INTRODUCTION
The monstrosity of the unbounded body that discards the containment of its own skin is reflected in those insects whose bodies transmute through the metamorphic stages of their life cycle, in the changeling lifeform generating within an egg, in the miraculous horror of a placental foetus growing and feeding parasitically on its host and, in the extreme, in the desolation and emptiness of the cadaverous body.

Betrayal of bodily containment is likewise exposed in orifices that ooze bodily fluids, a subject that is explored in Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection. I wanted to investigate the relationship between monstrosity and that horror which she describes as subversive, hovering

...on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or barely so – double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject.¹

This quotation encapsulates the themes that run through my research: the monstrous body, the fragility and dangers of borderlines and the disintegration of identity in constructing an imagery of horror.

My studio practice documented in this exegesis argued that the medieval monster has been reassembled as the unbounded body of environmental horror. I proposed that, if the earth is conceptualised as an unbounded body in which disturbing the delicate balance of nature could precipitate unanticipated environmental hazards and disasters, then this could see the spawning of monsters of environmental horror. Conceptualising the earth as an unbounded body also allowed me to treat the monster as an abstract entity rather than as the literal, mutant hybrid of gothic demonology.

In undertaking this research I wanted to come to an understanding of the fascination the monsters of medieval imaginings still hold for us. One way of achieving this understanding is to map the landscape of the unknown. In *Maps of Medieval Thought: The Hereford Paradigm*, Naomi Reed Kline established that the rationale for the *mappae mundi* was to map the world and the heavens to locate and contain monsters and demons within God’s plan of creation.

> Each text, each image informs and dispels a fear of the unknown and replaces it with authoritative evidence, and the limited number of spatial interstices dispel the horror of the vacuum (‘horror vacui’). The idea of the map was to fill the spaces, to prove that the world was contained within the framework of Creation, Judgment, and Redemption.²

My studio practice sought to map environmental horror in the Australian landscape and raise concerns for the human impact on natural ecologies. Practical investigations led to experiments with drawing and computer imagery, which resulted in ten digital landscapes, and experiments with collections of found objects, furs and bones that were to become a series of small assemblages trapped in miniature glass towers.

This exegesis explains the evolution of my studio practice, describing the experiments that led to the aesthetic decisions made in selecting the works for exhibition. It describes the studio-based methodology with which I engaged to

experiment with various materials and techniques. My approach was to cross boundaries between media, working with and combining digital and traditional media; scanning, layering and manipulating sections of original drawings in Adobe Photoshop®; utilising wide-format digital printing technology to transfer these images onto silk fabric; beading, stitching and fraying the edges of the silk images; and, finally, constructing the small sculptural assemblages.

The glass towers and the landscapes represented visually distinct bodies of work but were unified by the relationship between layering and assemblage. Layering, whether of glass, natural materials, metal, paint or digital image, is a fundamental process in my art making. Assemblage, in art discourse, is the combining of heterogeneous materials or found objects, giving them a fresh context and an alternative meaning. In Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism, Elizabeth Grosz employs the term assemblage to explain a concept of the body that is not bound by rigid boundaries, where linkages are made between fragments of bodies and fragments of objects.³ The fragmentation and linkage of ‘ideas, things – human, animate, and inanimate’ does not conform to a preordained order but operates on the imperative ‘of endless experimentation, metamorphosis, or transmutation, alignment and realignment.’⁴ Assemblage, then, shares much with the conceptualisation of the medieval monster and creates a link between the grotesques of the dissertation and the means of making monsters in my studio practice.

I was particularly curious about fledgling technologies in the textile industry and the potential of direct digital printing as a means to produce one-off, fine art prints. Only through new and innovative developments in the textile printing industry was this possible. I took advantage of direct digital printing methods to have seven of my landscapes printed on silk with a wide-format press. The

³ E. A. Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism (St. Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 1994). 167
⁴ Ibid.
research that I conducted into this technology represents my contribution to new knowledge in the field of visual arts.

In the following exegesis I outline the progress of my studio research, culminating in the works selected for my examination exhibition. The first chapter describes explorations of technique and media in my early drawings. The drawings became an important component in the making of digital images recording the environmental horror of drought, which is described in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 explains the process of direct digital printing and its application to silk and to archival papers. The final chapter describes early experiments with found objects and their evolution into the miniature assemblages that became the second body of work in my exhibition.
Chapter 1
Drawing

Image 1: 1 Autopsy Drawing 1, 2006
90 x 102 cm
Ink and pencil on drafting film

My investigations began with experimental drawing. In these images I contemplated skin as a liminal space. Skin, I conjectured, is the external boundary of the body and the symbolic periphery of the subjective self. Skin maps a territory between subject and object, personal experience and public interaction. As a crust enveloping the body, skin is the fragile membrane that encloses organs, bones and vessels and protects them from violation by outside elements.

However, as Kristeva’s theory of abjection argues, the fragile skin offers precarious protection. Skin does not define an impenetrable exterior barrier. Skin penetrates the ambiguous interior regions through the various bodily orifices from
which, in turn, leak odious secretions. Mucus, blood, vomit, faeces, semen, pus, sweat and tears, that were once part of the self, are projected into the domain of the ‘other.’ The body is seen to erode its boundaries, breaching a borderline and blurring the edges of identity. Appalled and disgusted by the uncontainable body, the subject is consumed by self-loathing and compelled to reject/abject his or her own self.

The series of drawings that emerged from these deliberations explore mark-making on translucent drafting film. Superficially, drafting film appears to be a delicate and fragile membrane. In reality, I chose it for its resilience. I can torture its surface, scratch into it, stab it with 8B graphite points, and drown it in ink splatters. The tactile quality of the drafting film lends itself to looking and acting like skin.

I approached the first series of drawings intuitively and without preconceived notions of graphically representing a monster. While the images that emerged were abstractions, I remained very aware of ideas pertinent to the abject. In these drawings internal organs, bones and entrails of human and nonhuman species intermingled in the terrain of the inner body. A macabre landscape was unveiled: the site of an autopsy. A body was being opened up to invite the viewer to look inside. Here, species integrity was compromised, revealing an implicit threat that, should the skin of the animal body be peeled away, flesh, bone, organs and viscera would expose the corporeal proximity of the human to the entire animal kingdom. But the landscape-like structure of the composition also allows for the outside—the territory of inanimate and animate ‘things’—to encroach upon the inside. The motif of skin, whether covered in fur, feather or scale, or starkly naked, functions as the permeable borderline differentiating species.

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Image 1: 2 Autopsy Drawing 2, 2006
90 x 68 cm
Ink and pencil on drafting film
The animal insistently inhabits my imagery. Fur grows out of the squishy entrails and sharp bones. Beak, claw, fang and tail amalgamate with skull and vertebrae in an encounter with the perplexing forces and inhabitants of nature.

