

Where Past and Future are Gathered: representations of self and concepts of ageing in the twenty-first century



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Abstract

This research project applies an analysis of identity, time and ageing to the practice-led project of investigating the way in which self portraiture may reflect and inform society's understanding of changing concepts of the ageing self in the early twenty-first century. Through the provision of visual metaphors, self portraiture facilitates a consideration of the way we inhabit culture.

The investigative process draws principally on studio based skills in drawing, painting, printmaking and papermaking as they pertain to visual forms of self portraiture. These visual means are closely supported by ideas relating to the visual history of the genre, an art historical and theoretical analysis of the self portrait, literary forms of autobiography and sociological ideas regarding the self in present day culture.

Temporal possibilities, characterization, reframing and recasting of both contemporary and historical imagery, each contributes to a process that draws upon contemporary sociological ideas, theoretical positions and practice-led investigations regarding the way in which identity, time and ageing might be portrayed in a contemporarily relevant manner. Progressing from the quotation of outstanding historical portrait images sourced from the canon of Western art, to a more developed and complex approach to the portrayal of the self through time, the research process has extended and deepened the range of my visual language in this field.

The thesis aims to offer a visual and textual commentary to the existing knowledge base in the field of self portraiture and contemporary understandings of identity.

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I

Time present and time past
 Are both perhaps present in time future,
 And time future contained in time past.
 If all time is eternally present
 All time is unredeemable.
 What might have been is an abstraction
 Remaining a perpetual possibility
 Only in the world of speculation.
 What might have been and what has been
 Point to one end, which is always present.
 Footfalls echo in the memory
 Down the passage which we did not take
 Towards the door we never opened
 Into the rose-garden. My words echo
 Thus, in your mind.

But to what purpose
 Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
 I do not know.

Other echoes
 Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?
 Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
 Round the corner. Through the first gate,
 Into our first world, shall we follow
 The deception of the thrush? Into our first world.
 There they were, dignified, invisible,
 Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,
 In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air,
 And the bird called, in response to
 The unheard music in the shrubbery,
 And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses
 Had the look of flowers that are looked at.
 They were as our guests, accepted and accepting.
 So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,
 Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
 To look down into the drowned pool.
 Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged.
 And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
 And the lotus rose, quietly, quietly,
 The surface glittered out of heart of light,
 And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
 Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.
 Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,
 Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.
 Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
 Cannot bear very much reality.
 Time past and time future
 What might have been and what has been
 Point to one end, which is always present.

II

Garlic and sapphires in the mud
 Clot the bedded axle tree.
 The trilling wire in the blood
 Sings below inveterate scars
 Appeasing long forgotten wars.
 The dance along the artery
 The circulation of the lymph
 Are figured in the drift of stars
 Ascend to summer in the tree
 We move above the moving tree
 In light upon the figured leaf
 And hear upon the sodden floor
 Below, the boarhound and the boar
 Pursue their pattern as before
 But reconciled among the stars.

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor
 fleshless;
 Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the
 dance is,
 But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it
 fixity,
 Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement
 from
 nor towards,
 Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still
 point,
 There would be no dance, and there is only the dance
 I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say
 where.
 And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.
 The inner freedom from the practical desire,
 The release from action and suffering, release from the
 inner
 And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
 By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,
Erhebung without motion, concentration
 Without elimination, both a new world
 And the old made explicit, understood
 In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
 The resolution of its partial horror.
 Yet the enchainment of past and future
 Woven in the weakness of the changing body,
 Protects mankind from heaven and damnation
 Which flesh cannot endure.

Time past and time future
 Allow but a little consciousness.
 To be conscious is not to be in time
 But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,
 The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
 The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
 Be remembered; involved with past and future.
 Only though time time is conquered.

III

Here is a place of disaffection
 Time before and time after
 In a dim light: neither daylight
 Investing form with lucid stillness
 Turning shadow into transient beauty
 With slow rotation suggesting permanence
 Nor darkness to purify the soul
 Emptying the sensual with deprivation
 Cleansing affection from the temporal.
 Neither plenitude nor vacancy. Only a flicker
 Over the strained time-ridden faces
 Distracted from distraction by distraction
 Filled with fancies and empty of meaning
 Tumid apathy with no concentration
 Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind
 That blows before and after time,
 Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs
 Time before and time after.
 Eructation of unhealthy souls
 Into the faded air, the torpid
 Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills of
 London,
 Hampstead and Clerkenwell, Campden and Putney,
 Highgate, Primrose and Ludgate. Not here
 Not here the darkness, in this twittering world.

Descend lower, descend only
 Into the world of perpetual solitude,
 World not world, but that which is not world,
 Internal darkness, deprivation
 And destitution of all property,
 Desiccation of the world of sense,
 Evacuation of the world of fancy,
 Inoperancy of the world of spirit;
 This is the one way, and the other
 Is the same, not in movement
 But abstention from movement; while the world moves
 In appetency, on its metallated ways
 Of time past and time future.

IV

Time and the bell have buried the day,
 The black cloud carries the sun away.
 Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis
 Stray down, bend to us; tendrils and spray
 Clutch and cling?
 Chill
 Fingers of yew be curled

Down on us? After the kingfisher's wing
 Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still
 At the still point of the turning world.

V

Words move, music moves
 Only in time; but that which is only living
 Can only die. Words after speech, reach
 Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
 Can words or music reach
 The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
 Moves perpetually in its stillness.
 Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
 Not that only, but the co-existence,
 Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
 And the end and beginning were always there
 Before the beginning and after the end.
 And all is always now. Words strain,
 Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
 Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
 Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
 Will not stay still. Shrieking voices
 Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
 Always assail them. The Word in the desert
 Is most attacked by voices of temptation,
 The crying shadow in the funeral dance,
 The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.
 The detail of the pattern is movement,
 As in the figure of the ten stairs.
 Desire itself is movement
 Not in itself desirable;
 Love in itself unmoving,
 Only the cause and the end of movement,
 Timeless, and undesiring
 Except in the aspect of time
 Caught in the form of limitation
 Between un-being and being.
 Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
 Even while the dust moves
 There rises the hidden laughter
 Of children in the foliage
 Quick now, here, now, always –
 Ridiculous the waste sad time
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T.S. Eliot
Burnt Norton

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Preamble

For almost thirty years now, my artistic practice has been largely engaged with the theory and the practice of portraiture and, in particular, self portraiture. During this rather long portion of my life, the idea and act of self portraiture has repeatedly drawn me back to contemplate aspects of the changing nature of my own physiognomy and my attitude to the mostly ordinary, but sometimes momentous, events of my life.

Although I could not of course claim to have had the current research aims clearly in mind at the outset of my artistic career, since my undergraduate days, I have been drawn to the way in which my artistic forebears had used the self portrait as a means (among other functions) of visually mapping their own passage through life. I therefore consciously set out to achieve just that, through the production of an ongoing series of self portraits and portraits of those in my immediate circle.

Recently, after reflecting upon these images, it occurred to me that the journey I had somewhat carelessly embarked upon all those years ago, might in fact turn out to be rather more than a series of largely singular images. Indeed, perhaps they could be re-framed as parts of a much larger, ongoing 'autobiographical' project based on notions of identity and ageing in contemporary society. This current study (both the practical works and the exegetical document that together form my thesis) is the outcome of those considerations.

The approach developed to my visual arts practice, does not sit comfortably with, on the one hand, the *avante garde*, nor on the other with traditional forms of visual practice, in that it touches on and relates to traditional practice methods without fully embracing traditional forms. However, this very relation to traditional practice methods tends to distance the work from acceptance by some who embrace the concept of the *avante garde*.

Whilst the artwork has gained some credibility over the years, this perceived dichotomy has led to some widely varying responses. The artists' visual work has tended to evoke occasional polemic responses from the critical art world, and the self-reflexive intensity within the works can prove confronting for those viewers whose expectations of self-portraits tend towards somewhat less challenging imagery.

Theoretically, while this thesis draws some inspiration from post-modern theories, most specifically the notion of quoting or appropriation and the recognition of fluid identities, the thesis is not positioned as a whole as a post-modern theoretical exposition. It is not looking at psychoanalytical theory, nor the death of the author. Nor has it rejected formal drawing, painting and printmaking as valid forms of visual engagement with contemporary ideas. It does however give weight to the significance of recent scholarship regarding tacit knowledge and intertextuality, and to the possibilities of expressing temporal ideas through visual means.

The topics of identity and ageing are vast and have decades of scholarly work from many disciplines behind them. Hence, discussion on these issues has been confined and targeted to those ideas most salient to the focus of the research aims and objectives. The research focus is tied to the aim of adding to visual knowledge about the fluid nature of ageing and self reflexive identities. As such it has focussed specifically on the face as an object of scrutiny and is grounded in the traditional practices of drawing, painting and printmaking, not in photography, video or performance art. Unlike much self-portraiture produced in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, it does not use the body ('the transgressive body', or the ill body for example) as a focus for discussing the nature of contemporary identity, focussing conversely on the face of an ordinary individual.



Chapter One

Introduction: Time future contained in time past

A genre [self portraiture] that appears at first sight to be highly individual may turn out to be the most deeply social of them all, and that is why it should never be seen in isolation but imagined in deep conversation with other works of art, with texts, [and] with social processes ...

Ludmilla Jordanova ¹

Background

An important attribute of fine portraits is that they often have the capacity to engage the imagination of the viewer about the nature and place in history of the person portrayed.² As an artist who has particularly focussed on the self portrait throughout my creative life, I have used this quality to undertake an investigation into the nature of identity in contemporary culture through a close study of the ideas, theories, histories and practices that underpin visual representations of the self. I have done this from the particular perspective of a practising artist – a maker of images. Pivotal to these ideas and my practice, and embedded within the planned study, are issues relevant to contemporary culture's understanding of, and interest in, the effect of ageing on the concept of personal identity. The experience of being an artist working from within a large, ageing demographic group has catalysed and informed my interest in this matter.

Central to this investigation is the belief that current approaches to self portraiture, by appropriating and deconstructing images from the canon of Western art and

¹ Jordanova, L., "The Body of the Artist," in *Self Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2005).

² West, S., *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.

through the provision of visual metaphors for considering the way we inhabit culture, have a key role to play in helping us to shape our understanding of the nature of contemporary identity.³

Early influences on the ideas about time that are intimately threaded throughout this practice-led research project, arose from a number of creative literary works. In particular, ideas about time, expressed by T. S. Eliot in his poem *Burnt Norton*, have been pivotal in assisting me to frame the project:

Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.⁴

Indeed, this poem so captured my creative imagination regarding the nature of time, that stanzas from *Burnt Norton* have been selected as appropriate chapter titles for this exegesis, also appear in somewhat modified form, as titles for the latter artworks, and the whole poem is reproduced as an epigraph for this document.

It is through his creative writing that Eliot has most eloquently expressed his abstract ideas about time, and it is this poem in particular that encourages me to believe that creative works do have a role to play in articulating complex ideas about time and ageing in contemporary culture.

It is of course apparent that Eliot has had an extraordinary impact on the creative imaginations of many artists, writers and thinkers since his poems were first published in the second decade of the twentieth century. It is also noteworthy that Eliot, according to Stephen Spender, had a strongly visual imagination and took significant inspiration from paintings by artists such as Piero della Francesca and

³ See for example Figs 1, 2, 3 & 4 by Jan van Eyck, Tamara de Lempicka, Annette Bezor and the author, for an example of how appropriation may operate across different eras in contemporary practice.

⁴ T. S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton' (1936) in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1944; Original Paperback 1959; this edition 2000), 4.

William Turner.⁵ Perhaps that visual imagination embodied in the ekphrastic nature of his poetry, provides some explanation for the very large numbers of visual artists who cite Eliot as an influence.⁶

Aim

The key intention of this project is to investigate the way in which self portraiture, as exemplified in the context of my own creative project, may reflect and inform society's understanding of changing concepts of the ageing self in the early twenty-first century. Through this research project, I will also test my contention that a small number of outstanding portraits from the canon of western art are able to speak about intangible matters such as the nexus between identity and ageing.

This is an important issue in today's society because as Anthony Giddens in *Self and Society* says: "the late modern world...introduces risks which previous generations have not had to face."⁷ The acknowledgment of an uncertain long term future for the culture and structure of the societies we currently inhabit, has resulted in an increasing lack of a sense of continuity in contemporary society, thus causing many individuals to experience growing feelings of anomie or loss of control.

Giddens also suggests that individuals engage in a "reflexive project of the self", which consists of the sustaining of [a] coherent, yet continuously revised biographical narrative..."⁸ This idea might be underpinned by a story that Inga Clendinnen related of a two year old who, when put to bed of an evening, instead of going to sleep, would talk to herself, sometimes for hours! So ... her loving and somewhat concerned parents (Academics both!) taped her conversations. She talked about a lot of things, practising the past tense (a difficult one to master),

⁵ S. Spender, note on illustrations to *Eliot*, (Glasgow: Fontana Paperbacks, 1975), vii.

⁶ For example Rick Amor's painting, *Study for the Dry Season*.

⁷ A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 5.

⁸ Ibid, 4.

recalling and reinterpreting the events of each day. However, at about the age of three she stopped, possibly realizing that she could tell herself stories without verbalizing them⁹.

Psychologists suggest that this very young child was “primarily ... working on the first draft of her autobiography: constructing both her personal self and her social persona; making useable human sense out of chaotic experience...” “Our own constantly redrafted autobiographies constantly influence our life choices, while collective narratives shape national histories”¹⁰ and the cultures we inhabit.

This project aims to add to our understanding of the visual means by which individuals may reflexively consider ‘narratives of the self’ from a prospect somewhat nearer to the end of a life story. The outcome is approached through a process that delivers what might be termed a ‘visual autobiographical narrative’, one that is constantly open to ongoing re-vision.

The need for such a perspective is related to Giddens’s comments above. In a society with an ageing demographic, where people are living longer and, *more* people are living longer than ever before, we inhabit a period of rapidly increasing uncertainty, and therefore it is not an easy time to be growing peaceably older.

The temporal aspect of self portraits is often claimed as the exclusive province of the autobiographical text.¹¹ The applicability of such temporal possibilities to the notion of extended visual narratives, provides a critical focus for the research as a means to engage with ideas about time, identity and ageing. I draw on scholarship from both the theoretical and visual advocates of this debate to underpin my approach to the research.¹²

⁹ I. Clendinnen, *Making Stories, Telling Tales: Life, Literature, Law*, 18th Lionel Murphy Memorial Lecture, 17 November 2004.

<http://www.lionelmurphy.anu.edu.au/Inga/Clendinnen/Speech/edited/version.doc->
(Accessed 14/5/07).

¹⁰ J. Bruner quoted in Clendinnen, 2.

¹¹ See for example West, Byatt, Malouf and Clendinnen, pp 12-14.

¹² See also for example Allen, Bal, Hockney, Jordanova, pp 14-20.

It is important at the outset to acknowledge the breadth of current scholarship on identity and recognise that while many artists work with this field of enquiry, the predominant concerns are with gender, sexuality and ethnicity¹³ and not, as is the focus of this study, with time and ageing. It is therefore appropriate to approach the investigation of the expression of ageing within self portraiture, through a specific focus on the face in contrast to what Shearer West describes as “a shift in attention from the face to the body,” and specifically, the “wholehearted emphasis on the body of postmodern portraiture.”¹⁴

Andrew Sayers¹⁵ reinforces the idea that the arguments contained in this thesis are timely and appropriate when he suggests that “self portraiture, [is] an area that has become one of the most vital and engaging in contemporary art,”¹⁶ and further, that winning work of the inaugural National Artist’s Self Portrait Prize, “gave compelling contemporary expression to one of the age old themes in portraiture: the artist’s awareness of mortality ... sickness, frailty, ageing and death are significant subjects in artists who are prepared to cast an unsentimental eye on themselves.”¹⁷ Phillip Sohm adds further weight to the currency of this study when he engages in a discussion of historical attitudes to the ageing artist in *The Artist Grows Old*.¹⁸ Sohm’s thesis however, in some contrast to my own, is approached from an admittedly gerontophobic viewpoint and as such is divergent from the objectives of this research.

¹³ West, *Portraiture*, 205. This has also been the predominant focus taken by writers such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Elizabeth Grosz, who have all contributed much to the postmodern debate about identity.

¹⁴ West, *Portraiture*, 206 and 213.

¹⁵ Sayers is the founding Director of the National Portrait Gallery in Australia.

¹⁶ Media release for *National Youth Self Portrait Prize 2008*, National Portrait Gallery.

<http://www.portrait.gov.au> Accessed 5/01/2009.

¹⁷ http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/articles/2007/10/21/1192301120062.html?s_cid=rss... Accessed 5/01/2009.

¹⁸ Sohm, P., *The Artist Grows Old: The Ageing of Art and Artists in Italy 1500-1800*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007), 1-15.

Outline of approach to research question

This research project has been approached from the perspective of a practising artist with a keen interest in self portraiture and particular skills in drawing, painting, printmaking and papermaking. It is also reflective of my ongoing interest in and engagement with the history and theory of visual forms of self portraiture, literary forms of autobiography, ideas grounded in sociology about identity and ageing, as well as theoretical perspectives related to all of these.

The primary focus of the project is the body of artworks that has resulted from this investigation. These works are underpinned by, and reflect on, ideas from those disciplines referred to above.

In introducing the investigation, the preamble and the first chapter provide a background to my interest in this matter, a description of the central aims of the project, and give an outline of the approach that has been taken.

The second chapter, the literature review, looks at both historical and contemporary ideas about the current relevance and practice of the genre of self portraiture, making specific claims for the depth and scope of contemporary practice, noting in particular my own approach.

In chapter three, theoretical concepts relating to appropriation/quoting, intertextuality, tacit knowledge, identity, time and ageing, are addressed in the context of their relevance to this research project. I have specifically included historical, literary and visual perspectives about artistic practice as they pertain to the investigation and in chapter four, I have outlined and explicated the methodological approach that has been used.

Chapter five addresses the nature of the studio investigations firstly, through a review of the processes and material methods that have been utilised and secondly

through a discussion of my enduring engagement with the self portrait genre within my artistic practice. I look at key practitioners of the genre, both antecedents and contemporaries, and comment on their specific relationship to the central themes of this investigation. Finally, I discuss in detail specific works from the various sections of the studio outcomes that together form the major component of my thesis.

The concluding chapter provides a reflective analysis of my own work, suggesting how it is linked to theoretical ideas relative to time, identity and self portraiture. It further contains clarification of the main argument that the contemporary self portrait is able to convey identity through time. In essence, it is proposed that a static interpretation of paintings is a flawed idea, and that many literary and art historical interpretations of visual representation have hindered this richly rewarding view.



Chapter Two

Literature Review: Both a new world and the old made explicit

Studies of self-portraiture have the potential to enlarge our understanding of artistic processes, artistic identity and the settings in which art was practised. Interpreting self-portraits requires an elaborate historical sense.

Ludmilla Jordanova¹⁹

Rationale for the cultural significance of self portraiture in the twenty first century

Although this genre had been largely disregarded by art curators and theorists of the late twentieth century, it seems clear that there is now much work being done to reconceptualize the theme of self portraiture. This recent upsurge in interest appears to signal a sea change in attitude towards portraiture in general, and self portraiture in particular.

For example, a briefing given by Tony Bond, the Curator of International Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) in 2003²⁰ provided an extensive overview of the major self portrait exhibition which Bond, along with Joanna Woodall of the Courtauld Gallery in London, was then curating. *Self Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary* opened in London at the National Portrait Gallery in October 2005, and in Sydney at the AGNSW in February 2006. This influential exhibition comprised almost 60 self-portraits painted in oils, taken from the canon of Western Art and spanning a 500 year period. Both the National Portrait Gallery and the AGNSW

¹⁹ Jordanova, p 45.

