

GARDENS OF THE MIND

**An exploration of the integral role of gardens
in the lives of contemporary Australians
by probing the construction of a public garden space and
exploring visually an idiosyncratic artistic experience
of the Flecker Botanic Gardens.**

A thesis submitted with an exhibition by

**Laurine FIELD
Diploma of Teaching (Secondary Art, English),
Bachelor of Education (In-service),
Graduate Diploma of Painting**

in February 2006

**for the degree of Master of Creative Arts
in the College of Music, Visual Arts & Theatre.
James Cook University**

ELECTRONIC COPY

I, the undersigned, the author of this work, declare that the electronic copy of this thesis provided to the James Cook University Library, is an accurate copy of the print thesis submitted, within the limits of the technology available.

Signature

Date

STATEMENT OF ACCESS

I, the undersigned, author of this work, understand that James Cook University will make this thesis available for use within the University Library and, via the Australian Digital Theses network, for use elsewhere.

I understand that, as an unpublished work, a thesis has significant protection under the Copyright Act and;

I do not wish to place any further restriction on access to this work.

Signature

Date

STATEMENT OF SOURCES

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

Signature

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to my supervisor Margaret Genever, for her generous encouragement and insight in extending my art practice. Many thanks to Dr Suzanne Albanus for her valuable supervision of the written component of the thesis. Appreciation is extended to the team at Cairns Regional Gallery for their facilitation of an outstanding exhibition experience. Thanks to David Warmington, Curator of the Flecker Botanic Gardens for opening *Gardens of the Mind* and to the many 'keepers' of the Gardens who make it such a beautiful place to visit. I would like to acknowledge Waratah Day Care Centre for their excellent care of my son Oscar. Finally thanks to my caring partner Michael Heaton for his understanding, support, assistance with computer issues, and wonderful parenting ability.

ABSTRACT

The research explores the construction of the garden in contemporary Australia through a visual art practice. The written thesis was conceived as a reflection upon the meaning of the Garden; and the exhibition as an individual interpretation of one particular public, tropical garden, that of the Flecker Botanic Garden. This Garden is located in suburban Cairns, Far North Queensland and is explored from the perspective of the aesthetic, sensory and spiritual, rather than the scientific.

Our garden sanctuaries are the product of centuries of development in garden making and are symbols of people's relationships with the environment. The garden is a significant part of Australian culture satisfying as it does a significant need in the contemporary Australian identity. This view is supported by an investigation into the highly interdisciplinary area of research of the nature of the garden in which attention is focussed on cultural geography to provide connections between place and identity. This is followed by an analysis into garden design and a discussion of the spiritual aspects of people's interaction with the garden as a place of peace, reflection and renewal.

The garden is an aspect of the landscape that is commonly associated with the domestic domain, rather than as a subject worthy of intellectual appraisal. In the realm of contemporary visual art this association has led to garden genre artworks traditionally holding an amateur status. In part, this is due to the lack of documentation about the ideology of the gardens in the garden genre in art. *Gardens of the Mind* seeks to address this deficit by examining artworks that have interpreted the garden in a manner that transcends the mundane and deals with aspects of people's perception of their environment. Research into artistic insights of gardens found that depicting a sensory and spiritual connection between the plant and human worlds was frequently communicated through the use of intimate and multi-viewpoints. It was also expressed in artworks by including sensory information, conceptual titles, enlivening colour schemes and the depiction of growth forms in optimum health.

My sensory response to the Garden was informed by the written research and by frequent field studies in which extensive photographic records were made in order to prompt recollection of the Garden's colours and growth forms. I also interviewed the Curator of the Gardens and attended tours given by the Interpretative Officer in order to gain insight into the site of the FBG. The paintings and watercolour prints created were shown at the Cairns Regional Gallery from the 5th of February to the 6th of March 2005 in the exhibition entitled

Gardens of the Mind. This was my first solo exhibition in a high status gallery and was a significant milestone. Exhibiting at the CRG extended my art practice, as I was able to explore exhibition concepts, utilise professional museum display techniques and present my work to a broad audience.

The images in the exhibition *Gardens of the Mind* fall into two series – the *Garden Series* and the *Wallpapers of the Mind Series*. The *Garden Series* focuses on the lifeforce of flora and observation of plant forms. The more decorative works of the *Wallpapers of the Mind Series* are concerned with mark-making and are in part inspired by the history of flora in art. The artworks created represent the abundant visual delights and kinaesthetic experience of walking through the Gardens. This was done by including several downward views and close-up images of plant forms and by using the grid format to represent the diversity of plant forms. Manipulating colour schemes and depicting garden scenes filled with light communicated the uplifting experience of being in the Gardens. *Gardens of the Mind* represents the depiction of flora as a means of connecting with nature and thus operating from an intuitive side of perception.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF PLATES	XI
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
1.1 What do gardens mean?	1
1.2 The role of gardens	3
1.3 Exploring the spiritual dimension of the garden	5
1.4 Rationale for and aims of the study	7
1.5 Organisation of the study	9
CHAPTER TWO: PERSPECTIVES ON GARDENS	
2.1 Introduction to perspectives on gardens	10
2.2 The continuum of the garden	10
2.2.1 Defining a ‘garden’ and a ‘botanic garden’	12
2.3 Garden design – a reflection of humanity’s relationship with nature	13
2.4 Identity and place	17
2.5 The restorative environment of the garden	18
2.6 Conclusion to perspectives on gardens	21
CHAPTER THREE: TRADITIONS WITHIN THE GARDEN GENRE: ARTISTIC PERCEPTIONS	
3.1 Introduction to the garden genre in art	22
3.2 Gardens in art	22
3.3 The lesser status of botanical art	24
3.4 Artistic interactions with gardens	26
3.4.1 Marianne North – female adventurer artist	27
3.4.2 Van Gogh’s garden paintings	28
3.4.3 Rousseau’s exotic garden paintings	30
3.4.4 Graham’s paintings of the Royal Botanic Gardens of Melbourne	31
3.4.5 Kushner’s use of garden motifs	33
3.4.6 William Robinson’s Beechmont Paintings	34
3.4.7 John Wolseley’s landscape journeying	36
3.4.8 Fiona Hall’s perception of the garden	39
3.5 Depicting the sensory and spiritual experience of gardens	41

CHAPTER FOUR: PERSONAL INTERACTION WITH THE GARDEN

4.1	Reflecting on the botanical	42
4.2	The Artist's own garden history	42
4.2.1	Childhood Rainworth garden	42
4.2.2	Gardenless Gold Coast unit	43
4.2.3	First garden: Inner City Gladstone	44
4.2.4	Tropical, suburban Edge Hill garden	44
4.3	External public space	45
4.4	Identifying the research site	46
4.5	Personal interaction with the Flecker Botanic Gardens	48

CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY FOR RESEARCHING THE SITE

5.1	Establishing the parameters of the study	49
5.2	Extant research sources	50
5.3	Capturing the philosophy	50
5.3.1	Tours of the FBG by the interpretive officer	50
5.3.2	Interviewing the Curator of the Flecker Botanic Gardens	51
5.4	Selection of media	51
5.5	Choice of style	51
5.6	Field studies and photography	52
5.7	Reflection and documentation	53
5.7.1	Journal writing	53
5.7.2	Studio critiques and supervisor feedback	54
5.7.3	Documentation of the artworks	54
5.8	The exhibition	54

CHAPTER SIX: ARTISTIC PRACTICE TOWARDS THE EXHIBITION

6.1	Technical basis for the practice	55
6.2	Acrylic painting technique	55
6.3	Calligraphic drawing technique	56
6.4	Watercolour printmaking technique	57
6.5	Modes of working	60

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCEPTUALISING THE EXHIBITION

7.1	Conceptualising the exhibition	61
7.2	Exhibition venue	61

7.3	Exhibition layout	62
7.4	Framing	63
7.5	Titles	64
7.6	Labels and signage	65
7.7	Invitation, catalogue, publicity and press release	65
7.8	Opening	66

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE EXHIBITION

8.1	Introduction to <i>Gardens of the Mind</i>	68
8.2	Acrylic works in the exhibition: Illustrations and descriptions	68
8.2.1	<i>Grounded Series</i> , (Garden series)	70
8.2.2	<i>Grounded</i> , (Garden series)	70
8.2.3	<i>Grounded Gingers</i> , (Garden series)	71
8.2.4	<i>Peeling and Revealing</i> , (Garden series)	73
8.2.5	<i>Girth</i> , (Garden series)	75
8.2.6	<i>Mulch and Trunk</i> , (Garden series)	75
8.2.7	<i>Cannonball Trunk</i> , (Garden series)	77
8.2.8	<i>Prized Bromeliad Collection</i> , (Wallpapers of the mind series)	77
8.2.9	<i>Effervescent Bromeliad</i> , (Garden series)	78
8.2.10	<i>Ecuadorian Ginger</i> , (Wallpapers of the mind series)	80
8.2.11	<i>Red Ginger</i> , (Wallpapers of the mind series)	80
8.2.12	<i>Gingers and Rousseau</i> , (Wallpapers of the mind series)	80
8.2.13	<i>Heliconia Caribaea</i> , (Wallpapers of the mind series)	82
8.2.14	<i>Colombian Ginger</i> , (Garden series)	82
8.2.15	<i>Antiquated Ginger</i> , (Wallpapers of the mind series)	82
8.3	Watercolour Prints in the exhibition: Illustrations and descriptions	
8.3.1	<i>Trunk with Bromeliads</i> , (Wallpapers of the mind series)	84
8.3.2	<i>Bromeliads</i> , (Wallpapers of the mind series)	84
8.3.3	<i>Bamboo Sentinel</i> , (Wallpapers of the mind series)	86
8.3.4	<i>Florilegium</i> , (Wallpapers of the mind series)	86
8.3.5	<i>Florilegium Tiles</i> , (Wallpapers of the mind series)	87
8.4	Conclusion to the exhibition	88

CHAPTER NINE: RESPONSES, REFLECTIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

9.1	Introduction	89
9.2	Responses to the artworks	89
9.3	Painterly outcomes	92

9.4	Evaluation of the project	94
9.5	Future directions	95
REFERENCE LIST		97
APPENDIX		
A	Artist Statement and Biography	101
B	Floor plan of Loft Gallery and location of key works	103
C	Exhibition invitation and catalogue	104
D	Exhibition Speeches	106
E	Media responses to the exhibition: Newspaper articles	110
F	Visitors' comments book	112

LIST OF PLATES

- Plate 3.1. Marianne North Gallery, Kew Gardens, London. (Royal Botanic Gardens 1980:10)
- Plate 3.2. North, Marianne. *North American carnivorous plants* (n.d) (Royal Botanic Gardens 1980:27)
- Plate 3.3. van Gogh, Vincent. *Garden Behind a House*, 1888, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 52.5cm (Fell 2001:104)
- Plate 3.4. van Gogh, Vincent. *Irises*, 1889, oil on canvas, 71 x 93cm (Fell 2001)
- Plate 3.5. Rousseau, Henri. *The Dream*, 1910, oil on canvas, 80.5" x 118.5" (Pioch online: 2002)
- Plate 3.6. Graham, Anne. *Exotic Plants*, 1996-7, oil on canvas, 155 x 122cm (Graham 1998)
- Plate 3.7. Kushner, Robert. *Warm Season*, 1993, oil, acrylic, glitter and gold leaf on canvas, 48" x 48" (Anderson-Spivy 1997)
- Plate 3.8. Robinson, William. *Sunset and misty moon, Beechmont* (Mountain' series), 1993, oil on canvas, 137 x 183cm (Seear 2001: Plate 64)
- Plate 3.9. Wolseley, John. *Salmon Muller's Line and the Geography of Leaves*, 1998, graphite and watercolour on nine sheets of paper, 136 x 205cm (Grishin 1998)
- Plate 3.10. Hall, Fiona. *Grapefruit: (Citrus paradisi)* from the series *Paradisus Terrestris*, 1989-90, aluminium and tin, 25 x 15 x 3cm (Davidson 1992:19)
- Plate 8.1 *Grounded Series*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 30.5 x 40.7cm, 9 works in grid format
- Plate 8.2 *Grounded*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 78.5 x 96cm
- Plate 8.3 *Grounded Gingers*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 30.5 x 40.7cm, 4 works in grid format
- Plate 8.4 *Peeling and Revealing*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 40.7 x 30.5cm, 6 works
- Plate 8.5 *Girth*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 96 x 78.5cm
- Plate 8.6 *Mulch and Trunk*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 78.5 x 96cm
- Plate 8.7 *Cannonball Trunk*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 96 x 76.5cm
- Plate 8.8 *Prized Bromeliad Collection*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), acrylic on canvas, 78.5 x 96cm
- Plate 8.9 *Effervescent Bromeliad*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 78.5 x 96cm
- Plate 8.10 *Ecuadorian Ginger*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), acrylic on canvas, 78.5 x 96cm

Plate 8.11 *Red Ginger*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), acrylic on canvas,
60.5 x 76cm

Plate 8.12 *Gingers and Rousseau*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), acrylic on canvas,
60.5 x 76cm

Plate 8.13 *Heliconia Caribaea*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), acrylic on canvas,
53 x 43cm

Plate 8.14 *Colombian Ginger*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 53 x 43cm

Plate 8.15 *Antiquated Ginger*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), acrylic on canvas,
53 x 43cm

Plate 8.16 *Trunk with Bromeliads*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), watercolour print on
printmaking paper, 28.7 x 21cm

Plate 8.17 *Bromeliads*, (Garden series), ink print and watercolour on printmaking paper,
21 x 28.7cm

Plate 8.18 *Bamboo Sentinel*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), watercolour on paper,
40 x 29 cm

Plate 8.19 *Florilegium*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), watercolour print on paper, 76 x 57cm

Plate 8.20 *Florilegium Tiles*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), watercolour prints on paper,
15 x 15 cm each

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 What do gardens mean?

The thesis *Gardens of the Mind* explores the construction of the garden in contemporary Australia through a visual art practice. The study was conceived as a reflection on the meaning and individual interpretation of one particular public tropical garden, that of the Flecker Botanic Garden (hereafter to be referred to as the FBG). The fact that this garden is a public, botanic garden, as opposed to a private garden impacts on visitor perception of the site. The experience of this public garden is shared with others, but at the same time can also be intensely personal.

The FBG is a place of great beauty consisting of a diverse range of abundantly healthy, professionally maintained plants existing in relatively ideal conditions. These qualities make it a pleasure to visit, and one has no pressing personal responsibility to care for this garden. Its purpose is to delight and educate the visitor.

The meaning that the Garden holds for this researcher is positioned from the perspective of an artist who frequently visits the FBG. This Garden is evidence of humans working in harmony with nature, representing notions of sanctuary, leisure and pleasure. The fact that the FBG is part of this researcher's local environment is significant to the spiritual and psychological attachment associated with this Garden by the writer. *Gardens of the Mind* communicates the spirit of the place that is embodied in the FBG and the contribution that it makes to the community's and this writer's sense of identity. This viewpoint of the garden is backgrounded by occasional home gardening, and informed by a study of the historical and cultural nature of gardens.

The title, *Gardens of the Mind*, refers to the imaginative experience of being in a garden, encapsulating notions of growth, regeneration, nurture and reflection. Halligan (1999:2) theorises that most gardens are gardens of the mind, explaining that "much of our gardening is a deeply mental process, rooted in our own and our people's histories." This study explores the nature of gardens as sites, which inspire the individual and collective imagination to roam and reflect on living.

Gardens surround our homes and work places. Abbreviated gardens are compartmentalised into strips that soften our roadscapes, shop fronts and outdoor parking areas. Gardens frame the spaces we occupy and move through, reducing the harshness of our existence in a world of hard edges and man-made surfaces. The underlying connotation of these living

green elements of our environment is a translation of our interpretation of nature. Gardens aren't just decorative adjuncts to our functional spaces; they are statements of our beliefs about the land.

Gardens are places of peaceful contemplation where pleasure and sensory experience are the desired outcomes of the designers. However, gardens are also dense repositories of human effort and history across the millennia. Ross (1998) provides a rich overview of the multi-layered symbology of the garden when she states that:

All gardens carry with them certain associations. For example, in Western culture, gardens inevitably suggest paradise, the bounty and bliss of the Garden of Eden. These Judeo-Christian connotations coexist with more primitive associations – sexuality and fertility, death and regeneration, the cycle of the seasons – as well as with more recent overlays ranging from the traditions of courtly love to the awareness of ecological crisis. (Ross 1998:4)

Gardens are laden with meaning, as well as flowers, fruit and decorative growth. These many meanings surface in this researcher's experience of gardens and manifest themselves in the visual interpretation of the garden, which is the focus of this thesis.

An additional conceptual framing of the garden may be gleaned from the Italian Renaissance humanists who called gardens a *third nature* because they combined both nature and art. The first nature referred to wilderness and the second nature was understood as one altered by man for practical purposes such as fields and villages. Hunt (2002) theorises that:

... the garden itself tends to allude to other natures by direct imitation, idealization, recreation or even simply by contrast, gardens define themselves... Gardens distinguish themselves from both wilderness and cultural landscapes either by their boundaries or by their more elaborate decoration and concentration of effects or by both.

(Hunt 2002:online)

Gardens must be viewed in relation to our perception of nature, for, no matter how controlling our garden design, a garden is still open to the effects of the environment such as the changes of the seasons, the weather, pests, and the soil.

When considering what gardens mean, it is important to acknowledge the individual's interpretation of a garden's meaning. As Ross (1998:186) explains: "each viewer brings cultural baggage (values, clichés and concepts) and personal quirks (memories, preferences and associations) which ... shape his or her experience of any given garden."

Timms (1999:233) provides a further interpretation of what gardens mean, when he explains that a garden for him ... "is not what you see but what you do, a process of learning, working and interacting, of working out your goals as you go along and changing them to suit

the circumstances as they arise". Hence, a garden for some involves a greater emphasis on process, the journey of creation, than the end product.

Gardens have a depth of meaning that traverses time and plunders cultures. The influence of past civilisations and other societies are evident in the shape of our current gardens. This researcher's interpretation of the garden is shared by Palmer and Manning (2000:16) who assert that: "In planning a garden we unconsciously bring cultural, ascetic, environmental and spiritual assumptions to bear ... gardeners bare their souls in what they do to and in the garden". Clearly, gardens communicate on many levels.

1.2 The role of gardens

Gardens, both public and private, are an important aspect of Australian cultural life. The enduring philosophical issues and visual delights associated with the Australian garden are the primary concern of *Gardens of the Mind*, which has at its heart a particular focus on the public garden of the FBG.

Harvey (1989:13), in discussing the function of public gardens, states that 65 per cent of people visit public gardens for aesthetic or recreational reasons, not for botanical or educational purposes. Gardens, for many, are a source of sensory pleasure and a tonic for the refreshment of the spirit and it is these functions of gardens that are the main emphasis in this study.

In order to investigate the role of gardens in contemporary Australian society it is necessary to take a brief look at the origins of gardening. The history of gardening in western civilisation is four thousand years long (Hobhouse 1992). Early gardens in the Mediterranean basin were mainly designed with practicalities in mind; however, they soon assumed a more decorative character. Hobhouse (1992) states that these walled gardens:

... emphasized the contrast between two separate worlds: the outer one where nature remained awe-inspiringly in control and an inner artificially created sanctuary, a refuge for man and plants from the burning desert where shade trees and cool canals refreshed the spirit and ensured growth (Hobhouse 1992:11).

Many contemporary gardens have been created to separate two somewhat different worlds: the outer public sphere and the inner private domain of the home, or the two different worlds of the man-made interior and the organic exterior. Probert (1999) discusses this protective function of gardens when she explains that:

... the idea that gardening is a refuge from a hostile world has been with us for hundreds of years [and] this idea took on far wider meaning and relevance as a necessary counterbalance to the unnatural rhythms of urban industrial life
(Probert 1999:61).

In returning to the origins of gardens, Ross (1998) neatly summarises the functions of early gardens when she states that:

Historians today trace gardens to two ultimate sources: (1) sacred groves and nymphaea dedicated to particular pagan deities, and (2) utilitarian kitchen and medicinal gardens. Thus gardens are linked with magic and religion as well as with practical needs.
(Ross 1998:1)

Davies (1989:133) comments on the role of gardens through time as having “fluctuated between being a means of survival or a status symbol, a spiritual retreat or a sensual paradise”. In the twenty-first century, the FBG satisfies all of these needs. Its botanic conservation role is viewed by some as vital for the survival of mankind. It can be seen as a status symbol for the opulence of the city of Cairns or as a sanctuary from the practicalities and pressures of the urban environment.

For much of the population, gardens provide a means to improve on nature – to select the combination of elements that best represents their particular vision of nature. Probert (1999:86) comments that gardens are “sites where [people] create desirable ‘lifestyles’ which define their identities in the public as well as the private sphere”. Gardens package the home, framing its presentation (and ours) to the public world. Gardens are potent symbols of our relationship with nature and may represent our values, gender, class, fashion sense and our family history.

In reflecting on the experience of the garden, it is pertinent to consider Hobhouse’s (1992:289) observation that: “... in most western countries there is no longer such a thing as a ‘natural’ landscape; even natural features, especially in urban environments, have become increasingly scarce and whole countrysides have been altered by foreign tree and flower introductions”. Clearly man’s impact on the plant world is far reaching and the decisions we make in our own gardens are of import to the wider ecology. ‘Nature’, as an unaltered landscape, is available to the few; therefore gardens provide us with an accessible alternate means of interacting with the plant world.

Perhaps the benefits of having trees and plants in our immediate environment are more significant to our well being than is generally acknowledged. Trees and plants affect air quality and our well being. The air our lungs breathe in effects us in ways we have only begun to learn about. Wood (2003:online) from the Centre for Ecotoxicology writes that: “Our lungs are our most important point of contact with the outside world ... we breathe in approximately 6 to 10 litres of air every minute”. Wood (2003:ABC) has embarked upon a project in the Netherlands,

exploring how plants affect our brainwaves and the way we feel. He sites research in a taxation office in Holland in which there was a 12 per cent improvement in productivity measured by work output produced by people working in front of a Video Display Unit when plants were present in the office.

A vital role of gardens in contemporary Australian life is based on the human need to connect with nature. This need to experience the plant world in a meaningful way has been submerged in our modern, industrial, suburban way of life leading to a separation from the natural side of our existence. Warmington (In Syme 2001:1) Curator of the FBG, cogently explains the revitalising role of gardens in modern life, when he philosophises that: “the complexities of modern life eroded dreams of a simpler, slower lifestyle and people would increasingly look to gardens as symbols of simplicity, tranquillity and sanity”. Probert (1999) also discusses the revitalising role of gardens in modern life when she writes that:

The notion that gardens and gardening have some kind of universal meaning is widespread among gardening writers, as is a belief in gardening’s uplifting qualities – that gardening is good for your inner being and not just a form of healthy exercise
(Probert 1999:62).

This belief that gardening gives people the opportunity to interact with nature and that this is beneficial and indeed necessary to a high quality life is the central premise of this study’s position on why people participate in the world of the garden in contemporary Australia.

1.3 Exploring the spiritual dimension of the garden

Gardens are sacred places – places of peace, reflection and renewal. Garden makers have been cultivating the uplifting experience of gardens for millennia. Sensory stimulation and nourishment of the body and mind are the aims of the designer. Smells drift, colours and textures awaken the mind. Ross (1998) espouses the many psychological benefits of gardens:

Gardens yield prodigal pleasures. Their bounty includes not only fruits and flowers, vegetables and herbs, but also beauty, respite, and reflection. Gardens delight the senses prompt thought, evoke feeling and emotion, and engage the imagination.
(Ross 1998:np)

The sensory and spiritual nourishment provided by gardens is the focus of *Gardens of the Mind*.

The Flecker Botanic Gardens is a place that has been provided by the Cairns City Council for that city’s inhabitants and visitors to enjoy. This sensory stimulation and pleasure is available free of charge seven days a week and is a source of solace, particularly in the face of endless media stories about corruption and the degradation of the environment for profit. Palmer and Manning reflect on the garden as a sanctuary:

In the midst of angst, uncertainty, the crumbling of tradition and all the other features of our changing world, gardens have never been so popular. They have become sacred spaces in which we can leave behind the pressures of an increasingly complex society and find sanctuary, control and personal space. (Palmer et al 2000:10)

Adams (1993:59) concurs when she describes gardening as a “powerful antidote to widespread despair and depression over the possibility of nuclear annihilation, environmental catastrophe, and out-of-control corporate greed.” Gardening can be a means of personal and ecological healing and gardens clearly have many life-enhancing qualities for the community and individual.

Gardening for many Australians is a spiritual experience. It is perceived as a powerful way of dispelling feelings of resignation and helplessness associated with the environment or life in general. The gardener can care for his or her plot – a symbol of the land, whilst being self-nurturing in creating a haven for their own existence that expresses their vision of the world. Some gardeners attempt to recreate nature by planting informally and encouraging wildlife into the garden, while others create ordered arrangements to represent “a sacred harmony between man and the Divine – an indication that humans can have a fruitful and productive partnership with the natural world” (Palmer et al 2000:35).

Much of today’s garden design is immersed in historical symbols of religious significance, which contribute to the experience of the garden as a sacred place. Davies (1989:3) writes that: “certain practices have been incorporated into garden design which have their roots deep in the philosophical and religious beliefs of ancient cultures”. A definition of sacred space, which supports the idea of the garden as a spiritual space is provided by Relfh (1976:15): “Sacred space is that of archaic religious experience, it is continuously differentiated and replete with symbols, sacred centres and meaningful objects”. Davies (1989) notes that gardens have been cultivated throughout history within the religious environment and that the first gardens were built by the Sumerians in Mesopotamia in honour of their gods. She writes that: “... gardens became symbols on earth of that assured paradise in the world to come” (Davies 1989:22), noting that the word paradise itself is derived from the Persian “*paridaeza*’ which indicated an enclosed park.

Some examples of garden symbology reflecting the spiritual include that stones, water and open grassed areas provide still spaces of reflection, while paths represent the spiritual way. Palmer and Manning (2000:119) explore the spiritual representation of the rock when they write that: “A stone or rock ... draws the eye and then allows the mind to reflect upon and from it; a rock ... expresses the vastness of evolution and ... bring[s] the worries of the present into a

wider, more cosmic perspective”. Flowers in many cultures are symbols of beauty and plants often represent personal growth.

