Portraits of country: 
a plein air painter in Arrernte country

Jennifer Taylor
Grad. Dip. Adult Education
B.V.A. Hons

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work herein submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Visual Arts at Charles Darwin University is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and works of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this exegesis and creative work has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not currently submitted for any other degree.

Signature of candidate
Jennifer Taylor

Date
15 November 2014
Abstract

In this study plein air painting practice is used to explore encounters with Eastern Arrernte country, Central Australia, and test the notion that this practice can support caring for country. Central Australia bears the visible legacy of violent colonial practices. The European landscape painting tradition has been associated with colonisation. This study draws on techniques, materials, and strategies from that tradition to give an account of place that is problematised, inquiring, and aligned with post-colonial thought. Its practice-based research methodology is informed by Indigenous research approaches and Arrernte protocols for community conversations about country. The thesis comprises two exhibitions of paintings and an exegesis of 45,000 words. The exegesis provides a context for the paintings, and describes the experience of painting in country through five key metaphors: thirst, beauty, haunting, portraits, and lost landscapes. ‘Thirst’ explores the desires driving plein air painting, and gives a phenomenological account of this practice as a discipline fostering relatedness to place. ‘Trouble with beauty’ asks how painting practice addresses the co-existence of beauty and damage. European ideals of the picturesque and the sublime are considered alongside Arrernte perceptions of beauty in country. ‘Haunting’ asks how absence is expressed in plein air painting. It compares the trope of melancholy to sadness expressed by Arrernte people, and cites early contact histories in Central Australia as the context for such sadness. ‘Portraits’ examines the use of portrait painting to question narratives of place, and explores the notion of ‘portraits of place’. ‘Lost landscapes’ considers the assertion that contemporary Australian landscape painting is primarily concerned with loss. It asks how landscapes are lost and regained, and how painting can assert continuity of connection with country. It looks at painting as a conduit for memories of places lost through migration. The study concludes that plein air painting offers a model for encountering place that is non-violent, respectful, and may serve to restore suppressed narratives of place. For the painter, and potentially for viewers of the work, painting facilitates the quest for ethical relationships with country, and therefore has a role in caring for country.
Dedication

To Isabel Agnes Taylor, 8 March 1928 — 29 May 2010

To Pamela Diane Lofts, 9 August 1949 — 4 July 2012

To Aboriginal readers

Although the images in this paper have already been published, I would like to respectfully advise that some people who are mentioned and whose images appear in this document have now passed away.
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Chapter 1 Introduction

Figure 1.1 Painting at Lhere Pirnte near Two-Mile. Photograph Sue Fielding 2011.
There is only one world. Things outside only exist if you go to meet them with everything you carry in yourself. As to the things inside, you will never see them well unless you allow those outside to enter in.

Jacques Lusseyran (1985 p. 66)

For Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to live together in Australia in the twenty-first century, in an ethical relationship to the country that supports us, requires sincere, sustained inquiry into the place where we stand. In this study plein air painting practice is the chosen method of inquiry. It is a way of encountering country ‘with everything that I carry in myself’, and investigating my experience as a non-Indigenous painter in Eastern Arrernte country, Central Australia. By placing myself in Arrernte country, I am in relationship to it.

The nature and dynamics of this relationship are explored through painting and writing. Plein air painting offers a model for relating to place that is non-violent, respectful, and serves to investigate suppressed narratives of place. It raises questions of Indigenous dispossession, provoking a quest for ethical relationships between self and place. The aims of this study are to generate new perspectives on painting as a means of exploring relationship to place, to investigate how this relationship might inform and stimulate painting, and to question whether painting has a role in developing ethical relationships to place. It asks whether, like the work of Indigenous artists, landscape painting by non-Indigenous artists plays a part in caring for country.

This introduction begins with a meditation on the ‘impossibility and necessity’ of landscape painting. It defines key terms ‘country’, ‘landscape’, ‘plein air painting’ and ‘embodiment’. It takes a preliminary look at the role of landscape painting in colonialism, and key
characteristics of post-colonial landscape painting. It describes the evolution of research questions that stimulated and guided the study, and gives an overview of the structure of the writing and its relationship to the paintings produced alongside this exegesis.

**Prelude: a meditation on the ‘impossibility and necessity’ of landscape**

*The idea of landscape… today attracts wider and more urgent reflections. A commitment to representing the landscape has become about the ‘loss’ of landscape in the twentieth century … that is about its necessity and impossibility at the same time.*

Ian Burn (cited in Stephen 1996, p. 8)

Any mark made on a ground potentially reads as a landscape, calling up the relationship between a being or object—a bird, person, or rock—and the space it occupies. Representations of landscape frame human relatedness to the world (Smith, T 1997 p.30). A finger traces a line in sand and there appears a tree, a horizon, a campsite, or a person walking across the plain. A field of colour becomes the ground, the sky, a body of water. There is no visible mark that does not potentially refer to the ever-present relationship of self and world. The wider context of interrelatedness includes all experience: seeing, feeling, consciousness itself—one’s entire subjectivity. Landscape as a category is radically inclusive.

Reflections on landscape in Australia must go to the losses associated with colonialism: genocidal killings and violent removal and dislocation of Indigenous people from their country; the ensuing damage to ecosystems and extinctions of animal and plant species. The
death of even one elder, or loss of a single language, is likened to a library burning—the losses we have sustained are catastrophic. Some Aboriginal people insist they were never dispossessed of their land, since they never saw it as anything but theirs (Read 1996). In any case, post-colonial landscape practice is concerned with critically examining the ongoing impacts of colonialism, and acknowledging the complexity of fractured, layered histories of place. For non-Indigenous artists this includes probing histories of place and bearing them in mind when responding to country (Browning and Radok 2013 p. 28). Landscape as a genre directly participates in a complex social context: it is not simple self-expression. The seeming impossibility of landscape relates to its inherent incompleteness: it can never be completely true or tell the whole story of a place. I look for ways to acknowledge this incompleteness in my research, and give an honest account of the limitations of individual vision. Plein air painting draws on traditions of portraying place to represent an encounter in the present. It deals with time as much as with space, and is always provisional, intuiting the past in the present, and falling forward into the future.

Exposure to the history of representations of landscape means saturation with a flood of images. Every mark and reference is part of a library of quotations from other works and worldviews. New work has the resonance of a new poem in a long literary tradition; every word echoes forward and back, to remembered works, and as-yet unwritten ones. It calls out responses building on existing works—it is an emergent genre rather than a finite, fossilised one. Landscape practice in Australia has become more innovative with the flourishing of Indigenous artists, and the opening of dialogues between them and non-Indigenous artists. I have sought to make work that resonates with the complexities and losses associated with country. This is an ethical imperative, but also a source of connection and a joy in itself.
Enjoying and celebrating country through painting is an aspect of ‘holding’ country, protecting and honouring it as a ground of life. Part of the necessity for painting landscape is to practice ‘the small and great secrets of joy’ (Cixous 1993, p120), found and renewed through inhabiting all the senses: seeing, touching, listening to and feeling country, in its broadest sense. Painting country is a way of touching it, making contact with eyes and hands, affirming its presence and my own within it. It is a faithfulness to place and commitment to being present, both of which benefit me as a painter, and I trust also benefit others, including the country itself.

When I discovered painting as a child, along with it came the startling possibility I could make something that in some way contained the world, as I knew it. This goes to the heart of landscape painting; it has no limit. One cannot draw a ring around a landscape; it is the known world and cannot be separated from the painter. The interconnected nature of landscape is embodied, enacted during the painting process, and finds its way into the painting. Landscape is not so much ‘represented’ as content, but rather is demonstrated or embodied in a painting. The painting brings some aspect of country into being for a viewer; this is why it is necessary. Between painting and viewer the co-creation of a world takes place. Landscape painting is not about matching the visible world with marks on a board. It is a call and response arising between painter and country, and between painting and viewer, with the viewer’s own relatedness to country coming into play. Whatever the painter intends to do, she cannot control how the painting is seen, but instead takes up her part in a rich, necessary, ongoing conversation.
Country

The Arrernte word *apmere* is translated as ‘country, land, region, area of land and the things on it (trees, etc) countryside’ (Henderson & Dobson 1994, p. 149). For Arrernte people, *apmere* is where their ancestors come from and return to, where their personal and collective creation stories and mythologies reside, and where they have specific custodial responsibilities to tracts of land and species associated with that land. *Apmere* is a domain that gives meaning to land and engenders socio-political relationships (Walsh, Dobson & Douglas 2013). Arrernte elder Margaret Kemarre Turner describes *apmere* as ‘really part of us’, related through everything that is there: creeks, trees, waterholes, animals, fire, rain, sun and moon. She affirms that relationships are at the centre of everything. *Apmere* is the ground of a fundamental relationship from which emanates all that exists, and to which humans are bound by personal and familial ties (Turner, MK 2010 p114). Turner’s interpretations of *apmere* are specific to the Arrernte worldview. They could be considered fundamental principles common to all Aboriginal Australians, though she does not make this claim. I use the term ‘country’ throughout the exegesis (in addition to ‘land’, ‘landscape’ and ‘place’) because it acknowledges the Indigenous values which inform the project’s aims.

Drawing on my own Anglo-Saxon heritage, I see a similar understanding of country in the old English term ‘landscape’ for a place and the people living there, including the mutual shaping and association of people and place (Whiston Spirn 1998). The related German term ‘landschaft’ and obsolete English word ‘countryship’ (the suffix ‘-schäft’ means ‘-ship’) refer to an abstract sense of belonging within a social landscape (Whiston Spirn 1998). For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, ‘country’/’land’ is foremost a cultural rather than ‘natural’ phenomenon, that has an abstract quality which constellates cultural beliefs and practices (Olwig 2008).
**Landscape and colonialism**

In Central Australia, continuity of Aboriginal presence is evident and widely acknowledged, and Aboriginal peoples’ relatedness to place is powerfully and publicly expressed through cultural forms including painting. Yet the region bears a visible legacy of violent colonial practices. Five generations ago, miners and pastoralists arrived with their animals—hard-hoofed, thirsty creatures. The animals stripped and trampled vital food plants, broke the ground, fouled and drained the water resources that Arrernte people depended upon. The newcomers stole minerals from the ground and claimed the land itself for their animals. Arrernte people fought for survival in an utterly changed economy, and made what terms they could to stay close to country (Kimber 2011). The collision of colonial values with Arrernte values and basic survival needs caused violent clashes, still held in living memory in Arrernte country. Colonial values and practices are addressed in this study, using the following definition of colonialism:

> *Colonialism is a relationship between an indigenous... majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and their ordained mandate to rule.*

Roger Tignor (cited in Osterhammel 2005, p. 16)

Landscape painting in Australia has been implicated in the projects of empire and nation-building since the arrival of the first ships. Propagation of colonial values can be found for example in the work of Thomas Watling, Eugene von Guerard, and Arthur Streeton,
painting in Australia in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. David Bunn suggests landscape painting is part of ‘a system of aesthetic, conventional, and ideological ordering useful in the management of political contradictions [...] imported from metropolitan Britain to the imperial periphery’ (Bunn 1994, p. 128). Whilst claiming to represent ‘nature’ empirically, artists have made tacit claims about who has access to place, who belongs there, who has the right to act upon place, and what they can do there. Bunn’s assertion that landscape as a genre promotes ‘public attitudes claiming to be private reverie’ (Bunn 1994, p. 141) is provocative. Public attitudes are teased out in painting practice that engages questioningly with the legacy of colonisation. However, an ideological critique of landscape painting risks flattening the ways disparate works are read, and assigning singular motives to artists whose works are complex and exploratory. Genuine ‘private reverie’ does exist, and powers critical reflection on issues surrounding representation of landscapes. One casualty of an ideologically-driven approach to landscape is the conceptually awkward, nuanced ‘mix of belonging and not belonging... a synthetic identity’ that Roslynn Haynes sees as underlying much of Australian art and culture. In fact she claims that ‘only in the act of making of art as a combination of belonging and not belonging, can we make up Australia’ (Haynes 1998 p. 54). Contemporary representations of landscape must be free to explore risky and awkward issues such as belonging, without conforming to ideological positions.

This study looks at the expression of colonial values in representations of landscape, but also notes that nineteenth century Australian painters responded to landscape in ways that were not always driven by such values. Furthermore, assessments of their work change with contemporary shifts in values. The impact of colonial practices on contemporary approaches will be explored in the following chapter.
The study shows that contemporary landscape painting in Australia goes beyond propagating colonial attitudes, by acknowledging Indigenous understandings of country, whilst expressing familiarity and belonging. I take a relational approach to landscape, emphasizing knowing through engagement rather than attempting to establish empirical truth. Landscape, in this sense, is significant as a relational field. As Anne Whiston Spirn observes, landscape is not only shaped by humans to serve human purposes. The relationship with landscape works both ways, and is a dynamic force that shapes human societies: ‘Landscape is an endless, reciprocal drama’ (cited in DeLue & Elkins 2008, p. 148). This understanding of landscape approaches the definition of *apmere*, country, as both source and ground of human and non-human life. W.E.H. Stanner states, ‘One is dealing not with land, but with country, land already related to people’ (cited in Walsh, Dobson & Douglas 2013, p. 6). In this study I have pursued an understanding of the reciprocal nature of relatedness to country, and sought to portray country as ‘land already related to people’. Personal reflections on responses to country have been essential to addressing the dynamics of colonisation.
I spend time in Arrernte country, alone or with others, painting, walking around, looking and listening. What am I doing, standing on a ridge for hours in front of a little board on an easel, pushing paint around? Why light a fire here, sleep on the ground, get up at first light, always looking at the sky and the land? What am I looking for? I don’t know the names of the hills, the birds and plants and seasonal winds, the water-sources and tracks, or the people who were born around here until just two generations ago. What meaning do I seek here—and what meaning do I find? Gary Lee writes of landscape painting as ‘lying about the landscape’ (Lee 1997, p. 100). Is this what I am doing? Lying about on rocks with the sun on my face, slouching in a chair, feet to the fire, writing. Does my painting and writing lie about the landscape? (Journal entry, February 2011, Jennifer Taylor (JT))
For Gary Lee, Indigenous artist, curator and anthropologist from Larrakia country, the function of the Australian landscape painting tradition is ‘an artistic representation of, and cultural justification for, the process of colonialism’. He sees cultural workers of colonialism as being obliged to ‘occupy the landscape, and mine it for the cultural right to build a new nation’ (Lee 1997 pp. 100-1). He questions the term ‘Australian landscape tradition’ because it excludes Indigenous ways of picturing country and affirms the primacy of the European landscape tradition in portraying the land. The contribution of landscape painting to the project of building a national identity, with corresponding mythologies about place, has been much discussed, but as Lee points out, this debate has generally not included Indigenous people. Meanwhile, Aboriginal art that asserts a prior claim to land has challenged the validity of the landscape tradition, calling into question the blanket usage of ‘landscape’ to describe disparate practices of Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists. Lee’s position is that any cultural production turning a blind eye towards theft of Indigenous land perpetuates injustice and is fraudulent—it involves criminal deception. He suggests cultural activity post-Mabo can only succeed and have meaning if it rejects such theft, acknowledges past frauds, and supports cultural and political empowerment of Indigenous peoples. My practice involves ongoing questioning of my position, relative to colonial and post-colonial practices.

Colonial practices are characterised by subjugation of Indigenous peoples, and appropriation and exploitation of their land and resources. A major theme of post-colonial theory, and landscape painting aligned with such theory, is precisely the acknowledgement of the violence of colonisation, and its continuing consequences for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and the land itself. An example is the work of veteran Australian painter John Wolseley, whose concerns with the misuse and abuse of land are central to his practice. He
has addressed such issues by recording the exquisite detail and texture of a threatened world, picturing ecological systems in ways that challenge exploitation and neglect, and acknowledging Indigenous knowledge systems (Grishin 2006).

**Plein air painting and embodied subjectivity**

The French expression ‘en plein air’ means ‘in the open air’, and refers to the practice of painting outdoors, directly from the subject. Another term for the practice is ‘peinture sur le motif’—painting on the spot, or on the ground (Tyrell 2007). Landscape painting based on direct observation of the subject, combined with preparatory drawing and sketches, and leading to the completion of a painting in studio conditions, has been a feature of European practice for centuries. Plein air painting, in which much of the work is completed in natural light outside the studio, was an innovation made popular by John Constable and the Barbizon painters, notably Francois Millet and Gustave Courbet (Tyrell 2007). From 1870 the availability of readymade oil paints in tubes, and collapsible field easels, made it easier for painters to access sites on foot. The practice was embraced particularly by Impressionist painters in France, and in England (the Newlyn School), Russia, the United States, Canada (the ‘Group of Seven’), and Australia (the ‘Australian Impressionists’ of the Heidelberg group). This study includes paintings completed on site, and others completed in the studio from sketches, notes, photographs and memory. I have referred to the former work as ‘plein air painting’ and to the latter as ‘landscape painting’, although there is not a clear distinction between the two. Both reference visible motifs and draw on tacit knowledge such as embodied memories of place and painting processes.
French philosopher, Merleau-Ponty, asserts the embodiment of consciousness and perception and the indivisibility of body, mind and perception. In a statement that illuminates plein air painting practice, he writes:

’[w]e cannot imagine how a mind could paint. It is by lending his or her body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings. To understand these transubstantiations we must go back to the working, actual body – not to the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement’ (1961 p. 123).

The distinctive character of plein air painting results both from this embodied ‘intertwining of vision and movement’ and from the play between body and environment—lending one’s body to the world. This is a grounded, immersive practice that exposes the provisionality of one’s existence in place, where conditions are constantly changing, and one’s responses to conditions are also in flux. One’s understandings and cultural conditioning also interact with, and condition, sensory experience. Physical and affective engagement with a complex, fluid environment is a kind of surrender to conditions, and a provocation to respond quickly and think outside familiar patterns. Constant intimate contact with the ‘otherness’ of a world that touches one’s skin, and being physically thrown off-balance by events, weather conditions or changing light, provoke thoughts and feelings about the self (and its projects) in relation to the other. For a plein air painter, the ever-present other is country, in its fullest sense, including people associated with country.
About the painter

I come upon a paint tin full of water, with a big brush soaking in it. I squat down beside it and with both hands drag the brush out of the tin and across the concrete path. A dark trail, a snail trail, a shadow—following the brush wherever it goes. It’s like stroking cat’s fur and leaving a trace. The dark trail is alive. It’s part of the brush, but then it’s not. Magically, it stays behind, in big sweeps and arcs. It becomes its own thing. It grows thin and gradually stops following the brush. The dry brush moves back and forth, but nothing! Then the trail itself begins to vanish from the warm concrete. Grain by grain dark fades to light.

(Journal entry, October 2012, JT)

This potent interaction of materiality and magic, body and place, space and time, is my earliest distinct memory and a continuing source of fascination. Plein air painting is at the heart of my practice because it entails what matters most to me: experiencing and understanding what it is to be in this world. Growing up in a cross-cultural environment, in a small town between estuary and sea in Aotearoa/New Zealand, taught me to see land and culture in ways that left a deep imprint, and have been explored in this study. The philosophy and practice of Theravada Buddhism have also been integral to my painting practice and to this project.

I migrated to Australia unintentionally at first, but quickly formed an attachment to country and people. Living in Central Australia for twenty years has involved learning to see and relate to a place I have loved from first sight. My working life here has been with Aboriginal
artists, first in an artist-owned company, then as a visual arts lecturer in vocational education, taking workshops to remote communities outside Alice Springs. It took fifteen years to feel ready to paint country. I was afraid of inadvertently stealing from Aboriginal artists. I needed to find a way to work that acknowledged first peoples’ relatedness to country whilst drawing on the European tradition.

**Evolution of the research questions**

There is a discourse about the arts, rarely written and at times unspoken which is neither that of historians so deeply tied to time and space nor that of critics concentrating on personal views about the arts [...] It is a discourse of sensibilities affected by the excitement of visual impressions. It is the discourse of love.

Oleg Grabar (cited in Radok 2012, p. viii)

This project began well before the emergence of the research questions, with enthusiasm for plein air painting and its signature characteristics: sustained attention, immersion in sensory experience, and critical reflection on relatedness to place. Love of this form of painting practice has been inseparable from love of being in country. The original research questions cast a wide net, until engagement with painting practice determined which lines of inquiry were central. Reflection on what occurred in the field led to refining questions and generating new ones, which were applied in subsequent trips, creating new contexts of inquiry. Each shift in the questions led to exploring different theoretical contexts, which in turn affected practice in the field—similar to an action research cycle (Haseman 2006). Most of the questions remain alive and potent in my painting practice. Some are like prickles in a shoe; they niggle and demand attention. These are abiding questions that by the end of the project have become unavoidable, and to some extent unanswerable.
The evolving research questions provided the structure for the exegesis, which traces eddies and flows of ideas and practice around them. I have explored them through narrative-based writing drawing on field notes; critical reflections on painting practice; reflection on the work of other artists and theorists; and ‘symposia’—focused conversations, from which questions and observations feed back into the research.

The exegesis moves between accounts of place and practice, and the historical and contemporary context that the work inhabits. Five chapters follow the chronology of field trips to Inteye Arrkwe and other parts of Eastern Arrernte country. They reflect on the experience of painting in country through themes emerging from encounters with place: thirst, beauty, haunting, portraits, and lost landscapes. The exegesis speaks in my voice, as embodied subject. Its tone is allusive and questioning, more personal than might be expected in a formal document. This is deliberate. The text mirrors the experience of conducting research through practice, in which the artist/researcher models or performs research questions rather than answering them. This is a speculative process, involving cycles of engagement and reflection, rather than attempts at mastery of the questions. The text unfolds this process through a narrative showing the reader how questions emerged from practice, and how they were responded to. The voice of the maker tells an ‘inside story’ predominatey about the experience of making, framed in place and time, and recorded in journal entries.

Other voices have also informed the exegesis, through personal conversations. These have been essential, since experience of country and of painting practice is affecting and complex, and at times difficult to convey in words. Conversing with others with a rich experience of place and/or art practice has helped previously unspoken ideas find expression, distilled what was seen and done, and generated new
understanding. This process is consistent with Aboriginal ways of talking things through. Conversation has also been important for checking the ethics of the research process, strengthening ties with the community, realigning the project, and informing the research questions.

The research questions

- How can the experience of a non-Indigenous painter working in country be understood and described?
- How can painting contribute to the development of ethical relationships to country?
- How do Indigenous perspectives influence my approach to painting in country?
- How does the interplay of environmental conditions such as weather, sounds and smells, time of day, and subjective experiences such as memory and association, affect plein air painting?

Overview of the structure of the exegesis

Chapter 2, ‘Research approaches’, describes how this study was designed and a practice-based research methodology was developed. It shows what plein air painting as research looks like, how it works, and what kinds of knowledge it can generate. It explores qualities integral to this kind of research, such as enthusiasm for practice, orientation toward process, tolerance of doubt, and the acknowledgement that community participation in the project is crucial to its usefulness and generation of new knowledge. The chapter questions what ethical landscape painting practice entails in the geographic, historic and social context in which I work. It lays out the
ways this study differs, in terms of its intention and its results, from colonial landscape painting practice. In an exploration of ethical approaches for a non-Indigenous artist painting in country, notions of encounter and ontopoetics are introduced. The theme of visualising poetics of place continues throughout the exegesis. Common ground is found with some Indigenous research approaches, particularly Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) ‘naming, claiming and remembering’, which along with Arrernte protocols for community conversations, guided the study’s ethics framework and methodology. Tyson Yunkaporta’s (2010) writing on relationally responsive research was crucial to early thinking about the project’s aims and methods, and his *Eight-ways Aboriginal pedagogy* is mapped across the painting process.

Subsequent chapters introduce the viewer/reader to a body of creative work. Paintings and text convey knowledge generated through immersion in a place and a practice. The text constructs transversal lines across discourses about place. One line is based on a chronological narrative of field trips in country, represented through journal entries. This narrative links themes or metaphors that emerged through the study and stimulated reflection and shifts in practice. Another line discusses the work of selected painters working in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, from the beginnings of colonisation to the present. Another line is traced through poetry and prose reflecting on relatedness to place. In each chapter, artists and writers are introduced and discussed at relevant points rather than in a separate literature/artist review.

Chapters 3 to 7 follow chronologically the study’s line of inquiry, and trace the evolution of ways of caring for country through painting practice. They begin by investigating the desire to be in country and paint in country; move through the issues and complexities that
were revealed through encounters with country; and end by looking at how the techniques, frameworks and memories that I brought with me into Arrernte country have begun to be integrated in my practice here, in ways that potentially contribute to the well-being of place and people.

**Chapter 3, ‘Thirst’,** begins with Arrernte man Walter Smith’s canny observation of how thirst drives the crow. Thirst is a metaphor for the desires that drive painting practice, and is expanded to include three aspects of desire found in Theravadan Buddhist philosophy. The chapter maps the pleasures of plein air painting practice against this deconstruction of desire: ‘thirst for experience’, ‘thirst for becoming’, and ‘thirst for non-becoming’. It draws on journal entries for a direct account of immersion in place, and reflects on the subjective experience of desire to be in country. It asks what happens when that desire is confronted by damage and misuse of country.

**Chapter 4, ‘Trouble with beauty’,** looks at the cultural construction of beauty. It describes the movement of painting practice from being attracted to subjects that struck me as beautiful, to questioning which aspects of place were perceived as beautiful, and by whom. Arrernte and European perceptions of beauty differ profoundly, including in how they relate to damage. This brought the issue of environmental damage into the foreground of the painting practice, asking how painting can help to address the roots of environmental damage in colonisation, and the co-existence of beauty and damage in country. A possible way through was found in encounters with place, in which the painter’s focus shifts from beauty as an end in itself, to beauty as a metaphor for continuity and relatedness. ‘Fitting in’ to country is a key Arrernte value that includes much more than how one relates to the visible world. It underpins social and spiritual life and the well being of country and people. I suggest the complex web of relationships through which one ‘fits in’ is another way of
defining beauty. I test this idea against Ellen Dissanayake’s notion of beauty as import, rather than mere visual impact (cited in Osbourne 2008).

To this point in the study I had underestimated the influence of ideals from the Western landscape tradition. It was timely to examine the tropes of the sublime, the grotesque, and the picturesque, for the part they have played in colonial painting and their ongoing influence in contemporary landscape painting. The chapter includes examples of how these tropes manifest in contemporary landscapes, albeit in altered form, serving postcolonial purposes.

**Chapter 5, ‘Haunting’,** traces a major shift associated with the commitment to working in one location. Greater familiarity with that place brought questions about who was there before me, and what their lives were like. This led to investigating local early contact histories and station histories, informed by published accounts, memoirs, and photographs. The chapter explores how absence is felt and expressed in plein air painting practice. ‘Haunting’ is a metaphor for feeling the presence of the past, in relation to losses occurring in Eastern Arrernte country with colonisation. The trope of melancholy is compared to traditional expressions of sadness by some Arrernte people, for whom sadness can be an important communal practice. Sadness is also considered as a dimension of creative practice. What emerges from this chapter is the challenge of using painting to picture the poetics of country, whilst not overlooking the violence that has occurred there, and in fact striving to find ways for histories of place to inform and inflect the paintings.
**Chapter 6, ‘Portraits’**, explores a strategy chosen to work against obscuring the past: using painting to reexamine photographs made in the area in the 1930s. Photographs by Roy McFadyen become a means of questioning popular narratives that valorise sturdy, self-sufficient white pioneers and neglect to mention land theft and Aboriginal labour. The faces of Arrernte people are brought into view in painted portraits, and their stories are drawn out. These portraits, and their functions, are compared with the landscape paintings. Roland Barthes’ writing on images that are ‘disruptive’ (impactful because they disrupt accepted meanings or codes) and ‘unary’ (unified, self-contained images whose meaning can be taken in at a glance) is used to draw out some issues around painting from photographs (Barthes 1973). Different levels of intervention in photographic images are analysed, with reference to paintings by Tim Johnson, and my own portrait paintings. The assessment of the portraits by surviving family members is discussed, with the conclusion that although the portraits were not so successful as paintings, they served an important community function by commemorating family histories. The chapter ends with a reflection on portraits and landscapes remembered from childhood, raising the question of how the two genres overlap in ‘portraits of place’.

**Chapter 7, ‘Lost landscapes’**, takes up the theme of loss of country, proceeding from Ian Burn’s (1991) assertion that contemporary representations of landscapes are primarily concerned with loss, and are both impossible and necessary. The chapter looks at ways landscapes are lost, for example through land theft, disruption to cultural life, damage to ecosystems, climate change, exile, and migration. Memories of ‘lost’ landscapes I grew up with in Aotearoa surfaced through the painting process, initiating inquiry into how visual memories of other places affect one’s perception of the place where one stands. I analyse Eugene Von Guerard’s ‘Milford Sound’,
and the impact of such images on relatedness to place. ‘Cook’s sites’, a project by New Zealand artist Mark Adams and writer Nicholas Thomas (1999), is concerned with reimagining sites of contact between colonists and Indigenous people. With permission, I worked with Adams’ photographs as a way of reexamining my own presence on Arrernte country. The chapter then discusses painting as a strategy used by the Arrernte watercolour landscape artists for claiming and affirming their ongoing presence in country, despite the dislocations and losses of colonisation. In conclusion, the necessity of acknowledging loss of landscapes is accepted, but paradoxically the process of making a creative response to loss, such as through landscape painting, is seen to assert and maintain connections with place.

Paintings and photographs referred to in the text appear in the same chapters as their references. Other paintings made during the study can be found in the appendix, grouped according to the relevant chapters. I suggest the reader refers to these images while reading chapters 3 to 7.
**Significance of the research**

The project has generated new knowledge by using plein air painting practice as a form of inquiry into relations with place. Painting practice was transformed by researching and reflecting on Arrernte understandings of country, and bringing these together with the perceptual frameworks, materials and techniques of the European landscape tradition. At the intersection of these bodies of cultural knowledge new understandings emerged through practice. These understandings informed the pursuit of ethical aims relating to caring for country through painting. Caring for country has driven the project, rather than being seen as an endpoint. Painting has been tested as a way of following conceptual and historical threads to bring the painter into a closer relationship to a particular place, and a richer understanding of that place and its people.
Chapter 2 Research approaches

Figure 2.1 Painting at Urrengetyirrpe, 2011. Photograph Sue Fielding.
Introduction: Plein air painting as research

Beginning a plein air painting is intense. Impressions stream through. You see, smell, and hear the place where you stand. You feel it against your skin and under your feet. Thoughts and emotions are stirred, as in a conversation. Your materials enter the conversation. You choose a board, squeeze colours onto the palette, make a quick drawing, and you are ready—sort of. It is a moment of possibility. With the first mark on the board you enter a reciprocal encounter with your materials and the place you stand. You stay with it until it is done and you are released. It seems your painting picks up only tiny scraps from the table, but the process is nourishing. You reflect on what happened, and what remains unknown—you ‘remain in proximity to a mystery’ (Gibson 2010 p. 4). You approach the next painting with provisional understandings, and more questions.

