

Tasmanian College of the Arts



***The Sensation of Place: Translating the experiential
sensation of a place through painting.***

by

Ann Holt

MFA (Monash University)

Submitted in the partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Signed statement of originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief it incorporates no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

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Ann Holt

Ann Holt

PhD Candidate

Abstract

The Sensation of Place: Translating the experiential sensation of a place through painting.

The aim of this project was to paint the complexities of 'felt' moments of experiencing place on Bruny Island, Tasmania, and in doing so, create a visual realisation of the subjective, experiential and conceptual awareness of the artist in relation to the matter and phenomena of the surrounding environment. The investigation was based on the phenomenological model that posits that our understanding of place arises through inter-subjective encounters: the connections, meaning and associations we make in our mind's eye to what we see.

This project explores the formal aesthetic and conceptual translations of atmospherics and movement (light, time, mark) because these aspects most readily provide scope for a painterly inquiry into a subjective and intrinsic experience of place. Through immersive encounters and extensive periods painting on location, the project was driven by the recognition of the intrinsic feeling of place on Bruny Island – the sense of an 'absence' and 'presence' in the landscape. In this context, the project not only draws on immediate experience but it also brings to bear a sense of past events that 'live on' in the ethereal feeling that emanates from the location. Painting on site from direct observation collates the nature of lived experience with the performative and reflective processes involved in making an image.

The exegesis investigates how intuitive knowledge and the effects of material artefacts on the senses contribute to an understanding of the nature of experience. Furthermore, the social and cultural constructs that

might pre-empt these underlying feelings intrinsic to Bruny are examined: specifically, Tasmania's dark colonial legacy and indigenous culture that is also central to Bruny Island's history.

The methods of a number of artists (in particular David Hockney, Claude Monet, Patrick Grieve and Neridah Stockley) for whom immersion is an essential part of the process in developing paintings that express a deeply-felt connection to place, are identified and explored. Emily Kame Kngwarreye's painting techniques are also informative in conveying aspects of an experience of place that may be invisible to the eye, yet nonetheless intrinsically felt, and expressed through a painterly language that transcends cultural boundaries. In this way the project proposes that painting has the potential to be an effective agency to transcribe sensations of what is both seen and felt.

The original contribution, as encapsulated in the artwork and the exegesis, is a body of work that evidences the layers of complexity that contribute to the experience of place. In this, the project adds to the understanding of human relations to place, specifically in relation to painting and a perception and knowledge of Bruny Island. The research exhibition provides a distinct visual interpretation of the site, which contributes to the evolving field of interpretative Tasmanian landscape painting.

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This thesis is dedicated to my dear friend Josephine Denne (1923–2016), of Dennes Point Bruny Island – a remarkable woman and kindred spirit.

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Introduction

Aims

The aim of the project is to paint an elucidation of the sensation or felt experience of place on Bruny Island, Tasmania. Our impression of a place is initially formed through the ocular sensing of a visual arena that is continually subject to climatic changes over time. However, if painting is to be more than a picturing of the discrete or distinct features of the locale, it will include something of the artist's experience of being in that place, and also what they bring of their previous experiences.

Our understanding of place comes from inter-subjective encounters: the connections, meaning and associations we make in our mind's eye to what we see. Associated memories, coloured by our experience of political, cultural, philosophical and scientific knowledge, further shape our perceptions and the relationships we form with specific places. Merleau-Ponty describes this phenomenological approach as viewing the world not as 'pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect' (1962:20). The premise for this research project is that our understanding of place is not formed through objective, distanced viewing, but rather through being 'immersed' within it (physically, emotionally and psychologically). We are, as Martin Heidegger suggests, 'within and not outside the visual arena' (cited in Jay, 1994:275).

Being immersed in a place is also profoundly sensory. Within the realm of a sensory environment, beyond our visual and physical sensations, what of the place itself? Like people, do places also carry a resonance of past histories that manifest in the atmospherics or feeling of a location? How would these forces resonate in the painting of place? I propose that physical immersion in a location opens up the possibility of an innate sensing or tapping into the feeling of place.

Through practice-led research, this project explores in painting, the elements that contribute to the sensation of place, specifically Bruny Island, and how these elements might be translated into paintings that express 'felt' moments in time and place. The research will address these conditions through the phenomenological model, in which painting place is foremost a mapping and material registration of the subjective, experiential and conceptual awareness of the artist in relation to the matter and phenomena of the world around them. The objective is to develop a visual language that captures what is both seen and unseen; a painterly and atmospheric rendition of time, place, light, colour and sensation, through the use of dexterous, spontaneous brush marks that respond to the moment or series of moments.

Background to the project

The research emerged from my ongoing interest in painting Tasmania's extraordinarily beautiful places, particularly in and around Bruny Island. Like many artists before me, I have been seduced by the visual power of the Tasmanian environment, the abundance of seemingly unadulterated, wild landscapes and the evocative light of this southerly outpost. However, the intensity of Tasmania's beauty is neither benevolent nor untouched. Having spent extensive periods painting out on location, I have felt increasingly susceptible to an awareness of an underlying presence, an ominous feeling of an intangible 'otherness', that resides in these places. As such, the intensity of these feelings makes it impossible for me to continue painting Bruny Island's unique environment on purely aesthetic terms.

Tasmania has long been marked as a place with a 'dark history'¹. I propose that this legacy manifests as a lingering sense of an emotive, psychological and melancholic 'absence', that stems from unreconciled and incomplete historical resolution. At the same time, there is also the sense of a primordial 'presence', a spirited energy that most likely stems

1 Tasmania's colonial history is renowned for its brutality as a penal settlement and its unjust treatment of the island's Indigenous population.

from the proliferation of undeveloped sites and the island's sensory nature, topography, visual drama and powerful weather conditions. This landscape's intriguing paradox of beauty and sadness, darkness and light, 'absence' and 'presence' has continued to fascinate me for a number of years. It is a strange combination of a place that is both seemingly haunted by its past and yet richly alive. My enthusiasm for this project has been driven by the desire to develop painting methods that might encapsulate the complexities of this unique equation.

The problem/central proposition

Intuitive knowledge or 'felt' experience is difficult to substantiate – after all it is a subjective phenomenon. However, I would argue that painting has the potential to be an effective agency to transcribe sensations of what is both seen and felt. Human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan confirms that pictorial art can depict 'areas of experience that words fail to frame', adding 'art makes images of feelings' (1977:148). The writer Ben Okri supports this premise pointing specifically to painting as a device that can make 'the invisible... visible, the allegory of unseen things' (2002:187).

This project aims to correlate 'lived' and/or 'felt' moments of experiencing place, channelled through the processes of painting, and realised in the material register of the completed picture. The primary objective is to develop a visual language that will convey both Bruny's ethereal beauty and light, along with the darker historical layers that contribute to the experience of place in Tasmania. This is a complex task that involves painting through multiple time frames.

Firstly, painting the light and atmospheric requires responding to the momentary changes – literally from one minute to the next. Secondly, conveying the complexity of layers that underscore the experience of place infers a very different movement of time – much slower, less effected by the ephemeral changes in the atmosphere. These layers are more likely revealed through sustained contemplation and reflection.

The seeming incompatibility of these different processes in relation to time can be resolved through being immersed in the location. The momentary encounters with the beauty and intensity of sensate forces on Bruny Island can arrest the viewer into a thoughtful and contemplative interaction with place. It is through these periods of pause and reflection that other aspects of a location are revealed – the mood and feeling of a location that may come from an alignment of sources and associations.

Deciphering the factors that contribute to the psychological intensity and intangible, metaphysical aspects of 'felt' sensations is critical to developing the visual representation of time and place on Bruny Island.

Outline of the exegesis/context

Tuan states 'there is far more to experience than those elements we choose to attend to' (1977:148). What factors contribute to the experience of place on Bruny Island and how can this be expressed through painting? I divided my investigation into three key areas that would provide a framework for the research and inform the visual investigations:

1. The nature of '*Experience*'
2. The '*Place*' (specifically Bruny Island, which is part of Tasmania)
3. The dynamics of '*Painting*', as both a process and its potential outcomes in translating 'felt moments' in time and place.

Phenomenology provided the theoretical framework, with an understanding that place is not confined to 'the "real" world of perception, but is also underpinned by 'the realms of the imaginary, of ideality, of language, culture and history' (Ede, 1964: xvi).

In addition, throughout this exegesis, I have included a series of journal entries that document first hand my experiences on Bruny Island, along with descriptions of place in relation to the transient atmospheric that set the scene for a painterly enquiry.

Experiencing Place

At the core of human experience is the desire to seek connections and bestow meaning upon events, objects and places: the ontology of living in relation to the world as an assembly of meaningful associations. In the context of this project, it has been important to consider the nature of experience and how we might detect and decipher information into a synthesis of felt moments that could then be translated into paintings.

In essence, experiencing place is a physical immersion in time and space, combined with psychological processes. Thinking, feeling, sensing and intuition are all components of experiencing place.

In the chapter 'Experiencing Place' I discuss the sensory aspects of being on Bruny Island and how, in the absence of superfluous distractions, the intensity of the sensate atmospherics and references to the past are brought to the forefront, embellished by personal associations and the imagination into a rich, multi-faceted experience of place that can be transcribed into paintings. If the intrinsic feeling of a location can be 'sensed' through physical immersion in a place, then painting on site is an essential part of the process in capturing lived moments in time and place.

Painting an image of the visual world can be full of moments where you are completely present and engaged in observing the light and conditions, in conjunction with the urgency of the task in trying to capture what is seen from one moment to the next. Experience can also encompass multiple time frames as our minds wander between the past, the present and the future tense and it is in this context that I consider how the flow of thoughts forms part of our encounter with places.

The investigation is informed by a number of writers and thinkers, including Carl Jung's psychoanalytical theories of intuitive knowledge, Yi-Fu Tuan's perspectives on the experience of place and anthropologist

C. Nadia Seremetakis' examination of the effects of material artefacts on the senses and perception of places.

The writing of Merleau-Ponty and J.E. Malpas contribute to the discussion in relation to developing a visual transcription of the feeling of a location made apparent through intuitive knowledge. Nicholas Rothwell's writing is of particular interest in considering how the past might become entwined into present moments of experience. Rothwell writes of a lingering presence, 'something in the air' (2013:14) that can be emotionally and physically sensed in the feeling of places.

Place

In coming to an understanding of the specificities of the intensity of 'felt' sensations that seem to be an intrinsic part of the Tasmanian experience, my starting point is a consideration of the broader issues of place and the relationship between humans and the environment. Tasmania's geographical features are immediately stunning, but what lies beneath this visual, sensory splendour? What are the components that underscore and/or inform these feelings of place in Tasmania, and in particular Bruny Island?

In his book *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama states that 'landscapes are culture before nature; ...and that once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place...it has a peculiar way of...becoming...part of the scenery.' (1995:61). One could argue that to paint a representational image of a landscape or place means painting what you see. However, the interplay between what we know, see, feel and imagine when being in a place, can be profoundly affected by cultural and historical associations. If I am able to pinpoint the external constructs that underscore my impression of Tasmania, then perhaps I will have a clearer measure of how sensate forces, working on site, tapping into intuitive knowledge and memory play out in the process of painting on Bruny Island.

This chapter is divided into two parts: the enduring legacy of Tasmania's colonial past and the influence of Indigenous culture on the interpretation and painting of place on Bruny Island.

Place: Part One

Tasmania – an island apart and the presence of things past

Tasmania is a complex and contradictory place. On one hand, the prevalence of vast areas of seemingly unadulterated natural environments mark it as a rare and unique commodity in an increasingly modified world. In contrast to the purity and vibrancy, or 'presence' of this natural world, Tasmania remains beholden to a dark and odious history that has infiltrated its landscape with a strange sense of a marked 'absence'.

History has become part of the mythic landscape in Tasmania that continues to overshadow the island's places and its people. Identifying the source of this 'absence' – (a lingering sense of foreboding or melancholy that stems from unreconciled histories and gaps in knowledge) and 'presence' (a powerful primordial life force imbued in the proliferation of seemingly wild natural landscapes) is a step towards authenticating the 'felt' experience of place.

These two aspects of place are common themes in Tasmania's cultural discourse. Artists such as Julie Gough focus on the pervading spectre of Tasmania's unreconciled Indigenous story. In contrast, artists like Richard Wastell concentrate on painting Tasmania's stunning, wild landscapes, often through the lens of a modern day political critique.

An examination of current art practices in Tasmania helps define the parameters of this project and positions the practical work that aims not to separate the two contradictory aspects of place in Tasmania, but to paint both the visual splendour of the location and the sensate feeling of place which emerges from the cultural and historical context. It is an approach to painting that recognises that 'there are various levels of experience and phenomenology is open to all of them' (Edie, 1964: xvi).

Place: Part Two

The influence of Indigenous culture on the experience of place and painting

Aboriginal spiritual beliefs belong to Aboriginal people and should neither be colonised nor swallowed up into the white cultural milieu. However, Malpas writes that we 'need to admit some recognition, in our own experience, of the presence of something of the Aboriginal feeling for the intimacy and connection to land and to locality' (1999:140). The impact of Indigenous culture in broadening the understanding and interpretation of place in Australia is such that it cannot be excluded from a conversation about experiencing place, especially one based on painting.

In recent decades, the emergence of a contemporary Aboriginal art movement based on painting has propelled Indigenous concepts of place into the mainstream white consciousness. I propose that beyond the trajectory of vibrant artworks based on traditional knowledge that have flooded the art market, there has been a subsequent transference of cultural knowledge that has led to a re-evaluation of how we perceive place in Australia. Numerous places in Australia's remote regions that were once seen as being culturally devoid have been re-imagined in light of Indigenous art. This increasing awareness of the complexity of Aboriginal culture in relation to place is relevant to Tasmania, as it highlights the breadth of loss of traditional practices and knowledge that has resulted from colonisation.

Bruny Island has a history of Aboriginal occupation spanning thousands of years, and this has left an indelible mark on the landscape. The archaeological evidence that confirms the extent of this lineage is visible on a daily basis. It infuses the experience of Bruny with a psychological gravity of known and unreconciled histories.

In addition, I recognise that I bring to this project *my* previous experience of working with Aboriginal painters on the mainland for more than ten years.

These experiences have altered the way that I approach, think and feel about places. Working with these artists has also opened my eyes to a range of contemporary approaches to painting place in Australia that is deeply 'felt' and resonates with the multiplicity of a location and its associated meaning. This project draws on these rich experiences and is consolidated around specific encounters of living and painting on Bruny Island.²

The project does not directly address the political implications of Aboriginal art in detail, but focuses on the development of a contemporary painting language that specifically relates to a unique interpretation of place and 'felt' experience. This cultural shift has flowed through to affect non Indigenous artists too, like Ben Quilty (b.1973), who openly acknowledges the influence of the Aboriginal perspective on his paintings of place (Stephens, 2014).

Furthermore, in direct relation to the aims of this project, Aboriginal paintings based on traditional knowledge are a demonstration of painting aspects of place that cannot necessarily be seen or substantiated but nonetheless intrinsically felt. Emily Kame Kngwarreye's paintings profoundly resonate with a 'felt' experience of place that transcends cultural boundaries. Cultural philosopher Erin Manning describes Kngwarreye's paintings as unlocking 'areas of sensation' (2009:156), aligning her work to a phenomenological model of painting in the context of a cultural and spiritual belief system conveyed through the personal, subjective lens of the artist's eye.

2 Numerous trips out to remote Aboriginal communities in the top end have reinforced that there are two distinct coexisting cultures in this country: a black and a white Australia.

Painting Place

Experience is the starting point for this exploration. Painting on site from direct observation collates the nature of lived experience with the performative and reflective processes involved in making an image. Within this context, the objective of the project has been to transcend the 'picturing' of a location to focus on the immediacy of mark-making that relays a physical, mental and emotive response to a moment or series of moments of being in time and place. I was inspired and informed by the work of a number of artists whose paintings demonstrate an insightful and eloquent expression of a deeply felt connection to place. David Hockney (b.1937) and Claude Monet (1840–1926) have both painted places from direct observation over extended periods of time. Their techniques have been a guiding force, as immersion is an essential part of their process in imbuing their paintings with a sense of a lived reality and authenticity through their observations of light and other natural phenomena. Through dexterous mark-making, these artists developed individual painting styles that encapsulate both a 'felt' experience and the 'essence' of a place. Their methodologies and techniques informed the painting strategies for this project in relation to seeing, feeling, time, memory and the importance of working on site.

I was also inspired by the works of two contemporary Australian landscape painters, Patrick Grieve and Neridah Stockley, who travel out into their surrounding homelands to paint or gather information that is then synthesised into highly expressive, intimate paintings back in the studio. Field work combined with contemplative studio practice sets up an osmosis between the self, place, sensation, painting and memory. Painting in the studio also shifts the emphasis from the sensory engagement with place to focus on the materiality of the medium and painting from reflective knowledge.

Stockley and Grieve are part of a modern day generation of Australian landscape artists who actively foster a personal connection to place

through painting the regions where they live. The inclusion of their work contextualises this project in relation to other contemporary practitioners working in the field.

All of the above mentioned artists paint place with a cross pollination between working on location and in a studio which set the course for this practice-lead research project.

In this project, I have limited the discussion to focus on the medium of painting, taking the position that painting is an effective agency that serves the aims and objectives of the research investigations. I have centred the discussion on painting around a handful of artists whose intent and practices directly informed the project. Therefore I have not included a detailed analysis on the broader field of contemporary art practices in relation to landscape, nor considered the range of contemporary or cross disciplinary media that exists within this genre.

Visual Investigations – Methodology

The visual investigations were distinguished by three distinct phases that marked the development of the paintings in addressing the aims of the project.

In relation to the themes explored throughout the exegesis, it would not have made sense to attempt to paint a representational illustration of the historical vestige, the influence of Indigenous culture or the feeling of 'absence' and 'presence' that I argue is a part of the experience of place on Bruny Island. The feeling of place is a subtle presence that cannot necessarily be seen, nor proven; rather it is innately felt, through an attentive engagement and awareness of the sensate atmospherics of locations.

In the first year of the project, I extensively painted *en plein air*, managing to capture aspects of the topography colours and light of Bruny Island. These early paintings on canvas conform to the formal structures of traditional landscape painting. These works pictured the visual splendour of the island but fell short in capturing the breadth of 'felt' experience.

However, this was a valuable phase in building further knowledge and intimacy with the location.

Merleau-Ponty asserts that 'a painter's vision is not a view upon the outside, a merely "physical-optical" relation with the world' (1964:181). In a phenomenological sense, painting can be described as an act of consciousness that includes intuitive knowledge, realised through the making, where layers of meaning are expressed in the visual language. With this in mind, in the second stage of the project I began to focus on the performative and durational nature of painting, using painterly marks as a direct response to being immersed in place, intuitively responding to the moment rather than deliberately trying to make a 'picture'.

I made a conscious decision to free up my process by moving away from painting on prepared canvas to working on paper. By focusing on painting details in the landscape, atmospherics and the ambient light I was able to create a series of momentary responses to what was both seen and felt. By using big brushes and spontaneous gestures, the paintings immediately became more visceral, emotive and personable. The trajectory of mark-making was no longer dictated by the need to establish a picture of place. This approach to painting broke down the boundaries between my interior and exterior worlds: what is seen in conjunction with what is felt.

Throughout the visual component of the research, I continually questioned representational approaches to painting by experimenting with a range of applications and simplified compositions. I also considered a number of artists and their techniques in developing a range of works that might aptly express the feeling of place on Bruny Island. The more reductive compositions highlight the use of emotive brush marks, as a lack of form creates ambiguous passages within the compositions that are open to subjective interpretation.

In a third phase of the research, I scaled up the size of the paper to see if this would give the paintings greater physical presence and reinforce

the sense of the experiential aspects of place. Over time the numerous paintings formed a series that spanned the seasons and became a sequential record of moments in time and place.

Project outcomes and significance to the field

The themes explored in this exegesis address the complexity of layers that make up the experience and feeling of place on Bruny Island. Painting place is subject to physical immersion, visual observation, historical reference, local knowledge, memory, an artistic contextual awareness and sensitivity to changing natural phenomena. It involves painting through time and in response to the atmospheric changes, along with the more contemplative and reflective processes of sensing the intrinsic feeling of place and the awareness that past events might 'live on' in the ethereal feeling that emulates from the location.

My original contribution rests on the development of a painterly visual language that responds to this complexity, as evidenced in the final submission. Bruny Island's ethereal beauty and light, along with the darker multiplicity of layers that underscore the feeling of place, are conveyed in a body of work that incorporates a range of approaches, rather than a singular style of painting, indicative of the multiplicity of place and experience. Furthermore, it does this within the very specific environs of Bruny Island. The project concludes there may be no single technique that adequately captures the visualization of experiencing place, and that it is only through the aggregation of all of these attempts that the project finds a way to convey the experience of one place.

The exhibition of multiple images and the fragility of working on paper further reinforced the transient nature of elemental changes and passing moments, creating a distinct visual interpretation of the site.

On reflection, the visual component of the project demonstrates that painting on location has altered my painting techniques. I have had to develop alternative approaches to painting in order to successfully capture my experience of place. These shifts have occurred as I have sought to demonstrate, through painting, the theoretical propositions, aims and objectives of the research.

In the latter stages of the project, the paintings became simplified by 'letting go' of form and details, and by placing emphasis on the brush marks. This less formal, looser approach to painting does not rely on description, but aims instead to encapsulate the emotional essence of being in that time and place. The division between *plein air* painting and studio work has been blurred. The application of paint became increasingly expressive and lively, reflective of a subjectivity imbued with a physiological intensity and 'lived' experience that dissolved the sense of emotional and physical distancing from place. In this way, the project extends existing work in the broader field of painting and place, specifically with regard to tactile and psychological aspects of painting an experience of place. It also adds to the understanding and discourse of different artists and practices in relation to the representation of place, specifically through 'lived' experience.

Painting a 'felt' experience of place is overtly subjective. However, by identifying the external precedents that contribute to the preconditioning of the interpretation of place, I have been able to distinguish the role of intuitive awareness that, in spite of cultural conditioning, has enabled me to focus on the feeling of place. The project adds to the understanding of the relationship between humans and place, specifically our perception and knowledge of Bruny Island. It also contributes to the understanding and range of methods used to picture the varying dimensions of place, thereby offering further avenues for future research.

The visual component of this project not only captures an image of a particular time and place, but also marks an important developmental phase in my life as a painter. This project has inspired me to continue

researching and developing painting techniques that might succinctly encapsulate both what is seen and unseen through the use of multiple layers of paint to create a spatial field, combined with an overlay of emotive marks and forms that encapsulate the sense of both a place and its intrinsic feeling. Experimenting with these techniques, I aim to develop large scale paintings where the viewer is surrounded by the physical presence of the image, conducive to the multiplicity of an immersive experience.

Key words

Experience, Place, Painting, Felt/ Feeling, Senses/Sensing, Subjective, Absence, Presence, Immersion, Phenomenology, Time

Chapter One

Experiencing Place on Bruny Island

The immersive experience of a place will always be subject to its physical nature. However, perceptions of place are not only formed through lived moments of experience, but also through associations. While our sense of atmospherics and spatial features initially ground us in a location, it is the reflective mind that gives it meaning. For example, the awareness that evening is coming can be so magical – the sky changes at such a rapid pace that we know that this moment will pass, never to be repeated in exactly the same way, and this gives it a distinctive, profound value. (Tuan 1977:142). Similarly, painting is made up of a series of distinctive moments ‘drenched by the painter’s awareness that nothing he sees and makes fixed will ever be fixed or come again’ (Rothwell 2013:7). The experience of place is continuously filtered through these types of reflections and understanding that in turn feed the creative process when painting on location.

In this chapter, I describe the look and feel of Bruny Island: sensory perception, atmospherics and immersive experiences that are the groundwork for painting place. I examine the nature of experience in relation to observation, found artefacts and the lingering sense of the past imbued in the landscape. The terminology I rely on to describe components of experience are based on Jungian¹ definitions of

- Thoughts/thinking, as an intellectual function, seeking to connect ideas with each other in order to understand the nature of the world and to solve problems.
- Feeling, as an evaluative function and emotional response to place that can arouse positive or negative feelings.
- Sensing, as the operation of the sense organs in relation to the world.
- Intuition as a perception that is usually unconscious nonetheless deeply felt. (King, 2003)

1 Carl Jung (1875–1961), a Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist and a founder of analytical psychology.

Thinking, feeling, sensing and intuition are all components of experiencing place, and as they influence our perception of place, they also influence the painting of place. Philosopher Jeff Malpas says 'places themselves shape and influence human memories, feelings and thoughts' (1999:5). Thus a place in conjunction with our state of mind and what is 'felt' will all contribute to a multi-dimensional, understanding and connection to a location.

Certain types of places may precipitate a heightened sensitivity or response in observing the nuances and character of a location. Tactile, sensory, richly atmospheric environments with historical vestiges can enhance the exchange between a person and a place. Thoughts of the past add to the multitude of factors that will influence the conscious encounter. Seremetakis writes that 'sensory memory, as the meditation on historical substance of experience is not mere repetition but transformation which brings the past into the present...located within and generated by material forces' (1996:7). Based on Seremetakis's proposition I propose that past events might linger in the materiality and/or ether of an environment to imbue a landscape with a feeling or mood that amalgamates the past into present moments of experiencing place. I explore this proposition in relation to Bruny Island.

Part One: Bruny Island

Bruny lies off the south-eastern coast of Tasmania and is actually made up of two islands joined by a long, thin isthmus. Flanked by ocean and



Fig. 1. Bruny Island

Storm Bay along its eastern shoreline, the island is separated from Tasmania by the D'Entrecasteaux Channel along its western side. Bruny is an island off an island (Tasmania) off an island (mainland Australia): all part of a sea of islands known as Oceania.

Made up of bushland, farms, beaches, towering cliffs, forests and delineated areas of national park, Bruny has a comparatively sparse population of about six hundred residents. The southern coast is extremely rugged with giant cliffs that hold back the force of a treacherous Southern Ocean that extends all the way to Antarctica. The channel side of the island is more sheltered. Orientation on this long thin island is via one main road, running north to south. There is a wealth of wildlife on Bruny Island, including large populations of wallabies, possums, quolls, snakes, lizards and a variety of bird life. Whales, dolphins and seals frequent the island's waterways and the coastline is abundant with shellfish.

The atmosphere on Bruny Island is often dictated by the dramatic weather changes. The island can be beset by violent storms, gale force winds and roaring seas. In contrast, there are days of complete calm when the sapphire blue water glimmers like a sheet of glass and the silence is only broken by a melody of birdcalls and the gentle sound of lapping waves.

The air is pristine and there is a majestic quality to the visual drama that is continually played out in the interconnected relationships between the light, sea and sky. Reflective light can bounce off a cloud and onto the surface of the water with a striking brilliance (Fig. 2.). Shafts of golden light stream down through breaks in the clouds forming patterns of light and shadow across its landscape. The skies are animated by ever-changing conglomerations of luminous cloudscapes.

I am continually taken aback by the number of panoramic views that unfold as I move around the island. The hills and cliffs create many natural vantage points. These elevated areas, covered in forests, cut dark



Fig. 2. Bruny Island

silhouettes across the sky and are often mirrored back down into the sea, casting deep shadows across tranquil blue waterways.

This island has a timeless feel, yet there is always an awareness of passing time that plays out in the cycle of daily occurrences – the sunrise, morning birdsongs, shifting tides and the onset of an afternoon sea breeze. Islands encapsulate the cyclic nature of a world that Merleau-Ponty describes as being ‘around me, not in front of me’ (Merleau-Ponty 1964:178). Being on an island perfectly embodies the concept of immersion, the self in relation to a surrounding space of endlessly moving, mutable elements. Bruny Island is a place where time, space and materiality seem to merge.

The array of provocative atmospherics and the extraordinary light conditions on Bruny are primarily what drew me to the island to paint. Walking, exploring, contemplating the views and painting all became part of my daily life.

Numerous artists and writers in Australia, like the novelist Tim Winton, draw on the physical nature of the environment in their creative process. Winton says “geography, distance and weather have moulded my sensory

palette, my imagination and my expectations” (quoted in Miller, 2014). Winton’s comment resonates with a phenomenological way of thinking and interpreting the world, where the exchange between person and place becomes intrinsically entwined. Certainly Bruny Island has both inspired and shaped my thinking and creative output, and a key aspect of this project has been to differentiate the factors that make up the intensity of these experiences.

Immersive experience – Walking

Journal Entry – June – Winter – 3pm

The sun sinks below the hills across the channel around 4.30pm. I decide to walk to the caves, about two kilometres away with Scout. Rugged up in gum boots, woollen hat and coat, I set a fast pace. The air is perfectly still but very cold. I walk fast; partly to warm up but also I am racing the clock, trying to make it back home in time to beat the impending darkness. I am also walking fast as if my haste will shake off the lingering sense of a mid-winter’s melancholy, not knowing if this tardiness comes from the place or somewhere deep inside me.

