

CHAPTER 6

EXHIBITION

6.1 SELECTING A VENUE

In selecting a venue for the presentation of the foregoing research as an exhibition, the criterion was its potential for a viewer to be surrounded by The Common rather than walking through it. In this way, the expectation was that a viewer could become part of The Common and thus be open to experiencing the energies the artist encountered—such energies emanating from the artworks. Ideally, therefore, the venue would need to have no visual distractions, such as windows and visual pathways to other areas, have the floor centre equidistance from all walls, and be of sufficient size to accommodate the outcomes of the research. All spaces that were not formal galleries were eliminated from consideration because of their inherent visual distractions. Table 6.1.1 presents the gallery options.

Table 6.1.1

VENUE SELECTION

Venue	Visual distractions	Configuration	Ability to accommodate display
Flinders Gallery	windows, pillars, staircase	irregular	yes
Perc Tucker Regional Gallery local artist's space	visual pathways	almost square	too small
Pinnacles Gallery Regional	glass doors, catering area	curved wall, "L" shape	yes
Umbrella Studio	visual pathway	"L" shape	yes
Vincent Gallery	nil	almost square	yes

As is clear from Table 6.1.1 the Vincent Gallery was the only one which met all three criteria.

An additional factor in favour of Vincent Gallery is that this gallery is located in the tertiary institution of James Cook University at the COMVAT site and is thus readily accessible by visual arts students and potentially of interest in a pedagogical sense.

6.2 Presentation and framing of research

As the practical application of the research was executed in three distinct stages, the method of presentation and framing of such research was driven by each process—specimens to be studied (Section 4.4), study paintings (Section 4.5) and final product (Chapter 5).

The prints created by the *gut reactions* driver (i.e. the specimens under study) were presented as such—raised from backing boards and encased in clear Perspex—akin to mounted insects on display. The notion behind this was to present the prints, in the initial instance not as artworks but rather as a series of interpretable black marks.

Hence, small stretcher frames 15.5 cm x 15.5 cm x 3 cm were made over which the etchings printed on white 300 gsm Somerset paper were stretched. White painted medium density fibre backing-boards 37.5 cm x 37 cm (to give the illusion of being square when viewed vertically as hung on the wall) were then covered in the same Somerset paper, thus creating a uniform background of support for the black marks (the print). The stretched prints were then attached to the backing-boards, slightly off-centre top-orientated. Finally, commercially formed five centimetres deep Perspex “lids” were affixed by brass screws through the sides of the backing-boards—presenting prints as specimens. Subsequently, editions of these prints were

commercially bound thus creating visual diaries of the initial stage of the research, entitled *Commonly Seen*.

The second process resulting in the painting studies was presented in the manner of a thumb-nail sketch with a line around it indicating the intermediate stage the position that these studies held in the research. To this end, five millimetres wide timber slats, treated to produce an unobtrusive mid-tone grey, were utilised only as an edging device. Thus, the focus is directed to the contents within the edge (the study painting).

For the final process, presentation differed from the preceding stage as the practical application of the research was complete. Hence, these paintings were framed more richly as a final product with fifteen millimetres wide silvered timber slat frames aged by rubbing in black ink. However, a mid-tone was retained to keep visual focus on the black and whiteness of the paintings and the exhibition.

Additional works accompanied the research—a personal practice control-painting framed in five millimetre wide natural timber slats and initial exploratory works compiled into a concertina book of small lino-cuts printed on hand-made Ti-tree bark paper [Appendix C], entitled *Common Marks*. One such print featured on the invitations.

6.3 Designing the invitation

In designing the invitation, three considerations were personally desirable, viz. appropriateness of image and format, practicality and a desire to share. Regarding the first consideration, appropriateness of image and format, an image with the potentiality to be analogous of *The Common* was required to remove any special importance placed on a particular energy, which would apply if an image from one of the research

processes were utilised. A format in keeping with the presentation of the research, that is the square, was also required. However, the practical concern to be addressed was how to adhere to the square format while at the same time creating an invitation that fitted neatly into an Australian Post preferred size envelope. A further practical consideration was that the information contained therein be readily readable. While, in regard to the third desirable outcome, the invitation needed to have the potential to give recipients a little bit of energy from The Common itself.

