The development of an art retreat that will assist retreatants
to describe and more fully understand the experience of
spiritual direction through “art creation”

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Statement of Authenticity

This thesis submitted for assessment is the result of my own work, and no unacknowledged assistance has been received in its planning, drafting, execution or writing. All sources on which it is based have been acknowledged in writing, as has the supervision which I have received in the process of its preparation.

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Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 1

Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................... 2

Chapter 1:  Introduction (Background and Project Definition) ....................................................... 3
  Background to the Research ........................................................................................................ 3
  The Research Project ................................................................................................................. 5

Chapter 2:  Methodology and Approaches to Research ................................................................. 7
  Methodology ............................................................................................................................. 7
  Two Approaches to Data Processing ....................................................................................... 9
  Phenomenological Approach .................................................................................................. 10
    Levels of silence and conversation ....................................................................................... 12
    The balance of teaching and contemplation ....................................................................... 13
    Particular traditional formats .............................................................................................. 13
    Directed or undirected retreat .............................................................................................. 14
    Special focus- or issue-based retreats .................................................................................. 15
  Hermeneutical Approach ......................................................................................................... 16
    Spirituality ............................................................................................................................ 18
    Apophatic and kataphatic approaches
to Christian spirituality ........................................................................................................ 20
    Contemplation and meditation ............................................................................................. 22

Chapter 3:  The Role of Spiritual Direction in the Retreat Context ............................................. 25
  Spiritual Direction in the Historical Context ........................................................................ 25
  The Nature of Spiritual Direction ........................................................................................... 26
    Focus on the presence of God and the guidance of the Spirit ............................................. 27
    The human experience of God ............................................................................................ 28
    Prayer and spiritual direction ............................................................................................... 30
    Contemplative listening ........................................................................................................ 30
    Avoiding leading pilgrims to analyze experiences ............................................................ 31
    Discernment .......................................................................................................................... 32
  Spiritual Direction Traditions ................................................................................................. 33
    Structured approach to spiritual direction ........................................................................... 34
    Non-structured approach to spiritual direction ..................................................................... 34
Chapter 4: **Art Creation as a Process of Deeping our Inner Journey** ......39

The Role of Art Creation in Spiritual Contexts .................................39
The Purpose of Art Creation in the Art Retreat Context ...............42
Three Approaches to the Use of Images in Spiritual Reflection ...43
  Active imagination and mental images ...........................................43
  Representing psychological images in art creations ..................45
  Spontaneous expressive art creation ..................................45
Understanding the Relationship between Spiritual Reflection
  and Spontaneous Art Creation ..................................................46
  The analogy of art creations as mirrors ...................................48
Art Creation and the Spiritual Direction Process ..................50
  Preparation for art creation – self-awareness ..........................50
  Reflection on the process of creating
    and constructing an artwork ............................................50
  Reflection on the completed work .......................................51
  Being open to all aspects of the process ..............................52

Chapter 5: **Creating a Context for Spontaneous Art Creation** ....53

Blocks to Art Creation ..............................................................53
  Poor self-image as an artist ...................................................53
  Art materials ........................................................................54
  The didactic approach .........................................................55
Promoting Spontaneity in Art .....................................................56
  Encouraging playful art .........................................................56
  Using simple colour, line and symbol approaches ...............57
  Using different media and methods ..................................57
  Art charting exercise ............................................................58
Creating a Sacred and Confidential Working Space ................59

Chapter 6: **Creating the Holding Space for Art Creation and Reflection** ..61

Withdrawing from “the World” .....................................................61
Silence ..................................................................................63
  Maintaining silence throughout retreat ............................63
  Visual silence ..................................................................65
Spaces for Silence and Quietness ..........................................67
  Living space ......................................................................67
Prayer space .................................................................67
Art creation space ............................................................68
Psychological Aspects of Silence ........................................69
  Limiting intellectual analysis of experience ..................69
Prayer and Contemplation:
  Awareness of Sights and Sounds in the Inner Landscape ......72

Chapter 7:  Design of Future Art Retreats ..........................75
  Spiritual Direction’s Complementary Partnership
    with Art Creation ......................................................75
  Liberating the Art Creation Process .................................76
  Promoting the Spiritual in Art Creation .........................77

Conclusion .......................................................................79

Bibliography ....................................................................81

Appendices ......................................................................87
Abstract

Topic:

The development of an art retreat that will assist retreatants to describe and more fully understand the experience of spiritual direction through “art creation”.

To engage in any art creation in a spontaneous manner provides material on which to contemplate and reflect. The art images produced in art retreats can therefore become the objects of contemplation of a spiritual nature, as Renate Düllmann states:

If contained in tangibly visible forms, art-images can embody feeling responses, or thoughts, or desires, or experiences of mystery, or images of self or of God, all of which allow for discovery, insight, enlightenment and discernment. Furthermore, art-images provide the frame and the focus for a form of attentive listening that is more immediate, perhaps, than listening to words shared between the individual retreatant and the guide, or the group and the guide, in the presence of the Spirit and in an atmosphere of mutual understanding.\(^1\)

The arts in retreats seem to speak to those who have come to recognise through the experience of imaginative contemplation, or other forms of guided imagery, ‘that when imagination is allowed to move to deep places, the sacred is revealed’.\(^2\)

This thesis looks at the development and design of a three-day art retreat. It explores the art creation components of the retreat program and how they relate and contribute to the processes of active reflection in conjunction with spiritual direction. It proposes that art creation provides one of the primary links into unconscious memory and consequently is a valuable partner to the process of spiritual direction. The primary source material is personal experience of running three art retreats and feedback from retreatants who participated in these art retreats.

\(^1\) R. Düllmann, “Art: Containment and Language of Soul”, *The Way* 1999/95: 82.

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Chapter 1: Background and Project Definition

Background to the Research

Having practiced as a spiritual director for over ten years, I have developed an awareness of the benefits of the use of images or imaging in spiritual direction in helping people get in touch with their inner life experience and faith journey.

Initially this came to my attention through the regular use of imaging by people who came for spiritual direction, commonly known as pilgrims. In the spiritual direction process, pilgrims imagine a scene or image that comes to them out of their meditation or reflection on what they are currently exploring in their lives. The imagined scene may appear as a playback of a real life situation or may be a dream-like image that captures the essence of what they are experiencing and feeling at the time. It may also be a symbolic image that carries a focused sense of what is significant to them in their current reflections on life.

Without drawing or capturing these images or scenarios in any physical format, pilgrims would describe, often in detail, what these images were like – including colour, ambience, shape and movement – often with a description of where they or others were imaginatively in the images they mentally formed. The impact and ongoing significance of these imaging experiences on the pilgrims, and oftentimes on myself as their spiritual director, were profound and in some cases the visualizations became core images in their ongoing reflection on their life experiences in subsequent spiritual direction sessions. Being their spiritual director led me to contemplate exploring the use of art as an extension of imaging that would give pilgrims a further means of expressing what was surfacing for them in their reflection on their inner journey. It was envisaged that it could also be helpful to have a record of their experience on which to further reflect at a later stage.

As part of my sabbatical leave in 2001, I endeavoured to locate a retreat in which art was intentionally used in association with spiritual reflection to enable me to personally experience what it was like to use art in this way. Having located a group that organized retreats, I booked in for the weeklong retreat and in the midst
of my sabbatical travels spent eight beautiful days at a retreat centre in Kent, England, participating in painting and prayer.

As it turned out, it was not the type of retreat I was hoping it would be, as lovely as the experience itself was. It involved a daily morning chapel service followed by a tuition session with a professional artist who introduced us to a variety of art styles and techniques and then invited us to spend the rest of the day exploring and painting or drawing or sculpting. In the evenings we would meet to reflect on the day and engage in a communal activity like watching a video on art or creating a slide show from slides we had created from coloured cellophane.

I had been looking for something that engaged me more in meditation and reflection on life and invited me to express this through the medium of art, whatever form that may take. I therefore endeavoured to construct such a retreat experience within this Kent retreat context and kept a journal of my experiences each day. However, I felt that I was still missing something in both the art making processes and in spiritual reflection. This was not due to any lack in the content of the retreat input, as I found the scriptural reflections each morning very meaningful and thought provoking and the art instruction helped me explore different methods and styles of art expression that I had never considered trying before. However I was left feeling that I wanted more than this. I wanted to explore the use of art creation in the retreat context combined with spiritual direction to see how art could be used as a complementary aspect of the spiritual direction process.

This led me in 2003 to offer a three-day retreat that used art as the primary reflection mode to explore the journey of faith and the experience of God. On a long weekend in March 2003, during Lent, the first Landscapes of the Soul retreat was run with ten participants. There were four team members involved in offering spiritual direction each day for those engaged in the art making processes. In light of the enthusiastic response from the participants, another three-day retreat was run in June 2004 during Pentecost and another ten retreatants attended, this time with three team members offering spiritual direction.

Several significant modifications were made in the way the second retreat was run, in light of what we had learnt from the initial retreat in 2003. Of the
retreatants that attended in 2004, two had participated in the 2003 retreat. In 2005 we ran a third retreat with four participants.

The Research Project

In seeking to research the area of art creation in the retreat context, I found that there was little in the literature written specifically about art creation used as a reflective medium in association with spiritual direction within a retreat setting. The only literature I have identified in my reading that specifically addresses this subject is a journal article written by Renate Düllmann in which she briefly addresses the role of art as a contemplative medium in a number of contexts including retreats. Most of the literature written recently about Christian retreat work tends to focus on Ignatian retreat formats and approaches. This material will be discussed in chapter 2. Outside the retreat context, very little has been written about the creation of art in its various forms as a means of spiritual reflection. Most of the literature written in related areas comes from work originating from a new movement within the art therapy profession. The art therapists writing this literature were discovering the significant role art creation was having in their own life experiences as a means of self-reflection. They were discovering how art creation was opening up for them avenues of spiritual awareness that went beyond the analytical disciplines of their own therapy practices.

It is in view of the very limited literature relating to the core elements of this thesis – the creation of art and how it combines with spiritual direction to enhance the spiritual exploration that occurs during a retreat – that I hope to contribute to the growing field of study of art creation as it relates to retreat work and spiritual direction. Insights into this field have been gained from existing literature and experience gained from my own practice as a spiritual director for over 10 years.

3 Düllmann, “Art: Containment and Language of Soul”, 82-92.
and a retreat leader and spiritual direction formation leader over the past five years. Retreatants from the three art retreats were also surveyed to gain their responses to the art retreat experience. This material is examined more fully in the following chapter.

This thesis explores how the phenomenological elements of the retreat experience intersect with the hermeneutical elements of interpreted experience to promote spiritual reflection and meaning for the retreatants. In particular, the impact of the reflective and contemplative experiences of retreatants associated with the art creation and spiritual direction processes in the retreat experience is explored. This exploration identifies how the processing of reflection on broader life experiences integrates with the various phenomenological elements of the retreat context to contribute to the overall retreat experience, so that future art retreats can be designed to maximize the benefits of spiritual direction for retreatants.
Chapter 2: Methodology and Approaches to Research

Methodology

This thesis seeks to evaluate art retreats and to understand their relevance to the broader field of spirituality and its practices. Based on the experience of retreatants, team members and existing understandings of elements of spirituality relating to art retreats, the research extends beyond the art retreat as a discrete phenomenon to its wider context. This is because the relevance of the art retreat experience within the field of spirituality is governed by how different schools of thought understand the various elements such as spiritual direction, retreat, spirituality, and art.

The main source of data used to describe the various elements of the retreat process and their effectiveness is the observations of the retreatants involved in three art retreats. This includes reflections on how the retreats functioned in view of the stated purposes and intended outcomes. To gain a sample of the observations of the retreatants, all participants in the three art retreats were approached to respond to a written self-completion proforma, referred to in this study as the survey (See Appendix 1b). The proforma is made up of twenty open ended questions with plenty of space allowed for them to expand on their answers. The questions were aimed at inviting the participants in the retreat to express their expectations prior to the retreat, their experience of the art retreat and the ongoing impact after completing the retreat. It particularly invited them to respond in relation to key aspects such as art creation and spiritual direction.

A letter (see Appendix 1a) was sent with the survey inviting retreatants to participate in responding to the questions in the survey. Participants were asked to sign a statement of agreement (see Appendix 1c) to indicate willingness to allow their responses to be used as part of this research project. This statement accompanied the documents. Within the agreement form were assurances relating to maintenance of confidentiality and security of information storage. All documents were sent in hard copy as well as on computer disk as soft copy with a self addressed and stamped envelope to encourage their return. This allowed participants to respond by filling out the proforma by hand and mailing
material. Retreatants also had the option of filling the survey out on the computer and emailing their responses. Of the twenty retreatants contacted, thirteen responses were received, two of which were from those who had attended the art retreat on more than one occasion. Sixty five percent of participants responded.

The feedback on the survey from all respondents has been collated onto single forms for each question. This enables the feedback to be compared and analysed to identify trends and variations in the responses relating to specific elements in the retreat experience. The feedback from all respondents to each question in the survey is included as appendices 2a – 2r (excluding 2i and 2o). A number is used to identify respondents in the set of responses to each question. The number remains the same throughout the sets of responses enabling feedback to be cross-referenced for a particular respondent.

Several limitations to the use of surveys in this study are noted. Firstly, due to timing of the distribution of the surveys, some of the respondents had to recall retreats experienced two years previously while for others it was only a matter of months. Secondly, the three retreat experiences, while basically similar in focus and intent, varied in content and approach. Due to this variation, the survey needed to be designed to be general enough to allow for variations across the retreats while gaining some specific responses in relation to key elements of each particular retreat experience.

As well as the responses from the participants in the three retreats, the author has drawn on his own observations as team leader as well as the feedback from retreat team members. In each art retreat, the team was made up of a team leader, the author of this thesis, and two or three team members who were trained spiritual directors. The team was involved in planning the art retreats, organising the program, running the various aspects of the program and offering spiritual direction to participants. They met before, during and after each retreat to assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of each facet of the retreat experience and program elements. The team also continued to discuss the philosophy and spiritual principles on which the retreats were formed. Their views and conclusions became the basis for the development of future art retreats. The author has sought to represent the views and conclusions drawn from these discussions as accurately as possible within this study.
Two Approaches to Data Processing

Responses from the surveys completed by participants together with views and conclusions of the author and team members were processed using the phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches. These two main approaches were used in conjunction with each other to provide a broader base on which to assess and understand the art retreat and its elements than application of a single approach would have allowed.

Looking at the art retreat as a phenomenon or contained experiential context, initially suggested the phenomenological approach as the natural approach to its study. However it is recognised that there are several key elements of both spirituality and theology that impacted the definition and understanding of what the art retreat seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of spirituality and theology. With this in mind, the hermeneutical approach was also chosen to look at key concepts and relate them to the fields of spirituality and theology. Applying these two approaches to the study of the art retreat and its elements provides a balanced and informed framework in which to assess the relevance and significance of art retreats in the broader context of retreats and spirituality. It also enables spiritual elements to be bought into conversation with the context in which they are experienced.

This research involved three main steps, as outlined by Schneiders⁵. These steps have enabled the development of a framework from which to assess the contribution of art making to the overall process of spiritual direction in the art retreat context. The first step was to describe the elements or phenomena in the retreat experience that relate to the core experiences of art retreatants. These include spiritual direction, art making, contemplation and meditation. These were identified within the survey as the key art retreat elements participants were asked to respond to. Secondly, these phenomena were critically analysed to examine how they contribute to the experiential formation of meaning. In this step, the collation and analysis of the responses of the participants to each question identified the influence each element of the retreat experience had on the retreatants and suggested its contribution to the formation of meaning within the

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retreatants. The third step was the process of marrying the phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches to understand how retreat contexts and the experiential aspects of the retreat can be interpreted as vehicles of transformation for retreatants. In this stage of the process, the findings of the second step were brought into conversation with the views and conclusions of the author and team members to assess how the retreat could be further developed to enhance the transformative intention of the art retreat experience for the participants.

The following sections outline some of the key aspects that each approach brings to this study.

**Phenomenological Approach**

The phenomenological approach aims to explore deeply the phenomenon under consideration – in this case the way retreatants experienced art creation and spiritual direction in a particular art retreat context and how this context impacted them. As Tesch describes the phenomenological method in an overview of types of qualitative research:

> In order to gain access to other’s experience phenomenologists explore their own, but also collect intensive and exhaustive descriptions from their respondents. These descriptions are submitted to a questioning process in which the researcher is open to themes that emerge…. Finding commonalities and uniquenesses in these individual themes allows the researcher to crystallise the ‘constituents’ of the phenomenon.  

In this study, the author explored his own experience of journeying with retreatants in three art retreats with a view to understanding the influence and impact of various elements of the art retreat phenomenon. While the survey responses may not be “intensive and exhaustive”, they have been systematically looked at with a view to identifying themes related to specific elements of the retreats. In this study these elements were identified as constituting the phenomenon. The first step was to isolate common and unique aspects in the retreatants’ responses. Common themes were identified that led to assessment of

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key phenomenological aspects of the retreats. This assessment contributed to refining the design of art retreats to better serve the needs and desires of retreatants to gain personally from the retreat experience.

To establish a framework in which to explore the function of art creation in a retreat context, it was important to define the parameters within which the key elements of the retreat were to be examined. These were spiritual direction, art creation and the phenomenon of retreat. The parameters for each of these key elements determined the particular approach that was adopted in the art retreats. This following discussion serves as a prelude to the main body of the thesis where deeper examination of the justification for making these choices in the particular context of art retreats will be explored.

The purpose of retreats is to provide a safe holding space for retreatants to deepen awareness of the inner journey and its subsequent relationship to the spiritual and divine or transcendent aspects of life, away from the distractions of everyday life. Deepening awareness is related to two main aspects of the retreatants’ spiritual experience. The first is awareness of the retreatants’ own inner life experience as they interact with the secular contexts in which they normally live and work. This requires retreatants to enter into a process of self-examination. The second aspect is awareness of the spiritual realm. This particularly relates to awareness of the presence of the Divine Other or God and how relationship with the Divine Other or God impacts their life experience and spiritual journey.

The retreat with a focus on spirituality continues to be the main form of retreating in Western Christian cultural contexts. A recent Canadian study of 521 retreatants that explored the reasons people attend retreats, particularly in a monastic environment, found that spirituality and “being away” from the everyday life situation were the dominant motivating factors in people retreating. In comparing novice or first time retreatants to those who returned for subsequent visits, the study found:

... the two groups were similar in their very high satisfaction with the retreat experience; further, their desire for spirituality was a significant factor in their satisfaction. ... And while both individual and communal prayer played a more

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major role for the repeat visitors, the groups did not differ in the central role of
time for rest and meditation during the retreat.\(^8\)

Interest in spiritual retreats has led to the growth of a very diverse range because
of the varying factors that govern the overall approach of retreat programs. These
include whether the retreat is silent or conversational, taught or contemplative,
follows particular traditional formats, directed or undirected, or has a special
focus or is issue based. These are not sets of dualistic criteria but mark the
defining elements on continuums between these elements. For example, in some
retreats the rule of silence for the duration of the retreat is absolute while others
allow varying combinations of silence and conversation.

Looking at each of these sets of factors, the following sections will briefly
identify where these factors came into play in the three art retreats. This provides
a framework on which the thesis explores in more depth the basis on which these
factors are applied within the art retreats.

**Levels of silence and conversation**

The amount of time spent in silence is one factor that defines the retreat context.
Some retreats are designed to be completely in silence from shortly after arrival
until the last community gathering. Other retreats stipulate particular periods of
silence throughout the retreat such as from evening prayer until after morning
prayer.

