Wildflowers and White porcelain

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WILDFLOWERS

AND

WHITE PORCELAIN

by

Jules C Mc Cue
PART ONE: WILDFLOWERS AND WHITE PORCELAIN

INTRODUCTION: 'I Don't Like Fruit'

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INTRODUCTION:
"I Don't Like Fruit".

the clear flower advanced

till whiteness was all, a pavilion
breaking nights object abysses,

and in the moved incandescence

the seeds spilled over amazed [1]

The seed is a symbol of fertility and as in the case of Sue Norrie's paintings of the earlier nineteen eighties, the seed is a symbol of abundance.[2] Fertility, abundance, ritual, the theatre of emotions and metaphysics: still life - the content of which has passed through many visual forms. It is this genre of painting that has permitted women in Australia to become 'great painters'. Ironically enough, the subject matter of still life has also been the traditional, feminine space which surrounds what was always seen to be 'low-plane reality' and therefore a lesser form of painting. It appears that there have always been excellent women painters and in post-colonial Australia, it has been through explorations surrounding the table-top, that women have surfaced and excelled as great artists dealing with the ordinary and everyday, inspiring many other women to pursue explorations in paint, making something of the object by giving it profound meaning.

There are many questions that surround the category of still life, some of which have been answered by the investigations that will unfold in the chapters that follow. With gratitude to Sue Rowley, the book Looking at the Overlooked, four essays on still life written by Norman Bryson[3], was a discovery of hidden treasure. Bryson's discussion was essentially about the status of still life in the art world which furnished a type of historical flow about the development of this genre. Bryson has answered the questions that have been circling round in my head for a long time and, with other valuable sources I have been able to make several links about the role of women painters in the developing art of Australia. Perhaps the most meritorious quality of Bryson's book is the author's ability to transform an epic journey into a sensuous poem.

When confronted with a still life, most Australian, non-artist males respond with the statement - 'I don't like fruit!' Most women derive some pleasure from still life paintings. Obviously this is a socio-cultural phenomenon that could possibly be isolated in a national sense. On a recent visit to a gallery in Berrima, New South Wales, on the subject of still life, the curator/owner and her assistant stated that 'men don't like still life but women generally do' to which I posed the question as to why so many men hold such a determined disinterest toward still life. Alas, they could not enlighten me, adding that men preferred
My research pointed out that I had always looked at art with the bias of my past Italian Renaissance slant. That is not to say that I did not appreciate still life. I believed that much art had underlying moral messages and the elements within were often gesticulating a narrative, be they figurative or not. Literature concerning Dutch art differs greatly in this matter. Whilst some emphatically expound that all seventeenth century Dutch art has a moral message, Svetlana Alpers in *The Art of Describing*[4], a literary gem surrounding the art and culture of Holland, denies this notion taking on a more scientific and often poetic view of this wonderful art. It becomes quite obvious that both concepts are truthful and can be applied to various still life formats. I coin the word 'format' for types of still life rather than 'categories', as I cannot classify 'still life' as a genre, for 'genre' is another category of art altogether. Vermeer painted genre paintings and Pieter Claesz painted still life.

Of course the question of women, objects, strong and simple subject matter, were always meshed together in history as they are now. "Why have there been no great women artists?"[5] This question was the title of a book in the early 1970s, and now we know there have been. In the past, few have been found, but it was too difficult and I declare it remains to be so. Those who did win the battle were as great as the men. Now they are there and they are 'very great'. What however are the sacrifices they so often need to make?

I have no pretensions that I have unearthed new evidence surrounding these questions. I have merely cleared up a few persistent and pertinent questions for myself as a painter who, delights in both painting and viewing still life: the parallel function of which has clarified for me, the approaches that I will be taking for future studio analysis with regard to poetic form and crafting.

In order to gauge my position in contemporary Australia, it has been necessary to look at the history of still life in the western tradition as well as in the Australian tradition, taking a large look at 'the big three', that is; Margaret Preston, Grace Cossington Smith and Margaret Olley. These three Australian women artists not only put still life on the map 'down under' but, led the way for women in the arts, by way of poetic inspiration and undying determination. Henceforth, a discussion about these three artists will be woven through the essay, underpinning each area of exposition. For you all!

_Come you indoors, come home; your fading fire
Mend first and vital candle in close heart's vault:
You there are master, do your own desire;_ [6]
CHAPTER ONE:

Thou still unravished bride of quietness!
Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy? [1]

What struggle to escape?

In his adoration of the Grecian urn, Keats gives the object its due, in so far as its symmetrical beauty holds the arcane secrets of time. The natural destruction of Pompeii has not entirely hidden the worlds of the villas at Boscoreale and Herculaneum. A great deal of frescoes have been uncovered: some of which are renderings of 'trompe-l'oeil' deceptions created for various social and cultural purposes.

One category of these Roman paintings was called 'xenia'. The 'xenia' resembled what we now term still life. Norman Bryson has devoted the first of his four essays on still life to 'xenia' in his book Looking at the Overlooked.[2] Bryson explains that he means still life to be a branch of painting that encapsulates those things that stand still[German, stiil], rest[French, repose] or are dead[Italian, morte]. Even these word descriptions are interesting from a cultural point of view. The English word is closest to the German - things that stand still. I would prefer to think of them resting [in relation to the Sylvan paradise], in preference to the Italian preoccupation with death or the German rather serious immobility.

Bryson stresses that although the 'xenia' resemble still life, they must be treated within their own standpoint. It is surprising that these descriptions of objects seem to be the first in this category and that groupings of everyday objects have not been executed prior to this time. Though I certainly have not delved into prehistoric still life renderings, the manner in which the Australian Aboriginal, the Lascaux and other cave painters had portrayed objects that were to do with bodily survival, have been closer in categorisation to being 'einzellkunst'. The German term meaning, 'art of the single thing' and refers to animals, objects, people that are depicted in the same picture but bearing no spatial or compositional relationship to one another. They do not describe activities or happenings in the way that we would perceive a narrative, nor do they resemble objects or natural products in display.
Bryson explains that it was necessary to realize the meanings of these fragments from the ruins of antiquity by establishing the cultural conditions from which 'xenia' were a part. He was led to the texts that encoded the 'xenia' such as Philostratus' Imagines and The Natural History of Pliny. It is essential that the decorative schemes of which the 'xenia' are a part be taken into account. Bryson explains that:

for Philostratus, 'xenia' bring to mind the whole narrative of culture's progression from primitive conditions, creature satisfaction and simple equality before nature's abundance, on to the complexities of affluence and leisure, social difference and estrangement. [3]

In his introduction Bryson stresses that he is sympathetic to viewing works of art in the historical and materialist vein, underlining the fact that art does not traverse the barriers of history in other words, the everyday struggle of existence. With the inclusion of both posterial and contemporary analysis surrounding the subject of still life, we shall see just how poignant the materialist view is, not of course, excluding the realms of spirituality, politics and philosophy.

The objects and natural products of 'xenia' frescoes are essentially the same as those depicted in seventeenth century Dutch still life easel paintings. As Bryson reveals, these cultural artefacts were 'already' old in Pompeii. This is the linking device, the objects themselves that are the still life. The changing practice and semantic view of contemporary modes of still life and object painting draws upon all times and this will be discussed in Part Two.

The glass bowl containing fruit [Pl. 1] is an 'xenia' that has remained 'in situ' as part of the architectural system for which it was meant. The bowl stands on a balustrade on the rear wall of the Cubiculum from Boscoreale. It was included in a rustic hollow or grotto rather than a 'quadratura' of 'trompe-l'oeil' extravagance. It is a strong and simple rendering, spelling of rustic freshness. It however, is perched above a yellowish image depicting a metropolis of the antique world as we know it. Unlike the fruit this image is more like a wallpapering decor. Incongruous scale and theme are juxtaposed on the same structure.

The fruit and bowl have been described by the artist with a high degree of realism. I think that I can see quinces, apples, peaches and plums. The spherical form of the centralized, singular image holds a tremendous power as a spiritual abstraction of agricultural reality. So here I have extracted this painting [of objects] from its Pompeian context and endowed it with a modern semantic code. I have placed it on an easel and almost framed it. This simple composition is really part of an elaborate piece of landscape gardening that had all the trappings of artificial fountains and murals of country life that were meant to divert city dwellers to more idyllic charms. Therefore the function of the 'xenia':

represents an idea of rustic simplicity that is
entertained, then, only on condition that the
actualities of agriculture and farm life are shed:
or rather simulated, transformed into theatre. [4]

Philostratus warns his students against becoming superficially impressed merely by lifeliness. He warns that a painting must be praised for its intelligence and sense of decorum which he believed to be the most important:

*elements of art, rather than imitation for imitation's sake.*
The painting is expected by Philostratus to "nourish the flow of thought". [5]

The next era, wherein still life painting that is significant to my discussion emerges, is the Late Gothic or Early Renaissance epoch in Italy. The niche painting [Pl. 2] by Taddeo Gaddi (? - 1366), the year of completion unknown, is to be found in the Baroncelli Chapel in Santa Croce, Florence. The function of the niche painting was essentially to decorate palaces and cathedrals. [6] Of course the style-form has been adapted from the true Italian architecture of the time: these niches contained pottery and other objects that were used in everyday life. They functioned as shelves for storage. In *Niche with Cruets* the upper shelf holds a pottery vessel and two cruets. On the lower shelf there is a platter and a pewter plate. In such works the degree of realism is attained by careful rendering of shadow and light which is carefully calculated to fool the eye. Of course the purpose of the 'false niche' was to fool the eye, and often the niches contained statues in 'grisaille' which were perfect imitations of marble.

Gaddi's *Niche with Cruets* is sacredly austere and 'still'. The simple pewter plate rests against the wall. The facade of the niche reminds us as spectators that we are separate from the contents that allude to being behind the chapel wall. The painted facade has a decorative pointed arch of the Late Gothic style along with carved rosette illusions formally adorning each side of the hidden treasure. What is this childish fascination for the box, the niche, the sensuously formed vessel. Marion Milman tells that:

*These images are painted in the very place where the cult objects which they represent should have been located, in the real niches which these images simulate.* [7]

Milman expounds that the skill in rendering is supreme for its chronological placement and says that:

*these painted niches compel recognition as the incunabula of still life painting. The fact that they are successful pieces of trompe-l'oeil only adds to their recognition.* [8]

Milman then goes on to discuss the 'ludic' aspect used in the self portrait of Paolo Schiario drawing aside the curtain of a simulated niche also painted in a church, in 'trompe-l'oeil fashion. The ludicrum or stage
play aspect of still life will be discussed further in Chapter Seven. I believe that the objects in many still life paintings are playing a role intended to communicate even more than their role as objects. The inclusion of a curtain, a cloth or drape at the front of the picture plane, reminds us that we are the audience for whom the cry was meant.

From the table or the altar, cruets for wine, plates for bread: to the kitchen table - from one spiritual food to another. The kitchen pictures of Juan Sanchez Cotan [1561 - 1627], are called 'bodegones'. These still life exercises surround the dogma of Christianity: abstinence from pleasures. Once again Cotan's Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber [Pl.3], shares the same defining feature as 'xenia', and almost all forms of still life. Although some still life spaces have included the female face[Chapter Four], the still life exudes the human body. Bryson perceives that:

- Cotan makes it the mission of his paintings to reverse this worldly mode of seeing by taking what is of least importance in the world - the disregarded contents of a larder - and by lavishing there the kind of attention normally reserved for what is of supreme value. [9]

The worldly importance given to foodstuffs has been totally undermined by focusing our eyes downward. One usually looks up at an altar, now we look down into the shelf of this Spanish 'cantarero' which was and still is in rustic Spain, a food cooling space. The foodstuffs are hung on strings to be kept separate, in order to preserve. In Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber the cavernous ebony background performs as the shadow that enables the painter to render the beautiful play of light on the delicately described surfaces of the soft, veiny cabbage and the crinkly, crunchy skin of the cucumber. Delicate also is the balance of each object in relation to the other.

Cotan was a Carthusian monk in Toledo around 1603. The Carthusians were a monastic order who underwent abstentions from meat and other worldly delights, especially communion with other human beings. The act of painting for Cotan was not permitted to be a sensual pleasure in any way [although I'm sure he could not have surpassed this delight in craft], instead, the weightless vegetables and fruits were supposed to be strictly constituents of a purely formal exercise. Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber was one of many Cotan masterpieces that were part of an experiment in 'topology'.[10]

Some of Cotan's other 'bodegones' are even more austere. This scientific approach will be enlarged upon in Chapter Six. Cotan creates an abstract space with no space allowed for the human body. The body must reach for objects from 'out there', though the body can relate to it some how, this relationship of body, food and utensils, is usually made evident by the placement of a knife, plate, glass, picked flowers, a draped cloth or something that evokes the tactility of the human hand having been there or about to be.
In the second essay on still life, 'Rhopography', Bryson discusses the status or place if you like, of still life in the art world at large. Bryson begins this chapter by explaining that still life is one of a number of painting genres; portrait, religious, landscape, heroic and mythological painting. In fact, Bryson plays at the idea of the exclusion of the human being in stating that:

still life also expels the values which human presence imposes on the world.

Still life avoids the narrative of history painting, the personalities of portraits or the mysticism and didacticism of religious painting. Yet, through a range of eras and styles in this genre, stories are told. Lessons are given and the archaeology of the history of man and nature are told. Men can be fools! Objects will always tell the truth!


The very serious, Australian still life painter Margaret Olley has painted many pictures that are indicative of her sightings of much art that stems from other lands, over the seas, far from Australian shores. *Turkish Pots and Lemons* 1982 [Pl. 4] not only depicts pots collected from exotic places and cultures but, shows that Olley has absorbed the devices of some extremely, powerful still life paintings from other lands and times. In *Turkish Pots and Lemons*, Olley has used the concept of the vertical corner of the wall that holds the horizontal corner of the table top or shelf upon which the objects have been arranged in a 'satisfying configuration'. The corner being analogous to that of Cotan's 'cantaro': the sideboard or table replaces the shelf. The shadows reveal light coming from the left of the picture plane and the lemons placed at the edge of the 'shelf' overhanging slightly, almost going beyond the picture into the viewer's space.

The silken, flesh coloured wall behind the object reveals all: the painter's world is at once similar and differing. Olley meditates upon the objects in order to carry out the spiritual act of painting:

The myriad of objects have no hierarchy, precious and ordinary blend together, their concern is with art and with the deployment of colour, surface and volume. [12]

Cotan's mathematical experiments seem to allow the craftsman to delight in his spirituality through painting. The category of still life painting, thus provides the material for a variety of pictorial departures that will take off into an infinite variety of aesthetic experiments and manifestations. The 'xenia' of yesterday will become the metaphysical abstractions of tomorrow, moving from what is deemed to be a lowly status to the esoteric and exalted echelons of the 'avant garde' at the not so humble beginnings of the
"modernist' movement in the arts.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st
'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' -- that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know'. [13]
CHAPTER TWO:


Seasons of mists and mellow fruitfulness.
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch eaves run;
To bend with apples the moss’d cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd and plump the hazel shells.
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o’er-brimmed their clammy cells. [1]

The inhabitants of the villa at Boscoreale were not farmers but Roman patricians visiting their country estate. What the 'xenia' meant to the Roman viewer has been ascertained by the poetic and informative source material which deals with the messages derived from these viewings. The Imagines written by Philostratus, a Greek sophist who taught in Athens and later in Rome, completed these lyrical and delicious descriptions of 'xenia' to perform the pedagogical function of guiding Roman students through the paintings of their 'own time'.

'Xenia I' contain descriptions about unadulterated nature, in its pure form. No secondary processes have tainted the produce with their particular brand of 'culture'.

It is a good thing to gather figs and also not to pass over in silence the figs in this picture. Purple figs dripping juice are heaped on vine-leaves; and they are depicted with breaks in the skin, some just cracking open to disgorge their honey; some split apart, they are so ripe. Near them lies a branch, not bare, by Zeus, or empty of fruit, but under the shade of its leaves are figs, some still green and untimely'. [2]

Philostratus goes on to set the theme of the sumptuous harvest, there are; chestnuts, pears, apples, cherries, grape-vine sprays, yellow honey, curdled cheese and bowls of milk. In a sense Margaret Olley's Flannel Flowers of 1976, [Pl. 5] displays the products of Spring and the harvest, the plate of gourds, the glass jar of flowers, the jug of - could it be milk or honey - all the produce of the 'land of milk and honey'. Flannel Flowers also reflects Olley's knowledge of Cotan. The objects are softly lit from the right: exuberant Nature is dramatized by the dark, cavernous background of Cotan's 'bodegones'. Flannel Flowers also reflects the knowledge of the still lifes of yet another Spanish monastic, Zurbaran. The limited colour, the
dark background perhaps influenced by the 'tenebrism' of Caravaggio, the white flecks of reappearing objects set in a row along a bench or on a shelf. The composition and the objects are simple, truthful and uphold the highest order of beauty.

Food means eating. We eat everyday. In the traditional domestic situation the woman has busied herself with the everyday routines surrounding bodily survival. Bryson states that this level of existence that revolves around food [in paintings], and the consumption of which, eradicates specificity of persons:

What is abolished in still life is the subjects access to distinction. The subject is not only exiled physically: the scale of values on which narrative is based is erased also. [3]

 Paramount to the questions, "Why have their been no great women artists? " or " Why do many non-artist men dislike still life painting?" Bryson introduces the distinction made by Charles Sterling, between 'megalography' and 'rhopography'. [4]

Megalography is the depiction of those things in the world which are great - the legends of the Gods, the battle of heroes, the crises of history. Rhopography [from rhopos, trivial objects, small wares, trifles] is the distinction of those things which lack of importance, the unassuming material base of life that 'important' constantly overlooks. The categories of megalography and rhopography are intertwined. The concept of importance can arise only by separating itself from what it declares to be trivial and insignificant. Still life takes on the exploration of what 'importance' tramples underfoot.

Even Napoleon, 'Sir Sidney Nolan', Rubens, Ned Kelly and 'Sir Robert Menzies' had to eat to survive. So too does hunger strike small children, the sick and old, the mentally ill and women, who have traditionally spent much of their time in the kitchen or the washing room. Women it seems have for a long time, been great still life painters, as we shall see throughout the discussion.

Caravaggio once stooped to portray a humble basket of fruit. Basket of Fruit [Pl. 6], omits the usual heroic character that is the subject source in Bacchus, c 1593, [Pl. 7]. This rather lively basket of fruit is lit from the side and the rear unlike Caravaggio's usual brand of dramatic chiarascuro wherein, the background is in deep cavernous shadow and light shines on from the front. It is almost certain that the young Bacchus is a self-portrait included with a still life of succulent fruit, vine and fig leaves of plenty that not only add to convince us of the realism but, emphasize the work of the God of abundance. There is nothing ordinary or everyday about either of these paintings. There is nothing 'earthy' about the fruit of Caravaggio. In fact, we are looking upward to the fruit in the basket, and the craftsmen has almost deceived us into picking out a piece of fruit. There are no signs of careful arrangement by the painter's hands. Caravaggio has carried out
a very formal exercise in 'aesthetic glamour'. Does he delight in the fruit as the produce of nature and human labour? The viewpoint is rather unusual, as Caravaggio has eliminated the shelf or table-top in height and depth and takes away the sense of a domestic space or any human-scale space unlike the deep niches of Cotan. Some of the leaves are almost silhouettes or profiles. The basket of fruit could almost be an 'xenia' frescoe or a 'trompe-l'oeil' exercise. It could be one of Philostratus' Imaginess, the figs are split, the apples have marks and Caravaggio's craft of colouring is ever so slick in creating volumetric solids, whilst massing the produce in a heap. Bryson points out that Caravaggio's careful selection of fruits that are similar in colour allows him to use the harsh light of chiarascuro to play down middle tones and so:

the image breaks up into areas of light and dark that are independent of contoured form. [5]

Bryson goes on to say that in one respect only Caravaggio's painting is similar to the work of Cotan and Zurbaran who separate the 'tactile and the visual' as they have espoused upon their fruit, the religious purposes of their monastic asceticism. However, unlike their paintings, Caravaggio excludes any notion of mundanity - the cooler space, the table, the room where work is done. The bench, Cotan's 'refrigerator' is humble and earthy. Caravaggio's fruit seeks a place in the heavens with the young, virile Gods such as Bacchus. Although, he has on this occasion set aside the fruit, he has taken it out of its earthly context of necessity. But his energy and passion as a lover or madman is still alive in procuring a mood of indulgence rather than everyday survival. He has presented us not with a basket of fruit but an idea that is somewhat esoteric. Bryson stresses that:

*The Basket of Fruit marks a return to the 'xenia' of antiquity in its themes of theatricality and simulation; no less than the grapes of Zeus or the curtain of Parrhasios, it's wish is to deceive the eye. And in fact this may have been its literal intention.* [6]

So, Caravaggio's *Basket of Fruit* has no value except as an aesthetic tool. Cotan's fruit and vegetables have maintained an earthy plane. Bryson calls Zurbaran and Cotan, rhopographers, placing Caravaggio in the megalographic arena with no less than Cezanne himself, the great formalist fruiter of the modern era. In *Still life with Blue Bottle*, c. 1900 [Pl. 8] Cezanne like Caravaggio, has eliminated the human scale space of a house or room, in fact, this painting completed around six years before his death speaks of uncertainty. Cezanne did not ever let go of the recognizable image as did Ben Nicholson, and here he has treated the foreground, middleground and background with almost the same tonal degree - splashing blue everywhere as a unifying element to his aesthetic experiment. Colour has become arbitrary: no longer describing nature. The rendering of light and shade is merely part of the experimental equipment. The fruit of course has no sense of fleshiness, appetising satisfaction or tactility about it. It is a series of coloured spheres that becomes part of the surface pattern tying into the composition the spherical shapes of the pots and bottles.
The curved edge of the table be it cloth or the side of a table, has become irrelevant, the treatment of which suppresses its role as a household article. In Chapter Six I shall discuss works of Cezanne and other painters who have utilized the crumpled linens, fruits and objects of the domestic table-top as experimental apparatus. A movement which in turn points the way for pioneering Australian women artists. Margaret Olley however, unlike many Australian women artists of and before her time, remains outside this modernist laboratory, a position which gives her work a lasting quality that is imbued with a magical time without time, auralic splendour. Bryson stresses those qualities that the still life objects can offer to the artist, either as spiritualist or inventor:

Since still life needs to look at the overlooked, it has to bring into visibility things that perception normally overlooks, the visual field can come to look radically unfamiliar and estranged. [7]

Bryson again discusses Cotan’s Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber, and the manner in which Cotan gives these everyday objects an extraordinary beauty because, they are painted in such a ridiculously ordinary setting.

the attention brought to bear on the objects stands outside normal experience and the normal domestic round. Defamiliarization defers on these things a dramatic otherhood, but the intensity of the perception at work makes for such an excess of brilliance and the focus that the image and its objects seem not quite of this world.[8]

Margaret Olley’s brilliant lifetime of still life painting falls into that world. The great Australian rhopogapher has given collected objects, everyday objects, primary produce and momentoes a new dramatic intensity, almost taking them to an ‘imagined world’ but not completely out of this world into that of ‘esoterica’.

Olley’s painting Ramunculus and Fruits, 1973 [Pl. 9], is a masterly reflection that Olley has seen Zurbaran’s paintings somewhere in her travels. Olley has maintained the Cotanesque rear corner and the rather stronger than Zurbaran, recessed shadows of objects. As in Zurbaran’s Pears and Flowers, c 1633-44 [Pl. 10], Olley has a dark, cavernous background, crisp, white petals of which, some have gently floated down to the table-top and, the inclusion of fruit. The mood that the restrained colours set is almost autumnal and they are definitely ‘nocturnes’ in their poesy. Perhaps Olley has taken great care to select the flower that is most similar to Zurbaran’s. Although his white petals may be that of the zinnia or rose. Like the vine leaves in Caravaggio’s Basket of Fruit, their flowers are animated: not by the sinuous line of the vine against a mustard background but, rather by the light, fluffiness of the petal against the dark background. They obtain the choreographic quality of tulle tu tus on a dramatically lit stage. Zurbaran’s Still Life with
Oranges [Pl. 11] is a tightly balanced composition of three separate activities neatly poised along the same line of the picture plane. It is possible that Olley has absorbed this compositional structure for Ranunculus and Fruits 1, as well as many other of her still life paintings, that are always a celebration of every day life. One cannot help but feel that the still life of Zurbaran must also be partly a celebration of everyday life, even though they are:

usually governed by a strict symmetry[9].

Not forgetting that Zurbaran was also a monastic who applied a pious love to his craft. Olley's works are always asymmetrically balanced and the massing of two bunches of flowers, not one, displays an extravagance, that which, the hermetic ascetic could not permit.

The acknowledgment of life, death, decay and the cycle of emotions is omnipresent in the still life of Margaret Olley. Zurbaran allows a little emotion into his Still Life with Oranges by way of the fine, white, porcelain, chocolate cup that is part of his Spanish culture as is the growing of oranges and lemons. He has even allowed the blossoms whose ethereal perfume must have activated his senses. There they are - chocolate cup, plate, flowers, oranges in a basket, a plate of lemons - sensuous, earthy, delicious, cultural: even if unintentional. The lemons in particular show their nipple-like ends, intended or not. Zurbaran has not only rendered this specific organic shape but the tactility of the thick, crunchy, textured skin to superb description. The other experience of this instance is in Margaret Olley's Lemons, 1964 [Pl. 12]. Herein, Zurbaran's basket has been tipped over and the contents are tumbling out onto a white cloth, a device which has been included in many still life paintings across time for many distinct purposes. Olley uses the cloth to take away the table-top that usually projects forward from the picture plane. The positions of the lemons accentuates their spherical volume and the nipped ends. Olley has sanctified the everyday lemon with its sour, course skin as did Zurbaran 440 years ago. Alas, Olley's Lemons are somewhat more exuberant as they topple sensuously and aimlessly from the basket that had been quietly meditating in the monk's serene setting. I am not giving it less status by using the preterite, merely altering the status culturally in time.

Out of lemon flowers
loosed
on the moonlight, love's
lashed and insatiatable
essences
sodden with fragrance,
the lemon tree's yellow
emerges
the lemons
move down
from the tree's planetarium
Delicate merchandise!
The harbours are big with it-
bazaars
for the light and the
barbarous gold.
We open
the halves
of a miracle,
and clotting of acids
brims
into the starry
divisions:
creation's
original juices,
irreducible, changeless,
alive:
so the freshness lives on
in the lemon,
in the sweet-smelling house of the rind,
the proportions, arcane and acerb.[10]

Wherein Cotan and Zurbaran rejected bodily appetite and creatural habit, Chardin depicts life as it really is, almost undisturbed: a glimpse of the kitchen table. No doubt, as Bryson advises, Chardin carried out just a little rearranging as the choreographer of his scene. Although:

He seems not to want to disturb the world or re-organize it before the spectator, as though to do so would be to keep the viewer at arm's length and to push the viewer out from the scene, when what is valued is exactly the way the scene welcomes the viewer in without ceremony, to take things just as they are found. [11]

The whole still life has come alive: background, objects and foreground have a textured, atmospheric haze that pervades the whole picture. One can almost sense atmospheric movement. In Chardin's Jar of Apricots, 1758 [Pl. 13], we can also sense a human presence not from an epic action, a story of pathos or that of a braggart, but one of satisfaction of appetite and, on a regular basis. The spoon is in the white porcelain cup, the steam of the warm drink is evident, bits of discarded bread project across the picture plane. An everyday occurrence. Here the apricots have been preserved, evidence of cultural intervention. In 'Xenia 2' Philostratus describes the Imagines that contain agricultural produce that has been worked by the processes of time or the work of human hands. The wine and the cheese in the 'Xenia' and in Chardin's painting have been produced by fermentation, thus so far, having eliminated the 'need for culinary fire'. They have required bowls or fermenting vessels. Hence the bowls become part of the material culture:

Xenia 2 explores the threshold between nature and culture which Xenia 1 had eliminated in order to project its idyll... The text of Xenia 1 had been built up by eliminating the signs of culture in a regression into nature. Xenia 2 reverses the movement into a progress away from nature towards the culture of the table.[12]
The culture of the table ensures that produce is organized in bowls, bottles and plates in very specific ways. The culture of Chardin's table is both 'strong and simple'. Although he masses objects quite closely, he uses a warm light that sets a veil over the objects allowing our eye to take in the whole scene. He focuses on everything and nothing at the same time. Bryson believes that the space is bound by 'gesture'. Habitual movements such as, stirring the liquid in the cup, taking the lid off the apricot jar, unwrapping the cheese and so forth. Beloved ritual becoming enmeshed in the process: the blending of the domestic ritual and the artful painter's ritual.

Margaret Olley's more recent still lifes also contain the magical overall colours of all surfaces especially, the backgrounds and table-tops. In Olley's Apples 1980, [Pl. 14], the background objects and table-top are bathed in a cool, deep tone that is softly warmed by specks of amber. Christine France describes the painting as having:

The use of well worn kitchen objects bathed in
a homely light.[13]

Both Jar of Apricots and Apples display objects that are meant to be arranged in a casual manner. All of the objects except for one in each are rude and rustic. The cobalt blue vase in Olley's painting, probably of porcelain, is as necessary from an aesthetic point of view as the dainty, white cup and saucer in Chardin's otherwise display of crude objects. The cobalt blue in Apples, catches the yonder light and in turn bounces on to each of the vessels in the group:

The blur in Chardin is not simply optical, though
theories of focal length and aperture may well
have influenced it; it is the blur that comes from
manual override, when the hand takes over from
eye and lets it off duty.[14]

This blur is not a part of the optical scope of the Dutch still life paintings of the seventeenth century, but Olley continually allows the hand to show its work. In the series Extinct [Pl. 15], by the contemporary Australian artist Susan Norrie, Chardin's blur and the heavily textured surfaces that set up a playful game with light and shadow create an atmosphere that emphasises things that were - things of the past. Norrie's objects are very much cultural artefacts. Norrie's installation includes the portrayal of a Tasmanian tiger, implements, clothes, a mask etc. Norrie has isolated them compositionally, although the modern day exhibition space allows the artist to create a thesis as a series or installation of ideas or an idea.

A parabola of all we are or do!
The life of nature is a formal dance
In which each step is ruled by what has been
And yet the pattern emerges always new,
Women in Australia have emerged not only as object painters but, are retrospectively catching up on where they 'were not' in the sense of the art world. I find much of Norrie's work as having a power of sentence and, it is also engaging from a conceptual point of view. Norrie actually says about a series which she terms *The Disney Series*, that:

*This series was the only departure from her obsession with still life.* [16]

However, Norrie's still life objects can be visually, very powerful and those single objects represented in *Extinct*, seem to have been weathered by time. Norrie reveals the context of her objects:

*I think there's been a consistency throughout my work. It's dealing with illusion, fakes, real and unreal and also melancholia, nostalgia, dislocation and alienation. It's dealing with a sense of ourselves, how we deal with history, how we deal with anything, the way we perceive - Here in Australia, because we've always responded to international trends far, too much, we haven't dealt with our own history or lack of history.* [17]

Norrie and Olley are European Australians, they have both been heavily influenced by European tradition. Some of the work of Olley could, it's true, have been painted anywhere in the world. Maybe intensities and hues of light could defy this statement. Geoffrey De Groet complains that:

*While the works have great beauty, there is a certain smugness about it all. No one would ever know that cars speed by in the street, that electricity lights up the room or the thousand and one energetic forces that abound.* [18]

On the other hand, Norrie is a product of the total experience, art history, the conceptual, non-painting period of the seventies and the Renaissance of the Post-Modernist eighties.

In 1993 we draw from the immediate and distant past. It is indeed important to know about and understand our heritage although, much of what we read is posteriorlly decided upon information. As far as Olley's work is concerned, one must see the strong works about simple, every day things, as having their own value. It is time that we admit defeat for, many instrumentalist works still find comfortable homes on the walls of museums and opulent houses. It takes a sensitive perception to recognize the work of a quiet, humble artist who paints about the mundane, the so-called lower-plane - 'rhyparos'. Margaret Olley believed that it was simply an artist's duty to paint good paintings.
Nevertheless, Norrie has embedded her monuments, large and small, with a multitude of issues. The images must never be looked at superficially: Mickey Mouse, the shovel, the shoe and the bridal corsage are all conveyed with a purpose that is carried beyond appearances. In Extinct, the objects in their singularity even hover in the air with a surrealist undertone.

Norrie is not really a rhophographer, the issues are too complex and I do not wish to discuss this fine artist's position within Bryson's world of still life. The argument tends to change in the post-modernist eighties and nineties. When one looks at Vincent van Gogh's Apples, 1887 [Pl. 16], you see a group of apples set in the middle of the picture, made up of a succulent red, surrounded by an ambiguous ground of complementary, phthalocyanine blue. The shiny colours of the apples seem to reflect into the surround that has undulating direction and also forms the background and foreground. Gogh seems to have isolated the apples, giving them a new status at the time. Even though Cezanne was experimenting with formalist ideas using the table, fruits and cloths as apparatus, van Gogh did not intend the still life to fulfil this purpose. The passion with which these apples have been immersed in this suffocating background, seems to brim with distressed, painterly action. The desperate need to paint - van Gogh's form of rhophography could be linked with that of Cotan or Zurbaran:

Their sense of painting as a spiritual discipline, bound up with self-negation and the reduction of ego, leads them to still life as a branch of art particularly suited to a vocation of humility. [19]

In the rhophographic painting Still Life with Round Bottle [Fig. 1], by Anne Vallayer-Coster[1744-1818], all of the objects are bound up with anonymity surrounding the creatural habit of eating. The broken bread, an apple, a bottle, a small glass of sherry, a pot of what, a knife and a slab of table-top. Each object has a simple honesty. What you see is what you get. There is no mystery, no attempt to elevate the act of filling the stomach with an air of extravagance or gluttony as in Francois Desporte's[1661-1743] Peaches and Silver Platters [Fig. 2]. Desporte's painting goes beyond the limits of lavish living and inflationary notions of rank and wealth: Desporte's super-Baroque is a flamboyant perception of the craft of art. It is almost grotesque. Bryson rightly states that:

What the image aims for is exactly the triumph of pomp and prestige over the trivial culture of the table, a triumph that is, unambiguously coded as male. [20]

Hands shaping the cup to its contour, showing the way to the barrel's roundity, the lunar outline of the bell. [21]

20
Unlike Margaret Olley, Grace Cossington Smith, another meritorious Australian painter of the twentieth century, did not restrict her work to still life. Realizing of course that Olley painted buildings, boats, interiors and other categories from time to time, Cossington Smith gave much attention to structures, interiors, street scenes, landscapes and buildings. With an architectural eye, Cossington Smith conveyed enclosed spaces such as; city streets, Martin Place and the rooms in her private sanctuary - her home. There are a multitude of allegorical gestures that can be implied to the open doors and windows but, I will discuss this element of her work in Chapter Eight. Briefly now I would like to introduce one of Cossington Smith's last still life paintings and in fact one of her final works in all, *Jug with Fruit in the Window* c1962, [Pl. 17]. Unlike Olley, Cossington Smith remained a part of what was happening in the mainstream of Australian art, although she maintained the stylistic exploration of painterly application when, non-representational and conceptual movements had dominated the art world. Many of Cossington Smith's still lives almost traverse to the interiors category of painting though, human presence is non-existent in the literal sense. The open windows, doors, the selection of jugs, fruit, cups, crumpled cloths and bed linen can be seen to be emblematic. Still lifes are products of artistic ritual. Cossington Smith paints very ordinary things for most of her painting life and this still life maintains humility whilst asserting the importance of an aesthetic adventure. No doubt Cossington Smith gives these ordinary objects a beauty distilled through the sincerity of truth that flows through her devoted paint brush. This 'great' Australian painter employed many traditional devices in depicting this still life. The crumpled white cloths, the play of light and shadow to render volume, the table-top as sacred altar. However, as an Australian living on the edge of the bush, Cossington Smith was conscious of the ever present surrounding landscape that she loved and respected. Discovering as did other Australian artists, the salient features and alluring spells cast over them, by leaving this arcane, ancient land and returning with renewed perception.