These images were designed to raise questions rather than provide answers. Do these landscapes show the aftermath of a violent death, a roadkill, or a slaughtered beast? Are the unbounded bodies of these autopsy drawings connected to the monsters of medical science? Is it a view of the space, temporal and emotional, where the drama of environmental horror begins? Do they allude to that simultaneous experience of attraction and revulsion that compels our fascination for horror?
Image 1: 4 Autopsy Drawing 4, 2006
92 x 122 cm
Ink and pencil on drafting film
The next series of drawings mark a departure from the intuitive, non-figurative pictorial language of the autopsy series. In *Skull* (Image 1: 5), the introduction of a recognisable skull explicitly references the human presence in an otherwise nonspecific confusion of organic body parts. Similarly, in *Body Relics* (Image 1: 6), animal and human heads are incorporated in a landscape format. The picture is no longer made up of a self-contained motif but, like a photographic snapshot, opens the possibility that the land can be imagined as continuing well beyond the defining edge of the picture plane. It effectively envelops the figurative elements, making them part of the land.
92 x 120 cm
Ink and pencil on drafting film

Image 1: 7 *Out of the Dark*, 2008
92 x 120 cm
Ink and pencil on drafting film
Out of the Dark (Image 1: 7) introduces a recognisable animal that nevertheless dissolves into an abstracted landscape of monstrous organic forms. Utilising a darker palette to emphasise the ominous gloom, the kangaroo is a mysterious creature camouflaged and concealed within the earth. Metaphorically, it is driven by the relentless passage of time converging toward death. Life is ephemeral; the soils, fragile.

River Remnants (Image 1: 8) marks a return to the nonfigurative landscape. It emerges as an aerial view of the estuarine mouth of the river where fresh and salt water merge.

Although not a literal presence in these landscapes, the monster is implicit in the ambiguous shapes that suggest unnatural forces and aberrant life forms. The medieval monster was a grotesque hybrid, a nonspecies that defied the laws of
natural taxonomy. Consequently, the monster that emerges in my studio practice is an elusive entity, emerging in different guises in response to subliminal fears and imaginings.

I wanted the images to be ambiguous rather than literal. I was looking for something to intrigue, something lyrical as well as disturbing. In making these drawings I was particularly drawn to the later works of James Gleeson. His surreal canvases are infused with atmospheric turbulence and landforms which metamorphose into anthropomorphic animal forms. (Image 1: 9)
He writes of

[clouds behaving like creatures! I wanted the clouds to look alive with some sort of animal life.]\(^6\)

In his cosmic dream panoramas, the landscape itself becomes monstrous. Forms mutate and change, and dismembered body parts are glimpsed and consumed in an orgasmic whirlwind. This meteorological turmoil erupts from the 'primordial fear of darkness' which, he imagines, is synthesised in surrealism with daytime reality.\(^7\)

Like Gleeson, I wanted my landscapes to be infused with an animal presence.

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\(^6\) James Gleeson, Hendrik Kolenberg, and Anne Ryan, *James Gleeson: Drawings for Paintings* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2003). 111

Watercolour and Collage

Image 1: 10 Collision, 2008
56 x 76 cm
Watercolour and graphite powder

Image 1: 11 Red Dirt, 2008
56 x 76 cm
Watercolour and graphite powder
In this early, experimental phase of my studio project I wanted to explore different media and allow the experience of mark-making to lead the process. The investigation included watercolour and collage techniques. The watercolours are painted on unstretched 640gsm watercolour paper chosen deliberately for the tactile quality of its rough texture. I wanted to expand my experiments to include graphite powders and paper collage that needed to be fixed to the surface with adhesives. Drafting film is incompatible with adhesive.

With Collision (Image 1: 10) and Red Dirt (Image 1: 11) the graphite replicates an earth pigment, and the collaged papers of Desert Fur (Image 1: 12) replicate the texture of rocks. These imaginary landscapes all have high horizons that leave about two-thirds of the paper’s area to explore mountainous and rocky landforms.
*Pattern Fish (Image 1: 12)* are two images where I have experimented with collage, graphite powder and a computer scan of a dead fish. The fish scan was
printed on iron-on transfer paper and adhered (ironed) directly onto the watercolour paper. The images were important to the development of my thinking; they introduce the idea of referencing human encroachment on the wild environment through grid-like instructions and symbols from paper dressmaking patterns that mark out the dimensions of the human body.

These drawings represented an exploration of ideas rather than finished works. Their significance to my research is in the abstracted landforms and the reference to the abject body that will resurface in digital images integral to my final body of work.
Chapter 2: Digital Images

Early Experimentation

The early years of my candidacy were characterised by experimentation with different techniques and materials. Coming from a painting background, and with recent studies in textiles, I was interested in taking a multimedia approach to these investigations. Significantly, I saw a similarity between the methodology of assemblage and working with layers in the computer program, Photoshop®. I was able to scan images from my drawing portfolio, for instance, and import them as layers into Photoshop®. Once digitised and imported into Photoshop®, a drawing can be treated as a dynamic element in a multilayered image. Decisions applicable to those made in traditional painting – in composition and in such elements as colour, tone, space, form, line, value – can be reviewed with the click of a mouse or stylus pen.

Once scanned, I was not confined to using the entire drawing, but could also select details of the digitised image and overlay these as alternative layers. Each layer could be individually manipulated (resizing, rotating, stretching, distorting, varying exposure, colour etc.) and after increasing or decreasing the transparency of individual layers, merged into any number of different resolutions.

In addition to scanning my drawings, I built up a ‘library’ of scanned found objects that might be useful to my studio practice of ‘making monsters’: animal skins and bones, natural materials, close-up photographs of patterns and shadows on rocks or even small animals themselves.

The images developed during this experimental phase of my work correspond to my dissertation research in which I was investigating the symbolic role of animals in the portrayal of medieval monsters. I chose not to follow this line of investigation because it soon became evident that the subject was already well covered by literature and beyond the scope of my topic. These images, however,
demonstrate aspects of working with Photoshop®: how a theme can generate a number of related images (Image 2: 1, four variations on the fox theme) and the results of collaging digitised drawings and scans of found objects (Image 2: 2, Birth of a Snake).

Image 2: 1 Four variations on the fox theme, 2006-2007
Digital Prints
Pattern Fish (Image 2: 3) demonstrates the technique of merging digitised images of found objects with a drawing of the same subject (Image 1: 12). The marks and codes of the paper patterns reference the human body, while a rocky embankment merges with animal fur that could alternatively be read as grassland. This image marks a return to the landscape configuration that characterised my autopsy drawings. Once more, I thought of Gleeson’s anthropomorphic landscapes and resolved to investigate the concept of a landscape infused with a monstrous presence.

A landscape journey and the mappae mundi

The direction of my dissertation was informed by the European-Christian cartographic tradition of mapmaking, the medieval mappae mundi. These maps served as 'a medieval container of concepts made visual' in which spiritual,
ethical and scholarly information was revealed. On the Hereford *mappa mundi*, which featured so prominently in my dissertation, an aerial view of land opened up possibilities for incorporating text and graphic images, detailing the features and anecdotes related to specific biblical landmarks and the animal and monstrous inhabitants of the landscape. The rationale was to inform people of their place in a created world, where the literal world was overlaid with metaphor and realities were connected to imagined places and peoples.

The *mappae mundi*’s shifting narrative, expressed in topographic form, was connected to a geography where monsters rightfully inhabited their place in the overall scheme of the world. As described in my dissertation, the monster in medieval iconography was depicted as a creature whose physiology, despite its hybridised nature and exaggerated emphasis on the sites of abjection, always gave the impression of being feasible.

Rather than replicate this portrayal of figuratively ‘real’ monsters in my studio practice, I chose to explore the relationship in Kristeva’s writing on the abject and the sublime. Kristeva describes the process of signification by marking the threshold between the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic is associated with the material/maternal body, where the child is undifferentiated from the pleasure-giving mother’s body. The semiotic is that which must be cast aside in order to acquire the language or text of the symbolic/paternal word.

