

**INTUITIVE INQUIRY AND CREATIVE PROCESS:
A CASE STUDY OF AN ARTISTIC PRACTICE**

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Key Words

Intuition

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Journaling

Self observation

Stream of consciousness

Abstract

This Master of Arts by research was comprised of two components: creative practice (60%) and a written thesis (40%). The creative practice was partially represented in an exhibition of paintings, drawings, photographs and artist books entitled *Traces*, held at WiseART Gallery, 166 Ann St, Brisbane, March 2005. The written component is represented in this manuscript.

This case study illustrates the creative process of an individual artistic practice through intuitive inquiry, which utilized self-observation methods such as painting, drawing, photographing, bookmaking, exhibitions, journaling, questioning and mindfulness. Intuitive inquiry is outlined as the predominant method of both the phenomenon of art making in this case, as well as the method used to study the creative process. The concept of intuitive inquiry as a research method, by its similarity to this particular creative process, was well suited to studying its delicate, preconscious, internally reflective and reflexive activities. Intuitive inquiry also underpins the exceptional, transformative experiences of the artist, which are often excluded from conventional empirical research.

The results of this study demonstrate that it is through the hermeneutic interpretations of process, product and dialogue that a deeper understanding of the creative process is gained. The hermeneutic model of creative process that emerged (Fig 4.14) will assist others in a deeper understanding of how creative process can be utilized in generating new knowledge. More importantly, it is this creative interpretive process that can lead to transformative experiences, which encourage both the artist and the audience to search for a deeper engagement with each other and the world.

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“The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made”

*Signature:*_____

*Date:*_____

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1. Introduction

...Art is one of the most important means of learning about ourselves and the world around us. When people create or respond to art, they make connections between themselves and the experiences of others...It is because art extends personal and public awareness that it is valued as a human activity (Sullivan 1994, p.5).

Overview

This thesis explores the creative process of one artist, myself, in an effort to understand more fully the motivation and processes employed in creative expression and its potential to transform human experience. I use the term intuitive inquiry to describe both the creative process and as a method of research because it closely resembles the creative process itself. As an artist I have over the years developed a highly sophisticated use of this method to explore personal, aesthetic and social issues. In the course of this study the circular nature of research became quickly evident. Experience is researched and expressed through creative process and intuitive inquiry researches the creative process. For example, my childhood experiences inform my creative process affecting both the content and the style of my paintings and the paintings that result from the process inform my quest for meaning through intuitive inquiry. This idea can be summarized in the following diagram.



Intuitive inquiry is a term defined as an investigation based primarily on intuitive rather than analytical or rational processes. Webster's II New Riverside

University Dictionary (1994) defines intuition as, “The act of knowing without the use of rational processes: immediate cognition”. The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2000) defines intuition as:

- 1** : immediate apprehension or cognition without reasoning or inferring
- 2** : knowledge or conviction gained by intuition
- 3** : the power or faculty of gaining direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference.

The value of intuitive inquiry is that it enables the artist/researcher to accurately relay the richness and complexity of the creative process. It also assists in revealing aspects of what it means to be human, including the profound, the transformative, the mysterious and the creative which are often unavailable through conventional empirical research. It is by applying intuitive inquiry to the process and product of my own creative practice that the subtle and complex nuances of creative process can be studied.

The study is divided into two components; an exhibition of art produced during the one and a half years of research and the written component which is subsequently divided into four sections and provides multiple perspectives on this complex study. First, in this introduction I give an overview of the study and then through a poetic yet chronological description I outline the autobiographical context as it relates to my development as an artist. Second, I describe how the research process unfolded including a literature review and a discussion of the shifts that occurred as a result of exhibiting my art work midway through the study. Third, I describe in detail my creative process which is broken down into five methods; the actual painting process, the role and means of self-reflection through journaling, a description of stream of consciousness, self questioning techniques, and the

importance of focus and mindfulness. Quotations from my journal are noted in bold italics throughout the written part of the study. Fourth, I discuss the major outcomes of this study including the circular nature of creating and viewing art, the concept of “the trace”, and how we might use the art product as a site where we discover meaning. I then introduce my hermeneutic model of creative process and discuss the transformative effect it can have on both the artist and viewer. In conclusion I discuss the major findings of this study and indicate directions for future research.

As a case study, my primary objective in this research is to describe my creative process and secondarily to analyze and interpret the resulting material in order to gain a detailed understanding of that process. The validity of this case study is tested by triangulation and by resonance. (Anderson & Braud 1998). By describing the case through a variety of creative mediums; painting, drawing, photographing, writing and exhibiting I establish multiple points of observation necessary for methodological triangulation (Stake 1995, p.114). In addition I provide primary data for the reader/audience to “see for themselves” (Wolcott 1994, pp.350-351) in the exhibition of art work, excerpts from my journals, the autobiographical context section, and an example of stream of conscious writing to enable the reader/audience to resonate with the descriptions and interpretations of creative process. It is by presenting this case study that I provide a vicarious experience for the reader/audience as they make interpretations based on their prior knowledge, which ultimately modifies or transforms their existing knowledge (Stake 1995).



Figure 1.1 - Chaos, acrylic on paper 164cm x 225 cm

Autobiographical Context

Crying, Crying, Crying, Crying, alone in fetal position to find something familiar. . . No one, no ease, no familiar heart, no familiar place. No we. Alone – Crying – Self-soothing abandoned infant. No soft mother skin. Lost - adrift. We are lost and separated at birth stolen from our life source, abandoned into the care of strangers. Who are we without our mother? We develop tension and armor in our shoulders from crying and we eventually stop and soothe ourselves. Without the boundaries of womb or maternal body we seem to float. We have lost our body to the harsh environment of the nursery.

Otherness - A sudden rupture. At five years old I fiercely want freedom and am pained by separation. It is difficult to know who I am and what I want. Difficult to remember and harder to forget the Other, the shadow of those who broke into my private space, a penetration sick with sweat and betrayal. I was required to believe that they were the Almighty Father and Mother. I am confused and fearful of others.

Tantrums, anger, grief, fear, hiding behind, observing, witnessing, leaving the body, crying, dreaming, loving animals, trees, soil, rivers, lakes, oceans, wind, rain, sun, stars, moon, dreaming a reality that was light. Not of this body which received the pain and demands of an abusive family. A yearning to escape the heaviness and fear of the unbearable experience of being me, a runaway child meets an angel and is redirected inwards to survive.

Now, I am not being. I am just quiet, alone, senses dulled by the cacophony of demands. Just sleeping, hiding, recovering and cautiously discovering being.

Someday I was to realize and understand the survival ways of depression and isolation.

Creating sense of a world so precarious, I quietly seek the magic of nature, watching tadpoles turn to frogs in the pond, merging with water as it flows down around rocks and pools of the streams in the Vermont woods. I am transformed by the cold quiet snow falling on everything and awed by the stars and the Milky Way. Hours spent gazing into the deep dark waters of ocean and lake patiently revealed the brown speckled movement of trout and other creatures. Finding colored eggs in the grass and collecting bumble bees from the flower garden helped me to forget the past and the future. Climbing trees, picking apples and pears, hiding under the forsythia bushes making a safe home tunneled under to thick overarching branches covered in yellow in the spring. I swept the dirt floor, pretended tea, made a soft bed to dream in to be alone. . . safe.

Making dolls alone in my room sewing, gluing, coloring, I dream a world different and separate from the others in the family. My needle goes in and out securing the association between disparate objects. I make a sling shot from a branch carefully carving the bark off and notching the Y ends to hold firmly the large rubber bands and piece of leather. The pebbles go sailing over the big grey house, high and free. I know I am powerful but I never once thought of killing, wounding or dominating. I am shocked and saddened by the deaths of wounded and rescued chicks.

The art room at school was in the attic of an old brick building. The space was a lofty and cluttered haven from the rigors of academic boredom and peer ridicule. Quietly exploring dreams and fabricating meaning from available bits and pieces. I drew a primitive bird in the trees, imaged the moon shining across the water, painted a red hat hanging on an old green door and printed a Japanese fish swimming in the wind. I was quiet and safe.

As a young adult I discovered that the art of photographs captured and organized my richly visual world. I successfully hid behind a camera lens directing my senses into two dimensional frames. Looking in windows, through doors, down stairways, I documented the passage of humans by their habitual and accidental markings in an inner-city environment, the ravage of time and decay and the persistent struggle of urban weeds to flourish in an inhospitable world. Multiple frames broken by line finally arrived at images freed from the rigid boundaries of photo-reality and became drawings and paintings of my imaginary worlds. Jungian analysis amply nourished this time of creativity revealing a long and deep depression along with the full richness of my psyche.

Painting – not relying on the outside world for anything, I withdrew into the realm of color and imagination freed from the limits of external visual cues, a dream-life expressed in sensual colors, textures. An archaeological dig into the depths unearthed the forgotten artifacts and precious understandings of my life that lay buried under depression and panic. Thankfully, I always had a room to fill with collections of creative materials, a space where creativity could flourish.

Words, poetry, letters, essays, ramblings flowed into spiral notebooks. Leafing back through the pages I see that the stories are repetitive, caught in a tangled maze of the expectations and demands of others. I am lost and cannot find the end or the beginning. It is better to be silent, to observe, to feel, to move, to whisper in a language all my own. Where are the words that are never spoken? How do I speak the unspeakable or write my experience? Words can spin tales that have no roots that I know of. I was not understood. I did not understand. Better to just paint. Better to hide my paintings under the bed.

In my 30s I became passionately engaged in the conception, gestation, birth and nurturing of my two children. Painting with egg yolk and pigment, I gave birth to a series of painted mandalas that were gently worked by hand against my gestating belly with seeds, feathers, sticks, bones and colored glass. Always perfect in their unfinished state they evolved, grew, and lived close to my heart and soul. I loved mothering these surprising bundles of my own flesh and blood. Reworked and nurtured for years, the mandalas and the children were weaned and gradually set free.

