allowing each stretcher to rest horizontally and by lifting and tilting its four sides, the paint was able to stain and settle, and mix and flow across the canvas. The colours combined and I allowed the rivulets and veins of paint to drift where they may. This was both a controlled and an uncontrolled process – it involved both purpose and chance. Two paintings were predominately yellow, the other red.

On one of the dried yellow paintings, I made six tracings of the bundle-shaped embodied pool, which I loosely painted in with the red mixture, giving over to the dribbles, drips and occasional splashes. These ruby shapes were suspended on a sea of gold. I painted two more passes on this painting. I extended my colour scheme, adding some warmer hues with a few cooler ones for contrast. The painting was layered it was built up of natural tree shapes and a cell body. Elliptical lines, dots and dashes and large relatively hard-edged yet undefined shapes were located beside, on top of, and underneath areas of pooled, blurred and blended paint.



Fig. 46 *Pool 1, Pool 2, Pool 3* in the process of being painted

Some of this imagery came from my imagination, some from photocopied references of diagrams and notations from books I had consulted, and some were traces of other cut-out shapes that I had made when I created my embodied pools. This painting resembled a cross between a primordial

soup and a cosmic explosion. These paintings were not completely resolved. Without consciously thinking, I squeezed transparent pthalo-green paint onto my palette and, with a wide house-painting brush, covered the three paintings in a thin glaze. I immediately responded to the rich emerald-green colour.



Fig. 47 Destanne Norris, *Pool 1, Pool 2, Pool 3*, (triptych), 2004, oil on linen, 186 x 186 cm each

The primordial sea painting was flanked on either side by the two more abstracted, water-flow paintings. I lived with these paintings for a few months before adding small dabs of complementary vermilion. The red created tension and a new dialogue: they were colour-field paintings with a figure-ground relationship.

Water is the substance of the wave in a similar way that consciousness is the substance of being. Thich Naht Nanh, in *Going Home – Jesus and Buddha as Brothers*, comments on how the wave is at the level of phenomena where water is at the level of noumena.¹⁰⁵ The concept and idea of the wave came to the fore. (This was after two failed painting attempts. I tried making a painting of a vortex that was spinning into a circular black void on the water surface and another of a vortex as one might see it if one was submerged underwater. Neither worked.)

In retrospect, it is at this point in the project that the concept of waves of water becomes the metaphor for consciousness and experiences we have

¹⁰⁵ Hanh, T. N., *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers*. London: Random House, 1999, p. 4.

as human beings in bodies, which are mostly composed of this oceanic fluid. The question now was how would the formal characteristics of the paintings constitute this metaphor. This question was answered not through intellectual analysis, but by an intuitive process in the act of painting.

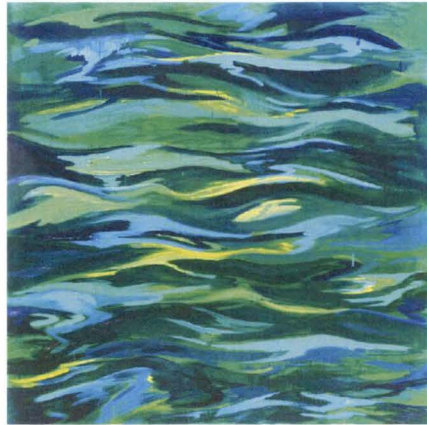


Fig. 48 Destanne Norris, *Waves in Mind*, 2004, oil on linen, 186 x 186 cm

I took the linen stretcher with the vortex spinning into itself, and onto my palette laid a mixture of blues and greens – ultramarine, thalo and Tasman blue, cerulean, turquoise, emerald green, thalo green, sap green – and added a little light yellow. Using a number of larger brushes, my body movement across the linen dictated the direction of the paint stroke.