Cossington Smith has employed a variety of techniques inherited from western tradition that she combines with her personal, vigorous vision to evolve her own dazzling brand of plastic application. Cossington Smith may have been privileged from a socio-economic point of view, but in so far as gender equity is socially concerned, she was part of a minority. In the face of adversity, she did it and survived. Of course men from her social class were far too busy doing 'important' things and women from less privileged backgrounds were too busy feeding the nation and cleaning up after them. So it is, that we have the likes of privileged women who seem to be the only women that were permitted to have such careers until recently.

No doubt her unmarried status and fanatical devotion must have placed her in a questionable position on the edge of society. Margaret Preston on the other hand survives as a single woman during her formative years but eventually marries which, logically allows her the freedom to carry out her vocation without fiscal restriction. Preston is one of the three major Australian women artists who painted still life and persevered with serious painting in what seems to be a post-colonial world of male chauvinism. Preston's
attitude toward her work unlike Olley and Cossington Smith, who were both insular in their painting environments, was audacious and ebullient. Nonetheless, Preston also did it and has proved to be a valuable inspiration for Australian women. Her Still Life of 1926 [Pl.18], exhibits her sizeable, modernist influence from other European movements as well as her early training in graphic design. In fact, the objects in her Still Life, 1926, have been given a cloisonniste treatment though, the apples, bananas, grapes, flowers, leaves, glass jug and desert dish are devoid of tonal rendering: the degrees of tone and colour achieved, become part of a pattern that almost slides the objects in to the plane of the background. The dark shadow under the dish and the glaring white cloth keep the viewer at bay from what could be a stained glass window in keeping with the heavily outlined objects.

Cossington Smith once said that a man may paint better but that he didn't feel better - her ludicrous observations were honest but poisoned by conditioning. It can make you wonder why she pursued her craft and vision with such determination.

Looking at another of the overlooked still lifes that is closely aligned with Jug with Fruit in the Window and Still Life by means of object choice and conscious arrangement, is Margaret Olley's Kate's Quinces, 1976 [Pl. 19]. Differing is the artist's preoccupation with depth rather than light and form or shape and colour. Unlike her precursors, Olley has approached the table-top at an oblique angle, in placing the cloth, not as an incidental but, as a deliberate device which creates distance between the viewer and the objects. Olley does not use the deep unending background of Cotan or Zurbaran, nor does she open the space to the outside as does Cossington Smith: there is a definitive end to Olley's space, the sacred space of her own environment. The objects are resting, simple, brownish culinary vessels, with a white, porcelain centrepiece that supports the highly animated branches from the quince tree. This emblem reminds us of growth and the origins of everything within nature. Olley's skilful handling of paint gives rise to a painting that competes with any other in any place or time, possessing the highest degree of mastery, sensual form and surface.

Looking at the still life pieces, Still Life 1926, Jug with Fruit in the Window 1962 and Kate's Quinces 1976, each artist has organized a large jug to play the role as central actor in the scene or in the play of forms. This is not an uncommon device and we will see is employed in many still life paintings executed by women artists.

Unlike her modernist sisters, Olley remains alone in her aesthetic imperative, pursuing a poetic description of nature that is unsullied by sophisticated contrivance of any fashion. Olley in various ways has picked up where the seventeenth century Dutch still life painter had left off.
CHAPTER THREE:  

Now my Five senses  
gather into meaning  
all acts, all presences,  
and as a lily gathers  
the elements together,  
in me this dark and shining,  
that stillness and that moving,  
these shapes that spring from nothing,  
becomes a rhythm that dances,  
a pure design. [1]

Before moving on to the development of modernism, post-modernism and women still life and object painters in Australia, it has been necessary for me to take a profound look into the golden era of Dutch painting. It was in seventeenth century Holland that the object, the still life came into its own.

In his book Dutch Painting, R.H. Fuchs treats the development of seventeenth century still life category as a direct result of the earlier fourteenth and fifteenth century religious and heroic painting that was embedded with symbolism and allegory. Fuchs believes that the object of all Dutch painting from this time, including the later still life and vanitas paintings, was a moral one. Whether or not this is true the early Flemish Masters did indeed carry out a narrative style. This narrative was filled with inventive realism and was the beginning of the meticulous descriptions of objects and nature that the Dutch artists have become famous for. The detail of the metal vessel, on a metal tray, on a wooden table-top from Rogier van der Weyden's[1399-1464], painting The Annunciation, c 1435 [Pl.20], exhibits the almost fanatical Dutch reporting of the truth. These paintings in the fifteenth century were designed to instruct, to satisfy the emotional expectations of the viewer and to please the eye. There was also another syromg undercurrent emerging that was to do with the description and observation of nature that was developing as a Dutch
cultural fetish. One must not dismiss the manner in which van der Weyden has treated the vessel with telescopic perception. The vessel is actually a very tiny object that sits in the background, behind the plane on which the figures have been placed. Although religious painting came out of Italy, and the story may have originated in Palestine, the Dutchman has looked around his own environment for examples of objects, clothes and nature to include in his story. So the settings of biblical or mythological legends will have a strong, Dutch flavour. This Fuchs perceives to be:

*roughly how realism slipped into painting.*[2]

The painting shows a rather convincing indication of the actual space in the room. There is an open window that shows off the distant landscape. The artist has employed atmospheric perspective and mechanical means of creating these illusions. The room where this very significant legend takes place is indeed Netherlandish in style and, one can observe the meticulous attention to the detail of fabric, floor tiles and platters, open book with writing, Eucharist lilies in a porcelain vase, a carafe of water and what appears to be lemons on a small shelf next to a northern architectural detail. The wooden cupboard that the metal vessel rests on, contains intricate detail as does the metal vessel and the chandelier.

Theoretically speaking, the painter employs the attention of a telescope to all small objects that would otherwise seem unimportant to the Italian painter of narratives and, in the words of Miriam Milman:

*Following in the tradition of van Eyck, the painter contrives
to render the specific tangibility of matter, to an almost
microscopic degree.*[3]

Milkman and Fuchs would infer that the metal vessel is charged with symbolic meaning. No doubt, most of the objects have dual roles as pictorial devices. No matter what the role of this vessel, it is an exquisite and elegant example of what was to follow in the north in the way of descriptive observation.

We then return to the niche that we witnessed in the Italian church frescoes. In the painting Cup and Bread in a Niche attributed to Barend van der Meer c.1668, the subject exudes religious symbolism. It is set in a curved, shallow niche. Therefore, initially, the Dutch still life was executed for a spiritual pretext. The holy bread and wine of the Eucharistic Sacrament - symbols of the body and blood of Christ. This simple but intense painting is imbued with the sense that it is a mirror of the world. This reality is evidenced in the reflection of the glass on the backwall. We can taste the crisp, fresh bread. We can smell these products of local, material culture. We could reach out and touch the knife that implores us to. We can almost hear the sacred songs of the ceremonious ritual.

Alas, these are objects, not people or saints and in other paintings like this, we see: pipes, tobacco, luscious
fruits and golden moselles. The delights of the flesh are being tantalized with an evocation of the senses but, the message is a moral one that instructs us that time is running out, the body is nothing or, that worldly goods are merely fragile, earthly possessions.

While I'm in my five senses they send me spinning all sounds and silences, all shape and colour as thread for that weaver, whose web within my knowing some pattern sprung from nothing - a rhythm that dances and is not mine [4]

I have included two of Pieter Claez' magic still lifes. *Still Life with Herring*, 1636 [Pl. 22] and *Still Life with Stoneware Jug, Wine Glass, Herring and Bread*, [Pl. 23]. Here the artist is taking total control of the design and finished product. These still life paintings could be said to be the quintessential, seventeenth century Dutch still life paintings. One supposes that Chardin would have interfered with his still life in a similar way; muting and tuning in the colours and tones, rearranging the objects to suit his purpose. Margaret Olley would have carried out this ritual as did Cossington Smith. Margaret Preston probably did most of her fine tuning on the canvas.

One can almost feel the breeze floating past the food in *Still Life with Herring*. The bread disappears into the hazy background and everything is saturated in a silvery grey: Claez has taken a corner of the table in both still lifes and placed a white cloth on the end with the idea of what Fuchs describes as:

* A conscious aesthetic element . . . . .

Herein Fuch's extrapolates that the tonality in a still life painting:

*must be totally artificial and deliberate, since the light that illuminates a still life is naturally independent of atmospheric conditions.* [5]

Norman Bryson adds to this by saying that these Dutch painters wished that the final product was a true representation of the hours and skill given over to their craft: inspiration was less important than skillfulness.

*Still life was able to provide its viewers with images in which the historically unprecedented instability and volatility of their material culture could appear as regulated and stabilized. In this work of visual ideology, the discourse of ethics is joined by a force no less stabilising, that of craft labour.* [6]

With regard to Claez' two still lifes, one could directly apply this statement of Eugene Fromentin in
defence of Dutch art as opposed to French or Italian:

*There nothing of the kind: an art which adapts itself to the nature of things, a knowledge that is forgotten in presence of special circumstances in life, nothing preconceived, nothing precedes the simple, strong and sensitive observations of what is.* [7]

The herring is very Dutch, the shape of the bread is Dutch. They are as Dutch as clogs, windmills and delft-blue. The specificity of what the objects are is paramount to what will evolve in the post-modernist culture. Materialist culture is the underlying element that separates one still life from another aside from the conceptual ideology. Alpers emphasizes that the visual culture is central to the way of life in Holland. Visual experience is the mode through which the individual manifests their consciousness. The image prevails throughout the Dutch person's world; in books, weavings, walls, interior design and arrangements. Another aspect of the materialist culture of Dutch art is the manner in which they apply the practice of 'opening', so that we can really see what the substance is that we are observing. Claesz' herrings are often cut, van der Meer's bread was broken.
Cutting the lemon
the knife
leaves a little
cathedral:
alcoves unguessed by the eye
that open acidulous glass
to the light; topazes
riding the droplets,
atars,
romatic facades.

So while the hand
holds the cut of lemon,
the gold of the universe
wells
to your touch:
a cup of yellow
with miracles,
a breast and a nipple
perfuming the earth;
a flashing made fruitage,
the diminutive fire of a planet. [8]

The lemons of Willem Claez, de Stomme and Kalf are cut open revealing the nature of the inside and curl of the peel. Such a thorough description! Such obsessive detail. Alpers compares Kalf's lemons to those of Zurbaran. Kalf's lemons have had to cope with the effects of time and the intense microscopic glare of the Dutch artist's eye - fanatical description. Zurbaran's are like Pablo Neruda's lemon; solid, graspable, human, whilst behaving with much decorum, quietly resting in a basket. Kalf's lemon [Fig. 5], is cultural and belongs with the herrings and bread of Claez' world. However the world is now in turmoil; the coiled lemon peel is divorced from its mundane context - the simple meal - part of the ritual of creatural habit - the everyday bodily acts of survival. Willem Claez' lemon [Fig. 3], is still presented with the food with which we all need to survive, but trouble is brewing, the glass is broken, the silver chalice has been knocked over. De Stomme's lemon [Fig. 4], is also a part of the disarray of an elaborate breakfast table. Worlds apart from the humble still life of Anne Vallayer-Coster or Chardin for that matter. How clever these men are becoming. There is much delight in Bryson's manner of describing Kalf's banquet piece[pronkstilleven]:

Kalf takes on a number of masterpieces: a Ming sugar-bowl, a complex patterned Persian rug, façon de Venise glass, and the challenge of the nautilus cup itself. And probably Kalf wins. [9]

Kalf's flamboyance has outstripped the makers of such fine craftware, of their own creative merit. This cleverness is taken to the limit, the current philosophy of the seventeenth century. The following is a depiction about what painting is, written by Samuel van Hoogstraten in his book, Inleyding:
Concerning the aim of the Art of Painting: what it is and what it produces.
The art of painting is a science for representing all the ideas or notions which the whole of visible nature is able to produce and for deceiving the eye with drawing and colour. [10]

An almost scientific display of this brand of scholarship can be seen in Balthasar van der Ast's *Still Life with Shells* [Fig. 6]. The tradition of instruction or informing is still present, this art is with the multitude of flower pieces that can be described in a vase, sometimes with exotic shells. So too has van der Ast set out his shells and installed a butterfly and another small insect. The space upon which the shells prevail is set out in what Bryson terms 'diagrammatic clarity, of tabulation'. The effect is beyond realism. The artist has created a dreamlike quality, that of a child's world, collectibles of a surreal edge. They are being described for classification in keeping with this era of unfolding discovery in physics and natural history that, permeated the philosophy of Dutch thought.

Bryson also believes that the butterfly or insect could be reminders of human ephemeralty. In fact Alpers points out that the seventeenth century Dutchman was well aware of the philosophies of Drebbel who was an inventor who made microscopic devices and all sorts of incredible machines that performed fantastic acts of motion. Drebbel had a long standing connection with the world of Dutch art and of course, one can see now where the microscope slots into this scene.

The 'lense' also played the role of telescope. Another contemporary, Johannes Kepler, who developed theories of vision and hence, created optical devices that were modelled on the eye. Alpers insists that this is quite plausible as the evidence surrounding Kepler is concrete. Mind, he does stress that Kepler's is only a possible source or influence upon the art of this time. It is no wonder that the artist's attention to detail went beyond the call of duty when the following definition was presented by the then leading Protestant theorist of education:

*If you demand what it is to be a good scholar, take this for an answer: to know how one thing differeth from another, and to be able to [note, or] marke out everything by its own name.* [11]

When browsing through some pictures I had collected, I found this poetic and serene painting by Chris van Otterloo, [Pl. 24]. Here were the shells of van der Ast, in Post Modernist Australia, c. 1982. There was no title but, the artist had taken his or her cultural heritage and re-established it in the new world down under. Knowing little about shell and butterfly varieties, am I to assume that these are indigenous to Australia? Perhaps not, but the light that bathes these meticulously crafted, natural phenomena is definitely not of a northern manner. There is however a surreal quality to the depiction of these objects, There is nothing
earthly or everyday about this portrayal. Which leads to a discussion of the dissipation of the earthly, everyday still life.

On to the Vanitas. From the purity of the unified design of Pieter Claesz' work to the appearance of catastrophe in Willem Claesz' still lifes, to the chaotic compositions of the vanitas of Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts',[c 1610 - after 1675], *Still Life* [Pl. 25], undated. The style or technique of this painting could be defined as 'trompe-l'oeil'. The artist has conveyed the objects in an architectural space, in which the objects fit perfectly. The red fabric with the golden fringe, paper and a red wax seal appear to be hanging over the 'table-top' and therefore, create a sense of depth. A trompe-l'oeil painting must be life size and no object is to be cut off by the edge of the painting. The artist has used relief and chiarascuro techniques with oil paint and varnishes so that there is no evidence of brushstrokes. 'More real than reality' is often the effect to be aimed at, and hard outlines, dark shadows and cut-away shapes all form part of the vocabulary of trompe-l'oeil. [12] There are to be no live figures but noticeably, the presence of the skull is found in many of Gijsbrechts vanitas.

A skull, coins, shells, snuff boxes, tobacco, musical instruments, silver and gold vessels are all part of the rhetorical vocabulary of symbolic objects that these artists depicted in those paintings, which grew out of the still life tradition into the world of over abundance and vanity, that had resulted from flourishing commerce in seventeenth century Holland.

The vanitas are visual sermons that warn of the problems of a far, too affluent life of over indulgence. Once again the emblems of shells and skulls warn us that our worldly time is a limited one and the excesses that money brings ought to be:

rejected as worldly ensnarement. [13]

It is with many art pieces that are executed for an instrumentalist function, that the paradox lies in the fact that they are still 'objets d'art' and, will be consumed as worldly possessions or status symbols that will adorn houses or museums, etc.,. This contradiction is very much apparent in much of the work of Sue Norrie the contemporary Australian artist. Norrie admits that this aspect of her work edges on being problematic. Anne Loxley's article about Norrie's exhibition at the Mory Gallery in November 1988, says this about the Objets d'Art:

Norrie regards the Objet d'Art series as her most mature work to date. The paintings provoke questions about cultural exchange and the function of painting as a highly marketed luxury or commodity. But as the artist herself admits, she is treading "a fine line, the work is risky". [14]
Ironically of course, the show sold out before opening, high prices are secured and they are beautiful paintings that are now probably adorning beautiful houses of 'homes'. There is no problem in Norrie's exhibiting of her brilliant talents and techniques. Men have been doing this for a long time. She ought not feel embarrassed about her genius. The triptych series of Norrie's 1983 work, *Fruitful Corsage, Bridal Bouquet* and *Lingering Veils* [Fig. 7], in a sense could be included in the category of vanitas. Norrie has used exquisite chiarascuro technique whilst conveying a brilliant texture that pervades other work of this time such as *Lavished Living 1984* [Pl. 26] and the triptych; *Deserted, Shielded, Encroached* 1984. The former triptych of 1983 reveals the sensual, materialistic qualities of the luxurious items [especially for women], that are displayed in the department stores of Norrie's childhood, as a result of her father's occupation. Shining jewellery, intricate treasures, luscious fabrics and substances. There is a meshing of these desirable objects with the sexual forms of biological phenomena. The dramatic light that Norrie throws on them reveals these explosive forms that seem to be sprouting with sexual dynamism. The spiritual quality derives from the primal urges that Norrie so successfully manifests into her plastic forms. There is also something quietly disturbing about these obsessively, erotic gestures. The painting *Lavished Living*, has become even more disturbing as a very successful attempt of combining non-objective, surrealistic and traditional aesthetic devices. At once they are; mountains, rocks, trees and plants in a primeval landscape, or characters on a stage or writhing, organic, simple-celled life forms that are the divulgence of primal, sexual instincts. They reek of sexual activity. They are more ribald than the most perverse scenes of realism from pornographic photos.

Some of these objects are static others seem to be squirming with life, but they essentially remain as displays of objects set out on table-tops. Maggie Gilchrist has this to say about them:

> Exaggerated chiarascuro dramatizes their ambiguity; they are at once seductive and repellent. Objects are tumescent, fruitfulness is everywhere; but so is the threat of suffocation and decay. [15]

The reference to 'tumescent' images is understandable as Norrie had recently suffered the losses of both parents to cancerous diseases. Both the warnings of the vanitas and the cries of Norrie can be seen as spiritual exercises in their origins.

So too can the portrayal of satins, fine objects such as; chandeliers, rich tapestries, beautiful, feminine head pieces, exquisite furniture, seen in the work of that very Dutch painter - Jan Vermeer of Delft. The no-nonsense approach of Vermeer is sensitive, strong and simple. Vermeer takes his lense or camera obscura a few steps back from the table-top and cuts into the world of the Dutch woman. Once again the likes of R.H. Fuchs will emphasize that the objects and people in Vermeer's paintings are symbols of morality. The
women are thought to be of an 'undesirable' nature. The women are nearly always pursuing crafts or acts that are set aside for them, apart from those things that men were expected to do. In Vermeer's painting *The Allegory of Painting* c 1666-67 [Pl. 27], the woman plays with her music and books, the man paints her. The female is often the subject of Vermeer's quite, still, interior scenes. Chardin painted women with children, carrying out the domestic chores allocated to them. Vermeer depicts women as elegant, fine creatures who take pride in their occupations. The women surround objects of the table-top, be they lacemaking, pouring drinks, preparing food, playing musical instruments or reading the books from the vanitas. This is the women's world. I shall discuss this world in chapter four. Thus far we have seen the table-top taken from the 'creatural anonymity' of 'domestic culture'[16], to the affluent abundance of the 'commercial empire' then, on to the interiors of feminine space of Vermeer's Dutch interiors where we peep into a world where women belonged and men are intruders. The seventeenth century Dutch artist, particularly those discussed herein, were assumed to be making a substantial living from their art which of course was their craft - their occupation. The males therefore, if included in Vermeer's paintings are often on the move, just 'dropping in'. They come from outside, somewhere else: hence the emblematic gesture that points to the woman of ill repute entertaining the male client remaining at the table-top, the centre of her domestic space, the table-top - essentially belonging to the space of the female. [17]
CHAPTER FOUR:

Women Do It Too: The Female Face in Feminine Space.

The mirror answers the face:
an animal in a cave
that lusts and tastes and sings.
A hill that breathes the air;
a glance that looks for love:
two crystals where all things
leech at the panes and stare. \[1\]

Domestic space - that is; the spaces wherein those acts that bodily survival relies upon, are carried out, in the past and still now, have been inhabited mostly by the female. In many instances today, the female is still responsible for feeding the family as well as providing part of the income that maintains the home. The objects that pertain to these spaces are those that the tradition of still life painting has built upon as a powerfully, expressive force in the world of art, in its multitude of forms that we have witnessed so far. Alas, the rules of this category of painting generally stipulate that the human body must be excluded.

The forces that stabilize and maintain the human world are
habit, automatism, inertia . . . when still life painting
comes to look at the overlooked. \[2\]

Hence, Bryson's title and the status appointed the painter of still life; be they from seventeenth century Holland, ancient Pompeii, modernist France, Australia or Medieval Florence, it appears that they have courageously taken on the lowest level of material life - material culture.

In regard to women in art, Eleanor Antin exclaims that:

It has been part of woman's glamour as an artistic
subject that she was seen as pathetic, passive - in short,
the superb victim. Most artists are gentleman and treat
us with compassion but their verdict is inexorable.
Anna Karenina doesn't leave her upright husband
to become commissioner of railroads. She leaves only
when she finds another host to live off. \[3\]

Antin holds a harsh view of the way in which women have stolen attention or been so-called 'loved' and, claims that when selecting women for her show of object biographies called, Portraits of Eight New Women, c. 1970, that she was:

determined to present women without pathos or
helplessness . . . My women had all chosen life
styles independent of men's. \[4\]
From what we know or understand about the lives of Cossington Smith, Olley and Preston, for the most part of their lives they could be in Antin's group. Interestingly enough, they have all painted a portrait or symbolic reflection of themselves that includes the still life objects that fill their art and lives.

In the still life painting *Women Looking at a Table* [Pl. 28] by Wolfgang Heinbach [1610 - 1678], there lies the familiar objects; cups, vases, glasses, meat, bread, cheese, fruit, cloth, plates and 'toute de suite' we have the face of a woman peering in on the discarded contents of a meal through a pane of glass in the window that acts as background to the meal of plenty. Is the woman in Heinbach's picture a voyeur, a beggar or is she the maid who has prepared the meal for her lofty masters? Her presence almost changes the category of this painting to 'portraiture' or 'genre'. Does this still life remain as rhopography within the lower plane of reality or in the instance of human inclusion, perhaps it ascends to megalography. It seems that as she peers 'through a glass darkly', she is on a low plane of reality herself - she belongs with the discarded foodstuffs. A female in a feminine space but, this time she is not taking part in the action she looks on as a reflection in a mirror. Is the reason why so many non-artist men often dislike still life and, why still life has been given a lower status in the world of art, been due to 'gender positions' and gender ideology. Are these men intimidated by what they see? [5] There is certainly no trace of heroic acts of greatness, no biblical emblems. The painting of Heinbach is very slick in surface, lacking the focusing blur of Chardin or the studio atmosphere of Claez, containing a smidgin of surrealist hyper-reality. The gesture applied by the women's grasping fingers though, suggests a pathos - a type of desperation that is held in her intense, catatonic gaze.

*The face that turns to the world
open itself to ask
Look at it now before
it learns it is a mask:
for eyes take light the dew
while their glance is new.* [6]

Margaret Preston's *Self Portrait* 1930, [Pl. 29], had been criticised for being 'masklike'[7]. Preston herself said this about the completed work:

*Yes, my self portrait is completed, but I am a flower painter
and I am not a flower.* [8]

This self portrait is like any other wherein, the eyes stare outward from the picture. Preston has obtained a fleshiness about the material of her skin but on the contrary the treatment she has given the neck, head and curls is stark and abstract, they are like the geometrical, solid components of a design. The solid, cylindrical neck sits, centered in the picture with a blackly, clad bust. The hand with easel and brushes whilst identifying the person, creates a space between the viewer and her body. Behind, are her beloved
wildflowers, hovering, deliberately in the otherwise stark background. The brick wall behind is also carefully designed and strategically drafted into the overall composition. This is Margaret Preston, a strong woman with a purpose. There is no pathos here. Preston’s portrait is not so much a still life as that of Cossington Smith, wherein the figure just sneaks into the background.

It takes out of the air
all it can know.
whatever look turns on it,
that look it will grow.
so some learn love, and some
can never find a home. [9]

In Figure Through Flowers 1932, [Pl. 30], Cossington Smith was almost identical in appearance to her sisters and although this portrait is probably one of them, it could also be herself - peering out from behind the flowers that celebrate the sacred in nature. No doubt, Cossington Smith is treading on sacred ground - the world of painting in Australia that had mostly belonged to men when viewed in the ‘serious’ context. Women dabbled and cultivated arts and crafts to give them that polished, well rounded finish, in order to make acceptable wives. But, here we have women who dare to make a career of painting - and what is worse they are painting ordinary everyday objects. Sylvia Stone comments in her essay, Healthy Self-Love c 1970:

Everywhere I go I meet interesting women: the point is, they were always there, but often too busy playing the non person role to make themselves felt as individuals and artists. [10]

However, Cossington Smith and Preston have come out of colonial Australia and had the strength, courage and above all, confidence to do it too. Obviously, they must have had encouragement from their respective families in one way or another and, the means with which to do it. The Figure Through Flowers of Cossington Smith, is not one of her greatest paintings but, the composition is well thought out - the flowers fill a circular motion that reaches out to us, speaking to us as it were, of isolation and loneliness.

Cossington Smith remained alone all of her life. A life that was dedicated to painting and family - almost monastic. Although she led a full life, surrounded by sibling love, Cossington Smith really experienced the black side of life with the deaths of parents, sibling and her profound emotional sense of duty with regard to the wars. Other than that, I believe her lack of intimate love would have been a source of sorrow and pain that came with the ebb and flow of the necessity to experience physical love. She was not in any sense a pathetic creature but, the sensual, the sacred, the spiritual and her delight in the act of painting fill the prolific amount of pictures executed, some of which will be looked at in later chapters. Anne French, the biographer of Cossington Smith’s artistic life, says this about her portraits:
The artist has the peculiar gift of expressing the spiritual character of the subject. [11]

Cossington Smith herself claimed that portraits and studies of people were:

*usually just dull sort of wooden things* [12]

and that is also a very poignant comment as from now on her work is mostly devoid of beings, though the door or the window is left open for the omnipresence of their spirit.

*The face becomes the world*
*It is the moving field*
*printed by days grown common*
*and the unmastered night -*
*by unacknowledged need*
*and fear of its own deed. [13]*

The face in Cossington Smith's portrait is alienated from the world. Margaret Olley includes her self-portrait - or shall I say a mirror of her world, her stare that is the world, with many objects and post-cards that are a part of her world, her environment. *Portrait in the Mirror* 1948 [Pl. 31], the composition of which is very busy, has less unoccupied space than there ever will be in her future still lifes. This is an early painting for Olley as she takes off into the second half of the twentieth century. Preston and Cossington Smith are still painting and are firmly implanted in their forms of modernism. Olley herein is influenced by Post-Impressionism by way of theme and stylistic treatment. In fact, there is a ‘magic realism’ [14] that will develop into the enchanted spaces of the more mature still life paintings of later years. The face, the pictures of other lands, the little masses of fruit forms, the flowers, the white mug and shells, the room lit up behind - are all a part of Olley's world reflected in the mirror - then into the mirror of the painting. Olley is about to embark on her first trip to Europe, perhaps this is prophesied in the reality of the still life that is there - the portrait glaring at us is almost an illusion coming from within the soul of the artist. The features of the portrait have been conveyed with an almost archaic stylization which, again accentuates the spirit of the person rather than the naturalistic reality.

*and yet knows that there have been,*
*flowering the world's dull years,*
*faces more true than stars*
*and made of purer light,*
*and they may happen again*
*O may they happen again. [15]*

35
Olley has represented the reflections of art, of hers and others in her world - the world of the woman painter and her objects - little, ordinary things in a domestic space which is also the work space. *The Black Servant* [Pl. 32], painted by Diego Valasquez, occupies another world of reality. The deep shadow which the dark-skinned woman is placed in, softly transcends the whole surface of the painting. This is almost the depiction of the human form with the domestic objects in the chiarascuro of tenebrism. However, the human form is a woman, who is a servant, who is black. The discarded waste and used wares that surround her drudgery, take her with them. They are all rhypras or waste, lowly objects. In the words of Bryson:

> the meaning of the image is that of the overlooked, 
> both object and persons.[16]

Olley, Preston and Cossington Smith were probably overlooked for a time. So, too, was their still life work. This painting of Valasquez would almost definitely have been overlooked in its time. Strangely enough the artist depicted the black servant in another painting titled, *The Kitchen Maid with Christ at Emmaus*, 1620.[Fig. 8]. The Emmaus version has the same servant doing the same work but, included in the background is an opening that divulges the figure of Christ resurrected and at supper with his followers. Bryson fails to reveal the date of *The Black Servant* though this painting is dated at 1620. The biblical narrative in the Emmaus painting reveals the irresistible urge of Valasquez to raise the level of *The Black Servant* to an heroic or religious painting - or, do 'still life values' in this painting take precedence over the narrative in the background. The jug, plates, cooking utensils and servant are as large as life in their intensity as pictorial components. They are even injected with a little drama as they are all hanging and balancing in various stages of animation as is the girl, caught in the act of cleaning. Again as the glares and stares of the women in the former paintings, the black, servant girl is also gazing but, is it the mindless coma of boredom and drudgery or is she aware that something else is happening. Something that gives her droll existence a higher purpose. She imposes religious ritual upon her everyday tasks.

In *Valasquez' Woman Cooking Eggs* 1618 [Pl. 33], the artist goes so far as to depict a woman at her life-maintaining work. She is shown cooking the food with casual surrounds of objects in use and the same basket and cloth from *The Black Servant* is the central object in the background: reminding us that the cleaning will have to be done after feeding the men - or, does it contain a more esoteric meaning. The young male is offered food and wine. He will not use the objects as such but, will consume them. His work is outside of the domain of the house. The woman in *Valasquez' and Vermeer's pictures is responsible for the maintenance of daily creatural survival and, the upkeep of moral purity.
In 1984, Margaret Morgan includes women in a domestic setting in her ludicrous painting, *Allegory After the School of Fontainbleau* [Pl.34]. The stage curtains, the gestures of the protagonists, the selection of objects, the cosy lounge room and the woman knitting in the 'wings', suggests that there are multiple layers of meaning. The painting includes still life but, is pregnant with allegory and narrative themes. The ludum, that is framed by ridiculously overdraped and folded curtains, conveys a specific, material culture of a twentieth century society. The hearth has become the central image and the knitting, elderly woman is kept in her place, inside, enclosed within the domestic space. The table-top with cloth, reveals some very stylish, deco teacups, a deco jug, a baroque hand mirror, a pen, an open book, a 'moderne' teapot, a comb, matches and a vessel in the shape of a lion that sprouts paint brushes. We have seen almost all of these objects before in the previous still lifes.

These contemporary women at the table-top are a reflection, symbolized by the mirrors, of how they perceive themselves and how they perceive that men see them. Morgan's painting contains innuendo that has been traversed across time from, the Fontainbleau School paintings in the Louvre. These paintings show women preparing themselves for men - *dame au bain* or *dame a sa toilette*. Morgan's women seem to be stuck in the domestic interior. They are stuck at the table-top. They are stuck at being non-persons. They are stuck at playing their role.

Above all, Morgan's picture is a caricature in style and colour. Above all, it is humorous by its very nature. Is this what we want?

*Laugh, Chloe, that delightful sound*
*Restores my spirits with my sense.*
*The present is the only tense*
*For love to make the world go round*
*And round and round until the sea*
*That takes you, bears you back to me.* [17]
Chapter Five:

*Wildflowers: Centrality: Female Composure in The Wilderness.*

*Three white petals float above the green You cannot think they spring from it till the fine stem's seen*  

[1]

Rachel Ruysch was born into a wealthy Amsterdam family in 1664. Her father was a noted professor of anatomy and botany. Ruysch studied in Willem van Alst's classes and became a well paid still life painter of some success. Indeed, she was a great painter but, most people who have heard the name Rembrandt have not heard of Ruysch.

Until recent times, women and men of the upper echelons were only encouraged to dabble in the arts. Linda Nochlin has decided that women and 'aristocratic gentlemen' were in a similar position with regard to dedicating a whole life to art. Both categories, had far, too many demands and responsibilities placed on them to find it permissible to be career artists. Linda Nochlin explains the circumstances of art and sexual politics:

*the amount of time necessarily devoted to social functions, the very kinds of activities demanded - simply made total devotion to professional art production out of the question, and indeed unthinkable both for upper class males and for women generally.* [2]

Ruysch did it, but how? Are we to assume that her father encouraged her, as much of her work was still life, flowers and fruit. The flower paintings of seventeenth century Holland were:

*literally botanical portraits of the rare varieties achieved*
So, they were scientific illustrations invested with poesy. Rachel Ruysch took her still lifes from the prosaic to the poetic. Ruysch's work includes shells and insects, further evidence of her botanical origins, though art historians will have us believe that these natural phenomena contain a metaphysical character. As was mentioned in chapter three, Dutch paintings of flowers, shells and other biological phenomena of the seventeenth century, were generally placed in clear, diagrammatic spaces, as though in preparation for expedience of classification. Of course the insects and shells included in flower paintings have been by some as symbols of human ephemerality. However, this is optional.

