Physicality and process: representing an evolving practice through the embodied experience

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PHYSICALITY AND PROCESS: REPRESENTING AN EVOLVING PRACTICE
THROUGH THE EMBODIED EXPERIENCE

A thesis submitted in (partial) fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

MASTER OF CREATIVE ARTS – RESEARCH

From

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by

LOLITA HAMILTON

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I, Lolita Hamilton, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Master of Creative Arts-Research in the faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Lolita Hamilton

Date:
Physicality and Process: Representing an Evolving Practice through the Embodied Experience.

Lolita Hamilton, *Poetry in Habitat vi* 2010
Oil on Canvas 95 x 125 cm

*Lolita Hamilton*
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Abstract

This study examines the impact of physicality on art practice, imagery and vision. The embodied experience of self and practice is examined through the art making processes of Rosalie Gascoigne and Aida Tomescu. The research investigates the physical relationship each artist has with their art form and the impact of this physicality on their oeuvre. It goes forward to reveal the links and relationships between each artist and myself and the ways in which this study has impacted on my own work and practice.

The study considers the embodied practice of Rosalie Gascoigne whose work reveals essential characteristics of place; beginning with the site specific then shifting to encompass a poetic narrative of region. Similarly, Aida Tomescu’s practice is an intensely physical one, which encompasses an exploration of energy and immediacy through process. The thesis asks how did Gascoigne’s and Tomescu’s physical relationship to their art form impact on their evolving practice and vision?

This research explores both what it meant for Gascoigne to experience landscape; and her physical relationship to the material world. It also considers the significance of the impact of physicality on her oeuvre, arguing that this was a determining factor in Gascoigne’s art making and breadth and scope as an artist whose practice evolved to establish an inextricable relationship to media and place. Gascoigne’s practice and work is examined within the framework of modernism and reveals parallels with contemporary painter Aida Tomescu in terms of modernist influences and an embodied approach to art making.

In contrast to Gascoigne, Tomescu works within the confines of the studio. The research establishes a link between Gascoigne and Tomescu in terms of an experimental, modernist approach to practice and imagery which is imbued with an intense physicality. Gascoigne’s and Tomescu’s work is explored in relation to the body of work completed for the creative component of this degree and is discussed as a reference for my own work in terms of approaches to practice and vision.
Following the discussion of Gascoigne and Tomescu, a chapter titled *Poetry in Habitat* outlines the theoretical and conceptual orientation of my work and explores the approaches to research-based experimentation I have undertaken through this study. Links are revealed between the work of Gascoigne, Tomescu and my own work in relation to an embodied practice.
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To my father and sisters Daniella and Natasha and their beautiful husbands and children and to my beautiful boy Hugo, you are in my heart with everything I do.
Introduction

This research examines the embodied nature of physicality and practice and the impact of physicality on image and vision. It focuses on the study of the art making practice of landscape artist Rosalie Gascoigne and contemporary painter Aida Tomescu. The most pertinent question for me initially, in regards to the study of Gascoigne and Tomescu, was why is our work so different in terms of representation and expression through media. It was through this fundamental, however vital consideration that a perspective for this research was developed. An exploration of our differing approaches to practice was essential to the process and journey of this research. It was from this plateau that I realised that our differences lay ultimately in the embodied experience. The examination of Rosalie Gascoigne explores the physical relationship between the landscape artist and place and examines the ways an artist might experience landscape and develop knowledge of place. The study of Aida Tomescu focuses on the physical nature of her practice and how she like Gascoigne, sought knowledge and understanding through an embodied experience of visual arts; both women evolved into significant artists of their time.

The physical experience of art making is crucial to the processes involved and the final orientation of the artworks produced. Therefore, I suggest the manner in which an artist approaches his or her practice is essential to the artist ability to relate to, understand and interpret their world. The embodied experience becomes woven into the fabric of the visual output. The embodied approach for Rosalie Gascoigne and Aida Tomescu is one, whereby the artist engages with their practice as an entire physical experience, in the case of this study, of place and media, in an attempt to find meaning and understanding of the world through knowledge perceived through predominantly a physical, kinaesthetic experience of art making. For these two artists, the embodied experience evolved to encompass also, the realms of emotion, intellect and spirituality. One cannot help but draw comparisons between the raw physicality of both Gascoigne’s and Tomescu’s work and process, however, it must be noted that Gascoigne’s process involved a strong presence in the landscape while Tomescu’s practice is predominantly studio-based.
What an artist reveals about place is intricately woven into the essentials of who the person is: where they live, their gender, the sum of their unique life experiences. An individual’s perception of place, by definition is not common to us all. There are multitudes of ways an artist can experience and reflect on landscape. Rosalie Gascoigne’s response to landscape was unique; a practice whereby she would physically orientate herself within space then go about perceiving visually the stimulus of light, colour and form through the process of mapping and collecting, this sensory, tactile experience would later culminate in sculptural assemblages that represent a physical experience in the landscape and a relationship to media and place.

Information about place is filtered through the senses of sight, sound, smell, touch. Complex decisions are made by the artist in terms of how to represent or express the experience of being in the landscape. The questions arise, what to represent and how to represent the impression of the outer world, absorbed by the artist physically and psychologically. What is included and what is omitted from an artwork, from the impression of place, I contend, has much to do with the manner in which an artist experiences landscape. An embodied engagement with place has a profound impact on imagery and vision.

Rosalie Gascoigne was highly respected for her original contribution to the ways of knowing and ways of responding artistically to the innate characteristics of the Australian landscape, in particular the Monaro region of Canberra where she lived as an adult, having arrived from New Zealand in 1943.

Australia, despite its short history of landscape painting, saw dramatic shifts in representation of country up to the period in which Gascoigne practiced as an artist; (1950s-1990s) from early colonial perspectives of the 19th century, to the revolutionary visions of the modernists in the 20th century. Gascoigne’s practice was predominantly aligned with concepts of modernism; this influence is evident in Gascoigne’s non-traditional representations of landscape and through the embodied nature of her artistic practice.
Gascoigne responded to modernism as an exciting stimulus that lead her to seek methods of practice that went beyond the conventions of traditional art making. Her artistic vision was also removed from earlier representations of landscape imagery in Australia such as the pastoral representations of landscape produced by the Heidelberg School artists, Arthur Streeton and Tom Roberts, in the late 1800s early 1900s. My research explores the theoretical framework in which Gascoigne’s art developed; at the same time it examines how Gascoigne existed in and experienced landscape, the significance of her physicality within landscape and the impact of this embodied practice on her imagery. It also explores how Gascoigne’s focus shifted from the ‘micro’ to the ‘macro’ and how this shift was a consequence of the artist’s increasing knowledge of place and physical movement through the region of Canberra, thus extending her emerging vision, and sense of belonging to place; I argue that this evolving vision represents a transition from local artist to regional artist through an embodied practice.

Gascoigne chose to represent the essence of region by establishing detailed knowledge of place, drawing on her personal experience of the elements intrinsic to location, such as climate, colour, form, light, space materials and the cultural history of region. I have focused on Gascoigne’s journey as an Australian artist, which began with her response to her immediate physical environment, the stones and grasses beneath her feet. This is the journey that saw Gascoigne’s vision develop from the sight specific, with much reference to the domestic, into an embodied practice and vision that referenced more broadly the visual experience of regional landscape; this shift from the micro to the macro coincided both with Gascoigne’s developing confidence as a woman and artist and an expansion of her personal and spiritual freedom.

The major works I have chosen to discuss are Enamel ware (1974), Monaro (1988), Great Blond Paddocks (1988/89) and Earth 9 (1999) which was produced the year Gascoigne died. These works reveal, I contend, a visual archive of Gascoigne’s developing practice and vision. They demonstrate her journey as an artist, representing her oeuvre from her earliest period to her latest; they are all works indicative of her unique response to her experience of landscape.
In contrast to Rosalie Gascoigne, contemporary artist Aida Tomescu works within the confines of studio, however her practice is shaped by her embodied experience of the materiality of media which is also common to Gascoigne’s practice. Although Tomescu deliberately disconnects from aspects of physical place, she focuses on an internal region, intellect and emotion. Her works do on occasion reference landscape however, through title, and her paintings could be viewed as metaphorical landscapes in themselves, her work conveys a topographical rendering of surface. A strong parallel exists between Gascoigne and Tomescu in the fact that both artists practice is inextricably woven into physicality and the concept of an embodied approach to art making.

Tomescu is a researcher her practice has evolved through knowledge gained through the repeated act of painting, an intuitive, physical response to the experience itself. For her it is about discovery, travelling and the journey of the artist attempting to piece together a network of physical and intellectual connections and associations to the history of painting and the history in painting. Like Gascoigne, Tomescu’s work has emerged through an engagement with modernism and the concept of process holding precedence over imagery. Tomescu’s influences can be traced back to the abstract expressionist painters of the 1960s, particularly to the work of Willem de Kooning and earlier to European artists such as Raphael. As is the case with Gascoigne, Tomescu was not born in Australia, arriving from Romania in 1980, coincidently though both artists have been inspired by qualities of the Australian landscape, the space the quality of light and the isolation. Tomescu’s work, as with Gascoigne’s, has strong connections to abstraction and modernism in terms of practice, process and imagery, and like Gascoigne there is a dialogue between artist and media and between the inner and the outer realities through an embodied approach to art making.