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The semiotic and symbolic afford the subjective and social identity of the speaking subject. The integrity of subjective identity is, however, vulnerable to a dialectic oscillation between the semiotic and the symbolic. The ‘horror of the abject’ is instigated by transgression of these boundaries. If, however, the semiotic completely dominates the symbolic it can trigger ‘madness, holiness and poetry.’ Kristeva argues that those moments of hedonistic instability, when the semiotic overpowers the symbolic, are the sublime imperative in creativity. For Kristeva, art, like religion or literature, represents a means of catharsis, of ‘purifying’ the horror of being, the abyss of abjection:

The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth... The abject is edged with the sublime.

I embraced the idea that a sublime landscape could embody spiritual meaning, and that landforms could possess allegorical significance and reveal hidden meanings. The earth is, in fact, a shapeshifter. Represented as an unbounded body, it is in a process of perpetual metamorphosis: transforming gently with the passage of seasons, dramatically altering during drought and flood, and radically shifting following catastrophic events like earthquake, tsunami, and wildfire. Over time, the earth’s dynamic is in a constant state of flux in which plant, animal and human lives are subject to cycles of birth and death, destruction and regeneration. Horror is at hand in the threat of climate change, devastation of habitat and the extinction of precious species of plant and animal life. This notion of land as a creative force is also apparent in the transfigured landscapes of the painter, William Robinson. Robinson transformed the landscape largely through the use of multi-point perspective, achieving a surreal atmospheric effect in which the viewer seems almost to inhabit the light and darkness of a painted scene (Image 2: 4).

12 Ibid. 17
13 Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. 9-11
The Journey

I conceived of a narrative series of ten landscapes that described a journey, made in 2009, that began in the arid red lands of Central Australia. The landscape that was revealed to me seemed to overawe human intrusion, alluding to the geographically sublime. Memories linger of ancient rock forms interrupting vast spaces, their exposed rock core marching like giants’ teeth along ridges, of birds of prey ripping the flesh off roadkill, of cavernous gorges and heat shimmering off rainbow cliffs and clay pans.

The journey, which I documented as a visual essay, continued from Alice Springs through South Australia to the Coorong and back to Canberra via the irrigated farming country along the Murray River. The shifting geography of my journey was remembered in ten landscape images. The images were developments of my earlier process of importing layers of elements, from my growing digitised libraries of drawings and found objects, and manipulating them in Photoshop®. It was important for me to embed the macabre landscapes of my earlier drawings, the Autopsy Series (Images 1: 1-4), Skull (Image 1: 5) and Body Relics (Image 1: 6), into the digital images. Similarly, the abstracted organic landforms of Out of the Dark (Image 1: 7) and the liminal spaces of River Remnants (Image 1: 8)
directly reference my formative ideas of the unbounded body, the abject and the monstrous landscape.

I decided upon a horizontal format in keeping with the landscape subject matter and presented each image sequentially, a point of reference for the journey following a visual narrative. Nevertheless, the landscapes were imaginary, concocted from memory on a computer screen and not painted as a record of any place. The process of discretely and separately manipulating the layers was not unlike the compositional decisions made in traditional painting except that the decisions were made on-screen.

The ten images improved upon earlier digital experiments by developing what I called ‘painterly abstraction.’ This is seen in the soft nuances of on-screen textures such as the rendering of grass from a transparent fur ‘glaze’ or the dark tones that gave a sombre and foreboding quality to the landscapes, suggesting the fierceness of vast inland spaces. Graphic notations on the *mappa mundi* were replaced by the markings of dressmaking patterns, the symbolic reminder of human presence in the land.

Although all the images give an impression of a landform reaching up to a high horizon, I have deliberately avoided using geometric perspective to give the illusion of depth. The flattening of the picture plane relates to the *mappa mundi*, which employs both the mapped conventions of an aerial perspective with a viewers’ perspective of the earth/body metaphor apparent when the map was *in situ* – that is, when it was displayed vertically on the altar. This dual approach to perspective is also evident in the first two landscapes, *Swarm: the blind nymphs waken* (Image 2: 5) and *Shadows: the wild light* (Image 2: 6). In these images aerial perspective is suggested in the swarming of the cicadas over the flattened land.
Technical notes: Components in *Lizard Rocks* and *Naked Poverty*

If you look carefully at these images you might recognise parts of my original drawings. In the background of *Lizard Rocks* (Image 2: 7), for instance, the watercolour collage *Desert Fur* (Image 1: 12) is obscured by a semi-transparent layer of fox fur. The rocks originated from *Autopsy Drawing 4* (Image 1: 4) and the reclining body is a scan of a mummified possum. In *Naked Poverty* (Image 2: 9) an altered version of the *Autopsy* detail is used.
In introducing this work I briefly discuss specific ideas associated with individual images.

The cicada that infests *Swarm: the blind nymphs waken* (Image 2: 5) and *Shadows: the wild light* (Image 2: 6) lives most of its life hidden below the ground. The eggs are laid in the bark of trees and when they hatch the small wingless nymphs fall to the ground and burrow into the soil. Here they live for several years, shedding their skins several times as they grow. When they finally climb into the daylight, the last nymphal skin is discarded like an empty suit of armour. When the fully-winged adults emerge they have a brief few weeks left to live and procreate.¹⁴

The titles of these two images are taken from Judith Wright’s poem, *The Cicadas*. She dramatically depicts the insects’ metamorphosis as an event inspiring awe, terror and wonder. Ironically, medieval fears of metamorphosis and deformity linger, and insects continue to serve as metaphors for calamity. Their ability to thrust aside their skin, and so fundamentally transform their bodies, reiterates those menacing hallucinations of shapeshifting monsters. Hovering over the heat haze of an arid land they are an insect metaphor for perilous foreboding. They predict a nature transformed into a fearful malignant wilderness, a habitat for the monstrous.
Technical Notes: Scan of cicadas
The cicadas in these images were created by scanning real insects that had died in my garden. They were combined as a group and inserted onto layers in Photoshop®. Changing the scale and slightly rotating each group varied their appearance.

In *Lizard Rocks* (Image 2: 7), primordial rock forms take on animalistic shapes. Lizards and insects hide amongst the rocks. The mummified possum that reclines above the rocks is a figure of pathos. Its small skeletal paws are contorted by its terrible death. It is the symbolic icon of all animal suffering.
You can easily become victim to clouds of bulldust when driving dirt tracks in central Australia; the fine red dust can be very deceptive, hiding treacherous deep holes. There is always the danger that a large red kangaroo might suddenly appear from nowhere, especially near nightfall. In *Speed: the flying dust* (Image 2: 8), the body of the roo is rendered ambiguous, barely distinct from the red dirt and merging with the blur of rock forms. Fur is transformed into sand and grass and adds to the sensation of motion. If read as allegory, *Speed: the flying dust*, is the destructive force that kills so many hapless native animals. It also refers to the acceleration of the adverse impact of human activity on the earth.
Technical Notes

*Speed: the flying dust* is based on the earlier drawing *Out of the Dark* (Image 1: 7).

I did have this image digitally printed on silk but the black dye tended to bleed into surrounding areas blocking out much of the detail. This image has been reworked in a lighter palette to avoid the problems I had with printing dark tones.

![Image 1: 7](Image 1: 7)

Travelling south, I saw how another iconic landscape, the Coorong Wetlands at mouth of the Murray River in South Australia, was being starved of water by upstream irrigation. The combination of low water levels and the drying out of acid sulfate soils had caused oxidation of soil constituents. The released acidity
was toxic to fish.\textsuperscript{15} The dead fish in \textit{Naked Poverty} (Image 2: 9) lie rotting and stinking in the sludge.

