Painting in the tropics

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Abstract

This thesis demonstrates a painted vision of the tropics as a space desirable and strange, redolent of fear and longing, bewilderment and comfort. Three painters from the French tradition provide the foundation of the research: Matisse, who concentrated on the *formal* element of its physical appearance; Gauguin, who immersed himself in an experiential *lived* involvement; and Henri Rousseau, who dreamed only of the tropics via his *imagination*.

Local Far North Queensland painters, including Ray Crooke, Margaret Olley, Ian Smith, Helen Wiltshire, James Baines, Claudine Marzik, Laurine Field, Claire Souter and Amanda Feher, demonstrate a continued fascination with the tropics. These painters allow us to revisit the vision of the French painters Matisse, Gauguin and Rousseau. Their experiences display the nuances of the wet tropic landscape by what they see as well as the projection of their inner thoughts. Crooke's attention focuses on the forms of the vegetation and the peopled world within it, while Olley responds to the mildew and colour. Smith, Wiltshire and Baines best describe the negative impact of urban stresses to tropical nature, in which the tropical habitat is seen as threatened by urban expansion. Marzik and Field bring insight into the sensory components of the tropics through its texture and spiritual dimensions, while Souter and Feher utilise the tropical landscape for its motifs and symbols.

As a response to the French painters' vision of the tropical world and the case study surveys, I have painted suites of work that reflect the tropical experience. The process of reflection considers the objects of the external physical world combined with imagination. My paintings participate in the tropical vision by expressing the characteristics that shape the imagery, and by the personal journey described within them. The paintings image the tropics using devices of portraiture, landscape and mythological narrative, expressed in the lexicon of postmodern painting.

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Introduction

This thesis considers the distinct aesthetic emanating from the wet tropics region of Far North Queensland. My contention is that the wet tropics reside within a regional frontier and have not yet caught the attention of the art museums which collect Australian work, partly because of policy that encourages museums to reflect purchases of local imagery, and partly because the regional galleries located in the tropics are themselves driven by the tastes and sensibilities of national trends, influenced by temperate tastes and a temperate palette.

Western attitudes to regions like the wet tropics have been investigated by Nancy Stepan, who argued that "tropical nature in the European tradition is often imagined as 'pure' if overabundant, unspoiled by or resistant to human activities". "It seemed interesting" she goes on, "to look at how nature has in fact been manipulated in the tropics to create a kind of controlled space" (2001, p. 210). Felix Driver pursued her question of the tropical "controlled space" by saying the tropics are "represented positively (as in fantasies of the tropical sublime) or negatively (as a pathological space of degeneration)…as a foil to temperate nature, to all that is modest, civilised, cultivated" (2005, p. 3).

However, the vernacular of western painting, upon which this thesis is based, stems from European traditions, so the point of difference is the aesthetic experience of the regional frontier, and the imagery it engenders from its location. Three canonical French painters, Rousseau, Gauguin and Matisse, provide the cardinal points to interpret painters of North Queensland included the case study. These painters celebrate, albeit in very different ways, the aesthetic sensibility of the tropics as a culmination of the trope of exotic difference. Taken separately, their work distinguishes

three elements in the European artistic response to the tropics: imaginative projection, in Rousseau; existential immersion, in Gauguin; and formalism, in Matisse. All artists negotiate these three elements in their practice, but these three artists allow us to appreciate their function in tropical art.

This research looks at artists painting Far North Queensland who work with sensibilities pertaining to, and residing in, the tropics. It tests whether an intrinsic quality exists in the paintings produced in the Far North Queensland wet tropics. Through a quantitative and qualitative survey I will develop a series of case studies in order to develop an understanding of a "tropical sensibility". Through personal narrative he painters of this region provide an aesthetic response that images the relationship between culture and nature. They demonstrate that experience gives meaning to place through imaginative, existential, and formal exploration of the tropical zone. The case studies will be set against the influence of the French painting tradition to determine how tropical space is rendered. This process creates an awareness of a genuinely tropical and Australian sensibility.

To track how the western presence in tropical space has emerged, we need to consider the origins of the concept of the tropics. The tropical world is contradictory in its beauty and danger. It is therefore an ambivalent site of continued exploration and interpretation, as people and culture discover the fragile habitats of the North Queensland rainforest. A visual construct of the contradiction latent in the tropical paradise expressed itself in Fred Williams' and Sidney Nolan's paintings of the Pilbara desert after rain. They described the transformation of the landscape as "seeds that had lain dormant, in some cases for years, burst into abundant and colourful life after torrential rain" (Fuller, 1988, p. 223). This contradicts the image of the wet tropics as paradisiacal and the desert as a harsh space. The tropics is also home to the noble

savage myth, by which Europeans express the dream of an idyllic state of primitive existence. Images of native people embodying the noble savage myth served to promote the fantasy of harmonious living with nature, "free from the artifice and ignoble passions of European civilisation…a life of primal innocence forever lost to more developed societies" (McDonald, 2008, p. 28). However, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notion of primal innocence was quickly replaced by the unsentimental view of James Cook. Cook perceived Indigenous Australians as being free from "the Inequality of Condition" (McDonald, 2008, p. 28). When the English explorer William Dampier landed at Western Australia in 1688, he described Indigenous people as "the most miserable people in the world." James Cook refuted this claim by stating that their needs were met by a more abundant land with cleaner air. "They may appear to some to be the most wretched People on earth, but in reality they are far more happier than we Europeans" (McDonald, 2008, p. 28).

The British Empire tended to regard itself as superior to the tropical world, but the French looked upon the tropics with a disposition that invited exchange. Gauguin, Rousseau and Matisse saw the tropics as a place of imagination, as a real destination, and as an arena for expanding their painting techniques. For Gauguin, Tahiti provided the fertile soil that tantalised his disillusioned and politicised search for the exotic (Wadley, 1985). Henri Rousseau used the imagery of tropical plant specimens as the basis for his creative movement to primitivism (Foster, Krauss, Bois, Buchloch, & Joselit, 2011). Matisse employed the repetition of coral and seaweed forms as central stimuli in his later compositions (Turner, 1995).

Rousseau's modern primitivism created an imagined world using a naïve style. . His invented jungle paintings produced a frozen stillness, demonstrated in *Surprise!* (1861) the jungle information he gathered depended completely on his visits to the

Jardin des Plantes in Paris, as he never left France. “According to Apollinaire, Rousseau was sometimes so overcome when painting,” jungle imagery with men being eaten by jaguars, “that he would become terrified and, all atremble, would be obliged to open the window” (Alley, 1978, pp. 70-71). In spite of his imagined fears, he celebrated tropical vegetation: “Each form is depicted with sharp definition, almost every leaf turned towards us to show its characteristic shape” (Alley, 1978, p. 67). Rousseau’s paintings displayed tropical nature as a construction of fictitious geography, created from his visions derived from the Jardin’s Greenhouses. This confected vision can irritate the actual inhabitants of tropical communities:

> Such views of the tropics as places of primarily untamed nature, a nature pregnant with meaning, awaiting discovery, interpretation or exploitation, bring in the nature tourists (and pharmaceutical companies) today, but it can also cause irritation among the inhabitants of tropical countries, even those who place a high value on their unspoilt nature are most concerned with defending it against environmental spoliation. They feel quite rightly that there is more to their countries than jungle. (Stepan, 2001, pp. 12-13)

The picture of tropical nature that Stepan described contrasts with Rousseau’s imaginative projection, and came from lived tropical experience, in which she reflected on her engagement with the people of Colombia. Gauguin, on the other hand, used the matrix of “primitivism, exoticism and racism” (Eisenman, 1997, p. 21), to express life in Tahiti. He revelled in its exotic beauty, but deplored the damage incurred by European settlement. Gauguin used the melancholic vision introduced to him by the book The Marriage of Loti, 1880, by Julien Viaudin (1850-1923). From this work he developed what Renato Rosaldo called, “[an] imperialist nostalgia”, which was “the

yearning for what one is directly responsible for destroying" (Eisenman, 1997, p. 53). However, Europeans began so see a "change in purpose for the appreciation of non-western cultures," and Oceanic art, as "the Other could be used to confirm French values" (Klein, 1997, p. 78).

Finally, Matisse offered a formal vision of the tropics through his experiences of North Africa. He extracted forms and shapes to fit his vision of "the myth of primordial harmony, whose very sacredness required the purified pictorial language he created" (Elderfield, 1992, p. 15). Oceania became a vehicle for him to reinvigorate his arts practice through technique, decoration and iconography. He was comparatively unproductive during his time there: "He explained his relative fruitlessness by saying that he felt lazy and had little desire to work in a place that was unvaryingly beautiful" (Klein, 1997, p. 44). Even though Tahiti was not his first choice of destination, that being the Galapagos Islands, the Polynesian landscape dazzled his senses in terms of fruit, flowers, fish, water, people and light. "He was so impressed by the strength and quality of the light, that it seemed to devour all forms" (Turner, 1995, p. 125). This experience encouraged him to rescue form from being saturated by light. His Polynesian seaweed motifs inspired paper cut outs and the stained glass windows at the Chapel of the Rosary, in Vence. In them, form contained or harnessed light. Although Matisse was truly inspired by the tropical experience, he took an almost clinical approach to form and space for the sake of constructing a painting. He thought even the people "looked better in Gauguin's paintings than real life" (Turner, 1995, p. 126). His detachment from and indifference to the imaginative and existential positions distinguished his response from that of Rousseau and Gauguin.

Western cultural attitudes towards the tropics reflect an understanding of geography as a culturally designated "space of desire". The yearning for the desired object, and the despair at its destruction by tourism, animate this view.

My research seeks to clarify the distinct visual impact of the tropical environment and the French Orientalist "take" on painters who work in the contemporary tropics. The landscape of North Queensland is influential in the work of these artists, but their paintings have not yet been embraced by Australian art museums, or included as a separate chapter in Australian art history. Intense tropical colour and vivid nature act to sustain the compositions of painters I interviewed. True immersion in the space– in comparison to temporary touching of it as was experienced by Rousseau, Gauguin and Matisse, reflects Martin Heidegger's concept of *Dasein,* which goes beyond tropical geography as a tourist trap, place of plunder or idealised space. The painters in the case studies do not describe a tropical landscape associated with clichéd aspects of either beauty or cyclonic tempests and dangerous crocodiles. They depict an experience of the tropics that is familiar and explored in detail, through daily life as a state of being.

The tropics are discussed here in relation to climate, vegetation, contrasts of light and shade in physical and metaphorical contexts, and to the notion of "paradise". Naturalists and explorers including Joseph Banks, Alexander von Humboldt, Charles Darwin, Richard Spruce, Alfred Russel Wallace, Henry Walter Bates, and William Jackson Hooker differentiated the temperate zone from the torrid zone. These scientists' journeys foreshadow the European vision which is later recorded by artists in their paintings of the tropics. This European idea of the tropics was described by David Arnold in *The Tropics and the Travelling Gaze,* (2006)

Understanding local tropical space engages the painter in a discourse on human geography and the tropical sensibility. The personal experience of painting is not only an artistic premise; it also recognizes a spiritual connection to community and place. Tropical representations in art, literature and science reveal the complexity and contradictory interpretations of tropical nature, extraordinary in its variety of ecosystems and contrasts.

To investigate the tropical sensibility of far North Queensland, a selection of artists were interviewed in order to gather descriptions of local space. The research seeks to discover perceptions of tropical nature in terms of understanding its intense light, subject matter, dynamic colour, and human involvement. Its impact on history and climate, viewed through the filter of the French gaze, has transformed the exotic paradigm in western painting. The research looks at key themes to emphasise the significance of the tropics located in regional North Queensland. Previously overlooked, this area of significance was identified by Ross Searle, Director of the Perc Tucker Regional Gallery in Townsville (1986-1996):

> Although there is much discussion about regionalism, there has been no definitive study undertaken to obtain information about regional visual arts practice. There is clearly a need for a major survey of regional art and craft in Australia with emphasis on defining the themes that preoccupy these artists and their attitudes to practice. (R. Searle, 1991, p. 59)

For historical reasons, North Queensland artists are particularly fascinated by the wet tropic landscape of the area, although many have also looked at dry savannah. The contrasts and continuities between what they see in an Australian view of the

tropics and earlier depictions by Matisse, Rousseau and Gauguin have shaped a compelling cultural reinterpretation of tropical space. Earlier tropical visions have generated a mythology of tropical symbolism. Cultural shifts in thinking between nineteenth-and twenty-first century perceptions have produced a new tropical idiom. The case study responses from artists located in the tropics demonstrated how they communicate their tropical experience through painting.

How have the tropics been imaged through representations in Western art and how has this influenced the tropical painters of Far North Queensland? The research explores a painted depiction of tropical North Queensland as a reflection of the discovery of the tropics by naturalists and explorers. It views the tropics through an Orientalist lens to see difference, and through the Edenic lens to consider tropical nature as a spiritual metaphor. The result of these ideas is a binary tropics as paradise and paradox.

To find how the tropics have been imagined in western art I review specifically Australian depictions in painting from the colonial to postmodern periods in contrast to a contemporary and local vision. This is accomplished by researching artists in the real world, as a lived experience study. This study locates the qualities that artists in far North Queensland working in the Western tradition respond to in their work. One such artist, Ian Smith, wrote a note that considers paradise as a theme in relation to the tropics:

> I understand what you are proposing but I wonder about your starting point, the cliché – 'Paradise'. 'Paradise' is an inarticulate yet iconic word for beautiful, pristine, balmy, idyllic place of arrival or retreat. In the same ways that love is an inarticulate yet iconic image/visual symbol

> for a body organ responsible for our living, breathing impulse; and apparently, our romantic impulses as well. Meanwhile, I would think the Tropics (right around the world) or the 'Tropical Experience' for indigenous as well as immigrant inhabitants has been Hell on Earth as much as a Paradise. Having said this, I shall attempt to address your questionnaire in the manner I think you intend it; that is, the Tropics idealized as Paradise, sometimes realistically, sometimes in fantasy. (Smith, 2010)

Chapter One of the thesis explores European vision, painting traditions and the history of tropical exploration. I discuss key literature by Richard Lansdown, Bernard Smith, Nancy Stepan, and Felix Driver, who examine European engagement with tropical nature and culture. In particular, I consider Australian art from the first Aboriginal inhabitants through to the colonial artists and more recent movements, and how artists have responded to the topography, geography and culture of place through flora, fauna, landscape and people. The discussion describes how a scientific, positivistic and empirical standpoint diminishes an impression of tropical space. It also explores the imagery of tropical paradise through the history of European painting, with artists like Matisse, Rousseau and Gauguin. Their fascination for the exotic "Other" is theorized and understood aesthetically by Edward Said and Roger Benjamin as "Orientalism." The idea of an essence that underlies a sensibility is examined through Heidegger's concept of truth and being in his *The Origin of the Work of Art,* (1977). Heidegger argued for a tripartite view of art: as thing-in-itself, where the substance and properties belong to the object; as a representation of the artist's mind in terms of a sense impression; and as the form that results as a creative outcome of the experience. This investigation of the visual product and the mechanisms that produce it are

important to locate specificity and difference, in order to claim there is an identifiable tropical aesthetic. “The work’s createdness, however, can obviously be grasped only in terms of the process of creation…we must after all go into the activity of the artist in order to arrive at the origin of the work of art” (Krell, 1977, p. 183). Heidegger’s theory allows my research to use lived experience as a reaction to place through the case study artists’ manipulation of their materials, their sensory knowledge and the autonomy of the images. In their work the art is the manifestation of the idea; in this case, the life world within tropical nature.

Chapter Two positions a contemporary context of North Queensland painting from the viewpoint of the exhibition curators Gavin Wilson, Ross Searle and John Millington, who seek to exhibit painters working within western traditions to depict the tropics. Exhibitions of paintings expressing their imaging of the tropics fulfil art historian Terry Smith’s notion of placemaking. Placemaking is a contemporary current and sits within the discourse of post-modernism, where eclecticism and globalisation rethink the aesthetics of geographical space. Gavin Wilson’s *Escape Artists* exhibition (1998) is a milestone cultural contribution, an entry point to the arts practices of North Queensland.

In order to describe the rationale for the research process, Chapter Three outlines the methodology that includes case studies of a sample group of artists that live and work in the wet tropics. The research methodology employs a mixed method approach. The method combine practice-led research with a case study model of surveys, interviews and exhibitions as set out by Robert Yin and Graham Sullivan, which look at why and how to collect and understand research data.

Chapter Four presents the case studies which repeat and challenge ideas from the French painting tradition explored in Chapter One, as a way to project new ideas. The research sources lived experience of the wet tropic environment and measures current art practice in the region. Using the questionnaire and interview methodology meant I could extract a history of place and the cultural impact by recording aesthetic problems. The cases study themes are introduced with a theoretical idea followed by the interview question, which is then answered by the participants. The investigation contains an analysis of the artists' reactions to living and working in the tropics, which unearthed sustainability and urban development issues alongside the aesthetic pursuits of imaging the tropics as an ambivalent space of desire, disillusion or spiritual awakening.

Chapter Five presents my work, which is a reflection on the research discoveries, tropical sensibility, personal truth and local perception. I am interested in Matisse's processes of absorption, in which he observes the world and then formalises the experience in a picture. Gauguin is fascinating for his passionately intense feeling of the tropics, which is evident in his warm colours and complex portraits. These are ambivalent in their allure and political awareness. I also find inspiration in Rousseau's tropical visions, which show delight in the patterns of leaves, flowers and wild animals. This delight manifests in Matisse's work as the formal structure of a decorative surface. My paintings focus on the journey of creativity and research that produces Exhibition work as a reaction to tropical paradise. They deal with the influences of personal history, European traditions in painting, the tropical approach of the French artists, the case study artists and the research topic. The text explains the ideas motivating my work. The display of the paintings in exhibitions at the Tanks Art Centre, Cairns, the Lux Gallery at James Cook University, Cairns, Tableland Regional Gallery, and group

exhibitions at Tanks Art Centre, Lux Gallery and Kick Arts, Cairns, shown between 2012 – 2015 reflect on the themes of tropical paradise as a place of iridescent light, brooding shadow, sensory experience, nature and cultural interface in a tropical Australia.

Chapter Six presents a consideration of the research processes and the conclusion reached on painting in the wet tropics. I conclude that painting in the tropics from the viewpoint of Western modernist traditions focuses on the duality which exists between the tropics as a real location and tropical paradise as an imaginary location. A final manuscript that offers reflections on a practice-led research methodology is included in this chapter.

Chapter 1 European Visions of the Tropics

1.1 Antipodes, Utopias and Dystopias

To understand the idea of the tropics in the European imagination, it is important to comprehend the European world at the time of voyages of exploration by Wallis, Bougainville and Cook, between 1767 and 1769. To satisfy the quest of attaining Imperial expansion, a philosophical experience of Utopia, or economic opportunity, Europeans were to find in the Antipodes the beauty of an unseen world, as well as disease, unfriendly people and a reality that did not match their expectations. Coming to know the Pacific involved how people perceived what they saw, and for this thesis, how artists interpreted landscape, colour and the world around them.

The space of the tropical world had been declared uninhabitable by Aristotle, and although the explorations of the Spanish in the sixteenth-century had dispelled this belief, the unknown aspects of the tropics played on the imaginations of the Europeans up until the twentieth century. The Spanish tried to colonise the South Pacific, but it was the Dutch and the English who were able to make landfall on the Australian continent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the British who finally claimed it as their own in 1788.

The information brought back by the explorers, recorded in notebooks, collections of flora and fauna, images, and narratives and descriptions of creatures (like platypuses and echidnas) greatly changed European views of the tropical world. European Imperialist goals meant that the western intent was to take hold of the Pacific. In *Strangers in the South Seas* (2006) Richard Lansdown argued the paradoxical problem revealed the fraught European movement of human geography. This led to a European confrontation with the self, in which the social mores of a dominant society

were challenged by a new concept of global space and the information contained within it. The Pacific revealed worlds within worlds, countless islands, a large continent, reef systems, languages, cultures and traditions complex in their form and fascination. "Cook's 'scientific gentleman' and fellow traveller Joseph Banks" (Lansdown, 2006, p. 9) expanded a dream of the exotic tropical world through science. Under instructions from the British government, Cook's voyage sought favourable locations for a colony in the South Seas. Because Europe was undergoing a cultural revolution, the solemnity and significance of the discovery of the Pacific and its peoples, produced a mythology of the 'noble savage'. Lansdown described the European cultural climate:

> The discovery of Tahiti coincided with the flood tide of the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment, the great decade of which had been the 1750s, when Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*, Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopaedia,* Condillac's *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge,* Voltaire's *Candide* and his *Essai sur les moeurs,* and Rousseau's discourses *On the Sciences and the Arts* and *On the Origin of Inequality* were all either published or gathering acclaim, and Buffon's multivolume *Historie naturelle* began (Lansdown, 2006, p. 66).

The antipodean world was a space to be discovered, conquered and understood. Cook was instructed by the British Admiralty and Royal Society to prioritise "military and scientific objectives – to undertake astronomical observation (the transit of Venus), to visit unknown lands and people, to collect botanical and zoological specimens, and to search for the mythical southern continent *Terra Australis*" (Schreuder & Ward, 2008, p. 106). Australia (meaning "southern land") was named by Mathew Flinders in 1804, and remained unappealing to European explorers for a long time. Due to its

seemingly unsympathetic environment, peoples and distance, it acquired a "reputation as a nightmarish antipodean other world" (Lansdown, 2006, p. 9). Because it was a geographical opposite, *Terra Australis* acquired a reputation as a diminished space. For example, Lansdown argues that dystopic ambivalence was evident in the remoteness and bleakness of the Australian continent from Europe, greatly contrasting with Wallis' discovery of Tahiti in 1767. Tahiti's discovery created a poetic language for the tropics as a utopia in which the "epicentre of the oceanic myth and for fifty years thereafter," gave the impression "of European imaginative constructions of the Pacific" (2006, p. 8).

Lansdown defined the mythology in terms of the description by French explorer Bougainville, who called Tahiti "New Cythera" (after the Greek Goddess Aphrodite), where the idea of the Pacific was "dreamlike" (2006, p. 66). But as Lansdown points out, it was a short - lived notion as the reality was followed by "a ghastly paradox" (2006, p. 66). Europeans viewed the land as inhospitable, deplored the isolation and dislocation, and disrespected Indigenous peoples-- viewing them no longer as noble savages, but as ignoble ones.

Lansdown argues that the antipodean dystopia was a problem for European social order; threatening because the savages at the end of the earth inhabited a world that was potentially better than Europe. This culminated in the myth of the noble savage. The opportunities for scientific discovery, human history and anthropological research into race, culture and religion was both an adventure and a dilemma for the European mindset. Europeans came to see the Pacific and the data it contained as a mirror of Enlightenment values: the advancement of knowledge within western thought. But it was more than this. As Lansdown demonstrated, the Western mirror also caught the reflected creativity, cultural identity and imagination within the human mind

to reveal “the desire to know where human beings stood in the world” (2006, p. 154). The depiction of the Western encounter with the antipodean world addresses the paradox of utopian space against the shadow of its dystopian reality, through the difficulties of explorers finding it then learning to live with the challenge of the climate. The binary experience that the discovery of the Pacific and Australia offered the European mind was a treasure trove of inspiration, knowledge and adventure which reshaped an understanding of science, anthropology and art. The imaginative possibilities and the vastness of the area created a fresh canvas for humanity to create a new colonial culture.

1.2 Reactions in Explorers and Artists

Artists and scientists who described the new vistas opened up by intrepid expedition attempted to communicate a perception of the Australian people, landscape, flora and fauna to the Royal Academy, Royal Society and British Admiralty. Bernard Smith stated that the discovery of the Pacific contributed new meanings for the philosophers of nature. However, it was the “empirical approach of the Society and not the neo-classical approach of the Academy which flourished under the impact of new knowledge won from the Pacific” (B. Smith, 1989, p. 1).

> For though the discovery of the Society Islands gave initial support to the belief that a kind of tropical Arcadia inhabited by men like Greek gods existed in the South Seas, increasing knowledge not only destroyed the illusion but also became a most enduring challenge to the supremacy of neo-classical values in art and thought. The effect of this challenge is to be observed in painting, in poetry, in the theatre, and even in ideas concerning the nature of the universe. The opening of the Pacific is

> therefore to be numbered among those factors contributing to the triumph of romanticism and science in the nineteenth-century world of values (B. Smith, 1989, p. 1).

The values described here signalled a culturally evolved understanding of the tropics, in terms of what it produced or inspired creatively. This is in contrast to the reality of eighteenth-century European contact with Indigenous peoples of the Pacific. Smith saw the notion of Greek gods and islanders as a product of cultural denigration and European immorality:

> …an attitude with its roots deep in the thought of classical antiquity. It is possible to distinguish two forms of this primitivist approach to Pacific peoples: a soft primitivism, more closely associated with deist thought and neo-classical values, was singled out for the most severe attacks by the evangelical critics; the notions of austerity and fortitude associated with hard primitivism being somewhat more congenial to both Calvinistic Christianity and to romantic interest in the historical origins of the northern nations of Europe. Nevertheless Christian thought…found any kind of belief in the natural virtue of pagan savages repugnant and did much to spread the belief that the native peoples of the Pacific in their natural state were depraved and ignoble (B. Smith, 1989, p. 5).

The initial reactions to the perceived world of the Antipodes (encompassing also the tropical world), struggled with awkward assemblages of ideas, language, symbols and pictures to describe it. Landscape painting and natural science provided accessible and distinct fields to understand human geography and nature in its entirety, as “the

object of imitation and expression," as well as "the object of philosophical speculation" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 1). In 1750, Joseph Banks was instructed by the charter of the Society of Antiquaries (B. Smith, 1989, pp. 1-2) to study the history of the natural world so that history appeared more plausible. Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913) discovered the theory of evolution in the tropics, which was viewed as the triumph of science. "As scientists came to question the teleological position implicit in the view of nature as a great chain of being, they tended to seek an explanation for the origin and nature of life in material evidence provided by the earth's surface" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 3). Banks was instructed to progress science in terms of cosmology, astronomy, botany and anything else useful for the expansion of the British Empire.

The empirical view of nature presented artists with the task of recording the visible world accurately, in painting styles that were synchronistic with the purpose of science. This purpose was to describe, define and archive objectively. Smith stated this attitude meant truth was decipherable: "It was most desirable, therefore, that the artists should depict them accurately, for it was only by the closest scrutiny and the most careful description that they could yield their meaning" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 3). Smith's description of the British colonial view of the Antipodes considered how landscape, country and culture were interpreted. Australia was depicted as a continent both new and strange. Smith advanced the importance of artist responses as a way to understand Australia as place, and the contrast between the progress of civilisation and the existence of savages in a state of nature. Smith also discussed the concern felt that initial contact with native people was empathetic but soon deteriorated: "the natives are no longer seen as individuals" (1989, p. 221).

The vast landscape of Australia was seen by Darwin, Watling and Browne as plain, monotonous and 'little-varied' (B. Smith, 1989, p. 224). Meanwhile, Robinson and Bowles described Australian bushland as "a savage wood into which only human occupation and cultivation can bring a social light" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 224). Smith describes their fear of the forest in terms of the theme of enlightenment: "For them nature is still an allegory (slowly unfolding itself through the ages) of the will of God; a long journey through a dark wood to a paradise garden" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 224). Tropical Australia might typify one of these ideal landscapes, but it was overlooked by many of the early explorers. Peron described a common view of much of the Australian continent as a place of misery, in contrast with the fertility of the Asian islands nearby:

> The dismayed navigator turns away his eyes, fatigued with these unhappy isles and hideous solitudes, surrounded as he views them with continual dangers; and when he reflects that these inhospitable shores border those of the archipelago of Asia, on which nature has lavished blessings and treasures, he can scarcely conceive how so vast a sterility could be produced in the neighbourhood of such fecundity. (B. Smith, 1989, p. 225)

The antipodal inversion of Europe, Peron's "fruitless dream", symbolised Australia as a site of melancholy, but it was interpreted by Barron Field in another light. He saw the landscape, its creatures and people as both brilliant and fantastic: "Australian nature had produced its own peculiar masterpiece, its own typical form of beauty" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 228). John Lewin's landscape pictures show us the interpretation of Australia at the time of settlement differed from the earlier topographical and exploratory records of new geography and species descriptions. Lewin's narrative paintings document the human world unfolding in the landscape, as

in *Campbell River* (1815), *Evan's Peak,* (1815), and *Sidmouth Valley* (1815) (B. Smith, 1989, pp. 230-231). These are paintings which reveal the constraint of European culture in contrast with the landscape of an expansive space which offers freedom.

Native-born William Wentworth described the landscape in positive terms when he referred to the Blue Mountains as a "majestic and commanding chain of mountains" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 233). John Oxley, however, found the landscape unappealing: "disappointment after disappointment, telling of dry creek beds, rotten swampy country, hostile natives and insect pests." This view was echoed by Watling, who said, " A variety of wretchedness is at all times preferable to one unvarying cause of pain and distress" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 233). When Mathew Flinders circumnavigated Australia between 1801 and1803, he commissioned William Westall to record an impression of the Australian coastline, who evinced a similar sentiment:

> Westall sailed from Portsmouth 18 July 1801 with expectations of making exciting discoveries in exotic lands and hopes of finding Arcadia, a rustic paradise of picturesque vistas. Little did anyone foresee that the expedition, despite its many successes and findings, would be plagued by misfortune and tragedy. Unfortunately, like many others undertaking this momentous journey, Westall returned a disappointed and frustrated man (Findlay, 1998, p. 9).

Bernard Smith states that William Westall had desired the exotic from the outset of his employment with Flinders' voyage on the *Investigator*, and hadn't planned to draw only images useful to explorers and science. However, he was disappointed with the scenery. "I was not aware the voyage was confined to New Holland only had I known this I most certainly would not have engaged in this hazardous voyage where I

could have little opportunity of employing my pencil with any advantage to myself or employers" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 193).

Westall's painting of *Port Bowen* (1802) portrays tropical vegetation as docile and fecund. However, Edgar Beale sympathised with Kennedy's difficult crossing of the "impenetrable" coastal ranges behind Tully: "Rarely can an explorer have been more cruelly deceived. The jungle and rough country alone would have been enough" (Beale, 1970, p. 28). However, Kennedy observed that beyond the "jungle scrub" of Mount Bartle Frere lay the "good country" of open woodland forest. Having to cross swamps full of crocodiles exacerbated the difficulties of navigating thick rainforest. The view depicted in *Port Bowen* not only shows a geographical record, it contradicted the ambivalence Westall felt for Australian geography, which he described as a "barren coast." Because Westall aimed to produce beautiful paintings, he thought he might discover better landscape in Asia, which contained "the rich picturesque…every part affording infinite variety, must produce many subjects to a painter extremely valuable" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 193). But ironically however, he captures his picturesque ambition in *Port Bowen.* Westall's sympathy for the Indigenous people was illustrated here. They are of people in their native homeland, not caricatures of dispossessed savages. Westall recorded some of the earliest European imagery of Aboriginal rock art. As well, his pictures "testif[y] to Westall's interest in Aboriginal ethnography," (B. Smith, 1989, pp. 196-197) including scenes of Aboriginal people and their habitation.

Plate 1.1 William Westall, *Port Bowen Queensland*, 1805-09, Oil on canvas, 97.5 x 142.5cm.
Ministry of Defence Art Collection, UK.

Port Bowen employs the colour palette of the temperate zone, of mostly muted hues in ochre, umber and raw sienna, scumbled across the canvas to produce woody tones reminiscent of Claude Lorraine's *Sunrise* (1646-47) and Nicolas Poussin's *Adam and Eve in Paradise* (1660-64), works which reveal landscape as a spiritual space. Westall's meteorological effects, displayed in the pacific blue/cerulean blue sky hung with cumulus and cirrus cloud formations, reflect the picturesque view and the exoticism of the antipodean world.

Although this early painting of the Queensland coast aimed to use both the artist's illustrative skills and his creative eye, it is in its structuring of the formal detail that it reveals the tension between the temperate and tropical colour spectrum. Westall's palette is earthy muted tones, not bold primary colours and iridescent greens. William Blatner described the idea of colour as a division in geographic space. It is described as a problem of understanding colour: "Our experience of colour is organised by the

formal structure of the colour spectrum, or perhaps by various proposed colour wheels, but the raw data gets organised by that formal structure" (Guignon, 2006, p. 160). Blatner's idea that forms or colour can be organised into interpretative data similar to space and time determined "to say something about the raw data that gets organised by the formal structures," (Guignon, 2006, p. 160). The data here are the visual aspects of muted colour; the foliage, sea and sky, and the human occupation of the landscape; depicted by Westall as harmonious interaction between the inhabitants and the environment.

In this composition, Queensland seems an appealing place, not significantly tropical in its aesthetic, as the trees have a European appearance. His accurate detail of the distant coastline, as well as the geological detail in the rocks, is evidence of his cartographical work and meteorological observation. The botanical species in the foreground also capture the importance of scientific classification:

> They are not simply topographical transcripts of nature, but landscapes which typical specimens of Australian flora have been introduced into the foreground in order to characterise the country depicted. The oil paintings which he executed for the Admiralty reveal greater fluency of treatment and a keener desire to render the truths of light and atmosphere than is to be found in the sketches made upon the *Investigator* (B. Smith, 1989, p. 197).

The Australian encounter was perpetually paradoxical in terms of what it offered the European arrivals to the antipodean world. The space of freedom was itself very often inhospitable. Thomas Baines (1820-1875), a British artist whose nineteenth-century explorations saw him document Africa and Australia, found his "duties of a

particularly harassing nature" (Bewell, 2003, p. 7). Then in 1855, the Royal Geographical Society in London commissioned a journey "to investigate the sources of the Victoria River in northern Australia, to provide information about the countries [sic] interior" (Loader, 2001, n.p). Documenting the tropical north of Australia was Baines' first professional assignment for which he was "commissioned draughtsman and artist with the scientific team on this expedition led by Augustus Charles Gregory" (Loader, 2001, n.p).

Baines' expedition to Queensland and the Northern Territory was problematic, as it meant trekking through wilderness. "Amazingly, much of the territory traversed remains almost as undeveloped and isolated today as it was in the 1850's" (Bewell, 2003, p. 33). The expedition found aspects of the northern landscape were inhospitable, while other regions offered bays and streams. As the appointed artist and storekeeper, Baines wrote of his contribution to the expedition: "My main object has, in accordance with my profession, been aesthetic but as far as opportunity offered I have exerted myself in the acquisition of more general information, such as the collection of specimens of natural history, botany and mineralogy" (Carruthers, 2012, p. 51), and he continued that he also corrected maps by calculating the positions by his sextant and compass.

The exploration of tropical Australia meant frequent encounters with Indigenous peoples which meant "importantly, to understand the Aboriginal people he met or saw" (Carruthers, 2012, p. 66). Beyond the encounters with Aboriginal people, the perilous landscape, climate and natural environment was far from "an ideal southern kingdom" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 48). Thomas Baines, *Watering party of the North Australian Expedition under a clump of pandanas at Quail Island, Paterson's Bay,* 1868, shows "a

desperate search for water after the *Monarch* was damaged on a reef" (Loader, 2001, n.p).

Plate 1.2 Thomas Baines, *Watering party of the North Australian Expedition under a clump of pandanas at Quail Island, Paterson's Bay*, 1868, Oil on canvas, 45.7 x 66.5cm.
With permission National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1973.

In this painting Baines depicts people digging for water on the Australian tropical coast beside a clump of pandanus, that introduces the tropical aspect of the continent. Topographical information as well as an experience of the picturesque can also be seen in the work of artists like John William Lewin, Joseph Lycett, and the portraiture of Nicholas Martin-Petit (B. Smith, 1989). The contributions of Augustus Earle, John Glover and Conrad Martens demonstrated a change in colonial art (McDonald, 2008). They painted the landscape in Wentworth's terms: as a landscape that produced awe and wonder. Smith argued that this idiom was a practical way of "assisting colonials to accommodate themselves aesthetically to the Australian landscape" (1989, p. 294).

1.3 Dystopian Tropics

In *Picturing Tropical Nature* (2001), Nancy Stepan portrays the human position within tropical geography. Her discussion extends the argument in Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory* (1995), that landscape and geography interweave as a cultural product: "This idea that our view of the natural world is always historically constituted by human material and perceptual interactions, so that our understanding of it is always a form of social knowledge, has become almost a cliché of contemporary historical studies," and she goes on: "nature is not just 'natural' but is created *as* natural by human desires and intentions" (Stepan, 2001, p. 15).

The tropics are a difficult place for Europeans to live in. Stepan's agenda is to revisit the tropics as a predetermined site, pre-conditioned by imagery describing the tropical experience and the place it occupies. This is particularly true of the invented tropical imageries created between nineteenth-century Humboldtian science and late twentieth-century degeneration and disease. Stepan argues that even empirical models of the tropics are shaped by "codes of seeing and representational conventions," where "we easily forget that they are just representations and take them for literal transcriptions of reality…all representations and pictures of the world, even the most technical and scientific are partial and selective" (Stepan, 2001, pp. 14-15).

The view of the tropics as either a paradise or hell is an ideological consequence of what the viewer projects onto tropicality. Lansdown presented the space of the Antipodes in Bougainville's terms as Cythera, or as represented by "issues of conscience, relativism and pessimism" (Lansdown, 2006, p. 66), as savagery and racism. But the reality may include both. The wet tropics environment offers an experience of lush verdant vegetation and bright colour. Stimuli like light, heat,

humidity and warmth, as well as climatic influences such as rainfall, describe the geographical areas called the wet tropics. Naturalists like Humboldt, Wallace and Darwin described the plant and animal species of the equatorial belt as varied, fecund, and often large in scale due to abundant supply of food and water. As Wallace said upon his return from his south-east Asian expedition (1854-1862), "A large proportion of my insects and birds were either wholly new or of extreme rarity in England" (Berry, 2002, p. 19). Humboldt explained the visible change in botany by the example of "the loftiest and noblest of vegetable forms" (von Humboldt & Sabine, 1849, p. 238): the palm tree. "In receding form the equator and approaching the temperate zone, palms diminish in height and beauty" (von Humboldt & Sabine, 1849, p. 239).

An example of the thick rainforest vegetation is presented in the detail of George French Angas's untitled scene of abundant foliage (1845), in which the forest hums with busy life. Verdant large leaf shapes exhibit a variety of textures between plant species to signal a complex ecosystem. These are rendered in picturesque detail and coloured with a spectrum of greens to achieve a tropical aesthetic, particularly the lime green hues. The tree ferns, philodendrons, heliconias, epiphytes, palms, mosses and algal forms on the trees create a richly textured surface, which revealed the layers of jungle information. Angas completed this rainforest scene with the snake of Eden and a path through an array of green hues. Stepan argued that the early explorers' collection of samples of flora, fauna and exotic memorabilia from the tropics promoted a European way of seeing in which "tropical nature offered an imaginative space for the fusion of these forms" (Stepan, 2001, p. 52).

Plate 1.3 George French Angas, not titled [tropical forest scene], 1845, watercolour, 31 x 46.6 cm.
With permission National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1976.