The outcome of these considerations presented in Appendix D, was arrived at in the following manner.

- A lino-cut was created from a mark portraying the fluidity of water (the wetlands of The Common) and was subsequently printed on hand-made guinea-grass paper (the non-wetland areas) roughly torn into square-like shapes—an analogy for The Common (image appropriateness).
- An A4 sheet of 120 gsm card was halved lengthwise, a third of which was then folded back on itself, creating two squares on the face of the invitation—one for mounting the print the other for written information (format appropriateness). Thus, the invitation would also neatly fit into an A4 envelope (practicality).
- The plain bold Lucida Bright font was utilised in presenting relevant information (easily readable).
- An edition of 105 prints was pulled from the lino-cut and one affixed to each of the invitations (potential energy from The Common for each recipient). Subsequently, each print was edition numbered and signed—an invitation to the exhibition.

6.4 A cohesive whole: the exhibition *Uncommon Common*

The entrance to the almost square (Section 6.1) Vincent Gallery is set off-centre. Hence, there are three walls of approximately equal size with the third being divided by the entrance in an unequal ratio. Thus being the case, the exhibition was hung with results of the research on the three uninterrupted walls, with additional works occupying the two shorter walls. The positioning of presentation was the next issue.

To give a viewer an overview of *The Common*, its physical features and size, as well as providing insight into the areas under research, a computer screen was set up to the left of the entrance on which a looped CD played presenting aerial views of *The Common* interspersed with reproductions of the research [Appendix E]. Assuming a viewer turned left at the entrance, this was the first presentation [Plate 6.4.1].

From this point, and to give a viewer a greater insight into *The Common* before encountering the research works, along the longer of the two short walls, twenty specimens (prints) not used in the five cycles studies were double-hung with the *Artist's Statement* [Appendix F] affixed in vertical alignment with the above eyelevel ducting thus negating potential visual distraction by such ducting [Plate 6.4.1]. On the next wall were hung the twenty specimens relating to the five cycles. These were double-hung in groups of four, equidistant apart, thus forming a square. Five of these squares of four appear along this wall [Plate 6.4.2].

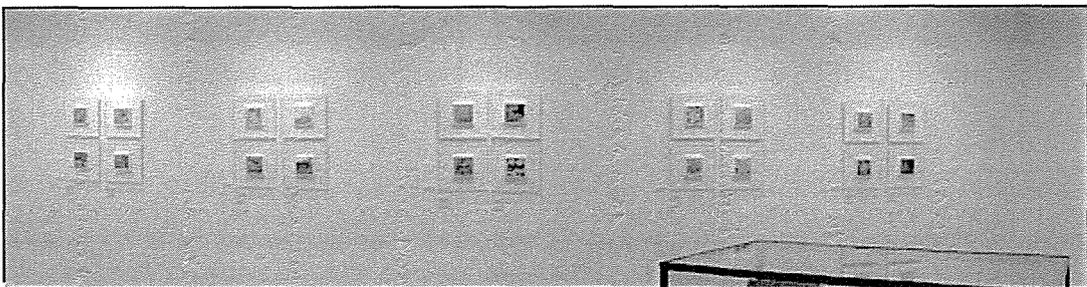
On the wall opposite these hung specimens, the twenty study paintings were hung in the same manner as the specimens [Plate 6.4.3]. The wall between these two exploratory stages housed the five final paintings as exemplars of the five cycles portrayed in the explorations [Plate 6.4.4]. Since this wall is directly opposite the entrance, a viewer would thus be initially presented with *The Common* from the artist's personal viewpoint, potentially to invite closer inspection of the exhibition.



Twenty specimens not used in the five energy cycles studies: lino etchings on 300 gsm Somerset paper mounted in Perspex cases (photographer Jeff Vickers)