(Journal entry, March 2011, JT)

In this challenging practice-based form of research, painting is a means of engaging with the world. Encounters with place are mediated by painting practice and examined reflectively. The outcome is the generation of new, communicable knowledge presented through painting, and through writing about painting. This chapter provides the reader with a ‘way in’ to understanding the paintings as results of a particular method of inquiry. It describes the processes by which practice-based research generates new knowledge. It begins by asking what defines and constitutes knowledge, declaring doubt, speculation, and uncertainty as essential to the emergence of new ideas within the research process. It considers the idea of a work of art as a ‘performance’ in which its audience participates. Post-colonial approaches have informed this study, and consideration is given to what differentiates my painting process from landscape painting as an instrument of colonisation.
Indigenous research approaches have been key influences on the study, especially its foundation in relatedness and ethics. This chapter refers to the writing of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Tyson Yunkaporta, whose ‘Eight-way Aboriginal pedagogy’ (2009) is mapped across plein air painting in country as a research method. Because my work takes place in the physical and social context of Arrernte country, it has been essential to think carefully about acknowledgement, access to place, implicit claims of belonging made through representation, and possible benefits or harms to Arrernte people resulting from this study.

Practice-based research
‘Fresh and useful knowledge’

Knowledge is created through practice-based research in specific ways. Central to my practice is the belief that knowledge is internally networked, so new learning is integrated into existing knowledge structures. This is particularly true of the knowledge emerging through practice. Painting proceeds from that which is known and visible to the as-yet unknown, invisible next step. Knowledge through practice is externally networked as well, in a holistic picture of connecting pieces. This process parallels the experience of painting in country, where learning proceeds via incoming information from one’s senses, and is constantly checked against the world in which one moves, sees and feels. External networking relates not only to the visible, tangible world, but to the painter’s cultural context, including the work of other artists.

Art as research, and the knowledge it generates, are usefully defined by Ross Gibson, Australian contemporary arts practitioner and theorist: research is ‘the purposeful generation and communication of fresh knowledge’, and art is ‘an intentional process or product
that causes surprising transformations in matter or in a moment’ (Gibson 2010 p. 5). Art and research come together to produce new knowledge when purposeful, focused experience is sought, resulting in a shift in understanding and, importantly, the ability to account for that shift (Gibson 2010). In this study emphasis has been placed on the dynamics of knowledge generation, such as how new understandings emerge, how they are grasped and used, and how new ideas interact with existing tacit knowledge deployed in art practice. The following exploration of characteristics and dynamics of knowledge suggests some ways it is generated through practice.

German philosopher and physicist, Niels Gottschalk-Mazouz (2007), sees knowledge as a complex concept with a cluster of defining features. Some of these are key features of the painting process. For example the practical aspects of knowledge mean that it can be bound to persons or to objects (for instance paintings) through external representations. In this study the work of painting is in part the search for ways to uncover and formulate knowledge by manipulating various materials and devices to create new forms. Gottschalk-Mazouz also observes that since knowledge occurs in time and space, new and old knowledge and local and global knowledge systems can interact in different ways. For artists working in cross-cultural settings, as I would argue all Australian artists are, there is much to learn from exposure to the work of artists drawing on knowledge systems that differ from one’s own in content, values and meaning. As a non-Indigenous artist, a woman, and a migrant, I experience a reverberation between learning generated through painting practice today and the memories and tacit knowledge formed in another time and place; between contemporary ethics and values and those of colonial times. There is interaction between the perspectives of the European painting tradition and those associated with Arrernte traditions, in the country where I now paint. Transformation in my painting practice has resulted from consciously bringing existing skills
and understandings into contact with this place, its histories, and its local knowledge systems. New knowledge emerging through practice is dynamic and generative—a process rather than a state. The process of learning through engagement with materials can be more compelling than the resulting artifact, the material trace of a dynamic process which has already moved on. For the viewer as well as the maker, there is no end-point to engagement with a good painting: it continues to generate sparks like a fire, and cannot be confined to a definitive interpretation.

Gibson’s emphasis on the need to account for new understandings implies that the artist as researcher is mindful of relatedness to her audience and community. Candy likewise distinguishes practice-based research from ‘pure practice’, arguing that the latter serves individual goals, while practice-based research seeks to add to shared knowledge through ‘culturally novel apprehensions’ (Candy 2006 p. 2). Asking how new, shared knowledge could emerge from this project shifted its centre of gravity. Rather than engaging with practice primarily in order to master its forms and processes, I aimed to deepen my understanding of the relationship between painting practice and its social and political context, asking what creates culturally valuable insights. Painting as research generates connections between people, between people and place, and between knowledge systems. It is a practice oriented toward ethical and social aims.

In practice-based research the method does not merely entail observing and documenting practice: practice itself is the means of inquiry and meaning-making. Reflection is a key element, combining reflection on practice, and reflection in practice in an inquiry cycle similar to that found in action research (Haseman 2006). This requires the ability to use the painting process as a tool for thinking, and to critically
review the results. Crucially, one benefit of this approach is that new findings emerge in a visual form that is novel and open to interpretation. Questions are extended and carried forward in an on-going creative process.

‘Thoughtful endurance’ and authority

What else should our lives be but a series of beginnings, of painful settings out into the unknown, pushing off from the edges of consciousness into the mystery of what we have not yet become, except in dreams that blow in from out there bearing the fragrance of islands we have not yet sighted in our waking hours...

David Malouf (1980 p. 134)

Within creative arts practice uncertainty, instability, and doubt inevitably arise, generating questions about the practitioner’s values and views. This is certainly the case in a complex, cross-cultural context. These issues are central to the inquiry, and not to be relegated to the realm of the personal. Engaging with them potentially contributes to knowledge emerging from within practice, to the improvement of practice and its extension into new areas. In this way practice-based research is intrinsically experimental (Haseman 2006). The maintenance of a critical distance from the research process is less important than willingness to go to the limits of one’s capability and understanding, and accept the resulting vulnerability as generative, if uncomfortable. This is learning through immersion; the voice of the researcher gains authority from going through things, from reflection and conscious self-doubt. Gibson, referring to the writing of Andre Gorz, describes such authority as the ‘ability to generate lucid, emphatic opinions in response to actual experiences that had been palpably but also thoughtfully endured, absorbed and synthesized into robust conviction’ (Gibson 2010 p. 3).
Doubt has been an essential element of this project, within the painting process and in thinking and writing about the work. The emergence of new ideas from within practice is not orderly or neat; insights do not often spring up fully formed and clothed in intelligible theoretical language. A new approach may begin as inept, formless enthusiasm, a hunch that something is possible, with no idea as yet about how to do it. Some insights begin as dissatisfaction with an existing solution which may have seemed adequate at one time, but opened up a deeper level of complexity, bringing uncertainty about what to do next. An opening to something unfathomable is often announced through affect or visual metaphor, rather than through words. The words come slowly and they falter. The territory being explored is new, beyond familiar language, and to some extent unknowable except via the process of painting itself, through Gibson’s ‘thoughtful endurance’. New knowledge is founded on the willingness to embrace doubt and give an honest account of the ensuing research process, rather than on constructing unassailable answers to research problems. This process is more akin to poetics than science, and elegantly expressed by David Malouf, quoted above.

There is a distinction between research based on practice and research that is problem-focused. When a project is designed around a central problem or question, aims and objectives can be set out, hypotheses tested, relevant literature surveyed, and the significance of the research asserted. Practice-based research instead often begins with ‘an enthusiasm of practice’ rather than with problem-setting (Haseman 2006 p. 3). The course of the research consequently is likely to be idiosyncratic. This is not to say that it will not have overarching emancipatory aims or a larger agenda. This project began with a love of painting in country, and though it generated many
questions, opening up unexpected areas for theorising, the inquiry looped back always to painting practice, where findings were tested and new ways of crystallising understanding were sought.

**Performing meanings**

Challenging traditional quantitative and qualitative research paradigms, practice-based researchers’ knowledge claims are made through the medium in which they work, using its forms and symbols. Thus research outcomes have to be *experienced*, either directly or as recordings. Haseman proposes a paradigm he calls ‘performativ research’, characterised by findings that are presented symbolically in varied material forms, and in imagery, sound, or digital code (2006 p. 5). He argues that, since their function is to communicate, these material forms could be called texts, even though they are non-discursive and non-numeric. They are performativ: actions that generate effects and gain resonance through relatedness to context, history, conventions, and lateral connections with contemporaneous work.

Viewers do not passively encounter a painting; they engage with it by bringing to bear their own experiences, skills, and perspectives. They are not asked to accept a truth claim, but invited to participate in a dialogue. It has been important to respect the messiness, unpredictability, and instability of the research process for the integrity of the process, but also because these qualities are like loose ends which others can grasp and unravel. When the research and its findings are not ‘all sewn up’, participation from a broad range of people is possible and invited. Interested local people have participated in ‘symposia’ about this study’s underlying ideas, as well as viewing finished paintings. Engagement with others has been crucial to the ethics and findings of the study.
The process of meaning-making can be mapped in poetic terms. What the artist expresses she cannot at first clearly articulate by herself, because of the exploratory and ambiguous nature of perception. ‘Clear thoughts are those that have already been said within ourselves or by others’ (Merleau Ponty 2007 p. 78) whereas the new work is still emerging. The meaning of new work is ‘primarily incomprehensible’ until other people approach it, and it gains depth and resonance through inter-subjective processes:

The painter can do no more than construct an image; he must wait for this image to come to life for other people. When it does, the work of art will have united those separate lives; it will no longer exist in one of them like a stubborn dream...

it will dwell undivided in several minds

(Merleau Ponty 2003 p. 284).

The vision of a work of art uniting separate lives and dwelling in different minds inspires me and recalls the expression ‘culturally novel apprehensions’ (Candy 2006 p. 2). If a painting conveys some new understanding of the world that is relevant and useful to others, and comprehensible on some level, however allusive, it succeeds as research and takes its place in the social realm.

**Networking painting**

Painting has enjoyed a privileged position in hierarchies of forms of art practice, but its position has been challenged by methodologies such as conceptual art, performance and installation, mechanical reproduction and digital media (Krauss 1999). Painting is now one discipline in a network of methodologies, and practitioners exploit lateral connections with other forms of inquiry and practice. Art
theorist David Joselit asks ‘How does painting belong to a network?’ (Joselit 2009 p125). He notes painting has always been situated within networks of distribution and exhibition, but practitioners now explicitly visualise the networks via which works connect with their viewers, how works circulate within these networks, and how they are translated into new contexts. This shift invites attention to social networks that envelop painting, and the movement of influence and meaning back and forth between painting and social networks—a movement Joselit calls ‘transitivity’. The concept of transitivity foregrounds painting’s potential to engage viewers in inquiry. Painting is not (and in fact never has been) limited to situating viewers within ‘phenomenological relationships of individual perception’, engaging though such relationships may be. It also uses a repertoire of devices to ‘suture spectators to extra-perceptual social networks’ (Joselit 2009 p132) and allude to ethically charged issues beyond painting itself. Once a painting enters a social network, for instance via an internet site, it can not be completely stilled, removed from circulation, or tied to conventional, immutable formats. Its potential for generating new cultural understandings is unconstrained by its original format or context (Verwoert 2005). In the Central Australian context, painting as a methodology is uniquely configured within social networks, due to the cross-influences of culturally diverse practices and an extremely long history of Aboriginal painting. In this setting painting is a lingua franca of sorts, fostering important cross-cultural conversations about historical and contemporary relations between people, and between people and land.

**Ethical painting practice**

My practice aimed to observe and address the impact of colonisation in a specific location. It was qualitatively different from colonial painting in its intentions, and its underlying ethics regarding encounters with place. Through investigating a particular place, and events and people associated with that place, it sought to acknowledge cultural values and visions held by people co-existing there. In Arrernte
country layered histories haunt the country and demand attention. I investigated these histories to counter amnesia about violent colonial practices. A post-colonial critique aims to analyse and respond to the functioning and legacy of colonial power structures, including their representations of colonised peoples. My intentions were aligned with such a critique and included acknowledging Arrernte relationships to place; investigating the nature of my connections with place and people; and inquiring into my perspective as an immigrant from Aotearoa/New Zealand, a country with its own history of colonisation and dispossession. These intentions were signalled in various ways, such as naming works according to Arrernte place-names, portraying Arrernte people and their non-Indigenous associates in ways that respect Arrernte values and protocols, documenting social and environmental change resulting from the takeover of Arrernte land, and using landscape imagery to encode responses to such change.

I conceived of cultural and political empowerment not in an abstract sense, but in relation to known individuals, families, and communities, considering how my study related to them, was affected by them, and might affect them. Comments and views of local people with an interest in the area were sought, and have shaped the course of the project. Comments included feedback on whether, or how, the paintings speak to Arrernte people of their own experience of empowerment. Overall, however, the paintings represented my own understanding of, and response to, the changes taking place in country; I cannot presume to speak for others. In terms of acknowledging one’s own position as an artist, the issue is not whether cultural orientation shapes the work—inevitably it does—but whether in so doing it excludes other voices, interprets, marginalises or exploits them. Painting involves taking in experience, reframing
and giving it expression, which raises questions about how one interprets and represents encounters with others, their stories and perspectives.

The original research proposal was drawn up without formal consultation with traditional owners, on the assumption that published material about Arrernte histories and perspectives would suffice for research purposes, and conversation with people would not be needed. I also assumed that since I would only be painting in places accessible to all, using public roads and tracks, I would not need to ask specific permission to enter and be there. I soon realised this was a serious omission, since the entire project needed to be in accord with local protocols, values and ways of thinking. Acknowledging Arrernte perspectives by quoting published works would not adequately represent Arrernte people’s experience. I needed to make personal contact with elders and families responsible for the area where I was painting, ask permission, and see if people wanted to talk with me about their connections with the area. I applied for an ethics clearance to talk with people about the project and the area where I was painting, clarified my accountability and the potential benefits to community members of the study, and consulted with Arrernte people about their interests and goals.

The project was extended, accordingly, to include portraits of Arrernte people engaged in stock work on their traditional lands at Inteye Arrkwe. Photographic sources from the 1930s were explored through painting and opened up to renegotiation of meaning. The portraits were intended to respectfully portray people, acknowledging their ownership and continuing connections with the land. Whilst portrait painting was not part of the original research approach, the omission of Arrernte people’s narratives and faces would have distorted the meaning of the work as a whole, making it complicit in overlooking traditional ownership and ties with the area. Reflection on the
portraits led to a renewed commitment to painting landscapes infused by traces of people who had lived there. These places are storied, named and claimed, and shaped by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural practices such as traditional burning, clearing trees, seeding grasses, stocking with hoofed animals and making tracks and roads. As well as representing people literally, painting practice could render their presence indirectly, through traces left in country and through how country was represented. This meant bringing together landscape painting with Arrernte perspectives on country, and seeing where and how they intersected.

‘Lying about the landscape’ was countered by differentiating my practice from colonial practices in the ways described above: by exploring the ethical foundations of the study and questioning where my work was continuous with the European landscape tradition and where it attempted something different, albeit using traditional tools. Although I aimed to picture landscape differently, cultural conditioning was powerful and resilient. For instance, it was difficult to shift the deeply rooted sense of looking out through my eyes at discrete objects existing independently of each other and me. This orientation remained, though contradicted by Buddhist practice and exposure to Indigenous perspectives. It was reflected in my painting practice in visual devices such as the play between figure and ground, the drama of the horizon line, naturalistic colour, and horizontal perspective. These devices had visual power and appeal, and exerted a pull stronger than mere preference—they were ‘wired-in’. Conditioned perceptions of place, whether hidden or conscious, were not very amenable to deliberate revision. Cultural orientation could be revealed, questioned, and experimented with, but not forcefully erased. Art practice as research is arguably more grounded and accountable when solitary practices of making and reflection are interwoven with communal practices such as debate and public critiques, in which exposure to other people’s responses and views
may help to effect changes in perspective. In this regard, the symposia provided useful feedback on the project’s relevance, on whether it communicated well, and was well founded ethically. Establishing ethical research processes was just the start; questions about ethics deepened as the project went on.

**Visualising the poetics of place**

The painting process involved negotiating territory where perspectives and processes from the European tradition were challenged. At the beginning of the project, I thought I could work with the genre of landscape painting in which I felt ‘at home’, bend it to my purposes and find ways to express anything that arose while painting. I appreciated the way that landscape imagery is familiar and ‘readable’ to many viewers, evokes emotion, and speaks a language of the heart. This makes the paintings approachable, a ready starting point for conversations about place, displacement, attachment and continuity—pressing concerns in the Central Australian context. Through acknowledging overlapping perspectives on place, landscape painting has the potential to break down binary notions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous apprehensions of place.

However, as the study evolved I wanted to be less fixed on plein air processes and the visual field, in order to extend the scope of painting. I needed a visual language for things felt but unseen, for cultural perspectives I sympathised with but did not own, for histories recounted but not witnessed, and people no longer alive but still somehow present through their family ties or their imprint on country. This pushed the project’s use of the landscape genre further into what I would call the poetics of place. When painting in country I still
drew on what I saw around me, but let memory and feeling affect the painting process more. It was like coming forward to meet the country by looking and listening, and in effect, letting the country come forward as well. Landscape paintings can evoke the way a place might be said to ‘speak’. For instance, the metaphorical force of ‘entities’ such as fire and smoke, cloud and dust communicates powerfully through painting. But small, ordinary events, like a puff of wind bringing the tang of smoke, or twigs swaying with the arrival of a bird, can also call one’s attention as strongly as if one’s name was called. Ecologist and philosopher David Abrams calls this ‘the intimate reciprocity of the senses’ (1996 p. 268), the familiar but usually overlooked experience that what we touch, touches us. Such events do not necessarily make compelling subjects for painting. I experimented with subjects with less obvious visual impact, but also trusted that paying attention, over time, would have consequences for how I saw and responded to country, and therefore for how I painted. Painting trained me to pay attention as if it really mattered. Small events and details may seem inconsequential, but as Cape York man Peter Peemuggina said of his country, ‘nothing is nothing’ (cited in Sutton 1988 p. 13). Everything is connected to other things. Everything is a sign that has meaning: ‘there is no alien world of mere things’ (Sutton 1988 p. 13). Increasingly, I approached plein air painting as a portal to a poetics of place, rather than a way to represent place. This opened up the territory of ontopoetics—the inquiry into ways in which country, plants, humans and other animals relate, and communicate with each other. The country where I paint already has an Arrernte poetics of place, developed over many generations and exquisitely systematised and articulated. I respected but made no claims on these cultural forms or the poetics that infuse them, since they are not available to me except in instances where some aspect is shared. Even then, I felt that respect consisted in making no assumptions of understanding. Ontopoetics is a cross-cultural approach that acknowledges existing cultural forms of communication between humans and the non-human world, but also opens up
possibilities for finding one’s own way toward an intimacy with place. Australian philosopher Freya Mathews writes of experiencing the world as ‘ineffably companionable’ and in a collaborative engagement with humans (Mathews 2005 p. 111). This approach is found in the writings of other Australian philosophers and ecologists such as John Cameron and David Russell, and is congruent with Buddhist thought and ethics, as found for example in the writings of Zen teacher Susan Murphy.

**Buddhist philosophy and practice as research tools**

Contemporary Buddhist practitioners, especially in the West, tend to select aspects of Buddhism that mesh with their cultural values, so that Buddhist traditions have had to reinvent themselves in terms of contemporary discourses (McMahan 2008). Modern Buddhism attempts to engage with the pressing issues of the cultures it infuses, and articulate itself in their languages, in order to be seen and felt to make sense. In this project Buddhist philosophy has been used to negotiate cross-cultural contexts, and is congruent with the speculative, immersive, embodied practice of plein air painting. I have engaged Buddhist practices to develop an ethical response to country, to respond to suffering and loss due to dispossession, and to work with contingency and change. Buddhist perspectives on interdependence intersect with Indigenous understandings of the indivisibility of human and non-human life. My interest is in ideas and practices that Interface with modern Buddhist philosophy and practice, rather than in traditional Buddhist cultural forms or doctrines. Though a long-term student and practitioner of Theravada Buddhism, I will not attempt an overview of its philosophy or practices here,
as my focus is on how particular perspectives inform the research process. I will borrow a traditional structure of three connected aspects of practice: ethics, insight, and meditation.

Ethics

The motivation of the artist is not to add another object to an already crowded world... (or) an impulse to reproduce... what already exists. The impulse to make or invent something stems, rather, from a growing sensation of silence, of loss, lack, incoherence, or absence. The need to draw together what has been scattered apart originates... (in) the frustrated desire of connection that inspires the recreative act.

Paul Carter (2007 p. 21)

Carter’s statement on the ethics of invention neatly summarises the motivating impulse of my painting practice: to connect with what exists, address incoherence or loss evident in human relations with place, and confront the disturbance or sense of lack that can result from disconnection. The desire to make paintings is an integrative one which takes different forms, such as bringing together unfocussed or undiscovered thoughts and perceptions through engagement with materials; bringing into view images or narratives that have been left out of popular discourse; collaborating with others to reimagine histories and restore connections with country, or simply using the painting process to gather and sustain attention to the experience of place. In Chapter Three the theme of desire and motivation, evergreen in Buddhist philosophy, will be investigated in terms of the painting process. Ethics in painting practice are expressed in two main ways: through attention to contingency and the interconnected nature of phenomena, including people and place; and through acting in accordance with an understanding of interconnectedness.
Insight

A central concern of Buddhist ontology is intuitive insight into contingency or provisionality, sometimes referred to as dependent arising. Dependent arising is expressed in the image of three reeds leaning on each other: they hold each other upright, but when one moves, they all move. Intuitive understanding of this idea comes from observing that everything experienced through the senses (including thinking and feeling) occurs dependent on other things, and whatever is dependent is ‘conditioned, ... subject to change, and lacking independent selfhood’ (Ronkin 2009 p. 14). If sentient experience consists of a dynamic flow of physical and mental events, the idea of a continuing metaphysical self, underlying experience and enduring over time, is not sustained. Instead the emphasis is on processes, events, and change, rather than on things. Although one tends to construct stable ‘things’ from the flow of sensory experience, change is pervasive and inescapable, bringing in train an inevitable vulnerability and poignancy. From a Buddhist perspective how things come to be is more pertinent that what comes to be. Thus, as in plein air painting, learning to be (relatively) at ease with an often indistinct mass of changing perceptions and sensations is central to intuiting how things arise, how events are indivisibly connected, and how one might live ethically in this fluid, interdependent world. Landscape painting practice informed by this approach emphasises relatedness over empirical scrutiny.

Meditation

The cultivation of attention is sometimes called meditation, but is not limited to the quietism and single-pointed focus often associated with that term. In painting practice there seems little need to direct attention, which is already aroused by interest, and absorbed in the
compelling process of painting. Instead a broad, flexible attention picks up and tracks experiences that are new, undefined, or associative. The very slipperiness and variability of attention are valuable to a painter, admitting uncensored impressions and responses that can take a painting in an unexpected direction, allowing different meanings to surface. When attention has a receptive quality, rather than being overly controlled and selective, it can turn towards rather than away from experiences that are strange or discomforting. This is useful in building tolerance for ambiguity, doubt and instability that feature in the creative process. Attending to present experience does not exclude a sense of the persistence of the past in the present, as in the haunting that is explored in Chapter Four. But immersion in a rapidly changing, contingent environment trains the painter to catch the instant as it flies, and to appreciate its vividness and transience.

All that is simple and strong in us, even all that is enduring, is the gift of the instant.

Gaston Bachelard (2013)

Both plein air painting and Buddhist practice (of this kind) are grounded in subjective experience and powered by attention and reflection. Attentiveness sensitises one to change, to transitions and the connections between events, and to provisionality. Observing and being immersed in provisionality, over and over, leads to deconstruction or de-emphasis of the notion of an abiding separate self and an appreciation of relatedness, and therefore of ethics.
Indigenous research approaches

‘Claiming, naming, and remembering’

Painting in country requires examining my practice in light of Indigenous critiques and values. My paintings mirror how I perceive, conceptualise and value place and time. While I cannot inhabit Indigenous perspectives, I can attempt to understand and invoke them in my practice. I question inherited conceptual frameworks and assumptions, not in the expectation that they will be uprooted, but as a discipline and a practice in itself. Maori researcher and education specialist Linda Tuhiwai Smith claims that Western research brings to bear ‘a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualisation of such things as time, space, and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialised forms of language, and structures of power’ (1999 p. 42). If underlying dynamics and cultural orientation are not seen and understood, the researcher’s subjectivity remains at the centre of her observations and interpretations, and of the ways she constructs knowledge. The orientation, values and conceptualisations that Tuhiwai Smith detects in Western research are inevitably present in art as research, as in any cultural production.

Tuhiwai Smith asserts that indigenous researchers’ purpose is ‘to take control of the survival of peoples, cultures, and languages’ (cited in Sullivan 2010 p 23). She notes Indigenous researchers are overwhelmingly concerned with Indigenous perspectives on power: with ‘claiming, naming and remembering; negotiating, reframing and restoring; […] creating, representing, and narrating; gendering, democratising, and protecting; and connecting and networking’. Working at the meeting place of Indigenous and non-Indigenous narratives about place, I therefore needed to actively invite the ‘naming, claiming and remembering’ by Arrernte people, of the areas I
was working in. I researched historical accounts of interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the location where I was painting. Family and personal histories were interwoven through generations and grounded in place. Portrayals of station life, along with written and oral histories, provided evidence of Arrernte families’ continuity of connection with Inteye Arrkwe. To ignore the evidence would be to collude in silence ‘about a shameful past and an uncertain future’ (Sullivan 2010 p. 181). With permission, I used photographs as a starting point for open-ended conversations respectful of Arrernte and European protocols, applying what I had learnt about Indigenous research methods. Smith (1999) writes of the detailed, culturally-specific expectations that communities hold, and how non-indigenous researchers need to consider these in order to understand against what standards they will be judged as trustworthy, or not. Through pre-existing relationships, I had some understanding of people’s expectations, but it was critical to clarify my responsibilities in relation to these.

Being accountable to others and accepting their input in the research process threatened a loss of autonomy and challenged my desire to be in control. I pictured my precious solitary field trips transforming into busy, sociable road shows. But the understanding sought was a shared one, not to be discovered alone; it required openness to people as well as place. Nicholls claims that the development of trust depends on ‘the researcher proving themselves as willing to move into a liminal, in-between space, de-centering themselves by challenging traditional notions of objective control between researchers and research participants’ (2009 p. 121). Drawing on such advice, I did not surrender autonomy regarding my painting practice but responded to the interests of others in negotiating our respective agendas. Initial research goals were not set collaboratively, but as time went by the project entailed ‘gestures of inclusion
(which) require de-centering’. This meant re-thinking assumptions about my role and negotiating ‘a fissured space of fragile and fluid networks of connections and gaps’. In this space relationships could develop; I could learn the nature of my accountability; and I could clarify what behaviour others saw as appropriate and ethical. The awkwardness and uncertainty of negotiating this space was compensated for by ‘being open and susceptible [and] learning from difference rather than learning about the Other’ (Nicholls 2009 p. 121). A capacity to work with Indigenous research approaches developed over the course of the study, and a balance formed between solitary trips and time spent with others.

‘Relationally responsive research’

Aboriginal education specialist, Tyson Yunkaporta, a Bama man of Nunga and Koori descent, proposes, in ‘Relationally Responsive Research’ (2010), a model for Indigenous research that takes axiology and ontology as its starting point. Yunkaporta defines Indigenous research as ‘research done by and for Aboriginal people within Aboriginal communities, drawing on knowledge and protocol from communities, Elders, land, language, ancestors and spirit’. In a research methodology with integrity, the bulk of the research activity will be devoted to establishing or increasing relatedness, and the research process is grounded in relationship: in values, ethics, and aesthetics. This means following cultural protocols, assuming enduring accountability and meeting community obligations. Yunkaporta (2009) asserts that, when this is done well, epistemology and methodology will emerge in a timely way from interactions between the researcher and the related community. He also stresses the importance of reinstating bio-regional identities and consciousness, an aim congruent with painting practice focused on specific, local histories and landscapes.
By this definition I was not doing Indigenous research, but I saw in his framework much that was relevant to the work of bringing perspectives from European painting traditions into the context of Arrernte country. I mapped Yunkaporta’s ‘Eight-way framework of Aboriginal pedagogy’ (2009) across painting as research, to locate similarities and differences between the two models, and explore common ground. I found much more commonality than difference.

A beginning point and primary focus of Indigenous research is story-sharing in which dialogue between elders and learners leads to introspection and analysis by learners. In this study story-sharing took place through paintings that wordlessly told a story of land and people, and through exegesis chapters that follow the story of the project, told in first-person accounts of place and process. The project also involved conversations with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people where personal, family and cultural stories were shared, and teaching and learning took place. These conversations directed my attention toward the non-visible world and led to questioning received narratives in which Indigenous histories were at times occluded. Communication was not always in words; silences and quiet spaces between people were significant and potent. Informal ‘symposia’ had a profound effect on my sense of the community-wide relevance of the questions I was exploring. They involved inviting interested local people to my home to share food and conversation about subjects that had arisen through immersion in country. Each was focused on a chapter from the exegesis, available for people to read if they wanted, and began with a short talk from me, then comments and discussion. They were informal, with a mood of conviviality, reflection, and respectful listening to each speaker. Margaret Kemarre Turner used the Arrernte word *urannge* to express her feeling about the group: familiarity with a place or person, a good friend, some-one who has been associated with a place for a long
time and is well-liked (Green 2010).

Extending from story-sharing is a visual approach based on **learning maps** or diagrams, which in Aboriginal pedagogy are used to visualise what will be learned or performed as well as to map the processes that will be followed. I see a parallel to this in preparatory drawing practice. Every painting in this study began with looking around, framing a view with my hands, sketching it, choosing a shape of board, doing a loose diagrammatic drawing to work out how the image would relate to the board. These drawings interpreted what I was seeing and helped me see into features of the land, test out compositions and find reference points for finally laying out the painting on the board.

In addition, **non-verbal, kinaesthetic** learning fosters independent, non-verbal testing of knowledge through bodily experience and introspection and is seen as crucial to independent critical thinking by Aboriginal learners. This relates to Merleau-Ponty’s (2007) description of silently grappling with the incomprehensible, until it can be understood through bodily engagement and reflection. Both are apt descriptions of making a painting, in which body and gesture are inseparable from thinking and feeling. Embodied practice requires unpressured, solitary time and cannot be rushed. At times in this project I was conflicted about having enough time alone, whilst still grounding the project in relationships. I needed to work in silence to let things develop. In Merleau-Ponty’s terms, I wanted to grapple with what was ‘primarily incomprehensible’ without the pressure of speech or interaction with others, so I could let it take shape before bringing it into the inter-subjective world. An important dimension of Aboriginal pedagogy and also of this study is the use of **symbols and images**. These are used to guide Aboriginal learners into a deeper understanding of concepts. Knowledge is coded to
support learning and memory. Thinking through images and shapes has helped me think outside prior understandings, for example using visual metaphors such as smoke and dust to explore themes of damage and beauty. Sometimes only after the image has been made I can see what I am thinking, and refine how to communicate that effectively. Yunkaporta (2009) states that learning maps provide the structure of memory, while images provide its language. Similarly, in painting, the structure and composition of the work could be said to provide its strength, and imagery its communicative power. Since all landforms and living things contain knowledge and are metaphors for that knowledge, in Aboriginal pedagogy all learning is linked to country, which is central to every narrative. My own commitment to landscape painting is in part due to a sense that country is communicative, and the forms of landscape can be understood on multiple levels. Thus the imagery of land, water and sky has a power that goes beyond aesthetics, and conveys something of the nature of being.

