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The pedagogical significance of the life and work of artist Helen Grey-Smith

Gwen Phillips
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**The Pedagogical Significance of the Life and Work of
Artist Helen Grey-Smith**

by

Gwen Phillips
B.A. Graduate Diploma in Art Education

Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the requirements
for the Award of Master of Education

at

Edith Cowan University

Date of Submission: March 1997

Abstract

Visual arts educational practice has been built upon a tradition which has neglected the work of women artists. The reasons for this are explored in the introduction to this research and in the literature review. The research will examine aspects of the lived experience and work of a Western Australian woman visual artist within a context of the traditional cultural and educational paradigms which influenced her development as a visual artist and which, it may be argued, continue to influence all visual artists. The participant in the research, Helen Grey-Smith, has been a prominent member of the visual arts community of Western Australia since the late 1940s. Helen Grey-Smith's chosen fields were textile printing, collage and painting in acrylics. She continues to work at her studio in Pemberton.

The research was conducted as a hermeneutic/phenomenological study, as explained by Van Manen (1990). This method allows for the study of unique human experience and is consistent with the values of feminist research. The method of data collection was through a series of tape recorded conversations conducted at Helen Grey-Smith's home. Material from the transcribed conversations is contained in the appendices, which are designed to help the reader gain a full understanding of the nature of this artist's life and experiences. Through the transcription and analysis of these conversations, themes which emerged formed the basis for analysis and reflection. Artworks which related to each theme were analysed to amplify information obtained from the transcribed interviews.

As part of the research, the implications of social justice issues in the field of visual arts education are examined. Social justice in education has been established in policy documents since the mid - 1980s and in order for these policies to be effective, there is still a need for programmes and courses in schools and tertiary institutions based on the work of women visual artists. It seems clear that there is a lack of resources for effective teaching in this area, especially materials relevant to Western Australian women visual artists.

The significance of this research relates to the documentation of the work of a Western Australian woman visual artist who could be seen as a role model for students wishing to enter the field of visual arts practice. In this research, the term "visual arts" is used as this specifies the area of the creative arts under consideration. In national curriculum statements and profiles, the creative arts are one of the eight Learning Areas, of which the visual arts are a sub area.

The research makes some recommendations for educators. The educational significance and profound nature of early childhood experiences are illustrated through Helen Grey-Smith's descriptions of her life, education and her choice of training. The importance of a non - sexist, comprehensive art education for all students is reinforced, as is the value of proper career guidance and encouragement for young women contemplating a career in the field of visual arts.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgment, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signature:

Date:

3rd Sept 1997

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Edith Cowan University,

March, 1997

List of Figures

		Page No
1	Conceptual Framework	13
2	Helen Grey-Smith, photographed at her home in January, 1996.	54
3	<i>The Prince, 1968</i> . Collage	78
4	Lord Mayor Reg Withers (with Kim Beazley Snr) in front of the curtains printed by Helen Grey-Smith in 1966.	97
5	Helen and Guy Grey-Smith working on her textile printing. c 1964. Photograph by courtesy of Richard Woldendorp.	100
6	<i>Winter Tree Trunks, 1993</i> . Acrylic paint and collage.	107
7	<i>Rock Pools, 1995</i> . Acrylic and collage.	113

Table of Contents

	Page No
Abstract	ii
Declaration	iv
Acknowledgments	v
List of Figures	vii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Background to the Study	1
Significance of the Study	4
Purpose of the Study	9
Conceptual Framework	12
Research Questions	14
Definition of Terms	15
Thesis Outline	18
Chapter 2 Review of Literature	20
General Literature	20
Literature on Previous Findings	29
Specific Studies Similar to the Current Study	38
Literature on Methodology	42
Literature on Art Pedagogy	48
Summary	52
Chapter 3 Method	53
Participant	53
Design	55
Phenomenology and Art Criticism	58
Investigation of the Experience	60
Materials and Equipment	61
Protocol	61
Data Collection	62
Data Analysis	65
Limitations	68
Ethical Considerations	69

Chapter 4 Examining the Themes	71	
Theme 1	Formative Influences - India and England	71
	Discussion of Artwork: India and Bali - Awakening of Memories	79
Theme 2	Helen Grey-Smith's Training at Art School	86
	Discussion of Art Work: Training and Textile Printing	96
Theme 3	Choice of Art Forms	101
	Discussion of Art Work: Choice of Media	105
Chapter 5 Reflection	113	
Theme 1	Formative Influences	119
Theme 2	Art Training	125
Theme 3	Choice of Media	132
Chapter 6 Conclusion	139	
List of References	150	
Appendix 1	157	
	Statement of Disclosure and Informed Consent	157
Appendix 2	159	
	Early Years in India	159
	Sir Robert Stanes	160
	Return to India	161
Appendix 3	168	
	The Trip to Bali	168
Appendix 4	172	
	Life in Australia in the late 1940s	172
	Stone Crescent, Darlington	174

Appendix 5	177
Screen Printing by Helen Grey-Smith	177
Appendix 6	179
The Art Work - <i>Rock Pools</i> , 1995	179
Helen Grey-Smith's Philosophy of the Sea	181
Collage and the Three Dimensional	183
The Integrity of the Picture Plane	184
Mother and Child Near the Sea	185

Chapter 1 Introduction

Background to the Study

This study is concerned with the experiences of a Western Australian woman visual artist and the significance of her life and work for art education. In this chapter, a theoretical framework is provided which establishes the relationships between the work of women visual artists, society and education. Inevitably, the traditional omission of women and their work from the history of visual art becomes a central issue and a number of feminist issues relevant to art and art education are investigated.

The first of these issues deals with legislation enacted to promote social justice for women. The Australian Government's *Sexual Discrimination Act (1984)* provided the legislative basis for current notions of social justice for women in Australia. This Act was the result of the ratification of the *United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1983)* which set minimum standards of equality between the sexes. Discrimination on the basis of gender became unlawful in the administration of Federal laws and programs and in certain specified areas such as employment, education and access to services. A national policy for the education of girls in Australian schools was formulated in 1987 to promote equal opportunity in education for boys and girls. The national legislative framework provided by these Acts created the impetus for changes in education in Western Australia and other Australian states. One of the stated aims of the *National Agenda for Women (August, 1990)* was to encourage the development of a society in which women have the right to a fair, just and equal place.

In response to the national initiatives mentioned above, the West Australian Education Department (EDWA) became more interested in social justice issues. In the October 1990 Education Circular, EDWA published a document entitled *Social Justice in Education*, which followed the Australian Government's *Towards a Fairer Australia: Social Justice Strategy Statement 1990 -1991*. The former stated amongst other things in policy and guidelines statements that:

Social justice in education will be achieved to the degree that:

- there are no significant differences in educational outcomes arising from ethnicity, socio-economic status, race, sex, physical ability, geographic location or any other variable irrelevant to educational achievement;
- all students understand the nature of the society in which they live and are empowered to redress inequalities. (p. 5)

Social justice issues were also considered in national curriculum initiatives by the Australian Education Council (AEC), viz. *A Statement on the Arts for Australian schools (1994)* and *The Arts - a Curriculum Profile for Australian Schools (1994)*.

All the documents mentioned above contributed to the development of a framework for all States of the Commonwealth to follow and in response EDWA published a revised framework to cover the eight Learning Areas entitled *The Arts: Student Outcomes Statements with Pointers and Samples (1994)* which adapted the National Arts framework to local needs. As an example of the growing interest in equality The Arts: Past and Present Contexts Strand of the document (1994, p. 13) reflected the idea that the records relating to arts of the past are not always value-free:

Students understand the ways in which the Arts of the past have been recorded, coming to recognise that knowledge about the Arts is based on the values of those making the record. Learning in the Arts enables students to recognise how both past and present societies construct and record knowledge about the arts.

The policy and curricula changes mentioned above encouraged educators to engage in a reassessment of traditional approaches to education, especially in the areas of mathematics, sciences and sport. Strategies adopted often resulted in changes to the way programmes were presented to students. The aim was to encourage wider participation in previously restricted areas of school curriculum. Visual art education seemed to escape the 1980s style social justice scrutiny because it had traditionally attracted girls (Reid 1995, Foster 1995). The primary school Art/Craft specialist programme set up in Western Australia in the mid - 1970s had already broken down the traditional separation of girls and boys into manual arts and needlework. Ambrus (1990, p. 216) stated that although it was true that girls were drawn to the arts, the majority of students of art at tertiary level were still taught by male teachers or lecturers. The effect of this imbalance has been examined by Cherry (1993) and Greer (1979).

It is important though to be aware that the field of visual art has provided women with opportunities for professional training and work when other fields have been closed to them (Cherry 1993, Krull 1986). Furthermore, the arts have also provided opportunities for the involvement of disabled and ill people. Sandblom (1992) provided examples of many visual artists (also writers and musicians) who worked in their fields with disabling illnesses and conditions.

The premise of this study is that the record of women's visual art has been neither accurate nor complete. Students and educators will be empowered to redress inequalities when they are informed about past inequalities and historical distortions which, to the present day, continue to influence people's thinking and perceptions. The researcher as visual art educator will record and reflect on the experiences of a local woman visual artist and consider the processes she employed against a background of contemporary policy in education and social justice.

The Significance of the Study

Power (1975, p. 9) stated that "the expressed opinion of any age depends on the persons and classes who happen to articulate it." Influential writers and philosophers, such as St. Augustine or St. Thomas Aquinas, as clergy, belonged to a powerful minority whose views were not necessarily representative of the population at large. Cherry (1993, p. 6) argued that knowledge and power are closely related. To support this view she cited Foucault, who stated that "individuals were brought to visibility within relations of power/knowledge which shaped that visibility." Cherry and Power maintained that the concept of significance must always be related to a socio-cultural setting. In this study, in addition to the usual contextual issues, another kind of tension exists between Helen Grey-Smith's view of her role as a women visual artist and the researcher's social justice agenda. The researcher's personal agenda which is informed by late twentieth century notions of equality and justice may be antithetical to Helen Grey-Smith's belief system, which was formed in a different socio-cultural setting.

Research on the work of women visual artists is a relatively recent phenomenon. Goddard, quoted in Snell (1991, p. 37), remarked that "a lack of history has been interpreted as a lack of practice". Philp (1994, p. 9) who wrote about the Sydney Society of Women Painters established in 1910, noted that much of the work produced by the members of this society was hidden from history because it was bought by ordinary people for their homes and was never given the kind of gallery exposure and publicity allowed to "established" artists. This is an important observation, touching upon the lower price of women's visual art, its smaller scale and subject matter, which was more often appropriate for people's homes than that of the huge canvases by established male visual artists created for display in galleries. In a way, it is a compliment to these women that this was often the fate of their work because it meant that people were (and probably still are) buying what they like, rather than that which is endorsed by curators and critics. In the case of Helen Grey-Smith, there is no doubt that her textile work was made to be affordable, enjoyed and used by ordinary people and this was a conscious part of her lifelong "modus operandi".

The history of women's visual art has been documented in recent times by many writers, such as Petersen and Wilson (1976), Greer (1979), Nochlin (1988), Chadwick (1990) and Broude and Garrard (1995). These writers recorded the ways in which the visual art of women has been viewed over the centuries, noting that it has often been ignored, falsely attributed, trivialised and even lied about. Cherry (1993, p. 72) reported that even Emily Dilke, a well known feminist and art critic in the 1870s in England, "kept aloof from women artists" thus contributing to the "structural exclusions of women artists in the history of art and the public collections of the early twentieth century".

The encouragement and valuing of all work of merit is fundamental to any social justice agenda and also to the "fair go" belief which is intrinsic to Australian society. A record of women's work is an essential stage in this process and a record of Western Australian women visual artists' work is even more desirable, given the paucity of information available at present.

Parker and Pollock (1981, p. xviii) pointed out that it is now unnecessary to assert that there have been many fine women artists. Further, they claimed that "the existence of women artists was fully acknowledged until the nineteenth century but has been virtually denied by modern writers ... the assumption made is that art is created by men, an attitude perpetuated by contemporary criticism." (Parker and Pollock 1981, pp. 3-4). Herbert Read writing in *The Definition of Art* published in 1931 (cited by Jacobus, 1968, p. 6) opined: "That philosophy ... exalted all human values and saw in the Gods nothing but man writ large. Art, as well as religion, was an idealisation of nature, and especially of man as the culminating point of the process of nature." Although Read may have claimed that "man" implies humanity as a universal notion, the concept of the all powerful male is embedded in the text. Until the early nineteen seventies, critics habitually wrote of women's art work as "feminine", often employing patronising language, using words such as "charming" rather than describing the formal qualities of the work. Here is a selection from *Women Painters* by James Laver published in the *Saturday Book* (1964, p. 19) cited in Parker and Pollock (1981):

Some women artists tried to emulate Frans Hals but the vigorous brush strokes of the master were beyond their capacity; one only has to look at the works of a

painter like Judith Leyster (1609-1661) to detect the weakness of the feminine hand.

If this were the case, then why were so many of Leyster's paintings attributed to Hals? Petersen and Wilson (1976) and Greer (1979) examined this problem. It seemed to them that less well known painters, both men and women, had their art works attributed to more famous names, often by unscrupulous dealers for economic reasons. But there were other reasons. Some of the Renaissance and Mannerist women visual artists working in their father's studios signed their work with a male name to win public acceptance. On the other hand, Elin Howe (in Dever, p. 105) pointed out that Ethel Carrick Fox was said to be "careless" about the signing of her work, using various signatures including E. Phillips Fox, the name of her husband, Melbourne artist Emmanuel Phillips Fox. This couple also painted similar subjects at the same time so that their work was quite easily confused.

Critics and art historians such as Cheney (1941), Read (1948), Hughes (1966), Gombrich (1970) barely mentioned women visual artists at all. This was in spite of historical evidence that they not only existed but had produced significant works. (One such woman was Lavinia Fontana (1552-1614) from Bologna, who became an official painter to the papal court of Clement VIII). Cheney (1941, p. v) claimed his book to be "so far as possible, factual and tangible", but in discussing one of the very few women visual artists he recorded, Marie-Louise-Elizabeth Vigee-Lebrun, painter to Queen Marie Antoinette, he had this to say:

She ... had escaped the nervous excesses and erotic implications of Watteau's followers. She had substituted a hardly less shallow type of pretty portraiture, of a

flattering surface loveliness, thus abundantly pleasing to the Queen and the court ladies and it is not David's fault if her progeny continued endlessly to repeat her specialties, the perpetually adolescent girl and the never-failing mother-with-child theme.

There is a dismissive spitefulness about the language used here. Perhaps Cheney failed to separate his art criticism from his socio-political viewpoint. More than forty years later, Heller (1987, p. 58) referred to Vigee-Lebrun as "the third of the principal women artist celebrities of the 1700s." Wolff (1993, p. 180) provided an explanation which accounts for the different evaluations of Vigee-Lebrun's work when she observed that "it may be threatening to absolute aesthetics to have to realise that criticism and its evaluations are ideological. It is probably even worse to learn that values change".

An Australian example of the way in which a woman visual artist was excluded from the art world is provided by Pigot (in Hoom 1994, p. 55) who noted Hilda Rix Nicholas' anger that her work was excluded from *Art in Australia*, a leading magazine of art criticism. Rix Nicholas blamed the editor Sydney Ure Smith, referring to him as "Manure Smith." Her early work was reviewed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1923 as "rivalling in its comprehensive sweep of style some of the best one-man efforts". It seemed that women's visual art work was good if it was like that of men.

Discrimination against the work of women visual artists has also occurred in the acquisition policies of major art galleries. An illustration of this was provided in a publication by Eagle and Jones (1994) documenting the I.C.I. collection. Of the one hundred and twenty works in the collection, twelve are by women, several being by the

same individual. The under-representation of women in collections was also illustrated by the research carried out by Ambrus (1992, p. 220). She documented the small proportion of women's visual art usually displayed in the major Art Galleries in Australia.

The fact that there has been little pedagogic material (in the form of reproductions or books) on women artists can be attributed to the factors noted above, however more and more books about women artists, such as Garb (1986), Heller (1987), Beckett (1988), Garrard (1989) Marsh and Gerrish Nunn (1989), and Higonett (1990) are now appearing. Folens Publishers (1994), have published a set of reproductions of women's visual art with accompanying information for teacher use. This is a landmark in the movement towards a more inclusive approach to art theory.

The Purpose of the Study

In the Introduction to her book *The Obstacle Race* (1979), Germaine Greer quoted from a speech by Gough Whitlam, a former Prime Minister of Australia:

A healthy artistic climate does not depend solely upon the work of a handful of supremely gifted individuals. It demands the cultivation of talent and ability at all levels. It demands that everyday work and run of the mill work, esoteric and unpopular work should be given a chance; not so much in the hope that genius will one day spring from it but because, from those who make the Arts their life and work, even modest accomplishment is an end in itself and a value worth encouraging. The pursuit of excellence is a proper goal, but it is not the race itself.

This remark highlights a problem that women visual artists have often faced. Art has been perceived as the product of “supremely gifted individuals”. Given the historic view that women were not as intelligent as men, they could not easily qualify as “gifted individuals”. Women’s visual art work was seen as “everyday work, run of the mill work, esoteric and unpopular work” which was of lesser importance than the work performed by men. (Huber 1987, p. 40). This notion is supported by the reality that women in society are still more likely than men to be in low paid employment. In 1992, the average weekly total earnings of women were 67% of those of men (*Women in Australia Report*, June 1992, p. 122).

The primary purpose of this study is to record the practice of a Western Australian visual artist, Helen Grey-Smith, who has been a respected member of the local visual arts community for many years. She arrived in Perth in 1947, having met and married Western Australian born Guy Grey-Smith, in East Anglia just before the outbreak of World War II. Helen Grey-Smith had completed two years training at the London School of Design, then worked in the drawing section of an aircraft factory during World War II. After World War II, the Grey-Smiths moved to Kalamunda, then Darlington, Western Australia where they commenced work as artists, exhibiting in Perth and nationally from the late 1940s. Since Guy Grey-Smith’s death in 1981, Helen Grey-Smith has continued to work and exhibit. She is a recognised member of the local community at Pemberton, where she has lived since 1974. Her experiences cover an eighty year period and include life under the British Raj in India where she was born, education in an English boarding school, her discovery of

the world of work and socialism during World War II, and then a long career as an artist, wife and mother in Western Australia.

There were two main reasons which drew the researcher to this study. The first reason relates to the need to document first-hand descriptions of this artist's unique lived experience. The second reason relates to the idea that the exploration and better understanding of these experiences could inform educational practice, especially as it applies to social justice issues. The research will attempt to understand the "essential" aspects of Helen Grey-Smith's life as a woman visual artist.

An ancillary purpose for undertaking the study was to employ a research methodology which acknowledged the researcher's involvement in the process. Garber (1990, p. 20) mentioned that for "women-centred critics, the validation of subjectivity that is part of self-knowledge becomes a celebration of what one critic has termed 'personal engagement' with works of art and a celebration of women". The researcher accepted that such 'personal engagement' was not only inevitable but desirable. This idea is supported by Korzenick (1990) who argued for research which pursued the truth for women in visual art education because they form the majority of visual art educators. Some writers called for more research about women by women.

The call for personal engagement and partiality raised issues relating to research methodology. Streb (1984) outlined ways in which phenomenology is concerned with the way in which creative individuals preserve experiences which then become the subject of experiences for others. The knowledge that Helen Grey-Smith would not want her life and work fitted into some pigeonhole, supporting this theory or that, has encouraged distance

from personal opinion and theorising. This idea fitted harmoniously with the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology chosen for the research.

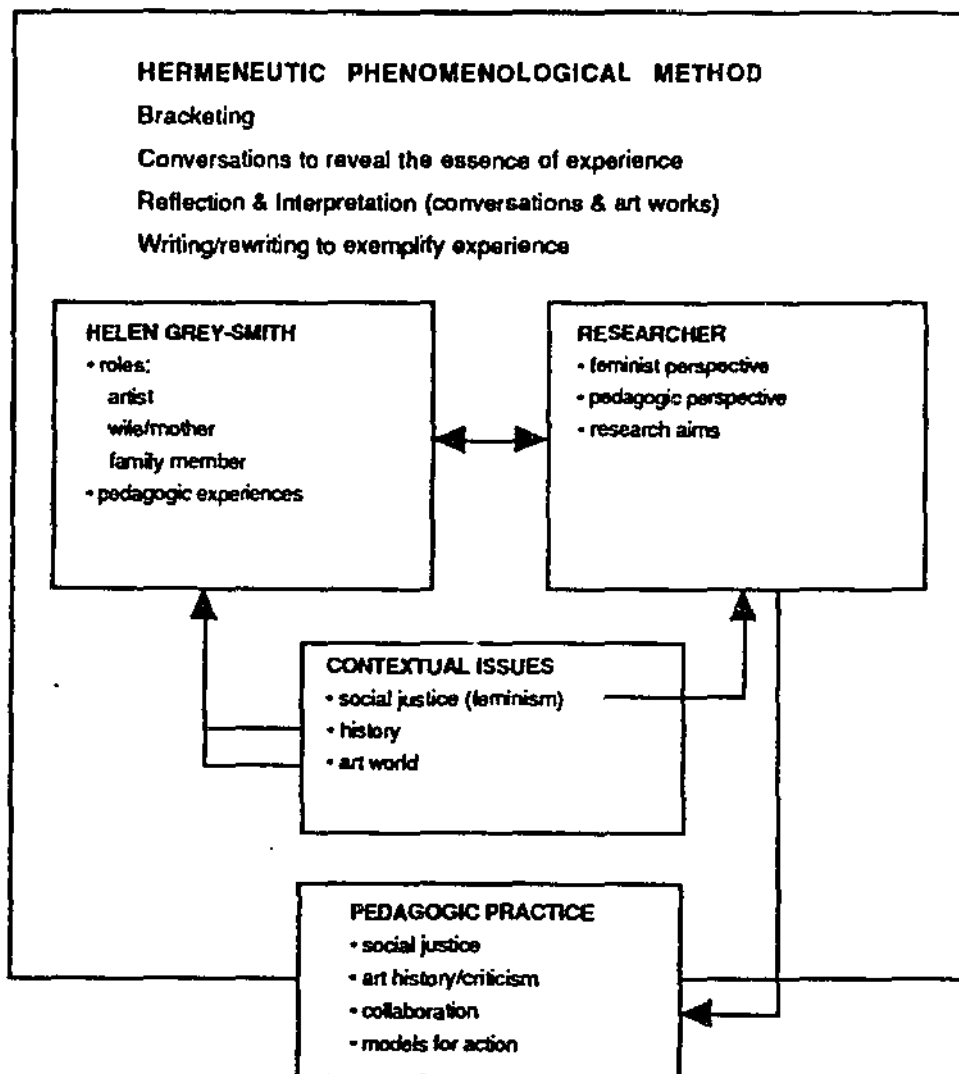
Conceptual Framework

The variables impacting on the research questions are presented graphically to illustrate that the research method forms the basis for interrelationships between the participant, the researcher, contextual factors, and the implications for teaching and learning in the visual arts. This conceptual framework was developed as a result of the researcher's literature review on the subject of women artists, a review of literature on appropriate research methodologies, and a perspective gained through many years of work as an art educator.

An artist such as Helen Grey-Smith works in a context of perceptions, both her own and that of the society around her. The visual arts world, of which she is a part, is itself a construction of traditional beliefs as well as universal ideas and emotions. In order to understand the woman visual artist in society, some of the factors affecting her life such as family background, its view of the role of women, her opportunities for and nature of training and the reaction of family and friends to her work need to be brought into focus. Factors relevant to the study which were evident in literature, such as the role of education, gender issues and the reaction of critics and curators are included in the framework. Finally, the relevance to education of the variables is examined. Some of the variables imply directions for action, such as the recognition of the importance of early educative experiences, the need for social justice in education and the need for provision of resource

materials based on work by women visual artists especially local artists. This is not to limit other directions which may emerge from the research.

Figure 1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Research Questions

The formulation of the research questions was influenced by the phenomenological approach of Van Manen (1990). The principle research question is:

- **What are the pedagogical implications of the life and work of Helen Grey-Smith?**

To illuminate the above question, the following subsidiary questions are asked.

- What is the significance of art training on the work and experience of a woman artist?
- What is the pedagogical importance of Helen Grey-Smith's choice of media as vehicles for artistic expression?

Definition of Terms

Art Forms

Certain art forms have been traditionally regarded as "fine art". These include drawing, painting, sculpture, architecture and some forms of printmaking such as lithography. The traditional view is that these forms are created to give aesthetic pleasure. Works with a functional orientation have been regarded as craft. The term craft is usually associated with ceramics, weaving, woodwork and needlework.

It is towards the latter forms that women artists have often gravitated or been directed. Hegel (1975, p. 461) retold Plato's story of Prometheus and Epimetheus, relating how Prometheus stole the art of working with fire from Hephaestus and the art of weaving from Athene. Through these gifts men had the means of life. In Roman times, making things was seen as servile, and even the practise of painting would have exposed an aristocrat to ridicule. The reason for the categorisation of forms emerges from the complex historical construction concerning the arts in Western society.

Phenomenology

A philosophy or theory of phenomena as consciously experienced, which presumes to be absolutely without supposition, which analyses data but which does not speculate about causes. The pioneer of phenomenology was Edmund Husserl (1858-1939). Husserl asserted the primacy of experience over language and claimed that "the analysis of experiences, with all their subtleties, is the pre-suppositionlessness beginning of philosophy." (Husserl, 1964, *The Paris Lectures*, p. XII)

Epoche

This term comes from Greek and was one of Husserl's key concepts. It is defined in Blackie's *Etymological Dictionary* as "stop, pause, fixed point in time or to stop, hold upon". Hammond (1991, p. 289) defined this as a check or cessation, as in checking an advance, later becoming a philosophical term for a suspension of judgement. Husserl maintained the need to suspend the "natural attitude" or everyday assumption of the independent existence of what is perceived, and investigate experiences without this. Hammond (1991, p. 4). Husserl stated in the *Paris Lectures* (1964, p. XIX):

We must not make assumptions about that which we ourselves do not see. For confirmation, we must return to the things themselves, ("zu den Sachen selbst") not to the physical objects but to any presentation or phenomenon that may confront the ego in consciousness, for example a chair, a stair, a law, a headache, sense of impending doom, the square root of one or whatever.

Hammond (1991, p. 84) quoted Husserl's penultimate sentence of the Paris Lectures, "I must lose the world by epoche, in order to regain it by a universal self examination". The structures of the world can only be those experienced by the subject.

Bracketing

This term originated with Husserl who first trained as a mathematician. "To bracket" means to put certain beliefs out of action or consideration.

We may 'bracket' the practical or scientific implications of an object or experience; we may thereby suspend any judgement and disregard our beliefs that concern the practical or scientific affairs of the event in question. As a strategy, bracketing excludes or 'brackets' any epistemological or metaphysical theories which interfere with the pure and unadulterated apprehension of an event or experience. (Husserl, 1964, The Paris Lectures, pp. XX, XXI).

Van Manen (1990, p. 47) explained bracketing as "how to make explicit understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, theories and hold them at bay and even turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing nature".

Hermeneutics

This may be explained as the theory of interpretation. Hermes was the messenger of the Greek gods, interpreting messages from the Delphic oracle. Hermeneutics is based

on the views of the philosopher, Martin Heidegger. Through the description, interpreting and understanding of people's experiences, truth is revealed.

Orienting

This term is important in understanding phenomenological method and it involves a redefinition of subjectivity and objectivity. Van Manen (1990, p. 20) stated, "Thus objectivity means that the researcher is 'oriented' to the object that stands in front of the researcher. Objectivity means the researcher remains true to the object. Subjectivity means that we are strong in our orientation to the subject of the study in a unique and personal way".