\textbf{Image 2:10 \textit{Like a feather falling}, 2010}  
\textit{140 x 105 cm}  
\textit{Digital image to be printed on silk}

\textit{Like a feather falling} (Image 2: 10) is the most lyrical of the images but the tranquillity of rock pool and river bank is deceptive. This is a scene of loss; the bird is a metaphor for the departing soul of the dead. The presence of symbolic

\begin{flushright}
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death transforms an apparently gentle landscape into a malignant, dangerous and vaguely ghostly space.

The preceding two centuries have seen drastic alteration and destruction of the Australian continent. Mighty rivers have been dammed and their water siphoned off to artificially irrigate crops which, like cotton and rice, are of questionable sustainability in arid lands. Native bushland has been denuded to accommodate horses, sheep and cattle whose hooves trample the earth, resulting in erosion, weed infestation and dust storms of fragile topsoils. Cities continue to spread and pollute, threatening habitat and poisoning the air.

In Scream (Image 2: 11), massive rock forms are caught in a vortex that sucks them in and spits them out of a monstrous mouth. The scream, however, does not indicate the submission of nature to the destruction of human intervention nor
nature’s intimidation. Rather, it is a scream of outrage. In her poem *Australia 1970*, Judith Wright validates the deployment of the many weapons of retribution that nature has at its disposal. To emphasise the images’ meaning, the titles of *Speed: the flying dust* and *Naked Poverty* were taken from lines from this poem.

\[
I \text{ praise the scoring drought, the flying dust} \\
\text{the drying creek, the furious animal,} \\
\text{that they oppose us still;} \\
\text{that we are ruined by the thing we kill.}^{16}
\]

**The Breaking of the Drought**

In a final series of three images, a discarded snake skin becomes an allegory for the rains that broke a long period of relentless drought. Following torrential rains in Queensland, long-dry river beds overflowed and transformed two ecologically sensitive sites, Lake Eyre and the Coorong, remembered from my journey through Central and South Australia.

When floodwaters coursed down from the north they reached the salt pans of the ephemeral Lake Eyre in Central Australia. The lakebed filled and the desert bloomed: wildflowers carpeted sand hill and clay flat, waterbirds flocked to breed, fish multiplied and land animals grew fat. While minor flooding of the lake is a periodic occurrence, such a dramatic event is rare. Nevertheless, in time the water will inevitably evaporate, returning the lake to a waterless expanse of salt crust.

Similarly, floodwaters affected the Murray Darling Basin. While the deluge devastated towns and farmlands to the north, it also meant that water flushed out the Coorong for the first time in the decade. Wetlands from the freshwater Meningie Lakes to the estuarine Coorong were replenished and birds began nesting and fish breeding. A potential disaster was temporally averted.

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Accessed as an e-brick reader from ANU library, 30 December, 2010
Nevertheless, the Coorong lagoons and the Murray mouth remain critically endangered ecologies, threatened by the combined impacts of upstream water diversions, barricades imposed by human intervention to restrain the flow of the sea back into the lakes and an unpredictable climate.17

The much-maligned snake is the most enigmatic of creatures. Fear of the effects of the poisonous venom injected by its bite or the horror of being suffocated by its constricting coils strike panic into human hearts. Snakes can propel themselves forward and strike with effortless speed, but with no means of gripping and

tearing their prey they have to consume it whole. Some snakes bear live young, others lay eggs. The snake is a creature of contradiction and anomaly. Uncannily devoid of limbs, sensing the air with a forked tongue, cold-blooded and scaly, the snake shares a physical likeness with the mythological serpent.

When the snake’s eyes grow cloudy and the skin on its head grows so tight it is ready to split, the snake discards its old skin and emerges a splendid creature, its scales cleansed and gleaming. It is as if it is reborn. This transformation adds another dimension to serpent/snake symbolism: rebirth, regeneration, resurrection and healing. The snakeskin in these images represents the benevolent earth monster that replenishes the land, its gigantic scaly body spreading like the proverbial serpent along river arteries from the north to the south of the continent.

Image 2: 13 Pipes the cloth of snakes, 2010
120 x 90 cm
Direct digital print on 310gsm Hahnemuhle paper
These images were made by applying a scan of the discarded snakeskin as a ‘glaze’ across a terrain that was digitally fashioned from an embroidered and eucalypt-dyed felt piece. The images are themselves ambiguous: a curious kind of hybridity is formed where the animal skin and the land/textile become one with each other. In the serpent series, elements of the sublime materialise in the dissolution and disappearance of land forms. The terror and power of solitude and silence spread across a twilight land fabricated from the darkness of the coiling texture of snake scales.

The titles of the images were suggested by Sylvia Plath’s poem, *The Snakecharmer* (Appendix 2), in which the piper controls the eternal process of creation and destruction. In a state of detachment he invokes a lush green watery world that he charms in and out of existence.

…”He pipes a world of snakes,
Of sways and coilings, from the snake-rooted bottom
Of his mind. And now nothing but snakes
Is visible. The snake-scales have become
Leaf, become eyelid; snake-bodies, bough, breast
Of tree and human.

When he tires of the music, however, he pipes the world back to a ‘simple fabric/
Of snake-warp, snake-weft,’ when snake/humanity was merely an idea in a primordial melting of green waters. Through the metaphor of the woven cloth, Plath’s poem has a particular connection to the association of textile with the reversion to the semiotic state of pre-Oedipal child submerged in maternal oblivion. Kristeva has theorised that in those moments of hedonistic instability, when the energetic, disorganised, fragmented forces of the semiotic overpowers the symbolic, then emerges the sublime.
Technical notes
The landscape in these images is taken from a felted and machine embroidered textile that I coloured with eucalypt dye. The scan of a shed snake skin is manipulated to form the serpent scale/water spreading across the land.
Chapter 3
Printing on silk and archival papers

My studio practice developed the idea of mapping the land, not in any literal sense but, like the medieval mappae mundi, as a ‘container of the concepts made visual’ that discloses the abject/sublime. The earth was interpreted as an unbounded body subject to the horrors of environmental desecration.

Upon reflection, I decided that the ten landscapes described not one, but two, narratives: the journey from Alice Springs to Canberra that connected with drought, and the last three images that documented the breaking of the drought. Consequently, I made the decision to differentiate them by using different methods to print each series. The first seven digital images were printed on silk habotai using dye and the latter three, Of snake-warp, snake-weft, Pipes the cloth of snakes and To a melting of green waters, were printed as direct digital prints using pigment ink on 310gsm Hahnemuhle paper by the ANU Inkjet research facility. These three images were not altered after printing, but the silk pieces require further explanation. They introduce new digital methods of printing densely-layered images on a semitransparent material such as silk.

Digital Prints on Silk
The translucency that appealed to me when drawing on drafting film allowed me to see beyond the surface. The film seemed ephemeral and fragile but, as I noted at the beginning of my exegesis, it was remarkably resilient. Even so, drafting film retains its rigidity. Silk, on the other hand, floats almost weightlessly and, even more stunningly, unites delicacy with surprising strength. Moreover, the tactility of silk resembles a fragile skin.