The blue fresh skies, broad gold hills and rocky cliffs washed with cold arctic currents of Northern California and the self sacrificing role of motherhood at last collided with the dark dank cellars of my past. I began to recall and relive memories of sexual abuse and incest. I divorced myself from my parents and siblings and partner. I swam in the loss of my biological history. I carried the drudge of parenting and my second unhappy marriage. Painting continued to be a nourishing lifeline during this dark period which finally resulted in a healing and reclaiming of positive

self esteem and the strength gained through survival. I was happy to find myself flourishing, able to speak out on issues of abuse at conferences, workshops and through publishing and distributing my book *Unsent letters paintings and poetry: An examination of healing from sexual abuse* (May 1995).

Eventually having arrived on Australian shores and enrolled in Masters of Arts program, I continued to share my artwork with others and found ways to talk about my creative experience. I was concerned that the perceptions, judgments and criticisms of others would stifle my creativity. My paintings had been carefully protected for many years as one would guard a diary from prying eyes. I feared for my ability to handle both positive and negative comments and expectations and I worried that somehow the fresh and unique child like quality of creative exploration that I had worked so hard for would become tainted by aesthetic theories and academic expectations. As I grew confident in my artistic process and in the value and meaning of my work I found that I could traverse back and forth between theory and practice, each feeding the other. And I found that the questions I ask myself are relevant and meaningful to others.

2. Research Process and the Role of Intuitive Inquiry

The real business of a case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself. (Stake 1995, p.8)

The following description of my research process demonstrates the gradual unfolding of the research process within two subsections, *Literature Review* and *Exhibitions*, as I the artist/researcher experienced it. Within my particular case, intuitive inquiry was established as the predominant methodology within my practice, as well as the methodology that was developed for studying my creative process. As outlined, the nature of this study was one of continuous discovery, building and interweaving knowledge through immersion in creative practice, review of pertinent and related literature, development of methods for collecting and interpreting data, and exhibiting, which led to the development of my hermeneutic model of creative process.

Literature Review

I arrived in Australia in July 2003 with an urgent need to continue an immersive painting practice which had begun during a week long master class designed to “stir up the creative potential and awaken creative passion” (Cassou 2001, p.1). A QUT studio on Merrivale Street in Brisbane was immediately provided to that end. A focused and sustained daily painting practice in the context of an academic setting gradually expanded to include conscious and deliberate self observation for the purpose of collecting data on my creative activities and thought

processes. Encouraged by the emerging field of using creative practice as a research method I placed an enormous faith in my creative practice and its ability to bring focus and meaning to the as yet undefined research project.

As I began to read about creativity, qualitative methodologies, intuition, and so on, I asked myself, “How can I translate what I am doing in the studio into a research methodology?” I was familiar with my own painting process and had gained immense personal satisfaction and growth through my practice but struggled with how to extrapolate these benefits to the larger research community. My natural working processes were validated by readings on qualitative methodology (Alvesson 1999; Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Reed-Danahay 1997; Stake 1995; Wolcott 1994; Rodriguez & Ryave 2002). Significant contributions to the emerging field of creative practice as research have been made by writers such as Sullivan (1994, 2005), Bolt (2004) and Carter (2004). Because creative practice as research is a new field participation in the general academic environment was of paramount importance. I attended CIRAC research seminars and had many conversations with fellow post graduate students who were using their art practice as research (Woodhams, Haselwood, and others at Queensland University of Technology, 2003-2005). Additional information from the Internet, such as *The Centre for Research into Practice*, *Artful inquiry salon ARTIS* and papers on *Practice Led Research* published on the QUT on line teaching web site provided me with current material which was unavailable from traditional print sources.

Investigations into the creative processes of artists have been scarce. However, the intensive research in the drawing lab at the University of Pennsylvania conducted by Beittel (1973) did establish an early and rigorous methodology to map the creative process as observed by him and graduate research students as objective

researchers. Although Beittel gained a deep understanding of creative process he admits the limitations of external observation. In my research I have discovered that both the objective and subjective view of the artist/researcher provides valuable insight into the creative process and is an effective way to gain insight into the delicate nuances of creative thoughts.

Creativity theories are often discussed in terms of psychoanalytic, cognitive and social processes. Margaret Gilchrist (1972) provides a clear summary of the research and theories of Freud and his followers who generally hold that the unconscious and subconscious realms are at the root of human experience and creativity. Jungian analyst Marion Milner's (1981) extensive self study candidly reveals both the difficulties and the insights that can occur through self-observation and offers one of the first subjective accounts on the nature of creative process. I concur with Taft's theories of "ego relaxing" (Taft in Gilchrist 1972, p.41) that describe the artist's capacity to permit "the expression of unanalyzed thoughts, unconventional and novel associations..." (1972, p.41) thus allowing the artist's inner world to find expression. These sentiments are also supported by concepts derived from Freud's theories of the primary processes of the unconscious mind and of preconscious and extraconscious mental functioning (Gilchrist 1972; Kaha in Joyce & Isaksen et al.1999). These forms of "undifferentiated perception can grasp in a single undivided act of comprehension data that to conscious perception would be incompatible" (Rothenberg & Housman, in Joyce & Isaksen et al. 1999, p. 81).

It is important to exercise caution when analyzing content or focusing on an external as opposed to intrinsic motivation for creative process, such as psychiatric diagnosis or treatment. Although creativity most certainly can be experienced as therapeutic, the method of working outlined in this study is not art therapy in that its

primary aim is expressive and aesthetic rather than therapeutic. According to Theresa Amabile there are six methods for killing creativity; expected evaluation, surveillance, reward, competition, restricted choice and extrinsic orientation (Amabile in Joyce & Isaksen, et. al.1999, p.65). The judicious voices of teachers, parents, art critics or therapists which are then internalized as “shoulds” and “should nots” can create blocks and conditions which limit the possibility for free expression and exploration. The creative process methods described in Section 3 are designed to maximize the artist’s freedom to explore authentic creative impulse through painting, journaling, stream of consciousness, questioning, and mindfulness.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996) made a significant contribution in the development of a systems model of creativity by introducing the concept of “flow” to describe the sense of timelessness often experienced during times of creative activity. Amabile (1999) moves the study of creativity beyond the mystique of the individual genius and situates the phenomenon of creativity firmly in the social realm. She states that creativity is dependent on social variables that in turn effect an artist’s motivation. In this case study I focus on descriptions of my particular creative process while recognizing that as an individual, my internal world is part of a larger system. The external world influences my art and my art influences the external world.

My inner world finds its expression through what I term intuitive creative processes. Theories of intuitive thought and insight are complex and the definitions remain imprecise, yet are considered to be central to the phenomena of creativity and the search for meaning (Bastick 1982; Stake 1995; Schwartz in Joyce and Isaksen 1999). Michelle Cassou (2001) writes extensively on intuition as the primary method of creative inquiry. Physicist David Bohm (1998) explores the phenomenon of

intuitive insight which he says increases the possibility of creating new patterns of perception and result in entirely new structures of thought or shifts in consciousness. My definition of intuition is a synthesis of three basic concepts; empathy, unconscious symbolism, as theorized by C. G. Jung, (Jung, 1964; Adams & Duncan, 2003) and a sensory or gut feeling based on bodily sensations. Some of the properties of intuition as described by Bastick (1982, pp.298-321) are that it is pre-verbal, pre-conscious and non-sequential. It is for this reason that logical or purely rational explanations of intuitive processes fall short. Robert Stake however, speaking of the interpretive aspects of case study asserts that “there is much art and much intuitive processing to the search for meaning” (Stake 1995, p.72). It therefore seems necessary in this study to embrace this imprecise faculty of human intelligence.

When I am painting, I loose track of time. I fall into a kind of meditative state where my thoughts and feelings seem to float by without conscious awareness. I am just putting paint on paper one color at a time. I feel content, tireless and sometimes blissful. The work of Brewster Ghiselin as described in Purto (2004, p.44) offer descriptions of “the *massive concentration* that the creator exhibits”, what “many other creative people describe as this trancelike state” (2004, p.45).

I have long been aware of the similarities of how I paint and the calm focused qualities of the mind, which I call mindfulness, that occur in meditation. The elements of meditation in my painting practice tend to minimize the impulse for forming attachments to both ideas and thoughts and enable me to focus on the creative process itself, relinquishing attachment to the final product. The works of Buddhist scholars (Pema Chodron 2002; Tenzin Palmo 2002; Anne Klein 1995; The Dali Lama 2001; Sogyal Rinpoche 2002, Krishnamurti 1985) support this notion of

non-attachment as a way of achieving deep insight and profound knowledge of the nature of self and the meaning of life. Christian theologian, Mathew Fox (2002) writes of a similar connection between meditation, spiritually and creativity. These writers believe that our true nature is to be creative, and equate the creative process with a spiritual yearning for knowledge, truth and wholeness. They believe that we create connections with each other through aesthetic experiences in order to express our most deeply felt beliefs and inner worlds. The notions of sustained focus and meditation are discussed further in Section 3.

Intuitive inquiry and creative process are essentially equivalent activities. Psychologist Rosemary Anderson introduced the term “intuitive inquiry” as a qualitative research method based on using “transpersonal skills such as intuition and alternative states of consciousness” (Anderson & Braud 1998, p.258). This term resonates with my desire to use creative process to explore the depths of my art making activities. Anderson affirms that the development of new research methodologies that include “alternative modes of knowing and of working with and expressing our findings” (1998, p.258) will broaden the capacity for researchers to study the exceptional and transformative experiences which are often excluded from conventional research.

