

2003

## **An exploration of the influence of the acculturation process on an artist's practice and the implications for education**

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**AN EXPLORATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE  
ACCULTURATION PROCESS ON AN ARTIST'S PRACTICE AND  
THE IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION**

**By**

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The written component of a Creative Project submitted in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements of the Award of Master of Education (Visual  
Arts Education)

Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences

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Western Australia

October 2003

## ABSTRACT

This Creative Arts Project investigates the relationship between expression in the visual arts and the process of acculturation. The focus of the study is my personal negotiation of this process.

The descriptive study is about engagement with the organic world and its past and present dialogues within the ongoing process of acculturation. I have explored the connection between nature, culture and art using a phenomenological research method.

The propositions that we do not see things as they are; we see things as we are (Talmud), and that as visual artists we are the 'architects of our own experience', (Eisner, 2001) are explored. The reflexive nature of visual arts activity is acknowledged and the impact of cultural influences and natural environment on the choice of subject matter is examined.

My investigation of a new physical environment is facilitated through the medium of a third cultural aesthetic that makes reference to the art and design of Japan.

The Project is divided into two parts. Part one is the thematic exhibition and part two is this exegesis that explains and supports the research. Documentation of the project also takes the form of visual diaries that record phenomena and explain design development through drawing and painting.

The main research question is directed towards evidence of the reflexive nature of the acculturation process as manifested in the work of the researcher. It is:

*How is the process of acculturation manifested in the visual artworks of the individual who has entered a new physical and cultural environment?*

Whilst acknowledging that the acculturation process is unique to the individual I believe that phenomenon experienced in this way has value in classroom practice. Therefore the secondary question is:

*What implication does this have for the visual arts curriculum?*

The significance of this Creative Arts Project for the visual arts curriculum is seen in the interaction of culture, personal experience and environment as integral parts of the creative process. Through my own process I have found that there are connections between past and present life-worlds that influence expression in the visual arts. Heritage and experience of the natural environment are linked to this process. Exploration of these phenomena within the classroom may lead to a clearer understanding of the nuances of a new physical environment.

This research has been influential in the development and production of curriculum material for a Western Australian educational institution. The materials are displayed as part of the thematic exhibition.

It is hoped that the publicising of this research may be seen as having value for the development of a multicultural visual arts curriculum.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thank you to Dr Tony Monk for his advice during the preparation of my thesis proposal and to Dr Judith Dinham for advice during the preparation of this document. Thank you also to Dr. Geoff Lummis for his review of my thesis proposal.

## DECLARATION

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

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## INTRODUCTION

Migration of people has occurred throughout time. The settling of people from differing ethnic origins in one place has resulted in the development of diverse societies. The essential nature of these societies is polyglot. Australia is one such nation of people, as is the UK and the US. These English speaking nations would appear to owe much of their ongoing creative development to the diversity of culture existing within them.

Customs, language and religion from all over the world meet in Australia. This makes for a very rich and diverse society. Climate and topography are unique. The pervasive Anglo-western cultural influence may be viewed as something of an anachronism within the Asia Pacific Region. However as more migrants from the region take their place in society, and indigenous voices start to be heard, social mores and values begin to change in ways that reflect this. This is not new, but part of an evolutionary process. What unfolds from this is a culture that is alive and developing, able to mutate and change.

The migrant to Australia experiences a process of acculturation. The context for this process is social, political, ecological and biological, tending to be informal and embedded in daily life. Within this milieu individuals require adaptive skills in order to meet the demands of the new and constantly changing situations in which they find themselves.

The migrant is responsible for obtaining the essential knowledge and skill for adaptation to the new situation. This may prove a daunting task due to differences in language and cultural traditions. Compounding these difficulties is a rapidly changing world situation. The development of sophisticated telecommunication and transport systems has resulted in a global communication network. The economies of the richest countries have united to form a powerful coalition that has alienated and

disenfranchised the poor. The cumulative effect of these developments is world wide cultural change.

The process of acculturation may be described as the transactional process that occurs between diverse cultures with a diffusion of ideas, behaviours and artefacts. It may be viewed as a process of borrowing between cultures resulting in new and blended patterns. The term implies contact with other cultures. The botanic term hybrid or hybridity is currently used to describe these new and blended patterns. The result may be appropriation and adaptation to new modes of thinking, behaviour and representation for those experiencing the process. The result of such a process may be viewed as a positive outcome that enlivens society and the arts as a consequence.

This descriptive study is about engagement with the organic world and its past and present dialogues within the ongoing process of acculturation. The connection between nature, culture and art is acknowledged and explored in the visual art of the researcher. A phenomenological research method is used. This method was seen as complementary to the multifaceted and expressive nature of not only art activity but also the process of acculturation. This type of phenomenological research may be likened to the acculturation process in that it makes reference to ecology, socio-politics and formal learning, as well as encompassing observation and imitation. The recording of creative ideas, visual research, cultural and historic references in this way acts as a metaphor for the dynamics of the acculturation process.

The Project is divided into two parts. Part one is the thematic exhibition and part two is this exegesis which explains and supports the research through narrative. The main research question is directed towards evidence of the reflexive nature of the acculturation process as manifested in the work of the researcher. Historically and currently Australian artists

reflect this process as characteristic of a nation of immigrants. They have recorded the rare and strange from colonial times to the present post-modern era. The practice of such artists has helped inform the process and context of the research.

Documentation of the project takes the form of visual diaries that explain design development and record phenomena through drawing and painting. Included also are magazine cuttings and journal articles. These are used to trace and analyse of the work of Australian and international artists past and present as relevant to the researcher's inquiry.

The researcher's experience of the past environment of England and the new environment of Australia is traced and recorded by engagement with the arts of a culture separate from either of these. The commonalities observed by the researcher with regard to the characteristics and content of English and Japanese art and design have prompted the researcher's engagement with the arts of Japan. This engagement has acted as a bridge between the divisions of past and present environments. The introduction of an additional culture has facilitated a visual perspective of the newly discovered Australian environment.

## **Part One - Visual Arts in a Multicultural Context**

### ***1.1 The character of the Creative Arts Project***

The distinctiveness of the Creative Project lies in the alignment of education and visual arts practice. Whilst the focus is on research into the visual art and design process of the researcher, links to multiculturalism and education are made. This exegesis explains an approach that has its basis in the hidden or informal curriculum where phenomena are experienced at first hand and observed as relevant to learning. The visual arts are recognised as providing a vehicle for this process. The recording of personal experience of acculturation in this way has provided material for a curriculum structure that enables students to become thus engaged. Examples of projects designed within this type of structure are described in part five of this exegesis.

### ***1.2 The parameters of the study***

The main parameter of the study is my own experience of the acculturation process as witnessed and expressed within the natural environment. For the purpose of the study, the acculturation process is seen as one of engagement and adaptation to a new physical environment.

Travelling from the Northern Hemisphere to the remote continent of Australia involves some major life-style changes regardless of the speed of 21<sup>st</sup> century communications. However this type of experience is not exclusive to the migrant from another country. The existence of indigenous peoples and two centuries of migration have resulted in the existence of a multicultural society, negotiation of which requires adaptive skills. In addition to this the vastness of the Australian continent and its resultant topographical and climatic contrasts contributes to its inhabitants experiencing many different lifestyles. Some provision for the exploration of this type of life-world takes place within the mainstream of the

educational curriculum. However the descriptive study specifies the personal aspects of exploration and adaptation to a new environment within the context of the visual arts.

For the purpose of the study I have traced and recorded my own creative journey within the natural environment through a culture other than my own. In order to do this I have made a connection with the Japanese design aesthetic. This is used both in order to engage with a different culture and as a vehicle for artistic expression. This is explained in 2.3. I have used flora as a focus because my cultural heritage and life-world are closely linked to their associated customs and traditions. This is explained in 2.2.

