Healing Art and the Art of Healing

by

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ABSTRACT

The question addressed in this research project considers whether and how it is possible to learn about healing and transformation through the practice of making, being with and seeing art. The study developed and trialed an Art-based Method of theological inquiry in order to understand the nature of healing in the absence of cure. The artist researcher considered ways in which art functions to promote and facilitate healing within her own experience of living with Multiple Sclerosis.

In particular, this study explored the possibility for including an Aesthetic method of inquiry within a model of Théologie totale. The researcher explored the question of healing by means of Reflexive Studio Practice. Material knowing about the research question emerged in the process of making both a source painting and then a series of palimpsests. Displaying the palimpsests in a public exhibition and inviting an intersubjective response from viewers extended the research procedures to include the experience of being with and seeing the work. Viewers offered possible titles for the works that were exhibited as Untitled. Thematic analysis of the responses led to the identification of questions of Becoming, Identity, Mystery and Desire, each in relation to healing. These emergent themes informed a Practice-led Theological inquiry into The Book of Ecclesiastes. The development of a further body of artwork enabled the researcher to engage with an embodied process of seeing as reading the text.

The findings that emerged within this stage of the inquiry show that Desire, Resistance and Repetition all have particular functions in the Art of Healing. The themes of Belonging, Accepting, Enduring and Engaging were also identified as the inherently healing message offered within the Book of Ecclesiastes.

The findings of this study suggest that Reflexive Studio Practice offers a methodological framework for Théologie totale, engaging material and embodied knowing to see the Word of God within the text, through the process of making, being with and seeing art. Theological reflections also emerged with regard to the Presence, Vulnerability and Desire of God and thus further dimensions of the art of healing.
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any university or other institution.

To the best of my knowledge the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

All scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA) unless otherwise stated.
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This project was designed to be participatory in nature and the findings therefore reflect the rich and generous engagement by so many viewers who see and respond to my work. To those who have been following my work over the years, I thank you for your commitment to being on the journey with me. Your presence encourages me to seek in the hope of finding something new, a clean, fresh line that enlarges the way we see and offers hope as we consider together the ways that we still can be.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, Stuart Russell Harris, who taught me to wonder about what might be possible and welcome what is still to be learned. His inspiration and loving encouragement to take the time to consider what I am going to do next has sustained me throughout this academic challenge and continues to nourish me everyday.
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CHAPTER 1: THE DISCOVERY OF ART

Painting has layers; it’s more than a moment. It’s more than a year.
It’s more than human time. It’s theological time.¹

To live and work with art in my life is something that I have often taken to be a given. One of my earliest childhood memories is the desire to make a painting at kindergarten. I can still see the solid and dependable easel, feel the texture of my cotton smock, sense the brush that seemed so large in my small hand and smell the paint that swelled in the pots lined up before me. I also remember the anxiety that was churning in my stomach whilst I waited for the teacher to bring me a fresh piece of white paper. It seemed at the time to be a very long wait. The teacher was distracted by the many other children who filled the room with noise, colour and movement. I stood patiently by the easel until she finally saw me and remembered her promise to get some paper. The mixture of relief and joy were palpable as the crisp white paper hung before me and I was alone with the materials. I have no memory of any particular subject matter that propelled my desire to paint, but I do remember the desire to make some marks with the paint and brushes that were at hand. This is the only memory that I have from my year spent in four-year-old kindergarten.

When I consider this experience now, I suspect that the length of time that elapsed between desiring, preparing and finally beginning to make a painting offered the milieu for all of my senses to be awakened by the proximity of the raw materials and the possibility that was inherent in my desire to use them. I stood still in the midst of the ordinary chaos of life and wondered. Although I have no recollection of the colours, lines or form that I created with paint and paper that day, I think that this childhood memory of the raw materials awakening my physical presence, vulnerability and desire is very much alive each time that I stand before the canvas to this day reminding me that “art is not a given, it is a discovery”.²

THE PRACTICE AND THE OBJECT

Before we explore the significance of the practice of making art, it is important to consider what we mean when we employ the word art. Initially I would like to note that the word art can be used both as a verb and as a noun. Mikel Dufrenne submits that the work of

² Yi-Fu Tuan, Place, Art and Self (Santa Fe, NM: Center for American Places, 2004). 22.
art is grasped in the aesthetic experience. On first consideration this description appears to position the work of art as an object that can be grasped by a spectator and so it is possible to understand the use of the word art to be a noun, an object or a thing. Dufrenne is clear that the work of art may take many forms including but not limited to the visual or to a material object. In my own experience as a painter I am aware that the artist may be the first person who is able to grasp the work of art as they engage with materials, forming and re-forming a material object in the studio. As the work takes shape in the studio the maker of the work is invited to become a viewer who is privileged to encounter the work through the full range of her senses. She has the unique opportunity to touch and be touched by the work as it emerges in the world. In this sense the work of art can also refer to the artist’s encounter with raw materials and the active reception of a new object or form.

It is therefore possible to consider the use of the word art to be a verb. The work of art is something that viewers and artists alike can do through their sensory attention to an object or constellation of events. In this sense the word art can be used as a verb referring to our capacity for attention in the knowledge and practice of a particular object or form of work. Within this inquiry the art of healing refers to the attention, authentic knowing and doing required in the work of distinguishing between the physical character of the body and what is compatible with that lived experience. Within this project I will employ the word art as both a noun and a verb to consider how the work of art might be implicated with the art of healing, the aesthetic experience being the fulcrum that supports the inquiry.

Dufrenne proposes that the aesthetic experience is of particular significance to the work of art because the viewer, in apprehending the work, confers particular significance and meaning upon the work itself. The viewer’s experience of the work is therefore considered to be an important contribution to the development of a work of art. Extending the opportunities for viewers to grasp the work in an aesthetic experience enriches the meaning and significance of the work and thereby amplifies the possibilities of its presence. Aesthetic experience is therefore not distinctly the domain of viewers or artists; rather it is an experience that dissolves these boundaries and enriches the value of the work at various stages of its existence. Dufrenne’s theory of aesthetic experience goes some way to

explaining the experience of mutuality that seems to exist within the relationship I have with art.

Michael Franklin helps me to understand this further when he speaks of a self-referential mutuality between object and artist and accords the quality of an *I-thou* relationship to his relationship with the art object. In my own studio practice I experience a continuous exchange with art as it emerges. I have distinctly different experiences of *making* and *being with* the art as it emerges. Whilst residing in the studio, art is held within the tension of this relationship and it is constantly open to the possibility of revision. The work, however, also has a deeply consistent quality and presence which enables it on occasion to become a vessel for the exploration and containment of questions of existence such as, “What is it like to be like this?” It is only when released from the studio that art is truly able to determine its own value. This is when I am able to apprehend the way in which the work may have shaped me.

**THE IMMEDIACY AND DURABILITY OF ART**

Yi-Fu Tuan claims that whilst our lived human experiences have immediacy they lack permanence. This means that there is an ephemeral quality to all of our human experience as it perpetually passes from the present moment into the past. Art lends the quality of durability to our transient lived experience and offers a remedy for the experience of loss that is inherent in each passing moment. Tuan suggests that we engage with art in order to render a sense of order and coherence whilst dwelling in the midst of chaos. This idea is of particular importance when we consider the reasons why we might choose to use particular materials to express or render our experience of the sacred.

On a summer day in 1985, as I walked near the Pont Neuf in Paris I saw a man standing on a pontoon in the middle of the Seine attempting to wrap the bridge with golden fabric that shone like satin. It was intriguing to watch the process and to wonder how and why he came to be doing this. Working with a system of pulleys and ropes, he seemed to be

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orchestrating a performance more than making a thing. Here in an open and public space this artist was engaging us as casual bystanders with something that was beautiful and temporal. As the artist, Christo, struggled with the large volumes of golden fabric, the wind would catch them and they would billow like sails, only to be pulled back into line in response to his desire and command. Christo was working with the fabric, the bridge and the natural forces of gravity and the elements to create an offering for the people of Paris.

Watching the work unfold I was aware of the dynamic relationship that existed between this man and the materials. I was also aware of his vulnerability as he invited us all to view that which he was still only capable of imagining. The artist was not only making the work but seeing the birth of the work in the way the creation responded to all the forces at play: the materials, the forces of nature, the form and structure of the bridge, his own movements and the presence of those who were watching. Being able to see what was happening with all of these elements was crucial to his capacity to make the work possible, but his willingness to invite us to share in a moment when possibility still lies open was extraordinary. In doing so he navigated mystery and the power imbalance that had previously separated the artist and the viewer in my mind. Our experience of this work was somehow shared rather than separate. Christo let us in on the secret of how this was done and challenged me to see that art could be “something completely pointless and beautiful”\textsuperscript{12}. For me, it needed no explanation. Christo and his partner Jean-Claude had challenged my definition of art by inviting me into a transcendent experience with material objects. They had shown me that the intricacies of the roles and relationships in art-making and viewing were more fluid than I had imagined whilst affirming the power of art to evoke a strong response in me as a viewer.

When I witness the material presence of a painting I am aware that something has drawn the maker of the work to take up raw materials and respond in a particular way. The marks that have been left on the canvas for me to see convey something about the sensory experience involved in the making of the work, in the same way that the billowing fabric over the Pont Neuf awakened me to the warm and gentle wind of a summer’s day in Paris.

A painting is not only the assemblage and articulation of raw materials but is composed of emotional and psychological content that is far beyond my scope of knowing as a viewer. The work is always more than it appears to be. When we really see art, the sensory qualities inherent in the material presence of the work transcend time and space. In this way, art has the capacity to awaken me to the immediacy of my own experience of presence, desire and vulnerability whilst creating interdependence within the experience I might share with other viewers or with the artist. Even in the solitude of standing in silence before a painting, the presence of art in my life is a potent realisation that I am not alone.

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14 Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 68.
A THEOLOGICAL TURN IN THE JOURNEY

The sense of being called into art and relationship has been with me for most of my adult life. In response to this I have trained and worked as an Art Therapist. This work was deeply satisfying and I had the privilege of witnessing the impact of the healing presence of art in the wounds that are part of our shared experience of humanity. I regularly found myself working with people whose art evoked deep questions of meaning and I knew that I required theological training to equip me in navigating this territory. I began a Graduate Diploma in Theology in 2007, whilst I was working as a Pastoral Care Creative Arts Practitioner in Palliative Care. By 2009 I was offered the opportunity to work as a student minister with the Church of Christ in Melbourne, Victoria, exploring how an artist might find a place in ministry. As part of my training that year I was asked to consider how my theological framework had been formed, or more simply how I had come to faith. I decided to travel back to St Stephen’s Anglican Church in Belmont, Geelong, which is the regional city where I had grown up. My desire to visit the church again was prompted by a memory of The Evans Memorial Window (henceforth The Evans Window), a major piece of stained glass art commissioned for the church in 1979.

![Figure 2. Robert Clarke, The Evans Memorial Window, 1980. Stained glass window, 2300 x 8200mm, St Stephen’s Anglican Church, Belmont, Geelong.](image)

Having left as a teenager, I returned to the church as a 44-year-old woman. Despite this 30-year gap in my experience of being with this image, I was met by a striking resonance between the design elements in the window and my own visual language. When referencing an image of God over many years, I have regularly drawn on rounded shapes and the relationships that were possible when these shapes were formed into stones or piles of rocks. Water has also been a constant theme for me in the exploration of an image of God. In seeing The Evans Window in 2009 I realised that I have been referencing these elements in my own
faith journey and visual language for some time. The following images offer a glimpse into the breadth and depth of my engagement with the shapes and colours in window as a means of representing faith (Figure 3-6 & 12).

In the previous year (2008) I had been engaged to paint *The River of Life* (Figure 8) for a congregation as a series of sermons about Revelation 22 were preached over four weeks. It was the recently completed painting, *The River of Life* that enabled me to really see the connection between my own visual language for describing God and *The Evans Window*. 
Having made the connection, I actively took up the opportunity to extend the possibilities for understanding scripture with these elements in my studio practice and ministry throughout 2010 (Figure 9-11).

Figure 8. Libby Byrne, *The River of Life: From the preparatory drawing through to the final work*, 2008. Oil on canvas, 2100 x 900mm, Melbourne.

Figure 9. Libby Byrne, *Tidal Wash*, 2010. Drawing on Paper, 350 x 260mm, Melbourne.

Figure 10. Libby Byrne, *Creative Potential*, 2009. Oil on canvas, 900 x 1500mm, Melbourne.

Figure 11. Libby Byrne, *Life in the Spirit*, 2009. Oil on canvas, 900 x 1500mm, Melbourne.

Figure 12. Libby Byrne, *Flame of the Rocks*, 2004. Oil pastel on paper, 210 x 148mm, Melbourne.
As I sat in the church in 2009 attending to the window, I had an unusual experience of perpetual motion in my field of vision. Despite a deep desire to focus my attention and then respond visually with a drawing, I could not settle in any one section of the window. Each time I found a frame of reference, my attention was drawn by the image into the next frame. My eyes darted back and forth across the length and breadth of the window. The image was so large that it seemed to require my body to move in order to see the work. I began to move my body in time with the rhythm and pulse of the lines. As the sun filtered through the glass, it seemed that the window itself was literally unable to be still. I was viewing the image with all of my senses and thus my whole body was drawn into the rhythm of the work. As I experienced my body coordinating so effortlessly in time with the image, I wondered if this image had somehow been reverberating within me all these years as an embodied image of God.

**Making Connections**

In 2011, I was invited to preach at St Stephen’s Anglican Church in Belmont, Geelong alongside an exhibition of artwork that reflected some of the different movements in my spiritual journey. I exhibited 15 paintings including *The River of Life* and *The Well*. *The Well* had been painted in 2007 in response to my engagement with the community of Box Hill Baptist Church and the music of *Les Miserables*. The image explores the construction and desecration of a well in the desperate search for living water that is sustaining. The brick work in *The Well* is collaged with playing cards on the canvas, evoking images of the temporal and fragile nature of our existence. The themes in this work seemed to resonate with the journey that had been part of my life experience over the past year and so *The Well* had a place in this particular exhibition.

As this piece hung in the church building I became aware of a strong resonance between the brickwork in the painting and the actual brickwork of the church (Figure 13). In the same way the blue shapes and lines in the lower half of the painting echoed the design of *The Evans Window* and the painting seemed to offer a bridge between these two physical elements of the church building. The brickwork in *The Well* is composed of playing cards collaged onto canvas and interspersed with carefully selected slices of text, roadmaps and images. The reference to a house of cards visually describes the essential reality of seeking Christ in this place as an adolescent. Once the collage was completed I unconsciously painted the brickwork with oil paint that is remarkably similar in colour to the cream brickwork of the church.
Applying paint to the playing cards offered a device that allowed me to ground the essential reality of my experience of faith, within an actual fact about the place in which I had worshipped as a young person. In my teenage years I discovered that the church that had seemed to be such a solid structure was actually a house of cards. My faith, however, was not embedded within the cream brick walls of the building, but was living water that continued to surge forth even as the material structure crumbled around me. The two realities are merged in this image to make a statement about what it was like for faith to grow in this place. The playing cards and paint worked together to enable the negotiation of what Williams and Jacques Maritain describe as the “tension between an ‘essential reality’ and the actual facts of the world”. In doing so, *The Well* seeks to reshape the data of the world so as to make the fundamental structure and relationship between people and the material world visible. Williams describes this process as an attempt by the artist to change the world, but to change it into itself, in order that we can see what is really there.

The blue shapes and lines in *The Evans Window* resonate and are developed within the lower half of *The Well* and within the painting the blue lines take on a new form. In the lower left hand corner of the painting, dark blue lines retreat inward to form an abstracted

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16 Ibid. 18.
female form who gazes down upon the phrase, *Then God Expands* even as she is confronted by the text *What went wrong?* This contemplative female form somehow names without words an *essential reality* of my own lived experience of God and art-making and negotiates the tension that exists between chaos and emerging potentiality. As a visual point of connection *The Well* negotiated the tension between the essential reality of my faith and the actual facts of growing up in and around this church building and then noted the potential for a new creative horizon.

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 14. Libby Byrne, *The Well* (detail), 2007. Collage on canvas, 2100 x 900mm, Melbourne.*

**KNOWING FOR THE FIRST TIME**

In hanging *The Well* at St Stephen’s, I had returned to the place where I began my spiritual journey and I was able to know both the place and the work in a new way. The decision to exhibit the work in this place was part of an inquiry into the question of how my faith had been formed. Once the work was in this place, it revealed both a discovery and a challenge. My participation and trust in the process created an opportunity to dwell within my faith as it had been formed in this place and in doing so I was becoming aware that there was

something more than I could tell at play within my knowing of faith and art.\textsuperscript{18} As I viewed my own work within the church building I recognised the significance of the resonance in the colours, the shapes and even the dimensions of the painting in this place. Seeing this for the first time presented me with a choice to acknowledge my own felt attunement to this place and to consider the meaning that I derived from the experience.\textsuperscript{19} As the work was physically dwelling in this place, layers of meaning revealed themselves and, in doing so, the mystery of faith was deepened rather than resolved or understood and new questions were born.

\textit{What do you see?}

When \textit{The Evans Window} was installed the incumbent Father Philip Burgess asked the congregation, “What do you see?”\textsuperscript{20} As a 14-year-old, I was expecting to be told what I should see in this image and so I was somewhat unsettled by the lack of boundaries in the question. As a teenage girl in the 1970s I had no authority and very little agency within the experience of parish life. I had no understanding of why my opinion on the meaning of this image was required in the public discourse and I was sure that I had little wisdom or knowledge to offer the interpretive community.\textsuperscript{21} Having grown up within the patriarchal structure of the Anglican Church I responded to the question with a level of compliance, laced with a strong desire to answer the question as best I could and thus please Father Philip.

As I offered my first response I was aware of a desire to be \textit{right} in guessing the meaning of the image and this was a new experience of vulnerability in church life. I wondered if I had just exposed something of myself that was about to be judged as inadequate. My capacity to respond to the question as a 14-year-old girl stemmed from a willingness to be obedient. But as I engaged with the window, my obedience became a deeper experience of listening for the presence of God within the visual metaphor that was before me. Simone Weil proposes that, “The Universe is a compact mass of obedience, with luminous points”.\textsuperscript{22} Having been invited to respond to this image through an open question,

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\textsuperscript{20} Father Philip Burgess was the incumbent of St Stephen’s Anglican Church Belmont from 1977-1980 and in that time was largely responsible for the commissioning and installation of \textit{The Evans Memorial Window} and the remodeling of the Sanctuary.
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my obedience in attending to the image became a luminous point in the attunement of my soul to the Word of God.

When my interpretation of the image was accepted and validated by Father Philip and the community, I began to trust the capacity of images to reveal something of the substance of God whilst at the same time holding, containing and even concealing my own vulnerability. Initially the question, “What do you see?” was intimidating and amplified my sense of smallness within the large patriarchal structure of the Anglican Church. However, as the question remained open before me, I was called into a deep silence before the image. “It is not with one’s eyes but rather one’s being that one looks upon a picture.” It was with my being that I was able to attune my attention to the image that was before me. When heard through this silent visual discourse the image offered an alternate experience of power and authority within the church structure.

TRANSFORMING THE EXPERIENCE OF CHURCH

*The Evans Window* was installed as part of a major renovation of the Sanctuary. Before the window had been installed, the altar sat at the end of what seemed to be a very long line of choir stalls. I remember the experience of taking my first communion after being confirmed in 1978, walking with a nervous mix of fear and awe down the aisle toward the altar. The altar seemed very distant and the journey towards it was intimidating. The choir stalls were removed to facilitate the installation of the window and the altar was placed in the middle of the Sanctuary. The faded pale green carpet was replaced with a deep, rich red and an invitation was issued to gather around the altar sharing in the Eucharist. I recall kneeling in that place and catching glimpses of faces framed by the vibrant colour of the window. Visual connections were readily made with people and images as the Eucharist was shared in this place.

*What do you see?*

The open question was an invitation to the making of connection: both with the image and with one another. The question opened the possibility of a dialogue characterised by an experience of mutuality and seemed to presuppose an excess of potential in the range of answers that might emerge. Having begun with a microscopic view of a blade of grass, the artist had expanded the potentiality in the xylem and the phloem by extending the nature of

the form in another medium. This was not a representational image but it was an abstract image that was capable of resonating deeply with the experience of life and growth. In the design of The Evans Window, Robert Clarke had offered the congregation an image that was therefore imbued with an excess of potential, with regard to the ways in which it could be seen and understood. This met the design brief which was to find “an image that we won’t be finished looking at in five minutes.”

*What do you see?*

To frame the question in this way was to be open to the potential for unfolding conversation and even relationship, through the discovery of a point of connectedness. The question was embedded with hopeful anticipation but entwined with risk. “Risk is an essential need of the soul...a form of danger which provokes a deliberate reaction...and represents the finest possible stimulant.” The installation of the window and the open question that followed acted as a stimulant for the deepening of relationship. The question made it possible for Father Philip to engage with me beyond the barriers of power that were inherent in his priestly role and my status as a teenage girl, releasing us both into a potent dialogue with one another, the window and moreover with God. Art became a tool for my own ongoing theological reflection and revision. Art offered a language free from gender and cultural constraints and it welcomed me into the act of contemplation. Art engaged my imagination and became as Sarah Coakley theorises, “an entry point into those levels of doctrinal truth that purely intellectual theology may have missed”. My commitment to living with faith became a commitment to living with art and living in the hope of the way things could be.

My initial engagements with The Evans Window were happening at the time I was struggling in my art class at high school. The fear of getting it wrong was an abiding presence in my teenage years and along with it, a fear of being seen. As I struggled to develop a folio of paintings that could be assessed in my final year of high school, fear was the most compelling and motivating force in the work that I was producing. The images I formed in

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24 *Williams, Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love*, 139. Williams explores Jacques Maritain’s work on the excess of potential that exists within art and the possibility of extending this into another medium.

25 Verbal communication in 2009 with Father Philip Burgess revealed that in considering a range of submissions for the design one church warden had said this. The comment had a significant impact on the design decisions that followed and thus an abstract image rather than a representational image was chosen.


my high school art class that year were the product of what I hoped others wanted to see and as a result they were disappointing. The fear of getting it wrong made it impossible to risk making any connections between my own felt sense of the work and the expectations of the nameless and faceless examiners. My desire to paint was subsumed by my need to succeed and the result was a failure in the final marking. In contrast I seemed able to embrace my fear when asked to engage my imagination within the church community. My response to this question was therefore unedited and the result of an intuitive engagement with my felt sense of the window.

I was now wondering what enabled me to trust my own responses in the church, whilst editing them in the art class. My relationship with The Evans Window was formed as I allowed myself to make a series of connections between the imagery that was offered and my own imagination. The invitation to respond was non-elitist; it was open to the entire congregation regardless of age, gender or expertise. The invitation did not seem to require the creation of anything new – other than the energy to be open to a new thought. Herein lies the essence of creativity.

Matthew Fox submits that we are creative when we are able to see relationships between matter and form that have not been imagined before. Further, he proposes that creativity happens when we see the relations or connections that we deeply want and need to see.  

Creativity and compassion are interdependent upon one another, to the extent that they may even be considered the same energy. Jesus demonstrates this deep connection when he stops, listens and asks Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man’s response is very clearly, “My teacher, let me see again” (Mark 10:46-52). Jesus hears this clear statement of deep need as faith and so affirms and heals the man who desires to see again. Bartimaeus receives not only the compassion that Jesus offers, but the freedom to live and respond creatively. Jesus encourages Bartimaeus to find ways to share this freedom with others, expanding the life-giving energy of the faith that has healed him. In essence the difference between my response to The Evans Window and the art class was the presence of compassion that opened me to creativity.

What do you see?

The question was framed within the shape of compassion as an invitation for us to consider what we deeply want and need to see. The experience of compassion was the

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precursor to discovery. Compassion called forth the courage to be in touch with my own need, to begin to know what it was that I really wanted and in this “wholeness happened”.29 I was able to make connections between my own need for God and the image that was before me and so the experience of God became silently embodied within my tacit knowing of the world. This was my primary knowing of God and yet as a teenager, explication of this knowledge was beyond my cognitive capacities. As I moved and served within worship around The Evans Window, I realised that somehow I knew more than I could tell about the character of God. Receiving the sacrament of the Eucharist in the presence of the radiant light of this image week after week, had shaped my capacity to indwell the experience of the sacrament. Mystery and awe were embodied as images rather than abstracted into words.

THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

In 1981 Gordon Kaufman argued that “Theology is now, and always has been, human construction of a concept of God. That is both the glory and the frailty of theology.”30 Jeremy Law defines imagination as “the ability to bring to mind that which is not directly and currently present to the senses”.31 Acknowledging that the role of imagination in theology has long been held to be problematic, Law argues that the imagination is the faculty that allows us to go beyond what is given and is employed in concert with perception and reason to become a source of knowledge and understanding.32 Imagination takes its place in relation to the future as a mode of anticipation and relies upon the past and the present to bring to mind what is currently not available to the senses.33 He then makes the point that the language of theology is an expression of hope that things will be otherwise than they are, reminding us that the realisation of a new creation lies beyond the boundaries of possibilities immanent in the world that we know. Law argues that it is precisely because the imagination can conceive of alternatives to what is presently real, that it is inherently useful, if not indispensable, in theological inquiry.

Our theological imagination is always situated and inseparable from the body. “When one imagines it is from a particular time, social location, geographical and cultural position.

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29 Laurence Freeman, Wholeness: Cutting the Bonds that Control Us, Monte Olivetto Retreat (Monte Olivetto, Italy: Meditatio Media, 2006). Freeman refers to wholeness as a verb rather than a noun.
32 Ibid. 280.
33 Ibid. 282.
Human flesh is gendered, has a given sexual orientation and racial identity; the imagination is implicated in all this.”\textsuperscript{34} Imagination therefore operates with a combination of constraints and constructions of experience and theological logic to lead us into action.\textsuperscript{35} Kaufman recognises that our construction of theology is “a notion of God believed appropriate for our time”.\textsuperscript{36} He argued that we must take responsibility for our own theological work, imagining what may be possible for our conceptions of God within the constructions of our particular situation. A phenomenological approach to the construction of theology is helpful when considering the questions and needs that are most pertinent within our cultural location.

**Theological Aesthetics**

The question of a relationship between art and theology is not new. Art has always been there to help us navigate the challenges of human existence and give shape and form to our ephemeral and yet lived experience. In one sense art is a reliable container for the ordinary work of theology that human beings have needed to do throughout the ages.

Rudolph Arnheim describes how art functions in this way when he says,

> Art (has been) a helper in times of trouble, a means of understanding the conditions of human existence and of facing the frightening aspects of those conditions, the creation of a meaningful order offering a refuge from the unmanageable confusion of the outer reality.\textsuperscript{37}

Consideration of the relationship between art and theology within an academic framework, however, has been somewhat more contentious. I recognise that any contribution I make to this debate is situated in the middle of an ongoing and unresolved conversation about the place of art in the imaginative reading and reordering of scripture, and in the search for doctrinal truth that encompasses all of our lived human experience. That said, I am particularly concerned with the work of theology that happens in Reflexive Studio Practice and the implications that this has for the way we explore and understand the questions that arise within an ordinary life of faith.

As an art student I was fortunate to be taught and mentored by Melbourne artist Terri Brooks and, whilst I didn’t realise it at the time, this was probably the beginning of my theological education.\textsuperscript{38} As I studied the art of painting and drawing with Terri, I learnt to

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. 292.  
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid. 297.  
\textsuperscript{36} Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God*. 274.  
\textsuperscript{38} From 1999-2001 I studied painting, drawing and sculpture at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (now Melbourne Polytechnic). Terri Brooks was one of my teachers and mentors. She is a well-respected contemporary Australian artist who completed a PhD in Fine Art at Ballarat University in 2005.
look, to see, to question, to explore and ultimately to risk going beyond what I had previously imagined being possible with materials. Eventually my experience with art materials led me to recognise my own human condition, needs and desires within the imagery that I was making (Figure 15). As the images emerged, they provoked theological questions and these questions in turn extended the possibilities for the image (Figure 16). In the process my imagination was nourished. “Imagination without theology is blind but theology without imagination is dead.”39 It was from this sustained rhythm of double attention to art and theology that my visual language began to make sense and I was able to understand and claim a new identity, as an artist.

![Figure 15. Libby Byrne, The Life of One Soul (detail), 2001. Artist’s book, 210 x 297mm, Melbourne.](image1)

![Figure 16. Libby Byrne, Vessel, 2001. Oil on canvas, 1200 x 1950mm, Melbourne.](image2)

Whilst working in a large shared studio, I once heard a fellow student ask our drawing teacher if the image that she had produced was finished. The teacher avoided making this judgement and asked the student to consider making her own judgement. The question bounced back and forth between the two until the teacher finally declared, “You are an artist! It’s not about an image or a finished product. It’s about acknowledging the layers: the depth of who you are, within your process.” A pregnant silence hung in the room and I was aware that in the moments that followed anything was possible: revelation, transformation, independence, freedom. The student eventually responded by patiently asking once more, “Yes...but is it finished?”

In many ways this vignette reflects the difficulty that we can encounter when theologians and artists speak about what they perceive to be the same thing, but with different intentions. This story also illustrates my contention that there are artists who do theology

Without knowing it. For these artists, their art-making practice anchors them in a version of faith that enables them to navigate the depth of who they are, within their processes. They understand the world through their material and felt senses. When they are unsure about the world and want to know something more or something new, they engage with materials and make art. It is from this material based process that a new understanding of themselves and their place in the world emerges. Their work makes its way into the world reverberating in galleries, permeating popular culture, settling into private collections and reaching even broader audiences through multifarious forms of publication. Theologians who are able to recognise, receive and respond to the art that they make, in turn affirm, activate and extend our collective theological imagination.

On each side of the perceived divide between art and theology, there are scholars and researchers who desire a point of connection, a methodology that will bridge the gap and enrich the capacity for both disciplines to extend human knowledge. With regard to the potential for the practice of art-making to be a useful methodology beyond the scope of fine art production Estelle Barrett says,

Practice-led research is a new species of research, generative enquiry that draws on subjective, interdisciplinary and emergent methodologies that have the potential to extend the frontiers of research...The growing recognition of the philosophical and knowledge-producing role of the creative arts in contemporary society needs to be extended both within and beyond the discipline.  

Graeme Sullivan concurs with this view and contends that a work of art can not only extend the boundaries of human thought, but can mediate an exchange between artist and viewer which can lead to the possibility of change or transformation, a shift from the unknown into the known.

Alongside this discourse within the Fine Arts tradition, an invitation to engage the arts beyond the perceived interdisciplinary boundaries is simultaneously being extended by systematic theologians. Paul Fiddes posits that art has a significant knowledge-producing role and argues that images and stories in literature can contribute to the actual making of Systematic Theology, rather than simply the illustration of it. Fiddes notes that whilst much has been written about Theological Aesthetics, which is the consideration of the arts within

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the framework of theology, considerably less work has been achieved in *Aesthetic Theology*. Noting that aesthetic theology depends on the realm of the arts for its content, method and theory, Fiddes identifies that this point of difference may be the harbinger for the development of a methodological framework capable of engaging the arts as a consistent and coherent system of theological thought. Fiddes highlights the need for imagination in the theological task saying, “The imagination reaches out towards mystery, towards a reality for which we feel an ultimate concern, but which eludes empirical investigation.” Employing an art-based methodology within a theological inquiry could offer theologians the framework to systematically engage the imagination in the making and finding of theology.

**Art-making as Ordinary Theology**

*Ordinary Theology* is the thought and reflection that we need to do when we find ourselves in places where the familiar rhythms and patterns of our life and faith no longer serve us well. Nicholas Healy considers that a systematic approach to doing everyday theology is one that can be embraced and practiced by all people in the course of a faithful life. Healy describes *Ordinary Systematic Theology* in the following way:

They are performed by the ordinary Christians in the sense they do not have the responsibility of teaching with authority; they are the product of by far the most common kind of theological inquiry; and they are the most fundamental form of systematic theology.

In the practice of ordinary systematic theology, the first step will be to clarify what it is that we actually believe. According to Pat Allen, “Art is a way of knowing what it is we actually believe.” In making this claim Allen is suggesting that art offers a means of *seeing* what it is that we actually believe. *Seeing* is a way of *knowing* but seeing involves much more than visual perception. Paul Fiddes suggests that “there is a seeing that is an embracing of the world in all its bodily reality”. The mode of seeing to which Fiddes refers is a *haptic* mode of seeing that involves touch and the immersion of all the bodily senses. Fiddes refers to the long tradition of haptic vision in Christian faith and practice which draws on the work of Jacques Derrida and Nicholas of Cusa to suggest that “seeing the text is a reading of the text”. Fiddes is suggesting that art can offer a visual field of reference in which we are able

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43 Ibid. 9.
44 Ibid.
46 Ibid. 28.
49 Ibid. 215-16.
to see what the text is saying, locate our own experience and make connections between time, place, practice and the traditions of faith. Art therefore has the capacity to affect the way in which we make theological judgements about the questions that emerge in ordinary living.

To see the text in this way can free us from assumptions about doctrine and enable what Coakley describes as the redirection of our minds, hearts, and imaginations towards a new participation in...God. To see the text with this desire for participation will require the adoption of participatory ways of knowing within the theological task. The material knowing that emerges from art-making practice relies heavily on tacit and embodied knowing, which emerges through the movement of the body and the materials in the presence of scripture. Coakley believes that “the symbolic uses of movement in the artwork...can overcome the rigidity of hierarchical and linear (thinking)”. When applied in the work of systematic theology, participatory ways of knowing offer an epistemological framework that enables theology to risk challenge, destabilisation and redirection, rather than resort to the need to clarify, control and master. In privileging material thinking as a primary way of knowing, systematic theology remains open to a potentially unsystematic method of inquiry as it remains open to the possibility of risk and challenge, effectively “vulnerable to interruptions from the unexpected—through its radical practices of attention to the Spirit”. It is this particular quality of material thinking that when employed within systematic theology will enable a shift from phallocentric thinking and the binary relationships between power and knowledge that have been both privileged and criticized in the history of systematic theology.

THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE – A CALL AND RESPONSE

Paul Fiddes claims that aesthetic theology offers a means of engaging with scripture and making systematic connections between concepts and images that emerge, thereby contributing to the development of the Christian story for the present age. The role of scripture in this participatory form of inquiry requires further explanation at this point. Fiddes clearly states that scripture has a unique status as the primary witness to God’s revelation in Christ.

From a theological standpoint, Scripture can be affirmed as the primary witness to God’s revelation in Christ, and as having a unique status as the narrative which has consistently

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51 Ibid. 261.
fostered and shaped the Christian community, while not excluding other means through which God can reveal God’s self.\textsuperscript{54}

He then goes on to explain that “Concept, image and story can all be understood as human response to a self-revelation of God”.\textsuperscript{55} There is a rhythm of \textit{Call and Response} residing in the communication of scripture and in our creative response, which is akin to the idea of \textit{seeking and finding}. The call and response that resides in the communication of scripture and in our creative response has been described by Rowan Williams in the following way, “We speak because we are called, invited and authorised to speak, we speak what we have been \textit{given}, out of our new “belonging” and this is a “dependent” kind of utterance, a responsive speech.”\textsuperscript{56} Jean-Louis Chrétien calls our attention to the function of listening as well as speaking within the dynamic of a call and response. “I listen and have the ability to listen because I am called...I am already here when I say, “here I am,” I have already come forth when I come forth, I have already responded when I respond.”\textsuperscript{57}

The stories that we tell enable us to see and to reconstruct the way that we are in relation to the world. As we hear the story that is told, we find ways to configure and re-configure a response that enables a particular relationship with the text. To speak responsively is to be open to speaking with a range of creative responses, from the verbal, prose, poetry, music and art. These forms of speaking issue a cry to the mystery that compels us and evades empirical investigation whilst at the same time issuing an imperative.\textsuperscript{58} “The creative word is a cry, to create is to call out.”\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{ART AS SACRAMENT}

This dynamic quality of relationship leads us to consider the potential for art and art-making to be a sacramental experience. Matthew Del Nevo submits that good art happens when the artist is able to resist inscribing herself in a work and becomes a witness to the arrival of an image, merging with it in a relationship that is sacramental in nature.\textsuperscript{60} Such a

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid. 8.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. 12.
\textsuperscript{57} Chrétien, \textit{The Call and the Response}. 19.
\textsuperscript{58} Fiddes, “Concept, Image and Story in Systematic Theology.” 12.
\textsuperscript{59} Chrétien, \textit{The Call and the Response}. 18.
\textsuperscript{60} Matthew Del Nevo, \textit{The Valley Way of Soul: Melancholy, Poetry and Soul-Making} (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2008). 128-136. Del Nevo discusses the poetic spirit of the author merging with the work in a relationship that is sacramental with particular reference to the poem, \textit{Devotion} by Yves Bonnefoy.
relationship requires the artist to be a “carrier of the word...uniting God, world and humankind in their irreducible differences” 61.

This method of relinquishing control and assuming a presence with the work as it forms and reforms has enabled Pierre Soulages to sustain a life time of daily art-making practice from 1947 until the present day. Even at the age of 96 years old, Soulages seeks only to bring out what the materials demand of him. He works as a maker who is, as Williams describes, obedient to the work. 62 In this way, art functions to take the attention away from the self and refocuses both the artist and the viewer on the work of the soul. In discussing the art of Leonard Brown, Cain and Ooyen suggest that any act of creation is likely to have religious or spiritual overtones, however, western art often has something particularly sacramental about it. 63

Mikel Dufrenne explains this by speaking of the binding relationship between the aesthetic object and its public. Dufrenne goes as far as to say that the work itself expects to be consecrated and completed by the public. In the same way the public have an expectation that the work will promote and expand humanity. The symbiotic nature of this relationship is described by Dufrenne who says, “The aesthetic object brings no less to the public than it receives from it.” 64 The exchange Dufrenne describes is sacramental in nature because it is characterised by the visible presence of invisible grace. The interaction promotes a climate in which the transformative power of this symbiotic relationship can expand the influence of the object in the world and in doing so promote human flourishing.

Rowan Williams says that “Art...always approaches the condition of being both recognition and transmission of gift, gratuity or excess; but it always approaches.” 65 As art approaches, the artist must be cognisant of that which may still be awaiting disclosure in the emergent image; the substance which may be symbolised and signified by the material presence of the work. In the sacramental process of making art it is important to risk looking past what may be evident on first sight.

In 1976 Brett Whiteley described his commitment to the good of the thing being made. “One of the hardest things is to discipline oneself...concentrate on one vision until it

61 Ibid. 155.
62 Williams, Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love. 52.
64 Dufrenne, The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience. 71.
65 Williams, Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love. 163.
discloses its third and fourth veil – to keep seeing past what you have just seen.” Whiteley is describing a process that relies heavily on what Michael Polanyi describes as \textit{tacit knowing} to determine how to stay with the form that is emerging.\textsuperscript{67} His trust in the process or faith in things unseen infuses him with the courage to be disciplined and attentive at the point of his greatest vulnerability, to reach beyond the limitations of what he has previously known in pursuit of something new that has integrity, which is a real and uncomplicated statement of truth. Whiteley described this as a state of “heightened ordinariness”.\textsuperscript{68}

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\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{66} Brett Whiteley in Rosemary Crumlin, \textit{Images of Religion in Australian Art} (Kensington, NSW: Bay Books, 1988). 120.
\textsuperscript{67} Michael Polanyi, \textit{The Tacit Dimension} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966).
\textsuperscript{68} Whiteley in Crumlin, \textit{Images of Religion in Australian Art}. 120.
THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

In 1953, at the end of ten years of intensive philosophical activity in France, Mikel Dufrenne first published his work attempting to discern the nature of the aesthetic experience. By 1973, he had managed to gather his work on the Aesthetic Object and Aesthetic Perception and present a major treatise on the subject entitled, The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience. In 1990, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi undertook a study with Rick Robinson of the J. Paul Getty Museum to understand the way in which we interpret the meaning of aesthetic encounters. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson noted that a 1982 review by Monroe Beardsley identified five basic criteria for an aesthetic experience. These criteria very closely mirrored the set of conditions for what Csikszentmihalyi had described as the flow experience. These criteria are outlined in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA FOR AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE (Beardsley, 1982)</th>
<th>CRITERIA FOR FLOW EXPERIENCE (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OBJECT FOCUS</td>
<td>MERGING OF ACTION AND AWARENESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention fixed on intentional field</td>
<td>Attention centred on activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>FELT FREEDOM</td>
<td>LIMITATION OF STIMULUS FIELD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release from concerns about past and future</td>
<td>No awareness of past and future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DETACHED AFFECT</td>
<td>LOSS OF EGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects of interest set at a distance emotionally</td>
<td>Loss of self-consciousness and transcendence of ego boundaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACTIVE DISCOVERY</td>
<td>CONTROL OF ACTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active exercise of powers to meet environmental challenges</td>
<td>Skills adequate to overcome challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHOLENESS</td>
<td>CLEAR GOALS, CLEAR FEEDBACK</td>
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<tr>
<td>A sense of personal integration and self-expansion</td>
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<tr>
<td>AUTOTELIC NATURE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does not need external rewards, intrinsically satisfying</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 1. Comparison of Criteria Defining the Aesthetic Experience and the Flow Experience. 69

Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson discovered that whilst place contributes significantly to focusing the attention of the viewer, a basic condition to the aesthetic experience was the amount of time available for viewing and being with works of art. They also discovered that despite the social distraction that is inevitable in a museum or gallery environment, particularly at an opening event, “viewing art is ‘almost something you have to do privately’ or perhaps ‘with a friend or with the artist there’”. 70

**SENSUOUS ENCOUNTERING**

Jean-Louis Chrétien recognises the significance of the presence of art in the aesthetic experience, suggesting that art is capable of offering an encounter in which we can dwell for a time and be companioned in cordial, radiant and communicative silence. 71 A silent encounter with art engages us in the work of curiosity, appreciation and inquiry and enables us to choose how best to pay attention. Within this silence, the thing that has been made provokes and catches our attention in a sensuous encounter. 72 In a moment of discovery we are open to seeing another, within the territory of our human experience. This moment of recognition can reassure us that we are not alone in our human experiences and yet art also has the power to disturb and remind us of the inescapable isolation of the individual and our fundamental human homelessness. 73 There is a resonance here with the historic experience of Abraham.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. (Hebrews 11:8-9)

Making art can be considered an act of faith, like pitching a tent in a foreign country. It is by faith that the artist is called to be obedient to the unfolding logic in the process of making the work, trusting that the work is able to disclose itself in time. 74 Just as Abraham witnessed the unfolding logic in the promises he received from God, so the artist bears witness to unfolding logic in the work. In doing so the artist is able to receive the work as Abraham received the Promised Land. The maker of the work is invited to become a viewer

70 Ibid. 145.
73 Tuan, *Place, Art, and Self*. 43.
who is privileged to encounter the work through the full range of her senses. She has the unique opportunity to touch and be touched by the work as it emerges in the world. Perhaps it is the human desire for a place of belonging expressed in Hebrews 11:8-9 that calls forth in us a desire for connection and creativity and it is in response to this calling that we find art.