Thesis Outline

The previous chapter has provided an overview of the background, purpose and significance of the research undertaken. The conceptual framework for the study established in graphic form that the phenomenological research method and the researcher's oriented interest provide a field within which Helen Grey-Smith's lived experience is documented.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature relevant to this research. An examination of the design, and methodology which is drawn largely from the work of Van Manen (1990) and the proposed data analysis is included in Chapter 3. The research is a phenomenological/hermeneutic study of the life and experiences of Helen Grey-Smith following the method recommended by Van Manen.

In Chapter 4, the research examines themes arising from the participant's lived experience. The themes are a) Formative experiences b) Training in art school and c) Choice of media. The three themes are examined in separate sections in connection with certain of Helen Grey-Smith's artworks and as an adjunct to each of these sections, there is an appendix which contains the text from the transcripts of conversations which illuminates that particular theme. These appendices are designed to be read before or while reading the analysis of each theme.

In accordance with the methodology, Chapter 5 contains reflections on the material presented and finally, in conclusion Chapter 6 draws some implications from the reflections. Brooks' (1996) article *Meaning and experience of career as it is lived by women artists* provided a framework for this chapter.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

General Literature

The review which follows includes works which have been chosen because they may be regarded as influential in the fields of the visual arts and education. The development of feminism and the context for its rise in the 1970s has been included because it could be argued that the impetus towards social justice in education has originated from this source. Most of the writers mentioned are from British or American traditions because the educational philosophies and structures of the Australian education systems largely grew from those traditions.

Value of Education

Literature on the exclusion of women from the world of work and visual arts consistently identified the lack of education (or a particular type of education) as an important factor. An early advocate of women's rights to an education was Mary Wollstonecraft, who worked for a publisher in London before going to Paris to observe the French Revolution in 1792. In 1787, Wollstonecraft wrote *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and in 1792 the *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. In both of these works, Wollstonecraft expressed concern for the education of women, not for what is now regarded as "equality". Her writings drew attention to the fact that the lack of education was a very serious limitation for women. Women artists in particular were affected because ignorance of Latin and Greek, for instance, excluded them from the highest categories of oil painting - the history picture and the biblical or mythological picture. Berger (1972, p. 100)

explained that the significance of the history or mythological painting was that “it supplied the higher strata of the ruling class with a system of references for the forms of their own idealised behaviour”. Holt (in Hoorn 1994, p. 117) pointed out that the use of classical reference was a “standard device for distancing the nude, for sublimating its overtly sexual content into a morally acceptable narrative”. Exposure of young women to education in the classics and/or art school was therefore a moral contradiction.

However, girls were not universally excluded from formal education. Heller (1987, p. 13) mentioned that the Bolognese aristocracy educated their daughters in response to the writings of Baldassare Castiglione. In *The Courtier*, published in 1528, Castiglione urged the aristocracy to educate their daughters as well as sons. Bologna produced a number of distinguished women artists in the sixteenth century, possibly encouraged by this writer’s ideas.

Victorian Writers and Critics.

John Ruskin, the Victorian art critic, wrote in 1872 that “the education of women should commence with learning to cook” (Herbert, 1964, p. 175). According to Cherry (1993, p. 99), Ruskin was “one of the most powerful cultural managers of the 1850s, his literatures pervading the literatures and economies of art”. Ruskin’s prominence was significant because his attitude to women artists could not be described as encouraging. Cherry (1993, p. 187) recorded that in 1856 Ruskin wrote a critical letter to Anna Mary Howitt about her painting of Boadicea in which he stated, “What do you know about Boadicea? Leave such subjects alone and paint me a pheasant’s wing”. Howitt’s mother blamed Ruskin for the termination of her daughter’s career. The portrayal of the warrior

Queen presumably did not “support his own view of himself” (Berger 1972, p. 101), rather it presented a view of womanhood anathema to Ruskin. Ruskin’s action also represents an attempt to exclude a woman visual artist from the field of history painting, even though Boadicea was a woman of significance in British history and could be seen as a suitable subject for a woman.

There was an atmosphere of reform in many spheres of life in Britain after the Reform Bill of 1832. Parliamentary representation had been dominated by the wealthy classes but the Industrial Revolution had seen the rise in the numbers of the working class and a series of reforms centred on achieving a realignment of representation. Suffrage for working men preceded the votes for women campaigns. One slow but major reform between 1856-1908 concerned the Married Women’s Property Act (U.K.). Women previously underwent what Millett (1969, p. 67) called “civil death”, forfeiting almost all rights upon marriage. Writers like Charles Dickens (*Oliver Twist* published in 1837-39), Charlotte Bronte (*Jane Eyre* published in 1847) and George Eliot (*Middlemarch* published in 1871-72) brought to public attention various aspects of life’s hardships faced by women.

John Stuart Mill, a prominent English philosopher, economist, writer and parliamentarian became a founder member of the first women’s suffrage society in 1867. Two years later, in 1869, he published an essay entitled *The Subjection of Women* written in 1861 just after the death of his wife Harriet Taylor, who was a feminist activist. This essay aimed to support the vote for women and in it he outlined many of the problems women faced. Stuart Mill wrote the following about the state of marriage:

I am far from pretending that wives are in general no better treated than slaves; but no slave is a slave to the same lengths, and in so full a sense of the word as the wife is. Hardly any slave, except one immediately attached to the master's person, is a slave at all hours and at all minutes; in general he has, like a soldier, his fixed task and when it is done, or when he is off duty, he disposes, within certain limits, of his own time and has a family life into which his master rarely intrudes. 'Uncle Tom' under his first master had his own life in his cabin, almost as much as any man whose work takes him away from his home, is able to have his own family. But it cannot be so with the wife.

Uncle Tom's Cabin published in 1850 by Harriet Beecher Stowe had been very influential in exposing the evils of slavery in America. Mill compared a slave's life favourably to that experienced by a wife. Mill (1867) also discussed common prejudices such as that women were less intelligent than men. He outlined reasons why he felt women were unable to contribute to the Arts as fully as men, the chief reason being, in his opinion, the constant calls by other people upon their time.

Mill and the other writers mentioned above highlighted some concepts embedded in the habits and laws of English society up to the end of the nineteenth century. The Victorian age was one of great entrepreneurial activity. The participant in this study, Helen Grey-Smith, was a direct product of this through her paternal grandfather who left England as a young man in 1837 to seek his fortune in India.

In the twentieth century, two World Wars fundamentally changed the lives of women. The fact that men were away fighting meant that women entered the work force in

great numbers, performing all sorts of tasks previously seen as “men’s work”. Through necessity, they were exposed to a world of paid work and also a world of new ideas. For women these experiences were transformatory and Helen Grey-Smith herself was directly affected by this process.

Feminist Writers and the Visual Arts

The feminist movement which gathered momentum after World War II was strengthened by the writings of such people as De Beauvoir (1949), Frieden (1963), Millett (1969), Greer (1971), Firestone (1971), Mitchell (1974) and many others. De Beauvoir, a French writer and philosopher, rejected the notion of marriage and family, viewing both as “bourgeois”. She viewed Socialism as the direction for women because she believed that the oppression of women was economic rather than sexual. In her examination of the aftermath of the French Revolution, de Beauvoir found that “the *cahiers* of the States-General contained but few feminine claims and these were restricted to keeping men out of women’s occupations” (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 131). In her opinion, the French Revolution had really done little for the cause of women. Under the *Code Napoleon*, spinsters had full civil powers, which enabled them to practice law or act as a guardian but this privilege was denied to married woman who were treated with “honour and exquisite politeness” to compensate for their loss. De Beauvoir (1949, p. 133) claimed that “most bourgeois women accepted this gilded confinement and the few who complained were not heard”.

Mitchell (1974) viewed the institution of marriage as a centre of male power, noting that within it, males were able to “give” women away, thereby creating a network of political and economic strength. The relevance of this notion to the Arts is examined by

Berger (1972) and also by Solomon-Godeau (1993). In an analysis of Ingres' painting *Achilles Receiving the Ambassadors of Agamemnon* 1801, Solomon-Godeau argued that Ingres provided a paradigm of "homo-social" power relations between men, presenting the woman as an object of negotiation and an onlooker, rather than an active participant. Solomon-Godeau maintained that the painting reflected the world of Homer as well as the world of the art studios of David and Ingres and the wider art world; a world of power largely closed to women.

Millett (1969, p. 35) identified sex role stereotyping in which women's real occupations were "domestic work and attendance on young children". She viewed the family as the site for the socialisation of the young and within the home, dominance was a source of power for men. Stereotypical attitudes associated with women's occupations are also reflected in the success of the American visual artist Mary Cassatt (1844-1926), who explored Impressionist painting techniques largely through the depiction of women and children in intimate domestic scenes. Cassatt's paintings sometimes showed women in active roles such as *Woman and Child Driving* 1881, but on the whole, her work is dominated by mothers caring for children. Because Cassatt never married, she was able to play the role of a spectator to the domesticity of her family and the families of her brother and friends, a role traditionally reserved for men. She acted as carer to her ageing parents, although this was in the relative comfort of upper middle class France. Cassatt also performed a nurturing service for her artist colleagues, encouraging and guiding wealthy American patrons to purchase their paintings. Hale (1975, p. 292) reportedly reacted with

anger at the comment by a museum attendant that "the value in her (Cassatt's) life was in terms of the enormous benefit to mankind in helping to create great collections of art".

Cassatt's painting subjects were in harmony with accepted female roles. Rubenstein (1982, p. 130) declared her to be "not only the greatest woman artist of the nineteenth century, she is also worthy of consideration as the most significant American artist, male or female of her generation". On the other hand, Hilda Rix Nicholas, an Australian visual artist of the 1920s and 1930s had very little critical acceptance for her work because it "threatened the patriarchal structure of the Australian art establishment by seeking to disrupt its gendered boundaries" (Pigot in Hoom 1994, p. 55).

Greer (1979) wrote a scholarly work on women artists called *The Obstacle Race*, having previously launched herself into feminist controversy with the publication of *The Female Eunuch* in 1971. One aspect of "femininity" which she identified in the latter book was the role of the mother as a repressive force:

What happens to the Jewish boy who never manages to escape the tyranny of his mother is exactly what happens to every girl whose upbringing is 'normal'. She is a female faggot. Like the male faggots, she lives her life in a pet about guest lists and sauce bearnaise, except when she is exercising by divine maternal right the same process that destroyed her lusts and desires upon the lusts and desires of her own children. (Greer 1971, p. 75)

Greer and other writers cast new and harsh light upon traditional thinking and accepted norms. For Greer it is not only males who provide obstacles for women, but women themselves who, as members of society, contribute to the repression of women.

Berger (1972, p. 47) exposed some accepted notions of aesthetics, especially in relation to the exploitative use of the female nude. He stated that "in one category of European oil painting, women were the principal, ever recurring subject". By this he referred to paintings of the nude figure. Despite this claim, Solomon-Godeau (1983) makes it clear that the male nude had dominated entries to the Prix de Rome from 1793-1862. The male nude had pervaded Greek and Roman sculpture, as well as Renaissance and French classical art as a part of the "male as hero" concept. Solomon-Godeau examined the use of the "ephebe" - the beautiful boy - an embodiment of transition as well as a symbol of the destruction of established values just prior to and during the French Revolution. Ingres and other painters of this subject later transferred their attention to the female nude. Solomon-Godeau places the switch from the male to female nude at about 1830. It seemed that a long tradition in painting was broken with political change. Signs of "male trouble" identified by Solomon-Godeau are to be seen in *Liberty on the Barricades* (1830) by Delacroix which depicts the Artemisian figure of Liberty standing over the dead or dying ephebe on the barricade, perhaps her twin brother, Apollo.

Dworkin (1981) wrote of the use and abuse of the female body. Hoorn (1994, p. 5) commented that in paintings, women's bodies were often depicted in ways which are foreign and strange to themselves. Pennings (in Hoorn, 1994, p. 136) examines the nudes of Charles Wheeler, a respected artist in 1920 Melbourne. He notes the clinical approach used by Wheeler, whereby the woman's body is turned into a "thing", making it easy for critics to discuss technicalities rather than face issues such as, why was the model reading a blank

book? Some modern critics are beginning to register that the voyeurism and racism of male visual artists is offensive, as is the depiction of women as passive bodies.

Contraception and abortion had become freely and safely available to women by the mid 1970s to early 80s, giving control over their reproductive function for the first time. This control gave women the confidence to assert their rights properly for the first time. For many women the career limiting role of mother became a matter for negotiation or choice.

Literature on Previous Findings

Value of Women's Work

Power (1975) documented the active role played by women in medieval commerce, especially in the silk industry in London. Circumstances often forced women to take on the responsibilities of breadwinners. De Beauvoir (1949, p. 131) claimed that "in the Old Regime, women had the right to run businesses and had all the legal powers necessary for the independent pursuit of her calling". There were however, quite strict rules preventing women's membership of guilds and societies, thus limiting their participation in commerce. This was only one of the many obstacles which prevented women's full participation in society. Many aspects of sex role stereotyping hinged on the lower value placed on women's work, an issue which is examined in Petersen and Wilson (1976) and Parker and Pollock (1981). Woolf (1983, p. 23) and Greer (1979, p. 142) both gave examples where a painting re-attributed to a woman visual artist fell in market value.

Women Artists

Krull (1986) posited that since Renaissance times in many European countries including Austria, Germany, France, Holland, Belgium and Italy, women were able to make a living in the visual arts. Their occupation in the visual arts had been recognised and training was provided mainly through familial networks. Heller (1987, p. 13) examined the role of the restricted education that was offered to women, noting that in Bologna, some women were educated in Latin and Greek thus allowing them access to the literature and stories necessary for painting classical and biblical subjects. Krull (1986)

observed that in the fields of painting, printmaking and sculpture women were well represented but few women seemed to have been engaged in such crafts as cabinet-making, upholstery, stone-cutting and architecture, which were generally closed to women.

Petersen and Wilson (1976), Greer (1979) and Chadwick (1990) all documented the scope of women's participation in the world of visual art. They showed the ways in which women worked as artists, mostly in their father's studios, or with husbands, brothers or lovers. Lavinia Fontana and Artemisia Gentileschi were both quite influential and successful in their careers. Cherry (1993) documented the existence of a large number of English nineteenth century women visual artists. For example, in Norwich, three or four families produced eight practising women visual artists. Yet two of these families, the Crome and Cotman families, were well known only for their male members. This is probably due to the fact that one of the tasks allotted the women in these families was to copy the works of their brothers or fathers. Perhaps this qualified them to be called artists.

Cherry (1993) researched the working relationships and the networks established by women in late nineteenth century Britain. There was a significant link between women visual artists, politically active women and the eventual achievement of women's suffrage. To illustrate this point, Cherry (1993, p. 82) quoted from a letter by the prominent feminist Harriet Taylor, to the young visual artist Eliza Fox. Taylor stated:

With the sole exception of artists, the only routes open to women consisted of poorly paid and hardly worked occupations, all the professions mercantile, clerical, legal and medical, as well as all government posts being monopolised by men.

It seems from this evidence that the arts could serve as a vehicle for the liberation of women from the role to which they were normally assigned. However, Parker and Pollock (1981) concluded their book with the statement that :

Women's practice in art has never been absolutely forbidden, discouraged or refused, but rather contained and limited in its function as the means by which masculinity gains and sustains its supremacy in the important sphere of cultural production.

The Views of Critics

Nochlin (1988) and others showed the ways in which women's visual art has been treated by critics and dealers. One preconception inherited from the nineteenth century was that there was no good female art. It had been assumed that all Medieval and Renaissance art was produced by men, but the research and documentation carried out in recent time shows this to be inaccurate. Petersen and Wilson (1976), Greer (1979), Parker and Pollock (1981), Heller (1987), Chadwick (1990) and others have all contributed to changing this perception.

Art critics have been notoriously neglectful in their treatment of women's work. For instance, Ruskin (1868), Smith (1962), Gombrich (1970), and Hughes (1966) mentioned very few women visual artists. In his collection of ninety essays for *Time Magazine*, Hughes mentioned only two women visual artists. However, he complained about the andro-centric nature of American art criticism in the 1940s and 50s!

One of the most glaring examples of critical and biographical neglect was the case of Artemisia Gentilischi (1593-1653). Garrard (1989, p. 3) remarked somewhat incredulously that:

This artist suffered a scholarly neglect almost unthinkable for an artist of her calibre. The neglect began in her own time, when she was like most women artists, notable more as an exotic figure in the art world than as an artist whose oeuvre might deserve definition and inventory.

Garrard (1989) documented the kind of record made of the life and work of Gentilischi. Between 1642-1812, all that had been written were brief paragraphs and there was no full biography. In 1916, Roberto Longhi wrote an article about Gentilischi, and in the 1960s several articles were written. Garrard found that despite a multitude of publications about other Italian visual artists, no monograph appeared about this woman. Garrard (1989, p. 3) concluded that this was because the artist was female. In the 1970s, feminist writers embraced Gentilischi as a gift to the twentieth century.

It was not that the style of Gentilischi's work was new and unfamiliar, as in Michelangelo's case, but that the expressive content of her imagery could not be acknowledged, nor perhaps consciously recognised, in an era that would not concede the value of authentic female experience. It has remained for the twentieth century to provide her true audience: women and men conditioned by a consciously realised feminism to respond to and share in an art in which female protagonists behave as plausible human beings.

Artemisia Gentilischi is an example of a woman visual artist whose work is now highly valued among feminist art critics and writers. Greer (1979, p. 207) noted that “for the women of today, Artemisia represents the female equivalent of an Old Master”. Gentilischi was prepared to model her style upon the artists around her, such as Caravaggio and Michelangelo. She freely used biblical stories and classical legends (traditionally restricted to male artists) probably because at the beginning of her career, she had worked closely with her father. Gentilischi’s life story is quite “colourful” as she was the subject in a notorious rape case in 1611. At the time, women were not permitted to attend life drawing classes, mathematics or perspective classes. The man said to have raped her, Tassi, had been employed by her father to teach her perspective.

The subject matter of *Judith and Holofernes* and *Susanna and the Elders* embodies her own experience not only of rape but of the sexual harassment which Garrard (1979, p. 207) argued the artist suffered before the rape. In *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, of which there are five surviving versions, Gentilischi portrays a woman in the act of cutting off a man’s head. According to the Biblical story, Holofernes had been in an alcohol induced stupor. There is an interesting parallel between this ancient story and a newspaper report of a study showing that women who killed their spouses as a result of abuse usually did so when the man was asleep or believed to be sleeping. (*The West Australian*, Feb 7 1996). Garrard (1979, p. 280) described the metaphoric female defiance of male power within the painting:

Artemisia’s *Susannah and the Elders* differs significantly from the *Judiths*, however, in offering not one woman’s fantasy revenge, but a sober metaphoric

expression of the broader situation that gives rise to that extreme solution: the reality of women's confined and vulnerable position in a society whose rules are made by men Great artists are those who can convert unconscious emotions into palpable form without intervention from the socialised brain - and we accept this in a Michelangelo, a Rembrandt, or a Goya as the explanation for their articulation of more deeply human values than those espoused by the cultures in which they functioned - it is not surprising that the young Artemisia Gentileschi, the victim of a traumatic sexual experience, and later the defiant advocate of female capability, should have drawn subconsciously from the wellspring of her female being and experience to humanise the treatment of a biblical theme that men had distorted beyond recognition. (p. 209)

Such personal involvement by the artist in the action of the painting had well defined precedents. Caravaggio and Michelangelo with whom Gentileschi identified and respected included self portraits in their art, thus identifying with the subject matter. However, there is a political world of difference between her version of this subject and that by any male artist. Garrard argued that Gentileschi's place is in the history of feminism as much as in the history of art.

The Ways In Which Women's Art Was Made Invisible

In *And When Did You Last See Your Father*, Strong (1978) regretfully pointed out the way that art historians had devalued English history painting and elevated work, such as that produced by the Pre-Raphaelite artists. Strong's arguments illustrated this devaluing process and highlighted the difficulties involved in judging the merit of visual art because

of the filtering operation performed by visual art historians and critics. He demonstrated how a powerful few can define what is and what is not acceptable, and how works of art can be made to “disappear from view”. Heller (1987, p. 11) provided straightforward explanations as to why women’s visual art was often “invisible”. She made the point that, “fashions in art are as ephemeral as those in any other field” and that women’s visual art has never been fashionable. Heller mentioned the ease with which a woman visual artist could be lost to history as a result of the traditional name change at marriage, and the ensuing difficulty of documenting and tracing the artist. Heller (1987, p. 11) cited the example of Lady Elizabeth Butler who was sometimes recorded under that name and sometimes under her maiden name, Elizabeth Thompson.

Parker and Pollock (1981) and more recently Cherry (1993) examined the ways in which women visual artists were made “invisible” through the influence of a post-Victorian stereotypical view of the role of women, a view reinforced by perceptions of Queen Victoria as dutiful wife and mother. Motherhood was presented as a woman’s national duty and a woman’s world was the home. Cherry (1993, p. 123) noted that the painting by Henrietta Ward *God Save the Queen*, 1857 was praised in terms of “delighting all mothers”. Queen Victoria certainly was a devoted wife to Prince Albert, whom she described in 1845 to members of Bonn University as “my all in all” (St Aubyn, 1991, p. 211). She was also the mother of nine children, but the life of the Queen was certainly not restricted to the domestic world. She dealt with politicians and diplomats at the highest level for sixty years and travelled widely in Europe. Queen Victoria became a medical pioneer when she agreed to the use of chloroform for the birth of her eighth child in 1853,

following which the popular press instigated a fuss about the Queen being used as a guinea pig. The Queen felt that a loving and merciful God would not want unnecessary suffering, and thought it unjust that men should enjoy the pleasures of procreation while women endured its pains. Her example led to the wide spread use of chloroform in childbirth (St Aubyn, 1991, p. 257). Queen Victoria, head of state, wife, mother and medical pioneer was also an amateur artist who encouraged women visual artists. In 1862, Victoria granted royal protection to the Female School of Art but this was of little significance in the business of creating a stereotype of the Queen.

The literature noted above represents a number of points of view all of which have contributed to a view of the place of women both in society and the visual arts. It is safe to say that problems from the past are being addressed today. Pollock (1988), Woolf (1981, 1990, 1993), Paglia (1990) and Nead (1992) all addressed various critical and methodological problems in the visual arts. Paglia (1990) made extensive analyses of the concepts of masculinity and femininity in relation to the visual arts, linking these to history and religion. She traced the roots of sexual identity as exhibited in the arts and drew critical attention to the imbalance produced through the omission of the female as an active force.

The Importance of Women's Art in Australia

Kirby (1992) reported on the wealth of contemporary women's visual art in Australia in the last two decades. Of particular interest to Kirby was the development of support networks created by women visual artists in NSW, Victoria and South Australia. She claimed that with the advent of legislation towards equal opportunity and improved

opportunities for women visual artists, the focus of the feminist art debate moved towards theoretical debates about the social and cultural production of “meaning”. It is clear that within the last decade, tremendous progress has been made in raising the level of debate among feminist writers on the visual arts.

Ambrus (1992) researched Australian women’s visual art since 1788. She investigated the treatment of women’s visual art in Australia and the reasons for the neglect of the many women visual artists who had been active. In addition to such reasons as scant historical records and patronising critical attention, Ambrus (1992, p. 6) pointed out the relative rarity of colour reproductions of women’s artworks and also the fact that fewer women worked in oil paint. Whether women artists’ preference for working on paper was due to the lack of training in the use of oil paint, or some other reason, the fact remains that oil paintings are easier to preserve and store than works on paper.

Ambrus offered a comprehensive survey of women visual artists in Australia, including many of the unrecorded details of the women’s lives and their work. She demonstrated that Elizabeth Gould, wife of the author of Gould’s *Birds of Australia*, was a trained artist and lithographer who actually completed most of the art work for the book. It seems clear that she executed hundreds of drawings and lithographs (often from her husband’s rough sketches) for a whole series of books published by her husband, however, the “definition of art considered to be worthy of historical interest excluded both women’s art and scientific illustration”. Ambrus (1992, p. 22) explained that Elizabeth Gould’s death at the age of thirty seven after the birth of her sixth child was caused by puerperal fever, although several biographers misrepresented her death so that it seemed that her

work had worn her out. Ambrus (1992, p. 74) pointed out that she had been “a healthy, productive young woman who fell victim of unhygienic obstetric practices, not overwork”. The value of Elizabeth Gould’s work was not properly acknowledged either at her death or during the rest of her husband’s lifetime. Hoorn (1994, p. 5) made the point that by naming her book *Strange Women* she meant to imply that the representation of women in art is often strange to women themselves and this is also true about the ways that women visual artists have been depicted in histories. The knowledge of what really happened to Elizabeth Gould makes far more sense to other hard working women than some vague notion of death through overwork.

Hoorn (1994, p. 9) claimed that it was the visual art of women that brought Modernism to Australia. She pointed out that Norah Simpson and Grace Cossington-Smith produced the first Post-Impressionist work in Australia. Gooding (1996, p. 43) noted that women visual artists found the transition to modernism easy through their links to the decorative arts and fashion. Smith in *Australian Painting* (1960) is quoted as having referred to Norah Simpson as “having a bright, independent and attractive personality”. But, asks Hoorn (1994, p. 13), could she paint? Smith does not say.

Specific Studies Similar to the Current Study

Brooks (1996) carried out a phenomenological study of eight women artists’ perceptions of their careers, noting the common perceptions which emerged as themes. Her research was directed towards the counselling of gifted and talented girls, and has much relevance to the present study. Many phenomenological studies have been carried out in the field of nursing, including that by Kondora (1993), which dealt with the victims

of incest. Kondora noted that, "The act of telling one's story is thought to be therapeutic and empowering in and of itself" (p. 14).

A few books and catalogues of exhibitions have been published on individual Western Australian women artists such as Elizabeth Durack, Kathleen O'Connor, Elise Blumann, Joan Campbell, Miriam Stannage, Margaret Forrest and Audrey Greenhalgh. Gooding in her role as Curator for Prints and Drawings at the Art Gallery of Western Australia has made a significant contribution to the documentation of the work of women visual artists. Her catalogue for the exhibition *Western Australian Artists 1900-1950* (1987) was thoroughly researched, and included all visual artists of significance working during the period. She has also contributed *Chasing Shadows: The Art of Kathleen O'Connor* (1996). In 1996, a book on the visual art of Sally Morgan was also published.

Research into visual art practice is not always a straightforward undertaking. Polizotto (1988) experienced difficulties with her biographical approach to the life of the visual artist Elise Blumann. The book failed as a conventional biography, but has the fascination of an incomplete jigsaw puzzle. There is a sense that Elise Blumann manipulated the author rather as she would have manipulated her paint, working as hard to blot out unwanted memories as she did to remember things to include, to the point that Polizotto's account is unashamedly incomplete, even false. Does this reflect "female" irrationality or lack of discipline? Is this a peculiarly female perception of ways of doing things? Polizotto (1988, p. 24) recognised the need to account for "the personal, the unresolved and the undirected in anyone's life". In relation to this, Dever (1994, p. xi)

pointed to a complex relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. Discussion of this complex relationship is deferred until later as it is a methodological issue.

Local Exhibitions Of Women's Art

In recent years there have been many exhibitions of the work of women visual artists, such as the *Completing the picture: Women artists and the Heidelberg era* Exhibition held at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in 1993. This exhibition was reviewed rather severely by a critic in *The West Australian* newspaper, 29th May 1993. He stated, "No one comes out and says it but the implication is that a vast conspiracy has kept their marvellous work from us." He went on to comment that much of the visual art on display should have stayed in the "cellars of provincial museums from which it was prised for this show." Perhaps this critic overlooked the fact that work must be seen in order for any judgement to be made about it. *In the company of women 100 years of Australian women's art* from the Crothers Collection was an exhibition held at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art in February-March, 1995. There was an exhibition of the work of Elizabeth Durack at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in March 1995 entitled *Derivations and directions*. An exhibition of the work of Kathleen O'Connor was held in the Art Gallery of Western Australia in July, 1996. In February 1997, the Art Gallery of Western Australia opened *Inside the visible: alternative views of 20th century art through women's eyes*. There have been other displays of women's visual art, and there are many active younger women artists whose work is regularly exhibited in galleries around Perth.