I was feeling the rhythm of the wave but I was not concentrating on a pattern. In a few areas the paint pooled, dripped and splashed. I let this be. This painting, *Waves in Mind* (Fig.48) was composed of dark blue shapes that recessed back into the picture space, next to lighter colours that projected forward, but the space was still quite narrow and shallow. It was as if the shapes were competing, vying for space. There was a chaotic randomness to the waves that appeared to be in the process of becoming, yet had not quite found their form. This was a conceptual painting of the concept of waves in mind.

My perspective shifted. My next painting, *Schouten Passage* (Fig.49) represented my engagement with place, land and sea. The work was inspired by the memory of a kayaking adventure that I had on the Tasman Sea on New Year's Eve 2003. The viewer or the participant in this composition is riding out the storm on the tumultuous waves of the churning sea. I did not use a drawing or photographic reference to support the making of this work. It swelled and erupted, quite powerfully, out of my imagination and body.



Fig. 49 Destanne Norris, *Schouten Passage*, 2004, oil on linen, 186 x 186 cm

The surface is active, dynamic, tense – here the paint is thick and thin, opaque and transparent, dark and light. There is mass, movement and colour slathered on with brushes and marked with tubes of paint used as drawing tools. The energy in the mountainous waves in this painting embodies my experiences of being in Tasmania, which I perceive to be on the crest of being propelled into a new future through reconciliation with its past.

These waves are at their peak, their breaking point.

And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back. I am aware once more of a new desire, something rising beneath me like the proud horse whose rider first spurs and then pulls him back. What enemy do we now perceive advancing against us, you

*whom I ride now, as we stand pawing this stretch of pavement? It is death. Death is the enemy.*¹⁰⁶

It was not long after I painted *Schouten Passage* that I took leave from my studies and flew to Canada, again, to help care for my mother who was dying. When I came back from Canada, five months later, I returned to Lake St. Clair in order to re-orient myself and to conduct some research. The four-day excursion provided me with time to bushwalk, read, draw and paint through some ideas for new work. Lake St. Clair was a *place* to re-search.

This was a period of adjustment and although I painted solidly for a month after I came back to the studio, I destroyed most of the work, unsatisfied. I went back to nature, to the edge, where the sea meets the shoreline. With my digital camera, I photographed moments in time at the seaside.



Fig. 50 Cropped Photograph of Shoreline
used in research to paint, *Water and Stones* (Fig.51)

Using one of the photographs, I isolated and cropped one particular image and made a sketch from this image (Fig.50) The sketch was the basis for the representational painting entitled, *Water and Stones* (Fig.51). This painting was named after Elkin's first sentence in the introduction to his book, where he equates painting to alchemy and likens water and stones to the elements in alchemy.

¹⁰⁶ King, J., *Virginia Woolf*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994, p. 469.



Fig. 51 Destanne Norris, *Water and Stones*, 2005, oil on canvas, 140 x 140 cm

It was important that this painting not only feature waves, but that the water be represented as being clear enough to see some shape and form beneath its surface. In *Water and Stones* the water is both transparent and opaque, it is a combination of lighter and darker values and there are specific areas where the light source was highlighted on the water surface. It was this image that became the source for the development of the last five paintings in the project.

I drew a grid on the already cropped photograph, used in the research for making *Water and Stones*, and cut the grid into squares. I chose three images to use as a basis for the next three painting, of which only two, *Surface 1* and *Surface 2*, were completed.

Focussed on the unique abstract qualities of the water surfaces, I began to work on the paintings concurrently. While in the process, the paintings took on their own trajectory and I became less concerned about the initial photographic image. I went with it and finished the painting that I had, in fact, envisioned as the last piece.

This painting, *Surface 1* (Fig.52), is brushstrokes of thin, fluid paint. The light is diffuse and soft, and the semi-transparent colours are blended and muted, – Tasman blue, turquoise, ochre, Naples yellow and titanium

white. There are no defined waves. The sea is much calmer as it undulates effortlessly over solid, murky forms. Land is intimated but the painting is about the surface – about rising up to the surface and above it. A stream of white foam – a trace – glides on top of the water and arcs diagonally across the pictorial space. There are reflections of light on the surface, and the knowledge that something exists beneath the surface. The water is forgiving.



