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A Sublime Landscape

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Abstract

This dissertation contextualizes my practice in relation to notions of the sublime.

My practice is a critique of some of the more formal aspects of the sublime.

This thesis investigates the culture of the European New Zealander and how aspects of the sublime have shaped New Zealand's history. It also shows how my practice is both embedded in this history and is also a critique of it.

Introduction

My research this year has the underlying goal of describing the culture of the Pakeha New Zealander. I have been exploring the history and culture of New Zealand and in turn investigating my own identity as a New Zealander of European descent. Using art history as a starting point I have researched nineteenth and twentieth century landscape painting and how the philosophical aspects of the sublime have helped to mould the culture in this country. I am investigating New Zealand culture by examining the work of artists who have helped to define identity in this part of the world. My interests in this area developed from listening to other New Zealanders describe their connection with New Zealand culture. Comments such as “New Zealand has no culture” or that they felt “disassociated from their place of birth” or disenfranchised from their cultural roots, have propelled this investigation.

This dissertation investigates the strategies of the sublime and determines how the sublime has evolved within New Zealand art. To begin, I will outline the genres of landscape painting in the nineteenth century.

The genres of landscape painting make up a large part of early recorded history. Artists working within the genre of landscape were not so much concerned in giving an objective description of New Zealand, rather to project a reality of landscape distorted by the concepts of the ideal and the sublime. An

overriding conceptual idealism of the time was a notion of a 'new' overpowering nature to be tamed.

In an essay on the sublime in the pacific, New Zealand writer Ian Wedde refers to history as being written for the elite and that the drama of the sublime distorted the consciousness of emotional life in the west. (Wedde 2001, pg 45) In this paper I give examples of history recorded not by the victor or the elite, but by the everyday person. These histories give a more objective and realistic view of the New Zealand landscape and culture. I examine the work of artists who have worked with the concepts of disassociation caused through the misrepresentation of the sublime during the colonization period and who have in turn created contemporary work using the sublime which now presents a clear-sighted view of New Zealand culture.

Accounts of a European history in New Zealand were recorded during Europe's Age of Reason. Authors like Jonathan Swift and painters such as John Gilfillan produced works that were a mixture of scientific and metaphysical information, Ian Wedde, paraphrases:

“The images recorded by artists in the time of exploration are the product of vision and thought. Poetic narratives about the Pacific date as early as 1568 with the *'Mines of Solomon'*, they also include Hakluyt's *'History of English Navigation'* (1598-1600), Francis Bacon's *'New Atlantis'* 1627, Robert Burtons *'Anatomy of Melancholy'* 1621. Some of the dreamiest narratives of the period include *'Gulliver's Travels'* by Jonathan Swift, *'Captain Singleton'* and *'Robinson Crusoe'* by Daniel Defoe. These stories are part scientific records part journal of exploration made up narrative from different sources. What Wakefield saw when he theorised about Settlement was a vision of Utopia. Charles Darwin and Wakefield prompted Samuel to write *'Erewhon'* in 1872”.(Wedde, 1998, pg 14-16)

New Zealand was presented to Europe in ways that attempted to encourage emigrants. New Zealand was portrayed as a Utopian ideal and offered new hope and adventure to a culture that was disillusioned with life in the Industrial Revolution and with the debate between God and science:

“The failure of the established religions either to satisfy society’s need for emotional outlet or to secure social justice is reflected in expressions of anxiety and frustration that welled up throughout the nineteenth century”. (Cornell, 1983, pg 354). The concept of the sublime allowed Europeans to find God within nature.

Edmund Burke first wrote about the sublime in 1757. He describes the sublime as “that which excites the emotions of self preservation” (Pound, 1983, pg 19). The viewer of a sublime landscape was reminded of his smallness in God’s universe. God in nature was a well-known concept in the European consciousness. “A stock theme in European talk of nature, from the seventeenth century on, is summed up by Sir Thomas Browne’s remark: ‘Nature is the art of God.’”(Pound, 1983, pg 17).

