The Camarina Tree

VISUAL TRANSLATIONS OF NATIVE PLANTS AND ABSTRACTION IN AUSTRALIA

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An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters by Research, School of Creative Arts & Humanities, Charles Darwin University

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I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Master by Research of the Charles Darwin University, is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree.
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*THE CASUARINA TREE*
Abstract

*The Casuarina Tree* is an experimental body of art work and accompanying written exegesis exploring the abstract representation of nature with particular reference to Australian native plants. This research explores the interstices between native plants and creative practice focusing on non-representational and abstract responses. Through critical engagement with the visual culture and representation of nature within the broader context of Australian art this research aims to find original, abstract forms in the translation of native plants. In the development of an experimental body of visual research utilising drawing and mark-making as a catalyst for the production and synthesis of abstract painting this research seeks to contribute new understandings to the field of abstraction and the representation of nature specific to the Australian experience.
Acknowledgments

This research was born out of the blackened, burnt woodlands of Wulkabimirri homelands in the heart of Arnhem Land. I acknowledge with great respect the spirit of Mary Milngurr whose crow-like hands smacked me more than I liked and who instilled in me the vision, passion and intensity for undertaking this research. I am privileged to have spent time in the presence of this formidable woman. I would also like to thank country itself for imbuing a sense of mystery that is ever-present and unattainable and the plants for their unsolvable riddles and beauty.

This research would have been impossible without the ongoing support of my principal supervisor, Dr. Andrea Ash and associate supervisors, Dr. Cornelius Delaney and John Smith. I would like to acknowledge the support of my family and friends, especially my flowers Philippe, Hurihah and Lyrdhan, whose radiance has provided me with support and courage. This work is also dedicated to the memory of my beloved grandfather G and the red dusty soil from which he was born...
above: figure 1, Imbi Davidson, Studies for country (Acacia auriculiformis), 2010, pen on paper, 25x30cm;
figure 2, Imbi Davidson, Ligne du feuille, 2011, botanical print on cloth, 20x20cm;
opposite page: figure 3, Imbi Davidson, Erythrina Leaf Print, 2010, botanical print on cloth, 5x8cm.

Item removed due to copyright restrictions.
Introduction

There is a myth of a gigantic Casuarina tree, which at the beginning of time, stood as a sacred site and touched the sky with its topmost branches...

But the tree was cut down by certain mythical personages, and the bridge between earth and sky was destroyed forever...

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THE CASUARINA TREE

*The Casuarina Tree* is an overarching body of work creatively examining native plants and abstraction. This exegesis coupled with the exhibition of my practical studio-led research together presents my thesis. Through the interweaving of both written and studio based components I have aimed to engage with the subject of native plants as a basis for creative production. This exegesis critically examines the key methodological processes and theoretical underpinnings of my research in conjunction with an overview of the historical, cultural and contemporary contexts of visual representation relative to my research. Further, this exegesis traces the development of my studio work as an interactive experimental site of engagement between multiple processes.

The key aims and objectives for my research are to:

- discern a viable methodology for responding to, translating and recording native plants in my studio practice.

- experiment with native plants as a source of inspiration using drawing and mark-making as a preliminary foundation for the development of new work(s).

- explore the characteristics of native plants and find patterns, shapes, colours and lines to create a deeper language based upon an essentialist reading of native plants.

- understand the world of native plants from multiple perspectives; cultural, botanical, mythological, ecological and physical and employ a mixture of these knowledge systems in my practical studio research.
- draw upon my experiences living in Arnhem Land and look at Aboriginal perceptions and relationships to land, plants and nature

- examine artists whose work explores native plants to build an understanding of how plants have been perceived visually and what role this plays in the wider pattern of Australian creativity and identity.

- critically examine the nature of representation particular to the plant world and discern whether abstraction can provide a language for expressing the translation of nature.

- find non-representational, irregular and/or emotive responses through abstraction to investigate the subject and visual systems associated with native plants in the creation of a body of work for exhibition.

- explore the disjunction, opposition and convergence between the theoretical and practical studio led elements of my research with openness to the subject material and curiosity to expand my practice as an artist.

Through addressing these fundamental objectives my research aims to provide an authentic abstraction of nature particular to the Australian experience and rich tapestry of plants endemic to this environment. I believe this to be a largely unexplored field of creative practice and my research seeks to discover new potentialities within the genre of Australian abstraction.

A theoretical underpinning to my research is Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s idea of the rhizome as a metaphor for the interconnectivity of thinking and practice which map new terrains, ideas and future possibilities or worlds-in-progress. In their
seminal work *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) Deleuze and Guattari explore the complexity of possibility and inclusivity of all things. The core aims of my research align with this understanding of mapping authentic terrains through experimentation with multiple interconnected elements. My research goal to find a language of abstraction derived from nature and native plants and to map an entirely different creative response to the conventions of this field is an essential component for this research.

'A rhizome, as a map, is to do with experimentation. It does not trace something that came before (again no representation) rather it actively creates the terrain it maps—setting out the coordination points for worlds-in-progress.'

My rationale has been to approach the subject of native plants with an open receptivity; like an explorer or plant hunter, to set out into the unknown to gather, collect and discover what might be possible. I have sought to experiment with all branches of the botanical world and interweave, where or if possible, new threads into my work and create new maps beyond representation that mark my connection to Australian native plants. Through finding linkages between the visual, historical, written and physical elements of my research I was able to allow for interconnected visual responses to emerge between these various registers. My research has involved the interplay between multiple methodologies and finding a dialogue of exchange to bring the various branches together.

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One of the major research methods has been to review the literature specific to historical representations and botanical illustrations of native plants whilst also researching modern, contemporary and Indigenous artists who have interpreted native plants within their practice. Further, I undertook a comprehensive study of native plant biology, mythology, etymology and systems of classification relative to native plants. This research opened a whole range of understandings about the world of native plants and how they have been represented within different cultures and by different artists. The importance of this literature review to my research was pivotal to understanding perceptions of plants, the place of native plants within visual culture and provided a range of visual information for my studio led research.

The principal method of research I have utilised throughout the duration of this project has been the development of my practical work in the studio. The core focus for my studio-led work has been to find a practical ‘way in’ to the visual world of native plants and develop a method of responding to plants as a precursor for painting. My practical research methods have involved wide experimentation with plants in the field across Australia recording images, drawings and prints in journals, photographs on paper and cloth. These field studies provided the ‘raw material’ for further extension into mark-making and painting investigations in my studio. The chief objective for my studio work has been to gather this source material and find a workable language of abstract responses in the development of a series of experimental paintings or artworks which join together my research objectives and aims.
Djinngi Djanguny | This One Story

As a preamble to my research this section provides a brief background of my practice as an artist and highlights the importance of my experiences living with an Aboriginal clan in Arnhem Land as the foundation for the development of my research. *Djinngi djanguny* - this one story sketches a critical understanding of my work and contextualises the conceptual bedrock underlying my research.

After many years experimenting and exploring various mediums, I moved into painting as an immediate source of mark making and as the quickest way to process thoughts into images. My practice evolved to embrace the abstract, to explore the mind, emotions and memories in directly applied layers of paint. In moving from my hometown in South Australia to the Northern Territory in 1998, I was adopted by an old Aboriginal woman, Mary, with whom I lived over the span of many years. In this dirty, dusty outstation life, I entered into a culture in continuum since time immemorial. The bones of the ancestors were inlaid into the trees, the fabric of the rocks; each leaf or flower in the bush related to a star, a song or was a part of one’s blood family. The many experiences I was immersed into in this world remained imprinted upon my psyche or soul. In living with Mary, I understood life, nature and spirit to be inextricably bound; the past linked with the future, the residues of the past lay scarred upon the breasts of the mothers and bodies of the landscape. This world enabled me to see both the complexity and interconnectedness of life.

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*Djinngi* literally translates as ‘this one’ or ‘this is’ and *Djanguny* means ‘story’, ‘tale’ or ‘telling’ in the Djineng Language from Central Arnhem Land.
After leaving Arnhem Land and settling permanently in Darwin, my work as an artist held these imprints and stories, influencing the way I imagined the land, the plants and memories silently embedded within and without. An integral part of my experience working with old lady Mary was collecting plants and learning from her about the manifold species native to the land. We had started to collate ethno-botanical material and Mary pestered me constantly to write a book, to scribe stories and record her knowledge, when she unexpectedly passed away. Her eyes and laughter inspired me to keep understanding the plants and in effect keep understanding the world. My time in Arnhem Land connected me to the threads that weave plants together into the ceremonies, lives and the cultural fabric of all people and heightened my capacity to see nature or plants as living interconnected beings. These experiences awakened my practice of reading the landscape as a painter, searching the seasons of the Northern Territory with conviction to see the interwoven nature of the landscape and its inner story. Further, my work with old lady Mary invoked a sense of responsibility to uphold her vision, to keep the seed alive and let it germinate into a creative blossoming. This research evolved out of those seeds and my own experiences.

Following on from this experience in 2008-09 I undertook an Australia Council Youth Mentorship with textile artist India Flint, whose pioneering work with native plants as a source of dye, colour and marks on tactile surfaces has been influential to my work. I developed a body of work using natural dyes, marks, stitches and fabric as a way to make large works, or what I termed as ‘story blankets’. This enabled my established painting practice to be more experimental with layers and textures and also established a firm commitment in my practice to working with native plants as a source of imagery and language of personal marks. The invigoration of my painting practice led to a more textural quality and synthesis between cloth, fabric and paint. I created new
works on pre-encoded materials such as dusty mail-bags, recycled canvas, blankets and tarpaulins and built upon those surfaces with layers of paint and marks.

Prior to the commencement of my research in 2010, my painting practice centred on large scale abstract landscapes reflecting an emotive response to the expanse, politics and extremes of life in the Northern Territory. My work referenced the tough edgy landscapes of the northern frontier, expressing my connection to the stories of intensity often felt in the Territory environment (figures 38 & 39). I created work utilising large, un-stretched canvases and/or primed recycled materials, thrashing out scratchy lines of bitumen, oil or enamel paint and reworking with stains, dyes or watery washes. In these works I played with the tension between foreground and background, building layers in and around the horizon line, ultimately forming a style of painting ‘inscapes’ whilst simultaneously overlaying with marks, lines and words as an extended part of each work. These works exemplify my underlying practice as an artist and provide a preliminary foundation to my research.

CARTOGRAPHY

...art practice as a form of cartography then, the creative mapping of our connections and potentialities, a mapping that pays attention to regions of intensity (the distribution of affects) and to trajectories of future becomings...4

The Casuarina Tree is a supporting document to my practical work and is divided into three chapters, each with sub-headings delineating the pertinent concepts and ideas relevant to my research. Further, this written document maps the journey of my research.

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theoretical research, my methodological processes and critically discusses my practical work for exhibition. In this section I will now briefly outline the structure or cartography of my exegesis.

The first chapter of this exegesis, *flora australis* examines a chronological history of the visual representation of native plants, discussing different cultural, historical, scientific and artistic conventions relative to the imaging of native plants throughout Australian history. This chapter critiques different artists, exhibitions, publications and important artworks which have inspired my research, contextualising my studio practice within the broader picture of Australian visual culture. This chapter chronologically relates the different ways native plants have been represented with emphasis on the connection between plants and landscape and the importance of Aboriginal and abstract modes of perceiving the landscape and the plants contained within. I conclude this chapter with an overview of contemporary artists and their use of plants as metaphors for a range of complex issues and interests and discuss the relevance of this research as an inspiration to my own practice.

The second chapter of my exegesis, *per adua ad astra* (through struggles to the stars) unfolds my practical studio processes, outlining the movement from drawing as physical observation and repetitions of mark-making into a living palimpsest and encounter in painting. This chapter charts the development of my own form of abstraction derived from native plants and how I have synthesised forms from nature into a workable language of marks translatable through the act of painting. In outlining my practical studio methods and critically exploring my own creative process, this chapter gives an insight into the physical and conceptual components of my work.
Chapter 3, titled *convergence* explains the shifting localities of my work from north to south and how this created new, altered and asymmetrical pathways of interconnection in the development of my studio work. I discuss examples of my work and relate how my studio work acted as a site of rebellion and uncertainty, referring to my paintings as battlegrounds for infinite expression and experimentation within dynamic and changeable settings. I critically assess the collective body of my studio work that formulates the backbone of my research and critique specific works that are pivotal to the presentation of my thesis.

I conclude this exegesis with the chapter, *In Vivo Veritus (In a living thing there is truth)*, which summarises the significant concepts guiding my research and analyses the practical understandings derived from my studio practice. I evaluate the relevancy of my research and assess how I have navigated my primary research objectives throughout the course of my candidature, reflecting upon the key findings of my research and the implications for my research in the wider context of contemporary art practice. This exegesis therefore, outlines the structure and pathways of my research and provides a map into the creative terrains I have explored over the duration of this research project.