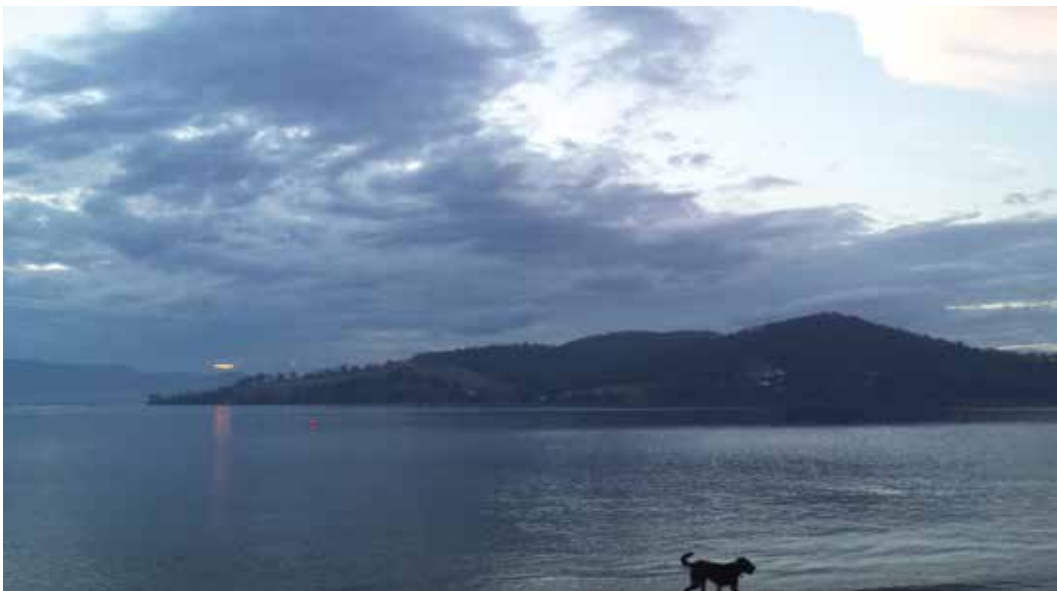


Fig. 3. Walking on a winters afternoon, Bruny island

Long walks are part of my daily life on Bruny Island, always with my dog Scout in tow². I enjoy this solitary pleasure, moving quietly through the landscape, observing details up close and letting my eye travel out into the distant surrounds. Tuan has written that 'Solitude is a condition for acquiring a sense of immensity. Alone, one's thoughts are free to wander freely over space' (1977:59). Walking gives me time and space to digest the landscape and unravel the thoughts and sensations that become intrinsically woven into my perception of the island.

Walking on Bruny is essentially a reflective conversation with place, a kind of meditation³. It is an opportunity to contemplate the intrinsic character of the island 'below... our conventional sight-level to recover the veins of myth and memory that lie beneath the surface' (Schama, 1995:14). Silenced by the visual beauty and sensory nature of my surroundings, through walking I became increasingly familiar with the island. These experiences became embedded in my memory. Jung believes that everything we experience remains stored in our personal unconscious (King, 2003). The accumulation of knowledge and the experience of place formed a portrait of the island in my mind's eye, and I could draw upon these impressions and memories when painting.

Through walking I am exposed to the elemental forces: the ambient air temperature, the motion of the wind and the energy of the water as it flows around the island's edge. I also come across subtle details in the landscape: ancient fossils embedded in the sandstone rocks, feather-light bones of a seahorse in the sand and the broken limbs of trees thrashed in a storm.⁴ Other discoveries like the flotsam and jetsam or a broken piece of whale bone near an abandoned whaling station 'also have their fate,

2 Sometimes Scout's brother Neo comes to stay with me on Bruny, often for a couple of months, hence the diary entries sometimes refer to two dogs

3 In *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, Jean Jacques Rousseau refers to his daily walks as 'afternoons spent in these peaceful meditations' (Rousseau, 1782, Butterworth, 1992:15)

4 I think of these sightings of the numerous skeletal remains of animals as the unmarked graves of the island's creatures.

their hidden order, and their own narratives to tell' (Rothwell, 2013:30) that become part of my understanding of this island.

Psycho-geographer and author Will Self says he walks 'in order to force the social dance to take a different rhythm, as a means of dissolving the mechanized matrix which compresses the space-time continuum, and decouples humans from physical geography' (Self, 2007). Walking is not only a physical journey – the mind also travels as thoughts oscillate between past, present and future moments.

Journal Entry – July

I walked around the point early this morning with Scout and Neo, not long after sunrise. The air was very cold and completely still. Low slung clouds hugged the hills and the surrounding water so that sections of the panorama disappeared into veils of white mist. A dead wallaby lay washed up on the beach. It looked peacefully asleep. It was a strange scene as its body had no apparent markings to indicate its demise. I wondered if it had drowned and how that could happen. In the sand nearby there was a fresh trail of smaller marsupial tracks leading straight to the remains: a fellow creature's investigation of this poignant scene.



Fig. 4 & 5, Morning walks in winter around the northern tip of Bruny Island

It is through walking that I have witnessed the island's moods, its changing colours and shifting light. Seeing a particularly beautiful cloud formation, I might try to hold onto the image in my mind's eye. Through walking,

I experienced the island through a painter's eye, assembling sights, sounds and sensations that allowed me to build an intimacy with the location. This was all preliminary work for painting place.



Fig. 6. Clouds across the channel

Immersion and the Senses

Someday I could find relief and just be in a place like this, with the elements all working together to caress my senses.

Young (2012:288).

The author and musician Neil Young has written about the power of certain places in enhancing sensory awareness. Surrounded by expanses of water, distant horizons and big skies, islands create a sensory-rich environment in which to live and paint. The isolation and intensity of this environment, combined with 360 degree views, creates an immersive experience.

The term 'immersion' implies a total physical, sensory and cognitive surrender to an experience or a place: by definition, to immerse is 'to plunge into anything that covers or surrounds' (Webster's Encyclopaedic Dictionary, 1968:423). In her book, *A Natural History of the Senses*, Diane

Ackerman explains the phenomenon of immersion by asserting that we inhabit the sky. She notes that the sky 'is the one visual constant in our lives, a backdrop to our every venture, thought and emotion. Yet we tend to think of it as invisible – an absence not a substance' (1990:235). Ackerman elaborates the concept of immersion stating that our experience of the 'sky' is not 'a roof of changing colours... you are standing in it...walk through it... breath it deep within ... inhale millions of molecules of sky and then exhale them back into the world' (1990:236). Similarly, smells and sounds physically enter our bodies through waves of air molecules. Smells in particular can stir up powerful memories.

Sensory preceptors are a primal part of experiencing the world around us. Seremetakis notes 'there are no clear cut boundaries between the senses and emotions, the mind and body, the voluntary and involuntary... and aesthetic experience (1996:5). Our bodies literally, and metaphysically, absorb the elements of the location and these sensations can evoke feelings of immersion. The ocular components of colour and light further intensify the experience of places because they, too, can arouse the emotions through associations such as the colours of autumn⁵. Yi-Fu Tuan notes that 'Through sensory experiences and organs human beings have a feeling for spatial qualities through kinaesthesia, sight and touch. Other senses expand and enrich visual space' (1977:16). Physical and sensory immersion in a place will inform the painting process through the transcription of spatial fields and sensory atmospherics that come from direct experience.

On Bruny Island, the sense of bodily immersion is intensified through a tactile exposure to the evocative aspects and extremities of the location, be it the smell of the bush and the sea, an icy south westerly wind that rushes through your bones or the meditative sound of lapping waves. Immersion is the state of sensing and embodying the world so that it

⁵ Of all the states in Australia, Tasmania has the greatest variation in seasonal light. Due to its latitude (forty degrees south) and proximity to Antarctica, it has extended summer twilights and short days in winter.

becomes part of you as you become part of it. Malpas writes that 'embodiment is essential to who we are' and we are fundamentally 'inseparable from the environment' (1999:11). His statement reiterates the sense of intimacy I felt with Bruny Island through exposure to the array of environmental elements and sensory interactions that I wanted to carry through to the painting process; being in it and feeling part of it as opposed to a detached viewer gazing out at a scene.

Part Two: The Nature of Experience and Place

At the core of human experience is the desire to seek connections and bestow meaning upon events, objects and places: the ontology of living in relation to the world as an assembly of meaningful associations. In essence, experiencing place is a physical immersion in time and space, combined with a psychological process that reflects the desire for meaning. This process involves conscious encounters with the location, interpreted through a person's inner dialogue. According to Jung, consciousness must be embodied and lived as action before it can be reflectively transformed into ideas, concepts and beliefs (Brooke, 2015:2). Thus the initial engagement with place was through the physical and sensory encounters of living on Bruny Island. These encounters were then transformed into subjective experiences through the reflective mind. Robert D. Romanyshyn explains this phenomenon as

The vision of a thinking mind displacing the vision of the living, incarnated eye, and in that displacement the appearance of things become precisely as they appear for an embodied perceiver... the world as object of mind to eclipse the body as ground of experience. (2015: xi)

Experience, from a phenomenological perspective, is not confined to 'the real world of perception, but will be augmented through imagination, language, culture and history' (Edie, 1964: xvi). Phenomenology is the model that provides the conceptual tools necessary to understand and articulate experience as a process that takes its visual form through painting.

Observation and the surrounding world

The level of human sensitivity, engagement and connectivity to places can vary depending upon a person's interest and the nature of the environment. Seremetakis has examined the factors that affect sensing place and has concluded that our experience of place has become increasingly uniform as a result of globalisation (1996). She proposes that daily routines and standardization has a profound effect on human sensitivity to places, asserting that sensory forces that shape culture, memory and identity have been homogenised (1996). The cultural sameness that is being replicated around the modern world, along with the global distribution of mass-produced goods and the onslaught of information technology, has depleted diversity and diminishes curiosity for a deeper engagement with our surrounds.

Seremetakis suggests the remedy for this dulling-down of the senses can be found through the attentive engagement and immersion into the physical experience of a location which creates a 'dynamic interaction between perception, memory and a landscape of artefacts, organic and inorganic' (1996:8). Certainly, painting *en plein air* can be a demonstration of an immersive, attentive activity that involves focusing in on the sensory and optical aspects of a place fusing description, culture and memory.

Being receptive and observant of the physical surrounds fosters the subjective experience of places. It requires conscious encounters with the sensory, elemental and material features of a location, in conjunction with the associated unravelling of thoughts, memories and emotions. The philosopher Bachelard supports this argument as he believes 'places themselves shape and influence human memories, feelings and thoughts' (Malpas, 1999:5). Hence, the painting of place will be a subjective exchange between the layers of perception, what is seen and felt, with the internalised processes of intellectual and emotional responses to the world around.

The level of sensory engagement and the experience of place can also vary depending on the type of environment and the weight of personal and cultural associations that heighten or diminish a person's receptiveness to

a location. Tuan states that 'In large measure, culture dictates the focus and range of our awareness' (1977:148). In remote places like Bruny Island, there seems to be more time for reflection, to pause and notice the light qualities, atmospherics and subtle nuances in the landscape. On Bruny nature sets the rhythm for daily life and painting a sensory experience of place.

Place and feeling

In Australia, our experience of place can be vague and uncertain at times in terms of the relationship between a place and its history. In the absence of recorded events, a sense of the past may manifest – as Rothwell suggests, a feeling of something “in the air” (2013:14). As historical events become part of the collective memory of place, and in the case of Indigenous culture, woven into existing Dreaming stories, these inexplicable feelings or gut reactions can colour our preconceptions of certain sites.

The notion of a 'spirit of place' is a delicate proposition yet its psychological and emotional impact on perception can be profound, affected as it may be through historical, mythical or religious associations. These types of encounters inspire wonder about what may have previously occurred on a particular site, what the surrounding trees, rocks and ground have borne witness to, and what histories lay hidden in its ether?

Psycho-geography⁶ is a concept applied to places that are physiologically charged and is normally used within a context of the built environment. However I propose that psycho-geography can also apply to more remote sites, especially those places that have been subject to powerful events. Matt Wieland describes psycho-geography as experiencing a place with

⁶ Psycho-geography is a manifesto that grew out of the French Situationists Movement of the 1950s and 60s. The movement focuses on the psychological impact of architecture and the urban environment, however in this instance I apply the terminology as a way of equating the psychological and emotional impact of inexplicable forces that relate to the geography of place in remote environments.

'a clear sense of the past and an eye for the present' (2007:77). Bruny Island is subject to historical record, but because of its remoteness and sparse population, much of its past remains obscured or forgotten amidst its bushland, secluded beaches and rural settings.

Guy-Ernest Debord (1955), a founding proponent of the Situationists movement, says that psycho-geography can encompass the 'effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions'. Thus, according to Debord, factual-based knowledge is not essential in an emotional sensing of a location that is psychologically arraigned. His proposition is substantiated by Jung's theory of the role of intuitive awareness in acts of perception and conceptual knowledge that inform experiences (Brooks 2015:23).

Sensitivity to the sensate forces and atmospherics of place are the starting point for tapping into intuitive knowledge and the feeling of place. Rothwell exemplifies this type of emotive sensory engagement that links elemental forces to intuitive felt sensations, when he writes 'I felt darkness all around me in the landscape. I felt what happened there, without knowing' (2013:81). Specific to Tasmania, the historian Henry Reynolds reflects on similar experiences recalling a sadness in the air, as he felt he could 'hear the Aborigines crying in the wind' (McClelland, 1996:90). These types of sensations seem to be a common occurrence in Tasmania, where the elemental aspects of a location are in cohorts with an intuitive responsiveness to the feeling of a location. Jung defines intuitive knowledge as perception that is buried deep within our subconscious (King, 2011) – a primordial response to external forces.

Intuitive knowledge can be difficult to substantiate and is often maligned. However recent scientific research from Linköping University in Sweden indicates that there is a neurobiological explanation for how intuitive knowledge is created. In a dissertation Lars-Erik Björklund proposed that tacit knowledge is experience-based and can be developed through practice, especially when in a person's specialised field or when dealing

with familiar situations.¹ Sensory memories are only stored if we are affected by them or where there is personal interest, repeated actions or focused engagement in a particular area. These sensory memories then consolidate intuitive thinking (Science News, 2008).

Memories are made up of 'sensory impressions' and experiences that are stored in both the conscious and subconscious mind which builds instinctive knowledge and understanding. 'We have a memory that needs to be filled up with sensory impressions,' writes Björklund and 'It can be ... an ineffable combination of impressions that makes what we call intuition tell us something' (2008). Björklund's theory helps to explain the concept of 'gut feelings' and our inclination to trust our instincts, especially when dealing with situations we know well.

Sensory impressions of a place (its sights, sounds, smells and the feel of the ambient air) naturally accumulate over the time spent living in an area and also through working in the specialised field of *plein air* painting. This type of engagement builds a knowledge bank of multiple sensory impressions that will lead to an implicit knowledge of the location.

The cumulative effects of ongoing encounters with the tactile elements, and seeing subtle artefacts that pertain to Bruny Island history have become ingrained into my psyche. This knowledge influences my perception of the location and filters through to the process of landscape painting.

Through experience and inherent knowledge sensing the mood of a known environment becomes second nature, trusting 'gut instincts' and sensing a 'feeling' of something in the air.

1 For example, professional's such as doctors will develop intuitive knowledge based on years of practice and experience that may enable them to intuitively diagnose a patient. Similarly, experiences of a particular place over time accumulate, building intuitive knowledge about the location, so the trace markers and nuance in the landscape become increasingly apparent.

Within phenomenology, this type of experience of place is an amalgamation of the physical, cognitive, emotional, imaginative and sensory reactions – the interconnected components that make up a state of human consciousness. It is the antithesis of the Cartesian concept of mind/body dualism which proposes that aspects of the self can operate independently of one other.

Feeling, artefact and memory in the landscape

As stated, certain types of environments may precipitate a heightened sensitivity in observing the nuances and character of a location, tapping into its intrinsic feeling. Paul Stoller notes that sensitivity to place might be retrieved 'through sights, smells, sounds and tastes, all of which trigger cultural memories' (1996:119). He pinpoints the role of sensory memories and emotions in the 'exchange with substances and objects to incite remembrance and feeling' (p.119). Stoller's statement can be applied to experiencing place on Bruny Island, as it is a highly sensory, evocative environment which also has numerous subtle, archaeological artefacts from bygone eras. Bruny Island is typical of much of Tasmania, where the landscape is richly imbued by the interplay between history, and the intensity of the natural environment.

*It was a place where what lay beneath the surface was ever present,
And all the tension in the landscape was hidden from the eye.*

Rothwell (2013:74)

Rothwell's comment suggests the undercurrent or feeling of place may be present but also obscured – a subtle suggestion of 'absence' and 'presence' that, like submerged artefacts, may initially be hidden from immediate recognition. These aspects of place will often only become apparent to the curious observer over time, or through attentive engagement. Potent environments fecund with historical vestiges can 'effectively create an undertow, forcing oneself into a certain system of interaction with the environment' (Debord, 1955). The discovery of old

objects in conjunction with an underlying presence or feeling of place can lead to a deeper sense of immersion and connectivity to both the location and its past. Simon Schama states that

when a place suddenly exposes its connections to an ancient and peculiar vision...discovering bits and pieces of a cultural design... leads...deeper into the past ...digging down through the layers of memories and representations... towards the light of contemporary recognition.. (and) an understanding of the landscape's past... (as) a source of illumination for the present and future.

Schama, (1996:16-17)

The English artist John Constable (1776-1837) painted a number of landscapes that include manmade structures that demonstrate how traces of the past edifies the experience of a place. When he exhibited the watercolour painting Stonehenge² (1835) in 1836 Constable wrote:

The mysterious monuments of Stonehenge,
Standing remote on a bare and boundless heath,
As much unconnected with the events of past ages
as it is with the uses of the present, carries you back
beyond all historical records into the obscurity of a
totally unknown period.

(Constable quoted in Parkinson 1998: 89).

The image of a double rainbow that frames the giant tomb-like stones in the painting signals the interconnectedness between time and place, as past and present, change and continuity can intermingle. In Stonehenge ancient artefacts in the landscape are juxtaposed with the elemental aspects of the here and now. The literal inclusion of these monuments in the image establishes the site's history, but the painting also points to the psychological effects of ancient traces in the landscape. Constable describes it as an experience of place that can carry 'you back' through time. (1998:89)

These types of experiences create the momentum for conscious human encounters with place, evoking memories and imagination that informs the overall perception of ambient space that can influence a painterly interpretation. Tasmanian artist Julie Gough (b.1965) refers to this type of encounter, in her video piece *Ode* (2014), in which the discovery of a seemingly meaningless artefact is linked to the sensate feeling of the location.

The video is set in Mills Plain in the central highlands of Tasmania where Gough discovers a tattered woman's shoe on a deserted expanse of bushy grassland. The shoe dates back to a period in the nineteenth century, around the time when a woman from this area mysteriously disappeared. Gough infers that this lone shoe could possibly be the lost relic of this woman.

The retrieval of the shoe reawakens local stories of foul play and murder that prevailed at the time of the woman's disappearance. The video's narrative reinforces this proposition by implying that there is an eerie feeling emanating from this site. As the camera pans across a scruffy remote landscape, the feeling of place is physically 'felt' and intuitively understood as exemplified in the narration:

You can feel it up your spine...something wrong about this area

Dialogue from *Ode*, Video, (Gough, 2014)

The images and story portrayed in *Ode* lead the viewer to imagine what might have happened, as it brings together the description, sensation and feeling of a place embellished by history, myth, memories and imagination. Rothwell describes these phenomena as the place where truth and imagination meet – where the remnants of distant lives intermingle and cohere (2013). Self says it's a 'meditation on the vexed relationship between psyche and place' (cited in Wieland 2007:77).

The writings of Merleau-Ponty (1964:12) are key to understanding these types of experiences where 'the perceived world is not a sum of objects' but subject to perceptual consciousnesses – a synergy of the mind, body, felt sensations and imagination in relation to objects and the surrounding

world. Merleau-Ponty's perspective is also in keeping with the Indigenous perception of the Australian landscape where signifiers in the landscape are loaded with meaning.

Many locations within Tasmania seem to be conducive to experiencing place through the amalgamation of intuitive sensing, imagination and a lingering sense of the past.

It's in the air

If history endures in Tasmania through an intergenerational, socially ingrained physiological mindset, can past events also infiltrate the fabric of a location to inform the feeling and the painting of that place? Nicholas Rothwell believes that past events are absorbed into the atmosphere of an environment. In his novel *Belomor* (2013), Rothwell explores this theme, and by example cites the German city of Dresden that was extensively destroyed in catastrophic bomb raids during the Second World War.

Rebuilding has masked over much of the destruction, however Rothwell asks, 'When a place has lived through things, do they linger? Does the memory stay? Somehow in the air, imprinted?' (2013:14). He writes

'It is not clear that places can endure disaster on this scale or escape from the shadows the past leaves for our minds to sense' (Rothwell, 2013:14). Rothwell's questions seem pertinent in places like Tasmania where harrowing events have occurred. Central to this project is the understanding that the traumas of the past continue to resonate in certain places in with an intensity that can be sensed and felt.

Social historian Germaine Greer has observed that in places like London, so much is happening in modern metropolises that despite the city's rich historical vestige, contemporary life has become all encompassing; the past slips away and is barely thought of as one goes about daily life (Greer, 2013). Tuan confirms that in busy places, 'social chatter and formulaic communication numb sensitivity' (1977:148). However, on

Bruny Island, in the absence of superfluous distractions, the intensity of the sensate atmospherics and references to the past are brought to the forefront, embellished by personal associations and the imagination into a rich, multi-faceted experience of place. These multiple elements create personal meaning and the connection to place that will inform the experiential paintings.

Malpas suggests that 'the stuff of our inner lives is thus to be found in the exterior spaces or places in which we dwell, while those same spaces and places are incorporated within us' (1999:7). Personal associations may draw us to a place, but it is through subjective perception and a sensory, emotive, psychological engagement that we not only form an understanding of place, but also the sense of our place within it. Painting place becomes a convergence between creativity, mind, body and the locality. These concepts are discussed further in chapter three (Painting Place), in which I explore the relationship between the performative aspects of painting as a vehicle to transcribe the experience of place, and examine methods and approaches to painting that might serve this purpose.

In this chapter, I have described the look, feel and atmospheric qualities of Bruny Island that set the scene for a painterly enquiry. I have discussed the nature of experience in relation to observation, sensory immersion, intuitive knowledge, and a sense that the past lives on in the ethereal feeling that emulates from the location. All of these components contribute to the experiential nature of place.

In the following chapter, I discuss the social, historical and cultural paradigms that underscore the perception of place in Tasmania and contribute to the overall mood, experience and feeling of place on Bruny Island.

Chapter Two

Place

Part one:

Tasmania, an island apart

Journal Entry – May

I walked along the beach with the dogs on a brisk morning to Dennes Point. The atmosphere was charged as the blustery wind animated the entire scene. Above me there was a passing parade of white roly-poly clouds against a perfect blue sky. It was a bit chilly, but lovely. I took in the vista – the heavy, dark hills, the choppy waves, and the magnificent light, everything that made up this kaleidoscope of colours and forms to delight the painter's eye.

Alongside the beach path I passed an abandoned midden as I made my way up the hill. At the top amidst the scrubby bush was a singular headstone – a nineteenth century convict's grave.¹ The weather-worn inscription was barely legible and I thought about this lonely soul's legacy fading into the past, transported to this place against his will, forever separated from family and homeland.

The remnants of past centuries, stumbled upon by chance, betray an absence and presence in this place – half-truths and secret revelations that are arbitrarily revealed as I go about my daily life on the island. How many people have walked upon this land before me? Who belongs here in this beautiful, desolated place?

1 There are a number of solitary graves from the early nineteenth century like this one scattered across the island.



Fig. 7. Nineteenth century Grave made from local sandstone at Dennes Point

Tasmania is a complicated place that can be hard to describe. Contradictory elements in the landscape infiltrate the senses. It is a place imbued with a feeling of the past as the pervading spectre of its colonial history continues to overshadow the island's stunning backdrop of intensely beautiful, wild landscapes. Indigenous scholar Greg Lehman describes Tasmania as 'a dark, unknown land where the wind whispers secrets too frightening to hear' (2013:205). It is this underlying sense of a lack of resolution that continues to haunt my experience of place in Tasmania that resonates on Bruny Island.

In the following sections, I examine the specificities of historical precedents, cultural values and concepts of place which have echoed across generations in Tasmania, and I explore these themes in the context of the work of a number of contemporary arts practitioners.

The shadow of colonisation

Tasmania is an island state. Its physical divide from the mainland precedes the view that it operates slightly outside the mainstream of Australian culture. It has been seen as a remote outpost with a wealth of undeveloped places of extraordinary natural beauty. However, Tasmania's unique qualities and autonomy are often undermined by attitudes of isolationism,

hereditary disquiet and a self-conscious sense of social disparity. Historian, Roslynn Haynes pinpoints the source of this conflict as the residual effects of Tasmania's colonial genesis. She states,

Whereas the mainland states progressively forged for them a specific and comfortable identity.... Tasmania has see-sawed awkwardly throughout its history between a sense of self-esteem and one of deep inferiority (2006:167).

Tasmania has remained an anomaly, separated from mainland Australia not just by a body of water but by the psychological impact of a dark and foreboding history that has been difficult to cast off. Cultural commentator Betty Churcher says of Australia's colonial past, 'much of it is dissolved in time, but our memory of it remains vivid' (2014:208). While mainland Australia has reassuringly fashioned a certain distance from its foundation as a British colony, the shadow of colonisation continues to resonate most profoundly in Tasmania. The writer and journalist Phillip Adams asserted that Australia's colonial history as a whole is "pretty terrible" adding "I can't think of a place less innocent than Tasmania" (2013).

References to the colonial era are part of daily life in Tasmania through its historic colonial architecture that continues to be used to this day. While these charming sandstone structures are prized for their heritage value, the chisel marks of convicts who forcibly carved each brick by hand are a constant reminder of the island's history as a penal settlement.

The Presence of Things Past

Tasmania's penal colony (1804–1853)² was legendary as one of the cruellest and most oppressive in the world. For half a century, Tasmania was at the forefront of Britain's convict transportation system and subject to the devastating effects of colonisation. Tasmania is essentially a society

2 Convict transportation to Van Diemen's Land was abolished in 1853, however many of the convicts already there still had lengthy sentences to complete.

founded on the displacement of two peoples: convicts transported half way around the world under duress and Tasmania's Indigenous communities, who were forcibly displaced as the colony was established. Haynes describes this period in Tasmania's history as 'a land condemned' (2006:57).

While mainland Australia had its share of massacres and the mandatory relocation of aborigines, mass killings of Tasmanian aborigines, reported to have occurred as part of a 'Black War'³ in Van Diemen's Land amounted to genocide. Refshauge notes 'the Aborigines had no experience of European military capability' (2007:48) making them vulnerable in their dealings with the British forces. Conflicts that arose between colonists and Aborigines over food resources, the abduction of Aboriginal women as sexual partners and servants, the pilfering of land and brutal treatment of the Indigenous population escalated in the 1820s with the spread of pastoralism.

These conflicts, combined with land seizures and the spread of foreign diseases devastated Tasmania's Aboriginal peoples. Of the groups who survived, many were dispossessed of their lands and/or relocated to the Bass Strait Islands, effectively segregating them from mainstream white society. As a result, art historian Daniel Thomas describes the relationship to place in white Australia as "intrinsically linked to the legacy of a nation founded on negativity" (2001).

According to Ian McLean, the effects of this pervading negativity have led to a collective societal melancholy in Australia, which he says is a 'fundamental trait of the colonial imagination' (1998:18). It is a collective grief caused by a 'phylogenetic inheritance' (Kirsova, cited by McLean, 1998: 18) that continues to flow through to subsequent generations.

3 The 'Black War' was not an officially declared conflict therefore the precise date it began and ended remain questionable. However, it is best understood as the officially sanctioned time of declared martial law by the colonial government in Van Diemen's Land between 1828 and 1832.

Psychoanalyst Carl Jung was a proponent of a societal 'collective consciousness' where 'memory traces from our ancestral past become a record of common experiences... repeated across generations' (King 2003). Jung believed that collective consciousness transcends time because our thought processes are free to operate outside of real space and time. Jung's theory explains how, through family ties, social influence and remembrance, the past becomes ingrained into a societal mindset.

Along similar lines, Schama coined the phrase "social memory" (1995:18) to describe an inherited mindset that draws history into our contemporary experiences of places. This is compounded in Tasmania because of its relatively small and static population. Author and social commentator Natasha Cica describes the island as a place that 'features an unusually small number of distinct family bloodlines, and relatively little demographic churn' (2014:13). A considerable number of Tasmanians are able to trace their ancestral heritage back to colonial times. Haynes confirms the profundity of this connection that has 'infiltrated every aspect of society from the economy to family pride' (2006:167).

The socialised collective melancholy that exists in Tasmania can also become integrated into an individual's intimate experiences of place. Seremetakis explains that

cultures that undergo colonial and post colonial experiences... have internalised the eye of the other and see their own culture and residual experience from a position of de-familiarization and estrangement ... (that) becomes the content of unreconciled personal and privatised experience (1996:pp 8-9).

The legacy of Tasmania's history also seems to permeate the mood of the island. It persists as a lingering melancholy imbued in the island's atmosphere. This feeling of place is often most pronounced in some of Tasmania's more remote regions, including Bruny Island.

Beauty and Sadness in the Landscape

Since colonial times, generations of artists have been inspired to paint the extraordinary splendour of Tasmania's natural environment. However, the dichotomy between the island's great beauty and its history and inhabitants is clearly recognised. Historian Manning Clark described Tasmania as

A society haunted by ghosts from the past – a society of people in which many things they had inherited from the mighty dead live on in them. I sensed then some contradiction between the gaieties in the very air, and some darkness in men's minds. (cited in Cica, 2013:13).

The discrepancy between the physical landscape of Tasmania and the physiological burden of its history creates an unsettling feeling. From a phenomenological perspective, location and history are mutually ensconced, bipartisan forces that will affect how a place is experienced; physically, cognitively and emotionally. The hangover of the island's colonial period endures, as Haynes notes as 'if it was inscribed on the landscape' (2006:66).