²⁰ Author's notebook entry: Self portrait exhibition briefing by Tony Bond, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 13 August 2003.

hosted accompanying symposia to the exhibition and also produced a major illustrated catalogue with essays by key academics in the field.²¹ The most pertinent essay in regard to the ideas which inform this investigation is that of Ludmilla Jordanova, entitled *The Body of the Artist*. In it, Jordanova posits the idea that through self portraits, artists engage in conversations about their practice, its history and their role in society and the wider world.²²

At the same time, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in Sydney developed a 2006 season of complementary exhibitions of contemporary practice in the field of self portraiture. A primary focus was provided by a solo exhibition, *Volte Face* by Mike Parr, an Australian artist who has sustained an ongoing self portrait project over a period of two decades. Also shown at the MCA was *Masquerade: representation and the self in contemporary art*,²³ an exhibition which presented the work of a range of Australian and international artists (from the 1970s to the present), who have dealt with the theme of self representation.

Additionally, as a response to the historical survey that *Self Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary* presented, the English art critic and broadcaster, Matthew Collings produced a three-part television series. This program (aired in the UK, but apparently not secured for Australian release) examines why self portraits exist, what function they serve and what it is to possess a 'self'. Each episode concentrates on a different kind of self portrait and features a contemporary artist who creates a work especially for the series.²⁴

²¹ Bond, A. & Woodall, J. *Self Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary*. (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2005).

²² Jordanova, "The Body of the Artist", 43 - 55.

²³ *Volte face: Mike Parr prints & pre-prints 1970-2005*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2006 and *Masquerade: representation and the self in contemporary art*, (Sydney, Museum of Contemporary Art, 2006). <http://www.mca.com.au> (Accessed 6/09/2006).

²⁴ http://www.channel14.com/culture/microsites/M/me_generation/ (Accessed 16/4/2006).

It is therefore clear that a recent concerted scholarly effort at an international level has been invested in a contemporary re-evaluation of the genre of self portraiture.²⁵ I suggest however, that this has yet to lead to a complete reappraisal of the contemporary practice of the genre, particularly in regard to the relevance of painted self portraits in today's society, and this concern has contributed in part to the impetus for the present study.

Debating contemporary relevance

During the initial 2003 briefing for *Self portrait: renaissance to contemporary* at the AGNSW, it soon became clear that Bond was drawing a scenario that differed somewhat from the initial impression that self portraiture was generally enjoying a revival. Whilst he identified both a beginning for the self portrait as a genre (which may clearly be seen to have commenced with Albrecht Dürer's three pivotal, painted self-portraits painted in the last decade of the fifteenth century), Bond more contentiously perhaps, posited an end to the tradition, which he believes lost its ability to "cut the mustard" somewhere around the middle of the twentieth century.²⁶

This is clearly a crucial issue for this investigation into the relevance of contemporary self portraiture. Such comments from an internationally recognized senior curator appear to be, as yet, unchallenged by his peers and eminent colleagues. I believe it is important to ask if this analysis is well founded, or whether contemporary historians and theorists are just too close in time to the cultural mores that have produced contemporary images that they consider *passé*, to provide a considered judgement. Many attending the briefing indicated assent to Bond's opinion, but for me, as a practising artist with a somewhat different perspective, it seems possible that an idea which for many years has been an accepted paradigm throughout the

²⁵ Ekkart, R., "Portraits in the Golden Age" in *Dutch Portraits: the Age of Rembrandt and Frans Hals* (London, National Gallery, 2007). Ekkart for example, in his essay for the catalogue accompanying this major exhibition says that: "Not until the past two decades has there been a reversal of this persistent neglect [of the genre of portraiture in the history of Dutch painting] ...The upward trend in art historians' interest in portraiture is clear." 18.

²⁶ Bond used this terminology in his briefing, which I have taken to mean that painted self portraits are no longer adequate to operate at the cutting edge of contemporary practice. Author's notebook entry: Self portrait exhibition briefing by Tony Bond, AGNSW, 13 August 2003.

discipline of art history and theory, remains largely unquestioned within that discipline.

The following section of this chapter addresses what might be seen to be the foundation of this belief and then goes on to address the relevance of such an idea in both a contemporary context, and from a practitioners' viewpoint.

The idea that posits the end of relevance for the genre of self portraiture, may originally have been promulgated through John Berger's influential 1972 essay, *The Changing View of the Man in the Portrait*.²⁷ Through this essay, Berger seems to have had a significant impact on the ideas of contemporary theorists and art historians with his view that the social relevance of the painted portrait began to change following the French Revolution, when Théodore Géricault painted portraits of the mad. By choosing to paint portraits of the dispossessed, Géricault was undermining the perceived role of the portrait, which until that time, had been used as a device for fixing hierarchy and social roles within the gentry of western cultures.

I argue that the perceived role of the portrait has undergone change in the past and will continue to change in relation to the prevailing ideas that each era holds about the nature of identity. Furthermore, I maintain that this is an inevitable outcome for a genre so intrinsically linked to the social mores of its time. What Berger was describing could be seen to be the necessary outcome of a period of great social upheaval that forever altered social relationships in France, and subsequently led to the shake up of set social hierarchies in the rest of Western society. Nevertheless, it remains clear that the canon of portraiture continues to maintain the ability to speak eloquently to early twenty first century artists, and wider society, about matters of identity.²⁸

²⁷ J. Berger, "The Changing View of the Man in the Portrait," in *The Look of Things* (New York, Viking Press, 1974), 38.

²⁸ See pp 18-20 in this chapter for a discussion relating to the nature of visual language.

It appeared that, at the 2003 AGNSW briefing, Bond was dismissing a good many of the contemporary self portraits that I believe are worthy of admiration. There have always been, and it is clear that there continues to be, a cohort of committed artists who pursue self-portraits with serious intent and have achieved reasonable claims to success.²⁹ Good examples of their work may be seen to stand up well to those historical examples shown by Bond at the briefing which are admired as outstanding exemplars of the genre.³⁰ There is of course dross, but one has only to walk through the great galleries of Europe to see that this has always been so. Perhaps it is telling that Bond only included in his briefing those painted self portraits supportive to his line of thinking. He argued that “the national portrait galleries need to keep faith with oil or easel painting or risk losing their credibility.”³¹ This point was made in relation to the other apparently widely held belief that painted portraits are no longer ‘cutting edge’ and that their place has been overtaken by photography, installation and performance-based works.³²

I suggest that portraits and self-portraits can, and perhaps should, be more broadly realized in contemporary practice. Artists after all, have continued throughout the ages to utilize new technologies in their working practices, without necessarily foregoing older means of production. For example, much of the work in the Museum of Contemporary Art exhibition, *Masquerade: representation and the self in contemporary art*, is not based on painted self portraits, and there are of course many other fine examples of self portraits and portraits which use other means of production.³³ A recent portrait of Queen Elizabeth produced as a holograph by Rob

²⁹ See for example the work of artists such as, Lucien Freud, David Hockney and Jenny Saville. Figs 30-44 and 58.

³⁰ Indeed, both Freud and Saville were included in the exhibition.

³¹ Who this credibility might be vested in was not made clear by Bond in this information session.

³² McPherson, H., *The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth-Century France*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7. Helen McPherson’s excellent book contains a discussion of the relevance of portraiture in the mid-nineteenth century when similar claims were made about the demise of the painted portrait following the advent of photographic portraits.

³³ See for example the work of Ken Apter (92 and 94) in *Quoting Caravaggio* by Meike Bal, as well as Freidl Kubelka (168-169) in *Autobiography* by Barbara Steiner and Yun Yang, for examples of contemporary self portrait practice that is not based on easel painting. Kubelka’s work is photographically based and developed over an extended period of time, whilst Apter’s uses oil on wood, sandblasted glass and bolts.

Munday and others provides a fine example of this,³⁴ as does an earlier self portrait by Munday.³⁵ As mentioned earlier, there are also excellent examples of artists who continue to use the more traditional approach of easel painting with fine results.

If the present day practice of self portraiture is seriously considered across the wide range of approaches it now encompasses, which includes contemporary easel painting, I believe there are considerable grounds for disputing Bond's dismissal of the contemporary form.

Contesting the scope of self portraits and autobiographies

In another area of creative arts scholarship, the self portrait has been unfavourably compared with literary forms of describing the self. A search of the relevant literature in this area appears to indicate that there is a broadly held belief amongst art theorists and creative writers about the nature of the visual portrait in relation to written autobiography or biography that appears to suggest that a portrait has limited ability (or none at all), to give temporal insight about an individual, compared to biography or autobiography.

In this regard, I will examine a range of opinions from relevant theorists, historians and writers about their understandings of the nature of linguistic and visual images of the self.

For many years I have taken great pleasure and inspiration from the ways in which writers have used the forms of biography and autobiography in particular, as a means of describing lives, cultures and times in both historical and contemporary periods. This type of writing has informed and fuelled my creative imagination in much the same way that the work of other artists in my field has done. It has become clear however, that many of the writers and scholars whom I admire, do not in fact

³⁴ *Queen Elizabeth II* (2004), by Chris Levine, Rob Munday, John Perry & Jeffrey Robb. <http://www.portraits.co.uk/thequeen.html> (accessed 9/05/2006).

³⁵ *Rob Munday with Lion Cub* (1983), by Rob Munday. <http://www.portraits.co.uk/thequeen.html> (accessed 28/07/06).

share my belief that written and visual forms of autobiography may serve (at least partially) similar functions in their role of describing self, identity and ageing in culture.

Shearer West has written a comprehensive and thoughtful book about the history and practice of portraiture. West says that there are clear affinities between biography and portraiture and as such, the portrait may fulfil the role of a brief biography in that it may say things about the character of an individual. However, despite the clear links, she maintains that there are essential differences between the two forms in that the 'momentary nature' ³⁶ of a visual portrait and its tendency to portray the identity of the sitter as timeless or iconic, is very different to the ability of biographical writing to describe the character of an individual over a long period of time. Developing this point she also claims that: "The particular moment chosen for a portrait cannot be extended...it represents the individual's appearance at a specific point, and other aspects of his or her life can only be alluded to." ³⁷

AS Byatt in her essay *Portraits in Fiction*, says that portraits in paint "exist outside time and record merely the time of their making, therefore they should be seen as opposites [of fictional portraits] rather than metaphors for each other." ³⁸

David Malouf's autobiographical novels *Johnno* and *12 Edmonstone Street*, have become seminal works in Australian literature on the basis of their evocation of time, place, the character of a particular era and the individuals who were part of that era. In a talk presented at the University Art Museum of the University of Queensland in June of 2004, Malouf discussed what he saw as the parallels and differences between portraiture and biography. He expressed the view that a self portrait may only refer to a fixed moment in time and is therefore wholly knowable: this is

³⁶ West, *Portraiture*, 50. West uses the term 'momentary nature', to refer to what I believe she sees as the measured span of time in the life of the subject that is encompassed during the production of a portrait.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁸ A. S. Byatt, *Portraits in Fiction*, (London: Vintage, 2002), 1. This short essay is based on the Heywood Hill Annual Lecture, delivered by Byatt at the National Portrait Gallery in London in 2000.

opposed to an autobiography wherein the writer may allude to, or refer the reader backwards and forwards through the lifetime of the subject, or even beyond it, therefore encompassing a much larger span of time in the portrayal of identity.³⁹

Furthermore in 2001, Inga Clendinnen, widely acclaimed for her autobiographical memoir *Tiger's Eye*,⁴⁰ suggested during her talk at a Sydney College of the Arts symposium based around ideas relating to self portraiture and autobiography, that the key difference between the two forms lay in the fact that a painted portrait could be wholly 'known' in a moment's glance, whereas a written autobiography required time to read and understand.⁴¹ Clendinnen was arguing for the merits of imaginative readers of autobiographies, but seemed to me to lack the same type of sensibility as a viewer of visual self portraits.

Thus, there seems to be a considerable body of respected intellectual opinion behind the idea that the key difference between visual portraits and biographies may be seen to be the idea that a written biography (or autobiography) is able to convey a broad span of time in the life of the subject and investigate character in depth. Visual portraits are said to differ in that they may only refer to that specific time in the life of the subject during which the portrait was produced; their primary role being to convey a physical likeness and some general aspects of character.⁴²

Counter claims

Whilst this premise may indeed be true for many portraits, I wish to argue that recent changes in our understanding of identity in culture *are* reflected in the practice of some contemporary portraitists and may, indeed even be read into a small number

³⁹ Author's notebook entry: David Malouf presented this talk as a component of the exhibition *To Look Within: Australian Self Portraits* at the University of Queensland in June 2004.

⁴⁰ Clendinnen, I., *Tiger's Eye*. (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2000).

⁴¹ Author's notebook entry: 'Likeness Symposium', Sydney College of the Arts, May 2001.

⁴² West, *Portraiture*, 51.

of outstanding self portraits and portraits from earlier times.⁴³ It is clear that these earlier works reflect different societal values, but they also speak to me most powerfully about common human conditions such as ageing.

It seems clear that practising artists 'read' and interpret images in differing ways from art historians and art theorists. It is also apparent that many practising artists use the complex nature of visual language available in so called 'static' imagery, to represent time in a way that seems to be largely unrecognised by those who work primarily with written forms of language. Through this research project, I will argue that it is possible to use the self portrait to allude to a life seen through time and at various junctures.

David Hockney, for example, has been making art and writing about its production with great insight since the 1970s. He provides valuable support for the idea that has been germinating through my work and reflection upon it; that artists by virtue of their close engagement with practice, 'know' things about images and image making that art historians and theorists or writers, do not.

In his book *Secret Knowledge*, Hockney has argued from his position as a maker of images and in defiance of traditionally accepted timelines, for the use by a range of artists from the early fifteenth century, of lenses such as a Camera Lucida⁴⁴ or a concave mirror. These devices were used as a means for accurately depicting such things as physiognomy and elaborate fabrics and folds.⁴⁵ As an artist who uses the artworks themselves as primary documents,⁴⁶ he notices and knows the level of difficulty, time and skill required to achieve the high level of accuracy that must have been brought to bear on the depiction of the portrait images he has considered in

⁴³ See for example the work produced for the *Regarding History* exhibition (Figs 71-85), which employs 'quotation' to refer to portraits and self portraits by Robert Campin, Piero della Francesca and Jan van Eyck (Figs 5-10), for the production of a body of contemporary self portraits.

⁴⁴ Hockney, D., *Secret Knowledge*, (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2001). Hockney is at pains to point out that the Camera Lucida is a very difficult instrument to use successfully.

⁴⁵ Hockney, *Secret Knowledge*, 17.

⁴⁶ Howgate, S. & Stern Shapiro, B. *David Hockney Portraits*. (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2006).

this enquiry.⁴⁷ Hockney says that: “Like most painters, I imagine, when I look at paintings I am as interested in ‘how’ it was painted as ‘what’ it is saying or ‘why’ it was painted (these questions are of course related)”. And that “...I’m sure that these things [how, what, why] could only have been seen by an artist, a mark-maker, who is not as far from practice, or from science, as an art historian”.⁴⁸

A voice from literary and visual theory who does offer a differing opinion, which in part seems to support my own point of view, may be found in the writings of Meike Bal. In her book *Quoting Caravaggio*, Bal says that it is clearly apparent that visual images are able to “*evoke or represent* time – the past, the future, two or more moments simultaneously.”⁴⁹ However she then goes on to say that it is more difficult to see how they can unfold literally through the act of viewing or reading in the way that film and literature may be experienced. I will argue that this literal unfolding is exactly what may happen, but over a briefer span of time, or perhaps in episodic periods of time, as a viewer returns again and again to contemplate the nature of a particular portrait or self portrait image, consequently developing a temporal understanding of the person portrayed by the artist.

Peter Timms offers some support for this concept of ‘episodic looking’⁵⁰ when he commences the chapter “What can art do?” in his book *What’s wrong with contemporary art?*⁵¹ by relating the tale of his own ongoing encounter with a particular work of art. What started as an unplanned but nevertheless powerful encounter with the National Gallery of Victoria’s eighteenth century painting by George Stubbs entitled *A lion attacking a horse* when Timms was only 11 or 12 years of age, has developed into a lifelong pattern of regular visits to see the work again and again. Timms relates that after such a long period of repeated viewings “I

⁴⁷ Hockney, *Secret Knowledge*, 21-26.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 13.

⁴⁹ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, 165.

⁵⁰ I use the term ‘episodic looking’ to refer to the fairly common practice of returning repeatedly to spend time looking at a particular or favourite work of art, thereby accessing the possibility of unfolding ideas from within a seemingly ‘static’ image.

⁵¹ Timms, P., *What’s wrong with contemporary art?* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd, 2004), 145.

feel that I know every brushstroke, yet it never fails to surprise me.”⁵² Timms is clearly not discussing portraiture here, however it is his acknowledgment of the way in which images may continue to offer unfolding access to understanding through the act of repeated looking that is relevant to this argument.

Bal differs somewhat from this notion of the unfolding temporal possibilities of a ‘static’ visual image, when she says that many contemporary artists today are concerned to make time the focus of their work “on a level that simultaneously acknowledges and challenges the fixity of the visual image”.⁵³ She is in fact referring to artworks that may be literally be seen to change before our eyes, disintegrate, go mouldy or simply begin to deteriorate physically. See for example the work of Jeannette Christensen, *The Passing of Time (Woman Holding a Balance)*, 1994 and *The Passing of Time (Girl Reading a Letter)*, 1995.⁵⁴ These polaroid photos which, whilst visually reaching back through time across four centuries to the iconic paintings of Vermeer, are literally snapshots which fix the moment in time of their creation and simultaneously, begin to fade.

Challenging the perceived ‘fixity’ of visual imagery through the epistemology of the artist

I count myself among those contemporary artists who intend to make time a focus of my work in order to both acknowledge and challenge the supposed ‘fixity’ of visual imagery. However my means can be seen to be less ephemeral and more bounded by the notion of painting as a visual language; one that has the capacity to translate empirical data (sensory input), to individual understanding and has a grammar, structure and continuity with a duration comparable to verbal language.

⁵² Ibid, 145.

⁵³ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, 165-166.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 166 and 170.

In part, the relationship or ability to speak across or through time exists because of the continuity that can be seen to exist in the language of mark-making as a means of communication. Graeme Allen in *Intertextuality* articulates this well when he says:

It is possible to speak of the 'languages' of cinema, painting or architecture: languages which involve productions of complex patterns of encoding, re-encoding, allusion, echo, transposing of previous systems and codes.⁵⁵

The ability to 'read' the language of painting and drawing has been passed from one generation of artists to the next for hundreds of years and, as with all living languages, it is mutable. While some understandings clarify and deepen, new ones appear and others are lost or the readings may change.⁵⁶

For example, Andrew Forge when writing about Claude Monet's painting technique, clearly articulates the process through which artists develop visual language as a form of dialogue between the artist and the artwork when he says:

Technique is the first embodiment of content. The more evolved the technique the more clearly this may be seen. Meaning accrues with manipulation. The painter sees this and responds. His [sic] recognition is added to the earlier content and informs further manipulation. A dialogue develops between the maker and the made that is unique to the conditions of making. It has its past and its future...⁵⁷

It is also clear that this dialogue extends to artistic peers and descendants.

Ludmilla Jordanova uses the term 'visual intelligence' when she refers to "the mental processing that is required for any work of art to be produced". She goes on to say that the transformative process that artists use to produce the material objects of their particular genre, is embedded in the time and place of the production of that artwork, interpreted through social, historical and material knowledge of what has gone before (the work and methods of artistic forebears and peers) and yet, is specific to the time and place of its making.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Allen, G., *Intertextuality*, (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, NY, Routledge, 2000), 174.

⁵⁶ See pp 35-36 of this document for a further discussion of the concept of artistic knowing and language.

⁵⁷ Gordon, R., & Forge, A., *Monet*, trans. John Shepley, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1989), 76.

⁵⁸ Jordanova, "The Body of the Artist", 54.