While there is growing interest in the work of women visual artists, there is a paucity of pedagogical material relating to the work of local women, especially coloured

reproductions suitable for use in schools. This situation makes it impossible for educators to implement effective educational programs about these visual artists unless teachers are very committed and prepared to be energetic in resource gathering.

Documentation of the work of Helen Grey-Smith

Documentation of the work of Helen Grey-Smith is scarce and unsystematic. Articles which mentioned her work appeared in *The Critic* in 1962, 1963 and 1966. An article by Duncan Graham appeared in *The West Australian* newspaper on 31 May, 1966 which acknowledged Helen Grey-Smith's completion of the printing of the curtains for the Perth City Council building. Another reference appeared in the same paper on 12th March, 1973 entitled *Painting her own vision* by Merome McPhee. Thomas (1976) included an account of an interview with the Grey-Smiths. Helen Grey-Smith's work was also mentioned in Mason (1979) alongside the work of Guy Grey-Smith. *The West Australian* newspaper 23rd July, 1981 published *Work from the Grey-Smiths* by Murray Mason. The 1983 publication *The WAIT Collection* included a reproduction of one part of her triptych *Village by the Sea* 1972. Curtin University produced a catalogue for the 1987 Retrospective Exhibition of her work. The 1990 *Darlington and the Hills* Exhibition catalogue included a photograph of Helen and Guy Grey-Smith working together, which illustrated her fabric printing process. (This photograph is reproduced on p. 107.) The catalogue for an exhibition held at the Lawrence Wilson Gallery in 1995 entitled *Interventions* contained an essay on the work of Helen Grey-Smith written by Margaret Way.

The Art Gallery of WA has maintained a file of information about Helen Grey-Smith's exhibitions and this has some personal information. Edith Cowan University has very little information apart from a catalogue of work by Helen Grey-Smith exhibited at the Delaney Gallery in November 1992 and several works, one a collage called *Sleeping Princess* circa 1968. In the catalogue for the touring exhibition of the work of Guy Grey-Smith *Landscapes of Western Australia* (1996), Annette Davis acknowledged the contribution made by Helen Grey-Smith to her late husband's work. Most information about Helen Grey-Smith, apart from exhibition catalogues, has been linked to accounts of her late husband's work.

Literature on Methodology

Traditional Philosophy and Methodology

Feminist writers such as Okin (1979) made statements about the misogyny of Western philosophical thought. She pointed out that Plato, a homosexual, sought to conquer physical love to find "ideal beauty", in so doing not only devaluing females but eliminating them as worthy of serious consideration. Okin's view was that most philosophers, writers and psychologists since Plato espoused essentially anti-female dogma which often originated from Biblical sources. Huber (1987) commented on the resulting philosophies as they affect discipline-based art curricula, concluding that women and girls must be ill-served by these basic assumptions. She also commented on traditional dichotomising, whereby male and female, art and science, cognitive and affective are assigned values. This is of great relevance even now in the allocation of funding in school

curriculum areas, where funding for mathematics, science and sporting equipment always outstrip that allocated for the arts.

Zimmerman (1981), Gilligan (1982) and Huber (1987) all questioned the basis of social science models which used male dominated research methods to generalise about women. Gilligan (quoted in Briggs 1986, p. 121) suggested that women “perceive and construe social reality differently from men to the extent that societal constructions of gender implicitly create different realities”. Methodologies used to research women’s perceptions need to recognise this. Cherry (1993, p. 50) called for “caution in deploying the tools which have contributed to women’s omission and negation”. In particular, she was concerned about the lack of documentation of black women visual artists.

Various methodologies could apply to this study. Geiger (1986, p. 338) espoused the life history method as follows:

These documents provide an exceptional resource for studying women’s lives at different points in their life cycles in specific cultural and historical settings and are invaluable for deepening cross-cultural comparisons, preventing facile generalisations and evaluating theories about women’s experiences or women’s expression.

Though this research does not concern itself with cross cultural comparisons, it does make some generalisations about women’s lives, as there are some aspects of the experiences of women visual artists’ lives which seem universal. Evaluating theories about women’s experiences is not within the scope of this work although this may be a valuable task.

The case study approach might be another relevant methodology. Stake (1988, p. 253) referred to it as belonging to “medicine, social work, urban planning and plant pathology. It belongs to science and social work. It belongs to all of us”. The case study method is a bounded system, usually involving more than one source of data. This particular study will examine aspects of the life of one woman, the emphasis being on valuing the unique nature of this individual’s life and work, attempting to reveal and uncover meanings through understanding the nature of her life and work while not necessarily expecting to make any generalisations. A case study would not normally research aspects of one individual using essentially one source of information as is the situation in the present study.

Another option might have been the use of grounded theory methodology. The aim of grounded theory, discussed by Wilson and Hutchinson (1991), “is to generate an analytic schema called substantive grounded theory that conceptually explains social processes at a higher level of abstraction It provides a conceptual framework useful for planning interventions and further qualitative research”. Grounded theory often deals with groups, and would expect to inductively derive theory from the data. This study will not attempt to do this.

One of the major problems for feminist scholars dealing with established methodologies is that of objectivity and subjectivity. Geiger (1986, p. 337) claimed these concepts to be andro-centric and stated, “Higher levels of abstraction assumed to present a true picture of reality often present neither truth nor reality for women”. Garber (1990, p. 19) pointed out three bases of practices by feminist art critics, the third being “self

knowledge, which holds subjective experience as valid and important for the individual's own self worth, as well as in creating awareness of women as social and political classes". Garber (1990 p. 20) noted that the *New York Radical Women* group in the late 1960s connected self knowledge and subjectivity to political consciousness raising.

Briggs (1986, p. 123) in his criticism of Gillian's exclusive reliance on interviews and decontextualised modes of analysis, saw a need to "listen to the way that women ordinarily articulate their experiences to other women". He suggested the interviewer-interviewee relationship implied a controlling-subordinate groups within society. Chandler (in Burgess 1990, p. 133) examined the ethics of objectivity in the conceptualisation of the interviewee as passive respondent. She called it "dehumanising" and called for a methodology which emphasised the human and social nature of social science.

A research method which acknowledges "everydayness" and emphasises the human dimension is provided by Van Manen's phenomenological approach. Van Manen (1990, p. 2) used the term "human science" almost interchangeably with phenomenology and hermeneutics. "Research is a caring act; we want to know that which is most essential to being". He addressed the issue of subjectivity and objectivity in this way:

Scientific requirements or standards of objectivity and subjectivity need to be reconceived ... both find their meaning and significance in the oriented (ie. personal) relation that the researcher establishes with the object of his or her inquiry. (p. 2)

Patten (1990, p. 69) explained phenomenology as "inquiry focused on the question what is the structure and essence of the experience of this phenomenon for these people?".

The underlying assumption is that there is an “essence or essences to shared experience”. Husserl (1859-1938) first used phenomenology in the development of a so-called rigorous science. He established the ontological primacy of experience over language (1964, Paris Lectures, p. XII). This notion is very significant for the art educator, because it is true that a young child develops quite sophisticated visual communication skills through drawing and painting before developing the same degree of language skills. This suggests that the practice of visual art may be closer to the essential truths of the experience of the individual. Prominent philosophers and writers in the area of phenomenology and hermeneutics are Sartre (1958), Merleau Ponty (1962) and Heidegger (1964).

Korzenik (1990), Hagaman (1990) and Garber (1990) all examined the implications of feminist art criticism. The notion of a feminist visual art criticism, visual art history and visual art practice has pedagogical and research implications and may be relevant to this study because an inclusive attitude to the sources of art is at the basis of social justice policies in art education. Harpley (1995, p. 9) pointed out that:

Merely adding names to an existing canon does not actually help us to understand either what it is we are looking at, nor to recognise the structures which have, and continue to devalue, the creative work of women.

In this research, aspects of the art of Helen Grey-Smith will be examined. The underlying decisions made by the artist about her work and the media she has chosen to work with will be of significance towards understanding her life and work and this in turn may be helpful in understanding the processes and perceptions which affect the art of

women. Helen Grey-Smith consistently affirmed the notion that men and women artists share a common goal, to work in their chosen field.

The story of women visual artists is about women achieving this goal, with varying degrees of success. They come from a different reality to that of male visual artists. Paglia (1990) attempted to define the origin and nature of femaleness and maleness. She identified the female "chthonian" as chaotic, mysterious, undisciplined, even violent but also fertile. Paglia (1990, p. 62) argued that femaleness belongs in the secret, frighteningly illogical realm of natural forces. Paglia contrasted the female "chthonian" with the male "Apollonian", the conceptual, the rational, the "eye" of the viewer, the source of the projected image, such as is found on the movie screen. Paglia (1990) revealed the complexity of sexual identity and the need for the inclusion of all aspects of femininity and masculinity in understanding visual art and artists.

A revelation of this complexity occurs in Kiaer (1993). She analysed Hogarth's *Strolling actresses dressing in a barn 1738* in terms of a view of femaleness. Hogarth presented a not unsympathetic view of a group of travelling actresses preparing for their performance in a tumbledown barn. He represented the women in a world exclusive of males; the solitary visible male is shown as a voyeur peeping in on the group from a hole in the roof as the actresses dress and rehearse. In their roles they are young, old, beautiful, ugly, rich, poor, male and female. They even have a baby amongst them. Hogarth's picture illustrated some reasons why males might have reason to respect but also fear feminine strength and self reliance and would perhaps wish to contain or denigrate it.

An example of female rejection of traditional aesthetics is discussed in Garber (1990, p. 20). She noted Solomon-Godeau's (1985) critique of an exhibition of "photographic appropriations" or photographs of photographs by Sherrie Levine. Solomon-Godeau termed this a "rejection of originality, subjectivity and the authorship of an artwork". She called it "a challenge to art in a capitalist system and to art governed by a patriarchal system".

This research will attempt to illuminate not only the experience of Helen Grey-Smith but also some of her artworks. The approach is focussed on important experiences (rather than all experiences), allowing the participant to freely discuss and reveal aspects of her life while keeping a sense of privacy about some areas of her life. The method needed to accommodate the concerns raised by feminist scholars.

Literature on Art Pedagogy

There have been a number of writers who considered the relationship between visual art pedagogy and gender issues. Hagaman (1990) outlined some directions in visual art education for feminist scholarship, drawing implications for curriculum development and teacher preparation. Garber (1990) argued that feminist criticism could be the basis around which to restructure the practice of visual art criticism in art education. Garber (1990) also considered that visual art should be understood in relation to its ideological context and social relevance rather than from the point of view of aesthetic value. This notion is relevant to the visual art of minority groups in society as well as women.

Hagaman (1990) examined the traditional dichotomy of “art and craft,” a categorisation which excluded many female visual artists’ products from the field of Fine Arts. Broude (1991) wrote about the history of the dichotomising tendency which was fashionable in the nineteenth century. Auguste Comte (the father of Positivism), believed that science was to art as male was to female. This kind of belief led to what Broude (1991, p. 14) called “binary thinking ... which derives its power from our culture’s habitually gendered understanding of the relationship between art, science and nature”. The dichotomising tendency which Broude (1991) identified in the evaluation of visual arts forms was also applied to visual art movements. Broude (1991, p. 9) argued that Impressionism was constructed as scientific and objective, engaged in capturing a moment in time, concerned with the science of optics and colour whereby the subject of the painting was really of little importance. This idea helped to distance Impressionism from the Romantic Movement and its “subjective reality”. Broude’s analysis provided an enlightening perspective on matters not exclusive to feminism.

Zimmerman (1991) pointed out that the Arts and Crafts Movement espoused by William Morris and others in nineteenth century England attempted to break down barriers and to unite the qualities of both art and craft in response to the dehumanising effects of the Industrial Revolution. As a response to this feeling and in an effort to bolster the British export market, doors were opened to men and women to train in the field of design at the South Kensington Schools where classes for men and women were provided. In Germany in 1919, the Bauhaus was established in which all tradition was questioned.

Good design became the focus rather than art or craft. The founder of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius wrote:

The object of the Bauhaus was not to propagate any 'style' system, dogma, formula or vogue, but simply to exert a revitalising influence on design. We did not base our teaching on any pre-conceived idea of form, but sought the vital spark of life behind life's ever changing forms. Hirschfeld-Mack (1963, p.1)

Hagaman (1990) saw the need in visual art pedagogy for historical recovery and contemporary recording of data about women visual artists to correct misconceptions. She claimed that teachers should place the study of individual visual artists in the context of time, experience and culture, a view shared by Garber (1990) and Reid (1995). This contextualisation of visual artists and their work was intended to counteract the concept of "the individual genius" or male artist and visual art criticism which was concerned only with the formal qualities of art works.

The Need for Women to Assume Some Control in Art Pedagogy

Korzenick (1990) noted that the majority of visual art educators at school level were women, yet men still chose who and what counted. She argued for a more personal approach to both visual art education and research. Nicely (1992) posited that within education lies a base for power and control and a position of great influence on the training of visual artists and educators. She inferred that women should use this power and exercise control. Garber (1990) claimed that education is the underlying instrument for change. Gilbert and Taylor (1991, p. 129) cited in Foster (1995) commented that "schools are

institutions which produce inequalities; they are also sites where these inequalities can be contested". These writers argued for "a gender inclusive curriculum" which implied a "recognition of otherness, a recognition of race, culture, sexuality and gender". These concerns are considered to be central to the post-modernist critique of education with social justice agendas.

Hicks (1992) and Reid (1995) suggested a deconstructivist analysis of art works which explored such constructions as the dichotomy of man-woman and of culture-nature. Reid suggested the use of Greek mythology or a painting like *The Dream*, 1910 by Henri Rousseau to illustrate the culture/nature, man/woman dichotomy which is ever-present in the visual arts. The so-called passivity of women is another common idea easy to illustrate through attention to artworks. The work of Paul Gauguin has been analysed by Pollock (1993) to raise issues surrounding his colonialist and sexist treatment of Tahitian women.

Summary

Writers, critics and artists have all drawn attention to the position of women in society. Historically, it appears that those making the record have defined women's visual art and the way in which it was recorded. However, the record of women in general has not been accurate. Over a long period of time, much visual artwork by women has been lost through critical neglect and for other reasons. The visual arts have played a significant role in defining the place of women, and will continue to do so. Although some progress has been made in establishing the place of women visual artists in society, there is a need for further research on women visual artists to prevent their practice becoming "invisible".

Feminist scholarship is now proliferating, with many scholars seeking a methodology compatible with their world view. Feminist researchers seek to contribute new approaches to research, not necessarily for or about women. Educators are in a powerful position to assist in the process of redressing inequalities, although it seems that progress in this direction has been slow. If educators were fully informed about major issues raised by feminist writers in the field of visual art pedagogy, an inclusive and reinvigorated view of criticism and analysis should emerge in classrooms.

Chapter 3 Method

This chapter will provide an outline of the design of the research and the paradigm on which it is based. The participant will be introduced and the reasons for her selection will be outlined. A description of the phenomenological approach to the study will be justified. The procedures for interviewing will be provided and discussed, as will other aspects of the research process.

Participant

Helen Grey-Smith is a working woman visual artist now in her eightieth year. She has lived a long and interesting life, and has worked as a visual artist for forty years, but her achievements have yet to be properly recorded and recognised. She has exhibited and sold works locally and nationally. Much of her work is held in the Australian National Gallery in Canberra. She continues to produce art works at her home in Pemberton where she lives alone after many years of marriage and family life. This research will be an examination of aspects of her experience, and will not attempt to present a comprehensive survey of her life. Three themes which emerged from her experiences form the focus of the research. Certain of her works will be linked to the themes, in anticipation that each will illuminate the other.

Design

The method of this research is based on the work of Van Manen (1990) who proposed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to researching lived experience. Van Manen placed his work in the Northern European (mainly German and Dutch) tradition of hermeneutic phenomenological philosophers and writers linked to Northern American developments. He acknowledged the contribution of such scholars as Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida, and others while Heidegger (1927/1933) who is regarded as the father of



Figure 2 - Helen Grey-Smith photographed at her home in January, 1996

Design

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Van Manen viewed phenomenology as the study of persons rather than subjects, because it was concerned with the study of the unique, that which is essentially not replaceable. He conceived of his approach as a human science through which to examine human existence. To support this conception, Van Manen drew on the work of Dilthey who differentiated natural science or the study of natural objects, from human science, which may include the examination of thoughts, emotions and values. Van Manen (1990, p. 177) described phenomenology as concerning itself with "essences, the inner nature of things, the true being of a thing". Phenomenology begins with the study of the *lifeworld* or the world of the natural attitude of everyday life and from this position the researcher makes a distinction between appearance and essence, viewing truth as that which is often veiled or hidden. The unique experience of the participant is then seen against the background of a wider whole or communal world, but the primary connection is to the world of the participant. Van Manen (1990, p. 181) stated that the facts of lived experience

are already meaningfully experienced and that the use of language is inevitably an interpretive process. For Van Manen, hermeneutics is the theory and practice of interpretation.

Phenomenology may also be described as a study of the essence of human experience seen through acts of consciousness. The phenomenological search is for underlying truth, to see and reveal the meaning of experiences faithfully without preconceptions. Husserl attempted to describe how the researcher could approach this experience; he named the process "the epoche". This process is also referred to by Husserl (1964, p. X) as "bracketing," a term derived from mathematics, which was Husserl's original field of study. The term "bracketing" is used to describe how preconceptions are acknowledged and placed to one side. Reduction, a term used in this context by Merleau-Ponty (1962) involves a stripping away of private feelings and scientific theories to see past the lived experience to universals or essences. One could argue that this process is very closely related to creating and understanding artworks because both are concerned with a search for hidden meaning. Husserl also argued for the notion of "suppositionlessness". Streb (1984, p. 160) explained that Husserl's purpose was to:

Free one of beliefs and prejudices which could interfere with critical thought. One is simply assuming an attitude of neutrality of reflection such that whatever is investigated can be seen as showing itself to be what it is essentially.

Husserl's key phrase "zu den sachen selbst" ("to the things themselves") indicated that he was not just concerned with material things because the "things" could be ideas,

feelings, experiences and so on. His approach was intended to involve a rigorous attention to what was “given”.

In this research, the focus will be upon Helen Grey-Smith’s descriptions of her experiences and her artworks. The researcher will need to keep aside notions expressed elsewhere about the fate of women visual artists and personal opinions about the nature of Helen Grey-Smith’s life and work at bay and only on few occasions will information from other sources be used. The process of reflection, which is part of Van Manen’s method, between the researcher and participant will be of a collaborative nature. A contemplative reflection of the “given” is entirely in keeping with Helen Grey-Smith’s own method of working and is a process upon which she engages daily. An expectation exists that essential truths lie embedded in things which seem to be significant in Helen Grey-Smith’s lifeworld.

The artist’s experiences and acts of consciousness interacted with and met those of the researcher. On both sides there was disclosure and intuitive grasping at moments of illumination. Streb (1984, p. 159) reported that Husserl was interested in how intentional experience structures thinking.

Husserl was concerned with all experiences of consciousness and the attendant structures of those experiences. All experiences have a particular structure which he called intentionality. All consciousness is consciousness of something Husserl was not concerned with the everyday experiencing of things but with how consciousness structures those experiences so that we are able to think. Husserl was primarily concerned with thinking.

Phenomenology and Art Criticism

Not only is phenomenology of interest as a research approach, it has an established place as a method for conducting visual art criticism. It could be said that visual art is the transformation of an artist's thoughts, feelings and experience into visual form. This explanation fits well with the idea that research about visual art or artists often concerns itself with "essences, the inner nature of things, the true being of a thing" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 177). There are precedents for writing about art works in phenomenology, for instance Heidegger's examination of a Van Gogh painting, *Shoes of the Peasant* (1977, p. 162-163). Heidegger referred to visual art as "the becoming and happening of truth" (p. 183). Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 393) also mentioned the art of Van Gogh:

Van Gogh's paintings have a place in me for all time, a step is taken from which I cannot retreat, and, even though I retain no clear recollection of the pictures which I have seen, my whole subsequent aesthetic experience will be that of someone who has become acquainted with the painting of Van Gogh Existence always carries forward its past, whether it be by accepting or disclaiming it.

Experiences are carried forward, building upon one another to form one person's reality. Underlying and interacting with these experiences is the ego. Streb (1984, p. 161) characterised the "ego as an essential substrate to human experience" and linked the development of a person's being with the structuring of experiences. Streb wrote about the way that an individual must structure his or her experiences in order to be who he or she is. He noted that phenomenology is concerned with how individuals constitute their egos and

this is at the heart of understanding visual artists and their art. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote about how the individual finds or loses him/herself by acts of conscious decision. Helen Grey-Smith's life is dotted with decisions which helped her to find herself and express herself through her work, although she claimed that many times "doors just opened". In this research the data, which Van Manen (1990, p. 53) defined as "things given or granted," largely takes the form of transcripts of recorded conversations. Because Helen Grey-Smith's art is an interpretation of her lived experience, "the setting-itself-into-work of truth" (Heidegger 1977, p. 184), the works themselves will also constitute part of the data.

Due to the personal nature of this research, the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity had to be re-examined. Van Manen (1990, p. 2) commented that in the human sciences these two are not mutually exclusive categories because:

Both find their meaning in the oriented, ie. personal relation that the researcher establishes with the object of his or her inquiry. Subjectivity means that the researcher is as perceptive, insightful and discerning as one can be in order to show or disclose the subject in its full richness and greatest depth. On the other hand, objectivity means remaining true to the object.

Dever (1994, p. xi) maintained that "the so-called objective standards of history are commonly founded upon a normative masculine subjectivity, thus excluding the experience of women from valid consideration". This is consistent with the view that traditional philosophy and scientific method may be less useful for this style of research. Feminist researchers have called for attention to reality as perceived by women and warned against using the tools which contributed to their omission from historical records.

Van Manen (1990, p. 127) described the task of writing as indistinguishable from the task of research because “To write is to measure the depth of things, as well as to come to the sense of one’s depth”. The words allow the invisible, that which is being illuminated, to be seen. The resulting description is inevitably an interpretation because the tools used for this are words, hence the use of the term hermeneutic. The use of words is the product of the individual’s experience and as such, highly subjective. As each individual is locked inside his or her own consciousness, the task of interpretation is difficult. Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 405) observed, “As far as pure, lived-through experience goes, we are each incarcerated in our separate perspectives.”

Investigation of the Experience

The researcher was faced with the task of examining the lived experience of Helen Grey-Smith. Behind this task is the contribution and influence of the researcher’s previous experience because “we are, as Proust declared, ‘perched on a pyramid of past life’” (Merleau- Ponty 1962, p. 393). The researcher grew up in Pemberton, was encouraged to take an interest in art as a child and developed a love of the environment which is so clearly important in the art work of Helen Grey-Smith. The researcher also lived for many years in Cambridge, not far from Godmanchester where Helen Grey-Smith’s maternal grandparents lived and where she stayed during the school holidays. The researcher experienced marriage to an ambitious partner. The attendant feelings of “taking a back seat” as wife and mother are possibly shared with Helen Grey-Smith. Even so, the primary interest of the researcher is in recording the achievements of this woman artist and at the

same time exploring one woman's experience from several viewpoints. The participant is a woman of considerable intelligence with excellent recollection of the details of her life. As far as possible, Helen Grey-Smith's experiences and work will speak for themselves.

Materials and Equipment

In this kind of research, the rapport between researcher and participant is crucial. No questionnaires or tests were devised to obtain the data required. Essential equipment included a four track recording device with microphones. This allowed flexible seating arrangements and produced good sound quality, which was invaluable when transcribing tapes. Even so, nuances of the spoken word were very hard to decipher at times. High quality, 50 minute tapes were used. It seemed that this was about the right amount of time for a session, allowing for preliminary conversation which was not recorded. Some photographs of art works were needed. Visual art photography really needs an expert, with proper equipment. Glass needs to be removed from works, photographs taken in proper light etc. Working photographs for the research were obtained with a hand-held automatic camera and high speed quality film.

Protocol

Initial contact was made with Helen Grey-Smith many months before the commencement of the research. She was happy to give permission for the work and has remained committed to the process. Following the submission of the Research Proposal, in June 1995, she signed the Disclosure and Informed Consent Form. Assurances were given

that all matters were to be treated with confidentiality, and that anything which she disclosed either on tape or elsewhere would not be divulged or shown to a third party without her consent. She approved work-in-progress documents and also material from transcripts for the appendices.

Data Collection

A series of fourteen conversations with Helen Grey-Smith was conducted over a period of approximately six months. All conversations were held in the kitchen of Helen Grey-Smith's home at Pemberton except for the conversation held in the Old Schoolhouse Gallery in Pemberton. Helen Grey-Smith lives in a weatherboard cottage in Jamieson Street on several acres of land well out of the centre of the town. The front garden is full of flowers, shrubs and trees and is faced by the front verandah which has cane chairs and a low table. Helen Grey-Smith often sits there to read or talk with friends or family. The inside of her house is quiet and dark, sparsely furnished, with paintings by Guy Grey-Smith and herself on all walls. The kitchen is wood panelled and full of the smells of coffee and cigarette smoke. Coffee mugs and other pots in use are hand made. The back room which receives the afternoon sun is furnished with low bookcases and looks out over shrubs full of wild birds. The house is uncluttered and comfortable.

At the beginning of each conversation Helen Grey-Smith would make cups of coffee and the recording equipment would be set up on her kitchen bench. The microphones were placed on the table on a mat or cushion because even the tapping of a cigarette on the side of the packet on the table, or a spoon stirring in a mug would vibrate

into the microphone as a thunderous noise. Helen Grey-Smith smoked cigarettes during the course of the conversations. Sometimes the sound of a match lighting up could be heard on the tape recording.

It was made clear at the outset that it was Helen Grey-Smith's life and experiences which we would discuss, not her husband's. She expressed a sense of relief at this prospect. The first two or three conversations were specific, in that well defined areas of Helen Grey-Smith's life were examined quite exhaustively. These areas were her childhood in India, her schooling in England, her return to India in the middle to late 1930s, meeting Guy Grey-Smith and life during World War II, life in Darlington and the artistic community of the 1950s. The artworks (and methods used to produce them) were mainly discussed in later conversations when other aspects had been covered fully.

The tapes were reviewed by the researcher soon after each meeting. Notes were made while listening to the tapes to prepare for the next conversation. Sometimes questions would be written down, then during a subsequent conversation, these would be asked. Sometimes one question led to a whole discussion. Some topics would be returned to for clarification, allowing Helen Grey-Smith to talk fully about her experiences. Sometimes matters needing clarification were referred by telephone or letter, so that in one case, the method of screen printing for the Perth City Council curtain projects was written by the artist. There was always consistency of accounts in repeated discussions. Helen Grey-Smith was asked if she would like to listen to the tapes to bring any matters forward, but she rather self - consciously declined, saying she didn't want to listen to herself.

Two conversations were specifically about visual art works. These conversations were the most difficult. To start with, the works exhibited in the Old Schoolhouse Gallery in October, 1995 were in a public place, in which Helen Grey-Smith did not feel at ease and secondly, the sound equipment began to malfunction. As a result some material was lost and the rest was very hard to hear.

Transcriptions of the audio tapes were commenced at the conclusion of the conversations, and this helped to find directions for further conversations, and familiarise the researcher with the information provided. Great care was needed in transcribing accurately, and recording what was actually said rather than what was imagined. This necessitated playing and replaying passages from the tapes, coming back to the passage repeatedly to really understand what had been said. The rhythms of Helen Grey-Smith's spoken language and characteristic vocabulary regularly punctuated with laughter became familiar. This often helped decipher difficult passages.