The first art retreat was designed as a silent retreat to promote deep contemplative
reflection and prayer over the full period of the retreat. This meant that retreatants
were required to enter into silence after the evening meal on the first day until the
final time of worship at the end of the retreat. This silence was understood to
include not entering into conversation with another retreatant. When it was
discovered, however, that several retreatants were not aware that the retreat was
supposed to be silent, it was proposed that conversation would be allowed for
those who wished to break the silence at evening meals and during an evening
session when films about artists were shown. This pattern continued for the two
subsequent retreats, with the exception of the evening session, which was dropped
after the first retreat.

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\(^8\) Ouellette et al., “The Monastery”, 186.
The balance of teaching and contemplation

Retreats can be planned around a range of inputs from team members. Taught retreats incorporate sessions of teaching around themes that seek to focus the retreatants’ reflection on particular aspects of their spiritual journey. The level of teaching and time devoted to it varies considerably across various approaches and emphases in the retreat experience. In some cases, there is intentionally no taught input and retreatants are invited to stay with their own reflection and contemplation around a daily rhythm of communal prayer and, in some cases, spiritual direction.

In the art retreats, the level of teaching initially was fairly high for a predominately silent retreat. In the first two retreats, a session of teaching around a central theme was presented each day. This theme was sourced from a biblical text and aimed at reinforcing principles relating to both the traditional liturgical season and the subject of art and spirituality. As mentioned previously, in the first retreat there was also an evening session that used audiovisual resources to help retreatants develop awareness of how artists understood the creation of art.

After two retreats, the teaching component of the retreat was replaced by briefer sessions of prayer, poetry and readings in the morning and evening sessions. The reasons for this change will be explored in chapter six.

Particular traditional formats

Some retreats are based on traditional formats that have been shaped over the centuries to provide particular contexts for reflection and self-examination. One of the more familiar is the Ignatian retreat. This is based on the Ignatian Exercises and runs over thirty days either consecutively, or spread over a series of shorter retreat periods, or over thirty weeks. This type of retreat has a very structured approach in guiding retreatants through a process of self-examination, reflection and prayer based on the Exercises originally developed by St Ignatius of Loyola (1491 – 1556) out of his own journey of spiritual growth and renewal.

After a move, particularly in Europe early in the twentieth century, to promote the participation of lay people in silent retreats, the second stage of a three-stage transition started that was supported by Pope Pius XI who published an encyclical
in 1929 “that made St Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises almost church policy”\(^9\). This transition opened up retreats to a broader representation of the Church and in some cases extended invitations to those outside the formal boundaries of the traditional Roman Catholic Church.

The third stage of transition occurred around the 1960s\(^{10}\) when there was a growth in the creative diversity of retreat types. While the formal Ignatian retreat formats continued in varying forms, other styles of retreat developed out of other age-old traditions. One such retreat style was an outdoor wilderness retreat, developed by Robin Pryor\(^{11}\) to invite retreatants to explore the presence of God within the Australian landscape. The traditional rhythms of prayer and reflection are incorporated into days of walking and exploring the landscape in various Australian locations.

The retreat format designed for the art retreats examined in this paper was not based on the Ignatian style of retreating. The retreats were non-structured in that they allowed retreatants to choose aspects of their spiritual journey that arose for them. They were encouraged to remain as open as possible to the leading of the Spirit of God in their reflection on their own spiritual journey of life. The art retreats focused on wherever the retreatants’ spiritual reflection took them in the context of art creation, prayer and contemplation based on their own reading and reflection on the retreat experience.

**Directed or undirected retreat**

Some retreats incorporate spiritual direction formally into the structure of the program and some intentionally do not offer this to retreatants.

The art retreats were designed to offer spiritual direction for retreatants to meet for approximately thirty minutes a day with a spiritual director. This was not a compulsory requirement. However, if they chose to do so, time was allocated to give them opportunity to reflect with a spiritual director on whatever they wished

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\(^{10}\) Tetlow, “The Remarkable Shifts”, 20.

to share about the retreat experience or matters that are being raised for them in their personal spiritual journey.

The spiritual direction sessions were intentionally non-directive in terms of suggested agendas for self-reflection or prayer or in interpreting or analyzing the art or their experiences of the retreat. The spiritual direction sessions did not follow an Ignatian style format with a prescribed program of reflection. The retreatants governed the content of the sessions and determined what they shared with their spiritual guides.

This approach to spiritual direction reflected a non-structured approach that does not fit neatly into any one tradition. There are aspects of several spiritual direction traditions\(^\text{12}\) echoed in the non-structured approach to spiritual direction adopted within the art retreat. However none fitted the particular approach adopted within the art retreats, which used a hybrid approach developed in more recent times to incorporate the best of several traditions that use an open agenda approach to spiritual direction.

The significance of this non-structured approach to spiritual direction will be explored in relation to the other elements in the art retreat in chapter three of this thesis.

**Special focus- or issue-based retreats**

Another development in retreats in recent years has been the growth of many new elements and themes being incorporated into some of the older traditional retreat formats. There are issue-based retreats that invite people to reflect on their engagement with particular aspects of life experience such as ecology, justice and vocational discernment. Other retreats have a special focus on particular frameworks and methodologies that may assist retreatants in their self-reflection and awareness. These include personality profiling systems, physical programs like yoga and meditation, art and other creative expressions. The phenomenon of

\(^{12}\) Several articles on the various approaches to spiritual direction have been published by *The Way* and a collection of these articles has been incorporated in a book edited by Lavinia Byrne IBVM, entitled *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance* (London: Cassell, 1990). These articles outline some of the historical understandings of spiritual direction in the various traditions such as the Benedictine, Carthusian, Carmelite and Jesuit traditions. The approach adopted in this retreat does not fit neatly into any of these traditions. However it does stand in contrast to the Jesuit approach to spiritual direction which is framed by the Ignatian exercises.
art retreat explored in this thesis is an example of one of these new approaches to traditional retreat practice and also strongly supports the agenda of promoting the participation of laity and clergy in the silent retreat contexts, as outlined by Tetlow\textsuperscript{13}.

In art retreats, the focus is not on the application of art as an interpretative tool for the retreatant’s self-expression. The art component is designed to provide an alternative means of imaginative reflection and expression that promotes the deepening process in contemplation and spiritual direction. Retreatants are encouraged to be as spontaneous as possible in their art creation. They are encouraged not to plan their art creations too much and to avoid getting too tied down by techniques, perspective, colour conventions and dictates of style and media. The intention is to allow the retreatants to express themselves as freely as possible as this leads to a truer expression of the inner journey of life experience. This aspect of the retreat experience will be examined in more detail in Chapter five.

**Hermeneutical Approach**

The hermeneutical approach seeks to provide avenues through which the exploration of meaning making can be advanced. It seeks to guide the process of how we bring meaning to situations relating to spiritual and philosophical understandings of life. This approach is not about formulas, theological or cultural or historical. Rather it seeks to bring meaning to the continually unfolding realm of experience of the incarnate and transcendent aspects of the human spirit as they interact with and are impacted by the Spirit of God. This approach tries to understand how awareness of self in relation to the broader context of life is expressed, to contribute to understanding the experience of life.

We find Jesus used a particular type of hermeneutical approach in guiding his followers in trying to make sense of their experience of the spiritual journey. He used image, metaphor and analogy drawn from everyday life situations in the form of parables and wisdom sayings. These parables and wisdom sayings drew

\textsuperscript{13} Tetlow, “The Remarkable Shifts”, 18.
on some of the archetypal stories, images and themes of spirituality, such as journey, growth, motivation and inspiration.

There are several key elements in Jesus’ approach that illustrate the hermeneutical approach needed to partner the phenomenological approach. Firstly, the use of image and metaphor from everyday life experience provides an accessible entry point for exploring meaning in the realm of spirituality where experience is diverse, and parameters for meaning making are broad. Secondly, the use of image and metaphor provides a vehicle for exploring meaning without being too prescriptive as to how the meaning relates to specific circumstances in life. While Jesus sought to point people to “the way”, he made it clear that it was not just a matter of following a prescribed tradition or approach to life but that there was the need to listen to the Spirit of God and observe life and reflect on what it is leading us into. Thirdly, the use of image and metaphor leaves room for hearers or readers or observers to reflect on their own spiritual life experiences without dictating agendas or outcomes in the reflective processes.

The hermeneutical approach, using image and metaphor to promote the exploration and formation of meaning in spiritual aspects of life experience, provides room for deeper reflection through meditation, contemplation and prayer on what constitutes our spiritual life. Images and metaphors offer fertile ground to explore and find meaning in less prescribed ways. Applied to the study of spirituality, the hermeneutical approach precedes the theological processes of exegesis of texts and draws on primary spiritual life experience.

Sandra Schneiders\textsuperscript{14} begins her critique of the various approaches to spirituality with the premise that “the object of spirituality as an academic discipline is the spiritual life as experience.”\textsuperscript{15} Schneiders also notes that the discipline of spirituality is not just about the spiritual life as experience within relation to the human spirit itself but also involves an understanding that there is an interaction between the human spirit and the Spirit of God\textsuperscript{16}. She argues that while anthropological, theological and historical approaches have been used to bring method to the research processes in the discipline of spirituality, each has fallen

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Schneiders, “A Hermeneutical Approach”.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Schneiders, “A Hermeneutical Approach”, 9.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Schneiders, “A Hermeneutical Approach”, 10.
\end{itemize}
short in being able to adequately address the unique issues in this field of study. This is due in significant measure to the notion that what is being dealt with ultimately in spirituality is mystery.

Schneider concludes that what seems most appropriate for the study of spirituality generally is the hermeneutical approach in conjunction with other fields of study, particularly theology and historical/contextual methods.17

The art retreat context, that this thesis examines, is one based on spiritual practices that promote the awareness of the divine in relation to retreatants’ personal everyday life experience. The hermeneutical elements that this paper unpacks in relation to art making in the retreat context will include various approaches to spirituality, meditation and contemplation.

**Spirituality**

“Spirituality” as a term, along with “retreat”, has grown in its adoption by ever-increasing numbers of groups – both non-religious and religious. It has become incorporated into a broad range of understandings of phenomena including earth awareness, natural birthing and a range of physical and psychological therapy methods.

In the religious context, particularly in Judeo-Christian contexts, the understanding of spirituality has developed from etymology related to the term “spirit”. “Spirit” in the Hebrew language is derived from the Hebrew word “ruah” which means wind or breath. In the Greek language in which the majority of the Christian scriptures were originally written, the word translated as “spirit” is based on the Greek term, “pneuma” from which we derive words like pneumatic which also relate to air and wind. The Latin term “spiritus” also carries with it the sense of “...breath, courage, vigor, or soul.”18

Each of these words, when translated, carries the sense that “spirit”, and thus “spirituality” encompasses concepts of movement and change influenced by invisible immanent or transcendent sources. Spirituality relates to processes of describing these invisible influences that move us in our everyday life experience.

both from within the human spirit and beyond. The identification of which “spirituality” is being referred to will relate to which “source” is being focused on as the initiating influence in the situation being studied.

For the purpose of this paper, spirituality refers to Christian spirituality in which the sources of movement or change in the subject are understood to be both the Divine Spirit of God and the subject’s own spirit, as these engage in interplay and dialogue. The aspect of spirituality that is explored in relation to the art creation and spiritual direction components of the retreat is the spiritual life as experience. This aspect is explored using the responses of the retreating to their experience of the art retreat as it related to their understanding of their spiritual experience.

Some of the key terms that will be used to express the metaphorical concepts inherent in the hermeneutical method will include “the inner journey”, “depthing” and “centring”.

The “inner journey” refers to the flow of thought and reflection that contributes to making sense of what is happening in and around all aspects of life, whether through conscious, subconscious or unconscious experiences. The image of journey points to the awareness that every aspect of life is part of an ongoing process that is continually changing and evolving. The inner journey concept also implies that reflection and awareness are not focused solely on our inner movements but also take into account the various aspects of the outer landscapes or contexts in which life is experienced. These landscapes or contexts include belief systems, cultural and social frameworks, personality traits, relationships and nature.

The term “depthing” draws on the image of experience as being multi-layered. Depthing refers to the process of increasing awareness of elements of life experience that are below the surface of the consciously lived experience. In depthing, awareness of the elements of inner motivation, whether thought or felt, becomes the focus of exploration of life experience. In the context of Christian spirituality, the depthing process is aimed at assisting the subject of the process to become aware of the divine source that ultimately influences life in its deepest and fullest sense and their responses, both positive and negative, to that divine reality.
When considering the breadth of life experience, “centring” is understood to be a way of focusing attention on specific aspects of the inner journey. In Christian spirituality, the centring process is focused on the awareness of the presence and influence of the Divine other or God within the subject’s experience of life.

As well as these general terms that will be used throughout the thesis, two other terms – the apophatic and kataphatic approaches to Christian spirituality and contemplation and meditation – need to be explained.

**Apophatic and kataphatic approaches to Christian spirituality**

In the history of Christian spirituality, two overarching approaches to spirituality - the apophatic and kataphatic - have defined spirituality from different perspectives. These approaches have some bearing on our understanding of how art making relates to spirituality in the retreat context. Harvey Egan describes them as the “via negativa” and the “via affirmativa”.

First, there is the *via negativa*, the apophatic way, which stresses that because God is the ever-greater God, so radically different from any creature, God is best known by negation, elimination, forgetting, unknowing, without images and symbols, and in darkness. God is “not this, or that”. All images, thoughts, symbols, etc. must be eliminated, because, as St John of the Cross points out, “all the being of creatures compared with the infinite being of God is nothing … Nothing which could be a proximate means of union with God”.

Secondly, there is the *via affirmativa*, the kataphatic way, which underscores finding God in all things. It emphasizes a definite similarity between God and creatures, that God can be reached by creatures, images and symbols, because he has manifested himself in creation and salvation history. The incarnational dimension of Christianity, too, forces the mystic to take seriously God’s self-revelation in history and in symbols. Because Christ is God’s real symbol, the icon of God, God is really present in a positive way.

Egan goes on to argue that these are not diametrically opposed propositions as would appear on reading the above descriptions. While both have their strengths and weaknesses, they each contribute to an understanding of the mystery of God.

The use of image and symbol is one of the pivotal distinctions in the definitions of apophatic and kataphatic approaches to spirituality. Understanding of the

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distinctive role of image and symbol in these approaches may help clarify some distinctive roles art creation provides in the process of engaging in the spiritual journey within the retreat context.

Egan notes in the apophatic approach “all images, thoughts, symbols, etc. must be eliminated...” \(^{21}\). What needs to be clarified in this understanding of the apophatic approach is that image, thought, and symbol in this context refers exclusively to the Divine or God as the subject. In other words, in the apophatic approach to spirituality there can be no image, thought or symbol capable of defining or representing God fully.

However this does not mean there is no role for image, thought or symbol in the apophatic approach to spirituality. In looking at three of the key proponents of this approach, namely St John of the Cross (1542 – 1591), St Teresa of Avila (1515 – 1582) and the author of The Cloud of Unknowing, dated to the fourteenth-century, we find that they use an abundance of images, thoughts and symbols to express their authors’ understanding of spirituality. The distinction they make is that their images focus on the experience of the person, often identified as the soul of the person, seeking to explore the inner spiritual journey. Whether in visual, poetic, prose or didactic discourse, these apophatic proponents create pictures that focus on portraying the experience of the soul as it reflects on the impact of the mystery of God in life experiences. For St John of the Cross, images of falcons in pursuit of prey became pictures of the soul’s pursuit of loving union with God. For St Teresa of Avila, the picture of the rooms in a castle depicted the various aspects of the soul’s journey to deeper awareness and response to God.

Looking at the kataphatic approach, the role of image, symbol and thought is distinctly different. The \textit{via affirmativa} emphasizes “… God can be reached by creatures, images and symbols, because he has manifested himself in creation and salvation history..”\(^ {22}\). In this approach, the justification of the use of image highlights an alternative role art plays in the realm of spiritual exploration and awareness. Art provides a means of heightening awareness of the components of creation, story and image that point to attributes of God in God’s relationship to humanity and the wider created order.

\(^{22}\) Egan, “Christian Apophatic and Kataphatic Mysticisms”, 426
As Egan notes, the role of Jesus Christ as “icon of God” is also significant in the kataphatic approach. Artists have portrayed Jesus Christ through the centuries in various historical settings related to their own life experience to relate the revelation of God in Christ Jesus to their contemporary life experience. Dutch artist, Rembrandt (1606 – 1669) produced many scenes from the biblical text, including the Gospel stories, setting them in contemporary Dutch surroundings and attire. Various forms of art have been used to connect Jesus Christ’s story with the human story in image, poem and story. These various creative expressions play a central role in assisting those seeking to deepen their awareness of God in everyday life experience to relate the key elements in the stories.

The distinctive roles of image, thought and symbol in the apophatic and kataphatic approaches to spirituality outlined above suggest several ways art can be applied in the deepening awareness of God in the lived experience.

**Contemplation and meditation**

The terms “contemplation” and “meditation” have often been used interchangeably in religious circles and require some clarification to highlight their distinctive contributions to spiritual inquiry and practice. A helpful distinction has been proposed in the practice of *lectio divina*. It suggests that each of these practices of contemplation and meditation provide avenues to explore the spiritual aspects of those engaged in reflecting on their life experience and its connection to their experience of God in scripture and other sacred expressions. *Lectio divina* offers a staged approach to reading and prayer. Starting with the reading of scripture or reflection on sacred art or writing, the *lectio divina* practice then invites prayerful reflection on the object or reading in a way that connects the life experience of the person with the subject of their reflection, and this is what is understood to be meditation.

In terms of the approaches to spirituality previously discussed, meditation is clearly in the kataphatic tradition in that it draws on image and imagination to

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23 Egan, “Christian Apophatic and Kataphatic Mysticisms”, 426
24 See S.A. Morello, *Lectio Divina and the Practice of Teresian Prayer* (Washington: ICS Publications, 1995). In this short treatise on the practice of Lectio Divina, Sam Morello gives a clear outline of each of the aspects of the lectio divina, process highlighting the distinctive elements of the process including meditation and contemplation.
inform the process of reflection on the mysteries of faith. The third stage in the lectio divina approach has been identified as prayer that moves the person involved in the process to hold the outcomes of meditation in an immanent or transcendent stance recognizing the presence of God. Prayer is the individual’s response to the invitation from God to deepen relationship with God.

The final stage of the process of deepening awareness is contemplation. It is understood to be the invitation of God into the place of graced presence in which God responds to the person. Contemplation, with its sense of imageless encounter, indicates the close association that is made between contemplation and the apophatic approach to spirituality. Contemplation is the process of centring one’s thoughts and awareness on the presence of the transcendent and immanent God. This practice suggests being open to God’s invitation in this space.\(^{25}\)

There is a temptation however to discuss these two aspects (meditation and contemplation) of the process of lectio divina as competing rather than complimentary practices. As discussed above, this mirrors what has happened with the comparison of the kataphatic and apophatic approaches to spirituality. When meditation is seen as simply the means to the end, that is contemplation, meditation can be devalued and described as the less significant of the two stages of the process of lectio divina.