It may also be seen that ideas embedded in particular times and places, and interpreted through social and historical knowledge, continue to affect society's changing understanding of the nature of identity. The modern era notion that a person's identity is relatively fixed and stable has changed to reflect a 'high' or 'late' modern view which sees identity as multiple and potentially fluid.⁵⁹

This clear dichotomy between concepts of the self as a fixed and knowable entity and contemporary understandings of the fluidity of identity has been clearly articulated in regard to written biographical and autobiographical works but, as yet seems to be largely unrecognized as a practice of visual artists.⁶⁰

Just as autobiography is a specific technique of literary language, self portraiture is a specific genre of visual language, a technique in its own right that painters have developed in referring to, or revealing, character and identity. The notion of 'identity being referred to' is inevitably specific to the time that the writer writes, the painter paints, the subject is presented and the audience 'reads'.

Therefore, my argument regarding this difference in interpretation, turns on the belief that the apparent lapse in understanding of shifts that are occurring in art practice, as seen through the eyes of many art historians, theorists and creative writers, stems from a different perspective. This perspective is from the dominant discourse of written language and so may be seen to be a form of cultural imperialism. The discipline of art history and theory necessarily draws on works of art for its meaning and purpose and has considerable influence over, and in many ways drives, what is seen to be acceptable in contemporary art practice. Many speakers of the dominant written language do not see the necessity of learning a subordinate visual

⁵⁹ Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity*, 14-15. Giddens uses the term 'modernity' in referring "to institutions and modes of behaviour" originally established in post-feudal Europe. From the commencement of the industrial era, these systems increasingly exerted world wide impact on social structures and behaviours. The terms 'high' or 'late' modernity to refer to our present-day world. Ibid, 3.

⁶⁰ See for example A.S. Byatt's essay, *Portraits in Fiction*.

language.⁶¹ After all, they are speaking from the centre, from somewhere 'other' than the field of art practice in which visual language operates.

Fortunately, there are exceptions to this stance. Ludmilla Jordanova offers a clear alternative to this point of view in her persuasive argument for artists' "vivid awareness that can be termed 'historical' of what has gone before" and their ability to make this knowledge manifest through the production of their artworks.⁶² She goes on to say that: "It is the job of artists to transform their knowledge, experience and skills [of the contexts and histories within which they work] into material objects and in each genre they do so in a distinctive and historically specific manner."⁶³

Paradoxically, as a practising artist and scholar, I must draw heavily on the knowledge base of this 'other' discipline of art history and theory, for access to written knowledge about my own field. It is of course a symbiotic relationship and one that is as often richly rewarding as it is frustrating.

In this section of the Literature Review, I have set out a rationale for the significance of the proposed study. The key points are as follows. That: (a) there has been a recent upsurge of interest and re-evaluation of the genre of self portraiture. (b) Many scholars however, continue to insist that the genre is dead or at best, irrelevant to contemporary art practice. (c) Key scholars maintain that self portraiture or portraiture is limited in comparison to autobiography or biography in relation to temporal understanding. (d) However, a few key scholars (writers and artists) believe

⁶¹ Carter, P., preliminary matters in *Material Thinking: The Theory and Practice of Creative Research*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004), pxii. Paul Carter provides an interesting, if somewhat rare example of a writer who has set out to directly engage with 'other' language forms. He approached this task through a process of working with artists on a range of collaborative projects over an extended period of time. Those collaborations "threw up the question of translation...[and]...the desire to integrate text based knowledge with the plastic wisdom of the craftsperson..."

⁶² Jordanova, "The Body of the Artist", 54.

⁶³ Ibid, 54.

that there is logical evidence to support the view that practising artists might 'know' art at another level and demonstrate that visual art can represent unfolding time. (e) Visual intelligence and the visual language of mark-making can bring new insight to contemporary understandings of the self. (f) All works of art are embedded in social time. (g) In our time, identity is understood as fluid. Self portraits and portraits are able to represent this fluidity, as well as temporal change.

The following chapter will address the theoretical concepts that underpin to this study.



Chapter Three

Theoretical Concepts: and they, in a formal pattern

To talk about my own work is difficult. If I must talk about it at all
I would rather come at it sideways, through the work
of writers [and artists] I admire, through broader ideas
about poetry [art] and fiction and their place in the world.

Jeanette Winterson⁶⁴

Theoretical concepts:

Winterson's quotation from *A Work of my Own*, revealing her preference for approaching her own creative work laterally or sideways through the works and ideas of other writers and artists in general, resonates strongly with the intellectual task before me in this exegesis of my own creative artwork. An exegesis must explain and underpin the nature and content of a research project grounded in a visual process and outcome. The visual outcomes of this research, the artworks, are informed from a range of differing disciplines and the techniques that have been used will be explicated in this chapter examining the theoretical concepts that underpin those techniques.

Appropriation / quoting

Originally applied to work produced by some early modernists, the term 'appropriation' was theorised as an important tool for the postmodern project in the late 20th century. American artists such as Sherrie Levine and Jeff Koons became associated with the practice of re-using or recasting, an existing artwork or object

⁶⁴ Winterson, Jeanette. "A Work of my Own" in *Art Objects: essays on ecstasy and effrontery* (London: Vintage, 1996). p.165

in the production of new artworks.⁶⁵ This practice has, in somewhat varied form, always played a role as a useful device for visual artists (John Welchman calls it “the historical syntax of appropriation”),⁶⁶ and as such has a history that may be seen to stretch back into antiquity.⁶⁷

The ideas explicated by Meike Bal in *Quoting Caravaggio: contemporary art, preposterous history*, have provided a useful theoretical starting point for this investigation.⁶⁸ With a background in literary theory, Bal writes about art with great insight. Her approach to visual theory, and in particular her analysis of appropriation or quoting, provides a useful framework for the theoretical investigation of the abstract and complex ideas regarding identity, time and ageing that are contained within this topic.

Bal claims that by ‘quoting’ (a post modernist device used by many contemporary artists since the 1980s) from historically important images, that we forever change the older image as it was before that intervention – we create a ‘new’ version or idea about the way in which that original work may be read. She further says that: “The process is exemplified by the engagement of contemporary culture with the past and has important implications for the ways we conceive of both history and culture in the present.”⁶⁹

To illustrate the process of quoting, we can consider a contemporary self portrait by Australian artist Annette Bezor. *Still posing after all this time (a self portrait)*,⁷⁰ is a painting which is relevant to this discussion because of the way that it references and quotes from the work of other artists. Bezor says that her painting

⁶⁵ Rosalind Krauss provided critical support for the concept in *Originality of the Avante-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*.

⁶⁶ Welchman, J.C., *Art after Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s*, (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2001), 10.

⁶⁷ See also the introductory quotation by Jeannette Winterson, Chapter 4 of this document.

⁶⁸ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 1.

⁷⁰ See Fig 3.

references a work entitled *Wisdom*, which was produced by the Polish artist Tamara de Lempicka in 1940/41.⁷¹ The similarities in the wrapping, colour and folds of the turban suggest that Lempicka herself had originally appropriated her turban from the fifteenth century Jan van Eyck *Portrait of a Man (Self-portrait?)*.⁷² A comparison of the three paintings suggests that Bezor is also familiar with the Van Eyck painting, as both artists pose and return the viewer's gaze in a remarkably similar way.

The Van Eyck is an iconic painting of extraordinary vision and clarity which has maintained its ability to 'speak' across time as an artistic forebear of contemporary painters. Both Bezor and Lempicka have used quotation or appropriation as a means of reflecting on, and paying homage to, the visual models of their forebears. Indeed in Bezor's case it seems possible that she is making reference to both paintings, albeit perhaps unconsciously to the Van Eyck.⁷³

Intertextuality

The term intertextuality (*intertextualité*), originally introduced by Julia Kristeva as a theoretical tool for linguistic analysis, has been of central importance to the poststructuralist discourse. Emerging initially from Kristeva's development of the work of literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin and the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, Kristeva in an essay published as *Word, Dialogue and Novel*, drew on the earlier work of these two when developing the first articulation of the theory in the late 1960s.⁷⁴ In this essay she says that: "... any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at

⁷¹ Bezor, A., "Artist's Statement" in *05 Archibald Prize* catalogue, (pages not numbered). See Fig 2.

⁷² See Fig 1.

⁷³ The use of quotation in my own practice is discussed here and there throughout Chapter Five of this document.

⁷⁴ Kristeva, J., "Word, Dialogue and Novel." Trans. Jardine, A., Gora, T., and Roudiez, L. In *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Moi, T., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 36-61 and Allen, G., *Intertextuality*, (Abingdon, NY: Routledge, 2000), 2-3.

least double.”⁷⁵ Subsequently, in “Revolution in Poetic Language”, she explicates the idea further:

“The new signifying system may be produced with the same signifying material; in language for example, the passage may be made from narrative to text. Or it may be borrowed from different signifying materials ... The term *intertextuality* denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign-systems into another ... If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality), one then understands that its ‘place’ of enunciation and its denoted ‘object’ are never single, complete and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated. In this way polysemy can also be seen as the result of a semiotic polyvalence – an adherence to different sign systems.”⁷⁶

Kristeva’s semiotic project has had an enormous impact on the ways in which poststructuralist theory has developed during the past forty years. Originally used by post structuralists as a means for disrupting concepts of stable meaning and objective interpretation, Graeme Allen suggests that, as a methodology, the term ‘intertextuality’ in recent times has become relatively commonplace, which tends to presume a generally agreed and stable suite of critical procedures for the use of this method (intertextual theory) to interpret a wide range of creative endeavours, with particular relevance to contemporary literary theory.⁷⁷

However, Allen takes some issue with this generalised usage of the term, when he says that “it is not a transparent term” but one that is in danger of meaning all things to all people.⁷⁸ With this warning in mind, it nevertheless remains clear that there are a range of valid ways of utilising this theoretical tool in relation to disciplines other than literary theory as a means of interpreting ‘texts’.

Most usefully for this project, Michael Crotty in *The Foundations of Social Research*, describes intertextuality as a method that may be employed to break through unities, enabling among other things, the ‘plurality of the text’ to be foregrounded. Echoing Allen, he goes on to suggest that, in the post structuralist

⁷⁵ Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel”, 37.

⁷⁶ Kristeva, “Revolution in Poetic Language.” Trans. Waller, M., In *The Kristeva Reader*, 111.

⁷⁷ Allen, *Intertextuality*, 2-3.

⁷⁸ *Idid*, 2-3.

discourse, intertextuality has become a key theme and has, in consequence, exerted a considerable impact on contemporary modes of creative expression.⁷⁹

Allen further supports this view when he discusses intertextuality in relation to the visual arts, citing Wendy Steiner's 1985 article on this subject. Referring to the apparent 'immediacy' of painting that some suggest renders the form beyond semiology, she says:

It is only by viewing paintings in the light of other paintings or works of literature, music, and so forth that the 'missing' semiotic power of pictorial art can be augmented – which is to say that the power is not missing at all, but merely absent in the conventional account of the structure of the art.⁸⁰

It is clear from the foregoing quote that as a method, intertextuality provides a means to describe the work that artists do: that is to operate outside of the limitations of traditional methodologies. In the case of this project, the method has been used in order to bring together textual ideas in the form of written autobiographies, and what I argue are the visual equivalent of those ideas, self-portraits. A further use brought together contemporary self portraits, and portraits or self portraits from early exemplars of the genre; thus offering the possibility of making new sense of previously disconnected practices.

Allen goes on to explain that Steiner has shown us that the intertextual features of paintings are manifested in a variety of ways, such as the complementary visual relationships of diptychs and triptychs, the 'quotation' of particular cultural styles from the work of earlier individuals or schools, and the ways in which a type of 'random' intertextuality operates via paintings (not otherwise connected), collected together for the purposes of

⁷⁹ Crotty, Michael. *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 209-213.

⁸⁰ Steiner, W., "Intertextuality in Painting", in *American Journal of Semiotics* 3 (4), 58. Cited in Allen, 176-7.

exhibition. Steiner argues that decisions that are made about the juxtaposition of works exhibited in this way, radically alter the ways in which these works are received by their viewers and that contemporary pictorial arts practice operates at a profound intertextual level.⁸¹

Furthermore, Graeme Sullivan says:

...meaning is not contained within a form itself, say a person, painting, or a poem, but exists within a network of social relations and discourse. This interpretive language of “intertextuality” serves as a means by which meanings become distributed and debated.⁸²

Most usefully for this project, Bal suggests that quotation “stands at the intersection of iconography and intertextuality” and as such provides a suitable place from which to consider the integration of linguistic and visual traditions of interpretation.⁸³ Bal goes on to say that the concept of intertextuality implies that the borrowed sign, “inevitably comes with a meaning” and that this then allows for an open dialogue backwards and forwards through time in a way that is not available to iconography. This is because iconography tends to refer visual motifs back to written texts whereas an intertextual method offers the possibility of taking the visual nature of borrowed motifs seriously.⁸⁴

This last point is of course a crucially important one for this investigation in that it offers a means to explicate and understand the differing ways in which practising artists and art historians or art theorists ‘read’ visual imagery.

Also of critical interest in regard to my practice, is Bal’s view that the visual forms (or visual language) of art, is an idea that enables artists and viewers to engage in a discourse related to those forms, between different works of art. Bal says that:

Intertextuality ... [is a] mixture of visual and discursive modes [and as such] will consider visual principles of form, such as chiaroscuro, color, folds, surface

⁸¹ Allen, *Intertextuality*, 177. Steiner’s idea regarding the critical importance of the juxtaposition of artworks in an exhibition, accords with my own approach which is further discussed on p 73.

⁸² Sullivan, G. *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2005), 43.

⁸³ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, 8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 8-10.

texture, and different conceptions of perspective, as “discursive positions” that entertain interdiscursive relations with other works.⁸⁵

For a contemporary visual artist (and most specifically for my own practice), the ‘visual’ principles of form such as surface texture, folds or chiaroscuro, to name but a few, are clearly capable of conveying particular and explicit meaning in the production and reading of images. In my studio practice, visual forms are regularly used to allude to the work or ideas of others, or indeed, earlier/other works of my own.

Identity

The complex ways society has of constructing or reading identity or notions of the self is clearly a key issue for this investigation. In contemporary times, the concept of identity is seen as mutable and very much attached to the perceived notions of selfhood that all societies develop and change through time, but this mutability has not always been so.

The notion of stable identity that represented the enduring sense that a person had of their ‘self’, held sway in western understanding of the concept of ‘the individual’ from the early Renaissance up until the last half of the twentieth century, when new understandings began to emerge as a result of changing views about the nature of the individual in society.⁸⁶ This change in understanding may be directly related to recent sociological and psychological theories which stress that an individual’s sense of identity, rather than being an enduring, relatively fixed notion, may in fact be seen to be “something multiple and potentially fluid, constructed through experience and linguistically coded.”⁸⁷

In *Portraiture*, West points out that prior to the seventeenth century, there was an earlier concept which understood identity to exist purely in the external attributes

⁸⁵ Ibid, 10.

⁸⁶ Frosh, S., “Identity” in *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, ed. A. Bullock and S. Twombly, 3rd ed. (London: Harper Collins, 1999), 413.

⁸⁷ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 5. See also Frosh, “Identity”, 414.

of physiognomy which distinguished individuals, one from another.⁸⁸ The understanding that concepts of identity continue to change and evolve through different periods of history, has important ramifications for the way in which this research project might be approached and may be seen to link in to the contemporary notion that individual identity is no longer considered fixed, but is multiple and fluid.

Positing yet another interpretation, Richard Meyer when describing identity in the context of art today,⁸⁹ quotes the historian Philip Gleason who claims that the term identity “came into use as a popular social science term only in the 1950s”⁹⁰ when it was used to describe the self as an existential category. In this essay, Meyer predicates his discussion about the contemporary usage of the term ‘identity’ in terms of its meaning as ‘social identity’ and whilst he rightly points out that “questions of identity have been taken up in virtually every area of specialization within the field [of art history and museum exhibitions]”, it should be clear that this investigation is primarily concerned with the notion of ‘individual identity’.⁹¹

Writing towards the end of the twentieth century and in the early twenty-first century, sociologist Anthony Giddens says that the concept of identity is multifaceted, but may be approached through the notion that understandings individuals have about the nature of their identity are tied to concepts of who they are and what is meaningful to them.⁹² Giddens notes that sociologists often refer to two types of identity. Firstly ‘social-identity’, which for many people may be plural and comprised of more than one attribute, each of which may have conflicting demands and therefore provide a potential source of difficulty in the life

⁸⁸ West, *Portraiture*, 29.

⁸⁹ Richard Meyer, "Identity," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 345.

⁹⁰ Gleason, P., "Identifying Identity: A Semantic History" in *Journal of American History*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (Mar., 1983), 910-931. Cited in Meyer, "Identity", 345.

⁹¹ Ibid, 345.

⁹² Birdsall, K. and Giddens, A., *Sociology*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 29.

of that individual.⁹³ Social (or shared) identities are also able to mark the way that that individuals operate within a collective grouping through “a set of common goals, values or experiences.”⁹⁴

The second type of identity Giddens refers to is the notion of ‘self-identity’. This sense of self is what distinguishes us as distinct individuals and refers to the process of reflexive self development by which we formulate a unique sense of self in relation to the world we live in. The interactive process that is undertaken between the self and society is a key factor in helping to shape self-identity. As individuals in the modern era have become more socially and geographically mobile, it is possible to see a shift away from the relatively homogeneous communities that previously guided the formation of individual identities, towards a more fluid, multifaceted way of being, able to “constantly create and recreate our identities.”⁹⁵

The research undertaken for this thesis is premised on ideas about the self which draw on the recent theories discussed above. This said, the portraits and self-portraits of earlier times, which are an important focus for this body of work, have of course been produced at times when concepts of the individual differed markedly from those at play in the early twenty-first century. Nevertheless it is clear that the best portraits are able to transcend the distance of time and so to make their subjects ‘knowable’ to contemporary society.⁹⁶ This clear dichotomy between concepts of the self as a fixed and knowable entity and contemporary understandings of the fluidity of identity, provides a central issue for discussion and interpretation throughout this document and the practical works which are the basis of the research.

⁹³ My own experience of juggling the often conflicting demands of family life, artistic practice, study and work responsibilities seems to bear this theory out.

⁹⁴ Giddens with Birdsall, *Sociology*, 29.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 30.

⁹⁶ Paintings by fifteenth century artists Robert Campin, Piero della Francesca & Jan van Eyck provide clear examples of this capacity, (Figs 5-10).

Time and ageing

The 'mask of ageing', ... can indeed be 'cast aside', involving not simply inevitable decline and melancholy emotional responses, but a living process of critical engagement with the past, present and future'⁹⁷

As mentioned in the introduction to this document, issues relevant to contemporary culture's understanding of, and interest in, the effect of ageing on the concept of personal identity as well as the experience of being an artist working from within a large, ageing demographic group, inform my interest in the matter of ageing in contemporary culture.

Simon Williams, drawing on the writings of N. K. Denzin and M. Hepworth, provides a useful analysis of the emotional process of ageing in society when he says that, "Emotion also possesses a temporal structure in which the future, present and past all become part of the same emotional experience; a circular, internally reflective process in which [Denzin says] "what is felt now is shaped by what will be felt, and what will be felt, is shaped by what was felt."⁹⁸ Williams suggests that "Ageing for example illustrates these ideas well." Quoting Hepworth, he goes on to say that "the experience of 'becoming old'... is not 'undirectional'. Rather, it is a fluid, non-linear process in which the individual moves through a spectrum of emotions involving past, present and future in an essentially 'unstable' combination." Therefore, ageing may be experienced as "a living process of critical engagement with the past, present and future..."⁹⁹

The many self portraits I have undertaken over the past thirty years may now be seen as a means of laying down some information about an ordinary, contemporary life. As stated in the Preamble to this document, I could not of course, have been mindful of the current research aims at the outset of my artistic

⁹⁷ Denzin, N.K., & Hepworth, M., "Ageing and the Emotions", in Bendelow, G., and Williams, S.J. (eds.) *Emotions in Social Life: Critical Themes and Contemporary Issues*. (London: Routledge, 1998), 184-5. Cited in Williams, S. J., *Emotion and Social Theory: Corporeal Reflections on the (Ir)Rational*. (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 59.