Throughout the duration of this study I repeatedly turned to the painting process, spending three to four hours per day working in the studio trusting that the process would lead me to an intuitive understanding of creativity. The skills described in Section 3 have been developing in my creative work since 1987 and gradually provided me with a clearly defined method of inquiry into the nature of creative process. I developed a means to document this process which consisted of taking notes on paper tacked on the wall and writing in journals. I did not try using a

tape recorder, because I could not imagine myself speaking out loud my thoughts and ruminations and especially as I was working in a shared studio. I began by making candid notes about what I was immediately doing or thinking and then asked questions related to those thoughts in order to dissolve creative blocks which appeared as moments of indecision, confusion, both negative and positive judgments, and loss of momentum. The research notebooks acted as a repository for quotes, notes on readings, thoughts about the project, methodology, day to day action lists, ink drawings, emotional processing of personal issues, intentions and ideas. They provided a safe and fluid arena for developing conceptual frameworks and strategies.

Through this attempt at recording my creative process in journals it quickly became obvious that an objective examination of self was impossible. In fact the writing temporarily and repeatedly interrupted the painting process. Later on I recognized that the note taking actually became part of a reflexive inquiry causing something like a “feedback loop” which changed my perception and understanding of the moment to moment painting process. This reflexivity resulted in intuitive progress towards deeper insight into the meaning of my work. Writing, used as a tool to gain observational data, became an additional subjective and creative tool for self exploration.

The difficulties inherent in observing the self have been noted by numerous social scientists. Rodriguez and Ryave (2002), in their work with systematic self-observation, try to mitigate some of the problems of validity associated with subjective data by collecting and analyzing the narrative self-observations or “field notes” gathered from a large sample of informants. They recognize that, “Virtually all major spiritual and self-development disciplines cultivate some form of self-

observation, and for several of them, it is a primary and essential feature of their practice” (Rodriguez and Ryave 2002, p.58). Artists in particular use highly sophisticated and personal systems of self-observation in the creative process. They claim that “the only way to obtain data on such processes [thought processes such as dreams, fantasies, stream of consciousness, idealizations . . . hallucinations and delusions. . .] is through asking one’s subject to introspect” (Rodriguez and Ryave, 2002, p.58).

The process of analyzing my own creativity has been similar to walking into a hall of mirrors. The infinite reflections blur the division between subject and object and draw anything and everything into the inquisitive frame; my experience, beliefs, gender, culture and so on. The paintings reflect my experience. The writings and drawings reflect the painting process and then the reflection becomes reflexive as I the artist/researcher am affected by the insights that occur in the process. However, in spite of the complexities of self-observation I can think of no better way to get closer to the creative process. This insider view is immensely useful in trying to understand how artists create.

My creative work is unwaveringly autobiographical and the focus of this study is on the personal introspection that occurs in my creative practice as well as the autobiographical content of the work. I have therefore found some approaches of auto-ethnography to be a useful model. As defined by Ellis and Bochner, auto-ethnography “is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (in Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.739). Additionally, I take a feminist stance with regards to the issue of subjectivity in research, firmly positioning my self in agreement with Oakley (2000, p.35) when she affirms the value of personal experience as research

data. It is important to note that the “inner expert” (Belenky, et al. 1986, p. 68) is not infallible, however subjective truth gains authority when applied to the validity of personal experience.

People often ask me which artists have influenced my practice. I honestly have to respond that although for the most part I take an active disinterest in other art, I do, however resonate with “outsider artists” (Tuchman et. al. 1992; Weiss 1992; Krausmann 1989). Outsider artists by definition live and work outside the predominant culture and create their work tangential to mainstream or commercial art contexts. I identify with these artists because like mine, their work is highly personal and particular yet it reflects the deep cultural concerns of our time, i.e. trauma, violence, isolation, poverty and so on.



Figure 2.1 - Her World exhibition, July 2004

Exhibitions

In July 2004, midway into the study, I presented all of my paintings dating back to 1987 in an exhibition entitled *Her World* in H block Gallery, QUT, Kelvin Grove. The oldest series of paintings were hung seamlessly across three large walls. My viewers and I were equally stunned by how the edges of one painting blended into the next in an unnerving way. As I sat viewing the exhibition I thought about how consistently my work describes my world and about how I often push towards realizing what exists beyond the material and psychological limits, realizing that I aim towards inclusion rather than exclusion. I often ask myself, “***What is lurking behind my shoulder waiting to be expressed, to be discovered?***”

It was evident in the exhibition that there was a quality to the work that goes beyond ideas of space and time which is achieved intuitively through the use of a change in “focal length” (Anderson & Braud 1998, p.85) that resulted in a imagery ranging from microscopic detail of molecules, atoms and particles to the telescopic grandeur of stars and nebulas. Later in the study I explored this notion of changing focal length through the digital process of enlarging and reducing photographic details of the original paintings.

This mid-study exhibition gave me the opportunity to step out of my creative experience in order to consciously and empathically engage in the subject matter through the eyes and responses of my audience. My presence throughout the exhibition of my work enabled me to dialogue with my audience using the art as a common point of reference. Together we witnessed my internal world represented by the characters, personalities, and symbols that explored and mapped my personal

experience. The works evoked deep resonances in my audience and inspired many conversations about abuse, trauma, suffering, beauty and creative process.

While viewing my work as it hung on the walls of the exhibition space I was drawn to photograph details of the large paintings. Recording and classifying the individual images freed from their relational context often exposed new and surprising meanings. In the role of artist/researcher I used the camera lens to explore, to order, and to define a visual lexicon of my symbolic language, which I describe in detail in Section 4. An initial feeling of confinement caused by working with the tight rectangular framing of the camera lens shifted to an experience of freedom as my focus shifted from the painting process to the discovery of symbolic information. Symbolic representation is an open ended system that explains our capacity for creating meaning from experience. They offer us a simple device for communicating a complex system of meanings and relationships and can be defined as “...the best possible representation of something that can never be fully known” (Jung in Hopcke 1999, p.29). I suggest that the enigmatic language of symbols speak directly to the unconscious mind of the artist during the creative process as well as to the unconscious mind of an external audience.

The photographic images derived from the exhibition I would later use in conjunction with text to create small concertina books (Figure 4.5). In an effort to join the textual and visual traces of my creative process I explored the phrasing and sequential aspects of my work through the book form. Putting the two together required a distillation process. Each phrase of text and every section of painting are replete with complex meaning and emotional depth and trace the creative urge to synthesize various creative voices into bite-size morsels of experience.

Although at this time I continued to focus on the creative process in the studio, I could not ignore the impact that the content of my images had on my audience and on me. It became increasingly difficult to position myself as researcher/artist in relation to my paintings, my changing perceptions of my self, the act of creating and the audience response. I asked, “What is the relationship between process and product?” “What meaning can be found in the process? In the product? In the interchange between artist and audience?” “What are the relationships between artist and audience?”

In an attempt to answer these questions I have developed a model based on the hermeneutic concepts of forward and backward arcs. This model offers a framework for thinking about the issues and questions stated above and describe how creative process generates new knowledge (Figure 4.14). Hermeneutics is generally understood as the science of interpreting text (Packer & Addison 1989) and is useful in this study for its capacity to shed light on the circular process of creativity. In my research I have found that that creative processes and related activities are processes of inquiry that build understanding upon previously formed insights or prior knowledge. This is a powerful tool when employed in the interpretation of and discovery of the meaning of art and art practice, which I explain in more detail in Section 4.

3. The Creative Process Methods

If you do not listen to your intuition, it will stop talking to you. Your intuition is like a sensitive friend. If you question it, censor it, judge it, it gets hurt and becomes silent. When you paint for process, you don't decide what is and is not acceptable. The gift of spontaneous expression has been given to transcend that choice, to open you to what you do not know, can not predict, or expect. (Cassou & Cubley 1995, p.81)

In this section I will describe methods I use for creating art; painting, journaling, stream of consciousness, questioning and mindfulness, all of which utilize intuitive processes and direct knowledge. Bastick (1982); Cassou (2001); Klein (1995); Bohm (1998) provide further indication that the pre-verbal, pre-conscious and non-sequential processes of intuition that result in creating new patterns of perception and shifts in consciousness are central to the phenomenon of creativity. My process is a deliberate attempt to circumvent the rational, limited, and judgmental aspects of mind. It is a process of giving up what I think I know about painting, about myself and about the world around me and is a celebration of a candid authentic creativity. Cassou and Cubley, who link creativity closely with intuitive process, say that the “creative process is enough [and that] it is a doorway into a direct experience of the essential life force which are at the root of the urge to create art” (1995, p.xviii). Intuitive creative activity has an intrinsic value regardless of the form or quality of the artistic product. The methods described below outline a structure within which a highly personal and idiosyncratic creative process can flourish. I use this structure to support both my ongoing creative process and a disciplined research methodology finding that it facilitates a fluid and deeply meaningful creative process and results in art that has both personal and social

significance and research that has value due to its transparency and accessibilities to others.

Figure 3.2 Painting in the Studio



Painting

14/9/03 “I begin with a blank sheet of paper tacked to the wall I pick up a soft tapered brush; scan the 25 premixed colors for one that draws me and dip into it. I move to the wall, start painting, let the brush find a shape, an image, a line. I pay attention to how I feel in the moment, watching my hand move the brush feeling alive and present in the immediate moment. Sometimes I think I know. How I will start a painting? Maybe a figure or an object? It must be something that fills my being with urgency. I don’t have a specific image in mind, only a feeling and a sense of what might be. A red organic shape may be a heart but I don’t know if it is located in a body. Whose body? Why? Maybe more than one heart? I try to make it feel real, deep red, with veins and arteries lacing through the tissue. I can feel it beating.”