**Tacit Knowing**

Our human experience is necessarily embodied and we initially perceive the world through our physical senses. These senses inform the development of our tacit knowing, which Michael Polanyi considered to be foundational in our human experience of the world. In 1966 Polanyi published *Tacit Knowing*, in which he began by proposing that we know more than we can tell. Polanyi suggested that we know by relying on our awareness of a range of physical and perceptual experiences in the world. Tacit knowing is both relational and participatory in nature, combining functional and phenomenal aspects of our lived experience. The impact of these experiences leads us to consider the semantics and thereby the ontological aspect of tacit knowing. Polanyi believes that our body is the ultimate instrument for all external knowledge, whether intellectual or practical and he identifies it with the understanding of the comprehensive entity.

We do not experience our bodies as objects, rather we experience the world to which we are attending from our body. When we encounter an artwork, we are attending toward the object from the position of our body. We are able to be aware of a full range of physical and perceptual experiences that may be provoked in the aesthetic encounter. Seeing art is therefore a rich source of tacit knowing, a material presence that bears direct relation to our lived experience and is capable of assisting us in the work of making sense of the world around us. “Viewing art is not only a receptive process, but a creative one as well.”

**Embodied Knowing**

“For a human person to be ‘clothed in the body’ is to be witness to God for the glory of creation.” Embodied knowing is at the heart of the Christian story. The presence of God

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75 Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*. 85. Chrétien argues that touch is the most fundamental and universal of all the senses and that “to touch is immediately to be touched by what I touch”.


77 Ibid. 15.


in the person of Jesus Christ can be understood as God seeking to find, restore and facilitate the possibility of new knowing between God’s self and humanity. Christ is clothed in the body in order to know what it is like to be human and in doing so he is able to be fully known by those whom he encounters in ministry. This putting on of the body is, however, also an experience of loss. Hannah Hunt draws our attention to the process of stripping off that the Incarnation necessarily entailed, “A symmetrical stripping of the glory of the Godhead to match that lost by Adam, and a reclothing of Adam through Jesus being ‘clothed in the body’”.  

The mode of stripping and reclothing that recurs throughout the life and ministry of Jesus points us toward a form of kenosis that is expressed as a willingness to change and be changed, for the purpose of knowing and being known. Hunt argues that Jesus’ use of human modes of existence and reception affirms the presence of the physical senses as a way of knowing.

Art-making offers a unique means of exploring and integrating embodied knowing. Hunt describes the way in which the soul and the body share modes of expression in worship and prayer. In the same way, the soul and the body engage with materials through gesture, posture and presence to make art. Hunt draws our attention to the fact that the scriptures record many instances in which Jesus employed modes of physical engagement and expression, such as touch, sight and smell to facilitate healing. “Being able to find God through the senses suggests a rehabilitation of the whole person, operating not just at an intellectual level but in an enfleshed body which perceives rather than intuits God.” To make art is therefore to seek, to engage the range of our own physical senses in the hope of finding and perceiving God. The knowing that emerges is necessarily embodied.

**FELT SENSE**

Eugene Gendlin noted in 1981 that there were people who were particularly successful in therapy because they could come to an inner knowing that he described as a felt sense. Gendlin describes the felt sense as "a special kind of internal bodily awareness…a body-sense of meaning". He described the felt sense as encompassing “everything that you feel and know about the given subject at a given time”. Not only does the felt sense encompass all of this, but it communicates these things as a whole, rather than in particular

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80 Ibid. 138.
81 Ibid. 151.
82 Ibid.
84 Ibid. 32.
detail. Rappaport reminds us that at first this bodily form of knowing is unformed. It requires mindful awareness, attention and an accepting attitude for it to find form and ascend from the inner realm into our cognitive minds.\(^85\) Rappaport believes that art is a vehicle for recognising, externalising and carrying forward the knowing that resides in the felt sense.\(^86\)

Gendlin asserts that our felt sense is perceived and intuited via the way in which the body feels the impact of being in the world.

The body "feels itself" but not as if it were an object along with other objects. Rather, the body feels its environment by re-recognising what it just did. Feeling is the series of impacts of what the body just did. With feeling, the body not only is, but feels the impact of what it "was."\(^87\)

Whilst Gendlin describes this experience of perception and feeling in terms of the body doing, Elizabeth Behnke notes that there are ways in which inner bodily gestures enable us to endure and be with human experiences long after they are over.\(^88\) Behnke proposes that there are gestures which are not expressive but are practical modes of perception that ensure that we are able to bear and withstand suffering. Whilst suffering can be momentary, the inner gesture that we draw upon to endure those events demands persistence and perseverance, and this experience can continue to shape our lived bodily engagement with the world, whether we are aware of it or not.\(^89\)

Our felt sense of the world is thereby impacted by the relationship between our direct expressive encounters and gestures and a series of more practical inner gestures that equip us for long term survival. As a result, knowing the felt sense requires the same willingness that Allen describes with regard to making art, a willingness “to confront ourselves, our fears and our resistance to change”.\(^90\) Being with art over time is a reliable means of exploring the topography of the felt sense and thereby seeing the real and yet ephemeral nature of our lived experience. Art lends a sense of durability to our felt sense that would otherwise be so vulnerable to change and revision. We can see what it is like, to be like this.\(^91\)

\(^{85}\) Laury Rappaport, "Trusting the felt sense in art-based research," *Journal of Applied Arts and Health* 4, no. 1 (2013). 98.
\(^{89}\) Ibid. 84.
\(^{90}\) Allen, *Art is a Way of Knowing*, 3.
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BODY

Merleau-Ponty claims that the body is not simply a boundary for the individual; it is the means by which the self is immersed in the world. Given the potential for chaos and disruption that are present in a lived experience of the world, it is important to consider that the body might also be a site for continuity and change. Paul Fiddes notes that the word incarnation refers to movements of divine life that are felt in the body as “coming, turning, flowing, and burning.” The body can be both a resistance to change and a site for a continual openness to something that can come in and change the present situation. Indeed, it is sometimes a crisis in the body that is the invitation to become more aware of the needs of the soul. Gillian Rose articulates this in her memoir when she speaks of her experience of illness and her impending death.

A crisis of illness, bereavement, separation, natural disaster, could be the opportunity to make contact with deeper levels of the terrors of the soul, to loose and to bind, to bind and to loose...To grow in love-ability is to accept the boundaries of oneself and others, while remaining vulnerable, woundable, around the bounds. Acknowledgement of conditionality is the only unconditionality of human love.

Rose is clear in proclaiming that acceptance of our conditioned and fragile existence is the only way in which we can be free to love unconditionally. In the Gospel of Matthew, we encounter Jesus living and dying in this way.

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). (Matthew 27:45-46)

Jesus’ unconditional acceptance of his embodied experience whilst suffering upon the cross enabled him to navigate the boundaries of his human experience and name the greatest pain of his own suffering as a sense of separation from God. In doing so he also expressed a longing for relief from the isolation of the cross. Jesus’ experience and understanding of the divine did not deny the imminent lived experience of his embodied existence. He did not reject the pain of human suffering in favour of transcendent reality with the divine. Rather, as Fiddes eloquently explains, “transcendence happens within the immanence of the body.”

This exchange is marked by openness to the Other, and a willingness to allow the Other to

95 Fiddes, “The Body as a Site of Continuity and Change.” 275.
make a contribution; embodied receiving as well as giving. The body can be a means of attuning to the rhythms of life that both transcend and embrace us, thereby becoming a place of radical change and acceptance.  

Human bodies are fragile and challenged by the effects of aging and decay. If we live long enough, we will all have the experience of living with a body that breaks down over time. Being willing to attune to the rhythm of disease and decay is challenging in a culture that borders on worshipping the healthy body. Rather than accept the ordinary experience of mortality and the effects of illness, the contemporary Western culture encourages us to resist and even to fight these natural processes. Fear of what may happen to our bodies in the future can lead us to deny experiences that are inherent in the conditions of our existence, such as the presence of illness, disability, ageing and death.

Even so, the healthy body is often taken for granted. “It is only when something goes wrong with the body that we begin to notice it.”  

Jean-Do Bauby was Editor in Chief of *Elle* magazine in 1995 when he suffered a massive stroke. He regained consciousness only to discover that he had survived but was living with *locked-in-syndrome*. Whilst his mental faculties remained intact, most of his body was paralysed and he could only move his left eyelid. In the months that followed the stroke he gradually realised that he would never recover the most basic bodily functions that he had previously take for granted, such as swallowing his own saliva. He did, however, retain a deep desire to find a way to remain present in the world and remain truly himself.

My old clothes could easily bring back poignant, painful memories. But I see in the clothes a symbol of continuing life. And proof that I still want to be myself. If I must drool, I may as well drool on cashmere.

Physical disability can also lead to social isolation. The uncomfortable experience of watching someone experience disability can awaken a depth of fear that results in the marginalisation of those who are already separated from the mainstream of life. Elisabeth Tova-Bailey says of her experience of being with people who visited her whilst she was living with chronic illness, “I could see that I was a reminder of all that they feared: chance, uncertainty, loss and the sharp edge of mortality. Those of us with illnesses are the holders of the silent fears of those with good health.”

Bailey was not only confronted with the task of

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96 Ibid. 275.
adapting physically, psychologically and spiritually to living with illness, but inadvertently became a container for the fears of those who cared for her. Bauby dealt with the isolation of his illness and made a difference in the world by patiently composing, editing and dictating a book with the use of his left eyelid. *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* is the legacy Bauby leaves us, an intimate exploration of the complex grief he experiences whilst trapped in his now inanimate body.

**The Experience of Illness**

As an art maker I have trusted and relied upon my direct experience with the physicality of materials to form the basis of my primary knowing. My sensory encounters with the world involve the coordination of my body and the intricate execution of gross and fine motor skills, tacitly deployed in shaping and forming an image. When working with materials I have become adept at integrating the physicality of my tacit knowing with my conceptual knowing. In 2010 I was diagnosed with *Multiple Sclerosis* (also known as *MS*). With the arrival of this illness there was a significant disturbance in my experience of a sensuous encounter, not only with art but with the world. The experience of *MS* undermined my capacity to trust in the simplicity of a sensory encounter with the world. The following is an excerpt from a diarised account of the experience.

I am unable to see colour and detail that I know must surely be there. I am unable to touch without experiencing the shudder and shock of neuropathic pain. Some days it is as though the edges of my body feel like they are being sanded away and other days it seems that a jackhammer is at work. Often I am convinced that the edges of my body are simply falling away. I am unable to walk a straight line or stand still without feeling dizzy and exhausted. As I recoil from these unpleasant sensory experiences my world shrinks and I am no longer able to trust myself or my body to know its limits. In an attempt to make sense of this experience I have drawn a distinction between myself and my body. The fear of a degenerative illness has driven me to convince myself that underneath the challenges my body faces, I am fine and well.100

In speaking of my mind and body in this disjointed way I realise, however, that I have divided my conceptual and bodily awareness, treating one as reliable and dismissing the relevance of the other. “Polanyi insists that what is most our own in knowledge is our bodily

100 Libby Byrne, *Diarised notes from a recorded interview with Patricia Fenner*, 2011.
awareness." If this is so, then the experience of MS undermines not only my bodily awareness, but also that which is most my own in knowledge.

A DESIRE FOR HEALING

Living with MS has meant that I need to learn to routinely be confronted by and accept my conditioned existence as I participate in direct experiential encounters of life as a patient. Since my diagnosis on February 4th 2010, I have adapted to the need for regular consultations with doctors, nurses and even other patients as I receive treatment in a major public hospital. Whilst the treatment is designed to impede the progression of the illness and keep me as well as possible, the experience of being a patient often serves to remind me that I am ill. When I am a patient I have very little control over the way in which the prescribed treatment is physically administered, and so as a coping mechanism I often retreat into my imagination in search of an image that will clothe the experience with a sense of healing. This has meant that images of healing are more present in my imagination than in my lived bodily experience.

The World Health Organisation proposes that, “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Is it possible for health to be present or even in relationship with disease and illness? Susan Sontag notes that the experience of illness and wellness is common to all human life. “Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick.” Hans Georg Gadamer notes that while we are living, health is consistently characterised by a fluctuating state of equilibrium and posits that the art of healing is “an attempt to restore an equilibrium that has been disturbed”. In doing so Gadamer links our understanding of health with the art of healing. Havi Carel acknowledges the relationship between illness and health challenging the dichotomy that Sontag proposes by saying that “episodes of illness can occur within health, an experience of health within illness is a possible, if often overlooked,

102 Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948. The Definition has not been amended since 1948.
104 Gadamer, The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age. 36.
phenomenon”.

With the diagnosis of MS comes an unspoken invitation to join a group of people who are perceived to share an experience of the illness, but what of the question of their shared experience of health? The diagnosis has the potential to reshape my identity with the shadow of illness and the fear of this new identity is often affirmed in concern expressed by those who are well.

There are some distinct challenges in living with MS relating to a constant and long term struggle to find the power to live life with dignity. Olsson, Lexell & Söderberg discovered an urgent need to support the health of women living with MS by formulating care that is focused on power that can be expressed as an action towards one’s own body, to unify and consolidate a sense of personal capacity. Metaphor is a powerful tool for constructing a narrative to support the experience of living with the impact of MS. Developing a reliable metaphor for the experience of MS enables people to modify what they do in response to illness and then attempt to modify how the illness reveals itself in everyday life. Wright-St Clair found that stories shared within research interviews revealed MS to be perceived as an aggressor, a saviour, a guest and an adversary. Despite these distinctly different narratives, the metaphors all served to help regain a sense of control over everyday life despite the physical consequences of the illness.

The loss and then subsequent regaining of a sense of control is a strong theme in research regarding the impact of art-making in illness narratives. My own art-making practice is a way of extending, dissolving and depthing a range of metaphors, in order to understand what might be shared and uniquely my own, within my human experience. “I think that is probably why I paint. It is exploring what is beneath the narrative...(discovering) what is common ground.” It is therefore possible that working with a metaphor for the experience of MS may have significant benefits in managing both the experience of living with the illness and offering a meeting place beneath the narrative for the fears of those who

105 Carel, Illness: The Cry of the Flesh. 77.
109 Libby Byrne, In Leanne Mallaby, "How Art Stimulates Theological Reflection in the Conversation between a Work of Art, the Artist and the Viewer” (Melbourne College of Divinity, 2010). 113.
care for me.

When I am a patient I have very little control over the way in which the prescribed treatment is physically administered. The following diarised account illuminates some of the challenges provoked by the lack of control within the procedure.

It is in the infusion room that I am often confronted by people whose illness is further progressed than my own. The traces of their struggle manifest themselves in the way they inhabit their bodies and the energy that they bring with them into the room. There is often a sense of desperation as people discuss alternative treatments, in the hope of stumbling upon a cure. Sometimes I meet people who seem to be invested in continuing to live with the experience of illness and I wonder how and when that happens. I judge them. I pity them. I resist the temptation to recognise my own experience in theirs; for fear that I will become one of them.110

The result of the experience of treatment can therefore be an even more pronounced experience of separation. When the medicine that is supposed to heal me creates a more fractured sense of my self, a hermeneutic gap in my experience appears, stimulating my imagination and arousing my curiosity.111 I have a need for recognition, a deeper sense of identity that is able to integrate this new experience of illness within the participatory and healing nature of my faith tradition. The experience of separateness that appears directly related to my experience of being a patient sparks within me the need to be reconciled to myself and to my fellow patients.

“To heal means to make whole...To make whole also means to make holy.”112 This simple and yet profound claim speaks to the heart of the Christian faith which is essentially a mystery of participation.113

In the event of Christ, there is made accessible to the human person a new participation in the divine Absolute (God) which becomes the matrix of a new participatory relationship between human persons, as well as between humanity and its natural environment.114

Being diagnosed with an incurable illness can be a difficult experience for the Christian who equates healing with cure. There can be a tension of inconsistency between the way in which we read the healing narratives in the Gospels and the lived experience of chronic illness.

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110 Libby Byrne, Diarised account of treatment, 2012.
Finding a way to live with this tension rather than rushing to resolve it too quickly can be the opportunity to seek and find a new understanding of doctrinal truth.

Whilst physicians and medical researchers are consistently making discoveries that redefine what we can expect in the lived experience of illness and health, there is still a 100% mortality rate associated with the human condition. The free radical theory of ageing argues that oxygen is not only necessary for sustaining life, but the primary cause of ageing and death. Over a lifetime, the damage caused by the free radicals produced in each cell of our body as we respire gradually accumulates until it finally overwhelms the body as it attempts to maintain its integrity. The very substance that sustains our life also leads to destruction. If healing is expressed in the restoration of integrity to the body’s systems, by virtue of the double attention that oxygen offers to those systems, human beings have a limited capacity or natural aptitude for healing. To accept the inevitability of physical decline, without wondering about the body’s capacity for healing, could result in resignation to a position which does not promote the conditions necessary for optimising health and wellbeing.

“Wonder arises when the understanding cannot master that which lies closest to it.”

It is precisely our inability to master healing that enables us to wonder about it. Sustaining this wonder through the course of chronic illness and treatment is challenging, and resignation to knowledge that seems certain can appear to be the easier course. To wonder about healing means to consider and explore the best way to live with disease and so mediate the experience of the illness. To wonder about healing also creates a sense of agency that shifts the locus of control from the disease to the person who is wondering. Art materials have the capacity to sustain wonder and direct attention toward the possibility of healing. Art is an experience of connectedness, an invitation to transcend our singularity and become open to the universal. We discover who we are within a work of art because the work awakens us to ourselves. When we see art with the full range of our senses it also has the ability to awaken us to the presence of the sacred in our lived experience of the world. Art is therefore helpful in considering how to approach the task of healing.

118 Ibid. 60.
Figure 18. Libby Byrne, *What if this gets worse?*, 2011. Derwent Inktense watercolour pencils on canvas, 180 x 180mm, Melbourne.
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Is it possible to learn about healing and transformation through the practice of making, being with and seeing art?

In order to apply a research methodology that is theoretically consistent with this research question, this thesis proposes an art-based method of systematic theological inquiry. Sarah Coakley’s model of Théologie totale identifies the need for the inclusion of aesthetic knowing in systematic theology.¹ To undertake this task with an expectation of theological breadth, depth and clarity will require a rigorous and reliable method of Art-based Research to be employed within the methodological framework of théologie totale. Reflexive studio practice offers such a method, enabling the researcher to consider the impact of the nuanced phenomenological experiences of making, being with and seeing art.

Designed for future application in théologie totale this research project draws upon the aesthetic realm for language, content, method and theory and is therefore an example of what Paul Fiddes calls aesthetic theology.² In this chapter I will argue that reflexive studio practice is a form of art-based research that is suitable for adaptation in the service of théologie totale. I will then explain how I have applied reflexive studio practice to the research question and explore some of the challenges and possibilities for this form of inquiry. Finally, I will outline the research design and procedures that have informed and shaped this inquiry, enabling me to make theological sense from aesthetic experience.

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE³

Mikel Dufrenne’s assertion that the work of art is always grasped in the aesthetic experience is foundational to the development of this methodology.⁴ The artist is inherently the first person to grasp the work of art through an encounter with materials in the studio. As the artwork emerges in the studio, the maker of the work also becomes a viewer who sees the works with a range of different senses. Her experience of the artwork is therefore an embodied experience; in touching the materials as the work is formed the artist will also be

¹ Coakley, God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'.
³ Dufrenne, The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience.
⁴ Ibid. 3.
touched by the artwork.\textsuperscript{5} Whilst in the studio, however, the artwork has a limited audience and is vulnerable to being changed by the artist at any time. Once released from the studio there is an opportunity for other people to grasp the work in their own aesthetic experience. As the art is exhibited in different places and formats over time, there are extended opportunities for viewers to grasp the work thereby amplifying the social, political and cultural possibilities for its presence. It is therefore only in being seen and grasped by a viewer that the work is finally able to determine its own value.\textsuperscript{6} O'Doherty describes this process as the work being \textit{socialised} and notes that the first viewers may be those who visit the artist in the studio, well before the work is exhibited on gallery walls.\textsuperscript{7}

Whilst reflexive studio practice privileges the experience of the artist with the artwork (as will be explained later in this chapter), this study has been designed to incorporate layers of engagement for viewers to apprehend the artwork and therefore contribute to the way in which it is received and understood.

\textit{Théologie totale}

In proposing her method of \textit{théologie totale}, Sarah Coakley calls for a means of systematic theological inquiry that is capable of engaging both academic discourse and our lived experience in the world.\textsuperscript{8} Coakley claims that to be relevant in a post-modern world, systematic theology needs to discover and acknowledge the experience of people who have been marginalised by the mainstream discourse, by actively seeking to explore philosophy, sociology, anthropology, history, music and art in the systematic task. Coakley lays the foundations for a more \textit{totalising} approach to theology by acknowledging the previously marginalised human experience of desire in systematic theology. Coakley claims that desire is “the constellating category of selfhood, the ineradicable root of the human longing for God”.\textsuperscript{9} The primacy of divine desire in our human experience leads Coakley to recognise the \textit{theological valence} of human desire and to identify the implications for systematic theology in her presumptions about sexuality, gender and selfhood.\textsuperscript{10} As a means of both engaging and subverting the discourse about desire within systematic theology, Coakley grounds her method of \textit{théologie totale} in the \textit{Ascetic Practice} of contemplative prayer.

\textsuperscript{5} Chrétien, \textit{The Call and the Response}. 85.
\textsuperscript{6} O'Doherty, \textit{Studio and Cube: On the relationship between where art is made and where art is displayed}. 19.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid. 26.
seeks a position of reflective and inclusive humility, thereby ensuring that her approach is not totalising in a controlling or domineering sense, where the theologian presumes to speak for others. Rather the totalising nature of her approach is an attempt to gather in the margins of our human experience and thereby appreciate levels of doctrinal understanding that may have previously been missed.

Ascetic practice is essentially a commitment to the prayerfully letting go of worldly attachments in favour of austerity. Whilst insisting that this practice of letting go is at the core of théologie totale, Coakley simultaneously issues an imperative to approach the work via the arts, which somewhat paradoxically involves attending to the material presence of objects for the purpose of extending the imagination. There is wisdom required in the attempt to balance the letting go of attachments in ascetic practice with the taking up ideas and images through aesthetic practices. To balance our direct experience of art and materials with the ascetic practice of prayer is an attempt to ensure that the ensuing dialogue is not misdirected by presuppositions, or sequestered by unexamined experience.

Ellen Dissanayake argues that although art is a cultural phenomenon it is also a biological one, a mechanism for survival. She submits that there is a selective advantage in the “universal tendency to form and to shape, to make things special…to single out and take pains to present something in a considered way”. Given the propensity for human beings to make art across cultures and throughout the ages Coakley argues that the aesthetic realm of art and the imagination is indispensable in a theological method that strives to engage the totality of our human experience. She believes that at its best, theological art can enable new expressions, animus and efficacy of doctrine. This belief is tempered, however, by a warning that although a symbol can give rise to new thought, it is not a simple matter to translate the visual directly into the verbal. In her recent theological work God, Sexuality and the Self, Coakley explored the possibilities incurred through her own visual analysis of the iconography of the Trinity. She claims that this excursion with art in the midst of her theological inquiry enabled the subversion of the normal conventions of discourse about the Trinity, by allowing seepage from her unconscious to find a place in the theological project. Coakley discovered that art was able to “catch (her) off-guard, disturb, intrigue, irritate and freshly inspire (her work)”. She acknowledges that there is a danger that these responses

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13 Ibid. 193.
14 Ibid.
will be dismissed as too personally affective to have a place in systematic theology but responds to this charge by suggesting that all interpretation involves what Gadamer refers to as a fusion of horizons.\textsuperscript{15} This is an assertion that requires a little further explanation.

The phenomenology of any aesthetic experience with art involves a fusion of horizons constellating in a heightened sense of awareness to the cultural, psychological and theological lenses that inform our experience and help us to make sense of the work. Elliot Eisner considers that the interpretation of symbols is the result of a dynamic relationship between the referant (that to which the image refers), the symbol and the interpretant (the person who is interpreting the image). Eisner suggests that it is not always necessary to discover a direct relationship between the symbol and the thing to which it refers, for the interpretant to make sense of a symbol. Indeed, he argues that the dominant function of art may be to provide evocative images that generate new questions and discussion. If this is the case the need for consensus on the original reference and received meaning within an image is much less significant.\textsuperscript{16} In making theological sense from images, Coakley proposes that it is helpful to begin by acknowledging the referant and any original intentions that may have been received and previously known about the work of art. Coakley then encourages the active pursuit of our own aesthetic responses to an artwork, in order to discover what else might be conveyed by the way in which the image has been made and in our contemporary receipt of the work. Applying an active imagination to help us to understand our own aesthetic response enables the unification of a range of different experiences, the formulation of new questions and the possibility of new theological sense on the fusion of our perceptual horizons.\textsuperscript{17}

Paul Fiddes contends that if art has a role in the production of knowledge, then images and stories in literature can contribute to the actual making of systematic theology, rather than simply illustrating doctrine that has already been received and understood.\textsuperscript{18} Having considered the breadth and depth of the work that has been done with Theological Aesthetics in recent years, Fiddes identifies that it may be more fruitful to approach the relationship between art and theology from the position of aesthetics.\textsuperscript{19} He suggests that a systematic approach to aesthetic and material thinking could enable theologians to develop concepts with the “wholeness of reality that imagination is feeling after”.\textsuperscript{20} Material thinking is a

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Dufrenne, \textit{The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience}. 352.
\textsuperscript{18} Fiddes, "Concept, Image and Story in Systematic Theology.” 5.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. Fiddes refers particularly to work by Richard Viladesau, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Patrick Sherry.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. 9.
concept deeply embedded in the aesthetic realm, referring to the potential for art-based research to deal in matter that signifies.\textsuperscript{21} An artist who employs material thinking in a theological inquiry will be able to materialise the tools of theological thinking, thus helping us to see what it is that God may be saying and doing with regard to a particular research question. I will now explain why reflexive studio practice is an art-based research methodology that can be adapted to integrate elements of ascetic practice within the aesthetic practice of material thinking, and thereby offer a methodological framework that can be employed in \textit{théologie totale}.

\textbf{Reflexive Studio Practice}

Reflexive studio practice is a qualitative method of inquiry employed by artists to systematically consider and explore a question that has captured their attention. Graeme Sullivan contends that the imaginative and intellectual work undertaken by artists is a form of research capable of creating knowledge that can help us understand the world we live in and how we learn to make sense of it.\textsuperscript{22} A studio based research inquiry typically involves the production of a cohesive body of artwork and an accompanying exegesis that is primarily in written form.\textsuperscript{23} Reflexive studio practice involves working with a defined direction in mind whilst holding an open-ended, undetermined, procedural trajectory.\textsuperscript{24} It engages an artist with multiple levels of experience, welcoming seemingly disparate ideas into the practice and requiring the artist to stay with them until the ways in which they are connected become evident. The artist who works in this way is looking and listening for cultural, spiritual and political imperatives that may inform their personal use of materials and extend the development of a body of work. The success of the art-making practice is often illuminated by the degree to which the process sheds new light upon the questions that have been posed and explored. To explain this methodology further we will consider each of its essential elements: the practice, the studio and reflexivity.

\textsuperscript{22} Sullivan, \textit{Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts}. xi.
\textsuperscript{24} Sullivan, \textit{Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts}. 85. Sullivan quotes Mika Hannula to describe the core components of artistic research as practice.
“To say that art-making is a practice indicates from the outset that the task of art is unfinished.”25 It is a considerable challenge to sustain a practice that will always remain unfinished. In the practice of making art the artist is doing something with materials in order to make things visible in specific and particular ways. The artist thinks in a medium as the artwork is developed. 26 As a thing is created and given form, so a new understanding of the human experience is also formed. In studio practice things are felt, lived, reconstructed and interpreted, therefore offering an opportunity to extend the boundaries of human thought and knowledge.

The practice of art-making does not consist of an inexhaustible and uninterrupted flow of doing something. Within a sustained reflexive art-making practice one can expect to encounter periods of stillness that are sometimes marked by not knowing what to do next. This time of not knowing can be a time for the artist to encounter the work as a viewer, dwelling for a time in cordial, radiant and communicative silence and listening for the emergent work of art.27 Within this silence of not knowing, the thing that has been made can provoke and catch the attention of its maker in a sensuous encounter.28 In the stillness of this encounter the practice of art-making is akin to the nature of contemplative spiritual practice.

The practice of contemplative prayer that springs from the traditions of the Desert Mothers and Fathers of the 4th Century embraces a perpetual movement between action and contemplation. Richard Rohr describes the movement between action and contemplation as an art form in itself, underlying all other visible art forms.29 The teachers of the desert traditions loved and sought silence yet were held in the tension of a network of relationships and community.30 They therefore relied on the movement between action and contemplation to enable the spiritual life to flourish in community. The practice of working alone in a studio enables the artist to navigate similar experiences of tension between the need for silence and the commitment to living alongside other people. One experience equips and resources them

27 Chrétien, Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art. 19.
29 Richard Rohr, A Lever and a Place to Stand (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2011). vii
for the other. In this sense art-making practice can be conceived as a form of contemplative practice.

Evelyn Underhill identified the relationship between art-making practice and contemplative practice in 1915 saying that, “The artist is no more and no less than a contemplative who has learned to express himself.”31 Underhill goes on to suggest that the artist has the ability to surrender their own need to see things in a particular way and see things for their own sake. In this sense, the contemplative practice of making art in the studio is an inquiry into reality, into the way things are, as much as into the way things could still be.

**THE STUDIO**

The studio can be considered as the site of production, the place where the practice happens and where things are made. The studio is circumscribed as a place offering shelter for the artist and the works that are being created.

The studio functions to unite different entities that have previously been separate. In the Middle Ages the word *studio* referred not only to the shop where a carpenter worked, but also the shavings, woodchips and detritus that was left behind in the process of making.32 Raw materials, older artworks and plans for the future all find a home in the place that is designated as the studio. The spatial relations that form between these elements in the studio inform the development of new artwork and the experience of the artist who inhabits the studio.

A studio can be an intimate and private setting or a place that is shared by a number of people and characterised by relationship and creative exchange. In choosing to work in a particular studio an artist locates their practice somewhere on a continuum of personal and public space. In doing so they find a place where they can explore their own experience of mind, body and spirit in the light of the spatiality of being in the studio. The studio is open to continual revision, expansion and renegotiation in light of the needs of others who work in the place and also with regard to the needs and requirements of the artwork itself.

The felt need for a studio can be a response to the need for a place in which to make sense of the world. Archibald Prize winner and contemporary war artist, Ben Quilty, describes his experience of the studio in the following way, “As an artist, my studio is a place

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of refuge. It is where I work things out."\textsuperscript{33} For Quilty the studio is a place where he is safe enough to inquire into what it is like to be aware, awake, confronted, challenged and alive in the world. As a successful portrait artist, Quilty was commissioned in 2011 to become an official war artist in Afghanistan. After spending more than three weeks being with and talking to soldiers on active duty, he returned to the studio to make sense of these experiences and to tell the stories he had heard with images.

In 2012 Quilty began to visit Kerobokan Prison in Bali to support the development of an art studio within the prison. It was here that he met and mentored Myuran Sukumaran, a young Australian man who had been confined to death row since 2006 as a result of convictions for drug trafficking. In the same way that the studio is a refuge for Quilty, the studio in Kerobokan Prison became a refuge for Sukumaran and for many other prisoners. It was the first place where men and women in the prison were permitted to freely interact. On at least one occasion Sukumaran forcefully defended the studio with an iron bar against prisoners who were rioting and intent on destroying it. The work that happened in the studio at Kerobokan Prison was so important to those who used it, that people who had been released from prison returned to that studio to paint rather than pursue their art-making practice in isolation at home. Such is the power of the studio.

The studio can also take on the function of a social institution galvanising social, cultural and political imperatives. In this sense the studio becomes a home for ideas. After more than forty years of practicing as a studio based painter, Anselm Kiefer said in a recent interview that he now sees his studio as an idea rather than an immobile place.\textsuperscript{34} Kiefer’s life time of practice has led him to work in ways that are particularly responsive to the needs of his studio and in return the studio environment has extended the way that he thinks about the possibilities for his work. There is a creative exchange between Kiefer and his studio that provokes and sustains the practice of art-making. In this sense, the studio has a significant role in sustaining the practice of making art.

Studios are often a particular reflection of the artist’s personality, resources, needs and desire. Edvard Munch had a practice of testing the resilience of his paintings by leaving them in the elements, a process he called ‘horse curing’. Munch’s winter studio was therefore a

\textsuperscript{33} Ben Quilty, \textit{Tribute to Myuran Sukumaran}, Sydney Funeral, 2015.

\textsuperscript{34} Anselm Kiefer, “Kiefer and the Studio,” in \textit{Anselm Kiefer speaks with Tim Marlow on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art} (Louisiana: Lousiana Museum of Modern Art, 2010).
notably minimal structure, giving him just enough shelter to sustain this practice in the Norwegian winter (Figure 19).


Anselm Kiefer’s studios, on the other hand, are often monumental built environments that allow for his practice of developing of equally monumental works (Figure 20). Very often, Kiefer leaves the art work in the studio where it was created and he searches for a new building to use as studio in the next phase of his work.

My own studio is modest. It is a Yurt (Figure 21), which is a tent-like dwelling. Originally designed in Mongolia and constructed of canvas, felt and timber, a yurt has cylindrical walls of poles in lattice arrangement with a conical roof of poles. My yurt has a clear perspex dome at the apex of the roof which ensures a good source of natural light. The round studio resonates with many of the shapes that have been part of my visual language for speaking about God. The tent like structure resonates with the experience of faith that is described in Hebrews 11:8-9 and thus honours the experience of theological time, in the practice of painting.\(^{35}\) Whilst the yurt is a temporary structure it holds me for a time, in God’s time, whilst I work.

\[\text{Figure 21. The Yurt. Libby Byrne’s studio in Montmorency, Australia. First photographed under construction in 2005 and then in 2015.}\]

**REFLEXIVITY**

To be reflexive involves thinking from within experiences. It requires a willingness to make aspects of the self strange in order to stand back from assumptions and habitual thinking and notice what may have been previously missed.\(^{36}\) Cora Marshall draws our attention to a long history of reflexivity as an aspect of research in the arts, citing Locke 1689, Dewey 1910, Eisner 1972, Gardner 1982, and Sullivan 2005.\(^{37}\) Marshall describes reflexive studio practice as being characterised by the gathering of thoughtful and critical reflections and actions for the purpose of bringing to light the underpinnings of our practice,

\(^{35}\) “Anselm Kiefer in conversation with Tim Marlow” (The Royal Academy of Art London, 2014). Kiefer’s description of painting as “theological time” resonates with my experience of Kairos as I have painted in the yurt over the last ten years. In my experience, Kairos is held within some individual paintings and also within bodies of work that have been made over many years.


our assumptions, biases and perspectives. It is a method of working that seeks to stand back and see what is happening whilst wondering – why is this so? The thoughtful questioning that wonder inspires is capable of sustaining what Heidegger calls a creative tolerance for the unconditioned. It is this tolerance that enables us to see the difference between what must necessarily be sustained and what is open to the possibility of transformation.

Reflexive studio practice has very practical implications and benefits for practitioners in the existential challenges in life. In the days leading up to his execution, Myuran Sukumaran relied on his reflexive studio practice to equip and prepare him for death. The paintings that emerged in those days were powerful images described by Ben Quilty as images of salvation that were able to turn our attention from the barbarism and the politics of the death penalty in Indonesia, back toward compassion. Working in his studio on the night of his execution in a contemplative art-making practice enabled Sukumaran to work in the way Underhill describes, unifying the reality of his life and impending death.

Reflexive studio practice involves the habit of taking time to think with materials in order to make sense of what can be known about the question being researched. Making sense, however, is not necessarily the same as knowing. Reflexive practice does not necessarily assure answers to our questions. Indeed true reflexivity can result in the discovery of what cannot be known and is required to cultivate theological imagination. Coakley notes that “there is an inherent reflexivity in the divine, a ceaseless outgoing and return of the desiring of God”. This is to say that our desire for God is actually requited divine desire; it is not I who pray, but God who prays in me. Applying our own reflexive practice in response to God’s reflexive desire for our prayer enables us to stand back and consider what might be happening when we pray, whilst wondering – why is this so, or, what am I seeing?

**CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR THIS INQUIRY**

One of the significant challenges and opportunities in this method of inquiry is to address the criteria by which we can judge whether an artwork or an artist is doing the work.

38 Ibid. In order to make this assertion Marshall cites work by Green, Eisner, Gardner, Sullivan, Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles and Lopez-Torres; Weber.
40 Esther Han, "Bali nine: Ben Quilty pays tribute to Myuran Sukumaran in speech at Sydney funeral," *Sydney Morning Herald* May 29, 2015.
44 Ibid. 55.
of theology or simply making art. Not every artist has a practice that can be considered analogous to the making of theology, just as not every artwork draws us to consider questions of meaning and existence. The parameters for considering how art works as theology are not clear at the outset of this inquiry, although it is possible that the inquiry will shed new light upon the ways in which we can consider this challenge. Barbara Bolt submits that art-based inquiry is concerned with articulating what has emerged or what has been realised through the process of handling materials and ideas, to bring to bear new knowledge and understanding within a particular field of inquiry. The results of this inquiry will shed light upon the question of how art can function as theology.45

Trevor Hart acknowledges that the contribution that the artist makes has not always been valued or appreciated in the church. Indeed artistic creativity in theological terms has “frequently been viewed negatively, as a potential source of untruth and idolatry”.46 Hart goes on to say that we commonly do not really expect the artist to be of much help in getting to the truth about the things that really matter and they may indeed seduce us away from the truth into dangerous un-Godly territory. It is important to acknowledge that this emergent style of theological inquiry runs the risk of disturbing the status quo and that in itself is both a challenge and an opportunity. Matthew Fox reminds us, however, that this has always been the case with art because of the power of images to challenge and change.

Images are not always easy to trust, for they bear within themselves, precisely because they are new, a capacity to disturb the peace, to question the peace, to rock the status quo, to wonder about the way things are, to suggest that at times chaos – which precedes birthing – is holier than the order that currently reigns.47

It is possible that new theological questions will emerge from within this project with the potential to re-direct the attention of the researcher. The challenge will be to maintain a clear commitment to systematically exploring the research question whilst bracketing new possibilities for future inquiry. There is also the possibility that more material will be uncovered than can be fully explored and understood within the scope of this inquiry. It is therefore possible that the project will uncover themes that are related to the research question and are worthy of further consideration in future research projects.

Given that there is always more to art than its physical manifestation in the world, one of the challenges for this project will be to find words that adequately describe and express new ideas that emerge from within the reflexive studio practice. Shaun McNiff calls on art-based researchers to find ways of presenting their work that look and feel like the work that they do. All too easily the exegesis of an artwork uses words and categories that move away from or devalue the actual impact of the artwork itself. The invitation to find words and modes of presenting that look and feel like the artwork is a risk that creates new opportunities to learn. One of the greatest challenges in the presentation of this project will be to shape the exegesis in such a way that it looks and feels like what has happened in the studio whilst enabling the audience to learn something new.

**Research Design**

This research has been designed to incorporate three distinct areas of practice in this approach to théologie totale. Firstly, there is the art-making practice itself, secondly the exhibition and the public’s engagement with the artwork and thirdly the written exegesis of the project. Cora Marshall proposes a design for reflexive studio practice that is capable of integrating these different elements of practice and achieving a robust method of academic enquiry. Whilst Marshall’s process is embedded in studio practice, she recognises the importance of making sense from the practice and the work and so has included a phase of inquiry devoted to what she terms, **Hermeneutic Phenomenology** and **Thematic Analysis**. It is this phase of her proposed model that enables the artist researcher to produce not only an informed body of artwork but a comprehensive written exegesis that is clear both in its purpose and expression. The three distinct phases in Marshall’s methodology enable it to be suitable for adaptation as an art-based method of inquiry for théologie totale.

**Phase One: Making the Work**

Marshall proposes that the implementation of a cycle of action and reflection enables artists to learn from their experience in the studio. What Marshall calls the **Aesthetico-action Research Cycle** is an adaptation of models of reflective practice pioneered by Donald Schön involving the practitioner in art-making processes, reflection-in-practice and reflection-on-

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Marshall places significant emphasis on reflection, planning and observation as well as on the making of art. She suggests that artists enter the research cycle by observing and describing their current work or practice. She coins the term *aesthetico* to describe a model of action research in the studio and to emphasise the Greek word *aisthesis* which means *to perceive*. Marshall goes on to describe the process of reflexivity that the artist brings to what they see. Questioning interpretations of what has been previously made enables the artist to shed light upon their biases, motives and intentions, thus making it more possible to identify what direction to pursue in future work. Marshall draws on Schön’s work to identify the fact that whilst the artist is exploring possibilities, the reflexive cycle of creating-observing-reflecting-creating can be happening simultaneously. This is known as reflection-in-practice. The process of planning that Marshall includes in the cycle is part of reflection-on-practice that happens when the artist is able to step back from the creative act and consider what has just happened and how to proceed.

\[\text{Diagram 1. Cora Marshall's Aesthetico-action research cycle.}\]

In order to apply this process in the method of *théologie totale* I have made two adaptations to Marshall’s model. Rather than including the idea of a conceptual planning phase, I have intentionally included a phase of contemplative prayer and silence within the studio practice as a means of stepping back from the act of creation. Whilst Coakley has described this practice as foundational to the work of *théologie totale*, it may not always be possible to partition the practice of prayer as a distinctly different phase of the studio practice.\(^{52}\) I have therefore further adapted Marshall’s model to allow for an overlap between the different phases of reflexive studio practice.