⁹⁸ Williams, *Emotion and Social Theory*, 59.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 60.

career. I have however been conscious of the way in which my artistic forebears have used the self portrait as a means (among other functions) of visually mapping their own passage through life and, many years ago, consciously set out to do just that through ongoing series of self portraits and portraits of those in my immediate circle.

A clear example of the way in which the ideas about ageing discussed above, are reflected in my studio-based research method, may be found in the body of work entitled, *Facing Time*.¹⁰⁰ These images can be seen as a visual response to the issue of describing identity in contemporary culture by the means of using physiognomy (the effects of time and ageing), and character (images painted at various times significant times in my life) over an extended period of time. The twenty images which constitute this work have been shaped by what 'will be felt', 'what is felt' and 'what was felt' and therefore form an important part of my reflexive project of the self.

Wrinkles and folds

The nature of the contemporary portrayal of ageing in society has led me to look carefully at the way in which ageing has been visualised in artworks through time. While it is clear that the canon of Western art provides many more images of people in their youth or prime, there is nevertheless, a significant group of images of ageing and aged individuals. Those images have provided interesting examples of the varying ways in which the effects of the passing of time might be visually signalled. Always fascinated by the nature of draped and folded cloth as an image, particularly in Early Netherlandish and Renaissance portraiture, I have made repeated use of the metaphoric and analogous nature of folds in cloth to signal 'wrinkles in time' in the artworks.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ See Fig 84.

¹⁰¹ Also see p 48 for a discussion of time and wrinkles in relation to the nature of a paper substrate as a metaphor for ageing.

A wonderful example of a richly symbolic use of folds and wrinkles may be found in a portrait painted by the little known Italian artist, Pietro Bellotti (1627-1700), entitled *Fate Lachesis* or *The Midwife Lachesis*.¹⁰² In this work, Bellotti has given the woman sitter, who has evidently worked hard during a long life, great dignity and pride.¹⁰³ The sumptuously folded fabrics of her headdress and clothing are good quality and beautiful, but not rich. They serve to underscore her wrinkled and darkly coloured skin, and her capable, work worn hands.¹⁰⁴

Much that has been written about the wonderfully rich concept of the fold, which in the twentieth century, may be traced back through the writing of Gilles Deleuze to the ideas initially promulgated by the eighteenth century philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1646 – 1716). Deleuze has written extensively about these complex ideas in his seminal text *The Fold: Leibnitz and the Baroque*.¹⁰⁵

Once more, the source that has proved to be of contemporary relevance for this investigation may be found in the writings of Meike Bal who also draws on the ideas of Leibnitz as a specimen of ‘baroque’ thought whose ideas resurfaced in the 1980s.¹⁰⁶ Among other ideas, and most relevant for this discussion, Leibnitz is responsible for the baroque concepts of both ‘the fold’ and “the labyrinth, an image for the continuum of space as well as time that encompasses both macroscopic and microscopic scale.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² See Fig 24 reproduced in Sohm, P., *The Artist Grows Old: the aging of art and artists in Italy 1500-1800*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

¹⁰³ Ibid p 21 and pp x-xi. This interpretation does not accord with Sohm who admits to approaching the subject from a gerontophobic point of view, based on his own ageing self, and his increasingly pessimistic view regarding the realities of that process.

¹⁰⁴ Frank, M.E., “Visible Signs of Aging” in *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe: Cultural Representations*, Campbell, E., (ed.), (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2006), 148.

The sitter also resembles in her dress and poise, the wet nurse depicted in the Veronese fresco, *Giustiniana Barbaro and ‘La Nutrice’*. In this essay, Frank suggests that in the role of such a trusted servant, a wet nurse would have enjoyed the position of a valued family member.

¹⁰⁵ Deleuze, D., *The Fold: Leibnitz and the Baroque*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

¹⁰⁶ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, 29.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 24.

For my practice and in relation to this project, the idea of ‘the fold’ has currency in the analogy that can be drawn between the notion of the fold and the wrinkle. My continuing fascination for folds in fabric and wrinkles in physiognomy is partly predicated on the idea of ‘a wrinkle in time’. These visual tropes may be seen as signifiers for ageing and the passage of time and whilst still bearing a relationship to the ideas outlined above are of course, more literal.¹⁰⁸

Art historical perspectives: self portrait

Shearer West says that the “representational qualities of self portraits”¹⁰⁹ mean that they may function in a range of ways. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, both technical and societal triggers were of pivotal importance in the emergence of the genre and continue to this day to play a significant role in changes that may be seen to have occurred to the artistic intent and manifestation of self portraits through time.

West provides a clear outline of the development of self portraiture over its 500 year history. However it is really the discussion regarding those artists who have used the self portrait in order to document either their own ageing in time or “their sense of self in society”,¹¹⁰ that is relevant to this investigation. Self portraiture, West reminds us, is indicative of the artist’s notion of their own social and artistic identity. Dürer for example, arguably the painter of the first self-consciously aware self portraits at the end of the fifteenth century, was already playing “with ideas of artistic and social identity”.¹¹¹ He is also the earliest of those artists who Shearer cites, as having produced serial self portraits over a period of time as a means of (among other objectives) documenting or mapping their ageing selves.

While West admits that there are obvious similarities between the autobiography and the self portrait, and that it is significant that the advent of self portraiture in

¹⁰⁸ See Fig 86 for an example of this use of both the fold and the wrinkle in my artwork.

¹⁰⁹ West, *Portraiture*, 163.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 165.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 167.

Europe coincided with the advent of autobiography, West, as discussed earlier, questions the ability of self portraits to convey narrative in an analogous way to autobiography.¹¹² Acknowledging the limitations of written autobiography to produce a record of an individual life, she also goes on to remind us that self portraits are even more limited than portraits in this regard as they may only present a frozen moment in time and as such are not able to present a clear narrative structure in the way that autobiographies may do.

This is clearly the case with some self portraits, however such a view fails to acknowledge recent changes in the way that some artists approach self portraiture. By conveying through their imagery both temporal understanding and a reflexive project of the self, artists are once more, echoing the changing nature of contemporary understandings of identity in culture. The changing nature of the genre is clearly acknowledged by Jordanova in her essay *The Body of the Artist*.¹¹³

One of the artists cited by West as being involved with an ongoing, autobiographical project to describe their “sense of self in time” is David Hockney.¹¹⁴ Kay Heymer, the curator of a retrospective entitled *Hockney's Portraits and People*, shown in Germany in 2001, tracks Hockney's journey with the self portrait from his first lithographic image of 1954, through the many stylistic and technical experiments that have characterised his artistic progress over almost fifty years, to a series produced in 2000 and 2001.¹¹⁵ Heymer declares this late group of self portraits to have a virtuosity not present to the same extent in the earlier series of self portraits. She says of them that: “Hockney is as unflattering as ever. His image is that of a doubting, ageing man full of experience and even

¹¹² See p 13 of this document.

¹¹³ See pp18-19 of this document.

¹¹⁴ West, *Portraiture*, 179. Hockney is discussed earlier on pp15-16 of this document in relation to the concepts of ‘visual language’ and ‘artistic knowing’.

¹¹⁵ Livingstone, M. & Heymer, K. *Hockney's Portraits and People*. (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2003).

wisdom...still preoccupied with the passage of time ...”¹¹⁶ Heymer also says that: “by choosing to make and then exhibit drawings such as these [frankly exposing introspection, self doubt and the inevitable signs of ageing], he once again reshapes his identity.”¹¹⁷

It is this preoccupation with time and ageing, along with his reflexive engagement with ideas about seeing and image production, that makes Hockney’s contemporary practice, of such compelling interest to this project.

Literary perspectives: Autobiography

As previously mentioned, the works of creative writers who have used the forms of biography and autobiography in particular, as a means of describing lives, cultures and times in both historical and contemporary periods, provide a source of great inspiration for me as a visual artist with a similar focus.

Literary examples demonstrating the interweaving or juxtaposition of times and individual lives include the English writer A.S. Byatt. Of particular relevance is her novel *Possession: A Romance*, a complex fictional tale which weaves the idea of late twentieth century biographers pursuing nineteenth century poets and lovers back and forth through temporal space.¹¹⁸ Also English/Australian writer Drusilla Modjeska’s, wonderfully poetic tale *The Orchard* and the memoir of her mother *Poppy*, each play games with the reader’s understanding of the nexus between autobiography, biography and fiction.¹¹⁹ Furthermore the distinguished Australian philosopher, Raimond Gaita’s extraordinarily evocative and moving memoir, *Romulus, my Father* is a biography that contains a strong autobiographical thread.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Livingstone & Heymer in *Hockney’s Portraits and People*, 39.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 39.

¹¹⁸ Byatt, A. S., *Possession: A Romance*, (London: Vintage, 1991).

¹¹⁹ Modjeska, D., *The Orchard*, (Sydney: Pan McMillan Australia, 1994), and *Poppy*, (Ringwood: Penguin Books Australia, 1996).

¹²⁰ Gaita, R., *Romulus, my Father*, (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 1998).

As stated earlier, these examples are just some of the writing which, over many years, has informed and fuelled my creative imagination in much the same way that the work of other artists in my field such as Alice Neel, Lucien Freud, David Hockney and Maryanne Coutts have all done.

In her collection of essays entitled *Art Objects*, Jeanette Winterson¹²¹ makes the point that good artists, always work in the living language [textual or visual] of their time. Writing in the last years of the twentieth century, she argued that artists have a special 'religious' type of insight that enables them to grasp from a fluid moment, the unique present, or the 'psychic resonance' of a people at a particular time:

Ours has been a century of rapid change, and if literature [or visual art] is to have any meaning beyond the museum, it must keep developing ... The true artist ... [has] an immanence that allows him or her to recognise and make articulate the emotional perplexities of his [sic] age...¹²² [Those] who seem to sum up their times are ... [the artists] who have this prescience. ... The emotional and psychic resonance of a particular people at a particular time ... is a living, breathing, winding movement that flows out of the past and into the future whilst making its unique present. This fixity and flux is never clear until we are beyond it and into further fixity and flux, and yet it seems it was clear, at least to one group of people ... who come to be absolutely identified with their day; the artists.¹²³

Visual perspectives: Auto portrait

The visual self portrait has a well documented history reaching back five hundred years and whilst it is not my intention here to reiterate that history, there are clearly key artists whose work is relevant to this inquiry by virtue of their engagement with visual ideas about ageing in time and multiple selves.

Famously, the first artist to produce self-consciously aware self-portraits, Albrecht Dürer, was also the first to document his ageing self. From a precociously adept draftsman at the age of thirteen, through his young manhood, maturity and

¹²¹ Winterson, J., *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery* (London: Vintage, 1996).

¹²² Ibid, 39.

¹²³ Ibid, 40.

decline, shortly before his early demise at the age of fifty-seven, Dürer has left an absorbing record of his changing visage and engagement with his world.¹²⁴

No discussion of the ageing self could be complete without reference to Rembrandt von Rijn and his extraordinary series of self portraits documenting (like Dürer) his progression from a similarly gifted youth, through to his rise and fall in the society of his time and, most poignantly, his unflinching scrutiny of the ageing process as it affected him in his later years.¹²⁵

Sofonisba Anguissola, who was active throughout a long life in both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, provides a relatively rare glimpse of this same process from the point of view of a woman artist.¹²⁶ In recent times, Alice Neel and David Hockney, have contributed revealing insights into key rites of passage and the ageing process in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, through the process of developing a continuing record of their selves, families and friends as they progress through life in contemporary times.¹²⁷

All of the abovementioned artists have worked episodically to produce over extended periods of time, a lasting and evocative narrative record of their lives. It is now becoming clear that, more recently, some contemporary artists engage in a more complex process of self portraiture as a means of evoking their interpretations of the fluid nature of contemporary understandings of the concept of identity.

For example, Rachel Lachowicz with her 1992 sculptural self portrait, *Forensic Project (28, 58, 88 years)*, visualized her own ageing process by imagining how she would look at thirty year intervals.¹²⁸ The contemporary Australian artist, Maryanne Coutts regularly produces self portraits with a strong fictional, narrative content. These images are at all times strongly connected to the larger project of

¹²⁴ Fig 12-14.

¹²⁵ Fig 18-20.

¹²⁶ Fig 15-17.

¹²⁷ Figs 25-29 and 35-43.

¹²⁸ Fig 57.

narrative imagery structures in visual arts practice that Coutts is working on at the time. Each one reflects a particular part of her working life and, as with writer Drusilla Modjeska, weaves a magical path between truth and fiction, which together may be seen to develop an extended concept of identity and time in the life of this artist.¹²⁹

Of particular interest in this discourse is the 2002 *Self portrait*, where Coutts has incorporated several self portrait images into what initially appears to be a single large head.¹³⁰ This visual acknowledgment of the simultaneous roles that contemporary society imposes on individuals is I believe, an important indicator of the intricate ways that visual imagery may evoke the complex nature of contemporary identity and I argue, comparable to the ability of autobiographical writing.

My own working methods and outcomes to date are outlined in chapter four of this document.

¹²⁹ See Figs 52-55.

¹³⁰ See Fig 56.



Chapter Four

Methodology: The detail of the pattern

...the calling of the artist, in any medium, is to make it new. I do not mean that in new work the past is repudiated; quite the opposite, the past is reclaimed ... It is re-stated and re-instated in its original vigour. Leonardo is present in Cezanne; Michelangelo flows through Picasso and on into Hockney. This is not ancestor worship; it is the lineage of art. It is not so much influence as it is connection.

Jeannette Winterson
¹³¹

Methodological Basis: voicing tacit knowledge and visual language

As discussed earlier, the disciplines that inform the practice upon which this research project is founded include: visual arts practice, especially self portraiture; visual art theory and history with particular reference to ideas about quotation or appropriation and the historical background and contemporary practice of self portraiture; literary forms of autobiography; and ideas about time and ageing in contemporary culture.

Until very recently, there have been few published texts regarding the methodologies that might be employed by creative artists in their research practice, and those artists who did pursue practice-led research were dependant upon finding a way forward through the methodologies of other disciplines. This situation is now beginning to change, and the recent scholarship of Slager, Sullivan, Bolt, Carter and, a reconsideration of Polanyi, have all provided valuable insights into useful ways of describing and understanding creative arts research

¹³¹ J. Winterson, *Art Objects*, (London: Vintage, 1996), 12.

methods relevant to this particular research project. The following discussion, focussed as it is on visual arts methods, is relevant because an understanding of the ways in which visual knowing may be critically understood, is needed in order to enable a clear reading of creative arts research. Such an understanding is crucial for the interpretation of this thesis, grounded as it is in the practice, iconography and materiality of the self portrait genre.

Henk Slager in his preface to the collection of essays entitled *Artistic Research*¹³² asks the pivotal question “what is the specific meaning of research in the context of the practice of art?” Slager argues that all research is bounded by, and relies on, the formulation of a sound methodology in order to frame questions whose answers add valuable knowledge to the field in question. It is clear that artists cannot and do not aim for an objective, empirical method. Rather, that research grounded in artistic practice is most often directed towards specific local knowledge.¹³³ He goes on to argue that “artistic research should not be characterized by a rigid methodology [but by] ... a firm and rationally justified belief in a methodological result, whose existence ultimately cannot be legitimized *a priori*.” Slager has coined the term ‘methododicy’ to refer to this approach and likens such an approach to the way in which philosophy differs from other forms of research in the generation of new knowledge.¹³⁴

Most usefully for this inquiry, Graeme Sullivan in *Art Practice as Research*,¹³⁵ argues a position where “the artist-theorist can be seen as both the researcher and the researched [focussing] on the practices used by artists to advance our understanding of who we are, what we do, and what we know.”¹³⁶ Sullivan also

¹³² H. Slager, “Methododicy”, 12-14, in *Artistic Research*, A. W. Balkema and H. Slager eds., trans. Global Verunft, vol. 18, *Series of Philosophy of Art and Art Theory*, (Amsterdam: Lier en Boog, 2004).

¹³³ Ibid. 13.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 14. Slager has drawn on ideas regarding philosophical research put forward by Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy* to support this idea.

¹³⁵ Sullivan, G., *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, (Thousand Oaks: 2005, Sage Publications).

¹³⁶ Ibid. p.xix.

examines the concept of *visual knowing*, “the complex cognitive processes that inform and shape art practice.”¹³⁷ This concept is of particular relevance to my discussion about the different ways in which writers and artists understand the nature of written and visual autobiographies or self portraits. *Visual knowing* may also be related back to Hockney’s idea that visual artists know things through their practice that those who write about art do not.¹³⁸

Perhaps the concept of *tacit knowledge*, a term first used by Michael Polanyi in 1967 in referring to aspects of knowledge which may only be gained through doing, through personal experimentation, personal practice or the observation of others, may be usefully applied as way of describing how *visual knowing* is acquired and transmitted within artistic practice groups.¹³⁹

To explicate his point that true knowledge of a theory can only be theorised in retrospect, that is, *after* it has been ‘known’ through experience, Polanyi uses the example of mathematical theory which he says may only be constructed “by relying on *prior* tacit knowing and can function as a theory only *within* an act of tacit knowing, which consists in our attending *from* it to the previously established experience on which it bears.”¹⁴⁰

This particular example seems to offer a clear way of understanding *tacit knowing* in relation to visual language and artistic research practices. Such an approach is also echoed in the premise put forward by Henk Slager and discussed earlier in this section regarding artistic research methodologies. Slager’s view is that appropriate methodology may only be properly understood and described *after* the conclusion of the research.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Ibid. 141.

¹³⁸ Hockney, *Secret Knowledge*, 13.

¹³⁹ Polanyi, M., *The Tacit Dimension*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967). ‘Visual knowing’ and ‘visual language’ are discussed in relation to the nexus between autobiography and self portraiture on pp 18-19 and p 35 of this document.

¹⁴⁰ Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 21.

¹⁴¹ See p 40.

Terms of Reference

The following section of this chapter deals with the various terms that have been coined to describe, in language, the way in which the emergent field of practice-led research or the material practice of art, may contribute ideas to knowledge.

Through Sullivan and Polanyi, we have already been introduced to *visual knowing* and *tacit knowledge*. *Material thinking*, *material productivity*, *visual language*, and *praxical knowledge* are further relevant and intricately connected terms that have been used in the description of visual arts research methodologies, and will also be addressed here.

Ideas relating to the efficacy of *tacit knowledge* as a way of knowing are further born out by Barbara Bolt in her essay, "The Magic is in the Handling".¹⁴² Bolt uses the thesis that underpins David Hockney's book *Secret Knowledge* as a means for explicating the particular way in which artistic research may be undertaken and understood in relation to more established research paradigms. She goes on to argue that this particular approach (Bolt and Paul Carter term it *material thinking*), is grounded in the previously discussed concept of *tacit knowledge*, a form of knowing through doing, that is particularly appropriate to artistic practice.¹⁴³

Bolt observes (as I have done) that Hockney claims the observations he made, could *only* have been made by a practising artist, someone who makes marks into images.¹⁴⁴ Of relevance to the methodology under discussion here, Bolt goes on to say that "The specificity of Hockney's experience as an artist and particularly a drawer, fashioned the nature of the question, the methodology and the types of realisations that emerged from the investigation."¹⁴⁵ This idea that practising artists are equipped in a way that others in related fields (such as art history and

¹⁴² B. Bolt, "The Magic is in the Handling", in E. Barrett & B. Bolt, (eds.), *Practice as Research: approaches to creative arts enquiry*, (London, 2007, I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd), 27-34.

