

## CHAPTER SIX – THE JOURNEY BEGINS: FRANCE

### 6.1 Searching for Connections with the Past.

In 1999, the present researcher applied for, and was granted, a three-month residency at the University of New South Wales Studio in the Cité International des Arts in Paris, France for the period July to September 2000. The Cité is a community of around two hundred and fifty studios (ateliers) leased by governments, arts organizations and tertiary institutions from all over the world. The Cité was created in the 1950s by Monsieur Bruneau and, since 1960, has been managed by his wife. Located in the fourth arrondissement, the Cité is close to the Musée Louvre, Centre Pompidou, Musée D'Orsay and one of the major gallery areas known as the Marais.

*I felt a need to go to Paris and France. Recently, it seemed that I had lost my way in my artmaking. The process had become almost mechanical, in that the need to draw was still there, but perhaps I had lost some of the passion. France represented a time in my life when I had felt excited about what I saw, I was hungry for looking at beautiful art that I had only seen in books. Being in France in the seventies was a wonderful time. Nothing seemed impossible. Paris had the Louvre filled with an enormous collection of the works of the Impressionists and Expressionists. I remember looking at the works of Bonnard and Van Gogh, seeing the individual marks they had made and rehearsed in my head how to create the colours, the light and the atmosphere.*

*In some way I thought that if I could go back to the place my passion could be rekindled. Artist's Diary, 4<sup>th</sup> July, 2000.*

In applying for the residency I pointed out that:

Artistic practice in the form of drawings by Australian artist Lloyd Rees (especially those created from 1970 - 1988) contains certain sites and artistic responses that inform my academic research and my studio practice. In Rees' series "The Cathedral of France" (in particular "The Shadowed Building", "The Ambulatory" and "The Altar") he explores the mood and atmosphere evoked by these environments and writes in almost an ethnographic way about what the experience of responding in these sites was like. The artwork and the written response parallel the type of research I am endeavouring to do during my time in Paris. Paris is identified as significant because in 1973 it was the place of my first "authentic aesthetic experience" (Dufrenne, 1973) or being

“seized” (Langer, 1982) during a visit to Notre Dame Cathedral (which incidentally is located very close to the Cité). This experience has helped form a perception that has had direct effect on my choice of becoming an artist and on the nature of my artistic production.

Paris also contains some of the sites Lloyd Rees responded to in the Cathedral of France series and I want to compare his images and writings about these sites while I experience, write and draw about them. Application for Cité International des Arts, May 1999.

The present researcher had experienced an overwhelming feeling of elation that he called his “aesthetic experience” in Notre Dame Cathedral during his visit in 1974.

His diary from this time records the experience:

*Today Lindy and I went to Notre Dame. I wasn't too keen on seeing yet another European church. There were nuns just inside the church selling candles and rattling cans filled with coins. The nuns looked like extras from a Fellini movie. Lindy and I separated and I found myself at the back of the church. A priest dressed in brilliant emerald green was conducting a service to three elderly worshippers. The light from on of the stained glass window seemed to suddenly shine down red upon the priest. He spoke in soft French tones and I knelt at a pew and felt an overwhelming feeling of heightened joy, turned to my right and felt Lindy kneeling beside me. We floated outside and I now realise that a man-made structure can create the aesthetic experience we always read about. Diary entry January, 1974*

The memory of this event was a critical factor in the application for the Cité apartment.

*While I was writing bits of my application, I took a break and opened up a book on Lloyd Rees and found a page at random and saw a drawing of the interior of Notre Dame Cathedral and discovered that Lloyd Rees had been there around the same time as me. I felt this act of serendipity was a signpost for bridging my past and my future. Artist's Diary 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2000*

My perception was that his and my life were somehow connected, through name, lineage, profession, media and now perhaps location seems to suggest a belief in some spiritual guiding force through which I search quite often subconsciously for evidence, guidance or reassurance.

My initial experience of Paris this year did not bring forward the passion or the feelings I had hoped for.

*My first week in Paris is a little strange. Dad died last week and I arrived in Paris confused, sad and a bit lost amongst these strangers chatting and laughing in a language I can't understand. The Cité seems like a bunker separate from the rest of Paris. The familiar greetings of "Bon Jour" and "Bon Soir" are not lead-ins to further conversation. Went to the Louvre - it is filled with people. Difficult to see the works between the constantly moving tourists. The artworks seem tired and a bit too familiar. Artist's Diary, 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2000.*

Even Notre Dame Cathedral, which had seemed to offer so much promise and hope that this place held special significance and potential for charging me with the passion lost, was a disappointment.

*They have cleaned Notre Dame! It looks new again but has lost its ancient magnificence – all the grim has been scrubbed back – very lacklustre. Thousands of tourists are lined up outside in queues that go for over 100 metres. The church is filled with chatter, a tourist shop has been opened inside the entrance and a priest over the PA (public announcement) is constantly asking for quiet. The back of the church has been closed and I couldn't revisit the place I remembered where the priest conducted his service. Artist's Diary, 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2000.*

By the end of the second week in Paris, I had spent each day searching out smaller galleries advertised in Pariscope, the weekly Parisian magazine that listed amongst a range of arts activities, current exhibitions and galleries.

*Bastille Day. Spent the last few days looking at one-person and small group exhibitions in the areas of the Marais and the close by Left Bank. Much of the works seems to be for the tourist market. I have a slight sense of panic that I will never find the one thing to start me working again – that the trip here might be wasted and more like a holiday rather than being productive. Artist's Diary, 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2000*

## **6.2 Walking with the Masters**

During the third week in France, I accepted an invitation to travel three and a half hours by train, to a friend's summer residence in Merindol, south east of Avignon. This was Provence where many art communities had flourished in the early part of

the twentieth century. It was the place where Bonnard, Van Gogh, Picasso, Gauguin and Cezanne had visited and created several important landscapes. The area was renowned for its particular light.

*It is good to be out of the city [Paris] for a while. As lovely as Paris is, I need a little quiet time to digest all that has happened recently. The house here is fantastic – even has a swimming pool. Certainly feels like summer but the overwhelming first impression is the smell of rosemary and lavender that seems to be growing wild everywhere.*

*When I opened the shutters on my bedroom window I could see over the olive groves, across the valley to distant hills and all above was blue skies marked only by the fuel streams of passing aeroplanes. The sky and the dry blue hills look so much like Mareeba (an area west of Cairns). Even the late afternoon sunlight has the golden glow of Australia. Artist's Diary, 16<sup>th</sup>, July, 2000*

My friends knew me as an artist and had told me before my visit about how Provence was the place to which many famous artists had travelled in the search for inspiration. I had taken a sketchbook with me as well as a few graphite pencils.

*Today I took my sketchbook down to the pool. This was more of a pose really. It seems expected of me that I do some drawing here. Enthusiasm for drawing is not happening - just want to feel the sun and relax and try to forget about work and family. I did a few sketches of the foliage and sky from the area around the pool – just mechanical drawings. The hand is a bit rusty and it is an effort to draw. Artist's Diary, 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2000*

Even though very little drawing was happening it would appear that conditions were building that might have been conducive to later work and perhaps even inspiration. An energy for artmaking was starting to pulsate and the small acts of building a possible niche for future drawing were beginning.

*I bought a new camera at Duty Free – it is small so I can carry it with me at all times. I took some photographs of my friends and through the tiny lens started to notice some interesting landforms and foliage relationships. The light is quite intriguing. The sun doesn't set until around ten o'clock at night and the twilight time creates a wonderful atmosphere.*

*Around a fantastic dinner tonight with lots of good local Rose on the terrace everyone seems so pleased that I was drawing today – didn't show them the bloody awful drawings! I sense that my friends believe that the drawing is a sign that I am coming out of my melancholy. The good old art as therapy. It is wonderful though how these people with no formal art background are so informed about twentieth century art and fiercely proud of the fact that so many artists find their piece of the world especially beautiful. These people seem more excited about art than most of the people I know at home. It is reassuring and such a pleasure yet highlights how my Australian friends are so disinterested perhaps disconnected from cultural activities. It is unusual in my life at home for conversation to centre on art.*

*I am still at a loss to know what I am going to produce – but frankly, I don't care – it seems now that something will eventually pop up.*  
Artist's Diary, 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2000

The methodology chapter did signpost the exploratory nature of artistic practice (See 5.3) with the intuitive sense that the environment would *reveal* itself. However, a foundation now seemed to be laid where my perceptions of this new environment are being constructed. Comparisons with known environments and the differences between each are being noted mentally. Photographed images were being gathered and through discussion with sympathetic friends, opinions were being formed.

*Over the last few days we have travelled throughout Provence. The landscape is so beautiful – lots of flat lands surrounded by hills. Wonderful ancient cultivated fields seen from mountain edges – brilliant fields of sunflowers. No wonder Van Gogh got excited. Compared with the bleak northern winter this must have seemed like paradise.*

*Visited Arles and went to Van Gogh's Yellow House. There is a particular colours scheme here that is identifiable and operates not only in the natural landscapes but is repeated in the stone walls and ochre surfaces of the houses and other buildings. The red and yellow ochres with blue sky seems so much like images of outback Australia but the shape and forms of the buildings make it definitely European.*

*The yellow that Van Gogh used is everywhere and seems to have settled into the local psyche – right down to table napkins! Even noticed my shoes have been coated in yellow ochre – reminds me of the red mud that gets into your body and clothing on the Atherton Tablelands (area west of Cairns).*

*The sunlight when it hits the rooves is also golden yellow not the silvery blue of reflection on Australian metal rooves – it is far less harsh – as Jean said “ the sunlight caresses rather than attacks”.*

*The French have a gentleness that is romantic – I do feel like the boorish peasant from a convict heritage. Artist’s Diary, 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2000*

Four rolls of film were taken from this visit to Provence, the initial shots were of friends and dinners but by the final roll, people disappeared and only landforms and buildings were being captured. The camera lens was a method of cropping and selecting. I was constructing and evaluating relationships of forms, attempting to capture certain light effects and building an aesthetic perception of this area. Consciously I was collecting data for future possible works and identifying sites to draw. I was connecting with the landscape and being saturated by my environment.

*I have started to see some of these places interpreted in drawing media but in the back of my mind I know these cannot be expressed without colour. My sense of colour is not good and tone is my friend – will have to find a way around this one. Artist’s Diary, 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2000*

### **6.3 Getting Started – Procrastination and Nest Building**

I returned to Paris and the Cité. Paris was finally warm, the sky unusually clear. My visitor Jean was returning to Australia and he had met two other Australian artists staying at the Cité. Claudia Damichi was a young painter who had just had an exhibition in London. She is a new generation Op Art painter who had had several shows in Australia and works primarily as an artist. David Sequiera, an Indian Australian, thirty-five years of age, works at the Australian National Gallery. His work is an eclectic mix of appropriated images and ready-made objects that explore Australian views of other cultures.

The excitement of the possibilities of Provence for making art seemed to wane after my return to Paris and I did anything but make art. The pressure to produce was

ever increasing and I became conscious of time and what others were doing around me.

*In this last week after returning to Paris – I am in panic mode. Done a lot of shopping – gifts for friends in Australia. Been to some great clubs and met some interesting people. Just as I relax on some wonderful terrace with an excellent glass of wine, I feel the panic set in. When am I going to start working?????????*

*I saw my beautiful Rothkos today at the permanent collection in the Centre Pompidou – his colours are so vibrating but images of Provence kept bouncing around in my head.*

*Claudia and David have started working – gulp! David has found a child's school exercise book and he has copied the writing using a silver pen on transparent red paper. There are about 30 sheets of this already attached to the wall of his atelier. Claudia has bought all her materials and is experimenting with colour and form relationships. I have done nothing and haven't a clue about what I am going to do. A month has now passed – a third of my time here. My email won't work and I am beginning to feel like a fraud – I talk about it all the time but can't seem to produce anything. Artist's Diary, 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2000*

My atelier was set back from the main building of the Cité. From my windows, overlooking the car park, around sixty atelier windows can be seen. Throughout the day and night artists can be observed working at their tables or working on the walls. This nest of activity further reflected on my panicking sense of procrastination and lack of motivation.

The atelier was designed specifically it seemed, for producing work. The interior is quite bleak with black lino flooring; not so white walls, a small table, and cupboard and tracking lights positioned on the ceiling of the working space. There was a large trestle-working table that dominated the main room. The room had lots of light and large windows, which, like the main building exposed the room to others in their ateliers and to the car park.

*I am conscious of the fact that my working walls are bare and everyone can see in -... so I have put up five large orange shopping bags on one*

*wall and cut out images from other bags and made collages to give the appearance that something is going on – how tragic! Artist's Diary, 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2000*

I arrived in Paris with no art materials (See 3.8) except for a visual diary and two graphite pencils. I wanted to leave the possibility for media open, hoping that the artmaking materials might in some way lead me into a new way of working.

*Visited the BHV (Bazaar l'Hotel De Ville) department store today and bought a few materials. Selected some pencils considering some of the colours that seem Parisian. There is a limited range of pastels and bought a dozen to cover the basic range of the colour spectrum. Decided to buy A4 size paper – remembered the problems of New York when I had to try and store finished drawings in a small living space and the huge expense of sending them back to Australia. Can't find an equivalent parchment paper – but selected a thicker architectural drafting paper – it is not as transparent as I would like and a little stiff but it might do the job. Artist's Diary, 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2000*

Instead of seeking out different materials, I selected the tools I was most familiar with and had used before. Practical considerations of transport from country to country, storage and the economics of travel were deciding factors rather than aesthetic considerations, which seem to dictate the form in, and on which, the content will need to be placed.

The next two days were spent nest building. The trestle table was moved several times around the small room until it finally found its resting-place against the wall designed for pinning work. The newly acquired media was positioned, arranged, rearranged. The tracking lights were adjusted and the collaged bags were thrown out. The table looked bare and more visits to the department store filled the table with sets of pastel pencils, charcoal sticks, spray fixative and adhesive, a steel ruler, a small roller, a couple of erasers, and two cutting tools. Although all the coloured pencils came with sharpened points, I resharpened the pencils until they had a fine point. Then the colours were tested on the different papers; colours were mixed



with a range of overlapping marks. Once again, the pencils were resharpened, waiting.

*Picked up my photographs today and organized them into piles – the ones with friends in one pile and the others of the southern landscape in another. Then I picked out those that seem the most interesting - mentally started cropping the images and assessed their potential of image making. The photos are quite beautiful and I am remembering some of the specific things in the landscape that attracted me to photograph them. There are also some details that are intriguing when you see them frozen. Artist's Diary, 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2000*

Some of the photographs from the landscape pile were pinned on the wall and rearranged several times until an illusion of a continual landscape was formed. These photographs were placed at eye level directly in front of the drawing board. Now the drawing materials were in order and the possible content was staring me right in the face, but the sole piece of white Carson cartridge paper lay bare.

*I am screaming in my head “get started” but instead I have invited Claudia and David over for dinner. Couldn't stand the pressure so as a diversion went to the grocery store and started cooking.*

*We had a great night – eating, drinking and talking until 4.00am. What a relief – it seems from our discussion that Claudia and David are going through the same as me. Both are feeling quite insecure about their work and we all talked about how difficult it has been to work. Claudia has only done a couple of experiments that she is very unhappy about and David is off to a monastery in the search of some inspiration. Both are concerned that their time in Paris will not be too productive but we all agreed that the experience of Paris was far more important in the long term than the short-term results.*

*They seem concerned about their work being new and different. David is very excited about being in the Prima Vera show to start at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney during the Olympics. I am quite envious that he has been selected for such a prestigious exhibition. I also feel like a dinosaur, such a traditionalist but at the same time quite secure in the fact that I do have some skill and faith in what I do produce. My work is not groundbreaking but has a quiet sincerity that I am comfortable with. I see that David, because he has no formal studio training – on the one hand frees him from traditional skills but on the other undermines his confidence. Artist's Diary, 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 2000*

This dinner became a crucial point for me as I realised that my insecurities were similar to those experienced by people around me. It also clarified, through comparison, what my strengths were and raised several issues about my way of thinking about my work.

The procedure of idea forming started to take on a recognisable structure: the slow, absorbing of a new environment; the surveying of a scene for possible departure points; comparisons of basic elements and schemas; contemplation of a range of possibilities; filtering images through other media (the camera) and articulating out loud to externalise the internal and make sense and/or achieve partial clarification. This latter point indicates the need for a sympathetic and perhaps like-minded community even if it is only one or two people.

Procrastination and lack of application represented perhaps really just the individual time out phase needed for the filtering all the external stimuli and the gradual brewing of a personal perception. The nest building seemed essential to preparation for making. Learnt and practised rituals of carefully organising the right physical setting to create conditions perhaps subconsciously, were essential to the creative process as it appears in this instance.

#### **6.4 Progress and Self-Doubt**

The afternoon following the dinner with Claudia and David, I began my first drawing (Plate 10.3.1) naturally using the layering technique I had used previously in my work. For a number of years I had been experimenting with drawing on several layers of semi-transparent vegetable parchment. Each layer is laminated with the previous one using spray glue and eventually an image is built up.

Depending on the particular drawing, there can be up to ten layers of transparent paper.

For this first drawing (Plate 10.3.1) one of the photographs was selected and placed on the drawing table. Particular elements within the landscape scene were selected and others discarded (in particular, cars, roads and people). An outline pencil sketch was made on the single A4 sheet of archival (one hundred percent cotton) paper (300 gsm) and, on a scrap piece of paper beside the drawing board, colour and outlines were diagrammed noting the various layers and what was to go on each layer.

Layers of charcoal were made and fixed with spray until dense blacks were achieved. The first layer of transparent architectural paper was laid onto the archival paper creating the effect of a semi-transparent skin over the surface. The underlay was visually exposed but softened by the slight misty effect of the architectural paper. Detail was somewhat diffused but still traceable. The charcoal black became slightly grey under the skin. Gradually some colour was introduced with pencils and pastels to replicate the colours experienced *in situ*. Colour became less intense, softer and tinted under the layer of architectural paper. This process was repeated as the image was built up to level when it *felt right* which in this case was six layers of the transparent paper laminated together. Each layer of transparent paper was spray glued and the edges torn leaving an overlay each time of about one centimetre. These extended edges were intended to be trimmed or folded under the stiff original layer. Only slight references were paid to the photograph to gauge colour. For most of the time during the process, the photograph was lying face

down on the table. Tone and colour on the last surface was more intense in comparison to the diffused underlaid layers of charcoal and pastel and exposed, rather than, veiled.

