Migration, Memory and Landscape: Recontextualising personal experience through contemporary abstract painting

Annemarie Murland
Migration, Memory and Landscape: Recontextualising personal experience through contemporary abstract painting

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An exegesis submitted in support of an Exhibition of works of art for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
The University of Newcastle, July 2009
I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a degree to any other University or Institution.

(Signed) ________________________
For my girls Kaitlin and Maela, so that you know there is nothing you cannot do

I would like to thank Dr Trevor Weekes and Ms Miranda Lawry for their supervision and mentorship during the course of this research. I want to thank my husband Jack and my girls for their kind understanding and support over the last ten years when my academic learning began. I acknowledge and thank my parents Agnes and Gerry McLafferty for giving me courage to believe that anything is possible and that there is nothing I cannot do. To my brother and sister, I thank them for who they are. I would also like to acknowledge the kind support of fellow artists and friends for their assistance and guidance during this project, for which I am very grateful, particularly: Dr Faye Neilson and Ms Maryanne Church who edited this exegesis and to Jeremy Ward for his assistance in publishing.
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A Long Road Home

An exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Annemarie Murland
In the fulfilment of a Doctor of Philosophy
The University of Newcastle Gallery, Newcastle
15 July – 26 July 2009
Prologue

She stares animatedly at the reflection, waiting, in triplicate she sees in herself all that she needs. Embodied treasure lies behind grey green eyes; and so, she jumps into the void that is home and for a short time sees again herself as new. She comes to the mirror, not for fortune but to be alone and escape the silence of interruption. Never far, over too quickly, too soon silence returns her, home, where she fails to recognise the treasure that is her.1

[Annemarie Murland]

As a small child I remember sitting in front of the bedroom mirror fixated by my own reflection, creating imaginary conversations that placed me elsewhere. A secret world existed within my reflection and I almost cry for this little girl who was never allowed to express herself. As an adult, my art practice has not only allowed me to communicate my sensory aesthetic, but is also my way of commenting on the world that surrounds me.

In my seaside home in Newcastle, I am so far removed from the life of my formative years in the East end of Glasgow. Looking back and forth, I see myself as an extension of the child with the wild imagination, who today is complete and contented. I have come to know and understand myself in this place, Australia, re-establishing my sense of identity and sense of place.

Now, as the birds sing outside my studio, I am comfortable in my skin. There is a great sense of ease to be found in a wordless world, where one engages with everything and nothing. My place of orbit, the studio, is where I come, to narrate my personal experience of migration. Comfortable secrets exist in this space where I roam free of any constraints that locate my life as ordinary, and so, through the surface of my artworks the voice of after memory reveals a life in transition…

1 Appendix i, after before white rabbits, Poems and Memories, Annemarie Murland, 2008. 11
Introduction

A personal experience of migration provides the content for this exegesis research and exhibition titled *A Long Road Home*. Narratives of identity, displacement and loss, common to the migrant experience are translated as concept and inspiration for this research. Exploring an attachment to my cultural past highlights a disrupted sense of place, which is examined within the context of personal experience. Movement as a condition of migration is a developed theme in this thesis, which is described through a shared sense of place between the Northern and Southern hemispheres, Scotland and Australia.


This exegesis and exhibition component employs mnemonic notations to explore memory as [re] remembering to conceptually underpin this thesis and also to prompt an emotive response. As an abstract concept, memories encompass an itinerant history that is teased from beneath the surface of the skin to extend the narrative of personal experience. *after before white rabbits*, a series of memories and recollections, reinterpret the past to inform the present, suggesting mindscape as an alternate landscape. A series of mnemonics invite the reader to participate on a journey that is in a continuous state of flux and transformation that moves between one horizon and another.

In my art practice the transformation of visual ideas is realised through exploring elements familiar to both drawing and painting to create an interstice between mark-making and the aesthetics of the picture plane’s spatial environment that deliver a ‘felt’ experience through compositional devices: colour, surface, texture and mark-making in the surfaces of the paintings and drawings. As the foundation of my practice, mark-making and surface express a self-reflexive textual response that link materials and medium as a conceptual concern. As a catalyst and dominant feature, the medium of paint examines the transformation of concept into material form and in doing so painting is referenced within its own subjectivity. From this
perspective I discuss my practice in relation to Formalism and will also reference the return to form in contemporary practice.

A focal point of my studio practice describes the painting process through colour and line as a metaphor that reinterprets the duality of ‘landscape’ as a motif for identity into abstract paintings and drawings. The movement of line through colour transforms the surface of the picture plane, referencing pathways that fuse mindscape and memory with lived experience. Paralleling stories never told before, a visual dialogue between the old world, new world, past and present is evidenced in the textured surface of the works.

Figure 1: Annemarie Murland, *The Old Firm*, 2007, Oil on canvas on board, 70x100x15cm.
Addressing the duality of interpretation between landscape and mindscape is my painting, *The Old Firm* 2007 [Figure 1] from the early works, which navigates the viewer through opaque horizontal lines of colour. However, this comparison is completely rezoned and resurfaced in my new work, *Four Green Fields* 2009 [Figure 2], which signals a shift in perspective where the stripe is transformed into micro marks that form a woven surface. The line is woven in a series of intricate marks over many layers of paint to create a new skin. The highly textured surfaces of these works establish a dialogue between personal experience and a changing cultural landscape embedded in the Australian experience.

*Figure 2:* Annemarie Murland, *Four Green Fields*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 100x140x15cm.
Within the context of contemporary visual Western culture this research examines the activity of painting and drawing to build a nexus of interpretation and expression between the personal and theoretical, creating a hybrid discourse and disparate body of abstract works of art. The experience of migration exposes the ‘personal’ to multiple interpretations and mapping the viscera of oneself provides the content for this exhibition, *A Long Road Home*, and accompanying exegesis. A dominant feature of this research charts a continuous journey between a personal and geographical merging of culture that translates as abstract visual leitmotifs. The material possibilities of both painting and drawing’s aesthetic potential are examined through process, and developing a methodology that discerningly forecasts an “embodied” experience as an interior and exterior spatial concept as defined with the ‘stretch as archive’.²

Although this exegesis investigates the influence of landscape in practice and its affect on identity, it is from the position of rejecting the landscape as a dominant cultural signifier that I locate my practice. My sense of identity and belonging in this place [Australia] does not recognise the landscape as a symbol of identity and is dismissed in favour of abstraction. In talking about abstraction, particularly in Australian contemporary art I would like to acknowledge the abstract artists, [Aboriginal] whose work is a benchmark for abstract painting in contemporary art. Ironic as it may seem, I have not included any reference to contemporary Australian abstraction as this thesis focuses on my personal experience of migration and my cultural experience of art and education that is firmly located within the Western tradition.

Migration as global phenomenon is discussed in relation to contemporary culture as site of mass migration, where crossing Border States is the accepted norm.³ The affects on society and culture in relation to the movement of people are examined through issues of identity, difference, and developing a renewed sense of place. This discussion is supported by the seminal texts of: Nikos Papastergiadis, Iain Chambers and Julia Kristeva whose observations relate directly to trans-global migration and its affect within an ever-changing contemporary community.⁴

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² The ‘stretch’ as archive relates to the architecture of the support. I shall often refer to the support as ‘stretch’ throughout the paper.


Migration in contemporary art practice is explored and discussed within the trajectories of a contemporary global phenomenon. Migration and material culture provide the content for a parallel analysis to take place between practitioners, Abraham Cruzvillegas a contemporary Mexican artist [1968-] and Cuban artist Humberto Caldaza [1944-] and Jorge J. E. Gracia a Cuban philosopher [1942-].

Interviews with contemporary migrant Italian artist Tommaso Durante [1956-] and Scottish artist Dr Anne Morrison [1966-] enhance the discussion of migration in practice through a discursive conversation that explores the personal and creative experience as new Australians. Both artists’ experience of migration and their individual perspective on art and its cultural role allow for a unique comparison to evolve.

The Sean Scully room, a permanent installation at the Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane, had a profound effect on me on many levels when I visited Ireland in 2006. The experience of seeing this body of work within a dedicated space delivered an experience unlike any other visual exchange I have ever experienced. I was overwhelmed by the polyphonic prose and sound that vibrated from within the works materiality. The paint’s visual presence invaded the surface of one’s skin and their compositional rhythm sang songs of old melodies that resonated from childhood. Their ‘Irish-ness’ was uncanny and in some way I felt that I had come home or had at least returned to my roots.

Informing my identity in practice is Clement Greenberg’s Modernist philosophy of Formalism and its counterpart, the contemporary theory, New Formalism, that advocates a return to formal aesthetics in contemporary visual culture. New Formalism reinvestigates Modernism’s formal philosophy in relation to the production and representation of art within a contemporary framework of interpretation. Subject matter and materials converge in a cultural conversation to critique Modernism’s discursive relationship with contemporary society and art history.\(^5\) Contemporary visual culture is explored in terms of not only the artist as product but explores the idealism of traditional modernist values that are self-regulating and reflexive in terms of its own subjectivity.

Throughout this research a self-reflexive narrative explores the navigation of space whether topographical, mnemonic or empiric to create a gateway to a locality where new aesthetic opportunities are manifest. The prospect of new possibilities are creatively examined both

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literally and pictorially to establish a definitive link that records a perception of self and place in relation to an embodied experience of migration. Abstraction, as visual leitmotif, examines a personal experience of migration and its affect on identity and sense of place through the unrecognisable landscapes of memory.
Chapter One

Shaping a Sense of Identity: Glasgow

The sky was sitting on top of her head, it was very low and grey that day. She recalls it as if yesterday; for time in memory is irrelevant. A life exhausted by good-byes. A lingering memory; a sensation, never forgot, never permanent, always biding time. ¹ [Annemarie Murland]

I was born in Glasgow in 1962, a third-generation Irish Catholic migrant. Originally from the southwest coast of Ireland, my great-grandparents were turn-of-the-century economic migrants who came to Scotland in the early 1900s. My ancestors left their homeland in County Donegal as British rule made it impossible to sustain an authentic and sated life style. Scotland offered them, and the many other migrants who moved there, an opportunity of a new beginning but little else, as they were to remain marginalised by their religious identity. This legacy of migration and movement from one place to the next has played a significant role in shaping our family history and identity. Transients, my forefathers avoided famine but not colonisation, nor the accompanying policies of suppression and isolation.

Growing up in a disenfranchised environment, family and culture embraced an oral tradition of narrative and storytelling, which played a significant role in shaping my sense of identity. Visual and performative, describing and identifying family history has always been oral, through song or allegory. Nothing was ever formally written down, which was probably due to a lack of education combined with a fear of authority and of being noticed. Stories, real or mythical, inherited tales, remedies and tinctures were handed down from mother to daughter and family to family, connecting a sense of self to something outside the family, a broader vision, perhaps.

A culture whose ancestral roots are steeped in Pagan mysticism, mixed with conservative Christian doctrine, formulated a fractured sense of identity and perception of belonging. The rigid rules set down by the Church created a dynamic that, although strict and orthodox, united the self, family and community, creating a culture that shared identity and place. As a result, life within the confines of this particular and marginalised group provided one with a recognisable sense of self. There were never any issues surrounding identity politics. We all looked the same dressed in the Celtic football club colours, green and white, dark hair, blue eyes. Some things in life are very simple.

¹ Appendix i, after before white rabbits, Poems and Memories, Annemarie Murland, Self-Published Book, 2009. 6
In the 1960s when I was a child, Glasgow, as I understood it, reflected a culture of diversity that was symptomatic of its inherent religious and economic divide. My family put down roots in the east end of the city in a place known as the Calton. Traditionally recognised as an inner-city place of refuge for Irish migrants, there were few raw materials or government assistance to help these people carve out a new life. My great-grandparents from both my mother and father’s side made a living from selling fish and hawking their wares at the Barrowland Markets [the Barras]² and latterly my grandfather worked at the local meat market during the second world war, which allowed him to feed many families in this area.

² An iconic local landmark that still survives today and is known to all Glaswegians.
This area has been and still is resolutely disadvantaged through a blending of socio-economic factors that reinforce marginalisation, typifying all that is recognisably wrong with Glasgow’s image as a city of culture. Despite a history of hardship and a reputation for violence and crime, the Calton [Figure 4] area retains a tangible sense of kinship that is reflected in the stories and lives of the people who have stayed behind. It is in the continuum of this narrative of community and identity that one is drawn back. Resolute in knowing that you belong to the history of place through folklore, songs and story, one is never a migrant or tourist.

On a recent trip back to Glasgow in October 2007 it was obvious that the urban landscape of the Calton was in a state of transition. Town planners and developers were, and still are knocking down old structures and rebuilding to gentrify and capitalise on the area’s inner-city commodity value. Well-fostered memories that have maintained an attachment to place are threatened by this progress. Ironically, I recorded the facades of tired buildings with my digital camera, where recessed within the bricks and mortar are memories of dead parents and of time gone by. Documenting a fading sense of place, family history and sense of belonging are reflected in the graffiti-clad, condemned doorways that are reminders of an evolving sense of loss.

Documentary photographs of Glasgow’s East End find resonance in the book I produced in relation to the visit in 2007, appendix ii of this study. the dead end of culture embodies a history of place and remnants of a culture that helped delineate my sense of identity as unique to a place. The camera was the unobtrusive tool that I used to frame an experience of place and, in doing so, the imagery was a blunt and bleak relic that echoed past lives and histories.³

Doorways and building facades shadow my movement through architectural space, place and time. After memory collides with mnemonic notations embedded within the exploding colour, surface texture of objects and anything that is not nailed down. Family histories bounce off graffiti clad stone crafted walls. Sporadic mark-making reflects and records a cultural history that has many voices - rich and diverse, marginalised and impoverished. In the past Caltonian’s embraced their sense of difference to authenticate themselves as local. In doing so identity and sense of place move beyond the intellectual trappings of identity politics into a landscape that today is defined by its commodity value and not so much the fragmented lives of the people who move and live in this space.⁴ [Annemarie Murland]

Individual interpretation surrounds the image, as if anticipating a shift in perspective; the

³ Anthony Bond, 1st Liverpool Biennial: Trace, Exhibition Catalogue, 24 September - 7 November 2007 (Liverpool: Tate Gallery, 2007). 19
⁴ Appendix ii, the dead end of culture, Annemarie Murland, Self-Published Book, 2009, Taken from Artist Statement.
camera focuses on the emptiness contained in the physical structure that in some somatic way is quietly seductive. The politics of place seem far removed from the formal qualities of the printed image. Separate and apart the images offer a discursive truth that implodes on notions of identity and what it means to belong to a specific place.

Embedded within the empty structure of these decaying buildings, lay the remnants of lives long gone. I can hear the sounds of time past, characterised by the constant drizzle that falls simultaneously from a pained grey sky that sits lightly upon tired shoulders. There lies a deep connectedness to this place and it is here that I always return, never a migrant or tourist. I am a Glaswegian as surely as my ancestors are encoded into my DNA. The streets are quiet enough; I can smell the rain as it mingles with the fragments of detritus that lie casually upon and in between the tar macadam and grassy verge that borders Glasgow Green. In temporal space Memory and Reality embrace, attaching like electricity to the surface of skin; the warm sensations are almost melodic in their touch. And I am home.⁵ [Annemarie Murland]

Glasgow as a whole services a thriving, cultural dynamic mix of people where race or religion is not the only distinction. The European city of culture circa 1989, Glasgow is a melting pot of Europeans sharing place and an international narrative of difference.⁶ It is from this position of disparity that the underside of this city’s cultural heartbeat is most poignant and discernible. The monumentality of the city’s architecture is overwhelmed by its innate sense of place.

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⁵ Appendix ii, the dead end of culture, Annemarie Murland, Self-Published Book, 2009, Taken from Artist Statement.
⁶ Townsend, New Art from London. 8
Glasgow, sandstone and grey, [Figure 5] colours my recollections of a town that is warm in its hospitality, especially to the visitor. Glasgow’s identity is a complex weave of religion, sport, humour and generosity ‘is miles better’ than anywhere else.⁷ As part of the global village, technology and relatively cheap air travel, I have maintained a relationship with my hometown, family and friends. Retrospectively, I have never really left Glasgow, and after seventeen years my connection and attachment to the place is probably stronger than it was when I migrated to Australia in 1991.

⁷ ‘Glasgow is miles better’ was a logo used by the Scottish Tourist Board advertising Glasgow as a place to visit during the seventies and eighties.
In sharing a personal narrative, a visual and sensory journey is explored through the motifs of memory and landscape to describe a lifetime of movement. As a custodian of my family history, layers of culture and personal association to place are revealed in the surface of the canvas and in the written word. Rich and sensitive information is passed on, adding to the already told migrant stories and extending the political and social fabric of place and people who are located in-between.

**Shaping a Sense of Identity in Practice: a theoretical underpinning**

In contemporary art practice it is difficult not to fall into the way of categories and labels when exploring the notion of meaning in a work of art, particularly in contemporary society where the viewer is exposed to consumerism on a grand scale. Contemporary art is not excluded from the comodification of culture or its social and public spaces. It is my aim to present a positive response to cultural excess and art’s inherent “tropism” through a visual dialogue that embraces notions of identity and meaning as an evolving concept. In a visual art practice, finding meaning lies in the transposition of an idea or concept through a visual analysis and examination of a medium’s possibility in terms of its materiality. However, the process of making art does not stop at the juncture of possibilities. The return to aesthetics in contemporary art explores the complex relationships between contemporary cultural materialism and art history’s temporal trajectory within an aesthetic context.

In terms of art practice, I position my practice within the context of a developing modernism, which acknowledges Greenberg's philosophy of Modernism and Formalist aesthetics. It is important, however, that my practice is not read exclusively as temporal formal aesthetics, but that it is recontextualised within a contemporary frame of reference. The advent of technology and access to new and immediate knowledge has reshaped the past towards a revisionist practice, which in theory explores process as a continuum that is constantly re-identifying and adjusting itself in line with culture. Placing my work in the context of both past and present theories of formal aesthetics requires an investigation of the Greenbergian philosophy of Modern art that focuses on painting and, in particular, its relationship with New Formalism.