The following lists are required attributes of the Burke’s notions of the sublime in comparison to the Beautiful:

Sublime and the beautiful

- Sublime
- Vast
- Rugged and negligent
- Shuns right angles
- The perpendicular
- Obscurity
- Darkness and gloom
- Sudden transitions
- Solid and massive
- Terror
- Founded in pain
- Beautiful
- Comparatively small
- Smooth and polished
- Loves right angles
- The horizontal
- Clarity
- Light
- Gradual transitions
- Light and delicate
- Love
- Founded in pleasure

The sublime came to be represented by everything that produced feelings of terror and awe. By the nineteenth century the European spectator had learnt from art and art theory to think of God whenever he contemplated the sublime landscape. It was this concept of the sublime that made it possible to take aesthetic pleasure in mountains. As seen in Charles Heaphy's painting, *Mount Egmont from the Southward* 1839.¹ Pound quotes Ruskin in *Modern Painters*: "There is something strange in the minds of these modern people! Nobody cared about mountains before". (Pound, 1983, pg 58).

To poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850) mountains were the "types and symbols of Eternity", an invitation into space boundless, the perfect expression of the 'Aesthetics of the Infinite', or that 'more beyond, to which the mind aspires, and which is the true sublime". (Pound, 1983, pg 58)

¹ (Refer to Appendices, Image 1)

Instances of the sublime can be recognized in John Gully's *The Chimney, Milford Sound*². The image has a ship on choppy water dwarfed by the superior power of nature. My favorite example of the romantic aspects of the sublime are shown in William Hodges *A View of Cape Stephens with Waterspouts*,³ a marine landscape described by Francis Pound as possessing: "...all of Burke's darkness which is not just an absence of light but a positive demonstrative sign of the sublime emotion" (Pound, 1983, pg21).

John Hoyte shows perpendicular peaks misted with the obscurity of a clouded sky in his painting *Entrance to Whangarei river*⁴. John Gully uses the smallness of the horseman to show the scale of the perpendicular mist-covered mountains in his work *In the Southern Alps*⁵. All of these examples demonstrate the power of nature over man.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the ideal landscape borrowed its grammar and vocabulary from seventeenth century artist Claude Lorraine.

Writer Sarah Cornell describes Lorraine's influence:

"The term picturesque appeared early in the century to describe natural scenery that had the same appeal as a painting, especially one by Claude Lorraine. Later in the century taste swung towards wilder scenery that recalled Claude's contemporary Salvador Rosa, whose

² (Refer to Appendices, Image 2)

³(Refer to Appendices, Image 3)

⁴ (Refer to Appendices, Image4)

⁵ (Refer to Appendices Image 5)

paintings seemed to arouse a sense of awe and mystery through their dark obscurity.” (Cornell, 1983, pg 354)

The picturesque, along with the sublime and the ideal, belonged to the genre of landscape painting. The genre also included the ‘topographical’ and the ‘sketch’. The genres enabled the viewer educated in landscape art clues in how to react to the given work.

“No ideal landscape was ever meant to precisely record a specific and actual place: each was imagined, and offered the pleasures of formal and poetic arrangement, the composition of nature within the rules. The aim was to present a perfected nature, pruned of fault and accident”. (Pound, 1983, pg 21).

New Zealand’s most famous ideal landscape, John Gilfillan’s *Native Council of War*⁶ is described by Pound.

“Within the genre of the ideal the artist made very effort to show a sense of nostalgia, the hearts yearning for its lost paradise, the innocent dreamed arcadia of antique time. That or something of that, the vision of an Arcadian innocence of a lost and ennobling simplicity is what Gilfillan’s picture grants to pre-European New Zealand.”(Pound, 1983, pg22)

⁶ (Refer to Appendices Image 6)

The topographers did seek to show a specific place, however they would search out a simplified version of the Claudian Ideal. Having found a Claudian prospect, the topographers would further rearrange it. The sketch as a genre included any type of preparatory work in any medium.