In addition to exploring the spiritual dimension of gardens, the written component of *Gardens of the Mind* also investigates the work of artists who explore the spiritual through the vehicle of painting plants. The role of the artist in exploring the sacred is lucidly explained by Waterlow and Mellick:

The lack, in the modern world, of effective and meaningful ritual, of true communal sharing, of a unified energy and a common aim has created in many a real need to discover other means of inner nourishment and fulfilment. Artists have traditionally been seen as capable of linking the sacred and its representation for broader understanding and even though the sacred no longer has the same fixed meanings and is indeed harder than ever to define, this search remains a necessary function of the creative spirit. (Waterlow et al 1996:35)

The living quality of both gardens and art making, draws many to participate in these spheres of interest. Spate (1996) discusses this living quality and identifies the sacred quality in artwork as having the ability to “create in one the sense of being intensely alive, and of being part of the aliveness of the world” (Spate 1996:76). Indeed, it is the life force of plants that is the pivotal subject matter of this artist’s visual exploration of the garden.

Gardens of the Mind explores the spiritual experience and personal aesthetic of the Flecker Botanic Garden in Cairns. The practical component of the study is centred on the creation of an exhibition of expressive paintings communicating the uplifting experience of the FBG; paintings with a spiritual dimension.

1.4 Rationale for and aims of the study

The study, *Gardens of the Mind*, explores the questions: What do gardens mean? and What role does the garden play in Australian society? These questions arose out of this researchers lifelong preoccupation with painting plants and a related, though more recent, fascination with the Flecker Botanic Gardens and what this amazingly abundant display of plants represents. For the artist especially, depicting flora is a means of connecting with nature and thus operating from a more intuitive side of perception.

Gardening is a very ‘fertile’ topic. Indeed, the relationship between humans and plants is a complex one, with gardens conjuring up dreams of Utopian paradise, of pleasure, but also of life sustaining food, sensory stimulation and spiritual refreshment. Gardens are growing, living extensions of our domestic and greater world. They are not natural, but are social constructs heavily determined by culture, fashion and history. Gardens are people’s marks on the land.

They are, as Fraser (1999) theorises, like housekeeping outdoors: “Most of us gardeners don’t work from observation of nature; we housekeep out of doors, tidying, confining, shoring up, twisting materials out of their natural function. Matching, featuring, displaying. Denaturing” (Fraser 1999:220). The artificially created sanctuaries that are our gardens are the products of over four thousand years of development in garden making and are symbols of people’s relationships with the environment.

The garden as a cultural phenomenon intrigues this researcher. Gardening is an aspect of the Australian lifestyle that is currently experiencing a surge in interest as evidenced by the proliferation of gardening television programs such as (*Gardening Australia* and *Backyard Blitz*) and the abundant provision of associated retail goods and services. Clearly, gardening satisfies a significant need in the contemporary Australian identity.

The garden is an aspect of the landscape that is commonly associated with the domestic domain, rather than as a subject worthy of intellectual appraisal. In the realm of visual art, garden genre artworks traditionally hold an amateur status because of this association. In part, this is due to the lack of documentation about the ideology of gardens in the garden genre in art. *Gardens of the Mind* seeks to address this by analysing examples of artworks that have interpreted the garden in a manner that transcends the mundane and deals with aspects of people’s perception of their environment.

A great many artists have dealt with the garden as subject matter in a limited way. In contrast, this thesis focuses on creating a body of images that concentrates on visually interpreting one particular garden. A further contribution that *Gardens of the Mind* makes to the garden genre in art is that it explores the spiritual function of gardens. The need to explore the spiritual role of the garden in contemporary Australia is indicated primarily through a searching for an individual approach to the garden landscape that would express aspects of identity such as a sense of place. This perception of plants is in stark opposition to the stereotypical images that are to be found at saturation level in the tourist outlets of Cairns.

The thesis *Gardens of the Mind* is original in that it is a regional study that investigates the construction of the public garden in contemporary Australian culture from a visual arts perspective. The paintings explore the contemplation of spirituality experienced in man-made garden landscapes.

The study: *Gardens of the Mind* has one central aim:

To explore the vital role of gardens in the lives of contemporary Australians through

- a) probing the underlying philosophy and construction of a public garden space; and
- b) exploring visually an idiosyncratic spiritual and artistic experience of a public garden space.

1.5 Organisation of the study

This thesis explores, through a visual art practice, the nature of the garden in contemporary Australian culture with particular emphasis on the Flecker Botanic Garden. **Chapter Two: Perspectives on gardens** makes inquiry into the continuum of the garden and looks briefly at garden design; and the sense of identity and spiritual belonging that a garden place can provide. **Chapter Three: Traditions within the garden genre: artistic perceptions** explores the botanical in art and analyses the depiction of the garden by eight artists whose work is of particular relevance to this researcher's thematic understanding of the garden. **Chapter Four, Personal interaction with the garden** describes my own experience of gardens, as well as identifying the research site of the Flecker Botanic Gardens. **Chapter Five, Methodology for researching the site**, details the methodology undertaken in researching this local garden. **Chapter Six**, entitled **Artistic practice towards the exhibition** elaborates on the technical basis of the acrylic painting and watercolour printmaking methods of art making. The conceptual process undertaken in the construction of the exhibition is documented in **Chapter Seven: Conceptualising the exhibition**. **Chapter Eight: The exhibition** provides descriptions and illustrations of the majority of works in the exhibition. Finally, **Chapter Nine: Responses, reflections, and future directions** evaluates the project; analyses responses to the artworks and proposes future directions for the art practice.

CHAPTER 2: PERSPECTIVES ON GARDENS

2.1 Introduction to perspectives on gardens

Garden design is a reflection of people's relationship with the land, and is affected by the history, culture and values of the community and individual. This chapter approaches the subject of the garden, a highly interdisciplinary area of research, from four angles. Firstly, the continuum of the garden is advanced from the perspective of the differences perceived between the public and private garden. This is followed by an analysis of garden design from the viewpoint of how biological considerations affect our aesthetic appreciation of the landscape, of which gardens are a part. Attention is then turned to cultural geography to provide connections between place and identity, and a spiritual exploration of the benefits of people's interaction with garden concludes the chapter.

2.2 The continuum of the garden

The Flecker Botanic Garden is a public, botanic garden, and as such, shares some characteristics with the average, private, home garden. However, the fact that the FBG is a botanic garden ensures that a great variety of plants are present, that they are professionally maintained, and aesthetically presented. Visitors have no pressing obligation to care for the plants, so pleasure and curiosity may be foremost in their minds. The private garden, on the other hand, requires constant maintenance and this can impinge on the feelings of relaxation and enjoyment experienced in it.

Botanic gardens have the responsibility of conservation and preservation of the world's plant species, "they are custodians of living seed banks and genetic viability..." (Cairns City Council nd: pamphlet). In fulfilling this vital role, botanic gardens have obligations to the scientific community to follow the current practices of collection, cultivation and presentation of the plants. Plantings in botanic gardens are commonly grouped with education as an objective, whereas arrangements in a private garden represent the aesthetic perception, values and personal histories of the individual. Botanic gardens are also likely to contain specimens of social, political and economic importance to the history of the community. Private gardens simply contain plants of personal significance to the owners and are generally limited to the stock of local suppliers, whereas botanic gardens have access to international avenues of collection.

A public, botanic garden represents the values and gardening practices of an organisation of professionals who have extensive education in the field. The local council also

makes a significant impact on decision making in a botanic garden through the budget. In addition, the local community often has input through a society of volunteers who undertake various activities and improvements. In contrast, a private garden represents the gardening habits and values of the owners and the individuals who service it.

A home garden is separate from the public environment and usually surrounds a dwelling. A public garden is separate from the built environment and provides a shared space for community activities including cultural programs such as concerts, community festivals, a cafe culture, photography, sitting and relaxing, and picnicking. Other recreational activities carried out in public gardens include nature walks, sunbathing and watching - birds, animals, and children playing. There is some overlap in the kinds of activities undertaken in public and private gardens with those activities performed in private gardens including more active and personal activities such as hobbies, exercising, reading, swimming, barbequing and entertaining (with the use of the ubiquitous outdoor furniture setting).

Both public and private gardens can increase the value and status of the properties located near by. A private garden is maintained and improvements undertaken for the owner's satisfaction and in the hope of increasing the value of the property. Similarly a public garden, through greening, can enhance the status of surrounding properties. Lippard (1997) provides historical background to the economic and social value of public and private gardens:

Public parks evolved from two socially distant directions: from private estates and gardens, and from the common green or shared pastureland ... City parks were also inspired by dual motivations – raising real estate values for the rich and providing places for the poor to be in touch with nature. (Lippard 1997:250)

A public garden, particularly a botanic garden, can be a symbol of prosperity for a community as the resources needed for its maintenance are considerable.

In addition to the display of achievement that gardens offer, they also represent shared social values. Seddon's (1997) discussion of order and disorder in the landscape examines the ideals that underpin control over nature in private gardens:

A well-tended garden is meritorious; neat edges, a good display of colour, tidy beds, a well-maintained lawn, all bespeaking obvious effort and intervention. The degree of intervention is the measure of the merit, of moral standing and good citizenship, in short, of the kind of person to whom the banks lend money. (Seddon 1997:18)

The function that gardens perform of openly displaying order and moral standing is also relevant to public gardens with the tidy towns competition in Queensland being evidence of the esteem in which well maintained public landscapes are held.

Gardens are generally associated with the natural world, however, they are very much extensions of our built environment. Holloway and Hubbard (2001:77) note that “there is a plethora of magazines, television programs and retailers dedicated to providing ‘new ideas’ designed to transform gardens into ‘outdoor rooms (...where more emphasis is placed on garden furniture, lighting and surfacing than planting)”. Thus, there appears to be a need in contemporary garden culture to exert greater control over the garden environment, reducing the quantity of natural materials and increasing the prominence of man-made materials. Perhaps this is a reflection of increased prosperity and less time to spend in maintaining a garden.

In comparing the nature of private and public gardens, Lippard (1997) offers a thought provoking observation: “Mediators between nature and culture, gardens are, paradoxically, communal places that encourage solitude and self reliance. There is something impersonal (public, perhaps) about the notion of a park, whereas even a public garden evokes a more intimate (private) landscape” (Lippard 1997:253). Lippard’s philosophy highlights the qualities of belonging, seclusion, intimacy and reflection that are relevant to public and private gardens. Also confirmed by Lippard’s insight are this researcher’s feelings of identification and personal participation in the world of the Flecker Botanic Gardens. These strong emotions can be explained by the intensity of the sensory experience offered by this environment – kinaesthetic, olfactory, auditory, visual and even imagined tastes. Hence, despite the many differences between them, the public garden can have a quality of the private for some individuals, slightly blurring the boundaries between public and private gardens.

2.2.1 Defining a ‘garden’ and a ‘botanic garden’

This thesis reflects on the nature and significance of gardens in modern Australian life. However, the primary focus of the practical component of the study is on the botanic garden of the FBG. Therefore, it is pertinent to provide definitions for both the ‘garden’ and the ‘botanic garden’. It is to be acknowledged that botanic gardens share many of the concerns of the common garden and the review of literature, which follows, encompasses both definitions.

It is difficult to define the necessary conditions that constitute a ‘common’ garden. Ross, author of *What Gardens Mean* (1998:187) writes that “there is no essential definition of a

garden; a garden needn't have any plant material at all. But most gardens do, and accordingly they make statements about our place in relation to nature". A more descriptive definition of a garden is provided by Hunt:

[A garden is] a relatively small space of ground, usually out of doors, distinguished from the surrounding terrain by some boundary or by its internal organization or by both. A combination of architectural (or hard) and natural (or soft) materials is deployed in gardens for a variety of reasons --- practical, social, spiritual, aesthetic --- all of which are explicit or implicit expressions of the culture that created them. A garden is the most sophisticated expression of a society's relationship with space and nature. (Hunt online: 19.4.2002)

Wyse Jackson provides the following definition of botanic gardens: "Botanic gardens are institutions holding documented collections of living plants for the purposes of scientific research, conservation, display and education" (Wyse Jackson In Australian National Botanic Gardens online: n.d.). The FBG currently conforms to this definition as born out by its Mission Statement: "To display tropical plant species of ornamental, economic, cultural and conservation value for educational, recreational and scientific purposes with emphasis on endangered species" (Cairns City Council Services 2004). The Gardens was designated as an official botanic garden in 1971. Prior to this time it was described as a municipal pleasure park.

For the purposes of this study, Hunt's definition provides a rich and highly relevant, though necessarily imprecise definition of a garden (in order to accommodate a range of different types of gardens). Hunt's definition is particularly appropriate for this study because it explicitly refers to the garden as being a complex manifestation of human interaction with nature, and his definition could apply to the private and the botanic garden.

2.3 Garden design – a reflection of the human relationship with nature

Within the context of a discussion of the contemporary garden it is pertinent (and particularly so for the landscape artist) to analyse people's feelings about nature because garden compositions are a distillation of their relationship with nature. Why are people attracted to certain landscape environments and what qualities do these environments have that draw people to seek aesthetic satisfaction or restoration from them? Rather than undertake an exhaustive exploration of the literature surrounding these topics, it is more appropriate in this context to provide a background.

The practice of arranging nature's elements into the ideal landscape of a garden is pursued with enthusiasm in Australia, and often in ways that contradict the push for leisure, convenience and efficiency in many aspects of our lives. De Charmant observes that:

Our relation to a new global and mutating environment is more precarious and complex than ever but in the space of the garden it has a chance of being laid out and expressed perhaps more penetratingly than anywhere else. How else could one explain the current fascination of artists with gardens, landscape and the natural media? (de Charmant 1997:2)

Perhaps it is because our daily, urban existence has become so distanced from nature, and because nature and the natural appear to be threatened or under threat, that gardening has evolved as a means to reconnect with our natural instincts and exercise underutilised senses.

Gardening is also a means of dreaming about cultivating a living Utopia. Seddon (1997:177) writes that the concepts of paradise, Eden and Utopia have a long history. He states that Utopia is unattainable and that this can be frustrating, or:

... it can be an energising dream that leads us on creatively to achieve far more than we could ever believe possible without it... This tension underlies a great deal of writing and thinking about the design and practice of gardening (and much else). (Seddon 1997:177)

Gardening is a powerful means of envisioning and physically working towards a perfect environment. This notion is at the core of the ability of gardens to nurture hope and balance the practicalities of life.

In order to discuss the emotional experience which humans feel in the contemplation of landscape, an overview has been taken of the contributions to this field made by Appleton (1996), Bourassa (1991), Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) and Ross (1998).

Appleton (1996) attempts to provide a language to bridge the gap between emotion and landscape content and interprets landscape aesthetics from a biological perspective. Much of Appleton's theory is encapsulated in his definition of habitat theory which states that the:

Aesthetic satisfaction experienced in the contemplation of landscape stems from the spontaneous perception of landscape features which, in their shapes, colours, spatial arrangements and other visible attributes, act as sign stimuli indicative of environmental conditions favourable for survival, whether they are really favourable or not (Appleton 1996:269).

Bourassa (1991:66) maintains that our perception of landscape is influenced by biological, cultural and individual factors and criticises Appleton for a simplistic pigeonholing of landscape elements and for concentrating too heavily on the biological approach. Bourassa points out that in contemporary times a keen sensitivity to environment is no longer a prerequisite of physical survival, however, he asserts that there is a cultural memory that makes symbolic understandings of landscape features still relevant. Ross (1998:174) also argues that Appleton's theory "appeals only to inaccessible primal instincts" because physical survival is but a remote

subconscious concern of people experiencing a pleasure garden. However what neither Appleton nor Ross consider is that landscape features that engender a perception (however unconscious) of physical wellbeing may enhance spiritual survival because one feels secure and able to rest the mind.

Appleton's habitat theory has three main conceptual underpinnings: that of the refuge, prospect and hazard. He argues that the mood of a landscape can be read in terms of these three dominant symbolic categories. Appleton (1996:230) further states that "we can find prospect, refuge and hazard permeating the history of landscape painting and appearing through the imagery appropriate to every school and every style".

Appleton's (1996:151) concept of the refuge involves understandings of seclusion and hiding. He explains that refuge overtones are generally implicit in the word 'garden'. Refuge landscape symbols include anything that suggests ease of penetration such as vegetation, darkness and caves. In contrast, Ross (1998:169) argues that the term enclosure is more contemporary than refuge. She theorises that: "Enclosure has a significance beyond Appleton's notions of concealment and survival; it indicates a basic sensory and kinaesthetic notion of surroundedness ... It can also signify comfort, security, passivity, rest, privacy, sensory focus and concentrated attention". Ross (1998:169) discusses enclosure as bringing about a concentrating of attention to the details of our environment, "encouraging us to reflect on our sensory and bodily engagement with them". This understanding of enclosure explains much of the attraction of the garden.

To return to Appleton's theory, the concept of the 'prospect' refers to a position of outlook – a sense of open space, light and visibility. Open surfaces, the sky and peephole vistas are examples of prospect symbols. Appleton's (1996:269) third landscape category, that of the hazard can be defined as a "condition prejudicial to the attainment of comfort, safety or survival". An example of a hazard is a landslide.

Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989:6) 'information processing theory' of the natural environment varies from Appleton's biological perspective, in that they state that there are broad areas of agreement as to what people like in the natural environment, however, their position is that an individual's preference for a landscape is influenced by the four factors of complexity, coherence, legibility and mystery. A brief summary of Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989:6) description of these factors follows.

Complexity refers to the intricacy or richness of a scene, and the Kaplans' (1989) research asserts that a moderate degree of complexity is preferred. Coherence refers to the degree of order, which is likely to increase one's sense of ability to function effectively, however too much order may lead to boredom. Legibility is the ability to understand an area, orientate oneself, or function effectively, with landscapes that are easiest to extract the information needed to function effectively and safely being preferred. Legible areas include those containing landmarks, open forest and spatially defined areas. Dense blocked forest views, where there is considerable understorey or a mass of foliage, impede visual or physical access and are not highly preferred. Similarly wide-open, undifferentiated vistas also are less desired. Finally, mystery refers to the perception that one could learn more, encouraging one to venture forth.

Ross's (1998) concept of 'invitation' involves similar understandings as that of Kaplan and Kaplan's category of mystery. Ross's (1998:167) notion of invitation refers to the features of gardens which "invite us to explore them perceptually and through movement. We take up these invitations by exercising our imagination, our senses, and our bodies". Garden features that are invitational in nature include paths and garden beds that curve around, implying that some visual information is yet to be experienced.

A further desirable quality of landscapes identified by Kaplan et al. (1989:154) is that of 'extent'. Landscape features that enhance the feeling of an area extending include spacious wide-open areas; numerous trees, especially large ones, trails and pathways; and intimate spaces within a larger area.

In summary, Kaplan and Kaplan's information processing theory, concludes that people's preferences for landscapes are positively affected by characteristics that allow for the prompt understanding of an area, and the experience of safety and comfort. These qualities are balanced with a desire for exploration of the site (Kaplan et al. 1989:29). Ross, Appleton, and Bourassa also assist in the construction of an understanding of the complex subjects of why people feel the way they do about landscape, and how it is that garden design is a manifestation of our relationship with the landscape.

2.4 Identity and place

An appreciation of the connection between place and an individual or a community's identity is needed to contextualise this study of the garden at a personal and local level. How can a particular local territory (such as the FBG) have meaning for an individual or indeed shape one's identity? To probe this question the framework of cultural geography assists in shaping a theory of place.

Hoffie (1997:6) theorises that "In Australia, the topic of identity – at personal, local, regional and national levels – has most frequently been characterised by attempts to draw connections between a sense of self and place". Relph (1976) confirms that identity is affected by place when he writes that the bonds linking people to their special places are profound and complex aspect of man's experience of the world and are an important human need. He explains that:

To have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp on one's own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular (Relph 1976:38).

Lippard's (1997) explanation of the notion of place also assists in crafting an understanding of identity and place:

The intersections of nature, culture, history, and ideology form the ground on which we stand – our land, our place, the local. The lure of the local is the pull of place that operates on each of us, exposing our politics and our spiritual legacies. It is the geographical component of the psychological need to belong somewhere, one antidote to a prevailing alienation. (Lippard 1997:7)

The opposite of having a sense of place is "placelessness" and Lippard (1997:9) defines this as place ignored, unseen, or unknown.

A sense of place, according to Ryden (cited in Lippard 1997:37) may be constructed from four layers of meaning: "local and material lore including local names for flora, fauna and topography; handed-down history, much of it intimate, some of it apocryphal; group identity and place-based individual identity; and the emotions or affective bonds attached to place". *Gardens of the Mind* places a heavy emphasis on this researcher's phenomenological experience of the Flecker Botanic Gardens and relates strongly to the final two aspects of Ryden's analysis of the aspects of place.

Another phenomenological approach which suggests how an individual's identity is impacted upon by a place is addressed by Tuan's concept of topophilia:

Tuan coined the term topophilia to express the phenomenological encounter between individual and field of care (the work 'topophilia' is the result of combining two Greek words to mean 'love of place'). This implies that individuals have an emotional need to identify with often personal and intimate places, and hence 'construct' these places for themselves on the basis of repeated experiences (of sound, smells, sights and sensations encountered in a place) ... and ties of spirituality ... (Holloway et al 2001:75)

Tuan's theory of topophilia is highly significant to *Gardens of the Mind* as the artworks relate to the subjective sensory experience of being in the Flecker Botanic Gardens.

The idea of place impacting on a community's identity is discussed by Relph (1976) when he reflects on a level of experience of place that is...

...cultural and communal rather than individual: it involves a deep and unreflective participation in the symbols of a place for what they are. It is associated particularly with the sacred experience of involvement in holy place, and with the secular experience of being known in and knowing the named and significant places of a home region. (Relph 1976:142)

Holloway and Hubbard (2001:114) contest Relph's humanistic approach to the landscape, asserting that it needs revision to consider the fracturing effects of power and difference. They write, "landscapes... are not just superficial visual expressions of relationships between society and nature, but the creative products of specific social contexts and power relation." The Flecker Botanic Gardens for example is in part a symbol of the wealth and achievement of the community of Cairns. Members of the public who do not have an affinity for the social structure that created the phenomenon of this garden may experience placelessness in relation to this environment. Hence, the meaning a place holds is not universally applicable for all people in a home region.

Lippard (1997:19) expounds upon the role of making art about place as being a means of forming connections with the external world. She writes that "Artists can make the connections [between people and places] visible. They can guide us through sensuous kinaesthetic responses to topography, lead us ... into an alternate relationships to place". Indeed *Gardens of the Mind* grew out of a searching for a sense of belonging to an area and the works endeavour to communicate this subjective experience.

2.5 The restorative environment of the garden

Investigation has been made into the psychological benefits of interacting with nature (of which gardens are a part) in order to broaden and deepen an understanding of the spiritual experience of landscape painting.

Gardens, for many, are a readily available means of accessing nature, and are commonly perceived as peaceful, restorative places. This phenomenon is elaborated on in Clinebell's (1996) theory of *Ecotherapy* which is defined as "the healing and the growth that is nurtured by healthy interaction with the earth" (Clinebell 1996:xxi). Clinebell's background is one of pastoral psychotherapy; however, this writer rejects the religious aspect of Clinebell's philosophy believing that ecological spirituality in itself provides a feeling of interconnectedness and self-transcendence. The eco-feminist Betty Roszak (1995:295) also expresses this view when she writes that:

[the] ...celebration of the cycles of nature and the fecundity and variety of life, ... becomes a religion that goes beyond churches and temples, a religion of all times and places. There is an emphasis on the importance of place, rootedness, and growing things. Living in one's place becomes an element in a religion of ecological wholeness.
(Roszak, B. 1995:288)

The theory of *Ecotherapy* argues that spending time in nature contributes to feeling grounded and strengthens inner security. This stronger identity is more able to interact in a connected way with the external world of relationships, culture, society, and nature. Furthermore, *Ecotherapy* states that interaction with the natural world is necessary for a child's development: "The central premise of ecotherapy is that our early relationships with the natural world have a profound shaping impact on the development of a grounded sense of identity for our whole body-mind-spirit organism" Clinebell (1996:27). The strongly related theory of ecopsychology also holds that there is an "ecological intelligence as deeply rooted in the foundations of the psyche as the sexual and aggressive instincts that Freud found there" (Roszak et al. 1995:16).

Clinebell's ecotherapy philosophy incorporates Wilson's 1984 notion of biophilia as being essential to the regeneration processes afforded by nature. Biophilia as defined by zoologist Wilson is "the innate, genetically rooted affiliation of humans to other animals and living organisms". Wilson theorises that "biophilia is part of our mental and emotional apparatus – as much a part of our history as love and bonding and having children"(Wilson cited in Clinebell 1996:41). Roszak et al. (1995:4) expresses the hope that the biophilia hypothesis will prove true and so become an integral part of the tradition of maintaining mental health offered by psychologists and therapists.

Clinebell sees that becoming more involved in nurturing nature through active earth caring as essential to people's sense of oneness with nature. Gardening can be a pro-active way of experiencing, perhaps even protecting the environment and for some individuals this reduces feelings of overwhelming despair about the environment. This despair is an underlying cause of many individuals' sense of futility with society and the future. Harper (1995:189) talks about

gardening yielding “deep insights into how we physically, mentally and spiritually find creative balance between wild nature and human nature. Gardening immerses us in a basic natural cycle that directly sustains our life”. Kaplan et al. (1989:191) also confirms this when writing that “many gardeners feel a relationship to a force or system that is larger than they are and is not under human control.”

The word “Ecopsychology” emerged out of the Deep Ecology movement, commonly describes the synthesis of the psychological and the ecological. Roszak et al. (1995:5) explains that... the underlying assumption of Ecopsychology is that ecology and psychology need each other. He continues with the assertion that: “The context for defining sanity in our time has reached planetary magnitude”. In other words, an individual’s mental health is affected by the local and global environment and vice versa.