Chapter 1 *flora australis*

Like a huge Python, winding round and round
The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars,
Up to its very summit near the stars,
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could live.  

*Dutt, T, Our Casuarina Tree, Quoted in Stedman, E (ed), A Victorian Anthology, 1837–1895. (Cambridge Riverside Press, 1895).*
[t]he complete suite of Australia's flora and fauna is one of the oldest and most distinct on earth...

In this chapter _flora australis_ I aim to chronologically outline the representation of native plants as a contextual basis for understanding the conventions surrounding the portrayal of plants in Australian art and to discuss key artists and art works related to my research. This broad literature review examines the depiction of native plants in visual culture spanning time from the beginning of human occupancy by Aboriginal tribes, through waves of European exploration and colonisation into our current post-modern, contemporary globalised reality. This chapter historically examines the different cultural perceptions of native plants focusing on the conventions of representation relative to an Indigenous cultural framework in contrast to inherited European artistic traditions. I discuss how native plants have played a pivotal role in the development of a national character and importance as emblems of an evolving cultural identity. Moreover, I explore the role of native plants within the landscape as a defining characteristic of the complex layers inherent within the fabric of the Australian experience. I examine the tenets of abstraction as a way of expressing these layers and detail how Aboriginal artists seamlessly weave together connections between native plants, landscape and abstraction. I continue with an overview of contemporary artists who utilise native plants within the tropes of their practice and as metaphors for a wide range of issues and interests. I conclude this chapter discussing how my studio work has been influenced and informed by my research and relate how my work differs from other artists and conventions of representation.

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THE BONES: THE HEARTBEAT

In this section I discuss how for Aboriginal people native plants were an essential part of survival and were considered living beings within the cultural matrix of life. Anthropologist, A.P. Elkin described this oneness with nature as the concept of totemism, where ‘natural species and phenomena are brought into man’s social order; that is, they are regarded as members of his local groups, clans, and moieties.’ Entwined into ceremony and sung into song lines, native plants formed a powerful cultural and mytho-poetic presence in Aboriginal culture, part of the living fabric which connects all facets of life. Artist Judy Watson explains ‘it is a whole intermeshing of life forms and the matrix of seeing through a landscape where everything is entwined and related.’ This living relationship to plants and ancestral connection to nature is the fundamental basis for Indigenous understandings of country and ways of perceiving the world. Nothing is separated. The leaves, branches and sap of plants form the heartbeat - the blood of the ancestors, whilst simultaneously and intrinsically embedded in multiple cultural layers.

Prior to the colonisation and discovery of the southern continent by European explorers, Aboriginal people were sustainably supported by the landscape and its plants. When living in Arnhem Land, I witnessed a Maradjirri ceremony, which re-enacted a creation story of the symbolic world-tree, with its ever reaching branches that link the spirit to the material to the earth. This ceremony revealed epic layers and stories, sung into and around the body of the tree. Every part of the tree was ‘sung’ and named, its flowers, leaves, branches, trunk, body and roots. Every part of life was sung and linked to the greater mystery or dreaming.

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8 Watson, J, Quoted in, Cameron, A. Replant - a new generation of botanical artists - Project Notes, (Nomad Art Productions: Darwin, 2008).
9 The Maradjirri ceremony is broadly defined as an exchange between clan groups, where material gifts are given in presentation of an ancestral pole.
The sustenance and rich tapestry which connected every part of this country cannot be underestimated or forgotten. The land itself holds the resonance and scars of those ceremonies in its roots. Native plants cannot, therefore be isolated as singular or separate, rather, seen as the embodied representation of culture and nature dancing together in the realms of mystery. The residues of plants painted in ochre on cave walls across Australia, carved into rocks and etched into tree trunks often remain as silent ghosts. Painted ochre motifs are a visual feature scattered across the Australian landscape and represent the interwoven stories inherent within the very fabric of the land.

This is the earthly painting for the creation and for the land story. The land is not empty, the land is full of knowledge, full of story, full of goodness, full of energy, full of power. Earth is our mother, the land is not empty. There is the story I am telling you — special, sacred, important.¹⁰

Painting as a manifestation of the multiple trajectories of traditional culture was an intrinsic part of the interconnectedness of all living things. In contrast, European understandings of plants were fundamentally different. In the following sections I discuss the settlement and history of Australia through its plants and visual culture.

BOUND FOR BOTANY BAY

The discovery of new species of plants and lands in new worlds like Australia prompted European countries to empirically advance and colonise. The British were motivated by the potentiality and capacity of Australia to be transformed from a perceived state of terra nullius or empty land into an extension of the European homeland. Contrary to Aboriginal beliefs the

British brought with them a totally different construct of the place of nature within the landscape where humans claimed superiority and structured the land in order to progress. The Australian nature was simultaneously revered and subjugated in relation to European notions of aesthetic beauty. Rod Giblett suggests the ‘European landscape aesthetic was part of the explorer’s and settler’s cultural baggage which they took with them and either found or recreated in the colonies.’\textsuperscript{11} The inheritance of European culture and ways of perceiving the land has been essential to understanding the conventions of representation pertaining to native plants.

Native plants are an inseparable feature of the Australian landscape. The discovery of new and useful plants was an important driver for European exploration into the new world. Plants were collected, named and classified within the system of binomial taxonomy that had been developed by botanist Carl Linnaeus in the eighteenth century, which ‘codified the use of Latin binomials for plants together with rules to distinguish between names.’\textsuperscript{12} On early voyages to Australia it was the plants which held the greatest fascination for scientific enquiry. William Dampier ‘was the first Englishman to make a collection of native plants’\textsuperscript{13} published in \textit{A Voyage to New Holland} (1703) as a series of printed engravings. When Cook sailed with Joseph Banks and botanist David Solander on the scientific voyage of the Endeavour (1768) they returned laden with what was described by English botanist John Ellis to Carl Linnaeus ‘the greatest national treasure of Natural History that was ever bought into this country by two

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{13} Kenny, J. \textit{Before the First Fleet – Europeans in Australia 1606-1777,} (Kangaroo Press, Sydney, 1995): 76.
\end{flushleft}
persons.\textsuperscript{14} The 1000 or more newly discovered Australian species were the core treasure in Banks' collection. Through the pre-colonial botanical illustrations and collections of native plants made by Banks and Solander, the Australian flora became familiar.

When the First Fleet landed at Botany Bay (1788) the colonial imperative was to conquer the Australian landscape, extract and utilise its resources, venerate what was pleasing naturally and eradicate what was not perceived as mutually beneficial to a growing colony. Australia also served to satisfy the growing desire in Europe for new varieties of plants that could be sent and cultivated in private and botanic gardens across Europe. The scramble for living treasures to send back to England was a phenomenon during the settlement of Australia. Curios, rare plants and artefacts from natives were prized and hoarded in botanical and museum collections. Botanist Robert Brown, at the behest of Joseph Banks was sent to Australia to undertake the first comprehensive botanical catalogue of native plants. Brown together with botanical artist Ferdinand Bauer accompanied Matthew Flinders' voyage of discovery to New Holland. This expedition led to the collection of some 3,900 new species of plants\textsuperscript{15}, thousands of botanical illustrations and plant specimens. Brown and Bauer's \textit{Padromus Florae Novae Hollandai} (1810) was a monumental botanical study of the Australian flora and represents the height of botanical and natural history illustration.

Each of the sketches reproduced by Ferdinand Bauer were coded with a system of numbering, which later 'translated into gradations of colour so fine that recapturing each shade seems more a job for a computer than a man'\textsuperscript{16} (figure 5).

\textsuperscript{14} Ellis, J. Quoted in ibid: 85.
\textsuperscript{16} Dwight, F. \textit{In honour of Ferdinand Bauer}, (Sydney Morning Herald Review, 17\textsuperscript{th} Jan, 1998).
The age of exploration and botanical discovery which dominated the settlement and colonial period of Australia firmly established the image of Australia as a field for scientific fascination coupled with a pioneering spirit of conquest. The heroic feats of inland explorers, such as Leichhardt, Burke and Wills, Spencer and Gillen are portrayed as epic conquests of man over nature; of an arid, barren landscape, devoid of heart, burning the efforts of struggle and effort. As the British colony extended out from its epicentre and began to embrace the entire nation the imagined or romantic view of an antipodean wilderness was met equally by a the harsh reality of a ‘hell on earth’; a battleground between the wild, often unforgiving savage aspects of the Australian bush. The adopted country did not yield to an easy alliance with the British hegemony; the establishment of a settled state was founded upon reframing the wilderness and eradicating its savageness. This meant the systemic clearing of land for agriculture and pastoral properties, extension of cities, roads and infrastructure and removal of Aboriginal people by the Government.

It was common place for Aboriginal men to accompany exploratory expeditions. Southern Aranda man, Erlikilyika travelled with ethnographers Spencer and Gillen into Central Australia. His *Drawings of native trees* (1901) recorded in Baldwin Spencer’s journals\(^\text{17}\) (figures 6 & 7) reflect firstly the often overlooked place of importance Aboriginal men held within this period of colonial expansion and secondly are a unique representation of plants as seen from the eyes of Erlikilyika, presenting a simplified and layered understanding of the essence of these particular species. These drawings render a whole experience of country through basic line and plant-like details.

and are representational yet grasp a deeper, more intuitive reading of the sensibilities of each particular species as perceived by Erlikilyika. These drawings were an important discovery in my research and inspired my own practice of drawing or responding to native plants with simplified lines and reduced basic structures or plant-like motifs. These works present native plants outside of the domain of botanical illustration which was dominant at this time. Throughout the settlement period native plants played a fundamental role in how Australia was perceived by the outside and provided scientific and aesthetic curiosity that was celebrated.

The portrayal of the Australian land and country through its plants has been a significant component of my research in discerning the conventions surrounding the visualisation and interpretation of nature as evidenced throughout history. Both Erlikilyika’s and Bauer’s drawings were important in developing an understanding of the different modes of representation particular to native plants and to highlight the varied circumstances and conditions of their production. Both the complexity and simplicity presented by each of these artists’ drawings has been significantly influential for my studio research.

LANDSCAPES OF THE WILD

The study and observation of native plants and the Australian wilderness became a pioneering foundation for representing both the wonder and ongoing subjugation of the Australian country. Historian Terry Smith writes of the foundations of visual culture in the Australian colony as having a dramatic impact upon the legacy in which a national culture was determined. He argues that images were produced either for scientific purposes, as romantic ideals presenting a picturesque utopia or for pure academic,
utilitarian purposes to record place, people and present to the world the landscape of a budding country. Representations of native plants were linked to the cultural hegemony of European conventions and were either botanical or part of the painted landscape tradition which emerged in Australia as the dominant artistic aesthetic.

Smith explains that images of landscapes and plants were utilised to present Australia to the world as an ‘antipodean arcadia untouched by European settlement and occupied only by Aborigines enjoying a bountiful existence’, of a ‘pastoral arcadia occupied by the squatters and their sheep and cattle, and from which Aborigines had been excluded’, and ‘a magnificent wilderness which the settlers had entered but not yet tamed.’ Further, Giblett’s assertion of landscape as ‘one of the central devices and means by which Europeans and their settler diasporas understood and related to land’ is essential to understanding the historical predominance of landscape as a visual form of representation within Australia. Principally, painted landscapes were motivated by traditions of European aesthetics, habitually overlaying romanticised perceptions of the picturesque, sublime and beautiful. Native plants were entwined in heightened scenes depicting the Australian nature in exalted settings. Large landscapes captured the romanticised heroism of enduring bush pioneers, celebrated the subjugation of the land in dappled light and scenes redolent with the patina of a utopian splendour carried the shimmer of wild, enduring nature. Landscape artists such as Eugene Von Guerard, Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts and Hans Heysen painted the Australian experience, entrenching romantic, elevated

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perceptions of a land undergoing transformation. In many instances these artists painted landscapes which are no longer present, recording places now lost.

This sublimated form of representation often overlooked the inherent reality of the Australian landscape. It denied acknowledgment of an Aboriginal presence and created the illusion of a European wilderness within the form of an Australian setting. This visualising of the world through landscape painting reflected the whitewashing of Australia as it moved towards federation. Racist assumptions and the white Australia policy presumed that Aboriginal people were a dying race in need of salvation and assimilation. At the time Australia was federated Aboriginal people were not even recognised as citizens or given basic human rights. Aboriginal people were stolen and forced into missions to learn to become civilised or become like white people. Landscape painting interestingly, was adopted by Aboriginal people and one of Australia’s most iconic landscape painters, Albert Namatjirra became a celebrated household name. Paintings such as Flowering Shrubs (c.1930s) typify his ability to find a deeper, richer form of landscape, almost as if, through his Aboriginality, Namatjirra was able to intuitively grasp the essence of the country whilst simultaneously mastering the European landscape aesthetic.