One sees little evidence of emblematic rhetoric in Ruysch's *Roses, Marigolds, Hyacinths and Other Flowers on a Marble Ledge* 1723, [Pl. 35]. The table-top in this instance is the glint of the polished red marble. The flowers are painted lovingly. The soft slices of fragile petals have been formed sensuously. The stark, taxonomic quality of Ambrosius Bosschaert's [1573 - 1621] *Bouquet in a Niche* [Fig. 9], has been eliminated in the hands of this middle-aged woman. The paint surface, the drama of light and intense shadow have been executed with a high degree of craft and polish. The rich colour that is both intense and fragile testifies to Ruysch's passion for both the subject and her craft. A certain hint of liberalism seems to pervade a part of the Dutch culture, for Ruysch was not the only woman painter of her time. This brand of broadmindedness is also evident in their approach to still life and to what one can see, due to Svetlana Alper's enlightenment - is the secularity of their approach to painting. That is not to say that the work lacks spiritual content. It is quite the antithesis. The subtleties and human craftsmanship of simple, strong subject is more highly spiritual than what can be blatant, contrived and vulgar in other forms of painting. It therefore accentuates that their chosen content - the simple, elegant and everyday embodies and manifests the most, pure spirit of all.

*When first I knew this forest*
*its flowers were strange.*
*Their different forms and faces*
*changed with the season's change* - [4]

Margaret Preston's *Native Pea - Australian Wildflowers* 1923,[Pl. 36], is not poised in a clear, diagrammatic space. Preston has included the exterior view through a window, a still life position coined by the Post-Impressionists and artists such as Bonnard. The function of which was to bring in the light from outside, either to illuminate the subject or exhibit the light of the climate - a geographical celebration if you like. Australian and Southern French skies lend themselves more to this display than those of the Netherlands and the north.

Preston's canvas is filled with summery yellow, white and green. At the close of her book, *The Contant Art*
of Rearranging, about the art of Margaret Preston, Elizabeth Butel concludes that:

She was above all, a communicator, not content that art
occupy a passive role in people's lives but demanding that
it to excite, enliven and engage. [5]

Therefore didacticism wallowed in Preston’s pictures of Australian flora and fauna and Aboriginal motif. Most of Preston’s floral pieces contained the central image of a vase, tub or jug to support her glorious flowers. The compositions weren’t always symmetrical. In fact, Howard Ashton when referring to her carefully, designed woodcuts of 1925, noticed her penchant for:

unsymmetrical jugs and vases [6]

Once Preston had discovered the unappreciated Australian flora she made herself very familiar with her exciting find. Her work was to convert many Australians to understand the wayward beauty of these indigenous plants. The Native Peas that have been thrust into the container, maintain their scrubby, shrub-like characteristics. Alas, Preston endeavoured to tame them as we will see in later chapters. Preston manipulated, ordered and self-consciously exploited these natives into some extremely flat, tight designs that, evolved purely decorative motifs. Not so in 1923, when she conveys the Native Peas with the expressive power of one who delights in the ritual of the craft and the feral beauty of the subject, capturing the salient features of the species. Already, Preston is employing influences from photography such as, the oblique angles and dramatic tonalities that are sometimes stark and cold.

The thick-fleshed Murray-lily,
flame-tree’s bright blood,
and where the creek runs shallow,
the cunjevoi’s green hood. [7]

Twenty four years later, Grace Cossington Smith snatches the wildflowers from her exterior surroundings and, it appears that she has also thrust them into a bucket. Some of the blood-red bottlebrush flowers are falling out in their wayward manner. Wildflowers in a Bucket 1947, [Pl. 37], is altogether much less descriptive than Preston’s Native Peas. Apart from the bottle brush it is difficult to discern the exact species depicted in this flourish of natural colour and textured brushstroke. Cossington Smith has employed her learned knowledge of light and colour to depict these very, wild flowers. They are not velvety smooth and soft like the roses and marigolds of Rachel Ruysch’s tame and civilized, Northern Hemisphere varieties. Cossington Smith has also used intuitive powers to complement the burnt and ochre colours of the wildflowers with a blatant use of purple and mauve in the shadows of her well used white cloth; well-used in the painters ritual not in the domestic sense.
In fact, Preston and Cossington Smith rarely indicate a domestic use for their flowers, cloths and objects. Cossington Smith has included a minute portion of window, in order to utilize the light in a formal sense, over the composition of substances. This device, a seventeenth century still life painter, would almost certainly never have employed. The Dutch still life was you will remember, independent of atmospheric conditions and, dictated its own terms that were abstract in compositional necessity. Bruce James makes an interesting comment about Cossington Smith's still lifes:

*Still lifes and flowers were predictable subjects for an artist of her temperament.* [8]

What does James allude to when he speaks of 'her temperament'? Persistent dedication and patience? Passionate and fanatical? He later describes her through her pertinent style as:

*the little gargoyle of Australian gothic.* [9]

One can understand that like Preston, Cossington Smith would have been out of step or perhaps, 'on the edge', They definitely weren't participating in 'normal' female activities. They weren't complying to the demands of their biological life-cycles. So what is the plight of the woman artist all about? The question is a complex one. Elizabeth Baker once revealed her thoughts on the history of art and sexual politics:

*There is still a broad social climate in which [despite decades of "emancipation"] women are not motivated or encouraged to take their work seriously.* [10]

Although these comments were made around twenty years ago, they still stand today, but for a few exceptions. Modern, western, technological society is still trapped in gender restrictions. More than their male counterparts, most female artists find they need to remain single or unpaired in order to carry out their work, which brings me to the other serious female artist who is still painting superb still life paintings.

*white violets smudged with purple,*  
*the wild ginger spray,*  
*ground orchids small and single,*  
*haunted my day;* [11]

Olley's aesthetic imperative is still life - Olley has almost never flinched from her imperative. Thus, she obtained the most polished, refrained, sensuously, rich forms that not only describe reality but, go further than existing as a mirror of nature - they embody the human spirit. They are life-giving and abundant. They are about a personal vision in a personal space. They are about a feminine history of Australia and at the same time, they are strong, simple and intelligent. Olley's work is forever fertile, exuding the spiritual in Nature.
All three of the wildflower pieces executed by the 'big three' of Australian women painters, seem to be a celebration of life - or death or, life that goes on after death. A force that is found after the grief of loss is over. Of the flower pieces executed after the death of Cossington Smith's mother, Bruce James says of these works, that they:

*exult nature and the life force in the face of mortality.* [12]

Preston and Cossington Smith have worked under the modernist banner but, maintained their personal visions. Olley is just Olley. She conjures the same spiritual strength that permeates the subjects, the same brilliance of technique loyalty to a vision. Of Cossington Smith, Harry Tatlock Miller said in 1947, that:

*her interiors voiced something of Bonnard's song* [13]

and the art writer for *The Bulletin* said that:

*her paintings become obscured by light or the various dissected components of it.* [14]

This is a very poignant description of how Cossington Smith depicts her reality and her use of light that comes in through the window from the landscape. A metaphysical device that could represent for this religious painter, the Holy Spirit. Cossington Smith developed enormously over her lifetime of painting, eventually the wave of her magic wand could manifest gracefully, all of her emotional and sensual forces that always gave generously to the audience.

*Brown leaves are withering on the alien trees:*
*The bronze green of our hills*
*Is veiled with blue that fills*
*The spirit with a bright*
*Sense of intrinsic light.* [15]

Olley's blue in *Hawkesbury Wildflowers and Pears* 1973, [Pl. 38], is mesmeric and tranquillizing - containing the ultimate, visual sensuality that soothes the soul. The blue has to be extracted from the Australian sky. This unusual background that is unlike a background, which in its celestial atmosphere, bathes the objects with:

*nuances of natural light* [16]

This painting recalls the enchantment of the ancient, idyll - the sense of place at Delphi in Greece. The pure, majestic, white jug, the dry, wild sweetness of her wildflowers like a garland of heavenly votifs, the
offerings of fruit and David Strachan's Fish of 1953, alongside which, the solid cupboard stands as an ancient, granite mountain. Those same timeless, arcane elements that pervade the Greek peninsulas, are present in the ancient, large, Australian island. The granite mountain at Delphi becomes the sandstone cuttings and gorges of the infinitely, ancient Hawkesbury area - Arcadia over this continent - sparkling colours and the monuments of time-honoured legends.

Above all, Preston, Cossington Smith and Olley have what Bruce James would term as: 'intellectual toughness'. Cossington Smith retreated into her own private, domestic world and painted for fifty years, developing:

    a painting technique which consisted of separate touches of
colour laid side by side over the entire area of canvas -
giving everyday subjects an added beauty and liveliness
bathed in golden light.[17]

Preston will rapidly detour from her painterly style, which celebrates the Australian wilderness - adopting a cloisonist approach that flattens her geometric solids and becomes 'rock solid' [18]. Her work is dynamic and assertive as was the artist.

Olley differs from all still life painters in that her work does not seem to be static and immobile. The work however does not lose the serenity and graceful harmony that still life and abstractions can hold. Christine France gives Olley the painter her due:

    The success of Margaret Olley's work lies beyond the fact
that she looks beyond the static into the essence of her
subject matter and perceives its complexities. [19]
END NOTES

INTRODUCTION:
I Don't Like Fruit.


CHAPTER ONE:


Ibid., p 20. [9]

Ibid., p 20.

Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*. p 64.

Ibid., p 68. [5]. The volumetric complexity of the objects in Cotan's painting is discussed by Martin S. Soria in *Sanchez Cotan's Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber, Art Quarterly*, 8[1945], p 311-318.

Ibid., p 70.


CHAPTER TWO:

*Ritual: Creatural Habit, Simple Objects and The Everyday.*

John Keats, *Ode to Autumn*, p 199.


Ibid., p 61.

Ibid., p 61. See Stirling, *Still Life*, p 27. Sterling's implication, that 'megalography' and 'rhopography' are terms bearing on the painting of antiquity, seems to me unfounded. For
one thing, evidence for the currency of the term *megalographia* in the ancient world is
unforthcoming. As for 'rhopography', although the word is sometimes used in classical
and post-classical texts, its etymology points less towards 'the painting of trivial objects,
small wares, trifles' than towards landscape painting, or painting that is badly executed,
or the pigments used in painting. Nevertheless, provided that the terms are understood to
be modern rather than ancient, the distinction between megalography and rhopography as
Sterling defines them can be a useful one, and the present study employs it extensively.
Although the related term 'rhyparography' has the advantage of being used in antiquity to
refer to 'the painting of low or sordid subjects', including *xenia*, its inescapably
perjorative sense makes it impossible for 'megalography' and 'rhyparography' ever to be
on a par in argument: the negative associations of 'rhopography', even at the cost of
asserting to a modern usage which, in the case of Sterling, somewhat muddles the roots of
the word. For a comparable modern usage of the term, see Stephen Bann's account of
'high' and 'low' art in antiquity, in *The True Vine*, p 37-38.


[6] Ibid., p 80. Parrhasios and Zeuxis entered into a competition, Zeuxis exhibiting a picture
of some grapes, so true to nature that birds flew up to the wall of the stage, Parrhasios
then displayed a picture of a linen curtain realistic to such a degree that
Zeuxis, elated by the verdict of the birds, cried out that now at last his
rival must draw the curtain and show his picture. On discovering his mistake he
surrendered the prize to Parrhasios, admitting candidly that he, Zeuxis, had deceived
only the birds, Parrhasios had deceived himself, a painter [*Natural History*, XXXV,65]


[8] Ibid., p 87.


theatricality, see Michael Fried's excellent discussion in *Absorption and Theatricality*. p
7-70, especially p 11-17.


CHAPTER THREE:


[17] Ibid., p 160.

CHAPTER FOUR:
Women Do it Too: The Female Face in Feminine Space.


[12] Ibid., p 51.


CHAPTER FIVE:

*Wildflowers: Centrality: Female Composure in the Wilderness.*


[9] Ibid., p 36.


[18] Ibid., p 69.

FIGURES


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MUSIC


[4] Villancicos, Chansons Populaires Espagnoles des XVc and XVIe Siecles. No 1. Poys deuezys que me quereys ben, Toda mi vida hos ame, Perdida tenyo la color.[Cotan , Bodegones]


[7] Pavana III, Llui Mila, XIVs. From, Le Moyen Age Catalan, de l'art roman a la renaissance. Ensemble Ars Musicae de Barcelona.[Zurbaran and Cotan]

[8] Soleta so jo aci. Chansonnier du Duc de Calabre. XVIIs. From, as above.[Zurbaran and Cotan]

[9] Fantasia, Pere A. Vila, XVIIs. From, as above.


[15] Delibes, Flower Duet from Lakme. Mady Mesple[Soprano], Danielle Millet[Mezzo-Soprano]. From, as above.[Wildflowers]
Colour Plates


Copied from Margaret Olley, Christine Frances. [p 81, Pl. 10]


[14] Margaret Olley, Apples, 1980. Oil on board, 62.0 by 76.0., Collection: the artist. Copied from Margaret Olley, Christine Frances. [p 119, Pl. 29]


[20] Rogier van der Weyden [1399-1464], Detail from The Annunciation, c.1435. Oil on panel. Copied from Miriam Milman, Trompe-l'oeil.

[21] Barend van der Meer, Cup and Bread in a Niche, c, 1668. Oil on panel. Copied from Miriam Milman, Trompe l'oeil.


[23] Pieter Claez, Still Life with Stoneware Jug, Wine Glass, Herring and Bread. Oil on panel, 30.0 by 35.8., Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Copied from Norman Bryson, Looking at
Chris van Otterloo. [Details unknown].


Wolfgang Heinbach [1610-1678], *Woman Looking at a Table*. Staatliche Gemaldegalerie, Kassel. Copied from Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, [p 152 Pl. 62]


Grace Cossington Smith, *Figure Through Flowers*, c 1932., Oil on pulpboard, 59.5 by 44.5., Private Collection. Copied from *Grace Cossington Smith*, Bruce James, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1990.

Margaret Olley, *Portrait in the Mirror*, 1948. Oil on board, 54.5 by 72.0., Collection the artist. Copied from *Margaret Olley*, Christine Frances, [p 65, Pl. 2]

Diego Valasquez[1599-1660], *The Black Servant*. Oil on canvas, 86.4 by 99.0., Chicago Art Institute. Copied from Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, [p 151, Pl. 60]


Margaret Morgan, * Allegory After the School of Fontainbleau*, 1984. Synthetic polymer paint on linen, 180 by 150., Art Gallery New South Wales, Sydney. Copied from *Art


Grace Cossington Smith, *Wildflowers in a Bucket*, 1947. Oil on composition board, 69.0 by 53.7., collection Queensland University of Technology.

CIRCLES

and

SEEDS

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Part Two: CIRCLES AND SEEDS

INTRODUCTION From Tarantella and Ennui to Composure in the Light of the Moon.

CHAPTER SIX The Table-top: An Aesthetic Laboratory for Modernist Application.

CHAPTER SEVEN: The Luderum: Still Life as Theatre.

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INTRODUCTION:
From Tarantella and Ennui to Composure in the Light of The Moon.

You who were darkness warmed my flesh
where out of darkness rose the seed.
Then all a world I made in me:
all the world you hear and see
hung upon my dreaming blood.[1]

The following discourse will eventually continue the discussion about woman in art and specifically still life painting. *Circles and Seeds* will follow on from Chapter Five in Part One, *Wildflowers and White Porcelain*. I say eventually because the first chapter, Chapter Six does not deal with the art of woman exclusively. Thus so far, a short history if you like, of still life painting in the western world has been mapped out. This was intended to set the scene in which still life painting had originated and hence developed. Having established the tone of the scene of the incubation period of still life painting, it became blatantly obvious, that it was through this usually overlooked category of art, that women were 'permitted' to take their part in the history of painting.

The present discourse, *Circles and Seeds*, will deal primarily with the evolvement of Australian women painters in the Modernist and post-Modernist eras of the twentieth century through still life and related forms in art. It is therefore essential that Chapter Six spells out the development of Modernism at large, which it seems takes off from the experimentation that surrounded still life objects on the table-top, in European painting. It is at this point in time that women artists in Australia, began to assert themselves in the quest for recognition as serious artists and indeed, to pursue their passion for the craft. In fact their contributions and professionalism were as strong as, and equal to those of the men. Indeed, Margaret Preston's contribution to Australian twentieth century art and design is arguably one of the most important contributions to the constructing of an Australian identity in art and design in the history of white Australia.

Whilst some very determined women take off into the chauvinest world of art, employing the forms that grow out of formal modernist ideas, other more traditionally based forms of still life painting persist and continue to evolve into what seems to be a new vocabulary of forms in art. A fine example of this is the work of Susan Norrie which has already been discussed and will be again in the following chapters. The search for very specific, female forms that contain a
psychological ambiguity, will be dealt with in Chapters Seven to Ten and the Conclusion of
Circles and Seeds, under the notion, that gender specific form or a feminine aesthetic has
developed as a result of the woman artist who is working in still life forms. Through this
investigation, the unearthing of many archetypal forms from within what seems to be the
unconscious of 'woman', will underline pre-existing knowledge that these forms have always
lurked there and, have always existed in her art. In fact, the forms are mere adumbrations of the
universal forms that have appeared in still life painting since its advent: the stuff of all material
cultures.

Historical survey will show that the majority of women who painted up until early this century,
have painted still life. The content of still life painting is about the domestic setting of the house:
the place and objects that are about woman. As Norman Bryson the author of the four essays on
still life painting, Looking at the Overlooked, will have it, still life is all about 'creatural habit'
and 'bodily acts of survival'. As is noted in Wildflowers and Wild Porcelain, it has always been
women and for that matter, women of the lower echelons who were the keepers of the soul and
the body; the emblematic detail of which is dealt with in the religious, genre paintings of such
'great masters' as Diego Valasquez and Jan Vermeer. So, women painted not only what was
available but, what was important to the maintenance of life and, what they knew and
understood. Looking at this art and what has developed out of it, leads us to believe that there
lies within, a profound depth and secret. There lies the mystery of life and the rhythms inherent
in the biology of woman.

Keeping in mind that there are relatively few known woman artists and that most of those we do
know have painted still life, then it is through still life and the content of female labour and love
that this category of painting and related art, deserves a newly appointed status. Therefore, we
must rethink and revalue what is thought to be the 'ordinary' and 'everyday'. If this is to happen
then we need to give praise to the art and life of woman, and understand how this position of
subordination grew out of the patriarchal systems that have governed society and general
environments in the past.

Norman Bryson decided that the reason for the 'great female artist' problem and the 'lowly
appointed status' problem of still life and therefore much of the art of woman, lies in the fact that
this art and the objects pertaining to it, are about the traditional feminine space and hence, the
social status of woman who was 'tied to the apron strings'. So much for the enslaved, working
class woman. Women of the upper echelons were also enslaved and were expected to uphold
their social roles in the 'dabbling' of 'fine crafts' and being good wives, unless they were fortunate
enough to be sold off for religious favour and then and only then, could they perhaps pursue there craft. But what of her biology? Bryson has failed to perceive that woman's body is the source of her confinement. This is surely the reason why woman has been held down and held back; she has been physically oppressed by various aspects of nature and therefore occupied with her duty as lifegiver and keeper for all creatures on earth.

What becomes obviously problematic in this discourse about women artists, is that the essence of the situation today is really no different, except that after a long battle for so-called 'equality', women seemingly have a choice. This is the very dilemma that is still faced head on or 'body on' by many women who desire to pursue their craft and who may also wish to pursue their inherent biology.

In her feminist critique Nothing Matters, Somer Brodribb analyses with somewhat acrimonious tone, a host of twentieth century theoretical frameworks which she believes to be anti-life, pro-Immaterialist and therefore anti the inherent nature of woman. Brodribb therefore spells out the dangers of what she believes to be a type of philosophical trap for feminism and women in what she deems to be the Late Patriarchy which sails under the flag of post - Modernism.

Consequently, Brodribb fears that post-Modernism is a misleading term and that we are not moving forward as a society or culture at all. She says this about the gender dispute with regard to prominent theorists of our century with whom she lays much of the blame for continuing female oppression:

  Structuralism and psychoanalysis also seem attractive to Rubin because they allow an escape from biology: . . . .The 'exchange of women' is a seductive and powerful concept. It is attractive in that it replaces the oppression of women within social systems, rather than in biology.[2]

Bryson believes in a feminine space and places her there, she belongs to it, it is integral to her social role: the matter of flesh is ignored, hence the title of Brodribb's book. Brodribb perceives that the tools and theories of Levi-Strauss and Freud are 'profoundly phallic', as the former would have woman exchanged through the systems of the mind and the will of man, and the latter would cut off her body from nature through the science of the mind. She stresses that this is part of a fear of life which results in the cognitive organizing of those things that can't be understood and controlled into this set of systems:

  Levi-Strauss and Freud provide conceptual tools for describing the sex/gender system: - The theories of Claude Levi-Strauss and Sigmund Freud were important to Gayle Rubin because, 'In a fear of life and a
disembodied approach to nature is an important characteristic of male history and scientific patriarchy. Reading through these works one begins to have a sense of a systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw material and fashions them as domesticated products.

So, it could be seen that it is the biological phenomenon, the mystery of the inherent nature of woman, that Brodribb fears that Late Patriarchy under the guise of post-Modernism, persists in annihilating. Here we are dealing with the same biology that the woman who glares out at us in Heinbach's painting [Chapter Four Wildflowers and White Porcelain], is controlled by, is enslaved by, 'biology', not merely scientific but, the spiritual, primal inheritance of matter and therefore life, comes to us through the psyche of Self. It is this Self that has been under cover, in the form of the catatonic glare of the women in the paintings of Heinbach, Vermeer, Valaquez, Olley, Preston and Cossington-Smith. Yes, we have also witnessed this face in the earlier work of these important Australian women artists.

What is it that Brodribb perceives to be the dangers in post-Modernist Late-Patriarchy. Perhaps we are employing the use of this word in far too flagrant a fashion. She passionately warns us of the patriarchal tradition upon which all epistemological systems have come into use, including the notion of post-Modernism. In fact one could almost vow to her pressure to avoid the use of patriarchal compartmentalizations from now on. Brodribb includes a number of definitions, explanations and opinions about this our time, making comment on the work of contemporary academics and theorists:

Women's memory, women's language, women's body and sexuality have been annulled in the patriarchal tradition which has feared the female sex. As bell hooks writes 'male suprematism encourages women to believe we are valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men' We are taught that our relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience. We are taught that women are 'natural' enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another.

We need to be aware of such accusations and perhaps whilst not accepting them we ought to endeavour to understand them in the light of historical evidence and reasoning. Germaine Greer hints at the hostility and rivalry which are traits of an oppressed species and how such insecurities have at times thwarted the careers of each other, often taking on the form of self-destruction. Greer discusses the careers of Vigee-Le Brun and Adelaide Labille-Guiard, two female painters of eighteen century France in this light. Following in depth research Greer maintains that much of what is written about their supposed mutual hatred was libel and that in
the event of this possible friction, they had been played off against one another. Of course, this sad situation is in keeping with the competition and struggle for survival that exists even today. The rivalry supposedly takes on such a flavour as this exert from the handwriting of Vigee Le Brun:

I was not at all unaware that a woman artist who has always shown herself my enemy, I don't know why, had tried in every imaginable way to blacken me in the minds of these princesses; but the extreme goodness with which they treated me, assured me in a very short time that these calumnies had had very little effect.[5]

Not only were women in competition with the men but it seems that just a few may have been in competition with one another. Patriarchal traditions that set up and controlled the academies where these women were forced to attend to learn the craft and receive 'real' recognition, also set up systems that resulted in the humiliation and consequent failure of those women whose self-esteem and mere struggle for survival impeded their success, in whatever form that may take.

As women who wish to carry out our dreams, no matter what they are, we need to have an unspoken law that results in the support of one another at the instinctive and psychological levels. We then must have a constructive centrality within our feminine culture which is always going to be closely linked to the life of woman from all times; that is as nurturers and keepers of the body and soul, this our essence. Brodribb perceives that no room has been allowed for constructive centrality in the post-Modernist era, as it seems to be a time in philosophy or culture that is de-periodising and explains that:

Gail McGregor calls it 'a portmanteau concept yielding something for everyone'[6]

To add another definition about this time, Brodribb quotes that John Rajchman remarks that:

Postmodernism is theoretical cannibalism; it is the supermarket approach to ideas. One jumbles together the different theoretical idioms available without commensurating them into a single coherent language.[7]

McGregor sees our time in a positive light and truthfully, why should we be told how to think, and what to produce or create by any one group in the form of debilitating manifestoes. Rajchman finds this approach problematic and he seemingly wishes to be dictated to by the superior master in his patriarchal terms. One would think that the inferred freedom of thought would imply a morally and ethically good tone. His term 'supermarket' though, is correctly coined as art has become part of the capitalist tradition and is served up to us in 'cultural
supermarkets' of our time. Again in Brodribb's feminist critique we sight the Marxist view of post-Modernism;

From this perspective, the term 'postmodernism' would seem to be a floating signifier by means of which the intelligentsia has sought to articulate its political disillusionment and its aspiration, to a consumption-orientated lifestyle.[8]

The revolution was a non-event in the west and Brodribb asks whether the movement for the freedom of women, which is incidental to a domino effect on black people and all the oppressed and repressed, has taken a retrograde step as a result of the rise of the new 'smug' capitalism that is fed so nicely by the hungry jaws of post-Modernism. One would assume that this aspect of our time would be healthy for the pre-recession intestinal fortitude of hungry artists. In fact Brodribb sees this time as a proliferation of the 'art of self-display, the conceit of masculine self . . . .' This is highly evident in much of the new architecture that has sadly moved from unhealthy modernist phallic edifices to million dollar fancy facades that again fail to address the real design problems of the real world.

What could be extremely problematic for women in post-Modernism is what Brodribb fears to be the establishment's and intelligentsia's embracing of the doctrines of Immaterialism which she believes is carried out in the scientist's laboratory and eventuates in the negating the need for or existence of woman's body:

Postmodernism is an addition to the masculinist repertoire of psychotic mind/body splitting and the peculiar arrangement of reality as Idea: timeless essence and universal form. When women appear in French philosophy as Sartrean holes and slime[Collins and Price: 1976] or Deleuzian bodies without organs[Guattari and Deleuze: 1983], the mind and the matter - is masculine. Plato answered the question of Being by awarding true reality to the realm of ideas: the sensible world possesses only the appearance of reality. Postmodernism is no less metaphysical: here, too, the idea absorbs and denies all presence in the world.[9]

This material from Brodribb encapsulates for me the problem that I have in accepting certain forms of art in this time. It also reinforces the existence of a feminine aesthetic as opposed to a masculine or patriarchal system of aesthetics. This means that the need for a feminine language and culture is desirable as a symbol of strength and a shedding of oppression. The superiority of Platonist Idea in art maintains its hold over certain post-Modernist art forms. Thornton Walker's beautiful little painting The Enduring Body Of Reality, 1984 [PI 1], epitomises the ontology that is employed by the male ego. It is not sufficiently intellectual to present the bowl of lemons for
what they are, the mirroring of reality, the embodiment of matter but, Walker has to leave a trail of words across the sky in order that the status of this still life is elevated to something greater, more heroic. Yes Walker has traversed the table-top that holds this xenia or rhyparos and transports it to a heavenly appointed body of reality that is only a perceived reality. He invests the fruit and seed of regenerative nature, life and decay with a great thought. He takes his still life to the heights of Platonic ideas that are beyond matter, beyond reality and therefore negating the flesh and hence the arcane mysteries inherent in nature.

Is this what Brodribb means when she reveals her perturbations about this time which is a consequence of Late Patriarchy? The discussion surrounding the still life forms in the art of woman within Circles and Seeds, will investigate the power of mystery, the artistic language and the archetypal form that female artists invest in their work in this post-Modern period.

The lemons of Thornton Walker become only a plastic representation of an erudition - there is no recognition of the real matter of flesh - the mysteries of biological time that are within human nature that makes art a natural extension of what is within the body and the mind, rather than the reduction of just the mind that becomes an organic blob existing in its own space somewhere in the universe.

The fruits of Fede Galicia's painting, Still Life with Peaches and Jasmine [Fig 1], and Margaret Olley's Cornflowers and Pears, 1982 [Pl 2], contain life and flesh. Here, there is the water of life and a pronouncement of the swollen matter of life. The fruit will decay, and new life will spring from the seeds. The fruit is fecund with the mystery of life. The objects of these restrained and honest still lifes acknowledge the body of women: they are an extension of her soul and her seed.

Further, regarding Brodribb's concerns about Immaterialist approaches, she stresses the imminent degradation of the female body and how it is in danger of being nullified:

Once satisfied to control her body and her movements once pleased to create images of her and then order her body to conform, the Master Discourse now aspires to the most divine of tasks: to create her in his image, which is ultimately to annihilate her.[10]

The Master Discourse being the orthodox academies from which we all stem[in terms of a part of our language]. This is also God the Master and our language surrounding our bodily survival, creatural habit, our spirituality, our fears, our dreams and hopes which need not be male
anymore. It is no wonder that Grace Cosssington-Smith perceived the human body as content that was extremely uninteresting. Remembering her comment as recorded in Chapter Four of *Wildflowers and White Porcelain*, referring to the subjects of portraits and studies of people as being:

> usually just dull sort of wooden things[11]

Look what fate the body has suffered at the hands of the lecherous and controlling. So much can be communicated through the images of still life forms, as will be seen in the following chapters.

With regard to the Master syndrome in art it is relevant to again raise the question asked in Part One, *Wildflowers and White Porcelain*; why are there no great women artists?; the very pertinent question raised by so many in the seventies. As became obvious in Part One, the answer to this question was directly linked to the question concerning the status of still life painting and the discussion herein, that revolves around the biology and inherent nature of woman. Greer addresses this tragic dilemma in a down to earth and honest approach through her survey of would-be great women artists. It appears that much of their work has been attributed to the Master or, the male family members. The situation is similar in the world of music. This is an example of the manner in which the plight of women was set:

> The engulfment of Constance Mayer - Pierre Prud'hon is then not a simple matter of her work being misattributed to him. In fact, the traffic went the other way: Prud'hon had far too much to do with work commissioned from and attributed to Mayer.

However as Greer discloses in her historical survey of women artists, *The Obstacle Race*, in the chapters entitled: *Love, The Illusion of Success, Family and Humiliation*, the case was all too often one of female subordination:

> It was her dearest wish to merge herself with Prud'hon, she willingly became his alter ego. She was a woman invaded by another's vision of life, utterly given up to a relationship of the most binding intimacy.

It appears that Prud'hon's wife had been incarcerated by an Imperial Order, after which Mayer always lived in close proximity to her Master, caring for him whilst he maintained his absorption in his art. Of course the crisis had eventually to happen, following a dedicated life of not so much unrequited love but, unconsummated love. Of course Mayer was blamed by his children for breaking up the family - the Garden of Eden revisited. After her fortieth birthday, a crucial
chronological mark in anyone's life, especially a woman who may have wished to have children, the emotionally bankrupt Mayer felt humiliated by guilt and despair. This oppressed woman had lost her youth and charm and consequently the qualities that attracted Prud'hon. Hence, her dream of romantic and maternal love, which were subjects of her paintings was never to be, and she felt publicly shamed:

On the twenty seventh of May, 1821, Mayer went into Prud'hon's room, took his razor and cut her hand with it. Finding it sharp enough she took aim at a looking glass and struck at her neck. . . . . Prud'hon who had been happily working in the neighbouring atelier, rushed past his friends and threw himself upon the body, trying to hold the edges of the appalling wound together. When they took him away he was drenched in her blood.[12]

Mayer's leap into asphasia rendered her speechless like the woman in Heinbach's painting. Her tragic existence in those times was due to her oppression and repression as a woman. She had been designated a degradation at the hands of the 'Superior Master': her senseless and unfulfilling adulation of another. Brodribb stresses that this degradation:

One can only create from pain and sex. The superior Master, of course, creates pain in another, makes his mark by leaving marks. What is central to the rape artist's ideology is that matter is worthless and must be given form. His. Matter must be recreated by man. Mother must be recreated by, and as the masculine. Mother is disassociated from creativity and communication. Flesh is created by the word of God, not by the body of woman.[13]

The world of Brodribb's Superior Master takes its vulgar prowess to the scientist's laboratory. What great man will render the matter of Her mystery worthless in the testube of genetic engineering? This threatening approach endangers the whole of nature; man carried away with pyrotechnics, dazzling displays of intellectual cleverness - negating the flesh - embarrassed by the flesh.

A further example of this philosophical development in post-Modernist art forms, is Timothy McGuire's recent painting, Untitled 1992 [Pl 3], which was awarded the Moet and Chandon Award in 1993. Mc Guire seems to be making a statement about painting and goes a few steps further than Walker in stealing the content of still life painting and recommunicating it as a clever idea. The painting takes what is a moving and sensuous object in nature stripping it of all magic, mystery and enchantment and leaving it threadbare as nothing but a banal, plastic image on a two-dimensional surface, a synthetic flower that has emerged from a test tube. The
Australian art critic John Neylon alludes to the world of winners as being part of a no-lose system in his article, *The Discreet Charm of the Moet and Chandon Award*:

Most candidates answered the question correctly,

and he wraps up the calibre of the brand of some of the selected showings with the following cynicism:

Previous catalogues do not shed any light on trends towards a *Moet and Chandon* style, apart from a fair amount of tail-feather shaking to catch the eye of the judges.[14]

Here we have a still life painting wherein the object has been stripped of almost all the sensual, and enchanting powers of nature, which had been the original source of the artist's inspiration. It is in this harsh and cerebral world of Idea only that women have been ignored as artists and ignored as the embodiment of life and matter. God made life and the minds of men made paintings. It is no wonder that the faceless glare of the females in their 'feminine spaces' conveys boredom, sorrow and the denial of the sensual in the true spirit of nature.

It is no wonder that in post-Modernism, the newly emerging forms created by women, that have grown out of the content of still life are encapsulating the mystery of nature. These forms which have been lying in the unconscious of woman are receiving a gentle and significant treatment in the hands of woman. The Idea in the paintings of woman does not exist in itself but is emeshed in the mysteries of woman and nature. The woman artist must no longer attempt to emulate the ideas of man as she often did in Modernism.