Journal Entry – October

It was a cool and gusty day. I spent some time out painting near the isthmus where the two islands, north and south Bruny, meet. Around four o'clock, I packed up and made my way over to Sheep-wash Flats to walk the dogs. There was no one around. We walked along the narrow dirt track through a series of delicate coastal forests. There were Shea-oaks, Native Box trees and a scattering of Blackwoods. As I made my way along the track, I had glimpses of the sea. There were various middens along the rocky shoreline telling me that many people had lived in this bush.

I studied the lacy network of dark forest branches that framed the stunning backdrop of golden light flickering on the water. This perfect scene looked like a magical painting.

All the trees were moving and vocal in the gusty breeze. Uncharacteristically, the dogs were sticking close by instead of their usual tact of running up ahead. I came upon a tree beside the track with a fire smouldering inside its burnt-out trunk. I threw some sand over the coals and covered the opening with rocks so the flames wouldn't spread. Who would light a fire on a windy day like this? There was no one around. I suddenly had an unsettling feeling that I should leave this place. The fading light and enclosure of trees seemed confining. This strange feeling could not be substantiated by anything I could rationalise, see or hear but an invisible presence I instinctively felt and trusted. I quickly made my way back down the track towards the car and the dogs were keen to follow.



Fig. 8. Shoreline through the trees, Bruny Island

The premise that the painting of place will be influenced by the psychological intensity and innate feeling of places has been validated through my experiences painting *en plein air* in Tasmania. Seemingly ordinary places, such as a pretty forest or an uninhabited beach, can all of a sudden evoke feelings of disquiet for no apparent reason. It is as if some unknown terror or sadness emanates from the site, and gut feelings tap into intuitive knowledge to psychologically affect the experience of place.

The impact of historical precedents and place on Tasmanian artists

The notion of a dark and unreconciled history has become a central theme in the work of many of Tasmania's artists. Robert Hughes describes 'the depth and virulence of Tasmania's obsession with the Stain' (1986:602). It is a precedent that infiltrates both the experience and representation of place in Tasmania. Ian McLean takes this further, stating Tasmania's 'artists and writers express social and ideological positions that exceed their own personal angst' (1998:18)

Julie Gough has often made very graphic works that depict the dark side of Tasmania's turbulent past. Using a range of media and found objects in artworks such as *The Promise* (2001), she explores aspects of the colonial paradigm with contemporary hindsight.

The Promise is a mobile/sculpture with a projection of figures encircled in the back of a colonial chair. The figures are provocatively entrapped in a shadow play that metaphorically shines a light on Tasmania's early racial conflicts. Gough's stated aim (in her Artist's Statement, 2013) is to present 'historical stories as part of an ongoing project that questions and re-evaluates the impact of the past on our present lives'. She describes this aspect of her work as the examination of 'subsumed histories.... to invite a viewer to a closer understanding of our continuing roles in, and proximity to unresolved National stories' (2013).



Fig. 9. Julie Gough, *The Promise* (2011) detail, found chair, shadow casting LED light and kangaroo skin

Gough has made a number of site specific artworks based around the themes of memory and place. These works often stem from artefacts found in the landscape (I discussed an example of this in chapter 1). Gough travels out to sites actively seeking tangible evidence that may give some clue to the submerged histories of forgotten people and their connection to places. I have had similar experiences painting on Bruny Island, where objects or marks in the landscape propel a sense of the past into present moments of experience.

Another Tasmanian artist who has made work that addresses the impact of colonisation is Bea Maddock (1934–2016). In her panoramic piece, *Terra Spiritus ...with a darker shade of pale* (1993–98), the artist maps out the entire coastline of Tasmania from the perspective of being out at sea. This circumlittoral incised drawing in 51 parts was realised by working mathematically from contour maps. It is a lateral view of the landscape in the western tradition. Maddock draws attention to the profundity of loss of Indigenous culture in relation to places by underscoring each section of the land with both its English and traditional Indigenous place names, thus re-connecting locations with their Aboriginal title. However, there is a sense of estrangement reinforced by the distancing between the viewer and the land as it appears far away. The floating script hovers adrift and is a lament for what has been lost in the wake of colonisation.



Fig. 10. Bea Maddock, *Terra Spiritus...with a darker shade of pale* (1993–98), (1993–98), detail of 51 parts, sheet 1 and 2, stencil print in Launceston ochre, each sheet 28.4 x 76 cm.

The overwhelming sense of loss and grief associated with Tasmania's history that is potently explored in works by Julie Gough and Bea Maddock is part of a broader, ongoing discourse that demonstrates that historical vestige in Tasmania remains topical in the visual arts. These key themes are also

re-examined in Tasmanian literature, social analysis, historical and political debates⁴. As a consequence, the voices of contemporary cultural production in Tasmania continue to inform and contribute to the perception of place in daily life.

In previous years, prior to this project, I occasionally made works that directly addressed the colonial precedent in Tasmania. *Circumnavigating the Island* (2001) was an experiential work made for the *10 days on the Island* festival in Hobart in 2001. The installation of this panoramic painting that wrapped around the walls of a gallery space presented a 360-degree view looking out from the shores of Bruny Island. Maddock's panorama, places the viewer out at sea. In comparison, *Circumnavigating the Island* surrounds and immerses the viewer within the colours and light of this landscape. The painting concludes with a small plaque and the singular word 'sorry'⁵ that refers to the Indigenous vestige and what has been lost.



Fig. 11. *Circumnavigating the Island*, (2001) Installation at the Warrnambool Art Gallery 2003, Monash University Faculty Gallery 2004 and The Danish National Museum, Fredriksborg, Denmark 2006, oil on canvas, 92 x 3060 cm

In a collage made on the pages of a nineteenth century dictionary⁶ (*Random History* – 2006), I arranged a series of ghostly figures strewn across snippets of torn landscape paintings. This work stemmed from my experiences of

4 Organisations such as the Colonialism and Its Aftermath CAIA (an interdisciplinary research centre based at the University of Tasmania that provides a forum for teaching, research, and scholarship in the fields of colonial and postcolonial studies, and facilitates interaction with the local community as well as with heritage and tourism industries), demonstrate the ongoing preoccupation and interest in the colonial paradigm in Tasmania.

5 'Sorry' is synonymous with a national political movement that demanded an official apology for government policies that saw countless Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their families. These people are known as 'The Stolen Generations'.

6 *Random History* was specifically made for an exhibition where artists were requested to make a work on pages they were sent from a nineteenth century dictionary to be exhibited at the City Library, Melbourne in 2006. By chance, I could associate a number of words on the randomly designated pages with Tasmania's colonial legacy.



Fig. 12. Detail: pages from *Random History* (2006) mixed media on paper 26 x 36 cm

painting *en plein air* in Tasmania when I have often felt that the sublime scenery was at odds with the feeling of a dark undercurrent and an inexplicable sense of the presence of ghostly apparitions. The work portrays imagined events that pertain to what might have happened in this place.

Schama notes that Rudyard Kipling has written about places where 'people who had stood on the same spot centuries ago... suddenly and inexplicably materialise' (Kipling, 1906; cited in Schama, 1996:3). This spectre, a fusion between past and present, intuition and imagination gives rise to unexpected moments where there is a sense that the past is imbued into the very atmosphere of a location.

For generations, aspects of Tasmania's colonial history remained obscured in a kind of veil of silent non-decree. However in recent years, an increasing number of artists and writers have addressed the unspoken atrocities, sadness and loss associated with this period. Richard Flanagan, in his novels *Gould's Book of Fish* (2001) and *Wanting* (2008), based his narratives on actual persons and/or events. In this way his books embellish lost aspects of Tasmania's history with an imagined repatriation of the past⁷. Similarly, in *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983), the writer Mudrooroo Nyoongah⁸, creates a historical

7 In *Wanting*, Flanagan tells the story of the Aboriginal child Mathinna (1835-1852) who was adopted and later abandoned by the Governor of Tasmania, Sir John Franklin.

8 There has been considerable controversy around the writer Mudrooroo Nyoongah in recent years. He has identified himself as an Aboriginal man but this lineage has been challenged by numerous Aboriginal authorities. I cite this author on the basis of his imaginative description of events that relate to Bruny Island and actual persons that lived there during the colonial period in light of the lack of accurate historical record.

narrative based on the lives of Indigenous Bruny Islanders set during colonial times. These stories and contemporary artworks that address the colonial legacy add to the mythology of a 'haunted' landscape and lack of resolution in Tasmania's history.

Tasmania, the natural state

Despite the dark historical shadow that hangs over the experience of place in Tasmania, it is also a place that has many unique and admirable qualities. Tasmania's small population has meant much of its pristine environment has remained undeveloped. The abundance of astonishing, unadulterated natural features within the landscape is an intrinsic part of Tasmania's image and lifestyle, as bushland sits just beyond the suburbs and isolated beaches, forests and wilderness areas are all readily accessible.⁹

Tasmania has towering forests, battered coastlines, stoic mountains, vast rivers, pristine beaches and countless grand scale vistas.¹⁰ This vibrant elemental island that sits on the edge of the world has a grandeur and untamed power and beauty that can seem indifferent to human presence.

Throughout history profoundly beautiful environments have inspired notions of a spiritual resonance both embedded in and emanating from the

9 As ecological issues have become increasingly prevalent in contemporary life, paradigm shifts in attitudes to the environment have ultimately affected our relationship to place and how we experience these sites. Modern-day desires to reconnect with nature can be attributed in part to environmental awareness and, as Tasmanian commentator and writer Peter Timms observes, an 'increasingly popular appetite in society for the idea of the last wilderness outposts' (Timms cited in Speed, 2011: p5- 6).

10 The island's natural attributes fitted perfectly into a colonist's mythic view of an untamed wilderness waiting to be explored and conquered. These same places have now been reconfigured to serve the environmental movement's agenda of a pristine wilderness that must be preserved.

landscape¹¹ from ancient Aboriginal creationist belief systems, to western religious doctrines¹² through to eighteenth century ideals of pastoral Arcadian utopias. Myths, beliefs and stories pertaining to the powers of the natural world as a place to retreat, restore and enlighten the human spirit have prevailed.¹³ Certainly, many of Tasmania's epic mountain scapes and giant forests have a cathedral like quality where it is easy to project personal and spiritual aspirations upon the landscape.

Schama (1996) believes it is a primordial instinct for humans to associate natural environments with possessing a certain mystique or metaphysical quality. Gaston Bachelard (1958:184) also believes people can be attracted to wild unadulterated places to satisfy powerful yearnings that psychologically represent the 'immensity within us'. Bachelard states that these types of places are 'where our dreams materialise; it is through that place that our dreams take proper form' (Bachelard cited in Schama, 1996:244). This type of inward reflection and communion with place can be compounded on an island like Tasmania because of its geography. Lea McInerney explains:

'It's all curves in Tasmania and it's rare to have an uninterrupted view of the sea. There is always a bay curling around or an outcrop or rocks, or mountains. Your view of the world bends inward (2013:159).

11 The idea that certain places can be deemed sacred or spiritual through religious or historical associations is a cross cultural phenomenon and there are countless places like this all over the world. These sites will often become places of worship or pilgrimage such as the ancient Celtic ruins scattered across the countryside in Great Britain or the Christian site of healing at Lourdes in France.

12 In The Temptation of Christ, Jesus was called into a wilderness by the Holy Spirit to confront a spiritual reckoning, to be tempted, for forty days and forty nights.: Matthew 4:1-11, Source: BibleGateway.com

13 Whilst I do not personally associate the landscape with any religious belief system, I respect that for Indigenous peoples the Tasmanian environment has been subject to spiritual, cultural belief system for thousands of years.

The intensity, brevity and natural topography of Tasmania reinforce the instinctual human urge to internalise the experience of this primordial place. This contributes to the attraction of Tasmania as a place for artists wishing to explore themes around powerful feelings associated with landscapes.

Contemporary paintings of place in Tasmania

In its relatively underdeveloped state, many see Tasmania as a significant natural site worth preserving, and people revere its landscapes, flora and fauna. However, to view it as a pristine arcadia would be one-dimensional, as this does not match the political reality that often challenges the value of maintaining these unexploited places¹⁴. In light of current environmental concerns, a number of contemporary Tasmanian artists focus on *wilderness* and the adverse effects of human intervention encroaching into these regions.

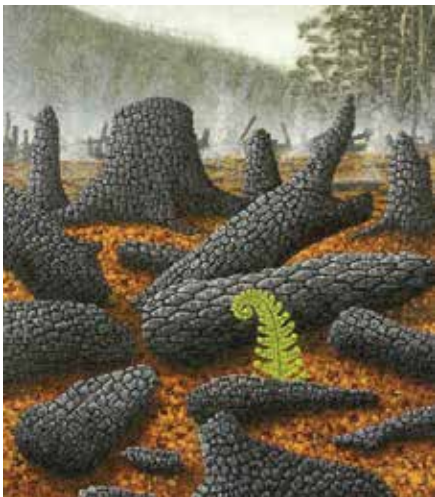


Fig. 13. Richard Wastell, *The Hard-Water Fern* (2006), oil and marble dust on linen, 132h x 122w cm

Richard Wastell's (b. 1974) paintings of logged forests lament the exploitation of the environment. In his painting *The Hard-Water Fern* (2006), the decimated and smoking forest has all but been obliterated

14 The environment remains central to social and political debate in Tasmania, with a highly contested forest industry and an economic push for development drawn from the state's natural resources. Tasmanian author Richard Flanagan's description of Tasmania's politics reflects the emotive input of these debates. He describes Tasmania as 'an island of secrets, threats, lies; of an often pitiless exploitation of both its own land and its own people' (Flanagan: 2006).

with the exception of a solitary fern spear. It is a bleak scene but also offers some solace as the emergence of this iridescent green shoot amidst charred surroundings signals nature's ability for rejuvenation. Whilst Wastell's painting can be read as a critique of Tasmania's contentious forest industry, his work also draws attention to Tasmania's beauty and endemic plant species.

In *Sheoak Meditation* (2010), Wastell paints one of Tasmania's Indigenous trees in minute detail. This large scale painting celebrates the forms, patterns and textures of the tree as well as the remarkable beauty that can still be found within Tasmania's diminishing wild gardens.



Fig. 14. Richard Wastell, *Sheoak Meditation* (2010), oil and pumice on linen, Triptych: 81.5h x 244.5w cm

David Keeling's (b.1951) paintings of pathways through forests with strategically placed objects portray Tasmania as an environment caught between conservation and human presence.

In *Early Morning* (2003), a table dressed in a formal white cloth sits in a forest clearing that is dappled in golden light. Both the object and the



Fig. 15. David Keeling. *Early morning*. (2003) oil on linen. 90 x 120 cm

ambient light suggest a civilizing presence on the edge of this quiet enclave of native woodland. However, the table is also an incongruous presence in contrast to the spirited and disorderly structure of the trees.

Both Wastell and Keeling's paintings directly engage with the political dimensions of place by examining the impact of human intrusion on the natural environment. Keeling confirms 'that when I look at a landscape I see much more than the benign view, it's a most contested political space' (Hanson,2007:5). Both of these artists undertake field work in preparation for studio painting. This direct engagement with places imbues their work with an authenticity in the observations of the light, colour and textural feeling of Tasmania's natural environment.

Two painters who wholeheartedly embrace a benevolent beauty in the Tasmanian landscape are Tim Burns (b.1960) and Michaye Boulter (b.1970). Both of these artists have worked on Bruny Island – the environment for my investigation. Burns has painted a number of works relating to Bruny Island since he first undertook a residency at the island's lighthouse in 1991. Burns simplifies forms into figurative distillations of pattern and mark-making that is a symbolic representation of a place. Victoria Hammond (1994) describes his paintings as eliciting a 'sense of fusion, light, mist, ether... *(and)* ... in spite of their austere geometry are still read as landscapes'.



Fig. 16. Tim Burns. *Cloudy Bay III* (2012). Oil on board, unframed, 4 panels: 51 x 163 cm

Burns' recent works have become increasingly figurative. *Cloudy Bay III* (2012) clearly refers to a specific site. There is an austerity to this painting in the delineation of forms in contrast to the artist's playfulness in rendering a delicate pattern of dots that represent raindrops and

a scattering of stars. The painting juxtaposes the conflicting forces in this landscape; the dark stoic heaviness of the land in conjunction with the lightness and vigour of the ephemeral elements.

In contrast to Burns' paintings, Boulter characteristically paints hyper-realist images of the cliffs and rugged coastline of Bruny Island. She uses photographs as references to transcribe minute details of surfaces and forms. Her paintings are embellished with a heightened reality as her colour saturates the natural features, and accentuates the ambient light and cloud formations. Boulter's images take on a theatrical grandeur that emphasises the dramatic qualities of this landscape and the forceful impact these environments can have on the senses.

Reflecting on Tasmania and precedents in contemporary art

In the context of this project, deciphering the elements that inform the experience of place in Tasmania was the first step in distinguishing my approach to painting on Bruny Island. The dual aspects of reconciling the past and embracing the present day paradigms in experiencing and imagining place in Tasmania remain a contradictory and complex equation.

The English curator Martin Barnes confirms that the scope of landscape as a subject in art can encompass not only our physical relationship to the world but it is also 'a vehicle for contemplation and personal expression'. He notes a variety of approaches in interpreting the 'physical, social, political, physiological and spiritual responses to the environment ...allow us to look afresh at unusual and familiar places and to examine our current position in the world' (Barnes 2008).

An examination of current art practices in Tasmania helps to define the parameters of this project and distinguishes the practical work that aims not to separate the two contradictory aspects of place in Tasmania, but to bring them together. It's a coupling of the visual splendour, beauty and light of this environment with the underlying feeling and atmospherics of this place. The aim is to develop subjective paintings that reflect an experience of this complex alignment.

Chapter Two

Place

Part two:

The influence of Indigenous culture on the experience and painting of place in Australia

In this chapter, I examine the impact and influence of Indigenous culture on the perception and painting of place in Australia. This discussion is based on my experiences and understanding of Aboriginal culture, actualised through a dynamic contemporary art movement based in painting. In this context, I also consider the emotive impact of daily encounters with the Indigenous vestige on Bruny Island, which is evidenced in the material trace and feeling imbued in the landscape.

Historical incentives

The colonisation of Australia established the import of a European vision, superimposed on an unfamiliar and foreboding landscape. Roslynn Haynes explains that for

early European colonists, the real horror of the land was not just physical deprivation and danger, but a succession of absences. There was no history, no cultural context with which the land could be *understood* (Haynes, 2006: xii).

During the early years of white settlement (the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) the content and stylistic approach to landscape painting in Australia reflected a colonist perspective. Paintings of place were bound to the social, cultural and political mores of the British plan to tame and transform a seemingly foreign environment.

Tasmanian based artists like John Glover used traditional European painting techniques to depict scenes of a pastoral utopia, as seen in *My Harvest Home* from 1840. Similarly, Glover's painting *View of the artist's house, Milles Plains, Van Diemen's Land* from 1885 shows the civilizing presence of a genteel English-style cottage garden, amidst an uncultivated bush.

The Tasmanian artist William Piquenit (1836–1914) also painted the landscape with a European eye, depicting the wilderness in the style of Romantic¹ painting. In *Tasmanian Landscape* (1880) Piquenit veils the location in an evocative, golden light that 'pacifies the unknown or newly discovered by making it an empty, silent ahistorical space' (McLean, 1988:23). Piquenit's impassioned renditions of remote parts of Tasmania shows nature at its most visceral and majestic but these paintings also 'visually lay claim to the land they survey' (Haynes, 2006:158). Unadulterated landscapes become legitimised through the visual record that acts as a portal into these remote locations.



Fig.16.1. Frederick McCubbin
Lost (1886), oil on canvas,
115.8 x 73.9 cm, National
Gallery of Victoria.



Fig.16.2. Frederick McCubbin, *Down on his luck*
(1889), oil on canvas, 145.0 x 183.3 x 14.0 cm, Art
Gallery of Western Australia

1 Romanticism was an artistic, literary, musical and intellectual movement that originated in Europe toward the end of the 18th century. Romanticism was a reaction against the order and restraint of classicism, neoclassicism, and was a rejection of the rationalism which characterized the Enlightenment. It emphasised emotion, subjectivity and a glorification of beauty in nature. Romantic painting promoted an emotional (and sometimes sentimental) interpretation of a subject..

The quest for a truly Australian vernacular in landscape painting was most keenly sought by a group of painters based in Victoria known as the Heidelberg School in the early part of the twentieth century. These artists² embraced the *plein air* painting techniques of their European counterparts, (notably Constable and to some extent the French impressionists) but adopted these methods to Australian conditions: its astonishing light, unique colour and the melancholic mood of the Australian bush.

For early European immigrants the scrubby, Australian landscape was a foreign and daunting place. Australian impressionist's often painted the landscape in context of the early settlers, who faced enormous hardships, as seen in Fredrick McCubbin's seminal paintings *Lost* (1886) and *Down on his luck*, (1889). Both of these paintings are infused with a naturalism that captures the essential nature of this part of the world and have become integral images to the establishment of an Australian national identity.

Robert Hughes credits the Heidelberg painters as giving 'Australian art a direction in forming the first identifiable national school (*that*) threw down the gauntlet to backward colonial taste.' (1970:51) Working on site meant many of the impressionist's paintings were small, informal compositions in contrast to the grand vistas and moral authority of their colonial predecessors who kept 'a distance from the landscape' (McLean, 1998:57). By immersing themselves in the environment, the Heidelberg painters developed an intimacy and familiarity with the Australian landscape that is conveyed in naturalistic paintings of uncultivated places.

From earliest colonial times Australia has been viewed as a place of immeasurable expanses of open, unoccupied space and untamed wilderness. It is a legacy that still resonates today and can be seen in the work of contemporary artists such as John Wolseley who focuses on the uncultivated aspects of the Australian bush. Ron Radcliff states

2 The key artists who were identified as the Heidelberg School of painters were Tom Roberts (1856–1931), Arthur Streeton (1867–1943), Fredrick McCubbin (1855–1917), and Charles Conder (1868–1909)

that 'There are few counties in which landscape painting has been so important to the national culture'... and that ...' landscape art continues to define the developing Australian nation' (Constable et al., 2006: x)

Just as colonialist and impressionist painters were influenced by historical paintings and cultural mores, contemporary practitioners are just as susceptible to a myriad of influences that affects their understanding and perception of place.

The stylistic approach and techniques that I use to paint Bruny Island stem from my European cultural heritage, and in writing this chapter it is not my intention to understate its prevailing influence on my painting practice. I am indebted to the Heidelberg School for establishing a visual language that reflected the realities of the Australian experience of place, beyond the European model. Their immersive methodologies of painting *en plein air* to capture the essential feeling of this country were ground breaking and remain relevant today.



Fig.16.3. Arthur Streeton, *The Cloud* (1936). Oil on canvas, 84.4 x 110.8 cm. Private Collection

Arthur Streeton was renowned for his *plein air* oil sketch paintings. *The Cloud*, from 1936 is a pastoral scene that stretches out to a far horizon and records the marks that mankind have wrought on the environment. However, the composition is essentially dominated by the big sky and an evocative light. It harks back to Constables paintings that emphasise the

'significance of the sky and its ability to dictate the mood of the landscape' (Constable et al., 2006:1). McLean writes that Streeton's paintings 'consciously evoke his place in it' (1998:58) and a sense of belonging and being part of the landscape is an essential part of the methodologies I use for this project.

Ron Radcliff wrote that the origins of the 'Australian landscape tradition belong more to British art... Constable and J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851)' than the French impressionists. Throughout this project I have referenced the work of romantic artists who sought an emotional and subjective interpretation of the landscape, as being an authentic source of aesthetic experience. Romantic landscape painting is aligned to the phenomenological approach that emphasises the sensory aspects of being in the landscape.

A Contemporary Cultural Landscape

In Australia, landscape painting has always be subject to a gamut of political, social, cultural and historical concerns in which Indigenous culture plays an increasingly significant role. Sasha Grishin wrote that

landscape is essentially a cultural image...
social geographers have long argued that,
"while the contents of landscapes and places may
be unique, they are nonetheless the product of
common cultural and symbolic systems". Inter
subjective intensions and experiences may be
thought of as embodied in the physical environment
and interpretable through a sympathetic reading of
its cultural landscape (2015:39).

In recent decades Aboriginal art has reconfigured traditional cultural practices into a contemporary painting movement that transcends tribal artifact. Through painting, the Indigenous perspective has been revealed and promoted. The prominence and impact of this art movement, with its alternative way of interpreting place, is such that it cannot be excluded from a conversation about

experiencing place in Australia , and especially one based in painting.

The poet Les Murray wrote that 'the convergence between black and white is a fact, a subtle presence, hard to discern often and hard to produce evidence for' (1977: 569). Since Murray made that statement almost forty years ago, there has been a pronounced shift in thinking, as Indigenous cultural production has entered the mainstream. The rise of a contemporary Aboriginal art movement, and in particular paintings based on traditional knowledge, has played a pivotal role in promoting the understanding and sensitivity to Indigenous interpretations of Australia's ancient environs. It is a testimony to the power of painting that it can reposition not only cultural perspectives, but also the perception and experience of places. Through painting, previously unwritten histories and the spiritual dimensions of locations, as cited in the works of eminent painters like Paddy Bedford and Emily Kame Kngwarreye, have diversified cultural discourse on place in modern-day Australia. Their work has given voice to a culture whose traditions and spiritual beliefs were overlooked by white Australia for more than 150 years.³

Spanning more than forty thousand years of occupation, Aboriginal beliefs and cultural practices have developed through a unique elucidation of spiritual connectivity and creationist beliefs endemic to the natural features in the landscape. Throughout the nineteenth and a large proportion of the twentieth century, the complexity and depth of the Aboriginal connection to place remained, for the most part, invisible to mainstream white culture. As Australia was founded on the principle of *terra nullius*, there was a total disregard for Indigenous ownership

3 The integration of Indigenous art and culture within western canons unfortunately has not been replicated to the same extent in the social integration of Aboriginal people into mainstream society. Yet, despite social disparity and community attitudes, a dynamic cultural production has brought about an awareness of the concept of 'country' and the spiritual, historical and political dimensions of place for Aboriginal people that through visual art, transcends social boundaries.

of land and the significance of place as the foundation of Aboriginal society, culture and law, and this remained the norm for almost two hundred years.

A detailed discussion on the influence of Aboriginal culture in relation to painting place may seem like a divergence from the key themes explored in this project, or it may seem like I am importing a cultural framework that does not reflect Tasmania's situation. However, while the trajectory of contemporary Aboriginal painting on mainland Australia does not directly encompass Bruny Island, its influence on the perception of place has been nationwide. This discussion also speaks of painting as a means of visual communication that can transcend both time and cultural differences.⁴

As a painter, I have been touched by the deeply-felt connection to country that is eloquently expressed in paintings by a number of seminal Aboriginal artists. I have been inspired by their techniques in conveying sensations of place through the dexterity of emotive mark making in relation to cultural practices and a spiritual belief system. Furthermore, Aboriginal paintings based on traditional knowledge demonstrate that certain aspects of an experience of place are intrinsically felt and that these feelings can be communicated via painting.

My particular interest in Aboriginal painting has grown out of direct experience of working with Indigenous painters on the mainland for more than a decade.⁵ Through this contact and the relationships that developed in the painting studio over many years, while discussing artworks and

4 The art scholar David Joselit has written extensively about the attributes of painting to transcend cultural specificities and occupy multiple time frames. He refers to paintings by Velasquez from the sixteenth century that can still be appreciated by us today. He said "A painting's relevance to a contemporary audience stems from its timeless quality and ability to communicate to us through the ages". (Joselit: 2013).

5 I was the founding Studio Co-ordinator and painting teacher/facilitator at Winja Ulupna from 2001–2010 where I worked with Aboriginal women from various regions throughout Australia.

sharing stories, I became increasingly familiar with a diverse range of techniques and alternative approaches to painting place.

Working in close proximity with Aboriginal artists also profoundly altered the way I think, feel and experience places. An awareness of the Aboriginal perspective has made me more receptive to the markers in the landscape which pertain to Bruny Island's Indigenous story – markers that previously I might have missed. I no longer assume that seemingly remote places are culturally devoid, but respect that these places can be the repository of histories and cultural meaning, beyond my knowledge or understanding. Most significantly, I have learned to trust my instincts in sensing the pronounced 'feeling' certain places harbour.

The artist Ben Quilty (b.1973) has spoken of a similar awareness in his experience of painting place. As a fifth generation Australian, of colonial heritage, Quilty says he is unable to escape the implications of being a white man painting landscapes that unbeknown to him, might be sacred places or massacre sites (Stephens, 2014:22). Whilst Quilty does not aim to paint overtly political paintings, he has stressed the importance of acknowledging the truth of his experience, without sermonising, but conceding to the profundity of Indigenous vestiges. He says "if I don't think about it and talk about it then I am not just implicated, I am guilty of covering it up" (Quilty, quoted in Stephens, 2014:22).

Quilty's landscape work is based on western traditions of observational figurative painting. However he also acknowledges the invisible aspects of a location. *Evening Shadows, Rorschach after Johnstone* (2011) depicts a typical bush setting of a waterhole and surrounding gum trees. The location is near Quilty's home in New South Wales and rumoured to be the site of an aboriginal massacre in the 1830's.

Quilty presents a double image of the location as a metaphor for the coexistence of two versions of Australian history; the non-indigenous and aboriginal accounts. Thick blobs of paint suggest a lone figure standing by the water; a vague presence that symbolises the obscurity of official records.

