2008

the indeterminate precision of narrative.

Appendices 2

Lyndall Adams

Southern Cross University
Appendices 2

research publication: artist statements, invitations and catalogues

solo exhibitions

2007

*the indeterminate precision of narrative*: Grafton Regional Gallery, NSW.

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*the indeterminate precision of narrative* catalogue cover (left) and invitation (right) (design and layout Grafton Regional Gallery)
I'm gonna wash that man right outa my hair

Lyndall loves stories. She loves telling them, hearing them, collecting them, witnessing them and being in them. She is a consummate storyteller and she knows her craft.

This exhibition the indeterminate precision of narrative is a story. A fluid and flexible story that is constantly being written and performed. As you engage the works you become aware that they are a collection of intersecting narratives acted out by family members and the author. The trajectory of the multiple plots is the encounter of studio practice meets personal histories and contemporary descriptions of academic life. The setting is the idyllic banks of Lake Wooloweyah. The location of this episode is the Grafton Regional Gallery.

The saga unfolds through a sequence of works like swinging 4, swinging 2, making 2 and Sticks and Stones. Each work behaves like a one act play. Individually they describe the story of an idyllic childhood ... innocent, self absorbed and insulated from world events. Collectively their story goes beyond such a narrow interpretation.

The witness to these events, the mother/artist, is also the narrator/witness/architect of these events. She secures the nurturing environment for the principle character and determines the nature and parameters of the picture space through the act of "colouring it in". The scene has become a pictorial-virtual-metaphorical space mediated through the multiple technologies that conjure the representation and the heritage of picture making that informs their design and production. It is a picture!

It is here that Lyndall's innovative skills and virtuoso techniques are sublimely displayed. From informal photograph, countless digital manipulations, and acrylic underpainting the process is mapped out ... and in that arena where the oil paint and the image collide a poem is uttered with every brushstroke. Here, the formal properties of figure and ground, colour and shape weave a magical spell that transforms paint into life. In this space, the image must be performed, it cannot be painted ... and that's another story!

The record cover was almost obscured by the sound system. Yet I recognized it immediately: Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “South Pacific”. I attended numerous screenings with my grandmother when I was young. It was there than I found my first onscreen heartthrob. John, Lyndall's co-supervisor, and I still recall many of the lyrics.

Thinking about the indeterminate precision of narratives it occurs to me how we understand what Mitz Gaynor means when she proclaims “I’m gonna wash that man right outa my hair. And send him on his way”.

Meaning is peripheral to the literal translation of the words. We know what she means because it is part of a story!

Not because we don’t believe her.

Not because we know love and understand the machinations of love stories.

Not because we recognize the construction of femininity in wartime movies!

But ... because it's a love story!

Gary Jolley
Senior Lecturer
Southern Cross University
narrative notes

It is very pleasing that the Grafton Regional Gallery can present one of the leading artists of Clarence Valley, Lyndall Adams has exhibited at the gallery since 1994 and has had her work acquired into the gallery’s collections through the Jacaranda Acquisitive Drawing Award in 1994 and 2002 and various exhibition programs.

The urban and natural landscapes of the Clarence coastal region is the backdrop and the theatre in which Lyndall’s narratives take place. This presentation of art created in our region develops the identity of our region and will invariably influence our view of it.

The indeterminate precision of narrative highlights the fruitful relationships between galleries, universities and artists. The exhibition is the culmination of three years of study by Lyndall for a Doctorate in Philosophy though the Post Graduate School at the Southern Cross University, Lismore, for which Lyndall won an Australian Post Graduate Award.

Jude McBean
Director
Grafton Regional Gallery

the indeterminate precision of narrative catalogue essay by Jude McBean
2006

**watching**, John Gordon Gallery, Coffs Harbour, NSW.

**artists statement**

*watching* speaks to my life in regional NSW. I watch my children and their friends play in the trees that run down to Lake Wooloweyah at the back of the family home. The younger children watch the older children climb the trees, tie the ropes and then swing out into the sky. They watch and learn so that when they are big enough they too will be able swing. They fall, laugh; argue about whose turn it is and how it should be done. They are oblivious to my watching.