\(^{51}\) Ibid. 81.
Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The development of a cohesive body of artwork requires the artist to be immersed in this cycle of making and reflecting over time. It is therefore important to build in phases of research that require the analysis and interpretation of what is happening within the work, giving particular consideration to how this may relate to the research question. Marshall identifies the importance of taking a phenomenological stance to the work of interpretation as the studio practice unfolds, thus enabling the artist researcher to think in new ways.\(^5\) Graeme Sullivan notes the importance of thinking in new ways proposing that within any scholarly community there is usually the possibility and even necessity, to move beyond the existing boundaries of accepted knowledge and thought.\(^6\) By noting new ideas, questions, social, political and cultural references in the work that is emerging, the artist develops what Gadamer describes as “a receptivity to the otherness of a work of art.”\(^7\) It is the otherness of a work of art that alerts our attention toward a phenomenology of experience that may otherwise have been missed. Becoming aware of a lived experience of what is present in the work of art and in the creative process enables the artist to undertake the hermeneutic work of interpreting and making sense of what has been revealed in the research.

Whilst Gadamer argues that hermeneutic work needs to be framed with the structure of dialogue, question and answer, he refers to the horizon of the question as the means for


\(^{6}\) Sullivan, Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts. 203.

thinking beyond what has already been said and known. Marshall reminds us of the importance of working within the rhythm of Heidegger’s hermeneutical circle, noting that “the object of the inquiry is ever in the process of becoming, interpretation has no final result, and each ending holds a new beginning”. Developing a hermeneutical understanding of the actions and reactions that take place within a reflexive studio practice will engage the artist with an ongoing and complex phenomenological inquiry whereby the whole is only ever known by understanding the parts, and the parts can only be known in relation to the whole. Continuing to bracket assumptions about the nature of the practice and the possible outcomes for the work will enable the artist to remain open to fresh and unexpected encounters in the phenomenology of their aesthetic experience.

**Phase Two: Exhibiting the Work**

The exhibition phase of this project was designed to add depth to the phenomenological experience of making sense of the work and assist the artist researcher in describing, equalizing and learning from the artwork, in response to feedback from the viewing public. Particular consideration is therefore required in the timing of the exhibition, the choice of venue and the means of engaging the viewing public with the work. There is a complex and curious relationship between the places where art is made and where it is displayed. Brian O’Doherty argues that whilst art is accompanied by the artist in the studio it has not yet been able to determine its own value; “That begins when they (the paintings) are socialised on the gallery walls.” In determining its own value on the walls of the gallery, the artwork is often available for sale and purchase. This can be a difficult process for the artist who now needs to await a response from the public and consider how that affects their own relationship with the work. Mark Rothko was quoted in the play RED as having said, “Selling a picture is like sending a blind child into a room full of razor blades. It’s going to get hurt and it’s never been hurt before, it doesn’t know what hurt is.” Rothko is referring here to the experience of being open to the audience whose responses lead to new interpretive possibilities for the work. James Elkins has remarked that anyone who looks at a painting also looks at themselves, at the way they might be. “Objects look back, and their incoming

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56 Ibid. 378.
59 O’Doherty, *Studio and Cube: On the relationship between where art is made and where art is displayed*. 19.
gaze tells me what I am.” If this is so, then looking at a painting with the receptivity that enables this exchange to take place requires a similar degree of vulnerability as making and exhibiting the work. In the process of exhibiting new work, both the artist and the viewer are vulnerable to being changed by the experience of seeing.

A phase for the exhibition of the work has been included in the research design of this project, so that the viewers’ interpretive responses will assist in clarifying the nature of the work and its capacity to speak to people in different ways, as it settles into a public space. Whilst this entails some risk it also extends the possibilities for the theological component of the work to engage a range of people and thus gather in marginalised experience, rather than relying solely upon the experience and interpretation of the artist/theologian.

**Thematic Analysis**

Marshall advocates that the process of thematic analysis can be used to uncover concepts and ideas enabling the researcher to observe and discern strong overall statements about a body of work. Collecting and collating audience responses from the exhibition and thematically analysing these responses will enable the artist researcher to see the work afresh and make room in the process of theological reflection for the way others see the artwork. Jennifer Attride-Stirling proposes a useful method for summarising main themes and identifying thematic networks in the systematic presentation of qualitative research. By grouping and clustering thematic concepts and categories, researchers are able to recognise and analyse patterns and discover relationships between ideas. This method of analysis will be employed by the artist researcher to identify resonance and dissonance in the various aesthetic responses to the artwork and then discern theological content.

**Repeating the Practice**

The emergent themes from the first exhibition were likely to extend the way in which the artist researcher thinks about the research question. It was therefore important that these ideas have the opportunity to inform the development of a fresh body of work in the service of a theological correlation. Exhibiting this second body of work once it is completed, offered the opportunity for me, the artist researcher, to observe, record and elaborate on observations,
descriptions and analyses of the theological insights gained throughout the process. Offering a second exhibition was also an opportunity for the viewing public to keep track of the progress of the inquiry and to see how the ideas that they have offered in the response to the first exhibition may have been received and reshaped within the artist’s reflexive studio practice. The second exhibition signaled the end of the reflexive studio practice and the completion of the artwork contained within the research project. In a sense, the second exhibition also offered a phenomenological bridge from the art-making process into the task of writing an exegesis.

**Phase Three: Writing about the Work**

Barbara Bolt reminds us of the importance of finding words that articulate and communicate the realisations that unfold within the creative process. She argues that the exegesis of the material practice is a critical site for extending the capacity of the artwork to shed new light on the way we think. It is therefore a process that is deeply connected and embedded within the reflexive activity of studio practice. Marshall considers the relationship between art-making and exegesis to be symbiotic. She contends that the exegesis of a practice-led model of research is developed at every level of the inquiry and is an integral component of a reflexive studio practice. Marshall describes the exegesis component of practice research in the following way: “In the exegesis, we record and elaborate our observations, descriptions and analyses.” The challenge in this phase is to find a form of language that is capable of translating visual and theological ways of knowing and uniting them in the purpose of responding to the research question.

**Research Procedures**

Having proposed that reflexive studio practice offers a method that can be generally applied in théologie totale, there are a number of procedures and practices that have been applied in this particular inquiry to ensure that the research design is tailored to the research question: *Is it possible to learn about healing and transformation through the practice of making, being with and seeing art?* In this section I will outline the nature of these practices.

64 Bolt, "The Magic is in the Handling." 33.
and articulate the way in which they function to illuminate the practices of making, being with and seeing art in the research design of this project.

**PHASE ONE: MAKING THE WORK**

In the next section I will explain the research procedures that were employed in this project.

**DEVELOPING A SOURCE PAINTING**

The first procedure of this inquiry was the development of a single image that is known as the *Source Painting*. This procedure is a recognition and adaptation of Paul Tillich’s method of systematic theology. Tillich proposes that in designing a method of systematic theology we must first consider three questions; “What are the sources of systematic theology? What is the medium of their reception? What is the norm determining the use of the sources?” In response to the first of these questions Tillich submits that whilst the bible is the original source for Christian theology, a systematic approach encompasses the church history of Christian thought and the history of religion and culture. Tillich goes on to explain that the medium through which these sources are received is that of experience. Whilst privileging experience as the mode of reception, Tillich requires the theologian to locate and determine a place for their personal knowledge within the doctrine of the wider church and the Christian message. In doing so, the individual’s experience extends the breadth and depth of the larger Christian message.

Frank Rees explains that Tillich’s method of correlation hinges on the belief that all aspects of human experience and culture have ontological significance and therefore invite a correlating theological response. The work of correlation requires recognition and articulation of relationships that exist between elements that “appear to be separate but are ontologically united”. Rees says that such knowledge is inevitably found and formed within human activity. Art is a human activity which offers a visual form of representation to articulate knowledge of the human condition. As the artist works to create a structure of forms that is analogous to the forms of human experience, art is able...
to evoke an empathic encounter that is capable of extending our understanding and knowledge of the experience.  

Within this art-based method of inquiry, the source painting is the means of evoking an encounter with human experience through which other theological sources will be recognised and then articulated. The source painting is not an illustration of a biblical text or doctrinal understanding about the nature of healing. Rather, it is a source for experiential human knowing about the research question. It is therefore the vehicle through which new theological questions, awareness and conversation will be revealed and received. In this sense the source painting exists as the threshold between the worlds of art and theology, enabling the artist to work from a place of liminality or boundary existence. Rees reminds us that boundary existence is crucial to the success of Tillich’s method. Indeed, he suggests that “Living “on the boundary” is the best place to derive knowledge of God.”

The research question focuses our attention on exploring what is known and unknown about the experience of healing and transformation. The painting that has become known as Risk was created in 2012 as an initial exploration of this question, with particular reference to my lived experience of MS and my desire for healing whilst living with this incurable and degenerative condition. Completed over a six-month time frame, the painting holds my experiential knowing about the problem of illness and the desire for healing thereby opening theological questions of identity and belonging, themes earlier noted by Rees as fundamental issues to be addressed by theologians working in contemporary Australian culture.

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74 Ibid. 286.
Eugene Gendlin asserts that in order to understand our experience we must begin with the body. Gendlin developed a method of knowing that he calls *Focusing*. Focusing is a means of accessing the particular internal bodily awareness, known as the felt sense. The focusing method enables the attunement of attention toward the body, allowing time for what is first sensed unclearly to come into focus. Gendlin describes the process of focusing in the following way:

Focusing starts with a concrete feeling in your body - in your stomach or your chest. It is a kind of inward bodily attention that a few people have naturally, but which most people don't yet know. Focusing is not being in touch with emotions or feelings and it isn't guessing or figuring things out in your head about yourself. It is a way of getting a body sense - I call it a felt sense - of how you are in a particular life situation. There is a way of staying with this feeling and coming back to it over and over again. With practice, there is actually a point at which time slows down. You may think you have stayed with this feeling for an eternity, when in fact only a few seconds on the clock have gone by. And there is also a point at which space changes. You were at first quite literally in your chair and now there is this new space.

Knowing that resides in the body is formed before the acquisition of language. The focusing method is designed to support the discovery of words that are a good enough fit to allow for the articulation of this implicit experience of knowledge. Like Michael Polanyi’s concept of tacit knowing, our implicit knowing is laden with more than we can tell. The bodily awareness that is embedded in this level of knowing ensures that our implicit knowing is most authentically our own.

When the symptoms of MS undermined my capacity to trust in my bodily awareness, I realised that I was no longer able to trust my felt sense. Healing the disturbance in my felt sense of relationship with art materials became a priority within my studio practice. As a research procedure in reflexive studio practice, focusing enabled me to identify a felt sense of my relationship with the materials, the artwork and hence with the research question. Focusing was a means for understanding the disturbance MS created in my felt sense, identifying the phenomenological experience of making, seeing and being with the artwork and accessing my tacit knowing about the art of healing.

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75 Gendlin, *Focusing*.
76 Ibid. 9.
78 Ibid. 80.
**INDWELLING THE IMAGE**

The value of the source painting does not lie in how it looks, but in what it can do to illuminate the questions that require attention. To assist in the process of attending to the artwork I have employed the procedure of *indwelling*. Indwelling is a phenomenological procedure that involves the direction of my attention toward the material presence of the painting through a process of paying “unwavering attention to the image”. In her book, *What Do You See? Phenomenology of Therapeutic Art Expression*, Mala Betensky proposes that we can begin a meaningful encounter with art by asking the question, “What do you see?” Within this particular project I provoked periods of phenomenological indwelling of the source painting by posing this question and then recording my responses in a visual journal.

**THE ROLE OF THE IMAGE**

Periods of indwelling offered an opportunity to extend my attention beyond what I could see visually in order to express a range of sensory responses that I had experienced in the presence of the work. As the maker of the work my relationship with the source painting had become embodied. Indwelling the work therefore awakened a range of responses about the process that had been previously unexpressed. In distinguishing my experiences as maker from those as a viewer, it was clear that the artwork itself had an active presence in the recorded dialogue. The narrative that emerged from indwelling the source painting revealed a dynamic triadic relationship between the art itself, my experience as maker and my experience as a viewer. Rowan Williams alerts us to the particular agency that art has in the process of being made when he says, “The maker’s obedience is to the thing being made, to the unfolding logic in the process of making, as the work discloses itself.” To work in this way requires the development of a reflexive studio practice that is essentially collaborative and participatory in nature, even when the collaboration is the emerging artwork, oneself as the art maker and oneself as a viewer.

**THE ROLE OF IMAGINATION**

An art-based method of theological inquiry will rely upon the development of a

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symbiotic relationship between the imagination and theology. Within reflexive studio practice the artist relies on imagination to make material connections between things that have previously been separate. Imagination can also “bring to mind that which is not directly and currently present to the senses” in order to make a distinct contribution to perception and reason.

Whilst it may be tempting to consider imagination as a foundational stimulus in the creative process of making art, artist Terri Brooks identifies the role of imagination as embedded within the process of making the work.

Quite often, when I get into mark making... (I am) wiping away the obvious and leaving traces which are then built up again… I am trying to work through this in a more systematic manner. I work until the image is something I could never have imagined.

The image is not first envisaged and then executed, rather it emerges as Brooks works with the materials. She employs image-in-ation in the development of a new work. The reflexive nature of Brooks’ studio practice is significant as it enables different encounters and experiences that exist beyond the studio to direct the creation of new imagery within the painting. Her imagination functions to enable Brooks to make connections between layers of materials and then to see something previously unimagined. Anselm Kiefer describes a similar experience with imagination in the process of working with materials. It is always an experiential or conceptual shock that initially prompts Kiefer to react and respond with materials. His imagination is engaged only after the materials have begun to take on a form. The imagination has a similar place in this research project. It is not privileged over and above the engagement with ideas and materials, but it is actively engaged in the process of discovering new imagery in the process of painting.

**CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE**

Central to this expression of théologie totale is the contemplative practice of prayer that has its roots in the traditions of the Desert Mothers and Fathers of the 4th Century. The monastic traditions that have evolved from these teachings encourage honouring and entering...
into the silence of God through repeated mental patterns of *un-mastery*. Evelyn Underhill describes this mystical practice as a *union with reality*.\(^8^7\)

Antoni Tapies worked throughout the 20\(^{th}\) Century making abstract art in this contemplative way. His intention was to achieve contact with reality through the materials, not through the desire for transcendence but through immersion in his own surroundings. Tapies described his practice as a search for a union with reality “which is neither purely physical nor metaphysical, but both at once”.\(^8^8\) Pierre Soulages has also worked in this way to find light in darkness. Imposing nothing on the materials, Soulages has learnt to move with them in an embodied act of painting.\(^8^9\) An intentional commitment to un-mastery sustained the practice of these two significant art makers, enabling them to remain free from the pressure of finding *the next new thing*, and thereby equipping them for the discovery of what else may still be possible. A sustained rhythm of double attention to the practice of *taking time* and *making sense* enabled them to be equally aware of what was just beyond the limits of possibility, and therefore could not be known.\(^9^0\) The same could be said of contemplative prayer as practice that sustains a rhythm of double attention, knowing and becoming increasingly aware of what cannot be known about God.

**PALIMPSEST**

The word *palimpsest* has been used to refer to a parchment or a manuscript where the original writing has been erased in order to make room for a second writing. A palimpsest is therefore inherently composed of layers of meaning. Something is concealed in order for something else to be revealed.\(^9^1\) This method of working has been applied within the visual arts and has sometimes been construed as an act of aggression. In 1953 Robert Rauschenberg famously produced an *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (Figure 23). Rauschenberg’s act of erasing a drawing produced by an older and highly regarded artist has been construed as the Freudian destruction of the previous generation. Rauschenberg’s request for de Kooning’s cooperation in selecting the work to be erased reveals far more complex motivations for this work. Indeed Rauschenberg recalls speaking with de Kooning about the choice of the work for this project

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90 Volpe, "‘Taking Time’ and ‘making sense’: Rowan Williams on the Habits of Theological Imagination." 348.
and says that de Kooning insisted that “It has to be something that I will miss.” Rauschenberg claims that de Kooning understood the idea and willingly participated in the process. In this sense, the erasure is not a negation but an affirmation of de Kooning’s work. This significant work of erasure falls short of being a palimpsest though, as Rauschenberg chose not to inscribing new marks on the paper, instead leaving the erasures mingled with traces of de Kooning’s old drawing.

![Figure 23. Robert Rauschenberg, Erased de Kooning Drawing, 1953. Traces of drawing media on paper with label and gilded frame, 640 x 550mm, Collection SFMOMA.](image)

Within the context of this inquiry, this procedure has enabled me to provoke the conditions of living with MS. Life before the diagnosis had existed, though it would never be possible to live in that way again. In order to create a material based experience analogous to this human experience, I decided to work with my own existing oil paintings by painting over them with a layer of opaque gesso, thus creating the possibility of a palimpsest. Whilst the old work still existed on the canvas, it was no longer able to be seen. In designing this procedure as a means of inquiring into the nature of healing, I was interested to discover how the life of the original image beneath the layer of gesso might direct the possibilities for new

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mark making on the fresh gesso. The following notes from my sketch book show the genesis of this idea (Figure 24).

![Figure 24. Libby Byrne, Diarised notes regarding the design of a procedure for inquiry, 2011.](image)

The notes indicate that it was possible for the application of a fresh layer of gesso to be perceived as protecting rather than destroying the original painting. This form of erasure could offer a layer of protection to ensure that the sensitive interior life of the painting remained untouched. I was interested to discover how I could continue to work with this invisible painting. Having rejected the thought that this might be the destruction of an original painting, I considered that this process allowed for what Simone Weil describes as decreation of the artwork. Weil claims that decreation is different to destruction in that rather than ceasing to exist, as the object (or person) is decreated they continue to exist, but pass into the realm of the uncreated.93

The palimpsest has also been employed as a narrative feature of double voicedness, allowing layers of story to recede into one another.94 This narrative form attunes the receiver of the story to how the story is told rather than what is being said, thus revealing a depth of meaning beyond the surface narrative.95 By employing this procedure in the practice of making paintings, I hope to learn what the painting is saying from how the painting is made.

In the process of selecting images for this project I was looking for work that had a relationship of thematic integrity with the research question and the source painting Risk. Having learned from de Kooning’s words, I was also looking for images that I would miss. It was important to have unrestricted access to the selected works and so the images chosen for this study needed to remain in my possession and ownership. I systematically searched digital photographic records of older paintings to ensure that I was not tempted to choose paintings that were familiar or to choose paintings that were readily available in the studio because they were unresolved. From a list of twenty possible options I chose the following seven images.

94 Jacobs, Munro, and Adams, "Palimpsest: (Re)Reading Women's Lives." 328.
95 Ibid.
Figure 25. Libby Byrne, *Left Out in the Cold*, 2007. Oil on canvas, 1000 x 1650mm, Melbourne.
Figure 26. Libby Byrne, *Learning to Breathe*, 2001. Oil on canvas, 1800 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
Figure 27. Libby Byrne, *Letting Go*, 2004. Oil on canvas, 1370 x 710mm, Melbourne.
Figure 28. Libby Byrne, *Resistance*, 2001. Oil on canvas, 1800 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
Figure 29. Libby Byrne, *Desiring and Shedding Form*, 2005. Oil on canvas, 1500 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
Figure 30. Libby Byrne, *Belonging*, 2007. Oil on canvas, 900 x 2100mm, Melbourne.

Figure 31. Libby Byrne, *Shame and Fear*, 2004. Mixed media on canvas, 1100 x 1650mm, Melbourne.
I worked with one painting at a time, choosing themes that seemed most pertinent to my lived experience at the time of commencement. As I approached the older work I covered the painting with a layer of opaque gesso, thus enabling the work to be decreated (Figure 32).

Once the work had been sealed beneath the gesso, I essentially had a fresh canvas that contained the material presence of the painting that dwelt beneath the surface. As I prepared to work on this fresh canvas I posed a question of the original work, *What do you want me to do for you?* This question enabled me to be still, silent and to clear a space for this question to be the focus of my attention, which is the first step in Gendlin’s focusing technique. The silence was also the opportunity to surrender myself and the painting in contemplative prayer. I waited in silence until I became aware of a felt sense and then began a material response through the creation of a new painting. This stage was the equivalent of Gendlin’s phase, *finding a handle.*

In the process of discovering a material response to the question, *What do you want me to do for you?* I was open to hearing a range of different answers and so I was open to the

Figure 32. Libby Byrne, *Desiring and Shedding Form (Palimpsest in progress),* 2012. Mixed media on canvas, 1500 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
use of a range of new mediums rather than restricting myself to the original medium of oil paint. There were times when I was led by the markings that resided within the canvas and allowed the image beneath to direct the new image. There were other times when I chose to intentionally contradict these marks and there were times when I decided to re-size the original image, cutting it down into a different or smaller shape or even tearing it into strips (Figure 33). On one occasion I made a decision to cut the canvas down to a smaller size before painting over the old work. In doing so the task became more physically manageable and focused on the most salient elements of the image (Figure 34).

There were times when I used materials that were contraindicated and this resulted in the development of paintings that were physically unstable. For the purposes of exploring the phenomenology of illness, this was particularly helpful. I developed a habit of taking time and making sense of each work before moving onto the next painting. The seven palimpsests were created over two years, from 2012 until 2014.
THE HEALING OF BARTIMAEUS

Having been covered with gesso, the images were no longer able to be seen. They were effectively plunged into an experience akin to blindness. The four canonical Gospels contain six stories of Jesus healing one or more blind people (Matthew 9:27-31; Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 8:22-26; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43; John 9:1-7). Having considered all of these stories, the phenomenological intention of the inquiry seemed to be reflected in the interaction between Jesus and Bartimaeus.

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’ And they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ The blind man said to him, ‘My teacher, let me see again.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way (Mark 10:46-52).

In response to Jesus’ question, “What do you want me to do for you?”, Bartimaeus considers his deepest need and is in touch with the vulnerability of his desire – “I want to see again”. Working with the question Jesus posed enabled me to clear a space for a new image and become aware of my felt sense of the story as well as my own vulnerability and desire in relationship with the canvas. Although I began each new image with the same open question, the answer was uniquely different for each painting, just as it would be for anyone other than Bartimaeus who might hear and respond to Jesus’ invitation to consider and name their deepest desire. There is a rhythm of question and response inherent in the story of the Healing of Bartimaeus. The rhythm of asking this question and then making a response was a research procedure that provoked an embodied experience of making and seeing this healing story and offered an opportunity to encounter the aesthetic realm of religious apprehension. The stimulant of such an open question is essential for the artist to see a range of aesthetic responses and theological possibilities.

PHASE TWO: THE EXHIBITION

Two exhibitions were scheduled at Chapel on Station Gallery in Box Hill, Victoria, Australia. The first of these exhibitions took place in 2014, in the midst of the studio practice

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component of the research and the other at the completion of this phase in 2015. The aim of
the first exhibition was to be open to hearing what others may be able to see and say about
the artist’s initial visual responses to the research question. Given that the title of a visual
artwork offers a direction in which the artist hopes to lead the viewer, the paintings were
displayed in this first exhibition as Untitled. Viewers were invited to contribute possible titles
for the individual works and for the exhibition as a whole. These contributions were
voluntary and anonymous. This procedure was an attempt to equalise the balance of power
between the artist and viewer with regard to the interpretation of the images.

THE VIEWING PUBLIC

A public invitation was issued across Theological, Art Therapy and Fine Art networks
in Melbourne, Australia to see and respond to the exhibition Untitled. People who visited the
exhibition and contributed an anonymous and confidential response were considered to be
participants in this inquiry.

A WRITTEN RESPONSE

Despite the fact that this is an art-based inquiry, the structure of a theological inquiry
requires a written exegesis. Whilst participants were invited into an aesthetic experience with
the artwork they were also invited to participate in the research by making a written response.
Information was offered to participants who saw the exhibition in the gallery as a frame of
reference for the purpose of the study (see Appendix A). Participants who were enrolled in
the class, The Arts and Theological Reflection at Whitley College made a class excursion to
see the exhibition in 2014. These participants saw the work whilst the gallery was closed to
the public and were offered a limited opportunity to respond not only with a written response
but with materials to make an art-based response. They were then offered the opportunity to
have the work photographed and included anonymously as part of the data collected.

PHASE THREE: WRITING ABOUT THE WORK

Recorded indwellings of the source painting revealed that my initial inquiry into the
research question had uncovered an existential struggle with questions of identity - most
particularly, Who am I now that I am ill? Initially I could see that I was engaging with the
studio practice both as a patient and as a working artist. Whilst my experiential knowing as a
patient had provoked the need for the inquiry, the patient was posing questions primarily as a
viewer within the reflexive studio practice. My identity and capacity as a working artist enabled me to do something with materials in response to the question and thus uncover a presentational form of knowing about the experience of being a patient. The artwork itself was the third participant who seemed to have agency in the creative process. The artwork was able to mediate exchanges between my experience as a patient and my experience as a working artist. The artwork provoked questions that led to new propositional knowing and deeper theological awareness. It was clear that in writing an exegesis of this work I would need to offer a particular voice for each of these participants in the inquiry.

**THE BUNYIP AND THE BILLABONG**

In the early stages of indwelling the source painting I was aware of a portion of the image that reminded me of a billabong (Figure 35). The recognition of a billabong in the source painting facilitated the discovery of presentational knowing my experience as a patient. A billabong is formed when the river swells and changes course, leaving a detached pool of water where the river once flowed. In the same way, illness can unexpectedly change the course of life and the experience of being a patient can result in a sense of detachment from mainstream participation in living. Having discovered this presentational knowledge within the phenomenology of the aesthetic experience of the painting, I developed a research procedure that enabled me to explore and write about the hermeneutical significance of the experience of painting in and through illness.

I began to wonder what I knew about billabongs. Aside from the obvious Australian reference in a popular song about the swagman who lived and died by a billabong, I was reminded of a story from my childhood, *The Bunyip of Berkeley’s Creek*. The bunyip is a mythological creature in Australian folklore said to lurk in swamps, billabongs, creeks, riverbeds and waterholes. The protagonist in the story that I remembered was a bunyip who heaved himself out of the black mud at the bottom of Berkeley’s Creek and then embarked on a journey to discover who he really was.

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97 Heron and Reason, "A Participatory Inquiry Paradigm." 281.
This bunyip was consumed by the question of his own existence asking anyone he could find, “What am I?” As the story unfolds the bunyip encounters many different creatures who each offer pieces of information that have a place within the larger puzzle. The bunyip gathers all of this information and continues to hope that he will eventually be able to make sense of these things and to find a place where he belongs (Figure 36). He is ultimately able to make sense of the question when, having given up on finding a place of belonging with these other creatures, he finally meets another who is just like him.

The bunyip’s quest and his method of reflexive inquiry have a strong resonance with my own research question and method of inquiry. Further reading about the significance of the bunyip in Australian folklore revealed that this mythological creature may have had its origins in natural history. In 1852 escaped convict William Buckley reported seeing bunyips in the Barwon River near Modewarre, Victoria. Then in 1933, Charles Fenner wrote a text entitled, Bunyips and Billabongs. Acknowledged sightings across different territories in Australia led Fenner to consider the possibility that such bunyips may have actually been fur seals that had swum upstream and were trapped in the upper reaches of a river (Figure 37). My grandfather Stuart Harris was working as a Victorian primary teacher when Fenner’s work was originally published. In the 1960s and 70s my grandfather had taught me to wonder about many things including the existence of the bunyip. This capacity for wonder was significant in my family’s cultural knowledge about bunyips and billabongs.

99 Ibid.
My commitment to reflexive practice inspired me to follow this line of inquiry and in doing so I discovered a possible linguistic link between the use of the word bunyip and the name of Bunjil. Bunjil is known as a Great Man in Aboriginal mythology, responsible for all of creation. Bunjil visits his creation in the form of an eagle to offer sustaining hope and help in fiercesome times. In early 2012 I recovered from a hospitalisation by camping with friends at Halls Gap in the Grampians, Western Victoria. It was then that I discovered that the only known painting of Bunjil, the creator, is in the Grampians National Park (Figure 38). Despite having visited this place many times throughout my life, this was a new discovery for me and the timing of the discovery was exquisite. I translated my experience into a drawing whilst on site (Figure 39) and the image accompanied me in the studio throughout this inquiry.
The work of integrating different layers of knowing and articulating new theological awareness in this research project was a task that required the integration of my identity as patient and artist. Given that writing about this phase in the inquiry would require me to draw upon personal, cultural, aesthetic and spiritual knowing, the integration of the patient and artist will be articulated in a theological voice that will be known as *The Bunyip*.

The following diagram illustrates the roles, responsibilities and rhythm of participation that enable an artist researcher to employ reflexive studio practice in the service of *théologie totale*.

![Diagram 3. Libby Byrne, Employing Reflexive Studio Practice in Théologie Totale, 2015.](image)

In this diagram it is evident that the inquiry is provoked by the patient who questions the experience of illness, treatment and a desire for healing. In response to these questions, art is present, stimulating and holding open an experience of wonder. The experience of wonder is inherently ambivalent and whilst it may not offer clear answers to the questions that have been posed by the patient, the experience of wonder is able to hold open the complexities of
the emotional, psychological and spiritual experience. Wonder therefore offers the milieu in which the patient can learn to breathe through whatever is there, in order to be simply present in the ambivalence and complexity of living with illness and disease.

Within this methodology art functions to hold open the experience of wonder for the patient, thereby enabling the artist, who is capable of creating and working with materials in the midst of wonder, to become an active participant in the research project. The movement between knowing and un-knowing that is inherent in contemplative practice is a central experience for both the patient and the artist and ultimately enables the receipt, integration and articulation of new knowing in light of the original question. The integration of the experiences of the patient, the art and the artist is articulated in this study by the Bunyip.

Given that the task of art is always unfinished, this phase of integration is likely to return the artist researcher to a further or deeper experience as a patient and so the process of inquiry is able to begin again. In the following chapter I will articulate in detail the foundation work of indwelling the source painting and then describe the process of making and exhibiting the palimpsests.
CHAPTER 3: FOUNDATION WORK

Be independent and active and search for that which makes you well.¹

The foundation work for this project began after I saw The Well hanging in St Stephen’s Belmont, Geelong, Victoria (Figure 40). It was in the church in Belmont that this art was able to really determine its own value.² Whilst seeing the painting in this place enabled me to make sense of some of my personal history, the visual resonances between the painting and the place also created a shift in my sense of ownership over the work. After the conclusion of the exhibition I left the painting with the congregation of St Stephen’s for twelve months giving them the opportunity to really see the work over time and presenting me with an opportunity to come home to my own story in a material sense. The presence of

the painting in St Stephen’s therefore evoked an opportunity for reconciliation *within* me and *between* me and the congregation.

In order to try and *see* what changes may have been effected in my emotional and spiritual experience I decided to make a second version of *The Well* on the same sized canvas. The first thing I noticed as I stood before the blank canvas was the height (2100 x 900mm) and I realised that the original work had been painted before I was living with MS. Working with this height was no longer possible without provoking physical pain so for pragmatic reasons, I decided to rotate the canvas into a landscape format. The surprising expanse of blank space that I discovered in this one simple movement took my breath away (Figure 41).

![Figure 41. Libby Byrne, *An Expanse of Blank Space*, 2012. (Photograph taken in Montmorency).](image)

This was an opportunity to acknowledge and embrace the new limitations of my physical capacities and in doing so to make room for a new experience of my bodily awareness before the canvas. I began as I often do, with layers of white acrylic paint raked together with various painting tools, randomly covering the surface and leaving marks and a
textured surface behind. Rather than stretching from the heights to the depths of the canvas, I found that I was moving from the left to the right and back again. There were several gentle steps that I needed to take in order to move along the width of the canvas and with each step I was invited into a new sense of the painting.

Over the next six months, I continued to work with this painting, building layers of colour and texture from disparate materials that seemed to be seeking healing (Figure 42). I built the surface with layers of bone white acrylic paint, deep blue ink and dark brown Weather Touch exterior paint (Figure 43). Over several months I routinely alternated between layers of paint and olive oil. As I worked I realised that I was applying the oil with the sensibility of a sacred anointing. Anointing the emergent image seemed to be nourishing my desire for healing.
Throughout this time, I was always aware of my ever changing physical experience with MS. Research conducted by Olsson, Lexell & Söderberg revealed that living with MS can involve a struggle to find the power to live life with dignity, within a body that is no longer reliable or predictable. They identified the feeling of solitude as essential to the experience of dignity saying, “People need to have a safe space where they can find themselves in a most private and sacred way, where no-one else should enter.” They also emphasised the need for a means to act towards one’s own body to unify and consolidate a sense of personal capacity. In light of this research finding it would be reasonable to suggest that working on this painting in the solitude of the studio enabled me to find the dignity and strength to stay with the unpredictable rhythm of MS and work toward reconciling seemingly disparate experiences of illness and health. This painting is also what Elisabeth Moltmann might describe as an independent and active response in my search for what might make me well. Within the framework of a theological inquiry, this painting contains my experiential knowledge about living with illness and my desire for healing (Figure 44).

The finished painting is a composition formed from the residue of the material resistance and recalcitrance that I had encountered over several months in the solitude of the studio. As such, there were now some particular concerns with regard to the construction and stability of the painting. As the maker of the work this was a source of some anxiety, but as a viewer of the work, I was able to apprehend the instability on the canvas before me and simply consider the new questions that this painting provoked. I therefore designed a pattern

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3 Olsson, Lexell, and Söderberg, "Meaning of Women’s Experiences of Living with Multiple Sclerosis." 425.
4 Ibid. 427.
of writing that enabled me to record the presence and potency of my experience as the maker and the viewer at different stages in the creative process. My experience as the patient has been identified as being aligned with the role of questioning and viewing rather than making the work, whilst my experience as the artist speaks of my physical engagement with the materials and with the artwork.

The framework proposed in Chapter 2 acknowledges the particular experiences of making and then being with and seeing the work. This framework was employed as a means of recording the different voices of these experiences in the process of indwelling the work.

The experiences and questions that emerged within the practice of making and indwelling the source painting, *Risk*, are recorded in this pattern of dialogue on the following pages.
A RECORD OF THE DIALOGUE

The artist withdraws into himself to make space for his creation.\(^6\)

There are eight themes that emerged from time spent making, being with and seeing this painting. They are as follows:

1. Learning to Breathe
2. Containing Canvas
3. Letting Go
4. Desiring and Shedding Form
5. Risk
6. The Wound of Wonder
7. Resistance
8. Belonging

The following dialogue has been presented with the intention of demonstrating how these themes were identified. The images that are included in this dialogue are photographs illustrating the development of the source painting, *Risk*, unless otherwise specified. In order to facilitate a smooth reading of the dialogue, images that are details from the painting *Risk* have not been individually referenced. The reader is encouraged to scan across the breadth of the columns of text whilst following the dialogue down the page in order to appreciate the rhythm of action and contemplation inherent in the making and receiving of this work.

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3.1. Learning to Breathe

The Patient Speaks

Having been diagnosed with an incurable and degenerative illness, I have a deep desire to pray for healing. I read in Mark that as he passed by Christ saw the blind man Bartimaeus, stopped, called him over and asked him, “What do you want me do to for you?” Bartimaeus answered this question swiftly and surely. He knew exactly what it was that he wanted. I take a deep breath and wonder what I could possibly say if he was to ask me the same question. I am dizzy in a muddy mixture of desire. I have no idea how I would answer this question. In my un-knowing I turn to art.

The Art Speaks

The mud is dizzy with movement and uncertainty.

And yet the marks he leaves behind are clear, maybe even clean.


The Artist Speaks

As I consider this painting by Antoni Tapies,

All I want is to reach out and touch this painting, to trace my fingers in the marks left by his fingers.

They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Can you see anything?” (Mark 8:22-23)

In response to these marks and to this scripture, I paint.
The Art Speaks

A sail billows in the wind above the water still and fresh.

Hear only the sound of the wind.

A fresh breeze on a cool day.

Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it (Gen 28:16).

The Artist Speaks

This landscape seems so familiar and yet strange at the same time. It has emerged from marks of frustration and difficulty and the desire for something fresh.

In the lower left hand corner of the work, I can see wings, soft and fragile.

What do you want me to do for you?

I want to give a name to these grey/green marks.

They seem to billow like a spinnaker, filled with the breath of God.

I find myself caught up in wonder;

I am open to the complexity of astonishment and anticipation.

I am learning to breathe through all of this.

“Perhaps dwelling in wonder is merely a matter of learning to breathe.” ¹

¹ Rubenstein, Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe. 196.
So what is it that I really want?

I want these wings.

I want the freedom to feel the fresh breeze and the cool still water.

I want to learn to breathe through the fear and also to rage and cry out for help.

I want to be astonished by hope and healing.

But taking the risk to name my deepest need also reveals my deepest fears.

What would I say if Christ asked me,

*What is it that you want me to do for you?*

I just want to feel sure of my next breath.
Rubenstein suggests that “Perhaps dwelling in wonder is merely a matter of learning to breathe.” The soul who is learning to breathe is dwelling in the midst of their deepest need. In this sense, wonder is revealed as the deepest need of the soul. When I was born I suffered *Meconium Aspiration Syndrome*, having inhaled contaminated amniotic fluid at some stage in the 48 hours that my mother laboured. After I was born, my mother was unconscious for 24 hours. She spent the day trying to survive kidney seizures whilst my first challenge was to find a way to breathe. To breathe deeply has always been a challenge and the experience has sometimes provoked fear and anxiety. As I faced that first magnetic resonance imaging scan (MRI) and the diagnosis that followed, I struggled to breathe. My breath was short and shallow in an expanding pool of fear.

What is it that you want me to do for you?

To think that Jesus would ask me this question fills me with wonder and yet as I consider asking for what I really want, I feel a sense of shame. How can I name what I really want when what I want seems so much?

I can hear Leonard Cohen wrestling with the same dilemma,

I saw a beggar leaning on his wooden crutch, He said to me,  
“You must not ask for so much”

And a pretty woman leaning in her darkened door, she cried out to me,  
“Hey why not ask for more.”

Why not indeed?

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2 Ibid. 196.
The Patient Speaks

As I was diagnosed with MS, I learned that the disease is both incurable and degenerative. Within two months the neurologist had told me that the path to deterioration had accelerated and I had an aggressive form of the illness. I needed to make a decision: to allow the MS to progress unchecked or to begin an equally aggressive course of drug therapy. I didn’t want to do either. How could this be happening? It was inexplicable and I was scared and fragile. I just wanted the nightmare to be over. As I learn to live with MS and the treatment that has been prescribed, I am aware that I am also learning how to breathe again in the presence of raw and unexpected emotions. I am learning to breathe in the presence of this illness.

The Art Speaks

I am resilient and responsive to the movements of the maker.

The Artist Speaks

I am absorbed by the marks that I make as the brush strokes rhythmically move across the canvas, in time with my breath, my energy, my physical presence with the work.

When I am making art
I am learning to breathe through fear.

I am learning to pay attention to the life that I find within the materials.
**The Art Speaks**

I am containing her fear and panic,

Transforming the pigment and oil into possibility and wonder.

Absorbing each breath and returning life,

**The Artist Speaks**

I am breathing in faith,

Taking up and letting go.

Letting go.

There are layers of deep blue ink, olive oil and dark brown weather tough acrylic. The canvas latches onto traces of pigment as the medium slowly soaks into the fibre and the underpainting.

Beneath the weight of this darkness the vulnerability of wonder lives, safely contained within the materials.
The Art Speaks

Just relax,
No need to try so hard.

The Artist Speaks

GASP!

Suddenly I am compelled by a weight of responsibility to complete this work.

I wonder what would happen to the painting if I simply let go?

I am unable to step away from the canvas.

But somehow in staying with this work, I feel myself letting go.
The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ‘Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.’ So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him (Jeremiah 18:1-4).

What is the nature of the relationship between the potter and the clay? Is it one of power over another or is it mutual and reciprocal? We may assume that the clay contained all that the potter needed to make a vessel that seemed good to him. How did the potter know that the first pot had been spoiled and then decide that the second vessel seemed good? Is MS a mistake that has spoiled me and if so is there still the possibility that I can be formed into a shape that might seem good to the potter?

In making this painting the artist chose to submerge the image that began to form in layers of darkness. She lost sight of the need to finish the work as it was such a wonderful container for the unformed materials. There was no need to resolve a finished image – rather there was a deep desire just to keep playing with the materials, to be found within the potter’s hand. That which is being created remains unable to be seen. The power of the canvas to contain unrealised desire fuels my tolerance for the unfinished work of being. I know that this is faith.

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

(Hebrews 11:1).
3.3. Letting Go

The Patient Speaks

My bodily experience of living with MS is characterised by instability and fragility. I doubt my physical capacity for endurance. The loss and then subsequent regaining of a sense of control is the new rhythm of my life. The version of me that was young and healthy has gone and she will not return. I need to find a way to let her go. Once I acknowledge the need to mourn her loss I find myself in the predictable territory of anger and blame. I realise that I am living with a lurking doubt about my capacity to be well. Maybe there was something I could have done to prevent this illness. The deepest struggle with my health is the dark and lurking sense of failure that permeates my lived experience of illness. With every trip into the infusion room at the local public hospital I feel myself letting go of my life as I have known it and sinking into a new and unwelcome version of my normal life. The illness is an invitation to learn to be with what is unfolding here and now. The illness is an invitation to empty myself of myself and be present to that which is still waiting to become within me.

The Art Speaks

See these uncontained moments of gravity and grace.

