Drawing as Performance: The Art Gallery meets Experimental Theatre

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Abstract
Since the 1970s, drawing as an art discipline became a performative, “non-gallery” activity – the verb “drawing” as kinaesthetic, time-based, anti-gallery, environmental – occurring within the desert landscape and on walls of the urban environment. Through examining the work of three Australian artists/drawers – Ian Howard, Mike Parr and John Wolseley – anti-gallery stances can be charted regarding the “performed drawing” intended to exist outside art gallery dictates; creating alternative, performative executions and viewer/receiver interactivity. In this period “the drawing” crossed over from the “gallery exhibition” into the realm of experimental theatre; time-based, engaged in situ, performed and completed by the viewer/audience; permanently shifting the art gallery exhibition paradigm.

In Australia, artists such as Howard, Parr, and Wolseley emerged in cross-disciplinary forms – exploring drawing-as-performance. Their forms were as diverse as: (1.) vast, real-scaled frottage rubbings of an airplane fuselage; commenting on the military industrial complex, surveillance, and communication systems – to (2.) self-portrait, the psychology and presence of the body in art performed as gallery artwork; as theatre of self – to (3.) eco-landscape; where drawing mapping interrogations of sketches are buried in the desert to be “completed” by nature and later resurrected towards gallery exhibition. This reflects the pursuit of identity that converged in cross-disciplinary Australian drawing practices from 1970 to now.

All of which engaged concepts of habitat – of lived space, through challenging the tropes of photomention principles and “the photograph” as dead object – by contesting the presupposed “static” nature of gallery art exhibition against emergent aesthetics of “moving image/performative” works. The transdisciplinary activity of Australian drawing-as-performance has created new dynamics of “the drawing performed” and its direct, discursive relationship to the body of the artist. Emerging from the writings of Artaud, Australian drawing-as-performance crashed headlong into aesthetics of theatre of self and theatre of the absurd, through fertile inter-disciplinary methodologies.

John Elderfield, Curator of Drawing at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (M.o.M.A.), wrote regarding the proliferation of contemporary drawing that:

> The character, and burden, assumed by new drawing as drawing has become central to avant-garde experiment in virtually all media is a very distinctive one indeed. Drawing’s own innate inclusiveness and lack of definability have become paradigmatic of recent avant-garde art as a whole, which reaches, with the help of drawing, into all sorts of odd corners… (Elderfield 1983)

The redefinitions “new drawing” applied across Australian art were towards the constraints of the white-cube art gallery as the display showcase of art. Drawing in Australia responded by creating transdisciplinary emphasis on the act of making; and performative duration – drawing as an action, as developmental process activity – rather than as artefact outcome hung on a wall.

Immediacies of “performance” enabled Australian drawing to be propelled by artists previously immersed in performance art, installation art, photography and sculpture towards hybrid cross-disciplinary territories.
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Since the 1970s, drawing as an art discipline became a performative, “non-gallery” activity – The verb of “drawing” as kinaesthetic, time-based, anti-gallery, environmental – occurring within the desert landscape and on walls of the urban environment. Through examining the work of three Australian artists/drawers – Ian Howard, Mike Parr and John Wolseley – anti-gallery stances can be charted regarding the “performed drawing” intended to exist outside art gallery dictates; creating alternative, performative executions and viewer/receiver interactivity. In this period “the drawing” crossed over from the “gallery exhibition” into the realm of experimental theatre; time-based, engaged in situ, performed and completed by the viewer/audience; permanently shifting the art gallery exhibition paradigm.

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All of which engaged concepts of habitat – of lived space, through challenging the tropes of photomention principles and “the photograph” as dead object – by contesting the presupposed “static” nature of gallery art exhibition against emergent aesthetics of “moving image/performative” works. From rubbings of airplanes and tanks, to drawing with the artist’s body exploring kinaesthetic exhaustion states, to Wolseley’s immersive drawings-as-exhumed artefact in and of the landscape; the transdisciplinary activity of Australian drawing-as-performance has created new dynamics of “the drawing performed” and its direct, discursive relationship to the body of the artist. Emerging from the writings of Artaud, Australian drawing-as-performance crashed headlong into aesthetics of theatre of self and theatre of the absurd, through fertile inter-disciplinary methodologies.

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Immediacies of “performance” enabled Australian drawing to be propelled by artists previously engaged in performance art, installation art, photography and sculpture towards hybrid cross-disciplinary territories. The performed drawing. Often, “drawing” as an art discipline has been historically defined by exactly that limitation – a discipline – the castor oil arts practice to flush out the system as good training for an artist, to hone their skills, preliminary to the real act of painting or sculpture. Conceptual art in the 1960s into the 1970s forced a shift in thinking not only towards the so-called independent drawing, that is a drawing in its own right that was not made as an identified task towards some other art end – but also the role of the body of the artist. By the 1970s the artist’s own body was no longer detached from the art object (drawing) they produced, but increasingly remained present and bound to it in its exhibition.