Stepan reviewed stereotypes of the tropics from a European point of view, and described depictions of tropical space as superabundant and fertile, enhanced by extraordinary plant life like giant waterlilies, orchids, bromeliads and varied fauna. However, she also described the tropics as a degenerate space where disease, danger, and the overtly sexual (Thomson, 2004; Thoreau, 1862) signified what she calls "fatal excess" (Stepan, 2001, p. 21). The idea that rampant nature in the form of a tropical rainforest was hazardous meant that human life was under threat, and fatal excess followed any attempt to take the tropical world for granted, either as a fantasy of the sublime, or as an exotic place of pleasure. "Those with the benefit of a classical education also thought of the Pacific as Arcadia, the idyllic countryside of the Greek Golden Age where nymphs and satyrs idled away their days in romantic courtship" (Fara, 2004, p. 115). Joseph Banks held a similar view of the Tahiti: "the scene that we

saw…was the truest picture of an Arcadia of which we were going to be kings that the imagination can form" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 43).

The journeys of the naturalists into the tropics immersed them in the geography of the Torrid Zone, and led them to create an historical tropical narrative. The tropics was depicted as a world of possibility for travel or the imagination, but also a dangerous space full of hostility and threat. According to Humboldt, Europeans had an advantage over locals in managing the aesthetic problems of tropical views, as they "possessed the language, arts and sciences needed to appropriate tropical nature, to transform it to a higher aesthetic" (Stepan, 2001, p. 43). George Caitlin (1796-1872), an American artist whose portraits of South American Indian people were executed with a similar vision to Humboldt aspired to "a reflection of a shared outlook of a whole generation of artists who were similarly prompted to explore equatorial America" (qtd. in Davis, 1990, p. 201) as paradise, El Dorado and frontier.

Humboldt wrote that European artists could use their imagination to construct "a world as free and imperishable as the world in which it emanates" (von Humboldt, Otté, & Bohn, 1850, p. 231), a view which inspired artists like Frederic Church to travel to the tropics. Humboldt describes the tropics with features that include "The azure of the sky, the light and shadows, the haze resting on the distance, the forms of animals, the succulency of plants and herbage, the brightness of the foliage, the outline of the physiognomy of nature" (von Humboldt et al., 1850, p. 234). The vision of the tropics pioneered by Banks, Humboldt, Darwin and Wallace is also exemplified in Frederic Church's paintings of South America.

Church's *The Heart of the Andes* (1859) caught the expanse of Humboldt's vision,

> …because of its expansive nature. It was nothing less than a summing up of the Andean massif pictured entire from the rarefied arctic air of dizzying peaks down through temperate zones to the green humidity of tropical valleys. It was in one canvas a portrait of an almost complete range of geographical physiognomy, the whole enlivened with that essential ingredient – novelty," but the attitude of novelty wasn't the only outcome. Humboldt's was a vision of the world, belonging to a man "who guided by his curiosity, tried to grasp the world as a whole – to involve the entire cosmos in his thinking (Bunske, 1981, p. 127).

Humboldt's mastery by the Western intellect is found in its arts, which conquer the tropical world:

> These [varied plant forms] and many other enjoyments which nature affords are wanting to nations of the north…Individual plants languishing in our hothouses can give but a very faint idea of the majestic vegetation of the tropical zone. But the high cultivation of our languages, the glowing fancy of the poet, and the imitative art of the painter, open to us sources whence flow abundant compensations, and from whence our imagination can derive the living image of that more vigorous nature" (von Humboldt & Sabine, 1849, p. 246).

Bunske argued that Humboldt not only aided artists by his visually evocative prose and scientific writing, but also encapsulated the variety of scale in the landscape from the grand to the minute: "Humboldt helped artists to avoid becoming hopelessly

lost in the bewildering diversity of tropical nature" (Bunske, 1981, p. 143). His approach was to focus on details within the overall context of the tropics in which he "exhaustively observed a minute organism underfoot, then made a visual leap to the heavens, to remind his reader of the unity in nature" (Bunske, 1981, p. 143). Humboldt taught Church "to select, to combine and to modify the rich natural diversity of the tropics" (Bunske, 1981, p. 136). The vision of the tropics became a marketable commodity to an eager European audience interested in material related to "natural history, travel, popular geography and ethnography" (Stepan, 2001, p. 43), as illustrations, artefacts and botanical specimens fetched high prices in the marketplace.

Plate 1.4 Frederic Edwin Church, *The Heart of the Andes*, 1859, Oil on canvas, 167 x 307cm.
Creative Commons.

Church's *Heart of the Andes* answers Humboldt's call to document the wonders of the tropical world as a spectacular vision and a treasure trove for science. However, it is exactly the transformation of the exotic world into a picturesque landscape that manages to avoid the reality of the perplexed dystopian space that Stepan pointed out. By this transformation the people, creatures and botany are reduced to consumable

objects rather than free agents with rights. The grandeur to which Church aspired is achieved through painting his vision of the sublime in nature, but it is also simplified and trivialised the problems in the tropical space. Stepan saw this as “fatal excess”, a situation in which the tropics are a site to be mined rather than respected.

Church saw the freshwater stream in the foreground, with pristine woods along the banks, lime green fields beyond to the soaring heights of the snow clad Alps, and all united under a firmament that promises rain, breezes and clean air. Where Westall had struggled with his earthy browns and muted temperate tones, Church seized upon glowing violets, viridians, limes and Indian yellow to produce an intense colour field to echo his vision of the tropics.

This large studio painting is the result of information collected in the field as sketches, notes and experience, then painted indoors to replicate the idea of the vision, in which the detail of the real world is subjugated to the artifice of the composition. The painting does not only honour the subject, it also aims to create the unison of the creative ingredients in a final product, which may or may not aggregate truth. The problem with this idealised landscape is a reflection of the notion of utopia versus dystopia. Humboldt and Church saw beauty, divinity and the origin of the world in the tropical vista, while Stepan found the fatal excess of a decrepit and dangerous environment.

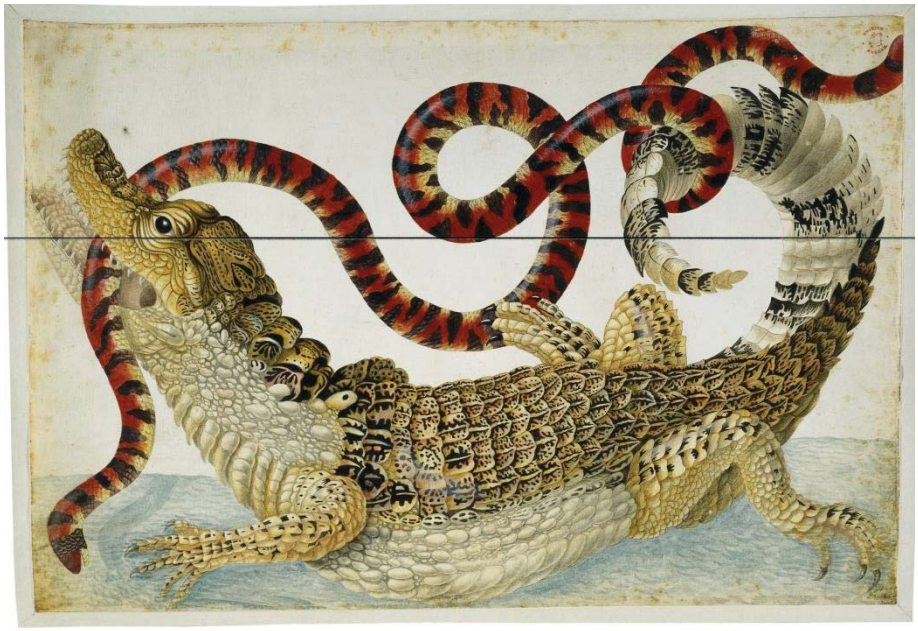

Plate 1.5 Maria Sibylla Merian, *Common or Spectacled Caiman and South American False Coral Snake*, 1705, Watercolour on vellum, 30 x 45cm.
With permission British Museum.

While the naturalist David Attenborough viewed Maria Merian's studies of nature, including her *Spectacled Caiman* (1705), as "magnificent work…one of the most important works of natural history of its era" (Attenborough, Owens, Clayton, & Alexandratos, 2009, p. 140), he highlights the ambivalence in the human artistry that sought to use the natural world as a metaphor for spiritual meaning. "The bestiary texts explained that animals were put on earth to illustrate God's purpose and teachings. They were, in the eyes of the devout, parables and sermons, and their morality was even more important than their morphology" (Attenborough et al., 2009, p. 13).

Similarly, Stepan saw Church's South American vision as problematic, firstly because "the scientists and painters who depicted the New World tropical and neo-tropical regions have profoundly influenced our perception of the natural world," whereas "these representations in turn often sparked contrary reactions in the newly independent American republics, where politicians and intellectuals were struggling to

create their own mythologies of national identity." Stepan's second assertion was that "Latin America was part of a system of informal European empire; the British for example were the major bankers and lenders of credit…throughout the nineteenth century," and she continued "agents from Kew gardens were dispatched to collect botanical 'intelligence' (Stepan, 2001, p. 23). Her final point was about the controversial subject of deforestation. "The area contains the largest tract of rainforest still in existence…infamous because of its rapid destruction" (Stepan, 2001, p. 23).

1.4 Empirical Vision of the Tropics

Felix Driver's *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire* (2005) underlined the economic, scientific and geographic emergence of the Europeans in the Torrid Zone. Driver's view of the European vision considered rainforest wilderness to be an image of Arcadia where "the earth without tillage produces both food and clothing" (Driver & Martins, 2005, p. 80). The fertile soils that support trees like mangoes, coconuts and bananas, producing fruit without help from the farmer is abundance seen as contributing to real sustenance. This abundance promoted the concept of utopia (More, 1913). But the tropics were also the site of disease: leprosy, for example, was considered "the exemplary disease of tropicality, not because it is any way limited to the tropics but because of its uncomfortable positioning within the discourse of 'tropical medicine' that was designed to contain it" (Driver & Martins, 2005, p. 20). Rod Edmond described the tensions around disease and its origins, supporting Driver's argument that tropical space and its native populations have suffered prejudice by colonial labelling as a pathological site or zone. It is labelled "ill-defined but capacious" (Edmond, 2006, p. 29), but helps define "the emergence of racial and cultural identity" (Bewell, 2003, p. 6). Driver argues:

> Germ theory is often said to have undermined geographical and climatic explanations of disease, and to some extent this is true. It certainly focussed more on the native subject as disease carrier than on the tropics as a pathological site…The late twentieth-century construct of tropical medicine was one of the prime means by which this increasingly pathologised relation between tropical and temperate zones was to be described and regulated. Historians nowadays frequently, and more accurately, refer to this turn-of-the-century branch of medicine as imperial or colonial medicine. Tropical medicine as a category ignored diseases like measles and influenza that made terrible inroads into indigenous populations and concentrated instead on diseases believed to be specific to tropical climes and to which Europeans were especially susceptible. In effect, it was a metropolitan imposition on the equatorial regions of the world at a time when the relation between temperate and tropical zones had become particularly troubling (Driver & Martins, 2005, p. 181).

The problem with the idea of torrid versus temperate origin of disease was that it was designed for convenience rather than accuracy. Patrick Manson's *Tropical Diseases* (1898) not only excluded some diseases from the tropics, but included others, like leprosy, that are found outside these regions "which as he admits does not depend on climatic conditions or terrain" (Driver & Martins, 2005, p. 181). Nancy Stepan argued elephantiasis was another tropical horror disease, which presented a way to "reveal the connections Europeans made between blackness, sexuality, pathology and the tropics" (qtd. in Driver & Martins, 2005, p. 182). Elephantiasis was considered by Stepan as "a frightening condition, largely of people far away, who *could* be shown

naked" (qtd. in Driver & Martins, 2005, p. 182) to purposefully enact the idea of a pathological tropics through its native population, culture and environment: "atrophy and deformation wrought by disease…was clearly an important element in its designation as tropical" (Driver & Martins, 2005, p. 182).

The European vision of the tropics is positioned as a way to distance Europe from the imagined danger of the region. "The new science of tropical medicine, therefore, can be understood as an attempt to put a fence around Europe and around the European in the tropics" (Driver & Martins, 2005, p. 184). This idea sought to isolate the temperate world from the tropical world, and at root aimed to achieve the preservation of the European identity during its conquest of tropical space. But the barriers that were designed to categorise and contain disease finally reveal European fear through fateful experience. In spite of the Royal College of Physicians maintaining that leprosy was hereditary rather than contagious, it took the death of Father Damien, a priest working with Indigenous people in the Hawaiian Islands in 1889, before this idea was discredited. Along with it was discredited the fear of "bacterial countercolonisation," a concern that linked "the close relation between fears of disease and degeneration in nation and empire" (Driver & Martins, 2005, pp. 185-189). This confrontation led to a conversation about the material space occupied by the empire and the colony, which resulted in a reduction of prejudice against the tropics.

Naturalists who went in search of botanical knowledge and a better understanding of scientific possibility were posed challenges by the tropics. Humboldt's experience of tropical nature varied between elegiacs to a sublime paradise in landscape vistas and complaints about the problems faced with collecting nature samples. "Sad experience taught us, but too late, that from the sultry humidity of the climate, and from the frequent falls of the beasts of burden, we could preserve neither

the skins of animals too hastily prepared, nor the fishes and reptiles placed in phials filled with alcohol" (Humboldt, 1814, pp. xiii-xiv).

Where Driver has pointed out the idea of a pathological, disease-ridden tropics, the naturalists continued the utopian-inspired search; the needs of empire ranged from fear to the expectation of gain. In this contradictory environment, Alfred Russel Wallace manifested "An earnest desire to visit a tropical country, to behold the luxuriance of animal and vegetable life…and to see with my own eyes all those wonders… were the motives that induced me to…start for some land afar…where endless summer reigns " (Chazdon, 2002, p. 5). Wallace's personal yearning either ignores or absorbs tropical prejudice, demonstrating the emotional world of his scientific journey. This contributes again to the mythology of tropical utopia. Chazdon's descriptions of Alfred Wallace's excitement are echoed in the works of Charles Darwin, who had a similar reaction when he visited Santa Cruz in 1832: "Here I first saw tropical forest in all its sublime grandeur. Nothing but the reality can give any idea how wonderful, how magnificent the scene is" (Chazdon, 2002, p. 9).

Images of the tropical landscape were seen to help communicate the vision of newly discovered regions, "where images of tropicality are concerned, pictures often speak louder than words" (Driver & Martins, 2005, p. 112). Tropical space is described by Driver as either "fantasies of the tropical sublime or negatively as a pathological space of degeneration" (Driver & Martins, 2005, p. 3). The picture of the tropics as a degenerative space included prejudice, disease, exploitation and objectification "as something to be seen – a view to be had or a vision to be experienced," (Driver & Martins, 2005, p. 1). The gaze of the naturalists and explorers was "the eye that observes, compares, and is itself rarely visible" (Driver & Martins, 2005, p. 112), in which the empirical vision was fixated on science, discovery and conquest.

What emerges for painting from this historical background to the discovery of the tropics is the concept of paradox. This paradox encompasses the imagery of exotic beauty contrasted with the degeneration of human health and natural habitat. The general themes identified by Lansdown, Smith, Stepan and Driver are the imaginative possibilities, emphasised in the paintings aesthetics by artists like Frederic Church, Thomas Baines, William Westall, and George Angas. British institutions like the Royal Society, Academy and Admiralty encouraged the study of the tropics as a scientific project. This motivated Joseph Banks to collect data to describe tropical space, and acted as a catalyst promoting scientific investigation by Humboldt, Darwin, Wallace, Bates and Spruce. The political, economic and exploitative goals of European dominance over tropical space through attitudes towards disease, racism and invented pathological conditions were also promoted by these scientific bodies.

1.5 Orientalism

Said suggested that to "understand Europe properly meant understanding the objective relatives between Europe and its own previously unreachable temporal and cultural frontiers" (Said, 2003, p. 120). He called Orientalism a late eighteenth-century construct, "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European western experience" (Said, 2003, p. 1). This notion, he argued, is a deep and recurring aspect of "Other" that gave European culture its identity by contrasting itself to the Orient, which is seen as a surrogate or underground self. The language Said used to create this contrast are "its strangeness, its difference, its exotic sensuousness" (Said, 2003, p. 72): concepts that are extended to encompass the unknown or unfathomable aspects of the tropics. The contradiction between the known

and the unknown contained the possibility and intrigue generated by the agent of place, as fantasy or imagined space:

> "The question amounts to knowing whether the Orient yields to interpretation, to what extent it is open to this and, if to interpret it is not to destroy it…The Orient is extraordinary…it escapes conventions, it lies outside all disciplines, it transposes, it inverts everything, it overturns the harmonies with which landscape painting has for centuries functioned. I do not talk here of a fictional Orient" (Fromentin, 1887, n.p).

In effect, Orientalism confirms the concept of a stable European centre from which the Orient is observed. In various manifestations, this cultural state of mind is a generalisation that implies a centre, which is still securely referred to as the "West." "The vindication of Orientalism was not only its intellectual or artistic successes but its later effectiveness, its usefulness, its authority" (Said, 2003, p. 204). Said argues that we need opposites and others in the construction of our identity, and in the case of Britain and France, Orientalism was constructed on an imbalance of power. The theory of Orientalism also related to the tropics as the opposite of Europe--as a space that could be measured and exploited for its exotic sensuousness, fecundity and wildness.

Orientalism is an idea that is based on studies of Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, but has come to embody Western attitudes to the entire non-European world. "Orientalism tells us something about the Near East but far more about the state of mind of nineteenth-century Europe" (Stevens, 1984, p. 39). Painting the tropics confronts the issues raised by Orientalism, "such as the various attempts to evoke an exotic, remote world, and the artistic solutions to the challenge of depicting unfamiliar

terrain, customs, light and colour" (Stevens, 1984, p. 15). It involved a Western desire to see this reflection in order to better understand itself in terms of difference and variation (Netton, 2012). Some nineteenth-century European artists travelled to North Africa and the Middle East in order to better understand Biblical scriptures. But the ethnographic difference was far more attractive to the western world as a sexual fantasy that could titillate a European audience, at the same time depicting eastern populations as inferior (Stevens, 1984).

Plate 1.6 Edwin Long, *Babylonian Marriage Market* 1875, Oil on canvas, 172.6 x 304.6cm.
Creative Commons.

In *Babylonian Marriage Market* (1875) by Edwin Long, the jostle in the market crowd in the background is initially exciting, but at second glance its ruthless exploitation reveals Long's own desire to characterise the Orient through the bizarre culture of a marriage market. He exploits the girls himself, as decorative objects for the viewer's inspection. Long contributes to the problem of the Orientalist gaze, which denigrated the non-European world. His canvas is painted with glossy oil paint, giving

the idea of sensuality through the interaction of its intricate mosaic tiles, nubile youth and brutish masculinity: “Long’s large-scale depiction set exotic Babylonian beauties among the reconstructed splendours of the ancient world…of archaeological costume drama” (Benjamin, 1997, p. 42).

Beneath the enchantment, Long’s Orientalist art rests on condescension toward the subject. Orientalism, anarchic and vehement, is depicted in *Death of Sardanapalus* 1827 by Eugéne Delacroix. It captured “the vision of the Orient – passionate, cruel and intoxicating” (Stevens, 1984, p. 18). Linda Nochlin suggested the painting is empowered by its erotic and sadistic elements, portraying the “ideology of male domination: the connection between sexual possession and murder as an assertion of absolute domination” (Nochlin, 1983b, p. 125). The exotic setting enhances an “extreme state of psychic intensity” (Nochlin, 1983b, p. 126). Delacroix’s fatal excess is a state far removed from Long’s decorative spectacle, in which the zebra, leopard and lion fur, shimmering curtains, porcelain tiles, and marble, are given as much tactile resonance as the figures; arranged to harmonise with the tapestry of their culture. Going to the Orient for subject matter foregrounded the raising of the curtain, “into a theatrical world where illusion rather than reality was to be the guiding principle” (Stevens, 1984, p. 18).

The exotic tropics depicted by Henri Rousseau in his imagined paradise, is painted without any actual physical experience of the environment. He collected all of his tropical references from his visits to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. Rousseau said, “When I go into the glass houses and I see the strange plants of exotic lands, it seems to me that I enter into a dream” (Larson, 2009, p. 196). Rousseau’s paintings were an artificial experience inspired by exotica: “whether he was painting jungles of plants and trees that barely belong in the same hemisphere, let alone latitudes or climate or scenes

of suburban Paris which, although sometimes begun as faithful topography, took on an aspect entirely derived from the artists' imagination" (Benchimol & Maley, 2007, n.p).

Plate 1.7 Henri Rousseau, *Tiger in a Tropical Storm (Surprised!)* 1891, Oil on canvas 130 x 162cm. Creative Commons.

In Rousseau's painting tropical grass looks more like an undersea kelp garden being washed about. The tiger appears as a taxidermy study collaged between botanical references. We can almost hear Rousseau making his own sound effects, of thunderclaps and cracking tree branches. It is surprising to see Rousseau intuit a monsoonal downpour, swirling around his image of large leaves, red flowers, species rich from the Jardin visits, and refracted through his imaginary process. His naïve painting style serves to accentuate the blocks of colour applied in warm green tones and woven into a tapestry-like composition. In this way Rousseau produced his enchanted response to the idea of the exotic, showing his preparedness to invest himself in the experience of things like of tigers, leeches and wait-a-while vines, to feel the emotional

impact of those imaginary elements of the tropical world that could transport him and his audience to a conceptual tropics.

Rousseau's portrayal of "Other" presents his vision of utopia sometimes in its luxuriant foliage and sometimes as dystopian in its fear and foreboding of dangerous animals. However, Rousseau's humour was a unique achievement. His tropics are an imaginary place, where he could experience joy. His delight foreshadows an important and compelling exoneration for the tropics, and is why the mindset of the French modernist painters moved closer to understanding the region. The imaginary tropics was not merely an experiment for Rousseau; he invested his soul in his ideas of lush foliage and exotic creatures.

The outward movement of the French to the Orient and beyond to the Pacific, is sensual in character (Segalen, 2002). This is expressed by the Tahitian concept of *Noa Noa* (meaning "fragrance"), used as a recurrent theme by Gauguin to portray nature as an aromatic entity that "carries an appropriate sense of something that is highly concentrated but unstable" (Wadley, 1985, p. 144). The exoticism of Gauguin's paintings reflects his immersion in Tahiti, which immersion is similar to that of the earlier Orientalists, who located themselves in North Africa:

> European painters who decided to settle in countries under colonial influence –whether Morocco, Algeria, or Egypt – made a rich contribution to Orientalist tradition. Those in more distant regions – British painters working in India or Australia, or French artists in Indochina or Tahiti – have for reasons of geography seldom been called Orientalists. Rather their work has usually been linked to fledgling

> national schools of painting in the colony concerned or, in the case of Gauguin, to the history of European exoticism (Benjamin, 1997, p. 41).

The exotic "Other", personified by the Orient as an imagined geography, also became a rich source of inspiration to artists like Matisse and Picasso. They referenced the primitive masks (F. S Connelly, 1995) of African and Oceanic art that had earlier inspired artists like Gauguin (Klein, 1997). The two tropics described by art critic Hal Foster in *Art since 1900: 1900 to 1944* were Oceania, with its sensuous noble savage, and Africa, with its "bloody or ignoble savage in the sexual heart of darkness" (Foster et al., 2011, p. 66). Foster argues that these artists created an imaginary Orient, sometimes located in the tropics, as "space-time maps onto which psychological ambivalence and political ambition could be projected" (Foster et al., 2011, p. 66).

Gauguin's *Tahitian Women on the Beach* (1891), is a painting understood through the figures' hostile and disinterested expression. The degree of disregard for the artist painting them is shown by frowning faces and their turning away from the artist. Gauguin's commentary on the lack of joy within the girls, or even his interaction with them, is complex. He uses their sadness to ask the viewer to feel sympathy for a people misunderstood and harmed by colonial invasion. The pink dress, made in Western fabric from imported cloth, presents the profound sadness of the assimilation of European values. The sitter's eyes look away, filled with hurt and anger.

The woman in the "traditional" sarong – which is another piece of imperial print, and not traditional at all – gazes not at the world that is judging her, but into her own culture and land. Her impartial response to the regard of dominance shows us how Gauguin perceived her world of despair. Gauguin's gaze was conflicted by contributing to perceptions of the Other, while asking the viewer to see the Tahitian people's misery

inflicted by colonisation. This departs from the North African Orientalist imagery that aimed at fictional beauty even in death.

Plate 1.8 Paul Gauguin, *Tahitian Women on the Beach*, 1891, Oil on canvas, 61cm x91cm.
Creative Commons.

In this painting Gauguin investigated the complex relationship between Europe and Tahiti. Stephen Eisenman in his critical reflection *Gauguin's Skirt* 1997 stated:

> Gauguin's seduction by his vision was one of the reasons he chose to move to Tahiti. The desire for erotic masculine mastery, as well as for wealth and political power was likewise an inducement to many other immigrants; desire itself was as Edward Said writes, at the heart of the colonial "male power fantasy." But the myth of the "new Eden" could be a hazard as well as a boon to the colonial enterprises. Erotic pleasures were not generally consistent with the other, and more necessary form of colonial desire: "*le gout du travail.*" Order had to be maintained in the midst of the far *niente*, and law and ideology were tailored for the

> purpose: native women and men were marked by racial decrepitude, and any colonist who "went native" (*encanaqu*e) was almost equal to "bestial" and degenerate (Eisenman, 1997, p. 164).

In *Tahitian Women on the Beach,* Gauguin sought to challenge the notion of the racial decrepitude. This challenge engages deeply with the problem of tropical space, through the expectations and entitlements of empire. But Gauguin was also a painter looking for an opportune subject. He reflected on the ideas of Van Gogh who thought; "the future belongs to the painters of the yet unpainted tropics" (Eisenman, 1997, p. 47). Eisenman stated that after reading *The Marriage of Loti,* a tale set in the Pacific recommended him by Van Gogh, Gauguin developed a fascination for escape to Tahiti:

> From that moment forward, the thought of more or less permanent escape from Europe became an obsession for Gauguin; *Loti* thereafter was both a fulcrum for the artist's dreams about life and love in the tropics, and a model of bourgeois exoticism that the artist would ultimately resist by means of an increasingly pronounced primitivism (Eisenman, 1997, p. 47).

The impact of Orientalist painting contributed significantly to modern art:

> "Matisse is the most celebrated artist to have contributed to the Orientalist tradition. The instigator of the Fauve movement which liberated colour from its descriptive function (1905-07), Matisse pushed painting to an art of sheer surfaces bound by arabesque lines" (Benjamin, 1997, p. 247).

Journeys to Algeria, Tangiers and Morocco (1906-1913) shaped Matisse's image of the exotic: "Persian miniatures…showed me all the possibilities of my sensations…By its properties this art suggests a larger and truly plastic space…Thus my revelation came from the Orient" (Benjamin, 1997, p. 247). For Matisse, the exotic experience was the "unabashed eroticism" of the nude model. Use of the nude model contributed to his experiments in abstraction, which produced a theme for his paintings. This contributed to the "fetishization" of the Orient in western thought. In 1930 he followed Gauguin to Tahiti, to again experience the "European imaginary of the exotic" (Turner, 1995, p. 123).

In *The Parakeet and the Mermaid* (1952), Matisse used paper cut-outs in repetitive placements to arrange shapes as purity of form, and to produce an aesthetic feeling from his memory of the Pacific Ocean. The composition is made up of seaweed, sponges, birds and a mermaid. Matisse's memory distorted reality both through pictographic design and abstraction. In addition, he added to the Tahitian aesthetic, which by now was dominated by Gauguin's interpretation. In many regards this return to pure colour, delineated form and narrative is a breakthrough for modern art, after previous movements' singular emphasis on light.

Plate 1.9: Henri Matisse, *The Parakeet and the Mermaid*, 1952, Paper cut out, 337 x 763cm.

Cultural motifs are drawn into Matisse's compositions with the references to the pattern, shapes and designs of Tahitian mats. Matisse owned patterned fabric and quilts called *pareu*, as well as tapas made from bark and Tahitian appliqué quilts called *tifaifai* (Turner, 1995). The outcome both shaped Matisse's compositions, and made Tahitian culture more accessible to a European audience. Scientists' and collectors' objects formed a bridge between the curiosity cabinet, or *wunderkammer*, terrarium and hot house, and the central hall of the Gallery. Matisse pictured his vast patterned shapes of birds, corals and fruits as an unlimited spacious garden where "space has the boundaries of my imagination" (A. Searle, 2014, n.p). The arrangement of objects in this framework is Matisse's response to the tropics through formalism.

From his memory of the Pacific, Matisse made two signature works of the skies and seas with fish, seaweed, masks and leaves: *Oceania: the Sky* (1946-7) and *Oceania: the Sea* (1946-7). "Sixteen years after my trip to Tahiti, my memories are finally coming back to me. There swimming every day in the lagoon, I took such pleasure in contemplating the submarine world" (A. Searle, 2014, n.p). Matisse's lagoon was "the Paradise of painters" (A. Searle, 2014, n.p) a recurrent reflective experience expressed in his flotilla of decoration. He repeatedly employed the lagoon as a conceptual container of things and forms.

While Gauguin painted from his experience of immersion in the life and world of Tahiti, its peoples and customs, Rousseau accessed the exotic through his imagination. Although Orientalism conveyed a distinctly European impression of the Other worlds, it became a conceptual, rather than space-specific rendering. Australian artists, (being exotic themselves), also contributed to and participated in the movement. Parallel to the North African movement expressed by British and French Artists, Australian artists such as Arthur Streeton, Charles Condor, Ethel Carrick, Hilda Rix

Nicholas and Rupert Bunny also contributed to the Orientalist movement. "Australian awareness of Orientalism followed this pattern of reference back to European knowledge, to the dissemination of cultural concepts through the Empire's channel of communication" (Benjamin, 1997, p. 41).

1.6 Dasein: Space and Place

The antithesis of being the exotic other is being oneself, and the German philosopher Heidegger named the connectivity of being in place as *Dasein*, meaning existence. The German meaning of *Da* is *there* and *zeit* is *being*. The idea of *being* is the existing component and the *there* is the world, which Heidegger then explains as being-in-the world. *Dasein* is the world we live in and the relationship between who we are and our interaction with the objects around us that give context and meaning to how we exist in the world. The creative act gave licence to Rousseau, Matisse and Gauguin to engage with the primary modes of existence in exotic or tropical space in a way that the British academies of science, letters and economics could not; through the personal product of human interaction, aestheticism and invention. In fact the sensual response in these French painters brought the west face to face with the tropics.

Another element of *Dasein* is care, in which idea the world around us cares for us and we care for the world. Edward Casey described Heidegger's emphasis on the primacy of place as a "definite location-relationship…the truly existential character of being-in in terms of *Dasein's* proclivity for inhabiting and dwelling" (Casey, 1998, p. 245). Casey explained that being-in-the-world suggests the idea of caring for something, as well as familiarity, and dwelling; that are unified by temporality.

The being in the world we have mentioned so far is in terms of the temperate or torrid space, the European identity or Other, visions of utopia or dystopia, or the light

and shadow of the painted responses to the world, as either-or arguments. But the primacy of existence finds a deeper more universal principle in *being*.

Heidegger's model of *Dasein* presented possibility for introspection, "the horizon in which something like being in general becomes intelligible – an understanding which itself belongs to the constitution of the entity called *Dasein*" (Guignon, 2006, p. 5). Charles Guignon states that Heidegger's agency of engagement gives a description of the relationship between mind and matter. "For Heidegger brackets the assumption that there is such a thing as a mind or consciousness, something immediately presented to itself in introspection, which must be taken as the self-evident starting point for any account of reality," and which finally aims at "revealing a primary understanding of the world" (Guignon, 2006, pp. 5-6).

The being part is the personal view of the world and how that looks and feels, as experience; and the in-the-world part is the space that being occupies. The premium on space has been the much politicised crossroads of this thesis, but what is space, and how is meaning attached to it so that it gets to be political in the first place? For space to become a place, not just a container that surrounds space as Aristotle suggested; "the place of a thing is the inner surface of the body encompassing it" (Gill, 2012, p. 207), it needs meaning and memory attached to it (T. Smith, 1993). Matisse's idea of the lagoon encompassing his forms acted to contain space, which created an inhabited world that uses *Dasein* conceptually as pragmatism.

Tim Creswell argued that place is the subject of human geography that seeks to locate people in the space of their surroundings, as a lived, felt and understood experience. It is the activities undertaken in space that gives context and meaning to the

notion of place. This is the idea of the landscape that has a history or memory, in which events that occurred in geographical sites are embedded:

> All over the world people are engaged in place-making activities. Homeowners redecorate, build additions, and manicure the lawn. Neighbourhood organizations put pressure on people to tidy their yards; city governments legislate for new public buildings to express the spirit of particular places. Nations project themselves to the rest of the world through postage stamps, money, parliament buildings, national stadia, tourist brochures, etc. Within nation-states oppressed groups attempt to assert their own identities. Just as the new student climbs on the bed to put the poster on the wall so the Kosovan Muslim flies a new flag, erects a new monument and redraws the map. Graffiti artists write their tags in flowing script on the walls of the city. This is their place too…What makes them all places and not simply a room, a garden, a town, a world city, a new nation and an inhabited planet? One answer is that they are all spaces which people have made meaningful. They are all spaces people are attached to in some way or another. This is the most straightforward and common definition of place – a meaningful location (Cresswell, 2004, pp. 6-7).

The place-making Cresswell demonstrates in these examples encompassed the legitimacy of meaning that emerges from human engagement with surrounding space; public, personal, national, individual or shared. The view of the tropical world, through the lens of its Indigenous peoples, naturalists, explorers, orientalists, artists and governments, has generated meaning and memory about the region in terms of its human geography and its climatic effects. The meanings tied to the fabric of human

activity validate the making of spaces into places. This kind of human influence over surroundings and the impact of the surrounding as cultural meaning becomes a shaping force, particularly in the example of the mapmaking where lines of geography show us where cultures and meaning begin and end.

The meaningful aspect of place as home is considered by Heidegger as a *dwelling place,* where "to dwell is to be at home" (Guignon, 2006, p. 373). The establishment of the Antipodes as a penal settlement meant the very opposite of home, it meant denial of the preciousness of primary meaning attached to place, and for the Indigenous people it meant theft. The western idea of the tropics as home is still in conflict with the popular idea of the tourist holiday in the "tropics". But for the Orientalist artist going to North Africa or the Pacific, leaving home was the motivation. The western view of the native inhabitants of the tropics was seen as dystopic or inferior by European standards: "But this is not all to say that colonial communities can never come to dwell in the colonised place" (Guignon, 2006, p. 383).

The constituent aspects of place are what John Agnew calls: 1) location, 2) locale and 3) sense of place, in his understanding of politics and place (Cresswell, 2004, p. 7). Agnew investigates place as sites that are discovered, celebrated, devalued and operate as areas of participation and mobilisation. The multiplicity of purposes and uses of space presented by Cresswell take us through intimate and urban spaces and into the landscape. Landscape was a term that encompassed looking at vistas of nature as an outward experience rather than a lived experience. Captain Vancouver's mapping of the coastline between Seattle and Vancouver on HMS *Discovery* in 1792 was an example that revealed the geography as the home of the native people who lived there. Vancouver couldn't understand the complicated routes taken by the inhabitants, who canoed in meandering paths around a lagoon, as he perceived the sea as a space to be

crossed in straight lines. But the native perspective encompassed the spirits and dangers, ocean currents, weather and environment of the sea. “While the colonialists looked at the sea and saw blank space, the natives saw place” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 9).

However, the naturalists and scientists needed the native perspective to find what they were looking for. People see things and places with the memory, purpose and meaning they attach to their vision. In contrast to Vancouver’s bewilderment, German geographer Aurel Krause noted in 1881 that the natives seemingly ignored the mountainous backdrop behind their coastal dwellings. They didn’t go there, but the European explorers wanted to examine the terrain. “In spite of the fact that the Tlingit is constantly surrounded by nature, he is only acquainted with it as it offers him the necessities of life…every bay…has names; but the mountain peaks…are scarcely noticed by him” (Raban, 1999, p. 106).

The significance of the landscape remains important to advanced western societies, as a space of spiritual and cultural importance, and resource worthy of protection, as endorsed by Tim Flannery, Jared Diamond, Steven Jay Gould and Simon Schama. These authorities valued geography as cultural history. Creswell, Raban and Agnew’s view of human occupation in the landscape as an ongoing presence considered historical geography a lived site of meaningful activity. Julian Young described the notion of dwelling place set out by Heidegger as the symbol of a homeland. Young stated that *being* includes the responsibility to act as a guardian to maintain and protect nature as one would care for their home, “To be at home in a place is to care for it. People do not litter their homes – if homes they have – in the way they litter motorways” (Guignon, 2006, p. 378). The aspect of care is connected to holiness, through Young’s interpretation of guardianship, “Because, evidently, the showing of respect, of reverence, is what is to apprehend my place as a holy place. If I am not

moved to respect for the ground on which I stand, I do not know that it is sacred ground" (Guignon, 2006, p. 379).

Wallace was interested in the conceptual aspect of the geography, as a metaphysical realm of human experience he called "spiritualistic phenomena" (Berry, 2002, p. 26). Wallace believed there was a purpose of human consciousness beyond scientific explanation, and this developed into his image of the tropics as "space" and paradise as "anti-materialist'(Berry, 2002, p. 222). This idea of space as material and immaterial is what lies at the heart of tropical paradise, a space that is both real and imagined. The idea of space is based on a holistic understanding, as unity related by connectivity, "There is an obvious symbiosis between climate and species of animals and plants, even between climate and land formation" (Guignon, 2006, p. 381). In this case, tropical space is both a historically constructed vision as well as a real place. Painting the tropics is a place-making activity that describes seeing and reinterpreting the tropical myth as against being in the tropical world as lived experience.

As we consider the various descriptions of tropical space through the lens of paradise and its dystopian opposites, the aesthetics, initial fascination and scientific endeavour produce an ominous sense of degeneration. Empirical understanding and Imperial expansion is stressed by Lansdown, Smith, Stepan and Driver. They are a reflection on enlightenment goals with the potential of newness; against racism, disease and exploitation. The painters who mapped this earlier vision included Church, Baines, Westall and Angas. The complexity of tropical space is revealed in the Orientalist movement, which succumbed to the compelling arguments for the human mind to chart its identity in relation to the dominant European position. This intellectual problem is communicated directly in the paintings of Rousseau, Matisse and Gauguin, who expanded Oriental geography to the Pacific in pictures. But Said's language provided

an impetus to look again at the problematic perceptions of Otherness. Guignon, Casey and Creswell used Heidegger's *beingness* to redress lived meaning prescribed to place by virtue of spatial interaction. It is their platform that produces a contemporary context to look at Australian's painting the tropics.

Chapter 2 Western Art and the North Queensland tropics

2.1 The Colonial era

The Art of Australia, Volume 1: Exploration to Federation by John McDonald first introduces the original inhabitants of Australia in their artefacts and paintings. These draw from a cultural connection to country, which is more familiar to them than to Europeans, who still struggled to see the interconnectedness of season and landscape. McDonald states that Indigenous rock art, bark paintings, ceremonial dancing and body decoration "testified to the Aborigines' close affinity with the land and its flora and fauna," (McDonald, 2008, p. 18).