While each layer dried, I made coffee or tea, or drank water or smoked or paced up and down looking at the drawing from several angles. The drying time allowed for a period of reflection in action about how the images were forming and what potentials might be explored. The dialogue between artwork and artist centred on the possible need to make colour or content relationships more subtle or more obvious.

After around seven hours the drawing was pinned to the wall and the track lighting positioned to cast full light on the work. Then the drawing was taken down off the wall and more coloured pencil, pastel and charcoal were added to the final layer until it reached a point when it was intuitively sensed to be *finished*. The final layer was not spray fixed allowing for future additions or subtractions if in the near future I decided to rework it. Once again it was pinned on the wall.

*I started drawing – just said ‘do it’ and off I went. I drew in the way I have been drawing for the last few years – just wanted to get the ball rolling without any clear destination of the content or without thinking this will be part of an exhibition. The transparent paper is not as clear as paper I have used before and the tones and colours react in a way different to what I am used to. It is near impossible to carefully cut or tear the paper but it does lie flat on the surface without the usual bubbles and raised folds.*

*The paper’s character means I have to rethink how the colours and tones change- once the paper is applied, vibrant reds turn to red brown and the black becomes less intense. Cutting and tearing the paper to expose some of the unlay is not possible so I have to reconsider how this might be visually read and adjust the process accordingly.*

*The drawing seems so small and I am conscious of the fact that audiences and critics like the large and the monumental. How many of these will I have to produce to create an exhibition????*

*I am not happy with the drawing – it seems bland and filled with tonal tricks and not good on the token colour. Not too sure about those edges of paper – may cut them off as usual – but there is something about them.*

*It is a bloody awful drawing – couldn't possibly exhibit that! Artist's Diary, 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2000*

The next day I worked once again from the same photograph but produced a different drawing (Plate 10.3.2). After four days, four drawings (Plates 10.3.1 – 10.3.6) were pinned to the wall. Each drawing was predominantly dark with charcoal but with slightly increased use of a limited colour range with almost equal amounts of sky, mountains and foreground. These drawings had similar elements to work done over a year before with strong gestural marks, subtle underlying colours and tones - loosely recognisable as landscapes but with no strongly identifiable unique land forms or foliage. All the A4 sheets were drawn in landscape format with four to six layers of transparent paper all torn at the edges in different widths and overlapping.

*I am pleased that I have at least got something on the walls but I am not too sure about their quality. The cutting into the layers is not successful and there is a lacking of richness because of the lack of transparency in the paper to adequately pick up the underneath tones and colours. But they do have a hint of atmosphere.*

*The edges have huge potential – the charcoal and pastel thickens on the torn edge and gives clues to the underlying layers – also discovered that with direct lighting the overlapping paper give a beautiful shadow that seems to extend the drawing.*

*Not sure where these drawings are leading me to and have lots of doubts about their worth and my worth – perhaps I can't draw after all. Artist's Diary, 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2000*

It is interesting to note that I seemed to believe that the drawings were leading me and not the other way around. From my diary entries it is clear that I was following

my intuition with a faith that eventually I would understand the works. The drawings were externalising my subconscious understanding.

Claudia came to see the work, which I showed her reluctantly. She was surprised that I had produced so much in a short time and admitted she had done nothing in the last week. She called the works “Rothkoish” and made supportive comments about the layers and the cutting back of the surface.

I had decided that the tonal qualities were not as important as the colour I had observed in the south. After visiting the Sennelier shop, the oldest art supply store in Paris, I came home and tested the thirty newly acquired pastels on the transparent paper.

*I know I must use more colour – not just colour but quite specific colours of those hills in Provence. These expensive pastels are so sensual as they move across the paper – the paper has very little tooth (roughness) so the powder just glides and the colours mix so well.*  
Artist’s Diary, 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2000

The inclusion of these new pastels had to be grouped with the now large range of pastels and coloured pencils. Pencils and pastels were placed in categories of colour relationships and matched with colour from the photographs. The particular range of green colours in the hills of Provence was the most difficult and required the blending of several shades of green with cooler and warmer colours.

Over the next week, three more works (Plates 10.3.7 – 10.3.9) were produced and illustrate an increasing use of colour. For the first time architectural structures appear in the images. There were now ten drawings pinned to the wall in a continuous line, each work separated by a space of eight centimetres. As the works

dominated the wall of the atelier, they are constantly in view not only by the present researcher who sometimes sits and looks at them (and occasionally adds or erases marks) but also to others at the Cité. Some of the observers are so bold as to knock on my atelier door to ask for a closer look. Their visits provide opportunity for critical analysis on various levels.

*Over the past couple of days three other artists have been to visit – strangers to me from Austria, France and South Africa. They saw my work from outside and wanted to see the works more clearly. It is kind of like someone seeing your house when you haven't expected visitors. I normally only show people my work when it is finished and framed. Uneasy about works in progress being viewed but it also feels good that someone is actually interested. The South African is a painter, the Frenchman a photographer and the severe Austrian is a drawer/sculptor. All three thought my works were photographs from a distance and were surprised – and even delighted that the works were drawings and 'so tactile'. They seemed interested in the technique and process.*

*My sensitivity to colour is becoming better – it is loosely relating to the photographs but more often used to lead the viewer's eye to particular points – I want the viewer to travel into the works and to discover and make their own sense of the images presented. There is a sense that someone else will bring their own experience to the work so the journey is shared – not so much that they know what it was like to be in Provence but more that they experience for the first time a place that has enough familiarity to be welcoming but new enough that they can find their own journey with the image. Artist's Diary, 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2000*

Through practice I was resolving my fears about my inadequacy in dealing with colour and was constructing a method of working that was inclusive of how the works might be read or experienced. From the first image to the last image there has been a move, particularly in the last four works, to more easily recognisable forms within each work. Person-made structures are evident but still treated as impressions. Nebulous areas of colour and tone that reference both natural phenomena, real and imagined counterbalance these.

## 6.5 Clarification of the Journey

I developed a roll of film taken a week earlier. The first images of Paris included several photographs of Notre Dame Cathedral taken from several angles and varying distances. The approach to drawing was now more refined and less tentative. A routine had been established and a recognized order of working was followed. This familiarity created a confidence and it now seemed reasonable that a body of work could be completed before leaving Paris.

*At the rate I am going I should be able to make 19 – 20 works before the end of September.*

*I picked one image out of the few I have of Notre Dame – this one sees the cathedral nestled amongst the surrounding buildings and floating above the Seine. What is most important about this one is that it seems to fit the schema of the works preceding it and just as importantly it is my favourite view of ND (Notre Dame) – the one I see most days from Pont Marie (the bridge opposite the Cité). This drawing is quite exciting – it brings together so many elements – the layers are informing each other – the colour has the mix of subtlety and tonality – there is enough visual candy for the eye to move around. It is difficult working with such a familiar image as Notre Dame – so many people have used it – I wonder how obvious it is to others? Artist's Diary, 20<sup>th</sup> August, 2000*

When this work was pinned alongside the others, a sense of how the collective works might create an exhibition. I adjusted the space between the works to allow a breathing space from one image to the next. It occurred to me that there was perhaps too much predicability from one work to another and an element needed to be added that was generated by the body of work and functioned as a punctuation mark in a sentence.

*The movement of images do kind of flow but perhaps a breaking up of the flow is needed – a rhythm perhaps. I have also been a little concerned at the realistic nature of the works – perhaps a little chocolateboxish – the body needs an edge – but it must come naturally rather than feeling like a gimmick.*

*I went onto Pont Marie and looked at Notre Dame and as I was thinking I realised I was staring up at the sky or down into the water – I have a solution. Artist's Diary, 20<sup>th</sup> August, 2000*



I went back to my drawings and used them as the departure point to create the next three works (Plates. 10.3.10 – 10.3.12). Each work was filled with one feature: the sky from one drawing, the mountain from another, and the water from yet another. These images were expanded from their original site to fill an entire A4 sheet. These three were placed on the wall in between other works several times until I perceived the *flow* or the *rhythm* to be correct. The entire length of the atelier wall was now covered with thirteen completed drawings. A final act of accepting that the individual works were finished was when I gave each several coatings of fixative spray.

At this point two changes to the method of working have occurred. The drawings themselves are now being used as departure points for generating other drawings that separates further the distancing of the artist from the external images that stimulated the original images. The group of individual drawings have now taken on their own life and are seen as a body of work with internal relationships that inform and respond to each other. The photographs work less as inspiration and more as a tool for referencing colour variations and architectural forms.

The second change in the method was that I had begun to deliberately seek out specific sites to photograph, informed with knowledge from practice, rather than recording random and incidental places that I just happened to find myself. I was now leading the drawings consciously rather than operating fully in intuitive mode.

*For the last couple of days I have been seeking out locations that I have been to in Paris. There are particular views that I remember now that have the potential to be included in this series of work. The schema I work on is also now clearer so the photographs can be quite specific.*  
Artist's Diary, 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2000

I selected the early mornings for taking photographs because it was then that there was less likelihood of people being in the way and the forms captured would not have the distraction of passing cars or bodies. Also, it seemed that places had a greater atmosphere of the type I favoured at certain times of the day.

*In the morning or to a lesser extent, early evening there is a quiet to the city more like the country and there is a feeling that I am the only one there. I like the sense that mine is an isolated view. The mist in the morning is more dramatic – a natural drama rather than the drama and noise created by people and traffic. Artist's Diary, 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2000*

The new set of forty-eight photographs was divided into two piles as usual but with different categories in operation. One pile was for working on *now* and the other for *later*. I was looking for photographs that contained elements such as colour and form that that could be utilized to create a sense of atmosphere and drama. The first pile was further culled to about ten images that best exemplified the atmospheric and dramatic elements and these were pinned to the wall in front of the drawing board. No drawing was done for three days as I thought about what I was really trying to do with the work.

*I feel that in my subconscious the reasons for this work is bubbling away – I feel intuitively right about what I am doing but can't clearly utter what it is. I have doubts that they are so banal and I should be sitting on the banks of the Seine making art for the tourist. What separates me from those commercial artists? Drawn landscapes in pastel seems so loaded – so derided by the contemporary art scene – feel like I need a gimmick to transcend the obvious but that wouldn't suit my sense of integrity. This is what I do – and this is my journey. Artist's Diary, 24<sup>th</sup> August, 2000*

David appeared late one night with a bottle of wine and expressed eagerness to see my work. I value David's opinion because he is informed, intelligent and his work is considered highly by the art community. Our discussion is long and at times heated with insecurities uttered by both parties. At the heart of the discussion was

what made my work *contemporary* and what does it add to contemporary art dialogue. I was shocked when David finally realised that the works are physically multi-layered and then understood that David had been purely reading the content of the images and not how that content was created. David liked the isolated sky, mountain and water images best because they appeared more *abstract* but he kept on referring to how much he *loved* the ancient cityscape of Provence, particularly the light and my ability to draw with a brevity of suggestion.

*David has just been around – we had a good discussion but my head is racing. I am concerned that my work is all process and no content. What does a white male from a loving family, a protestant work ethic and working with romantic images of a passé centre have to offer? I am kind of deflated, angry – Heart and Hand are working but what about the Head – and it is not too pretty!*

*What I am realising that through this particular work and this particular place there is a parallel between my own early history and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century history of European art. I am discovering my artistic roots and gaining a greater understanding of what I do and how I see the world. That in itself is the mental journey so perhaps Head is working with Heart and Hand. Artist's Diary, 25<sup>th</sup> August, 2000*

There is the suggestion here that I had recognized that the need to have the external acknowledgment of my artistic community was far less than my need to understand the internal structures that mould my practice. Perhaps I really need the acceptance of my work only from those whose opinions are important to me, such as David, and Lindy Lee. This lack of dependence on the art community could be because I had never really been part of the gallery scene and had not sought to be a full time artist. My profession as an art/design educator has given me much support and accolades, sufficient perhaps not to be overly dependent on the opinions of critics, gallery directors and even, other artists.

With my time in Paris now in the last half and conscious of the fact that I was going to Nova Scotia for a week, I decided that in the next ten days I must produce more drawings and that there was no time for socialising or just relaxing. Like the rhythm of the drawings I had periods of intense working punctuated by days of reflection and diversions.

*I have been drawing steadily for four days and three more works are done. I find myself going back to the sites for reference rather than looking at the photographs. It seems somehow important that the works grow from having “been” in the location – that I am a witness – does this make the work more authentic and is this crucial to the reading of the work? What if I wasn’t there or only use memory and the photos as prompts – would this change the images – would the lie be evident in the work? If these works are testimony to my journey what do they tell others about the journey – will this be important in the long run?*  
Artist’s Diary, 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2000

Perhaps here lies a moral dilemma for the integrity of this artist. The dilemma involves a form of truth. Is it more truthful to record what is actually seen *in situ* rather than relying solely on memory and/or photographs? Is the use of photography as a reference somehow a form of cheating – a deception to fool a viewer? What truths are corrupted by memory and the desire to create a more interesting image?

Four more works (Plates 10.3.13 – 10.3.16) were completed over the next week making a total of sixteen. One continual line of drawings flowed along the walls of the atelier. For the last work (Plate 10.3.17) I considered what would be the final piece that was symbolic of the end of my Paris trip. In true romantic style, an image of the waters of the Seine just on sunset was selected.

*The final drawing has been such a pain – warm gold reflections on blue water – seems so simple – but it has taken three full days of peeling back surfaces, building up surfaces, wiping them off and starting over and over again. The pastel is so thick the laminating has had difficulty in adhering – the image hits*

*a point and then becomes so kitsch then I rework it, pin it up, rip it down, threw it on the floor and went back to it. Artist's Diary, 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2000*

## **6.6 Contemplation and Questions – the Next Step in the Journey**

With three weeks left of my residency and with the body of work on France complete, for the first time I was able to put some distance between myself and the work, to see it as an entirety. I began to speculate about what the work from all three geographical areas might look like in an exhibition and to question some fundamental issues about the content of the drawings. Diagrammatic drawings were sketched out with consideration about the layout of the works and how they might be framed and installed in a gallery. A time-line for completion of the works and possible venues to house the show were planned.

I saw the works as one continual journey and as a summation of my journey to the point of the exhibition. What would be represented in the show is an exploration of one person's journey, not all the details of a life but the places that had pivotal significance in my life. I envisaged that the individual works might demonstrate some stylistic changes which mirror the influences of time and place have had.

Probably the most obvious question about the work was why the landscape/cityscape was the centre of my image making. All of the current work, finished and envisaged, operated around landforms.

*When I came to Paris I did not have a rigid view that I was solely going to do landscapes or cityscapes. But it was always in my head that mountain, sky and water were going to figure prominently. Never did I suspect that the works would be so literal. This surprises me yet it just seemed like the natural thing to do. I guess that in my head is always the hills, the sky and sea of Cairns and all my thinking seems to be heading in that direction.*

*But, there is a pattern in my life that is becoming obvious. I always chose to live in apartments that are high up and have a view of distant hills and preferably, water. My home must have strong light. There is also my view that artworks should be intimate and contemplative. The dual view interests me – looking at a distance – a kind of surveying the terrain and then the close-up view to notice detail and structure. I always put a focal point in my work that I call “a reward for looking” where a subtle detail is added that contrasts to the sweeping generalised marks. I like to think that my works are a quiet conversation with the viewer – like I am sharing a secret. That is what this exhibition is about – me quietly telling anyone who is interested, about my life. Artist’s Diary, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2000*

The connection between the preference to explore the far distance and the immediate foreground is a perception perhaps related to the early experience of prescription glasses as noted in the autobiographical details of Chapter Five (See 3.5). In retrospect it should not have been a surprise that the content was richly geographical when the leading issue at the beginning of this research clearly identified environment. So even though when I arrived in France I was open to whatever might lead me, I was already subconsciously and, to an extent, consciously seeking a connection with the landscape.

When the series of French works was finished I started to think about Nova Scotia and how that place might be represented. What had I learnt from this experience of France that could inform me about exploring another place. I was looking for an edge that grew naturally out of experience, not a gimmick but a strategy that might alter my view slightly yet still *fit* with the foundations already laid:

*All through the night I have been thinking about a truth in the work borne of the fact that these works are testimony to the fact that I was in a place at a certain time and this is what I saw. But that is not entirely true because the ‘real’ site was mediated through several processes and the resulting drawing is not a mimic of the photograph or of the actual land/city scape, only a reference to it. Perhaps it is in the distancing from the place or image mixed with memory that there is a niche to explore. What if I change one of the steps I have been using? Artist’s Diary, 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2000*

I needed to deal with this dilemma about the integrity of the work and question my moral stance on the authentic experience. Also, I suspect that there is a connection between my ability to render realistically and a viewer's valuing of technical skill. This was never a problem when my work was more abstract but now that I have begun again to draw more realistic and recognizable forms, a strange moral dilemma has occurred and I needed to deal with it. The two dilemmas to explore are: the necessity of authentic experience - Heart and the degree of evidence of Hand.

I decided to take a risk. On paper I had noted the formula for practice that was now somewhat explicit. I did not want to change the techniques or format structure but to alter the process of thinking about place. What I hoped to test was the act of being emerged in the actual place and set about a plan to deal with the images of Nova Scotia. The motivation for this change of plan was perhaps driven by a need to explore the ideas generating the drawings and reduce the emphasis on technique and media.

### 7.1 Looking Back To Look Forward

Chapter Three identified a number of pivotal environments and geographical locations and, in the process revealed that it was the winters of Canada (See 3.6), and especially, Nova Scotia, which had juxtaposed dramatic comparisons of light and colour with the environments of Far North Queensland. Nova Scotia has also afforded greater focus in my studies of art education and art practice, particularly my investigations into drawing. The experiencing of Nova Scotia took me away from my daily life of teaching and living in Cairns that had become somewhat stale, repetitive and predictable. This geographical relocation marked a quantum leap in my confidence and ability as an artist and art educator.

### 7.2 Questioning Authentic Experience

Within the diary entries quoted in Chapter Six, there were references to authentic experiences (See. 6.6), witnessing, and actually being in the place that informed the artworks. However, in practice the French series of works as recorded in the previous chapter were initially a result of first hand experience and later became images that developed autonomy from the scene that had first generated the idea. So in one sense there was already some distancing from the *in situ* method of creating artworks. Yet, as previously noted, a dilemma had arisen from the perception of artistic integrity in the art works. It was in the recent experiencing of France that refreshed memories, passions and inspirations that perhaps made the memories of the place a more potent source for stimulating artistic response. The issue was whether the cherished memories of a place might be equally re-activated by another method?