¹⁴³ P. Carter, "Interest: the ethics of invention", in *Practice as Research*, 15-25.

¹⁴⁴ See pp 15-16 in the Literature Review for a discussion of my own observations regarding Hockney's ideas related to visual knowing as it pertains to visual language.

¹⁴⁵ Bolt, "The Magic is in the Handling", 27.

theory) are not, to design and interpret the results of visual investigations, is a critical point in regards to the nature of artistic or practice-led research.

Bolt further develops this point when she says that Hockney “devised a complex and idiosyncratic methodology that involved research through drawing, an investigation into optical devices and their use as drawing aids, and a visual analysis of drawings and paintings dating back to the fourteenth century.”¹⁴⁶ Based on the outcomes of his investigations and experiments with drawing, Hockney questioned the established ‘fact’ of the unequalled drawing brilliance of key artists from especially, the fifteenth century. He argued through visual means and also, through documents of the period,¹⁴⁷ that artists had used optical devices and the new science of perspective, to attain the extraordinary verisimilitude that began to be apparent in the late 15th and early 16th century. Hockney clearly points out that his argument is not designed to undermine the great skill of these artists, rather, that they were making use of new (and quite difficult) technology, in a way that artists throughout history have always done.¹⁴⁸

Coincidentally (or perhaps not) three of the paintings that I had selected to reflect on for the *Regarding History* series (by Robert Campin and Jan Van Eyck), are among those that Hockney used as examples of the “paradigm shift” in drawing conventions that occurred in a very brief period of time.¹⁴⁹ Whilst this selection of images is clearly of interest to me, I have in fact used Hockney’s thesis for another reason; to underpin my argument that visual artists use a different ‘language’ from theorists, (a visual rather than a written one), to ‘read’, interpret and understand artworks. This was done as a means of countering the contemporary argument put

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 28.

¹⁴⁷ Hockney, *Secret Knowledge*, 205-216. See Fig 44 for a reproduction of Hockney’s pinboard. The diptych by Piero della Francesca, is also included in a later timeframe on the pinboard.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 14.

¹⁴⁹ All the works for this series were selected following a study trip to Europe and the UK where I was able to ‘see’ the material nature of paintings for the first time. The way in which each of these works seemed able to transcend the distance of time and ‘speak’ to me directly was a pivotal factor in my selection of these particular portraits from the many that I saw on that trip.

forward by art historians, art theorists and creative writers, that visual self portraits are unable to convey concepts of the self in time.

With a somewhat different aim in mind, Bolt has used Hockney's thesis to illustrate her argument for the validity of *material thinking* as an effective way of undertaking practice-led research. Bolt and Carter's ideas regarding *material thinking* or *material productivity*, provide a useful support to further strengthen my own position in regard to the above point.

In regard to methodology, Bolt says that it is possible to argue visually. She has used Hockney's non standard methodology as a means to highlight the important and relevant way his investigation has enabled "the development of methodologies and approaches in *practice-led research*."¹⁵⁰

Her argument is structured in the following way. That: (a) the initial *practice-led* research question arose from the disjuncture Hockney saw in a drawing by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, which was based on his vast practice-based knowledge of drawing.¹⁵¹ (b) The resulting visual hypothesis derived from his experience using projection devices and photographic technology. [His prior experiments with spatial knowledge and perspective were almost certainly other key drivers here]. (c) Hockney's extensive experience as a drawer predicated the particular methodology he used to test his hypothesis. (d) That practice based experience provided Hockney with the means to focus on particularity, rather than generalization to examine his proposition. That is, he had the requisite skills as a drawer as well as the theoretical and practical knowledge that enabled him to set up both *camera obscura* and *camera lucida* machinery to test his hypothesis.¹⁵² (e) Bolt says that: "Finally, and most importantly, Hockney's visual argument

¹⁵⁰ Bolt, 29.

¹⁵¹ This perceived disjuncture grew from Hockney's knowledge of the relatively brief time that Ingres had spent with the sitter (evidenced from the historical record), his practice based knowledge of the time needed to produce images of such verisimilitude, and the particular nature of the drawn marks. Hockney, *Secret Knowledge*, 23-33.

¹⁵² This focus on 'particularity' may also be seen to relate to Henk Slager's view of artistic research methods, discussed earlier in this Chapter.

demonstrates the double articulation between theory and practice, whereby *theory emerges from a reflexive practice at the same time that practice is informed by theory* [emphasis mine]. This double articulation is central to practice-led research . . . [in that the visual argument it is based upon] enables us to look at and think about artwork from a different perspective.”¹⁵³

In summary, Bolt says that Hockney has allowed us to realise “the material nature of visual thinking” because his insights demonstrate a very specific sort of knowing, a knowing that arises through handling materials in practice, and further that: “the materials and processes of production have their own intelligence that come into play in interaction with the artist’s creative intelligence . . . [therefore this] form of tacit knowledge provides a very specific way of understanding the world”¹⁵⁴

The approach taken by Paul Carter in his book entitled *Material Thinking*, is also relevant here. Carter says that the:

elements of material thinking that define its distinctive reach as creative research [are] a recognition of the creative intelligence of materials [and] that making art . . . is an act of self-realisation . . . at that place and time . . . , a creative aptitude for collaboration [which is what happens] whenever artists begin to talk about what they are doing [by] . . . joining hand, eye and mind in a process of material thinking.¹⁵⁵

Developing the idea of the nature of *material thinking*, or as she prefers, *material productivity*, Bolt again uses Hockney as a clear exemplar of her thinking when she says that his:

observations about Ingres’ drawings arose out of a sustained and sustaining drawing practice. His particular tacit knowledge came from the experience of working with pencils, charcoals, paint, projections and the camera in realizing an image . . . his engagement with the tools and technologies of drawing practice produced its own kind of sight or logic.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Ibid. 29.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 29.

¹⁵⁵ Carter, *Material Thinking*, pxiii.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 30. Whilst Bolt prefers to use the term *material productivity* (the collaboration between artists and materials) instead of Paul Carter’s use of *material thinking* (the collaboration between

In support of her preference for the term *material productivity*, Bolt invokes two further concepts. Firstly, *praxical knowledge*, or knowledge that involves a reflexive process which overlaps and grows out of the process of *handling* as described by Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time*. Heidegger argues that we may come to know the world theoretically, only after we have come to know it by doing though handling. New knowledge therefore, can be seen to emerge through engagement with practice followed by reflexive thinking about that practice.¹⁵⁷ The second term she refers to is *originary*. Rarely used, Bolt argues that the term is pertinent to practice-led research in that it “is a way of understanding that originates in and of the thing in question.” In this case, through visual art practice.¹⁵⁸

Whilst most of the terms discussed above are products of the emerging field of practice-led research, the term *visual language* is one that has been used by many artists for a much more extended period of time. It is broadly understood within the specific field of painting for instance, to refer to the way in which each artist constructs meaning through a variety of means. For example, the materiality of the surface; the use of colour and form, brush marks and scale are just some of the rich and complex ‘language’ tools that artists have at their disposal.¹⁵⁹

The methodological ideas of Bolt, Carter, Hockney, Polanyi and Sullivan outlined above, have currency in relation to the research steps undertaken for this thesis in the following ways. Whilst the research draws on the disciplines of art history (self portraiture and ageing), critical theory (appropriation and intertextuality), sociology (identity theory and ageing in society), and creative writing (autobiography), it has been approached from the position of a practising artist, a maker of images. Therefore, the real meaning of the thesis is properly found in the material

artists and writers). Both terms appear to be useful when applied to different modes of artistic production.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 30 and 34.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 30.

¹⁵⁹ A discussion of the nature and relevance of ‘visual language’ as it relates to the supposed ‘fixity’ of the visual image, may be found on pp 16-17 in the Literature Review.

outcomes of this project, the artworks which ‘speak’ through their iconography and materiality. Whilst acknowledging that this document, the exegesis, is critically important as a reflexive tool and a means to explicate the new understandings that have emerged from this investigation, the methods outlined in this chapter support the view that such knowledge could only have emerged through a practice-led research method of making images.

The opening quotation for this chapter by Jeannette Winterson was selected in order to point to the critical nature of *visual language* as the means artists use to “re-state, re-instate and perpetuate the lineage of art.”¹⁶⁰ The foregoing discussion has demonstrated that concepts such as *tacit knowledge*, *visual knowing*, *praxical knowledge*, *material thinking* and *material productivity*, are all related terms (with Polanyi’s *tacit knowledge* providing the core idea), which refer to the ways practice and practice-led research may articulate ideas through both visual and exegetical means. In the following chapter I will address the nature of the studio methods that both drive and inform my visual research activities.

¹⁶⁰ Winterson, *Art Objects*, 12.



Chapter Five

Studio Methods: Time ridden faces

The central argument had to be visual...
David Hockney¹⁶¹

Process and material methods

My studio practice for this project seeks means to pursue ways of expressing ideas through groups of interrelated images. Those means and the ideas that underpin their use will be discussed in some detail in the following section of this chapter, firstly through reference to earlier works of my own, followed by a discussion of those antecedents whose work has particularly influenced the direction taken for this research project. The work of those of my peers who have played an influential role in the development of my ideas and approaches to practice, will also be addressed. Finally, the artworks that form the practical part of the thesis will be discussed.

Facing Time, the large work produced in 2006 for the *Plus* exhibition provides a clear example of the working method that I have come to employ.¹⁶² The work is comprised of a set of 20 drawings which are intended to be read as one large work. Predominantly drawn with charcoal and pastel, some images also incorporate digital prints or relief prints within the drawn image. They are all self portraits; some contemporary, but the majority referring to older self portrait images. The earliest is from 1979. Repeated, reversed, cropped, scaled up or down, drawn, scanned, cut into lino, printed, redrawn and repeated again and

¹⁶¹ Hockney, *Secret Knowledge*, 15.

¹⁶² Fig 84. A joint exhibition with Dr Maryanne Coutts and Ms Sally Miller, held at the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, June – September 2006.

again ... they are intended to act as a conversation through time with my 'self', my artistic forebears and with my peers.

My working method is to use paper as a support material. Much of it I make using plant fibres, recycled cotton or hemp rag. Some handmade sheets are purchased from papermills or art stores while others are high quality machine made-papers. They vary in both scale and substance; tiny, mid-sized and very large, translucent and fragile, opaque and tough. All are selected or made in order to add material meaning to the images they carry. For example, the minute folds and creases that are the result of treating a sheet of handmade abaca fibre paper, with the Japanese technique known as 'momigami',¹⁶³ alters that paper from a crisp, slightly rigid sheet of paper, to one that has a strength and suppleness that is similar to finely woven cloth. For my purposes, this creased and folded, almost translucent surface (which visually belies the actual strength of the paper), may be seen as analogous to the surface of ageing skin containing the inner strength and knowledge that an older 'self' has.

The manufacture of handmade paper, the cutting of lino blocks for relief prints and the development of drawings or paintings, are all very intensive process and time based activities. The nature of this necessarily 'slow' approach to developing artworks is a key ingredient in the ability of artists to reflect on ideas and to use their visual intelligence in the application of a transformative process to basic materials.¹⁶⁴ Geoff Wallis in his catalogue essay for the 1994 exhibition

Accumulations of Time, said of my practice:

... her works have a strong material presence; we are always aware that they are things made...the real trace of the artist can be found in the worked over surfaces

¹⁶³ The momigami method I employ differs from the traditional Japanese technique in that I use plant fibres other than kozo (papermaking mulberry) and do not impregnate the paper with size.

¹⁶⁴ This idea is perhaps analogous to the philosophical approach to cooking that underpins the 'slow food' movement. Another artist whose practice has consciously embraced intensive, time based methods is Chuck Close. See p 67 for a more extensive discussion of his practice in relation to my own.

themselves. It is here in the scratchings and rubbings, that the artist's imaginative activity and inner life is truly revealed.¹⁶⁵

Wallis here recognises that there is serious intent and 'visual intelligence' behind the material nature and practical implementation of the ideas which form my artworks. This has been an evolving process which I have consciously followed throughout my working life.

As discussed in the introductory chapter of this document, I use the practices of drawing, printmaking (both relief and digital prints) and painting, to realise the images made for this project. These combinations of traditional and relatively new technical devices, enable me to employ the theoretical technique of quoting, from both the work of others and from my own earlier works, as a means of developing ideas and images into a visually cohesive and exploratory body of artworks. Additionally, the ability to recast and develop images back and forth between these different modes of expression, provides a visually rich means of exploring the ways that visual response and dialogue within a given group of artworks may extend and develop meaning.

The conscious development of that process began with the body of drawings and paintings collectively shown as *Regarding History*. The genesis of these works is discussed in the following section which reflects on my long term engagement with self portraiture.

An enduring engagement with the self portrait

As discussed in the preamble to this exegesis, my artistic practice for almost thirty years has been largely focussed on the theory and the practice of portraiture, particularly self portraiture. This long term engagement with that genre has resulted in a close contemplation of the changing self, both in relation to my ageing physiognomy and to the events that have shaped my life.

¹⁶⁵ Wallis, G. "Accumulations of Time: Works on Paper by Loris Button", 1994.

Throughout the years that I have pursued a visual arts practice, I have been drawn to the way in which my artistic forebears had used the self portrait as a means of visually mapping their own passage through life. As a consequence of this deep interest in earlier forms of the genre, there are many instances where I have purposely referred to the works of my forebears within the various series of self portraits and portraits which I have undertaken throughout this long period of time. Again, as mentioned at the outset, these series can now be seen as parts of a much larger, ongoing 'autobiographical' project, based on notions of identity and ageing in contemporary society.

Examples of earlier self portraits may be traced back to my undergraduate studies when it had gradually become clear that the critical area of visual arts practice lay, for me, with the human figure and in particular, with portraiture. From that time forward, I have regularly (perhaps obsessively) produced self portraits as an ongoing record of my passage through life. Some record merely my physiognomy at the time of their production, some key rites of passage, and others deal with ideas about light, form and structure or pay homage to my artistic forebears and the traditions of the genre. In these latter works, as a self-conscious post modernist, there may also be found on occasion an element of playful parody.¹⁶⁶

Early Works

Some earlier self portraits are relevant to this discussion because of the influence they have had on the particular approaches and practices which have been utilised in the production of artworks for this investigation. The following examples have been selected for discussion in view of their bearing on the ongoing development of my practice and, in particular, for their resonance with the aims of this practice-led research project. Some of the images discussed are among those that have also been revisited as a means to encompass ideas about time and ageing into the current works.

¹⁶⁶ See for example the "Portrait of a Family" series in which the *découpage* background and cast frames were designed as a rather 'tongue in cheek' twentieth century reprise of the symbolic conventions of earlier times. See Fig 64.

1979 Self Portrait

The small glass painting from the late 1970s entitled *1979 Self Portrait*, is relevant because of the influence it exerted on the way in which *Facing Time* was conceived. This connection is primarily evident through the use of colour, in that digital prints derived from the earlier painting were pinned to the studio wall and became the touchstone used to inform colour choices made for the drawings that form the later work. Additionally, the structure of multiple images placed within a grid to make a larger whole, may be seen in both the early painting and in the recent set of drawings.¹⁶⁷

1979 Self Portrait is the first example of a regularly repeated use of grids within my working practice and also of the use of photographs to provide a view of the self not available through mirror images. Both have been critically important devices in the development of my current working methods. Further, one of the tiny heads was also used for appropriation or 'quotation', as a component image of *Facing Time*.

Portrait of Loris Button 1983, 'The Candidates' series

This work is from a series of portraits and self portraits produced whilst undertaking MFA studies at the University of Tasmania in the early 1980s. In an attempt to remove the portraits from the obvious semiotic signs that denote age, class and gender, all sitters were painted without hair and in gender neutral garments, with the aim of encouraging viewers to look more closely at the person portrayed.

A further intention with this body of work was to develop images through an act of collaboration with the subject, which relied upon a range of sources for the types of information about the sitter that were then incorporated into the portrayal. This

¹⁶⁷ Figs 59, 84 and 86. The grid is a repeating theme in my own work and indeed has been taken up by many artists who became active in the 1960s, '70s and '80s. Chuck Close who has obsessively and very successfully, used grids in his working practice since the 1960s, provides a prime example of a useful contemporary engagement with this ancient device. Storr, *Chuck Close*, p 93.

information took the form of text, a photographic image of the sitter holding a card (stencilled with the text the sitter had chosen to present as a part of their self image), imagery that the sitter had selected as a part of their self description, and a portrait painted from life. In my case and at that time in my life, my artistic identity, my role as the mother of a young child and my age, were incorporated into both the textual and visual keys to the narrative content of the painting.¹⁶⁸

Materially, this series proved to be an important imperative in my continuing engagement with the potentialities of hand papermaking as an expressive device in image production. In the intervening 25 years, I have returned again and again to this wonderfully various substrate as a way to add meaning through material substance to my paintings, drawings and prints.¹⁶⁹

Late Night Self Portrait 1986

This particular self portrait was produced as part of a group painted on tea chest lids which had been provided by my gallery with a themed exhibition in mind. Having recently returned from a five year sojourn in Tasmania to live in Victoria and indeed, residing once again in the suburb where I grew up, my contribution to that show consisted in part of several self portraits reflecting on my personal history and current existence in that part of Melbourne. Connections to time, place and society, have always played a key role in my ongoing interest in portraiture.

As is clear from the title, this image was painted late at night after a long day's paid employment, and with a looming exhibition deadline. The best of this group of works, it has continued to stay in my mind and visual imagination as a benchmark to aim for and surpass. Today, the image offers both an interesting insight into the way that as a considerably younger woman I viewed my self, and most recently,

¹⁶⁸ In the 1980s, having recently been labelled by the medical profession as an elderly *prima gravida* (first birth), age had become a relatively early subject of interest for me.

¹⁶⁹ For me, the substrate frequently forms an integral part of an image. See for example Figs 76-83.

has provided an interesting image for quotation in view of the current focus and aims of my practice.¹⁷⁰

Loris, Elizabeth, Peter, Anna the cat, 'Portrait of a Family series', 1987 – 1989

This particular group of works had its genesis in the Tasmanian School of Art papermill where I had first been introduced to handmade paper, and as a consequence had learned the techniques required to make handmade paper casts. The works were made using casts of picture frames as the substrate for the images. The portraits of my family members were then painted from life and the 'background' was produced using a *découpage* technique.

Each individual's background was carefully selected from sheets of images then readily available to use as *découpage* for hobbyists and children.¹⁷¹ The selection was based on images that in my case were strongly resonant of my 1950s childhood; for my partner, the type of 'boys' own' imagery of the 1940s; and for our daughter, the sort of imagery that as parents, we felt we had imposed on her in the years of her early childhood. Surprisingly, having included Anna the Cat at my child's insistence (after all, what is a family portrait without the family pet?), I was also able to find enough cat images to provide our pet with a suitable background.¹⁷²

The 'Portrait of a Family' series has been exhibited on two or three occasions since its completion, but excepting those brief interludes, has continued to reside on the wall of our various sitting rooms where it has developed a somewhat iconic role within the family and our circle of friends. For me it provides a window back to

¹⁷⁰ Fig 63.

¹⁷¹ Of English origin, some of the images had been designed in the 19th century and the designs of new images seemed to have been continued up until the 1960s.

¹⁷² Fig 64.

earlier times and has now become a subject of much interest and discussion for our granddaughters.¹⁷³

The artist after her second marriage, The artist following the death of her father, The artist Loris Button in her fortieth year, The artist in her studio, from 'The artist beginning the middle of her life' series, 1991

As is clearly apparent from the titles, this series of four drawings dealt quite directly with a significant range of rites of passage in my life, all, as it happened, occurring in a very brief space of time.