The early European voyages of exploration found Australia were difficult, and when landed, the artists were not as impressed by the landscape as they were with tropical islands. The artists on board Cook's three voyages included William Hodges (1744-1797), Sydney Parkinson (1745-1771), Alexander Buchan (?-1769) and John Webber (1751-1793). Webber made paintings of the islands of the Pacific, but very few landscapes of Australia. It was the painters like William Westall and Thomas Baines who began to depict the geography of the Australian landscape. The development of colonial art is evident not only in the paintings of John Glover, Augustus Earle and Conrad Martens, but most emphatically in the large oil canvases of Eugene von Guérard, Nicholas Chevalier and William Charles Piguenit. These salon works hang in the national collections and fulfilled the orientalist goals of beauty and luxuriance, while maintaining a focus on the Australian landscape. This landscape seems to have been transformed from a frontier to a landscape of possibility for the painter. It no longer was what John McDonald describes as, "the idea of the bush as a bottomless pit of melancholy" which reflected the European "sense of isolation – a heartache of being

so far from home"(McDonald, 2008, p. 149). However splendid and sentimental Chevalier's Victorian *Buffalo Ranges* 1854-67 appeared for him, the novelist Marcus Clarke wrote,

> There is no mountain range which be compared with the Australian Alps – not for magnificence – but for gloom, for greatness of solitude, and for that grandeur which is born of the mysterious and the silent. The Australian mountain forests are funereal, secret and stern. Their solitude is desolation. They seem to stifle in their black gorges a story of sullen despair. No tender sentiment is nourished in their shade…All is fear inspiring and gloomy. No bright fancies are linked with the memory of the mountains. Despairing explorers have named them out of their sufferings – Mount Misery, Mount Dreadful, Mount Hopeless. The plains below bear titles of ill omen (McDonald, 2008, p. 150).

The painting *Buffalo Ranges* must be read in the context of European discomfort with antipodal space, as McDonald confirmed that Clarke's "pretext for his gothic excursions" were a "melancholy tirade" (2008, p. 150). But the character of the Australian landscape that was revealed in the paintings comes also from Clarke's discontent, "In Australia alone is to be found the grotesque, the Weird, - the strange scribbling's of nature learning how to write…but the dweller in the wilderness acknowledges the subtle charm of this fantastic land of monstrosities. He becomes familiar with the beauty of loneliness" (McDonald, 2008, p. 152).

So the remarkable outcome of Clarke's commentary on Chevalier is a feeling of national pride hidden in the artifice of pain, "in its kernel the pain and guilt of colonial experience." The conclusion that McDonald arrived at was "that in order to endure life

in Australia, one has to learn to love the land on its own terms" (McDonald, 2008, p. 152). Chevalier's depictions of the picturesque were, in Clarke's mind, an image of gloom, solitude, desolation and misery. However, *Buffalo Ranges* expressed the Humboldtian aesthetic of the European sublime transposed onto the Australian landscape.

Plate 2.1 Nicholas Chevalier, *Buffalo Ranges*, 1864, Oil on canvas, 132 x 183cm.
Creative Commons.

McDonald stated that Eugene Von Guérard found the lush natural grove in the Dandenong ranges greatly inspiring, and utilised it as the subject of *Ferntree Gully* (1857).

> …which has never been equalled as a depiction of verdant, claustrophobic Australian rainforest…The giant sized ferns, the dense foliage and sinuous curves of tree branches capture all the strangeness that observers see in the Australian bush. There are no human beings, only a single lyrebird posed in the foreground, heightening the unearthly, exotic atmosphere (McDonald, 2008, pp. 188-189).

However, Von Guérard's Victorian temperate rainforest gully is less species rich than the diversity of the tropical forests. These have an even more exotic entanglement of vines, epiphytes, trees, cycads animals and bird life. Certainly his sensitivity to a lush vision is displayed by his dense surface textures of radiating Ferntree fronds.

Plate 2.2 Eugene von Guérard, *Ferntree Gully Dandenong Ranges*, 1857, Oil on canvas, 92 x 138cm.
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Gift of Dr Joseph Brown AO OBE 1975.

The movement of artists to Queensland, then further north to the tropics, continued the expansion of the western reach. Tropicality fitted orientalism, a banner that encompassed Australia by its difference. The problems of tropical Australia reflected Stepan's concerns of misrepresentation, in which the science of botany overrides the needs and governance of the Indigenous people. Stepan argued that primitivism and alterity contributed to a colonial bias, producing fatal excess and degeneration in the course of the expansion of empire. The tropical aspects of northern Australia emerged in the early paintings by topography, lurid palette or the people, flora and fauna. Thomas Baines painted *South Brisbane from the North Shore* (1868), which

shows the settlement of sub-tropical Brisbane, which had developed from the new Moreton Bay colony in 1859. The hybrid culture of Australia is present here, with the eucalypts of dry sclerophyll terrain sitting alongside a banana tree. A melange of vegetable gardens, stock, ships, bark huts, settler's cottages and children emphasises this dichotomy. A little girl in a white dress peers into the bark hut, Indigenous boys play with spears and a shield. The Aboriginal man sits in the foreground encampment; in the background a settler leads his bullock wagon. In the emergent dichotomy of forms, culture and space; western art identifies the colonial impact that lies somewhere between exoticism, orientalism and *being* involved in the everyday experience, even as one ethos replaces the other.

Plate 2.3 Thomas Baines, *South Brisbane from the North Shore, Moreton Bay*, 1868, Oil on canvas, 45.8 x 66.4cm.
Research permitted.

Other early colonial painting emanated from the Julian Ashton School, established in 1890, and the Heidelberg School, from 1891. These schools have had a lasting influence on how Australian painting presents the topography and geography of Australia. Their colour palettes reflect the quieter hues of the temperate zone, with imagery mostly of Victoria and New South Wales (Eagle & Jones, 1994) (Skerritt, 2011).

The Heidelberg artist Arthur Streeton sought to paint *en plein-air,* to catch the light effects of the Australian bush. Streeton wrote to his friend Tom Roberts about his visit to Cairns, Townsville and Magnetic Island describing his experience of the mountains surrounding Cairns; "the hill information everywhere is beautiful" (G. Smith, 1995, p. 179). In *Barron Gorge and Sugar Plains,* Streeton used the tones of a temperate climate. These were a result of his training in Victoria, and the spectrum of hue found in the temperate climate. In the *Sun* newspaper, *Barron Gorge* was described as a "beautifully atmospheric and sincere interpretation of the Queensland landscape" (G. Smith, 1995, p. 179). Streeton pictured the landscape from a map-like perspective: between the cliffs of the gorge, with agricultural land, the Barron River on its way to the coast and the mountainous horizon that encloses Trinity Bay and Cairns.

Streeton brought the stylisation of the orientalist gaze that sought to produce imagery of the grand or sublime. In doing this, he took the view of tropical Cairns out of its own context: distorting the colours, light and geographical features, which in reality are much closer, greener and not actually as high. In reality the view of the gorge from his painting position is of a view that is both claustrophobic, with its high humidity, and much greener, with its bright vegetation.

Geoffrey Smith states that Streeton found ‘charm’ in the distance, height and vastness of atmospheric landscape, that reveals not only pioneering bush life and the realism of Australian sunlight, but the expressive feeling that could command, “the intimate facts of our own life and environment” (qtd. in 1995, p. 9).

Plate 2.4 Arthur Streeton, *Barron Gorge and Sugar Plains*, 1924, Oil on canvas, 101 x 152cm.
Public Domain.

In historical terms, Streeton’s painting of *Barron Gorge and Sugar Plains* employed the picturesque style, using analytic naturalism to record the Australian geographical vision. This style produced the “close relationship between art and science” as a description of the “new world of Australia and the Pacific” (Serle, 1973, p. 10). It is possible to read the foreground of the rocky edifice as cloaked in dry seasonal tones, not the lush viridians of the monsoonal season. The 45˚ angles of the gorge tip us into the chasm above the coastal plains as though on a roller coaster, with trompe-l’oeil artifice or forced perspective creating the illusion of deep space. Streeton utilised the aspirations of Australian culture to illuminate the *plein air* landscape, with the impressionist focus on the effects of natural light,

> It is better to give our own idea than to get a merely superficial effect, which is apt to be a repetition of what others have done before us, and may shelter us in a safe mediocrity, which, while it will not attract condemnation, could never help towards the development of what we believe will be a great school of painting in Australia (Conder, Roberts, & Streeton, 1889, n.p).

The Heidelberg school inspired the sense of individuality, of Australianness and national feeling. The colonial era dealt with Europeans adjusting to Australian topography, interacting with Indigenous people, and finding a sometimes awkward identity. The landscape painting of early Australia shows us how the antipodean frontier was idealised as a sublime space. This is demonstrated in the examples of Chevalier, Von Guerard and Streeton, but also in Thomas Baines attempts to record ideas of a developing culture. Clarke's critique of the European gaze articulated the conflicts between two perceptions of landscape imagery.

2.2 Modernism and Post-modernism in the tropics

When modernist movements like the Angry Penguins emerged in the 1940s the representation of landscape and culture changed to a style that used expressionism and surrealism. Sydney Nolan's *Paradise Garden* (1968), "a work based on botanical studies", contained "hundreds of small panels of flower plant forms" (Fuller, 1988, p. 223) and signified the idea of transformation. Angry Penguins' narrative of the painting was not simply the modernist use of the painted canvas, but was in Kenneth Clark's terms: "Paradoxically, the Australian vision of man's struggle to come to terms with a hostile environment to have acquired an almost universal significance in our troubled country" (Fuller, 1988, p. 222).

Plate 2.5 Ian Fairweather, *Alligator Creek, Cairns*, 1939, Gouache on cardboard, 47.5 x 51.2cm.
Private collection.

Ian Fairweather moved to Cairns in 1939, and subsequently inspired a wave of artists, particularly Yvonne Cohen, Valerie Albiston and Noel Wood. Fairweather lived at Malay Town on the Alligator River, with the Indigenous people with whom he "felt at home" (qtd. in Bail, 2009, p. 59). In his painting *Alligator Creek* (1939), he captured the various aspects of landscape and presented them as a unified whole: "earth, water, foliage and humid sky are one" (Bail, 2009, p. 59). The pattern-like effect of the composition produces a tapestried surface of flattened perspective. It relies on the lively surface and symbolic motifs to describe Cairns and his reactions to place through paint. The depth of his blue and green hues caught the lush terrain of the tropics. As a result of the Second World War, there was a geographical movement to the north, which bought many artists to the tropics and Far North Queensland. This produced an important a psychological leap into modernist colour. In response to movements in

Europe and the US, the pre-war and post-war movements in Australian art saw the rise of nationalist themes. These attempted to capture Australian subject matter, landscape and identity (Eagle & Jones, 1994).

Plate 2.6 Eric Thake, *The Birds of Paradise*, Watercolour, 1945, 38.1 x 47.4 cm.
Research permitted.

As an official war artists from 1944-46, Eric Thake produced imagery of the Pacific and Australia to reflect everyday life in the military. Thake's surrealist image of war planes revealed his metaphorical and ironic interpretation of flight, both airborne and dismembered. The havoc of war is emphasised by destruction as the object of engagement in a tropical space. The backdrop pictures serene coconut fronds and a paradisiacal sky interrupted by aircraft. This image pertains to the tropics as an ambivalent site, a tranquil backdrop to a hellish nightmare.

Objects dislocated from their anchor points emphasise the turmoil of war. Thake's primitivism displayed uninhibited expression not tied to the rules and burden of the picturesque. Francis Connelly argued that the notion of primitivism meant that traditional painting could appear "naïve, or rude" (1995, p. 21). She maintained that the childlike quality meant freedom, and the "lack of sophisticated technique was more

than compensated by lack of a guile" (1995, p. 21). This aided directness, unaffectedness and truthfulness. In Thake's painting the violence of is war portrayed crudely and honestly, and touches the viewer with its dismembered *bird of paradise* that has its feathers splayed in a spectacular mess.

John Coburn's (1925-2006) work makes use of abstraction from the primitive idea. His style is flat-patterned, with brilliant colour laid around shapes inspired by nature. We can see the tropical sensibility at work in the primitive simplicity, orientalist abstraction and the unique character of space. His colour field brings forth *Dasein,* signified here as a rendering of humidity, atmospheric warmth and strong colour.

Plate 2.7 John Coburn, *Paradise Garden*, 1986, gouache on paper, 48 x 72cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales. Gift of the Christensen Fund 1995.

Curator Ross Searle's *To the Islands* (2013) is an exhibition of work designed to reveal imagery that depicts how the tropics were imaged in the mid-1950s. Artists included Noel Wood, Yvonne Cohen, Valerie Albiston and Fred Williams. Cohen's blaze of colour captures the infernal heat of the tropics. Her colour is decadent, dripping with sweat and almost scorching. Yet her plants revel in it. Fred Williams,

whose work uses a modernist painting style of experimentation, moves away from traditional representation to interpret the tropical landscape.

Plate 2.8 Yvonne Cohen, *Mango Trees*, 1945, Oil on canvas, 45.5 x 50.5cm.
Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville.

Searle's exhibition recognises paintings that were made locally as recently as the 1940s, in which Australian artists painting the tropics formed their vision from the western influences of exploration and discovery as a foundation for viewing the landscape. Noel Wood's painting of Dunk Island describes the fecundity of the tropics through his spectrum of lush green hues. Banana leaves and coconut palm fronds are botanical symbols, and the lagoon- like Coral Sea is protected from the white foam of breakers by the Barrier Reef. The restfulness of an uninterrupted, unpeopled place demonstrates remote peace.

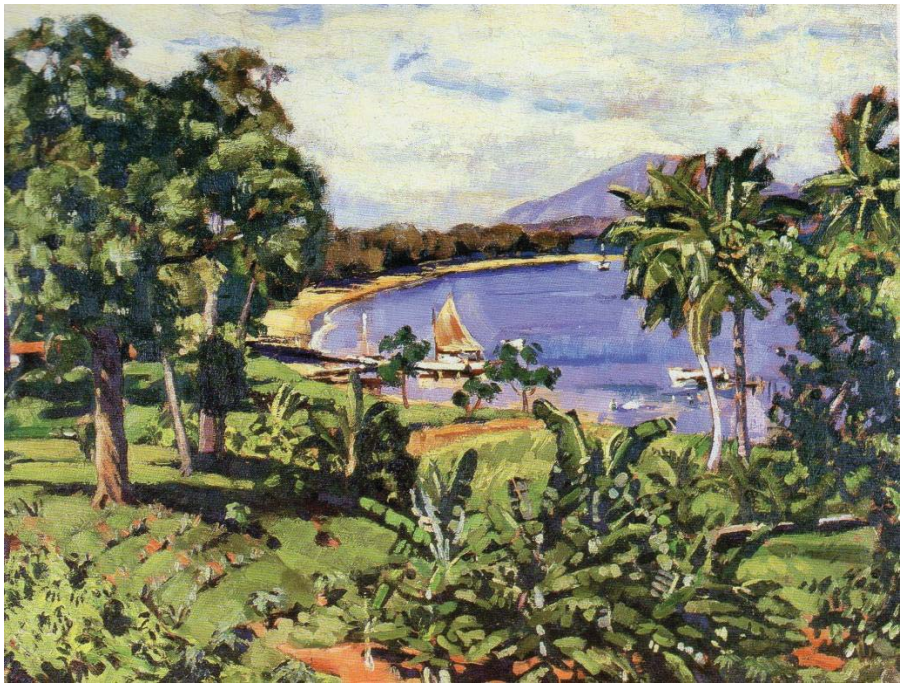

Plate 2.9 Noel Wood, *Brammo Bay, Dunk Island*, 1946, Oil on canvas, 46 x 58cm.
Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville.

These aspirations supported the dream of paradise, through the Orientalist and colonial filters, but begin to diverge in two ways. Like the boats that are nestled in the harbour in an almost unimportant unglorified manner, the tropical foliage grows over the image. The fecundity is not being tamed: it appears acceptable in its brash messiness, reinterpreted again as celebration. Other problems emerge, like the absence of indigenous people, cleared land and pollution. In Wood's painting the colour palette reflecting the wet tropics is brighter and denser, with more intense greens, with bolder hues than those of the earlier temperate paintings of the colonial era. The subtle grey, olive and brown tones of the dry tropics could be associated with a European temperate climate and colour palette. These paintings remain European in their atmospheres, but

this contrasts with the startling fauvist palettes of the wet tropic paintings. This point of comparison is evident between the temperate and tropical colour palettes of painting is demonstrated by a comparison of *Barron Gorge and Sugar Plains,* by Streeton, and *Islander*, (1975) by Ray Crooke.

Streeton's colour palette in *Barron Gorge* reflects the muted tones of the temperate palette in contrast to the dynamic shift to the warm colours of the tropics employed by Ray Crooke. His is a field of colour, boldly applied with the vibrancy of the tropical colour palette. Crooke's use of the primitive model renders the tale of humanity as simplistic, pious and truthful, or as the noble savage in a "state of nature" (qtd. in Lansdown, 2006). Crooke reverently liberates his cast of characters in two ways: they have his painter's permission to carry on with life as they are with little staged instruction and interference from him, and he also tries to understand them as people rather than symbols of mythological caricature. This attempt to understand the tropics and its peoples reflects Stepan's argument for the tropics being a site of inherent value, as well as Said's argument for claiming authenticity back from a diminished and exoticised Other.

However, Crooke has been criticised by mainstream Australia for his modernist compositions which recreate the Tropicana myth, a fictitious ideology of escape and excess. Serle argued that the figurative expressionism of the 1940s aimed at aesthetic purity, personal identity and patriotism. "The expressionists provided the prototype of a new popular art (as practised by Ray Crooke and Pro Hart) which express folk taste" (Serle, 1973, p. 225). Serle based this observation on what he saw as the art climate of the 1970s, which had a young urbanised "mobile elite group" who aimed at a metropolitan international feeling, as opposed to the older, suburban or rural group who sought sustenance from, "a sense of identity from (Australian) legends and history"

(1973, p. 225). The *Dasein* model can be applied here: "experienced as central to *constituting* a particular way of life…experienced as an episodic sequence," to produce "authentic temporality" (Guignon, 2006, p. 283). The aim is for cohesiveness and integrity as authentic creative response. Crooke, however, looked not only to Australian legends and culture, but more broadly to the Pacific, especially the island of Fiji. Although the "folk" quality was attacked as regressive, it actually signified variety in creativity: "however international Australian artists may intend to be, they will continue to need the particular stimulus and "critical edge" which local experience can provide" (Serle, 1973, p. 225).

In Crooke's paintings one sees *Dasein* as the reverent space his vision occupies, in his view of people, palms, sand, and the greens and blues of his tropical compositions, and his experience of sustenance and survival. Crooke is the paternal hallmark of civilisation at its finest; perceptive, generous and talented. His work is both deceptively simple, and profoundly complex. Its complexity resides in its use of primitive values and the hybrid aesthetic of national legend married to French influence. His compositions evoke Gauguin, but Crooke's relationship to his subjects is the opposite of Gaugin's. James Gleeson argues that the subtlety contained in Crooke's paintings is "magic" contained in silence,

> To the casual, unobservant eye, Ray Crooke passes as no more than a very good landscape painter who specialises in depicting the tropic north of Australia and the adjacent Melanesian islands, a landscapist who likes to animate his scenes with the dark shapes of native people. Their special kind of magic only begins to work when one has discovered the stillness and the silence that lies at the heart of everything he paints (Gleeson, 1972, n.p).

However, Sue Smith saw the silence he paints in his evocations of distant outback and island worlds as urban introspection, making his contribution reflect "his own time and place". She continued that together "Australian artists like Ian Fairweather, Russell Drysdale and Donald Friend" and, "Crooke's art bears its own witness to Australia's gradual movement outwards from Eurocentric isolation to the cultures of the Indigenous peoples of our region and the wider Pacific" (S. Smith, 1997, p. 17).

Smith stated that Crooke's art continued in the pattern of painters that were sensitive to "Otherness." Her examples Otherness included the relationships of "Gauguin to the Polynesia and, Picasso and Matisse to Africa, Paul Klee to the drawings of children, and Jean Dubuffet to asylum art" (S. Smith, 1997, p. 17). Although Crooke's paintings used the textures of earth, rocks, foliage, sea, and sky to build his compositions, it is the narrative elements of observed life and his poeticised vision that explicated the world around him. Smith points out that paintings like, "*Dawn, Papua* (1964), *Morning Catch, Fiji Island* (1969), and *Making Camp, Laura Waterhole* (1970), possessed an innate clarity and order suggesting familiarity with classical European painting," (S. Smith, 1997, p. 16). She went on to explain that the classical influence is softened by his innocent eye, as it was, describing his first discovery of these experiences.

But Crooke's symbolic narrative struggled to wrench his painted poetry away from the stereotypes associated with the symbols of what he paints. The modernist painting problem of the intellectual and visual discoveries of the tropics again enters the painterly equation in the reinterpretation of the representation of tropical space,

> We could say the tropics became "tropicalised." Take palm trees for instance. These tall and graceful plants, which had long symbolised the origins of civilisation in Asia or the Biblical desert lands of the Middle East, were claimed by Humboldt to be the most noble of tropical plants, whose mere presence was responsible for much of the aesthetic impact that tropical landscapes had on the human imagination. Palm trees thus came to be valued in themselves, primarily as objects of nature. Over time, the palm tree became the ubiquitous sign of the tropics, images of it instantly signalling less a botanical species than an imaginative submersion in hot places (Stepan, 2001, p. 19).

We think Crooke wants to convey his immersion in equatorial warmth in *Islander* (1975), in which the foreground shows large leaf shapes, breadfruit trees, coconut palm fronds, as the place where people dwell and meet. The European clothing worn by the people demonstrated the colonial impact, and Crooke painted them with a sensitive rather than erotic eye. This can be interpreted as an advancement in painting, as Stepan pointed out: "Representation of the human body serve as a litmus test of a culture's preoccupation, responding to all sorts of contradictory projections and anxieties" (Stepan, 2001, p. 88). Crooke's figures aimed at an authentic state of being, rather than being fetishized or sexualised objects of exotic portrayal, as they are in Gauguin's painting of *The Spectre Watches Over Her* (1892), or *The Delightful Land* (1892):

> Among these representations, the image of frankly erotic, sexually available body (almost always female and partially nude), situated in a tropical landscape, is among the most alluring in the European tradition. It is a very old representation, originating in classical and medieval

myths about the mystery and fertility of faraway places, of Eden and the Fall (Stepan, 2001, p. 88).

In Crooke it is possible to see the visual references to Eden overlap the European influence. These images manage to steer away from erotic stereotypes. Smith stated that Crooke's approach to painting his subjects was to show "individuals in harmony with their environments as being closer to the needs of humans than the patterns of life in modern technological society". She further expressed that Crooke's aspiration was to "attain" for his audience, "a kind of Paradise Regained: an existence of integration and wholeness with the natural world" (S. Smith, 1997, p. 17).

Plate 2.10 Ray Crooke, *Islander by the Sea*, 1975, Oil on canvas, 59.5 x 79.5cm.
Research permitted © Ray Crooke. Image: Saville Galleries.

The structure of Crooke's paintings consists of organised forms to symbolise the natural world. The motifs are ordered in space through colour, silhouette, and the contours between the light and dark shapes. These indicate perspective, as either the depth in a landscape with a far horizon, or flatness of depth of field by strong use of

pattern. His palm trees capture the lush Pacific, and his eucalyptus gums capture the arid Australian terrain. This demonstrates his perception of the character of the vegetation; its implication emblematic of the tropical worlds it sought to define. He saw a world through his reference to European traditions in western art, but he responded to an experience he knew. Gleeson argued that Crooke "…is creating out of his mind's eye – and this opens the way for the mind to make its contribution to the ensemble of truths that is the finished painting" (Gleeson, 1972, n.p).

Gavin Wilson's *Escape Artists* exhibition (1998) focussed on the notion of travel and escape to reinvigorate arts practice as well as understand some key features of the tropics. It related the transformative quest of discovering the unknown to discovering the self. David Arnold argued that travel in a colonial situation, "was more than a physical activity. It was an epistemological strategy, a mode of knowing" (Arnold, 2006, p. 30). Arnold explains that early explorative travelling was distilled by cartographers, artists and missionaries "to transform space into an object of knowledge" (Arnold, 2006, p. 30). Wilson's exhibition told the story of modernist artists escaping to the tropics. He traced the backlash of colonial settlement, "Ever since humanity devised the model for settled civilised behaviour, we have sought to free ourselves from it" (Wilson, 1998, p. 11). Wilson's notion of freedom is a search for inspiration, for an imaginative impulse that will result in the creativity of a painting composition, rather than a descent into the banal.

> The world of the escape artist is essentially a poetic world of the imagination, a world first grasped by the romantic impulse. Yet the art, the evidence of the engagement, is derived from deeply felt encounters with reality, where sights and sensations have been transformed by the

> imagination into scenes of compelling beauty and mystery (Wilson, 1998, p. 172).

Peter Denham writes: “The immense diversity of the natural world of the tropics – its teeming life, the colour, pattern and texture of place – is unique. This exhibition records the tropics by eliciting valuable responses from artists who have managed to recognise its abundance” (qtd. in Wilson, 1998, p. 9). Denham’s response to the tropics followed the Humboldtian views of visual spectacle. Wilson understood the contemporary value of the responses of the artists who painted the tropics as a movement that documented a relatively unknown regional frontier, as regional Queensland has been distanced physically and psychologically from mainstream Australia.

To Wilson, the visual processes of modernist painting meant that a faithful depiction of the external world is not paramount. The process entails personalising an experience and constructing a symbolic form to represent the object of the experience. In this regard his objectives were achieved in his modernist exhibition. “As modernist images, they possess a type of synergy that simultaneously contains the object and the subject, the world outside the individual and the artists themselves” (Wilson, 1998, p. 12).

> To escape is to free oneself. It is an age-old aspiration which generally remains unfulfilled, but for many, engaging with the exotic or “Other” has become a vital necessity. As a creative alternative activity the practice of escape has proven to be an invigorating tonic for individuals, especially artists, who need to experience and express their independence and originality (Wilson, 1998, p. 11).

Wilson's argument for painters seeking inspiration from the tropics, sources the Orientalist agenda, in which the aura of the unique or singular experience makes distinct the type of engagement the artist has with his/her subject. But he also acknowledge Gauguin's escapism: "The motivation for Gauguin's escape to Polynesia" (Wilson, 1998, p. 17), he continues, "was to create a timeless, universal art language that could express in addition to the physical facts of the visible world the invisible emotional verities of thought dream and superstition" (Prather & Stuckey, 1987, p. 25). Wilson presented the escape problem through subthemes which deal with the struggle of colonial impact, the "crude subjugation of Indigenous occupants," (1998, p. 14) the westerner's misreading of "the conquered landscape" where "explorers disappeared and perished, farm lands failed and townships were abandoned" (1998, p. 15). Themes of hardship emerge that echo Clarke, Baines and Westall, who all expressed frustration with the colonial project.

But Wilson argued that these circumstances forced a re-evaluation of the harshness of the northern Australian climate, and the land practices employed by Indigenous peoples. This re-evaluation was then reflected in architecture, politics, lifestyle and attitudes to tropical space. These influences were regarded by Wilson as unique, revealed when he quoted Gough Whitlam; "Queensland is not a state, it's a condition" (qtd. in Wilson, 1998, p. 15).

The strange ambivalence that Wilson noted returns him to Gauguin's self-questioning, "Coming to this ever present problem. Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? What is our ideal rational destiny?" (qtd. in Prather & Stuckey, 1987, p. 25).

Gauguin's questions are in part answered by Margaret Olley and Donald Friend, who followed the Australian escape tradition. Together, they travelled to North Queensland, making paintings along the way. Olley's image of a cane cutter's cottage shows the European settlement architecture accumulating its own antiquity, with rusting iron clad roof and wild tropical garden that beginning to engulf the building.

Plate 2.11 Margaret Olley, *Canefarmer's House*, 1955, Oil on board, 60 x 75cm.
Reproduced with permission UNSW Collection.

Ollie's frankness with colour is revealed in her painting *Canefarmer's House* (1955), particularly the spectrum of greens that catch the light and shadow of the ranges in the background, the exotic planted garden in the foreground and the dense foliage that frames the dwelling. Her luminous warm colour, suggestive of the lushness of the tropics, is seen in her paintings and reflected in her description of how she saw Tully in North Queensland:

> Green cane grew in rows, higher than the tallest adult, with stalks that rustled when you came up close and sharp cutting leaves. At the slightest breeze, it rippled like a green sea touched with silver. Green tangles overhung the creek; rainforest tendrils spiralled from verdant heights along the road, more sand than dirt, which ran out to the real ocean, warm as bathwater, and every way you looked there was a brooding green mountain. Mount Tyson, the biggest, loomed right at the end of the main street of town (Stewart, 2012, p. xv).

Escape Artists demonstrated Australian artists' "passion and vision and to pursue the extravagant landscape and diverse culture that characterise the region" (Wilson, 1998, p. 12). The artists used the tropics for reasons of travel, or as a way to reinvigorate their work by escaping from 'boredom' or 'depression' (Wilson, 1998, p. 12). Their paintings capture an inner experience of the exotic. The artist Lawrence Daws relates the exotic experience to paradise, when he stated

> And then there is the landscape! I have spent a lot of time in the rainforest throughout Queensland and they are truly Gardens of Eden. The paintings of Piero della Francesca exude the quality of an ideal world, a divinely inspired world. Come April or October, when the haze threads the large flowering trees and the extraordinary light bathes the mountains and the landscape, I find myself in just such a world (qtd. in Wilson, 1998, p. 169).

Wilson's exhibition included visions of both the wet and dry tropics. The dry tropics paintings include such artists as John Firth-Smith' works *Trap, At Home, Billabong,* John Olsen's painting *Nolan at Broome* and Alan Oldfield's *Lizard King*.

Sidney Nolan invested local historical tales with Greek Mythology. We see mythological layers about regional culture in his swamp paintings.

Tony Tuckson described his "profound feeling for Aboriginal art" (Wilson, 1998, p. 140), through their depictions of space in painting. This depiction parallels modernist principles, of experimentation beyond representation. The notion of space in Aristotelean terms as a physiological or mathematical set of coordinates is also the place that *Dasein* understands in the notion of "dwelling place." Aboriginal paintings are maps of their country, and narratives of their culture and customs, as explained by Tuckson:

> Space is realised in a subjective, non-visual fashion and paradoxically, the visual elements of art, its lines, its rhythms, and patterns are clear and direct. Further there is no perspective. And rarely are the figures overlapped to indicate space. There is, however, in some paintings, a gradual building up from ground to surface by the super-imposition of lines which in itself creates a real if minute space in the picture (qtd. in Wilson, 1998, p. 140).

Orientalist escapism was superseded by strange melancholic excursions into the heat and humidity of the wet tropics of Queensland in Fred Williams' imagery of light and shadow. In his paintings *Bedarra* (1973) and *Milkwood Tree* (1974), Williams, principally impressed by the different shapes of foliage, seeks to catch "the extraordinary beauty of the place" (Wilson, 1998, p. 28).

In his paintings Williams aimed to catch the "rich diversity of shapes and colour…from the elusive dark atmosphere of the rainforest environment" (Wilson, 1998, p. 27). He said of his paintings: "I managed a fairly good start on the dark shapes

against the light backgrounds – these are easily the main motif of this country" (Williams, 1973).

Plate 2.12 Fred Williams, *Rainforest, Bedarra Island*, 1973, Gouache on paper, 35 x 77cm.
Permission Lyn Williams.

Paintings of tropical Australia by European artists are very rare in a national context. Most artworks in national museum collections are produced by artists working or living in the temperate zone, and mostly reflect this geographical location. The muted tones of the temperate painters contrast with the high key tropical palette of intense colour. Examples of the intense tropical hues can be seen in the paintings of Yvonne Cohen, John Coburn, Donald Friend, Margaret Olley, Ray Crooke, Fred Williams and Noel Wood. But colour is only one of the traditions employed by the artists to reveal tropical history and aesthetic difference.

Postmodernism, with its eclectic access to source material, makes use of the discoveries and work of earlier artists to re-imagine tropical space. This process is evident in the painting of Ben Quilty, *The Island* (2013). The island displayed leafy foliage and rocky outcrops surrounded by ocean, an accessible image of an island. The painting doesn't exact any particular landscape; it is geography of the mind. It is

created out of ink blots, and then scaled up and decorated with foliage that is general rather than specific.

The lean of the palm tree introduced a note of chaos; an uncomfortable space that is an unpleasant dream rather than a peaceful utopia. Painted in his Sydney studio, this idea of remote nature is the reappraisal of a threatened natural state of existence. It reflected the relationship between humans and nature. It depicted a fanciful history, set in the urban landscape as exoticism. Humboldt's noble vegetation is recast as a wilted heap, suffocating in atmospheric gloom. Quilty's landscape distilled an island of remoteness and echoes admonitions of global warming, as it transposes nineteenth-century utopian goals onto a reality of decrepitude. The paradise of tranquil utopia, however, was captured by Arthur Streeton in *Moonlight, Magnetic Island* (1924). Lit only by moonlight, the remote northern tropics were depicted in his Heidelberg style to capture a vision of an untainted and pristine world, whereas Quilty's painting incorporates the effects of contemporary pollution and environmental threat.

Plate 2.13 Ben Quilty, *The Island*, 2013, Oil and acrylic on linen, 390 x 880cm.
With permission Ben Quilty and Jan Murphy Gallery.

My sister Grace Hari's paintings of *Mangoes with Red Bananas, Lime and Coconut* (2002) and *Bowl of Mangoes* (2003) reveal another example of the local tropical aesthetic. Here Grace paints Mum's wheel thrown ceramic bowl that she decorated with Thancoupi (1991). The tropical view in this still life reflects Gauguin, in which, "the form without colour, is like a body without a soul' (Jones, 1856).

Plate 2.14 Grace Hari, *Mangoes with Red Bananas, Lime and Coconut*, 2002, Oil on canvas, 35 x 45cm.
Photo by Grace Hari.

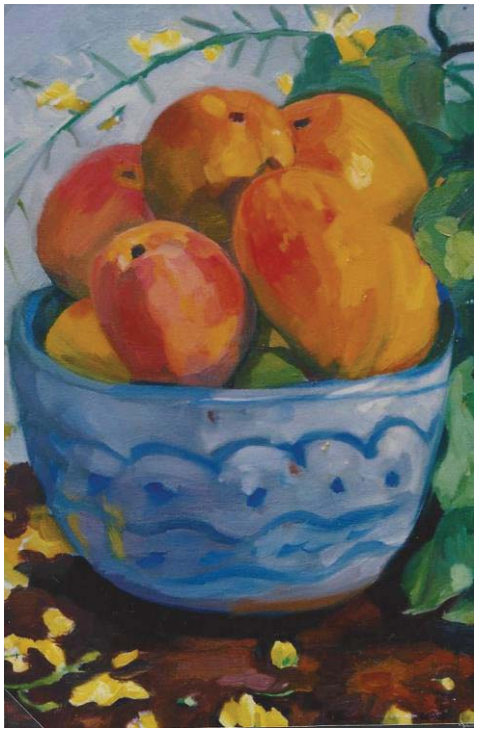

Plate 2.15 Grace Hari, *Bowl of Mangoes*, 2003, Oil on canvas, 40 x 50cm.
Photo by Grace Hari.

Australian painting moves with the current of identity as an evolving process based on human geography. The thoughts and polemics that stem from culture's reflectiveness and invention are created through the examination of place and imagination. From the early perspective of the Indigenous inhabitants of the Pacific in their experience of *Dasein*, through their Orientalising by the European colonial invasion, and the growth of a multicultural society Australia's creative cultural product is revealed.

In the imagined mind, the wet tropics of Australia are the Cythera of the Pacific, a geographical island on a big continent that bears a conflicted emotional response to the aridity of dry sclerophyll, desert and variety. An authenticity of place emerges from within the multiple historical angles and art movements. Australia, a successful colonial experiment, emerges as a paradoxical achievement, flawed by the dilemma of westernisation.

Unpacking the mythology of the primitivist tropics provides a means to come to terms with the gain and loss of human interaction. My research is limited to a series of case studies designed to draw out common themes. The theme isolated at the start of the project was the influence of the wet tropic landscape topography and geography as a physical, psychological and spiritual space of creative influence

The human soul manifests in a reciprocal relationship with place and space and underscores the aesthetic outcomes of how ideas and feelings can be traced as an historical current. *Dasein* and Orientalism describe the deeper notions of being, culture and the spirit: "For Heidegger the facticity (*facticia*) and the soul (*anima*) is not unique to Aristotle…the human soul is literally "created" or "made" by God" (Hayes, 2007, p. 265). Lansdown describes the western view of the South Pacific as a space of "envy or contempt" (Lansdown, 2006, p. 110), where pernicious attempts by the London Missionary Society instructed the likes of John Williams to use "God and the laws of Europeans" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 147) to create obedient citizens. Europeans in the torrid or tropical zone emerge as "ideological agents in their own right" (Lansdown, 2006, p. 119); objects themselves caught in the vastness of the Pacific Ocean.

While Humboldt's inspired explorations celebrated European vision and supressed Indigenous occupancy, it also revealed what he saw as an "ancient bond which unites natural science with poetry and artistic feeling" (qtd. in Bunske, 1981, p. 146). Terry Smith considers that place is defined by a reflection on contemporary cultural activity:

> Placemaking, world picturing and connectivity are the most common concerns of artists these days because they are the substance of contemporary being. Increasingly, they override distinctions based on

> style, mode, medium and ideology. They are present in all that is truly contemporary. Distinguishing, precisely, this presence in each artwork is the most important challenge to an art criticism that would be adequate to the demands of contemporaneity. Tracing the currency of each artwork within the larger forces that are shaping this present is the task of contemporary art history (Netton, 2012).

The modus operandi of the French artists Rousseau, Matisse and Gauguin revealed the special perceptive windows to render a view of the tropics as a unique space. Rousseau's imaginative quest followed the acquisition of specimens from the tropics by Banks, Humboldt, the French explorers and the Orientalists. These produced his "Other" world experience, which he internalised so completely that his paintings went beyond observation into the world of dreams and magic. Gauguin's complex personal sense of being and identity crisis produced the "love" that the Empire could not achieve by other scientific means. He somehow fulfilled the goals of the Missionary Society of London: "there should be that powerful melting of love, which the apostolic exhortation demands" (qtd. in Lansdown, 2006, p. 116). Gauguin "was thus an agent of colonialism as well as one of its (more privileged) victims" (Klein, 1997, p. 66). His paintings provided the essential documentation of the clash of cultures. They produced combinations of colour to deal with tropical geography that shapes modern art. Matisse extracted a language of pure form that positioned his tropical marine world as the container of possibility. "…though it may arise originally from domination, may also favourably unite culture…in a reflexiveness at once unintended, ironic and transcendent" (Klein, 1997, p. 89).

Chapter 3 Methodologies

In order to undertake practice-based research it is essential to understand how practice and text based research will interact and drive towards a conclusion to the research problem. As a practitioner I use the studio to understand elements of the world around me, I gather data through my experiences and observations and synthesise these into a range of practical activities. My artist's journal, sketch books, the documentary camera, notes in my diary and other recording mechanisms all provide data to understand the space of the tropics. This Ph.D. has allowed me to delve into theoretical texts and conduct discussions with supervisors, curators, artists and the public Thus I could gather a body of information to determine how we represent the tropics. The challenge is to generate new knowledge that can be used to further our understanding of tropical space. The melding of theory and practice is to be undertaken through a series of trials, presentations, reviews, reworkings and re-presentations. This was parallel to my theoretical research, trialled draft versions of chapters, reviewed by peers and supervisors, reworked to encapsulate both the theory and practice of this research project.

To create a visual practical pathway that links the stages and areas of knowledge to be examined, I have constructed a flow chart as a way of keeping my themes and processes in a cohesive relationship. The flow chart helps to demonstrate the path travelled to accumulate and process information, research and thinking. In this way my research journey is structured as a logical approach to the areas of investigation. These stem from my aims of researching painting in the tropics. Through a review of related literature, I was able to construct survey questions and interviews. I also recorded photographic documentation of artists, paintings and survey forms. The outcomes

demonstrate the testing of the ideas through exhibitions and reviews. The process results in a written thesis, a reflection on painting in the tropics through cases studies of painters and studio work.