I have explored the connection between nature, culture and art in my visual diaries and acknowledged this in my painting. Connection is made to the dynamics of the acculturation process through paintings that describe my personal responses to Australian flora within the natural environment.

### ***1.3 Key Terms***

*Acculturation (1)* – The influences of changing cultural contexts on individuals. The term implies contact with other cultures and the diffusion of ideas, behaviours and artefacts across cultures.

*Acculturation (2)* – The process of borrowing between cultures, marked by the continuous transmission of elements and traits between different peoples and resulting in new and blended patterns.

<i>Culture –</i>	Many definitions are offered. The term is generally understood to mean learned and enduring behaviours, beliefs and attitudes characteristic to a particular society. These shared views may be seen as continuous, cumulative and progressive.
<i>Difference-</i>	Many definitions are offered encompassing the idea of domination and colonisation of societies in opposition to minorities and remote peoples, hence the self and the other.
<i>Globalisation –</i>	The developing process of the world viewed as a single community united by means of rapid and comprehensive information systems.
<i>Hybridity –</i>	Anything derived from heterogeneous sources, or composed of elements of different or incongruous kind e.g. as in a multicultural society.
<i>Life-world -</i>	The perceived experience of day to day living and its attendant influences.
<i>Multiculturalism –</i>	Describes the theory that it is beneficial to a society to maintain more than one culture within its structure. The dynamics formed by shared cultures. The term given to the diversity of peoples' ideas, values, beliefs and customs within a polyglot society..
<i>Phenomenon –</i>	Occurrences, circumstances observed or observable that impresses the observer as extraordinary.
<i>Pluralism –</i>	A theory or system within a multicultural context that recognises more than one ultimate substance or principle.
<i>Post-Modern –</i>	Describes the reaction to Modernism and is characterised by an emphasis on individual expression, progressing through a sequence of styles.



*Post-Modernism* - Any number of trends in literature which developed in the 1970s as a reaction to the idea of Modernism with its emphasis on individual expression, progressing through a sequence of styles, in particular a movement in architecture, painting and the decorative arts which used historical material as 'quotation' material in a playful or critical way that involves recognition of famous images and motifs of the past as an essential part of its meaning.(Macquarie Dictionary, second edition 1991).

*Visual Art* - painting and sculpture, printmaking and the like as distinct from other arts such as literature, dance and music.

*The Arts* - a term incorporating visual, applied and performing arts.

#### ***1.4 The multicultural context of acculturation***

In discussion of the acculturation process within the context of multicultural education the relationship between industrialisation, globalisation, urban development and economics is recognised. The politics of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and special ability are now mainstream issues in education and as such provide material for Post-Modern practice in the Arts.

The Arts as cultural production have to some extent always been linked to economic and social forces. The current view of what defines culture would appear to need to take into account the changing definitions of society. Multiple realities, views and understandings exist and it is within this milieu that current debate takes place.

For Eisner (2000) all experience of the environment is a process shaped by culture, influenced by language, impacted by beliefs, affected by values and moderated by the distinctive features or that part of ourselves we sometimes describe as our individuality. He believed that humans simultaneously give both a personal and cultural imprint to what they experience; and he sees the relationship between the two as inextricable. Eisner emphasised that the ability to experience the qualitative world we inhabit is initially reflexive in character, and that culture and personal experience interact.

In a recent paper delivered in Sydney in 2001, Eisner posited that the arts have a significant role to play in the transformation of consciousness:

The human mind is a kind of cultural invention. To be sure children come into the world well wired but how they develop, which aptitudes are cultivated and which are left to atrophy, what modes of thinking they become good at, are all impacted by the culture in which they reside. The forces within that culture are given operational significance through the formation of purposes. The aim of the inquiry or act and the type of material the child uses impose their own constraints and provide their own affordances ....Thus, defining the features of the culture to which the child will be exposed and the manner in which that culture will be addressed is the most powerful indicator of the kind of thinking and therefore the kind of mind a child is likely to realise during the course of childhood. (p.18)

Eisner, (2001) identified the need for the child to develop her/his own mind. He emphasised the point that education is a process of learning how to become the architect of one's own experience, and therefore learning how to create oneself. He stated his belief that the arts have a distinct contribution to make through their emphasis on the expression of

individuality and through the exercise and the development of the imaginative capacities. He added however, that imagination must be developed into representation if it is to make a social contribution to a culture.

Eisner believes that because humans have the distinct ability to create a culture through which their community can grow, they can leave a legacy for future generations. This legacy is passed on by means of inscribing, editing and communicating. These are the processes of cognition used in the act of representation. Forms of representation are the means through which the contents of consciousness are made public. He added that the arts go well beyond making visible the visible and believes that they also tell us something about how places and relationships feel. He said that seeing is an achievement, not merely a task.

Eisner (2001) posited that whilst we learn to discriminate, to recognise and recall, our sensory system does not work alone. For its development, it requires the tools of culture: language, the arts, science, values and the like. With the aid of culture we learn how to create ourselves. Eisner saw schools as enabling institutions for the development of community, a shared way of life and a medium for developing young minds. Experience is central this growth and education provides this experience.

In 1999 Duncum argued a case for a visual arts education of the everyday aesthetic. He believed that the visual environment that we experience is a rich resource for the construction of identity. He said that where fine art aesthetics stresses the cultivation of detachment and distance, everyday aesthetics emphasises involvement. He believed that there was a synergy between cultural life and everyday aesthetic experience, and that this informs a view of the world beyond personal experience. In support of this

he quoted Bruner, (1970) who argued that knowledge was assimilated through osmosis, and that powerful, isolated incidents were a poor indication of what constitutes learning as a whole.

Duncum's (2001) belief that culture is one of everyday experience led him to argue that visual culture may be viewed as provisional and contestable. He stated that television and the Internet are the dominant tools, and these technologies influence change in society. Duncum saw current visual culture as far more inclusive as anything with which art educators would want to be involved. He defined this by stating that art education is concerned with artefacts that are at first significantly visual and secondly constitutive of attitudes, beliefs and values. He believed that artefacts and the ways they are perceived are alike in being, socially, historically and politically context-bound. He explained that visual artefacts exist in relation to other semiotic codes, and identified the relationship between the study of images and sociology, as witnessed in the (industrial) design process. He posited that the role of the visual arts educator from a social reconstructivist position would not significantly change.

Desai's (2001) commentary also established a political connection. She identified the role of representation in shaping people's perceptions of other cultures. She examined the connections between power, dominance and representation. She identified the partiality of all forms of representation, and related this to the ways in which a culture is historically shaped. Her concern was with the question of how we know another culture, and in turn how this knowing is presented in the classroom. Desai saw the inclusion of a politics of location and positionality as necessary in order to address the existing imbalance of the "matrices of domination and subordination" as identified by Frankenberg and Mani (1996). She believed that representation is historically determined and mediated by social, ideological and cultural processes. She

further defined representation in the visual arts as shaping our understanding of reality and thereby setting the terms of our culture. Representation then, involves producing meaning.