Smith argues that the landscape in Australia seems to ‘constantly attract a mixture of contradictory emotions: the dream of an essential Australianness, the desire to be stitched to place, and the deep sigh of a sociality deferred elsewhere, onto signs of
otherness. Landscape until the birth of modernism provided a means of constructing a new world and representing post-colonial relationships to land. Wolfgang Sachs writes ‘the landscape is the construct of a society that no longer has an unmediated relationship with the soil’. This loss of connection to the soil, the bones and heartbeat is palpable within the trope of European values and perceptions of nature. Rod Giblett further explores this disconnect, describing landscape as ‘the surface of inscription and production that denies and represses the depths of the land.’ Modern art shifted the formal structures of landscape painting and underlying conventions of representation which had been culturally embedded since the sixteenth century. Australian modernism was linked to European styles and schools of art yet propelled Australian artists to find a deeper rhyme within the fabric of their own unique landscape and emerging cultural identity.

THE MODERN NATIVE

Entrance into the twentieth century fuelled a nationalistic fervour in Australia, cemented by the united struggles of war and social progress. Native plants played a vital role in the culture forming, becoming icons and symbols of a strengthening emergent Australian identity. Species such as the Waratah (*Telopea speciosissima*) were stylised as motifs within the arts and crafts industries. Native flowers were often the subject of women’s painting and were collected, studied or utilised in the transference of the image of Australia as its own civilised, significant culture. The ‘Golden Wattle’ became the national floral emblem and

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became the study of many artists as exemplified by A.J Campbell’s *Golden Wattle – Our National Emblem* (1921) featuring art photographs of ‘wattle nymphs’.

Margaret Preston’s devotion to the study of native plants and wildflowers elevated the notion of flower painting to a heightened level of artistic engagement. Throughout her career, Preston pursued native plants and flowers as symbols for an emergent, uniquely Australian aesthetic, responding to the particular characteristics of native plants in highly coloured, heavily shadowed, linear and patterned works. The appearance of Preston’s *Wheelflower* (figure 8) woodcut on the cover of *Art and Australia* (September, 1929) draws attention to the nationalisation of native species and also Preston’s modernist reading of the Australian flora. Preston commented, ‘our landscape teems with forms which are not English or French in shape’23, and suggested that the artistic ‘treatment of our flora must be different.’24

Preston continued to advocate for a uniquely Australian form of art. Her famous dictum ‘be Aboriginal’25, Smith claims, meant ‘to go to the source, to remove all accumulated, civilised knowledge, to let the materials speak their truth.’26 Preston’s later studies of plants and landscape illustrate her quest to force together modernist, cubist, abstract and aboriginal art into a representative Australian style. Her work *Aboriginal Landscape* (1941) exemplifies the adoption of a more Aboriginal palette, ochre shades

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24 Ibid: 151.
26 Ibid.
above: figure 8, Margaret Preston, *Wheel/Flower*, 1929, woodblock on Japanese paper, 44x44.3cm;
figure 9, Margaret Preston, *Aboriginal Landscape* (detail), 1942, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown.
and cubist sectioning of the picture plane (figure 9) comparative to earlier more floral works such as *Wheelflower*. The era of modernism shifted the conceptual boundaries from the outer to the inner, to a deeper engagement with nature and ultimately the self. Preston’s adoption of modernist principles and adaptation to the Australian landscape and unique flora represented this deeper engagement and a renewed interest in Aboriginal cultural values and relationships to the land.

**THE ABSTRACT LANDSCAPE**

Abstraction was one of the leading art movements to circumvent conventions and explore new ways of expression. It unearthed new structures and challenged formalist traditions of landscape and figurative realism. Painting especially became the realm of abstraction, with canvases serving as playgrounds for paint, texture, layers, lines and acting as the surface of emotion, ideas and intuition. Abstraction distilled an artist’s experience into a primal surface and transcribed reactions that often shocked; the abstract challenged preconceived understandings of what painting or art could be. Movements like abstract expressionism gave emphasis to the surface quality of a painting, the act of painting itself, the all over treatment of the picture development of significant inner meanings and the absolute individuality of the artist.²⁷ In Australia, the infiltration of abstraction was intertwined with multiple forms of expression and styles of experimentation, yet was not openly or widely adopted as it challenged the so called ‘home-grown’ landscape and figurative traditions which had shaped the birth of art in Australia. However, Sydney based artists such as

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above: figure 10, John Olsen, *Golden Summer*, Clarendon, 1983, oil on hardboard, 182.5x244.5cm; figure 11, Elisabeth Cummings, *Edge of the Simpson Desert*, 2011, oil on canvas, 180x300cm.
John Olsen, pioneered the development and adoption of abstraction in Australia, being heralded as ‘serious practitioners of abstract art.’

From the 1950’s abstraction became an increasingly important art form in which to map new territories within the landscape of the inner self, the inner nature in response to the Australian setting. Australian abstraction appeared to oscillate between the intangible landscape and purely emotive experience. Artists such as John Olsen, Elisabeth Cummings and Fred Williams penetrated deeper into their own connection to land, history and culture, unravelling the seams of the landscape. John Olsen declared ‘I am in the landscape and the landscape is in me.’ This form of abstracted landscape painting acted as a confluence between the land, its story and history in connection to the emotive presence and inner resonance; abstraction became a map making tool for charting the depth of the Australian landscape. The influence and persistence of the traditional landscape aesthetic was present yet rendered abstract.

*It is as if the environment is permitted to flow through the artist’s perception and to establish its own language with its unique syntax and sense of preciousness.*

Both Olsen’s and Cumming’s work translates a deep engagement with the shape, line, and contour and the rich hued colours characteristic of Australia. Olsen’s *Golden Summer, Clarendon* (1983) and Cummings’ *Edge of the Simpson Desert* (2011) both

address notions of landscape yet hold their own abstracted narrative (figures 10 & 11). Artist Fred Williams' abstract paintings carry whispers of scarred sites of sorrow and melancholy. His work *You Yangs Landscape* (1963) typifies the technique of immersion into place, where the land itself resonates, carrying the story of the land and abstractly giving shape to something deeper than mere landscape. James Mollison references Williams' painting on location at an Aboriginal burial ground in New South Wales as a site of presence that becomes infused into a language of paint. This style of land literacy and engagement with the heart or spirit of place was typical of this style of landscape abstraction and exemplifies a quintessentially Australian visual response.

Abstract artists Ian Fairweather and Tony Tuckson, although informed by landscape, were the stewards for a more emotive, lyrical form of abstraction. Fairweather is revered as one of Australia's most important abstract painters. Murray Bail suggests 'there is nothing like these paintings in Australian art - or anywhere else.' His style of abstraction, exemplified *Forest* (1959) built upon many layers of paint reflecting the layers of his inner world (figure 12). Fairweather said, 'You ask about abstract art -- it is something I think like the Buddhist idea of suspended judgment. The mind is cleared of thought but not awareness. Always the purpose of art is to find its way through the forest of things to a larger unity containing all things.' Both Fairweather and Tony Tuckson painted from the inner, emotive world, the inscape or interior landscape in layers and marks of paint. The gestural quality of both artists' work as seen in Tuckson's *White Lines (Horizontal) on Red* (c.1970) reflects the inner resonance which

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32 Bail, M. Quoted in Shakespeare, N. *Fairweather and Foul: Art as Driftwood*, (The Australian Newspaper, July 07, 2010).
33 Fairweather, I. Quoted in ibid.
above: figure 12, Ian Fairweather, *Forest*, c. 1959, gouache on paper, dimensions unknown;
figure 13, Tony Tuckson, *White Lines (Horizontal) on Red*, c. 1970-73, synthetic polymer paint on board, dimensions unknown.

*Item removed due to copyright restrictions.*
both artists were able to transcribe through painting (figure 13). Fairweather and Tuckson’s work explores the interconnectivity between personal, environmental and inner truths inherent within, connected, as Fairweather suggests to the larger unity of all life.

The work of these artists has been important to understanding the way in which abstraction offers an in-road into the complexity and density of the Australian landscape. The ways in which Australian abstract artists have found expression in deeper engagement with the world around us is an important component of my research mapping native plants. The particularities of the Australian experience which encompasses the unique flora, landscape and historical legacy imprinted upon the story of the land, give rise to a specific aesthetic response unlike any other. The developments in abstraction in Australia are linked implicitly to country and its patchwork-like blanket of interwoven elements. Tuckson and Fairweather did much to open and propel the movement of abstract painting in Australia – a pivotal primer for the birth of aboriginal abstraction that was to emerge from the sands of Papunya.

BIRTH OF CHANGE

When Geoffrey Bardon arrived in the central desert community of Papunya in 1970, he described it as ‘a foreign, miserable place of alcoholism, drunken fighting, car accidents and murder.’ Yet from the fringe of this desert camp arose an art that would eclipse all other forms of representation in Australia and render debates between abstraction and figuration hollow. Laurie Duggan claims that ‘the new Aboriginal art was clearly both ‘abstract’ and ‘representational’ as well as being more ‘Australian’

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34 Bardon, G. Quoted in, Pierse, S, Papunya: A Place Made After the Story, (University of Wales, 2007).
than the competing aesthetic philosophies could hope to be 35, exposing the fact that both abstract and figurative artists ‘almost inevitably reached back to European mythologies’ 36 and artistic traditions.

From 1971-73, Bardon worked with elder Aboriginal men introducing for the first time an opportunity to translate traditional stories into contemporary forms of painting. Bardon wasn’t interested in reproducing white-fella art; he was primarily concerned with fostering the truthful presentation of the ancient, powerful cultural beliefs that these Aboriginal men shared in relationship to the landscape and the world. Paul Carter argues, that through their painting these Aboriginal artists ‘reclaimed the interior of the Australian continent as Aboriginal land’ 37 and suggests further ‘many of the thousand or so paintings produced at Papunya at that time were masterpieces of ambiguity, equivocation, and disguise.’ 38 These abstract style paintings presented a true reading of the Aboriginal landscape; its complexity, mystery and unbroken trajectory into the ancestral realms, creating the foundation for a new wave of abstract, traditional art to spread across Aboriginal Australia. The emergence of painting as a new form of visual narrative, translating dreaming stories and totemic connections burned like wildfire and within years its leading artists gaining international recognition. Howard Morphy suggests Contemporary Aboriginal art ‘represented dynamic and diverse traditions, and for those who were prepared to see, it was an avowedly political art.’ 39

36 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
From the desert country to Arnhem Land and beyond, painting mapped the intricacies of country from a perspective unknown to European conventions of understanding thus piercing through imposed boundaries and activating a reclaiming of the land, its soil and heartbeat as the source of life. An old lady from Utopia, Emily Kngwarreye began making paintings in the late 1980’s and graduated to large scale abstract expressionist style works of monumental scale and power utilising a simplified gestural line across the body of her canvasses. Her fixation with the yam vine (figure 14) and its rhizomatic, spreading form appeared as a constant theme in her paintings, often symbolising ancestral connections to a myriad of significant plant, animal and ancestral dreamings.

This living fabric of life painted by Aboriginal artists such as Kngwarreye and many others according to Margot Neale, elicits a ‘broad inheritance of meaning related to the intrinsic value of everything in life.’40 Neale further explains that the ‘power of Emily’s mark making transcends the local to the universal.’41 The universality of aboriginal readings of the land through abstract painting has been significantly influential and has reframed contemporary understandings of landscape, ecology, plants and visual culture in Australia. The complex and multi-dimensional works of artists like Kngwarreye connect us implicitly to a deeper understanding of nature through painting. Her use of the native yam vine, wild grasses and seeds relate not only to land but to a

41 Ibid: 15.
wide, interconnected range of stories related to Awelye\textsuperscript{42}, her Dreaming; we may not know the inner or deeper meaning, yet the mystery and power of this authentic connection is reflected through the spreading rhizome or linear marks.

Similarly in a recent exhibition, \textit{Punu – Nguru: From the Trees} (2011) Pitjantjatjara elders from Amata in the central desert, created a body of epic abstract paintings (figure 15), exploring the concept and symbol of trees, using plant-like imagery as a mask or to restrict access to deeper levels of cultural meaning, and yet at the same time affirming the power of traditional roots. Artist Frank Young explains:

\begin{quote}
We're painting the outside story in these trees: the leaves, the branches, the stories that spring from them. But the secrets beneath the trees, the root of the story - that we can't tell...\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

These works are masterful in their interplay between abstraction and representation, story and secrecy, certainty and ambiguity. For these desert artists, there is an effortless translation of ancient powerful stories and culture represented in layers of abstract lines, dots and colour, merged within the frame of identifiable tree-like imagery. These paintings present the mastery and 'genius'\textsuperscript{44} of Aboriginal artists to find an aesthetic language of abstraction beyond representation that engages with the specificities of the Australian landscape. These works exemplify, through an abstract rendering of native plants, multifaceted layers of inner and outer meanings which detail both the particularities of the plant, yam or tree and further map a broader

\textsuperscript{42} Emily states: \textit{(Awelye (my dreaming), Arlatyeye (pencil yam), Arkerrthe (mountain devil lizard), Ntange (grass seed), Tingu (Dreamtime pup), Ankerre (emu), Intekwe (favourite small food plant of emus), Antwerle (green bean) and Kame (yam seed). That’s what I paint, whole lot.)}, Quoted in ibid: 232.