I also watch them play. The games they play are perhaps influenced by popular culture. And perhaps not. In play, we learn how to do things. It is in effect a form of mastery. We practice until we get it right or give it up. The children I watch seem to like sticks. They fight with them. Big or small, they seem to know what to do – make contact with another stick. As a responsible parent, I have instigated a blanket ban on any form of weaponry from my children’s arsenal of toys. When I watch them play – there are the sticks, guns, lightsabers, swords, knives etc etc. I have not given up my abhorrence of these games but I am more willing to ask questions about the games we play as children that prepare us for the adult world …

I am a practicing artist, currently enrolled in a PhD (philosophy) by research at Southern Cross University. The working title for the PhD: *The indeterminate precision of narrative* looks at complex narrative structures role in positioning visual images of the body. My influences are drawn from the interface between post-structuralist and feminist thinking that has spread through much art practice and debate in the last decade or so. This had led to an awkwardness of representing the female body itself and some absolute stances in relation to it, for instance, a refusal to depict the female form in an image, designated as too ideologically over-determined. However, this refusal to represent the body directly can serve to distance the image subject for the viewer. Within my arts practice I attempt to speak about the female body, the lived body that is determined and specific.

The work made for *watching* speak to the lively concerns of femininity, the day to day runnings of the lived body in a state of flux, defined and redefined by changing practices and discourses.
2005

*ellipsis*, John Gordon Gallery, Coffs Harbour, NSW.

**artists statement**

hidden in the ellipses
somewhere between memory, archive and history great stories hide.
ordinary lives imagine extraordinary tales
half forgotten images are tied together by memory
often quoted with much hesitation, many omissions and a certain lack of clarity.
it is those stories that interest me.
that indeterminant betweenness lurking just out of reach
that unfinished sentence glossed over by …
that … in a quote it is assumed that we are all familiar with
it is that omission,
that hesitation,
that lack of clarification,
that has shaped this collection of paintings.
selected collaborative exhibitions

2006

pause play, Grafton Regional Gallery, NSW.

pause play invitation (design and layout lyndall adams)
artists statement

Lyndall Adams is a painter and digital printmaker.

Fiona Fell is a ceramic artist.

They are both interested in notions of post feminist arts practice and representations of the body.

They are both interested in each other's processes.

Their common interests set up an environment in which a collaboration is possible that looks at each other’s processes and practices and explores the potential for a rethinking of self and other.

This collaboration explicitly plays with the notions of foreign bodies and of the stranger and possibly estrangement. These works are neither a representation of the outsider, the stranger, nor a representation of the self, while being all simultaneously, allowing debates surrounding both self portraiture and representation to be unwrapped. This exhibition introduces the idea of collaboration between artists’ being somehow an issue of interactions between bodies, performativity and emergence or becoming.

“Are these works self-portraits or a possibility for the self-portrait, if we think of self-portraiture as inviting interaction, interactivity and inter-subjectivity? We are questioning the critical exchange between artists and possibly between artists and viewer.”
selected group exhibitions

2007

*Three’s company*, Michael Reid Galleries, Elizabeth Bay, NSW.

Michael Reid invites you to meet the artists

Lyndall Adams
Stephen King
Adam Lester

At an evening viewing of their exhibition

*Three’s Company*

**Wednesday 7th March 2007**

44 Roslyn Gardens
Elizabeth Bay
6pm till 8pm

Exhibition Dates—
Wednesday 7th March to Saturday 24th March 2007

Gallery open—
Wednesday to Saturday
11am till 6pm, or by appointment

Works now selling—
www.michaelreid.com.au
or call +61 2 8353 3500

*Three’s company,*
invitation (design and layout Michael Reid galleries)
2006

The O’Grady sisters redrawn: a contemporary view of five women artists from the collection, Grafton Regional Gallery, NSW.

The O’Grady sisters redrawn: a contemporary view of five women artists from the collection, invitation (above) and catalogue (above right and following) (design and layout Lyndall Adams)
In May last year, I received an email from Jude McBean inviting me to participate in the Grafton Regional Gallery’s 2006 “Women and Drawing Project”. The project highlights the activities of women artists with a special emphasis on the contemporary arts practice of drawing. This opportunity not only started my discovery tour of beautiful Grafton, but more importantly I discovered the Grafton Regional Gallery’s collection, the O’Grady sisters and five great women artists: Alison Williams, Lyndall Adams, Jan Davis, Christine Wilcocks and Jenny Kitcusher.