The concept of ‘Ecoalienation’ described by Clinebell refers to the awareness of being cut off from nature which is often caused by over focussing on controlling, repressive activities that are a by-product of living in an urbanised, industrialised society. Jungian therapist Wheelwright Schmidt also addresses the alienation from nature and the regenerative effect of interacting with a wild place:

Entering the wilderness and its microcosms – gardens and parks – gives us an opportunity to connect with that instinct (the earth-groundedness of personality) and rests our fragile psyches from the exhaustion of trying to stay intact in the civilised world, which is so alien for many of us. It is necessary to know a wild area that feels right. For some, a park is just right; for others, it may be a garden. (Wheelwright Schmidt cited in Clinebell 1996:131)

Kaplan (1989) refers to psychological research that substantiates that the garden as providing significant benefits including...

...enjoyment, relaxation, and lowered stress levels. In addition, the research results indicate that physical well-being is affected by such contacts. People with access to nearby-natural settings have been found to be healthier than other individuals. The longer-term, indirect impacts also included increased levels of satisfaction with one’s home, one’s job, and with life in general. Surely this is a remarkable range of benefits for such a relatively simple and inexpensive environmental change.

(Kaplan et al. 1989:198)

Kaplan (1989:197) writes that governments, mental health professionals and economists need to acknowledge that gardens are a rich resource for enhancing health, happiness, and wholeness.

The notion that humans require a nurturing relationship with nature is a thread that runs through *Gardens of the Mind*. The writer’s art practice is constructed around activities that incorporate experiences of nature that require a slowing down of thoughts to examine nature

and humans (as a part of nature) in more depth. This artist's understanding of the benefits of painting plants is confirmed by Sewall (1995:213) when she writes that observing nature can be "a vehicle for communion with the nonhuman natural world and may be experienced as a spiritual practice. We experience reverence, simply by looking." The underpinning function of the art practice is therapeutic – the artist, in opening the senses to nature is gaining the powerful spiritual revitalisation from nature and dispelling recurrent feelings of ecoalienation.

2.6 Conclusion to perspectives on gardens

This chapter has explored the nature of the garden in contemporary western society. Through an analysis of the design of our gardens it has been revealed that the qualities of belonging, seclusion, intimacy and reflection are intrinsic to our sensory experience of gardens. The role that gardens hold in shaping personal identity and a sense of belonging to a community is also explored. Chapter three builds on these understandings and turns our attention to the garden genre in art, to examine how individual artistic perceptions of the garden are communicated.

CHAPTER 3: TRADITIONS WITHIN THE GARDEN GENRE: ARTISTIC PERCEPTIONS

3.1 Introduction to the garden genre in art

This chapter provides an overview of the theme of gardens in art and also explores the origins of the status of botanical art. This is followed by an investigation into the work of individual artists who have produced significant collections of paintings of the garden landscape or images concerned with human/plant interaction. The garden genre research was undertaken to explore other artist's sensory and spiritual perceptions of the garden, to position *Gardens of the Mind* within this field of interest, and to nourish the conceptual basis of the practice. The research provides new insights into the garden art genre, positioning it as a significant vehicle for expressing people's relationships with the land and thus raising the status of the garden genre in art.

3.2 Gardens in art

The connection between gardens and art is a finely woven one. Holme (1982) provides a three thousand-year overview of paintings of gardens and explains that much of what we know of the earliest civilisations and their gardens is gleaned from the extant artwork from that time. For example, more is known about Egyptian gardens than many of the other earliest civilizations because details of these were "preserved in tomb and temple paintings, on bas reliefs and were referred to in hieroglyphics found on walls or written on papyri" (Davies 1989:8).

Throughout history, the plants that were represented in decorative motifs were those that were deemed to be of most significance to that particular society, for reasons of usefulness, beauty or because of their symbolic function (Hobhouse 1992). There is evidence of the use of flowers and leaves for personal ornament and the decoration of buildings and pottery before 2000 BC. Hobhouse's (1992) states that:

These early stylised versions of trees, flowers and leaves seem to hint at an appreciation of plants for their beauty. But the plants used most frequently as decorative motifs (and which have continued to be employed through the ages), such as the invaluable palm ... which provided shade for the garden, dates for food and had plenty of more mundane uses ... also had religious significance. The palm was deified as a symbol of fertility and was an important tree in the sacred temple gardens both in Egypt and in the Euphrates and Tigris basins. (Hobhouse 1992:11)

Palmer and Manning (2000) provide a further illustration of the history of gardening being communicated through art when they explain that: "Much of what we know of the layout, design and contents of medieval gardens comes from the gardens portrayed in the backgrounds

of Virgin and Child paintings” (Palmer and Manning 2000:70). Similarly, the history of gardening in Persia has been transmitted through their carpet designs. Davies (1989) asserts that:

The Persians loved their flowers ...and ... to compensate for the brief flowering season they began to weave carpets with a garden design. These stylised versions of their gardens enabled them to relive spring throughout (the) summer and ... winter months.... Floral carpets preserved many designs long after the gardens themselves had vanished and are invaluable today in establishing early garden layout. (Davies 1989:28)

Conversely, the motifs of interior decoration have influenced garden design. Early in the seventeenth century, ornamental gardens resembled the floral embroidered designs on the silks popular for dressmaking (Davies 1989:80). In Elizabethan times intricate pattern was a dominant characteristic of decoration and was most evident in embroidery and the design of gardens. Davies states that:

These arts were closely connected, drawing inspiration from each other. Chair covers, valances, clothes, even shoes, had complex patterns based on nature, with bright flowers and foliage or complete garden scenes. At the same time, a knot garden could reflect the design on an embroidered cushion cover. (Davies 1989:86)

There are close links between gardening and landscape painting in China. The aim of both arts was to represent the essence of the life and form of the landscape. The earliest gardeners in China were the scholars, painters, poets and monks. Davies (1989:40) explains the shared concerns of these endeavours: “Gardening was ranked as an art along with painting, poetry and calligraphy. To excel at one, required excellence in the others, and all were concerned with capturing the essence of nature”.

A further illustration of the strong relationship between painting and gardens can be seen in the work of the Zen monk, Sesshu (1420 – 1506), regarded as the greatest Japanese painter of Muromachi Japan (1392 – 1573), and who was also a poet and garden maker. Davies (1989) describes this connection as follows:

The combination of straight and angular strokes from a Muromachi artist’s paintbrush was seen to capture the essence of rocks within the landscape. Likewise, rock compositions in the garden were abstractions of the natural scenery and resembled those brush strokes of a black monochrome painting. (Davies 1989:59)

In contemporary times, gardens and painting in the west still share common concerns. Both art forms often have a developed sense of a foreground and a background; and framing devices are often employed. Many of the compositional elements applied in painting such as light, shade, texture, balance, and colour are manipulated using a similar perception in gardening. Ross (1998:91) analyses the sister relationship of gardening to painting (and poetry) nominating three qualities, which could be argued to link them: imitation, allusion and

representation. Paintings and gardens also make use of symbols and messages through “inscriptions, sculpture, architecture, [and] plants, even topography” (Ross 1998:54).

Ross (1998) investigates why gardening didn’t become established as an art form equivalent in status to that of painting and poetry. This could have been done, had the garden’s moral and literary content and its lengthy history been emphasised. She asserts that gardening operated as a manual trade handed down from father to son; that the gardeners didn’t group together to form societies to strive for better conditions; and finally that gardens were less able to “share the subject matter of epic poems and mythological paintings”(Ross 1998:48). She concludes by stating that garden’s lack of recognition as an art form, has contributed to the “sense of gardening’s kinship to painting and poetry being lost” (Ross 1998:202).

Ross’s analysis of the status of gardening sheds some light as to why paintings of gardens are perceived to be of low status in comparison to subjects with a more current and extensive history of intellectual endeavour. Paintings of gardens need not be just ‘decorative’; they can deal with complex aspects of a society’s identity.

3.3 The lesser status of botanical art

The botanical – fruit, vegetables, trees and in particular flowers, has been an ongoing source of artistic inspiration for women throughout the centuries. However, in contemporary art, the subject of gardens is denigrated as a feminine tradition and hence of low status. Painting gardens as an oeuvre is problematically close territory to the exclusive practice of flower painting which is regarded as even lower in status as evidenced by Grant’s assertion that: “Flower painting demands no genius of a mental or spiritual kind, but only the genius of taking pains and supreme craftsmanship” (Grant In Pollock 1988:44). This research seeks to investigate the nature of this aspect of art history and to provide an alternate reading of garden images that recognises the female experience.

Insight into how the garden has been a source of inspiration in the lives of women is provided by Isaccs (1987):

The garden, full of colour, peace and fruitfulness, has provided a constant theme in all women’s art. As much as the house, the garden was the domain of the woman of the Australian family from the nineteenth century to the present. It has provided an infinite source of images of flowers, plants and trees as well as the creatures that live within it – butterflies, insects and birds. These have inspired women in all their arts particularly embroideries, lace, drawings and paintings. (Isaccs 1987:22)

All things botanical are associated with obedient domesticity, thus lowering their status and the perceived skill level of those arts utilising botanical subject matter.

When discussing the history of the botanical as female inspiration in Australia, Isaccs provides background into the amateur status of botanical handicrafts and thus through association, all botanical subject matter:

The study of botany was one of the important skills of civilised society in the nineteenth century and both men and women would sketch and paint flowers, fruit, birds and insects. In the early years of Australian settlement, however, the men had to be more concerned with physical labour and the affairs of the colony so it was left to the women to record the new plants and to occupy themselves with the Victorian pastime of drying and pressing native plants. (Isaccs 1987:27)

Indeed, there was much interest at this time in the flora and fauna of the world and this was an additional incentive for Australian women to study the botany of their new home.

In establishing their gardens the new settlers superimposed the gardening traditions of their old homes onto the new landscape. Plants from the mother country were imbued with feelings and memories of the country of origin. Botanical motifs were “symbols of another home, a lost culture, with ancient associations with families, celebrations, funerals and religious beliefs” (Isaccs 1987:38). Herein lies the source of all things botanic being associated with sentimentality, and hence a lack of intellectual endeavour.

As with their gardens, indigenous Australian flora combined with traditional English flowers in aspects of interior design. Isaccs states that:

Flowers are traditional feminine embellishments. Over many centuries women have worn them as part of their personal costume.... Floral designs abound on feminine fabrics and in household interiors on wallpaper, upholstery and curtains. Australian women inherited a long tradition of English floral arts. (Isaccs 1987:22)

The use of botanical information in the home and for self-ornamentation is a manifestation of the feminine desire to engage in decorating, collecting and ritualised activity. These pursuits have not traditionally inspired individualised approaches to art making and have only become acceptable in certain contexts through the efforts of the feminist art movement.

A further factor contributing to the low status of art depicting botanical motifs is the consideration raised by Lippard (1995:133) that: “Since most homemade hobby objects are geared towards home improvement, they inspire less fear in their makers of being ‘selfish’ or ‘self-indulgent’”. This attitude may be responsible for a reticence of the maker to put concerted mental effort into their work, lest it be seen as taking up energy that could be used productively in serving their families. Minimising the importance of the art has associated effects such as lowering presentation standards, and reducing the quality of art materials selected.

Over familiarity with the botanical theme is one explanation for the low status of botanical art. Floral subject matter is common place and artists throughout time have chosen flowers in particular as a readily obtainable source of visual information with which to experiment with colour harmonies, style, and seek solutions to aesthetic problems. The fact that this tradition is so easy to participate in also says much about the plant world's ability to sustain interest, however, in contemporary art more complex and challenging content is required.

Another consideration in an investigation of the low status of botanical subject matter is the personification of nature as female and the ancient mythological belief of women having power over growing things. This writer rejects the earth-based spiritualist dogma that presents women as being closer to nature than men. The perceived supernatural power of women appears to threaten men concerned with dominance and seems to inspire discrimination against women. Being seen as close to nature can be interpreted as being sensitive and weak in the competitive world of work and money where the senses are disregarded in the pursuit of a profit.

Feminist artists and critics in the 1960's and 1970's investigated the history of Australian women artists and their subject matter. The artists confronted the low status of women's crafts which "combined craft media and techniques and an interest in pattern and decoration in their art" (Israel 1987:157). Such women's activities as embroidery, fabric design and sewing were combined with contemporary fine art techniques and a questioning of symbolism in order to address the neglect that women have experienced in the history of art. Their celebration of craft skills was also a manifestation of a yearning to identify with the tradition, processes and sense of belonging that activities such as these provided in the past. Reference to traditional female subject matter and the history of women's art was often done in multi-layered ways in order to express political messages and this had the effect of breaking down some of the old art/craft distinctions.

3.4 Artistic interactions with gardens

The artists selected for inclusion in the garden genre chapter are categorised as expressing the lifeforce of plants or espousing a spiritual connection with nature. The artists chosen were selected on the basis of style, process, or subject matter, and are western, modern or contemporary. The garden genre research was undertaken with the following questions in mind: What could I learn from other artist's perception of the garden? and, how were these artists conveying their spiritual (or other) experience of the garden?

3.4.1 Marianne North (1830 – 1890) – female adventurer artist

North was a Victorian adventurer botanical artist who undertook many expeditions to every continent of the world to make pictorial records of tropical and exotic plants. Her compact compositions of diverse, detailed vegetation explore some of the themes that provide inspiration for me. North’s lively compositions of fecund, exotic flora painted using saturated colour, contain a palpable sense of life. Her painterly output is to be seen in the collection of over 800 paintings housed in the Marianne North Gallery at Kew (Plate 3.1).

IMAGES HAVE BEEN REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

Left: Plate 3.1 Marianne North Gallery at Kew, London (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew 1980:10)
 Right: Plate 3.2 North, Marianne, *North American carnivorous plants* (n.d) (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew 1980:27)

Exoticism is a key theme in North’s work. Huxley (1980:9) notes that, in 1882, when North’s paintings were first displayed at Kew Gardens, photography was in its infancy and the British public, increasingly more aware of the diversity of life on Earth, were hungry for news of the natural wonders of the world. This interest in botanical exotica continues today as evidenced by the avid visitors to the Flecker Botanic Garden's collections of gingers and palms from around the world.

Huxley (1980:12) describes the Marianne North Gallery as “almost overpowering.” He explains that: “It is easy to take a rather cursory view and reel away bemused by sheer quantity, overall colour and a slightly appalled sense of incredible diligence, but a methodical unhurried approach provides many rewards”. Images of the densely packed gallery have inspired me to present my paintings using a grid format to represent a similarly intense visual experience (see Plate 8.1 *Grounded Series*).

At times North's brushwork is overly dry and compositions unresolved. These qualities are due in part to the nature of her production as many of the images were created on location under difficult circumstances, and, apart from some preliminary lessons in oil technique, North was essentially self-taught. *North American carnivorous plants* (n.d.), (Plate 3.2) shows North's style at its best with a masterful handling of green and a well-structured sense of space. North's paintings reveal a powerful thirst to experience immersive observation of the plant world. The vibrancy of her work communicates the pleasure and invigoration that she experienced from her all-consuming passion for botany.

3.4.2 Van Gogh's Garden Paintings

Van Gogh (1803 – 1890) was passionately involved with the life of several gardens and painted flowers and gardens more than any other subject matter. His images of gardens emanate a sense of burgeoning, pulsating life. An understanding of what inspired van Gogh to devote so much artistic endeavour to the painting of gardens is to be found in an exploration of his letters which detail his interest in colour theories, observation of nature, and particular plant preferences (Fell 2001).

Van Gogh's exploration of plant motifs frequently echoed his mood and certainly as vibrant as many of his paintings are, there are some that are equally as dull. However, it was van Gogh's emotional intensity that obstructed recognition of his work during his lifetime. Fell (2001) explains:

Although feeling and expression are evident in most Impressionist art, it is van Gogh's intensity that set him apart from the other Impressionists. For the times his bold, impetuous, energetic style was too big a departure from prevailing artistic tastes. Though Monet's and Renoir's work was at first ridiculed, it presented softer, more romantic imagery, which gradually gained acceptance because it was easier to appreciate. (Fell 2001:17)

Van Gogh's style was more idiosyncratic and expressive in its interpretation of nature than that of the other Impressionists, and this is partly why I have selected his garden images to study.

Another reason why van Gogh's images are of interest to the writer is his preference for the close-up view - which presents a concentrated and searching relationship with nature. According to Fell (2001:17) van Gogh's close-up views were a result of his interest in Japanese art, which frequently depicted close-up views of plants. Other features of the Japanese approach to the garden genre, which van Gogh employed included decorative structures, the garden in all seasons and weathered trees (Fell, 2001:25). In relation to the incorporation of decorative garden motifs (such as carts) into his paintings, Fell has this to say, "Ornament adds a human presence that van Gogh found essential to many of his images" (Fell 2001:90). In

contrast to this approach, I avoid including references to human inhabitation of a garden, as in my view man-made objects interfere with the life force of the garden and often introduce an unwanted sentimental element to the image.

An aspect of the garden as subject matter that van Gogh and the writer have in common is an emphasis on the life force contained in grasses and soil. Van Gogh painted these with gusto, depicting them as moving and energised. Both *Garden Behind a House* 1888 (Plate 3.3) and *Irises* 1889 (Plate 3.4) illustrate the life force of the soil and grasses through broken and energetic brushwork. Fell comments that: “Van Gogh gave the soil a majesty never seen before in artistic expression” (Fell 2001:42). Van Gogh broke away from the traditional treatment of soil as a passive space, he (as do I) represents it as the source of life.

IMAGES HAVE BEEN REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

Left: Plate 3.3 van Gogh *Garden Behind a House* 1888, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 52.5cm (Fell 2001:104) Right: Plate 3.4 van Gogh *Irises* 1889, oil on canvas, 71 x 93cm (Fell 2001)

A further trademark of van Gogh’s work was his use of vibrant colour schemes. Fell’s (2001) study of van Gogh’s approach to colour has refocused my attention of the power of colour schemes to resolve a composition. Van Gogh explored strong colour contrasts and was interested in the colour theories of Chevreul, which included complementary colours, and the idea that juxtaposed, two separate colours often produce the same effect as mixing the colours. Fell (2001) comments that van Gogh often used white (and to a lesser extent silvery grey) to enliven any colour it is placed next to, as well as improving colour combinations and providing resting space. I have followed this example and have used white dry-brushed over several works to unify compositions as well (see Plate 8.13 *Heliconia Caribaea*).

In summation, this analysis of van Gogh’s garden paintings has highlighted the significant role of the close-up view in communicating an artist’s expressive interpretation of the life force of the garden; has affirmed the writer’s understanding of the possibilities of grass

and soil as garden motifs; and refocussed my attention on the power of colour schemes to enliven and resolve a composition.

3.4.3 Rousseau's exotic garden paintings

Rousseau (1844–1910) completed many exotic garden paintings as backdrops for portraits or as stages upon which wild animals roamed. Much of his reference material for these garden landscapes was sourced from frequent visits to the public botanic garden of *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris where exotic tropical plants thrived in hot houses. Rousseau comments on these excursions: “When I enter these hot-houses and see these strange plants from exotic countries, I feel as if I have stepped into a dream” (Rousseau in Marshall Cavendish 1995:2376). Le Pichon references Boitard's (1845) book on the *Jardin des Plantes* to make clear Rousseau's enchantment with this botanic garden:

There is a place, at the very edge of Paris, which is surely the loveliest spot for refreshment and relaxation that one may encounter in this vast, dark, tumultuous universe of Paris. There we find an admirable medley of calm, freshness, shade, burgeoning flowers, all the sweet joys of nature ... all latitudes, the birds of the sky, the ferocious beasts of the desert ... this miraculous garden, on the banks of the Seine... (Boitard In le Pichon 1982:137)

The lushness and immense variety of plant life of Rousseau's painting *The Dream* (1910) (Plate 3.5) appears to encapsulate the essence of this garden.

Other sources of Rousseau's tropical and imaginative subject matter are well known as being magazines, encyclopedias, children's animal books and reproductions of artworks. From these he created new compositions imbuing them with exoticism, a quality explored by several other artists of the time (such as Gauguin and Matisse). Hoog (online: 2003) refers to exoticism as being a reaction against urban life and the domination of the machine. Le Pichon (1982:137) notes that the Parisian public of the time was greatly interested in the descriptions of Asian, African and South American landscapes that were in abundance during the “colonial conquest”. Some of Rousseau's exoticism can also be attributed to his lack of formal training which resulted in the creation of innocent, stylised and flattened interpretations of plants that are frequently distorted, repeated and altered to create new species and compelling patterns.

Rousseau's fascination with nature is apparent in the meticulous way he has painted the details of trees and flowers. “In his famous jungle pictures, he isolated the individual flowers and leaves of his favourite plants and blew them up to an enormous size, giving equal emphasis to every detail, to create a fictional jungle...” (Marshall Cavendish 1995:2376). Rousseau's garden scenes are imbued with the spirit of pleasure and are crammed full of life. His paintings are complex in the depiction of the detail of foliage and simple in their flattening of subject matter.

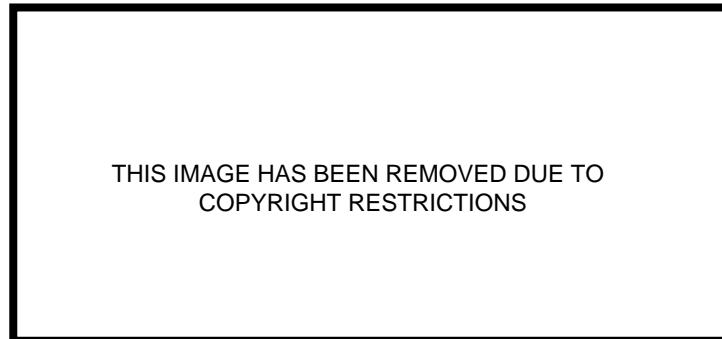


Plate 3.5. Rousseau *The Dream* 1910, 80.5” x 118.5”, oil on canvas.
(Pioch online: 2002)

Many of Rousseau’s images have mystical, spiritual and mysterious qualities. Much of this atmosphere can be attributed to the juxtaposition of subjects in unusual contexts and through the use of bright colours that spring to life against darker colours that provide hiding places. Alley (1978:71) observes that Rousseau’s construction of mood is based in a “strongly lit distance, against which he silhouettes the darker forms of the trees or foliage”. *The Dream* (1910), redolent with romance and music, eloquently illustrates these aspects of Rousseau’s style. I have paid homage to Rousseau’s manipulation of light in the painting *Gingers and Rousseau* (Plate 8.12).

Rousseau uses powerfully illuminated colours and tranquil light to produce his glowing images. Adriani (2001:25) notes that Rousseau’s handling of light is usually frontal and uniformly bright, and on his use of colour he states: “Intense, colourful energy is expressed through piercing tones that are either complementary or dissonant”. Colour contrast is a dominant feature of Rousseau’s work and he also relies on colour to create depth.

Rousseau’s evocative garden paintings illustrate a perception of the garden that emphasises the joy of nature, pleasure, and a delight in observing plant forms. His images remind the viewer of the relaxation and beauty to be found in nature.

3.4.4 Graham’s paintings of the Royal Botanic Gardens of Melbourne

Like Rousseau, Anne Graham (1925 -) has produced a significant body of work in response to a public botanic garden, in her case the Royal Botanic Gardens of Melbourne. Graham’s one

hundred paintings of this Garden have been presented in the text *A Garden for all Seasons: An artist's view of the Royal Botanic Gardens of Melbourne* (Graham, 1998).

In studying man-made gardens, Graham and the writer share a vision of gardens as a civilised Utopia. However, a major difference in our depiction of gardens is that Graham's paintings frequently describe particular sections of the gardens, such as kiosks, herb gardens and BBQ areas. Graham has depicted the gardens as a venue for human recreation and entertainment. She depicts people enjoying the space – picnicking, reading, walking, and enjoying the wildlife. Peers describes Graham's vision as containing a type of holiday delight in images of play and recreation: "Parks and gardens constantly provide her with the setting for gracious social humour and celebration of small but positive experiences in life. Her art draws a wide metaphorical resonance from the many activities taking place within municipal gardens" (Peers In Graham 1998:24).

Graham's garden images are of manicured, panoramic garden views. These peaceful landscapes capture more than one garden room per painting – the composition often cast across paths, architectural features, ornaments and several garden beds. Graham's spacious images often contain a stillness, which evokes a sense of unhurried leisure – a quality significant in the cultural experience of gardens.

Plate 3.6 Graham, Anne. *Exotic Plants*, 1996-7, oil on canvas, 155 x 122cm (Graham1998)

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED DUE TO
COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

Graham has created images that are colourful, decorative and naive in approach. The paintings are quite sophisticated in the manipulation of composition as can be seen in *Exotic Plants* 1996-7 (Plate 3.6). There is some variation in the quality of Graham's paintings but many images lack rich tonal ranges or colour combinations of the calibre of *Exotic Plants*.

These criticisms aside, Graham has succeeded in producing images that communicate a contemporary Australian perception of public gardens as a setting for quiet, regenerating pleasure.

3.4.5 Kushner's use of garden motifs

Kushner (b. 1949) is a New York based artist whose involvement in the use of the garden as a constant source of imagery is derived from his mother's love of gardening, his own garden and the long history of flower painting. Kushner explains his fascination with the flower as subject:

Flowers are lovely. In good taste. Safe. Insipid. Good for amateurs. These stereotyped associations with flower painting attracted me to the genre. Can I imbue my flower paintings with the power, wonder, and sheer beauty that I have always experienced while looking closely at flowers? Can I make these paintings remind us that every blossom is a memento mori, a brush with death?

(Kushner quoted In Anderson-Spivy 1997:60)

For Kushner, flowers are powerful symbols of beauty, pleasure and aliveness. Diehl (1999:online) describes Kushner's interpretation of flowers: "There is a sense of movement, of upward growth, of faith in the processes of renewal, and nature becomes more than subject matter, a source of joy".

Kushner has an equal interest in Western and non-Western art, borrowing motifs and processes from a vast range of cultural sources including Indian fabrics, images of flowers from Chinese clip art books, Africa, China, India, Japan and modern Europe (Anderson-Spivy 1997). Kushner explored themes, processes, and materials drawn from the work of artists, anonymous artisans and traditionally female creative activities (such as embroidery and fabric design). Matisse and Dufy are primary influences – the spontaneous joy of colour and life exuding from their work being the essence of the attraction. For Kushner, ornament and decoration are the foundation of his art. A motivating force in his obsession with pattern stemmed from his observation of Islamic art and his realisation of the awe-inspiring power of decoration (Anderson-Spivy 1997:34).