Aboriginal pedagogies stress non-linear processes, by means of which lateral thinking flourishes and novel combinations of ideas produce innovation. A parallel is made with hunting, where the person does not walk in a straight line, intent on one result. Bringing in elements that are unexpected and seem to be off-topic can result in rich, complex understandings. Learning is continuous and relational, rather than sequential. Existing knowledge is added to by association, and returned to repeatedly for deepening understanding. In painting too, problems are often solved intuitively rather than in a linear fashion. Marks or gestures might be repeated over and over until a sudden shift occurs. This project has taken a zig-zag route, where questions arising through the painting process have been allowed to guide the course of inquiry, with unexpected results. An example is the apparent ‘detour’ into portrait painting that enriched and broadened my understandings of place.
Another aspect is **deconstruction/reconstruction**—the modeling of a text by a knowledgeable other, prior to independent practice by the learner—which recalls the process of examining and copying the work of other artists, on the way to applying their techniques in one’s own context. This is a time-honoured way to learn, in European painting traditions as well as Indigenous ones. It echoes the inspiration found in ‘breathing in’ the overall impression, power, and meaning of a significant work by another artist. Such impressions are internalised, memorised, and carried over into new work, whether consciously or unconsciously. Similarly, I have been deeply affected by the work of other painters, and have embraced their influence on my work, at times consciously testing out elements such as mark-making or colour-ways.

Finally, for Aboriginal learners there is the give and take of learning and **returning benefits to the community** in useful ways, traditionally including performance and display. The end result of this project too is an exhibition of works intended to contribute to community understandings. For Yunkaporta the relevance of learning must always be clear. For a painter, the challenge is to imbue works with the reach and power they need to make a meaningful contribution to cultural life.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has described the contributors to this study’s practice-based research methodology; how it evolved over time; plein air painting as an embodied practice; how an ethical approach was developed; the types of knowledge produced, and the influence of two Indigenous research approaches. The next chapter begins introducing the reader to the body of work and associated knowledge produced within this methodology.
Chapter 3 Thirst

Figure 3.1 Marlene Lyell, *Torresian crow*, 2010.

The old way again (to find water). Old crow might come to your camp in the morning, early. Salt some meat up. Rub your salt in, cut the meat up in small pieces. Old crow will have a feed. You got to sit down and watch him then, to see which way he’ll fly. That’s where the water is. Oh my word, the crow goes that meat. Watch him. He’ll sit down for a while. But not too long though! Might be half an hour at longest. And then you’ll see him fly up. He’ll fly around first; gets his direction, you see, and then straight! You’ll see him dip down then. Oh, that’s where he’s going! Oh yes! Follow him up. Find the water that way.

Walter Smith (cited in Kimber 1986 p. 90)
Introduction

The story about the thirsty crow, told by Walter Smith, Arrernte man from Arltunga, draws on keen observation and the understanding that all living things contain knowledge and are metaphors for knowledge, and aptly illustrates Yunkaporta’s Aboriginal pedagogy. In this chapter the metaphor of thirst is used to explore the desires that drive the painting process, in particular the desire to be in country and to paint there. Thirst as a metaphor for desire is also found in the Theravadan Buddhist tradition. Three aspects of desire are discussed in Buddhist philosophy: desire for sensory experience, for becoming, and for non-becoming. These three provide the structure for this chapter.

The crow—keen observer at every painting camp, opportunistic and smart—evokes the thirst for experience and understanding. The flight of the thirsty crow enacts the painting process: flying around, getting the direction, then ‘Oh that’s where he’s going! Oh yes! Follow him up.’ In the environment in which I paint, thirst shapes the lives of humans and animals. It is the reason that, until recently, life revolved around precious water resources, and is at the heart of pressures brought to bear when pastoralists introduced thirsty stock into the region. It evokes the restless, relentless opportunism of colonisation, first enacted in Central Australia by miners and pastoralists. Thirst is a ready metaphor for the drive to be in country, and to paint there. Regardless of the ups and downs and physical challenges of painting practice, I wanted to be there, and focus my encounters with place through painting.
‘Thirst’ is a word that points in two directions: the state of experiencing thirst, and the resulting motivation to act. It can be a physical or psychological phenomenon, and is common to animals and humans. As motivation, thirst is defined by the Encyclopedia Brittanica (‘thirst’ 2014) as ‘an ardent desire: craving, longing, “a thirst for success”’. I like the word because (as with the crow) it crosses over, spanning physical, psychological and metaphysical realms. It means more than intellectual curiosity, interest, and the drive to understand. It suggests a desire for engagement, fulfilment of potential, the generation of something new. It implies an innate restlessness; thirst is briefly satisfied, but will recur. The physical, intellectual and spiritual dimensions of painting practice are compelling and make one thirsty for ongoing involvement. Painting is salty meat—tasty, and leading to another flight to water. The thirsty crow circles and finds his direction, then dips down and quenches his thirst. The thirst for new understanding through painting, however, is not so quickly quenched. It is not just a thirst for a painting or even for meaning inherent in the painting, but for engagement with the entire experience of painting in this place, at this time. In the broadest sense, thirst is a metaphor for the desire for wholeness.

In Buddhist thought, desire is problematic and central. The Pali word ‘tanha’ is often translated as ‘desire’ or ‘craving’, but more accurately as ‘thirst’ (Ergas 2013 p. 139). A literal translation, ‘blind demandingness’, conveys the reflexive, unconscious nature of yearning. In English, ‘desire’ means ‘a strong feeling of wanting or wishing something to happen’ and is associated with ‘sexual feeling or appetite’ (‘desire’ 2014). Tanha, however, conveys a broader sense—restless, endless reaching for new or other experiences. This broader meaning is conveyed in English by synonyms for desire: aspiration, impulse; yearning, hankering; eagerness, enthusiasm, determination. Some Buddhist commentaries consider desire as a source of psychological suffering, whereas others see it as inevitable,
value its potential for provoking insight into one’s mode of operating in the world, and cite desire for liberation and understanding (Smith, H & Novak 2009). My approach is akin to the latter. The exploration of desire reveals some of the motivation for painting and for seeking relatedness with place. Another Pali word for desire is ‘chanda’, whose meanings include ‘eagerness to offer, to commit, to apply oneself’. This aspect of desire, relevant to the creative process, is described as ‘a psychological “yes”’ (Sucitto 2010). In a statement resonant with Martin Heidegger’s (1963) writing about motivation, one commentary calls it ‘the stretching forth of the mind’s hand towards the object’ (Anuruddhācariya p. 82), just as, in painting, there is an embodied reaching towards something as yet unrealised.

In Buddhist philosophy three aspects of thirst are discussed: thirst for experience, which includes conceptualising, theorising, holding views and beliefs; thirst for becoming, including developing and sustaining a sense of identity; and thirst for non-becoming, including yearning for dissociation, separation, and the ending of things. I have used these three aspects to frame desire in the painting process. The first of the three was initially most apparent. Later the second and third aspects emerged as ways of thinking about constructions of identity and place, and responses to loss and change.
Thirst for experience

Plein air painting plunges one into an experience of place that is complex, layered and in constant flux. It involves close encounters, and immersion in the elements, with their pressures, offerings and demands. Exposure to heat, strong light, constant movement, and wind can be exhilarating—and at times overwhelmingly intense. Returning home, washing off the smoke and dust, and sleeping in a room whose roof and walls muffle the sounds of the night outside nevertheless brings a sense of loss. Painting records some of the flow of experience. Field notes add another dimension:

The notebook is open and folded back, awkwardly balanced on my knees. I adjust it as my pencil moves across the page. The whiteness of the paper is broken by blue/grey bars of shadow from the thin branches of mulga overhead and behind. The bars move irregularly back and forth. Moving air is cool on exposed skin, lifts hair on the back of my head, carries the volatile oils of sun-warmed plants and the iron tang of damp soil. Sighing mulga leaves, intermittent sounds—squeal of a kite working the updraft, contact calls of finches. A cloud of finches sweeps in, alighting in a mulga in ragged formation. They arrive singly, bounce from branch to branch, loosely collect, comment, pause for a moment. One whirrs away, dropping off the edge of the escarpment into cold blue air. Beeping, one after another they launch themselves, become falling specks of light, and vanish into the range’s shadow below. 100m of air under my feet. The slope curves away in deep shadow. Below, the sun picks up hairy glistening leaves of eremophila, and yellow witchetty and cassia flowers beginning to open. I can see east and west maybe 40km along the valley to the furthest of the ranges, standing clear and blue. Distant slopes look as sharp as close ones. Close up there is the dun and gold of winter grasses and dark olive of witchetty foliage. Distinctive blue/grey shapes of mulga drift along the foot of the range and into the folds of valleys.

(Journal entry, May 2011)
Immersion in place for a few days or a week at a time can loosen one’s sense of identity. Especially in solitude, perception alters and sharpens, and previously unnoticed events come forward. Experiences can seem less self-referential, less ordered around judgments and opinions, and shaped instead by a sense of participation in larger patterns and rhythms. The boundary between oneself and the world is softened, and tiny events, like the movement of twigs in the wind, can appear more vivid and connected with other events. This loosening of self-definition and sense of interconnectedness is a quiet joy. It is associated with, but distinct from the joy of painting, which also involves absorption, but is directed by intention and often accompanied by a background sense of being the one who paints. Roland Barthes (1973) distinguishes the *plaisir* (‘pleasure’) provided by a ‘readerly’ text from the *jouissance* (‘physical or intellectual pleasure, delight, or ecstasy’) provided by a ‘writerly’ one. Plaisir has to do with cultural enjoyment and an identity in which one’s position as subject is unchallenged, whereas jouissance involves breaking out of the ways in which one knows oneself. Jouissance therefore seems a more accurate description of the pleasures of time spent in country, where there is a breakdown of hierarchies of significance and a sense of being in a ‘more-than-human’ world. Jouissance is associated with unboundedness and transcendence of limits (Gilbert 1975), and the use of the term in relation to country evokes the sense of freedom associated with a softening of boundaries between self and other. But being in country is not about being literally unbounded. This is not an empty space where one might go anywhere, do anything. Enjoyment in this context has to do with a sense of participation and connectedness that is unpredictable and non-hierarchical, and less constellated around a sense of self. One comes to know oneself in relation to place—an experience that goes beyond delight and could be called solace or healing.
Thirst for the experience of connection, and ways to imagine and express it, has driven my painting practice. Gaston Bachelard speaks of the need for a ‘material imagination’ through which we are able to see objects and forms as alive and related to us, rather than as ‘unrelated things, immobile and inert solids, objects foreign to our nature’ (cited in Bishop 2003 p. 100). The kind of experience that I am thirsty for in plein air painting is a deepening into place, through imagination aided by the discipline of practice, in ‘an enduring, intimate conversation with matter’ (Hillman 1982 p. 89). In the Western tradition the figure of Echo embodies yearning. Echo was a nymph associated with rivers, rocks and mountains, and especially with hollows and in-between spaces. She suffered so much from unfulfilled longing that she wasted away and her bones were turned to stone, leaving only her beautiful voice. It is her voice, falling from high rocky places and whispering through valleys, that invites humans to move on, as she did, from failing to find lasting gratification in sensory experience into a deeper identification with what is called ‘anima mundi’, the soul of the world. David Russell writes: ‘The air, the stone, the water, all have a psychological potency that is available to humanity if they [...] respond to Echo’s invitation’ (2003 p. 153). This potency of things and places may be described as ‘soul embodied’; ‘It’s like hearing a voice in the nature of things—a knowledge in the stone of the bones’ (Thomas Berry, cited in Russell 2003 p. 153). Without accessing or imagining this dimension of place, plein air painting practice would be flimsy and insubstantial, unsatisfying. The ‘knowledge in the stone of the bones’ quenches a thirst in the maker, and potentially in the viewer of the work. Thirst for a sense of connectedness with place is what gives landscape painting its psychological import and makes it necessary, on a personal and cultural level.
Painting is pleasurable and never finished with. Oil paint is compelling stuff: its smell, flow, skin, solidity or mobility; the way it yields or resists the pressure of one’s hand. It retains the imprint of a brush and the gesture with which it was laid on the board. It tells the story of the speed and direction, the pressure and intent and mood of the painter—intimate as a caress but open to view. It tells what the painter was giving weight to, what she was looking into and what she was skimming over, how she delineated forms or probed the massy weight and bulk of them. Traces left behind are marks of engagement, recording the performance of a painting. The gloss, richness and plushness of oil paint can evoke the lustre of healthy skin and shining eyes, abundance and luxury. For some Aboriginal people the association of oil and fat with medicine and healing has deep significance.

In the European painting tradition, oils call up more troubling connections. Their polished, considered, glossy appearance can be associated with patronage, privilege and claims of ownership, with painting as an item of currency and status. The choice of oil paint for plein air painting has these associations, but is also pragmatic. Its slow drying time means the paint is workable for long enough to complete a painting in one go, even in hot weather. It is sturdy enough to withstand being leaned against rocks, blown over in the dust, rained on and carted home over rough roads. It is resilient and workable; it can be pushed and pulled, thinned and poured, semi-dried and scrubbed, covered with flying ash or dust and still retain its character. The painting process has the pacing and focus of ritual: walking around, looking; choosing and laying out paint, matching mood and intent, light and weather with colours waiting in tubes; squeezing paint onto the palette in a set pattern; matching, blending, working quickly or slowly.

The colours of the oils have depth and intensity, and power to persist when layered, glazed, or blended. Transparent colours over coloured, textured grounds introduce randomness and chance, disrupting the image or economically implying layers of rock or vegetation. Colour is laid down, shoved around, made to work against the ground, mixed into other colours on the board, pushed and scrubbed with the brush so that every movement of the hand leaves its mark. Painting is physical labour. It calls for focus, presence and stamina to stay with it until it is done. The commitment is easy when the task is so engaging.

(Journal entry, May 2011, JT)
Thirst for becoming

Buddhist psychology engages not just with thirst for sensory experience, which flickers and is gone, but also with yearning for an ongoing sense of self, preferably a stable and pleasing one. Again, this is a drive that in Buddhist terms ultimately cannot be fulfilled, but is nevertheless a motivating force with which one can form a conscious relationship (Epstein 2005). Bringing a painting into being means bringing a particular self into being—I identify with the process and effectively do not separate it from myself. Some desires that drive the painting process relate to attributes of the self, for example the painter-self, who loves the properties of paint and has an embodied memory of the gestures and processes of painting. Making something new by bringing together materials and experience into a new configuration is compelling. There is a desire to be absorbed in the painting process; absorption brings a loosening of constraints, a pleasurable sense of collectedness, and relative freedom from self-consciousness. There is a desire to re-connect with the familiar, to repeat something that worked before: a desire that is usually thwarted and leads instead to something new. There is the yearning to make ‘the one’—the painting that is always possible but never appears, the one that all others are leading to. With the beginning of every painting, ‘the one’ hovers for a time but doesn’t land, and at some point allegiance shifts to the painting in hand.

There is the wish for clarity and definition, a foothold in the welter of shapes, forms, colours and changing light. I might begin a painting by delineating the skyline before attempting complex layered forms and textures. This desire for differentiation is akin to exploring ideas. The act of painting gives thought processes tangible form and reveals movements of thought, in which a sense of self is found. There is also the opposite pull of ambiguity and soft focus, dropping out detail so that forms simplify. When the atmosphere is smoky or hazy, or
in low light, visual ambiguity allows a haptic exploration of perception and feeling. While painting at dusk after a long day, working fast in fading light, there can be a sense of crossing a threshold. Shapes are less defined and intuitions come forward, uncensored. The inclination toward accuracy gives way. Forms become looser, stranger, and the sense of self also becomes looser, absorbed in the working process.

There is the compelling desire for a long-range view. The pleasures of distance and space run counter to the different pleasures of detail and intimacy in close-range seeing. I am drawn to both, but when choosing what to paint I often avoid the complex detail of close-up views. Big shapes, veils of colour and the dropping out of detail seem to offer the imagination more freedom. In this context the long range view serves a different purpose than Streeton’s implied surveillance and mastery of what is seen. It offers connection with a wider world, a larger life, and an expanded sense of time. There is a sense of entering a place where other possibilities exist. I have a life-long habit of standing, looking out from high places, imagining how one would traverse the flood plains, valleys and ridges that can be seen, and picking out a route. It is an imagined journey through both space and time, since distance implies both dimensions.

There is a desire for the drama and intensity of change. The visible world changes constantly, calling for a rapid working pace that cuts through hesitancy, raising energy and focus. Painting can never keep up, but does evoke the press and flow of change and contingency. There is also the wish to slow down, reduce choices, accept a poverty of means and take the chosen medium as far as possible. Focus on process has a quieting and unifying effect, as the momentum of concentration gathers. A painting moves from the relative openness of its beginnings through a progressive reduction of possibilities. Although the possibility of radical re-working exists up to the last brush
stroke, in practice each choice conditions the next and the painting becomes more finely calibrated till it seems there is nothing more to be done.

Through all of this, volition is sometimes conscious, sometimes submerged in the process. Hundreds of small choices made in an hour of painting coalesce into a sense of self: of who this is doing the painting, who this is in relation to place. Close attention to things draws threads of connection between outer and inner life, weaving narratives into an identity associated with place. Participating in the life of a place alters my sense of self in a way that is like being slowly drenched by drizzle. Over time memories, feelings and images of place accumulate, and identity and place seem inseparable.
I grew up pakeha (Maori language name for someone of European descent) in Aotearoa. Maori culture and language were very much part of our family life, due partly to our father’s ties with the local Maori community. He was pakeha, but as a young man had lived and worked in a tiny bush community where Maori was the only language spoken. He made friends easily within the Maori community, and had an abiding interest in Maori culture and history. I learnt early that place was storied, and that stories were revealed gradually. I learnt that land and people are inseparable, and every person must have and know their turangawaewae—their place to stand. Whether Maori or pakeha, one should be able to state the basics of identity: extended family, tribal group, and the mountain and waterway around which one’s life revolves. Ties with place formed through play and repetition. The contours, shadows, smells, and shapes of the ground; the names of plants; the way daylight came and went; the sweep of air and rain; shifting light over water—all these contributed to a sense of turangawaewae. The liminal space of twilight was a zone of wild play between the ordinary world and the world of the night, alive with spirits and ghosts. If it was dark enough you could hide by lying flat in long grass, pulling it overhead and melting into the ground, vision divided by springing grass stalks. Against the last light summer moths emerged, teeming up from the grasses and throwing themselves into erratic wobbling flight paths criss-crossing the sky. In these memories an indivisible constellation of self and place is held.

Arriving in Australia in the ’70s, I was amazed and sceptical when Melbourne friends claimed they had never met an Aboriginal person. So many hills and streams, trees and birds, towns and streets were stripped of their original names and known by the names of European men. I glimpsed the profoundly different legacies of the two countries’ colonial histories. Loneliness for Maori language and culture—prayer, song, oratory, humour, largesse—was part of my move to Central Australia. I wanted to live where Indigenous people visibly held their ground and their language was heard in the street.

(Journal entry, August 2011, JT)
In 1990 I saw *Sacred Grasses* by Ada Bird Petyarr (1989), in the Australian National Gallery (figure 3.2). I was struck by its lyrical marks and colours, vivid depiction of plants, and indefinable perspective. I felt drawn into the picture plane and underground, as if lying on my back just under the surface of the earth. Above and below everything was alive and in motion. Grasses bent overhead, dancing in a wind that passed over and through everything. Small plants and elaborate taller ones glowed, branched and fruited, their cells pulsing with life. I imagined insects and birds arcing through the space leaving phosphorescent traces. Airy structures permeated the entire field of the painting, neither abstract nor literal, elusive and shifting.

Twenty years later the painting was intact in my mind’s eye, the impression of vibration and live particles in motion still strong. I tested my memory against a reproduction: fewer curving lines than I remember, more structure in the streaming ‘sky’. Constellations and patterns of stars in place of what I remembered, a sunlit windy sky alive with insects and pollens. The plants seemed like dancers, gesturing widely, shaking something down from their arms and fingers—song, oil, or sweat? It glistened and flowed out and around them, aligned to the airy structures in the sky. The painting suggested a shift from privileging the visible world, to experiencing phenomena from ‘inside’. It conveyed warmth and delicacy of feeling for the country and the grasses. The artist did not stand apart as a witness; she was a participant. The painting was at once about her country and about herself. It was more than personal expression: alive with the rhythm and joyful momentum of ceremony, it implied the presence of others and located the artist in a kinship structure, and a more-than-human context.
Paintings from all traditions may communicate the artist’s ‘interior vision’ of the world vividly and movingly. This one conveyed the artist’s vision in a way that, for me, could be physically apprehended, verifying her claim of knowledge and belonging. I admired its accuracy and liveliness, and felt literally moved by it. Petyarr’s evocation of the ‘inside’ feeling of place, plants, seasons and weather mirrored my own feeling for familiar places, and my thirst for immersion in place. Much later I linked the underground, twilight atmosphere of the painting and my childhood experience of lying in the long grass at nightfall, watching the teeming sky and feeling the ground at my back. The painting had acted as a catalyst. Its communicative power came in part from the painter, and in part from my own sense of recognition. A spark jumped across a gap of language, culture, and memory.

**Thirst for non-becoming: wanting things to go away**

In Buddhist psychology, desire can take the form of resistance to what is present—a paradoxical desire for absence, such as a craving for the end of pain, or for escape from an unpleasant experience. There is a particular kind of pain in having to associate with something unwanted. Resistance is also a feature of painting practice. It manifests, for example, in spending too long trying to make a painting work in a certain way, censoring elements that are difficult to deal with, or imposing an old approach when a new one is called for. An example:
On a winter morning I drove out of town towards Undoolya looking for a quiet place to work with a long view of the hills. The area was marked by vehicle tracks, bare patches deeply grooved by run-off and trail bikes, piles of junk metal and dumped white-goods half concealed by weeds. I set up and began painting on a ridge overlooking the ranges. Within twenty minutes someone drove up in a ute and parked near where I stood. He turned his radio up, set out a camp chair and some gear, and sat down. He began banging on paint cans with a metal rod and making sarcastic remarks. Thought I was an artist did I? Well he was a sculptor, been coming here for years. How thick was I, not to know this was his place? Thought I owned it did I? I sparred with him until I felt unhinged, then packed my things, cursing, and drove to another ridge out of earshot. I could see Undoolya and the massive undulating ridges in the east, west to Honeymoon Gap, and further on, the fading blue tiers of the Western Macdonnell Ranges. Light on tin roofs marked the town sprawling across the flood plain to Heavitree Gap. To the south, power lines followed a dirt track to Whitegate camp. At my feet were green cans, bourbon and coke cans, plastic bottles, butts, broken toys, wrappers from Kimbies, Hungry Jack’s, KFC, Subway, and Wendy’s, and a glittering spread of broken glass and bottle tops catching the sun. Where the slope dropped away, clumps of weeds and dry shrubs rattled with plastic bags and sale catalogues. Who brought all this stuff up here, and why? During the day I stopped work to chase someone dumping a trailer-load of whitegoods. People drove up to check out the view, have a smoke and a beer. ‘Painting, are you? Can I have a look?’ Ankle deep in rubbish, irritated by the whine and dust plumes of dirt bikes and 4WDs, I made serene images without a sound track. My eyes were on the horizon: the lure of distance, the drama of the skyline, and the shapes of the hills. I painted doggedly until last light.

(Journal entry, June 2011, JT)

Figure 3.3 Undoolya. Photograph Jennifer Taylor, 2011
Figure 3.4 Jennifer Taylor, *Undoolya, looking east*, 2011. Oil on board, 20 X 60cm. Photograph Peter Carroll
In figure 3.4 shapes of sky, range and foothills are laid down sketchily in bands of colour. The details of vegetation and contour are hinted at by scumbled paint. A few dark forms and an indentation on the wavering line of the range stand out. The outline of the range identifies the place: Ntaripe/Heavitree Gap. There is a space between the near hills and the far range—a broad valley that can’t be seen. Only the cool smoky air it holds is visible. The dark shape on the hill suggests a figure overlooking the valley. Low light suffuses a landscape soon to disappear into darkness. The warm, high-key palette of mauve, gold, burnt sienna, and pink, over a sienna ground, suggests intimacy and the ease of being in a well-known landscape. It bears associations with skin, the body.

The painting was made at the end of a frustrating day, amid highly visible environmental damage: scarring, gullies, dust, weeds, traces of fire, eroded tracks, vehicles, trash. I edited out these scars. My desire to be alone was thwarted, and to compensate I focused on the long view, ignoring sounds and sights closer in. The painting reflected a push and pull of yearning and resistance, reading as a warm, serene landscape, but conveying uncertainty. The forms are fuzzy and ungraspable, and loose rendering makes it difficult to resolve them or settle in to the pictured space. My sense of pervasive violence affected how I saw and depicted the country, but remained unconscious and unexplored. What was underfoot was overlooked in favour of distant ranges, but the painting process conveys tension through rough sketchy marks, and a permeable ground has been left open for other meanings to come through.


**Conclusion**

Until this time in the study I had been relatively unaware of how and why I was selecting subjects for painting. The trash and damage I tried to ignore at Undoolya spoke of neglect, aggression, and disarray—the ugly consequences of disruption and dispossession. I was barely conscious of matching painting motifs with images absorbed from the European tradition, that had shaped my sense of what was a desirable subject and what was not. Buddhist theories of desire helped me to examine the subjective experience of desire and its influence on painting practice. The cultural construction of desire—what is seen as attractive or repulsive—is revealed in ideas about what defines beauty, artistic tropes such as the picturesque and the sublime, and the part such tropes play in social life. This is the concern of the next chapter.
Chapter 4 Trouble with beauty

Figure 4.1 Jennifer Taylor, Smoke at Urungetyirrpe, 2011. Oil on board, 30 x 40cm. Photograph Peter Carroll
We see our country, even though it might be destroyed by another species, we see how the beautiness is still in the country. Anwerne-rale areme ampere nhenhe nanthe-rale pweleke-arlke-arle akenge alhintyeke, ampere anwerne-kenhe-arlke arelyemelyeme ampere utnenge anwernekenhe-arlke. It doesn’t matter that horses and bullocks have caused such destruction, we still see the spirit of that Land glistening... we see what’s in the Land, and how we fit into it [...] ‘Fitting in’ means how we hold, and how we relate to it [...] the most important thing is to understand that we are part of our Land, and the Land is part of us [...] We who see the beautiness of the Land.

(Turner, MK 2010 p. 126)

Introduction

At this point in the study it became evident that choosing subjects for painting according to subjective perceptions of beauty had led to trouble, in the form of a confrontation with environmental damage and the exposure of my own selective vision. Cultural constructions of beauty were investigated, and Arrernte and European perspectives compared. My reading of Arrernte perspectives suggested beauty in country could be seen as a metaphor for interconnectedness, bypassing any question of whether particular qualities of place were beautiful, or ugly, or ordinary. This posed the challenge of how to understand and picture damage to country. Margaret Kemarre Turner (2010) affirms that the integrity and ‘beautiness’ of country, and its spiritual power, are undiminished by damage, yet at the same time that respectful treatment of country is essential. No feature of the land, however small, is accidental, and all relate to ongoing creative forces within the land.
I looked for a way to address the coexistence of beauty and damage in country, and found it in the poetics of encounter. The mode of encounter is fundamental to plein air painting, which depends upon looking and listening to orient oneself within the practice and in country. Cultural ideals such as the sublime and the picturesque, with strong roots in colonial painting practices, have a continuing influence in contemporary landscape practice, and need to be understood. But considering beauty and damage in terms of encounter shifts the emphasis from culturally formed ideals of beauty, to asking how these ideals function in relation to the ongoing life of the land. That is, whether perceptions of beauty actually help one not only to feel delight and attraction to country, but also prompt one to hold, uphold, and ‘fit in’ to country, as is now clearly necessary for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike.

**Beauty and damage**

At the outset of this project my view was that a contemporary portrayal of landscape as beautiful risks being discounted as sentimental, nostalgic, or dishonest—a denial of past and present damage. The poignancy associated with fragile, temporal beauty can be admitted, but abstract qualities such as ‘timeless’, ‘pristine’ or ‘natural’ are problematic because of embedded cultural assumptions, and because they obscure the realities of environmental change. In Central Australia damage that has accompanied colonisation is observable in many ways: loss of resident traditional care-takers; changes to vegetation due to overgrazing, feral animals, and altered fire regimes; more frequent, hotter wild-fires due to invasion by weed species like buffel grass and the reduced application of traditional burning techniques; changing climate resulting in hotter, wetter summers with booming weed growth followed by devastating fires; and soil erosion and dust due to high impact grazing and loss of soil structure (Letnic 2000). Prior to colonisation Aboriginal people expertly
deployed fire to maintain and encourage the plant and animal species that sustained them (Kimber 1983, 1994). Since the advent of colonisation and the removal of people from their country, the protection of buildings, infrastructure and domesticated animals has taken priority, resulting in the suppression of fires and diminishing of traditional burning practices, and ultimately in catastrophic, uncontrolled fires (Gammage 2012).

Plein air painting in Central Australia inevitably raises the question of how painting can address the coexistence of beauty and damage. Developing a visual language for this is not easy: signs of damage may be relatively subtle, and need informed interpretation. To a newcomer, weeds can look like lush pasture or charming wildflowers. Wild horses or camels can look romantic and exciting. The absence of Aboriginal people from traditional lands can look like ‘the desert’ in pristine form. Paradoxically, the visual drama and beauty of Arrernte country can work against the exploration of key issues through paint: paintings can be taken as seductive portrayals of ‘natural beauty’ that conceal specific local issues and cultural bias. I asked whether, when beauty in landscape painting is the focus of attention in a painting, the work is complicit in forgetting or ignoring troubling realities.