“The O’Grady Sisters redrawn” is a contemporary view of the O’Grady collection by five women artists, all of whom have made new work for this exhibition. In March 2006 I went to Grafton for my first visit to the gallery and researched the gallery collection. That visit and especially one image “Crab Apple” 1925, a watercolour by Gladys O’Grady was the starting point for my decision to base the exhibition on “a sense of the sacred and purpose”, a homage to the O’Grady Sisters.

The drawings and watercolours of Gladys and Doris O’Grady are a very distinct feature of the Grafton Regional Gallery’s collection and include watercolours of the birds and flora of the Clarence Valley, sketchbooks and folios. When I looked through the O’Grady sister’s oeuvre, I was fascinated by the way Gladys placed her subjects, native birds and flora in the landscape and sky and how the background becomes as important as the subject. Most of the time the viewer focuses on the birds and flora and the background becomes secondary in the work. Not so in Gladys’s work, it grows and grows, pushing the birds and flora towards and inside the landscape and/or sky. Doris on the other hand draws the subject, the native flower, approaching it in botanical way, a documentation.

Drawing is of the greatest importance in the work of both sisters. This is why I decided to embark on a project to mark the influence of the sisters and ask the selected artists to create drawing images and text around the theme: a Homage to the O’Grady Sisters...landscape and skies”. Drawing as a medium comes first. Before the artist picks up a paintbrush or begins to carve in stone, plans an installation or even a performance, there is a drawing. There is immediacy to drawing that narrows the space between thought and expression, allowing ideas to be put on paper or any other surface.

This exhibition reflects on the notion of drawing rather than simply being a collection of drawings. For that reason I asked the artists to avoid the rules of most drawing shows which permit only unique works on paper and instead draw on all kind of surfaces, flat as well as three dimensional. The work should tease out the relationship between the drawn and variety of surfaces.

Alison, Jan, Jennifer, Lyndall, Christine and I met several times in Grafton to discuss the exhibition and one thing I know for sure is that I have developed a great fondness for this group of remarkable women. I respect their willingness to be vulnerable. I recognize their wisdom and skill. I appreciate their humour. What a privilege it has been to participate in this great adventure as the curator. Each individual artist has created exceptional work that I have been able to draw together to make this a strong exhibition.

Thank you to all the artists, to Jude and staff of the Grafton Regional Gallery for being special and to Cheryl and Robert O’Grady for receiving me on the O’Grady family property “Tristania”.

appendices 2

The O’Grady Sisters Redrawn launches the 2006 Women and Drawing project presented by the Grafton Regional Gallery with support from ArtsNSW. The project highlights the activities of women artists of the Northern Rivers region through drawing. The support of innovative and contemporary Australian drawing is a special focus for the Grafton Regional Gallery.

The focus on women artists in the Gallery’s collection recognises the contribution that women artists have made and continue to make to the visual history of the region and it is the first exhibition to be curated through an examination of women artists held in the Gallery’s collection.

The curator of The O’Grady Sisters Redrawn, Akky van Ogtrop, selected the landscape works of Gladys and Doris O’Grady, our most significant women artists held in our collection, as the starting point for the exhibition.

The drawings and watercolours of Gladys and Doris O’Grady are a very distinct feature of the Gallery’s collection. Our collection of over 900 items including watercolours of the birds, flora and landscapes of the Clarence valley, sketch-books and folios, is nationally recognised and held in great regard by our community.

The sister artists lived their long lives on the family property “Tristania” at Seelands, an area formed by a bend of the Clarence River west of Grafton. The area is just before the river splits into its wide floodplains and consists of low undulating hills of open woodlands and grazing farms edged by rainforest gullies and river banks. The sisters travelled throughout the region and to other states to create a remarkable legacy.

Akky van Ogtrop selected five women artists from the gallery’s collection who currently live and carry out their arts practice in the Northern Rivers region. Since 1989 the five women artists Alison Williams, Lyndall Adams, Jan Davis, Christine Wilcocks and Jenny Kitcusher have had works acquired at various times into the gallery’s collection through the Jacaranda Acquisitive Drawing Award that aims to foster innovative contemporary drawing practice and through the Gallery’s active acquisition of artworks by artists from the Northern Rivers area.

