

PATRICK SHIRVINGTON

Patrick Shirvington is a practicing artist investigating our relationship to the natural world through drawing. He has been artist in residence at many schools and colleges including Arthur Boyd's Studio: Bundanon. His work is held in permanent collections with Macquarie University, Kedumba Drawing Collection, Hawkesbury Regional Gallery, Edogowa Museum Osaka, Japan and Arthur Boyd's Bundanon Collection. Patrick has a Masters of Cross-Disciplinary Art and Design from UNSW Art and Design.

PHENOMENOLOGY: DRAWN FROM

The practice of drawing has proven to be a way of knowing the world. This paper will endeavour to enhance cognition through the practice of drawing with the purpose of reconnecting to the world around us. *We tend to look at the object, however, do we see the subject?* The project will work with drawing, but not in the usual way of developing precision and draftsman-ship, but rather as a tool for phenomenology.

This paper will look at the process of drawing in relation to what can be observed as an outcome of the drawn, not in the customary scope of drawing, which is the movement through the mind linking the seen through multiple marks on the drawing surface. Rather, we will be observing the marks made by our surroundings, which are not usually noticed.

We speak of ego, of what “I” have drawn or as so often stated, what I was directed to draw. But, do we really listen to what is behind the drawing and engage in dialogue with our surroundings? Are we truly conscious of all that is around us as separate entities that come together to become one? Awareness of our environs involves cognition, as Humberto Maturana mentions, “Living systems are cognitive systems, and living is a process of cognition” (Maturana 1980, 13). In other words, do we really see and take notice of the things that are around us? Even Christian teachings support a deeper soul recognition and belief in the things that are “seen and unseen”, included in the words of the Nicene Creed of the third century AD, “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all that is, seen and unseen...”.

Through contemplation we begin to experience a deeper sense of the unseen around us. As Frederick Frank comments in his book *The Zen of Seeing*, “In this twentieth century, to stop rushing around, to sit quietly on the grass, to switch off the world and come back to earth, to allow the eye to see a willow, a bush, a cloud, a leaf, is an unforgettable experience” (Frank 1973). The drawing itself, as object, adds another dimension to the complex subjective experience of object, drawing and the drawn (Ashton 2014, 49). As mentioned by Patricia Cain “The vital question was not as my tutors had asked, ‘what is the drawing about?’ but rather ‘what have I come to know about the world through making this drawing?’”(Cain 2010, 19).

Taking drawing out of our hands and allowing the world around us to speak is crucial to developing an understanding of that world. “Through trying to direct attention into the act of looking, we can experience for ourselves the gap which there is between our habitual awareness and the direct experience of what is there in front of us. It is only when this hiatus in experience is overcome that we realize how little we usually perceive directly of the concrete detail of the particular. We usually classify verbally and experience just a vague generality” (Bortoft 2013, 67). We tend to get into a habitual way of seeing and experiencing the world and refuse to see anything else within, similar to the experience of the cube (fig 1) or the *Bronzewing* (fig 2). We often only perceive the object in one way and look no further.