Warm Season 1993 (Plate 3.7) is a lush example of his mature painting style, which is characterised by rich layers of saturated colour, and the sensuous play of bold line. An oriental flavour is created through the use of metallic elements, which are reminiscent of Asian silks and the calligraphic style, which was influenced by Chinese brush painting. Kushner's intense interest in pattern can be seen in the repetition of motifs and the division of the background into panels, the organisation of which are derived from rug designs. Anderson-Spivy (1997:60) notes that it is the "blown-up images, dramatic cropping, and sense of insistent sexuality" that creates the consistently high visual energy of his work.

Plate 3.7 Kushner, Robert. *Warm Season* (1993) oil, acrylic, glitter and gold leaf on canvas, 48" x 48"
(Anderson-Spivy 1997)

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED DUE TO
COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

Anderson-Spivy (1997) provides an assessment of Kushner's thematic involvement in the garden:

In turning to the garden Kushner allied himself the one of the most constant, universal, and symbolic themes in art. Every culture and religion incorporates the symbol of a garden: a place apart where heaven and earth are most closely aligned. ... the garden provides an evanescent record of cultural uniqueness, a place for personal expression and cultivation. In short, the garden represents almost everything that interests artists – metaphorically, experientially, and expressively. (Anderson-Spivy 1997:59)

Kushner's emersion in the garden genre is an energetic demonstration of the inspiration provided by the observation of plants and their representation throughout time. His original appropriations of a wide range of artistic styles provides inspiration for me as a means of deepening the dialogue with the tradition of depicting the garden in art.

3.4.6 William Robinson's Beechmont Paintings

In contrast to Kushner's energetic, decorative paintings of flowers, the Australian contemporary landscape painter, William Robinson (b. 1936) depicts a garden on a grand psychological scale in his Beechmont images. Despite the monumental subject matter of his work, these paintings often depict a section of his rainforest backyard that is quite restricted in geographical size. Robinson's paintings have a spiritual dimension that summons the viewer to contemplate humanity as minute in the web of nature. His work explores a religious experience of nature with trees, ferns, clouds and mountain ranges cascading into the images to overwhelm the viewer with visual information exploring the evolving cycle of life.

Robinson's influence on my work is significant because he was one of my painting lecturers at college. The primary message that he impressed upon his students, which he absorbed from Bonnard, was to create art about subjects that you know intimately – in Robinson's case, his own surroundings. Robinson's paintings project a deep sense of belonging

and spirit of the various places he has lived in. Robinson moved numerous times over his lengthy painting career and each move signified a change in subject matter and an evolution in style. Fern (1995) notes that these moves were part of a continuous process of refining his personal and painterly identity. For Robinson to paint a location, he had to live there and experience it personally and profoundly communicating a deep sense of wonder in the natural world of his backyards. Robinson identifies himself as a parochial painter explaining that “Lou Klepac [the art critic] tells me a lot of artists should be tied up to their backyard gate and not allowed to move from there”. He continues, “My subject for painting is a very small area, but within that area I can extract information that I know intimately” (Robinson In Cosic 2001:21).

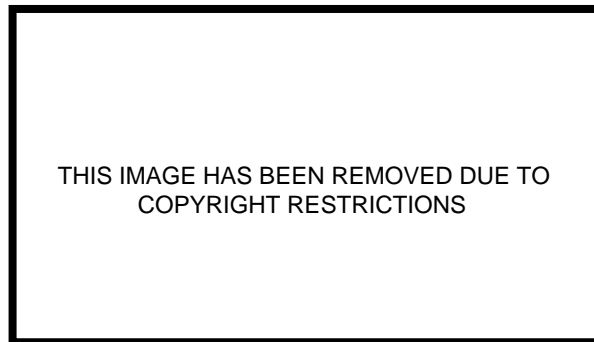


Plate 3.8 Robinson, William *Sunset and misty moon, Beechmont* (Mountain' series) 1993, Oil on canvas, 137 x 183cm (Seear 2001: Plate 64)

Robinson's charmingly open-eyed exploration of his backyards has frequently been labelled naive, however, Fink (2001:24) reminds us that “The amateur is, literally, the ‘lover of’; one who practises his art for private pleasure. Art for Robinson has always been an intensely personal exercise”. Part of Robinson's achievement is the contrast between his often-naive style and the depth of the representation of his spiritual experience. Fink (2001:24) asserts that Robinson is “passionate about etymological and theological connotations of religious enthrallment”. These attitudes are sublimely evident in *Sunset and misty moon, Beechmont* (Mountain' series) 1993 (Plate3.8). This painting, like many of Robinson's images is assigned to a series. This system of naming has directly inspired a similar strategy in my own practice.

Robinson employs the traditional art materials of oil paint and canvas, watercolours, lithographs and etchings. This researcher is also satisfied in utilising a restricted range of conventional media, preferring to accept these boundaries as part of a practice that focuses on

subject matter and style. Robinson's image making process involves horse riding and walking in the landscape, absorbing the atmosphere and storing images in his memory as well as creating pencil and watercolour sketches on site. These images are transferred to canvas using charcoal and a complex carpet-like surface that is built up using multitudinous repetitive brushstrokes that are reminiscent of Bonnard. Robinson's use of the Impressionist technique of placing colours beside each other so that the eye mixes them creates a vibrating energy imbuing the subject matter with luminosity and life.

Robinson's signature style combines many views into one image communicating the enormity of nature and alluding to an active experience of walking through a landscape – observing above and below, close and distant scenes. This multi-viewpoint style reminds the viewer that the artist was surrounded by nature, and is in stark contrast to the traditional perspective of the frontal, distant viewpoint. Seear (2001:22) explains that: “The multiple perspectives created by planes which recede, tilt and plunge, reinforce the feeling of a vastness in nature which is impossible to express or experience from a fixed viewpoint”.

Hart (2001:39) summarises Robinson's contribution to Australian painting as “residing in his visionary response to the natural environment ... [his] ... feeling for luminous colour ... and his multidimensional grasp of time and space also suggesting metaphors for states of mind and being, life and death, continuity and transcendence”. Some of these qualities are made possible through his inclusion of several scenes, times of day and perspectives into the one painting. Robinson's mastery is all the more breathtaking because of the often naive rendering of the images that are woven into his complex vision of the backyard. It is the presence of such oppositional qualities that are the source of Robinson's enduring appeal.

3.4.7 John Wolseley's landscape journeying

Like Robinson, John Wolseley's (1938 -) observes the landscape in an immersive manner. The two artists also have in common an interest in the microcosmic, and a communication of the complexity of nature in their painting. Wolseley's work is not about conventional gardens, the natural landscapes he depicts are uncultivated, nomadic camp gardens. Botanical imagery is a significant feature of his landscape work and his process, philosophy of art making and material usage has much to contribute to an understanding of the communication of a spiritual relationship with the land.

Wolseley has a highly intimate relationship with the places he depicts. The following passage captures the unique qualities of Wolseley's landscape images as they involve the:

... describing of a journey, the sense of time lapsed, the importance of objects organic and inorganic, such as animals and their tracks, insects, rocks, plants and birds. In order to assist in the process of orientation so essential to the journeys Wolseley employs maps and charts, so that events that have taken place at different times occur within the same picture. (Carmichael, Makin and Woseley 1982:39)

Wolseley observes the landscape in a more wholistic manner than the tradition of the French Impressionists, which weaves its way through much western landscape art. Wolseley's viewpoint is not external to the land he is depicting, he describes the land from around him, and he is a part of nature. His images frequently create "a sense of the pace and texture of movement *within* that landscape" (Carmichael et al. 1982:124).

Wolseley's practice is process driven and he often works on isolated sections of an image at a time. This approach frequently creates images that lack compositional organisation. His method is an attempt to find an alternative approach to the traditional European fixed viewpoint artist who arranges the view of the landscape by balancing things aesthetically. Wolseley emphasises that:

...one doesn't usually *experience* land like that, looking at the whole 'field' at one time. One actually experiences it from moment to moment, rock to rock; and it is at the end of the day that one has an overall picture of the land that has been traversed.
(Wolseley In Carmichael et al.1982:150)

Wolseley's artworks are unquestionably and sumptuously aesthetic, however, in conventional compositions there is often more contrast or a stronger focal point. His evenness of treatment is evidence of his holistic view of the environment where one part is not more important than another part. Indeed, the often subtle, nature of his treatment of the land invites the viewer to explore rather than dictating a dominant eye path imposed by the artist on the landscape.

Carmichael et al. (1982) also comments on the lack of compositional unity of many of Wolseley's images: "His theory that the composition might have a structure 'from within' seemed to have worked in parts but in others there was no flow and the picture fell apart" (Carmichael et al. 1982:158). This is the irony of Wolseley's work – it is so very satisfying on so many levels, that it is almost a forgivable oversight, or perhaps a necessity of the process that the viewer is denied exercise of the traditional aesthetic enjoyment of much of his work.

Wolseley's images offer a depth of perception about journeying and moving through a landscape; alluding to the experience of the land from a kinaesthetic and multi-sensory position. Wright and Teo (1999) give insight into Wolseley's individualistic approach:

... scientific representation and its implicit codes of domination are mollified in their application by the new visual explorer's identification with what is seen, as if his seeing were transmuted by some alchemy into a kind of kabbalistic, diagrammatic rendering-up - a meeting point between the piercing eye of scientific knowledge and the concrete topologies of indigenous naming. (Wright W. and Teo L. (eds) 1999:10)

A sometimes-startling element of Wolseley's work is the incorporation of scientific observations of flora and other aspects of the land. The highly detailed drawings are a contrast with the emptiness of the images, the diaristic wanderings, and the deliberate weathering of his work. Wolseley (1998) explains his style:

Sometimes I want to get the thing accurate and anatomical. Sometimes I want to express its mood and would like to do the equivalent of a haiku in paint. What I hope is that when all these meditations are strung together the whole will be sort of stream of consciousness and, though huge, perhaps epic (?), will have a gentle meditative pace to it. (Wolseley 21 August 1980 In Grishin 1998:60)

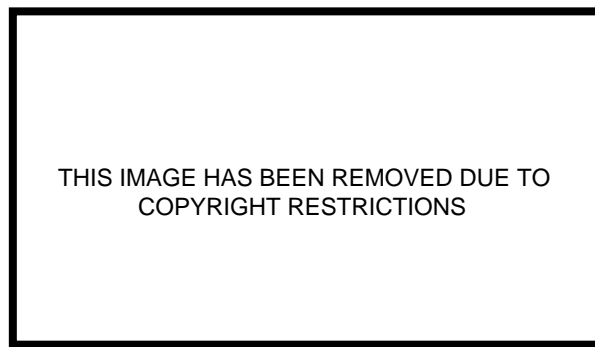


Plate 3.9 Wolseley, John. *Salmon Muller's Line and the Geography of Leaves*, 1998. graphite and watercolour on nine sheets of paper, 136 x 205cm (Grishin 1998)

Many of these qualities are illustrated in Wolseley's 1998 *Salmon Muller's Line and the Geography of Leaves* (Plate 3.9). The colour scheme, however, is unusually intense as it varies from his typically muted natural tones and pigments. The background shapes appear to take on the form of islands and the close-ups of leaf studies are metaphoric clouds against a sea of colour, while the contour drawn fungi allude to the representation of a mountain on a map. Grishin (1998:73) theorises that the ... "tiny microcosmic 'snapshots' are comments on geology and deep time, on lifestyles and cultural habits, on the unfolding ecological catastrophe..." Scale has been manipulated in order to communicate the oneness of the relationships of the different parts of the ecosystem.

Wolseley's perception of nature is nomadic, immersive and solitary. His images have an even pace to them because they are often been created in 'empty' landscapes and also

because of the limited colour scheme. Ultimately, Wolseley's work represents an ecological wholeness and a spiritual identification with the land. His paintings are far removed from the traditional view of the landscape and demonstrate ways to communicate personal and philosophical content through images depicting the botanical.

3.4.8 Fiona Hall's perception of the garden

Like Wolseley, Fiona Hall (b. 1953) draws on the world of science in her depiction of botanical information. She is a contemporary Australian artist who has produced a significant body of work on the subject of the garden. Many of her images comment on contemporary human existence and our tenuous relationship with nature. Hart (1998:204) defines Hall's work as exploring the complex theme of "layered interactions between the plant world and human existence" and states further that "among the most striking aspects of her work are the interrelationships between the body and the plant world".

Davidson (1992:5) in addressing Hall's work describes the garden "as a site of interaction between the human world and the natural world – a complex microcosm of structures based on power and pleasure." She continues by writing that it is "in the garden (that) our own naturalness, physicality, is also conspicuous by way of our senses which are continually aroused and engaged". This later notion is a significant perception of the garden given that this study seeks to investigate the sensory experience of the garden.

Hall incorporates drawing, photography, sculpture and painting into many of her works, often using materials that include everyday household objects. Her use of low cost, mass-produced items is frequently startling, because the viewer must delve into the mystery of the images to draw connections between the different layers of the artwork. The sardine tin series of works, for example, demonstrates exquisite craftsmanship in aluminium that is reminiscent of fine silver jewellery, however the viewer must ponder how sardines relate to human sensuality? The sardine cans contain bodies that are uniform and packed in closely. The reading is that human sensuality is tightly compartmentalised into our modern, cramped lifestyle, packed away, too smelly to be displayed openly, revealed only when convenient, and then often in containers that have dangerously sharp edges.

Hall's work often includes literary references or utilises scientific classification systems. Her *Paradisus Terrestris* (1989-90) series of which *grapefruit: (Citrus paradisi)* (Plate 3.10) is a part, refers to one of the first British gardening texts to classify plants. Davidson (1992:18) describes the *Paradisus* series as referring to "the temptation in the Garden of Eden, discernible here as intricately formed sexual organs, hands and breasts, corresponding to the sensuous

attributes of the plants above”. The familiar metaphor of plant and human sexuality is interpreted in a contemporary, overt and original way.

Plate 3.10 Hall, Fiona. Grapefruit:
(*Citrus paradisi*) from the series
Paradisus Terrestris 1989-90,
aluminium and tin, 25 x 15 x 3cm
(Davidson 1992:19)

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED DUE TO
COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

Hall’s sophisticated use of materials and complex communication of themes is at a highpoint with the sardine tin series. The sumptuous resolution of this series lies in the artist’s use of only one material and is in contrast to much of her earlier work that combines organic and inorganic materials with the effect of dissonance. In the sardine tin series plant and man-made subjects are sensuously and evocatively combined.

Hall’s precise botanical observation is combined with fertility imagery to produce startling results in this *Paradisus* series. Hart (1998:206) interpretation of this series is as follows: “Hall’s own sense of the fantastic is apparent in her grasp of the regenerative, erotic nature of plants, finding affiliations with human sexuality and sensuality”. This researcher would argue that Hall is making obvious the unstated source of the visual appeal of many plants to humans. This interaction is not based in fantasy but according to Shannahan (2001), it is the sexual appeal of plants that permits their collection by humans and thus transportation to new sites. The erotic nature of plants is a key source of interaction between the plant and human worlds.

Hall researches individual plant species in depth. She is interested in systems of plant classification and some of her images of plants are entitled using a three part naming system, including the botanical, common, and Aboriginal names. She views the naming system as informative of the society from which it originates. Morrell (1990:46) theorises on Hall’s investigation of classification systems by writing that: “Her work is about the ancient and

continuing need to make a system and a structure of things to fear and believe. She studies the way civilisation has tried to make logical order out of the chaos of life". Fiona Hall's investigation of the garden is a potent commentary on the nature of human arousal, the sensual experience of the garden, and classification systems. Her observations of the human plant relationship are compelling and informed by extensive research.

3.5 Depicting the sensory and spiritual experience of gardens

This research into the artistic perceptions of the garden found that depicting a sensory and spiritual experience of gardens was frequently communicated through the use of intimate and multi-viewpoints and the detailed depiction of growth forms in optimum health. Other characteristics that carry this message include: the use of titles which intimate broad ranging concerns; enlivening colour schemes and active brushwork.

CHAPTER 4: PERSONAL INTERACTION WITH THE GARDEN

4.1 Reflecting on the botanical

The paintings of the Flecker Botanic Gardens that make up the practical component of *Gardens of the Mind* are an extension of the representational plant images that I produced in my teens. The early subject selection of plants was made subconsciously in order to provide an alternate focus from the human environment that surrounded me. In my twenties I continued to respond to plant material in the context of still life painting. I recall being interested in representing the beauty of the wilderness, however it was physically inaccessible, and was too separate from my everyday existence. Now in my thirties, exploring the garden as a symbol of the human and natural worlds overlapping is a means of indulging in an ordered, yet unpredictable living beauty and creates a sense of belonging to home and community.

4.2 The Artist's own garden history

Understanding something about the artist's life often sheds light on an exhibition's perspective. Therefore, a brief description of the gardens I have tended and the period of my life they are associated with is provided.

4.2.1 Childhood Rainworth Garden

For the first twenty years of my life I grew up in Rainworth, a quiet, hilly Brisbane suburb at the foothills of Mt Cootha. Our large family lived in a Federation style home rented for a nominal fee from my Grandmother and Great Uncle. The large garden was a sloping double lot sharing fences with four properties. At the bottom of the garden a wall of twenty metre high pine trees created a deep green enclosure. On the left side a large Poinciana tree draped over the fence sheltering our view of one neighbour and beside this property lay an old lady's garden with immaculately tended garden beds of chrysanthemums and vegetables. On the opposite and closest side, a bauhinia tree and two large golden fir trees nudged the fence near my bedroom.

Our own garden consisted mainly of bushes that my father pruned heavily twice a year. His technique may have been appropriate in England (from whence he originated) but the effect was a persistently barren garden. The trees that had been established before our arrival were largely viewed as a danger to our constantly overflowing plumbing. The backyard consisted of open grass for playing cricket and riding go-karts, a shed, a set of swings and a long vacated chicken coup. The front yard contained a gravel driveway, my studio caravan, and sloping grassed areas that we used to roll down. My seven sisters and brothers each had allocated jobs around the garden, and mine was to weed the stony beds down one side of the house.

My father, a deeply religious man, had a daily ritual of reading the Bible and natural health books in the garden every morning after breakfast. Dad lost the sight in one eye from a stone chip when mowing and as time went by lost most of the sight in the other eye from glaucoma, however, he still managed to do most of the weeding. I suppose that he did this in order to stay active and to obtain relief from an overcrowded house. My father's blindness affected my artistic identity to some extent, as he was unable to appreciate my efforts in this important area of endeavour. I felt unacknowledged despite his encouragement for our academic success and the enthusiastic praise offered from the rest of my family. I can remember as a young adolescent presenting my father with my latest artistic effort, and he leaning forward, straining to make some sense of the paper in front of him. Unable to see the image, he gave a deep, bitter groan and retreated back into his armchair.

Conversation didn't bridge the sight barrier as neither of us had much propensity for conversation on an interpersonal level. Dad hadn't had the opportunity to develop this as he had grown up in a home for motherless children in London at the dawn of the twentieth century. (His mother had died giving birth to Dad's brother, and my grandfather, unable to care for three children on his own had placed them in care.) Despite the lack of a role model, my father put all of his energy into caring for his own children.

From the age of five my mother encouraged me to be an artist. In contrast, my father, who had managed to work throughout the Great Depression, quietly advised a government job. Always the diplomat, I decided to become an art teacher as I viewed this to be a compromise between the two points of view and the source of much needed security for me.

The art education course was uninspiring and I failed to immerse myself in my studies. Painting classes with William Robinson and Ian Smith made some impact, however, it was late in both their teaching careers; they put little energy into their classes and tended to be dismissive of teacher trainees. This lack of a quality art education has been made up for over the years through part-time study and access to supervisors who have assisted the development of my practice. Being deprived of an inspiring art education has also fuelled my desire to provide my own students with meaningful art experiences in a supportive learning environment.

4.2.2 Gardenless Gold Coast unit

At the age of twenty I took up my first teaching position on the Gold Coast. It was a coincidence that my boyfriend at the time lived in a unit across the road from the school and I saw it as easier to move in than organise a new life. I painted the upstairs unit's still-lives and views, which contained only glimpses of foliage in the form of pot plants and palm trees. At the

end of the year I was given a transfer to a remote Aboriginal community, and promptly resigned, opting to go overseas for a couple of months. Upon my return, I worked in my boyfriend's newly established pottery in Gladstone Queensland, manufacturing kitchen and domestic ware for the gift and corporate market. I was in charge of the gallery and decorating the huge output with predominantly floral designs. These designs originated from plants in the Rainworth home that were my mother's favourites – pink and apricot lilies and fuchsias. The decorations were pretty, feminine and sold well. In fact they were so popular that we became overworked.

4.2.3 First garden: Inner City Gladstone

After a couple of years, we bought a Queenslander on a corner block in the inner city. The garden was bare, so many natives and a large veggie patch were planted. Over a period of years, my then partner succumbed to the twin diseases of workaholism and alcoholism and would periodically burn sections of the garden when chronically depressed. In the end I did all the gardening and after eight years of painting flowers at the pottery, I made a fresh start both personally and professionally and took up a teaching post in Cairns. Part of this fresh start also involved making the decision to make a larger place for art in my life so that a strong interest would provide depth, and a sphere of total control and continuity in my life. Participating in the visual art tradition gives me a sense of connection to a history of endeavour and to some extent is a forum for crafting part of my identity.

4.2.4 Tropical, suburban Edge Hill Garden

In coming to Cairns the shared housing merry-go-round was my lot for three years, after which I bought a house close to the Botanic Gardens. I never considered moving into my new boyfriend's unit as it didn't have a garden and I was determined to do things my way this time. Fortunately, he was easy going, ready for change and so moved in. The garden of this modest home consists mainly of palms and flowering bushes, which create privacy, shade and an attractive, growing, landscaped area for the home.

My current garden is very much a fantasy, established upon the enthusiasm generated by watching popular Australian TV gardening shows such as *Gardening Australia* (ABC TV). Dreaming about and planning a garden are almost as beneficial and stimulating as actually working it. This garden is reasonably low maintenance but there are always areas in need of attention. After some years a happy balance has been struck between my partner's need for order and my desire for flowing arrangements. Now, some years later, with a toddler in tow, more time is being spent in the garden pottering around because this environment provides new

opportunities for exploration. It is a pleasant paradox that I am busier than ever, and yet more time is spent in the garden, as it has become a place of retreat.

In having a home and studio of my own at last, I was able to pursue through distance education a Graduate Diploma of Art through the Gippsland Centre of Art and Design. This proved to be a highly rewarding experience and after much experimentation the subject of my suburban garden was settled upon for my final exhibition. This theme was perceived as being capable of carrying in a metaphorical sense, the spiritual philosophies that were shaping my identity. The majority of the works in the 2000 show were expressive, perceptually orientated images of my suburban, tropical garden located in Edge Hill, Cairns. The exhibition, entitled *Moving gently through*, expressed sentiments of connecting with the life force of the plant world, an idea which *Gardens of the Mind* continues to extend. The topic of gardens was found to be a fulfilling experience and one that was seen to have much ongoing potential for self-expression. Making images in response to gardens was found to be a means of sandwiching nature connectedness into a busy schedule.

4.3 External public space

After a year of intensively observing my small plot, it was time to explore another garden. The municipal garden of Flecker Botanic Gardens, one kilometre from my doorstep was settled on. It was one of the first places I visited in Cairns and I have vivid memories of the dense and mesmerising atmosphere. The huge flora that looked like shanks of meat made a compelling impression on me. This shared garden provides a larger plant world to interact with. This environment was perceived to be very much a part of my new localised territory and this feeling of ownership is intrinsic to the autobiographical aspect of the study. I wanted to make images about the land I inhabit, not a pristine natural landscape.

Producing works in response to the plant environment of the Flecker Botanic Gardens was a way of narrowing the scope of the study of gardens. The garden was close at hand, and required little organisation to visit. The public nature of the garden was also a desirable quality, as many of the people who view the final exhibition would also visit the gardens, thus opening up opportunities for dialogue in the local community.

One of the reasons I was creating images in response to the local territory of the FBG (and my own garden before that) was to rid myself of a sense of placelessness or rootlessness that several years of repeatedly moving towns and share housing had created. By regularly visiting and painting this garden I was fuelling a sense of attachment, security and identity,

confirming this new town as mine. Lippard (1997) explains the various stages of identification with local environment:

For some people the lure of the local is neither felt nor acknowledged; for some it is an unattainable dream: for others it is a bittersweet reality, at once comforting and constricting; for others it is only partial reality, partial dream. These days the notion of the local is attractive to many who have never really experienced it... (Lippard 1997:7)

Lippard's lure of the local shares some sensibility with Relph's (1976) discussion of the enticing insideness of places, which reveals that:

To be inside a place empathically is to understand that place as rich in meaning, and hence to identify with it, for these meanings are not only linked to the experiences and symbols of whose place it is, but also stem from one's own experiences
(Relph 1976:54).

At an instinctive level I was in awe of the rich history and layers of meaning encapsulated in the gardening tradition of the FBG. In having undertaken reading about the history and nature of gardens I now understand the symbols that make up the FBG.

The artist William Robinson (b.1936) also has much to offer in a discussion of place. He describes himself as a parochial painter who extracts visual information from a confined area, thus forcing himself to search deeply to express and forge relationships with place. Similarly, Lippard (1997:278) warns against a superficial representation of place when she writes that: "A "place ethic" demands a respect for a place that is rooted more deeply than an aesthetic version of "the tourist gaze" provided by imported artists whose real concerns lie elsewhere or back in their studios."

So for me, undertaking regular field trips and social visits to the FBG provides a continuity of interaction that has built up layers of understanding and attachment to this place. Participating in the Friends of the FBG has also assisted in this process by providing access to a wealth of knowledge about, and attachment to the Garden.

4.4 Identifying the research site

The Flecker Botanic Gardens is an environment of mystery and paradise. It is a sanctuary that exudes pungent, prolific life, through the burgeoning undergrowth, the huge organ-like flowers, exotic plant forms and extensive canopy. It demonstrates prolific indigenous plant life as well as providing the optimum conditions for growing rare tropical flora from throughout the world in an area only four kilometres from the City Centre. It is little wonder the Gardens is such an intense sensory and aesthetic experience as its location "in an 80 kilometre radius of Cairns ... is believed to be one of the richest resources of indigenous flora and fauna to be found in the world" (Henty 1988:127).