I wanted to make paintings that were specific, nuanced, and accurate, but not didactic. Rather than literally picturing damage, in the form of weeds, erosion, or feral animals, I wanted to explore responses to it, such as loss, fear, unease or anger. The spring and summer of 2011 was a time of massive uncontrolled bushfires, in which much of Central Australia’s rangelands burned, including a staggering 65% of the Tanami, north-west of Alice Springs (Bastin & Allan 2012). Smoke, brown haze, and ash hung over the town for weeks, and sparked many conversations filled with grief and despair at the loss of plant and animal life, including ancient trees brought down by
unprecedented frequent, hot fires. I began to paint smoke, fire, and cloud, firstly by way of documenting them, then as signifiers of environmental and cultural change. These phenomena were treated as metaphors, in the sense that in them a part stood for the whole—rising smoke standing in for a cascade of damage caused by human failure to appreciate the interconnectedness of humans, plants, weather, and land. Like any visual metaphor, this one was relatively out of control, in that smoke has radically different cultural meanings. Smoke from traditional burning, carried out skillfully, can be a reassuring signal that all is well and people are looking after country properly. Here is Kimberley elder Dinah Marrngawi on seeing smoke plumes: ‘Look! … this is how it should be, this is how it was when the old people were alive, look this country is burning, it has been lifted up, we have embraced it again’ (cited in Gammage 2012 p. 184). In the context of rapid environmental and climatic changes, however, smoke and fire have new meanings for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, for many evoking unease, fear for the future, helplessness and grief about the loss of predictability in seasonal patterns and activities.
Figure 4.2 Jennifer Taylor, *Fire front*, Triptych, 2012. Oil on board, each panel 60 x 60cm. Photograph Jennifer Taylor
Figure 4.3, Jennifer Taylor, *Firefront 2*, 2012. Oil on board, each panel 60 x 60cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Figure 4.4 Jennifer Taylor *Smoke at Urrengetyirpe 2*, 2011. Oil on board, 20 x 60cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Figure 4.5 Jennifer Taylor, *Smoke at Anthwerrke*, 2011. Oil on board, 30 x 80cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Visual metaphor

The use of a metaphor, such as smoke, is a means to an end, a way of prompting a jump in thought and feeling, via the provocative suggestion that something is in fact something else. In the interaction of meanings between the two parts of the metaphor (fire, say, and ecological damage) that do not literally match, a number of possible new meanings are intimated. The process allows perceptions of the world to be revised and enriched, testing and extending concepts that have been accepted as empirically true. In poetic or visual form metaphors are particularly open, like a doorway through which the viewer can step away from dualistic thought, into a more equivocal space of emotion, allusion, and implications. For example, responses to images of fire go beyond arguments about conservation and protection of property versus traditional burning practices—fire as catastrophe versus fire as friend—allowing different aspects of one’s relationship to fire to be reconsidered. The image says ‘fire can be this, and this, or this: beautiful, terrifying, fascinating and repellant, dreamt or intensely real’. It can be all these things.

Visual metaphor accesses flexibility and negotiability of meaning easily, by circumventing concept-formation. It can go directly to intuition and feeling, across which concepts and language can play, but which do not have to be translated into words in order to convey meaning. Visual metaphor in painting literally embodies meaning, in materials, textures and colours that evoke the textures and feeling of experience. Linguistic metaphors also have the capacity to evade logic and go straight to feeling, but are potentially more controlled by the writer or speaker, who can lead a listener quite firmly toward a chosen meaning, whereas visual metaphors are less under the painter’s control. German philosopher and cultural critic Friedrich Nietzsche described truth as ‘a movable host of metaphors,
metonymies, and anthropomorphisms’ (1976 pp. 46) because of the way concepts are basically formed from metaphors, proceeding from the stimulus and response of images on the retina, or from sound as signifier. Sound and sight are the original metaphors, since both seeing and hearing are already being interpreted, from the moment vision or hearing occur.

Beginning with smoke and fire as metaphors for damage and loss, over time I came to think of beauty in painting as a metaphor, rather than an end in itself. Instead of seeking beauty in the visible world, and attempting to represent it in painting, perhaps the potential of landscape painting lies in learning to see and show something less obvious than visible beauty. When Margaret Kemarre Turner (2010) speaks of the ‘glistening’ in country, I cannot really know what she sees, or what she means. Her use of the word, as metaphor for a quality or dimension of country, is opaque to me in the same way as if she used an Arrernte word I did not recognise. Like all metaphor, it is culturally constructed, not universally understood, and not a mere shortcut to meaning. Even though I cannot fully verify it, ‘glistening’ conveys meaning to me, to do with the song-lines that, for some Aboriginal people, underlie and weave through the visible world. In a painting ‘glistening’ becomes a non-linguistic metaphor that brings together visual perception, emotion, and the realm of the spiritual. Sacred Grasses shows the glistening of country—a shining part of a larger whole, which could be described in terms of wholeness or interconnectedness. ‘Glistening’ also evokes a traditional Mahayana Buddhist metaphor for interconnectedness. The ‘net of Indra’ is a multidimensional web, with a glistening dewdrop or jewel at every junction, one to represent everything that exists or has ever existed, each droplet reflecting every other one, ad infinitum. It is an image of the inseparability and interpenetration of all facets of the universe (Watts 2008). Both metaphors point toward something foundational to their respective traditions. I cannot assume correspondences
between them, but I can allow them to resonate within my painting practice. They are gestures toward something I too have felt in

country, that at times finds expression in an Ineffable, allusive dimension of landscape painting that might be called the poetics of

encounter. Perceptions of beauty inevitably expose the fragility of country and damage sustained: perceptions of violence and damage

are in turn infused with the beauty of interconnection, and with pathos and a sense of responsibility for country.

Moving encounters

Encounters with country through plein air painting involve sustained attention that results in knowing the place in certain ways. Allen

Carlson (2002) argues that knowledge of the landscape is a necessary condition for the appreciation of its aesthetic qualities. What kind

of knowledge enhances appreciation of country? Knowledge based on empathic observation and long association, or scientific

knowledge based on rigorous, structured observation and recording—or both? Noel Carroll questions this emphasis on knowledge, which

may ‘exclude very common appreciative responses to nature—responses of a less intellective, more visceral sort, which we might refer

to as “being moved by nature” ’ (Carroll 2002 p. 245). These kinds of responses need not be mutually exclusive, but knowledge based on

conceptual frameworks, by default, often overrides intuitive responses.

Australian environmental philosopher Freya Mathews articulates why a shift in emphasis, from aesthetic appreciation based on

knowledge about country to appreciation felt as a visceral response to country, is significant. She sees a ‘necessity for existential

modalities radically at variance with those [of] the materialist universe of modernity’ and proposes ‘a modality of encounter as opposed

to knowledge’ and a ‘modality of synergy as opposed to domination-and-control’ (Mathews 2004 p. 6). For Mathews, ‘the primary goal is
not to theorise the world, but to encounter it’. Encounters with a world understood to be responsive and interactive with humans require ‘a mode of address, rather than of representation or explanation’ (Mathews 2004 pp. 3, 4). In plein air practice I depend upon the mode of address, including listening and waiting, to orient myself within the practice and in country. Painting brings elements of encounter together to produce visual and emotional effects.

Painting practice based on encounter, rather than on judgments about beauty and damage, would entail suspending judgment and a world-view based on cause and effect. It would require listening, and attentiveness to inter-subjectivity. It would mean a sense of beauty characterised by involvement, in which beauty has import rather than merely impact. Beauty would be found in relatedness, rather than in idealisation: a quality ‘inside’ experience, rather than an experience to be sought. In terms of environmental damage, a long-range view and sensitivity to contingencies would replace reactive moves to correct imbalances in the short term. Values to do with the ‘natural’, the pristine and the damaged, and with what should be protected and controlled by humans, would be questioned. The intention to impose one’s will—the primary ‘modality’ of colonialism and modernism—would be recognised both in actions that damage and in actions intended to protect. Both cut across the mutuality of encounter, in which the subjectivity of the other can be glimpsed, and from which relationship can proceed. Painting as encounter would gravitate towards witnessing and responding, and away from didacticism. It would tolerate bafflement and ambiguity. It would involve waiting. It would stop trying to explain. Perhaps it would even stop trying to represent beauty, and focus instead on the raw encounter, of which beauty, in painting, is sometimes a by-product.
French philosopher Michel Foucault dreamed of a new form of critique that would demand a similar quality of open-ended, but far from passive, encounter:

...a critique that would not try to judge, but, rather, would try to allow a work, a book, a sentence, an idea to exist. It would start fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind and seize spray in flight so as to scatter it further. Such a critique would not create a profusion of judgments, but signs of existence, it would call them, raise them from their sleep... Criticism by condemnation sends me to sleep. I would like to see a criticism that sparks the imagination. It would not reign supreme, or be robed in red: it would bear the lightning of possible storms.

Michel Foucault (cited in O'Farrell 1997 p. 8)

As the project evolved, painting was used less as a means to represent beautiful, desirable aspects of place and more to register encounters with place, whether pleasing or troubling. The painting process reproduced the movement and energy of these encounters by setting up another contact zone: the surface of the painting and the picture plane within the painting. This was a place where Foucault’s ‘signs’ could be allowed to exist. Across that surface, and in and out of the picture plane, knowledge of place held in the body was traced. Gestures and marks made with brush, hand and arm negotiated the space, generating a kind of parallel world to the one in which a body moves through space. The picture plane offered a field where marks and materials were used to physically grapple with the experience of place, and communicate it in some way, even if what was communicated was as elusive as ‘seizing spray in flight’.
With this approach to painting, representing the world as beautiful becomes almost irrelevant. The painting comes out of, and addresses, an experience of continuity and relatedness. It is made in a contact zone, a field of interconnection between see-er and seen, eye and hand, mind and materials. Traces of the encounter convey something of an experience which, whether beautiful, repulsive, or nondescript, has gone now. The painted image seems to refer to the encounter, but it too dissolves in a web of connectedness and cannot really be located. It exists as a material object that seems to be something else—a tree or a skyline. None of its marks or colour patches function in isolation, but together they appear to make a world. As Eleanor Ray says of Georgio Morandi’s still lifes: ‘We can’t see a line or a shape in his still life as merely what it is because we can’t separate it from its participation in the painting’s representation’ (Ray 2013 p. 4). In this sense it could be said that painting models interconnectedness, and mirrors the sustained connection between self and place that the painter experiences, in the process of painting.
Figure 4.6 Jennifer Taylor, *Anthwerke after fire* 2012. Oil on board, 40 x 30cm.

Photograph Peter Carroll.
Anthwerrke/Emily Gap after fire is a painting that embodies an encounter, in this case literally bearing parts of the country in the form of ash particles blown onto its surface by a willy-willy that swept through, raising clouds of ash, while I was painting. Some particles have been pushed into the paint and more have stuck on top. The paint is scratchy and thin, and crisscross brush marks weave the surface of the painting together, replaying hand movements that followed land contours, the vertical shapes of surviving trees, and distant rocks and contours almost obscured by thick haze and drifting smoke.

How is continuity between painter and place reflected in the painting? Perhaps it is in the sketchiness of the marks, which have followed eye movements around and across the land and show little concern for explaining topography to the viewer or clarifying details: they are more concerned with feeling out what is present in a place so recently and drastically altered by fire. The colour shifts are shorthand for spatial shifts; they make layered zones within the painting rather than reproducing the colours one would find in a photograph taken at the time. In other words, the colours connect to each other, within the field of the painting, rather than to objective observation. As in Morandi’s still lifes and landscapes, marks and shapes manage to convey the illusion of something else. Colour and the imprint of a quickly moving hand suggest emotion. Looking at the painting, I remember how quickly, roughly, and energetically the painting was made, how hot and choking the wind was. I was absorbed in the effects of the fire, the smell of smoke, and wondering whether a wind change would rouse the fire and bring it round again. I stopped painting abruptly when Pam and I had to leave. I thought I might finish the painting in the studio, but it had a fragile materiality that I didn’t want to wreck. It was as if I’d taken the board and pressed it into the ashy ground, or done a rubbing, to take an imprint of this time and place.
Fitting in to country

Beauty perception is to ordinary perception as ordinary perception is to sensation. Beauty is an integrative sensibility.

Frederick Turner (1991 p. 93)

M. K. Turner’s affirmation that beauty in country could coexist with damage caused by humans and feral species remained a riddle to me, but I had a glimmer of understanding of the connection between seeing ‘the beautiness’ of country and ‘fitting in’ to country: both were based on a lived understanding of the inseparability of people and land. Both operated within the ‘modality of encounter’. M. K. Turner’s statement supports Frederick Turner’s claim that beauty is an ‘integrative sensibility’, but goes much further. She seems to locate beauty as a generative and regenerative quality inherent in the land, and she locates the capacity to see beauty in humans who ‘fit in’ and are in relationship with the land. The seeing of beauty is dependent on relatedness.

C.S Lewis frames beauty in Christian terms: ‘We do not want merely to see beauty [...] We want [...] to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it’ (1949 pp. 42-3). The relationship between humans and divinity for Lewis is characterised by yearning and uncertainty about whether one will be able to connect, or sustain connection. John Armstrong similarly writes of beauty as a consolation for lack: ‘We long to inhabit a world of [goodness and truth] even though we know all too well that we do not. The power of beauty may derive from the fact that it ministers to this longing. The beautiful object creates in the mind of those who attend it the spiritual home that reality does not provide’ (2004 p. 74).
The passages quoted above convey a wistful separateness from some ultimate state, and invest beauty with the power to mediate between the human domain and this other, ultimate, one. The power of beauty then is in its promise: through beauty we might be able to connect with something elusive or otherworldly. It moves us toward something of even greater value, which humans can faintly apprehend but only tenuously grasp. M. K. Turner’s statement about beauty has a profoundly different tone, suggesting a quality that is inherent in the land and therefore accessible through relationship. It appears that for her, the ability to see and experience beauty is strengthened by one’s everyday actions and obligations, including caring for country and kin. One’s spiritual home is present, visible and enduring, and one’s own actions contribute to its flourishing. Interactions with people in country demonstrate how human well-being and the beauty and flourishing of country are inseparable, and confirm the observation that traditional Aboriginal people see the land ‘like a shop as much as a church’ (Cataldi, cited in North 2002 p. 9).
We drove to Ahalper in June 2010, after weeks of rainy weather. Rain had fallen in the Sandover and we expected to see lots of new growth but were unprepared for the full impact of the season. As far as the eye could see plants were flowering and setting fruit and flowering grasses danced, waist-high. Animal tracks criss-crossed the damp road. We dodged long puddles of red water surrounded by the lacework of bird-prints. Vehicle tracks veered sharply off the road where people had piled out to chase goannas. Grasshoppers flung themselves into the air, coming to grief en masse on the windscreen and grille. Huge flocks of budgies and parrots had bred up while seeds were abundant. Thousands upon thousands of wood swallows wheeled in loose formation above the road and grasslands, working clouds of flying insects.

When we reached the community most of the old ladies were gone—everyone who could get in a car was out hunting. People’s faces were plump and glossy. Hunting stories and goanna tallies, laughing and exhilaration—atherrkeny mwerrangker: the beautiful green time. We began the workshop, and between hunting trips women made dozens of drawings and prints of plants and animals, insects and birds, building up an intricate composite image of the season. Voice recordings by Jeannie Pwerl Mills, Pansy Petyarr MacLeod, Rosie Pwerl, and Beryl Ross are transcribed and translated by Gail Woods. They recount the details of the connected flourishing of people, plants and animals in a joyful prose poem.

(Journal entry, May 2011, JT)
**Atherrkeny mwerrangker: ‘the beautiful green time’**

*Kwaty arrangkwel-antey uthip alkwarrer-arrrpwernenhel ilem, ‘Kwaty angerr apetyem. Lher nhenh arleny-angker. Kwatyel anhetyenh lher uthen alkerr uthen pwelap iletyenheng’.*

*Anyemwerrarl ilek, atherrkeny apek anyemwerr-irrem kwaty-penh weth atherrk anem. Anyemwerr anem ra irrem atherrkenyel.*

*Kwaty ilkwearl atwek, atherrkeny anem ilek anwekantherrenh atherrkeny anem.*

*Atherrkenyel anwantherr alhetyek arlewatyerr uthen amwelyek uthen.*

*Ker anter angerr atherrkeny-ipperrek.*

*Intelty apawerr alkerek-irrem.*

*Ingkerr irrer-alhem ahakey uthen alkwarrerek uthen.*

*Mern ahakey angerr inerl-alpek tyampit-warl.*

*Anwantherr uthip angerr aretyel arrpanenh alkerek-irrerleng apawerr.*

*Nyengk, perrpantywel, kwepalepal, atetherr.*

*Perrpantywelel angkerrerl-anem yerramp akern-iletyel.*

*Arratyey, yerramparl akern ilep-ilem perrpantyelel.*

*Arlewatyerr anter atwetyek atherrkenyel.*

*Angerr atwetyek. Iltatwetyek anem anwantherr ker.*
Yekay, mern anaty mwern-irrem. Kerwep inay!


Atherrkeny mwerrangker, ingkerr mwerr inkwerelhem atherrkenyel.

Before the rain we hear the Channel-billed cuckoo calling out, ‘Big rain is coming. The river is too dry. The rain will come and fill up the rivers and the swamps.’

The country is refreshed, renewed. It’s green and lush after rain and there’s green grass. The country has become green again.

A big rain fell and made our country lush.

In the green time we go hunting for goannas and cadney lizards.

They are really fat when the country is green.

Grasshoppers are flying everywhere.

Everyone goes hunting for bush plums and bush bananas.

We go and come back with billy cans filled with bush plums.

We see lots of birds - lots of different ones flying around all over the place.

Finches, black-faced woodswallows, crested bellbirds, budgerigars.

The black-faced wood swallow makes a lot of noise and calls up the honey ants.
That’s true. It’s those woodswallows that make the honey ants come up closer to the surface.

We hunt those fat goannas when the country is green.

We kill lots of animals and get lots of meat.

Hey! Look at all these bush potatoes growing together, get the crowbar!

All day, we keep hunting. We just keep going and going all through the day until nightfall.

Wonderful lush country, everyone feels really happy and excited in the green time.

(Myills et al. 2010)

This Anmatyerr text expresses how, for the speakers, relatedness to country, nourishment, and enthusiastic enjoyment of beauty are interwoven. The richness of connections, and the multitude of creatures and plants that are part of this flourishing scene, make up an impression of fullness and interdependence. Ethnologist Ellen Dissanayake (Osbourne 2008) proposes a theory of beauty that crosses art-historical borders. Her naturalistic aesthetic progresses in four stages from visual impact, to relevance, to evocative resonance, and ultimately to a sense of fulfillment and resolution when a work of art touches one’s life interests. Throughout these four stages, and certainly at the last one, deep cultural knowledge and personal experience come together in how we discern beauty and quality. ‘The difference between levels one and four can be said to lie in the contrast between “impact” and “import”—impact is wow, import is wonder’ and some levels simply do have more value, psychologically and emotionally, than others (Osbourne 2008 pp. 57—8). My
reading of *Atherrkeny mwerrangker*: deep cultural knowledge and personal experience come together in how we discern beauty and quality. 'The difference between levels one and four can be said to lie in the contrast between “impact” and “import”—impact is wow, import is wonder’ and some levels simply have more value, psychologically and emotionally, than others (Osbourne 2008 pp. 57—8). My reading of *Atherrkeny mwerrangker*, ‘the beautiful green time’, is that this prose poem, and the artworks made at the same time, express beauty as fullness of connection. Every detail of this nourishing season is appreciated for its import for human beings, and other creatures on whom they depend.

This raises the question of how beauty in paintings of country is related to beauty in country. Although many non-Indigenous artists do not have the richness of cultural associations with country accumulated over time by Indigenous artists, cultural knowledge from one’s own tradition combined with personal experience of country can still yield a sense of deep connection that can contribute to a sense of fullness and resolution in the work. Skilled workmanship is crucial to perceptions of beauty in a work, as it conveys the import of the subject and the artist’s care in seeking excellence in representing it. Dissanayake claims that appreciation for workmanship—what she calls ‘making special’—is innate in humans. However, as an arts-worker, I have been involved in conversations with Aboriginal artists when the conversation has stalled with the artist’s insistence that their painting is good because it is a painting of good country. End of discussion.
**Perceptions of beauty at “Beyond Conversation”**

In March 2012, 44 paintings from this study were shown in ‘Beyond Conversation’, an exhibition at Watch This Space in Alice Springs, along with texts by Sue Fielding and drawings by Pamela Lofts. The exhibition reflected our individual practices and our experience of working together in country. It dealt with ‘conversations’ between artists, between different forms of creative practice, and between artists and place. The viewers were mostly Alice Springs residents, many of whom knew the places portrayed. Artists’ floor talks addressed ecological and cultural issues of the region, such as the role of fire in country, and how non-Indigenous people relate to country. When viewers commented that they found the paintings, drawings and poems ‘beautiful’, I asked what they meant. Some said their associations with the places portrayed enhanced enjoyment of the work. Some saw the paintings and drawings as portraits of country. Some commented on how the handling of materials affected their reading of the subject. For instance paintings with dark colours and a somber atmosphere made known places look unfamiliar and intriguing, and resonated with painful histories of the region. Some wondered why blue skies and red soil were not much in evidence; others saw in the dark paintings a nuanced and ambivalent relationship with place. Paintings of smoke and haze were seen as both beautiful and ominous; the relationship between beauty and damage was familiar territory for a local audience. Figure 4.7 shows one of the paintings thought by viewers to convey beauty and a strong sense of place.
Figure 4.7 Jennifer Taylor, Urrengetyirre 10, 2011. Oil on board, 19 x 40cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
This painting (figure 4.7) was made in a place where I have camped many times. It was the last painting of the day. Laying it out seemed simple and pleasurable, like matching a template that existed both outwardly and in my mind’s eye. As I worked I enjoyed the shapes and distribution patterns of the shrubs and trees, and their subtle variations in tone. I was more interested in observing the plants than representing them—putting them down in paint was a casual adjunct to seeing them. I put down enough to give the painting shape, rhythm and movement, and a loose structure. I had a haptic sense of the placement of the plants across the hillside, the relationships between them, the way they caught the light on one side and threw shadows on the other. I appreciated their persistence and success in a hot, dry season. The painting process was rhythmic, like modeling the forms in clay and placing them in formation, or telling a story about them. In Central Australia Aboriginal women use leaves as props indicating the characters in sung narratives, while drawing, erasing and redrawing the changing elements of the story (Green 2014). Stuck upright in the sand, the leaf shapes look a little like the trees in the painting.

There was an easy flow from seeing the trees to picking them out and giving them form, colour and shape. I watched the shifts in tone across the hillside as grasses caught the late light. I generalised tone to suit the structure that was emerging in the painting: the ridges on left and right darker, the light near the top of the central hill providing a focus. I painted the sky last, when the light was fading and warm hues reflected off the land. I kept an overall subdued tone, lightening the ground and darkening the sky.

The painting’s appeal is partly due to a quality of homeliness. While painting I anticipated walking down to where friends were camped, lighting a fire and cooking a meal, spending the night under the hills and sky. The calm quiet pleasure of being in this place contributed to a sense of ease in painting it.

(Journal entry, June 2011, JT)
The painting recalls musical notation with its spacing, clusters of emphatic marks and quiet intervals, tonal shifts and directional lines. It has the pulse of walking or singing, or bird sounds. Plein air painting involves hours of slow dancing: standing, stepping forward and back, pacing, making marks, looking close and far, taking in sounds and smells. A flow of tiny and large events makes up a rhythm that weaves itself into the painting. The painting synchronises with the pattern of shapes and events in the wider world. Painting becomes a direct experience of interconnection, of finding one’s way ‘inside’ a rhythm and working with it, seeing and hearing from inside the pattern.

After the exhibition I took stock of the research project. Since that day of painting surrounded by trash, with my eyes fixed on the horizon, I had felt the contradictions in trying to paint what I saw as beautiful, but blocking out the ubiquitous damage to country. My response had been to investigate Arrernte perspectives on beauty and compare them with those of the Western landscape tradition, and to think about ways of addressing damage to country without being didactic. Two main ways of doing this were to use metaphor, and to shift the emphasis from visual beauty to encounters with country. Beauty as a dimension of country seemed to reside less in appearances than in relatedness. It could therefore be reflected in images of encounters with ordinary-looking places, and not only in images that were in accord with the ideals of the Western landscape tradition. However, so far my selection and handling of subjects for painting resembled the approach of the unschooled early colonial painters in that I pursued what appealed visually or aroused curiosity. I collected motifs and worked out my relationship to country via visual cues: picking them out, laying them down and shuffling them around, like the leaves of the storytellers.
I reflected on early colonial artists’ attempts to reconcile demands for accurate representation of exploitable resources with their own efforts to come to terms with this new environment. I began to understand how trained artists like Thomas Watling used the learned structure of the picturesque ideal to claim this (to him) new landscape, by representing it in the idiom of his own culture. In painting Arrernte landscapes I had also employed familiar devices from the European tradition, such as horizontal perspective and naturalistic colour. My aim was not to lay claim to what I was seeing but to acknowledge Arrernte claims to country. My practice was shaped by visual frameworks and ideals integral to colonial practices, whose influence seemed resistant to deliberate change, but my intention was not to forcibly change ways of seeing and picturing country. As in Foucault’s new critique, it was to let things exist, testing the application of Western approaches in the context of Arrernte country, seeing where they intersected with other approaches, and seeing whether new understandings would emerge at that intersection. Having explored different aspects of beauty, I looked at the ideals of the sublime, the grotesque, and the picturesque, in terms of their deployment by colonial artists and their role in conveying moral values associated with colonisation. What follows is a brief overview of early colonial painting, and of these three ideals, or tropes. Contemporary paintings influenced by the ideals are also discussed.
Colonial painters in Australia

On my first landing everything was new to me, every Bird, every Insect, Flower, &c. in short all was novelty around me; and was noticed with a degree of eager curiosity, and perturbation, that after a while subsided into calmness.

Elizabeth Macarthur (cited in Neville 1997 p. 17)

As soon as the First Fleet made landfall in Australia, artists set to work documenting coastal landforms and features in topographical views. Aboriginal people were drawn, and their material culture and their very bodies were collected and traded. Plants, birds, animals and insects were depicted and collected for an English audience avid for curiosities. A ‘rage for curiosity’ characterised practices of collecting and trafficking in objects, including drawings, paintings and prints representing the wonders and assets of this new world. (Neville 1997 p. 20). Most early colonial artists were officials charged with documenting anything that could be of use to Britain, and commissioned to make topographical views of buildings and settlements situated in a landscape. Their purpose was political and commercial: to promote and measure the progress of the colony and thereby counter prejudice in England regarding the colony’s convict origins. ‘Realistic’ panoramas and the exact depiction of features that would inspire investors were required.

Artists met naval demands for depictions of landforms and coastal features, and documentation of events such as the wreck of the Sirius and the spearing of Governor Phillip. In most cases their art training was limited and did not include the fashionable genre of the picturesque. Their images tended to be direct and literal, in the manner of natural history drawings, often animated by enthusiasm for new and curious landforms, plants and animals. These were not necessarily well-observed, and images were often copied and altered by
different artists. Selected drawings and watercolours made in plein air were later re-ordered by professional English artists familiar with the principles of the picturesque and of composition, published as prints, and distributed in Australia and England.

Thomas Watling was one such professional, arriving in 1792 equipped with the skills to compose images of land and settlements resembling a ‘European’ order. Although he despaired of finding fit and interesting subjects in the Australian landscape, he drew outdoors and then used judicious selection and combination of landscape features to create a sense of permanence, encoding a ‘moral landscape’ (Neville 1997, p. 68). Colonial landscape paintings from 1788 to 1830 were largely about promoting the colony and claiming its place in the British Empire. The freshness and awkwardness of early depictions of a place that was unknown and Aboriginal gave way to composed depictions of a place named as British, as the colonialists ‘subsided into calmness’. Convicts and Aboriginal people, both morally troubling subjects, were generally confined to the edges of landscape images, which must emphasise above all progress and respectability. Although portraits of Aboriginal people were made, most have the appearance of ethnographic sketches made for the European market. By the early 19th century, these portraits tend to resemble caricatures more than the careful likenesses of individuals first produced by the Port Jackson painters. This was documentation driven by curiosity and objectification, and a refusal of the subjectivity of the people it recorded, lest ‘the shadows of a people [...] disturb the unrelenting drive of colonisation’ (Neville 1997 p. 57).

As mentioned earlier however, care is necessary lest an ideologically-driven critique of colonial painters erases the complexity of individual motivation and practice, and the appreciative and protective sentiments aroused in some artists by this ‘new’ environment:
He is delighted with this country, assures me that nature is not less singular and essentially distinguished in her landscape than in her animal creation—though I might not at present see it.

G.T.W.B. Boyes describing John Glover, 20 April 1831 (cited in Bonyhady 2002 p. 67)

Indeed landscape painting had a significant role in the development of environmentalism in Australia. Art historian Tim Bonyhady (2002) cites Eugene Von Guerard, Louis Buvelot, and William Piguenit as painters known for celebrating ‘wilderness’ but also for promoting environmental causes. They influenced aesthetic values in relation to Australian landscapes and helped to arouse public opinion that the destruction of environment was too high a price for development. Contradictions remained, however: painters made commissioned works valorising pastoralism, and benefited from, and at times participated in, clearing trees and opening up views in forested areas. Arthur Streeton recorded how, while at the Hawkesbury painting The purple noon’s transparent might, he was asked by a road mender: ‘Ain’t them trees in your way?’ Streeton agreed that they spoiled the view, whereupon the man felled the trees and ‘unveiled a perfect view’ (cited in Bonyhady 2002 p. 207). Yet around this time Streeton was campaigning against the clearing of trees and establishment of coalmines around his beloved Cremorne Point, on Sydney Harbour.
These contradictions may be traced to the way colonial painters’ portrayals of the landscape were intended to convey not only their close observations and imaginative response to the Australian landscape, but also truths with moral or ideological import—a combination of sense and sensibility promoted by John Ruskin. Moral truths could range from reverence for nature through to the idea of a ‘national space’, resulting in a varied ‘pictorial bush-lore feeding images of pastoralism, mining, tourism and conservation in varied
measure’ (Moore 2007 p. 348). Ian Burn takes Streeton’s paintings as an illustration of the layering of expression, empiricism and ideology (1991). Figure 4.8, for example, offers an elevated perspective and extensive views over country, with an exhilarating sense of freedom of movement and flow through the landscape. The composition’s balance of foreground, middle ground and far horizon invite the viewer to take a contemplative, proprietorial stance, contemplating past and future, and the ‘natural order’ of things. The long view can also stand for surveillance and dominion over what is seen, with ‘flow’ serving as a metaphor for economic order, the control and movement of resources in a capitalist economy. A subtle link is made in the viewer’s mind between the ease and flow associated with a high viewpoint and the flow of resources from the land into the channels of an imperial economy. Given vicarious oversight over country, the viewer is aligned with a claim of access and control. The painting’s suggestion of emotional attachment to place may be seen as a personal expression of belonging, but combined with a detached moral viewpoint, also conveys a narrative of white progress and belonging.
Overview of three ideals in colonial painting

Colonial artists in Australia used a medley of styles, each of which owes something to plein air practices of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Gradually conventions were established for picturing exploration and settlement in terms of edifying discourses, such as scientific observation and survey work, and the heroic exploration of exotic places. Ian McLean succinctly pinpoints the role of aesthetic ideals in colonisation as not merely to do with handling subjects, but with transmitting moral values, claiming that each style served particular ideological purposes: ‘The sublime is the principal trope of exploration, the grotesque of invasion and the picturesque of settlement’ (1998 p. 23). For each of the three ideals I have tested this claim against a painting by a colonial painter. In the case of the sublime, with its ongoing influence in landscape practice, examples of contemporary works that evoke the sublime have been included for comparison.