This thesis argues that a tendency to polarize both the apopathic and kataphatic approaches and contemplation and meditation is to misunderstand the significance of each in the understanding and practice of spirituality. They are interdependent in an ongoing cyclic process of meaning making that gives perspective to how people respond to life experience and how their response resonates with or works against their life source in God. Meditation gives space to allow the other voices that are often not listened to, (the voices of image, colour, shape, symbol, story or poetry), to come to the fore and stimulate sense perception. Contemplation helps to quieten the distracting and counterproductive voices in our life experience to

\(^{25}\text{Gerald May describes contemplation in the following terms. “In traditional religious usage, the term contemplation implies a totally uncluttered appreciation of existence, a state of mind or a condition of the soul that is simultaneously wide-awake and free from all preoccupation, preconception, and interpretation. It is a wonder-filled yet utterly simple experience. The Newman Dictionary of Moral Theology defines contemplation as “a gaze of the mind accompanied by admiration”. G. May, Will and Spirit (San Francisco: Harper, 1982), 25.}\)
allow us space to experience the voice and presence of the divine, so often drowned out. Both meditation and contemplation in their most evocative expressions call for engagement with life experience and reflection on God’s response or reaction to it. This is dialogue in the deepest sense of the word. This thesis argues that both these practices in their distinctive ways are essential to the processes that are part of the art retreat.
Chapter 3: The Role of Spiritual Direction in the Retreat Context

Before looking at the elements of the retreat, it is essential to understand the central role spiritual direction plays in the art retreat context. The principles of spiritual direction run parallel with, and in some ways define, the approach to art creation in art retreats. Based on the assumption that art retreats are guided retreats, this chapter first examines spiritual direction in the Christian tradition and its application within the art retreat context.

Spiritual Direction in the Historical Context

Spiritual direction has evolved out of a long history of Christian tradition particularly related to religious communities who offered it to those within their communities and beyond starting with the desert fathers and mothers in the early centuries of the church and continuing today. Across the centuries, spiritual direction could relate to crises or high points in the pilgrim’s relationship with God, another person or themselves. It could also cover decisions about where life was leading pilgrims and aspects relating to their ongoing vocation, particularly religious vocation.

One of the distinctive elements of spiritual direction is that, at its best, it is not an overtly directive process, contrary to what could be implied by the terms used to describe it. Spiritual direction is not about telling pilgrims what they should decide, or about giving advice, or telling them how they should process their life experience.

Spiritual direction developed as a way of companioning people in their own self-discovery and exploration of what they experienced in everyday life of God, others and themselves. As stated above, the prime purpose of this process is to guide people to reflect deeply on their experience and how it relates to their sense of God within their lived situations. It is to help them contemplate how their life experience may relate to their sense of the transcendent and intimate influences of God on their lives. While the commonly used term in spiritual direction for the person guiding the other is ‘director’, in the remainder of this thesis spiritual
directors will be referred to as guides. As mentioned previously, the person to whom the spiritual direction is offered will be referred to as the pilgrim.

The Nature of Spiritual Direction

The shaping of people is something that happens from birth or, as some would argue, before birth. People are shaped in the everyday interactions and responses to life as they are impacted by a variety of experiences, whether abusive, affirming, distant or very intimate. They take in messages relating to values and virtues, vices and compulsions, which over time they sort into what they want to take on as their own and what they want to reject. These experiences come together to shape their conscious and unconscious memories and in turn become the basis from which their consciences and belief systems are formed.

Behind all these influences is the prime influence of God as the source of life and being. As Paul describes God in his sermon at the Areopagus, “In him we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28 NRSV). We are all shaped in our innermost being by the values and virtues that reflect the nature and being of God, the intimate yet transcendent influence on all lives. These values and virtues are understood to shape the innermost regions of our conscious and unconscious beings, depending on what response is made to these values and virtues. However this is not the complete picture. People are also impacted by experiences that are antithetical to God and which promote reactions in the form of vices or compulsions against the principles and values embodied in their understanding of God. Spiritual direction assists pilgrims to process experiences and discern what impact these experiences have on their lives. Discernment aims at identifying what is sourced in God and leads to fuller experience of life and freedom and what is not sourced in God and leads to being caught in the self-denying and limiting elements of our life experience.

Spiritual direction developed to promote the process of exploring the deeper aspects of life in relation to the growing awareness of the influence of God in their human experience. To deepen awareness of the spiritual journey, spiritual guides accompany pilgrims in their reflection on life experience and invite pilgrims to retell their stories that relate to what they want to process. The focus is on the felt
and lived experience as it unfolds in the larger story of God’s revelation in the context of life. Spiritual guides seek to help pilgrims get back in touch with the essence of their lived experience in the present moment. Thus the pilgrim is helped to process their experience. In linking the story of pilgrims’ lived experience with the larger story of God’s presence and interaction with their story, guides seek to help the pilgrim link God’s presence with their life experience.

Pilgrims are encouraged to adopt a contemplative stance that enables pilgrims to listen deeply to their stories in reference to the bigger story of God’s revelation in human history in the person of Jesus. Such listening by the guide models for pilgrims the need to listen to themselves. Particular attention is given to what they describe and what they feel in relation to their experience. The purpose of such listening is for pilgrims to get in touch with their inner most experience shaped by immanent and transcendent influences. The ultimate goal of the spiritual direction process is for pilgrims to come to a deeper awareness of the influence of God’s Spirit in these experiences. Out of this awareness it is hoped that pilgrims enter into a deeper relationship with God through the mystical experience of dialogue and union with God that flows from these encounters. Spiritual direction is about engaging in awareness of what it is to be in the presence of God and others in the broader experiences of life. Such experiences can be transformative.

There are several features that identify the core of spiritual direction and relate to the associated art creation process in the art retreats being considered in this thesis. They include a focus on the presence of God and the guidance of the Spirit, the human experience of God, prayer, contemplative listening, avoiding leading pilgrims to analyze experiences and discernment.

**Focus on the presence of God and the guidance of the Spirit**

The focus on the presence of God in the spiritual direction sessions is a feature that generally distinguishes spiritual direction from the broader range of helping professions. Allied with this understanding of spiritual direction is the assumption that the Spirit of God is the real guide in the process of spiritual direction. This defines the role of spiritual guides as companions with pilgrims rather than those who have the expertise to tell pilgrims what they need to know in order to relate to God in life. Spiritual guides listen to and discern with pilgrims as they reflect
deeply on their life experience. The goal of such listening is to help the pilgrim make the connection between their life circumstances and their awareness of the presence of God. The assumption embodied in this understanding is that God can be related to and experienced in everyday life as affirmed in the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus. This affirmation is the focus of the kataphatic approach to spirituality that emphasizes, as Egan notes:

Although creation is not identical with God, creation exists within God’s being, and thus human persons may mystically experience the presence of God in and through creation and incarnation.²⁶

This does not assume that human experience is complete in providing a context for understanding “the presence of God in and through creation and incarnation”. This understanding continues to rely on the broader point of reference in the stories of God revealed in Jesus Christ and in the scriptures and traditions of the Church.

In terms of the art creation process within a retreat, the assumption of the presence of God and guidance of the Spirit of God reinforces the significance of remaining open to what the creative process may reveal about the pilgrim’s spiritual journey and relationship with God. It is also significant that retreatants recognize they are not alone in their art creation. They are working in the company of God who inspires the creativity they express and the reflection that flows from it.

The linking of the presence of God to both the art creation process and the spiritual direction process helps the pilgrim see that not only are the processes linked spiritually, but that the outcomes of each process are not reliant primarily on the pilgrim or guide but on influences above and beyond them.

**The human experience of God**

Allied with this understanding of the presence and guidance of God in the art creation and spiritual direction processes is the understanding that God can be experienced as part of our human experience. Here the understanding of Jesus as the incarnated image of God is seen to give expression to the experiencing of God in human existence. This understanding informs the argument that the kataphatic

approach to spirituality supports the idea that spirituality can be earthed in images and experience. Thus images and experience can provide a basis for processing of our faith and spiritual understanding.

As Egan describes it:

> The incarnational dimension of Christianity, … forces the mystic to take seriously God’s self-revelation in history and in symbols. Because Christ is God’s real symbol, the icon of God, God is really present in a positive way.  

Spiritual direction supports the understanding that if pilgrims can get in touch with their authentic human experience they can experience something of God within their human experience. These human experiences are not limited to specifically religious or intentional spiritual events but can be drawn from the breadth of life’s engagement with others, the environment, God or their own self awareness.

In both spiritual direction and the art creation process, the understanding is that life experiences are remembered primarily as felt and sensed memories relating to sight, sound, smell and touch. As John Welch notes in his discussion of imagination in the work of John of the Cross, Carl Jung made this point in his writing. Welch writes:

> Carl Jung was a modern pioneer in the land of the psyche. He concluded that symbolic imagery is the first language of the psyche. The psyche expresses its depth experiences first in imagery and only later in rational concept.

Welch goes on to directly quote Jung who wrote:

> The [imagination] is to be understood here as the real and literal power to create images – the classical use of the word in contrast to phantasia, which means a mere “conceit” in the sense of insubstantial thought…. [Imagination] is the active evocation of [inner] images… an authentic feat of thought or ideation, which does not spin aimless or groundless fantasies “into the blue” – does not, that is to say, just play with its objects, but tries to grasp the inner facts and portray them in images true to their nature.

It is from these felt and sensed memories, captured by imagination in symbolic imagery or inner images, that pilgrims process their experiences to become aware of the impact of these images and their imagination. The spiritual director’s...
understanding of the primacy of sensed experiences leads to a clear focus on helping the pilgrim get in touch with the variety of sensual aspects of their experience.

The art creation aspect of the process supports the retreatants in getting in touch particularly with the visual triggers in their sensed experiences. This enables them to more readily explore some of these often hidden aspects of their visual memories. We will look at the role of the art creation in the total art retreat context in more detail in chapter four.

**Prayer and spiritual direction**

In spiritual direction, prayer is foundational. The emphasis is on the dialogue of prayer, in whatever form, between pilgrims and God and is not limited to any prescribed practices or techniques. Art creations too can become part of the dialogue between the retreatants and their direct or indirect experience of God, whether seen or unseen, who inhabits their memories. Art can act as a mirror to enable retreatants to explore their life experience more deeply.

Through the growing awareness of God in human experience, pilgrims are invited through the spiritual direction process to give expression to their awareness of the presence of God in their reflections on life. The pilgrim’s response to the awareness of the presence of God can be expressed in a variety of ways of what is traditionally known as prayer.

Prayer can be expressed in a dialogue that is opened between the pilgrim and God without assumptions about the nature and understanding of who or what God is. Another expression of the prayer response of the pilgrim could be to create a visual or verbal expression of what they are experiencing or what they want to express to God. These various creative expressions of prayer lead to deepening awareness of different forms of prayer that naturally flow out of pilgrim experiences of the presence of God in the midst of their human experience.

**Contemplative listening**

Contemplative listening, often referred to as listening with the heart, is central to the practice of spiritual direction both for the guide and the pilgrim. Combined with the embracing of silence, contemplative listening encourages the pilgrim and
guide to give space and take time to listen to their hearts and God’s heart. To contemplate means “to gaze”. In contemplative listening, the “gazing” is aimed at listening to and seeing pilgrims’ story and the world more closely aligned with the heart, mind and eyes of God. Such listening enables pilgrims to become more aware of the influence of God and/or others in their reflection on their inner and outer life experiences. The desired outcome of such listening is to enable the pilgrim to keep processing the story. The pilgrim will perceive the world as free of conscious and unconscious agendas as possible. By endeavouring to be free of agendas, pilgrims and guides seek to reduce the adverse influence of presumption in understanding, belief or method on their reflection and discernment. The goal of such listening allows God to be God in what flows from reflection on life as distinct from other voices and influences. This is to check divergent motivations and influences in processing the pilgrim’s experience.

The open agenda stance, reflected in contemplative listening, is equally significant in the art creation process. The invitation to retreatants is to approach their art creation with a similar open agenda as is embodied in contemplative listening. The sense of “gazing” relates to the art creation that the artist is confronted with at the various stages of the art creation process. It refers to the gazing at the empty page through to the finished product. Maintaining the open stance of contemplative listening throughout the process of art creation increases the possibility of accessing some of the deeper aspects of their life experience that often have greater influence on life choices. The open agenda stance also allows the art to be art rather than controlling its meaning.

Later in the thesis in chapter six we will look at how the contemplative approach to listening was promoted within the art retreat context and the reactions of retreatants to this approach.

Avoiding leading pilgrims to analyze experiences

In spiritual direction, guides intentionally avoid giving advice or sharing experience. This avoidance of promoting problem solving does not suggest a solely feeling-based interpretation of experience. The pilgrims are invited to engage with their experience of life and explore more deeply what its unfolding meaning is for them. To get caught in trying to analyze these experiences can
limit the potential deeping of the experience to that which can be known or conceived of within the mind. In recognizing that life and the relationships that flow from life are complex, the process of spiritual direction is aimed at letting the story speak as a whole without trying to diagnose particular parts of it or fitting it into preconceived frameworks of understanding and belief.

In the retreat context, the avoidance of attempts to solve things logically and analytically also extends to the process of creating art. One of the key guidelines to approaching art creation in this context is not to try and work out what is to be created or even how an art creation is to be produced. The most appropriate approach applied within the art retreat is to encourage retreatants to approach art creation in a playful and non-intentional way.

The avoidance of critiquing also applies to reflection on the art creation process in spiritual direction. It is essential that guides do not lead the retreatants into a process of trying to dissect or analyze the products of the art creation process. Rather guides are encouraged to invite pilgrims to express what has come up for them in the broad context of the retreat, whether or not it relates to the process or products of the art creation process. This is to avoid leading the pilgrim to focus on one aspect of the broader experience of the retreat.

Discernment

A key element of spiritual direction for both the spiritual guide and the pilgrim is discernment.

Discernment is the process of sifting the various aspects of life experience, systems of belief and strategy to explore more thoughtfully what seems to be of God and what seems not of God. For both guide and pilgrim, the sense of God in their experiences and decisions is often related to experiences of vitality and freedom. This is contrasted with awareness that what is not of God is often associated with feeling limited, devalued or deteriorating within oneself. Awareness of these aspects of discernment is crucial to the processing of life experiences.

Throughout the process of discernment, there is emphasis on guides not leading pilgrims in choosing one aspect of the reflective process over another. As noted
above, guides also avoid trying to logically analyze the process of discernment as an attempt to solve the dissonant aspects of the pilgrims’ life experiences. This non-interventionist approach is crucial in enabling pilgrims to discern more directly what the various elements of their life experience are leading them to discover.

Discernment is also crucial in exploring with pilgrims the whole art creation process, not just the finished art product. One of the key understandings in journeying with pilgrims in the art creation context is not to put emphasis on any part of the process but to keep minds and hearts as open as possible. This is because the various elements of the process – anticipation, initiation, development, completion and reflection – each contain their own clues to the life experience that is being reflected on by the pilgrim. This will be explored in more detail in later in this chapter.

Because discernment relies on being as free of agendas as possible, being open to work with the various stages of the art creation process in spiritual direction is essential. This includes each stage of the creative act, from the initial conception through to the finished product and reflection and contemplation of it.

Having looked at key elements in spiritual direction, we turn our attention to the contribution of various traditions of spiritual direction and their appropriateness to the approach taken to art creation in the art retreat as described in this thesis.

**Spiritual Direction Traditions**

There are a wide variety of Christian traditions that identify their spiritual guidance approaches as spiritual direction. These have developed throughout the history of the Christian church and generally are related to the variety of rules established within religious communities and Christian denominations.

There are two main approaches to the art of spiritual direction currently being applied within the broad field of spirituality. These can generally be referred to as the structured and the non-structured approaches to spiritual direction.
Structured approach to spiritual direction

In the structured approach to spiritual direction, the guide and pilgrim use a prescribed framework to provide an outline of where and what they will explore together in the process of examining the pilgrim’s life experience. The most widely used structured form of spiritual direction in the Christian tradition is the approach based on the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. These were formulated by Ignatius of Loyola in the early sixteenth century to provide a systematic approach to becoming aware of the key processes of awareness, growth, discernment and conversion within the faith journey of the pilgrim in preparation for and as part of the spiritual direction process. The Ignatian approach to spiritual direction and retreating has come to be accepted within the Roman Catholic Church as the foremost form of spiritual exercises. Pope Pius XI’s encyclical Mens nostra (1929) was a sign of the importance accorded by the Church to the Exercises.

According to Harvey Egan, the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises are an expression of the kataphatic or via affirmative approach to spirituality that “focuses explicitly upon traditional Christian images, symbols, and mysteries to initiate a deep, silent mystical movement” On the surface this approach seems to be appropriate to an art retreat as it relates to the use of visual images and symbols. However, by overlaying the process with prescribed structures, the Ignatian approach, while being very open to the engagement of imagination and images in the process of reflection, narrows the scope in which creative expression and exploration can occur. These structures limit the freedom of retreatants to range widely in their creative expression and be open to whatever the art creations hold for them.

Non-structured approach to spiritual direction

The non-structured approach to spiritual direction is characterized by a very open process in guiding a pilgrim in their exploration of the inner journey of life experiences. There are no pointers as to which part of the journey to explore or in what order to approach the exploration. The underlying assumption on which this approach to spiritual direction is built is that God can be found in every aspect of life experiences. There are no pointers as to which part of the journey to explore or in what order to approach the exploration. The underlying assumption on which this approach to spiritual direction is built is that God can be found in every aspect of life experiences. There are no pointers as to which part of the journey to explore or in what order to approach the exploration. The underlying assumption on which this approach to spiritual direction is built is that God can be found in every aspect of life experiences. There are no pointers as to which part of the journey to explore or in what order to approach the exploration. The underlying assumption on which this approach to spiritual direction is built is that God can be found in every aspect of life experiences. There are no pointers as to which part of the journey to explore or in what order to approach the exploration. The underlying assumption on which this approach to spiritual direction is built is that God can be found in every aspect of life experiences. There are no pointers as to which part of the journey to explore or in what order to approach the exploration. The underlying assumption on which this approach to spiritual direction is built is that God can be found in every aspect of life experiences. There are no pointers as to which part of the journey to explore or in what order to approach the exploration. The underlying assumption on which this approach to spiritual direction is built is that God can be found in every aspect of life experiences. There are no pointers as to which part of the journey to explore or in what order to approach the exploration. The underlying assumption on which this approach to spiritual direction is built is that God can be found in every aspect of life experiences. There are no pointers as to which part of the journey to explore or in what order to approach the exploration. The underlying assumption on which this approach to spiritual direction is built is that God can be found in every aspect of life experiences. There are no pointers as to which part of the journey to explore or in what order to approach the exploration. The underlying assumption on which this approach to spiritual direction is built is that God can be found in every aspect of life experiences. There are no pointers as to which part of the journey to explore or in what order to approach the exploration. The underlying assumption on which this approach to spiritual direction is built is that God can be found in every aspect of life experiences. There are no pointers as to which part of the journey to explore or in what order to approach the exploration. The underlying assumption on which this approach to spiritual direction is built is that God can be found in every aspect of life experiences. There are no pointers as to which part of the journey to explore or in what order to approach the exploration. The underlying assumption on which this approach to spiritual direction is built is that God can be found in every aspect of

\[\text{Tetlow, “The Remarkable Shifts”, 19.}\]

\[\text{Egan, “Christian Apophatic and Kataphatic Mysticalisms”, 414. In this article Egan is arguing that while the Ignatian Exercises appear to fit best in the kataphatic or Via Affirmativa stream of spirituality, they also can be seen to guide pilgrims “. into the very depths of this apophatic consolation.”, 420.}\]
life. Further more to be open to the presence of God, one does not have to rely on working from traditional spiritual frameworks or formulations, as helpful as these may be. This less structured approach encourages greater openness and awareness of the creative and vulnerable places in everyday life where God appears often to be absent.

Non-structured spiritual direction involves guiding pilgrims to explore significant aspects of their life experience and deepening their awareness of these experiences without reference to a prescribed process. This is to enable pilgrims to range widely in their exploration of the diversity of their life experiences and, in time, to focus on those facets of their experience that impact them most deeply. It is believed that engaging with these deeper facets of experience leads to an awareness of the presence and influence of God in the midst of these experiences.