Helen Grey-Smith was provided with all transcripts as soon as they were complete. At the end of the conversations, both researcher and participant felt that everything of importance to the study had been examined. No diaries or journals were offered by the participant, but a search was conducted for material on Helen Grey-Smith in the newspapers, tertiary institutions, files held in the Art Gallery of Western Australia Library, in books, catalogues and journals. Helen Grey-Smith offered her collection of fabric print remnants for photographing as well as any art works in her possession. No interviews were held with members of her family except for a brief conversation with Helen Grey-Smith's sister Mary at a social function.

I was given permission to photograph works in King Edward Memorial Hospital as well as the curtains in the Council House. The photograph of the curtains eventually used was provided by courtesy of the Perth City Council administrative staff member, Jenny Fisher.

Data Analysis

Van Manen (1990, p. 79) advocated the use of themes as a way of ordering or making sense of the data. He described themes as “knots in the web of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes” (p. 90). Themes can point to aspects of a phenomenon which are significant. The more persistent the theme, the more essential it would appear to be to the structure of the phenomenon. In her phenomenological study on eight women artists entitled *Meaning and experience of career as it is lived by women artists*, Brooks (1996 Doctoral Dissertation) found that nine common themes emerged. One theme which arose from the feeling that the artists had of being outsiders was of particular interest to this researcher. Another theme which emerged was that the women artists felt a conflict between their interests and the needs of others. These themes certainly reflected the concerns expressed by many writers on the work of women artists, and recurred in the conversations with Helen Grey-Smith.

In order to reflect on the “given,” in this research, three themes were isolated. Helen Grey-Smith’s lifelong practice and development as an artist is an underlying theme overlaid with the following themes:

- **Formative experiences.** It seemed that the source of the sense of self which directed Helen Grey-Smith's decisions was formed during her childhood, which was also the source of her cultural knowledge as well as the enduring images which became part of her artistic vocabulary.
- **Training in art school.** This experience provided the philosophical underpinning of the artist's decisions about the nature of visual art. The nature of the training determined Helen Grey-Smith's situation in the world of visual art and reinforced her role as a woman visual artist.
- **Choice of art forms.** The use of collage, painting and fabric printing and the relationship between them informed the way in which the artist perceived the nature of her role as an artist.

Of course these themes affected one another. The threads of Helen Grey-Smith's experiences as a child in India ran horizontally across that time and space, but they also ran vertically through her subsequent lived experience. This meant that a kind of web of intersecting experiences was built up. This web or net of experiences provided what Husserl termed "noetic" description. Experiences form a unity, ordered in time. Streb (1984, p. 161) cited Heidegger's explanation of the interconnectedness of an individual's past, present and future experiences and the relationship of an individual's experience with that of others.

As Heidegger pointed out, being-in-the world is at the same time a being-in-the-world-for-others. The creative individual, called the authentic individual, is one for

whom being is a question and one for whom his or her being in the world for others is thematic. The creative individual by virtue of his or her ego's uniting past, present and future experiences along essential lines is one who uses the reflexive and objectifying capacity of consciousness to embody his or her own immanent experiences in some sign system such that these experiences will be preserved and made a subject of experience for others.

Identifying the themes required a process of reflection. The time spent on data gathering was essential to this reflective process. There were occasions when an important snippet of conversation was lost and had to be checked, sometimes by telephone or by letter and some words or spelling confirmed. There were times when a strong feeling was communicated in conversation and changes in Helen Grey-Smith's facial expression led to further reflection about what was being said. The constant listening to the tapes while transcribing gave plenty of opportunity for reflection, as did the reading and re-reading while piecing the story together. A certain level of familiarity and trust was also developed, so that the discussions about the artworks, which were the last very personal and intense conversations, were possible. In the end, the important themes seemed obvious, but another researcher may have chosen other paths to tread. In the presentation of the transcriptions, questions asked or comments made by the researcher are underlined. The emphases (in italics) are Helen Grey-Smith's, as are the pauses. Four periods indicate interruptions in the conversation or sections omitted. The researcher's responses and repetitive verbal mannerisms have been omitted.

Limitations

It could be considered that one of the limitations of this research was the distance travelled to obtain the data used. Many trips were made between Perth and Pemberton by the researcher, and many weeks spent on visits to Jamieson Street. There were also visits to local curators, and people like photographer Richard Woldendorp who had important information which could be used.

There was possibility that the participant might become ill or tired of the process, or even alienated by some means. Fortunately, this did not eventuate although she did undergo several operations for cataracts over the course of the data gathering, and suffered severe spinal pain from a pinched nerve at one stage. Her interest and consideration never flagged at any stage. It would be true to say that the whole process was entirely enjoyable and enriching, certainly for the researcher.

The eventual feeling of rapport and familiarity between researcher and participant could also be construed as an undesirable occurrence in a research project. Both parties were aware of this as a potential problem and in fact, the recorded conversations never contained casual conversation which sometimes did occur before or afterwards the taped conversations. There was a consciousness by participant and researcher of the difference between material which was relevant to the task at hand and just gossipy conversation. The participant was restrained and tactful and this extended to matter relating to personal disclosure. In some ways, this reserve could have been seen as a limitation. It was pointed

out in Chapter 6 that the research did omit aspects of her life. This was consciously decided by the researcher and participant. The phenomenon demonstrated in Polizzotto (1988) was attributable to the flawed memory of a very old woman. But the methodology used in this research allowed for selectivity; flawed memory and subjective views are part of human experience so this could not then be seen as a damaging weakness in the research.

Relying on the account of one person would definitely be seen as a weakness in research which aimed for the type of factual accuracy or triangulation. However, this research was concerned with faithfulness and accuracy in that it was constantly oriented only to Helen Grey-Smith's own experiences. Obtaining the views of others could have seriously jeopardised the confidence of the participant in the research process and led the research into areas beyond the scope of the study. The artworks which reflected Helen Grey-Smith's experiences, philosophies and emotions formed a type of triangulation, supporting her stories and opening windows to the experiences for both researcher and participant. The feminist perspectives which form a major part of the contextual framework may not be very helpful in attempts to illuminate the lived experience of Helen Grey-Smith. Aspects of these perspectives were however essential in creating a background to the study.

Ethical Considerations

The question of confidentiality was mentioned previously. A research project such as this succeeds or fails on the trust built up between the parties involved. The nature of

the research method removed the need to relentlessly pursue every aspect of the artist's life, basically leaving the onus upon the participant to decide what to reveal or conceal. There was seldom a feeling of prying or prodding and the resultant conversations were relaxed and cooperative, while at the same time exhaustive and involved work on both sides. Helen Grey-Smith was fully cognisant of her right to "cease cooperating at any point in the research" Gay (1992, p. 95). Tapes and all materials have been kept secure and all information shown to the supervisor, and other readers has been with the agreement of the participant.

Chapter 4 Examining the Themes

Over the course of the conversations, certain aspects of Helen Grey-Smith's life began to shine forth. Three themes were chosen from the "given" and supported by appropriate artworks. In the discussion of the themes, essential quotations have been included in the text. The reader will gain a deeper understanding of each theme by reading the relevant appendix contiguously. The three themes are: Formative Experiences, Training at Art School and Choice of Media. Each theme will be discussed in turn.

Theme One: Formative Experiences: India and England.

Helen Grey-Smith was born on 26 May 1916, at Coonoor in the Nilgiri Hills of Southern India. The family lived at Coimbatore. Her family name was Stanes. She was one of four children, the third daughter in the family, with a younger brother. Here are some of Helen's words to describe her childhood.

Oh well, my parents lived in India. My father was head of a firm that my grandfather started way, way back, of tea and coffee and my mother lived up there with him, coming back for leaves and all us kids were sent off to boarding school in England, aged about eight I suppose and we had a very strange life in that way because we really were not a family. I have two sisters and a brother; my brother was the youngest and I was the third girl, and never were we all together because one would be sent to boarding school then the next one would be at boarding school and so it went on. And so it was a strange life, never knowing my parents well. But

the extraordinary thing is that those very early years, only *eight* years that I was in India, had an amazing effect and I remember it all so *very* clearly and I have such a strong warm feeling for India. It really is extraordinary how those early years of the feeding years, you feel that's home in a way. And England was home, too, of course. (Refer to Appendix I for a fuller text).

In the years from 1924-1935, Helen Grey-Smith and her sister Mary attended a Church of England boarding school for girls at St Leonard's-on-Sea near Hastings on the south coast of England. Their older sister had been sent to Malvern College, regarded in the family as a better school. Life in her school was based on the English public school system. The academic standards of the school did not appear to be particularly rigorous to Helen Grey-Smith; she also thought her school "deadly dull", but within the limitations of the school, Helen enjoyed history, reading and sport. On Sunday afternoons, the girls were expected to read morally and spiritually "uplifting" books, such as ones about the lives of missionaries. Helen Grey-Smith decided instead to secretly read other books such as Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. The girls played netball, hockey and lacrosse in winter. They walked to the playing fields some distance away because the school had very little playground space around it. In summer they played cricket and went swimming. Helen described marching down to the pebbly beach in the cold mornings to learn to swim as "a mixture of horror and joy". Despite having been labelled in the family a "difficult child", she did very well at school and in her final year she was made Head Girl. This was cut short when she was "wafted" back to India part of the way through the year. She felt she had had quite a limited education, never knowing what it was to shop or handle money,

visit the local town, or indeed be informed of events which were soon to overwhelm Europe.

Her school holidays were spent at Godmanchester, in Huntingdon with her maternal grandparents whose family name was Hunnybun. This part of England was the birthplace of Oliver Cromwell and the home of a seventeenth century religious visionary, Nicholas Ferrars. The family at Godmanchester had much in common with that of her paternal grandfather in India. Both grandfathers had struck out against convention and belonged to the same religious sect, the Plymouth Brethren. Both had eight children. One of her maternal uncles went out to India to grow tea and coffee near the Stanes family estate. In both families, one daughter became a missionary. As was the case in her own immediate family, Helen felt that "the two who were important were the eldest daughter and the youngest son".

Her maternal grandfather was a lawyer who owned a comfortable home where everyone had enough of everything, where there was a lovely garden and nearby a river, the Great Ouse, to play on in boats. The household was "God fearing and almost teetotal".

My grandmother came from a much more worldly and rich family called Woodley. I remember there was some function or other and people were producing food for it and she had the cook make some magnificent trifles, with that thick cream and those tiny little ratafia biscuits, and we went with her. I really liked that grandmother and I said, "Have some trifle granny," and I brought one over to her and she said, "Not that one dear, that one," because all the others had sherry in them and she knew which one hadn't. That's dedication for you, isn't it?

One of her aunts at Godmanchester was Miss Noel Hunnybun, an unmarried lady who after World War II became an eminent clinical psychologist at the Tavistock Clinic in London. Another aunt, Dorothy, who had been a missionary in China returned to live with and care for her ageing parents. These women influenced Helen Grey-Smith's life in providing role models as independent women as well as nurturing others in an unselfish manner. Helen Grey-Smith's return to India at the end of school was to a life of parties, balls, "club do's", watching polo and playing tennis, a life of "endless entertainment, incredibly pleasurable but not very interesting".

Here is part of Helen's description of this period.

So as you needed processions of evening dresses, I got a lot. I mean, long skirts, evening dress, right down to the ground (laughs). People looked very nice. You went out (from England) with the latest fashions and you were the most fashionable person and then after a while, somebody else came out with the latest fashions and you would be less fashionable, and then in the end you were wearing stuff made in India, which wasn't as good (laughs). Yes! Absurd isn't it! Did you choose the things? We went in and tried them on and yes, it was quite easy because at that age you are young and slim and you could try anything on. Oh yes, she (Helen's mother) was pretty good in that way, I must say, she really knew. They didn't skimp about our clothes or anything at all. There was a social life, you had to have a lot of changes and they used to *change* a lot in those days. You used to have a morning dress and an afternoon dress, and an evening dress! Wasn't it ridiculous! (laughter) I always remember that from my infancy, *always changing clothes!* And

of course, you didn't have to wash them, the dhobi did that! So it was strange! Way back in the past, wasn't it, the amount of clothes. But at least our clothes were comfortable, we weren't having to wear what they wore when they first went out, high necks and the long skirts. At least the day dresses were just short. And we were still wearing that awful topee. But you could have bare legs and sandals and that sort of thing. I don't think my mother would have had that, she would have had stockings, probably. Amazing!

We did go with my father to Cochin. I really did enjoy that, it was a fascinating town. I think he must have had some business there, and again I saw the great feast of I forget which one it is, and saw the temple lit up and everything like that. I think we stayed in the old Portuguese town which I found very fascinating, and we always went of course up to the hills, that's the Nilgiri Hills where my grandfather was and we'd go up there when it was getting hot; they still had the old club thing up there, I didn't go to those much, the club. I really enjoyed the walking, in..... it's quite like Australia in a way, it's extraordinary you know, they have a lot of eucalyptus trees there. They have the tea plantations and they have an Australian tree called a silver oak (silky oak?), a grevillea I think it is, shading the tea, so you could go for long walks in the tea plantation which are all neatly lined out with nice little round bushes which they kept pruned all the time because they are picked all the time and at the top of them are these lovely trees shading them. Must have been because it's a rather hot, low, warm country. And then you could go for walks, in Upper Ooty

there were nice open downs where you could go for a walk. I really got out of the party swing up in the hills but I enjoyed it. I enjoyed both.

And then, you see, in my mother's brother's estate, he had a tea estate, and they were up right up high, really high, and there you could get quite close to the real jungle. I can remember going for a walk. We had two dogs, quite big dogs and I went for this walk, and they both started looking very frightened and they started running home, so I ran home too (laughs)! I don't know. I don't know why they ran. So there must have been something there. To frighten a dog, it must have been something large. Must have been a carnivore of some kind! Something was lurking there! I didn't hear anything, and dogs, if it's a small animal they'll attack, they'll go and do it. You didn't have to call them back or anything like that, they were quite intelligent dogs. So you felt there was this sort of primeval forest around, which was quite exciting, I thought. The hills, the Nilgiri Hills were full of people who had semi-retired, and also the government would go up there for the hot weather. Oh, they had balls and so on. I did go to a few of those but I quite enjoyed the contrast.

You'd probably have to have an invitation to the Government House Ball, and you'd go in and sign a visitor's book, and if you were O.K. you'd be invited. And the Club, of course you'd just go to the club and they'd have organised things, very repetitive things, and well if you were in the Army, they'd have a lot of things, and my cousin was you know. It was great for us two girls being together in this Army set, and she came to stay with me of course. Oh, we had a great time, and lots of

boyfriends and things. It was terrific (laughs)! (More on this in Conversation 5). She'd been to boarding school in England too; there was a sad story about her. She stayed out in India about the same time as I did and then went back and she trained to be a nurse, at St Thomas's Hospital, and she was fully qualified and everything was going fine and then the War broke out. She was bombed and killed. St Thomas's got a bad bombing because it was on the river and that was terrible, a terrible shock to one to have one's contemporaries killed. So that was very sad. But then the strange thing was that really we were shut out from the world and the politics and everything, I think it was partly because we didn't bother. We didn't bother. We didn't get a paper. I think my father got the *Times of India* and just read it himself. I never saw it, no radio, no television, nothing, but we knew *nothing* about the stirrings for independence. I mean we just didn't know a thing about it. We were ignorant! And it was going on all right.

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Figure 3 - *The Prince*. 1968. Collage. 63.5cm by 40.4cm.

Discussion of Art Work

India and Bali - Awakening of Memories

The Prince 1968 Collage

“All art, as the letting happen of the advent of truth of beings, is as such in essence, poetry” Heidegger (1977, p.184).

The first analysis of Helen Grey-Smith's artwork at this stage may seem chronologically out of place because the reader will be aware that discussion of the early part of Helen Grey-Smith's career is omitted and the analysis here is of work which was completed in 1968. The reason for this is that the experience of being in Bali, where the Grey-Smith family stayed for two months in 1967, brought Helen Grey-Smith into contact with her childhood memories and experiences after thirty years away from India. She commented that she herself was not aware of the strength of this connection at the time. Kondora (1993, p.13) referred to this phenomenon as what Heidegger had called the “coming of what has been”, a commemorative thinking back. Kondora noted that we all have memories but do not always have access to them until something triggers their recall. Helen Grey-Smith also referred to her collages as the beginning of her career as an artist so a discussion of the collages seemed appropriate at this point.

By 1968 Helen Grey-Smith had given up the textile printing in which she had been involved since 1954. Her right hand had been damaged by continuous lifting of heavy screens while executing huge commissions of curtains for the Perth City Council, the University of WA and the Reserve Bank. After ten years of textile printing and working

towards cooperative exhibitions with her husband, she was ready to move on to another challenge. She was also looking for freedom from the restriction and discipline of printmaking.

The collages were inspired by the stories from the Ramayana which were re-told to the family by the Argun (see Appendix 2). *The Prince*, 1968 was one of the last and largest works of the series which were completed at this time. Helen Grey-Smith referred to these collages as “the transition from craft work to fine arts” and as “decorative works”. They are “landscapes as much of the cultural life of Bali as of its physical appearance”.

Instead of trying to do scenic things of Bali, with sort of palm trees and things, I got the feeling of the background there. Cultural background. To get the amazing ornateness of Balinese structures and the fragileness, I used paper that I had block printed on ... I cut that paper up and tried to get the kind of gaudy, fragile yet very impressive mixture, which was very ornamental. You never see a real Balinese building without that.

Depicted on the right of the collage *The Prince*, 1968 is an ornate temple-like pavilion constructed from lino-printed paper. While seeming to be casually assembled, this was carefully composed with the masses of colour, texture and space on the left balancing the bulk of the composition on the right. An orange-on-greenish print in the top left area is balanced by the same design in bright orange on the bottom right hand section. Thomas (1976) quoted Helen Grey-Smith as having said:

What they came down to was the Bali carving that attracted me, like the Indian: so that to get that kind of effect I cut lino. I'd superimpose linocut onto hand coloured

papers I'd made, and stuck down, like painting on paper. My ideas come from folklore, myth, poetry. They're figurative but not realistic. I think I have some affinity with Persian or Indian work-they're compressed and detailed, ornamental.

Forge (1978, p. 7) noted in his examination of *langse* which are cloth paintings used in Bali to screen the offerings placed in the temples, that the "printed pattern favoured by the Balinese is yellow or gold floral on a red ground". He also noted that:

The paintings were not intended to be objects of contemplation in their own right, but to be part of a more complex whole involving buildings, which they decorated; offerings, which often partly obscured them; and a whole set of actions by priests and congregation which were the main focus of attention.

Some silvery green has been painted behind the spiky palm trees which wave their fronds like flags; the eye is drawn to this greenish space, which perhaps recalls a field of rice with a sheen of water. Helen Grey-Smith described the subject of the collage, Bali and the temple offerings in this way.

It's really just an old prince sitting there drinking rice wine He's a Prince but he's a bit of a bon viveur! And that's the point, he's a slightly reprehensible character. There are trees and things and the suggestion of a grove with bottles of wine underneath it. Because they really do know how to enjoy themselves The orange part at the front is where they put out carpets and gaudy, wonderful things hanging over the fences. It's got all the Hindu background that I grew up with, it was all around me, but it is far more ornamental than the Indian. The Indian temples are one huge mass of ornamentation. But they are more controlled really

than the Balinese It's extraordinary, the ornate landscape with its wonderful palm trees and everything, whereas India is much bigger, wider and more spacious and I don't remember in India the offerings being what the Balinese offerings were. They'd have regular offerings going into the temple and women take them on their head and they would be ... all lavish pinks and oranges, all built up out of coloured dough. They make them into shapes and ornamentations all coming up into a pinnacle with fruit and flowers and things all underneath. They spend ever such a long time preparing those. I think they were given to the chooks. The kind of thing that was so beautiful in Bali was that everything was in a wonderful circle and the ornamentation, the wonderful coloured banners they would carry and the kind of wonderful fringed umbrellas. Ornamentation is so natural to them.

The transition from printmaking to collage was a natural and logical progression for Helen Grey-Smith because her method of working with silk screen printing was through cutting and tearing paper and actually composing designs in this way. The materials used flowed from one art form to another. The "debris" of designs, such as scraps of printed paper for textile printing could be used in the collages. The screen printing ink can be seen on the pillar of the Prince's pavilion. The techniques and processes were familiar. By means of printing, the papers were transformed and subsumed into Helen's creation. She explained:

I was very at ease because when I made screens with collage which I did quite often I'd be making a little image, it could have been framed-you know what I mean? I'd be using my own paper, not paper like newspaper, my own coloured scraps and I'd

got at ease in cutting and tearing and sticking it on and sticking it on and Oh, it seemed like a good idea and we went to Bali and I (pause) was very fascinated with the old man whose sort of palace we lived in who would come down and tell us stories, old folk stories which really came from ancient Indian books, not the Maharbarata but very important, like Aesop's fables (long pause).

Perhaps the Argun himself is depicted in the collage; maybe the description of the reprehensible *bon viveur* applied to Bali itself. This first series of collages which Helen Grey-Smith exhibited alone was a significant knot in the web of her experience. It drew on threads going back to her childhood, from those early years in India. The stories told by the Argun linked her simultaneously with her childhood and at the time almost without her realising, with the "great mother culture of India". It also represented the experience of being with her own children in Bali, listening to the old tales from the Ramayana. She discovered with joy the people and environment of Bali. Discovery and rediscovery were intimately linked. In a way, she was revealed to herself and thus began her own true career as an artist.

Collage, like textile printing, did not compete with her husband's painting and pottery. She had been working and sharing exhibitions with her husband for years, neither artist encroaching on the field of the other and so her work in collage continued that tradition. "And partly it was a bit of a new idea, to see collages on the wall. It was sort of not the old thing". By moving into this medium, she situated herself in a world which seemed to have originated in folk art but which had in fact been the focus of an art

revolution in the first half of the twentieth century. She was right, it was a new idea to see collages on the wall.

Collage is commonly thought of as the sort of thing seen on nineteenth century valentine cards or screens made with torn or cut out and pasted pictures, lace, cloth, old cards, tickets and coloured paper. McIntyre (1990, p. 13) however, pointed out that the roots of collage can be traced back to Japanese calligraphers of the twelfth century, Persian leather artists of the thirteenth century, through to the seventeenth century Russian religious icons and Dutch silhouette cutting in the same century. Janis and Blesh (1967, pp. 4-5) drew a link between collage and the art of *trompe l'oeil* or “fool-the-eye” art practised in the sixteenth century. An element of this activity, especially in the nineteenth century, seemed to be the need to commemorate and “save things” and this is certainly a strong aspect of modern collage art. This notion fits in very well with the late twentieth century feelings about recycling and environmentalism embraced by young artists.

Janis and Blesh (1967) traced the beginnings of modern collage to the invention of the magic lantern, whereby an image could be “wedded to real space”. This notion is examined by Paglia (1990, p. 31). She regarded conceptualisation and the projection of images as Apollonian or “male art”, citing the cinema an example of the epitome of this. In the years prior to 1914, the Cubist artists, Picasso and Braque used scraps of newspaper glued onto their paintings which made witty comments and literally spoke to the viewer. These artists were responding to great changes which included the industrialisation of production and such things as the nickelodeon and aircraft construction. Their actions reflected a confidence in their own viewpoint and methods, indicative of the great

contribution which Picasso would make in helping to define twentieth century art. Picasso used collage to assist his analysis of forms; he went on to produce some of the first assemblages which utilised existing artefacts to arrive at new meanings.

Streb (1984, p. 161) described the creative act as one of uniting the “given” with the process of uncovering new ways of expressing “self” or ego:

It may be that a person transcends the bounds of any categorical mode of being by his or her creative efforts. Such efforts involve a projection of the ego principle beyond what is given in the world and a uniting of what is uncovered with what was already given. Such efforts are the works of truly unique personalities and are the bases of founding new object domains of human concern.

Collage became linked to construction or the notion that the artist was assembling a work, building something, thereby defying the hallowed painting tradition of illusion of depth on a flat plane. Janis and Blesch (1967, p. 12) referred to the experiments with collage as “the baffling intrusion of objects - simple, real and honest - into what for centuries had been unquestioningly accepted as the stage of illusion”. Sayers (in McIntyre, 1990, p.30) noted that cut paper and “such baubles” as needlework, artificial flowers and shellwork were banned by the rules of the Royal Academy in the late eighteenth century. “Fool the eye” art was not regarded as high art either. The rejection of official art values after World War I and the flowering of collage as well as other art forms such as junk sculpture may be associated with the disillusionment in society following the carnage of the war.

Collage and montage (monter being the French word for assemble) was taken up by the Dadaists in 1916, by artists such as Max Ernst, Kurt Schwitters and Marcel Duchamp, whose philosophies were “anti-art”. Schwitters named his work Merz, taken from the word Kommerz. He did not differentiate between his various art forms and his literary efforts, indeed he combined them sometimes in performance art. Henri Matisse spent his last years creating with cut and torn paper in the 1940-50s. Wilhelm de Kooning used collage to plan and execute paintings, sometimes leaving the paper in amongst the oil paint. Lee Krasner tore up many of her early works on paper and re-worked them into collages in the 1950s. Jackson Pollock also used collage as did other more recent artists including Sidney Nolan. This collage assemblage tradition inspired the three dimensional art of the late twentieth century, a type of work strongly embraced by women artists. McIntyre (1990, p. 21) referred to “the final decades of the twentieth century which can logically be termed the Age of Collage”. A discussion on the significance of collage for Helen Grey-Smith follows in a later section.

Theme 2: Training at Art School

In 1937 Helen Grey-Smith returned to England, having enjoyed eighteen months of life of “complete frivolity” in India. These were the years of the Raj, with its routine of dances, balls, concerts, games of tennis, polo, golf, bridge and holidays in the cooler hill stations. Enduring pictures of this life have been drawn by E. M. Forster and others. During this time, most young women would have found their life partner, an army officer or civil servant. Helen did find romance, but she did not wish to accept the lifestyle of the army. Both her sisters married men in the Nigerian Civil Service.

They got right into the old Empire game. And I wasn't, I was a rebel in the family I wasn't going to have a bar of it. I had always been interested in art you see, even from a little girl I was always drawing; there were lots like that, but it went on and I loved it.

Helen Grey-Smith decided to go to England and undertake some art training. Her position as the third daughter in the family meant that she had reasonable freedom from family expectations, the burden of this falling on her sisters and brother. Helen admitted to feeling "like a misfit" in the family, partly because she identified with India but they hadn't. She remembered:

I was a difficult child too, so I had something peculiar about me from the beginning. I think my nose was put out of joint when my brother was born, because they had been waiting to have a son and he was a son and I was the third daughter and I was a disappointment. I think I was suffering from childhood jealousy. That was the reason I went into tantrums and sleep - walked and did all that stuff.

The servants accepted her behaviour and had sympathy with her. They were "different", unconventional and they could deal with her childish emotional turmoil. They worked with their hands but were also clever, like the tailor who came and sat on the verandah, making all manner of clothes and soft furnishings with his portable sewing machine. Helen Grey-Smith described the Indian people as being "very gentle like artistic people, being a little bit irresponsible".

It has been suggested that Design Schools were freer of prejudices against women than Art Schools, because they dealt with "useful skills". This fact alone probably lead to

her parents agreeing to such a move. A career as an artist was out of the question for a respectable girl. The two years she spent at the London School of Interior Design were critical to Helen Grey-Smith's future directions and in forming the values which were to structure her future life.

During the course, she absorbed the nineteenth century amalgamation of art and craft, and the ideas espoused by the Art/Craft movement and the Bauhaus. Traditional values seemed to have failed society. In the Bauhaus, after the chaos of World War I, efforts were made to get rid of old barriers and start anew. Ideas stemming from the founder, Walter Gropius heralded a return to valuing the proficiency of the designer and craftsman, and in particular, the architect.