In representing flora of the Wet Tropics and Equatorial regions, the FBG is in an important position on a national and global scale because it is the only Wet Tropical Botanic Gardens in Australia and it is not hindered by the underdevelopment or lack of resources experienced by many tropical countries (Cairns City Council Services online: 2004). The Gardens has a budget of one million dollars and the plant collections are seen as a source of pride and as a jewel in the crown of Cairns (Warmington 2002, pers. comm.).

The FBG was established close to the site of a nursery selling native plants and orchids that was opened in 1888 by a botanical collector Eugene Fitzalan. The Cairns City Council named it in 1971 after Dr Hugo Flecker, the founder of the Flecker Herbarium and North Queensland Naturalist Club (formed in order to construct a Botanical Garden). The FBG is located in the suburban suburb of Edge Hill and covers an intensively cultivated area of 2.5 hectares. The Gardens is surrounded by larger areas of parkland with a salt-water area in one direction (Centenary Lakes) and to the left and behind the dry rainforest mountain reserve of Mt Whitfield Conservation Park.

The FBG is designed to give the impression of a natural tropical landscape availing freedom of exploration (Warmington 2002, pers. comm.). It has an informal layout characterised by meandering pathways, layered plantings and a limited number of signs. Vince Winkel (the Curator and Director of the Parks and Gardens Department of the Cairns City Council from 1966-1984) focussed “his landscaping attention ... on the need for pleasing the visitor through varying the leaf textures [and] creating anticipation by having curving pathways leading round corners. He believed in forming groups of trees and disliked specimen planting...” (Henty 1988:132).

The Garden consists of a collection of native and exotic tropical plants including rare and valuable collection specimens, different species of palms, a collection of fruit trees, native and exotic rainforest trees and a large selection of gingers and aroids (Cairns City Council n.d.:1). The plants of particular interest in this thesis are heliconias, gingers, the Cannonball tree, Sago palm, tropical fruits and orchids.

The FBG provides a sense of enclosure, of insiderness and protection. Ross (1998:170) defines enclosure as inferring to: “a basic sensory and kinaesthetic notion of surroundedness, of being surrounded. It can also signify comfort, security, passivity, rest, privacy, intimacy, sensory focus, and concentrated attention”. This sense of enclosure is intrinsic to an appreciation of the Gardens and is created by the seating, visual screening of vines on gates and

fences and internal gardens that form room-like spaces. In addition, the dense perimeter created by a fence that surrounds the Garden has layers of foliage on either side of it and this separates the Garden from the surrounding roads and suburb. An atmosphere of mystery is created through the screening, narrow pathways, overhanging growth and pathways that create a sense of anticipation.

The FBG is a place of profound significance to many individuals in Cairns. In a very concentrated area it characterises much of the environment that draws many from the South. This fecund environment typified by its informal style, luxuriant growth, enormous heliconias and extremes of leaf shapes and forms was perceived to be the icon of my new localised territory of Cairns. [Ironically approximately seventy per cent of the plants are exotic (Warmington 2002, pers. comm.)]. The plants are lush, vigorous and productive resembling a living Garden of Eden complete with fruit and birds. The FBG is not a pristine, natural landscape; it is a highly cultivated symbol of people's relationship with the land. It is an important source of individual and communal identity and history, a place to which people have emotional and psychological ties. It is recognised as such as evidenced by the daily stream of tourist buses that unload their visitors at its gates and compete with the peace loving locals for an uplifting experience of this magnificent garden.

4.5 Personal interaction with the Flecker Botanic Gardens

In this study the approach to making paintings of plants of the FBG is contemplative and expressive. Painting gardens is undertaken as an activity in which observation of nature soothes the soul, thus providing a balm against a lifestyle of routines and responsibilities, and a palliative for an overstimulated mind that is a product of the modern way of life. For me, visiting and painting gardens stimulates the senses, thus providing a spiritual experience, as empathy with nature is a part of my feeling of oneness with the world.

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY FOR RESEARCHING THE SITE

5.1 Establishing the parameters of the study

This thesis is a personal exploration of the ideology of the garden and is written from the point of view of an artist. The process of artmaking and research practices incorporates sensitivities to the sensory, emotional and spiritual dimensions of human experience. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge that the conditions conducive to establishing a desired state of openness to the natural world are actively cultivated and an important element in the methodology. I recall the Australian landscape painter William Robinson referring to the need to cultivate receptiveness to nature in a 1986 painting class, “You know it takes a particular state of mind to create these images” (Robinson 1986, pers. comm.). Therefore, some information pertaining to the development of my deep appreciation of the FBG is included.

Gardens of the Mind is an idiosyncratic visual exploration of one particular tropical garden, that of the Flecker Botanic Gardens. The FBG was selected as the subject of the study as this environment is located close to my residence thus allowing me to explore a personal sense of place in my local community as well as having the advantage of requiring little organisation to visit. More importantly the FBG symbolises the tropical, fecund plantworld that exists in pockets of the Cairns geography. The decision to focus the practical component of the study on creating paintings solely in response to the environs of the FBG confined the project in a manageable way. The visual opportunities were found to be prolific as the cycle of growth and decay, the changing seasons, and the evolving nature of my perception all presented fresh possibilities for portrayal.

Three different aspects of the artist’s experience of the garden will be represented through the following interrelated series:

The *Garden Series* will have a representational focus concentrating on the diversity and profundity of the garden’s plantlife.

The *Wallpapers of the mind series* will be decoratively inspired and draw on the history of the botanical in art making.

The series entitled *Open your heart to the sky* will be concerned with calligraphically representing a meditative experience of the garden.

The processes and materials used will be predominantly conventional in nature. Experimentation into different styles and media will be curtailed by the need to present a unified exhibition. Canvas size will be primarily be small and intimate to allow for portability to and

from the Gardens and to facilitate the timely resolution of images. Larger canvases will extend the theme of the smaller images.

A scientific botanical classification system will not be used in the thesis as the focus of the study is on the expressive interpretation of plants, as opposed to producing scientifically accurate descriptions of them. Botanical classification systems reflect the concerns of the society from which they originate and operating within such a system would shift the focus from the spiritual and visual to the political and scientific.

Parameters established in the study are dominated by the desire to represent the regenerating aspect of human interaction with nature. The paintings will express the lifecycle of the plantworld and act as a vehicle for pondering a spiritual connection with nature.

5.2 Extant research sources

Many local artists visit the Gardens at one time or another for inspiration as the plant life is so vibrant. What separates this study from works of a general botanic nature is the fact that *Gardens of the Mind* is exclusively focussed on the FBG, is an intensive research project and draws on the long history of gardens in art for inspiration.

5.3 Capturing the philosophy

In order to gain an understanding of the history and aims of the Flecker Botanic Gardens I will attend tours of the Gardens and interview the Curator of the Gardens. Library and Internet research on the Gardens will be undertaken and I will join the Friends of the Botanic Gardens – a group committed to improving the Gardens and sharing their knowledge and enjoyment of botany.

5.3.1 Tours of the FBG by the interpretive officer

The Gardens provide the service of a daily tour by the interpretive officer whose role it is to educate visitors about the history and plants of the gardens. During the study, I will attend several of these talks which are delivered by Peter Shanahan, a biologist who has worked at the Gardens for over a decade. The tours are an entertaining way of expanding my appreciation of the complex relationship between humans and plants. At times the interpretive officer resembles an animated textbook, such is the depth of his knowledge. The tours are tailored to the interests of the audience, so I will be able to gain an appreciation of the social and historical significance of the particular plants that I will be painting. Some of the tours will be audio taped in order to permit reflection on particular themes, stories or facts. The interpretive talks are scheduled to last for 90 minutes but frequently extend to twice this length.

5.3.2 Interviewing the Curator of the Flecker Botanic Gardens

The Curator of Gardens will be interviewed in order to investigate the nature of the FBG including its history, design considerations and gain an appreciation of the planting decisions. The aims of this activity are 1. To explore how landscape aesthetics is being manipulated and perceived at this particular site; and 2. To investigate the roles that the FBG performs for its community. Preparation for the interview will include construction of a series of questions centred on these themes. A hand held tape recorder will ensure that information can be reviewed and analysed at length to ascertain its relevance to the thesis. This interview will examine the relevance of, and link the literature review to the local environment.

5.4 Selection of media

Acrylic painting on canvas will be the main media as these materials are durable and allow for the constant revision of marks and are an affordable means of presentation with no framing needed. Acrylic colours are vibrant and substantial, essential qualities in the depiction of the burgeoning life of the garden. Layering of acrylic paint permits depth to emerge, thus developing a sense of affinity with the subject.

Diversions into watercolour and mixed media on paper will allow for the exploration of more calligraphic approaches and will provide some variety of processes for the artist. These materials are direct and easy to transport – ideal for field trips. The watercolour media in combination with black waterproof ink has in the past been a familiar diaristic media for the artist.

5.5 Choice of style

A form of representation concentrating on the detailed observation of plant life will be the primary style of painting. This style will serve as ecotherapy for the artist ie. as “the healing and the growth that is nurtured by healthy interaction with the earth” Clinebell (1996:xxi). This style will frequently involve the cropping of images resulting in an abstraction by scale and conveying a searching relationship with nature. These paintings are to have a meditative quality and explore the spiritual dimension of human interaction with gardens. Human inhabitants, garden furniture, ornamentation or architecture will not be depicted, as these tend to introduce a sentimental element and detract from the all-encompassing experience of the Garden’s lifeforce.

As a result of examining the landscape theories of Appleton (1996) and Bourassa (1991) I was able to select localities for visual exploration with insight and efficiency. Those sections of the Gardens providing a sense of enclosure and mystery were found to be most desirable subjects. My choice of garden scenes to visually explore is dominated by close-up

and ground views. The close-up view enables the viewer to observe the light effects and surface of the plants. This perspective communicates a sense of the nearness of the plants. Ground views represent the way I experience movement through the garden, observing the path that I walk on.

As a result of researching the artists in the garden genre chapter, subtle shifts in my artistic process have been made. Wolseley's practice of pouring many of his intellectual concerns about the environment into the representation of landscapes has inspired me to identify and incorporate these cultural representation into my own images. Wolseley and Robinson's approach to grouping and titling categories of works into series has inspired me title works in a similar way.

Wolseley's philosophy of representing his spiritual experience of the landscape as all around him and himself as a part of nature, tracking his movements within it has served to crystallise my intention to depart from the traditional landscape approach of viewing the landscape from a distance.

5.6 Field studies and photography

Frequently visiting and walking around the FBG with a relaxed and aware state of mind will permit new visual possibilities to present themselves. The act of walking around the gardens is an important part of the methodology for as Lippard (1997:17) notes: "Motion allows a certain mental freedom that translates a place to a person kinesthetically" allowing the walker to determine the rhythm of the land.

Several series of works will be created primarily on location at the Gardens. In these works there is an emphasis on process and expressiveness because my art practice is formed around the need to create images in a fluid and vital way.

Photography will play a significant role in sourcing reference material for some of the paintings. These studio images will be based on a reconstructed form of representation, and comprise a considerable proportion of the artistic production. Large canvases (80 x 100cm) were rarely taken into the gardens. Photographs will be taken with paintings in mind, in other words, I have a clear idea of the sorts of images that I'm seeking out. These often include intimate views that permit the viewer to investigate the subject's detail and energy.

The act of taking photos also introduces new ways of seeing. For example, adjusting the focal length of the lens alters the relationship of the viewer to the subject. The influence of

photography will be evident in the heavily cropped nature of the subjects – allowing the viewer to study form and texture in a more concentrated and isolated way than might normally occur.

The camera is a Nikon F90 with a 28mm – 70mm lens. Films of 400 ASA will be used to allow for the shady conditions and permit details to be captured. Photographs will mostly be taken between 8am and 10am – during the Garden’s opening hours, but before the light becomes too strong to capture fine detail and extensive tonal gradations. A tripod will not be utilised, as it is too cumbersome and heavy for walks around the gardens. Images will be developed and printed at Tropical Pics whose personnel deliver a consistently high standard of workmanship.

5.7 Reflection and documentation

There will be a strong emphasis in the art making process on decision making and reflection upon the concepts being communicated. A journal will be maintained to organise the progress of the body of works. Studio critiques and regular documentation will be undertaken to assist in providing feedback and charting the direction of the work.

5.7.1 Journal Writing

Practical works will be reflected on through a process of journal writing, which will assist in maintaining clear goals and also provide a forum for the habitual process of self-expression. The maintenance of a journal will ensure that there is due consideration given to decision making as well as reflection on the processes and product. The journal’s content will include concept sketches for images, recent work achievements, influences and inspirations. The journal is not approached as a public document suitable for display in a gallery, however, having said this, the content is primarily focussed on the concerns of the practice rather than being personal in nature.

Compositional problems will be addressed in the journal. It should be noted though, that generally, images are not planned extensively before starting work as I have a psychological need fulfilled by the art practice, to take risks and explore different directions as the work unfolds.

The range of ideas that inform my work is extensive and it is at times necessary to monitor the rate at which new content is explored. This makes it possible to maintain a balance between fresh material and ongoing concerns that have developed complexity and depth and deserve further exploration. Working in series of images also assists in creating continuity of style, as the artist can change small things from one image to the next. Journal writing is an integral part

of the process of sifting through ideas, of prioritisation and restructuring that is necessary to produce a thematically consistent body of work.

5.7.2 Studio critiques and supervisor feedback

Professional artist associates of the region will be asked to participate in informal studio critiques. The JCU visual art postgraduate student group (to which I belong) will also provide input on the artwork and aspects of the writing. Supervisor feedback will be sought on conceptual and compositional concerns four times a year.

5.7.3 Documentation of the artworks

Paintings will be photographed and documented three times a year. Documentation will consist of standard size colour photos on matt paper, mounted on white archival paper. Accompanying text will focus on the central idea, how it was communicated and an evaluation of the image. These pages will be inserted into archival protective document pockets which allow for the organisation of images thematically and into sections of exhibition quality works and less successful images. If at a later time, an image is determined to be less than resolved the photographs will be drawn over using chinagraph pencils to further explore aspects of the composition. This process of regularly documenting the artworks will assist in organising a coherent conceptual basis of the body of work.

5.8 The exhibition

In order to position the exhibition as representing the artist's participation in the world of the garden the following strategies will be employed:

- A statement detailing the artist's experience of the Garden will be displayed.
- A catalogue including a list of all works, their details and a brief essay explaining the intent of the exhibition will be displayed.
- Key paintings in the exhibition will be accompanied by a short paragraph outlining the intent of the image or series.
- I will present an artist talk prior to the exhibition opening outlining the intent of the work.
- The Curator of the FBG will be requested to open the exhibition by speaking on the topic of the value of the FBG for its community and my supervisor Margaret Genever will speak at the opening on the exhibition's artistic perspective.
- Publicity relating to the artist's statement will be sent to local newspapers.

CHAPTER 6: ARTISTIC PRACTICE TOWARDS THE EXHIBITION

6.1 Technical basis for the practice

The technical basis for the practice consists of three primary modes of art making: acrylic painting, calligraphic drawing on site and watercolour printmaking. The acrylic painting and calligraphic drawing on paper works could be described as conventional in media usage, while the watercolour printmaking employed a variety unconventional printing materials.

6.2 Acrylic painting technique

My facility with the use of acrylic paint on canvas developed during the project, as works on paper had been the main focus of artistic endeavour prior to the study. Acrylic is now my preferred paint medium due to its relatively low toxicity, quick drying time and durability. The processes and materials used are largely developed from personal experience, reading and attending the occasional workshop early on in my artistic development.

Whenever possible I sketch up subjects directly onto the canvas at the gardens. This provides for an immediacy of contact with the subject – a spiritual bonding of a sort. Indeed, this initial act of drawing is quite a Zen like process in which all the senses are tuned to the moment. It is both relaxing and exciting, and the intense focussing of concentration demands an emptying of the mind of all other extraneous self-talk. The importance of this *plein air* process is that it provides a sense of connectedness with the subject allowing the artist to experience the tactile and sensory concerns of smell, humidity, sun, insects, birds, the gardeners working, and other visitors to the gardens.

Images are sketched onto the canvas using an ochre coloured aquarelle pencil, which is easily removed with a damp cloth or painted out with gesso. The mid-toned pigment blends easily into the vast majority of colour schemes and doesn't interfere with overpainting. The background image is then blocked in quite quickly. Once the overall structure is established, the image is let to dry for 24 hours before a varnish of acrylic paint medium is applied to the canvas. This protects the underpainting and provides a sealed, smooth surface, which permits more substantial brushstrokes – the successive layers of paint are thicker and sit up off the previous layers of paint. Utilising this varnish generally twice during the creation of a painting also has the benefit of enabling controlled wiping back of paint without removing established areas.

The acrylic paints employed were predominantly of the Atelier brand as this was the only brand stocked by the local art supply store. Liquitex gesso was used as it produces a finer

and smoother surface than Atelier. Brushes utilised were mostly small in size with marks often having a strong linear quality. Liner brushes were used quite extensively in creating detailed areas. As the work progressed I began to block in background colours using a sponge brush. This sped up the painting process and provided for a more unified image. Larger brushes were also used to block in areas and this resulted in more varied mark-making.

Acrylic painting mediums employed in the painting process include in order of frequency of usage:

1. Atelier clear painting medium to dilute tube pigment by approximately 50% and create smooth brushstrokes; also used as a mid-painting varnish and finally as a glazing medium in a 70% or greater proportion.
2. Atelier flow control and airbrush medium for fine, calligraphic brushwork.
3. Atelier satin varnish was used as a final protective varnish.

Canvas sizes were limited to mainly 80 x 100cm for large images; with 53 x 43cm and 40 x 30cm canvases used for small, grid works. In general, smaller formats suited my process and work environment and were easily transportable to the FBG. On several occasions a series of small images was created on a theme, and was followed by the production of a larger canvas, which extended and consolidated the interpretation of the theme.

6.3 Calligraphic drawing technique

Developmental calligraphic images created on location at the FBG focussed on communicating the sensory experiences of the moment with life force being at the heart of the thought process and the creative act. The process of creating these plein-air images differed from the more time consuming studio works because they were generally more spontaneous in approach. The risk-taking element of this calligraphic process is intrinsic to the sensory experience and balances the slower more pre-meditated work. This calligraphic method of working was returned to each winter (when the Gardens are at their most sublime with a relief from the heat and humidity, mosquitos and mud) and whenever a more energetic method of working was needed to balance the cabin fever of the studio.

The scale of these calligraphic drawings was mainly imperial, A2 or A4, facilitating speed and intimacy of execution. Predominantly conventional materials were utilised – that of black waterproof ink on printmaking paper or hot pressed watercolour paper. Paper was usually cream or fawn in colouration. To some extent this method of working draws on the Chinese tradition of brushmarks and Zen landscape painting.

Before commencing work I walk around the garden focussing on being open to fresh visual possibilities and seasonal changes. On average I spend an equivalent time selecting views, contemplating angles and backgrounds, framing the subject, as on the actual drawing up of the subject. The attitude taken in the drawing process is similar to that taken in gestural life drawing. I found myself responding to the lifeforce of the subject. The purpose here is to capture the essence of the subject and to establish the composition quickly. Working as a rapid rate is also essential due to the physical environment of the Flecker Botanic Gardens due to the mosquitos, rain, mud, sun and members of the public all providing their challenges. Minimal reference photographs are taken with these images in case further visual information (such as details of colour and texture) are needed to extend the image at a later date.

Images are sketched in using diluted black waterproof ink. A contact lenses case was an ideal container for this ink as it provided two wells – one for diluted ink and one for near full strength. The ink was applied using a calligraphic nib and Chinese calligraphy brushes. A medicinal dropper was employed to control the amount of water added to the pigment. Usually, half an hour was required to dry the ink before watercolour pigment could be applied. Artists Spectrum or Winsor and Newton watercolour pigments were employed depending on the qualities of the particular hue. Pan and tube pigments were utilised. Often additional colour washes were applied with the assistance of photographs after the on site session.

As the exhibition developed it became apparent that some of the calligraphic drawings were not going to be included in the final exhibition. This was due to a need to limit the amount of stylistic variation of the works. The calligraphic drawings were deemed to be less original and of less significance than the more conceptually complex acrylic and watercolour printmaking images.

6.4 Watercolour printmaking technique

The basis of the watercolour printmaking technique was suggested to me by Steve Royster, a contemporary American artist with a Masters degree in printmaking. I have investigated this technique, elaborating and refining it to suit my practice. As an experienced art educator, I believe this process to be an ideal printmaking experience for studio artists and students as it is low toxic, low cost and utilises readily obtainable materials. The process is a combination of drawing, painting and printmaking. The drawing aspect is an advantage to my practice because my work is often linear in style, whilst the printmaking aspect provides variety and permits experimentation with image making. This technique lends a shimmering energising effect to the images, which expresses my perception of plants as pulsing with life. It utilises the medium of watercolour paints, which I am very familiar with.

The watercolour printmaking process involves a print being pulled from a plate that has a gessoed surface that has been manipulated, let to dry and then painted with watercolours. A damp piece of printmaking paper is placed on top of the plate and then pulled through the press. The dampened paper is embossed with the surface of the plate as well as receiving the watercolour pigment. The result is a low relief painting that often has white lines etched into it where the surface of the plate is low and has not met the paper in the printing process. This sets off the already shimmering quality of watercolours, which traditionally utilise the white of the paper. Watercolour prints are individual artist proofs because the plate must be coloured with paint each time a print is pulled. This process is ideally an open-ended one where variety is invited.

Boxboard of 3mm thickness is an ideal base material for a plate as it is quite easy to cut with a Stanley knife and is very low cost. Later experimentation found that card thinner than 3mm, although easier to shape, had a tendency to warp when drying. Alternative plate materials include matboard, placemats, cardboard, pliable plastic and drink coasters. Plate materials with a shiny surface were found to be less desirable as the gesso has less tooth on which to grip onto during the drawing and printing processes. The plate is covered in approximately 2mm of gesso with a knife in an action similar to icing a cake. Allow the gessoed plate to dry flat for approximately 30 minutes (depending on the weather).

Draw into the plate using a 2B pencil with a thickish lead. If the plate is too wet the gesso will sink back into the lines. If it is too dry, you will draw onto the surface of the gesso, rather than 'etching into the gesso'. The idea is to make a low relief drawing. The plate is generally 'open' for approximately 30 minutes, although this can be extended by reapplying gesso. Drawings are quite spontaneous in nature, however, changes can be made to the composition and detail by moving the gesso around with the pencil or other tools.

Once you are satisfied with the drawing the plate needs to be thoroughly dried. With the use of ceiling fans, this will take approximately three hours. However, if the gesso is particularly thick or the weather damp, 24 hours is more likely. You can test if the plate is dry by checking that the gesso doesn't move when you gently press your finger into it. If the plate is still damp it will feel cold.

Watercolour paint of quite a thick consistency can be applied to the plate using brushes. More linear brushwork can be applied where definite marks are needed to define your image. Allow the painting to dry for ten minutes to prevent uncontrolled bleeding or muddying of your colours and marks during the printing process. While the painted plate is drying, the paper can

be dampened. It suits my images to use cream printmaking paper, which I dampen by running under a tap on both sides. A paper bath could also be used. Blot the paper until there is no sheen on it.

To print the image the plate is positioned with the use of a registration sheet. The dampened paper is placed on top of the plate; a bed of paper is placed on top of this, and pulled through the press. The paper is promptly and gently removed from the plate and allowed to dry flat. If the paper has stuck to the plate it can be sprayed lightly with water, this may help to release it. Once the print is dry, additional handcolouring may be added. In this stage of the process, I am wary of losing the embossed effect of the plate, which is an intrinsic quality of this process and is to be retained.

Further prints can be produced from the gessoed plate. The traces of paint that remain from earlier applications lend a subtlety to the colours. One point of caution in producing further plates is to be aware of how damp the plate is. If it is too damp some muddying of brushwork and colours may occur because the pigment sits too loosely on the gesso. Painting on a drier gesso surface is more pleasurable as the pigment is received by the slightly absorbent gesso.

Other alternatives to this working method could include utilising a collage surface with an approximately 3mm-depth variance. A thinnish layer of gesso could be brushed onto this surface and then the process resumed. Multi-plate compositions are a possibility that I have explored. Once the printmaking process is exhausted, the plate may be worked on with watercolours or acrylics to produce a resolved image with an incised surface texture.

Advantages of the watercolour printmaking technique include its low toxicity. Throughout the entire process, the only material to create a smell, is the wet and damp gesso at the initial plate preparation stage. Plate preparation is very easy and requires no toxic chemicals or arduous mechanical or labour processes. Images are drawn into the plate as opposed to cutting out or carving into. Clean up is very minimal. As watercolours are water-soluble, the plate need not be printed immediately that the pigment is applied to the plate. This technique is relatively low cost. Plates are inexpensively produced. Artist quality watercolour pigments are not cheap, however there is no wastage involved. The recolouring of the plate creates opportunities for original image making. For all of these reasons, this technique is highly recommended for school students. Junior students could use low-grade watercolour pigment and cartridge paper, while senior students could use higher quality materials.

From my own perspective, the watercolour print process is a way of exploring printmaking processes in a non-laborious environment. The images have a 'freshly drawn' quality stemming from the fluidity and spontaneity of the plate linework. The strongly graphic quality of the images and the original nature of each proof are also attractions.

6.5 Modes of working

The technical basis of the practice initially encompassed three approaches, but was then curtailed to two mainly because the acrylic painting and watercolour printmaking techniques provided more challenge and interest for the artist at that point in the practice. The calligraphic drawing technique will no doubt be returned to when this more immediate and expressive approach is deemed to serve the state of mind of the artist. *Gardens of the Mind* seemed to require a more reflective and complex approach.

CHAPTER 7: CONCEPTUALISING THE EXHIBITION

7.1 Conceptualising the exhibition

This chapter details aspects of the construction of the exhibition experience from the choice of exhibition venue and layout, to framing considerations, title methodology, the design of the invitation, publicity and exhibition opening.