Referring to the specific role of imagery, Desai stated that it determines not only how other people think about us, but also how we see ourselves. Continuing this theme she commented on the role of mediated representation, that is demonstrated in formative and expressive interpretation. Desai posited that all multicultural representations are positioned in relation to unequal power dynamics. To illustrate this point she referred to Chandra Mohanty's (1989-90) description of the "race industry" which uses representation to "produce, codify, and even rewrite the histories of race and colonisation in the name of difference". (p184.) Desai's views on the distinctions of low and high art in Western terms are worth reporting within the context of this overview as they help expand the parameters of discussion on the definitions of multicultural art education. She stated (2001, p. 120.) that Multicultural Art Education, by acknowledging and respecting aesthetic pluralism, actively criticises and dismantles the dominant distinctions of high art (including crafts) and popular culture. Art educators such as Duncum 1990; Hamblen, 1990 are among many cultural critics including Bourdieu, 1984; Williams, 1958 Wolff, 1981 who have demonstrated the ways culture is categorised into a hierarchy based on social classes, gender, and race. Notions of authenticity and cultural excellence inform this categorisation, placing high art or fine art above popular culture. In a multicultural society, people deal in complex ways with popular culture for their own ends and this is reflected in the aesthetic pluralist position within multiculturalism.

In conclusion Desai affirmed that it is only by continually emphasising the relationship between power and representation in multiculturalism that

art educators can begin to reduce what she called the epistemic violence of the 'other'.

### ***1.5 Conclusion***

The significance of these discourses in relation to this Creative Project is in the identification of a focus for visual art activity that recognises the context of pluralism within Australian classrooms.

This Creative Project focuses on an exploration of phenomena within the natural world. Within these parameters students from all backgrounds are afforded the opportunity to relate and describe their experiences in a way that has personal significance for them. Visual art may be observed in this context as an immediate and valid form of expression and communication. These factors may be recognised as important to the negotiation of the acculturation process.

## **Part Two - Cultural influences**

### ***2.1 A personal context - overview***

The cultural influences on my own work are many and various as befits someone born into a country such as England that has a chequered history of invasion and conquest and is steeped in the ensuing traditions. Images from the Lindisfarne Gospels, the Bayeux Tapestry, Medieval brass figures, early ecclesiastical embroideries and botanical watercolours are all part of my make up.

The early days as a student on the south coast of England and later in London were formative firstly in consolidating my love of the countryside and secondly in revealing the world of art and design to me. The study of textiles at the Victoria and Albert Museum within the context of mid 60s London was a powerful influence.

Training and practice in textiles, drawing and printmaking flowed on to the early teaching years in the UK and Canada. The British Arts and Crafts Movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the design theories of the Bauhaus in Europe have been, and still are, important influences on my creative expression and teaching in the visual arts.

In Leicestershire during the 70s and 80s I was involved in, and worked with, Design (and Technology) as a core learning area. The arts are integrated in this way in the UK and in 1979 I gained part 1 of a 3 part Master of Education degree in Design Education. At this time I continued to produce and exhibit my own work in the form of textiles.

My arrival in Australia was witnessed by new apprehensions of landscape and people. My initial responses were manifested in textiles and this flowed on to the work of my students. The break from textiles to painting came in during the 1990s when early endeavours at a response to native Australian flora led to the Frangibility exhibition (1998). In 2000 I completed three units of study in Art Therapy at post-graduate level. This study revealed to me the importance of the cathartic aspects of work in the visual arts and has been influential in my work for this Creative Arts Project.

## ***2.2 Environmental and cultural influences***

My painting is to some degree representational, stylised and graphically explicit. This is a manifestation of cultural influences found in my English origins.

My current work is concerned with the meeting of difference. It celebrates my wonder at the richness of my chosen Australian environment and the continuing joy in its apprehension. It seeks to make connection with the multifaceted reality witnessed in the coexistence of native and introduced flora. This coexistence provides a metaphor for the negotiation and development of acculturation. Each of these elements is transient in nature, mutating and changing through physical interaction with the environment. I aim to emulate this in my painting by synthesising diverse ranges of colour, motif and pattern.

The essence of my work is to be found in an ongoing exploration of the colour and spiralling rhythm of the Australian bush with its heavily patterned foliage. The pattern of trees against the changing colour of the sky is significant to me and I celebrate these unique qualities in my painting. I also acknowledge the presence of water as being vital to all



living things. The process of producing these paintings gives me direction for both my artistic and acculturative journeys.

### ***2.3 The introduction of a third cultural element***

Within my own cultural heritage there is an ability to take on existing ideas and synthesise these into new and original forms. This ability is also manifested in the sophisticated creativity of the Japanese who equate art with beauty in nature and express this in the production of both visual art and everyday artefacts. Their design motifs are an intrinsic part of their culture, having a history that connects to China, the South Pacific and more recently to the West.

I see connections between expression in both Japanese and English design that is relevant to the expression of Australian flora within the symbolic context of the acculturation process. I have identified the Japanese design aesthetic as providing a connection between the metamorphosis of Australian flora in terms of their coexistence and transience and that of the acculturation process. By engaging with a third culture I have reached out into an area beyond the physicality of the Australian environment.

In Japanese art colour is used expressively and symbolically. Its meanings may be exploited along with the elements of geometry, (pattern, symmetry, counterchange, scale and grid) in order to add symbolic meaning to expression in the visual arts. These elements convey notions of constancy, boundlessness and timelessness, as they too are able to mutate and change. I have integrated aspects of motif, pattern and colour that are contained within Japanese design in my paintings in order to express some of these notions.

## ***2.4 Conclusion***

Influences on my life-world have been recorded in my visual diary research. References to contemporary and past artists and designers, quotations, design development and commentary are all influenced by my personal life-world as currently perceived. These encounters are valuable personally to me as an artist and professionally as a teacher. This type of experience provides a rich source of material for expression in the visual arts within an educational context.

## **Part Three - Work Process**

### ***3.1 Phenomenological research***

The life-world experience of the acculturation process is fluid in character as it changes and mutates. In order to investigate this, phenomenological research appeared appropriate. Similarly, the multifaceted nature of visual arts activities complements this approach. Phenomenological research in the visual arts makes allowance for reference to life-worlds and facilitates perception of various aspects of people, places and things. References made in this way to history, ecology, heritage and formal learning facilitate the fusing of past and present experience into new and integrated forms. Through an unravelling of events involving people, places and things and reconnecting within an open-ended framework, new form is created and meaning revealed. This process may be described through direct experimentation with materials and techniques that are already familiar to the researcher or may facilitate a new approach. The use of visual diaries appeared to be the most appropriate way to collect and record these types of ideas and processes.

### ***3.2 The role of the Visual Diary***

My creative process is recorded as drawing and painting and is complemented by references to my past and present life-world. Delving into collections of magazine cuttings and scrapbooks that have been developed over many years, I have been able to unearth a wide variety of phenomena seen as significant at the time of collection. When reviewed within the parameters of this project many of these references became pivotal in developing creative ideas in drawing and painting.

I produced six diaries altogether starting with the unit 'Landscape and You'. The production of this first diary described my personal journey into

the Western Australian landscape. At the start of the diary I state that my European and specifically English heritage inform each discovery made. My perceptions are strongly visual and reflection is made through childhood, maturity and the present time. At the conclusion of the diary three months later the written reflection serves to remind me of my immigrant status.

The statement at the start of the second diary acknowledges the realisation that there are many disparate elements to pull together and the Japanese proverb that has a special meaning for me is quoted. It states that the instruction is the way and the method and that the vision is the work of one who has wished to see. The content of the diary connects my current perceptions of Australian culture as expressed in the visual arts and reflection on my past and current practice. Included also are examples of textile designs and paintings, along with sketchbook recording from student and early teaching days. These are inter-woven with historical and geographical references to connections seen in English, Australian and Japanese design. The development of the Flame Tree, Jacaranda and Grevillea paintings is also recorded within the context of this diary.

Diary Three opens with the quote from the Talmud that states that “we do not see things as they are. We see things as we are”. The research traces the traditions and symbolisms of flower painting in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. References are made to European, Australian and American paintings of flora in conjunction with my own design developments for the Kunzea Revisited, the Cassia and Smithy, the Lechenaultia series, the Tree Lily series and the resolution of the Flame on the River series of paintings.