18 Kline, Maps of Medieval Thought: The Hereford Paradigm. 5
In this body of work, silk, the most ancient and magical of fabrics, merges with the newest innovations in textile printing technology and computer graphics. The impact of digital technology has ushered in a new era in printing on a broad range of surfaces from paper, plastics, glass and a variety of synthetic and natural textiles. After the fabric is pre-treated to ensure ink absorbency and colour vibrancy and to fix the colourants onto the fabric, digital images designed on a computer screen can be directly printed onto fabric using wide-format inkjet presses. Unlike conventional rotary screen printing technologies that use multiple colour separations, digital technology allows the full-colour image to be printed intact.19 While this means that the full-colour tonal gradations that replicate the complex subtleties of photographic detail are possible, the digital image must be of a high enough resolution (up to 760dpi) to equate to the size of the intended fabric piece and avoid pixelization. As an application in the apparel or home furnishing industries, direct digital printing offers unlimited repeat sizes and the ability to print designs across multiple seam lines.20

As distinct from the emphasis on mass production in traditional commercial textile printing methods, this technology is being promoted as an ideal means to sample a design before going to the expense of full production. The capacity of digital printing to make a short run of a customised design or even a one-of-a-kind print from a digital file also opens an innovative and new field of exploration in the fine arts.21 The recent work of the Canberra artist, Julie Ryder, demonstrates the vibrancy of colour possible in her digitally manipulated and

20 Dr. Cathy Treadaway, Digital Crafting and Crafting the Digital, (Cardiff, UK: University of Wales).
printed images of photomicrographs taken with a scanning electron microscope.\textsuperscript{22}(Image 3: 1) The exciting use of colour in the fantastic gardens of Ryder’s otherworldly imagery is quite unlike the subdued tonal range of my own landscapes. It is the digital process that is the common link between our works.

![Image 3: 1 Julie Ryder Metamorphosi 3 (detail)
62 X 250 cm
Digitally printed silk
Photo Julie Ryder](image)

I had seven of my landscapes printed on silk \textit{habotai} by Think Positive Designer Prints in Sydney. Their use of dye rather than pigment inks ensured that the lustre and handle of the silk was retained. The specialised and expensive presses meant that it was necessary to use a commercial printing business to process the work. I faced some technical difficulties because I had to relinquish control once the image was at the printer and it was hard to know how the image would change between computer monitor and printed fabric. On the computer, the vibrancy of the landscape images was enhanced by the illuminated screen. The hue and intensity of colours was measured in depth and richness. Even the most intricate detail and the finest linework was precisely defined.

\textsuperscript{22}Julie Ryder, \textit{Apm Portfolio}, (Canberra: Craft ACT). http://www.craftact.org.au/portfolios/artist
Regrettably, detail, depth and luminosity in the printed version of the image were diminished. Nevertheless, it was worthwhile to take advantage of the capacity for printing a one-off image on a 120cm wide piece of fabric. By working in close consultation with my printers to ensure precise quality control over colour management, we overcame most problems.

Image 3: 2 Details of Lizard Rocks showing beading and stitching

In order to address this flattening effect, I began drawing on the fabric with tiny seed beads and stitching (Image 3: 2). My approach was painterly, building up the areas of beads to re-establish tonal values and using stitching to redefine lines and forms. Drawing on the cloth with stitching transformed the surface of the silk, adding to the mystique of the work. The resulting hangings are very tactile and the weight of the beads gives a satisfying drape. At times I drew symbols like concentric circles and pointed arrows to reference the diagrammatic symbols of the dressmaking patterns of earlier works and their suggestion of the human body. At other times, the beads and stitching represent the marks, tracks
and traces of animal life. Drawing on the surface of the silk equated to the drawn images that appear on the Hereford *mappa mundi*.

In preparation for their hanging in the exhibition I frayed the edges of the silk, producing hairy fringing suggestive of a feral monster. I then built brackets to hold the work about ten centimetres away from the gallery walls. As a result, the hangings moved with any breath of air that wafted past, giving the sensation of three-dimensionality and the intriguing impression that each piece was a living, breathing monster.

105 x 71 cm
Acrylic pigment on silk, wool-filled, hand-stitched

The tactile quality achieved by surface manipulation through stitching characterises the work of many textile artists. Jan Irvine-Nealie’s art quilts, for instance, use stitch to emboss and mark the fabric surface. Her landscapes achieve subtle gradations of tone and colour by applying acrylic pigment or dye with an airbrush. In *Opposition and Balance* (Image 3: 3) simple running stitch transforms the surface, building up a texture that replicates the undulations of the
land. The effect, she suggests, is ‘akin to windblown dune sands or reminiscent of stipple work in antique quilts.’

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24 From her official website www.janirvinenealie.com (accessed December 15, 2010)
Chapter 4
Collections and Miniature Towers

Early Experiments with Animal Fur and Bones
Crossing boundaries between media was important to my research into the unbounded bodies of monsters. Contemporaneous with drawing and developing computer images, I had been collecting old furs and the bones of dead animals. Many of these found objects were recorded as digitised files in my library of images and used in the compilation of digital images as described in previous chapters. Animal fur and bones also featured in my early drawings. I was interested in reusing these found objects to make works that further commented on the abject nature of the monster. I will briefly outline some of the initial experiments undertaken during the early stage of my candidacy.

Fur
Amongst the furs in my collection were several tanned fox pelts. Fox fur is soft, finely coloured and sensually seductive. Turn the fox’s pelt over and its inner flesh side is the rough surface created by tanning. The fox, together with its intrinsic life force, is tossed aside. The fox’s flesh is taboo, unclean, abject and
unfit for human consumption.\textsuperscript{25} I thought about the issues that surrounded my autopsy drawings: the idea of skin as a borderline between the inside and outside of the body.

\textbf{Image 4: 2 Experiment with printing on fox pelt, 2006}

I began experimenting with transferring imagery to this inner skin. My first attempt was to have digital images printed by the ANU inkjet research facility in

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{25} Shrewd schemer, the fox belonged to the earth, to the underground. The animals that dwelt below the earth occupied the lowest place in the hierarchical categorization of Christian iconography. A fox displayed the predator’s natural preference for the hours of darkness, and as a result was linked to evil, even with the Devil himself. It was the unseen arch-deceiver that transgressed the boundaries of the wild and the familiar. It stole those animals, ducks, geese and young lambs that human beings had domesticated for their own consumption. In the medieval hunt the rightful objects of noble pursuit were beasts of venery – the hare, the hart, the wolf, and the boar – and then there were the beasts of the chase, and finally, vermin. The fox was an animal of the gaps, of taboo, hovering between legitimate prey and common vermin. Dorothy Yamamoto connects these attributes of the fox with the abject.

\textit{‘The fox is thus associated with the body’s outgoings, those products which transgress the boundary between the self and the not-self and, liminal between two categories, are themselves objects of taboo.’}

\end{quote}
the Photography & New Media Workshop (Image 4: 2). The thickness of the pelt meant that the process had limited success. I tried silkscreen and hand-painting. I abandoned these lines of inquiry because the figurative content seemed inappropriate and aesthetically unsatisfying.

**Bones**

My early constructions with bones (Image 4: 3; Image 4: 4) were improbable grotesques confronting each other in wacky combat. The wings and animal bones were joined together with paper dressmaking patterns soaked in painting gels and mediums: the dress patterns described the human body, the bones, animals and death. It is deliberately difficult to decipher the role of the small porcelain doll heads. They are apparently in control. Their position implies that they are riding the skeletal creatures, but at the same time their bodies are the creatures’ bodies, ambiguous, the human component of a human/animal hybrid. The insinuation is that, in the face of the power of nature, human superiority is an illusion. The forces of nature are the ultimate controller of life or death.