By the end of the nineteenth century, painting had peaked in a technical sense. The rules of genre had become very strict, with art academies and their rich patrons determining the brief for the artists to follow. The rules of perspective and three-dimensional space were elements that were expected within a commissioned work. These beautiful and ideal images did not reflect the life of the people of those times. Writer Sara Cornell contrasts the visual depiction in painting with the real world: "...in the nineteenth century this unity and harmony of space did not reflect the rapidly moving changes that uprooted and isolated people from each other and from the natural world."(Cornell, 1983, pg342)

The concept of landscape painting is an introduced European concept of seeing nature as a picture. The different genres of landscape painting left a legacy of art that depicts the history of early New Zealand. The genres were also important for classification. The genres themselves show the attitudes and underlying philosophies and ideologies that the enlightened European had towards nature.

The concepts of the sublime were used as marketing tools in the colonization of New Zealand. This is not unlike advertising today - the difference being that in

the nineteenth Century they were selling Utopia and today they sell commodities. Landscape was seen as utopia and now commodity is seen as utopia. The reality of the harsh environment found by pioneers must have been a far cry from their Pacific dream. Different genres of landscape paintings had promoted New Zealand as the 'new' Britain: a better Britain, the ideal Britain. The sublime was used as a commercial tool used for capital gain, an instrument in marketing. Exploiting the needs and desires of the settler in search of a new start, the sublime played on the emotional aspirations of the emigrant. The Pacific must have been a very profitable venture to those in the business of selling. It is ironic that the one of the companies whaling in the Pacific is the same company that now controls the multinational fast food chain McDonald's.⁷ This company along with introducing employment to the Pacific during early whaling, also introduced the tools in the form of drugs and alcohol for the indigenous people to live a potentially unhealthy life style. As in modern society health is affected as a result of bad diet.

New Zealand writer Ian Wedde, discussing aspects of the sublime in his article 'Life Ho' he explains how the narratives of the time were often exaggerated and romanticised: "Pacific history recollected from romantic maroons, twists and contorts around such hallucinating narrators as Stevenson and Melville".(Wedde, 2001, pg 43). Wedde uses the words: "twists", "contorts" and

⁷"Wedde's novel makes the connections between Reynold's backing of the expedition searching for the entrance to Hollow Earth and Reynolds' descendants' discovery of Hollow Mountain – McDonaldland. For these descendants are today involved with aluminium foil, fast food and nuclear submarines. Jeremiah Reynolds was on the right track. And the novel makes the link between the secret purpose of the exploring expedition and the presence of a McDonald's hamburger joint in Courtenay place, Wellington". (Roa in Wedde, 1986 pg12-13) (Max Boas and Steve Chain, *Big Mac, An Unauthorized Story of McDonald's*, E. P. Dutton New York 1976)

“hallucinating” to describe the exaggerated narrative of the two writers. This language is an example of the romantic overtones used to portray the Pacific in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Wedde argues that the concept of the sublime had the effect of disassociating place from reality of place. This exaggeration of the sublime caused a ‘sublime trauma’ (Wedde, 2001, pg 43), it encouraged tourism and brought more anthropologists and ethnologists into the area. The frenzy for the sublime could be described as an unethical or unemphatic craving for pure transcendence, beauty as sensory recognition of perfection, awe of God. The subliminal cruise resulted in the blind dissociation of place and reality, which resulted in the renaming of places already named in Aotearoa. ‘Cooks’ Strait for example was a name given to a place already named by Maori. This disassociation also caused sacred artefacts to end up in British museums as trophies of taming the sublime. [Wedde, 2001]

Wedde writes:

“... We can divide this braided Utopian vision into two parts and call the nostalgic part Arcadian and the progressive part utopian. In Samuel Butler’s Erewhon, the two appear together as a golden city on the side of a mountain. What both parts leave out is the present. In Arcadia, the present has not yet happened. In utopia, the present is about to be overcome. In the Arcadian dreams of European settlers in New Zealand, there are few if any Maori. In the Utopian vision, Maori are about to die

out. It was the diarists, keepers of notebooks, and amateur sketchers like Reverend James Preston in the 1870s and 1880s, who show a present in which settlers' cottage gardens, fishing picnics, and children's activities have begun to occupy a fragile clearing in the towering, sublime landscape (Wedde, 1998, pg 17).