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9 Townsend, *New Art from London.* 28, 30
“Form” not only opens the way to inspiration; it can also act to it; and technical preoccupations, when searching enough and compelled enough, can generate or discover “content”.10 [Clement Greenberg]

Synonymous with Clement Greenberg’s Formalism was his concept of Modernism, which was reactive towards traditional conventions in visual representation that sought to limit painting’s advocacy.11 In his critique of modernism, Greenberg encouraged the dismissal of real and traditional symbols or signifiers that located painting in the past, that is, within the genre of nature as representation and its proponents, the ‘old masters’, towards a new reflexive system of “renewal” and “innovation”.12 The materiality of the medium in ‘practice’ determined and defined painting’s continued existence as the principle signifier in ‘art’ at this time.13

Greenberg’s critique of modern painting provided the discipline with its own language with which it could critique and define itself, in doing so, “self-criticism”14 provided a platform for a responsive discourse to emerge.15 ‘Purity’ and notions of the ‘absolute’ within the genre set in place a system, where identity and meaning were self-reflexive. A temporal re-adjustment of painting’s history was negated in favour of a ‘pure’ art where ‘material specificity’ reinforced painting’s dominant position in Western Art.16 The resulting discourse established painting’s primacy with a renewed identity that embodied the materiality and properties of paint and the use of colour and form to deliver an aesthetic experience, the objective of which was pictorial flatness.17 Formalism or “visual form”18 was the outcome of the modern painter’s exploration of paint as subject matter.

Greenberg’s Formalism changed the dynamics of modern painting, away from traditional narratives of subjectivity towards “artisanal concerns”,19 which failed to recognise content as a stimulus for meaning within a pictorial context. As Greenberg intimates: “it was empty of significant meaning”,20 suggesting that both form and content are responsive to aesthetic interpretation. The plurality of this reading implies that Greenberg’s Modernism was discursive, fractured and open to multiple interpretations. The establishment of formalist aesthetic philosophy

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10 Greenberg, *Necessity Of “Formalism”. 175
11 Ibid. 171
12 Ibid. 172
16 Ibid. 93
17 Ibid. 94
18 Harris, *Writing Back to Modern Art after Greenberg, Fried, and Clark*. 65
19 Greenberg, *Necessity Of “Formalism”. 172
20 Harris, *Writing Back to Modern Art after Greenberg, Fried, and Clark*. 65
in praxis and practice illustrated a move towards transcendence in art, where the expression of emotional depth through materials asserted painting’s move from past narratives towards a new form of art. Formalist aesthetics, as such, played a conditional role in repositioning the traditional tableau in art as obsolete. In doing so, Formalism provided the New York School of abstract expressionists a discursive playing field to expand and explore the phenomenon of painting’s autonomous subjectivity and identity in non-representational form.\(^{21}\)

To mention Greenberg in this conversation, one must also acknowledge the work of abstract American painter, Jackson Pollock, [1912-56] who characterised the radical of modern painting’s challenge to both its tradition and history. Pollock defied pictorial convention with his ‘drip’ paintings and as part of his process and production he subverted tradition easel painting by coming off the wall and onto the floor.\(^{22}\) The artist’s specific methodology rejected the need for traditional tools and his process and application of paint, referred to as ‘action painting’, reinforced the self-reflexive character and individuality of the modern painter. However, it was Pollock’s practice of modern painting, as an expression of a deep emotional engagement with the subjectivity of paint and its self-referentiality that connected him to Greenberg’s modernist philosophy.\(^{23}\)

Modern art has come a long way since Greenberg, and as fate would have it, his critique on modern painting’s formal identity is currently being ‘revised’. No longer a protagonist, we see Greenberg’s notion of painting’s autonomy and position of ‘hierarchy’ come under deep scrutiny. I am interested in the application of Greenberg’s philosophy in relation to Formalism, as both subject and history, and its relationship to contemporary art’s return to form and aesthetics.

Contemporary Formalism or New Formalism is not a return to the specificity of the material as form, but rather an edition of Modernism’s dialectic between past and present histories.\(^{24}\) Finding form in a contemporary art setting is reliant on a fusion of aesthetic and conceptual ideas. This genre of art practice features the employment of hybrid materials and practices in the act of ‘making’ art. The artist is thus, in a dialogical engagement between materials as narrative and content within the context of the gallery space.\(^{25}\) The subject and object

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\(^{22}\) Harris, *Writing Back to Modern Art after Greenberg, Fried, and Clark*. 65

\(^{23}\) Ibid. 108


\(^{25}\) Neil Mulholland, “Awkward Relations,” (Tate Online: Tate Papers, 2004). 16 re the exhibition “Early One Morning”.
emerge as one, functioning as a contemporary referent on the modern world, offering a ‘new perspective’ on the old and traditional notions of practice based institutional art.

It is not difficult to see why there has been a return to form in contemporary art, particularly in Britain, where the subject matter of art is the translation of popular culture’s excess into aesthetics, creating a new, reflexive discourse within a variety of “contemporary practices.” British art critic, J.J. Charlesworth identifies a return to formal values in art, where the gallery is the cultural site of consumption that articulates practice as a process of material production.

Art as cultural currency takes place in the gallery setting and is represented in a variety of media, where meaning is determined through ambiguity and the juxtaposition of disparate characteristics, which describe complex temporal relationships between materials and context.  

The rationalised appeal to an ideal, are the actual conditions of presentation that formalism sought to mystify as essential to the object, rather than the context of its presentation. [J.J. Charlesworth]

Charlesworth references ‘context’ as a principle strategy and as an essential ingredient in relation to an artwork’s value as a marketable product in a global world and cultural environment. Determining New Formalism’s identity within this context requires an alternative from which to contrast its message. The performative Relational Aesthetics model of art, which serves as a form of social art, offers a comparison to New Formalism. Both forms of art are currently popular and share similar characteristics that comment on contemporary cultural excess. However, Relational Aesthetics honours the textualist qualities of the post modern, as well as utilising its characteristic feature ‘appropriation’, whereas New Formalism serves to expose the flaws inherent in Modernist aesthetics and their defining role in contemporary society’s fractured identity.

The proponents of this type of art come from all over and one could suggest that it is an ‘all over’ type of art. Scotland’s Jim Lambie [1964-] falls under the umbrella of New Formalism and its “feel good” aesthetic function that is embedded in art as cultural object, Lambie suggests that the employment of:

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26 Townsend, New Art from London. 30,31  
27 Ibid. 10  
29 Mulholland, "Awkward Relations." 2 [6]
Encultured materials ‘allows the object a more multi-layered reading, that there aren’t such hard-edged parameters on the work, that it isn’t just about one thing, and that most people could find a way into the conversation.’

Jim Lambie

Lambie communicates an alternative type of art that differs from what is readily available in the gallery setting today. [Figure 6] Previously a disc jockey and member of a pop boy-band in the 90s, Lambie impresses personal experience and personality as a strategy that comments on popular cultures ‘dislocated’ perception of identity. Lambie’s work comments on modern culture’s plasticity and saturation with media, through rejecting traditional forms of representation to deliver a message that embodies “social meaning” within a visual context.

Lambie’s art embraces modernist discourse to critique contemporary culture’s consumerist nature, through appropriation and parody, to deliver an experience that engages the viewer instantly. His signature works are taped floor installations, where space and place converge in visual vibrations to create an overall sensation of spectatorship between viewer and gallery space. The striped floors bring to mind the ‘hard edge abstraction’ of the 60s and one is also reminded of Pollock’s radicalism in his move from easel painting to using the floor, defying painting’s history and classical identity.

Figure 6: Jim Lambie, Sitting Pretty, 2008, Mixed Media Installation, Dimensions variable with installation, Glasgow Museum of Contemporary Art.

30 Ibid. 2 [6]
32 Ibid. 2
Lambie’s practice rejects Greenberg’s intellectual model of Formalism by confronting the viewer with exploding floors of colour to create a direct relationship between audience and work that suggests an understanding of ‘aesthetic’ culture. Lambie’s narration of gallery space as a vehicle to prompt understanding and meaning is in direct opposition to High Modernism’s self-reflexive and exclusive identity.

Supplementing sensory experience and notions of embodiment the reactive colours of Lambie’s installations extend an implicit psychology towards a critique of popular culture’s investment in visual stimuli as a means of identity. Lambie’s work relies on formal aspects of composition, where pattern and rhythm, scale and space fall out and onto the floor in caphonic colour relationships. It is his aesthetic’s response to discursive dictums that create pathways between established histories and the practice of contemporary culture. Lambie’s objective, it would seem, is recontextualising contemporary cultural narratives that are in sync with contemporary art as described within the gallery setting. Locating Lambie’s practice within a contemporary art context is examined in the return to formalist aesthetics. New Formalism and its open ended ‘system’ of making art offer multiple interpretations, which in a world, as Nikos Papastergiadis, suggests, “culture is in crisis”.33

A return to form brings a reengagement between cultural narratives and aesthetic engagement, the objective of which is to provide content for mass-communication and visual enjoyment.34 New Formalism is intent on redefining the problematic of representation in a global world environment, where the politics of place and identity fuse with the practice and conceptual concerns of contemporary art that find aesthetic relief in the not so new ‘formalism’.

33 Papastergiadis, The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity. 9
Shaping a Sense of Identity: abstraction

Bessie is a living organism, constantly changing, constantly ingesting food and air, transforming it, getting rid of it again. Her blood is circulating, her nerves are sending messages. Viewed microscopically, she is a mass of variegated corpuscles, cells, and bacterial organisms; viewed from the point of view of modern physics, she is a perpetual dance of electrons. What she is in her entirety, we can never know; even if we could at any precise moment say what she was, at the next moment she would have changed enough so that our description would no longer be accurate... Bessie is no static "object," but a dynamic process.35 [S.L. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, 1991]

Painting and drawing the way of the migrant follows the route of abstraction, but like most journeys there are dips and bends in the road that lead elsewhere. Artists from the old masters through to contemporary modern painters, for example, Sean Scully36 have informed my knowledge base and sense of aesthetic. Learning from the past is part of the investigative process that I employed in arranging this exegesis. However, I do not appropriate the work of master painters but reflect on their methodologies to extend my knowledge of painting/drawing as process. Integral to my process and methodology is the relationship between artist and materials, which translate the embodied experience of migration into visual, abstract documents that reference ‘surface’ as skin.37

35 Dr Anne Morrison, “Interview Transcript,” (Launceston: the University of Tasmania, 2009). 9 Anne Morrison provided this text from a web source - kankanchadash.blogspot.com/2009/02/definition-of-abstract.html
36 Sean Scully as influence is discussed in this chapter under the sub-heading Shaping a Sense of Identity in Practice, P37
My view of abstraction is multidimensional and is not reliant on any master doctrine for the purpose of interpretation. As an artist, I am primarily concerned with the fusion of relationships that connect the materiality of the medium with real experience. Developing a concept into form relies on recognising the role of space and aesthetic as a forceful dimension where materials and medium connect. I do not practice automatic ‘action painting’ or rely entirely on unconscious discoveries to activate the process of painting. I prefer a more liberal and expressive extension of aesthetic possibilities in the use of paint, as well as an alternate use of pictorial space. My practice denies formal representation in favour of abstraction as there is no alternative model or strategy that can render a visual phenomenon of experience. 38

I share a similar approach to the abstractionists of the past, American artists Jackson Pollock [1912-57] and Mark Rothko [1903-1970] for example, in their rejecting rigid conforms

of institutional and formal painting practices, common to the abstract expressionists of the New York School. Rothko’s articulation of a consummate experience through painting is evident in his subliminal floating surface paintings that transcend beyond the verbal. [Figure 7] Resonating a sense of place, Rotko’s aesthetic has impacted on my art practice through renegotiating formal structures, creating a ‘felt’ experience.

It is an expectation that the viewer engages with the work from a position of having been affected by its materiality and beauty and not necessarily the work’s conceptual underpinnings or subject matter. The notion of ‘experience’ is pivotal to the success of the work’s translation into objective form. This is particularly difficult with abstract art, as the work is often interpreted from an aesthetic perspective only. A lack of recognisable signs or symbols directs the viewer towards a subliminal understanding of an abstract work. To go beyond the point of aesthetics, it is my challenge as an artist to affectively engage the viewer. The process and evolution of a work is established through a reinterpretation of material as subject, whereby intention and meaning appear as form through a self-reflexive exchange between material and concept.

The disparate relationship between traditional representation and abstraction is visually examined in this study through discordant colour relationships that link the horizontal and micro line to memory and the northern and southern hemispheres. Comparing the “ground we walk over” and the ground of the canvas creates a duplicitous interpretation between real space (landscape) and that of the picture plane. Through compositional devices the essence of one environment is translated into pictorial space. Real, imagined and felt visual landscapes emerge from a personal experience of space and place, revealing abstract surfaces that form a series of works that re-claim the title of landscape as a signifier of personal identity. By reinterpreting the landscape into unrecognisable symbols, cultural and personal identity become a complex weave of intricate lines of colour as depicted in my work. [Figure 8] Distinctly different and separate in the universal understanding of space, both ‘grounds’, pictorial and real, signify a quest to put down roots.

40 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception. 178, 179
Figure 8: Annemarie Murland, *Summer in the North*, 2008, Oil on canvas, 70x90x15cm.
Shaping a Sense of Identity in Practice: Sean Scully
Dublin 2006: The Hugh Lane experience

The influential practice of Sean Scully [1945-] serves as a critique on modern painting but also prepares the ground to discuss my work, which focuses on the impact of migration in visual terms. Process and osmosis play a role in my practice and through investigating the work of Sean Scully there is a shared sense of engaging with materials that transform experience into an art object. [Figure 9]

In July 2006, I had the opportunity to visit Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane, where there is a dedicated room for the works of Sean Scully. Previously, I had only looked at Scully’s paintings from the pages of books and journals that imprinted only a graphic trace of the original work’s overall aesthetic impact. This type of ‘looking’ is static and lacks bodily experience, negating any form of sensory engagement and leaving one unfulfilled and wanting more. However, when one is up close and in the body of the picture, there is a palpable exchange between work and viewer. The notion of spectatorship comes to mind as one is faced with the grandeur of The Hugh Lane interior and Scully’s big boy paintings.

Scully’s work appears as High Modernist with enormous brush marks and big surfaces. The overall scale of the paintings and their positioning within a designated space reinforces their
presence as a felt experience. These huge structural works reference the significance of the monumental throughout art history. The painting’s sheer physicality, aesthetics and scale impressed upon the senses and I fell, metaphorically, into the surface structure and became part of the picture plane. There was a feeling of a door opening, and an entrance into the visceral plasticity of the work’s façade to a place behind the paint where I could observe, smell and feel the paint. On reflection, I was able to view myself from within the work, and from a position of ‘elsewhere’.

Discussing Scully, one explores life experiences within the medium and materiality of paint. There is beauty, harmony and discord within the surface texture of his paintings but there is also a deliberate sense of conflict in the spatial relationship between audience and artist, structure and venue. The paintings in situ offer a recontextualisation of space and one wonders if he is reconstructing a base or location to platform monumental visual devices that demand a slowing down and a silence. The intensity of the engagement with Scully’s work directly affected my senses as I felt a real and embodied response to the work’s beauty and aesthetics. However, looking at the paintings in terms of paint as subject matter, I was concerned with how I could translate conceptual ideas into visually stimulating works of art that would have an emotional affect. This meant that in practice I would need to reflect and respond to the medium’s properties and capabilities with a concrete methodology.

As a human experience Scully’s imagery has presence and beauty that require the viewer to be present and still, which in a homogenised society where everything is fast and quick requires a commitment from the viewer. Scully’s paintings take one out of the ready-made zone into another dimension where sensation and experience are localised within the picture plane, reaffirming my passion for painting and as a vehicle to explore further, my personal journey.
Sean Scully
A Master in Pieces

Sean Scully is a painter and a migrant three times over: Irish, English and American, he describes himself as “having no nationality”. Belonging to neither here nor there, Sean Scully is an international artist. He transforms paint into something other than its material; the idea of movement is fluid in his works – just like himself, a migrant always ready to move forward into the next the part of his journey. He has an edge that separates him from other painters and in a way; Scully is the quintessential “storyteller”.

Scully’s personal history reflects the émigré narrative and I find myself drawn to this, without a doubt it plays an osmotic role in his visual response to whatever his conceptual concerns might be. I relate to the exploration of personal experience in his work that is expressed through pigment on linen in a search for reconciliation or perhaps resolution. Processing personal and embodied emotions infects the making of a work of art with spiritual reverence. Traditional and religious motifs, common to both Scully’s life and mine, draw upon Catholic metaphors that explore notions of ritual and purging as a visual leitmotif through the act of painting. Scully’s practice seems fearless; it is able to reshape the viewer’s response by navigating the gaze beyond the surface texture of the canvas, back towards the self.

History and narrative play a significant role in Scully’s art, separating him from contemporary arts practitioners’ who favour a mediated art that parodies material culture’s excess. A skilled craftsman, Scully compositions are visually convincing as is his dialogue and conversations that separate him form what is ‘readily’ available in contemporary art practice. There is no trickery or a ‘gimmick’ behind his practice, only as painter at work.

A humanist at the core; Scully brings to his audience a sense of ‘feel good’ reality that is located in the surface qualities of his work, delivering a pure sense of engagement. Scully’s pictorial prompts of discordant colour and the repetition of pattern, orchestrate the viewer’s attention towards a subliminal experience. The viewer is drawn into the centrifuge of the paintings silence, where one is locked in a self-reflexive dialogue with the work of art.

Ideas, thought and action are Sean Scully's tribute to the trinity of Western painting's subjectivity that describes the relationship between 'body', subject and material. As part of the tradition of painting, Scully's work sets up a “paragone” that considers classic 'master' narratives of “beauty” and “reality”, which find form, through an “authentic” abstracted response. Scully's work translates across geographies, and history. His practice and aesthetic is located in the Western idiom of Modernism but also refers to the history of Renaissance painting and craftsmanship. Scully's art assaults contemporary culture's mediated ‘hybrid’ aesthetic with sensory and sensual stimulus in the shape of large format abstract paintings.

Scully is always on the move and has studio practices in Barcelona, New York, London and Munich. Personifying a contemporary cultural nomad his ‘internationalism’ places his identity as both transitory and idiomatic. Scully is simultaneously a local and a migrant wherever he lives. A sense of internationalism can be traced through his painting practice and is also readily noticeable in his photographic work. Scully’s interest in Photo-media compliments his traditional practice, just as my documentary photographs evidence cultural and family history, which nurture the motifs of identity and belonging in my practice.