The study of Tomescu’s work has focused on three paintings exhibited in 2006, at Niagra Galleries, Melbourne: Broken April 1 (2005), Pelt 11 (2005) and Windhover (2005). These paintings demonstrate the structural considerations that Tomescu explores which are relevant to my research and current art making. They are large works that are a record of Tomescu’s physical encounter with media, displaying the

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1 Niagra Galleries Melbourne: 4-29 April, 2006
energy and physical struggle characteristic of Tomescu’s process. They are examples of methods of practical and conceptual approaches to abstract painting, with precedence given to the exploration of the memory of the layering of paint, that is, the history of the works in progress as recorded in the paint layers and surface treatment which is intrinsic to Tomescue’s embodied practice and conceptual orientation of her current work.

The body of work created for the creative component of this research reveals influences from both Gascoigne and Tomescu. Gascoigne has predominantly influenced my conceptual understanding of what constitutes landscape, and models alternative ways of responding to place, whilst Tomescu has informed my work in terms of structural considerations of abstraction and surface treatment. The discussion of my own work is preceded by an introduction to Jay Appleton’s theories of habitat, and prospect and refuge as a means of placing my work theoretically.
2. Physicality and belonging: Rosalie Gascoigne

*My country is the eastern seaboard, Lake George and the Highlands. Land that is clean scoured by the sun and the frost. The record is in the roadside grass. I love to roam around to look, and hear. The voices an ungraspable thing of the landscape. I look forward to foaming seas of crops singing songs of place.* 

(Gascoigne 1997)

Physicality of place, and the experience of physicality within place, was at the core of who Gascoigne was, what she chose to represent artistically and how she carried out her art practice. Kelly Gellatly, curator of the Rosalie Gascoigne retrospective at the National Gallery of Victoria, 2008/9 makes the comment that across Gascoigne’s oeuvre there “is (a) deeply embedded sense of sheer physicality” (Gellatly 17). We can examine the physicality of place in terms of the geography, the geographical features of a location, its plains and mountains, its river systems, its seasons and climate: in this instance the Monaro region in and around Canberra where Gascoigne lived. We can also examine the physical relationship Gascoigne had with place and how this experience manifests into an original response and vision.

Gascoigne’s response to the landscape she inhabited was to internalise it by engaging with it in an intensely physical way. Knowing it thoroughly by means of mapping the terrain, initially by walking and collecting, etching colours, shapes, shadows and sounds into her consciousness and later, as a regional artist, by driving thousands of kilometres across and through the terrain, interlacing and intersecting the landscape; encompassing Yass in the west, Goulburn in the north and Cooma to the south (Clark 29). As Edmond Capon, director of the Art Gallery of NSW states, Gascoigne’s work “evokes a strong sense of place” (Capon 5). Place was what Gascoigne knew in terms of an embodied practice, that is physical, psychological and spiritual experiences forged through a relationship to the natural environment, Gascoigne stated “my environment is what has conditioned me and what I respond to daily. It’s what I’ve got my art must come out of
that” (qtd in Israel 93). Place for Gascoigne meant forming a relationship to the land she inhabited, knowing it, and belonging to it through experience of and interaction with it, over time.

Gascoigne’s physical experience of landscape was transferred to her art practice. Collecting, sawing, nailing, sorting and arranging were all aspects of Gascoigne’s inherent need to move, Gellatly points out that “her hands were always moving things around” (Gellatly 17). Gascoigne’s artworks reveal her deep relationship with the natural environment; she describes a genuine need to be at ‘one’ with nature in a comprehensive interview with Robin Hughes in 1998, Gascoigne comments “I’ve got a rapport with nature, I always have had” (Gascoigne, interview Hughes, tape 5). The concept of ‘oneness’ with the natural environment developed throughout Gascoigne’s life to the point where the idea of being separate or separated from nature was inconceivable to her.

Through their weathered exteriors, and their representations of the physical elements that are characteristic of and intrinsic to the locality of the landscape she lived in, Gascoigne’s works are a narrative of time and place. Bleached and weathered colours, pale golds and greys are visual cues to the harsh environment they are reflected in, revealing a regional story of climate. These dominant colours are repeatedly used in Gascoigne’s work. Plywoods and linoleums, sawdust coloured woods, patina surfaced irons, fragments of ceramics, enamel ware and white swan feathers, both found and natural materials, are all aspects of the materiality of Gascoigne’s physical location (Keller 313). Used as elements in an artwork these materials become evocative and whimsical and by association reveal much about the relationship between the landscape and the discarded materials which Gascoigne chose to represent her visual interpretation and experience of place.

The significance of Gascoigne’s practice is the original, modern way in which she sought to respond to location and region. Her works convey a deep respect, empathy and connection to the elements and materials found in nature; she speaks of her “love of the earth, her intoxication with the air and sky” (Keller 312). She formed this connection to place through detailed knowledge of site, resulting in the experience of ‘belonging’ to her
natural environment. Gascoigne’s work assists the audience to draw visual and conceptual associations between elements of nature, such as light, colour, materials and space, revealing powerful relationships within the conceptual framework of artist, audience, artwork and world. Her art is cultural in its representation of aspects of region through exploration of found materials and also through her relationship to the modernist art movement. Despite Gascoigne’s subjective focus on a specific regional landscape, Gascoigne’s work can be viewed within the broader context of Australian modernism.

**Beginning Journey**

Born in Auckland in 1917, Gascoigne grew up during the severity of the depression years. She was from a family whose values were firmly placed in the tradition of a “restricted English background” (Gascoigne, *interview Hughes*, tape 2). Gascoigne’s artistic journey can be traced from her awakening sense of aesthetics and an awareness of nature as a child in New Zealand, to Mt Stromlo in Australia where she arrived with her husband, astronomer Ben Gascoigne, in 1943. Gascoigne’s interest in collecting later became a major theme in her work and dominated her practice, this interest as a young child, collecting driftwood and shells from the coast. Plagued with insecurities as a child, Gascoigne describes a sense of being unworthy or not belonging (Gascoigne, *interview Hughes*, tape 1).

Although Gascoigne’s artistic potential was initially ignited by her aesthetic, sensory awareness of nature as a child, it was not until she arrived in Australia that she evolved artistically. Of her life in New Zealand, Gascoigne commented that, “there was no possibility of being an artist of any sort, too many restrictions and standards” (Gascoigne, *interview Hughes*, tape 3). Making art gave Gascoigne a purpose in life: “I think that’s what I was searching for (in art), something that you could empty everything, you’d got, into” (Gascoigne, *interview Hughes*, tape 3).

At the root of her desire to embrace and be immersed in the natural environment, was her need to belong, a developing sense of ‘bonding’ with nature and hence to place gave Gascoigne the inspiration to explore her environment as an artist. Gascoigne cultivated this connection with the Australian landscape and communicated these developing emotional and physical connections through imagery, practice and the process of art.
making. However it was through her initial physical experience of the natural environment that Gascoigne was first inspired, subsequently this experience resulted in an oeuvre that maintained an enduring theme about, and relationship to nature.

Gascoigne’s inception into artistic concepts began during the 1950s she became proficient in Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging (Gellatly 22). From the discipline of Ikebana Gascoigne developed a strong sense of balance and sculptural aesthetics (M. Gascoigne, *Rosalie’s Artists* 36 41) that would determine the direction of her work in later periods. Gascoigne would later rely on a hands-on sculptural approach to the various elements of her art making that is, collecting, sorting, arranging, nailing, gluing. Gascoigne states that her art making skills did not include the traditional techniques of painting and drawing (Sages 44). She mixed shapes, not colours, she used a hammer and nails instead of a brush, and wood in place of canvas. “My art was always going to be different, because I made it up myself” (Gascoigne, *interview Hughes*, tape 4). Gascoigne did not study at art school but rather embarked on an original ideal for artistic expression, one that saw her find her own vision through a physical practice, that resulted in a personal visual construction and visual language; a unique exploration of process and materials.

**Materiality and Narrative of Place**

Gascoigne developed knowledge of the finest details, and smallest fragments of the materiality of site and place. This knowledge assisted her with her developing connection to the Australian landscape. The experience of knowing the intricacies of place reinforced her sense of belonging, Gellatly comments that Gascoigne was “an artist in possession of an innate knowledge of country” (Gellatly 23). Speaking of the seventeen years she spent on Mt Stromlo, Gascoigne reminisces that “it was always the place I knew and it knew me” (qtd. Gellatly 11).

By acquainting herself with the detail of place, by physically orientating herself within her new homeland, Gascoigne’s practice enabled her to ‘internalise’ (Casey 107) a place before she would draw on it artistically. Her work reflects the embodied experience of landscape. The bodily experiences of exploring, investigating and mapping landscape, were an essential part of her practice. The American philosopher Edward Casey, whose
discussion on representing place and the importance of the lived body in connection to developing knowledge of place (Casey 227) informs this study, he comments that “the body can be an exploratory agent” (Casey 228). Casey proposes that the body and its physical experience of place can be a legitimate tool for gaining insight.

The narrative of the land told through Gascoigne’s physical and sensory relationship to nature is revealed through artworks that tell the story of people, time and place. These narratives are realised through the weathered exteriors of materials utilized by Gascoigne, such as enamel ware, road signs, Schweppes crates and representations of elements that are quintessential and common to the Australian landscape and experience, such as colours, fields of grasses, discarded and natural materials, elements of the spatial. As Kelly Gellatly writes “the materials that she uses retain associations of their earlier lives” (Gellatly 16).