Fig. 52 Destanne Norris, *Surface 1*, 2005, oil on linen, 186 x 186 cm

There were still two more paintings I wanted to finish, but one was set aside and the other was completed. I changed and transformed one of the paintings upon which I was working into something *other* in mid-stream and it became the painting entitled, *Surface 2* (Fig.53). My imagination took over. In a wave-like motion with my body I layered transparent glazes of ultramarine blue, pthalo green and Paynes grey over the entire surface of the stretched linen. The image was now one of obscure waves of water that were slick and reflective. The work's own painted history was apparent in the nuances on the surface of the linen where paint had dried into ridges – little rivulets and veins, and in the pulsating hints and emissions of neon blues and greens.

There was, however, a luminous soft white light shining from an undefined source onto one specific area of the dark, ominous water's surface – a

light that appeared foreboding, as it simultaneously seemed to be a surface reflection but also something contained below that surface: something not *on*, but *within* the water.

The paintings, *Surface 1* and *Surface 2*, evolved into images that were different from their original intention. In both paintings, the viewer is confronted with an intimate view of water and its surface. Although one may get the sense of being close to the shoreline in *Surface 1*, it is not easily determined whether one is standing on the shoreline or flying above the shore and water in *Surface 2*.



Fig. 53 Destanne Norris, *Surface 2*, 2005, oil on linen, 186 x 186 cm

Subsequently, I left the Tasmanian shoreline and returned to Canada to live where I painted three more paintings. These representational paintings, *Mem Pool 1*, *Mem Pool 2*, and *Mem Pool 3*, were painted from memory of direct experience and from my imagination. No preliminary drawings were made on the canvas. The intimate perspective of the water surface, light and dark, and the wave is the story in each of these paintings. They each have been built up in layers of glazes into opaque and semi-transparent surfaces. It is not possible to see under the surface, the water is not clear.



Fig. 54 Destanne Norris, *Mem Pool 1*, 2007,
oil on canvas, 186 x 186 cm

The painterly surface is smooth, the brush strokes have been blended into each other. The color-palette is of various blues and greens: phthalo blue, ultramarine blue, phthalo green, cinnabar green, phthalo cerulean blue, phthalo turquoise, except for naples yellow and zinc white. Overall, the values in the paintings range from mid-tone to dark, even though there are lighter areas that represent the white foam of the water and the reflected light.

There is a sense of three-dimensional space and of being immersed into the waves in these three paintings. The viewer is invited to enter into the painting. They are up-close and personal, yet there is a detachment, of sorts, as the perspective is as may be seen from above. There is something prominent that pushes out, and that mysteriously lies hidden underneath the waves in the dark, opaque waters in *Mem Pool 1* (Fig.54). Like *Surface 2*, this is a painting of night. However, there are highlights of foam and light that streak across the surface, where little pulsating notations of white light – starlight – sparkle sporadically as well.



Fig. 55 Destanne Norris, *Mem Pool 2*, 2007, oil on canvas, 186 x 186 cm

In *Mem Pool 2* (Fig.55), the swell and motion of the waves is absorbing. The viewer is invited into the experience of the water. What cannot be missed is the distinct white line formation in the trough of a wave just to the left of center in the painting. It's the shape of a figure eight on its side. It is a lemniscate, the term for the infinity symbol. The water, which is a subtle blending and blurring of a combination and layering of greens and blues, is less dense and more transparent than in *Mem Pool 1*, but you still cannot see through it. Again, as seen in *Mem Pool 1* drops of light dance on the water surface and the break of the wave creates a white foamy froth, but at the same time the water is being highlighted from a light source, the sky above.

In *Mem Pool 3* (Fig.56), the water surface is in the process of becoming calm as the waves are dissipating, although not completely as the painting depicts tranquillity and movement being almost equally weighted. The hue is more green than blue and the colour value has lightened in comparison with *Mem Pool 1* and *Mem Pool 2*. But nothing is totally clear. There is a suggestion of suspense where the wave peaks and forms a crest horizontally across centre of the painting. It hovers on the verge of breaking.