Scully’s use of new media, as opposed to paint, reinforces the subjectivity of his artistic identity as multifarious. Although embodying notions of spirituality and unity, Scully’s abstraction sits outside of the generic and accepted genre of Abstract Expressionism. Scully’s practice embraces the language and history of art that is inclusive of Modernism’s authority of authorship and the Post-Modern characteristics of deconstruction and rejection, which serve as a means of classification. Comprehensive and universal, Scully's art is a revisionist and conceptually evolving art practice that reflects culture, “past and present, memory and experience.”

Commanding attention, Scully’s practice is as sure as his DNA and attests to the Celtic culture’s embodiment of storytelling as a traditional signifier of identity. Scully’s practice generates meaning and forms identity from multiple perspectives that include a personal itinerant history and the concept of painting as environment.

49 Carrier, Sean Scully. 188
50 Hegyi, “The Possibility of Emotional Painting: Sean Scully’s Hidden Narrative.” 21
The mechanics of the support provide Scully’s work with an architectural ground for a new reality or environment of a pictorial kind to emerge. Through the support’s architecture, Scully sets up his canvas as structure and environment to test visually, subject and object, semiotics and empiricism. The sheer physicality of the support, Scully’s work presents as hedonistic, which is in stark contrast to the subliminal stripes that serve as his aesthetic signature.\textsuperscript{51} The compositional placement of the stripes in space reinforces the notion of ‘object’ that, when fused with the structure of the support, delivers a unified visual experience. [Figure 10] Scully, therefore, presents his audience with a modified reality of the pictorial kind. Through a reductive process, one experiences a fusion of aesthetics, materiality and intellect.

Culture is an enigmatic theme throughout Sean Scully’s practice and as if to add complexity to the understanding of his work, Scully references Irish poet, Samuel Beckett, as a way of finding ‘meaning’ in practice. In doing so, he directs the viewer towards the minimal as an experience of the macro that engages with the formal content of the work’s physical and conceptual structure. Scully’s aesthetic objectivity merges with Beckett’s poststructuralist sensibility to inform the outcome and readability of the work, which, in essence, is the realisation of an idea taking shape.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid. 21
\textsuperscript{52} Morgan, “Physicality and Metaphor: The Paintings of Sean Scully.” 2[3]
I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. I wish I could remember in Latin. It is even finer in Latin than English. “Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned.” That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters.\textsuperscript{53} [Samuel Beckett.]

Reshaping ideas is evidenced in the journal article, \textit{Physicality and Metaphor}, where the author Robert Morgan references Samuel Beckett as an influence on Scully.\textsuperscript{54} Beckett’s quote illustrates how Scully attaches meaning to his work and also demonstrates his ‘world’ view that is adapted into visual responses.

\section*{Sharing a Horizon: Scully as influence}

In a sense my work is a question of trying to retrieve the irretrievable. My work has a lot of yearning in it. There is structure, and the structure is being undone or subverted by a sense of emotion and of loss.\textsuperscript{55} [Sean Scully]

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Figure_11.png}
\caption{Sean Scully, \textit{Wall of Light Tara}, 2000, Oil on linen, 279.4x335.3cm}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Figure_12.png}
\caption{Annemarie Murland, \textit{M71}, Oil on canvas on board, 2006, 40x40cm}
\end{figure}

A determining aesthetic in my paintings is the stipe as subject, which has played a significant role from early on in my painting practice. I have investigated the horizon in terms of creating stability within the picture plane, both as a pictorial tool and as personal metaphor for grounding. My strong response to Sean Scully fits with a shared heritage and cultural identity that evidences an experience of displacement as both a migrant and artist. I have reinvented

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. 65
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid. Title Page
\textsuperscript{55} Ingleby, ed., \textit{Sean Scully: Resistance and Persistence: Selected Writings}.94
my sense of self and created a new identity through my art practice and Sean Scully appears to have explored these issues in his work. A sense of difference is visually obvious in Scully’s work as disparate paint converges in spatial arrangements, the architecture of which is both ambiguous and confronting in scale. ‘Pieces’ are put together, slotting into space, a space that resists intrusion, this is Scully’s practice as its best.

The role of the support in my practice responds to Scully’s monumental structures. I responded to the architectural nature of his painting supports, as they are a reminder of packing up and leaving home. Also, in some way, the physical nature of these structures propelled a sentimental remembering of my physical home and neighbourhood where colour and graffiti invaded the textured surfaces of the old buildings that were part of my everyday life. The support as a metaphor of containment is played out not only in the architectural format of the painting support but also narrates an “e-motional” response to material as experience. Upon reflection a subliminal relationship between meaning and interpretation of the ‘supports’ role as having an affect denotes its function as ‘hybrid’.

Scully’s lines recognise in their eloquent and disparate colour combinations conflict and discordance. The subject of the stripe in Scully’s work provides the basic material for the construction of his paintings. The stripe is humble, and its form cannot be disputed; it is what it is. Given the modesty of the stripe, one begins to realise that Scully’s inspiration rests in the lines’ purity of form that is absolute, and as such can be ‘transformed’ creating its own indeterminacy. Through colour, a personal narrative appears that offers an ambiguously emotive experience of ‘difference’.

I sometimes think my paintings look as if a family of refugees has been living in them; sometimes that makes me smile when I look at them, gives me a kind of joy. [Sean Scully]

Arranging and organising space as a metaphor for personal loss, or to create a sense of displacement, is how I read Scully’s work and allows for a connection to be made between Scully and myself. In exploring the multiple and coloured horizons that are part of Scully’s work and mine, personal stories express loss and sadness through opposing points of the

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58 Ingleby, ed., Sean Scully: Resistance and Persistence: Selected Writings. 75
59 Ibid. 75 [Mooseurach, July 2005]
60 Ibid. 75
colour spectrum. Scully’s work titled *Wall of Light Tara 2000* [Figure 11] and my painting titled *M71 2006* [Figure 12] are reminders of a sense of place and the experience of going home. Scully’s work explores a response to visiting Ireland while making a documentary film for Irish television.\(^6^1\) There is drama in the painted bricks of colour that confront the viewer through the cool temperature and construction of the spaces they occupy. A sense of Scully’s displacement and sadness evaporates as the light is absorbed into the palette, which is diffuse of light.

Loss is an evolving physical and emotional experience of being a migrant that erodes a sense of identity in relation to new space. Responding to returning home is the work [figure 12] that was painted in 2006. In opposition to Scully’s work [figure 11] this painting, *M71* navigates a [re] remembering of travelling through Glasgow into the country. The grey sky hovers above the horizon, meeting the verdant green colours of farm and countryside. From this experience of place a cool palette that resonated a mixture of discordant warm and cool tones filled the space of the square support. In comparison to Scully’s large format work, which responds to the interior and exterior space of self and country, my work is small in format, providing a sense of security and stability.

**Shaping a Sense of Identity: the stretch as archive**

The construction of the support acts as an archive that is specifically connected to the concept of identity and memory. As a duplicitous allegory, the support acknowledges the traditional format of canvas painting, but is a host for the development of disparate ideas. As painted objects these works define the space they occupy, suggesting a new aesthetic and way of seeing. In their entirety, the paintings have the potential to become an installation that acknowledges the individual in space.

\(^{6^1}\) *Carrier, Sean Scully.* 196
The work titled *Windows in the West* 2008 [Figure 13] represents looking from a distance. Notions of the voyeur are revealed in the small informal squares that rest upon the surface of the stretch. The concept of the window is deconstructed through composition and structure. The environment of the stretch and that of the mnemonic space of childhood is evidenced in the translation of the monumental towards the individual. Without support, the painting is free standing, engaging the viewer from a position of authority.

The objectification of the support as site or environment of its own subjectivity, witnesses a transformation of painting towards an idea of the monumental. Ironically, the notion of monumental has it origins in childhood memories where I was surrounded by architecture.
from the Imperial past. My playgrounds were the old Kirk Graveyard on Ingram Street, a place
were rich merchants buried their dead and also George Square, a landmark in the city centre
of Glasgow. The experience of place in memory has framed my vision subconsciously towards
the monumental, the artefact. In my work there is an autonomous modularity contained within
the structure and aesthetics that defies the fragility common to two-dimensional works of art.
Needing no support, the works have the capacity to come off the wall and stand alone.

Time and memory are integral presences in the overlapping relationship that exists in the
physical space of the support. The creation of an archive introduces the notion of storage
and containment, which conceptually transports personal history and memory of place
into aesthetic form. The suggestion of archive also mimics a metaphoric distancing of time
and space through the physical architecture of the structure that records past and present
landscapes. Reinhabiting, integration and the idea of not conforming are feelings that are
assimilated within the physicality and production of the support. There exists a parallel and
direct link between the support and the creation of pictorial space as a motif that describes
the migratory experience through the materiality of paint and memory as colour.

As a repository box, the stretch transports memory into a new dialectic of spatial relationships
that connect form and content. Conceptually, the ‘stretch’ frame plays with the dynamics of
space to suggest the idea of objects and people being placed in spaces where they do not
necessarily belong. Carving out a new existence was a primary objective when I first migrated
to Australia and through the structure of the support and application of paint and medium
I explore this phenomenon. The juxtaposition of floating colour stripes and highly textured
organic surfaces create an ambiguous visual relationship. The tension between the discordant
colours and textured surfaces establish a visual presence in the aesthetic surface of the
’sretch’ that describes a sense of self in place and a response to the Australian landscape
as experience.
Chapter Two

Migration: memory and landscape in practice

Space colours energy that is
Beyond blue light of dark night
Shines quietly upon solstice that is
Freedom beckons beneath lying flat surface
Raptures separation that is
Interstice1 [Annemarie Murland]

A personal experience of migration, the role of memory and an experience of the Australian landscape illustrate how space and place affect a sense of identity and adjust notions of belonging through the continuum of journey. Locating the experience of landscape in practice is the journey into the Western Desert of New South Wales; Broken Hill is described through the experience of moving through space. My art practice is discussed through the visual processes and methodologies employed to illicit an embodied response to the experience of migration, memory and landscape. These narratives are conceptually developed through the translation of materials into pictorial form and are identified as Tartan landscapes.

Migration: a personal experience

In a light that was not grey I failed to recognise myself. I had nothing in common with this place and so I rejected the landscape, culture and people that surrounded me, all of it reinforced a sense of difference and of not belonging once more. This place was too different.2 [Annemarie Murland 1991]

There are moments in life when our path and destination is altered, changing how we feel and see ourselves. Coming to Australia in 1991 with my Australian husband was not what I had imagined for myself; I had always believed that, like my other family members, I would have gone to America. Although I had travelled, lived and worked elsewhere during my formative years, migrating to Australia significantly changed the scope and parameters of my life. One might think that moving from one English speaking country to another would be an easy transition, particularly as Australia is connected to Britain as part of the colonised world. However, in my experience this is where the similarities begin and end.

1 Appendix i, after before white rabbits, Poems and Memories, Annemarie Murland Self-Published Book, 2009, 13
2 Appendix i, after before white rabbits, Poems and Memories, Annemarie Murland, Self-Published Book, 2009, 46
During my early years of migration language [sound and accent] played a significant role in my diaspora as it signified a sense of cultural difference. Syntax and accent reinforced a sense of isolation that, although common to the migrant story, had a definite negative affect on my sense of self.

The sound, the unfamiliar syntax choked the vernacular from her throat, who was this girl, a bride dressed in awkward clothing suitable but yet not so suitable?3
[Annemarie Murland 1991]

As a point of departure from the past and familiar this new beginning challenged an already established pattern of displacement that was lodged comfortably within the Glasgow experience. The reality of permanently relocating to the new world had an enormous affect on my identity and sense of place. My relationships with home and culture, space and place, became fractured and in some instances completely broken down.

My focus centred not beyond the periphery of self into the surrounding landscape but was embedded within my interiority. A self-absorbed internal dialogue that questioned my look and sound of voice plagued my every thought. Fragmented, my self-confidence was in tatters. A figure of modernity, the migrant traveller as I had imagined myself was now without movement and in a state of permanent interruption. Dislocated and external to this space, I was not as remarkable as I had once thought.

Melancholic, old world lyrics invade the senses orchestrating a tableau that fashions as other. “Off course” daily, she lies still in her silence and is reminded of their loss. Where is the greyish, green-eyed mother? Who yearns for her shadow light, whispering as she tallies. “Out damned spot.”4
[Annemarie Murland 1991]5

Caught in a place outside myself, the light was not always dark upon my face. My voice, appearance, auditory and visual symbols located me not as unusual but as individual. Through time, I have been able to embrace my sense of difference as a defining part of my identity. As I have grown, my reflection on the journey of migration has offered a realisation that although living here in this place it is acceptable to remain attached to another. Understanding oneself is made possible by measuring life experience with the documented experiences of others. In relation to the broader migrant story, the impact of how ‘difference’ separates people in a homogenised environment is established and described in chapter three.

3 Appendix I, after before white rabbits, Poems and Memories, Annemarie Murland, Self-Published Book, 2009, 44
4 “Out Damned spot” is a line I remember from William Shakespeare MacBeth. 22
5 Appendix I, after before white rabbits, Poems and Memories, Annemarie Murland, Self-Published Book, 2009, 41
Movement and Memory: a condition of migration

The migrant experience has played a significant role in the psyche of the McLafferty [maiden name] clan for as long as I can remember. Through stories and songs handed down from the old country, Ireland, a history and tradition of lives far travelled has been kept alive from generation to generation. Tales of melancholic movement invaded the culture of my young world forming the structure of an identity that was dislocated from my country of birth, Scotland. My cultural inheritance significantly shaped and reinforced an adopted sense of displacement as I was located neither here nor there and it is from this source of cultural confusion that my true story of migration begins.

From behind barriers we wave them off, America, some place new. A bigger part of nothing smaller than the incidental I was already a migrant taking tiny steps towards a journey that was yet untold… Looking forward, looking back, through time and space I move to the constant beat of ancestral pool [pull] never knowing always looking for the break in the road, the place in-between.6

[Annemarie Murland]

My earliest memory and experience of migration started on a dank grey day in Glasgow, circa 1966. Standing beside my mother, we waved goodbye to my grandmother and uncle, who were going to visit my aunt who had migrated to America years earlier. I was four at the time and remember clearly the feeling of departure and knew then that moving away would be part of my future. I recall having no fear only a firm realisation that upon my arrival a journey would take place. This “after memory”7 experience has followed me through my travels, providing clarity, purpose and acceptance [sometimes] of what seemed a pre ordained destiny.8

6 Appendix i, after before white rabbits, Poems and Memories, Annemarie Murland, Self-Published Book, 2009. 46
7 Marita Sturken, “Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory,” Afterimage 26.6, no. May-June 1999 (1999). 2 Although note a direct reference is made to the Holocaust the idea of after memory was derived from this reading.
8 Ibid. 2
Migration in Practice: an abstract perspective

Artists are not only among the most mobile members of a community, but they are often outriders of the transformations between the local and the global.⁹ [Nikos Papastergiadis]

An area of exploration in my art practice is visually ‘settling’ new space through a sensitive engagement with the materiality of paint. The rendering of sensory experience is developed within the spatial dimensions of the support. A new space and place is created, providing the painting with a deliberate conceptual environment. Exploring the aesthetics of space is described visually though an engagement between concept and materials that suspends traditional notions of landscape painting. Personal experience is renegotiated by rejecting the landscape as a form of identity towards abstraction, where unrecognisable signs and symbols describe a sense of self and an attachment to place. The painting titled Interstice 2007 [Figure 14] explores the idea of landscape through the coloured horizons that negotiate the picture.

Figure 14: Annemarie Murland, Interstice, 2007, Oil on canvas, 70x90x8cm.

⁹ Papastergiadis, The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity, 9
plane to create a sense of stability. An exploration of the hidden space beneath the surface is revealed through a series of marks that record personal history and the process of painting.

‘Putting down roots’ socially, intellectually and emotionally is a common metaphor used by those who travel from place to place. Creating a new sense of place is described through relationships and a sense of interconnectedness between self and the space we occupy. For many migrants, finding that place where one feels at ‘home’ is often negated to the space ‘in-between’ that is in direct opposition to all that was once familiar. Reconnecting to a space or culture, as discussed previously, requires a shifting of one’s mental focus. “Mapping ourselves in a foreign space”\(^{10}\) allows for an alternative way of looking at the landscape and our position in it. This is made possible pictorially by creating an aesthetic of ambiguity and tension within the picture plane. An embodied response, that signifies a temporal movement across cultural aesthetics, is reinforced through the use of a repetitious horizon line and colour to record and describe bodily sensations.

Preparing the ground for painting the way of the migrant is the first stage of the process of transforming a personal experience of movement and journey into pictorial aesthetics. The ground that I shall paint or draw over is meticulously prepared to create a surface that can withstand many layers of mark-making and medium that express a somatic experience of migration. A measure of how the paint will react is determined by the preparation and process of adding layers of gesso over rabbit-skin glue, affecting the surfaces material qualities with a sensory and tactile finish. Whether painting or drawing the ground functions as a major contributor to not only the aesthetic outcome of the work but directs the mark-making and brush strokes in a specific direction that assists in retelling the past as an abstract concept.

Physically juxtaposing and interposing disparate and oppositional colour fields suggests both displacement and belonging as composition. Conceptually, however, the elements of the compositional are intended to reveal in their composite energy a place where the past meets the present and where landscape and memory collide in space. Inside a landscape of abstraction and hidden beneath the painted surface is where my identity is formed. Residing in a place of self-recognition, the canvas connects narratives of place and identity within a cross-cultural, global engagement between space and place. The fusion of metaphor and process link my primary thematic concerns of weaving ‘relationships’ that encompass the role and significance of the activity of painting with the experience of migration.

Developing a New Methodology
Tartan Landscapes: drawing

In April 2008, I was involved in a group exhibition titled *The Wailing Wall*, Watt Space Galleries, Newcastle, which provided the conceptual framework for a new methodology to develop in my painting and drawing. My interpretation of the theme, ‘children in society’ was explored in relation to a specific interest in cultural landscapes and the relationships that develop therein. It was my intention to fuse current research within the paradigm of childhood memory. I explored the intimate relationship between mother and daughter that was located in the memory of my mother teaching me to knit. A series of rectangular woollen blanket forms that mimic landscape, through a random merging of wool, was the result of this investigation.