Quilty describes the flattened, mirrored composition as “two dimensional”, denoting a missing ‘third dimension’ in the paintings content – ‘a spiritual resonance and indigenous history of place that spans thousands of years that can never be fully comprehended by a white person’ (Stephens, 2014:22). Through a series of subtle suggestions and sub-texts in the painting, Quilty relays the complexities of acknowledging the multi-dimensional aspects of the perception and experience of place in Australia.



Fig.16.4. Ben Quilty, *Evening Shadows, Rorschach After Johnstone*, (2012) Oil on linen, 8 panels, 230 x 702 cm overall, Collection The Art Gallery of South Australia

Quilty’s observations of Australia’s hidden history are especially relevant to painting the Tasmanian landscape, where many of the island’s colonial-Indigenous stories remain obscured and un-reconciled. It is from this perspective that I acknowledge and include the influence of Indigenous history and concepts in the experience of place .

Aboriginal culture is made up of a vast number of tribal groups and complex knowledge systems that can never be fully understood by a non-Indigenous person. I am neither an authority nor spokesperson for Indigenous culture and write this chapter based on my own experiences of living on Bruny Island and working with Aboriginal painters on the mainland.

Black and White voices in the painting of place

Schama points out that ‘not all cultures embrace nature and landscape myths with equal ardour’ (1996:15). The profundity of Indigenous concepts

of place has impacted upon the collective consciousness and cultural landscape in Australia on many different levels, especially for contemporary artists who explore the theme of place. Quilty self-consciously describes his relationship to place in Australia as a white man “on a land that is so riddled with an intense cultural history, that we still barely acknowledge it” (quoted in Stephens, 2014:22). Through his art practice Quilty has demonstrated that an awareness of the Indigenous perspective can lead to a reimagining of places and their associated meaning.

Through my work at Winja Ulpna, I occasionally had the opportunity to paint alongside artists in the studio and/or *en plein air*. While my stylistic approach to painting occupies a very different cultural space,⁶ I found when painting with this group of artists there was a shared dialogue based on mutual respect for a deeply-felt expression of an engagement with a location. Spatial interpretations and pictorial content inevitably differed, but I soon realised that any artist concerned with the painting of place will be intent on capturing the feeling, characteristics and subjective understanding of that environment through their own chosen forms and media.

Knowledge and diversity

There are two distinct knowledge systems in Australia, that of the first nation Australians and that of non-Indigenous Australians. Aboriginal artist and scholar Robyn Latham believes that Australia’s great potential lies in the coming together of these two different ways of seeing the world (Latham, 2015). Both of these systems potently affect how place is perceived, valued and experienced in this country.

Over recent decades, contemporary Aboriginal art, land rights and the recognition of the stolen generations, have changed and shaped attitudes towards Indigenous people and their culture. Less tangible is the subtle

⁶ Aboriginal methods of painting place were most often in the context of the associated dreaming that often included the topography of the location, whereas my endeavour and interest was in capturing the atmospherics, colour, light and mood.

shift in consciousness in terms of the way we might think and feel about place. The notion of a 'spirit of place' is a delicate proposition, yet its psychological and emotional impact on perception can be profound, affected as it may be through historical, mythical or religious associations.

Home and Country

Despite being one of the most urbanised countries in the world, there is a tendency for white Australia to look beyond our cities to the vast expanses of remote areas (which Tasmania has in abundance) as a symbol of home and national identity. Landscape painting has long been embraced as part of the cultural tradition, manufacturing potent images of place and identity. Schama (1996:15) confirms that 'national identity... would lose much of its ferocious enchantment without the mystic of a particular landscape'. In Australia ideas of home and country are intrinsically linked to the landscape in both black and white society.

At the centre of Aboriginal culture and identity is the concept of a homeland (my country) and the belief that people belong to a place as much as a place can belong to a person. Tuan (1977) observes that all peoples can form an intense attachment to their homeland; however the relationship to place is intensified in Aboriginal culture as

landscape is personal and tribal history made visible. The native's identity – his place in the total scheme of things is not in doubt, because the myths that support it are as real as the rocks and waterholes he can see and touch. He finds recorded in his land the ancient story of the lives and deeds of the immortal beings from whom he himself is descended, and whom he reveres. The whole country is his family tree. (Tuan, 1977:157)

European debt to Indigenous culture is undoubtedly more significant than is normally acknowledged, a point made by McLean who wrote that 'Aborigines have given their traditions and mythologies the capacity to occupy a contemporary Western Space (and)...the success of the Aboriginal art movement cannot be underestimated' (1998:110). Concepts of sacredness

in the landscape can be directly attributed to Indigenous culture. This aspect of place has been endorsed by white Australia's tendency to mythologise its landscapes and project the image of a primordial, enigmatic presence onto its vast expanses of wide open country. David Tacey writes that in Australia, the landscape 'carries our experience of the sacred and other...a mysteriously charged and magnificently alive archetypal presence' (1995:6). This archetypal 'presence' has been implanted in the national psyche, and in recent decades has been intensified by Indigenous concepts of a 'spirit of place'.

An Indigenous perspective

Wooreddy as a child and young man belonged to Bruny Island: two craggy fists of land connected by a thin brown wrist. It was separated from the mainland by a narrow twisting of murky water. Living on an island he was never far from the sea....

Born between day and night he had a fascination for things that lurked and threatened. He walked onto the beach thinking of charms and omens, mysteries and things hidden in the dark cave of the mind....

(Mudrooroo Nyoongah, 1983: pp1-2).

Mudrooroo's fictitious character Dr Wooreddy, based on a nineteenth century Indigenous Bruny Islander Woureddy (c.1790s-1842), portrays the fundamental interdependence that exists between mind, body, spirit and place in Indigenous culture. Aboriginal society is based on a complex system of social organisation and spiritual practice, all inherently linked to specific sites. When an Aboriginal person refers to 'my country', they are describing not just a physical place but their place of cultural origin.

On the mainland, the Indigenous relationship to 'country' is explained through narratives known as Dreaming. Rothwell defines Dreaming as 'the realm of high belief and law' (2014:7). It is essentially a creationist belief system that forms the pattern of life for Aboriginal people, and includes both the physical and metaphysical relationship to places. Aspects of knowledge

within Dreaming stories may be passed on in initiation ceremonies, and through storytelling, song, dance, carvings, sand drawing and painting.

Dreaming stories are also the basis of songlines, a complex network of invisible pathways that cover the continent, traversing over and under the land and across the sky.⁷ Songlines recount the Dreaming narratives within the context of particular areas and pinpoint significant sites. These local stories are intimately linked to an individual's sense of belonging and connection to a specific place. Rothwell explains that

Songlines are not open superhighways of ceremony down which one may travel freely from coast to coast. They vanish and bifurcate, they go into the air and underground, they belong not to whole peoples but to individuals and local groups who tend them with songs and dance, and feel a love and connection to them that this possession underpins. (Rothwell, 2014:7).

An informed person is able to navigate across vast distances by singing Dreaming songs in the appropriate sequence.⁸ Dreaming stories and the related songlines challenge early European perceptions of Australia as an empty continent. They have also become the basis of much of the mainland's Indigenous painting production. Through arts and cultural practice, white Australia has increasingly come to recognise how Aboriginal heritage and songlines fill Australia's expansive landscape with a rich, envisaged

7 The continent of Australia contains an extensive system of songlines, some of which pertain to a few kilometres, whilst others traverse hundreds of kilometres through lands of many different Indigenous peoples. Since a songline can span the lands of several different language groups, different parts of the song are said to be in those different languages. Languages are not a barrier because the melodic contour of the song describes the nature of the land over which the song passes. The rhythm is what is crucial to understanding the song. Listening to the song of the land is the same as walking on this songline and observing the land (Lawlor, 1991).

8 Dreaming songlines are like a map, used as a guide to transverse the continent, traditionally travelling by foot and often through some of the most inhospitable terrain on the planet.

network of multiple associations, reflecting an empathetic, human connection to many places across the continent.

They moved off in silence.....The land sparked under the morning sun. It was summer but the earth was still damp from winter. As they progressed tendrils of steam began rising, and they moved through a strange misty landscape of which Crow knew not only every landmark, but how they had been formed

(Mudrooroo Nyoongah, 1983:195).

Mudrooroo's portrayal of the character Crow illustrates that within Indigenous culture, an intimate knowledge of place can be localised, holistic and spiritually based. This can also be said of paintings where both the content and stylistic approach is specific to the region in which the painting is made.

Susan McCulloch wrote that 'Aboriginal culture is not one simple belief system, but many systems specific to the hundreds of different tribal groupings occurring throughout the continent' (2001:22). Yet while this is so, there is a common principle that links all Aboriginal life and cultural identity, that people and the land are intrinsically and intimately linked. This is why, since colonisation, the forced removal of Indigenous people from their traditional lands has been pivotal in demoralising and devastating their society. It has certainly been the case in Tasmania, where colonisation resulted in the significant breakdown of cultural practices and traditional knowledge.⁹

Whilst much of the Tasmanian Indigenous culture has been lost (and it is inappropriate to directly equate aspects of traditional culture that is still commonly practiced in northern and central parts of Australia with the descendants of Tasmania's Palawa people), studies of traditional songs, dances and myths of Tasmanian Aborigines confirms that their culture is also based on a complex spiritual creationist belief system that relates to specific geographical locations (Haynes, 2006).

9 There are still Aboriginal people on the mainland for which English is a second language, whereas traditional languages have not been used for daily communication in Tasmania since the 1830s.

The role of painting in Indigenous culture

For thousands of years on the mainland, painting has been a significant form of cultural expression within Aboriginal society.¹⁰ Its pictorial forms articulate concepts and traditions that may include sacred knowledge. Painting performs a very precise role in Indigenous spiritual life, as it is an activity intrinsic to ceremonial life and each individual's link to ancestral beings associated with their birthplace. It is a communiqué of knowledge that has been transcribed onto woodcarvings, rock face, bark and body painting for ceremony¹¹.

The emergence of a contemporary art movement that incorporates the use of modern-day materials had its genesis in Papunya Tula, a remote community in the Central Australian desert, in 1972¹². It has led to the creation of a new and unique visual language that combines traditional content and schematic mark-making into individual painting styles that reconfigured symbolic imagery and stories pertaining to place.

10 The oldest known Aboriginal painting is thought to be a rock painting of a mega-fauna (emu like bird): a species that is considered to have become extinct 40,000 years ago. Though it is impossible to pinpoint the exact date of this work, the proliferation of painting sites across the country is testament to Aboriginal occupation and the prominent role of painting throughout the millennia.

11 Haynes notes that in Tasmania there is 'none of the sophisticated rock art' as exists on the mainland. However, 'Ballawinne Cave and Judd's Cavern are decorated with vivid red ochre hand-stencils and ochre streaks on the ceiling, suggesting that these places had strong ancestral and spiritual resonances' (Haynes, 2006:3)).

12 A local schoolteacher, Geoffrey Bardon, introduced non-traditional painting materials, such as acrylic paint and canvas, to a group of senior Aboriginal men. Bardon actively encouraged the artists to refrain from the expectation to imitate a 'white man's dreaming' style of painting. He supported artists to paint in their own style, based on the traditional symbolic patterns such as those used in sand drawings that referred back to ancient knowledge. These painters formed the founding group of Papunya Tula artists. The group embraced customary, schematic mark-making and imagery whilst experimenting with the scope and qualities indicative of free flowing acrylic paint. They introduced bright colours and individualistic, distinctive, painterly gestures to their work, alongside the more traditional earth-based pigments. The combination of traditional content, individual painting styles and contemporary materials reconfigured symbolic imagery that led to the creation of a new and unique visual language.(Drury:1998) .

Since that time, collectives of contemporary painters have been established across Aboriginal communities, especially in the central desert areas and northern parts of Australia, and a number of seminal painters have become synonymous with their regional styles. The artist Emily Kame Kngwarreye (1910–1996) from Utopia developed a distinct, painting technique that is based on traditional mark-making from her 'country'.

The paintings of Emily Kame Kngwarreye

Identity and place are key components in the paintings of Emily Kame Kngwarreye. The depiction of her Utopia homeland demonstrates her experience and connection to place through the use of traditional mark-making which she uses to describe specific sites, ancestral stories and song cycles. Kngwarreye also adopted marks based on traditional body painting in developing her stylistic approach. The artist has said of her work, "Whole lot, that's what I paint: whole lot" (Kngwarreye, quoted in Lancashire, 1998:18). I interpret "whole lot" to mean all the components that make up a place, combined with a body of knowledge that celebrates and distinguishes her 'country' of Utopia, her experience of it and connection to it.

The spiritual content of Kngwarreye's paintings is carefully orchestrated to conceal what is sacred as much as to reveal her personal interpretation of ancient knowledge. Kngwarreye's paintings are consciously edited for a western audience while upholding tribal laws that protect the secrecy of sacred material.

From a Western perspective, Kngwarreye's paintings might be seen as a type of modernist abstraction. Margot Neale compares Kngwarreye's painting style to Monet with 'their sea of dots', capturing the essence of pure sensation or like Kandinsky 'in their singing surfaces'. (Neale, 1998:29). Yet, the artist had no previous knowledge of this or any other western canon of art. The use of dots in her paintings stems from traditional sources, but Kngwarreye's departure from the more customary applications and iconography pushed her work into an experimental approach to painting and

interpreting stories of place, and this distinguished her from many of her peers. Her technique of applying transparent layers of dot on dot give her paintings an optic vibration and rhythm which is uniquely her own.

Benjamin suggests that the Eurocentric need to categorise and 'understand the unfamiliar by relating it to the familiar is a potentially imperialising proposition' (1998:53). However, Nelson confirms 'it is not abstract... The markings are produced in rhythmic accord with body designs or topographies and narratives' (Nelson, 2010:8). Although the content may be culturally sensitive, Kngwarreye's paintings can be equally and satisfyingly understood in aesthetic terms through the lively and vibrant painterly language. When asked to decipher her paintings, Kngwarreye said "You know", indicating her confidence in the power of painting as a communicative device that was complete (Kngwarreye quoted in Hodges, 2008).

The sophistication of her painting techniques transcends cultural boundaries and speaks of the universality of painting as a language that can convey commonly felt human emotions. Neale wrote that Kngwarreye's view 'is not a view of the land, but rather an experience of it' (Neale, cited in Lancashire, 1998:18).

Kngwarreye uses painting as an agency to communicate the 'felt' experience of place and it is this aspect of her work that informs this project.



Fig. 17. Emily Kame Kngwarreye (1994), *Alalgura Landscape III*, synthetic polymer on canvas, 120 x 90 cm

In Kngwarreye's painting *Alalgura Landscape III* (1994) didactic colour and marks allude to the natural characteristics of the location, as observed in the waves and flow of subtle gradations of warm earthy pinks and ochre splotches of paint. The imagery is reminiscent of windblown patterns that cover the surface of a soft, sandy desert terrain. The ambiguity of form, the rhythmic marks and the sense of infiniteness in the painting parallels the open and vast continuum of the landscape that stretches outwards. We feel the physical and physiological spaciousness of this seemingly limitless and immense area of central Australia in her painting. The artist's profound depth of understanding and connection to her country is expressed through a compelling visual language that is sensitive, tactile, and effectively encapsulates the spatiality of this place.

In another Kngwarreye painting *My Country* (1994–95) the viewer is dwarfed by the enormity of the picture; one feels submerged in the colour and life force of the location expressed through a veracity of energetic brush marks.¹³



Fig. 18. Emily Kame Kngwarreye, *My Country* (1994–5), acrylic on canvas, 53 panels (5x15 Metres), installation at The Emily Museum, Cheltenham, Victoria 1996

Of further interest are the apparent performative aspects of her painting style. The optical vibration of the colours and marks creates a liveliness in her paintings that expresses moments of lived experience that are

13 I saw this painting at a survey exhibition of Kngwarreye's paintings at the National Gallery of Modern Art, *New Delhi*, in 1996. Viewing this painting in context to having spent three months immersed in Indian culture, I was struck by the sense of "Australianness" of this painting as it potently conjured up memories and the feeling of being in the central Australian desert.

'ontogenetically recreated through the processes' (Manning, 2009:155). Manning reiterates Neale's point that this type of painting 'unlocks areas of sensation' (Manning 2009:156). It is a concept that directly relates to this project's aim of painting an experience of place that encapsulates a series of momentary sensations and immersive encounters with a location through the subjective lens of the artist's eye.

In addition, Kngwarreye's paintings incorporate the past, present and future into an articulation of identity, time and place. Her paintings are a contemporary expression of Dreaming stories that have evolved over thousands of years and continue to be part of her daily life. Her paintings project into the future and continuum of a cultural identification. This aspect of her painting fits the phenomenological model, in which painting place can embody multiple timeframes. I discuss this concept further in the following chapter, *Painting Place*.

Historical and Political Revisions of Place in Painting

Kngwarreye's paintings link spiritual eminence to specific places. Paddy Bedford's (1922–2007) paintings of the massacres at Bedford Downs station in the 1920s shine a light on elapsed historical truths.¹⁴ From an Aboriginal perspective, these events become part of the collective memory of a place and are woven into existing Dreaming stories.¹⁵

14 Paddy Bedford's paintings of *The Bedford Downs Massacre* challenge the views of historians such as Geoffrey Blainey and Keith Windschuttle, who claim that the new 'revisionist' histories of Australia's past are politically motivated rather than factual. For Bedford, the events that took place at Bedford Downs station in the 1920s are a personal, lived history, as the victims included members of his own family, thus the paintings provide an Aboriginal historical record.

15 For Aboriginal people, oral history is seen as a reliable source of knowledge and it becomes formalised into the Dreaming stories of a place. Curator Tony Oliver explains 'the massacre site becomes part of the stories associated with this particular piece of country.... stories are connected by land and absorbed into the Dreaming' (Oliver, 2002:8-9).

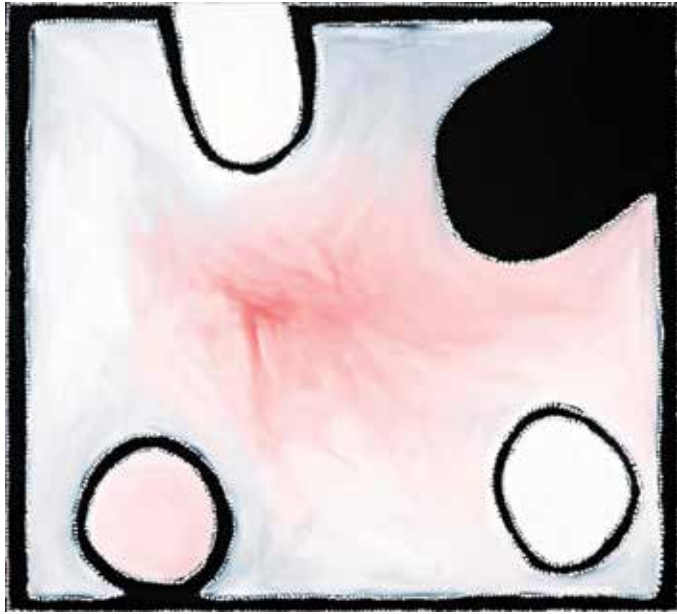


Fig. 19. Paddy Bedford, *Old Bedford* (2005), ochres and pigment with acrylic binder on Belgian linen, 122 x 135 cm

Through painting, the history of these places is conveyed to a white audience.¹⁶

The revelations revealed in Bedford's paintings impact upon the physiological experience of place, as it is made apparent that a seemingly remote, untouched landscape has been subject to ghastly events and the echo of human atrocities. Places feel different when there is recognition of a locations history and the past injustices that have occurred on these sites.

Bedford's reductionist methods of describing a location in the painting *Old Bedford* (2005) reduces the landscape into a series of forms within an expanse of layered colours.¹⁷ His structural composition creates a figure-ground relationship in the painting that conveys a spatial field. Bedford's painting techniques are masterfully direct – kinetic gestures that speak of a deeply-felt human encounter with place. The artist advises that when

16 Cath Bowdler supports the legitimacy of the story portrayed in Bedford's paintings when she writes 'It is testament to this artist..... that the truth distilled within his canvasses has brought broad acceptance amongst a majority of Australians as to the credibility of Gidja oral accounts of their traumatic encounters with white settlers' (Bowdler, 2005:44).

17 The smear of earth red paint at the centre of the composition suggests both the colour of the desert landscape and the blood chilling horror of the events that took place.

looking at the painting you must “Take it into you: see what’s hidden, the story of Bedford Downs” (Bedford cited in Rothwell, 2013:126). Through an attentive contemplation of the painting, the multiplicity of the emotional content and meaning is revealed: the painting resonates with a sense of place and the associated ‘felt’ sensations that come from the gravity of the events depicted.

Place, Value and Feeling

The Aboriginal concept of place referred to repeatedly in paintings such as those of Kngwarreye and Bedford, expands white Australia’s definitions of what constitutes a ‘place’ as opposed to a ‘space’, as it opens up our thinking to acknowledge the significance of places beyond our own cultural agendas. Places considered to be of profound cultural and/or historical importance to Aboriginal people often sit outside western models of cartography. They can include places that are neither marked nor disturbed, and many lie in remote areas.

Tuan differentiates between ‘place’ and ‘space’, asserting that places are ‘centres of felt value’ (1977:4). He says, ‘What begins as undifferentiated ‘space’ becomes a ‘place’ as we get to know it better and endow it with value’ (1977:6). Acknowledging that, for Indigenous Australians, particular sites are imbued with spiritual meaning or subject to significant events, not only reflects a particular system of beliefs, but also reconfigures many of Australia’s vast ‘spaces’ into ‘places’ and taps into the innate human desire to bestow meaning upon, and form attachments to, the land.

On Bruny Island

There has not been the same production of revered aboriginal paintings based on traditional knowledge in Tasmania that has occurred on the mainland.¹⁸

18 Modern painting in Tasmania is starting to use techniques shared by Indigenous art on the mainland with a focus on traditional Tasmanian motifs, such as spirals and celestial representation (Langford, 2015).

The scale of destruction and breakdown of traditional Aboriginal society during the colonial period in Tasmania has left significant gaps in knowledge, culture¹⁹ and language²⁰. However, this does not mitigate the Indigenous relationship to place in Tasmania, but rather highlights the profundity of loss of country and traditional practices. Common themes in Tasmania's Indigenous contemporary arts tend to focus on race relations, loss of identity and narratives of dispossession as demonstrated in the works of Julie Gough.²¹ The exploration of these themes is not only a demonstration of personal or collective grief, but also serves as a means of retrieving knowledge and the connection to places.²²

Indigenous writer and scholar Greg Lehman admits his journeys into the Tasmanian bush are a search 'to make sense of my cultural identity' (2013:204). He pensively describes viewing ancient Aboriginal rock carvings as 'the faintest of circles... (that) just survive to mark the work of hands in distant creation times' (p.205). Lehman's expeditions suggest that a reconnection to culture can be fostered through lived experience, by visiting 'country'. Bruny Island has its own rich history of Aboriginal occupation, spanning thousands of years that has left an indelible mark on the landscape. Archaeological remnants are visible on a daily basis, infusing the experience of place with a psychological burden of both known and unreconciled histories.

19 Aspects of Aboriginal Tasmanian culture are practised in various parts of the state and the islands of the Bass Strait.

20 Traditional languages in Tasmania were last used for daily communication in the 1830s.

21 Ricky Maynard's photographs mark historical sites, events and figures of great significance to Tasmanian and mainland Aboriginal people, and speak to their struggle. Julie Gough's work (discussed in Chapter 1) also typically purveys the overwhelming sense of loss and grief that is synonymous with Tasmania's turbulent history of black/white relations. She has undertaken a number of site-specific works using found objects and artefacts to forge links between memory, history and place.

22 Contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal art production includes textiles, sculpture and photography and often incorporates ancient motifs and techniques of traditional crafts such as shell necklaces.

Roaming on Bruny Island

The past is everywhere, pressing down

(Rothwell, 2013:142)

Aboriginal people have lived on Bruny Island for millennia.²³ Its traditional name is Alonnahlunawanna.²⁴ Fundamental to the experience of being on Bruny is the sense that its landscape carries a resonance of that history, not only in the archaeological remains in sites of occupation, but also in the innate feeling of place. Seremetakis states 'sensory memory is encapsulated, stored and recuperated in artefacts, spaces and temporalities' (1994:128). Lehman recalls the emotional weight of discovering cultural remnants when journeying through the Tasmanian bush, and the associated consuming feelings of 'sadness in lonely places... drenched with an abiding absence that could be sensed, felt [and] heard' (2013:205).

Middens made up of pearlescent shiny mounds of broken shells and discarded tools can be found all over Bruny and signify the pattern of life for the island's Indigenous population prior to colonisation.²⁵ There is a sense of pathos connected to these abandoned sites which are often obscured as they meld back into the overgrowth of bush. The proximity to colonial relics can signify an apparent clash of cultures;²⁶. The relationship between

23 Bruny was inhabited by an Aboriginal population prior to European arrival and there are still a number of people living on the island who identify as Aboriginal.

24 The name Bruny Island was derived from the French explorer Bruni D'Entrecasteaux who undertook an expedition to this area in 1792 (Davis, 1990).

25 Ochre pits show where handfuls of clay have been scooped out near Barnes Bay on North Bruny Island. Adult Aboriginal males on Bruny Island traditionally wore their hair long and caked it with ochre. This discretely hidden site would have once been a site of activity and production.

26 In scrubby bush near Bull Bay there is a large midden located next to a fresh water rivulet that runs down to the sea. Nearby, there are the remains of a whaler's camp. I have found fragments of very old whale bones near this site.

Aboriginal people and early settlers (whalers and sealers) on Bruny Island was often fraught.²⁷

At first, these sightings are simply a registration of what lies on the surface, the appearance of things. However, any contemplation as to the associated meaning is loaded with an awkwardness that is both ratifying yet full of lament in imagining the course of events that has led to this reminiscence. These discoveries can be laden with feelings of uncertainty, of half recognitions and imagining what might have been as 'places themselves shape and influence human memories, feelings and thoughts' (Bachelard, cited in Malpas, 1999:5).

The writer W.G. Sebald (1944–2001) speaks of experienced history as the 'temptation to work with very fragmentary pieces of evidence, to fill in the gaps and blank spaces and create out of this a meaning which is greater than that which you can prove'. (Sebald, cited in Romer, 2002). To explore, experience and decipher is not conventional history but is what Sebald describes as 'historiography'. It is the subjective sense of an ephemeral presence imbued in the materiality of place that becomes part of the atmosphere and the experience itself. In a phenomenological sense, history loses its linear structure as everything becomes enmeshed and interwoven into personal history, identity, and the sense of self within a place. Rothwell concludes that when these multiple timeframes seemingly meld, 'all of life seems tangled up: the past, and the present and what will come' (Rothwell, 2013:42).

27 The records tell of the abduction of Aboriginal women and children, rape and open hostility as many local Indigenous people were forcibly removed. In 1829, George Augustus Robinson was commissioned by the Van Diemen's Land government to set up a mission for Aborigines on Bruny Island, believing that conciliation was possible. However, the mission was not successful and was abandoned nine months later. Reference: *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, (2006–16).

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Fig. 20. Found object: animal bone

I walked out to the point at Bull Bay, past the remains of an abandoned whaler's camp and happened to spot a small, glowing white animal bone that stood out against the dark, grey boulders that lined the shore (Fig. 20). It was obvious that it had been shaped into a tool, perfectly smooth with a finely tapered point. I held it in my hand like it was some long forgotten treasure and it felt beautiful to touch. I could see it was very old and imagined it might have been used to make nets or weave baskets?

I walked back around the beach and set up camp beside a large midden where a fresh water rivulet trickles down to the sea. I swam and then began to paint. I painted Betsy Island, (Fig. 21) hovering in the distance amidst a grey, softly swelling ocean – but my brush marks were tentative as if any boisterous painting might disturb the island's ghosts?...In this moment of being there, painting.... I felt both a deep reverence and sadness for this place.



Fig. 21. *Betsy Island*, oil on paper, 12 x 60 cm

On reflection

When I begin to paint on Bruny Island, I am entering into a dialogue with a place that I understand holds both a history and meaning that at times may be beyond my comprehension but is nonetheless 'felt'. There is a profound sense of an evocative presence and mystery embedded in the landscape that I trust is a legitimate part of the experience of being there. Malpas writes that we 'need to admit some recognition, in our own experience, of the presence of something of the Aboriginal feeling for the intimacy and connection to land and to locality' (1999:140).

My aim was not to paint the more elusive aspects of Bruny island's history but to acknowledge how trace and intuitive knowledge inform the lived experiences and felt sensations of place. Sensory memory and cultural knowledge augment the recognition of Bruny Island's artefacts and confirm the nexus of multiplicity in comprehending the feeling of this location. These aspects of experience are conveyed in subtle ways, through the tactile and emotive aspects of oil painting.

In this chapter I have examined how Indigenous perspectives, conveyed through painting, have opened the door to a new way of seeing place that has increasingly become a fundamental part of the Australian story and its representation. In addition, the painting techniques of artists like Kngwarreye and Bedford are informative in demonstrating the development of personal visual language that conveys the subjective experience of place in capturing both what is seen and unseen. Their work contributes to this project's contextual framework, in both their technical approaches to painting and in the complexity of layers involved in the subjective dialogue of painting an experience of place that is culturally informed yet personal and felt.

Whilst the pathos of Tasmania's Indigenous story is markedly different to that of the mainland, the presence of an Indigenous voice in mainstream cultural discourse fosters sensitivity in detecting the nuances and details of material evidence in the landscape. It throws light upon the cultural impetus, expanding the interpretation of place and painting as two diverse cultural forces, the past and the present, potentially entwined. The feeling of

place is not just reliant on the fabric of a location, nor is it merely sensed in the air. The feeling of place is the result of an inter-related, internal human projection onto places that is precipitated by the environment. However, regardless of the source, the 'feeling' is there. This project draws on these rich experiences which add to the intensity of place and painting on Bruny Island.