Fig. 56 Destanne Norris, *Mem Pool 3*, 2007
oil on canvas, 186 x 186 cm

These three paintings, *Mem Pool 1*, *Mem Pool 2* and *Mem Pool 3*, were the final paintings for the project: *painted pools: a lens into subjectivity*. This project was a journey of discovery into whether I could find a way to make paintings that would elicit the notion of water as a metaphor for life. The project has sought to present painted images of water that may induce a reflective or meditative frame of mind in the viewer, one that is akin to a common response to water itself. It rests with you, the viewer, who engages with these paintings, to decide whether this has been achieved or not.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Summary

The project has been an investigation of visual metaphor, specifically through the subject matter of water. The primary research question was: *Can the material substance of paint and visual language be used to explore the notion of water as a metaphor for life?* The aim was to explore this possibility using direct experience.

The project's focus emerged out of a walk up Tasmania's Ouse River. The project became equated to a *mythic exploration*, extrapolated in this document via the methodology of hermeneutics. Subsequently, the experience also became a *rite of passage*, with the act of painting serving at times as a ritualistic process, where the substance of paint, using James Elkin's theory, functioned as an alchemical element. The project examined the perceptual relationship between surface appearance and underlying meaning.

Within many of the paintings produced throughout the project, the *pool* is conceived and represented not only as a reservoir in nature but also it stands for the human body and as the image enshrined in the painted object. As the project progressed the way light and darkness play on ocean waves of water, and the subsequent associations that light, darkness and waves can be made to life, in general, become a principal concept.

The investigation involved research into other disciplines – anthropology, literature, philosophy, psychology, theology/spirituality and science – as is the nature of studying metaphor as Tilley states in the Preface to his book, that 'to write about metaphor is immediately to enter into a multi-

disciplinary field'.¹⁰⁷ The art-theoretical writing by Thomas McEvilley has been used quite extensively. The project has been inspired by the work of artists of the Romantic Movement, along with others who, although not members of Romanticism as a movement, have been relevant to my work.

¹⁰⁷ Tilley, C., *Metaphor and Material Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999, p. ivx.

Outcomes

There are two principal outcomes of this project: one is the final body of paintings and the support work, which serves to chart the process of the exploration into the research question and aim; and two is this exegesis which serves to interpret the visual research, setting the context and explaining the methodology.

As detailed in the methodology, the visual research developed into three phases, with the outcomes of the first two phases culminating in the final phase of the project – that which is represented by the principal exhibition.

These phases I entitled:

Phase One – *A Lens into a Landscape*

Phase Two – *A Lens into an Inscape*

Phase Three – *(After David Peat) Synchronicity: The Speculum of Inscapes and Landscape.*

In summary, I began with my usual methodology to landscape painting by making *plein air* paintings and other representational paintings based on sketches and photographs from my forays into the local Tasmanian environment. The work shifted and I moved into new territory making abstract paintings on boards that mapped my body as posture, along with other related abstract paintings on smaller square and rectangular supports. The result of mapping my body on boards was a distillation and simplification of imagery, symbol and form through colour in a new painting on canvas. This painting, *Where Vestiges Surface and Emerge* (Fig.44) marked a turning point and the works that ensued became the outcome – the final body of paintings.

There are a total of eleven paintings. Ten paintings with dimension of 186 x 186 cm each and one painting that is 140 x 140 cm. The paintings move from abstract to representational imagery where water is conceived as a

primordial beginning – birth and death – in *Pool 1*, *Pool 2* and *Pool 3* (Fig.47); to a mental conception of waves in *Waves in Mind* (Fig.48), to an image that represents the experience of being physically thrust into the waves in *Schouten Passage* (Fig.49); and then to representational images of surfaces of water as ocean waves that explore, in varying ways, the way light and dark plays on the surface and beneath the waves of water in *Water and Stones* (Fig.51), *Surface 1* (Fig.52), *Surface 2* (Fig.53), *Mem Pool 1* (Fig.54), *Mem Pool 2* (Fig.55), *Mem Pool 3* (Fig.56).