\textsuperscript{43} Young, F. Quoted in, Rothwell, N. \textit{Mysteries of the Desert Kings stay revealed behind the trees}, (The Australian Newspaper, March 1, 2012).

above: figure 14, Emily Kngwarreye, *Untitled (yam)*, 1995, synthetic polymer on canvas, 92 x122cm;
figure 15, Barney Wangin, *Punu*, 2012, acrylic on linen, 152x101cm.
geography of the landscape as an interconnected, living being. Aboriginal abstraction has become a powerful contemporary art movement. Its place of importance within the milieu of Australian art is paramount and has carved new inroads into the conventions of painting, landscape and abstraction as a singular, embodied narrative. The influence therefore, of Aboriginal abstract art to my research has been palpable.

CONTEMPORARY DYSTOPIA

Many contemporary artists, including Aboriginal artists, have examined native plants or the botanical world as a way of unpacking or relating to both nature and the human experience. In a contemporary setting, issues of environmental degradation, sustainability and development have become paramount. Many artists have turned and tuned into the natural world, its landscape, phenomenology, history, botany, biology and whole living complexity as a source of inspiration. It seems there is a renaissance in contemporary art for nature inspired themes addressing issues of ecological importance and in finding links between science, art and biology. Many contemporary artists working within the trope of this field, across platforms and mediums, relate to the subject of native plants as metaphors to express a wide range of issues, ideas and interests.

'It all starts with a leaf' suggests artist John Wolseley, whose work tracing native plants and environments of the Australian landscape has reconstructed the value of wilderness and visual understandings of nature. His works have over time, celebrated the

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unique diversity and peculiarities of native plants, their ancestral connections and spatial distribution. Wolseley's map-like watercolour drawings fuse the empirical recording of plants, animals and minutiæ together with marks, scratches and imprints of nature, reflecting a deep immersion into the actuality of experience. Exemplified in exhibitions Drifting Continents – The Araucaria Trees of Queensland and Chile (2001), Tracing the Wallace Line (2001), Six Months in the National Park (2002) and Carboniferous (2010), Wolseley's unique collaborative process with nature and mapping of its species present 'new ways of looking at the Australian natural environment that break from European visual conventions' (figure 16). His work further documents the fragility and vulnerability of the natural environment. Similarly, Western Australian artist Gregory Pryor's Black Solander (2006) documents over ten thousand species of native plants, hand drawn in black ink on black sugar-paper. It is an essential work about both the fragility of native plants; the imperative for Pryor was to capture each plant before it 'disappeared'. This work addresses both the implicit beauty of Australia's flora and its potential extinction. Pryor suggests over 2,000 native plants appear on the Western Australian endangered species list which prompted a sense of urgency in registering a complete census of native plants in his work Black Solander. Both Wolseley and Pryor's work operates on many levels; botanical, scientific, aesthetic and ecological with native plants as a central theme.

Other artists address issues of loss, memory and nostalgia through the exploration of native plants. Janet Laurence's Veil of Trees (1999) specifically engages with plants, history, memory and regeneration in her site-specific installation. Her work of glass

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above: figure 16, John Wolseley, _Tracing the Wallace Line: descent of dipterocarp_ (detail), 1999
watercolour on paper, 56 × 190cm;
figure 17, Fiona Hall, _Leaf Litter - Smilax sieboldii_ (detail), 2000 – 2002, gouache on bank notes, dimensions variable.
panels installed within a replanted red forest gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis*) and native grass bed ‘refers to an original stand of red gums laid low by the axe during early European settlement. Its message is moral and redemptive.

Inscribed with quotations taken from history on the ‘musings of the tree’, each glass panel highlights the presence of the past resonant within the emergent cityscape invoking a nostalgic reminder of what was once. Julie Roberts discusses Laurence’s work, suggesting ‘the eucalypt embodies, literally and metaphorically, the “membrane” of tensions, anxieties, misunderstandings and misperceptions underpinning settlement.’ Likewise, artist Robyn Stacey suggests that her work, *herbarium* (2004) addresses the ‘many layers, historically and culturally around natural history and colonial settlement in Australia.’ Her survey of herbarium specimens from the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens reconfigured images of native plant collections into hyper-realistic, saturated digital photographs portraying the ‘secret history of Australia’s flora’ in a contemporary light. Her images evoke a nostalgic remembrance of the encounter of European culture upon the shores of Australia and its botanical history.

Artist Fiona Hall also uses plants as ‘complex metaphors and signifiers for a wide range of interests and issues.’ Her work *Paradisus terrestrius* (1989-90) merged the botanical and sexual into a suite of detailed sculptures, featuring anatomically incised aluminium native plants and sexual body parts framed within a sardine can structure. Similarly in *Leaf Litter* (2000-02) Hall’s

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48 Ibid.
52 Judd, C. *Artist Commentary – Fiona Hall*, (12th Biennale of Sydney)
study of economics, trade, botany and currency is translated into a series of botanical illustrations painted onto different international bank notes (figure 17). Her inclusion of native plants within these conceptual works shifts the perception of how we relate to them, contextualising the cultural, political and social environment in which plants exist. Her work included in the exhibition Replant- A New Generation of Botanical Art (2006) further explored a cross-cultural dialogue between Indigenous and non-indigenous artists and their relationship to plants in the Northern Territory. In the project notes Hall suggests ‘I am beginning to think about the way the botanical world is totally inseparable to all living things, even the soil.’

This exhibition, in conjunction with Djalkiri – We Are Standing on Their Names (2010) both curated by Angus Cameron, present a deep engagement with the plants of the Northern Territory from a range of cultural perspectives and different artists. Cameron suggests the aim of Djalkiri was to bring together artists, scientists and print-makers together in a cross-cultural exchange to ‘juxtapose Western scientific view-points and knowledge with the holistic perspective of Yolngu people.’ Similarly the exhibition Abstract Nature (2010) brought together twenty different artists from a range of cultural backgrounds navigating the theme of nature, organic abstraction and the connections between self and the wider biological universe. Curator Margaret Osbourne writes ‘this abstraction is grounded in forms, patterns and textures found within nature at both the micro and macro level. Rather than being geometric or purely non-representational, it remains partially tethered to the representation of things in the

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53 Hall, F. Quoted in, Cameron, A. Replant – A New Generation of Botanical Art, (Nomad Art Productions, Darwin, 2006).
54 Cameron, A. Djalkiri: We are standing on their names, Blue Mud Bay, (Nomad Art Productions, Darwin, 2010).
natural world, whether seen or unseen. This exhibition presents a fusion of stylistic interpretations crossing divergent systems of representation and highlights the multi-disciplinary approaches taken by artists exploring the theme of nature, plants and landscape specific to the Australian experience. Osbourne suggests 'as the 21st century enters a phase where the Earth's ecological balance is threatened by humanity's short-term economic imperatives, there is an increased poignancy to our sense of connection with the natural landscape.' In short, there is an ecological imperative in finding a language to [re]connecting to the land.

The importance of abstraction in finding a form of visual communication to speak of the connection to land, plants and country is exemplified in the work of artist G. W. Bot. Her language of marks on surfaces derived from scribbling and scribing scratches of trees and fence posts create a language of glyphs or as Bot terms, *austalglyphs*, is a poetic rendering of landscape through line, allegory and symbols which ‘conjure up a less straightforward representation of an experience in the landscape.’ Likewise in the abstract paintings of Ildiko Kovacs, she places emphasis on line and colour to present an abstracted experience of the natural world. Exemplified in the painting *Magnolia* (2008) Kovacs makes reference to plants as a stimulus for painting and draws out the vital essence within through an experience of line (figure 18). Her work is not recognisably plant-like however; there is vague connection to the structure or resonance of the magnolia tree or flower as she takes a line on a ‘dynamic journey around the

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55 Osbourne, M. *Abstract Nature - The nature of things: thoughts on organic abstraction, beauty and immanence*, (Curatorial Essay, University of South Australia, 2010).
56 ibid.
rectangle.' Magnolia exemplifies Kovacs’ use of line as a primal source for creating imagery that like G.W.Bot’s line glyphs is a fundamental way of distilling the broader specificities of nature into a sinuous, reduced line or mark.

Native plants hold a vital place in the heart of visual representation in Australia. Covering a wide range of meanings from abstract metaphor, historical symbol, and botanical specimen to encapsulating visual narratives, the landscape, dreamtime stories and ancestors entwined in the art-nature-culture fabric. Reflected in the work of Guy Maestri, his painting Lantana (2007) brings together a conversation between these multiple elements, traversing urban, graffiti style layers of paint, detailed studies of flowers, plants and animal bones with scribed Latin plant names upon the surfaces (figure 19). His work explores tensions between; past and present, wild and tamed, native and exotic, rural and urban, dead and alive, exemplifying a true synthesis of the contemporary patchwork that creates present-day Australia. Through interweaving many visual elements Maestri’s works permeate the surface of the country and find a deeper narrative through abstraction and paint.

Throughout this chapter I have presented the ways in which native plants have been visualised throughout Australian history discussing different artistic traditions, modes of representation and the many artists whose work has addressed the field of native plants and/or the landscape of abstraction as a critical basis for my own creative research. Through understanding the place of native plants within the context of Australian visual art it is evident that; firstly, native plants figure predominantly within

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58 McDonald, J., Ildiko Kovacs | Simone Fraser, (Sydney Morning Herald, May 19, 2011).
above: figure 18, Ildiko Kovacs, *Magnolia*, 2008, oil on Plywood, 180x120cm;
figure 19, Guy Maestri, *Lantana*, 2007, oil on board, 160x150cm.
botanical illustration and landscape traditions thereby forming an integrated part of the landscape which has been imaged both
figuratively and abstractly. Secondly, the movement of Aboriginal abstraction has provided an essential way of perceiving plants
as a part of the interconnected, living fabric of life and lastly, many contemporary artists utilise native plants as a metaphor for a
range of issues and to express multi-layered, interconnected stories, ideas and meanings. These core understandings have been
critical to the development of my research to comprehend the systems of representation associated with native plants and the
different ways artists have explored this field in comparison to my own practice and studio based explorations.

My practical research has been inspired by the varied artists discussed throughout this chapter and influenced by the history,
development and contemporary conventions associated with the representation of native plants in the visual arts. This overview
provides a snapshot of artists whose work addresses nature or plant related themes and is not exhaustive. However, my work
specifically focuses on [re]presenting native plants in nonfigurative or unconventional ways through my own language of
abstraction, which I believe has not conclusively been attempted by other Australian artists. In the following chapter I discuss my
studio based research and exploration of native plants, outlining my studio methodology and creative response to native plants in
Australia.
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Chapter 2  *per adua ad astra*

[T]he Casuarina tree plants itself and in turn settles, solidifies and fertilises the soil till it is ripe for a more varied and luxuriant growth; and then, having done its work, dies down before the ruthless encroachment of the myriad denizens of the jungle. 59

* *per adua ad astra* (Latin) — through struggles to the stars.

My studio work evolved to uncover a language of abstraction drawn from the experience and experimentation with native plants. The primary focus for my studio research involved developing a process of drawing and mark-making as source material for the development of larger abstract paintings. Painting became the principal method through which to find my own story, to map my own encounters and visual language in response to native plants, the landscape and its underlying nature. The process of painting ultimately acted as an experimental alchemy and physical, tactile layering between materials, ideas and production.

Through an engagement with line, colour, form, texture and mass, the process of painting enables an artist to think visually.  

In this chapter I outline the methodologies developed throughout my research and translation of native plants into abstract paintings, examining the progression of this research through various stages. Firstly, I outline the process of physical observation where through drawing I collated a body of evidence derived from the observation of native plants and external phenomena. These drawings became extended through the process of repetition where the observable was translated into abstract marks and lines that found new and different associations of meanings. I then describe my broader methodology of painting outlining the idea of a palimpsest | patchwork of interwoven layers of multiple registers into paint and fabric. Lastly, I conclude this chapter discussing the geography and surface of my paintings as an experience | encounter between material and visual thinking.

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PHYSICAL OBSERVATION

At the outset of 2010 my research project was initiated by a road trip across the desert, where I began sketching the contours of different plant species. Through the process of travelling and seeing country, looking at the plants and drawing impulsively and rapidly recorded these traces in my journals. As the research progressed this approach to drawing observable characteristics in the plants and landscape around me established the foundation of physical observation. The many small details of leaf structure, written elements, botanical notes, shapes, plant physiology and language, all details informed my eye and drawing. Artist John Wolseley refers to this process, explaining that in the close observation of the complexities of nature and by truly seeing intricate details in leaves or plants one can ‘become one with the pattern which connects all living things.’61 These drawings were often linear, simplistic and coded with personal narratives or experiences.