The studio environment is another important site where intuitive research can flourish (see Figure 3.1). As a child I found that being alone in my room or out in nature were the only times I felt safe enough to let my vigilance relax. I need time to myself with no interruptions, no one looking over my shoulder making comments and no expectations to produce. This “soulful shelter” (Cassou 2001, p.4) is a physical place and a mental state. It is a space where the mind can be free of censorship and where mistakes are valued as signs of creative risk.

The routine practices described below accommodate intuitive right brain processes are relatively unfettered by the rational left brain (Edwards 1999). These include variable routines for mixing and applying paint, taping additional paper to work in progress and habits for finishing and signing the work. For example, when I think a painting is complete I spontaneously choose a color and write my name somewhere on the painting but look to see if there isn’t just one more dot or line that could be added in order to encourage breakthroughs into unexpected subject matter or surprising associations. Sometimes that one dot inspires working for an additional hour or so. I often return to previously “finished” paintings and work back into them

with more detail and I routinely add images to the existing paintings by adding more paper or by layering images on top of others to accommodate my expanding visions.

The use of A1 size paper and Siberian squirrel brushes in sizes that range from #2 to #12, acrylic paint premixed to a particular viscosity and tacking the paper directly to the wall allow fluidity and flexibility. I prefer to work in silence in order to minimize distractions. I find that the discipline and practice of these routines minimize interruptions due to technical difficulties and outside disturbances and have enhanced my ability to focus and sustain intuitive inquiry.

Journaling

19/8/03 “Keeping the brush moving

Dots

Slips

One color – adding detail

Enjoying color – repetitive motion – dipping the brush – moving back and forth to the painting – not looking – letting the mind wander- smells – noise, irritated at lack of control of studio environment - I am actively blocking out intrusions.”

Reflective listening is required for any good communication and can be practiced by paraphrasing what we hear people say in a non-judgmental way. It is a skill I learned while participating in therapy groups and as a mother, teacher and group leader. Reflective listening, applied to the creative process, functions more like a mirror or a tool for reflecting various aspects of the self and specifically my own creative processes. I have found that journaling is an excellent method for documenting this self reflection and is one that I have used to observe my inner thoughts and feelings since I was a teenager. Journaling also provides a safe place to experiment with creative writing. Reflecting on my painting process in a journal provided an environment where I could record the thoughts, feelings and actions that occur while painting, reporting or paraphrasing the creative thought processes without censor or criticism in order to track subtle and creative decision making activities.

My written journals are an instrument of self exploration similar to the painting process. This highly introspective work through painting and written observations is the major research activity of both intuitive inquiry and creative process. In order to protect the sensitive, experimental, highly personal and sometimes insecure painting process from the intrusive effects of outside criticism I used the “private diary” concept of reflective listening as a means to ensure that my

work would transparently explore the deepest elements of my experience and my creativity. By revealing these private notations my inner process of creativity are brought to light.

It is significant to note that although I treasure the intimate privacy of my work, I have also in the past sourced my journals and paintings for material while I was writing a book about my experiences of healing from the effects of sexual abuse (May 1995). I had discovered that both my writing and painting contained accurate depictions of the suffering and despair of what I had, at first, no conscious memories and I had never spoken of these memories to anyone. To publicly expose my deepest self was a natural progression in my quest for healing as well as the result of a compelling desire to make my voice heard for the sake of other victims of abuse. Discovering that the results of a previously private process have an aesthetic value beyond the intrinsic and personal motivation to create is an element which surfaced several times during the course of this current study.

Focusing on the content and the meaning of the imagery has been a challenging aspect of this inquiry. Initially I tried to write about the paintings and discovered that in taking the position of objective observer my analytical mind could not effectively convey the emotional nuances of the subject matter. I then applied the process of intuitive inquiry to writing and found an exciting world of uncensored words that paralleled my visual work. In the process I realized that my writing, paintings and drawings could all be considered a form of stream of consciousness.



like a small child in a crowd, lifted
 up put in the blue sky - living in the sea
 floating like a seed searching a home -
 growing by mysterious plan. Come
 but understood feeling by too fast -
 heart in throat throat - Gagging
 on the living rot of death 
 and birth  Open wide
 to see to view the passing nurtured
 hearts breathing oxygen + gassed particles
 of light digested along with liquid
 passing through excrete. Gestating
 nurses the earth the soil the wormy
 soil like blind snakes burrowing into
 the center for warmth. Nerves raw
 to stimulating passing noise + ~~hair~~ hands
 on flesh like blinding lights driving late
 and tired vessels of life - veins of fluid
 pumping pumping processing growing from
 the dead - Multicultural. Multi Cultural
 senses wirey hair, long noses, freckled skin
 large feet, small brain, fur, horns, eyes
 + tongues disintegrating + living on - breaking

Figure 3.2 - Sample from stream of consciousness journal

Stream of Consciousness

12/04...like a small child in a crowd, lifted up put in the blue sky – living in the sea floating like a seed searching a home – growing my mysterious plan. Gone but understood fleeting by too fast...

Stream of consciousness is a term that describes a literary genre that represents the uncensored and continuous flow of ideas and feelings that constitute an individual's unconscious experience and is often used as a writing mechanism to realize what seems at first to be incomprehensible and inexpressible. Similar to the consciousness of a pre-verbal child, the flow of consciousness “is not censored, rationally controlled or logically ordered but parallels actual mental experience” (Humphrey 1954, p.3).

In this study I used stream of consciousness writing (see Figure 3.2) and drawing (see Figure 4.2) as a method, independent from painting, to creatively explore non-rational experiences and insights that were emerging through painting. I discovered that the written and drawn images were similar to the painted images indicating to me that the creative source, my experience and my world view are an integrated whole. The writing and the paintings mirror each other but do not literally explain each other. According to Sellers (1988) writing is thus another creative process tools used in intuitive inquiry and will bring into existence alternative forms of relation, perception and expression. It is this alternative language, the link to the pre-conscious experience that I use while immersed in the creative process. I consider my painting processes to be a visual stream of consciousness embedded in the present moment through mindfulness and informed by the totality of my subjective self.

Following the stream of conscious flow, intuitive inquiry leads me to new and surprising knowledge about myself and my perceptions. For example, I was motivated by a vague but persistent desire to paint ghosts (*Ghosts* figure 4.1). I asked myself, “*What if I could paint something that was unknown? What would I paint? A dot, a line, a color, a ghost?*” By deliberately avoiding limited pre-conceptions of what constituted ghost imagery the amorphous figures that emerged at the bottom of the painting were somehow ghosts and not ghosts simultaneously. Using intuitive exploration while painting led me to create a new visual symbol. The grey forms express an indescribable feeling rather than a particular concept of ghost. In the painting process I rely on my intuitive and uncensored mind. As the stream of consciousness flows I release attachments to meaning, content or style of the painting allowing new understanding to emerge with the images and often merely focusing on the aesthetic sensuousness of paint as it flows onto the paper. (See Figure 4.3)

The Questions/Self Interviewing

As a reflexive practice, questioning can serve many purposes as issues are explored, concepts challenged and ideas clarified. A critical art practice not only considers what is apparent and assumed but addresses that which may be neglected, contrived and contested. (Sullivan 2005, p.88)

The questioning or self interviewing procedure is a major element of my intuitive inquiry. I use questions to support and direct my working process. They are designed to free my mind from habitual thinking patterns and often focus on assumptions of perspective and other factors that influence how I make decisions. It is difficult to collect data on how I develop and answer questions during the painting

and drawing processes because the act of stopping to record instantly brings me out of the creative process. Instead I discovered that there were natural breaks in the process when for example, I am unsure of how to continue or when I am confused, bored or tired. I used these breaks to query myself.

“Who is painting?”

I am painting

“Who are you?”

The colorist

The philosopher

The woman, mother, child

The wise one

The angry one

The frustrated one

The curious one

The playful one

The know it all one

The perfect one

The artist one

The slob

The student

The critic

The judge

The curator

The wise one

The Egg

The womb

The star

The snake

Infinite unknown sources?

The whole me in undiscovered always emerging, fluid, entwined, illusion of matter and transcendent of the self as inherent fixed reality.

“What am I feeling?”

An anxiety, a sickness in my belly and emptiness. All is futile. Nothing Matters. All is the same. Nothing is clear. All is suffering, out of control with unwanted growth. There is a spark of white like a shimmer in the blue water! Oh yes there is light too. Always light.

“What am I NOT painting?”

More stars

More teeth

More babies

More black holes

More eggs that are holes

“What would I paint if I could be unskilled, stupid, if it did not look like what I wanted? What would I paint if it was childish?”

A big wounded heart – several in the back ground

More heads

Decorative colorful squiggles on the center figure

Tears

A flood of tears from the eyes

Tears from the god/mother above with the huge heart

“What could come in from the edges? From inside? From somewhere else? What is lurking behind my shoulder wanting to be expressed, to be discovered?”

black hand

snake around neck

ball of fire

golden glow

hands reaching down

white blood

milk from breast

more suffering

death

heavy chains

suffering

“What would be really interesting to paint?”

Planting pink seed in each gold nodule, like a bee fertilizing its nest.

“What if I was out of control?”

Paint nodules ‘till I drop from repetition, till I’m sick with stuff in my belly.

Till I suffocate by the sheer weight and closeness of it all.

“What would I paint if the images didn’t have to relate or make sense?”

eggs floating

nothing

hands reaching out

a black void

oh god – lots of arbitrary grasping for images is going on for me now.