The traditions that are more readily identified with the non-structured approach to spiritual direction are the Benedictine and Carmelite traditions. In relation to the former, Jean Leclercq OSB writes:

Benedictine guidance is an experiential affair rather than a science; it presupposes no special training, but rather a gift whereby those who are able to give it are designated as ‘spiritual’ without anyone being particularly clear about what that means. ... The fact that there is no special teaching means that ideas can be used from other spiritual traditions both past and present.32

When Leclercq speaks of “no special teaching” he is not suggesting that spiritual guides in the Benedictine tradition are not trained in formation programs as spiritual guides. The inference is that they are not taught particular prescribed methods of prayer or guidance to govern their approach to spiritual direction. The focus in formation programs needs to be on developing the gift of the guide, to journey with pilgrims in whatever form of prayer and guidance aids them in exploration of their inner journey. As Dom Columba Marmion writing early last century suggests, the process of spiritual direction presumes “great fidelity to movements of the Holy Spirit”.33 One of the emphases of the Benedictine tradition, as espoused by Paul Delatte (early 20th century), was to minimize the influence of the guide in the process so as not to “… enhance the paternal and filial relationships between the abbot and his monks, or fraternal ones between the

members of the community."\textsuperscript{34} These principles continue to be a guiding factor in the Benedictine tradition of spiritual direction in the relationship between guide and pilgrim and form some of the basic principles of non-structured spiritual direction practice. The Carmelite tradition\textsuperscript{35} emphasizes similar principles with a particular focus on the undergirding of the broader Christian traditions of scripture in the process of spiritual direction.

While the principles of Benedictine and Carmelite traditions are not foreign to the more structured approaches to the processes of spiritual direction such as the Ignatian Exercises, the emphasis in non-structured spiritual direction is on the more open agenda of the overall process. This openness is also key to the art creation process. A more open structure encourages retreatants to enter into the art creation process less influenced by the agendas of others or their own expectations of having to conform.

These non-structured traditions, as with Ignatian spiritual direction, still remain predominantly in the kataphatic tradition of spirituality. In such traditions there is an emphasis on experiencing God in and through the created order and human experience. However, the apophatic emphasis on the mysterious revelation of God that cannot be limited to image, symbol or created reality is also a feature of the more non-structured traditions as espoused by St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila. This phenomenon of integration of the apophatic and kataphatic approaches\textsuperscript{36} to spirituality, and the role of creative art in giving expression to each approach as outlined in chapter two, provides a bridge between the human experience of the pilgrim and the mystery of God’s revelation. It is the attraction of the open process style of non-structured spiritual direction and art creation in promoting this integration that has led to it being the model of spiritual direction used within the art retreat context being considered in this thesis.

\textsuperscript{34} Leclercq, “Spiritual Direction in the Benedictine Tradition”, 25.

\textsuperscript{35} Michael Brundell OC gives a concise summary of Carmelite understanding of spiritual direction in his chapter titled “Themes in Carmelite Spiritual Direction” in the collection of articles in \textit{Traditions of Spiritual Guidance}, ed. L. Byrne (Cassell Publications: London, 1990), 64-77.

\textsuperscript{36} Egan’s article, “Christian Apophatic and Kataphatic Mysticisms”, deals concisely with the phenomenon of crossover between these two approaches to spirituality and argues that the prominent traditions that are identified with these approaches generally carry elements of both approaches within them.
Having explored briefly the distinctive features of spiritual direction that are foundational to the guided reflective processes of art retreats, this thesis now looks at how art creation contributes to the depthing process and how this role can be enhanced.
Chapter 4: Art Creation as a Process of Deepthing our Inner Journey

This chapter draws on the literature of art within spiritual contexts and the contribution of the art creation process to spiritual reflection and exploration to provide some historical background to modern art retreats. It also examines the responses of retreatants to the art creation process and looks at how spiritual direction and other factors influence the way art creation contributes to the art retreat experience.

The Role of Art Creation in Spiritual Contexts

Art creation has been part of religious expression from the earliest period of human awareness of the spiritual realms. The earliest known expressions of life and faith were in pictures painted and carved on the walls of caves and imprinted in clay and on animal skins. Later, in early Christian times, symbols and pictures illustrating stories and events, along with written accounts, were depicted on tombstones, in the catacombs, on the walls, floors and ceilings of churches and other significant church property. Over the centuries the use and application of art in Christian contexts has waxed and waned due to shifts in theological interpretation and experiential understanding of the role of art in the Christian understanding of spirituality.

Some of the contexts in which art flourished as an expression of the Christian faith journey were in the early Celtic Christian communities where visual symbols and illustrations of the Gospel stories came to be central to these communities expression of faith. In the Eastern Church, icons took on a significant role for the faithful in visually representing the incarnate presence of God in Christ and of the saints – the cloud of witnesses.

In Medieval times, there developed a culture, particularly in the monasteries and convents, which saw art as a significant aid to contemplation and prayer. As Hamburger notes
The drawings from St Walburg belong to a culture in which sight had come to complement contemplation as an accepted avenue of insight and access to the divine.\textsuperscript{37}

In the Renaissance period, the growth of an art industry around the decoration of churches and homes with Christian art produced a great body of work representing scenes from scripture and the story of the church. However at the time of the Protestant Reformation there was a reaction to the use of visual religious art as a devotional aid to reflection and contemplation. Hamburger summarizes:

Protestant reformers envisioned medieval images … as illegitimate, even illicit, affronts to the authority of “sola scriptura”, the word alone.\textsuperscript{38}

He goes on to note that it was not just the Protestants in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries who had issues with the use of art as devotional aids. Modern “popular religion”\textsuperscript{39}, which had attempted to distinguish its approach to faith from the medieval traditions, became caught up in the Reformation protestant rhetoric in connection with women. Hamburger describes the argument of modern “popular religions”:

Their line of argument, echoing medieval theologians who maintained that women, in their reliance on images, gave vent to an innate corporeality and irrationality, implicitly depreciates the religious practices of women in which visual experience, much of it molded by images played a central role.\textsuperscript{40}

The effect of these movements on the application of art in meditation, prayer and contemplation has been to raise questions about the reliance on any form of visual or creative expressions to support a person of faith in their faith journey. This doubt about the legitimacy of visual images in spiritual practice has extended to dreams. Like other forms of visual experience, dreams have also come to be seen as a suspect means of accessing authentic experiences of the inner journey.

Presently an awareness of the relationship of art to the spiritual life and journey of people of all faiths is resurfacing. This rediscovery of the relationship between art and spirituality has been paralleled by growing interest in the secular world of psychotherapy through the particular stream of art therapy where the use of art as


\textsuperscript{38} Hamburger, \textit{Nuns as Artists}, 217.

\textsuperscript{39} Hamburger, \textit{Nuns as Artists}, 217.

\textsuperscript{40} Hamburger, \textit{Nuns as Artists}, 217.
a self-reflective tool has grown significantly. As an art therapist and spiritual art retreat leader, Renate Düllmann observes:

Art therapy is based on the idea that visual symbolic representation is far less likely to interrupt and distort than verbal translations of sensory-based experience. Thus, central to the art therapy process, as I see it, is the individual’s or the group’s involvement in spontaneous image-making in pencil, chalk, paint, clay, etc. in the presence of a therapist.\(^{41}\)

Patricia Allen, also an art therapist, asserts that there are real connections between art creation and deepening spiritual awareness. She notes:

Art therapy has the potential to be an enormously subversive force. I have repeatedly seen individuals in the studio rediscover wonder and awe, a sense of something larger than themselves. We cannot underestimate how our present culture works against this sense of the spiritual, how hungry people are for something they can’t quite name.\(^{42}\)

In his article on Paul Tillich’s view of the role of art as revelation, Douglas Purnell explores Tillich’s interest, as a theologian, in expressive art. The expressive art that grew out of the art movement in Germany about 1910\(^{43}\) was a form of art that did not conform to any particular traditions in terms of form, perspective, or archetypal symbols. As such this free style expressive approach to art comes close to what is understood as the open agenda approach to art creation within this thesis. Purnell comments on Tillich’s view of expressionist art and its relationship to religion:

When individuals touch the deep places of their lives, when they wrestle with the questions of being and non-being they are being religious. Tillich saw expressive art as providing a means for helping people engage these questions. Expressive art was energetic, active, restless, emotional, distorting. It shaped questions in the viewer that opened the possibility of the breakthrough of the infinite.\(^{44}\)

Both Allen and Tillich, from two very different perspectives, confirm the significance of art, particularly in its more free form expression, as a means to take both artist and viewer beyond themselves and experience something of the mystery at the depth of human experience.

\(^{41}\) Düllmann, “Art: Containment and Language of Soul”, 84.


\(^{44}\) Purnell, “Paul Tillich and Art as Revelation”, 9.
The Purpose of Art Creation in the Art Retreat Context

Before artists on retreat begin the art creation process, it is important for them to be clear about the purpose of art creation in the art retreat context. Such art creation, while sharing some aspects of art creation in general, is distinctive in that the focus is not so much on technique and visual composition as it is on expressing the artist’s inner moods and experiences. This emphasis suggests that the art creation approach in the retreat context is more about what is produced in the artist than what the artist produces concretely in the form of art creations.

The art creations, in terms of the purposes for which they are created, become a means to an end rather than ends in themselves. The end that needs to be kept in focus throughout the creative process is the deepening awareness of what is revealed of the inner journey and its relationship to the divine mystery. In other words the art created in the process becomes an avenue of reflection on the inner life experience of the retreatants engaged in the process of art creation.

This focus on the art as a means to an end does not suggest that the products of the process are irrelevant as works of art and therefore cannot be identified as “real art”. In some senses they become more relevant to both the artist and the viewer as art pieces than works of art that are created for specific functions and purposes. Their relevance lies in the fact that if they are created out of unimpeded creative responses to the inner life of the artist, they reflect more accurately the artist’s soul. These art creations are not primarily aesthetic or representational expressions of subjects or objects. The process by which they are created is a translation into visual form of that which cannot be expressed adequately in words and concepts. The product thus becomes a “mirror”45 to invite active reflection on what of the inner journey has been expressed in the art created.

As Renate Düllmann observes:

The aim is not to interpret or produce …aesthetically pleasing pictures … but to facilitate important processes that effectively aid someone to discover the

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45 This analogy for art has been adopted by writers such as: A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* (New York: Dover, 1956), 34; T. Moore, *Care of the Soul*, 245-6; and Düllmann, “Art: Containment and Language of Soul”, 84, who each relate to fact that art is not just an aesthetic object but also can be a reflective object to those open to allow themselves to sense what an image or work of art is touching within them.
meaning and the mystery of God in their prayer and their lived human experience.\textsuperscript{46}

Noting that both the process and the products of the art creation process are significant in the purposes of the art retreat highlights the art retreat approach to art as a distinctive approach. It requires a different set of presuppositions from those of other art approaches. To maximize it’s impact, attention needs to be given to the context in which art creation occurs. It is necessary to help retreatants to be aware of the assumptions and influences they bring to the process that may block their creative expression. Pre-existing attitudes (conscious and unconscious) limit the retreatants’ ability to engage in the type of art creation that reflects their inner journey.

It is against this backdrop that we look at several approaches to the use of images and art creation in the personal experience of contemplation and reflection to promote a deeper awareness of the retreatant’s true self and in the spiritual sense, God’s true self.

**Three Approaches to the Use of Images in Spiritual Reflection**

There are three general ways in which imagination and images are engaged within the spiritual direction process that need to be identified. This identification will help distinguish the particular approach taken in art retreats to applying spiritual direction to the art creation process.

*Active imagination and mental images*

Imaging is the process of creating a mental rather than physical image. In the process of reflecting on their life experience, pilgrims may imagine themselves in a particular setting or may imagine an object that symbolizes what they are feeling or experiencing at the time. There are many ways in which images and imaging have been employed in the process of spiritual reflection. Ignatius encouraged the use of visual imaging in reflection on biblical stories to invite readers to enter the story and relate to it as if they were living in the experience of the story. This practice, which can be a key element in the lectio divina approach to prayer, is

\textsuperscript{46} Düllmann, “Art: Containment and Language of Soul”, 82.
one way in which imaging and imagination is applied to spiritual reflection and in turn spiritual direction.

Another example of this approach is to invite people to reflect on works of religious art as a way to earth or concretize elements of a story so that they can identify with the story. An excellent example of this approach is found in the work of the late Henri Nouwen. In this book *The Return of the Prodigal Son*\(^{47}\), Nouwen uses the painting by Rembrandt depicting the biblical story to invite reflection on the characters in the story of the prodigal son and invite us, the readers and viewers, to identify with one of the characters. Nouwen assists the reader to mentally imagine themselves as a character in the story and become aware of how it informs their view of themselves and their relationship with others and God.

In spiritual reflection, this example of the application of images predominantly within the kataphatic approach assumes that the biblical account from which the images are drawn is earthed in the incarnated revelation of God. In the kataphatic or *via positiva*, that which is perceived to be known of God through revelation provides the basis for constructing mental images or symbols that connect the story of divine revelation into the realm of human experience and provide the bridge to incarnating the experience of the divine in the life of the pilgrim.

Along with these methods of reflecting, there are approaches in spiritual direction to the use of image and imaging that relate to the kataphatic approach to spirituality in that they are based on the understanding that the experience of the revelation of God can be earthed in visual form. One such approach is for spiritual director and pilgrim to explore images that arise out of the pilgrim’s reflection on particular experiences of life. The images might be expressed in realistic, surrealistic or symbolic imagery that come out of the life experience of a pilgrim. Pilgrims are invited to get in touch with life experience and allow an image to come to mind, then to describe this mental image as if it were a picture in front of them. Pilgrims might be invited by the spiritual director to explore how they see themselves in the picture or image and whether there are any other people present, recognized or not, “in the picture”. If there are other people, pilgrims may be invited to enter into dialogue or conversation with them as a way of engaging

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other senses and getting in touch with their deeper awareness of their experience relating to others, and particularly God, in the life situation whether real or imagined.

**Representing psychological images in art creations**

In a second expression of images in the context of spiritual reflection and spiritual direction, mental images or visions that arise out of the contemplation or prayer are recreated in the form of paintings, sketches or sculptures as a means of earthing or concretizing them. A famous exponent of this approach was Hildegard of Bingen (1098 – 1178). She either painted or commissioned paintings of elements of her visions and sometimes included these paintings in her writings.

This approach to image making and imaging that flows from meditation, contemplation or personal reflection has been applied in spiritual direction sessions where art materials are offered and the pilgrim is given the option to use them to express mental images in visual form during or after the session. The images produced may become part of a visual journal.

While this approach may be closely related to the previous approach of mental imaging, it must be understood that it is limited in what it contributes to the reflective process in that no one, no matter how skilled as an artist, can adequately replicate a mental image as well as the mind can conceive it. All the artist can do is create a copy that reminds them of the real mental image that was significant to them. Yet even these images can provide material to reflect on in spiritual direction.

**Spontaneous expressive art creation**

A third approach comes out of the process of contemplation or reflection and is also expressed through visual art creation. In this case, the art creations are not primarily planned or executed from a preconceived image or limited by the norms of artistic principles of perspective, form or colour. This spontaneous, expressive process of creating artwork flows out of a contemplative or prayerful stance and is encouraged prior to a spiritual direction session. The art created in this way and
the process of creating the art becomes the basis for reflection in a spiritual direction context or in other reflective processes.

In this spontaneous approach to art creation in association with spiritual direction, one of the first things to note is that there is no such thing as an irrelevant image when it flows from the artist’s own reflection and contemplation. Some images may be formed out of preconceived images or concepts of self, others or God and they may be distorted by imposed views of God and the world. However even these images are relevant and can be useful in the process of reflecting on the artist’s experience and understanding of their relationship with God and the world.

The emphasis on spontaneity aims at reducing, as much as possible, conscious and unconscious blocks that the artist may have in approaching the art creation process. It is hoped that in minimizing the influence of blocks, the art created will reflect as clearly and deeply as possible significant aspects of the visual memory. From the process of capturing images in concrete form based on visual memory, the spiritual guide will endeavour to promote active reflection on the process and/or the product of the art creation process to assist the pilgrim to get in touch with what is being touched within from the experience.

Understanding the Relationship between Spiritual Reflection and Spontaneous Art Creation

Spontaneous art creation is the primary art activity promoted within the art retreat context that is the subject of this thesis. The art pieces should be produced with a minimum of planning and design. This spontaneity is designed to reduce the influence of unconscious and conscious expectations and blocks and to minimise intellectualisation of the process. It is hoped that by being spontaneous, the artists maximise their freedom of expression from an intuitive and reflective space that will more directly access and express their inner feelings, perceptions and lived memories.

The spontaneous nature of art creation aims at moving beyond the natural guards that tend to get erected over and around our most vulnerable and valued inner
feelings and memories. Ultimately the process seeks to provide an avenue of access to these deeper and often unconscious memories that have often lain dormant for long periods and yet continue to influence and shape our ongoing inner and outer journeys. The art created in this context of spontaneity and freedom, in whatever form, media or style, becomes an avenue for the conscious mind to access these memories and emotions locked away in the unconscious mind. As one retreatant described them, the art creations produced became ‘holding spaces’ (App 2c: 10)\(^{48}\) for their memories and life experiences.

It is significant to note that the primary source for memory is the senses and not the intellect. The intellect tends to be engaged later to interpret the sensed experiences into meaningful concepts and language. For most people, the primary sensual mode through which they take in life experiences is the visual mode (vision-impaired people are the exception). What people see becomes one of the first inputs that they register in their memories and these visual memories get stored in the conscious and unconscious for later reference. It is these visual memories that will in time be processed by the emotional and intellectual centres to give them meaning and govern reactions and responses to them.

The primacy of sensory input means that for most of us, visual images are one of the first access points for memory. Because the visual sense shapes and holds memory, it reinforces the significance of art creation to the process of accessing and reflecting on memories that shape our inner journey. In the spontaneous occurrence of dreams, people experience visual expressions of deep inner memories, as well as reactions to memories that have been unconsciously and consciously registered. The visual responses in dreams to deep inner unconscious memories occur when the psychological defences are relaxed or disarmed in sleep, allowing free expression, unimpaired by conscious processes or self constructed expectations.

Another way visual senses come into play in relation to memories occurs when we look at photos that depict situations in which significant life events were

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\(^{48}\) The appendix references relating to the survey questions are included in the text as an appendix notation i.e. 2c to locate which appendix is being referred to and a number (in this case 10) or series of numbers which identify the responses of individual respondents. Each number in the series of appendices relating to the survey responses corresponds to the same respondent in each appendix.
experienced. The photos act as memory prompts and bring to the fore other elements of memory, whether sensed memories or intellectually driven interpretations of what happened or sensory aspects of how we felt at the time. In fact, for most of us our memories are like scrapbooks or photo albums of stored images that hold within them a store of other sensory, emotional and intellectual elements that make up the various aspects of what can be referred to as the inner landscape of our being.

What spontaneous art creation seeks to do is to create some concrete visual images that contain within them visual clues to key elements of memory that touch critical aspects of inner journeys or landscapes. It is hoped that through active reflection on these images in personal meditation and contemplation supported by spiritual direction, the artist will be able to use them to more readily access unconscious memories. Active reflection of art creations is also aimed at uncovering the deeper significance of these memories.

*The analogy of art creations as mirrors*

An analogy that encompasses some of the central terminology used in processes of reflecting on art creations is the analogy of art creations as mirrors. It is noteworthy that several retreatants made reference to ‘reflecting’ in various responses to the questions about art creations. The notion of reflection is readily associated with the function of mirrors. A mirror enables a visual image to be shown in such a way that people standing or sitting in front of it can see several parts of their outer appearance. The visual image seen in the mirror is not complete or necessarily accurate, particularly if the mirror is flawed. However the mirror shows the actual physical appearance on which the person viewing the reflection can ponder.