The concept of ocean waves of water becomes a metaphor for consciousness and experiences we have as human beings who are water-filled bodies. As the ebb and flow of the wave and the daily cycle of light and dark falls on these oceans and water bodies, so to may we experience times in our lives that is kin to the ebb and flow of the wave, and times that are filled with light and darkness. The waterscape paintings are presented in a sequence that can be read as a narrative of the passage of life itself. These are abstracted and representational waterscapes that are universal rather than specific in their scope, even though they were mediated by a particular connection to place.

Alongside the visual research, the outcome of the literary research has been a discussion of how certain artists are relevant; how the substance of paint and it's usage can be metaphorical; how particular painted images can be interpreted to be metaphorical and symbolic; how water, the pool and waves have metaphorical potential; how Romanticism has associations with the metaphorical and symbolic; how landscape and place, have a relationship to metaphor as a process that *we live through* and that metaphor *arises from bodily experiences*; how representational and abstract paintings have an *inter-relationship*; and how either representational or abstract paintings can be read as being metaphorical. It is suggested that painted images of water can be interpreted to be metaphorical as representational and as abstracted paintings.

In response to the primary question posed: *Can the material substance of paint and visual language be used to explore the notion of water as a metaphor for life?* I would venture to answer yes, as a result of the discoveries made during the project. However, in regards to my paintings, whether the viewer and reader agrees this to be true or not, is largely a matter of perception – a particular lens, perhaps.

Although, this marks the end to this Master of Fine Art by research project it is, conversely, a new beginning. It is my intention to further investigate water as a subject in painting and research, beginning where this project has left off. I would like to pursue, in the not too distant future, a practice-based research PhD – to lecture (moreover to inspire others in developing that which is latent), research and continue my practice as a painter within the University environment.

The outcomes of this project from an artistic and academic standpoint have been immeasurable. There has been a positive transformation within my paintings – they have altered from being more specific, traditional landscape scenes to paintings, which invite a more universal interpretation of landscape. This, I believe, has occurred, in part, because of my dedication and immersion into my work - both the visual and the literary research. I have learned the art of research and the commitment and determination required to be a researcher. I have experienced a development in my critical thinking skills, I have gained a greater understanding of contemporary art issues and I have increased my ability to engage in critical debate. Due to the substantial written component required for this degree, my writing skills have been fine-tuned. Having experienced setbacks, I have learned to regard them as opportunities in disguise. And of particular note, through being open to this experience, which has involved many shifts in perspective, by being able to accept criticism and willing to challenge my ideas I have learned and have more to offer.

Contribution

This project, *painted pools: a lens into subjectivity* has been about change and transformation; it has sought mediation and relationships between opposites; as a means to envision and create wholeness. I suggest this connectivity is reflected in what Ihab Hassan calls the *spiritual project of postmodernity*. Hassan believes that this requires relationships founded on truth and a need to see our selves in a more dialogical relation to the diversity that exists in nature and culture, indeed within the whole universe itself.¹⁰⁸

In the Introduction I cite David Abrams, who articulates that the relationships we have to the world are *reciprocal relationships*. In mathematics a *reciprocal* is 'the number by which a given quantity is multiplied to produce *one*'.¹⁰⁹ The concepts of oneness and wholeness are all a factor of reciprocity. Reciprocity does not exist in and of itself. Oneness can be known and understood through an exchange or interplay, through the balancing of opposites, through relationships – through love.

It is hoped that this project might contribute, as part of a cultural and critical mass, to meditating on how our human and planetary existence is dependent upon understanding our *embodied* relationship to water; and within this how the experience of the specificity of place can reflect this universal truth.