Diary Four opens with brief quotes from Leonardo da Vinci and Auguste Rodin expounding their theories with regard to nature and its representation. The diary research further explores the history and traditions of flora and its representation in art and design. This leads into commentary on textile design and wearable art. The Fire-bush Banksia is explored through textiles and print and significant connections are made with traditional Japanese design.

Diary Five opens with quotations also. The first is from Vernon Blake who states that art exists because the idea special to it cannot be transmitted otherwise. The second quote is from Mario Fusinato who comments that art results from pre-meditated creation as well as the process through which it becomes a final reality. He adds that the final product is always unpredictable, even though the idea behind it is a definitive one.

The work of Georgia O'Keeffe and Margaret Olley is explored and connection is made with early 20<sup>th</sup> century and traditional Japanese design. My own design process is worked through these interrelationships as I explore the native Lilac Hibiscus. The Cassia is revisited in this diary following the same process.

Diary Six consists of cuttings and references to Post-Modern practice in the Arts. The emphasis of this diary is on current Australian art practice within a multicultural society.

The compilation of these diaries resulted in the production of a wealth of reference material, some of which had immediate relevance for the Creative Project. A collection of this kind acts as an on ongoing resource that may be developed and exploited at any time. Material and references from previous diaries, some of which were produced many years ago, have been searched out and seen as relevant to this study. The implications of

this for education would appear to be in the fluidity the creative process and its ability to explain and describe events within a changing life-world.

### ***3.3 Materials and techniques***

I chose to paint in gouache as the primary medium as this provides a link to my past creative experience in drawing and textile design. The use of soft coloured pencils to render the gouache creates nuances of colour that give life to the work. A link to childhood is made at the same time. This serves as an anchor in the sea of acculturative change.

Working on a large scale allows me the freedom to express detail in the form of motif and pattern not readily visible to the naked eye. In this way possibilities for design exploration within the work are facilitated.

I refer to print-making methods and textile design when developing a painting as my past experience of these is relevant to the current research. The scope of the study however does not allow for their inclusion.

### ***3.4 Commentaries on paintings***

My cultural heritage and life-world is closely linked to traditions and customs surrounding flora and this provides a focus for my artistic expression. In these paintings I have explored aspects of Australian flora as a response to my new environment. For an immigrant from the Northern Hemisphere the first views of landscape carry little meaning. It is set apart from the self and elicits none of the emotion that is attached to the apprehensions of one's country of origin. Colour is bleached out in the bright light and details such as flora are easily overlooked.

As the eye gradually becomes attuned to the increasingly familiar surroundings detail begins to emerge. As this process evolved for me I

began to photograph small flowers such as the Geraldton Wax in order to record its colour and detail. Among my earliest paintings of Australian flora are interpretations of the nuances of this flower. I expressed the hardy little bloom on a large scale emphasising its colour, pattern and motif.

Most of my subsequent paintings have expressed Australian flora in this way in order to celebrate my apprehension of their unique qualities as survivors in a harsh environment. This would appear to be symbolic of my negotiation of the acculturation process and an attempt to make a statement about my presence in the landscape. In researching, recording and interpreting this aspect of my new environment I have been able to contribute something of myself.

- Flame Trees on the River

These are a series of three paintings that explore the Western Australian winter. The duration of the season is short lasting only four months. In contrast, winter in the Northern Hemisphere is eight months. Climate as witnessed in the changing seasons impacts on the environment and psyche of the migrant. On arrival in Australia there appears to be only one season and that is summer. The heat bleaches the bush out and flora is camouflaged. By contrast, in winter the flame trees that line the river appear well adapted even though incongruous. My response demonstrates an affinity with these living forms that have been transplanted from their native land.

In each painting I have formalised the exploding pattern of the Flame Tree, sharply focused against the winter sky and as counterpoint used its





emerging green leaves, symbolising spring. The hardy peeling paper bark and the moving river suggest the movement of time and space. The flame is symbolic of life with its burning energy and new shoots of youthful leaves. The background is the cold winter sky, painted in the same cerulean blue that was used in the heraldic symbols of medieval times.

In the earliest painting I had great difficulty in expressing the winter flow of the river. On researching how other artists had represented water I decided that the inclusion of Japanese motifs would not only complement my stylised forms, but also serve to express an engagement with a culture other than my own. I interpreted a Japanese water pattern in the second painting by adapting its colour, form and context. The original pink cherry blossoms on foaming waters became minute red flame petals.

The final painting served to resolve most of these issues and was completed after a year or so had elapsed. This allowed time for reflection and osmosis of ideas. The new painting was smaller depicting only one group of three vermilion flames as the central motif. These were embedded within an adaptation of the Japanese summer grasses pattern that in turn was embedded with the colours of the winter sky, the river and the emerging leaves.

- Grevilleas

To the migrant the many forms of the *Grevillea* are baffling. Their ubiquitousness and complexity present as rare and strange. The colour range is analogous reds, pinks, oranges, gold and yellows. They shoot determinedly from spiky grey green foliage and endure through all seasons. My early attempts to express these forms were limited to direct



representation of the pattern and colour in red, orange and pink. I likened the rhythms of the flower to the symbolic treble clef, unable at this time to understand the form in its environment. After a period of time I returned to the Grevillea and observed the relationship of the flower and foliage. The counterchanges of light, dark, small, large, negative and positive forms within the entire bush as the light filtered through the branches echoed that of the traditional Japanese reed pattern. This revelation was the catalyst for embarking on a major exploration of the Grevillea. I used monochromatic and analogous harmonies of magenta and red to depict the life of the flower entwined and contrasted against the gold, grey greens and soft turquoise of the foliage.

- Native Hibiscus on Japanese Pattern - painting 1

Coming upon the native Lilac Hibiscus flowering by the roadside in spring was an arresting experience. The tall plant manifests as a large, delicate, tough survivor, a metaphor for so much within the Australian landscape. Its lilac petals form spirals travelling away from the sturdy central stamens which have the colour and powdery texture of a well cooked egg yolk. The colours are complementary. The purple is diluted and delicate, the yellow pure and strong.

My first painting was a very immediate response to the spiralling rhythms of the bloom. I represented these blooms large, overlapping the frame of the painting. In order to further emphasise this scale I set the stylised blooms against an enclosed area of Japanese pattern rendered in the bronze, gold and deep greens echoing the Australian bush in spring. The pattern contains small repeating motifs of cherry blossom, which act as counterpoint to the large Australian blooms as well as a symbol of the northern spring.





- Revisiting the Lilac Hibiscus – painting 2

Returning to the lilac hibiscus was not easy. Although its form, pattern and swirling movement are unique and intriguing in themselves, I wanted to relate and in some way integrate them into the patterns of Japanese dyer's stencils and European designs (1898-1905) which tend to be indistinguishable from one another. (By making connections and juxtaposing forms hybrids are created. The original botanical term is now used vicariously to describe cultural meeting and mixing). My aim was to integrate forms whilst keeping the essence of each character. The form may overlay the background, be overwhelmed or lost within it.

By introducing a traditional Japanese pattern the context changed. The introduction of black was absolute, representing a step into unknown experience. Georgia O'Keeffe's 'Black Hollyhock, Blue Larkspur' related and prompted further experimentation. I used the Japanese dyers stencil technique was used to cut away and overlay motifs.

The introduction of the Japanese Seigaiha wave motif echoed the movement of the hibiscus petals. I changed the colour to a combination of strong reds, gold with the black as a constant and created pattern by symmetrical and asymmetrical repetition. The waves and hibiscus took on a dynamic relationship. Pursuing the wave, I introduced the linear 'fall' in order to represent water, adding this element which represents the life force.