Something similar to the functioning of a mirror can apply to spontaneous art creations. However in the case of art creations, what is mirrored to the artist is not a representation of what is external but what is internal and in most cases unconscious. As one of the retreatants put it, “painting drew up into my consciousness things that were lying low, craving for wordless outward

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49 There were twelve direct references in the responses in section 2c to reflecting as part of the art creation process.
expression..” (2c: 1). Another retreatant described the effect of art creation on her personal reflection as the “..unconscious surfaces much more readily, even unexpectedly” (2c: 2).

More specifically picking up the mirror imagery, a retreatant spoke of “..how my external creative expression reflected what was going on in my inner being..” and allowed her “… to see where God was in my life more clearly” (2c: 4). For another, art creation deepened her reflection and “.. helped express the richness and complexity of … inner life, grief, joys, and spiritual longings..” (2c: 9).

A further reference to the reflective nature of art creation was expressed in a retreatant’s comments on the spaces within her that were opened up by art creation and that held for her concrete expression of her experience. She went on to say that it allowed her “.. to savour the reflection and allow it to settle into the bones of my experience and knowledge of God and myself..” (2c: 10).

This last comment highlights an advantage art creation has over traditional methods of non-visual meditation, prayer, contemplation and inner reflection. The fact that in most cases the art creation is a concrete and permanent expression of the artist’s inner landscape, at the time of creating it, enables the artist to “savour” or “ponder” it well beyond the moment of creation. As one retreatant noted, art creations continued to provide opportunities for reflection some two years after the retreat (2c: 5). For another retreatant, art creations formed part of an art journal through which he could review his spiritual journey by reviewing his art (2c: 8).

The very specific terms in which the retreatants expressed their experience of art creation reinforces the significance of it for their self-awareness and their ongoing experience of their inner spiritual journey.

In this next section the spontaneous art creation process will be looked at in terms of key understandings that need to be considered in guiding the retreatant/pilgrim in their reflection on the process in spiritual direction.
Art Creation and the Spiritual Direction Process

When retreatants get to the stage of reflecting on the art creation process, they are invited to sit with their experience and/or the products to reflect on what has happened for them based on three aspects or outcomes of the process. These are: preparation for creating art; creating the art; and reflection on the completed work of art.

Preparation for art creation – self-awareness

The first stage of the art creation process focuses on self-awareness during preparation for art creation in which the retreatants may become aware of what happened in them as they looked at the empty page before they made their first strokes. Verbal prompts can point to some of the issues and aspects of reflection that may need to be explored by those coming to share with a spiritual director in the art retreat context. Examples are such questions as: “What were the thoughts that flooded to the surface as you were faced with having to act without knowing where it was going to take you? What were the resistances or blocks in you? Where were energy, hope and possibility in what was before you?”

This type of reflection is important as it helps retreatants to become aware of what happens in them when they are faced with decisions in the broader experience of their lives. For most people, having to make decisions in life is sometimes like staring at a blank page and trying to work out what to do next. In this sense the process of art creation mirrors broader life experience.

Reflection on the process of creating and constructing an artwork

In the second stage of the art creation process, the spiritual director may explore with the artist/pilgrim the experience of what it was like creating the picture or art piece. This exploration includes the experience of watching the development of shape and colour and pattern on the page as a new and completely unique work of art emerges.

Reflection on this stage assists artists to become aware of the creative aspects of their spiritual journey that reflects the creative activity of God in their lives. They may also become aware of the critical and subversive voices that undermine their confidence and distract them from being creative and creating art. These
contrasting aspects of awareness suggest to them what they reacted against in the emerging creation and what drew them into the creative process and helped them explore the elements of their life experience that were blocking or promoting their creative expression in the broader aspects of their life experience. In the broader life experience the voices of affirmation and criticism are constantly at odds with each other, creating the tension that often debilitates people in their creative engagement with life.

**Reflection on the completed work**

In spiritual direction as part of the art retreat, artists may be called to reflect on how the art created as a complete work invites them to respond. Focusing on this stage allows exploration of emerging feelings or experiential memories emerging from the art created.

The artist may want to focus on particular aspects of the artwork or on the general impression conveyed by the artwork. The guide seeks to remain neutral in guiding the artist to discern what the artwork may be expressing of the pilgrim’s life experience and inner journey. In some senses, as has been mentioned previously, the artwork becomes like a mirror to the artist in that it reflects something of the personal inner experiences or memories to be meditated on.

This approach, outlined above, is distinct from that taken by art therapists where the detail of the art piece is reflected on in a more analytical way. In art therapy, the tendency is more to read the artwork as a part of a story, trying to find clues to issues that need to be addressed in the client’s life circumstances. In spiritual direction within the art retreat context, the intent is to elicit reflection on the inner life experience in a way that connects artists and their art creations with their experience of life in the present moment. It is not the role of the spiritual guide to interpret or point out particular aspects that appear to be significant to them, the guide. The invitation to the artists/pilgrims is to reflect on their own art creations in a way that promotes their self-awareness and inner responses in the present moment.
One overriding principle that, Düllmann\(^50\) notes, needs to be made clear to spiritual guides in the art retreat context. It is that all images created by retreatants need to be honoured, and seen as significant objects for reflection.

**Being open to all aspects of the process**

Spiritual direction invites engagement with any or all of these stages. The spiritual guide does not systematically go through the various stages as listed or follow the order of the art creation process but invites the artist/pilgrim to reflect on and share out of the completed experience.

This may mean pilgrims start at the last stage and focus on the completed work. On the other hand, they may not even bring the finished work but want to talk about the process of creating the work or the preparation and approach to the work. It could be that in the process of art creation the pilgrim may have touched on something that has no relationship at all to the art creation process. This insight may become the subject of further reflection of their life experience.

Each of the stages in the art creation process is significant to the expression of the inner or soul journey. It cannot be stressed too highly that the whole process of art creation is as important to the spiritual guide as the work of art produced. It is in the process of art creation that the artist is confronted with all the forces that work for and against life, freedom and hope.

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\(^50\) Düllmann, “Art: Containment and Language of Soul”, 91.
Chapter 5: Creating a Context for Spontaneous Art Creation

Because one goal of the art retreat is to maximize the depth and consistency of the retreatant’s self-expression, this chapter explores potential blocks to self-expression and art creation and ways in which these can be addressed within the art retreat context. The chapter then describes ways to promote spontaneous art creation in the retreat context.

**Blocks to Art Creation**

Artists in general may well be influenced by their own or others’ perceptions of what constitutes “good art”. For art retreatants, however, the most important precondition for the creation of “good art” is the clearing of the mind and heart, as much as possible, from whatever might block free, creative expression.

**Poor self-image as an artist**

One of the aspects of art creation that need to be addressed in the retreat context is the artist’s self image as artist and creative being. Two retreatant-respondents in this study identified themselves as inexperienced artists (2a: 5, 6). This seems to be a more significant issue than is indicated by the small numbers identifying themselves as such in the survey responses.

The notion of being inexperienced or not feeling that they could refer to themselves as artists was not just about whether the retreatants had had experience or not. It was about what experiences they had had with art. This perceived lack of experience was an important factor in how they interpreted responses to their previous attempts at art creation. Some pilgrims associated their attempts to create art with ridicule at their efforts. Inner voices that criticize or dismiss artistic expression can significantly reduce creative expression in all forms of art. For others it had been the reinforcement of particular aspects of their creative expression through praise and affirmation that had locked them into patterns of expression they found hard to move away from. Such an experience is especially relevant for experienced artists who have found their niche and style, which locks
them into producing art that they are affirmed in creating. It is the understanding of team members that not being too experienced in art can be an advantage in gaining more from the art creation process. However, sensitivity to artistic ability and productivity are influential factors in the decision of retreatants to attend a retreat that is specifically identified as an art retreat\textsuperscript{51}.

It has been the retreat team’s experience that retreatants are often acutely aware of their perceived abilities and in some cases comments have been made by some prospective retreatants that this type of retreat is not for them because they are not artists. This attitude has evolved from a distorted notion reinforced by ‘the world’, that art creation is about producing products for others appreciation rather than for self-exploration and reflection. In response to these attitudes, part of the design for future retreats will involve considering carefully how the retreat is promoted to prospective retreatants. One way to minimize the stigma that seems to be associated with these terms would be to avoid reference to ‘art’ or ‘artist’. Terms like “creative expression” or “visual expression” could be more neutral and thus less likely to trigger assumptions about the purpose of art. Consideration needs to be given to how potential retreatants read and identify with retreat descriptions.

\textbf{Art materials}

Another subtler block to the process of free and spontaneous artistic expression is the awareness that art materials are generally expensive and therefore should not be wasted. While such an attitude was not expressed directly by any of the retreatants in their responses, this awareness can be seen in the positive responses of retreatants to the availability of free art resources. They noted that they found the “great amounts”, “plentiful”, and “wide range of materials” a significant element of the retreat experience (2n: 1, 2, 3, 12, 13).

For most retreatants, an ample supply of relatively low cost materials along with some better quality materials allowed them the freedom of mind to have a go at things they would not have tried if they felt it was costing too much. The fact that there were materials supplied for their use was another element of the freeing up

\textsuperscript{51} In one case (2a: 5) the retreatant makes mention of the fact that “I had almost no previous experience as far as drawing/painting is concerned”. The other (2a: 6) comments on how they “felt unsure of how “good” my art would be”. In response to the question of the most significant aspect of the retreat, a comment is made in reflection that “I need not be disconcerted by other participants and their apparent artistic productivity” (2q: 11).
process that reduced their anxiety about using materials freely. Those for whom material quality was an issue (2n: 10) were encouraged to bring their own materials although some high quality materials were supplied to encourage their ongoing exploration of art creation in different media.

**The didactic approach**

In the first art retreat run in 2003, an attempt to name and identify various blocks or “voices” that work against free creative expression was presented in the form of didactic morning prayer sessions. This approach was based on retreat models that incorporate didactic teaching sessions where some content around the theme of the retreat was presented to the retreatants each morning as a study to give them something beyond their reading and reflection to contemplate during the day, if they found it touched their life experience.

As the first retreat was held during the Church’s Lent season, the theme was built around the temptations of Christ in the wilderness. Each day a different temptation of Christ was focused on and related to the experience of art making. In particular, there was a focus on how each temptation pointed to different sets of blocks and negative voices that can lead to discouragement and even cessation of the art making processes. To encourage creativity in each session, contemporary paintings by Australian artists relating to the focus of the daily reflections were set up. This display highlighted the variety of styles and subjects that can be used to express interpretations of life.

While the feedback from some retreatants was very positive about the reflections and the incorporation of art into the presentations (2h: 1-5), the team felt the didactic approach dominated by words and concepts tended to promote analysis of the story and art rather than more contemplative reflection on it. As has been noted previously, this principle is also relevant to the process of spiritual direction, that invites pilgrims to avoid engaging analytical and didactic elements in their reflection on their own life experience and the art making that flows from this reflection.
Promoting Spontaneity in Art

These three blocks need to be addressed if the retreatants are to be given the broadest scope to explore their inner journeys through the art creation process by, as one retreatant put it, “painting from the soul” (2a: 9).

Encouraging playful art

To address blocks, several practical suggestions were made to the retreatants in the introductory session of the retreats. One of the things that Thomas Moore notes about children is that they are very free in their approach to art. For most of us the experience of playing with art as children was a pleasurable experience. Using these memories, retreatants were encouraged to pretend they were back in kindergarten (2f: 5) if this was helpful. This was an attempt at giving permission that cut across the “adult” messages we sometimes absorb about expectations of how art should be created. Unfortunately in a culture that has elevated certain expressions of art to places of higher value than others, along fairly arbitrary guidelines, this permission is not always given.

Douglas Purnell notes that Paul Tillich speaks of the playfulness of art as a key element of allowing imagination to be fostered. Purnell quotes Tillich as saying;

Painting … was the highest form of play and the genuinely creative realm of imagination. When the artist played, the painting showed the inmost character of the human spiritual condition.

The importance of taking this playful attitude to painting cannot be overstated. It is a significant contributor to motivating retreatants into creative expression that touches the depths of their being and life experience. As one retreatant mentions in her response to the impact of art creation, “I became immersed in playing with mixing colours – simply playing in no thought – in meditation – thoughts arising yet the paint and the colours and their mixing commanding more attention than any thought or reflection.” (2c: 1).

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52 Moore, Care of the Soul, 302.
**Using simple colour, line and symbol approaches**

Another suggestion that some retreatants found helpful was to start not with an object or subject in mind but just a colour or a line or a symbol (2f: 7) and then to engage with the materials as if in a game and not an exercise (2f: 6, 11). In using this approach of simple colour and line, artists need to take time to sit with the empty piece of paper and contemplate on what colour or line or form to start with or which visual media to work with. There should be no expectations of what they are supposed to produce. It can be anything and any pattern or shape or representation. Retreatants are invited to just enjoy engaging with the paper and the media and the colours.

In the first retreat, the spiritual direction team offered a daily meditation session first thing each morning followed by an invitation to sketch or paint what came out of the meditation time before breakfast. At 7am each morning, retreatants gathered and were led into silent meditation with a suggested art expression focus such as being aware of colour in the meditation. On other mornings different foci were suggested.\(^{54}\) The intention of these meditation exercises was to provide a model that retreatants could use at home or elsewhere as a way of getting started with art creation out of a reflective process. While this seemed like a good modeling exercise, it became apparent on review that it tended to cut too much across the freedom the team was seeking to create in the midst of the retreat experience.

**Using different media and methods**

Another suggestion to retreatants, who feel stuck in a particular style or expression of art, is to try a different set of materials or methods from the ones they had previously used. New methods can help them break out of being tied to one approach. Some alternative methods that can be suggested include using their less dominant hand or hand painting without brushes. These alternative methods can free retreatants from the expectations of doing things right and getting caught in detail.

\(^{54}\) These were being aware of line on the second day, and symbol on the third day.
Art charting exercise

Another activity that was tried in the first retreat was an art charting exercise to help the retreatants reflect on what was being expressed in their art making through the use of colour, line and symbol. Three charts were prepared with sets of eight commonly used terms that relate to spiritual aspects of our life experience. Words such as ‘love’, ‘spirit’, ‘anger’, and ‘church’ were incorporated into a series of boxes on the charts and retreatants were invited, if they felt comfortable, to match words with colours, line drawings or symbols that expressed the essence of what the words conveyed. Each day different words were offered and the retreatants were asked to use a different element of art making each day to respond to the words. They were assured that they did not have to share their responses with anyone, especially their spiritual director, if they did not see any relevance to what they wanted to share with their spiritual director.

The theory behind this exercise was that it might help them, as they started reflecting on the colours and line patterns in their art creation, to unpack what their art may be saying to them in relation to their life experience. It was hoped that the charts could become keys or glossaries to help the retreatants unpack some meaning from their use of various elements in their art creation.

On the first full day we explained the charts to the retreatants. This occurred late in the morning after they had had a chance to start their art creation. On the following days we just handed out the charts about the same time as on the first day. On reflection, after the retreat, it was felt that this exercise, rather than contributing to the awareness process, may have created another way for the retreatants to get hooked into the analytical processes of trying to find particular meaning in their art creations rather than focusing on the contemplative aspects of the retreat process. In going through the process of identifying certain words with colours, patterns or symbols, the retreatants were tempted to try and interpret their art creations using these keys, assuming that the colour or pattern in the art chart directly defined the meaning of colour components and similar patterns in their art creations. This may have worked against the principle of allowing the art making processes and/or products to speak for themselves to the retreatants out of their own reflection on the process and their life experience.
Creating a Sacred and Confidential Working Space

One of the key guidelines given to retreatants at the start of the art retreat was that they would each have their own workspace for the duration of the retreat. As well as having a space of their own in the open workshop area, there was an expectation that they would agree not to intentionally look at others’ art creations. This emphasis on privacy was reinforced by a direction not even to silently acknowledge another’s creations in affirmation or query through gesture or physical expression. These directions were given to ensure the protection of the artist’s space as sacred and confidential as much as this can be done in an open art space. This was a crucial aspect of the art creation process in that all retreatants needed to know that they had a space that was safe, set apart for them and sacred to them (2a: 1, 10; 2f: 6, 10, 11).

Associated with the confidentiality of space, retreatants were assured that they did not have to bring their art creations to spiritual direction. It was up to them whether they brought them and if they did, it was left open to them as to whether they talked about them. This was to reinforce the point that the process was not just focused on the art produced or on the analysis of the artwork but on their reflections on the process and the art they had created and what it touched of their inner awareness of the journey.
Chapter 6: Creating the Holding Space for Art Creation and Reflection

This chapter explores those elements of the retreat context that contribute to providing a supportive environment in which the retreatants maximize the effectiveness of their creating and processing of art. After examining the notion of “the world” from which retreatants withdraw, it looks at silence, particularly at spatial and psychological considerations that assist retreatants to process aspects of their reflections on the “world”, as the bridge into exploring the sacred aspects of their lives. It then looks at the significance of prayer and contemplation in the creation of a holding space.

Withdrawing from “the World”

It has been established that one of the central functions of retreats is to provide a space where people can withdraw from the distractions and demands of life. This withdrawal can be notionally identified as retreating from “the world”\(^56\). The “world” in traditional Christian parlance would refer to the places and experiences of life where unhealthy distractions continue to catch our attention and lead to living apart from the influence of God.

Typically the concept of retreat is understood to relate to withdrawing from regular routines and moving away from familiar environments. This withdrawing is intended to enable retreatants to start listening to and noticing what is happening in them and around them. The intention of the retreat experience is to deepen their awareness of the movements that are happening in them in relationship to God, others and the environment.

The retreatants surveyed in this study tended to read this withdrawal in terms of withdrawal from the noise, demands and clutter of their everyday life experiences\(^57\). Neafrey cites Aldous Huxley’s definition of ‘the world’ as an

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\(^{57}\) There was an emphasis on needing “quiet space … where I could be totally on my own” (2a: 1), and “to have some quiet time … without any interruption from the usual distractions in my life” (2a: 10) which reflected the spatial and environmental aspects of withdrawal associated with retreats in general.
expanded updated version of the traditional Christian understanding of this term. Huxley explains there is more to retreating from ‘the world’ than just retreating from the spatial and environmental aspects identified above. He defines the world as:

… man’s (sic) experience as it appears to, and is molded by, his ego. It is that less abundant life which is lived according to the dictates of the insulated self. It is nature denatured by the distorted spectacles of our appetites and revulsions. It is finite divorced from the Eternal. It is multiplicity in isolation from its non-dual Ground. It is time apprehended as one damned thing after another. It is a system of verbal categories taking the place of the fathomlessly beautiful and mysterious particulars which constitute reality. It is the notion labeled ‘God’. It is the Universe equated with the words of our utilitarian vocabulary.  

Huxley’s “world” is about the state of mind and ego we live out of and the associated impact on our perception and understanding of ourselves, others, our environs and what we name as “God”. When trying to understand what it is that is being retreated from when one goes on retreat, Huxley’s conception is a significant alternative view to one of the world as a physical context.

Engaging in art creation with a view to deepening awareness of the inner journey and its links to relationship with the Divine is not just a matter of doing the art creation and processing it in spiritual direction sessions. There is the need to provide a conducive context both prior and subsequent to art creation and spiritual direction to ensure that the whole process maximizes the effectiveness of the broader spiritual context of the retreatants life experience and relationship with God and others. This involves limiting external distractions and influences that could impair deepening awareness of inner aspects of life experience. The physical context also needs to be designed to deepen awareness of being divinely accompanied and supported in community.