In a post-colonial society, new narratives of people who immigrated to New Zealand have been recorded in the form of journals and diaries. The art of amateur sketchers has enriched the history in New Zealand, an example of this is *Opawa Station, Albury*⁸ by James Preston. These histories do include a present. These are clear-sited accounts of the culture of pioneering New Zealanders. People who were greatly affected by the Imperial project, not just an elite account of history recorded for an elite audience. All people in a new colony must at first feel a strong sense of anxiety and isolation, two aspects which fit within the sublime genre.

Within anthropology of the enlightenment ones level of humanness was determined by the way in which people appropriated their environment. That is within evolution man who had conquered the heavy plow and commodified there environment to its utmost, were beings that had advanced further along the evolutionary leader. The attitude toward Maori was that they were

⁸ (Refer to Appendices, Image 7)

considered savages less advanced in a evolutionary sense and in need of help on both a spiritual and commercial level.

“The more carefully the individual was defined in terms of his property, his rights and his appropriation, the more clearly it followed that the individual who had not yet appropriated was not yet fully an individual or fully human.” (Pocock , 2001, pg 51)

It is this type of appropriation that I am parodying in my work. My decision to incorporate famous images such as the ‘*Lady of Shalot*,’ was a deliberate attempt to suggest appropriation, both in a physical and practical way of representing the work of another artist. As well as suggesting appropriation on a deeper level, that is commenting on the consciousness of the west that looks upon the environment as a commercial commodity to be exploited.

Pocock writes:

“As civilized man, the individual acquired a much richer and more diverse sense of his own identity. The primitive sense of self, precisely because it was deficient, was far more intense and immediate, on those berserk occasions when it found expression, than the civilized sense of self could ever be”.(Pocock, 2001, pg 49).

Considering the mind set of the educated settler in New Zealand allows us to revisit the way in which the Europeans viewed Maori. It was the Maori who suffered through the oppression that followed, which included their loss of culture and way of life. However, the Maori knew the importance of their cultural identity and were determined to keep that culture alive.

The Europeans on the other hand were living in a new country, one that had been misrepresented as Arcadia. Europeans were soon to find themselves living in a society with no culture of their own as New Zealanders'; instead they borrowed a culture belonging to a country on the other side of the world. In this sense it is easy to understand the melancholic attitude that is explored in this poem by Allen Curnow:

Home and Land

The sensitive nor'west afternoon
Collapsed, and the rain came;
The dog crept into his barrel
Looking lost and lame
But you can't attribute to either
Awareness of what great gloom
Stands in a land of settlers
With never a soul at home.⁹

⁹ (Wedde, 1995)

I have included one of my own paintings as a response to this poem¹⁰. The work is titled '*Belonging*'. In this work I am commenting on urban migration and the increasing number of dairy farms occupying the land that for generations had consisted of sheep and cattle farming. The expression on the dogs face has a sense of melancholy, and I thought it illustrated Curnow's work well.