### **7.3 The Plan for Testing a New Approach**

The initial plan was to travel to Nova Scotia after finishing my time in Paris. This seemed like a logical steppingstone on the way back to Australia. Halifax would have just been moving into Fall when the colours would offer wonderful visual material for my work.

#### **7.3.1 Alternative Plans**

The current research was delving into practice and the emerging issues demanded more considered direction than simply following a logical travel plan. Research was leading practice rather than simply responding to it. The reflections (See 6.6) on practice after the French episode of work were focussing on solving a dilemma of perception and this marked a considerable shift in my behaviour. I was far less inclined to rely on the exotic stimulus and/or difference of a new location as the genesis of new images. Now the goals had changed and certain questions were demanding answers.

An alternative was to challenge the idea of direct, recent experience by relying on my memories of the place and supplement these memories by referring to photographs I had taken in 1983 while I lived there. In 3.8 it was noted that I had a strong sense of wanting to control every part of the process of creating and, intuitively, I sensed that much might be gained by relinquishing some of that control. In the beginning of this research I expressed a need to find new ways of creating artwork and to achieve this perhaps a bolder approach was needed.

A plan evolved to take the least travelled road. I decided not to go to Nova Scotia, but to trawl through memories. However I needed some additional stimuli to refresh the memories. I could not depart from all my methods of practice but was willing to move the focus of control. The photographs taken in France had worked to make the leap from idea to action and I felt I still needed some images from which to work initially. My photographs from past travels to Nova Scotia were interesting but nevertheless too familiar. Hence my argument was that perhaps fresh images of remembered places might afford the right mix of familiar and new. How could I obtain photographs of my memorable Nova Scotian sites without actually being there?

What I needed in my process of creating was an intervention that did not send me into complete chaos but removed predictability. Therefore the intervention needed to be considered, surgical and yet still contained within the structure of my practice methodology. Essentially, this variable needed to be at the point of the Artist Perception Model (Fig. 4.5.1) where an altered perception of the geographical location could simulate the potential to innovate. This would not only test the model but also test the questions that have arisen about authentic experience.

If the challenge was to question authentic experience and the next step in the process was at the point of capturing fresh images of previously experienced places in Nova Scotia then I needed someone to replace me - a surrogate, an informant (Spradley, McCurdy, 1972), to act on my behalf.

### **7.3.2 Formulating a Schema**

In order to ask someone else to be my instrument in this process I had to know exactly what I wanted, both the form of the images and the location. For the locations I sorted through memories of places that remained in my mind. A structured format required that I look back at my drawings to make explicit the kind of schema that had evolved in my current research practice. A reduced schema of relative eye level, spatial relationships and type of content evolved and was described in graphic and discursive form (Appendix C).

### **7.3.3 Selecting an Informant**

The informant I selected needed to be: a local Nova Scotian, willing to participate in this process, be sufficiently reliable to carry out my instructions and be able to take a photograph as required. From my Nova Scotian friends with whom I still had contact with, I chose Scott Robson. He fulfilled all of the criteria and, as a committed local historian, had also the potential to be excited about contributing to this research.

### **7.3.4 Implementation**

From Paris a letter (Appendix D) was written which described the kind of images I required and the process involved in the selecting of particular views. Two weeks later I received a reply from Scott saying that *Yes* he was excited to be involved and that he clearly understood what I wanted or what he thought I wanted. His only concern was that he had access only to a digital camera and was that fine with me? The images could be digitally sent via an email attachment and I would print or read

from screen. This seemed like an interesting and unexpected twist and I agreed to it. The possibility of this had not been part of what I had envisaged but it seemed that this was part of giving up some of the control and might also create new avenues for exploration.

In a strange way I became aware of the connectedness of being in Paris, communicating with Nova Scotia through past contacts and envisaging creating in Australia. Links already formed were providing clues to the future and geographical barriers seemed not to exist as the influence of each *place* overlapped and formed new possibilities in one common lived experienced.

## **7.4 The First Glance**

In early November the first couple of images from Nova Scotia were emailed as an attachment. These were of the Lakeview area around Halifax and a place with which I was familiar from my stay in Nova Scotia. As it was the end of summer and the beginning of autumn, the colours were just beginning to change from greens to oranges, reds and yellows. Autumn is my favourite season in the Northern Hemisphere because the changes and the colours differ so markedly from my experience of Australia. They are an obvious sign of geographical location and the beauty is overwhelming.

### **7.4.1 A Dead End or a Possible Side Road**

The images on screen were somewhat familiar yet not ones burnt into memory. They were almost too picturesque, too pretty. I began to print out the images on a medium priced colour printer. The first two attempts created a flat tonal rendition.

In the next attempt the image was crudely formed in that the blocks of colour did not completely merge and yet there was a kind of interesting representation emerging that took away some of the prettiness and reconstructed the way the image was viewed.

I thought perhaps there was some potential to be explored in these images that were emerging from my printer. I had realised that there would be some emotional distance created from having someone else take the photographs but I had not figured on the process in between the taking of the photographs and the images to which I might refer.

Somehow it was intriguing to see how someone else interpreted my instructions. There was also disquiet about these images, not so much in their printed representation but in how I was relating to them. I was viewing someone else's aesthetic that, of course, was different to mine and this made me feel uncomfortable. Maybe it was just a premonition but I felt uncomfortable about these A4 prints. What was exciting was the issue of how images/artworks are read on screen or experienced from a print. The mediation process seemed to offer all sorts of possibilities. Perhaps I could just frame these prints and place them in between the two other series or print directly onto my architectural transparent paper. The powdered colours are a lot like pastel in many ways. If I had all my drawings on screen and placed in the exhibition site, the audience could look at both and make qualitative comparisons and thus become more active in the viewing/appreciating process.

The initial feeling of disquiet and discomfort was most probably based on my reluctance to accept a vision created by contemporary technology:

*Was there a place somewhere between the completely hand crafted and the technologically created that would satisfy my sense of human contact? The images fit my schema and to a certain extent my aesthetic so I can see them finding a place comfortably between France and Far North Queensland. There will be the distance I was hoping for but also the connection. It could set up an interesting dialogue between the works and between the works and the audience. The problem is in the ethics of 'authentic experience' and a moral dilemma borne out of allowing technology and someone else to make the work. What part of me and my experience will remain? I have instigated the project, examined the material and made (not yet) the decision about the form. To satisfy my needs it may be acceptable if I still give evidence of my hand in the final construction of the individual images.*

*In many ways this argument in my head has been answered by the Post-Modernists. Replication and appropriation are legitimate methods in studio activity and certainly fit with my experience at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and their focus on the conceptual. I can justify the process and inclusion of technology on an intellectual level but on an emotional level, there is uneasiness. Artist's Diary 11<sup>th</sup> December, 2000.*

In early January I began working on the seven images that Scott had sent to me. However, it had been some time since he sent any further digital images and I emailed him several times inquiring, but not trying to push too hard. On my return to Australia I had moved into a new apartment and set up a temporary studio. Diary entries note the initial starting point of working on the new series and a kind of longing for the productive flow that gradually built up towards the end of residency in Paris.

*As usual, my biggest problem is starting. I have some images. I have a way of working but the ritual of nest building has to happen. My apartment is not the perfect place for making art. It is new, clean with white walls and very little space. I have set up a drawing table in my bedroom and unwrapped all my equipment used in Paris. I keep thinking how easy it was to work in Paris – it was all I had to think about. Now that I am back at work full-time it is easy to let work be all*

*consuming and it is going to require a particular discipline to do my job and to research and draw.*

*Despite all the alternatives I have been considering I have made a decision to interpret the printed images in the manner I have already established in Paris. That is to select from the images, draft out possible solutions, speculate about the layers of drawing and then to make the drawings with some or no reference to the original photograph or in this case, print. My paper is new, slightly different from Paris. I cannot get the same weight of architectural tracing paper here and to import it from France is too expensive.*

*I don't have the enthusiasm for these images. I find it difficult connecting with them and have been trying to remember when I was in a similar place in Nova Scotia and what that was like. So, the result is more like copying or directly interpreting the images and it is not so satisfying. I find I am getting annoyed with the process and it is quite tedious but I am happy that at least I am engaging with the ideas and the materials and doing something. This first drawing is oh so pretty and just looks far too cliché, even for me!*

*I am determined to just go with the flow and work. Trying not to be too critical but if I am finding the images dull and boring I am sure an audience will feel the same. Artist's Diary 27<sup>th</sup> December, 2000.*

Perhaps the degree of discontent with the Nova Scotian drawings was born of the fact that there was a small sample of digital images to respond to and I had no control over the quantity and merely had to wait. By comparison, France had presented an infinite number of possibilities for the creation of images that were easily accessible and I had only myself to rely on.

By the beginning of February I had overcome the predictable period of procrastination and seven drawings had been done. These all contained autumn coloured forests, reflecting lakes and ocean and spreads of blue grey sky. The fear that the alternative process of experiencing Nova Scotia was not going to progress in the way it was hoped, began to create a situation of panic.

*These works are all too literal but perhaps no more so than the ones of Paris. I have left them all on the floor for viewing and I have no respect for them but I am thinking that considering past experience, with time they may make greater sense to me than they do now.*

*After several unanswered emails, Scott finally wrote to me apologising for the lack of images. The technology had failed him in a sense. He was having trouble loading the images onto his computer and trouble even locating where they might be amongst the dozens of discs he had scattered around his office. What had seemed originally as a good idea had now soured and I doubt this direction I had taken.*

*Nova Scotia is a bit too far to race off to and take a few photographs and what would happen to my ideas of testing authentic experience?*  
Artist's Diary, 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2001.

## **7.5 The Second Attempt**

The realization that Scott was not going to be able to deliver dawned on me and consequently the decision had to be made as to how to move forward. Perhaps it was not a fault in the method but simply in the choice of informant. Adhering to the plan, a second local Nova Scotian was contacted.

### **7.5.1 A Second Informant**

*I was still interested in the idea of someone else's involvement and about distancing myself from the work somewhat. I decided to ring another friend in Halifax. Bryan Maycock studied with me in the masters program and was now teaching at NSCAD. I described what I wanted and the locations I needed him to capture. It did seem easier to describe what I wanted to another artist and he was more than enthusiastic. One week later three rolls of film arrived. When they were developed I was more than pleased. I could see such potential in the images and adding to this we were able to email each other and discuss the places and remember when we were both there. The stories attached to these images gave them life for me. Also by now it was winter in Nova Scotia and this is probably how I remember the place most with its darkness and heavy sky and the sense that I had found the antithesis of Far North Queensland.*

*I have just looked at my earlier drawings of Nova Scotia; the ones stimulated by the printed emailed images. The surfaces have all buckled and bubbled and they are basically ruined. I suspect that it is a reaction to mixing the adhesive spray and the fixative spray. The two*



*sprays are causing the layers to lift. And really, I don't care. These works were never meant to live.* Artist's Diary, 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2001

### **7.5.2 Nova Scotia Delivered**

Within two weeks of the telephone conversation, four rolls of film arrived from Canada. These rolls were immediately developed and printed. One hundred and forty-four prints provided a rich source of inspiration over the next week. Prints were selected and rejected according to their potential to become interesting drawings. Potential was assessed by the extent to which and the ways in which they evoked my memories of Nova Scotia and by the possibility of finding within the image, an area of visual information that could be translated eventually into good drawings. The kind of visual information I sought was about light, relationship of water, ground and sky and the spatial relationships of landforms.

### **7.6 Testing Touch of Hand**

Although the first attempt to secure images caused difficulties, the exercise was not without merit because the unforeseen process of translating image to form had presented several potentially interesting issues. Differences between on-screen image, the printed image and the working drawing were quite fascinating in their potential for different readings. The varying forms highlighted individual qualities of colour, texture, tone, size and, most important to this current research, the sense of touch. Perhaps it is only by having immediate comparisons that a viewer may come to value observable evidence of the artist's hand.

A further relationship between the printed image and the hand drawn image was noted in the artist's diary. This relationship connected the powdery, layered surface of the print with the pastel layering of the past drawings. It is in the slight

difference of the resulting processes that may present some interesting, subtle readings of the future drawings might emerge.

Representation of recognizable forms and how *reality* is constructed in various ways by a viewer may also be exemplified through the comparison of the digital print and the hand drawn. It is in the viewer's accommodation of various visual symbols interpreted by the technology and/or the artist that may provide potential for teasing out a curiosity and a deeper narrative.

### **7.6.1 A New Approach to Practice**

With very little knowledge of digital technology I had passively accepted the first images from Scott and sat back and watched the images emerge. My dissatisfaction with Scott's images may have been partially because I was too passive and needed to be closer to the process. In order to be more involved, I had to learn how to use the technology and acquire additional skills if I was to delve into the issues raised.

I consulted with my colleagues in the Computer Department at my workplace and it was recommended that, in order to participate in the process, I needed to learn the computer program PhotoShop that would allow me to scan, manipulate and print images.

*Without knowing all the alternatives I had decided that I needed to know how to use the computer programme Photoshop to translate photographic images into digital images that would become an interesting or not, inclusion in my body of work. I enrolled in a five-day intensive Photoshop 6 course that included scanning, altering, saving and all sorts of tricks that I may never use. This was all much more difficult than I had suspected. Admittedly, I struggled with the process of finding commands to do the simple tasks that I had seen students flow through. Yet, I did learn*

*rudimentary actions that I had hoped would equip me with enough knowledge to do what I felt I needed. Artist's Diary, 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2001*

### **7.6.2 Technology and New Processes**

Equipped with an alternative process, the decision now needed to be made about when and how this process might be inserted into the methodology of practice. At this stage it was just a skill that had not been tested or accommodated into my way of artmaking. The logical point of insertion was in the initial part of the process, the area between exploring photographic images and working on paper. As previously stated, I had culled the one hundred and forty-four photographs using multiple criteria and, at this stage, had around thirty photographs with potential for stimulating final drawings.

### **7.7 Nova Scotia Emerges**

In organizing the new skills to fit within my process of working I had foreseen that the computer process would be carried out in the blink of an eye and I would be back in my studio surrounded by my beloved pastels and creating the most amazing new work. However, this was not the case.

*The process was long. Each image had to be scanned, cropped, areas within the image altered, rearranged and then colour corrected and finally saved on screen and then on disc. The first one took over an hour but with each image the process became faster. It became obvious that there was the dominant schema operating as in the previous drawings I had done. It was painstaking to get each image just right. Instead of building the image, it was already there, on screen, yet the same need to control the image was still strong. Each image had to be altered – squeezed, distorted and adjusted to make it my own.*

*At one point I wondered why I didn't just leave the image as it was originally scanned, why I had to interfere. This phase passed as I*

*worked through aesthetic decisions until the images felt right. I may have distanced myself from being in a particular environment at the time the photograph was taken but what I seemed to be doing was making the evolving image familiar. In a sense I was creating these images of the Nova Scotia I remembered or had constructed through memory. The technology although vastly different from what I experienced in the studio was quickly accommodated into my way of thinking about my practice and making.*

*The next stage of the process was printing the digital images. Though the size of the works were measured and sized on screen, the eventual print on A4 paper was smaller. The image shrunk slightly in the printing. Then there was the colour distortion. The prints appeared high in magenta and the surface very shinny. The difference between the screen image and the printed image was more than marginal and in some ways had not registered many of the changes I had made on screen. Artist's Diary, 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2001*

The process was foreign in so many ways to my studio practice. The intimacy and solitude were gone. During this creative episode, I was constantly referring to technicians, working on a computer in a room with twenty other computers and operators, moving from one computer room to a printing room, waiting in line for my work to be printed, having all sorts of people comment on the images. It was all so public that decisions were made quickly with little or no time for reflection. Things happened without my full control but, finally, I had thirty printed A4 sheets.

I locked myself away and looked carefully through this pile of possibilities, I began to categorize the images into three groups, the definite, the maybe, and the unacceptable. The latest group seemed to lack any excitement as images. They were perhaps flat or awkward in composition or missing the layers of colours and forms that I like to tease out. Sixteen remained in the final pile.

The problem before me was to enlarge the works, correct the colour balance and to print the images onto the heavy (115gsm) tracing paper. For this I used another

more familiar technology, the colour photocopier. Each image had to be tested at least four times to get the size correct and the colours acceptable. Depending on the type of printer used, the size of photocopy print can change markedly from the dimensions indicated on the computer screen. Colour on screen and colour in a photocopy print can also vary enormously and, in this case, the colour balance between reds and greens varied and needed repeated attempts to achieve the desired colour. Once again, this became a public act with several people around me giving opinions yet, amongst this chatter, I was able intuitively to sense when each image was at the right stage. The other consideration was that this process is quite expensive - with the costs of printing now running into hundreds of dollars.

Out of these fifty or so multiple copies I was able to select fifteen that already looked like drawings; but they were not just drawings, they were *my* drawings. They looked like photocopies of my drawings, similar but not the same. The process that I had previously thought of as merely a blink of an eye between idea and solution had become a major production. Head and Heart were certainly fully engaged at every stage of the process and, like all tools, the computer/digital process provided but another road to the same destination. It was only until I could run my Hand over the tracing paper with slight changes of surface made by the print that I felt satisfied or nearly so.

It was with much relief that I returned with these images to my familiar drawing table, surrounded by my pastels and pencils. The first semi-transparent sheet was placed over the A4 white cartridge paper.

*This was new – having the image already down, placing it on white paper. The old familiar process of building up the layers of the image is now in reverse. The image is done and the white paper is equal in visual force to the floating image. The print is so glossy, the paper so white, no relationship – what have I done? This was supposed to be the easy part! Glue them onto the paper and it is finished – a production line that I figured would see all fifteen works done in a day. The images look too photographic, for me. I stared at the two overlapping sheets, placed them on the wall, paced around the room, and smoked cigarettes, panic set in.*

*What was missing? The surfaces looked like pastel – well a synthetic pastel, a relationship visually, some surfaces looked like graphite, this was not satisfying. What is missing – my touch. The beauty of discovering the human touch, the tentative, the surprise, the mistakes, the Vaughan in the work. There is no doubt that these images are now mine, not Bryan the photographer but a construction of my aesthetic.*

*I turned the tracing paper over. In reverse it seemed more refreshing, no more gloss, paler, less obvious, less contrasting, the background lessened. I laid down some colours on the white paper and then glued the image on, tore the edges as in the previous series and thus married the two surfaces – a relationship formed.*

*Then I interfered with the image using pastel and pencil, sharpened certain forms and reduced over others. My thinking had to change. Whereas before I had constructed the image layer by layer now I had to think in reverse and deconstruct the image. This took two days, just for the one work, so much for using high technology to speed up the process! But the result from this first work is finally acceptable. I am excited by the fact that images appear highly realistic but on closer examination reveal the hand and become a hybrid of photographic, digital, photocopy and human touch. Artist's Diary, 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2001.*

With the first Nova Scotian drawing complete (Plate 10.3.18) the studio practice became relatively efficient for completing the rest of the series (Plates 10.3.19 - 10.3.29). The intensive labour section of this studio practice was mostly done away from the studio, in the computer and printing rooms. The studio worktable became the place for finishing the drawings rather than the place where most of the images were created. This marks a definite shift in the work process from isolation to a more public, shared working environment. Yet the degree of technical manipulation and creative problem solving had not changed and perhaps because of

the accommodation of new techniques and technology, greater skill of a different type was required.