In rare moments of inspiration, moments beyond the control of his will, the grace of heaven may cause his work to blossom into art. But proficiency in his craft is essential to every artist. Gropius (1919), quoted in Hirschfield-Mack, (1963, p. 4).

Much of the creative energy at the Bauhaus was directed towards building and construction and the combination of design with crafts such as in furniture making and weaving. From the Interior Design course Helen Grey-Smith learnt textile design, her first experience of this medium. "That was the thing I liked most," however, it was not the only area of design she learnt.

I was trained in the School of Design about interiors, about the Bauhaus and that was a very, very strong influence and that in many ways was a very good influence because it was so basic and so severe and the design we were taught was not soft

furnishings and all that kind of thing. We were designing good shaped rooms and furniture to match it.

Helen Grey-Smith placed great store by her training, but felt the lack of proper training in painting. While undertaking her training in design, she also attended some art classes at the nearby Polytechnic. Helen Grey-Smith recalled her experience of life study classes in this way:

The very strange thing about starting off from life which always seems so bizarre was that there's a young girl comes in and is confronted by a rather ugly middle aged naked lady! And you have to paint and draw her! Well, the whole point is that the dealing with the subtleties of the human body, the shapes which the muscles make under the skin, the sort of going in and out, the sort of hollow of the collar bone, the projection of the breast and all the rest of it is all a way of looking at something, all a way of learning to cope with what could be a huge landscape. It's basic training in observation and then handling what you are using, either pencil or brush. I think it's actually training on how to look. I mean, they never worried whether you had a likeness of the face; never, it was of no importance.

As a result of this course Helen Grey-Smith also learnt the language of modern art, the terminology of such things as the picture plane, colour value, and tension in a painting. Traditional ideas of perspective and naturalistic colour were rejected. Helen Grey-Smith commented that, "you get your aesthetic principles like a child's education, it's absolutely in you like when you first learn a language, it's in you". It was a language which few people other than artists understood and it formed a bond between those who understood it.

She did a lot of drawing, “things of the village”, landscapes of the beautiful English countryside and water colours on large pieces of paper. “I loved it. I always loved it. You know, it is the most marvellous thing just to put something down on paper or canvas”.

While studying in London, Helen Grey-Smith continued to visit her family home at Godmanchester, and it was near there at a New Year’s Eve party in 1938 that she met a Western Australian airman, Guy Grey-Smith. He had been seconded to the Royal Air Force from Western Australia and was stationed at one of the air force bases in the area near Thetford in East Anglia.

The thing that attracted me to him, other than the normal way was that I would have to do so many sketches and things which I would have to take back to school in the summer to show and he was fascinated! And he took it seriously! Nobody else did, nobody else did at all! And he would pinch one and put it up in his room, and I thought, this man is really interested. Instead of being the conventional, “Oh that’s nice dear,” kind of thing. And that’s when his interest in art started. It was extraordinary, wasn’t it?

The other men were conservative and traditional and conventional in their attitudes. I think that was why Guy seemed so attractive from these other men. He had a marvellous open mind, when other men had closed minds. About the art thing too. I must have had something in me that needed that, not that I actually made decisions but something gelled you know. Strange isn’t it.

Guy Grey-Smith was not from the same mould as other men she had met; as a “colonial” he was free of the class-based thinking of the British. While serving in the

Royal Air Force, he was able to express a kind of essentially Australian larrikinism which his friends at Bunbury High School had witnessed. The Royal Air Force seemed to foster this. During his years as a prisoner of war Guy Grey-Smith had been one of the "sloppy airmen" who annoyed their captors with their apparent indiscipline. Amongst the other men whom Helen Grey-Smith met at this time were also some who had attended Grammar Schools, an education system distinct from the Public Schools with which she was familiar.

Well, I found it was intellectually so exciting, and I was always very alone in that, in my own milieu, you know. Oh, I talked to Guy, converted him all right! And we both had the same attitude!

There is a sense of relief here, that a solitary and stoical soul had met its mate. Guy had an interest in her work, perhaps stemming from his father's interest in art. Helen's openness and enthusiasm about her studies resonated in him. The couple married in October, 1939. Guy was shot down over the German-Dutch border in May 1940, and spent the next four years in various prison camps, where he contracted tuberculosis.

Everyone who was able bodied was expected to work during the war; Helen Grey-Smith sought to get away from Godmanchester and went to London to work for the social services, a job which her Aunt Noei obtained for her. She assisted in the evacuation of children, mostly from the slums of London.

I had never seen slums before. The slums were really terrible. I remember going into a slum and there'd be three or four stairways up and all of them reeked of urine and absolutely ghastly smells everywhere and they'd have these miserable little flats that you'd go into and they hadn't enough money to pay for the electricity so

they'd have a candle burning or something like that You would go and see people and ask them why they hadn't paid in for their false teeth! They'd be given false teeth and they had to pay for them by instalments I went to places which I'd never dreamt of! And again, people were terrific, you know and I got total sympathy for them! I didn't care whether they paid for their teeth or not! And (the committee) would say, Helen you didn't put enough in you report and that doesn't explain why she didn't pay for her teeth. That was really rather fraught and it was a dreadful system, a dreadful system; they pecked over people's lives. That was a little shove on the line to becoming a socialist.

As life became more dangerous in London, Helen Grey-Smith moved to Newbury, Berkshire where her sisters were living. She did not want to "join the forces, be a land girl or a nurse". Through her own efforts, she found work in the drawing office of an aircraft factory. Her design course had provided her with technical drawing skills, and she worked hard for four years, arriving at seven a.m. and finishing at five p.m. The people on the factory floor were working twelve hour days. It was here that her political views were formed.

I really got my education in the factory. That was a real bomb of an education! Of course, they didn't believe me! They said, "Well, where did you work before?" The inspectors who inspected the work and who were liaison officers were pretty well educated. I learnt all my politics from one of those inspectors ... he was opening a whole door to me, to life. I supposed we talked when we had coffee and things ... about unions and the handicaps of the working class and all that which I

had been completely out of touch with and kept from and he indoctrinated me. He wasn't rabid but he explained; it was shocking. In the middle of the war, the miners would go on strike. The only time they could ever get any notice taken of them was when they were absolutely invaluable. You see, that was a staggering thing to me. There had been a long history of oppression.

For part of the time, Helen Grey-Smith stayed with her maternal aunt Violet who was married to the Headmaster of Cheam Preparatory School. Her family found Helen's conversation about socialism and art even more remote, all except her cousin Gerald, who understood her views. Helen had not wanted to marry into the forces, but Guy's illness meant that he could continue with any active service, and he was repatriated before the end of the War. She was exhausted with work and then with several years of hospital visiting. After Guy's discharge from hospital, the couple found a place to live in King's Road, Chelsea. He had gained a place in the Chelsea School of Art.

Guy Grey-Smith commenced his own training, and Helen's life became one of homemaking. She learnt how to cook and not waste the precious amounts of meat or whatever food was available. After a recurrence of Guy's tuberculosis, the decision was made to return to Australia in 1947.

Well, we arrived in 1947 and Guy was just recovering from another bout of T.B. so he was pretty fragile. We went up to live in Kalamunda in the hotel there where you could afford to live in those days. The hotel then had a lovely bit of bush in front of it and under the trees were all the spring flowers and you can imagine what a paradise it was for us after the blackness of the war, so we stayed there. It was

absolute heaven because there was all this food, all the sun and friendly people! Quite extraordinary really. Even after the war was over in England, there were great shortages of food and the climate and weather were dreadful and went on being dreadful. There were shortages of everything, and then to come to this place where there was everything you could want and it was so simple and so quiet after the scramble of bombed out London, Perth was so beautiful, I thought. Perth was marvellous and the people were just my cup of tea. Lovely! We got a little apartment place from two strange old ladies, furnished with second or third or fourth hand furniture that had to be treated with great respect. (Laughs)

It was at Darlington that the couple built a house (see Appendix 3) and even without a studio, which was soon built, Guy Grey-Smith commenced work. By 1949 he had his first exhibition. Two children were born, Susanna and Mark. Helen Grey-Smith's life in India had prepared her for the climate and landscape of Western Australia.

It was the Indian landscape that made me accept the Australian landscape. Most English people can't bear it not being green all the time; they don't like the big spaces. But that didn't worry me one bit because I'd had that from my childhood, early childhood and then also I really cracked it into knowing all sorts of people, not just my own class and education through the factory. It was a good introduction to Australia. I loved it, just loved it!

In the 1953, the family returned to England for further art training. Guy commenced study of frescos, and upon his suggestion, Helen attended the London County Council Art School, at Hammersmith to learn textile printing where she worked under John

Drummond. This training continued that of her earlier course and enabled her to commence a career to complement that of her painter husband.

Discussion of Art Work - Training and textile printing

The Curtains for the Perth City Council. 1966

Helen Grey-Smith commenced work of her own after her two children, Sue and Mark were old enough to attend school. Helen's attitude to family life had been defined by her own experience and she had no regrets about either the time spent caring for and assisting her husband or caring for her children.

It wasn't until both the children were at school that I got to work on textiles. I never regretted that for *one moment*. Because it meant, I think, I gained an enormous amount from having the children and of course I was involved with the creativity which was going on with Guy's pottery and painting, and with the children and that was quite enough when they were little. Then once they were at school and I'd had that training, I started working seriously. I'd work in the mornings when they were at school, work flat out and then stop to look after the children.



Figure 4 - The Lord Mayor of Perth, Reg Withers in front of the curtains on the eighth floor of the Council House which were printed by Helen Grey-Smith in 1966.

The studio that Guy originally had built was made into a printing studio for Helen, while Guy built another studio and pottery. A four metre long table with an adhesive vinyl surface was built in the studio. Helen Grey-Smith's method of working is fully described in Appendix 4 and Figure 5, p. 99.

For the Perth Council House project, Helen Grey-Smith was asked to design and print curtaining for the eighth floor of the building, which accommodated the Mayor's office and official functions area. The architects provided the fabric, which was a fine gold silk/nylon blend. The design was to incorporate the Town Hall crest of two swans holding up a shield. Helen Grey-Smith designed a central panel based on this design, in black and the rolled gold paint over the black to join the black design to the gold fabric. Her inspiration for this, she said, was photographs of Medieval shields, which looked "rather rubbed over with age". The material was cut to size by Aherns store and delivered to Helen Grey-Smith's studio. She then returned the finished printed fabric. In all, 1000 yards of fabric was printed.

Following this enormous project, Helen Grey-Smith was commissioned to print curtains for the University of Western Australia and then for the Reserve Bank of Australia. The process was time consuming and very taxing. But she remained true to her craft training and maintained a disciplined approach to the whole process. Her commitment was to the marriage of design and craft, and the importance of "living, hand-made crafts" (*West Australian Newspaper* 31/5/66). Despite building up a good demand for her work, she never expanded her workshop by employing people. Her husband Guy assisted with the

physical work in the textile printing workshop. Helen Grey-Smith described the textile printing process quite vividly:

Once you had drawn it out and designed very carefully, (the size has to fit the material) you have this fairly tense thing of putting the design on the screens, three screens probably, one for each colour and then you'd have the awful business of first printing it. Guy always said it was frightful because every time I'd hold the screen and he'd pull the squeegee and I'd go Ahhhhhhh. This ghastly sigh would come out! (Laughs) That's concentration, you know, and in the end I got a little bit more relaxed but then you see, you could have a disaster like colours bloating underneath or something. Well, then you come through and there's a sense of achievement when you pull the thing off and it's OK I was pretty well trained to stop anything sloppy going through. So it was exciting and fascinating with great physical demands on you really.

Thomas (1976, p. 263) gave an account of the textile printing work of Helen Grey-Smith.

They have had combined exhibitions over the years, of painting, fabrics and pottery. Commissions arising from these exhibitions for Helen's hand-printed fabrics, which have never been sold through shops or descended in design to the fashionable, have included 1000 yards of curtaining for Perth's Council House. "That was a terrifying job to take on," she says. "Then I did the University House Curtains - 500 yards, and 600 yards for the Reserve Bank in Canberra.

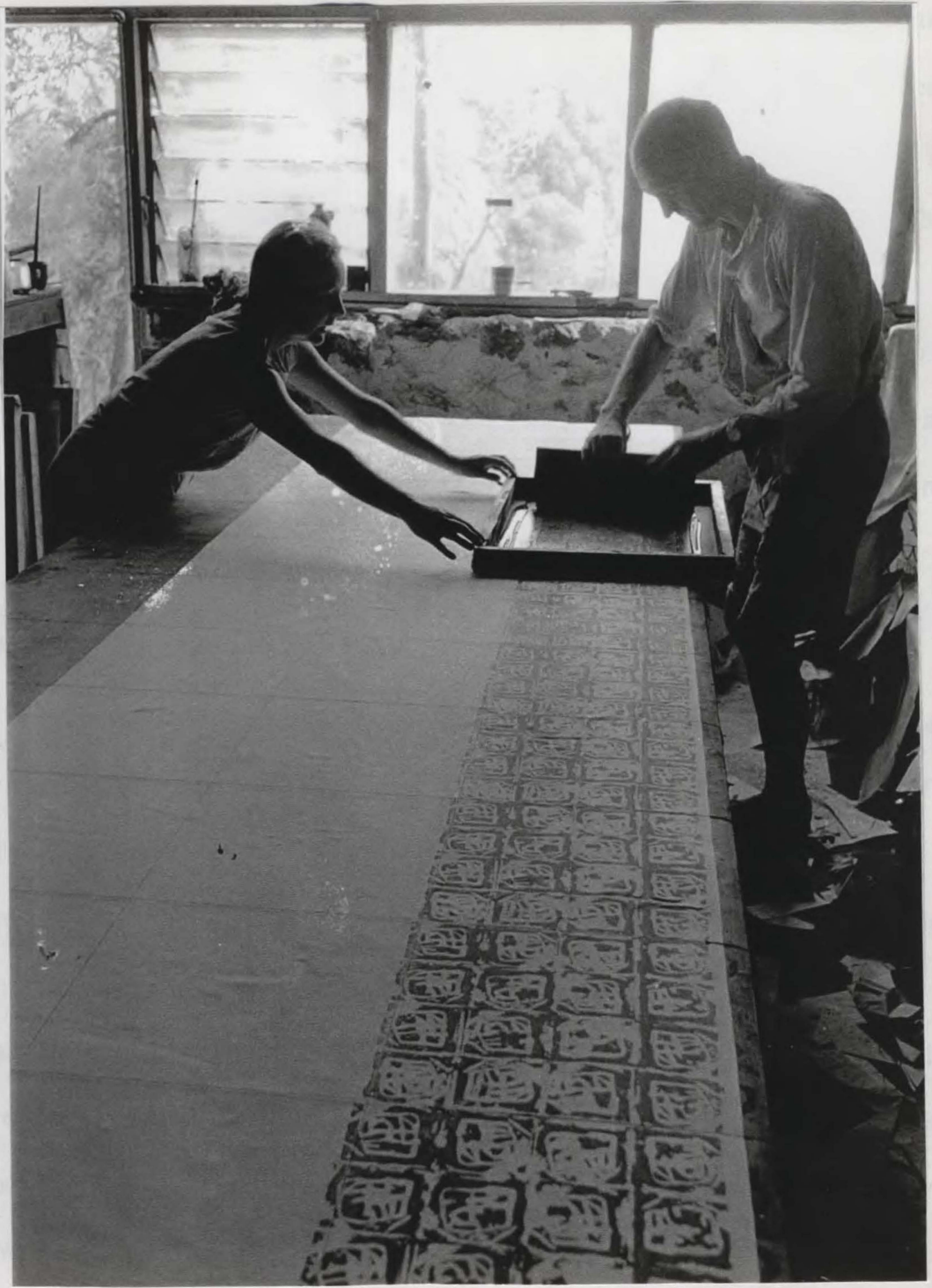


Figure 5 - Helen and Guy Grey-Smith working on one of her textile designs, c 1964.

Photograph by courtesy of Richard Woldendorp.

Dr Coombs saw the Council House curtains and said to his architects: 'Would you please ask Mrs Grey-Smith if she'd do something for the Reserve Bank, and she can do what she likes.' It just had to be abstract in black and gold. He didn't even ask to see the proofs. The only condition was there were to be no coins shapes.

'After that a muscle in my hand had been overstrained - it happens to crab fishermen and potato peelers - so that was the end of screen printing and I moved into collage - I think naturally because a lot of my designs had made use of cut and torn paper'

Theme 3: Choice of Art Forms

Helen Grey-Smith had been interested in art since childhood. From an early age she drew secretly but she was given little or no encouragement. Her description of her childhood is strongly visual, and she was fortunate to have had wonderfully rich environments to enjoy, both in India and England. However, a sense of Helen Grey-Smith as an outsider within her family is conveyed in her accounts of her experiences. She explained how she "watched" her grandfather with the Indians, albeit with great fondness and respect. There was also the constant separation from her parents and siblings. Due to her position as the third daughter in the family, she was able to avoid serious pressure to follow the usual path of "suitable" marriage and she was permitted to undertake a training course in Interior Design. The decision to go back to England to the course also created distance between Helen Grey-Smith and her immediate family. Through this training, she was then able to commence work in the aircraft factory and later, to start her work in

textile printing, contributing to exhibitions with her husband, and also contributing financially to the household.

Helen Grey-Smith's first love was of plant forms, which is not surprising considering that she grew up with magnificent gardens around her both in India and England. She used plant form with great success as subject matter in her fabric designs. Even though the colours are subdued, the textile designs are strong and confident, perhaps reflecting her feelings of being in Darlington in the mid-fifties and early sixties, enjoying the pleasures and creative stimulation of that time. The culmination of her work was in huge commissions for curtain fabrics, the completion of which led to her hand injury and the end of this stage of her career. The injury made changes of directions both necessary and possible. Her choice of collage as a form of artistic expression and successor to textile printing was both logical and seemingly innocuous. It did not compete with the work of her increasingly well known husband, but through collage she could express private experiences which she did not share with him. The subject matter of the first series of collages in 1968 was probably not even fully accessible to Helen Grey-Smith herself. This field of collage was one in which she then became extremely proficient.

Helen Grey-Smith viewed the collages as a bridge between fine art and craft. Her training had taught her the difference between them but on the other hand, it had also taught her that an amalgam of the two was essential and acceptable by the standards of the Bauhaus; the great breaker of traditions. She realised that an artist must work within a tradition, otherwise there could be no recognition. Unfortunately, in her view, proper training in painting had been denied her. Her task was to work in a way which retained her

artistic integrity, yet at the same time staying true to her role as wife and mother which involved supporting the other members of the family. To retain harmony in her partnership with Guy Grey-Smith, she did not encroach on her husband's area of work. After a time, Helen Grey-Smith moved from collage as the sole means of expression to working in acrylic paint. Her paintings usually retained an element of collage.

Village by the Sea 2 and 3 1972 (Curtin University collection) are views from the sea towards Quinns Rocks. The distant shed-like beach shacks and property for sale signs created in collaged paper cast their tiny shadows. The artist obtained a sense of distance by the use of a mass of sea in the foreground balanced by the sky. The horizontal line of colour and collage trapped across an expanse of foreground and sky is found again in *Sandy Desert* 1972 (Edith Cowan Collection). *Sandy Desert* 1972 was one of the paintings completed as a result of family travels around Western Australia. The distance and scope of the unpeopled Australian landscape became a preoccupation for Helen Grey-Smith. The problem of where to fit people in this landscape was solved in her later work.

In 1974 the Grey-Smiths bought a property at Pemberton, 300 kilometres south of Perth. The area was settled before World War I and expanded in the early 1920s as part of the Group Settlement scheme. The hilly town serving the farming areas around it was (and still is) the centre of timber milling in Western Australia. The forest near Pemberton is dominated by karri trees, some of the biggest trees in the world, their trunks light in colour and quite smooth, their branches only appearing high up the trunk of a mature tree, forming a canopy. Bark falls seasonally from the trunks in huge, long strips. Underneath the karri and marri trees is dense undergrowth with banksia, some acacia and tall shrubs and in

spring, many types of creepers and wildflowers. The soil is loamy with a lot of clay. The karri forest is much less open than the jarrah forest of Darlington, cooler in summer and colder in winter; the winters in Pemberton can be very cold and wet, with frosts and mists which hang in the valleys.

Helen Grey-Smith responded at once to this environment. She felt its lushness, experienced the mists hanging in the valleys, and saw the cottage appearance of many of the gardens in the town. Perhaps it all reminded her of her English childhood. Her feeling for plant form surfaced again very strongly and it was here that she made a connection to another tradition, Chinese ink-painting. Helen's love of plant form had been expressed exuberantly in her fabric designs, but her feeling had been that it was "feminine" to draw and paint flowers and plants.

I liked plant growth and things from a very earliest age. I can remember I always wanted to draw flowers. I loved them. I loved plant growth and I just didn't see how it could be done because it might be terrible, it might be sort of wishy-washy feminine in the worst sense of things to do, and there were very few flower painters who impressed me anyway, until I realised the Chinese painting. And that was when I did those black and white plants, fruits and flowers and that, in the Chinese tradition which I suppose you could say could compare with female work, a certain delicacy, a certain sensitivity they have and a kind of understatement. And that was the interesting thing, I wasn't going to do the classical feminine things, but it comes through. It comes through. You pretty well know whether it's a male or female painting, and why not?

Of course, male artists have made a success of plant form as a subject for art. Emile Nolde's vivid watercolours of his mother's garden and Vincent Van Gogh's expressive flower paintings are two examples. But as a tradition, plant form had fallen into the category, like the scientific drawings of fungi completed by Beatrix Potter, of "hobby" work by women. Margaret Forrest was a Western Australian example of a woman whose paintings of indigenous flowers and plants approached the factual or technical and therefore her work was not "art." But in the Chinese tradition, this subject held a place of honour, an art form resulting from deep contemplation of, and respect for, the subject matter and great technical and intuitive skill with the brush. Once this link had been made by Helen Grey-Smith in the late 1970s, she was able to work at a series of ink on rice paper paintings of plant forms, many of which were bought for the collection of the King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women. The karri forest as a subject, continued to occupy Helen Grey-Smith, as did landscapes of the Pemberton area.

Discussion of Art Work - Choice of Media

The Art Work - Winter Tree Trunks 1992 (Acrylic paint with collage).

Discussing her work, Helen Grey-Smith remarked:

If there's anything that's structural, like rocks, trunks, buildings, things like that, that's when I do collage. That's when I get the contrast of this hard surface with the softness of the rest.

Winter Tree Trunks belonged to a series of paintings of the karri forest completed by Helen Grey-Smith in 1992. She originally exhibited them at the Delancy Galleries, Perth in November, 1992. These comments were made by Helen Grey-Smith after looking at this painting shown again in the exhibition of her work in The Old School House Gallery, Pemberton on Saturday, 2nd October, 1995.

The forest is massive, especially the karri, it is almost like the sea, isn't it, a massive thing? Yes. Enormous. Wonderful. It has the same parallel fascination for me. The karri. I mean, I've never seen a forest like it. All the forests I've seen have been smaller. It isn't only the size, it's the gracefulness of it and it's a light forest, too. There's a light coming in and there's a gentle feeling in the karri forest. Whereas, when I go to see the tingle forest, that's really fascinating but it's fascinating in a different way, it's rather like (Pause) rather like (Pause) kind of like elves and gnomes, a forest full of suggestions of mythical characters, the tingle. It hasn't got that benign clear lovely colour of the karri. It doesn't have the gnarled thing that the tingle has - very, very gnarled, a wonderful subject for a rather cruel fairy tale. (Laughs). A lot of the European forests are like that you see, and they are also much more mixed, well certainly in England, you have a mixture of trees and plants. But the karri forest is dominated by the karri, there is the undergrowth and everything. It's just such a fabulous scene.



Figure 6 - *Winter Tree Trunks*, 1993. Acrylic and Collage. 1.6m by 1.3m approx.

In *Winter Tree Trunks*, you have got intimacy and distance I think. Yes, that was an extraordinary thing, quite extraordinary how that came off. I had done quite a lot of paintings about the forest itself, I had done a lot and many people liked them because I had experienced it. (Pause) I had developed a technique. You could see the depth and you could see these white trunks coming out and I did a lot of that and then I suddenly realised that when I was going round looking at things, I was looking at just tree trunks. I was fascinated by these things. The karri tree trunks are the most interesting ones I have ever come across, because to start with they change four times a year. It's not just like a fall of leaf, it's four times they change their whole structure and their colour. In winter they are dull grey, dark greys with little streaks of orangey things coming in, and they are massive, the whole thing is massive! And I realised, a lot of people just look at the tree trunks, that's what the forest is really. So I dashed out onto this and did big paintings, big structures and I really realised that it is not on to put landscape behind them, other greens and things like that behind them, so they were just surrounded by the very dark almost black. Not really black but as near black as you could get. And that, curiously enough even though it is completely flat, gave a feeling of distance. Extraordinary how that happened. Because it was a very small area, of course. Stripes really. And then of course, I looked at the trunks and I was absolutely fascinated by the surface of them, the kind of marvellous maps and the pattern of them and all the little scars and as the seasons go, the winter goes and then the spring, there must be a certain barking then. You don't see it but in spring it goes very pale, almost white, really a

wonderful white, shiny trunks and then flowers and it's really a florescence of everything. I did one big one of the spring, with those white pinky and all those colours, trunks with clematis that climbs up it and the same solid background. And then you find in the autumn, that is when the tree really drops its bark and you have this fascinating thing of great strips falling down or little light bits falling down like little flags and streamers and only in the autumn and at the same time you have patches of areas where it has been torn off where it is pink and patches where it is not. And stripes going up it, so that was what I did. That was the autumn. I did do a small autumn one with the bark falling. I used a good deal of mauve and pink so it got the feeling of the gaiety you feel when you see that.

Terrific! I think there is a feeling of the fleshy colour when the bark is coming off. Yes, it's extraordinarily interesting.

It's as if you have put it under a great deal of scrutiny. You've given it a great deal of attention. Yes, that's right. Because you go and look at it again and again. So that's how it really comes off. It's a kind of detail of the trunk, just doing that area in detail.

And yet, by the fact that it is so big, it is as if you are doing it from a long way away as well. You are looking from a long way away and yet you are up close. You wouldn't have done that deliberately but it in a way is two focuses. That is in a way the way you work you see. You go right up to the painting and you paint on it not even at arm's distance, half arm's length and then you walk back. You are perpetually doing the two focus, you see. And that is what you are always doing.

The values you see, what you call the values, the relationship between colours and tones and light and shade and all that kind of thing, can only be seen from a distance, you see. Not a big distance, but at least a small room away. So you have to work on that at the same time that you work on the close.

The same kind of long contemplation and attention which Helen Grey-Smith paid to her plant form paintings has been given to the karri forest. In a sense, this painting brings together her earlier collage methods and that of her ink paintings. In *Winter Tree Trunks* 1992, Helen Grey-Smith used small but extremely effective areas of collage which depict the strips of bark falling from the karri trees; the artist has included "little flags and streamers", an idea more fully realised in a smaller painting in the same exhibition entitled *Bark Falling*, 1992, perhaps reminiscent of the Balinese palm trees in the collage of *The Prince*, 1968. She also created a magnificent bluish-black background perhaps signifying the infinity of the forest, and the impossibility of its literal depiction by any artist. In the same exhibition, at the Old School House Gallery, Pemberton in October, 1995, the artist exhibited a work which was undoubtedly a culmination of years of work and thought. It is called *Rock Pools*, 1995.

The Art Work. Rock Pools. 1995. (Painting in acrylic with collage).