**Gadji beri bimba**

beri bimba glandridi laula lonni cadori
The loud, haranguing phonetic word poems which Hugo Ball, the Dada artist, when he was brought out on stage dressed in a rigid cardboard suit – screamed out at patrons of the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916 – began our twentieth century engagement with this see-saw of art and theatre. It emerged on the heels of Marcel Duchamp's exhibition of a toilet, or rather The Fountain, in 1917, as an art object rejected from gallery exhibition in New York. Performance sought an interactive insertion that permanently redefines "viewer" as audience in terms of their expected participation in and completion of the artwork.

The resurgence of "drawing" as the principle means of engaging spectatorship and theatricality in Australian art surfaced stridently in the years after 1970, in the wake of international proto-conceptual art. But why it was drawing rather than other art means is to do with its immediacy; and drawing's probity as a process activity. Drawing already had claims towards sketching that was "recording" in ways both temporal and temporary, and was constantly in flux. It has always defined itself as process, rather than by the finished object outcome. The nature of sketching as study, as enquiry, is a precondition to the performed drawing in situ. Importantly, "drawing" as an art practice is territorially without its own empire – there are drawings made for set design, costume design, theatre, painting, animation storyboarding, character development, graphic and interior design, sculpture, and manifold skirmishes backwards and forward between otherwise contested borderlands of fine art and design.

In Australian art, the 1970s saw "drawing" meld into experimental theatre. The focus of this paper is intended as historical account; in as much as it charts the moment or decade when drawing moved from the periphery to become central to 1970s eclectic arts practices, and I visit this through the exemplar of three differing aesthetics of performativity introduced then by three artists whose longevity of practice continues today. My writing here is not as a current survey of performed drawings in 2015 – only in as much as it identifies continuing practices, whose gestation and conclusions were precipitated by that earlier period.

In theorising upon an almost-immediate past, Terry Smith, in his book Thinking Contemporary Curating (2012), outlined the value to curating from contemporaneity reflecting on an earlier period:

Yet we should not overlook the fact that this focus on current currency has been accompanied by an urgent wish to revisit repressed, unknown, or forgotten prehistories of the present precisely to ascertain why the forgetting occurred and to find out how valuable insights and energies from an earlier moment might be reshaped into a current relevance. (Smith 147)

Of drawing that has evolved from performance art in the 1970s, in an Australian context, one needs firstly to cite Ian Howard's early 1970-77 rubbings from airplanes. Sculptural and photographic in their origins, they utilized photographs of and rubbings made from a Boeing 707 by "placing the sheeting onto actual surfaces and employing a frottage technique." (McIntyre 4) Other rubbings were made from West German military equipment, parts of the Berlin Wall, and New South Wales Government railway carriages. Arthur McIntyre notes these drawings were first exhibited in 1972, in an exhibition entitled Return to Subject Matter, at the Watters Gallery in Sydney. In McIntyre's estimation, this 1972 exhibition represents "the first time Sydneysiders experienced massive, unmounted drawings in a commercial gallery." (McIntyre 4) So one could effectively critically identify this as a starting point to the pre-eminence of wall-sized drawing in Australia.

Enola Gay (1975) by Ian Howard was a series of rubbings made on the fuselage of the plane which had dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima in 1945. (figures 1,2) Stretched taut on tacked-up paper across a wall, the work engulfs its audience in the military industrial horror it pares back as a full, boned fossil-form. Howard has continued into 2015 to pursue the politics of tanks, trains and planes in war zones – in particular in North Korea in 2009. (figures 3,4) The once familiar brass rubbings many of us have made in churches on tombstones, or of the embossing on cannons, are now in Howard's tent-shrouds of endless loaded semiotics of armoured machines.
Ian Howard’s exhibitions since the 1970s are monumental scale drawings as gallery exhibition – but what validates its insistent performative dimension is that it cannot be considered outside of the time/body referent of the artist himself. As rubbings (frottages) made on the sides of airplanes or tanks, these vast, unfurling drawings stretched across the gallery walls, as if vast skins that Howard has peeled off these tanks and military hardware from his time spent in their presence. The scale of drawings in the 1970s allowed them to become walls, not merely rectangles hung on walls. In making panoramic walls of paper, an installation is created as the viewer steps into a sculptural space: literally walking into the “drawing”. Whenever the viewer is forced to walk into or through the work, it is shadowing the artist as performer.

In 1977 Ian Howard first exhibited large wax crayon rubbings of U.S. fighter planes, made when working in North America in 1974 – 76. Shown at Watters Gallery in Sydney, these rubbings of military equipment were part of a wider documentation including photographs and photocopies. Some rubbings from Boeing 707s were first exhibited at Watters in 1972, but were actually executed in 1970. His “rubbings” were made in a frottage manner by placing large paper around parts of planes, and even of the Berlin Wall, to achieve these curtain-like black wax crayon drawings, a process he continued with military tanks in Beijing, China in 2001. The process and production of the rubbings were as important to display as the rubbings themselves. Howard’s work emerged from a similar disillusionment with the photograph that Mike Parr experienced. Whereas photographs can be reproduced over and over again, and have no uniqueness, the rubbings move closer to being a one-off.