Chapter Three

Painting Place

In this chapter I consider techniques and approaches conducive to painting an evocation of a phenomenological experience of place. This raises a number of questions. How might an artist establish an understanding and connection to place in order to make paintings that capture the essence of the location? What role does the relationship between the eye (seeing), hand (mark-making) and mind (consciousness) play in creating a visual language that acts as an agency for translating experience? Furthermore, what methodologies might be employed to facilitate tapping into the underlying or innate feeling of place, and which painting style or approach would best express the multiplicity of place and the experience of it?

Through an examination of the symbiotic relationship between the processes of painting in relation to developing visual language, a connection to the location, sensation, associations, time and memory, I established a working plan for the visual investigations.

I evaluated the methodologies of a number of artists who practice *plein air* painting, especially artists who paint the places where they live. Focusing on artists who developed an intimate connection with the landscape through daily interactions imbue their paintings with the freshness and vitality of 'lived experience', that aligns with the research propositions of this project.

Constable declared that 'Painting is but another word for feeling' (Constable et al,2006:78), acknowledging the connection between what is seen and felt. Painting outside in the landscape, Constable used sensitive and lively brush strokes to convey light, time, and nature as a vital and energised force. Constable's methodologies are the cornerstone for subsequent generations of artists who paint *en plein air*.

David Hockney (b.1937) and Claude Monet (1840–1926) are exemplars in the field of landscape painting, and their methodologies were instructive in establishing the importance of working on site to create paintings that express lived moments. Their paintings of the light colour and atmospheric of place, embody a phenomenological experiential approach that references both time and memory, consolidated through living in the environments in which they painted.

Northern Territory based artist Neridah Stockley (b.1973) and the Tasmanian painter Patrick Grieve (b.1969) have also demonstrated a knowledge and personal connectivity to the places they paint, grounded in lived experience and synthesized into their respective individual painting styles. Their methodologies further collapse boundaries' between studio practice and working out on location, as the dual approaches complement each other in expanding the processes of painting a deeply-felt experience of place.

The methodologies and techniques of all of these artists both inspired and set the course for the visual investigations for this project.

Visual language: *the hand, the eye and the mind*

In a phenomenological approach to painting place, the focus shifts from the pictorial organisation of space to one in which the elemental aspects of place are filtered through the artist's subjective encounter. Experience is the starting point for this exploration in developing a visual language that aptly conveys the felt sensation of place.

Philosopher and commentator David Woodruff Smith defines experience, in a phenomenological sense, as 'including not only the passive experiences of sensory perception, but also imagination, thought, emotion, desire, volition and action...it includes everything that we live through and perform' (2013). Smith's definition is useful for thinking about painting through experience as a material registration of the conceptual process of mapping the landscape in terms of the relationship between an internal dialogue and the matter and phenomena of the world around.

There is a symbiotic relationship between the nature of 'lived' experience and the performative and reflective process involved in making a painting. The process of painting place develops as a result of osmosis between physical action, immersion and the visual, analytical and intuitive engagement with the subject (place).

Barbara Bolt writes that 'It is through the performativity of process that the world is opened up and the scope and limits of being are experienced' (Bolt, 2004:124). Bolt's comment highlights the potential of painting as a process to expand and encapsulate subjective experiences of place – the interchange between human consciousness and the surrounding world, realised through the action of painting.

Carl Jung's psychoanalytical theories are also useful in understanding that the creative process is 'planted in the human psyche' and can 'form a conduit directly into the conscious and unconscious' mind (Walker, 2002:110). Jung's hypothesis supports the notion that painting will be informed by the artist's psyche and past experiences. Painting involves conscious and/or sub-conscious processes, amplified by a visual and sensory engagement with the location. It is through this synthesis that a painting will encapsulate lived moments.

Visual language is one of the primary and intuitive portals in the transaction of ideas, thoughts and feelings. The techniques employed in rendering the formal elements of what is both seen and felt (in conjunction with cognitive, emotional and imaginative processes), results in a visual translation of the conversation between subject, self and painting. The composition and application of paint may be dictated by preconceived ideas or the transcription of a particular concept or thing, but mark-making can also be a spontaneous reaction to the present moment; a reflection of the sensations of the world as experienced. Theorist Rab Walker states that painting can be 'responses to experience, conceptualising feelings both sensory and emotional' (2002:110). He adds, 'you make one stroke and from that moment you are in discussion with your subject' (2002:108). Working on location sets up a direct and integrated exchange between the artist and the place.

The painting methodology and stylistic approach, established in the form, content and individual mark-making techniques of the painting, are the

descriptive devices available to the artist in translating subjective sensations of experience. The pictorial language will define the painter's elucidation of the subject, nuanced in the tactile and sensitive application of individual marks that convey felt moments of engagement. Robert Nelson observes that, 'painting is so much more than paint...its manipulation constitutes a language in which the technical immediacy acts metaphorically and meanings are generated beyond the physical units' (Nelson 2010:xii). These comments are significant because they highlight the potential for painting to convey an experience of a place beyond that of pictorial reproduction.

The materiality of paint is also important. The relationship between methodology, content and the feeling that emanates from the painting's surface cannot be separated, notes the painter Marlene Dumas (cited by MacKenny in Coelewijn et al, 2014:70). These components work in conjunction to form a painting language or painting style – an assembly that conveys not only the picturing of an image but also the individuality of the artist's subjective intent. The painting language reveals the personalised, tactile aspects of the painting. Painting is essentially a physical process where the surface of the painting and trajectory of the brush marks convey the 'lived' and 'felt' moments of its construction.

The English landscape painter William Turner (1775–1851) deliberately employed very specific painting techniques to support the emotional currency and transcription of ideas evidenced in the dabs of paint.¹ He applied boisterous swaths of impasto paint across his canvas so that the

1 Turner's brush work is visceral and obvious. Other artists will go to great lengths to disguise brush marks and smooth out the surface of their paintings, which can be equally suggestive. In contrast to Turners paintings the careful blending of flat plains, muted colour and precise definition of forms in Prudence Flint's (b.1961) paintings allude to a quiet, calmness that perfectly complement the stillness and solitude of the women who occupy her paintings. Flint's stylistic approach in the painting *Cook* (2008) is typical of her methodical, unhurried approach that demonstrates the artist's tenderness and affinity for her subjects – women portrayed in private moments within a domestic setting.

brushwork and tactile surface of the painting conveyed the energy of wild storms, shifting skies dramatic cloudscapes.

Historian Kenneth Clark noted that Turner's late, more abstract paintings 'depended entirely on light and colour and have no identifiable subject – nothing to distract us from pure sensation' (Clark,1973:223). However, the forms in the compositions still succinctly convey mass and spatiality – the sensory nature of time, light and atmospherics. Turner was renowned for working on site in an array of weather conditions that lead to the development of a highly individualistic painting style which conveyed what the artist saw and felt. In paintings such as *Venice with the Salute* (1840–45), the evocation of ethereal atmospherics, time and place are enhanced by the artist's technical finesse, displayed in the soft gradation of colours and affecting, sensuous manipulation of paint.

Turner's paintings demonstrate the visceral qualities of oil paint to materialise a visual language that can be read intuitively, or as Kenneth Clark would say, as 'sensation' that manifests through the performative mark-making. Painting is 'about the trace of the human touch' states



Fig. 22. J.M.W.Turner, *Venice with the Salute* (1840–45), oil on canvas, 62 x 92.5 cm

Dumas (cited by MacKenny in Coelewij et al, 2014:70). However, a painting is only fully realised in conjunction with the artist's thinking processes and feeling for the subject. The completed painting will reflect this integrated process: the unity of the hand, the eye and the mind, or as some would say, the hand, the eye and the heart.² Heidegger supports this view when he writes 'gestures of the hand are so intimately connected to thinking, when you thoughtfully retrace 'the hand's footsteps' you discover wordlessly, intuitively ...something of the draughtsman's thinking' (Walker, 2002:112).

Paintings of place translate experience through the techniques of application and materiality of the medium, to potently convey the formal elements of atmospherics, thoughts, emotion and imagination: a visual translation of the conversation between subject, self and painting. The performative application and material qualities of painting evidence the processes of a conceptual and formal enquiry.³

This understanding establishes the attributes of the painting medium and the role of an individualised visual language as the basis for my exploratory investigations in painting on Bruny Island.

The connection to place: *painting in and around home*

Yi- Fu Tuan offers the view that for an artist to capture a deeper 'sense of place', she or he must have spent time with that place. (1977:183). Painting *en plein air* fosters a physiological and psychological interaction with the location that develops and expands the connection to place through the durational processes of painting. Tuan notes 'An object or place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind' (1977:16). Painting lends itself to translating sensations of experience from a phenomenological perspective, in that it occupies a similar

2 David Hockney has been known to quote the Chinese proverb: "You need three things for paintings; the hand, the eye and the heart. Two won't do." (cited in Gayford, 2011:62).

3 Place is the focus for the inquiry and immersion in the experience of that focus (i.e. the phenomenon which is being explored), is realised through the act of painting.

realm.⁴ When a person paints places they are intimately familiar with, the connection is further intensified through daily interaction.

For the most part, home has potent meaning because it is the locus of everyday life and the repository of objects and memories (Cooper cited in Giesecking & Mangold, 2014). From a Jungian perspective, home is a symbol of the self (Cooper, cited in Giesecking & Mangold 2014:168), interwoven into notions of identity and belonging that are established early on and reiterated throughout life. Thus artists, who paint the places where they live, operate within the jurisdiction of the self in relation to that place. Art critic and commentator Peter Timms has written that

It is not necessarily those lands that present the most spectacular scenery or those that are most remote from human influence that are closest to our hearts, but rather those in which the land in being shaped by people and has shaped them in turn.... The countryside we respond to best is that which is inextricably bound to our stories (2008:7).

Memory and associations are most profoundly at play when experience is entwined with personal history. When an artist repeatedly paints a particular location, they establish a connection to that place through the performative, attentive engagement of painting a picture, so that it becomes part of their identity and life as an artist.

I have always been drawn to artists who paint the environments where they live, as their work most often reflects a depth and authenticity that comes from firsthand experience and an emotional investment. Hockney says the artist's role is to 'make the world around us seem more interesting and enigmatic than it usually appears' (Gayford, 2011:10). Artists who paint with an intimate knowledge of their subject, in and around home, offer

4 As Merleau-Ponty points out, 'a painter's vision is not a view upon the outside, a merely "physical-optical" relation with the world' (1964:181). In a phenomenological sense, painting can be described as an 'act of consciousness', realised through the making, where layers of meaning are expressed in the visual language.

the viewer the possibility to see places through their insight. It is through this experience that the painter can confidently distil their perceptions of the outside world down to its 'essence and, in turn, project them outward through his or her creative acts' (Hoffman, 2005:129).

Constable wrote that 'I should paint my own place best' (Constable, Beckett and Constable, 1964:78) and it is through the purpose of his medium that he expressed his attraction, familiarity and fascination with his homeland: English pastoral scenes, billowing clouds and shafts of light that so eloquently capture the feeling of a location.

Paul Cezanne (1839–1906) repeatedly painted the view of Mount St. Victoire from his home on the outskirts of Aix en Provence, *en plein air*. Proximity enabled the artist to build a visual fluency with his subject that in turn, allowed him to move away from painting traditional landscapes and explore perception through new spatial configurations in an attempt to convey the experience of objects and space. Cezanne took nature as his model in depicting forms, but at the same time aimed to paint sensations in 'the very way objects strike our eyes and attack our senses' (Merleau-Ponty, cited in Johnson, 1994:61). Cezanne dissolved outlines, laying colours in small dabs so that spatial structures and objects optically vibrate and radiate out of the painting, similar to the way in which colour and sunlight can flicker before the eye in real life.

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947) also centred his practice around his home, often painting the view from the balcony or a window.⁵ In addition, he also spent hours walking through the countryside, pondering the light, taking notes of the weather conditions and making sketches. With his head full of images and ideas, Bonnard retreated to his studio where he synthesized these experiences into vibrant paintings that reflect the artist's felt moments of being in nature.

5 Bonnard painted the rural region between Lyons and Grenoble in the early part of his career. He made works of the area around the village of Vernonnet, where he acquired a little house in 1912. In 1926, Bonnard bought a house, Le Bosquet (The Grove), in Le Cannet on the Côte d'Azur, not far from Cannes, and he painted many works depicting this region around the Mediterranean Sea in the latter part of his life.

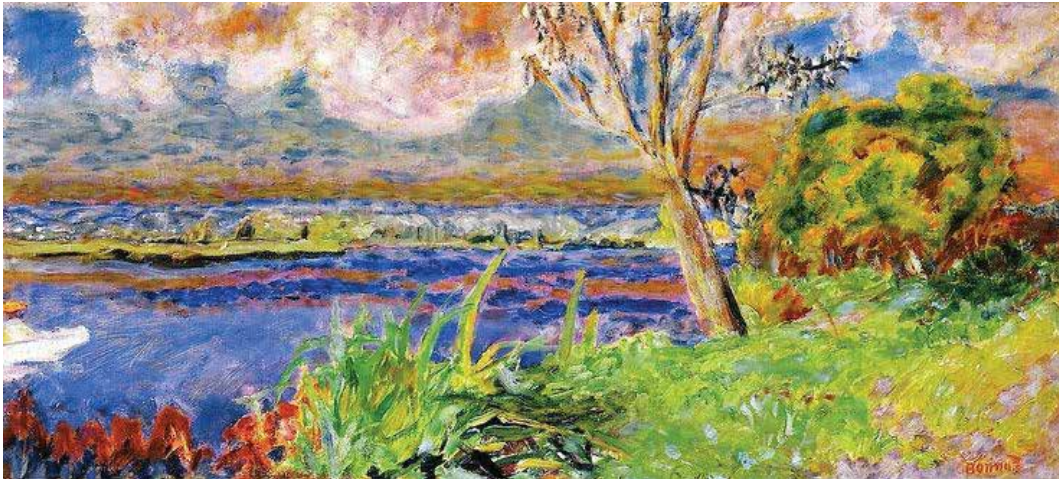


Fig. 23. Pierre Bonnard, *The Seine at Vernon*, (1923) oil on canvas 35.5 × 76.2.

Bonnard condensed his daily experiences into images with the aim of “giving life to painting” (Bonnard, quoted in Terrasse, 2000: 27). In paintings such as *The Seine at Vernon* (1923) his attentive application of multiple paint colours side by side, creates an optical vibrancy indicative of sunlight and ambient atmospherics. Bonnard captures the ‘feeling’ and integral atmosphere of place nuanced in the application of painterly marks. His painting techniques demonstrate a confident familiarity and understanding of both the subject and painting as a vehicle to transcribe ‘felt’ sensations.

The exchange or osmosis between an artist and the places in which they live can become integral to their practice, informing their approach in capturing the ‘essence’ of that environment. The Italian-based Australian painter Jeffrey Smart (1921–2013) spoke of his experience of living in the highly cultivated environment of Italy, surrounded by gracious historical architecture, antiquities and masterful paintings, like those of Piero Della Francesca (1410/20–1492) in the nearby township of Arezzo. In Italy, daily life still revolves around traditional food and social rituals. Smart recognised these time-honoured traditions, along with the aesthetics of his surrounds, as significant in shaping his view of the world and his paintings. Reflecting on the decades he spent painting in Italy, Smart spoke of how the elements that made up the character

and ambience of this environment infiltrated both his subconscious and artistic vision (2012)⁶.

Monet and Hockney also spent prolonged periods painting the places where they lived, creating significant bodies of work from both direct observation and memory.

David Hockney

In 2004, after spending decades living in Los Angeles, Hockney returned to his childhood home in Yorkshire to live and paint the landscape. For Hockney, painting *en plein air* from direct observation is an essential part of his process. Hockney has spoken of the importance for him of “being there” and of capturing “passing time, the sense of a lived reality” (quoted in Weschler, 2009:8) as he focuses on painting the shifting skies and changing weather patterns. Lawrence Weschler observes that ‘if the famously season-less Los Angeles taught Hockney space and spaciousness, the East Yorkshire countryside was now teaching him time’ (2009:10). Hockney’s methods include painting the same view repeatedly, recording the changes in vegetation, colour and light conditions as they occur throughout the seasons – from the intense greenery of an English summer through to wintery scenes of bare trees blanketed in snow.

Moments in time and place are encapsulated in Hockney’s paintings via deft, almost calligraphic brush marks that result in vibrant representations of leafy country lanes, quivering spring blossoms and animated cloud formations. The sense of passing time in Hockney’s paintings of Yorkshire is at its most profound when simultaneously viewing a number of paintings that represent the same scene across the gamut of seasonal transformations.

6 Geoffrey Smart in conversation with Michael Cathcart, Books and Arts Daily, ABC Radio National, Australia, broadcast on 10th January 2012. Smart’s precisionist depictions of urban landscapes are based on the principles of the ‘golden mean’ of geometric proportions embraced by the empires of ancient Greece and Rome. This complex network of interlocking rectangles, triangles and diagonal lines, forms the basis for the structure of Smart’s compositions.



Fig. 24. David Hockney painting on location in Yorkshire 2006

Through painting on site, Hockney recounts how the accumulation of experiences becomes embedded in memory. Over time, details of the location amass and distil in his mind's eye, and it is these 'distillations' that Hockney uses as crucial references when he is painting in his studio. Hockney speaks to the value of drawing from both direct observation and memory, as the two processes are interrelated. He states "We see with memory. My memory is different from yours so if we are both standing in front of the same place we're not quite seeing the same thing... there's no objective vision – ever" (quoted in Gayford, 2011:102).

The subjective experience of place and painting from memory are both intrinsically bound to an understanding that certain elements will take precedence, according to ways of seeing and interpreting the surrounding world. Hockney understands that his perceptions will naturally edit and highlight various aspects of an encounter, saying

"(s)ome mornings I just go out and stand there for twenty minutes and come straight back in here (the studio). If you do that you have an incredible lot in your head. I knew what I was going to look at.

Depending on what you decide, that's what you see". (quoted in Gayford, 2011:105).

In *Woodgate Woods III* (2006), Hockney uses formal perspective and scale to create a sense of spaciousness and depth in the painting. The artist's feeling for the location is expressed through his use of vibrant colours and nimble dashes of paint, which give his images a spirited liveliness. Hockney's painting technique conveys the energy and sensory nature of this environment, suggestive of gentle breezes rustling the leaves, dappled light filtering through the canopy of trees and the cool dampness of the forest floor. By painting *en plein air*, Weschler notes that Hockney had 'found a figurative way clean past the monocular optical vise...his eye out of the viewfinder... his eye, his heart, his hand wide open, lively, freely responsive to the wide world before him' (Weschler, 2009:10). Hockney's brushwork channels a series of sensations – a sense of the artist's lived moments as he stands in the forest and paints.

Despite Hockney's adherence to formal representational techniques, the paintings have a strong sense of immersion, of being in the landscape as opposed to picturing the view from afar. This is, in part, due to the enormous scale of the pictures, but also to the way he structures his

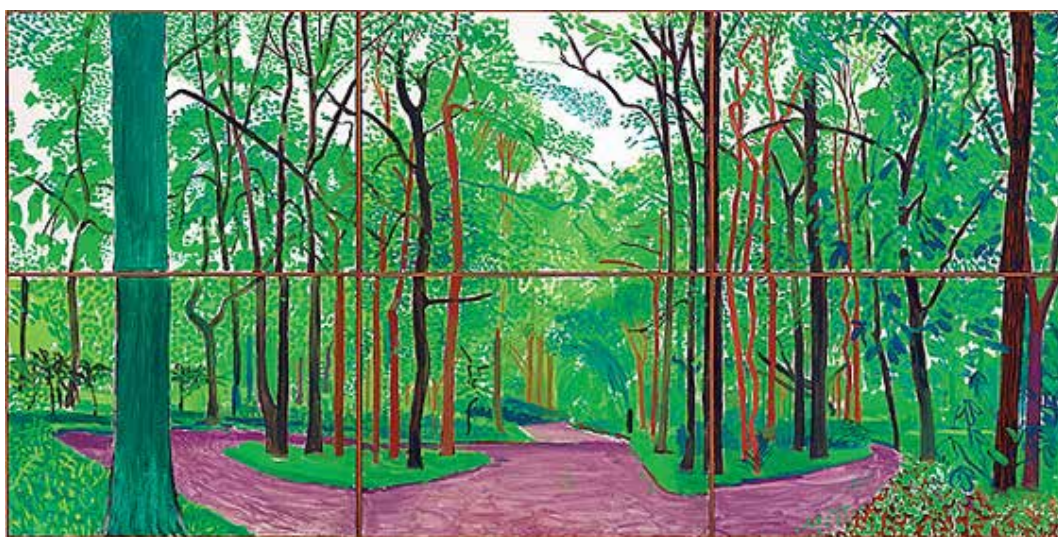


Fig. 25, David Hockney, *Woodgate Woods III*, (May 20 & 21 2006). Oil on canvas. 183 x 366 cm

compositions and the liveliness of the painting's surface.⁷ Hockney is fond of the expression "the infinity of nature", and by using large canvases he aims to locate the viewer in the middle of the picture. (Gayford 2011:65)

Monet

Preceding Hockney's paintings of Yorkshire by almost a century, Monet employed a similar methodology when painting the garden around his home at Giverny *en plein air*. Monet also painted from memory in a studio situated within in the garden.

Monet would have decided I am just going to look at this. How do you really see clouds reflected in water? Then the memory would be very, very good for ten or fifteen minutes. Imagine, early in the morning all he would need to do was walk down to the lily ponds, have a few cigarettes while sitting there. Then go back and paint. (Gayford, 2011:105)

Monet's intense familiarity with his garden allowed him to focus on the act of painting itself.⁸ The succinct dexterity and economy of the brush strokes in Monet's water lily paintings combine both his 'profound knowledge of his garden with his technical command of painting, honed over a lifetime...he was painting as much as what he knew as what he saw' (Cross, 2013:5090). The paint appears to dance over the canvases in a series of animated marks combined with a lightness of touch that is typical of Monet's technical finesse. The combination of emotive suggestion and description that epitomise Monet's painting style encompasses both the immediacy of seeing with the sensations of his surrounding environment.

7 The average size of Hockney's paintings from this period is 183 x 366 cm. He also made several works that are up to seven meters long.

8 Monet literally created the subject for his paintings. He was fifty years old when he purchased his house at Giverny, which was originally surrounded by flat open paddocks. He designed an elaborate network of gardens, diverted a nearby stream, transformed ponds into aquatic pools filled with water lilies and constructed decorated Japanese style bridges. I suspect the artist knew every plant, contour and detail of the garden which provided inspiration for his painting for more than forty years.



Fig. 26. Claude Monet, *Reflections of Clouds on the Water-Lily Pond*, (1920) 78.74 × 502.36 inches. Oil on canvas, Museum of Modern Art, New York City

In *Reflections of Clouds on the Water-Lily Pond* (1920), areas of the composition waiver in and out of focus, depending on the viewer's proximity to the work. Up close, Monet's brush-work reads like a series of shorthand dashes of colour and playful gestures. This is what gives his paintings their fantastic vitality and sense of liveliness. Standing further back from the picture, the forms become apparent – loosely rendered waterlilies, cloud reflections and the shimmering qualities of light on the water. Monet's painting optically parallels an experiential phenomenological model, where various associations, thoughts and emotions oscillate in and out of focus – a series of sensations and responses to the surrounding world. In this way, Monet's visual language is highly attuned to evoking the transient nature of 'felt' sensations.

The eight panels of Monet's seminal series, *Nymphéas* (1920–1926), are displayed around the curved walls of the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris. The paintings depict clusters of lilies floating on translucent, flickering pools of water. Leaves cascading gently down from the gnarly branches of the willow trees frame the edges of the picture and enhance the sense of a spatial field, a foreground and background within the picture plane. Forms lose their definition to the pleasure the artist finds in mark-making.



Fig. 27. Detail, Monet's *Nymphéas* (1920–1926) on display at The Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris.

Dashes of light pigment flicker over the deeper tones of the water and we can sense the bright sunlight playing on its surface. We feel this place more than see the features that define it – we experience being there.

One could easily get lost in the immensity of these paintings, as they cover almost the entire walls of the gallery, across two rooms. Following the trajectory of the panels replicates the sensation of walking through the actual garden. These paintings are a great example of what John Berger describes as the potential of painting to manifest a felt presence of the material location. He writes painting 'starts with what can't be seen... Painters study appearances in order to get closer to what lies behind them. Visual art is a chase after the invisible' (Berger, 1997).

Elizabeth Cross describes Monet's painting style as 'the sensation of sight, executed without concession to the appearance of the visible world, with almost abstract results' (Cross, 2013:5118). The reduction of forms in Monet's paintings evokes a sensory world where associations, memories, thoughts and feelings reside in the materiality of mark-making.

Neridah Stockley and Patrick Grieve

The paintings of Northern Territory based artist Neridah Stockley and Tasmanian based Patrick Grieve encapsulate the characteristics of their particular regions but also a sense of the spirit and feeling of those places.

Stockley bases her practice on *plein air* painting but also works in a studio. When painting on location, her objective is to ‘observe the world in its simplest and purest state (as) an excuse for that critical observation, not an end in itself’ (Angel, 2014:3). Her studio work is more contemplative as she balances the specifics of a given location into metaphysical and symbolic gestures of her felt experience of the place. Stockley defines her relationship to place and painting as one of “an extreme awareness of oneself in a place” that “ends in an extreme awareness of oneself in a painting” (quoted in Angel 2014:7). Stockley’s methodology is an example of an artist’s integration (psychologically, physically, emotionally or imaginatively) into her surrounding world through the act of painting.

Using bold brush marks and an economy of description, Stockley sets up a tension between the figurative image and the gestures of painting. This gives her work an energy and tactile sensuality that reflects both an intense considered feeling for the subject and the action of painting. The surface of her work is unrefined, much like the scrubby bush she paints. These techniques result in paintings that are not only observations of a very specific environment, but imaginative renditions of her feeling and relationship to place.

Rich earth tones in paintings such as *Ilparpa* (2007) conjure up the breadth and heat of the desert. The structure of Stockley’s compositions of multiple



Fig. 28. Neridah Stockley, *Ilparpa*, (2007), acrylic paint on Canson paper, 55.3 x 80.5 cm

flat planes conveys a physiological spaciousness in the paintings that matches both the mood and topography of the area.

The scale of Stockley's paintings is generally modest, which adds to the feelings of intimacy with the subject. These small paintings are an interesting counterpoint to the enormous life-size canvases of Monet and Hockney, which draw the viewer's gaze into the pictorial space. Surprisingly, Stockley's diminished painting scale does not detract from the intensity and evocation of place; rather, it operates on a different level that is immediately personable, and encourages the viewer to move in closer to the paintings. The proximity of the viewer magnifies the emotive qualities of the brush work that is visceral, tactile and 'felt'.

In contrast to Stockley's paintings of untamed desert scenes, Patrick Grieve paints the highly cultivated pastoral area near his home in Northern Tasmania. Grieve primarily paints in the studio but says time spent out on location is an integral part of his process. He explains the experiential nature of his methodology as

travelling the coast to take photographs and then draw and paint from my memories of these places. The photographs are kept as reference only when the work has started. I will re-visit each place and just look, no drawing. The photographs themselves form a very small part in the composition. I want the work to be a reflection of my visits and I am not that fussed to be tied too closely to a copy of the landscape... I will draw places and scenes not as a representation of a specific place but as a memory of a visit. I then try to interpret this image through the eyes of now. Even when my work was abstract it referenced the landscape.⁹

Like Bonnard, almost one hundred years before him, Grieve's excursions out into the landscape offer thinking time for the artist to ingest the essence of the landscape. Of particular note are the ways in which Grieve

⁹ Letter from Patrick Grieve to Ann Holt, Bruny Island, (July 2011)



Fig. 29. Patrick Grieve, *Cold day sky light* (2005) Oil on linen, 90h x 90w cm

distils and transforms these ordered pastoral landscapes of delineated paddocks, into a carefully calibrated balance between picturing place and gestural painting. His simplification of forms, as seen in *Cold day sky light* (2005), seems to capture the fundamental spirit of the area he paints.

This part of Tasmania is renowned for big skies, distant horizons and an incredible sense of spaciousness. Grieve's exuberant and expressive brush marks conjure up shifting, moving fields of energy that bring a sense of aliveness to the paintings. The edifice of memory seems to serve the artist well, as he deciphers standout moments of his experiences of places that then become the quintessential forms and colours in his paintings, such as a hovering cloud or vibrant stretch of green field. *Cold day sky light* (2005) is typical of Grieve's mastery in composing compositions of seminal structures and painterly surfaces that pulsate with the vitality of a momentary aspect of the physical world in transition.

Stockley's and Grieve's painting techniques incorporate representational imagery and a loose gestural style. They succeed in marrying acute observation with the feeling for place, conveyed in the simplification of forms and expressive mark-making. Field work and building a connection to place remains an essential part of their processes.

In addition, artists like Stockley and Grieve are actively engaged in developing a visual language that specifically addresses the distinctive qualities of the

regions that they paint. Their paintings document selected areas that are part of a myriad of differing geographies that exist within Australia.