The Artist Speaks

In the first moments of creation, thick and fluid paint hangs on the raw canvas and settles into the fibres, simultaneously becoming and being. I am applying the paint in an act of love, but it is not long before I risk disturbing the moment with a stream of cold pressed olive oil, released from the top of the canvas.
**The Art Speaks**

Uncontained rivulets of oil flow through the resolute acrylic.

They eventually drip off the surface and onto the floor.

There are flaws that emerge as olive oil drips and flows from the canvas to the floor.

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**The Artist Speaks**

Layers that have been cherished as they tenderly emerged, now lie beneath the surface unable to be seen, and yet still present.

I am hunting for form even as the image is shedding the same.

The image is receding into the realm of the uncreated.

It happens so quickly.
The Art Speaks

Breathe out.

Breathe out.

Breathe out.

Remember it is a gift
and let it go.

The Artist Speaks

I listen for the rhythm and pulse within the painting, but I am scared.

Breathe in.

Breathe in.

Breathe in.

Breathe in.

Breathe out.

Rest on that.
The Bunyip Speaks

Whilst the artist works with the image she can imagine being in control, and yet the reality is that with each mark there are fewer choices that can still be made. Rowan Williams says that, “The artist first listens and looks for the pulse or rhythm that is not evident; but she cannot do any sort of job if she refuses to work with such pulses.” Working with the pulse of an unformed image requires humility.

As the artist struggles to let go of this image she is aware of an experience of relationship with the canvas. As the maker she has the power to cling tightly to what she likes and reject that which offends her. Does she have the power to let go of her own desire and respond to the rhythm that she finds within the work? What might happen if she surrenders her will to the rhythm and pulse of the image? The image is being formed in a confluence of materials and desire. What will ultimately be seen is being made as the materials are shaped by wells of desire.

“By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.”

(Hebrews 11:3).

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4 Williams, Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love. 27.
The Patient Speaks

Every four weeks I sit in an infusion room amongst people who use a drug known as Tysabri as the bedrock of their medical treatment. My neurologist hopes that tysabri will stop the disease from progressing, whilst acknowledging that with each infusion there is a risk that tysabri will spark an irreversible and fatal brain infection in me. His assessment is that the benefits of the drug outweigh the risks. Living with the risk creates a battle ground of opposing forces within my body. I have strong emotional responses to the people with whom I share the infusion room. Sometimes despair seems to mingle with suffering. The experience of fear has been a recurrent theme in my life and indeed within the trajectory of the illness. I question whether the medical treatment I have agreed to undertake is a response that is based in faith or fear. Are we responding in faith that these drugs may help, or from the fear of what might happen if we do nothing? The neurologist weighs up the risks and the benefits and then recommends treatment on the basis of a statistical analysis. I see the tracks of our hope, even as they are stained with our fear. Surely God is in this place, but there are times when we just don’t know it.

The Art Speaks

The form is emerging from behind a veil

Surely the Lord is in the place, and I did not know it. (Gen 28:16)

The Artist Speaks

I dribbled layers of olive oil over the stone.

The image that was first shaped with charcoal has now been cleansed, anointed.

It weathers the canvas.
The Art Speaks

So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. (Gen 28:18).

The Artist Speaks

Finally, the comfort and reassurance of a predictable shape.

Dwelling in the lower left of this painting, a stone appears.

This is a shape I know well and I am glad to see it here and now.

This form is reliable, resilient and trustworthy.

The stone is smooth and cold,

It anchors me in the midst of chaos.

The olive oil mingles with white acrylic paint anointing the shape and leaving a track.

I cherish the tracks and wonder if the painting is weeping.
The Bunyip Speaks

Rowan Williams has observed, “The artist may be a ‘hunter of forms’, but the life that the artist engages with is a shedder of forms, dispossessing itself of this or that shape so as to be understood and renamed.”

The artist and the patient are seeking a form that is familiar, a shape that reverberates faith and offers a moment of recognition in the midst of a landscape where everything seems strange. As a form begins to take shape on the blank canvas, the life within the emergent image resists the temptation to be shaped as comfortable and predictable. It retreats into the realm of the uncreated and regroups, waiting for the moment to reappear and be truly seen and understood. Attending to the rhythm of this dance becomes an imperative for the artist. To find and encounter one who is willing to dispossess themselves in order to be seen requires humility and patience from the hunter-artist. The temptation of desire piques the artist’s curiosity and affirms the need to pursue all that might still be possible for this once recognisable form.

As the stone emerges in the painting Risk, the known form wrestles with the surrounding blank space. Having emerged as distinctly different from the background, the form ultimately merges with the surrounding landscape and finds its identity in the way it inhabits this place. None of this is the artist’s making. Rather it is a gift born of desire and persistence, bestowed upon the artist, and received in a form that desires to be so much more than the artist could ever imagine. In this way the hunter-artist finds that she is in service of the form in its own progress towards being understood.

Figure 49. Libby Byrne, Desiring Form (Detail in the painting Risk), 2012. Mixed media on canvas, Melbourne.

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5 Ibid. 153.
3.5. Risk

The Patient Speaks

It is in the infusion room that I am most deeply aware of the wound that MS has created in my everyday experience. The needle and the IV drip in my forearm create a wound through which the medicine can flow – changing the course and progression of my illness and, in turn, my life. My veins are difficult to find and they become more difficult with each infusion. Sometimes the nurse misses the mark as he tries to insert the cannula and I wince with pain. He hates this experience almost as much as I do and I assure him that it is fine, I am alright – let’s just try again. It is in this fragile moment that the most solid of my thoughts and intellectual constructions lie open and vulnerable and I feel the full force of all that is fantastic, amazing, dreadful and threatening. I am challenged and changed by the experience each time I visit. The infusion room, so full of tension, of stories, of fear and of hope is also overflowing with people who are being brave. Every now and then raw emotion breaks free and spills into the middle of the room and we all try to work out what to do with it.

The Art Speaks

A fine white line leads from the upper right hand corner into the water.

Wait a minute...there are two lines.

Did the first one miss the mark?

There is bare canvas, exposed as the underpainting flakes away.

The Artist Speaks
The Art Speaks

It is part of my practice to wound the paint or the canvas, not to do harm to my creation but to open up the opportunity for a new and unplanned thought to emerge.

The Artist Speaks

I am looking deeply into the wound in the canvas.

Specks of pigment hover around the surface.

I become aware that this water is murky, dark and stagnant.

I am ready to leave the surface.

I am drawn by that which lies beneath.

Directly beneath this place, the water seems clear and fresh, icy, glacial.
The Bunyip Speaks

The risk I take in being open to this treatment can be documented with statistics and empirical evidence. Even so, the statistical evidence does not do justice to the lived experience of risk. The drug itself is laced with the anxiety of death, but the illness also carries the threat of nonbeing. In the process of normalising this new experience of illness, I find myself longing for the version of myself who was well. As I spend time with others who share this diagnosis and experience of illness, I wonder if I have become like them. In the absence of Libby who was well, have I become Libby who is ill? What am I risking if I find myself identifying as one who is ill, rather than one who is whole and healed? The risk is bare, sheer and brazen. It is the naked risk of seeing what is now real, what is waiting to be faced and cannot be avoided through any elaborate words of explanation. This is my reality.

“Who could imagine it could be so hard to remain a presence in your own life?”

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3.6. The Wound of Wonder

The Patient Speaks

Each time I visit this room, I take a blue cashmere blanket and I hide beneath it, longing to be alone in this crowded room and safe in the strength of heaven. As a patient who is in the middle of treatment, how can I pick up and contain another person’s despair when I am so very tired of trying to contain my own? And yet as a human being, how can I not offer the gift of containment as the other sits alongside me? Beneath the blanket all is right with the world. I wonder if I can just stay under the blanket forever and ignore the others who share this place with me. Who is the person hiding under a blue blanket and pretending she is safe? One day a loud and disabled woman heaves herself into the room announcing that, “It’s good to be in a room of fellow sufferers.” I slide deeper under the blanket – determined not to be one of them.

The Art Speaks

This wound in the canvas is a mark from beyond your imagining.

It is the mark of grace. It needs your care.

The Artist Speaks

An unexpected wellspring of life appears in the midst of this landscape evident in the gash that was formed in the underpainting as it mixed with too much olive oil. This naturally occurring well takes the form of an open wound in the earth, evident in the very flat dark green colour of the naked canvas.

This well reveals itself as an unexpected blessing and is a form that I am determined to preserve.
The Art Speaks

The Artist Speaks

As I rested in hospital for three days I took care of my wounds by attending to a digital reproduction of this painting.

The image helped me to stay present to the wonder that had interrupted my world.

As I sat with this image and the experience of being a patient, I recognised a billabong in the top right hand corner of the painting.

This was a place where I had permission to be still. There was no need to try and keep pace with the main river.

It was passing me by.

Take the risk to just listen and wait.
The Bunyip Speaks

For me the billabong is disquieting, a menacing presence with the potential for death and destruction. It is a place where light and darkness meet and become one. I remember a story about a Bunyip who emerged from the black mud at the bottom of Berkeley’s Creek and then embarked on a journey to discover who he really was. This Bunyip was consumed by the question of his own existence. He feared that he may be alone in the world but desperately hoped that there might be another like him, who would find him not only acceptable but even a desirable companion.

As I returned home from hospital, I realised that the billabong has presented itself to me at a time when the wound of wonder was distinctly open. Resuming the rhythm of my life once more, I heard the all too familiar refrain inside my head, Who am I (now that I am ill)? Am I like the others who sit in the infusion room, battling and suffering with this disease? If not – who else might I be? This is not a medical question; it is a theological question.

Rubenstein declares that wonder has the function of being a wound in the experience of the everyday. The wound she speaks of takes the form of an interruption to the everyday experience that demands our attention. Illness creates such a wound. John O’Donohue claims that it is the work of the artist to stay with the wounds that interrupt our everyday experience, returning time and again in the hope of excavating something new. Could it be that in spending time in the darkness of the wound of wonder, there is healing?

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7 Wagner, The Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek.
8 Rubenstein, Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe. 10.
3.7. **Resistance**

*The Patient Speaks*

In the infusion room, I am often confronted by people whose illness has progressed further than my own. The traces of their struggle manifest themselves in the way that they inhabit their bodies and the energy that they bring with them into the room. There is often a sense of desperation as people discuss alternative treatments, in the hope of stumbling upon a cure. Sometimes I meet people who seem to be invested in continuing to live with the experience of illness and I wonder how and when that happens. I judge them. I pity them. I resist becoming one of them. Sometimes I wonder if this treatment is helping me to preserve what remains of my health or serving to remind me that I am ill. Every four weeks I receive a letter from the hospital confirming the date of my next infusion. I am never glad to see this letter and most of the time I don’t even open it. Sometimes I destroy it. My resistance to the treatment is confusing – particularly when those around me seem so grateful to have found this elixir. Maybe I choose resistance because it is a choice that I can make.

*The Art Speaks*  

The canvas is caked with layers of paint and olive oil. As they have been applied these substances resist one another.

They are not meant to sit together.

They are incompatible and they are reactive.

But nothing new will emerge without the gift of resistance.

*The Artist Speaks*
The pathway of the pigment is exquisitely inexact. The materials have a life that is beyond my control. As the fragments of the paint dry, they take on the quality of a relic and they become precious to me.

The oil causes the acrylic paint to recoil on itself and yet gravity forces it downward on the canvas.

Ink runs quickly and freely through this landscape leaving traces of desire and the struggle with the immutable forces of nature. The relics of pigment require careful attention to details in order to preserve their existence.
The Bunyip Speaks

When I received a diagnosis I also received an unwritten and unspoken invitation to join a club of people who share the diagnosis with me. The diagnosis may be the single thing that we have in common with one another, and yet its resounding power has the potential to draw us into a new sense of self – a new identity. The only thing that I can do is to embrace my resistance. It is the artist who knows and can show me how.
3.8. Belonging

The Patient Speaks

When I was first diagnosed I lay in hospital receiving daily infusions of steroids, somehow expecting that this treatment would return my health to normal. Despite the infusions on day three I was significantly worse in some regards and was explaining this to the nurse. I could not understand why the existing symptoms were not better or indeed why new symptoms were occurring. I asked a nurse to explain this to me. She stood next to me listening to my confusion and then said in a very measured way, “You have MS and we can’t do anything to stop it.” It was at that moment that I first became aware of an experience of separateness. You have this and we can’t stop it. The sense of isolation within the hospital was profound. I realised that I no longer belong with we who are well. I have no idea how I can belong as one who is ill, when there is such a deep sense of separateness. The hospital is a bubble in which a very particular form of living takes place – a cacophony of life and loss, chaos and order, beginnings and endings. I used to work in a hospital. I was a staff member who was well. What does it mean to now be a patient who is not well? How can I belong?

The Art Speaks

“I am William Buelow Gould & I mean to paint for you as best I can, which is but poorly, which is but a rude man’s art, the sound of water on stone, the fool’s dream of the hard giving way to the soft, & I hope you will come to see reflected in my translucent watercolours not patches of the white cartridge paper beneath, but the very opacity of the souls themselves.”

The Artist Speaks

The colours of kelp and rust abound.

The Art Speaks

Fluid organic colours and textures, acknowledge the possibility of aging well. High tide waxes and wanes with the pull of the moon, in and out and in again.

I am constantly making decisions. Each mark is a decision, an investment, an expression of hope.

Inspired by William Buelow Gould, I am open to being surprised by the opacity of my own soul.

I am open to consider the form that might lie beneath. Consider that which is being created even in the midst of loss.

I am breathing with the rhythm of the tides. Sometimes my breath is shallow. Other times it is deeper.

But it is always enough.

The Artist Speaks

{Artwork Image}
The Art Speaks

It is finished.

The Bunyip Speaks

Caretake this moment.
Immerse yourself in its particulars.
Respond to this person, this challenge, this deed.
Quit evasions.
Stop giving yourself needless trouble.
It is time to really live; to fully inhabit the situation you happen to be in now.

(Epicteutus)
The following chapter explains how the themes that have emerged as the Patient, the Artist and the Bunyip have been making, being with and seeing the source painting, *Risk*, informed the development of a series of palimpsests exploring the question of healing.
CHAPTER 4: MAKING THE PALIMPSESTS

Something continues to call for art, something in the experience of those who make it and something in the experience of those who seek to apprehend it.¹

Is it possible to learn about healing and transformation through the practice of making, being with and seeing art? The themes that emerged from the source painting and required further exploration in the pursuit of this research question were as follows:

1. Learning to Breathe
2. A Containing Canvas
3. Letting Go
4. Desiring and Shedding Form
5. Risk
6. The Wound of Wonder
7. Resistance
8. Belonging

In order to extend the boundaries of my previous capacity to think about these themes I created a series of palimpsests. This work took place from 2012 -2014. Initially I attempted to work with one theme on one piece at a time. As I stored works that seemed finished in the studio, they would often continue to catch my attention whilst I worked on the other pieces (Figure 50).

Figure 50. Libby Byrne, In the Studio, 2014. (Photograph taken in Montmorency).

¹ Stewart, The Open Studio: Essays on Art and Aesthetics. 17.
When a particular work seemed to be insistently calling for further attention, I was willing to look once more at the work and reconsider my response to the question, *What do you want me to do for you?* This process often meant that I would return to the work that I thought had been finished and further develop the earlier palimpsest in light of what I had learned or seen in more recent work. This process was particularly important once I had decided to engage *rust* as a medium. The rust changed over time in response to the climatic conditions in the studio and I continued to work with the rusting surfaces to find accurate reflections of my changing experiences of illness and health (Figure 51).

Each piece had a place in the whole body of work and the body of work was not completed until each individual piece had found its place within the whole. It was therefore not possible to finish any individual piece until I had worked through all of the identified themes. By working in this way I was drawing a body of work together in the cyclical way that Heidegger’s hermeneutical circle functions. The following pages explain and illustrate the material development of each of the palimpsestes in the studio.
4.1. Learning to Breathe

*Help me!* This painting from 2001 was large and it haunted me. It had lived in my shed for years – without daylight or air. It needed to learn to breathe. As I spent time with *Help me!* I found that one corner of the painting had rotted (Figure 52). I was relieved. The work was too big and overwhelming now.

*Figure 52. Libby Byrne, *Help me!* 2003. Mixed media on canvas, 1800 x 1200mm, Melbourne.*
Knowing it was rotten meant that I could re-stretch the canvas and cut it down in size. Once the original painting was no longer visible, I posed Jesus’ question for Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mark 10:51). The question was a harbinger of the further development of the painting. As I worked with the question I recognised the power I had to bring healing to the unseen image. As I worked I was no longer the patient who required healing, rather I was the artist who could bring about change. The shift in my sense of agency was significant.

In the original oil painting a stark white figure was trapped in a container that appeared to be rusting. Once this work had been reduced in size I became aware of a strong desire to rust the figure rather than the container. I chose Dulux Rust Effect paint to shape her and then literally let her rust. Moving in response to layers of lived experience, I applied a chemical solution to provoke the surface of the painting to begin the rusting, only to halt the process by layering another base coat directly over the rust. For several months I rhythmically applied base coats of paint over the already rusted canvas, only to reignite the chemical reaction that would once more instigate rusting. Each time I shifted the process I risked going too far in either direction. I was not able to settle or rest with any of the images that emerged, though there were many aha moments of insight and realisation along the way (Figure 53). I was frustrated with my inability to bring a sense of completion to the work.

Eventually it dawned on me that what was happening with the painting was somewhat similar to what was happening to me as the disease interacted with the prescribed treatment. The medication prescribed for me requires my regular attention to ensure that the condition does not flare up. There was something deeply familiar in the rhythm that I had found in allowing and then stopping the rust in the painting (Figure 54). I had found a useful metaphor. I worked with this painting over two years, and eventually discovered several open wounds in the figure. These wounds settled into place within the image and did not require fixing. I wondered if they offered a way for the painting beneath the gesso to breathe. Within these wounds and in the soft white veil intersecting with the darkness, the image continues to speak of desire. The image is somehow whole or even holy.
Figure 53. Libby Byrne, *Learning to Breathe (Palimpsest in progress)*, 2012. Mixed media on canvas, 1050 x 1050mm, Melbourne.
Figure 54. Libby Byrne, *Learning to Breathe*, 2014. Palimpsest, 1050 x 1050mm, Melbourne.
4.2. Containing Canvas

This work had contained my fear of being *left out in the cold* for many years (Figure 55). A figure cloaked in darkness reached out for the warmth and light of a seemingly sacred place which was very much beyond reach. As the work resided in the studio it functioned to remind me that I was right to be afraid of being left out. Painting over the piece with gesso was liberating but then it was difficult to know how to respond to the question, *What do you want me to do for you?* In the first instance the only answer I could find was the word *blue*. I worked with a meditative and prayerful rhythm finding just enough blue and allowing space for breath (Figure 56). Over time, I lost the sense of blue as I tried hard to find an image that would somehow release the difficulty that I knew lurked just beneath the surface. It was as though the stain of rejection and isolation was leaking through the peaceful blue. I tried turning the work from landscape to portrait format. Each time I found stillness and silence in the blue I was tempted to disrupt it with darker elements and strong marks. In the end I felt trapped in an irresolvable work (Figure 57).
Figure 56. Libby Byrne, *Containing Canvas (Palimpsest in progress)*, 2013. Mixed media on canvas, 1000 x 1650mm, Melbourne.
Figure 57. Libby Byrne, *Containing Canvas (Palimpsest in progress)*, 2014. Mixed media on canvas, 1000 x 1650mm, Melbourne.
In frustration, I finally tore the painting from the frame and into shreds. The pile of detritus on the floor evoked a deep sadness and memory of a work that had once had the potential to be beautiful, but was now gone. At first I was plagued by doubt and wondered if I had simply lacked patience with this idea. It was tempting to think about not including this piece in the final exhibition. The work seemed to undermine my research question which was to consider how making, being with and seeing art could help me learn about healing. This work had become nothing but a pile of detritus. Eventually I realised that the remnants of this work were the evidence of my continuing power as the maker of the work. The fragments therefore belonged at the heart of the exhibition, but to exhibit them would require humility and courage. I placed them safely in a cardboard box and thought about how to manage this for the next few months (Figure 58).

Figure 58. Libby Byrne, Containing Canvas, 2014. Palimpsest, Melbourne.
The figure in this original work is tentatively entering the water below and wondering what it would be like to really just let go (Figure 59). There is a hesitant commitment to hopefulness in the way she holds her body. Choosing to paint over this piece was about letting go of my old hopes and expectations. It seemed that I would never be able to let go, until I stopped romanticising about the possibility that was enshrined in this moment and discover what life might be like in the depths of the water that lay beneath.

Figure 59. Libby Byrne, *Letting Go* (Palimpsest in progress), 2012–2013. Mixed media on canvas, 1370 x 710mm, Melbourne.
Letting go of this image, however, proved to be more difficult than I had hoped. There was a continual rhythm of presence and absence in this work. The figure would recede into the realm of the decreated, only to return again in weeks to come. The blue beneath the original figure eventually became the blue that surrounded her, though only after it had traversed some murky depths of grey, green and white (Figure 60). The figure went through phases of being transparent, solid and almost indiscernible in the landscape. In the end the figure re-emerged and relaxed her stance. She seemed to be standing in a grotto and enjoying a refreshing shower of water from above rather than hanging from a ledge in space and wondering about the water that lay beneath (Figure 61). The following notes from my studio practice track my lived experience of this journey in and out of presence and absence.

There is no going back. “What do you want me to do for you?” I asked her five times and then I heard her say, “Remember me”. And then there was freedom. No pain in my body, just deep breaths, a sense of excitement and exhilaration. The movement up and down the canvas was at first highly controlled and graceful - reminiscent of the woman beneath. I even found myself wiping the brown back to find her.

I created her in oils and then I lost her in the chaos of ash brown and canvas, cloth, acrylic - and now I need to redeem her with water colour. I need to seek her and find her.

In the beginning she was like a porcelain doll – afraid of breaking. Now she is both flesh and life.

The freshness of her experience was lost.

I am angry and disappointed with myself.

I should have known better.

I have placed pressure on this woman as I have considered how she will be seen by others.
Once the figure has gone I am calm again.

Now that she is no longer visible I think that I feel safe enough from the judgment of others.

She can dwell beneath this abstract colour and no-one need know that she is there.

I pause for a moment and think of the love and the grace that God showers on me, creating me in His image and likeness, making me his temple.

I sent a photo of this work to a friend and asked her to comment. She replied, “Loaded with physicality, emotion and experience.”

I am glad that this is resonant for the viewer – and her response validates my experience as the maker. This woman belongs to the landscape and the landscape is reflected within her.

The figure in this image (Figure 62) worked hard to retain a sense of self possession in an ever changing landscape. Thomas Moore describes how letting go can lead to confidence and trust in the process of living, in the following way:

Self possession is not the same as self-control. You possess yourself when you are able to allow life to flow through you. You are not threatened, and you do not resist. You are a conduit for the uncertainties that life offers you. You possess yourself because you are not fighting the life that wants to be in you.²

Figure 62. Libby Byrne, Letting Go, 2012–2013. Palimpsest, 1370 x 710mm, Melbourne.
4.4. Desiring and Shedding Form

I began this piece in 2008 and it was painted at the graduation ceremony for the 2008 Churches of Christ Theological College in Melbourne, Victoria, as I began a year in student ministry with Hartwell Church of Christ, Victoria. I thought that the original image was a simple image about the birth of creative potential (Figure 63). I was sure and clear about the shape of this work – and yet the year that followed in ministry was a continual lesson in how to live without clarity and still seek wholeness. It was a year that was marked by the desire for healing and transformation and so it made sense that this image should be reworked in the light of all that had happened since. I began this palimpsest with the understanding that whilst I desired a simple form that would contain and express my creative potential, the complexity of this idea did not reside in simple shapes and colours. I needed to find a way to accept that the desire for creative potential held both the desire for form and a willingness to shed the same (Figure 64-68).

Figure 63. Libby Byrne, Creative Potential, 2008. Oil on canvas, 1500 x 1200mm. Melbourne.
Figure 64. Libby Byrne, *Desiring and Shedding Form (Palimpsest in progress)*, 2012-2014. Mixed media on canvas, 1500 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
Figure 65. Libby Byrne, *Desiring and Shedding Form* (Palimpsest in progress), 2012–2014. Mixed media on canvas, 1500 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
Figure 66. Libby Byrne, *Desiring and Shedding Form (Palimpsest in progress)*, 2012–2014. Mixed media on canvas, 1500 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
Figure 67. Libby Byrne, *Desiring and Shedding Form* (Palimpsest in progress), 2012–2014. Mixed media on canvas, 1500 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
Figure 68. Libby Byrne, *Desiring and Shedding Form (Palimpsest in progress)*, 2012–2014. Mixed media on canvas, 1500 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
In the end, the egg-like shape that had nestled and settled into the first image was stretched to become a line that was reminiscent of a young sapling (Figure 68). The colours were almost inverted with the warm colours now receding into the background and the white that once surrounded the form taking a central role in the image. The rust that surrounded the sapling evoked qualities of aging and even the sense that there may have been a fire that had precipitated the growth of this tree. The shift that is evident in Figure 69 illuminates the lived experience that the hope for creative potential was found not in the original bright, almost primary, colours but in the melancholy Michael Leunig employs to describe love.

Love is born
With a dark and troubled face
When hope is dead
And in the most unlikely place
Love is born:
Love is always born.³

4.5. Risk

Figure 70. Libby Byrne, Risk (detail), 2012. Mixed media on canvas, 900 x 2100mm, Melbourne.

Having begun with a source painting entitled Risk, this theme was present in the way I worked throughout the breadth of the inquiry (Figure 70). It was evident as I began each palimpsest and engaged with music, poetry, and other works of art from outside the studio. As well as the risk that I regularly took with the use of materials, there was an inherent risk in surrendering to the reflexive nature of studio practice.

Simone Weil names risk as one of “the essential needs of the soul”. She says that, “Risk is a form of danger which provokes a deliberate reaction...the finest possible stimulant.” As my studio practice progressed it became clear that continuing to employ materials that are contraindicated in the search to understand the nature of healing is a risk. Continuing this practice despite the apparent fragility of the palimpsest is a risk that is analogous to the risk that I take in living with chronic illness whilst remaining open to the experience of wonder. Wonder functions to move me forward in my thinking, even when the illness was calling me to be still.

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4 Weil, The Need for Roots. 33.
5 Ibid.
The maxim *trust the process* underpins my practice as an artist and an art therapist and yet there is a risk that one encounters in trusting the process enough to surrender. Surrendering to the process requires trust in what Rowan Williams has described as the unfolding logic in the process of making.\(^6\) This risk was particularly evident when I chose to intentionally rust the surface of five palimpsests by applying Dulux Rust Effects paint (Figure 71). The outcome of the process was somewhat unpredictable and the impact of the rust was different on each palimpsest. The process required time and the climatic elements in the studio had a significant impact on the outcome of each piece (Figure 72).

To continue to work with this medium required not only trust but courage. Paul Tillich says that “Courage always includes a risk, it is always threatened by nonbeing.”\(^7\) The artworks were routinely threatened by the risk of nonbeing as different stages of the emerging images passed from being created into the realm of being uncreated, a process described by Weil as *de-creation* and equally applicable to the experience of being human. “We participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves.”\(^8\) The participation that Weil encourages

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results in the transformation of our troubles, rather than the disappearance. The rust that was created in these palimpsests worked to re-form the layers of the previous paintings on each of the canvases. Rather than disappearing, the material presence of the paintings reflected the experience of transformation that the rust solution had provoked. My courage for working in this way grew as I learned to trust the unfolding logic in each of the palimpsests.

Knowing when to stop was difficult. I had been rusting one particular work for several weeks before I noticed there was a resonance with a poster that I had pinned to the cupboard nearby, featuring an article about shipwrecks around the coast of Australia. The images in the article reminded me of holiday long ago on Fraser Island. Although they had no particular relevance to this current research they had previously found a place in the studio and were currently reverberating in the emerging palimpsest. When I noticed the resonance, I wanted to stop the palimpsest and enjoy the watery surface that had been created (Figure 73). Nonetheless, I continued to apply rust solution in acknowledgement of the ongoing process of treating the illness that could not be stopped. The evanescent surface that had been present as the surface was in flux (Figure 74) was lost as the rust became more and more solid (Figure 74 A). There was sadness in making the decision to keep developing the work, which is evidence of the courage that is required to employ studio practice for research, thus making art as theology, rather than simply making art.

![Image]

Figure 73. Libby Byrne, Belonging (Palimpsest in progress), 2013. Mixed media on canvas, 300 x 2100mm, Melbourne.

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Figure 74. Libby Byrne, *Evanescence in ‘Belonging’* (detail), 2013. & Figure 74. (A) *Losing Evanescence in ‘Belonging’* (detail), 2014.
Conversations with Ghosts

In 2013, whilst I was in the middle of making the palimpsests, a song cycle called *Conversations with Ghosts* was performed at the Melbourne Recital Centre. The work was co-constructed by Australian folk rock singer Paul Kelly and classical composer James Ledger. Kelly and Ledger performed the work with recorder virtuoso Genevieve Lacey and musicians from the Australian National Academy of Music. The work was based on poems by Les Murray, W.B Yeats, Judith Wright, Lord Alfred Tennyson and Kenneth Slessor. The performance was billed as a meditation on time, mortality, friendship and love. On Wednesday 4th September 2013, I found myself immersed in the experience of this cycle of songs along with the musicians and 1,000 other people, who were fortunate enough to witness this performance.
The collaboration had begun with Kelly attempting to find music for a poem he had known and loved since childhood, *Five Bells*, by Kenneth Slessor. Kelly had a memory of particular phrases that resonated for him as being full of beauty and mystery. The call to understand these things more deeply led him to explore the poem through the medium of music. He has said of the poem,

> I discovered it a long time ago, in my late teens, and it's lived with me ever since. I don't think I really understood it when I first read it, but I always remember phrases like 'deep and dissolving verticals of light' or 'These funeral-cakes of sweet and sculptured stone.' It's just studded with these beautiful jewels of language.\(^\text{10}\)

The nature of reflexive studio practice welcomes resonant experiences from beyond the studio into the practice of making art. The music that Kelly and Ledger have composed for *Five Bells*, enabled me to recognise the value of these words and sounds in the practice of making palimpsests. There were some stanzas from the poem that struck me as poignantly able to describe my experience of making this work. I decided to welcome this song cycle into the studio whilst I worked and so I regularly played a recording of the performance as the research progressed. The phrases that seemed to be particularly potent include:

> Time that is moved by little fidget wheels
> Is not my time, the flood that does not flow.

> I thought of what you'd written in faint ink,
> Your journal with the sawn-off lock, that stayed behind
> With other things you left, all without use,
> All without meaning now, except a sign
> That someone had been living who now was dead:

> I felt the wet push its black thumb-balls in,
> The night you died, I felt your eardrums crack,
> And the short agony, the longer dream,

> What purpose gave you breath
> Or seized it back, might I not hear your voice?\(^\text{11}\)


Several weeks after discovering this poem at the Melbourne Recital Centre I was visiting the National Gallery in Canberra and happened upon John Olsen’s sketch book for his mural in the Sydney Opera House, also entitled Five Bells. Whilst this work was originally commissioned in 1963 and completed for the opening of the Sydney Opera House, this was the first time that I had realised it existed. When commissioned to paint this work Olsen had also been inspired by Slessor’s poem, Five Bells, and the way in which language ignited his visual imagination and engaged his lived experience of being in and around the harbour (Figure 77). Olsen engages Slessor’s metaphors as a means of visually describing his own emotional and physical involvement with the harbour. Olsen worked on the mural for ten years, finding ways to show what it might be like to be part of the movement of the harbour and the sound of the water. Olsen’s work in turn awakens us to our own bodily experience of the world and thus our felt sense of Slessor’s poem, Five Bells.

Having discovered Olsen’s visual translation of the poem so soon after experiencing Kelly and Ledger’s rendering, I was intrigued to think about why Slessor’s poem had provoked such openness to wonder. Rowan Williams theorises that “the inner life of a work of art unfolds in time, generating more and more symbolic structures”. It seems that as a work of art, the poem continues to unfold and generate life, particularly when it is engaged by other artists across different media. Indeed, the translation from one medium to the other may be very helpful in liberating the excess of potential contained within the original poem. For these reasons, I risked remaining open to these questions and influences that Five Bells evoked within my own reflexive studio practice throughout the research project.

13 Williams, Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love. 139.
4.6. The Wound of Wonder

Who am I now that I am ill? This was the question that opened the wound of wonder for me. This question is an open wound that I fear will always compel my attention. The burden of the question is best expressed in an image that I made in 2004 exploring the relationship between shame and fear (Figure 78). There is an experience of judgment that seems to be embedded in this question – and the silence that resounds when there is no answer. All I could do to attempt to heal shame and fear was to take one deep breath on the canvas. The veil of white watercolour paint is transparent and the dark organic colours from the original painting anchor the work from beginning to end (Figure 79).

In the midst of this breath of beige I found a line, recovering the darkness from beneath the surface. It weeps a little from the edge and then it is still.

The mark seems to speak of what Slessor described as unimportant things I might have done, but have now forgotten.

I wonder about the cry for help that seems to resonate through this mark – and I leave it alone.

The palimpsest rests as an open question – and I have no idea what the response may be.

Figure 78. Libby Byrne, Fear and Shame, 2004. Mixed media on canvas, 1100 x 1370mm, Melbourne.
Rubenstein asks us to consider “what it might mean to stay with the perilous wonder that resists final resolution, simple identity, and sure teleology”. There is a sense in which this image seems to be crying out for further resolution and it is difficult to resist working toward that end. What might it mean to publicly display an image that is unresolved? Maybe that is one way of attempting to stay with the wonder she has described. With this in mind, I decide to leave this image and allow it to find its true value on the gallery walls.

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14 Rubenstein, Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe. 23.
4.7. Resistance

Sometimes I think that resistance is actually the only thing that keeps me going. The painting *Help Me!* was so hard to live with and equally hard to live without. The painting was originally called *To Fight* and it formed part of the thesis that I completed for my Master in Art Therapy (Figure 80). The strength that this figure embodies is something that I had been drawing on within the midst of illness and treatment. And yet this figure was always fighting a losing battle, never able to shift the boundary that contained her (Figure 81).

To let go of this image took a long time. I worked on the piece for eighteen months between late 2012 and the middle of 2014, simply because I was not sure where to go or how to resolve the dilemmas that the image had produced (Figure 82-84). Toward the end of 2013 I went to a funeral for the husband of a friend. It was a tragic funeral – the result of a violent suicide. The grief that hung in the air on that hot morning was visceral and oppressive. It was in the midst of the funeral as we prayed for all that had been and all that was still to come, that I had a vision of how to proceed with this image (Figure 85). A glimpse of grace was the best way to describe what I had seen. I was finally able to finish the work four days before hanging the exhibition *Untitled* (Figure 86). This is a work of grace – and grace alone. The images on the following pages track the journey of this palimpsest.
Figure 81. Libby Byrne, *Help me!,* 2001. Oil on canvas, 1800 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
Figure 82. Libby Byrne, *Resistance (Palimpsest in progress)*, 2012–2014. Mixed media on canvas, 1800 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
Figure 83. Libby Byrne, *Resistance* (Palimpsest in progress), 2012–2014. Mixed media on canvas, 1800 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
I needed to find another way to approach the very large problem of resistance and so I cut the piece in half and then turned it upside down. I placed the work flat on the floor and worked in the style of Jackson Pollock, dripping paint from above as I rhythmically formed an arc above the surface of the canvas. Suddenly the boundary was no longer a solid arc. It had been transformed into gossamer like rhythms of memory and loss.
The joy of the fine white arc eventually receded into a fog like haze, though the texture of the lines remained. I was stuck in this place until I received a vision of verdant green grace in the midst of devastating loss.
In speaking about the art of David Jones, Rowan Williams suggests that Jones’ commitment to working with watercolour was one way to avoid the temptations of rendering mass and depth through oils. “Watercolour does not allow you to escape from two dimensions; it obliges you to translation or transubstantiation.” Williams is quick to assure us that in saying this, Jones is not claiming that his paintings have the significance of transubstantiation, as it is expressed in the sacramental relationship found between the bread and the body. Rather, he is suggesting that in making a watercolour painting Jones is attempting to render the whole active presence of the object with the medium of paint – not just reproduce aspects of its appearance. My work about resistance began as an oil painting. As I covered the surface of the oil painting with acrylic house paint a new texture emerged.

15 Williams, Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love. 60.
16 Ibid. 62.
enabling the watercolour paint, that I then applied, to uncover and highlight the active presence and the depth of the present object. The watercolour offers a medium that is able to translate the energy inherent in the previous layers of work, transforming desire into action. The tension of resistance has been released and the work renders visible the invisible energy that previously held all of this together. This is particularly evident when we see the original painting and the final version side by side (Figure 87).

Figure 87. Libby Byrne, Resistance, 2003–2014. Translating an oil painting into a watercolour, Melbourne.
4.8. Belonging

As an artist I am always wondering where I belong. In particular, where do I belong in the Christian community? Am I compelled to live on the edges, in the margins, or do I have a place somewhere in the body of Christ? This image above (Figure 88) began life as a commission to brand an exclusive new beauty product. The image was purpose built in response to the client’s needs and yet when the image was complete, the client didn’t want to pay for the work that had been completed. I was left with a painting that had been created and contrived for a commercial purpose and was no longer wanted. This was not a place where I belonged. The work sat in the studio for years until I realised that it was time to attend to the wound of belonging (Figure 89). Over the top of this contrived beauty I unleashed the power of corrosion (Figure 90). I then hung the work directly beneath the source painting that was richly layered with pigment and oil.

Figure 88. Libby Byrne, Belonging, 2007. Mixed media on canvas, 300 x 2100mm, Melbourne.

Figure 89. Libby Byrne, Belonging (Palimpsest in progress), 2013–2014. Mixed media on canvas, 300 x 2100mm, Melbourne.
Figure 90. Libby Byrne, Belonging (Palimpsest in progress), 2012–2014. Mixed media on canvas, 300 x 2100mm, Melbourne.
It was particularly sad for me to see Belonging go. The rocks behind the figure on the left hand side of the painting had always glowed with an element of mystery that I had enjoyed (Figure 92). There was a sense in which I could see an image of myself in those rocks as they seemed to glow from within. There was, as Rowan Williams describes, an excess of potential in this image that seemed to reside in those rocks.\textsuperscript{17} There was also a strong resonance in those shapes with the shapes that were part of The Evans Window in Belmont, Geelong (Figure 91).

The sure hope of the lines and the form found in the rocks was sacrificed in the decision to make this work into a palimpsest; however, the movement that is present within The Evans Window was activated in the organic process of rusting the work. Pools of rust solution were employed on the palimpsest as it lay on the floor of the studio. Whilst there was some movement in these pools, the rust solution was largely unable to flow anywhere and dried up over several weeks in 38°C temperatures (Figure 93). This process effectively simulated the conditions of life in a billabong. There were moments in the process of making that would have been wonderful to capture and contain but as the temperature in the studio changed, so the image responded in kind.
4.9. Humility

I did not intentionally address this theme, but the need for humility in this work presented itself over and over again as I let go of old work. This was particularly evident in the work that I did with the theme *Desiring and Shedding Form*. In deciding to rest with my inability to resolve the image and to display the detritus, I needed to rest in humility. As I sat with the detritus I was aware of the reality of my own brokenness. My first response was to protect the shredded painting in a box. The first box that I found to shelter the detritus was a box that had been used to deliver fruit and vegetables to our home (Figure 94). This delivery was made on a weekly basis and the boxes were always the same shape and size. They had lids to protect their cargo and this made them particularly helpful for storage. I decided to gather more boxes at the rate of one per week, until I had the makings of an installation (Figure 95). As I collected them, I painted them a uniform colour – a left over from some house painting that had been completed several years before. I chose to rust several of the boxes to emphasise the time taken in gathering. Collecting and presenting in this way was an attempt to work with what I had, to make do and make the most of the materials, an experience that was resonant with my experience of living with *MS*. I was determined not to hide these fragments in a corner. Presenting these boxes in the middle of the gallery meant that viewers would need to navigate this work in order to move around the paintings that were on the walls. As the only piece in this body of work to take a three dimensional form the humility that is found in *Containing Canvas* anchored and connected the individual artworks as a body of work.

![Figure 94. Libby Byrne, *Containing Canvas (Palimpsest in progress)*, 2012–2014. Mixed media on canvas, Melbourne.](image-url)
Figure 95. Libby Byrne, *Humility*, 2014. Gathering boxes for an installation (to the right) whilst working on another palimpsest. (Photograph taken in Montmorency).
EXHIBITING THE WORK AS Untitled

Having worked for three years on the development of these images, I was deeply immersed in my own understanding of the work. I sensed that there had been a shift in my experience and understanding of each of the works individually, but it was important for me to have the opportunity to see them in relationship with one another as an exhibition; a body of work. I opened the exhibition as Untitled and invited viewers to offer titles for any or all of the works.

All seven palimpsests were included in the exhibition along with two extra works that spoke of the experience of engaging studio practice as a research methodology. The first of these extra images relates to the continual question that accompanies an artist researcher as they inquire throughout the development of a body of work, Is it finished? The image that represented this theme in the exhibition (Figure 96) was actually a drawing on canvas that was created at the outset of the inquiry. The image refers to the distance that would need to be covered from beginning to end and the sense of mystery that characterised the destination of the research as the project began. Including this image in the Untitled exhibition seemed to be the best way to acknowledge that the research was unfinished even as this work was exhibited. The participants who offered titles were willing to see the work as complete and this was evident in titles such as From Creation to New Creation. This title was offered for Figure 96 and presented me with an image of a journey completed, rather than unfinished. In light of the viewers’ responses to this painting in particular the question of how and when I would know if the research was finished seemed somewhat redundant.
An Encounter at the Billabong (Figure 97) was included in the Untitled exhibition to clearly reference the significance of the billabong as a recurrent theme in the process of reflexive studio practice. As well as being a place of paradox, life and death, the billabong offers a place to rest from the journey and to be still. This painting was completed with oil and water on linen. It was painted as a visual response to a sermon series that explored Psalms of Passion throughout Lent in 2014. The work was painted in-situ as I worshipped with the people of Merri Creek Anglican, in Melbourne. I was not aware at the time how well the piece resonated with the work that I had painted for Untitled. The inclusion of this piece in the exhibition was a risk as I effectively included a newcomer or an outsider into the fold. Given that the image was painted in response to the Passion story throughout Easter in 2014, it makes a contribution to a body of work that explores healing and transformation. The inclusion of this work in the exhibition Untitled led me to wonder if everything I had been doing in this project was somehow held within the larger story that is the Gospel.