These simple drawings based purely on observation were an entry point into the subject of native plants (figures 23 & 24). I wanted to understand the structure, the form and skeletal architectures of plants, to see how they may translate into material for later use. My drawings reflected my own hand style of making marks in response to different sources of imagery and information. I also began to see a pattern of interest emerging in the marks and lines I was making. My eye was drawn to elements of repetition, line, and pattern, to areas of heaviness and lightness and intersections between branches, leaves and vines. The bulk of the physical details observed tended to be on a small, intricate and micro scale, revealing isolated parts of plants that held significance to my

point of interest. The alignment of leaves and geometric patterning of many native plant forms, as well as finding the rhythm between structures, branches, flowers and seeds was an important facet of this process. In the smaller, macro details, there was much to be found, as well as in the overall configuration of branches, leaves and design. The wealth of information derived from native plants that could be observed and recorded to find meaning became endlessly fascinating.

In concurrence with the process of the drawn marks, I also began experimenting with leaves, vines and berries as sources for creating marks and imagery. I experimented through a simple technique of using a hammer and board to pound images out onto cloth, capturing the essence of a leaf, its colour, shape and structure. Through this process I would often gain a clear, precise and perfect representation of a plant species (figures 2, 3 & 21). This process was a tactile way of marking physical characteristics onto a surface, acting as a rough, plant skeleton extracted from the plant oils themselves. This process coupled with drawing translated a wide amount of visual information acting as a codex to decipher elements of native plants. Through both the tactile immersion and physical observation I was able to penetrate and simplify complexities encoded within the broader and often impenetrable landscapes. Likewise, artist Gregory Pryor found in his survey study of Western Australian native plants ‘the best way to come to terms with the landscape is to study the plants carefully.’

My drawings were also mined or extracted from the multiple sources of research material. I would notate and observe the wealth of botanical journals, illustrations, etchings, engravings, maps, fossils and collected native plant specimens, making drawings in

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above: figure 23, Imbi Davidson, *Studies for Country - Spinifex planes & the barkly*, 2010, pen & pencil on paper, 30x40cm;
figure 24, Imbi Davidson, *Studies for Country - Scribing Solander*, 2010, pen on paper, 30x40cm.
response to these sources of visual information (figures 23 & 24). In travelling the pages and records from these sources, often intangible details would be filtered into my drawings, creating non-linear, random free associations between text, graphics, branches, stems, umbels, stamens, classificatory codes and registers. My journals became loaded with a vast range of drawn material sourced from both the external environment and from within decoded pages. This sourcing of visual material was non-prescriptive; an illogical immersion into a way of thinking about a subject, a pathway 'into' the forest, leaf, vein or other visual registers. Through this process of physical observation I was able to take a wide range of visual sources and render them into simplified drawings to develop a foundational visual language that could be reconfigured in later formulations. I describe this method of filtering observable fragments of native plants and the accumulation of drawings as gathering a 'body of evidence' or learning to speak the language of the landscape. The development of this process provided the bedrock of marks, imagery and patterns which could be later translated into other forms of creative possibility.

REPETITION

Building upon this 'body of evidence' derived from the physical observation of plants, I discovered endless variety in the pattern, form and shape of native plants and began evolving my language of marks and vocabulary of line more productively. I saw a pattern and rhythm of similarity both within different species and the material I was drawing. For example, the different branches of various pine species took on familiar patterning while structures of varied flowers and leaves showed familiar whirls, radial axis, patterns and repeated characteristics. My drawings centred on reinterpretation through line, dots, asymmetry, traces, imperfections,
veins and text. Extending upon the initially observed material, through a process of intuitive, internal reflection my drawings acted as a point of translation between the outer and inner, finding the essential patterns of repetition within. In reproducing and repeating various marks the lines between recognition, order and control became untethered. Further, through the obsessive repetition of lines and marks, my drawings continued further into paths of disorder and undoing, ultimately becoming abstracted.

In *Difference and Repetition* (1994) Gilles Deleuze speaks of the complexity of repetition and its multiple registers within the human experience, suggesting repetition opens a space of *in-betweeness* where 'the mind that contemplates in its multiple, fragmented states, is to draw something new from repetition, to draw difference from it.'63 Finding difference and new space within the repeated form, line or drawing, delineates new territories and opportunities to explore. My drawings engendered a reinterpretation into unfixed clusters, patterns and compulsive, irrational lines. I explored the use of repeated line in both vertical and horizontal configurations, using alternations of tone, depth, weight and colouration and often repeating the simplicity of the line in a multitude of ways.

*If we are lost without repetition, we are also lost to it, and in thrall to it. At the very ground of consciousness, repetition cuts both ways, both shoring up and shattering its fragile and precious hold. It is a means of organising the world; it is a means of disordering and undoing. It can be utopian and dystopian.*64

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The repeated line, as Briony Fer discusses in *The Infinite Line* (2005) became both dystopian and utopian, a way of organising my mind into associations, recording those as drawings and marks as a reference for future reinterpretation. I became obsessed by line, its psychology, anatomy, ability and function within my studio work and as the underlying structure of plants, life and being (figures 25-27 & 35). These repeated lines took on a life and meaning of their own and became an unconscious response to everything, representing grasses on the Barkly Tablelands, flood ravaged detritus, daggers, widow-makers, deathly silences, concrete, scribbled marks on Eucalypt trunks, vistas, landscapes, pain, mountains, branches and flowers in bloom. These repetitions plagued me and followed my feet around the world acting as prints of latitude and longitude, lines of connection and disparate strings of the stretched heart. The line repeated became an abstract record of my research.

*mutant line of this kind that is without outside or inside, form or background, beginning or end and that is as alive as a continuous variation—such a line is truly an abstract line....* 

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The distorted line repeated over and again became abstract and transformative, unfolding strange new associations of meaning and difference. In my drawings, lines of trees, branches and stems developed into distorted scars, scratches and bones, reduced forms and the simplest structures. Artist Robert Smithson describes abstraction as the ‘reduced order of nature; a representation of nature devoid of realism, based on mental or conceptual reduction.’66 The reduction of nature and synthesis of marks into repeated lines further extended the underlying foundation of my research goal to find a language between native plants and abstraction. Through

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repetition of natural forms and the intangible reduction of plants into a workable language of marks I was able to find a truly abstract form of visual response.

My abstract drawings created a productive field in which to cultivate multiple, complex disjunctions and find new patterns or indeterminate readings of nature and plants. Through my mark making I was able to repetitively find this alive, continuous variety of abstract line and define new trajectories or what Deleuze terms ‘becomings’. The transition from drawing into painting was logically an extended form of defining the repeated line, continuing the difference and response into new encounters of materials, mediums, colours and textures in paint. In the studio I embarked upon the translation of drawings and source material into multiple studies in paint which comprised obscure and mismatched configurations of line and colours concurrently embedding and estranging recognisable plant or nature inspired material into a background of layers (figures 25-27). In many of these experimental studies there remained an obvious link to observed phenomenon, however, original forms completely disappeared becoming abstracted and disconnected whilst remaining a part or essence of the overall structure. Through the asymmetrical space of abstraction I allowed myself freedom to play with unlikely linkages, lines and forms without restraint and produced multiple series of works on paper focusing on the repeated line and its application into abstraction. These loose, fluid works allowed me to bring together my studies of plants and nature coupled with a deeper engagement with my own personal narrative and history.
PALIMPSEST | PATCHWORK

A palimpsest is defined as: ‘a manuscript or piece of writing material on which later writing has been superimposed on effaced earlier writing’ or ‘something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form.’ In the applied development of my studio work, my paintings became a living palimpsest, a record between layers of paint, marks and material, ghosts of previous records, erased and re-worked. The notion of palimpsest describes the system of building, destruction and [re]construction of surfaces within my paintings and also the stitching together of layers of marks, words, language and abstraction. Palimpsest outlines the systematic blunting and sharpening of painterly layers which linked the multiple, interconnected threads of my research together.

An amorphous collection of juxtaposed pieces that can be joined together in an infinite number of ways...

Deleuze and Guattari describe patchwork as ‘collections of juxtaposed pieces’ conjoined together in endless forms. In the creation of my paintings the layers or collection of random pieces of colour, mass and form shaped the base structure and original outline of each work. The entry point to painting lay in colonising the empty picture plane with liquid responses to build upon and rework through a process of stratified layering. I began by fleshing out large sections of paint, often random, disassociated and patchy, using alternations of thick, opaque acrylic paint glossed over with heavier enamels and washed with layers of natural dye or stains. Through scratching or erasing denser areas, I would reload again and build more layers of paint and surface texture to reinhabit at

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67 oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/palimpsest?q=palimpsest
69 Ibid.
later intervals. Whilst adding layers, I would often erase and delete sections within the paintings, covering and concealing unresolved spaces. These base layers were the exploring ground and determining soil upon which many layers unfolded. It was a way of constructing the preliminary painting surface, breaking down and recreating a landscape upon which to embed further details, scratches and marks. This point of contact defined the understorey, the fabric and bones of my paintings establishing the space and site for further intervention.

The building and formation of these intermediary layers was a crucial component of my paintings and key element of my work. The concept of a dynamic palimpsest re-utilised previously inscribed spaces and reworked fresh layers connected to the old and yet re-imagined in the new. Of importance to this unfolding palimpsest was the idea of reworking over old layers of paint, building upon old stories and finding the history resonant in the structure of surfaces. Inspired by layers of paint, graffiti, cover-ups, patch-ups and retagged sites within the urban landscape I sought to embed these reflections within the living palimpsest and growing abstract planes of my paintings.

Textual language, graffiti, asemic writing and symbols associated with botany also formed part of the development of the stratified surfaces of my paintings (figures 29-32). I utilised my drawings and language of marks, in conjunction with text, words and calligraphic information as a reference in the continual building and construction of my paintings. Moreover, the root meanings of many plant names have their sources in classical mythology and ancient places, serving as a system of recognition that links plants, people, cultures, language, time, space and stories into a string of multiple interconnected associations. The etymology or meaning of
plant names became another scrap within the living patchwork of my paintings. Through playing with levels of transparency, thickness and heaviness in paint in conjunction with these multiple sources of visual material my paintings continued as sites of construction, erasure, and re-colonisation. This process of shaping an evolving palimpsest brought together the diverse branches of my research into experimental layers of paint and provided a means to outlay a bunch of connected ideas and intangibles into sites of further possibility.

These collections, pieces and fragments were reflective of each element within my research. The paintings as a focal point became living pieces of layers whilst my tactile explorations with fabric and textiles also assumed this multiple, amorphous puzzle-piece-like quality. The many fragments I had created similarly carried the trace or marks of my research into native plants. Through dyeing, smashing, stitching and re-layering surfaces, these experiments with textiles mirrored the living, evolving surfaces inherent within my paintings. The stratified layers could also be interpreted as patches, stitched together into new configurations and constructions. Each patch also held the story of its own creation. For example, Dog Blanket I – Darwin (2012) fuses together a recycled Qantas blanket from Darwin with a Dog Blanket procured from NSW and dyed with leaves from my hometown in South Australia (figure 33). Like my paintings, each piece of fabric held the fibre of colour, recording the warp and weft of line and structural threads of marks, stains and layers. Parallel to the evolution of my paintings as a living palimpsest, my textile works progressed into a living patchwork, seamlessly threading together the additional products of my research into their own sites of infinite possibilities. These story-blankets are an adjunct to my painting practice reflecting the same essential nature and signature response inherent within my work.
above: figure 33, Imbi Davidson, *Dog Blanket 1 - Darwin*, natural dye on recycled woollen blanket, 120x180cm, 2012; figure 34, Imbi Davidson, *Candle Nut, Eucalyptus & Black Rust blanket*, natural dyes, velvet & canvas on recycled woollen blanket, 120x180cm, 2012.
EXPERIENCE | ENCOUNTER

Painting is an unspoken and largely uncognised dialogue, where paint speaks silently in masses and colours and the artist responds in moods...

I have described the processes of drawing, mark making, patch-working and transition into painting as developmental stages in my studio work. In building the surface quality and establishing the foundations of my paintings, the evolving palimpsest created an experimental in-road into further engagement and encounter between materials, paint, subject, ideas, fabric, stories or moments. Through a more rendered experience with painting, the shifting [dis]order between layers of paint progressed into a more refined language of abstraction in continuum with the previously recorded layers and memories. Through the encounter of paint as a physical process I was able to further extend my own developing language or landscape of abstraction and interweave more specifically the multiple juxtaposed pieces of my research.