The retreat context should promote the deepening awareness of what is happening within the retreatants as they engage in this process of art creation. As Thomas Moore states:

The point of art is not simply to express ourselves, but to express an external concrete form in which the soul of our lives can be evoked and contained. It is about arresting life and making it available for contemplation. Art captures the

eternal in the everyday, and it is the eternal that feeds the soul – the whole world is a grain of sand.59

To enable this deepening awareness to happen, artists need to be encouraged to enter a contemplative stance to centre themselves and get in touch with their life experience and their awareness of how it transcends their immediate self-awareness of engagement with others, God and the environment. The promotion of deepening awareness involves creating both physical and psychological environments that minimize the influence of “the world” on the retreatants’ experience of the art retreat.

Silence

Just as the concept of “world” need not be just a physical context, the concept of silence in the retreat context need not be just about the absence of noise. It can also be about the quieting of the mind, heart and senses irrespective of what noise is happening around the retreatant.

Maintaining silence throughout retreat

One of the well-tried methods of entering into quieting of the mind, heart and senses is to eliminate the verbal interactions retreatants have with others around them. This is what is commonly understood as silence within a retreat context although this is usually only in relation to conversations between retreatants and minimized conversations with retreat leaders and team members, not to other noise such as cars passing or birds singing.

Silence is a valued aspect and a core element in the contemplative aspect of the art retreat experience and to compromise it too much reduces the benefits to retreatants. Anthony De Mello observes that there is a trend away from the strict observance of silence in retreats and yet he believes in the need for silence if retreatants are to hear the voice of God and experience any sense of spiritual depth. He states:

A few years ago it was self evident that the voice of God is heard best in silence; that a retreat should be made in silence. This is no longer obvious to many

59 Moore, Care of the Soul, 302-303.
people. Silence is a discipline on the ear more that on the tongue. We silence our tongues in order to hear better. How hard it is to pick up subtle sounds when you are talking! And the voice of God is a very delicate, subtle sound, particularly for ears that are not accustomed to it…. We need to be exposed to God’s voice in silence for a long time if we are later to detect it amidst the noise of the marketplace.  

De Mello’s argument is well supported by tradition and life experience and needs to be taken seriously in considering whether to allow the breaking of vocal silence. One of the key tasks in the silent retreat context is for retreatants to become more sensitive to awareness of God’s influence in their lives. To compromise this by breaking the silence reduces the depth of awareness retreatants can gain in this unique opportunity to experience silence in a communal environment.

Ideally it is more beneficial to maintain silence for the full extent of the retreat, thus giving retreatants the unique opportunity of long-term contemplation in silence. While this may be challenging, particularly for retreatants not accustomed to silence, it provides an experience more consistent with the tradition of retreat making. As De Mello notes in his introduction to his book on retreats:

Exterior silence is an enormous help for attaining interior silence. If you cannot bear to observe exterior silence, if …it is unbearable for you to keep your mouth shut, how will you bear the silence that is interior? …Your tolerance of silence is a fairly good indicator of your spiritual …depth. The noise is there all along. Silence is only making you aware of it and giving you the opportunity to quiet and master it.  

The connection between spiritual depth and tolerance of silence points to the need to encourage retreatants to eliminate as many distractions to interior silence as possible. In the art retreats, retreatants were encouraged to minimize use of mobile phones, and other electronic entertainment devices and in particular avoid television.

De Mello also quotes Isaac of Nineveh who makes the further point that it is in continual silence that the benefits of communion with God are found. He puts it this way:

Many are continually seeking, but they alone find who remain in continual silence… Silence like the sunlight will illuminate you in God and will deliver you from the phantoms of ignorance. Silence will unite you to God … More than

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61 De Mello, *Contact with God*, 40.
all things, love silence: it brings you a fruit that tongue cannot describe. In the beginning, we have to force ourselves to be silent. But then there is born something that draws us to silence.”

In many senses, part of the growing awareness in the context of retreat is the great benefit of silence. The silent retreat becomes an opportunity to help retreatants with or without experience to enter into silence and, drawing on Isaac of Nineveh’s images, bathe in its “sunshine” and taste of its “fruit”.

**Visual silence**

Flowing from the need for verbal silence is the relevance of silence or quietness in visual and other sensory elements of the life experience. As with the auditory triggers that need to be silenced to enable awareness of the deeper voices and sounds of the inner journey, consideration needs to be given to finding ways of “quietening” the visual stimuli. These stimuli can distract the soul from becoming aware of the deeper images that define the inner landscape of the lived experience.

Openness to the mystical experiences of life requires us to get in touch with some of the more elemental aspects of our lived experiences accessed through the language of the senses, including images and visual prompts. Paradoxically, these can negatively impact the reflective processes, particularly in the art retreat context and this happens in similar yet different ways to verbal distractions that arise in the stillness of contemplation and meditation. In some ways the visual aspects of our lived experience are more primary experiences than the words and intellectual constructs that are part of our inner and outer conversations. The visual along with other sensory inputs is one of the first encounters we have with the environment we live within. Words and intellectual constructs are responses to the primary inputs of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell.

Among the possible sources of visual stimuli provided in the art retreats were books and artwork for reading and browsing. Books devoted to imaginative expressions of art, story, and poetry can also “serve the religious impulse” because they are not primarily focused on being intellectually deciphered and analyzed, but are created to invite the viewer’s imagination and connection with

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62 De Mello, *Contact with God*, 41.
63 Moore, *Care of the Soul*, 289.
life experience. When asked about the reading and visual resources offered at the retreats (Appendix 2p), retreatants generally appreciated the range and content of the resources offered. There was one respondent (2p: 2), however, who felt there were too many resources, raising the question of distraction from the visual silence needed to allow space for the inner images to be noticed and meditated on.

The prayer space can also be a potential distraction visually, if visual foci work against the primary purposes of the retreat and prayer space. At the art retreats, the prayer space was designed around a centerpiece that provided a visual focus for prayer and contemplation and this remained in place to remind retreatants who revisited the space throughout the day, of the reflection focus for the day. This centerpiece was also intended to deliberately stimulate the prayer and contemplation of the retreatants. In ensuring a positive contribution to the visual silence or quietness in the prayer space, it is important that the visual focus is not such that retreatants get lost in their own feelings of inadequacy and lack of creativity by getting hooked into thinking about how creative and clever are the artists who created it. On the other hand it does need to be created in a way that does not distract retreatants because of its visual dissonance, leaving them trying to work out what they do not like about it.

Several retreatants commented on the significance of the visual symbols and themes incorporated into these visual foci (2g: 3, 4, 6, and 2h: 11, 13). As Düllmann comments:

> It is important that whatever images, symbols, or art reproductions we offer retreatants for prayerful reflection, they have the capacity to evoke a sense of mystery and invitation to contemplation.65

This means the focus should not be too directive in what it seeks to convey visually. There needs to be room for the retreatants own imaginations to have space to receive whatever relates to their own experience of the mystery and presence of God in prayer and contemplation. This was usually best achieved by keeping the key elements of the visual focus simple and uncluttered (2h: 11) and using images, symbols and pictures that evoked the sense of mystery and openness.

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65 Düllmann, “Art: Containment and Language of Soul”, 90.
One aspect of the visual foci which suggests they did not intrude into the visual silence was commented on by two respondents (2g: 3, 10, and 2h: 11, 13). They appreciated the opportunity to interact with the visual foci either in placing some of their work in the focus or being invited to engage physically by doing something with some of the elements of the focus. For example, on one occasion, participants were invited to place stones provided into a stream that was part of the focus as a part of their prayer (2h: 11). This tactile aspect of the visual focus was designed to promote a more sensed experience of the focus and sought to minimize the purely intellectual experiencing of the focus.

**Spaces for Silence and Quietness**

It is critical in the live-in retreat context to create quiet physical spaces in which to withdraw and reflect and to work. This section discusses spaces used for accommodation, prayer, art creation, walking and meals.

**Living space**

The geographical location of the retreats, particularly the natural aspects of bush, gardens, birds and insects, provided many visual pointers to the presence of God as creator. Perhaps equally important was the fact that each retreatant had their own room to retreat to and use as their space away from everyone else. This provided a safe place for them to go to when they wished to be alone to rest, pray, reflect, write or sketch. It is worth noting that retreatants not only mentioned the provision of their own room in their comments on the facilities (2m: 7) but also commented on the provision of en suites as a bonus (2m: 7, 11). The significance of having individual rooms was particularly important, as retreatants spent so much time together in the art creation space. Having a space to retreat into which they could truly be on their own contributed to them finding quiet inner space to reflect and write and rest.

**Prayer space**

The second space consideration that was significant for retreatants was that of the communal worship and prayer space. This space was designed to provide a meeting place within the silence to come together for quiet prayer and reflection
as well as corporate worship. This space acted as another physical retreat space to be quiet within the overall physical location of the retreat. It also existed as a reminder that prayer and contemplation were at the heart of why participants were gathering to engage in art creation.

Several factors contributed to decisions about the location of the prayer space in relation to workspace. One was the accessibility for those who had limited mobility. This required the prayer space not be too far from, and where possible on the same level as, the art creation space.

The second was the symbolic relationship between the processes of prayer and contemplation, and the art working space. In the retreats described here, close proximity contributed to reinforcing their close relationship.

One retreatant who attended two retreats in consecutive years noted the change of location of the prayer space from a room on a different level to the working space to one adjacent to the working space. Her reflection on the change (2r: 7) suggests that for her it was helpful to have the prayer and workspace well away from the art workspace. Her reactions may relate to the understanding that the prayer space could be a place of retreat for those who were experiencing deep emotions and difficult memories. When this happens, they may wish to withdraw to the place of prayer as a reminder of the presence of God and they may wish to cry or pray out loud. The close proximity of the prayer space to the workspace could deter retreatants from using this space as a retreat space for this purpose.

**Art creation space**

As well as having their own room and a prayer space to retreat to, it was important that retreatants had their own working spaces in which to paint and create and not feel that they were being watched or distracted by what others were doing. This was part of the need to quieten the senses, particularly the visual senses. Retreatants could so easily have been distracted by comparing what they were creating with what others were creating. This is a significant issue particularly for those who are tentative about exploring art creation as a reflective process. The temptation to look around and compare one’s work with the quality and production level of others is very seductive.
One retreatant commented indirectly on this point when she wrote “I need not be disconcerted by the other participants and their apparent artistic productivity…” (2q: 11). This comment alludes to the fact that it is part of human nature and culture to compare ourselves with others around us. The layout of the workspaces needs to minimize the possibility of the retreatant being distracted by what is happening nearby.

In choosing the silent retreat context, the ongoing sense of being on a journey together as a group is foundational to retreatants. Nevertheless, within the art workspace, separateness needs to be kept in tension with maintaining the sense of community within the workspace that many retreatants look for in being part of a group retreat.

**Psychological Aspects of Silence**

As well as the spatial considerations impacting the retreat context, there are issues relating to some of the psychological aspects of silence. Psychological aspects of stilling the mind and senses contribute to a deepening awareness of various elements of the lived experience and their relationship to the transcendent experience of the Divine. One key factor in the process of deepening awareness is the impact of intellectual analysis of experiences.

**Limiting intellectual analysis of experience**

As has been noted in the discussion relating to spiritual direction, intellectual intrusions on the reflective and creative processes can be counterproductive. In the broader context of the art retreat, it has been noted that the spiritual process changes when higher levels of intellectual content are introduced into the midst of creative, contemplative or reflective activities. The retreatants tend to get sidetracked into trying to make sense of what they are doing not from a position of prayerful openness but through trying to analyse the various elements of their art. While ultimately making sense of their experience is one of the key outcomes for retreatants, to do this prematurely is to restrict the processes of spontaneous art creation and deeper processing of the conscious and unconscious aspects of their life experience.
Premature intellectual processing naturally brings retreatants to focus on the conscious elements of their life experience which tend to short-circuit their unconscious explorations. In the context of art creation and spiritual direction, the unconscious elements of life experience are crucial to them getting the clearest and deepest sense of the influences that guide and dictate their responses to life and their relationships with God, others and themselves.

The distraction of intellectual processing can also contribute to retreatants blocking or avoiding painful and unpleasant elements of their life experience. This naturally occurs through the defensive strategies that have developed over the years to enable them to cope with and suppress disabling emotions that are triggered by these painful memories. Many of these defensive strategies have become so integral to a person’s way of being and living that he or she is not aware of being influenced by them.

As well as avoiding painful memories, engagement in premature intellectual processing can lead to reinterpretation or distortion of memories and life experiences. This processing can make the memories more palatable to the person engaged in reflecting on them. This reinterpretation of experience can relate to avoidance and may be governed by a desire to make experiences fit with idealised belief or value systems retreatants have come to hold dear.

These idealised belief and value systems are usually driven by expectations retreatants bring to the retreat about what others think about them and what they think about themselves. It has been noted in some of the responses to the survey questions that some retreatants entered the retreat with expectations relating to their level of competence as artists. Others came with particular theological understandings that had been formed through their faith traditions and these had led to presumptions about what they expected to discover in their reflection within the retreat context.

Because the ultimate intention of the experience of reflection on life experiences is to make sense of them, to prematurely or pre-emptively engage in intellectual processing and analysis of what is happening in the retreat context is to limit the effectiveness of exploring the depths of the inner conscious and unconscious elements of the spiritual journey.
The contrast between the approaches taken by the intellect and the soul in processing experience are quite distinct, as Thomas Moore observes:

> There are serious drawbacks to the soul in the abstraction of experience. The intellectual attempt to live in a “known” world deprives ordinary life of its unconscious elements, those things we encounter every day but know little about. … The intellect wants to know; the soul likes to be surprised. Intellect, looking forward, wants enlightenment and the pleasure of a burning enthusiasm. The Soul, always drawn inwards, seeks contemplation and the more shadowy, mysterious experience of the underworld.⁶⁶

During the first retreat in 2003, an optional session was provided after the evening meals during which documentaries on the work of contemporary artists were shown. In these videos, the artists talked through how they approached their artwork. The intention of this session was to address the blocks people have in approaching their art creation as discussed in chapter 5. Time was provided in the session for retreatants to express their views and reflections on the content of the documentaries.

Of the six survey responses from the first retreat (1-5, 9), only three mentioned this session in their reactions to the retreat. Two (2p: 4, 5) saw the session as very helpful and one listed it under the unnecessary aspects of the retreat (2r: 2). The guiding team, in reflection on this activity after the first retreat, felt that it was counterproductive in that it led to a more intellectually-oriented process, even though some retreatants had really appreciated the video and discussion session for what it opened up for them about the creative process and its spiritual connections. The addition of another set of visual and verbal elements (the video and discussion) had actually taken the retreatants away from the focus on their art creation and reflection and had led to some fairly intellectual discussions. In subsequent art retreats, it was decided to drop the evening sessions involving the documentaries and have an earlier evening prayer time to enable retreatants to retire early if they preferred to do so.

After the first retreat, the teaching input from the guiding team was also simplified to limit the possibility of too much intellectual analysis. The morning prayer and contemplation session became focused around quiet music, reading of scripture and poetry related to a theme, accompanied by a simple visual focus and a piece of art to reflect the theme. The piece of art each day was intended to

⁶⁶ Moore, *Care of the Soul*, 233
connect the theme with a visual expression that evoked something more than words can say. The other variation that was introduced in the morning and evening sessions was that retreatants were invited to physically engage in contributing symbols to the visual focus.

**Prayer and Contemplation: Awareness of Sights and Sounds in the Inner Landscape**

Retreatants come to a retreat seeking to grow in awareness of their own inner experiences or landscapes. They need to be guided into becoming alert to various levels of awareness that will inform their reflections on their inner journey. The key structured elements that provide the means to promote this awareness in the retreat context are specific periods of prayer and contemplation.

Each morning and evening of the three retreats, the retreatants were invited into a prayer and contemplation session. They gathered as a community around a visual focus created with candles, symbols and pieces of art relating to the theme of the day. The theme of the day had been chosen to act as a catalyst to promote awareness of the interaction between the visual and the contemplative aspects of the retreat experience.

In looking at the general response to the morning and evening prayer and contemplation sessions, several themes arose from the retreatant’s responses. Five retreatants (App 2g and 2h) across the three retreats mentioned the visual focus as a significant aspect of the prayer times in contributing to the depth of their experiences. In other responses, several retreatants mentioned that the sense of community was an aspect that was important to them. Gathering regularly in the day apart from meals is a significant part of the development of a sense of holding space for those for whom silence can feel isolating at times. The gathering of the community reinforces that participants are not on their own in the process of journeying through art creation in the retreat.

In relation to the purpose of the retreat and morning and evening prayer, in particular, some retreatants (2f – 1, 9, 11, 13. 2g – 4, 9, 10, 11) mentioned the impact these sessions had had on their reflective processes and the deepening
awareness of the presence of God. There is a concentration of responses to the last two retreats\textsuperscript{67} that speak of the positive contribution the morning and evening prayer and contemplation sessions had in promoting the reflective processes and awareness of God and faith themes. This corresponds to the shift away from having significant teaching and verbal input in the prayer sessions in the first retreat to a more minimalist approach on the part of the guiding team to these sessions in the latter two retreats.

The importance of the contemplative aspect of the retreat experience for the soul or inner journey cannot be overstated. Contemplation is understood to be the state of being completely open to God’s loving influence in the present moment. It enables a person to engage in prayer and inner reflection at a deeper level of awareness. Contemplation is also essential for retreatants to enter into the process of centering their thoughts and awareness on the presence of the transcendent and imminent God. It is about allowing the sense of the presence of God to penetrate our life experience giving us perspective on how that experience resonates with or works against our life source in God. The contemplative stance helps to quieten the distracting and counterproductive voices in our life experience to allow us space to explore the aspects we have feared, buried or denied. It also gives us space to allow the other voices that we often do not listen to. The voices of image, colour, shape and symbol come to the fore and stimulate visual expression.

Thomas Moore’s observation (noted at the beginning of this chapter) that art contributes to inviting the soul into contemplation is borne out in the responses of those retreatants who found the visual focuses and art pieces used in the prayer and contemplation sessions a significant aspect of the contemplation and prayer. Moore writes:

\begin{quote}
The soul makes a quick exit before these purely technical approaches to learning.

The arts are important for all of us, whether or not we ourselves practice a particular discipline. Art, broadly speaking, is that which invites us into contemplation – a rare commodity in modern life. In that moment of contemplation, art intensifies the presence of the world. We see it more vividly and more deeply. …. As we have seen, art arrests attention, an important service.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{67} In noting that respondents 6-13 participated in the last two retreats, the positive responses to the prayer sessions in the last two retreats out numbered those from the first retreat three to one.
to the soul. Soul cannot thrive in a fast-paced life because being affected, taking things in and chewing on them, requires time.\textsuperscript{68}

Moore’s ideas are supported by the retreatants’ comments that their own processes of art creating contributed to them being able to more readily enter into deeper reflection and contemplation on their relationship with God.

\textsuperscript{68} Moore, 	extit{Care of the Soul}, 286
Chapter 7: Design of Future Art Retreats

The aim of the research reported in this thesis, as the title suggests, is to develop an art retreat that will assist retreatants to describe and more fully understand the experience of spiritual direction through “art creation”.

This final chapter brings together the key design considerations of art retreats highlighted in this thesis based on the retreatants’ responses, a review of the literature pertaining to this subject and the author’s eleven years of spiritual direction and retreat team involvement. It suggests a basis for designing future art retreats.

The findings in relation to the key design considerations have been grouped around the themes of spiritual direction and its partnership with art creation, the art creation process and the promotion of the spiritual in art creation.