In my search for the underlying leitmotif that will disclose the feminine aesthetic and the language which will embody it, I have referred to the writings and very much the 'findings' of Esther Harding, in her book *Woman's Mysteries*, first published in 1955, and Clarissa Pinkola Estes in her book, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, published in 1992. Harding is a physician and a specialist in the treatment of psychogenic illnesses. Her book is, 'A Psychological Interpretation of the Feminine Principle as portrayed in Myth, Story and Dreams'. Estes is a 'jungian analyst and storyteller who believes that women's 'flagging vitality can be restored by extensive "psychic- archeological" digs into the remains of the female underworld'. Their work has provided me with a 'gateway' into the world of woman's past and life, giving to my thoughts and work a vital anthropological and psychological basis. Harding offers facts at the 'universal anthropological level of tribal myth'[14] and Estes provides knowledge at 'the individual
psychological level'.[15]

Through this discourse I will be taking the woman artist who is essentially ‘woman' from the fearsome and dread of Brodribb's Patriarchal systems wherein she is lost or forced to be lost by losing control. Brodribb likens this state to the dance of the *Tarentella*:

The tarentella is a sudden Italian ritual dance by women, which lasts several hours, even as long as a day. A wildly passionate, raging and public dance, it exorcises and enacts a ferocious female desire for freedom and pleasure. It is an interlude which concludes with the woman's reinsertion into the rule and prohibitions of masculine culture.[16]

So here the woman has gone into a state of ennui: that state of boredom and subordination that the women in those paintings are experiencing. C.P.Estes sees it this way:

that female psychic slumber is a state approximating SONAMBULISM. During it we walk, we talk, yet we are asleep . . . .

She goes on to tell of how woman can rise up out of this coma through:

The wild creature states of being, perception and knowing. These are the many conduits through which the wild woman speaks to us. So this loss and the betrayal are the first slippery steps of a long, initiatory process that pitches us into *la selva subterranea*, the underground forest.[17]

The metaphors chosen by Estes, such as; wild woman, wolves and subterranean forests and caves, may seem to be a little far fetched but, they do work in capturing the spirit or intrinsic features that she is attempting to explain as being a way to attain psychic healing: the empowerment of woman. In perfect harmony with the content of still life painting and the fruits that contain the mystery of nature, she also selects the symbol of the Tree of Life, the apple tree, the pear and other forms of nature that appear in ancient legends, to reinforce the meanings of her didactic objectives. Estes has studied with real life experience coming herself from a background of storytelling people. She believes that these legends that have been handed down over many generations, hold truth and are therefore invaluable for the lessons that woman must learn about herself, her value and her strengths. Estes carries out the content of these lessons with a poetic sensibility. One of the stories handed down in the western world of eastern European tradition is *The Handless Maiden*, parts of which will be included throughout *Circles and Seeds*. The emblems in this story are appropriate in accordance with the content of the
artforms and the psychic journey that takes place in the twentieth century by the woman artist through the selected forms:

The apple tree and the maiden are interchangeable symbols of the feminine Self and the fruit is a symbol of nourishment and maturation of our knowledge of that Self. If our knowledge about the ways of our own soul is immature, we cannot be nourished from it, for the knowing is not yet ripe . . . . The flowering apple tree is a metaphor for fecundity, yes. But more so it signifies the densely, sensual creative urge and the rippening of ideas.[18]

These images may be stereotypical but, it is the 'ripening of ideas' that is important to our quest. Not referring to the Idea of Plato but rather to the ideas of woman about her Self and her art and life, that is sacred. When she acquires all of this, her true 'feminine culture', which is not to be subordinated to the position of 'the other' any longer, then and only then will she be able to transfer her magic into the greater, global 'culture', in this sense:

Culture is also a moral term. We are not just talking about literature but a concept of life and quality of life. Culture means the search for a positive relation between people, for an active, moral attitude of solidarity.[19]

Women, men and all forms of life will live in the dream of a nurturing and vigorous culture.
CHAPTER SIX
The Table-Top: An Aesthetic Laboratory for Modernist Application

From what hardened hands
the tool comes to us,
and the cup,
the notable curve
of a hip that clings to
the whole of a woman and prints itself there![1]

Up until now, my discussion of still life/object/table-top painting has surrounded subject matter that is actually round, spherical, circular, elliptical etc. The fruits and bowls of xenia take the great leap forward to the modern world, where we shall observe the gradual fading away of these forms. Of course circularity can be associated with certain archetypal characteristics of female gendered forms, the material and essence that which, will be part of the discourse in later chapters. Whilst I have previously included the post-Impressionists such as Cezanne[formalist] and van Gogh[expressivist] in a discussion surrounding the status of still life and historical attitudes in pre-feminist eras, I will now include these and other early moderns to set the scene of the eventuation of the modernist application of the content of still life.

It is at this place in time in Europe and Australia that many women take up the paint brush with a view to serious work, and this leap takes place on the table-top. This is partly due to the availability of subject matter, as has previously been sighted and perhaps their is a link to the various movements in modernism that rethink and revalue the areas of craft and design. The latter disciplines are of course integral and intrinsic to the art and life of woman as is the content of still life painting.

Looking at the formative period of this category of painting, Pieter Claez looked at his still life compositions:

as a semantically neutral art of description.[2]

This art of description was gradually imbued with an abstract formality. The compositions were meticulously balanced, the elements of which were set out with intense care, thus creating visually satisfying designs that slip into the category of formalist painting even though, subject matter is simple, strong and surrounds the everyday of 'creatural habit'. The delicately painted and planned still life, Dessert with Wafers [Fig2] by Lubin Baugin[c.1611-1663], also contains a degree of formality. The placement of the plate, precariously balanced just off the edge of the
table, hinges on the position of the carafe and its shadow, the now-appearing glass and the acute relief of the table end. The strength and simplicity of design, the diligence of positioning is calculated with the same care applied in the *Bodegones* of Cotan. It must not be tampered with, one must not pick up a wafer, that is not their purpose.

*Dessert with Wafers* does not belong to the realm of rhopography. The composition that does include everyday objects in a domestic space, has a departure of contrivance.

Because rhopography is committed to looking closely at what is usually disregarded, it can experience extraordinary difficulty in registering the everydayness of the everyday in what it is actually likely to inhabit 'low plane reality', without departing from that into a reassertion of painting's own powers and ambitions, or into an overfocused and obsessional vision that ends by making everyday life seem unreal and hyper-real at the same time.[3]

Bryson therefore places the wafers into the category of hyper-real or unreal as the painting is asserting its own power as being created for the sake of art. Unlike Chardin's casual composition that continues to relate to the acts of consumption and preparation, Baugein's highly strung painting has departed into the world of formalism and therefore megalography. The viewer, the consumer of food has no place at this table. She will be kept at more than an arm's length for some time. One aspect of rhopography does remain, however, and that is the notion of ritual. The ritualistic arranging of subject elements and the act of painting. It all happens on the table-top, continuing to do so into the twentieth century. There will be an abundance of circular forms, but they will lose their volume and, in many cases the edges will sharpen and the straight line will take over giving way to rectilinear form.

I need big hands

to help me change the profile of planets;
the traveller requires
triangular stars;
constellations like dice
cut into squares by the cold;
hands that distil. [4]

Paul Cézanne has used the table-top very much as a laboratory for aesthetic experimentation. Most of Cézanne's paintings of fruit, bottles and everyday objects have little regard if none, for bodily acts of survival. The table-tops, the draped cloths and in the case of *Pots of Flowers with
Pears, 1888-90 [Pl 4], the background, are all abstracted components of an overall surface pattern. The solid objects were given architectonic formality. In the words of Bryson:

Still life's potential for isolating a purely aesthetic space is undoubtedly one of the factors which made the genre so central in the development of Modernism.[5]

As far as we know Cézanne set the ball rolling. Many others followed, especially Australian painters, many of whom were and still are women. The female space of domesticity becomes the vehicle through which the woman painters such as Modersohn-Becker and Preston have their say in traditional and modern times. Love and devotion is given to the 'object': the object is empowered and this is the content that stems from still life and if you like xenia or even the earlier, numenous einzelkunst of neolithic imagery.

Cézanne has abolished the description of nature or the real world and paints what he thinks rather than what he sees. One cannot sense any love or devotion bestowed upon his objects. The objects a merely secondary to intellectual experimentation in formalist ideas. Here, there is no sense of nature, decay or regeneration. Perhaps there is only a love of the plastic material of paint and hence:

    reality raised to the level of the indestructible, as a symbol of what endures, transcending all that
    is perishable.[6]

Vincent van Gogh[1853-1890] on the other hand has used the table-top for its 'expressive' function. One can observe the enormous transition that he makes by observing the two still life paintings, Cabbage, Wooden Shoes and Potatoes [Pl 5] of 1881, and Onions and Red Cabbages [Pl 6] of 1887, that are separated by a six year period. The first of these still lifes is fiercely related to the material culture from which it derives; the clog, the potato, the cabbage. Such primitive, raw subject matter. The painting is charged with emotion. The forms of the objects are almost exploding into anonymous lumps of emotional matter. Gogh has begun to reduce these real forms, intuitively, into abstract masses of colour and tone. The relief and tonal modelling is simple and truthful. He too captures a type of 'blur' or abstract 'haze' that may have been an inheritance from his cultural antecedents. Though the rustic colour and display are rather more Chardinesque. In Onions and Red Cabbages the latter of the two, van Gogh has included the white cloth, objects and shadow to contain equal status as pictorial elements. These are all part of a painterly display of colour and form. There is something rash and haptic about the rhythm that
is set up by the overall pattern of colour play and the almost monotonous conglommeration that is heaped in the centre of the composition. Gogh is well on the way to eliminating the value of the object - excluding its identity for the sake of emotive expression. He never really does do this however, and the first artists who did were the Russian expatriots, such as Kandinsky. This brand of modernism, in due course, leads to Abstract Expressionism.

A retrospective glance suggests that it was the Cubists who courageously take on the aesthetic results of Cézanne's experiments. The Cubist, George Braque is very much a still life painter. In fact two-thirds of his paintings are still life such as *The Purple Tablecloth*, 1936, [Pl 7]. Braque's fanatical preoccupation for technique follows in the line of the seventeenth century Dutch still life painters such as Pieter Claez and der Ast. However, Braque was not so enthusiastic about conveying naturalism as he was about the finishes that he had learnt when apprenticed to his father, whose occupation was that of a painter/decorator of houses. This trade included some very specific crafts in the application of fake and imitation finishes such as those found in the earlier Pompeian frescoes. Hence, this was an extension of a very old tradition of tromp-l'oeil craft. Braque was free from the quest to mirror nature which, really wasn't a part of the French material or philosophical culture, as it was one that belonged to the Dutch. Braque was concerned more with very informally arranged still life scenes. Mathematical precision was not important and so he found his place in the French tradition of Chardin in the eighteenth century. The 'table cloth' paintings of Braque and Cézanne trace their ancestry to such compositions as this one by Chardin, *The White Tablecloth* [Fig 3], which is a:

> careless arrangement of simple things on a table.[7]

Braque however gave in to the notion that he was depicting enclosed spaces but, indeed, no matter what, the truth be known, it was a two-dimensional surface. Like Margaret Olley and Grace Cossington Smith, Braque carried out his aesthetic experiments in his personal space, his studio, or in the case of Olley, Cossington Smith and Preston, their homes. Private painters, personal visions. In these images, *The Purple Tablecloth* and *Still Life with Flowers and Fruit*, 1938-39 [Pl 8], we observe that although the pictures have some very real descriptions of what is natural, it is only a small part of the multitude of ideas that were being thrashed out on the table-top. The table-tops in his studio were the beginning of the metaphysical element that eventually dominates his painting. The Braque still lifes included herein are far more representational than much of the work he had completed in his analytical and synthetic Cubist stages wherein the works were almost completely non-representational. Braque is running off into the world of the Idea.
In the tradition of rhopography, most of Braque's table-tops were small in size and strong and simple in subject matter. This humble tradition of 'nature morte', provides joyful entertainment for the viewer. They are relaxing and pleasurable for the devotee of simple and everyday things. A vase of flowers, a pitcher or jug, a bowl of fruit and as in 'vanitas' sometimes, wine and musical instruments. The objects that charge up the senses. His love of decorative surface combined with sharply divided areas of colour, delicate nuance of light and shade - result in a two-dimensional pattern of vertical forms that either stand or hover on and around the table-top. At times he does allude to illusion as in the edge of the table-top in [Pl 8], receding wall panelling or shadow.

The concern however, was about space. Space becomes the idea and the reason for his art; space that surrounds and infiltrates still life objects. Braque and other Modernist still life painters negate the matter, the flesh, that the fruit is made of and hence, the gradual leap into total abstraction which exploits the objects of everyday survival for the pursual of the Idea. Giorgio Morandi[1890-1964], was similarly concerned about space and still life objects. However, concrete, solid space was not part of this almost, hermetic aesthete's painting agenda. Morandi conceived of this space in a non-objective framework.

The table-tops were always covered with paper which was scarcely ever changed. Onto the paper he would mark with pencil the spaces between the objects, draw in shadows and eliminate any distinction between background and foreground. Blocks under the paper raised the horizon so that, instead of receding, it came forward. Often it would reach above the tops of the objects on the table . . [8]

These are the observations of Janet Abramowicz from her article The Liberation of the Object.. Within the article, Abramowicz raises the problem concerning the lack of appreciation and thorough understanding of Morandi's work that is due to incomplete collections presented in exhibitions of his work. Morandi's ideas surround the spatial relationships that give the objects or conventionally, occupied space and the conventionally, unoccupied space[backgrounds and frontgrounds], an equality on the picture plane. All of the space was occupied by paint and the ontological coma of Morandi's act of painting. He would paint many paintings using the same table-top arrangement expounding a single idea. He might alternatively use many different arrangements to expound the one idea. But obsessive repetition was Morandi's trademark.

Morandi worked alone in his private space, his small, humble flat that served as his bedroom, studio and living space. Unlike the Dutch, still life painters, the surface was not a brilliant,
perfect, mat sheen - it was textured and rough, the brushstrokes were rash and crude - eliminating tonal modelling and chiarascuro without eliminating tone. His approach to the humble everyday object was direct and intuitive whilst at the same time, being carefully thought out. The objects are immobile and static, almost monumental. He would continually scrape back canvases and begin again. In Still Life, 1949[Pl 9], the vases, the bottles, the pots and bowls are instruments of sight that evolve through the incessant paint brush or palette knife, as a series of muted colours, sliding tones, curves, lines and curved and cornered spaces. If ever there was a painter's painter, Morandi was it. The delight of this table-top is ever so subtle, so esoteric, such pure, painterly poetry. His colours glow like pearls and polished stones resulting from the slumbering tonal application that is always low key. But what of matter:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{And once the lover and the thing he loves.} \\
\text{Who should he be? I can not guess: but such} \\
\text{As desperate hope or lonelier passion moves} \\
\text{To tempt his fate so far, to dare so much:}\[9]
\end{align*}
\]

Still Life of 1949 and Still Life of 1952, [Pl 10], are two of hundreds of paintings wherein the artist as did Braque, played out his passion for space. This passion also encompasses the ritual of painting. Although, Braque obtains a metaphysical level through the inclusion of devices that are illusionistic and abstract, and Morandi obtains a mysterious world from the continual adjusting of focusing images and poetic nuance in the shift from one colour to the next, something is lacking. Is it objectivity, profound meaning, the negation of matter? The objects of the table-top are taken from their true context. On Braque, Bryson says this:

And however vertiginous the painting's ontology becomes, its play with shifting modes of illusion, is grounded in the familiarity of tables, cups and saucers. It is the security and dependability of the routine space which allows the metaphysical transformations to take off and soar.[10]

and when discussing Modernism and the role of still life, Bryson again draws the need to stress, that goods and commodities are embarrassing to the modernist declaring that:

those few possessions which are displayed are chosen to make the surrounding space vibrate with its own emptiness.

and in the case of Morandi this space is:
made up of such vibrations in vacancy, of seeing solid in void and void in solid, and of interresonating intervals eventually so fine that it takes a lengthy viewing to analyse their discriminations.[11]

A reply to Morandi's conversation regarding the table-top, is the Australian artist Kevin Lincoln's *White Bowl*, 1985 [Pl 11]. The size however, reflects its larger than life mentality. The pattern that equalizes solid-void is blatantly reminiscent of Morandi. So too are the furry brushstrokes that give evidence that it was really painted by the human hand. Yet the objects have been released with even greater liberty from their real meanings - of matter. At the same time the tonal contrasts allow the objects to stick together in a heap, maintaining only a hint of illusion when the centralized, curving form or the main character, the white bowl, is highlighted minutely from the not-so-white vessel behind. However, Lincoln's aesthetic experimentation does take place in the laboratory of the table-top, the apparati of which are simple, everyday objects. The white bowl will surface again in this discourse and with a very moving presence.

Ben Nicholson goes even further than Lincoln, Morandi or Braque in his picture, *Still Life: Alice Through the Looking Glass*, 1946, [PL 12]. Nicholson takes the table-top almost to the limit of dispossessing of the humble object. The humble idea, the simple, everyday object is trundling into the realm of megalography. The table-top has taken on the 'vertiginous' position of Braque's still lifes. The real space of objects such as; goblets, bottles, cups, vases and carafes are depicted and arranged, so that they hide the real and actual space in which they belong. Nicholson has gone several steps further in the tradition of Cezanne, the original modernist scientist. Bryson describes Nicholson's departure from naturalism and post-Impressionism in terms of the *art for art's sake* paradigm:

> In place of their own geometry, they are reconstructed in terms of the painting's internal rhythms: the oscillation of arc and circle, the play between tan and lemon, the contrasts of yellow and green against brown and red.[12]

Any sensuous celebration or the matter of the flesh becomes irrelevant. The man and his science adulate the Idea only. With regard to Modernism in Australia, women painters were there in the midst of the turmoil. Grace Cossington Smith and Margaret Preston were recognized as being part of the mainstream in Australia in the first half of the twentieth century. With regard to Cossington Smith's first still life paintings, Bruce James describes her as taking:

> a magpie approach to picture building: Bright and shapely objects congregate uncertainly, and for their
Still Life with Vegetables is not a description of a domestic scene, the pile of objects is a barrage of simple forms set up, where she intended to place her aesthetic imperative in which she:

issued in a profoundly sacred art[14]

Cossington Smith had seen the book by Beatrice Irwin of 1924, entitled, *The New Science of Colour* in which Irwin declares that modern decoration pivots around colour, advising that it is best to begin with the colours of nature.

Cossington Smith has also looked at architectural forms, further discussion of which takes place in Chapter Eight. These forms are mostly those that enclose an interior space or exterior space, an exception being the Sydney Harbour Bridge descriptions. The bridge of course is a great curve that spans the harbour of that name. It is at once interesting and not surprising that Cossington Smith entitles many of these pictures around the word 'curve'. Eventually this arching, spanning and ellipsing of space transfers across into still life paintings. The curve dominates as a directional pattern in *Blue Glass* 1929-30, [Pl 13]. Each object is built out of blocks of colour in elliptical forms including a tray as table-top and the two intuitively but strategically placed curves in the background. This addition is evidence of Cossington Smith's modernist thought patterns. For a time, nature and reality are irrelevant except in a manifestation of the spirit. Through instinct and intuition, the nature and reality of Cossington Smith's holy existence, by way of pure forms, communicates via the sacred icons that do gradually turn up in her paintings. Her ability to place light throughout the emblems of her paintings, is remarkable and hence, evidence of the serious devotion and inspiration that she gives to her vocation.

She does for a time become carried away with all these exciting new ideas from Europe. Gradually though she finds her own voice and empowers these everyday objects with a sentience that goes far beyond the realm of ideas. Bruce James adulates her as the: 'the sensualist of light.'[15]

Margaret Preston is the quintessential 'modernist', in that her work leads into the incredible world of design magic that forms the skeleton of twentieth century art through into the world of post-Modernism. Preston creates her monument to the colour blue in the thoroughly modern *Implement Blue* of 1927, [Pl 14]. Here Preston has employed a post-Impressionist approach to
colour and shape. Glancing back at *Still Life* 1926, [Pl 18, Part 1. *Wild Flowers and White Porcelain*], the artist one year later has almost eliminated natural colour, giving the everyday objects, cups, saucers, jug and the beloved table-top, a very graphic execution. Each ordinary object is outlined with a deep tone. The background is reduced to a linear pattern, as are the reflections and surfaces of the objects that are reduced to a design of tonal patterns that are donated by shadows and reflections. Except for the hard lines of the background, the predominating images are ellipses. Both Preston's *Implement Blue* and Cossington Smith's *Blue Glass* are exceedingly clever solutions to the modernist explorations that these artists were faced with at the time. One can't help but see the way in which the circles and other shapes are beginning to hold an intrinsic power that will eventually become powerful symbolic devices as they once were, for more spiritual peoples in times long past.

Although I have not seen *Still Life with Blue and White Porcelain* 1900, [Fig 4], painted by Paula Modersohn-Becker, I could almost be sure that Margaret Preston had. This still life painting foretells the compositional elements and design of both *Implement Blue* and *Blue Glass*. In all three paintings the objects seem to be marching off to the right of the picture plane. The semicircular shadows on Modersohn-Becker's painting are very bold and assert their formalist independence from the otherwise domestic setting. Preston seems to have taken on the same despotic shadows. All three paintings have a dominant large vessel that is surrounded by circling, sailing, lesser vessels, all of which reinforce the solid, strong, centrally important vessel. Whilst Modersohn-Becker's still life remains humble and rustic in its post-Impressionist mode, Preston has coined elements of the language of Cubism. A strong feminist expression asserts itself in this very graphic display of the table-top, almost departing into a stark world of chauvinist power.

Paula Modersohn-Becker's still life objects do not lose an acknowledgement to creatural habit that is required to maintain body and soul. Preston's does - her vessels are lined up like 'soldiers preparing to march into fashion,' that which is what Bryson describes as:

pitting art against domestic space[16]

Bryson claims that this particular brand of Modernism is the masculine strategy of Cezanne. Cossington Smith almost loses art to science in *Blue Glass* but, through her use of light, she contains the sacred and the sensual of her spirituality.

The oblique placement of the vessels and overhead view observed in all of these paintings, can
also be seen in Margaret Olley's *Evening Whites* of 1980. [Pl 15]. Though now, there are more pots. In this evocative setting there is a busier occasion and no strong linear expressions bar the vessel decorations. Olley has not adopted a modernist mode of expression. Nonetheless, her work develops with a perpetual accumulation of enrichment, polish, depth and spiritual strength. Olley remains outside, independent from the mainstream of dictated fashion.

*Evening Whites* parades Olley's very personal and inspired artistry through the exquisite drawing and atmospheric qualities that she dreams up. A sort of twilight magic moves in and around these vessels. The haphazard grouping of the white vessels seems almost to be totally uncontrived. This is a curious creation for Olley and somewhat more scientific and formal with the unusual elimination of fleshy fruits and flowers. This could also be said of Cossington Smith's *Things on an Iron Tray on the Floor*, 1927-28, [Fig 5]. The spherical constituents of which are very casually thrown together in a heap of forms that is given serious treatment. Once again we look from overhead. The saucepan, its lid, the bottles and metal cup, all extracted from low-plane reality, no longer exist in their own right but for the sake of art and the long spiritual pilgrimage that Cossington Smith will take. These objects in the hands of Cossington Smith, do not ever lose their dignity as anchorages of the earth or webs in the cosmos.

Francisco de Zurbaran's *Metalware and Pottery* [Fig 6] of the early seventeenth century, reveals a variety of objects that are either fluted, glazed, metallic or mat-finished. Olley and Zurbaran have both considered not only a variety of surfaces, shapes and sizes but a variety of angles that emphasise the clever and poetic play of light and shadow in and around the vessels. The artist takes us to enchanting and magic places and using only such 'ordinary things'. The fluting, angles, handles, planar shifts in direction, all create a pattern of twisting and turning. Olley includes the traditional cloth that intervenes 'twixt viewer and players' and, unlike Zurbaran's dark swallowing background, Olley pronounces her vessels with a warm painterly one that:

absorbs and reflects light, enhancing the textural qualities

The purity of Olley's white vessels restores the serenity of even-tide - a time that Olley's friend David Strachan, believed to be:

most pregnant with creativity . . . . a special time

and goes on to say that Olley:
uses the half light of evening to express a stillness and universal harmony[17]

a quality that the Cistercian monk may have wished to embody in his still life that, wherein Bryson says that Zurbaran:

floods this normally darkened and non optical space with brilliant, raking light . . . whereby vision is to be aroused from its habits of sloth and inertia . . . as though the lights had been switched on in a dark room.[18]

Olley and Cossington Smith intentionally or not, contain in their works the metaphysical - an endowment of their souls. One cannot help but be deeply moved by the sentient qualities of their paintings. It is this archetypal phenomenon that wakes up the unconscious. Although woman has slipped into astasia or ennui, the women painters who follow on from 'the big three' in Australian art, are reaching into their psyche, working with their inherent biological nature that is one with their spiritual inheritance and so endeavouring to transcend consciousness.

The big three in Australian art were mostly alone in their lives. This somewhat insular lifestyle enabled them to go on with their creative work. We pity the woman who does not create her art and those who have suffered because of the unfulfillment of this need. Paula Modersohn-Becker made the ultimate sacrifice to her art by acknowledging her biological imperative:

When Paula Becker[1876-1907], married Otto Modersohn, one of her teacher's in the artist's colony of Worpsede, she had already progressed beyond what Worpsede could offer . . . . Modersohn pressed his claim on her and she yielded, taking over the running of his household . . . .In 1903 she left for Paris again, only to return again. She made another attempt to escape into art, but Modersohn followed her, with the promise of a big new studio of her own. For the last time she weakened and returned pregnant, to Worpsede . . . .

She would not have been the painter she was if she had not given great importance to the life of feeling and of family feeling in particular . . . . Her deep respect for the simplicity of peasant life was also her respect for these primary relationships which she depicted as monumental and noble . . . . Rilke wrote, in her Requiem, referring perhaps to the self-portrait of 1906,

'And finally you saw yourself out of your clothes, and carried that self before the mirror, let it up to your gaze; which remained large, in front, and did not say: that's me; no, but this is'

Her resistance to Otto's pleading was not helped by the fact that of all her two hundred and fifty-nine paintings, she only ever sold one. Throughout her pregnancy she worked, producing her greatest paintings,
but when the day came to rise from childbirth, she suffered an embolism and died. She was thirty one.[19]

Modersohn-Becker's life and art are examples of what was and still is hopefully to a lesser extent, the problematic complexities that woman found herself suffocating within since the advent of the modern world. Her friend Rainer Rilke reveals in his writings that her art was most definitely a reflection of her; the quintessential woman who is also artist. She loves, she feels, she suffers, she sympathizes and, she is driven to create her art. Chapter Seven will develop the discussion surrounding the notion that still life, in particular those painted by woman, invariably reflect the inherent nature and psychic essence of her sex.

Consequently, it is necessary to begin a critical investigation into specific still life works that deal in some of these conflicting emotions and those other states of being or of feeling which woman may encounter in her life. From here on the investigation departs from the beginnings of Modernism and winds its way into the twentieth century which is hastily drawing to a close, occasionally glancing retrospectively at the work and lives of women artists since the Renaissance, to draw analogy. Through still life and related forms I will attempt to unfold the depth of meaning that might lead to the clarification of what a feminine aesthetic may be, if this notion is to hold vigor for further research. Many still life objects expressed or communicated messages from that confined and often enclosed space in the more traditional forms.
CHAPTER SEVEN
The Luderum: Still Life as Theatre.

*The sadness in the human visage stares out of these frames, out of these distant eyes; the static bodies painted without love that only lack of talent could disguise.* [1]

From the position we are situated in with regard to still life objects becoming the receptacles of profound human experience, we must now look at still life as staging the theatre of emotions. In the past and after modernity, still life as the overlooked category or art, has always been a powerful voice that is sentient to the archetypal, human emotional and spiritual experience. In the past and after modernity this voice can be heard through either subliminal renderings or deliberate devices. It has already been seen that the artist consciously places the objects here or there. In order to attain greater understanding we need to look at what lies beyond the rituals and the artist's intention. We need to find out if the artist is aware of what she is doing and saying and hence, find out why we become seduced by the often intuitively, selected forms and the chosen colours and so forth.

In her book *Trompe L'oeil* [2] Marion Milman discusses the 'ludic aspect' that appears in the self-portrait of Paolo Schiavo. His left hand is drawing aside the curtain of a simulated niche which is part of a fresco painted in the Collegiate church of Castilione Olona in Lombardy. This witty artist was setting about to fool the viewer using the tromp-l'oeil techniques that were very much a part of the incubation period of still life painting in these medieval times. In Chapters One and Two of *Wildflowers and White Porcelain*, a discussion of the earlier still life paintings in Pompei and medieval Italy revealed that still life was often the subject of the quadrattura and trompe-l'oeil frescoes that were more or less staged to trick, allude or amuse the Roman patricians at their country villas or, to enhance the symbolic meanings of the Blessed Sacrament of the Christian religious rituals. Milman refers then, to this theatrical aspect by referring to the term ludic, which relates to the word meaning stage play, luderum. At this instance in history we have illusion, amusement, messages of morality and ludic events occurring in still life painting. These elements are carried through if you like into the twentieth century where still life objects continue to take part in the luderum, so to speak. On the luderum, the objects are very much set out to deliver a message, a cry or a whimper.

This form of still life that is largely realistic and naturalistic, must contain more than the aesthetic effects that similarly move our emotive senses. For example, when we observe the light of a full moon aglow over the bay we are moved not only by the the obvious, sentient
power of poetic chiarascuro but, surely the shape of the moon and its cosmological context must also be relevant to our profound reactions. In the case of still life constituents we need to understand whether these performers are acknowledged, archetypal allegories. Perhaps this is a semantic imposition. In her book *Woman's Mysteries*, Esther Harding whose primary concerns surround the psychology of primitives, with folklore, mythology and the comparative history of religions believes that an understanding of unconscious processes is imperative if we are to understand the human psyche. Harding believes that:

>This inner subjective aspect of experience is not nonsense nor is it only superstition. Material science it is true, has disregarded it, but it remains a potent factor in human life. Indeed the discarded element contains that subjective or physical factor which constitutes the spirit. [3]

Still life that appears to be theatre, is placed on a table-top but, this table-top is transformed into a stage or luderum. The luderum stages the message of the human spirit.

The Australian painter John R. Neeson has employed still life painting to carry out a form of theatrical symbolism. In his painting *Requiem: In Memory of My Mother* 1986 [Fig 7], the entire posse of forms and objects are easily identifiable. We have in fact seen them before, many times though, not to be juxtaposed in such a dramatic event. Neeson has utilized several traditional techniques such as the background of a sky, a dramatically, foreshortened table-top, the drawn back curtain and the geometric solids that are really abstractions of the usual still life objects [vessel, fruit and so forth].

There is no doubt that Neeson is commenting on painting in the historical sense. Cezanne's cone, cylinder and sphere are sitting on a rectilinear form that resembles the marble slabs that Rachel Ruysch and other Dutch painters used as table-tops. Therefore he is referring to two aspects of the development of formal concepts of late and modern, western, easel painting. The concept is further contrived than these forms or objects were in either the work of Cezanne or the Dutch still life painters. These are tools of the geometrist, the designer, the painter and the sculptor. However the objects remain abstract in their geometric simplicity. They do not take on the meaning that is implied in the objects of the xenia 1 or xenia 2. There is no domestic, material culture here, but rather a stark intellectualising process. Nonetheless, the semiotic silhouettes and shadow deem incongruity when placed in front of the naturalistic sky of a Romantic or Mannerist landscape. The curtain, elaborate in its graphic detail[see detail Pl 17], is also
somewhat of an illusion that traverses a distant romanticism. It is possible that Neeson faces the dilemma of deciding whether he would pursue the path of abstraction or that of representation - a common problem for free thinking artists of the new fin de siecle unlimited.

So much for the mannerist sky, the half drawn curtain and the red cone. How much significance does Neeson give to the title of the painting in relation to the emblems he selects. Harriet Edquist affirms her thoughts on this very important aspect of contemporary creating:

clearly it dealt with matters of the spirit that we are at times loathe to confront. That these matters are of concern to painters now, that the hermetic, alchemical, mythic, private aspects of art practice are being explored, is symptomatic of our times.[4]

We ask where Neeson's mother's presence or spirit lies within the aspects of the painting. Through the title we are immediately led to believe that the artist sings praise for the mother he mourns. This tradition in still life painting reminds us of the incubation period in the Netherlands of the seventeenth century. The Dutch vanitas of this period always conveyed a narrative which was a moral message that is manifested in the still life objects. Remembering that this emblematic mode of religious painting derives from the earlier, Flemish, biblical paintings which were already harking the scenes of Dutch genre painting: we must also remember that the human figure was eventually eliminated. In the vanitas the strong secular culture of sixteenth century Holland allows the everyday object to take on a spiritual significance. There is no need for the human figure. The objects hold sufficient significance to the sinful viewer. The objects in Neeson's painting hold their own academic significance. Again there is no need for the human figure. The elements of this still life painting are all familiar texts to the student of arts historical references.

As the niche becomes the stage of a cast of thousands it is necessary to look once again at this pictorial set-up. Cornelius Norbetus Grijsbrechts executed many still life paintings of the vanitas theme. In Grijsbrecht's Still Life, [Pl 17], the artist has used a vocabulary of symbolic objects that are similar to many vanitas paintings of the time. In the trompe-l'oeil tradition, the illusion created is almost super-real. Realism and naturalism are generally the manner in which the still life of drama operates. Looking at each single object in its careful placement, you will perceive the enrichment of meaning that is the purpose served by the beautifully painted objects. The skull no doubt, is included to remind us that death is imminent. Tobacco and liquor equate with the evils of the flesh. The transient nature of the pleasures of the senses is represented by the musical instrument. Once again, the shell is the emblem of ephemerality. The paper that
overhangs the proscenium nevertheless, holds the *libretto* that spells out the human condition in the face of immortality. The stage is dramatically lit to transform the status of the painting to greater heights in the eye of the convinced; convinced that the delicate attention to technique and finish are super sensual and for the intellect - provocative.

However, the work of Neeson and Grijsbrechts, are belonging to the realm of the rational statement. Whilst this is a fine thing, these works are far less poetic than those works that consider a more personal content. It could be said that the extreme, scientific approach taken, strips them of the more subliminal psychic associations that lurk in the deep. Now we will investigate some of the archetypal images and symbols that surface in the work of many Australian women artists that could be renderings of 'inherited representations', 'archaic remnants'[Freud] or the 'otherside'.[5]

Bruce James has established the fact that the flower paintings completed by Grace Cossington Smith in the aftermath of her mother's death, were an 'artistic response'. James believes that:

> An aspect of festivity infuses a whole group of flowerpieces which issued as her grief subsided, indeed helped it to subside. These works exult Nature and the life-force in the face of immortality. They can be understood as poems to a departed parent, tokens of her continuation through her daughter's art.[6]

Hence the universal theme arises: that of the Life - Death - Decay cycle that seems to be confronted head-on by woman; at least, it is much dealt with through the creative acts of woman. James points out a number of still lifes of Cossington Smith's artistic fecundity which curiously seem to spell out emotional unearthings or intuitive prophesies. In *Teacups*, [The Harlequin Set],[Pl 18] there are no flowers. In fact it is reminiscent in composition, viewpoint, structure, and content of the earlier, *Things on an Iron Tray on the Floor*. There are four matching cups and saucer sets with one yellow saucer in front that is devoid of a cup. Cossington Smith, two of her sisters and her father had been nursing the ill mother for some time before her death. It is possible, that the three upright vessels of warm hue are the sisters sallying supportively around the turned down, blue cup which is the grieving father. Has the yellow cup gone missing or is this consciously emblematic of the departed mother? It is not unusual for Cossington Smith to allegorize the constituents of the still lifes that she so masterly renders with sensitive, painterly panache.