### **7.8 Questioning Memory**

To what degree memory is operating as a major driver in the research is questionable. Memory of places and the significance of that memory are what began the process and to some extent, play a role in the final reading of the works. However, in the process it is the aesthetic decision making that is fundamentally about what felt right (Damasio, 1999, Langer, 1982). Memory is perhaps submerged into a belief system that dictates the aesthetic rightness of an image. The exploration of light, colour, softness and sharpness of forms would appear in this current research to be about the intellectual, visual interplay of symbols to create significant form (Bell, 1914) rather than the blurred softness of memory traces (Arnheim, 1974).

### **7.9 Authentic Experience and Artistic Integrity**

The Nova Scotian drawings offered a view of a geographical location that may or may not have been different had I experienced it at the same time and place as the informant. In this particular case, the informant was a data-collecting tool who performed as an extension of my eyes. The connection and the experience between Nova Scotia and the artist are authentic though different from what occurred in France. What is essentially the same is that the collected data acted in both situations as stimuli for what became autonomous drawings. These drawings have an emotional, intellectual connection with places, with geographical locations and

are visual autobiographic deposits of experience. Therefore, a sense of integrity about the work is maintained.

### **7.10 Technology and Process**

Familiarity with a well-honed artistic process becomes an unquestioning part of personal studio practice; hence, to change the process requires stepping outside of one's zone of familiarity. Scrivener (2000) predicted that within creative production research, the researcher might have to acquire new knowledge and skills (Fig. 5.5.1) to explore issues as they arise. Acquiring skills in digital technology may not have made the drawings more potent forms but it did help to clarify questions that emerged and was able to be contained within the research. Experiencing the potential of the digital as an adjunct process to my studio production not only altered my perception about digital art in general but, more specifically, about how traditional drawing methods and new technology may inform one another.



## CHAPTER EIGHT NO PERMANENT ADDRESS: FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND

### 8.1 Home

Whereas Nova Scotia and France emerged early (See Chapter Three) as possible sites for research, Far North Queensland was acknowledged from the beginning of the research as the most important place, both visually and personally. As Chapter Three records, Far North Queensland was the place of my birth, my childhood and where I had spent many years as an adult. Cairns was my *home* both physically and emotionally. The perception of home was so emotionally charged and so filled with memories that I considered this *place* held the key to unlocking crucial information that directly informed my personal knowledge base (Fig. 4.5.1). By revisiting Cairns and its geographical surroundings, I hoped to be able to address some of the fundamentals underpinning my studio practice, especially those that may have constructed the aesthetic content and form in my studio practice.

In late December (2000) I flew to Cairns to deal with the family business and to visit some of my favourite locations. After the death now of both my parents, the concept of coming home was a strange one. Was this still *Home*? Did I really feel anything for this place? I was certainly nervous about coming home. The family house was now sold; Mum and Dad were not going to greet me and I was not sure how my only surviving family member, my older brother, might feel about my return. My father had left the only remaining family property, a farm, to me and not to my brother. I anticipated some tension. On top of this I knew that I had to face the duty of spreading my father's ashes.

As the QANTAS flight neared Cairns I looked down on the green cultivated fields and the sparkling ocean dotted with occasional boats and my heart soared. Its beauty and the sense of the familiar and an expanding love of the environment overwhelmed me. We flew over the area I knew to be where my farm was positioned and felt then that I still had a home – physically located in the North with connections with my family. This seemed to calm my fears and I felt *I am home*.

Cairns was hot and muggy but not as extreme as I had expected. The drive down the main street from the airport to the city was even more ugly than my trips before. Garish signs advertising all sorts of things for tourists barely hide the hideous Besser brick buildings but every so often there was the hint of an old Queensland wooden house and splashes of brilliantly coloured bougainvillea.

That afternoon I looked from the hotel room and saw the mountains through palm tree leaves. These were no ordinary mountains. I had forgotten their exact colour and the relationship of that colour to the sky. And what a sky! All heavy with cloud and huge. I raced down to the Esplanade (the green strip of grass that follows the shoreline along the area designated as the City of Cairns). This was tropical yet not all greens and bright colours but the tropical grey of the Wet Season (December to April) with low heavy clouds reflecting grey on the ocean. The temperature was moderate and the humidity level reasonable. I realised this was one of my pivotal views of home. Not looking *at* Cairns but *from* Cairns – with the town behind me and only the ocean, the sky and the jutting peninsula in view. This was the inspiration view – the place of contemplation – the distant view out to where fine focus just reveals the edge of the water and the edge of the sky. So many greys in

lilac, pink, blue and green. This was the spot where there were no people in my view, where there was only quiet except for the sounds of slight water movement. Everything was *over there* in the void of greyness, beautiful greyness, soft, calming – a wonderful loneliness without feeling lonely.

The next morning at dawn I spread my father's ashes on the Esplanade just at the water's edge. The grey powder of my father's last physical presence seemed to belong here. The speckles of dust lay on the water's surface and then floated out until they became indiscernible from the reflected greyness of the sky. As prosaic as this may read, there seemed to be completeness in this moment, my father, my home, and my view into the void, my research, my art and my continuing journey. A time in my life had been reached where past, present and future seemed all one.

In my hand had collected a small mountain of ash. I placed it in some plastic wrap and kept it for a drawing. In my ceramic days I had read of how Chinese ceramicists kept the ash of their loved ones to make an ash glaze and it seemed fitting that in my last drawing of Cairns I would use the ash – a symbolic merging of Head, Heart and Hand.

I spent a few mornings after that returning to the Esplanade to burn the images I saw there consciously into my memory so that, in the future, my comparisons with other geographical environments might define greater subtlety of difference, never sameness but perhaps similarity. I could see then what my drawings for this research were going to be – even the sequence, particularly of the final five.

For two afternoons I drove through the Tablelands looking. I remembered past places - the rich greens and red soil were interesting, nostalgic and possible images, yet they did not seize me in the way I had predicted or even hoped for. One day I went with my architect friend John to see a house he had just completed in Julatten (an hour and half drive from Cairns). It had been raining there for several days and the house sat on a small hill overlooking a valley with a panoramic view stretching to the far off mountain ranges. Somehow this was different, similar to what I had seen on the tablelands, but new to me. It was almost foreign but like no country I had experienced. The greens were unbelievable - like an enhanced photograph - the foliage seemed to encircle the house and spread ever outward and perhaps this was like my first experiences of the Tablelands. I took photographs because the contrasts of dark and light were so extreme and the green was almost impossible to re-imagine.

### **8.1.1 Drawing Home**

On returning to Sydney I felt the need to re-establish my life. After having six months away from work, living in France, dealing with the family tragedy, and setting up a new apartment, I felt the need to see friends, organize a structure to my life and totally immerse myself in my job. However, during these early months of the year, the images of Far North Queensland and their relationship to the works from Nova Scotia and France were constantly working away in my mind. In times of quiet I reflected on Cairns and placed myself on the Esplanade looking across the ocean to the distant landforms and horizon. The images in my mind were sharper, clearer with flashes of brilliant colour and the heaviness of the sky. Memories of Cairns were the more recent ones (in comparison to memories of years ago) and,

maybe because I actively and self-consciously stored particular views for future reference, I used memory directly as a tool as I have never done before. I did not start the drawings of Cairns until several months after my last visit there.

*Finally I am drawing again. It has been some time. The technical aspects have almost been fixed and over Easter there has been a block of valuable time. I need a spread of time – the moments between action/drawing are crucial – I need the time to contemplate and consider, building up to the event. Though this time there was a different feeling. The images of Cairns are so potent in my head and there is a kind of urgency to make the works. There is also a focus, I find that finally I know what I am doing and why.*

*That blind faith I had in Paris has been replaced with a certainty. Yet somewhere in the back of my mind there is a future project that all my intuitive knowledge seems to be preparing. There is something wonderful about that charging forward without knowing where the journey leads. The work I am doing now is the proof that my tentativeness in Paris was leading to this and the faith in the unknown journey restored.*

*I started with the image that was strongest in my mind – the first powerful image from the Cairns Esplanade – the pearly greys were all constructed in my head but reproducing them was difficult. I couldn't mix the colours as I wanted because my palette of pastels was all those chosen for France. Two hundred pastels and still I don't have the endless combinations. So the cycle continues – back to the shop to find possible colours. And this is a game I play in the ritual – a full justification to buy more pastels. A new material means a new beginning and this is part of the excitement – buying a possible solution – dealing with the untouched. My studio – well this is now a small table in my bedroom. Pastel, charcoal, torn paper, fixative and adhesive spray are not good for sleeping conditions but I find I must work around everyday living. In my house, when I get frustrated with the drawing process I can change to domestic activities while thinking out a solution but I yearn for the Paris apartment where conditions seemed perfect for making – where all activity centred on the making. Artist's Diary, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2001.*

## **8.2 Land, Sky and Water**

With the urgency to project the images from my mind on to paper I began to draw scenes from the Cairns Esplanade (Plates 10.3.34 – 10.3.40). These works concentrated on the three basic forms of land, sky and water and I moved between

quantitative portions of the water and sky emphasizing one over the other, or giving both equal space. The landforms acted as a focussing point to divide water and sky and to allow the viewer to project themselves into the image. Only occasionally did I refer to photographs I had taken in Cairns and this was mainly to refresh my memory about some of the details of forms and/or changes in the greys of sky and water as they reflected each other. Most importantly, I wanted to capture the atmosphere of a drama that plays out in Cairns during the wet season when heavy clouds tease with promises of cooling rain.

### **8.3 The Interior View**

While I worked on the greyness of sea and sky my memories were often interrupted by the contrast of the rich greens I had seen in Julatten. This was the natural contrast to the views from the Esplanade and formed two opposing views of the one area. Once again I experimented with different quantities of sky and land to give each element an emphasis of weight and produced three works (Plates 10.3.30 – 10.3.32). Developing the greens as I remembered proved difficult and the solution lay in the contrasting red and purple browns of shadows. In anticipation of the exhibition I decided to include another work (Plate 10.3.33) to act as a punctuation in between works as I had done with the French series.

I had a sense now that all the works for an exhibition were had now been completed yet I wanted a work that marked the end of this series, a high note. This drawing (Plate 10.3.41) hinted at land, sea and sky but of no particular place, except maybe of home. It was symbolic of real and imagined places, of places visited and yet to

be experienced; it was into this drawing that I drew with my father's ashes (See 8.1).

#### **8.4 In Memory of ...**

Re-experiencing Cairns and Far North Queensland was an emotionally charged journey where certain perceptions were re-affirmed and others altered. The beauty of the place was even more powerful than I had remembered. However, it was the kind of beauty that perhaps could be fully appreciated by one who had at one point lived there, understood the mood of this time of the year and yet had some distance. As a child I remember everyone hating the wet season with its heat, humidity, grey skies and constant rain. Tourists were also reluctant to visit at this time of year because of the conditions. Yet, for this expatriate, for the first time I was able to appreciate its somewhat unique qualities. The intersection between initial experience, memory traces and re-experiencing seemed to be its most potent in research and studio practice in Far North Queensland. This would re-affirm the perception that this *place* was indeed the foundation for all other perceptions in later life.

For every new insight gained there emerged a renewed feeling of loss. I was now an outsider (albeit one who was once an insider) who only visited for a short time. As important as Cairns was to forming my identity, it was no longer a place I felt *at home*. In this realization came the question "Where is home now?". The answer is obvious: Sydney, the place where I have chosen to live for the last fifteen years. In terms of this research it may now be strategic to explore my perceptions of Sydney and how memory and experience interpret this geographical location. This would

also give some sense of completeness to the research as this is where the present research began and now will end, the full circle of the Head, Heart and Hand of this visual autobiography of place.



## CHAPTER NINE THE CRUCIBLE OF HEAD, HEART AND HAND

### 9.1 Roadtesting the Exhibition

Up until this point, the process of making had been conducted but none of the drawings had been seen in a final state, ready to exhibit. That is, all of the works had been seen either in the artist's ring-bound portfolio, on the walls of the Paris atelier, on the floor of my home or seen in sequence as thumbnail images on my computer. In my mind I had seen the works in their exhibition. In Paris I had drawn diagrams of how the exhibition might be installed and how each work might be framed (Appendix E).

In February, 2000 I was part of a group exhibition at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery in Sydney, which consisted of works by my colleagues at the College of Fine Arts. Two drawings were exhibited; one of Notre Dame Cathedral (Plate 10.3.11) and another of the waters of the Seine (Plate 10.3.12) near the Cathedral. Along with the physical exhibition was a website that showed the two works with a brief description.

*I selected these two works for the exhibition from the French series for several reasons. One, because they were a fair representation of the series. The Notre Dame drawing had the recognisable symbol of Paris and I felt allowed people to connect with such an obvious landmark to geographically position the work. The other drawing was quite abstract alone but alongside its buddy hopefully would set up a dialogue with each work informing on another. These works also tested the perspex box framing system I designed. Artist's Diary, 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2001*

On a trip to a homewares store I had found some small Perspex boxes that had been molded together rather than joined with separate pieces. This made the corners clean rather than the usual glued edges forming a distractive join. I found out who manufactured them and went home to produce some designs for Perspex box

framing of my drawings. The initial idea was that the drawings could be contained in such a way to preserve and protect them yet minimize any hard lines or frames around the works.

*There is a kind of magic that happens between when the drawings are taken out of the plastic sleeved portfolio and are hung framed, spotlighted and then hung in an exhibition space. On one hand they are sealed, removed, untouchable strangely “finished” and are physically distanced from the viewer (including the maker). Conversely, they are now so accessible to a larger audience. Artist’s Diary, 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2001*

Another audience also had access to the drawings. I emailed the website displaying my work to around fifty people and was surprised when many of these recipients forwarded the address on to several other people. A few people in other universities downloaded the images and used them in lectures. Some told me how they saved the images to use for further reference. One threatened to use the images for e-card greetings! This forced me to re-look at the images and how they were re-created digitally and beyond my control. The drawings were no longer drawings except in name. All evidence of the touch of hand was removed from view and of course, the drawings became far more two-dimensional. The small scale (4 x 3 cm), the positioning of the drawings, placed one above the other, and the reductionist effect of the technology essentially created a hybrid of the originals. The real texture, the visual texture, disappeared on screen and I can only speculate what they might have appeared like shown with a digital projector on a larger scale in a lecture hall.

The framing system worked well in the group exhibition allowing people to see the works on the side and notice the layering of images. The foamcore floats used to raise the drawing and to create the coloured shadow were not so successful in that

the floats were too high and the colours did not translate in shadow. Lighting the work without creating a shadow from the corners of the frame was also a nuisance and interfered with the white border around the works.

Critical responses to the works were enthusiastic and very *nice* in the polite way but generally fairly superficial. Even though I did not solicit comments from those viewing the work, many were willing to share their opinions during the exhibition. I was looking for more: perhaps even damnation would be better than *really interesting work*. Yet what I did find exciting was how people connected the images with their own experiences of Paris. Some people commented on how they had forgotten that the Seine was so green. I am not sure that they ever noticed that the Seine was at times a particular green but seeing my drawing they now appeared convinced that the famous river was as I depicted it. Perhaps these images recreated a view of Paris that informed an audience about a similar experience they had had and this is a niche for me to consider as a dimension in the possible audience response. This kind of response in the audience substantiates the theories of Damasio (1999) who discusses how a reader begins to create a personal journey intertwined with that described in words by an author. A greater sense of a journey might be possible in the orchestration of the placement of the artworks in the final exhibition of these drawings.

Having two works that were different but connected seemed to have set up a situation of comparison between the recognisable and the abstract and a preference for one or the other. Within the future exhibition several layers of comparison between individual works and the three series of works should create some valuing

system adding to the dialogue between individual works and groupings of works. The issue of whether it might be important to install the works in a way different from the usual linear on-the-wall presentation emerged. This is of course speculative but the possibility of creating a kind of edge where subgroups of works may appear through an almost infinite set of aesthetic variables. But this would require a very different form of presentation that would allow a viewer greater flexibility in sequencing the viewing of individual works and works in a particular series.

This is a next step in the thinking about the exhibition installation. My earlier considerations had been about a kind of linear reading where the physical arrangement of the three sites begin and end in one continual line and it may be that this would be far too limiting in terms of setting up a situation in which various relationships and dialogues could be generated by a more carefully considered installation. A dilemma for the design of the exhibition will be to construct a way in which individual viewers will be able to create their own pathways through the body of works.

## **9.2 The Intention of the Exhibition/Installation**

The epistemology of artistic practice is often shrouded in the mysteriously constructed convention of the exhibition where an audience is invited to observe the outcome while being simultaneously denied access to process. The challenge for this exhibition of research outcomes was to construct an experience whereby the viewer is afforded the opportunity to be more informed at a number of levels:

...demystification is not a show up of the falsity of the practitioner's claim to knowledge but a bid to undertake the often arduous task of opening it up to inquiry. ( Schön, 1991:289)

### 9.2.1 Concept

Initial questions in the research (Refer 1:4) sought to explore the potential for generating a visual narrative of place, a landscape of memory where intersections between skill and memory might occur. This concept implied the possibility that the narrative could be *read* visually had implications for how the work should be installed.

I had originally envisaged the exhibition (See 6:5) as following the convention of a line of drawings hanging at eye-level on walls and read from left to right. The concept of a landscape of memory drove me to contemplate alternative methods of installation. Consideration of the elements of sky, land and water in the content of the works meant a possible grouping of the drawings on the wall in a three-sectioned grid pattern with works arranged according to the element that dominated the imagery. Neither of these modes of installation seemed sufficiently compatible to the demands of the concept. I imagined myself as the viewer in the exhibition and sought out memories of how I first meshed visually with the vista of Provence. Imagination and memory morphed to produce an image of being immersed in and surrounded by a landscape of drawings.