Gascoigne did not record specific places, landforms or features but rather evoked a sense of the essence of a place or region. This is evident particularly through the materials she used. If we consider the work titled Enamel ware, (1974) (fig.1) we can see Gascoigne’s desire to re-present the essential found object or objects ‘as is’; discarded, faded, chipped, rusting, now without function. Enamelware, as a material, has strong connections to the cultural history of Australia because it is symbolic of earlier settlement in the late 19th century. The bowls, cups, jugs, saucepans and baking dishes, all housed in a wooden frame, are not dissimilar to specimen displays found in museums, revealing the value Gascoigne places on these humble items. Through the representation of the historical in terms of human domestic experience, Gascoigne delivers aspects of Australian social and cultural identity to the viewer.

Enamel ware reveals a subtle and poetic association between found object and the landscape in which it was discarded; a relationship is suggested between object and environment. This is not a literal interpretation of landscape but a realisation of the elements that are an integral part of its whole. Curator and arts writer, Deborah Clark, refers to the evocative, poetic nature of Gascoigne’s work, suggesting that it is “ignited by a distillation of poetry” (Clark 33). Gascoigne herself states that her artwork “must be allusive and lyrical” (qtd. Keller 316). The effects of weather and utility on these found
objects is obvious; Gellatly comments that these materials “proudly mark(ing) the passing of time, the battered signs of their history of use and abuse” (Gellatly 16). The material enamel, symbolic of earlier domestic settlement, echoes the history of a location and its settlement. In this work a layering of meaning is evident: the enamel ware has lost its original intention; it no longer holds meaning as a functional domestic object but now represents a fragment of another time and has assumed a role in the fragmented, modern interpretation of the domestic in the landscape. The suggestion of a human presence within the landscape is evident through the use of kitchen ware and is relevant to Gascoigne’s modernist interpretation whereby she challenges traditional landscape representation; this work alludes to a domestic perspective as opposed to the pastoral subjects and themes commonly portrayed in traditional Australian landscape painting and makes connections to a female gender perspective in landscape representation.

An artist can reveal aspects of history and geography through interpretation of place, and more, such as aspects of spirituality. Artist Bronwyn Oliver suggests that Gascoigne “selected and assembled ordinary components into a significant whole that resonate with the big questions of our existence” (Oliver 539). Gascoigne was committed to finding truth through her art making, a search for truth was central to her personal and artistic philosophy. She states that for her, “the bottom line in art is honesty” (qtd. Gellatly 9). For Gascoigne, honesty involved truth through artistic practice which was an integral part of the entire process, moving through the landscape; seeking, selecting, sorting and collecting; truth through representation; materials that are not interfered with but left to represent themselves, and truth through experience, Gascoigne developed soulful connections to place, materials and subsequently to image: “I look for the eternal truths in nature, the rhythms, cycles, seasons, shapes, regeneration, restorative powers, spirit” (qtd. Gellatly 9). Edmon Capon comments that “perhaps most powerfully of all, [her] works demonstrate the honesty of a distinctive and individual response” (Capon 5).
Rosalie Gascoigne, *Enamel ware* (1974) wood enamelled metal 113.52 x 24.0 cm (fig.1)
Finding confidence in her personal freedom (released from the domestic confines of motherhood as her children became independent) Gascoigne made the comment after exhibiting for the first time, in her late fifties, in 1974, that “the world opened up; I found I was legitimate” (qtd. Gellatly 14). Gascoigne’s personal and artistic experiences were adding up to define her as a unique artist. Gellatly points out that there were “few if any parallels in contemporary Australian art at the time” (Gellatly 9). She told not only a personal narrative through art making, but also presented an original way of responding to the Australian landscape, through an unorthodox practice, through a selection of unique materials and media and finally through a modern interpretation of landscape.

Modernist Influences
Modernism, a new artistic construct in the early 20th century, created an external environment in which Gascoigne was able to define a place as an artist: to become, in her mind a “legitimate” artist (qtd. Gellatly 14). By the 1950s, Australian landscape artists were influenced by modernism and abstraction. This gave Gascoigne a reference point for her expression, modernist artists defined themselves in less academic modes, with a greater focus on the conceptual elements of art making. As Deborah Edwards, curator and editor of the Material as Landscape catalogue states, “modernism became a crucial structuring principle for Gascoigne” (Edwards 13). Modernist theory and practice advocated the physicality of process and a preference for the conceptual as opposed to the pictorial. Capon suggests that “in vision, technique, and materials (Rosalie’s work) is anything but conventional landscape” (Capon 5). For her, this progressive period in art history enabled Gascoigne to respond to place and to create artworks, with a new vision in mind for representing Australian landscape.

Gascoigne’s vision is that of a modernist, as much as of an artist with postcolonial sensibilities. She is inclusive as she seeks to encompass representations of landscape without authority, she is inclusive of historical and gender perspectives, in relation to thematic representations of the domestic in the landscape, and she produced artworks without formal agenda or a linear approach to art history (Smith 42). It can be argued that Gascoigne’s works are more closely aligned with indigenous perceptions of place than for example, the work of Arthur Streeton, whose pastoral scenes depict Australian
landscape imagery with strong reference to western, European conventions of landscape painting. Through Gascoigne’s practice of mapping and acquiring knowledge of place by this means, her work is reminiscent of indigenous art. Curator and critic Felicity Fenner makes the point that “her connection to the land is often articulated in terms which echo those used by indigenous artists” (Fenner 88). Gascoigne’s artworks are produced with great consideration given to acquiring knowledge of site and place through an embodied experience and practice which includes mapping.

Through a modernist approach to art making, Gascoigne was able to dismantle the viewer’s traditional experience of landscape; she challenged the embodied perceptions of visual culture of Australian landscape representation. Her artworks are conceptually strong and emphasise associations and relationships between landscape and materials used in their making, rather than a mimetic literal response to location. The structural elements of the overall design aspect of Gascoigne’s work holds precedence over the literal or pictorial. This can be observed in works such as Monaro, (1989), (fig.2) which demonstrates the modernist abstract qualities she employed in her work. By arranging small pieces of collected materials into larger two-dimensional constructions, she emphasises structurally and conceptually, qualities associated with abstraction. As Gellatly comments “fragmentation an exploded material order is a given in Gascoigne’s oeuvre the premise of abstraction” (Gellatly 21). Gascoigne “did not concern herself with the great debates of art theory and art history” (M. Gascoigne, Rosalie Gascoigne; Earth 44) and although as her son Martin Gascoigne, has claimed, she worked mostly in isolation, theoretically her work has its roots in the modernist era. In the first half of the 20th century a dominant influence on Australian painters was cubism (Rourke qtd. Bamford 31). This influence can be perceived in Gascoigne’s work in the breaking up and flattening out of the picture plane. Martin stated that Gascoigne had a particular interest in the work of Picasso (M. Gascoigne, Rosalie’s Artists 43). Many of her works are dependent on repetition, division of the picture plane, and the ordered nature of the ‘grid’ format. Gascoigne’s grid configurations are contemplative in their repetition, order and general classicism. Strong references to Mondrian’s Neo-Plasticism are evident in many of Gascoigne’s works with the systematic ordering of objects into horizontal and verticals evident in works such as Monaro and Roadsign, (1988).
on wood and plywood 131.0 cm x 457.4 cm
(fig.2)
A conceptual link can be assumed between Duchamp’s famous modernist work *Fountain* (1917), [fig.5] and Gascoigne’s assemblages of ready found objects and the modern representation of them; the way in which these objects are reassigned meaning through their re-contextualisation, that is, objects removed from their original location or context and re-presented. Gascoigne wrote to her son Martin in 1973, claiming (on discovering works by Duchamp) that she had “taken on influences” (qtd. M.Gascoigne, *Rosalie’s Artists* 37). This re-contextualisation called the audience to consider an object for its intrinsic characteristics, without contextual associations, (as is the case with Gascoigne’s road signs and her use of the Schweppes crates) and to consider more importantly (as with Duchamp’s *Fountain*) the conceptual question of what constitutes a work of art.

Theoretically, modernism enabled Gascoigne the opportunity to question the ways in which an artist might be able to respond to place. In the use of, for example, non-traditional forms and materials, such as assemblage and found objects, she questioned the conventions and representation of the genre of traditional landscape. Through this new practical, structural and visual approach to landscape, Gascoigne calls on the viewer to reconsider what a landscape is. Modernism allowed her the conceptual freedom to experiment with methods of artistic practice that were less orthodox; process had become less standardized enabling Gascoigne to move beyond the conventions of traditional aspects of landscape interpretation and representation; creating for example, works without aerial perspective, or focal points without middle ground, background or foreground. No reference is evident in any of Gascoigne’s works to traditional concepts of perspective, traditional drawing, or any other conventions of traditional landscape representation. Because Gascoigne omits perspective in her work, the viewer has no position in the landscape, a major shift from conventional interpretation of landscape. Her art making practice was experimental, including assemblage as a new modern method of art making, bypassing the long-held traditional western concept of landscape defined as, painting on canvas.
Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain* (1917)
sanitary ware and enamel paint
(fig.3)
A Regional Vision

The relationship of place to landscape and landscape to place is inseparable. As Casey states in the preface of his book titled Representing Place “to be a landscape is to be a place” (Casey xv). By the time Gascoigne created Monaro, in 1989, she had transcended place in terms of broadening her scope and vision, to move within the broader landscape, the regional landscape. Gascoigne comments on her developing vision “When you’re an artist you’ve got an expanding universe” (Gascoigne, Hughes interview tape 8) Gellatly makes reference to Gascoigne’s “self proclaimed role as a regional artist” (Gellatly 19). Her shift in practice to encompass a regional perspective was however informed by detailed experience and knowledge of the smaller units of place that are “essential to the totality of region” (Casey 75). Gascoigne created artworks that reinforced her own personal sense of identity which was inseparable from nature, through her developing engagement with, knowledge of and experience of location; simultaneously her vision expanded towards revealing elements of regional identity “Gascoigne’s travels through her country gave her its measure, its volume, its features, its sounds and its smells, it also gave her the materials for her art” (Clark 29). Gascoigne’s concern with the regional is evident not only in the materials used in her work, collected on her travels but also in the titles of works dated from the late 1980s and 90s, such as Monaro, Great Blonde Paddocks, Clouds 1, Far view, as opposed to earlier titles (pre 1980s) which have strong reference to the domestic, such as The Pink Window, Room with a View, The Pepper Pot, and The Tea Party.