In the final painting indigo replaces black. The representation of the environment is manifested as pattern. The negative spaces between the





stylised reed leaves are represented in blues and greens of varying scale in order to suggest the open Australian sky and large tropical leaves. The stylised hibiscus is represented in its natural lilac and the complementary, yellow. The constant form of the Hibiscus varies in scale and each contains subtle nuances of colour that intermingle throughout the field.

- Tree Lily Series

Lilies, like Irises appear to be survivors and as such are frequently used as symbolic forms. The immigrant is the ultimate survivor, changing form and context to meet the circumstances in which it finds itself. The Tree Lily series is a personal response to the urban environment where hybridisation reigns supreme! Each painting is a response to a hybrid 'Lily Tree' seen flowering in tones of magenta on a suburban lawn. I used the colours of the Australian landscape in three different combinations juxtaposed with the traditional Japanese pattern in order to express a return to reality. Ultramarine, red and yellow ochre, viridian and gold are used as I recognise these as the quintessential colours of the wide Australian landscape. The character of the Japanese pattern echoes the pattern of tree branches and its rendition in gold acts as a metaphor for the growth, drought, wet, dry seasons.

- Cassia and Smithy on Japanese Pattern
- Cassia and Smithy Revisited

The apprehension of the urban Cassia produces an immediate response to its vibrant yellow colour and distinctive shapes. The 'fall' of the blossom is echoed in the traditional Japanese 'Bush-Clover' pattern. The flowers of the Smithy grow in sequenced repetition. In the late evening sun their







petals glow in tones of orange. Their dark green leaves are serrated and arranged symmetrically in contrast to the paler green Cassia leaves that echo the shape of its blossom. The stamens spill out of the Cassia in an untidy fashion, whilst those of the Smithy are straight and directional.

The first painting of the Cassia and Smithy records their vibrant colour and distinctive shapes by juxtaposing them on a ground of traditional Japanese Bush-Clover pattern in complementary purples. This colour relates to O'Keefe's use of strong yellow for her painting 'Yellow Hickory Leaves with Daisy' (1928). Her large yellow leaves have been juxtaposed with white daisy that is rendered on a smaller scale in an almost childlike simplicity. Daisies survive like the tiny bush clover in miniature abundance.

Later connection with the Cassia and Smithy lead me to experiment with more characteristically Japanese (kimono) colours, as well as black, metallic silver and gold. I revisited the reed leaf motif as it appeared to offer an opportunity to create more movement within the design. In the resulting painting the Cassia is depicted in vermilion integrating into a complementary green reed pattern. The metallic colours are used throughout the piece. I found a connection O'Keefe's 'Red Canna' (1919). Her painting is a very immediate response to the sculptural form of the flower and its rendition appears to owe much to the influence of Japanese brush work. Her design is simple, but by no means minimal. My design is intricate and complex by contrast.



- Fire-bush Banksia

The dyer's stencils of the Japanese Meiji period, (1868-1920) are masterpieces in black and white counterchange pattern. Moser's illustration for 'Ver Sacrum' (Vienna 1898-1903) is simple by comparison, but effectively in keeping with the purpose of graphic design at the time. At this time also Klimt integrated geometric and natural forms and highlighted his compositions with gold leaf. He borrowed from Japanese design and the geometrics of Modernism. The study of the 'Firebush Banksia' acknowledges these influences. The symmetry of the immature bloom is startling in its geometry, whilst the mature bloom blazes in a regular pattern of red. The first studies of this rare and strange plant incorporate black with representative colour. Connections between the immature seedpod of the Banksia and the Japanese Hemp Leaf and Spotted Fawn patterns are made. The counterchange pattern of the Sea Moss motif from the Japanese Edo period is classical. It flows and moves in connecting spirals as does the Banksia pod that has ejected its seeds. Using the cut away stencil technique the hemp leaf pattern and Fire-bush pods are juxtaposed. Scale, context and colour are changed. Black 'absolute' is used, symbolising as it does the burnt Fire-bush whose seeds regenerate after fire. Greens, oranges, blues all symbolise the resultant vegetation, the earth and the sky. Gold and bronze symbolise the wealth and uniqueness of the process. The regularity of the Japanese pattern is transformed by the application of colours from the Australian bush.

### ***3.5 Commentaries from Visual Diaries 4 and 5***

- Examples of the historic use of flora as symbol

Flowers have been an enduring theme in painting since earliest times and as such have often been viewed as symbolic. They are depicted in medieval manuscripts and Renaissance painting. Popular and readily understood, Monet's Waterlilies endure, symbolising the pleasure and joy of light and the garden. Georgia O'Keefe's sensuous works from the early 1900s serve to herald the advent of the Feminist movement. One of the most poignant symbolic works is that of Lurcat's "La fin de tout" (1959). The fallen, dying flower placed at the bottom right of the tapestry symbolises the horror of the nuclear holocaust, as witnessed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II. Seen in the Chapel of St John in Angers, it forms a startling contrast to the lush pastoral and hunting scenes of the medieval works in the Castle of Angers (Northern France).

Until 1500 the depiction of flowers in Western art was as a decorative device on manuscripts. However as interest in botanical recording grew, still life painting of flora grew. As the public became more aware of flowers as collectables, (along with gems, shells etc.), so the demand for such paintings grew. Often the paintings sold for less than the original specimens! Bosschaert (circa 1600) assembled bouquets from individual studies of flowers, hence the idyllic stylisation of the time.

Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) declared that the artist is a confidant of nature and that flowers carry on dialogues with him (her). He added that through the graceful bending of their stems and the harmoniously tinted nuances

of their blossoms, every flower has a cordial word that directs nature to him (her). Rodin elucidated here the subtle symbolism of flowers and envisages their design potential in his phrase 'tinted nuances'.

For Europeans living in a cold climate the advent of spring and summer is poignant. The act of bringing flowers indoors is part of the way of life. Brueghel and the early Dutch flower painters, the Impressionists from Manet through to Dufy, Van Gogh, Matisse and Klee all did this. The timelessness of flowers, their representation and symbolism is contained within Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers' (1888). Yellow sunflowers, symbolic of hope, life and the elusive northern sun were used in the mass production of ceramic tiles by the Gladstone Pottery in 1857. Monet's, 'Waterlilies' paintings produced at the same time were echoed in the restrained designs of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Japonisme was a strong influence at this time. The discovery of Japanese textiles sumptuously embellished with sophisticated representations of peonies, cherry blossom, wisteria, chrysanthemums and camelias had a lasting influence on European visual art and design. Japanese kimono prints symbolised the seasons through flowers and plants: pink cherry blossom for spring; summer grasses, autumn chrysanthemums in yellow and white; and winter camelias in deep reds.

The scale and simplicity of Georgia O'Keefe's early 20<sup>th</sup> century paintings speaks volumes for her reverence and awe of nature. Her work communicates both transient and enduring aspects of nature and art. She produced many flower paintings between 1918 and 1932. Her work is expressive and forms an interesting comparison and juxtaposition with that of Klee. His 'Cosmic Flora' (1923) owed much to scientific discoveries



of that time (microscopics) according to Robert Hughes, (Shock of the New, p306). He says that in such paintings Klee tried to give back to art a symbol that must have been lost forever in the nightmarish violence of WW1 and the social unrest that followed.

The British textile designer-craftspeople of the 1970s and 80s pioneered textiles as an art form. Richard Box's 'Cornflowers and Marigolds' embroidery constructed from collaged fabrics and machine embroidery in the 1980s exemplified this.

In Australia during the 1980's and early 90s Lin Onus happily mixed Western stylised representations of waterlilies with traditional Aboriginal representation of pattern. His painting 'Fish and Lilies' (1987), may also to have made reference to the prints of M.C.Escher who in turn was influenced by Japanese representations of the pattern of the natural world.