The entire surface is pervaded by an iridescent luminosity. The artist gives attention to all areas of the composition, some of which are quite complex - but, always with strict intention, therefore
creating no voids. There is no 'nothingness'. Cossington Smith's aesthetic form reaches efficacy through the all embracing celebration of light that promotes renewal and continuation of existence and life, whether it be through birth-death-birth or her very untemporal and theosophical belief and intrinsic knowledge. It doesn't matter if she has not experienced the giving of life herself, she has been a maintainer of life. Nor does it matter if she believes in a Supreme Being for her work and her life are anti-annihilist, ant-existentialist and pro-embodiment. Perhaps she intuitively always recognized that destructive arena of killing, pollution and dread that Somer Brodribb believes are belonging to the:

sterile masculinity of nothingness - These theories of masculine subjectivity and substance speak only to the unborn and the undead, those without past or future.[7]

The circular patterns that seem to waltz across the shiny stage are also reminiscent of Blueglass. The seasoned colour is imbued with the spiritual that seems to manifest itself in the matter of most of her work. Is this the all-pervasive 'soul' of the artist? Carl Jung discusses the unfathomable in his writings on The Importance of Dreams:

Because there are innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding, we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot define or fully comprehend. This is one reason why all religions employ symbolic languages or images. But this conscious use of symbols is only one aspect of a psychological fact of great importance:

Man also produces symbols unconsciously and spontaneously, in the form of dreams.[8]

Still Life with White Cup and Saucer, 1971, [Pl 19], was painted by Cossington Smith in the final stages of her own life. The years leading up to the final still lifes with empty vessels, saw mainly an array of interiors that were of course extended still lifes which, were along the same lines as those of Margaret Olley. Still Life with White Cup and Saucer, is larger than most of her still life paintings. There the theandric artist bestows a mysterious and holy efulgence on her objects which transmits from the stately monuments. The vessels are almost personified as spiritual supports or substantial pillars that hold Grace, the small, fragile, white angel and, at the same time, glance mesmerically toward the all pervasive, cosmic glow outside, in the bush, the afterworld. This painting is surely more than a masterful, formal composition; the formal properties align with those of Neeson's Requiem. The sacred light of Cossington Smith's pre-requiem prayer transcends Neeson's in spirit.

In ancient myths and legends the cup and bowl, chalice and cauldron take on a multitude of
symbolic meanings. The cup bore the phallus. The bowl and phallus have been the eternal symbols of generation - a recurring theme in mythologies. The cup, bowl, Vase of Life, white cloth and other objects have been included metaphorically in much still life, be they a conscious or unconscious instrument. In Egyptian mythology, the bowl and cup became the boat or the arc which takes souls to incarnation. The remainder of this discourse will play with the notion of metaphor and its place in the art of woman. Clarissa Pinkola Estes draws on her extensive knowledge of myth, story telling and Jungian psychoanalytic experience to postulate on the true feminine powers. She believes strongly in the treasure box of the metaphors which pervade thousands of years of legends that have been passed down to us:

But given expansive enough metaphors we can construct, from what is known and from what we sense about the ancient knowing, new sights for ourselves that are both numinous and make sense right now and today. These metaphors are loosely based on empirical experience and observation, developmental psychology, and phenomena found in creation myths, which are some of the best primal bones of human psychological records.[9]

If we are to apply our study of metaphor to the emblematic detail of the art of woman then we will need to consider some very old and more recently discovered meanings within her art forms. This is the beneficial position we can take as post-Modern women. Whilst the phallus of ancient myths might be irrelevant to the discussion of Cossington Smith's dainty, white cup of:

Platonic, pure form[10]

the painting is definitely a symbolic depiction of an end. This was her final painting. The Cup of Soma is also the mind in Hindu ceremony, it brings forth an ecstasy that fills one with the spirit. White also appears in the tale of The Handless Maiden; an archetypal legend told by Dr.C.P. Estes in Women Who Run With The Wolves. The pathetic maiden who is to gain the power of her soul and move through a steep learning process, has her hands that have been cut off by her father:

wrapped in white gauze. White is the colour of the deathland, and also the colour of the alchemical albedo, the resurrection of the soul from the underworld. The colour is a harbinger of the cycle of decent and return.[11]

The maiden who has become a wanderer has a death in her old life and resurrection into the new. Cossington Smith's stage has become filled with this luminous, white light and a large, white
cloth waits in the background like a shroud that is ready to engulf the small, fragile white cup. The aged, delicate painter has travelled a great distance both aesthetically and spiritually. She is heroic in her efforts and must be saluted to have stood so strong and still in a heavily chauvinist and fearful time. Hers was a remarkable artistic and personal life.

Cossington Smith's stage opens out from the table-top into the room. This multitude of interiors reek of allegory and unsaid emotion as well as the spiritual presence of people important to her. Cossington Smith employs the use of traditional perspective devices such as: converging line, diminishing size and colour intensity, without forfeiting the personal poetry within.

These interior aspects devoid of people are not devoid of emotion. Interior with Wardrobe and Mirror, 1955, [Pl 20] has such angles and indications of space that bring to mind the Dutch peepbox. [Fig 9] We are often voyeurs of Cossington Smith's personal space, her lifestyle and her emotions. This aspect will be discussed in terms of feminine biological phenomena in Chapter Eight. Presently the concern is with the viewing of an intimate scene, an occurrence or happening within a still space. As did Pieter Saenredam [1597-1665] of the Netherlands, so did Cossington Smith explore an enormous quantity of architectonic space, be they exterior, interior, bridges, city plazas, cathedrals and churches. The aesthetic imperative does not stem so much from an interest in architecture that is prevalent but, rather in the words of Svetlana Alpers on Saenredam's paintings:

  it is the surface of the works that is remarkable . . . delicate linear patterns . . . arch laid on arch . . . and bound by walls of the palest tones of wash, have reminded many contemporary viewers[and not without reason] of the surfaces of Mondrian in nuce. What is further distinctive about these as patterns is that they are noticeably asymmetrical. The works often display a wide angle view.[12]

What do we peep into, at such a wide angle? Of course, Cossington Smith has little in common with Mondrian, the quintessential, modernist Dutch painter. She is however, probably a modernist painter and one wonders if she would ever have taken her spiritual exercise a step further into abstraction. Unlike Jan Vermeer's exquisite interiors that stage the private lives of Dutch women at their occupations, her interiors show no visible human activity. She literally translates into painterly expression, the concept of 'mirroring nature'. But Cossington Smith is mirroring her own Self, her own Nature, her Almighty. Bruce James claims that:

  These were the obsessional devices marshalled by Cossington Smith to gather the wider world into her private one.[13]
The characters in this play are the objects, pieces of fabric, furniture and other household articles. One can't help but ponder about their true significance and whether these objects are meant to be communicating to us. Surely they weren't meant for an audience. It seems that light was the main protagonist in this story. The painting *Interior with Red Jug*, [Pl 21], is divorced even more so from everyday reality, in spite of the presence of the still life objects. The contrivance of theatrically draped sets is aesthetically ambiguous. Wide angles are not important here, rather the set is, and we face it head on as the audience. Cossington Smith maybe drifting off into modernist abstraction. It is quite likely that religiosity holds her down. The spirit emanates through the constrained notions of recognizable rather than intuitive forms, like the interwoven web of the cosmos that rests in our unconscious. The stage is lit by the light of the spirits. These are holy spirits, those who have gone into the next world and those who are sick and need the love and care of this dedicated woman.

Margaret Olley's memento to her late friend David Strachan, *Afternoon Interior* 1972, [Pl 22] could also be included in the world of a luderum of events. Once again there is no human presence, only the objects of still life, that branch of painting through which Olley has exhibited her mage-like vision. The stage is lit from behind, the door is ajar inciting the omnipresence of Strachan's spirit to enter, to come and go as he pleases. This is his home. These are his still life objects. Olley honours Strachan through the poetry that she imposes on his precious objects, most of which he had painted himself.

Nevertheless, the room is lonely, almost eerie. Here, there is more than the material that meets the eye. Christine France relates aspects of the enriched relations between Olley and Strachan which are epitomised in the selected objects in this group of Olley's paintings:

> which is indicative of Olley's great understanding of Strachan . . . .Strachan had always been interested in the notion of the 'creative impulse'. For years he had studied the theories of Carl Jung and as a consequence believed evening to be a very special time of day, the time which was most pregnant with creativity.[14]

The ellipses that reflect from the dark openings of the vessels indicate the forms of the chalices, urns and bowls that stand in salute to their once owner. These full bodied forms that are fecund with the spirit are suggested only by a dark, curved silhouette and shadows that pull us the audience into the scene.

In this painterly instance, we are not looking into the cave or grotto. We are there, looking out of
this artist's shrine that Olley converts to a sanctuary with her aspergillum. What seem to be almost impulsive, brush splashing are indicated by the feral forms of the wild flower silhouettes that seemed to be rendered into motion by a wild turbulence. Does Olley conjure up an acrimonious atmosphere or is it a personal, poetic vision of her loss? Olley's chief concern as an aesthete has been with the produce of the earth, the flowers and fruits of the Tree of Life, growth, abundance and in this instance, death and decay which concur in the same cycle. In ancient Egypt, mythology explains for us this mystery of death and life and how it can be embodied in the use of symbols or more specifically in the mood and forms of a powerful painting such as *Afternoon Interior*, a painting that captures the poignancy of death and the departed spirit:

The veil of Isis has other derivative meanings. It is said that the living being is caught in the net or veil of Isis, which means that at birth the spirit, the divine spark, which is in everyone, was caught or embodied in the flesh. And it also refers to the fact that we all get entangled or caught in the net of nature . . . The spirit of man must necessarily be caught in the net of Isis or it cannot be carried in her boat to the next phase of experience, for nature consists necessarily in growth and decay.[15]

Olley herein, has captured Strachan's spirit in Nature: through her nature in paint, gesture and, through the very specific objects that are rendered with the divine spark of Strachan's spirit. This veil which we have already seen in much still life painting appears as the cloth. We have seen the veil before in this discourse and we will see it again in multifarious fashion. The boat curiously becomes an iconographic preoccupation for other female artists in post-Modern times but, is believably one and the same as the ubiquitous still life vessel that appears in a multiplicity of forms such as the cup, the chalice, the vase and the bowl. Nothing is just as it seems, especially these humble and simple objects.

In Chapter Eight the curved device in aesthetic applications, enclosed space and the forms of the seed that encloses life, the fruit of the tree, will be discussed in the light of holding a significance for the art and life of woman through, her inherent, biology. Before doing so, it is necessary to look behind and construct the links that might be part of this feminine, visual language. It is interesting to study the stage of Clara Peeters, yet another proficient but much overlooked artist from seventeenth century Holland. Peerters also deals with the vessels, seeds and fruits that are fecund with life and growth in *Still Life*, 1611, [Pl 23]. In Holland at the time that this brilliant painter lived, there were many female painters. The women were in ferocious competition with the men as flower painters for textile and porcelain manufacturers, botanical illustration and the overall, very, hectic, commercial market. In *Still Life*, Peeters displays an exhibition of her exquisite skill in painting flowers, vessels of varied material, as well as the pretzels, nuts and
exotic dried fruits that are here in abundance. This is a very, fine, luderum performance and may even verge on being ostentatious for those of us who have travelled through modernist manifestoes. Nonetheless, in comparison to her male counterparts, Peeters' tactic in the display of newly imported, exotic goods is very graceful and understated. In other words there is a gentle quality rather than the pretentious display of pyrotechnics that is found in the work of Willem Kalf and other contemporaries. Peeters' rather busy choreography is perhaps a display of her calibre as an artist, nonetheless, I profess her motive to be a sensuous display of delicacies that had recently become available on the Dutch market as a result of the colonising of exotic countries such as the East Indies, now Indonesia.

The 'motifs' of subtle curves that play an interlacing network of ellipses through graceful linearity, dominate the proscenium of this composition. The autumnal mood is set by her strategically balanced colours; golden beige, warm russets umbers and the yellow ochres at each end with pretzels, daffodil and tulip. The eggshell, thin skin of the white porcelain bowl is devouring and open like a large central bloom. The bulb forms are exotic as is the elaborately decorated, tall vessel that dominates compositionally as a central pillar rather than in colour or tone. The splendour and riches of apparent wealth that have been brought across from Turkey and the orient equate to the splendour and richness of the painting.

Unlike Kalf, Cezanne, Morandi and Nicholson, Peeters celebrates the curved form that encloses the holy spaces that hold the fruits of abundance that are central to her inherent nature and the flesh and feelings of woman. Her stage is sacredly set out as are those of Cossington Smith and Olley around three hundred years later, down there in the antipodes, in yet another colony.

So often there is a central character in the paintings of woman and often there is a white porcelain bowl, jug or vessel of some description. So often too, there are colours chosen that are symbolically charged. At least, it must be said that whilst the symbolism in colour may vary from one religion or culture to another, there are those colours that communicate a universal symbolism at least for the inherited knowledge of our western culture. The white and red evoke for many of us the meanings of spiritual transcendence and sacrifice, respectively. So often too, the chosen objects are circular or spherical and contained within an enclosed space. These are some of the specified elements that become prominent when looking closely at the art of woman and more especially at the essential forms of still life painting and related artistic disciplines when in the hands of woman.
CHAPTER EIGHT:
Enclosed Space: The Spiritual, The Inside World and The Curved Aesthetic.

I have never
understood red or black
seems too theoretical
so what this portrait is
I have no idea though
the frame has one or both of us
enclosed there is me
but then perhaps
we look like one another
you are the one with the frame
catching things to paste down
with twigs of colour
I am the one illustrating
a fear of edges
punching out black
absences from white pages.[1]

Modern art has developed many universal symbols. All art has symbols of one type or another. What is important is that the symbols used in the art or images of less technologically advanced groups or cultures, are often used deliberately or consciously in a numenous way. In modern art the symbols have arisen unconsciously. We find the same images over and over again - each having the signature of its creator. Whatever these symbols are, for the creator at least, they give meaning to what could be the senselessness of life on earth. Carl Jung explains:

I have spent more than half a century investigating natural symbols, and I have come to the conclusion that dreams and symbols are not stupid and meaningless. On the contrary, dreams provide the most interesting information for those who take the trouble to understand their symbols. The results, it is true, have little to do with such worldly concerns as buying and selling. [2]

Many ancient tales and myths have the symbol of either the image of the fruit tree, the Tree of Life, the Tree of Knowing, the Tree of Life and Death or the Tree of Knowledge. The fruit tree is covered with food and the fruit is full of nourishing juice, the storing of water. C.P.Estes describes the significance of these symbols:

Water, the primal fluid of growth and continuance, is soaked up by the roots, which feed the tree by capillary action - a network of billions of cell plexuses too, small to see - and water arrives in the fruit and plumps it out into a beauteous thing.[3]

In the traditional art of representation or, art of the 'sensory style' [4] of Louise Moillon, richly
swollen fruits are once again piled into a basket which is the centrepiece of this sacred altar and a compositional device that is becoming a tradition in the art of woman. In Still Life with Asparagus, 1630 [24], not only is the basket a centerpiece but there is an even more poignant centralizing agent in one, scrumptious peach that is the core of the heap of fruit that is rendered with perfection as a description of nature. The asparagus, the open pod of peas and one of beans, the plums, cherries and grapes are all deliciously swollen to bursting. C.P.Estes regularly emphasises the importance of fruit as a symbol that is invested with 'soul' and 'life force'. Fruit embodies all aspects of life on earth; water, air, earth, food and above all seed. The fruits in these tightly, enclosed compositions are stressing the delectable - taste - the sensory aspect that draws the naturalist painter to create such an image as that of Louise Moillon. This painting exhibits both a serious and sensualist approach to the subject. Germain Greer describes these fruits as:

closer to the Dutch influence, the favoured shapes in her still lifes were smaller, more jewel-like and the colour values more linear and translucent than Galicia's, but, like her predecessor, she inclined to deceptively simple compositions.[5]

Greer makes a comparison of the delicious fruits to those of Fede Galicia's whose fruits will be part of a discussion in Chapter Nine which refers to feminine objectivity and desire. Galicia's approach holds a more profoundly metaphysical rendering due to the focus and view that moves toward an abstraction of the circular forms that contain fecundity. This more imaginative presentment of these ubiquitous forms will be seen in this chapter to become part of the post-Modernist, feminine artistic vocabulary. However, returning to Moillon's fruit we witness the emergence of a very delicate use of the imaginative aspect in the strong linearity of colour value that does invest Moillon's work with a primitive style, if we are going to pigeon hole. This may not be at all necessary when dealing with the strengths and richesses of the art of woman.

Whilst acknowledging the intense and sensualist observation of fruit by Galicia, which is a distinctively feminine approach, a salutation is owed to Margaret Olley who, later in the twentieth century, develops an intense concern with form as an embodiment of flesh, matter and the inherent spirit that is contained in the spherical, circular and full bodied forms of her fruit. Olley gives a rich plumpness to the vases, urns, jugs and a bowl of pears in the classic, sensory painting of nature, Pots and Pears, 1978, [Pl 25]. The shape of most of the pots reflect that of the golden pears, the representation of which, Olley has come to perfect without becoming slick. The majesty of the pots, the handles that pertain to a human quality, the warm hands that touch and create, the mystical atmosphere of enchantment created by a refinement of painting technique, all lend to an ethereal ambience. These fruits and objects suggest a similar poetic
impact to those vestiges of ancient, Greek sacraments, the vessels of votive offerings. The monumentality this image conjures up is once again reminiscent of Delphi - the Tholos. There are the warmly lit stone edifices that exist in their own right as do the warmly lit monuments of Olley's table-tops that are so often surrounded by the offerings of fruit and the white cloth that is redolent of weightlessness and the free flying spirit of nature.

Here in Olley's painting we recognize the dignity and composure that derives from an honest and 'down-to-earth' approach to one's art. Olley does not deny matter, the earth, herself, and through this scrupulous intent, the art reaches a higher level of purity and truth than that of the over intellectualized, the scientific. Olley's still lifes are subconsciously manifesting her dreams, that come from her psyche which is indeed her Self. Olley is fortunate to be in touch with this Self through her art. Olley chooses the pear on a multitude of occasions as an embodiment of her luscious, painterly sensuality and hence the Self. In C.P.Estes relating of *The Handless Maiden*, an ancient legend that deals with psychic growth, the magic pear tree volunteers its fruit to feed the helpless maiden, by dropping down into her mouth. The maiden has died[her psyche], and she is travelling through a chthonic area of her Self; this is the subterranean forest where she will be enlightened and live again:

To eat of the Tree of Life in the land of the dead is an ancient impregnation metaphor. In the land of the dead, it was believed a soul could invest itself in a fruit or any edible thing, so that its future mother would eat it, and the soul hidden within the fruit would begin its regeneration in her flesh. So here at the almost midway point, through the pear, we are being given the body of the Wild Mother, we are eating that which we will ourselves become.[6]

Wild Mother, free spirit, running with the wolves are all terms that post Modernist woman knows and understands as she strives for a new life and awareness that frees her from patriarchal constraints but does not deny her essential femininity. Margaret Preston let no one thwart her ambitions which took on the form of dynamic and imaginative still life pieces. Through her modernist influences, Preston almost transfers her art into the realm of 'design'. Her more sensory dealings with nature as realism can be perceived in *Australian Gum Blossoms*, 1928, [Pl 26]. The bright-eyed blossoms are glittering like warm, glowing stars pushing out of the mandala formation, which in turn, extrudes from a circular base. Again there is the circular shadow that becomes a formal preoccupation in the later *Implement Blue*. [Pl 14]. Appearing at the top of the painting are vague indications of decorative motifs; this is a prophesy of things to come. Of course, it is an historical tradition in the arts of woman to create beautiful decoration in lacemaking, embroidery, stencilling, manuscript production, miniatures, tapestry, food
preparation and floral design. Germain Greer discusses the way of woman and the decorative arts with the notion that these creative activities were truthful and gave joy. The creative life is an imperative for woman if she is to regain her 'soul'.

Many men and women have become isolated from their true cultures and find themselves alienated in hostile, modern societies. It is of course much more devastating for those indigenous people of wilderness scapes and continents who have been invaded by another more dominant but usually inferior culture. It is through the creating of objects and images we label 'art' and 'artifacts', that the Australian indigenous people have become empowered and of course, on the down side, spiritually and financially exploited. However, the positive aspect of all this 'creativity' has been useful in enabling many of the ignorant and dominant culture to perhaps understand just a little of this culture that has for so long been oppressed. Hence, we have a situation wherein less ignorance breeds less contempt. I refer once again to the anthropological wisdom of C.P. Estes who is emphatic that creative work is an integral part of the woman's life-force:

Creating one thing at a certain point in the river feeds those who come to the river, feeds creatures far downstream, yet others in the deep. Creativity is not a solitary movement. That is its power . . . . That is why beholding someone else's creative word, image, idea, fills us up, inspires us to do our own creative work. A single creative act has the potential to feed a continent. One creative act can cause a torrent to break through stone.[7]

Margaret Preston and Grace Cossington Smith had this effect on modern Australian women painters. The art world at large may have forgotten this, but, with the rediscovery of these women painters, there was definitely a great wave of inspiration for young women in this country, especially those who had become disenchanted with some of the forms of art that prevailed in the seventies and into the eighties. There was a conflagration of art that was; machismo, idea only, unjoyful, angst-filled, disorientated, cut off from the roots that lie in nature and above all, it had to be the biggest. Somer Brodribb describes this our epoch:

Post modernism is the attempted maculine ir/rationalization of feminism. I prescribe a listening cure for this masculinity in extremis, this masculine liberal philosophy in totalitarian form. How can one recognize a P.M.S[postmodern/poststructuralist man? An individual suffering from the PMS, Political, Personality and Discursive Disorder exhibits at least three of the following delusions:[8]

This list reveals harsh and bitter words from Brodribb. However, they are vaguely reminiscent of
certain art schools, biennales and perspectas of the seventies and eighties. Mercifully, there are many exceptions to the rule and the 'culture' is slowly changing. One fearfully recalls a glut of blood curdling circus tricks and egocentric displays of overt carnality in our major art galleries, completely ignoring the real sicknesses in our society but rather promoting egotistic displays of male subjectivity.

This is what lay on the edge of the fine line that becomes post-Modernism when many Australian women began to realize through the long awaited celebration of Preston, Olley, Cossington Smith and many others, that woman no longer has to emulate the aggressive, masculinist approach to art.

Margaret Preston seems to be the first woman to celebrate the dimension and sensual delight in the design of feminine work as a painter. Preston expresses her belief in the fundamental power of design and decoration in a letter to the painter Norman Carter in 1913:

I am very interested to hear of your decorative work . . . it is the only thing worth aiming for this century. Its really the key note of everything - I'm trying all I know to reduce my still life to decorations and find it fearfully difficult. . . .[9]

Whilst trimming painterly detail to quite, austere design, *West Australian Gum Blossoms*, 1928, [Pl 27] epitomizes Preston's movement into formal modernist modes. Such movements as Cubism are obvious influences for this audacious artist who no doubt, shocked the public of the time in Post-colonial Australia. Preston includes a carefully thoughtout background of rectilinear, hovering shapes. They float over a black, impenetrable background. Through the kaleidoscopic detail of the hexagonal, glass vase the inner contents and reflections become merely a pattern for play. The composure of the exotic and fantastic gumblossom display is almost symmetrical. A triumphant achievement in picture making that employs traditional feminine objects. A vase of wildflowers, the feminine of which takes it a step further with the inclusion of the archetypal symbol, the seed. Not only did Preston assert her desire for a 'national culture' but, she tooks steps to ensure a 'feminist culture'. The bloated curves of the blossoms and seeds that are gumnuts, are pregnant with generative power, whilst at the same time they spell out a magic that is haunting and primeval, that eery and mysterious ambience that pervades this arcane and ancient continent.

The importance of Preston's statements, which are well documented, are astutely observed by Susan Norrie the outspoken post-Modernist woman artist. That many documented statements of
Preston were overlooked for so long is problematic and speaks for itself. As a tribute to this cyclonic artist, an exhibition of her work was shown at the Art Gallery of N.S.W in Sydney in 1985. A group of Australian artists were asked to complete a work based on Preston's *West Australian Gum Blossoms*. Norrie explains her artistic response:

I concentrated on the pod - that crusty, white-powdered casing at the end of the flower. This epitomised my feelings for Margaret Preston, a reference for the self-contained nature of her work and her stubborn, uncompromising attitude to working. Together these elements present a sort of tightness which characterizes her work - a 'boxed' view of the world, a capsule that contains the flowering.[10]

Norrie's tribute to Preston's *Untitled*, 1985, [Fig 9], was a single, centralized, spherical image. This gum nut as we know it, is the seed that contains the flowering of the tree. Norrie's rendition of what is usually a small, round, hard, universal form, the likes of which are to be found anywhere in the natural world, represents the primal, archetypal form that spells out regeneration - the seed of new life. Norrie takes the imaginative mode of artistic representation one step further than Preston's own imaginative executions of nature. These twentieth century representations of the same still life content have merely shifted in graphic style from the earlier still life renditions of Galicia, Moillon, Vallayer-Coster and Ruysch. However, they maintain the same depth of secret, the same basic forms that contain the mystery of the universe, even though the mode of expression has changed from the 'sensory' to the 'imaginative' style.

The seed is bursting like the plumped gourds of Keat's Autumn and this aspect also dominates the composition as a central, singular image that emulates and dramatically echoes the character of Preston's very often centralized compositions that are: 'claustrophobic'. [11].

Norrie's dialogue with nature contains a numinous quality. Her tonal and textural sculpting of this vital image have invested in it a magic power. The gumnut is taken from the stuff of dreams and verges on the surreal. It becomes a talisman for the late-modern time slot of this century. Andre Breton when commenting on dreams and reality as a young, medical student imparts his prophecy:

I believe that the apparent antagonism between dream and reality will be resolved in a kind of absolute reality - in surreality.[12]

Norrie has created a monster in her dream, an aberration in the face of nature, which creates a strong association with the Dutch description of a natural aberration in *Radish* [Fig 10], of 1626.
from the Netherlandish school. One can only ponder as to the artistic origins of this imaginative execution of this portrait of a giant radish that also has a surreal quality. It is a celebration of growth and fertility with the dwarfed cornflowers registering scale in the background. Except for the claw-like roots, the glowing form of the radish waxes and wanes like the moon, as does Norrie's gumnut. The radish swells out to the edges of the picture in the manner of Norrie's encapsulation of the nature of nature; this is the sensory style that is at once imaginatively conceived through the creative processes by both artists. Svetlana Alpers includes in her intriguing book, *The Art of Describing*, examples of the somewhat didactic writing of Francis Bacon, in her discussions which investigate the nature of sixteenth century Dutch art. Bacon insists that one must need always to return to the source in order to gain insight and perception into the understanding of the very nature of nature:

> Those however who aspire not to guess and divine, but to discover and know: who propose not to devise and mimic fabulous worlds of their own, but to examine and dissect the nature of this very world itself: must go to the facts themselves for everything.[13]

This quotation from Francis Bacon's notion's about the acquisition of knowledge, is referring to the idea that natural history is the primary or 'mother' history. Nature, Mother, again we land on Dutch soil, where apparently existed a comparatively, liberal civilization. It is this culture from which derives those 'secular' arts that exude a richer sense of the poetics of the spirit than those coming from figurative, religious narrative could ever wish to convey. The Dutch preoccupation with the craft of truthful representation stems not merely from the scientific exploration in optical physics of the time,[Kepler, Drebelle, Huygens], but was as witnessed in Chapter Three of *Wild Flowers and White Porcelain*, an intrinsic part of their culture which is material, spiritual and otherwise.[commercial]

Alpers also includes examples of the descriptive art of Jacques de Gheyn. De Gheyn curiously renders in black and red chalk, a descriptive drawing of an old woman juxtaposed amidst a vine and, in the lower, left hand corner is a detail of a miniaturized melon that could also represent a seed or a nut. When observing, *Old Woman and Vine*, [Fig 11] one can't help but perceive the seed-sized melon and the woman to be of the same kind - a matching pair. She is small, round and self-contained - full - the linear tonality expressing rotundity. She reeks of the old fertility goddess, such as the Venus of Willendorf of Neolithic times. Here she is again, remaining in the sixteenth century as a full, curved form and depicted by a man.

The recent, reactionary rebirth of the ancient goddesses by groups and individuals in post-
Modern times is a topic that deserves attention that is appropriate to the remaining discussion of the art of woman in the closing period of the twentieth century. However, on the seed-like form which sits on the same picture plane as the small, fecund, feminine form, the anonymous, female specimen, Alpers comments:

De Gheyn's serious descriptive care deals equally with plants and with the human form. It adjudicates between disjunctive shifts in scale: the woman is made small by the vine while her rotund form is strengthened by the presence of the melon. [14]

Svetlana Alpers is treading on semantically, dangerous ground. Yes, woman is life and growth but, we must inquire into this curious tabulation where her status becomes that of a scientific specimen. De Gheyn's unconscious workings would make for fascinating research. Her identity as a woman seems somewhat callous and diagrammatic. Risky as it is, the drawing and the above statement are interesting from the formal aspect of shifts in scale and the magical role that this phenomena plays in shifts from the sensory in art to the imaginary. Curiously, de Gheyn has included an eye amidst the central leaves. The attentive eye is and was a part of the central cultural tradition of Dutch picture making which we have inherited as easel painters. A renewal of this approach at the end of this century, is giving substance to our art as we continually return to nature, of which we are a part..

To further an understanding of the rationalist approach to nature which almost pre-supposes the Immaterialist approach to matter, we must take a brief look at the ideas of Robert Hooke the British scientist and philosopher. Alpers has included some of the writings from Hooke's, Micrographia that was published in 1664, to support her notions surrounding the development of Dutch art that was in turn influenced by the discoveries of the new, rationalist thought. In Micrographia, Hooke claimed to contribute to a reformation in philosophy and thereby states the following:

The eye helped by the lense, was a means by which men were able to turn from the misleading world of Brain and Fancy to the concrete world of things.[15]

Hence, his book was to be a bible for truth in knowledge.

Shewing that there is not so much requir'd towards it, any strength of 'Imagination', or exactedness of Method, or depth of 'Contemplation' [through the addition of these, where they can be had, must needs produce a much more perfect composure] as a Sincere Hand and a Faithful Eye, to examine and to record,
Hooke in the Baconian tradition ties sight to recording and representation. He transverses from the seventeenth century praxis of a preoccupation on perception of the object or whatever, to the crafting of the object - Nature - thereby referring to similarities and differences - which afterall, is part of the universality of the forms in Nature.

Hooke represents his truth to nature by observing through drawing, nine seeds of thyme. *Seeds of thyme* [Fig 12] is a pertinent metaphor for growth and decay. Hooke not only perceives them graphically, but testifies to:

> the way in which each is different to the other . . . .'both as to the eye and light . . . .They seemed each of them a little creas'd or wrinckled, but E[indicated on the engraving] was very conspicuously furrowed.[17]

The observer is literally mirroring nature on a page that exhibits nine magnified seeds showing their differences in features such as, furrowing, wrinkles and creases, not unlike Norrie's gumnut, which metaphorically renders the scars of life on earth - life that is both degenerative and renewing. Of course, the commonality of the *seeds of thyme* is the nob at the top of the seed where it was once joined to the life source - the tree, the plant, the vine.

An alternative mode of scientific illustration is rendered in simple still life compositions and studies of birds, fruit and insects by Giovanna Garzoni, an unmarried, successful, Italian miniaturist who was also very much aware of Flemish, flower painting. Though a humble rhopographer and "painter of trifles", Garzoni made a living from her art, her skill, her talent, her sensuous and life-inspired observations. *A Dish of Broad Beans*, [Fig 13] probably rendered in watercolour on vellum, is teeming with generative activity. Fecundity is made visible by the profusion of full, ripe, encased beans, and like seeds spilled out in front of the piled plate. Other forms of life prevail in the crisp petals of carnations and the luscious leaves. Garzoni is a natural progenitor of the psyche of a long line of women who went on to paint still life as they were permitted. As we believe, still life was woman's only vehicle through which she could get to the paint brush in her domestic space which was a consequence of her biological status. On the other hand, perhaps it is the content and primal spirit of still life painting that is part of the psyche of woman since her genesis till now. From the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Life to the woman who must garden, there lies a significance in the occupation of gardening as an ontological device that manifests psychic development. We are enlightened upon this subject through C P. Estes' telling of *The Handmaidens Tale*:  

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The gardener is a cultivator of soul, a regenerative keeper of seed, soil and rot. He is similar to the Hopi Kokopelli, who is a humped back Spirit who comes to the villages each spring and fertilizes the crops as well as the women. The gardener's function is regenerative. The psyche of woman must constantly sow, train and harvest new energy to replace what is old and warnout. There is a natural entropy, or wearing down and using up, of psychic parts.[18]

C.P Estes explains, once again from the story telling passed down from the Hungarian women, the roll of regeneration and renewal in the psyche of woman, stressing the 'constant living, the constant death dealing, constant replacment of ideas, images and energies' - all of which are important for the woman as artist - mother - lover - story teller - philosopher. We must not forget, however, about the real, physical enrichment that may be derived from gardening.

In her article Male monoliths, female symbols, Maggie Gilchrist, the Australian art writer, speaks of painters Susan Norrie, Margaret Morgan and the sculptor, Hilarie Mais as artists who are 'breathing new life' and 'new vocabularies' back into painting and sculpture. Whilst Mais's Seed of 1983, [Pl 28] is a sculpture, it is very much a still form and about life. By its very nature Seed deserves to be a part of this discourse, entitled Circles and Seeds, as well as for its meaning and purpose:

Sculptor Hilarie Mais is fascinated by the rhythms and seeding processes of nature and with the symbolic and emotional richnesses of sculptural forms.[19]

One can't help but wonder, whether woman is serving a gross untruth and disloyalty to her sex by attempting to paint at all. Not because we may not have the skill but, the visual and formal language that we are employing is so often male and traditionally, woman did manifest her 'soul', psyche and inherent nature, through more sculpturally, crafted forms such as; lacemaking, embroidery, food preparation, offspring, plant growing and creative works that were generally more functional. Though we do know that women were highly operative in medieval manuscript illumination.