Site, place and region are all interconnected through representations of landscape and aspects of these locations revealed in Gascoigne’s work but at the same time these representations are not faithful to the original site of any particular location, Edwards concludes that “Gascoigne’s evocation of a sense of place is both nowhere and everywhere at once” (Edwards 16). Monaro is suggestive of many elements of regional Canberra as opposed to the specificity of a particular location. Clark comments that Monaro is constructed from pieces of crate that “fit together in undulating curves that insinuate the contours of the hills and the movement of wind across grassland” (Clark 3). Few of Gascoigne’s works respond directly to a particular place, instead they “conjure the sensation of the experience of being in the landscape, the change of its seasons, the colours and texture of its crops” (Gellatly 21). As Casey suggests, “to
concentrate on “a part of the country” is to concentrate on a region of that country, on the characteristic, and indeed idiosyncratic, features of the land and sky and water that inform its landscape” (Casey 76).

Monaro- sawn, nailed glued and joined in horizontal parquetry, is considered by Gellatly, curator of Gascoigne’s retrospective, to be one of Gascoigne’s most “ambitious” and defining works (Gellatly 19). Monaro was constructed approximately fifteen years after Gascoigne’s initial collection series of ‘boxes’ and ‘Enamel ware’ and reveals a shift away from the domestic. A new approach is evident not only in the materials used in her work from the early 1980s, such as the commercial symbols of the Arnott’s biscuit company, apiary boxes and carnival dolls but in her new freer approach to her practice. Gascoigne now had the personal freedom to physically engage with the vastness of the countryside commenting that “when I am out, nature speaks to me…. there is a sense of place, air to breathe in, to smell and feel” (qtd. Gellatly 16). She made connections with local and regional aspects of country; Lake George, tip sites, the open plains; systematically mapping back roads, highways, dumpsites and any other site or place that could offer her materials for her assemblages (Eagle 132). This personal physicality was juxtaposed against representing the physicality of place, Gascoigne claimed that “artists should sing the songs of their district” (Keller 308). She developed a broader view of landscape and region, and a sense of belonging to far more than her immediate domestic surroundings.

An additional interest in the use of text is demonstrated in Monaro, road signs cut and reassembled, a new focus in Gascoigne’s work. First introduced into Gascoigne’s assemblages in the early 1980s, text is symbolic of Gascoigne’s exploratory approach to the experience of place, region and country, the aspect of moving through the landscape, the road journey. Gascoigne references modernism through the use of text, for example, as a non-traditional method of representing the experience of landscape, being an active participant as opposed to traditional concepts of the artist as a passive and external observer. Gascoigne admired the work of fellow New Zealander and modernist, Colin McCahon (M.Gascoigne, Rosalie’s Artists 44) who frequently made use of text in his paintings. Text became a defining feature for most of Gascoigne’s later oeuvre however it was treated differently in individual works. In Monaro, for example,
the black text taken from roadside signs, is cut and assembled in a miss-match of letters to create a blurred effect, giving the viewer the sensation, of passing the work by in a moving vehicle; just as Gascoigne had passed the subject by in the landscape. The sense of movement created in Monaro refers again to Gascoigne’s physicality through process and experience, and how her active involvement with landscape was a defining element of her overall vision of region.

Gascoigne transfers her interpretation of her active involvement within the landscape to her art making and work. A sense of speed and movement is identified in Monaro, through long expanses of horizontals and the use of text, a cue to road signs and hence to her physical relationship to the vast landscape which she draws on for inspiration. The interpretation of the spatial aspect of Australia is not only personally but culturally significant. The theme of ‘the spatial’ is indicative of the experience of the Australian landscape. Artists such as Fred Williams and Arthur Streeton have explored this theme in their work and although there are obvious differences between these artists and their interpretation and response to landscape, Clark suggests that there is a relationship between works such as Monaro and Streeton’s work, in the “go forever sensibility” of his epic paintings (Clark 32).

In the triptych Great Blond Paddocks (1998/9), (fig.3) physical mapping is evident on the surface of the work through the systematic arrangements of thin strips of Schweppes crates, organised into connecting horizontals. It is as though Gascoigne is meditatively reinforcing, through the process of making, the memory of the elements repeated in the landscape she moves within and which she inhabits physically: elements such as continuous fields of golden grasses, and infinite space.

Again Gascoigne makes connections to region through the sheer scale of Great Blond Paddocks, representing the breadth and scope of the country, as well as to more ephemeral qualities of region such as light, air, colour and narrative of place: stories about the open space, skies and seasons, the colours, the birds casting shadows over the land. The materials used in Gascoigne’s art making are often remnant from early settlement, and are also a means of communicating narratives of place. By utilizing discarded and natural materials and referencing elements of nature, Gascoigne creates
an evocative story: a poem perhaps, about fragments, traces and associations of materials to place and region, as well as lyrical representations of elements such as climate, weather, light and space all threaded through her work. Gascoigne’s use of suggestion, metaphor and association are all forms as stated by Edwards, as being “intrinsic to poetry” (Edwards 11). The poetic nature of Gascoigne’s work is also noted by Clark, who comments that Gascoigne “evoked the poetry of landscape” and that her work is “potently poetic in its construction” (Clark, Rosalie Gascoigne 1917-19999 38). These associations reveal in total, an expansive inclusive vision, developed through an interactive and physical practice. Gascoigne does not attempt to translate this experience as a narrative of distance or space travelled but rather as a non-literal response to the entirety of regional landscape, a poetic and lyrical response to place. A sense of spatial infinity is developed through the repetitive nature of the composition of Great Blond Paddocks, that appears to have no beginning or end, a frameless extract inspired from nature, that is reflective of the vast fields of vision one is exposed to whilst travelling through the countryside on the outskirts of Canberra. This sense of infinity aligns the viewer with an extensive narrative of place, in terms of the topography of the country that represents the commonality of elements; the physical and visual features of the region absorbed by Gascoigne and reinterpreted through works such as Monaro and Great Blonde Paddocks.

On close inspection of Great Blond Paddocks, a beauty of surface is evident. Sculptor Bronwyn Oliver, simply states the materiality of the work as: ‘sawn wooden soft-drink crates’ (Oliver 539). The crates have been sun streaked and weathered, the aging process appears to have been fast tracked. The paint surface in Great Blond Paddocks pre-exists the artist, it is the paintwork of the Schweppes Company. The surface mostly opaque, resembling the hard sheen of enamel, shows signs of strain in its battle to resist the harshness of climate. In smaller areas the surface is worn to the bone, colour thin, like watercolour, staining the parched bare remains of the wood.
Rosalie Gascoigne, *Great Blonde Paddocks* (1988-9) painted on plywood
154 cm x 543.2 cm
(fig.4)
Final Series
Recurrent themes of the regional and the universal, earth and air, are prominent in Gascoigne’s work, the scale and scope of themes, including the domestic, to representations of the magnitude of the spatial aspects of the Australian landscape, opened up a channel for Gascoigne to “manufacture feelings” (Keller 312). This is no more evident than in Gascoigne last series of works titled Earth. Keller alludes to the spirituality of Gascoigne’s works.

There is an axis that exists in Gascoigne’s work between the concrete and the metaphysical, that is between the materials with which she worked and the feelings and longings, which she sought to give visual expression (Keller 317).

Evocative, the pungent smell of soil is almost tangible by association of the rich velvet earth-brown colours displayed in Gascoigne’s final series Earth. Earth 9 (1999), (fig. 4) consists of patchwork colours of earth; warm umbers and stained brick reds contrast with the silence of a flat, cool raw umber; dull and final in its lack of light. Each panel of the work is sensitively etched, sanded and ordered, adding to an overall melancholy. Towards the final period of Gascoigne’s artistic output, a noticeable move towards spirituality is evident (Keller 317). Gascoigne had transcended barriers that she had come up against her whole life: domestic barriers, the limitations imposed on her as a mother and wife; the barrier of age; the limitations of being an artist without traditional technical skills; the barriers of the isolation of living in country Canberra. Gascoigne overcame these limitations as her practice grew from her initial associations with the domestic to encompass images and a vision of region, and finally the universal, encompassing the spiritual; an inner location without boarders or boundaries. This spirituality evolved through her work as Gascoigne found personal and artistic freedom.