Mike Parr emerged out of a performance art background, having co-established the Inhibodress Gallery in Sydney as a conceptual-performance space with Peter Kennedy in 1970. Performance for Parr was an underlying question of reactivating the presumed inert role of “audience/viewer” in the gallery space. By 1981, his arts practice had elided performance, steering firmly into the art estuary of the “performed drawing”. This was two-fold: firstly, the large-scaled wall-drawings were completed in one exhaustive session by him – explained in what he declared to be “kinaesthetic states of exhaustion”, like a distance runner pushing pain thresholds – where the artist was in physical contest with the duration of the monumental drawing, and it lay completed when he was physically exhausted. The parallel to performance is in the time-based nature of this conduct, and in the relationship between the drawing itself, and the performed state of its making. The drawing is never independent of the performance that generated it – at a scale where the loping sweep of the human hand led to exploration of kinaesthetic states, and the “performance” of working to extremes of concentration and physical exhaustion as part of the drawing. A term that rapidly arose in Mike Parr’s lexicon was one he coined as “photo-death” – whereby he moved away from “performance art” actions because the record of their occurrence existed only in the photographic documentation of it; a dependence on photomention principles of a document referred to in passage. “Photo-death” was, in Parr’s view, the rendering static or in death what was a real-time event that needed to be experienced in motion or in situ. By 1992, the two aesthetics coalesced in his performance of sucking drawings up to his face – in 100 Breaths – sucking each drawing individually to his mouth, until eventually exhausted to the point of passing out. The record of this performed action is less “the photo” as dead artefact, but the video on Youtube. However, it is still the art object document resulting from the performative activity, and not the performance itself.

In 2012, the author Janet McKenzie wrote of Mike Parr’s drawings and printmaking that: “enable him to process and displace marks for the sake of other somatic sensations, are deeply inflected by performance.” (McKenzie 152) And that: “Performance art enabled him to establish an intensely personal, intellectual analysis of the world beyond the strict confines of the stage or performance space – the individual or artist in relation to the wider, political world.” (McKenzie 152)

Parr’s continued relationships with performance, and the performed drawing as drawing exhibition… rely on it as an incomplete form in flux to be added to or ended by the viewer/audience, in the presence of the constant reiterations of self-portrait focus on his bi-furcated head. Drawing exhibitions by Parr into the 1980s carried a further provocation towards intervention, or performed completion… of charcoal sticks left on a plinth, and the gallery viewer being invited to add to or complete the work exhibited there, as in Mike Parr’s A-Artaud (Against the light) Self portrait at sixty-five 1983 installation at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. (figure 5)

Parr’s process of working in the 1980s would be to start a large portrait from a mirror in a darkened room, or in the vague single light of a projected image of a drawing-from-a-drawing cast up onto the wall. Imagination takes root in the
darkness and he begins, like a child scrambling in the dirt for half concealed pebbles, to let his memory play upon the shafts of light, until the charcoal fashions itself into a pear, or some other half-forgotten form of trees, or writing, or a face. He then attempts to link these back to representational forms. It is a synthesizing back to the object the drawing grows to suggest, in a similar manner of working to that which Braque and Picasso evolved in their later 1912 synthetic Cubism phase. The resulting drawings were undoubtedly figurative in their self-portrait images, and in part arrived at perceptually; as in *Luridities* (*Mengele and Co. come back for a heart transplant*) the rapids *Absque hoc self portrait* 1985. (figure 6)

This evolving sense of scale combined with an autographic immediacy that, like taking hold of the space in a theatre, attracted artists engaged in performance, photography, sculptural or conceptual work. Mike Parr had been involved in performance through his activities at *Inhibodress* from 1970 – 72, as a gallery devoted to performance and conceptual art. His other earlier installation work had been executed largely at Sydney Biennales or Australian Perspecta exhibitions, or overseas, and consequently received less exposure in Melbourne or elsewhere, other than in the form of photo-documentation. Ultimately, Parr’s reaction to the stultification of photo-documentation motivated the drawing activity that has dominated his work since 1981. It provided a tangible art object, other than the photographic record of event, and one that retained the fingerprints, time and signature of its making.

Monumental drawings emerged from performance art as a natural outcome of installations; performance artists could see some of their ideas for sculptural events in ready visual form, being invested with a degree of permanence. Disillusioned by the “photodeath” embalment of his performances as a static documentation, for Mike Parr by the mid 1970s “performance”, once it had been critically categorized and given a name, had then lost its capacity to confront. Of which he said, “In a sense, by then, it had become theatre… which people then approached in the manner of an ‘audience’.” (Overton 2003) The physicality of performance was brought to paper in Parr’s gestural expressionist charcoal drawing, sweeping tangles of lines that attest to his body’s scale; and making the drawings as a form of kinesthesia – of pushing a drawing until physically and mentally exhausted, which arises from the pain and exhaustion threshold concerns of his 1970s performance pieces, and of having driven the body to the point of over-exertion. His cavernous *Do Padera Coco (Self Portrait as a Pear)* TO HAVE DONE WITH THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD 1983 (figure 7) of dragged charcoal, smeared by margarine on photographic backdrop paper as a triptych – is a frenzied, bedraggled circus ride down a wall.