*Image 4: 1 Bone Monster 1, 2007
Animal bones, doll parts, pheasant feathers, paper dressmaking patterns*
These two grotesques come closest to literally representing the hybrid medieval monsters of my dissertation research. Upon reflection, I decided that they lacked the sense of ambiguity that I was trying to achieve. The resemblance to the monster was too obviously descriptive. This observation led to my abandoning the overt use of human/animal hybridity in favour of the disembodied landscapes and assemblages that were to become the second component of my exhibition.
My decision to persevere with animal bones after I abandoned the two bone monsters called for a reassessment of my thinking about monsters. If making a recognisable monster proved to be unsatisfactory, then how to reveal the monstrosity of the unbounded body?

My dissertation found that the interpretation of the monster based on the ominous forebodings of medieval religion was being transformed by the explorations of the scientists, embryologists, teratologists and anatomists of today. The making of monsters moved from the imaginary to the medically and scientifically achievable. I began collecting medical, optical, mathematical and scientific instruments. These instruments carry multiple meaning. Forceps and scissors, dental mirrors and pliers – the contorted shapes of miscellaneous hardware for poking about in the internal organs of human and animal bodies are the precision tools of human enterprise. They insinuate that human intercession in the fate of any living creature is possible. For me, the old and now outmoded instruments allude to the inevitability of death despite all the efforts of science to cheat the Grim Reaper.
The objects of glass, metal, animal bone and doll parts that made up my collections fascinated me with their intricacy of detail: the fine lines created where the plates of bone in a small skull meet, the tiny hinges at the corners of spectacles, the optical distortion, reflection and transparency of glass, and the contradictory dull shine of tarnished silver, copper and brass.

I cleaned the animal bones that I found on the edges of highways and then sanded and polished them. I chose not to polish the metals. The ageing of the non-animal elements suggest that decay is part of the process of life and death. In combination, all these elements suggest processes of transmutation: a weird scientific experiment involving the body parts of animals, their beaks, bones, claws, fur and scaly skin are ingredients in an alchemical transformation into miniature monsters. This work does not literally illustrate the monster but, more accurately, addresses the process of its making. In this way the miniature
assemblages are visually related to the second part of my dissertation, *The Monster Transformed*, which researches the medical and secular fabrication of monsters.

I set about building small towers to encase the monster assemblages by stacking and gluing together found pieces of scientific and domestic glass. The process of building towers from commercially produced and junk-shop finds glued end to end had precedent in Neil Roberts’ *Cryonic quintet* (Image 4: 7). Roberts had an eye for the poetic in the shabby and worn found object, giving unexpected nuance to discarded tools, household implements, sporting equipment and work gloves. The memory of past use remained in the unstitched football bladder that splays open like a plant, the rusty trowel with a strategically placed flower, or a snowflake made from old garden rakes. Unlike Roberts’ beautifully stark *Cryonic quintet*, my towers were reminiscent of the glass vitrines in a natural history museum that incarcerate small dead creatures and yet leave them eternally exposed to the human gaze.
Fiona Hall made use of the glass museum vitrine to enclose her complex and inventive sculptural objects made from carefully chosen and incongruous materials. Aluminium cans, sardine tins, plastic bottles or cakes of soap were dissected and reinvented as beautifully crafted objects imbued with layers of symbolic meaning. In her work, strange components of human anatomy, exquisite organic animal and plant forms, collages of biblical narratives and altered banknotes are transformed by knitting, beading, photography, painting and carving. In *Tender* (Image 4: 8), for instance, Hall deconstructed American one-dollar bills and remade their shredded remains into replica bird’s nests. The allure of the dollar has seen whole forests felled for profit, robbing animals and birds of their habitat: nests may no longer symbolise sanctuary or shelter.  

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The African-American sculptor, Leonardo Drew, sourced his materials amongst the detritus and decay of urban streets and industrial sites: bales of cotton, rags, timber off cuts, rope, nails, plastic and found objects including animal skulls and pelts. He assembled these forlorn items in large installations disciplined by an idiosyncratic form of grid structure. In *Number 90* (Image 4: 9), he arranged strange paper objects cast from urban debris in glass jars topped with wooden blocks. Attention is drawn to individual collections of material in each of the small containers and, like my miniature towers, they bring to mind preserved specimens of animal bones and bodies in scientific laboratories. For Drew, however, the overview is the gigantic. Collectively, the glass jars form enormous ‘*wall-bound sculptures that are like panoramic barriers or dense curtain walls.*’

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27 Madeleine Grynsztejn and Dave Hickey, *About Place: Recent Art of the Americas* (New York: Chicago, Ill.: Art Institute of Chicago, 1995). Exhibition catalogue 38
My glass assemblages are at the other end of the scale – diminutive. I was able to play with light, shadow and reflection, and the transparency and translucency of the glass that revealed what was inside. Glass has a history of association with medicinal mysteries. Strange chemical concoctions in an apothecary shop, swirling black leeches in water-filled vessels, bell jars where fragile objects were protected and displayed in a perpetual vacuum, and the curious shapes of modern laboratory glassware. Glass is a substance of dreams and nightmares, capturing and distorting mirrored reflections of its surrounding world.

The immediate response to these assemblages was that they bring to mind the cabinets of curiosity, the Kunstkammer or Wunderkammer, which so encapsulated the mood of empirical inquiry that resonated from the Renaissance
Early collections, characterised by their eccentric array of weird and wonderful curiosities, were conceived to make manifest the existing harmonies of the universe, as acting as microcosms of universal nature, the assembling and contemplating of which was at once an act of discovery and definition and a mystical exercise.  

Like Shakespeare’s apothecary’s shop, the cabinet of curiosities of the Professor of Medicine at the University of Copenhagen, Olaus Worms (Image 4: 11), stemmed from scientific interest in pharmacology, zoology and botany.

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28 Dissertation, The Making of Monsters. 64-68

Apothecaries and physicians were themselves collectors and compiled their own collections as an aid to scientific observation of unfamiliar and diverse things.  

30Arthur MacGregor, Curiosity and Enlightenment: Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century. 21
CONCLUSION

My studio practice resulted in ten landscapes where the monster materialised as a subliminally foreboding presence inhabiting the looming rock forms of an awesome land, and in a series of assemblages where the inimitable body of the monster emerged in different guises within miniature glass towers. These works were presented for examination in an exhibition at the ANU School of Art Gallery.

Seven of the landscapes are made from beautiful materials, tiny glass beads and embroidered silk. Rich earth colours fade into the soft tones of a bleached sky beyond a distant horizon. However, this poetic lyricism is deceptive; it masks terrible flaws. The journey documented in the beaded and stitched narrative follows the horrors of drought. The monster is embedded in the terrain. The rocky outcrops are composed from the flesh, bone, entrails and bodily organs of my early autopsy drawings. Each image addresses the attributes of the monstrous: metamorphosis (Swarm: the blind nymphs waken, Shadows: the wild light), suffering (Lizard Rocks), treachery (Speed: the flying dust), disfigurement (Naked Poverty), or death (Like a feather falling) and destruction (Scream).

The landscapes taunt us with glimpses of the incomprehensible forces of environmental uncertainties. The land, like the silk and beads of these works, is sensuous and fragile but also resilient. Three more landscapes tell of the rains spreading like a gigantic serpent over the drought-stricken land. New life emerges and the earth is once again fertile.