The Earth series is reminiscent of the dark, final paintings of the late 1960s abstract expressionist painter, Mark Rothko, who observed:

the progression of a painter’s work, as it travels in time from point to point, will be towards clarity: toward the elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the idea and between the idea and the observer (qtd. Jawuszczak 19).
This progression towards simplification and clarity is exemplified in the *Earth* series. An over-simplification of design and technique is notable compared to Gascoigne’s earlier work. Gellatly suggests that “formally they are the simplest she ever did” (Gellatly 23). These works are without obstacle, visually and structurally, and as such reveal the clarity of Gascoigne’s intention to produce as many works as she could in her last years. A poignancy is evident in these works, McDonald suggests that most of Gascoigne’s work is “imbued with a sense of mortality” (McDonald, *A Life Littered* 15). Martin Gascoigne describes his mother’s intensifying work ethic in her final years; apparently she felt time was running out. Perhaps it was this urgency to complete works that lead Gascoigne to adopt a change in the physicality of the process in terms of the simplification of not only design but technique. This correlated with a shift towards a more spiritual connection to land, and a less kinaesthetic approach to subject and materials. The last embrace with nature is metaphorically exposed in *Earth 9* produced in the year of her death, 1999. One could interpret this as earth as death, earth as the grave. Art historian and critic, Mary Eagle, concludes that “metaphor was Gascoigne’s felt response to life” (qtd. Clark, *Standing On The Mountain* 32). Of this series Gascoigne said “it looks like death, where do I go from here” (qtd. Gellatly 22).

This chapter has examined Gascoigne’s embodied relationship to place and artistic practice and the significant impact this had on her imagery. It has traced Gascoigne’s artistic development from early representations of the domestic and immediate connections to site, to a practice whereby she encompassed a regional vision through an embodied approach to art making. Gascoigne’s practice evolved through a modernist theoretical perspective and reveals narratives through relationships forged between the artist, place, materials, and the land. This chapter has explored what it meant for Gascoigne to be a regional artist in terms of her embodied approach to practice, and how she engaged with, interpreted and represented place. It has also discussed the perceptual and conceptual considerations behind Gascoigne’s imagery.
152 cm x 104.5 cm
(fig.5)
3. Archaeology of Surface: Aida Tomescu

Our admiration goes to the artist on account of the intensity of his tacit struggle. That struggle can matter more than the work coming out of it: there can be no ultimately satisfying way of translating a living person into a ‘wall of paint’ (Lynton 1980)

Another artist whose aesthetic work and practice has arguably emerged through an engagement with modernism, is Aida Tomescu. Born in Romania in 1955, Tomescu arrived in Australia in 1980. She is a contemporary abstract painter, and has exhibited frequently in the Wynne Art Prize for landscape at the Art Gallery of NSW. Tomescu is important to this research as a case study for my work in terms of approaches to abstraction and surface treatment through oil painting. This chapter examines Tomescu’s work in relation to modernist influences particularly those of the abstract expressionist painter, Willem de Kooning, and looks closely at her process through an analysis of three works. Links are drawn between Tomescu and Gascoigne in terms of image, physicality of practice and theoretical orientation.

Aida Tomescu is a researcher. Her paintings reveal an urgency to deal with the act of painting itself, the struggle of the artist against the material, oil paint on board or canvas. Art critic and author Peter Timms states that for Tomescu “painting is a kind of battle” (Timms 238). Predominantly a studio-based artist, Tomescu’s work is largely concerned with modernist concepts of abstraction, surface and process (Maloon 9).

Margot Osborne, curator of Indecorous Abstraction 2\(^2\) a 2003 exhibition of work by contemporary women painters which included work by Tomescu, comments on the ‘reinvention’ of abstraction whereby the artists use the “materiality of paint” and the “subtle tonal and textural effects achieved through application of multiple layers of opaque or translucent paint” as features of a contemporary form of abstraction (Osborne Fields of Movement 1). Surface is a clue to the essence of Tomescu’s abstraction, which deals with the materiality of paint and with the act and experience of painting itself,

\(^2\) Indecorous Abstraction 2: Newcontemporaries Gallery, Sydney. 1 August - 7 September, 2003.
rather than with the finished product. This is a modernist position that is concerned with a shift from the pictorial to an emphasis on process (Lynton 356). Tomescu’s earlier works of the 1980s and early 1990s were a direct response to, or rejection of, the notion of artwork as commodity (Maloon 7). Tomescu makes use of the canvas as a research station for experimentation and experience: “I don’t make concessions by doing things which just please me. The paintings must not fully resolve themselves. They must not be decorative” (qtd. in Timms 228).

The works explored here, Broken April 1, Pelt 11 and Windhover, all from 2005, are rich and dense in impasto colour, with merging fields of underlying layering that invite the audience to experience visually their process and creation. Timms comments on the physical structure and process of Tomescu’s developing work “the structure grows with the making of the picture and is integral to it” (Timms 238). Colour may well be immaterial to the physical structure of Tomescu’s paintings, however the colours used represent changes in the works memory, layer by layer, and reveals the narrative of the works in progress. Timms suggests that ultimately Tomescu deals with “relationships of colour and form, the reconciliation of surface and depth” (Timms 238). The completion of a painting for Tomescu is frequently resolved through a final layer of colour, evident in works such as Pelt 11, (2005), (fig.7) and Windhover (2005), (fig.8) They are rich, bold colours reflective of the energetic spirituality of Tomescu’s physical practice that pursues new knowledge of painting through the process itself. In terms of the overall intention of the works, “Tomescu has let the paintings ask the questions and has applied herself to the difficult task of finding the answers” (McDonald, Intoxicated By Technique 14). Tomescu’s paintings are concerned largely with the ‘random’ (Tomescu, Studio 07) giving further credence to the experimental, research intentions of her practice.

**Archive of Process**

Tomescu’s paintings speak of history, tension and process: “I like to keep the tension of something that is full, that is saturated that is on the threshold, both full of itself and imminently productive of something else” (Tomescu, Reflections 3). The history of Tomescu’s paintings is documented through the archive of process, the *making* of the works, notable on examination of the surface and its under painting and layering. This is
also where the tension resides between the struggle of the final layer to conceal the working method underneath. This underpainting is essential to the finished product which may reveal a resolved exterior, but does not, or cannot, hide the struggles of artist and media within the layering underneath.

This layering reveals changes in direction, in the use of colour, texture, mark making, tone and mood. Tomescu speaks openly about her process in terms of the logical and illogical aspects of her working method, or the conscious and unconscious, that allows random changes to occur, she comments that “painting is not a linear process. “She believes that if it were, there would be no “experience in it” (Tomescu, Studio 07), for example, a change in colour may simply be the result of “opening a new tin of cadmium red” (Maloon 9). Often Tomescu allows the random to guide her painting practice. She deals with unintentional aspects of painting as they occur, colours haphazardly blended or mark making that has no intended outcome except for the experience of the physicality of the process itself; the colours, marks and surface treatments are incorporated into the final experience of the work and are evidence of the dialogue that has occurred between artist and media, thus defining the experimental nature of her concepts and processes.

The viewer can discern aspects of the random, the spontaneous and the unconscious through the history of Tomescu’s work which is often revealed at the edges of her paintings. The raw and unfinished edges deliberately expose the sequence of unfolding events experienced by Tomescu through process. Broken April 1 (2005), (Fig.6) is an example of one of Tomescu’s most unresolved works in terms of the dynamics of shape and structure and the chaos exposed in the final layer. It is not as unified compositionally or resolved in terms of colour, as works such as Pelt 11 (2005), (fig.7) it is a work in process.

A rough exterior, displaying large patches of warm reds and oranges, opposes patches of cool violet; Broken April 1, suggests a discordant message projected through the colour, and aggressive paint marks as well as the fracturing of composition: paint marks scumbled and dry, loaded with a gritty texture and in gesture is reminiscent of the expressive action works of the abstract expressionists, such as Franz Kline and Willem
de Kooning. In reference to Tomescu’s work Timms states that “this is action painting pure and simple” (Timms 237). Tomescu’s work relates to painting of this period in terms of abstraction, surface treatment and media, her work “comes out of this history, which obviously involves development of abstraction” (Maloon 3).
Aida Tomescu *Broken April I* (2005) oil on linen 184 cm x 154 cm (fig.6)
A Modernist Approach

Tomescu, like Gascoigne, makes artworks that can be attributed to influences from the modernist period. A connection to the history of abstraction is evident in Tomescu’s relationship to the methods and practices of the abstract expressionist painters of the 1950s and 60s. Osborne concludes that contemporary Australian “artists, paint in full consciousness of the complex history of modernist abstraction” (Osborne Fields of Movement 1). Tomescu is particularly influenced by the works of artist Willem de Kooning (Timms 238), similarities are evident in the chaotic energy of the surface treatment of both Tomescu’s Broken April 1, and de Kooning’s painting Woman 1, (1950). “Tomescu’s paintings is not merely due to the accumulation of material on the surface: it is an abstraction of the mental and physical energy that has gone into the paintings construction” (Maloon 7).

In both Tomescu’s work and de Kooning’s Woman 1, the process of creation is consciously revealed through transparency of layers and marks. There is evidence of energy and action contained in the vigorous mark making evident in Woman 1. This chaotic effect is primary to the overall abstracted nature of the work, as is the case with Tomescu’s Broken April 1, whereby the energy and aggressive action of the mark making is intrinsic to the abstract nature of the work.

Not all of Tomescu’s paintings are quite as revealing as Broken April 1 in terms of evidence of direct process. In Pelt II, the “battle” of painting recurs through the pushing and pulling of paint within the confines of the canvas space through the large movement of brush marks, horizontal and vertical. The overlaying surface of golden yellow acts as a shield to the turmoil experienced by the artist in the under layers of oil paint. Art historian James Elkin discusses the language of paint and its ability to reveal the artists process: “medium has its own language of moods, its own way of reporting what the artist did and felt” (Elkins 98). It is only at the edges of the painting that Tomescu provides an insight into the process through a controlled entry point. Here we can ascertain what has occurred during the art making experience. The process mirrors Tomescu’s shifting mental state which corresponds with changes obvious in painterly direction, the mood the artist is projecting in each layer and sequence in process, revealing the way the work has evolved. In contrast to Gascoigne’s assemblages that
represent a continuum of space undefined by borders, the edges of *Pelt 11* are deliberate and contain the work within the limits of the canvas. The painting is meant to end here. We can tell this by the way in which Tomescu has defined the border of the work with bold orange and contrasting lilac, and the central mass of gold loses its density and energy at the edge of the work.