The drawings were all produced using ink, charcoal, pastel and encaustic wax on large sheets of machine made paper.¹⁷⁴ Using a mirror, they were based purely on an observational method and drawn at night to enable the use of dramatic controlled lighting to obtain a chiaroscuro effect.

A significant influence on the nature of the drawings may be found in their direct reference to some of the visual devices and signs found in portrait conventions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. See for example *Portrait of Georg Gisz* and *The Ambassadors* by Hans Holbein the Younger.¹⁷⁵ At this time, a green-toned ground had been found to provide an excellent basis for flesh tones, and many works routinely included textual and symbolic information about the sitter and, sometimes, the artist.

In this instance, green-toned translucent ink backgrounds proved very successful in relation to the particular qualities of pastel as a means to describe flesh, and all of the text was made and then inserted into the 'set' of the image field from which I

¹⁷³ Each child spent time identifying and memorising the subjects at an early stage in their speech development, and each continues to review and rehearse identities through the regular reiteration of their understanding of the relationship of the subjects to themselves.

¹⁷⁴ Figs 65-68. The artist Bea Maddock had very generously provided me with the recipe for encaustic wax which she had used with considerable success on handmade paper. In my own practice, I found it a useful means of sealing pastel and creating beautifully tactile, burnished surfaces.

¹⁷⁵ Figs 21-22.

drew. Unlike my precursors, this vital information was then drawn as a mirror image in order to attract the viewers' attention to the artifice of the image and also to force viewers to work harder in order to visually and literally 'read' the drawing.¹⁷⁶

Memento I: 1995 Self portrait, 'Memento' series, 1996 – 1998

Following the deaths of both my parents and another close family member in the decade of the 1990s, my work for a time centred on documenting the operation of memory as an important function of grieving. I wished at the time, to make some comment on the fact that the processes of aging, death and grieving, are largely denied in contemporary Australian culture.¹⁷⁷ With these ideas in mind, the 'Memento' works were conceived with the primary idea of honouring the memory of my parents and acknowledging the impact of their loss on my life.

Whilst all of the works in the 'Memento' series were intensely personal, not all were self portraits. However the small and significant group that were, focussed on both face and hands, reflecting my increasing interest in the ability of hand gestures to impart meaning. This particular painting *Memento I*, completed shortly after my mother's death was, and remains, important in terms of both its personal meaning and visual outcome. Now part of the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery collection, it seems to elicit a strong empathetic response in many viewers.

¹⁷⁶ Fig 8. Jan van Eyck is known for his frequent use of explanatory and allusive text in his paintings and on the frames. See p 60 for further discussion of Van Eyck's relevance to this project.

¹⁷⁷ This idea was arrived at through my personal experiences at the time of these deaths and the illnesses which preceded them. The experiences of others I discussed these matters with, confirmed my view that we have few means to deal with the significant rites of passage attached to death and dying in a contemporary, secular society. Jalland, P., *Australian Ways of Death: A Social and Cultural History 1840-1918*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1. The view expressed above is supported by historian Pat Jalland who cites the concerns of scholars in the field about attitudes to death and mourning in current day Australia.

Drawing the Signs: self portrait, 1998, "Memento" series, 1996 – 1998

*Drawing the Signs*¹⁷⁸ was painted at a time when the primary focus of my work was shifting from portraiture in the strict definition of the term.¹⁷⁹ As discussed above, whilst working on the self portraits from the "Memento" series, I became particularly interested in hand gestures and, increasingly, had portrayed only my hand as a means of imparting quite specific meaning to the works. Therefore the use of the very expressive language of signing, seemed to offer scope for development of the ideas that underpinned the "Memento" series, beyond the natural end of that series.¹⁸⁰

The body of work which followed entitled, "Signing the Times", represented a shift from dealing with intensely personal matters of loss, to a more distanced, although more critical, look at the social and political imperatives of the 1990s.¹⁸¹

Once again calling on symbolic devices from earlier times, this particular self portrait was embedded with the draft images from the series that I was then so immersed in, and also refers directly to the act of drawing, once again calling the viewer's attention to the device of the mirror and also, the hand of the artist.¹⁸²

The 1638-39 Artemisia Gentileschi *Self-portrait as the Allegory of Painting*, has, since I first became aware of it, remained quite clearly in my mind and visual imagination as a compelling image of a female artist at work.¹⁸³ While at the time

¹⁷⁸ Fig 70.

¹⁷⁹ Whilst all the works in this series were images of my own hands and in that sense, are still images of the 'self', many did not include my face.

¹⁸⁰ The images used as text for "Signing the Times" were for the most part, sourced from the American Sign language (ASL) alphabet because it is complicated and for the most part aesthetically difficult to draw two handed signs such as Auslan, which also rely on facial expression and gestures to convey specific meaning.

¹⁸¹ My view was that the Kennett era in Victorian politics, had undone many of the social structures and forms of social justice that had until then, underpinned the fabric of the society in which I lived. The federal political scene was also beginning to impact on the nature and structure of the Australian system of social justice in a profound way. The works were intended as an expression of the personal sense of loss that change engendered.

¹⁸² Bond, T., "Performing the Self", p31-39. In his essay Bond repeatedly refers to the twin devices of the mirror and the hand of the artist as integral themes in self portrait images.

¹⁸³ Fig 23.

of painting, I deliberately refrained from referring to a reproduction of Gentileschi's work, *Drawing the Signs: self portrait 1999* was certainly painted, in part, as an homage to this artist.¹⁸⁴

The preceding discussion has focussed on the evolving nature and development through time of both my studio methods and the conceptual ideas that underpin those methods, related to the practice of self portraiture. The ways in which these key earlier works have informed the current research ideas has also been discussed.

The following section of this chapter looks at the ways in which the work of other artists has fuelled and informed the visual ideas that are at the heart of this project.

Antecedents:

Robert Campin, Jan van Eyck, Piero della Francesca

When I first began to plan the *Regarding History* works that form the earliest section of the studio investigations carried out for this research project, the artists whose portraits particularly captured my attention included Robert Campin, Jan van Eyck and Piero della Francesca. All three were contemporaries and active in the early fifteenth century. It should be clear however that all were selected on the basis of the compelling nature of the particular images drawn on for the artworks produced for the first of the series that form the studio based component of this thesis.

Having 'seen' pivotal paintings by these artists for the first time during a study tour to Europe in 2000, I was struck by their extraordinary contemporary feel. The subjects seemed absolutely 'real' and believable as individuals, able to speak across the span of time, to the contemporary world with such verisimilitude and

¹⁸⁴ Viewing the actual painting instead of a reproduction, some years after painting *Drawing the Signs*, when it was included in the *Self Portrait: renaissance to contemporary* exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2006, proved to be extremely rewarding. I returned many times over the few days that I had in Sydney to look, and look some more.

truth. The nature of that truth seems to be related to the clear-sighted gaze and lack of artifice that is such a feature of the artists who formed that first generation of Flemish realist painters.¹⁸⁵

Whilst the works I have referred to and subsequently drawn from, were known to me through reproduction, the opportunity to 'see' the material reality of paintings such as these, provides the artist viewer with an invaluable and materially different understanding of the nature of the painting. The scale, the paint surface, the particular richness or nuance of colour and plasticity of surface; is all lost in reproduction, no matter how good that reproduction might be.¹⁸⁶

The National Gallery in London has two of the small number of the portraits now thought to be attributable to the early Flemish artist Robert Campin (c1375 - 1445).¹⁸⁷ Well known and highly regarded during his lifetime, following his death, Campin quickly became a sketchy historical figure. His work has been subject to intense scholarly debate about the real identity of this amazingly gifted artist who painted with such luminous skill and virtuosity in the early years of the fifteenth century.¹⁸⁸

For many years the debate surrounding the attribution of Campin's paintings, led to some scholars preferring to refer to 'The Master of Flemalle' and others attributing the work to Campin's pupil, Rogier Van der Weyden.¹⁸⁹ In more recent times, Campin scholars such as Lorne Campbell and Robert Thürlemann, now agree that he did in fact exist as an historical figure who was active between 1406

¹⁸⁵ See p 62 for a discussion of the influence of Flemish style on Piero della Francesca's approach to painting.

¹⁸⁶ Bond, T., "Performing the Self?" in *Self Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary*, p 36-37. Tony Bond's description of the physical and metaphorical nature of oil paint, here provides a clear example of the importance that the material substance of paintings may have to the interpretation of the images portrayed.

¹⁸⁷ Figs 5-6.

¹⁸⁸ For example, Mojmir Frinta, Charles.D. Cuttler, Lorne Campbell and Robert Thürlemann.

¹⁸⁹ Thürlemann, F., *Robert Campin: A Monographic Study with Critical Catalogue*, Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2002, p 185. It seems that confusion arose during Van der Weyden's lifetime, when Jan van Eyck was erroneously supposed to have been his teacher. This legend was finally written into the historical record by Giorgio Vasari in the 16th century.

and 1445 in the city of Tournai. Indeed, Thürlemann's monographic study of Campin is much more secure in the attribution of works and the critical influence that Campin exerted on the development of early Netherlandish painting at the beginning of the Quattrocento.¹⁹⁰

Robert Campin is largely known for the complex and beautiful altarpieces such as The Merode Triptych and *The Descent from the Cross*. Now quite firmly attributed to him, the latter work contains a number of striking 'role' portraits which in at least one case is clearly based on the portrait of a particular individual.¹⁹¹ The very small number of portrait heads, now thought to be 'by his hand', are painted with extraordinary skill and insight, enabling these anonymous individuals to remain 'knowable' at the commencement of the 21st century, almost 600 years after they were painted. Campin is recognized for his extraordinary (for that time) sculptural command of realistic painting, a feat which has ensured his place as a great innovator of early Flemish painting. He may now be seen to have strongly influenced Rogier Van der Weyden, Jan Daret (both apprenticed in Campin's workshop), and Jan van Eyck.¹⁹² According to Lorne Campbell he, "was without forerunner or immediate successor and was not surpassed by any fifteenth century portraitist."¹⁹³

The particular works which had such a strong influence on the "Regarding History" series are known as the *Portrait of a Man* and the *Portrait of a Woman*.¹⁹⁴ Whilst there is no means of identifying the particular individuals who sat for the portraits in about 1430, their clothes indicate that they were prosperous townspeople. The

¹⁹⁰ Thürlemann, *Robert Campin*.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 77 and 82-83. For a discussion of the importance of the usually poorly regarded genre of the 'role portrait'. Also see Fig 11.

¹⁹² Thürlemann, *Robert Campin*, 173-177. Thürlemann here suggests that a complex artistic dialogue existed between the Van Eyck brothers and Campin. There is good evidence to suggest that Campin was influenced by Hubert van Eyck and that Jan van Eyck was in turn, influenced by Campin.

¹⁹³ Campbell, L., "Campin's Portraits" In *Robert Campin: New Directions in Scholarship*, Foister S. & Nash S. eds. (Brussels: Brepols Publishers, 1996), 133. A paper originally delivered at the National Gallery in London's Symposium on Campin in 1993.

¹⁹⁴ Figs 5-6.

two panels are likely to have been a pair, originally hinged together, which gave rise to the speculation that they were man and wife. Due to differences in painting and drawing techniques it is thought probable, that while both have been designed by Campin, only the *Portrait of a Woman* was painted by Campin, whilst the *Portrait of a Man* has been undertaken by a senior apprentice in his workshop.¹⁹⁵

Underpainted in egg tempera, the paintings have been completed using pigments ground in oil and it is now clear that Campin was one of, if not the first, Northern European painter to use oils, a distinction once erroneously given to Jan van Eyck. The “staggering skill”¹⁹⁶ brought to bear by Campin on these two portraits and the two others attributable to him, means that they are completely convincing representations of ‘real’ individuals and, able to be recognized as such across the span of time.

Relatively securely attributed to his hand since its production in the fifteenth century, the work of Jan van Eyck (c.1390 – 1441), has therefore enjoyed much greater renown than that of Robert Campin. Somewhat paradoxically, he is almost as ephemeral as an historical figure as Campin, with little known about his early life. He was certainly active in Bruges from c.1426 and is known to have completed the *Ghent Altarpiece* which was commenced by his brother Hubert (also a renowned painter). Also like Campin, Jan van Eyck was highly regarded during his lifetime, but unlike Campin, he never lost that renown. As discussed earlier, whilst it is now clear that he was not the first artist to use oil paints, it is equally clear that through his practice, Van Eyck did much to advance the skill with which the new medium was used.¹⁹⁷

The painting by Van Eyck that proved to be of real significance to the “Regarding History” series, and which continues to reappear in the subsequent artworks that

¹⁹⁵ Thürlemann, *Robert Campin*, 14. A common practice at the time which would not have undermined Campin's role as the author of the painting.

¹⁹⁶ Campbell, “Campin's Portraits”, 133.

¹⁹⁷ Cuttler, C.D., *Northern Painting: From Pucelle to Breugel / Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968, 83-107.

form this thesis, is possibly a self portrait.¹⁹⁸ Known variously as *Portrait of a Man (Self portrait?)* or *Portrait of a Man in a Red Turban*, it was in part (as with the Campin and the della Francesca portraits), the wonderfully exotic headgear that drew me to the image in the first place.¹⁹⁹

The scarlet ‘turban’ of the Van Eyck and Campin portraits is properly known as a ‘chaperon’, a common item of Western European headgear during the Middle Ages. Originating as a hood, the chaperon later developed into a highly versatile hat of complicated construction. In the case of the Van Eyck portrait, the tails which were usually worn behind and beside the head (as in Campin’s *Portrait of a Man*), seem to have been tied up.

As must now be clear, this particular Van Eyck painting has been a significant inspiration and driver for numbers of the artworks which form this dissertation. Indeed the image, whilst appearing most notably in the “Regarding History” series,²⁰⁰ is threaded throughout the various groups of works that have been undertaken in the pursuit of this investigation. As with the Campin portraits, this painting returns the gaze of the viewer with such unflinching regard and it is this, allied to the luminous quality of the paint and flamboyant, complicated drapery and folds of the scarlet chaperon that draw me back to repeatedly consider the nature of the work through a variety of interpretations.

The folds and wrinkles of elaborate drapery whilst clearly not intended for the same purpose in the original painting have provided a useful and evocative metaphor for time and ageing in many of the artworks. Further, the possible attribution as a self portrait is based in part on the inscription painted by Van Eyck

¹⁹⁸ Bond, *Self Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary*, 2006, p 84. Whilst it was first referred to as a self portrait in the mid-seventeenth century, scholars still hold a variety of opinions on this matter, and while it does seem feasible on the available evidence, Tony Bond points out that it is not possible to give a definitive answer.

¹⁹⁹ Fig 7.

²⁰⁰ Figs 71-81.

on the original frame.²⁰¹ This is of course also of great interest to me in that it provides an important early example of the previously mentioned practice I have followed, of frequently including textual information in artworks.²⁰²

It seems possible that the somewhat puzzling, and sudden leap in plastic skills that Campbell refers to in relation to Robert Campin's painting, may be partially accounted for by the thesis David Hockney posits in *Secret Knowledge*. Hockney links the earliest use of lenses by artists to the period when Campin, Van Eyck and della Francesca were active. Indeed, Campin's *Portrait of a Man* and *Portrait of a Woman* and Van Eyck's *Portrait of a Man in a Red Turban*, feature prominently at the point on Hockney's pinboard of images that he argues, marks that first use of lenses.²⁰³ If Hockney is indeed correct in his thesis, this may explain the extraordinary leap in the command of realistic form that may be seen to have occurred at that particular time.

Of great renown as one of the most influential artists of the early Renaissance, Piero della Francesca (c1412 - 1492) is thought to have been born in the Italian town now known as Sansepolcro. He began travelling at an early age and spent a large part of his life at the important courts of Central and Adriatic Italy. Della Francesca's legacy is a body of work which has continued, for more than five hundred years after his death, to maintain its central importance for the development of western ideas about painting and to influence the work of contemporary artists.

Della Francesca's approach to painting was profoundly influenced during his stay in Florence at a time in the late 1430s when the cultural life of the early renaissance was flourishing there. Working on frescoes with Domenico Veneziano, he had the opportunity of observing the work of artists and architects

²⁰¹ Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*, p 12. Fig 8.

²⁰² See earlier discussion regarding the use of text on p 54 of this chapter.

²⁰³ Figs 44-45.

such as Brunelleschi, Masaccio and Fra Angelico. It is considered that this experience profoundly influenced the development of his mature style.²⁰⁴

Later in his career, and of particular interest to this investigation, whilst working at the Court in Ferrara during 1451, della Francesca had the opportunity of seeing a painting by the Flemish artist Rogier Van der Weyden, now known to have been a pupil of Robert Campin. This opportunity enabled him to closely observe the Flemish or Netherlandish style of painting which involved a keen eye for detail as well as skill with the new medium of oil paint.²⁰⁵ Ronald Lightbown describes this style as "...cool Flemish realism that portrays objectively, without suppression or emphasis..."²⁰⁶

Working for Federico de Montefeltro at the Court in Urbino, which in the 1470s was increasingly influenced by Dutch culture, della Francesca produced the famed portrait diptych of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino. Said to be "the most renowned works of the time [they embody], the synthesis of different trends [or styles of painting] combined in a unique painting technique."²⁰⁷ The portraits in the hinged diptych are approximately life sized, and unusually show the Duchess, Battista Sforza on the left and the Duke, Federigo da Montefeltro on the right.²⁰⁸

The diptych had long been of key interest to me and again, the opportunity to 'see' this actual work, the scale and the surface facture of the paintings as well as the sheer 'presence' of the subjects; allowed these images, particularly the painting of

²⁰⁴ Lightbown, R., *Piero della Francesca*, New York, London: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1992, 14-16.

²⁰⁵ It is in part, these very traits which allowed each of the three artists to produce works of such verisimilitude and truth; that ability to speak as real individuals across time, the factor which drew my attention to the specific portraits that provided the focus of the "Regarding History" series.

²⁰⁶ Lightbown, *Piero della Francesca*, 237.

²⁰⁷ *Piero della Francesca at the Italian Court*, exhibition at the Arezzo Museo Statale D'Arte Medievale e Moderna, March-July 2007. <http://www.mostrapierodellafrancesca.it> Accessed 18/1/2008

²⁰⁸ Figs 9-10. Her placement on the dexter side of the diptych (traditionally the place of honour reserved for the male), is unusual in conjugal portraits

the duchess Battista Sforza, to grow in my creative imagination as a springboard for my own working ideas.

Using the technique of quotation as a starting point, the resulting images as well as those that were developed from the works by Robert Campin and Piero della Francesca, have been woven in varying ways throughout the different groups of works which I have produced following the pivotal European journey referred to at the beginning of this section.²⁰⁹ They continue still, mostly at a more subliminal level, to exert visual influence over the artworks that have subsequently been produced, and those that are still in process, for this thesis.

Peers:

Alice Neel, Lucian Freud, David Hockney, Chuck Close

With the exception of Chuck Close, the following artists have been discussed in chapter three of this document. That discussion concentrated on the ongoing engagement with the notion of developing a long-term narrative based on their passage through life that each was interested in documenting. This chapter is differently focussed toward the studio practice of the artists in question and the relevance of those approaches to this practice-led investigation.

No longer living, but an older contemporary of mine up until her death in the early 1980s, Alice Neel (b.1900 – 1984) provided an exceptional role model at a time when few contemporary artists had the necessary determination to swim against the prevailing tide of late modernism. By the time I came to be aware of her work, Neel had managed this extraordinary feat for over fifty years.

Living in New York City, the centre of post war American modernism, she had, with great tenacity, maintained her focus on the daily life of friends and family as the central theme of a rigorous, perceptual approach to visual arts practice. The direct unflinching honesty of her portrayal of her subjects and their role in her life

²⁰⁹ See pp 57-58 of this chapter.

provided a contemporary model whose approach might be likened to that of the “cool realism” of the Flemish painters of the early fifteenth century.²¹⁰ The 1970s and early 1980s were not comfortable times to be practising figurative and narrative styles of painting and as a result, I was regularly required to defend my own practice of portraiture and self-portraiture in the light of the then current minimalist orthodoxy.²¹¹ The singular vision of Alice Neel’s visual art practice was of great assistance in giving substance to that argument.

