

# **HEAD, HEART AND HAND – A VISUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

A thesis

submitted with creative work in fulfilment of the requirements

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By

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## **STATEMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS**

I acknowledge the assistance of my supervisor Professor Diana Davis and co-supervisor, Mr. Robert Preston in the College of Music, Visual Art and Theatre.

The exhibitions for this dissertation cost approximately \$15,000 for:

Art materials,  
Hiring of gallery,  
Opening night refreshments,  
Printing of invitations and catalogues,  
Frames and Plinths.

These costs have been met by the student.

## ABSTRACT

The visual autobiography entitled Head, Heart and Hand is a research project in which one visual artist interrogates environment as artistic crucible. The concept of Head, Heart and Hand corrals the various domains of studio practice, the intellectual, perception and cognition (Head), the emotional, memory and intuition (Heart) and, the technical, skills, media and processes (Hand). These three domains form a triangulation of artistic activity to guide the researcher's examination of practice.

The journey begins with the personal dilemmas embedded in the artist's practice. The genesis of ideas to creation of artworks and exhibitions, reflection on practice and on action expose aesthetic decision making through the voice of the artist. Drawing, using traditional and emerging contemporary media and processes, is the core fine art studio medium and practice integral to the research and the primary instrument of Hand.

A theoretical framework derived from the writings of Bell (1914), Langer (1954), Arnheim (1974), Csikszentmihalyi (1993) and Damasio (1994,1999) provides the framework from which the researcher shapes the various drivers (intuition, memory and perception) for artistic practice. The research deals with such academically unfamiliar concepts of *feeling* and the *sense of rightness* so comfortably a part of the creative process yet generally grounded in the somewhat tacit knowledge of artists.

An extensive survey of drawing as a *core* fine art practice and as a stage en route to other art forms or realizations maps out the various attitudes and categories of drawing practice that exist within the context of the Western Fine Arts tradition. With a particular focus on Australian artists and personal mentors, particularly those highly regarded for their draughtsmanship, the Australian foregrounds the researcher's studio practice.

A personal research tool termed visual autobiography is constructed from contemporary social science research methods used to explore culture and cultural production. From an artist centred model, this organic research methodology allows the artist/researcher to experience periods of intense studio immersion and to extract a meta-narrative from which patterns of behaviour become explicit and therefore examinable.

A substantial autobiography maps out the life-world of the artist and explores the very foundations of his belief system and the elements that shape particular personal perceptions about art, drawing, environment and his place in the visual arts world. Traditional artist research tools such as visual diaries, sketching *in-situ* and photography describe the way the artist moves through sometimes-exotic far-away environments to find inspiration for future artworks.

From the written autobiography, three pivotal environments emerge to become the fertile ground from which individual episodes of artistic production emerge. Paris and Provence, France, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada and Cairns, Far North Queensland, Australia develop into the significant sites for stage one of the

research. The outcomes of these investigations culminate in a solo exhibition comprising an installation of thirty-six drawings.

Using the visual autobiographical tool as a mode of reflection on the content and process of work in the exhibition, it became clear that the circle had not yet been completed. As a result of this reflexive process a further body of drawings was created to test the theories and models generated during the initial phase of the research. This final body of drawings explore the morphing of memories with the factual observation of place thus exposing the insider's view of the city of Sydney, Australia.

At the end of the journey the artist/researcher pauses to reflect and look back at the terrain thus covered as a basis for speculation about the implications for future research and future studio practice as well as a retrospective look at the exhibition outcomes.



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