The abstract nature of *Pelt 11* is ambiguous on a number of levels. There are multiple viewpoints from which to observe the work, above or beneath; top layer as opposed to preceding layers. There is an ambiguity in the title: if we accept the title, *Pelt* as fur, it appears the qualities of both fur and skin exist simultaneously, the frayed fur like edges of the yellow, making contact above the raw flesh hues exposed underneath. The pelt is a veneer that possibly covers aspects of the inner, a metaphor for Tomescu’s practice and the way the layering, in her work, veneers the process and perhaps her inner state. Is Tomescu referring to the pelt of an animal? which was my initial consideration, or is she referring to the action… ‘to pelt’ meaning to throw? The title *Pelt* belongs to a series of works and may refer to action, as is the case with titles such as *Vent, Drift* and *Thaw*.

Vigorous movement is indicated in the title *Windhover* (2005), (fig.8) just as a bird hovers in the air the image of rapid wing movement is conjured. Vigorous movement is also evident in the physical properties of the painting itself through the lavish spreads of impasto pigment, and the dense application of blue paint applied hastily with a palette knife, suggesting in its movement the direction of the wind. *Windhover* refers once again to physicality, the action of the subject, the action of the process.

Although Tomescu’s work has obvious associations with the action paintings of the abstract expressionists of the 1950s and 60s, one cannot help but draw a comparison between the raw physicality in both Tomescu’s and Gascoigne’s work and process. However, it is interesting that Gascoigne’s process involved a strong presence in the landscape while Tomescu’s practice is predominantly studio based. The physicality of the artistic process impacts on the image and vision. For both artists physicality is a defining feature of their work. Gascoigne’s practice encompassed an enormous stretch of actual physical space. The spatial aspect of the topography of Gascoigne’s landscape
can be identified in the scale of her works. *Monaro*, measures, 131.0x457.4cm and *Great Blond Paddocks* measures, 154x543.2cm, there is a sense of a continuum of the work, beyond the boundaries of the physical frame.

Tomescu’s works are large but not in the range of Gascoigne’s work. In contrast Tomescue’s practical and physical experience of art making is mostly confined to the studio, she speaks of her practice in terms of discipline and complete commitment to the studio (Tomescu, *Studio 07*). As with Gascoigne, Tomescu’s paintings are driven by an energetic response to process and practice. Her works are repeatedly overpainted, scraped back and subjected to “repeated demolitions”, Terence Maloon concludes that her works are the result of “mental and physical energy” (Maloon 7). The raw physical energy of her practice is obvious in the overall application of marks, thick, dense, scratched, scumbled; *her* unique visual language. Tomescu grapples with a metaphorical landscape, the topography of paint surface.
Aida Tomescu *Pelt 11* (2005) oil on linen 184 cm x 154 cm
(fig. 7)
Aida Tomescu *Windhover* (2005) oil on linen 184 cm x 154 cm
(fig. 8)
Archaeology of Surface

After an initial examination of Tomescu’s work as a whole, we are drawn closer to examine the archaeological nature of surface, viewing the work intricately, mark by mark, the viewer is able to analyse the detailed account offered to us by Tomescu, of the physical features of surface, a landscape in itself. The viewer negotiates the physicality of the terrain: scratches, blemishes, random marks, nodules, crazed impasto, seeing into the depths of the transparency of media and process alike, at other moments blocked by the opaqueness of pigment and the final veneer. Tomescu has reduced the painting outcome to the physicality of the media and surface. In doing so she has removed cues to our material world, and offered us an entry point to discover her work in terms of the intangible, the emotional, the spiritual, and the universal.

This chapter has introduced the contemporary painter Aida Tomescu in relation to her approach to abstraction and surface treatment. Through the analysis of three paintings executed between 2005-06, the discussion of Tomescu’s work has outlined her processes and methods of working as well as her influences from the abstract expressionist movement in America in the 50s and 60s. Links have been drawn between Tomescu and Gascoigne in relation to physicality of practice and a modernist theoretical perspective.
4. The Poetry in Habitat: Lolita Hamilton

Artists have the landscape in their hearts,
because they contemplate, because
their soul becomes the landscape, and their
landscape becomes their soul. (Kurt Eberlein 56)

In the following chapter I define the conceptual orientation of my practical, creative research work, outlining the theoretical and practical approach involved in the creation of a series of approximately 20 paintings titled Poetry in Habitat. This chapter explores the influences on my work, from the study of Rosalie Gascoigne who informed my work in terms of responding to place, and the influence of the work of Aida Tomescu, who offered insights into the processes of abstraction. The discussion focuses on an analysis of five paintings from this series that reveal the conceptual and structural developments of the work. The series was constructed between August 2008 and August 2010 during the period of my MCA-R studies.

Painting allows me to reflect an inner desire for a romantic ideal, as well as aspects of personal spirituality. I look to the landscape as a means to express emotion, and as a subject that enables me to exceed the limitations of paint on canvas. I look to the landscape as a means by which to reflect an inner human experience. In 2005, I completed a coursework Masters degree, at the University of Wollongong. I was searching to place myself theoretically. Through my research, I encountered the binary theories of Habitat and Prospect and Refuge in Jay Appleton’s book titled The Experience of Landscape. These theories resonated with the underlying, though unconscious, intentions projected through my landscape painting. The theory of habitat and the theory of prospect and refuge gave me a key to unlock my work both symbolically and theoretically, and a language with which to articulate my artistic concepts, in particular, the theory of prospect and refuge which can be traced from my earlier landscape paintings through to my current work.

Theory of Habitat

Appleton, a geographer and academic at the University of Hull, explores further John Dewey’s philosophy (c1958) on the aesthetics of landscape whereby Dewey advocates experience as the central theme in understanding aesthetic satisfaction through landscape, by
exploring the “primitive relationship of the living being to it’s surroundings” (qtd. Appleton 53). Appleton goes on to suggest we view or read the landscape, whether it be the original copy or an art work, in terms of fundamental human biological needs. In the *The Experience of Landscape*, Appleton introduces the biological assessment of landscape as habitat theory, whereby the viewer gains aesthetic satisfaction by contemplating landscape in terms of “environmental conditions favourable for survival” (Appleton ix). Appleton argues that we require our basic biological needs to be met, such as food, shelter, and a hazard free environment to have an agreeable aesthetic experience of landscape (Appleton 63).

After exploring the theory of habitat, it occurred to me that I was unconsciously seeking to represent shelter and safety within the landscape, frequently positioning myself as the viewer within the dense foliage of the foreground of my landscapes, as though peering out to the prospect of a distant vista from the safety of the trees or the shelter of a large land mass. My landscape paintings (c2003) were and currently are concerned with my physical relationship to place and therefore importantly, my position within the landscape. Interestingly Gascoigne’s practice and work demonstrates a strong concern with her physical relationship to place and the landscape. However as a result of her modernist approach to representation she fails to position herself within the landscape; perhaps alluding to a spiritual position.

**Refuge and Prospect**

Prospect/refuge theory “provides us with a frame of reference for examining the aesthetic properties of landscape” (Appleton 71). The work titled *Refuge*, (2005), (fig.9) is reminiscent of works that are symbolically aligned with concepts of habitat theory as well as prospect/refuge theory. *Refuge* belongs to my earlier practical and research period, around 2000-2005. The concept of prospect juxtaposed against refuge exists in this particular work, as with most of my works since this period. We can determine prospect as Appelton suggests, as the light in a painting “a bright sky” or as the sensation of distance, open space or any evidence of the uplifting (Appelton 75, 77). A link can be drawn between Gascoigne’s emphasis of spatial infinity in works such as *Monaro* and *Great Blond Paddocks* and an engagement with (although perhaps unintentional) the theory of prospect within landscape representation. Just as prospect can be represented in a non literal sense, we can also consider the concept of refuge as non-literal and non-representational; for example, refuge may be recognised as lack of light, tonal darkness in a work, or a limited palette; forms of sanctuary
and concealment. Appleton comments that, “light and darkness are themselves potently charged with prospect and refuge symbolism” (Appleton 122). Art historian Douglas Davies comments that “very often symbols are what might be called a physical manifestation of ideas” he suggests that “symbols demand attention, they stimulate thought to produce new levels of association” (Davies 33).

In the painting titled *Refuge*, the horizon is relatively low and the palette is limited to three colours: raw umber, Australian red gold and cerulean blue. A road offers a strong entry point into an infinite distance. However the viewer is positioned off to the side, unable to take the journey; this can be read as a symbol of refuge. Refuge can be determined here as represented by a limited palette and the sheltered position of the viewer in relation to the prospect of the distance or the prospect of the future, if one chose to enter the vista. The viewer is placed to the right of the work, within the safety of the trees and foreground foliage, reference again to habitat theory and a position of safety. Paths and roads are viewed according to Appleton as “potent invitations to movement within the three-dimensional environment of the observer” (Appleton 107). I encourage the viewer to enter the illusory space of my work, by positioning them in front of a path or road, the only reference I make to human presence within the landscape. The opportunity to enter and experience the landscape, to travel through distance and perhaps go infinitely into the work is always an option.