The sublime

McLean associates the sublime with exploration because it lays claim to the unknown, picturing it as outside history, unpeopled, and therefore subject to possession. In colonial art, sublime spaces wait silently, or perhaps are stirred by nature into tumultuous and fearsome moods and weather—either way they admit no intermediary between God and man, or rather, between God and the artist. This is what gives them their power and awesome appeal. They are unbounded places where solitary, heroic men can encounter divinity and return to tell the tale, invigorated by an unassailable moral authority. The sublime carries associations with fear, and even horror, at the expanse and indifference of nature, and in this is related to the grotesque (Hawker 2001), so the two may be found combined in some works. Examples of the sublime in Australian paintings relating to exploration during the late eighteenth century are hard to find,
though William Hodges, who sailed with Cook’s *Resolution* in 1779 evokes the sublime in his paintings of the South Pacific and the Antarctic. However, McLean’s claim is borne out by painters working in Australia from the mid-1800s, and seeking out parts of the continent not yet ‘settled’. Eugene von Guerard, trained in the German Romantic tradition and dedicated to revealing ‘God in the detail of creation’, made highly detailed sublime landscapes such as *North-east view from the northern top of Mount Kosciusko*, (figure 4.9) painted from plein air drawings in 1863.

Figure 4.9 Eugene Von Guerard, *North-east view from the northern top of Mount Kosciusko*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 66.5 x 116.8cm. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (Von Guerard 1863)
Von Guerard combines landscape painting as a record of a scientific expedition, led by Georg Von Neumayer, with richly romantic allusions to paintings by Carus and Friedrich in which the figure of the Wanderer, epitomizing exploration, is central (Dixon, Radford & Ward 2008 pp. 19—20). The artist is in view as the central silhouetted figure, gesturing grandly and wrapped in his cloak. We do not just see what he sees: we see him in the setting. He is miming his enthusiastic embrace of the project of exploration, the spectacle of elemental nature, and the underlying ideology that a human being is ‘a creature who can gain significance only by learning from and contemplating Nature’ (Siegel 1978 p. 26). It is interesting that, although Von Guerard himself was pleased with the painting, and contemporary reviewers saw that its subject was the sublime, there was criticism that the colouring and the rocks were too rough and coarse. This suggests that viewers were unwilling to associate the sublime with the ugly roughness of the grotesque, a trope they recognised in the painting. Or perhaps they were simply unwilling, in 1863, to admit the existence of such rough wild places in the newly ‘settled’ colony of Australia.

There are many twentieth and twenty-first century Australian landscape painters whose work evokes the ideal of the sublime, either intentionally or because it is in the well-conditioned eye of the beholder. Examples are Sidney Nolan, Philip Wolhagen, Jason Cordero, William Delafield Cook, Peter Daverington, Billy Benn Perrurle, Angelina George, and William Robinson. Nolan’s Central Australia (figure 4.10) was made after his 1949 visit to Central Australia, when he flew over the country. He retains an aerial perspective, giving the landscape an air of remoteness and surreal clarity suggesting the sublime. The painting follows Nolan’s Wimmera landscapes of the 1940s, and like them, emphasises the feeling of travelling above or across the landscape rather than into it. A viewer is conscious of the
vastness of what seems an unpeopled space, as if vastness itself is the subject of the painting. But however elemental and removed from the human realm this landscape is, the painter’s intentions were not necessarily to picture the sublime, or even to present landscape as spectacle. Neither does the work communicate affection for place. Ian Burn suggests that post-war modernists interpreting landscape were caught between emotional and nationalistic associations with landscape, and rigorously modernist approaches that denied landscape any particular significance as a subject (1991 pp. 77—80).

Figure 4.10 Sidney Nolan, Central Australia, 1950. Oil on board, 122.0 x 152.5 cm. Art Gallery of NSW (Nolan 1950).

Figure 4.11 Angelina George, Near Ruined City, 2007. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 160 x 200cm. Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (George 2007).
Nolan (figure 4.10) seems to have taken on the challenge of picturing the landscape in order to look directly into its cultural status and metaphorical resonance. He has chosen a subject (Central Australia) that is rich with mythmaking, and handled it in a way that makes it at least visually evocative of the sublime, but with none of the existential intensity of earlier painters of the sublime, because that is not his subject. Burn proposes that Nolan is exploring a transitional view of landscape, which ‘accepts how the modern world has transformed our experience of the land’ (1991 p. 85) and engages in experimentation and deconstruction of ideological notions of landscape. His evocation of the sublime, masterful as it is, is self-conscious, irreligious, and even playful.

Tonal Modernist painter Clarice Beckett, and to a lesser extent Elioth Gruner, also deconstructed and contradicted heroic or sublime interpretations of landscape. Both employed different means from Nolan to create questioning, sometimes enigmatic representations of familiar landscapes. Following a naturalistic approach to colour; working quickly in plein air; creating sequences by painting repeatedly in the same locations; cropping and framing views in such a way as to emphasise the momentary and fragmentary nature of seeing, Beckett contradicts 19th century notions of the sublime and conveys an immediate and intimate response to place (Modjeska 2002). Especially when viewed in sequence, her paintings demonstrate a ‘network’ of responses that is open-ended and incomplete, as opposed to heroic, summary statements.

A comparison of Nolan’s painting with Angelina George’s 2007 painting, Near Ruined City (figure 4.11), is intriguing in that two paintings with strong visual similarities serve such different purposes. George’s painting is as warm as Nolan’s is cool. It is infused with personal and cultural memories which give the space a feeling of being activated and peopled, unlike the stark, cool expanses that in Nolan’s
painting go unhindered all the way to the horizon. Although George’s painting has a strip of horizon at the top, the near ranges seem to occupy the same space as the far ones, creating a dreamlike plane with maybe three horizons—and therefore no real limit. Its aerial perspective could as easily derive from imagination as from actual plane travel. In effect, the space the viewer imaginatively travels through in this painting is one of memory, detailed and specific. George is a Ngyameratjara woman who grew up around Roper River, and her description of her painting practice suggests an imagined reentry into places she inhabited as a young person, with her family. If so, then a vivid, haptic reliving of childhood experience imbues the painting with an intimate knowledge of place, and a great imaginative sweep that encompasses geographical features and remembered walking routes (Angel 2006 pp. 595-6).

...my imagined country never stops in my memory... I have special memories from my travels here. I can paint my memories and imagination ... not exactly what it looks like. You know. Traditional way and law.

Angelina George (2008)

A painting that, for viewers acculturated to the Western landscape tradition, conveys the vastness and otherworldly feeling of a celestial-looking sublime landscape, in fact draws on the warmth and detail of cultural life to recreate a deeply familiar, cherished place.
I have chosen a painting (figure 4.12) that somewhat resembles those of Nolan and George, to show the influence of the sublime, without its underlying ideals, and with different meanings from figures 4.10 and 4.11. The painting was loosely based on a smaller one made at speed, en plein air, in fading light. This version was made in the studio and takes advantage of the freedom of imagination.
associate with not working directly from the subject, but letting limited visual cues be supplemented or overtaken by memory and feeling. It is a landscape that is not anchored in time or place but looks inward and backward. Like Angelina George’s painting it recalls a childhood landscape, in a dreamlike way. It is less an embodied memory of a particular place than a meditation on time; on what endures and what is fleeting; on the enigma of how forms exist and persist in deep geological time; and on a world larger than human understanding. It recalls verses by Japanese Zen master Eihei Dogen Zenji (1200 — 1253): ‘These mountains and waters of the present are the expression of the old buddhas... they are constantly at rest and constantly walking’ (cited in Zenji 2001 pp. 10—17). Unexpectedly, the painting process took me through reflections on landscape into a space of reverie and association, where the material forms of the mountains are plumbed for metaphor of a spiritual or metaphysical nature.
The grotesque and the trope of melancholy

The time-worn gums shadowing the melancholy water tinged with the light of fast-dying day seem fit emblems of the departed grandeur of the wilderness, and... a monument of the glories of that barbaric empire [of the Aborigines] upon whose ruins the ever-restless European has founded his new kingdom.

Marcus Clarke (1990 p. 135)

The tropes of the grotesque and melancholy accompany invasion because they are strategies for, in the first case, excluding otherness, and in the second, setting the scene for a redemptive ideology. Colonial painters of the late eighteenth century saw and focussed on grotesque, inverted characteristics in the Australian landscape, such as gloominess, irregularity, contorted trees, scrublands, strange animals—and people who were fierce, exotic, treacherous and unpredictable (McLean 1998). McLean argues that art and literature of the nineteenth century does not so much erase images of Aboriginal people, as sublimate them in the trope of melancholy bush, which remains central to colonial identity as a sign of the other. The poetry of Henry Kendall and Charles Harpur, and the landscapes of Nicholas Chevalier and John Glover include works that evoke the ghostly presence (or the absence) of Aboriginal people. These works mirror, in narcissistic fashion, the identity and subjectivity of non-Aboriginal people, but refuse direct engagement with Aboriginal people. Instead, a pervasive, repressed awareness of the violent removal of Aboriginal people from their lands is expressed in an aesthetic that draws on the 19th century preoccupation with melancholy and the grotesque, as in Figure 4.13. The trope of melancholy constructs a colonial history and identity built on loss, haunting and memory, and in a ideological sense takes possession of the country by giving colonists this ‘new indigenous identity’ (McLean 1998 pp. 50—51).
In figure 4.13 Glover borrows from the picturesque ideal a serene schema that allows him to construct an Aboriginal Arcadia (Bonyhady 2002). The viewer is invited to witness a gathering of Aboriginal people prior to invasion. Though it is unlikely that the title had then the ominous meaning that it does now, the painting has elements of the tropes of the grotesque and melancholy. It pictures a fractured space: from the point of view of a colonist a time before colonisation is being imagined, idealised, and memorialised, yet the events that Glover knew had unfolded since that time are nowhere to be seen in his paintings. Instead we see the ‘before’, when Aboriginal people
are present, and in other paintings the ‘after’—successful, prosperous pastoralism, undisturbed by Aboriginal people. We are left to reflect on the supposed free and happy life of the people pictured, and if we take the hint Glover offers by modeling the landscape on those of Claude Lorrain, to view the painting as an image of a paradise lost. The melancholy implicit in the painting is subtle and possibly unintended, but the choice of subject suggests unease, nostalgia and regret. Even as it affirms Glover as inheritor of the land, the painting betrays his mindfulness of ‘the Aboriginal presence which shadows his paradise’ (McLean 1998 p. 44).
The picturesque

Figure 4.14 Thomas Watling, *A Direct North General View of Sydney Cove*, 1794.

Oil on canvas, 91 x 120cm. Collection State Library of NSW (Watling 1794)

The ideal of the picturesque was introduced to the English leisured classes in 1782 by William Gilpin, who published practical instructions for tourists, guiding them in examining landscapes according to ‘the rules of picturesque beauty’ (Gilpin 1782 p. B). This was a challenge to neo-classicism and the established ‘Grand Tour’ of classical sites in continental Europe. Gilpin proposed that rural Britain, with its own ruins and the ‘wild scenes’ of the Lakes District, was a worthy location in which to ‘pursue the beauties of nature’ as a sportsman might
pursue an animal (Gilpin 1782 p. B). The picturesque ideal was framed in terms of painting, and exemplified by J. M. W. Turner’s early work, and the landscapes of Claude Lorrain, Thomas Girtin and Gaspard Dughet. Devotees judged landscapes according to how closely they resembled the works of favoured painters (Chilvers 2004). Tourists and professional artists crowded the Lakes District, sketching and painting using special portable tinted mirrors called ‘Lorrain Glasses’ to frame and darken the view, ‘capturing’ wild scenes for sale or display. The picturesque ideal was also applied by landscape architects such as Humphrey Repton, who designed landscapes as if composing a painting: a foreground showing artifice, civility and formality; a middle ground with a park-like appearance, and a background that looked wild and ‘natural’. Landscape paintings and prints often used a framing device of wild, rough or textured plants or rocks in the foreground. The picturesque therefore could be said to mediate between the ideals of beauty and sublimity, between serenity and awe. Compared to neo-classical ideals, it was rough, homely and plain, featuring variety, texture, and curious details (Chilvers 2004).

In figure 4.14 Watling interprets Sydney Cove according to an adaptation of the picturesque ideal. The rough (and rather generic) foreground vegetation serves the purpose of framing a view of orderly receding planes, featuring a broad road and charmingly placed buildings. Two dapper gents occupy and animate the centre of the landscape, and the middle ground is devoted to signs of progressive human activity such as building, shipping, farming and road building. In accordance with the particular needs of colonial painting perhaps, in this image the bush has been pushed back to the crest of the furthest hill, so is divided between the sheltering, homely vegetation in
the foreground, and the pleasant, distant backdrop to human activity. A large proportion of the canvas is devoted to a serene, tranquil sky, which seems to promise an Antipodean arcadia.

The contemporary sublime

McLean’s formula of the three tropes’ functioning in colonisation is coherent and persuasive on the level of ideology, but chronologically the sublime does not fit neatly into the exploratory phase of colonisation. Neither does the formula address the uncontrolled metaphorical power of sublime images, or their ongoing use in contemporary practice, where the sublime still has resonance and relevance. Some Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian landscape painters are reinventing versions of what might be called the sublime in works that have qualities evocative of the sublime of the colonial painters, but with profoundly different underlying ideologies. For example, for many Indigenous painters the world of human concerns is not separate from the vastness and complexity of the wider world of country. There is no silence, and no solitude, because the presence of other beings is felt and the patterns of their lives are integral to country. There is no sense that the landscape must be instrumental in intercession between humans and an ultimate power remote from human beings. There may be a suggestion, though, that the natural world, in the throes of damage wrought by humans, will itself become an avenging force. Deborah Bird Rose (2004) writes of the difference between ‘wild country’ and ‘quiet country’: wild country has been wrecked by lawless, unthinking human behaviour whereas quiet country has an orderly quality maintained by appropriate human interventions, and is nourishing to body and spirit. In paintings like those of Angelina George I see resonance with this trope from the European tradition, but in addition a sense of deep quiet and security found within country. In my
own practice I have sought to convey a depth of quiet engagement sometimes found through immersion in country, by drawing on and reimagining the tropes of the European landscape tradition that, after long exposure, are rich with associations.

At the outset of this study I expected that direct sensory experience would be the main source of images in plein air practice, and that I could consciously bring influences from the European landscape tradition to bear on the experience of being in country. I had not accounted for the persistence of internalised perceptual frameworks, or for the power and pervasiveness of the landscape genre as a system of communication. Ian Burn’s statement ‘a landscape is not something you look at, but something you look through’ (Burn 1989), provoked a re-examination of my relationship to cultural templates for seeing landscapes. Terry Smith calls ‘landscape a process of configuring, as space, a perceived part of the world’ (1997 p. 32). Templates for seeing are individual, social, and historical. Smith proposes that before being a genre of painting or a way of framing vistas, the conception of landscape has at its core ‘a desire to experience being-in-the-world’, which he suggests relies on using vision to understand our presence in the space that surrounds our bodies. In other words, looking at landscapes may be one of the ways we grasp relatedness, confirming ‘...that there is space other than my internal imaginary spaces. But, at the same time, (confirming) my being in that space of other than me’ (1997, p. 32).

This profoundly relational process is configured by social practices and frameworks for organising relationships between self and other. It is at this level that the perception of beauty as a culturally relative learned way of looking at and experiencing the world matches up with M. K. Turner’s ‘beautiness of the Land’. Her reference to ‘fitting in’ obviously includes much more than a visual process of orientation and understanding one’s place in a visible world. Perhaps ‘fitting in’ is a succinct term for relatedness, for taking up one’s cultural and
spiritual responsibilities toward life in its entirety. The ongoing work of relatedness leads to understanding beauty as dynamic, and conditional upon practices of connection and care taking.

**Conclusion**

The investigation of different cultural frameworks surrounding perceptions of beauty has implications, which include freeing beauty from having to do with only what is pleasing. The apprehension of beauty in landscape has been associated with aspects of the sublime, but in a contemporary practice that acknowledges Arrernte perspectives the sublime is found to infuse relationships that weave together human and non-human life, rather than relationships with a remote divinity. M. K. Turner’s language, ‘seeing the spirit of that Land glistening’, is vivid, idiosyncratic, and powerful, like many Indigenous peoples’ expressions of the beauty of country. Such expressions have affected my thinking and feeling, but I still have to find my own ways of perceiving the qualities and dimensions of country, and expressing them through painting. In the next phase of the project perceptions of beauty in country were opened out further to include dimensions of country that were troubling and unfamiliar to me. On field trips I began to encounter a sense of haunting and sadness that provoked questions about the people who were there before me.
Chapter 5 Haunting

Figure 5.1, Jennifer Taylor, *Smoke at Inteye Arrkwe 2*, 2011. Oil on board, 20 x 75cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
The histories of most nations founded on violence suggest that an inability or refusal to acknowledge the past will produce evermore confusing and distressing symptoms in the body politic.

Ross Gibson (2002 p. 158)

We never learn truths by being told them [...] will never discover the actualities of the past by having theory spouted at [us]. We learn truths by experiencing them in some way.

Greg Dening (2006 p. 9)

Introduction

Instead of going to different locations, I decided to make field trips to one place only: Inteye Arrkwe or Ross River, formerly known as Love’s Creek. With this commitment, almost immediately I keenly felt the relative absence of Arrente people from this part of their country. I began to ask how absence is registered, and how it is expressed in painting. I was conscious of being in a place of whose long complex histories and affiliations I was ignorant. I thought of ‘haunting’ as a metaphor for absence, and for not-knowing.

This chapter follows questions of absence, haunting, and history along a narrative thread, via photographs of people at Inteye Arrkwe in the 1930s, to early contact histories of the region, uncovering systematic, sanctioned violence towards Arrernte people. It draws on the writing of historian Greg Dening in reference to my struggle to apprehend these brutal truths and respond to them. Personal and public responses to histories of violence and oppression have an inexpressible quality, which I have attempted to explore in different ways: sadness as private reverie, sadness as a communal practice, and in terms of the part that sadness plays in the creative process.
I headed east along the MacDonnell Ranges for a week-long painting trip. I set up camp off the Arltunga road in a spot with not too many cows. Next day I worked in the riverbed, moving with the shade. It was hot and still. The flies were sticky, the ants inescapable. The cast over the sun and fragrance of smoke were faintly ominous. Late in the day the smell changed, as when a fire is close. Orange haze rose and thickened, filtering through the river red gums. Ribbons of white ash fell, twisting, like slow soft rain. There were fires around Pwenye/Corroboree Rock, 30km west, so when the westerly freshened it seemed a bad idea to be camping here alone. I threw everything in the car and drove to Inteye Arrkwe campground. Before last light I followed a faint track up a ridge, lugging my easel and boards. Near the top was a narrow ledge where grasses were flattened. Others before me had climbed up for this view: the shining, braided river coiling across the flood plain. East, west, north and south stood rows of ranges in procession. Wind and sound dropped away with evening. The silent space between me and the hills, between the ranks of ridges, and over my head, held fine particles of smoke and ash, suspended, softly drifting in hanging veils of colour that intensified as the light faded.

By morning the fires had died down and the smoke settled to wisps and low undulating planes. Each afternoon that week, unseen fires were fanned by the wind and the evening skies were lurid and thick. Each night the fires cooled and by morning skies were clear. I spent days on the ridge looking, daydreaming, writing, napping, and painting. The occasional car crept across the riverbed below trailing dust and droning like an insect. All around were signs of abandoned works: weedy cattle yards marked out by posts made of whole tree-trunks, a covered cistern on the slope above the homestead, bits of iron and concrete, a disused bore.
From time to time I scanned the flood plain and slopes for smoke—not the big smoke of out-of-control fires, but fainter wisps of smoke from little domestic fires, the kind of smoke that tells someone is hunting there, has sat down for a while, or has just left. I was imagining, reminiscing—not really expecting to see smoke, but haunted by what I could not see. I wondered how long it had been since small groups of people walked across the flood plain to the gorges and back, looking around, gathering food, signalling their progress. I wondered about the Arrernte names for the river and outcrops, the gaps and caves in the ranges, the walking routes. I wondered who knows these names and routes and remembers family members who crisscrossed the country. When were those names last spoken here? I felt how it was to be here, not knowing these things.

Some paintings I made on the ridge were crisply lit, with windy skies. Others, made as the light turned, were somber, infiltrated by a smoky darkness. The ranges were black and mauve, like the funeral clothes Arrernte people sometimes wear. The veiled peaks in the paintings gave a shape to the searching loneliness of looking out for signal fires and seeing only the vast impersonal smoke of a fire belonging to nobody. I thought of the entwining of beauty and fear in the sublime, of Caspar David Friedrich’s solitary gentleman looming over the mists cherishing a loneliness fed by self-consciousness. I felt that here was a different sublime, in which loss was made resonant by the beauty of country, beauty made piercing by loss.

(Journal entry, July 2011, JT)
Figure 5.2 *Inteye Arrkwe, looking west*, Photograph Jennifer Taylor, 2011.

Figure 5.3 *Inteye Arrkwe, looking east*, Photograph Jennifer Taylor, 2011
The painting in figure 5.1 was made in low light and thick haze. The paint is thinly applied and scratched back so that the pink underpainting shows through. Ridges and peaks are depicted loosely and flatly. Scratches mark out contours and slopes reflecting the late light, lightening tones indicating distance and increasing haze. Amongst ranks of far ridges one peak, centred and dark, is close enough that scrubby trees are visible on its flank. The ground underfoot is not seen, only the distant ranges and the smoky air between them. The painting evokes a space between day and night, visible and invisible, between the viewer and an unreachable territory that is cool, lonely and forbidding.

By the time I stopped work it was so dark the colours on the board could barely be distinguished. All day I had thought about things invisible, and absent people. I made this last painting at speed, wanting to catch feelings and intimations that were elusive in the daylight. Dusk evoked the sense of things ‘here but not here’—the past, which is gone, but is perhaps present in an imprint on the land. The painting reminds me of the intense sensation and apprehension felt when blindfolded. I felt ill-equipped to understand the place where I stood, and was conscious of not-knowing. The painting broaches the subject of loss and haunting, the loneliness of a place emptied of its people. Who were those people and where were they now?

‘Rainmaker and goat shepherd’

One afternoon a few days later I had had enough exposure to light, heat and open space. I climbed down from the ridge and drove over to the homestead to see who was about. I walked up wooden steps into the rough stone building. After
the windy dazzling hill, it was shockingly cool and still. It smelt of cigarette smoke and meat cooking somewhere out the back. In one dim room after another, old photos hung crookedly on the lumpy whitewashed walls: the station families and workers, back to the early 1900s; a child of four standing at the shoulder of a working dog; a man holding the halter of a camel; a Bedford truck pausing on its trip to the store for a photograph, a woman and two children on the tray, and, who’s this? another woman sitting further back, face turned away, her dark arm showing that this is who I was looking for: someone representing the Aboriginal families—the stock-men and women, their parents and children, the backbone of this hard, hard enterprise. The men and young boys and girls who helped bring the cattle through grinding dry years, and build the yards and bores and fences. The women and girls who cleaned this building, milked goats, looked after white babies and washed rust-red work clothes. 

And old man Bloomfield, pastoralist and patriarch—where was his Aboriginal son, Baden? I looked for Arrernte faces; I saw young white men and women seated around a table in this same room, sweating over Sunday dinner beside the open fireplace.

Then in the next room: a photo with a hand-written inscription in capitals: ‘“PETER” – A REMARKABLE MAN LAST OF THE HALE RIVER TRIBE PHOTO BY ROY MCFADYON’. An old Arrernte man with a broad white beard, one eye showing under his hat, on his head a bunched-up cloth supporting some huge structure I could not at first make sense of; his thin wrist supports the immense bloody head of a bullock, one torn ear ragged against the white sky. One horn curves up and out of the frame. The bullock’s visible eye is closed and black with blood, the huge nostrils gleam as though still wet. The old man’s name “PETER”, in quotation marks. A given name, station name, the name used to direct, dismiss and maybe to befriend. In the background, indistinct in flaring light, is a rail fence and some sort of building. “PETER” has turned his back to it. His mouth is set, under the beard. He submits to the photo but his eyes turn away. He is heading away—where? Down to the creek? How far will he carry that great heavy head and with whom will he share it? ‘Last of his tribe’? Then who are those un-named people who will sit around his fire with him? The dual identity he is given alludes to so much but tells us little: “‘PETER” RAINMAKER AND GOAT SHEPHERD. CIRCA 1938”.

(Journal entry, July 2011, JT)
Figure 5.4 “Peter” Rainmaker and Goat Shepherd. Circa 1938. Photograph Roy McFadyen (McFadyen, R. 1938a)
On returning to town I was haunted by the recollection of being in a smoky, silent space, ignorant of the lives and events that had animated Inteye Arrkwe in the past. Paintings such as Figure 5.1 were suffused by a mood of cool melancholy and emptiness. Considering the way melancholy has been used by colonial artists and writers as a trope affirming ideological positions, I was cautious about investing my experience of haunting with social significance. I did not want to fall under the spell of ideology masquerading as private reverie (to paraphrase David Bunn, 1994). I wanted to find out who had lived at Inteye Arrkwe, and under what conditions. Although to me the space was silent, to others who knew the faces and histories of the people here before me, it surely was not so. I followed the thread of ‘Peter’s’ photograph. Who was he? Who had photographed him that day, and why? This thread led to a fabric of intersecting lives. I learnt that ‘Peter’s’ Arrernte name was Ulyerre and that he had worked at Love’s Creek with his wife Maggie at the same time as the photographer, Roy MacFadyen; young station hands Alec Kruger and Tim Shaw; local Arrernte workers such as the Williams family; the pastoral lease-holder, Lewis Bloomfield; his sons Harry and Baden and his wife Lillian (McFadyen 2009, Kruger & Waterford 2007), amongst others. I will take up the stories of some of these people in the next chapter, which describes the process of making portraits based on Roy’s photographs. The sense of haunting was to some extent supplanted by accumulating details gleaned from the intersection of Roy’s and Alec’s stories and images, from conversations with families, and from published histories of ‘station times’. Questions about how Love’s Creek pastoral lease came to be, how Arrernte people came to be involved with it, and how the dynamics of station life had developed, however, led further back, to accounts of early contact between Arrernte and European people. A brief summary of such accounts is given here, followed by an exploration of their impact on this study.
Early contact history in Arrernte country

First contact accounts and oral histories from Arrernte country are marked by violence, as they are across all states and territories of Australia. They give a sense of Arrernte people’s fear and wonder on encountering white men on horseback for the first time. Walter Smith told historian Richard Kimber how Arrernte people thought they were seeing arrentye—‘devil-monsters’—composite animals like centaurs. They were amazed to see a man dismount and separate from the horse, and speculated that the creature had given birth and the horse was the man’s mother. Smith described the experience of tracking horses and boot-wearing men:

*We were terrified by these foot-prints. The boot-tracks looked as though they were made by human beings; but what kind of creatures could men be who had broad, flat, toeless feet? As for the horse tracks, we could tell that they must have been made by huge four-legged creatures, larger than any we had seen before... Surely, we thought, both these kinds of creatures must be evil man-eating monsters!*

(cited in Kimber 2011 p. 51)

The Arrernte elder Errumphana (Ampetyane) described how he and other men watched from a cliff-top as the first white men and horses arrived at Honeymoon Gap, near Alice Springs. ‘They were unsure whether the strangers and their horses had blood or not, or if they had come out of the ghost gums’ (Kimber 2011 p. 59). Seeing the horses swishing their tales at the flies, the men thought the horses were signaling to them to come down. Notwithstanding their fear, they approached the strangers and offered them water. These uncanny beings, arriving without signal smoke in the familiar nurturing environment of Arrernte country, brought alarm, anxiety and anger. Within
a few years of their first appearance, stock were consuming and fouling precious fall-back water and food sources on which, in dry periods, Arrernte people depended for their lives. The first cattle stations, Undoolya and Owen Springs, east and southwest of Alice Springs, were stocked in 1872. By 1875 ‘drought’ had prompted the removal of cattle, sheep and horses to permanent water at Dalhousie Springs. As soon as rain came again, additional cattle were driven in to the stations. So began a pattern of overstocking, devastation during the frequent dry periods, and progressive degradation of native plant and animal populations. In dry times, the country around any major water source would be picked bare and the water fouled by stock. Not only water, but survival reserves of food plants and animals were destroyed through grazing, trampling and habitat loss (Kimber 2011).

Kimber chronicles changing Arrernte apprehensions of the strangers and their animals, from fear and flight to defiance and defence. Reprisals included attacking cattle and horses, and burning the grass needed by stock. Sometimes the animals killed were eaten, other times their bodies were left lying, as though to communicate anger and resistance. In September 1884 concerted attempts by Arrernte and Anmatyerre fighters to drive white men and stock away from key water supplies resulted in the wounding of two stockmen, burning ‘Anna’s Reservoir’ homestead, and killing increasing numbers of cattle. Mounted Constables Willshire and Daer led punitive patrols of Native Policemen, trackers, and volunteer vigilantes—usually pastoralists and stockmen—armed with Martini Henry rifles, hunting down men, women and children. The word ‘dispersal’ is used frequently in official reports and here, as in all states and territories, this was code for shooting to kill Aboriginal people. An unrestricted supply of ammunition for these patrols was made available by the South Australian Government, which at that time administered the Northern Territory. Willshire informally petitioned his superiors for
permission to carry out ‘anticipatory policing’ in the Alice Springs region, meaning the right to take armed patrols anywhere he chose, regardless of whether requests for assistance had been made. He cited widespread approval for his actions, from pastoralists in the Alice Springs region, and indeed a letter signed by eleven local pastoralists was sent in his support. Permission was granted, giving Willshire freedom to roam the region from Glen Helen in the west, through to Undoolya, Loves’ Creek and Arltunga in the east — including the area around Inteye Arrkwe (Nettelbeck & Foster 2007).

In late 1884, when a report was made of cattle being killed at Temple Bar, just west of Alice Springs, Willshire was busy elsewhere, so Daer led native police and a group of pastoralists, stockmen and drovers in pursuit of thirty Arrernte men. They were suspected cattle killers who, with their families, were heading west towards Simpson’s Gap. A drover named Williams and pastoralist named Willoby made innocuous unofficial reports about the patrol, in which Daer’s actions are not specified, and no mention is made of killing, but the word ‘dispersal’ is used. Kimber cites a less guarded oral account given later by an Owen Springs stockman called Tucker: ‘After chasing ’em along the valley, we rounded ’em up on that razorback hill over there. Then we let go. We ran a tight cordon round the hill an’ peppered ’em until there wasn’t a “nig” showing. Poor devils. There must have been 150-170 of ’em on that hill and I reckon that few of ’em got away. But what could we do? We had to live up here. That was the trouble of it’ (Kimber 2011 p. 57). Kimber notes that the number of people killed on the hill reflects the fact that women, children and old people were with the thirty men.

Between 1871 and 1905 three main waves of intruders arrived in Arrernte country: workers on the Overland Telegraph Line, prospectors looking for rubies, and miners drawn by the Arltunga gold-rushes. The influx of so many single men had dire consequences for Arrernte
women and men, in terms of sexual exploitation and violent conflict. As much as twenty percent of the Arrernte population may have died between 1860 and 1895, from introduced diseases such as venereal disease, typhoid, and influenza (Kimber 2011). In less than a generation, Arrernte people had endured rapid, catastrophic change: from their first sighting of white men and horses; to the pressure of competing with stock for vital food and water reserves; to armed resistance and punitive, murderous patrols; to beginning to work with horses and other stock on the first cattle stations. Arrernte women and men proceeded to adapt the language, methods and values of their life as hunter-gatherers to their work with stock—an extraordinary feat of resilience. These were the people, and their descendants, who were at Love’s Creek in the 1930s, and whose photographs were taken by Roy McFadyen. All these events occurred in the lifetime of “Peter”, ‘rainmaker and goat shepherd’.