Irrational states such as autism have intrigued Parr in seeking to inject chaos into his ordered work. It floats between the two extremes of brittle, emotional compulsion, and the rigid systems of mathematical, scientific “boxes” and grids that are the constructed nature of representation he explores. Parr has also experimented with drawing from curved mirrors in the past as part of this study of anamorphic distortion, or of how our eyes see a self-image. The “camera obscura” is Latin for dark chamber, and was a device used by artists and topographers whereby a small aperture lets light through a lens into a darkened room. Reflections from outside were cast onto a wall from which an image could be traced. Parr approximates these conditions by working in these self-same shadow rooms. What Parr stresses is the concept of working at a high energy level in a dark studio, in the shadow light of a projector or epidiascope, which opens the mind to the power of suggestion of shapes: in this way, it is never a literal translation from a photograph that he seeks. The darkness prods memory to act upon the literal image until pears, or an element of landscape, or a scrap of another vaguely remembered shape from childhood creeps in. In the darkness of the projector’s thin light the process relies on drawing “blind” from touch alone and looking at the paper as little as possible, so that the drawing becomes impulsive rather than replicating – it is improvised performance.

In the 1980s in West Germany the galleries were replete with ominous wall-size images on paper; and the Nuremberg *Third International Drawing Triennale* in 1985 became a repository of wall-sized drawings that had proliferated in the late 1970s and 1980s, arising from artists previously engaged in photography, sculpture, installation and performance art. Internationally, the role of the viewer concertedly shifted away from not only *viewing* drawings, but rather to move through them; as “drawings” became a temporal theatre. Artists in Australia at this point of the 1980s were wide open to the influence and experience of the massive European exhibitions taking place. The shadow of German and Italian neo-expressionist drawing seemed to loom everywhere; in its monumentality, its dark reliance on the monotone directness of charcoal or black pastel on paper, and its vigorous assertion of serious figuration and “the image” or representational realism in art.
In Australia in the 1980s, the mechanics of scale and brooding voids were interrogated by artists as diverse as Peter Booth, Godwin Bradbeer, Bernhard Sachs, Jan Senbergs, and Mike Parr. Parr’s drawings did more to rejuvenate the self-portrait as subject matter than any other Australian artist of the mid 1980s; they are a constant dichotomy of the mind testing out the limits of the body, and at a certain point the spectacle of endless Easter Island heads disembodied upon a wall becomes repetitious and exhausted. Since 1970, he has always been a provocateur, cultivating offence, such as exhibiting accumulated bucket loads of human shit generated over 50 days in a performance piece at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2001. In 2002 he had his lips sewn together and photographed for Art Monthly as a political statement about the inhumanity of Australian detention centres, and his arm nailed to the wall in the Artspace gallery as a performance work – or having himself photographed in wedding dresses like some last gender-defying Miss Havisham of conceptual art.

His significance to Australian drawing is difficult to overestimate. What visually confronts us is the richest, most powerful use of charcoal and pastel rhythms and line-making since the late 1960s work of Roger Kemp. To say that Parr is this country’s Georg Baselitz; the most vigorous, tactile draughtsman of his day, is not hyperbole. But is there any essential Australian idiom that he explores? Why his work was so well received, along with the drawings of Ken Unsworth and Imant Tillers in America in An Australian Accent in 1984, was for exactly this reason – that it inhabited no provincial idiom or Australianisms. It had no local accent, except to evidence the capacity to produce monolithic drawings of the scale and integrity of other leading international artists.

Influenced by the writings of Antonin Artaud, Parr explores the psychological edge of extremes that co-exist in the human psyche: the rational and irrational mind; control and intuitive gesture, expressionism and conceptualism. Other than the mimetic sense of copying a photograph’s black gradations and depth of field, like so many movie stills immortalized into poster form in Australian drawing, Mike Parr’s autobiographic investigations continue to be the one continuing body of work that intellectually and gesturally exerts its pull on local art whilst translating into an international gravitas. Parr regards the photograph with an informed suspicion; not unlike a prisoner locked in conversation with a guard through a pane of glass. This cautious distrust has led his work to plunge into all manner of comment on the context of its production. This emerges through anamorphic distortion, scaled up photographs, gridded up drawings, and working from and about bent mirrors. Gridded up and anamorphically bent so that the drawings are transforming rather than baldly copying; as a result, they make an entirely new entity of the image, rather than mere enlargement. In the 1990s he worked copiously from self-portrait drawings made from direct observation in the mirror. These were then photocopied, or otherwise utilized towards drawing installations, such as Mike Parr’s Ablaut Self Portrait 1984, (figure 8) where the mathematical grid hovers in scuffled juxtaposition to floating dream-fields.

Towards the close of the 1960s, Australia was subject to the tidal pull of American art dictates through the impact the Two Decades of American Painting exhibition in 1967 had in Melbourne, which elevated the stature and direct influence of the then-contemporary American Field painters, inevitably disseminating their stances and creating a field of second-rate imitators, yearning to work in “the style” that appeared international rather than towards any local intent. In fact the art critic Terry Smith went so far as to state:

Such exhibitions may not be intended as tools of cultural imperialism, but it would be naive to believe that they do not have precisely this effect… when they emerge from the New York art world I have described they cannot but carry the condescending implication of superiority. (Smith 137)

By the 1980s, some of this cultural traffic had reversed – in particular through drawing and performance artists. The An Australian Accent 1984 exhibition showed it was possible to send coals to Newcastle, or rather our drawing installation artists to Los Angeles. What do the second-hand derivations produced here, by inauthentic process, have to offer up to the metropolitan centres of New York, London, Paris or Rome? In writing about An Australian Accent from an American point of view, New York curator Jonathan Fineberg said:

In the new works of Imants Tillers, Ken Unsworth and Mike Parr, American audiences will, I think, be
struck both by their stylistic affinities to international tendencies and by their strength and originality... a number of important new painters from Germany, Italy and the United States share their concern with expressive immediacy, linking them all in a wider tendency. (Thomas 11)

This critical examination of the artists’ current work from an international perspective ran as an essay in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition; as if no finer praise could be bestowed upon a body of Australian work other than to say it could well have been produced in New York, Germany or Italy, comfortably detached from the origins of its making. In other words, their deliberate internationalism made their work perfectly palatable to an American audience already inculcated in aesthetics of performance leading to drawing from artists of many nationalities, in the works of Christo, Sol Le Witt, Arnulf Rainer or Richard Long.

Most cultural transmissions are one-way; it is only our willingness to subscribe to the terms of that transmission that changes. Aboriginal art has hardly been in any position until recently to bargain with the dominant power structures controlling art, culture and technology. Imants Tillers wrote in 1982 regarding changes to the debate about parochialism in art by saying that there was a critical optimism arising about the role of Aboriginal art, and that this would:

Reflect the change in critical attitudes towards ‘regionalism’, a word which now has ascendancy over the formerly popular and derogatory expression, ‘provincialism’. For today we believe that ‘remarkable work is as likely to arise in Cracow, Turin, Dusseldorf, Vienna, Paris, London or Amsterdam as in New York.’ Why not Sydney or Melbourne as well? (Thomas 11)

In relation to drawing activity by the 1980s, the twin ramifications of internationalism and giant projected scale resulted in the detachment of much of the large-scale drawing by that decade. It is removed from the preconditions of its making, and suffers accordingly by being separated out from its consideration as a form of “archaeology of touch” which critic Tony Godfrey offered as a summary of its purpose; (Godfrey 8) – it is removed from being handled, tactile, pencil-scaled – towards the entrance doorway of the charcoal tomb which Mike Parr, Bernard Sachs, Godwin Bradbeer, Adrienne Gaha, et al advocated through sheer scale. Seeing the work reproduced in a catalogue is not the experience of seeing the work itself: this concept of needing to see the work itself rather than its reproduced state is the further entreaty towards real-time performance as the natural postmodern art climate. The conceptual drawing in Australia from 1980 to 2015 can be seen to preoccupy itself with image and meaning, but to lose the qualities of touch and intimacy that previously differentiated drawing from the homogenised sea of “works on paper”. Characteristically, the large-scale work of the 1980s had less to do with the Australian experience than becoming a counterpoint of international drawing.

By the 2000s, a seismic shift had occurred in the value accorded to “the regions” in art. The contemporary experience of academic/research links between Scotland, Ireland, England, China and Australia has been undertaken in this country within this past decade. In particular, the International Drawing Research Institute (IDRI) was initiated by the then-Dean of the College of Fine Arts (COFA), Professor Ian Howard, at the University of New South Wales in 2000, and is a consortium including COFA, the Glasgow School of Art, Scotland and the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China.

Their successive conferences, in particular those from 2001 and 2003, represent the first formal attempts to create an enlarged discourse from delegations of senior artists and academics from these related institutions: Professors of Drawing and of Design from the tripartite directions that IDRI represents. This was under the auspices of Ian Howard, whose own continuing contribution to Australian conceptual drawing is well established, and Professor Mike Esson, the Director of IDRI, whose Glasgow background brings not only a perspective of the figurative/realist art work being undertaken within Scotland, but whose own work establishes a surreal imagist investigation linking medical, anatomical, and diagrammatic art back to large scale charcoal/pastel drawing.

In discussing the future role of drawing within so-called new technology courses, Ian Howard has said “That future lies in the marriage of traditional techniques with advanced technology and drawing applications.” He extended this, at the 27th July 2003 plenary session at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, to the question of regionalism:
Through the mediation of technology there is always the creating of a generalised experience – through Information Technology there is always an expectation that things will come to you, not come from you as an independent vision. (Howard 2003)

His argument was that the mediation of technology creates a generalized experience detached from locality, and that drawing had always been a “particular experience, free of mediation.” The concept of mediated or unmediated experience features strongly in critical debate about digital drawing, and Howard’s emphasis has been that the computer leads to globalized or international art – homogeneity of purpose. There is a digital signature to digitally mediated images – computer artists always refer to the armada of programs that exist, but they are the same universal programs available to everyone globally – the way they are lit, printed or pixilated always keeps the fingerprints of that technology. Professor Deanna Petherbridge advances about drawing in the outback, as if that physical distance and removal from technological “interruptions” to process makes it somehow more legitimate than other, less immediate types of drawing. She reinforces that touch and absence of technical process is important to drawing’s primacy:

Drawing is the prime model which other arts practices are predicated upon. Because drawing is so direct and so relatively unmediated. Drawing on the computer is the most mediated process you can come up with. Creativity is least interfered with when it is just the mind and the hand coming up with ideas.