Traditional conventions of landscape painting are obvious in the work titled *Refuge*, for example, it exhibits distinct planes of sky and earth; the painting demonstrates the convention of spatial scope in terms of aerial perspective; the light leads one to a focal area at the horizon line. Although these are aspects of the representational in landscape depiction, I have attempted to deal with contemporary constructs of landscape in terms of paint application and edges. This work leans towards a breaking down of representation through brushwork. The edges of the trees are eroding into the sky plane, the trees are bending, scruffy and have a two dimensional aspect to them. Casey comments that “we place the ingredients of a landscape painting onto the display of its surface, a place of exhibition occupying an ambiguous location between the inner domain of representation and the outer world of perception” (Casey 249).
Lolita Hamilton *Refuge* (2005) oil on canvas 20 cm x 36 cm
(fig.9)
This statement is aligned with my intention to impose an inner emotional perspective to the outer reality of landscape, to explore through landscape painting the tension between nature and the human experience. Ultimately it is the romantic concept of revealing an inner reality, using painting as a means of delivering an expression of the inner state that I identify with as a landscape artist.

Recently my work has been focused on aspects of the concept of prospect and refuge more so than habitat theory. The abstract nature of the concept of prospect/refuge has inspired me to conceptualise and manipulate ideas of power plays within the landscape. This is evidenced in the struggle to find a balance between large tonal masses, inducing concepts of safety, (refuge) juxtaposed against large open vistas corresponding with the definition of prospect in a landscape. In addition I concentrate on attaining an aesthetic beauty within the works, by finding a balance between the dualisms of light and dark, positive and negative space, representation and non-representation: and tangible, and intangible aspects of landscape. For me, tangible aspects of landscape represent the process of documenting and referring to (through practice and image) actual place, the intangible aspect of landscape refers to the material qualities that are less defined, such as the ephemeral, transient nature of the skies, seasons and weather. The tangible and the intangible are also explored by Gascoigne through her practice: the documentation of place and the exploration of the essential, yet ephemeral characteristics of landscape are common themes evident in her work.

The work titled Little Sharkies iv (2008), (fig.11) was one of the initial paintings produced during this research project. Little Sharkies iv has connections to my earlier landscapes in terms of image and technique. It reflects the theory of habitat and the theory of prospect/refuge, that is, viewing the distant vista from the security of the foreground, and the concept of prospect revealed through the light in the sky and the infinite sense of space. This work represents the starting point of the journey of this research, in terms of image and process. It has strong reference to the original copy, with noticeable reference to the representative elements of landscape, such as the spatial relationship between the earth, water and sky planes and aerial perspective. The pictorial space is handled within relatively traditional conventions of landscape representation: foreground, middle ground and background. However, there are suggestions of abstraction notable in the simplification of the sky and earth planes. This painting is harder edged than works produced towards the end of
the research project, and gives a reference point for analysis of the conceptual and practical
development, I believe is evident in my work since undertaking this research degree in 2008.

**Working from Memory**

*Memory ii* (2009), (fig.10) painted approximately a year after *Little Sharkies iv*, is the first
work in the series *Poetry in Habitat* to represent a progression towards a less representative
approach to landscape. This work breaks down into simple bands of sky and earth; detail is
dropped away leaving the viewer to contemplate the work predominantly for the structural
aspects of colour, tone and surface treatment. The light in the sky plane is plastered on more
as an experience of paint in itself, than as a distinct representation of sky. The pictorial space
is reduced to a flat plane. The reduced contrast of light and dark and reduced hues holds the
single plane together, by reducing pictorial depth; hence the viewer is positioned in front of a
two dimensional plane rather than observing the traditional conventions of foreground, middle
ground and background.

This work was conceived with Aida Tomescu’s work in mind. Areas of the underpainting
break through, particularly along the contour of the landmass, joining the sky plane with the
earth. Again, this structural interference draws attention to the two dimensional concept of
surface as opposed to the representative components of the work. The water is represented by
a haphazard slash of blue not truly representative of the sea blue colour, nor is the water
grounded but suggestive of a floating slash of blue paint. The title is reminiscent of the
process: *Memory ii*, is derived from knowledge of place remembered. Again it is
representation of a particular location: Little Sharkies, a seaside location north of
Wollongong, depicted in my work time and again. It has emotional connections for me, a
place where from 1994, I spent many years with my son as a baby and small child. It is
significant to my work in that it is a place of belonging, it is somewhere I know, and it
embodies my perceptual knowledge and physical experience of the location where I live. The
process of remembering and returning to place is grounded in the ritual of practice.
Lolita Hamilton *Memory ii* (2009) oil on canvas 50 cm x 45 cm (fig.10)

Lolita Hamilton *Little Sharkies iv* (2008) oil on canvas 50 cm x 60 cm (fig.11)
Working from memory assists with a developing shift towards a more internal experience of place. The obstacles of detail are replaced with an intuitive, sensory consciousness, a psychological and emotional response to place, as opposed to a purely visual response. I, similarly to Gascoigne, have internalised the experience of the environment I live in. I know this place at a deep psychological and spiritual level. My practice is less about physicality within the landscape, and more to do with contemplation, observation and absorbing meditatively, elements of the seaside environment where I live. This does not suggest however, that Gascoigne is any less contemplative but rather proposes Gascoigne’s dominance of physicality through her practice and her experience of landscape as well as through her art making.

This contemplative aspect of my process informs my ability to work often from memory. My memory is informed by preliminary processes that include walking, taking notes, doing sketches and watercolour studies, observing, writing and taking photos. This practice reflects a relatively restrained physical approach to the experience of landscape and documentation, compared with Gascoigne’s extensive forays into the surrounding countryside and region. Gascoigne’s process involved at times heavy manual labour, through driving, collecting, sorting, de-nailing and storing, large and often heavy and awkward materials. This emphasis on the physical experience was then transferred to her art making.

I have been more inclined to think about place, to remember place, to quietly absorb place, from one particular location than Gascoigne’s later experience of engaging with region. My imagery reflects my relatively less energetic physical experience of the environment. This is reflected through a predominantly studio-based practice and the media I use, oil paint on canvas as opposed to Gascoigne’s tactile media and materials. My images have a timeless, dream-like atmosphere. They are representations of “natural landscapes” as opposed to “cultural landscapes” (Appleton 72). I do not reference landscapes that have been altered by humans, I do however allude to human presence through pathways that lead the viewer into the work. I do not, for example, include car parks, waste bins, council signage or street lamps that exist in and around the sites I choose to depict. What is omitted from my landscapes pertains to the rejection of the constructed cultural identity of the time. It is a longing to engage with landscape through imagination and memory which enables me to exclude such
detail. Gascoigne in contrast, chose to assemble elements that represent a cultural experience of place, elements and materials that reveal human presence and relationships to landscape.

Knowing the characteristics of a particular site does not mean one has less knowledge of location; in fact it is possible to know a broader location at an even deeper level through the repeated study of a particular site. Casey makes the point that “by exploring in perception or imagination or memory a series of settings…we come to determine what is indispensable to its essence” (Casey 81). It is through repeated study or repeated exploration through art making and practice that one often finds the essence of a thing or place. Tomescu repeats process and techniques to arrive at a knowing and understanding of the experience of media and process; as does Gascoigne, repeating her steps through the process of mapping and internalising the knowledge of place. Casey points out that “to know a region is also to be able to remember it” (Casey 76). Gascoigne’s memory of site and place was informed by her physical experience and was paradoxically what enabled her to perceive region.

Shifting to the Inner

Until recently, my paintings have focused more on the exterior, the outer world, in terms of emotional response to landscape; I was looking more to find the symbolism of spirituality in the actual landscape, but recently, as my research has developed the spirituality I am capturing is internal rather than external. I am using the subject of landscape as a metaphor for an emotional state and relying less on the original site and documentation of place and more on intuition, perception, imagination and memory. I believe that through my research I have reached an understanding that materials, medium and approaches to practice are intrinsic to the creation of a work as much as the actual, external subject. This realisation has aligned me more closely with the artistic practices and conceptual approaches to art making that both Gascoigne and Tomescu engaged.

An example of this shift to the inner is evident in the work titled Basin (2009), (fig.12) which displays an attempt to un hinge the conventional format of landscape, as part of my practice of experimentation through research. This painting is the stage for a shift towards abstracting space and surface. Although there is still significant reference to landscape, experimentation holds precedence over an accurate copy of place. The landmass is not grounded but floats, acting as a frame for the exploratory mark making in the arena of the sky plane above. Once
again, pictorial depth is not important. The picture plane moves towards the two dimensional experience of abstracted surface.

The paintings in the *Poetry in Habitat* series which includes approximately twenty paintings ranging in size from 10x15cm up to a scale of 95x120cm, all oils on canvas demonstrate a strong sense of the land and sky planes; the meeting place of the sky and water or land, the horizon, is where I concentrate the focus; it is at this point that a sense of freedom, conveyed by a sense of infinite distance is possible, an opportunity for the spirit to move beyond the painting via the merging, blending and softening of the edges, creating an entry point or escape into a spiritual experience. Casey describes the intangible quality of the horizon; “a horizon, like the end of a rainbow, cannot be located with cartographic precision (Casey 235).
Lolita Hamilton *Basin* (2009) oil on canvas
(fig.12)
The title for this series, *Poetry in Habitat*, reflects the abstract qualities of landscape that have inspired me most: the beauty of nature, the ephemeral, transient aspect of weather and seasons, the infinite dimensions of space and spirituality of place.