- Examples of political symbols in a multicultural context

Lurcat's tapestry 'Le Chant du Monde' 1959 expresses his outrage and anger at the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The tapestry is housed in the ancient hospital of St. John in Angers, the medieval centre of tapestry weaving in France. The use of such a traditional art form to express his (political) outrage says much for the integrity of the artist and his subsequent truth to materials.

American Neil Jenny comments on the compromised, polluted world of 1975 using plant forms as symbols for the long gone pristine wilderness. This commentary continues today and in 1995 Asian artist Choi Jeong-

Hwa comments with his inflatable installation 'Super Flower-Plastic Spring'. Indian artist Mrinalini Mukherjee used traditional hemp (string) in 1993 to construct a sculpture entitled 'Pushp' (The Flower). This sculpture was formed from knotted string and relates well to Lurcat's truth to materials and the inherent symbolisms contained within.

Australian Pat HOFFIE's work is also political. She has a perspective gained from her Scottish ancestry. She is concerned with what she calls "the politics of caring, of colonisation and the status of women" (New Visions New Perspectives p 121). In her 1991 painting, 'Requiem' she uses the symbolic imagery of lilies and flames in order to refer to the decimation of indigenous peoples. Her work also depicts the rose as an exotic species thriving within the Australian bush. This is a comment on the imposition of one culture over another.

- Examples of Post-Modern responses to heritage and environment

In 1997 Hossein Valamanesh's 'Longing Belonging' made a strong symbolic statement about the meeting of difference in a new country. He juxtaposed the highly crafted traditional Iranian rug that is from another place, time and culture with the Australian bush, (itself timeless and an alien place for Valamanesh). He set fire to the rug with sticks from the bush. The surrounding light appeared to indicate sunrise/sunset echoing the moment in time captured by the flame. The burnt hole in the carpet may be symbolic of the removal of his former psyche/cultural roots. At the same time the rug may indicate the rite of passage of the immigrant/migrant.

Similarities may be observed in the indigenous art movements of recent years. Indigenous people are also working to untangle the confusion of their heritage, using metaphor and symbol from both past and present

urban experience. Lin Onus exploited these connections in many different forms, incorporating irony and humour in his landscapes. He combined Western style representation with traditional Aboriginal symbolic forms.

Gordon Bennett has explored his mixed parentage by re-contextualising found images, some political, others personal. His painting, 'The Outsider' (1988) illustrates his feelings of alienation. Julie Dowling's work is both personal and political as she explores her heritage, reflecting on the meeting of cultures. The portrait of her grandmother 'Melbin' (1999) is poignant in its depiction of the Aboriginal woman in late 19<sup>th</sup> century European dress and bonnet.

Contemporary practising artists Gordon Bennett and Anneke Silver refer to the conventions of cubism and expressionism in their explorations of identity. The colour and pattern of Silver's 'Memories of the Aegean' (1990-3) may be readily identified with Braque's Synthetic Cubism. The imagery and technique used in Bennett's 'Outsider' makes deliberate reference to Van Gogh. The messages in both paintings go deeper, conveying notions about the mixing and marriage of cultures, through rites of passage and tradition. In her painting 'You Don't Even look Aboriginal' (1991), Bronwyn Bancroft uses metaphor to express her ideas about stereotyping, physical characteristics and behaviour. She uses her passport photograph along with others belonging to her family to represent aspects of her life. She comments that she uses red and green to represent black and white, as it doesn't matter what colour a person is.

### ***3.6 Conclusion***

These commentaries serve to illustrate the diverse ways that artists use flora as symbol historically within a multicultural society. Their artistic language expresses multiculturalism as a moving, living process where synthesis and accommodation takes place. There is no attempt at



assimilation as understood in previous generations; rather there is a celebration of difference and a communication of shared and separate experience. Casmir's (1993) discussion regarding the building of cultures within cultures would appear to describe a Post-Modern approach to acculturation within a multicultural context.

## **Part Four - Curriculum Theories in Multicultural Art Education**

### ***4.1 Post Modern theories***

The theories of Post-Modernism have challenged representations and apprehensions of the world. The emphasis on difference, plurality and independence appears to be generally understood, and still owes much to the philosopher Herbert Read and the developmental psychologists Jean Piaget and Victor Lowenfeld. Each emphasised the importance of the individual as practitioner. Their writing was influenced by the development of psychology, and was set against a backdrop of world war. Theorists such as Bowden and Miles are today contending with the ideology of economic rationalisation that is bound up with globalisation. The recognition by visual art educators of a multicultural world has inevitably led to a call for change.

### ***4.2 Future directions***

Freedman (2000) identified art as democratic in terms of social knowledge. Her concern was with the interactions of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, special ability and culture, within natural and virtual environments. She viewed visual arts education as the meeting place for these perspectives. She saw interaction between these factors as the key to change within society.

Freedman examined the meaning of old truths and artistic freedom, and saw culture across traditional and social boundaries as freedom in a democracy. She looked at meaning and its forms, and discussed it in terms of the how and why of painting. Freedman agreed with Berger and Luckman (1967) that the context of art contributes to its meaning. She believed this fact is often overlooked, and images and objects are seen without the context of their original intent. Freeman identified the

curriculum as one of these contexts. She looked at the contexts of people, production and belief and regarded critical reflection of issues of social justice and reconstruction and their relationship to aesthetics as vehicles for interchange and self-discovery. She posited that art education is increasingly important in societies built on expressive freedom and identified a need to address the educational implications of a visual aesthetic that is both sophisticated and popular. Freeman sees this as the future direction for art education.

Freedman believes that art exists in a four-dimensional space where cultures collide and intermingle and time works back on itself. She added that in the last three decades social perspectives have broadened beyond the reconstruction of the past and that socio-cultural issues have made teaching art worthwhile. She commented that even when the future of the visual arts involves recycling the past, this presented new challenges to new audiences. In conclusion Freedman (2000) stated:

If we are astute, we will spend less time arguing about the structural character of curriculum and more time on its meaning; we will focus less on national and state bordered guidelines and more on local and global communities; we will be less concerned with the technical qualities of art and more concerned with its reasons for being; above all, we will focus less on teaching students what we were taught and more on what they need to know. (p 319)

### ***4.3 Visual Art studies***

Visual Art studies are concerned with the appreciation and adaptation of the world around us. From these studies students learn to identify and solve problems by understanding more about functional, economic, social and ethical considerations. They learn to research in a purposeful way, negotiate their learning, integrate ideas from a wide range of sources and

make value judgments. The design process involves open-ended phenomenological research that enables the individual to communicate ideas that have impact on their social and cultural learning.

As a society that is dependent on technology, we are becoming more aware of the impact of its influence on the environment in which we live. An understanding of the nature and significance of the visual arts and its relationship to the physical environment affords the individual an understanding of the implications of socio-cultural and physical change that takes place within it. Projects that are open-ended allow for this type of discovery allowing new meanings to take place within a changing environment.

In a multicultural society people interact with phenomena informally and in diverse ways. This interaction is personal and this allows for transformations of ideas to take place. The design process allows for engagement with phenomena and provides experiences that are simple, accessible and relevant to the individual. This type of research encourages conscious creativity through problem solving, promotion and production of alternative forms of representation that link past, present and future. Further analysis in the form of reflection challenges students' understanding of the character and nature of the arts in general and the visual arts in particular.

Exploration within the natural environment allows for a connection away from the pervading materialism of contemporary life. The synthesis of information discovered in this way may facilitate a spiritual and emotional response, in contrast to the type of cognition associated with technological interaction. The communication of personal meaning and the ability to articulate the current life-world that results from this type of activity may

be viewed as a validating experience that nourishes the self and sets a pattern for lifelong learning.