In the accompanying body of work, the miniature glass towers act as an outer skin that envelops and reveals a strange collection of mysterious assemblages. I imagined that they were concocted to perform scientific experiments in the making or transforming of monsters. These assemblages allude to the features associated with the monster: hybridity, transformation, metamorphosis and abjection. Their semblance to the apothecaries’ cabinet of curiosities or Kunstkammer/Wunderkammer, which encapsulated the emerging interest in
scientific enquiry of Enlightenment Europe, links them thematically to the transformation of the monster discussed in my dissertation. In the same vein, the idea of mapping the land connects the landscapes with the body/earth metaphor of the medieval Hereford *mappa mundi*.

It was important to me that all facets of my studio practice were linked. My approach was to scan my collection of small bones, fur, skins, beaks, claws, eggs, cicadas, mummified lizards and frogs and other found objects. This library of images, together with digitised copies of my experimental drawing, became the materials from which I composed the landscape series on my computer by manipulating and merging the layers in Photoshop®. The same found objects that were digitally embedded in the landscapes were also components of the monstrous assemblages. Here they were skewered on prongs, pipettes and other ancient medical instruments and enclosed safely under glass. Medieval minds might have conceived of the creatures of my collections as marginal beings from liminal spaces. Enlightenment apothecaries might have displayed them as specimens on the shelves of a cabinet of curiosity. In my body of work, they hide amongst the rocks in my silk hangings, spread like a gigantic serpent over the land or represent the making and transforming of unbounded bodies.

I found in my studio research that, through the layering of scanned elements of my drawings and found objects in Photoshop®, I could create a painterly abstraction appropriate to my interpretation of the monstrous landscape. I took advantage of direct digital print technology to have seven landscapes printed on silk and further embellished them with beads and stitching, demonstrating the interaction of hand-making with the digital. This multi-layered methodology I likened to assemblage, linking these landscape pieces to the small glass towers.

The innovations I achieved in imagemaking using Photoshop®, and my research into techniques using direct digital print to transfer images to cloth, represent my contribution to new knowledge in my field of the visual arts. Theoretically, I
presented an original approach through the juxtaposition of the medieval and modern monster and its relationship to the unbounded or abject body.

Throughout my candidacy I have been cognisant of the difficulty of confining the ephemeral, intangible monster within a precise definition. I identified that the monsters of medieval religion and those of the present secular world shared characteristics of the abject and unbounded body, but concluded that this body could take many forms. The dangerous unpredictability of the monster’s existence could only be diminished once it was defined as a recognisable body and normalised within a known world. After all, a constant facet of the monster is its singularity, its defiance of natural taxonomies. I chose instead for my monsters to be abstract: creatures of rhetoric and allegory that are not understood as a thing but a figurative sign.31 As such, I concluded, the monster is unconstrained and unencumbered, acting as a coffer for horror and fears of the unknown. It is as potent in medieval religious thought as it is valid for our fears of the unknown consequences of experimental medical science and environmental horror.

31 In my dissertation, The Making of Monsters, I expound on David Williams’ theory of the monster as signifier of the sacred 20-21, 42-44. ‘In apophatic theology the mimetic tradition of revealing the world through logic and the power of discourse is supplanted by rhetoric and allegory as the primary vehicle for knowing.’ David Williams, Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996). 16
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United States Holocaust Memorial. Mentally and Physically Handicapped: Victims of the Nazi Era.


Appendix 1: The Poems of Judith Wright

The Cicadas

On yellow days in summer when the early heat
presses like hands hardening the sown earth
into stillness, when after sunrise birds fall quiet
and streams sink in their beds and in silence meet,
then underground the blind nymphs waken and move.
They must begin at last to struggle towards love.

For a whole life they have crouched alone and dumb,
in patient ugliness enduring the humble dark.
Nothing has shaken that world below the world
except the far-off thunder, the strain of roots and storm.
Sunk in an airless night they neither slept nor woke,
but hanging on the tree's blood dreamed vaguely the dreams of the tree,
and put on waverling leaves, wing-veined, too delicate to see.

But now in terror overhead their day of dying breaks.
The trumpet of the rising sun bursts into sound
and the implacable unborn stir and reply.
In the hard shell an unmade body wakes
and fights to break from its motherly-enclosing ground.
These dead must dig their upward grave in fear
to cast the living into the naked air.

Terrible is the pressure of light into the heart.
The womb is withered and cracked, the birth is begun,
and shuddering and groaning to break that iron grasp
the new is delivered as the old is torn apart.
Love whose unmerciful blade has pierced us through,
we struggle naked from our death in search of you.

This is the wild light that our dreams foretold
while unaware we prepared these eyes and wings-
while in our sleep we learned the song the world sings.
Sing now, my brothers; climb to that intolerable gold.
Australia 1970

Die, wild country, like the eaglehawk,
dangerous till the last breath’s gone,
clawing and striking. Die
cursing your captor through a raging eye.

Die like the tigersnake
that hisses such pure hatred from its pain
as fills the killer’s dreams
with fear like suicide’s invading stain.

Suffer, wild country, like the ironwood
that gaps the dozer-blade.
I see your living soil ebb with the tree
to naked poverty.

Die like the soldier-ant
mindless and faithful to your million years.
Though we corrupt you with our torturing mind,
stay obstinate; stay blind.

For we are conquerors and self-poisoners
more than scorpion or snake
and dying of the venoms that we make
even while you die of us.

I praise the scoring drought, the flying dust,
the drying creek, the furious animal,
that they oppose us still;
that we are ruined by the thing we kill.
Appendix 2: Sylvia Plath

The Snakecharmer

As the gods began one world, and man another,  
So the snakecharmer begins a snaky sphere  
With moon-eye, mouth-pipe, He pipes. Pipes green. Pipes water.

Pipes water green until green waters waver  
With reedy lengths and necks and undulatings.  
And as his notes twine green, the green river

Shapes its images around his sons.  
He pipes a place to stand on, but no rocks,  
No floor: a wave of flickering grass tongues

Supports his foot. He pipes a world of snakes,  
Of sways and coilings, from the snake-rooted bottom  
Of his mind. And now nothing but snakes

Is visible. The snake-scales have become  
Leaf, become eyelid; snake-bodies, bough, breast  
Of tree and human. And he within this snakedom

Rules the writhings which make manifest  
His snakehood and his might with pliant tunes  
From his thin pipe. Out of this green nest

As out of Eden's navel twist the lines  
Of snaky generations: let there be snakes!  
And snakes there were, are, will be--till yawns

Consume this pipe and he tires of music  
And pipes the world back to the simple fabric  
Of snake-warp, snake-weft. Pipes the cloth of snakes

To a melting of green waters, till no snake  
Shows its head, and those green waters back to  
Water, to green, to nothing like a snake.  
Puts up his pipe, and lids his moony eye.
Curriculum Vitae
Beverley Bruen

Education
2006-2011  Candidate, Doctor of Philosophy (Visual Art), School of Art, Australian National University
2001-2004  Bachelor of Arts (Visual)
Awarded with 1st class Honours, Australian National University.
1971-1977  Bachelor of Arts, Sydney University
1961-1966  Diploma of Painting
Awarded with Credit, National Art School, East Sydney

Academic Awards
2008 ANU Post Graduate Materials Award
2006 ANU PhD Graduate School Scholarship
2004 Canberra Museum and Gallery Emerging Artist Award
2004 Alliance Francaise Exhibition Award
2003 ANU Honours Scholarship