The process of painting fused together incompatible collisions between source material, drawings, symbols, sensations, impressions, emotion, marks, scratches, words and tensions between the horizontal and vertical plane. In the studio my works interwove disjunctions between the varied threads and visual fragments from within the trope of my research. Jean Michel Basquiat said of his painting process, 'I get my facts from books, stuff on atomisers, the blues, ethyl alcohol, geese in the Egyptian style ... I put what I like from them in my paintings.' In a similar yet different way, I put into my paintings what I liked sourced from my drawings,

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71 Armand, L. Jean-Michel Basquiat and the art of dis(empowerment), (Transcript, Monash University, Comparative Studies Research Seminars, 2000).
marks, feelings, books, everything; 'that's what I paint - whole lot' suggests Emily Kngwarreye. In some ways this process is relative to the perception of an interconnected reality, where all things are inextricably connected and form part of the whole. My encounter with painting became a rendering of my own world and imaging of external and internal registers materialised through layers of amorphous, unstructured paint. I would paint lines, clouds and shapes. These would then be transformed into forms of branch-like trees (figures 25-28) and or sewn into patches. In the frenzy of my studio work I would incorporate leaves, scribbles and saturations of heavy bitumen. My work explored this transformative capacity, each work acting as an alchemical furnace where many elements were physically thrown into fire in order to create something new or altered. James Elkins describes the studio as a 'kind of psychosis - where the act of painting is a type of insanity', where rational constructs are thrown out the window and raw material is given its own voice to speak its own language. In this frenzied and suspended state, representational thought disappeared. Painter Peter Adsett suggests 'the very act itself of painting is not trying to represent the idea but to become the idea'.

*it was not a matter of representing nature, but of representing those sensations of exultation which nature commonly elicits...*

Artist Agnes Martin extends this concept as the 'sensations of exultation' rather than the [re]interpretation of nature in painting, it is the process where paint itself becomes a sensation, experience or encounter. Deleuze and Guattari suggest 'art is the language of

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76 Ibid.
sensations\textsuperscript{77} where what is experienced becomes transcribed onto a painted surface. In this way, sensation refers to the internal response of artists to make sense of the world which is reflected without. It is the realm of feeling and impression as opposed to logic and representation. As Adsett and Martin imply, the act of painting as sensation refers to the embodiment of ideas, thoughts and reactions as a methodological response. This understanding of representing the sensation and experience was important to my aim of trying to penetrate beyond [re]presentation of nature to find abstract ways to convey my interaction with native plants, landscape and the shifting boundaries that influenced my work. By suspending any form or code of representation other than sensation, I allowed my painting to undo, rewrite and pull apart the subject matter. The action and encounter of painting, the actual physical interface between thought and idea, where brush meets surface, created its own syntax and synthesis of responses. The dynamic sensation of painting created its own language, its own rules; untethered, incomplete and irrational. Similarly, in the process of dyeing fabrics with plants, the plant itself was able to infuse itself in its own way without my intervention, allowing for its own form, colour, shape and physicality to be embedded within the structure of the fibre.

The process of developing my paintings therefore was intuitive and active in its capacity to free-range between the instinctive and observational as played out through textural qualities of paint. Simon O’Sullivan discusses the concept of art as an encounter or meeting place between ‘a specific artist-subjectivity and particular materials\textsuperscript{78} that collide in the moment of production to become ultimate fields or sites of transformation.

My work explored this transformative site as a location for exploring paint as a substance and encounter with the world reflected in thickness, viscosity, density, volume and weight. Areas or patches of colour became fused with tangled arrays of line, overlaid with cloud-like shapes and interwoven between patterns of light and dark. In the cauldron each piece of fabric fused its own saturations and topography. Like a rudderless ship roaming at sea, my work was not mapped or chartered, but acted as a very real process of mapping new territories, finding new paths and as O’Sullivan writes, involved real transformation. My work did not read or comply with any form of traditional rendering of native plants. Often I wanted to grasp at recognisable motifs or embed plant-like imagery, yet, in the alchemical furnace of transformation these were often obliterated, erased or reworked into something different. Quite often the collision between the internal or subconscious and external or conscious would create tension within my paintings. It is as if my paintings became a site to solve the riddle of abstraction, a place to puzzle out a language of native plants within the ever-changing realms between space and time.

Through exploring my practical methodology in this chapter, I have outlined the connected steps between the physically observable material and the repeated marks into layers of paint as a basis for finding an abstract response to native plants. By experimenting with the key processes of drawing and mark-making my studio work became a site of experiential encounter between abstraction and paint; patching together multiple layers and disconnected elements with a focus on the inherent nature and experience of native

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plants. This chapter has elucidated the actualisation of my practical work from its inception as a simple idea or concept of a plant, flower or stem and followed the threads of my process as an artist transforming those seeds into something more complex, abstract and divergent. In the synthesis between the various methodological processes I have outlined throughout this chapter I found a valid and personal formula for creatively engaging with native plants. In the next chapter I critically examine my studio works and critique the major works to be exhibited as the culminating point of my research, discussing the important shifting locations and inherent story embedded within my work.
Chapter 3 convergence

Follow the plants: you start by delimiting a first line consisting of circles of convergence around successive singularities; then you see whether inside that line new circles of convergence establish themselves, with new points located outside the limits and in other directions.80

In this chapter I critically discuss the collective suite of works produced as a product of my research. I examine the ways my work evolved and materialised throughout the duration of my research unravelling the story of production and meaning implicit within key works detailing my response to native plants and developing language of abstraction. I explain how my studio practice shifted in response to the change of physical location in which I was situated and the significance of these changes to the overall development of my studio work. I discuss my paintings as the critical component of my research and an important point of convergence between multiple, fragmented and shifting elements.

The overall development of my work encompassed a wide range of reference materials and the bringing together of many intangibles to form a series of interconnected works. The subject of native plants acted as a guide to understanding plants, nature and botany, yet at the interface, my paintings became indeterminate responses within the form of abstraction derived from a close relationship and connection to native plants and the landscape. Throughout this chapter I place my work between the locations of north and south discussing the changes of format, colour and style my work underwent and also relate how my understanding of plants, land and abstraction were significantly affected and found trajectory within the movement of my research. The works presented in this chapter evaluate the application of my research and the embodiment of my own approach to the field of native plants within the terrains of abstraction.

*the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight.*

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Deleuze and Guattari write of the rhizome which ‘actively creates the terrain it maps.'\textsuperscript{82} My paintings became active sites of engagement between multiple internal and external registers, a creative map of the country I travelled, traced, lived and documented over the course of my research. Throughout my research, my paintings became like rhizomes – a series of connected works, constructed and produced through a variety of sources and modified through layers of experience. My paintings became maps charting the movements between plants, landscape, the unknown in ways that do not comply with conventional understandings of the landscape and natural world. The suite of works included an abundance of phenomena, interconnections and networks of associations related to plants, nature and land that renegotiate conventions and traditional forms of representation usually related to these subjects. My paintings grew to be an intangible atlas mapping my relationship to native plants and experiences within the Australian landscape whilst also reflecting an inner, instinctual connection to country.

**NORTH**

My research began in the Northern Territory with a focus on the native plants, patterns and extremes of seasons embedded within the landscape. The north represented the foundation and background, acting as the core site of origin and departure underpinning my research. In the twelve years I lived across the Top End, I developed a relationship to the environment which shaped my perception and understanding of ‘country’ as an interrelated matrix of plants, history, stories, and people. The north became the experimental ground for beginning my work and the preliminary foundation for my studio practice. The familiarity of the native

plants endemic to the Top End, my observation and relationship with different species was quintessential to the initial phases of experimentation coupled with my existing creative painting practice.

The first series of large works I completed as part of my studio work were landscape, freestyle, un-stretched canvasses of bitumen, oil and enamel, developed in conjunction with work I had begun prior to the commencement of my research project. These works were included in the exhibition *The Lost City* (2011) at the Chan Contemporary Art Space in Darwin exploring the theme of abstraction, history, country and the complex relationships inherent within the social landscape of the Northern Territory. The works *Mt. Isa Magnolia* (2010) and *aster-aceae: stop you muthafucka* (2010) exemplify both the landscape style of abstraction and orientation of the canvas and the beginning of my inclusion of botanical marks, stains and residues within the construct of my paintings (figures 38 & 39). These works were important as a starting point through which to enter the landscape linked to my previous work and exemplify the beginning point of my research with native plants and developing vocabulary of nature-plant marks and botanically inspired works.

However, as I continued to research and experiment with native plants my established practice was altered. I felt unsure how to integrate or apply new systems of knowledge into a cohesive practice or body of work and felt limited by the conventions of landscape that had embodied my prior work. My studio work shifted to be a zone of transition, where I experimented with multiple source materials and techniques, drawing, mark-making resulting in a temporary departure from painting as the principal source of making imagery. In this intermediary space between the past style of making work and a new, different approach to the
more specific research I sought to find a new way or approach to understanding the overarching theme of native plants within the field of abstraction. My creative research led to the production of a vast number of textile and botanical prints on fabric, multiple series of works on paper and a vast wealth of observational drawings accumulated in my journals. This experimentation was a ‘way in’ and precursor to the larger, more developed works. The works on paper became a sophisticated group of paintings which contributed greatly to the development of larger paintings and presented the raw, unrefined, experimental interface of my studio research. *Studies for Country: Remembering the Long Grass, Arnhem Land* (2010) and *Studies for Country: Blood and Flowers, Terania Creek* (2011) exemplify the puzzling out of a new type of visual response in my work and the experimentation I engaged with as a basis for my research (figures 25-28).

Finding currency again with paint, I created a series of upright panels, shifting the format from landscape to vertical and fleshed out an amalgamation of paint, dyes, stains and cloud bursts of thought onto newly primed surfaces. Prior to this my works had been sombre, dark and melancholy, ebbing between striated shadows of black, white, brown and grey (figures 38 & 39). However, these upright panels incorporated new tonal ranges of blues, purples, pinks and greens and slipped away from the parameters of landscape, dissolving the horizon line and blurring the point of entry into clusters of colour and gestural marks (figures 41 & 42). The vertical format created a new relationship between the branches of my research and the continued reconfiguration of my understanding of landscape. In the series of smaller, vertical paintings *Darwin Panels* (2010-11) there is a connection to plant-like, text based imagery interconnected within a melange of painted layers, hectic lines of varied colours (figure 40). These works brought together a mixture of marks and references situated within the rough, interleaved painted layers
above: figure 38, Imbi Davidson, *Mt. Isa Magnolia*, 2010, oil, enamel, acrylic & natural dye on recycled canvas, 150x120 cm.
above: figure 39, Limbi Davidson, *aster-aceae (stop you mutafucka)*, 2010, oil, enamel, acrylic & natural dye on recycled canvas, 150x120 cm.
and personify my goal to try and interweave the many threads of my research into a state of cohesion in painting. Yet these works, created in Darwin exemplify the messy and awkward state of flux my work entered into as I continued to experiment and produce work.

The focus for my research centred upon unfolding the surface layers of these vertical panels as a dynamic background for moving into new circles of [re]presentation. They also provided the initial ‘story’ or ‘map’ responsive to the milieu of the north. I began work on a series of twelve large panels interpreting the works on paper, fabric and smaller studies as a base layer for further intervention. Illustrated in paintings P flower (2010-11) and Blueblood (2010) these works revealed a freedom from landscape and renewed sense of colour sourced from my imaginings and observations of native plants and flowers, coupled with a developing way of working with abstracted form through layers of paint, the shifting inscriptions of marks, text and radial, multi-axial configurations of elements (figures 41 & 42). The initial layers inscribed upon these works is representative of my the studio work developed whilst based in the Northern Territory, stitching together the interwoven interstices between experience, country, plants and the stories embedded within and without.

SOUTH

Halfway through my research project, my family relocated to northern New South Wales. Like transplanting a tree, I felt my root structures; the rhizome of interconnectivity had been severed. All that was familiar ceased. This new country seemed impenetrable, depressing, whitewashed, full of weeds, incessant green, with only vague hints of ancient foot prints hidden
masterfully amongst the vines and tangles of thick scrub. Beyond that, new colours, terrains, mountains and species conjoined with new faces, ghosts and green pastures which all rolled before me as an unfamiliar environment.

"The emotionally displaced subject exhibits a displaced creativity..."^83

In relocating, I realised my experiences of the Top End defined my way of mapping the landscape and native plants. I searched for similarities and lines of connection to stitch together the shifting localities of my research. I entered into a site of displacement - a dystopian collapse into unchartered waters. My research again had to reinvent itself, find new ways into the map, to puzzle new entries into this seemingly impossible new landscape. In this place of disconnection I struggled to reorient and direct my research to bring into view these new fore-grounded layers of information and experience. Nothing made sense, nothing was similar. The challenge of moving, shifting my practice and yet again finding connections between past, present and creating something new was both exhausting and infuriating. My work irrevocably shifted, exhibiting what Paul Carter describes as a displaced creativity. This shift had major implications for the development of my studio practice and reconfiguration of key works.