Figure 97. Libby Byrne, An Encounter at the Billabong, 2014. Oil and water on linen, 1500 x 1000mm, Melbourne.
A public invitation was issued across Theological, Art Therapy and Fine Art networks in Melbourne, Australia. Anecdotally it was recorded that there was a good response from each of these sectors, although gallery staff noted that women visiting the exhibition outnumbered men by approximately 5:1. With regard to attendance at selected cultural venues and events in Australia, The Australian Bureau of Statistics report that women marginally outnumber men in attendance at art galleries.

Across the majority of age groups, attendance rates for females were higher than those for males. Females under the age of 25 were much more likely to visit an art gallery than their male counterparts with attendance rates of 30% and 18% respectively. Overall the attendance rates for all females and males were 29% and 23% respectively.\(^\text{18}\)

The percentage of women compared with men who visited *Untitled* was significantly greater than we might expect when considering the national average. Given that invitations to the exhibition were issued throughout the *creative workforce* in Melbourne, the gender balance amongst those working in these areas may have impacted on the gender balance of the audience. Drawing on data collected in the 2006 Australian Census, David Throsby reported to The Academy of the Social Sciences in Canberra that 51% of people involved in the initial production of art in the Australian workforce are women.\(^\text{19}\) If this is the case, the invitation issued through fine art networks should have been received in roughly equal proportion by men and women. The invitation was also issued across theological schools, particularly those schools associated with the University of Divinity. In 2015 48% of theological students enrolled in the UD were women, which suggests that the invitation to participate in this inquiry was received by roughly equal numbers of male and female theological students. There are, however, many more women than men working in the art therapy sector in Melbourne, Australia. Out of 199 art therapists who are publicly listed with ANZATA (The Professional Association for Arts Therapy in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore) only 7 are men. This means that 96% of arts therapists known to the public through the ANZATA website are women. It is therefore plausible that the interest and engagement of people working in the art therapy sector may explain why this exhibition attracted the participation of so many women.


It is important to note that the data is composed of responses from people who were aware of the exhibition and able to be present at Chapel on Station Gallery in 2014. Responses to the exhibition indicated that the work had a capacity to engage viewers in a broad range of experiences, from grief through to joy. Participants in The Arts and Theological Reflection class at Whitley College were keen to respond with materials and make visual connections between their lived experience and the artwork itself. One of the participants was so moved by the boxes of detritus in the middle of the gallery that she attempted to lace them all together with string and thereby ensure that nothing was lost. She worked on this task for an hour, often breathing through frustration to maintain her determination for the work to be held together (Figure 98). As I watched, I realised that these aesthetic objects had transcended the singularity of being my work and were now embraced by others who saw their own experience in the material objects.

Figure 98. Workshop Participant, Response I, 2014. Engaging with the installation, Melbourne.
A theme of the womb and birthing was recurrent in the visual responses. The participant who created Figure 99 was very engaged with the artwork that she had made. She described the way that her painting offered a different view into the place where the figure was present in my work *Letting Go* (Figure 100). She had painted a frontal view of the figure, as seen through a perceived gap in the rock wall. She seemed to recognise herself within my work and was excited to share this connection with me.
The participant who created Figure 101 shared with me the image and her story of her recent miscarriage. She explained how viewing the work and making this response had been a surprising and healing experience. Taking the time to work with the materials in the midst of this exhibition had offered an opportunity for her to acknowledge the depth of her experience as a woman. Sharing this story with me was a tender moment that required a therapeutic sensitivity.

Figure 101. Workshop Participant, *Response III*, 2014. Acrylic on canvas, 300 x 300mm, Melbourne.

As participants spoke with me about the significance of the exhibition and the work that they had made in response, it was evident that art-making offered a means to explore the depth of the aesthetic experience beneath the surface of what could be seen. A material engagement with the depth of these experiences was able to bring to mind and shed new light upon particular life events, and offered new ways of seeing and thinking about these things. In this new thought, there is transformation.
The maker of Figure 102 seemed to articulate the process that the makers of Figure 99 and 101 had described. The maker of Figure 102 told me that in painting this image she had been able to see the experience of being with the works in the exhibition. She spoke to me about the experience of looking deep into the work and connecting with the life that was beneath the surface of the images. As the maker of this image spoke with me about it, the image seemed to articulate a shared experience of connection and discovery.

Figure 102. Workshop Participant, *Response IV*, 2014. Acrylic on board, 300 x 300mm, Melbourne.
**WHAT DID WE SEE?**

Whilst the exhibition was open, the responses were collected in sealed boxes in the *Chapel on Station Gallery*. I was aware that when the exhibition closed, I would need to bring the entire body of work home and also make room in the studio for the participant responses. Before I dismantled the exhibition I took the time to thoroughly clean the studio, clearing it of all unnecessary clutter. I bought a clean carpet for the centre of the room and rearranged the furniture (Figure 103). In doing all of this, I was preparing space for the next phase of the research project. Eventually I was ready to read and respond to the participants’ ideas.

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**Figure 103. Libby Byrne, The Studio in Waiting, 2014. (Photograph taken in Montmorency).**

There were three boxes of responses and as I opened them I systematically recorded the participants’ ideas (Figure 104). Before moving on to the next participant, I took time to offer a prayer of thanks for the person who had shared these things with me. I then checked in with my own responses to what had just been shared and noted how I was affected by what I was reading.

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**Figure 104. Libby Byrne, Opening the Response Box, 2014. (Photograph taken in Montmorency).**
There were 104 written responses in total. It was evident that the participants had generally taken great care to engage with the work and clearly articulate their responses. One participant took the time to go around the exhibition twice, identifying which title emerged in the first viewing and then naming what may have shifted in a second round of viewing. The gallery staff reported that a woman had photographed all of the work and taken the response sheet home saying that she wanted to sit with the ideas for a few days and then come back with her response. Yet another participant took the time to create two columns on the response form, assigning a sound for each of the images in the first column and then noting a corresponding word in the second. This particular response form was folded into the shape of a boat and then deposited in the box. It was interesting to note that the participant chose the title Undone for the exhibition and then clearly ensured that her response was intentionally and intricately Done. This response and method of posting seemed to speak clearly of the experience of paradox that was held within the exhibition for so many people.

**DISTILLING THE DATA**

The titles that the viewers offered were collected and collated into a data set. The ideas that were contained within these titles were then considered and distilled into themes to help make sense of the work that had been produced and exhibited at this point. On first reading the responses, I was particularly interested to note words and ideas that resonated with my own prior understanding of transformation and healing. I was also looking and listening for any ideas and words that were consistently used by a range of viewers to name particular artworks or the exhibition as a whole.

The first reading of 104 written response forms had the potential to become overwhelming and it was important to find a way to anchor my own thinking and relationship with the work as I considered the viewers’ responses. I therefore chose to read the responses in the studio where the work had been made, surrounded by the work itself and supported by the layers of personal visual material and experience that had congealed and coagulated in the studio over many years. One visual journal was particularly helpful for identifying and acknowledging my own experience within the deluge of new ideas.

Created in January 2010, the journal contained a series of mandalas, drawn on a daily basis with the intention of exploring the shape and colour of potent and pertinent emotional

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experiences. Unbeknown to me at the time, whilst making this work I was experiencing the major MS relapse that precipitated my diagnosis. The journal has therefore become a visual record of my inner world as I was in a process of transformation from health to illness (Figure 106). These images were not made within the framework of this inquiry and they have never been exhibited. They were, however, unexpectedly useful as I integrated the viewers’ responses within my own particular experience of the inquiry. They reminded me that despite inviting others to name my artwork, they were not able to name my personal experience. My own experience remained truly mine.

There were some titles that seemed to have been deliberately offered to provoke a difficult response. An example of this would be a title offered for the image Letting Go, which featured a naked female figure. One participant titled this work as Shit a brick...Avon Calling. As I received this response I sensed aggression that I could have experienced as an attack. I was able to locate my own emotional response to reading that title amongst the images from my 2010 visual journal and name it as Dismay (Figure 105).

Figure 105. Libby Byrne, Dismay, 2010. Drawing in a visual journal, 350 x 260mm, Melbourne.
Referencing my own particular responses in this way enabled me to sift and separate my personal counter transference responses to the data collection from the responses that would be useful in developing the research. The range of emotional responses I encountered in this data collection phase included exhilaration, anger, envy, sadness, hope, joy, tenderness, intrigue, wonder and thankfulness. These images from the journal (Figure 106) were particularly relevant as I navigated my emotional responses to the reading and receiving the various titles.
Once the responses were collected, they were collated and then coded in various ways. In the first instance, I collated the responses to discover how many titles spoke directly of Illness or Healing. The following is a selection of titles offered for the exhibition as a whole and referencing either Illness or Healing. It is interesting to note how few titles are able to reference both of these ideas; the title Affect(ed by life) being a notable exception.

### Suggested Titles Referencing Illness or Healing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suffering Exposed</th>
<th>Working with what comes</th>
<th>Affect (ed by life)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>The Struggle: Breathe in, Breathe out</td>
<td>What does it mean to be healed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean Dressings</td>
<td>Body</td>
<td>The stages of illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsettling</td>
<td>Corpus</td>
<td>Am I growing in the experience of pain?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Edge of Breath</td>
<td>Little Ease</td>
<td>Nine kinds of medication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of life cycle</td>
<td>Healing from the inside</td>
<td>Undone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding open the hope</td>
<td>Healing elements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Suggested Exhibition titles that directly related to illness and healing.

Some images provoked strong responses that were directly related to this theme, for example the work in which I had explored the theme Learning to Breathe (Figure 107). With regard to the theme of Illness and Healing, this humanoid figure provoked the following responses.

![Figure 107. Learning to Breathe](image)

### Table 3. Responses that were related to illness and healing.

- Towards healing
- Bleed
- Bleeding, hiding, afraid
- Looking up - hope for things to come
- My soul is bleeding through
- Acceptance
- His banner over me is love and healing
- Relapse: Grappling with hope and change, fear and longing
- Injury
- The solitude of disease
- Wound
- In sickness and in health – until death do us part: promises to self

I wanted to understand more about the phenomenology of the experience that led viewers to choose these titles. I wondered if their aesthetic experience of the work was indexed to any physical, emotional or spiritual concerns. I employed Attride-Stirling’s method of Thematic Network Analysis to code the data and considered if the titles offered related to an experience of the Body, Emotions, Existential Concerns or Aesthetic Responses. This level of coding revealed that these categories were not easily separated. The density of

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21 Ibid. 391.
the range of experience was for one viewer, *Too much for words*. Existential questions and concerns were provoked and connected with lived bodily experiences, as seen in the titles, *My soul is bleeding through* and *The Solitude of Disease*. The work that I understood as *Learning to Breathe* had provoked existential and emotional responses that were the result of an embodied aesthetic experience. This was particularly evident in titles such as *My soul is bleeding through* and *Peering through the darkness*. It was also clear that the aesthetic responses occurred on a continuum that engaged visual recognition and a range of sensory and bodily experiences. This was evident in the titles, *A Mottled Person, Cobalt Wound* and *Shhhh*. Table 4 illustrates the range of responses to this work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body</th>
<th>Existential / Soul</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Looking up</td>
<td>Becoming one</td>
<td>Waiting, watching, hoping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hello world</td>
<td>Your mercies are new every morning</td>
<td>Indecision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bled</td>
<td>Beyond the darkness</td>
<td>I feel connected to this image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching</td>
<td>Facing the darkness</td>
<td>Fear of discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing still</td>
<td>Contemplation</td>
<td>Afraid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bleeding, hiding</td>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>Pondering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peering through darkness</td>
<td>We think our planet is the centre</td>
<td>Pit of despair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking up</td>
<td>Cosmic veil</td>
<td>Hope beyond the horizon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>Reaches for the heavens - the divine</td>
<td>Truce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tete</td>
<td>Angel view</td>
<td>Cracks appearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release</td>
<td>Beyond time</td>
<td>Hope for things to come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person, injury</td>
<td>Reaching for the universe</td>
<td>Turmoil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wound</td>
<td>My soul is bleeding through</td>
<td>Lifting farewell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In sickness and in health</td>
<td>His banner over me is love and healing</td>
<td>Glass half full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unto death do us part</td>
<td>Forgiveness in a dark place</td>
<td>Trying to focus on the light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bile duct</td>
<td>What the eye sees and what the heart feels</td>
<td>Grappling with hope, change, fear and longing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiding</td>
<td>Virgin’s praise</td>
<td>Ease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My hurting body</td>
<td>ET Phone Home – but who?</td>
<td>Veil of illusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promises to self</td>
<td>Light articulated through the presence of darkness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>Insist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaven and Earth</td>
<td>Unique anonymity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archangel</td>
<td>My angry mind peeps through a veil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through a glass darkly</td>
<td>Reaching from the depths of despair into unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where is safety?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.** 1st Level Coding for the painting, *Learning to Breathe*.

Discovering these nuances in the aesthetic responses to the work I determined to understand more about the nature of the viewers’ engagement with the process. I wondered if the work prompted them into a mode of active response or passive observation. The 2nd
Level of Thematic Coding enabled me to consider whether the titles offered were verbs, nouns or adjectives. Table 5 illustrates proportion of responses to this image that fell in each of these categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Invitation</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Looking up</td>
<td>A bold face in the darkness</td>
<td>Beyond the darkness</td>
<td>Hello world</td>
<td>What is it all about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming one</td>
<td>Black hole</td>
<td>Hidden cracks</td>
<td>Your mercies are new every morning</td>
<td>Could it be...?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bleed</td>
<td>Indecision</td>
<td>Cracks appearing</td>
<td>We all think our planet is the dead centre</td>
<td>ET phone home – but who?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards healing</td>
<td>Fear of discovery</td>
<td>A mottled person reaches for the heavens</td>
<td>His banner over me is love and healing</td>
<td>Where is safety?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching, waiting, hoping</td>
<td>Afraid</td>
<td>Angel view</td>
<td>What the eye can see and heart feels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising the veil</td>
<td>Contemplation – pit of despair OR hope beyond the horizon</td>
<td>Beyond time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel connected to this image</td>
<td>Truce</td>
<td>Veiled</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spilling or seeping</td>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>Covered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching</td>
<td>Black silent hole</td>
<td>Undulating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing still</td>
<td>Cosmic veil</td>
<td>Virgin’s praise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bleeding, hiding</td>
<td>The Divine</td>
<td>The solitude of disease</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facing the darkness</td>
<td>False gravity</td>
<td>Curtain thrown off</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pondering</td>
<td>Never perfect</td>
<td>Light articulated through presence of dark</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifting the veil</td>
<td>Turmoil</td>
<td>Unique anonymity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peering through the darkness</td>
<td>Enclosure</td>
<td>Light in conversation with darkness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking up – hoping for things to come</td>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>My hurting body, my angry mind</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevail</td>
<td>Another country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break through</td>
<td>Furnace</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifting farewell</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching for the universe</td>
<td>Alien moon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My soul is bleeding through</td>
<td>Glass half full</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facing the darkness</td>
<td>Tete</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifting the veil</td>
<td>Monument</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to focus on light and forgiveness</td>
<td>Body of earth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifting the veil</td>
<td>Person, veil, injury</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relapse</td>
<td>Ease</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grappling with hope &amp; change, fear &amp; longing</td>
<td>Wound</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In sickness and in health, to death do us part...</td>
<td>Veil of illusions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promises to self</td>
<td>Angel, veil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insist</td>
<td>Bile duct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shhhh</td>
<td>Heaven and earth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through a glass darkly</td>
<td>Archangel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiding</td>
<td>Wave, bubble, moonscape</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peeps through a veil</td>
<td>Gold</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking past the veil</td>
<td>Unseen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolving</td>
<td>Alien</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching from the depths of despair into unknown</td>
<td>Cobalt wound</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promises to self</td>
<td>Angel, veil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. 2nd Level of Thematic Coding for the painting, Learning to Breathe.
Once I had begun this process I realised that I needed to add two categories to account for *invitations* and *questions*. Data collected from the painting *Learning to Breathe* reveals that some viewers saw in this painting the opportunity to name something in their own experience such as, *I feel connected to this image, Truce* or *Glass Half full*. Others were provoked into a state of doing or maybe wanting to do something, and suggested titles such as *Pondering, Reaching* and *Standing Still*. These results indicate that this particular work prompted many viewers to name something that related to a lived or bodily experience.

**Basic Themes**

After three weeks of collating and coding, I realised that the audience had largely been engaged in a very active experience of contemplation and reflection. They had worked hard to find words that might be the *right fit* for their experience and had taken the opportunity to name those things. The themes that emerged were extraordinarily diverse and yet deeply related. It was, however, possible to distill the data into basic themes. The responses offered for each of the images were considered to determine some basic themes that were present in the work.

The basic themes have emerged from the search for titles that were directly related to illness and healing and then the 1st Level of Coding, where the criteria for analysis was to discern the nature of the response as it related to bodily, existential, emotional and aesthetic responses. The coding of this data revealed that a significant number of responses were related to physical and bodily responses to the work, as well as existential concerns.

I considered the responses to each image separately before attempting to look at the responses for the exhibition as a whole. I then spent time considering how my own understanding of the work related to the basic themes that had been identified by the viewers. It was interesting to note the relationship between the idea that had been explored in each of the works and the viewers’ responses. In many ways the viewers extended the theme under consideration by asking questions of the work. The artist’s understanding of the theme had been identified in making the work, but the viewers’ capacity for inquiry was embedded within the experience of being with and seeing the work.

An example of the way in which the title extended the possibilities for the theme was evident in the work *Containing Canvas*. As the maker of this work it was very evident that the canvas was capable of containing many emotional, psychological and spiritual experiences and the title alluded to the significance of this in the process as a whole. The
viewers extended the way I thought about this piece by asking questions of the work such as, *What has been? What to make of my remnants? To hold or discard?* One viewer titled this work, *Lost but not forgotten.* It was evident that the viewers, who did not know how I had titled the work, had a sense of what I had intended, but also the freedom to look, inquire into and even interrogate the work to understand how and why it had been presented in this way.

The same was true for the work, *Letting Go.* Whilst I was keen to allow the theme of this work to rest in a brief moment of experience, the viewers’ responses to this work investigated what may have led the figure to this moment and considered what the result of *Letting Go* might be, suggesting that the work could be titled, *Avon Calling- Shit a brick* or *The woman in the womb yet to be born.* Viewers also examined what it might be like for the figure to be in this place and employed titles such as; *Emergence, Drenched, Enveloped, Step of Courage* and *Waken-Seeing.* The viewers were open to appreciating what this might be like and how this particular experience belonged in an inquiry into *The Art of Healing* with titles such as, *Dealing with Grief, Working with Hope, Courage and Trust, Resisting Oppression,* and *I am here, I accept, I am.*

Suggested exhibition titles included *Suffering Exposed, Corpus, Equilibrium* and *Affect(ed by life).* These titles all speak to elements of the lived experience of being challenged by questions of ultimate concern. Likewise, *Present and Awake, Too much for words, Beyond Words,* and *Undone* are titles that offered a glimpse into the viewers’ direct experience of being with and seeing the artwork.

The 1st Level of Coding the responses revealed that viewers were willing to consistently question and extend the theme under consideration. A full record of the data collected and the coding analysis undertaken can be found in Appendix E and F. In the pages that follow there is a record of my own ideas about the theme being explored in each artwork and the basic themes identified in the viewers’ responses to each piece. The works are displayed in order according to their place in the exhibition, which in turn correlates with the order in which participants were asked to respond.
1. Is it Finished?

Viewers’ Response

Existence in Time and Space

2. Desiring and Shedding Form

Viewers’ Response

Solid and Fluid held in tension
A paradox

3. Resistance

Viewers’ Response

Chaos and Order
Control is Suspended
Order Emerges from Chaos
4. Letting Go

Viewers’ response

Liberation and Entrapment
Freedom and Oppression

5. The Wound of Wonder

Viewers’ Response

Clarity and Obscurity
Known and Unknown

6. An encounter by the billabong

Viewers’ Response

Transcendence and Immanence – A Meeting Point
Into my Body: The Depths of my Being
7. Learning to Breathe

Viewers’ response

From the Particular to the Universal
Truce

8.1. Risk

Viewers’ Response

Existence and Non-Existence
Alone in a Vast and Complex Landscape
- But Also Alive
A Truthful Contradiction
Faith and Fear

8.2. Belonging

Viewers’ Response

I am here, Underneath it all
EMERGING QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

The invitation to title the artwork was an opportunity for viewers to become engaged with a conversation that led us to collectively make sense of what we were seeing. The invitation framed the exhibition as a question requiring a response and the number of responses received, reflected the significance of this question for the audience. The themes that were identified suggest that viewers saw their involvement with the exhibition as a relational dynamic of Open Question and Response. Whilst viewers were aware that this body of work was an inquiry into The Art of Healing, they had no information about the particular themes that had been explored in the individual works. Despite this apparent gap in the viewers’ knowledge of the work, the titles that were offered seemed to articulate strong relationships between the artist’s intentions and the themes identified by the viewers. The installation of boxes and shredded canvas that explored the canvas as a container for difficult emotions (Figure 108) elicited a response from viewers which collectively considered the wisdom of holding or releasing that which is being contained. Thus the viewers collectively considered what was being contained and the impact of this for them.

Figure 108. Libby Byrne, Holding or Releasing?, 2014. Installation, Melbourne.
Exploring the experience of *Letting Go* (Figure 109) posed a question for the viewers and provoked expressions of advice and wisdom regarding the possible outcome of the figure’s position. This wisdom was sometimes directly related to the artwork and sometimes a message for the artist. In longing for the painting that lay beneath this work one viewer even suggested of this piece, *I can hardly bear that you painted over this one.* The responses to this painting fell broadly into either an encouragement or a warning that the figure was experiencing liberation or entrapment, freedom or oppression. In this sense, the image was able to offer a point of view that reflected a vast range of human experience. Depending on the circumstances of the act of *letting go*, it is possible that the result could be either liberation or oppression.

![Figure 109. Libby Byrne, Liberation or Entrapment?, 2014. Palimpsest, 710 x 1370mm, Melbourne.](image)

The painting that explored the theme of *Belonging* (Figure 110) elicited a response that could be considered directly relevant to the question of where we belong. *I am here-Underneath it all* appears to be an answer to this question, responding with a deep longing for recognition.

![Figure 110. Libby Byrne, I am here – Underneath it all, 2014. Palimpsest, 300 x 2100mm, Melbourne.](image)
One of the most notable relationships between the theme explored by the artist and the viewers’ responses is located in the painting that was created for Easter, 2014: An Encounter by the Billabong (111). The viewers’ responses spoke of a Meeting Point Between Transcendence and Immanence. One viewer titled this Easter painting as, Into my body: The Depths of my Being. These responses suggest that the painting offers the viewer the essence of the experience of the journey toward the cross and resurrection. The painting therefore offers the viewer an opportunity to recognise the embodied presence of mystery, and name it as their own.
There was, however, another significant theme addressed in this painting and named by viewers as the female body. As I began the painting titled, *An Encounter by the Billabong* in 2014 I was searching for a felt sense of Psalm 121, which is a Song of Ascent. “I lift up my eyes to the hills - from where will my help come?” (Psalm 121:1). Referencing my experience of this verse in the light of the journey toward the cross, I began with the memory of an Arthur Boyd painting, *Crucifixion (Shoalhaven)*.

![Image](image1.png)

*Figure 112. Arthur Boyd, Crucifixion (Shoalhaven), 1979-80. Oil on canvas, 1750 x1830mm. Bundanon Trust.*

Boyd’s still water at the base of a steep embankment was present in my memory as I painted *An Encounter by the Billabong* (Figure 111). When the painting hung with the other works in *Untitled*, however, it was clear that I had also referenced Boyd’s crucifix in the water with lines that evoked an intimate, if not abstracted, female form. Some viewers responded to this form by offering titles such as *Being Birthed, Birth Canal Down into the Ocean, Depth of Femininity*, and even *Cervix*. In receiving these responses, I was able to clearly see the feminine form of a uterus and cervix embedded in the core of this work,
although it had not been a conscious decision in making the work to employ this imagery in this way.

Twelve months later, in writing the exegesis, I sought out a reproduction of Boyd’s *Crucifixion (Shoalhaven)* and realised that he had chosen to paint the Jesus figure on the crucifix as a naked female form. This discovery came as a surprise, and led me to consider if there is deeper relationship between these two works.

![Figure 113. Arthur Boyd, Crucifixion (Shoalhaven), 1979-80. & Libby Byrne, An Encounter by the Billabong, 2014.](image)

Whilst both paintings employ feminine imagery to explore what is essentially a masculine story, Boyd’s painting involves the observation of a female form within the landscape, whilst my own illuminates the landscape of being in a female form. In this sense, *An Encounter by the Billabong* (Figure 111) translates and thereby extends the conversation begun by Boyd in *Shoalhaven (Crucifixion)* (Figure 112). Boyd’s gendered experience of the work means that he will always be painting the female form as an observer. My own gendered experience as a viewer of Boyd’s painting, enables me to translate what I have seen, and explore what it might be like to see and understand this story from within a female body. Thus the crucifix is not observed, but experienced, in the lines and shape of the womb and cervix.

Within the exhibition *Untitled, An Encounter by the Billabong* (Figure 111) spoke of the inner landscape encountered within the embodied practices of painting and of theological thinking. The painting is a reminder that theological endeavor is always gendered because it
is inherently connected to the theologian’s experience of being in the world and seeking God. Theology that is explored via material practice and presented visually is capable of engaging and including the viewer’s unique and gendered reading of the subject at hand, as well as the artist’s gendered experience of working with materials. This means that although Boyd’s intention to employ this figure in this way is deeply influenced by his gender, it does not have the capacity to shape my own theological response to the work, which is embedded in my own gendered experience of seeing and reading the artwork.

In her doctoral study Art as Theological Conversation, Anne Mallaby discovered that art has the capacity to become a meeting-place. She suggests that art offers “a place of encounter, a communion between one and the other, a genuine connection that is embodied in the art piece itself, but transcends the frame of the canvas”. The viewers’ responses to this study bear out Mallaby’s findings. They also suggest, however, that the conversation that unfolds within the artwork can be more than the recognition of a shared human experience. The responses that viewers have offered in this study seem to be framed by an experience of Call and Response that is capable of questioning and then extending the experience. As the artwork called out a question, the viewers were captured by the need to respond.

Jean-Louis Chrétien submits that, “To create is to cry out.” If this is so, art, that is the result of this creating crying out, embodies a question or calling that desires a response. Positing that the Creative Call of God occupies every instant of our lives, Chrétien proposes that we are always caught up in listening and responding to the cry of the creative Word of God. The artist who hears and takes up materials in response to the creative cry of God works to make visible this infinite calling, in the hope of lending a material presence to an invisible reality. When the viewer hears this call in the silence of the painting, they are likewise stirred to find and make a response. The opportunity to seek and find a title that is the right fit for the work is in itself a creative response to the call first heard by the artist and now embodied in the work.

Tuan’s suggestion that we engage with art to render a sense of order and coherence to our lived experience whilst dwelling in the midst of chaos had particular relevance for viewers who are seeking to discover healing or transformation in the exhibition Untitled. Titles such as Raw Emotions Emerging and Finding a Place of Acceptance, Tactical

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22 Mallaby, "How Art Stimulates Theological Reflection in the Conversation between a Work of Art, the Artist and the Viewer." 110.
23 Chrétien, The Call and the Response. 18.
24 Tuan, “The Significance of the Artifact.” 463.
Acceptance, and Dealing with Grief suggest that viewers were negotiating some challenging lived experiences with the artwork and maybe with their own health, to find a sense of order and cohesion. Glaucoma, Cataract, Blurred Fissure, Pouring out Pain, The Solitude of Disease, Nine Kinds of Medication, MRI, In sickness and in health – until death do us part: Promises to self are all titles that illustrate the way art can render a sense of order and coherence to the chaos of our lived experience. The invitation to offer a title rather than a more detailed description of what was seen enabled some viewers to be succinct and eloquent in their responses: The Struggle: Breathe in, Breathe out. These responses support Chrétien’s declaration that art enables us to see, hear, touch and give voice to the creative call and response that shapes human life.²⁵

Valuing the Response

It was evident that many viewers who responded sensed that their contribution was of value with regard to the research question and they took up the opportunity to be engaged with the hermeneutic work at this stage of the inquiry. As they searched for suitable titles for each of the works, viewers were actually reaching for what Gadamer described as the horizon of the question.²⁶ The artwork and the open question combined to offer the means for both artist and viewer to think beyond what has already been said and known about the research question. Some viewers wrote notes on the forms offering thanks for the opportunity to be involved in this way. One viewer even noted “She can give me $500 for that”, indicating the value placed upon the thoughts and ideas that had been shared. It was evident in these comments that viewers felt heard within a dialogue that extended beyond the boundaries of the frame of the canvas into matters of universal human concern.

Organising and Global Themes

Following Attride-Stirling’s model for thematic analysis, the next step of the data collection phase involved grouping the basic themes into some larger Organising Themes and then uncovering a Global Theme capable of naming the essence of the viewers’ responses. The 2nd Level of Thematic Coding assisted in gathering the Basic Themes together and identifying three Organising Themes. Considering the nature of the titles offered as Verbs, Nouns, Adjectives, Invitations or Questions, enabled me to identify what nature of the

²⁵ Chrétien, The Call and the Response. 33 -43.
responses that had been offered. *A Breath in Surrender*, or *Reaching from the depths of despair into the unknown*, are examples of titles that I considered to be articulating something that was happening for the viewers as they engaged with the artwork. Many of the titles that were categorized as verbs related to the human experience of *being* described incisively in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. The viewers whose titles could be categorised as verbs were seeking clues to what it might mean to be or to become an authentic human being. They understood that time was finite and their existence was related to the stretch of time between birth and death. In posing their thoughts as verbs, these viewers were recognising that being human is always and inherently *becoming*. *Becoming* was therefore nominated as the first Organising Theme.

The 2nd Level of Coding revealed that many participants responded by offering titles that were nouns. These were the viewers who needed to name something that they saw in the artwork and these names often raised issues and questions of *identity*. *Ha’adama* is probably the most potent example of a title that names and gives identity to the image *Letting Go*. In Phyllis Trible refers to Genesis 2:7 suggesting that Ha’adama is one way to speak about the creation of humankind in an un-gendered way. “Yhwh formed Ha’adam (the earth creature) from the dust of Ha’adama (the earth)”. This title is therefore a deeply significant contribution to the question of identity that is inherent in the artwork. The questions of liberation and oppression that were considered by viewers in relation to this work were deeply connected with questions of identity as evidenced in the nouns that were offered as titles, such as *Woman* and *Mother*. *Identity* was therefore nominated as the second Organising Theme.

The titles that were less directly relevant to themes of Becoming and Identity were the titles that were adjectives as well as some of the invitations and questions. Titles that were categorised as adjectives described both aesthetic responses and longing for spiritual connection and in this sense they spoke into the mystery of the artwork. *Darkness embraced, Timeless Metamorphis, Invitation into the Unknown* and *The Edge of Breath* were all examples of titles that revealed the presence of mystery within the ordinary and the everyday. The question of mystery was articulated in questions such as *Where is Grace?* and *What lies Beneath?*. *Mystery* was therefore nominated as the third and final Organising Theme.

The exhibition *Untitled* therefore largely related to three organising themes; *Becoming, Identity and Mystery*. Undergirding all of these themes is *Desire*; the desire to see and be seen, to know and be known and to wonder about life beyond the frame of the canvas. Jan Olav-Henriksen suggests that “Desire is what connects us to the world. Desire is shaping our orientations, giving us directions, suggesting aims to strive for. Our contemplation, consideration, and plans for action would mean nothing without desire.”\(^{29}\) The same could well be said about art. The responses offered by participants in this inquiry suggest that *being with* and *seeing* art can connect us with the world, giving shape and form to our desires. The palimpsests were imbued with an expression of desire as described by Henriksen. The themes that have emerged from the participants’ responses suggest that the sensory qualities inherent in the material presence of the work have the capacity to awaken others to the immediacy of their own experience of desire. Whilst this is something that could have been a solitary experience, the opportunity to contribute a written response to this exhibition enabled desire to function not only to connect participants with the world but to give them agency; to be seen, heard, acknowledged and recognised within this inquiry. The desire to respond to the creative call of this body of work was present in all of the received responses and so *Desire* was nominated as the Global Theme. The following diagram illustrates the relationships between the Basic, Organising and Global themes.

The Plates on the following pages offer a record of the artworks that comprised the exhibition Untitled, 2014. In the next chapter I will explore how these emergent themes informed the development of a fresh body of work, in the service of a theological correlation with the question of healing.
UNTITLED, 2014.

Plate 1. The invitation issued for the exhibition Untitled.
Plate 2. Libby Byrne, *Is it finished?*, 2012. Drawing on canvas, 400 x 400mm, Melbourne.
Plate 3. Libby Byrne, *Desiring and Shedding Form*, 2012-2014. Palimpsest, 1500 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
Plate 7. Libby Byrne, *An Encounter by the Billabong*, 2014. Oil and water on linen, 1500 x 1000mm, Melbourne.

Plate 12. Libby Byrne, *Untitled*, 2014. Chapel on Station Gallery, Box Hill.

CHAPTER 5: EXEGESIS IN THE STUDIO

To live in the Spirit of wisdom is to inhabit God where one finds him.¹

Being diagnosed with an incurable illness can pose a conundrum for the Christian whose doctrinal belief equates the power of Jesus to *heal* with the *cure* of disease. The descriptions of physical healing found in the Gospel stories can be at variance with the lived experience of chronic illness. The data collected in response to the exhibition *Untitled* suggests, however, that healing a whole person involves much more than attention to the physical aspects of disease and illness. There may be other dimensions of healing that transcend the physical illness, perhaps of a spiritual nature. If healing is a spiritual task it requires our theological attention. In the first stage of this inquiry the patient was focusing attention on the lived experience of illness. The artist worked with materials to see what lay beneath and within the leading edge of the experience. The bunyip, however, acknowledged the primacy of this lived experience and then looked beyond this to scripture, music, literature, philosophy and art, thus taking the time to understand the nature of healing rather than remaining trapped in the experience of illness. In this next stage of the inquiry I will explain how the bunyip returned to the studio to work as an artist, making a new body of work as a means of intentionally inhabiting scripture in the search for a theological response to the question of healing.

FOUND THEOLOGY

In his work *Found Theology*, Ben Quash proposes a method of theological inquiry that requires a commitment to the development and transmission of theology that is found rather than made. Quash offers the modes of *searching* and *finding* as a helpful procedure for engaging scripture.²

Scripture remains profoundly important here as a locus for finding and knowing God, but just as important are ‘the things of the world, and the persons and events of history’, for...God will be found and known in these things too: To live in the Spirit of wisdom is to inhabit God...

² Ibid. 5.
where one finds him – where one finds God in Scripture and where one finds him in the world and in history. 3

Quash argues that this form of theological exegesis requires a leap of imagination and creativity that is responsive rather than initiatory, thus reflecting the presence of the Holy Spirit. 4 Theological imagination heeds the voices of others, allowing another’s perspective to refine and stretch our own imagination. 5 It adopts a position that is dependent, responsive and reflective of the presence of the Holy Spirit, thus enabling the researcher to hold and engage with the tension of divergent thinking and experience in what Frank Rees describes as a correlative conversation. 6 This approach thereby avoids the temptation of too quickly explaining away the dissonance between our ideas about God and our lived experience, creating the time and space for new ideas to brew before coming to fruition.

Applying the distinction that Quash draws between making and finding theology to studio practice means that art-making can be considered an act of searching for theology rather than making ex nihilo. Quash notes that the act of seeking requires an open and active form of attention, a stance that is consistent with reflexive studio practice where the artist works with a defined direction in mind whilst holding an open-ended, undetermined procedural trajectory. 7 The artist who is seeking to find theology in the studio is working with materials that are able to disclose new knowing about the question, even as they are culturally situated in a particular time and place. The attention that the artist pays to the practice of making art in the search for theology is therefore located in the material and theoretical space between what has been previously known and what may be discovered. It is important to note that Quash considers the act of finding to be not wholly within our own hands, but the result of “placing oneself in the way of grace”. 8 Thus the artist who seeks with the materials in the studio works with a spirit of participation and waits in anticipation for the expansion of new perceptions and ideas, rather than designing them from a position of authority. The hermeneutic gaps that may arise in this process can be understood theologically, to be an invitation to look for God’s presence in the rhythm of seeking and finding.

3 Ibid. 9.
4 Ibid. 29.
Seeking

The themes that emerged from the first stage of art-making and exhibiting illuminated a broad range of interrelated human experiences, summarised by the Organising Themes of Becoming, Identity and Mystery and the Global Theme of Desire. The task that then lay before me was to make some sense from these experiences in the light of scripture and the Christian witness of faith. Where is God in the midst of all of this, and how could the presence of God in these places shed light on the research question: Is it possible to learn about healing and transformation through the practice of making, being with and seeing art?

The thematic analysis of the viewers’ responses to Untitled suggested that the exhibition had been an opportunity for different people to experience many different things. Whilst some people were ready to see grief in the artwork, others were ready to see joy. This one exhibition was able to hold all of these seemingly disparate responses and note them as seen and therefore equally valid. This apparent capacity to evoke a comprehensive range of human experiences caused me immediately to remember a widely known passage of scripture. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 offers one unit of text that acknowledges a significant variance of experience that can be expected within the course of any human life.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

Finding

This unit of text enables the reader to find a place for any or all of the experiences that were identified in the responses to Untitled. The complexity of human experience addressed in the passage reveals, however, that it may have more that is waiting to be explored and
discovered. As a result, it was possible to conceive that finding this passage at this point of the inquiry was a result of “placing oneself in the way of grace”.9 It was therefore possible that a wider and more thorough reading of The Book of Ecclesiastes (henceforth BE) could yield theoretical understanding about the nature of illness and healing, beyond what had previously been known. This led to a decision to locate the theological component of this inquiry within BE.

**Reflexivity in the Practice of Exegesis**

Within this research project imagination was employed as a resource to assist in the *observation* of both human experience and scripture. I applied a phenomenological approach to the reading of scripture that involved firstly hearing the words of the text and then searching with art materials for an exposition of the text. In making the artwork I was becoming aware of my felt sense of experience in reading the scripture and then observing what patterns, rhythm and movement could be seen in and through my aesthetic reading of text. The *interpretation* of the scripture took place once the making of the artwork had been completed. In the first instance, periods of indwelling enabled close attention to be paid to the form and content of individual images. Attending to the visual and conceptual relationships that existed between various works enabled a more thorough interpretation of the body of work that had been produced. As well as searching across the body of work for meaning it was important to look back at the preceding work, considering the extent to which external influences or personal desire had informed the development of the artwork, and thus shaped the way in which the scripture had been observed.

The *correlative conversation* between the scripture and the themes explored expanded when I read commentaries and philosophical works from theologians who had previously explored the text that I had considered within my studio practice. The subjective nature of the process of art-making was thus challenged and informed by a range of intersubjective experiences including the exhibition of the artwork, dialogue with viewers about the work and the conversational consideration of relevant Christian thinking and theological commentary. The studio practice engaged my theological imagination and my perspective on the interpretation and correlation of the work was routinely refined and stretched by other voices that were located and engaged from the realms of both art and theology. Writing the exegesis in light of all that had been learned throughout these stages of inquiry was the

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9 Ibid. 50.
opportunity to creatively revise my theological understanding of healing and ultimately respond to the research question.

Reflexivity was an important theoretical construct informing the studio practice component of this inquiry. The development of the artwork was not only informed by the scripture and the experience of illness but also influenced by the poem *Five Bells* (Kenneth Slessor), music from *Conversations with Ghosts* (Paul Kelly and James Ledger), paintings by Pierre Soulages and reflections on an eight-week sermon series about *BE* that was delivered in 2014 for the congregation in which I belong. Reflexivity also informed the way in which the writing of the exegesis progressed. As I wrote I read commentaries and philosophical works from theologians who had previously explored *BE*. It is important to note that the making and seeing of the artwork about *BE* preceded the reading of these commentaries. The images produced were objects that informed and shaped material knowing about the research question and the scripture under consideration, rather than illustrations of prior cognitive understanding. The images therefore had the capacity to shed light on the commentaries, in the same way that the commentaries offered further information for the interpretation of the images.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of this study it is important to write an exegesis that is comprehensible, relating to and useful for people across the disciplines of art and theology. Barbara Bolt notes the significance of this particular stage of an art-based inquiry, saying that the exegesis is concerned with “articulating what has emerged or been realised through the process of handling materials and ideas, and what this emergent knowledge brings to bear upon the discipline”.

A reflexive approach to the application of knowledge that flows from the studio practice informs the writing of a theological exegesis.

**DISCOVERING ECCLESIASTES**

Merryl Blair describes Ecclesiastes 3 as a complex unit of text exploring the nature of being, through the rubric of relationship to time. She notes that “a careful contrast is being drawn between two forms of being: that which is very much in time, present, and manifest, and that which is utterly remote, unfixable, and unknowable.” In this sense, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 has the capacity to address the identified Organising themes of *Becoming, Identity* and *Mystery*.