7.2 Exhibition venue

The Cairns Regional Gallery (CRG), in the heart of the Cairns business district, was my first choice of location for the exhibition because of the CRG's status in the region and the high level of professional exhibition management offered there. My application to participate in the CRG's Community Exhibition Program (CEP) was accepted in 2004 and the exhibition date of February 2005 was granted.

The Community Exhibition Program was created by the CRG "as a community resource and in recognition of the breadth and diversity of artistic practice in the region...[the}...CRG offers local artists, art organisations and community groups opportunities to display their work in a professional gallery" (CRG 2004:3). Acceptance into this program is quite competitive with over thirty applications each year and only nine places.

Exhibitions at the CRG are curated and installed to specialist standards. Gallery Director, Louise Doyle promotes exhibiting at the CRG as "a chance to extend art practice, explore exhibition concepts and utilise professional museum display techniques. It is also an opportunity to present your work to a broad audience, including local residents and national and international visitors to the region" (Doyle in CRG 2004:3). The CRG also promotes "the exhibition through standard Gallery marketing tools and media outlets including local cultural organisations, media, elected representatives, Friends of the Gallery and the wider public through the Gallery magazine, 'Art Dekko' (Doyle 2004:2). Indeed, exhibiting at the CRG did fulfil all of these claims and was a significant milestone in my artistic career.

In 2005 Louise Doyle secured funding to assist artists participating in the Community Exhibition Program by way of a \$700 grant for each individual artist conducting a solo exhibition. This fee is at the Australia Council recommended rate. A further advantage of the CRG venue is that stock frames are available for works on paper, thus reducing the cost of presentation and allowing more works to be displayed.

The Loft Gallery Space on the third floor of the CRG is set aside for participants in the CEP program. It is an odd shaped room with two levels (see floor plan at Appendix B) and the walls frequently change direction. The short wall lengths and small hanging spaces have a slight spatial similarity to some areas of the FBG in that you are able to view works from a limited distance. The Loft space has no windows and narrow entranceways and is slightly claustrophobic. Off-white walls and unobtrusive lighting assisted in presenting a quiet atmosphere. The Gallery, in consultation with the artist, professionally presented labels, signage and didactic panels.

Opportunities for sales are available through the Visitor's Services Officer and Front of House staff who are located in the Gallery shop (some two floors away). However, there is little emphasis on the commercial aspect of exhibiting with no red stickers permitted; no discounting arrangements entered into and only one A4 price list discretely displayed above the guest book. This is because the CRG, although a business, emphasises cultural and education concerns above the commercial. As a Council funded enterprise the CRG is careful not to duplicate the approach of retail galleries in the area. For example, the Gallery does not permit exhibitors or their agents undertaking any overt financial transaction (such as credit card swipe machines and cash boxes) in the exhibition space. Mention is made of this, as some significant sales were lost due to the no discounting policy, and the distant location of sales staff. Having said this I was delighted with the sales that were made and the level of service offered by the Gallery staff.

7.3 Exhibition layout

Decisions regarding the exhibition layout were made by the CRG's Senior Curator Steven Tonkin in consultation with the artist. Discussions were undertaken with photographs of the paintings a month prior to the 'bump in' day and were finalised when works were physically laid out around the Loft Gallery space.

Tonkin has a preference for interspersing different sizes and media in order to create variety and movement and to emphasise each subject. Initially I was doubtful about his hanging strategy as I had envisaged groupings of similar sized works and media, however, this is the advantage of working with a curator who has a vision formed from lengthy experience in drawing out the conceptual structure of an exhibition. Indeed on two occasions Tonkin identified relationships between works of which I had not been fully aware. The pairing of *Mulch and Trunk* with the similarly realist ground focussed *Grounded Series* was one example of this. Lighting emphasised key works; however, this could have been done with more conviction. If the lighting of the space had been a little darker overall, this would have created

more contrast with the illuminated works and the atmosphere present in the gallery would have been more awe-inspiring.

The layout of the exhibition was structured around major works that were placed in key positions around the gallery space. Works were then organised thematically with a number of images depicting trunks grouped together; a series of predominantly green works were sited creating a 'lush' corner which was highlighted by the brilliant red-pink image of *Red Ginger*. Studies accompanied major works to further draw out the conceptual basis of the exhibition. One series of canvases depicting the garden floor was sited on a low plinth to alter the texture of the display. This plinth was located around a corner in order that the viewer would be 'surprised' by the change in height of the display as well as relate to the original positioning of the subject on the ground in the garden. The watercolour print sited above the plinth depicted the same plot of earth as one of the canvases in the group, this giving the viewers another understanding of the plant.

The tone of the exhibition was set with *Heliconia Caribaea*, a colourful evocative work, which was positioned at the bottom of the loft staircase to introduce the show and invite viewers to climb the stairs. Similarly, *Effervescent Bromeliad*, a brilliant hued image was situated at the end of the ramp (see Appendix B), and was the first work that people entering from the lift would see. *Prized Succulent Collection*, a luminous image was placed on a feature wall, as was the major series of acrylics *Grounded Series*. The effect of *Peeling and Revealing* was given greater impact through a horizontal display of the six works. It had been considered initially as two rows of three, however the chosen layout created a dynamic rhythm and suited the gallery space. A pair of delicate images, *Tile 1 and 2*, whose colour was lighter than the main body of work, was placed on a small wall at the entrance of the room. This encouraged close inspection and allowed their colouration not to be overwhelmed by the brighter colours of the rest of the show.

Some of the decisions made in the studio change in the different environment of the gallery. Two watercolour works were culled from the exhibition as they were considered to be more graphic in orientation and lacked the conceptual depth of the rest of the show.

7.4 Framing

The tradition of framing artworks conveys information about the values of the artist and presents the work for viewing on not only a physical level. For example a heavy gold frame may carry connotations of wealth and position the artwork as a trophy. Framing artworks is a complex process of balancing aesthetics and finances. My experience of framing over twenty

years has been fraught with disappointment including one exhibition experience in which all eight frames in a show were damaged to the extent of needing lengthy sanding and revarnishing. So it was with relief that I was able to secure an exhibition venue that was sympathetic to the practice of modern painters presenting works unframed. Hence, the majority of acrylic works on canvas were not framed. This decision was based primarily on financial considerations, however, not framing the works also expresses the concept of the image extending beyond the edge of the image.

Two canvas works were framed as one of the pair had stapled edges and was thus unacceptable for unframed hanging. These works were of plants seen from a viewpoint of approximately one metre and the frames did not impinge unduly upon the images. A flat, plain, deep-coloured moulding with a thin gold inner edge was selected, in consultation with the framer, in order to bring out the lighter tones of the works. It is ironic that the one work that required framing was in fact bought, at the buyer's request, without a frame.

The watercolour prints were displayed in ivory mats cut to the size of the Gallery's standard stock conservation frames. Without the availability of these frames the artist would not have exhibited the works on paper due to the prohibitive cost of doing so. Indeed an additional series of works were undertaken as I viewed this as a rare and valuable opportunity. It is true that contemporary hanging practices do not necessitate works on paper be framed, however, the watercolour images were enhanced by the mat and frame which lent contrast to the works.

7.5 Titles

Titles are a significant means of communicating information to the viewer with explanatory titles being an extension of the work. Categorising the paintings into series and recording these as the second half of the title was a strategy inspired by the painter William Robinson. The *Wallpapers of the Mind Series* had a decorative emphasis or were inspired by the history of plant painting, whilst images belonging to the *Garden Series* stemmed from the observation of nature.

Approximately half of the titles of the paintings reflected the conceptual concerns of the works, in some cases this was of a metaphorical nature, for example *Peeling and revealing*. Common descriptive and botanical names such as *Sponge Tree* or *Red Ginger* were granted to one third of the works because the work was perceived not to need any further explanation.

Although I was inspired by artists reviewed in **Chapter Three: Traditions within the garden genre: Artistic Perceptions**, *Gingers and Rousseau* stands alone in its homage to an individual artist. While *Antiquated Ginger* refers to the colour scheme inspired by Pompeian floral mosaics. In a similar vein, *Florilegium* signals a debt to the historical botanical images of the same name.

Three of the works depicting gingers were entitled with their scientific botanic names (eg. *Colombian Ginger*). In hindsight, these works could have been given more evocative titles that highlighted the atmosphere or particular quality of the garden display. Although connection with the scientific role of the Flecker Botanic Garden is alluded to through these botanic names and contrasts with the expressive emphasis of many of the works.

7.6 Labels and signage

While works of art should be able to stand alone, additional information can promote deeper viewer understanding of the exhibition. For this reason, the CRG provides text panels (with content sourced from the artist) including: a wall mounted list of works with prices, a title panel and biography (see Appendix A), an introduction to the exhibition and labels for works. Five didactic panels (slightly larger in size than the title panels) explaining the conceptual concerns of major works were also displayed beside the works. The size of the text panels was appropriate given the community-based nature of the show.

7.7 Invitation, catalogue, publicity and press release

Invitations, catalogues and other forms of media releases are an important form of publicity for the artist and should be striking and physically easy to read. CRG invitations must conform to guidelines of font, information presented, logos displayed and a paperweight of 300gsm must be used. I designed it in Photoshop with some troubleshooting technical advice supplied by my partner, Michael Heaton. The layout involved the superimposition of text over a to-scale detail of one of the *Grounded Series* works. This artwork was selected as it contained the lifeforce and mark making that represented the exhibition well. The invitation (see Appendix C) was single sided as I have always found invitations with enticing visual images on the front and information of the back to pose a dilemma for display on a fridge. I always choose to view the image and then forget the details of the opening. The invitation was in colour, rather than black and white, as colour was a major focus of the exhibition. Many positive comments were received about the invitation from the CRG team reviewing the invitation and in conversation with recipients.

The invitations were printed by Create – a design company who accommodates small runs (in my case 170) at reasonable prices. The bulk of the invitations were distributed to the Friends of the Gallery in the gallery mailout to disseminate to arts industry, media representatives and particular interest groups, with the remainder dispersed amongst my friends. A limited number were left at the Botanic Gardens sales office.

The decision was made to produce a catalogue one month prior to the opening. Initially I had not wanted to undertake this task due to the expense and the fact that I did not feel the need to promote myself as an artist in this way. However, my practical supervisor convinced me of the benefit to viewers of being able to access additional information in this way. For this reason, I produced a colour and black and white catalogues using Publisher including two artworks, an artist statement, details of artworks, a selected resume and sponsor's logos (see Appendix C).

Publicity was handled by the CRG and was quite substantial. It involved a press release in the Cairns Post; the publishing of a review by the Cairns Post free lance art critic Karen van Harskamp (Appendix E); an article in the CRG's Art Dekko Magazine and a listing on the CRG's 6-month Program brochure. Additional articles of a less substantial nature were published by the Cairns Sun Newspaper, City Life and Barfly Magazine. Patricia Cuda, Acting Marketing Manager for the CRG commented that publicity had been very successful due to the recognisable and colourful nature of the images.

7.8 Opening

The exhibition launch was on Saturday 5th February at 2.30pm. The Gallery program circumscribes opening times. A daytime opening allows the Gallery to reduce costs as it is within opening hours, and leaves more Friday nights available for 'blockbuster' exhibitions and openings at the Kick Arts Gallery (with whom the CRG works co-operatively for the benefit of the artistic community). The artist talk preceded the opening at 2pm and was attended by twenty-five people, many of whom stayed for the opening.

In the artist talk I briefly described the FBG from a personal perspective in particular my sense of belonging to the Gardens. I explained that *Gardens of the Mind* represented in essence my sensory experience of the Gardens: its rich and pungent smells, the humidity and its exotic visual delights. I outlined my artistic inspirations and showed colour reproductions of their work. Following this I briefly elaborated on key works in the exhibition and took questions from the floor. I emphasised that the exhibition was a four-year project and the culmination of a life-long, compulsion to paint plants and engage with the tradition of artists

representing gardens. The audience was quite receptive during the artist talk, however, only a few general questions on technique and the use of photographs were offered.

Steven Tonkin, Senior Curator, acted as Master of Ceremonies. David Warmington, Curator of the FBG, officially opened the exhibition and spoke about the role of the Gardens in the community as well as discussing the sensory experience of the Gardens. Mr Warmington was selected as a representative from the Flecker Botanic Gardens and as an authority on gardens. I had interviewed him two years earlier to gain his perceptions of the design of the FBG. Margaret Genever, Lecturer in Visual Arts at JCU, spoke on the conceptual nature of the exhibition. Ms Genever, as my practical supervisor was able to express her depth of knowledge of my art practice and locate it in the context of contemporary art making. Speeches are located at Appendix D.

At the conclusion of the opening people moved to the Education Room to enjoy customary drinks and food. Three sales were made at the opening: two to local collectors and one to an international tourist keen to acquire a souvenir of the tropics.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE EXHIBITION

8.1 Introduction to *Gardens of the Mind*

The images in *Gardens of the Mind* fall into two series – the *Garden Series* and the *Wallpapers of the Mind Series*. The *Garden Series* focuses on the life force of flora and observation of plant forms. The more decorative *Wallpapers of the Mind Series* is concerned with mark-making, experimentation with the watercolour printing process, and draws inspiration from the history of flora in art.

Gardens of the Mind communicates the fecundity that permeates the pungent environment of the Gardens. Works in the exhibition feature close-up sections of individual plants, garden beds and ground covers. Some of the works clearly originate from a manicured garden whilst others appear more wild in form. Several of the paintings employ the relatively unusual perspective of the downward view - a commonly experienced view, but an unconventional one for landscape or garden paintings in which subject matter is more commonly depicted at eye level and from a more distant perspective.

The images included in this chapter were exhibited at the Cairns Regional Gallery from the 5th of February to the 5th of March 2005. The works are detailed here predominantly in the chronological order in which they were created in order that the development of themes and processes can be followed. Media, and to a lesser extent size, are the other means of categorising the images. The acrylic on canvas paintings are shown before the watercolour images as they are more significant works. The six smallest watercolour works have not been documented here, as they are of less consequence.

8.2 Acrylic works in the exhibition: Illustrations and descriptions

The acrylic paintings formed the bulk of the exhibition in terms of wall space, intellectual endeavour and time taken to create. Conceptually, these works were more powerful with an emphasis on perception of the plant environment of the Gardens. Aesthetically the acrylic works employed bright colours, often with strong contrast, while the watercolour paintings were higher in key. Layers of glazes were used to establish texture, tonal variety and emotional depth.



Plate 8.1 *Grounded Series*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 30.5 x 40.7cm each,
9 works in grid format



Plate 8.2 *Grounded*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 78.5 x 96cm

8.2.1 *Grounded Series, (Garden series)*

Grounded Series (Plate 8.1) explores the perception of the Garden floor as the viewer walks upon it. Each of nine images represents a distance between two of my feet of the ground seen from the distance of my eye height. The ground is the primary point of physical contact with the Garden and as such provides significant material for investigation, from pebbles, mulch, and quandong fruit to ginger tubers thrusting upward.

The images have a sense of aliveness and reflect a feeling of the ground being in a state of constant change – of growth and decay. Decay is approached not from a depressing angle but as a part of a life-sustaining cycle. The images are sumptuous in their display of colour and texture. Some of the plant life looks good enough to eat and certainly some of the subjects can be eaten. Perhaps this sensory perception is a generational memory of gathering from the forest floor. However, now in the twenty-first century, a search of a different kind is being undertaken, a search for visual and intellectual stimulation; searching for my place in nature; and searching for spiritual sustenance. On a personal level this *Grounded Series* parallels a process of sifting, consolidation, and analysis of my life experience to date.

The *Grounded* compositions were constructed from a smorgasbord of photographs that provided the visual material from which to select textures, colours and growth forms. The works were not restricted by the content of one particular photograph, but instead are a synthesis of realistic rendering and emotional expression. Botanical accuracy was not a compulsive concern, as expressive mark making and the selection of rich surfaces dominated my approach.

Working on the *Grounded Series* was somewhat meditative. The series shows a maturation of my ability to problem-solve images as all works that were initiated are included in the final series. This signals major progress, as in the past I have produced prolifically but often without a sufficient emphasis on resolution. The small canvas size was ideal as it allowed the images to be completed within a relatively short period of time. The representational style employed in the series served its purpose of refining painting skills, however, at the completion of the series I was ready to return to a more expressive mode of mark making in which observation played less of a role.

8.2.2 *Grounded, (Garden series)*

Grounded 2003 (Plate 8.2) developed out of the visual research undertaken in the creation of the series of nine small canvases of the same name. *Grounded* expresses fundamental aspects of burgeoning life. The style of the image combines observation with more imaginative additions

and is a culmination of a year's searching for a 'blueprint' to develop. The over-riding concern of this painting is to express the sense that the flora is alive. Mark making, the upward movement of the tubers, colour and texture capture this imperative.

The composition was developed from a collection of photographs of various ground covers from several different beds in the garden. The image is not botanically correct as such, because the different plant material depicted would not be found in the one location. *Grounded* is more a representation of the wonder experienced in looking at the microcosms of the Garden.

The painting presents the perspective of a downward view onto the writhing ginger tubers and extends upward to include the surging vertical ginger stalks. The bulbs have a phallic quality to their forms and appear to have a potent, latent energy that is about to be unleashed in the journey upward. This emphasis on fertility is a trace element in the exhibition with plant forms and marks alluding to plant pheromones and reproduction. The chemicals carried in the potent smells of the garden impacts on the actions of the insects, animals and people in the vicinity. The effect these have on the human psyche are recognised as including relaxation and attraction – we are after all a part of nature.

8.2.3 *Grounded Gingers, (Garden series)*

Grounded Gingers (Plate 8.3) continues to explore the concerns of the original *Grounded Series* with two main exceptions, colour and composition. The colour scheme is significantly brighter and it was necessary in the final stages of painting to work back into the four images as a group to unify them. The strong directional lines contained in two of the four images were considered essential to the unity of the group.

At times the viewpoint in *Grounded Gingers* is a little awkward due to the distortion created by the camera's lens and the use of several reference photos involving slightly different perspectives. These concerns do not detract substantially from the overall enjoyment of the intense study of texture and ground life present in *Grounded Gingers*, rather it conveys a sense of heightened vision.

There was some indecision regarding the display of this series – whether to exhibit them sandwiched together or apart with a space of four centimetres. The later was finally decided upon after the effective display of the original *Grounded Series* in the *No Boundaries* (2003) exhibition. Some time after the *Gardens of the Mind* exhibition, the four canvases of *Grounded Gingers* were exhibited vertically between *Grounded* (Plate 8.2) and *Prized*

Bromeliad Collection (Plate 8.8). This arrangement worked well because it allowed the separate compositions to be considered individually, whilst still displaying their conceptual link.



Plate 8.3 *Grounded Gingers*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 30.5 x 40.7cm each, 4 works in grid format



Plate 8.4 *Peeling and Revealing*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 40.7 x 30.5cm each, 6 works

8.2.4 *Peeling and Revealing, (Garden series)*

The Sago Palm paintings include the six canvases entitled *Peeling and Revealing* (Plate 8.4) which depicts various sections of the surface of the bark; and *Girth* (Plate 8.5) a large painting of a portion of the Sago tree's trunk. These palms are seemingly ancient trees, with their pruned fronds, surfaces of great variety, and a perceived grandeur and strength. Silvery swathes of bark are etched by wrinkles that delineate the growth formation of the branches. Bark peels back, surrendering life to reveal hair and tender layers of new bark. Towards the base, fine veins ooze a toffee like sap. Examining the surface of these trees was like experiencing a landscape or skin weathered by time. On a metaphorical level *Peeling and Revealing* (2001) explores a sense of peeling back, of revealing; a kind of searching within and then retreating to the air again, which evokes the emotional states of intimacy, distance and concealment.

In reality these sago trees at the Flecker Botanic Gardens are only seven years old. At seventeen years of age they send out a single flower twenty metres up containing thousands of seeds. After this once in a lifetime flowering, the plant dies and the pure starch or sago found in the heart of the trunk can be harvested.

The appearance of the Sago Palms at the Flecker Botanic Gardens is heavily manicured, and the distinctive patterning of the cut fronds is entirely man made. The visual impact of this tree would be very different in the wild with many lifeless branches drooping towards the ground - creating a more weathered impression and quite removing the feeling of grandeur that the manicured version maintains.

There is a sense of displacement from the real world in these six panels. This is due to the sectioning off of the bark from the tree as a whole, creating comparisons with shanks of skin, metal, or some other surface. Indeed, the manipulation of scale was of some concern in this series. The 40.7 x 30.5cm canvases were selected due to their portability, intimacy, and uniformity with the other multiple grid works in the show, however, this size proved slightly too small for the natural translation of the palm sections onto the two dimensional surface. Some of the palm's power emanated from its size and this was partially reduced with the reduction of its scale. Clearly a consideration of the scale of the canvas for a particular plant needs careful deliberation and cannot always be dictated neatly by the orderly organisation of an exhibition of works.



Plate 8.5 *Girth*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 96 x 78.5cm



Plate 8.6 *Mulch and Trunk*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 78.5 x 96cm

8.2.5 *Girth, (Garden series)*

Girth (Plate 8.5) is an intimate analysis of an almost life-size portion of the Sago Palm, which is depicted at eye level and is thus represented as equal to the viewer. It is a complex painting that is concerned with the nature metaphor of the layers of human interaction from the deep to the superficial. The important aspect of this image, however, is about going beneath the surface; swathes of bark twist and turn to reveal the exposed visual information of wrinkled skin, hair and cracks – like an ageing, vulnerable human form. *Girth* continues the themes commenced with the *Peeling and revealing* series of smaller studies and is a synthesis of realistic rendering and emotional expression. It combines the smaller works' perception into a larger view of the tree. In doing so, it completes a cycle of contemplation of the surface of the Sago Palm.

There is an enormous amount of movement in the composition, with peeling limbs and etched wrinkles creating reciprocating arches and repeated lines. Shimmering silver sections of trunk reflect light and create a contrast with the dark recesses of the shadowed areas. Some of the wrinkles are not quite attached to the surface and appear to swim across the surface of the tree, Lin Onus-like. This tree is metamorphosing, growing, breathing, and ageing in front of us – with us.

8.2.6 *Mulch and Trunk, (Garden series)*

Mulch and Trunk (Plate 8.6) depicts the base of a Cannonball tree and is another investigation of the ecology of the Garden, thus continuing the exploration of the ground view evident in the *Grounded* (2001-2) works. A study is made of the overwhelming complexity present in the textures and colours of this rich ground cover. The translucent soft flesh of the fallen petals contrasts with the dry 'crunch' of the surrounding leaf mulch and the tough exterior of the tree's bark.

The composition is divided by the upward moving trunk and the squirming, though gravity bound, leaf matter. Two competing rhythms exist in the work – the upward moving diagonal of the bark pattern balances the downward rushing spillage of mulch. Perspective is somewhat distorted as the trunk is slightly skewed and the leaves seem to cascade towards the left side of the canvas. Some relief is provided from the restless energy of the mulch, by the dark recesses of the shadowy trunk.

Mulch and Trunk (2002) is a painting that achieves a break from the seemingly endless domination of the colour green in the garden. The presence of the pink blossoms is somewhat of a compromise on my desire to paint a flowerless image. Nevertheless, the painting succeeds in communicating the stoic strength of the trunk, which sources its sustenance from the mulch.



Plate 8.7 *Cannonball Trunk*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 96 x 76.5cm



Plate 8.8 *Prized Bromeliad Collection*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), acrylic on canvas, 78.5 x 96cm

8.2.7 Cannonball Trunk, (Garden series)

The intriguing appearance of the Cannonball Tree provides much visual information for exploration. This remarkable tree has thin drooping branches, deeply textured bark and large spherical seedpods that protrude from short stems close to the trunk. Early in my teaching career in Cairns one of my students drew this tree from memory, and never having seen it before, I remember thinking how imaginative he was, such is the startlingly unusual nature of its appearance.

The intention of this painting was to create a mysterious portrait of a tree trunk in order to stimulate reflection on the nature of this living being. Trees are so often just backdrop information to other subjects, while in *Gardens of the Mind* the view that plants impact on our lives in subtle and far reaching ways is projected. It was a challenge with this subject to preserve the essence of the Cannonball's appearance without resorting to botanical illustration. Leaves were sketched in late in the work's development in order to alleviate the static and somewhat disunified quality of the three vertical sections. The approach of delineating the leaves focuses on the permanency of the girth; creates a subtle move away from representation and reduced the amount of green; a colour that I had at this stage grown weary of working with.

The mood of *Cannonball Trunk* (Plate 8.7) is more contemplative than the majority of the paintings, and I would have liked to continue in this vein for a number of works, however, following this image I was without exception drawn to light, colourful subject matter. At that point in time it was against my nature to create 'dark' works.

8.2.8 Prized Bromeliad Collection, (Wallpapers of the mind series)

Prized Bromeliad Collection (Plate 8.8) depicts a group of bromeliads in the FBG that is maintained by the Cairns Bromeliad Society. The effervescent colours and enticingly waxy smooth texture of these succulent plants are sought after amongst plant collectors. Indeed, shortly after sketches were made of the garden bed several of these specimens were stolen.

This painting has a quality of inner vibrancy and overall the work's high key is lighter than many other works in the exhibition, which are on the whole dominated by deeper browns. The less representational, more imaginative colour range explored in this work is a desirable shift in direction.

A significant development in paint technique evidenced in this work is an expansion in the range of 'edge quality' with the outlines of some leaves blurring with the background. This reduces the emphasis on the outline apparent in some earlier works.

A long held ambition achieved in this image is an increase in the quantity of resting space. This has been achieved mostly through working with a subject that consists of larger shapes. However, after the work was put aside for some months, additional information was added so that this painting was more similar to the other works in the exhibition. Caution was taken to add visual material using less demanding tonal variations so that the ‘quiet’ quality remained.

Stylistically *Prized Bromeliad Collection* is related to the more representative works; however, the sense of life that it generates unifies it with the body of work as a whole, projecting the central philosophy of the exhibition of the life generating properties of flora.

8.2.9 Effervescent Bromeliad, (*Garden series*)

Effervescent Bromeliad (Plate 8.9) was conceived as a sister work to *Prized Bromeliad Collection* (Plate 8.8) so that there would not be only one image in the exhibition with a relatively uncomplicated composition consisting of large shapes. It is the first work in which comparatively large brushes and the dry brush technique has been used. These developments created a greater variety of mark making; served to more readily unify the composition; and reduced the overly busy effect of the work.