#### ***4.4 The past, present and future***

Baynes (1999) believed the Arts at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to be dynamic, stemming from their interaction with technology and social change. He suggested that the arts curriculum should provide a creative forum for realistic problem solving in relation to the future. This, he argued would provide young people with a valuable tool for social and cultural learning. Baynes discussed the transmission and preservation of cultural values, reasoning that the past is part of our present identity. He called for an active engagement with this process that emphasised links with past, present and future. He identified this in the context of a multicultural society where individuals explored their past through the medium of the Arts. Baynes posited that the Arts bring people together by helping them to understand the value of difference.

#### ***4.5 Difference, representation and identity***

Atkinson (1999) discussed the fluid meaning of “difference” (Derrida), in connection with re-conceptualising the art curriculum. He discussed the production of particular forms of language or discourse that lead to an understanding of others. He criticised current modalities, saying that the measurement and categorisation of ability leads to “power knowledge formations” as described by Usher and Edwards. Atkinson (1999) referred to Lacan’s theory of symbolic networks in relation to visual codes of representation, customs and rituals. He argued that the identity of the learner is constructed through these key signifiers, and that there is a discourse and practice that possesses a chain and structure of meaning. Pertaining to these beliefs, Atkinson (1999) saw current assessment structures as inadequate. He believed these to be banal based on the

assumption that vision is taken to be a universal ontological process, and representation is understood in terms of mimesis.

Atkinson (1999) posited that human beings should be understood as constructions of discourse and practice and as such are capable of manipulating these factors. He discussed current challenges within the art curriculum, identifying the social complexity of a multicultural society, and within it issues of racism and gender. He stated that the concept of multiculturalism has moved towards the notion of "difference", which is multi-layered. He believed that the idea of cultural hybridity suggested states of flux, fluidity and coalescence. In this context he called for an end to the hegemony of the traditional curriculum. Atkinson consolidated his argument for change by referring to the influence of Read's construction of the child as practitioner that owed much to the popular discourses of the time. Atkinson asserted that the discourse now is one of difference, representation and identity. These he believed provide a platform for change.

Atkinson quoted Derrida's definition that difference is never total, suggesting that it is possible to apply a logic of difference to art practice and therefore to the assessment of a pupil's artwork. He identified difference in practice and representation, identifying these as conceptual tools for exploring practice in relation to culture and tradition. Atkinson called for practitioners to question the aesthetic discourses in which they understand art practice and representation. He argued for a framework that provides a more inclusive space for practice that is driven by respect for difference, rather than by an assessment structure grounded in a limited conception of practice.

#### ***4.6 Functional and cultural literacy***

Bell referred to the relevance of the Arts in society and economy in his discussion of functional and cultural literacy. He identified functional literacy as the acquisition of basic skills and recognised the importance of these. However he did not believe that the acquisition of these skills alone constituted an educated person. Bell stated that visual, aural and tactile skills seek to achieve a balance between intellectual and emotional abilities. He identified these competencies as liberating, affording individuals the opportunity of transforming their modes of thinking, acting, and expression.

Bell considered the implications of a relevant Arts curriculum for future employment, prosperity and world peace. In doing so he argued the case for an interdependent, teachable and accessible art curriculum, in the context of contemporary society. Bell (2000) posed some radical questions such as, "Can claims to the personal, social and economic benefits of the arts be sustained?" and "What minimum entitlements should there be for pupils, parents and teachers to improve access to the arts?" Further, Bell made a plea for Arts curricula that ensures functional literacy is overcome by a cultural literacy.

#### ***4.7 Traditional methods and the culture of the teacher***

Bowden (1999), was also concerned with the practice of art teaching, and stated that significant advances have been made over the past two decades. He recognised this at both primary and secondary level. He recognised the use of traditional methods and materials to challenge observational and expressive skills, and to develop an understanding of artistic language. He saw this as leading to a fostering of critical abilities and knowledge of cultural heritage.

Bowden believed that the particular culture of the teacher is a predominant factor influencing process and product. He identified the existence of many individual cultural nuances such as different viewpoints that are socio-political in nature and form. In conclusion Bowden called for an in-depth rather than broad approach to the curriculum, and suggested that open-ended problem solving activities should celebrate students' own cultures and interests.

#### ***4.8 Conclusion***

The previous commentators see current frameworks as no longer adequate. They appear to advocate cooperative interaction between dominant and minority cultures as an expression of a desire to participate in an ongoing process. They believe that language, tradition and beliefs may find ready expression through the range of the visual and performing arts.

There is a call for current Arts curricula to reflect a changing cultural context where both the learner and the teacher are unfamiliar. From this perspective it appears that provision needs to be made for the differing cultural contexts and beliefs of both participants. This by implication necessitates finding new directions for content and context within the visual arts curriculum.



## **Part Five – Implications for Visual Arts Curricula**

### ***5.1 The Western Australian Curriculum Framework***

The significance of the Creative Arts Project is also to be found in the recommendations of the Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 Education in Western Australia Overarching Statements 8, 9, 10.

8 'Students understand their cultural, geographic and historical contexts and have the knowledge, skills and values for active participation in life in Australia.'

9 'Students interact with people and cultures other than their own and are equipped to contribute to the global community.'

10 'Students participate in creative activity of their own and understand and engage with the artistic, cultural and intellectual work of others.'

The aim of these recommendations is that the individual should be empowered with a greater awareness of the society in which s/he lives. This, by implication would give the individual an informed appreciation and ability to interact with others within their society and environment.

### ***5.2 The culture, beliefs and role of the teacher as artist***

Bowden believed that the particular culture of the teacher is a predominant factor influencing process and product and identified the existence of many individual cultural nuances. He called for an in-depth rather than broad approach to the curriculum, and suggested that open-ended problem solving activities should celebrate students' own cultures

and interests. He recognised the use of traditional methods and materials to challenge observational and expressive skills, and to develop an understanding of artistic language. He saw this as leading to a fostering of critical abilities and knowledge of cultural heritage.

Bowden's words accord with my experience of the role of visual arts teacher. The ongoing development of my personal work in art and design continues to have a direct influence on the setting of projects for students. The brief descriptions (5.6) of Art and Design projects at Post Compulsory level are included as an illustration of the strong connection between my personal understanding of visual art, my teaching philosophy and my practice. My cultural beliefs, modes of artistic expression, passion for the environment, diverse teaching experience and philosophy all contribute to the character of my practice.

Engagement with the natural environment is central to my research. I understand the natural environment to be a constant within the restlessness of Post-Modernism. Interaction with the environment offers divergence away from constantly changing images as exemplified in electronic media. The natural environment appears to offer a context for artistic expression that does not look to Modernism or Post-Modernism for representational modalities. Rather, I believe that reference made to traditional symbolisms existing within cultures may enhance the meaning and context of expression.

### ***5.3 Historical and cultural influences on my practice as recorded in personal commentary from visual diaries 4 and 5***

For Klee the eye/seeing was the meeting place for many roads. He collected pressed flowers, stating that perhaps starting from nature one may achieve formations of one's own. He suggested that one may then

become like nature and start creating. The expressive use of colour as natural forms, especially flora is observed in the work of Matisse and Klimt during the 1920s and 30s.

Throughout the 1930s millions of metres of floral prints were sold to couture houses in Europe, but it was not until the 1960s that couture became entwined with popular culture. A watershed was experienced in the 60s as Andy Warhol produced large photomontages of stylised flowers. Pop idol Diana Ross wore floral prints and the factory girl in 1960s Britain wore hair curlers and headscarf with her 'run of the mill' floral print overalls.

The design source of the rich pattern of the 60s textiles was predominantly from nature. Couture and popular fashion design echoed the natural environment drawing from the traditions of botanical recording, Elizabethan embroidery, the sophistication of William Morris, Liberty prints and the Fauve and Expressionist movements.

