The Sacred Tree

A Visual Investigation into the Tree as a Symbol of Life, Death and Regeneration.

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Signed statement of originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it incorporates no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgment is made in the text.

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This research is dedicated to Joke Delrue.
ABSTRACT

This research project is a visual investigation of ‘the sacredness of nature’ utilising the tree as a metaphor for the mystery of life, death and regeneration. The project developed into a journey through history, exploring ecological and spiritual concerns as well as personal issues of migration and adoption of a new country.

The project aims to create a contemplative experience through the use of a symbolic visual language. Combining an installation approach with drawing, I look at ways of expressing my relationship with my adopted country without losing my rich European cultural background. Drawing represents one of the earliest forms of image making and connects us in an unbroken line with the first human who drew in the dirt or on a wall in a cave.

In the work, I explore a variety of visual languages: figurative/narrative, referring to a traditional European perception of nature and the spiritual, combined with an abstract as well as a process-orientated language where the material is the signifier.

Within this context, the research examines the long tradition of artists using nature, the tree and the forest to express connection with the sacred. For many of these artists drawing has been of great importance to their practice. Precursors include, amongst many others, Caspar David Friedrich, John Glover, Anselm Kiefer, Wolfgang Laib, John Wolseley, Peter Booth and Kiki Smith. Contemporary theories relating to the subject underpin the project. Foremost have been: David Suzuki, Simon Schama, Robert Harrison-Pogue, David Tacey and Mircea Eliade.

The visual outcome of the project is a series of symbolic works which have been produced using materials from the trees: charcoal for drawings and installation work; dyes distilled from leaves; flowers and bark from trees to create works on paper and to dye wool. These works are installed in rooms and form connections with each other and with the space, evoking an atmosphere of contemplation. They reflect the diversity of life and its celebration as well as meditations upon death and regeneration.
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1999  **Devonport City Council:** Gateway to Tasmania mosaic walls for the entrance of Muray street.

1998  **Devonport High School:** mosaics for the entrance foyer of the school.

  **Burnie City Council:** Commission of series of banners.

  **Cowra Festival For International Understanding:** commission of ‘Mie Katoen’ Belgian Giant.

1996  **Fairview Primary School, New Norfolk:** mosaic floor for foyer.

1995  **Reece High School, Devonport:** mosaic floor for foyer.

  **Lilydale High School:** ceramic vessel and oil painting for school collection.

1994  **Hotel Le Meridien, Noumea:** sculptures for water feature at the entrance of the hotel.

1992  **Nixon Street Primary School:** ceramic mural

  **Strahan Visitors Centre/Robert Morris Nunn and Associates:** Ceramic wall sculpture.

1990  **Ikeda Sister City Committee:** ‘Sister City’ mural in Ikeda Osaka Japan

**SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- *The place where three dreams cross*, exhibition catalogue, University of Tasmania, 2005, pp. 8 – 9.
- *Public Art in Launceston*, catalogue of selected sculptures, murals and monuments, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston 1986

**GRANTS**

2005 *Arts Bridge Grant*, towards exhibition in Belgium  
1995 *Quick Response Grant*, through Arts Tasmania, towards exhibition at Distelfink Gallery in Melbourne.  
1993 *Pat Corrigan Artist Grant* to assist with exhibition at Nexus Gallery in Adelaide  
1990 *Japan Australian Foundation Grant* to do research in Japan  
1989 *Workshop Development Grant*, Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board towards the purchase of equipment.  
1988 *Bursary from Victorian Ministry for the Arts* to attend 'Creative Cities' Melbourne.

**AWARDS/ NOMINATIONS**

2005 Inaugural Tasmanian Honour Roll of Women, awarded for contributions to the arts.  
2002 *Material Girl*, Woman Tasmania, Highly Commended, Drawing Award.  
1998 The Apex Club Of Tamar inc.: award for best constructed float.  
1997 Cowra’s Festival of International Understanding: award for most unique participant.  
1995 Multicultural Art for decorative ceramics.  
1993 Nominated for the Ross Bower Award, Australia Council for the Arts  
1983 Acquisition Award, Footscray City Council.