The core of New Zealand art history is made up of landscape painting and although the sublime and Ideal images of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may not portray a very realistic representation of life in this part of the world, they are still the beginning of our recorded visual history. There is now a great anthology of works within the Arts. Artists such as Michael Shepherd use the concepts of New Zealand history and the place of the pakeha within that history as the basis for his work. My work, like that of Shepherd's could be placed within the category of history painting. The difference between our works is what the aspects of the allegory or what the 'absent signifier' suggests. Shepherd's work comments on the corruption of colonisation by the Europeans as shown in his work '*Self & Rangiriri*'¹¹. In this work he is comment on the place and meaning of place. The work has the sub-titles of (My Country My Year) and (Looking for Mercer). Mercer a town in the North Island is an example of disassociation of place, being named after Henry Mercer who was the "...captain of the Blue Jackets and was shot at Rangiriri, and a man who probably never stood on the ground that bears his name" (Finlayson, 2004, pg 82). Shepherd states: "There are these continual abrasive colonial histories

¹⁰ (Refer to Appendices, Image 8)

¹¹ (Refer to Appendices, Image 9)

that are still being enacted around these areas they're still bitterly contested" (Finlayson, 2004, pg 82).

Ian Wedde describes an article called '*History Painting: Paintings of History*' written by Tony Green for the *Now See Hear!* Project in 1990:

"The old master kind' of history painting, as being 'not the painting of historical event'. A history painting of this kind, said Tony next pitching us towards allegory, 'is one that involves the representation of figures who can be identified with those of a classical literary text, for example Homer, or the Bible.' Further on, he reiterated that "The 'absent signified' of the history picture is not actual people or events, primarily or exclusively, but the various texts: Ovid, Homer, the Bible ..."(Wedde, 1999, pg 6).

The 'Absent signifier' in my work is that of disassociation. I have used appropriated images from the romantic period hoping that the viewer will recognise them as one, being European and two, that they are appropriated. By using images from literary texts such as the 'Chronicles or King Arthur', Homers Odyssey and the Greek myth of 'Narcissus' I am placing my work within the genre of history painting and at the same time critiquing it.

Wedde explains 'Absent signified' in regard to the work of Michael Shepherd:

” 'Absent signified' is a kind of acute historical consciousness, not found in or as a specific text such as the Bible, nor in historical representation as such, but the key driver of meaning in the work nonetheless - a kind of painting very familiar to us in New Zealand, exemplified brilliantly in the work of Michael Shepherd”.(Wedde, 1999, pg7).

Michael Shepherd likens his work to the story by Jorge Luis Borges in which the King of a land demands his cartographers to produce a definitive map of the country. The map ends up being the same size as the empire and as it decomposes parts of the land can be seen through it [O'Brian, 1996, pg 109].
Shepherd Quotes: “ It's only a few tracings of history overlaid on something it will disintegrate on...Any model I can propose to do with history and painting will be surpassed, and so it should. “...And by history I don't necessarily mean I paint the history of narrative, but I'd like to build a model over a lifetime by which I can plausibly *pictorialise* history (O'Brian, 1996, pg 109).

Michael Shepherd is concerned in history in the sense of memory and is also concerned in aspects of tradition as he strives to perfect his techniques:

“Michael Shepherd is a passionate investigator of the enigma of history, knowing that his paintings add another layer to the thick strata of historical stories. He is similarly devoted to perfecting his skill with paint through a close study of historical techniques.”(Beaglehole, 1998, pg 190)

In, '*Old Values*'¹² Shepherd is raising the consciousness of the history of colonization in New Zealand. In doing so he seems to be both searching for his personal heritage and adding to the archives of New Zealand art history. By appropriating Pre-Raphaelite images I am commenting on the appropriation of European culture in New Zealand landscape. The mythical images are a valid part of our culture. The tragic story of the Lady of Shallot lends itself to being a romantic parody of the concepts of the sublime. I have incorporated native birds and other animals to construct a dialogue within the works. The placement of these creatures emphasises the contrived construct of the compositions.

New Zealand art has come a long way since the European genres of landscape painting. Artists such as Michael Shepherd and Graham Sydney have questioned their belonging to this country in their art practice. In their investigation they have created work strong in aspects of technical skill and integrity. They are showing artists of the next generation that it is now possible to take strength and pride in New Zealand art history. Thanks to these artists and those who came before, like Rita Angus¹³, there is no longer any need to look to Britain for artistic influences.