(Petherbridge 2009)

Much as this reinforces the “monastery of art” view of drawing that I am well acquainted with, it is however firmly belied by Howard, Parr and others in their own large-scale practices in the 1970s. Performance, and drawing as performance, was to provide the key bridge of internationalism from the 1970s to now. Whether or not the artwork is doggedly “Australian” in its local variance does not define it.

Alan McCulloch concisely outlined the chronology of the first drawers of British settlement who worked here, and it is worth repeating this known history to understand how applied drawing was to the scientific concerns of white settlement:

The first draughtsmen in Australia were the marine topographers who drew the coastal profiles; they were followed by botanical and zoological artists and the military and convict recorders of early life and settlement. After that came the work of the free settlers, the scientific sketches and notations made by explorer artists and the discovery of the local landscape. After which came the influx of foreign artists with the gold rush by 1851. (McCulloch 5)

Imbued with that early spirit of discovery that possessed the historical botanical illustrators, yet fully aware of the postmodern irony he enacts, John Wolseley has since his arrival here from England in 1976 set about “charting” the Australian landscape through drawing: though his chartings are about time, place, and his experience of the landscapes in which his nomadic journeys have taken him, more so than geographic facts alone.

Since 1976, from the deserts of the Northern Territory to the remote plateaus of Western Australia, Wolseley has journeyed to inhositably harsh reaches of wilderness, to draw from the richness of flora and fauna that teems beneath the outward face of such isolated places. Apart from the acutely observed pencil and watercolour drawing, one of Wolseley’s conceptual intentions lies in the exploration of the “accidental” or “incidental” weathering effects of nature as part of his exploration of the passage of time. How does a drawing achieve a temporal significance, and deal with the passage of time, if so much of drawing is invested in the transfixing of a single moment through a direct sketch? Wolseley leaves drawings buried for a length of time, or pegged out in the open held by stones, to be returned to and completed often years later. These are Wolseley’s localised “collaborations” with landscapes such as the Simpson Desert.
Upon recovering a half-drawn page, on returning after years to see nature’s completion, Wolseley wants to see if it has been eaten away, stained by seeping rain, or pocked with mysterious tracks of nocturnal insects who added their mark and memory-trace across its surface in the intervening years. In some instances, it has been disintegrated by the elements. The artist is acknowledging time, process, and chance as elements that also leave fingerprints on a “controlled” drawing. There is also desire to remove the artist from the work: the desire to remove the ego of any one man in the vast tract of a seldom seen desert; a handing over of control to the landscape itself. As Wolseley has said in interview:

There is an incredible tendency now to think that art is some violent, huge, important activity. Whereas actually a lot of the most subtle things that happen in life are much more gentle. And I just think that it’s a lovely gentle idea that the other things that have been around have affected that bit of paper, not only the human being. (Overton 2003)

The concept of a drawing that is not only made from a particular region, but affected by it, and using even the mud, sand and water of that specific place within the drawing’s surface, is a different stance of sublimation to the desert, one that does not conform to the Russell Drysdale and Sidney Nolan mythologising of the stoic settler dominating and battling a harsh environment. In Wolseley’s drawings, the presumed harshness and aridity is eschewed by the effort to live within the desert it “charts”, and explores the overhead views long evident in Aboriginal art to do so.

Wolseley attempts the always difficult endeavour to resolve long distance views integrated with close up views, within the one large multi-panelled drawing. This is linked by the concept of time passing, and how a drawing might indicate time and our passage through the land. It moves, panning in and out cinematically, from the macrocosm to the microcosm in each huge drawing. Wolseley’s drawings exist in the land, not from it. His visual diaries are of encampment in dry creek beds, of moving cyclically to Gosses Bluff in the Northern Territory, where its crown of peaks rises up like a natural amphitheatre in a rock crown about six kilometres across. Apart from Gosse, there is a beach of mangrove swamp 200 kilometres north of Broome, W.A., and an upstream meadow in the Snowy Mountains. All of these locations he returns to periodically to draw the passage of time and its effects.

The overall abstract purpose Wolseley applies is to unite as many as perhaps 70 or 80 panels, as in Journey to Ormiston Gorge in Search of Rare Grasshoppers 1980 to make one map, like a panoramic folded leathery document, or Forty-eight Days in Tnorula – Gosses Bluff, Northern Territory 1980. (figure 13) They become constructed monolithic assemblages of sketched pages. One vast map of a large area of land, and then as the viewer closes in to this wall of drawings the tiny, once invisible sub-layer that exists within that landscape is revealed. The surfaces of the drawings percolate with jottings and diagrams of the microscopic wild-life. Each passage within the drawing is then symptomatic of the whole drawing.

The more trampled or battered his drawn “travel maps” became in their making, and subsequent multi-panelled assemblage in the studio, the more “authentic” the work became when finally pinned, framed and rendered “gallery permanent”. The bricoleur’s instincts that guide John Wolseley’s processes are an additive one. Unlike even John Olsen, the authenticity invested in Wolseley’s drawing was that it was of the landscape, not outside of it. His pencil and watercolour drawings sought to understand the structures and time of the landscape, rather than restating the Russell Drysdale myths of its harsh and alienating properties. He conjoined an Aboriginal art identification with the time and structures of nature and the seasons, and has unfolded them visually and philosophically in ways previous artists (at least of the twentieth and twenty first century) had not.