3.1 Research Flow Chart

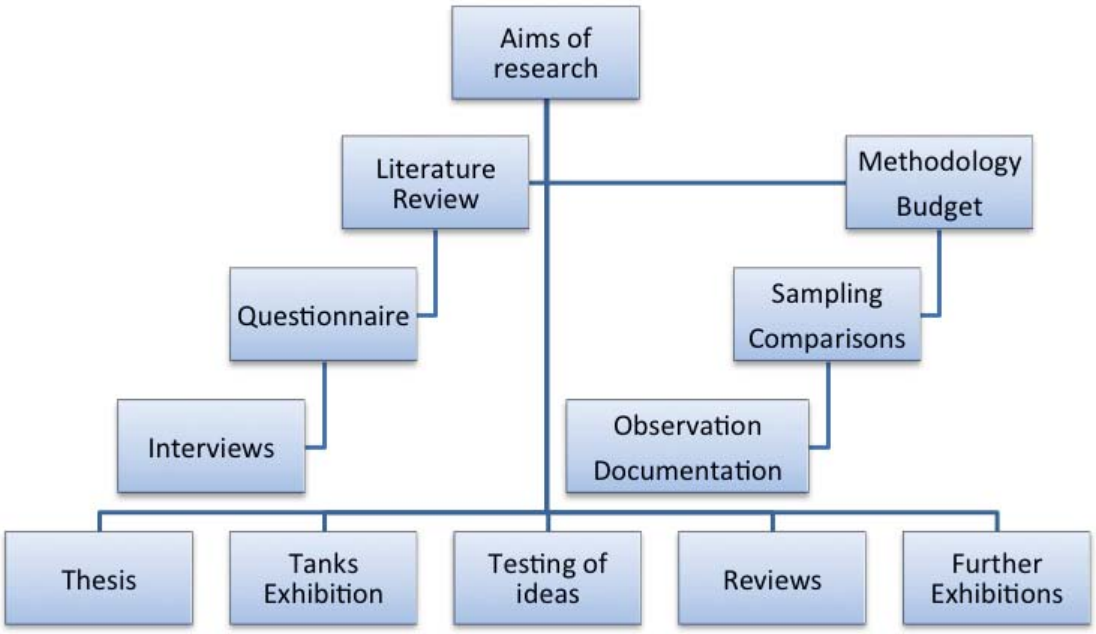

Figure 3.1 Flow chart to illustrate research

3.2 Approach

This research views the tropics through the lens of European imagination, and considers the importance of this world view. It then aims to measure creative expression limited to painting in the North Queensland tropics, surveyed through a sample size of ten participants. It also includes my studio experiments. This research follows Heisenberg's view of influence, in which the outcome will reflect the bias of the researcher, the similarities and differences of the participants and the aims of the hypothesis in order to locate a tropical sensibility. For the purpose of locating known

information by local artists, it is imperative to establish the conflicting nature of measurement in order to produce a tabled outcome of ideas.

The standard or benchmark of comparison is the work of the French painters who painted the tropics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These include Matisse, Rousseau and Gauguin. The view of the tropics as a distinct Other location offered the European mind possibilities for creative invention of an alternate space. The motifs, symbols and natural forms found in Tahiti by Matisse were employed in idiosyncratic form, "In three plates entitled, *Lagoon,* algal and indeterminate animal forms are stylized into flowing curves and undulating fronds evocative of the shallow pools that had enchanted him in Tahiti" (Klein, 1997, p. 54) .

For Gauguin the immersion in lived experience gave him a deeper, richer and more vivid impression of the nuances of tropical people and place. There, he could interpret the "magical landscape setting," as a space for "diverse dramatis personae: children, gossips, "figures" (genderless), old women, farm animals, totemic and allegorical creatures, and an idol" (Eisenman, 1997, p. 137). The invented experience of Rousseau transported him to a conceptual plane where the tropics are imaged through secondary sources like botanical gardens, stories and taxidermy. Rousseau's tropical paintings contain a "dream-like mood" (Alley, 1978, pp. 45-46) that departs from familiarity. These French artists acknowledged a space that was different, a leap in awareness of the diversity that space occupies, particularly the zone of the tropics.

This study was a mixed method, practiced-based and case study research program. It employed the self-as-instrument method suggested by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008). There are two models for the artist researcher; a historical approach, in which historical context informs the research, and a practice-based approach, in which

theory drives the practice (Janiak, 2012). This thesis uses the first model to collect local data, and the second model to respond through studio practice (Sullivan, 2009). The case study artists create their work in response to the tropical location and my practice reflects on this in order to experiment with imagery and narrative.

This study looks at the unique characteristics of the tropics as distinct from temperate climate landscape, and considers how environments influence artists. The research required a plan that would allow the investigator to collect, analyse and interpret the motivations of artists painting in the tropics, and also to consider how the tropics is filtered through the French influence. The artist responses to the questionnaire and interviews showed the inferences and causal relations of the environment on the artists and their art practice. For example, it was stated that the colour green is significant in the wet tropics and therefore influences the colour palette of the painters. Sensory aspects such as heat and humidity impact on perceptions of outward space, together with the aesthetic and spiritual views, influences, meaning and psychological effects of being within a tropical environment.

The methodology I used designed a pathway for new knowledge to be gathered by "artist-researchers who, through their studio practice, use art in an experimental capacity to investigate historical moments by creating artworks," and in this study painting is a form of visual investigation that records and responds to the possibility of, "looking beyond what is known" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 232). It allowed me to look beyond the known creative experiences within the paintings, and reflect on the discovery of the tropics or the French interpretation. Matisse's aquatic cut outs, Gauguin's fitful passions, and Rousseau's playful collages manifest as a "constellation of time and eternity come to pass in an authentic work of art" ("Journal III," 1857, p. 10). The time sequence he suggests contrasts 'now' time with a corresponding past, either as fashion

and imitation or empty time that neutralises standards. This sequence can "burst the inert continuum of history" (Habermas & Lawrence, 1990, p. 11). The inert continuum of history, the repetition of ideas, was suddenly burst by the French vision of Rousseau, Gauguin and Matisse. They were prepared to engage with the unknown colour-field and the strangeness of the tropics. This became raw data to inform their practice. It is this reflective critique that finds the positive progression of understanding of the external world. The reflective study of painting practices by tropical artists responds to tropical rural space. Through their sensory perceptions and observations, they reflect, record and invent imagery of a dynamic and productive space. Thus, in an Australian context, we find a sensibility that was previously celebrated in modernism, primitivism and Parisian aestheticism a century earlier.

My role as researcher follows Sullivan's idea that practice-based research anticipates the "artist-theorist as a critical figure in higher education research" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 92). The researcher role uses studio experimentation to investigate culture by interpreting creative responses in the studio-as-laboratory. The research methodology builds on existing theoretical frameworks, while research problems in visual arts are explored in order to clarify purpose and practice (Nochlin, 1983a; Sullivan, 2009). It reflects on past painting practice dominated by European views of the tropical world, and projects forward to new approaches to painting strategies. It is built from an interpretation of the world contained within an image of a tropical painting. Heidegger's model of truth in his theory of *Dasein* has influenced the research process, as a way to view tropical space through the lens of the spirit and science.

The methodology included questionnaires, interviews, studio practice and exhibitions. The point of this experiment was to locate the authentic experiences within

a framework of the social sciences, on the assumption that human phenomena can be measured by natural science. The information collected in the interviews and surveys gather quantitative (small in sample size) and qualitative data. These were gathered to analyse to find a tropical sensibility. The tropical sensibility possesses some characteristics that describe the topography and psychology associated with being in and being affected by tropical space, and the impact this has on painting. Paintings produced under tropical influences shape a way of thinking about tropical space as they reveal the inner world of the artists. This cyclical idea looks at how place affects attitudes and how attitudes are affected by creative response, which is the juxtaposition of real space and the interpretation of the effects of place.

The need to interview artists arose because my research requires authentic data from real experience. Therefore, an ethics clearance was required. The participants were informed as to the nature of the study. In collecting data it was important to consider the thesis reader's right to know as well as the participants' right to privacy. After reading a description of the process and an outline of my research study (Appendix D), the artists signed consent forms to participate in the study (Appendix E). The questionnaires (Appendix C), were posted to the nine participants and mailed back when completed, seven of whom agreed to be interviewed. The interviews were held in five of the artists' studios; one interview was conducted by phone and one by Skype. After the completion of the interview typed notes of the recordings were made, and a copy of the interview notes, were sent to the participants for their approval.

The questionnaire provided a semi-structured observation method as a starting point to which I could refer during the studio interviews. The questionnaire format enabled the artists to respond to the same questions about the site of enquiry. Their

responses could be measured through a tally of similar and dissimilar reactions. These are depicted in the graphs in Chapter 4.

Artists' responses were measured on a Likert scale. This is the most commonly used psychometric scale for evaluating responses in survey research. In it, one goal is to measure human responses and the other goal is to measure theoretical ideas. The Likert scale was used here to measure whether interpretations of the tropics were a key motivator in artists' practice. The interviews expanded the information gathered in the Likert scale results (see Chapter 4) and additional ideas from the participating artists were collated from the section marked "other."

3.3 Theoretical framework for research design

Arts practice drives the theory of art making (painting) within the scope of this research and it is measured in the studio-as-laboratory. The studio is a reflective space in which artists access their ideas about their inner and external world through the processes of being in space and time. In this way images reveal ideas and thinking as experimental hypotheses and perceptions. The theory being tested is whether the *a priori* 'tropical paradise' as a concept holds justified meaning. Consideration must be given to the stereotypes of the tropics as a disease ridden place, with things like malaria, dengue fever, and tropical ulcers. The paradox of place considers the tropics to be a subjective paradise. The role of the artist is to examine the subjective elements of vision and sensation from the emotional world, and to inform the psychology of presence and being. The environments and psychological reactions of each artist to the tropics were examined in the case studies of this research.

Firstly the design followed a sequence of questions that elicited possible descriptions of the tropics and how these impacted on their productivity. These questions sought to discover a definition of a real tropics, as opposed to the urban tropics are fast becoming an alternative space for western expansion. Also, parcels of undeveloped land are being transformed from rainforest to agricultural crops (Foley, 2014), which requires reflection on preservation as a necessary factor in forward urban planning. Responses from the artists are important to identify issues and ideas significant to the tropical region. Analyses of the findings are tabled in the Questionnaire results (Table 4.1 Artist responses to the survey questions), and in excerpts from the interviews. In order to structure a logical argument between the data and the propositions, a reflection on existing theory and knowledge was drawn from the literature review.

How the Australian tropics have been perceived or misperceived nationally forms a lacuna in Australian art history. This thesis offers an insight through a report of comments by painters working in the tropics. This knowledge of regional Far North Queensland is used as a source for expansion within my own arts practice. This thesis looks at Heidegger's model of a perception of the tropics formed through considering the geography of the wet tropics as its own space, as opposed to an external imagined concept bound by stereotypes.

To determine a sensibility that has meaning and understands painting in the tropics, positions like "the agreement of the course of nature and of the lawfulness 'innate' in the 'understanding'; what is needed is the phenomenological elucidation of meaning, thinking, knowing, and the laws and the ideas arising therein" (Lewis, 1955, p. 475) are examined. The distinction between the science of forms existing as fact in the real world and the pseudo-science of psychological forms that exist in the mind's

perception illustrate how we understand our world through physicality and imagination, or science and philosophy (see Figure 3.2).

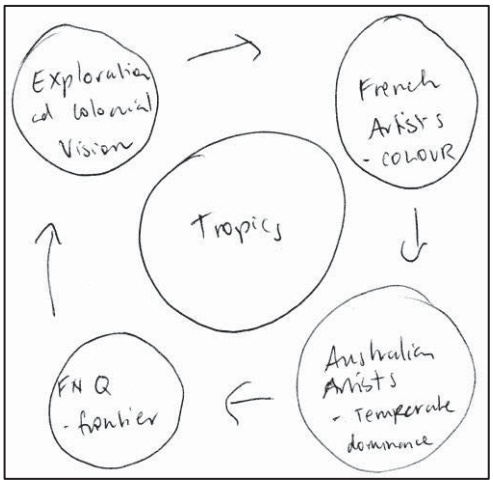

Figure 3.2 Arts practice and the tropical lens

The contribution of the tropical paintings of Far North Queensland yields an identifiable recurrent aesthetic or genre that makes explicit a set of unique characteristics of dense vegetation, bright colours and regional culture. The theory of recurrence (Casey, 1998) considers what artists seem to be continually doing in terms of individual responses to lived experiences of the tropics. The characteristics of tropical aesthetics or visual imagery are understood as "particular" and unique rather than "other" (Nochlin, 1983b). Different aesthetic lived experiences are measured as identifiable or unique by the instruments and analysis of research design methods (Sullivan, 2009; Yin, 2003), which are the interviews, surveys and exhibitions.

The design methods enable a starting point for collecting data to answer the research question. Knowledge and perception of the tropics is a way of using sensory experience as a description of place and evaluation of the parameters of that space. The visual cues are the descriptions of visions and imagery, together with the beliefs and feelings artists depict in their pictures. Based on the aspect of looking at the external

environment, this reaction is analysed in conjunction with the emotional and psychological reactions the artists have to their surroundings (see Figure 3.3).

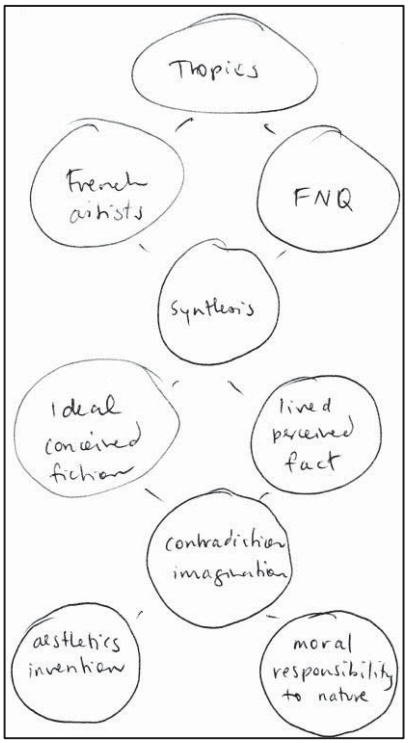

Figure 3.3 Tropics as place of fact and fantasy

3.4 Case study method

To discover the characteristics of tropical space from the painter's perspective this research seeks an "empirical investigation focused on familiarity and preference" (Stepan, 2001). This investigation seeks a real world understanding of tropical space and the contribution of this insight to image making. The interrelating variables from the case-study artists reside in their different reactions to the tropical sensory features and aesthetic attributes. Although the attempt is to see the tropics through local painter's eyes, this framework compartmentalises the tropics as the symbolic against the reality of physical features. The context of the artist in the tropical environment is contained in the effect the outer world has on the expression of that artist's creativity.

The theory of a tropical sensibility is tested by artists who paint their notion of tropical paradise, revealing and dealing with its fecund inspiration and its extreme climate, poisonous jellyfish and crocodiles. This thesis argues that the painters of this region reflect its culture within their paintings. They synthesise paradise in the traditions of the western world alongside a rebirth and re-flowering of the Indigenous art of the region[1]. They are tackling a celebrated and blighted paradise, pioneered with racial bloodshed (Bottoms, 2002) and environmental catastrophes like flooding rains and cyclones.

3.5 Selected artists

The selection of professional painters of the wet tropics region of North Queensland reflects on the artists' personal engagement with tropical space as "the world of human experience" (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 36). The selection criteria included a focus on painting of, as well as residency in the North Queensland wet tropics for a significant period of time. Their paintings needed to reflect the tropical landscape or human connectedness with local tropical space. Further selection filtering included assessing attributes like style, medium, narrative quality evident in painting, colour choice, and drawing vocabulary. This sample selection is described by Louis Cohen as stratified random sampling (Cohen & Manion, 1994). A group of similar people who paint the tropics is identified, in order to gain inferences from them. From within this category, proportionate sampling required a balancing of the gender of participants. The artists who met the above criteria included Margaret Olley, Claire

[1] This thesis has an Ethics Clearance for the non-Indigenous art of this region.

Souter, Ray Crooke, James Baines, Amanda Feher, Claudine Marzik, Helen Wiltshire, Ian Smith and Laurine Field.

The emphasis on practice and text in relation to the artists' thoughts and the art history component entailed conducting research on the artists: reading their history and sourcing documentation and archival records from libraries and the internet. Evidence of their practice was also drawn from direct observation of their studios, paintings and the artefacts that inspire their work.

3.6 Studio as laboratory

From their studio practice, conversation revealed the artists' concept of a real environment of tropical paradise, being the North Queensland wet tropics. This practice is influenced by the French tropical responses of Matisse, Rousseau and Gauguin, whose examples of painted worlds reflected the European response to tropical ideological, geographical and psychological immersion. The key transition is the movement of the European fascination with Orientalism founded in North African geography to the land and culture of the Pacific. The Pacific presented an entirely different world; complex, antagonistic and often resilient. For instance, Gauguin's Tahitian portraits capture the aggressive stance of the locals, Matisse's seaweed cut-outs worship the life of the ocean and Rousseau's fear is so real when he invents cameos of beasts in the jungle, that he opens a window for respite. My studio response is an exhibition of works that deal with these historical concepts, overlayed by the current threads of flux that infiltrate contemporary tropical experience as a departure from the earlier models. As well, my paintings include the European concepts and an archaeological sifting of primary sources in mythology; to find contexts and shapes for the vastness of unknown space. The paintings culminate in several stages, exhibited

publicly at the Tanks Art Centre in a suite of eight large scale canvas paintings, and followed by subsequent group shows and studio exhibition. Further displays of major works were shown at Tablelands Regional Gallery.

. The case studies focused on painters who have lived in the tropics for a significant period. This group of artists was established following my literature review and they subsequently presented new knowledge that understands the tropics as a particular space. This new perspective of the tropics creates a source for my practice. The theory of a tropical sensibility that I am testing looks for the intrinsic quality that exists in the paintings produced in the Far North Queensland wet tropics as new information.

3.7 Summary

The research aimed to find a context for my painting practice within tropical discourse. This was achieved through discussions with a group of painters reflecting upon their aesthetic experience of the tropics. Tropical North Queensland has been their home for a significant period of time, in which the physiological and psychological recognition of place provides the evidence of lived experience. This is reflected creatively as composition outcomes in their paintings. A cross section of generations of painters involved with the tropics was sought. James Baines, Amanda Feher and Claire Souter access the Atherton Tableland geography whereas Ian Smith, Claudine Marzik, Laurine Field and Helen Wiltshire use coastal locations. Crooke, Olley, Smith and Baines are the most distinguished painters with the longest spanning careers, while Marzik, Feher and Field are rising stars, and Helen Wiltshire is a popular painter. Their ability to paint the tropics and deal with its inherent issues inform this dissertation.

During the research project Margaret Olley and Helen Wiltshire passed away; the material included here is the contribution they agreed to on the signed consent form.

Chapter 4 Case Studies

In this chapter I shall describe the tropics as a unique space through the lens of painters' lived experience and the traditions of painting in a contemporary setting, while reflecting on historical views of the tropics. The questionnaires and interviews presented to the artists provided the description. Their responses reflect a range of attitudes about place and the tropics, and the significant attributes and challenges of working in a regional tropical area. The wet tropics region of Far North Queensland is located as the area of the study. This is followed by biographies of the participants. The questionnaire responses then demonstrate how the artists responded to ideas about the tropics. Aggregated concepts of the tropics are presented as a report on the interview findings, in which I relate their discussions and perceptions.

4.1 A case study of painting the tropics in Far North Queensland

The case study has provided a useful methodology to define the wet tropics of tropical Far North Queensland through their artists' eyes, with a focus on painting to contrast Gauguin's view of the tropics against the view of Ray Crooke. Their images describe the lifestyle of the tropics.

Significantly, the *Escape Artist*s (1998) exhibition attempted to summarise the tropics as a place of escape, and it gave some insight into tropical experience. However Ian Smith thought the exhibition was a misrepresentation of the art of the tropics:

> When Gavin Wilson did his book, and a show called the *Escape Artists*, he wasn't talking about people like Tom Risley and I who came from there, even though he admired us as artists. He put us into other exhibitions like *Beneath the Monsoon: Visions North of Capricorn*

> (2003), we understood that, but having said that, Tom Risley and I looked a bit askance at some of those people who did make it into the show… The gap in Australian art or the missing chapter in Australian art is that a lot of people claim to be doing the tropics, but I don't think that they are doing the tropics properly (Smith, 2010, pers.comm).

A similar sentiment was suggested by Ross Searle, who added that it is not only the representation of the tropics in painting that is lacking, but the tropics as a regional location, "There continues to be a wholesale lack of recognition of the contribution of regional artists to the overall canon of Australian art history" (qtd. in Edmond, 2006, n.p). Searle argued that further investigation into the arts of the region is required, and emphasised the importance of paintings that capture tropical space in their paintings.

The abundance of nature within the North Queensland tropics, observed by Cairns Regional Gallery curator Peter Denham (1998), offers painters unique inspiration in the form of colour, pattern, texture and teeming life (Wilson, 1998). Denham believed this possibility was available through immersion in the culture and environment (Wilson, 1998). This idea of immersion was expressed earlier by explorers such as Humboldt (1769-1859), who understood the role of the artist as "looking at vegetation and environment with a painterly gaze" (Garrido, 2013, n.p). Preliminary attempts at the painterly gaze are captured in curator John Millington's *Tropical Visions* (1987), an exhibition which included paintings that begin to use the colourful palette that echoes the hues found in the tropical spectrum. These paintings also layer the work with psychological experience in tropical geography.

The questions that I posed were designed to search for a way of viewing the tropics as a place to paint, and also to find out whether it possessed unique measurable qualities that were different from other Australian geographical influences. Because the word 'paradise' is often used in conjunction with the tropics, I wanted to explore that theme through the artists' responses, to see if it was a shared and valid approach to understanding tropical space. If so, it could then be measured to deliver empirical data about the wet tropics. John Olsen said "Tropical Queensland has hardly ever been touched…you'd have to bring to it a lot of invention. He understood, as no other artist has done, how sad the shadows are in our landscape" (Olsen, 1975, p.122).

What guided the decisions for formulating the questions in the survey and interview was the need to understand and contextualise painting practice in the tropics, as a means to convey meaning through creative response to place. The sample size was confined to nine participants. They provided a range of data, covering a broad set of experiences. These yielded not only new knowledge, but confronting assumptions about the tropics. In formulating the questionnaire I sent a preliminary questionnaire to Ray Crooke. Crooke's responses alerted me to a framework of place, family and thought underpinning his painting practice. The final questionnaire (Appendix C) was sent out to the participant painters using the preliminary letter exchanged with Crooke (Appendix G). The extended interview response is available on the Tropical Research Data Hub (https://eresearch.jcu.edu.au/tdh).

To illustrate the data I have constructed tables and bar graphs to show the participant responses. I include artists' responses to the questions to show where some artists agree or disagree with the propositions offered to define the tropics as paradise or regional location. The alternate perspectives give an insight into painters' lived experience of the tropical region of northern Queensland. The parameters of the survey

are the wet tropics region of North Queensland, and specifically, north to Cape Tribulation and south to Ingham, west to Ravenshoe and east to the coastal islands as well as Cairns and the Botanical Gardens (Figure 4.1).

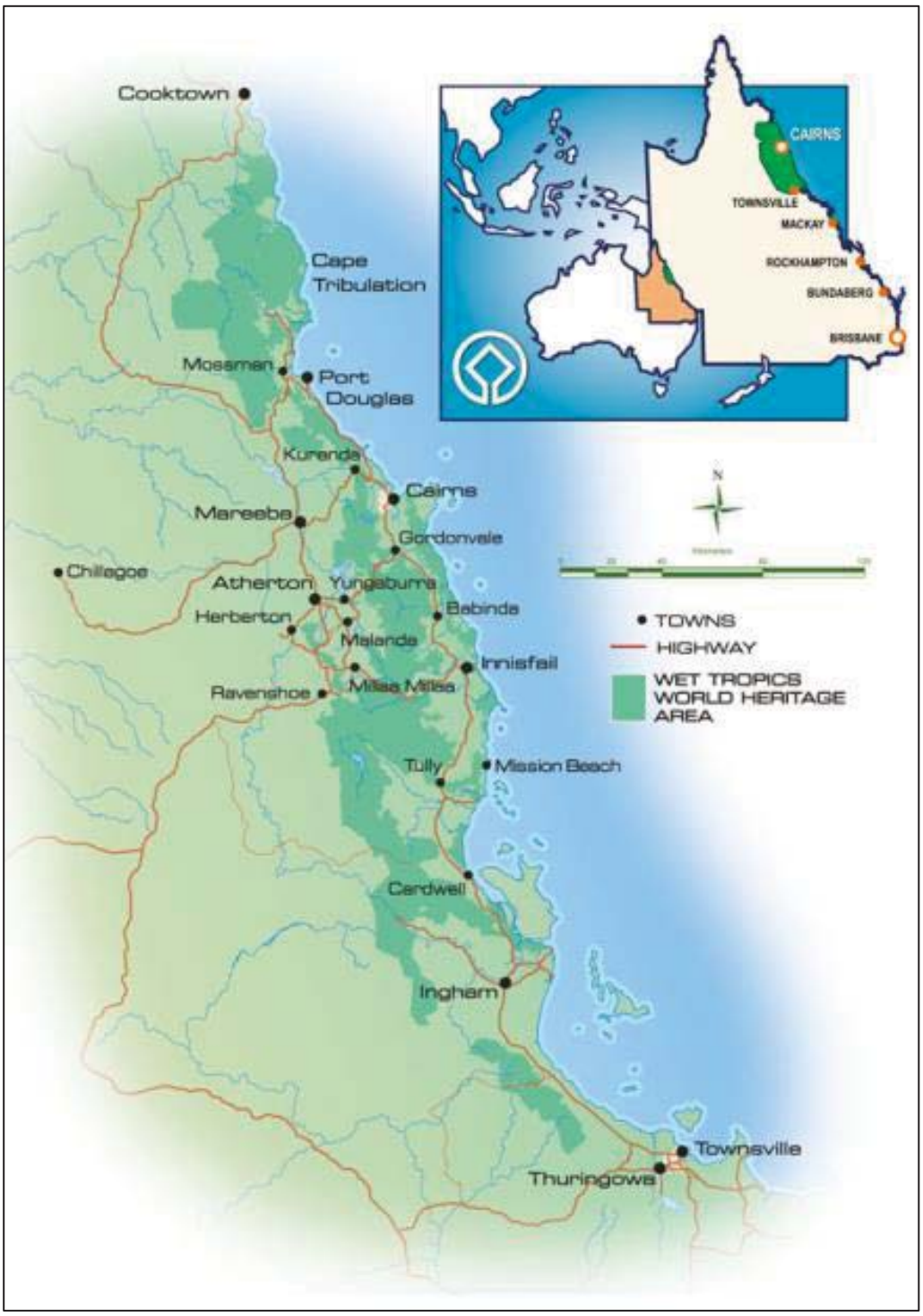

Figure 4.1 Map of study area.

Wet Tropics Management Authority. Research permitted.

4.2 Artist biographies

4.2.1 Background

The artists whom I have selected for the study have engaged deeply with the tropics as a unique and special place. They have synthesised the elements of difference found in the tropics, sometimes obvious, with symbols and motifs in botanical imagery and otherwise subtle, through texture and mood. Together the insights they offer produce a tableau of tropical space as a rich, vivid and deep world of the perceptual and the visual. The artists' comments give context to how they perceive the tropics from their origins, their artistic training and their world view. Their various approaches to figuration, abstraction, symbolism, and narrative, decorative or primitive applications have extracted responses to the tropics as a place of desire or dystopia.

4.2.2 Profiles

4.2.2.1 Ray Crooke

Ray Crooke was born in Melbourne 1922 and studied at Swinburne Technical College. He discovered the tropics when the Army posted him to Cape York and Borneo 1940-45, where he sketched his fellow soldiers and the Indigenous people in the tropical environment. Crooke gained national recognition for his work after winning the Archibald Prize in 1969 with his portrait of George Johnson. Then followed a commission to paint two large murals at Australia House in London in 1975. Crooke is often associated with Gauguin, as demonstrated in Brisbane's *Courier Mail*, "Australia's answer to Gauguin exhibits in Brisbane" (Brown, 2013). However, James Gleeson observed that, "One has only to compare his tropical landscapes with those of Gauguin to see the difference between an artist working through tone and one who

worked through colour" (Gleeson, 1972, n.p). Gauguin tended to use more colour across his canvas, in a style adopted by the Fauves, whereas Crooke uses the shadowy quality of tenebrism to contrast light and dark shapes which form his compositions.

Gleeson wrote that Crooke may appear to be regarded simply as a very good painter of landscapes with a focus on the North Queensland and the Melanesian tropics. Characteristic of his paintings are the dark shapes within domestic and natural landscapes, of people, huts and the seashore. Gleeson notes the importance of Crooke's technique that catches "stillness" in order to suggest his preoccupation with "deep and permanent things" (1972, n.p). These things, like mountains, rocks and traditions, establish the rhythms of form in the landscape. Gleeson continues

> He is no casual observer of physical facts but one who collects facts in order to arrive at an understanding of true reality…[which]…opens the way for the mind to make its contribution to the ensemble of truths that is the finished painting (1972, n.p).

Crooke was selected as a participant in this research as his work is ground-breaking in the traditions of Australian painterly vision. He shares the traditions of the French aesthetic of Gauguin, Matisse and Rousseau. He echoes their perceptive salutation to the tropical world, with its nuance of the primitive, Orientalist, savage and free lens to describe equatorial peoples and place. Crooke's intimations of the French aesthetic is combined with his immersion in Fiji, North Queensland and the Torres Straits to look at how tropical nature is pictured.

4.2.2.2 Margaret Olley

Margaret Olley was born in 1923 in Lismore, N.S.W. and died in 2011 in Paddington, Sydney. Her family moved to Tully south of Cairns when Margaret was

two years old. Here she would develop an affinity for colour, before going to St Anne's Boarding School in Brisbane in 1929 (Stewart, 2012). She later attended Brisbane's Sommerville House. In 1941 she attended Brisbane Central Technical College, before enrolling at East Sydney Technical College in 1943. After graduating with first class honours she was befriended by William Dobell, Donald Friend, Russell Drysdale and Sidney Nolan. Olley exhibited annually between 1948-2011. It is her work produced in the mid-1950s that revisits the tropics, produced during her travels through Far North Queensland, Magnetic Island and Papua New Guinea. This work expresses the vibrancy she experienced as a child. The dynamic spectrum of vivid colours and textures reflect the sensitivity of the French artists towards Humboldt's vital force of the tropics.

She travelled through North Queensland with Donald Friend in the 1950s, looking for visual material for their work. Wilson said they were, "consistently searching for fresh vital stimuli that would emerge in their work" (Wilson, 1998, p. 98). Olley visited Ian Fairweather at his camp at Bribie Island in subtropical Queensland in 1965. Although Olley's exhibiting career was primarily celebrated in Sydney and Brisbane, it is evident that her childhood in the tropics influenced her use of lavish colour and fecund painterly surfaces, with splashes of scarlet hues against lush viridian.

Of her childhood impression of Tully she said, "I was too busy dreaming away at the bottlebrushes and the enormous blue butterflies that were all around. Right from the start I could lose myself in the visual" (qtd. in Stewart, 2012, p. 6). The tropical landscape is captured in her painting *Canefarmer's House, North Queensland,* with the bold pattern of the agave plants in the foreground, the bright green hues of garden foliage, the freshness of the humid atmosphere in the textured low slung clouds, and the magenta dance of crotons, spangled blossoms and bougainvilleas which together present a fertile image. A remnant tropical palette is evident in her later paintings of

flowers including examples like *Red Hibiscus* (1978) *Yellow Room with Lupins* (1994) and *Still Life with Mandarins* (1975), in which overflowing petals capture blazing warmth.

4.2.2.3 Ian Smith

Ian Smith was born in Cairns in 1950 and matriculated from Trinity Bay High, Cairns in 1967. After a year of architecture at University of Queensland in 1968, he obtained work at the Bank of New South Wales. He received a Diploma of Art and Design from Prahran College of Technology in 1972 and lectured at Queensland College of Art from 1973-1979, before leaving to paint full time. In 1979 he visited Hawaii, Jamaica, Tahiti, Canada and Europe. Since 1977 he has exhibited at the Archibald Prize nine times, twice in the Wynne Prize, five times in the Sulman Prize and once in the Dobell Drawing Prize. Smith is represented in Australian and overseas institutional collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, National Gallery of Australia, and regional and university collections. He currently lives in Brisbane and regularly visits Cairns.

Smith's paintings consider "the human presence within the landscape" (I. Smith, 2011) through eclectic styles that include Pop artists Agnes Martin, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. However, his palette was shaped by growing up in Cairns with its lush foliage, and visible in his strong use of colour and personal stories. Smith contextualises the Australian landscape as an "uninterrupted scenic flow," which "can be any landscape I choose: seen, imagined or appropriated from other art. We live in a country of black and white painters possessed by the landscape. The best of them have taken a personal possession of particular landscape" (I. Smith, 2011). Smith's possession of the landscape encompasses the idea of the tropics as portable, in that it

can be mentally carried to other places and accessed by the memory of colour in flora and fauna, forms of the mountains, valleys and sugar plains and by its fragrance and humidity. His sensory response is seen in *Man with his children on an international flight*, (2006) that demonstrates his lush use of colour.

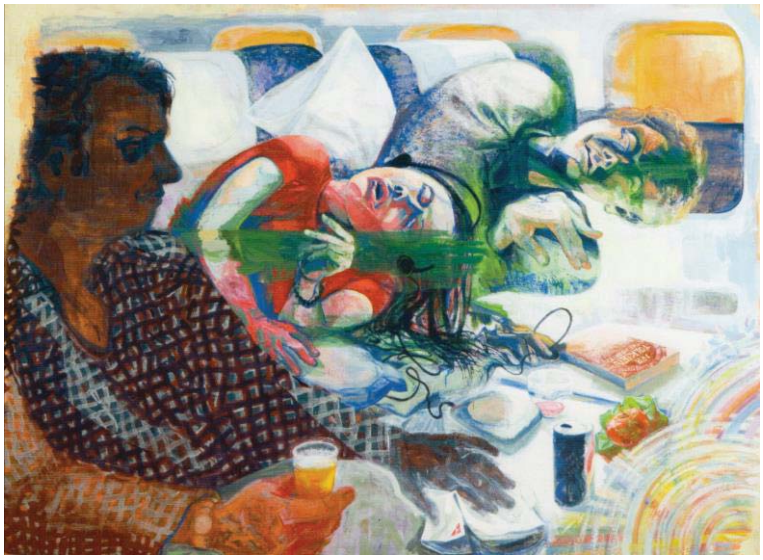

Plate 4.1 Ian Smith, *Man with his children on an international flight*, 2006, Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 120 x 117.5cm.
© Ian Smith.

Smith's work uses the modernist gaze and "memory" (I. Smith, 2011, p. 28) to structure pictorial space as in *Truckload of vital national importance,* (2007), and *Range road – road rage* (2004) where the under-drawing reveals the mountains behind Manoora in Cairns. His colour-fields use the popular and allegorical world of the image with characters that wander through markets, cycle through urban streetscapes, or drive trucks hauling boats; as in, *The Dark side of the Fish* (2003) and *Waiting for paint* (2004). The imagery produced by Smith describes the close relationship between the architectural and industrial impact of humanity on the landscape as a play of forms. His imagery oscillates between human feeling and the vast urban wilderness of Australian geography. Smith's paintings do not convey the discovery of tropical space; they

portray his emergence from a tropical region against the irony of the human conquest of nature where he aims to “explore himself as much as to explore the land” (Netton, 2012, p. 223).

4.2.2.4 James Baines

James Baines was born in Sydney in 1944, and graduated from the National Art School in 1963, having studied under Godfrey Miller, John Passmore, John Coburn and John Olsen. Baines is represented in collections in the USA, Asia, Europe and Australia, and has won over 30 awards since 1960. He works from Malanda and was highly recommended in the Doug Moran Portrait Prize. He is a long-time resident of North Queensland depicting landscapes, portraits and historical murals in oil or acrylic.

Baines’ landscapes reflect the tropical palette of warm tones, bright colours and fecund textures, evidenced by the mauve and Prussian flecks in the tropical shadows of *Gold Hill* (1986). In his historical imagery of pearl diving in *Broome Odyssey* (1989) he documents the passing of time since Dampier’s voyage in 1699 to draw from the pioneering and turbulence of settlement and industry. He uses charcoal drawing beneath layers of paint to depict vessels, oceans and the reef. His painting *River of Gold* (1987) depicts the gold rush and the Palmer River (Bewell, 2003) on Cape York.

Plate 4.2 James Baines, *Moore Road, Peeramon,* 1984, Oil on canvas, 120 x 140cm.
Photo James Baines

Baines creates his idiosyncratic interpretation of the tropical world through irony, humour and genuine appreciation. He said, "Do you know what it's like to drive a car stuck in neutral? Well the tropics are like that; all green…and green is neutral" (Baines, 2009). However, in *Gold Hill* (1986) Baines painted green, not as a neutral non-colour, but as a spectrum of glittering flecks which catch many shades of blue, green, violet, sienna and magenta. He paints warmer tones of mandarin, raw umber and neon green in *Moore Road Peeramon* (1985).

4.2.2.5 Claudine Marzik

Claudine Marzik was born in 1957, in Basel, Switzerland, and moved to North Queensland in 1988. She is an award-winning artist who lives and works in Cairns. Marzik has held many local and international exhibitions. She uses a tropical palette of green and earthy grey and brown to describe the texture of the tree trunks and alluvial soil. She is inspired by the monsoon season and the patina or texture on tropical surfaces.

Marzik paints imagery described as, “clammy, claustrophobic, enshrouded with vegetation almost seething with warm tropical growth” (Naylor, 2010, pp. 37-38). Her painted responses to the wet tropic landscape acknowledge the human presence dominated by the power of environment, “for its massive energy and fecundity” (Naylor, 2010, pp. 37-38). This is evident in works like *Germinating, Wilting, Growing* (2010) and *Seed to Seed* (2012). Marzik uses abstract expressionism to communicate her painted message. It is underscored by a tapestry of textures, which creates her image of the forest lichen and moss.

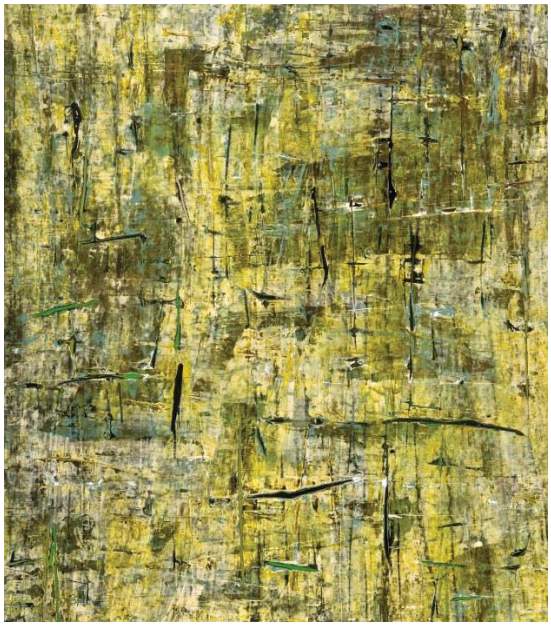

Plate 4.3 Claudine Marzik, *Far North Series*, 2010, Mixed media on canvas, 136 x 127cm.
Photo Michael Marzik.