WALL ONE— *UNCOMMON COMMON*

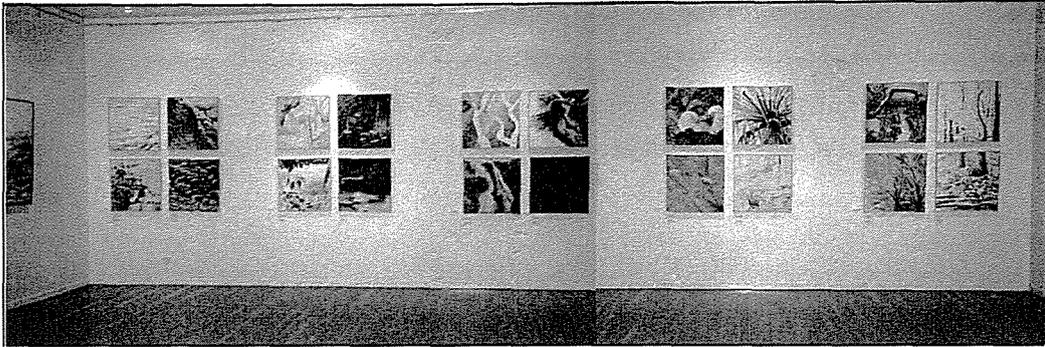
Plate 6.4.1



Five cycles of specimens researched: lino etchings on 300 gsm Somerset paper mounted in Perspex cases (photographer Jeff Vickers)

WALL TWO— *UNCOMMON COMMON*

Plate 6.4.2



Twenty study paintings: ground charcoal and wax on canvas, each 62 x 61 cm (photographer Jeff Vickers)

WALL FOUR—*UNCOMMON COMMON*

Plate 6.4.3



Five paintings as exemplars of energy cycles: ground charcoal and wax on canvas, each 104 x 103 cm (photographer Jeff Vickers)

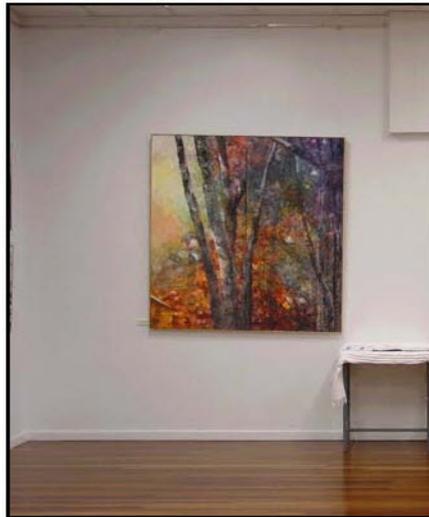
WALL THREE—*UNCOMMON COMMON*

Plate 6.4.4

The remaining short wall was the backdrop for the colour control-painting on a table next to which was placed a *Visitor's Book*, thus bringing a full-stop to the visual journey [Plate 6.4.5]. A display case was placed diagonally in far left-hand-side corner placed so as to allow an unobstructed view of the walls and ease of passage. The artist's books were displayed in this case as were the black lacquered boxes containing the small lino-cuts used to produce the book, *Common Marks* [Plate 6.4.6].

Didactic labelling was placed so that there was no visual interruption by the reflection from the specimen boxes when under lights—slightly lower than traditional placement—thus completing the hanging component of the research exhibition.

The promotional fliers, catalogues, list of works and business cards produced as auxiliaries to the presentation of the research (the exhibition) had the issues of appropriateness and readability. Hence, the promotional fliers and catalogues were designed around the square format used throughout the research and printed in plain fonts. In consultation with graphic designer, Adrienne Cerutti, the commercially printed fliers [Appendix G] featured four works grouped as a square in the centre of an A4 sheet with relevant exhibition information appearing above and below the graphic square. The catalogue [Appendix H], also commercially printed, followed a similar format for the reproductions of the study, eight of which appear on the cover (four prints each on front and back covers). However, as a leader to the research sections, page one features a colour reproduction of the painting *The Townsville Common*, that is, The Common as interpreted by the artist prior to commencing this study. The following pages house the research sections reproductions—prints and paintings divided into the relevant cycles. Within the painting section, the final painting for each cycle appears opposite the relevant group of study paintings. Hence, the juxtaposition of the studies (Section 4.4) and the culminating work (Chapter 5) creates the potential



Control painting: oil and wax on canvas, 145 x 144 cm
(photographer Jeff Vickers)

WALL FIVE—*UNCOMMON COMMON*

Plate 6.4.5



Presentation of books and boxed lino cut plates
(photographer Jeff Vickers)

DISPLAY CABINET—*UNCOMMON COMMON*

Plate 6.4.6

of an internal dialogue for a reader. On the final page is a colour representation of the two books *Commonly Seen* and *Common Marks* (Section 6.2) thus completing the graphics component. Accompanying text retains the square format used in the graphics presentations. Hence, *Acknowledgements* and *Artist's Statement* were overprinted on a shadow reproduction of the painting *Townsville Common: Diurnal Change*, inside the front cover while. *Selected Résumé*, appearing inside the back cover, received similar treatment utilising the painting *Townsville Common: Migration*.