Within the contemporary culture of New Zealand art there are still signs of the sublime. The sublime that disassociated a culture of meaning of place has helped to shape that culture into a unique and somewhat gothic aesthetic. The

¹² (Refer to Appendices Image 10)

¹³ (Refer to Appendices Image 11)

work of artists such as Angus and Shepherd are full of ambiguous qualities. Graham Sydney's work¹⁴ deals with isolation and the environment in a much clearer way than the artists discussed at the beginning of this dissertation. Aspects of the sublime continue to be an undeniable quality in the work of contemporary New Zealand artists. I believe that the focus of the sublime has transgressed from Edmond Burke's description and now fits closer with the sublime described by Jean Lyotard: a description of the sublime as a type of undetermined feeling of anxiety, an anxiety relating to the human condition of transience. The very real experiences of the pioneers and settlers in this country have produced a culture transfixed with the knowledge of isolation, and aware of the very real idea of man's smallness in the face of our sometimes unforgiving landscape.

“There is a popular account of our culture which casts it as irredeemably gothic, a people forever menaced by the unforgiving nature of the landscape and by a hard-wired tendency to madness and violence in the face of isolation. This dark Antipodean night of the soul has been told with countless variants in twentieth century novels, paintings and films as well as recounted in the newspapers”.(Strongman, 2001, pg 6)

New Zealanders and Australians tend to show empathy toward criminals. Murderer Stanley Graham¹⁵ was romanticised as a man alone against the world. Several novels, portraying him as a victim of society, and the 1981 film

¹⁴ (Refer to Appendices Image 12)

¹⁵ (Refer to Appendices Image 13)

Bad Blood, have been based on his story. The Mackenzie Country is named after New Zealand's most famous outlaw: James Mackenzie¹⁶, a sheep rustler who, along with his sheep dog Friday, was accused of sheep stealing. He was finally captured in 1855, and after a series of escapes and increasing illness, he was released in 1856 and promptly disappeared forever. In Australia there is Sydney Nolan's Ned Kelly paintings portraying a national hero. All are tales of human endurance in the face of an extreme landscape.

Jane Campion's *Piano*¹⁷ and *An Angel at My Table*¹⁸. Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures*. *Smash Palace*, *The Scarecrow*, and *Once Were Warriors* are some of the films covered in Sam Neil's Documentary *Cinema of Unease*. *Sam Neil quotes:*

“*The Piano* raised for me ..., the intriguing but worrying thought: if a national cinema is a reflection of ourselves, then ours is a troubled reflection indeed.” (Sam Neil)

New Zealand is now known to produce art with ambiguous and gothic qualities. The works of Doris Lusk¹⁹ and Brent Wrong²⁰ both have an essence of unease. The unease within their composition could be attributed to the naked hills in the

¹⁶ (Refer to Appendices Image 14)

¹⁷ (Refer to Appendices, Image 15)

¹⁸ (Refer to Appendices, Image 16)

¹⁹ (Refer to Appendices Image 17)

²⁰ (Refer to Appendices Image 18)

background and the lifeless air of a presence of absence due to the lack of inhabitants.

Lara Strongman comments on our gothic sensibility:

“In this part of the world, the gothic sensibility is still inextricably interwoven with the last remnants of frontier culture. It plays itself out in the no-mans-land between separate worlds at the lawless border between old world and the new where the old ways have lost their meaning and the new ways are struggling to evolve. It is an inherent aspect of the post-colonial moment for New Zealanders of European descent as Europe recedes in cultural memory and a new sense of identity as Pakeha is negotiated.” (Strongman, 2001, pg 7)

Aspects of the sublime easily parallel concepts of the *Unheimlich*, an idea drawn from Freud, meaning to relieve the blandness of modern life by being pushed out of the ‘comfort zone’. *Unheimlich* can be translated to the English word uncanny or unhomely; these terms can also be described as the return of the past within the present. There is clear evidence of these ambiguous, undetermined qualities in New Zealand art.