Boring stuff like angels, houses chains, wire, blob, sun, tree, water,

stomach blood

fire

digesting

reaching out

holding in

pool of vibration

street light

a skeleton, standing by the side, life size

organ

hearts

kidneys

*lungs
bones
spit
hair
My mind goes blank as it reaches out towards nothingness.*

“What could I do if I could ruin the painting?”
*Black void creeping from the top sides and bottom
Hands green from top or blue
Pink babies floating on top.
More many armed beings in brown and dark blue, coming out of existing
fingers
tendrils
A big eye only on one side
Heavy black and grey clouds hanging over and raining on everything
A cage or fence around everything or just on border of image.
Done!
Black destruction
Wire mesh
Fence
Bracket
Containing
Feel excited by doing something so drastic – so evil
The concept is that I can NOT get past the boundary into the unknown.
Emptiness comes at me , nihilism threatens – right – no . But it is exciting to
be at this edge.*

The above examples are representative of an internal questioning process that occurs almost continuously while I work. The questioning procedure is condensed, occurring almost instinctively. For the purpose of collecting research data, I periodically captured them in detail. The questions act as a focusing mechanism for self-observation which then inform my creative decision making process.

Mindfulness

***4/8/04 Drawing, panting, discovering researching intuitive- sensory- brain
– heart- connections – excitement- digesting – synthesizing reality – energy
– generating- unknown – sparks – expanding. Self exploration is God
exploration. Self in landscape – Landscape – water – earth – plants – sun –
stars – symbolic – reduced – simplified into complex relationships.***

Mindfulness is a specific form of subjective awareness which can be cultivated and practiced as a method of inquiry. Painting with mindfulness demands a rigorous and sustained focus similar to Buddhist meditation practices. Anne Klein (1995, p.137) suggests that mindfulness can be a natural stabilizing tactic in response to the loss of a parent, the loss of innocence, a betrayal, or the loss of a world view or belief system as it dissolves or is ruptured. Klein is speaking specifically about the process of dissolution that occurs through the practice of meditation when she states that it is this concentration that allows us to safely encounter “emptiness” (1995, p.137). I believe that it was in response to the rupturing effects of trauma and abuse that I naturally developed a capacity for mindfulness. I was able to tolerate occurrences of violence and abandonment in my early childhood by retreating to the naturally meditative states achieved in contemplating nature and through creativity.

This watchful self reflective state is the same mental alertness achieved in the process of painting. While I paint I am focused on staying in the subjective now and become aware of many different states of mind. Using painting as a mindful practice, I try to observe the meanderings of my mind without grasping onto or identifying with any specific thought or feeling. When undisciplined, my mind goes rampant with distraction, judgments, criticism, ideas, and limitations. In painting I learned to come back to the present, just putting paint on the paper, again and again, teaching my mind to ignore its distractions, similar to when in a disciplined meditative practice I return my focus to the natural rhythmic action of breathing in and breathing out.

This method effectively turns my mind inward on itself where its process is revealed moment to moment. It is this mindfulness that brings a kind of honesty to my work, as if the deep listening quality of meditation brings to the surface my

awareness of every thought and memory that I have ever had. Mindfulness can also be understood as “indwelling”.

Indwelling refers to the heuristic process of turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of the nature or meaning of a quality or theme of human experience. It involves a willingness to gaze with unwavering attention and concentration into some facet of human experience in order to understand its constituent qualities and its wholeness. To understand fully, one dwells inside the subsidiary and focal factors to draw from them every possible nuance, texture, act and meaning. (Moustakas 1990, p.24)

Graeme Sullivan (2005) asserts that the apprehension of new knowledge is arrived at by giving focused sustained attention to the mind, its confusion, its patterns and its belief systems. Some of my thoughts are repetitive and persistent, some are negative and disturbing, others happy and playful. When I stay mindful and simply observe my experience I can let the trace of these thoughts emerge onto the paper without the need to identify with them or label them as concepts. If I can simply apply paint to paper, avoid grasping at meaning, and stay present with the ebb and flow of feelings and thoughts, then I can avoid the suffering, limitations, and creative blocks caused by habitual patterns and conditioned beliefs. Buddhist nun Pema Chodron says that mindfulness, “is a lifetime’s journey to relate honestly to the immediacy of our experience and to respect ourselves enough not to judge it” (Chodron 2002, p.29).

4. Outcomes

Art is thus not driven by or enslaved by any particular understanding; it is always productive of ideas. (Bennett 2005, p.8)

There are three major outcomes of this research study; first, the traces of creative process as seen in the art work, second, an interpretation of some symbols found in the artwork and finally my hermeneutic model of creative process. None of these outcomes are an end in themselves but are artifacts that act as a stimulus for further study and personal transformation.

Traces

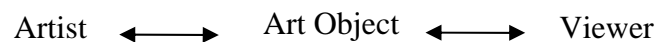
19/8/03 “The pink baby beings reoccur over time – to me they are babies, animals, fetus, formed and unformed, off-spring, result of fertility. The result of being a mother.”

I use the word “trace” to describe and discuss several aspects of creative process. A trace is an indication that something has been present in the past in much the same way that footprints show where someone has walked or an artifact left from an earlier culture signals the existence of previous civilization. The paintings, for example, are the material record of the creative process. The content of my work shows traces of both conscious and unconscious experiences and belief systems. Paintings can only suggest the original richness of creative process in much the same way that memories only point to an experience in the past. And, as John Dewey (1980, p. 28) suggests, the viewer is linked to this experience through their emotional response to the work of art.

Before beginning this study I was almost exclusively interested in the process and not the product of creativity. I reveled in the freedom of process and stacked up paintings without looking at them once they were completed. My practice has been almost completely process oriented and the paintings were simply objects that documented this process. It was not until exhibiting them that I began to recognize the significance of these artifacts and the transformative effect that they can have on an audience. In this way the paintings themselves became important objects of study as they indicate the dynamic link between the process, product and audience.

Nancy Aiken in her work *The Biological Origins of Art* (1998) touches on the concept of “art behavior” and insightfully regards art as an artifact or residue of the creative process. The creative process is therefore inextricably linked to the creative results: The process leaves behind an art object as evidence.

The products of creative process can be considered the “artifacts of thoughts” (Rhodes in Joyce & Isaksen et al.1999, p.20). “Objective investigation into the nature of the creative process can proceed in only one direction, i.e., from product to person and thence to process...” (1999, p.20). However, I found that there was a reflexive component in the investigation. This idea can be visually summarized in the following diagram.



The paintings reveal aspects of myself that I do not consciously engage with during the creative process but can only see from perhaps the more objective role as a viewer. My personal experiences or stories are partially revealed in the paintings, which can be interpreted to some degree by the viewer and it is through those

interpretations that both personal and social significance can be found. It is the dialogue between the artist, the art and the viewer which provides a vehicle for new understanding. Ellis and Bochner make clear the ethical and moral imperatives for artist/researchers to tell their stories, be it in text or other creative media.

The usefulness of these stories is their capacity to inspire conversation from the perspective of their own lives. The narrative rises or falls on its capacity to provoke readers to broaden their horizons, reflect critically on their own experience, enter empathically into worlds of experience different from their own, and actively engage in dialogue regarding the social and moral implications of the different perspective and standpoint encountered. (Ellis and Bochner in Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.748)

If the art object, the trace, is located at the site between the artist's creative process and the viewer's experience of the art, then the interpretation of the object and the meaning derived from it depend on the interpretation of a symbolic language. In analyzing the images, I have created a visual lexicon and a partial list of symbols currently found in my work. The images, as fragments, provide an entry into an analytical interpretation of the work which is different from but does not exclude the equally important emotional and empathic understanding of the images. "These symbolic systems – these codes of meaning are the vehicles by which thought takes place. By their nature they are a creative open system." (Gardner 1982, pp.4-5). The codes of meaning in my work are not static but change and evolve with each painting. Interpretation of the content is therefore an open process. As described previously, interpretation results in insight and further creative inquiry into the meanings of experience.

The Art Work



Figure 4.1 - Ghosts, acrylic on paper 84cm x 118cm.

Painting and drawing are the most intuitive mediums for me because I have resolved most of the technical limitations allowing the intuitive mind to be free from left brain problem solving. This image started with the top panel and the large gold figure. The ghosts appeared from the bottom later and then the green hands and beings began to reach in from the sides. Images layer on top of, in between, inside and around previous layers leaving a trace of my internal struggle with boundaries.



Figure 4.2 - Snake in Grass, ink on paper 20cm x 15 cm.

I draw with an ink pen when I am traveling or unable to get into the studio. Staying within the bounds of a small notebook and the limits of black and white require me to focus my attention on one or several simple images using texture and outline to define the forms. In this example a larger image is implied by the hands reaching in from the top.