The researcher made arrangements to meet Helen Grey-Smith at the exhibition to discuss the work on display. This was to be the second last conversation for the research, and we had looked forward to it, feeling very excited that Helen would be there with her work and never doubting that some kind of magic would eventuate. The same equipment used previously had been organised, a four track recording device with microphones. It

may have been ill-advised to attempt this during a public opening time, and although Helen was her usual generous self, we ended up deciding to talk onto the tape at her house later. As a consequence, some extremely interesting things which she said in front of the works were not recorded, especially what was said about her feelings about the process of painting. Ironically, the sound quality of this and the following recording was very poor, due to mechanical problems(see Appendix 5 for the text of this discussion).

The exhibition was entitled *Forest and Sea*, and in some ways Helen Grey-Smith saw the two subjects of the paintings as parallel, but structurally they were opposed, verticals as opposed to horizontals. Some, like the first of the series, were paintings of a river.

After the verticals of the karri forest, all the verticals I did, it was wonderful slashing away at the clouds and things and the sea below, the water below.

Helen Grey-Smith had been on a “motoring holiday” with her son in the summer of 1993 and they had visited places on the south-west coast near Denmark and Walpole. She had “gone around sketching” but described the problem of having to “fight against the things in front of you” and “being dominated by the things in front of you”. She also described her contemplative method of working to get the feeling of a place, this being more important than any literal depiction; “that is really the basis of my painting”.

I am very interested in how you are working with the collage. Well, I find it very easy but the main thing is, that you get the concept of what you are painting in your head and you decide, like the one called *Rock Pools* that we looked at and I knew I

wanted big rocks with pools in them and I went straight off, straight off, and found coloured papers in my boxes and started cutting and tearing them and putting them on and that was the basis of the whole thing. That was what it was all about really and then after that you have to adjust everything to that, you know and you get the space. In the trees trunks one, I knew I wanted the collage for the bark and also for the kind of strange extrusions, but I knew that the whole basic composition, the whole basic composition of the trunks, filling in the painting had to be done first though I did sometimes work on areas of the trunks after the collage is on because you need these endless adjustments going on. So collage is a kind of flexible kind of thing. Yes. It seems to me that in the *Rock Pools*, you are building the whole structure of the painting with collage. Yes. That's right. Though collage was the dominant thing there, the whole thing was oriented around that. Absolutely. The hard work, actually putting the collage on is not hard work at all. The hard work is keeping that band of collage strong and at the same time adjusting to all the other bits in a painting, that make a painting.



Figure 7 - *Rock Pools*, 1995. Acrylic and Collage. 45cm by 42cm

In *Rock Pools 1995*, Helen Grey-Smith had at last discovered a solution to her problem of the unpeopled Australian landscape. She stated several times that she found it impossible to place people in the Australian landscape, “because people just don’t occur there naturally as they do in Asia”. But the beach is part of the Australian myth, as a playground and a theatre of the body. The beach is where the European settlers first encountered this country, sometimes in traumatic circumstances. The Impressionists had used the subject quite often, as had the nineteenth century Heidelberg School painters.

The painting *Rock Pools* has subdued colours, in keeping with the cool south coast and in keeping with the feelings of respect that Helen Grey-Smith expressed for the sea. The subtleties of the colour and texture of the rocks are communicated very well by the use of painted paper, and the use of orange and mauve tones here and there give colour without intruding on the sense that this is an image of the rocks and sea. On this quiet beach, the children lean forward to gaze into the rock pools. This is a timeless image, like the rocks themselves. Each rock pool is a watery universe. The sea is trapped for brief time, affording a glimpse of its mystery. The children crouched over the rock pools stare into the mystery of the origins of life and become one with this great element. All is in harmony. The children play, trusting and innocence before the huge power of the sea. It is an image of the child gazing into life, having evolved from this element.

In this chapter, three themes have been presented. In each case, the participant’s words were supported by the analysis of an art work.

Chapter 5 Reflection

Introduction

Aspects of Helen Grey-Smith's life and work have been recorded in detail, through the transcripts of the conversations, and a commentary made on her art and methods. Throughout the conversations, she revealed a great deal about her family background, her early life at home in India and school in England, her art training, her life and work in England, as well as her marriage and life as wife, mother, and artist in Western Australia. Her choice of art media has been discussed and her method of working in textile printing has been explained. This chapter will document the reflective process, seeking to place Helen Grey-Smith's experiences in an educational and art historical context.

Van Manen (1990, p. 77) stated that "the purpose of phenomenological reflection is to try and grasp the essential meaning of something. Phenomenological reflection is both easy and difficult." It is easy because we undertake this process constantly - we see people and things around us all the time and interact in complex ways with them at various levels. We perhaps think we understand what a teacher is, but as Van Manen (1990, p. 77) pointed out, "what is much more difficult is to come to a reflective determination and explication of what a teacher is." This reflection will be an attempt to come to terms with the life and work of Helen Grey-Smith, as recounted by her. Helen Grey-Smith's words will assist in "the process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of the meaning of the lived experience." (Van Manen 1990, p. 77) The art works provide a

permanent and externalised reflection of her experience. They provide windows into the artist's life. The challenge is to see what the art works reveal.

The means by which the text is structured has been explained previously. Van Manen (1990, p. 29) advocated the use of themes to assist in the work of writing, and he referred to themes as "woodpaths". The artworks could be regarded as sign-posts which point towards other paths and places where the essential aspects of Helen Grey-Smith's experiences lie. Themes are also the structures of experience. The three areas chosen, formative experiences, art training and visual art media chosen by the artist, may be too broad to be called themes, but within these structures messages have filtered through which illuminate and reveal that which is hidden. "Everything visible has its invisible aspect" noted Lankford (1984, p. 152) in his discussion on art criticism and Merleau-Ponty.

As Van Manen (1990, p.79) stated:

Making something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure-grasping, and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process, but a free act of "seeing" meaning. Ultimately the concept of theme is rather irrelevant and may be considered simply as a means to get at the notion we are addressing. Theme gives control and order to our research and writing.

Helen Grey-Smith's very first comments in this series of conversations were about the French writer, George Sand, the pseudonym of Amandine-Aurore Lucile Duderant nee Dupin, 1804-1876. Helen Grey-Smith created a verbal picture of this famous woman who left her family, took to wearing men's clothes and smoking cigars, used a man's name, was

sexually promiscuous and generally behaved in a “bohemian” fashion. Helen Grey-Smith agreed with George Sand’s opinion expressed in a letter to Flaubert, which she quoted. “Don’t give up every moment of your time to writing, don’t agonise about it so much. Don’t work so hard. Don’t take it all so seriously!”

She (George Sand) took the line that there was a life to be lived as well as everything else. And it’s a weird dichotomy of women’s lives that if they don’t have family, children and all those sides to them, they are impoverished really and so you have the other problem of combining the two and she saw it as two sides of a woman really.

She writes her books on that basis, that you have the romantic, artistic person and the earthy sort of sexual person, and the combination of the two is quite difficult to achieve If you deny all that side of you and struggle just to be *an artist*, nothing else, you’re not really a whole person I don’t think women want that. I think they just want to do what they want to do. I think that if you experience as a woman as much as you can, even that business of bringing up little kids and things, it certainly does something extra to you. It’s something that contributes towards your attitude to art really, although it doesn’t come out simply, that you are going to paint pictures of babies and nappies and things like that, but it makes you more deep, more philosophical.

This view of a woman artist’s perspective was mentioned a number of times by Helen Grey-Smith over the course of the conversations.

I feel that the most important thing in an artist's life is to be able to do what you want to do. And being famous and being very well recognised and struggling for that interferes with the work unless you've got a massive source of energy and ego. Quite often people fall down in their own work, I suppose because there are too many other things demanded of them as an artist. Personally, I think it is absurd. You should just do what you want to do as long as you can see a way of doing it. Do it that way. And do not be frustrated in that way. If you are completely dependent on selling, well then, that's difficult. And there are ways to not be dependent completely on selling your paintings.

Greer (1979, p. 35) supported this view.

Several issues emerge here. Helen Grey-Smith maintained that women artists have the same need to work as male artists, that they are capable of the same kind of thinking as male artists, but that there is an in-built conflict in their lives. Even so, she saw the business of marriage and bearing children as essential, and indeed, contributed to the artist's work. She also saw that a way must be found to work, so that the essential womanly role can be played and the woman artist can be a whole person. To her, doing the work was the important thing. Expressing one's ego, in the way commonly thought of as typical of artists, she saw as waste of precious energy. As John Stuart Mill pointed out, women have many demands on their energy. Helen Grey-Smith felt that most women artists take the work of being an artist seriously but not the *role* of artist. The degree which she herself achieved her goals, to do what she wanted to do, is the essential story of her life.

Theme 1: Formative Influences

Helen Grey-Smith was the third daughter in her family, and said she felt feelings of negativity from her parents because she was “not a boy”. This disappointment was probably compounded by the fact that her mother had experienced a great deal of ill-health during her child-bearing years, a fact told to the researcher by Helen Grey-Smith’s sister Mary. The three girls had been born over a period of eight years. A son was not born for another four years.

Forer (1976, p. 86) wrote about the importance of “birth order”. Citing a study conducted at the University of Montana, Forer stated that:

Later born men and women make up the majority practising in the creative arts The advantage of the later born would seem to derive from his or her ability to work independently and tolerate isolation - surely qualities required of an artistically creative person ... Another study showed that many third born women turned to religious vocations, consistent with the clinical observation that third born girls tend to be gentle and idealistic. A study at Mills College in Oakland, California showed third born women to be drawn to the creative arts. Because of sibling rivalry, these women felt deprived of affection and attention which aroused feelings of rage and self concern and encouraged a process of separation from parents This complex of feelings may lead to the development of creative skills which play a dual role of making oneself emotionally self-sufficient but also capable of ‘winning back’ the

parents The creative potential itself suggests personal attention to one's own unique feelings and perceptions.

In her summary of what she calls "women's achievements which may be anticipated from birth order", Forer (1976, p. 109) stated that:

The middle born woman is likely to be disinterested in competition and more interested in human relationships such as rearing a family than in outside achievement alone. She may also be artistic.

Some of these findings may be simplistic, but they are interesting when compared to some of the statements made by Helen Grey-Smith about herself.

Helen Grey-Smith was fortunate to have had a number of adults around her, apart from her parents, to soften the potentially difficult position in which she found herself. There seems no doubt that there was a distance between her parents and herself, and that in India the servants played quite an important role in both creating this distance and also in helping her adjust to "the haze of wrong doing" in which she said she found herself, perhaps brought on by her childish jealousy of her baby brother. The servants accepted the shows of emotion and "tantrums" without being judgemental and were a source of solace at these times.

Helen Grey-Smith had the magnificent environment of the family home in India, with its great garden full of people, colours, fragrances and many places for the young girl to escape, explore and enjoy. She described the ox drawing water from the well and the joy of playing in the water as it filled the stone tank in the garden and the channels which watered the garden. As well, there were visits to the bazaar and temple places, with their

exciting and somehow dangerous overtones. Her abiding love of craft work, in particular printed fabrics, and hand-made things grew from there. This to Helen Grey-Smith was “the mother culture of India”.

India was the place where her paternal grandfather chose to make his home. He was a dominant figure, a Victorian adventurer who had pioneered a business and lived all his life in India. Helen Grey-Smith watched him with Indians, and “got the feeling that they were real people, not just the odd servant”. He committed himself to his adopted country and in a spirit of religious humanitarianism built two schools to educate the Eurasian children who could not otherwise obtain an education. He was a man of integrity and sincere beliefs, although members of the family did not approve of the time and money their father spent on philanthropy. However, Britain did reward his efforts with a knighthood.

A commitment to India developed in Helen Grey-Smith; she felt she was the only member of her family who had that commitment. However, she could see that she could only stay in India as an expatriate, as times were changing. A sense of justice and idealism remained with her and expressed itself later in her socialist beliefs, perhaps grown from a seed planted by her grandfather in those early childhood days.

Boarding school in England at the age of eight or nine years old, the fate of so many “Empire” children, created more distance between the children and their parents, but also between the individuals within families. Helen Grey-Smith’s elder sister was sent to Malvern College, regarded by the family as a “better school” than the school the younger two sisters attended. There appeared to be a differentiated value placed on the eldest and

the younger members of the family, as there had been in her mother's family, expressed here in the type of schools chosen. There also emerges an essential valuing of a "proper" education, which becomes established throughout this research in a number of ways. There was no way that being educated in India was acceptable in English society. The family, however, was "oppressed" by the nature of Malvern College, probably because the family on both sides had taken an "outside the social class" stance through their membership of the Plymouth Brethren sect. Although her sister Mary attended the same school, Helen Grey-Smith found herself isolated there, or as she remarked, "flung into an institution".

And what I found so awful and I can remember very early on thinking, it was so ugly. There were no curtains on the windows and no comforts. You didn't have your own room, you just had your own dormitory. You never had time to do anything vaguely, like nothing, or drawing or writing or anything like that. And you only had this minute stretch of grass as a playground. Dreadful. And I had this real anguish at wanting a nicer environment.

This seems like the response of someone with strong aesthetic and environmental sensitivity. However, despite being a "highly strung child" who the family at one time thought would not cope with boarding school, she did well.

I did well, ending up as Head Girl and all that I had moments of thinking this was awful nonsense, I think I learnt how to play the game. But when I was in enormous pain about some injustice, I had nobody to talk to about it. My mother was in India and my Aunt Dorothy wouldn't know what I was talking about. You know there's no way out of being in that school, there's no point in complaining, there's no one

to complain to and the thing is, you just put up with it. And so it did create stoicism and self sufficiency, and a longing for something more free and creative. And in a way that is a strength, that stoicism.

All this background created the climate for Helen Grey-Smith's growth as an artist. She had a privileged life as a young person, with material wants well provided for. Her environments, one way or another, were very stimulating. But developing in Helen Grey-Smith was an inability and unwillingness to "fit in," with the family or with its style of life. There was a need to create something for herself, while realising the practical limits to which she could go in achieving her ends. Her school life developed strength in her to bear emotional pain and loneliness and the ability to rely on her inner resources. It also developed in her a sense of the futility of "bucking the system" when faced with overwhelming odds. While generally accepting the rules and learning to "play the game," she was still prepared to slip a novel out of the "little library" to read on a Sunday afternoon, instead of the book about missionaries which was expected reading. School provided a rather inadequate education which she took upon herself to rectify. Helen Grey-Smith remembered:

Very constricting! Interesting to hear about but not very interesting to live through. Maybe it really encouraged you to teach yourself, learn yourself when you were older. You have a passion for knowledge.

At the same time, the men and women in her family provided a whole range of models and avenues for success. Apart from her grandfather, Helen Grey-Smith really loved her maternal grandmother, who belonged to the age of late Victorian grandeur, and

whose main tasks related to managing a house with cooks and servants, providing magnificent meals for the family. Of Helen Grey-Smith's aunts, there were two missionaries, although the lack of communication amongst the family members meant that little was known of their activities. Marriage was the overriding family ambition for women, so other models of behaviour were not apparently greatly valued. Helen Grey-Smith's Aunt Noel was the youngest in her family, and was relatively free of family pressure to marry. She became a trained psychologist after becoming involved in social work during World War II, and went on to an illustrious career in that field although her achievements were apparently seldom discussed in the family. It was through the work in the slums of London which her Aunt Noel helped her obtain that Helen Grey-Smith's social and political education began. Despite her sheltered life and education, Helen Grey-Smith coped well with this rather grim experience.

Her paternal grandfather's example of caring for the less fortunate was before her as was the family religious ethos. Her school experience helped her work independently and with stoicism. Working with poor people, of whom she previously knew nothing, convinced her about the need for socialist policies to help the poor. It also helped her see herself as a working woman, not a sheltered, upper middle class female.

They'd tell me lots of terrible stories, about people losing their arms and I'd think, how weird, it doesn't happen in my background. And then the penny dropped that they were really underprivileged, they really were. They had poor amenities. The slums were really terrible.

The experience of working in the slums also reinforced her resolve to move away from conventional attitudes. She disliked the attitude of members of her own class towards the poor.

There was this awful system of these well-heeled upper class people with two professional social workers and teams of young people who went around and found out stuff you needed to know, and then you would make a report. They'd have a committee meeting where these old codgers, old colonels and battle axe ladies would peck over people's lives. It was really rather fraught and it was a dreadful system.

Another significant aspect of her work at that time was the evacuation of children from London. She felt keenly for the dislocated children, "poor little blighters" and their mothers. "They had no choice, really." In a way, she probably identified with them.

Theme 2: Art Training

When Helen and Guy Grey-Smith were working in Cambodia in 1971-2, their daughter Sue was completing art training in London and just before they left the country which was on the brink of war, they received a letter from their son, Mark.

Mark was at university and he came out for a holiday and that was good. He went back and just before we left some mail came through with a letter from Mark saying would it be O.K if he leaves university and starts sculpture! He got us at the lowest, weakest point we ever were and we couldn't say no. But Guy wasn't very keen on art, so he said Mark had got to go to W.A.I.T., it's Curtin University now, do a foundation course and then try and get into Chelsea. And he got into Chelsea. And

he said that's got to be done before you can do any art and you have got to do a real training in London. Which he did.

Obviously, the family placed the highest value on training. Local schools were not good enough either. Both the children trained in London, for which money had been put aside.

Helen Grey-Smith was completing her course of training at the London School of Design when she met Guy Grey-Smith. Helen Grey-Smith's decision to undergo an Interior Design course was a breaking away from one tradition in her family, that was the engagement and marriage to someone probably in the army or the civil service. It may have even been a form of rebellion although her parents raised no objection to her choice. Enough women in the family had done unusual things, and travelling from India to England was an everyday occurrence in the family. Schools of Design were acceptable for women students because they provided a craft orientated training, which offered the acquisition of "useful" skills. It would have also been quite difficult for Helen Grey-Smith to have persuaded her parents to finance an art school course and become enrolled in an art school without contacts and established networks, which she did not really have.

At this time many women had attended the art schools. Greer (1979, p. 313) presented a picture of the various attitudes to women who attempted to obtain training in them. One attitude was that the women were there to "educate their sensibilities by the palpitating contemplation of male greatness". Helen Grey-Smith noted the effect of male teachers in her own training.

I experienced this, and even in my day it was flooded with women students. I think a lot of the men thought the women students would go off and get married or else live a bohemian life, and some of them were like that and so there wasn't absolutely even terms, even though they would have been horrified to have had it suggested that they were being sexist. They wouldn't have dreamt it.

I've questioned in my mind, thinking of this, when you go into an art training which is a very elastic education, all the teachers are men. Not all of them are now, but they used to be, so you have a male supervision of a female who is just developing, and when you are developing in your own way and a man comes along and says this and this, you may be unable to do anything else but follow that male advice. I mean, the liberation of women has made a difference there. I suppose it depends on your attitude to older men, such as your father, and they knew. And if your father was a bit dominating, it made little subtle pressures go on. I'm sure we haven't got to the end of the process. It's much better now but it will take ages.

The training at the Design School was not "proper" visual art training in Helen Grey-Smith's perception of what visual art training should be. She knew that she was outside some magic circle and had not "been through the mill of a big art school". It meant that she would never paint in oils as an equal with trained painters, men or women.

However:

There was an idealism and that I think was what was put across to me and fitted in really with my feelings of what art should be. I always had that. I think my teachers in the art school had that. The Bauhaus was very strongly interested in

craft. They had this tradition that it was much better to design and make a perfect teapot than to do a similar great painting. I felt that all along and I always felt for the Medieval craftsmen and thought and wondered about their work and that partly explains my fascination with peasant pottery and the ancient crafts of India and Asia. You get a feeling when you go there that you're seeing something a bit before the Industrial Revolution.

The idealism of the Design School training was compatible with Helen Grey-Smith's beliefs. This could lead to a conclusion that the choice of this course was deliberate, in the sense that Helen Grey-Smith sought paths which suited her. The training she experienced allowed her to identify with all the unknown craftsmen and women whose work she loved in India and England. It allowed her to later form a successful partnership with her husband, because her training and fields of work would never compete or conflict with an art school training. Helen Grey-Smith was strong in her beliefs and comfortable in her adopted country where class barriers were of little importance and where rigid attitudes about working in her chosen field were largely irrelevant.

Helen Grey-Smith's training had immediate relevance in her life. After she left London and work in the slums, she was able to obtain work in the design office of an aircraft factory at Newbury, Berkshire. Two valuable things resulted from this work. One was an education - "a bomb of an education". The other was contact with "ordinary people".

They said, "Well, where did you work before?" They looked at me as if I was a thing from Mars, but they were so open and friendly, especially the people working

on the factory floor. I worked in the drafting office. The inspectors who inspected the work were kind of liaison officers with the drawing office. They were pretty well educated. I learnt all my politics from one of the inspectors. He was very interesting and was opening a whole door to me, to life.

Helen Grey-Smith's feeling about the role of the visual artist as an individual in a capitalist society directed her away from the self-promoting role adopted by some successful visual artists. She commented that:

It explains my attitude and lack of worry about it. It isn't just that I'm a woman that I haven't had masses of recognition - probably don't deserve it anyway. It's partly that I'm not the kind of person who can stand around cultivating the people who can give you a reputation. And that's what is done, if you are keen on being famous. If you are very famous, you are cut off from ordinary living. I feel that art has been completely taken over by the capitalist society so that the artist has been made into a star and if he doesn't succeed, he just falls over.

These sentiments are not those of an ambitious visual artist. They are the sentiments of an idealist and rebel. Helen Grey-Smith's socialism and Bauhaus inspired idealism (which also had socialist foundations) suited her approach to craft, working with her hands and following the process from the design stage through to the completion of the project, with help only from Guy Grey-Smith. Because he was her partner, and a trained artist, she saw him as an equal. She commented that she would rather sweep floors in a supermarket than turn her art into a commercial venture. (quoted from an article by Duncan Graham, *The West Australian newspaper*, 31st May 1966).

Following Guy Grey-Smith's discharge from hospital in Midhurst, in 1945, he gained a place at the Chelsea School of Art, one of the most prestigious in England at that time. He had shown great promise in the hospital rehabilitation art classes and benefited from courses available to returned servicemen. Considering that his injuries and illness were to weaken him for the rest of his life, it could be said that fate had sent his wife to him before the War to provide him with a path to follow. It was training which enabled Guy Grey-Smith to create his career with confidence and support his family, although he also received a War Service pension to provide a stable income.

Guy Grey-Smith also supported Helen Grey-Smith in that her need for attention to herself was fulfilled. His background provided her with an escape from her conventional upbringing and his work gave her every justification and encouragement to pursue her own art. Her identity as a visual artist was reinforced in a way which she had not experienced before. Helen Grey-Smith's self concept grew harmoniously with her husband's success. She had been tired and worn out after the years of working in the factory, and the role of home maker suited her while he began his climb to fame. Their partnership became her whole life.

For men and women who have a big family to support, it was very difficult, except a trained person could teach. You have to have a training from an art school to teach and some of these students who resist being trained about anything are just cutting their own throat. They'll never be able to latch into that situation. Because if you can do that you are freed from the frightful problem that some of the really young ones have of borrowing money. Living on very little food and getting onto

coffee is absurd, and another danger too, you can't afford to turn down commissions, whether you like it or not and sometimes you should turn down commissions that have strings attached.

In the statement above, Helen Grey-Smith pointed out a very important principle - that a visual artist needs to avoid pressure to work in ways directed by others because of financial need. Between them, the partners were able to keep their integrity as visual artists. One potential pressure came from the gallery directors and dealers.

All this business of taking you over. The thing is you are given all these promises but they expect too much of the artist. None of that particular kind of dealer would be able to see that an artist needed a year off from painting. There was nothing. You had to be like stars all the time, for that gallery and you had to belong to their stable like racehorses. It's a horrible idea. It was domination... You had to be the kind of person with a certain kind of independence, say a small pension like what we had and you had to be very clear-minded about what art was about. There is the cut-throat thing that goes on around galleries and the turmoils and politics, so you've got this awful broth lurking around you.

Helen Grey-Smith completed her second training course in 1953 with encouragement from her husband. She acknowledged that she had doubts about her ability to cope with the two children and a course in London, but Guy Grey-Smith encouraged her and they shared the child care, taking turns to attend their respective courses. After her return to Perth and with the children at school, Helen Grey-Smith was able to commence her career in textile printing.

For a woman of my age it was very difficult to feel I had the right to do what I wanted to do. But I never could get away from the fact that I had these children and a husband, so when I worked, I worked when the children were at school and as soon as they came back from school, I dropped everything Women are conditioned.

Although this may be true, Helen Grey-Smith's institutionalised and isolated school life also played its part in deciding the kind of care that she felt necessary to give her children. She made sure that they went to the local school, so that they were not away from home and would not be alienated from the neighbourhood children.

Theme 3: Choice of Media

Helen Grey-Smith's pursuit of a career as a visual artist necessitated processes of negotiation throughout her life. Some of the negotiations were testing times. If she had failed to reconcile conflicting agendas, her life would not have led her in the way it did. Even at an early age, she seemed to have had an ability to make use of situations such as the presence of servants or her life at boarding school, in a positive way. She retained an intelligent and fair distance from things which seemed to her wrong, but reacted in a way which was usually positively rewarding. It seemed that her inherent strength kept her life in balance, and in some way which is difficult to define, fate was with her.

Rose (1983, p. 98) who described the relationship between Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock, argued that it was Krasner who had her "feet on the ground" in the relationship, and that her use of verticals and horizontals in her work and the anchoring of images to the frame illustrated this. While Pollock was alive, Krasner could not afford to

let go of this anchor because someone had to have a grip on reality. Helen Grey-Smith's severe horizontals of the 1970s and her forest verticals of the 1980s perhaps reflect a similar situation. Guy Grey-Smith became ill in the late 1970s leading to his death from a recurrence of T.B. in 1981 but all through their life together, her pragmatism and balance was an essential part of the success of their relationship and family life. Her own family, for all their faults, had provided her with stability, security, and the support needed for the things she wanted to do. Without these things, Guy Grey-Smith's own life would have been much more difficult.

Over the course of the conversations, it seemed that travel was of great significance in Helen Grey-Smith's life. She spoke at length about her trips to Asian countries. The trip to Bali in 1968 triggered the series of collages which she regarded as the beginning of her career as an artist. However, she mentioned nothing at all about the regular family trips to the north-west (documented elsewhere), which produced much of her husband's best work. However, she had this to say about her trip to India with her daughter in 1983.

One of the best things I did in my life was to go back again and look at it. I couldn't go back earlier really. (Pause) I didn't feel I could go back with Guy. I just wouldn't have been able to wander around and absorb the stuff and think again (Pause). He would have explained it all and he would have demanded all sorts of explanations and I wouldn't have had them. And Sue of course was different.

It is significant that Helen never felt that she could return to India with Guy. Somehow she felt inadequate to the task of sharing it with him and it wasn't until after his death that she returned there. The outbursting of "the great mother culture" of her

childhood in the 1968 Bali collages was already embedded in her work - it appeared in the landscapes of the north west as scraps of paper. In her later work, such as *Rock Pools* 1995, it dominated in the full maturity of complete mastery and understanding. Because her nature is to be retiring and her family training instilled reserve and discretion, she retained a privacy about her self revelation in her work, even from her partner. There is an essential truth here, that even though married and sharing all kinds of experiences, the partners remained individuals. There is a level at which there was a profound gap between these two people.

How was her daughter Sue different from Guy? Was it that she was a woman, understanding the "mother culture" as Helen Grey-Smith herself did? The communication between them was from mother to beloved eldest child, mother to daughter, woman to woman and artist to artist. This was a kind of intimate sharing, a passing down of heritage and an opening of a window to herself which was for her daughter only. In the light of the unwillingness of the male dominated world to admit women as equals, this could represent the nature of a fundamental situation. The fact is, women do forge these intimate links with their children and with other women whereas the ability of a male to do so is more limited. It entails work and effort which many men do not understand, and for which they often are not equipped.