During the 1970s and 80s the Americans and Japanese took the lead in visual art and design textiles. Whilst the practitioners in the USA exploited existing materials and concepts, the Japanese built on their tradition of design and craftsmanship to produce innovative art pieces in new fibre textiles.

The couture houses of Europe exploited these developments in the 1990s, producing wearable art on their catwalks. The Japanese designer Issey Miyake contributed influential innovative and retro designs during this time also. These movements continue to provide a rich source of inspiration to students.

#### ***5.4 Textiles as art - Multiculturalism, design and wearable art***

In the Western world today clothing creates an image and as such is an expression of individuality. Clothing is our second skin and climate, culture and tradition exert an influence. The colours, textures and forms of the physical environment are intricately connected to clothing design and 20<sup>th</sup> century fashion has appropriated this imagery. The physical environment, space exploration, electronically engineered textiles and popular culture all influence fashion. Materials such as hand made paper and wire are used as substitutes for leather and animal skin that are no longer regarded as ethically acceptable.

### ***5.5 Rationale***

The projects described below (5.6) both allow for active student engagement. In project one the focus is Wearable Art and in project two the focus is Graphic Design. The process of each project is experiential and experimental. Each project is multi layered and diverse, involving meta-cognitive thinking and transfer. This process allows for cultural connection and the recognition of diversity within a society.

Students combine historical reference, personal experience and ability to bear in solving visual art and design problems. They are afforded the opportunity of making personal or political statements about their life-world. This by implication includes commentary on the situation of themselves and others within their environment.

### ***5.6 Descriptions of projects for students at Post Compulsory level***

- Project 1. Compiling an Art and Design brief for Wearable Art (Yr 12) at the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education, Western Australia.

The design brief specifies the production of a wearable art textile that echoes a contemporary environmental theme. The activities presented are aimed at extending the students' understanding of their natural environment. Intrinsic to this process is the development of a capacity for discernment and appraisal within that environment.

Eisner (2000) believed that humans give both personal and cultural imprint to what they experience and saw the relationship between the two as inextricable. He said that the Arts go well beyond making visible the

visible as they tell us about how places and relationships feel. The structure of the Wearable Art Project allows this to happen through involvement with culture and environment.

The investigation is open-ended as expressed in the various stages of the design process. This involves brainstorming ideas, collecting organic forms and examples of 2 and 3 dimensional textile design. By analysing design elements and recording organic forms through drawing the students are afforded the opportunity of making discoveries about themselves and the environment in which they live.

Design development explores the formal elements of motif, pattern, and colour. In common with sculpture, the principles of space, volume and scale are also considered as these contribute to the style of a wearable art textile. The brief is to relate theme, function and chosen media in order to produce a distinctive visual art statement.

Historical and contemporary reference is made to works that are described as ethnic, naturalistic, futuristic, geometric or post-modern and these provide valuable interrelationships for the students. In using these types of references students are able to make emotional or spiritual responses in keeping with their current life-world perceptions.

Social inquiry is pursued thematically through an analysis of human need. This enables the students to consider why the art-piece is needed. Who will wear the design and who will construct it? What source materials and construction techniques are appropriate for the theme? When, where, how is it to be designed, constructed and worn? How much will it cost and how much time is at the designer's disposal? What are the student's personal skills and knowledge?

Experimental production and reflection takes place throughout the project, culminating in a final self-assessment task in keeping with the Western Australian Student Outcomes Statements.

- Project 2 Compiling an Art and Design brief for Graphic Design (Yr11) at the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education, Western Australia.

The main purpose of graphic design is communication. Contemporary contextual reference is made to the fact that graphic design reflects events within society. The communication and illustration of ideas and information provides a visual message to the public.

Desai (2001) viewed representation as shaping people's perceptions of other cultures. Design consideration within the Poster project recognises pluralism in society and challenges the student to engage with both familiar and unfamiliar images. The aim of this involvement is to enhance the students' understanding of what art is, thereby broadening their perception and extending their modes of representation.

The brief is to design and make a presentation visual and poster that promotes Eco-tourism for visitors to Western Australia. The brief describes the main function and purpose of Eco Tourism as the promotion of a better understanding of the significance of an area. This indicates inclusion and promotion of the social and cultural aspects of the area as well as that of flora and fauna.

Duncum (2001) sees involvement with every-day aesthetics as witnessed in the natural environment as a rich resource for the construction of identity. The sourcing of natural forms from the environment exposes the students to their personal environment. The aim of this is in order to facilitate drawings that have depth and meaning for them. Approaches to drawing are made in pencil, pen and mixed media in order to record responses to the natural world and provide tools for experimentation and expression within the activity. The student becomes involved in an investigation that leads to an awareness of various ways of representing their environment.

Design considerations include the graphic elements of illustration, text, layout and colour as part of the imagery of the visual message. The elements of line, contour, pattern and colour are reiterated and emphasised.

Reference is made to the life and work of Margaret Preston and this introduces traditional art terms such as Modernism, etching, woodcut and monotype prints.

Reflection takes place throughout the project culminating in a final self-assessment task in keeping with the Western Australian Student Outcomes Statements.

## ***5.7 Conclusion***

It is within the aims and process of each of the projects described that reference may be made to Lacan's theory of symbolic networks as discussed by Atkinson (2000). Within multicultural arts practice students are able to form their own discourse within the bounds of their own



knowledge and beliefs. There is room for pluralism within the context of these open-ended problem-solving tasks.

The instruction and colour reproductions booklets that explain these projects are displayed as part of the thematic exhibition.

## CONCLUSION

This Creative Arts Project was informed by my own experience of the acculturation process within a multicultural society. I used a phenomenological research method to explore experience within the context of the natural environment. The subsequent influence of this process on the personal aspects of visual art activity have been identified and recorded in visual diaries and as paintings. The research has made connections between past and present life-worlds, referring to the natural environment, heritage and modes of representation within my culture and that of others. My investigation of a new social and physical environment was facilitated through the medium of a third cultural aesthetic that made reference to the art and design of Japan.

The significance of this Creative Arts Project for visual arts education is evidenced in the interaction of culture, personal experience and environment as integral parts of the creative process. The phenomenological exploration led to a clearer understanding a new environment.

I acknowledge that the acculturation process is unique to the individual, but have found that phenomena experienced and expressed in this way have value in classroom practice. The manifestation of this finding may be understood as being within the scope of informal or life-world learning. I perceive this kind of knowledge as that which enriches life and allows a society to grow.

Observations of this type of research suggest that phenomenological investigation of new and past cultural and physical environments are of value to the individual entering a new environment. This may be seen as

facilitating a more informed creativity and as such may facilitate a catharsis of what is, to a greater or lesser extent, a traumatic experience.

Miles (1999) hinted at this kind of process when he questioned why visual art is a subject in formal education. He saw art in education as a critical rather than a social process. This he affirmed results from the idea that knowledge is negotiable. He cautioned against the demise of the visual arts as it becomes entangled with the 'dross of the culture industries', stating that, seen as knowledge, but no longer the transmission of a body of knowledge, such transformations are metaphors for social change.

For me, the dynamics of creativity as described in this exegesis provide a metaphor for the dynamics of inter-ethnic accommodation within a diverse society. Cultural identity mutates with engagement in a new environment sometimes leading to a duality of experience. It is at this juncture that cultural difference may be recognised as a reference point for growth within a society.

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## **APPENDIX**

The exhibition of Visual Artworks from which this exegesis is derived took place at All Saints' College Gallery from 11-14<sup>th</sup> November 2003. The exhibition consisted of original paintings executed in gouache on paper. The large paintings measured approximately 110x75cms. The development of each painting was documented by a story board containing colour photocopies of visual diary research.