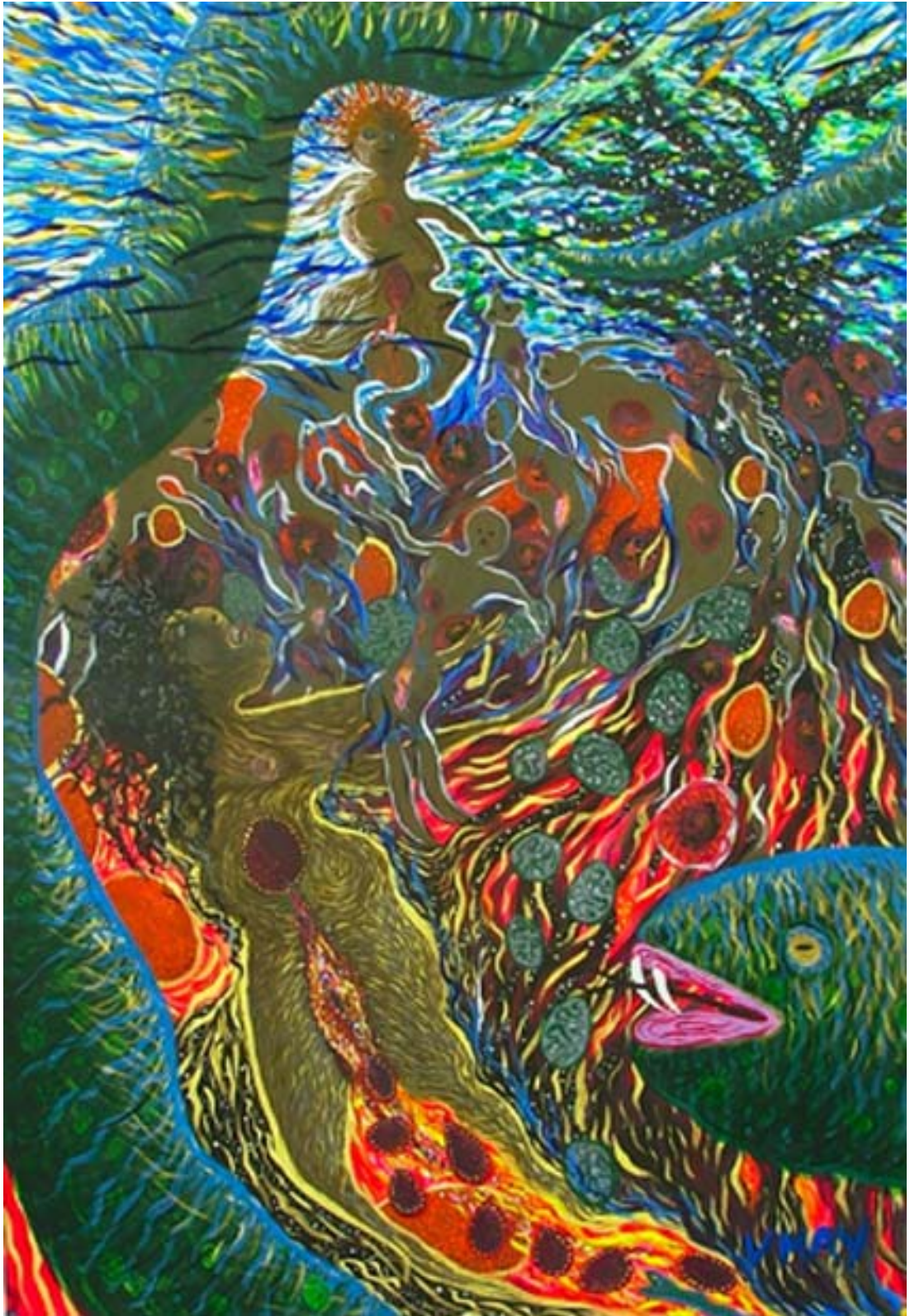


Figure 4.3 Big Fish 75cm x 109cm



Figure 4.4 –Dark Goddess 54cm x 75cm



Figure 4.5 The Mad Mother Cat 109cm x 150cm

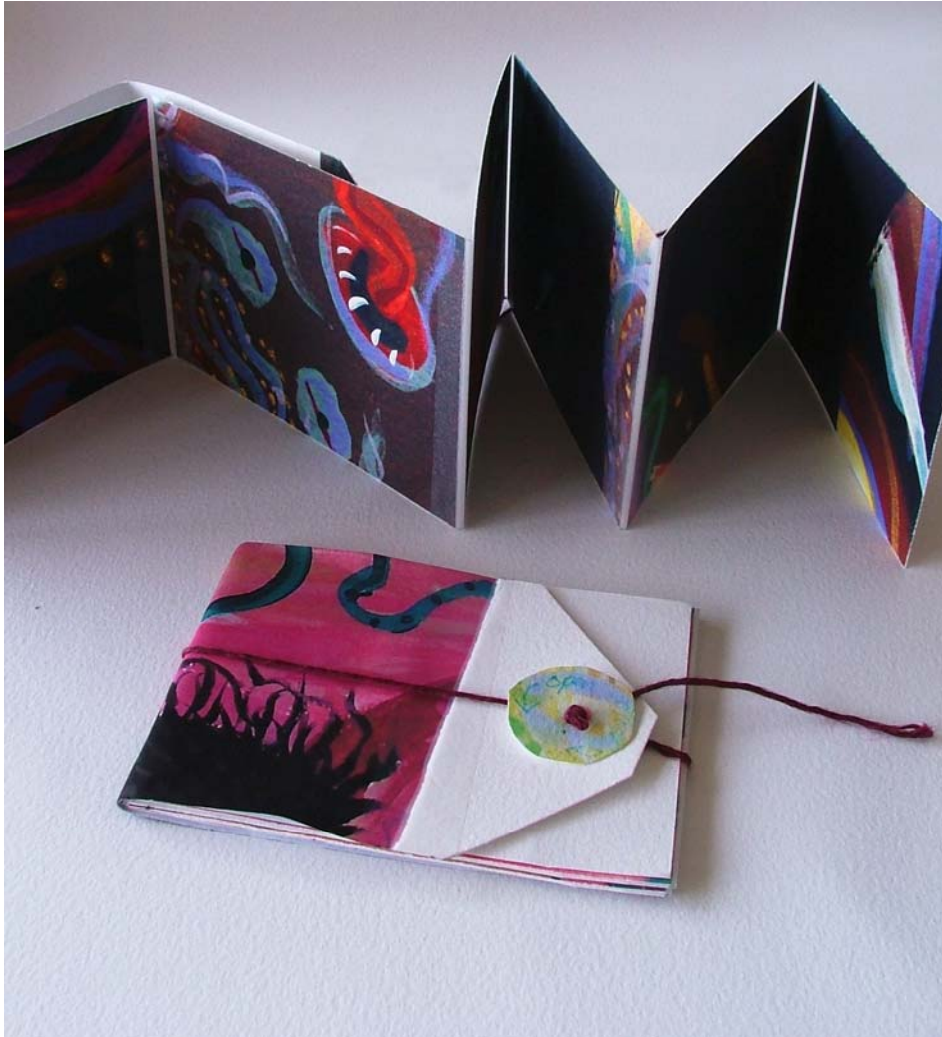


Figure 4.6 Books, digital prints, 11cm x 8 cm.

(back) “Confused in this night void. No Memory of the last Form”

(front): “O soft warmth. Nest of Flesh and Breath.”

First attempts at combining large sections of text with illustrations were unsuccessful. These were originally made to experiment with how to construct a concertina book. I was surprised how they resulted in a haiku-like experience. Through the books the viewer can access small traces of my pre-conscious mind.