As a departure point, this series of knitted blankets provided the idea to explore new possibilities through the drawing and painting process. Through a commitment to material sensitivity the works on paper and new paintings are self-reflexive and a translation of concept into pictorial form. [Figure 15] The technique of embossing provided a relief of the blanket on paper that could be translated into drawing. Through a process of ‘reacting’ to the surface with pencil and other medium’s, I articulated a sensory feeling of ‘tactile’ space. The materiality of the
medium and washes of paint, in some of the works added to the sensitivity of the images surface quality.

The drawings in this series are highly textured, and through their tactile surface, mimic the coarseness of knitted woollen blankets. The surface is responsive and feels soft and tangible, connecting memory, space and material. The drawings function as an emotive connection to my home space, Scotland. Through an act of remembering, the mnemonics of place is reflected in the materials and colours employed to navigate and construct the picture plane. Woven lines of colour meander through the rugged terrain of the papers surface-texture where disparate mixes of warm and cool colours create an atmosphere reminiscent of Glasgow.

![Image of the work](image.png)

**Figure 16: Annemarie Murland, Agnes, 2008, Embossed print and pastel on arches paper, 30x100cm. [Detail]**

It was important to create an environment where that the transference of experience as materials engaged the viewer as a ‘felt’ and aesthetic experience. The materiality of one object imposes its identity upon the surface of another, echoing my experience of migration. The embossed work titled *Agnes* [Figure 16] reflected a minimalist aesthetic that was very feminine in its purity of form and its lack of colour reinforced a subliminal trace of memory.
The work on paper titled *After Memory* [Figure 17] comments on the fragility and fragmentation of memory and its translation into material sensitivity through a process of working over the surface to reveal and obscure detail, just as memory does in day-to-day life. What emerged was a specific process of mark-making that was motivated by the materiality of the embossing that left a trace and history upon the paper’s surface. From engaging in this particular process of responding to the surface quality of the paper produced drawings that engaged with the minimal qualities of both the material and its embossed surface to create a new spatial environment of woven grids.

*Figure 17:* Annemarie Murland, *After Memory*, 2009, Pencil and Conte on Arches Paper, 45x50cm. [Detail]

*Figure 18:* Annemarie Murland, *A Heavy Load*, 2009, Pencil, Pastel and Paint on Arches Paper, 80x120cm. [Detail]
The progressive works on paper had Japanese Kozo paper added to the surface to add more weight and another skin to the surface. [Figure 18] I wanted to reinforce the textural feel of the paper’s surface and by adding another layer, the form had the presence of a blanket. Through the application of fundamental compositional devices that were tied to the concept of material and memory, the drawings found their own identity. Aesthetically and formally the works on paper reflected a material sensitivity through the translation of process and methodology.

The process of knitting is recontextualised as painting by renegotiating the stripe into multiple grid-like horizons. The paintings that developed from this process explored identity and sense of place, not as traditional landscapes but as imagery independent of subject matter. Processed in sections, tangible surfaces were created that represented both the physical and sensory nature of experience and materials. As with the drawings, the paintings observed the material qualities of oil paint in their transformation.

**Tartan Landscapes: painting**

It was important to create an environment where process and concept are seen to merge, as it was from this juncture that the methodology for the tartan landscapes developed. Notions of weaving memories into materials provided the concept for these works, and as mentioned previously, learning to knit stimulated this response. I was probably five or six at the time and remember clearly the time spent trying to learn my mother’s craft. My mother, Agnes, could knit anything and did so with a grace and expertise that would be found in any traditional cultural craft. Knitting was how she defined her sense of self as could identify her self-worth with the quality of work she produced.

From painting stripes and horizons to reinterpreting embossed works on paper, a new methodology was developed that observed a basic knitting technique. A process of mark-making followed the grid of the embossed blankets and I was able to articulate the travelling of line through space. Heavily processed, the paintings ironically read as fragile in their delicate viscera that conceptually convey a contrast between texture and non-texture, interior and exterior, past and present landscapes.

In their aesthetic portrayal, these works interpret as mnemonic landscapes, but their portrait format sets up an opposition to this reading. Binary opposition is evident in their engagement
with the viewer, and as in Scully’s work, the audience is asked to question the content of these works beyond the obvious symbols and metaphors that belie their surface. The process of these works challenged me on a physical level as each layer had to be worked up in one sitting, taking many hours to create the desired surface texture. Each layer added another ‘row’ or dimension to the overall interpretation of the works aesthetic form. However, the process of replicating the idea of the blanket has been transformative. With each consecutive work, the painting and the way the paint goes on and comes off responded to the type of palette knife and stroke[s] that I employed, but also the size and scale of the support, whether on board or canvas, directed the work towards its own conclusion. Looking carefully at the surface of the paintings there is a sense of aerial mapping, which was not part of my original intention.

Figure 19: Annemarie Murland, Journeys Past and Present, 2008, Oil on canvas on board, 70x100x15cm.
The painting titled *Journeys Past and Present* [Figure 19] was the first painting to be resolved from recreating ‘knitting stitches’ into painted form. Observing the picture plane, there is ordered chaos in the surface layers of paint. Surface and texture transform the picture plane through a frenetic process of putting on and taking off paint over a long period. Compulsively the line is extended and directed in long horizontals until it is deconstructed into small and fractured lines that are reminiscent of the traditional grid format to form a new spatial environment. As an aesthetic object, the work’s surface flows between texture and non-texture. Colour and line merge to create a harmonious optical engagement, which conforms to the formal spatial arrangements that establish unity through variety.

In their continuum, the works articulate an evolving trinity between the materials, concept and artist through a commitment to process. Processed in sections, tangible surfaces were created that represented both the physical and sensory nature of the materials and as with the drawings, the paintings observed the material qualities of oil paint and how it reacts when highly processed.
A collision of concept and narrative is played out on the surface of the painting titled *Galway Shawl* [Figure 20]. Memory and childhood are revisited in this work, where in delicate detail, tartan colour fields reflect a landscape of lived experience and act’s of reverie. This painting was one of the first paintings from the new trajectory of work that references through its surface detail, ‘memory’. I recall my mother that while knitting or cleaning her way through the house would sing the traditional Irish song, *The Galway Shawl*. This memory stimulated a response to paint an expression of the tactile qualities of the songs title. I also, wanted to replicate an illusory affect of memory that, through paint would describe how the shawl would feel and what it would look like if it were real.
Navigating a Foreign Land

To know myself within Australian culture, and to create an autonomous sense of self, the accepted notion of Australian identity being historically positioned within the traditional genre of landscape painting is dismissed in favour of abstraction. The Australian landscape possesses an intrinsic energy that is difficult to verbalise or interpret through words or imagery. As such, the landscape of country is best described in terms of “emotional depth.”

The expanse of the Australian land mass invites a feeling of wide vision and a sense of isolation that, when expressed through painting, captures an essence, which expresses, in some way, my experience of life as a new Australian. The work titled *Heather* 2006 [Figure 21] is a personal reaction to the open space of desert that seemed to diminish upon sunset into a something quite different. In this painting an experience of place converges upon the canvas, creating a new environment where distance and time unite in the warm colour of desert and memory. In this space of composition, memories of Scottish summer nights, when the light in the sky is bright into late evening, merge with the experience of country. Transposing one space into another is an on going experience of migrancy that in my art practice translates

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Cataldi, Emotion, Depth and Flesh: A Study of Sensitive Space Reflections on Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Embodiment. 89
into horizon lines, where identity and belonging navigate and find form through the structure of the paintings composition.

Creating a sense of space that reflects notions of freedom and exploration are aspects of my practice that I view as particularly Australian. Articulating an authentic story that ties the relational threads is my approach when describing and rendering a sensory feeling of country. Exploring beneath the surface of experience is at the crux of my art practice. I like to work comprehensively, utilising all that is not paint before I approach my canvas.

Ritual and observation are intrinsically connected and part of my process before and during the act of painting. Stirring my obsession with paint, this landscape presents an active surface that touches beyond and beneath the senses, the here and now. Colour and line highlight an on-going journey that describes the interaction between the visual world of landscape and the mnemonic land of imagined landscapes. Painting in an abstract style parallels my experience of Australian life and society. Purity and the ease of self-expression, qualities that represent Australian sensibility, are also motifs of abstract expressionism. However, although ‘purity’ and the idea of the ‘absolute’ are common metaphors used to describe the spiritual and metaphysical reading of abstraction; this is not where I locate my art practice.12 My practice is located in concrete subject mater, which directs my process and methodology, and as such, I do not begin a painting from the perspective of the spiritual. However, notions of transcendence and accessing an ontological truth are part of my art practice and belief system.

Using palette knife and brush, the paint “evolves”13 and “dissolves”14 through an application of multiple layers of paint, which resonate an embodied experience of migration. Colour and line provide further evidence of ‘metaphor’ at play, creating an overwhelming aesthetic response to materials and experience of place that are in opposition. The negative emotions of loss and conformity respond to the quiet colours of the organic pastoral landscape of my journey into the western desert of New South Wales.

13 Morrison, “Interview Transcript.” 7
14 Ibid. 7
The painting titled *Black Irish* [Figure 22] is an illustration of converging landscapes and cultural diasporas. In this work I explore through broken horizontal lines, memory and a displaced sense of self within a new cultural system. Pictorially, I have played with the spatial arrangement of line through colour interplay that recedes and comes forward to renegotiate spatial borders. A conceptual journey between space and place, the centre and periphery are intrinsically tied to the fractured horizon, whose parameters weave beyond the edge of the support. Intention and meaning is reshaped through the juxtaposition of colour choices that converged into disparate and organic pigment that deliver a collision of concept and materials.

Landscape reflects back and tells us how human we are and how powerful we are because we have made them.15 [David Malouf]

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15 Papastergiadis, *Dialogues in the Diasporas: Essays and Conversations on Cultural Identity*. 78 Conversation and interview with Australian writer David Malouf.
From the perspective of a new Australian, a shared Anglo-Celtic cultural heritage presents an opportunity to explore the relationship between identity and landscape through a process of re-remembering. My presence in this land, Australia, has over time generated multiple conversations that centre on displacement, loss of identity and belonging. However, within the context of looking forward and looking back, a new framework of reference is cultivated through an engagement and experience of place. A trip to Broken Hill, April 2006, is the site of a direct experience of a ‘foreign’ place. As I shall illustrate, the journey created new narratives of identity that are located within the geography of the landscape.

Establishing more than a physical connection to the space, place and country that I now call home, I have often wondered if the sense of connectedness that has developed over time lies in the nature of the land or through its disrupted identity. To understand myself in this place I first had to understand the cultural mechanics of Australian society and its politics of identity. Historically, Australia has negotiated a sense of national identity from an Anglo-Celtic perspective that is the direct result of imperialism and colonisation. The British model has shaped Australian society and culture with its overwhelming and powerful self-reflexive relationship that ties identity and landscape with that of the mother country.

Australia from the beginning, and continues to be, a unique and exciting experiment. [David Malouf]

The landscape as subject of identity, as opposed to object, presents Australian culture with an authentic means of national identity. Jason Smith defines Australian culture in the book, No Compass? A Postscript to Fieldwork, as being tied intrinsically to its geographical location. Smith refers to the establishment of an art practice that describes a break from “traditional” and “national” aesthetics in favour of a more personal and individual vision of a global world.

Smith’s dialogue denotes a move from Imperialist identity politics to an independent and autonomous sense of self and country. Moving forward, by Australian artists into a global world market, is marked by the plethora of international works of art being exhibited by both

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20 Smith, “No Compass? A Postscript to Fieldwork.” 123
regional and national Galleries. Australian culture and contemporary art is no longer “fieldwork” but is confidently situated on the global map as serious practice.\textsuperscript{21}

**Fieldtrip**

There is ‘something’ about this place; it seeps into your being and you fail to recognise yourself in it. Ancient, nature occupies an emptiness that is hard to define, while feelings of isolation resonate in the magnitude and unspoilt beauty of this country. Touching my centre in a primitive way, I feel small and invisible once more.\textsuperscript{22} [Annemarie Murland]

It was my intention to navigate and explore the metaphor of ‘a journey’ between diverse locations with a view to developing the idea of ‘connectedness.’ This concept was made real by the experience of travelling between Newcastle, on the coast and the western desert landscape of New South Wales. My destination, Broken Hill was chosen for its shared cultural history with Newcastle. Both towns are traditionally identified as industrial mining towns, where the migrant worker played a significant role in the economic and cultural identity.

The connection between Newcastle and Broken Hill is found not only in their disparate locations, one on the edge of the ocean and the other on the edge of the desert, but also the contradictory fusion of spatial contrasts that exist in each space: ocean and desert, interior and exterior.\textsuperscript{23} Isolated, within the borders that contain them; the beauty of the ocean and the magnificence of the desert seem obtuse to the man made edifices that surround the landscapes they occupy. In Newcastle there are the remnants of the BHP, displaying a graveyard of machinery and memory that still vibrates with the ‘hard yakka’ that was the everyday experience of the migrant labourer. Similarly, Broken Hill’s iconic “Line of Lode”\textsuperscript{24} that engulfs the town’s perimeter, provides a sense of identity and history. Particularly, the ‘slurry’ [the leftover detritus from mining] impacts on the physicality of the landscape.

An eerie sense of stillness hovers above the townscape creating a stillness that is evidenced in new aesthetics. A memorial delivers homage to the dead and migrant workers in the form of a steel tunnel that sits regally upon the hillside reflecting an absent gaze but regal gaze.\textsuperscript{25} [Annemarie Murland]

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. 123
\textsuperscript{22} Appendix i, *after before white rabbits*, Poems and Memories, Annemarie Murland, Self-Published Book, 2009. 14
\textsuperscript{23} Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power.* 2
\textsuperscript{24} Christine Adams, *Sharing the Lode: The Broken Hill Migrant Story*, First ed. (Broken Hill: Broken Hill Migrant Heritage Committee Inc., 2004). Title Page
\textsuperscript{25} Appendix i, *after before white rabbits*, Poems and Memories, Annemarie Murland, Self-Published Book, 2009. 16
As the journey unfolds, I sit in the comfort of a camper van, monitoring and recording the flat and vast landscape that infringes on my sense of space. I watch the intrusive, fenced farmland appear and disappear as I venture further into the expanse of desert. The arid colour of land mnemonics as wet sand common to the coast, paradox and contradiction cover this place, as does the absence of water.

In this transit space, I am dislocated from the everyday life on the coast. The presence of the bush rushes by and directs my focus towards empty space where there is no sound and a feeling of disembodiment slides from within my core, I notice everything and nothing at all. Out of place and discordant, sand and soil are etched into memory and infiltrate my skin. The surface texture of the landscape’s ‘desert’ identity is affective in its visceral location; diversity is manifest in this spatial wilderness. My gaze is at odds with the wideness of this space that crashes physically into my interior and I wonder who I am.

Firing up a long held fascination with travelling, the journey through farmland, scrub and bush places me directly onto the land. I survey and observe the landscape from the perspective of being in it, as opposed to just looking at it. Negotiating a strange sort of intimacy between the environment and myself, everything collides in sensory overload. Mnemonics come into play and I am dislocated; catapulted back in time and space to the wetness of snow that burns the tips of toes like sun on sand, and once more I am in two places at once.

I am ill at ease and confronted by the freedom, light and space that surround the constant movement of van over tarmac. Traversing over and through the land, soil and the roots of natural habitat, I am disrupted and think about the absurdity and impossibility of ownership, as a Coles truck passes by in the hot spring dust.26 Embracing this natural space, I allow my thoughts to run far and wide and I am at once here in this space and simultaneously in the mnemonic space of Scotland.

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26 Carter, *The Lie of the Land*. 2
The work titled *The Sound of Barley Calling* 2009 [Figure 23] traces memory and experience of place through repetitious marks. Memories of open desert space weave through the picture plane, which is congested with colour and broken line that create a space of comfort and silent reverie. This work, like most of my work, references the converging landscape of Scotland and Australia. The experience of place as mentioned previously is ‘felt’, delivering a sense of ‘emotional’ engagement.

*Figure 23:* Annemarie Murland, *The Sound of Barley Calling*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 100x140x15cm.
I recall the grey sky of Glasgow and compare the richness of the soil and verdant colours of this place, which reach a deep shade of desert rust and I wonder where is home? I feel the presence of the desert space as it interrupts my reverie and I oscillate between the past and present. The stimulus of nature in motion makes me think of my studio and I try to emulate the colours that I see in response to my palette. My painter’s eye gathers the variety of colours that merge and fuse nature with memories of past landscapes and I remember my first encounter of desert landscape that remains embodied in my psyche. Paynes grey colours as a wash over a cobalt sky to resonate the late afternoon sun from my position of looking out.

In response to the experience of the desert landscape, the work titled *Beneath a Hidden Shadow* [Figure 24] expresses a disparate engagement with unfamiliar space. From a position of having no ancestral or cultural connection to this space, I was at odds with the environment. In rendering a response to the experience of place, I adjusted my view to a position of looking down into the ground and not out towards the centre. The surface of this work is deceptively

![Figure 24: Annemarie Murland, Beneath a Hidden Shadow, 2007, Oil on canvas on board, 60x80x15cm.](image)
muted, leaving only a trace of what is beneath. The subtle mark-making that hovers below the surface translate a sense of atmosphere that floats between real space and mindscape, and once again I find myself in two places.

Heading further west, large bales of processed cotton rise from the landscape; tightly bound and organised, they stand staunch in their engagement with the space they occupy. The bales function as an installation and in their dotting of the landscape they appear stuck in the white plastic sheeting and brattice that forms a protective coat or skin. Their structure imposes an iconic image of home space, a place of safety and identity. Tightly secured from the elements and wrapped in manufactured brattice, one is reminded of the security of home and family. This journey is a reminder of the cultural opposition that exists between the desert landscape and myself; I feel it but I am not of it. I challenge myself to weld this experience of country with the threads already woven in my relationship and experience of place towards new possibilities in practice.

It is my experience that although both landscapes [ocean and desert] share a common schema, the intensity of feeling in response to each space is quite different. Being familiar with the coast, I found that where there is less evidence of civilisation there is more experience of place and the suspension of outside interference. A sensitivity to open space produces feelings of freedom that leave one feeling light in body and mind. This uninhibited desert space awakes the senses and I experience a connection between the sight and sound of this space with my interior landscape of the memory. The emptiness of my viscera is filled by this landscape experience and there is space within my head to consider where I am from in relation to where I am now.