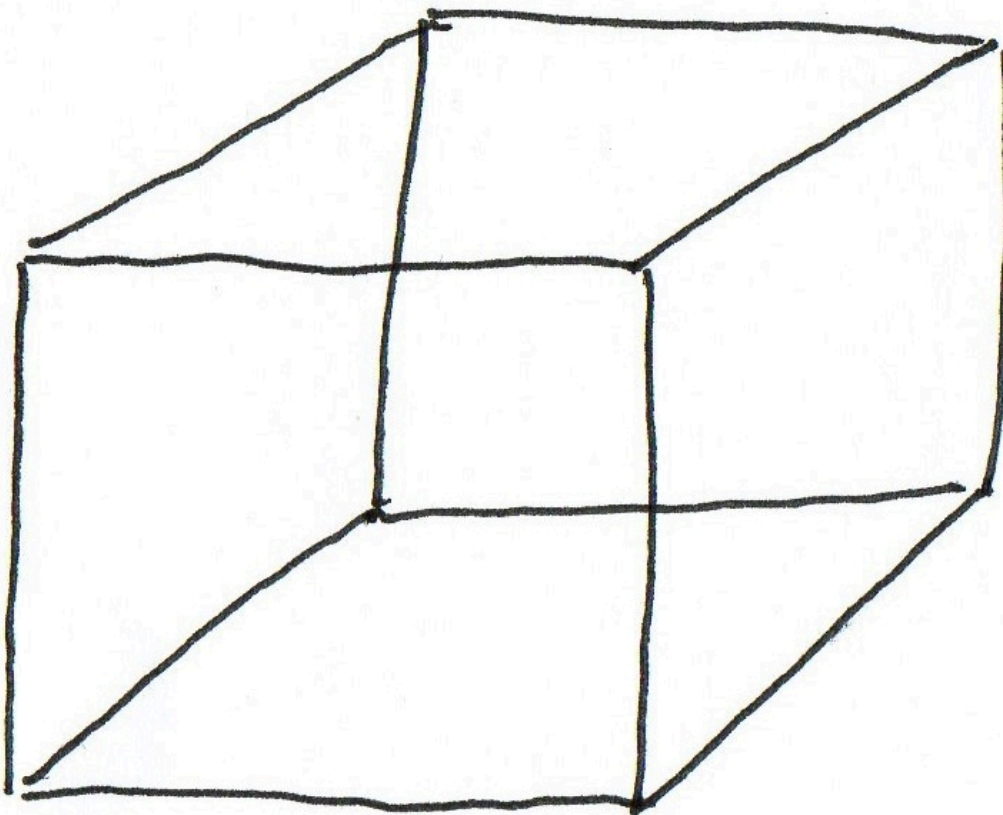


Fig 1. The cube. Seen two ways.



Fig 2. *Bronzewing amongst the leaves*. Watercolour-ink on Arches paper. 40 x 41 cm. Private collection.

As artists—and observer—there is a tendency to not allow the hidden, intuitive; the unknown or esoteric to manifest in our work. Instead we take the safe route of acceptance, avoiding questioning and ridicule to preserve our mental integrity and credibility.

Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story...

Homer, first line of the *Odyssey*

I could speak of the cliched experience of my work being directed by a greater hand than mine, just as artists have witnessed throughout the centuries from their desolate garrets. I have no doubt there is a transcendant influence on creativity to which other artists could testify, including such names as Beethoven, van Gogh, Rembrandt, Michelangelo, and, of course, Rothko.

In this paper I will not attempt to investigate this phenomena, as I feel it is fruitless to even begin, let alone find any answers to what is known as intuition. Einstein first described his intuitive thought processes at a physics conference in Kyoto in 1922, when he indicated that he used images to solve his problems and found words later (Pais 1982). Einstein explicated this bold idea at length to one scholar of creativity, telling Max Wertheimer that he never thought in logical symbols or mathematical equations, but in images, feelings, and even musical architectures (Wertheimer 1959, 213-228)(Bernstein 2010).

“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift” (Albert Einstein quoted in Blyth Hall 2014, xix).

To look at or study intuition is not easy, it cannot merely be looked at, as the phenomena itself has to be looked into, as another dimension. I recently visited the Temple of Apollo (fig 3) inhabited by the Oracle of Delphi, dating back to 1400 BC. “The god goes to Delphi and pierces with his arrows a monstrous serpent which was ravaging and laying waste the land” (Shuré 1906, 36). Apollo then establishes the temple; a symbol of this divine light over darkness and evil, ushering in the oracle and the divine through the ensuing *prophecies*.



Fig 3. Delphi, Temple of Apollo.

For centuries scientists, archaeologists, geophysicists and historians have investigated the site, many espousing that it was through hallucinations from gases escaping from beneath the earth that bespoke the prophecies, believing the oracle was nothing more than charlatan superstition.

I feel the real answer is not with the scientific proof either way, but on the pediment of the temple whose inscription announces: "Know thyself, and thou wilt know the Universe of the Gods". It is this tacit knowledge we all have within, and need to be aware of, this dormant knowledge that seizes the truth and stimulates creativity. Drawing needs to be viewed not through ego or artefact, but rather as a means of deep contemplation.

As we drove north from Athens through the meadows of grapes and olives we were awakened to the majesty of mount Parnassus with lofty peaks 2450m high, cradling the Temple of Apollo between its peaks. We had entered a lost world, or as the Greeks believed, the centre of the earth. This place has inspired *artists, poets, writers, and philosophers* for centuries; it was not a place that I was about to visit as a weary tourist. On the contrary, I had found an entry point for my imaginings where my drawing implement could be spiritually supported.

I have been developing the drawing implement (to be referred to as DI from now on) for a couple of years, endeavouring to bring the world of object closer to our cognitive understanding. It was exhibited at Eramboo “On Islands project” in Sydney in 2014, under the title *Insula Natura* (fig 4). This was a project with sculptural drawing and soundscape as tools for phenomenology, describing what one would feel if nature could speak. Research has shown that full awareness or cognition comes about through time spent with and experiencing the subject, in this case, the natural world. This work will endeavour to enhance cognition through reconnecting to nature, allowing one’s observations to elevate a mere objective glance to a heightened spiritual experience.