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10 Bolt, "The Magic is in the Handling." 34.
Blair reminds us that *BE* is the result of an exhaustive inquiry into the human condition and an attempt to understand how God is associated with the unfolding story of humanity.\(^{12}\) In Ecclesiastes 3:11 we find out that whilst it is impossible for human beings to understand how God has been working *in the whole* of human existence, their sense of past and future will ensure that they continue to search.\(^{13}\) Though we remain unable to appreciate the intricacies of the pattern of God’s action and presence in the world, the desire to apprehend this movement is imprinted in our conditioned existence; we are born laden with a desire to know. The challenge of this struggle is evident in the received responses to the exhibition *Untitled*. I therefore decided to begin the theological component of this project by making art about Ecclesiastes 3, with particular consideration to the question of how every human experience could be suitable for its time.

Located within the Bible between Proverbs and Song of Solomon, *BE* is classified as one of the Wisdom books. The book was written by *Qoheleth* (also known as Koheleth), a preacher who is in some scholarship identified as Royal Philosopher, the son of David who is King in Jerusalem. In earlier centuries, commentators such as Matthew Henry have seen the book as having been written by Solomon in the last part of the 3rd century BCE. There has been considerable debate over the centuries about the authorship of Ecclesiastes. Peter Enns suggests that the authorship of the book may be less important than the theological point being made in the adoption of the name Qoheleth.\(^{14}\) In the classic view Matthew Henry notes that Qoheleth is “The preacher, which intimates his present character. He is *Koheleth*, which comes from a word which signifies to gather.”\(^{15}\) Henry’s suggestion is that Solomon wrote the book toward the end of his life in an attempt to gather in the strands of his life story and turn his attention once more toward God, whilst at the same time gathering in others who had gone astray or who may have been led astray by his example.\(^{16}\) Regardless of the identity of the author, the choice to write from the position of Qoheleth signifies the intention of the author to gather in that which has been fragmented. With this movement in mind, it is possible to conceive the intention of *BE* to be for the purpose of healing.

The book is characterised by a consistent interaction between traditional theological teaching and the contemporary concerns of everyday life. Qoheleth is consistent in teaching

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\(^{12}\) Ibid. 45-57.

\(^{13}\) Fiddes, *Seeing the World and Knowing God*. 300.


\(^{15}\) Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the whole of the bible (Job to Song of Solomon)*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2005). 1826.

\(^{16}\) Ibid. 1827.
from the position of what he has seen in the world. He is sharing what he has learned from his participation in the rhythm of life, and seeking to understand how God has been positioned in the story. In doing so he offers a guide to the hidden presence of God in the contradictions of life.

As a result of the phenomenological approach that Qoheleth takes toward understanding wisdom, there are a number of internal inconsistencies dotted throughout BE. To illustrate this point, Enns offers us the examples of 1:18 and 2:13, 5:10 and 10:19, 7:3 and 8:15. Whilst Qoheleth may have intended to include these inconsistencies as an honest phenomenological observation of his life, Blair suggests that the inconsistencies in the text can be seen as hermeneutic gaps in the interpretation of the Hebrew text. If this is the case, such gaps offer theologians creative opportunities for rethinking the meaning of the text.

Paying particular attention to the translation of Ecclesiastes 3:11, Blair considers in detail the implications of the reinterpretation of the word suitable as beautiful, concluding that:

To be human is to journey in cycles, aware and in awe of that which is far beyond ourselves, but concerned with, and enjoying, the beauty of that which lies under our noses in our very present time…And while we are noting and living with the difference between the divine and the human, the spirit of gentle observation and living with difference may colour and beautify our appreciation of our own human differences.

Qoheleth has a concern for the best use of language, acknowledging that he has sought to find pleasing words to enable him to share the truth plainly (Ecclesiastes 12:10) and yet the hermeneutic gaps or variances in translation from the Hebrew, have a significant impact on the way that we are able to see, read and ultimately engage with the careful words chosen in BE. Having claimed authorship of the book, Qoheleth begins by proclaiming,

Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. (Ecclesiastes 1:2)

Qoheleth begins his work of gathering in by emphatically employing the Hebrew word Hebel, which has been frequently translated as vanity or meaningless. It is possible that Qoheleth may have intended this reading of Hebel as a recollection of the familiar cry found in David’s Psalms.

Behold, thou hast made my days as a handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah. Surely every man walketh in a

17 Enns, Ecclesiastes. Loc 96 of 3898.
18 Blair, "Beautiful in its Time": An Optimist Reads Qoheleth." 57.
This translation of *Hebel* does render a particularly negative message. The description of people who “walketh in a vain shew” evokes the sense of a person engaging in a conceited, foolish and futile pursuit. The literal translation of *Hebel* is, “vapour” or “breath”. When *Hebel* is translated as “breath” the same passage evokes the humility required to live a temporal human existence.

You have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight. Surely everyone stands as a mere breath. Selah. Surely everyone goes about like a shadow. Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; they heap up, and do not know who will gather. (Psalm 39:5-6. NRSVA)

The translation of *Hebel* has a significant impact on the felt sense of the scripture, if not upon the meaning. The word is used 38 times throughout the book and so it frames the intention of the text. The associations of meaning between the words *vanity* and *meaningless* are close. Both suggest a lack of value, something worthless and trivial. By contrast, the word *breath* has particularly different associations. Whilst vapour might be considered to be transitory, it is a visible sign of air exhaled; the result of breath that is necessary for sustaining life. Vanity may be meaningless, but vapour speaks of breath which is essential to our existence. Given the different associations of meaning with the words *vanity* and *breath*, if Qoheleth sees the wisdom he is imparting as significant for the reader it is hard to imagine why he would use *Hebel* to mean vanity. If his intention is to find pleasing words that speak plainly of truth (Ecclesiastes 12:10), it is possible to imagine that the meaning he wished to convey with the word *Hebel* speaks to the essence of life, which is breath.¹⁹

¹⁹ There is, however, another aspect of the term vapour which does have strong resonances with the idea of vanity or something not worthwhile. Here the colloquial idea of hot air, or worthless words comes to mind. So while I will argue for a more positive sense of Hebel as breath, this other sense should also be kept in mind.
In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:1-2). The impact of the wind from God over the face of the water is an evocative image and it was possible to see this in several of the works from the first exhibition. Most notably *Encounter by the Billabong* and *Resistance* illustrate the variance of experience that can be described with this analogy (Figure 114).

I decided to paint the exegesis of *BE* with images that explored the impact of breath or wind over water, thus enabling me to see the impact of translating *Hebel as breath* throughout *BE*. I explored the felt sense of Qoheleth gathering in all of his experience in the following image of a billabong surrounded by trees, or maybe people who look like trees (Mark 8:24). This is a gathering place, evocative of the landscape around Halls Gap and therefore the presence of Bunjil. Water and wind sweep down into the place as vapour rises from the stillness of the billabong (Figure 115). In the cyclical descent and ascent of breath and water, there is a felt sense of *gathering in* that echoes Qoheleth’s task in *BE*. 
THE CHOICE OF MATERIALS

Martin Shuster argues that in translating Hebel as breath BE amplifies the contingent nature of our human existence. In order to see my felt sense of the Hebel it was therefore important to choose materials that were congruent with this sense of contingency upon circumstance, welcoming of uncertainty and vulnerability within mark making. BE reminds us that the present is always dependent on the past. “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

With this in mind, I decided to locate materials that were conversant with traditional methods in the practice of painting, but offered a new challenge within my own practice. I decided to work for the first time on traditional linen rather than canvas as the task seemed important enough to warrant the expense of a finer material. I sourced linen that was coated in a transparent primer, rather than with opaque gesso, meaning that the linen retained its natural brown colour and had a particularly smooth working surface. The ability to work with the smooth, light brown linen was an invitation to incorporate the presence and surface of this raw material into the painting. It offered a milieu of melancholy, which Del Nevo describes as being necessary in the work of deepening the imagination and essential to the work of soul-making.20

I then chose to paint for the first time with gouache rather than oils, acrylics or watercolour. Gouache is a paint in the category of water media that consists of a pigment mixed with a binding agent, designed to produce an opaque surface. Whilst the heaviness of gouache is designed to soak into the surface to which it is applied, there was a binding agent in the primer on the linen that was somewhat contraindicated to the use of gouache and resisted the application of the paint. This meant that the brush marks were vulnerable to change each time water, paint or brushes touched the surface. The instability of the gouache on the smooth linen surface created an opportunity for mark making that was immediate and

20 Del Nevo, The Valley Way of Soul, 45.
lacking in permanence. “Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was breath and a chasing after wind” (Ecclesiastes 2:11). Working with gouache on linen could be considered as chasing after wind and, in this way, the materials chosen were congruent with the message of BE.

Gouache generally dries to a different value than it appears when wet (lighter tones generally dry darker, while darker tones tend to dry lighter), which can make it difficult to match colours over multiple painting sessions. This led to a decision to work smaller pieces that could be completed quickly. I conceived the work to be a series of impressions or sketches that were building slowly toward a finished painting. I began with a series of eight small works 500 x 500mm, exploring different themes from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 as they related to the organising and global themes that were uncovered in making the palimpsests and exhibiting them as Untitled.
5.1. **Desire**

*Ecclesiastes 1:5-7*

The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south, and goes round to the north; round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they continue to flow.

Figure 116. Libby Byrne, *Equilibrium I*, 2014. Gouache on linen, 500 x 500mm, Melbourne.

Martin Shuster submits that if we read the text translating *Hebel* as *breath*, we discover a sense of anticipation permeating existence and bringing possibilities into focus.²¹ He notes that vapour is reliant upon another entity to give it form and so in our lived experience of breath it is possible to recognise dependence, reliance and connection to that which is the source of our breath. As we let go of one breath and await the next, there is an undergirding experience of loss and desire. The loss of the breath that has just been evokes the desire for one more. Whilst it is not possible to anticipate the next breath with certainty, the repetition of the rhythmic relationship between loss and desire offer a sense of stability.

Chengxin Pan explores the nexus between knowledge and desire in his recent work *Desire, Knowledge and Power in Global Politics: Western Representations of China’s Rise*. Pan draws on Foucault to remind us that whilst knowledge needs to speak to desire, desire expresses itself in the form of knowledge.²² Pan goes on to suggest that the role of desire in relation to knowledge is often “invisible, silent, unconscious, and largely unacknowledged”.²³ Meanwhile, Anna Goldsworthy, posits that “Desire…is one form of knowledge, gained

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²³ Ibid. 15.
through the body: In desiring, I know that I exist."24 If this is so, then desire that is invisible resides in a bodily experience that may also be unrecognised. If Coakley is right in suggesting that desire is the core of our selfhood, then recognising it within our lived and bodily experience is of primary importance in understanding the way in which desire connects us with ourselves, the world, and with God.25

In making space for our desire for God, it can be tempting to privilege what we may consider our ‘spiritual’ lives over the ordinariness of our material existence; but faith that separates the mind, body and spirit can leave us with a fragmented sense of self and amplify our sense of isolation in the world. It can be a source of great pain to try to focus on transcendent spirituality when our attention is captured by the acute physical challenge on navigating serious illness. Privileging transcendent spirituality can leave us living with a sense of separation from God when we are in the midst of imminent physical suffering. This may also make it difficult to acknowledge the reality of desire as it resides within our lived bodily experience, at a time when the body needs particular attention.

By contrast faith that is rooted in a bodily awareness of the sacred in our everyday life can be robust enough to be challenged and even reshaped in the midst of illness. Challenges to the physical health of our bodies will almost certainly evoke fear in the first instance. Jesus experienced fear when his body was so deeply challenged on the cross and yet he was able to express a deep desire for connection, relationship and presence. He was, however, able to hold this desire lightly knowing that the way to enter into fullness of life was in letting go. Art is able to anchor us with a sense of coherence in the midst of the chaotic experience of living. It is this ability to ground us in our bodily experience of the world that paradoxically enables art to ground us in the sacred moments of our lives, and it may well be the presence of desire in both that enables this to happen.

BE speaks directly into our human experience of desire, locating it within a larger story of divine providence and assistance. “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2). The knowledge that resides in this sentence speaks of the human desire to acknowledge the significance of living and dying. This form of knowledge expresses a desire to understand how and why life unfolds as it does and how it fits within a larger story. There is a deep desire to uncover or claim a sense of belonging in this text. The knowledge resides, as

Tolman and Goldsworthy suggest, through the body. It is the bodily experience of living through many seasons of experience that motivates Qoheleth to write. From the very beginning of Chapter 1 he locates his knowledge of the presence of God in the lived experience of being in the world. “The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south, and goes round to the north; round and round goes the wind and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow there they continue to flow.” (Ecclesiastes 1:5-7). The images that are employed in the description of nature, such as the wind that goes round to the north and then round and round again, speak of experience that is felt in the body and thus gives rise to knowledge. Choosing to speak and write about these things is itself an expression of desire.

The movement of breath throughout the course of life can be imagined in different ways. The palimpsest, Resistance (Figure 117), developed in the first phase of this inquiry, contains a struggle with visceral grief. There is a deep sense of memory in this work as paint from the surface flakes away and marks from the original painting are revealed. Despite the

Figure 117. Libby Byrne, Resistance, 2012–2014. Palimpsest, 900 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
fact that this work took eighteen months to complete, it holds the immediacy of an explosion of primal energy and it is possible to see the moment when “The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). Several viewers who saw this work in the exhibition Untitled named the work as Spirit Hovers the Water whilst another saw Creation. The arc of breath that sweeps over and above the water in Resistance is echoed in the first of the gouache paintings, Equilibrium I but it has been clarified and presents as simpler, clearer and cleaner (Figure 118). There is stillness in this new work that allows the viewer to rest.

One viewer noted in conversation with me that in the darkest part of Resistance (Figure 120), the waterline, could be seen as a cross beam and just below there was a shadow reminiscent of the figure in Salvador Dali’s, Christ of Saint John of the Cross Christ (Figure 119).
When the crucified Christ is seen in the light of Genesis 1:2 it is possible to understand how viewers were able to see themes in this image of control suspended whilst order emerges from the chaos. It is therefore possible to read the palimpsest Resistance as the emergent chaos that is present in the time of birth. When seen as a reprise of the movement that is present in the moment of birth, this first gouache painting not only considers how “All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full” (Ecclesiastes 1:7), but beckons us gently toward the reality that there is also a “time to die”. As they speak to one another, these two works travelled the distance between the time to be born and the time to die.

5.1.1. DESIRE FOR RECOGNITION

Ecclesiastes 2:11

Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

Figure 121. Libby Byrne, Equilibrium II, 2014. Gouache on linen, 500 x 500mm, Melbourne.

The conclusion that Qoheleth draws in Ecclesiastes 2:11 comes at the end of a detailed account of his attempts to make the most of his contingent life.

I made great works; I built houses and planted vineyards for myself; I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house; I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and of the provinces; I got singers, both men and women, and delights of the flesh, and many concubines (Ecclesiastes 2:4-8).

The significant string of achievements he claims underscores the significance of Qoheleth’s conclusion that there is nothing to be gained by anything he has done. He acknowledges that all of this was not simply for his own pleasure, but in the pursuit of recognition. “So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with
me” (Ecclesiastes 2:9). Qoheleth has accepted that at the end of his life the reward for his toil will not be found in recognition but in the enjoyment that he has gained along the way. In working with this image I therefore attempted to suspend my desire to find recognition in the work and looked for a pattern of engagement that allowed me to enjoy the aesthetic and perceptual dimensions of the process.

The image began with solid white acrylic paint, flung freely and playfully through the air in search of a place to land. The lines that are sprouting from the bottom of the canvas were reminiscent of sea reeds and so from the very beginning of the work I was exploring what lay beneath the surface of the water, the place where breath is suspended and time slows down. So many patterns and colours were swept away in my desire to stay with the experience of play. The resulting image bears an emptiness that is the result of a week spent playing with the felt sense of Hebel in these verses. I was, however, left with the question of how to hold the weight of the deeper reality that all of this play is indeed work, and in the end it all amounts to nothing. If everything is breath, and that is involuntary, perhaps we have no choice but to be working, even when we are at play.

Despite Qoheleth’s claim that there is nothing to be gained by all that we do, “humans have a desire to be recognised - seen, respected and accepted as responsible individuals within society”.26 The palimpsests created in the first stage of this inquiry had been subjected to the experience of no longer being seen. In continuing to work with them I was seeking a way for them to be embraced and accepted, even though they were no longer recognisable in their original form. The work was provoked by Jesus’ encounter with Bartimaeus, in which he asked the blind man to name what it was that he desired. In the same way this painting was an attempt to see the need for recognition expressed in 2:11, in the light of an encounter with desire. Bartimaeus desired only one thing and so he responded without hesitation, “My teacher, Let me see again” (Mark 10:51). Jesus recognised his expression of desire as faith and so proclaimed with confidence, “Go. Your faith has made you well” (Mark 10:52). Jesus’ healing of Bartimaeus is the result of a confluence of recognition and desire. Bartimaeus desires not only this recognition within society, but desires to be recognised by Jesus as one who is able to see. Jesus sees the blind man and recognises him as one who desires to be seen, respected and accepted within society. In response Jesus desires to gather him in as one who is whole.

26 Henriksen, Desire, Gift, and Recognition: Christology and Postmodern Philosophy. 56.
The moment of asking and waiting to receive can be a moment when breath is suspended – nothing is sure, yet everything is possible. Reflecting on the spiritual significance of asking for what we want Laurence Freeman says, “to ask means to be in touch with, clearly, courageously, to embrace our own need: to know what we want”.²⁷

Figure 122. Libby Byrne, *Equilibrium II* (detail), 2014. Gouache on linen, 500 x 500mm, Melbourne.

There was a moment in making *Equilibrium II* when I became aware of the transparent gesso on the linen peeling away and leaving parts of the painting’s surface raw fabric (Figure 122). The patches of raw linen absorbed the paint deeply and the colour darkened in those places. There was a contrast between these moments of depth and the marks that sat on the surface of the gesso, so vulnerable to being wiped away. Breath is suspended. Nothing is sure but everything is possible. In these places the desire to be recognised is embraced as the real texture of the linen is revealed. As the different surfaces settle and co-exist there is a sense in which layers of material reality are united in wholeness, upon the canvas. The linen is revealed as foundational to all that happens upon the canvas yet is revealed only when the surface has been worn in particular ways. The surface of this gouache painting echoes the way in which *Resistance* was able to present the viewer with glimpses of the original canvas beneath the surface (Figure 123). In this palimpsest the wound in the surface of the painting was a recognition of “all the toil my hands had done” (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

Figure 123. Libby Byrne, *Resistance* (detail), 2012-2014. Palimpsest, 900 x 1200mm, Melbourne.

²⁷ Freeman, *Wholeness: Cutting the Bonds that Control Us*. 
The relationship between these layers of material speak to the way in which Qoheleth understands the contingent human existence to be met, framed and held within the presence of God. Apart from the presence of the canvas or linen, these materials could not exist together as a whole. In the same way, Qoheleth claims that apart from God we cannot eat or have enjoyment (Ecclesiastes 2:25). In concluding that everything is breath, Qoheleth reminds us that it is the presence of God’s desire that shines through the different seasons of life. In the glimpses of contrasting texture and the layers of material and movement, we can read the felt sense of this text and see how Qoheleth understands the foundational presence of God to be holding all things together.

The desire to be recognised as one who is seen, respected and accepted as responsible individuals within society was a strong theme in the source painting and the palimpsests. Indeed, the need to exhibit the work could be seen as evidence of a need for recognition as someone other than a ‘person-with-MS’. Diarised notes about making the Palimpsest Letting Go revealed the significance of being recognised, seen, accepted and respected. Indeed, my desire for recognition was expressed when I sent a photo of this work in progress to a colleague and asked for her reflections. She replied, “Loaded with physicality, emotion and experience”. I was glad that the painting was so resonant for the viewer – and her response validated my experience as the maker. Rendering one’s whole active presence in the world with art materials is one way to be recognised, to see and be seen.

5.1.2. DESIRE FOR STABILITY

Ecclesiastes 2:14-16

The wise have eyes in their head, but fools walk in darkness. Yet I perceived that the same fate befalls all of them. Then I said to myself, ‘What happens to the fool will happen to me also; why then have I been so very wise? And I said to myself that this also is vanity. For there is no enduring remembrance of the wise or of fools, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten.

How can the wise die just like fools?

Figure 124. Libby Byrne, Equilibrium III, 2014. Gouache on linen, 500 x 500mm, Melbourne.
The desire for stability was present in the dialogue that emerged through indwelling the source painting *Risk*. The use of Dulux Rust Solution in a number of palimpsests challenged the desire for stability and yet uncovered a predictable rhythm in the process of corrosion. The desire for stability was in many of the participants’ responses. The desire for stability in the midst of living with illness goes to the heart of the matter and addresses one of the core themes in Ecclesiastes, the inevitability of death. In beginning to paint an image of death I drew on my experience of working in Palliative Care and being with people as they took their last breath. As he considers the theme of death in *BE* Martin Shuster refers to Heidegger and notes that “Death is that which individualises and totalises.”29 No one death can be substituted for another. Whilst each person’s death is entirely their own Heidegger proposes that we can approach death from two positions, that of expectation and anticipation.30 Qoheleth understands both of these perspectives and concludes that the universality of death is therefore a welcome and stabilising force in the chaos and unpredictability of living (Ecclesiastes 4:2-3, 7:1).

I chose to work with one colour, Paynes Grey, in order to appreciate the totalising experience of death. I sought the rhythm of the last breath in the way that I moved this colour around the surface of the painting (Ecclesiastes 7:1). A period of indwelling this image revealed that Kenneth Slessor’s poem *Five Bells* had also informed the shape this final breath took. Slessor describes the last breath of his friend Joe Lynch saying, “I felt the wet push its black thumb balls in the night you died.”31 It was in the making of this third gouache painting that I unconsciously drew on a poetic visual analogy to help me see the felt sense of the text (Figure 124). When writing or painting about the day of death we can only ever be writing as death is observed, as anyone who has experienced death for themselves is not here to tell us about it. “Never again will they have any share in all that happens under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:6). The felt sense of this experience of the text is therefore a compilation of observations (Figure 125). Poetry, music, scripture, life and death observed come together to bring this image to fruition.

29 Shuster, "Being as Breath, Vapor as Joy: Using Martin Heidegger to Re-read the Book of Ecclesiastes." 224.
In making the palimpsest, *Resistance*, I discovered an arc hovering over the surface of the water, the result of swinging the brush like a pendulum suspended above the surface of the painting while it lay on the floor (Figure 126). The heavily laden brush released gossamer-like threads of white acrylic paint that came to rest upon the darkness and light that inform the background. The threads of paint are delicately interwoven to form the shape of a vessel, maybe even suggesting a nest. The act of repetition lends stability to the fragile form as the threads of paint are gathered together, evidence of human presence and desire. There has been an active and embodied form of attention lavished on this work that could be described as the artist *watching over* the work in a rare moment of wonder.

The arc originally suggested in *Resistance* and then acknowledged in *Equilibrium I* is both clarified and completed in *Equilibrium III* (Figure 127). The power of this simple line to speak into these very different moments of experience is significant. Brett Whiteley notes in
his journal in 1972, “The curve is the most beautiful of all forces”. The curve in the arc is evidence of the presence of a force of energy. Slessor knows and describes the force of the arc when he asks, “What purpose gave you breath or seized it back?” The giving of breath and the seizing back are evident in the two curved lines that sweep vertically into and out of the painting *Equilibrium III*. The beauty that Whiteley has noticed is evident in the capacity of the curve to hold the viewer in the moment of seeing and the experience of being with.

Within this painting, the individualising nature of death is explored in the restrained use of white denoting the presence of vapour over the water. The scale in this new painting pushes the water back into the distance and emphasises space expanding in an upward movement. The scope of perspective in this third gouache painting speaks of the distance Qoheleth imagines between “God (who) is in heaven and you upon earth” (Ecclesiastes 5:2). There is also a sense in this image of a passage through the middle of the breath, resonant with the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea, ”But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.” (Exodus 14:29). In a manner analogous with this story, the last breath is the passage through the ocean that is life returning us to God, as dust returns to dust (Ecclesiastes 3:20).

Having recognised that a literal meaning for the word *Hebel* is vapour, Martin Shuster proposes that the Heideggerian notion of contingency appears to be a tenable way to understand the repeated use of the word throughout *BE*. Shuster notes vapour or breath cannot spontaneously come into existence, but relies on another entity to give it form. In the same way people cannot exist spontaneously, but rely on another entity to give them form. Humans are historically located in time and place, their options culturally defined by their forebears and yet within this defining construction of meta-narrative, humans have a unique capacity and presence enabling them to appreciate and imagine difference. Just as breath once expelled can never truly be repeated, so a human life is never able to be truly replicated.

Shuster then proposes that this analogy has been employed by Qoheleth not to suggest that “Existence, then, is vaporous, not in the sense of being empty, fleeting, or vain, but rather in the sense that it is contingent, and essentially historicist, in nature.”

To understand the nature of health as contingent enables Qoheleth’s message to have particular applications for the way we understand healing. Living with illness has taught me

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32 Crumlin, *Images of Religion in Australian Art*. 120.
that my experience of breath is anything but meaningless. Rather, my breath encompasses everything. Within each breath there is the possibility of life and death. When we breathe in, we breathe in the gift of life. In letting go of our breath we experience a gap, a brief moment when we wait, in the hope that we will be able to draw another breath and yet in the possibility that the breath we have just released could be our last. There are times when the contingent nature of our health means that our next breath is not certain and so the focus on breathing can consume all of our attention. This has been the case for me when I have experienced difficulty breathing and swallowing as a symptom of MS. “It's funny, but you never really think much about breathing. Until it's all you ever think about.”

Qoheleth’s cry that “Breath of Breath, All is breath” (Ecclesiastes 1:2) could therefore be understood as a qualified and yet optimistic understanding that the nature of our existence is dependent on the sameness that we find in the ongoing presence of breath and indeed in the ongoing presence of God. Qoheleth knows that as humans we tend to make things more complicated than they need to be. “God made human beings straightforward, but they have devised many schemes” (Ecclesiastes 7:29). In a world where everything is contingent and things can easily become overly complicated, there is something reassuringly straightforward in the stability of breath as it recurs time and time again.

5.2. IDENTITY

The theme of identity emerged from the viewers’ responses to the exhibition Untitled, with particular reference to questions of the challenges to identity that emerge from holding the tension of extremes that are encountered in human existence. Within the course of any life time there will be experiences characterised by turning points that mark the beginning of a new stage in the life cycle. In 1959, Erikson characterised these turning points as periods marked by increased vulnerability resulting in a radical new perspective and thus a potential experience of crisis. Vickers identifies these periods of crisis as a status passage and suggests that they can have significant implications for the person involved. She notes that,

The passage that people with MS experienced with the onset of their disease...results in that person shifting into a new life role as a 'person-with-MS', a new bodily awareness, and the need to develop a whole new self and identity as a result of the transition.

36 Winton, Breath. 40.
38 Margaret H. Vickers, "Illness Onset as Status Passage for People with Multiple Sclerosis (MS)," Journal of Health and Human Services Administration 33, no. 2 (2010). 197.
There were several experiences pertinent to these challenges to identity noted in the thematic analysis that deserve theological attention in the light of BE.

5.2.1. Resistance

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Those who experience the onset of MS are invariably confronted by a status change that is irreversible, involuntary, undesirable and highly stigmatised, with the capacity to affect relationships, social standing, careers, finances, future life choices, stress and anxiety levels, quality of life, health and wellness. It is therefore hard to imagine why there might be time or a season that is right for this crisis of experience and identity.

With regard to the proposition that there is a season for everything Matthew Henry writes, “Those things which seem most contrary the one to the other will, in the revolution of affairs, each take their turn to come into play.” He notes that we live in a world that is persistently changing and we must find ways to “take things as they come, for it is not in our power to change what is appointed for us”. This classic summary of the teaching in BE sees the cycles of life as a constant ebb and flow from one extreme to the other and Qoheleth does not advocate resisting this natural cycle. What then are we to do with the difficult circumstances that are less preferable than others? Ecclesiastes 2:24 suggests that there is nothing better than to eat, drink and find enjoyment in our work with an awareness that this is God’s provision. To live in this way, instills and affirms an attitude of humble dependence.

39 Ibid. 199.
40 Henry, Commentary on the whole of the bible (Job to Song of Solomon), 3. 1853.
41 Ibid. 1852.
upon God and his providence, which in turn engenders an attitude of open anticipation to all that is encountered in life. By accepting the cyclical rhythm of life we have the means to embrace the fullness of life in both anticipation and expectation. Irreversible and degenerative illness brings with it the crisis of a status change that can be perceived as a downward trajectory rather than a cycle that returns us to a better place. Resisting this trajectory is a natural human response and so, in light of this, Qoheleth’s proposal that we take things as they come in life requires some further exploration.

Figure 129. Libby Byrne, Risk (detail), 2012. Mixed media on canvas, 900 x 2100mm, Melbourne.
Figure 130. Libby Byrne, Resistance (detail), 2012-2014. Palimpsest, 900 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
Figure 131. Libby Byrne, Equilibrium IV, 2014. Gouache on linen, 500 x 500mm, Melbourne.

The marks that were made in Equilibrium IV (Figure 131) were made slowly, gently and over time. The background colour was somewhat constant and reminiscent of ash or dust (Ecclesiastes 3:20). It was upon the backdrop of the immutability of human existence that I explored the passing and reposing of time, with a watery white gouache. The paint was applied in simple slow gestures and then allowed to take the time to run down the surface of the painting. With regard to the analogy of breath over water, in this painting the breath was in the water and the water was raining down upon the earth.

A similar rhythm of mark making is found in the details of the palimpsest Resistance (Figure 130) and in the source painting, Risk (Figure 129). Resistance functions within this experience to pull us up and cause us to notice what is happening. The experience of suffering is a form of resistance that promotes a deeper awareness of our reliance on other people and indeed upon God who is ultimately steadfast (Ecclesiastes 21:13-14). The contingent nature of our existence therefore leads to reliance and dependence and thereby connection and communion.
This is a theme echoed and explored by Paul in his letter to the Romans. In Chapter 5 Paul clearly states that followers of Jesus should rejoice in suffering “knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:1-5). Inherent in this call to rejoice in suffering is Paul’s deep awareness that the natural tendency can be to reject suffering. It was clear in the making of the source painting Risk that resistance is a significant force to be engaged. Resistance is a choice that can be made to notice what is really happening and to gather in the whole of the experience making room for it within God’s healing purpose. It is possible to conceive that Qoheleth engages the mechanism of resistance to draw our attention to what is happening as God gathers in and makes our fragmented experience whole. When considered in this way, resistance is a form of attention that awakens us to the intermingling forces that shape our experience and promote both health and illness. Resistance enables us to take the time we need to examine what is going on around us before simply flowing from one moment into another. In this way, resistance can be understood as a resource for growing faith and should therefore be welcomed in the crisis of an irreversible status passage.

5.2.2. Acceptance and Belonging

**Ecclesiastes 5:18**

This is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot.

In the painting Equilibrium V a single wave swells and peaks rising up in response to the current then surges backward as it is met with a sharp breath of wind. The interplay between the swell beneath and the wind above the wave both impact on the form and
direction the wave takes. Whilst this wave is no doubt one of many, in this moment it is the one wave that commands our attention. In a period of indwelling I see a wave that Slessor describes in *Five Bells*; “I looked out my window in the dark at waves with diamond quills and combs of light that arched their mackerel-backs and smacked the sand in the moon’s drench.”42 The poem *Five Bells* is essentially Kenneth Slessor’s attempt to find some form of acceptance with regard to the drowning of his friend Joe Lynch. Amid unanswered questions of whether this death was accident or suicide, Slessor sees Lynch’s life and death in the continual surge of the harbour waves. After detailed examination of all that he has seen and known about Joe Lynch, Slessor is able to accept that his friend now belongs to the depths of the sea, rather than in the land of those who are still living.

The human need for acceptance and belonging are routinely addressed within the Christian bible that tells and re-tells a story of alienation, separation and exile between God and God’s people. Brueggemann notes that one of the most remarkable facts about the experience of exile in the Hebrew bible is that dislocation becomes a time for theological generativity.43 Brueggemann claims that seasons of loss, guilt and despair inevitably raised a series of imaginative and poetic voices (Isaiah 40–55, Jeremiah 30–31, Ezekiel 33–48).44 The imaginative rendering of the need to find our way back to God is at the heart of the Christian story also the story of the crucified and risen Christ clearly portrays God’s desire to gather God’s people back to God’s self and in doing so heal the wound of separation (John 3:16, Romans 5:21, Romans 6:1-23, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 John 2:2). *BE*, however, presents us with the possibility of belonging even in the place of separation. This is an image of belonging *for a time* and *within God’s time*, because this is our lot (Ecclesiastes 5:18). This is an image of belonging that resonates with the story of Job. Matthew Henry draws this comparison and reminds us that “Life is God’s gift, and he has appointed us *the number of the days* of our life” (Job14:5).45 There is a place of belonging within the portion that is considered to be our lot. Making the most of the days of our life is therefore a proper response to God’s gift of life.

To be human is to be one of many, interconnected and interdependent, whilst at the same time unique and completely unrepeatable. The need to belong is an amplified

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44 Ibid. 70.
45 Henry, *Commentary on the whole of the bible (Job to Song of Solomon)*, 3. 1881.
expression of our dependence upon another. Embedded within the question of belonging is a question of trust. BE notes that

Surely there is no one on earth so righteous as to do good without ever sinning. Do not give heed to everything that people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you; your heart knows that many times you have yourself cursed others (Ecclesiastes 7:20-22).

We can therefore expect that the trust we place in other people may not lead to an experience of acceptance or belonging.

The palimpsest that explores the question of Belonging relies heavily on trust, not trust in my own capacity but trust in a process that is somewhat beyond my control. In one sense the process of making this work began when I painted over an old image (Figure 133).

The painting that is becoming a palimpsest in Figure 131 had originally been commissioned because a buyer had seen and liked another of my works, Deep Cries Out to Deep, 2005 (Figure 134). Deep Cries Out to Deep had been previously sold and was not available for further sale, at any price. The new buyer was insistent that Deep was the painting she wanted to brand her new line of cosmetic products, and so she commissioned me to paint something that was just like it. One of the many difficulties that I encountered in undertaking the commission was the intention behind the two different paintings. Deep Cries Out to Deep was a theological work, whereas Belonging was intended for a commercial purpose. The translation was challenging and ultimately the work was not accepted by the new buyer. The trust that we had each placed in the other was laden with expectations that were unrealised. What began as a hopeful exchange led to a breakdown in relationship as power was misunderstood and misused. “All this I observed...while one person exercises authority over another to the other’s hurt” (Ecclesiastes 8:9).
In making *Belonging* a palimpsest, I chose to rust the entire canvas (Figure 135). In this way I was able to relinquish control to an organic process and wait upon the outcome. There is sadness in the loss of the figurative work and equally in the loss of some of the dramatic colours that occurred as the rusting progressed. This loss was gathered in to become part of the face of wisdom through what Chrétien describes as the “sedimentation of experience".  

Chrétien uses this term to make note of the importance of our accumulated observations drawing out the constants in life. The *sedimentation of our experience* reminds us not to be disconcerted or shocked by what happens in life and enables us to learn the ways of the world.  

This wisdom is expressed in contemporary popular culture by U2 who sing, “I’m not afraid of anything in this world, there’s nothing you can throw at me that I haven’t already heard”.  

Qoheleth is saying more than this though. He clearly states that the reason he is not surprised or afraid of anything in this world is not simply because he has seen it all

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47 Ibid.  
before. Rather he knows that the sedimentary layers in this human experience are embedded within of the deeper wisdom of God who “has made everything suitable for its time” (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Qoheleth relinquishes the need to understand the complexities of human existence in favour of accepting this as his lot, and enjoying what he sees to be good (Ecclesiastes 3:22, 5:18, 8:15). Blair draws our attention to the communal nature of Qoheleth’s repeated suggestions that there is nothing better to do than eat, drink and enjoy life. Thus the landscape of vicissitudes and tragedy that Qoheleth assures us to expect is sedimented by, through and with our active participation in the good things that are also possible. In this way the sedimentation of our experience can be considered as compost, capable of nourishing our being and stimulating growth in being itself, rising up in response to the rhythm of current and tide (Figure 136).

5.3. BECOMING

As we are challenged by illness and the inevitability of ageing and death, who are we becoming? In suggesting that there is a time for everything and everything is beautiful in its time (Ecclesiastes 3:1,11), Qoheleth considers time to be the mechanism that enables the world to keep turning. “The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises” (Ecclesiastes 1:5). By locating the passage of time within the rhythm of the creation itself Qoheleth reminds us that creation is never static, indeed it is always becoming by way of repetition.

Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day (Genesis 1:3-5).

Repetition has a very significant function enabling the passage of time.
5.3.1. **REPETITION AND RECOLLECTION**

*Ecclesiastes 1:10*

Is there a new thing of which it is said, “See, this is new”?  
It has already been, in the ages before us.

Understanding the function of repetition is the key to understanding the message in *BE*. We participate in the rhythm of life by finding patterns of repetition that will sustain us and move us forward. Gillian Rose draws on Kierkegaard to explain how the movement of repetition can function to propel us both backwards and forwards.\(^49\) To do so Rose draws a distinction between *recollection* and *repetition*. She describes Kierkegaard’s understanding of the function of recollection as being a backwards movement that locates our attention in the past with the potential to make us unhappy.\(^50\) As he recollects the things that he has seen in life, Qoheleth is certainly unhappy, in fact the task of recollection causes him to decide that he hates his life (Ecclesiastes 2:17-18). When he is able to focus the same movement in a forward direction Qoheleth’s recollection allows him to consider the implications of the past in light of possibilities for the future. The shift requires acknowledgment and acceptance of the countenance of despair.

So I turned and gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil of my labours under the sun, because sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it (Ecclesiastes 2:20-21).

If, as Rose and Kierkegaard suggest, repetition is a movement of recollection that propels us forward, we need to cultivate a particular relationship with recollection that allows

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us to acknowledge the past and consider the patterns of living that, when repeated, have the capacity to move us forward. This is the work that Qoheleth repeatedly engages in throughout BE. Having acknowledged that there are times when those who toil with wisdom miss out, Qoheleth knows from experience that there is nothing better than to find enjoyment in eating and drinking, for this particular enjoyment is from the hand of God (Ecclesiastes 2:24-25). Throughout the rhythm of BE Qoheleth continues to accept the countenance of despair but then remembers that this is the reason why it is so important to enjoy the wisdom that comes from living in a way that pleases God (Ecclesiastes 2:26, 12:13). Qoheleth finds the repetition or sameness in human experience to be testimony to the ongoing presence of God and it is this hermeneutic framework that is able to propel us forward.\(^{51}\)

In a world where we prize the next new thing, there is a contemporary cultural anxiety around the experience of repetition. Gillian Rose proposes that the forward moving capacity of repetition involves a resignation to loss. Catherine Keller concurs with this theory and references Edward Said who asserts that “Beginnings are consciously intentional, productive activity whose circumstances include a sense of loss.”\(^{52}\) The art of being requires us to be perpetually, consciously, intentionally and actively engaged in becoming and this necessarily involves loss.

Repetition is learnt in the studio and then practised in the world.

Pierre Soulages is an artist who relies heavily on repetition in his studio practice as he concentrates on using only black paint and exploring the way it is transformed and transmuted by light (Figure 138). Soulages paints to present and to be present.\(^{53}\) He works to find light in the darkest places and notes that this desire is consistently referenced throughout the history of painting; “Man has been going into the darkest places on earth, in the total darkness of the caves. To paint.”\(^{54}\) In this sense Soulages works repetitively, knowing that there is nothing new to be found in the work, other than the life and light in his own material presence before the canvas. “Soulages imposes nothing on the material, he moves along with it. Emptying oneself of self so as to be filled with the ceaseless movement of the world, as embodied in the act of painting.”\(^{55}\)

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51 Fiddes, Seeing the World and Knowing God. 301-306.
55 Godon, “Soulages: From 14th October 2009 to 8 March 2010, Gallery 1, Level 6.”
Soulages’ kenotic approach to his work enables the painting to embody the temporal qualities in his lived experience. In doing so he relinquishes the pressure to create and assumes the responsibility of simply being present before the canvas, time and time again.

Soulages’ practice could be considered a natural outworking of Qoelth’s philosophy that there is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:10). The repetition of white lines in the blue of this small gouache painting brings to mind the familiar experience of looking out to sea in wonder (Figure 139). “Every breaking wave on the shore tells the next one there’ll be one more...Are we ready to be swept off our feet, and stop chasing every breaking wave.” In the same way, BE is reminding us that rather than looking for the next new thing, it is important to just be looking.

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Figure 138. Pierre Soulages, *Peinture*, 2 Mars: 2009. Oil on canvas, 2270 x 3060mm, France.

Figure 139. Libby Byrne, *Equilibrium VI* (detail), 2014. Gouache on linen, 500 x 500mm, Melbourne.

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5.3.2. Vitality in Sickness and in Health

Ecclesiastes 7:4,10.
The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning.
Don’t say “Why were the former days better than these?”
For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

Figure 140. Libby Byrne, Equilibrium VII, 2014. Gouache on linen, 500 x 500mm, Melbourne.

I need to feel strongly, to love and to admire, just as desperately as I need to breathe.⁵⁷

It is not possible to speak about Equilibrium VII (Figure 140) without speaking about what lies beneath (Fig 141). Originally this piece was a breath-full blue haze, evoking a sense of freedom from above the atmosphere. The piece waited in the studio for several months until just before it was due to be exhibited, when the pristine surface was accidently blemished in the studio. My attempt to clean the work resulted in the activation of the Paynes Grey gouache paint that was beneath the surface and the result was a dark composition of grief and loss.

Figure 141. Libby Byrne, Equilibrium VII (in progress), 2014. Gouache on linen, 500 x 500mm, Melbourne.