Embracing a wider dialogue, interchangeable ties to both here and there absorb and shift my sense of place; seduced by the aesthetics of the space; duplicity is everywhere in this landscape. Nature in opposition to itself works in perfect order struggling to maintain balance and symmetry. This experience of land, when juxtaposed with an inner personal exploring of self, brings one closer to the centre. Vast, wide open, abundant space does not leave one feeling lonely or displaced as does living on the highly populated urban edge of civilisation.

As part of my daily life memories are a constantly interrupted and complicate my sense of identity; with one foot in the past and the other in the present, a fractured sense of self exists. A sense of emptiness completes the disruption that in some way has been the desert
experience. The ‘unfamiliar landscape’ of both self and country delivers an empiric truth that goes beyond the need to understand belonging to a place. A sense of belonging is timeless when one’s expectations are released into the void that is landscape.

The influence of man in the desert is not absent, but seems oddly defeated. The empty interior of the desert is resolute in its power, beauty and isolation. I recognise the emptiness of the space but do not feel abandoned or lonely in it, there is, however, an energy that provides a sense of comfort and strength. I consider these observations of self and country and contemplate how this relationship can be rendered in the medium of paint. An ontological truth is rendered in response to the changing landscape, and as abstract leitmotifs, identity and place become the surface and texture of the picture plane.
Chapter Three
Migration: a contemporary global phenomenon

Migration, in its endless motion, surrounds and pervades almost all aspects of contemporary society. As has often been noted, the modern world is in a state of flux and turbulence.¹ [Nikos Papastergiadis]

In a state of transformation, contemporary culture is transformed by not only the movement of people but by the unprecedented access to new and fast knowledge through the Internet. Mass communication provides a sense of connectedness between the outside world, regional towns and villages, constituting a “site” of new internationalism.² As a result, diverse and often opposing groups merge and interact leading to a shift in the cultural landscape. A transformed cultural “hybrid” emerges from the effects of globalisation, providing not only social commentary but content for the recontextualising and production of art.³

I shall focus on the multiple horizons that are part of the migrant experience to discuss the relevance and importance of migration as a global cultural signifier and contemporary art issue. Supporting this dialogue are the seminal writings of Nikos Papastergiadis, Iain Chambers and Julia Kristeva, who convey the significant and important role of the migrant and the impact of movement between places within a contemporary art and cultural context. Homi Bhabha and Edward Said are acknowledge as experts in the field of social theory and art history and are quoted in conjunction with this discourse.

An overview of migration as a global concern is discussed in relation to its affect on culture and identity. The migrant in contemporary culture is examined in relation to mass trans-global migration, as it is perceived today. Movement between people and place has transformed traditional cultures and conventional spatial relationships. Upsetting the balance of power, the contemporary migrant moves in and beyond national boundaries, disrupting identity and what it means to belong to a specific place.⁴ The evolving social structures, narratives of difference, identity, displacement and loss inform not only personal and itinerant histories, but assist in the reshaping and understanding of local culture and place.⁵

¹ Papastergiadis, The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity. 1
² Townsend, New Art from London. 11
⁴ Ibid. 19-20
⁵ Chambers, Migrancy Culture Identity. 23
Identifying the Migrant in Contemporary Culture

Modernity, nationally and locally, traditionally located cultural identity within the context of belonging to a specific place in relation to Western culture. According to Nikos Papastergiadis “an allegiance to a nation-state” provided heterogenous groups with a sense of place, belonging and identity. Given this frame of reference, Nationalism, albeit from a position of diversity and difference, provided the agency for representation and identity to take shape. However, defining the migrant in contemporary society is not as clearly demarked, as established methods of mapping the movement of people through space and place have become outdated. Borders and continents have crossed creating a diverse populace who belong to many places. Papastergiadis highlights that being local are no longer a right of passage as people and countries merge creating multiple identities that are never static and are in a constant state of transition. As a point of connection, the adaptation of a micro – macro analogy succinctly parallels ‘felt’ experience with that of the wider world. It is important at this juncture, therefore, to recognise the similarities between individual and universal experiences of migration that centre on the premise of new horizons.

Today, the cultural climate of the colonial past collides with the shape shifting presence of the migrant whose sense of identity is collectively indeterminate and open to interpretation. The contemporary migrant signifies not only the ubiquitous skilled worker, who roams the globe contracting to non-western nations, but is also the displaced, homeless, political and economic refugee who alters the geo-political landscapes of the Western and non Western world. Recognising cultural difference as an experience of migration, confronts the ‘host’ society, its traditions and sense of identity, with the unknown permeating relationships based on suspicion and fear. The changing topography of contemporary society makes it difficult to define a sense of belonging or what cultural identity really means, particularly in a post-colonial environment where identity and landscape present as a fusion of Others.

Iain Chambers, author of Migrancy, Culture, Identity, describes the migrant as a modern protagonist who confronts and disrupts the status quo bringing new and appropriated “style” to the dominant culture. Challenging the “order” of things, the migrant, being “uprooted”,

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6 Papastergiadis, The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity. 2
7 Ibid. 39
8 Ibid. 14, 39
9 Ibid. 40
10 Ibid. 49
11 Chambers, Migrancy Culture Identity. 23
rejects established forms of recognition.\textsuperscript{12} As a result one’s gaze is directed out towards the periphery of self in the direction of others, searching for a familiar face that will place one as ‘local’.

In a hunt for recognition, belief systems and notions of ownership become disrupted creating an impasse that centres on loss of identity and resembles or approaches feelings of exile.\textsuperscript{14} Reinforcing a personal perspective is a condition of my practice, the migrant [me] adjusts the landscape as they go, revealing a fractured sense of self that is evidenced by feelings of difference and displacement. Confronted by the harsh reality of grieving for a self that no longer exists, or at the very best is exiled, the migrant experience confronts one internally and externally, locally and nationally in a compelling sensory engagement between self, place and culture. To go back is never or seldom an option for the migrant and so the best possible outcome is a renewed sense of place and identity that establishes a connection to the community and culture of choice. In this adaptation of Ian Chambers dialectic of alienation, there is a definitive and shared narrative of difference that unites migrants from all-over.

Given the dilemma of displacement, the migrant’s notable differences are localised and in turn are reflected back towards the centre and or dominant culture. As such, ‘our’ gaze is redirected away from established colonial points of view, to a place where the migrant is not a victim of cultural diaspora, but re-claims it [diaspora] as a sign of identity. Thus, the migrant is positioned, or one might say reinvented as a post-modern symbol, that despite cultural opposition, is elevated and clearly identified as a person of importance, creating the possibility of a new social order.\textsuperscript{15}

The migrant experience alters the dynamics of the status quo within society, the rearticulating of personal experience between disparate groups provides a platform where collectively and individually a sense of engagement is recognised and recorded.\textsuperscript{16} Through sharing narratives of difference one becomes part of the history of place, emphasising the cultural importance of the role of the individual within social structures.\textsuperscript{17} This being the case, the migrant reflects universal problems that centre on place, identity and belonging. These motifs, although

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. 23, 24
\textsuperscript{14} Chambers, Migrancy Culture Identity. 23, 25
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. 27
\textsuperscript{17} Chambers, Migrancy Culture Identity. 23
endemic to migrants throughout the world, afford culture with new possibilities and scope for reinvention or for simply developing a sense of compassion towards others.

In her book *Strangers to Ourselves* Julia Kristeva references language as a primary source and defining point of difference in the life of the migrant or ‘foreigner’. Unlike my personal narrative, Kristeva makes no effort to include the intimate and sensory experience of the individual in her exploration of the migrant, but renders the individual absent and without description, he/she has no identity. Presenting the migrant as decentralised, Kristeva provides society with a snapshot of cultural bias through the absence of the individual in contemporary culture. This snapshot reinforces the existence of prejudice in society, where the everyday use of language acts as a determining source of difference and separation as a universal and cultural condition.

A narrative of shared experience is explored through Kristeva’s decentering of the individual, which parallels my interest in the idea and role of the individual. Although, Kristeva negates the autonomy of individual experience in favour of a universal dialogue, it is by examining the common denominator of language that a nexus and platform for discussion exists. By way of shared experience, Kristeva incorporates the migrant story into a socially wider dialogue, and in doing so becomes part of a collective narrative that exists solely through the individual.

Separation from the landscape is physically and culturally a universal condition of migrant people throughout the world. The Cuban artist Baruj Salinas discusses the use of language as a tool to navigate the landscape. Salinas intimates that to reject the language of one’s adopted land is to dismiss the wider world and that in doing so one is immediately exclusive and separate. The irony of this position, and it is one that I have deliberated when reassessing my journey, is that to establish a point of order or connection to a new world, one must embrace ‘exclusiveness’ and sense of difference to feel alive and moreover, to recognise oneself.

Exposing the flaws inherent to contemporary culture the migrant experience highlights a structure that is embodied in a religion of ethics and moral codes, which are based on a homogenised value system of judgement. Kristeva exposes the similarities that, although embodied in the

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18 Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*. Title of Book
19 Ibid. 3
20 Ibid. 3
21 In the book: *Identity, Memory and Diaspora: Voices of Cuban-American Artists, Writers and Philosophers*. Baruj Salinas refers to language and landscape – page 15
23 Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*. 3
personal, are in effect common to the wider experience of migration. The individual migrant becomes the ‘face’ of a value system that operates in a global and contemporary culture. This reflection on the migrant creates an opportunity to renegotiate the social and cultural landscape that surrounds a mobile contemporary culture, but also provides a platform to understand ‘cultural confusion’ as personal experience and a diaspora.

The side effects of migration: displacement, loss [identity and home] and exile play a significant role in the lives of migrant people who, for whatever reason, decide to live elsewhere. As mentioned previously, the migrant/foreigner shares narratives of difference, whether through visible or auditory signs that locate them as ‘other’. Treated differently, the migrant is extraordinary in his/her outlook. Representing a world-view, the new age migrant personifies within contemporary culture all that is contemporary, reaffirming a shift in a balance of power between traditional and static cultural perspectives and that of the movement of people through place.24

From a position of transience, therefore, the migrant who previously was courted as ‘other’ is today a symbol of the time. This being the case, the migrant experience acts as witness to a complete turn around of not only cultural practice but a change in attitude towards people on the move.

As a “metaphor for journey”25, movement characterises the everyday life experience of not only the migrant but also the temporary migrant [artist/worker] who is local for only a short time.26 The contemporary artist explores ‘locality’ as a characteristic of a globalised culture, where diasporas are a fundamental experience of migration or movement. The international artist, [self] mediates loss through visual prompts to explore the dynamics of cultural shifts, as explored in the texts of Kristeva and Papastergiadis. Language has been shown as a signifier of displacement and multifarious identities, as recorded in the ordinary and everyday signs and symbols that surround the mediated environment of the migrant. In its translation, language takes on the form of the cultural commentary and is discussed visually by artists who travel beyond personal geographies that adapt cultural materialism towards a new aesthetic in art practice.

24 Chambers, Migrancy Culture Identity, 27
25 Papastergiadis, The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity. 9
26 Ibid. 9
Contemporary Art as Cultural Currency

In towns and cities across the globe, streetscapes are alive with a new sound of international argot and parlance, espoused in the form of migrant workers, travellers, artists or new citizens. Community and culture are injected with new and multiple identities that, whether welcome or not, reflect the transient, shape shifting of the ‘new’ global citizen. Globalisation provides the stage or site of reference that supplies the artist with raw materials to produce a ‘new type of art’ that charts the journey of the city and its fluid but complex culture.\(^{27}\)

Contemporary art as a mechanism for exposing the contradictions and ‘reality’ of a world where parameters and boundaries cross through globalisation, is referenced in the writing of Niru Ratman, *Art and Globalisation*, ‘Documenta 11’, Kassel 2002. Representation and the translation of contemporary society and the globalisation of culture into visual culture is the job of the contemporary artist. Pulsating to the disorder of mass cultural interchange is problematic for not only the general public, but also for the artist who lives and works outside their country of origin.\(^{28}\)

Movement as a metaphor of contemporary art’s embodiment of cultural shifts plays host to established dictums and traditions that, through process, give new meaning to art and the artist’s role in society. The meaning and intent of the art object is recontextualised to explore and expand on the mass cultural differences that are standard in a global community. Production and process reflect the material qualities of the medium while commenting on the site of engagement. Thus, making art translates as a type of embodied experience, which germinates the environment and local culture with life narratives that are reflective of a broader community.

In contemporary culture the translation of narrative based subject matter invites a postmodern interpretation that explores and finds form in the characteristics of the mediums material qualities.\(^{29}\) As subjectivities collide in the contemporary and global art market, artists reside in one place and belong to another. Bringing with them an experience of a unique cultural landscape, that when reshaped or redefined creates a new form of artist as explorer. Notions of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* emerge as the contemporary artist brings to life new

\(^{27}\) Townsend, *New Art from London*. 10
\(^{28}\) Ibid. 8,9
perspectives of embodied cultural experiences that are no longer entrenched in Western thought or civilisation.

A hybrid culture is a result of temporal and spatial convergence between the migrant, space and place. As people relocate, multiple points of view merge in a fusion of multicultural and post-colonial landscapes. New centres of diversity appear that replace the local and disrupt the ‘historicism’ of the ‘host’ landscape. Contemporary society presents the artist as citizen with new ‘cloth’ from which to produce and make art. Mapping the everyday, the contemporary artist is a multifarious character, as are the materials and sites of representation.

30 Ibid. 282
Chapter Four

Migration in Contemporary Art Practice

The idea of ‘migration in practice’ is examined through a critique of the work of contemporary installation artist, Abraham Cruzvillegas [1968-], who was born in Mexico but transports his practice around the world to investigate practice in relation to place. Cruzvillegas’s work is discussed in terms of his ‘Glasgow’ experience. A comparative dialogue and experience of migration is presented through Cuban artists Humberto Caldaza and Jorge J. E. Gracia, who have ‘different’ perspectives on the experience of migration in relation to identity and practice. A point in common with the Cuban artists, interviewed in the book *Identity, Memory and Diaspora: Voices of Cuban American Artists, Writers and Philosophers* is the migrant artist’s overwhelming “need to express experiences through objects”.1 Relocating personal and transient histories via the art object does not isolate the migrant/artist further, but bridges the void between often-disparate cultures.

The formation of an exclusive reality is formed through the adaptation of personal experience via the art object that engages and challenges established cultural parameters. In doing so, the migrant artist recreates a sense of place that when realised as an art object has multiple readings. Through constructing and deconstructing identities, the artist/migrant establishes and recreates a site-specific aesthetic environment that is simultaneously local and international.2 Migration as subject or concept provides the migrant artist with complex personal and cultural problems to solve that, when realised, visually create an interstice between the ‘experience’ and its translation of the medium’s material properties.

Interviews with migrant artist Tommaso Durante and Dr Anne Morrison explore the subject of migration in practice, providing an alternate dialogue that illustrates the migrant experience. Their practice examines art, art history and the role of culture in contemporary art, which adds to the diversity of the research.

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1 Gracia, Bosch, and Borland, eds., *Identity, Memory, and Diaspora: Voices of Cuban-American Artists, Writers and Philosophers*. 2
2 Ibid. 252
Abraham Cruzvilleges: Representing the ‘Contemporary’ in Art

Mexican born artist, Abraham Cruzvilleges is one of many emerging international artists who live, work and exhibit outside their country of origin, illustrating a ‘global’ trend in the representation of visual culture in the twenty-first century. The ‘temporary’ is a metaphoric feature in Cruzvilleges’s work that applies to not only the location of his practice, but is a characteristic of the many materials he uses in response to repositioning his sense of place. His work translates easily into the host landscapes, negotiating cultural exchange on one hand and the interplay between site and materiality on the other. Paradox and contradiction are narratives that translate and interpret Cruzvilleges’s aesthetic, creating a heterogeneous contemporary discourse. Abraham Cruzvilleges was brought up in the overspill that surrounds Mexico City, in an area known as Ajusco. As a transient environment of new ‘settlers’, the makeshift landscape of Cruzvilleges’s youth evolved through a collaborative process of community interaction. His formative experiences of putting down ‘roots’ and place building not only shaped his sense of identity but put in place “a model for living”. The home is at the centre of Cruzvilleges’s conceptual frame of reference, providing an intimate dialogue that translates into the imagined landscapes of elsewhere.

A Duchampain advocate, Cruzvilleges employs the found object as part of a complex practice that crosses over the disciplines of social sculpture, performance, and writing, all of which feature in his work. The movement between diverse and disparate landscapes, offer site for his specific aesthetic and performative explorations, are also key characteristics of his practice. His practice is determined by a fusion of process and materials that challenges modernism’s reliance on form and space as a precursor for meaning and understanding.

3 Abraham Cruzvilleges lives and work in Europe and in 2008 participated in a residency in Glasgow, reference to this is made further in the chapter.
5 Ibid. 102
It is from the conjuncture of living and belonging to a fragmented world that Cruzvillegas’s work caught my attention. Working in and beyond his native cultural background, Cruzvillegas’s practice bridges the social and political gaps prevalent in Western culture, creating an accessibility of engagement that is often amiss in our experience with works of art. Breaking down, or at best confronting the formalist hierarchy of art history, he directs our experience beyond the notion of the “masterpiece” in the direction of the everyday as ground for representation and interpretation.

During a joint residency in Glasgow and Cove Park, Scotland in 2008, Abraham Cruzvillegas continued to construct and explore notions of identity through the collaborative process of engagement between artist and site of reference. Working with the local community, Cruzvillegas’s self-reflexive art practice found form in the translation and exchange of personal and culture experience. Glasgow and Glaswegians in what has been described as a ‘hard’ city thrive from the position of outsider and it is from this position that Glasgow is at its most hospitable, especially towards the visitor. Offering a culture and personality to match, Glasgow is full of contradictions, many of which are evidenced in the visual culture and diverse social groups that were part of my formative experience. Social, political and sectarian problems are part of the city’s history, but it is these very characteristics that provide the city with a resolute sense of identity.

In Glasgow, everybody knows who they are, identity and politics provide a wealth of parody and cultural satire for the many emblematic Billy Connolly’s who live there. The Glasgow that I have just described would have had a primary affect on Abraham Cruzvillegas and would have infected his practice and the production of works of art with a great sense of the city’s unique culture and identity.

