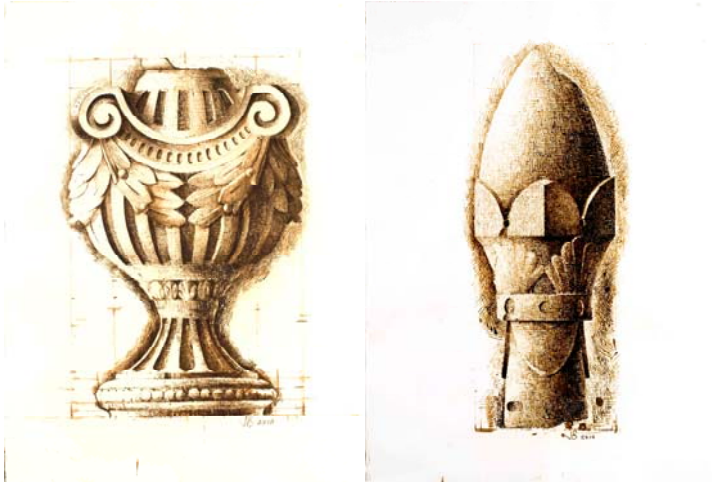


FROM MODEL TO IMAGE



James Brown

4th May–16th May 2012, eMerge Gallery, SoCA, JCU, Townsville



(left) *Finial* (an architectural feature from the old East Flinders Street printery and excavated from the site by the JCU archaeological team), 2010–12

Pen, ink and lemon juice on watercolour paper, 76 x 57 cm

(right) *Finial Crown* (the capping element that was found broken and separated from the lower portion of the above finial at the East Flinders Street excavation, 2010–12)

Pen, ink and lemon juice on watercolour paper, 76 x 57 cm

There is a long tradition in the graphic arts of portraying architectural ornaments, such as, column capitals, urns, volutes and cornucopia. Sometimes these forms are used to reference the spirit of a classical past in terms of contextualising them with classically attired staffage and settings. For example, Aegidius Sadeler's (1570–1629) engravings of monumental vases after drawings and designs by Polidoro da Caravaggio (c.1492–1543) and Jean Le Pautre's (1618–82) engravings featuring urns so large that they dwarf the folk mingling beneath them (see below). Other artists portray architectural forms for scientific illustration particularly in the field of archaeological documentation. The most famous of these illustrators, Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–78), goes further than simply depicting the forms. He adds drama to their portrayal with strong lighting and curious viewpoints. He also projects the idea that the featured architecture is in a state of transience (the notion of *vanitas* that was popular at the time) by focusing on cracks, crumbling edges and vegetation taking root within stonework.



Jean Le Pautre (1618–82)

Architecture Etching—Decorative Vases

Published by Charles Antoine Jombert Paris in 1751 for "Oeuvres d'architecture de Jean Le Pautre..."

Although the motivations behind the tradition of portraying architectural ornaments have shifted over the centuries, three hallmarks of the tradition are constant and still resonant: objectivity, accuracy and clarity of visual expression. These hallmarks certainly underpin the two drawings of the finial—*Finial* showing the urn-shaped base with its scattered top and *Finial Crown* showing the conventionalised acorn crown that once capped the base. For instance, both drawings feature the subject centred horizontally on the page. By design, this symmetrical arrangement presents the subject in an objective way (i.e. the arrangement presents the subject as a specimen without subjective meanings). The drawings also exhibit traces of the initial stage of the drawing process as seen in the faint horizontal and vertical measurement lines laid before the formal rendering of the subject commenced. Again, by design, the retention of these early construction marks hints at the care taken with measuring and plotting proportions and attests to the second hallmark attribute: accuracy. Regarding the final hallmark, clarity of expression, the drawings follow the Western convention of lighting a subject from the top-left—a convention based on a left-to-right reading direction—so that the form of the finial can be readily understood.

Of course, there is more to these drawings of the finial than simply reflecting the tradition of depicting such an object. The central motivation behind their execution is to explore ways to portray the non-visual element of an aura of presence that the artist perceived—a legacy extending from the note of drama that Piranesi imbues his prints. Interestingly, this element is easier to express by not engaging in aesthetic arrangement and contextualisation with other objects. Based on the explorations with these drawings, the projection of an aura of presence seems to arise from the treatment of the subject itself. For instance, the choice of colour and the transparency of the medium, the lighting angle and strong tonal contrast all play integral roles.



Door Lock Plate (an architectural feature from the old East Flinders Street printery and excavated from the site by the JCU archaeological team), 2012
Pen and ink on watercolour paper, 76 x 57 cm

Like the finial that came from the same excavation site, the lock plate is also in a very poor state of preservation. Most noticeable, its once beautiful filigree pattern has all but corroded away and the lightest touch now crumbles the rusting metal.

Mindful of its disintegration, a central aim of the drawing, *Door Lock Plate*, is to record the fine metalwork pattern of intertwined volutes before it deteriorates any further. Consequently, this drawing fits into the same category of illustration as the two drawings of the finial in terms of presenting the subject objectively, accurately and with pictorial clarity. But, similar to the finial drawings, there is the additional aim of portraying the plate as emanating an aura of presence—an inexplicable feeling that this relic from the past embodies the lives of those who once used it and touched its surface.

