

# *Lightness of Being*

**Maria Osmotherly BFA (Hons)**

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed:

**Maria Osmotherly**

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# PREFACE

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Two significant events in recent years have exerted a major influence on this thesis, leading to a profound shift in my studio practice and its theoretical underpinnings. When my partner was diagnosed with cancer in the very early stages of my post-graduate studies, I was not to know then that this was only the beginning of a long journey which would fundamentally change my philosophical moorings. After surgery to remove a tumor encountered complications, he was transferred to the Intensive Care Unit where for three weeks he clung to life and endured countless further surgical procedures. On several occasions it seemed certain he would not pull through. Ultimately, he survived; however, the experience of sitting by his bedside through those terrible weeks had an enormous impact on me, both emotionally and intellectually. To witness someone close hover so precariously on the brink forced on me a new awareness of our existential fragility.

Not long after this I was confronted by another crisis, with similar effect. After a stay in hospital with breathing problems, a close friend was diagnosed with the asbestos-related cancer mesothelioma and subsequently given only six to eighteen months to live. To make matters even more tragic, this same woman had lost her

thirteen-year-old daughter a few years previously to a very rare auto-immune disease. This girl was also my own daughter's best friend.

These two deeply upsetting episodes have forced me to reflect on the tenuousness of existence, on the relationships we forge with others in order to belong, and the significance, or weight, of our being on this earth. The arbitrary, yet unavoidable nature of mortality seemed to have given these things a new gravity and, inevitably, could not help but merge into both my studio practice and theoretical investigations.



# ABSTRACT

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This thesis focuses on the metaphysical question of whether or not ‘being’ or ‘existence’ (our human life as we live it on this earth) can carry metaphorical weight, giving life serious meaning. In other words: how can we balance the weight (significance, importance) of our existence with the lightness (fragility, transience) that is present simultaneously? This question prompted an investigation into the existential, conceptual and literal notions of weight and lightness and the way these concepts impact on our life. It has also initiated an essentially philosophical approach to the research involving the exploration of theories of phenomenology and the sublime in the hope of finding a resolution to this question through their application within the field of contemporary sculpture.

The aim of my studio practice is to communicate the metaphysical notion of human significance or lack thereof through combining fragile allusions to the human form (in the shape of twigs) with large, heavy structures in the form of rocks and boulders. The sculptural works will essentially provide a physical expression of the notions of lightness and weight by which we might measure our existential significance. A strategy of repetition has been integrated to enhance

this expression, thus reflecting my understanding of Nietzsche's theory of eternal recurrence. Photography is used as a major supportive medium.

Finally, rather than asserting any comprehensive challenge to the areas of philosophy cited, this thesis should be considered an expression of specific philosophical exploration of our existential fragility within the context of sculptural concerns.