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10 Billy Connolly is an internationally iconic Glasgow Comedian.
A solo exhibition, at the Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, titled *Autoconstruccn*, ["self-building"]\(^{11}\) September 26 - 8 October 2008, CCA, was the result of Cruzvillegas’s residency. A combination of sculptural installation, performance and procession through the cityscape playing music from a handmade mobile ‘Calderesque’ bike was one part. [Figure 25] While poems written from childhood memories that were given to Scottish musicians to interpret and produce, in the format of a CD, completed his residency.

Looking back on the Glasgow trajectory, Cruzvillegas develops a dialogue between the visual and real environment of the city that dances to the tune of olfactory smell sounds, documenting a meshing of hybrid and complex strategies. The works of art that emerged from this exchange, and the artist’s engagement with the everyday vibe of Glasgow, reflected a repositioning of his aesthetic that embraced the cultural essence of the city and its citizens. Abraham Cruzvillegas sums up perfectly the local, as he reveals the multiple subjectivities that make up identity, culture and place.

\(^{11}\) Vincent, “Abraham Cruzvillegas.” 27
As part of a wider narrative, however, the art of Cruzvillegas crosses many ‘border-isms’. He appropriates Duchamp’s\textsuperscript{12} concept of the readymade, as well as Joseph Beuys’\textsuperscript{13} legacy of art as a social performance and engagement that offered a repositioning of modern discourse and critique.\textsuperscript{14} Recently, however, the concept of Relational Aesthetics in contemporary art, pioneered by Nicolas Bourriaud has become important. A critique on Modernism’s value system and cultural commodification, Relational Aesthetics reflects that art as both subject and object is no longer just a formal representation of an idea.\textsuperscript{15} Rather, relational art is more about the direct ‘experience’, participation and development of relationships that reconsider art’s function and value in contemporary society.\textsuperscript{16} Placing Cruzvillegas, ‘social sculpture’\textsuperscript{17} in the same category of Relational Aesthetics, is perhaps too convenient and out of place with the current trend of artists, who take up residence elsewhere and make ‘local’ their art practice. Cruzvillegas’s art goes beyond the ‘staging’\textsuperscript{18} of representation as an event, but illustrates the new modern in contemporary art. Movement between space and place reflects a localisation of the art object, while his process and methodology offer a critique of the host environment’s sense of identity which localises the artist into the culture of place.

\textsuperscript{12} Flood, Laura Hoptman, and Trevor Smith, \textit{Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century}. 50
\textsuperscript{13} Widholm, \textit{Escultura Social: A New Generation of Art from Mexico City, Exhibition Catalogue: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, June 23 - September 2, 2007}. 14
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. 14
\textsuperscript{17} Widholm, \textit{Escultura Social: A New Generation of Art from Mexico City, Exhibition Catalogue: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, June 23 - September 2, 2007}. 14
\textsuperscript{18} Lutticken, “In Hell Frozen Over.” 300
As a catalyst for mass migration, the Cuban Revolution, circa 1960, resulted in many artists leaving their homeland for a new life in the United States of America, Humberto Caldaza [1944-] was one of them. Calzada, a Cuban artist living in Miami, chose to leave his native country and settle in Miami, circa 1960. He is resolute in his sense of identity as primarily Cuban. Calzada states:

I can function in the American world perfectly. I've never felt like losing my identity or anything like that.19 [Humberto Caldaza]

The need to explore identity and sense of place is a common theme in the migrant experience. Humberto Calzada reconstructs thematic in his work where a narrative of place is examined through the tradition of Latin American painting. Personal experience and recreating an environment that function as a bridge between past and present landscapes is a key factor in his practice. Reconstructing a sense of place is embodied in his compositions that reflect a

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19 Gracia, Bosch, and Borland, eds., Identity, Memory, and Diaspora: Voices of Cuban-American Artists, Writers and Philosophers. 23
sense of nostalgia. Memories of a past life are overstated through the architectural motifs that are part of his visual dialogue. Elements of composition: colour, light and scale emphasise the contradictory location between the real world and that of the picture plane, inviting the viewer to participate in his journey.20 [Figure 26]

Some migrants never wish to assimilate into the immediate culture or to be classified as exclusive, that is, a migrant artist.21 Calzada, in retrospect, represented the ‘new age’ migrant. Comfortable in his sense of self, he recognised that the world was a global and transportable place. As such, identity and displacement became something ‘other’ than a disruptive or a personal tragedy, as was the case with the early settlers to the new world. The retaining of a Cuban style of life and identity was expressed through his art practice, which describes the architecture of space in relation to landscape, presenting pictorially a mindscape of his homeland. The history of his native country is described visually in the buildings of his painted compositions that reinforce his sense of self and place as being primarily Cuban.22

At eighteen years of age, Jorge. J. E. Gracia [1942-] arrived in America from Cuba in 1961. Leaving his family behind and knowing very little English he arrived in the U.S with the allowed amount of five dollars in his pocket.23 Embracing all that the new world had to offer, Gracia embarked on an academic career. This investment in the secular world of academia has taken him beyond the periphery into the centre of American culture. A self-confessed “pan-American”24, Gracia, has experienced life from multiple perspectives. Known and respected internationally as a philosopher, writer, historian and medievalist, he currently resides and lectures at the University of Buffalo, New York State. When culture and tradition are broken or disrupted, people and place are in a state of transition, in fact, their whole identity is transformed. Identity is no longer perceived as natural, exclusive or fixed. It is always formed in relation to others.25 [Nikos Papastergiadis]

From this alteration, new horizons appear that reshape our vision, creating a sense of identity that is achieved through a process of “splitting”26 all that is known and recognisable into

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21 Gracia, Bosch, and Borland, eds., Identity, Memory, and Diaspora: Voices of Cuban-American Artists, Writers and Philosophers. 22
22 Ibid. 20
23 Ibid. 223
24 Ibid. 226
25 Papastergiadis, Dialogues in the Diasporas: Essays and Conversations on Cultural Identity. 30
26 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, First ed. (London: Routledge, 1994). 44
something that is ‘other’. Jorge. J.E. Gracia, has negotiated identity and culture throughout his life as a migrant. Recreating his own reality in a culture that offered a hybrid Cuban sense of identity in the shape shifting location of Miami, Gracia chose to reinvent himself through an adaptation of the host culture.

I had not a great deal of interest in anything that had to do with Latin America.\(^{28}\) [Jorge. J.E. Gracia]

Gracia, immediately locates himself outside of his native culture, suggesting that in the new world of America there is, perhaps, an ambivalence towards what could be considered a “constructed” off shore sense of Cuban identity.\(^{29}\) Confronting the ‘hybrid’ culture, Gracia, rejects this reinvented form of ‘Cuban-ness’, suggesting that his is an identity of choice.\(^{30}\) From this negation of the collective, Gracia locates the Cuban migrant outside of political paradigms of ‘identity politics’ creating a dialogue that resonates the emergence of a fusion between the ideals of “solidarity” and “difference”\(^{31}\). Garcia like Calzada, knows himself as authentic, and, as a result, identity becomes transportable unlike place that remains fixed. However, as identity is tied to a knowing and understanding of place, it is easy to understand why many migrants create multiple personalities and identities.

In contrast to Humberto Calzada, Gracia engaged in the American culture to recreate an alternative sense of identity that embraced his native Cuban culture, whereas Caldaza remained resolutely Cuban. It is interesting how location has played a significant role in each artists sense of diaspora: Caldaza has maintained his sense of Cuban identity by relocating to Miami, a satellite community of Cuba whereas Gracia has moved around and has perhaps developed a wider sense of self. Although, both men have engaged in their experience of migration from separate polarities, and in direct opposition to each other, both have a strong and self-determined sense of self in spite of their exile from their native ‘home space’ Cuba.

27 Papastergiadis, Dialogues in the Diasporas: Essays and Conversations on Cultural Identity, 30
28 Gracia, Bosch, and Borland, eds., Identity, Memory, and Diaspora: Voices of Cuban-American Artists, Writers and Philosophers, 226
29 Papastergiadis, Dialogues in the Diasporas: Essays and Conversations on Cultural Identity, 31
30 Ibid.30
31 Ibid.32
“A Trio of Trespassers”\(^\text{32}\)

A line from Walt Disney’s *The Lion King*, ‘a trio of trespassers’ is my way of defining the conversation with artists Tommaso Durante and Anne Morrison who were interviewed for this research. On location in Melbourne and Launceston respectively, I had the opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas with both artists on their art practice, experience of migration and notions of place. Each artist brought with them an individual history and extensive knowledge of art that had traversed through many continents and international borders, providing an alternative perspective on practice in process. A discussion on the role of art and the artist in contemporary culture, and the use of public and virtual space as a forum for art presented a broad scope of material knowledge that has extended the scope of my work.

As new Australians, we three artists share the physical experience and conceptual sentiments of the idea of ‘journey’. A metaphor explored in our practice, the notion of movement has taken each of us into new horizons, geographically, artistically, intellectually and personally. It is from the juncture of a wider vision that I would like to share an interpretation of the conversations that emerged between each artist and myself. I have recontextualised some of the dialogue and have quoted each artist with their consent in the shaping of this discussion. I shall endeavour to weave together an authentic representation and articulation of the material content that took place on each occasion.

My art practice reflects and records the experience of migration within a contemporary and global setting. The motifs of past and present, interior and exterior are the conceptual parameters that frame my work, thoughts and ideas. I have found the same narratives in the work of Anne Morrison and Tommaso Durante, which characterise a shared experience, albeit through a definitively separate sense of aesthetics. Located in the migrant experience, a shared visual disparity between the three of us presents a dialectic of ‘hybridity’ to emerge through a pathway of embodied experience that focused on space, place and the art object.

\(^{32}\) A line from the animated film *The Lion King*, Walt Disney Productions, 1994.
Tommaso Durante

My first interview was in Melbourne with Tommaso Durante, [Interview transcript appears in appendix iii a.] where I was also introduced to his wife Mariella at Warrandyte. Durante and Mariella bring a personal history that is rich in Italian history and culture to contemporary Australian society. Both academics, in the field of art and literature respectively, provide unique and individual perspectives on life as a new Australians. Their story, and specifically Durante’s responses to my questions, has added to my understanding of the significance of the ‘migrant story’ in a global world environment. My conversation with Tommaso Durante was an experience that in many ways overwhelmed the senses. ‘A real character’, as Glaswegians would say, his wealth of knowledge on many subjects has added to the breadth and scope of this research.

Durante is a passionate Italian who takes art, life and the impact of contemporary culture extremely seriously. He is disrupted by the lack of critical debate in contemporary society, particularly in relation to a “homogenised national culture”33 that in Durante’s opinion is awaiting a “severe re-definition”.34 Durante’s art practice constructs and deconstructs a process of cross-cultural engagements between space and place that articulate difference in a contemporary and technology driven setting.

At the centre of Durante’s practice there is a global conversation taking place that questions culture and identity, place and memory, all of which are digested and translated into an aesthetic concept that embraces new media and digital technology.35 Durante is a professional artist, historian and writer. His is a transitory and multi-national practice that translates into the cultural geography of landscapes near and far, real and virtual. Known for his widely collected artist’s books, Durante’s art practice is set in a continuum of evolution, driven by the massing of new and traditional media that translate into new and ‘hybrid’ art forms.36

Durante’s art production is multifarious, inhabiting many genres that are intrinsically linked to contemporary cultural and universal art issues such as, “the autonomy of art in a multicultural context.”37 Durante is also known, particularly in Asia, for his public art projects that reference

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34 Ibid. 2
35 Tommaso Durante, “The Silk Road Project, Part 11: Cross-Cultural and Multidisciplinary Public Art Research Project” (Master, RMIT, 2008). 1
36 Durante, “Transcript of Interview.” 2
37 Ibid. 2
a transformation of conceptual narratives of place into a new dialectic that focuses on the sublime and philosophical engagement between art and culture.  

Beyond the language of abstraction, where purity and the absolute are common metaphors for the spiritual in modern art, Durante talks of colour in his early practice in relation to time, space and its aesthetic role. He talks of his twenty year ‘fascination’ with the colour black, which traces not only Durante’s Italian culture and history but creates a framework where the artist and his oeuvre can be observed from a particular setting. Durante’s fixation with black circa 1970 perhaps had its origins in the Arte Provera movement where materials and culture reflected the bleakness of the time. Durante’s practice at this time referenced a “sort of personal, nihilistic-philosophical framework”, allowing an internal perspective to emerge. The threads of history, culture and intellect converge into a humble and sublime exploration of colour as a symbolic and metaphorical agent. From this perspective, it is clear that Durante is constantly creating and recreating dialectical tension between disparate elements, which reinforce a sense of connectedness between past and present, history and culture.

A sense of freedom and an authentic sense of self are evident in Durante’s formative career. This was clearly a time of great access to not only European art but was enriched by his contact with, what we might call, the hierarchy: “Cy Twombly, Andy Warhol and Joseph Beuys” to name but a few international artists. Durante also exhibited with European artists, “Cucchi, Clemente and Paladino”, for example, but Durante is clear to point out that his is a practice mainly influenced by philosophy, the history of art and the work of poets and literary artists. His interest in public space is historically located in the Ancient world of the Greek and Roman Empires, where the square served as a forum and meeting place for political debate and community gathering.

The geometry of the square is tied to not only the tradition of painting and its reliance on a square ground for pictorial exploration, but is universally re-conceptualised in contemporary society through the flat screen of the television and that of the computer. In this special, fourth dimension, we enter a virtual, hybrid space that communicates to the masses in many languages, providing fast knowledge and quick learning. This new place of engagement is

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38 Ibid. 2
40 Durante, “Transcript of Interview.” 6
41 Ibid. 4
42 Ibid. 4
43 Durante, “The Silk Road Project”. 4
a contemporary stage, where socialisation takes place, beneath the ground so to speak. Hidden from view we interact on an altered level of reality, which creates a disrupted and “de-characterised” cultural identity.

It is my impression that Durante would like to re-establish public space as a new and commensurate functional space, which endorses multiple identities and needs of the citizen, despite his or her national identity. This gives us insight into Durante oeuvre and his particular interest in the use of public space as a forum or meeting place for great and creative projects to take place. Influencing not only a sense of aesthetic possibilities, public art should reflect a cultural engagement that clearly defines the importance of art and its role as a cultural signifier and not as a decorative nuance, so frequently experienced in the Café Latte life style, prevalent in contemporary society.

From this dialogue, Durante emerges as a cultural critic who has a strong sense of responsibility not only for his craft but also for the environment and its use as public space. Regardless of nationality, Durante views the landscape of the world as being an international place of ‘being’ that suggests we are all in some way universal migrants. A sense of being that arises from an engagement with the “entire world as a foreign land” reinforces a renegotiation of the subjectivity of the ‘other’. Transforming perspectives towards a universal sense of ownership might perhaps settle outdated and colonial notions of identity and place.

His most recent work is evidenced in his book titled, *Skin, Surfaces and Shadows* and the public art project, *The Silk Road Project*, China, 2007, provided the material for his Masters in

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44 Ibid. 6
45 Ibid. 5
46 Ibid. 6
Public Art Thesis. [Figure 27] Durante’s thesis is an investigation of art in public spaces that thematically examines the idea of “traveling cultures and public art in a cross-cultural way and by connecting them within a frame of social and artistic-cultural criticism.”47 In both projects there is a commonality with my interest in the concept, ‘a narrative of place’ that references the landscape as a visual motif.48

However, the process employed in the exploration of this narrative is within completely different contexts. Durante is concerned with the prevalence of the existence of an active “sophisticated cultural apartheid” taking hold within the global world environment. His is a concern that deals with culture, identity and landscape as a macro universal condition. My research, however, deals more with a direct and personal engagement with place as a metaphor for re-discovering identity and articulating personal experience of place through the process of painting.

In closing my conversation with Durante, a glass of imported southern Italian wine in one hand and homemade foccacia in the other, I was happily displaced. When talking to Durante one is reminded of a Foucaultian character whose identity is not fixed or located in any one place or fine art discipline. Durante’s knowledge and expertise resides in the history of art and contemporary culture and he eloquently directs an understanding of his point of view. Located in a universal frame of reference, his ideas and thoughts translate over many disciplines, geographies and cultures. In my final deliberations, I realise that Durante has directed my interests as an archaeologist does by digging below and running over the top of many surfaces to deliver a new and heightened perspective on material culture within a heterogenous cultural landscape.

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47 Ibid. 2
48 Durante, “Transcript of Interview.” 3
I met with Dr Anne Morrison at the University of Tasmania, Launceston, Gallery Space, where a retrospective exhibition of her work was taking place: *STRATA*, selected works 1994 – 2009, 20 February – 3 April 2009. [Figure 28] [Interview transcript appears in appendix iii b] A shared heritage and an affiliation with the city of Glasgow was the initial point of contact that brought Morrison to my attention. For the purposes of this project, I intended to discuss Morrison’s life as an artist, a fellow Scot and a migrant to this country. I was interested to see if, or how, our paths crossed, and if any common ground existed.

Before I met Morrison we exchanged some brief e-mails, but in reality we barely knew each other. It was a great relief that when we did meet there was a real connection that made me feel at ease. There was a comfortable sense of the familiar in our banter that focused on the experience of ‘journey’ and ‘movement’, through the properties and materiality of the medium of paint.
In my engagement with Anne Morrison, I found her easy to talk to and her answers were honest and forth-coming. A wealth of experience and knowledge of her subject, the body as landscape, went far beyond the interiority of “auto-referential” subject matter. Morrison explores the external and surrounding vista of not only the Australian landscape, but also that of the many horizons she has travelled. Her practice is entrenched in the history and tradition of painting that, through process and production, challenges formal notions of plasticity and flatness. It is in her use of materials and the fluid application of paint and medium that a rich and personal methodology has been formulated. However, it is Morrison’s focus and attention to detail and her visual articulation of an authentic methodology that impressed upon my practice and process.

In conversing with Anne Morrison, it is evident that nature nurtures her practice, as does personal experience as a somatic response in relaying aesthetic and pictorial concerns. Morrison refers to the importance of landscape and environment in her work and how it has inspired an investigation in mapping the ‘journey’.