The final painting in this series, *Poetry in Habitat vi* (2010), (fig.13) demonstrates the technical and conceptual developments that have occurred during this research process. Through my research, I have been drawn to greater experimentation with surface, and a conceptual shift toward a less representational approach to subject. This painting has progressed from beginning works in this series, in terms of approaches to surface treatment and ways of representing place. The surface is thick impasto, layered on with a palette knife. I have explored processes concerned with media and its application, experimenting with numerous impasto mediums and palette knifes of various sizes in conjunction with preliminary studies in oils, concerned with breaking down the image into bands of colour rather than conventional landscape planes. Abstraction is evident in this work in the layering of large tonal shapes and colours laid over each other, in an attempt to make less distinguishable the conventional division of pictorial space.

Although my work is largely concerned with tone, I am developing a strong relationship to colour as a vehicle for emotion. This development enables me to work more within the conceptual boundaries of modernism, shifting my focus from romanticism. I have considered the techniques applied by abstract expressionist Mark Rothko in terms of exploring spirituality through colour, through focusing on the relationship of colours exhibited in a work and the disintegration of edges. I believe this will be a beginning point for me in relation to establishing and developing a future research direction for my practice.
Lolita Hamilton *Poetry in Habitat vi* (2010) oil on canvas 60 cm x 50 cm (fig.13)
Structural Considerations
Like Tomescu, I have allowed underpainting to have a role in the final layering of the work titled *Poetry in Habitat vi*. The grey greens of the underpainting compete with the acid turquoise opaquely layered over top. I have inhibited myself from the urge to resolve the work completely; a simplification of form accompanying a random approach to mark making creates an overall semi-abstract image. Although I have experimented with complete non-referential abstraction, during this project, in the form of small oil studies for each major painting, it has not been my intention to produce works on a purely abstract level, Casey argues, “depth is the very first consideration in an uninhabited landscape of natural place, part of its being and essential to its representation” (Casey 16). Creating a sense of belonging to place by representing and responding to specific cues to place is still a vital aspect of my work.

I discovered however, that experimenting with painting without cues to visual orientation within the landscape such as horizon, earth and sky was beneficial to developing a sense of surface and surface treatment. I became more focused on the experience of painting as opposed to the subject, more focused on the act of painting as opposed to the finished product. As a result, my work has developed a more experimental edge and a loosening up of the physical definitions of landscape formatting which supports a conceptual shift in terms of ways of seeing and responding to landscape.

Experience of Gascoigne
On a field trip to Canberra, in July 09, to interview Gascoigne’s son Martin Gascoigne, I stopped at a site overlooking Lake George, a favourite place for Gascoigne and one from which she drew much inspiration. I remembered her commenting in the *Material as Landscape* exhibition catalogue 1997, of the “ungraspable voices” of the landscape. As I contemplated Gascoigne’s landscape, initially there was only silence, then it occurred to me the voices Gascoigne referred to were the sounds of the winds as they crossed in different directions across the vast plains; the sounds of the moving grasses; the sounds of the distant magpies and other birds; the sounds of silence.

When I returned from this trip, I felt I knew more about who Gascoigne was. I had met her son and was given personal insights, into Rosalie the person as opposed to Rosalie the artist. I
had also come away with an experience of her country. I knew her work for the first time. I had experienced her inspiration, the place she belonged to and the place that belonged to her. When I returned, and looked at Gascoigne’s work, paradoxically, it was the stillness in the landscape and the silence I recognised mostly, punctuated by the memory of the “ungraspable voices.”

Through this research, I have expanded my recognition of what constitutes landscape, and have gained further insights into how meaning is forged through experience and knowledge of and a sense of belonging to place. I believe I have become more adept at the structural and conceptual considerations and skills required to move beyond graphic representation and into a space of semi-abstraction which enables me to experience, interpret and represent landscape at a more contemporary and spiritual level.

This chapter has initially focused on the preliminary research position that has been the catalyst for further development and study through the MCA-R. It has discussed the *Poetry in Habitat* series of paintings developed in conjunction with an exploration of the work and practice of both Gascoigne and Tomescu. Through the analysis of five paintings from this series, I have revealed the structural and conceptual shifts that have occurred through this study and that are evident in works I have completed since August 2008 and August 2010. In conclusion, my position for further research directions is noted.
5. Conclusion

Through this study I have examined physicality, process and the embodied experience of practice; the manner in which Rosalie Gascoigne and Aida Tomescu developed their practice and vision through a predominantly physical relationship to art making and the world around them. The most pertinent question for me initially, in regards to this study, was why do we as artists have such unique responses to elements such as media and place? As a landscape artist I asked the question, why was my impression, my vision of place so different to that of Rosalie Gascoigne’s and as a painter why was my treatment of media so different to Aida Tomescu’s? An exploration of our differing approaches to practice was central to the process and journey of this research. It was from this perspective that I realised our differences lay ultimately in the physical manner in which each of us engages with practice.

Interestingly, the links revealed between Gascoigne and Tomescu established through the examination of two opposing perspectives in terms of practice: that is the cartographical approach of Gascoigne as opposed to the studio-based approach of Tomescu, has revealed much in terms of the respective intention and the vision each artist aspired to. Not only did these two artists approach their practice with intense physical commitment to attaining knowledge of the art making experience through an embodied connection to place and media respectively but connections were revealed also between each artist’s pursuit of clarity toward the poetic and the spiritual: merging the inner and the outer worlds.

Gascoigne’s work and vision, it has been revealed, was highly influenced by her personal energy. This energy, expended through her art making practice, guided her to gain embodied knowledge of, and insight into the vastness and yet paradoxically, the detail of region. The physical mapping, through process, engaged by Gascoigne was transferred to her two dimensional assemblages revealing evocative narratives of place and region, often resembling a cartographic organisation of materials, through a modernist approach to the grid. Influenced by the physicality of the geographical and the materiality of place, Gascoigne’s artworks reveal narratives of people, time and place as she sought to reveal deep understandings of the cultural relationships and connections between human experience and the natural environment: the place we inhabit.
Gascoigne’s husband Ben, made a prophetic observation in an interview for the Arts Show in 2001, when he commented on taking a trip to Cooma and noted how much the landscape resembled his wife’s work; suggesting perhaps, the actuality of the merging of Gascoigne’s vision with place; suggesting perhaps how synonymous Gascoigne’s images would become to the landscape they were inspired by, revealing perhaps the merging of the inner experience with the outer world.

Gascoigne’s engagement with landscape enabled her to develop knowledge of site, and subsequently a sense of belonging to place; an inseparable unit of region (Casey xv). This desire to belong informed Gascoigne’s vision; a grand vision in the end, that reflected her ability to move beyond limitations, both personal and artistic; to encompass the vastness and the essence of region, including ultimately a profound shift to a spiritual interpretation of place. Gascoigne’s journey was arduous and is inspiring in its narrative of a woman whose experience included personal, artistic and spiritual growth. By the end of her life Gascoigne had reconciled a place historically as one of Australia’s most renowned artists. One could assume she had fulfilled the desire to belong.

Aida Tomescu has been vital to this study, particularly in terms of my own practice-based research. Consideration of Tomescu’s working methods has shed much light on the importance of the artist’s relationship to media and the significance of this relationship to the creative process and what is produced. Tomescu demonstrates a powerful embodied experience of visual arts which is reflected in large energetic paintings that divulge many layers of searching and meaning. For Tomescu, the human body is inextricably woven into the experience, the performance of art making. She gains knowledge through a kinaesthetic experimentation with paint on canvas. Although she works from a region of the inner, Tomescu does make reference to influences of the Australian light and space and isolation (Pia 22), and herein lays the same archetypal inspiration for Gascoigne’s work.

The concept of modernism is an evident force in Tomescu’s practice and vision whereby the artist shifts from traditional representations to evocative, multi perspective artworks which detail the struggle of process and reveal the ambiguous results of experimentation, the random and the abstract. As Tomescu’s practice evolved she moved from the literal representations of still life and landscape to a poetical image, through association, metaphor and title; her
paintings can be viewed as metaphorical landscapes in themselves with material qualities representative of the geological and topographical nature of landscape, features such as ridges, craters, crevices, valleys and encrusted earth. The materiality of paint and the ensuing textural effects are reminiscent of aspects of landscape and the geographical, and are evident in her surfaces, a terrain that is explored and travelled by Tomescu through the journey of art making. What has been realised through this study is Tomescu’s physical passion for the application of paint; for the dialogue the artist holds with media, and her attempt to connect with the reality of painting and the artists ability to learn, and create meaning through an embodied experience of visual culture. The study of Tomescu’s methods has impacted on my own approach to process by a new method I have adopted, of considering a less defined outcome for my work. I believe I am more inclined to open up possibilities of the random and the progressive opportunity this offers the artist to create and learn, with a new awareness of the archive of process and the archaeology of surface.

A common experience for Gascoigne, Tomescu and myself is the exploration of identity through art making; a search for a reflection of ourselves conducted through the narrative of personal experience be it physical, psychological and or spiritual, expressed in the visual arts. Each of us adheres to a particular model of practice and engages with an individual aesthetic vision in an attempt to place ourselves: often as revealed through this study, our visions, practice and experience intersect and overlap, particularly through the shared experience of the artists journey and for each of us, the desire to reflect on the poetry of media, be it paint or plywood and of place; a place of the inner or the landscape or studio. This thesis has attempted to reveal the importance of process and how meaning is revealed by the manner in which we physically engage with art making through practice. It has attempted to highlight the significance of the impact of physicality on the artist’s vision and what is created through the embodied experience.

We are the innumerable facets of the crystal where the world is reflected and returns us to its reflections, so that we might know ourselves only through the universe and the little of us which it has retained

(Mary Ann Caws 1981)
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