In this state of rupture I began to slowly continue working, reinhabiting my paintings in the attempt to utilise the experience of physical displacement and disjunction as a constructive point for mapping what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as new terrains, new becomings and world’s in-progress in my paintings. Further, their suggestion to ‘always follow the rhizome by rupture”^84 reflects

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opposite page: figure 40, Imbi Davidson, *Darwin Panels*, 2010-11, oil, enamel, acrylic & natural dye on board, each 45x60cm.

above: figure 41, Imbi Davidson, *P flower*, 2010, oil, enamel, acrylic & natural dye on board, 150x120cm;
the space in which I found myself; having to rebuild to a place where something new and varied could be mapped out. Andrea Ash suggests ‘it is a cut-and-paste art practice that disrupts and dislocates art objects and/or events to function as an alternative to authoritarian or conventional representations’\(^{85}\), and further, she discusses the dispersion and disjuncture within contemporary art practice as providing the means to ‘select, reinterpret, transform and negotiate’\(^{86}\) art practice.

*Always follow the rhizome by rupture; lengthen, prolong, and relay the line of flight; make it vary, until you have produced the most abstract and tortuous of lines...*\(^{87}\)

I [re]invaded my research and practice from within this new location, reinterpreting lines of connection between north and south, past and present. I started to [re]present these new, unchartered forests and largely impenetrable mazes, finding new entrances and doorways ‘into’ the destabilised spaces and began to translate my experiences through experiments with encounters of colour, pattern and line. I produced a series of studies on vertical boards that highlight the shifting boundaries and state of transformation my works were undergoing. I fleshed out an abundance of rapid, intuitive and layered responses creating over thirty boards as preliminary studies for breaking through into the unfamiliar territory of New South Wales. Placed together, *Studies for Country – Angry Painting I* (2011) and *Studies for Country – Angry Painting II* (2011) illustrate these studies and my adoption of change into new, harsh colours, slashes of red and bright intense abstractions movable between layers of opacity and transparency in thick, rapid and messy masses of paint (figures 43 & 50). These studies, or ‘angry paintings’ opened an emotional reaction against the rigours of relocating and sense of

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\(^{86}\) Ibid.

\(^{87}\) Deleuze, G & Guattari, F. *A Thousand Plateaus – Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* (1980): 12
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above: figure 45, Imbi Davidson, *Studies for Country – Angry Painting I*, 2011, oil on board, each 30x60cm.
above: figures 44-45, Imbi Davidson, *Antíreen 1 & II*, 2010-11, oil, acrylic, enamel & natural dyes on canvas, 80x80cm.
displacement and gave me the freedom to explore without restriction in an honest, reactive and responsive way. These works became like samples in an overall patchwork, unfinished and unaccomplished individually, yet came together as a unit of disjointed, juxtaposed fragments. These studies also provided the means to experiment with unfamiliar layers of line and colour as a precursor to engaging with and creating larger paintings.

Puzzling out this new topography affected a new engagement and response within my own practice. The larger suite of works I had originally begun in Darwin extended into new layers of inscription, marks and colours overlaid with multiple coats of cover-ups erasing previous material. The diptych, *Antifthnûn* (2010-11) began as a work in progress in Darwin and demonstrates this [re]invasion and continuation of my paintings in the flux of shifting borders and exemplifies the [re]orientation of my work as it incorporated new layers and reworked surfaces (figures 44 & 45). The larger panels also continued along these lines of building and re-working the surfaces, exploring new ranges of colour and a widened range of registers or marks sourced from within a new environment. Like Maestri’s painting *Lantana* (figure 19) these works encompassed a complexity of entwined ‘stories’ inherent in their structure and layers alluding to multiple dialogues between different localities, past and present referencing the story of the land as it pulsed from within the country.

RESOLUTION | REBELLION

In the merging of my work between the localities of north and south, the convergence between the many varied points of my research opened multiple creative possibilities rather than what I had considered sites of struggle and tension with negative or
limiting associations. Utilising the element of displacement as a part of my practice became a key element within the overall qualities of my paintings. Through the journey of my research, I found the unstable elements contributed to a valuable place of experimentation which was crucial to developing a mode of abstraction truthful to my own experience of nature and ways of making work. Throughout the period of my research, my collection of works became complex sites of rebellion against certainty, finality or explicit codes of representation. Each painting embodied binaries between resistance and surrender, ideas and ambiguity, convergence and divergence, creation and destruction - as active principles in the mapping of new terrains.

*Each work then presents a micro-universe (or a micrologie).*

As sites of transference, the larger panels held the presence of my movement through physical and emotional spaces, recording all in the ever-changing layers, matrix and evolving story of my work, and ultimately reflecting my life. Each painting became a universe in itself; a love story, a tree, a star, a flower, a leaf, a secret message, unspeakable truth, emotion, obsession, silence and destruction. The discordant branches both connected and disconnected simultaneously. The stratified layers of paint engendered a battleground between line, colour, form, texture, layers and thought, harnessing the residual effects of battle; bloodstained boards capturing the multiplicity of moments, drawn into its own surface. Through the interplay between these narratives my works collectively depict the detritus of battle; they are incomplete works in progress, intermediary sites of significance along the road - a frame in which to convey my 'disjunctive synthesis' of native plants, paint and abstraction. Each work presents a picture of my journey and tells the story of its creation through layers of paint that can be understood in a multiplicity of ways.

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above: figure 46, Imbi Davidson, *In the Ghost Light*, 2010-11, oil, acrylic, enamel, pencil & natural dyes on board, 80x120cm; figure 47, Imbi Davidson, *Bone, Axil & Umbel*, 2010-11, oil, acrylic, enamel, pencil & natural dyes on board, 80x120cm;
These larger works amorphously enabled a freedom between the latitudes and longitudes of line and paint, fighting amidst the vertical and horizontal planes of each board. Exemplified by the works, *In the Ghost Light* (2010-12), *Bone, Axil & Umbel* (2010-12) and *Skeletons of the Forest* (2010-11), these paintings began in Darwin with layers of natural dyes, patches of blue and white paint. On arrival in the valley of Terania Creek I built upon those surfaces with vertical white lines and through a constant push and pull between transparency and opacity of line intermeshed between patches of overlaid paint and worked to a point of stasis (figures 46-48). Worked over with added scratches and line these works reflect the ongoing interaction with the forests of the Nightcap National Park and vaguely address bones buried in the ground and hidden layers implicit in the understoreys of the natural landscape. The bleeding marks and drips exemplify the concept of my paintings as battlefields between paint, emotion and thought. In the work *Skeletons of the Forest* for example, the white represents my perception of the ‘whitewashing’ implicit within the southern landscape, the bleeding of the heart and whiteness of purity, light and becoming, and also references the flooded gum, a white Eucalyptus tree on the slopes of the forest.

Similarly, *In the Paths of the Widow Makers* (2010-11) references the Eucalypt tree that drops its spear-like branches or ‘widow-makers’ like deathly daggers upon the ground. Painted over these lines are fluid, meandering lines which are derived from the Scribbly Gum which is like a nature derived form of living graffiti specific to a particular species of native Eucalypt and also portrays an aerial like spatial view of a winding river, coursing its way across a linear terrain and embedded within the scar-like slashes of line in the lower layers within this painting. This work engages with stories and elements that saturated my environment and the concurrent covering up of multiple layers of past explorations begun in Darwin and continued over the
changing course of my studio work (figure 49). These works typify the intrinsic layering and wealth of complex, interrelated meanings inherent within this series of paintings.

She could never bring herself to trim them to any pattern; so she shifted and fitted and mused and fitted and shifted them like pieces of a patient puzzle-picture...  

In addition to these larger works on board produced as the focal point of my research it became apparent that the wider collection of studies undertaken on smaller boards, fabric and paper had become an essential component or trace of the process of my journey. I could not disregard the importance of these elements within the wider presentation of my work nor could I rely solely on the larger painted boards as supports for the totality of the research I had undertaken. This meant mapping out a way to physically configure the many pieces and studies together and, like the larger paintings, find a unity between the many separate layers and cohesion within the overall story or pattern of my work. To resolve this point I strived to find a method of bringing these studies of colour, threads and forms together. I looked at the many boards and saw them as puzzle pieces within a broader patchwork of my own design. I played with different configurations and finally brought the varied pieces together into a collection of larger panels. The works *Studies for Country – Angry Painting I & II* and *Studies for Country – Light Painting*, exemplify the individual panels or studies reframed into a patchwork of disjointed, yet connected paintings (figures 43, 50 & 51). Like pieces of a puzzle, the repetition of colour and marks inherent within each individual panel unites the whole, creating

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landscapes within landscapes, stories within stories. Here, in these works, it is as if each panel supports an aspect of the story which unfolded as I responded to the different environments and changing worlds, pieced together to create a disjunctive landscape of entwined memories. The work *Studies for Country – Light Painting* (2010-12) shows also a further intervention of white marks and tracks over-painted onto the surface pieces of boards (figure 51). This work in particular unravels the process which became familiar, where the initial painted surfaces became reconfigured into a new form, providing broader layers and stories upon which to intervene or mark upon. The final white lines act therefore, as a final track or latitude crossing the story upon which I had previously sung.

This patch-working style of arranging smaller studies into larger works became a stitching together of fragments from all forms of my research ultimately forming crucial part of my studio methodology. Extended into the many naturally dyed pieces of cloth and fabric, these became similarly embedded and stitched together into larger fabric pieces or story blankets. Linked to the process of painting, these blanket paintings mirrored the marks I was making in paint, echoing the same layering and development of ideas, analysis and synthesis of each branch of my research. As seen in the blanket pieces, *Dog Blanket I – Darwin, Candle Nut, Eucalyptus & Black Rust blanket, Grandfather Blanket* and *Landscape, Eclipse & Lotus Blanket*, each work features embroidered sections of hand-stitched marks, pieces patched together to fit into more complex works with details of colour, pattern and textures derived from native plants (figures 33, 34, 52 & 53). Each segment built upon layers and sewed over with a myriad plant stains, found cloth, patches and larger areas of varied textures. These works examine a similar play between density and form, shape and marks, colour and composition as within my paintings.
Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome of interconnectivity which links together disjunctive sites or threads is relative here to the process that unfolded within both the painting and textile elements of my work. Each disconnected element created between north and south was re-woven, re-stitched and re-threaded to become a resolved work. Through their own pathways both the patch-work paintings and story blankets became integrated into new, activated sites of creativity built upon previous layers of memory inherent within the supporting structure of each work.

*Follow the plants…* as Deleuze alludes to, my research began by delimiting lines or circles of convergence around the broader theme or field of native plants, nature and aesthetics. My aim was to explore those circles and grow or extend these established lines, finding paths within abstraction, painting and textiles to delineate new directions, discoveries and trajectories in the progression of a series of developed artworks. This chapter articulates the story behind the collection of works presented as part of my thesis, provides a conceptual understanding and critical analysis of key works produced throughout my research candidature. Throughout this chapter I have unraveled the convergent themes within my work as it travelled and how through a patch-working or puzzling of its threads into new configurations it found some foundation of resolution. The concluding chapter of this exegesis will further discuss the wider significance of my research objectives, reflect upon the importance of my research findings and discuss the implications of my research within the field of contemporary art practice.
paint the casuarina tree

abstract

plants repetition botanical

investigate taxonomic colour mimics

detail patches plants

press pins language classify

blankets canvases collections
Conclusion *in vivo veritus*

Of the Casuarina tree they say that if you take in a boat with you a piece of it, be it ever so small, contrary winds will arise to impede your journey or storms to imperil your life.

They say also that if you stand in its shadow by the light of the full moon you will hear, whispered mysteriously in its dark rummage, the secrets of the future.

* in vivo veritus (Latin) – in a living thing there is truth.

The Tahitians claim the Casuarina tree sprang from the bodies of warriors, with the red sap representing their blood and the pine needle-like branches their hair.91

Through this research I have sought to embrace the world of native plants, not merely as observable phenomena rendered two-dimensionally, rather, I have aimed to represent my relationship to native plants as an abstract and multi-layered experience searching for a deeper, essentialist dialogue within my creative practice. Gilles Deleuze suggests art is ‘specifically not to do with the manipulation of already existing signs or codes but precisely in accessing that wildness which is always already underneath these systems.’92 My research has inhabited this underneath space mapping out open ended, experimental pathways related to native plants; a cartography of wild connections and potentialities. Deleuze writes, ‘the map expresses the identity of the journey and what one journeys through. It merges with its object, when the object itself is in movement.’93 In this concluding chapter, I reiterate my chief research aims and outline the key findings relative to the movement and journey of my research.