Painting place in Australia is still in many respects a frontier, as many parts of the country have rarely, if ever, been painted. The veteran landscape artist John Wolseley (b.1938) confirms he has gone 'to places where no European has ever been...where a European person has never painted' (Wolseley quoted in Grishin, 2015:39). Wolseley's art focuses on the uncharted aspects of the vast Australian continent, which still retains a sense of discovery for many artists¹⁰

The increasing numbers of Indigenous voices in the Australian art scene have altered the cultural landscape and precipitated a shift in consciousness, as many Australians identify with the concept of 'a spirit of place' embedded in

10 Wolseley employs a similar methodology to the one I adopt for this project: working on location over extended periods of time to foster an intimate engagement and understanding of a particular place. In addition, the 'starting point for Wolseley's exploration of wilderness lies neither in the theory nor in the aesthetics of picture making, but in the experience of the wilderness itself'(Grishin, 2015: 17). However the similarities between this project and Wolseley's practice end there as his interpretation is more about engaging with the geographical, tactile elements that make up the environment whereas in this project the focus on painting the ethereal, psychological and emotional experiential aspects of place.

Wolseley's process involves scientific like observations of the natural history that shapes the geography of location.. He records the trace of the lands forms, mapping and documenting the essential physicality of a place by layering surfaces with various media, written observations and collage. These assemblages (often a mixture of watercolour, gouache, graphite, colour pencil and ink) can incorporate earthly elements such as imprinted rubbings of a rock surface onto paper that records the textures caused by glacial action, attaching found objects such as bark or insects to artworks, and drawing on paper that has previously been stained and immersed in the soil. (Grishin, 2015: 23). The tactile attributes and methodologies of Wolseley's artworks contrast to my approach to the landscape which investigates how human history, action and intervention become intrinsically connected to the feeling and atmospherics of a location. Furthermore, my stylistic approach involves painting the transient aspect of light that suggests a conscious and sensory experience that is dependent on time, expressed through emotive painterly gestures. In this respect Wolseley's artworks sit outside the perimeters of this project but serve as a reminder of the varying ways in which contemporary artists choose to interpret the Australian landscape.

the land.¹¹ In recognising the cultural significance of this undertow, younger non-Indigenous artists like Stockley and Grieve (consciously or not) seem to be drawn to fostering a sense of belonging and personal connection to place, capturing something of the felt essence of their homelands through an intimate engagement with the places they paint.

Memory in Painting Place

Memory plays a significant role in the practices of Bonnard, Monet, Hockney, Stockley and Grieve. It is through direct encounters with places that these artists can later draw on memories to distil the 'feeling' of the location when painting in the studio. Painting *en plein air* initially builds a knowledge and connection to the location. However it is in the studio, separated from this direct observation that the synthesis of the subjective encounter with place manifests through memory.

Memory, embedded in both conscious and subconscious thought, interlaces visual perception, and Hockney stresses the importance for painters to develop "visual memory" (Gayford, 2011:104). I understand that Hockney means this not only in terms of memorising visual details, but in critically and emotively compiling the sensations and the felt experiences of places.

I have discussed the advantages of artists living and painting on location to establish a relationship and build their knowledge of a place. However,

11 The painter Idris Murphy (b. 1949) acknowledges this contribution and is 'has been inspired by indigenous painting and storytelling, which he feel is informing new paradigms of painting in an Australian and contemporary context'. (Craven, 2012). Whilst aesthetically Murphy's work shows little similitude to contemporary indigenous painting, he is indebted to this cultural movement for imbuing the experience of landscape with a psychological and emotional consciousness, of a 'spirit of place'. Whilst I have argued throughout this exegesis the significance of aboriginal painting on the perception and painting of place in contemporary paintings of place, Murphy's use of unconventional colours (metallic purples, green, and pinks) sets it apart from the aims of this project. My intension to evoke a sensory and atmospheric rendition of the feeling of a location which relies on using colours that are endemic to the landscape of Bruny Island, to capture the particular light conditions and mood of the location in relation to time.

Endel Tulving makes a distinction between knowing and remembering. He writes 'knowing is more factual whereas remembering is a feeling' (1972:385). This differentiation helps define the function of memory in studio paintings of place. Recalling 'felt' sensations is an important part of how our memories of place become visible in our mind's eye.

Tulving's research reveals that places or events that hold emotional significance are more likely to become encoded as vivid memories (as opposed to factual based knowledge). He coined the term 'episodic memory' to refer to these types of recollections. Episodic memories are inclined to be autobiographical and include events, visual and temporal-spatial relations (Tulving, 1972). His theory provides an explanation of how spatial locations become personalised in the minds of artists who have spent years painting particular places to which they have formed an attachment.

Places become part of us, as they are held within our memory bank. Diane Ackerman reminds us that through memory we can 'relive scenes from days or even years earlier, viewing them in our mind's eye' (1990:235). It is through memory that the experience of place is realised.

In a phenomenological sense, the past and associated memories meld into our vision of places and how we perceive them. Rothwell describes this as a collapsing of memory with seeing. He wrote 'it is as if one come(s) up against the past: the mind's eye and the eye collide' (2013:43). Blending precise observation and description with these innate mental processes lies at the heart of subjective painting.

Layers and time in painting

The durational nature of painting closely aligns it to memory and time-based experience, as it also spans multiple timeframes, subject to the continuum of felt responses and subjective thought processes. When *plein air* painting, our eye can travel out into the distance but also our thoughts can travel back and forwards in time, as Tuan points out, 'when we stand before a prospect, our mind is free to roam' (1977:125).

The author Richard Flanagan has stated that “we all live in the past, present and future simultaneously, that’s how life works” (2013) and painting encompasses a similar realm. Painting on location will be the response to a series of present moments, as seen and felt. The brush marks are the embodiment of these moments of lived experience and can also include a manifold of viewpoints. Art Historian Martin Gayford wrote, ‘(A) painter is not simply adding more and more paint to canvas or a piece of paper; fresh thoughts and observations are going on, each adjusting the one that came before (2011:115). Dumas describes similar experiences when painting, as she responds to unexpected moments that occur in both the painting and her surrounds (cited by Andriess in Ceolewijn et al, 2014). The materiality of paint becomes a repository of these moments of experience. The action of painting is the visual transcription of physical and metaphysical aspects of perceptual vision through time: seeing the world, feeling, thinking and actively responding to it.

In a recent lecture, Carnegie Professor of Art at Yale University, David Joselit, discussed time in relation to painting. Joselit argued that “painting can occupy several time zones at once” thus painting has “regained a new conceptual force for its capacity to store time and to articulate time in a range of tempi” (2013). His comments were made in relation to the flood of instant digital imagery that dominates contemporary visual culture across global communications networks. By comparison, painting is durational and multilayered.

Hockney has used photography throughout his career, and as such speaks from considerable experience in comparing painting and photography in relation to making images that speak of time and place. Hockney sees the limitations inherent in reducing the recording of an experience of place in a photograph that by its nature contains a mere instant of time and a singular point of view (Gayford, 2011:115). His experiments in photography have included using multiple cameras and photographic collages. He describes these assembled images as ‘putting one layer of time on another’ (Gayford,

2011:116). However, in his efforts to depict images of the Yorkshire countryside, Hockney feels that 'photographs couldn't capture multiple vantages, roving detail, passing time, the sense of a lived reality', adding that a photograph 'is not at all what life feels like, and life, liveliness, lived reality is what we always ought to be after' (Weschler, 2009:8).

David Joselit points out that the "marking and storing of time in painting occurs at the same time" (2013), as paintings will always be the result of a multitude of moments. The present tense is embodied in the action of making a picture. This can be especially true when painting *en plein air*, as the artist is absorbed in the task of capturing transitory, atmospheric changes.

Painting also embodies time past because seeing is always prefaced by previous experience. Berger writes '(W)here as the sight of a tree is registered almost instantaneously, the examination derives from, and refers back to much previous experience of looking' (1985:150).

Beyond the artist's gaze and production is the anticipation of future viewing, and the life of a work beyond its completion. Berger makes the point that in deciding a painting is finished the artist calculates the 'foreseen ideal moment of it being looked at ... the process of constructing the future moments (1985:206). The painter's deliberation in both the production and the completion (of a painting) is subjective and therefore mutable. Similarly an audience will also bring a range of personal responses that can vary and span a continuum of multiple time frames. In an examination of the painting process, the author Dr. Warren Lett wrote that, 'the meaning is not just derived at the end of an analysis (viewing); it is discovered in the experiencing and is present continuously in the representations and the inter-subjective responses' (cited in Jeynes, 2006:6).

Similarly, Aboriginal paintings of place in relation to Dreaming, span a multiple time-space continuum. Erin Manning notes that Dreaming stories 'extend beyond the continuum of the everyday, towards the conjunctive disjunction of future past' as the painted image 'propels the Dreaming towards the

multiplicity of its univocity' (2009:206). In Kngwarreye's art, the act of painting is preceded by a conscious intent to paint her story of place, based on thousands of years of cultural tradition. It is actualised in the mark-making that makes 'present both the future and the past'. (Manning, 2009:181)

The artist draws on previous experiences, knowledge and training in the perception and evaluation of the subject. The feelings of 'absence' and 'presence' that I refer to as part of my experience of place on Bruny Island, may be founded in my prior knowledge of the location. However these aspects of place are brought to mind via the immediacy of 'felt' sensations that come from being in a particular time and place.

When painting out on location, one's sense of time drifts between the past, present and future tense.¹² Erin Manning writes that 'events of perception are always called forth through pre-hensions which are pulling out of expression from the durational plane of experience' (2009:7). Within this state of consciousness are the momentary 'felt' sensations of place expressed in the tactile nuances of painterly mark-marking. The multiple layers that contribute to experience and sensations of place are further synthesised through memory when painting in the studio. The artist, author and musician Patti Smith writes

Real time...cannot be divided into sections like the numbers on the face of a clock. If I write about the past as I simultaneously dwell in the present, am I still in real time? Perhaps there is no past or future, only the perpetual present that contains this trinity of memory (2015:83-85)

Memory is the portal for the amalgamation of past and present moments in both the experience of place and painting.

12 This understanding links the paintings of place to the nature of experience within a phenomenological framework, as a multiplicity of layers and time are involved in both of these pursuits.

On reflection

In this chapter, I examined approaches to painting place in context to time, memory and the importance of working on site – paintings that express lived moments in assimilating the past, present and transitory nature of the world around.

Understanding time and memory in relation to place and experience provides a framework for experiential paintings of place on Bruny Island. Painting is primarily a performative action that takes its form in the concreteness of present time and place, but a painting is also the material register of how the 'enigma of time manifests itself on the cyclorama of matter' (Okri, 2002:187). If painting can embody layers of time and sensation, then it can be an agency for transcribing moments of experience that are intrinsically bound to human consciousness. Painting *en plein air* is an expression of mental processes, with the immediacy of what is seen, felt and sensed.

I considered a range of methodologies practiced by various artists that could be applied to painting place on Bruny Island. I established that painting an experience of place demands a synergy of the hand, the eye and the mind, in order to develop a personalised visual language that becomes an extension of subjective experiences. The stylistic application and materiality of paint is the mechanism for expressing 'felt' moments in time and place.

Hockney's methods highlight the importance of being immersed in the environment, being exposed to the sensory nature of a place first-hand, in order to cultivate a familiarity with the location so that the paintings reflect the complexity and authenticity of lived moments.

Monet's painting style and techniques are also of particular interest in balancing referential imagery that encapsulates a time and place, with the potential of highly expressive ambiguous painterly mark-making that encapsulates 'sensations' brought about through daily encounters.

Both Monet and Hockney's paintings reflect their personal connection, knowledge and understanding of the places they paint; the colour, light, form and atmospherics intrinsic to the locations. It is this type of intensity of a lived and felt engagement with place that I sought in painting an experience of Bruny Island.

Neridah Stockley's and Patrick Grieve's techniques are also relevant, as these artists oscillate between painting referential forms and a simplified 'essence' of place that reflects a 'felt' intimacy and engagement with place. Stockley's practice, in particular, highlights the relationship between studio painting and working out on location, in capturing different aspects of place: *plein air* painting that is observational, tactile and intuitive, informed by immediate sensations, compared to studio work that is more self-referential in painting through memory and past experience.

In this chapter, I have referred to a number of paintings that are an impression, essence or simplification of the subject and which bring to the forefront the qualities of the paint medium. The word "impression" is defined as 'an effect or influence on the senses, on the mind and/or feelings' (Webster, 1968:428). The idea of synthesising compositions down to a series of reductive forms that elevate the properties of paint and gesture was instructive in developing a succinct and personal visual language to describe the experiential nature of Bruny Island.

Chapter Four

Methodology/Studio Practice

Part One

Journal Entry – Bruny Island – November

I sat on the beach at Bull Bay, looking out across a vast stretch of water to the familiar landforms on the horizon: Betsy Island, Goats Headland and Cape Roul in the distance. The ocean was rhythmic, gentle and swaying. Long lines of currents formed a network of spidery veins across the sea, as small gusts of wind intermittently danced across the surface of the water creating flashes of light and sparkle. I walked up through the grassy paddock behind the beach at Dennes farm, sat down and began to paint.

The practice-led research focused on a number of painting processes and experiments I undertook to explore the aims of the project.

In relation to the themes explored throughout the exegesis, it was never my intention to paint a literal illustration of Tasmania's historical artefacts, the Indigenous influence or the feeling of 'absence' and 'presence' that I argue is a part of the experience of place on Bruny Island. Artefacts may persist in the landscape but the feeling of place is a subtle presence that cannot necessarily be seen, nor proven; rather it is innately 'felt', through an attentive engagement and awareness of the sensate atmospherics of locations.

I propose that the expressive painterly gestures used to describe colour, light and form, encapsulate the emotive aspects of what remains invisible to the eye: the mood and felt sensations of place.

David Hockney believes that 'being there' is an integral part of the process of landscape painting in capturing the sense of 'a lived reality' (Weschler,

2009:8). I was seeking the kind of engagement with place that other artists have experienced by immersing themselves in an environment and painting. Painting on location sets up a mutually dependent exchange of witnessing and interpreting the elemental changes as they transpire. Experiencing place and painting simultaneously, in real time, is an essential part of this exchange, in which painting is filtered through the artist's immediate subjective encounter.

In the following sections, I have outlined the formal and technical methodologies employed in relation to the research propositions. I have explored various painting processes and reflected on the outcomes of these methodologies. This chapter has been divided into three sections that correspond to the various phases and bodies of work produced over the course of my PhD candidature.¹ I review and evaluate each phase, provide a number of examples and note developmental shifts. I have also included a number of journal entries which set the scene for painting on Bruny Island.

First Body of Work

Preparation and Method: *Plein air* and painting on canvas

In the initial stages of the research, I followed David Hockney's method of painting the same view repeatedly in exploring the seasonal variations and the continual atmospheric changes. It was through painting *en plein air* that I set myself the goal of examining the distinctive features and character of the island. This knowledge can never be obtained in the same way when painting from photographs, because mechanical reproduction flattens forms, modifies colours and physically removes the artist from the sensory nature of immersive experience.

1 I have not specified the year of paintings; rather they are categorised within the different phases of painting. Similarly, journal entries are marked by the month rather than the year. As my candidature included several intermissions, the flow of ideas and painting are aptly conveyed by the marking of months and seasons. This is in keeping with the feeling on the island where time is not subject to the sense of a linear construct, but seemingly flows through cyclic changes that occur within the natural world.

Part of the process of *plein air* painting was to watch the weather and identify the ideal moments of light, colour and 'sensation' that would inspire me to paint. The impact of weather is not just on our physical being, but also effects the emotional responses we have to places. Smith describes the impact of 'high winds, cold rain... a looming continuum of calumnious skies (that can) subtly permeate my entire being ...(slipping) into a ...lingering malaise...a... melancholia' (2015: 25). I was conscious of the role of the elements in dictating the mood on the island that could affect my physical and emotional reactions to place, and that these aspects were always shifting and changing my perception.

I initially worked on small canvases so that I could paint an entire scene and capture the variations in colour, light and mood in one sitting. This created a sense of urgency in my process, in trying to paint fleeting moments. Painting multiple images reflected the feeling of impermanence in the landscape.

I prepared canvases with a preliminary reddish wash of thin oil paint that would enrich the subsequent layers of colour and add to the illusion of a 'depth of field' in the compositions. I realised with hindsight that I was setting myself up to paint a 'distant view'.

I painted a series of images (Fig. 30), that were based on western traditions of landscape painting with a delineated horizon. The landforms were typically suspended between an expanse of water and sky, emanating the feeling of "islandness" – a floating world where the land appears to hover in the vaporous milieu.



Fig. 30. Twelve studies, Bruny Island, oil on linen, each 36 x 36 cm

I continued to paint on canvas for a number of months, experimenting with palette knives and big brushes so that the application of paint might encapsulate the energy of the elemental forces. These paintings portrayed an array of Bruny Island's animated and often ominous skies but fell short in conveying the intensity of a deeply-felt physical and emotional engagement with place. There was still a sense of 'picturing' the scene from a distance (Fig. 31).



Fig. 31. *Grey Cloud*, 46 x 92 cm, oil on linen

Inside and Out

By the end of the first year of the project, I had completed building a studio on Bruny Island. A large window took in the view of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, from where I could witness incoming weather.



Fig. 32. Studio window overlooking the D'Entrecasteaux channel

By painting both indoors and out I wanted to maintain the freshness and authenticity of painting from direct observation with the more contemplative processes of studio painting. I painted, looking out of the window (as Bonnard had often done). Although this method is not traditional *en plein air* painting, I was still painting from observation, in real time, and I resolved to extinguish any formal divisions between the two methodologies.

Field Trips



Fig. 33. *Lilac Morning*, oil on linen, 122 x153 cm

I went on a number of field trips, painting from numerous vantage points.² *Lilac Morning* (Fig. 33) is based on research studies painted out

2 There are many natural vantage points on the island and, in conjunction with the clarity of air and light, the views can extend beyond twenty kilometres. I painted a panoramic study looking across Storm Bay from a hillside at Bull Bay. Reviewing this multi panelled work reaffirmed my preference to use a single framed format for this project, as it seemed more conducive to capturing succinct moments of time and place.

on location from a lookout at Mount Nelson.³ It shows the trajectory of Bruny Island as it snakes its way out into the Southern Ocean. I was awe-struck and inspired by the grand vista and wanted to capture the sense of spaciousness, light and serenity. The completed painting had a feeling of nostalgia: it focused on the scenic beauty, and the gentle gradations of smooth paint seemingly negated the darker aspects of this environment.

Evaluating the first body of work

The numerous oil paintings produced during the first phase of this project displayed a kaleidoscope of moody skies, majestic light and still moments that are typical of Bruny Island. However, the paintings fell short of conveying both the passion and underlying apprehension I felt being immersed in the island's landscape. Instead of creating a spatial field of emotive painted marks that expressed being in the moment, the pictures were more conventional in their representation of a scene. Robert Nelson wrote that representational painting confines visual language to the judicial control of brush work that will 'match the incidental visual presence of the object or space that is represented' (2012: xii). In my quest to achieve a type of representational realism, I was limiting the scope of emotive, spontaneous mark-making that could express 'felt' moments in time and place.

Despite the shortfalls of these early works, the rigours of *plein air* painting gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in the environment and gain a sense of the look and feel of the island. By focusing on the light, moody skies and muted tones in the landscape, these paintings did touch on the melancholic feeling of Bruny Island.

Lilac Morning proved to be a critical turning point in the investigation as it highlighted the compromise of distancing myself from the sensory aspects of an immersive experience when painting in the studio. However, it also highlighted the benefits of studio painting: the possibility to paint during

3 Mt. Nelson is on mainland Tasmania with extensive elevated views looking across to Bruny Island.

encumbering weather and the alternative but equally interesting process of painting partially from memory and imagination. By comparison, working *en plein air* relied on painting from observation but it also involved the intuitive process of responding to the moment or a series of moments in time.

Second Body of Work

Alternative Strategies – working on paper

I considered a number of strategies that might increase the sense of capturing felt moments in the paintings. Anne Galbally wrote 'If the 'truth' of the *plein air* landscape experience was the aesthetic emotion sought by practitioners in the mid to late eighteenth century, then it was epitomized above all in the oil sketch.'(2006:85). Constables multiple studies of clouds painted on site capture this type of emotive truth and the immediacy of experiencing a place. I was seeking a similar type of engagement in my painting process and made a study of Constable's *Seascape Study with Rain Cloud* (1824). This exercise enabled me to familiarise myself with Constable's techniques and to explore first hand the trajectory of his loose, gestural style of painting. Following Constables example encouraged me to continue painting *en plein air* with increasing confidence and allowed me to move on from the mannered style of painting that I had become accustomed to.

The painter Euan Macleod has spoken of the 'less precious qualities afforded by working on paper... offering 'breathing space' and a chance for 'the artist to let go' (cited in Angel, 2015:6). After experimenting with a variety of materials,⁴ I began a series of studies on oil sketch paper, (approximately 16 x 16 cm).

In a significant step, I abandoned conventional landscape compositions of a foreground, middle ground and background. I experimented by using large brushes and gestural marks that had an immediacy in responding to the look and feel of Bruny Island.

4 My first experiments were on ready-made canvas boards. However, the texture was crude, causing the paintbrush to drag on the hard, glued surface of the canvas. In addition, the paint was absorbed into the chalky, pre-primed gesso.



Fig. 34. *Number 13*, oil on paper,
approx 16 x 16 cm



Fig. 35. *Number 27*, oil on paper,
approx 16 x 16 cm

Focusing on details such as a section of cloud (Fig. 34) or the ridgeline of a hill (Fig. 35) gave me the sense of being immersed in the elements. The simplified compositions conveyed the energised aspects of the moving, shifting weather patterns. I also used rags and my fingers to work back into the compositions. These practical methods added to the sense of spontaneity in paintings. It was a tactile, physical way of working that felt in tune with the physicality of the environment.

Critical Reflection of the works on paper:

I produced multiple paintings over a number of months which I placed around the walls of the studio. The assembly of these images formed a visual narrative of the constant changes that occurred on Bruny Island. I made the following observations:

- In a significant shift, many of the paintings were not literal translations of a place but a direct response to the surrounding light, colours, atmospherics and feeling of a place.
- Painting transitory configurations of light and atmospherics bears the mark of a witness.



Fig. 36. Viewing the multiple works on paper and canvas in the studio.

- The economy of brush strokes and expressive application of paint confidently captured the liveliness of the scene and performativity of painting an immersive experience.
- By simplifying the forms and compositions these paintings speak of an 'essence' of place.
- The untouched areas of white paper in the compositions establish a figure-ground relationship, indicative of the spatial arrangements within a location. These unadulterated areas also create a psychological space within the paintings.(Figs 37 and 38)



Fig. 37. *Number 32*, oil on paper, approx 16 x 16 cm



Fig. 38. *Number 41*, oil on paper, approx 16 x 16 cm

The significant shift in the stylistic approach to painting that occurred at this stage of the project indicated that I had begun to know the environment well enough to work intuitively and economize forms in the paintings. The paintings progressed from a formalist approach to picture-making to painterly renditions which encapsulate an immersive experience of place: *being in it and of it*. This methodology brought me closer to achieving the aims of the project.

Moment

Selections of these works on paper were exhibited at the Faculty Gallery, Monash University in Melbourne as part of the exhibition *Moment* (2012). I had initially thought of these small paintings as studies for the project. Seeing multiple works installed as a series made me realize that they formed a resolved body of work that successfully addressed the aims of the project. With this in mind I continued to work in this format.



Fig. 39. Install of, *33 moments* (2012). Each images approximately 16 x 16 cm, oil on paper, Faculty Gallery, Monash University.

Chapter Four

Methodology/Studio Practice

Part two: Letting go of form

The small works on paper, of clouds, water and mists were promising in that they conveyed a sense of the atmospheric and mood intrinsic to the experience of being on Bruny Island. These looser images, with minimal forms, suggested an ethereal 'otherness'. They made me question whether I should move away completely from painting figurative representations of place, to a more reductive style of painting that is more an expression of feeling rather than looking. A reduction in rendering forms would also give rise to more ambiguous passages of paint as a metaphor for aspects of experience that cannot be seen- the sense of an 'absence' and 'presence' in the landscape.

Letting go of form in the paintings might also enhance the sense of immersion in place. Monet's waterlily paintings eloquently demonstrate a feeling of immersion, as the eye is pulled into the vitality and complexity of the painting's surface. I considered a number of painters who place emphasis on emotive and expressive painting techniques and considered how these methods might be applied to encapsulating 'felt' experience.

American artist Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011) is described as an abstract painter, yet her work intentionally references place. The artist said, 'I see most of my paintings as landscapes or vistas, changing views, motion caught' (Rowley, 2007:45). There is an ambiguity in Frankenthaler's paintings that blurs the distinction between figure and ground. Her paintings are not bound to the conventions of visual representation, but embody the understated suggestion of a location. Letting go of recognisable forms in compositions shifts the focus to the materiality of the paint as motional, cognitive and tactile. The painting becomes an extension of the material world; what

Rowley describes as 'a trace of body/consciousness/world in a continual process of coming-into-existence in the perceptual field' (2007:48).

Frankenthaler's approach to painting can be aligned with the principles of phenomenology: a physical, emotional and cognitive engagement with both the surrounding world and the action of painting. The critic Barbara Rose described the freedom and complexity of Frankenthaler's paintings as being 'not exclusively of the studio or the mind, but explicitly and intimately tied to nature and human emotions' (Hall quoting Rose, 2011). Her paintings display the performative, experiential aspects of picture-making as much as they are the result of an idea. It is a painting process that encompasses action, thought and sensation.

Frankenthaler's technique demonstrates freedom and inventiveness in the pouring of paint and arbitrary dribbles.⁷ The artist allows the medium to take on a life of its own. Parallels may be drawn between these applications and the nature of experience as both are susceptible to chance and both rely heavily on intuition and feeling. Frankenthaler's seemingly organic process celebrates the emotive aspects of human gesture within the medium of paint, as opposed to the judicial control of every brush mark. The obvious skill and dexterity in her paintings also reveals a great deal of discernment, as what she leaves out is as important as what she puts in. Areas of unadulterated, raw canvas establish moments of pause that counterbalance the impact of the colours and lively distribution of paint.

7 Helen Frankenthaler, like her contemporary, fellow American painter, Joan Mitchell (1925–1992) was a "Second Generation" Abstract Expressionist. Mitchell and Frankenthaler both painted on un-primed canvas, but Mitchell's style embraced 'gestural and sometimes violent brushwork'. (Hall, 2015) Frankenthaler's paintings, unlike many other abstract painters of the period, are distinguished by her 'soak and stain' technique where she poured paint directly onto the canvas. The fluidity of Frankenthaler's painting style results in soft areas of unstructured flowing colours that are indicative of atmospheric pools of light and spatiality. In contrast, Mitchell's forceful brush strokes favour line and calligraphic gesture that tend to flatten the picture plane.

I am drawn to the surface of Frankenthaler's paintings, where the energy, the flow of paint and trajectory of the mark-making conveys a sense of the human touch. However, I am also conscious (when looking at her paintings) of the innate human desire to seek the recognisable, the subject, amidst the ambiguity of mark-making. Theorist Paul Crowther states that on one level, 'abstract works can only be made intelligible on the basis of the link between form and feeling' (2002:146).

In pure abstraction, the subject of the painting can be subsumed by the voice and power of the medium. Erin Manning believes it is the mixture of restraint, precision, force and felt gesture in abstracted paintings that creates sensations so that the painting becomes 'so much more than a painted surface' (2009:156). This theory is essential in understanding how paint can encapsulate the essence of an experience. However, the British art critic Adrian Searle, warns that paintings that rely too much on the materiality of the medium, can risk becoming 'just splodges and pattern, smears and dabbles' (2012).

David Hockney prefers to paint images of the 'visible world' (quoted in Gayford, 2011:47). Hockney is a committed figurative artist and as such his preference for representational images over abstraction betrays an obvious bias. However, I do see his point in relation to painting place. The more ambiguous a landscape painting becomes, the further it is removed from being recognised as a specific location, unless of course one takes the view that the abstract painting is the actual location.

By abandoning the forms that represent the character of a location, does the abstracted landscape image court a visual generalisation? Furthermore, does it stop being a representation of an actual place? Frankenthaler clearly stated that her paintings are not to be 'recognised for what they are...it has to do with spirit or sensation' (Rowley 2007:46). It is precisely this ambiguity Frankenthaler is seeking – 'coexistence between the subject and the phenomena of a lived interrelatedness' (Rowley 2007:47).

By comparison, David Hockney's figurative landscape paintings make obvious the artist's vision, intensely looking at, and experiencing, a specific location. The brush marks retrace the artist's eye in transcribing a multiplicity of details, colours and forms that contribute to the look and feel of a place, and in doing so, reflect his engagement and connection to a place. In addition, when a place is recognisable, the viewer is predisposed to the broader cultural, social and historical associations attributed to the site. In this respect, painting figuratively is a viable part of this project, as it affirms the affiliations between the location and the cultural constructs that might underscore the experience of that place, specifically Bruny Island.

Representational landscapes can be loaded with meaning, however this style of painting, as my earlier experiments established, risk becoming a "picture" that can place the viewer outside the spatial field of the image.⁸ In contrast, letting go of form and perspective in painting can create a different kind of spatial field within the picture frame; the sense of immersion and a sensory, emotive and psychological engagement that draws upon the viewer's imagination. The contemporary American abstract painter Brice Marden (b.1938), argues that when references to the real world are vague, the subject of a painting will be open to interpretation, and therefore can take the viewer to more complicated places (Sfmoma, 2015). The possibility of creating this type of ambiguous space in a painting has led me to consider how the reduction of formal structures in a painting might further serve this project, in terms of reflecting the nature of experiencing place (material, tactile, sensory and essentially 'felt') whilst maintaining a link to the character and specifics of the location.