Accompanying this formal publication was a user-friendly *List of Works* [Appendix I] produced as convenient reference material for a viewer. These separate handouts were three double-sided printed A4 sheets stapled in the left-hand corner. Black and white numbered thumbnail reproductions of each creation cross-referenced to the didactic wall labelling, were printed below the exhibition title, venue, dates and artist. Finally, business cards featuring the lino-etching *Townsville Common 22* were commercially printed and made available to visitors [Appendix J].

CHAPTER 7

REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 CONTEMPLATING THE PROCESS

Prior to this research, the author's sense of place regarding The Common and coastal tropical landscapes in general was limited as many years had been spent in Western Queensland. Moreover, the author held an inexplicable dread of portraying the land despite previous attempts to express a strongly felt affinity with it (Nixon-Smith, 1998). Although fully aware of personal physiological and emotional responses to energies emanating from the land, how to portray these connections was elusive.

Added to this issue, was a healthy cynicism regarding the value of codes in art. After all, according to the author's thinking at the time, a personal response is unique to a specific time and place and, as such, could not be captured by a formula or a set of conventions. Moreover, from a viewer's perspective, the idea of a code underpinning an artwork seemed incompatible with perceiving creative invention at play. Going further, the viewer's knowledge of the existence of a code negates seeing the sensitivities of the artist by awareness of how a work was constructed; a concern somewhat akin to the adage of not being able to see the wood for the trees. Conducting this research helped to allay and even eliminate these concerns by proving them to be unfounded with regard to the outcome of this study.

The first issue to be laid to rest was the acquisition of a sense of place regarding The Common. This feeling developed after the realisation that the *wow* factor in coastal tropical landscape exists in relationships between features observed by close scrutiny. After a year of very close scrutiny regulated by weekly field trips to

The Common, the author developed a very strong sense of place. And, following rigorous interrogation of personal responses to the energies of The Common that were fundamental to the development of the code, an awareness of what constituted this sense of place was firmly installed.

Hand in hand with this acquisition was a change in perspective on the value of codes. This new attitude arose from the discipline of the research itself, in that the tight control imposed by the process of encoding responses showed that constraint may liberate creative invention rather than curtailing it. Going further, on conclusion of the research, the shift in perspective is even more of a sea change. Now, the balancing of intuitive and analytical mindsets underpinning the code and by the artist's experience of applying it in the final paintings has led to a fresh appreciation of the capacity of a code to promote creative invention.

Also laid to rest was the personal reluctance to paint landscapes. The overcoming of this issue had its roots in the process of finding ways to show the energies of landscape rather than portraying landscape qua landscape.

Overcoming the issue of viewers "not being able to see the wood for the trees", however, was more problematic and hinges on how the code is applied. More specifically, it hinges on the artist's serious intent. The way forward was to focus on maximising the potential for the devices of the code to project meaning. And, by the serious intent to project the "desired outcome" (Section 4.2), hopefully, viewers' interest will also be directed to reading the artist's sensitivities rather than the mechanics of how a work is constructed. In short, the overcoming of this issue is about flow: the viewer sensing the artist's need to communicate and the flow-on effect of being driven to read the encoded meanings.

7.2 VIEWER RESPONSE TO THE EXHIBITION

Given the variables of viewers' experiences discussed in Sections 2.6 and Section 2.7, contemplation of viewers' responses²⁸ to the exhibition is useful as their comments helped the author in rationalising the outcome.

Regarding response to the exhibition invitations featuring a linocut print (Appendix D), three recipients contacted the artist to advise that their print from the invitation had been framed. Interestingly, each prefaced the statement: "I don't usually do this but . . ." Their advice attests to viewer interest in the images and suggests that the notion behind the design ". . . to give recipients a little bit of energy from The Common . . ." (Section 6.3) may have been fulfilled—at least for these three people.