Visual communication of such an aura must always be an uncertain outcome as each viewer's reading of meaning rests with an infinite range of variables; for example: a viewer needs to be in a receptive mindset at the time of looking at the drawing; a viewer needs to have past experience of—or at least knowledge about—sensing such a phenomenon; and, importantly, a viewer needs to be acculturated with negotiating meaning from artwork. While not ignoring the range of variables such as these, *Door Lock Plate* is designed to facilitate a receptive viewer's understanding of the aura of presence experienced by the artist. For instance, the colour of the ink (a mixture of Burnt Sienna, Sepia and carbonised lemon juice) is intended to have associations with past memories in the same way that sepia tinted photographs epitomise a past era. Going further, the line work rendering the object is intentionally a mixture of hatched strokes laid in a calculated way augmented with serendipitous spots and splashes. By design, this mixture of approaches (i.e. calculated and chance) helps to capture the dual ways characterising of how one "looks" at objects: an analytical view of an object's physical attributes (i.e. the concrete reality of superficial appearances) and an intuitive response to the object (i.e. the reflexive reaction to what is observed).



(left) *Referencing Millet*, 2012
Pen and ink on watercolour paper, 76 x 57 cm
(right) *Referencing Jacque*, 2012
Pen and ink on watercolour paper, 76 x 57 cm

Arguably, there has never been a wholly original artwork that did not reference other artists' imagery and artistic practices. Of course, the degree of synthesising, translating and personalising of other artists' imagery and practices may vary from an exact replication to the merest reference.

In the graphic arts, there is an especially strong tradition of reproducing other artists' images. This tradition extends back to the Renaissance with the Weirix brothers, Hendrick Goltzius and Marcantonio Raimondi amongst many others who translated their peers' paintings, sculptures and drawings into prints. This tradition culminated with the reproductive engravers of the nineteenth century who offered the only alternative for recording artwork for dissemination in books and folios before the advent of photography.

In translating the two etchings on display by Jean-Francois Millet (1814–75) and Charles Emile Jacque (1813–94) my interest was far removed from the fascination that these Barbizon artists' exhibit for the everyday activities of rural workers. Instead, my focus is experimenting with the play of light and shade on their subjects and substituting the soft French light with a stronger and warmer light of the tropics.



(left) **Jean-Francois Millet** (1814–75)
Peasant Returning from the Manure Heap, 1855–56
(right) **Charles Emile Jacque** (1813–94)
Mendiant [Beggar]. 1846



(left) *Referencing Le Clerc*, 2012
Lemon juice and ink on watercolour paper
57 x 76 cm

(right) **Sebastien Le Clerc** (1587–1633)
Defespoir de l'amour qui a perdu Psyché et n'en a conservé que le Portrait. Douleur, rage de tout ce qui l'accompagne. Arrivée de Mercure, qui annonce a l'Amour le changement de sa destinée
Etching, 12 x 17.8 cm

Like the two drawings referencing the prints of Millet and Jacques, *Referencing Le Clerc* is also an exploration of the effect that the light of the dry tropics has on a French landscape. With this drawing however, the experiment extends further. Here, all traces of the figures that Sebastien Le Clerc (1587–1633) featured in his print, *Defespoir de l'amour qui a perdu Psyché et n'en a conservé que le Portrait. Douleur, rage de tout ce qui l'accompagne. Arrivée de Mercure, qui annonce a l'Amour le changement de sa destinée*, have been removed. In short my interest fits the description expressed in the article "Reconstituting fragments: a dialogue between a contemporary North Queensland landscape artist and some early European etchings":

I perceive a distinct difference between Le Clerc's type of landscape fabricated with a Rocco taste for folly and lolling about in and my experience of the harsh North Queensland scrublands where even the idea of having a relaxing time while sweltering in tropical heat quickly evaporates. I like Le Clerc's landscape because it is so resonantly unlike my experience of a tropical landscape that simply looking at his depiction triggers a moment of reverie—like having a soft chair to relax into and dream. ... My adaptation of this imagery ... is about creating visual equivalents in angled and broken line for sensory experiences of a specific moment—like the sounds of insects buzzing and the feeling of oppressive and unbearable heat. (Brown, G & McCulloch, R 2009, "Reconstituting fragments: a dialogue between a contemporary North Queensland landscape artist and some early European etchings", *Tracey Contemporary Drawing Research*, viewed 1 May, 2012, < <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/sota/tracey/journal/frag/brown.html>>)



(left) *Apollo Belvedere—Front*, 2011

Lemon juice and ink

76 x 57 cm

(middle) *David's Nose*, 2011

Lemon juice and ink

76 x 57 cm

(right) *David's Ear*, 2011

Lemon juice and ink

76 x 57 cm



(left) *David's eye*, 2012

Lemon juice and ink

76 x 57 cm

(right) *Apollo Belvedere—3 Faces*, 2012

Lemon juice and ink

57 x 76 cm

Drawing plaster casts has been the foundation of most fine art academies during the nineteenth century. Times have changed in terms of what is seen to be appropriate for study. Nevertheless, from my standpoint, the rewards offered by this seemingly anachronistic subject material is too valuable to ignore. For instance, plaster casts allow for careful measurements of proportion and the chance to reappraise how one's perception skills are developing without fear of a model moving or light changing.