Spiritual Direction’s Complementary Partnership with Art Creation

It is proposed that the design principles for art retreats take into account the spiritual nature of the retreatants’ desire to deepen their understanding of God. Spiritual direction should play a central role in guiding retreatants to depth this spiritual awareness by actively inviting them to reflect on both their art and everyday life experiences. While spiritual direction is offered in a wide range of retreat contexts, its role in the art retreat context is to work in partnership with art creation to maximize the benefits of the reflection process in association with art creation.

As outlined in chapter three of the thesis, the non-structured approach to spiritual direction provides the optimum framework for retreatants to engage in reflecting on their art creations, because it is not limited by prescribed structural reflective methodologies. This is important in guiding retreatants in general reflection on their own life experiences with open minds. However it is also significant in modeling the open and spontaneous approach that is basic to art creation. The reinforcement of the need to keep an open heart and mind when approaching art
creation is key to deeping the unconscious aspects of the retreatants’ life experiences and memories.

As well as keeping an open agenda within the reflective approach to general life experiences, the guide and pilgrim are also encouraged to keep an open mind in processing the retreatingant’s reflections on the art creation process. As chapter four pointed out, it is very important to approach reflection on the art creation process without planning to target any particular stage of the process. Instead it is important to allow retreatants to choose what they want to look at in the art creation process or beyond it.

**Liberating the Art Creation Process**

In looking at the relationship between spiritual direction and art creation, the retreat design process should consider how to best promote spontaneous art creation. This involves considering the various elements of the art creation and the retreat context that contribute to freeing and/or blocking the process. Chapter five of this thesis offered a range of strategies that could be incorporated in the retreat context to help retreatants deal with such blocks and distractions.

Central to the retreat design is the provision of a safe and confidential workspace. The design of the workspace needs to provide assurance to retreatants that, within an open communal context, their personal space will be respected and their art creations held in confidence. A further element of the process design involves gaining the agreement of the retreatants to not intentionally look at other retreatants’ work or respond to it even with non-verbal gestures while maintaining silence.

Suggestions have also been made about various techniques and approaches to art creation that help disarm blockages and personal agendas. Such strategies include encouraging retreatants to adopt a playful attitude to art creation using simple and non-intentional approaches such as working with one colour or symbol at a time and trying a different media or technique to the ones retreatants are familiar with. Consideration also needs to be given as to what and how many materials and resources are provided for retreatants to use. It was noted that adequate supplies
of low cost art materials and resources contributes to freeing up retreatants to experiment with their art.

Promoting the Spiritual in Art Creation

It has been argued that it is important to pay attention to the various factors that promote spiritual awareness and it was observed over the three retreats that certain elements of the retreat experience worked to contribute positively to the deepening processes of contemplation and spiritual direction. These observations include the reduction of distractions within the retreat environment that work against open and free art creation and reflection. Some of the factors discussed in chapter six of this thesis include the reduction of verbal and visual distractions. It was also noted that eliminating any elements that promoted or led to analytical processing of life experience or art creation would contribute to deeper exploration of the inner experience. This would in turn lead to more consistent awareness of unconscious factors in the retreatants life and spiritual journey.

In relation to several of the changes that have been implemented over the three art retreats, there has been a simplification of all aspects of the retreat, including various input sessions like the communal prayer times and guidance given to retreatants in relation to art creation. The intention of these changes has been to reduce the amount of intellectual analytical content and the number of times retreatants are called away from reflection and art creation.
Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis argues that maintenance of an open agenda in the key aspects of spiritual direction, art creation and reflection on the art creation process provides a foundation for maximizing the transformational impact on retreatants within the art retreat context.

These aspects are further enhanced when art retreats are designed to promote more spontaneous art creation through provision of safe and confidential contexts and addressing the blocks and limitations retreatants may have relating to pre-existing attitudes to their own capabilities.

As well as addressing the artistic factors when designing retreats, this thesis suggests consideration needs to be given to minimizing verbal, visual and intellectual distractions within the retreat context and program.

In implementing the recommendations outlined in this thesis, the design of future art retreats will contribute to maximizing the impact the art retreat experience will have in transforming retreatants through art creation in association with spiritual direction.

There is scope for further exploration of the significance of the relationship between the broader creative arts including music, film, poetry and story and deepening spiritual awareness. Within the limits of this thesis, visual art creation provides some clues for exploring some of the other creative art fields. This thesis seeks to contribute to a gap in the literature relating to art retreats incorporating art creation in association with spiritual direction.
Bibliography

Books


**Articles**


**Dictionary Articles**


Appendices

**Appendix 1a:** Letter to retreatants explaining the written self-completion proforma

**Appendix 1b:** The written self-completion proforma, referred to in this study as the survey

**Appendix 1c:** Statement of agreement to participate in the Art Retreat Research Project

The survey responses
The appendix references relating to the survey questions are included in the text (e.g. 2c: 2, 13) as an appendix notation (i.e. 2c) to locate which appendix is being referred to and a number or series of numbers (i.e. 2, 13) that identify the responses of individual respondents. Each number in the series of appendices relating to the survey responses corresponds to the same respondent in each appendix.

**Appendix 2a:** What were your expectations of the art retreat before attending the retreat?

**Appendix 2b:** What are your reflections on the time set aside for art creation?

**Appendix 2c:** How did the art creation impact your personal reflective processes?

**Appendix 2d:** Have you been involved with spiritual direction prior to the retreat?

If yes, what differences, if any, did you notice in the spiritual direction sessions with art creation as a means of reflection?

**Appendix 2e:** Introduction Session
Appendix 2f:  Evening Prayer reflection

Appendix 2g:  Morning prayer reflection

Appendix 2h:  Meals (silent or conversational)

Appendix 2j:  Spiritual direction sessions

Appendix 2k:  Length of the retreat

Appendix 2l:  The timing of the days

Appendix 2m:  The facilities

Appendix 2n:  Art resources

Appendix 2p:  Reading and other visual resources

Appendix 2q:  In overview, what did you find the most significant aspect of the retreat in terms of your spiritual reflection and journey?

Appendix 2r:  Were there any aspects you felt were unnecessary or ideas for improvement for future retreats?

Program Outline

Appendix 3a:  Landscapes of the Soul Retreat 2003 Program Outline
Appendix 1a

Date

Dear

I am writing to request your assistance in giving me feedback on your Art Retreat experience with WellSpring. I am preparing to write a Masters Thesis on the development of an art retreat and would very much appreciate getting your input on how you found the art retreat/s and what aspects you found promoted spiritual reflection.

I have enclosed a survey form for you to respond to and a statement of agreement that you may consider signing, if you are open to me using your responses without reference to you personally in my Thesis.

Your responses will be considered anonymous for the purpose of protecting your views and personal experience. On receipt of your survey forms I will endeavour to assess trends in the feedback that suggest ways to improve the format or content of the retreats. Your survey responses will have no personally identifiable information on them to avoid biasing the outcomes and disclosing your identity.

Those who do choose to participate in the survey will be kept up to date with the progress of the thesis and given opportunity to read it on completion.

I believe that there is a lot to gain from this research in terms of developing the most appropriate retreat contexts for future generations. Your assistance in this matter would be greatly appreciated.

Yours truly,

Peter Bentley
Appendix 1b

Masters Research Project
WellSpring Art Retreat Survey

Retreat attended:

What were your expectations of the art retreat before attending the retreat?

What are your reflections on the time set aside for art creation?

How did the art creation impact your personal reflective processes?

Have you been involved with spiritual direction prior to the retreat?
If yes, what differences, if any, did you notice in the spiritual direction sessions with art creation as a means of reflection?
Please comment on your view of the benefits or limitations of the following aspects of the art retreat.

- Introduction Session
- Evening Prayer Reflection
- Morning prayer reflection
- Meals (silent or conversational)
- Spiritual direction sessions
- Length of the retreat
- The timing of the days
- The facilities
- Art resources
- Reading and other visual resources
- Other
In overview, what did you find the most significant aspect of the retreat in terms of your spiritual reflection and journey?

Were there any aspects you felt were unnecessary or ideas for improvement for future retreats?

Since the retreat, what impact has the retreat experience had on your:
• art creation
• spiritual reflection
• use of art in spiritual direction

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

Peter Bentley
Appendix 1c

Statement of agreement to participate in the Art Retreat Research Project

I have chosen to be part of this project out of my commitment to seeing the Art retreat continue to develop as a means of assisting people in their journey of spiritual reflection. I will be careful in my responses to the survey questions recognizing that my responses will contribute to the project as some of its primary source material.

I understand that all responses will become part of the reference material for the Thesis paper and as such will be open to be read by other people. I also understand that my name will not be associated with these responses or any other material shared with Peter.

Peter will ensure that my responses or any other material passed onto Peter in relation to the project will be kept in safe and private storage for the scope of the project and for the required time following the completion of the Thesis.

If you have any complaints or queries that the researcher has not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact the Ethics Liaison Officer, c/- The Dean, Melbourne College of Divinity, 21 Highbury Grove, Kew 3101, tel: (03) 98533177, email: admin@mcd.edu.au

On this basis I am willing to sign this Statement of Agreement and Understanding.

Signed:

Date:
Appendix 2a

What were your expectations of the art retreat before attending the retreat?

1. I expected a quiet space where I could paint meditatively, alone yet in community, with group prayer reflections to inspire and stimulate my creative process. I expected to be respected for the particular way I wanted to work and have freedom to choose the times that I used for art. I expected to also have a space where I could be totally alone, places to go walking and not have to communicate if I didn’t feel inclined to this. I expected to have offered spiritual direction.

2. To discover prayer without words (I thought it would be silent).

3. Fellowship/painting with a spiritual emphasis. Exploration.

4. I had no real expectations, but was looking forward to relaxing, spending time with God and being creative and allowing my inner self to express whatever came up.

5. That somehow – I would become aware of new aspects of my life in God revealed by the creative process, of which I had almost no previous experience as far as drawing/painting is concerned.

6. I saw the art as a means of deepening my spiritual life and as a new way of exploring where I was. I also felt unsure of how “good” my art would be but I trusted the team.

7. That it would be a similar structure to other Wellspring silent retreats, with space to engage in painting. That I would meet with God in this space.

8. I had none. I was given the retreat as a gift from my wife.

9. I expected there would be time for group prayer, silent reflection, painting “from the soul” and sharing with others.
10. I expected to be able to have some quiet time, and to focus on art making. I was looking forward to spending some time in the creative process without interruption from the usual distractions in my life. Given my work as an art therapist where I spend my time watching over the creative process of other people, I was looking for a space where I could enter into my own creative process with someone watching over that.

11. Retreat – send – I expected that I would have time to work through personal faith and family issues, and to have opportunity and facilities to create, and see a spiritual director if I wish to do so. I was not disappointed. I had booked the retreat early because it would be six months after both my parents’ deaths and I thought I needed an opportunity to work through the grief. I was particularly interested in the availability of a spiritual director as I wanted dialogue and feedback on my paintings.

12. Firstly that I would explore a different and visual way to express my life and my innermost feelings which would lead me into prayer. Secondly to appreciate and be drawn into artist’s work and to better “see” with deeper insights what is revealed.

13. I went with an open mind to experience what it offered me. I did expect to have time of creativity using different art mediums.
Appendix 2b

*What are your reflections on the time set aside for art creation?*

1. I think the time set aside was perfect – it was nearly all the day and night after all. I felt great freedom in knowing that I could paint at any time of the night or early morning that suited me.

2. The time that was structured to guide slowly into each step of understanding our own art language was well thought out.

3. The private table/ample space and the silence made this a very special time. I have never painted in reflective silence in company before.

4. I think time being set aside for art is important, where there is a space to “just be” and touch your centre and to be in touch with your creative side. I believe this allows for a deeper connection to God and self and to allow for a flow of creative energy and spiritual awareness. At least a weekend is needed for the centering down process to take place and to free yourself of the weekly burdens and other anxieties so as to be free to hear God speak through your creative expressions.

5. By day 3 I was aware I could stay longer and was pleased that this was so – it was a valuable time, full of surprises.

6. I felt free to do/ponder/work on my art in that time. I felt too close physically to others.

7. There was plenty of time for art creation. Although I did find that I could have easily done a full week in this type of retreat. It took about a day to begin to wind down and ‘loosen up’.

8. It created the stimulus to keep developing my art.
9. I felt thankful and excited to have the space and time to paint “from my heart and soul”. It was absorbing and energizing and cathartic for me.

10. These times were rich and full of life and activity. Personally I was in a space where I wanted to make the most of every opportunity to paint and so used each of the sessions for this work. It was important for me to allow myself the rhythm that came from reflection and then creation. In order to make the most of the experience I knew it would be important to create a sense of discipline for myself so that after reflection I would engage in creation, whatever emotional space I found myself in. This meant that the images I produced were true to the length and breadth of the journey and in the end created a narrative.

11. It was a relatively new activity for me to create art drawings. I need a disciplined time for pondering on the images of water, fire and wind. Art creation time was free for me to do what I wanted to explore, to produce art or not. The time set aside was adequate for me.

12. The time set aside was sufficient for me, and allowed good space for quiet reflection and for beautiful walks.

13. I enjoyed the quiet space to be creative. I experimented with mediums I haven’t used before something I wouldn’t have done otherwise. In my busy life at home I don’t often get the chance to spend a lot of time being creative in art. I found the time in art was very relaxing and I was able to express myself freely especially my inner feelings. The time set aside for art allowed me space to quietly reflect and reflect on the art I did and reflected on what I thought it meant and was saying to me. It was an experience of freedom for me.
Appendix 2c

How did the art creation impact your personal reflective processes?

1. In more ways than I can put words to! Many things were impacting me – I made the art in different ways. On one occasion I had been walking and began to ponder our human relationship with nature – I collected rubbish from the nearby creek feeling an urge to express my sadness on paper – to paint the rubbish into the green – to blend it in/perhaps cover it up, when I came into a clearing and an eagle sat above me in the tree, being dive bombed by cockatoos. This gave rise to so many images and ideas – the king of the birds being turned away and I had great desire to make a picture of the eagle and the rubbish and all that I was feeling so I ran back and begun – there was too much in me the paper seemed lifeless but the green paint layer upon layer began to give it form – the layers of life and of myself the green was comforting and peaceful and after some time led me to make woven pieces with sticks and this led me further in my reflections and on and on I wandered the art guiding me and showing me. At a point I felt satisfied – the picture expressed so many things and felt right, whole, completed. I looked at it and it was full and it still rises up the ponderings it rose out of. At other time painting drew up into my consciousness things that were lying low craving for wordless outward expression. At one stage I became immersed in playing with mixing colours – simply playing in no thought – in meditation – thoughts arising yet the paint and the colours and their mixing commanding more attention than any thought or reflection.

2. Surprised me. Unconscious surfaces much more readily, even unexpectedly.

3. In a very deep way and totally unexpected.

4. I was amazed how my external creative expression reflected what was going on in my inner being. It spoke to me very profoundly. This allowed me to see where God was in my life more clearly. As I do Mandala work I am also in awe how such painting reflects my inner world yet at the same time brings out my God given creative gifts. I believe to know God is to know yourself and to
know yourself is to know God so this art work helps in this knowing and allows me to work more closely with God.

5. In my pondering, I was very excited to have firstly ‘colour’ then ‘shape’ add an enormous and previously unexplored dimension to relationship I had with God and the growing, changing nature of that – this continued to give me hope 2 years on.

6. I felt it affirming of me. I was acknowledging a gift from God. Until a short time before the retreat this was unacknowledged. One or two were very evocative and gave me new understanding.

7. It helped me to articulate much more specifically how I felt or what my perception was through colour, shape or picture.

8. My art is my journal. To review my spiritual journey I review my art. What was created was an expression of my spiritual journey.

9. The act of painting deepened my reflection and helped me express the richness and complexity of my inner life, grief, joys and spiritual longings.

10. The creation of the artwork opened a space where it was possible to hold what I had become aware of in reflection. However, more than just holding these reflections, the art creation gave me the opportunity to open and explore what these spaces were and for them to become concrete in my experience. The creation process allowed me to savor the reflection and then allow it to settle into the bones of my experience and knowledge of God and myself. The creative process is the fuel that allows movement in the personal reflective space stretching my thinking, understanding, questioning and knowledge.

11. I mulled over the impact of water, fire and wind in my life; how have these metaphors been demonstrated in my life. The leader’s choice of faith symbols is pivotal in helping us to focus on our own faith journey. When I painted I found that I needed to persevere and pursue deep quests in my own life relating to my identity and my persona. Who am I? What are my birth links?
How significant I am? Who am I before God? Because the art creation was an intensely personal activity without me having to share my meanings with others or to create for an external purpose, I felt free to explore and to grapple with my inner self in a visual form.

12. I can’t say that it had a deep impact generally, except for one occasion – but then I’m still a beginner. I loved the vibrant colours.

13. I was surprised at how in tune I became to my feelings as I painted, drew and played with clay. Feelings I didn’t realize I had surfaced often when being creative in the artwork I was creating. I was aware quite often when I reflected on pieces I had just completed that they showed me more about myself. It was easier to express my feelings in art than any other way. Art was a great way to reflect; looking at the colours I used and why, the space taken up on the paper or board, the symbols and shapes used and also the thick or thinness of the paint used. I realized the importance of reflecting before and after events or things. It certainly opened my mind to the need of reflecting and as the retreat went I developed in this area.
Appendix 2d

Have you been involved with spiritual direction prior to the retreat? If yes, what differences, if any, did you notice in the spiritual direction sessions with art creation as a means of reflection?

1. No.

2. Yes. To paint or draw an image is easier than finding words.

3. No.

4. Yes, fairly regularly but not recently. There is a great difference for me, as it is not just auditory but visual as well. Somehow seeing what you have painted or created taps into your inner world as it is an expression from within. It is part of your true self, of who you are. When painting it is as if “you have closed the door and gone inside to pray” as Jesus once said but your prayer is expressed in a visual manner. I feel close to God whenever I paint my mandalas or my icons and especially on retreat. God continually creates in me and brings forth my visual expressions in a wonderful way.

5. Yes. Very grounding – released solely from reliance on verbal/cerebral ways to explore/reflect – the physical images released more and more and continue to do so.

6. Yes. I didn’t use them in my sessions – except to add these understanding to others.

7. Yes. I found this to be much easier for me to move out of my head space and into my heart. Sometimes in a normal sd session, I can struggle with hearing what is going on because I am stuck in my head. Picture, colour and shape help me to move into where I am really at much more quickly.

8. Yes. The difference is only in format not necessarily in impact.
9. Yes – monthly individual sessions with a spiritual director. As a painter, I found the process of reflecting on my own paintings led to new insights about my own psyche and that God can speak to me thought the creative process.

10. No.

11. No formal session but have some notion about spiritual direction from a spiritual director friend. With assistance and with my own willingness I allow the uncovering of myself in order to plumb its spiritual core.

12. Yes. I did not find the spiritual direction sessions helpful. I felt “closed off” rather than an invitation to delve deeper.

13. Yes. I think the biggest difference is the freedom inside to express what is deep within, that is if you just allow them to come out without pre – conceived ideas on what you are going to paint. I think another difference is the silence which played a big part me of being able to express things as well as the art work can say more and tell you more than words can.
Appendix 2e

Introduction Session

1. Gave a good practical orientation.

2. Clear and inviting.

3. As this was my first time and I had not known the retreat was a silent one, for me this was a time of threat and confusion.

4. An excellent way of gathering oneself in readiness to be with God, to listen and prepare for what is to come. I am not sure whether this is more the morning prayer. Loved hearing about other artists and the direction God lead them and to be guided into what was meaningful to them. This introduction is very inspirational and sets the tone for the day.

5. I remember how freeing it was to hear Peter say – pretend you are back in Kindergarten – that helped me open to God’s creativity, rather that bound by my lack of experience.

6. Reassuring – confidentiality of my art was stressed and I felt I was not going to have to “perform”.

7. From the second retreat I found it very helpful when you advised to just start with a colour then shape. Both times I remember these introduction were short, but to the point. Not too much information.