In her choice of media, Helen Grey-Smith reveals herself in very interesting ways. Her choice of textile printing as medium for her expression as an artist provided an ideal vehicle to work and shine alongside her husband without encroaching on his field. At the same time, it identified her with Medieval craftsmen and pre-industrial workers and the

craft heritage which she loved and respected. It also allowed her to work in a field which recalled the handmade crafts of India which were familiar to her from her childhood. It allowed her to express herself as a "worker," making useful things which people could afford, at the same time not allowing herself to be taken over by capitalist profit-making. She retained full responsibility for all the processes, never alienating herself from the end product, but thereby limiting her output and at the same time placing a physical burden of work on herself which eventually brought about the end of her ability to do the work. She stands revealed as a hard working, intelligent, independent, disciplined and determined person with great integrity and tact, able to accept the consequences of her actions.

The transition to collage as a medium was consistent with her determination to go on working, using the experience and expertise which she had built up over the years of printmaking. The art form was distinct from that of her husband, and now their exhibitions also became separate. Her decision to take up collage placed her in the company of visual art revolutionaries and the visual artists of the latter half of the twentieth century. As well disguised the collages may be, in their quiet colours and moderate size, they are the work of a determined and far-sighted artist. There is also no doubt of the appeal of her work - very few of her works in exhibitions have not been sold, usually to private buyers. The collages established distance between herself and her partner, because the source of her inspiration was never shared with him. It is possible that as symbols of her "non-paintings" they may have even embodied a kind of resentment. Helen Grey-Smith herself, however, never intimated any such sentiment.

As her work matured, and without her husband, Helen Grey-Smith continued to use collage in varying amounts in her work. She also retained the use of acrylic paints, out of personal inclination and, one feels, out of obstinate defiance of the "art establishment" but more than that, a faithfulness to her own ideals and training. Having once committed herself to this course, she has not altered it. There is this kind of steady commitment about her whole life.

Respect is a very strong motivating urge in Helen Grey-Smith's work. She has great respect for the ancient traditions of India and other Asian cultures as well as natural phenomena, such as the sea and the forests of the south west. The series of ink-paintings of plant forms reveal her respect for Chinese painting. She expressed great respect for the paintings of Velasquez. Helen Grey-Smith believes that visual artists have respect for one another, in the sense that they all understand the urge which drives them to work. They may respect certain visual artists more than others, but as Helen Grey-Smith pointed out many times, there is a camaraderie which has no discrimination. Discrimination in the visual art world commences at another level, perhaps in the market place when money changes hands. Although she never painted overtly political works, the respect for the karri forest and the sea is there in her attempts to go beyond the objects before her to a spiritual contemplation of the subject. She said that her love for the work of Piero Della Francesca is because it conveys a spirituality to her.

Postscript

On Friday, 5th June 1996 a retrospective exhibition of landscapes by Guy Grey-Smith was opened at the Lawrence Wilson Gallery at The University of Western Australia.

It was pointed out during an open discussion on Sunday, 7th June between members of the family, the Curator and audience, that the Grey-Smith family undertook annual painting trips to the north-west of Western Australia as well as to the south-west in the 1950s and 60s. For these trips, they would take enough food for several weeks (the bread was homemade by Guy Grey-Smith) and drive until Guy Grey-Smith saw somewhere he regarded as “good country”. They would stop and he would proceed to sketch and record colours. Sue Grey-Smith remembered always hoping that they would be near to some water. To augment their diet, Guy Grey-Smith would sometimes shoot a kangaroo, and cook it.

These trips were of great importance in providing Guy Grey-Smith with images for his paintings and were important occasions in the life of the family for many years. During the course of conversations for this research, Helen Grey-Smith did not mention these trips. No doubt there were other things in their lives which also remained private, but it does seem significant that she never referred to the trips. It seems as if they were for *his* work and even though some of her art was affected by the Australian landscape, she really stood back and had a holiday at these times. All were agreed on Guy Grey-Smith’s incredible energy, and these outings seemed to be quite gruelling in their direct contact with the inconveniences of “up north”. Helen Grey-Smith’s reticence conveyed something of her discipline and lack of self indulgence. She restricted her conversations and did not merely discuss “everything”. This also demonstrated her feeling of separateness, and her essentially private nature.

The reflections above made use of the transcribed conversations, feminist literature, artworks and anecdotal material contributed by the researcher. The aim was to grasp the essential meaning of Helen Grey-Smith's experience as wife, mother, and visual artist. The use of the three themes, formative experiences, visual art training and choice of media, provided a structure for reflecting on her lived experience.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This Chapter will evaluate the appropriateness of the hermeneutic/phenomenological methodology used in this research and address the research questions. Some recommendations are provided for the future direction for visual art education. For this research to be successful, a methodology was needed which could apply to an individual as opposed to a group, be rigorous and searching but at the same time would focus upon an individual's unique experiences and feelings. It needed to accommodate the idea that visual art works are data sources. Hermeneutic/phenomenology is valuable as a methodology for analysis of visual art, because it involves the explication of phenomena, whether real or imagined as presented to consciousness, empirically measurable or subjectively felt. Van Manen (1990, p. 7-8) noted that hermeneutic/phenomenological research was valuable for education because although it is a philosophy of the personal, it could be pursued against a background of understanding the whole, the communal and the social.

The methodology as presented in Chapter 3 called for an unprejudiced approach, yet Helen Grey-Smith's husband, Guy Grey-Smith, was deliberately omitted from consideration in most of the conversations. The argument for this was that the research was not about the relationship of two practising visual artists, but about the work and experiences of Helen Grey-Smith. His presence was seen to be potentially overpowering because his life and work has had a great deal of public exposure by other writers and researchers as well as attention from curators and critics. The conversations were restricted to Helen Grey-Smith's first-hand experience, memories, thoughts, feelings and work. The research questions posed by this study concerned the pedagogical significance

of the life and work of Helen Grey-Smith, the significance of visual art training on her work and experience, and the importance of training on her choice of media. In this chapter, a number of matters will be discussed which are relevant to visual art educators and students, particularly to young women who might wish to pursue careers in the visual arts.

The Pedagogical Significance of the Life and Work of Helen Grey-Smith.

Helen Grey-Smith was born into a family which valued education. Her paternal grandfather, Sir Robert Stanes built two schools for the children of mixed racial origins. He saw the provision of education for Anglo-Indian children (who did not fit into English or Indian culture), as their only chance for future success. His active participation in this, though not particularly popular in the family, provided Helen Grey-Smith with a heightened awareness of the importance of education, even an idealistic view. Her grandfather's example provided her with a model for getting something done in the field of education. For Helen Grey-Smith and her sisters, education of a particular kind was necessary to enter the right social environment to make a suitable marriage. For her brother, it was education for a career and social position. Although Helen Grey-Smith was quite critical of the quality of her education in an English boarding school, she was seen to have been provided with the "right education". Early in her life, Helen Grey-Smith was very fortunate to have experienced enriching environments. The influence of these experiences informed and shaped her life and work. This is highly significant for the educator, especially of young students. It is almost a cliché that early influences are important, but in this research the power of formative influences on Helen Grey-Smith is

amply demonstrated. It would seem that an educator could materially assist the young visual artist by providing a stimulating and enriching environment. The value of education at the pre - primary and primary school level is also implied.

Perhaps of equal importance to Helen Grey-Smith was her natural intelligence. She was open to new experiences and realised that education did not cease upon leaving school. She also realised that it was in her power to provide herself with the education which suited her temperament and ideals. She had the approval and financial support of her family to pursue tertiary education, but this came at the cost of not training at a "proper art school". To fight to attend an art school would have involved a great struggle, anathema to her character. The perception that fine art training is not appropriate for young women has changed, but it represented a serious barrier to Helen Grey-Smith.

Of particular relevance here is the work by Brooks (1996) on the meaning and experience of career as it is lived by women artists. The direction of Brooks' research was towards counselling of gifted and talented girls, to provide a framework for the development of "post college vocational plans". Brooks (1996) found that many of her participants were impeded in the early stage of their career as artists by lack of familial and social support, but also that the full identity resolution did not usually occur until the demands of child raising had subsided. Brooks' research found a common story in the lives of eight women artists, (women artists in visual, performing or literary fields aged between 40-65 years), beginning with identity struggles in childhood and adolescence, then career experimentation in young adulthood and experience of the challenge of giving voice to artistic creativity while balancing work and other important roles. The women's careers

crystallised in mid-life in the consolidation of their identities as artists and feelings of satisfaction with the lives and careers they had created.

One of the difficulties which Brook's participants experienced was the lack of role models and mentors. She found that this lack was especially damaging at the stage when the real career decisions were being made. This did not occur for Helen Grey-Smith because Guy Grey-Smith, whom she had met at a critical stage of both their lives, was her mentor. For the next forty two years, Helen Grey-Smith was part of a creative partnership with her husband.

Davis (1996) acknowledged that Helen Grey-Smith certainly influenced and contributed to the life and work of her visual artist husband. When asked at a public forum at the Grey Grey-Smith *Landscapes of Western Australia Exhibition* at the Lawrence Wilson Gallery in July 1996, why she sent him art materials, she answered that if it had been her in a prison camp, that was what she would have liked. Perhaps all actions do spring from this kind of egocentric source, but as it turned out, this was the path which Guy Grey-Smith was able to take. We do not know what other influences motivated him, but there is no doubt about the powerful educative influence she had been on his life (and he on hers).

The Importance of Training on the Life and Work of Helen Grey-Smith

Helen Grey-Smith grew up in an education orientated environment, so it is not at all surprising that her life and work (and also that of her children) was oriented towards a "proper education". Helen Grey-Smith made this point most emphatically, seeing that to avoid being trapped by dealers and gallery owners into "selling out" (as she saw some

visual artist colleagues doing), it was essential to have some other form of financial support such as being properly trained and being able to teach. As the wife of an ex-Serviceman, she was able to share the pension which supported them, as did Guy Grey-Smith's various teaching posts. Together, they fought to retain their freedom and integrity as visual artists, maintaining quite a frugal life-style when necessary, especially in the early days of their careers. It seemed from Brooks' (1996) study that her women artists were not particularly driven by economic gain or upward mobility, but being able to financially support themselves and families was essential. Brooks (1996) stated that the reality of women artists as an economically disadvantaged group pointed to the need for advice which would assist them to support themselves in their chosen field in areas such as coaching or teaching.

Helen and Guy Grey-Smith trained in their respective fields so that their work was seen as professional. This was tremendously important to Helen Grey-Smith. She maintains to this day a stance that work had to be professional and she eschews "local hall-C.W.A type exhibitions" as amateurish. The derogatory label of "amateur" was one often given to women visual artists, due to their inadequate training and Helen Grey-Smith consciously battled this all her life, not only for herself but for both her children. She also however deplores the need for exhibitions in large, centralised venues, feeling that this disassociates visual art from ordinary people.

It would seem that the need for artistically gifted and talented girls to be fully informed of the strong presence of women visual artists of the past and present, especially working local visual artists who could act as role models and even mentors, is crucial in

strengthening them in their career choice. Informed vocational guidance for these girls is of great importance. The ability of a young woman visual artist to maintain a commitment to the field of art in the face of structural and economic discrimination is another issue examined by Brooks (1996).

The Importance of Training on the Choice of Media by Helen Grey-Smith.

The question of the media chosen by Helen Grey-Smith opens a fascinating view of a visual artist whose training reflected the idealism of the Bauhaus Art/Craft nexus but who was left with the feeling of never having been properly trained in painting. Because of having to forge a career which would not cause conflict in her marriage, Helen Grey-Smith went forward into the fields of printmaking, collage, works on paper and painting in acrylic, often on paper. It placed her in a position of using what has been perceived as a less robust medium than oil painting. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but educators should be aware of the importance of this in the market place, and subsequent implications for an artist's ability to earn a living. Storage of works on paper in galleries is more difficult, requiring stringently controlled conditions and specialist curators. It is clear that traditional thinking in the world of visual art means that some media are valued less in terms of the price dealers and curators are prepared to pay. It does seem that even now women are drawn into this field of visual art practice far more than men - perhaps for the same reasons as Helen Grey-Smith.

Writers on the subject of women visual artists have constantly pointed out the conflict between the domestic and professional areas of life. Helen Grey-Smith's need to have a close family was met by her in a capable and intelligent way. In Helen Grey-

Smith's experience, the role of mother and nurturer was never shunned because of the way that she had been brought up; she was glad to give of her time and energy to her sick husband and her children. Again, her early experiences were fortunate because her desire to create a close family unit unlike that of her own experience, greatly lessened the destructive sense of conflict between her family life and her career. Helen Grey-Smith said she saw her life as a wife and mother as enriching to her life as an visual artist. She achieved her aim to work in ways that have been described but she also had the foresight to see that there would still be time for a career after the busy years of raising a family. In fact, her life and work were a harmonious whole, especially as she could share the achievements of her husband. Undoubtably, there were conflicts and struggles, played out in Helen Grey-Smith's psyche, but her childhood experiences had toughened her to take a disciplined and independent stance. Her training stood her in good stead because she and her husband really regarded one another as equals. Her choice of media no doubt also reduced the possibility of professional jealousy and conflict between the partners.

Although she may seem reserved and reclusive, Helen Grey-Smith's life has been characterised by a quality of tolerance and openness to different people and situations. This was demonstrated for example, in her childhood love of Indian culture, her positive dealings with the poor of London, her openness to the ideas of the unionists she met in the factory, and her enjoyment of her new country. In fact, her interactions were and are anointed with a sparkle of enjoyment and pleasure. Brooks (1996) found this to be an essential quality in women artists together with a willingness of all her participants to "live on the edge" and enjoy their experiences. By living alone in the way she does, working,

reading and entertaining visitors, Helen Grey-Smith exhibits strength and inner resourcefulness really essential to her life of an visual artist.

A primary concern for Helen Grey-Smith, which she spoke about many times and which she illustrated in a number of ways, was that of being "able to work". Without this, there could be no art. The classical notion of the struggling visual artist has some validity in this context, because the need to work as an artist is fraught with many problems, not the least being financial insecurity. The literature review of this research pointed towards specific difficulties which exist for women visual artists such as the lower value placed on their work. The visual art educator certainly needs to be aware of these difficulties and here reference needs to be made to the social justice issues raised at the beginning of this research which include issues as seemingly trivial as the necessity of making sure that there is a space in which to work. This perhaps explains the reason why so many women turned to writing instead of the visual arts - the one occupation took up very little room, and could be disguised as letter or diary writing. Learning the assertiveness needed is a valuable lesson for young women visual artists. The statement by Gough Whitlam quoted earlier, that the creative work of all should be valued is also appropriate. This could be generalised to educational opportunity for all, a great theme running through Whitlam's philosophies as well as feminist writings, a notion Helen Grey-Smith would heartily endorse.

Helen Grey-Smith was able to establish her career in tandem with her husband and said she felt there was a camaraderie in the community of visual artists, but this may be different for a woman setting out to create a career on her own. Brooks (1996) noted that an aspect of difficulty for women visual artists, in particular young women, is sexism and

gender role conflict. Brooks (1996) maintained that help needs to be given in the recognition of this when it occurs and means made available to overcome these problems. Sexism is closely connected to issues such as racism and bullying in schools. All these issues are addressed in the social justice in schools documents and mechanisms are in place in many schools to assist all children overcome instances of social injustice.

In dealing with students inclined towards the visual arts as a career, the educator needs to be aware of the difficulties faced by these students. Good training would include non-sexist and non-racist approaches, with thorough and non-discriminatory training in all areas of visual art and craft by well qualified teachers. An awareness needs to be developed that this career choice is an immensely difficult one in economic terms, but for the dedicated visual artist, immensely satisfying, and personally defining. The young woman visual artist would have to face the fact that her route to a career in the visual arts might be circuitous, almost certainly longer and harder than for a young male visual artist. But as can be seen in the example of Helen Grey-Smith, there are years in the middle and later stage of life which can be hugely productive and satisfying.

Helen Grey-Smith was fortunate that in meeting Guy Grey-Smith she was able to identify and establish herself in an visual arts context even before she was in a position to advance her own career. Her partnership was a source of strength, as was her parenting of two children. Brooks (1996) signalled that in her findings, the women went to extraordinary lengths to maintain their artistic careers, and made sacrifices, such as leaving non-supportive relationships. She also maintained that it was usually only in mid-life years that a synthesis of the individual and her career occurred. Helen Grey-Smith repeatedly

asserted that for her, to work was the thing. Not to take the socially defined role of artist too seriously but to just *do it*. Informed and wise educators should certainly be instrumental in making the young artist aware of ways to achieve a successful career.

Helen Grey-Smith's lived experience has been rich and fulfilling. It could be said that she was born into a privileged situation, yet within this life there was what some might regard as the deprivation of a close and loving family life. She was driven towards her life as a visual artist by very early feelings of isolation, then the growth of love for, and sensitivity towards, the environments which surrounded her as a child. The Indian servants of her childhood cared for her and from this grew a love and tolerance for people outside the family and some rejection of the values of her family. One family value that she did not reject was the importance placed on education, especially by her grandfather. This was ingrained in her and is reflected strongly in her own values. There is no doubt that in the visual arts community of Western Australia of the 1950s, the training obtained by Helen Grey-Smith and her husband gave them confidence and materially assisted their careers and their status in the community. Their training also created equality between the partners, essential in creating a successful partnership in marriage and work. She formed strong views about the value of family life due to her own sense of childhood isolation and loneliness. This sense later strengthened her ability to work alone and sustain an intense privacy and greatly assists her in what could be perceived by some as a lonely old age.

Helen Grey-Smith's art has been her constant companion and a source of intellectual stimulation, a means of expression, financial support, a source of comfort and pleasure, personal independence and self identification. She is able to go on working,

feeling that the experiences which others might have seen as limiting, were actually enriching and could be used in more and more refined ways in her work. Her open, positive attitude assists her even now in her work and in her relationships with people.

This research has explored a woman visual artist's life in a context of past and present attitudes to women visual artists and their work. Visual art has been of the greatest importance in the life of Helen Grey-Smith. She has overcome difficulties common to women visual artists as well as coming to terms with the difficulties experienced by all artists. She has enjoyed a long and successful life, thanks to her personality, intelligence and experiences. Her life is a valuable example to visual artists and visual arts educators.

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Appendix 1

Statement of Disclosure and Informed Consent

Dear Helen

The purpose of the proposed research is to record aspects of your life and work. I am aware that you have been a prominent member of the visual arts community for many years, at the same time that you were a wife and mother to your family.

My perspective is as a visual arts educator and I understand that the Education Department have policies which encourage the equitable treatment of students, regardless of their sex, racial background, economic or geographic location or level of ability. These policies make it clear that the Arts of all people should be understood by students and successful women artists, such as yourself, are valuable role models. Your work is part of our visual arts heritage.

The research will take for form of hermeneutic-phenomenological study, as explained in Van Manen, 1990, *Researching Lived Experience*. London, Ontario: University of Western Ontario.

There will be a series of recorded interviews, then a collaborative reflection of the experiences raised in the interviews, as well as analysis of a number of artworks, chosen because they reflect and enrich the experiences we see as significant. Photographs of these works will form an important part of the final presentation of the work.

We will chose interview times which fit in with your work schedule and will be of approximately 45 minutes duration. There will be a series of meetings, over the course of several weeks. Further meetings may be necessary to consult over work in progress.

One or two interviews may be arranged, with your permission, with other members of your family, if this seems like a desirable thing. All written work in progress will be approved by yourself, and audit-tapes and any other notes and materials will be stored in a secure place.

Any questions which you may have about the study, which is presently entitled *The Pedagogical Significance of the Artist Helen Grey-Smith's Work: A Phenomenological Study* should be addressed to Gwen Phillips, 4 Carroll Street, Ardross, 6153 (09 364 2445).

Having read the information above and asked any questions needed I would be grateful if you would sign and date this document in the space below.

Yours sincerely

Gwen Phillips.

Helen Grey Smith: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2

Early Years in India (Recorded in July, 1995)

You used the phrase feeding years which I thought was an interesting thing and I wondered if you would like to explain what you had in mind about that.

Yes, it's very strange isn't it? Wasn't it the Jesuits who said give me a child until it's seven and you've got him for life? I was not *got* by anyone, but it shows you the *enormous* impressions that go in to a child. Because I have very strong remembrance of my infancy, it was really, in India. I think I have a much more visual mind than the rest of my family who had the same experiences because I can remember so *much* visually and it is such a very fascinating visual place, you know, India, it's a very, very lovely interesting place and I suppose I was, as a little girl without realising it, affected really by the Indian culture (pause) as opposed to the English culture.

We had a lot of servants knocking around. My family did not make friends with Indians but as a child you are very close to servants, you are very close on that lower level, so to speak, (laughs) you (pause) I had a kind of sympathy. Well, I just learnt such a lot from them. They were very gentle people (pause) how can you describe, more like artistic people in that they are fairly irresponsible in some ways and don't keep things to time and all that kind of thing and are not very conventional and very (pause) oh, I don't really know how to describe what it did to me but the strange thing was that none them, none of my brothers and sisters had that identification with it. That's what it was but I have identified with it, but they were outsiders looking on, which was what the Raj was of course. You

can't occupy a country and be completely one with them; you have to keep your status and all the rest of it and I found when I went back again when I was eighteen this absolutely appalling (pause) I found it absolutely appalling the way they treated Indians.

My parents were very good living and very sort of religious in a way and strict about things. I was absolutely astonished at my father yelling at the servants in the way he did. That to me is a terrible intrusion on people to yell at them when they're in that position. I felt all the time a sense of unease - that one didn't (pause) know them and didn't understand them. You used to wonder what they were talking about. You hadn't a clue! (long pause)

Oh, I felt a great feeling of belonging. It kind of gets a hold on a few people. Very strong. I don't know why I identified with India. That's one of the things you just don't know. I mean, that's why I feel I'm so (pause) sort of a misfit in the family in that they didn't because they looked upon India as an endurance test to live in India and there was no feeling like that. But I don't know why I did. And I don't know why from my family why I became a painter. Because none of them are. Just something way back.

Sir Robert Stanes.

Well, my grandfather was an interesting person in that he came out in the year of the Indian Mutiny (1837) as a young man on a sailing ship and joined his brothers and they were pioneers in growing tea and coffee in India, south India and he was a very dynamic person and he got very bored with watching the coffee and the tea grow so he went down to where we were at Coimbatore, on the plains and started a coffee and tea manufacturing

firm. The family firm. Actually, they tinned the tea and coffee and everything. When he was there he had some kind of religious, some kind of religious experience, as a young man, he said and he became one of those (pause) I don't know (pause) Plymouth Brothers or something like that, people with very strong low church kind of beliefs, but he wasn't in the least bit "pi" (fashionable slang for pious) about it you know. I think he had a long suffering wife and a lot of children but he saw the terrible plight of the children who were the offspring of Indians and whites, the Eurasians or half-castes. And so he started a school for them. They couldn't go to school because the Indians wouldn't accept them and nor would the whites accept them, so he started this school which is going to this day, a highly successful school. Now it isn't just for Eurasians, it's for everybody. But he also had this amazing ability with Indians. I remember as a little girl watching him. It may have been him you know that affected me. But I remember watching him sitting there, he was a big handsome man and very much the boss you know, but he would be sitting there on the verandah or something and an Indian would come along in a terrible state, they got in awful states, and saying they'd had a terrible quarrel, and this man was doing (pause) and all that kind of thing and grandfather got the two of them together quite calmly and settled their differences, and said it takes two to make a quarrel and that kind of thing. They *came* to him to solve their problems. That was an amazing thing really, you know. And they always (pause) they just loved him.

Return to India

When Sue and I went back, we met an elderly man in an office of the firm and he talked about grandfather with tears in his eyes. He just (pause) they all just absolutely

loved him. He was an extraordinary person. The family thought he put too much time and effort and money into it and they weren't really very (pause) I got the feeling, especially from my mother's side that they rather deplored all this stuff going on you know. He wasn't a missionary but he in the end was knighted for his services to Eurasians in Southern India. He started a girl's school too and he was very bossy too (pause) and he would (pause) I think the Headmasters had a terrible time probably from him. (long pause)

But it was great to me, great. I thought it was a great feeling when I went back when I was a young girl and since then thinking about it, you see our parents and my grandfather were not in the whole system of the Raj. We were business people as opposed to being in government service of any kind so there was none of that hen pecking order or all that kind of thing that went on. There was no constriction about what you did, you know you did what you liked, what you could do and my parents and my grandparents didn't go to the Club and they didn't drink much or anything like that but they allowed me to do anything I liked. There was a feeling I suppose, an identification with India, and my grandfather stayed there and died there. He didn't leave but my parents did. And so I think I got as a little child watching my grandfather with Indians I got this feeling that they were real people you know, not just the odd servant. That was my father's father, Sir Robert Stanes. (pause)

So when you were little, can we just go back a bit further, when you were little, did you have very interesting memories of say going on outings, events or things that you were taken to that made a big impression on you?

My earliest memories? Well, not very much.(long pause) But I remember my father did take me once not when I was really little, no it must have been to a big festival in a place called Madura, to see an interesting temple festival. Madura is like the kind of Rome of South India and they had *amazing* performances, you know, with masses of elephants, oh absolutely, they really go to town! (laughs) And I remember that very clearly, and then we went to Cochin, a very interesting place, a very early place, an old Portugese place, and we went to old Cochin and there were these beautiful old Portugese buildings. Really, really extraordinary! And I remember that very clearly. No, it was always as a little child the day to day sort of events of the domestic life I suppose. And oh, we had a good life with everything you could possibly want and in the hot weather we went up to the Nilgiri Hills where my grandfather was and had a nice cool break there. It was all very comfortable and all very nice. I can't describe it to you, you can probably remember when you were a little child, of five or six, you remember things but you can't explain why they were important, but they are (long pause)

Of course even though I have a strong feeling about India, I know I'm not Indian I know I'd be living an expatriate life if I lived there. You know that it's artificial.

What sort of a house was it? It was a very nice, very beautiful house. Everybody lived in great *grandeur* and we had an old house and very derelict now. It was a kind of, well how can you describe it, you came in and there was a porte cochere, a thing so that when you came in and the cars stop there and the rain doesn't come down, a huge port...porch, and you'd come in and there was one huge room tiled with red tiles and just arches to the dining room and then four little bedrooms on either side of that and then a

stairway up to a *huge* room up there which my parents had as a bedroom and then another smaller one for whatever resident child. Everybody had their own bathroom and water was brought up by the waterman up the steps you know, hot water, cold water, everything and the kitchen was right outside. It was right outside and everything was brought from there. I suppose charcoal or wood, cooking, I don't know, I never went in there much. I was never encouraged, even by the cook! (laughs)

It was a lovely garden in that right at the other end - it was between two roads - and right at this end there was a well, a big well and the water was brought up by bullocks and it used to be one of my thrills to go and watch this *great big skin* being brought up from the depths you know, and then it went into little channels and little channels fed the whole garden, and that was lovely because the little channels filled the little tank, and that would fill up and you could play around in that for ages; it was absolutely beautiful and lovely big trees. Lovely big, those red flowering ones, you know (pause) you have them in the tropics, flame of the forest they call it, a golden morhar or something I think, beautiful, lovely scented trees, hibiscus and what's the other thing, bright purple thing, bougainvillea, about the size of this house and with a kind of, you could sit underneath that, and then there were little attempts at kind of English growth of garden too. They mainly were the trees and shrubs, just wonderful and we were always very careful, they had to worry about snakes a bit and all that kind of thing. But the house had a verandah all around, big wide verandahs and it had these big white pillars on which they hung very strong, heavy, cheap blinds and when it was very hot they'd just throw water on the blinds and cool the place off. I had a wonderful swing they had on the verandah and I said to Sue, that's where I used to swing!