When I gazed at the dark painting that was the end result of this mishap, I was searching for what had once been. My hope that I would see the previous light within or

⁵⁷ Bauby, The Diving-Bell and the Butterfly. 63.
beyond the image prevented me from seeing what the image had now become. When I attempted to see the image I was longing for a past which I had enjoyed so well and this recollection captured not only my attention but my capacity to see what the image was becoming. I was seeing the image but with an *aversive gaze* as I looked through a veil of circumspection.\(^{58}\) It was possible that I was averting my gaze because I was mourning the loss of an earlier attachment to a version of the work that was gone and yet preferred. It could also be argued, however, that I was seeing through an act of recollection, caught therefore in the past and unable to attend to the present. Either way, my ability to see grief and loss in this image was meeting a felt need and I was trapped. Herein lies a conundrum; how to mourn without bemoaning (Ecclesiastes 7:4,10).

Matthew Del Nevo suggests that the state of sadness described in *BE* is the natural condition of human existence. Del Nevo notes Augustine’s basic premise: “You (Father God) made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you,” and suggests that by implication we live in a state of exile within the world, hence our existence is essentially one of continual restlessness and melancholy.\(^{59}\) Del Nevo goes on to propose that a climate of melancholy is necessary in the work of deepening the imagination and creating the conditions in which it is possible for our soul to be blessed.\(^{60}\)

Del Nevo draws a clear distinction between the soul and the self, saying that the “Self has to do with the first person singular...(and) sees its individuality as singular, that is, worthy and deserving of admiration and preference.”\(^{61}\) Soul is not a given nor is it reliant on our own worth, yet our experience of soul is made possible by the way we choose to live within the world. Whilst the ego driven self is able to exist in isolation, it is the experience of soul that enables us to live in connection with one another and with God. For Del Nevo, soul is about living a life that is blessed, not by anything that can be earned but by creating “the conditions for it to be bestowed”\(^{62}\). When we pay attention to the serious work of *soul-making* we are awakened to the importance of melancholy as it thickens our own experience of blessing and strengthens the connections that we have with others on a soul-to-soul level.

It is in the light of melancholy that darkness is able to be illuminated sufficiently so as to reveal the true nature of our existence in exile. Melancholy creates a softening in the

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\(^{60}\) Del Nevo, *The Valley Way of Soul*, 45.

\(^{61}\) Ibid.

\(^{62}\) Ibid. 45.
landscape of the heart in which we are able to be vulnerable enough to receive the gift of wisdom that is born out of loss (Ecclesiastes 7:4). According to Del Nevo, melancholy is different to depression as it opens us up to other people. In doing so, it enables a journey of transformation to the whole that includes reconciliation with God and with all other people with whom we are interdependent.\(^63\) Herein we find the difference between the experience of mourning and bemoaning. Mourning thickens the soul, opening us to ourselves and connecting us with others who share the experience of grief and loss and ultimately reconciling us with God. Bemoaning, on the other hand, is a more singular and self-interested act of recollection, lamenting the past and disapproving of the present. Mourning therefore strengthens the soul, whilst bemoaning isolates the self.

The possibility of experiencing a perception of vitality in mourning may reduce the risk of bemoaning. Daniel Stern considers that vitality is a central feature of human existence, essential to our relationship with others though “hidden in plain view”.\(^64\) Stern identifies significant vitality effects in the intersubjective experience of comprehending another’s experience of bodily motion. Wojciehowski proposes that viewers may be awakened to their own experience of vitality through a ripple effect of close connection to the movements of actors on a stage. Jean-Do Buaby noted that despite his very limited capacity to engage physically in the world, he still needed to feel strongly, to love and to admire, just as desperately as he needed to breathe.\(^65\) It is possible that the need that Bauby was articulating was the need to experience his own vitality particularly as a result of the lack of movement in his own body. Feeling strongly enabled Bauby to find a remedy for his experience of loss, in the absence of a cure for his condition.

In one sense, a painting is a compilation of the traces that are left after a physical encounter with art materials. The material presence of a painting can therefore offer a spillover of vitality, transmitted from the body of the artist, into the artwork, to be apprehended by a viewer. In this way a material exploration of grief and loss can be infused with vitality effects and so reaffirm our attachment to each other and to life itself.\(^66\) The artist who experiences firsthand the vitality effects of making the work is likely to experience a profound attunement to reality.

\(^65\) Bauby, The Diving-Bell and the Butterfly. 63.
A clear example of this can be seen in a painting I made in 2010 when I was living with Optic Neuritis (Figure 143). As both of my eyes were affected with neuritis, touch had become the essence of my engagement with materials. Limited in my capacity to see colours, I decided to sculpt the hem of the garment out of paint. In the midst of a mingled mess of bone white acrylic and brown jasper, a concave line appeared, leading from the right hand side of the canvas. I knew that in that moment I had connected with the hem of the garment and in doing so there was healing (Matthew 14:36, Mark 5:22-34, Mark 6:56, Luke 8:40-49). This is not to say that I was cured of optic neuritis, but the open wound of my longing for the presence of Christ was healed as I met Him in this simple concave line amongst the paint. I had found a deep attunement to the reality of the presence of Christ as I moved with the materials.

The familiar and clear concave line dripping with hope and grief were present once again in Equilibrium VII. This work emerged in 2014 in a similar way, as I attempted to clean the mess from the first draft of the painting and then work with the felt sense of loss that was now embedded in the image (Figure 142). This time I chose to rotate the image 90° to the right, in the first instance to avoid an all too recognisable visual connection with the previous painting (Figure 143). This change of perspective enables me to see the work with a liminal gaze. Rather than a mess of grief and loss, I could see a sense of vitality in the fresh white marks on the right hand side of the painting, which in a Western cultural reading could

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there are challenges that routinely emerge with unwelcome and unpredictable shifts from sickness to health or vice versa. Laurie Lambeth has likened the shifting experience of numbness and physical sensation that comes with MS to a palimpsest in our bodily experience, noting that it can be difficult to remember what is normal. It is easier to experience vitality effects when we are healthy and have the ability to engage directly in the full range of human movement. Art captures and communicates vitality through the intersubjective experience of seeing the evidence of another person’s movement on the canvas. Wojciehowski claims that we are constantly appraising our own vitality and the vitality of others through our perception of the dynamic events of movement asserted by Stern as, “(i) movement, (ii) time, (iii) force, (iv) space, and (v) intention / directionality.” We can see this happening in the public responses to the palimpsest Resistance. Titles such as Splash, Landing, Bracing, Jumping, Falling, Swirling, Krash, Maelstrom, Embracing or Invigorating are evidence of the viewers’ ability to see the force of movement within the temporality of existence. Other viewers could see intentionality in the image as they named it Above & Below, Public & Private, Spoken & Unspoken, Seen & Unseen. For these viewers the movement in the image was going somewhere and in these titles they had found direction. These responses indicate that viewers were experiencing vitality effects spilling from this

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68 Ibid.
painting; indeed, one person titled the painting, *Vitality Depths* and noted that it was their favourite work.

*Resistance* also had the capacity to evoke an experience of the movement of God in the world for some viewers (Figure 145). Three viewers suggested *Spirit Hovering over Chaos*, one offered *Baptism* and another *The Second Coming*. *Psalm 121* was also offered as a response to this work.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 145.** Libby Byrne, *Resistance*, 2012-2014. Palimpsest, 900 x 1200mm, Melbourne.

Psalm 121 describes the vitality effects of seeking God through seeing; “I lift up my eyes to the hills” (Psalm 121:1). David Morgan considers the relationship between seeing and touching and notes that there is an element of desire evident in the way we understand seeing. The elements of movement described by Stern as having vitality effects are all implicit in the act of touching. Seeing as an interpretation or reading of scripture is therefore able to engage desire and mediate an experience of perceived movement toward the divine. The vitality effects of this embodied seeing thus infuse our lived experience of the text with vitality.

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71 Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling*. 111. Morgan notes that in English, the verb ‘behold’ suggests a relationship between sight and touch. He also notes that to ‘look for’ means to expect, to seek out and to long for.
5.4. MYSTERY

In reflection upon the exhibition *Untitled* and the viewers’ responses, another crucial theme was the element of mystery, evident in ideas of chaos and order, clarity and obscurity, and the interplay of transcendence and immanence. Further exploration of these ideas and dimensions of experience led to the recognition of a number of dynamic elements, the first being a process of formation and re-formation.

5.4.1. FORMED AND RE-FORMED

*Ecclesiastes 6:1-2*

*There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy upon humankind: those to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honour, so that they lack nothing of all that they desire, yet God does not enable them to enjoy these things, but a stranger enjoys them.*

Figure 146. Libby Byrne, *Equilibrium VIII*, 2014. Gouache on linen, 500 x 500mm, Melbourne.

Working and reworking, forming and re-forming are studio based practices that enable the artist to regularly move between knowing and un-knowing with the materials and with ideas.

Figure 147. Libby Byrne, *Equilibrium VIII (in progress)*, 2014. Gouache on linen, 500 x 500mm, Melbourne.
This process was particularly evident in the process of making *Equilibrium VIII* (Figure 147). I moved quickly through a series of ideas in search of a felt sense of what it might be like to “lack nothing of all that they desire, and yet God does not enable them to enjoy these things, but a stranger enjoys them” (Ecclesiastes 6:2). Having begun with the idea of a vessel in the sea, I then rotated the image 180° and the same concave line became a shelter in a storm. Re-turning the painting another 180° I found myself in the place where I began and I was tempted to find refuge in abstraction. Eventually I discovered the sense of a horizon line within the word and with it the possibility of an expansive landscape. The horizon provided a point of stillness in the chaos of ideas and enabled me to spend time developing the surface and defining the difference between the land and the sky.

There were many ways of seeing this work. Whilst the practice of seeing was both conscious and unconscious, it was a means to find a handle for my felt sense of the text. The image that was seen could then be named, enabling me to read the image. The words that were assigned to the image were interlaced with the text, thus enabling me to see the text through the image. David Morgan suggests that seeing is a way of looking for what one wants or needs. The changes that this image endured whilst in process are evidence of a search for what I wanted or needed to see in the text. Looking for the text in this image therefore awakened a deeper awareness of my subjective perceptions, bodily sensations and my experience of desire. This embodied seeing of the text enabled a re-formation of my *self* in communion with the work.

The movement of being formed and re-formed by the divine is explored in Jeremiah.

Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.’ So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him (Jeremiah 18:2-4).

As the potter forms and re-forms the vessel, desiring to find an image that *seems good*, he is working for the good of the thing being made. The potter employs repetition as a function to ensure the progression and enduring capacity of the clay rather than the particular vessel. The first vessel was spoiled and so the potter creates another that seems good, not perfect and not original. The succession of pots made by the potter is reminiscent of Qoheleth’s description of the succession of people who enjoy God’s good gifts. God’s presence and agency in the process is integral in Jeremiah 18 and Ecclesiastes 6. His wisdom and

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72 Ibid.
73 Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love*. 47.
providence extends beyond the good of the individual and is applied for the good of the many.

The active presence of God who forms and re-forms promotes connection and interdependence between God and God’s people. The countenance of God is able to form and re-form our experience of illness with the wisdom of healing, *as seems good to him*, ensuring that our individual stories find their place in something much larger. The dynamic of interrelationship described in Jeremiah 18 means that whilst we may not necessarily experience healing as a cure, we may find a deeper awareness of the rhythm and pattern of the divine dance of relationships both in our personhood and in society.\(^{74}\)

Wanting to be well can actually make it difficult to enter into the dance of being ill. It is easy to resist God’s desire to form and re-form us *as seems good to him*, and remain committed to our own image of how things should be. If we believe that God’s providence enables the provision of good things, we want to anticipate that all will be well for ourselves and our families (Psalm 73:7, 17:4) and yet Qoheleth reminds us that even those who lack nothing may not find time to enjoy these good things (Ecclesiastes 6:1-2). The inability of human beings to master the timing of their own existence can mean that someone else enjoys the wealth we have created. In light of this, our expectations of the grace and providence of God may also be formed and re-formed many times, and even this will ultimately be shaped in ways that *seem good to him*. Sometimes when we have all that we could wish for in life, we do not desire what is in reality best for our soul. In light of this, the experience of serious illness can be a circumstance that provokes the desire for grace and enables us to discern the difference between what we want and what we really need; that is to say that the experience of illness can put us in touch with our deepest and truest desire.

The formation of *Equilibrium VIII* attests to the fact that we can read scripture through the lense of what we think we want – a vessel, a shelter or an abstracted landscape. In the final version of this image, there is a sense of emptiness that is completely full. This image offers a good analogy for the way in which the Word of God can release us from the burden of what we think we want in order to fill us with what we need. Living into our limitations grows humility, which in turn enables divine wisdom that shapes us in particular ways.

\(^{74}\) Fiddes, *Seeing the World and Knowing God*. 164.
5.4.2. ENDURING AND ENGAGING

**Ecclesiastes 3:14-15**

I know that whatever God does endures for ever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him.

That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

Figure 148. Libby Byrne, *Works in progress in the studio*, 2014. (Photograph taken in Montmorency).

Whilst *BE* states clearly that it is God alone who endures, Qoheleth encourages us to find ways to both endure and engage with life. The Latin word *indūrāre*, from which the English word *endure* is derived, means *to make hard*. The word is also informed by the Latin, *dūrāre*, meaning *to last long*. There is therefore a double sense of meaning in the word *endure*, requiring both a quality and capacity. In producing a body of artwork that becomes an exhibition, the artist draws on their capacity to endure or last the long distance of the project to produce something that has an enduring quality, a material expression of an ephemeral experience. Enduring throughout the process of making a body of work both requires and promotes the quality and capacity that the word entails.

As these small gouache paintings gathered in the studio (Figure 148), it seemed that they belonged together as part of the whole and yet the whole was surely so much more than the sum of these parts. This became evident when I decided to gather these individual works together and fix them to a larger blank canvas (Figure 149). The enduring capacity of the whole is something that *BE* attributes to God and God alone. Qoheleth acknowledges that multiple pieces of experiences cannot be pieced together to make the whole, but none the less urges a courageous engagement with the portion that is ours, in the face of contradictions (Ecclesiastes 5:19, 9:9, 11:2).[^75] This mode of being promotes our capacity not only to endure the whole as it unfolds but to engage with and participate in life’s possibilities wholeheartedly. Fiddes suggests that in this way we can know the narrative of the whole by participating in it and, in so doing, bring something into the whole ourselves.[^76]

[^75]: Ibid. 311.
[^76]: Ibid. 323.
“To endure something requires that one become firm and strong enough to last it out, standing up to it and surviving it rather than succumbing to it, by offering sustained and solid resistance to it.” Elizabeth Benke’s definition of the inner gesture of *enduring* is also an apt description of the position that I have taken in managing life with MS. The description of this posture also offers an explanation of why one might engage with an art-making practice to address the health challenges posed by living with MS. Living with a condition that is both progressive and degenerative requires a commitment to living with the loss and then subsequent regaining of a sense of control over time. In 2008, Olsson, Lexell & Söderberg noted some distinct challenges for women living with MS and identified a need to formulate care that is focused on the power that women with MS can express towards their own bodies, in order to unify and consolidate a sense of personal capacity. This is the power not only to endure the illness over time, but to be actively engaged in making something solid within a body that is experiencing degeneration. To do so requires a mode of caring that acknowledges and accepts a range of physical, spiritual, psychological and emotional experiences.

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77 Behnke, "Enduring: A Phenomenological Investigation." 82.
78 Olsson, Lexell, and Söderberg, "Meaning of Women’s Experiences of Living with Multiple Sclerosis." 427.
5.4.3. **The Flood That Does Not Flow**

Kenneth Slessor describes the power of unresolved grief and loss as a "flood that does not flow". His poem *Five Bells* acknowledges the ways in which this flood, held back by time and memory, shapes both the present and the future. This description could also be employed as an analogy for emotional responses to the significant challenges to the physical health of our bodies. Vickers highlights the substantial emotional burden that people experience when making the status transition from being a *person-without-MS* to being a *person-with-MS*. Whilst studies show that up to 50% of people experience clinically high levels of anxiety and stress in the early phase after diagnosis, the management of the physical impact of the condition may take precedence over attending to the emotional, psychological and spiritual impact of this life changing experience. The treatment of the disease can be the very thing that holds back the flood of emotional, psychological and spiritual experience associated with the experience of illness. What is the impact of continuing to live with a flood that does not flow?

![Image](image.png)

Figure 150.(A) Libby Byrne, *Shame and Fear*, 2003. Oil on canvas, 1100 x 1650mm, Melbourne. & Figure 150.(B) The *Wound of Wonder*, 2012-2013. Palimpsest, 1100 x 1370mm, Melbourne.

The diagnosis can evoke a range of potent emotions including shame and fear (Figure 150 A). The desire to be free from shame and fear was embedded within the palimpsest that explored the *Wound of Wonder* (Figure 150 B). When the image was presented in the

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80 Ibid.
81 Vickers, "Illness Onset as Status Passage for People with Multiple Sclerosis (MS)." 218.
exhibition *Untitled*, viewers responded to the warm glow of light in the painting and looked for hope in that which seemed to be obscured and distant. Viewers saw a *Winter road, Radar, Juncture, Open Highway, Path through a fog, Hidden Path* and even *Misted Window*. This sampling of titles indicates that the palimpsest invited the viewer to consider the possibility of a journey. The image did not, however, allow the viewer to embark upon the journey and this was clearly articulated by a viewer who offered the title, *I don’t know if I want to go against the stream or with it? But I know that I am stuck outside of it.*

In preparing to exhibit my exploration of *BE* I was mindful of the audience who may return from seeing *Untitled* in 2014 to consider how the work had evolved in 2015. Having heard that some viewers may have felt unable to find an entry point for seeing *The Wound of Wonder* (*Figure 150 B*), I decided to re-engage with the painting in the light of *BE*. Given the way that shame and fear had been *trapped* in the original image, there was a risk that releasing them could also release a flood of emotions, the thought of which provoked its own experience of fear and shame. Realising this, it is possible to conceive that the first palimpsest was simply a veil that hid the figures from view. If, however, there is a time that is suitable for everything (*Ecclesiastes* 3:1), then it should be possible to engage with the emotions of shame and fear simply as one of the many seasons of experiences that all human beings are likely to encounter or endure. “That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by” (*Ecclesiastes* 3:15). Whilst this description focuses attention on the relationship between passing time and present experience, it also calls our attention to God who seeks out what has gone by. This suggests that spiritual wholeness should not ignore or neglect our past focusing only on the present or future. Whilst the first palimpsest attempted to place shame and fear in the past tense, it now became clear that God does not leave things that way, but seeks out what has gone by, and carries it with the intention of gathering in all that has been and will be. Returning my attention to this palimpsest (*Figure 150 B*) was therefore a response to this awareness expressed in *Ecclesiastes* 3:15.

Engaging with art materials to allow the flood of emotional responses to flow offers a form of containment for the experience, enabling it to be held in an external material presence rather than remaining caught within our psyche. As I continued to work with *The Wound of Wonder* (*Figure 150 B*), I allowed the emotional experiences of shame and fear to swell. The flow of this tide changed the course of the original concave line, in the same way that when the river swells, a bank can burst and the resulting flood changes the course of the river, forming a billabong.
The flood of emotions associated with the irreversible status passage of becoming a *person-with-MS* changes the course of life. When they are allowed to flow, it is possible to mimic the flow of the river that bursts its banks and simply changes course, rather than continuing as it had been before. The relationship between the resulting billabong, as a place of stillness, and the main river that flows freely can be explored over time, throughout the course of life with illness.

![Image](image)

_Figure 151. Libby Byrne, *Unchartered Territory*, 2015. Palimpsest, 1100 x 1370mm, Melbourne._

It is possible to use art materials to simply engage with the psychological component of a theological question. For the work to have relevance as a theological inquiry however, the art making process must also engage with the intellectual rigor required to make sense of these experiences, in the light of scripture. There is a significant distance covered between energy that was present and even erupting in *Resistance* (Figure 145) and then the energy that has been channeled and redirected to reshape the course of the river in *Unchartered Territory* (Figure 151). These two images thus reflect the distance to be covered between art that is an intuitive, creative expression and art that delves into theological inquiry.

**Taking Time and Making Sense**

After careful consideration of Rowan Williams theological habits, Medi-Volpe identifies two distinct and interrelated theological tasks and names them *Taking Time* and *Making Sense*. Taking time implies an attitude of patient humility that facilitates the arena for
discovery and reflection. Volpe considers the habit of making sense to be the primary work of the theologian and notes that this task is utterly dependent on taking time.\(^{82}\) It is my contention that the practice of making art enables theologians to take the time that is needed for discovery and reflection, offering a place where one can be found seeking God. Making sense of the theology of art happens when we inhabit the places where God is found – in patient conversation with the artwork itself, with others who apprehend the artwork and with scripture.

Having completed this series of eight small works I was now determined to visually summarise the work that I had painted in this series, to bring this research project to a conclusion. I decided to continue to paint on linen but return to the size of the original source painting, 2100 x 900mm. There was a sense of loss in being ready to paint this final piece and thus finalise the practice-led component of the research.

In preparing the canvas for paint, there were further layers of loss to encounter. I realised that I was not well enough to physically stretch a canvas this size myself. The proprietor of the shop where I regularly buy supplies was happy to stretch the work for me and to avoid the extra cost of hiring a van to transport the finished product she offered to do the work in my home. The preparation of this linen stretcher was therefore imbued with a generous spirit of relationship and participation. I waited some weeks before attempting to paint this work, as I gathered the physical and emotional strength for the task.

When I entered the studio in the middle of the day to begin putting marks on the linen, I discovered that the surface was awash with light as the sun streamed through the dome in the centre of the yurt. It was as though the shape of the work had already been determined for me by the presence of the elements. Light and shadow had formed a bright white shape that was emblazoned on the brown linen, opening a milieu of wonder. Having expected that I was about to attempt the conceptual summary of the Ecclesiastes paintings, I was now presented with a moment when I was able to simply engage my theological imagination with this found natural image and respond in grace.\(^{83}\) The shape was reminiscent of the shape I had identified as Jacob’s stone in the source painting \textit{Risk} (Figure 152), and so I decided to begin by painting the shape that was present in the white light with white gouache (Figure 153).

\(^{82}\) Volpe, “‘Taking Time’ and ‘making sense’: Rowan Williams on the Habits of Theological Imagination.” 345.
\(^{83}\) Quash, \\textit{Found Theology: History, Imagination and the Holy Spirit.} 54.
I was attempting to render a sense of permanence to a moment that was utterly transient and ephemeral, however, by the time I had finished making the shape the light had moved. The shape I had painted no longer fitted with the reflection of light and shadow. I realised that the moment of discovery had gone and I would never be able to return to that place. Repeating the practice would not take me back to where the sun had been, but it might allow me to move forward in wonder, to follow the light and shade as it moved across the stretched linen (Figure 154).

Time was visible in the ephemeral qualities of light and shade that could not be restrained. I was working quickly to keep pace with the passage of time, moving with an
experience that was immediate and yet lacking in permanence. The painting had become a record of the passing of time (Figure 155).

![Figure 155. Libby Byrne, Borderlands, 2015. Gouache on linen, 900 x 2100mm, Melbourne.](image)

The painting is evidence of an embodied encounter with wisdom, as a figure who treads the path of the sun (Proverbs 8, Ben Sira 24). The image emerged from active participation in the world and in the sustained practice of working with materials to see scripture. It is an example of knowledge of God that arises through careful attention to what is before us in daily practice. Fiddes proposes that within such a practice which is other-than-God we are able to participate in what he describes as a “self-giving movement of God…This is why seeing the world is knowing God”. The creation of this work was an unplanned opportunity to actively contemplate the mystery and participate in the movement of this self-giving God. Following the movement of the sun enabled me to take time to be with the mystery. Making sense of the image was work that could be managed later, in the writing of the exegesis.

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84 Tuan, "The Significance of the Artifact." 463.
85 Fiddes, Seeing the World and Knowing God. 191.
86 Ibid. 188.
It is clear from this inquiry that the call to participation is at the heart of the message of *BE* and has particular application in the experience of healing. Several weeks after completing *Borderlands*, I found myself struggling to walk. In the days that followed it became evident that I was experiencing a MS relapse that would require time in hospital for medical treatment. I wondered if it was possible to not only endure but engage this particular time, so that it had more to offer with regard to healing than just a medical response to the physical challenge. I wondered how I could bring the wisdom of Ecclesiastes into the hospital ward as a healing resource. Art Therapist Shaun McNiff says that, “Art heals by accepting the pain and doing something with it.” In the light of the wisdom of *BE* it would be reasonable to suggest that in doing something with the pain, art gathers in and reconciles all that has been, all that is and all that will be, and in doing so, makes healing possible.

The planned treatment involved three days of intravenous steroids administered over a two-hour period each day. I decided to paint one canvas each day as I received the infusion in an attempt to do something that would gather in and reconcile the physical, emotional and spiritual experiences of the treatment, and thus promote healing. Given the space restrictions of the hospital I determined that I would need to work with small canvases, 200 x 250mm. I was also aware of the need to not create extra stress for the nurses by making too much mess. I chose to use Derwent Inktense watersoluble pencils because they could be applied dry to the canvas and when mixed with water the colour becomes a vibrant ink. Thus with only a set of pencils, a brush and a glass of water, I had the capacity to work with a material that could engage techniques of pen and ink, line and wash directly onto the canvas. I employed the metaphor of the billabong to facilitate a phenomenological inquiry into the experience of the treatment each day. This meant that my felt sense of the treatment was conveyed onto the canvas through a visual exploration of what it felt like to be by the billabong each day. Seeing the billabong in the painting enabled me to see my felt sense of the treatment.

Given that steroid infusions have been a recurrent experience in healing from MS, I paid attention to the way in which healing takes time and attention. In order to reflect on this experience theologically, I decided to use the time and the materials to consider the healing story found in Mark 8:22-25.

They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put

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saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, ‘Can you see anything?’ And the man looked up and said, ‘I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.’ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

Jesus made more than one attempt to heal the man at Bethsaida. I decided to direct this time of attention toward making sense of this scripture.

On the first day I located the billabong in the distance. There was a mountain near the billabong that grew steeper in the first hour of the infusion. Throughout the second hour, I was working with the foreground of the painting. Here were the people who looked like trees walking. The process of washing the pencil with water enabled me to move these figures many times. In asking the man at Bethsaida if he could see anything, Jesus appreciated that our perception of healing is a direct and lived experience. The healer did not presume to know this man’s experience. Jesus was wondering if things had changed for the blind man. At the end of the first infusion I was wondering the same thing about myself. In the rhythm of making and then seeing this work (Figure 156) I had a felt sense of the presence of Christ inquiring about the lived experience of the healing process (Mark 8:23).

Figure 156. Libby Byrne, *Finding a Way Through*, 2015. Derwent Inktense pencils on canvas, 200 x 250mm, Melbourne.
On the second day of my stay I hung the first painting on the wall behind me. This gave me an opportunity to be with the artwork, which was different from the experience of making the work. As the second painting perched on the tray alongside my lunch (Figure 157), I was aware that my skills as an Art Therapist were being engaged. I was working at my own bedside in the way that I had often done for other people whilst working as a therapist in a public hospital. As a therapist I have a particular set of skills that enable me to negotiate the limited space in this way and in this instance I could employ these skills for my own benefit as well as for the benefit of others. This was a strong reminder of my capacity and my identity beyond the experience of being a patient.

By the time I had completed the second piece I was settled with the need for treatment and had accepted the experience of being separated from home, work and the general flow of life. Being in hospital meant that I was able to routinely speak with my doctor and physiotherapist about how to manage the relapse and promote physical healing. The only place to hang the second painting was over the notice that displayed my name upon the wall above the bed (Figure 158).

The second painting enables the viewer to find a place just near the edge of the billabong, amongst a host of tree like figures. This image therefore helped me to see the phenomenological distance I had covered since beginning treatment the previous day. Two paintings completed, meant only one to go. Hanging these works on the wall created a little distance from the lived experience of the infusions and extended the way I was able to think about what was happening. The spiritual dimension to the healing process was embodied in the trees that I was painting by the billabong. Seeing the work hanging over the bed enabled me to integrate the physical and spiritual dimensions of the healing process.
Some hours later the Nurse Unit Manager (NUM) came into my room and was quick to notice that the artwork was covering the name plate on the wall. She insisted that the art needed to come down saying, “We can’t see who you are”. The irony was that the presence of the paintings had actually enabled me to see who I really am - a person who is actively working toward healing, not just a patient who is being treated. The NUM just did not have the time or imagination to see this. Her commitment to patient management procedures outweighed her commitment to person-centred care. Later in the day I became more deeply aware of the presence of an icon that was sitting on my bedside table (Figure 159). A friend had loaned this to me to take into hospital, saying that it was intended to bring healing. I had brought the icon with me, grateful for the gift of friendship and love, though not believing it had any particular healing power.
Throughout the night the steroids had the unwanted side effect of making it very difficult to sleep. It was in early hours of the morning of the third day that I paid particular attention to the stance that the figure held within the work. I was reminded of the stance Jesus may have employed to reach out and touch the blind man’s eyes. Once again I felt met by the presence of Christ in this image and in response I used the pencils to draw the encounter in a visual diary (Figure 160). In a period of indwelling I recorded my response to this image and encounter; “I have come for living water, Face to face, In relationship, No shame, The bowl is almost submerged, I am here for a blessing.”

![Image of artwork with text](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coracle#/media/File:Two_Coracles_and_Tungabhadra_River.jpg)

**Figure 160. Libby Byrne, *I am here for a Blessing*, 2015. Drawing on paper, 300 x 420mm, Melbourne.**

On the third and final day I was ready to rest. I was drawing the still water in the billabong and the shape of the dish that had been present in my drawing overnight when the nurse who was preparing the cannula and the infusion asked me if I was drawing a coracle (Figure 161-162).

![Image of coracle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coracle#/media/File:Two_Coracles_and_Tungabhadra_River.jpg)

**Figure 161. Libby Byrne, *A Coracle Appears* (detail), 2015. Derwent Inktense pencils on canvas, 200 x 250mm, Melbourne.**

**Figure 162. Two Coracles and the Tungabhadra River, Accessed August 5, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coracle#/media/File:Two_Coracles_and_Tungabhadra_River.jpg.**
A coracle is a small light-weight boat, made of a framework of split and interwoven willow rods, tied with willow bark (Figure 162). The outer layer was originally an animal skin with a thin layer of tar to make it fully waterproof. In a sense, the structure of the coracle is very similar to the structure of the yurt that is my studio (Figure 163).

Each coracle is uniquely shaped for its owner and the water that it is intended to traverse. It is a very effective fishing vessel because, when powered by a skilled person, it barely disturbs the water or the fish. The coracle is light enough to be carried by one person from one part of the river to another, or indeed from the billabong back to the main river. As I spoke with this nurse, the dish in my painting became a coracle (Figure 161).

By the end of the infusion, it was evident that the three small canvases and pencils had been a coracle for me throughout the hospital stay. They had offered a version of my studio that was able to travel with me to this still place, sustaining my practice and nourishing my spiritual health. The practice of making art throughout this study has been like a coracle – art has been a vehicle that has enabled me to negotiate and thereby explore the depths of the theological question of healing (Figure 165).
Upon returning to the studio after this excursion by the billabong, I considered how to articulate this experience of healing, within the body of work *Everything is Breath*. I remembered the figurative work *Letting Go* (Plate 5), and realised that the position of the figure was no longer resonating with my felt sense of the art of healing. The image was expressing the tension of longing and desire that was inherent in searching for an answer to the question, *What do you want me to do for you?* There was a sense in which the figure in the image seemed to be holding her breath and waiting to think of an answer that might be both acceptable to God and possible for the doctors. There was no coracle in sight in the water and thus the figure would be relying on her own capacity to remain afloat if she truly
let go and found herself in a body of water. The figure’s tentative stance expressed my own felt sense of being stuck in a moment of wonder, unable to name my own desire and so therefore unable to move toward healing and wholeness. This experience is noted in the Record of the Dialogue with the source image:

What is it that you want me to do for you? To think that he would ask me this question fills me with wonder and yet as I consider asking for what I really want, I feel a sense of shame. How can I name what I really want when what I want seems so much?

The palimpsest that emerged from the painting Letting Go (Plate 5) was deeply embodied with rich emotional and perceptual experience. The figure was no longer suspended in midair, but grounded and breathing more deeply. She was, however, still naked and somewhat exposed and I decided that this had gone on for long enough. In order to protect the figure and to give her shelter, I deconstructed the palimpsest (Figure 166) and stored it in a series of wooden drawers (Plate 31). The work was presented as an installation in the exhibition, Everything is Breath.

The significance of the studio as a place where it was safe enough to deconstruct and challenge ideas was acknowledged in the exhibition Everything is Breath by the inclusion of two sketches made in the early stages of the inquiry. These exploratory works had been present in the studio whilst I worked throughout the years of this research (Plate 30 and 33). The pages that follow feature the artworks that were exhibited at Chapel on Station Gallery, Box Hill in 2015, as Everything is Breath. The exhibition invited viewers to consider the Book of Ecclesiastes through the imagery of breath, rather than the idea that everything is meaningless.

Figure 166. Libby Byrne, Deconstructing Letting Go, 2015. Palimpsest, 710 x 1370mm, Melbourne.
EVERYTHING IS BREATH, 2015.

Everything is Breath

A PhD Inquiry with the University of Divinity by
Libby Byrne

25 June - 8 July 2015

You are invited to view recent work and check in with the progress of this inquiry
Please join us for an evening of conversation with the artist
Sunday 28th June, 4.30-6.00pm

Chapel on Station Gallery
Cnr Station Street and Ellingworth Parade, Box Hill VIC 3128. 03 9890 5810.
Tuesday - Friday 11.30-3.30, Saturday 1.00-4.00, Sunday 4.30-7.00.

Plate 14. The invitation issued for the exhibition Everything is Breath
Plate 27. Libby Byrne, *Finding a Way Through I*, 2015, Derwent Inktense watercolour pencils on canvas, 200 x 250mm, Melbourne.
Plate 34. Libby Byrne, *Everything is Breath*, 2015. Chapel on Station Gallery, Box Hill.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

Our task is not to give an answer…but to offer ourselves up as such in response, without assigning in advance any limit to the gift.¹

I am now in the position to draw several conclusions from the results of this study to indicate that it has indeed been possible to learn about healing and transformation through the practice of making, being with and seeing art. In this chapter, I will identify several key theological insights about the character of God and consider how they have contributed to developing my understanding of the art of healing. I will then consider the function of art in this particular example of théologie totale. Finally, I will address the significance of these findings for theologians and the wider church.

6.1. SEEING THE CHARACTER OF GOD

The words we use to speak about God have a profound impact on the ways we are able to make sense of the interaction between God and our human experience. Walter Brueggemann has analysed the rhetorical power of scriptural text. His analysis of the creation texts within the Hebrew Bible pays particular attention to the verbs used to describe Yahweh’s creative activity. For Brueggemann these texts have the rhetorical effect of creating a world into which we can live.²

In Ecclesiastes 3 God is described as making (3:11), doing (3:11), giving (3:13), enduring (3:14), seeking (3:15), judging (3:17) and testing (3:18). The language leads us to anticipate God’s presence and action in the world, but leaves us with considerable doubt about how, when and why God works in particular ways (3:11). The repetitive use of language throughout the chapter offers a degree of consistency in the experience of reading and therefore lends a sense of coherence to the chaos described by Qoheleth. In seeing the text through the development of the works Equilibrium I-VIII, it was possible to read the repetitive use of language as a reason to learn to trust the character and presence of God throughout these many and varied human experiences.

6.1.1. The Healing Presence of God

One of the key theological insights gained through the process of making art is that the healing presence of God holds and unites all of the disparate experiences of being human, regardless of the nature or quality of those experiences. Qoheleth believes that God works in a similar way, seeing all that is, all that has been and all that will be (Ecclesiastes 1:9-10, 3:15, 3:17, 7:14, 12:14). The development of the palimpsests, whilst originally a means to reference and understand the healing story of Bartimaeus, also enabled the acknowledgement of the past, present and future. Working with old canvases led to a heightened awareness that there was nothing particularly new that was necessary for the production of the images, other than my own presence and vulnerability before the canvas. The palimpsests contained and then transformed a range of distinctly separate experiences. They were the means to gather in both the good and the bad, without preference for a desirable or edited narrative. The installation of boxes in the exhibition *Untitled*, was an opportunity to acknowledge that all things are worthy of attention, consideration and ultimately judgment.

God’s willingness to gather in and make room for all the disparate experiences of humanity was evident in the small sketches that comprised *Equilibrium I-VIII*. Initially each of these works stood alone, illuminating the different ways in which Qoheleth sees God as present in the challenging experience of the Hebel. God’s presence in all of this is described in *BE* as transformational, as he makes everything suitable for its time (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Everything is not necessarily suitable in and of its self, but God makes everything suitable by framing it with time. The consistent and healing presence of God in the midst of the Hebel became particularly clear when the individual paintings were fixed upon the background of a larger white canvas (Figure 167). Until this moment the individual works were vulnerable to being changed or lost, as was the case with *Equilibrium VII* (Plate 21) but the large white canvas was capable of holding all these smaller paintings in unity and in relationship with one another.

As they took up their place it was evident that together they were much more than a series of small sketches. Once they were fixed to the background, it was no longer possible to take one piece and consider it in isolation. Seeing any of the smaller paintings necessitated seeing the others. In the same way that *The Evans Window* had offered a field of perpetual visual motion, *Equilibrium I-VII* offers the viewer an image that requires an active mode of receptive looking. The work is more than the sum of its parts, as the individual pieces have become something larger. In the same way, *BE* reminds us that it is the character and nature
of God to be consistently gathering the individual person into a larger frame of humanity, that is found in the wholeness of God. Indeed, Qoheleth reminds us that wholeness can only be found in God, who carefully and persistently seeks out what has gone by, in order to gather in and know “that which is, already has been, that which is to be, already is” (Ecclesiastes 3:15). The remedy for the human condition is not to be found in the individual’s desire to be special or different, but in God’s willingness to seek out all that has been and find a place for it within the larger story. The healing presence of God ensures that the qualities of individual difference are not lost in the gathering in, but recognised as belonging without needing to enforce or induce another to be the same.

Figure 167. Libby Byrne, *Equilibrium I-VIII*, 2015. Gouache on linen, 1050 x 2150mm, Melbourne.

God’s willingness to look back and seek out all that has been speaks of a desire to gather in the whole human story rather than select and prefer an edited version of what is good, better or best. The desire to make all of existence whole, requires a willingness to judge (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Gathering in all that has been requires God to recognise and then transform that which has been broken, in order that it will be re-formed as seems good to God (Jeremiah 18:1-4). The healing power of God’s judgment and ultimate forgiveness is clearly articulated in James 5:13-16.

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.
6.1.2. The Persistent Vulnerability of God

The processes involved in the making of art enabled me to recognise that God engages the functions of resistance and repetition in order to bring about healing and transformation. This means that God is persistently vulnerable to the shedding of form in order to be understood. Our ideas and concepts of God therefore need to be equally vulnerable and open to be changed, if we are to live in continuing relationship with the living God. The fluctuating and seeming instability of our lives and bodily health can therefore be understood as a natural outworking of the presence of this vulnerable and transformational God.

In the same way that the source painting was made through the repetitive application of olive oil and water based paint, God makes days of prosperity and adversity for all people to enjoy and endure (Ecclesiastes 7:14). In Ecclesiastes 7:14 Qoheleth makes the point that the repetitive presence of adversity and prosperity means that mortals will never really know what comes next. Adversity and prosperity both shape the human condition and create opportunities for tension or resistance that can facilitate a change of state. The balance between adversity and prosperity can restore equilibrium that has been disturbed and reveal a vision of wholeness.

The making of palimpsests shed light upon the character of God who allows things to fall apart in order that they can be re-made, in ways that seem good to him. The possibility of being formed and then re-formed, suggests that God is willing to keep working with us, enduring and engaging with all that is difficult and calling us to do the same. In making art about Mark 8:22-26, I discovered God’s focus in this process to be upon vulnerability in relationship that enables the possibility of transformation. The significance of the relationship between Jesus and the man at Bethsaida echoes the relationship between the potter and the clay in Jeremiah 18:2-4. In both of these stories we see God employing the function of repetition to bring about healing. Having been originally formed does not prohibit the pot or the blind man from being uniquely re-formed. Indeed, God’s willingness to re-form his creation is evidence of a deep commitment and involvement in the ongoing process of creation that is becoming. “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).
6.1.3. The Latent Desiring of God

*It is the creative potential itself in human beings that is the image of God.*

The responses to the exhibition *Untitled* suggest that art contains present, but not yet visible, desire. There was a consistent expression of desire amongst the received responses, which was routinely accompanied by a recognition of the ‘not yet’ quality of this experience. Titles such as *Breaking Through*, *Breaking Out*, *Emerging*, and even *Not Quite Hopeless*, suggest that desire exists as potential within the art and led viewers to consider that there was something more that could happen. One respondent navigated the psychological journey of seeing latent desire by naming the exhibition, *Undone* and then folding her response into the shape of a boat (Figure 168). In this way, the respondent articulated the possibility that even in the experience of being *Undone*, there was the creative potential in the form of desire to find an image that might assist in making a way through.

![Figure 168. Undone, Response form (no.92) as it was unpacked.](image)

Chrétien recognises the call of divine desire in the need to create. “To create is to call out.”

It is interesting to note that in submitting this response, the participant sought me out to tell me that she had made a boat. This response and the way it was submitted suggest that to call out by creating is to make visible the latent desiring of God – which, in this case, is the desire to see and be seen, to know and be known, to heal and be healed. The material practice of making art thus enables the latent desire of God to become visible and apparent in the world. This work takes time, vulnerability and commitment to the calling from both the

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viewer and the artist. In Chrétien’s opinion it requires the willingness to answer by offering ourselves up in response to the work, “without assigning in advance any limit to the gift”.  