Acknowledging Kngwarreye's statement that she paints the 'whole lot' made me question the appropriateness of following western conventions in the division of abstraction and figuration as contrary, autonomous approaches to painting. In Kngwarreye's paintings it is the gestural mark, colour, and movement of the paint that becomes the form – the body of the

8 Hockney overcomes this by painting on a huge scale, dwarfing the audience in the physicality of his paintings.

painting that evolves 'with every encounter' (Manning, 2009:156). At this point of the investigation the divisive categorisation of painting styles seemed restrictive in developing methods to paint intuitively, responding to experiential moments whilst also acknowledging the role of observation and the form and substance of place. As previously stated, the experience of place can be multi-dimensional and continuously subject to change. Therefore, the style of painting employed to render it could also remain unfixed, responding to what is seen and felt in the moment of painting.

With the above theories in mind, I continued to paint on paper both in the studio and *en plein air*, rendering seminal forms in the landscape, in a simplified, reductive manner with emotive, gestural mark making. I painted from observation, felt sensations, memory and imagination. I placed no restrictions on the painting techniques and allowed my intuitive response to the subject – be it a form, the light or a sensation – to guide my composition and stylistic approach to each work.

I experimented with a series of compositions *en plein air* (Figs 40 and 41). These were observational paintings but I also consciously focused on the sense of melancholy that plagued these beautiful, ethereal scenes of light and water. The action of painting became a conduit for my tactile, emotional and sensory engagement with the location.



Fig. 40. *Number 52*, oil on paper,
approx 16 x 16 cm



Fig. 41. *Number 50*, oil on paper,
approx 16 x 16 cm



Fig. 42. *Number 70*, oil on paper,
approx 16 x 16 cm



Fig. 43. *Number 71*, oil on paper,
approx 16 x 16 cm

In the paintings numbers 70 and 71, (Figs 42 and 43) my aim was to replicate the look and feel of stormy skies and the rain running down the studio window, by orchestrating droplets of paint to run down the surface of the paper. Even though I was painting inside the studio, I still felt part of what was happening outside. I could hear the wind howling, the trees swaying, and the torrent of rain thundering down on the tin roof. The studio shuddered as the gales hit the southwest corner of the building. The natural light both outside and in the studio was softened by a grey, woolly sky. This ambient light and the subdued colours of the scene were rendered in a series of semi-transparent washes, drips and fervent brush marks that translated the sense of being entrenched in a storm at the mercy of the elements.



Fig. 44. *Number 80*,
oil on paper, approx
16 x 16 cm

I painted *en plein air* at dusk, focusing on the intensity of colours that saturate the sky around this time of day. I found that the best way to accentuate the luminosity of sky's colours was to frame it against the contrasting figurative elements of dark vegetation (Fig. 44).

I often kept painting once the light had completely gone or the storm had passed, finishing a painting from my imagination and the memories of the recent moments I had seen and experienced in the landscape.



Fig. 45. *Number 90*, oil on paper, approx 16 x 16 cm (left) and *number 94*, oil on paper, approx 16 x 16 cm (right)

Critical reflection

It was only through painting, and responding to the moment that I could weigh up the possibilities and potential of different approaches to painting to address the aims of this project – studio painting versus *plein air*, representation versus gestural mark-making, memory versus observation.

As the number of works grew, they formed a coherent body of work, a visual memoir that reflected an array of unfolding moments and experiences on Bruny Island. The swift and energetic application of paint seemed fitting for capturing the essence of the island's vitality, colour, sense of liveliness and primordial 'presence'. In contrast, the images of darker, moody skies and sombre tones were more representative of the underlying sense of melancholy in the landscape. Some paintings were primarily figurative

whereas others were reduced to a series of marks that merely suggested forms in the landscape.

This period of painting marked a key turning point in the research, as this body of work became the most accurate rendition of my experience of the island thus far.

The figure-ground relationship in the painting of place

Robert Nelson wrote '(I) n abstract art, the paint can be put down without a whole string of spatial implications' (2010:133). In relation to this project, spatiality is precisely the mechanism that grounds the gestural mark-making and reduction of forms to an image of place.

During this period of the research, I looked at Mark Rothko's (1903–1970) paintings. The American abstract painter had an extraordinary sensitivity in encapsulating the contradictory elements of empty spaciousness and tangible substance that set up a provocative tension between 'absence' and 'presence' in his paintings. The predominant feature of Rothko's paintings is the sense that they are deeply 'felt'. The power of his work, contained within hovering fields of colour, is the suggestion of 'otherness', some inexplicable arena of thought, vision and sensation that seems to tap into the innate human physiological fascination with the intangible, metaphysical aspects of existence, time, place and being. Semi-transparent, horizontal bands of scumbled colour and rectilinear forms appear to float upon the surface of Rothko's canvases. The suspension of these forms establishes the figure-ground relationship in the compositions, which can be read as 'spatiotemporal locations' (Crowther, 2002:156). This technique confirms the artist's ability to balance spatial implications within ambiguous passages of paint that in combination imply both a metaphysical and physical location.

Crowther describes Rothko's work as 'luminescent abstractions', referring to the 'evanescent or precarious configurations of light' (2002:156). This aspect further connects Rothko's paintings to renditions of the natural world, as his images typically radiate delicate qualities of light, colour and matter.

Rothko's visual strategies, and his emphasis on the figure-ground relationship, began to inform my processes in painting the ethereal, sensory aspects of place. The structure of Rothko's compositions can be applied to cloud-strewn skies or islands that float upon fields of colour and the capturing of light within a spatial field that suggests location.

Whilst being inspired by Rothko's minimalist approach to painting, I did not want to entirely abandon the beautiful shapes, geographical features or boisterous cloud formations or the rendition of shimmering reflections on water, because these aspects are so indicative of Bruny Island's character.

The figure-ground relationship in Rothko's paintings was important in guiding my methodology. It led me to consider painting reductive forms but in the context of a spatial field that would connect the paintings to a place.

Form and spaciousness

Following on from painting clouds and atmospheric elements, I found my way back to rendering place through the use of emblematic colour, suggestive motifs and the replication of seminal shapes, such as the ridgeline of a hill (Fig. 46).



Fig. 46. *Number 100*, oil on paper, approx 16 x 16 cm

At the same time, I tried to maintain a sense of the ephemeral by working loosely with big brushes and bold gestures that were more suggestive of atmospherics and mood, as opposed to observational illustration. I continued to simplify forms and paint on paper.

Journal Entry – October

On a cool day and I walk down the deserted beach at Dennes Point. The hills at Tinderbox across the channel appeared to hover in the monotone backdrop of silvery, white sea and a soft grey sky.

My methodology remained reliant on visual observations, but I consciously tried to balance painting my surrounding world with the more ambiguous painterly gestures that transcribed sensations.

I laid out the paintings around the walls and floor of the studio. The fragility of the paper added to the sense of impermanence in the transient moments depicted in the images. In addition, the lightweight qualities of the paper made the works appear to float around the walls. Placing figurative works next to more reductive compositions (Fig. 47) set up a visual dialogue between the individual pieces. The different styles of painting represented different aspects of place and experience: the embodiment of picturing a location with the more ethereal aspects in time and place. There was an intensity and intimacy to these paintings that was reinforced by their small scale. They were personable, tactile and conveyed the felt subjectivity of being on location, being part of and painting my surrounding world.

On the following pages are a selection of numerous figurative and reductive paintings made during this period.



Fig. 47. Numbers 107 & 108, 111 & 113, 117 & 12, oil n paper, each work approx 16 x 16 cm



Fig.48. Numbers 122 &123, 138 &139, 142 & 146, oil on paper, each work approx 16 x 16 cm

Chapter Four

Methodology/Studio Practice

Part Three: Four Seasons

Scaling up

I began painting on bigger sheets of paper (56 x 60 cm), to see if the increase in size gave the paintings greater presence. Working on a bigger scale was more physical than working on small paintings and seemed in keeping with the physical nature of the environment. I also occasionally painted on canvas again as the sturdier surface supported multiple layers of paint and allowed me to work reductively by rubbing back into the paintings.

The Four Seasons

At this stage of the project it became obvious that there were marked variations in the colours and compositions of the paintings that reflected the various seasons. The natural cycle of annual changes not only affected the colour and light in the paintings but also often dictated the stylistic approach used for painting.

Les Murray believes that the European concept of four seasons is one of the greatest cultural impositions on the Australian landscape since colonization, as the model rarely matches our climatic conditions, nor does it align with the indigenous cyclic calendar (Murray, 1997:167).⁹ However, Tasmania's weather patterns correspond quite comfortably to the European model as the

⁹ In some areas of the continent, the temperature remains relatively consistent throughout the year. White Australians living in the tropics divide the year into two distinct phases: the Wet and the Dry. In contrast, Aboriginal people have a very different take on the natural cyclic calendar, and in parts of northern Australia there are said to be up to eight seasons during a calendar year.

summers are generally warm and mild, autumn is traditionally temperate and still, and the winters are cold and sometimes snowy. Spring is the most tumultuous season in Tasmania, as it is frequently windy with wild storms and fluctuating temperatures. In addition, because of Tasmania's proximity to Antarctica, a prolonged summer twilight and dramatic reduction of daylight hours during winter is more pronounced than in any other part of Australia. Grouping the paintings according to the seasons for exhibition acknowledged the enduring, repeated patterns of nature, along with the memories and associations we attach to each phase of the year.

The journal entries in this chapter correlate my experiences of Bruny Island in relation to painting throughout the various seasons.¹⁰

Journal Entry – Spring – Bruny Island

The first week of spring brings mild temperatures as doors and windows are flung open and the long phase of introspection experienced during the winter months on the island suddenly dispels.

10 Pictures that depict changing seasons is a well-established European tradition which can be traced back to medieval illuminated manuscripts and illustrated books of days. Some of the earliest oil paintings that focus on seasonal change are by the Flemish artist Pieter Bruegel (1525–1569). In 1565 he painted a series of works that recorded the metamorphosis of a landscape over the course of a year. The pastoral landscapes depicted in *Hunters in the Snow* and *The Harvesters* serve as backdrops to the numerous figures that demonstrate the agrarian aspects of man's relationship to the environment.

In keeping with the aims of this project, I am more interested in artists who depict landscape as an autonomous entity, where nature itself renders the seasons apparent. For example, Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) made the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, depicting the mountain in its various guises from its wintry snow-capped peak to the striking blue backdrop of a cloudless summer's day. Monet's Haystack paintings also convey seasonal changes, from the golden, sun-drenched harvest time to the depths of a snowy, white winter's landscape. The twentieth century photographer Ansel Adam's (1902–1984) also made multiple images, recording the seasonal changes in America's south west wilderness. Landscapes never remain fixed but will always be subject to continual changes over time and artists working in the genre respond accordingly.

However, in the second week of September I am thrown back into a period of cold, grey days with the lowest overnight temperatures on record! I am trying to find my way into a new season of painting, but I never seem to have the right colours on my palette to match the constantly changing conditions. Snow falls on the hills across the channel and I am bunkered down in the studio again.

Late September: Two weeks of gale force winds, trees down, wild seas, huge storms, lots of rain, sun showers and fast moving skies. I walked down the beach with Scout yesterday, amidst almost unbearable 90km winds. The seas were huge and swelling as waves crashed down hard on the shore. The water had come up to the embankment, covering the beach in rich red seaweed and a trail of assorted debris. One night there was a tragic boating accident and the body of a man overboard washes up on the beach during a storm – this environment can be brutal and unforgiving.

October – more wild weather with several days of 100km winds – impossible to paint outside! This was followed by a number of hot days reaching 27 degrees and a gentle sea breeze flowed through the house and studio.

Late October – we've been having cold nights with near zero temperatures, followed by mild, lovely days in the low twenties. Up to thirty degrees again today but it is overcast. I set up outside to paint, start my composition, then it suddenly starts raining! Lots and lots of rain this spring; the tanks are full and the garden is booming. A friend who lives across the channel sends a message – 'oh the gorgeous sound of water rushing into the tank'.

Painting in spring

The weather is extremely spirited in spring on Bruny Island. There is a constant parade of animated skies and every type of cloud: from brilliant blue expanses punctuated with big white fluffy clouds, low-slung, billowing grey clouds that swallow up the vista, streaky rain clouds and swirly wind-scattered clouds. I painted several studies on paper to record the kaleidoscope of these golden, blue, white and grey conglomerations.



Fig. 49. *Numbers 151, 162, 165, 170, 171 & 173*, oil on paper, approx 16 x 16 cm

The effect of spring's unsettled weather patterns means that the atmosphere can become highly charged. Brilliant sunshine bursts through; rain comes and goes intermittently, creating huge rainbows across the sky. The conditions can completely change within a matter of minutes. I tried to capture the energy and feeling of this time of year – the 'presence' of nature in full force as animated trees dance and sway to a roaring chorus of howling winds (Fig. 50).



Fig. 50. *Number 179*, oil on paper, approx 16 x 16 cm



Fig. 51. *Spring 5*, oil on canvas,
approx 36 x 36 cm



Fig. 52. *Spring 7*, oil on canvas,
approx 36 x 36 cm

I painted looking out through the studio window as gales blew in from the west throughout the day. The landscape morphed into a series of subtle tonal gradations, and then suddenly the wind would drop. Form and detail in the landscape disappeared as clouds and a steady drizzle shrouded the hilltops. This scene naturally pushed my paintings towards simplified veils of colour and I tried to maintain a depth of field in the paintings by using variations of warm and cool colours (Figs 51 and 52).

Spring is the fast painting season. Windy conditions called for vigorous brush work. Blue skies can suddenly cloud over and the whole scene changes and I sometimes had to abandon paintings half way through, when the changing weather made it impossible to continue.

Summer

Journal Entry – January

I settle into the summer season and the long stretches of daylight and mild conditions make it possible to extend my painting time

outdoors.¹¹ We had a hot spell and a number of bush fires broke out across the state. At first the air smells sweet with the scent of burning gum leaves. After a couple of days the build-up of smoke made it increasingly laborious to breathe. I would instinctively wake up in the middle of the night with the smell of smoke. Danger lurked in the fires that burned on the nearby hills across the channel and the view all but disappeared in an eerie pink haze.

I painted the ruby blushes of the sky and bright red fire lines along the top of the ridges of the hills. Over the course of this period, I also worked on a series of about a dozen larger works on paper, which followed the trajectory of atmospheric changes. Smoke plumes have a different density compared to normal clouds – they hang heavy in the sky. The paintings became increasingly minimal. I edited down the components of a scene to a singular dirty plume, suspended in a background of blank space above the smouldering ridgeline. (Fig. 54). The exposed areas of paper established a figure-ground relationship, creating a tension between substance and emptiness in the painting that I saw as a metaphor for the underlying feelings of ‘absence’ and ‘presence’.

11 There are two huge manta rays I regularly see swimming up and down the shallows at the beach during summer. I have become familiar with a local octopus, a curious creature that will move in close to observe me when I stand very still in the water. It displays its chameleon abilities, changing colour from white to pink to brownish-red. It moves in a graceful acrobatic dance, twisting and turning as it changes shape to disguise itself as a rock or piece of floating seaweed.

Animals are part of daily life on the island and reflect the pace of life and time given to observing the world around me. Over time, I have come to recognize the individual creatures that regularly cross my path: a green parrot who sings every morning, wallaby paths through the garden, mother and juvenile pademelons who shelter in a burrowed hole under a fallen log, a number of quolls and a huge echidna that leaves a trail of sand piles in its search for ants.



Fig. 53. *number 200*, oil on paper, approx 16 x 16 cm



Fig. 54. *Summer 7*, oil on paper, approx 56 x 60 cm

Journal Entry – February

Some fool lights a camp fire at Dennes Point on a very hot, windy day. It gets out of control quickly and sets the whole point on fire. Local volunteers frantically rush to extinguish it before it takes hold.

The northern tip of the island was flattened and charred as a result of a fire. I painted this weird, levelled landform with its protruding black edge surrounded by the intense blue of the sea. The flat areas of colour and the

shapes in the painting reminded me of the graphic simplification of forms and the economy of colours that Paddy Bedford used to describe a location.

At the height of summer, around the time of the solstice, I noticed tiny patches of light that illuminated the southern sky late at night. I assumed that this was reflective light from Antarctica's midnight sun. I wanted to record these very subtle, glowing patches in the inky night sky. I put down a ground of dark indigo blue and rubbed back into the paint to create subtle areas of light on the horizon. I had to work in very low light to capture this moment. I felt that I was discovering yet another aspect of this place, which was revealed to me through living on the island and through daily observations.

Journal Entry – February

There was a huge summer storm with thunder, lightning and violent winds. My neighbour's front window blows out and the island loses power for two days. I cook dinner by candlelight. The pump is out and there is no running water. My nephew Sacha is visiting and we spend Sunday evening lying on couches looking out the front windows at the night sky and the passing parade of luminous clouds that roll by in the pearly moonlight. The sky is filled with stars and it all feels very magical.

The night after this journal entry, I aimed to paint a similar scene. It is not easy to paint the moon and stars without feeling like one is resorting to



Fig. 55. *Summer 11 & 12*, oil on paper, approx 56 x 60 cm

romantic clichés. I deliberately tried to conjure up the sense of wonder I felt in witnessing the celestial scene of the previous night. The stars became blobs of broken colour, strewn across a dark expanse of night sky (Fig. 55). The paintings used a hybrid of methodologies, as I worked simultaneously from memory and observation. The contrasting areas of light and dark in the rendering of forms, along with ambiguous areas of paint, are a reflection of the multiplicity of 'felt' moments – the elusive array of thoughts, observations and the sensation of an intangible 'presence' expressed in a series of moody, melancholic paintings.

Autumn paintings

As the sun moved further south, the shadows became elongated, creating a network of patterns across the ground. The increasing chill in the air was sobering, combined with a seductive golden light that pervades at this time of year. The prolonged, still twilight was conducive to painting at a much slower pace, and the paintings became increasingly figurative. In this series of works, dark sombre trees framed the soft fleeting colours of an enlivened, evening sky. Like the season, the paintings became increasingly shadowy and introspective, as I felt immersed emotionally and physically in the intensity of the location.



Fig. 56. *Autumn Light*, oil on linen 4 x41 cm. **Fig. 57,** *number 215*, oil on paper, 16 x16 cm.
Fig. 58. *Number 217*, oil on paper, 16 x16 cm.

Winter paintings

During the depths of winter, as the days grew shorter and the nights longer, my focus shifted to painting night scenes. I painted the lights from the signal stations and houses across the channel that sent long, vertical reflections over the surface of the still black water. I tried painting outside wearing a head torch to throw light on the canvas, but this proved too distracting. I got rid of the torch and surrendered to the darkness, waiting for my eyes to slowly adjust to reveal shapes and details in the landscape.

I painted from observation, but to some extent I painted blindly, relying on my brush and hand to follow the trajectory of what my eye struggled to see. Working outside, rugged up against the chill of the evening air, I painted quickly, using big brushes and thick paint. I simplified the compositions into areas of light and dark. In other night paintings, I focused on the silhouettes of the trees against the sky, the dark shapes of the landforms and the black expanse of water. Again, simple compositions, rather than detailed descriptive paintings, seemed to be the most effective in capturing the essence of place.

I enjoyed the spontaneity and uncertainty of navigating my brush over the canvas in very low light. I sometimes accidentally picked up the wrong colour off the palette, but it didn't necessarily matter and I let these misconstrued dabs of paint remain as part of the picture. They were indicative of the experience of being outside on Bruny Island at night with few houses and no street lights. These paintings were about being part of the environment rather than self-consciously paying attention to the aesthetics of the painting.



Fig. 59. *number 225*, oil on paper 16 x 16. **Fig. 60.** oil on paper 65 x 65 cm.

Fig. 61. *Nightscape Six*, oil on canvas, and 41 x 41 cm

Details in the landscape were slowly revealed the longer I looked into the darkness. I painted these forms so that they subtly emerged out of the dark areas of paint. Other aspects of the scene remained hidden in opaque areas of dark colour. I wouldn't have this kind of felt intensity with the environment if I was painting from a photograph. I was at the mercy of the elements and had to physically push my vision out into the darkness, experiencing the presence of night and adjusting to this environment in order to paint. The paintings were loaded with the intensity of 'felt' encounters, both the embodiment of, and a metaphor for the sense of an 'absence' and a 'presence' that I experienced on Bruny Island.

Coming back inside and viewing these night paintings under the light, I was often surprised by the lack of precision in the mark-making, discovering many unintentional daubs of paint. There was an authenticity to these paintings and a visceral experience of place displayed in the impulsiveness of the brush work. Some paintings I left in their original state, whilst to others I made slight adjustments, to resolve the image, thereby blurring the distinction between *plein air* painting and studio work.

In addition, I made a number of night paintings looking out through the window of the studio (Figs 59, 60 and 61). I had to turn off the main lights to minimise reflections in order to see the night sky. I painted with the aid of a small lamp, strategically placed on the floor. At this stage of the research, I continued to maintain no formal division between painting inside and outside, as both methodologies essentially came from observation and the immediate engagement with my surrounds. The decision to paint in the studio or *en plein air* was simply a practical one that enabled me to continue painting across an array of conditions.

In the painting *Nightscape Six* (Fig. 61), I began by blacking out the entire surface of the canvas, then worked back into the dark areas of the painting with a rag to re-expose parts of the canvas, thereby creating illuminated areas that became clouds or patches of light in the night sky.

Journal Entry – Late Winter – August

Lots of gale force winds – up to 90km last Friday. Rain and icy cold temperatures means being mostly confined to indoors. I occasionally ventured out, rugged up in waterproof jacket and gum boots, to wade off cabin fever. The sea was wild and lots of debris washed up onto the shore including a number of dead birds that had been caught in the storm.

Most of the holiday shacks are empty now and closed up for the season. Bruny is bleak, and windswept and can feel very isolated at this time of year. On still days, low slung clouds hover in the channel, hiding the hills. There have been some beautiful mists and often in the mornings there is ice on the front deck.

Winter snow



Fig. 62. *Forest*, oil on linen, 51 x56

By late winter, there was a thick blanket of snow on the distant hills across the Channel. After several days of looking at these gleaming white peaks, I was lured off the island to inspect the scene at closer range. I caught the ferry and headed towards Cygnet via Nichols Rivulet Road. As the winter sun rose up behind Bruny Island, it cast long shadows through the woodlands and bathed the snowy ground in a glowing pink light. I did a few studies on paper sitting in the back of the car. I held the vision of this place in my mind's eye, and back in the studio, I worked on a number of canvases exploring techniques that would enable me to paint what I had experienced and seen close up: the colour and surface texture of snow. I also used



Fig. 63. *Flurry*, oil on linen, 61 x 142 cm

photographic references, but found working from a photograph immediately pulled the paintings towards the articulation of representational forms, rather than emulating the experience of this magical phenomenon.

Journal Entry – Bruny Island – August

Woke up to a covering of snow¹². The early southern light was a pinky gold colour. The atmosphere on the island was serene and silent as all life bunkered down in the frozen stillness of this beautiful winter wonderland.



Fig. 64. *Number 250*, oil on paper, approx 16 x 16 cm

12 In the winter of 2015, it snowed on Bruny Island for the first time in about thirty years.



Fig. 65. *Number 252, oil on paper, approx 16 x 16 cm*



Fig. 66. *Number 270, oil on paper, approx 16 x 16 cm*

I painted looking out through the window. Captivated by the tranquility and excitement of bearing witness to such a magical scene, the colour and the light guided my approach: I applied the paint with tentative brush marks to create a soft colour field of pinky-white snow and dense fog that was punctuated by a series of darker blurred forms in the landscape.

Evaluating the seasonal paintings

The seasons not only influenced the quality of light and content in the paintings of place, but also informed the painting methods and stylistic approach: from the speedy putting down of paint during a dishevelling spring storm, or the physically taxing, internalized intensity of minimalist painting during the cold dark depths of winter, to the softly rendered enchantment of painting snow and contemplative, measured paintings of still, autumnal evenings.

At certain times of the year, at particular sites, or on particular days, the atmosphere becomes very intense and suggestive of underlying forces that permeate the atmosphere. At other times, the light and beauty of the island dominate the experience of place. These oscillations of contrasting experiences are reflected in the paintings that span the seasons, moods and various times of day on the island.

The psychological complexity of the way in which Tasmania's great beauty is underscored by a foreboding sense of darkness is perhaps most obviously addressed in the night paintings. Primarily, they are paintings that represent the atmospheric conditions typical of winter in this part of the world. However, there is also a sense of an ominous presence that was beyond these natural phenomena, most probably compounded by the propensity to be introspective at this time of year. As my mood aligned with the season, it was during this period of painting that I felt most susceptible to a metaphysical darkness in the landscape. I attributed these sensations to a melancholy embedded in the fabric of this place; an amalgamation of something in the air that might be attributed to Tasmania's unresolved history and trauma that manifests particularly during the lengthy winter months.

The night paintings are the most obvious realisation of the infiltration of worldly influences on a visual language used to transcribe a time and place. Areas of dense, dark colour give way to small patches of light that break through the surface of the painting and build the tension between what is seen and unseen: an allegory for the different aspects of place.

Nature replicates this flow of transitional psychological and sensory experiences, as the ethereal atmospherics are susceptible to change and never remain fixed. The division of paintings into seasonal categories also reflects the transformative aspects of place in relation to time.

In addressing the research questions, the painting methodologies evolved from the early stages of the project of painting a picture of place, into more emotive, expressive paintings, which reflect the physicality and physiological intensity of experience. The mark-making became the vehicle of expressing both observations and felt moments that arise from being immersed, witnessing, feeling and responding (through painting) to a place.

Late stages of studio research/ongoing work

In the late stages of this project, I saw an exhibition of paintings by the Melbourne artist, Thornton Walker¹³. I followed his work closely in the 1990s and admired his ability to combine figurative and abstract elements in the one painting, such as a piece of Chinese pottery suspended in an abstracted painterly field. The tension between the two styles, the powerful referential aspects of a detailed patterned bowl combined with the enigma of reductive loose areas of paint, seemed to perfectly mirror the phenomenological aspects of experience and painting in the shifts between what is seen and what remains hidden – the ‘known and unknown, the conscious mind, chance and accident’ (Grishin, 2015).

These reflections led me to consider how I might further develop techniques to marry the two styles of painting within the one image, mirroring phenomenological aspects of an experience of place. I felt that I had partially achieved this, especially in some of the night paintings. Further developments in techniques might resolve the duality of addressing the specificity of place, while also alluding to the more ethereal moments of being in a location, where thoughts, sensations and atmospherics are all subject to a multitude of influences.

Kngwarreye’s paintings remain significant in informing the further development of techniques that speak of an expansive spatiality and felt experience. Whist her painting style is based on traditional indigenous mark-making, her technique of building up multiple layers of paint (semi-transparent and/or opaque applications) sets up a figure-ground relationship in her compositions. The implication of a spatial field, combined with an overlay of deliberate emotive marks that have an agency similar to more formal structures in painting, encapsulate the sense of a place and the ‘felt’ experience of it. It is the layering of paint that sets up a tension between what is seen and unseen in her works and which, in the context of this project, could help resolve the difficulties in painting the feelings of ‘absence’ and ‘presence’.

13 Thornton Walker exhibition and book launch at Australian Galleries, Melbourne, May 2015

Of further interest was a recent exhibit in London, Tightrope Walk: Painted Images after Abstraction (White Cube Gallery, 2015–16)¹⁴ which examined the impact of twentieth century abstract art on representational painting. The exhibition surveyed the work of a number of twentieth and twenty-first century artists in this context. The inclusion of works by the painter Cecily Brown (b.1969) demonstrates the power of combining dynamic, ambiguous passages of paint with recognisable forms.

Brown mostly paints entwined nude figures, cleverly camouflaged and obscured in jungle-like explosions of wild foliage that is loosely painted in energetic dashes of paint. The element of shock and surprise at discerning the underlying erotic image amidst a field of colourful gestural brush marks imbues her work with a complex emotional leverage. As a viewer, the sense of voyeurism can be confronting, because you feel compelled to examine the enlivened surfaces of Brown's painting at close proximity whilst at the same time feeling slightly uncomfortable to be scrutinising such a brazen scene.

Francis Bacon famously said that 'incorporating abstraction and figuration is an attempt to bring the figurative thing up onto the nervous system... more poignantly' (Sylvester cited in Schwabsky, 2015). Brown's work illustrates this point. The emotive potential of free gestural painting to enhance the potency of a figurative image could be applied to experiential paintings of place.

Painting the blue hours

The painter Lucien Freud (1922–2011) observed that "'knowing something by heart" gives you a depth of possibility which is more potential than seeing new sights' (Grey quoting Freud, 2006:3). Having spent three years of this project painting *en plein air*, I felt that I had become intimately familiar with Bruny Island. I could often predict its weather; I knew the contours of its landforms by heart and understood the colours required to paint the water in its various guises.

Having acquired a deep knowledge and understanding of my subject, I felt that I could shift the emphasis from painting the literal appearance of things to focus on further developing the tactile, emotive aspects of painting. In addressing the research aims I wanted to convey more succinctly the complexity and vitality of a subjective 'lived experience' of Bruny Island. I hoped to achieve this by simplifying the compositions and using brush marks, colours and forms to suggest nuanced sensations.

I wanted this suite of paintings to encapsulate all the elements that unpinned the research aims. As such the island's elemental forces became the central focus of the compositions. I decided to limit my subject to a very specific time – frame, from late afternoon to nightfall. The successions of moments – and sometimes hours – that make up these transitions from day to night often evoke a state of reflection.