The broad aim of this research has been to abstractly examine the world of Australian native plants. The specific core objectives have been to undertake a detailed literature review of the conventions, history and contemporary visual culture pertaining to the representation of native plants and chiefly to find a viable practical methodology within my studio practice to create an experimental body of creative research exploring native plants through abstraction. The interweaving between the theoretical and practical components of my research has provided a rich foundation to the tapestry of my work and the conceptual underpinnings.

91 Elevitch, C. & Whistler, W. *Casuarina equisetifolia (beach she-oak)*, (Species Profiles for Pacific Island Agro-forestry Ver. 2.1, April, 2006): 6.
of my research. The many elements of my research have been stitched together to create a patchwork of interconnected threads, stories, ideas and associations.

The main theoretical objectives for this research have been to carry out a detailed literature review examining the conventions of native plants and abstraction from multiple perspectives, draw upon the history of visual culture in Australia to discover artists, artworks and relevant exhibitions to develop an understanding of the significance of native plants and abstraction within the field of Australian art. My theoretical research has explored perceptions of landscape, culture, nature, plants and different modes of visual representation and found resonance with abstract concepts of aesthetics expounded by theorists Deleuze and Guattari. In reviewing the historical and botanical representation I found native plants to have a central place in the formation of a national identity and culture, that plants have been fundamental to the visual arts in Australia and form an ongoing place of importance in the dialogue between multi-disciplinary, collaborative and creative practices. However, I further found there is a prevalence of scientific, realistic, and figurative or landscape based images of native plants within Australian art which largely dominate the culture of representation familiar to native plants. My research found that abstraction in Australia somewhat decentralised these familial traditions and conventions and yet also remained informed by the intricacies of the landscape. Similarly, I found the movement of Aboriginal abstraction to have shifted the parameters of landscape and influenced the ways in which abstract artists, including myself, respond and engage with the land and its plants.

My research with native plants and objective of discerning a viable pathway of abstract response to the plants has engendered a creative, alternative encounter that has been informed by both European and Indigenous forms of representation and yet rebels
against both simultaneously. My work has defined a new relationship or connection to the soil rather than simply relying on pure observation or imaging of the landscape. My form of abstraction has been driven by a compulsion to penetrate deeply the soul or presence of, not simply native plants, but the entire fabric that supports, grows and encompasses the living essence of native plants as symbols of this wide, complex, scarred and shared country that is Australia. My work differs from other artists whose work explores this field, for example John Wolseley, Fiona Hall and Guy Maestri and differs from other abstract painters such as John Olsen and Tony Tuckson. The contemporary theories outlined by Deleuze & Guattari and discussed throughout this exegesis have been critical to my research in providing a conceptual basis for the unconventional and irregular pathways my work has defined. Through developing an understanding of their ideas about the rhizomatic structures of thinking and connection which map whole new possibilities of creative practice, my research has defined its own terrains and an abstract aesthetic connected to Australian native plants. What has emerged for me, is a breaking away from traditional concepts of nature and native plants into a new vision of possibility.

The primary objectives for the practical components of my research have been to discern a viable methodology within my studio practice to explore the characteristics and inherent pattern of native plants to find a language of abstraction in the development of a collection of new works. Further my goal has been to experiment with a broad range of techniques and tactile processes to find deeper layers of meaning and response in my translation of native plants. Throughout the duration of my research, painting emerged as the central method for creating work and as a convergent site through which all branches of my research came together. The development of my studio methodology through the tactile processes of physical observation and repetition and
subsequent reworking of layers into a living palimpsest or patchwork experience of painting provided the means through which my research could evolve and take form. I found my studio methods at times to be unstable, unclear and disjunctive and yet, each stage of development became clearer and more-defined as my work progressed. Within shifting localities and boundaries, my work adapted to find its own integrity and way to synthesise the core aims and objectives of my research. I found key processes that were essential to unravelling an experimental visual language of marks, lines, colours, patterns, forms and structures sourced from an essentialist reading of native plants.

My aim to establish non-representational, irregular and emotive responses through abstraction in my studio work became focused on painting. After experimenting with a wide range of materials, textiles, paper and cloth, the immediacy and capacity of painting to augment my mark-making and language of abstraction was critical. Paint, as a transformative encounter between subject and material and as a constantly shifting medium capable of rebellion and renewal, enabled a freedom within my studio work to explore disjointed networks of association, contrasting layers, untamed lines through a disjunctive synthesis of visual responses. I found this experimental freedom essential in the formation of finding new and unconventional encounters with native plants.

[We] are here because of paint, the way it smells, feels, looks; its ability to circumvent language, rebelling against the screen-based image in this pixel splitting, digitally saturated era – a primitive sensuous and unforgiving substance applied in innumerable ways to any surface; a physical manifestation of the artist’s inner life.94

Through this experimental, alchemical method of painting my studio work found a form of abstraction unique to my experience and encounter with the particularities of the Australian landscape. My work puzzled out a complex mapping of interwoven threads derived from the ongoing translation of marks and lines into paintings. The form of abstraction that I created throughout this research became an intermeshing of outside registers with a complex layering of the inner story or impulses. My larger paintings engaged with gestural, innate and fluid abstract responses whilst also acting as a site battling with overlaid marks, scratches and lines sourced from, but not tethered to the outer, observable characteristics of nature. Through the interplay between the background and foregrounded elements and in pushing and pulling the abstract qualities of my mark-making into the fabric of my paintings has given my work traction and authenticity. Through this language of abstraction my paintings gave materiality to immaterial qualities inherent within nature or plants and translated those intangibles into an ever-evolving palimpsest of shape, line, pattern and colour. Clement Greenberg suggests 'abstraction is a type of purity and validity in art that is comparable to the validity of nature.' In essence my aim was to try and grasp this pure or valid nature within plants as the source of my own nature and find its representation through abstraction.

Miles Hall argues in *Anatomy of an Image* (2010), that painting establishes 'alternative encounters - something that our everyday experience with technology is not capable of offering us.' This idea permeates my research in that, through the material encounter of paint we are immersed in a real-world, sensory experience, saturated by line, colour and the fraught tensions underlying the layers of paint. Through these alternative encounters we experience the landscape inherent within the painting, the

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95 Greenberg, C. Quoted in, Barris. R. Abstract Expressionism: Overview of Critical Reception, of Key Ideas, and Stylistic Sources, (Radford University, Virginia, 2010).
flowering of mass becoming form and entangled presence of the deep jungle of complex thoughts. Paramount to my research is the concept of an aesthetic encounter capable of holding the residues of authentic experimentation and engagement with the subject material in a way that finds or opens new possibilities and interpretations and is not shallow, digital or superficial. My research found that painting holds a place of importance in contemporary art and increasingly as street based, graffiti art gains momentum as a new art movement, encounters with the tactile, juicy and real qualities of paint maintain their power and relevancy.

Similarly with my works created upon fabric, these works are not separate from my painting and mark-making practice. The methodology employed of bringing together of fragments into a cohesive multi-layered surface is parallel within my textile pieces and paintings. What establishes itself in each work has been my intervention with the surface history and layers inherent within the fibre, structure and supporting material as a basis for building new narratives. Each work therefore, explores the engagement with native plants, landscape and the personal through my signature, story and style of marking its trace. There is interconnectivity between all of my work that stems from the same source – my complex experience of the Australian landscape, implicitly embedded in the colour, texture, depth, frame and fibre within the totality of my work.

Throughout my research, I developed the concept of a patchwork-like ecology of creativity which interweaves the complex relationships between land, abstraction, painting, textiles and an artist’s experience together. My research aimed to find a pattern within the Australian landscape and native plants responsive to the contemporary environment and moreover, piece together the never-ending jigsaw of associations, histories, layers and multi-tangled interstices that comprise our country. My experience
living with Aboriginal people firmly implanted an imperative way of seeing the land where, conceivably the country itself speaks and plants and trees have their own tongue, telling their own stories and if we listen to the whispers then it is possible to hear and dream the future. My research has tried to find, as a non-Indigenous artist, a deeper form of creative response that demonstrates our connections to land, plants and the blood of this land as a shared dialogue. My paintings hold the story of this attempt to visually speak of the unspeakable and address imperceptible truths that lie inherently buried within the trees, flowers, roots, soil and structure of Australia. The significance of this research has been to address the key concepts of native plants and abstraction as an umbrella for a wide body of research and find a method to align the two seemingly disconnected branches of research. I will summarise the core findings and significant implications for this research:

- native plants provide an inexhaustible field of reference for creative interpretation
- the Australian landscape and wider patina has a deep influence upon the character and nature of visual arts in Australia
- my particular experiences living with Aboriginal people and creative practice framed by twelve years living in the Northern Territory has given me a unique lens through which to view the wider Australian landscape
- my studio work offers an encounter with the materiality and complexity of paint, puzzling tactile, aesthetic responses in abstraction which challenge the conventions of representation familiar with native plants
- the shared Australian landscape provides contemporary artists with a capacity to find new, alternative and unconventional encounters that address the issues, complexities and stories inherently buried within
- abstraction provides, a means to express multiple, interconnected layers of connection
my creative work extends upon the vocabulary of landscape painting in Australia through a patchwork response of abstract
marks, layers of colour, stains and residues which threads together a new language of engagement with the structure, surface
quality and possibilities of painting

This exegesis has articulated my engagement and passion for the world of native plants and creative study of their myriad forms as
a basis to finding new pathways in my practice. The paintings and works presented for exhibition accompany this exegesis. I
have further attached a catalogue of works illustrating the body of studio work I have undertaken during this research project that
will be presented at the showing of my exhibition. It is my intention that this exegesis supports and attempts to demystify my
practical work. However, the paintings and works included in my exhibition delimit no boundaries of interpretation and provide
insight into the world I have creatively explored, mapped, stitched, struggled and journeyed through.

'I feel that works of art which genuinely puzzle us are almost always of ultimate consequence...'

My work has been shaped by truly seeing the land and walking its pathways. It has been drawn from sitting in the dirt with elders,
listening to the stories and hearing the leaves rustle in the winds. Through my research I have aimed to find a 'means of
conveying ideas and impressions that lie beyond easy understanding and the simple reference frames of our experience' to reach
deeper into the roots of the ground and find the soil and structure of inherent creativity.

98 Rothwell, N. Mailbags from the very edge, (The Australian Newspaper, 19 Feb, 2011).
In vivo veritus - In a living thing there is truth...
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List of Plates

1. Imbi Davidson, *Studies for Country (Acacia auriculiformis)*, 2010, pen on paper, 25x30cm.
2. Imbi Davidson, *Ligne du feuille*, 2011, botanical print on cloth, 20x20cm.
10. John Olsen. *Golden Summer, Clarendon*, 1983, oil on hardboard, 182.5x244.5cm.
11. Elisabeth Cummings, *Edge of the Simpson Desert*, 2011, oil on canvas, 180x300cm.
29. Imbi Davidson. *Amour Amor* (detail), 2010, oil, bitumen & enamel on canvas, 120x150cm.
31. Imbi Davidson. *Work in Progress* (detail), 2011, oil on board, 30x60cm.
34. Imbi Davidson. *Candle Nut, Eucalyptus & Black Rust blanket*, 2012, natural dyes, velvet & canvas on recycled woollen blanket, 120x180cm.
35. Imbi Davidson. *Heartline*, 2012, red ochre & PVA on paper, 40x40cm.
38. Imbi Davidson. *mt.isa magnolia*, 2010-11, oil, enamel, acrylic, leaf imprints & natural dye on recycled canvas, 150x120cm.
39. Imbi Davidson. *aster-aceae (stop you muthafucka)*, 2010, oil, enamel, acrylic & natural dye on recycled canvas, 150x120cm.
40. Imbi Davidson. *Darwin Panels*, 2010-11, oil, enamel, acrylic & natural dye on board, each 45x60cm.
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46. Imbi Davidson. *In the Ghost Light*, 2010-11, oil, acrylic, enamel, pencil & natural dyes on board, 80x120cm.
47. Imbi Davidson. *Bone, Axil & Umbel*, 2010-11, oil, acrylic, enamel, pencil & natural dyes on board, 80x120cm.
48. Imbi Davidson. *Skeletons of the Forest*, 2010-11, oil, acrylic, enamel, pencil & natural dyes on board, 80x120cm.
49. Imbi Davidson. *The Path of the Widow Makers*, 2010-12, oil, acrylic, enamel, pencil & natural dyes on board, 80x120cm.
50. Imbi Davidson. *Studies for Country – Angry Painting II*, 2010-11, oil on recycled boards, 120x120cm.
51. Imbi Davidson. *Studies for Country – Light Painting*, 2011-12, oil on recycled board, 120x60cm.
54. Imbi Davidson. *Journal Entry*, 2011, ink on paper, 20x20cm;
55. Imbi Davidson, *Erythrina & Mangrove Print*, 2010, digital image
59. Imbi Davidson. *Banksia & Brachychiton*, 2010-11, botanical leaf print on cloth; 50x60cm.

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