Previously, I lived in cities such as, Glasgow, Paris, London and Rome, the contrast of being based in a city such as, Hobart, which is dominated by nature instead of the city dominating nature played a huge part in the development of my work.50

Perhaps those of us who move frequently experience life in a state of [e]motion and tend to embrace a metaphoric vocabulary that emphasises a sensory experience and engagement with place. Morrison is no exception to this classification as the descriptive narration of her work and life experiences show. Hers is a practice that observes the ‘mise-en-scene’ placing one instantly on the same horizon. From a perspective of the panoramic landscape there is an understanding of how migration and experience of movement impact on Morrison’s art practice.

The relationship between cityscape and nature strip are evident in Morrison’s painted explorations. These evidence a transposition of topographies through the substance of paint on canvas. Morrison’s journey towards migration was woven into her art practice very early in her career, being from one place and working in another, Morrison travelled through a series of residencies and scholarships to various parts of Europe, ending up in Tasmania in 1994. Her art education at both the Glasgow School of Art and the Royal College of Art, London, took place at the time

49 bid. 1
50 Morrison, “Interview Transcript.” 1
the YBA [Young British Artists] group of artists rose to fame, and some would say stardom, in the late 1980s. It struck me how Morrison’s work at this formative stage paid no homage to commercialism and avoided the gimmick mentality so prevalent at this time.

I was fortunate to view Anne Morrison’s retrospective exhibition, STRATA at the time of the interview. This body of work is evidence of a change in not only cultural landscapes, but observes a translation of personal experience into a series of “self–regulating systems”. Within the environment of the canvas the imagery effectively portrays the journey of the artist’s aesthetic development. [Figure 29] Morrison deliberates on her immediate environment that metaphorically reflects an embodied sense of landscape, which translate as a visual leitmotif in her painted works of art.

Figure 29: Anne Morrison, Coral Tree, 2007 Acrylic on linen, 137x122cm.

Parallels with Durante's notion of the “silence zone” are symptomatic when viewing Morrison's physically powerful paintings. The place of silence that Durante explored in his early Australian work correlates to Morrison’s pictorial exploration of colliding land and thought-scapes, which somehow arrive at the destination that Durante describes as “the place in-between”. An overwhelming site of excavation is evident in the STRATA works, as one is taken on a visual journey that weaves in and out of the spatial constraints of the canvas format. There is a sense of mediation taking place here, as “a trio of trespassers” investigate and converge in the disparate experience of place, landscape and culture, delivering a dialogue that fuses individual trans-national aesthetic.

Anne Morrison’s comments and answers to the interview questions reveal a pure sense of engagement in her practice and mark-making. A total focus on the subject of paint and what it can do draws one immediately into the surface of the work. Visually distinctive, Morrison’s paintings venture further than traditional narrative landscape painting in her concentration and attention to detail. Driven by repetitive mark-making, Morrison’s methodology hints at the obsessive, characterised by the managed drips of paint that form the composition. Alive and abundant, an emotional landscape emerges from within the structure of the painting that suspends belief and disbelief through a process of painting that is unique. Morrison has developed a methodology that is specific to her practice, using no brushes; she is able to direct the paint towards a sophisticated, formal representation.

As a pictorial arrangement, Morrison’s work speaks and reads as process. The viewer is immediately confronted with visual and sensory stimuli that position one directly in the painting. The subject of body and landscape is ironically un-recognisable in the exploding surfaces that, without a doubt, examine a phenomenological truth that is evidenced in the exchange of sensitive materiality into sensory aesthetics. Morrison’s work does not need a theoretical support for it to have an affect; one is immediately convinced of the painting’s authority as a work of art, as one begins to journey over the surface.

The viewer is invited to enter pictorial space where subject and object transform into visual form. A trinity of sorts is evident in Morrison’s work, the body, the materials and the subject. Above all there is a sensory engagement, not only a physical and visual experience, but there is a ‘felt’ energy in her surfaces. There is a definitive, complex and intuitive order at play in these works, displaying an abundant and confident mastery of the materiality of paint.

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\[52\] Durante, “Transcript of Interview.” 2
\[53\] Ibid. 3
Morrison’s oeuvre has grown over time into a meditation that explores the external physical landscape and that of mnemonics to reshape and reinvent an alternative viewing space. Observed and collected, Morrison’s observes nature; from the position of student she is guided by the flotsam and jetsam tide of change. There is an overlapping of the micro and macro dematerialisation of the natural environment that resonates in the plasticity of the painted surface. I see a contrast in Morrison’s work that moves beyond the great divide of culture and landscape, history and imperialism. There is, a re-positioning of the barren and lonely landscape of Tasmania into a collide-a-scope of visceral high chromatic colour engagements that are almost in conflict with the natural environment.

The STRATA works present a dichotomy between landscape and representation, serving as a catalogue of ‘remembering’, of temporal experience. The images probe our understanding of the traditional symbols of interpretation and, in doing so question the validity of recognisable forms of representation. A discordant relationship between reality and representation creates an illusion that implies a reconceptualising of the landscape as a traditional locus of identity. Taking this theme further, one is invited to reassess the idea of place and landscape from an alternative context. The rejection of recognisable signs and symbols reshape our engagement with established expectations of landscape painting and one is urged to go beyond the surface to an interior location, negotiating horizons and many borders that form together, creating a sense of embodiment.

The role of memory in Anne Morrison’s work is similar to that of my own. As a tool, memory stimulates a visual response to the immediate landscape or that of a personal experience. Unlike Tommaso Durante who intimates:

> Memory never deliberately plays a role in my art practice. Probably memory acts more often in a subliminal way due to the role that it plays in the age of the immaterial culture.\(^5^4\) [Tommaso Durante]

Durante in a sense deals with culture and memory not as tool, as Morrison and I do, myself but as a philosophical engagement that serves as a much-needed critique in contemporary discourse. The different take on memory that Morrison and I subscribe to, is probably indebted to our practice as process painters whose influence is recreating as sense of landscape and embodiment. Durante, however, is engaged with material culture as represented in his writing on ‘political space’ in a global and multicultural context.\(^5^5\)

\(^5^4\) Ibid. 2
\(^5^5\) Ibid. 2
There is a commonality in that beyond the narrative or subject, Durante says: “art refers to the language, not to the life. It is only a translation of the world.” I think Morrison and I share Durante’s sentiments, but obviously from different cultural and philosophical perspectives. Experience and process are embodied in the completed work of art in both Morrison’s work and that of my own, whereas Durante’s process materialises from his perspective as an art writer and historian, where the truth is located in the history and philosophy of the subject and not as a direct result of an auto-referential experience.

Morrison explores the role of memory and its influence in the production of a work of art in painterly terms. There is a direct fusion of dialogues between the language of painting and that of lived experience, where notions of transparency combine with the process of adding and subtracting layers of paint metaphorically and symbolically converge into form.

During the course of interviewing Anne Morrison it became apparent that although migration was the subject of the enquiry it was the experience and exposure to the craft of painting, as a tradition, that was at the crux of her practice. Beyond the scope of subject matter lay an overwhelming commitment and broad based knowledge in the practice of painting. As our conversation came to an end my last impression of Anne Morrison was of an artist who revealed a dedication to her art practice with an ease that spoke of a true engagement. There was a direct and believable ontological truth and connection that was tangible in Morrison’s responses to my questions.

56 Ibid. 1
Chapter Five

Conclusion

This research commenced three and a half years ago with the intention of examining a personal experience of migration in relation to my visual art practice. A self-reflexive examination of the narratives of identity, displacement and loss translated into the genres of painting, drawing, documentary photography and mnemonic notations. A process of translating embodied memories into abstract leitmotifs resulted in a series of works of art that are the subject of this exhibition, *A Long Road Home*.

Within the context of contemporary art and culture I have explored the impact of migration as a global and cultural phenomena. As a contemporary art issue, migration in practice was further examined through the work of contemporary artists who as part of their art practice are transitory. The dedication to practice as a cultural signifier is exampled by the work of contemporary artist Abraham Cruzvillegas, who illustrates how art and material culture are interchangeable and self-reflexive. An analysis of contemporary art as cultural currency paralleled an ongoing investigation with my own practice to illustrate the emotional ‘affect’ of migration and its translation into works of art. Supporting this dialogue were the interviews with migrant artists Tommaso Durante and Dr Anne Morrison that defined each artists relationship and experience of migration. Both artists extended responses added to the breadth of this study’s examination of migration in practice and also helped shape and clarify my artistic sense of identity.

Contemporary art in practice was also surveyed through the theoretical proposition of New Formalism, which focuses on a return to aesthetics and form that serves to critique material culture within the gallery setting. This discussion was developed in tandem with Clement Greenberg’s modernist philosophy of painting’s formalist qualities and its influence on not only my practice but that of contemporary art’s discursive relationship with art history. It became apparent that, although time and technology had shifted, creating new possibilities, contemporary artists were still responding to both the history and language of art through a ‘material’ and cultural engagement. In effect, I came to the conclusion that regardless of classification art evolves as society does and the practitioners of art react responsively to popular culture through material engagement.
A relationship between form and content is linked through aesthetics, object and space. A consideration of interconnecting spatial relationships is brought into play through mnemonic notions that deliver the past into the present articulating discordant space. Developing the idea of the past in the present is determined through the relationship between my work and contemporary art that returns to formal aesthetics. My art practice explores a fusion of Greenberg’s Modernist philosophy and its temporal relocation in popular culture as described by New Formalism. However, my practice also relies on the translation of conceptual concerns into material form as a point of departure. Exploring the aesthetic possibilities of an idea requires an investigation of the mediums properties to develop a methodology that embodies the physical nature of the concept. The concept provides scope for an exploration of technique whereby new processes come into play that stimulates an affective and sensory response. The idea of a material journey suggests a blending of practice and culture that is the vehicle that re–processes ideas through a specific methodology, advancing new aesthetic possibilities.

This research continued to progress as I filtered my sense of displacement and loss of identity through a material investigation into what paint can do within the environment of the support. The idea of the ‘stretch’ as archive or artefact expanded the reading of the painted works of art beyond the conceptual parameters of migration in practice by renegotiating the role and function of the support and its relationship to traditional painting practice. The ‘stretch’ as archive therefore, reinforced concept and materiality through its physical objectivity by engaging and challenging the spatial relationships both as surface and as experience.

The works on paper embody the sensitive qualities of knitted woollen blankets creating a relationship between form and content. The transference of ‘felt’ experience into material form is extended by the addition of pencil, graphite, conte and sometimes paint to the surface of the embossed paper. Through a personal process of mark making and erasure personal memories are woven over surfaces that float in space, capturing a trace of past and present landscapes. From this subtle manipulation of material and personal methodology the works on paper deliver an alternative interpretation of landscape as a form of representation.

A continued dedication to painting as subject provided a lateral shift in developing a specific methodology that expanded the possibilities of paint within a material context. The construction of a methodology that evidenced a thematic translation between subject, materials and concept has been one outcome of this research. As discussed in the body of the text, the shift was conceptually conceived as a consequence of examining the possibilities of advancing the
surface quality of the drawing surface through recontextualising the mark-making process into paint. The challenge was to take the surface of the drawing that conceptually and physically originated in ‘knitted blankets’ and reinvent them into painted works of art.

From a personal perspective this research has significantly altered my perspective on many issues, particularly those concerning, identity and a sense of belonging. Through my art practice I have redefined myself within this place, Australia. The physical experience of distance has been a major factor in coming to terms with my sense of self in what has been a ‘cultureless’ existence. I have questioned my cultural identity in relation to Australian culture and have concluded that I am resolutely Scottish. Through maintaining my cultural identity I have resisted the homogenisation of contemporary culture where generic replicas appear and reappear transforming ‘host’ cultures as they go. I recognise my Scottish culture as having a role to play and that my presence adds to the developing identity of this place. In effect my identity has been re-established in Australia, and a renewed sense of belonging has been created through a process of re-evaluating space and place.

At the beginning of this exegesis the digital image, Hope House [figure 3] put in play visual irony that, throughout the text and imagery has been recontextualised into sensory aesthetics. The resulting exhibition, A Long Road Home, illustrates my understanding of migration in practice. The complex narratives of identity and displacement have been embodied in material sensitivity and have largely been resolved through a translation into the art object. The contextual setting of the support has extended and developed the possibilities of both painting and drawing within a material context. Through a specific technique of replicating a ‘knitted surface’ I have demonstrated how a systematic and process-driven methodology articulates a conceptual narrative through the vehicle of abstraction. In bringing this research to a conclusion, the allegory of the journey, A Long Road Home, has arrived at where it first began, in hope and house.
Appendix i

after before white rabbits


By Annemarie Murland
Appendix ii

death end of culture. Glasgow 2007


By Annemarie Murland
Appendix iii

a. Interview Transcript Tommaso Durante

Interview Transcript: Tommaso Durante at participants home, Warrandyte, Melbourne, Saturday 10 October 2008.

Questions:

a. How has migration influenced your art practice and has it impacted on the aesthetics/methodology of your work to a greater or lesser extent?

Yes, migration and dislocation, as side effects of my life moving from Italy to Australia, influenced in some way my art practice. Even if my art practice always fore grounded a multi perspective outlook and always I looked at the world as Edward Said wrote ‘seeing the entire world as a foreign land’, I think that migration influenced my aesthetic, but not the process or the methodology of making.

Thinking about migration today involves the identification of a trans-national political space. It means, also, thinking and refining a new idea of public space. “It is finding ourselves in the moment of transit” - as the post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha wrote in his interesting book The Location of Culture, where space and time cross to produce new complex figures of difference and identity.

I feel that my art practice, today, is much more extended and richer than before coming to Australia in 2001. This happens because, definitely, migration is about our relationship with the experience, whether we are here in Melbourne or in Rome, in New York or Moscow, it is about crossing boundaries and places, space and time and above all it is about exchange. Even if, today’s world is apparently without boundaries. What emerges from my early Australian artistic production is something that embodies cultural hybridity, typical of the transformation and transition periods that can occur in private life like in the history.
b. Do you consider yourself to be a migrant artist or an Australian artist, or just an artist who lives in Australia?

Migration is about movement but, as I said before, I always see the entire world, my country of origin included, as a foreign land. So migration can occur anytime in one’s life but migration in itself does not add or decrease the value of an artist. So, I simply consider myself as an artist who lives in Australia.

c. Is your art practice solely located in personal experience or does it explore contemporary issues, if so, what are they?

Of course my art practice involves my personal life experience but it would be too simple and auto-referential to limit my artistic production to that. Furthermore I believe that art refers to the language, not to the life. It is only a translation of the world.

My artistic production is focused on the edge of art and philosophy and it connects digital technology with traditional media in the aim to explore the boundaries between abstraction and materialism. I try to translate the imitation of ideas by transposing them into other ideas: sculpture-installations, paintings and artist books. This process is unavoidably linked to major issues like autonomy of art in a multicultural context connected to the contemporary globalised culture.

d. What role, if any, does the past play in your art practice and does memory serve a purpose in your aesthetic, if so what is it?

Well, we are aware that memory always plays a role in every field of expression, the artistic one included, and at different levels. Frankly speaking, memory never deliberately plays a role in my art practice. Probably memory acts more often in a subliminal way due to the role that it has in the age of the immaterial culture. Today past and its memory become contemporary in the virtual and remote domain of our lives, as a continuum that unavoidably affects our knowledge and aesthetic experience and acts as an active cultural memory.
e. The idea of storytelling and notions of an oral tradition are common to many cultures, do you feel that in some way through your art practice that you are extending this and adding to your own cultural traditions?

In spite of what Walter Benjamin predicted about the extinction of the oral tradition in the modern era, today, in the post-modern era, storytelling has been preserved and transformed by virtue of the digital information technology. I have a great respect for oral tradition but storytelling is not involved by my art practice. I like to work around a definition of art as characterized by complex linguistic themes and resolutions, from narrative to conceptual, crossing the fields of art, craft and design. Storytelling is not among my media.

f. What relevance, if any, does the narrative of ‘place’ play in the conceptual origins of a work of art and does this influence the process of making?

Well… I like to start from the past. Aboriginal and tribal artefacts in general were of great inspiration for the Western artists of the twentieth-century, like Brancusi and Picasso, Matisse and Max Ernst - just to mention few of them. It does not matter, in this context, if we look at this influence as a cross-cultural practice or just as another example of Western Colonial appropriation. But, to give you a more suitable and ‘technical’ answer, I think that the concepts of homogenised national culture and the idea of the transmission of historical traditions and the influence of what you call the ‘narrative of the place’, are in the process of a severe re-definition.

If we look at my latest bookwork, Skin, Surfaces and Shadows, or at my public art project started in China last year, The Silk Road Project, the ‘narrative of place’ is part of the artworks in a strong and powerful way. In ‘Skin, Surfaces and Shadows’ the fragility of the Australian landscape is the visual leitmotif while ‘The Silk Road Project’ had the ancient Silk Road route as geographical horizon. Anyway in both artworks the places of reference undergo an extreme conceptualisation up to reaching a philosophical reflection.

If you look at the early artworks I produced after my arrival in Australia, they are hybrid artworks, under every point of view. I passed from what is called the ‘silence zone’ to the ‘place in-between’, a place of silent colliding cultures, where the cultural clash is embodied by our newspapers in different languages and by SBS in 68 different news broadcast, that far from representing the multicultural richness of the different Australian cultural backgrounds, they are
the evidence of a very sophisticated cultural apartheid. By quoting Tyler Cowen and his very interesting book Creative Destruction we can say that “… art producers need ‘otherness’ to fulfill their creative wishes’. So, yes, I definitively think that what you call the ‘narrative of place’ is part of my artistic exploration, but often as a metaphor or cultural translation.

g. Do you define yourself as an abstract artist or just an artist? Therefore, what does abstraction mean to you?

An artist, is an artist … to paraphrase Gertrude Stein’s ‘A rose…’

It does not matter if I am an abstract or figurative artist. What is important to me is that I am a creative mind. In the existing historical context, art makes the world its own material. I like to work around knowledge and ideas of materials that cover and translate a wide field of experience. But this happens by rejecting the idea of an international style or avant-garde depositary of an artistic truth. If I must categorize my art practice, I should say that, yes, I am, generally speaking, an abstract artist.

h. How would you describe your approach to abstraction, contemporary or historical? Or a combination of both? Or something else altogether?