Figure 4.7 Firehead 75cm x 165cm



Figure 4.8 Grasping Mind 75cm x 109cm



Figure 4.9 Nodules 54cm x 75cm



Figure 4.10 Red Eggs 75cm x 165cm

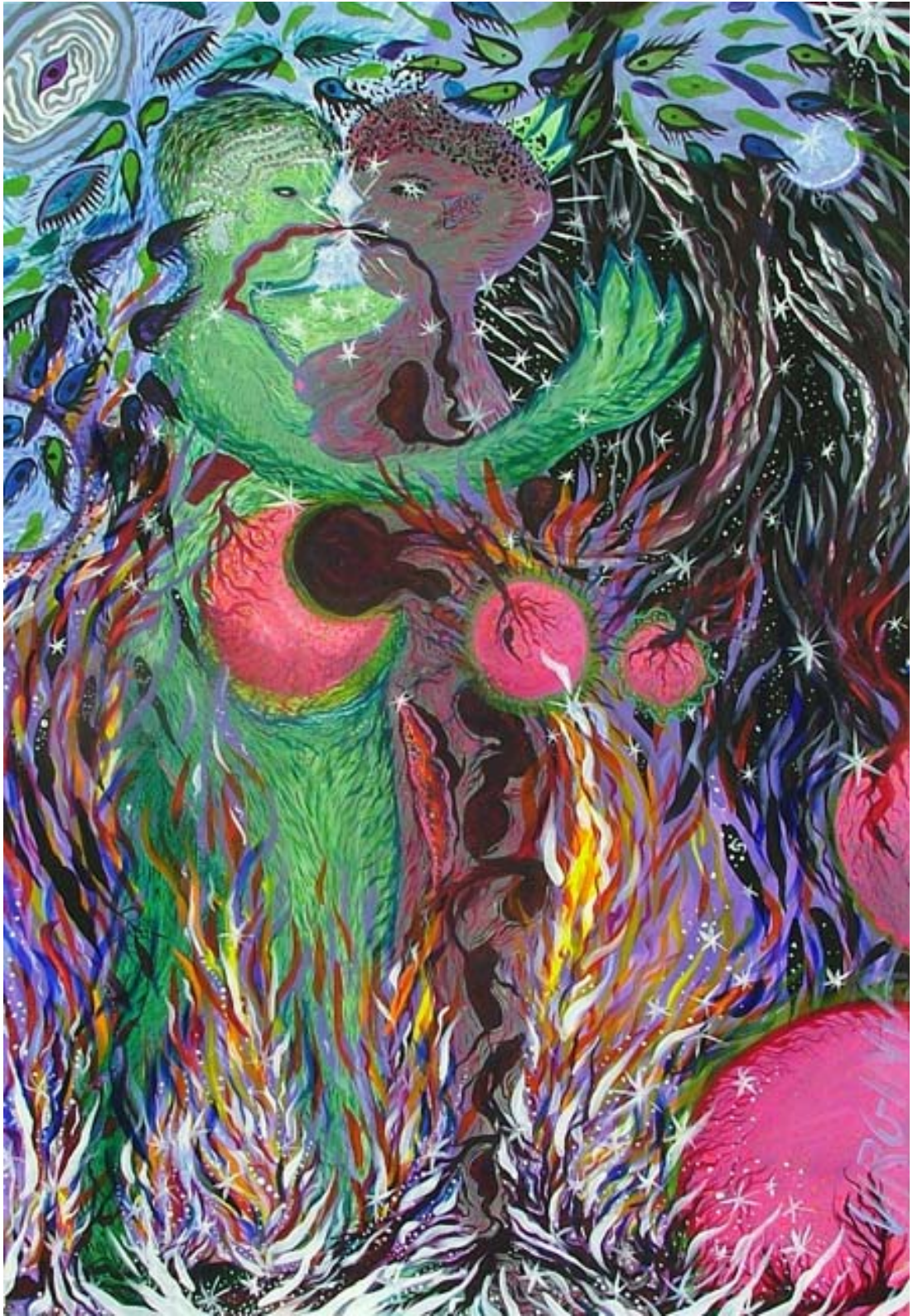


Figure 4.11 The Kiss 75cm x 109cm



Figure 4.12 The Women 195cm x 150cm

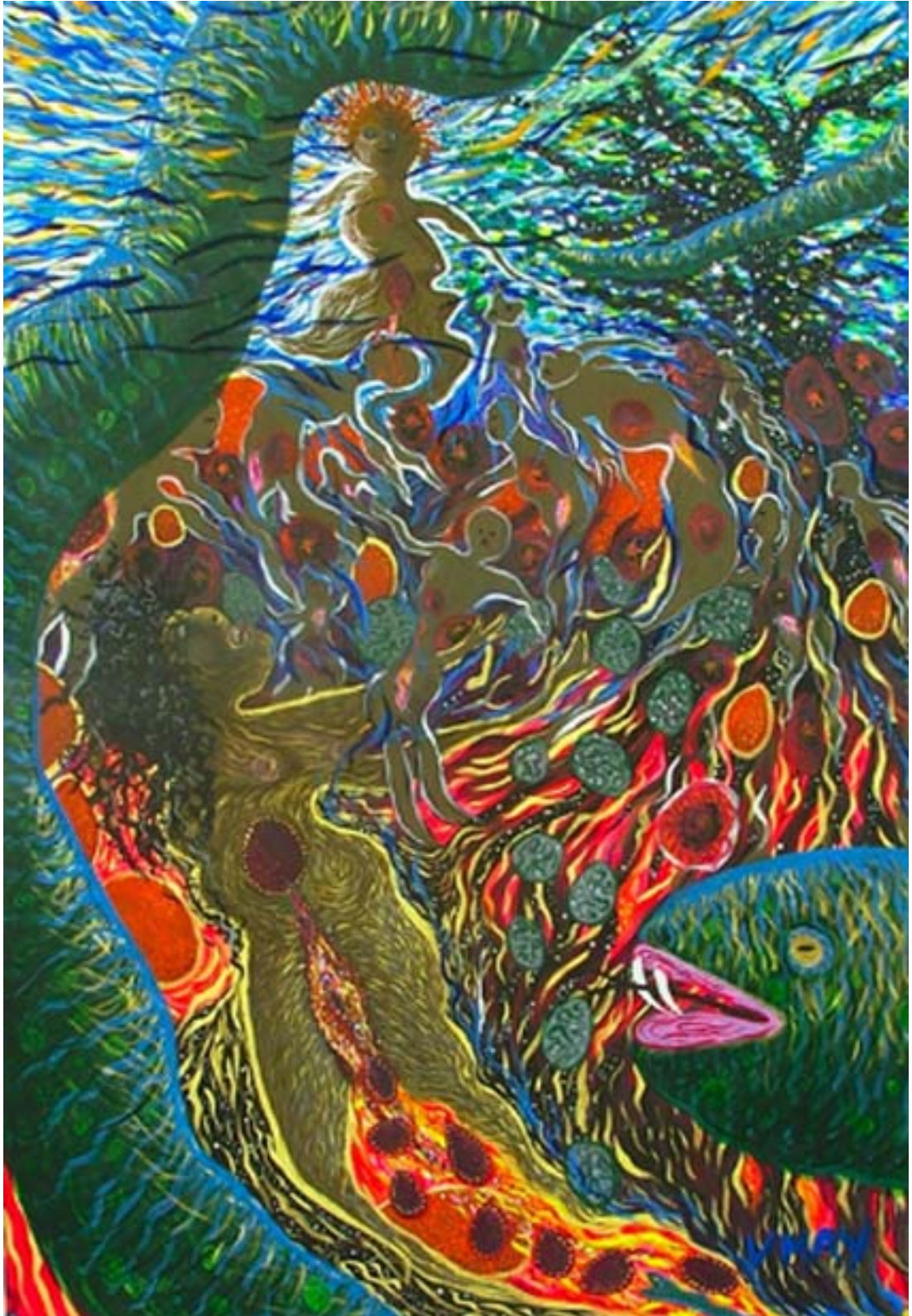


Figure 4.13 Big Snake 75cm x 109cm

The Symbolic Language

I have developed a very strong and personal style that speaks with both subjective voice and vision. The meanings of these symbols vary depending on my feelings, relationships and context at a given point in time. The following images and definitions provide a partial dictionary of this complex visual language as an example or suggestion for how I use color and symbol in my work

Visual Lexicon.

Speechless terror experienced by victims of violence, abuse and terrorism is represented by the open mouthed figures with many different variations.



Suffering. mouth open, tongue protruding.



Rage. The vomiting figure with teeth.



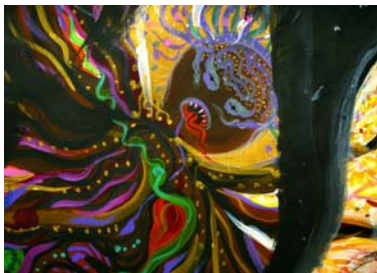
Comatose. Figure with pierced eye bleeding mouth stuffed with green snakes.



Anguish. A silent scream into the eternal void.



Shock. Open mouth with the cosmos leaking through.



Misery. Open mouth, teeth and protruding tongue.

The portraits also portray an internal silence which may be full of peace or signify a withdrawal to internal spaces.



Quiet. The face is wrapped in gauze, insulated from sound and speech. She is peaceful.



Determination. Mouth closed eyes clearly focused.



Innocence. A song slips through in moments of peace.

The paintings are populated with monsters and fearsome creatures.



The teeth of this monster are imbedded in bleeding gums. The tongue is fire.



The mother cat screams an explosion with the force of the entire universe.



A green monster with an open mouth and a silent scream.



An annoying small black monster with sharp teeth.

Birth and the maternal force of nature arise from the body/earth, its fluids and the energy of light.



The womb is a magical place full of energy, a fertile environment to create.



The membrane between water and the creative void is like the shell of an egg.



The vagina birthing a child/animal/fetus.



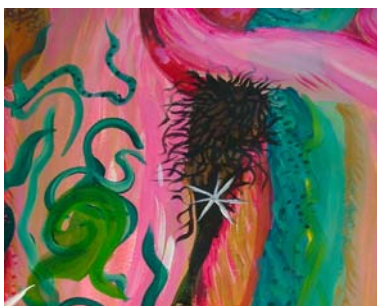
A hybrid fetus with hair and a womb lives inside a golden egg. It has an open mouth and protruding tongue.



A full grown female with umbilicus.



Pink fetus in a red womb. The umbilicus gives sustenance and is a bridge or link to others and the outside world.



A nest of black hair amid pink flesh.



Pink and red eggs with pink fetus and points of white light.



An abstract womb with nodules.

The pleasure of color, the fluidity of paint and the multi layering of form is a richly satisfying aspect of the painting process existing simultaneously with the symbolic meaning of the images.



Brilliant pink hearts hang like ripe strawberries from a tangle of, blue and green tendrils and veins.



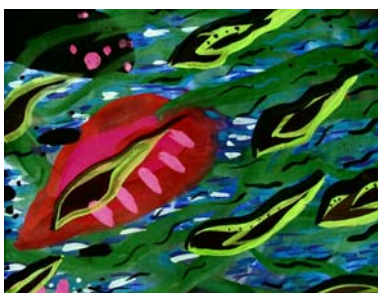
Sparks of light accent the fluid motion of pure color.



Earthy browns backlit with luminous water.



Water blends with the starry depths of space.

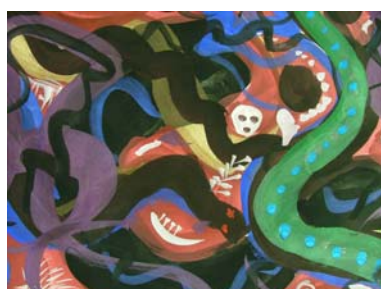


The water world is blue and green splashed with light and dark fishy things.

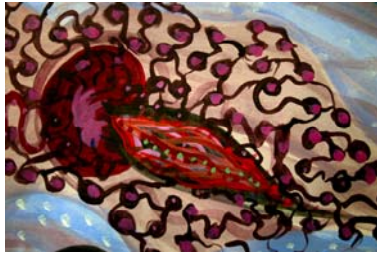
Death and decay are seen as part of the natural process of living.



The bones become part of the earth from which grows life.



The skeletons have a personality even as their bones are scattered.



The black nodules crawl over and into everything without mercy like decay or a cancer sometimes with bits of pink life within.



Sometimes with the expanse and limitlessness of space.

List of Symbols.