¹⁰⁸ Hassan is one of the progenitors of the term postmodernism. Hassan, I., *From Postmodernism to Postmodernity: The Local Global Context*. Essay from a lecture 7pm 21 August 2000. Woolloomooloo: Artspace Visual Arts Centre, 2000.

¹⁰⁹ *Macquarie Essential Dictionary*, Macquarie University: The Macquarie Library Pty. Ltd., 1999, p 658.

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Edwards, M. & Kunda, M. (Co-curators), *Periscope: a view from the Original Lake Pedder*. Artist Geoff Parr. Carnegie Gallery, Hobart, 24 August - 24 September 2006.

Pridmore, M. (Curator), *Propinquity and Distance: Self-Portraiture in Contemporary Painting Practice*. Artists Wayne Brooks, Mary Pridmore, Lucy Rickard, Allan Young and Destanne Norris. Carnegie Gallery, Hobart, 18 November - 12 December 2004.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

DESTANNE NORRIS

Education

2003 - 08 MFA Research Candidate, University of Tasmania, Australia
1984 - 87 BFA First Class Honours, University of Victoria, BC, Canada

Solo Exhibitions

2008 *Painted Pools: A Lens into Subjectivity*, Selected Paintings, Fina Gallery, University of British Columbia Okanagan, Kelowna, Canada
2005 *Painted Pools: A Lens into Subjectivity*, MFA Graduation Exhibition Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart, Australia
2004 *The Feeling of What Happens*, Entrepot Gallery, Hobart, Australia
2002 *Recent Paintings*, The Gallery at JPL, Jasper, Canada
2001 *The Rockies Larger than Life*, The Gallery at JPL, Jasper, Canada
2000 *New Landscape Paintings*, The Gallery at JPL, Jasper, Canada
2000 *Alberta Passages*, Kensington Fine Art Gallery, Calgary, Canada
1996 *Leah's Gift*, Sunrise Gallery, Jasper, Canada

Group Exhibitions

2007 *Green*, Juried Members' Exhibition, Gallery Vertigo, Vernon, Canada
2006 *Nucleus*, Gallery Vertigo, Vernon, Canada
2004 *CAST Annual Members' Exhibition*, Hobart, Australia
2004 *Propinquity and Distance*, Carnegie Gallery, Hobart, Australia
2002 *Converging Landscapes*, Leighton Foundation, Calgary, Canada
2001 *Annual Members' Exhibition*, SA Public Art Gallery, Salmon Arm, Canada
2000 *In the Artist's Eye: Mount Alberta*, Jasper Museum, Jasper, Canada
1999 *Reflections of Jasper National Park*, Jasper Museum, Jasper, Canada
1998 *Annual Members' Exhibition*, SA Public Art Gallery, Salmon Arm, Canada
1995 *Wildlife, Landscapes and Wildflowers*, Jasper Museum, Jasper, Canada

Travelling Exhibition

2001-2003 *Blooming Prairie*, Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition
Juried Exhibition from the Alberta Society of Artists
Produced by the Edmonton Art Gallery

Collections

Acrobat Results Marketing Inc.
Alberta Foundation for the Arts
Bennett Jones LLP
Canadian Farm Credit Corporation
Consulate General, Japan
Finning Canada
Parks Canada, Jasper National Park
Sherritt Greene
Simpson's Num-Ti-Lodge
Whistler Hotel
Private homes in Canada, USA, Asia, Australia, Europe

Commissions

Private Commissions
1997-1998 Prizes Men's Mountain Classic Golf Tournament

Workshops and Artist in Residence Programs

2007 Strategies for Teaching Art, Professional Development Workshop,
Gallery Vertigo and the British Columbia Arts Council, Canada
2001 Brewsters' Artist in Residence Program, Columbia Icefields, Canada
1999 Gushul Studio Artist in Residence Program, Blairmore, Canada
1998 Brian Ayteo Workshop, River Rock Studio, Cochrane, Canada
1997 Art by the Lake, Georgian College, Barrie, Canada
1997 Canadian Society of Watercolour Painters, Jasper, Canada