It is these qualities that I hope to show in my own work. I am referencing notions of the sublime in several ways: in the scale of the paintings, stressing a feeling of being overwhelmed by the landscape; by including a lone inhabitant

in the images I am suggesting isolation, a feeling that would cause most New Zealanders anxiety if they were to find themselves alone in the bush. The isolation of the New Zealand bush is a strong example of the concept of 'Unheimlich'.

Gavin Hipkins draws on aspects of the sublime in his series of photographic works, *The Homely*²¹. The aim of his project was to define nationhood and national folklore within New Zealand and Australia.

Landscape painting is a popular subject in New Zealand art. Or could it be the urge of for New Zealand artists to depict their surroundings coincides with a need to affirm heritage and identity? Rural New Zealand could be mistaken for England, considering the introduced vegetation.

In my practice this year I show my connection to New Zealand by showing a sense of pastiche to the landscape as well as describing culture. The narratives I pose are a balanced between fiction and reality. By appropriating images from the nineteenth century I am parodying the idealizing notions of the Enlightenment, and making a connection to the early landscape paintings of New Zealand.²²

With the appropriation of Pre-Raphaelite images I am reintroducing European culture into the New Zealand ideal landscape. The paintings are situated

²¹ (Refer to Appendices Image 19, 20, 21)

²² (Refer to Appendices Image 21, 22, 23)

between the pragmatic document and the imaginative construct. I am commenting on the interplay between art as romantic representation and art as empirical record. A combination of the two was the basic grammar of New Zealand visual history. I am also parodying historical record.

The works I have appropriated are from John Waterhouse (1849-1917) who was a follower of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The Pre-Raphaelites rejected the politics and ethics of the Industrial Revolution which led to the return to subject matter of the Middle-Ages, to recapture the beauty and simplicity of the medieval world. These artists were looking for truth in art and nature. They showed this by painting only from nature and from live models. They were also rejecting the established concept of the Ideal.

I am referencing their rejection of the Industrial Revolution as an allegory for rejecting consumerism in New Zealand today. I consider both to have the effect of disillusion and disassociation of place and identity.

A well-known philosophy of the late nineteenth century was that of Empiricism, which claims that only by physically experiencing something can one gain knowledge of that thing. With the increased urbanization in New Zealand fewer people manage to experience their environment first-hand, or rather prefer to experience it from the comfort and warmth of their arm chairs. In today's age of technology it is even more important to physically experience our environment in order to live healthy lives. Our consumer-based reality has taken the

transcendence once found in the subliminal depiction of God's wilderness and transferred it to the craving for the material object.

The landscapes in my paintings are of places that have personal significance to me. These places are part of who I am. In reproducing images of beautiful and ideal places like these, I hope to raise the consciousness of the human involvement within the environment. The images within the landscape are fragments of our multifaceted visual culture and could be described as being of the mind. Our visual culture is a subjective appreciation of the creative imagination, which does not produce specific forms, but feelings.

My work shows a balance between body and mind; consciousness and the subconscious, describing identity as a fusion of nature and culture. I believe that respect for our environment is a reflection of how we treat ourselves, and argue that in today's society both are in need of attention. The better we know our environment and ourselves, the greater the awareness of identity and belonging.

New Zealand writer Tracey Clement, makes the point in her article, *Location location location*, that New Zealanders have always known that they come from two islands in the middle of nowhere. And that this knowledge has helped strengthen our sense of place. Clements also says that Pacific is urban, and she sees Kiwi culture a dynamic hybrid rather than a diametric opposition. (Clement, 2004, pg 28).

In our post-colonial society our unique history and culture is becoming stronger and better understood as lesser known narratives find their way into the mainstream. Our culture becomes stronger as the fragmented parts weld together. My work explores my history and culture as a New Zealander of European decent and in doing so I hope to add to the anthology of work already put in place by previous artists.

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Appendices: Images

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