Beyond the sheer pleasure of simply drawing what once were—and still are—objects valued for their beauty my engagement with plaster casts is also about experimenting with acidity and alkalinity of the ink mediums: each drawing is like a litmus test of colour changes.



Referencing Piranesi, 2012
Lemon juice and ink
76 x 114 cm

My interest in Piranesi has a long history. For instance, my fish tank features a reconstruction of one of Piranesi's architectural follies with arches and towers for darting Neon Tetras to enjoy (see below) and I have had two exhibitions of artworks referencing Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1729–78). By intention, my interest in continuing to reference this important printmaker has shifted to engage with his vision of architecture as a haunting memory. As is the case with the plaster cast drawings in this exhibition, *Referencing Piranesi*, this work is equally a litmus test experiment of acidic and alkaline substances involving ingredients such as an old fashioned snake bite remedy, red cabbage and lemon juice and extracts from fertilisers.



Photograph of fish tank construction



Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–78)
Aqueduct of Nero in Rome leading to the Palatinate, 1775
from *Vedute di Roma*, 1775



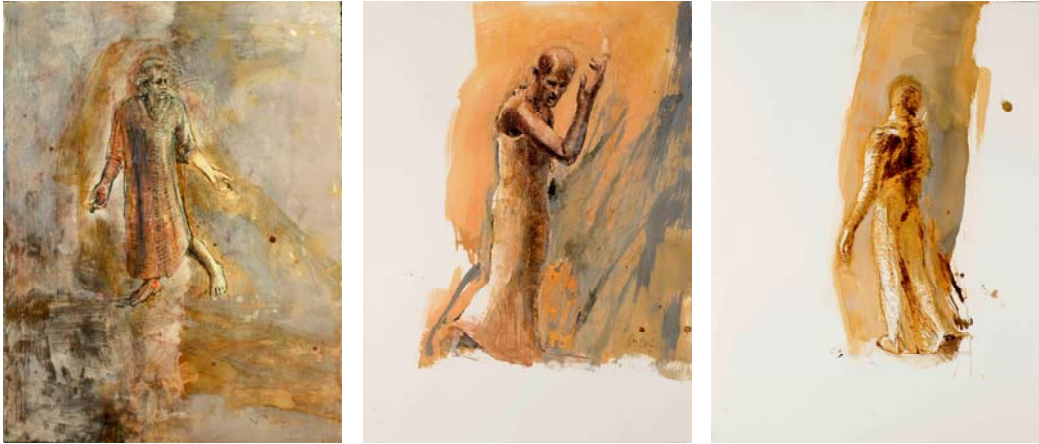
(left) Model for *Reconstructed Landscape—Ross River*, 2012
Collaborative construction: Hilary Mangan and James Brown
(right) *Reconstructed Landscape—Ross River*, 2012
Lemon juice and ink
57 x 76 cm



(left) Model for *Reconstructed Landscape*, 2012
Collaborative construction: Hilary Mangan and James Brown
(right) *Reconstructed Landscape*, 2012
Oil on canvas
127 x 101.5 cm

Every Saturday for many years I have been making plaster casts with Hilary Mangan with the aim of creating subject materials for the SoCA drawing classes. Over this period we have both honed our skills in casting and, most importantly, solved ongoing construction problems. The plaster casts in this exhibition are examples of our collaborative teamwork.

As development of the plaster casting sessions, the idea of dipping and preserving objects evolved. The present twig constructions have served as models for a number of drawings and paintings (some of which are shown in this exhibition). What is most enjoyable is that they are sculptural ideas allowing for significant conceptual departures rather than the fragments of "real" sculptures that require rigorous scrutiny of their forms when drawing.



(left) *Referencing Rodin's "Jean de Fiennes"*, 2012

Lemon juice and ink

76 x 57 cm

(middle) *Referencing Rodin's "Pierre Wiessant"—Front*, 2012

Lemon juice and ink

76 x 57 cm

(right) *Referencing Rodin's "Pierre Wiessant"—Back*, 2012

Lemon juice and ink

76 x 57 cm

At present I am fascinated by Rodin and, in particular, his *Burghers of Calais*. A large part of this fascination is due to what can only be described as my "gut" response to his figures' expressed emotions; in the sense that the expressed body language and Rodin's sculptural treatment of the figures seem very genuine. But the real motivation driving me to execute drawing after drawing of the same figure (and I'm still drawing these figures) is the result of casting them and knowing the dynamics of the forms very intimately. I mention this as Hilary Mangan and I have endured many demanding thinking sessions in the difficult process of casting each figure.