Planning on paper led to the realization that, in order to achieve such a landscape, the works would need to be raised off the floor with each individual work exhibited

like a three dimensional artifact on a plinth. The issue then was the extent to which the drawings and plinths might be arranged in such a way that a viewer could journey through the installation in a semi-directed way allowing for various entry and exit pathways (See 8.4).

### **9.2.2 Minimal Aesthetic**

Aesthetic decision making for the exhibition had its roots in the selected framing techniques for the individual drawings (Refer 8.4) where the design of the matting and framing was minimized in order to facilitate viewing that was not distracted by extraneous colour or borders, hence the logic of using clear, transparent Perspex. Without the lines of frames, coloured matts and solid plinths, all that should remain is the floating arrangement of a landscape of drawings.

The design of white matting and transparent framing reflected a pared down minimalist aesthetic. This aesthetic then drove further considerations of all design elements that supported the exhibition including plinths, catalogues, labelling, invitations and the gallery.

### **9.2.3 Practical Considerations**

In order for the viewer to access the work as completely as possible, a number of resources designed to extend the audience's own experience and knowledge needed to be available at the exhibition site: a catalogue with Artist's Statement, a printed numbering system to identify the work, an exemplar of the visual diary, a List of Works including dates and media, and a digital display of the works created in chronological form.

### **9.3 Locating a Gallery**

The search for an exhibition space was designed to find the closest possible match between what was envisaged and what was available. Certain physical criteria were obviously paramount. The gallery needed to have a large floor space to accommodate the number of drawings displayed horizontally, adequate lighting, be available for hiring within a set time frame and also to be affordable. It was also desirable that the interior design of the space reflected a minimalist aesthetic. Approximately twelve galleries were surveyed to meet the criteria. However, most of the galleries were not available for booking for over a year and/or were too small in their available floor space.

A match was found with SourceFourNinety Exhibition Space (Surry Hills, Sydney) that met all the physical needs though it was considerably expensive (originally \$2,500 per day later negotiated down to \$1000 per day) which, if accessed, would dictate a short length of three days for the exhibition. SourceFourNinety Exhibition Space is a commercial space not usually hired for art exhibitions – its purpose is to display top end of the market, industrially made, commercial products such as shower units, washbasins and other designed products. Therefore, it had exhibition lighting but no facilities for conventions of art exhibitions such as white walls and hanging systems. The walls were glass and the floor white marble. The glass walls allowed natural light in and on several visits there I noticed how the sunlight moved across the floor and felt at the time the changing mood of the light might also add an atmospheric dimension to the display of landscapes. These elements seemed to be an extension of the white matting and Perspex frames I had designed and, as this was not a conventional art gallery, there was the added advantage of breaking with

convention perhaps gives the viewer a different experience – an opportunity for the artist/curator to innovate.

## **9.4 Exhibiting Artifacts**

### **9.4.1 Space**

SourceFourNinety Exhibition Space had a floor area of approximately sixty square metres that was only intersected by four pillars. This meant that there was more than enough space for the works to be positioned on the floor space (See Appendix F.) and to allow viewers to walk around works. In keeping with the concept of a landscape of memory, the plan was to arrange the works to spread across the floor, although this was limited in area by the positioning of the overhead spotlights.

Further considerations of the space were the location of the main entrance and access to the outdoor area and the bar. In planning the location of works these elements needed to be considered in order to consider how the audience might negotiate the site.

### **9.4.2 Plinths and Arrangements**

Once it was planned that the works would not hang on walls but be placed on the floor, a decision had to be made about elevating the works. The most obvious solution was to use the conventional wooden box plinth. I had experimented with a number of drawings sitting on white plinths. However, the size and apparent heaviness of the plinths made *them* the centre of attention rather than the drawings.

The search for a minimalist aesthetic made me consider other materials and methods



of supporting the works. The base/plinth needed to be as unobtrusive as possible, yet strong enough to provide the necessary support. I had further to consider how the support might travel and later be stored. I referred to my speculative drawings of the plinths and saw the box shaped plinths in a different material – one that was transparent rather than opaque. The problem was solved by using the same material as the frames, Perspex, and designed in such a way they could be flat-packed and assembled/dissembled easily (Fig.9.4.1).

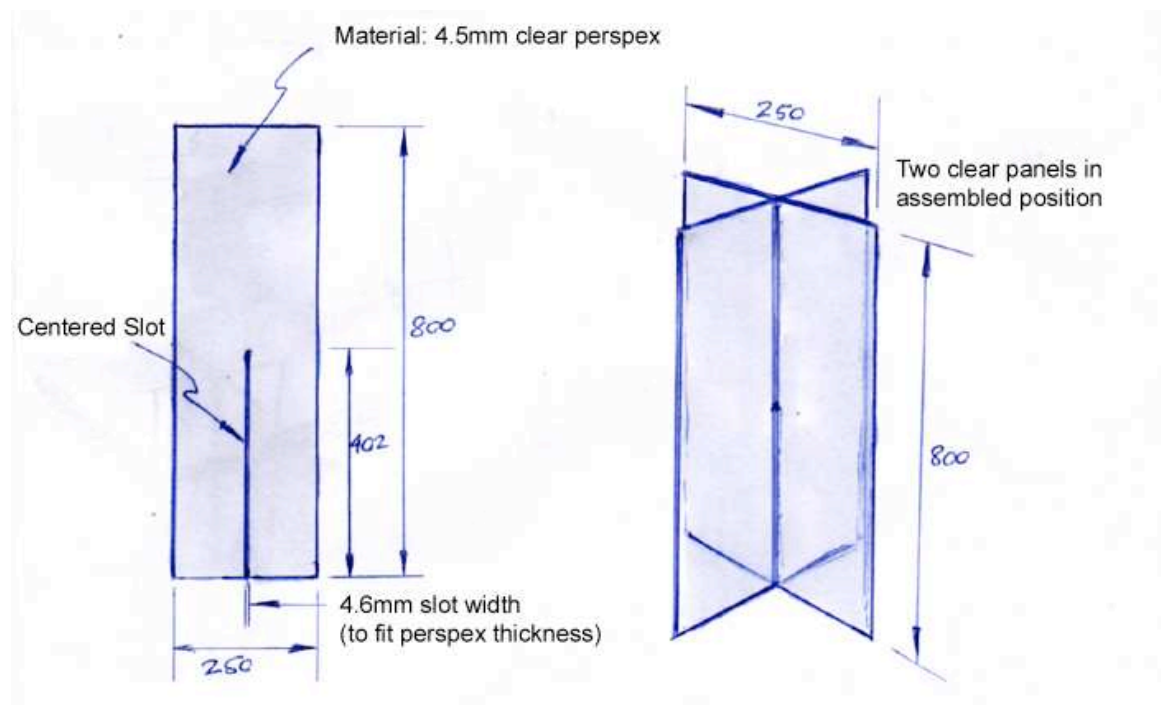


Figure 9.4.1 Perspex Double Blade Base

The transparency of the material against a marble floor would mean that they would appear so minimal as to disappear allowing the drawing to float at a raised level – so that any distraction from the drawings was as minimal as possible.

The height of the plinths was determined by the height of my drawing table so that the audience could view the work at the same angle, height and position the drawings were created – to view them as I viewed them during the process.

## **9.5 Selecting the Works**

Consideration of the spotlighted floor space, the concentric circles, size of the drawings, gaps for entering and exiting and space that would allow for an audience to move around the works meant that a maximum of thirty-six drawings could be installed in this area. The logical conclusion was to give each geographical environment equal representation, i.e. twelve drawings from each series. Therefore three works from the French series and two works from the Nova Scotian series could not thus be included on the floor plan. Was there a way to still include these works in the exhibition?

Speculation about which works to include and where they might be placed was rehearsed on paper with a collage of thumbnail sized images on my drawing table. The sequence of the works was determined by their geographical sub-categories. For example, the French series was broken up into two categories: Paris and Provence. The two key positions in the arrangement were the ones that the audience would see first as they entered through the main entrance and the work that would occupy the centre of the circles. As France was the beginning of my journey, the two works of Notre Dame Cathedral (Plates 10.3.11 and 10.3.12) were planned for the initial impact. Notre Dame being such a familiar symbol, it is argued that this would immediately locate the geographical area. For the centrepiece, the final drawing in the final series on Far North Queensland (Plate

10.3.41) was chosen. Since this was also the work that contained my father's ashes, its significance was thus honoured by its placement at the *heart* of the group (See 8.3).

The images that were excluded from the floor plan were those that were part of multiple interpretations of a similar geographical environment and could thus be deemed already represented. For example, three drawings were made of the mountains in Provence but I chose only one of the three that seemed to fit aesthetically with the images that were placed on either side. That is, they had a connection either by colour or content.

On the floor plan of the gallery I speculated about different configurations until I arrived at one configuration (See Appendix G.) that allowed an audience to move through the works in different ways. Entrance and exit points were planned by making spaces in an arranged pattern of concentric circles. The outer circle would comprise predominantly the French drawings; the first inner circle would include the Nova Scotia drawings; and clustering towards the centre would be the Far North Queensland drawings. The absolute centre of the pattern was reserved for one drawing, the final drawing created in this series. To give the audience a sense of the journey and how it unfolded, this pattern followed the chronology of the environments researched.

### **9.5.1 Labelling**

Each work was to be discretely numbered on the side of the picture frame in a possible path-finding sequence. For example, the two works selected as the ones initially seen by the audience as they enter the gallery were numbered “1” and “2”. This set up a way for the audience to be guided through the installation and was to be supported by corresponding numbers on the catalogue. The final work in the centre of the circles was numbered “36”. However, it was envisaged that people might choose a different path/journey through the multiple physical entrance and exit corridors

### **9.5.2 Catalogue and Invitation**

The catalogue (Appendix H) was designed to be consistent with the dominant aesthetic of the exhibition relating the content and process of the exhibited drawings.

The form of the catalogue was to be a sleeve of thin cardboard into which was inserted an A3 sized folded sheet of transparent paper similar to that used for the drawings. The transparent nature of the folded paper gave a layered effect to the printed images and text in much the same way as the drawings were constructed. Text was printed in pale grey to replicate the softness of pastel.

The outer thin cardboard sleeve was designed to replicate the size, relationship, and text of the invitation to form a seamless connection between invitation (Appendix I) and catalogue as it was presumed that the audience would bring the invitation (to locate the gallery) and then be given a catalogue as they entered the gallery. The

text on the both the invitation and catalogue was created by using a stencil effect with pencil to foreground what was to come. The content of the catalogue was to contain: representative images of the works, a List of Works, a Selected Biography and an Artist's Statement.

One image from all three series was selected for the catalogue. Printed coloured images of the first and last work numbered in the exhibition and one of the Nova Scotian series were selected. A select biography was constructed to be included to give the audience insight into the person who created the works and therefore a layer of personal exposure and thus potentially greater access to the drawings.

### **9.5.3 Artist's Statement**

With a broad range of people likely to attend the exhibition, the intention of the Artist's Statement was to build a general context. As it was planned to present the catalogue to the viewer at the point of entry, it was hoped that the Artist's Statement might be read before the work was viewed. The statement was deliberately brief to stimulate access. The Artist's Statement was thus the first page of the catalogue:

Certain environments and events become pivotal in the changing of an individual life. This visual autobiography is the result of an intensive investigation into the evolving realization about how certain perceptions were formed along my life's journey and how those perceptions influence my studio practice of drawing. The epistemology of artistic practice is often unexplained and perhaps mysterious and therefore tacit. The thesis that accompanies this exhibition attempts to unravel the layers of personal artistic experience to make the previously unknowable, known.

There are three series with this exhibition and each series explores places amongst the many that have in some ways created or informed my studio practice.

Far North Queensland and in particular, Cairns my birthplace marks the beginning of my journey and in many ways also marks an end to part of

the journey. It is the place where a certain construction of how the world was supposed to look became the basis for all other comparisons.

Halifax, Nova Scotia in Eastern Canada presented like Cairns, a place where a small city grew beside the water. Yet Nova Scotia became visually the antithesis of my tropical home and a beauty of paradoxes informed the environments of both places. I became aware of the lightness in the darkness and colour in the greyness of a Canadian winter and saw a monsoonal summer in Cairns as shadowed brilliance and cool heat.

France, Paris and Provence were the places of my younger self – where the most romantic notions of being an artist were formed and the vision replenished in middle age. In a Paris revisited my passion for making art was renewed. With this renewal came a comfortable calmness with taking some ownership over the title, artist – a word that usually stuck in the throat of this bloke from Cairns.

Ultimately this exhibition represents the crucible where learnt behaviour (Head), emotional sensing (Heart) and skill through touch (Hand) combine to speak of part of one artist's journey and perhaps touch the visual memories of places that the viewer may have also journeyed to... (refer Appendix H).

#### **9.5.4 Other Resources**

The Artist Centred Model (Figure 5.3.1) illustrated the various layers of artist knowledge and the autobiographical processes that have attempted to interrogate those layers. The processes detailed herein and beyond the visual autobiography are obviously not available to the viewing audience. However, by providing some information beyond the works exhibited and the catalogue, the audience may have additional resources to understand the processes, skill and memory involved in the exhibition.

While, as already acknowledged, not all drawings created were framed and exhibited, an additional strategy by which the audience might have access to the complete series of works was envisaged in order to afford a comparison between the actual hand-drawn and other representations.

In order to facilitate this comparison I decided at first to scan all the drawings and project them on an overhead screen during the exhibition. With greater consideration, I believed that this might be too much of a distraction and thought it would be best to present the images in a more intimate way by displaying them on a computer adjacent to the body of the drawings. I prepared the images in the sequence they were created in a continual loop so there was no beginning or end enabling the viewer to enter and exit at any point.

As explained in 5.5, the visual diaries were an important data collection tool and it seemed advantageous that this tool might also be given some access to the audience who could see the quick sketches done *in situ* and read my thoughts at the time recorded in my own writing. Instead of showing several pages of many diaries I chose to just use one diary and to open it at a page where I had recorded image and thoughts of Notre Dame. This was intended to create a direct relationship between the images of Notre Dame on screen, in the diary and as a finished work and entry point to the main body of the exhibition.

As the computer and the diary were part of the exhibition, they were designed to be integrated into the aesthetic and experience of the show. I selected a special plinth with a Perspex box cover for the diary and hired a white, clear IMAC computer that also sat on a similar plinth to the diary.

## **9.6 Installation**

### **9.6.1 Plinths**

The Perspex plinths were in two parts (Fig. 9.4.1) and slotted together to form a cross-pattern. For the thirty-six plinths needed, seventy-two sections were made. To keep the plinths in pristine condition they were kept wrapped and could not be set up prior to access to the space. These Perspex sections arrived several days before the exhibition and a sample from several boxes was tested to ensure they functioned. Each section of each plinth was coated on both sides with a glued protective paper. Of the ten sections tested, the protective paper peeled off easily in one sheet. However, on the day of the installation it was found that for the majority of the remaining sections, the protective paper did not peel off in one sheet but had bonded with the Perspex and could therefore only be removed in small strips. A job that should have only taken three people less than an hour to accomplish presented a nightmare that eventually meant that ten people spent five hours to remove the one hundred and forty-four strips of protective paper. Given the test case successes, this potential problem had not been anticipated or calculated into the timing of the installation and pushed the finishing of the installation to half an hour before the first guests arrived for the opening.

### **9.6.2 Floor Plan**

The plan for the placement and sequencing of the work (Appendix G) worked well and the planned arrangement made the installation of the works relatively easy once the plinths were assembled. However, once the works were all in place, the configuration did not work visually as well as had been anticipated. While the effect of the marble and its reaction to light had been perceived as positives in the



initial site visit to the space, the reality that the marble was not continuous but was, in fact, rectangular tiles, had not been obvious. *In situ* the strong geometrics of the marble tiles at night were at odds with the circular concept for the works. Hence it was necessary to adjust the circular pattern of the arrangement of the artworks to a rounded rectangular pattern so that the grid pattern of the floor then complemented the arrangement of the drawings. While this was activated easily without disrupting the sequencing of the works, the need to do so added to the frenetic stress prior to the opening.

### **9.6.3 Lighting**

Previous visits to the gallery at night had indicated that the general lighting was adequate and that there were sufficient spotlights to highlight the drawings. As the drawings were displayed horizontally and the Perspex frames faced upward, the spotlighting was directed not at the drawings (as this would cause distracting reflection) but at the floor space between the rectangular circles. Thus, a pathway was illuminated between the works. Two spotlights were directed towards the plinths that housed the computer and the visual diary as a visual way of giving them a connection with the main body of drawings.

## **CHAPTER TEN – EXHIBITION IMAGES**

### **10.1 Plates of Artwork**

This chapter contains Plates of Artworks (Plates 10.3.1 – 10.3.41) that formed the exhibition *Head, Heart and Hand – a visual autobiography*, held at SourceFourNinety Exhibition Space, Level I, 490 Crown Street, Surry Hills, Sydney from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2002. The art works are presented in chronological order of the sites investigated.

A digital copy of the works is also available in the form of a CD-ROM in Appendix J.

### **10.2 Context for Viewer Experience**

Images of the installed exhibition (Plates 10.2.1 – 10.2.3) are illustrated over the following few pages to give the reader a context for the viewer experience.