This selection process of the curator brought into contrast the lives and arts practice of two women artists of the first half of the twentieth century with five women artists working at the beginning of the twenty first century in the Northern Rivers region. In particular The O’Grady Sisters Redrawn demonstrates the development of drawing and its positioning as a major area of practice in the late twentieth century.

This beautiful exhibition has been made possible by the professional dedication of the artists and the curator and the support of the Clarence Valley Council and ArtsNSW.
A few years ago, I made a series of works titled *conversations with Doris and Gladys*. Those works gave me the opportunity to look at and imagine conversations I never had with my mother and grandmothers. The *O’Grady Sisters Redrawn* exhibition has given me the opportunity to revisit and extend those conversations. The conversations I have had with Doris and Gladys O’Grady however have been a little fierier. We have fought over the integrity of the original images. We have argued over the representational aspects of the imagery. We have agreed to disagree on the correct way to draw birds. We have wrangled out a definition on what properly constitutes drawing. We are in complete accord as to the formal aspect of the picture plane. We are sympathetic to each other in regards to the process of making works in general. We have had extensive conversations about the differences between sketches, working drawings and fully resolved works, in addition, where these should sit in one’s practice.

In all, my conversations with Doris and Gladys have stimulated responses to the project that have been fraught with false starts and mindful conundrums. I have asked myself, “How far do I go? Where is the line between a wilful misinterpretation of their works and a visual homage that reflects the incredible respect and admiration I have for these women who spent their lives drawing and recording the natural world.”

There are other women in this conversation. Akky, Alison, Jenny, Jan and Christine have been a delight to work with. Time spent in the collection room with them and Doris and Gladys’ work has been a rich experience. We have had very clear aims and very little time at our scheduled meetings. Somehow, it all went awry. We are a bunch that delights in being sidetracked. As each page of a sketchbook was turned, as another bundle of drawings was unwrapped, as each work was unfolded, a raucous gaggle of glee would erupt and another conversation begun. Discussions on; flowers, birds, mushrooms, landscapes, colours, paper quality etc. etc. *ad infinitum* followed. I am sorry that the project has come to an end and can only hope than I will have the opportunity to work with all of these women again.
**Jacaranda Acquisitive Drawing Award**, & touring exhibition, Grafton Regional Gallery, NSW.

**artists statement**

In this study, the most simple drawing media are used to explore relationships. Relationships between figure and ground … between the media used … between the marks made and what is left unsaid … between the boundaries of the picture plane … between the figures pictured … between my body and the paper … between representation and abstraction … between light and dark … between adults and children … between watching and seeing.

2004 - 05

**River & Wood**, Grafton Regional Gallery, NSW.

**artists statement**

Against the apparent biases of history, memory stirs. Against history’s rationality, the reveries of memory rebel. Against history’s officialism, memory recalls hidden pasts, the lived and the local, the ordinary and the everyday. Against history’s totality, memory’s pluralism blooms.¹

It was cedar that brought the earliest settlers to this isolated valley back in the 1830s. Apparently, the stands of prized red cedar grew right to the water’s edge and ‘The Big River’ was soon a hive of activity as barges, tugs and steamers transported the timber getters’ bounty to the coast. By all accounts, it was a successful venture as the cedar of the Clarence River were quickly logged to extinction. *The memory of water* is my response to this well-known history.

I am a lower river dweller. Half of my life has been spent on the banks of Lake Wooloweyah. Cloud polishing was a favoured pastime as I traveled by bus to school along the river. My memories of the river are rich with the sight of the waters of the Clarence. Memory has a tendency towards the private and the emotive, the personally biased and the corporeal. Next to history’s judgement, the ghosts of memory rise up. Against history’s formalities, memory reminisces on veiled accounts, the lived and the local, the commonplace and the mundane. The woods that once grew right to the water’s edge are simply evocative illusions that enrich the aura of place that memory resists.

The works made are a personal recall of the river set against culture’s official explanations of the past and the fate of the red cedar floating hazily in and above the big river.