(laughter), because I could see the places where they had it. Generally it was a very pleasant, sort of luxurious sort of life, I suppose. And one of the wonderful things was as we all remember, all of us that was there, the wonderful time when they were roasting the coffee; of course the smell would come right over. (long pause)

You obviously had a lot of servants? They had lots of servants, I can't remember how many. We had a cook, of course and a cook's assistant; they had a main butler cum sort of senior servant, who was a Christian called David and various others came and went ; a sweeper who would be the lowest class of all and sweep and deal with all the toilet stuff and the water man who would bring the water in; and we had a watch man at night. He would go the rounds and bang on a piece of iron or something to say there were no naughty people around and I don't know exactly how it added up. I didn't have an ayah, a real Indian ayah. I had a nurse, an Eurasian, who wasn't very satisfactory; on the other hand the ayahs had a tendency for taking the child over completely. So do you think that was why you didn't have one? Yes I think so, my mother was rather afraid of them. And they had the reputation of being so clever that if the child was a bit restive they could give them a little bit of dope you know, and I don't know how true it is. (Long pause). I think she was wise not to have an ayah really; they could be difficult people too because they were separated from their families and so I didn't have that close relationship with an ayah, but I did with the servants. The other ones, you know. They had one marvellous cook, he wasn't a Christian and he got drunk on and off and I remember standing out on the back verandah watching his performance, dancing and singing. (Pause). Nothing nasty. My parents were in shock and in no time he was sacked. (Laughs). Oh yes, there was a lot of

life going on, having servants, a lot of things happened. (Long pause). I was a very difficult child too, so I had something peculiar about me from the beginning. I think my nose was put out of joint when my brother was born, because they had been waiting to have a son and he was a son and I was the third daughter and I was a disappointment, you know. I think I was suffering from childhood jealousy of my brother; that was the reason I went into tantrums and sort of slept-walked and did all that stuff, you know, wet my pants and everything and I can always remember “a haze of wrong-doing” at one stage. With my parents, but the Indians of course totally accept that kind of thing. (Pause). When I’d go into a tantrum and rush out of the room, one of the servants would come along and be nice to me! (Laughter). Then I’d get hauled in and given, (pause) well, pained, I can remember them being so pained! I remember feeling awful and never quite making it, you know - very difficult! I was very highly strung they all said, and they even wondered if I could take boarding school. So I must have been pretty awful; I always sensed being slightly tagged like that and I think that may have helped me feeling different.

You have relationships with your elder sisters? Did you play with them or one in particular? I had my elder sister, Mary; she’s just two years older than me. We played together quite a lot and then she was whisked off to England and my brother and I were together quite a lot. That’s the strange thing you know, there wasn’t that balancing thing of the whole family; you were separated out together. Difficult.

I remember being fascinated, we used to go down to the bazaar sometimes in the car, (of course we had a chauffeur too) and you know, being *absolutely fascinated* by the absolute semi-chaos well not really chaos but vitality of the Indian life in the bazaar and I

still get a real kick when I see films or something of it but my mother was so apprehensive, she'd be looking for terrible sights, and they'd be there too; the deformed people and lepers and things like that and she'd of course say, "Don't look, don't look!" and then we'd come to an Indian temple which would be decorated with the most unseemly things. I wasn't allowed to look. I was blinded. And of course, the poor old Brits, they had a terrible time with Indian art, because it's so earthy, so sensuous. They didn't know how to cope with it and they more or less closed all that side of it down. I mean, the art has suffered appallingly and I can't see it really ever coming up again. It was pulled out by the roots really and the only art that was left was a little bit of bazaar art. That's all. They were taught art, they were probably taught English Victorian water colours or something like that!

Was there any destruction of the art?

They couldn't possibly destroy the art in the temples, that would raise the populace. They were very much not taken seriously, not, well they were frightened of it. There were always awful tales and yarns, about temple prostitutes and things that went on behind the scenes and you read it in some of these books, the mystery they put onto Hindu religion. It's not mysterious. It's very strange. It wasn't mysterious, really. It's quite extraordinary. One of the best things I did in my life was to go back again and look at it. It was really very interesting to go back again (1985) with Sue. She and I both feel very strongly of the opinion that India is the mother cultural country of Asia.

Appendix 3

The Trip To Bali (Recorded in July, 1995)

We went to Bali and that was after I had finished screen printing. We had a blissful time, this sounds very gushy but it really was; it was before they had the international airport it was only a very small airport and we had to go in on a kind of DC4, you know the things, it was very, very primitive. We were told to write and get accommodation from this Argun, which is a kind of chieftain, just a chieftain of the village and the areas around and he had what they called a puri which translated means palace but it isn't a really a palace it was just a very big spreading country house with a courtyard in the centre and all that kind of thing but it has a kind of mystique. The Argun was certainly the father figure, and considered very aristocratic and there was certainly a strong feeling of that about him.

He was very very interested in art because he'd mixed up with those German and Dutch people who came into Bali before the war, I don't know the exact date, in the 30s I think and introduced Western art into Bali and he was great friends with them. And they created a little museum and art gallery and he was the patron and protector of the art gallery. A lovely art gallery surrounded by moats and boats and all things like that and so he was very interested in art because of his connections but he didn't know a thing about art really. I mean, he didn't understand Guy's work at all! He'd come down and look at Guy's work, he was very interested in Guy's work and he'd look at Guy's work and go aaahhhh! Always say aaahhhh! (Laughs). Anyway, he introduced us, we lived in his little puri, that meant that we had (Pause) and the children were with us and we each had (Pause) Guy and I had a separate room and we each had a separate little room with three walls,

bamboo walls and bamboo roof that opened into the courtyard and then alongside one which was ours was a kind of courtyard where we ate which had a roof over it. You lived as honoured guests, though we were paying of course pretty heavily I think and he would then take a great interest in you if and also he liked to tell you sort of stories. The trouble was he spoke very bad English and his secretary took us to Balinese dancing which was fabulous, really marvellous.

You'd sit around in chairs watching it. There were many, but there were not tourists. They didn't have tourists in those days and you'd see what they were doing because they did their dancing after the rice harvest was got in and it was a sort of a traditional thing for them. And they had their own orchestra. The orchestra actually played very close to us, where we lived. It was lovely hearing that. And the orchestra would be trying out new numbers! And often there would be giggles and mirth when things didn't go quite right. The dancing was *staggering* and I turned to Barata who was the secretary and I said to him, they look like gods and goddesses they do, that man and that woman and he said, well she has got five children and works in the rice field part time and he's a carpenter or something. And you realised how all that *fantastic* artistic tradition was just sort of natural to them. They didn't have to become great stars, they just *did* it. *So refreshing* to have. Just so beautiful. And they weren't paid for it, it was just the thing that went on and all those things and he introduced us into the festivals, the Bagumu. We were made to go and have festivals and eat their absolutely terrible turtle meat and half-cooked pork, that was hmmm. And what was interesting, because we were part of the *puri* while we were there. And a couple of other people too. If anything happened that affected

the puri, we had to pay. It was sort of obligatory that we would have to do the right thing. One was the funeral of a man and we had to go before he was actually interred and there he was lying, absolutely dead to the world in the courtyard while everybody was wailing and weeping and we just *had* to be there. So that was an incredible experience. Hmm? Absolutely! And he told us all sorts of things like the great difficulties of (Pause) he saw, he saw the horror ahead and he was right, he saw the tourists coming.

He saw all of them were going to get seduced into this getting money from tourists and he hated it. I didn't see it so strongly then but I'm sure it's true, though Bali itself, of course Barata told us, was very poor and they needed the money. They have the posh hotels so that the young couples go off for a blissful sort of tropic island thing, that's all right, and that works there. But they also then go in their hordes to Ubud, where we were, which is the artists cultural centre and wherever you go I believe you are just pestered by people wanting to buy things. They'd never even heard of that when we were there. I mean, they'd giggle if you wanted to buy a bit of batik, or something, you know. And *he* was very worried about that and he was worried about the whole thing. He's dead now of course, but it I just felt it was really sad he had that at the end, because they had very strong traditions of (Pause) it still goes on. (Pause). There is this hierarchy of the chieftains and the thing they had in Bali which is interesting is that that they had control of these chiefs in that although he may become dominant in the village and the land around. They have a committee of people who decide how the water irrigation is worked and if the Argun started being too objectionable and you know, grinding their faces down, they'd just cut his

water off! Wonderful! Wonderful balancing! That's what Bali is like, absolutely wonderful!

But it is also now very much more under the thumb of Indonesia that when we were there. It was an *incredible* experience, it was, really, because you were drawn into this culture. Of course, we stayed in one place - I think that was great and we also had around us people who knew all about the arts. And also we could see the actual craft work. They were everywhere, they were all painting and carving you know. And it was *absolutely marvellous* the immersion into that, that was absolutely wonderful, it really was. And I feel it's incredible. It's very sad that people can't do that. They can actually go to more remote spots. Ubud is right in the, more or less centre but you can go further north and to various parts and get into real Balinese life but not the super civilised life that we, shall we say, culture, that we got into. So we were very lucky. How long were you there? Oh, I think we were only there for about two months, oh not as long because not with the kids. We couldn't. It was a great experience for children. It was their first introduction to Asia, very gentle and very unscary. We didn't have any illnesses or anything much. We made such friends that when we had to go it was a pouring wet day and the Argun sat there with somebody holding an umbrella over his head and the rain coming down, we all started to cry! (Laughs). It was such a kind of wonderful feeling. But of course, you can't *keep that up* because there is no means of communicating. You just remember it. I'm sure we all remember each other. And how old were the kids then? They were teenagers, just teenagers. Yes, I think Mark was a bit younger. That was a terrifically good move that. Previously we didn't take them to Sri Lanka, they seemed too small and too vulnerable. I

with my Indian background felt sure they would fall down with one of those dreadful diseases and I couldn't face it. As well as the fact that they couldn't really cope with the kind of travelling around we did. In Bali you see, it was so easy, they only had one car in the village and that was driven rather erratically. And they'd take us in it and that kind of thing, but you walked, we just walked everywhere, along the paddy fields. Just wonderful! And the children really got a lot from it. Then, and I'd got my whole series of little collages and Guy got a lot of paintings of big temples and things; he always gets a lot of work from wherever he goes. It was um, it was to me a sort of a kind of link back to India.

I was going to ask you whether it reminded you? Yes. Oh, very strongly. Because it was much smaller, a kind of microcosm of it and the religion, which is very, very important, which is very complicated and has got a lot of animism and all sorts of different things in it and a lot of things which you never had in India like all these kind of trance dancing and all that kind of thing - that's not done in India and I realised of course that it's the great Indian culture has stretched out that far. And all that culture, you know, the power of Indian culture is enormous because it got to Bali right into Indonesia, because the dancing is the same in Indonesia and it got to Sri Lanka but all watered down somewhat you know, in their own way but it made me feel, I felt very at ease there in that way and it brought back all sorts of. Oh I wasn't conscious of it but I suppose I remembered the Indian things. It wasn't totally alien to me. Oh, it was lovely. It was a really great experience.

Appendix 4

Life In Australia: Kalamunda And Setting Up Home And Studios. (Recorded in July, 1995)

So when you did get back to Australia, how did you manage at first? Oh well, that was, we arrived after old war torn England and the ghastly weather and everything and I thought it was an absolute paradise! We arrived in a lovely time. I loved it. I loved Australia from the start. I loved the sense of space and the climate and the kind of lack of tension there seemed to be in Australia. You had much more space around you as a person for example and also the whole landscape and everything was spacious and I found it very agreeable from the very start. We went up to Kalamunda. Well Guy was still a bit sort of shaky in his health, and we stayed there for a while in the hotel and Kalamunda was *wonderful*. We must have come in the Australian spring, that's right - this amazing old hotel, a real Australian hotel!. There were probably no plugs for the bath, you know, and in front of it was a great mass of Australian wildflowers, the whole place was undeveloped and you could just wander through and it was just beautiful. Just small, there were just a few shops there. You wouldn't recognise it now, anyone coming wouldn't recognise the present Kalamunda. Oh yes, we had a rather funny time renting a kind of flat place from two old ladies who were kind of staunch Australian backbone old ladies who had their house equipped with the most decrepit old furniture. The place we lived in and shall we say, a chip heater to heat the bath and all those things that I had not ever got used to. I didn't know anything about a wood fired stove, so *amazing* the things they had, like the

decrepit cane furniture, which you had to be careful when you sat in it and they used to spend their time telling me, they'd say quite regularly to me, Australia is a pioneering country dear! (Laughs). And they got very pernicky and watched everything you did and I don't know, it was it sort of rather too much for us and we managed to get another little place at the bottom of a big house, they had a kind of small cottage thing and we were there, that's right, that's right, we were there when before Sue was born, that's right, and that was quite nice *but* we wanted to live in Darlington. Typical Guy, you'd go out for a walk across Gooseberry Hill and look across to the Darling Scarp and he's say, that spot there, that's what we're going to buy! He had absolute certainty, so before we built the house and bought the land we moved to Darlington and got quite a nice little house before Sue was born. I had her there, in this little house in Beenong Road.

Stone Crescent

And meanwhile the building was going on and it was very difficult because there were restrictions on materials or there were shortages, that's what it was, absolute shortages, you couldn't get nails even, that kind of thing, but we did, we had a War Service Home situation where they built it more or less. I've forgotten; they build it and you pay it off, and it was very, good. A very good system it was too. We had one man, one builder. Oh, we had to have bulldozers and we found the place, that's right. When we came here, Guy was charging around and I think we came over quite often and looked at it and saw this marvellous spot of on top of the escarpment looking right over to Perth, right over Gooseberry Hill, beautiful, sort of with an *incredibly* steep route up and also with no access

road at all from the main road and this was an experience, and this was one of my interesting experiences of Australia. I said, you can't get at it! It's a wonderful block, but you can't get at it! And he said, Oh don't worry, we'll just get the Shire to make a road and just put it on their map and they'll make a road for us! That just didn't happen in England! (Laughs). Ah, but he did, it was a Crescent, Stone Crescent and it was supposed to go right round this escarpment up there and we had to make our own road going up from it, and we did, but it was an absolute nightmare road for most people because you had to turn sharp right and then go *full bore* to get up to the top! However, it didn't worry Guy of course at all. (Laughs). And the land was for sale very cheaply, it had belonged to a bankrupt firm, something like that and we got several acres, just bush and that was when we were living down on Beenong Road, that's where we were when the building started and it was very exciting of course. It was difficult though, because of the difficulty of getting materials. However, we got it done eventually, but it was never quite finished off.

Then Guy got his studio built too, designed by an architect and a hopeless design; light came on a huge grey wall throwing the light right on the back of the painter and you couldn't see very well, and anyhow, he used that for a while. And then after I started doing textiles, we turned that into a printing studio for me and then he actually built his own studio and also the pottery. He built the pottery from all rock, the pottery only had two walls and the other was open, bush poles holding up the tin. He went off to Mundaring and got the tin somehow, somehow and rolled it out. Somehow it had been rolled out by a steam roller and you could get it for practically nothing. Incredible pieces of tin were plonked on that and then ... it was a very cold studio, and very primitive really. He got an

electric kiln and that worked OK but it was a pretty primitive place but still he did a lot of work there. He built his other studio. Was it open to the elements, the studio? The pottery studio was open on two sides. It was very cold.

It probably wasn't very good for his health. No, no. It was very good in summer, it was very cool in summer. He didn't do it all the time. He was very part time with his pottery; he'd do it as a change from painting. Oh, it was all very exciting actually. Yes, you could imagine the first time we fired anything! All that was nice, and all that.

Appendix 5

Screen Printing by Helen Grey-Smith. (Written in February, 1996)

Screens are a form of stencil through which you press dye onto material. The following method is one we used. It is a primitive version of modern screen making which uses machines.

I tacked one side of a frame with fine organdy and coated it with potassium dichromate and gelatine which made the whole surface sensitive to light - and had to be kept in a dark room - our laundry. When it was dry, a painting in thick black ink on transparent paper was placed on the surface and exposed to the sun for about ten seconds. It was then withdrawn to the darkroom and washed with hot water. The gelatine mix that had been protected from the sun's effect then washed away leaving a stencil of plain organdy surrounded by hardened gelatine, thus waterproofing the rest of the screen. When dry, the screen was placed face down on the fabric and dye was pulled from one end to the other by a squeegee. The design had to be made with a separate screen for each colour, so I never used more than four colours.

The fabric was smoothed onto an adhesive vinyl covered table four yards long. The fabric was marked with chalk marks exactly the size of the design and the screen was marked to exactly relate to the design - "a repeat," and printed so that the repeats joined and covered the fabric.

The designing which was the interesting part I did for about six months of the year. The printing filled up about three months of the year I used to present six furnishing

lengths and six dress lengths for exhibition and took orders. In designing I had to consider the joining of all sides to each other and the colours. I used all sorts of techniques for designing - painting, lino-cuts, torn paper, roller printing; but it all had to be rather broad, loose compositions to make the repeat joining feasible.

For the Town Hall (Perth Council House) curtains, (1000 yards) the design had to incorporate the Town Hall crest - two swans holding up a shield. The fabric was provided by the architects - a fine silk/nylon in dull gold. To make it possible to do, I designed one broad, central panel of the swans etc in black covered with a roller design in gold dye. This softened the black (rather boring) crest and joined the design with the gold coloured fabric. (Inspiration for the design was photographs of medieval shields which looked rather rubbed over with age!) The material was cut to size by Aherns and delivered to us. We returned done ones. So it worked out quite well.

I enjoyed designing and printing but got fatigued and tired of the limitations it imposes. So after two years and three big commissions, (Town Hall, University of WA and Reserve Bank in Canberra) my arm gave up and so did I! Guy was an enormous help in the printing, pulling the squeegee, but picking up the large screens damaged my arm eventually.

Appendix 6

The Art work. *Rock Pools 1995.* (Recorded in October, 1995)

I wanted to talk to you about the experience of the *Rock Pools*. The way you see the experience you had which set you off to paint the picture. Yes, that's right you have to have an experience. I have to. Well, I have to relate to something but the difficulty in going around sketching is that you are dominated by the actual scene in front of you. Dominated with the way the earth is, the scene of rocks and waves and everything, that altogether. That is often not a very good composition so then you do that sketching and then you start to contemplate, to get the feeling of the place and the whole of what it said to you, what feeling you had.

I was looking at all those rocks around the south coast, around Green Bay and all those places, all those beautiful, massive great rocks and I tried several things, doing exactly like that and it didn't come off so I thought of rock pools, the fascination I had and the massive structures sticking out from the sand and so I didn't tie myself to a place but to a kind of rocks, smooth curved rocks and the atmosphere which was down there - rather calm, rather grey, all cool, calm, no sparkling surf or anything, or when I was there contemplating there wasn't and that was how it all came off really. The rocks I put in straight away and they were in dark grey and pinks and blues and things and then I got the cool, cold contemplative look and I stuck a couple of yachts in. You see all the time, all the time you solve the problem of the rocks, that's all right. You have then got to solve the problem of the area above them and the area below them! And there are certainly areas

where I don't make things up completely and there are certain areas where there is just open sea and that is always quite difficult so I put in boats and so on.

You talked about having to fight against the things in front of you. Yes, you do, you have to. I find it very difficult not to. I feel I've got to be truthful you see but then it dawned on me that you can be truthful in different ways. You don't actually have to do a replica of the scene as if you were pre-photography in the days when you had to. That is not on. You don't have to do that. And so you have to fight the feeling, am I taking too many liberties, you know. I have a lot of difficulty there. Some people don't have that difficulty but I do. And I do want to get the feeling of the place, that is really the basis of my painting, the feeling of the place, and that does tie you a bit to being very literal. And I have to break down that literalness.

And then the people in the place, well the thing that I knew when I started doing these paintings from the summer was that there were people there, not too many, not a mass, there weren't great crowded beaches but always where there were rocks and rock pools there were these kids looking in them. That was there and then where you had beaches, you had people sitting there or swimming and playing with this great mighty ocean. And it's a very interesting thing I discovered, you can put people in the landscape of the sea. Because if you're being quite honest about the Australian landscape, there are no people in the landscape. There are no peasants just going round like they do in Asia, things like that, so I can't put people in because I don't think it's being true to the place. So I've had a job putting people in. They are very subordinate, very small but it's truthful I think!

Helen Grey-Smith's Philosophy of the Sea.

And the ocean as a play place is a very recent thing. Yes, that is the extraordinary thing, it is only in the late nineteenth century that anybody ever bathed in the sea. They'd go on it in boats for centuries, *centuries*, getting places and exploring, trade and everything but it was looked upon as a very hostile environment, and only the brave could do it. You had to be very brave but then in the late nineteenth century or perhaps the late-eighteenth when Brighton came on, and then the late nineteenth came an idea to do it. And then it has just burgeoned out terrifically. So much so that the people lying on the sand like masses of seals are not involved very much themselves in the sea. They are just exposing themselves to the sun, or they were, or getting involved in the beach culture, things like that. But I think it has gone better than that now. I think that people actually go to know, understand and love the sea. You get the snorkellers and underwater diving things and the little sail things and also walking around looking at the rocks and I think that is a very interesting philosophic concept of human beings with this great massive sea. I didn't want to make the sea tame. The sea looked pretty tame in *Rock Pools* but it was just a very calm day. The sea changes you see, that's another thing, you can see *so* many different changes. One day it would be overcast and grey and then the next it would be bright and calm and then scudding clouds and then it would be a big surf. I'm still trying to get a feeling on another three or four, there's that one called *Inlet*. It's exact really. Just the water, very calm, very calm. There were clouds there. But I haven't tackled the more active sea ones. Not really yet.

Do you think this is part of your personal experience? I mean, the sea is part of everybody's experience, most people have experienced something of the sea but is this a significant experience of yours? I haven't been brought up by the sea, I haven't had a great deal of experience there but I just think it is a tremendous attraction. It is quite frightening to try to deal with, it is so impressive and so important and you can easily get over-romantic stuff. It very difficult. I was very fond of rivers, I don't see them here in WA. but I love water too. I think water is wonderful, something about truth, I don't know what it is something extraordinary.

I suppose with the sea you can't dissemble or act. You can't and at the same time too, it remains pure in a way, even though it is polluted and all that, but it's not like say, a landscape which if it's an agrarian landscape it can be just completely altered by man and changed its face indefinitely, if you go up into the wilder parts up north that has the same feeling as the sea, it's enormous.

It has a contemplative feeling. Well it has, that was because it was a quiet day and the colours were cool colours and I put little children in it, very subtly, as subtly as I could. (Laughs). Because I didn't want it to be a genre painting of children on the beach. I wanted them to be incidental.

And you've used the orange haven't you, with the blue. Yes, quite right. Quite good having that bit of orange with the blue. It reminds me a bit of Constable putting in his little dobs of red. That's the trouble with the sea, it's all blue or grey! (Laughs loudly) And you've got some beautiful subtle effects there - yes it is all very low tonal and low key.
Yes. Yes.

Rock Pools 1995, Collage And The Three Dimensional

We were talking about the feeling of the collage and being able to present a little feeling of space and perhaps a bit of perspective? Yes well, it's not perspective. It's a tiny weeny thin little bit of the three dimensional. There *is* a feeling. One woman came into the exhibition and she said, "I saw that painting of the *Rock Pools* and when I got up close to it, it was really rough!" (Laughs). She had no idea from a distance that it was paper stuck on. She thought it was very clever. I felt that too when I saw it. But if you painted it, you would never get that unless you used an awful lot of light and shade and making it. You see, it is sort of flat. I don't like making it look as if it is sticking out from the rest. You could take those rocks and model them up but you wouldn't get that sort of solid, sort of elemental, sort of mineral feeling or look about them. So wherever you put any bit of collage you get a tiny bit of shadow, a tiny bit and tiny edges and things. But you have to be very careful and stick them down properly. But that gives you a tiny bit of another dimension. Some people, some painters put bits of wood and that on, but that to me is just a bit too much, you know? Hm. It tends to move the painting into a design. Yes. I've got lovely paintings of designs and lovely textures and that but this one had to have this rather strange atmosphere that paintings have. I think it is successful. Yes. I didn't think so at the time but it's all right. I really enjoyed it and when I saw it up, in the exhibition, I thought it really comes to life. I do too. Yes.

The Integrity Of The Picture Plane

You were talking about the three dimensional thing, betraying your training. Yes, well you are taught of course in your training and you do life drawing from figures and you are taught what you have to do and that is an incredibly good education. But to me as an artist it is not all that, it is a kind of interference. A painting is a flat board with colours on it. That's all it is. And all the time I think, one struggles to keep the integrity of what a painting is. Because you can, if you are very, very clever you can paint something which is so realistic you could take it off the board, there is a bird or a fly there. But that is not what a painting is about. It is about a move to another kind of state. You are not looking at an imitation of nature, you are not looking at a kind of false imitation of nature, you are looking at a somewhat intellectualised, but you are looking at an emotional response. To what you saw which was a nuance and full of detail, to a kind of very basic feeling you get when you have seen it and you remember it. And to make paint look like a third dimension is wrong. That's a sculpture.

And I don't even like a lot of very famous artists because of that except the old ones who are frankly doing a painting. It's really hard to explain.

I can sort of understand what you are saying. People like Giotto were honestly painting on a wall, wasn't he? That's right. That's right. It doesn't mean that you don't make distances or backgrounds or that kind of thing. It just means you don't model everything. You do it in a very subtle way, I suppose. You have to. For instance, in the *Rock Pools*, they are the main thing there. Those rocks. Then you have the pale sand, pale sea and the headland going out. And I realised that it wasn't good enough as a painting

because the rocks are the dominant thing there and there was this whole area of pale stuff and so I shoved in some more rocks going along the beach and that joined that to the rest. So it is a subtle, endless looking and designing. Hm. It is a long slow process. And that produces contemplative painting! (Laughs).

But you are also constructing aren't you? You are constructing a work of art so in a sense you are diverting from the scene in front of your eyes. That's right exactly! Because a work of art has got to have a good composition, the things we recognise in good painting. A relationship, some sort of relationship from top to bottom and the colour related so you get occasional harmony. I work in harmony, harmonic colours, not the other ones which clash. But you sometimes need a spot just to rest the eye or do something. That's a difficult thing. That's very difficult. The only thing I took a few liberties in the little ones, in that the sea has got a bit more pink in it, and also the rocks are more orange in one than they really were, and of course that complemented down, a sort of orange on a rock, could have been a beach towel or anything. And so you have got overall demands of a painting. That is what makes a work of art.

Mother And Children Near The Sea

Do you see any other ideas in there? Are there other ideas there that haven't been exploited? In the sea thing, do you mean? I mean in the concept of the mother and children on the beach near the sea?

Yes, well, I wanted to do some more like that because I think it is very interesting. I feel that I subordinate the painting. I nearly did one with a really big beautiful figure of a girl in front of the sea but that *simply* wasn't on for me. I felt it was alien to me. I don't like

big, beach scenes because that becomes genre painting and you are just looking at the people whereas I want to have this what I think is a very touching thing about humans beings absolutely mad about the sea, especially in Australia and most places, and having the confidence to play on the fringes of it.

It is a very fascinating subjectand so much enterprise and world activity started with the sea. Cook and people like that. Ah, yes. They must have been incredibly brave. They had little tiny boats. It's a kind of escape. It's a cross between an escape and an adventure. The sea. It's like getting away from being stuck here on the earth but at the same time the earth has its own attraction itself. That's right. And when you're at sea you wish you were back on land. Yes, well that is something else. Well, the sea is very difficult I think. Yes, it's ever changing and it has big areas of unbroken area, unbroken area, that's the difficulty and I don't want to have it peopled and dominated. I want to see this amazing element which we can do nothing about except pollute it! And another thing, the sea is the basis for our appearance on this earth, I reckon. Things come from the sea and in those rock pools we see the very small, very tiny minute creatures and shells and all those things. It is just fascinating. It's lovely for children to be fascinated by it. I've always been fascinated by it. It's a marvellous thing to start thinking about. Isn't it, yes, it is.