

PATRICK SHIRVINGTON - UNSW MCDArtDes.  
Artist-Educator-Conservation and Land Management.

With forty years' experience as a visual artist Patrick continues to exhibit his work in both private and public galleries, including Macquarie University, Hawkesbury, Bathurst, Orange Regional Galleries, Art Gallery of NSW. Works are permanently housed at Macquarie University; Hawkesbury Regional Gallery; Edogawa Museum, Osaka, Japan; Arthur Boyd's Bundanon and the Kedumba Drawing collection. Being faithful to the landscape, Patrick has combined his veneration for ecology and art by conducting workshops through local councils and taking up residencies highlighting our environmental connection utilising the simple tools of pencil and paper. Completing his Masters of Cross-Disciplinary Art and Design studies at UNSW, focussing on Phenomenology, cognition of the natural world, Patrick is currently working on a program for schools and councils to further their knowledge and connection to the environment.

Patrick Shirvington supervises teams in natural area restoration through the National Trust of Australia.

## Character of the bush

### **ABSTRACT**

Through environmental education, art could be used as a conduit to the fundamental experience of nature. I feel that the art of drawing has the power to connect directly, enhancing complete immersion in nature.

With a piece of paper and pencil students work directly in the landscape, identifying plants and creating characters and stories. I begin by telling an ecological story utilising the different characters that inhabit the natural world. The student's then engage with the bushland discovering their own imaginative characters, by identifying traits within their chosen plant. The student becomes more connected and has fun creating their stories. By exposing students to nature in this way doesn't over-burden them with science and negativity but introduces the journey of wonder and beauty, initiating their veneration of the environment. To experience nature in this way will stimulate a new consciousness, inviting the imagination to connect the natural world as an extension of simply being human.

## THE SCIENCE OF NOT SEEING

Let me first begin by discussing the way we normally approach the subject of the natural world, and thus the environment, climate change and so on. It is through scientific analysis. Science, in its common usage has come to be associated with the one and only way that data is gathered and tested. This is probably because the word was originally derived from the Latin word, “Scientia”, meaning knowledge or understanding! We need to remember that when we use the word science in the context of gaining knowledge, we are generally referring to a particular approach or scientific method. Likewise when the word intuition is used it is generally thought to mean a set of beliefs and rituals that are not subject to any verification process. This is too simplistic in both cases!

Firstly let’s look at the scientific method of investigation. When we physically observe something, we are using our senses, termed eye of flesh, however we are only observing through sensory or monological experience. This monological way of looking doesn’t have the ability to explain the aesthetics or mood or soul of what we are seeing, this vision must then include a dialogical or eye of mind lens i.e. one that utilizes our imagination, exploring the seen with most of our mental capacity. The third way of seeing is termed trans-logical which is knowledge gained through contemplation. Just as reason transcends flesh, so contemplation transcends reason. Where the eye of reason is trans-empirical, the eye of contemplation is trans-rational, trans-logical and trans-mental. This is the *causal* realm and the knowing that develops, is sometimes described as *gnosis*, or knowledge of the spiritual realm.

So to attempt an investigation without contemplation will inevitably commit a category error. It is the trap of reductionism or scientific materialism.

## DRAWING AS COGNITION

I don’t really know something until I draw it.

Professor David Haley maintains “*drawing is integral to perception and cognitive understanding*” (Haley. 2010).

However, the education system today deems art as a play thing and excludes it from important learning and concentrates on “more useful” and economic viable subjects.

Forgetting skills like:

- Cognitive observation
- A means of hand eye coordination
- Reflection and contemplation - the condition of presence
- Fostering creativity
- To envision through intuition

## CONTEMPLATION: Allowing the world to speak

It could be said that the first two experiences, through the eye of flesh and the eye of mind, act in similar ways, as they refer to the seer and the seen and the felt life, which allows them both to be declared as object and able to be explained. The third 'trans-logical' experience as mentioned is only gained through contemplation. In his book *The New Man*, Thomas Merton described contemplation as – *"the perfection of love and knowledge"*.

Through contemplation we begin to experience a deeper sense of the unseen around us. As Frederick Franck 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"* (Franck xx.1973). *"I have learned that what I have not drawn I have not really seen, and when I start drawing an ordinary thing I realise how extraordinary it is"*. Franck P6.

*The drawing itself, as object, adds another dimension to the complex subjective experience of object, drawing and the drawn* (Ashton 2014 p49).

To draw is to slow down and contemplate -

*A spontaneous thought put on a surface as a mark, a mark creating a spontaneous thought.*

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. P67)

## THE CHARACTER OF THE BUSH - Phenomenological Drawing

*"I believe the aim of art is to make real through the imagination, that which science cannot articulate through the word, allowing the child to connect"*.

OK...When we get the children into the bush away from the masses of electronic devices - Then what ?

Once the child enters the natural world, we begin our connection with some simple stories and examples of morphology and metamorphosis of the surrounding bushland. This is then followed by simple mark making with pencil on paper. The main focus is with the movement of the bushland that one is feeling, just allowing things to happen. Eventually the participants will relate to what they have drawn through the marks they are making and mould the stories with the characters they produce.

## THE NATURE OF DRAWING.

The idea of “Drawing on Nature” workshops came about through an invitation from Brewongle Environment Education Centre at Sackville North, west of Sydney. Through a number of links and needing a venue to experiment with a project of cross-disciplinary art and science, I was fortunate to team up with Chris Tobin, Darug Heritage Educator conducting a teaching and learning field study program for 8 Stage 6 students and 3 teachers. From this program I was invited by various councils in Sydney to conduct environmental talks utilising the scaffold of drawing. The program has been broadened to now work with younger students, allowing their imagination to expand by their creative and intuitive meanderings. As professor Robin Moore comments, “*Children live through their senses.....Sighted in Last Child in the woods.* (Louv 2010. p66).

Memories are so often related to the senses; we remember back to the smell of the Boronia, the feel of the rough dry grass under our bare feet, the sound of the morning song of the magpie or the association of happiness with the constant buzz of the cicadas at Christmas time.

IF WE DRAW IT ...WE THEN SEE IT.



## SELECTED QUOTES

*“It is more important to pave the way for the child to want to know than to put him on a diet of facts he is not ready to assimilate”.* Rachel Carson 1956

*“The arts provide a more comprehensive and insightful education because they invite students to explore the emotional, intuitive, and irrational aspects of life that science is hard pressed to explain. Humans invented each of the arts as a fundamental way to represent aspects of reality; to try to make sense of the world, manage life better, and share these perceptions with others”..* Fowler 1996

*“Drawing is integral to perception and cognitive understanding”* David Haley (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 (Blyth Hall. P xix. 2014)*

*“Almost at once the very quality of my perception changed. Nothing interfered now between my eye and what I say...Drawing the landscape, I ‘became’ that landscape, felt un-separated from it... This is what seeing-drawing really does; you become what you draw. Unless you become it, you cannot draw it”.* Franck 1993

*“Art always the daughter of the divine, has become estranged from her parent. If it finds its way back to its origins and again is accepted by the divine, then it will become what it should within civilisation, within world-wide culture; a boon for mankind.”* Steiner 1923

*“Art enhances creativity, which is crucial for innovation and adaptation. Creative people have the ability to see multiple solutions to a problem, employ original thoughts, and use their imagination. As a field, art promotes these skills, encouraging unique and divergent responses and diverse ways of looking at things”.*J. Bullard 2010



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