Plate 10.2.1 Installation I



Plate 10.2.2 Installation II



Plate 10.2.3 Installation III

### **10.3 The Exhibition Images**

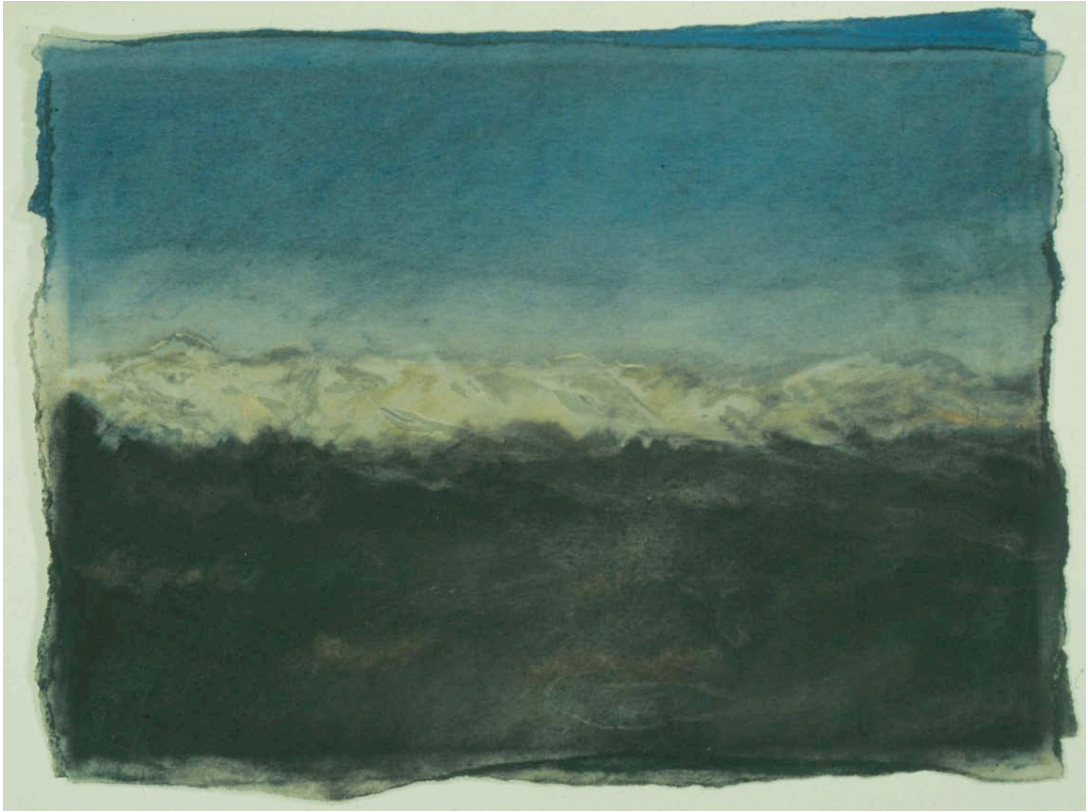


Plate 10.3.1 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000



Plate 10.3.2 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000



Plate 10.3.3 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000



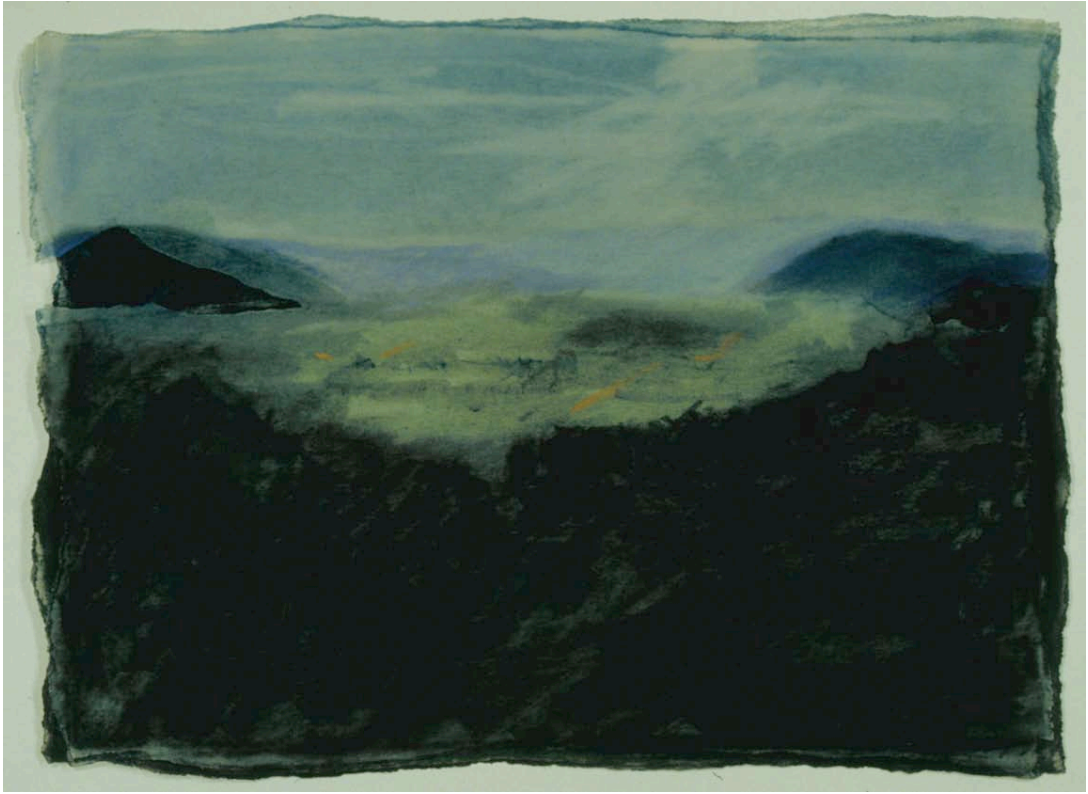


Plate 10.3.4 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000



Plate 10.3.5 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000



Plate 10.3.6 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000



Plate 10.3.7 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000



Plate 10.3.8 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000



Plate 10.3.9 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000

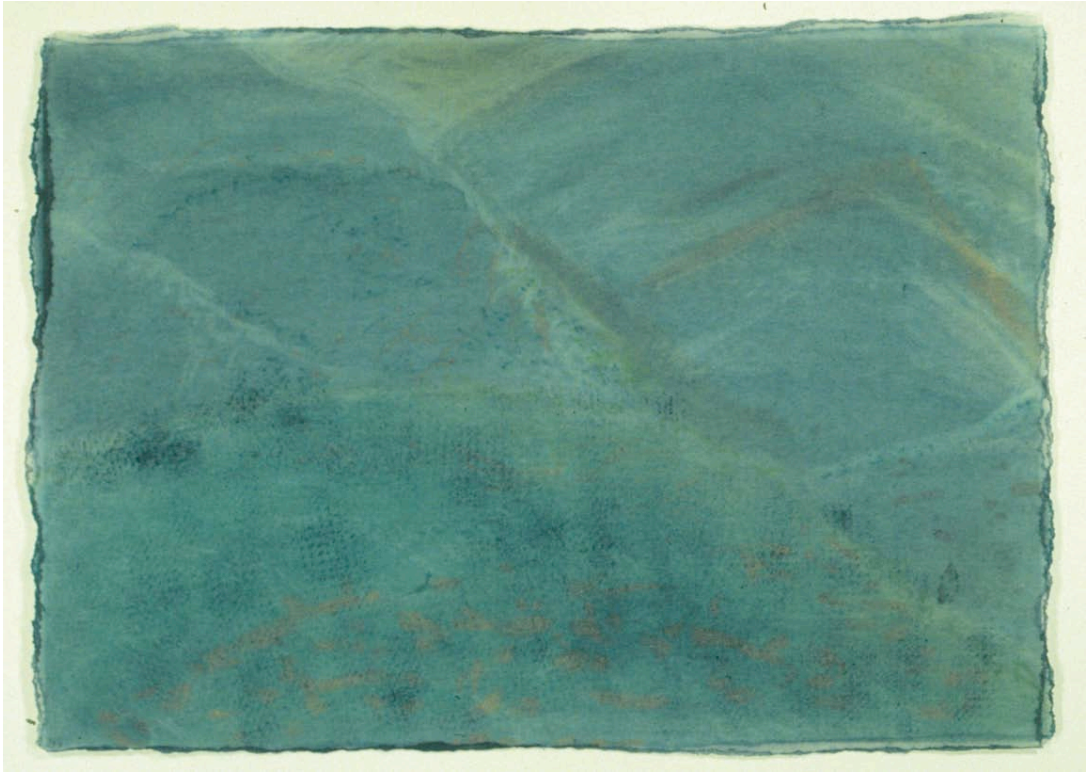


Plate 10.3.10 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000



Plate 10.3.11 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000





Plate 10.3.12 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000



Plate 10.3.13 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000

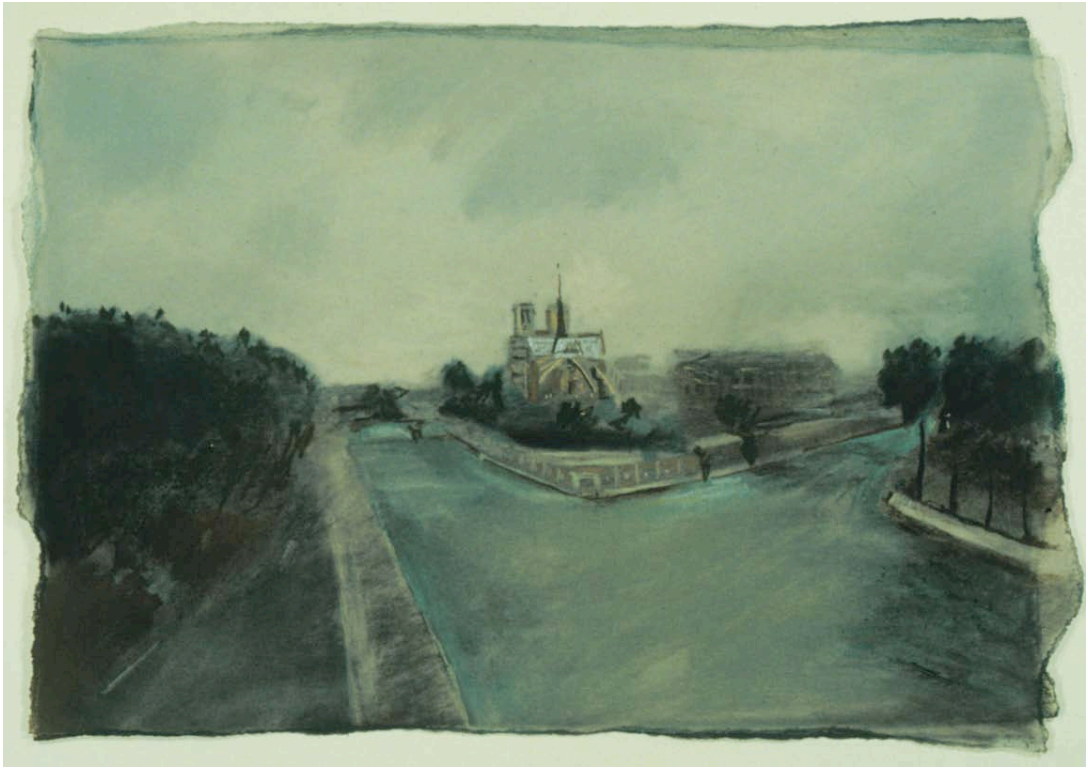


Plate 10.3.14 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000

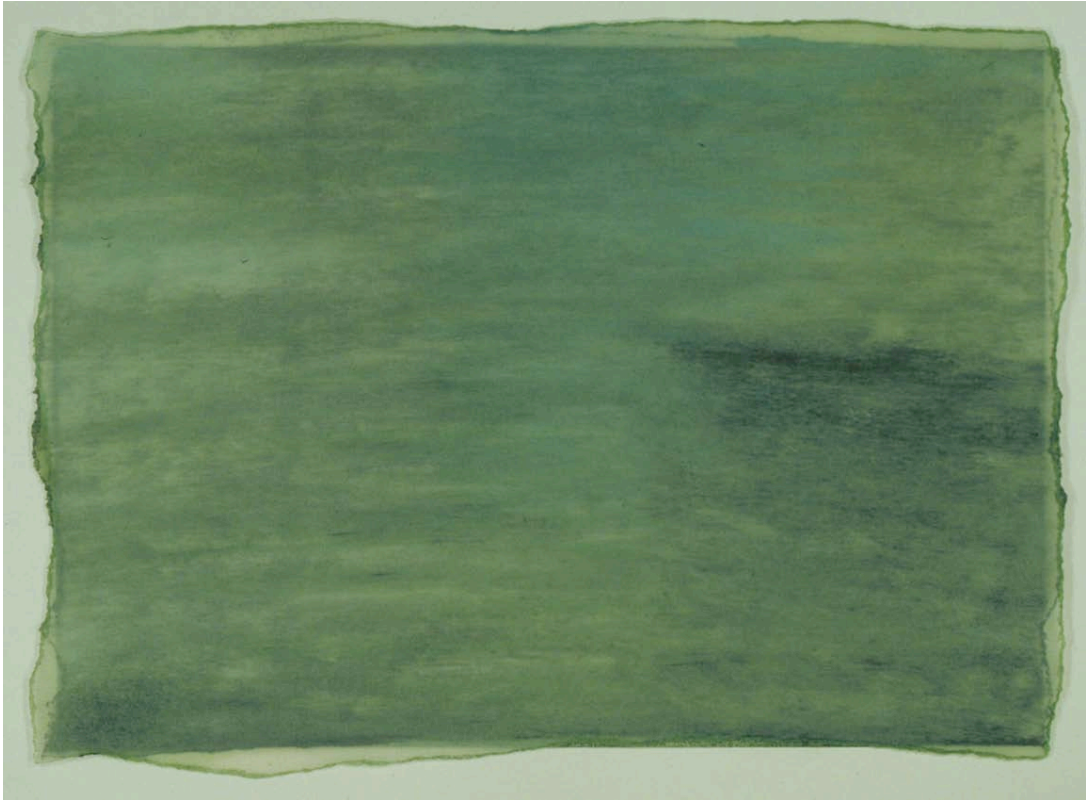


Plate 10.3.15 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000



Plate 10.3.16 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000

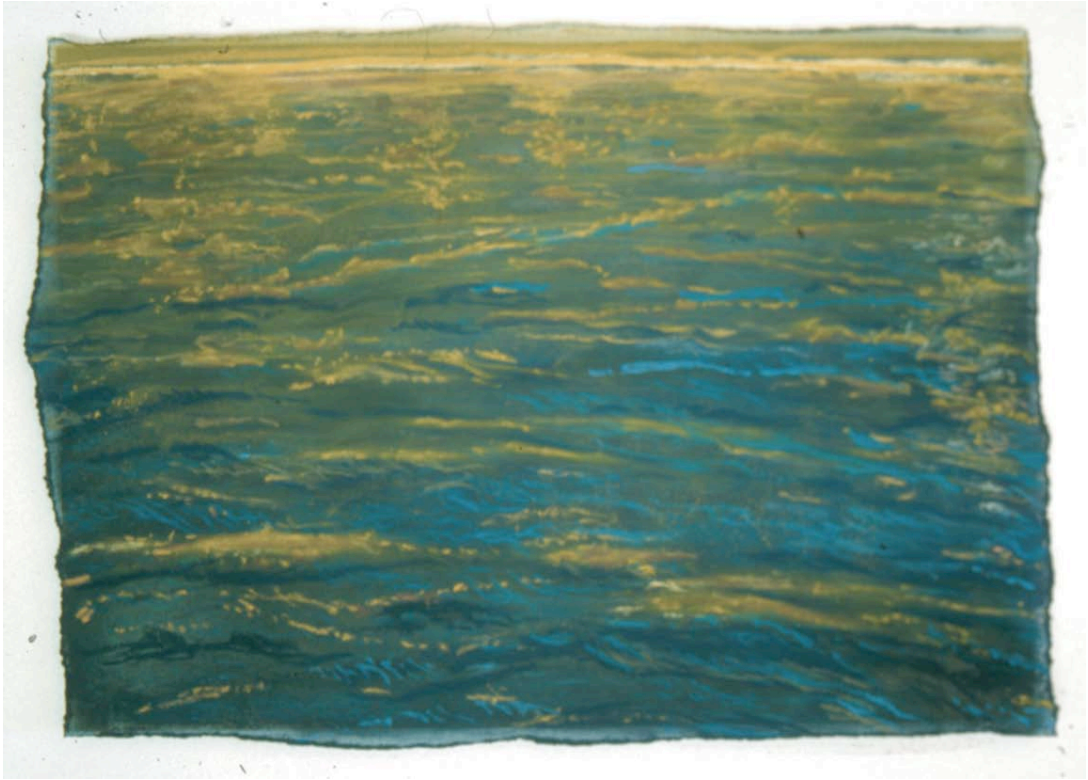


Plate 10.3.17 *France*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2000



Plate 10.3.18 *Nova Scotia*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.19 *Nova Scotia*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001





Plate 10.3.20 *Nova Scotia*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.21 *Nova Scotia*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001

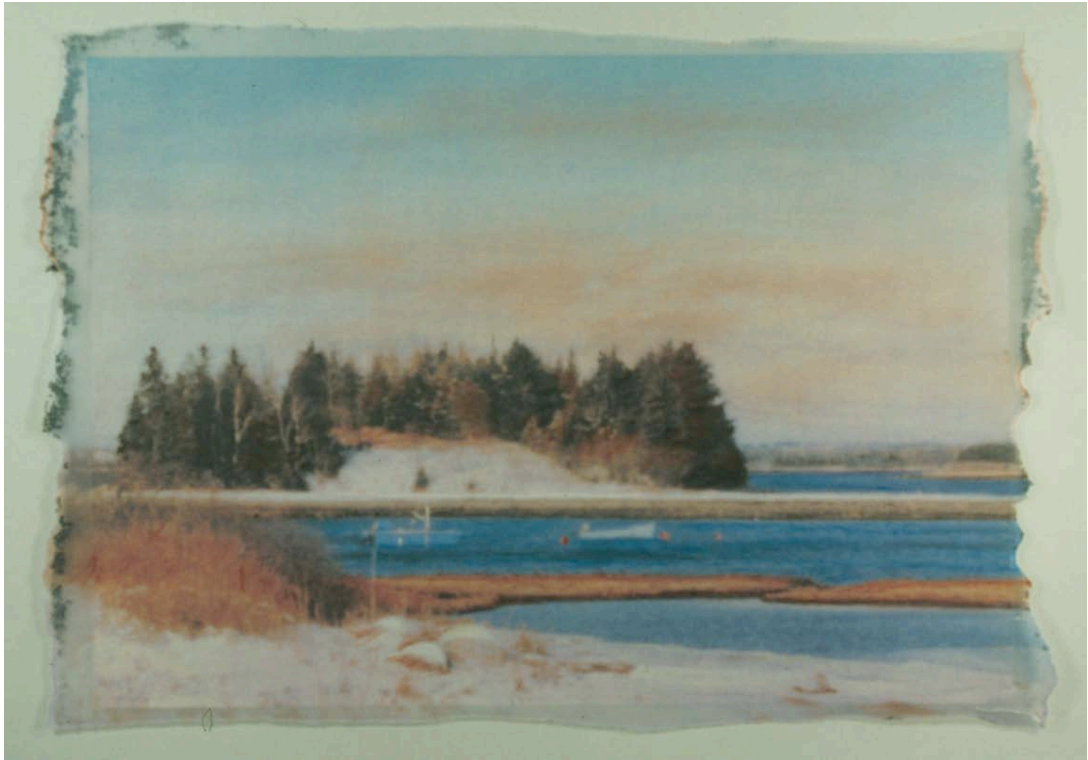


Plate 10.3.22 *Nova Scotia*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.23 *Nova Scotia*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.24 *Nova Scotia*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.25 *Nova Scotia*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.26 *Nova Scotia*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.27 *Nova Scotia*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001





Plate 10.3.28 *Nova Scotia*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.29 *Nova Scotia*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.30 *Far North Queensland*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.31 *Far North Queensland*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.32 *Far North Queensland*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.33 *Far North Queensland*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.34 *Far North Queensland*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.35 *Far North Queensland*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001





Plate 10.3.36 *Far North Queensland*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.37 *Far North Queensland*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.38 *Far North Queensland*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.39 *Far North Queensland*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.40 *Far North Queensland*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001



Plate 10.3.41 *Far North Queensland*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2001

#### 10.4 The Digital Element

The following two images (Plates 10.4.1, 10.4.2) illustrate the method in which the digital element and the sketchbook were included in the exhibition.