Her work is revealing in its layering of textured forms. These abstract her forest experience, to produce a feeling for the marks and incidental moments of intuitive response. David Burnett described this process as, “the time and processes of accretion and layering that form the very subject of the work”. He found jewels of colour that belie the subtle grey-white quiet tones, to produce the effect of the seeping nature of equatorial colour as it is, “ punctuated by jewels of colour and flashes of light which

animate and enliven the surface of this quiet and subtle painting" ("Claudine Marzik wins top Redland art award," 2012).

4.2.2.6 Helen Wiltshire

Helen Wiltshire was born in 1945 in Melbourne and died in Cairns in 2011. She came to North Queensland in the 1970s, leaving behind a successful career in fashion in Melbourne. She lived on Bedarra Island, before opening her gallery in 1980. Her work is featured in private and corporate collections around the world. She is known internationally for her imagery of the Great Barrier Reef and rainforest that surrounded her studio at Bingil Bay. Marina Muecke described the formal aspect of Wiltshire's tropical paintings as a visual reaction to the natural features of the environment: "her broad-brushed watercolours of reef and rainforest subjects…expressed harmony between tropical forms and features" (Muecke, 2014, n.p).

Wiltshire's paintings use decoration and pattern in a similar way to Matisse, with rich colour and bold shapes reflective of the tropical imagery of Mission Beach. The way Matisse absorbed the graphic elements of tropical motifs and their strange and curious shapes was echoed in Wiltshire's detail of her tropical location, and the power of the symbolic gesture produced an enchanted geography of forms of birds, coral and seaweed. Similarly, Wiltshire aims to render graphic motifs that read almost like hieroglyphics of tropical space as in *Aquamarine 11* (2009) and *Sea Shells* (2009).

Plate 4.4 Helen Wiltshire, *Tropic Garden*, 2005, Print cotton rag archival paper, 76 x 56cm.
With permission Helen Wiltshire Gallery.

In Wiltshire's *Tropic Garden* we see the simplification of colour where bright orange connects rocks, hibiscus and the sandy bay. Shape is very important, in terms of describing a variety of leaves that typify the botanical tropics, extraordinary for the scale and distinct angular geometry in bright reds, deep blues and lime greens. The strong design element replaces a direct experience of nature with an imaginative idea of what it represents. Wiltshire's vision resists the conflict between wild nature and the man-made element that reflect, "her peaceful, private life in the tropics" (Muecke, 2014). Painting is her conduit between an outer world heritage listed nature full of birds, fish and rainforest, and her feelings translated through modernist design. "Helen Wiltshire saw a bigger picture with the poetry, peace and harmony she sensed beneath the surface of subjects and between natural features" (Muecke, 2014, n.p).

4.2.2.7 Amanda Feher

Amanda Feher was born in 1976, and grew up on an avocado farm at Tolga. She studied at James Cook University in Townsville, graduating in 1997 with a University medal. Amanda works from Tinaroo. She uses a variety of media to describe her relationship to the tropical landscape, including painting, sculpture, drawing and new technology. She has won many prizes and is included in national and international collections, including the Perc Tucker Regional Gallery Collection.

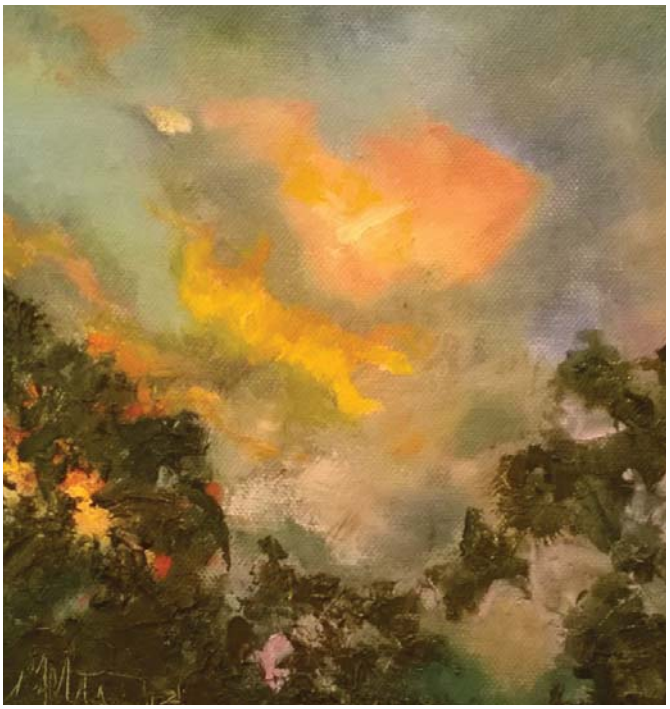

Plate 4.5 Amanda Feher, *Tinaroo Landscape,* 2008, Oil on canvas, 60 x 60cm.
Photo Amanda Feher.

Her mixed media charcoal paintings depict the human body as sculptural form, and the surrounding Tinaroo landscape as spare and emotive in its layering of leaves, trees and atmosphere. She shares her experience of the North Queensland landscape in silhouettes and bold shadows, made accessible through European technique. Feher is influenced by the techniques of European artists including Michelangelo, Caravaggio

and Leonardo da Vinci. Feher frequently works as a public artist, with designs like the large metal leaf sculpture at the Tablelands Regional Gallery in Atherton, contributions to the Strand Ephemera exposition and Jezzine Barracks. Feher's painting *Tinaroo Landscape* catches the luminescence of the tableland sky, brought about by bushfire, agricultural dust and humidity, in the dreamy afterglow of the farming day. Her sky is framed by the low lying nimbus clouds full of the water that greens the luscious tablelands.

4.2.2.8 Claire Souter

Claire Souter was born in 1950 in Toowoomba and studied art history and humanities at Flinders University in Adelaide. As a teenager, she painted under the tuition of Ruth Tuck in Adelaide. Souter raised three children in Mount Gambier, South Australia, and said she found "gaps in time where I could sneak off on my own and investigate art" (Thorne, 2006). In 2002, Souter and her husband moved to Cairns, where she found inspiration for the landscape and the lush surrounds that she paints evident in *Yellow and Green Croton 5* (2009), *Elephant Apple* (2009) and *Leaf 1, Botanica,* (2004).

Plate 4.6 Claire Souter, *Leaf 1, Botanica,* 2004, Acrylic on paper, 56 x 76cm.
Photo Claire Souter.

Souter has won many prizes including an Indian art competition, in which she received the Nehru Gold Medal. She is also collected widely. She operates a Kuranda Gallery, and is an artist and teacher who paints rainforest plants and flowers, showing her enthusiasm for tropical nature. Although Souter's tropical motifs are portrayed with the exactness of botanical illustration, her work is not strictly scientific. Nor is it symbolically decorative. Rather, her work brings together observation of a tropical experience derived from the world of botanical forms, to construct a designed image. This image aims at a balanced aesthetic, in order to mirror her projected tropical experience. We see this in the example of *Leaf 1, Botanica*, where the image of the real

becomes personal. It is seen in her arrangement of the forms that weave a chromatic scale of greens. Souter's signature detail is in the imperfections in the leaf, which she stresses. These underscore her belief that nature is always in a state of decline and always imperfect.

4.2.2.9 Laurine Field

Laurine Field was born in 1968 in Brisbane, and studied under William Robinson. She lived in Cairns between 1989 and 2007 and is currently living in Brisbane. Her work is included in private collections throughout Australia. Field's paintings of the Flecker Botanic Gardens, *Gardens of the mind* (2005) was exhibited at Cairns Regional Gallery. Her figurative work includes a portrait of Margaret Olley. Field's exploration and documentation of the Flecker Botanic Gardens in Cairns, which portrays a collection of equatorial plants, is significant to this research. Field's research project considered the constructed premise of a garden and its role in the contemporary life of Australians. Her work contributes to the tropical aesthetic with the richly coloured and textured imagery of motifs, found in the tropical landscape as in *Sago Palm* (1999) and *Orchids* (2001). The polychromatic bromeliad collection painted in *Bromeliads* (2006), echoes the rhythm of forms used by Henri Rousseau. We see the linear gestures sweep organically to imply a larger circumference than the actual plant.

Plate 4.7 Laurine Field, *Bromeliads*, 2006, Oil on canvas, 1.3 x 1.5m.
Photo Laurine Field.

Field's image of a constructed tropics reflects the Orientalist gaze, which responded to the sheer decadence and superabundance of the tropical environment, recreated here as a tapestry of desirable forms, and as an assemblage of various tropical locations as a hybrid tropics. The tropical exotic is explored "not because Exoticism is a unique aesthetic force, but because it is a fundamental Law of the Intensity of *Sensation* of the exaltation of Feeling: and therefore of living…[whereby]…through Difference and Diversity…existence is made glorious" (Segalen, 2002, p. 61). Field's tropical foliage deals with plants as subdued and desirable for their aesthetic appeal within the safety of the garden, not as the impenetrable jungle Kennedy encountered on his Cape York exploration: "Those days, that scrub cutting, and the harsh terrain caused the final breaking of the spirit of many of the men" (Beale, 1970, p. 70).

4.3 Questionnaire results table

The following table (Table 4.1) presents the artist responses to the survey questions. These reveal some of their experiences with the tropics, as an imagined space, a real space and as an aesthetic space. Not every category was selected by the artists, as sometimes they wrote their answers in the section marked “other,” and these responses are included in the report section.

Table 4.1 Artist responses to the survey questions

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Question 1: Would you define Paradise as a theme in relation to the tropics as					
Exotic	1	4	2	2	0
Garden of Eden	0	2	2	3	1
Place of ideal beauty	2	1	4	1	0
State of delight	3	3	1	1	0
Question 2: Do the inherent qualities of the tropics bring to mind					
Heat & humidity	5	1	2	0	0
Idyllic islands, tropical fruit	3	3	2	0	0
Pristine nature	4	3	1	1	0
Erotic escapes	1	4	0	3	0
Question 3: Does topography and geography shape Australian art in terms of					
Colours of sky, foliage, water	3	5	0	0	0
A psychological capacity	3	4	1	0	0
Climate	1	5	2	0	0

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Question 4: Are the tropics imbued with particular spiritual connotations as in					
Biblical representations	0	1	3	3	1
Indigenous spiritual beliefs	1	2	2	3	0
Alternative belief systems e.g. Guru worship, etc.	0	1	3	3	1
Mother nature	2	3	4	0	0
Question 5: Is the tropics an internal vision or sensation					
That is present as a creative process	1	1	5	1	0
That is triggered by sound, temperature, colour, smell or texture	3	3	3	0	0
As an intuitive reaction, or considered process	3	0	3	2	0
Question 6: Does being located outside the major metropolitan areas offer special advantages					
In terms of studio practice	2	3	2	1	0
In terms of unique subject	1	5	3	0	0
In terms of cultural significance	1	0	3	4	0

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Question 7: Would you say the light is different from other latitudes, is it					
Brighter and whiter	1	5	2	0	0
Has more yellow tones	0	5	2	1	0
Less smog, more clarity of colour	4	4	0	1	0
Question 8: Does the tropical deliver a rural notion of paradise and would you describe this as					
Air quality and lower levels of pollution	5	2	1	1	0
Access to nature	6	3	0	0	0
Relaxed environment	4	3	0	1	0
Question 9: Does tropical culture transgress into mainstream culture					
As a souvenir	1	3	3	1	0
As a dreamed of destination	1	5	1	1	0
As the missing link	1	1	5	1	0

The questions and answers in the above table support the outline of the research project. They aimed to qualify the context around the primary focus of what drives personal practice in relation to working in a narrative theme within tropical space. Arguably, this focus is narrow, but the data has revealed a significant conversation about painting in the tropics in North Queensland. The following report analyses the response to the concept of the tropics through the lens of lived experience.

4.4 Report on findings

The data reveals that the concept of 'tropics as paradise' is an important imaginative idea. It raises significant questions for artists to consider, in terms of its cultural and natural inspirations, resources and vulnerabilities. Using the lens of paradise to view the tropics not only motivated the earlier French artists, but also acts as a driver for local artists, whose concerns range from environmental preservation, through cultural interface, psychological balance, spiritual need, and sensory impression. Claire Souter stated, "the tropical couldn't be external" (2010). Surprisingly, sometimes the results in the survey contradicted those of the interview. They moved away from some of the artists' initial statements about the tropics as a place, and the notion of paradise as both a positive and negative projection.

I have used the conversations with the artists and their observations of place, which provides a local context, to access the primacy of what can be drawn from the tropics as a resource. They reveal the issues which fascinate these individuals, as well as what they hold as important to their life and art. My findings are presented under headings that follow the sequence of the interview questions. These reflect on the benchmark set by Rousseau, Matisse and Gauguin, whose fascination with painting tropical space belongs to an earlier generation that viewed the tropics with different

eyes and expectations. The local lived experience looks at a current experience framed by the standards of our time.

There are nine subheadings: paradise as a theme, defining qualities of the tropics, geographical impact, spiritual significance of place, the tropics through the senses, rural lifestyle attributes, light, regional location, and the outcome of under-representation of the tropics in the mainstream. Together these ideas argue that the tropics needs to feature more significantly in our national identity. The report includes excerpts from the interviews, which communicate the responses to these ideas. Graphs of the survey responses are included between the artists' commentary to show the responses to the questions.

The case study identifies how the artists interpret the tropical landscape through signifiers that describe the tropics. The experiential data reveals how artists live with the tropics and how they view the role of humanity within it. The human presence is viewed positively as a critically aware presence, and negatively as a destructive presence that clears land and kills habitat. The idea of the perfect Garden of Eden or pristine nature seems only accessible through the act of poetic imagination as a space that refers to paradise.

Although Matisse, Rousseau and Gauguin portrayed the truth in their observations and imaginative projections, this study reveals another truth: of how the tropics are viewed in local space. The examples that this group of case study artists document display an affinity with the tropics as vital context for their arts practice. We see this in the contrasting tone of Ray Crooke's landscapes of Cape York and the Pacific Islands, in the luscious colour used by Margaret Olley with her rich surfaces and vibrant colours, in the patina used by Claudine Marzik to reflect the texture of the

rainforest, and the high key colour layered in Ian Smith's paintings. Amanda Feher evokes the elements of volcanic soil and climate to inspire her work, while Claire Souter focuses on botanical rendering as a spiritual focus. James Baines paints the paradox of place, whereas nature inspired Helen Wiltshire's use of pattern.

4.5 Paradise as a theme in relation to tropical nature

Survey Question 1: Would you define **Paradise** as a theme in relation to the tropics as, exotic, a Garden of Eden, a place of ideal beauty or a state of delight?

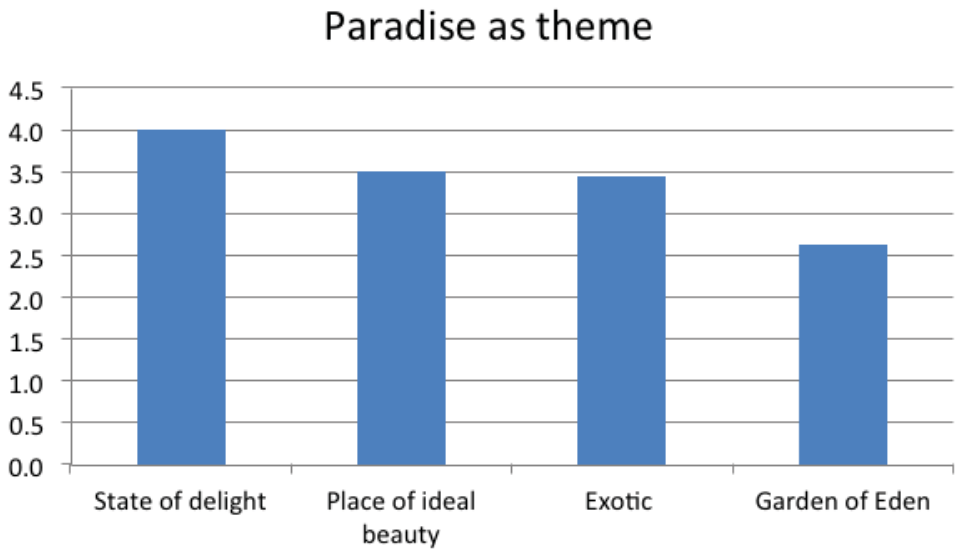

Figure 4.2 Artist reactions to paradise as a theme from survey 2010.

We see that most of the artists chose "state of delight" as the preferred summation of paradise. However, in the following interview responses the artists sometimes veered away from their first responses. Paradise has been depicted as an imaginative space, in which mythical traditions refer back to Arcadia. Tropical nature has also been regarded as reality where botanists have explained nature through the prism of science. However, human understanding of tropical vegetation and the geography, by means of external experience, demonstrated the impact on the internal

world of experience, “We see it [the landscape] as being outside ourselves even though it is only a mental representation of what we experience on the inside” (Schama, 1995, p. 17). Gauguin’s experience of tropical nature in Tahiti was projected as an experience of abundance, “On either side of the stream there cascades a semblance of a path: trees pell-mell, monster ferns, all sorts of vegetation growing wilder, more and more impenetrable as you climb towards the centre of the island” (qtd. in Wadley, 1985, p. 25). Gauguin’s earlier description of the tropical landscape was echoed by Claudine Marzik, “I think that coming from Europe if we talk about paradise and it is not in a religious context, we think paradise is ocean, it is rainforest, it is a lush environment, exotic flowers” (2010).

But Gauguin’s reaction to the vegetation of Tahiti contrasted with Ian Smith’s problems with the idea of tropical space as paradise; “Paradise is an inarticulate yet iconic word for a beautiful, pristine, balmy, idyllic place of arrival or retreat” (2010). Although Smith agreed with paradise being a place of ideal beauty and a state of delight, he also said the global experience of the tropical experience had also been a hell on earth due to tropical diseases, racial degenerations and poverty. He said the “reckless” myth of paradise is founded against its opposite, “Tropical Experience for Indigenous as well as immigrant inhabitants has been Hell on Earth as much as a Paradise” (Smith, 2010).

During the interview James Baines questioned the ideal of a tropical paradise, “its not picturesque…what is paradise if you haven’t got a comparison, how are you going to know?” (Baines, 2010). Baines revealed the conflict with regards to human geography, governance and colonialism, in describing an area of forest in Malanda that shows his ideal tropical vision.

> In Malanda we have got 60 acres that has never been touched, just as you come into Malanda over the ridge, it is a fantastic bit of scrub, opposite the information centre…there are some massive big trees, that to me, is pristine, because there are no foreign palms, nothing introduced, the whole family has kept it pristine, it's wonderful (Baines, 2010).

The emphasis on an untouched environment existing in the real world answered Baines' question about the ideal of paradise as an imaginary concept, not limited by the idea of the picturesque, or an Arcadian model of western projection, where human presence is problematic; as humans interrupt nature.

The wet tropics location did not meet James Baines' image of the Garden of Eden.

> Not in my experience, I mean it is all very nice…depending on where you are looking at it from, it's not very nice to get tangled up with wait-a-while (*Calamus Motii)*, and then you are backing out of that and you fall into a stinging tree…you wouldn't be thinking its paradise then would you? (2010).

Baines said the wait-a-while and stinging trees represented the tropics as a Biblical place of "thorns and thistles" (2010). In contrast to the reflective visions of Eden and the lost golden age that Baines referred to in a Biblical context, the theme of exoticism held the utopian promise of the creative possibility, as explored through Ray Crooke's observations. During his time in the army when he first saw North Queensland and Thursday Island he said, "the tropics made a big impact on me…we were able to see all the different vegetation" (2010) and he agreed this was exotic "from

a drawing point of view" (2010). His formal compositions mirrored the earlier efforts of Matisse, who made cut-outs of the different shapes of tropical Tahiti.

Western civilisation's general population has taken some time to appreciate the variety and intrinsic value of the native wet tropics plants that had fascinated the European naturalists centuries earlier. Ian Smith commented that current gardening practices embraced not only the distinction between exotic and indigenous plants but the variety they offer. Smith considered that the imaginative construct of the Garden of Eden brought practical dilemmas for the early European residents to the wet tropics, "people struggled to grow roses, and they were cutting down native plants" (2010). Where Smith described a generation cutting down rainforest, we see a cultural swing towards preservation, as stated by Field. She said the Flecker Botanic Gardens is "a man-made construct, [a] culturally created phenomena [sic]" (Field, 2010). Her comment reveals the irony of a certain relationship between humans and nature, in which botany is more suitably consumed as a tamed, mowed, friendly public garden, rather than in its raw form, where it appears as an impenetrable, messy or a potentially harmful experience.

As the survey showed, most of the painters had a positive reaction to the notion of Paradise as a tropical theme through visual triggers like vegetation, lush foliage and varied plant species; "the colour and unusual variety of plant species in optimum health... is very dynamic and reveals a great life force" (Laurine Field, 2010). Like Henri Rousseau, Laurine Field referenced plant collections in the botanical gardens, and used "collected" samples in her paintings. "In Rousseau's later jungle pictures there is a frozen stillness. The vegetation is profuse and luxuriant, yet everything is beautifully ordered and lucid" (Alley, 1978, p. 67). The tension between the natural and

the constructed vision of tropical nature defines the broader problem of fictitious tropics.

Amanda Feher considered her reaction to the tropics as a theme in relation to paradise, brought about by her familiarity with her real world environment. "In terms of instinct and this being a paradise, I've always felt very fortunate to live here, and it has been around me my whole life" (2010). Her appreciativeness is contrasted with James Baines' ambivalence, in which paradise and the tropics were a paradox; "it is changeable, tranquil, even miserable, but inspirational" (Baines, 2010). Claire Souter's pleasure derived from tropical nature: in leaves, stems and flowers, within the cycle of newness and decay, described her ideal of beauty which, "describes the pleasing thing that makes you want to paint it" (2010).

4.6 Inherent qualities of the tropics

Survey Question 2: Do the inherent qualities of the tropics bring to mind heat and humidity, idyllic islands, tropical fruit, pristine nature or erotic escapes?

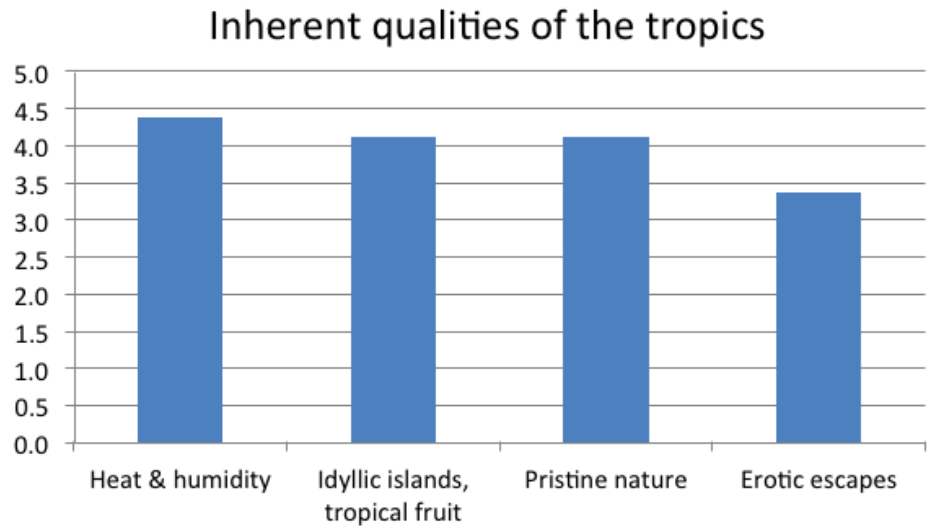

Figure 4.3 Artist questionnaire responses to tropical qualities 2010.

This element of the survey identified the tropical qualities that artists are motivated to articulate in their practice and continues as testimony to the aspects of the tropics that require preservation and further understanding in the human/nature relationship. Overwhelmingly in Figure 6 we see, “heat and humidity” was selected by the sample group as the quality to describe the tropical experience of climate as oppressive, with an intense level of heat. Six of the artists agreed with the notion of idyllic islands and tropical fruit symbolising the tropics, and seven of the artists agreed with the notion of pristine nature as an inherent quality. Four of the artists agreed with the idea of erotic escapes to describe tropical perception. Claire Souter said, “The heat and humidity makes the growth so lush” (2010). Ian Smith responded similarly, “As an artist, what defines my tropical work are not the bright colours of tropical fruit, but the heat and humidity” (2010). Rain is influential in the life cycle of the tropics and the impact of the monsoonal rain events were evident in Ian Smith’s description of weather, atmospheric conditions and seasons to better understand how to paint the vegetation; “the greens are subdued and subtle” (Smith, 2010) and he said the tropical seasons is, “Wet, less wet, warmer, cooler,” (Smith, 2010) .

The sensation of taste was identified by Claudine Marzik, “Heat and humidity give the texture and the flavour of the vegetation, on natural things like wood, rocks; it’s the surface and patina” (2010). Amanda Feher said, “the heat and humidity really affect me, I always seem to get the big commissions for creating large works in the summer, you are making heat, welding, and then there is the additional heat, that go with the seasons” (2010). The intensity that Amanda described provide her with creative fuel, “it is definitely energising, it is also debilitating…I think that adds to the quality of the work because there is an extra element and struggle… it makes it a more complex and composite result” (2010). The idea of “idyllic islands and tropical fruit”

resonated with the participants, Ray Crooke said: “Coming from Victoria… to North Queensland, there were bananas growing, and up in Thursday Island there were coconuts” (2010). Earlier, Gauguin responded to similar motifs in Tahiti, “The mango seen against the mountain… Against its light the mountain stood out in strong black against the blazing sky” (qtd. in Wadley, 1985, p. 16).

Crooke reflected on his experience in Fiji and said

> Fiji hasn’t moved forward. I like the way the people live. They live in a country that hasn’t been developed. They build their own houses, grow their own vegetables and catch their own fish. In our region this has been replaced by the supermarket (Crooke, 2009).

But Gauguin saw the harm colonisation did to Tahiti; “a whole feudal society that has vanished forever” (qtd. in Wadley, 1985, p. 16). Ian Smith qualified his position of idyllic,

> I agree with the word idyllic in terms of the European construct rather than an Indigenous one…I would rather be warm than cold. Some people hate the heat, and would rather be in Scandinavia than Darwin, maybe Edward Munch had his ideal backdrop for his significant part as the Arctic North (2010).

Helen Wiltshire saw the tension between human construction and the untouched landscape to describe tropical nature as, “untamed, wild and free of man-made intervention” (2010). Claire Souter disagreed;

> There is no pristine nature, untarnished and perfect. When you paint you look for things that aren’t perfect, like the dying part of the leaf…We

> might think something is pristine, but it's not, it is in a state of decline, growing and declining. I did a painting called *New Growth*. When I started doing tropical paintings the new growth had been eaten. It is a human metaphor, when we paint we look for human things, sometimes it presents itself as a metaphor or symbol, although I am not consciously thinking of that, only thinking those thoughts when I paint (2010).

The constructed tropics was the lens through which Laurine Field interpreted the Cairns Botanic Gardens, "My understanding of the tropics is not pristine…definitely touched by people, it is constructed" (2010). For James Baines, the impact of the human condition was more than destruction or construction; it is also about interference and the regret of humanity spoiling nature.

In response to the survey question that asked the artists if erotic escapes was important, Ian Smith summarised Gauguin's Tahitian experience, "for Gauguin as a European coming to Tahiti in the 19th century…he got the paradise in his mind, of a middle aged man escaping to the tropics" (Smith, 2011). Gauguin writes in *Noa Noa*, "Through her excessively transparent dress of pink muslin the golden skin of her shoulders and arms could be seen" (qtd. in Wadley, 1985, p. 33). Matisse said that his goal to paint nudes from life meant that North Africa could provide this experience; contrasted with his observation of Tahitian people whom he found not to be erotic (Turner, 1995). James Baines said, "North Queensland is different because of the people themselves; wasn't it the Tahitian people that he [Gauguin] found attractive, the only erotic thing around here is what you bring to it yourself" (2010). Laurine Field said, "I guess the erotic part of the painting is the sensuous realm being projected into painting, sexuality is linked with abundance" (2010).

4.7 Impact of topography and geography

Survey Question 3: Does topography and geography shape Australian art in terms of the colours of the sky, foliage or water, or as a psychological capacity, or the climate?

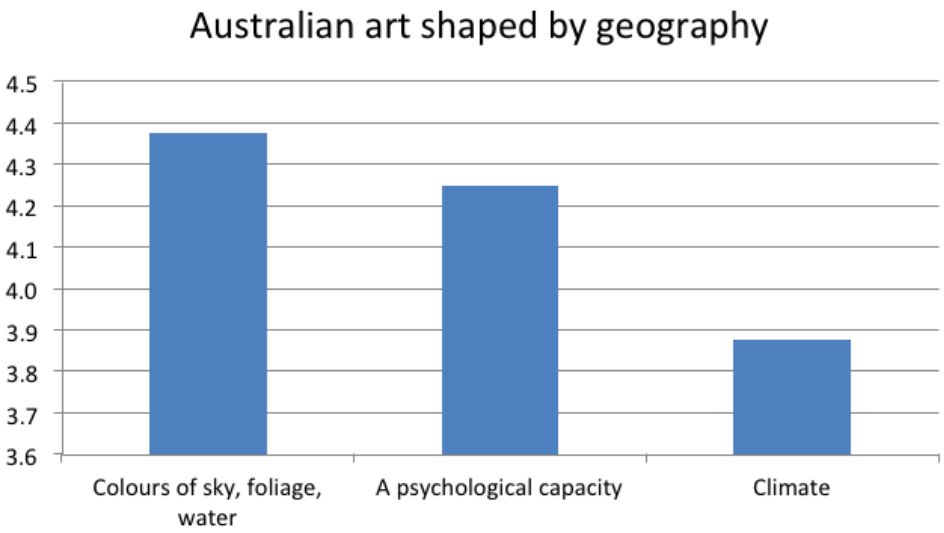

Figure 4.4 Psychological impact of geography on artists 2010.

Landscape is not just an aesthetic problem. It also operates in terms of an external experience. The image of nature in the capacity of landscape is described as experiential by Bernard Smith, "nature is conceived as concrete geographical force acting upon men from without through the agency of climate" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 86). The interconnection between landscape and climatic conditions refers to the Aristotle's idea of zones.

In Figure 4.4 the bar graph identifies characteristics that describe the impact of geography on the artists. On the survey form, Margaret Olley replied, "Australia is a big place" and the geography was affected by "strong light" that is "hot and colourful" (2010). The expanse of the Australian continent encompasses the temperate and Torrid

Zones. However, previously the focus of most Australian paintings has been the temperate latitudes. Although Olley deals with the vastness that is affected by bright light across the entire continent, the tropical region was more colourful in her eyes. Amanda Feher agreed with the diversity, "There are so many aspects" that influence Australian art, and Helen Wiltshire found Australian geography, "extremely diverse" (2010). It is in the detail of the type of vegetation that the difference emerges. Ray Crooke said, "The big difference I noticed was the foliage, once you start getting further north you see the rainforest" (Crooke, 2010). Crooke went further with his reaction to the view of vegetation, which he saw as inspiration for painting compositions, "You look out of this window at Palm Cove, and I think you could turn that into a good painting…there are paintings everywhere" (Crooke, 2010).

Colour was an important factor in shaping the interpretation of geography. Amanda Feher responded to colour: "I grew up on a farm with rich volcanic soil…I think subconsciously and also consciously…that the connection with the earth and the environment up here have influenced those colours and textures within my work" (2010). However, Ian Smith said that tone and contrast are necessary in relation to colour and content, "There is as much consideration of black, white and grey in tropical humid imagery as there are bright colours, wet and dry" (2010). These responses were both visual and psychological, as they merged the seen with emotional reactions. These emerged through their personal histories, in which lived experiences informed their perceptions of the surrounding tropical world. Claire Souter, who came to the tropics from Adelaide, thought "The colours of the tropics are more vibrant…brighter and [have] an effect, on the subject matter that people [her students] choose" (2010). Similarly, Laurine Field was "absorbed in the observation of the colours and patterns…unusual and greater variety of plant forms" (Field, 2010). James Baines

commented on the “iridescent” greens found in Malanda on the Atherton Tablelands (2010).

The psychological and spiritual capacity shapes Australian art through its perception of geography and topography. James Baines said of the Malanda landscape, “people call its God’s country…because of the rain and the green grass…I have seen it drizzle rain for five months, people go bonkers” (Baines, 2010). This answer contains the contradiction of the tropics: visual beauty of lush foliage opposed by the stifling monsoon season. This dilemma was emphasised by Smith, “If it rains for more than three weeks in North Queensland…people’s mood changes” (2010). He said melancholic feeling was brought about by continual heavy rain. Laurine Field reported an opposite view. “My relationship with the tropics is one of comfort and closeness to mountains…they offer protection and safety. The trees offer shade and food, and are the link between tropics, ease, comfort and are projected onto a way of relaxing” (Field, 2010).

Marzik understood the topographical aspect of the tropics as an environmental experience, “you are half indoor and half outdoor, everything comes in… I’m not an artist that actually locates herself into the environment to paint, but it is all that I do, I paint the outdoors” (2010). The tropical environment was described by Ian Smith as the botanical influences of native flora, tropical species, and indigenous habitats.

> The blooming of different flowers…people are much more into tropical plants now. When I was a kid, people had no respect for the mangroves or environment, but now of course they realise that they are very important ecologically to the balance of the whole place (Smith, 2010).

The realisation of balance and connectedness was echoed by Field; “The role of landscape art is to help connect people to …identity, place and culture” (2010).

The sense of place expressed by these artists revealed a close up experience of the tropics the artists described as inspirational. It was inspirational in terms of the intensity of light seen by Margaret Olley, richness of colour seen in the volcanic soil by Amanda Feher and the iridescence of green identified by James Baines. Ray Crooke was observing the natural world when he reacted to the tropical vegetation. Field, Souter, Marzik, Smith and Wiltshire remarked about the effect and interconnectedness of the geography on the human psyche, through identity, respect for nature, comfort and melancholy. Souter’s contemplation of wild nature encompassed fascination for her painted subject. But the genre of the nature specimen is born out of a dichotomy that traps pieces of wilderness repackaged as neatly classified species orders. The viewer’s quandary is the artifice of perceived nature against creative expression that celebrates tropical lushness.

James Baines expressed his frustration about picture making of what is left of the pristine North Queensland rainforest and landscape. He considered that the design in a painting rests on choosing what to actually see, “I’ve always got this problem, you look across a really nice landscape and it’s got this English tree stuck in the middle of it, or an introduced tree. Don’t you find that disturbing?” (Baines, 2010). His idea that a non-indigenous tree interfered with his view of the landscape is resolved when he added, “I leave them out” (Baines, 2010). Because artists overlay ideas on topography, it is the information translated through various senses including colour, subject matter and symbolism that communicate their painted response.

4.8 Spiritual tropics

Survey Question 5: Are the tropics imbued with particular spiritual connotations as in Biblical representations, Indigenous spiritual beliefs, alternative belief systems e.g. guru worship, etc. or mother nature?

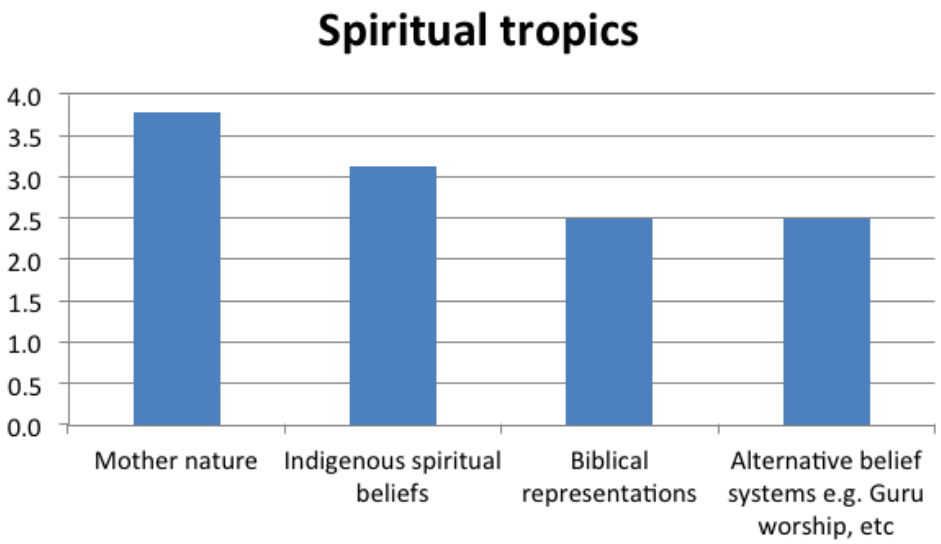

Figure 4.5 Artists' spiritual response to the tropics 2010.

The bar graph shows that Biblical representations and alternative beliefs were the least representative of the case study artists' interests. However, the interviews presented a different view, as they collectively referenced Biblical stories and alternative spiritual knowledge. The spiritual discussion topic was significant to the project as it links to the notion of paradise, which evaluates the tropics from the viewpoint of reverence. This importance signifies not only creative fascination, but also the desire for preservation of the tropical ecosystem and rainforest habitat as an environmental priority. To understand the tropics through the spiritual lens, the case study artists provided insights into how they interpreted the dimension of the physical world as either the handiwork of a God or a greater being, or through the science of

observable facts that are measurable, or as a location that that inspires imaginative thought.

The idea of finding the spiritual aspect of nature is considered by Simon Schama as a, “deep personal distillation of spirit and concept which moulds these earthly facts into some transcendental emotional and spiritual experience”, as a way to “inquire of my own soul just what the primeval scene really signifies” (Schama, 1995, p. 9). Schama however saw the presence of humans within nature as “a cause not for guilt and sorrow but celebration”, however calamitous the impact of early inhabitants through fire or colonisers with industry (Schama, 1995). Gauguin’s feeling of spiritual reverence for Tahiti signified spiritual freedom; “I could imagine space above my head, the vault of heaven…my hut was Space, Freedom” (Wadley, 1985, p. 17).

In Figure 4.5 Mother Nature was identified as the most popular response from the artists. Alternative belief systems and Biblical representations were said to be the least representative of the sample group’s perception of the tropics. However, the idea of a Biblical tropics did evince some surprising feedback. In fact, it provoked a welter of reasons and rationales for making paintings, ethics around subject matter, a deep respect for Indigenous art practices, and references to Christian influences. Ian Smith said “I always see that Biblical Garden of Eden story wasn’t what it was cracked up to be…the original mythological inhabitants were cast out of it because they abused it” (2010). Smith suggested that the story of Genesis concentrates on the human error of eating the forbidden fruit, “I don’t think there is anything wrong with the Garden of Eden thing, but I think it was used as a backdrop to show the fallibility of mankind” (Smith, 2010).

The negative aspect of the tropics is also evident in James Baines' response; "it's under the curse if you know your Bible" (2010), "A real paradise is how the Garden of Eden really was" (Baines, 2010). Baines thought the tropics wasn't a spiritual Eden;

> …not compared to what it was, not from a Biblical point of view… that all came with the curse… Flowers and no wait-a while to catch you up…all the other things too, like the bugs, beetles and bities, I mean you sit on a rotten log and you get scrub typhus…how about the stinging trees…I find Cairns a disappointment…Mangroves and the mud flats… it's not clear water… it's not picturesque (2010).

However, tropical space and paradise as place was approached differently by Claire Souter, who replaced spiritual icons with foliage.