**Bringing it home**

Writing about my responses to the violence described in the accounts cited above has been immensely difficult. I have struggled, partly because of the ‘unspeakable’ nature of the events. The violence and its ongoing consequences are as if hidden in plain sight, an eradicable part of everyday life in Australia. Although I had known about frontier violence across the country, taking in information about systematic violence occurring in or near specific places I had camped in, walked through, and gazed at for days while out painting, was painfully confronting. When reading about similar events located at a distance in time and space, I unwittingly had an emotional buffer, but knowing these events had taken place nearby, and recently, had an irreversible impact on my sense of the place where I live and work.
When setting out to learn about country through immersion, unaccountably I had not anticipated confronting the details and dimensions of genocidal racial violence or apprehending specific local instances of unspeakable crimes. I was struck by the question Mitchell Rolls posed in response to Henry Reynolds’ question, ‘Why weren’t we told?’ (1999): ‘Why didn’t you listen?’ (Rolls 2010 p. 1). Rolls finds Reynolds’ question peculiar for ‘its exculpatory sentiment, the implied refusal to accept responsibility for ignorance, its facile rendering of complex matters, and its inaccuracy’ (2010 p. 1). He goes on to also repudiate W.E.H. Stanner’s much-quoted claim of a general inattention to Aboriginal history and a ‘cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale’ (2009 p. 189) on the grounds that a wealth of published and unpublished evidentiary material exists, and has done so since the time when such violent practices were commonplace. Such material encompasses 19th century newspapers and official government records, parliamentary records, general histories, travellers’ tales, letters and reminiscences, literary and middlebrow fiction and non-fiction, radio and other spoken-word sources, and poetry. And it includes the poetry, fiction, non-fiction and oral histories of Aboriginal people.

Notably, social realist painters such as Yosl Bergner (Aborigines in chains, 1946) and Noel Counihan (Aboriginal family outside Swan Hill, circa 1962) had no difficulty in identifying with the plight of Aboriginal people, drawing on direct witnessing and public sources such as newspaper articles for inspiration for their work. Jane Lydon has documented the comprehensive photographic records that bore witness to human rights abuses of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (2012). In all, a huge body of literature, creative work and media coverage demonstrates that knowledge of frontier violence and dispossession has never been inaccessible (Rolls 2010). The question then, as Rolls suggests, is how and why anyone would claim naïveté? Or rather, ‘Why weren’t we able to hear?’
(Attwood & Foster 2003, p. 3). Rolls points out that although responsibility is often laid at the feet of inadequate school syllabi, or an urban white middle-class upbringing, these too are attempts to make ‘someone or something else [...] responsible for our ignorance, for which we are ashamed but not blameworthy’ (2010 p. 11). This comment and challenge struck home as I recognised that in thirty-five years of living in Australia, I had side-stepped responsibility for (fully) knowing what I (half) knew of Australian history, identifying as a migrant who had not been through the Australian education system. So what is it then, that makes it still possible to feel ignorant—however shameful it might be to admit ignorance—in the face of what I have known, remembered, and even witnessed? How can I, as Rolls suggests, investigate those ‘mechanisms and provocations’ that work against the recognition of brutal truths? My defenses against these truths were shaken by twenty years of living in Central Australia, but paradoxically they might also have become deeper, and harder to see, as I became more emotionally attached to people and place. Australian historian Greg Dening writes:

*The dead need history for the voice it gives them. The living need history, not for a past they are not responsible for and cannot change. The living need a history disturbing enough to change the present.*

(cited in Lydon 2012 p. 22).

Being in country, and coming face to face with these images and histories, was disturbing enough to motivate me. Until this time I had been confident that painting could be used to respond to whatever I encountered. That confidence now evaporated. For one thing, it seemed unthinkable to paint about my responses to racial violence without invitation from, or negotiation with, those most affected. Dening, who wrote histories of cross-cultural encounters of all kinds, addresses this issue:
‘the past belonged to those on whom it impinged more than to those who had the skills to discover it and tell it. Those on whom the past impinges are owed the dignity of being heard with their own voice’

(2006 p. 3).

Dening understood ‘voice’ to include performance arts and visual arts, faces, gestures, language. What then is asked of me, in terms of hearing, witnessing, and responding to, in this case, Aboriginal voices telling histories? ‘It was our responsibility to learn how to listen, they told us. It was our responsibility to enlarge our notion of history, to discover all the ways the past is in the present’ (Dening 2006, p. 3). As a painter, faced with the unspeakable, the issue is not so much how to represent that hard truth—representation risks fixing it and reifying it—but how to imagine it in a way that gives it a voice and a life. This is how I understand Dening’s prompting to discover the ways that the past lives on in the present: as an encouragement first to listen, and then to use imagination to find the images or words that others will be able to respond to, that will help us to remember and activate what we already know. Dening quotes Herbert Marcuse:

‘All reification—the transformation of lived experience into things—is a forgetting. Art fights reification by making the petrified word speak, sing, perhaps dance’.

(cited in Dening 2006 p. 9).

I wanted the paintings to take up the responsibility to listen, and imagine the haunting brought about by dispossession. I thought this process had begun with the dark paintings made at dusk, but on looking back through paintings made earlier in the study, I saw that a
subtle sadness or haunting was already visible. I did not know how this sense of haunting had got into the work, or how to proceed with it. To be overly intentional about expressing sadness or haunting seemed inauthentic. Painting seemed slight and inadequate as a way of addressing the suffering associated with this place, but perhaps painting would begin the necessary work of reflection, imagination and dialogue. If ignorance and vulnerability were part of the process of coming to terms with the past then surely they would also be reflected in the painting process. As Dening writes, allowing a reader to sense and share the writer’s vulnerability is part of the ‘dialogic gift’ offered by the writer or artist.

**Sadness as private reverie**

When I camped alone on painting trips, sadness was a strange companion—not unwelcome—sensitising me to the atmosphere of the place. On each return to Inteye Arrkwe a sense of melancholy accompanied my arriving and settling in to the rhythms of night and day. It took different forms, like restlessness or deflation, or thinking about the people there before me. When alone, I dwelt on these things more than I would in company. Melancholy brought me into contact with hard truths about what had happened here, while simultaneously I recognised that there was so much I would never know. It arose from exposure to narratives that were not mine, but demanded I attend to them, as part of learning how to look and listen, and respond to events.

While out painting at the ‘witching hour’, low light heightened feelings of aloneness and uncertainty. I recalled, from childhood, hearing Maori women keening, in prayerful sorrow after a death in the community. Similarly, I had heard Aboriginal people in sorry camps cry
out during the change of light, and felt the piercing sadness of sounds of grief in the evening air. Eugene Marais, in ‘The Soul of the Ape’ described what he called ‘hesperian depression’, a temporary depression occurring just before sunset. He claimed that a tendency to experience this is universal among primates, due to a foreboding of death accompanying the end of day and the setting of the sun (1969).

At that hour, the purposeful concentration of the day gave way to a looser rhythm of painting. I worked until I could barely see and cared less what the result looked like. The sense of haunting was accompanied by a receptive sensibility in which the country, or perhaps events embedded in it, seemed to come forward in dialogue. The discipline of painting steadied me and helped me catch what was emerging. Shifts occurred when an image or intuition unexpectedly came through in a painting. As I dwelt on what I knew of the country’s past, a re-orientation to place was occurring. Although sadness over injustices does nothing to redress them, it does acknowledge them, rupturing habitual ways of thinking. In that rupture, perhaps a new response can form. Meanwhile, sadness is a watchful waiting. The exploration of haunting and sadness through painting was intended not to perpetuate melancholy, but to counter denial and acknowledge the complexities of contested histories. Judith Butler writes of melancholia and ‘disavowed mourning’ as a consequence of the erasure from public records of the names and images of those who have been killed by the state, whilst other lives and deaths are commemorated in acts of nation-building. She asks ‘What counts as a livable life and a grievable death?’ (2004 p. xiv). Recounting and grieving our collective losses has the potential to ‘acknowledge and incorporate (rather than fearfully exclude)’ (Gibson 2002 p. 149) the welter of haunting, varied and contradictory stories and events that are part of Australia’s past, present and future.
Sadness as a communal practice: ‘When sad people’s fires are burning...’

In the past, in my mothers’ time, my mothers used to have weeping-sadness at morning daybreak, and in the evening... the sadness of watching the sun go down and watching the sun come up is the Law... Sadness forever is. Sadness lives deep within you... if you have a sadness, it breaks open your sadness from the past...You must always know that it will come back to you, that it is part of Aboriginal peoples’ ways.

Margaret Kemarre Turner (2010 p. 104)

McLean avoids speculation about Aboriginal peoples’ views on melancholy, but Margaret Kemarre Turner, Kathleen Kemarre Wallace, and Alec Kruger speak eloquently about their experience of sadness which, given Aboriginal histories, is well-founded. Their experiences are distinctly different from each other, and are expressed with immediacy and poignancy that make the trope of melancholy appear contrived and disconnected from life. Turner describes sadness at daybreak and evening as ‘the Law’, having therefore a sacred dimension. Acknowledgment of one’s sadness by others is essential to healing and is sacred in itself, a part of healing. Participation and the sharing of sadness through hugging and shaking hands is necessary because ‘you have to spread that sadness out long and wide so it can wear out’ (Turner, M.K. 2010 p. 106). The context in which sadness is experienced makes a difference: it may be eased by being in one’s homeland: ‘the Land gets into them and some of the sadness goes away... or sometimes it doesn’t. But mourning in another country, on some-one else’s land, even here in town, is really, really sad’. The sadness Turner describes is no mere convention, but a warm, inclusive communal practice serving to bind and restore extended families, to strengthen people and renew their ties with
country. The paintings from this study dealing with loss, rather than being intrusive or distressing, were intended as respectful acknowledgement that might play some part in ‘wearing out’ sadness.

Kathleen Kemarre Wallace writes about the cultural context of sadness, for example citing the death of her grandfather in 1984:

... his death symbolised the end of our knowledge and our cultural practices. The changes to our culture and our way of life had been happening so fast and Atyelpe was one of the last who represented the old ways, one who had held ancient knowledge from the ancestors. The family... was deeply sad and some of them did not want to pass on our cultural knowledge anymore...They wanted to forget all we had lost. There was so much grieving. We were always in sadness thinking about the past.

(Wallace & Lovell 2009 p. 158)

Sadness can be the subject of ceremonial songs, as in an Alyawarr womens’ song called Ampeny-ampeny (Loneliness). Katie Kemarre Morton paraphrases the song:

‘We are sad for our country’. When they returned and saw their country they felt sad because no-one was there. ‘A deserted country’ they thought, ‘has been revealed. Our father’s country overwhelmed us with emotion’.

(Morton et al. 2013).
Sometimes sadness about country is bitter-sweet, mingled with an intense, poignant appreciation of its beauty and meaning. Here is Ada Wades, speaking of Alhirntarlpe, a site near Inteye Arrkwe:

*We used to sit there on the ground and look at the Dancing Women mountain. It was so beautiful that we used to cry.*
(cited in Kimber 2001)

Many Arrernte people experience continuity with the past as the presence of spirits, in different forms. Some are incarnate spirits that enter a person at birth, them return after death to reside in their country. They interact with people and country in ways that might be interpreted as ‘haunting’. Though some spirits are malevolent, Wallace speaks of them positively as an important and natural part of human life:

*If we had no living spirits, our life would be nothing to us. It is the spirit in us who makes us do things, move around and live life. Arrernte live with the awareness of spirits... of our ancestors, our country and ourselves.*

(2009 p. 22)

For Alec Kruger, taken so young from his family and his country, and finding himself achingly alone in Arrernte country, sadness was a bleak and solitary experience, to be endured without hope of comfort. In his early days at Love’s Creek he was forbidden to go down to the Arrernte camps in the riverbed, and be part of the family life there, so could not access the comfort of communal sadness practices spoken of by M. K. Turner. His separation from family and country were made even harsher by his isolation.
It was the night-times that would weaken me... These were the loneliest times... I hated Love’s Creek and struggled with the lack of warmth in everything that was happening. I would feel the tears well up behind closed eyelids. But there was never anything I could do about anything. It was my ongoing initiation into an adult world. You had to swallow your sadness, get up every morning and get on with whatever was happening. That was how I had to survive.

Alec Kruger (2007 p.77)

Sadness and the painting process

T. S. Eliot (1987) proposed that two key elements combine in the creative process: the unconscious working through of ideas during a period of quiescence and incubation, and the outpouring of new work facilitated by a temporary absence of inhibiting factors. The latter may be associated with physical illness. I suggest it is also associated with melancholy or sadness which, although it can be debilitating, can also lead to a shift in understanding. Arrernte country provided an incubating environment where I was susceptible to influences and moods, sounds and silences, and where ideas and feelings were re-configured. At times this working through gave rise to a rush of energy and an episode of working without hesitation. Eliot also described a negative capacity in which

*some obstruction is momentarily whisked away: (there is some) disturbance of our quotidian character which results in an incantation, an outburst of words which we hardly recognise as our own (because of the effortlessness).*

(1987 p. 138)
Eliot described the relief accompanying this release from inhibition as ‘less like what we know as a positive pleasure, than a sudden relief from an intolerable burden’. What is the nature of the burden? For Eliot, worry and fear were pervasive and constant. For me, painting in Arrernte country, a weight of grief and loss was connected with memories that did not belong to me personally, but to which I felt I must respond. I also felt loss in relation to the violent treatment of country.

The burden was less sadness itself, than the feeling of being caught up, unable to respond to what I knew had happened in this place. Ross Gibson, in *Badlands* (Gibson 2002), suggests that haunted ‘badlands’ teach us by provoking and disturbing. They ‘goad us into thinking more boldly about how the past produces the present. This remembering is something good we can do in response to the bad in our lands’ (Gibson 2002 pp. 2-3). I do not think of the country around Inteye Arrkwe as ‘badlands’, although bad things have happened there. Gibson points out that ‘badlands’ are created in time as well as space: ‘they can be staked out in the past of a place, in a time just the other side of your immediate consciousness’ (Gibson 2002 p. 2). Haunting makes the present permeable, as events from the past saturate present consciousness. The disturbance felt in country gives impetus to searching for a way to break through the ‘unspeakability’ of violence and loss. Images of smoke or darkness are taken up in the paintings as a way to imagine and give form to the sense of haunting. I welcomed these experiences of haunting and melancholy because they were unsettling, bringing together painful events of the past with the apparent calm of the present, keeping alive questions about how country is to be negotiated, now, as a shared place.
On not seeing ghosts

It was the fearful loneliness of the place that most affected her—the absence of ghosts. Till they arrived, no other lives had been lived here... She had not understood, till she came to a place where it was lacking, the extent to which her sense of the world had to do with the presence of those who had been here before, leaving signs of their passing and spaces still warm with breath... most of all, the names on the headstones, which were their names, under which lay the bones that had made their bones and given them breath.

David Malouf (1994 p. 110)

Melancholy is not just personal; as a trope it is a convention nurtured by cultural bias, which may render invisible the reality of another’s grief and thereby deepen the harm. David Malouf’s character in Remembering Babylon feels a ‘fearful loneliness’ in the absence of her own ghosts and her own old people—people whose bones made her bones. Absorbed in her own story, she sees the land as empty. She overlooks the possibility others besides her own people have left traces and ‘spaces still warm with breath’ and she has in fact displaced these people. Malouf indirectly suggests haunting might be a catalyst for breaking through the self-enclosure and willful blindness of terra nullius, into recognition of the prior presence and humanity of Aboriginal people, and the shared human experience of loss. Acknowledging sadness and haunting might take us beyond ideology and trite narratives about white pioneers and close some of the distance that those narratives maintain. As Marcia Langton famously pointed out:
The densest relationship is not between actual people, but between white Australians and the symbols created by their predecessors. Australians do not know and relate to Aboriginal people. They relate to stories told by former colonists.

Marcia Langton (1993 p. 20)

If the trope of melancholy has served colonial purposes of obscuring Aboriginal experience and thereby laying claim to the land, a genuine exploration of sadness and its causes instead contributes to dialogue in a ‘field of intersubjectivity’ (Langton 1993 p. 33): that shared space of meaning in which intercultural relations are shaped and defined (Lydon 2012). The risk is that terrible things will be aestheticised when explored through art, politically neutralised rather than confronted. Viewers’ responses to paintings I had made earlier in the study had shown that this risk was present in my work. Critics of Malouf’s Remembering Babylon raise the issue that his consummate skill in creating transcendent moments of resolution in a text emphasises “the spiritual” as a way of effacing the real, political questions’ (McCredden 1999 p. 3). Landscape painting is particularly susceptible to being viewed as apolitical, uncritical and concerned with a spiritual dimension. The challenge in painting landscape is to embrace the poetics of place whilst striving, as MacCredden sees Malouf doing, to ‘acknowledge the material, political and the spiritual violence, as well as the possible paths of renewal beyond such violence’ (1999 pp. 9-10). Articulating the complex, haunting histories of country in painting is one possible pathway to acknowledgement and renewal.
**Conclusion**

‘Haunting’ has traced a path from disquiet about ignorance of histories of place, through exploration of events occurring in the country where I have been working, to confronting violent frontier histories and their impacts on Aboriginal people associated with Inteye Arrkwe today. A role for melancholy has been found not in sentimentalising or smoothing over the past, but in provoking questioning and acknowledging its losses and complexities. Painting may provide one way of articulating the haunting histories of country, and activating questions about how we can now live together in this place. In the next chapter a more intimate understanding of the lives of people at Inteye Arrkwe in the 1930’s is sought through the process of painting portraits of them.
Chapter 6 Portraits

Figure 6.1 Willie Williams, circa 1938. Photograph Roy McFadyen (McFadyen 1938b)
If I like a photograph, if it disturbs me, I linger over it... I want to enlarge this face to see it better, to understand it better, to know its truth.

Roland Barthes (2000 p. 9)

Introduction

Portraits are treasures, and in Aboriginal communities, as elsewhere, they are a precious way of maintaining connections with family. This chapter explores how portraits have been used in the study to interpret the past and negotiate histories. Roy McFadyen’s photographs are used to imagine encounters with people at Inteye Arrkwe in the 1930s, and to think about how the interpretation of an image can lead to omitting some histories, affirming others, and perpetuating deceptions.

I introduce Roland Barthes’ idea of one’s political right to be recognised and respected as a subject, in relation to the ethics of creating an image of another person. The process of making paintings from photographs is explained, and critical reflection on the results is informed by Barthes’ ideas about ‘unary’ and ‘disruptive’ images. One of these paintings is examined as an example of the use of the image as a subtle intervention in historiography. Two paintings by Tim Johnson are considered as further examples of overt and subtle interventions in photographic images. The chapter gives an account of how family members responded to the portraits from Inteye Arrkwe, providing an insight into the potential role of portraits in community and family histories. Finally I raise the notion of portraits of place, in which without literally portraying a person, a painting of a place evokes the presence of someone to whom that place is significant.
Willie Williams stands on the track between the homestead and the riverbed where Arrernte families camp (figure 6.1). He looks at a camera held by work-mate Roy McFadyen, who is a few metres away, stooping to take the photo or holding the camera at waist height. Willie is about 10 years old, a horse-tailer during mustering, and a rouseabout at other times. He is barefoot, and wears heavily patched men’s trousers and shirt, with pants and sleeves rolled up. He has taken off his hat for the photo. His shadow tells us it is mid to late morning in summer. The light is strong overhead, shading his eyes and making it hard to read his expression. His face appears relaxed, half-smiling. His whole body faces Roy and his gaze is level. He stands easily, his free hand loose at his side. Behind him are the goat yard, vegetable garden and spring. Along the far riverbanks no buildings are visible; this is where his family lives. He is standing between two worlds. Looking at the photo, I want to know more. As Roland Barthes says, I want to see this face better, understand it better. I want to see the next moment as well: when Willie swings away, claps his hat on, and resumes what he was doing; when Roy packs the Kodak away and speaks to the boy. What will be the tone of their voices? Who stands beside Roy, behind the camera? Is smoke drifting up from the camp? Maybe it is dinner-time, and they are about to eat salt meat and damper left over from breakfast. Why write in the present tense? Because when I look at the photograph, my body responds as if I am there now. I know the contours of the track, feel dry air, and smell hot gravelly dust. I am stirred by Willie’s too-big clothes and bare feet. What I have read and heard about station life ‘disturbs’ me and is present in my body as I look. A narrative is spun like a spider’s web, attaching to points in the photograph: Willie’s feet, a stain on his trouser leg, the family resemblance he bears, the way he holds his hat, and the shadowy interior of the shed. The photograph brings this moment close, but it doesn’t deliver. It locks a moment in time, with a satisfying click that we speak of as ‘capture’, but it cannot answer the question that Barthes raises: why, in the ‘vast disorder of objects’, has someone chosen this moment, this exact object, to photograph? Nor does it tell us whether or why someone else has consented to be portrayed, or how they might have wanted to be seen. (Journal entry, October 2013, JT)
Faces and stories from Inteye Arrkwe

I owe the past and the other the dignity of being able to be their own selves in my representations of them.

Greg Dening (2006 p. 2)

After encountering Peter Ulyerre’s photograph at Ross River homestead, I learned Roy McFadyen had photographed Peter and Maggie, and other people on the station, in the late 1930s. Seventy years later, he published the photographs in his memoir, ‘At a Cost’ (2009), that includes an account of station life and politics, and sheds light on Peter Ulyerre’s life on the station. Roy tells of arriving from Victoria on a motorbike as a twenty-year-old, broke and looking for work. Lewis Bloomfield hired him as a station hand for two weeks that extended to two years. Roy was new to the Territory; he brought a fresh eye to the ways of the pastoralists and responded in a friendly and empathic way to his Arrernte co-workers. He carried his camera while at work, documenting work practices and relationships. His images of station life convey the texture of relationships between people, animals, and place. They are selective, focussing on men’s labour and reflecting Roy’s dedication to his job. As a young European man, Roy could not easily document the work life of the women and girls inside or outside the homestead, or Arrernte family life in the camps, nor was he privy to events inside the homestead. Nevertheless his photographs build a picture of labour practices on the station, a work history that is still a strong source of identity for Arrernte women and men. It also brings mixed feelings: pride in the knowledge that their labour was highly skilled and essential to the survival of the pastoral stations; nostalgia for a time when people were able to live on or near their own country and had work that was
meaningful to them; sadness about the passing of a temporary equilibrium in the midst of rapid social change; and anger or resignation about their exploitation as unpaid workers.

As a hired hand, Roy’s social position was considered below that of the Bloomfields, but above that of the Aboriginal station hands. He was expected to direct the (often more experienced) Aboriginal workers on projects like dredging out soaks and building cattle yards. Pay scales reflected the social hierarchy. In theory, Roy was paid two pounds a week, while the Aboriginal station hands were unpaid and received only rations of flour and salt beef. The Bloomfields’ policy was to feed the workers but not to provide for their dependents, contrary to the custom on other stations in the region. Women and girls mustered cattle and worked with horses and goats, as well as in the house and garden. Boys began working at eight to ten years old as horsetailers, accompanying the musters. Families relied on hunting and gathering to supplement rations—or perhaps it was the other way round and rations were secondary food sources. The Bloomfield men were said to be mean: the salted meat they provided was sometimes rotten and the flour sometimes rancid and weevilly (McFadyen 2009). There were no ‘luxuries’ like tea, sugar or tobacco, though Agnes Abbott remembers Lillian Bloomfield offering her licorice. Agnes refused the treat, fearful that it was a trap (2013). When a beast was slaughtered for meat every part of the body was used, including the legs, offal and head. Hence we see Peter (figure 5.4), taking the bullock’s head to share with family. Another of Roy’s photographs shows Peter Ulyerre with his wife Maggie, who carries home the skin of a bullock, also for food. Peter and Maggie worked for the Bloomfields as goatherds, at Atnarpa, an outlying part of Love’s Creek Station. In his other life outside the station world, Peter was an Arrernte man of high degree, one of the region’s last male elders fully versed in high culture.
Omissions, affirmations, and deceptions

Figure 6.2 Interior of Ross River homestead. Photograph Jennifer Taylor, 2012.

Today ‘Ross River Resort’ hosts tourists and locals on camping holidays and conferences. Casual visitors may well think, as I did, that the photographs on display show life in the old homestead to be only about non-Indigenous people: a wedding photo of Louis and Lillian Bloomfield, Harry Bloomfield on his horse, the Green family hosting a bush christening. Other faces are there, but mostly unnamed. Without clear identification and supporting material they do not affirm the place of Arrernte families in the station’s history and by default create a narrative of exclusion. Tacit support is given to the more obvious narrative of pioneering European families triumphing over adversity through ‘true grit’. An example, published in Lorraine Day’s history of the station, is this photograph caption: ‘Love’s Creek homestead 1939. Close by is a laundry and lock-up for the house girls if they got out of line... next is the meat house, then the bush...’
garage and a tennis court’ (Day 2012 p.131). Oral histories, such as one recorded by Lillian Bloomfield in 1964, combine tales of ingenuity and hardship, suggesting that the family lived in isolation, with casual mention of close, dependent relationships with Arrernte people:

> We never had any bother with (Aboriginal people)... my nearest neighbour was thirty miles, and it was all men. We had the natives working at home... The only companion I ever had was a native girl... old Ruby. She was a real faithful old thing. When the boss used to go away she’d come up and she’d stay around... She’d camp in the garden somewhere, to be near me. Oh they were wonderful old people. If I ever wanted them—sometimes a snake would crawl in... I used to blow this whistle, and they knew then that they were wanted. They’d race up from the camp... They never prowled around at night, or did anything that they shouldn’t. We never had any trouble with them.

(1964 p.6)

In contrast, here is Alec Kruger’s recollection of social relations on the station:

> The Bloomfields were so distant and dismissive, especially the women. It was like you were one of the dogs about the place. I only heard from them if they had a job or if I was in trouble. The house girls were my usual contact point... but we would get into serious trouble from Mrs Bloomfield if we so much as looked too long at each other. The house girls were restricted from going down to the Aboriginal camp. Like me, they were being taught how to live like the whitefellas. Not that we were ever going to be allowed in. Peggy might visit her mother after work but had to sleep at the homestead—Lillian Bloomfield’s rules.

(2007 p.77—8)
I searched the display of photographs for traces of stories that had been concealed or not drawn out in station histories told by non-Aboriginal people. Roy McFadyen’s photograph of Peter Ulyerre, with its hand-written inscription, is the startling exception among images not overtly acknowledging Aboriginal presence.

**Historiography, powered by an image**

The dual identity of goat shepherd and rainmaker inscribed on the photograph (figure 5.2) may not have been intended ironically, but it captures the disjuncture between the old man’s cultural and ceremonial life, and his role and identity on the station. It leaves much unsaid, about how Peter and Maggie lived in this zone between cultural worlds. Can the image tell us more than its caption?

The two photographs of Peter and Maggie carrying away parts of a bullock as their rations are striking (see painting after the photograph of Peter and Maggie, figure 6.9). They evoke mixed feelings about the dignified bearing of these two old people carrying food that would today be considered abject and unacceptable. The photographs are emblematic of a much discussed theme of ‘frontier social change’ in the 1930s and ‘40s: that of the so-called ‘craving’ for rations and a ‘drift’ to missions, pastoral stations and towns. Terms such as ‘craving’ and ‘tribal drift’ are used even by seasoned observers such as W.E.H Stanner, and imply the absence of agency or reason on the part of Aboriginal people (Rowse 1998 p. 33). Commonly Aboriginal values and codes to do with giving and exchange were not understood by white observers, who were inclined to see Aboriginal people receiving rations as morally and culturally fragile, in need of protection and already corrupted by detribalisation. Although rationing and work practices brought givers and receivers together, this proximity was often a missed opportunity for understanding each other’s motives (Rowse 1998 p. 5).
Standpoint theory (Harding 2009), affirms that without seriously engaging with the ways that others understand themselves and their social relations, and their ways of understanding us, there will not be a genuine meeting, from which insight can arise. Instead, speculation about the motives of the other will tend to be based on self-interest. Rowse links this notion to Foucault’s ideas about how colonists wish to construct a body of knowledge about colonised peoples, to inform practices of governing. What is missing in each instance is the voice of Indigenous people reflecting on their own situation and on how they see the colonists.

I saw Roy’s photographs as a possible way of recovering some missing voices of Arrernte people working at Alhirntarpe in the 1930’s in two ways: through conversations with Arrernte people, and through my own examination and reworking of the photographs. I was doubtful about the validity of using my own imaginative response to the images. For instance, here stand Peter and Maggie, looking at Roy, in an encounter that is now silent, although the details of their clothing and possessions are eloquent. The image disturbs: to use Barthes’ term, it ‘punctures’ complacency. It engages feeling and imagination but does not easily yield to interpretation. Like the photo of Peter carrying the bullock head, it creates a moment of shock and incomprehension—what is that thing, and why is he carrying it? A photograph is already an interpretation of events, and a painting from a photograph is doubly interpretive. In working from these photographs, I am imagining an encounter (of my own) with Peter and Maggie that didn’t happen. Dening argues that imagination has a role in historiography and is a valid way of ‘seeing what is absent, hearing the silence as well as the noise’ and ‘taking the cliché out of what has been said over and over’ (2006 p. 5). The use of painting to rework and investigate these photographs allows imagination a role in taking up a dialogue that began between Roy, Peter and Maggie in the 1930s. There is much more to learn about the interwoven lives
of these three people and their situation. Painting creates an imagined intersection between past and present. The voices of people who are now gone cannot be heard, but their painted image invites reflection from their families, and from others who, like me, never met them but would have liked to.

**Ethics of representation**

Roland Barthes defines private life as ‘that zone of space, of time, where I am not an image, an object. It is my political right to be a subject which I must protect’ (2000 p. 15). I was cautious about how the process of image making might, as he says, turn a person into an object at the disposal of the Other, ‘ready for the subtlest deceptions’ (2000, p. 14). A painted portrait would have different qualities from a photograph, but it also had the potential to restore a person’s story, or to distort and misrepresent it. Those ‘subtle deceptions’ could include interpreting or representing a person in ways that reflected my perspective more than theirs—a result that would be unintended but almost inevitable. For example, the failure of the Ross River Resort display to name Aboriginal subjects, whilst naming European ones, was likely unintentional but perpetuated a deception: that the people who count in the pastoral stories of hard work and stoicism are white. Though the ethics of representation are fraught, refraining from portraying Arrernte people whilst portraying their country in no way evades such complexity. Rather, it leaves a silence that could be understood as a disavowal of Arrernte presence.

I wanted to make paintings that would help restore an overlooked dimension of narratives about Inteye Arrkwe, and render more visible the interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people there. I wanted to engage with the photographs by looking closely at
each face and attempting to imagine these people and their lives. Plein air practice is characterised by charged encounters between place and painter, based on sensory experience. Working from a still, two-dimensional source would be different, but my intention was that landscape and portrait painting would provide an enriched context for each other.