Through the use of sound projecting from a lyre-shaped sculptural installation in the natural environment, the viewers were given the opportunity to reflect on their surrounds. The sculptural web tapers to a single thread, featuring a drawing implement whose ethereal movement is suggestive of nature's enduring voice. Evoking an innate meditative state accessible to us all, *Insula Natura* bridges the mundane and invites us to reflect on our symbiotic relationship with the natural world.



Fig 4. Drawing implement. *Insula Natura*. Eramboo Artist Environment 2014.



Fig 5. Drawing implement. Constructed of laminated dead tree branches.



Fig 6 .Drawing implement with ink-soaked hemp.

The DI is a metaphor relating to the voice of the world around us, making marks upon a surface, as if it is directly speaking to us. The practitioner then observes through contemplation, the intuitive tacit knowledge that the drawings impart. The DI has been erected in different environments including a now permanent fixture in the bushland adjoining my studio (figs 5 & 6). There is a portable model that can be carried and used in any situation.

The permanent or main installation (fig 5) has been constructed from fallen tree branches laminated together. Attached is a suspended natural hemp cord cradling a weighted drawing utensil.

Attention to the writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 – 1832) was the stimulus for this investigation as even today we tend to be divorced from nature

and only attend to it through mainstream science as an observer, studying only the mere surface. As David Seamon comments “I argue that Goethe’s way of science, understood as a phenomenology of nature, might be one valuable means for fostering a deeper sense of responsibility and care for the natural world. By providing a conceptual and lived means to allow the natural world to present itself in a way by which it might speak if it were able, Goethe’s method offers one conceptual and applied means to bypass the reductive accounts of nature typically produced by standard scientific and humanist perspectives” (Seamon 2002). Inviting the observer to sit and meditate on the installation, resonate sound will gradually envelop the participant and appear to flow uninhibited from the harp-like structure. This subtle aural interaction will entice viewers to remain with the seemingly simplistic sculpture for longer than anticipated, allowing for an intuitive realisation to grow. Being enabled to grasp our symbiotic relationship with the natural world is integral to a continuing, sustainable human existence on this planet, our island home, in this unforgiving universe. *Insula Natura* fuses sculptural and interactive soundscape with the intent to nurture this understanding, bringing into focus nature’s voice for those who have rarely stopped to listen.

From the Upanishads: “Not what the eye sees, but that which makes the eye see, that is the spirit; and: Truly, oneself is the Eye, the endless Eye” (Franck 1973, 113).

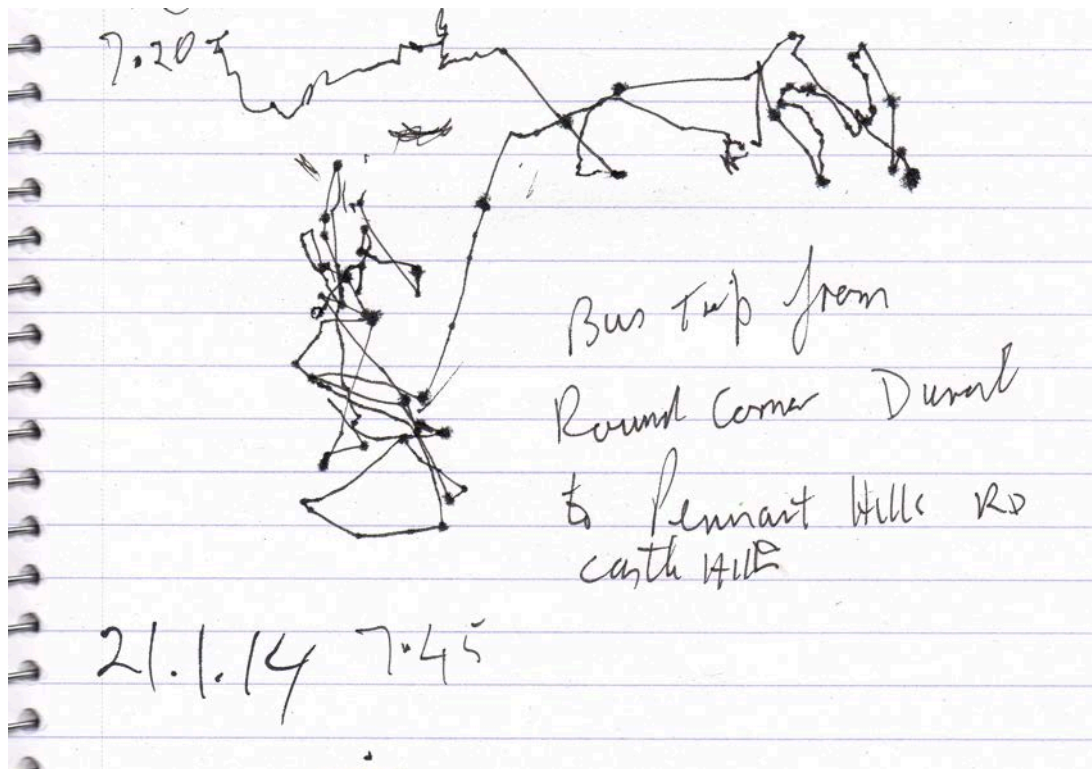


Fig 7. Drawing marks from bus trip.