> Looking at my paintings before I came up here, I did a lot of two dimensional designs from stained glass windows, and my subject matter was spirituality. Now I am looking at leaves. You are always looking for something spiritual. I think it is more about a stage in life, than geography, more about age. Foliage has become my subject matter…it is fulfilling what earlier subject matter was doing (2010).

The conversations strongly emphasise Biblical links to Genesis and Christian iconography with a variety of interpretations, as the influences are seen both positively: with tropical nature as subject matter, and negatively: as a spiritual association in terms of Christian symbolism and the stinging trees.

The literal aspect of illustrating the Bible was discussed by Ray Crooke, who described his cathedral paintings at Thursday Island. Crooke said

> I was attracted to early Christian art, European primitive art, Giotto and those people. The main connection was that the paintings were used as illustrations. Early Christian art was really teaching people about the church, educating them with pictures (Crooke, 2011).

> I have done about three or four Stations of the Cross that I painted for the church on Thursday Island…St Paul's have the 14 pillars and so I painted the Stations of the Cross. I don't go to church at all now…It has fascinated me, not from the religious point of view, but just as something to do. One of the problems for artists is what are we supposed to be doing, I think you have got to believe in something (Crooke, 2010).

Crooke's emphasis here is on spiritual purpose associated with creativity.

Claudine Marzik remarked on the influence of cultural exchange.

> I looked at a lot of indigenous art…I strongly react to it…I work with very similar emotion, often not defined as this tree and that flower; it really is what is out there. They gather this and put this down, which is more the right side of the brain; and I think I have very similar gestures when I work, to Indigenous artists, with repeating patterns or the technical approach; and surface treatment can be quite similar (Marzik, 2010).

The descriptions of reasons for composing an image were very specific, involving technique, applications and materials. In fact the artists gave equal weight to the Indigenous spiritual motives and methodologies and Biblical stories, which is fascinating as it shows that landscape is both an inward and external experience as old traditions are freshly inherited.

The tropical landscape was interpreted by Ian Smith through the long history of Indigenous spiritual beliefs and western material culture and values,

> Of course Indigenous spiritualism didn't come from somewhere, they were just there, through a long evolutionary process…Indigenous people from all over the world…don't have a point of comparison…I don't think a kid growing up in the troubles in Haiti would have an understanding of what it would be like in New York or London or in a chateau in Switzerland. Life is life and they are dealing with it. What may be paradise to some may not be to others… many Jamaicans leave Jamaica, to live in a tiny flat in London and work as a railway porter or go to places like Canada, because once they had a sense of contemporary values, money and capitalism…suddenly their paradisiacal backdrop didn't mean anything…whatever spirit they had, they took it with them" (Smith, 2010).

Amanda Feher was born on the Atherton Tablelands, and has lived within the tropical landscape her whole life. She saw this shaping effect between the tropics, her family background from Hungary, the spirit of place and the influence on her creative expression. Together they form her identity.

> There is definitely something spiritual about lots of places in Australia and in the world…there definitely are those influences within indigenous culture, and within the different cultures that came to this country…it is a multicultural nation, that does link back to the topography and geography…and maybe even the history of the spirits in the area; in an unconscious way, we don't know what has been here and what has gone, and I think that all has an influence (Feher, 2010).

The active approach taken by Laurine Field was another aspect of spirituality. She practiced yoga and saw spirituality, "in things like, patience, stamina, quality of thoughts, being true to yourself, being calm, beauty within and beauty without," (2010). But Field thought spirituality in the tropics was best represented by the aspect of Mother Nature: "I think when basic needs are met you have more time for spiritual development. There is a primitive memory that associates the tropics with survival" (Field, 2010). Field perceived the tropics as a super-abundant and fertile space, displaying the organic profusion of the energy that botanical growth creates. Her paintings captured the forms of the plants through rapid painterly marks on the canvas. In line with her inward descriptions of her human experience; Field's view was both feminine and nurturing.

The idea of alternative spiritual movements in the tropics was observed by Ian Smith, in reference to the Mormons, and perceptions about the availability of tropical food; "I grew up in Cairns in the 50s and 60s and as I was leaving, there were a lot of people of those persuasions arriving, I was being objective and reporting on what I witnessed… if you want to shrug off your riches and possessions and find true happiness in a more natural place, the first thing you want to do is ditch your overcoat

and go somewhere you can grow something on a tree without having to buy it in a shop. The tropics have satisfied that" (Smith, 2010).

Helen Wiltshire's comments highlighted the current conflict between urban development and pristine nature. Wiltshire reported the spiritual aspect of nature to be the, "exuberance of nature, the power of nature versus the man-made element" (2010). Her perception of nature as powerful and exuberant revealed the life force she saw as belonging to the environment, and the man-made element was the human relationship with it.

4.9 Sensory reaction and perception of tropical colour

Survey Question 5: Is the tropical internal vision or sensation that is present as a creative process triggered by sound, temperature, colour, smell or texture or as an intuitive reaction, or considered process?

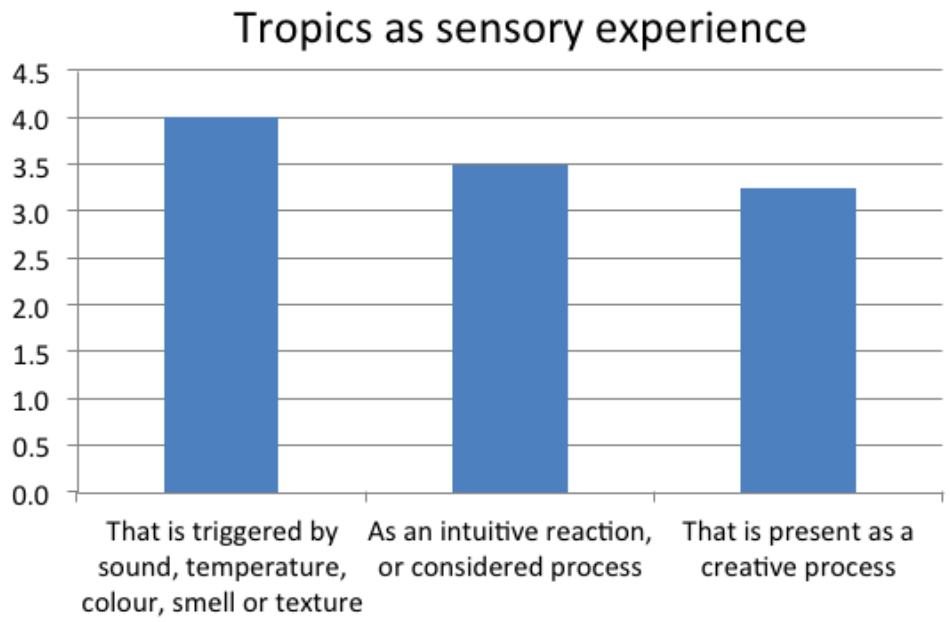

Figure 4.6 Responses to the sensual tropics 2010.

In Figure 4.6 the artists selected their preferred description of the sensory reaction to the tropics. This reaction described a tropical vision expressed through creative phenomena and intuition. Fragrance of the forest with floral scent, mould on trees, the decay of leaf litter and smell of vegetation were important sense reactions for the artists. Margaret Olley wrote, "I was brought up in the tropics as a child and the smell of mildew and colour in the tropics were very important" (2010). Claudine Marzik said she was motivated by "the spicy smell from the flora and the seasons," (2010). Similarly, Laurine Field described internal vision and sensation; "smell was very important to me in a psychological and physical sense at the Botanic Gardens." Through sensory experience of a tropical setting we step, "into the realm of the garden where we come alive through our senses" to be inspired by "unusual and greater variety of plant forms" (Field, 2010). The emphasis on their reactions to the external world gives context and form to the tropics as sense experience.

The sensory reaction to colour experienced by Gauguin in Tahiti made a major impression on him as described in *Noa Noa* in 1893.

> Coming from Europe I was constantly uncertain of some colour and kept beating about the bush: and yet it was so simple to put naturally on to my canvas a red and a blue. In the brooks, forms of gold enchanted me – why did I hesitate to pour gold and all that rejoicing of sunshine on to my canvas? (qtd. in Lansdown, 2006, p. 379).

The strong use of colour by Australian painters was described by the historian Mary Eagle to suggest the "association of colour with unbridled emotion" (Eagle & Jones, 1994, p. 35) in response to bright harsh light. The heightened sensation of intense

feeling may be sourced not only in sound, colour, smell and texture, but also in the sense of taste with tropical fruits like mango, jackfruit and durian.

As Cairns Regional Gallery Curator Peter Denham stated that there is no shortage of sublime landscapes or beautiful flora and fauna in North Queensland (Wilson, 1998). The colour in the tropics represents a contrasting palette to the temperate zone. Tropical colour can be perceived by a visual sensory response in bright green forest leaves, the iridescent cerulean blue of Ulysses butterflies, the magenta of Cooktown orchids, the orange breast of a kingfisher and the turquoise of the ocean. Through its contrasts, Australian landscape offers many vistas of the sublime, and tropical landscapes present sweeping views that encompass minute details of complex life forms.

Crooke's paintings of the Pacific and the Torres Strait referenced Gauguin's tropical imagery of Tahiti. The tropical vision realised in Gauguin's use of primary colours captures a polychromatic tropical vision with more gold, red and orange, while Crooke's palette, especially in his turquoise oceans, conveys tropical iridescence. Crooke saw nature in Cape York and the Pacific Ocean Islands with its "special kind of light…[that] has revealed the tropical north as it has never been revealed before" (Gleeson, 1972, n.p). The tropical paintings by Crooke and Gauguin share a vision of a tropical world in which western civilisation has destroyed much of the beauty they saw. James Baines, however, describes the object of the tropical detail in his observation of the Malanda rainforest.

> All these red brown leaves, not dead leaves, they are new leaves, they are red, not black like they are burnt, but rather sunburnt, with colour,

> they are so delicate and pretty, you don't think of the rainforest as being delicate and pretty (2010).

Claire Souter described the relationship between the external and internal world as an act similar to breathing. The information from the outside world is inhaled like breath, to become an inner feeling, and internal experience, "The tropical couldn't be external". Her description was similar to the fragrance Gauguin calls *Noa Noa*, that embodies the tropical experience. Souter continues; "sound, colour and smell are sensations that I am aware of. They all go in and they come out. I'm just painting and those things are there" (Souter, 2010). The tone of her description suggests that the tropical vision is triggered by both observation of what is around her and the feelings awakened by her senses. Souter's paintings show the veins of leaves, transparent sunlight and decay or imperfection as "design…that achieves balance" (Souter, 2010). The sensation of place underlined by Claudine Marzik;

> Flavour is a big part of how something looks to me, I often think I can smell the surface patina and when I go away from Cairns, or go to visit family, the first thing I notice when I come back is a very herby smell. Paradise and the strong herbal scent and smell are definitely something that goes together (Marzik, 2010).

Gauguin's tropical experience continues through a new generation's reaction the tropical scent of the Far North Queensland wet tropics.

The trigger of tropical space is described by Claudine Marzik as,

> …a process that goes from the eyes, through the emotions and gets out emotionally, it is an emotional process…this looks like just what is in

> my garden, that space behind the shed, that patina, or the rain pouring down…what you see and experience is actually just what I do (2010).

Marzik reveals the contrast between the temperate and Torrid Zone and the elements that signify the textures and layers of tropical geography, its impact on her emotion and the creative process that responds to her perceptions. The inner vision of the tropics is described in intuitive terms by Amanda Feher; "instinct is primary, no matter how much training you have as a visual artist…the environment enhances the focus on those areas" (2010). Feher said the shaping elements in her work are; "Sound, colour, texture…seem to be a predominant influence in my work and life" (Feher, 2010). The tropics as a sensation affected Ian Smith in terms of his interaction with the physical environment; "I do feel inspiration from a tropical experience… I do get refreshed" (Smith, 2010). Smith's inspirations are present also in Laurine Field's imagery of tropical nature; "My work celebrates the Botanic Gardens and the leisure aspect of nature as opposed to the science aspect" (2010). Ray Crooke described his documentation of the tropics in technical terms, of how he actually records then paints his imagery, similar to the way Matisse absorbed his experience of tropical Tahiti, and made work later in his studio. Although Crooke's methodology is a well-understood practice, it demonstrates how he compartmentalises his tropical landscape experience, then restructures it in a studio setting as an internal reaction to his sample sketches and collected experience, "When I'm away, I take photographs, and also do drawings, when I come back (to the studio) I do the paintings" (2010). The drawings tend to have more detail than the paintings. As he explained, "That would be because I am on the spot. When I come back I can alter them. The drawings are a start. You have got to start somewhere" (2010).

4.10 Significance of tropics in regional location

Survey Question 6: Does being located outside the major metropolitan areas offer special advantages in terms of studio space, in terms of unique subject or in terms of cultural significance?

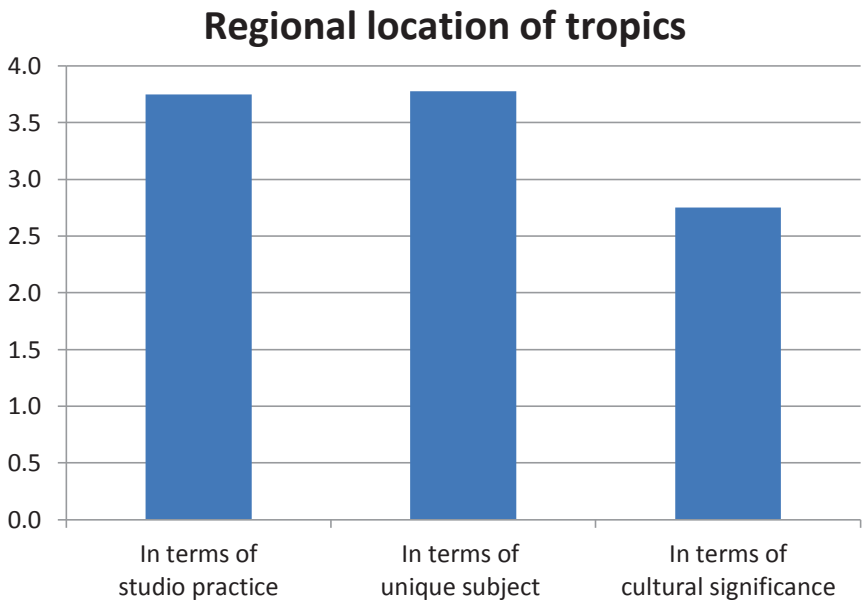

Figure 4.7 Artist responses to regional location of tropics 2010.

This data suggested the visual features of the tropics make the space unique. Having a studio located in this region was seen as advantageous, whereas, for career building, distance to the mainstream marketplace was seen as a disadvantage. Strategies were identified to overcome these obstacles. Six of the candidates responded positively to the advantage of having access to unique subject matter. Five indicated that studio practice presented an advantage as there is more space in the regions and real estate is cheaper, where four candidates said that being located in a regional area was not an advantage in terms of being culturally significant, because they missed out on important exhibitions in the cities.

In Figure 4.7 the unique subject matter available in the tropics is signalled as the preferred description. The engagement with place for Margaret Olley was about immersing herself in the landscape. She wrote to me saying that during her time in the tropics, "I painted out of doors" (2010). The special advantage for Claire Souter's painting practice in the regional location of the tropics was her dynamic interaction with the community and culture. She agreed that the environment shapes cultural significance; "There is significance in where we are culturally with my students and studio; it contributes to the culture of here" (2010). The pace and environment of Kuranda presented a unique way of working and her subjects are shaped by the unusual environment. "I've always lived outside the major metropolitan areas…which impacts on the subject matter. Here I am painting foliage" (2010).

The advantages and disadvantages of a regional tropical location, according to Ian Smith, are

> Probably you can have better studio space. Artists, sculptors, writers, choosing to be an artist in North Queensland don't have to have the heater on. Real estate tends to be cheaper. There you can use more space. A lot of people sitting in Sydney think that they have to [live in the city], for business reasons. I think they wish they had a big studio in a big backyard. But the person with the big studio/ barn in North Queensland knows they miss the wheeling and dealing going on in the city. That is the decision you have to make. I strongly agreed that to do the work is an advantage in the regions, but to be in the city is the business or recognition end. In Brisbane I am on the fence, in striking distance of Nirvana in the north and Mecca in Sydney (Smith, 2010).

If North Queensland remains unpopular due its perceived lesser economic viability, the negative human impact on the fragile tropical environment may ultimately be minimised. Ian Smith stated that the business aspect of the art market is driven by the capital cities and the mainstream. Ray Crooke has managed to overcome this problem by achieving mainstream recognition.

Laurine Field signalled possible traps in the tourist industry in North Queensland, "There is a need to be wary of the tropics as a commercialised product" (Field, 2010). She was referring to tourist kitsch, which has a market of its own. Field recognised that the location of the regional wet tropics was in some cases economically beneficial to artists, "the proximity to the tourist market and Regional art organisations." Because she drew her inspiration from botanical nature and the tropical plants of the Botanic gardens, she saw the location as positive for "the unique subject matter. For my painting it was helpful to have an individual perspective which was the ground view and close up" (2010). She also identified some negative considerations. "…being further away from the hub, major commercial galleries, and government purchasing opportunities… public art programs" (Field, 2010). One gets a sense of being left out of the national art conversation, not necessarily because of subject matter, but because of geographical distance.

Claudine Marzik's comments reflected on the advantages and disadvantages of life in the regional tropics. She uses the problem of isolation as her unique subject matter.

> We miss out on a lot of things working up here, but then again we are quite exotic. If we take our practice seriously, and take our work down south and wherever we can, and we get selected, we are selected because

> we do live and work in this environment. There are so many famous artists who have lived and worked up here, who are very well known in Melbourne and Sydney and New York and Milan. I think we do miss out on information and networking, so I try to be on all the mailing lists of art organisations (Marzik, 2010).

As well seeing an advantage in being seen as special for emanating from the regional wet tropics, Claudine Marzik also saw the environment as a creative influence.

> The theme that I work with does show that I live in a very special environment, that is not urban, and creating work with Australian themes and landscapes, that is when they would look at my work as representing the area up here (2010).

The isolation of the North Queensland tropics was seen as both an advantage and a challenge Amanda Feher. It was

> …an advantage in terms of focussing on the work at hand and not being distracted, and also being in this environment nurtures creativity and your intuition. But there is also a lot of adversity for being an artist in the north; you are a long way from metropolitan areas, the freight on your work is very expensive as well as your insurances. You are a long way from contact with those centres so you don't necessarily have the ability to be abreast of what is going on unless you have the internet, but actually physically being there is a great benefit to walk in and talk to people and see what is going on and attend those huge exhibitions, and work out what the politics are (Feher, 2010).

Feher also considered that there is existing bias in the mainstream which prevents inclusiveness towards art work from the regions; “There are a lot of preconceived ideas about art from within the mainstream; that is unfortunate, you don’t have the dedicated art transport companies that will come up here and they are very expensive, because of the remote location” (Feher, 2010).

> The problem of distance and expense was described by Feher in the following: Freighting a large scale work to Sydney you are talking about $15,000, and then you’ve got to get it back if it doesn’t sell. There are financial reasons why I haven’t taken up opportunities, even though people have wanted to include my work in major exhibitions (2010).

Aside from the economic challenge, her response to being unique echoed Claudine Marzik’s response; “I don’t think I’d be the same if I was in an urban environment, I think that is the key, I’m different because of the area that I live in and my inspiration and intuitive feelings and emotions are completely different to what they would be if I had grown up in a metropolitan area” (Feher, 2010).

Ray Crooke’s commercial success in the mainstream has been a positive outcome. “Well for some reason it sort of works, I never expected it to. There is a boxed market for my work. I just sold one the other day at Sotheby’s.” While his work fetches high prices in Sydney and Melbourne, Crooke says he is unsure about the art market or viability of a gallery in Cairns.

> I don’t know what goes on in Cairns. I once thought it might be an idea to have a gallery in Cairns. It’s really hard work, and a lot of cargo, but I can send it down to Sydney or Melbourne (2010).

Ray Crooke identified disadvantages in operating within the mainstream, suggesting that special advantages and/or disadvantages exist in both circumstances: the regions and the metropolis.

James Baines struggled with being located in the tropics; “I have never been attracted to the tropics, it’s just that I ended up here, I found myself coming back here, without any intention of coming back” (2010). He also saw the positive side of studio practice; “it is easy to be reclusive so you can paint” (2010). The regional location of the tropics had a shaping effect on the artists’ work in terms of things like opportunity, recognition, freighting expense, cultural hubs, and economic issues. Within the sample group, the special advantage of being located outside the mainstream was the unique shaping factor of the region. The region described a place of focus for uninterrupted creative processes.

4.11 Tropical light and light in painting

Survey Question 7: Would you say the light is different from other latitudes, is it brighter and whiter, does it have more yellow tones?

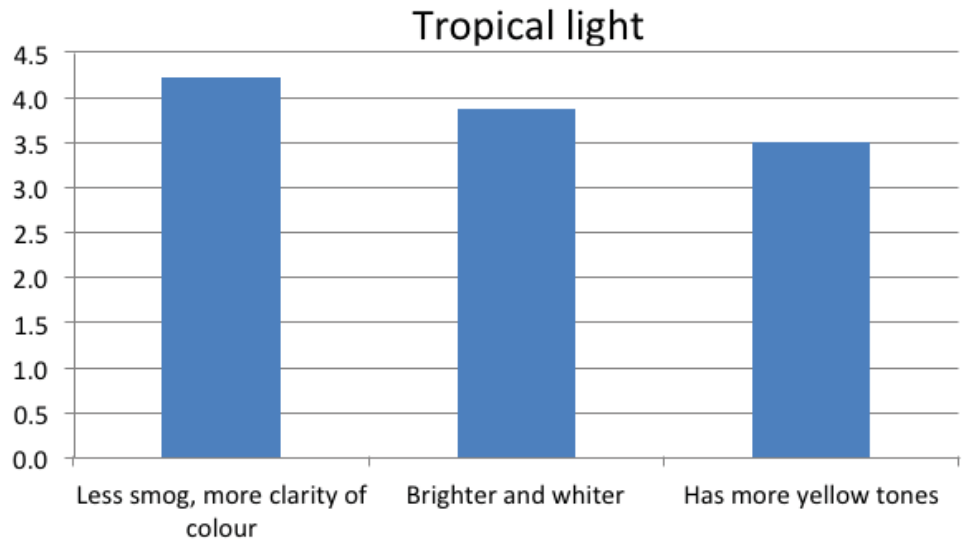

Figure 4.8 Impact of light in tropics 2010.

The Australian geographical identity has historically implied intense light. Light has also been used by painters to distinguish time frames. "The nature of this distinguishing light changed altogether, from a pre-war haze to glittering transparency" (Eagle & Jones, 1994, p. 19). Margaret Preston viewed the environmental features of the Australian landscape as "harsh, cool light…sharp flatness…pure unbroken form, and stern and simple colour" (Osgood, 1964, p. 187). She was speaking from her experience of the variations she had seen across the continent, not specifically the wet tropics of North Queensland. Arthur Streeton commented that the light in Cairo presented; "strong sunlight, rich colours" (G. Smith, 1995, p. 131), which he recorded with a lightened palette.

In the survey response of Figure 4.8, the artists had conflicting responses to the nature of light, as to whether it could be seen as tropical or temperate. For Margaret Olley tropical light was different. She wrote that it "has brighter and significantly, greener light" (2010). Helen Wiltshire, however, stated the opposite. "I don't believe the unique quality of colour and light is significant" (2010). Wiltshire's paintings

demonstrated an emphasis on primary colour, with imagery of a symbolic tropics that weave together bright light and motifs representative of the natural world. The impact of light on the effect of colour influenced Claire Souter's reaction to her tropical surroundings, "there is more clarity of colour" (2010). The pristine aspect of nature was referenced in her perception of clean, clear colour. Claudine Marzik compares Europe to North Queensland. "The light is very different from Europe, it's always in your face, it is sort of strong…richer light, and goes together with what the seasons do to the environment, it influences my work" (Marzik, 2010). Ian Smith explained his perception of tropical light in relation to atmospheric conditions,

> On a clear day in North Queensland it is very sharp focus and clean. On a gloomy rainy day, it looks more like a Whistler *Nocturne on the Thames,* than a sunny day in the fruit orchard, in Van Gogh. Therefore the tropics is prone to as much atmospheric variety as anywhere else, although a lot of people might say that in more temperate places with winter and snow and short days and across a whole range of things including when the season bursts in to spring. It could be argued that they [temperate artists] have a greater variety of weather effects; they might think tropical North Queensland is just hot and bright (2010).

James Baines' description of one of his paintings recorded an emotional response to light and its effect on the landscape, "The sky, the grey in the clouds…the light shining on the hill…it's magic" (Baines, 2010).

4.12 Rural paradise

Survey Question 8: Does the tropical deliver a rural notion of paradise and would you describe this as, less smog, more clarity of colour, clean air quality and lower levels of pollution, access to nature or a relaxed environment?

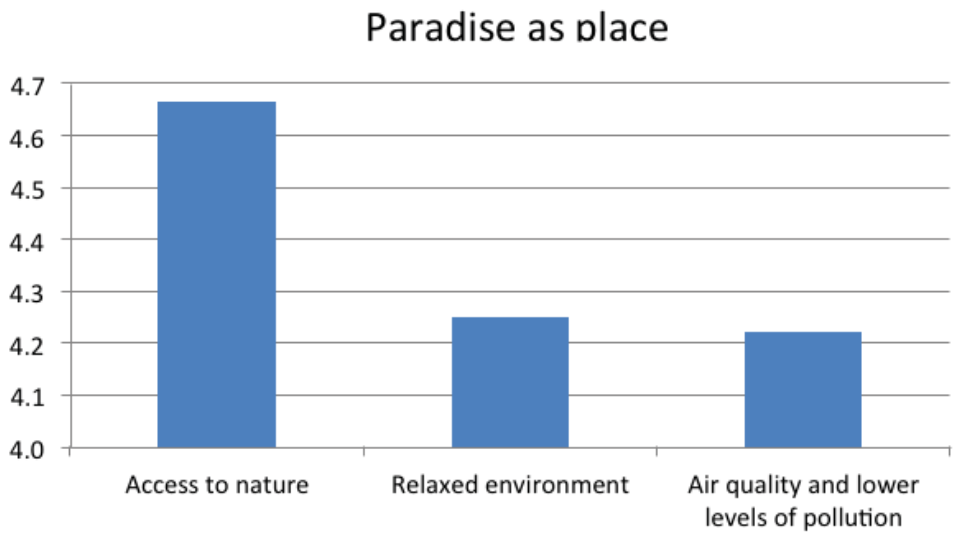

Figure 4.9 What constitutes paradise 2010.

In Figure 4.9 the data suggested access to nature was paramount. The variation in atmospheric conditions was observed by Amanda Feher as an element of visual enrichment, where the sky and the atmosphere have texture, "There is smog from the bushfires and dust from the farming communities; this can intensify the colours in the sunsets and add texture," or otherwise, "the air is clearer, the colours are clearer, there is more definition" (Feher, 2010). She offered a contrast, "Just coming back from Melbourne, the colours there are more muted, by environmental factors like the smog of the big city, there is a kind of haze that takes away the clarity and richness…whereas up here there is warmth to the colour" (Feher, 2010). The essence of light in the previous survey question is distinct from atmosphere, which operates not only through visual perceptions but also through air quality. As described by Laurine Field, "The air

is cleaner" (Field, 2010). The cleanliness of the air was shown as a contrast to the contamination in the city. Ian Smith said, "In some areas of western Sydney the light depends on what is happening [at the sulphur factory] in terms of whether you are getting more yellow tones in the environment, but I don't think the sun is more yellow up there or anything like that" (2010).

On the question of whether the tropics provides a more relaxed lifestyle, Amanda Feher said, "People are much more relaxed, much more laid back even in terms of time…everything is less rushed than in the city" (2010). However, cyclones and bushfires impact on a tropical rural lifestyle. Amanda Feher said, "It is a highly dangerous area to live in, and it adds a lot of stress to creating in this area" (2010). Other stress factors were identified by Claire Souter, who didn't agree that the tropics were more relaxed. She pointed out her studio school and gallery are busy, in addition to the stress of taking exhibitions of her work to Adelaide. "I don't think when you look around that it is more relaxed. Yes, I am more relaxed; I don't tighten up and shiver" (Souter, 2010). Ray Crooke agreed that the lifestyle was more relaxed. The notion of being relaxed was described by Ian Smith as:

> There is a condescending attitude from tourists, and the relaxed lifestyle is played on by the incumbent Tropicales. That is something they have got over the city folk…like I remember you couldn't wear a pair of thongs into a pub after five o'clock (2010).

But the effects of climate were positive for Laurine Field; "The heat makes us slowdown in the tropics…being close to nature makes you relax" (2010).

Linking paradise to the tropics is an ongoing problem for James Baines. His attitude displayed ambivalence, together with frustration and despondency.

> I hated this place…back in the 60s…we came through Malanda and saw the moss hanging on the telegraph poles, and it was drizzling, I felt like the clouds were sitting on my head, when I realised I was coming back here, I thought, oh, no, how can I live here? (Baines, 2010).

The impact of increasing urbanisation was noted by James Baines. "…more people coming into the area, more rules and regulations, they've turned Malanda into Lego town…nothing to do with the tropics" (Baines, 2010). The interviews confirmed that a tropical lifestyle provides a relaxed and mostly uninterrupted creative world, advantageous for art production. However, it is also culturally isolated or disconnected, and threatened by population expansion and urban development.

4.13 The missing link

Survey Question 9: Does tropical culture transgress into mainstream culture as a souvenir, as a dreamed of destination, or as the missing link?

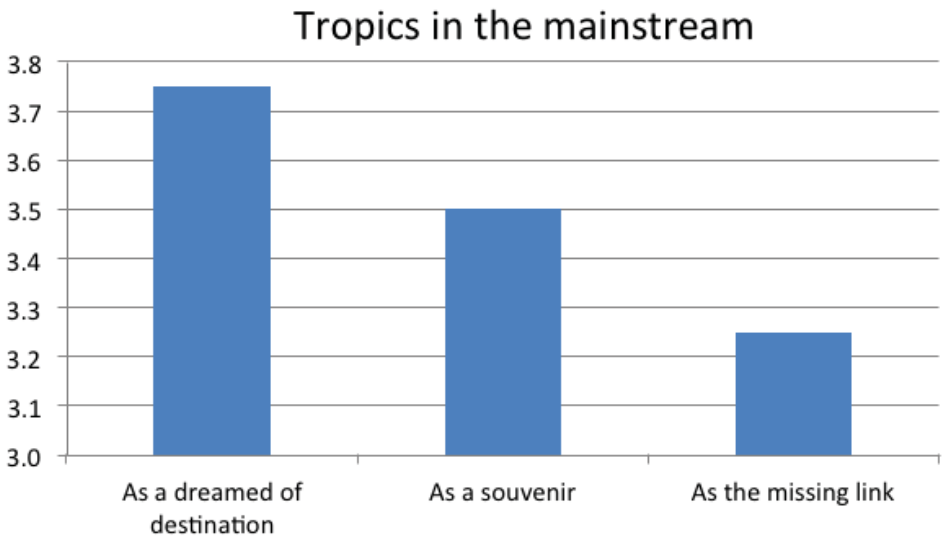

Figure 4.10 Tropical position in western thought 2010.

The outcomes suggested by Figure 4.10 show that the tropics are mostly considered a dreamed of destination. The idea of the tropics as a missing link is qualified by Laurine Field. She established the concept of tropical space through its symbolic meaning, "Some of the meaning has come about through paintings, by artists such as Gauguin, Ray Crooke…as well as artists like Helen Wiltshire, these artists helped construct meaning" (2010). Whereas, Claire Souter said:

> A lot of people come to the tropics for a holiday, or an escape. I took tropical paintings to Adelaide, and sold eight paintings. What I see down there is that people don't bring the tropics back, other than kitsch or as a souvenir (2010).

She said that other than her paintings depicting the foliage of the tropics, Adelaide didn't represent the tropics, although she suggested that there is a growing awareness that values rainforest and nature, "Maybe people are learning more, greening the world" (Souter, 2010).

Contextualising the tropics for a mainstream western audience was described by James Baines, who said, "People want to come here, they think it is…fruitful or as pleasant" (2010). However, Amanda Feher didn't think the tropics found its way into mainstream culture, "From my recent trip to Melbourne, other than a similarity from the Mornington peninsula, I didn't see anything manmade or art or otherwise that looked remotely like North Queensland" (2010).

In describing North Queensland as distinct, Ian Smith said "In Australian society life is full of ironies" (2010). Smith believed

> One irony is that people from the south would love to go to the north, but these same people look down intellectually or culturally on the people who choose to live there all the time. People who have arrived intrepidly from the south or elsewhere have been aware of that slur and have revelled in that distinctness, and have defined themselves from the others. As for our uniqueness, similarities or differences around the tropical places of the world, I would point out that people in Indonesia would live quite differently to people in Innisfail or Tully, and people in Panama, Mexico or Africa. Of course we're different. I think the people who live in North Queensland to a large extent, become proud to live there, and are proud they are different, from the tourists who may have a deferential attitude" (Smith, 2010).

The recurrent qualities depicted in paintings and narratives within tropical Far North Queensland convey an understanding of the people's lived experience. This is shaped by how the tropics have been imagined in Western art and positioned in a current understanding of tropical space. The contribution of the tropical imagery of Far North Queensland is a neglected visual area of representation in Australian art. The medium of painting specifically addresses this issue as a visual style of communication that has led to a further understanding of tropical space.

4.14 Summary

My data exposed the contrast between the empirical and individual responses to reveal a contrasting set of views. The fact that painters continue to take inspiration from the tropics in many ways has been documented through lifestyle, nature, and exotic colour. The more difficult aspects of history also demonstrate the influences that

connect artists to tropical space. The artist responses are framed by these environmental concerns. The human interpretation of tropical space and the boundaries of the creative experience are described in James Baines' response to the tropical vegetation in the colour green, and the spiritual context. The monsoon season present a psychological challenge in which the environment is emotionally stifling. Claudine Marzik's reaction to the sensory aspect of smell in the tropics, and Amanda Feher's experience of the tropical climate as debilitating or invigorating, describes the link between natural space and human creativity in the tropics. A further review of the responses from Crooke, Olley, Souter, Smith and Field to art and place examines the tropical aesthetic of Far North Queensland.

Chapter 5 Exhibition Work

5.1 Aim of my work

My work aims to reflect my experience. It uses imagery from the tropical world, memory and painting traditions, and expresses a current, "view produced *in* and *from* the tropics," as a response to "the history of tropicality as a European concept" (Stepan, 2001, p. 29). The work explores the symbolic relationship between humans and nature in the tropics through understanding of the value of the natural environment. The work responds to sensory aspects of local space and creates meaning through narrative compositions. Paintings communicate through the visual senses, in which ideas in the pictures change over time. They may become reflective and historical, as in *Portrait of Percy Trezise* (2001), or they may be mysterious, as in the *Three Graces* (2001), which foreshadowed the arrival of my three daughters. The present and the past tense are reflected in Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art* (1950), in which his notion of the role of art is to consider truthfulness,

> The origin of the work of art - that is, the origin of both the creators and the preservers, which is to say of a people's historical existence - is art. This is so because art in its essence is an origin: a distinctive way in which truth comes into being, that is, becomes historical (qtd. in Krell, 1977, p. 202).

Heidegger reasoned that artists' access truth through the poetic sequence of "…bestowing, grounding and beginning," and this active approach uses art to document history: "Art is history in the essential sense that it grounds history," (qtd. in Krell, 1977, p. 202). Art presents a practical way to measure the process of change over the passage of time. The work produced for this enquiry examines the context of art history

and tropical geography in order to locate arts practice. This chapter utilises the studio-as-laboratory (Sullivan, 2009). It is a crucial research site, employed to synthesise the ideas of an imaginary, real and participatory investigation of tropical paradise. Information collected from the artists I interviewed demonstrates the research workflow and distils the exploration of the tropics through painting.

Painting in the tropics offers an explanation of the nexus between the physical and the metaphysical in our perceptions and understanding of actual physiological characteristics of tropical space. It is a theory of description where "definite descriptions purport to pick out a single object" (Griffin, 2003, p. 203). The object of space was reclassified into smaller sub-spaces, in order to determine its meaning through the questionnaire responses. The ability to then view the descriptions as sets of marks, patterns, colours, forms, characters and lines provides an analysis of the perception of the tropics. For Heidegger, truth in art is either an appeal to the past as preliminary reflective knowledge, or a forward projection which he poses as an either-or dilemma. His play with the idea of the dilemma as riddle is answered by the ability to see it.

> Almost from the time when specialized thinking about art and the artist began, this thought was called aesthetic. Aesthetics takes the work of art as an object, the object of *aisthesis,* of sensuous apprehension in the wide sense. Today we call this apprehension lived experience (qtd. in Krell, 1977, p. 204).

The process of painting accesses the inner world of thought, as well as the observed physical world, to bring together fact and fantasy. In this way I can source ideas about the tropics from the French painters, who engaged meaningfully with ideas

and imagery pertaining to the tropics. This is contrasted with the ideas of the case study painters, in order to re-examine meaning through personal narratives and collected concepts (Sullivan, 2009). This multilateral approach produces an historical, local and personal account of lived tropical experience reflected in painting practice. Heidegger continues,

> The way in which man experiences art is supposed to give information about its essence. Lived experience is the source that is the standard not only for art appreciation and enjoyment but also for its artistic creation (qtd. in Krell, 1977, p. 204).

Through my survey I have examined aesthetic responses to the physiological environment which reflects my fascination with tropical nature, as expressed through a progression of paintings. The progression of work from the research is a response to the aim of the study which seeks to locate a tropical sensibility. The technical designs of Gauguin, Rousseau and Matisse provide references for image-making about the tropics through their motifs, symbols and colours.

This chapter seeks to clarify the ideas behind the painted forms, colours, patterns and visual devices of the paintings that depict tropical paradise. I unpack the content and meaning of the paintings presented in my exhibitions to reveal ongoing developments, strategies and discoveries. These outcomes manifest in practical terms as experimentation with feedback from peer artists, colleagues, gallery curators and directors.

The studio work experimented with ideas and imagery of narratives about lived experience, tropical exploration, Orientalism, and French modernist traditions. The autobiographical emphasis is a way of accessing original thought and using tropical

surroundings. From my online searches and visits to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, National Gallery of Victoria, Queensland Art Gallery and the Australian National Gallery, I found that paintings of the tropics are comparatively rare in the museum collections within Australia. This is not surprising as Museum policy emphasises collecting local work, which is outlined in the opinion of Nikolaus Baylart,

> In my experience, generally I have observed that Regional Galleries in Queensland have more of an interest in tropical scenes. Institutions generally have collection rationales which determine what work they collect; so (for example) the National Gallery of Victoria, where there is no tropical environment, and artists aren't connected to tropical environments, is less likely to collect those works. Whereas Cairns Regional Gallery and Queensland Art Gallery are obligated to collect work on behalf of the state, which means Queensland has a far greater collection of tropical paintings than the other states (Baylart, 2014, pers. comm).