Of particular and ongoing interest to me, are the portraits of her immediate family that cover a period from the 1920s, right through to her extraordinary nude *Self-portrait* painted at the age of eighty.²¹² Whilst many of the paintings and drawings are not self portraits, together they provide an autobiographical narrative of her family, their lived experience and a picture somewhat akin to an oral history or life writing, of the interesting times in which they lived.²¹³

Twenty odd years younger than Alice Neel, Lucian Freud (b.1922 -) has also played a key role in the development of the approach I take to the practice of portraiture. Like Neel, his images have repeatedly returned to family and friends in order to further develop the intimate knowledge of his subjects that is so unflinchingly revealed in his paintings, drawings and prints.

A grandson of Sigmund Freud, it is perhaps not surprising that his portraits and self portraits create a sense of the psychological history of the person portrayed, rather than the social history so evident in Neel’s paintings as a result of the clearly domestic setting that is, in her work, as much a part of the image as the sitter. In contrast, the external world is almost obsessively excluded from Freud’s paintings.

²¹⁰ Lightbown, *Piero della Francesca*, 237. A term used by Lightbown in reference to Piero della Francesca’s distinctive style of painting which had been influenced by his acquaintance with Flemish painters and their use of oil painting techniques.

²¹¹ A further argument for the relevance of this practice may be found in the exegetical document that formed part of my 1984 submission for an MFA degree at the University of Tasmania.

²¹² Fig 29.

²¹³ Hills, P., *Alice Neel*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1983). Figs 25-28.

The studio, the flesh, the paint, or the gaze which frequently fails to meet the viewers' (or the painters') eye: these are the apparent subjects of Freud's attention.²¹⁴ Impossible to imagine such works being produced before the twentieth century, they are also somehow out of time, as they make no concession at all to the nuances of social history.

Among the many portraits of family members whose visages repeatedly people Freud's paintings, the portraits of his mother Lucie, completed in the latter years of her life, remain of compelling interest to me.²¹⁵ Painted between 1972 and 1984, the production of these paintings, drawings and prints involved more than a thousand sittings and created an extraordinary sense of complicity between the painter and his subject, as well as an unusually probing look at the ageing face of an elderly woman nearing the end of her life.²¹⁶

In stark contrast to Lucian Freud, David Hockney (b.1937 -) came to prominence as a young artist in the early 1960s when his work seemed to provide a contemporary voice for the new hip English culture that was then challenging the hegemony of American modernism. More than a decade later, on the other side of the world, his example provided a possible way forward for young art students with a bent towards figuration, who were searching for a relevant figurative approach to art in the latter years of the twentieth century.

Amongst the broad sweep of Hockney's visual art practice, his recurring interest in self portraiture has led to the production of many compelling images over the past fifty years. Whilst many of the earlier self portraits deal with Hockney's artistic identity and sexual orientation, it is the later works in which he confronts his ageing self, that self which needs spectacles, struggles with the onset of deafness and

²¹⁴ R. Hughes, *Lucian Freud Paintings*, (London, Thames and Hudson, 1987), 20. Figs 30-34.

²¹⁵ David Hockney, like Lucien Freud, also produced an extended portrait of his ageing mother which provides a moving, tender and fascinating record of this key relationship of the artists' life.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, 21. Fig 34.

has an increasingly lined face, which most particularly resonates with my own preoccupations and working ideas, at this period of my life.²¹⁷

Hockney's constant engagement with different means of production is also relevant to my own practice. He has explored the varying properties of oil, acrylic and watercolour paints; drawing in many media; photographic techniques; papermaking; and printmaking. Using traditional approaches, innovative techniques and 'lost' skills has enabled him to pursue his manifold ideas and the rich breadth of his imagery in considerable depth, therefore providing this particular early acolyte, with an ongoing interest in the visual outcomes of such a fertile creative imagination.

Like Hockney, the work of Chuck Close (b.1940 -) is relevant to this investigation in terms of method and the focussed pursuit of portraiture and self portraiture which Close has undertaken throughout the past four decades. Close's reasons for this pursuit are however very different to mine. Trained and nurtured in New York during 1960s at the epicentre and during the height of the American modernist movement, Close still remains a confirmed modernist. His subject matter is of almost secondary concern, merely providing a vehicle for the formalist concepts which have driven the approaches taken to the evolving project of his visual arts practice.²¹⁸

For the above mentioned reasons, the work of Chuck Close has not previously been discussed in this document. It is however evident that the studio methods Close employs are worthy of extended consideration in relation to the focus of the practice-led research methods under discussion in this chapter.

Whilst he has recently admitted that he does have an interest in portraiture *per se*, for many years Close refused this connection and referred to his work as

²¹⁷ Figs 35-43.

²¹⁸ Storr, R., *Chuck Close*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 22-23. Figs 46-51.

'heads'.²¹⁹ Completed in the 1970s, my undergraduate training was largely formalist in nature and as a result, I too referred to my images as 'heads', rather than portraits for a period of time. Not until I began the research for my Master of Fine Arts degree in the early 1980s when post-modernism and semiotics were beginning to have an impact on the Australian art world, was I ready to own the term of portrait in regards to that imagery.

Close is of a generation whose formal art education predates my own by just over ten years. There may nevertheless be seen to be some crossover in formalist ideas about the significance of the surface *facture* (or handling) of a work, due in part to that initial formalist training, but perhaps more critically, to an entrenched fascination with the possibilities of visual richness and nuance that the materials of art offer the maker and the viewer.

Also relevant to this investigation is the practice Close has of pursuing his visual outcomes across a varied range of material methods. They include photographic prints as both a source of imagery and final outcome; oil, acrylic, and watercolour painting; pastel, charcoal and paper pulp drawings; various ink based printmaking techniques and digital prints. Across the breadth of these approaches, Close has employed both traditional and experimental means. Notwithstanding the diverse nature of the material means, he has held the resulting visual outcomes together through the tight focus of his subject matter. And it is this repeated reworking of the same pictorial references, sometimes over a period of many years, which makes Close, an extremely interesting artist to consider in relation to my recent working methods.

This is most clearly relevant in regards to the works entitled *Facing Time*, discussed in the opening section of this chapter, and in *Gathering Time* which both

²¹⁹ Ibid 49-50. Close selected work for the exhibition *Artists Choice - Chuck Close: Head-On/The Modern Portrait*, in 1991 from the MOMA collection. He admits to being somewhat surprised by the particular interest in portraiture that became evident during the selection process.

re-use older self portrait images alongside contemporary versions of my self, and include multiple versions of these self images in differing configurations.

No discussion of Chuck Close could omit his long-term engagement with the self portrait and the inevitable close scrutiny of his own ageing that a project such as this must come to terms with, after such an extended period of time. All cropped to just head and neck, the self portraits, as with all the portraits he has produced, provide a constant and unsentimental exploration of the forms of the face.

Close says of his approach: "I consider myself a humanist, but why must all humanists deal with ... [the human condition]? I'm interested in approaching the subject flat-footedly, very unemotionally."²²⁰ Discussing this aspect of the self portraits, Robert Storr says that: "Close himself felt this curious alchemy of unrestricted intimacy transformed into distance ... objectivity may subvert subjectivity even in a work's author."²²¹

This experience of emotional distancing resonates strongly with my own experience and approach to the act of portraying the self. At one level, it is when formalist concerns tend to be uppermost in my mind, although it is important to stress here that those formalist concerns form only a part of the picture. I am at pains to make each work operate through multiple levels of meaning.²²² Curiously, I tend to have a similar distancing experience when viewing my self portrait images in a public place, rather like the experience of unexpectedly confronting one's reflection in a shop window or in a snapshot. Although I am of course aware that the particular work(s) will be present, I cannot really 'look' or scrutinise the images in the analytical way I would wish to in that situation. Out of the public eye, my inner pictorial analyst feels free to steadfastly return the gaze of that self.

²²⁰ Ibid 45.

²²¹ Ibid 47.

²²² The works are intended to provide various levels of access to meaning for viewers. The multiple ideas contained therein, should develop in complexity according to the viewer's visual knowledge. Meaning might be related to the visual design, to colour, to material means, to art historical references which acknowledge my debt to the forerunners of my discipline, to metaphorical and symbolic ideas, and of course, to identity.

The foregoing discussion, in combination with the images discussed and illustrated in Appendix 1, provides an iconological review of both the historical sources and my own earlier self portraits. This written and visual review is intended to describe and illuminate the way in which the methods of intertextuality and appropriation or quotation, have enabled me to engage in an interpretive dialogue between these earlier exemplars of self portraiture and the thesis artworks.

Visual Outcomes:

Regarding History and Facing Time

The artworks which comprise the visual outcomes of this research project and which have been produced to date, consist of two separate but interrelated bodies of work. For the exhibition titled *Regarding History*, a group of interrelated works were produced consisting of drawings, paintings, and relief prints.²²³ The practices and techniques referred to in the previous section and discussed in relation to the “Facing Time” series,²²⁴ were initially employed in this earlier body of work. This enabled me to develop images and extend their meaning as they were continually recast and reassembled across the various modes of practice.

The *Regarding History* works differ from those produced in the more recent series, in that they drew more explicitly on the work of artists from earlier times. Through the process of appropriation or ‘quotation’,²²⁵ they make reference to and acknowledge, the debt owed to my artistic forebears. In the catalogue notes for *Regarding History*, Peter Baird, referring to the ideas which drove my studio method writes that:

²²³ *Regarding History: Loris Button recent works on paper*, Ararat Regional Gallery, Ararat 2002 and Goya Galleries, Melbourne 2003. Figs 71-81.

²²⁴ This series contains a number of related works, the first of which is entitled *Facing Time*. Fig 84.

²²⁵ The practice of ‘quotation’ or ‘appropriation’ is of course not a new one. Whilst the terms betray their post-modern history, artists have been consciously studying and referring to the work of their forebears, since early Renaissance times. In conscious awareness of post-modern theory however, many contemporary artists do reflect on this age-old practice in ways that would not be familiar to artists from earlier times.

[The] works on paper focus on the intimate links between the then and now in the history of representation and display ...conscious awareness of that continuity ... [revealing] the common and timeless elements of symbology.²²⁶

A further set of drawings which comprises the first work in the previously mentioned series *Facing Time*, was accompanied in the *Plus* exhibition²²⁷ by the painting *Spending Time with the Duchess* as well as a set of digital prints titled *Living in the Seventies*.²²⁸

Spending Time with the Duchess, which incorporates a large self portrait, overlaid with a rather amorphous image of Battista Sforza and a background pattern from the sleeve of her elaborate garment, was intended to act as a bridge between that earlier body of work and the newer works that were then beginning to grow in my mind and creative imagination.

Living in the Seventies takes its title from a popular song that had been a feature of the end of that decade. The images are digital quotations from the tiny self portrait heads of my 1979 *Self Portrait*. Digitally reworked and printed on handmade hemp rag paper, they played a critical role in the development of the next large series entitled *Facing Time*, by enabling me to begin the process of reflecting on past selves.²²⁹

Gathering Time and The Larger Gathering

In 2007 I completed a set of linoprints and digital prints on handmade paper, following the method which, as discussed above, was developed first during the production of the "Regarding History" series. The images are based on the drawings which comprise *Facing Time* and, as with the earlier works are aimed at developing and extending the meaning of the initial drawings. The resulting artwork, titled *Gathering Time*, is intended to be read as a self portrait which

²²⁶ Baird, P. "Regarding History: Recent Works on Paper by Loris Button." 2003.

²²⁷ *Plus: Loris Button, Sally Miller, Maryanne Coutts*, Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, June-Sept 2006.

²²⁸ Figs 82-83..

²²⁹ See pp 47-48 for a discussion of *Facing Time*.

conveys an extended time scale in the life of this subject.²³⁰ This intention has been effected through the use of a variety of means, they are; 'quotation' from other, earlier self portraits, through layering of imagery and, through a careful and reflexive process of juxtaposition between the small images which comprise the larger whole.

The finished work incorporates both current self portraits and those from earlier times, as well as images developed from my earlier interpretations of the Della Francesca and Van Eyck portraits, and a print based on the decorative carvings that abound on Mughal monuments in India.²³¹ This last has found its place by linking up with the decorative Renaissance embroidery and hair decorations seen in the della Francesca image of Battista Sforza, and as an homage to the extraordinary richness and depth of creative culture that I had encountered during that recent trip to India.

All printed from lino blocks on plant fibre papers that had been handmade by me throughout the time of this candidature, the images have been repeated, reversed and cropped, printed in different colours and overprinted. Some also include digital prints which have been incorporated into the primary image of the linoprint using the method known as *chin-collé*. The resulting set of 'unique state' prints was produced during an intensive six month period of practice-led research undertaken in the studio.²³² When packed up, this 'large' body of artworks, may be held in a small container in one hand.

²³⁰ This work was shown as a component of *Eye to I: the self in contemporary art*, a recent survey of contemporary Australian self portraits. The exhibition curated by Geoff Wallis, commenced at the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery in August 2007. *The Larger Gathering* replaced *Gathering Time* for the 2008 tour of the exhibition to other regional venues in Victoria. Figs 86-88.

²³¹ The particular carvings used as the basis for this image, were seen at the Qutub Minar complex (commenced in the twelfth century), in Delhi during a recent trip to India. See for example Fig 89.

²³² Whilst several versions of each image were often printed, most were then developed using a variety of additional images and or colours. The varying nature of the handmade papers is also a factor here as an 'edition' requires the close replication of a version of an image, including the use of the same paper. Handmade papers are by their nature rather various and, in this case, numbers of different plant fibres and beating processes had been used to produce the different pulps from which the papers were made.

In early 2008 I further developed some of the images contained in *Gathering Time*, through the production of a series of three larger paintings based on a number of those small prints. The sudden jump in scale is intended to make use of the capacity of a larger than life size face to invade the personal space of the viewer, who is thus enabled to visually ‘enter’ the work. This apprehension of a large image is in direct opposition to the intimate experience of viewing the markedly smaller, but more intensely layered, images of *Gathering Time*, *Small Gathering*, and the earlier *Fragments of Time*.

The later work is titled *The Larger Gathering*, in homage to David Hockney’s important contribution to this project through both his artworks and his somewhat rare contribution from the viewpoint of a practicing artist, to theoretical ideas about the ways in which images might be visually ‘read’.²³³

A critical component of all of the artworks may be found in the physical installation of the separate parts. As has been discussed, most are composed of multiple images, which together form a larger whole, and it is the visual relationships that are carefully constructed between these different parts or fragments of each of the works, that are intended to act as a dialogue. In part, this has been achieved through the process of recasting and reframing the same image(s) in different media (prints, drawings or paintings), different papers and size scales and configurations. Additionally, when more than one work is installed in an exhibition, that installation is also designed to create visual response and dialogue between the different works through the further extension of those visual relationships.

²³³ Fig 88. The title refers to a significant painting by Hockney entitled *The Bigger Grand Canyon*. Painted following the development of a number of smaller versions of the image, Hockney has used the series to test a theoretical position related to perspective.

Remainder of thesis artworks:

The Old Made Explicit and Gathered Here

This large painted triptych, the 'final' self portrait of the thesis, although completed too late for inclusion in the illustrations of this exegesis, did form part of the examination exhibition, thus contributing to the completed dissertation. In attempting to sum up the scope of this visual investigation, the painting employs a current self portrait image and makes reference to the visible signs of ageing through wrinkles, folds, earlier self portraits and visual 'signs' from early exemplars of the genre. For me, there remains more visual work to be done, and so further works exploring the way in which self portraiture may be utilised to reflexively comment on the nature of identity in contemporary culture will continue to form a part of my ongoing practice.

Possibilities inherent in new understandings that have been forged through the development of this research project, regarding the thematic and aesthetic operations of the powerfully engaging genre of self portraiture, suggest that it is timely for 'the face' to return to the centre of attention, as a means for artists to challenge the idea of the lack of temporality in self portraiture.



Chapter Six

Conclusion: And do not call it fixity

Art takes time.

The slow gestations and transformations of language
are my proper study and there can be no limit on that study.

Jeannette Winterson²³⁴

Jeanette Winterson's comments regarding the nature of her own creative understanding, are readily translatable to a visual context if one adds the word 'visual' to language in the above quotation. As I approach the end of this research project, it is clear to me that there is in fact no real end point for the creative endeavour that has driven this investigation and it will continue to inform my subsequent art practice. That said, it is incumbent upon me to draw together the threads of the argument I have outlined in the exegesis and pursued visually in the studio.

Undertaken from the particular perspective of a practicing artist, I have studied the nature of identity in contemporary culture through a close engagement with visual representations of the self. The resulting enquiry has focussed on the ideas, theories, histories and practice that underpin this genre. As stated in the Introduction, discussion of these issues has been confined and targeted to those ideas most salient to the focus of the research aims or objectives and as such was not positioned as a whole as a post modern theoretical exposition. It has not looked at psychoanalytical theory, nor the death of the author and has not, unlike much self portraiture produced in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, used the body as a focus for discussing the nature of contemporary identity. Rather it has focussed specifically on the face as an object of scrutiny and means for a reflexive analysis of the ageing self.

²³⁴ Winterson, J., "Art Objects" and "A Work of my Own" in *Art Objects*, London: Vintage, 1996, pp 7 and 172.

Theory and practice in relation to time, identity and the self portrait

The research that informs this thesis and the ideas that permeate the work have been developing and were undertaken over an extended period of time and owe a great deal to historical images sourced from the canon of Western portraiture, creative literary texts, especially autobiography and theoretical sources drawing on post structuralist ideas relating to appropriation or quoting and intertextuality.

Whilst taking separate form, the practical and exegetical approaches to the research project are interdependent and indivisible parts of a larger whole. It is also important to note that for all of the artworks, the nature of the final images and the configuration of the works were constantly re-thought and re-envisioned during a working process based on a reflective method that relies on both visual and textual forms of knowledge. Thus, the critical work of this practice-led research project was undertaken in the studio and its primary outcomes exist as visual documents which are closely supported by this text.

The investigation has focussed primarily on the way in which self portraiture, as exemplified in the context of my own creative project, might reflect and inform society's understanding of changing concepts of the ageing self in the early twenty first century. As an outcome, this thesis aims to add to the visual means by which individuals may reflexively consider narratives of the self in an ageing society. In support of this possibility, Carter's suggestion that artworks, through their nature, have the ability to "give back to time its materiality, the sense of temporal process," has currency.²³⁵

A further concern has been to test my contention that a small number of outstanding portraits from the canon of Western art are able to speak about intangible matters such as the nexus between identity and ageing. I have suggested that the quotation and deconstruction of images from this canon enables the provision of visual metaphors for considering the way we inhabit culture. Further, that these outstanding historical images through the veracity of

²³⁵ Carter, P., *Material Thinking*. pxii.

their nature, do have an important role to play in helping us to shape our understanding of the nature of contemporary identity.

Both the visual and textual outcomes of the project have been underpinned and informed by the theoretical ideas explicated in chapter three of this document. I have in essence, sought to visually examine the various ways in which self portraits might operate in contemporary art practice to propose ideas about time, identity and ageing.

As a means to analyse the artworks as they relate to time, I considered the scholarly exploration of the concept of 'quotation' or appropriation undertaken by Meike Bal. This has been particularly apposite in relation to the artworks which have relied upon quotation from portraits by Campin, Van Eyck and Della Francesca wherein I sought to relate to my forebears, the authors of these compelling images.