As described in the Introduction, I sought permission from family members, and from Roy, to rework the photographs as painted portraits. In every case, the response from family members was positive and enthusiastic. Although care must still be taken in exposing photographs of Aboriginal people who have passed away, community attitudes to such photographs are changing. In the case of people who died many years ago these images are now sometimes displayed as family treasures. I offered to give the portraits to the relevant families after the completion of the project. To me, this meant making portraits that were recognisable and respectful, since the families in a sense already owned them. As a result, the painting process was constrained; I had no experience in portraiture, but did not feel free to work experimentally. I did not know whether people would have a use for these paintings, or whether I would be intruding on their privacy. In fact everyone I approached responded positively to Roy’s photographs and to my request to paint portraits from them.

**Painting the portraits**

First I chose photos of Tim Shaw and two young horse-tailers, Willie Williams and Jacky Williams, and used projection techniques to make pencil drawings, establishing the outlines of the figures. I painted the figures in monochrome. They looked awkward and ghostly, poignant—uncomfortably so, given the trope of melancholy about the imminent demise of Aboriginal people.
Figure 6.3 Jennifer Taylor, *Tim Shaw, after Roy McFadyen*, 2013. Oil on board, 40 x 30cm. Photograph Peter Carroll

Figure 6.4 Jennifer Taylor, *Jacky Williams, after Roy McFadyen*, 2013. Oil on board, 40 x 30cm. Photograph Peter Carroll
Next I made portraits cropped to heads and shoulders, in imitation of a studio portrait of Lewis Bloomfield that was on display in the homestead. The framing was intended to give weight and dignity to the subjects, equal to that of a formal studio portrait of the time. Inevitably the figures were very still—less animated than the landscapes painted in plein air. Their stillness was compounded by my dropping out background detail and cropping the images. I tried to draw out a sense of the person from the limited information in the photographs, which had high contrast from having been taken in intense light, and from Roy McFadyen’s practice of developing film by moonlight in dam water! In every photograph the person’s eyes were in deep shadow. As the group of portraits accumulated, all with hooded eyes, they conveyed a remoteness and mystery that, en masse, appeared stereotypical. My attempts to interpret expressions felt awkward and intrusive, but in some cases these interpretations did convey the power of the subject’s direct gaze, confronting the viewer. I had the sensation of ‘touching’ the faces of people I had not met, trying to bring their image to life, read their expression and imagine their experience. I felt a tenuous connection with people through their image, but it was based on guesswork and imagination. There was no escaping the fact that I did not know these people. Nevertheless painting added weight and meaning to the images, according to comments from viewers. Time spent looking at the photographic images, absorbing them, and interpreting them in another medium gave me a sense of paying homage to the people pictured. I wondered whether this devotional intent could be detected in the finished work.
Figure 6.5 Jennifer Taylor, *Peter Ulyerre, after Roy McFadyen*, 2013. Oil on board, 40 x 30cm. Photograph Peter Carroll

Figure 6.6 Jennifer Taylor, *Jacky Williams, after Roy McFadyen 2*, 2013. Oil on board, 40 x 30cm. Photograph Peter Carroll
Stillness in a photographic image does not jar, but in a painting it becomes a dominant feature. The portraits had an awkward reticence that belied the vitality of their subjects. The richness of incidental detail in the original photographs arguably conveyed more about people’s lives than the simplified paintings did. Although the portraits were evocative, the struggle to achieve a likeness dominated the working process. Using projection techniques for outlines didn’t ensure accuracy; the slightest flick of paint could alter an expression and change the impression of a person. Perhaps the original photographs were more communicative than these paintings.

Although I thought the cropped portraits would suit the families, I felt dissatisfied with them as paintings, finding them too stiff and controlled, with a tight focus on single faces. I decided to experiment with paintings of people at work. I made loose drawings from a photograph of Johnny Williams, Sammy Williams, and Harry Bloomfield preparing horses and equipment for mustering at Atnarpa. The figures of men and horses were rendered in monochrome, in a high-key coloured landscape, in order to distinguish the time frame of station work from that of cultural and geological narratives, and suggest a meditation on people and place. Much detail was dropped out, to support the narrative and make the relationship between figures and landscape more dramatic.
Barthes on ‘ unary ’ and ‘ disruptive ’ images

On reflection, I thought cropping and reducing detail radically separated subject from context, just as a studio photograph would. This strategy might work in a portrait painted from life, where direct contact would make it easier to render the subject with emotional intensity. In the case of painting from photographic sources, however, it resulted in flattening and oversimplification. There was just one main point of entry, one unifying idea: the face. The centrality of the face suggested an essential core, which ran contrary to understanding this person as intimately connected with others and with place. The tight format did not allow for elements that would throw the image off-balance, let it breathe and develop lines of connection. In Barthes terms, the images were too ‘ unary ’—too
controlled and ‘docile’: ‘no duality, no indirection, no disturbance’ (2000 pp. 40-1). It is not surprising that a painting is often unary, given that the painter has ongoing control over the developing image, and can censor what is included. The painter may not want to exercise such control, but is influenced by habit or convention. Of course happy accidents and surprise inclusions can happen in a painting, as they do in a photograph.

One reason for using photographs as sources is that they can introduce disruptive elements to a painting which otherwise would be dominated by a unifying idea, imparting ambiguity and complexity. Barthes describes the ‘lashing’, ‘striping’, ‘puncturing’ effect of photographs in which attractive or disturbing details suggest different interpretations than the obvious, literal ones. Such images provoke new ideas because they are not cohesive, but instead create a doubling and vacillation of thought (2000 pp. 40-1). Vacillation entails doubt, suggesting that alternative interpretations exist. In the case of historical photographs it prompts useful questioning and a search for ‘aberrant’, overlooked stories. If these paintings have succeeded in provoking reflection and vacillation, they have done so rather gently. Perhaps at times they have set side by side ideas and images that are slightly incongruent or unexpected: Peter Ulyerre and Maggie pose for the camera with dignity and formality, Maggie with the enormous skin of a bullock balanced on her head, a pile of laundry in one hand and a billy in the other (figure 6.9); the young Williams men pose with Roy McFadyen for a group portrait, one with a supportive, affectionate hand at Roy’s back and another with a firm grip on his young cousin (figure 6.10); Roy pours water into his hat for his dog, watched by his sick, emaciated stockhorse (Appendix p.71); in a stockyard that could be seen as emblematic of the hard-working (white) pioneers, young Tim Shaw, stolen as a boy from his family, strikes a sturdy proprietorial pose, adze in hand (figure 6.11);
the young Williams men pose with Roy again, holding aloft goannas they have caught to supplement their inadequate rations (Appendix, p. 72). It is quite simply the centring of Arrernte people as subjects in some images, and the depiction of peer relationships between them and their white co-worker in others, that complicates and subverts conventional station histories. The paintings have qualities that might have been rejected by Barthes as unary and unprovocative—such as a focus on the person, emotional warmth, and a gentle, contemplative atmosphere—which nevertheless give them value in the eyes of the family members of the people portrayed.

The work of Central Australian painter Rod Moss exemplifies the disruption of views of Arrernte people as ‘other’, or as idealised embodiments of cultural and spiritual knowledge. Over twenty-five years of art practice in Alice Springs his group portraits have exposed the daily suffering of his Arrernte friends from Whitegate camp as they endure cycles of grief and violence, alcohol and ill health. Yet at the same time Moss shows us the intersection of his own life, family, and practice with the lives of the Arrernte families, and doubly disrupts trite, gloomy views of Arrernte life with rich narratives of friendship, trust, absurdity and complexity. His painting and writing (Moss 2010; 2013) constitutes a dedicated intimate act of bearing witness. It does not avoid hard truths. Moss views his painting as ‘a means of reciprocated respect to the people depicted... kinds of love letters.’ The portraits in this study do not approach the depth and courage of Moss’s portraits, which are the product of many years of keeping company, observing, imagining, consulting, seeking permission and enjoying the support and friendship of Arrernte families. Yet, like Moss’s paintings, they aim to ‘carry out a necessary psychic task’, described by Alice Springs-based Jungian psychologist Craig San Roque as ‘an attempt to allow some of the delusions and fictions about being Australian to be dispersed and corrected by reality’ (San Roque, quoted in Richards 2013).
Figure 6.9 Jennifer Taylor, *Maggie and Peter Ulyerre, after Roy McFadyen*, 2014

Oil on board, 40 x 30 cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Figure 6.10 Jennifer Taylor, *Willie Williams, Sambo Williams, Roy McFadyen, Albert Williams, and unknown boy, after Roy McFadyen*, 2014. Oil on board, 30 x 40cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Figure 6.11 Jennifer Taylor, *Tim Shaw, after Roy McFadyen*, 2014. Oil on board, 30 x 40cm.

Photograph Peter Carroll.
Interventions, overt and subtle

Wanting to make works that had value to the families of the subjects constrained the works’ communicative power, usually found through experimentation. When painting landscapes I was answerable to no one, but with the portraits I followed the photographs as closely as possible, limiting experimentation. I did add colour to give the paintings additional visual and emotional warmth, but otherwise there was minimal intervention. Some of the photographs had disturbing elements, but the paintings bypassed many of the devices available to a painter to further disrupt or puncture a photographic image. For this project, the portraits served their purpose. Outside of this project I would like to work differently with photographs, for instance collaborating with others to set up the photographs, asking the person being portrayed to decide what would constitute a true portrait of them, working together on the paintings, and painting portraits from life, in settings chosen by the subjects.

Interventions by painters can be overt or subtle. An example of an overt intervention in a photographic image is figure 6.12, Papunya by Australian painter and conceptual artist Tim Johnson (1983-5). The painting contains multiple portraits of artists at work, in a schematic landscape. The portraits appear to derive from separate photographs, combined in a group portrait. Although very loosely painted, the artists are recognisable by their features, and their paintings. Johnson explains that they are ‘placed at sites, arranged on one picture plane... the landscape includes some features in perspective’ (Tunnicliffe & Ewington 2009 p. 53). Johnson’s key intervention has been to place the figures in such a way as to disrupt Western notions of perspective and recall the multiple viewpoints employed by the painters.
in their own work, in which the painted surface can be read both as a ground and as a diagram or map of spiritual forces within the land.

Johnson is using photographic sources here to approximate the visual mapping that he found compelling in the work of the Papunya painters, who he thought ‘used imagery in the same way we use language—to tell a story, taking an overview, like a map’ (Tunnicliffe & Ewington 2009, p. 58). Two sets of visual conventions are present in the painting at the same time, producing a visual and conceptual doubling, in the coexistence and mutual influence of different world-views.
Figure 6.12 Tim Johnson, *Visit to Papunya II*, 1983. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 130.2 x 90cm. Collection Marianne Baillieu.

Figure 6.13 Tim Johnson, *Two Bob*, 1983. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 61 x 91cm. Collection Rebecca Hossack. Photograph Eleanor Ackland.
In figure 6.13, *Two Bob* (1983), Johnson’s intervention is a less obvious version of what Barthes might call ‘puncturing’, again creating a disruption and vacillation in the painting that is not overtly present in the original photograph, taken by Johnson. Both show the artist Two Bob Tjungurri standing outside his Papunya home with his painting, which is as tall as he is, perpendicular to the picture plane, and reads like a painting within a painting. Johnson’s own painting is very closely modelled on the photograph and its interventions are subtle. It renders Two Bob’s painting and his face with care and delicacy, while reducing other forms, such as tin drums and corrugated iron, to flat shapes and sketchy lines. The fine vertical lines of Two Bob’s painting echo those of the corrugated iron, and its elegance and compressed visual language are both mirrored and contrasted by the setting. The original photo shows the makeshift nature of Two Bob’s shelter. In his painting, Johnson has reduced detail and modelling, and rendered a sheet of iron in a way that mimics Two Bob’s painting, in what appears to be homage to the painting’s cultural strength and a negation of the poverty-stricken nature of the painter’s home. Johnson’s palette is reduced to sky blue and ochres, like Two Bob’s palette, in a move that prefigures his collaborations with Anmatyerre and Pintubi artists at Papunya. Overall, Johnson’s painting could be read as a modernist handling of space and form, and simultaneously as a statement about his willingness to acknowledge and even imitate the resilience and creative strength of the Papunya painters.
Responses to the portraits, from family members

The painted portraits did things that the photographs did not do. They intervened subtly in the photographs by selecting and shifting emphasis; by echoing studio portrait formats in order to accord dignity to the subjects; and by giving the subjects the prolonged attention needed to paint a likeness rather than make a candid photograph. Above all, they restored images of people, now passed away, to their families, and exhibited them in public, bringing attention to the narratives of station life that they contain. I asked the families for their responses to the portraits. All had expressed positive interest in the photographs and were keen to own painted portraits of their fathers, uncles and grandfathers. Alec Kruger, now aged 89 years, recognising himself as an 11-year-old, said: ‘Well—seeing is believing! That’s me alright! God bless you a thousand times!’ Turning a photograph into a painting added value to the image and honoured the person. Other responses were also positive. People requested multiple photographs of the paintings to share with family. Some found them more real than photographs, warm, life-size, and colourful. Some expressed a sense of closeness and familiarity on seeing the paintings, like a sort of reunion. The paintings were seen as affirming each person’s identity, role as a station worker, and connection with Inteye Arrkwe. People felt that the portraits belonged with their family, to help them remember their old people and take pride.

The paintings fulfilled their social purpose and provoked questioning of narratives of place, such as the one about independent white families, toughing out adversity and ‘settling’ Central Australia unaided. However, I was not convinced that they were aesthetically strong, or departed sufficiently from their photographic sources to make distinct statements. I questioned whether literally portraying individuals was the best way to evoke their presence and history, particularly in the case of people for whom country was a fundamental
aspect of identity. I decided to return to landscapes and refocus my inquiry on plein air practice as a way of apprehending Arrernte country inclusive of the people who lived there, and their stories. I wanted to push the capacity of landscape painting to explore, metaphorically and phenomenologically, what it is to be alive in this place, at this time.
Landscapes and portraits

The only paintings I remember in the house where I grew up were four framed reproductions cut from a calendar by my father. They were portraits of Maori people by William Goldie and Gottfried Lindauer. Two were old men with full moko (facial tattoos), holding greenstone mere (fighting clubs) and wearing kiwi feather cloaks and heavy greenstone earrings. One was an old kuia (woman elder) with a moko on her chin and a tobacco pipe in her hand, dozing with bent head. A younger woman wore a fine flax cloak and carried a baby on her back. I seem to remember inscriptions in Maori, penciled on the back in my father’s old-school script, with the full tribal names of the people portrayed. These were real people; I felt that I almost knew them. I knew where they came from, and that their descendants were alive now. My understanding was that these were fine paintings and revered objects because they were true depictions of fine people—veracity and quality went together. My father loved the detail and finesse of the portraits, their craftsmanship in fact. He believed in them; they were more real than a photograph and somehow more honorable, because the artist had chosen to carefully depict these exact details. The texture of a plaid blanket, a pair of huia feathers, the dreamy sunlight of late afternoon on the old lady’s wrinkled face—how could these not be true? These portraits were accorded the status of ‘taonga’—precious objects or heirlooms that are related to as living beings. When I later saw landscape paintings, for me they were always connected with the portraits. They were New Zealand landscapes, known places and therefore verifiable. Again, truthfulness was a key value. Detail and accuracy were important, and inseparable. The fine polish and aura of the portraits, the glass and controlled depiction of atmosphere, were important criteria for judging the quality of the landscapes as well—or so I understood. No-one ever said these things to me but I inferred them from the way people related to the paintings, and the way they behaved around them. They were treated as true historical documents with a spiritual dimension. Polished, highly detailed, atmospheric, both portraits and landscapes had the gravitas of religious icons and were treated as such.

(Journal entry, August 2013, JT)
The practices of Goldie and Lindauer later became controversial, criticized for perpetuating a colonial perspective that located Maori people in a dreamy past, cynically mourning their demise while stealing their land and future. Many years later, I attended an exhibition of Goldie’s portraits in the Auckland Art Gallery. The atmosphere was charged. Every one of the portraits had been honoured as a living person, a taonga. They were consecrated. They were addressed and welcomed by family members, and prayers were sung. Tears flowed. Laid before each one were green fern fronds and branches, as used by mourners on the marae at tangi (funeral ceremonies). I saw some of the complexity of post-colonial approaches to the representation of people and places. A painting could be revered as a treasure, embodiment of ancestors and direct link to living culture, or damned as an expression of an oppressive ideology.

Conclusion

This experiment with portraits made me consider how both portraits and landscapes can explore the identification of person or group of people with a place. Landscape painting can convey intimacy and insight into place much as a portrait conveys insight into a person. Furthermore, a landscape painting might convey the identity of a person allusively, as a kind of non-figurative portrait. Although it was beyond the scope of this project, I wanted to take the portraits further by collaborating with people on how they wanted to be represented. I imagined landscape paintings of places where significant events have taken place, and narratives were re-enacted so as to convey elements of personal or group identity. But for the final stage of this study, I returned to landscape painting to more fully explore what it is to be alive in Arrernte country in this time, cognisant of some of its stories of loss and survival, and concerned for its future.
Chapter 7 Lost Landscapes

Figure 7.1 Jennifer Taylor, *Dust at Inteye Arrkwe 1*, 2013. Oil on board, 30 x 40cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Introduction

This chapter further explores the implications of Ian Burn’s (1996) claim that contemporary representations of landscape are about loss.

As discussed, loss of landscapes in Central Australia has occurred through the appropriation of Aboriginal land, the removal of Aboriginal people from their traditional lands, and subsequent disruption to ceremonial life and caretaking practices, such as traditional use of fire in land management. Damage to ecosystems is the visible result. The chapter describes how an instance of loss through damage was inadvertently reflected in paintings of dust. Landscapes from Aotearoa, familiar from childhood and ‘lost’ through migration, reappear as a persistent ghostly presence in studio paintings of Arrernte country, prompting reflection on the influence of memory on responses to place. I look at Eugene Von Guerard’s painting of Milford Sound, and the role of such images in my development of a sense of place. ‘Cook’s Sites’, a project by Mark Adams and Nicholas Thomas, is a post-colonial strategy for re-imagining sites of contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. I reflect on making paintings in response to Adams’ photographs, as a way of re-imagining my presence in Arrernte country. The loss of landscapes through exile is considered, in relation to forced separation from physical and cultural landscapes, separation due to migration, and disconnection from ‘spiritual’ dimensions of place. Disruption of identity through dislocation, and the need to identify oneself in relation to place are key issues in post-colonial practice (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1993, p. 9). The words and work of Albert Namatjira and other Arrernte watercolour painters convey the constancy of their relationships with country, despite disruptions due to colonisation. They inspire a renewed commitment to painting landscapes which acknowledge loss, and pay attention to seen and unseen dimensions of country.
Dust

When I drove up to the painting camp on the ridge, the track was cushioned with dust. On the flat below were two prime movers with trailers, an earth-mover and a dozer, and a large excavation resembling a haphazard dam. Grooves gouged by the earthmover patterned the ground. Tracks looped across the flat, around rough trenches with smashed-up shrubs and trees piled in windrows. Workers came and went, trailing dust plumes, digging gravel and carting it to a construction site. Pale clouds of dust drifted across the valley, dispersing in yellow mist. The ground was on the move, blowing away. As a marker of loss and damage, dust may be less dramatic, but is equally as significant as smoke.

Up on the ridge I painted against the light, drawn by the visual complexity of layered ridges backlit by sun (figure 7.1). Dust filtered and reflected the light, as smoke does, thickening the air and making the spaces between things visible. Each ridge had a rim of intense yellow/green vegetation flaring in the back-light. I used muted colours, laying paint in quickly and scratching back, revealing the warm yellow underpainting to suggest planes of light. I wanted a broken ‘skin’, a not-solid ground. Disruptive marks intensified the play between the materiality of paint and the illusion of spaces and forms. The not-solidness of paint reminded me of the porous ground in Arrernte accounts of ancestral beings ‘going into the ground’ or travelling underground. These accounts suggest that other worlds are close by, just through the ‘skin’ of our seeing and thinking. Similarly, painted forms seem to invite one to enter the space they inhabit, but at the same time the ‘skin’ of the painting refuses entry. It is a boundary that cannot be crossed except in imagination.

In the strong light outdoors, the effect of dust on the paintings was not obvious, but back in the studio, I realised I had been looking through a filter of dust—painting images of dust, even. I had not literally shown the land being ripped up but a sense of dissolution had infiltrated the paintings anyway. It was impossible to see the landscape without seeing damage.

(Journal entry, September 2013, JT)
A few months later, when it became too hot to work outside, I reworked these four paintings using a gold/green and burnt umber palette (figures 7.2, 7.3, 7.4 and Appendix p 83—6). Working in the studio, I was able to depart from my usual ways of picturing place, and freed from direct observation and the literalness that at times dogged my plein air practice. I used the original paintings as visual sources, and drew on memories of what I saw and felt in country. In each painting, tiers of rocks, hills and ranges built a structure of receding planes almost closing out the sky. There was a semi-aerial perspective, as if the viewer hovered in mid-air on the level of the middle ground. I began to recognise other landscapes in the Inteye Arrkwe ones, and an atmosphere reminiscent of the saturated, misty conditions, low light, and steep terrain I had grown up with in Aotearoa. I emphasized this association, making the contours more rugged, heightening contrasts and bringing planes closer together. This gave the paintings some of the drama and claustrophobic intensity of forested ranges in Aotearoa. Scratching back through dark blue/green paint and sculpting contours, I relived scrambling up and down steep bushy slopes in rain and watery light, amongst remembered smells, patterns and colours of rock, soil and plants. When the four paintings were finished, for the first time I felt that I had made studio paintings that were alive in a way that plein air ones can be. They had the intense, dream-like quality of landscapes influenced by memory, imagination and affect, as much as by direct observation.
Figure 7.2 Jennifer Taylor, *Lost landscape 1*, 2013. Oil on board, 40 x 60cm. Photograph Jennifer Taylor.
Figure 7.3 Jennifer Taylor, *Lost landscape 2*, 2013. Oil on board, 40 x 60cm. Photograph Jennifer Taylor.
Figure 7.4 Jennifer Taylor, *Lost landscape* 3, 2013. Oil on board, 40 x 60cm. Photograph Jennifer Taylor.
It was evident that landscapes of my childhood, lost through migration, persisted in my mind’s eye as templates for perceiving place. I had been unconscious of the influence of these lost landscapes, but the paintings demonstrated how they affected my responses to Arrernte country. This prompted looking into the experience of migration, using painting as a medium for drawing out visual impressions that had been buried in memory, a process which, again, seemed akin to that of colonial painters viewing new landscapes through familiar visual paradigms. The sombre atmosphere and colouration of the new paintings reminded me of Eugene Von Guerard’s Milford Sound, New Zealand and prompted a closer look at his response to his first encounter with that landscape.

Figure 7.5 Eugene Von Guerard, Milford Sound, New Zealand. Oil on canvas, 99.2 x 176cm, 1877—79.

Art Gallery of NSW (Von Guerard 1877-1879).
Contemporary reviewers acclaimed Von Guerard’s panorama *Milford Sound, New Zealand*. Its starkly powerful composition, the massive scale of the peaks, somber evening light and unearthly stillness all accord with the ideals of the sublime (Dixon, Radford & Ward 2008). Von Guerard’s acute observations of foreground plants and the geological structure of rock formations attest to the influence of Carus’ *Nine letters on landscape painting*, which proposes landscape art should reflect the Earth’s formation, and be informed by scientifically accurate observation of geological forms (Dixon, Radford & Ward 2008). The painting is masterly. With its large scale and impeccable finish it is an imposing spectacle, designed for maximum impact—a blockbuster movie of its time. It is theatrical, in the sense of Susan Sontag’s claim that ‘beauty is theatrical, it is for being looked at and admired’ (2002 p. 24).

My personal response to the painting is paradoxical; it is almost too impressive, and therefore unapproachable, in its own silent world. The smooth accuracy of its draftsmanship and grandeur of its composition do not invite entry into the picture space. It is evocative of place—particularly those hazy spaces that recede beyond the pyramidal peaks—and its cool perfection arouses awe and admiration of the painter’s skill and control and his accomplishment in creating an illusory space. But it does not strongly convey a sense of his response to this place, nor invite the viewer in turn to respond imaginatively. I might picture Von Guerard as one of the tiny, barely visible figures in the centre of the canvas, but I do not feel his presence. The painting projects a polished rhetorical quality more suited to persuasion than open encounter. Face to face with it, one can look, one can be persuaded that this landscape is associated with heroic male endeavour, but one cannot touch.
Anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose has used the term ‘trophy’ for items produced as evidence of frontier relationships, of the presence of whites and blacks, of the triumph of the former and vanquishing of the latter (Rose 2001 p. 150). Although Von Guerard is not portraying a moment of overt violence, the landscape he spreads before us is a trophy—impressive evidence of an encounter. Although he shows us a pristine place, empty of people other than the visiting Europeans, he was well aware that this place was inhabited. A companion painting inspired by the same voyage, *Lake Wakitipu with Mount Earnslaw, Middle Island, New Zealand, 1877-79*, features two Maori waka (canoes) which Von Guerard did not draw from life, but added as ‘local colour’, sourced from another artist’s work, knowing that the reference would engage his viewers (Pullin 2011 pp. 260-5). The power and sublimity of *Milford Sound* rest in part on an implied claim of conquest. Von Guerard is picturing a landscape that to him is already ‘lost’ to its Maori owners, but in fact has never been ceded.

**Reimagining sites of contact**

Re-imagining sites and circumstances associated with alienation and dispossession is a strategy used by artists as a corrective to colonial values and an exercise in post-colonial practice. A 1998 collaborative project by Nicholas Thomas and Mark Adams, *Cook’s Sites*, revisited sites of first contact between Captain James Cook and southern Maori in order to ‘re-imagine the sites and their histories in ways that seem appropriate to the present’ (cited in Stutchbury 2010 pp. 45-7). The project brought into contact contrasting perspectives on Cook’s voyages: the heroism of exploration and the tragedy of invasion and dispossession. Thomas and Adams sought to open historical events
for further interpretation, rather than expound a particular view, just as in earlier work Adams had created two views of each of a number of contested tribal sites: binocular vision suggesting Maori and pakeha views of the land.

Figure 7.6 William Hodges, *A View in Dusky Bay, New Zealand*, 1773. Oil on panel, 81 x 79 x 6cm.

Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tamaki (Hodges 1773)

A hundred years before Von Guerard’s visit to Milford Sound, Cook’s ship, the Resolution, sailed into nearby Dusky Sound. A small family group of southern Maori stood on a rocky islet to hail the ship. After the encounter, William Hodges, artist with Cook’s expedition, made an idealised portrait of the senior man in the party (figure 7.6). Rather than representing the family group, the painting shows a solitary
figure in the wilderness, evoking the sublime and situating this man as the viewer’s proxy witness to the emptiness of the place. Hodges chose a circular format, possibly inspired by viewing his subject through a telescope.

In response to Hodges’ painting, Adams camped at Dusky Sound for nine days and made a suite of photographs titled 2-10 August 1998, Indian Island, 360 degree panorama after William Hodges’ ‘View in Dusky Bay’ (1998b) and another called 10.8.1988 Indian Island, after William Hodges’ ‘View in Dusky Bay’ (1998a). He positioned his camera where the Maori leader had stood, taking that man’s perspective rather than Cook’s and Hodges’, ‘turning the picture inside-out’ as if reversing the telescope (Adams & Thomas 1999).

The wide format of Adams’ panorama echoes that used by early colonial artists to record shorelines and landmarks for military purposes, but this time the point of view is that of the Maori family. We are on the brink of a first encounter, in this region, between Indigenous people and colonisers. A cascade of changes is about to take place. The multiple images imply multiple perspectives on Dusky Bay, and on the events occurring there. They suggest that unseen things are just out of view, in the gaps between frames, or the time lapses between exposures. The weather and light are mercurial in this part of the world. In the photographs, a flickering silvery light plays across the water, like the swiftly changing light that plein air painting attempts to show, but never can completely. Multiple images strung out in a line convey an unsettling feeling that one cannot quite keep up. Peripheral vision half-reveals things that come and go too subtly and quickly to be recognised.
Adams’ and Thomas’ project of opening the image up for the reimagining of sites and events succeeds in reversing the standpoint of two of the protagonists, without allowing the viewer to settle in to one interpretation. Reimagining, in this context, does not mean substituting a revised, more ‘correct’ view of history, but rather asking the viewer to put herself in the place of the protagonists, or be a witness. The viewer stands at an intersection, a point from which an understanding of two worlds might develop. Standing where the
Maori leader stood and turning slowly to scan the horizon we might at any moment see the ‘Resolution’ sail into view. If so, we will be seeing it from a Maori perspective. In terms of Ian Burns’ ‘necessity and impossibility’ of landscape, this work suggests that representations of landscape are necessary for investigating colonial encounters, but does not pretend that landscape imagery can do the impossible: that it can sum up the truth for all parties involved. Instead, a silvery landscape, sublime if you will, invites the viewer to the threshold of a historical space of encounter. It hints that we could enter imaginatively into that encounter, but leaves us at the threshold, asking us to bear with the impossibility of finding one correct view. In this sense it is unlike Von Guerard’s theatrical presentation of what he must have considered the enduring truths of his subject, ‘its monumental scale, immeasurable age and breathtaking beauty’ (Pullin 2011 p. 265), all of which would have reflected favourably on the scale and rightness of the colonial project in which he played a part.
Adams’ invitation to imagine the subjectivity of another whilst inhabiting one’s own subjectivity resonated with my experience of being in Arrernte country whilst actively aware of my cultural conditioning. His work evoked a somatic response akin to that of painting in country: looking out and down at the ground beneath my feet, listening, and feeling the country, at the intersection of cultural worlds. With Adams’ permission, I based made eight paintings based on the eight frames of his panorama. I prepared boards with textured grounds to give a sense of another, lost landscape underneath. The paint was applied thinly, giving a flickering effect of watery light. Pale shapes emerged randomly, according to the texture of the grounds. I pictured the steep ranges around Inteye Arrkwe, the geological processes taking place there, and the presence of the inland sea over 100 million years ago. I imagined the valleys between those ranges inundated with water. Painting long-range views held familiar pleasures of looking into the distance, enjoying the play of light and the way forms advanced or receded in space. While painting the thickly forested island on which the Maori family had stood, and on which, in imagination, I now stood, metaphor and visceral understanding came together. The dark tangle in the foreground mirrored the complexity and struggle of understanding my position in Arrernte country. Painting that tangle felt like trying to work out where I stood, literally and metaphorically. Pushing the paint around on the board was like finding footholds and handholds to scramble up rock faces and push through wet scrub. I felt how hidden one’s subjectivity can be, even when ‘in your face’ like thick undergrowth. More difficult again to understand the world of another. The coolly beautiful long-range view contrasted with the struggle through this ‘thicket’ of subjectivity. The painted panels advanced from distant view to close-up to distance again, with the rhythm, familiar from painting, of paying close attention, opening to a wide view, and focusing in again. Or observing the country, letting narratives about the past influence perception, then returning to more dispassionate observation—a pulse that allows the weaving of threads from past and present to inform the paintings. Over time political, environmental, and personal concerns have permeated the Inteye Arrkwe paintings, woven together inseparably, and my identification with place and people has deepened.

