

THE TOWNSVILLE COMMON: CODIFYING A PRIVATE VIEW OF NATURAL ENERGIES

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ABSTRACT

Humans have been interacting with the Townsville Town Common Environmental Park throughout its history. This study probes the relationship between artist and The Common. More specifically, it examines this artist's response to energies of cyclical change within the Common (growth cycle, diurnal change, seasonal change, migratory patterns and motion of tides).

An account is given of the previous one hundred and thirty year history of The Common to provide a background to the artist's interest in, and use of, the park. A scientific view of The Common is also provided to give a context to the research explorations. Particularly useful in this regard is information on the evolution and uniqueness of this park obtained by extensive consultations with wetlands ecologist J.G. Blackman, an authority on The Common.

To set a visual arts context for the practical component of the study, artists using a range of mediums and featuring The Common as subject, are examined: John Olsen (gouache paintings), Jim Cox (pen and ink drawings), James Brown (oil paintings) and Hilary Mangan (lithography prints). This examination reveals the essence of each artist's relationship with The Common.

In revealing the response of the artist to energies of cyclical change on The Common, the thesis lays out the development of an idiosyncratic visual code to express the energies of cyclical change experienced during 2002. By design, this code integrates intuitive and analytical processes framed by these experiences.

Predicated on personal observations and responses to natural energy cycles (Growth, Diurnal, Seasonal, Migratory and Tidal) experienced at five different sites during weekly field trips spanning a twelve-month period, intuition and analysis drive

the research. From studies made during these field trips, involving diaries of drawings, field notes, forty etchings and extensive photographic records, a framework of intuitive responses (*gut reactions*) to, and ideas about, natural energies is established. This framework is pivotal to the development of the code by allowing changes in personal response to energy cycles to be identified.

Construction of the code involves three stages. First, there is analysis of the intuitive responses involving examination of twenty field-trip etchings and supporting diary notes. Second, is extension of key features from these intuitively drawn etchings, by transposing pivotal sections from the prints into twenty exploratory study paintings. These studies determine visual devices for the code by focusing on separate design elements (line, shape, tone and texture). Third, is the application of these devices as a code in five paintings to convey the notion of energies experienced. By intention, the application of the code in these final paintings should show the expression of the artist's responses to the energies of cyclical change.

Evaluation concerning aptness of the code for capturing expression of these energies is from the viewpoint of the artist in the context of comparison between a pre-research control painting and the five post-research paintings. This comparison shows that the code integrates intuitive response and analytical thinking to convey the notion of cyclical change regarding *The Common*. Analysis reveals that this code also has potential for application to a much wider range of landscapes. Moreover, the three stages of its development may be a useful approach for other artists to encode their vision.

The outcome of the research is presented by an exhibition of sixty-eight artworks tracing the development of the idiosyncratic visual code from driver of *gut reactions* in response to singular experiences, to encompassing views of energies of five cyclical changes.

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