Plate 10.4.1 Installation IV

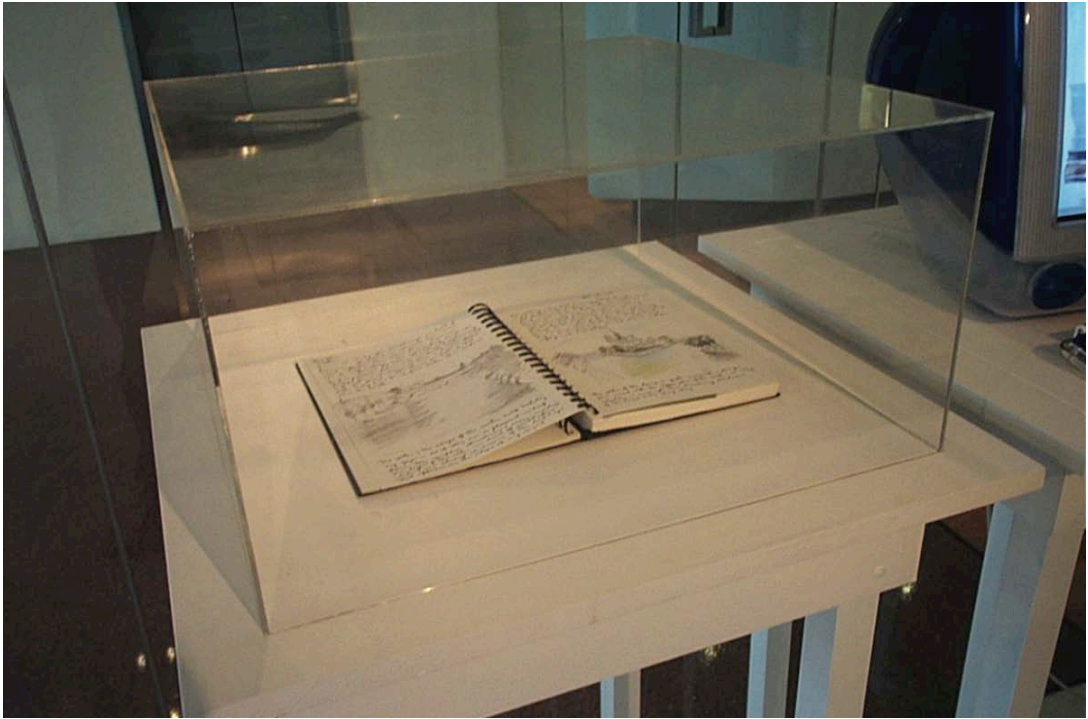


Plate 10.4.2 Installation V



## CHAPTER ELEVEN VISUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF PLACE: THE FULL CIRCLE

### 11.1 A Turn Not Taken

The exhibition enabled all the works to be viewed as a totality in a state of completeness that I had only imagined before having only viewed the works unframed in a series or as a small group of framed drawings. Now I was able to step back and critique the collective works.

Consistency in media, size and the minimal framing created an observable unity for the exhibition while ideally making the viewer more attentive to the content of each drawing. The *sameness* of the aforementioned elements was designed to emphasize the *difference* of one work from another. On another level, the *similarity* of drawings within each particular geographical location (e.g., Far North Queensland) made it *dissimilar* to other geographical locations (e.g., France).

However, the benefit of hindsight revealed but inconsistency of style and consistency of different styles of representation in the work. This became more obvious as I observed the entire body of work. Some drawings were loose and highly gestural in their rendering while others were more detailed and focused. Most drawings were coloured realistically with subtle construction of layers and yet the final drawing was almost totally tonal and abstract. These ambiguities contributed to a general sense of *incompleteness*. In retrospect these places were significant – but they were all places I had left.

## **11.2 Morphing Memories: Completing the Circle**

Head, Heart and Hand – a visual autobiography of place emanated from a cherishing of the past and a pattern of envisioning the future when focussing on the content of my work. Nostalgia for places once experienced drove the search to rediscover those sensations that were encountered in a place different from my everyday life. The concept of *home* was a place geographically and emotionally distant yet sealed in memory with traces remaining of significant sites connected to particular experiences.

Yet I had not confronted what was now my home. I have lived in Sydney for sixteen years and had not considered exploring its potential as a place for the obvious reasons that it represented the here and now, the place which is immediate, familiar and therefore lacking the lure of the far away and, perhaps, the exotic. If I were to complete the circle what might Sydney offer? Could viewing the commonplace yield fruitful information about how my memory intersects with experiencing my daily life?

## **11.3 The Insider/Outsider Dilemma**

For most, if not all, of my life as artist the pattern of making art has revealed a process in which I transport myself to another place as an outsider, relying on the encounter with a place less familiar to be the source of content. In many ways, I have been the artistic equivalent to Urry's (1990) contemporary pilgrim (Urry, 1990:8), one who envisages a destination well before venturing out and, upon arrival, opens oneself up with a perception more keenly receptive than in everyday existence. The triangulation of Head, Heart and Hand in Fig.1.4.1 anticipated an

equal balance of its three parts but my experience in the previous three geographical locations perhaps explored studio practice in each case with an imbalance. France and Far North Queensland were quite emotionally driven indicating a sway to the Heart while the deliberate separation of the artist being physically apart from Nova Scotia during the genesis of that series made it more rational and objective thus directing it more towards the Head. To what extent is it possible to generate purposeful artwork that is a result of a balance between Head, Heart and Hand?

It is thus with some intrepidation that I seek out now to explore my hometown as an insider and authentic Sydneysider. This differs from my pattern of artistic behaviour and has the potential to break new ground for my personal artistic practice. To what extent might it be possible for me to engage in my own environment with the enthusiasm I have displayed for other geographical locations, and in doing so, to generate meaningful artistic outcomes?

#### **11.4 Research Leading Practice**

In keeping with the aims of this research I intend to explore the environment of Sydney as artistic crucible using visual autobiography of place as the research tool. Consciously I seek to balance the components of Head, Heart and Hand to test the model in Fig. 1.4.1 (Rees, 2001) and to reach the point of possible innovation indicated in the Artist Perception Model (Fig. 4.5.1).

##### **11.4.1 Retracing Footsteps**

Everyday I follow particular pathways and patterns both within the private and domestic, as well as the public and professional domains. These are well-worn

paths created almost without thinking as the regular routine of everyday existence. Obviously memory aids the routine but perhaps, it is in the unusual, the unexpected connections and the occasional moments of serendipity where memory and everyday life collide to create personal significance that offer a niche for the familiar.

#### **11.4.2 Armed with Research Tools**

If and when these moments of significance arise, the intention was to be prepared for them by being armed with research tools, a digital camera and a sketchbook/artist diary. While these are normal research tools, in order to search my current environment I needed to transport not only the tools used for researching in France and Far North Queensland, but also to be armed with at least a comparable intention and readiness for ideas as and when they appear.

#### **11.5 The Researcher/Artist**

For the purposes of this part of the research I chose a time period that was broadly representative of the quotidian. It is argued that seven days would cover the variety of activities that occur during the private and professional existence that includes work and recreation. Consistency with past research excluded night-time frames; hence from early morning to dusk, from Monday to Sunday, my awareness both as artist and researcher was focused on opportunities as they arose.

##### **11.5.1 Places of Significance**

For the most part of daily life the ambit of place is quite limited as I live and work within the areas known as the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney. My place of employment

is a four-minute walk away from home, which is located on Oxford Street, one of the busiest streets in Sydney. I walk down back laneways to work, past Victorian houses, cross major noisy roadways and busy shopping streets. On most weekdays in the early morning I walk down to an area called Woolloomooloo, around Mrs. Macquarie's Point on the southern side of Sydney Harbour and back home via the Sydney Botanical Gardens. My apartment is on the tenth floor of a building that looks across the suburb of Woolloomooloo to the harbour and across to North Sydney. On weekends I tend to go into the Surry Hills area for coffee with friends and on Sunday morning I drive down to Bondi Beach or to a secluded park by the harbour to read the Sunday papers.

### **11.5.2 Recording Thoughts *In Situ***

For the duration of this research week I carried my camera and sketchbook/artist's diary. When a situation arose that may have had potential for a drawing, I photographed the vision and recorded thoughts *in situ* in my diary. At night I reviewed the diary seeking significance through key words e.g., *remember*, *connected*, *reminds me of*, *just like* and sometimes added further thoughts. Images were downloaded on to my computer and those that were out of focus or which lacked interest in their virtual form were disregarded and deleted.

### **11.5.3 Preparatory Drawing**

Quick thumbnail sketches in pencil were recorded in the diary during the day, mostly at the site. In the evening, some of these sketches were duplicated on a larger scale with added detail in the diary. Process notes were added indicating layers of image; structure and composition were subjected to experiment; coloured pastel and some tonality supplemented the sketches.

## **11.6 Morphing Memories of the Past with the Present**

Autobiographical notes in the artist's diary noted the continual referencing, comparisons and relationships between what was experienced in the present, and images and actions of the past. Scenes, experiences, atmospheres and physical structures, both person-made and natural, were considered *significant* because they evoked memory traces of other places in other times. Therefore, the morphing<sup>1</sup> of the present with the past created a reciprocal experiencing of what was being observed and felt in the present and what had been observed and felt – being in the moment while also being in a past moment – a simultaneous, cyclical sensing of the actual and the remembered.

### **11.6.1 Ways of Morphing**

How can two or more experiences become morphed into one? Might it be feasible to present images/drawings in such a way as to exemplify the experience of the artist? Might the viewer be able to interact with the created image(s) in a personal context and thus participate in the morphing process? What potential exists within this artist's skills base to create morphed images? How might such morphing fit within the visual landscape of personal place?

### **11.6.2 The Dominant View**

The view I experience each day is that from my apartment across the eastern part of Sydney down to the harbour and across to North Sydney. In the coolness of a Sydney autumn, the view connects with the memory of an even cooler Nova Scotian

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<sup>1</sup> The term "morphing" (short for metamorphosing) in this research refers to a transformation where one image turns into another.

harbour and far off landforms. For me the point of focus in Sydney harbour is Pinchgut Island (otherwise known as Fort Denison) sitting in the middle of the harbour where it can be seen through the high-rise buildings and various rooftops.

*The most common view would seem to be the best way to start this new series on Sydney. This is the view that is most readily available and accessible from my home and studio area. It links so strongly with Nova Scotia especially now that it is getting colder. Linking the two I have decided to parallel the experience of remembering with the sorting through of the left over images I had previously printed from digital images onto transparent architectural paper – the physical memory traces of my own process in drawing. If I draw the image as I see it from my balcony and then morph it by hand in a second drawing with a transparent underlay of a past image of Nova Scotia this might be the solution. Artist's Diary, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2004.*

The resultant drawings (Plates 11.6.1, 11.6.2) are the first attempt at morphing experiences of a significant site. The first image is an interpretation of viewing the actual scene while drawing and is the first time during this research that I have actually recorded a view fully *plein-air*. For the second and comparative drawing I used a sheet of transparent architectural paper on which I had printed a digital image on of Nova Scotia some two years before. On to the top layer of the transparent sheet I transposed by hand an image of Pinchgut Island and, into the fading background landform, I placed the buildings of the North Shore. To give harmony to the pastiche of images in the drawing I rendered overlays of pale blues, soft purples and warm browns to increase the illusion of a credible environment.



Plate 11.6.1 Pinchgut Island. 2004. approx. 204 x 310 mm.





Plate11.6.2 Pinchgut Island and Nova Scotia. 2004. approx. 204 x 310 mm.

### 11.6.3 Morning Walk

One afternoon I was with friends on the North Shore and, in a single moment, had the sense of *déjà vu*.

*I was not purposely looking for moments of connection today but as has become habit these days I carry my sketch pad and pencil and just happened to have my camera with me to take photographs of my friends Pamela and John. At one point I had the sense of déjà vu while looking across the harbour. The pathway and the light pole seemed strangely familiar and I kept on thinking about Ponte Maria in Paris. Later in the evening I went through my piles of photographs of Paris and came across an image that indeed had a similar light pole beside the roadway on the bridge crossing the Seine. Artist's Diary May, 5<sup>th</sup>, 2004.*

The sense of *déjà vu* is a sensation different from other incidences of memory. When I see a scene and it connects me to a place as familiar as Cairns it is a moment where an overwhelming experience gently envelopes the perception before

me. With *déjà vu* the memory connection is abrupt, isolated and not so readily accessed. The memory trace is minute, short, confused and difficult to trace but reinforced by a modicum of trust which, in this case, was confirmed in the finding of a photograph of the scene remembered and connecting to the experience in Sydney.

The two drawings that emerged (Plates 11.7.3 and 11.7.4) are mirrored images of each other that connect in a visual language of objects and structure. The pathways lead to each other and the common symbol of the lamppost acts as a trigger to draw comparison. The images are, of course, creatively constructed to enhance the sensation of connectivity. The lamp posts were drawn at relatively the same size and position in the individual drawings. The pathway and roadway were angled more sharply to draw the viewer's eyes to the lampposts. The skyline was dropped or raised to be almost continuous from one drawing to another.

The way of morphing these two images was, in this instance, relying on the viewer as the instrument of morphing. There was a presumption that the viewer would encounter the two separate but physically connecting drawings and morph the connection.

#### **11.6.4 Harbour Water**

Most mornings I walk for an hour as a form of exercise around the area jutting out to the harbour called Mrs. Macquarie's Point.

*This morning was so quiet around the harbour – just the soft sound of small waves lapping the rocks. I thought how clear the water was in the harbour, so unlike the muddy foreshore in Cairns. Across the bay I*

*could see a large ship being repaired and it reminded me of “The Dredge” – a ship that scooped mud out of the channel ways into Cairns Harbour. In the moment I was in Sydney’s foreshore and at the same time I was thinking about standing on the Esplanade in Cairns. The view seemed similar in construction with key landforms mirroring each other – sky, water and land and the similar quiet atmosphere and my quiet watching. Artist’s Diary May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004.*

In this next pair of drawings (Plates 11.7.5, 11.7.6) the two locations were morphed into one composite schema where water, sky and land had almost equal representation in both drawings. Focus in both works was drawn towards the mid-right-hand side where a person-made structure was inserted, a shopping centre in one, and, a ship in the other. Once again, it was envisaged that the viewer would make connections between the two with the replication of a structure that both morphed the locations but clearly distinguished their essential difference.

### **11.6.5 Harbour Island**

On Sundays I like to read the weekend newspapers at a stretch of grass adjoining a park at Rose Bay.

*I was sitting on a park bench overlooking the harbour when the sky grew cloudy and grey. In front of me was a small but perfect island – probably less than an acre heavily covered in tall trees. It is the greyness of the water and sky and seems so much like Peggy’s Cove in Nova Scotia in wintertime. This is as close as we get to the greyness I have experienced in the northern hemisphere. There is moodiness about the scene unlike the coming rains of Cairns or the grey smog of Paris but more of a warning of how cold this winter in Sydney might become. Artist’s Diary 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2004.*

For one of the final two drawings (Plates 11.7.7 and 11.7.8) I referred initially to my photographs of the harbour island to create a reasonable illusion of what I saw on the day I selected the site. For the second image of the pair, I scanned a photograph of Nova Scotia, cropped and recoloured the image and printed it out on the transparent architectural paper. I then drew by hand from memory the harbour

island onto the digitally printed paper and coloured the work by hand to make a seamless coalescence of the digital and hand drawn and thus the distant and more recent memories. My intention was to make the scene in the second drawing credible but not entirely so. I wanted the Sydney harbour island not quite to *fit* into its Nova Scotian harbour, to create a kind of uneasiness in the viewer to engender questions as to whether any of the places that I had described visually really existed in the way I had depicted them.

### **11.7 *This Way* Exhibition**

In July 2004 I curated an exhibition called *This Way* (Plates 11.6.1, 11.6.2) with two colleagues at the Exhibition and Performance Space, College of Fine Arts, the University of New South Wales, Paddington, Sydney. As space was limited only six works of the eight works available could be included. I chose to omit the first two in this series as they used the same morphing process used in the final pair of works. Ultimately the latter I considered to be stronger in the way they illustrated how my memories fed the creation of the drawings.

#### **11.7.1 Installing *This Way***

In keeping with the aesthetic of Head, Heart and Hand but also consistent with the economies of space, the drawings were installed in a linear fashion (Plate 11.7.1) with paired works placed in proximity but with maximum space between each pair to aid the viewer's reading of the works and yet to enable the viewer to see both drawings in the pair at the same time (Plate 11.7.2).



Plate 11.7.1 *This Way* Installation II



Plate 11.7.2 *This Way* Installation I

### **11.7.2 *This Way* Exhibition**

The following Plates (Plates 11.7.3 – 11.7.8) present the six works installed in the *This Way* exhibition.