In the 2014 William Dobell Australian Drawing Biennial, John Wolseley continued the trajectory of eco-research he had instigated in the 1970s – where nature itself and the landscape is enlisted as co-conspirator in the completion or performance of the work. In 2014, in the Noltenius Billabong, Daly River region of the Northern Territory, his aesthetic of drawing-as-performance is for it to allow a discursive interaction with nature as complicit audience to shape his work. Wolseley works not only at drawing the plants there, but incorporating them – swamp arrowgrass and spikerush – embedded into the papers he uses. Wolseley states that:
A constant in Wolseley’s approach has always been to enter the landscape on the basis of time spent observing within it; weeks in a desert observing the patterned steps of a tiny bird, a wren or a grasshopper, returning in cycle. The conceptual underpinning of all his exhibition activity fomented in the 1970s was to convey the “drawing performed” by ensuring the vast, unfurling “travel maps” of his multi-panelled drawings constructed sequences that placed the viewer/audience in the filmic narrative of sequence – the drawing as documentation was unfolding the passage of time of the artist-in-landscape; a directly immersive space, rather than the drawings as description. In leaving his drawings in the landscape, half-buried in the sand in deserts, and returning to collect them from their remote burial sites up to a year later… the pages would often be marked by insects, or half washed away by rain, or otherwise “tracked” and scarred by the natural erosions of the desert. Rather than using drawing to depict or make sketched likenesses of the Australian desert… he has invited the desert itself to add its own marks, erosions, patinations to complete the “performance” of the drawing experiment. It is the opposite of drawing being considered as an artist’s skilled hand that makes lines and shapes emerge. It is incidence; call and response – these are provinces of theatre, of improvisation, and of performance art.

Increasing emphasis on ecology in the landscape has led to reassessment of nature’s varied intrusions; Irene Barberis, writing a Coda: On Drawing, in 2011, summarised:

> It is fascinating to incorporate into the vocabulary of drawing things both visible and invisible. Some accept sound as drawing, or natural phenomena and occurrence as drawing. It is now considered that not only human interventions, but the actions and residues of nature, might constitute drawing. (Barberis 237)

In the evolution of regard for drawing as an independent medium, Bernice Rose, then curator of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, had noted in 1976 that:

> As a discipline it has with few exceptions remained within perimeters basically defined by the end of the 17th century. Perhaps the most notable innovation in drawing of the three intervening centuries was the introduction of collage into fine art by Braque and Picasso in the second decade of this century. (Rose 8)

In considering the concept of the static drawing being animated or passing over into “another state”, the South African artist William Kentridge’s animated drawings from the 1970s are still representing the type of crossover now possible, in fact inevitable, between drawings, etchings, animation and sculpture. Since 1989, he has created series of charcoal drawings towards animated films known as Drawings for Projection. Many of these are politically driven accounts of the violence of South Africa under Apartheid, and employ the disturbing devices of charcoal transforming itself through animation; the exact culmination of “traditional” charcoal drawing writhing into motion. Animation is more than a detour or exception to drawing’s prerogatives since the 17th century. In terms of Kentridge’s performed drawings in conjunction with animation, Anne Rutherford (2013) writes that:

> For Kentridge, the body becomes a medium in itself. He is not a dancer but he knows the poetry of a body moving in space. To his teacher, the famous Jacques Lecoq, the body was the vehicle of creativity and experimentation and the essence of creative theatre was play – an openness to discover what can emerge from movement and play. (Rutherford 23)
This is not an insignificant position: that drawing proceeded from the end of the 17th century relatively uninterrupted in emphasis until Cubism’s introductions of found media enlarged its line and language, and its possibilities to reflect on high and low culture. Postmodernism has created a similar impact on drawing’s provenance; in the language of the orchestrated car tyre burn-out, such as Ben Morieson’s *Burnout 2001 – Torana Spiral*, where the resultant “drawing” is a photographed overhead view of car tyre burn out marks. The “drawing that moves” of digital arts and animation is the *Nude Descending The Staircase* of the 21st century, with experimental theatre and immersion as benchmark rather than the discrete gallery work. In the 1970s, Guy Warren made “drawings in the sky” over Sydney with a sky-writing plane. Via the performance strategies which emerged in that decade; we no longer view drawing as a polite form of study, but through post 1970s criteria of its independence and the augmentation brought to it by aesthetics of performance, theatre, photography or film.

The discussion of why we are “making art indistinguishable from that of the majority of New York artists” has shifted diametrically in the intervening years to 2015. It no longer holds that we are making art with international objectives; by the mid 1980s the sense of regionalism as a distinctive rather than derogatory objective within art had progressed, and drawing became empowered by this return to “place” in Australia. The “provincialist bind” that Terry Smith indicates lies in the tension between “a defiant urge to localism (a claim for the possibility and validity of ‘making good, original art right here’) and a reluctant recognition that the generative innovations in art… are determined externally.” (Smith 1974) That we have, in effect, no control over the provincial nature of our art-making – the provincial relationship is imposed from outside; we find ourselves in that unequal relationship with no element of choice or ability to change New York art power structures. In 1974 Smith had already seen the real innovation occurring in performance art, and in *process* activities:

> In recent years, however, an inventiveness encouraged by open form sculpture, process, environmental, and performance art has marked Australian art. This ranges from the restraint of Nigel Lendon’s systematically arranged metal sculpture to the documentation of inter-personal social situations by Tim Johnson, Peter Kennedy and Mike Parr. (Smith 1974)

Mike Parr, Peter Kennedy, Ken Unsworth and others evolved from performance art into the more permanently viable extensions of process in art: the drawing installations of the 1980s. And yet the character of these exhibitions remained steadfastly “international” in subject matter and style: it plainly eschewed any tarring with the imprint of its regional origins; because provincialism was still in the 1980s associated with Nolan and landscape, deemed unimportant on the world stage. In fact, the positive *lack* of Australian reference in the work determined the success of the major exhibition ironically titled *An Australian Accent* which toured to New York in 1984.

The influence today from Howard, Parr and Wolseley is less one of individual momentum, but in what they allowed into contemporary discourse in practice, and it is endemic. One notable example is that of Gosia Wlodarczak, whose performed drawing residencies included the Dobell Australian Drawing Biennial of 2014, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and the Tarra Warra Museum of Art, March 2015. Jane Somerville writes of her aesthetic:

> Drawing is at the heart of Gosia Wlodarczak’s practice. She doesn’t work in a studio. Instead her drawings happen in real time in the exhibition space documenting the present moment as she witnesses it. (Artist Profile 2015)

To which Wlodarczak adds: “Drawing is the basis of my whole practice, extending towards performance, interactive situations, installation, sound and film; I refer to it as cross-disciplinary drawing. I draw my environment as I see it, in real time. I think of my process as archiving my actuality.” (Artist Profile 2015)

To Tony Godfrey (1990), British art critic and author on drawing aesthetics, this performative capacity resides in:
To exist “in time” is to be the perpetrator; which has, with Dada aplomb, restored oneself, albeit cardboard suited and screaming, back into the dynamic. “Drawing” may well be traditionally perceived as the airing of study-skills; of watching a monkey ride a uni-cycle. In every ragged sense of this disappearing cultural memory of lost generations of sketchpads, pencils sharpened with a blade, or life drawing of nude models and folds of white drapery – all somehow anachronistic crossovers to Renaissance skills… yet the types of drawing-as-performance pursued in the 1970s has enabled our view of contemporary drawing as a crucible of innovation. The languages constructed then were less of “drawing”, but borrowed and repositioned the provocations of experimental theatre to reinsert the artist-as-performer; as time-traveller, and iconoclast, back into the shop-worn gallery drawing matrix.

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Figure 1: Ian Howard *Enola Gay* 1975 black wax crayon rubbing on three sheets of paper, two black and white photographs wax rubbing 274.0 x 361.0 cm (irreg.) ov photographs 99.0 x 116.7 cm each sheet: 99 x 116.7 cm
Figure 2: Ian Howard, installation: *Mig Alley Fighter (PLA Airforce Mig 15)* 1976 pigmented wax rubbing with paint on canvas 176/186 x 152.7cm
Figure 3: Ian Howard inkjet on paper site documentation 3, 2009.
Figure 4: Ian Howard Installation: PLA HERO TRAIN -2009 pigmented wax rubbing with ink on canvas 152.7 x 1022cm
Figure 5: Mike Parr. *A-Arnaud (Against the light) Self portrait at sixty-five* (detail). 1983 installation at the Art Gallery of Western Australia.

Figure 6: Mike Parr. *Luridities (Mengele and Co. come back for a heart transplant) the rapids Absque hoc self portrait*. 1985 charcoal, pastel on Stonehenge paper 127 x 291 cms.
Figure 7: Mike Parr  Do Padera Coco (Self Portrait as a Pear)  TO HAVE DONE WITH THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD  1983 charcoal and margarine on photographic backdrop paper triptych: each sheet 183 x 274cms

Figure 8: Mike Parr  Ablaut Self Portrait 1984 charcoal, pastel on Stonehenge paper 127 x 335cms
Figure 9: John Wolseley (detail) 2006 watercolour and coloured pencil on paper 123 x 208cms, Roslyn Oxley Gallery
Figure 10: John Wolseley Carboniferous 2010 wall installation Roslyn Oxley Gallery
Figure 11: John Wolseley Carboniferous 2010 (detail study) wall installation Roslyn Oxley Gallery
Figure 12: John Wolseley  Carboniferous 2010 (detail) wall installation Roslyn Oxley Gallery
Figure 13: John Wolseley  *Forty-eight days in Tnorula – Gosses Bluff, Northern Territory* 1980 watercolour, charcoal and pencil on paper on canvas 259 x 315cms
About the Author

Dr. Neill Overton is Senior Lecturer in Art History and Visual Culture at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga. His research interests are in contemporary Australian drawing, art prizes, awards and surveys. He was a lecturer at RMIT, Victoria College, and Melbourne University in Art History and Drawing, and worked extensively as a newspaper illustrator, exhibiting artist, art reviewer and novelist. He has curated major exhibitions towards histories of Australian film, theatre and television. His PhD was on Icons and Images in Australian Drawing 1970 – 2003, and his critical essays address the relationship between contemporary regional and urban art.