Black – void, infinite space, evil
Bright Blue – veins, water
Brown – earth, eggs, flesh
Dark Blue – night, deep water
Deep Red – blood, cancer
Gold – precious
Green – snake, vegetation, life, growing
Light Blue – other being, not human, ethereal, water
Orange – fire
Pink – virgin or young flesh
Purple - night
Red – fire, blood, vagina, cervix, organs
Silver – light, precious
White – light, eyes, sparkle
Yellow – Fire, sun, energy source

Circles – womb, cervix, holes, planets, bubbles
Dots – stars, atoms, molecules, light particles, seeds
Eggs – creation, fertility
Esophagus – digesting or vomiting objects, swallowing
Fetus – unborn life, potentiality, my children
Halo – angels, light being, enlightened, wisdom, holy
Hands – reaching, holding, touching, protecting, grasping
Heart – human connection, life
Monsters – evil, fear, irritations
Open mouth – voice, scream, anguish
Seeds – womb, potential, concept, fertile
Snake – mother, phallus
Spiral – creation, cosmos, galaxy
Teeth – anger, danger, hunger
Water – primal matter, emotion, flowing

The Hermeneutic Model of Creative Process

There is no self-understanding that is not mediated by signs, symbols and texts; in the final analysis self-understanding coincides with the interpretation given to these mediating terms (Ricoeur 1991, p.15)

The following diagram is based on the hermeneutic model (Packer & Addison 1989) of forward and backward arcs showing in a simple graphic manner how creative process enables transformation through self awareness and insight. I use it here as a visual tool to aid in the complex dialogue concerning creative process, intuition, transformation, and subjectivity.

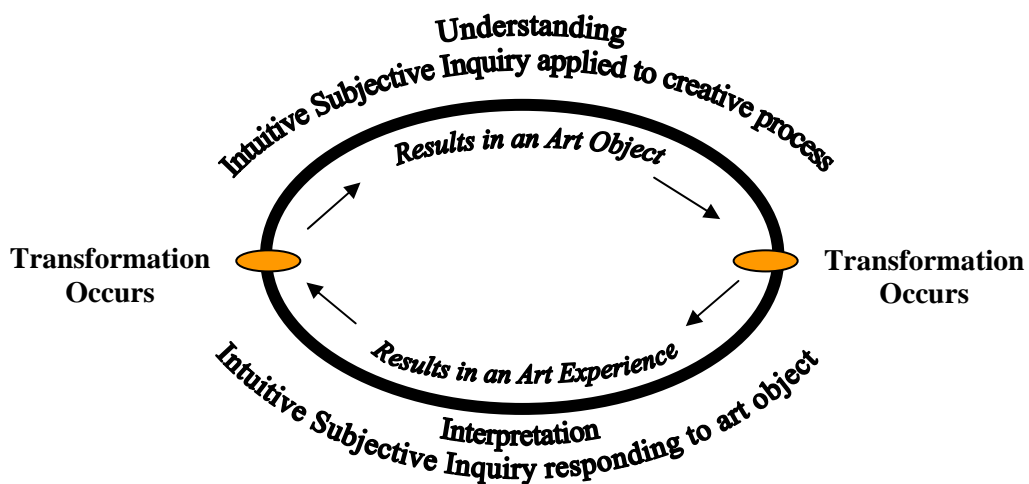


Figure 4.14 - The Hermeneutic Model of Creative Process

In the forward or projected arc the model shows how intuitive subjective inquiry or understanding, based on and derived from personal experience, previous knowledge, and cultural influences, is applied to the creative process. The inquiry results in an art object wherein a transformation occurs and new perceptions arise.

The return or uncovering arc is also an intuitive subjective inquiry. The viewer or artist interprets the object by applying intuition to the content of the art object with these new perspectives. So the activity of the return arc results in an art experience and additional transformation can also occur which then provides a starting point for new cycle of inquiry. This cycle of understanding and interpretation describes the process of creativity and the discovery of new knowledge. The model illustrates how a continuous and spiral progression of knowledge emerges through applying intuitive inquiry to both the creative process itself and to the art object. It equally describes both my creative process and the researching of that process.

For example, in the forward arc, I developed an understanding of my painting process through journaling, questioning and mindfulness intuitively exploring how the process works. As I progress I gain a deeper understanding of how intuition functions in the creative process, the importance of maintaining a soulful shelter, how I dissolve creative blocks through questioning, and the value of sustaining introspective focus. The painting process results in paintings, which I will outline as “traces” in the next section, as well as deeper or new knowledge of my creative process.

The return arc is an interpretive activity in response to the art object, which can happen on two phases. The first occurs while I am immersed in the painting process. While I am painting I am also viewing the work in progress. As I paint I

alternate between the activity of applying each brush stroke to observing each brush stroke. In each moment of painting I am making intuitive decisions based on interpretations of color, form, and symbol and am essentially participating in a reflexive dialogue with the art work.

The second or alternative phase of the return arc occurs when the viewer, who may be me, the artist, or may be an audience, views the art object and responds according to their particular viewpoint. For both the artist standing back to view the completed work and the viewer at an exhibition this response is interpretive and results in an art experience. The viewer gains new knowledge or is perhaps transformed by this interpretive process. For example, when “Chaos” in Figure 1.1 was nearly complete, I stepped back, for a moment, to contemplate the image. With frustration I began to cover over with black paint from the outside edges in. I thought that there was a good possibility of ruining the painting yet the compulsion to paint black was a strong motivation to continue. As the black streamed and spiraled in towards the center I began to understand it as celestial space rather than just black paint. As I added stars, galaxies and light, my mood changed from frustration to expansiveness and I understood that black could be a symbol for freedom. I still try to remain detached from this meaning which may shift again as I continue to work. The art stimulates dialogue in the viewer. The viewer enters into a dialogue with the art. New knowledge gives new perspectives which can transform individuals.

This model can be compounded at any stage with elements that spiral off into new areas of creativity for the artist, new areas of research for the researcher and a multitude of unpredictable responses from the viewer. For example, the work provided a catalyst for a group of eight or nine women from a local drug and rehabilitation center who attended Traces, my final exhibition. As part of their

recovery program they were engaged in various group and individual art projects. After they spent some time viewing the work I spoke to them briefly about my history, my creative process and my experience with exhibiting my work and they had an opportunity to ask questions. In this way I, as an artist, provided these viewers with an interpretive response that encouraged further exploration of the work and its meaning. I felt that this experience had had a strong impact on them and I hoped that by example, I could encourage them to pursue their creative interests. Several weeks later I received feedback indicating that they had all found renewed interest in their work and were excited about the possibility of exhibiting their art. Furthermore I engaged in extensive conversation about art and trauma during a roundtable discussion entitled *Using Art to Understand the Impact of Childhood Trauma* held at WiseART Gallery in Brisbane, February 7, 2005, in conjunction with the final exhibition.

Conclusion

Engaging in research that delves into the depths of human experience, demands compassion and understanding for the richness of human expression and possibilities and the interconnectedness of the personal-political-universal circle of our endeavors, especially our research endeavors (Anderson & Braud 1998, p.79).

31/5/05 Just as in painting... What do I know now that I didn't know before? How have I changed? What if I didn't know myself anymore? What if I were a different person than I was before? What is it that has made me different? The process of research? The exchanges and dialogues I've had with others and therefore with myself?

This research provides a detailed case study of an artistic practice through intuitive inquiry, the use of methods such as questioning, stream of consciousness and mindfulness, and through practices of painting, journaling, and photographing. The autobiographical descriptions of abandonment, childhood trauma and abuse, motherhood, depression, and isolation helped to contextualize my intuitive drive for creative expression. This expression is made manifest in a variety of artifacts, although the content of the works is not explicit. *The words that are never spoken* have been expressed through intuitive creative processes and methods and the outcomes, my art, provide traces of these personal experiences. Through rigorous self-observation of my studio practice, I have developed the concept of intuitive inquiry as a research methodology, which by its similarity to my creative process is well suited to studying its delicate, preconscious and internal reflective and reflexive activities.

The title of my final exhibition, *Traces*, provided a conceptual arena to discuss the notion of the art product as the trace of the creative process. Similarly, the art works, which included photographed details that recontextualised the paintings, this text, which provides a symbolic lexicon of images found in the works,

the books, the journals and so on grant continuing access to a specific site where the artist and the audience convene. Further exploration of the artifacts of this site is available to all, to me as I move into the next stage of my artistic practice and by others. This report is now available for interpretation, according to particular needs and perspectives, by those in academic, professional and creative disciplines.

The resonant meanings derived from the life experiences of both artist and audience are discovered through the interpretation of process, product, and dialogue. The hermeneutic model of creative process that emerged (Fig 4.14) may assist others in a deeper understanding of the creative process, the human essence and the potential for transformation. "...creativity... leaves an outcome [trace] ...[that] adds to the richness and complexity of the future" (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, p.2) and this fact grants art making a unique and important task by offering us an opportunity to change who we are and what we think.

But, how have I changed? I have changed by engaging with my world through intuitive creative processing. Just as in my painting practice I add a new piece of paper to accommodate new visions, I am looking beyond what I already know into unknowingness. Prior to this study I practiced my art in private, often disengaged from my audience, intuitively developing tools and methods for personal exploration. Now through the rigorous process of studying my artistic practice as demanded by the research, I am beginning to see the larger implications of my work as an artist and a researcher. In conjunction with my final exhibition, *Traces*, the roundtable discussions, *Using Art to Understand the Impact of Childhood Trauma* models how the research site can bring together the art, artist, and audience into a

potentially transformative social process similar to creative process and intuitive inquiry.

My understanding of my position and my value as an artist has shifted, enabling me to approach my work with more clarity and confidence. I am now more fully engaged with my world in ways that can bring about change. I am now looking to areas of future exploration and I have more questions. What is the role of art in stimulating social change? How does art act as a language for the often unspeakable experience of trauma, suffering and despair? What is the role of art making in building and strengthening links between individuals, communities and organizations? I believe that it is discourses such as the ones outlined in this study that lead to a deeper understanding of creative process and its resulting art works and more importantly that lead to further engagement with each other and our world.

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