Plate 11.7.3 *Sydney*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2004



Plate 11.7.4 *Paris*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2004





Plate 11.7.5 *Sydney*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2004

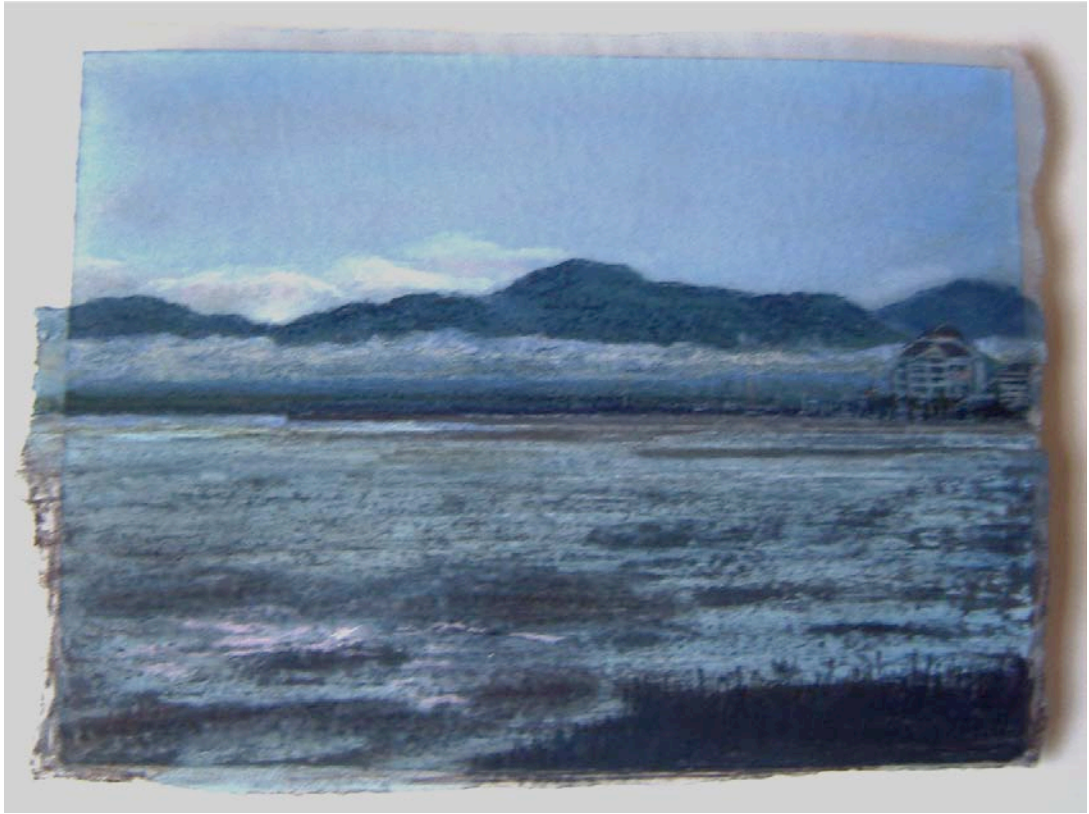


Plate 11.7.6 *Cairns*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2004



Plate 11.7.7 *Sydney*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2004



Plate 11.7.8 *Halifax*, approx. 204 x 310 mm. 2004

### **11.8 The Wheel of Memory: Reflections on the Familiar Cog**

The excitement of the familiar, the seemingly mundane suggests that it is the spectacles, the perceptual frame through which it is seen rather than the activity that creates the sense of *ennui*, the challenge to creativity.

Hence, despite my earlier reservations, it was possible to be excited by the local geographical environment and the familiarity shapes my days. However, the commonplace was made more interesting in that it evoked memories of other places. It is perhaps this inextricable link between the ordinary and the seemingly exotic that created a dynamism that drove the personal desire to explore beyond the representational.

Certainly the first drawing in each pair has identifiable elements redolent of the original experience of place. If then each of the first drawings in the pair were to be viewed in isolation, the conclusion might be that they reflect interpretive skill rather than a new and different direction. It is only when the pair is complete that a dialogue about memory and significant environments becomes potent. The drawn outcome then becomes the pair, the subtotal of the two images for it is only when the works are together that their absolute intention is realized.

What then is the balance achieved between Head, Heart and Hand across the works in the Sydney series? It is argued that, through a rationalization of the emotional responses and connections or, as described by Langer (1953) by *objectifying* the *subjective*, and accommodating the digital and the hand rendered, equilibrium of the triangulation was reached. The rational and objective did not compromise *intuition* but rather focussed those intuitive *feelings* in terms of more disciplined and explicit planning. The insertion of the digital into the images was less experimental, more intentional, and integrated with the hand rendered while the play between *places* was truly electric.

## CHAPTER TWELVE – REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### 12.1 The Process in Retrospect

The chance to research in France was pivotal in that it opened a portal to an environment previously experienced, experienced anew and differently and began a process of comparison between the past, the present and the future, a chain of inter-connecting events and places. When I began the research, I had no fixed position on what the content of my studio production might be but wanted to leave myself open to whatever opportunities might unfold. However, the physical and geographical environment became a rich source for inspiration for artistic creation. Nova Scotia, Canada became the environmental fork in the road of my practice. If I were not engaged in research in practice, it is most probable that I would have taken the road most familiar and entered this environment and responded in the way I had previously.

Remembered environments or what might be called *memoryscapes* are those memories of places once experienced and recalled when certain external environments are encountered. Sight is not always the trigger for such memories (Derrida, 1993) as smells, sounds or more *felt* experiences such as atmosphere are often the sensations that connected experiencing the external environment to the memory of another place. This is how it has become for me.

Imagined environments based on memories of past journeys into distant places often acted as a type of rehearsal for what might be experienced in the future. Environments such as Cairns were replayed in memory several times before

revisiting the place. In my mind I rehearsed where I might go and what I might see. Part of this rehearsal was preparation for finding suitable images to drive the drawings. Cairns, Far North Queensland was the most difficult environment to which to respond. I had presumed before confronting Cairns and *home* that this environment was the one that I knew extremely well. What I had not envisaged was the degree of personal and emotional influence that would affect my perception of home and belonging. The visual autographical reading of the works that eventuated about Cairns signifies the artist turning his back on Cairns and looking beyond its borders to a very different future.

For the last environment in the series, the site of Sydney, I was finally able to unshackle myself from the need to rely on far-off places as the trigger for my studio work. I am far more aware and able to take advantage of moments of visual opportunity wherever they might arise. It was also in this last environment that researcher and artist became at one, the roles fused and I was able to enter the field of potential data not only with the tools of the artist but also equipped with the conceptual tools of the researcher. Rather than merely responding, I had frameworks to explore and analyse far beyond observable, representational reality.

As the research developed, the process of technical and aesthetic decision-making was documented. The ability to examine the stages of a process that had been largely intuitive before the research, exposed a cycle of activity where research led practice which, in its turn, led research. The following Table 12.1.1 makes explicit the trajectory of these processes in this instance.

**Table 12.1.1 Research Process of Technical and Aesthetic Decision Making**

STAGE	DESCRIPTION
1	Selection of larger sites of investigation e.g., Paris
2	Selection within sites for investigation, e.g., The Seine
3.	Initial responses, diary sketches, notes, photographing
4.	Reflection, sometimes in diary, reworking of sketches, further sketching.
5	Sorting and culling of photographic data
6	Formal aesthetic decision-making.
7	Construction of a loose coloured pencil plan/sketch on foundation layer of paper.
8	Gradual building up of layers and images with pastel and charcoal.
9	Pin-up (ie. Pinning work up on a wall), reflection (self and at times other critical opinions), criticism.
10	Reworking, changes, extra layering, rejection or completion of a single artwork.
11	Pin-up
	For each work within a series (eg French series) the cycle from Stage 2 – 11 was repeated. Often specific sites were revisited to gather further sketches, further information or to re-experience.
12	After several works were pinned up in a line further critical aesthetic viewings were conducted which led to small changes of individual works. This process also led to further research questions as a visual pattern began to emerge between individual works and the on-going series as a whole. The decision making was recorded in the artist's diary.
13	Completion of a series – further reflections and diary notes which changed significantly how the next series would/could be shaped.
	This process listed above repeated for all three series until the larger body of evidence could be surveyed in its entirety.
14	Decision making about what images might be finally exhibited and in what configuration.
15	Decision making re format, material, type, style and size of framing.
16	Decision making re relative placement and speculation about the kinds of dialogue that exists between individual and series of artworks.
17	Selection of an appropriate place and time to exhibit the outcomes.
18	Installation of exhibition
19	Reflection and audience feedback.
20	Speculation about future research and practice.



Such a tabular record is not intended to be in any way a recipe for art production but functions more as research documentation of artistic practice, thus enabling process to become explicit and examinable and providing a foundation for future points of departure towards further innovative personal practice.

With the unfolding research, the intervention of research questions or dilemmas offered alternative ways forward, with a selected path grounded more in reason than simply intuition. At the beginning of this research I acknowledged/admitted that I felt that my practice had become somewhat stale and predictable. Hence I hoped through the process of this research to invigorate my practice and move in new directions. I now feel that researching Nova Scotia in an alternative way added significantly to my vocabulary of artistic practice and skills base. The success of this research can be verified through the fact that the initial tentacular foray into new practice has now gleaned a broader working methodology that has been accommodated into my daily practice.

## **12.2 Visual Autobiography of Place as a Personal Research Tool**

In 5.2 concern was expressed that making one's own practice explicit might paralyse the flow of intuitive knowing. This has definitely not been the case but rather the opposite. My trust in intuition is now more grounded in the intellectual knowledge that the sense of what might eventuate becomes recognition of a sub-conscious knowing. Langer's (1972) concept of *feeling* and *rightness*, which intuitively was accepted when read, became explicitly understood during the creative process. The more informed one is about one's practice, the more informed the sense of feeling and rightness – and direction. Explicit knowledge of my own practice has also helped to subvert the procrastinating activity of *nest building*

referred to in Paris. Armed with a useful model of practice, the work episodes become more focused and deliberative.

Visual autobiography is sufficiently structured enough to guide visual research while at the same time it can be tailored to accommodate different types of practice or even changes in practice during a research period. As artistic practice is by its nature ever changing, any appropriate methodology must have the flexibility to adapt to and with the artist.

As integral to the methodological frame of this artist-centred research project, visual autobiography of place proved to be an appropriate personal research tool as it accommodated episodes of total immersion in studio activity as well as a meta-narrative. In fact, the active and disciplined activity of writing reflection in practice and in action tended to focus practice more acutely as well as increasing confidence in moving forward.

### **12.3 The Exhibition Outcomes in Retrospect**

Encompassed under this section are issues related to the curation of the exhibition as well as the body of work generated as a result of the research.

#### **12.3.1 The Vision and Planning**

Every attempt was made to plan the exhibition *Head, Heart and Hand – a visual autobiography* tightly especially as the artist was also the curator and designer. The vision and the planning had begun in Paris almost two years before the event and its evolution paralleled the creation of the drawings. A mental map of the exhibition

and meticulous planning was essential to this vision. The exhibition became a site-specific installation where all the elements came together in a planned way to form a whole.

### **12.3.2 Implementation/Installation**

With the benefit of hindsight the consideration of time was perhaps the most negative element of the exhibition. The compromise of economy and duration of the exhibition dictated a short period for the installation and viewer access to the work. A longer installation period would also have allowed for the problem with the plinths to be solved well before the opening. A longer period for the exhibition would have offered more people access to the work especially given the coverage in the weekend newspaper (Reines, 2002) and greater leisure to access.

The lightness of the exhibition with the illusion of the works floating in space was realized (Plates 10.2.1 – 10.2.3), as was the sense of the viewer wandering through the landscape of works. The planned and implemented entrance and exit points allowed for individual journeys as evidenced during the exhibition. The one unforeseen pathway was only obvious on the Opening Night when a large proportion of the viewers came through the entrance, collected a catalogue and walked straight towards the bar to collect a drink before they entered the terrain of the exhibition.

Both computer and sketch book (Plates 10.4.1, 10.4.2) were accessed by viewers both on the Opening Night and subsequent days. Visitors were observed walking

across the room to make comparisons between the digital copy and the actual drawing.

### **12.3.3 The Art Works**

The drawn outcomes in this research are original and unique in that they are *transformed* environments that exist somewhere between the real (the factually observed), the remembered and the imagined.

The two exhibitions, Head, Heart and Hand – a visual autobiography, and *This Way* are quite different in scale and intention yet obviously connected in terms of content, media and processes. The first of the two exhibitions was quite large in terms of number of works and the range of experiences contained within the works. Perhaps it tried to cover too broad a territory in its quest to survey a life of experiences. However, it did remain true to the intention of the exhibition. The final exhibition, with the benefit of hindsight and a more focused intention assisted by the research methodology, clearly explored observation and the connection with memory.

The role of completing the circle with Sydney as a significant place for this artist created a sense of wholeness for the research. The research questions/issues signalled during and after the first exhibition were able to be addressed and grounded in the aesthetic decision making for the second.

The personal processes and the media in the creation of these particular drawings also transform the images into a visual language that may be read in a variety of

ways depending upon the interpretation of the viewer. Therefore the image is continually being transformed. I would hope that some of the images are actually retained, transformed and become part of the memories of an audience and that the exhibition became a conduit where my own objects of memory could potentially meet the personal memories of others.

## **12.4 Implications of the Research**

### **12.4.1 Future Research**

The journey of this research has opened up many new pathways for studio practice and there are several I am eager to explore.

The potential of digital imaging was only partially explored in the Nova Scotian series and, to a smaller extent, in the final Sydney series. The computer program PhotoShop offers greater potential for experimenting with the combination of digital manipulation on screen, print outcomes and the hand rendered. The idea of the *transformed* landscape seems particularly ripe for exploration through the digital and the hand rendered.

The scale of the work is no longer restrained by the limitations of transporting the drawings. The potential of working on a larger, panoramic view of place could create an environment in which the viewer could be immersed in one work and provide a different type of intimacy with the drawing.

The relationship between the observed and the remembered/imagined provides a niche that is ripe for further exploration. From the experience gleaned from the works in the final exhibition, the potential understanding of how everyday views are reconfigured through past personal experience, offers an endless source for future artmaking whether faced with the familiar or exotic.

The model of the triangulation of Head, Heart and Hand also offers directions for studio practice by experimenting further with the *imbalance* of each face of the triangulation in order to see how purposefully emphasizing each side of the triangulation changes the process of creation and the reading of the image.

#### **12.4.2 Tertiary Pedagogy**

As an artist and designer educator I now have a more grounded understanding of the creative process to guide my students to construct their own pathways to create art or design outcomes. With my postgraduate research students I have already begun to illustrate the possibilities of research processes with examples from this research. I have found there is greater interest and acceptance from practice based research students when models of aesthetic decision making originate from the personal experience of a studio practitioner.

For lecturers of postgraduate studio based research students, this research provides another example for a profession in which there is increased pressure to understand and substantiate studio practice as research, yet thus far, has not created a critical mass of research from which to draw.

Perhaps the most obvious finding in this research relative to pedagogy is the importance of *reflection* in the creative process. The challenge for tertiary educators of undergraduate visual arts is purposefully to include time for reflection into studio programs.

### **12.4.3 Research**

In surveying and researching the literature I became aware of the very small amount of research that has been published in the area of drawing in design. It may be possible to transfer the knowledge gleaned in this research through drawing in a fine art domain to the various types of drawing practice employed in the design field. Rawson's (1972) categories (Fig. 2.2.1) may offer a starting point for researchers of drawing in design to track the process of visualizing eventual designed outcomes. Visual Autobiography as a personal research tool may also have some currency and application with designers researching their own practice. The elements of emotion, memory and perception could supplement their technical knowledge base. Through a greater emphasis on the designer's reflection on action and process, it is argued that the designer may become more self-conscious of both process and product thus leading to better outcomes.

In the somewhat self-focussed process of art making the audience participation and feedback is very much after the fact. Through the process of this research it became obvious that the audience brought their own narratives to the experiencing of the exhibition. There may be a way of including the viewer's narrative in the installation of the work either by incorporating sound, as in the voice(s) of the viewer(s) or by printed, written narratives. This activity would require an insertion

of feedback somewhere between the finished drawings and the exhibition. Thus it might be instructive to gain insight into the degree to which an audience engages with artwork when they experience more than the artist's voice/vision.

The models I have created attempt to expose the range of activities which occur in visual practice and research in practice. Perhaps, in the spaces that exist between identified activities, there is potential for more in-depth teasing out. In particular, the areas between "Creative application and process" and "Summary of work episodes" (Fig. 5.4.1) there is a fine niche between the making process and the refining of image. These are moments of reflection in action where the nuances of aesthetic decision-making occur and qualitative difference is negotiated. As this is a heightened state of reflection in action, it may be a prime focus for further research.

### **12.5 Directions: The Reflexiveness of Practice Based Research**

I began this research primarily as a practising visual artist and through the process have not only fundamentally infused my studio practice with more firmly embedded conceptual grounding but have been convinced as to the worth of research in practice. The two are no longer mutually exclusive but work in symbiosis informing each other to produce, I believe, a better end result.

The process of writing the autobiography and later organizing the clusters of personal memories into categories was intriguing, at times illuminating, and yet felt embarrassingly self-indulgent. However, the process of self-revelation exposed patterns of behaviour that, through reflection, have had enormous influence over the



rest of my life. Autobiography does make the artist in this case the main protagonist within the narrative. However, through a system of research tools such as analysis through category and sub-category forming, a meta-narrative was constructed from which more objectively to understand the drama as it unfolded. Studio practitioners/researchers need to know themselves by objective submitting to the discipline of analysis of the patterns of their behaviour.

The very act of recording memories through written words seemed to make sense of ideas that have been floating around in the subconscious mind for some time. It was only when I analysed the text in some detail that I could recognize the significance of certain environmental factors and how these factors influenced my life. Studio practitioners/researchers need to reflect on the significance that *place* has had on the content of their studio production.

The autobiography recorded memories of the past but, more importantly, it recorded the memories most potent. If the memory traces back to particular events and situations it must be asked why these were retained and kept for endless recycling. Is it merely for survival and if so, the survival of what? I believe at this stage these memories reinforce the persistence of identity, reinforce how we know what we know, how we build our belief system. Studio practitioners/researchers need to make explicit their personal memories so as to interrogate and probe their belief systems towards greater understanding and mastery.

It is essential that the moments of reflection in action and in process be grounded in the personal history, belief system and identity of the maker. Without context

building description it is arguable that a reader of practice based research would not necessarily make total sense of the reporting of reflections.

The reflexivity of this practice based research meant that there have been continual cycles of reporting, analysis and reflection on that reporting which led to a change of perception which has further changed the way I operate and the way I make aesthetic decisions. The recording of the reflexive process demonstrates that I am indeed a self-conscious, systematic and reflective artist fully engaged with Head, Heart and Hand and the potential implicit in their different balances.