Publications
Textile Fibre Forum, Issue 2, No. 78, 2005
Craft arts international, Issue 64, 2005

Exhibitions
2006 Continuum 3, Tuggeranong Arts Centre
2005 EASS Group Exhibition, Alliance Francaise, ACT
2004 Green, graduating exhibition, ANU School of Art Gallery
2004 Resolution: From Digital to Cloth, Foyer Gallery, ANU
2003 ANU Textiles, Spiral Arm Gallery, Bega, NSW
1988 Tuggeranong Valley Exhibition, Kambah Village Gallery, ACT
1970 Solo Exhibition, Amphion Art Gallery, Hong Kong

Professional Experience
1980-2000  Freelance illustration specialising in wildlife subjects
1989-1990  Graphic design and illustration for ACT Parks and Conservation Service
1968-1980  Teacher of life drawing, workshop practice, painting and experimental drawing at:
            University of New England, Armidale, NSW
            Sydney University Art Workshop (The Tin Sheds)
            National Art School, Sydney
            University of Hong Kong
1976-1979  Teacher of life drawing in the Community Arts Program funded by the Australia Council
Significant Commissions
1995  Mural, Possums of the High Country, Namadgi National Park Visitor Centre
1994  Mural, Nature and Community, the Canberra Hospital.  
      Art and Public Places Project funded by the Arts Council of the ACT
1988  A Fine Balance, poster showing wildlife in the ski fields of Kosciusko National Park
1982-3 Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia, definitive series of eleven postage stamp designs for Australia Post
1982  Venomous Snakes of Australia poster, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service
Appendix 4
Proposal for Doctor of Philosophy by Studio Practice and Dissertation

Title
Fragile skins: searching the borderlines of subjective identity

Aim
My thesis will be an exploration of ideas associated with subjective and objective experience. In particular, I will consider the notion of abjection described by Julia Kristeva as borderline, neither subject nor object. For Kristeva, subjective autonomy is under constant bombardment by the body’s physicality: the trauma of birth, death, bodily fluids, wounds and disease. Revolted, the subject rejects itself. The borderline between self and other has been breached and, in the confusion, neurosis and psychosis surface. Naming, or ‘signifying’ as Kristeva would have it, and giving symbolic meaning to this crisis of identity is fundamental to creative practice.

My studio practice will entail an investigation of these subliminal psychical sites of abjection. In search for a key to enter this dialogue, I have chosen to investigate ‘skin.’ Skin represents the external boundary of the body, separating the self from its external environment. I anticipate that my work will initially take the form of simulated skin-membranes. These will potentially wrap sculptural objects and references to codes of the abject that I uncover through theoretical investigation.

Previous Research
My previous research has drawn on the ideas, imagery and tactile qualities of animal skin to investigate human predation on other animal species. Animals are collected and catalogued as museum specimens and their skins used as raw materials in clothing manufacture. By reducing the animal to a commodity its intrinsic life force, its conscious dimension, is denied. I approached this work with
an interest in drawing, computer imagery and technical experimentation with
textile dyeing and fabric manipulation through chemical treatment and stitching.

It was in developing this body of work that I became interested in the idea that
skin represented a metaphorical barrier symbolically enclosing the inner
emotional self while excluding the outside world from this private domain. Skin
signified the isolation of each individual and ultimately a demarcation to the limits
of intimate relationships.

Methods and Resources

Studio Practice

My studio practice will be an exploration of ideas associated with the borderline
between subjective and objective experience. My focus will be on skin, the
symbolic periphery of the subjective self. Skin symbolically mediates between
subject and object, a barrier between personal experience and public interaction.

- I propose to explore the physical properties of skin by conducting
experimental investigations into techniques and materials that simulate
skin-like membranes. I will initiate this investigation with a series of
drawings exploring mark-making on a variety of surfaces. These surfaces
will be integral to the work produced. I am interested in the transparency
of drafting film, the tactile qualities of handmade papers and the
manipulation of natural fibres.

- I intend to use silkscreen printing and computer graphics as a means to
transfer drawn images to papers and fabrics. I am particularly interested in
printing large-scale digital images using the wide-format printers available
in the Photography & New Media Workshop.

- I propose to experiment with chemical treatments to manipulate the
surfaces on which my images are drawn or printed. In particular, I will
conduct extensive research into the potentialities of printing silkscreen
images on silk organza using de-gumming and dying processes that I
briefly explored in my undergraduate studies.
I will experiment with such media as latex, waxes and resins. In this I am inspired by the work of Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois.

From these experiments I anticipate that I will develop the simulated skin-membranes. The final outcome of this study will be a body of work which will include drawing, painting, sculptural construction and computer imagery. This work will be exhibited as a mixed media installation.

The resources that I require to conduct this work would be available from within the ANU School of Art.

Dissertation Topic

Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection as described in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* will form the nucleus of this study. Kristeva has indentified the horror of the abject associated with bodily waste, decay, wounds, disease and, ultimately, the separation of birth and loss of identity in death. The edges of identity are blurred by ejecting what was conceived of as self, projecting it into the domain of other. Significantly, she construes the abject as borderline, neither subject nor object, neither image nor reality. Kristeva identifies in abjection the non-distinctiveness of inside and outside. The horror of the abject, the unclean and improper, hovers:

…on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or barely so double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject.32

The abject threatens to invade even the most carefully constructed subjective identity.

It is my contention that the trend toward an abject reading of the human body in art is linked to fascination with the bizarre, macabre or grotesque. In this context I will analyse the unsettling nature of such art practices as Joel-Peter Witkin’s photographic tableaux, the photographic essays of Cindy Sherman, the

sculptural work of Kiki Smith, the out-of-scale hyper-realism of Ron Mueck’s latex bodies and the mutant lifeforms in Patricia Piccinini’s work.

Kristeva identifies the confrontation of this crisis of subjectivity as the source of creative thinking. Through visual, written or musical language, ‘the work and play of signs’, there is potential to deal with the in-between terrain of the abject. Is confronting the abject, as Kristeva sees psychoanalysis as doing, a path to the realm of imagination, play and possibility that constitutes social integration of the three aspects of psychic life: the symbolic, the imaginary and the real?

**Context**

Notions of abjection have had a significant impact on current art discourse. Significantly, the late 1980s was marked by controversy over the photographer Andres Serrano’s Cibachrome print, *Piss Christ* (1987), which portrayed a crucifix immersed in urine. The vociferous conservative reaction to *Piss Christ* was countered by art theorists and critics as a manifestation of the phobic disgust described in Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror*. In 1993 Whitney Museum of American Art held the exhibition, *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*. In his essay for the exhibition catalogue, Simon Taylor suggests debate around the body and its materiality has:

> entered the critical syntax of contemporary art. Scatological assemblages, bodily fragments, and base materials – dirt, grunge, and traces of sexual difference – have defiled the white cube...  

The Whitney Exhibition did more than just exhibit the abject art of the late 1980s to early 1990s. Alongside works by Andres Serrano, John Millar, Robert Gober, Cindy Sherman, Robert Mapplethorpe and Kiki Smith were placed iconic works such as Duchamp’s *Fountain*, Claus Oldenburg’s *Soft Toilet* and works by Eva

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Hesse, Jasper Johns, Jackson Pollack and Andy Warhol. Abject art assumed an art historical legitimacy and the theoretical discourse that ensued appropriated Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror* as the seminal text.

**Bibliography**