5.2 Influences

I have been inspired by visiting the Australian collections (in the Art Gallery of New South Wales, National Gallery of Victoria, Queensland Art Gallery and the Australian National Gallery), as well as some of the major art museums in Europe, North America, Mexico and the State collection in Bali. My painting practice responds to the overall influence of Italian Renaissance painters, such as Michelangelo, Botticelli and Raphael, Magic Realist painters of Mexico, such as Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, and German Expressionist painters including Gerhard Richter, Marc Chagall, Anselm Kiefer and Herman Nitsch. In this study I chose to refer to particular artists who

consciously use the tropics in their work; Gauguin, Matisse and Rousseau. These three French painters depicted the tropics for its psychological and geographical difference to the space occupied by the temperate zone. These artists engaged with the idea of tropicality explored by Nancy Stepan and Felix Driver, "as an imaginative submersion in hot places" (Stepan, 2001, p. 19). In a formal manner, through the painting conventions of their time, the French artists constructed an idea of the tropics in which they brought vibrancy out of the graphic appearance of a flattened picture plane. "Gauguin's colours and patterns respected the two dimensionality of the picture plane…(Henri) Rousseau and later Matisse, also became masters of this kind of decorative space" (qtd. in Lubroth, 1951, n.p). The influence of these painters underscored the influence of their vision of the Torrid Zone within their paintings of the tropics, as a brightly iridescent space against shadow.

5.3 Development of arts practice: selected works

The development of my painting practice arose from the goal to use the French artists' vision of the tropics through painterly conventions, identified as movements of post-impressionism, primitivism, modernism and fauvism. I borrowed from their technical applications, which was followed by overlaying my personal narrative. This was contextualised by the North Queensland case study painters' approach to representing lived experience in tropical nature as a synthesis; "hybrid in construction" (F. S Connelly, 1995, p. 2). I did this because the *ideas* borrowed from primitivism, exoticism and Orientalism mix styles from European art movements that exist in the "eye and the mind" (F. S Connelly, 1995, p. 2).

The decision to create a body of work was based on using a painting framework. This uses large scale canvas panels to sequence individual narratives, which together

form a broader story. The style describes and distorts the objects, landscape and figures through abstraction of forms, in order to reveal the image as a symbolic idea. This method considers the visual languages used by Matisse, Gauguin and Rousseau, who rendered stylised representations of the human form and environment overlayed with their feelings for their subject. Where especially Gauguin and Matisse used the female character to represent detached desire for the tropics, I paint imagery that accesses a domestic portrayal of family life and experience. Further decisions meant painting suites of work that extended earlier work ideas. This included *Kuranda Hokkaido Dreaming* (1997), with fan dancers from Hokkaido, my sister with Indian skirt, and a Chinese Ibis, imaged in front of Lake Barrine on the Atherton Tablelands.

Plate 5.1 Angela Meyer, *Kuranda Hokkaido Dreaming*, 1997, Oil on canvas, 1.7 x 3m.
Photo David Campbell.

In some of my paintings the environment masks or overwhelms the psychological moment; as in *Proserpina's Lament* (2013) and *Orpheus in the Underworld* (2013). In *Descent into the Abyss* (2013), the figure is veiled in a deep blue

film produced with layering, transparency and gestural brush work to respond to the vibrancy of the tropics and kinetic forms in space. In other paintings the tropical environment is the central statement, as in *Philodendron in the garden* (2012) and *Beatrice in the garden* (2012). In *Ellis Beach Looking North* (2012), the botany contains variance in depth and receding shadow. The wash or block colour that I explore on the canvases is contrasted with the linear elements and passages that describe form. This kind of sensory engagement accesses *Dasein* through being in a tropical environment teeming with life, due to the abundant rainfall, sunlight and temperature. The light and shadows of tropical life describe the ongoing balance between an internal relationship with tropical space and practical daily events. This emerges as a story of place. Using large scale canvases to project the grandness of nature in tropical space, was similar to the way Seurat handled scale in *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte*, (1884), which emphasises the space of the outdoors. Nature is a fundamental anchor which gives bearings to space and time, around the temporality of impermanence. From a series on the Great Dividing Range, *Herberton in Jacaranda Season* (1999) expresses the symbolic links between the personal and the external.

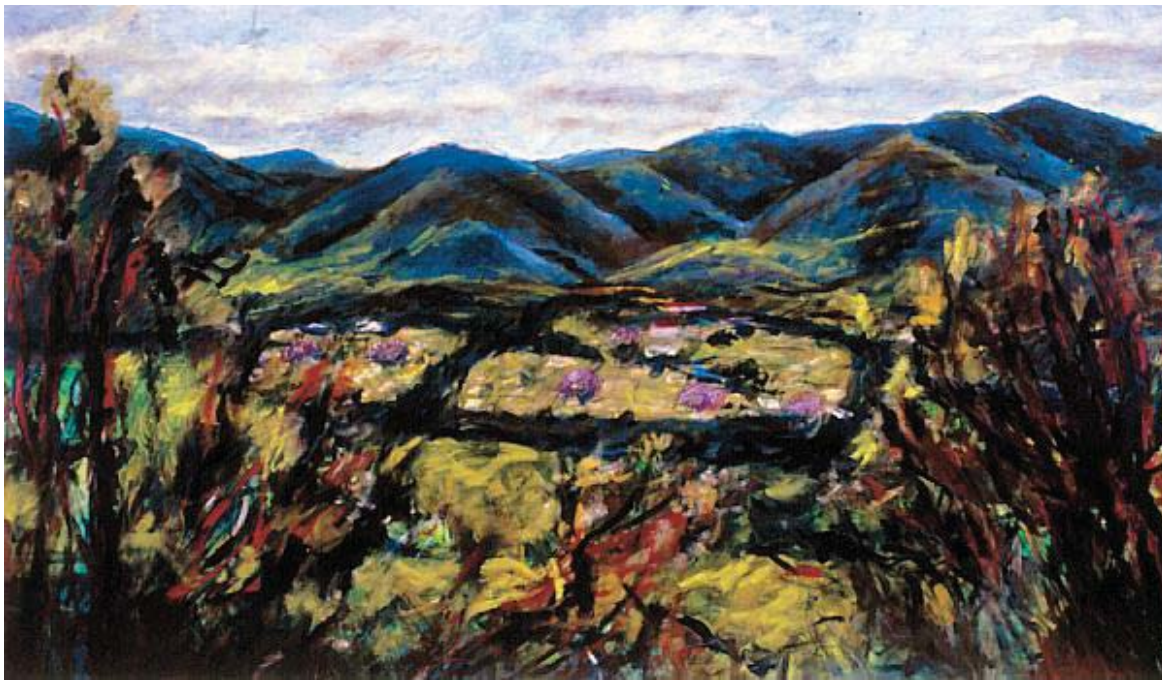

Plate 5.2 Angela Meyer, *Herberton in Jacaranda season,* 1999, Oil on canvas, 1.7 x 3m.
Photo David Campbell.

5.3.1 Tropical Paradise: Its Light and its Shadows

The exhibition *Tropical Paradise: Its light and its shadows* shown at Tanks Art Centre in 2012, displayed a series of visual narratives of inner and outer world places. It also considered the contradictions of lived experience with tropical paradise, which is both positive and negative. The Tanks exhibition located the thesis research in a public forum, to demonstrate a measured response to a hybrid identity of the artist/theorist, who works within the studio to produce new knowledge (Sullivan, 2009). The exhibition enabled the meaning and insight to be more fully ascertained. It allowed me to see how these outcomes impact on historical and local frameworks, through audience reaction to the compositions and meaning. The contrast between the neutral tones in the Tanks Art Centre architecture and the colour palette in the paintings were described by Amanda Feher as “bright expression” (2012). This was echoed by Trish Molloy in her statement, “It did look a bit like a fluorescent cartoon, and North Queensland is a bit

like a fluorescent cartoon" (Molloy, 2013, pers. comm). Before the paintings were shown, Ian Smith previewed the work. He wrote "The paintings are large-scale ambitious narrative paintings in the tradition of historic narrative paintings…however; they are occupied by the artist's personal life and surroundings…the point being to examine being an artist in a tropical place" (Smith, 2012).

Smith then described the paint application.

> The paintings favour thickness and thinness of finish because that is what the world looks and feels like; that is we perceive the world visually in different weights and measures, and with unequal points of focus, and, emotions come always in different weights, measures and degrees of focus (Smith, 2012).

Smith said the paintings reflected my experiences of looking at history paintings.

> They freely call on classical references like Michelangelo. They are executed in the vigorous, energetic, immediate manner of much twentieth-century expressionist painting, for example Max Beckman, Emil Nolde, Sydney Nolan, Chagall and more recently the German neoexpressionists, and the active immediacy of twentieth-century century styles (2010).

Smith argued that in the case of painting "one image is presented, and it is complicated, and can be enjoyed on many levels, but this is the lot of the medium (2010).He cited the example of Rembrandt's painting *Night Watch* (1642), which, "can't spell out its narrative, like a book or a film," but he continued, "Narrative paintings are like a jigsaw puzzle; they put information

together" (Smith, 2012). Finally, it is the viewer that "reads" the symbols of painted code in order to understand the artist's ideas. Paintings are mirrors that catch symbols invested with meaning through juxtaposition of style and concept. Ingrid Hoffman thought my work, "argues the case for expressing in paint your dearly-held connection to place through the motifs that carry that meaning for you…the metaphors suggested by shadow – darker, hidden, less obvious, unknowable dimensions" (Hoffman, 2013).

The painting *Philodendron in the garden* presents a horizontal layering of perspectives, a foreground of garden, a mid-ground of bright sunlight and a background of the upper tree canopy and sky. The foreground shapes of various plant species is about the warmth of the tropics, in which the "colour and unusual variety of plant species in optimum health… reveals a great life force" (Field, 2010), or as a "beautiful, pristine, balmy, idyllic" place (Smith, 2010). The warmth is achieved with bright colours to describe tonal value. At the centre of the painting a passage of light surrounded by busy foliage frames allows the eye to rest, reflect and restore. Simon Schama argues that "landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination" (Schama, 1995, p. 25), and this painting connects nature with cultural projection. The constructed garden is an exotic plant collection that symbolises the tropics, which includes species of plants no longer found in their natural habitats.

Plate 5.3 Angela Meyer, *Philodendron in the Garden,* 2012, Oil on canvas, 1.7 x 3m.
Photo Michael Marzik.

Arched over the understory plants is the philodendron, whose enormous leaf shapes characterise the tropical climate. This opulent vegetation impacted on Ray Crooke when he travelled with the army by rail along the Queensland coast, and saw "different vegetation" (Crooke, 2012), more varied than that in the Victorian landscape. The mid-ground sunlight portrays Wiltshire's enthusiasm for tropical nature as exuberant and powerful (Wiltshire, 2010). The yellow hue is warmed by adding Indian yellow, and cooled by mixing zinc white. It is then applied in opaque sections and translucent areas. The birds that fly through the foliage portray the garden space as both active and tranquil, and contrast with the motionless architecture of the plant structures, to show the interdependent relationship between flora and fauna. I painted this work in spring when the bromeliads, crotons and cordylines in magenta and scarlet hues were at their peak. Brush strokes are applied loosely to suggest movement, with repetitive pattern in cross hatching and overlayed by darker Prussian blue tones to indicate depth. Olive green and Indian red are mixed for earthy tones in the foreground. Pink violet

hues contrast with sunlight to generate a lush atmosphere. Central to the composition are the fern fronds, with their tendrils reaching into the stillness. The paint colours and configuration of the forms revisit Matisse's, Gauguin's and Rousseau's sensory responses to tropical environments through their styles, colours and compositional devices.

Claudine Marzik's observation of the tropics as a, "lush environment" with its "exotic flowers" (2010) was combined with Claire Souter's sensory observations: "Sound, colour and smell are sensations that I am aware of. They all go in and they come out. I'm just painting and those things are there" (2010). This culminates in a "design…that achieves balance" (Souter, 2010). Matisse used bright colour and decorative pattern for his paper cut-out compositions. *Philodendron in the garden* describes my personal reaction to the tropics, understood through the information from the case study painters. It reflects on the notion of tropical paradise as a heavenly garden. From this work I have learnt to scale up the botanical imagery that I usually paint in acrylic on paper. This is done by using the solvent in place of water to thin the washes and build the layers of pigment. This achieves the opacity and translucency that describe the garden and foliage.

My priority is not to order nature but to appreciate it as a whole, and the intent behind the expression was built on experimentation. The imaginative world that emerges within the two dimensional planes explores a visual language of emotion, observation and physical sensation. This is created by passages of block colour, painted lines and textured brushwork. The marks on the canvas link the real world and the painted world, where the form emerges from mixing pigments, loading brushes and measuring the geometry of the plants.

Paintings that I saw in Europe, North America and Mexico contain large scale imagery that inspires my work. I created a combined aesthetic from Modernism, Post-modernism, Magic Realism and the Renaissance. Artists who made an impression on me include Anselm Kiefer, A. R. Penk, Gerhard Richter, Jackson Pollock, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Monet, Matisse, Diego Rivera and Picasso. The different kinds of vibrancy and symbolism of these styles revealed a common denominator; that is the vision of an inner world that responded to the outward currents of culture and place. My suite of paintings connects a sequence of narratives in order to depict a vision of place. This vision expresses the ideas I absorbed from real world research.

In *Beatrice in the Garden* my daughter symbolises growth and light, as an expression of nature. The idea of Mother Nature is painted as a world of celebration through a prism of primary colours. They are sharp and clear to link the real world garden with emotional expression. The drawing styles in the picture construction are observed from life, as well as referenced by personal symbols: the leaf forms of the custard apple tree within the beehive gingers. The red cordyline produces the Fauvist idea of block colour in an exaggerated hue. The intensity of colour and graphic use of the surface is achieved with a wash of solvent and oil pigment. This aims to preserve the original lines of the under drawing. The form of the garden emerges from drawn lines that describe shapes and angles. . This style borrows from Matisse's paintings *The Dance* (1912), *The Beasts of the Sea* (1950) and *Music* (1939), in which he flattens the picture plane with broad areas of colour. These are applied in translucent layers to create a backlit or stained glass window effect, achieving radiance or iridescence. His graphic line maintains a raw link to experience.

Plate 5.4 Angela Meyer, *Beatrice in the Garden*, 2012, Oil on canvas, 1.7 x 3m.
Photo Michael Marzik.

Ray Crooke alerted me to the 'Matisse-like qualities' in my earlier painting *Portrait of Seraphina*, (2003) (Crooke, pers. comm. 2005). These qualities include graphic line, block colour, stylised portraiture and repeat pattern. Ray Crooke encouraged me to consider Matisse's attitude to portraiture as not concerned with exactness but rather a more universal truth. "There exists an essential truth that must be disengaged from the outward appearance of the objects to be represented. This is the only truth that matters." (qtd. in Klein, 2001, p. 19). Matisse continued: "the essential expression of the work depends almost entirely on the projection of the feeling of the artist in relation to his model rather than the organic exactitude of the model" (qtd. in Klein, 2001, p. 23).

Plate 5.5 Angela Meyer, *Portrait of Seraphina,* 2003, Oil on canvas, 88 x 110cm.
Photo David Campbell.

Klein argued that Matisse thought all art, including portraiture, should defer to the "projection of the artist's sensibility…as the principle goal of artistic composition" (2001, p. 24). In this way Matisse's application contained his expression by "the art of arranging in a decorative manner the diverse elements at the painter's command to express his feelings" (qtd. in Klein, 2001, p. 24). This provided Matisse with a means of creativity that prioritised decoration, composition and emotion. In this strategy the artist's relationship with the model and the portrait are central to the conflict between self-expression the subject. The tropics and *Dasein* exist in *Portrait of Seraphina*, through the colour of the patchwork quilt and her presence of being in the world.

Although the personal stories drive the narrative aspect of the imagery, the images test the ideas gathered in my research to describe the tropical sensibility. The elements and principles of design become compositional devices to express the contemplative and pensive qualities of tropical space in a critical reflection. *Distance*

between worlds is a painting about the death of my grandmother, the tyranny of distance and raising children. My painting was reworked with the colours of the garden symbolising the life-cycle. Once, standing on a shifting platform of sand being washed by the tide, my grandmother beamed at the horizon that separates heaven and earth and said "Turn your face to the sun and the shadows will fall behind you" (Maori proverb). Before Granny died she visited North Queensland and said of the foliage, "This is a paradise" (Bice, 2007, pers. comm.). I reflected on the peace of the garden set against feelings of loss. My painting accesses her optimism in a brightly coloured palette of red and yellow pigments. This links the important narratives of the spirit and place.

Plate 5.6 Angela Meyer, *Distance Between Worlds*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 1.7 x 3m.
Photo Michael Marzik.

5.3.2 Garden of Eden

In a second suite of works, this triptych explored the idea of the idyllic garden. This series makes the language of painted colour explicit, to observe North Queensland in terms of tropical nature as a spiritual Garden. Bernard Smith argued that Australian gardens demonstrated people's "love of nature". That most significantly contributed towards taste, "as a manifestation of man's civilised progress" because they "were the material evidence of man's improvement" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 293). Smith believed that the Australian picturesque landscape prohibited a romantic vision. Such a vision needed, "ancient monuments and places hallowed by historical associations" (B. Smith, 1989, p. 295). But the garden as a venue of colour and form crystallizes the tropical idea as exoticism, primitivism and Orientalism. It does so through a grouped array of species, nationality and diversity which gives meaning to place.

Plate 5.7 Angela Meyer, *The Garden of Eden*, (Triptych) 2013, Oil on canvas, 3/1 x1m. Photo Michael Marzik.

Imaging the tropics through botany revisits the tropical world as a place of strangeness and splendour. In the previous Tanks exhibition, the use of foliage served as a theatrical backdrop to lived experience in tropical space. In this triptych tropical space presents botanical observation as a symbolic idea of immersion. Plant iconography was demonstrated in the patterns of Matisse, Rousseau and Gauguin. The imagined flora and fauna Rousseau depicted in paintings like *Tiger in a Tropical Storm,* 1891, depicted tropical nature as wondrous.

> Sometimes the changes of the scale of flowers and animals, combined with the tendency for leaf forms to remain uniform in size (or even become larger) right up to the top of the pictures, in defiance of the laws of perspective, create the feeling of an irrational and dream-like world (Alley, 1978, p. 72).

I have utilised the botany of the garden in a local context to further test light as brighter, greener, clearer and more intense, than the temperate vision. This work opens the enquiry to the history of the ground on which we stand, considered in darker recesses of shadow like *Reflection Pool* (2012).

Plate 5.8 Angela Meyer, *Reflection Pool*, 2012, Oil on canvas, 1 x 3m.
Photo Michael Marzik.

Beneath the terrestrial foliage another battleground is explored, that of nature itself. Nature was judged harshly by Edmund Kennedy, who thought of it as the enemy as he pushed his way northward towards Cape York. On the Great Dividing Range behind the coastal ranges, he was forced back by: "his old enemy, thick mangroves" (Beale, 1970, p. 56).

5.3.3 Shadows of the Underworld

The third suite of works explores the shadows and recesses beneath equatorial light, the human world and the obscurities of paradise. *Orpheus in the Underworld* (2013) uses the dark tone of the rainforest to deal with the problem of paradise as a primitive space; "frightening yet pleasurable" (F. S Connelly, 1995, p. 114). Contrasted with *Philodendron in the garden* (2012), the tones are much deeper, with the concentration of blue and violet hues. The light paintings favour a warmer range of tones and thinner washes to achieve the translucency of glaring tropical light: the light of civilisation and reason. The subdued tones in *Orpheus in the Underworld* let the eye rest in the intervals of broken sunlight beneath a thick canopy. At the centre of *Philodendron in the garden* yellow sunshine falls on bare space, but in *Orpheus in the Underworld* a man walks through the rainforest. The narrow pathway portrays an eerie foreboding that warns of humanity's impending havoc within a fragile ecosystem. Our potential to salvage what is left is felt as a tenuous divide between anguish and faith. "The mind…experiences a plenary joy in witnessing the birth of an idea, in seeing the forms and of things rise from some unfathomable abyss of unity" (Segalen, 2002, p. 28).

The darkened atmosphere of *Orpheus in the underworld* shows the figure diminished by the overwhelming ground. As a response to the first suite of paintings I

sourced Heidegger's notion of the "Greek" man, as a way to more intimately locate the human presence within the external world of nature. "For Greek man prior to the metaphysical scissions, nothing human has become separated out, and no relation can be separated out" (Haar, 1993, p. 164). This is because he is absorbed within the unity of the surrounding world. The underworld in my painting is the metaphor of contemporary lived experience, against the rainforest as a tapestry of complex outer world forms. Orpheus in the underworld is situated between worlds of thought and worlds of being, between light and dark, life and death, summer and winter, dense vegetation and sunlit clearings, damp mildewed aromas and fresh sea breezes, the monsoon and the south east trade winds, civilisation and nature. The ancient rainforest through which Orpheus walks is a rethinking of the wet tropics as a sacred space or state of exile. It is a sensory world that emphasises the binary poles of shadow and light.

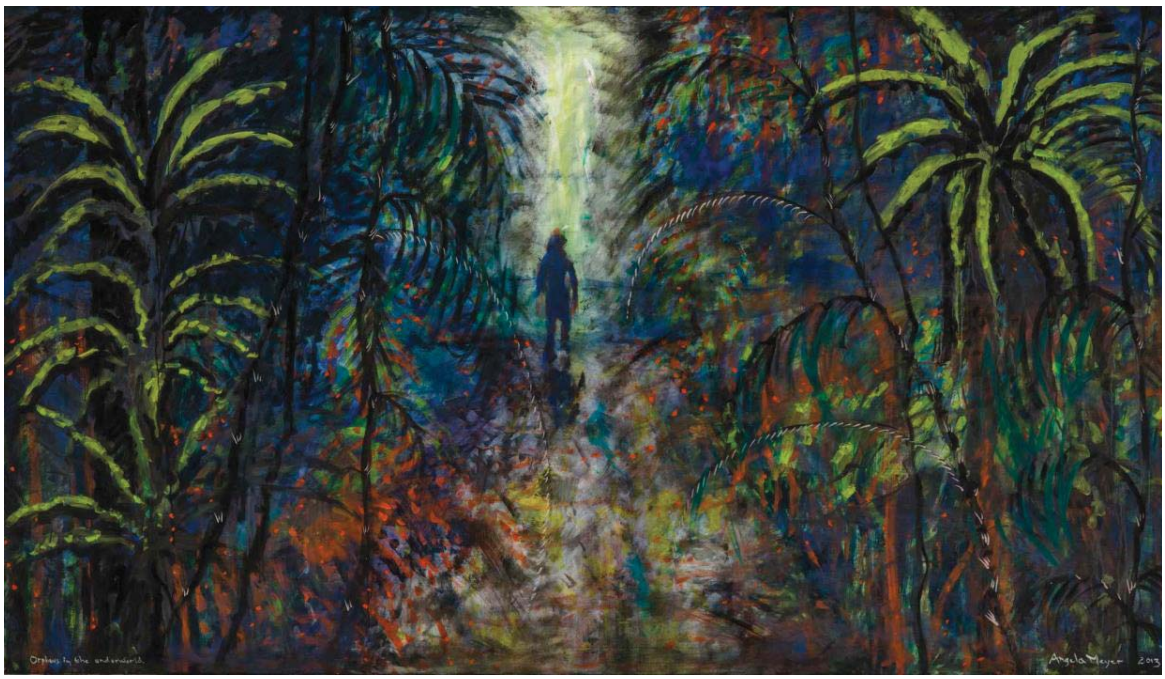

Plate 5.9 Angela Meyer, *Orpheus in the Underworld.* 2013, Oil on canvas, 1.7 x 3m.
Photo Michael Marzik.

James Baines drew a parallel between the Biblical 'thorns and thistles,' and the local wait-a-while and stinging trees. He felt these were the antithesis of an Arcadian ideal or tropical utopia. I wanted to capture that sense of threat which resides in abundant nature, through tone in a psychological sense, as depth of consciousness. The layered paint shows the consuming aspect of the rainforest, close foliage, against an illuminated pathway. Lime green against French ultramarine places creates shadowed recesses, perceived as deep space. The colours presented here as the rainforest echo the stained glass hues in European cathedrals. Tapestried marks and colours describe a surface of dense foliage within a complex natural ecosystem. The focal point of the image is the figure, which is engulfed by the great expanse of nature. A similar foreboding of sleepless reason was produced by night diving on the reef, an occasion captured in a self-portrait produced from memory. The picture *Descent into the Abyss* (2013) also included added crustaceans or imaginary monsters.

Plate 5.10 Angela Meyer, *Descent into the Abyss*, 2013, Oil on canvas, 1.7 x 3m.
Photo Michael Marzik.

In another painting; *Portrait of Zane Saunders* (2013), I explore tropical paradise, theology and a parallel life growing up in Kuranda. Both Western and Indigenous traditions are incorporated in this study painted from life. This portrait references Ray Crooke's depiction of Father Boggo Pilot in *Island Priest* (1958). Crooke's portrait is in the traditional ecclesiastical style that references the missionary presence in the Torres Straits. Crooke wanted to bridge the gulf between the Christian position and island values (S. Smith, 1997).

Plate 5.11 Angela Meyer, *Portrait of Zane Saunders*, 2013, 1.2 x 1.6m. Photo Michael Marzik.

Zane Saunders described how paintings focus the intent of place through the spirit, and act as a reference point to return to. "The painting as a point of reference can convey meanings and ideas" (Saunders, 2013, pers. comm). Saunders commented that my use of dark colours in the paintings were a process of enrichment in the paintings that dwell on the shadows. As a contemporary artist trained in both European and Indigenous traditions, Saunders discussed technical devices such as colour, narrative

and theoretical underpinning to communicate visual meaning. He considered darkness as a strategy to achieve depth. It reveals universal principles that occur in ancient mythologies such as law, ritual, belief and faith.

Historically, botany from the tropics was shown to a European audience in order to create an archetype of what the tropics appeared to be. Within our local landscape tropical plants can be both native and exotic, which produces a hybrid tropics. In my watercolours *Botany Versus Cartography* (2013) the botanical tropics are explained via the organic visual impact of calligraphic line in conjunction with cartography. This process is recorded in the *History of Art* (Goff & Goldhammer, 1982). This study reflects the movement of human geography in tropical space, from the point of view of western thought, within a framework of language, theory and world maps.

Bernard Smith saw the western gaze on Australian shores use both the scientific and creative understanding of place. It operated in terms of the "elements of the picturesque sensibility," (B. Smith, 1989, p. 295) to describe the new landscape. George French Angas (1822-1886) provides an example in his watercolour of a tropical scene. The world of nature adapts and resists the imaginative projections of explorers and artists. Artificial environments like green houses are created, where false climatic conditions exist. "It must be said that all great aesthetic periods of human history have only preoccupied themselves with what is, strictly speaking, Human. At the edges and neglected at the time lies that life of nature" (Segalen, 2002, p. 31). However, "passionate feeling" for exotic nature encompasses difference.

Plate 5.12 Angela Meyer, *Botany Versus Cartography*, 2013,
Watercolours on paper, 9 /56 x 76cm.
Photo Michael Marzik.

The *Post-impressionism's Fuel* (2013) sequence investigated geographical space interpolated with appropriated imagery from Gauguin's *La Orana Maria (Hail Mary)*, (1891); Rousseau's *Sleeping Gypsy*, (1897); and Matisse's *Dance*, (1912) These images contrast the French painting aesthetic with tropical geography, in order to reconsider nature in the context of a multifarious garden. The case study artists' revealed tropical projection as immersion and fantasy in tropical space. Claudine Marzik stated she painted what she could actually see. By contrast, Ian Smith was interested in the Biblical story of Adam and Eve cast out of paradise, found in Ptolemy's illustration (1454), in which "Adam and Eve [are] driven out of Paradise" and appear "just off the edge of the map" (Nathanson, 2013).

Plate 5.13 Angela Meyer, *Post-impressionism's Fuel,* 2013, Mixed media on paper, 9 /56 x 76cm.
Photo Michael Marzik.

5.3.4 Stained Glass Exoticism

In this fourth suite of works the local wet topics are depicted by the stained glass window aesthetic with its symbolism, illumination and colour. The paintings *Orientalism's Looking Glass* (2013) and *Stained Glass Exoticism* (2013) describe spiritual significance in the tradition of stained glass windows. These were employed to depict religious iconography displayed in cathedral architecture, which inspire belief in religious doctrine. In this case colour exemplifies the Divine as everlasting life or paradise, in which the picture's intent "animates and humanises very beautiful landscapes…the eternal oceans bubbling with life" (Segalen, 2002, p. 32). They reference, "the breath of the universal being, the mysterious life of the giant organism,

an absolute and definitive fact, a supreme divinity" (Segalen, 2002, p. 32), embedded here as exotic revision. In my watercolours, the French ultramarine hue surrounds tropical floral designs. Hoffman saw these designs as "your signature floral motifs: light, loose and deft" (2013). Windows at Chartres Cathedral, Matisse's Chapel at Vence and Chagall's windows at Mainz Cathedral inspired a sensory experience of intense colour, similar to my experience of tropical nature. The man-made light effect of light streaming through glass conveys the brilliant aspects of light in nature. I use this reference for my botanical illustrations of plants and flowers. These are an artificial collection of tropical plants, as well as a symbol of the exotic that captivated the early botanists and explorers. The same luminosity is evident in the paintings of Gauguin, Olley, Crooke and Cohen.

Plate 5.14 Angela Meyer, *Orientalism's Looking Glass*, Watercolour on paper, 90 x 120cm.
Photo Michael Marzik.

Painting the stained glass watercolour images uses tropical light described by James Baines as "iridescence" (2010), due to equatorial proximity and atmospheric humidity. My paintings use decoration, pattern and calligraphic gesture to represent tropical nature as fecund and dynamic. This is in keeping with the earlier representations by the European naturalists and explorers. My watercolours interpret the tropical aesthetic as an experience of *Dasein* and the presence of being with the plants in the garden in a real world relationship. However, they also borrow from the Orientalist's gaze where "(marvels, miracles and wonders) very much lends itself to fantasy and the description of things fantastic" (Netton, 2012, p. 223).

Plate 5.15 Angela Meyer, *Stained Glass Exoticism*, 2013, Watercolour on paper, 9/76 x 56cm.
Photo by the artist.

5.3.5 Dream of the Torrid Zone

Dream of the Torrid Zone further explores the research problem of tropical paradise, to focus more intently on the shadow narratives. The darker tone emphasises

human engagement beneath the rainforest canopy, ocean or dream world. Francis Connelly considered the primitive aesthetic of ornament: “Ornamental structures of repetition, opposition and metamorphosis resisted the causality of narrative, which depended upon the clear articulation of spatial and temporal relationships” (F. S Connelly, 1995, p. 60). These are an account which emerges from what she calls hieroglyphs or ornament, which displays the primitive as “hybrid, metamorphic figures” (F. S Connelly, 1995, p. 60).

Plate 5.16 Angela Meyer, *Dante's Dancers*, 2014, Oil on canvas, 1.7 x 3m. Photo Michael Marzik.

Paradise is regained as a dream world, both historical and forward reaching, through a reworking of *Hannah wants to paint a waterfall*. These were replaced by the characters from William Blake’s painting *Divine Comedy: Beatrice addressing Dante* (1824-27). In Blake’s narrative, “his subjects are often mythical figures of his own invention than those of past literature” but his poetic vision, “tells its stories through the actions of human figures” (F. S Connelly, 1995, p. 54). In *Dante’s dancers*, a warm palette simmers beneath the silhouettes’ shadows, as an “evocation of myth, dream and

memory" (F. S Connelly, 1995, p. 54). *Dream of the Torrid Zone* is a reworking of the *Jum Rum Drowning,* which sought to reflect on a real life drowning caused by torrential rain and flooding from a cyclone. However, the figure is not dead, but dreaming, and refers to Rousseau's painting of *The Sleeping Gypsy* (1897). This painting had "a note of menace, yet is calm with a trance-like stillness" (Alley, 1978, p. 45).

Plate 5.17 Angela Meyer, *Dream of the Torrid Zone*, 2014, Oil on canvas, 1.7 x 3m.
Photo Michael Marzik.

The earlier painting dealt with a personal reaction to tragic death, whereas the reworked painting reconstructed the central character immersed in the colours and forms of nature. Gauguin describes the creative act as a sense response: "It is the summation of all our sensations, and contemplating it, we can each, according to our imagination, create the story. In a single glance, our souls can be flooded with the most profound reflections" (Nathanson, 2013, n.p). The idea of a dream is the state of being both somewhere and nowhere simultaneously. It is located an ambivalent site of tropical paradise that places immersion and imagination on equal ground. *The Sleep of*

Reason is another painting that was reworked to explore Orientalist views of the tropics through the lens of primitivism, and exoticism. This painting borrows tropical pathos from Gauguin, an exaggerated garden from Rousseau and electric patterns from Matisse, qualities which together knit the painted world of imagination; "the poetic dream of aesthetic diversity and the fantasy" (Segalen, 2002, p. viii).

Plate 5.18 Angela Meyer, *The Sleep of Reason*, 2014, Oil on canvas, 1.7 x 3m.
Photo Michael Marzik.

In Goya's *Sleep of Reason that Produces Monsters* (1799), the artist portrays himself asleep beneath a nightmarish scene of bats, owls and beasts. This picture symbolises his futile response to Spanish political society. I borrow the metaphor of sleep in my iridescent cartoon, in order to explore the absence of reason. I also want to plumb the depths of the irrational as human folly in tropical Eden. Michelangelo's Delphic Sybil, on the other hand, envisions a hopeful future.

5.4 Critique from research methodology

The critical analysis of practice-based research identifies, "contextual factors that influence visual cognition…to better understand how artists think, act and create" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 140). Francis Jeffrey's (1773-1850) views of taste and tradition meant "external forms of validation were necessary sea-walls against being swept away by ferocious urgings within" (Benchimol & Maley, 2007, p. 192). Exploration of the tropics and painting links present-day issues with public and personal relevance that "directly experiences knowledge as an enabling personal construct," through "visual culture as a site to be opened up to creative critique"(Sullivan, 2009, p. 219). The critique is a dialogue with a local audience that acts as a "cultural membrane" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 197) to show how ideas are shaped then reformed through their interpretations in a cultural context. "The fluid mediating processes means ongoing meanings are made as conceptual connections are fashioned and fractured" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 197).

The influence of the tropics displays artists' and audiences' engagement with tropical space as an imaginative experience and as a lived real world experience. This symbolism both celebrates and critiques the imagery of a painted tropics as paradise. In this capacity I have used two narratives: a real world tropics located on a map, and a paradise garden as a spiritual idea. The imagery that refers to art history and geography was understood by Michael Marzik as, "the interplay of images" that, "tell the story" (2013); whereas Jill Chism responded to the repeat patterning of foliage and design as creative methodology: "you are playing with decoration" (2013). Michael Marzik felt the close up viewpoint in the corridor of the Lux Gallery in contrast to the large scale painting *Orpheus in the underworld* meant that the viewer is literally walking with Orpheus through the rainforest. This allows the viewer to enter the narrative in the painting (Marzik, 2013, pers. comm). Jill Chism saw this approach as unusual: "The

darkness contrasts with the free style… is a new way of looking at the rainforest, producing a perception of a dark atmosphere…the figure emerging out of the darkness creates a moody atmosphere" (Chism, 2013, pers. comm).

This study provided a mechanism for testing ideas; "in a practice-based research project it should not be seen as the research itself, but the method through which ideas can be developed" (Brockelman, 2003, p. 92). I have considered the responses from the case study artists against the explorers who first saw the tropics, and the French artists who painted it, as a context for my own arts practice. I found the qualities of tropical space to reflect on internal and external reactions to space. Therefore, "there are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false; it can be both true and false" (Sullivan, 2009). Smith, Driver and Stepan sought to understand tropical geography from a European perspective, as a real world involvement in tropical place and culture. This research has explored themes of paradise, links to botany, diverse backgrounds, and Far North Queensland as a unique environment. This has led to an understanding of both a constructed tropical idea, and the description of the real tropics. This shows how the shaping effect of the environment comes to the forefront in constructing imagery as representations in paintings.

In my studio experiments, the paintings explored how a current global attitude addresses the tropics as a space of immersion. Also I explored how people reason with it, live within it, protect it and can at times be threatened by it.

> When we look at a space as a habitat for human beings and other living things, as well as inanimate objects, we have to learn to decipher it, to see how, historically, it has been altered by human actions and how, too,

> the character of the vegetation, rivers, topography, climate and parasites have in turn shaped the activities and experiences of human beings (Stepan, 2001, p. 242).

The paintings responded to how the tropics have been imaged in western thought, by measuring the reactions of the case study artists in relation to my personal narrative of place.

> Tropical nature, then, like other kinds of nature, is a heterogeneous thing, a mix of the natural and the artificial, the human and the non-human, the organic and the non-organic, both a physical space of living and non-living things and a human invention (Stepan, 2001, p. 242).

The case study artists' responses revealed descriptions of the tropics as a physical place, constructed space, and cultural environment, through their statements and their paintings. The way artists respond to place as exotic on the one hand and familiar on the other is to "see the world, then put forth one's vision of the world" (Segalen, 2002, p. 68). The frame of Orientalism continues to provide a contemporary audience and its creative practitioners with a lens to appreciate nature and culture.

> Thus, Orientalist art, far from exposing the primitive to the industrial gaze, far from producing a sense of a strict binary construction between the modern and the pre- and anti-modern, was actually revealing visual resonances which greatly appealed to Victorian contemporaries. Here was a world they had, to a certain extent lost, and it was a world they wished to regain (Netton, 2012, p. 123).

Human aesthetic concern for tropical nature remains contemporary: “Many will find in the contemplation of tropical nature an emotional satisfaction and/or scientific interest without which our concern for the health of tropical environments would surely diminish” (Stepan, 2001, p. 245).

Chapter 6 Conclusions and Reflections

6.1 Tropical space as a painted vision

The idea of the distinct but undervalued visual representation of the wet tropics of Far North Queensland has been created by its exclusion from predominant national museum aesthetics in the temperate landscape. This idea has, I think, emerged firmly as a recognisable space of difference. To understand the idea of the tropics represented in western art and its influence on tropical painters, I firstly reflected on an historical notion of the tropics. Then I undertook a field study with artist interviews, and finally I created a studio response. This response was intended as an internalised summary of ideas and arts practice, in order to demonstrate a painted vision of the tropics as a space at once desirable, degenerate, excessive, controlled, sublime and strange (Driver & Martins, 2005; Lansdown, 2006; Segalen, 2002; Stepan, 2001). Inside the paradoxical struggle to articulate the tropics in its hybrid nature, difference emerges as imperative.

Three painters from the French tradition: Matisse, Rousseau and Gauguin, provide a way of reading location, to show a continued fascination with the tropics where painting is an agency of thought. It is their thinking about exoticism that not only is able to dwell on the idea of the tropics as a particular kind of space, but takes up and celebrates the difference, which gives access to the material world of the tropics on its own premise. The lived perspective acquired through the descriptions of the case study artists reflects on exoticism as a mode of inspiration and continuity. My research aims sought compare the imagery of the torrid and temperate zones, to describe the characteristics of the imagery of the Queensland wet tropics.

Researching a tropical aesthetic through an interpretist as opposed to a scientific method involves both the measurable descriptive features of the tropics (with climate,

light, species diversity and colour) and its cerebral meaning in the psychological impact of space. The poetics of space as a room in a house or a daydream is underscored by imaginative possibilities (Bachelard, 1994). A local context of tropical space emerged as the contrasting answers between the questionnaires and interviews with the eight painters.