Whilst this sculpture of Mais does not serve a decorative or pragmatic function it does pose some very vital and important questions that further strengthen the arguments and discussions surrounding gender specific forms in the arts. Mais stresses that the formal qualities of such an almost abstract but more aptly termed, "aesthetically ambiguous" piece, are subordinate to the 'symbolism and iconic power' that is there, within.
The invocation of emotion is the objective of *Seed*. The red, radiating forms contain the power to evoke either excitement, surprise, the brilliance of light or the power of growth. Needless to say, the central splitting form is either provocative as a sexual emblem or as the flesh of fruit as tantalizing food. More specifically, the melon appears again, for it holds a great quantity of liquid and, in lush conditions, it grows abundantly and swollen with the water of life. At first sight, however, the viewer immediately casts one's thoughts to the red, splitting form as referring to female specific biological phenomena. Mais herself describes her sculpture of the early seventies as:

lyrical constructivism located between bodily and rhythmic gesture and emotive form[20]

Mais was directly influenced by an interest in Russian Constructivist works thence, absorbing a multitude of other influences that she meshes with her intuitive inspirations. At one stage she was rejected as a sculpture student on the basis that works she deemed to be sculptures, were not thought to be by said authorities. However, Mais seems to have broken through the constraints of compartmentalization once again, creating sculptures on her canvases on the wall. There the forms were presenting horizontally and vertically rather than in the round, but always protruding from a basic frame-like structure.

So the protrusions become projections in the eighties; compact, small and still for the wall. Their meaning changes from pure abstraction to the context of weapons and tools, from uncoloured objects to spikey implements that conjure the ritual empowered by primeval cultural talismans. Gilchrist uses the words 'menace' and 'great beauty' that have 'dynamic presences'. Repeatedly in a discourse surrounding the art and life of woman we are reminded of the archetypal myths that stem from the ancients. Consequently, as a post-Modernist artist she explores a variety of forms which have been unearthed over all time.

In her book *Woman's Mysteries*, Esther Harding has completed some very thorough and enlightening research that surrounds that mysterious 'dynamic presence' that is contained in *Seed*. Harding as long ago as 1955, presents a variety of symbols that connect with so many of the forms that are produced in art in this century. She often relates tales and symbols in myth through the moon and moon goddesses that have always, across many cultures in time, represented the inherent nature of woman:

The earliest representation of the moon deity and perhaps the most universal, was a cone or pillar of
stone.[Fig 14] This stone was particularly sacred . . . .The colour of stones was varied too, sometimes they were white, sometimes black, corresponding to the bright and dark aspects of lunar deity.[21]

However, the form of the stone and the moon worship will be relevant also to the discussion of the symbolic use of circles and spheres in Chapter Ten and, the very literal translations about the fascination for the unearthing of female deities by the Australian painter, Anneke Silver. It is remarkable that the symbols which appear in the dreams and art of modern people are very close to those of ancient and primitive people. The seed, the moon, the fig, the orange, all of which emanate from a single source: that of regenerative power, reproduction, the cyclical life of the galaxy and all encompassing universe. The tree that is mentioned everywhere, often naturally ties in with the moon, the seed and the fruit as Esther Harding explains:

In addition to the cone, the pillar of stone, a wooden pillar or a tree is frequently found as an emblem of the moon. The sacred Moon Tree is of a very ancient date, and appears over and over again in religious art . . . .especially frequent in Assyrian pictures. . . .Sometimes the sacred moon tree is pictured as an actual tree, or plant, with the crescent moon or the moon god in its branches.[Fig 15]. [22]

Many of the meanings for these emblems vary from, wakar and taboo which means spiritual, consecrated, wonderful and can be used for women at the menstrual period. The tree is often covered with fruit and gifts like a Christmas tree. Here is the tree with bright coloured leaves and flowers and fruits that are:

all gifts of the moon goddess, giver of fertility[23]

So, it is only natural that woman has taken the cup, the fruit, the seed and made it into her art and her creative expression. This visual symbol can be likened to the little tree in the grotto or sanctuary. Some of the paintings of fruits and leaves are like miniature gardens or sanctuaries. Esther Harding has included some very provocative examples of images which equate to all of the topics that are relevant to these discussions. Even the Tree of Life in the form of The Moon Tree, [Fig 15] has radiating branches that generate from a central point similar to the radiating structures of Mais's Seed:

Mais answers her own question. Her work embodies a quest about female significance; their is anger that surrounds significant populations of repression and interestingly enough, admits her concern that the tradition of macho sculpture could easily become a:
This notion of fear and risk is highly relevant to the argument about taking up devices that are traditionally male. He has visually exploited the female body over and over again until it becomes a scientific apparatus. . . .but has he gone so far as Mais's graphic symbols do as they venture into a world of symbols that may be appointed a new or renewed significance. This is extremely problematic, especially when portrayed under metaphorical guise. It verges on the pornographic. Again the need for a new language of visual symbols or perhaps an old language, could be a solution.

Mais's experience of child birth gives rise to wooden, painted sculptures such as Seed - a succinct, signifying label. Seed and other works are built around 'circular and central core imagery' and the wonderful realization of this woman which imparts the Estian intuition:

> when you have a child you are aware that you are no longer a full stop, you are part of a link, passing on the baton, if you like, down the generations. My work is now more about the seeding, birthing, fertility, the end product of sexuality, and about death.[25]

There is the other fact of life here in Seed, the notion once again of abundance, the arcane and the post-colonial fallacy. One may think of the good life that is promised in the land of milk and honey. Gilchrist describes this phenomenon as:

> [fruitfulness] in Australia, its alien flora and the artist's coming and working on the moon kind of feeling[26]

Mais herself through her experience of giving life, gains an inner knowing or insight; it is untermed, a power if you like, that only woman can derive from childbirth. This is her inherent nature that is too easily annihilated in a showy, scientific world, the significance of which is an underlying 'leitmotif' in the Handless Maiden, yet another pedagogical legend from C.P.Estes:

> The flowering apple tree in the tale symbolizes a beauteous aspect of women, the side of our nature that has its roots sunk into the world of the Wild Mother, where it is nurtured from below. The tree is the archetypal symbol of individuation; it is considered immortal, for its seeds will live on, its roots system shelters and revivifies, it is home to an entire food chain of life.[27]

Before we leave the seed and the fruit for a time, the content of still life, the category of painting
through which woman has asserted her inherent nature which is her biological specificity, it is essential that the male notions of existence and sadly 'nothingness', be shown to be anti-life, anti-birth, anti-cyclical and anti-spiritual. Brodribb expounds that the existentialist notions of the modern era are 'thanatical'. Preoccupations with death, hopelessness and fear are responsible for the almost catatonic states of asthasia that many people of this century have existed in. To say nothing of the emotional blackmail that has psychologically tortured people which has come from the doctrines of all of the so-called christian institutionalized religions that are controlled by male supremacy:

Existentialism and structuralism turn the tree of life into a hanging post: no new embodiments. This preoccupation with empty, timeless space and the nothing which is everything is the poststructuralist, postmodernist, postcoital, postmortem scene.[28]

This is not a discourse in which a lengthy discussion of twentieth century art movements could be needled through in order to expand the argument that encompasses the belief that existentialist and structuralist philosophies pervaded many such movements. Briefly, however, the distorted and mutilated women of Picasso's middle to late canvases, the satirical bent taken by our own Bret Whitely in his presentation of the female form, the pro-destruction manifestoes of the Italian Futurist movement and not least the gargantuan, drunken splashings regurgitated by some of the American Abstract Expressionists members are blatant examples of this trite and machismo language of the dread and the unfruitful dead. Let us not waste too much time in this fearful mess. True, the works may have historical significance as does the holocaust, witch burning and the Spanish Inquisition, but also may history allot them a true value. That is not to say that all of these artists have produced some very valuable work at one time or another.

Now we will move from the radiating, red glow of the opening of Seed, to the warm, radiating glow of the hearth of Grace Cossington Smith's early painting Firelight, 1919, [Pl 29]. It is an interesting selection of subject, in that it is a round hearth; it is warmth and light, it is the centre and therefore the heart of her happy household at Sylvan Falls. Cossington Smith is already, early in her career, selecting subjects intuitively, as a female, as a painter of light. There is a growing architectural interest, particularly toward enclosed spaces, be it a cup, a hearth, a church interior. It is only a tiny painting and, as Bruce James gives modesty of scale its due:

small surfaces have provided the platform for the most radical departures of artists freed from the fascism of size.[29]

Dimension is pertinent to any discussion of the art of woman and the discussion will be enlarged
upon in following chapters. *Firelight* is not perhaps a common subject, but Cossington Smith has taken this theme and centralized the composition with this warm, orange/red glow. It is open and inviting. Secondary to this centrepiece, is the still life on the white linen cloth, on the tabletop. There is also the familiar, white porcelain in the form of a jug. There is nourishment - warmth for the tired soul. One of many interiors that Cossington Smith will complete in her long, artistic career.

*Church at Assissi*, 1949, [Pl 30], completed thirty years later, has a central core to the composition which is an arched entry in the form of a warm, circular opening. This is the opening into the cave, the sacred grotto which invites the hungry and the weary to enter, to be still and to meditate. In ancient times, the sacred and the sexual were one. C.P Estes uses the legend of *The Matchgirl* in her story telling. The moral of which, surrounds the problem of self-angst:

> where problems or issues are diminished by enthusiastically fantasizing unrealizable solutions or nicer times, does not only assail women, it is the major stumbling block of humankind. The stove in *The Matchgirl* fantasy represents warm thoughts. It is also a symbol of the centre, the heart, the hearth. It tells us her fantasy is for the true self, the heart of the psyche, the warmth of a home within.[30]

Cossington Smith was a woman who was highly concerned about global problems such as war and the human condition. She harboured an intense vocation to the search for truth through her artful undertakings. This self-contained, warming, little painting is representative of the centre, the heart, the hearth and above all the heart of her psyche. It has the enormous sentient power that is found in the Thirroul sea paintings that were completed after her mother's death. Further discussion will take place in Chapter Nine where a monumental relevance is given to her painting *Sea Wave* within the realm of feminine objectivity.

Of course the painterly qualities of the *Church at Assissi*, recall the light of Monet. Bruce James describes this painting:

> The painting is whisked to cream in the cathedral. Alluringly deep and open.[31]

The artist painted many subjects of a sacred nature, not only the obvious cathedrals and churches, but the sacred interiors of her studio and home. There are no photos of these sacred places, only paintings. This grotto was her place to be alone. A subterranean cave where woman as creator could go to be:

> fuelled by the energy we gathered on our journey to home and practicing interim union with soul through
Cossington Smith epitomises the woman who is artistic creator, who did not pass on the baton to new life but, as many women of the past and future, she created her art. The need for aloneness and solitude, in order to shed fatigue and fill the empty soul is not a new one:

Women from ancient times as well as modern aboriginal women set a saved place aside for this communion and inquiry . . . 'women's places' were used anytime, not just during menses, and more so, that each woman often had her own 'woman's place', consisting of a certain tree, place at the water's edge, or some natural forest or desert room or ocean cave. [33]

With regard to the ocean cave, Dora Carrington[1893-1932] an English painter, completed a painting in 1918 just one year previous to Cossington Smith's *Firelight*. This was a portrait of the home she inhabited, at first alone and then sometimes happily with male friends. In *The Mill at Tidmarsh*, 1918 [Fig 16] Carrington has used the dark, semi-circular curve of an underground mill stream as the central core of her painting. The enclosed space is small and dark. According to Greer, Carrington lived a tumultous, emotional life of disturbing upheaval. That was exacerbated by numerous attempts at finding that one 'great love' but which instead resulted in sexual unfulfillment and almost the repugnance of sexual love with a male. Carrington harboured a great need for love and affection, perhaps approval and support, thus, often becoming entangled with homosexual men and usually tending houses for her loves. She obviously placed her artisic career as second fiddle, as was her place in the social lives of her men. After marrying Giles Lytton Strachey, who incidentally accepted her love and domestic care, he reverted to his homosexual activities after an unsuccessful attempt at a sexual relationship with his wife. However, it became evident from her letters that she loved him immensely and her suicide six weeks after his sudden death gives witness to her engrossment. Greer explains:

Because he could feel no deep interest, she became bored with her work, turned away from and shrank from pretense to any but occasional pieces. She saw her life as a continuity with other lives; hers was not the ego of the artist. Her talent was considerable but she lacked ruthlessness in asserting it[34]

No doubt, there have been many exemplary cases such as that of Strachey and Carrington, and, though Greer suggests that a relationship with another woman may have been more successful, one can only believe that self-subordination in relationships, can occur in any gender combination. The problem goes much deeper than that. Deep as the tunnel and the mill-stream and the evidence that Carrington's complex disposition was there at all can be seen in her
apparently wonderful, interior design and decoration attempts as she:

decorated rooms for friends, rarely finishing any of them . . . .Like most of women's artistic activity they were intricate, kinetic structures, relying as much upon the smell of quince cheese in season as the sunlight on the walls that she painted, the rhythm and ease that she created out of chaos.[35]

The description of Carrington's interior is as sensuous as the visual evidence of Cossington Smith's whipped cream palette - welcoming firelight, inviting archways, warm, snug, private places. One takes a risk with the mentioning of stereotypical metaphors such as 'womblike' or 'uterine' in a discussion surrounding the art of woman. Somer Brodribb explains that womb means mater, hence matter, the flesh of woman, the inherent nature of woman. It is never as simple as matter or material, for there are the soul and psyche as well: all of which are the source of the mystery for us. Thus far they have been forced to be:

The great wild forces of our own psyches means to place its paw on our shadows and in that manner she claims us as her own, Once the Wild Woman snags our shadows, we belong to ourselves again, we are in our own right environment and our rightful home. . . . They only need to be set in the right direction, which is always down, down into one's own work, down into one's own inner life, down through the tunnel to the lair.[36]

Greer speaks of the decorated rooms for friends and, that Carrington rarely finishes anything, in her documenting of Carrington's temperamental, creative life. Each incomplete project leaves a poison in the unconscious that can become debilitating. It is the need for creativity that perhaps impulsively and sporadically kills itself, peetering out, dwindling to nothing.

It is very good for a woman to have a devoted animus figure, strong, able to see far, here both in the outer world and the under world . . . .Animus development varies from woman to woman . . . .There is an old phenomenon in the psyche: When a woman is afflicted with a negative animus, any effort of a creative act touches it off so it attacks her . . . .These are the deformed life forms . . . .But here something is wrong with the animus and therefore the ability to manifest and implement one's ideas in the world.[33]

How difficult it is for woman who wishes to love and maintain life and needs to balance the creative imperative that nourishes herSelf.

The broken bread, the crumpled table cloth, the opened tureen and the often, sliced meat of the paintings of Anne Vallayer-Coster, give rise to a two-sided approach to still life painting. The
contents of her paintings previously discussed in Chapter Two of *Wild Flowers and White Porcelain*, are essentially rhoprographic. That is, that they are portrayals of simple, fresh selections of everyday trifles in humbly appointed settings. Vallayer-Coster was from a priviledged background and was favoured by Marie-Antoinette in eighteenth century France. So her clean, clear, honest works could almost be thought to be incongruous to her social echelon and the obvious affiliations. Remarkable, is the fact that she remained alive after the revolution. She is supposed to have lived a quiet, private and hardworking life. Her still life objects are infused with the labour, toil and humility of her attitude to life and work. Whilst the content reveals the feminine - domestic nature of the lower classes of this time, one senses through observation of the formal properties and the simplified, almost austere compositions, an abstract and cerebral approach to describing nature. The studio and artist perceived atmosphere is similar to the approach taken by Pieter Claez in seventeenth century Holland.

*The White Tureen*, 1771, [Pl 31], is almost Platonist in its conception by this self-contained artist. The full round tureen of white porcelain is the centrepiece and the title. Metaphorically speaking, this tureen could be the moon. The moon in various stages and climatic atmospheres. The steam rising from the bubbling cauldron could be the soft fog of the cool, moist night sky. Vallayer Coster gives intense atmosphere with the deeply shaded, phthalocyanine blue for the subtly lit background which gains status [ like those of Morandi] in this painting, due to the vapourising steam. It is an important space that is vibrating with life and nocturnal energy. All objects seem to be lit by the moonlight. This is one of the most overlooked paintings that has ever been completed. This painting will have to gain its deserved status in the light of this rethinking and revaluing of still life painting and therefore the art of woman. *White Tureen* encapsulates all the qualities that any 'great' painting has ever possessed. However, as it is 'only' a still life, it is relatively unknown. It has been executed by the knowing hand of a woman. Here lies the insight and unfathomable perception that Leonice Benedite describes in her book, *Women Painters in France*:

> Woman in Art is a fruitful subject. It is both psychological and aesthetic, involving as it does a question of paramount interest. [38]

Although Vallayer Coster in her paramount interest, leaves the bread, the fruit, the vessel, and the object that is necessary for survival, in their humblest state. There is something else happening. Something profound and mysterious. The paintings are networks of curves and enclosed forms, they are not spilling out compositions but rather, they gently unfold their contents, the contents of the larder. Bryson says this about her work:
the objects are stated frankly and on their own terms. There is no desire to inflate the scene beyond itself: domestic life is left as it is, not translated with another, supposedly 'higher' discourse of achievement, rank or wealth. The painter is able to participate directly in the space without anxiety about her capacity or right to do so.[39]

I cannot agree to this assumption. Most masters of a privileged household, would rarely lay eyes upon the likes of the humble scenes of Vallayer Coster's portrayals. Of these times, the ruling or wealthy classes would more likely restrict their viewing to svelte, opiated domestic scenes, easing the pain of any recognition of hard labour in the kitchen. Perhaps something more in line with the opulence of Desportes. On the other hand, the domestic surrounds of Vallayer Coster would not necessarily have been crude and humble because she was female. Her still life is contrived for formal reasons, though, it remains unpretentious. No doubt, few females if any, have ever felt the need to paint in a showy manner. There seem to be more unearthings of psychological truths even if there is a fruitfulness. Bryson believes that Chardin painted a similar status of still life but, he was almost embarrassed by this and takes his work to a slightly 'higher' discourse by using the alibi of his 'dazzling technique'. It really depends on what 'dazzling' means to whom and for what.

Bryson states that Vallayer Coster maintains the level of domesticity conveyed in her paintings at the level of truth - low-plane reality. This fact is certainly questionable. Vallayer Coster has changed its status by painting it - and by painting it in such a subtle but, brilliant manner, giving the content of this category of painting the spiritual status and power that it deserves, as the content needed for bodily survival and sensuous pleasure. Such a supreme statement is constructed in paint about these simple but magical objects. A restrained and dignified portrayal of Rhyparos and Xenia.

Further on in time, just two hundred and ten years later, Leah MacKinnon exhibits her rendition of what seems to be a white porcelain vessel in Spring Mantel 1, 1981, [Fig 17]. Julie Ewington writing for the Critiques of the magazine Art Network states that the work in MacKinnon's exhibition at the Union St Gallery in Sydney in 1985 was a:

contented [not complacent] set of works that have to do with self-love and personal esteem, pictured through familiar old things about the house and about one's life. MacKinnon's subjects are jugs, basins, bowls of fruit, very ordinary tools and loved but otherwise unremarkable items of furniture.[40]
The white vessel [bowl or vase], is given a similar status through rendered form of fruitfulness as that of Vallayer Coster's white tureen. The full, rounded forms of tureen and bowl have become, the core, the altar of the table-top. They are now altar-pieces - the adored - they have graduated from the everyday place to the sacred, without losing the original context. Mackinnon offers up those simple vessels that are a part of her self-love that can be obtained through the completing of one's art forms just as the ancients offered up the food we need for survival which was always of great importance when people gave votive offerings to their gods, the gods all over the earth who gave fertility and abundance: through whose power it was, that food was able to be placed on the table. Self-love is also about feeding the body, celebrating life and in turn loving to live as opposed to the self hatred or self denial that goes with anorexic states of death in life. Ewington decrees, that MacKinnon's bowl and object have been:

monumentalized, intimate objects seen larger than life[41]

These white, curved forms are given status and are adulated through the art and psyche of woman. The very scale of the main protagonist is larger than life. The white bowls are imaginatively conceived as having centrality both compositionally and psychologically. From whence and where do these remnant images that are stored in the collective unconscious of woman stem. Esther Harding would probably align these large soft white stone-like objects with the talismans of neolithic times wherein, the ancient shrines and the sacred stone of the Moon Goddess, was once enshrined in her temple as is evident in present and past civilizations all over the planet. Of course, there are many emblematic forms that represent the natural power of woman, but the bowl form, fruit and flower forms of the plant and tree, are archetypal symbols that continue to evolve through the art forms and activities, the gardens and grottos of woman. There is also the Moon Mother's help in child birth, the crescent moon amulet that charms 'increase'; the crescent moon and her various and changing forms reflected in the white vessels:

For feminine nature, like the moon, is light as well as dark; and the light, unlike that of the sun, is mild and cool, aptly represented by gentle and timid animals such as the hare.[42]

MacKinnon employs realist, drawing techniques of delicate, subtle 'crafting', that which gives to them much of their gentle power. This feature does not stand alone though. They appear to be vibrant and full to the brim with life - life that is ongoing - in the cycle of life and death, always present in these sacred objects. Ewington's summing up of the technique and overall effect is quite intriguing and could be applied to the paint work of Vallayer Coster's tureen or to the enchantingly lit moon:
The drawings spoke both of asserting mastery over objects and at the same time acknowledged their elusiveness, an elusiveness that is played out in the fall of light on their surfaces, better, in the way light constitutes their surfaces.[43]

The cup, bowl and vessels of many paintings contain the keys to the arcane mysteries of time - our ancient blood - the shadows and light that constitute the spherical forms of the objects that are age-old symbols. The lid of the tureen, that waning form that contains the dual form of the moon and the vessel. The Moon Mother who once ruled over so many civilizations and cultures could be manifested here; it is the power of the moon and her cycles that since ancient times, is believed to be the underlying force of woman's desire her physical and creative cycles which ultimately give way to the reproduction of new life. Here, concealed and protected in these enclosed forms will forever lie the mystery of the inside aesthetic and the much sought after spirituality of post-Modern people, especially woman who has had her head and heart down for so long. In Chapter Nine further discussion will unfold about the flowering of woman's art and the feminine objectivity that lies within the related and desirable forms.

She lived her life in phases, manifesting the qualities of each phase in turn, . . . . the slender crescent appears in the sky . . . . the full moon . . . . there after the decrease . . . . until the brightness of the moon 'has been eaten up' [44]
CHAPTER NINE:
Desire: Feminine Objectivity and Poetic Form.

The flower begins in the dark
where life is not.
Death has a word to speak
and the flower begins.

How small, how closely bound
in nothing's net
the word waits in the ground
for the cloak earth spins.

The root goes down in the night
and from night's mud
the unmade, the inchoate
starts to take shape and rise.

The blind, the upward hand,
clenches its bud.'
What message does death send
from what grave where he lies ?

Open, green hand, and give
the dark gift you hold.

Oh wild mysterious gold!
Oh act of passionate love! [1]

Desire of the flesh, fruity flesh, bodily flesh, objects of desire, creative desire, a desire for freedom, the desire for love: all women can be party to one or all of the above. Feminine objectivity is a phenomenon of the species. In any case, woman through her creations of art or flesh expresses in concrete form, that which is real, is earth and at the same time embodies spirit and soul. Woman through her art, her biology and her feminine characteristics, has attempted to make sense of these arcane mysteries, by objectifying those internal and biological phenomena, drawing them outward and dealing with them with feeling that is fuelled by life in nature and therefore her ancient blood. Perhaps her art by way of still life forms, maintains this truth and objectivity, as she has refrained from merely investing in these forms the surplus opinion of those masters who, callously deal in the world of ideas only, negating the flesh - running with fear.

The peaches of Fede Galicia and the pears of Margaret Olley reveal evidence of a secret knowledge that can be dealt with through objectivism rather than through vehicles of the ego. By coining the term 'objectivism', I am referring to the manner in which the artist conveys and treats
the contents of the still life painting and related subject matter, at least in part for what it is. Previously mentioned is the fruit of Cézanne or the bottles of Ben Nicholson. Both artists have used these lowly subjects merely as an aid to travel along the formalist, intellectual path to great academic heights. Therefore, they are negating the manifestation of flesh and revealing, that perhaps they would be embarrassed to paint the fruit and the bowls conveying the object not only for what it is, rather than to express themselves through this honest exploration of nature. Consequently, there is a loss of the sense of the mystery of the cosmographic that may emerge.

In some ways the claim to objectivism, manifested through the paintings of Galicia and Olley, is strengthened by the fact that the paintings could almost have been executed at the same time, in the same place, in the same culture. This time or place becomes a universal in the culture of woman; the feminine culture of objectivity which is ubiquitous, for it is also the material culture of the human world. It is pertinent to recall Geoffrey De Groet's objection to this quality found in Olley's paintings. [See Chapter 2 of *Wild Flowers and White Porcelain*] One cannot help but sense that De Groet failed to see the true, feminine objectivity that lies within the forms of her celebrations of nature. This brand of what may seem to be passive or inert objectivity is far more powerful and enduring than the more obviously active forms of feminine objectivity that almost always fail in their only objective which is to voice a belief or opinion. Inevitably, these politics-only paintings that deem commerce and ownership as being unsavoury eventually become property, part of a collection denying them their existence, which had been for instrumentality alone.

To take up the larger than life, machismo, ego-powered, anti-aesthetic, anti-life 'art forms', so readily imitated from those across the Pacific Ocean, is to ignore our own, arcane 'fruitful' land, our inherited origin, our feminine, biological and spiritual nature, our 'other' Australian cultures and therefore the truth that brings with it beauty and sincerity. Olley's paintings have endured time as have Galicia's. What they say with subtlety is extremely powerful, potent in fact, and loyal to their sex. They are what they are. They do not attempt to ascend to great intellectual heights that alienates from the real world. They are at once beautiful and art.

The fruit in *Still Life with Peaches in a Porcelain Bowl* by Fede Galicia[1578-1630] is an extension of the artist as being one with nature. Germaine Greer describes Galicia's fruit:

> the grandeur of these humble objects suspended in an atmosphere of timeless stillness.[2]

The sensitively painted, swollen, fleshy forms are as large as life and their furry, velvet texture
makes a sensual contrast to the shiny, milky smooth porcelain. The painting is about them. The earthly bodies of all flesh and life. A pair of small plums resting on the edge of the table-top, echo the forms above. The stem and leaves give testament to the tree of their origin - that will in turn rot and decay, passing on the seed that will begin another life, perhaps to the pears in Margaret Olley's *Plumbago and Pears*, 1980-1990. The pears have their stems, the evidence of plant forms: flowers, leaves, branches all that need water to maintain longevity. The tree and its fruit are part of the feminine culture. The tree has always been all powerful as a giver and protector of life and therefore is taken on as a powerful icon traversing the geography, time and cultures of ideologies. Stemming from ancient times, the leaves, branches, fruit, flower and trunk have been reused motifs often containing a universal iconography.

In *The Shrine of the Moon Tree*, [Fig19], we have Galicia and Olley's table-top[altar]. This could be the leaves and branches with the fruit and vessels for offering. In this emblem, the worshipper is to approach the altar to ask for an oracle from the moon. In this instance the moon's tree is a source of 'inspiration and secret wisdom'.

The crosses and logs in many ancient pagan and christian emblems are often abstract representations of the tree. In [Fig 20], the crescent moon is the host power. In other emblems the tree is modified into a 'fleur de lys' or lotus form. So the tree is also the flower.

With regard to the fruit of the tree in the western mythology:

This fruit is the source of that drink of immortality, of secret knowledge, and of inspiration so highly prized by the gods and so jealously guarded by them. Belief in the wonderful powers of this tree long predated the Genesis story 'of the tree in the midst of the Garden', . . . In the garden of Eden the fruit of knowledge and the fruit of immortality grew on separate trees. More often both these gifts are thought of as the fruit of the one tree which grows in the 'central place of the earth' as an ancient hymn has it . . . . The hymn commemorates the moon tree and its fruit, and is as follows:

```
Its root[or fruit] of white crystal stretched toward the deep.
Its seat was the central place of the earth;
Its foliage was the couch of Zikum, the [primeval] mother.
Into the heart of the holy house which spreads its shade
like a forest
hath no man entered,
There [is the house of] the mighty mother, who passes
across the sky
[In] the midst of it was Tammuz. [3]
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So, in this mythology the moon is 'the mighty mother that passes across the sky', and Harding
explains how the notion, 'the heart of the holy house' - hath no man entered' is indicative of the mystery of woman. The desire that is contained in the flesh of the fruit, and mirrored in the peaches and pears is the desire that is also ancient or an extant primeval instinct - the mysterious perpetuator of life. This is the body of woman that gives life, holds life and has the innate desire to create.

When Bryson concedes that Caravaggio's fruit, [Chapter Two: Wild Flowers and White Porcelain], 'stresses drama, spectacle, and a bravura display of skill.'[4] and that the fruit in Galicia's painting, 'is certainly skilful, but it makes no attempt to astound the viewer with pyrotechnics'[5], then we need to understand that the mystery of the 'arcane secrets of time' which is held in Galicia's fruit, in Olley's fruit and much of the art of woman is an innate force. This force must be revalued in art and therefore allotted a place that is equal to the often more cerebrally derived forms of the Masters. Under which patriarchal epistemology do the latter forms attain their superior status? Now we must revalue the forms of the art of woman under our own terms, priorities and language.

Within the forms of feminine objectivity there are those symbols of 'desire' that denote 'sexual pleasure' or connote genitalia that can be dangerously stereotypical. Without meaning to be trite or crass, but rather looking for the profound meanings, one could join the linking devices of Galicia's and Olley's sacred altars of fruit and tree to the flower of the Tree of Life. One could not deny the graphic, conjuring up of female genitalia, the nature of which repeats itself in all levels of the animal and plant kingdom: the essence of which is contained in the flowering of the forms of Georgia O'Keefe [1887-1986], Grace Cossington Smith and many others. The delicate watercolour rendering, Black Iris III,[Pl 33], epitomises this aesthetic phenomena. O'Keefe wrote the following after discovering that all of her work was merely a conglomerate of teacher's influences:

'I have things in my head', she wrote, 'that are not like what anyone has taught me - so natural to my way of being and thinking that it hasn't occurred to me to put them down'.[6]

It was from this point on that O'Keefe developed the, 'sensuous organic forms' that were to become her very feminine trademark. A sign of her very active and determined animus. So much of her work as symbols has evolved around the forms equated with the generative forces of nature. However, the abstractions of these symbols are not about the particular, but rather the overall type and therefore conjuring up the mystery again. O'Keefe's highly developed, poetic style, is now taking us into sensory representations in woman's art. These are less derivative than
what has come before, as they also call on the 'idiosyncratic' of her imagination. O'Keefe
developed and to coin the word more appropriately, 'designed' a keen set of personal icons, some
of which actually became national icons. As well as encapsulating her 'self' they contained a
sense of place, rendered with a very specific language of poetic form and colour.

*Black Iris III*, is painted with a symphony of monochromatic hue. The tonal intensity softens
from the black centre to the fragile, fluffy petals. The whole painting appears to be moving,
billowing as do clouds in the atmosphere This delicate and exquisite watercolour employs thin,
watery washes and areas of almost pure pigment. O'keefe was familiar with Wassily Kandinsky's
*On the Spiritual in Art*.. She was very much aware of the evocative power of music and was
interested in psychological and emotional powers. Her rhythmical colour and forms gave witness
to the skill, perception and creative powers of this highly perceptive artist.

O'Keefe stated that she painted her experience of the flower or object or place, rather than
attempting to paint it. Again this is feminine objectivity, the painting of 'experience' not just the
reproducing of nature. This understanding could be applied to all the women artists who have
been discussed thus far. In fact, 'experience' is very important to biological states of being and is
directly linked to the nature of woman, woman in nature and the content of still  life and related
subject matter. When confronting the question of the lack of women artists or the lowly status
appointed her subject matter, lifestyles, ritual and social status become paramount rather than the
isolated notion of the 'Idea' and Platonist ideals of beauty and truth. This is exactly why we need
to rethink and revalue just exactly what, why and how we assign value.

O'Keefe abhorred the critiques comments that described her work as being feminine or even that
the *Black Iris III* was a representation of an anatomical form. Let's be honest it is not an
anatomical form, it is a poem in paint that surrounds the essence of nature but, whilst respecting
her objection, it is quite the obvious to see the *Black Iris III*, as echoing the nature of female
anatomical forms. This is an instance of intrinsic nature repeating itself through intuition.
However, what ought to be contemplated is the unconscious attraction to and selection of
universal emblems that stem from matter by women painters which embody the inherent nature
of their being: the Self as part of the great mystery. The everyday flower is imbued with mystery,
love and care and ultimately it also holds beauty and truth.

Grace Cossington Smith's close up views of flowers such as, *Hippeastrums Growing*, 1931,[Pl
34], are so dense with life and generative nature that Bruce James has described these garden
paintings as:
and whether Cossington Smith would have agreed or not, he describes this painting as being:

startling in its immediacy, profuse, sexually assertive, life affirming.[7]

James makes a statement later in his book that affirms O'Keefe's notion of 'experience' as perception rather than merely visual understanding:

To attempt the sensual through itself was folly. Ultimate senuality, which is actually a spiritual state, is the accomplishment of virgins of one kind or another.[8]

The notion of 'virgin' is almost employed far, too audaciously in this instance. Though, it is interesting to read Chapter Nine of Woman's Mysteries, by Ester Harding, wherein she explains the ancient meanings of the word and as James suggests it has meanings of varying instances.

In Chapter Three of Wild Flowers and White Porcelain, the 1984 Triptych works of Susan Norrie have been discussed in the light of likening them to the 'vanitas' of The Netherlands, by way of Norrie's use of visual devices and objective intention. Another triptych, Deserted, Shielded, Encroached, [Pl 35], reveals some extremely peculiar forms. The paintings that are skilfully executed are bordering on being science fiction illustration They are as has already been stated, a combination of still life and landscape forms, set out on a stage. There is an eerie drama going on there. These forms may have been intuitively conjured up from primordial images that are lurking deep within the unconscious. The paintings are oozing out of the picture plane with desire, growth, regeneration, huddlings of togetherness. Are they the single-celled life forms of pre-universe time? Here it becomes an ideological imperative to look at the term post-Modernism once again. Maggie Gilchrist says this about 'our time':

Norrie, Morgan and many other contemporaries do not share with their immediate predecessors[their teachers], the same distrust of the kinds of academic practices that were unseated by Modernism. Their post-Modernism is more open and inclusive, employing traditional practices with a view to renewing them on renegotiated terms.[9].

Here is a brief description of what post-Modernism means with regard to women in art. It is sounding very positive, but it is imperative that we recall Norrie's objective in order to continue
the discussion of feminine objectivity in form. Already the need for a new vocabulary for the art of woman, has been sighted. Norrie claims to be attempting this major feat, but she has already admitted[as do all], to employing the formal language that derives from male[master] determined epistemological systems of 'our aesthetic heritage'. Norrie and Gilchrist explicate:

'woman entering an exclusive tradition' as necessarily charged with ambiguity; but instead of attempting to play down this ambiguity, she dramatizes it, producing an art of darkly glittering wit, parody and, ultimately, of transformation.'[10]

On this note, I have included two images, that seem to be in the aforementioned category of our time. The first is a monotype by Rosie Weiss entitled, One Very Dominant Cloud, 1987, [Pl 36], and secondly, Untitled, [Pl 37] a painting by Margaret Snowdon, the year is unknown. Initially, the development of these bizarre, organic forms seemed to tell of imminent erruption or even those Sartrian holes of dreaded 'nothingness'. Explosive, geological activity looms largely. Do these late twentieth century forms contain a feminine specificity? Perhaps these are the next logical, sequential stage in the development of Norrie's writhing, unspecified, organic forms of the early eighties. It is possible then that they are the natural consequence of the post-Modernist woman's exploration of still life devices and semantic contexts. It is highly likely that these forms contain the metaphorical chasms of a new language that is; seething, boiling, bubbling and foreboding all of which will eventually form a rounded whole: a constructive and responsible world of thought, action and equality.

Indeed, seeking out the significance of the one dominant,white cloud could be paramount to our understanding of the evolution of these forms. Curiously enough, all three artworks contain ambiguously described images derived from the geological and biological aspect of the great landscape. Ah! The microscope and telescope have been employed as imaginative devices rather than as sensory instruments, as they were there in the Dutch art of describing. Landscapes are and were 'great and heroic', still life was and is 'overlooked' and unimportant. Have these three women extracted the biologically instinctive, aesthetic imperative from its downtrodden status, translating it into aesthetic forms that are more noticeable and at once, maintaining this instinct that brings with it this archetypal, pictorial alphabet. Norrie's pictures contain mountains, mushrooms and various amoebic forms; fungal penicillens, pubic hair sproutings, phallic monoliths, mollusc membraine, ludic drapery, romantic lunar light, desert and beach sands and soils and darkness impending. Weiss has one central core, geological specimen, the swelling surrounds of dynamic activity, darkness looming, the cloud floating up and away from it all and, as does Norrie, the artist utilizes a dramatic chiarascuro which incites evidence of deep,

There is no evidence of existentialist 'death' in life. Margaret Snowden's realistic abstraction or abstract realizations [a visual phenomenon of the post-Modern epoch] is there and, it is not. Snowden has used a light, monotonal palette where Weiss has used a dark, monotonal palette. Both pictures achieve a high, dramatic intensity through singular form, centrality of idea, the unconscious poetic forms of that 'desire' which ensures the propagation of the species, and the formality and innovative representations of feminine objectivity.

In the true feminine culture, these forms could be environmentalist in tone. Symbolic instruments of a foreboding nature. Explications of the imminent swallowing up of the earth, fiery explosions of the geo-layers, as a consequence of avarice and ignorance, buying and selling, the glutonous gatherings of vast fortunes and expeditious profiteering. Yes, perhaps this covetous man of Late-Patriarchal Capitalism will succeed in creating a 'burnout' or a 'sucked-up void'. In attempting to understand or find meaning in these forms we ask many questions, lacking retrospective wisdom and we endeavour to discover the origins of these selections of form. Have they evolved naturally from the still life images of fruit and vessel that are universal. These natural forms are duplicated in human forms as well as being predominant in the life and art of woman. In Somer Brodribb's feminist critique, *Nothing Matters* the questions surrounding philosophical frameworks also embrace the questions about biology and therefore form. This inquiry is essential in any discussion concerning the suffocating, patriarchal traditions that precede us:

In his section, *Extinction caused by Natural Selection*, Darwin muses how in the *Struggle for Existence*, each new species will exterminate those most similar to it[1900,p.82]. Thus extinction of old forms is the almost inevitable consequence of the production of new forms[1900, p.276] [11]

And so Modernism - through still life explorations of a formal but, imaginative nature, extinguishes the traditional forms in western art and establishes new forms. Strangely enough, women employing intuitively modernist and abstract forms are evolving in post-Modernity those new forms that are subtle evocations of the figurative. This statement is in accordance with the art of woman in this late twentieth century enclave. This then appears to be a natural selection of more useful, meaningful forms that are more strongly tied with traditional forms of still life. Brodribb is meaning here:

that Darwin's theory surrounds the notion of 'the simultaneous succession of the same forms of life throughout the world' [11]
and she discusses Darwinian theory of natural selection and therefore the origin and binary combination of forms in the light of Sartre's conclusion that man is alienated, stretched to the limit on a cruel oppressive earth. Darwinian theory of natural selection becomes tainted, humans living in a 'great hole'. Brodribb strengthens the argument about the anti-life-matter-nothingness theories of post-Modern times by claiming that Foucalt and Derrida have similarly taken Darwin to the annihilating extent of:

'nature red in tooth and claw'.

Levi-Strauss, she claims merges us with the void:

in a final dispersal of content by binary form'[12]

and, continues to say that Sartre, Levi-Strauss and Foucalt are preoccupied by and concerned mainly with the death side of the life cycle rather than the life side of the life cycle that so often concerns woman in her life and artistic creations, be it through unconscious or conscious manifestations. Could we then say that these volcanic and chasmic forms of late twentieth century woman are the singular, concrete embodiment of a fearful expression for the woman artist whose concerns move into global dimensions, or are sensuous forms appearing from her unconscious.

And, so too, what of the sea waves of Cossington Smith, painted in 1931, immediately following the death of her mother. At this time, the family took reprieve at Thirroul on the South Coast and the young artist took refuge in painting. There were the 'recuperative waves' of Thirroul Beach. About the paintings surrounding this subject, James believes that:

They stand in degree of denudation and emotionally with the Wamberal works of 1927-28, but aspire to a loftier spirituality and personal signification.

On the contrary, these waves, volcanoes and geological chasms aren't primarily concerned with death and nothingness but, rather these forms that exist, by their very nature, can be reproduced through the notion of creativity and the 'leitmotif' of environmental concern, that is stoked by the protection of life. These forms of art are the same that are reproduced in nature - the patterns and rhythms that are binary in nature. Above all, they are about a concern that surrounds life, the existence of what is - to venerate life, affirmation, partiality rather than death, negation and
neutrality. This is where woman stands in the thick of her environment, nurturing instead of destroying. James gives these waves greater prominence still:

\[
\text{Sea wave is one of the greatest images of Australian art, a work in which sublimity of purpose and mastery of execution create an infallible ideogram of assuaged sorrow.}[13]
\]

Cossington Smith has really extracted the waves, the rhythm and overt form from the context of the beach. Whilst waves aren't usually included in discourse that hinges on still life painting, they are still in a sense, as they become a pattern. However, what is important here is the feminine objectivity that may or may not be related to desire in the sexual sense but are in a sense anachronistic, and now we may look at them and feel her deep abiding love and sadness. The objectivity of her waves belongs to the cosmographic treatment of geological forms of this set of three: which in turn, were a natural development from Norrie's 'reworkings' of the interior or still life, 'the luderum' of which Gilchrist says the:

\[
\text{space is intimate and stage-like.}[14]
\]

Cossington Smith, Snowden and Weiss have endowed the exterior forms of an almost abstract representation, with personal intimacy and a stage-like presence. For Cossington Smith, the waves are really a part of her material culture as a coastal Ausatralian, just as the herring was for Claez or the carafe of wine in the chapel niche was for Taddio Gaddi. Bruce James draws similarities to \textit{Sea Wave} in some of the work of van Gogh and Georgia O'Keefe as 'aesthetic equivalents', claiming that the gender specificity that is contained in the \textit{Sea Wave} and for that matter, in \textit{Hippeastrums Growing}, is the same as that found in the poetic abstractions of the American artist.:

\[
\text{Both artists had the ability, which we may be permitted to call sexual, of passing into the landscape by allowing it to pass through them. Sea Wave is a life-caste of the psyche, subtly paraded as landscape.}[15]
\]

On the notion of feminine intuition and the female psyche, Esther Harding introduces another ancient form of female deity, one who is as all Goddesses, 'Queen of Heaven'. The goddess is also ubuiqitous if one wishes it to be so:

\[
\text{She was born from the sea foam. In one form she was even represented as half-fish, a sort of mermaid or leviathan, inhabitant of the primal waters . . .}[16]
\]
The sea foam is the fragmentation of the wave, the rhythm - the flood of water: 'waves of euphoria' or perhaps an unspecified ecstasy which is a part of the inherent nature of woman's biology. What are we carrying within our biology - what primal instinct is lying in the psyche, which stirs up in our creations and finds expression through the natural forms found in women's art? The menstrual time for modern woman is made complex and often stressful due to the patterns of life style which negate our biological existence. Many women in western, hyped-up-technological societies have merely lost touch with their instinctual nature. But if one is taking time out to dream, to feel, to be: then one ought to experience 'waves of euphoria' of an undetermined nature during this time:

At the time of the period, instinctive feminine nature stirs in her and like a rising tide engulfs at least a part of her consciousness. This is not necessarily only a negative experience, it can also be a positive one, just as sleep can hardly be considered as only a waste of time, however inevitable.[17]

So woman experiences a 'little death' many, many times in her life, but at this time she may have the opportunity to dream, to enjoy the primal waves within her and look profoundly into the deeper basic layers of her own psychic and sensory life. Woman can also see death on a larger scale as having the positive face - of her knowing deep within, that life will grow again and remain forever - always - it will never end, nor will the ongoing cycle of the ebb and flow of the tide which is pulled by the moon - in the form of waves: The feminine principle - objectified. Woman has always found these forms through expressive media. At least for as long as she has been able to.

[Figures 21-24] reveal just another four paintings of fruit vines, flowers, insects and other traditionally overlooked items, painted by woman and derived from specific material cultures, alas, all being equal in spirit and necessity. The paintings are overbrimming with life and abundance and of course, the stuff of Bryson's 'bodily survival' and 'creatural habit'.

In Anna Quast's *Still Life with Butterfly* 1640, [Fig 21], the artist has placed the peeled lemon of Kalf and de Stomme in the very centre of her vanitas composition. Greer suggests that this competent still life painter may have had to maintain the lives of her family following the early death of her painter husband. However, in terms of vanitas or pronkstillen, this niche painting is highly dignified in its portrayal of the objectified reminder of our ephemerality: conjuring up more of the life side than the death side of existence, with the inclusion of luscious vines and full-bodied fruits. The curl of lemon peel is central in both the objective sense and in the formal sense, and rather suggests the ongoing cycle of life through its rhythmic pattern and playful
positivity. The peel dances the rhythm of life.

Judith Leyster's fruits of abundance are even more objectified, [Fig 22]. They are unusually large and central to the larder contents of any household. These fruits take on a fleshiness which is similar to those of Galicia's. Though they are sharper, almost hard and tough. Greer suggests that Leyster was influenced by the Utrecht 'Caravaggisti' and that most of her paintings were figures, that are almost identical to the work of Hals, equally as good, now placing Hal's authenticity at risk. Shame! Shame!

Rachel Ruysch's lively still life, takes on the animated, sinuous linearity of her flower paintings, [Fig 23]. There is a vivid and and vivacious display of life that is wild and, the curious inclusion of the self-contained nest of eggs: as well as the intoxicating array of nature. Ruysch's xenia are pulsating with the rhythms of primeval, biochemical nature. There is no sense of a void here: death does not exist. The prolific and pertinacious Ruysch also produced ten children.

Anna Peale's Still Life of the nineteenth century, is very formal even in its primitive presentation. There again is a slice of life - revealed within. Central to the composition is Hilarie Mais's melon and the regenerative seeds.

So woman constantly focuses on life and a reality that is concrete. C.P Estes says that she must do this through:

> stopping and looking and smelling and listening and feeling nd tasting. Focusing is the use of all of our senses, including intuition . . . .If you've lost your focus, just sit down and be still.[18]

Women have always painted what is still, focusing on life and the living. Many painters when lost and confused revert back to still life study, where they find their anchor, returning to the truthful and creative self.

Again Susan Norrie explores still life subjects in her Objet d'art, 1988, [Pl 39]. Anne Loxley comments that:

> Objet d'Art seemed too decorative for comfort.[19]

Loxley's remark is a sad one. Woman has always created and decorated beautiful forms be they either three-dimensional or two-dimensional: be they functional or decorative, the fine-crafting is
also there. Whatever purpose they serve, Norrie's paintings are beautiful and that is sufficient, investing them with spiritual significance. However, Norrie is compelled to perhaps give them what we term 'greater' meaning - a meaning that debilitates them and is totally unnecessary. Of course Norrie always returns to being 'still' when she is refocusing her ideas and feelings about art. Whilst she questions the instrument of art as a highly marketed product for investment, as has been said before, the works are sold out and have fetched higher than usual prices. Very risky and paradoxical.

As Loxley explains, the beautiful surfaces are in keeping with the luxurious state of material possessions of a superior nature. The full-bodied forms of Japanese vessels, decorative design of flowers, branches and fabrics, are also in keeping with a feminine art that is traditionally a celebration of life and everyday objects. Norrie need not make excuses. The patterns and surfaces which are there, are desirable and were there in the past when woman who always created a warm, titillating, spiritual environment, was making beautiful lace, tapestry, weaving, embroidery, stencilling, flower painting and still life painting. She was also applying her aesthetic spirit to the careful setting out of the dinner table and preparation for a life-giving meal. Of course, in our time this highly important and enjoyable activity is enjoyed by both men and women.

But once again, these objects of desire have given birth to new work for this artist. These objects have given new life to her work and her ideas. Sometimes the ideas ought to be left to the hand, the senses and the inner, female psyche as did Grace Cossington Smith and Margaret Olley. The latter artists produced many profound statements about life and woman's experience through the unconsciously derived emblems which continued to appear in their still life and interiors that celebrate death through life and hence acknowledging immortality.

Up until now the content and meaning of the art of woman has been discussed in the light of the development of a feminine aesthetic that goes far beyond the visual or the intellectual as woman takes on her creative power in the world of art before, during and after Modernism. At this stage of my observation, I would like to investigate some of the forms and compositional designs that seem prevalent in her art. The circular, spherical and centered image predominate. I will discuss these characteristics in the light of the Jungian notion of 'archaic remnants' which investigates dreams and the inner being: the soul if you like and the notion of that other aspect of our life and how the developing feminine iconography relates meaning within the cosmos, the spiritual. I am not equating this circularity of form with the obvious and stereotypical rounded form of outward physicality. However, I am interested in the essentialist theory of femininity. This is not a
separatist standpoint but rather an attempt to unearth a minute part of woman's language and feminine systems that have been suppressed for so long. The development of a feminine culture is not intended to annihilate all masculine culture but would foster a sound, living, surviving culture wherein masculine and feminine culture keep a wholesome balance as has never existed. This is preferrable to the phallocentric and maleficent culture that pervades our world. C.P Estes has this to say on keeping the balance and facing life and death straight in the face:

If one believes that the Life/Death/Life force has no stanza beyond death, it is no wonder that some humans are frightened of commitment. They are terrified to go through even one ending. They cannot bear to pass from verandah into the inner rooms. They are fearful, for they sense that there in the breakfast room of the house of love sits Lady Death, tapping her toe, folding and refolding her gloves . . . She means to maintain a balance.[20]
CHAPTER TEN:
Aureole: Strong and Simple. The Silent Motto.

Let me be most clear and most tender;
let no wind break my perfection.
Let the stream of my life run muted.
and a pure sleep unbar
my every depth and secret.[1]

The content of still life in the hands of woman has been understood, perceived and dreamt producing mostly forms that are circular or spherical by their very nature. Still life, the content of which is mostly related to woman in the traditional sense. Up until this point in this discourse, an attempt has been made to give meaning to some of the forms that have eventuated, gently moving through from Naturalism to Modernism and now post-Modernism. Many of these forms are utilized by woman either consciously or unconsciously as a feminine language. A feminine, visual vocabulary is becoming evident. How have these forms that link with 'creatural habit' and 'everyday bodily acts of survival' been used unconsciously as archetypal symbols that are about the mystery of woman - of life? In this chapter there seems to be a logical sequential imperative to attempt to discover the depth and the secret that many of the symbolic forms which have grown out of the stylized circular design of Modernism and the post-Modernist iconographies, that have taken on a feminine specificity.

More specifically, it will be the circle and sphere in extreme abstraction that is looked at rather than the more realistic and natural forms of the previous chapter. Though both forms have been organically evolved these abstractions will be treated more as signs that seem to have taken on a symbolic universality, yet again. These symbols which become signs, will maintain their poetic impact through the feminine objectivity that fuels their very creation. Esther Harding explains the meaning of 'symbol' in her chapter that encompasses the meaning of the moon cycle and how certain shapes and forms in nature correspond to male and female, which justifies the apparent unconscious choices of symbolic forms in the past and present:

A symbol, however, is not just a sign or token, a 'chosen' image, it is something far more significant. Primitive man did not choose his gods in any conscious or comprehending way. The process of god-choosing, to coin a word, takes place entirely otherwise. The volition seems to be in the symbol which obtrudes itself upon man's consciousness. It has fascination for him, mana it demands attention or worship.[2]

Harding expands man's selection of symbols as being encapsulated with a power: but of course
the power comes from within us not really from without. We, our unconscious, invests power in outer things as we need; thereby giving objects value. As artists, we take these symbols and thoroughly explore them. That is our impetus, our urge. But, we take the power out of the symbol, almost exorcising them by excessive and obsessive exploration. Although most art forms have a more complex nature as Harding explains:

For the symbolic creations of the unconscious contain layer after layer of meaning which cannot be exhausted in a word.[3]

Georgia O'Keefe and Sonia Delauney commenced using single image forms of a circular and spherical nature early in this century. One could say that their images were strongly modernist. In fact, their very personal abstract forms were derived through their feminine design sense and applications. However, they had abstracted the still life and life forms of their early training, conjuring up a set of images that were heavily symbolic. Not only were these images to be signifiers for their work but, they were distinctly female and, contained a power that was mysterious and alluring. It is necessary to ask why this may be so. Jung explains his use of the word 'symbol':

What we call a symbol is a term, a name, or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning. . . .

The yellow, circular form in Georgia O'Keefe's *Pelvis Series: Red with Yellow*, 1945, [Pl 40], would initially connote the sun, a meaning especially reinforced by the fiery, red, outer space. This, however, is not the specific intention of the artist's selected visual language:

Thus a word or an image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. It has a wider 'unconscious' aspect that is never precisely defined or fully explained[4]

So, if we take Jung's view of the wider "unconscious aspect" then O'Keefe's yellow shape was part of her metaphysical and individualistic approach to modernist methodologies of seeing, and, the personal and poetic representation of ideas through visual art. She perceives the circle as the cavity of a bone. Really, the studies of bones, were a vehicle through which she could express something that is specific and profound - that was Georgia O'Keefe. Those things which she had never seen realized before that were to be her aesthetic imperative. This image, the yellow void becoming whole has a power of sentience to all of us. It is strong and simple. The colour alone denotes many levels of meaning depending on our experiences, cultural and religious, as well as
our own psyche. Take for example the meaning of the ring of light in Christian art which is an aureole. An'aureole' is:

the circle of light which surrounds the head or the body as a symbol of holiness, in representations of angels, saints and other sacred figures. When the circle appears around the head alone, it is a halo or nimbus, when around the whole body, it is known as a glory, MANDORLA or Vesica Piscis. [5]

No doubt, the aureole has a 'sacred' power for many peoples but what is the reason for the inordinate selections of this particular shape to symbolize 'holiness' across world cultures. The early christians chose this shape to be the symbol of holiness, the extension of their God. So many cultures, ancient and modern choose the circle as a powerful, religious symbol.

Hence, the work of Modernist, Sonia Delauney[who incidentally did not show her work during Robert, her husband's lifetime], was bound up with the circle as an expressive image which became her decorative, iconic shape. Much of Delauney's work was within the decorative arts and, was powerful and original as well as feminine. Her abstract compositions were mostly based on the circular 'leitmotif'. These paintings resonate with rhythmic pattern and structure. Monumental II, 1967,[Aubusson Tapestry], [PI 41] is a compelling design based on concentric circles rendered in bright, pure colours and black and white. The circles are reminiscent of those ancient, celtic engravings from the British isles. These are circles within circles and spirals that are often juxtaposed with trapezoids and other chains of circles. In his book about the art and life of Sonia Delauney, Arthur Cohen observes that:

The source of the geometric imagery is not a metaphysics of the building blocks of the universe but rather a consideration of the tissue and webbing of light. One can see through the light to the density behind, the tissue overlay of light, the fuzzy edges of light.

Light is given volume by colour, and the illusion of light movement - the 'rhythm of Delauney's imagery - is adumbrated by colour.[6]

Although there has been much research carried out about the history of meaning of shapes, the artist's selection of colour is probably purely subjective, according to associative, emotional and formal considerations. No doubt, colour affects us all in varying ways and 'the tissue and webbing of light' could be perceived as being one and the same as the cosmic structure of the universe that only exists through light within or outside of our minds. Delauney has, however, used one small, orange circle to centre her large design. The impetus for her selection of this compositional device is desired knowledge. There is no doubt that Monumental II is a
celebratory image. We ask again, what could be the reason that the circle is so often a psychological choice for empowering an image with sentience, especially those of the art of woman. Aniela Jaffe says this about the selecting of symbols in Man and His Symbols:

The circle is a symbol of the psyche [even Plato described the psyche as a sphere]. The square [and often the rectangle] is a symbol of earthbound matter, of the body of reality. In most modern art, the connection between these two primary forms is either non-existent, or loose and casual.[7]

Jaffe goes on to discuss the idea that man's soul has become separated from its roots and that is the present psychic state of twentieth century man. This is a Jungian based theory and is strengthened in the late, late twentieth century by the desperate search for meaning through so-called 'spirituality', a reaction to the onerous task to save the planet and 'souls'. Of course Jaffe wrote this essay some thirty years ago, though, what she says still rings true. Certainly Somer Brodribb believes that twentieth century man has lost the point to life on earth, finding no heaven, finding no other life out there as yet, and consequently, taking himself seriously, sulking because he does not know the answer to the great mystery of matter. But, what about the importance of 'soul' and its required nourishment. Much of woman is striving through her inner powers of reasoning, her art and her creations, to keep body and soul in union. Mercifully, there are some men doing this also. Unfortunately, since the Industrial Revolution, woman has taken care of life and the planet after man has taken what he wants and devastated. Jaffe further explains possible significance of the circle and the connection with the whole of our unconscious through nature:

Dr. M. L. von Franz has explained the circle [or sphere] as a symbol of the Self. It expresses the totality of the psyche in all its aspects, including the relationship between man and the whole of nature.[8]

Much of man has lost his connection with nature, woman remains at one with nature - therefore it could be said that she employs the circle intuitively, to express her inner senses and knowledge. It is her connection of soul and psyche, when she wakes her soul. Jaffe speaks of the self-contained:

The single most vital aspect of life - its ultimate wholeness.[9]

In the pictorial culture of the Australian Aboriginal the circle is most often presented as a series of concentric circles and, presents as an abstract ideograph which contains a multitude of symbolic meanings. The circles can have multiplied meaning at the same time. For example;
Campsite, Breast, Stone, Well, Rockhole, Cloacca, Fire, Hole, Fruit and Hill. Of course, these symbols are also similar to many western, graphic symbols, even those that are used for instance in survey drafting, naive and children's art and the unconsciously, sought icons that float their way into abstract forms of visual art. Of course, the aboriginal ideographs have a totally different purpose or function; even though some aspects can be equated to certain forms of modern art at times. One could almost believe that the modern human is advancing backward into the honest, simple sophistication of misnamed 'primitive' peoples and their cultures. Perhaps modern woman is moving closer to her intuition, her psyche, her unconscious and her primal instinct.

Interestingly enough, four smaller circles placed in the configuration of a square can represent; Rain, Ants or Eggs: the water of life and the self-contained, ellipsoid of new life. However, the Aboriginal picturemaker, selects the ideographs and symbols quite consciously.

Throughout previous chapters of this discourse, the objectivity of certain forms that derived from biological and geological phenomena, have been discussed as being pertinent to the art and therefore, life of woman. Such forms are; the egg, the cave, the grotto, the bowl, the moon, the pool, the flower[tree], the fruit, the volcanic chasm. So too, there can be seen to be a type of homogeneous linking of forms in much of the pictorial, symbolic language across the globe. But, there are vital links in the art of woman which could be endemic to the species. Ann Marie Brodie in her essay on Papunya painting includes the observation of Nicholas Peterson, concerning the ideographical meaning of much of Australian Aboriginal imagery which he perceives to be:

an artistic system with only a small vocabulary of graphic signs, plus a limited range of animal tracks, creates the impression of a certain homogeneity . . . yet any close inspection of this art reveals a wide and complex variation in structure and compositions.[10]

The homogeneity of the content of the art of all Woman can be quite, precariously perceived, vowing to the limitations of the amounts of work that are available to sight as evidence. It must be said that this entire discourse treads dangerously in the journey towards the unfolding of what might be a 'feminine aesthetic'.

In Women's Dreaming, 1981, [Pl 42], by Turkey Tolsen Tjupurrula and his daughters, Kitty and Pamela Nakamarra, the creators have placed the homogeneous symbol of the white dotted concentric circles in the centre of the picture space. They have covered the golden, dotted ground with a small, circular ideograph which is, a floral motif representing the bush cherry. This motif
consists of a small, white dot with smaller, black dots latching on to its edge as a host dot. This follows the leitmotif of the flower, the mandala, the centre of growth that has been woven through this discourse. The importance of this floral motif is highlighted by its inclusion on a white, densely, dotted background of the ovoids in the central activity of the picture. The u-shapes of course, indicate that the women were sitting at this place. They were sitting there - exactly where the wild cherry is to be found growing. As always in the art of woman and the art about woman, the objects of domestic use or spaces are included. In this instance of Aboriginal Women's Dreaming, their digging sticks and containers for bush food are present. These are the utensils that are paramount to the preparation and consumption of nourishment; the life giving substances. Here again is that linking device that Bryson mentions as being present in the still life paintings of all ages from ancient times up until the present. These are those objects that derive from the material culture of all human cultures and civilizations. Still life, and the content of which is homogeneous to the art of woman from western, traditional renditions to modernist, abstract symbols that, stem from the forms of the fruits, bowls, trees, flowers, moons, planets, earth or the more chthonic, grotto, cave and hole in the ground - where the digging takes place. The digging for the growth - the digging for the foods of abundance. The digging for water.

In *Women's Dreaming*, by Turkey Tjupurrula and his daughters, the central roundel represents the women's camps and of course, this ideograph can be employed for variations of the meanings previously stated. The dot, circle and radiating shapes appear again in *Women's Dreaming*, 1981, [Pl 43], by Tim and Vivien Johnson. There is however, no other pictorial form that equates to these isolated images of the Australian Aborigine. Annemarie Brodie infers:

> The dot, line, circle which are often perceived to be the source of its considerable diversity and innovation [11]

In this second representation, *Women's Dreaming*, the overall surface of the picture plane differs enormously to *Women's Dreaming* of Plate 42. This overall surface or alternatively allover surface, is most often the land area, the pathways and the landmarks that are relevant and most specific to the story being passed on. The pattern is still formed on a compositional symmetry: here, there are indications of further complexities such as; women's footprints, the large floral motifs that are women sitting around campsites, containers[oval shapes] and rocks for grinding seed to make damper. Might one imagine that the rocks or stones are represented by the larger black dots, strategically placed near the bowls. Hence again the stone, the bowl, the flower - the flowering of woman in art - in aboriginal art. Ann Marie Brodie suggests the Australian Aboriginal women have always held their own ceremonies with the:
associated designs, dances and stories.

Women's ceremonial art includes, sand paintings, body designs and the decoration of ritual objects.[12]

However, Brodie reveals that their paintings on canvas, [that form of Aboriginal expression that eventuated in the 1970's in the Papunya area], 'have tended to be small' and most often resembled the work of the male artists. The latter fact is understandable for many reasons but, the most obvious is that the expressionistic and instrumental devices are homogeneous and have a homogeneity that lies deep within their culture. However small is interesting when considering the art of woman. Brodie also advises that the women have gained the experience of more contemporary forms of paintings, by assisting their husbands. This is a complex social situation that not only stems from within their own culture but, from the interaction that has occurred with the influence of white settlement.

On the subject of dimension, again Germain Greer makes some vital observations: for the dimension and scale of woman's art has traditionally been smaller to small, especially those fine, intricate mappings held across the surfaces of lace work, embroidery, tapestries and miniatures of fruit and flower paintings. Greer has this to say about dimension:

The element of heroic maleness has always been present in the concept of the artist as one who rides the winged horse above the clouds beyond the sight of lesser men, a concept seldom applied to those who worked with colours until the nineteenth century. When the inevitable question is asked, Why are there no great women artists? it is the dimension of art which is applied . . . For the lover of painting there is another question, Why is the women's work usually so small? [13]

Greer goes on to equate size with self-confidence and, although this may be so, we now understand and perceive that large is not always aesthetically successful or as spiritually rich. We have witnessed this historically in the conversion from Greek to Roman. The smaller work can be more monumental, through its strength of idea, technique and above all self-containment. Just how big is a human body, be it male or female. The human being must have an art that conveys contextual relationship. So often largeness has slipped accidentally into the category of the grotesque or vulgar: just as mainstream, western culture has in many of its various forms, through the uncensored, insensitive enticement of that big country across the Pacific, and the erection of one, too, many edifices, lost its roots in alienation.

Before returning to a discussion of the symbolic power of the circular and elliptoid in