As a metaphor of observation

The DI opens the door to a dialogue with the object, to delve into and observe the essence of it's being, natural or man-made. By observing the outcome, one is transported on an unconscious journey reminiscent of Alice through the looking glass, to a deeper point within ourselves. The links of supportive language and interfacing of the drawing are explored and new possibilities suggested by the marks on various surfaces (figs 8&9).



Fig 8. Drawing implement suspended in water solution.

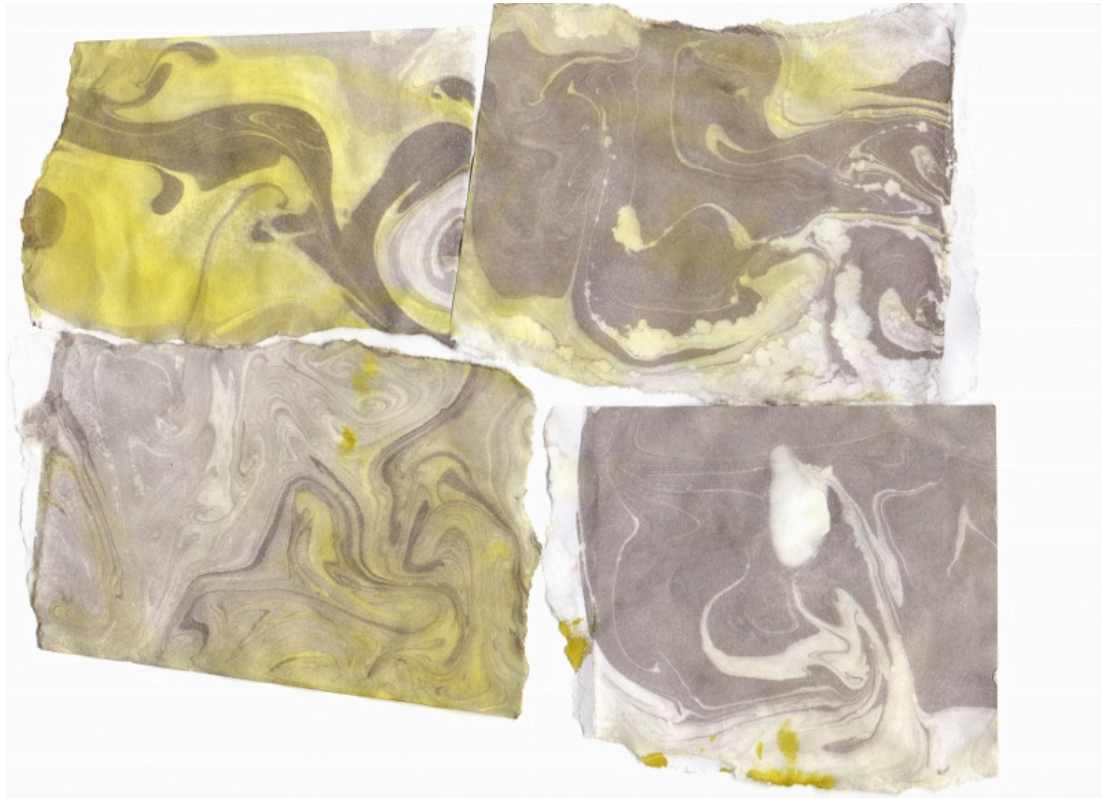


Fig 9. Drawing samples on paper, from water solution.

Tying in the metaphor of the DI to the oracle of Delphi is best read through the words of Joseph Campbell when he comments, “The agony of breaking through personal limitations is the agony of spiritual growth. Art, literature, myth and cult, philosophy, and ascetic disciplines are instruments to help the individual past his limiting horizons into spheres of ever-expanding realisation. As he crosses threshold after threshold, conquering dragon after dragon, the stature of the divinity that he summons to his highest wish increases, until it subsumes the cosmos. Finally, the mind breaks the bounding sphere of the cosmos to a realization transcending all experiences of form – all symbolisations, all divinities: a realization of the ineluctable void” (Campbell 1993, 190).

For drawing to key into the consciousness of the now—2015—one must “Know thyself”.

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