Awards and Grants

2004 Graduate Research Support Scheme, University of Tasmania, Australia
1997 Arts Jasper Scholarship, Canada
1993 Arts Jasper Scholarship, Canada
1986 Victoria Arts Council Bursary, Canada
1986 Academic Scholarship, University of Victoria, Canada
1985 Academic Scholarship, University of Victoria, Canada
1985 M.H. Mooney Fine Arts Bursary, University of Victoria, Canada
1984 Credit Union Foundation Bursary, University of Victoria, Canada

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* 'Visual artist's exhibition features six-foot square pieces', Christine
Pilgrim, *The Daily Courier: Vernon Edition*, 10/10/08

- **Artist takes a dive in her painted pool: Life continues to flow for Norris', Kristin Froneman, *The Morning Star*, 31/01/07
- **Propinquity and Distance: Self-portraiture in Contemporary Painting Practice', (catalogue essay), Mary Pridmore, Carnegie Gallery
- **Propinquity and Distance', Joerg Andersch, *The Saturday Mercury*, 27/11/04
- **Artists dominate and dazzle', John Briggs, *The Saturday Mercury*, 20/05/04
- **The feeling of what happens', Joerg Andersch, *The Saturday Mercury*, 28/08/04
- **Local artist headed down under', Quintin Winks, *The Jasper Booster*, 11/12/02
- **In the Artist's Eye: Mount Alberta' (catalogue essay), Wendy Wacko, Jasper Museum
- **Galleries: Best Bets', *Calgary Herald Entertainment Guide*, 04/05/00
- **Calendar girls market unique reflections of Jasper', Nick Lees, *The Edmonton Journal*, 07/03/99
- **Leah's gift a tribute', Heather Berezowski, *The Jasper Booster*, 06/12/96

Memberships

Alberta Society of Artists, Past Juried Member, Canada
Gallery Vertigo, Vernon, Canada
Vernon Art Gallery, Vernon, Canada

Committees and Volunteer Work

2003 - 04 Plimsoll Gallery Board Member
1999 - 02 Arts Jasper Board Member
1988 Jasper Heritage Folk Festival Logo and Collaborative Stage Design
1984 University of Victoria, Collaborative Heritage Project

Teaching Experience

2007 Private Drawing and Painting Lessons (Adults)
2007 *Once Upon a Time....Collaging with Henri Matisse*, Art Class
2002 Private Drawing Lessons (Child)
1999 Mixed-Media Collage Workshop (Adults)
1998 - 99 Summer Art Camp for Kids (Week Session)

Lectures on Artistic Process and Work

2002 *Tasmania Bound*, Jasper Park Lodge, Jasper, Alberta
2002 *Life, Art and Healing*, Distant Education University of Alberta
Psychology Class, Jasper, Alberta
1998 *Leah's Gift*, After Eight Club, Edmonton, Alberta

Art Related Employment and Special Projects

- 2007 Beyond Art Gallery and Framing/Art Supply Store, Vernon,
 British Columbia, Canada
- 2003 - 05 Gallery Attendant, Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania,
 Australia
- 2004 - 05 Luke Wagner Framemakers, Frame Designer /Customer
 Service Representative, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia
- 1999 Produced, marketed and was one of six female artists from Jasper
 featured in a millennium calendar, *Reflections of Jasper National
 Park*, Canada
- 1988 Designed Fall Brochure for Jasper Community Activity Centre,
 Alberta, Canada
- 1988 Designed and Sold T-Shirts, Notepaper and Postcards, Jasper,
 Alberta, Canada
- 1987 Glass Cutter for Double Visions Stained Glass Company,
 Commissions Winter Olympics 1988, Jasper, Alberta, Canada
- 1985 Illustrator, Project for MA Candidate, University of Victoria, British
 Columbia, Canada
- 1984 Assistant Researcher Sequential Art Development Project, Dr.
 Marion Small, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

*With the drawing of this
Love and the voice of this Calling*

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always -
A condition of complete simplicity*

T.S. Eliot