Plein air studies formed the basis of these studio paintings, but of equal importance were my vivid memories of the extremities of weather, remarkable light and saturated colours in the landscape. The process involved quickly rendered under painting where the mind, eye and hand work expediently to establish the bones of the composition. The subsequent layers of paint drew on the complexities of feeling a 'presence' or trace on the island, building a visual language that spoke of time, contemplation and reflection. The reflective practices of working in the studio and applying multiple layers of paint were, in my experience, connected to the enigmatic history and intangible aspects that underscores the feeling of place on Bruny Island.

As I painted, I reflected on Constable's statement that 'painting is another word for feeling' (Constable, Beckett and Constable, 1964:78). This method of working in the studio seemed to intensify the relationship between what was seen and felt in the landscape with the process of painting.

I frequently referred back to the methodologies of the artists I had researched for this project in my experiments with various painting techniques. Monet's water-lily series remained a source of inspiration

wherein his agile brush strokes appear to dance across the canvas and bring to life images flickering with light and colour. I also studied Ben Quilty's technique of pushing thick paint around the canvas using palette knives and brushes which gives his paintings a tangible dynamism and vitality.

In the three-paneled composition, *Watching the water* (Fig. 74, 74.1,74.2), I used a palette knife to sculpt layers of thick paint into cloud formations. These brilliant white forms are suspended above washes of blue paint that depict an expanse of glassy water and the shafts of light that glimmer upon its surface. I pared back my colours to a simple combination of cobalt blue, cerulean and Payne's grey with a tiny speck of pink amidst lavish rations of white paint. I feel there is a sense of unending openness in these paintings that are essentially images of water and light. The combination of brush marks and palette knife, created an energy in the pictures that was indicative of both the elements I was painting and the tactility of the painting process.

I further experimented using these methods for *Nightscape channel no.1*, (Fig. 77) and *Nightscape channel no.2* (Fig. 78). In these images I aimed to capture the force of a coastal wind and the way it moves the dark, silhouetted trees against the night sky. These methods allowed me to surrender to the pleasure of mark making and to paint as a subjective response to a specific time and place.

I also used techniques that allowed the paint to run freely over the canvas, creating flowing pools of colour so that the paint appears to have a life of its own. In *Rainy Day* (Fig.72) the landform is almost completely consumed by a looming raincloud. To paint the bursting cloud I used spirited brush strokes and a heavily laden, thick bristled brush that left streams of paint dripping down over the canvas.

During these final stages of the project I was drawn to the paintings of the Australian artist Clarice Beckett (1887–1935). Beckett painted extensively *en plein air* in the nineteen twenties and thirties around Port Phillip Bay.

She typically blurs forms in her paintings so they become secondary to the atmospheric ambience of the scene. In addition, Beckett used muted colours to describe diffused light conditions, giving her paintings a meditative, subdued quality. These methods were of particular interest in this phase of the project where I continued to paint some of the more ethereal atmospheric qualities of the island and aimed to convey the sense of immersion in the landscape. In *Bruny winter yellow light, Mauve and grey*, and *Blue red and grey* (Fig. 81) I simplified the forms in the compositions into areas of soft, muted tones, indicative of the various phases of light and colour that can so strongly dictate the mood of the island.

In *Morphing Sky* (Fig. 73) I built multiple layers of paint to create voluminous cloud formations that take over the entire picture plane. In a series of night paintings, *Dead of night* (Fig. 75), *Torch light* (Fig. 76) and *Port and starboard* (Fig. 79) I used Prussian and French ultramarine over the entire surface of the canvas, then rubbed back into the paintings to create subtle patches of light that emerge from the darkness. Tiny dots of paint indicate lights from a boat or house that are dwarfed by the scale of the vista in these elusive dark images.

When night fell I observed that the landscape resembled a Rothko painting, as the last strip of daylight clung to the ridgeline of a hill between a darkened sky and the inky coloured water. I began to see images of paintings in the landscape, and the essence (colour, light and feel) of this environment in my paintings. The interchange between what is seen and what is sensed, imagined or remembered was encapsulated in the paintings.

The emotive painterly gesturers in this suite of paintings were driven by a sensory engagement and intuitive knowledge of the location. The combination of pared down forms and use of a limited palette both simplified and strengthened the paintings. The Blue Hours series of paintings are a succinct expression of a multi-faceted and deeply personal experience of Bruny Island.

Final Experiments

In the final works I made for this project, I experimented by working on both canvas and multiple sheets of paper joined together, putting down washes of acrylic paint on which to build up forms in subsequent layers of oil paint. The use of acrylic paint speeded up the process of creating layers of paint on a large scale. I hoped the expediency of the quick-drying medium would maintain freshness and spontaneity in the paintings. However, in the early experiments of combining acrylics and oils, there was a disconnection between the two layers. Through further experimentation, practice and investigation, I aim to resolve this methodology that could evolve into a viable and dynamic extension of my current approaches to painting place. The painting component of this project ends as it began, as a continuum of my practice-led research that spans many years, and which is exploratory and open ended.

Conclusion

Painting Light in a Dark World

The aim of this project was to paint the complexities of 'felt' moments of experiencing place on Bruny Island. The project developed strategies to devise a visual language that captures what is both seen and unseen; a painterly and atmospheric rendition of place, light, colour and sensation, through the use of dexterous, spontaneous brush marks that respond to a moment, or series of moments, in time and place.

Throughout this exegesis, I have argued that our relationship with place is one of inter-subjectivity. Within a phenomenological model, human encounters with place encompass the physical responses to the surrounding topography and atmospherics, with memories, imagination and thoughts. These multiple elements create personal meaning and a connection to a place and thus inform the experiential paintings of place.

The project was driven by recognition of an intrinsic feeling of place imbued in the atmosphere of Tasmania, a lingering spectre of 'absence' (a sense of foreboding or melancholy) and 'presence' (of a primordial life force that imbues its landscapes). The source of this undercurrent was identified in the exegesis through an examination of the historical and cultural constructs that influence place in Tasmania.

Simon Schama (1995:61) declared that the perception of place results from the human propensity to project cultural constructs onto locations and it is difficult to prove otherwise. I concur that the recognition of a colonial legacy still holds power over the experience of place in Tasmania. However, in examining the nature of experience, intuitive knowledge and sensory engagement, I established the possibility of a phenomenological experience that encompasses an innate awareness of a 'feeling' that is imbued in the island's atmospherics.

Supported by Carl Jung's theories of intuitive knowledge and collective consciousness, Merleau-Ponty's view of immersion and Nicolas Rothwell's belief in the existence of 'something in the air' I determined that places can have a profound emotional effect on the psyche. This concept is further referenced in acknowledging the subtle cross-cultural exchanges that have occurred between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. The work of painters like Emily Kngwarreye demonstrate the concept that certain aspects of an experience of place can remain invisible but nonetheless intrinsically felt.

Whilst intuitive sensing or a feeling of place cannot necessarily be seen or proven, this project has sought to explore, through painting, the formal aesthetic and conceptual translations of atmospherics and movement (light, time and mark), because these aspects provide, most readily, scope for a painterly inquiry into the subjective and intrinsic experience of place.

Outcomes of the visual investigation:

Exhibition – *The Sensation of Place*

The emotional currency of the paintings is expressed through a visual language that was developed through working on location, and guided by the project's aims and objectives.

The paintings aim to encapsulate both what was seen and unseen: an atmospheric rendition of time, place, light, colour and sensation. Descriptive images that are indicative of Bruny Island's environs are displayed alongside works that are more reductive and demonstrate a retreat from figurative interpretations. These works succeeded in transcending the 'picturing' of a distant view, to convey an immersive experience, best demonstrated in the paintings of clouds, spatial fields and ethereal atmospherics. These more ambiguous images are an allegory for the 'unseen' elements or 'felt' experience, expressed as sensations in the emotive, gestural mark-making.

The project has resulted in an exhibition in three parts:

Part one: *Two hundred and thirty four Moments*

I considered a number of strategies to exhibit the extensive series of *plein air* studies on paper.¹ I thought of strategically editing the series down from the hundreds of works produced over the course of the project to thirty or forty key pieces framed and installed as a continuous horizon line around the gallery walls. This edited selection, mounted in white box frames under glass would be a succinct overview of various moments I witnessed and painted on Bruny Island. However, a ridged editing of paintings would potentially limit the scope of the research outcomes.² In addition, exhibiting these works under glass would create a barrier between the viewer and the physical qualities of the paper and hand painted surfaces that was in keeping with the tactility and transience of painting outside in a wild place. Pinning these paintings directly onto the wall seemed like the most suitable outcome as it reflected both the sense of the fragility and impermanence of the material (paper) and the paintings subject (moments of light, color and mood on Bruny Island).

Furthermore, exhibiting an extensive collection of the *plein air* studies encapsulated the scope of the project: to explore a multi-faceted witnessing of the Island in relation to time and the feeling of place. This body of work collated the projects processes and provided a record of the durational nature of the methodology that involved a sustained and intimate engagement with a location and painting, as evidenced by a prolific number of images.

1 I also considered having prints made of the paintings and combining them into a book based on the idea of a 'Book of days' that adheres to a calendar of recorded time. However, a book seemed like a detached, formal document compared to the primacy of venturing out into the landscape, with messy oil paints and paper in hand, facing the elements in order to capture sensory experiences in time and place.

2 Framing works might be more suited to a different kind of audience such as a commercial gallery exhibition at some stage, whereas the function of this exhibition was primarily to demonstrate the research outcomes..

Painting out in the open I often became lost in the intensity of the scene and the moments of concentration required to manifest in paint, what I saw, sensed and felt. Looking at the paintings back in the studio the images seemed to carry me backwards and forwards through time. Looking at the pictures I could reclaim moments and sensations of being in that place. This was a feeling that I hoped to replicate in the exhibition: the sensory onslaught of a kaleidoscope of images that recall the various moods of the island; a place with vast skies, changeable weather conditions and the feeling of solitude, isolation and a present, if enigmatic history.

I installed two hundred and thirty-four of these small oil painting studies in a semi-irregular continuous grid around three walls of the gallery (Fig. 71).³ The idea was born out of my habit at the end of each day's field work of placing wet oil paintings on the walls of my studio, which over time grew into a display of hundreds of images. The unintended configuration of the paintings formed a narrative of accumulated experiences on Bruny Island. The sequential nature of these studies also revealed an evolving painting language that grew out of the research questions. Figurative paintings that clearly spoke of an "island-ness" were hung alongside more loosely rendered compositions that had little or no forms, but captured the mutable aspects of the atmospheric conditions. In the more ambiguous compositions the paint came into its own, laden with emotive gestural mark-making that spoke of the intensity of feeling on Bruny Island.

In the gallery the seemingly random arrangement of the paintings replicates the studio install and reinforces the extemporaneity aspects of the *plein air* process that was often unpredictable. The scale and irregularity of the installation mimicked the trajectory of the eye when

3 Initially I thought of installing this large volume of paintings as a single horizontal line around a constructed labyrinth of multiple walls within the gallery space. By following the trajectory of the passageways the viewer would be lead on a visual journey that conveyed a sense of continuum in the landscape as they witnessed the unfolding atmospheric changes that occurred over time. However the size limitations of the exhibition space prevented me from adopting this presentation.

standing out in the landscape, as it is continually forced to move in order to survey an expansive view. Various images compete for attention as the viewer moves in for a closer look or stands back to take in the breadth of the installation that is over nineteen meters long. Some paintings break the confines of the grid and are mounted high on the wall so the viewer has to look up, whilst others are placed low.

When the paintings were made I numbered each image in sequential order as a record of my process. However, in terms of determining the layout of the individual pieces of the installation I concluded they worked best as a whole if they were arranged according to the aesthetics of each individual composition in relation to the next. The flow of this visual arrangement resulted in an overall effect of unfolding moments in time and place, and gave continuity to the entirety of the display. I also grouped some of the paintings into various themes such as clouds, trees or nightscapes which highlighted natural variations that occur within the landscape.

The overall impact of exhibiting two hundred and thirty-four small works on paper presented a coherent visual statement that poetically conveys the multiplicity of experiences and the nature of being on Bruny Island.

Part Two: *Transmutation*

Transmutation is a series of thirty medium sized oil paintings on paper, (approximately 61 cm x 65 cm). This suite of paintings marks the transitional stage between *plein air* painting and studio practice as several of these paintings began out in the open and were later reworked in the studio (Fig. 67, 68 and 69).

The paintings are divided into four categories that mark the seasonal variations on Bruny Island. The scale and resolve of each painting defines them as standalone works, however the narrative aspect of recording seasonal changes is reinforced by the cumulative result of individual paintings presented as part of a series. This series conveys my understanding of the different seasonal phases that affect the sea, the sky,

the colours in the landscape and the light conditions. *Transmutation* also echoes the time frame of the project that was always susceptible to the various cycles of nature.

The more laboured parts of the paintings that were made in the studio counterbalance the areas of unselfconscious brush marks that come from the immediacy of observational painting. This combination of painting techniques synergises the dialogue between reflective studio practice and the instinctive impulses of *plein air* painting, thus bringing together various ways of interacting with and digesting the multiplicity of place.

Due to the limitations of the exhibition space, this body of work was edited down to just eight paintings which impacted upon the overall narrative aspects of this body of work and the sense of a transformation in the landscape.

Part Three: *The Blue Hours*

The Blue Hours tells the story of observation, experience and the transformative aspects of a place as the late afternoon transitions into evening. Its focus is the extended moments, indeed hours, when the island can become saturated in a series of monotone colours. In the still afternoon light, cerulean and cobalt blue emerge, but as night descends these deepen into the inky tones of Prussian and French Ultramarine. I was drawn to the intensity of colour and light at this time of day and how the material form of the location can seemingly dissolve into ephemeral, elemental forces.

I began to recognise these phenomena through sustained observation that came from living on Bruny Island. These kinds of experiences of place are not solely dictated by what is seen but the result of a passionate commitment, and intense familiarity and intimacy with the island that had developed over the course of the project. As a result the paintings demonstrate the benefits of durational processes, getting to know, understand and sense the environment so that the painting process taps into intuitive knowledge.

The aim was to create paintings that are simultaneously emblematic and enigmatic in referring to the extremities of weather, colour and light along with the more elusive aspects of the feeling of place. To achieve this I continued to experiment with various painting techniques to convey both intuitive and reflective responses to the landscape. I painted semitransparent clouds with ambiguous edges that appear to 'float' across the canvas; shots of glimmering light on the surface of water conveyed in a single brush stroke; and night paintings that are so dark they demand close inspection to see the faint house lights that glimmer on the water of the channel. In other pictures, the free flowing paint drips and runs down the canvas captures the energy of bursting rain clouds.

I kept the palette restrained and compositions simplified so as to establish a space for reflective viewing. To increase a sense of intimacy I decided to exhibit the paintings in a small and semi-enclosed gallery space that would bring viewers into close proximity with the pictures. Two large paintings, (97 x 102 cm) were hung at either end of a softly lit, modest sized room. A series of smaller canvases (40.5 x 40.5) ran along the adjacent walls. The subdued lighting, scale and enclosure of the space added to the sense of seclusion. The intimacy of the space was mirrored by the human scale of the artworks that are small enough so that a single brush mark can suggest a form, but of a scale substantial enough to support the measured layering of paint.

On reflection, I felt that this final suite of paintings captured both the forms of the landscape and its emotional qualities and best demonstrated the research aims. They convey contact, warmth and presence that is equally suggestive of a deeply felt engagement with place and with the processes of painting. In this, the final paintings deliver a succinct visual representation of a subjective and phenomenological experience of place.

On reflection

In addressing the research questions, the approach to painting evolved throughout the project, from the early stages where there was a tendency to 'picture' place, to increasingly emotive and expressive paintings which reflect the physicality and physiological intensity of the sensate experience. The mark-making in the latter was specifically developed in order to express 'felt' sensations. Although many of the paintings have figurative elements, there is a sensuality displayed in the visceral materiality of the brush marks that speaks of immersion, felt moments of witnessing, and responding to place.

Yi-Fu Tuan states that art can privilege us to 'savour experiences that would otherwise have faded beyond recall' (1977:148). When I look back over this body of work, the images form a diarist account, shot with an emotional engagement that takes me back to the moments of painting, remembering the sensory nature of this environment and the underlying sense of a melancholic 'absence' and 'presence'. In this respect, I am confident that these paintings have achieved the aims of this project in effectively capturing my subjective experience of Bruny Island.

In weighing up the outcomes of the project, it is questionable whether individual images might succinctly convey the multiple complexities of the 'feeling' of place, or if this aspect is reliant on the overall effect of displaying a multitude of images. The arrangement of the paintings in *Two hundred and Thirty-four moments*, viewed as a unified continuum, implies that there may be no singular, definitive formula to adequately visualise experiencing place. However, the presentation of a range of pictorial approaches is in keeping with the durational nature of experience and the painting process – that is, it is only through the aggregation of all of these attempts that the project finds a way to convey the gamut of experiences and phenomenological aspects of place and time: the visual arena in coherence with the felt experience of place.

The outcomes have precipitated further research in developing painting techniques that synthesize what is both seen and unseen in the landscape:

to transcribe the multidimensional aspects of experiencing place onto large-scale, site-specific works that evoke sensations of an immersive experience.

Contribution to the field

The writer and art critic Peter Timms observed 'We have definitely seen a resurgence of landscape painting in Australia over the last 20 years or so, which is due to some degree... to Aboriginal Art, which has shown us that the genre still has a lot to say.' (2011:6). This project is part of a broader national discourse on painting place in Australia that signals the changing attitudes that have come about in response to the influence of indigenous art on the perception of place and the acknowledgement of the continual impact of colonisation on both the feeling of place and our psyche. In this context, the project not only draws on immediate experience, but it also brings to bear cultural influences and the sense of past events that 'live on' in the mood of the island.

The feeling of place is not just reliant on the fabric of a location, nor is it merely sensed in the air. The feeling of place is the result of an inter-related internal human projection onto places, which is precipitated by both intuitive knowledge and sensate engagement with the environment. This project draws on these rich experiences, broadening the understanding of human relations to place, and specifically our perception and knowledge of Bruny Island.

The original contribution, as encapsulated in the artwork and the exegesis, is a body of work that evidences the layers of complexity that contribute to a subjective experience of Bruny Island. Our sense of place is complex and these artworks seek to negotiate the many layers that make up its apprehension – physical immersion, visual observation, historical and artistic contextual research, an awareness and sensitivity to changing natural phenomena and local knowledge. Paint is also a complex medium, through which the development of a visual language reflects the synergy between the artist's thoughts, feelings and performative action in relation to place, sensation, time and memory.

The suite of numerous small paintings is a response to a moment or series of moments in time and place. All together they encapsulate the multiplicity of an experience of Bruny Island, providing a distinct and layered visual interpretation of the site, which contributes to the evolving field of interpretative Tasmanian landscape painting.

I conclude this project in the realisation that painting an experience of place relies on balancing the relationship between the materiality of paint, formal composition, technique, and subjective perception. These aspects come together in a visual language that gives the work both its meaning and presence. Through the extensive period of painting my surroundings, I have built a deeper understanding of, and connection with, Bruny Island. For me, the most powerful aspects of being on Bruny Island are the unexpected encounters with the sensate forces of atmospherics, the confounding sensitivity to the feeling that emanates from this very evocative place, and the joys and challenges in attempting to make paintings that aim to do it justice.

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Ann Holt – Résumé

Solo Exhibitions

- 2016 *The Sensation of Place*, The Plimsoll Gallery, College of the Arts, University of Tasmania, Hobart
- 2013 *Terra Ambulare (Earth Walk)*, public art installation, City of Hobart.
- 2009 *Cloud Garden*, Chapman Gallery, Canberra
- 2007 *A Bend in the River*, Christine Abrahams Gallery, Melbourne.
- 2001–06 *Circumnavigating the Island*, touring exhibition, Danish National Museum, Denmark (Australian Visit exhibition), Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart (as part of 10 days on the island), Faculty Gallery Monash University, Devonport Regional Gallery, Burnie Regional Gallery, Warrnambool Art Gallery, Mass Gallery Melbourne,
- 2005 *10 days + 4*, Despard Gallery, Hobart.
- 2004 *Roaring Beach & Beyond*, Christine
- 2002 *The View from Here*, Christine Abrahams Gallery, Melbourne
- 2001 *Light on Water*, Firbank Grammar, Artist in Residency
- 1999 *Thin Blue Line*, Temple Studios, Melbourne
- 1998 *Edge of the World*, Jackman Gallery, Melbourne
- 1996 *Journey's North & South*, Salamanca Arts Centre Hobart & The Continental, Melbourne

Selected Group Exhibition

- 2014 *Tarkine*, Brightspace Gallery, Melbourne
- 2013 *Shore thing*, Brightspace Gallery, Melbourne
- 2013 *From the Island*, Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart
- 2012 *Moment*, five painters, Faculty Gallery, Monash University.
- 2011 Finalist Tasmanian Art Award.
- 2009, 2005 & 2004 Finalist, *Glover Prize*, Tasmania
- 2009 Finalist, *Buller Art Award*

- 2009 *Same but Different*, Kristian Pithie Gallery, Melbourne.
- 2006 *Gallery Artists* Christine Abrahams Gallery, Melbourne.
- 2006 *Lexicon*, City Library Gallery Melbourne.
- 2005 artsofar, Office of Premier and Cabinet, Parliament House, Melbourne.
- 2006 *Water & Glass*, Despard Gallery, Hobart.
- 2004 Finalist, *John Leslie Prize*, Gippsland Regional Gallery.
- 2003 Finalist, *Island Art Prize*, Stanley Artworks, Tasmania
- 2000–01 We are Australian, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Canberra Museum, State Library Queensland, George Adams Gallery, Victorian Arts Centre, and United Nations Conference, South Africa.
- 2000 Finalist. *Fleming Muntz Art Prize*, Albury Regional Gallery.
- 1998 *Studio Xposed*, Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart,
- 1998 *Caught Looking*, Jackman Gallery, Melbourne and Tap Gallery Sydney
- 1995 *Sub-lime Light*, Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart,
- 1995 *Viva la Donna*, Woman's Gallery, Melbourne.
- 1989 *12 Days*, ACCA Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne.
- 1989 *Heidelberg-Heritage*, 9x5, Linden Gallery, Melbourne

Collections

Macquarie Bank, Artbank, Lowenstein Sharp, Monash University College Collection. Joseph Brown Collection, Firbank Grammar School Melbourne, Jon Voight Collection Los Angeles, Private collections Australia, Britain, France and the United States.

Artist In Residencies

- 2004 Arthur Boyd Trust, Bundanon, N.S.W.
- 2001 Firbank Grammar School, Melbourne.
- 1998 Pacific Island Council (funded by Australia Council Grant)

Awards/Grants

- 2011–13 Public Art Commission, Hobart City Council and Sustainable Living Tasmania Community Development Fund, *Terra Ambulare (Earth Walk)*, 24 meter public art installation
- 2011 Research Travel Grant, University of Tasmania (to Oxford University)
- 2010 Research Scholarship, University of Tasmania (PhD)
- 2007 Research Publication Grant, Monash University.
- 2006 Dame Elizabeth Murdoch Trust Fund Grant.
- 2005 Research Travelling Fellowship, Monash University (to Denmark)
- 2001 Commissioned Solo exhibition for *10 days on the island* Festival, Hobart, Artistic Director, Robyn Archer
- 2001–04 HECS Exempt Scholarship Masters Fine Art, Monash University.
- 2001 & 03 Pat Corrigan exhibition Grants National Association of the Visual Arts.
- 1998 Australia Council Cultural Community Development Grant, Artist in Residence

Education

- 2016 PhD candidate, College of the Arts, University of Tasmania.
- 2004 Masters of Fine Art, Monash University, Melbourne.
- 2003 Certificate IV, Training and Assessment, Victoria University.
- 1991 ACRACS, Certificate IV, Advanced Certificate in Community Service, Victoria University
- 1987 Bachelor of Fine Art. Phillip Institute of Technology (now amalgamated with RMIT)
Major: Painting. Electives in Film, Video and Printmaking
Additional Undergraduate Studies:
Photography and Painting, Prahran College of Art and Design,
Design and Textiles, RMIT

Professional Development/Teaching

- 2008–16 Lecturer in Charge, Painting and Drawing, Australian Catholic University.
- 2004–15 Lecturer, Drawing, Faculty Art, Design and Architecture, Monash University.
- 2015 Lecturer, Painting, Monash College, International School.
- 2010 Lecturer, Drawing, College of the Arts, University of Tasmania.
- 2005–11 Lecturer, Drawing, Monash College, International School.
- 2001–09 Co-ordinator/Painting Teacher, Aboriginal Women's Art Studio Program, Winja Ulupna.
- 2004 Independent Assessor, School Creative Arts University of Melbourne
- 2003 Lecturer, Drawing; *The Exquisite Corpse*, School Creative Arts, University of Melbourne. 2001–03 Lecturer, Drawing, Studio Materials, Presenting Information, Victoria University.

Research Papers and Publications

- 2012 *The Sensation of Place*; translating the experiential sensation of a space into a work of art, chapter for book, *A Sense of Space*, Harvestway House, Oxfordshire, U.K. 2012
Moment, catalogue essay, Monash University
- 2011 *A Sensation of Place*, Space and Place conference paper, Oxford University
- 2009 *Winja Tiddas*, catalogue essay, Australian Catholic University.
- 2007 *Form, Content and Meaning in Urban Aboriginal Painting at Winja Ulupna*. Exhibition essay, Gasworks Park and Art Gallery.
- 2007 *Creative Minds*, Exhibition Essay, Melbourne Conference Centre.
- 2005 Creative Ministries Network Research Project; Linking Aboriginal Art Program to educational institutions for accreditation.
- 2004 Masters Fine Art Research Exegesis: *Landscape, a Response to the Australian Environment*.

- 2004 *Traditional symbolism in Victorian Aboriginal Art*, Creative Ministries network research program research
- 2001–2008 *Research Reports*, Urban Aboriginal Art Program , Creative Ministries Network, Melbourne.

Curitorial Projects

- 2012 *Moment, five painters*, Faculty Gallery, Monash University
- 2009 *Winja Tiddas*, Australian Catholic University Faculty Gallery.
- 2007 *Paintings From Winja Ulupna*, Gasworks Park and Art Gallery.
- 2007 *NAIDOC Indigenous artist's exhibition*, St.Kilda Town Hall.
- 2007 *Creative Minds THEMHS*, International Conference on Creativity and Mental Health, Melbourne Convention Centre.
- 2002 *Deadly*, Urban Dreaming project, artsofar Gallery Melbourne and Regional tour to five Aboriginal Cultural centres throughout Victoria.
- 2001 *First Time Out*, Indigenous Artists in St.Kilda, artsofar Gallery Melbourne
- 1996 *Caught Looking, Identity & Self Portrait*, Jackman Gallery Melbourne and Tapp Gallery Sydney
- 1996 *Towards 2006*, Arts Access and Department of Health & Community Services, Footscray Community Centre.
- 1995 *Sub-Lime Light*, 5 Women Artists, Salamanca Arts Centre Hobart

Selected Bibliography

- 2013 *Time's Passing Parade*, review, Joerg Andersch, Hobart Mercury
- 2009 *Cloud Garden*, catalogue essay, Fiona Trigg. Chapman Gallery, Canberra
- 2007 *A Bend in the River*, catalogue essay, Kit Wise, Christine Abrahams Gallery and Monash University.
- 2006 *Australian Visit*, catalogue essay, Bronwyn Scanlon, Danish National Museum, Fredriksborg, Denmark.
- 2005 *Message of Conflict*, review, Joerg Andersch, Hobart Mercury.

- 2004 *Masterful Melancholy*, article, Felicity Allan, Herald Sun, Melbourne.
- 2003 *All about the Island*, catalogue essay, Dr. Robert Nelson, Devonport Gallery, *Beauty & Hidden Agendas*, article, Laura Murray Cree, State of the Arts. *Monumental Art*, the Advocate, Launceston. Reconciliation scape The Examiner, Launceston.
- 2002 *Tasmania, the New Sea Change*, The Age Melbourne and Sydney Morning Herald.
- 2001 *Nature of the Beast*, review, The Age, Melbourne.
- 2000 *Close Up* – the Arts Show, Television documentary profile, ABC TV Australia

Visual Documentation



Fig. 67



Fig. 68



Fig. 69

Figs 67, 68 and 69, paintings from the series *Transmutation* in the Studio, Bruny Island.



Fig. 70, Installing *two hundred and thirty four moments* in the Plimsoll Gallery (2016)



Fig. 71, *Two hundred and thirty four moments* in the Plimsoll Gallery (2016). Oil on paper.
Total installation approx. 1.4 m h x 17 meters

Selection of works from
The Blue Hours



Fig. 72. *Rainy Day* (2016), oil on linen, 92 x 107 cm



Fig.73. *Morphing Sky* (2016), oil on linen, 92 x 107 cm



Fig. 74. Panel One: *Watching the Water* (2016), oil on linen, 3 panels each 41 x 41 cm



Fig. 74.1. Panel Two: *Watching the Water* (2016), oil on linen, 3 panels each 41 x 41 cm



Fig. 74.2. Panel Three: *Watching the Water* (2016), oil on linen, 3 panels each 41 x 41 cm



Fig. 75. *Dead of night* (2016), oil on linen, 41 x41 cm



Fig. 76. *Torch Light* (2016), oil on linen, 41 x41 cm



Fig. 77. Panel One: *Nightscape channel* (2016), oil on linen, each panel 41 x 41 cm



Fig. 78. Panel Two: *Nightscape channel* (2016), oil on linen, each panel 41 x 41 cm



Fig. 79. *Port and starboard* (2016), oil on linen, 41 x 41 cm



Fig. 80. *Beacon* (2016), oil on linen, 41 x 41 cm



Fig. 81. *Blue red and grey* (2016), oil on linen, 41 x 41 cm