The colour scheme of *Effervescent Bromeliad* is bright, almost to the point of garishness. The hues are high in key and the background lighting frames the plant group with an arch of light that centres the viewer’s attention on the bromeliads.

This painting was the first work constructed using a fully blocked in background. This method was liberating in the speed with which images become substantial and the image as a whole unified. I was reminded of my painting lecturer, Ian Smith describing his method of beginning a painting by saying that he always painted the canvas a colour; any colour would do, as long as he didn’t have to face a white canvas.

Whilst painting *Effervescent Bromeliad* I discovered that when translucent colours are applied thinly they created a shimmering result. This effect can be seen in the purplish-blue-green groundcover centre right and in the bluish-green background where light projects through the leaves. The overlaying of glowing colour serves my message well of life emanating from the plants.



Plate 8.9 *Effervescent Bromeliad*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 78.5 x 96cm



Plate 8.10 *Ecuadorian Ginger*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), acrylic on canvas, 78.5 x 96cm

8.2.10 Ecuadorian Ginger, (*Wallpapers of the mind series*)

The unusual appearance of these gingers was the point of interest as well as the layering of the foliage, lit from behind. The luminous background was inspired by Rousseau's technique of creating light horizons that intensify the mystery of the darker areas. The background was also partly influenced by the 'strip' method of landscape painting; a system which involves using three colours with significantly different tones.

The composition of *Ecuadorian Ginger* (Plate 8.10) consists of three horizontal layers – these proved difficult to reconcile as they contained quite different visual information and general tonal makeup. The top third was particularly problematic due to the uneasy effect produced by most of the leaves hanging down.

The colour scheme is the first predominantly green one completed in some years and signals a greater personal acceptance of my work in the plant genre. At times there is a shifting of planes, which serves my purpose of drawing the viewer into the foliage for closer inspection. Evident in this work is a preference for a larger brush and for some visual information to be indicated rather than detailed.

8.2.11 Red Ginger, (*Wallpapers of the mind series*)

Red Ginger 2004 (Plate 8.11) is a reworked version of a painting executed in 1999. Much superfluous mark making in the background has been eliminated and a greater sense of depth has been created. The colour scheme is evocative with a pink hued background dry-brushed in to evoke the smell of these gingers. The central aim of this work was to capture the heavy atmosphere and rich vegetation that these red gingers epitomise in the Garden.

8.2.12 Gingers and Rousseau, (*Wallpapers of the mind series*)

Gingers and Rousseau (Plate 8.12) again pays tribute to the exotic garden images of Henri Rousseau. Naive, colourful and laden with pattern, Rousseau's work communicates the pleasure in observing the living quality of a garden. Aspects identified in common with his work include the view from peering into the foliage and the glowing distant light against which plant forms are silhouetted.



Plate 8.11 *Red Ginger*, (Wallpapers of the mind series),
acrylic on canvas, 60.5 x 76cm



Plate 8.12 *Gingers and Rousseau*, (Wallpapers of the mind series),
acrylic on canvas, 60.5 x 76cm

8.2.13 *Heliconia Caribaea*, (Wallpapers of the mind series)

Heliconia Caribaea (Plate 8.13) depicts gingers with a striking blue hue, a colour effect that was inspired by the photographic process of producing the reference photographs. I thought that the blue colour was unusual and would give variety to the exhibition's colour scheme as a whole and decided to capitalise on it.

This tropical image conveys lush layering of foliage. An overall dry brush treatment of white serves to unify the work. It is the only painting sourced from the centre of the garden - a deeply lit, low area with a creek running through it. As I don't use a flash or tripod the low light makes photography difficult and provides ideal conditions for mosquitos. The area is also rather cramped with no open areas, narrow access paths, and no space for contemplation.

8.2.14 *Colombian Ginger*, (Garden series)

Colombian Ginger (Plate 8.14) proved challenging to resolve due to the strong verticals conflicting with the busy background information. Further photographic reference material was sought on two occasions in an effort to solve visual dilemmas. I experienced some difficulty in rendering this species of plant as each time I photographed it, it appeared to have different features and I became confused as to which plant I was actually painting. After an exhausting number of painting sessions a light dry brush overlay assisted in unifying the image.

8.2.15 *Antiquated Ginger*, (Wallpapers of the mind series)

Antiquated Ginger 2004 (Plate 8.15) is an image that has been reworked many times over the course of the four-year project. The painting has incised lines drawn into the background similar to the watercolour prints. As the painting developed it was necessary to minimise the effect of these marks in order to unify the paint quality of the canvas works (none of which had incised linework).

The lack of depth was the main difficulty to be overcome. Increasing the tonal range between foreground and background provided the solution. The colour scheme also proved difficult to resolve due to the unusual lilac hue of the flowers, which clashed with the soil colour. The colour scheme was inspired by Pompeian tile mosaics, which I recall as being aqua in orientation. An aged look was communicated through the burnt sienna and the dry brushing.



Left: Plate 8.13 *Heliconia Caribaea*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), acrylic on canvas, 53 x 43cm

Right: Plate 8.14 *Colombian Ginger*, (Garden series), acrylic on canvas, 53 x 43cm



Plate 8.15 *Antiquated Ginger*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), acrylic on canvas, 53 x 43cm

8.3 Watercolour Prints in the exhibition: Illustrations and descriptions

The majority of the watercolour prints were explorations into the technique of the watercolour print and were representational views of the Garden. Two of the prints explored the theme of garden motifs in the domestic environment. The watercolour works in general were quicker to create than the acrylic works, although several layers of pigment (representing many work sessions) were used to develop depth.

The technique of watercolour monoprints is detailed in Chapter 5 the **Methodology of the practice**. This monoprintmaking process accommodates some of the qualities of artmaking that suit my practice when a break from detailed observation is needed – speedy execution, loose mark making, moderate cost and the ability to rework the image.

8.3.1 *Trunk with Bromeliads*, (Wallpapers of the mind series),

Trunk with Bromeliads (Plate 8.16) is one of a series of watercolour prints executed in 2002; and shows a spectacular established planting of multi-coloured bromeliads interspersed with ferns, creating a profusion of twining foliage. The large central tree provides a sheltering canopy for the extensive bromeliad display beneath.

In this image active brushwork is again a feature – the looseness of the marks transmitting the message of the vitality of the plants. The relatively unrestrained brushwork has become a desired quality in the painting endeavour. Overlays of process white succeed in unifying the colour scheme and the composition as a whole. This use of white is ‘rediscovered’ two years later in several acrylic paintings.

8.3.2 *Bromeliads*, (Wallpapers of the mind series)

Bromeliads 2002 (Plate 8.17) was a successful experiment in the mono-printing process. Ink (instead of watercolour) was used on the gesso plate; this absorbed almost completely into the gesso and transferred in a minimal way to the paper. The resulting image contained many open areas and had the feel of a Renaissance sepia drawing. Onto this print, watercolour pigment was built up and some line work re-established with a calligraphy pen. The limited colour scheme was a soothing break from the challenge of working with the colour green.

Bromeliads has a quality of quietness that is unusual in the painting output. This pause in the restless energy of the artwork is a quality to return to so that the exhibition is not unrelenting, but contains some variety in the representation of the garden – just as the FBG contains open spaces – breaks from the visual delights of more heavily cultivated areas.

Plate 8.16 *Trunk with Bromeliads*,
(Wallpapers of the mind series),
watercolour print on
printmaking paper,
28.7 x 21cm



Plate 8.17 *Bromeliads*,
(Wallpapers of the mind
series), ink print
and watercolour on paper
21 x 28.7cm

Plate 8.18 *Bamboo sentinel*, (Wallpapers
of the mind series),
watercolour on paper,
40 x 29 cm



8.3.3 *Bamboo sentinel*, (Wallpapers of the mind series)

The impressive bamboo flowerhead depicted in *Bamboo sentinel* (Plate 8.18) grows to one side of the main entrance of the Garden. The head of the plant, detailed in this image, is captivating with its repeated leaves arching up to a point. The protective cupping of the arching leaves extends out to reveal a fragile inner layer. Taller, thicker bamboo poles appear to surround these 'leaders'. This botanic image has a commanding presence with the unusually high hued lemon-green of the section of the plant surrounded by a forest of towering dark green bamboo poles.

The original central plate was enhanced by the addition of multiple borders. The association that was evoked is that of Indian carpets and illuminated manuscripts. The border motifs were derived from sections of the same plant, framing the large motif and creating an embellished effect. These images containing frames were not included in the exhibition due to their overly decorative appearance and stylistic diversion from the body of work.

8.3.4 *Florilegium*, (Wallpapers of the Mind series)

Flowers presented a problematic subject matter for me. How could I offer an original approach to such a well-visited and possibly dangerously amateurish subject? It was inappropriate for me to avoid the flowers, as I have always responded strongly to them. After all, the action of people admiring and picking flowers provides a role in the plant lifecycle, that of seed transportation to new locations (Shanahan 2001). In previous images, flowers, if present, were not the main focus; however, here they dominate the image. A highly expressive mark making approach, coupled with a return to the grid composition was decided upon.

The title of *Florilegium* (Plate 8.19) refers to the historical botanical illustrations, which often employed the grid format. The dimensions of the individual images mimic those of bathroom tiles that decorate the interiors of our dwellings. Thus, the association is one of the daily rituals of cleansing and domestic adornment. Recognition of the role played by garden motifs in domestic adornment throughout the ages is acknowledged. It is through this presentation of ideas that my depiction of flowers offers a contemporary dialogue on the age-old theme of flowers, drawing as it does on the history of painting plants.

Prints of vastly different colour schemes were pulled; one indicative of sunlight – the warmth of the sun on skin; and the other muted earthy tones to take the sweetness out of the representation and elicit associations of the limited Renaissance colour schemes of sienna and umber. In terms of colour, working harmoniously with pink and green has been a continuing concern, so this limited colour scheme was a welcome relief. The neutral painting was found to

have a depth and subtlety of colouration and a freedom of mark making that provided a satisfying interpretation of the flowers.



Plate 8.19 *Florilegium*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), watercolour print on paper, 76 x 57cm



Plate 8.20 *Florilegium Tiles*, (Wallpapers of the mind series), watercolour prints on paper, 15 x 15 cm each

8.3.4 *Florilegium Tiles*, (Wallpapers of the mind series)

The twelve plates that made up the *Florilegium* grid were originally separate. Two of these images were printed individually before the grid format was decided upon. As previously with *Florilegium*, the intention of these experimental watercolours was draw on my sense of the history of plant representation. Their colouration is reminiscent of Pompeian tiles.

8.4 Conclusion to the exhibition

Gardens of the Mind was my first solo exhibition in a Regional public gallery. It was essential to develop a coherent exhibition as well as providing a satisfying tightness of concept with images working together as a unified aesthetic experience. The length of the project enabled these goals to be achieved through the development and resolution of images. The following chapter evaluates this endeavour; draws conclusions and outlines future directions.

CHAPTER 9: RESPONSES, REFLECTIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

9.1 Introduction

This, the final chapter of the thesis details the responses to the exhibition; reviews the painterly outcomes of *Gardens of the Mind*; evaluates the project overall and outlines future directions.

9.2 Responses to the artworks

Responses to the exhibition included comments made at the opening, those written in the CRG's guest book, the CRG's exhibition report and observations made in conversation after the exhibition by friends and associates.

Comments made at the exhibition opening were complementary and congratulatory with friends and colleagues expressing their amazement at the scope of the undertaking. Observations tended to be in the vein of "beautiful work", "so talented" or "stunning". Several people wrote their remarks in the CRG's guest book – which is reviewed later in the chapter and a copy of which is provided at Appendix F. For some months after the exhibition friends and acquaintances continued to share their perceptions of the exhibition with me. This was a rewarding aspect of the exhibition experience as it demonstrated that the works had resonance and inspired people to reflect on the ideas presented.

One observation shared at the opening, which differed from the majority of affirming views was that offered by long-term friend and surrealist photographer Glen O'Malley who noted that all of the works contained an element of "malice". I was quite taken aback by this as I had felt that this quality, which had surfaced in past years, had been placated by consciously not including prickles or forms that appeared foreboding. However, it appears that for O'Malley at least, this psychological quality is communicated through such visual elements as the unusual views chosen and the strong tonal contrast. Only one other person had ever commented on the element of malice – Julie Adams, my supervisor for the Graduate Diploma at Gippsland Centre of Art and Design. Over time, I have endeavoured to moderate the malice contained in the paintings through subject selection and formal concerns such as tonal variation as I do not wish to project negative tension into an exhibition space (including my own home) but instead would prefer a calming, invigorating atmosphere, akin to that of the Gardens. In a more positive vein, Glen O'Malley also commented that it was a 'tight' show. This was a great compliment as a conceptually unified exhibition was my aim. Steven Tonkin Senior Curator at the CRG also used this descriptive word.

Far North Queensland artist Angela Meyer observed that the work had succeeded in capturing an authentic tropical feeling, which transcended the purely stereotypical visual symbols of the region offered in the tourist galleries. She also considered that as owner of *Girth* 2001 (Plate 8.5) it appeared to have more life in her own home, amongst furniture and with a rainforest backdrop. She expressed some doubt about the Loft Gallery as an exhibition space that shows this kind of artwork to its best advantage because of its complex physical layout.

Some weeks after the exhibition, artist Jan Graham raised the subject of her comment in the guest book regarding experiencing ‘momentary claustrophobia’. She explained that the tightly presented grid format of several works and the closeness of the works depicting complex observation, together with the enclosed gallery space contributed to this feeling.

The *Grounded Series* (2001) received many positive comments. People identified with the downward perspective and appreciated the level of acute observation depicted. Several individuals noted that the grid format communicated the complexity and variety of ground surfaces present at the Gardens. A highly gratifying response received in regard to these works and the exhibition as a whole was the efforts of the voluntary group the Friends of the FBG to purchase this series to hang in the FBG’s visitor’s office. The Curator and Interpretative Officer whose daily territory this is were also delighted with this idea and eventual purchase. To me, this was an honour and recognition of my endeavour by the ‘keepers’ of the Garden; people who know this place intimately. The fact that it was purchased with monies raised through the voluntary efforts of a group of workers for the Garden made the purchase even more significant. In the future the *Grounded Series* will hang in a prestigious new visitor’s centre that many visitors to the Gardens will see. Through this celebratory response and the comments of others who enjoyed the revelation of the observation of the Garden evident in the works, the community aspect of choosing the FBG as a project was found to be a highly rewarding one.

The majority of responses received via the CRG guest book were positive. There were 151 comments made in all with 93 written by international visitors, 58 from Australian visitors including 35 from locals. Outstanding comments included Karen van Harskamp’s offering: “‘Prized Succulent Collection’ is just hypnotic in its luminosity”. Another visitor to the Gardens from Cairns wrote: “ I’ve just come from the Gardens and realised that I walked through it without “seeing” it at all!! (p.5)” I found this particularly gratifying. One of my more talented year 11 students wrote: “Great work! I’m surprised”. Viewing the exhibition opened up opportunities for dialogue with him about painting and art in general. It seemed to raise his interest level and long term commitment to art.

Briony Bond of Broken Hill, N.S.W wrote: “Lovely to see the real thing and then how it’s portrayed in vivid detail and colour on canvas (p.3)” and from Darwin in the N.T “Exotic. Tropical Beauty. Great capture of lushness (p.5)”. Catherine from the Gold Coast wrote: “Divine. Bright, beautiful and a bit surreal”(p.6). Evelyn from Perth wrote: “Love the theme of ginger – reminds me of my hometown Malaysia and the beautiful aroma, colourful and gorgeous.” Kirsty from Innisfail: “Fantastic, rich – full of life!”(p.11).

A perceptive comment from a Canadian resident reads as follows: “I love the variety of perspectives of this work ... from broad compositions with the depth of looking into an area of a forest or garden, to the intimacy and closeness of a snapshot – or looking into the cross-section of a plant – muscular, fleshy and beautiful. Thank you”. S.Green from the U.K penned: “Stunning, especially to English eyes” and a resident of the U.S.A wrote: “Wonderful new perspective on plants and gardens”.

Negative comments included one from a Kuranda resident: “pleasant, though in some places very much like David Stacey’s painting (p.1)”. Stylistically and conceptually our work is very different. The similarity she mentions can only refer to the highly observational forest floor works, a subject which Stacey has also dealt with. A London resident commented that I should: “Stop taking LSD, it doesn’t help the painting!” This was probably due to the slightly surreal quality of the canvases.

The CRG provided an official exhibition report compiled by Senior Curator, Steven Tonkin. In the introductory paragraph he wrote that:

The exhibition attracted over 1955 visitors during its four weeks on display. Visitors appreciated the quality of the works, and commented on how beautiful and evocative the paintings were. Your exhibition also gave a great contrast to the reticent minimal works in the AGWA’s touring exhibition, *Howard Taylor Phenomena* (Tonkin 2005:2).

Steven selected the following four quotes from the visitor’s book as examples of public response:

“Your *Grounded Series* is outstanding Laurine. The colours beautifully balanced and life like detail. Excellent” – Jill Joyce, Cairns.

“Inspirational, captivating” – Joanna Harbrow, Cairns

“Exotic. Tropical beauty. Great capture of lushness” – Olga Kaye, Darwin

“After seeing your pictures I feel like staying in Australia forever” – Laura, Denmark.

Responses to the main features of the artworks such as visual complexity, observation of tropical beauty, and perspective were very positive with many people offering perceptive comments. The more representational *Garden Series* received more comments due to the strong colours, rich tonal variations and realistic approach. In comparison, the *Wallpapers of the Mind*

Series was more visually subtle and less readily understandable, given its conceptual background in the history of the representation of flora in art. It was a delight to have the artworks in a public space to be viewed after four years endeavour in the studio.

9.3 Painterly outcomes

A greater understanding of image construction; paint application; colour; viewpoint and scale which are all critical to the artistic process, developed during the project. Choices made were more individual and imaginative with less reliance on photographic reference material for composition and colour. Subjects were selected more deliberately and with more consideration being given to the range of compositional alternatives suitable within the parameters of the exhibition. I was careful to reflect upon the scale and presentation method that would suit the painting best. Image resolution was uppermost in my mind and decision-making given high priority in the practice. In the past, process and the thrill of undertaking new work had been the primary focus.

During the project it became apparent that it was necessary to reduce the four series that I had planned to produce down to two. This was needed in order to create a conceptually tight show, but was also determined by my own intellectual interest in the concerns of the series. Hence, the *Show your heart to the sky series*, which focussed on the calligraphic representation of an attitude of openness to the natural world, was abandoned. The *Flowergirl series*, which was to comment on the symbolic use of the flower as woman, summoning connotations of beauty, power and sexuality also became a redundant topic. The two completed series, provided abundant variety in art making process and intellectual stimulation.

The range of brushmarks expanded during the project creating paintings with more texture and variety of mark making. The laying in of background colours prior to sketching up images on a canvas was a key development, as was the use of dry and transparent brushmarks. The simple strategy of using rags to remove some paint was also a new mark-making technique, created more interest in the texture of the surface of the canvas, as well as speeding up revision of marks made. There was a reduction in use of agitated mark-making as it became apparent that it had been previously used to fill in areas of empty canvas thus stultifying rather than increasing the energy of the work.

Overall I felt a greater freedom with colour developed during the project and in the final year in particular, I began to select colour schemes with more insight, and to enjoy colour for its own sake. The therapeutic benefits of colour are well documented and colour is a powerful means of expressing emotion. To this end, colour was often a starting point for an image. For

example, *Heliconia Caribaea* Plate 8.13 is saturated with an intriguing blue cast that the photographic process contributed. This colour seemed to enhance the sense of mystery and exoticism of the tropical heliconia scene. The colour of the ginger leaves were a warm grey and without the blue cast the image may not have been selected for further development.

Confidence in colour increased during the project, with my approach becoming more adventurous, purposeful or intuitive depending on the occasion. A greater range of neutrals was utilised and overall there was less reliance on tube colours. The tonal range broadened, creating images with greater depth and emotional resonance. An interest in high-keyed hues developed which resulted in the creation of luminous works such as *Prized Succulent Collection* (Plate 8.8) and *Effervescent Bromeliad* (Plate 8.9).

Further evidence of my palette maturing during the project is to be found in the use of white and burnt sienna as unifying agents. White linear brush strokes were used to introduce movement and define form. Later works also featured white, dry-brushed over areas to unify colour schemes and soften tonal contrasts. Burnt sienna was often used in a similar fashion with another signature colour being a combination of Pthalo blue and Paynes grey, for shadows and backgrounds.

Photography was an integral, challenging and enjoyable part of the image-making process. To record images photographically was liberating in that I could reflect on the views in the comfort and privacy of the studio. Having said this, the absorption of first-hand impressions and sensations were also vital to the meaning of the images. Photography assisted greatly in achieving my aim of communicating the lifeforce of plants, allowing me to record the details of plant material relatively quickly. However, the delay created by waiting for images to be developed and printed often interrupted the creative flow. The digital camera that I had access to compressed the time delay, however images lacked the necessary richness of detail and colour definition that the SLR provided.

It is often said that photography flattens images, and I was not oblivious to this distortion when comparing free-hand sketches to photographic images, however, it was more an overall visual representation to prompt my recollection of the colours, shapes and movement of a scene that I required. I rarely adjusted images to counteract the effects of photography. Photography is a popular filtering device for experiencing the visual world and I did not resent this technological intrusion. Instead, I value the framing device of the viewfinder and enjoy the act of isolating areas from surrounding environment to create personal statements. Some

traditional artists counteract the effect of photography, while I preferred to acknowledge this accessory to mainstream memory capture.

A relatively limited range of viewpoints was utilised in the exhibition – from downward, to a frontal view taking in a range of two metres. These perspectives permitted intimate observation of plant life. I selected images that were close-up studies of predominantly one plant being the focus to better engage with the growth forms and life force of individual plants. The viewpoint of eye-level was most appropriate, although the downward view also provided a personalised way of representing one's line of vision in experiencing the garden while walking around it. Photographic images were usually taken with a telescopic lens to afford greater selection and observation of detail. I took several close-up images of a plant rather than one overall photo.

The scale of the plants in relation to the scale of the images is realistic in half of the canvases, as I wanted to portray the Garden realistically. In the other half I reduced the plants by approximately fifty percent. The scale of the plants represented in the watercolour prints is significantly reduced in order to represent a wider scene.

9.4 Evaluation of the project

Gardens of the Mind was a lengthy project spanning four years from conception to finalisation. This long gestation enabled growth and maturation of concepts and the visual arts practice as a whole. Through the process of undertaking this thesis I have gained a broader understanding of the history and symbology of the garden and this has served to deepen my appreciation of the place that is the Flecker Botanic Gardens and the wider phenomenon of gardening in contemporary Australian culture.

On a personal level, my primary aim in undertaking the thesis was to become a better painter but within the context of a research project where conceptual development, research skills and critical analysis were an integral part. A new strength in my own artwork has been achieved and I have a broader understanding of the art world with particular strengths in the painting practice outlined earlier in this chapter. My understanding of contemporary art has broadened, as has my understanding of the place my art has in relation to this. Aspects of my visual art practice have developed including documentation and presentation techniques, and production of exhibition resources such as artist statements and catalogues. A disadvantage of the lengthy nature of the project was the time that a large body of work was tied up from being offered for sale in retail galleries or other exhibition opportunities. The lengthy written

component also deprived the visual art practice of much time and creative energy, although its benefits to the practice are palpable.

The aim of representing a sensory experience of the FBG perceptively and in a way that a reasonable proportion of viewers could identify with has been achieved as born out by the responses to the artworks received. Images of representational views of plants and flowers have a universal appeal and are powerful symbols of nature. The paintings are evocative and encourage people to recall related experiences of the Flecker Botanic Gardens and garden nature.

The botanical subject matter is recognisably of North Queensland and this contextualises the work as regional in focus. Lippard's (1997) view of on an artist's ability to communicate understanding of places is helpful here: "Artists can be very good at exposing the layers of emotional and aesthetic resonance in our relationships to place" (Lippard 1997: 286). At the same time, the FBG is a storehouse of tropical plants from around the world and this determines an exotic emphasis to the work. Exoticism and the theme of escaping to the warmth and abundance of the tropics is a theme prevalent in western society and is experienced in this project at a personal level.

A positive outcome of the written component of the thesis is the higher literacy level in its broadest sense acquired by the writer. Knowledge of research methodology, critical analysis, literature reviews, structuring written text, quotation and bibliographic procedures, as well as the process of interrogating my work. Knowledge of computer programs including Microsoft Word, Power Point and Publisher have been gained through having a purpose for using them. These competencies are drawn upon in my role as a secondary art teacher as Education Queensland has a policy of involving computer literacy in learning as a priority. Certainly *Gardens of the Mind* has given depth, purpose, and clarity to the practice.

9.5 Future directions

A visual art practice changes with the interests, and life of the individual artist. Changing life circumstances of raising a family has impacted on the painting practice necessitating shorter work periods and undertaking work of a smaller scale. The frequent interruptions to work also suggest the need for a painting style requiring less concentrated attention. At the end of a rigorous work period the need for a more intuitive, though no less resolved approach is needed for a time. The calligraphic mode of art making outlined by the direct sensory experience proposed in the *Open Your Heart to the Sky Series* almost seems a logical necessity. This series would be balanced by continuing the observational mode found to be so meditative in the

Garden Series. These changes will have as a foundation, the conceptual foundation established with the project *Gardens of the Mind*.

Having gained an understanding of the art community and traditions gives me a better background for approaching the marketing of my work with retailers and on line. Exhibiting work in group exhibitions will be a focus for the next couple of years, as the solo exhibition demands too great a time commitment and as well I found the exhibition opening to be an unpleasant experience as I do not enjoy being the centre of attention.

The community aspect of the project provided opportunities for sharing perceptions and was an advantageous one, as it enabled a dialogue of ideas. This is an aspect I would like to return to in a future project with the cactus gardens of the Brisbane Toowong Botanic Gardens. Due to the positive experience of discussing the FBG with the staff that spend their time there, I would endeavour to engage more in oral research to gain an additional layer of perception rather than working from the solitary individual artist stance.