8. [No response]

9. Was relaxed but well organized. It helped to orient me to the creative and prayerful nature of the retreat.

10. Very helpful to explain the way in which the retreat will work….particularly good to set limits around personal space and to claim the work table as a
sacred space. Once I realized that no-one would be looking over my shoulder as I worked I felt an incredible sense of freedom.

11. Very important because it set the art retreat in perspective. It allowed us to meet as a group with the facilitators, to be informed about the purpose, expectations and schedule of the weekend. For me I could then anticipate what I can achieve at the retreat. Two days before the retreat I suddenly thought ‘can I cope with a silent retreat’. With no previous experience I felt I needed clarification that I had the freedom to freelance and DIY even if the tangible artistic output was minimal. Recommendation: Please emphasise that each participant is working at her own pace faith-wise and in expertise. Some may be professional artists, some novices. No need to compare with others. Reason: I put pressure on myself [not by the leaders or others!] when I observed that some participants were working with professional skill. Yet we were advised not to observe others’ works!

12. Very good introduction with a written handout. As a beginner I would have appreciated maybe half an hour of practical teaching.

13. Very relaxing took away fears and misconceptions. It was very informative as well and gave plenty of time to ask any questions.
Appendix 2f

**Evening Prayer Reflection**

1. I found this particularly beneficial to give me a space to stop and be still at the end of the day. I was grateful for the space being held even after people had left – that I could sit there as long as I wanted without everything being packed away around me.

2. Noisy and too invasive.

3. Very helpful. I really liked the visual and tactile part of this reflection.

4. A lovely way to finish the day, to cap off the events and happenings and to prepare for a peaceful night. I loved the evening prayer with art as the focus.

5. I loved the lengthy period of sitting with music.

6. I found the use of art works in these times (evening and morning) wonderful. Very apt choices and evocative for me.

7. I seem to remember the first year that evening sessions were a little longer and I found this helpful. I found that once I was in the big room painting it was hard to leave my painting, however the longer sessions allowed me to stop and quieten down and listen. In the middle of creating there were often a lot of things happening.

8. [No response].

9. It was good to quietly reflect on the days activities and be in the presence of God.

10. This was an important part of the day, particularly as it echoed the theme that had been present within the day. It was great to be able to bring any work that had impacted upon us to the evening reflection.
11. Appropriate and pleasant way to re-group and re-focus on significant faith matters. To close the formal part of the day with quiet reflection. To receive and to pause. I recommend its continuation.

12. Well presented and led.

13. I enjoyed the evening reflections one of the benefits for me was the settling down before sleeping which I have trouble with. I found I reflected in my sleep in a very peaceful way. I would have liked the typed reflexion guides and poems in the evening rather than the morning.
Appendix 2g

Morning prayer reflection

1. I found this beneficial to orientate myself within the group and the community after time alone and to give inspiration and challenges to work with in myself throughout the day.

2. Centring and wonderful challenge

3. A good way to start a silent day.

4. A centering space, harmonious and peaceful time to reconnect with yourself, God and your surroundings in readiness for what is to come forth and how God will speak to you. Very important time in the preparation for God’s work.

5. Great way to begin together – maybe something to focus on – scripture verse or this might be distracting.

6. I enjoyed the visual beauty given to me.

7. From memory this was your session speaking on certain piece of art. I found this interesting as I have had no education on the significance of certain styles etc. It was an eye opener for me and helped me look differently at works of art – not that I gained a great knowledge from that weekend. It created an interest which I will no doubt follow up one day.

8. [No response].

9. Helped to have the time of prayer and reflection prior to painting, to listen for the Spirit’s prompting and express my heart response to the Bible passages and poems.
10. It was particularly helpful to have a tone set in the morning and start the reflective process in this way.

11. It’s good to sit in a circle and see each other. We are individuals and we are a group. I like input to facilitate my reflections. I love the quiet understated artistic presentation of the theme each day: the soft fabric, candles, water, painting, music. It was poignant to share in each person’s response to the texture of water. The theme of Pentecost is very vivid and powerful.

12. Well presented and led.

13. It was a lovely way to start each day. It gave plenty of space for reflecting before starting any artwork. I loved the visual stream that changed for each reflection and the way we were involved in its changes during the reflection time and the active part within that of holding and feeling things. The music was a lovely touch also. I wouldn’t change the way it was presented or done; it was perfect how it was done for me.
Appendix 2h

Meals (silent or conversational)

1. I was grateful for the possibility to maintain silence during the meals.

2. I choose silent. I find conversation distracting and energy draining.

3. Once I became used to the silence I began to value it highly but at first it was a most uncomfortable experience. Not knowing either, if eye contact or smiles were also forbidden.

4. Preferably silent although it is nice having some conversation with people as most of the other time you are busy creating or painting and by yourself.

5. I love silent meals and while pleased by the available alternatives, would have preferred one or other – maybe at different meals e.g. breakfast and lunch silent; dinner – conversational.

6. Were silent but with music. I found the music distracting and annoying. Meals, for me, were strained.

7. This session was good in that it was not too long but enough to start the day together and orientated toward God.

8. [No response].

9. I enjoyed the opportunity to talk with others over the evening meals; it balanced the time spent alone in the quiet reflection during the day.

10. For me it was important to eat in silence. God was doing some work in me and I really wanted to stay in that space…I did not mind others talking, but was pleased to have the option to sit at a silent table.
11. I like the interspersing of mandatory silent breakfasts and the optional silent meals. I wonder whether participants preferring the silent mode were perturbed by the talkers. Maybe a separate room? Meals were beautifully prepared. Again it was my first experience at silent breakfasts. The eye and body contact with other participants was a strong connector to others around me.

12. I value silent meals.

13. I appreciated the choice of being quiet or not at the evening meal; I noticed that when choosing to come out of the silence at evening meal people still remained relatively quiet.
Appendix 2j

_Spiritual direction sessions_

1. Very beneficial – particularly M’s gracious receiving of me out of my allotted time.

2. No director available.

3. My first experience, a door opening to a new dimension.

4. Very important – I need the director to help sometimes to understand the relationship between my work and God. This expertise is needed and valued in discerning one’s walk with God and its meaning. How it reflects what is going on inside yourself and your journey with God.

5. Always helpful for me to have verbal interaction! It helps me to ‘own’ through reflection, more deeply the journey inward.

6. Helpful – right length, good direction.

7. The only difference is that there is that invitation to bring my art to the session, however I find this very helpful. *Visual helps me to articulate what is in my heart.*

8. [No response].

9. An important part of the retreat for me.

10. These were well timed for me as the first one came on the second day of the three day retreat. These were a really valuable time of checking in with my spiritual director and just getting some reassurance that God was with me on the journey. What was happening in the journey was overwhelming in some ways and the sessions of spiritual direction were like a safety valve, whereby someone could act as a guardian acknowledging the importance of the work.
11. Not sure what to expect but I wanted to take up the opportunity. I recommend these sessions in a retreat because they add insight and energy. This is the main opportunity to share privately the story behind the story. Recommend these sessions as optional.

12. Generally these sessions were not a good experience for me

13. A very beneficial time to share what was happening to you. However having allocated times interrupted what you were working on at times and made me aware of the need to check on the time. Allocated time sometimes wasn’t the most appropriate time of choice for me. I would have preferred it an open time arrangement as when you went. When stuck in a place and not knowing where to go with it you needed to wait till your time slot If happened in the morning you had to wait till mid afternoon and if it happened to you later in afternoon it was almost a day to wait stuck in that place. Maybe a choice of times with in a time frame still may have been more beneficial to me.
Appendix 2k

Length of the retreat

1. I think it would have been more harmonious for me to finish at lunchtime and break the silence here sharing a meal together. The number of days was fine.

2. Prefer three days /two nights

3. For a first timer – perfect.

4. At least 3 days, if not longer. I would love a week or for those who work, a nightly one run over several weeks. I think it needs time to be able to listen and hear God.

5. Would like a 5 day.

6. 2 or 3 days – right for me.

7. Each time I find that I could easily do this for at five days. Although three days is still good. I think I am always surprised at the art that just begins to flow after a few days.

8. Good.

9. Friday 11th to Monday 14th was fine.

10. It was really good to have three days and nights. I would be interested in an art retreat that was longer again. I really feel that engaging in the creative process in a sustained way allows for the work to become potent and move me into new directions. Sustained engagement with art making allows space for the transcendent experience. One image informs the next and so a journey unfolds. The images work on me as much as I work on them and so I would be interested in a week long retreat with silence and art.
11. For a beginner 3 days at a silent art retreat was sufficient for me. Initially I was not sure that I could take it. The facilitator assured me that it was my own agenda at the art retreat; no checking no accountability. Once into it I found the 3 days flowed with much freedom available.

12. A good length of time. The three days gave more time to relax into God.

13. I have mixed feelings on the length of time due to me missing my children. I think if it was shorter it would have missed something or become rushed. I liked the length of time and to be very honest if it wasn’t for missing my children so much I could have gone a few more days.
Appendix 21

The timing of the days

1. I felt good with it.

2. Well thought out.

3. Good.

4. Consecutive days are better but if not available then weekly over a period of time.

5. Was okay, as I remember.

6. Right for me.

7. There was plenty of time to do art, with just enough time to begin and end the day together.

8. Good.

9. Generally well timed and paced but for people who are working the registration time from 5.30pm to 6.30pm was quite early.

10. The timing of the days worked fine for me. I liked the opportunity to work into the night if I chose….

11. Long weekend is suitable for me. It is setting aside the time and commitment. I can see the scope for a retreat in the weekdays for those who are available.

12. [No response].

13. Timing of the days was fine.
Appendix 2m

The facilities

1. A more bush setting would suit me better, perhaps a smaller place a bit quieter.

2. Beautiful.

3. Excellent.

4. Somewhere like St Paul’s Missionary was fine. Plenty of space inside and out for participants to be able to find space, freedom and quietness. Also to be able to walk and enjoy themselves in between painting.

5. Walking was important so the space outside was great.


7. The facilities are excellent. To have your own room and bathroom is good. I remember the first year we were to wash our brushes in the little room, where as it was the toilets this time. I found the big sink much better to wash brushes, however I do understand it was so we could keep that room for quietness.

8. Workable.

9. Good for small groups.

10. The facilities were fine. I liked the large room with the tiled floor. I knew that I could make a mess and that we could easily clean it up. The tables were good for spreading out materials but as a work surface were too low and so were not ergonomically good. Bench height tables or easels would support the physicality that is inherent when we sustain our engagement with the creative process.
11. I found the venue accessible yet near bush land. Having ensuite was a bonus and I welcome it. I would attend the place again. Washing the brushes in the nice clean toilet basin was not suitable. Perhaps big buckets of water for staged cleaning of brushes from dirty to clean.

12. Excellent.

13. Perfect. The outside grounds were so relaxing and spacious. Inside was also spacious and sleeping area more than adequate. It was close to home. The views no matter which way you looked were fantastic.
Appendix 2n

_art resources_

1. Great amounts of paint and paper for playing with. The loose leaf paper wasn’t suited very well for drawing.

2. Plentiful.

3. Excellent.

4. Usual variety of art materials or participants can bring their own.

5. Difficult for me as I had nothing to draw on – no knowledge. But – fine!

6. I do silk work so I had to adjust to water colours.

7. Good. Though the only books that caught my attention were children’s books.

8. Workable.

9. Quite good, but I also bought my own paints with me.

10. As someone who regularly engages in art making, I was really glad to be able to bring my own materials, as I would have been frustrated with the materials provided. For me, the quality of materials has a real impact on the end result and part of the process comes from the satisfaction of working with colour that is strong and paper that is resilient. The investment of emotional energy and time demands a similar investment in materials that will offer a rewarding result.

11. I appreciate the art materials being available as I don’t really paint at home and have few paints and brushes. A sketch book for each person is good. Recommend: perhaps suggest what is reasonable usage of materials.
12. Excellent.

13. What more could you want. There was a wide range of materials to use. Plenty of choices in colours and types of paper and boards too. I liked the choice of play dough to try. There could have been more tools for the clay.
Appendix 2p

Reading and other visual resources

1. Adequate amounts of reading materials.

2. Too many for me.

3. Excellent.

4. Subject related books to inspire and stimulate the participants’ artistic abilities. Videos/DVD etc are a very good way to understand other artists and why they painted in the way they did.

5. Loved them, a great bonus. Also the videos – very extending of my understanding of the creative process.

6. Excellent range of art books provided by Peter and others.

7. Though the only books I that caught my attention were childrens books.

8. Good.

9. Excellent art books and the use of pictures, coloured cloths and candles during prayer/reflection helped create the mood.

10. There was a good range of these resources and I found them really helpful for moments when I was tired and not sure of where to move next.

11. I value the range of books available especially the art and faith ones. Some are not readily available in the shops. Perhaps mention that participants do not take away the books for too long.

12. Excellent and greatly appreciated.

13. There was a large variety of reading and visual resources to explore.
Appendix 2q

**In overview, what did you find the most significant aspect of the retreat in terms of your spiritual reflection and journey?**

1. The quiet space in which to explore myself through art for many hours at a time.

2. Symbols are simple and important to me. It made me break down symbols, colour and images to discern God all around and within.

3. Using my art in a totally new way, which has continued thus enabling a much richer understanding.

4. The most significant aspects for me were as follows:
   - Time to be still and tap into my inner self and to wait upon God
   - To hear scripture and its relationship to being creative
   - To being able to express myself creatively
   - To understand, with the help of the spiritual director, the meaningfulness of my artistic work
   - To know that in my work God is a creative God and brings forth all that I do and in doing so, fortifies my relationship with Him.

5. The most amazing thing was each night, in my own prayer – God gave me what I needed for the next day:- colour for God/self , shape of self – even though I didn’t know that I would be asked to reflect on those areas!

6. It added to my enjoyment of my art and thus is part of acknowledging my gifts and is part of “me” now.

7. The most significant aspect was the space and encouragement to express myself through the medium of colour and shape.

8. The time to stop and work on my art.
9. The most important aspect for me was how many different images and symbols came to mind that expressed my psyche and spiritual growth.

10. For me the most significant aspect of the retreat was the permission that was offered to engage in a relationship with God, through the creative process and the making of images. I feel that it was this permission that then led me into a space of having permission to embrace a new view of God and myself.

In regard to my view of myself in God’s image, I recall asking my spiritual director on more than one occasion, if it was ‘OK’ to be spiritually gifted in the visual arts and if this expression of my inner faith life was ‘valid’. The positive responses that followed these questions were significant and profound in offering permission to accept God’s gifting and enjoy moving in the direction that God was opening up for me. Coming from an evangelical church background, this was new and liberating.

Having been given permission to speak this new spiritual language God was offering me the tools to take me on a journey where I could begin to know her as mother. This was a powerful birthing experience for me. Since that time I have come to accept the duality that exists within God as both masculine and feminine and I have enjoyed the active presence of a sacred mother in my life. She has worked as a midwife through some difficult things and as a result I have been able to honestly trust God for the first time. My suspicion is that God speaks to me as Father through his word and Mother through images.

These understandings have also led me to a different view of my own creative process as an artist. I have been prolific in my work since that time, having realized the importance of speaking the language with which God is gifting me. Since the retreat I have decided to publish the images and the narrative of this story in a book. This is the first time I have embarked on a project like this as an artist. I think that having been moved by the impact of the language being spoken through the paintings I decided that it was important to find ways in which the language could make its way into the world other than through original paintings in galleries, thus a book is being born. And so my
view of myself and my role as an artist has also been shaped by this experience.

11. For me, it was a special 3 days’ commitment to explore and to plumb my inner self through quiet reflection and art form. I have not done much of this before and I don’t really paint. I wanted an outcome in tangible art that I had created. I was satisfied but I wonder whether I pushed it too much. I need not be disconcerted by the other participants and their apparent artistic productivity. I need to be quietly confident about where I am as a person in my own journey, both in faith and in art.

12. My “sculpture” in clay led me into a deep reflective place of prayer.

13. For me the most significant part of the retreat was being quiet and having space to explore my inner self in many different forms; silence, art, journaling, writing poetry, walking, just sitting with me and my god away from the busyness of every day life and feeling gods presence ever so close to me.
Appendix 2r

Were there any aspects you felt were unnecessary or ideas for improvement for future retreats?

1. [No response].

2. Didn’t like the artist’s video.

3. I feel it is most important to spell out in advance that it is a silent retreat and maybe just a small paragraph explaining how it all works.

4. At this point of time I cannot think of any. As it was my first art retreat I just loved every moment of it and wanted more. Any time and space to just be free to paint and be creative is heaven for me.

5. I’d like another opportunity – but different themes.

6. Meal times – why is there music in a silent retreat?

7. I found that the first year when the evening sessions were held upstairs in the chapel area good, because there was a completely different space for reflection away from the work. Where as the second year we walked through the work and for some reason I felt I wanted to be further away for that time.

8. Only the inclusion of other materials for use as mentioned previously. I don’t see art as meaning only pen/ink/oil on paper.

9. Although it goes against the commitment to silence, I would have enjoyed discussion with the other artists – their skills, techniques, experiences and spiritual insights.

10. [No response].

11. The ergonomics of the workspace and the potential for a longer retreat.
12. Selecting the appropriate theme is important because it sets the context. Pentecost is a good spiritual and visual focus. Personally I would like some instruction on painting skills but I acknowledge this might not be the retreat’s objective.

13. No.
Appendix 3a

Landscapes of the Soul Retreat 2003

Friday Evening (Focus on colour and light)

- **5.30pm**  Registration
- **6.30pm**  Dinner
- **7.30 pm**  Introductions
- **8 pm**  Concept of the Retreat
- **9 pm**  Supper
- **9.30 pm**  Evening Prayer – enter into silence

Saturday (Focus on texture, shape and patterns)

- **8 am**  Morning Meditation – focus on colour
- **8.30 am**  Breakfast
- **9.30 am**  Morning Lenten Reflection – 1st Temptation of Christ
- **10 am**  Free Expression time working with the colour that was prominent in meditation
- **11.30 am**  Sharing about Colour in landscape and personal preferences
- **12.30 pm**  Lunch
- **1.30 pm**  Art Exploration Time
  Personal half hour SD sessions available by appointment
- **6.30 pm**  Dinner
- **8 pm**  *An Artist’s View of Creative Expression* (Video)
- **9 pm**  Supper
- **9.30 pm**  Evening Prayers – enter into silence
Sunday (Focus on symbols)

- 8 am  Morning Meditation – focus on Texture, Shape and Pattern
- 8.30 am  Breakfast
- 9.30 am  Morning Lenten Reflection – 2nd Temptation of Christ
- 10 am  Free Expression time working with the Texture, Shape and Pattern that was prominent in meditation
- 11.30 am  Sharing about Texture, Shape and Pattern in landscape and personal preferences
- 12.30 pm  Lunch
- 1.30 pm  Art Exploration Time
  Personal half hour SD sessions available by appointment
- 6.30 pm  Dinner
- 8.00 pm  *An Artist’s View of Creative Expression* (Video)
- 9 pm  Supper
- 9.30 pm  Evening Prayers – enter into silence

Monday

- 8 am  Morning Meditation (focus on symbols)
- 8.30 am  Breakfast
- 9.30 am  Morning Lenten Reflection – 3rd Temptation of Christ
- 10.00 am  Free Expression time working with the symbols that was prominent in meditation
- 11.30 am  Sharing about Symbols in landscape and personal preferences
- 12.30 pm  Lunch
- 1.30 pm  Art Exploration Time
  Personal half hour SD sessions available by appointment
- 3.30 pm  Celebration of Collective Creativity
- 4.30 pm  Depart