contemporary forms and the similarities that are found in neolithic times, it is necessary to complete the discussion surrounding the Australian Aboriginal art that relates to woman. The works for discussion will be of a semi-figurative narrative mode. The first, *Women's Law at Marapinti*, 1991, [Pl 44], again gives evidence of the very, specific country which is mapped out across the picture surface. There is also reference to a centrally placed ideograph. Again, the use of concentric circles - the roundel is employed. This time the circular body is given appendages which are highly animated. Here, there is action, the movement of the woman. The movement which represents the strength, power and integral role which woman has in the overall Aboriginal culture.[more specifically the tribe, place or group]. This is woman who brings the Law and ceremonies to this country, these people. These women are highly important, as are the body paints used in ritual which, they too bring with them. The colours represent the night and the land[day]. The women from different Laws come here together and share. This is almost a global phenomenon and an occurrence which is now taking place on a more regular basis across the world. They of course, carried out rituals of which, judging by the animation of the figure, 'dance' as we call it, must be an integral part. There are the homogeneous u-shaped symbols which denote figures sitting down and the footprints which tell us that women came to this place from other places. In this picture, there is also the white bowl which we have seen so many times before, the basis of any material culture: pure, clean vessels for the preparation and consumption of food. It could be the symbol for the white clay that is used in the ritual and the Laws about the paint. Prominent though it is, it is also of a circular nature.

Pam Johnston Dahl-Helm's pictures of her exhibition, *Spirituality and Mother Earth: Woman's Stories*, 1993, [Fig 25], consist of goldleaf, shellac and acrylic on rag paper. Johnston Dahl-Helm explains that she applies gesso to the paper, then laying the goldleaf on a polyurethane base, she manipulates it, in order to obtain a 'skin affect'. Skin - this is real life matter. Johnston acknowledges our bodily state, our inherent nature: the mother who passes on life to the child. She then feeds the child from herself and the earth. Once again relevance is given to those planets, those circles way out there, the sun and the moon. The moon and cycle of the body of woman. In Johnston Dahl-Helm's own words:

incorporating loving, nurturing and the giving of life . . . .This series of works explores the nature of life and spirituality through four states:

conception /fertility:

birth metamorphosis:

life:

death/transition using the image of woman's body as an allegorical alignment with mother earth, [14]
Johnston Dahl-Helm uses the analogy of the linking circle as the chain or bond that joins woman through the generations 'and back again, always to Mother Earth'. [15] The forms of woman's body also move from schematic representations of human specificity to circular forms that are adumbrations of the pregnant stomach, the planet earth, the soul of woman and the body within woman. Observing more closely, the drawing of the woman with the spherical outline which surrounds her body one can see a white line that is similar to an aura around her body. The aureole and radiating lines that surround her head seem to be another homogeneous or archetypal emblem. The self-contained body - the soul - she is within the aura of her soul. There is of course much more which the writer may never understand or know about in the context of The Dreaming and the very, complex mythologies that communicate through systems which are highly subtle and developed to levels of sophistication which, are therefore, incomprehensible to western people, who aren't in touch with the psyche or the intuitive Self. Nonetheless, we do experience dreams of many types:

Very often dreams have definite, evidently purposeful structure, indicating an underlying idea or intention - . Though, as a rule, the latter is not immediately comprehensible.[16]

Jung's statement in *Man and his Symbols* about the 'evidently, purposeful structure' of dreams, which is indicative to 'underlying ideas and intentions,' is applicable to the Art of the Australian Aboriginal Dreamings and to any dreams of those sleeping or awake. The second half of the statement rings most true for us but whatever we take from the Dreaming images is only superficial. The same could be said about much of the artwork of woman that we have looked at so far, and those images which develop into post- Modernist forms. This is especially referring to the symbolic abstractions and the stylized images of late, twentieth century woman.

Recognizing the frequency of the circle and ellipse, it is necessary to look at some of the forms that have evolved out of these feminine specific shapes. This 'silent motto'[17] is withheld in the momentum of Bronwyn Oliver's still life sculptures, *Web*, 1992, [Pl 45] and, *Relic*, [Pl 46]. This silent motto is the apt description that Bruce Arnold gives to the celtic motives that are found all over the British Isles and other parts of Europe. Arnold states that this motif or ideograph, is basic to all Celtic art as it is to much of Australian Aboriginal art. Similarly, the function of this so-called art was not merely to decorate but, holds a profound 'depth and secret'. In the case of Celtic art, that mystery has never been unfolded. Bronwyn Oliver's borrowings reveal the spiral forms and in the Aboriginal paintings we have seen the concentric circles which are so similar in format to those of the Celts, [Figs 26, 27, 28]. There must be a perceived magic which operates
from these numens in the form of shapes. We are reminded of a previous glance at the meaning and magic of the stone as moon deity, in early representations such as a cone or pillar of stone. Here, at New Grange, there are the pillar of stone and the decorative carvings of the spiralling circle, which in turn, form a pattern of diamonds.[Fig 26]. The images of these earlier, earth dwellers curiously remained as simple geometric patterns for so long. As post-Modern people we search for meaning in these simple geometric forms which find their way back again into the art of the twentieth century. Speculation reveals that these Celtic forms could be linked to some cult which surrounds the moon deities; those which pervaded the religious life of many ancient, neolithic cultures.

Wherever these circles were found, especially remains of the 'great wooden cathedrals' [18], large amounts of 'pottery and domestic rubbish' were also found. It is assumed that this 'rhyparos' which cannot be linked to 'ordinary, domestic activity', be linked to the votive offerings and ceremonial rites of 'ritual feasting and drinking of religious festival'. However, Evan Hadingham warns us of the danger of making:

fortuitous similarities between one culture and another[19]

No doubt, with this warning in mind, one cannot help but maintain a fascination in pondering about the links which are always found in the material culture of civilizations. Hadingham asks the question:

Was there, indeed, ever one'Mother Goddess'? Stylized female carvings are found in some French tombs, but rarely elsewhere.[20]

Thoughts such as these also lead to the question of the 'unconscious culture of woman' that Estes often suggests is existent. Certainly the symbols are there. These may well serve some oracular cult. The scale, the distance on the globe which at once joins and separates these enigmatic forms, also forces us to enquire of the source: was it from within the planet earth or from without? The strange one armed creature of the celtic carving,[Fig 28] would suggest either an alien form or a headless woman. There is a curious abundance of concentric circles. Hadingham capitulates that the mystery only becomes deeper in revealing that:

The celtic world knew no centre, nor was it conscious of its own unity.[21]

Perhaps this is also the spiritual nature of our contemporary or modern culture. Perhaps we are
forming a new religion which is a natural reaction to the adoration of the void of the dollar - buying and selling. There is a certain sense of tragedy and futility that lurks around the idea of an artwork becoming an object of exploitation for the market place, in order that 'suits' can purchase them to make an immorally, enormous amount of money on the sweat of human labour and love. The ritual, the spiritual, turns into dollars and cents at the cultural supermarket when the artwork loses its magic power: that which it held when it was created and even maintains when it is purchased, owing to its uplifting, magic and mysterious power when passed on at a fair and realistic price. Jung's pre-occupation with 'man's' imminent downfall is explained through the power of dreams and the use of symbols:

But to know and understand the psychic life-process of an individual's whole personality, it is important to realize that his dreams and their symbolic images have a much more important role to play.[22]

It is through symbolic images that white man finally and, almost, too-latedly gains some insight into the sophisticated culture that he has barbarically dominated and all but destroyed. He finds out just a smidgen about, the refined and pacifist cerebral culture's Dreaming and only through the proliferation of their 'art forms': an eventuation that has occurred mostly because of the profits that can be made through the commercial exploitation of these once sacred objects. Has he ever looked at his own inherited culture so intently, in order that he might solve the devastating problems which, are social and environmental? The spirit and the body have become separated from the soul, due to this denial of the spirit.

Many women artists have used their creative expression to identify and communicate the nature of what is problematic to modern and traditional western culture. Mirka Mora, states the obvious, using the face of woman with the lunar-like light form reflecting from within the feminine face. When the Soul Sleeps, 1970,[Pl 47], is a blatant representation of the feelings and ideas of the artist: a personification if you like, of what is usually presented in metaphorical form. It could be more accurately described as lying somewhere between the two modes of expression: the figurative or personified/the abstracted or metaphorical. The forms presented are simplified and stylized. There are the round, moon-like face, the meandering line for hair and the vivid green body of colour below, which supports the face. We have seen this face before.

Any discussion of the art of contemporary Australian woman, would not be complete without the inclusion of the name of Janet Laurence. Her work articulates a very conscious expression of forms and objects which are about feminine objectivity. Laurence has set up her very own pictorial and stylistic devices. Melusine and Object, 1984,[Fig 29] displays two, very
compositionally, separate images. Both of these images become iconic in terms of what develops into later work through various layerings within formats of installations. This painting is part of an exhibition which Laurence held at the United Artist's Gallery, in Melbourne in 1985. The title of her exhibition, *Life is Probably Round*, deals with the primeval, the mythical and as most of her work to date, the pursual of forms in visual imagery which touch upon the primal in woman. The object in Fig 29, closely resembles an egg. Rachel Ruysch included the nest of eggs in her *Still Life* of 1711,[Fig 23]. The nest is the ultimate, self-contained capsule of life and nourishment. Melusine is the archetypal faery who is an underlying theme in A.S. Byatt's astonishingly complex but magical story of romance, *Possession*:

And what was she, the Fairy Melusine?
Were these her kin, Echidna's gruesome brood,
Scaly devourers, or were those her kind
More kind, those rapid wanderers of the dark
Who in dreamlight, or twilight, or no light
Are lovely Mysteries and promise gifts -
White ladies, teasing dryads, shape-changers-
Like smiling clouds, or sparkling threads of shears[23]

Hence, Laurence's motifs are conjuring up, calling for the arcane images which lurk in our unconscious: our primal souls. Who is this faery Melusine?

The large pastel paintings with collaged fragments[grasses especially] - brood with a dark intensity and exert a strong pull - like the moon alluded to in a number of works.[24]

Elizabeth Cross discusses Laurence's exhibition from within her own framework of feminine sensibility. Cross includes a comment which poignantly insists that, the work relies on the installation concept, each separate work hinging on the whole for strength. Each part belongs intrinsically to the other. Perhaps there is a message herein. 'What menace threatens to devour us?' It seems that Laurence, through her intelligence and poetic sensibility conveys her message in this way:

The sombre intensity of works like *Leda's Moons* and *Anima* with its curious white face-like shape cocooned in a richly embellished nest, suggest the metamorphic and the apparition of dreams.[25]

Once again, the aureole, the egg, the moon, the bowl, the fruit are the basic forms which pervade
the art and life of woman. Laurence has delved deeply into her unconscious and given a type of music to her painterly forms through a truthful investigation of her spiritual, feminine powers.

Strong and simple are the forms of Marion Borgelt's *Field and Body Suite, No III*, 1992, [Pl 48]. This pigment and pastel painting on paper, presents nine ideographs, which are pictorial configurations of the circle or oval. One of which is the object in Laurence's *Melusine and Object*. In fact, the title which, includes the signifiers, "field and body", suggests that Borgelt is crossing similar, psychic territory to that of Laurence. Later work of Laurence reveals further exploration of forms and spaces that might reveal the secret and depth of our searching. Both include the triangular form and the cross, as well as the feminine elliptoids and circles. Do these images allude to a modern day alchemy? It is possible that these women employ the materials of the artist in order that they may pursue the transmutations of paint, pastel, paper, circle, egg, cloud of light, far back into the magic and mysteries of our primeval, inherited remnants. Borgelt's employment of the alchemical, symbolic colours is intriguing. C.P Estes explains the three stages of alchemy which are the essential steps that the protagonist in the *Handless Maiden*, that psychically vigorous tale, must go experience in order to get in touch with her psyche, her soul:

In alchemy there are three stages; the nigredo the black or the dark dissolving stage, the rubedo, the red or the sacrificial stage, and the albedo, the white or the resurgent stage.[26]

When the maiden bargains with the devil she is in nigredo, when she has her hands chopped off, she is in rubedo. When leaving home and her father, who betrayed her naive soul, her hands are wrapped in white bandages, she is seeking to learn, she is in albedo. Borgelt has used only three colours being black, red and white. She has employed the colours and geometrical forms of alchemical practice. It is probable that this artist is communicating either consciously or unconsciously with the transformation of her soul[individually] or, that of woman [collectively], or the planet [globally]. Of course one could write a universe of ideas surrounding the possible meanings which might be within this painting.

Juliet Fowler Smith has included the colours of nigredo, rubedo and albedo in the installation, *Installation detail*, 1988. [Pl 49]. Here is the black that evokes the void, the emptiness of an impenetrable state of non-existence. The red corpuscle, full of blood will burst into the light of the heart of the placental matter. There again are the spiralling circles, that may be the 'circadian rhhythms' of the 'soul-self' and the 'heroic animus' which C.P Estes describes when discussing the need to nourish the creative life for woman:
It is bitterly harsh to water them once a week, or once a month or even once a year. They each have their own circadian rhythms. They need us and need the water of our craft every day.[27]

Circadian rhythms, chalk circles: Estes continually included the notion of the circle in the drawing of a chalk circle which protects the handless maiden from the devil when she stands inside it. The circle is symbolic, as is the round river moat: the water which protects those within. To draw a circle around oneself is symbolic of a magic circle of protection which is also empowered in sacred thought. Estes extrapolates that here:

we see a fragment of the old, night religions. The young woman bathes, dresses in white, draws a chalk circle around herself. It is an old, goddess ritual to bathe - purify - to don the white gown - the garb of descent to the land of the dead[28]

In her essential post-Modernist manner, Estes moves on to explain that woman can stop and listen to the voices of a far away ancestral time:

a voice that tells us how to stay strong, how to keep simple and pure.[29]

It seems that artist women such as Laurence, Borgelt and Oliver are doing just that. Denise Green has maintained a simple, pure but strong palette and composition in her painting Alassio, 1985, [Pl 50]. Again we must refer to the medieval movement of alchemy around 1000 A.D. The alchemist's concern for setting matter in a position that was on par with the celestial spirit of Christianity, called for graphic explanation in the form of symbols. Jaffe explains that:

What they sought was a wholeness of man encompassing mind and body, and they invented a thousand names and symbols for it. One of their central symbols was the quadratura circuli [the squaring of the circle], which is no more than the true mandala.[30]

So, that artists who studied alchemy or, were aware of alchemy, were influenced into producing, 'imaginative art' - art conjured up from within, the dream from deep within the psyche, rather than the art of the 'sensory style' that is taken from without. Green's circle on a square on a circle, has other, more suspicious looking curves placed nearby - nuanced by the artist's hand. This art that seemingly stems from Green's imagination might offer a profound spirituality as we suggest do any of the geometric, abstract forms found in neolithic and other ancient times. Do Green's basic, geometric forms consciously represent symbols of weariness or of grief? Perhaps Green
has gone too far, attempting to stretch the imagination beyond it's limits. Whilst her chosen icons hold universal meanings, they are at the same time, recognisable forms. How do we comprehend or perceive such a personal language? It may be a language of the collective but, we are cut off from our roots. Or, we may, as are so many post-Modernist women looking back to the times when the Goddesses were all powerful and cast it as a magic object exhibited from the unconscious of Circe, the sorceress. We are acquainted with the association between the feminine and the lunar. This may well be the sun, the alluring, the majestic:

in the Greek she is 'frighteningly powerful' having a seductive and more shrill than melodic song . . . .In the realm of the Great Goddess, magic was still an immediate divine power, not something artificial, not sorcery.[31]

So there, as Karl Kerenyi suggests, the strength of the Goddesses lay deep within the spiritual soul of the human. Green's strong and simple image could also be aligned to the mandala - which in turn relates to the Christian, saintly representations and hence, aureole. Green's icon can also be related to the 'abstract circular figures' found in Romanesque churches, that 'probably stem from pagan originals'. Jaffe extends the argument:

In architecture the mandala also plays an important part - but one that often passes unnoticed. It forms the ground plan both of secular and sacred buildings in nearly all civilizations.[32]

On the subject of architecture, Alassio is a town on the Italian Riviera that boasts a natural protection by an amphitheatre of great mountains, which protect it from cold winds. It is on the shore of a great bay and has a beach that is two miles long. It is possible that Green makes reference in her abstraction, to the essence of experiences of this town or, perhaps to the flavour of architecture in this town.

On the subject of sacred architecture, the table-top, the luderum and the quadratura mentioned in early chapters which relates to the sacred, the altar, Anneke Silver has presented her own altarpiece in post-Modern times in Bush Ikon, 1989, [Pl 51]. It is executed in the traditional triptych of christian, architectural symbolism. Silver has included the moon. Yes, it is definitely a portrayal of the full moon as the waning moon is on the left and the waxing moon is on the right. Silver has also adopted the traditional, christian iconographic media of goldleaf on wood. There again is the Tree of Life, the stone or rock, and the three phases of the moon. The main concern for this artwork is that it epitomises the eclecticism of post-Modernist language. It encompasses, a variety of religions and artistic styles and techniques. It is interesting to refer to
so that discussion may prevail around the possible source of Silver's content and forms which are bound up with feminine deities that are receiving renewed attention in these new fin de siecle years.

This renewed sometimes fanatical attention to female deities is no doubt tied into the search for something profound and spiritual which is hoped to aid in the empowerment of woman. One must perceive that this movement was inevitable, following a lengthy period of patriarchal, religious and secular oppression. The yearning to draw body and soul together again - unlike Mirka Mora's sadly, sleeping soul or the existentialist, alienated male of Brodribb's Late Patriarchy, the women in post-Modernism are dancing to their own rhythms.

The abstract pagan symbol of the three phases of the moon and the sketches of the three Triunes of Moon Deity that are found on ancient coins, are also present in late twentieth century woman's art. Here are the symbols that represent woman's search for her primitive origins: the casting off of the post-Modernist trappings of Late Patriarchal Capitalism. Anneke Silver has used other very obvious adaptations of pagan, female deities in her *Epiphany of the Goddess*, 1989, [Pl 52]. Noticeably, the lively ritualistic dancing takes place on an ovoid plate. Silver's blatant use of symbols is somewhat too overt to be clever and her Goddesses are flimsy figures that are directly absorbed from some such images as *The Hecate Triformis*, [Fig33]. Very little is left to the imagination and the work is lacking in the mysterious and truly spiritual qualities that are present, for example, in the fruit of Fede Galicia: the vessels of Margaret Olley, the interiors of Grace Cossington Smith, the dignified objects of Anne Vallayer Coster and the personal iconography of Janet Laurence.

To conclude this chapter on the circular forms that emanate from a multitude of earthbound, spiritual and religious sources, it is necessary to touch once again on the significance of the stone or rock which often has appeared in the varying art forms in this discourse. In [Fig 34], the symbol that was found in the catacombs is a direct derivation of the moon which equals stone in neolithic cultures: the stone that becomes the altar for the worshipper of the Moon Deity. The stone or rocks which appeared in Australian Aboriginal images, also appears as an oval or circular symbol of significance and curiously enough, the sacredness of the stone is also found in Celtic lands. [Fig 35] shows *The Turoe Stone* which is in County Galway on the far, western edge of Ireland. The stone is gently carved with the usual spiral motifs of some skill. The stone is thought to be a religious, cult object. Whatever its meaning, this Celtic art is carried out by the so-called artist/sculptor who:
follows the shape and contour of the stone on which he works. His thinking is three dimensional and his concern is with harmony, rhythm and the balanced pattern of simple, abstract forms, rather than with any attempt at representational art reflecting his immediate animal and vegetable environment. In this sense it seems spiritual in nature, belonging to the realms of pagan magic, possibly part of a heathen religious cult which in all other respects is lost to us forever.[33]

We can't help but notice Bruce Arnold's presumptive usage of the masculine gender for the appointing of artistic ownership to this fine and ritualistic crafting. One can perceive why so many women have sought the need to explore the feminine past through mythologies, art, design, craftworks, literature and music. Woman in art has to be rediscovered, rethought and hence, revalued. It is quite possible that we are moving into a new world that more closely resembles an ancient pagan world and expresses itself through abstract symbols which will develop into a new and universal language through on-line technology and celluloid imagery. There will though, always be the necessity for marks to be made by the human hand, the variety of which is inexhaustible provided that we maintain or rediscover our true 'souls'. As for woman and her art, it will continue to be reactionary and the almost, too obvious forms that echo the distant mythological past may prevail for a time. This is a part of the healing process of psychic enlightenment and growth that is happening in our time. It is perhaps wishful thinking to deem that this new pagan world of new found spirituality will facilitate the healing necessary after two thousand years of devastation of the earth, and the human spirit.
CONCLUSION


The Woman With Hair of Gold

There was a very strange but beautiful woman with long golden hair as fine as spun gold. She was poor and without mother or father, and lived in the woods alone and wove upon a loom made of black walnut boughs. A brute who was the son of the coal burner tried to force her into marriage, and in an effort to buy him off, she gave him some of her golden hair.

But he did not know or care that it was spiritual, not monetary, gold that she gave him, so when he sought to trade her hair for merchandise in the market place, people jeered at him and thought him mad.

Enraged, he returned by night ot the woman's cottage and killed her with his hands and buried her body by the river. For a long time no one noticed that she was missing. No one inquired of her health or health. But in her grave, the woman's golden hair grew and grew. The beautiful hair curled and spiralled upward through the black soil, and it grew looping and twirling more and more, and up and up, until her grave was covered by a field of swaying golden reeds.

Shepherds cut the curly reeds to make flutes, and when they played them, the tiny flutes sang and would not stop singing.

Here lies the woman with golden hair
murdered and in her grave
killed by the son of the local coal burner
because she wished to live.

And that is how the man who took the life of the woman with golden hair was discovered and brought to justice so that those who live in the wild woods of the world, like we ourselves do, were safe again once more.[1]

From whence do such tales begin we wonder, and why for so long has woman been a prisoner in her own home, at the hands of physical oppression. Is this another aspect of nature that we must accept or can we alter the culture in which we live?

As woman we have travelled a long way from those ancient times when, it seems apparent to us that female deities loomed largely or those times when women shared the powers and, even better used her power as an integral part of the ebb and flow of the said culture or civilization. Much of the art of the late, twentieth century Australian woman, appears to be about these passages of time. They are narratives which surround this journey - the passing from one time to another - the spiritual travelling - remembering - remembering through our psyche - reaching deep within to our primal Self. Much of the art of woman of our time still surrounds, exalts, or didactically explores the domestic place/space of woman in the traditional role of nurturer, caregiver - the enslavement which resulted in the oppression - depression - ennui. I will complete this discourse by coming the full circle, so to speak, and moving through the newly evolved forms that have specifically grown out of post-Modernism and inevitably a last look at the traditional painting forms which have remained.
One can't help but notice the appearance of the boat as vessel in much of the art of this era. What is its significance? Lynne Boyd's *Boat [After Manet]*, 1987, [Pl 53], and her *Maritime*, 1986, [Pl 54], are curiously treated as vessels that serve the category of still life painting. Boyd has given the boat an iconographic quality, removing it from its usual context to a more ethereal one. The boat seems to have left the buoyancy of a water base and floated into air, transforming into a heavenly body. Both of these works are for the writer extremely, powerful, iconic images. The curves, the centrality of composition, the singularity, the stillness, are paramount to the sentience which venerates this vessel.

Wendy Teakel takes her boat out of the water and places it within the protection of another vessel. This ghostly vessel that resembles an upside down head and neck is imprisoned within a sinister fence. [Fig 36], and a restless surround. One can almost see a person in this boat. Ancient myths often refer to the boat as a symbolic vessel that traverses from evil to good - the risen soul - the receiving of wisdom - the arrival at the place in the psyche of the Self. The boat that saves one from drowning in the deluge. All of these metaphors refer to the constant search or struggle for spiritual and psychological survival, rather than physical. Although, that too has been an epic struggle for woman. The moon sends the deluge but she also provides a means of salvation. Esther Harding investigates the metaphor of the boat in western mythology:

> The boat that she provided was an ark, a crescent moon boat, and in this her people were carried to the sun, the place of warmth and light.[2]

In [Fig 37], *The Egyptian Moonboat*, the moon rests on the crescent. It is self-propelled and 'guarded in its journey by the two eyes of Horus'. So the boat here is crossing the passage - of time or space, but, whichever it is to do with, it is a type of rescue or resurrection.

> that redemption from the cold-blooded attitude of the unconscious waters of instinct[3]

On the other hand, [Fig 38], *Sinn enshrined on the crescent and surrounded by the circle of the full moon, Sinn is the man in the moon who fights the devil or darkness who would devour him*. Perhaps Teakel's vessel holds Sinn, who is protected by his own head - a metaphor for sensibility and wisdom - the light of grace - the bright soul that is surrounded by the darkness. Boyd's *Maritime I*, is as the Egyptian Moonboat, it is self-propelled and it moves through a passage in time.

Janet Laurence the quintessential, late, twentieth century, woman artist, has travelled through a
career as an artist, reaching her mid-career. Laurence has had no children, but, she says herself, rather chooses to concentrate on her painting creations. Laurence has discussed in the light of her feminine objectivity, her subject matter which is quite often an inquiry into our mysterious origins. She has given titles to paintings which address those mysteries. This urge that woman has to trace her heritage, be it biological or spiritual, appears to be a post-Modernist phenomenon of intuitive origins. Blinded Periphery, [Pl 55], Colonization, 1986, [Pl 56], and Traces of Our Passage, [Pl 57] all contain references to the spaces of our mind and inherited unconscious. Psychic consciousness of where we are, and who we are; mappings of the mind if you like. Laurence has curiously developed a pictorial style that shares a certain similarity with the Australian Aboriginal pictures, in that it creates a feeling of mind space that covers the canvas surface but, doesn't really view from the side or the top but rather is from within. She deploys an inimitable iconography of feathers, grasses and trails of the unconscious, colour and light that hover and resonate like the nuances in the timbre of music, rather than the traditional, pictorial imagery of the west. Laurence has a unique relationship with and response to nature. The artist says this about our position today:

I've always thought about how we deal with nature in Australia . . . .Its always a battle against nature. There is no romantic period that celebrates nature except for the brief phase of the Heidleberg School. We've tried so hard to catch up with international trends, we have neglected what is here.[4]

The paintings are then ambivalent. They are filled to the brim with enchantment and magic and at the same time they make comment on devastation and repression. As well as this dichotomy, there is an acknowledgement of spaces and that mind mapping in and around those forms that were spiritual signs for the artist. Elizabeth Butel the art writer who seems to have a special insight into the work of Australian women artists makes perceptive comment:

Primal images such as the egg and the nest became an obsession, circles and spirals dominate her personal iconography.

Laurence's more recent work has moved on from this and:

is less interested in the picturesque and the image as a visual thing and more concerned with the sensations and feelings that it gives rise to. With the nests she worked from the inside out, but now the process has reversed.[4]

The still life artist Margaret Olley is still painting in 1993. Olley has traversed a lot of mind
space in her creating life within the twentieth century. *Cornflowers and Apples*, 1993, [Pl 58],
does not obviously tell the story of Olley's narrative. Of course, the narrative is not religious or
heroic, or gestural in the conventional sense. It is highly possible that Olley can now create or
map out this space that deals with an interior that contains her usual corners, table-tops,
windows, rugs, pictures, cloths, bowls vases and fruits. Olley intuitively senses what is there -
the space is more ambiguous than in earlier works of the same subject. It is all encompassing.
The interiors with still life are now mappings that have been firmly surveyed within her mind,
hersoul, her psyche. It is her spiritual place; just as Laurence maps out historical narratives using
very specific pictorial devices, it is their Dreaming. Olley has softened her forms creating a
psychological ambiguity that conjures up more cosmographic space that is drawn from the
unconscious. Olley is alone and great in her future.

Glancing at the place that woman has journeyed from to now, we ask where it is that she now
stands. What ordeals has she suffered along the way? How many still have to make the journey,
travelling through their own psyche to come up from the dark in order to live, create and breathe
freely? *The Woman With Hair of Gold*, [1], another legend passed on to us by C.P Estes
functions as an ontological device that deals with the terrors and steps of this journey that are
imperative if one is to move on. How many of us recognize this story, which is particularly
evocative of the fears and dangers that being alone with only the unconscious waters of instinct,
can bring. Being alone suggests a psychological vulnerability. Having to make decisions that
endanger us physically or spiritually, and then having to get up and out - making that journey
onward to a resurrection is a difficult but rewarding path.

As has been discussed in previous chapters, to be alone some of the time, is an imperative, in
order that we may create and think freely. If one can gain self-containment, then a wonderful
growing will occur. However, 'lonely' is quite another state of existence that lurks in the mind:
an immature psyche.

The works following immediately may not be still life but there lies an important link with the
still life images that also contained the female face and space in Chapter Four of *Wild Flowers
and White Porcelain*..

*Imprisoned Spirit*, 1990, [Fig 39], a lithograph by Dona Leslie, *Moods and Moments* *1: passages in form and gesture*, [Fig 40], a monoprint be Wendy Stokes, and *Woman With Wood*, [Pl 59] by Chris Dyson, all convey a similar message. *Imprisoned Spirit*, was shown in an
The second title of course, is the more literal. An imprisoned spirit as we all understand does not need to be behind bars as is the present situation of the Australian Aborigine. Psychological imprisonment is their only rite to existence in their own land. These works are an important part of the artistic vocabulary of post-Modernism wherein we work towards a new and enlightened 'culture'.

*Woman With Wood*, the head from which is vaguely a face and her cut off hands intrude on a formally devised picture plane that is adorned on each side by a small, stylised, kneeling figure. Esther Harding tells of the concealing of a spirit in a bundle of faggots:

The Moon Goddess was, indeed, thought of as being actually the fire or light of the moon, which could lie latent in wood. This is attested by the legend that Orestes brought the worship of the great Goddess to Italy after slaying King Thoas, by concealing her image in a bundle of faggots, which he took with him. Thus the Goddess was as it were, the latent in the bundle, waiting to be brought to life again by certain rituals . . . She is shown in her statues crowned with the crescent and carrying a raised torch . . . So that the bundle of faggots, in which she came from Greece was really an unlighted torch.[6]

So the woman takes the torch of transformative fire, discovering the right mood and the right moment, tuning into her soul, releasing the imprisoned spirit from that state of 'ennui', that which we see in the catatonic glare of the face in Dona Leslie's lithograph.

More recently, we see that glare of the women from *The Female Face in Feminine Space* once again in *Still Life*, 1992, a pastel and pencil rendition by Madeleine Winch. This time the imprisoned spirit is on the same plane as her domestic objects that enslave her. She and the objects in traditional guise, are given equal status; on a wall as rubbish - trifles - curved forms - feminine - useful - controlled - out of control. The frying pan keeps her down, keeps her steady. The woman in the red top with the made obvious round breasts, is like the girl in *The Red Shoes*: She is made to be kept still under the heavy force of the metallic instrument made of iron as in the first stage of the alchemical earth. She is buried in the demonic stage, she has not as yet had her spiritual death, so that she might resurrect her psyche. The woman in Winch's *Still Life* has been carried away with the initial euphoric state of love or marriage which is still sold as being a blissful and therefore desirable life:

Please! she begged the executioner as she danced by his door. Please cut off my shoes to free me from this horrid fate. And the executioner cut through the straps of the red shoes with his axe. But still the shoes stayed on her feet. And so she cried to him that her life was worth nothing and that he should cut off her
feet. So he cut off her feet. And the red shoes with the feet in them kept dancing through the forest and over the hill and out of sight. And now the girl was a poor cripple, and had to find her own way in the world as a servant to others, and she never, ever again wished for red shoes. [7]

So, the girl with the red shoes is kept still at last as is the girl who is trapped in her domesticity; she also is kept still, so still in fact that she is stuck to the wall with her objects, her tools of trade so to speak. She stares outwardly in her state of ennui and the catatonic glare of helplessness.

Estes says that this ending to the legendary tale, is a 'gruesome conclusion', and this is archetypal mythos that is found in all fairy tales wherein the 'spiritual protagonist' is unable to complete an 'attempted transformation'; to be carried away with euphoria - and to be blindly racing off into tragedy. That is when we need to 'stop' and stay 'still'. Look at the tranquil air of Vermeer's maid,[Pl 61] who is pouring the milk, attending the simple meal, on the table-top. Vermeer's milkmaid is so, because she is represented by a man. A man who has his meals prepared, his body cleaned and dressed, his house cleaned and his desires fulfilled. Of course this domestic scene is depicted as the epitome of tranquility and bliss. A trouble free environment, for the man at least: the life of composure. Little did the milkmaid know what she was going to experience in the next four hundred years.
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10 Ibid, p xvi.

11 Bruce James, Grace Cossington Smith, p 51.

12 Germaine Greer, The Obstacle Race, p 39.

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2. Germaine Greer, The Obstacle Race, p 230.
4. Norman Bryson, Looking at The Overlooked, p 164.
5. Ibid, p 164.
7. Bruce James, Grace Cossington Smith, p 90.
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*Aureole: Strong and Simple: The Silent Motto.*

2  Esther Harding, *Woman's Mysteries,* p 64.
3  Ibid, p 64.
4  Carl Jung, *Man and His Symbols,* p 34.
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10 Annemarie Brody, *The Face of The Centre; Papunya Tula Paintings 1971-84*.
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CONCLUSION.

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**MUSIC**


7. Jacqueline du Pre[Cello Solo], *Elgar Cello Concerto:* Jacqueline du Pre was forced to be a child 'prodigy' by her ambitious parents. Of course this wonderful girl was especially gifted and became the greatest cellist in the world. She married Daniel Barremboem who loved her dearly until she contracted multiple sclerosis in her twenties. She was driven to play at an intense rate. However, before Jacqueline died in her early thirties having suffered the terrible years of gradually not being able to play her cello, her beloved husband finds another and practically ignores her existence. Daniel remains as one of the greatest pianists and conductors in the 'known'world, as we speak. I would like to dedicate this essay to the crazy young woman of Jacqueline du Pre. To her passion and craft.


9. Anne Mc Cue, *Even The Angels Fall:* Written and arranged by Anne Mc Cue, Vocals, Acoustic Guitar and Bass by Anne Mc Cue, Keys and Recording by Robert Parday.


11. Anne Mc Cue, *A Little Bit at a Time:*
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COLOUR PLATES


2 Margaret Olley, *Cornflowers and Pears*. Oil on board, 50 by 75cm. Copied from *Margaret Olley* by Christine France. Craftsman House Sydney, 1990.


11 Kevin Lincoln, *White Bowl*. 1985. Oil on canvas. 81.0 by 115.0cm.

12 Ben Nicholson, *Still Life: Alice Through the Looking Glass*, 1946. Oil and pencil on canvas. 68.6 by 76.2cm, St Ives.


14 Margaret Preston. *Implement Blue*, 1927 Copied from *Margaret Preston*, by Elizabeth Butel.


16 John Neeson, detail from *Requiem: In Memory of My Mother.*, 1986. Oil on canvas, 120 by 240cm.


18 Grace Cossington Smith, *Teacups*, [The Harlequin Set], 1931-32. Oil on Pulpboard, 44.5 by 37.5cm. Private Collection, Copied from *Grace Cossington Smith*, by Bruce James.


22 Margaret Olley, *Afternoon Interior*, 1972. Oil on board, 91.5 by 121.7cm. Collection Sir Zelman and Lady Cowan. Copied from *Margaret Olley* by Christine France.


25 Margaret Olley, *Pears and Pots*, 1978. Oil on board, 75.0 by 120.0cm. Private Collection. Copied from *Margaret Olley* by Christine France.

26 Margaret Preston, *Australian Gum Blossoms*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 55.5 by 55.5cm. Bought 1928.

27 Margaret Preston, *West Australian Gum Blossoms*, 1928.


29 Grace Cossington Smith, *Firelight*, 1919. Oil on pulpboard, 23.0 by 22.1cm. Private Collection. Copied from *Grace Cossington Smith* by Bruce James.

30 Grace Cossington Smith, *Church at Assissi*, 1949. Oil on pulpboard, 43.5 by 35cm. Private collection. Copied from *Grace Cossington Smith* by Bruce James.


32 Margaret Olley, *Plumbago and Pears*, [1980-1990]. Oil on board, 50.0 by 75.0cm.

Washington.


44 Muntja. b. circa 1931[Kukatja language group]. *Women's Law at Marapinti*
1991. Acrylic on canvas, 1000 by 750mm, Artist's aunts country: Walla Walla [Kiwirrkurra]. The painting is concerned with some very important dreamtime women who brought all the Law and ceremonies to this country. They also brought the body paints that represents all the colour of the night and the land. Women from different Laws came here and shared with each other. They carried out rituals, including putting pegs through their noses. The wild foods that are still collected are shown. 1993 Warlayirti Artist's Aboriginal Corporation. Hogarth Galleries.


54 Lynne Boyd, *Maritime I*, 1986. Oil on canvas, 102 by 122cm. Arden St, Melbourne

55 Janet Laurence, *Blinded Periphery*.


59 Chris Dyson, *Woman with Wood*, Oil on canvas, 137 by 137cm. Copied from *Art and Australia*.


FIGURES


2. Lubin Baugin, *Dessert with Wafers*, oil on wood, 52.1 by 40.0cm. Musee de Louvre, Paris. Copied from *Looking at the Overlooked*, by Norman Bryson.


14 *The Sacred Stone of The Moon Goddess*. Figure 1, *Woman's Mysteries* by Esther Harding.

15 *The Moon Tree*, Figure 7, *Woman's Mysteries* by Esther Harding.


18 Fede Galicia, *Still Life with Peaches in a Porcelain Bowl*. Oil on panel, 30 by 41,5cm. Silvano Lodi collection, Campione Switzerland. Copied from *Looking at the Overlooked* by Norman Bryson.

19 *Shrine of the Sacred Moon Tree*, Figure 14, *Women's Mysteries* by Esther Harding.

20 Ibid, Figure 15.


23 Rachel Ruysch, *Still Life*. Copied from *Why are There No Great Women Artists?* Hess and Baker.


26 The decorated *Kerbstone* at the entrance to the burial chamber at New Grange, Co. Meath, c.3000B.C. Copied from *A Concise History of Irish Art* by Bruce Arnold.

27 Carving on a block of whinstone not far from the stone circle and cairn cemetery at Cauldside Burn, Kirkcudbright. Copied from *Circles and Standing Stones* by Evan Hadingham.

28 *Design of Circular Motifs*, from one corner of the *Panorama Stone* now enclosed by railings opposite St Margaret's Church, Ilkley. Copied from *Circles and Standing Stones* by Evan Hadingham.


32 *Coin of Megara*, The three crescents represent the three aspects of he
Moon. Copied from *Woman's Mysterie s* by Esther Harding.

33 *Hecate Triformis*. Copied from *Woman's Mysteries* by Esther Harding.

34 A symbol found on the walls of the catacombs entitled, *The Kingdom of Heaven*. Copied from *Woman's Mysteries* by Esther Harding.


37 *The Egyptian Moonboat*, Figure 43. Copied from *Woman's Mysteries* by Esther Harding.

38 *Sinn enshrined on the Crescent and Surrounded by the Circle of the Full Moon*. Copied from *Woman's Mysteries* by Esther Harding.


40 *Moods and Moments: Passages in Form and Gesture*, Wendy Stokes. Monoprint, 166 by 75cm. Copied from *Art and Australia*.