The FBG is also an ideal venue for an excursion for my senior students when they study the unit *Place*. I have a depth of knowledge and level of enthusiasm that would benefit students enormously.

My representation of the Flecker Botanic Gardens in *Gardens of the Mind* highlights various aspects of the Gardens and these could be further pursued, as individual works have not exhausted its representation. The FBG is a place that has a palpable energy that visiting is sufficient to make me feel revitalised. Observing the life and optimum health of the plants dispels mental confusion and lethargy. Just as several Sydney artists such as Lloyd Rees for example have explored the visual possibilities of Sydney Harbour over an artistic lifespan, so might I continue to return to this beautiful and energising place created by the people of Cairns.

REFERENCE LIST

- Adams, C. (ed.) (1993) *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*. Continuum Publishing Company, New York.
- Adriani, G. (2001) *Henri Rousseau*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Alley, R. (1978) *Portrait of a Primitive: The Art of Henri Rousseau*. Phaidon, Oxford.
- Anderson-Spivy, A. (1997) *Robert Kushner: Garden of Earthly Delight*. Hudson Hill Press, New York.
- Appleton, J. (1996) *The Experience of Landscape*. John Wiley & Sons, West Sussex.
- Australian National Botanic Gardens. (n.d) *What is a botanic garden?* Australian Government, Department of the Environment and Heritage. [Online]. <http://www.anbg.gov.au/anbg/what-is-a-botanic-gardens.html> [Accessed 3.5.2003].
- Backyard Blitz*, (2005) Channel 9, CTC Productions.
- Bourassa, S. (1991) *The Aesthetics of Landscape*. Belhaven Press, London.
- Cairns City Council. (n.d) Flecker Botanic Gardens, Guided Walk No.1. Pamphlet. *Flecker Botanic Gardens, Cairns*.
- Cairns City Council Services. (2004) *Flecker Botanic Gardens*. [Online]. http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/council/services/flecker_botanic_gardens [Accessed 20.10.2004].
- Cairns Regional Gallery, (2004) *Community Exhibitions Program Guidelines*. Cairns Regional Gallery, Cairns.
- Carmichael, J., Makin, J., and Wolseley, J. (1982) *Orienteering: Painting in the Landscape*. Deakin University, Victoria.
- Clinebell, H. (1996) *Ecotherapy – Healing Ourselves, Healing the Earth*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Cosic, M. 2001, August 25-26. Natural Wonder. *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, p.21.
- Davidson, K. (1992) *Garden of Earthly Delights: The Work of Fiona Hall*. Australian National Gallery, Canberra.
- Davies, C. (1989) *The Eternal Garden*. Hill of Content, Melbourne.
- de Charmant, A. 1997. Art and the Garden: Travels in the Contemporary Mindscape: Gardens Present and Future. *Art and Design*, 12 (11), 2.
- Diehl, C. (1999) "Robert Kushner at DC Moore." *Art in America*. [Online]. Find articles.com <http://www.findarticles.com> [Accessed 29.9.2002].
- Doyle, L. (2004) *C.E.P Artist/s Agreement*. Cairns Regional Gallery, Cairns.

- Fell, D. (2001) *Van Gogh's Gardens*. Simon and Schuster, New York.
- Fern, L. (1995) *William Robinson*. Craftsman House, Roseville East.
- Fink, K. (2001) "Light years: William Robinson and the Creation Story." In L. Seear (ed.) *Darkness and Light: The Art of William Robinson*. Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane.
- Fraser, M. (1999) "Down to Earth." In P. Timms (ed.) *The Nature of Gardens*. Allen and Unwin, St. Leonards.
- Gardening Australia* (2005) Australian Broadcasting Corporation.
- Graham, A. (1998) *A Garden for all Seasons: An Artist's View of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Paintings by Anne Graham*. Craftsman House, Sydney.
- Grishin, S. (1998) *John Wolseley Landmarks*. Craftsman House, Sydney.
- Grishin, S. 1998. The Journeys of John Wolseley. *Art in Australia*, 36 (1), 68-75.
- Halligan, M. (1999) "A Sufficiently Exciting Occupation." In P. Timms (ed.) *The Nature of Gardens*. Allen and Unwin, St. Leonards.
- Harper, S. (1995) "The Way of Wilderness." In T. Roszak, M.E Gomes, and A.D. Kanner, (eds) *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*. Sierra Club Books, San Francisco.
- Hart, D. (2001) "William Robinson's Artistic Development: An Intimate and Expansive Journey." In L. Seear (ed.) *Darkness and Light: The Art of William Robinson*. Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane.
- Hart, K. 1998. Fiona Hall's Garden: Fertile Interactions. *Art and Australia*, 36 (2), 204 – 210.
- Harvey, R. (ed.) (1989) *Botanic Gardens Education*. Australian National Botanic Gardens Occasional Publication No.11, Department of the Arts, Sport, The Environment, Tourism & Territories. Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.
- Henty, C. (1988) *For the People's Pleasure: Australia's Botanic Gardens*. Greenhouse Publications, California.
- Hobhouse, P. (1992) *Plants in Garden History*. Pavilion Books Limited, London.
- Hoffie, P. (1997) "Landscape and Identity in the 1980's." In G. Levitus (ed.) *Lying About the Landscape*. Craftsman House, North Ryde.
- Holloway, L. and Hubbard, P. (2001) *People and Place: The Extraordinary Geographies of Everyday Life*. Pearson Education Limited, Essex.
- Holme, B. (1982) *The Enchanted Garden: Images of Delight*. Thames and Hudson, London.
- Hoog, M. (2003) "Rousseau in His Time." In "Henri Rousseau." *Artchive*. [Online]. http://artchive.com/ftp_site.htm [Accessed 7.1.03].
- Hunt, J. D. (2002) "Garden." In L.Macy (ed.) *The Grove Dictionary of Art Online*. [Online]. Macmillan Publishers Ltd. <http://www.groveart.com> [Accessed 19.4.2002].

- Hunt, J. D. (2002) "Three Natures: Gardens, Cultural Landscapes and Wilderness." In L. Macy (ed.) *The Grove Dictionary of Art Online*. [Online]. Macmillan Publishers Ltd. <http://www.groveart.com> [Accessed 9.4.2002].
- Huxley, A. (1980) Foreword to *A Vision of Eden: The Life and Work of Marianne North*. In Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and Webb & Bower, Devon.
- Isaacs, J. (1987) *The Gentle Arts, 200 Years of Women's Domestic and Decorative Arts*. Lansdowne Press, Willoughby.
- Israel, G. (1997) *Artwise: Visual Arts 7–10*. Jacaranda, Milton.
- Kaplan, R. and Kaplan, S. (1989) *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- le Pichon, Y. (1982) *The World of Henri Rousseau*. In J. Neugroschel (Trans.) Phaidon, Oxford.
- Lippard, L. R. (1997) *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*. The New Press, New York.
- Marshall Cavendish Weekly Collection. (1995) *The Great Artists Their Lives, Works and Inspiration: 75 Rousseau*. Marshall Cavendish Partworks, London.
- Morrell, T. (1990) "Fiona Hall." In A. Carroll (ed.) *Art from Australia, Eight Contemporary Views*. Australian Exhibitions Touring Agency.
- Palmer, M. and Manning, C. (2000) *Sacred Gardens: A Guide to the Traditions, Meanings and Design of Beautiful and Tranquil Places*. Piatkus, London.
- Pioch, N. (2002) "Art of the Fantastic." [Online]. Web Museum, Paris. <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/rousseau/rousseau.dream.jpg> [Accessed 5.7.05].
- Pollock, G. (1988) *Vision and Difference – Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*. Routledge, London.
- Probert, B. (1999) "How We Shape the Garden." In P. Timms (ed.) *The Nature of Gardens*. Allen and Unwin, St. Leonards.
- Relph, E. (1976) *Place and Placelessness*. Pion Limited, London.
- Ross, S. (1998) *What Gardens Mean*. Chicago Press, University of Chicago.
- Roszak, B (1995) "The Ecology of madness." In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, and A.D Kanner, (eds) *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*. Sierra Books, San Francisco.
- Roszak, T., Gomes, M.E. and Kanner, A.D. (eds) (1995) *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*. Sierra Club Books, San Francisco.
- Royal Botanic Gardens. (1980) *A Vision of Eden: The Life and Work of Marianne North*. Webb & Bower, Devon.
- Seddon, G. (1997) *Landprints: Reflections on Place and Landscape*. University Press, Cambridge.

- Seear, L. (2001) "The Problem of Interpretation." In L. Seear (ed.) *Darkness and Light: the Art of William Robinson*. Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane.
- Seear, L. (ed.) (2001) *Darkness and Light: the Art of William Robinson*. Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane.
- Sewall, L. (1995) "The Skill of Ecological Perception." In T. Roszak, M.E Gomes, and A.D. Kanner (eds) *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*. Sierra Club Books, San Francisco.
- Shanahan, P. (2001) *Interpretive Officer's General Garden Tour*. 20.4.01, Flecker Botanic Gardens, Cairns.
- Spate, V. (1996) "Concerning the Spiritual in Art: A Sceptical Essay." In N. Waterlow and R. Mellick (eds) *Spirit + Place, Art in Australia 1861 – 1996*. Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.
- Syme, R. 2001, June 6. Trip to Capital Plants Ideas. *Cairns Sun*, pp.1 and 8.
- Timms, P. (ed.) (1999) *The Nature of Gardens*. Allen and Unwin, St. Leonards.
- Tonkin, S. (2005) *Exhibition Report*. Cairns Regional Gallery Ltd., Cairns.
- Waterlow, N. and Mellick, R. (eds) (1996) *Spirit + Place, Art in Australia 1861 – 1996*. Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.
- Wood, R. (2003) [Online]. <http://plantsatwork.org/pdf/Symposium> [Accessed 3.5.2003].
- Wood, R. (2003) *A New Urban Ecology*. 3.5.2003 Radio National
- Wright, W. and Teo, L. (eds.) (1999) Sherman Galleries, *Crossing: the Rose Crossing Contemporary Art in Australia*. Sherman Galleries, Sydney, Australia.

APPENDIX A – ARTIST STATEMENT AND BIOGRAPHY

ARTIST STATEMENT

The exhibition *Gardens of the Mind* explores the garden landscape of the Flecker Botanic Gardens. This magnificent garden is evidence of people working harmoniously with nature to produce a sensory experience providing visual delight and spiritual refreshment.

The practice of arranging nature's elements into the ideal landscapes that form gardens (public and private, small and large) is pursued with great enthusiasm in Australia and is a significant part of our culture. Gardens are dense repositories of the human-plant relationship and as such, the Flecker Botanic Gardens in Cairns is a highly cultivated symbol of people's finely woven connection with the plant world.

Gardens of the Mind draws on the tradition in art of artists painting gardens, capturing growth forms, and textures through mark making and colour. Indeed the endeavours of painting and gardening have many qualities in common such as a struggle for visual balance and the expression of a personal aesthetic through the arrangement of elements.

The Flecker Botanic Gardens is a sanctuary that emanates life through the burgeoning undergrowth, extensive canopy, huge organ-like flowers, exotic tropical plant forms, and prolific indigenous plant life. *Gardens of the Mind* communicates the fecundity that permeates the pungent environment of the Gardens featuring close-up sections of individual plants, garden beds and ground covers. Some of the works clearly originate from a manicured garden, whilst others appear more wild in form. Several of the paintings employ the unusual perspective of the downward view, focussing attention on the ground as a source of life. Images are either acrylic on canvas or hand-coloured watercolour prints and are organised into two series. The garden series explores representational views of the garden and has a quality of moving through the layers of the foliage. Works in the Wallpapers of the Mind series share a decorative concern and draw on the long history of depicting flora in art. In essence, *Gardens of the Mind* captures the enlivening experience of visiting the Flecker Botanic Gardens, an environment that stimulates the mind and restores the soul.

BIOGRAPHY

This information was displayed on a wall panel in the gallery.

Laurine Field (1966) grew up in suburban Brisbane and from an early age was encouraged to explore art as a means of self-expression. At seventeen she made the decision to pursue art education as a career because it provided a means to work in an area she felt passionate about whilst providing a degree of security not availed by the life of an artist.

At the end of a lack lustre teaching course relieved only by painting classes taught by Bill Robinson and Ian Smith, Laurine taught for a year on the Gold Coast. She then resigned and worked for eight years decorating pots in a studio pottery in Gladstone.

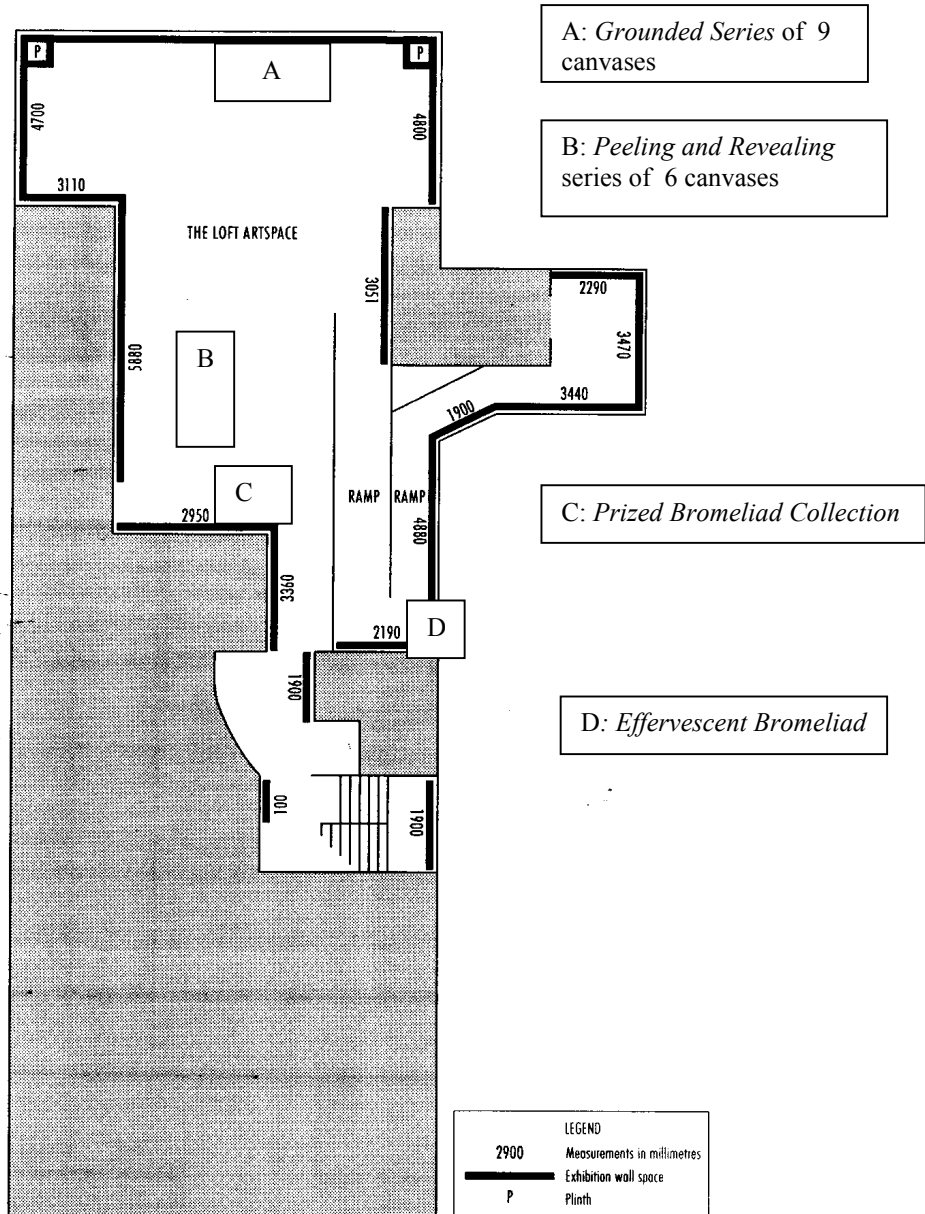
In 1996 she reapplied to the education department prepared to teach anywhere in the state. Fortunately Cairns was the posting granted. Whilst teaching, Laurine studied painting part-time through the Gippsland Centre of Art and Design. This study program proved inspirational and Laurine followed this course with a Masters of Creative Arts at JCU Cairns, for which *Gardens of the Mind* is a practical component.

Laurine currently works part-time as a secondary art teacher and has a young son. For Laurine, painting plants has been a thread through her life for the last twenty years as it provides refreshment and intellectual stimulation.

APPENDIX B - FLOOR PLAN OF LOFT GALLERY AND LOCATION OF KEY WORKS IN *GARDENS OF THE MIND*



CAIRNS REGIONAL GALLERY
second floor






APPENDIX C – EXHIBITION INVITATION AND CATALOGUE

Cairns Regional Gallery
Community Exhibitions Program
presents

Gardens of the Mind
Paintings of the
Flecker Botanic Gardens
by
Laurine Field
4 February - 6 March
2005

To be opened by
David Warmington
Curator Flecker Botanic Gardens
and
Margaret Genever
Lecturer - Visual Arts - JCU
from 2.30pm
on Saturday 5 February 2005
at Cairns Regional Gallery
Corner Abbott & Shields Streets
CAIRNS

RSVP essential on 4046 4800
by Wednesday 2 February 2005
Artist Talk 2pm

*Through the Community Exhibitions Program Cairns Regional Gallery
profiles the work of artists and organisations throughout
Far North Queensland*

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

EXHIBITION SPEECHES

DAVID WARMINGTON – CURATOR OF THE FLECKER BOTANIC GARDENS

Firstly I would like to thank Laurine for inviting me to speak at the opening of this exhibition Gardens of the Mind. It is an honour and a pleasure.

I would like everyone to think about this statement for a moment

ALL LIFE DEPENDS ON PLANTS

A very powerful statement and one we have all heard --no plants no O₂ --no O₂- no life

We live in a world where the greenhouse effect, global warming, salinity, are household words.

We live in a world that is ecologically stressed.

A speaker at a conference that I recently attended referred to the current global practice as “**spending the earths ecological capital rather than living off the interest**”.

While all life does not depend on the plants in a botanic Garden they do have a very important role to play in our lives and this is what I would like to talk briefly about

The international coordinating body for Botanic Gardens the Botanic Gardens Conservation International **BGCI** recently described a botanic garden as “**an institution holding documented collection of living plants for the purpose of Scientific research, conservation, display and Recreation**”

Our mission statement at Flecker is “To display tropical plant species of ornamental economic cultural and conservation value for educational recreational and scientific purposes with emphasis on endangered species”.

While **scientific research** is not part of the Fleckers portfolio and we do not have laboratories staff in white coats studying evolutionary relationships through DNA sequences. The Gardens do assist other institutions in important ways. For instance this week we have been able to assist a forensic botanist at the Deakin University with seed of *Gardenia orcherata*.

Many of the plants in the Flecker collection are of **conservation significance** and the numbers of plants on this list increase as global destruction of natural habitats continues

I frequently hear collector who have gone to rich past collecting areas only to find the site now totally cleared

Obviously the best way to conserve a species is to protect its natural habitat, Botanic Gardens play an important role in the continuation and survival of some plants

This year at Flecker we will be aligning our **schools eduction program** with the Qld Education Science Syllabus. Students will be offered a range of outdoor lessons through the gardens interpretive officer. What a great way to learn about science!

As peoples dreams of a simple slower lifestyle are eroded by a more complex reality of todays world people look towards gardens as a symbol of simplicity tranquillity and sanity

(and a Botanic Garden has the great advantage that you don't have to do **the weeding**)

Gardens are a symbol of peace

Tranquillity

Protection of the environment

Growth

Productivity

Beauty
Security

Laurine's work we see here is a reflection of all of these qualities

We come to gardens in times of joy and celebration
We come to gardens in times of sadness and despair
We come to gardens for answers and inspiration
To sit in a garden and contemplate the past present or future is one of life's simplest pleasures

Laurine has commented on the similarity between gardeners and artists
In her words **“indeed the endeavours of painting and gardening have many qualities in common such as a struggle for visual balance and the expression of a personal aesthetic through the arrangement of the elements”**

Like a painter the gardener has a palette of plants to choose from. We are very fortunate to have these fantastic tropical plants with some of the most robust bold characters as well as some of the most delicate and exquisite forms on our palette

Licuala ramsayi Dendrocalamus Metroylon **refer to paintings**
Understory gingers curcumas and kaempheria

The Flecker Gardens are designed to be visually appealing, without that you have lost 90% of your audience It is important that people come away with a positive plant experience
The landscape however is dynamic for ever changing with the seasons and forces of nature
We were witness to these forces of nature in February 2000 when Cyclone Steve ravaged and rearranged the Gardens. Initially there was pain and disbelief until the plant life flourished to take advantage new found opportunities

Laurine's description of the Gardens **“as a sanctuary that emanates life through the burgeoning undergrowth, extensive canopy, huge organ like flowers, exotic tropical plant forms and prolific indigenous plant life”** is so descriptive and accurate that she obviously has a very close association and appreciation of this Garden

It is easy to become hardened by the beauty and unique environment that surrounds us and I often wonder what an amazing experience it must **be for visitors from the winters** of the Europe or America to arrive at Flecker, mid summer to the sounds, smells and heat of tropical NQ to be confronted with the extremes of horticulture – the Botanical superstars of the plant kingdom

“Gardens of the Mind communicates the fecundity that permeates the pungent environment of the gardens” These are powerful and appropriate words that Laurine has chosen to relate this exhibition to the Gardens.

Congratulations Laurine on this impressive exhibition, you have captured the spirit and essence of Flecker Botanic Gardens in these works.

**MARGARET GENEVER'S OPENING SPEECH FOR
GARDENS OF THE MIND 5 FEB 2005**

You have to be very brave woman to make figurative garden and flower paintings in this pluralistic era, where artists use any and every material and at times none at all. The first reason is that the new media is often seen as providing the cutting edge that painting no longer can manage. And the second is that garden and flower paintings are often relegated to that second rate category, the domestic, the decorative, the domain of women.

Regarding new media, despite their supposed primacy over traditional and the figurative, we observe that the time-honored styles and subjects of art remain strong and relevant. In fact it is the presence of the traditional that gives the postmodern, the minimal, the conceptual, and the abstract, their effect. And it seems to me that the opposite is also true: that traditional works are enhanced, not diminished, by the challenges of new media. However I think today we have higher expectations of traditional artists and their work. Now more than ever, they must offer us something more. In some ways they have a much harder task before them.

Laurine has taken up this challenge with quiet determination, commitment, a great deal of skill, and pleasure. She has chosen to remain with the figurative and traditional mediums and methods, and the subject of the garden. Despite the fact that most people treasure the garden and the idea of gardens, gardens are not usually thought of as significant or essential because of their relation to the domestic and the decorative realm which, to say the very least, are undervalued in western culture. Even botanical gardens such as the Flecker, the site of these explorations, where science is an important factor, the gardens remain for most people an extension of their own. Happily though someone else has to weed and water it, and everything is at its best all the time.

Undeterred by any of the negative associations, the garden has been Laurine's primary focus for some time now and in the tradition of the great flower and garden painters, she supplies us with more than our desire to capture and record their beauty. This exhibition extends her enduring interest and research into the way in which humans relate to nature through the garden and its flowers. Her work is underpinned by a philosophical framework which is informed by her response to 'third nature' and is an interaction with cultural and personal experiences and beliefs.

The concept of third nature comes from the scholars of the Renaissance period around the 15th century. First nature is the natural world, the wilderness untempered by human beings, something increasingly rare as we know. Second nature is agriculture and human occupied spaces. Third nature is the garden. Laurine introduced me to this idea, and I like the term because conceptually it repositions the garden so that it has a complementary relationship with Nature rather than being a pale and lesser imitation of it. And it this I think, which adds depth and significance to Laurine's focus on two of the conceptual elements of the third nature. They are the sensory pleasure and the spiritual refreshment which derives from it, which is different to that of the first two natures but just as necessary to our wellbeing.

Laurine has brought these concepts of the spirit of nature to the still space of the art gallery. I think that it is an exhibition which is strong on the two artistic principles -conceptually and formally. Like nature itself the works are structurally sound, but not all are necessarily nice pictures. Some are quite challenging designs, like the painting of the curious "the cannonball tree" where the huge tree trunk dominates the picture space. Another is the "palm tree" series where the design elements in the bark are so strong as to make you look again to notice the subtleties of the composition of both the tree and the painting. They are all well wrought pictures, with evidence of intense concentration which she brings to the garden and its products and they embody the sense of growing to flourishing maturity like the plants they depict. And

while they are figurative they are not literal representations. There is a nice balance between the two, which enlivens the surface and our experience of the paintings, so that they need close and distant examination.

There is so much sensory pleasure in these pictures, the delight the artist takes in her surroundings is obvious and transmits very well. I also like the way in which she approaches each of the series to think about and create the human link. For example the 'ground paintings' depict what you can see at eye height on the ground between your feet. Lastly I should mention the wonderful colour, the most sensory experience of all, which is in fact the first thing which one reacts to in the exhibition. It is celebratory and uplifting.

I would like to close by thanking Laurine for asking me to speak here today, an opening is always an exciting but also a nerve-racking event. It is a great pleasure to be standing here at the best end of the long hours of work and thought that go into a cohesive body of work. I have also had the privilege over the last couple of years of being associate supervisor for her Master of Creative Arts Degree at JCU of which this exhibition is one component. I have admired her dedication and commitment to her art, especially as she is a full time teacher, and a wife who during the production of the exhibition also produced the wonderful Oscar, her son. His first word was not garden but Dog, surprisingly. So it gives me great pleasure to join with John Warmington to declare this exhibition open.

Margaret Genever

Lecturer, College of Music Visual Arts and Theatre, JCU, Cairns

**APPENDIX E – MEDIA RESPONSES TO THE EXHIBITION: NEWSPAPER
ARTICLES**

Van Harskamp, K. (2005) "Dreaming of flowers" *Cairns Post Timeout* 10.2.05 p. 13

THE CONTENTS OF THIS PAGE HAVE BEEN REMOVED
DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

“Gardens of the Mind” *Cairns Post – Weekender 5-6.2.05*

THE CONTENTS OF THIS PAGE HAVE BEEN REMOVED
DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

APPENDIX F – VISITOR’S COMMENTS BOOK