That interaction took the form of reflecting on and acknowledging the artistic skills and visual tropes that had enabled the production of portraits of such truth and verity, produced at the outset of this genre, to transcend time and speak to contemporary viewers. Within this early body of work, I further sought, through the inclusion of self portraits, to acknowledge the debt owed to those artistic forebears. Bal's valuable contribution to the analysis that I have been able to bring to those earlier works of the thesis, is related to the way in which she has seen that it is possible to engage those works of other, earlier times in a dialogue and that, by the act of reinterpretation, we forever change the reading of those older works.

It is the concept of 'intertextuality' which allows us to engage in an open dialogue backwards and forwards through time. This premise has meaning for my studio practice in that visual forms, such as surface texture or folds (which Bal argues are discursive positions and as such able to engage other visual forms in dialogues), are regularly used to allude to the work of others or my own earlier self portraits, as a means to convey particular and explicit meaning.

Further, her ideas regarding quotation and its relation to intertextuality, may also be seen to have informed the way in which the later works were approached. In them I have extensively drawn on, and quoted from, my own earlier self portraits. The concept of intertextuality played an important role in my ability to give voice to the intuitive and imaginative ideas that had previously informed the way in which I saw, read and connected visual self portraits and literary forms of autobiography. The resulting intertextual discourse forms a continuing thread throughout all the thesis artworks, and is closely aligned with the notion that visual self portraits *are* able to convey a sense of extended time in the life of the subject.

Challenging fixity through the contemporary self portrait

A project based on self portraiture must of course have concepts relating to identity as a focal theme. Mutable and multifaceted contemporary notions of identity, as explicated by sociologists Giddens, Frosh, Gleason and Birdsall, and by art historians and theorists such as West and Meyer, have informed the outcomes of all the artworks and may be seen to operate most clearly through the ways in which various images of the self are repeatedly revisited, reversed, reframed and reinvented.

The artworks, made up as they mostly are of multiple images, remain open to further reworking, enabling a continual revision of both my social and self identity through a method Giddens refers to as 'the reflexive process of the self'. Time and the ageing self have been addressed variously through the above mentioned repetition and quotation from other, earlier, self portraits. Additionally, the use of the visual reality of wrinkles and the elaborate folds of drapery as an analogue or metaphor for the passage of time, also acknowledges the abstract concepts surrounding the notion of 'a wrinkle in time' as explicated by Leibnitz, Deleuze and Bal.

An important focus of this investigation, and one which is closely allied to the primary aim described earlier, lies in the claim that the contemporary self portrait *is* able to convey the complex nature of present day understandings of identity

and ageing through, and across, an extended period of time. I have argued this claim through a close study of the genre from the point of view of art history, the visual artefacts of that history, art theory, creative literature and most persuasively, I hope, through art practice.

The artworks which comprise the visual outcomes of this project have been broadly grouped into two series. The first took its focus and inspiration from portraits by the fifteenth century artists, Robert Campin, Jan van Eyck and Piero della Francesca. These works were examined and reflected upon, through a process beginning with quotation or appropriation, resulting in an extended visual meditation on the extraordinary skills and visual insights that each of the three artists brought to bear on what was, then, a new genre. The stylistic mores and visual conventions that these early portraitists were instrumental in establishing have also been considered and acknowledged. Each was selected because of what I viewed as their ability to convey a sense of the individuals portrayed as 'knowable' across both the span of time and vastly different cultural codes.

The second series has been more closely focussed on the ability of visual self portraits to convey extended time in the life of the subject. This ability has been the subject of considerable debate in scholarly circles and is often denied, most frequently from the point of view of scholars whose first language is a textual one. I have argued that such a static interpretation of paintings is flawed, and that literary and art historical interpretations have hindered our view of this. It has been shown that visual artists such as David Hockney are unlikely to subscribe to this view and that some scholars, Jordanova, Bal and Timms for example, concur with that viewpoint. This second body of artworks are intended, in part, to provide a visual counter argument to the idea that a visual self portrait may only provide a momentary view of an individual at the time of the making of the image.

Outcomes

As an outcome, this thesis offers a visual and textual commentary to the existing knowledge base in the field of self portraiture and contemporary understandings of identity. As with all practice-led research, it is important to acknowledge that as

it does not employ an empirical method, there are some intangible aspects to this visual project.

Through a process of reflecting back through time, firstly to the progenitors of the field and then by mining and quoting from the visual archive of my own earlier works, I have shown that a scholarly research method which involves working through both studio practice and theoretical / historical knowledge, is able to produce artworks which may say things about the nature of identity to individuals in contemporary society.

I have achieved this firstly, through identification with key artists from the early modern period, all proponents of self portraiture during the earliest development of this genre. By considering the material and interpretive operations of these early self portraits through the quotation and transposition of the imagery into my own practice, I have engaged in the historical dialogue that Bal, Jordanova and Winterson suggest is the lineage of art, and so extended that dialogue stretching across a 500 year time span, into an engagement with ideas of the self current in the early years of the 21st century.

The key aim of the project, namely to reflect and inform society's understanding of changing concepts of the ageing self in the early 21st century, has been achieved by challenging current notions of the temporal possibilities of visual portraits and self portraits.

By working outside the predominant postmodernist approach to self portraiture (ie: a focus on 'the body' as a means to address concerns relating largely to gender, sexuality, abjection and ethnicity), and instead engaging with a specific focus on the ageing face as a means to consider identity in time, I have used the genre of self portraiture in a way that eschews the emphasis on the body that has characterised this genre in the post modern era. Using this divergent approach, I have somewhat paradoxically employed the postmodern devices of quotation (or appropriation) and intertextuality as a method that has enabled me to demonstrate that self portraits using traditional means of expression (drawing, painting, printmaking, paper), are able to convey a sense of duration in the life of

the subject in ways that are not dissimilar to the unfolding experience of written autobiographies.

The artworks have substantiated this thesis through their ability to materially demonstrate the narrative theme of ageing. They have done this through the iconography and materiality of both the imagery (referring as it does to self portraits that cover a 30 year time span), the fragility of the surface (various types of hand made papers) and the thematic and visual complexity developed through sequences and repetitions of imagery. In this way, the artworks provide a visual means by which individuals might reflect on the nature of the self, time and the process of ageing in the twenty-first century, an era when old certainties have departed and the pace of change seems ever faster, when we can expect to live longer and face very different concerns from our forebears. The artworks may be seen to provide a visual example of the way in which one individual visually constructs, reflects on, and continuously revises, the narrative of her own life.

A further, though to my mind closely related outcome, is that contrary to widely held beliefs, it is possible to use the visual means I have devised in the studio and explicated through this exegetical document, to reflect on and convey a sense of identity through extended time in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Appendix One:
Reference Images



Fig 1 Jan van Eyck (c.1390-1441)
Portrait of a Man (self portrait?), 1433.



Fig 2 Tamara de Lempicka (1898-1980)
Wisdom, 1940/41



Fig 3 Annette Bezor (1950 -) *Still posing after all this time (a self portrait)*, 2005.



Fig 4 *The Red Turban and Van Eyck in London*, 2001.



Fig 5 Robert Campin (c1375 – 1445), Above left: *Portrait of a Man* c1430.
Fig 6 Above right: *Portrait of a Woman*, c1430.



Figs 7 Above left: Jan van Eyck (1390-1441) *Portrait of a Man (self portrait?)*, 1433.
Fig 8 Above right: Painting in original frame showing inscription.



Fig 9 Piero della Francesca (c1412-1492). Above left: *Battista Sforza*, 1472-73.
Fig 10 Above right: *Federigo da Montefeltro*, 1472-73.



Fig 11 Robert Campin, details from a *Mérode Panel* and the *Madrid Descent from the Cross*, c1430.
 Top right: The sitter for the *Portrait of a Stout Man* appears in this role portrait as Nicodemus.
 Below left: *Portrait of a Stout Man*



Figs 12-14 Left to right: Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) at ages 13, 20 and 51.



Figs 15-17 Left to right: Sofonisba Anguissola (1532/35-1625) as a young woman, as a mature woman, and in her old age.



Figs 18-20 Left to right: Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669) in 1629, 1640 and 1669.



Fig 21 Hans Holbein the Younger (1497-1543), *George Gisz*, 1532.



Fig 22 Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve (*'The Ambassadors'*), 1533.



Fig 23 Artemesia Gentileschi (1593-1652),
Self-portrait as the Allegory of Painting. 1638-9.



Fig 24 Pietro Belotti, (1625–1700),
Fate Lachesis or The Midwife Lachesis. Not dated.



Figs 25-27 Alice Neel (1900-1984), Left: *Richard at Age Five*. 1944. Centre: *Richard*. 1963. Right: *Richard in the Era of the Corporation*. 1979.



Fig 28 *Last Sickness*, 1952.



Fig 29 *Self-Portrait*. 1980.



Fig 30 Lucian Freud (1922 -)
Above left: *Reflection with Two Children* (self portrait), 1965.



Figs 31-32 Above left: *Reflection* (self portrait), 1982/83.
Above right: *Reflection* (self portrait), 1985.



Fig 33-34 Above left: *Large Interior, W11* (after Watteau), 1981/83.
Above right: *The Painter's Mother Resting III*, 1977.



Figs 35-37 David Hockney (1937 -) Left to right: Self portraits in 1954, 1961 and 1973.



Figs 38-40 Left to right: Self portraits in 1983, 1999 and 2001



Figs 41-43 Self portraits in 2003.

Theses images have been removed for copyright reasons.

Fig 44 David Hockney's pin board

Fig 45 Hockney using a Camera Lucida

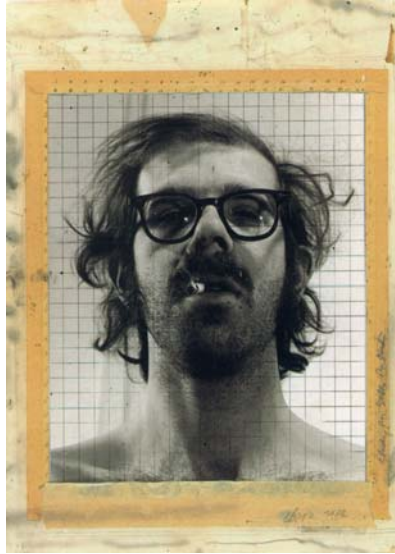


Fig 44 Chuck Close (1940 -)
Study for Self-Portrait, 1967.



Fig 45 *Self-Portrait/ Watercolour, 1976-77.*



Fig 46 *Self-Portrait, 1986.*



Fig 47 *Self-Portrait II, 1995.*

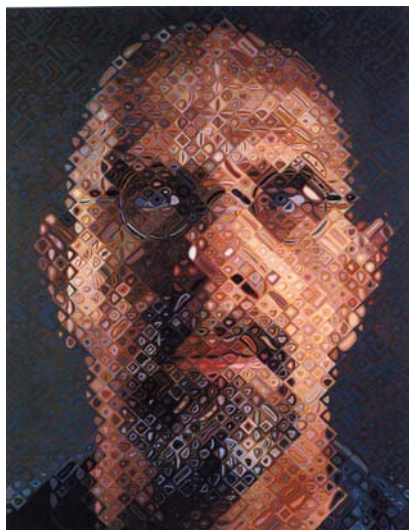


Fig 48 *Self Portrait, 2005.*

This image has been removed for
copyright reasons.

Fig 49 Close in his studio working on
Self-Portrait, 1993.



Figs 50-53 Maryanne Coutts (1961 -) Left to right: *Self portrait as a Detective*, 1996; *Self portrait as Eleanor*, 1997; *Self portrait as a Realist narrator*, 1998; *Self portrait as Myself*, 1999.



Fig 54 Above: *Self Portrait*, 2002.

Images courtesy the artist and the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, Ballarat.

This image has been removed for copyright reasons.



Fig 55 Above left: Rachel Lachowicz (1964 -) *Forensic Projections* (28, 58, 88 years), 1992.

Image courtesy Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Santa Monica

Fig 56 Above right: Jenny Saville (1970 -) *Juncture* [a self portrait], 1994.



Fig 57 *Self portrait 1979*



Fig 58 *Portrait of Loris Button, 1983, "The Candidates" series*



Fig 59 *Self Portrait Coburg 2/12/86.*



Fig 60 *Self portrait 1986.*



Fig 61 *Late Night Self portrait, 1986.*

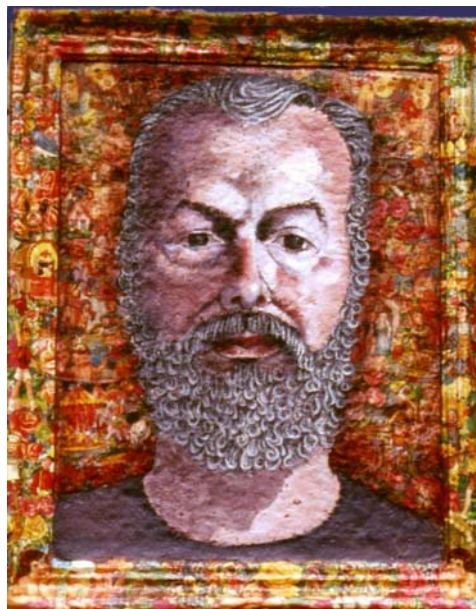
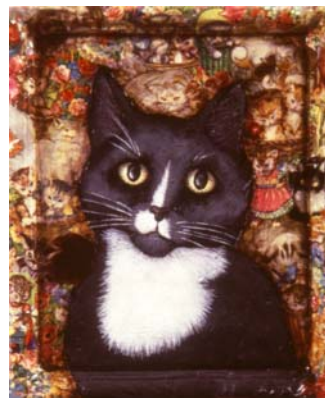


Fig 62 "Portrait of a Family" series.
 Top left: *Loris Button*, 1987. Top right: *Elizabeth Button*, 1987.
 Centre: *Anna the Cat*, 1987.
 Below: *Peter Cooper*, 1988/89.

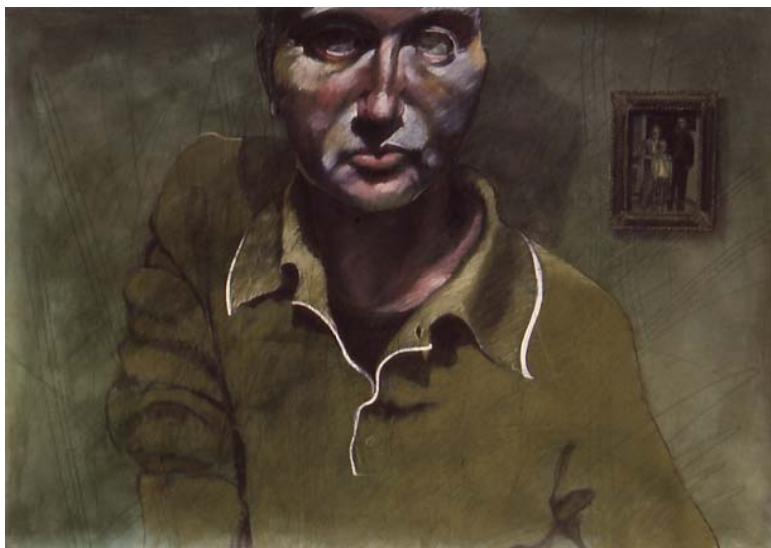


Fig 63 *The Artist after her second marriage*



Fig 64 *The Artist following the death of her father*



Fig 65 *The Artist Loris Button in her fortieth year*



Fig 66 *The Artist in her studio*

"The Artist beginning the middle of her life" series, 1991



Fig 67 *Memento I*: 1995 Self portrait, "Memento" series, 1995-1998.



Fig 68 *Drawing the Signs*: 1998 Self portrait, "Memento" series, 1995-1998.

Appendix Two:
Thesis Images



Fig 69 *The Red Turban* and *Van Eyck in London*, 2001.

Fig 70 *A Man in London* and *Robert's Man*, 2001.

Fig 71 *A Woman in London* and *Campin at the National Gallery*, 2001.

Fig 72 *Turban Dreaming* and *Remembering Jan in London*, 2002.

Fig 73 *Federigo's Darling* and *Piero's Eye*, 2002.



Fig 74 *Dialogue with the man in a Turban: self portrait 2001.*



Fig 75 2001 Self portrait Regarding Robert Campin.



Fig 76 *Remembering the Ornaments of Time: self portrait 2002.*



Fig 77 *Contemplating the Turbans: self portrait 2002.*



Fig 78 *Fragments of Time*, "Regarding History" series, 2002.



Fig 81 *Drawing on History*, "Regarding History" series, 2002



Fig 80 *Spending Time with the Duchess: self portrait, 2003.*



Fig 81 *Living in the Seventies, 2006.*



Fig 82 *Facing Time*, 2006.



Fig 83 *Facing Time*, 2006 (detail).



Fig 84 *Gathering Time*, 2007.



Fig 85 *Gathering Time*, 2007 (detail).



Fig 84 *The Larger Gathering*, 2008.



Fig 87 *Small Gathering*, 2008.

Glossary

| | |
|---------------|--|
| CAMERA LUCIDA | An optical instrument incorporating a prism which provides a mechanical means for securing accuracy in drawing. |
| CHAPERON | A French word, originally referring to a form of hood which later developed into a highly versatile hat worn in all parts of Western Europe in the Middle Ages. Especially fashionable in mid -15 th century Burgundy, it is the most commonly worn headgear depicted in Early Netherlandish painting. |
| CHIAROSCURO | The term <i>chiaroscuro</i> is, in general, used to refer to the (usually dramatic) balance of light and shadow in a picture. |
| CHINE-COLLÉ | A technique used in printmaking which bonds a lighter sheet of paper to a heavier substrate during the printing process. Traditionally using a paste made of wheat or rice starch, the method of fusing the two papers varies and the technique is now also used by contemporary artists as a collage technique. |
| EGG TEMPERA | Traditionally made by grinding pigments into an emulsion of egg yolk and distilled water, tempera paint was the principal medium used by artists in Europe until the invention of oil paint largely replaced its use in Northern and Western Europe in the 14 th and early 15 th centuries. It nevertheless remained popular in Russia and Greece and has continued to maintain a small following among Western artists. |
| EKPHRASTIC | Ekphrasis or ekphrastic art (usually poetry), written in response to visual art. The word is Greek in origin and originally referred to the verbal description of a visual representation. Ideally, it is poetry as a speaking picture and painting as mute poetry. |
| ENCAUSTIC | Encaustic is an ancient painting technique which is based on an emulsion of beeswax and dammar varnish which after application to the surface of the work, is 'finished' by heating. Practiced in antiquity, the technique was lost until its revision in the 19 th century. |

| | |
|---------------|--|
| FACTURE | The French term for handling, or <i>fatture</i> in Italian. |
| GROUND | Usually white gesso or oil with a transparent tint which provides a colour focus for the whole painting. In many instances, the ground, whilst still exerting a significant effect on the colour harmony of the finished work, is largely painted over. |
| MINIMALISM | The minimalist movement in visual art is most strongly identified with developments in Western art (especially American art), of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Often interpreted as a reaction to Abstract Expressionism, the movement grew out of the reductive elements of Modernism and, is regarded as a bridge to the Postmodernism movement. |
| MOMIGAMI | A traditional Japanese papermaking technique which may be literally translated as hand-crushed or wrinkled (momi) paper (gami). The traditional fibre used is kozo (papermaking mulberry), the paper is then impregnated with konnyaku (size) before being wrinkled, rubbed and stretched. |
| ROLE PORTRAIT | Also found in classical sculpture and medieval painting, the role portrait integrates the donor into the image in the guise of an iconographically traditional figure. This artistic device enabled the donor to be actively involved in the biblical events depicted, whilst at the same time, allowing artists to pursue complex character analysis. |
| SUBSTRATE | The foundation layer, ground or support on which the image is formed. |
| UNIQUE STATE | The term 'unique state' refers to the fact that the prints are not able to be printed as multiple repeatable images in a limited edition in the traditional way. |

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