My approach to abstraction is contemporary and it is part of a multidisciplinary cross-cultural art practice with a strong emphasis on bringing together public art and urban design, digital art and traditional media, contemporary art and craft.

i. Do you see your work as challenging established dictums/traditions or as an extension of a particular thematic or concept?

I consider my artworks as the result of my personal exploration of contradictory concepts like abstraction and materialism, spiritualism and science, carried out on different levels of the art language, on the borders of art practice and philosophical reflection.

j. Has the experience of relocating and the changing cultural environment transformed your idea of abstraction? If so, how?

Not really. Probably what have sometimes changed are the level of representation and the subject of exploration.
j. Is there any particular artist or period in art that influences your practice today? And if so, what and who are they?

Not really. Even if I had the opportunity to meet and share time with artists like Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol, Cy Twombly and Jannis Kounellis or to exhibit with artists of my generation like Cucchi, Clemente, Paladino etc… my art practice was mainly influenced, from the very beginning, by philosophers, literates, poets and occasionally scientists. Probably this was due also to the fact that I started to make art in a post-conceptual period and I was also very much focused on history and theory of art.

k. Do you try to evoke a particular response from people who look at your work? If so, what is it?

No, I don’t. I don’t think that art needs to evoke a particular response from people. This is what politics need. For me, art and artists need to raise questions more than looking for answers.

l. Culture and identity are synonymous with Australian landscape painting; do you position yourself outside of this arena of identity politics? If so, do you think that abstraction allows for an independent re-contextualising of identity and landscape?

I refuse such polarizing identifications between painting and landscape. Even if I am aware of such Australian obsession. For me this type of univocal choices to identify art productions and cultures are no longer valid. They were probably suitable to define art in the colonial period but certainly they are not acceptable today. For sure, I am outside the Australian cultural-artistic obsession of identity and landscape also because I am a new Australian and for me the cultural difference plays a different role.

In the 21st Century we live in the so-called digital era and network society that is more urban than rural. Therefore, generally speaking, we can talk much more about streetscape, city landscape or web-scape, rather than landscape. Anyway, abstraction gives you the opportunities to re-contextualize the concepts of identity and landscape like it happened with my bookwork *Skin, Surfaces and Shadows*. It can act at different levels of representation and it is not limited by the identification with the landscape.
m. In your experience, does the 'process' and materiality of the medium direct the work or is it confined to a concept?

As a visual artist I like to think that medium and process, concept and development, quality of the processes and choice of materials included, are all not negotiable issues, and all of them are part of the creative journey.

n. Does colour play a significant metaphorical role in your work? If so, could you describe that?

For the first part of my artistic career, for over twenty years, my favourite colour was black in all its variations and nuances. In that period of my life I was totally fascinated by the colour black because of its richness and its natural elegance. Moreover it was a sort of personal, nihilistic-philosophical framework. Today colours are just part of the very different process of making artworks, rather than an ideological framework postulate.

o. Do you have any further comments to make?

No. Thank you
Appendix iii

b. Interview Transcript Anne Morrison

Interview Transcript: Dr Anne Morrison at the Gallery Space, University of Tasmania, Launceston, Thursday, 26 February 2009.

Questions:

a. How has migration influenced your art practice and has it impacted on the aesthetics/methodology of your work to a greater or lesser extent?

When I first came to Australia in 1994 it was not through a conscious decision to migrate, it was to undertake a one-year arts residency in Australia. This was an invaluable and productive period of time, contributing to the development of my practice as an artist. The journeys I embarked on during this year provided a wealth of inspiration that led to my continued interest and further opportunities to work in Australia for several more years.

The ‘journey’ played a significant role in my approach to painting in Australia. I was able to map and experience unfamiliar terrains and learn about new and challenging environments. Previously, I lived in cities such as Glasgow, Paris, London and Rome. The contrast of being based in a city such as Hobart, which is dominated by nature instead of the city dominating nature, played a huge part in the development of my work. Exploring and responding to the more remote places, such as central Australia and the South West of Tasmania have also impacted on my practice and sense of aesthetics.

The decision to migrate, to become a permanent resident arose following five years in Tasmania. I then went back to Scotland in 1999 for approximately two years. It was during this time, with my Tasmanian Partner (who had received a Samstag Scholarship), that I made the decision to return to live in Australia. It was important to live in Scotland again prior to making the decision to ‘migrate’. And, yes, it has impacted significantly on my art practice. Not migrating, or leaving Scotland for the unknown (due to my time already spent here), but the fact that I ‘returned’ to a place, specifically Tasmania, that seemed to feed my soul, if you like, an environment that enriches my day to day well being, as well as my art practice. It is a place where I am able to think, create and move at a slower pace. Tasmania is also a place
which draws people from all over Australia as well as overseas, often people come and visit this island for a holiday and end up staying. I enjoy the fact that there are many people living here from so many other places.

b. Do you consider yourself to be a migrant artist or an Australian artist, or just an artist who lives in Australia?

I think I consider myself as an ‘international artist’ in part due to the fact I have travelled a lot and lived and worked in many places, most recently undertaking a year’s residency in Malaysia. I have maintained professional and personal connections with people overseas, in many different places. In many ways I never really thought that I had migrated, it seems I found myself here by a strange twist of fate. Perhaps if I had undertaken the arts residency back in 1994 in Rome, I would be living there today! Who knows, I may also find myself (and my family) somewhere in Asia again or Europe undertaking another arts residency, if circumstances permit. I think I will always embrace opportunities to travel. However, I feel confident I will always return now to my little cottage in the Forth valley in Tasmania’s North West.

I have only recently sat the Australian citizenship test, to embark on the next stage of becoming an Australian Citizen. After which I will still be able to retain my British Passport. I enjoy knowing that I can return to live in Scotland again for a period, or perhaps somewhere else, but I believe I will always return to Australia now.

c. Is your art practice solely located in personal experience or does it explore contemporary issues, if so, what are they?

Personal experience, yes, yet also always exploring and engaging with, and responding to, contemporary issues. I am immediately observing, experiencing and responding to events that are happening in the world around me. However, I am not working in isolation. From the late eighties-early nineties my work was triggered by personal loss (The death of my mother). I found myself dealing with issues related to the body, to the vulnerability of the body. However, I recall Chernobyl in the eighties, the fear of watching graphic images of a cloud passing across Europe while on holiday in Spain, not sure what had occurred due to the language barrier, so I was relying on visual images and references to Nuclear explosion. I recall the CND protests against nuclear facilities in the UK and the aids awareness campaigns in the eighties in the UK. There was an increased focus on the body in art and these were a few of the things you could say were underlying, or present beneath (within) the surface of my work at this time.
I became interested in developments within science and medicine, to changing geographies, to changing shifting boundaries between countries, questioning how lines drawn on maps change, and why. I found myself looking at satellite imagery of the earth and magnetic resonance imaging of the human body. I was curious about technological remapping of the body and the mapping of the human genome that represented and contested blurring boundaries, reflecting the world (micro and macro). Working with imagery related to medical scans, x-rays, diagrams and fusing these with maps of the land. Lines scratched into the surface delineating borders and boundaries, continually changing and shifting, yet attempting to create paintings that fragmented the body (as often the medical gaze did), yet created works which were also viscous and tactile that attempted to draw the viewer back to ‘body’ as something more than a fragmented image, diagram, a section of an x-ray etc but a living, breathing, feeling person.

Over the years my work has shifted from looking inwards, from inner body shapes, which could be evocative of the land to looking outwards to land forms or vegetation etc that is suggestive of the body. My work is a personal landscape, which still explores the osmotic relationship between the body and land. Contemporary issues I am concerned about and that perhaps underlie some of the decisions I make in my work, relate to the environment, local as well as global. An interesting piece of writing I came across while finishing up the work for Strata 2008 was an essay by Dael Allison called Polyp, published in Island magazine 2007, which focused not only on the aftermath of the Tsunami in Indonesia but the enormous loss of life and huge damage to the coral reef also.

In Australia, however, although 2007 was the international year of the reef there are still ghost nets in the Gulf of Carpentaria. On the other hand there are some fascinating developments by a Tasmanian company who are harvesting an introduced seaweed/pest to help find a cure for certain cancers. This extracted compound also boosts the immune system while contributing to inhibiting the HIV virus from entering cells.
d. What role, if any, does the past play in your art practice and does memory serve a purpose in your aesthetic, if so what is it?

Memory as a metaphor is linked to my exhibition, Strata which continually builds layer upon layer that evokes previous experiences of places and the understanding of process. There is a thread that runs through my work and has done for over a period of twenty years or so, from my first solo exhibition in 1989. The connectivity of all things that inter-connect: patterns, rhythms and processes, being part of our environment, not separate from it, or outside of it.

Memories of places and journeys and experiences are layered one over the other, some are more visible than others, they are semi-transparent if you like, but all ever present. The work I make today, builds upon experiences connected to different places, to Scotland, Italy, France, Australia, Malaysia, Thailand, Africa, many, many places. They are in some small way all significant and all present, part of me, my memories and, like, an archaeologist; I sometimes unearth these memories some more clearly than others. They are there present, perhaps veiled, over only partially visible within the many semi transparent and fractured, layers of paint.

e. The idea of storytelling and notions of an oral tradition are common to many cultures, do you feel that in some way through your art practice that you are extending this and adding to your own cultural traditions?

I think so; the work does have a narrative and is telling a story, very much. I hope that is evident from what I have written in the notes so far.

f. What relevance, if any, does the narrative of 'place' play in the conceptual origins of a work of art and does this influence the process of making?

My work has evolved and developed very much in response to 'the narrative of place' there are connections and threads through each body of work, but as I have moved, travelled, relocated to different 'places' it has been always been important to embrace the connections or differences between different 'places'.

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g. Do you define yourself as an abstract artist or just an artist? Therefore, what does abstraction mean to you?

First and foremost my practice is one that revolves around interpreting (my experience of) the world around me, through a process of navigating familiar and unfamiliar surroundings, weaving connections between different forms, patterns, rhythms and processes in nature (elemental processes). I do not think there was a specific time I thought of deliberately or consciously becoming an abstract painter. Yet, as a young student I was working in the mid to late eighties as a ‘figurative’ painter, influenced by the energy of the ‘Glasgow boys’ at that time, artists such as Steven Campbell. The ‘Glasgow girls’ were not being promoted at this time, or were very visible. However, a young Edinburgh artist Gwen Hardie may have been partially influential in my development of looking beyond this kind of figuration.

Gwen Hardie’s work utilised the outline of the body, a linear form whereby the space between the interior and exterior was connected through a continuous painted ground. This brings to mind Susan Rothenberg’s paintings of linear form that were expressed in the outline of a horse. [“Rothenberg first gained critical attention in the mid-1970s, when she introduced the simple outline image of a horse into the austere, canvas plane of Minimalism. Like her peers, she considered the materials of the artist, but rather than denying the use of illusion in painting, she instead explored the relationship between the figure and the painted ground.”].

My work has become more and more abstract over the years. Since 1989 the figure became fragmented (linked to the medical gaze and the body in pain) and literally began to tumble out of the canvas, (in response to personal loss), over a period of two to three years this happened until the figure through a process of fragmentation and/or ‘abstraction’, began to relate to other forms within the landscape, linked more to cellular or satellite imagery of the earth. I enjoyed the ambiguity that began to surface, yet there was still a reference to the body through a fragmented outline, a shadow or trace, for a long time, perhaps up until 1996.

I think of things in the world as interconnected, fluid, continually shifting and changing. Poets, writers, rhythms; words leave an impression not by recalling the actual word, but by the implication that they leave.
I have always called myself an artist rarely using the term ‘abstract’ artist. I did begin my career working figuratively, and over twenty years my work has evolved changing and developing as my interests and experiences have grown and expanded. I think as an artist I am continually trying to be surprised and engaged by paint and process as metaphor, what the very stuff of paint is capable of, slowly pushing the boundaries of what it can do, rather than refining a particular technique or process.

I feel I am continually pushing my understanding of the medium and forms and relationships that are drawn out of the process or emerge through the process itself, and I feel the work could be described as being representative.

h. **How would you describe your approach to abstraction, contemporary or historical? Or a combination of both? Or something else altogether?**

In many way’s I still think of myself as hovering between abstraction and representation, similar perhaps to Judy Watson. Partially representative, echoing patterns process as a metaphorical vehicle even though they are abstracted images they are representative of events and processes occurring around me.

i. **Do you see your work as challenging established dictums/traditions or as an extension of a particular thematic or concept?**

From the mid nineties since arriving in Australia, my work has been about my experience of the Australian landscape, through focusing on the body’s intimate connection to the land. By investigating fluid processes, patterns and rhythms, I aimed to evoke a landscape in a process of transition and transformation that says as much about the body and a sensorial experience of place. Therefore, I think my practice continues an ongoing exploration of issues relating to the landscape, and humankind’s relationship to nature. I do challenge certain established conventions about our idea of a tradition of ‘landscape painting’ that is familiar. I am no means alone in pursuing this direction, which is in a constant state of flux and transition.
j. Has the experience of relocating and the changing cultural environment transformed your idea of abstraction? If so, how?

I actually think that it has enriched my idea of abstraction, from my first flight across central Australia, witnessing such contrasting terrain from the air then later by foot, then over many years attempting to understand the complex and layered histories of Australia. Landscape is not something that is fixed and static, it is continually changing and shifting as is my experience and engagement with this country, through a layered experience of place.

k. Is there any particular artist or period in art that influences your practice today? And if so, what and who are they?

Rather than speak of artists specifically today, I would prefer to list a few artists that I referred to in my PhD, which may give you an insight to who seemed relevant in the nineties. (The Exhibition: Sentient Body 1999)

I acknowledged the fluid painting processes of the Abstract expressionists Helen Frankentahaler and Morris Louis as precursors and the work of ‘the new modernists’ such as Ian Davenport. However, the metaphorical potentialities of processes drew me to artists such as Judy Watson, Moira Dryer, Ian McKeever and Pat Steir. Pat Steir said of the New York school “you didn’t go far enough. You stopped when you saw abstraction…I have taken the drip and tried to do something with it that the modernists denied. [They denied] the image…” Fluid processes in paint have such a rich metaphorical potential to evoke fluid processes elsewhere, things, observed in nature, such as waves, waterfalls and rain. Ian Mckeever and Judy Watson's work has been described as hovering between, ‘figuration and abstraction’. She describes herself as being ‘between experiences’ being between ‘traditional and urban aboriginal culture, black and white, India and Australia, northern European and the Asia pacific’.

There were artists such as Terry Winters and Georgia O'Keefe who I felt shared similar concerns, yet utilised very different methodologies. Helen Chadwick (viral landscapes), Mona Hatoum (Corps Etranger/foreign body) and Ana Mendieta worked with related concerns, yet in other media such as photography, installation and video.

It has been a long time since I have been moved by a contemporary painting or artist’s work, I may admire and appreciate, certain works by Jon Cattapan (from 3rd deadly system series)
and Judy Watson (I curated both these artists into an exhibition for ten days on the island titled Intimate and Distant Landscapes) but have not been moved or felt influenced by a particular artist’s work for a long time.

On reflection Dorothy Napangardis’ exhibition Dancing up Country, I was privileged to see in Kuala Lumpur in 2003, an Asia link touring exhibition from MCA - that was the last exhibition that blew me away. I felt it was the most exciting contemporary painting exhibition I had seen in a long time. Did it influence my own work? I don’t know! But it influenced me enough to work towards having two of her works in the exhibition I curated at the Devonport Regional Gallery for the ten days on the island Festival.

I. Do you try to evoke a particular response from people who look at your work? If so, what is it?

In part you could say I am interested in viewers questioning whether the works are evolving or dissolving? Are they are caught in an in between state? I guess I am interested in the idea that we are part of the landscape and our environment, which is not fixed or static, but as part of nature that is in a continual process of transition and transformation.

m. Culture and identity are synonymous with Australian landscape painting; do you position yourself outside of this arena of identity politics? If so, do you think that abstraction allows for an independent re-contextualising of identity and landscape?

I cover this in question j.

n. In your experience, does the ‘process’ and materiality of the medium direct the work or is it confined to a concept?

Process and the materiality of the paint is very much integral to the development of the work and can direct it at times (it is not confined to concept). I enjoy the freedom, sometimes, of being surprised by the processes, and approaching a painting, not really knowing what my aims are other than the pure enjoyment of engaging with the materiality and fluidity of the paint. A point may come when the painting takes me in a new and surprising direction. However, I am continually building upon a broad knowledge base of what the paint can do
when working with fluid processes, dripping spilling, dispersing droplets of one consistency of paint upon another. There exists a fine balance between accident and control working in this way. However, I am always consciously building upon previous bodies of work where I have been and where can I take the work next?

O. Does colour play a significant metaphorical role in your work? If so, could you describe that?

There are some colours and combinations of colours I visit and revisit, through a love of certain colours and for the metaphorical associations which I link to the body, the internal, the visceral, as well associations with place and with specific places that have left a lasting impression upon me. As if imprinted within me I am continually drawn to these certain colours that I personally associate with the land from the earth on the north west of Tasmania, which is as red as central Australia, but also the vibrant greens of new re-growth, following a fire. To see green shoots through blackened vegetation and through red-earth (visit and re-visit Nickel Azo gold, ochres, crimsons, earth colours, and vibrant greens).

P. Do you have any further comments to make?

One of the best presentations of the idea of "abstract" I have encountered is in S.I. Hayakawa's *Language in Thought and Action* (1991). Hayakawa introduces us to abstraction by asking us to consider the example of a cow named Bessie:

Bessie is a living organism, constantly changing, constantly ingesting food and air, transforming it, getting rid of it again. Her blood is circulating, her nerves are sending messages. Viewed microscopically, she is a mass of variegated corpuscles, cells, and bacterial organisms; viewed from the point of view of modern physics, she is a perpetual dance of electrons. What she is in her entirety, we can never know; even if we could at any precise moment say what she was, at the next moment she would have changed enough so that our description would no longer be accurate... Bessie is no static "object," but a dynamic process.
### Source of Figures


26 Humberto Calzada, *El Jardin V1*, 1986, Colour reproduction from: http://www6.miami.edu/UMH/CDA/UMH_Main/1,1770,2593-1;50677-3,00.html [accessed 22.05.09]


29 Anne Morrison, *Coral Tree*, 2007, Colour reproduction from the artists collection.
Bibliography