Other artworks evoked different responses. For example, *Commonly Seen* (a book compiled from stage one of the process) featuring prints from intuitively drawn lino plates stirred two different responses. On the one hand, the book triggered the desire to see *The Common*. This response came from two different art collectors, one from interstate and one from overseas, and their guests. From the author's viewpoint this desire indicated that the expressed energies of landscape conveyed a sense of place. And, from a different way of rationalising this response, the projected energies may have universal appeal. On the other hand, another patron who also acquired the book valued his edition as inspirational for his own experiments into lino etching. Such a response lends credence to the idea that intuitive responses captured in the prints may have a guiding place in instruction.

The reasons for acquiring (or not acquiring) an artwork were as varied as the diverse persona of the purchasers. For instance, one couple considered acquiring the

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Where discussion involves purchasers' responses, names have been withheld to protect their privacy.

print, *Townsville Common* 35, but one partner felt so strongly that it exuded an uncomfortable feeling that they acquired the painting, *Townsville Common: Tides*, instead. This painting projected the feeling of “expansiveness” with which both parties were comfortable. Interestingly, the print under discussion was intuitively drawn in response to energy of the feeling of “uneasiness” experienced by the artist. Hence, for this person the print projects this energy and helps validate the artist’s envisaged outcome and assists in confirming the importance of intuitive responses in developing a code.

Viewers’ comments in the exhibition Visitors’ Book focus mainly on quality of execution: “lovely marks”; “great marks”; “amazing technique”; and, “glorious detail”. Nevertheless, there were also remarks about presentation: “exceptionally well organised”; “beautiful presentation”; “striking when walking in”; and, “power of black and white”. For the author, these comments indicate that the viewers were drawn to visual expression in the sense of skill and creativity. Moreover, regarding the author’s concern that viewers should be able to see the “wood for the trees” other comments also show that some of the exhibition audience could see beyond skill and creative invention: “strength and subtlety together”; and, “. . . brought back memories and times [of the Common]”.

Supporting communication of the “desired outcome”, the Visitors’ Book also reveals the intended reading by the statements: “can almost smell [T]he Common”; “this ancient land so old, so new, portrayed . . .”; and, “like entering [T]he Common space, each of the energies are alive within”. In contrast to such comments, that suggest a reading of meanings going beyond everyday appearances, arts writer in *Townsville Bulletin*, Scott-Cumming (2004) presents a less lyrical viewpoint by

observing: “. . . a huge variety of textures and form that nature presents . . .” (Scott-Cumming 2004, p. 30).

Reflecting on visitors’ response from a pedagogical perspective, Visitors’ Book comments are similarly revealing: “inspiring use of wax and charcoal”; “. . . found it very inspirational”; and “great inspiration for a student, thank you”. For the author, the comments indicate the exhibition was a learning experience for these viewers. Highlighting this viewpoint were the many probing questions about thought processes, techniques used in the artworks and presentation of the exhibition, directed to the artist during and in conclusion of a floor-talk presented to a class of TAFE Visual Arts students.

Although the above discussion of viewers’ responses is only a light sampling of the exhibition audience, nevertheless, these responses lend support to the artist’s ambition of being an “experience engineer” discussed in Section 2.5.

7.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The scope of this study is limited to the landscape of The Common and its energies of cyclical change. In portraying this restricted foci, the approach to the use of medium (etching and wax painting) and technique (colour neutrality) is equally limited. Nevertheless, these constraints open doors for further development.

Possible areas of extension include: how to portray other energies and energy relationships within landscape touched on in Section 4.1. For example, visible energy fields within landscape features and their changes such as “pulsating radiances emanating from each feature within the landscape”. In pursuing this fresh field of inquiry, the question may arise of how to introduce colour into the code to add the

dimension of an extra “sensory experience”. This may be an interesting point of departure as, personally, colours are experienced by senses other than vision due to “sensory blendings”. Another worthwhile extension to explore is the transposition of the code to other landscapes or even the expression of energy without reference to landscape at all.

In conclusion, this study has enabled the artist to expand a feeling of connection with the landscape and to overcome the personal reluctance to paint it. By addressing the use of visual codes and developing one specifically to convey the artist’s vision of The Common, this project has proven an invaluable diagnostic tool. And, going further, the approach developed by the artist may be a useful tool for other artists.