(Journal entry, March 2014, JT)
Figure 7.8 Jennifer Taylor, After Mark Adams’ *Indian Island*, 360 degree panorama after William Hodges’ ‘View in Dusky Bay’, 2014. Oil on board, 8 panels each 40 x 60cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Figure 7.9 and 7.10, Jennifer Taylor, *After Mark Adams’ “Indian Island, 360 degree panorama after William Hodges’ ‘View in Dusky Bay’”, details, 2014. Oil on board, each panel 40 x 60cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.*

See more details of this work in Appendix pp. 87—91.
Losing and finding landscapes

My memory of South Island landscapes matches Von Guerard’s paintings so closely that it must have been shaped by such images, as well as by direct experience. Can the ‘lost landscapes’ of childhood really be just this, an insubstantial heap of impressions, some of which were not mine in the first place? I think there is more to it. Engaging with the landscape around Inteye Arrkwe through painting has drawn out embodied memories of Aotearoa landscapes. It seems not possible to experience one without ghostly impressions of the other. I feel at home at Inteye Arrkwe, but my sense of home includes the imprint of another place and time, as well as the immediacy of present contact. As a migrant, my sense of home is contingent on deliberate connections I make with place. Remembered impressions of old places become inseparable from new ones, and enrich them. This state of affairs feels familiar and ordinary: I do not have first-hand experience of being born into country that ‘knows’ me and claims me, where my bones are made from the land and the bones of ancestors. But I have, at times, a clear sense of being ‘known’ and ‘seen’ by country. Part of the appeal—or necessity—of painting in country is that such ways of experiencing place are at times accessed through painting.

Like many non-Indigenous people, I respond strongly to some works by Indigenous artists in part because they convey, in forms belonging to their cultural traditions, what Howard Morphy (2000 p.129) calls ‘a journey inside the land’. Morphy goes on to describe these works taking the viewer ‘below the surface of things to reveal the underlying structure of things (and) into contact with the spiritual dimension’. I would not argue with Morphy’s structuring of the experience of an inside perspective, but for me the language goes too far. I simply do not know from direct experience if ‘creative events and regenerative powers’ (Morphy 2000 p.129), on a more-
than-personal level, reside ‘inside’ country, but I do know that a sense of benevolence and renewal is part of my experience of country.

Star Gossage, a painter of Maori descent, speaks of how in her landscapes of her ancestral home at Pakiri, Aotearoa, she tries to convey the ‘wairua’, or spirit, of the land rather than merely its appearance, and that when she succeeds in doing this, others recognise the presence of wairua (2014). It is difficult to describe this aspect of country, as language is unwieldy and tends to bury the experience in words. Painting can to some extent make the experience available without summarising it, instead conveying it allusively through colour, atmosphere, or the way forms are handled.

**Arrernte landscape painters and the country of exile**

*Exile is an uncomfortable situation, though it is also a magical situation. I am not making light of the experience of exile. But we can endure it differently. Some exiles die of rage, some transform their exile into a country... We have lost the taste of hands, of the touching of hands. We have lost all the small and great secrets of joy. But the country of exile is not unattainable.*

Helen Cixous (1993 p. 120)

Post-colonial practice characteristically explores alienation, dislocation, or disconnection from place, and the ensuing effort to establish, or re-establish, an identity grounded in effective relationships with place. I want to consider here whether ‘exile’ is an appropriate term for separation from home or from significant sites. Exile is defined by the Oxford dictionary as ‘the state of being barred from one’s native country, typically for political or punitive reasons’ though sometimes by choice (‘exile’ 2014). I would include still living within or close to one’s own country, but having lost the assurance that it is secure and sustainable. The term ‘solastagia’ has been coined by
Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht (2007), for the experience of loss of confidence in the future and sorrow for what has been lost through social and environmental change. Solastalgia is a longing for home, felt even when one is at home. I suggest the experience of exile also includes the loss of familiar places through migration. I consider how Arrernte artists have responded to separation from their homelands, and whether they characterise this separation as exile.

It is now around 140 years since Europeans began moving into Arrernte country with the intention of occupying it. The ensuing conflict over land and resources saw many Arrernte people relocate to missions, settlements, or pastoral properties. Nevertheless, as has been stated, they never saw the land as anything but theirs. For over 80 years, since the mid 1930s, Arrernte artists have been painting their country by adapting the techniques of the Western landscape tradition for their own purposes. Five generations of watercolour painters, beginning with Albert Namatjira and his extended family, have developed an Arrernte landscape idiom affirming their continuing connection with country. In 1986 Ian Burn and Ann Stephen protested that for 40 years Arrernte watercolour artists had been omitted from serious critical writing and major exhibitions, even though their works were widely popular. In the absence of first-person accounts of the painters’ intentions, Burn and Stephen speculated about their approach to landscape. Already in the 1930s the Western landscape tradition was criticised as obsolete and discredited by modernism, but arguably it suited the artists’ purposes of ‘declaring’ their country (1986 p. 62). Unlike modernist landscapes like those of Sydney Nolan or Russell Drysdale, traditional approaches, as seen for example in the work of Hans Heysen or Elioth Gruner, were suited to conveying spiritual qualities in the landscape. These qualities were taken up by commentators, if not by the artists themselves, as emblematic of national character. By celebrating a spiritual dimension of landscape
white artists contributed to the construction of belonging and attachment to place, and thereby ‘made an implicit claim to the antiquity of the land as a basis of cultural heritage and authenticity’ (Burn & Stephen 1986 p. 62). Therefore an exclusively white landscape tradition would imply a contradiction to Arrernte claims of belonging. However, to Arrernte artists, the tradition offered an opportunity to infiltrate the genre and ‘reclaim’ their land within the terms of the European tradition—a guerilla tactic for maintaining cultural authority and custodianship. Artists creatively extended the genre to support their own meanings and intentions, which were coded and may or may not have been recognised by white audiences. An example of a painting which could be said to carry an encoded message is Albert Namatjira’s *Simpson’s Gap*. 
This painting would have been accepted by a popular audience of its day as a portrayal of a place familiar to the artist, conveying warmth and beauty. The site was well-known as a tourist destination, as attested to by the vehicle tracks leading to the edge of the white riverbed. The painting would have had the appeal of a momento, an invitation to come and see, a sort of postcard of an iconic landscape (and in fact it has been reproduced as a postage stamp). The colour and fine detail of the image, and the familiar motif of the gap in red ranges also make it easily ‘readable’ to white viewers. But there is more to the painting than its obvious appeal. The landforms that
Namatjira and other Arrernte artists chose to paint repeatedly were also ‘readable’ to Arrernte people as embodying narratives of spiritual significance and, in the words of Colin Jack-Hinton, ‘infused with the particular totemic symbolism of the individual painter’ (cited in Burn & Stephen 1986 p. 58). The painting therefore asserts the authority of a metaphysical system, incarnate in the visible landscape and pre-dating by far the European idiom used to represent it. It is in this sense both a strong statement of continuity and survival, and a subtle appeal for recognition by those with eyes to see.

Remembering early contact histories of the region adds another layer to this reading. Urrungetyirrpe/Simpson’s Gap, like all the major fall-back water resources in Arrernte country, was a site where the incursions of the pastoralists, and Arrernte reprisals, led to violent confrontation with armed police and vigilantes. As well as affirming the continuity of Arrernte presence, in this painting Namatjira may have been acknowledging or memorialising the losses entailed in his people’s struggle for survival. For Arrernte people, ‘irrernte-arenye’ are ‘incarnate spirits’ who accompany a person from birth and return to that person’s country after death, so are believed present in places where people have lived, watching over them and noticing who comes and goes (Wallace & Lovell 2009 pp. 22-8). Urrungetyirrpe would have been one of these places, inhabited by irrernte-arenye from ages past, as well as the spirits of family members who had more recently died in episodes of frontier violence. Namatjira’s painting could therefore be read, not only by Arrernte people but by anyone cognisant of post-contact histories, as a memorial to people and perhaps also to place. The site he portrays retains all its Arrernte cultural significance, but in addition has been ‘opened up’ to pastoralists and stock, and now to vehicles bringing tourists. It is the same,
and it is profoundly different. It is both lost, and not lost, since he is still here, still affirming his claim and upholding the meaning of the place. Years later, in 1988, Namatjira’s nephew Wenton Rubuntja put it this way:

*Waterholes which we never touched, now everybody’s swimming in the waterhole. And the other country in the gorge. Everybody swimming, used to be not allowed. He’s pretty water and that’s on top of tywerrenge (sacred objects and places). Our country whitefella mob always go there now, everybody’s footwalking, footprints now everywhere... Country was pretty and country was tywerrenge. We don’t forget about tywerrenge.*

(cited in Green 1988 p. 13)

From the 1930s to the 1980s the watercolour paintings, intended for sale to white people, gave the painters not only income, but access to white society and a way to voice their concerns and values, access that would otherwise have been difficult to achieve at that time. They could therefore be seen as a way of countering the effect of exile, by repossessing what had been stolen and reasserting authority and a prior claim over country. W.E.H. Stanner, in his 1968 Boyer lecture, speaks of the ‘offer and appeal’ made by Aboriginal people in their approaches to white society. He saw ‘an implicit offer of some sort of union of lives with us, and an implicit appeal for a new identity within the union’ (2009 p. 217). These paintings ‘make an offer’: they negotiate the ‘country of exile’ by acknowledging and employing a European tradition to quietly affirm the priority and continuity of their own cultural knowledge and vision. They also embody an appeal for recognition. Although at the time this appeal may not have been heard or understood by critics and art institutions, the popularity of the work with a more general audience in Australia and elsewhere indicates that it struck a chord. Burn
argues that during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s there were few avenues for Aboriginal people to make public expressions of their love for and attachment to country. The Arrernte landscapes made a significant impact on national audiences, and helped prepare the way for an understanding of the justice of their appeal for land rights and recognition.

Since the 1980s there has been more acknowledgement and debate about the Arrernte landscapes, and some artists have clearly articulated their intentions. For example, a publication compiled for the 1988 exhibition, *Pmere, country in mind* contains statements by renowned Arrernte artists like Jillian Namatjira affirming that, just like ‘dot’ painting, ‘landscape painting…keeps the dreaming strong’ (cited in Green 1988 p. 8). Wenton Rubuntja describes how landscape painting ‘came out from whitefella’s hand’ but now ‘we’re continuing to paint, in our own way’. He says:

> These rocks, we’ve got to worship. The rainmakers, the caterpillars, or the kangaroos, emus, we got to pray for it. In this country… we were looking at worship, before the settlers came here.

(cited in Green 1998 p 13)

He catalogues acts of trespass and damage, such as cutting trees, digging holes, removing rocks, and swimming in waterholes, but goes on to assert that ‘What belongs to this country, belongs to the Aboriginal culture, we never lost, keep going ahead.’ He says clearly ‘landscape painting is the country itself’, and ‘Doesn’t matter what sort of painting we do in this country, it still belongs to the people… Country is nothing else but culture, and all over Australia this culture is alive’ (cited in Green 1988 p. 13).
Douglas Abbott expresses a duality in his landscape painting, encompassing both a kind of exile and staunch belonging:

_Whiteman’s way of looking at it. Whiteman got a camera, well we got our eyes. We can just put it on the board and show. This painting is really important I reckon for the country. This is our country and we’re proud of it.… Our land is part of us. Deep inside me, I miss my country. I might stop in Alice Springs here, and the station owners own the country, but I know in my heart that it’s my country. It’s my land._

(cited in Green 1988 p. 15)

**Small and great secrets of joy**

Ian Burn’s words about loss still ring true twenty years later, when climate change makes reflections on landscape even more urgent, and the catastrophic results of human interventions have become abundantly clear. We all live now in a state of exile from the time when we could take for granted the continuity of human life. As for whether Arrernte people experience contemporary life as a kind of exile from country, evidence of connection and continuity seen in Arrente landscape paintings suggests the proposition is both true and not true. Notwithstanding profound loss and change, artists have demonstrated that they have ‘never lost’ country as the nourishing ground of all life, and that they still carry responsibility for country through their painting. Of course, my evidence for this view comes from the intersection between the painters and their audiences, and cannot be assumed to be true for all Arrernte people.

Feminist philosopher Helene Cixous writes ‘we have lost all the small and great secrets of joy’, but that even so ‘the country of exile is not unattainable’ (1993 p. 120). I would suggest that Arrernte artists’ constant affirmation and re-imagining of their country, using Western
idioms, has played a part in attaining a ‘country of exile’ within cultural change, so that transformation is supported by maintaining an ancestral vision. Furthermore, painting has enabled Arrernte people to creatively frame their claims of entitlement to their land in terms that have proven to be comprehensible to white audiences, and opened new possibilities for dialogue. Burn cites, for example, their likely influence on public perceptions of claims for native title. A crucial quality of the paintings is that they convey joy, by presenting country as loved, cherished, and beautiful, simplifying its forms and colours and rendering it as luminous and even heavenly. They persuade me, as a viewer, that here are places where the small and great secrets of joy are not lost. The joys of seeing, touching, tasting country are nourishing to one’s spirit. The ‘great secrets of joy’ evoked by these paintings are to do with acknowledging interconnectedness and taking on responsibility for the larger-than-human life of country.

**Conclusion**

The notion of the loss of landscapes, and the impossibility and necessity of their representation, is revisited as this chapter closes the circle of reflection begun in the Prelude to the exegesis. A physical encounter with loss of landscape, through dust caused by earthworks, unexpectedly gives rise to paintings that evoke the rediscovery of New Zealand landscapes, lost through migration but persisting in memory and affecting my perceptions of Arrernte country. This leads to a comparison of Von Guerard’s colonial representation of Milford Sound with Mark Adams’ post-colonial project of reimagining sites of contact between Maori and Europeans at Dusky Sound, Aotearoa. The notion of landscapes lost and found through different forms of exile is considered, with a focus on the example of Arrernte
landscape painters and their use of a European genre to affirm continuity and ownership of their land, even in conditions that outwardly resemble exile and dispossession.

The Arrernte landscapes, the painters and their families, and their eloquent expressions of how country is absolutely fundamental to life, are as crucial to my approach to painting, and as inspirational, as the Western landscape tradition. They have authority and gravitas, and their influence is ever-present where I live and work. They set the context for a landscape painting practice that is grounded in relationship and respect, as well as in the direct experience of country. I appreciate the challenges to my practice that are implicit in the social and political context established by Arrernte artists. This is a ground for engagement where my own cultural knowledge and perspectives have their place, and there is no pretence that Arrernte and Western approaches are incommensurate. On the contrary, the Arrernte artists invite an ongoing conversation about a shared past and future, enlivened by beauty and many small and not-so-small joys.
Chapter 8 Conclusions

What was researched, and how the research was conducted

In this study painting was the medium for investigating my encounters with Arrernte country. Enthusiasm for the practice of plein air landscape painting was the initial impetus for the research, and questions crucial to the study emerged at the meeting-place of practice and country. These questions revolved around my experience of country, as a non-Indigenous painter, and asked whether painting can foster ethical relations with country. They addressed the interaction of Indigenous perspectives and the Western landscape tradition in my approach to painting. My position as a researcher was one of embodied subjectivity, as I asked how the dynamics of place and the subjectivity of the painter enter a painting. These issues were examined with reference to writers and theorists such as Ian Burn, Ross Gibson, Margaret Kemarre Turner, Ian Maclean, Richard Kimber, Roland Barthes, Jane Lydon, Greg Dening, and Kathleen Kemarre Wallace; Theravadan Buddhist doctrines; and the work of artists such as Eugene Von Guerard, Sidney Nolan, Angelina George, Ada Bird Petyarre, Mark Adams, and the Arrernte watercolour painters. An action/research cycle approach structured the project: painting trips alternated with critical reflection, writing and painting in the studio. During field trips, painting alternated with writing and reflection, testing and integrating theory while in country.

Having lived in Arrernte country for many years before commencing the study, I presumed that a relationship between Arrernte country and myself already existed. The research process aimed to explore the nature and dynamics of this relationship as the foundation for
ethical relations and a sustaining painting practice. The effect of relatedness to country on painting was investigated through critical reflection, community conversations and ‘symposia’. Cross-cultural histories were revealed during fieldwork, through photographs, conversations, and historical records. Layered histories ‘haunted’ the painting process, prompting a deeper integration of painting practice with its social and political context in Arrernte country.

At the beginning I focused on what I was drawn to in country. Confrontation with environmental damage led to questioning how painting could address the coexistence of damage and beauty. Cultural constructions of beauty in Arrernte and Western traditions were explored, leading to a search for a painting practice that actively engaged with both perspectives. The decision to paint in just one location in order to know it more thoroughly was a watershed in the study, resulting in a searching encounter with the area around Inteye Arrkwe. It exposed my limited understanding of the human history of the place, and precipitated inquiry into early contact histories and the legacy of frontier violence. The influence of sadness and haunting on relationships with place was investigated. The faces and stories of people who had been at Inteye Arrkwe in the 1930s were explored through portraits, which helped me imagine the lives of these people and make connections with surviving family members. The portraits were an unexpected addition to the project, acknowledging Arrernte peoples’ continuity of occupation, and labour practices on the pastoral lease at Inteye Arrkwe. I asked whether landscapes could be ‘portraits’ of place, infused by human relationships to country. The urgency of the commitment to landscape was framed by discussion of how landscapes are lost, for example through dispossession, environmental damage, and migration.
My encounters with Arrernte country have been deeply affected by Arrernte landscape painters’ expressions of relatedness to country. Their work and words demonstrate their power to claim, reclaim and remember country. Reconsidering paintings by Albert Namatjira and others in light of events unfolding since colonisation has been humbling and inspiring. These painters’ passion for country, and pragmatic, skilful deployment of landscape painting to claim and protect what they love, gives them moral strength and clarity of purpose. My own practice, though fed by the joys and sorrows of relatedness to country, will always be coming from a different place, that of a migrant whose heart is in two places and whose vision goes both ways. Abiding visual impressions and perceptions from my childhood home have manifested in the painting process, infiltrating encounters with Arrernte country, and bringing me face to face with my own separation from country through migration. It will be interesting to see whether future explorations of landscape painting in New Zealand will be correspondingly compromised by remembered encounters with Arrernte country. The migrant experience has not been as intense for me as Imants Tillers suggests when he speaks of ‘heart and body living in separation from one another’ (Hart 2005). Nevertheless I have a sense of rediscovering and re-entering lost landscapes as they emerge through painting. At the end of the study, my enthusiasm for plein air painting is undiminished, and nuanced by ongoing questions. Memories, desires and perceptions I brought to encounters with Arrernte country are no longer hidden aspects of subjectivity—they are part of the work of connecting inner and outer worlds. Painting practice has proven to be a way of testing out the ethics of relations with place, neither evading nor becoming reconciled to past and present damage, or to cultural and personal experiences of loss, but holding them up for discussion and re-imagining.
Risks and challenges

My practice has a distinctive geographic and social context. Arrernte artists’ expressions of relatedness to country are crucial to this setting, and to my thinking about plein air practice. The issue arises of whether my work competes with their claims of ownership—does it amount to a counterclaim? Who needs more landscape paintings from Central Australia, when we have the eloquent, authoritative works of the Arrernte watercolour painters? In the early stages of this project I was concerned that my presence in Arrernte country could be intrusive, so aimed to minimize this by using only published sources to research Arrernte people’s views and histories. Fortunately, friendships and contacts with local people made me realise that I should not be so reticent. Understanding and rapport, from spending time with people, could not have developed at arm’s length. Besides, it would have been simply rude not to approach people connected with the area where I wanted to paint, and ask their opinions and permission. Personal conversations, symposia and field trips with Arrernte elders have profoundly influenced my thinking, practice, and ways of relating to country. They have imbued the research process with warmth and confidence. I have felt welcomed into mutual engagement in matters that concern both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. I do not claim knowledge of, or affinity with the cultural practices of Arrernte people, but I do see a working basis for friendly co-existence in country.

White artists have on occasion used notions of Aboriginality (as they understand that term) to validate an aesthetic or stance adopted in their own work. In the 1980s Vivian Johnson commented that however problematic ‘white excursions on to the terrain of Aboriginal representation’ might be, they do contradict the limiting view that there is no way for artists to approach each other across a perceived
cultural divide. Although painting landscapes in Arrernte country has at times seemed a risky business, it has been necessary to take such risks, in order to find a ground where different views, traditions and histories can come into dialogue. It is a way of showing up for Arrernte artists’ ‘offer and appeal’, and of making a response.

**Contribution to knowledge**

The study’s unique contribution comes through new understandings generated by practice and reflection. Almost two hundred new paintings have been produced over the course of the study, and shown in two exhibitions. Local venues have been chosen, with the aim that the work will promote community conversations about shared concerns, such as how Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can jointly assume responsibility for caring for country.

The combination of portraits with landscapes has had unforeseen benefits. Amongst landscape paintings of a particular area, portraits of the people who once lived there evoked stories generally unacknowledged in that setting, and altered how the place was perceived. The portraits commemorated and paid respect to those people and their peers, and acknowledged continuity by involving surviving family members.

Conversations about painting in country, and ‘symposia’ where people reflected on shared concerns, have offered a model for bringing individual visions of place into dialogue, resulting in new apprehensions of place informed by collective wisdom and experience. New understandings of place in turn affected painting practice, potentially reflecting back to the community their insights and concerns. Visual
imagery was a democratic starting point for dialogue less dependent on shared language and literacy. Images sparked anecdotes and memories, and inclusive conversations revolving around emotion, intuition, attachment to place, and spirituality. Acknowledging and remembering the past are not enough. Debate and analysis are needed, and so is hearing, in their own words, from people ‘upon whom the past impinges’. Images have been a good starting point for debate, and elicited first person accounts. When addressing portraits or images of country that is known and loved, conversations can start from a positive place, where care has already been expressed through respectful representation of place or people.

Landscape painting requires authority of vision, for the work to develop from a sketch or a view into a fully-fledged painting. In the history of Australian painting in the European tradition, it has been relatively uncommon for women to take up this challenge, and even more uncommon for women to focus on plein air painting—an issue worthy of an entire research project, and beyond the scope of this study. The notion of authority residing with individual male practitioners is challenged by the great number of Indigenous women who paint their country with superb confidence and authority, often working collaboratively. The setting and aims of this project have enabled a particular kind of authority to emerge in the work, one grounded in reflective encounters with place and confrontation with the losses sustained there through colonisation. These elements combine in a lived sense of place and a sustained commitment to country. I do not have the authority of deep cultural knowledge of country, with its interwoven lives and energies, resulting in paintings of certainty and grace such as Ada Bird Petyarr’s Sacred Grasses. But over the course of this study a growing confidence has manifested in the paintings, reflecting not only familiarity with painting this country, but also the fact that the work of integrating painful histories
with present experiences of place is underway. Reverent attention to place is tempered by pragmatism; some things are damaged, some are broken beyond repair, and all deserve recognition. Colonial approaches to landscape painting infer that authority consists in separating out some aspects of place from the rest, and laying claim to them by representing them in ways that align with cultural values. My interest is in producing work whose authority is based on lived experience rather than on the power to represent landscapes persuasively. It is the authority of recognising the integrity and interdependence of what has previously been seen as separate, and finding ways to communicate the indivisibility of human life and country.

**Coda**

Going into Arrernte country, with hopes of painting my way into some new understanding of country, revealed how little I knew the places where I stood. I had to learn to recognise signs of the past in the present, seek guidance on interpreting them, and work at being in sound relationship to what exists in country. I felt acutely the limits of what I could know. I saw how incompletely I understood the experience of another—in particular the experience of Arrernte people in relation to country and kin.

In the process of connecting with country, painting was a discipline that held me, and a practice to which I could return. It was my *turangawaewae*—my place to stand, from which to look into the past and bring memory and cultural frameworks into contact with present experience. It was a ground where subjectivity and the wider world encountered each other, as in Lusseyran’s statement:
There is only one world. Things outside only exist if you go to meet them with everything you carry in yourself. As to the things inside, you will never see them well unless you allow those outside to enter in (1985 p.66).

The painting process showed me one world. It drew and held my attention to ‘things outside’ and ‘things inside’, and the inescapable relatedness of people and place. Painting in itself couldn’t magically produce connection with country, either for me or for anyone seeing the paintings. But it brought into focus apparent obstacles to connection, like self-doubt, unexamined views, reticence about talking with Arrernte people, and reluctance to confront racial violence and its legacy. These ‘obstacles’ were in fact crucial to this inquiry, and ‘going to meet them’ resulted in a sense of resilience and a deeper engagement with painting practice and with country. I saw more of what I carry in myself: formative impressions from the landscapes and cultural settings I grew up with, as well as more recently acquired visual frameworks and skills. The practice of close observation and reflective engagement with Arrernte country, over time, has become a permeable ground through which pre-existing personal and cultural understandings can percolate, and be consciously integrated in the painting process.
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Appendix

Catalogue of selected paintings completed during the study, arranged according to the relevant exegesis chapters.
The Appendix is in digital form, on the CD attached inside the back cover.

Photographs are by Jennifer Taylor, unless otherwise indicated.
Chapter 3 Thirst
Jennifer Taylor, *Undoolya looking east 2*, 2011. Oil on board, 45 x 120cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Urrengetyirrpe* 9, 2011. Oil on board, 30 x 50cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, Approaching cloud, Lhere Pirnte, 2011. Oil on board, 30 x 80cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.

Photograph Peter Carroll.


Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Road to Wiggly’s*, 2011. Oil on board, 40 x 50cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.

Photograph Peter Carroll.
Photograph Peter Carroll.

Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Near Urrengetyirrpe 8*, 2011. Oil on board, 30 x 40cm.
Jennifer Taylor, *Contiki Camp*, 2012. Oil on board, 40 x 36cm.
Jennifer Taylor, Inteye Arrkwe 4, 2012. Oil on board, 21 x 30cm. Photograph Peter Carroll
Jennifer Taylor, *Inteye Arrkwe 5*, 2012. Oil on board, 21 x 30cm. Photograph Peter Carroll
Jennifer Taylor, *Near Urrengetyirrpe 1*, 2012. Oil on board, 30 x 34cm.

Jennifer Taylor, *Near Urrengetyirrpe 2*, 2012. Oil on board, 30 x 34cm.

Oil on board, 30 x 21cm.


Oil on board, 30 x 21cm.

Oil on board 21 x 30cm.


Oil on board, 21 x 30cm.
Jennifer Taylor, *Inteye Arrkwe ridge line 1*, 2012. Oil on board, 30 x 40cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.

Jennifer Taylor, *Inteye Arrkwe ridge line 2*, 2012. Oil on board, 30 x 40cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Inteye Arrkwe, evening*, 2012. Oil on board, 30 x 34cm.
Chapter 4 Trouble with beauty

Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Anthwerrke after fire*, 2012. Oil on board, 30 x 60cm.

Photograph Peter Carroll
Jennifer Taylor, *Fires at Anthwerrke*, 2012. Oil on board, 20 x 60cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Smoke at Urrengetyirpe* 2, 2011. Oil on board 30 x 60cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Smoke at Urrengetyirrpe 3*, 2011. Oil on board, 30 x 80cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Firefront 3*, 2011. Oil on board, 60 x 120cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Firefront 4*, 2011. Oil on board, 60 x 180cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Fires at Inteye Arrkwe 3*, 2011. Oil on board, 60 x 120cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Fires at Inteye Arrkwe 4*, 2011. Oil on board, 60 x 120cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor *Fires at Kurrajong* 3, 2011. Oil on board, 120 x 60cm.

Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Fires at Kurrajong 4*, 2011. Oil on board 100 x 100cm.
Jennifer Taylor. *Fires at Inteye Arrkwe I*, 2011. Oil on board, 60 x 50cm. Photograph Jennifer Taylor
Chapter 5  Haunting
Jennifer Taylor, *Smoke at Inteye Arrkwe 5*, 2011. Oil on board, 40 x 120cm. Photograph Jennifer Taylor.
Jennifer Taylor, *Smoke at Urrengetyirrpe*, 2011. Oil on board, 21 x 40cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, Dusk at Inteye Arrkwe, 2012. Oil on board, 27 x 29cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Night walk at Inteye Arrkwe 4*, 2013. Oil on board, 30 x 40cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Night walk at Inteye Arrkwe 1*, 2013. Oil on board, 30 x 40cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, Night walk at Inteye Arrkwe 2, 2013. Oil on board, 30 x 34cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Night walk at Inteye Arrkwe 3*, 2013. Oil on board, 30 x 40cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.

Oil on board, 25 x 25cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.


Oil on board, 25 x 30cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.

Oil on board, 25 x 30cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.


Oil on board, 30 x 30cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Late light, Inteye Arrkwe 1*, 2012. Oil on board 40 x 57 cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Late light, Inteye Arrkwe 2*, 2012. Oil on board 38 x 58cm. Photograph Peter Carroll
Chapter 6 Portraits
Jennifer Taylor, *Bruce Wallis, after Roy McFadyen*, 2013. Oil on board, 40 x 30cm. Photograph Peter

Jennifer Taylor, *Alec Kruger, after Roy McFadyen*, 2013. Oil on board, 40 x 30cm. Photograph Peter

Photograph Peter Carroll.

Jennifer Taylor, *Peggy Cleary, after Roy McFadyen*, 2013. Oil on board, 34 x 30cm.

Photograph Peter Carroll.

Oil on board, 40 x 30cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.

Oil on board, 40 x 30cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Alec Kruger and Albert Williams, after Roy Mc Fadyen*, 2013. Oil on board, 30 x 40cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Roy McFadyen, after unknown photographer*, 2013. Oil on board, 30 x 40cm.
Jennifer Taylor, Johnnie Williams, Albert Williams, Roy McFadyen, and unknown boy, after Roy McFadyen, 2013. Oil on board, 30 x 40cm
Jennifer Taylor, *Untitled 1*, 2013. Oil on board, 20 x 15cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.


Oil on board, 20 x 15cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.


Oil on board, 20 x 15cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, Untitled 9, 2013. Oil on board, 21 x 12cm.
Jennifer Taylor, *Untitled 10*, 2013. Oil on board, 21 x 12 cm.

Jennifer Taylor, *Untitled 11*, 2013. Oil on board, 21 x 12 cm.
Chapter 7  Lost landscapes
Jennifer Taylor, *Dust at Inteye Arrkwe 4*, 2013. Oil on board, 30 x 40cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Lost Landscapes 4*, 2014. Oil on board, 40 x 60cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Lost landscapes 6*, 2014. Oil on board, 40 x 60cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Lost landscapes 5*, 2014. Oil on board, 60 x 120cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Oil on board, 40 x 60cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Oil on board, 40 x 60cm. Photograph Peter Carroll.
Jennifer Taylor, *Inland sea*, 2014. Oil on board, 3 panels 40 x 60cm.
Jennifer Taylor, *Inland sea*, detail. Oil on board, 40 x 60cm.
Jennifer Taylor, *Inland sea*, 2014, detail. Oil on board, 40 x 60cm.
Jennifer Taylor, *Inland sea*, 2014, detail. Oil on board, 40 x 60cm.