

2003

## Active imagination

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ARTCAP SYMPOSIUM 2003

## ACTIVE IMAGINATION

by

JANEEN CAMERON

Janeen Cameron is currently completing a Masters Degree in Art Therapy at the Edith Cowan University in Western Australia. This is the first of a series of four active imagination sessions she has recorded during her illness. Janeen's background is in Occupational Health and Safety, Nursing and Business. Janeen is also a practicing artist and can be contacted on [janeen.cameron@bigpond.com](mailto:janeen.cameron@bigpond.com)

"I don't know Lyn, I just can't seem to get my head around the words"  
"Me either" Lyn replied twisting the portion of chicken quiche around the plain white café plate with a large fork. "I wonder if we read it to each other out loud it may mean more?"  
"Sounds good - worth a try" Disentangling the last of my tuna and salad sandwich from between the gaps in my teeth and swishing the remains with a sip of water "Would you like to read first - you're the poet?"  
Lyn missed my comment at trying to express my admiration for her writing. Her words were exciting, the way she arranged them together successfully lyrical.

Clearing her throat Lyn read aloud, "Another night from the gallery window I saw a brindled heaven, the moon just marked by a blue spot" she paused, as if thinking her way through the text and then continued "pushing it's way through the darker cloud, underneath and on the skirts of the rack, bold long flakes whitened and swaled like feathers"

Lyn stopped and I realised in that moment I was transfixed on the isolation, the foreboding of what was about to burst forth to disrupt the tranquillity, the peacefulness. Lyn's voice was quiet and reminded me of a twig blown from its place of safety high above the ground on a long slender branch. Tossing from space to space getting caught in the snow, feeling damp, decomposing, covered again by a blanket of snow to be lost until spring's fervour.

"Below the garden with the heads of the trees and shrubs furry grey" She offered with vigour then trailed off to an even longer pause than before. "I read a broad careless inscape flowing throughout." and she ended and looked up at me.

"Sorry don't really know what that means". Maybe, I thought, that was the reason for the delay and I reassured Lyn that I didn't know either.

We read the passage back and forth, out aloud, while we concluded our lunch by consuming flat white coffee and fruit custard tarts.

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I wondered that night what the other customers had thought as we had read aloud over and over again. This gave me an idea! I would simulate my conversation with Lyn but this time I would converse with myself and try to lock in on the feelings I experienced. Later I would replay my conversation listening to the tonality of my voice, the pauses and the noises of my art making. It would, I believe, give me an understanding of myself that I could engage in. Listening, in itself, I was discovering was a creative process. By engaging in the use of active imagination as apposed to just random thought or association, allows me to occupy a space to listen to the things I am saying - my own inscape, where I can interconnect with my unconscious and experience an authentic engagement.

Through the use of a recording device and the process of image making, the following is a transcript of a fifteen minute active imagination session which resulted in an image (no1) which informed and became rationalised, at a later date, into another artwork (no 2).

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October 25, 2003

My room is quiet, peaceful and I have prepared my paints. The paints arranged around the room, different mediums and different colours ready for a quick retrieval during the active imagination session. . Fearful of what I may find deep within the recesses of my unconsciousness I prepare myself. Sitting comfortably and breathing deeply I'm aware of the peaceful place I go to in my mind. I hesitate and then slowly turn my micro cassette to record. Introducing myself to the tape I commence:

I stretch my paper like I stretch my mind. Make it wet, make it damp so it feels nice and smooth. It's like my mind, it doesn't stop it keeps going ñ go and go it does ñ oh boy! When I look out of my gallery window I feel quite scared I can't exactly see where I'm going in my life and I get frightened. It's a terrible fear just like I hope it all works out. I'm hoping I'm doing the right thing whatever that may mean. It's a big, white piece of paper Ö. it's blank [and I laugh] I sometimes wish my mind was blank. It would certainly save a lot of problems. Mmmm - I feel confident right now when I think of the passage. A person looking back, whatever has been before remains in our unconscious. I think that when it stays in our unconscious it allows us to inherently use it. You know when we make mistakesÖ. We make a lot of mistakes. I wonder how the mistakes I've made have affected meÖ. I'm sure they have been positive.. I wouldn't be where I am now. I think that if I hadn't said 'gee I've made a mistake' and gone and tried again I maybe somewhere else today. I wonder how my worryingÖ. you know how you worryÖ may very well haveÖ. you knowÖhave actually affected me physically? I'm ill at the

moment.

[I'm mixing the watercolours furiously] I never use watercolours they're insipid.

I don't know what is going to happen to me over the next few months. I don't know enough about my prognosis... I may even die... that terrifies me. [I laugh and sigh at the same time]. It's a worry.

Reminding myself to stay with my feelings in this period of deep active imagination I continue to press myself with the feelings I'm experiencing around dying. The uncomfortable feeling is sickening and hitting my physical body around my throat and chest. I feel it could stop me but feeling very determined I avoid turning the recorder off.

If I die what does that feel like? Am I going to die? Will I change? What will I change if I know I'm going to die? Would I do anything different?

I really don't know... re-a-l-l-y. I don't know. Am I going to really die? The fear of dying...

I'm hitting the paper with the brush and the agitation is audibly heard on the recorder and becomes incessant and more determined... I was not aware of this but in hindsight my frustration of not knowing enough about my illness was very present at this moment. I continue to ponder on dying.

The fear of dying... no I don't have a fear of dying. What will be will be. I'm just scared of the unknown right now that's all. [Sighing deeply and breathing audibly] Will I be able to finish the course? Feelings of all the things I could have done. All the things I should have done [rocking stance]... I suppose I could do a lot of things still. I worry about and really hate the thought of people enjoying themselves without me being around... what I might miss out on [laugh]. Being ill for so many years and not knowing why... hate it... hate just not knowing... hate not knowing what, hate not knowing, hate not knowing, really hate not knowing! [Quiet]

I feel absolutely wonderful in some respects because... I've got an excuse for the way I've been the last few years. Even though I have pushed myself to get things done... now I have an excuse for being the way I've been and getting in the way of being. It's wonderful having an excuse but at the same time it's quite disabling because I have pushed myself so hard that - you know- it's been hard and hard and hard... and hard... and hard... and hard... and hard... and hard [crying and flicking the brush violently over the damp paper] and I hate it... this whole thing... being seen to do.

You always have to do so much... yes f\*\*\*\*ing well I had to. Feeling so bloody ill I felt so bloody stupid. If I couldn't get out of bed, couldn't get out of bed, out of bed, and couldn't get out of bed... I would crawl up the wall. God I'm angry, angry, angry. Angry. Angry with myself... angry with myself [slashing movements over the paper] ANGRY WITH MYSELF.

Bleed it, bleed it, bleed it [throwing salt onto the paper from an old bucket in the corner



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