While the French lens contributes to a vision of the tropics as a place of paradox, immersion, primitivism, exoticism, and the decorative, it is the intensely abstract world of the Other that can only produce fear of the demonic and fascination of the quixotic. “Primitive idols were disliked by Europeans and were frequent targets for destruction because they seemed to embody the irrational superstitions and savagery of uncivilised peoples” (F. S Connelly, 1995, p. 81). However the Other understood as diversity and alterity gives a crucial insight to the importance of ethnicity and difference (Spivak, 1990). In the way Segalen intended to unpack its meaning, exoticism was a truthful understanding of difference. It was separate from colonial reductionism, which he explained through aesthetics and ontology. The way Rousseau used his imaginative projection to reach into the tropics was significant, as it took the European psyche mentally into the Torrid Zone. He accessed the exotic experience Segalen called “elsewhere” through the idea of escape. In pursuit of mystery and distance, he used escape as a way to discover an experience of difference (Segalen, 2002, p. xvi). This is perceptible in Rousseau’s kaleidoscope of hieroglyphic patterns and enchanted monsters, both fearful and benign.

The experience of immersion given to us by Gauguin is his journey and lived experience of Tahiti, as a peopled world of extravagance and subjugation. He rendered it in pictures which capture the struggle of the human condition (Eisenman, 1997). The forlorn anguish of tortured souls that produces Gauguin’s reflections of Tahitian beauty

comes about from tubes of rich colour. It charts the politics, feeling and mathematics of his pictorial space. The usefulness of these geographical and cultural dilemmas provided Gauguin with the narrative for his picture making. These features translate his ideas through decoration and ornament. However, Gauguin did not trivialise the Other as fashionable exotica. He refused to see it as "… a sequence of fashionable crazes in the second half of the nineteenth century" that embraced designs from the Middle east, South Asia and the Far East (Netton, 2012, p. 121). Matisse's formal use of decoration as hieroglyphic expression returns pictorial space to the inspirations of Tahitian traditional designs and the primitive. There "ornament was seen as a cultural fossil, an artefact that retained clues to the origins of art-making; it was also, however, understood as a fundamental building block of style, a kind of DNA that carried the imprint of the key characteristics of style" (F. S Connelly, 1995, p. 55). Matisse finds paradise in the prosaic; his submarine motifs are formalised from memory, decoration and Tahitian visual culture.

The historical background reflects European tropical exploration, as well as the paintings of Matisse, Gauguin and Rousseau, viewed together through the prism of Orientalism and *Dasein*. The two-dimensional paintings by the local artists present the architecture of their thoughts, possibly only resolved once the shapes and forms find the canvas. This overview situates Australian artists who deal with painting the tropics to test the theory of difference of the tropics. This difference is demonstrated by Arthur Streeton, who painted Barron Gorge with Heidelberg eyes, and Ray Crooke who painted Fiji and the wet tropics of North Queensland with lush tropical greens. The blueprint of the French fascination underscores the modernist interpretations in Crooke, Olley, Friend and Williams. The case study artists I sampled lent a vision to access new work.

The intrigue for the textures of the North Queensland wet tropics responds to the sensory qualities of its flashes of iridescent blue in butterflies and flowers enhanced by atmospheric light effects. Painting in the tropics charts being in equatorial space through its detail, rhythms and visual spectacle. While Australia's earlier painting aesthetics played out the goals of the British empire through civilised pastel mutedness, it clearly is the French who succumbed to the flights of fancy, excess and decadence, filling their canvases with the bright hues of Matisse's "deep golden goblet" (Girard, 1994, p. 134).

The research design accessed instruments of data collection and analysis, exhibited at the Tanks, Lux Gallery, Kick Arts and Tableland Regional Gallery. Feedback was obtained from audiences, who pondered whether my paintings depicted nature or humans as the enemy, and whether nature and culture were in conflict or harmony. The paintings pit the fission of temporal time against mythological narrative, where seeing is constructed from previous knowledge. The results of the cases studies revealed emergent themes of nature as a space of occupation under threat by its use, and its implication for human interaction. This showed how the tropics were viewed from Empire (Driver & Martins, 2005), how picturing tropical nature is a fraught political problem (Stepan, 2001), and the usefulness of Orientalism to consider the space the Other occupies (Said, 2003).

Painting in the Far North reveals a heightened awareness of lived experience and reflects on the intense relationship painters enjoy with the tropical climate and their environment. The words "intense" and "fusion" characterise imagery from this region, providing a clear link to the French legacy of the exotic. Survey outcomes show how botany is rendered as iconography, in conjunction with decoration as influence. It is

depicted as scientific or poetic discourse through its observation and symbolism, as well as the collective reaction to the tropics as a pristine space of clarity and colour.

The important distillation of the meaning of the tropics presented by the case study artists was employed to suggest a context for my arts practice. This was overlayed with a play of narrative stories/dramas/themes around joy and pathos, in which the studio acted as laboratory to explore concepts of tropical symbols. The idea Shadows of the underworld contrasted with the concept of tropical paradise. This contrast was used to explore the complex issues beneath the veneer of the fluorescent cartoon of bright colour projected as the antithesis of paradise in the example of *Jum Rum Drowning*. The figure was made more exaggerated by its actual in the reflection pool series that brought in shadows, chiaroscuro and tenebrism. These techniques served to intensify tropical light, to play with the dark side and to make light more pronounced alongside humidity, climate, intensity of colour, and the oppressive and fecund environment. It served to demonstrate how the importance of exoticism produces a way to see difference. Gauguin, Rousseau and Matisse were able to visualise the tropics through its complexities and colour vibrancy. They dealt with the paradise problem as a problem of the European gaze, which tried to accommodate and integrate a western self into tropical space.

The point of the study was to find how contemporary painting practice communicates a tropical aesthetic or sensibility in local space as current discourse. John Agnew stated that “Indeed, in the end it is the concrete effects of places that matter more than remaining at the abstract level of conceptualising place” (Agnew, 2011, p. 5). Because my research aimed to find a distinct visual aesthetic recognisable in paintings made in Far North Queensland, I used the lenses of arts, science and history to work out how the tropical region yields sensory reactions to the wet tropic

environment as texture, colour, complex patterns and imaginary constructs. Agnew considered the region as a platform for processes of being within space:

> The conflict between these two dominant meanings, space versus place, is longstanding. Indeed, the vicissitudes of the argument in geography over such definitional issues as regions, spatial analysis, and human-environment relations involve competing conceptions of space and place as much as distinctive views about the nature of science or the relative virtues of quantitative methods. Outside of geography, little critical attention has been given to either definition, yet, of course, implicitly one has been adopted. By definition, everything happens somewhere. Typically, the definition adopted has been the view of place as a location where things "just happen" rather than the more holistic view of places as the geographical context for the mediation of physical, social and economic processes (Agnew, 2011, pp. 3-4).

The special features that embody the motifs and symbolism of the tropical world agreed with Aristotle's notion of a torrid zone that is harsh with hazardous tempests and burdened with disease and infection. But the place of the tropics also rejects the negative view, as the tropics emerged as fascinating in its biodiversity and extreme beauty under the naturalist's gaze. This is especially evident in Humboldt's appreciation of verdant foliage, Darwin and Wallace's species theories, and the detailed imagery of Bates and Church. It is however Gauguin, Matisse and Rousseau who liberate the tropics with a sensitive code of understanding, through pictures on canvas.

Through arts practice, and data collection that describe place and space, North Queensland has emerged as a site from which painters derive the tropical aesthetic.

Faranack Nader Benz states, “the effect of the environment goes beyond the mere imagination…local space becomes everybody’s space (globalisation and the internet effects) in the current period, the purity of local tropical narrative are becoming interwoven with the outsiders’ impact” (Benz, 2014, n.p). Alfons Hug further repositioned the tropics, from a problematic “South” in relation to the European “North”, by using art as a stabilizer; “The general idea is to re-aestheticize the subject of the tropics…we are offered a glimpse of the artistic complexity and aesthetic richness of the tropics in a way that promises to change the terms of the North South dialogue” (Hug, 2009, p. 1).

This research attempted to find the tropical influence on North Queensland painters. I have aimed to locate what drives these artists to draw from tropical nature. This thesis has explored themes of paradise, links to botany, diverse backgrounds, and Far North Queensland as a unique environment and an unspoiled tropical habitat. This has led to an understanding of both a constructed tropical idea in an Orientalist exotic context, and the description of lived tropical experience. The data I collected displayed repeated ideas: the influence of heat, humidity and tropical biology on the painters gives evidence of climatic impact on artists and is reflected in the complexity of colour gradation and conceptual underpinning in their work. The development outcome is demonstrated in the work I have produced for exhibitions.

6.2 Significance of findings

Painting practices in North Queensland have displayed a Western interpretation of tropical and continental climates and the consequent styles of representation. The paintings produced in North Queensland are unique in the context of Australian Art.

This exploration of tropical paradise through case studies and a painted response produces new data reflecting on the painting practices in North Queensland painters.

These outcomes are fascinating for painting in this region. It is surprising that paintings made in North Queensland vary in aesthetic outcomes, while the survey responses showed quite similar attitudes to climate and geography. For example, heat and humidity were seen as a tropical feature, along with lush foliage and easily accessible and abundant nature. However, the artists expressed a tropical reaction either in abstract forms, symbolic images or representational landscapes. The characteristics of painting practices in Far North Queensland are identified as responses to the visceral and visual environmental stimulus, making the work unique within in Australian painting practice. These practices are demonstrated by a tropical colour palette and mode of thinking which produces its own painting aesthetic.

6.3 Discussion of case studies results

The interview responses include the artists' descriptions of external reality, as well as the feelings and meanings of their internal world. The survey categories demonstrated how the artists were affected by factors such as light, colour, climate and topography and spiritual associations. Some of the artists thought that the tropics were not linked to paradise. Acknowledgement of Indigenous heritage was considered vital for informed contemporary western arts practice. While the spiritual world remained a conceptual problem, Ray Crooke shared his view of painting as a learned discipline engaged with the tropics. This enabled him to form relationships with the people who then become a theme for his paintings. This cycle of immersion is revealed in the case study enquiry.

The sensory tropics were explained by Claudine Marzik as the surface texture of the natural environment, which she translates into surface texture on her canvases. Ian Smith said he carries his experience of the tropics within him. James Baines has an ambivalent relationship with the tropics, speaking about the spiky plants and the spoliation due to human impact. He described the tropics as a Garden of Eden, which in Biblical terms, is under a "curse". Baines' tropics are both dystopic and magically iridescent with flashes of bright colour. He describes himself as a colourist who responds to the tones and hues of the landscape. However, he struggles with the colour green, as it symbolises the overabundant rainfall and wild vegetation, revealing the tropics as claustrophobic. Claire Souter states that spirituality is personal and nature is in a perpetual state of decline. Amanda Feher said her relationship to her surroundings is instinctive and the uniqueness of the tropics fuels her work. However, it is a battle economically being outside the mainstream, particularly with the cost of freighting large scale works.

The role of contemporary art to reflect upon or reveal humanity can be physical, theoretical, sensory or experiential. These interpretive layers are founded in the immersive experience of Gauguin living in Tahiti. This, in turn, affects the tropical immersion of later painters, including Margaret Olley and John Coburn. Olley was inspired by Gauguin's prints while at high school in Brisbane. Matisse adopted Gauguin's absorption of purity in shape, colour and form, which brought the southern ocean aesthetic into full view of the European sensibility. Matisse's formal cut-out compositions of tropical fish, coral and seaweed contrasted with Rousseau's imaginative flights of fancy.

For the case study artists, the lived reality is measured in physical terms: Feher, Marzik and Souter investigate damp patinas, foliage and skin, whereas Baines, Crooke

and Field paint tropical narratives of an original encounter with the natural environment or people. Marzik finds that her open window is drenched in a heavy aroma of trees and plants. Colour and epiphytic growth on the boughs and limbs of the rainforest trees fascinate her. Feher's closed industrial shed provides a reprieve from environmental harshness, and her charcoal paintings of the human form serve as a respite from lurid colour. Feher was born in the tropics and said that the nature of the tropics shapes her and her work; it is what she identifies with as familiar and what makes her work unique. Extending into the Pacific Ocean, Crooke empathised with the island lifestyle, which was advantageous for an artist looking for models to draw. He said "People sit around all day which is good for drawing" (Crooke, 2009).

The investigation of rainforest plants and flowers by Souter through observation and painting is echoed by Field, who used the Botanic Gardens. Understanding and appreciating plant species for their beauty and colour has infused some of these case study artists' desires to examine and articulate the forms. Field based a whole series of paintings on the relationship between humans and plants. She saw the garden as an overtly constructed tropics that maintained by human intervention, produces a lush spectacle in which her gaze is directed downward to the soil and the plants.

Ian Smith, born in Cairns, argues for an authentic experience of the tropics as a way of seeing and picturing from the point of immersion. He advocates replicating Gauguin's experience of living in Tahiti and being involved with the people and place. Marzik uses a palette that reflects the spectrum of greys in the rain clouds of the monsoon season. Feher commented that the effects of Cyclone Larry emitted a feeling of terror in which she could feel the turmoil of the extreme weather event: "You hope you don't get ripped to shreds and everything you've built doesn't get torn down"

(2010). Feher said the environmental forces connect the human soul spiritually and psychologically to place.

The distinct characteristics of authentic painting in the North Queensland tropics are: sensory as heightened colour or tactile as surface texture, technically structured through symbolic motifs like vegetation, ocean, sky, flora and fauna which represent the tropics, and imbued with the psychological engagement of the artist who invest their personal lived experience of place. The descriptions, reasons and practices covered in this sample group depict an actual relationship with place and deliver a real world insight into art practices in the tropics.

6.4 Meaning from painted response

The interviews enabled me to build an artist profile through which I examined the theory of the tropics as a unique place to work, and from this I could expand their responses to the tropics. I sought to understand how visual representations in paintings are exposed through the content of thought that goes into them. In this way the interpretative constructs of the researcher finds value, not only in the painting subjects but also the sensory responses in artists. Through close observation, surveys and discussion I have found a depiction of a real world North Queensland wet tropics that continues to fascinate, challenge and inspire artists.

My paintings were the starting point for this investigation, which required locating a context for interviewing other regional painters who work in a similar way. By drawing on their knowledge and experience I can compare my methodologies and outcomes in order to more fully understand the recurring themes of tropical space, ambivalence and paradise. As a research experiment I then made new work to combine some of their concepts of light, space, composition, colour, and technique. The tropical

zone has been interpreted here as a dynamic and complex site of tropical nature that inspires artists to respond, in a sensory capacity, through their paintings. The content was drawn from a cross-section of painters who use the wet tropics of North Queensland for their painting practice.

6.5 Subversive space and humour

The tropics as exploratory space emerge again as a place of opportunity to rethink the western gaze and the attributions of its meaning and structure. The idiosyncratic characteristics can, at times, appear humorous, as when James Baines said he viewed the colour green as neutral. He said, "Do you know what it's like to drive a car stuck in neutral? Well the tropics are like that; all green…and green is neutral" (Baines, 2010). His example of the difference of aesthetic comprehension demonstrates the gamut of frustration and reality about how to interpret the visual cues which are then constructed as pictures.

Thinking underscores the creative process and writing and painting stem from a similar source; for example you could either paint a bouquet of flowers or write about their features, and both would communicate a kind of essence. Writing may help the reader paint the flowers in their own mind, whereas a painting of the flowers may present the bias of the artist. But the viewer may read colour and form as a way to reimagine the bouquet. The artist may have elaborated a point of description in despair of not being able to paint the delicate petals; "It is not the notion of writing in the narrow sense so that one looks at everything as if it is written by some sort of a subject and can be deciphered by the reading subject" (Spivak, 1990, p. 2). Images can help words communicate.

However, pictures mean more when text accompanies them, as in the historical contexts that surround paintings, time frames and cultural association. Reworking Greek myths is a way to revisit old narratives, to keep those stories alive. It challenges the meaning, which then aims to be subversive, as a striving to understand the universal meanings of the human condition. Reflecting on Orpheus, Proserpina and the three Graces embeds the current day in history's shadow. In the paintings of the tropics as an ancient garden of mythology, Proserpina is permitted six months of terrestrial bliss in the radiance of paradise painted as the tropics, while Orpheus proceeds through a thicket/rainforest/underworld.

Creativity is a kinaesthetic process where imagination is the spark of raw energy and movement, similar to a pin ball machine in which the silver sphere gains velocity from the levers acting upon it. Inspiration is the catalyst triggered by the surrounding coordinates of things in the world, producing thought responses like adrenalin from rage or wonder. Then there follows the means of translating the thought through infrastructure such as canvas, paint, and paper, etc., to harness the feeling through images, which is the embodiment of electricity.

6.6 Conclusion

How have the tropics been imaged through representations in Western art and how has this influenced the tropical painters of Far North Queensland? Painting the tropics has been investigated through the lens of the real and the imagined in the constructed visions of Matisse, Rousseau and Gauguin. In my case studies, local tropical painters have gone beyond the French aesthetic response of a distanced tropics. They not only collectively anticipate their reception in the temperate empire, but move into an expanded view of colour and climate, of sensory reactions to humidity, smell

and light, to draw out the internal iridescence of the complex world of tropical lived experience.

This thesis has focused on painting as the medium to express ideas about a lived experience of the tropics. The medium itself sits within a discourse that uses varied media and applications to make art and express ideas. The fact that the environment can affect the painted outcomes as a response to the tropics as a unique geographical space is demonstrated by how people paint with intensity of colour. It is also demonstrated through the enrichment of the painted surface, symbolised by tropical motifs from the environment to capture a response to the tropics. The North Queensland tropics in an art historical context, is an under explored and under-represented chapter of Australian art. Tropical painters are able to extend the vision of earlier French painters like Gauguin, Rousseau and Matisse to interpret a contemporary immersive experience of the tropics. My painted response to the tropics uses research, arts practice and a synthesis of the findings which culminate in a deeper understanding of place both real and imagined.

> We must take seriously Vico's great observation that men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography. As geographical and cultural entities – to say nothing of historical entities – such locales, regions, and geographical sectors as "Orient" and "Occident" are man-made" (Said, 2003, pp. 4-5 [1978]).

Similarly the tropics has been a constructed space. The tropics as a unique and different space emerges as a space of contrasts; where the paradox of paradise is shown through a tropical language of painted colour, light and shadow.

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Appendices

Appendix A Publications and Conferences

Meyer, A., & Naylor, S. (2013). The Paradise Problem: Painted Experience. *Etropic: electronic journal of studies in the tropics*, *12*, 30-40, available: http://www.jcu.edu.au/etropic/pgcontents.htm.

Meyer, A., & Naylor, S. (2014). Paradise painted in North Queensland. Submitted to Sage Publications 2014.

Conference Presenter:

Tropics of the Imagination 2009: Tropical Paradise: its light and its shadows.

Tropics of the Imagination 2013: The paradise problem: understanding the tropics through ideas and images, co-presented with Professor Stephen Naylor.

Appendix B International Women's Day Speech – Painting in the Tropics

Presented with Knock Knock Contemporary Arts Collective at Kick Arts, Cairns, 2014. At the invitation of Louisa Ennis a principal curator for Knock Knock Women's Art Collective, I presented my research in a paper to outline the influence of the tropics on painters who have been engaged with and inspired by the climate and geography including Margaret Olley, Claire Souter, Laurine Field, Helen Wiltshire and Amanda Feher, who have made substantial contributions to painting the North Queensland tropics. The audience was positive about Claire Souter's botanical motifs, and her shared vision that local artists are able to access through her painting workshops and classes at her studio in Kuranda. The women felt they were "growing with her" (2014). Another area of resonance was to Margaret Olley's comment that the tropics are signalled through mildew and colour, which accesses the visceral, textural and sensory experience of vision and feeling.

Appendix C Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Q.1 Would you define Paradise as a theme in relation to the tropics as					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Exotic	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
A Garden of Eden	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Place of ideal beauty	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
State of delight	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Other……					
Do the inherent visual qualities of the tropics bring to mind					
Heat and humidity	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Idyllic islands, tropical fruit	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Pristine nature	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Erotic escapes	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Other……					
Does topography and geography shape Australian art					
Colours of sky foliage, water	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
In a psychological capacity	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
climate	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Other……					
Are the Australian tropics imbued with particular spiritual connotations, as a result of being located outside the major metropolitan areas, and would these notions include					
Biblical representations of the Garden of Eden	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Indigenous spiritual beliefs	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Alternative belief systems e.g. Guru worship, etc	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Mother nature	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Other……					
Is the tropical an internal vision or sensation					
That is present as a creative process	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
That is triggered by sound, temperature, colour, smell or texture	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
As an intuitive reaction, or considered process	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Other…… .					
Given that the tropical regions of North Queensland are located outside the major metropolitan areas, does this offer any special advantages in your art practice					
In terms of studio practice	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
In terms of unique subject matter	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
In terms of cultural significance	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Other……					
Would you say the light in tropical North Queensland is different from other latitudes,					

is it					
Brighter and whiter	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Has more yellow tones	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Less smog, more clarity of colour	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Other……					
Does the tropical deliver a rural notion of paradise and would you describe this as					
air quality and lower levels of pollution					
Access to nature					
Relaxed environment					
Other……					
Does tropical culture transgress into mainstream culture					
As a souvenir	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
As a dreamed of destination	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
As the missing link	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Other……					

Appendix D Information Sheet

Information Sheet

You are invited to take part in a research project that investigates whether tropical light has a significant impact on the work produced by artists in the tropics; the project also considers the impact of the French artists, Matisse and Gauguin on tropical aesthetics. The study is being conducted by Angela Meyer and will contribute to the research degree project in a PhD study at James Cook University. If you agree to be involved in the study, you will be invited to complete a short questionnaire and a follow up formal interview.

There is a questionnaire that you will be required to complete, asks you about your concepts of art and the tropics. The questionnaire should require a time commitment of only 10 - 15 minutes and will be the basis for a formal interview based on your responses. We request the return of the questionnaire within two weeks of receiving it, so that an interview can be organised to undertake a more in-depth analysis of your practice. The interview, with your consent, will be audio-taped, and should take approximately 1/2 hour of your time. The interview will be conducted at a venue of your choice preferably at your studio or a location that accesses examples of your work.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you can stop taking part in the study at any time without explanation or prejudice. You may also withdraw any unprocessed data from the study.

Your responses and contact details will be strictly confidential. The data from the study will be used in research publications my PhD Thesis. You may choose either to be identified in this research or remain anonymous for the purposes of publications.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Dr. Stephen Naylor or Sophie Thomson.

Sophie Thompson

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Research Services

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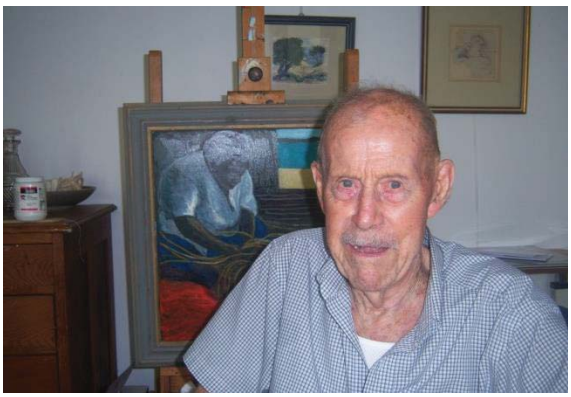
Appendix E Informed Consent Form

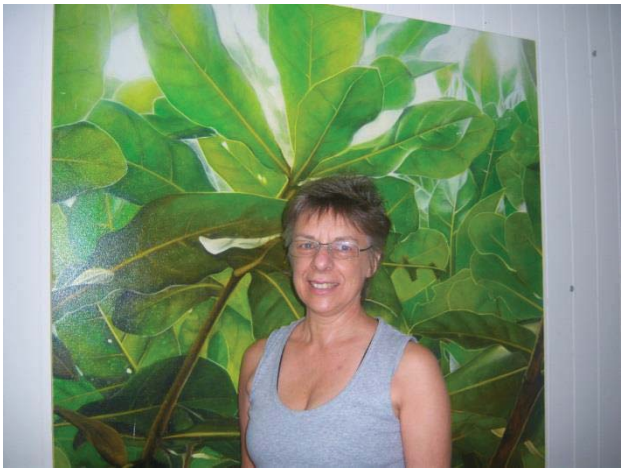
This administrative form has been removed

Appendix F Case study artists



Ray Crooke, Palm Cove studio, 2010.

Islander by the Sea, Oil on canvas, 59.5 x 79.5cm, 1975.



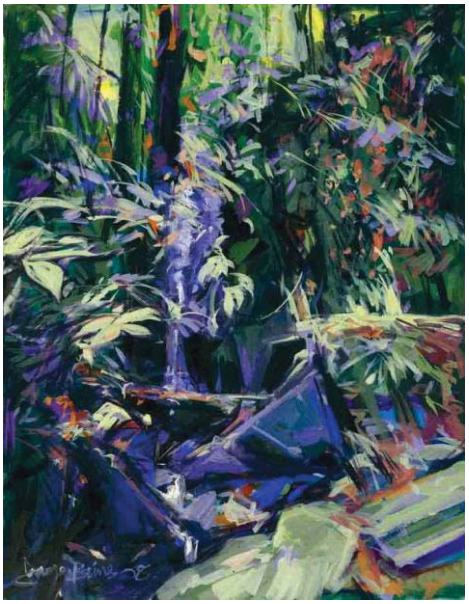
Claire Souter, Kuranda studio, 2011.

Leaf 1, Botanica, Acrylic on paper, 2004.

Claudine Marzik, Smithfield studio, 2011.

Far North Series, Mixed media on canvas, 2010.

James Baines, Malanda studio, 2011.

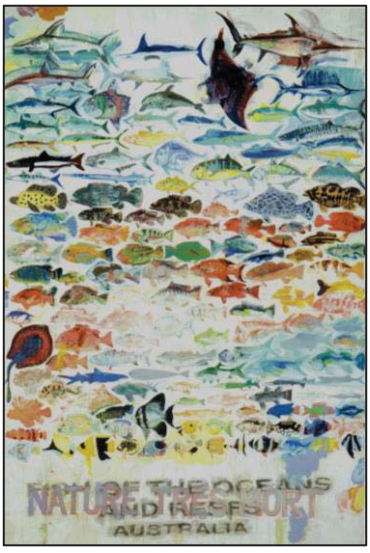


Gold Hill, Oil on canvas, 1986.

Amanda Feher, Tinaroo studio, 2011.

Tinaroo Landscape, Oil on canvas, 2008.

Ian Smith, Brisbane, 2009.

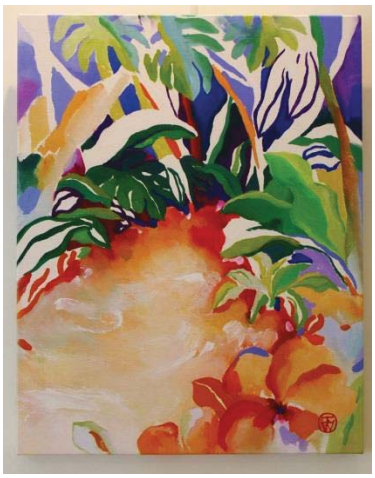


Pink Nature trés mort, Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 2006.

Laurine Field, Brisbane studio, 2011.

Bromeleiads, Oil on canvas, 2006.

Helen Wiltshire, Mission Beach.



Tropic Garden, Print cotton rag archival paper, 76 x 56cm, 2005.

Margaret Olley,
Photo Hugh Stewart,
Permission Philip Bacon Galleries.

Cane Cutter's Cottage, Oil on board, 62 x 75 cm, 1978.

Appendix G Preliminary questionnaire to Ray Crooke

Letter to Ray Crooke and in his response dated 14 April 2009:

Dear Ray,

My Thesis title is "Tropical paradise: its light and its shadows." The questions that follow will be part of a chapter on the history of North Queensland art.

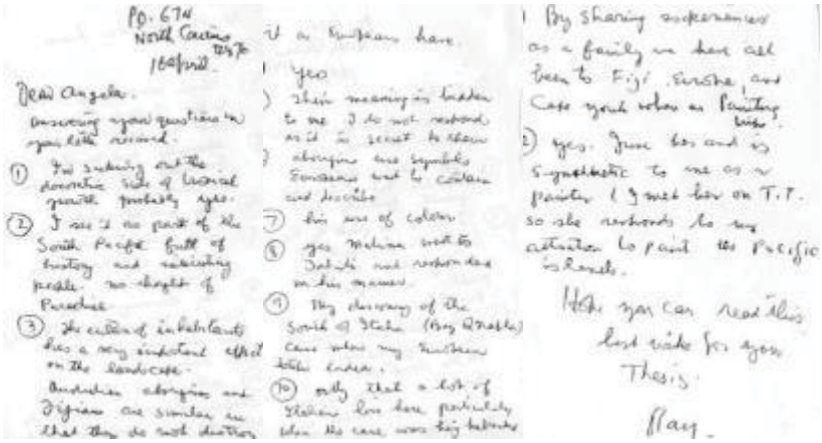


Plate 6.1: Ray Crooke, Response from to preliminary questionnaire. 14 April 2009.

Investigator: In your painting practice, have you consciously depicted the Australian tropics as not many other Australian artists have done that?

Ray Crooke: In seeking out the decorative side of tropical growth probably yes.

Investigator: When you paint Fiji, are you thinking about the island as a tropical region, or does it offer biblical ideas of paradise?

Ray Crooke: I see it as a part of the South Pacific full of history and interesting people, no thought of Paradise.

Investigator: What effect does culture have on the landscape and how does Aboriginal Australian habitation contrast to Fijian habitation?

Ray Crooke: The culture of inhabitants has a very important effect on the landscape. Australian aborigines and Fijians are similar in that they do not destroy it as Europeans have.

Investigator: Do you find that European religion provides a vehicle for communication between Indigenous and European people?

Ray Crooke: Yes.

Investigator: What has prevented you from using Aboriginal motifs in your work?

Ray Crooke: Their meaning is hidden to me. I do not respond as it is a secret to them.

Investigator: How do you understand the difference in perception of landscape painting by European artists and Indigenous artists?

Ray Crooke: Aborigines use symbols, Europeans want to contain and describe.

Investigator: What is the most important contribution Gauguin made in his tropical paintings of Tahiti?

Ray Crooke: His use of colour.

Investigator: Would you say that Matisse was able to successfully paint a tropical attitude?

Ray Crooke: Yes, Matisse went to Tahiti and responded in his manner.

Investigator: You mentioned that if you could start again you would paint Amalfi and live in Italy, what is it that Italy offers that you wish to paint?

Ray Crooke: My discovery of the south of Italia (Bay of Naples) came when my European trip ended.

Investigator: Does Cairns and tropical Cape York have something in common with the Italian environment or sensibility?

Ray Crooke: Only that a lot of Italians live here and particularly, previously when the cane was being harvested.

Investigator: How have you balanced family life with painting?

Ray Crooke: By sharing experiences as a family. We have all been to Fiji, Europe and Cape York when on painting trips.

Investigator: Has your family been important for your work?

Ray Crooke: Yes, June has and is sympathetic to me as a painter. I met her on Thursday Island so she responds to my attempts to paint the Pacific islands (14 April 2009).

Appendix H Cover note by Ian Smith

Ian Smith wrote a cover **note** to accompany the questionnaire he posted back to me:

Cover note to my response as an artist to questionnaire regarding 'Tropical Paradise: its light and its shadows'. (Paradise as a theme in relation to the tropics)

I understand what you are proposing but I wonder about your starting point, the cliché – 'Paradise'.

'Paradise' is an inarticulate yet iconic word for beautiful, pristine, balmy, idyllic place of arrival or retreat. In the same way that love  is an inarticulate yet iconic image/visual symbol for a body organ responsible for our living, breathing impulse; and apparently, our romantic impulses as well.

According to the Macquarie dictionary: paradise n. 1. heaven, as the final abode of the righteous. 2. (according to some) an intermediate place for the departed souls of the righteous awaiting resurrection. 3. a place of extreme beauty or delight. 4. supreme felicity.

Meanwhile, I would think the Tropics (right around the world) or the 'Tropical Experience' for Indigenous as well as immigrant inhabitants has been Hell on Earth as much as a Paradise.

Having said this, I shall attempt to address your questionnaire in the manner I think you intend it; that is, the Tropics idealized as Paradise, sometimes realistically, sometimes in fantasy.

Appendix I Ingrid Hoffman: Opening night speech, 9 November 2012

Tropical Paradise: Its light and its shadows.

Thank you Angela for your kind invitation to open an exhibition filled with colour, energy and personal perspectives on the tropical place that is a temporary home to many, but your heartland from childhood.

I respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners past and present of the land on which we gather, the Walaburra Clan of the Gimuy Yjdinji People.

I also acknowledge Cairns Regional Council's support of artists through this venue we value deeply, the Tanks Art Centre.

With a decidedly female eye, Angela's exhibition aims to explore the shadows as well as the familiar sunlight of the tropics where many flowers blossom and butterflies delight. Shadows are metaphorical in several works and refer to tragedy (the accidental drowning at Jum Rum Creek after Cyclone Yasi), melancholy for a dying grandmother, and the painful ambiguities of in *Argument at La Traviata*. The settings of these paintings are local environments but the subject matter embraces the psychological dimensions of the human conditions.

By contrast, Angela's family world embraces her garden setting, the light-filled sanctuary that celebrates respect and love for growing things. In her own words;

The honey-eaters that fly through the foliage are like fish on the coral reef, darting and floating and chasing. The activity and sound they bring to a busy garden is the soundtrack of busy life, and a way of the native tropics to reclaim introduced gardens. Their flighty forms give context to the architecture of the plant structures, and speak of the interdependent relationship between flora and fauna.

It's always fascinating watching the stages of artist's journey – or listening to new musicians or reading new writers – because while their experiments and trial ideas may seem raw in places, their vigorous pursuit of a goal can be so affecting and motivating for the viewer/listener/reader.

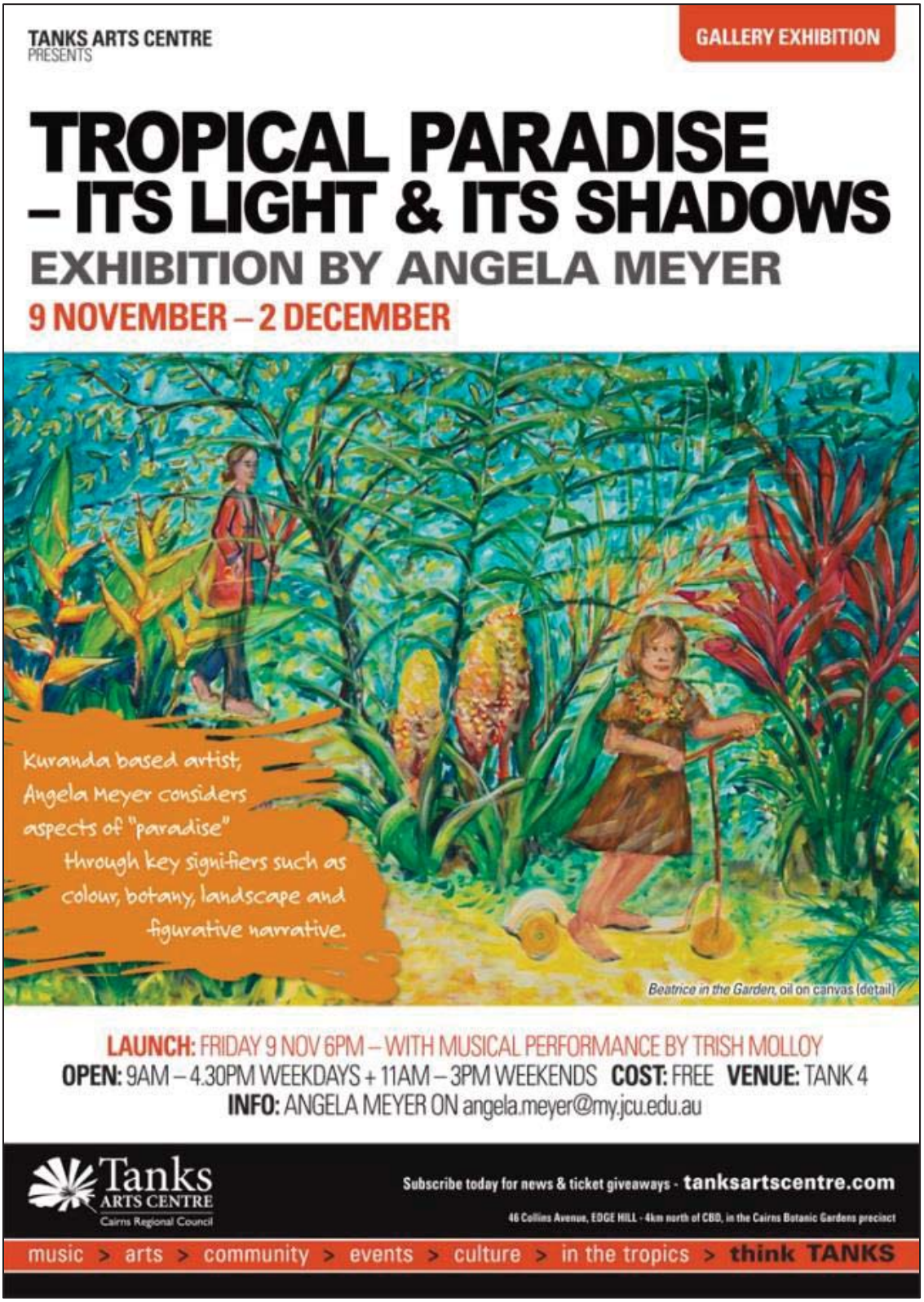
Angela concentrates on the things she holds dear: the strength of women, the ecological connections of gardens and rainforest, the simple beauty of flowers, the importance of family and love of place.

Angela's work is both a culmination of a phase, and the very beginning of a new one. I know she will seek the feedback of other artists further on the path as she continues her research, and there will be new opportunities, further directions…

I congratulate Angela on *Tropical Paradise: Its light and its shadows*, and look forward to seeing the future unfolding of her art.

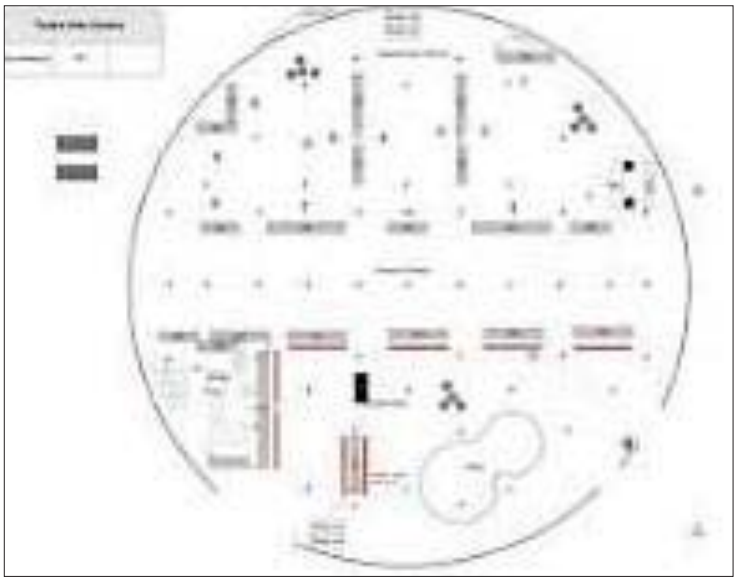
Thank you everyone for coming to this newly launched exhibition by Angela Meyer.

Appendix J Poster for Exhibition designed by Lisa Monks, 2012.



Appendix K Invitation for Exhibition designed by Kade Moir, 2015.

Appendix L Exhibition Floor plan at Tanks Arts Centre 2012.



Appendix M Exhibition Floor plan at Tablelands Regional Gallery 2015.