This project has required the creation and exhibition of two complete bodies of work in three years. None of the work has yet been sold as would normally be the case in the course of making, exhibiting and then making again. This has meant that the experience of being with the artwork in the studio was a particularly extensive experience. As the maker of the work, I was able to be with the work in the studio and in the gallery, over a three-year period. It was interesting to note that it took time to see what was happening in some of these works and respond to their needs. This was most evident in the work, Letting Go, which was one of the oldest works to be engaged, one of the first to be transformed into a palimpsest and the last to be completed as an installation. The process of being with the work over time enabled me to become more deeply aware of the latent desire of God, who takes the time to recognise and see us, even in our deepest need and then calls us to respond from our creative potential. In Mark 10:46-52 we see God, in the person of Jesus, recognise Bartimaeus first, in the vulnerability of his deepest human need, and then as one who is healed and whole. The work of being with the painting Letting Go shed light on God’s willingness to recognise both our need and latent potential. God recognises us, in the midst of vulnerability, and holds this in the larger context of all that happens in the course of life. God’s latent desire is to hold a place for us within the larger story of humanity, in order that we might ultimately be drawn in and reconciled to himself as healed and whole.

Seeing the art that I had made in the exhibitions in the gallery enabled me to appreciate that human life is designed to be contingent in order that we might be interdependent and reliant upon the source of our existence, God. Seeing the individual palimpsests come together as a body of work in the exhibition Untitled brought home the reality that we each have a place in the human family, belonging on earth for a time and yet still held within something larger that is God’s time. Wholeness was revealed in the body of work as it was exhibited, rather than in the individual palimpsests. At the conclusion of the research, even the exhibition of palimpsests found a place of belonging in a larger body of work which included the source painting Risk and the works created for the second exhibition, Everything is Breath. The cyclical nature of the rhythm of life expressed in BE shed further light upon the significance of each artwork within the whole collection. The

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5 Ibid. 13.
latent desiring of the vulnerable and transformative God is present in the art inviting us to move with it as we hear its call.

6.2. **What Does it Mean to be Healed?**

God’s desire for a suitable time for everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8) is evidence of God’s ongoing desire for stability within chaos. Stability, however, does not denote a position that is static, stalled or stationary. Rather the stability that God desires is the reliability and dependency of a perpetual tidal rhythm, an inward and outward progression of desire that is born and resides in God and is offered to humanity in grace. The rhythm of stability that is found throughout *BE* became embodied as I painted the translation of *Hebel* as breath (*Equilibrium I-VIII*). The findings from this study indicate that to be healed is to find stability within chaos.

The findings of this study also highlight the importance of not limiting our understanding of healing to an outcome labeled *being healed*. To speak of healing is to describe a process that requires recognition and participation. Healing is not something that is done to us or even for us, but it is something that God does with us. This means that to be healed one must be willing to participate in the whole contingent experience of living, rather than resisting painful experiences in favour of those that are perceived to be good. The call of *BE* is to wholeheartedly participate with all that life offers. Gathering in all that has been, and accepting both the good and the bad – as we have seen, consistent desires and actions of God – is a divine remedy for the fractured state of the human condition. Becoming familiar in the studio with the repetition of God’s timing in the cycle and stages of making, being with and seeing, can prepare us for what is to come in life and enable us to endure and engage with all that is.

The healing of Bartimaeus and the blind man at Bethsaida both resulted in a remedy or cure that restored sight. It is easy to read the call to pray for healing in the gospels as an invitation to pray for the restoration of physical health. To desire physical health is normal and yet it is an equally normal human experience to live with illness that may eventually lead to death. If the absence of illness and disease is considered to be evidence of healing, then it may not be possible in the course of an ordinary human life to expect to experience and sustain a state of healing over time. The results of this study therefore indicate that to equate healing with the cure of illness is to consider what may essentially be a spiritual question in the light of a medical model.
In his *Apologia for the Art of Healing*, Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that medical intervention must be understood as an attempt to restore an equilibrium that has been disturbed by disease or illness.\(^6\) He goes on to explain that whilst this state of equilibrium is characteristically fluctuating, the art of healing involves arresting and assisting the progression of health until the “definitive loss of equilibrium when everything finally comes to an end”.\(^7\)

This experience was visible in the double hanging of the images, *Risk* and *Belonging* and articulated by respondents who titled these two works, *Lost and Found, Overwhelmed Rest* and *A Truthful Contradiction*.

![Figure 169. Libby Byrne, Double hanging of Risk and Belonging in the exhibition Untitled, 2015. Melbourne.](image)

Having noted the inevitability of loss in the task of balancing the equilibrium of health, Gadamer asserts that healing can only be achieved when we recognise that “the nature of the whole includes and involves the entire life situation of the patient and even of the physician”.\(^8\) Gadamer proposes the art of healing involves knowing and doing what we can to ensure that we participate in behaviours and treatments that seek to restore health to the whole person, body and soul. This was clearly articulated by a respondent who named the double hanging of *Risk* and *Belonging* (Figure 169) as, *I am here, underneath it all*. Healing is thus not an outcome, but a process of persistently responding to the fluctuating lived experience of illness and health in order to maintain the integrity of the whole person.

Within this study we have seen that healing requires participation. In the two gospel narratives that have been considered, Jesus invited the blind men to participate in their own healing from affliction. In the first instance, Bartimaeus was confronted with the open ended question, “*What do you want me to do for you?*” (Mark 10:42-52). The question is an open

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\(^7\) Ibid. 37.

\(^8\) Ibid. 41.
invitation for Bartimaeus to be involved with the healing process by recognising and naming his deepest need. Jesus recognised his response as faith that resulted in healing. Healing was not something that was done to Bartimaeus. I would venture to suggest that it was not even something that was done for him. Rather it was something that Jesus did with the full participation of Bartimaeus who wanted his sight restored and expressed his desire directly with Jesus.

In the second healing narrative that has been considered in this study, there is also evidence of Jesus employing a participatory mode of perceptual engagement at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26). Jesus was engaged in a private, intimate and very physical encounter at Bethsaida, as he rubbed his own spit on the blind man’s eyes. The vulnerability of the exchange is evident in the question Jesus then asks, “Can you see anything?” Rather than taking a position of authority and proclaiming healing, Jesus joins the blind man in the task of seeking healing and asks for his perception of the situation. At this stage the blind man could indeed see something and so he could have answered in the affirmative. But the balance in the equilibrium of his health had not been completely restored. He could see people, but they looked like trees walking and he wanted more. He desired clarity of sight and so he had the courage and wisdom to name his own experience and wait for Jesus’ response. When this man’s desire is aligned with Jesus’ desire, both the patient and the physician’s whole life situation united and the result is healing.

Can you see? What do you want? These are questions that invite a response in the form of a direct and participatory engagement with the healing process. In each instance, a wholehearted and faithful response led to healing. The importance of participation is echoed in BE as we are encouraged to engage and endure throughout the course of our human life. Qoheleth is clear that the nature and timing of our experience is known only to God and so he encourages us to embrace the contingent nature of our existence and participate in the whole experience (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Free from the need to know what God is doing, we are able to pay attention to what is actually happening in the past and present and in the future as we imagine it to be, which must include experiences that we perceive as both good and bad.

Ecclesiastes 8:14-15 records Qoheleth’s frustration with the injustice that seems to persistently reign in the world, and yet he “commend(s) enjoyment, for there is nothing better for people under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves, for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 8:15). Qoheleth does not advocate shrinking from the difficulties of life, rather he
acknowledges our need to endure and suggests that being engaged with all that life offers will sustain us through the trials and tribulations that characterise human existence.

6.2.1. Healing Art

The felt sense of these scriptures has been particularly present in several of the artworks that were created in this study. The source painting Risk (Figure 170) emerged as a result of several months of enduring and engaging with the challenging perceptual experiences of living with MS. The rich thematic resource that this painting offered enabled me to explore some particularities of these experiences in the next two stages of the inquiry.

![Image of Libby Byrne's Risk, 2012, Mixed media on canvas, 900 x 2100mm, Melbourne.](image)

The painting titled Letting Go (Figure 171 and 172) was the site of some significant embodied knowing with regard to my understanding of the nature of healing. The viewers’ responses to this palimpsest in the exhibition Untitled alerted me to the potential that the image had for provoking a truly embodied experience of seeing. My suspicion that this mode of seeing would be healing led me to further develop this work, deconstructing it and presenting it in such a way as to invite the viewer to touch and even hold the work in the final exhibition, Everything is Breath.

Having carefully measured and cut the palimpsest into pieces, it was displayed for the viewers in a cascading series of drawers (Figure 173). The canvas spilled like a waterfall over the open drawers, offering a visual cue that the work was still in flux. This translated into an invitation to touch the work. Each day whilst the exhibition was on display, there were people who not only touched the work but rearranged the fragments within the drawers. Several times, as viewers touched the fragments of the work they engaged in discussion about the
potential healing qualities of the colour blue. The intimacy of haptic seeing evoked a deeper awareness of the colour that had always been present in the work and enabled viewers to ask questions about the possibility of healing. The participatory knowing that unfolded in these encounters arrived in the form of new questions about healing provoked by the sensory perceptions in the aesthetic encounter.

Relinquishing the need to preserve the image in its original form enabled the discovery of new ways to make, see and be with this work. In reshaping the work, I was also able to offer the work to viewers with the chance to touch and be touched by the aesthetic presence of the work. The courage to make these changes to this work sprang from desire expressed in response to the question, What do you want me to do for you? Participating in the process of healing may require relinquishing an idealised vision of how life has been or should be and then actively imagining what might still be possible.

6.2.2. The Art of Healing

My material exploration of Mark 8:22-26 throughout my 2015 hospital stay created a shift in my understanding of the nature of healing and this is evidenced in the progress made with the palimpsest, Desiring and Shedding Form (Figure 174) in the time between the exhibition Untitled (2014) and Everything is Breath (2015). The heat of desire in the rusting surface had originally framed the tree trunk ensuring that this slender form was seen as the
object of desire. The same tree trunk is still present in 2015 (Figure 175), but it is now in relationship with a figure that pays close attention to the phenomenon of the object. In this second image the focus is no longer on the object, but in the phenomenology of the relationship. Significance lies in the presence of the healer and the I-thou relationship that the healer experiences with the object, rather than in the object itself. The size of the painting has changed and as a smaller work it now draws the viewer into an unfolding relational dynamic. The viewer is invited to participate in the transformation thus represented.

Figure 174. Libby Byrne, Desiring & Shedding Form, 2014. Palimpsest, 1500 x 1200mm, Melbourne.
Figure 175. Libby Byrne, Emerging, 2015. Palimpsest, 1370 x 710mm, Melbourne.
Figure 176. Libby Byrne, Emerging and Letting Go in Everything is Breath, 2015.

In 2015, Emerging hung on the wall where Letting Go had hung in 2014 (Figure 176). The deconstructed version of Letting Go sat nearby and the blue toning in Emerging was the subtle hue of the colours that reflected the paintings of the billabong. Viewers who had seen both exhibitions were able to recognise the transformation from what had been to what had become of the figure in Letting Go. The figure was no longer alone, but in relationship and no longer naked, but clothed.

It is evident from the results of this study that the art of repetition has a function that enables our participation in healing. The repetition of behaviours, thoughts and experiences that are healthful can lead us toward reconciling and balancing the equilibrium of health. This has particular implications with regard to the theology of prayer for healing. When we pray for healing we are anticipating that something may change as a result of our prayer. Scripture encourages us to believe in the power of faithful prayer to change things. “For truly I tell you,
if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there”, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20).

Having acknowledged that healing may not result in the absence of illness, a prayer for healing requires us to watch and wait for movements of divine life in the body itself. Fiddes considers that we may recognise and describe this movement as coming, turning, flowing, and burning. If a prayer for healing is offered in the spirit of participation in the life of God, then it is important to continue to pray in this way, repetitively and with anticipation. The movement of God within the body as a result of prayer for healing may or may not equate to relief from the physical experience of illness, but the repetition of the prayer may well be the mode of perception that turns our attention toward the life of God that is inherent in the experience of prayer in our embodied existence. Thus it is possible to say that if we have faith we will be healed even if we are not cured, because it is in faith that we participate in the life of God and God’s life participates in the body.

The art of repetition affords us the time to pay attention to the movement of God within our lived and bodily experience. Dissanayake claims that making art offers the opportunity to engage with the art of repetition to elaborate on our experience and instil a sense of belonging, meaning and competence in ourselves and in other people. Art can also redirect our focus away from ourselves, enabling us to pay attention to the movement of God. Art can therefore function to engage our bodies, enabling us to be aware of ourselves and attend to our bodily presence whilst refocusing our attention toward God in whom we ultimately belong. In this way art offers a remedy for the experience of separation from God that we read about in Hebrews 11 and then described so eloquently by Augustine of Hippo, “For thou has made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee”.

They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:13-16).

The results of this study indicate that art is also capable of healing the wound of separation felt in a bodily experience of living with the effects of MS. Actively engaging with altered physical capacities and sensations, rather than avoiding them, enables the person-

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9 Fiddes, "The Body as a Site of Continuity and Change." 274.
with-MS to adapt to and incorporate an appreciation for the new bodily awareness that is now their reality. In this way, rather than befriending the illness the person is befriending their own body as it lives within the experience of illness.

The language we use to speak about illness and health can have considerable power in shaping the experience of living with the impact of disease. Havi Carel articulates the physical impact of receiving a dire medical prognosis in the following way; “The cramped doctor’s office, the tightening chest, the cold panic washing over you; these are so visceral, so traumatic, so real.”  

12 From the moment words are used to articulate a diagnosis of illness, the body is captured by the language that has been used. In an attempt to make sense of the situation, we form associations between the language and our experience and begin to anticipate the future. Martha Nussbaum argues that the connections and assumptions that we make can lead people to be wrong about their health in many ways. It is just as possible for people to believe that they are doing well when they are really not, as it is possible to believe that the outlook is much worse than it really is.  

13 The language that is used to speak about illness and health may be so entrenched in cultural traditions that it shapes our expectations of living with illness and determines our future experience.

The results of this inquiry suggest that not only does the language of illness and health have the power to shape our experience but equally our experience can re-form the language that we choose to use, enabling us to take the time to make sense of our experience and find words that are the right fit. Art has a significant role to play in identifying the essence of our lived experience with illness and health. It can itself contribute to our healing and transformation. It can also be a significant force for re-forming our language about illness and healing and thereby transform our experience.

6.3. Practice-led Systematic Theology

Rowan Williams calls us to consider the multiple ways in which language is formed and asserts that the development of language is a creative and material process.

Language is unmistakably a material process, something that bodies do; so thinking harder about the oddities of language may help us see new things about bodies, indeed about ‘matter’ in general...how matter and meaning do not necessarily belong in different universes.

12 Carel, Illness: The Cry of the Flesh. 117.
14 Rowan Williams, The Edge of Words: God and the habits of language (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2014). Loc. 64 of 4844.
He reminds us that with the material practice of art-making “there are no ‘conclusions’, only
points at which to pause in a continuing and developing practice”. 15 The experience of
making, being with and seeing art can have a significant role to play in the development of
language and particular implications for the language that we use in speaking about illness
and health and indeed about God.

Kaufman claims that to be called to the vocation of Christian theologian is to be
called to the task of constructing a conception of God which will be meaningful and
significant for the situation in which we are living.16 Making, being with and seeing art are
modes of participatory inquiry that can be useful in the task of constructing, seeking and
finding theology for our time. In BE Qoheleth finds wisdom as a result of what he has
observed through seeing the world (Ecclesiastes 1:12). What follows is an exploration of the
patterns he can find in human behaviour and the construction of a divine meaning that can be
intuited in the pattern. Qoheleth has employed a mode of observing and seeking traces of
divine presence and activity within the phenomenology of human experience to construct a
conception of God that is suitable for its time.

In the same way Practice-led Systematic Theology offers a methodological
framework for theological inquiry that is ideally suited to the work of seeing and constructing
theology. Seeking after a particular question, observing the patterns and rhythms within the
materials and the resulting artwork is a way to both see and read the text and so construct
theology. Embodied seeing invites a range of perceptual experiences that inform our
experiential and material knowing and thus enrich our tacit knowing. In this way, making,
seeing and being with art offer the means to read scripture in a different key – that is through
a felt sense of the Word via our tacit knowing.

6.3.1. REFLEXIVE STUDIO PRACTICE IN THÉOLOGIE TOTALE

The application of a reflexive mode of inquiry naturally welcomes voices and
influences from beyond the boundaries of the studio, thereby enabling it to be a method of
what Sarah Coakley called théologie totale. The results of the study indicate that employing a
practice-led method of aesthetic theological inquiry offers the means to uncover new
knowing through an actual practice of un-knowing and un-mastery.17 We have seen that
reflexive studio practice seeks to engage and do justice to the different levels of apprehension

15 Ibid.
16 Kaufman, The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God. 274.
and expression involved in the search that follows when theological questions are posed. The practice offers the means to explore what may have been previously neglected by systematically and perpetually following leads that risk destabilising and redirecting our knowledge and attention. This study has demonstrated that reflexive studio practice addresses the need for a theological method that recognises what Coakley describes as “the embodied nature of theological thinking”.18

This project has also demonstrated the potential for an art-based method of inquiry to renegotiate an arena for engaging the feminine imagination in the construction of theological discourse. Having been made by a woman, this art work attracted a significant response from participants who were also women. The participatory mode of inquiry enabled voices to be heard and the exhibition attracted participants who had not visited The Chapel on Station Gallery before, but who sought to respond to the question of healing that had been publicly posed within the framework of a PhD Inquiry with the University of Divinity. The invitation to embodied seeing enabled participants’ responses to find words that validated and extended the significance of an embodied approach to theological thinking. This was particularly evident when respondents acknowledged how thankful they were for the opportunity to be involved in the research; “Thanks for the gift – I am glad it is Untitled.”

6.3.2. Participation in Théologie totale

There were several levels of participation that were critical in shaping the theological component of my art-making practice. Firstly, there was my own participation in a range of perceptual experiences particularly in the making of the palimpsests. My felt sense of the scripture became clearer as the images that were covered with gesso and then worked in response to Jesus’ question, “What do you want me to do for you?” Throughout this level of inquiry, I was continually awakened to my own desire, which was on some occasions a surprising experience. I participated with the latent and surplus energy in the older work and worked for the good of the thing being made. This practice was marked by the experience of humility, most evident in the boxes of humus that appeared in the exhibition, Untitled (Figure 177).

18 Ibid.7.
The second layer of significant participatory experience in this inquiry was my engagement with viewers in the Chapel on Station Gallery. The invitation to offer an anonymous written response to the artwork offered a forum for people to speak openly and honestly about what they saw in the work. Receiving these responses broadened my appreciation and understanding of the artwork, as well as the conundrum that is present in the question of healing. The open invitation to respond was warmly embraced by viewers and it was clear from the number of people who left their contact details that many people were interested not only to speak about the work but to hear about the progress of the inquiry over time.

The third layer of participation that had particular significance in this work is the way in which the work has begun to travel and find an audience in different faith communities. Throughout the years of making and exhibiting there have been several unplanned opportunities to share the artwork, aside from the planned exhibitions in the Chapel on Station Gallery. As a member of Merri Creek Anglican, when a series of sermons happened to coincide with my own studio based exploration of BE, I took up the opportunity to exhibit the works within the church service as the minister preached. The art took its place alongside the sermon and invited the congregation into an aesthetic encounter with the text, thus extending the possibilities for the congregation to go deeper into the living Word.

Whilst the exhibition Everything is Breath was on display at Chapel on Station Gallery, I offered an opportunity for a silent retreat with the artwork, before the gallery was open to the public. Seven participants attended this two-hour retreat. They were offered
resource material that supported the discovery of their felt sense of the exhibition and so facilitated an experience of embodied seeing (see Appendix D). As a result of the exhibition *Everything is Breath* I was invited by one of the viewers to take some of the work to the Brunswick Uniting Church and speak with a group of people about the way art and faith intersect. This artwork has therefore already been seen within Baptist, Anglican and Uniting Church communities. According to Dufrenne, “Art creates communion which does not exist prior to it.” These vignettes suggest that art offers a communion that is ecumenical in nature. Art is able to generate a public who bestow meaning upon the work as the plurality of their responses are offered and received by the work itself. Dufrenne proposes that meaning concerns and determines our responses, resonating within us and moving us. “Meaning is a demand to which I respond with my body.” Making, being with and seeing art work are all significant components of the experience of embodied seeing. It is this form of seeing that enables the imagination to create a liaison between mind and body and thus assist us in the task of finding meaning, not only individually but also in new expressions of community.

6.4. **The Art of Healing in Congregational Life**

Within this study art offered the means of travelling between the experience of being a patient and the mainstream experience of living, working and functioning as an artist researcher. In this sense art functioned in the way a coracle functions, uniquely shaped and carried by one person from one place to another. Art was both the place from which sustenance and nourishment was sought and the vehicle that enabled new territory to be explored. Proactively taking up the opportunity to engage with art shifted my position from being a patient to being a healer, capable of acting toward my own body with power and dignity. Within this inquiry, art was a remedy for the sense of separateness that was so often part of the experience of being a patient. Painting the felt sense of scripture enabled a sensuous encountering with the Word of God, thereby facilitating a dynamic form of attention that was in itself healing.

This raises the question of the significance of adapting a reflexive studio practice within the context of a local worshipping congregation. The Gospel is inherently a message of healing. The healing potential of this embodied form of seeing the Gospel therefore has implications for the wider Christian community and the way in which the Gospel is

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20 Ibid. 336.
21 Ibid. 345
communicated and shared. The benefit of material knowing and embodied seeing within the life of a congregation could shape the creative potential for the community to not only sustain the regular members through all the seasons of life, but to reach out beyond the boundaries of the mainstream church, into the farther reaches of the general community. If art is a vehicle that enables new territory to be explored and brings healing and wholeness, then it is worthy of further consideration as a framework for faithful people who seek to engage with the creative work of ordinary and found theology in their own lives, but also as a means of being mission focused in the life and work of the wider church.

The capacity for multiple viewers to extend the meaning of an artwork ensures that art offers a language that is capable of gathering in the voices of those who have previously been marginalised by mainstream theological discourse. The painting An Encounter by the Billabong (Plate 7) extended and expanded our understanding of the influence of gender within this inquiry. The engagement of the viewer, who has their own gendered experience of the artwork, ensures that the gendered experience of the artist holds equal weight with the viewer in the exegesis of a theological inquiry. Thus art offers a theological language capable of acknowledging and engaging gender within theological inquiry, whilst balancing and seeking equilibrium in the influence that gender exerts, as different people respond to the work of art and to the question at hand. In this sense, art has the capacity to heal any imbalance that may have been created through gendered and authoritarian use of the written word as a language to speak about God.

The findings of this study indicate that théologie totale is essentially embodied and participatory in nature. It relies on the continual and persistent desire to gather in all that has been, all that is and all that might still be, from the far reaches of human imagination. This in turn enables us to discover ideas, images and experiences that draw us forward in the way we think, perceive and act.22 Employing a reflexive studio practice as a means of théologie totale unifies these modes of reception, enabling theologians to see and respond to the Word, thereby shaping language that speaks directly from our material and embodied knowing of God. In this way theology, like healing, is an active dynamic process rather than a conclusive outcome.

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Wholeness: Cutting the Bonds That Control Us, Monte Olivetto Retreat. Monte Olivetto, Italy: Meditatio Media, 2006.


Vickers, Margaret H. "Illness Onset as Status Passage for People with Multiple Sclerosis (Ms)." *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration* 33, no. 2 (2010): 197-227.


Healing Art and the Art of Healing
A PhD Inquiry by Libby Byrne
libbybyrne@bigpond.com

My name is Libby Byrne and I am conducting an art-based research project with the University of Divinity into the experience of living with illness and the desire for healing. Thank you for being willing to work through this form which explains what is involved in accepting the invitation to be involved in this research.

What is the aim of the project?

As an Artist, I am aware that my work in the studio is a disciplined spiritual practice. Matthew Fox suggests that as the artist commits to the discipline of this work, art heals. But what does it mean to be healed? This exhibition is the first stage of a theological inquiry into the question of what it means to live with illness and also desire healing. When we speak of being ‘healed’ from illness, this can often be interpreted as being ‘cured’. When our hope for healing resides in our faith (Your faith has healed you), can we live in faith even if we are not ‘cured’? How can we live with illness and continue to live in faith? What are we hoping for, if we believe that art heals?

The intention of this exhibition is to help us explore these questions together and hopefully extend the way we think about illness and healing. I am issuing a public invitation for anyone who is interested to participate in the research whilst the exhibition is on display in the Chapel on Station Gallery from June 26th – July 10th, 2014. I have presented all of these works without a title in the hope that you might have the opportunity to see them as clearly as possible in the light of your own experience.

How can you Participate?

To participate in the inquiry you would firstly be required to spend some time viewing the art work. Having seen the work you are then:

1. Invited to offer a title for each of the art works and for the exhibition.
2. Asked to consider one or two words that might be a succinct statement of what you see in each of the works.
3. List your responses on the form provided. There is no compulsion to find a title for ALL of the works. Simply offer titles for the works that seem to speak clearly to you.
4. Once you have looked at all of the individual works, consider what you think might be an appropriate title for the exhibition as a whole.
5. Fold and post your form in the Confidential Receipt Box.

What happens with the data collected?
All of the responses made in this study are completely voluntary and anonymous. Once you filled out your responses on the following sheet and returned the form to the collection box, you have consented to being a participant in this study. I will collect the responses from the gallery after the exhibition has closed. I will then tabulate and analyse all the responses and look for common themes. This information will Help me! see the work through your eyes, rather than just my own. Your responses will form part of the data collected in this research project and I am hopeful that they will Help me! to understand more about what might be shared in our human experience. Having identified the themes that were important to the people who view this exhibition, I will use those ideas to develop a second body of art work in the studio. Developing these new images will be an opportunity to consider how I might discover God in the midst of these human responses and experiences. This second body of work will then be exhibited as a theological reflection on the nature of illness, desire and the Art of Healing. A summary of the themes that emerge in this first stage of the inquiry will be available for participants to read at the gallery when I exhibit again in 2015. The summary will also be published at that time on my website www.libbybyrne.com.au.

Once you submit an anonymous and confidential written response to this project it will not be possible to withdraw from that level of participation in the project. In submitting a response you are agreeing to participate in the research without prejudice. If you are planning to submit a visual response to the exhibition, you have the right to withdraw from active participation in this research project within four weeks of completing your participation. All the responses we receive through the gallery will be photographed and/or stored confidentially on a CD. These documents will be kept securely for five years and then passed onto the University of Divinity Registrar for safe-keeping and eventual destruction.

Are you taking a risk being involved?

Whenever artwork is displayed in a public context and people enter a gallery to view an exhibition, it is possible that they will be challenged emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. If any of this work evokes responses that are uncomfortable for you, please speak with Rev Dr Anne Mallaby or Alexandra May. They will be available in the gallery at different times whilst the work is on display and they will able to offer you pastoral support or a referral to a counselling agency should that be necessary.

How will you know what this research reveals?

At the conclusion of this research I plan to offer an exhibition and launch a book for the purposes of communicating the results of the this study. I hope this research will have significant implications for those seeking healing within Christian communities for our understanding and development of the healing potential of art within our contemporary Australian culture.

Questions regarding this project may be directed to the University of Divinity Administration, (03) 9853 3177. If you have any complaints or queries that the researcher has not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact the University of Divinity Director of Research, (03) 9340 8826, or email mlindsay@divinity.edu.au.

Thankyou for taking the time to consider being involved with this research project.

Libby Byrne (PhD, Candidate University of Divinity) under the supervision of,
Associate Professor Frank Rees (Whitley College, University of Divinity)
You are invited to suggest a title
for this exhibition from Libby Byrne

‘Untitled’
Chapel on Station Gallery
Box Hill
June 26th – July 9th 2014

Your Anonymous Response to this project will be considered part of the data for this research project with the University of Divinity.

Image 1____________________________________________________________
Image 2____________________________________________________________
Image 3____________________________________________________________
Image 4____________________________________________________________
Image 5____________________________________________________________
Image 6____________________________________________________________
Image 7____________________________________________________________
Image 8____________________________________________________________
Image 9____________________________________________________________
Image 10____________________________________________________________
Exhibition Title_____________________________________________________
Consent for Use of Images

I ……………………………………………… have read (or, where appropriate had read to me) and understood the information above, and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that the information provided by me or with my permission during the research project may be included in a thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals on the condition that neither my name nor any other identifying information is used.

I ……………………………………………… give my consent for my art work to be photographed and used for research purposes by the researcher, Libby Byrne. Any art work used shall be returned undamaged to me, via the Chapel on Station Gallery in Box Hill.

I understand that my art work will be documented and presented in the research anonymously, and that all care will be taken by the researcher to prevent any identifying information about me or my family, or circumstances being disclosed.

I agree to participate in the research without prejudice and I understand that I can withdraw my consent within four weeks of the image being made. I understand that a digital record of the image will be kept with the University of Divinity Registrar for five years, after which time it will be destroyed.

Libby Byrne (Researcher)

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ___/___/___

Participant’s Name (block letters) ________________________________

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ___/___/___
To understand the kingdom is to understand what we really want. And we will never be whole – we will never experience this integrity, this completion, this fulfilment, until we have got into touch with what we truly want. That means for most of us that we will need to do some quite hard work in sorting out the difference between our desires and our needs. Sometimes it is very painful external circumstances like being in prison or having a serious illness that might be what we need to find out what we really want, to put us into touch with our deepest, truest desire - which is our true self. Let us consider two stories from the gospel of Luke and the gospel of Mark. They are very close to each other in each gospel and in meaning I think – and they might give us a clue into what we are meaning when we talk about wholeness.

Jesus is speaking when the rich young man of the gospel comes up to speak to him. The young man comes straight up to Jesus and says, ‘Good master what I must do to win eternal life?’ And Jesus says, "Why do you call me good? Only God is good." And Jesus says to him, “You know the commandments”, and he runs off the commandments. “So keep the commandments, be a good person.” And the rich young man is stopped in his tracks because he says, "I have kept all these commandments since my youth. I am OK. I don’t cheat, I don’t lie, I don’t steal, and I am basically a moral person. And yet there is still something else that I want.” That’s what he’s really saying. Jesus in the gospel of Mark looks at him and loves him in that moment. And then Jesus says,” OK then: There is one thing that you still lack. If you want to be whole go and sell everything you have and give to the poor and then come follow me.” All we are told then is that the rich young man goes away sad at heart because he was a man of great wealth. And so we might say this is a story of failure...he has failed to respond to the call of Jesus. He asked for it and he got the invitation, he had the privilege of a personal invitation and yet he failed to respond. Or we might also say that he really heard it. He really heard the invitation and he had to go away and work out how he had to do it and work through his resistance and work through the long process of detachment that he would have to undergo. Then Jesus gives his teaching on the dangers of wealth and the spiritual life. The more attachments we have, the less easy it is for us to be whole.

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Things move on and Jesus is leaving Jericho and Bartimaeus the blind beggar is sitting by the gate begging and he hears that Jesus is passing by, and he begins to shout out in a loud voice, “Jesus son of David, have pity on me.” The crowd tell him to shut up but he calls out all the more – he’s persevering. And then Jesus calls him over and they bring him over and then Jesus asks him a question, “What do you want me to do for you?” And immediately he replies, “Lord I want my sight back.” And Jesus says, “Your faith has healed you ... you have your sight back.” And the man sees, he follows Jesus, celebrating, rejoicing and the crowd rejoice with him.

So these are two different approaches to this invitation to wholeness and we are in both of these. We are both the rich young man and the blind beggar. We are still held back by our attachments, and our attachments are not merely material possessions. We have all sorts of attachments. And we are hopefully also on our way to becoming like Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, who just knows what he wants, who is poor in spirit, who desires only one thing, purity of heart is to desire one thing. **So what do we really want?**

If we know it and we are truly in touch with it - and that’s what asking means really I think – it’s not repeating our requests, ‘please, please, please’ all the time – to ask means to be in touch with, clearly, courageously, to embrace our own need: to know what we want. And then wholeness happens, the kingdom is revealed.

And in many of these stories it is through healing, that wholeness is revealed.
An Embodied Experience of Seeing

Allow yourself time to settle into this place.

Be aware of your breath.

Is there an image that is drawing your attention?

What do you see?

What do you feel when you consider the image?

Where in your body would you locate this feeling?

Is there a word, phrase, gesture or sound that matches your felt sense of this image?

Spend some time and then consider if this word, phrase, gesture or sound still seems to be the right fit for your felt sense of the image.

If not, what might be a better fit?

What do you need now?

What do you want to do?

Take some time to hear and respond to this work before moving onto another.
## APPENDIX E: RECORD OF RESPONSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image 1</th>
<th>Image 2</th>
<th>Image 3</th>
<th>Image 4</th>
<th>Image 5</th>
<th>Image 6</th>
<th>Image 7</th>
<th>Image 8</th>
<th>Image 9</th>
<th>Exhibition</th>
<th>Researcher’s Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shrouded Unknown</td>
<td>A Possibility</td>
<td>A reflected invitation</td>
<td>Stepping into</td>
<td>Careful but bounded hope</td>
<td>Trusting hope</td>
<td>Looking up</td>
<td>Named</td>
<td>Timeless metamorphis</td>
<td>Boxed memories of life cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Zen in Autumn</td>
<td>Sentinel</td>
<td>Sea Storm</td>
<td>Embryo</td>
<td>Winter road</td>
<td>Ghost dancer</td>
<td>Becoming one</td>
<td>Primal</td>
<td>Vintage Shock</td>
<td>YES! You saw the road! Exhilerating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What’s around the corner?</td>
<td>Falling</td>
<td>What’s happening?</td>
<td>Forest Dance</td>
<td>Winter moon</td>
<td>Light’s depth</td>
<td>Hello world</td>
<td>Jungle</td>
<td>Life’s detritus</td>
<td>So pleased that image 7 is welcomed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>Rust river</td>
<td>Awakening</td>
<td>Caught</td>
<td>Glaucoma</td>
<td>Reborn fear</td>
<td>Bleed</td>
<td>Dreams</td>
<td>Regeneration</td>
<td>Maybe this person has been ill? I am moved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The numinous</td>
<td>Eyes move vertically</td>
<td>.Tree trunk</td>
<td>Shroud</td>
<td>Cupping, serenity, flow</td>
<td>milky</td>
<td>Risk –mould, cool, scarred tears</td>
<td>Midden mud and heavy loss</td>
<td>Seeing the surface. much lies hidden beneath</td>
<td>This person engaged with the marks rather than meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>To traverse the watery way – or not?</td>
<td>Evening Forest Heat</td>
<td>Stretching Space</td>
<td>Finding an Opening into Mystery</td>
<td>A bold face in the darkness</td>
<td>A quiet descent into the fecund stillness/ silence</td>
<td>An earthen way through dry land</td>
<td>What a gift they have offered – I am thrilled with no. 1.</td>
<td>Holding this response tenderly – The Nest (17/1/10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>New horizons</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Undone</td>
<td>I want to be free</td>
<td>Out of the depths</td>
<td>Black hole</td>
<td>New life</td>
<td>Holding this response tenderly – The Nest (17/1/10)</td>
<td>Thankyou! Good, good, good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Eternity</td>
<td>After the fire</td>
<td>Serenity and Hope</td>
<td>Into the womb, Free at last</td>
<td>Radar</td>
<td>New Life</td>
<td>Towards healing</td>
<td>Into the Abyss</td>
<td>At the end of the day</td>
<td>Unchartered Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>From Creation to new Creation</td>
<td>Still standing</td>
<td>Spirit hovers (over the chaos)</td>
<td>Cocooned</td>
<td>Through the mist - dimness</td>
<td>Rest</td>
<td>Your mercies are new every morning</td>
<td>After the fire</td>
<td>I took a deep breath at 7.</td>
<td>Thanks! Good, good, good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 1</td>
<td>Image 2</td>
<td>Image 3</td>
<td>Image 4</td>
<td>Image 5</td>
<td>Image 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Arriving, new, unknown, still</td>
<td>Tree -- strength, rigid, reaching</td>
<td>Chaos settling</td>
<td>Waken Seeing</td>
<td>Cloaked, veiled, sky</td>
<td>Opening, entering, draining, movement -- release, relief</td>
<td>Waiting, Watching, Hoping</td>
<td>Weighted, heavy, can't breathe</td>
<td>Discarded, lost, forgotten</td>
<td>Grief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>Lost Soul</td>
<td>Angelic Host</td>
<td>From darkness to light</td>
<td>Indecision</td>
<td>Man's will through risk to God's will</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Sunrise on a wave</td>
<td>First snow</td>
<td>Splash</td>
<td>Dance among the trees</td>
<td>Saintly</td>
<td>Transcendence</td>
<td>Raising the veil</td>
<td>A light in the forest</td>
<td>Earth Boxes</td>
<td>Elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Outsider</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Trapped OR Safe?</td>
<td>I don’t know if I want to go against the stream or with it? But I know I am stuck outside of it</td>
<td>Separate Journeys (sometimes I am adventurous - sometimes I am an outside observer of myself)</td>
<td>I feel connected to this image</td>
<td>I am the earth, being, the land</td>
<td>Coping via compartmentalising</td>
<td></td>
<td>A Pause in the Journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Surfacing</td>
<td>The flowing of time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spilling or seeping</td>
<td>I am here, underneath it all</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Oxidation by waterfall</td>
<td>landing</td>
<td>Hopping into the shower</td>
<td>concave</td>
<td>created</td>
<td>reaching</td>
<td>The small window to escape and go anywhere</td>
<td>redemption</td>
<td>Dripping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Gateway</td>
<td>Beginning to shed</td>
<td>About face/ Towards the light</td>
<td>Lift the veil</td>
<td>Held in the light</td>
<td>warmth</td>
<td>Standing still</td>
<td>Moving forward</td>
<td>Exposed</td>
<td>Journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Shifting Fog</td>
<td>Come Explore</td>
<td>Maelstrom</td>
<td>Keeping On</td>
<td>Being Birthed</td>
<td>Beyond the darkness</td>
<td>Through the glass darkly</td>
<td>The past is a far country</td>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>WOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 1</td>
<td>Image 2</td>
<td>Image 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Maybe Hope</td>
<td>White Hot</td>
<td>Defying the truth</td>
<td>Deadline</td>
<td>Reprieve</td>
<td>Hidden Cracks</td>
<td>My feet upon a rock</td>
<td>I didn’t know</td>
<td>Clean Dressings</td>
<td>Intriguing title for the exhibition – I like it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Rage</td>
<td>The Journey</td>
<td>Light at the end of the Tunnel</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Whatever!</td>
<td>What’s it all about?</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>Despair</td>
<td>Unsettling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Anxious mist</td>
<td>Invitation to the unknown, Risky adventure</td>
<td>The gift of life</td>
<td>Mother – still unknown (now dead)</td>
<td>Warm energy</td>
<td>Falling Relaxation</td>
<td>Fear of discovery</td>
<td>Earth’s iridescence</td>
<td>The places where feelings might go</td>
<td>Earthed Emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Islands in the fog</td>
<td>The darkness</td>
<td>The spirit hovered over</td>
<td>Holding on by the fingernails</td>
<td>I AM</td>
<td>The Tree</td>
<td>Bleeding, hiding, afraid</td>
<td>Fear and Trembling</td>
<td>Buried memories</td>
<td>The Edge of Breath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Into Eternity</td>
<td>Stream of Life</td>
<td>Angels on High</td>
<td>Overcoming</td>
<td>Future Indistinct</td>
<td>The Curtain Opens</td>
<td>Facing the darkness</td>
<td>Through darkness to hope</td>
<td>Garden of Eden</td>
<td>I think that this is my mother’s response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Trek</td>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>Bracing</td>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>Merge</td>
<td>Spike</td>
<td>Truce</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Secrets</td>
<td>Equilibrium</td>
</tr>
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<td>25</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cascade Rush</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Landing</td>
<td>Trees</td>
<td>Awakening</td>
<td>Happy days</td>
<td>Woosh</td>
<td>Valley</td>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>Other planet</td>
<td>Filling</td>
<td>Eclectic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 1</td>
<td>Image 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>27 Misty Peaks</td>
<td>Sapling with timber cut background</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>Tribute to Isadora</td>
<td>Curve in white</td>
<td>Parallel falls</td>
<td>Lifting the veil</td>
<td>Brown rust in motion</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>Veiled Truths</td>
<td>Isadora Duncan was a dancer killed in 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Landscape</td>
<td>within a landscape</td>
<td>See the face beyond</td>
<td>Like a Frog jumping out of a pond</td>
<td>We all live in a bubble – so that’s life</td>
<td>No thoughts on this</td>
<td>The parting of the waters and Jesus beyond</td>
<td>We all think our planet is like the dead centre of the universe</td>
<td>The cool of the mind</td>
<td>Beautiful but ‘inferno’ landscape</td>
<td>Thanks for the gift – I am glad it is “Untitled”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Apartness</td>
<td>Sediment</td>
<td>Possibility</td>
<td>Bubble</td>
<td>Juncture</td>
<td>Wound</td>
<td>Black, silent hole</td>
<td>Overwhelmed Rest</td>
<td>Heart beat</td>
<td>Crucible</td>
<td>Love the title!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Yonder</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>Lost Souls Leaving</td>
<td>Ingenuity</td>
<td>Peering through darkness</td>
<td>Will I enter the cavern? Take the risk?</td>
<td>Burnt memories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Two sheets of paper were folded together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Horizons...the light appearing</td>
<td>Innocence...calm glances...empty faces</td>
<td>Peering through darkness</td>
<td>Will I enter the cavern? Take the risk?</td>
<td>Burnt memories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I think that they can see the figures beneath!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 Distant Lands</td>
<td>Creating Light</td>
<td>Falling into Darkness</td>
<td>Keep Trying</td>
<td>Moving to light</td>
<td>Falling to lightness</td>
<td>Cracks appearing</td>
<td>Finding Light</td>
<td>Half unpacked</td>
<td>Searching for Light</td>
<td>Love the title for the boxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 Chasm Crossing</td>
<td>Exposed – bark stripped bare, back to the bone</td>
<td>“That’s how the light gets in” (Cohen)</td>
<td>Membrane: Return to the womb</td>
<td>Blurred Fissure</td>
<td>Life Seeping Back...Darkness deepthing light</td>
<td>Cosmic veil</td>
<td>Enchantment Healing</td>
<td>Conditional release / hesitant hope</td>
<td>Holding open the hope</td>
<td>Someone has worked hard here</td>
</tr>
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<td>34</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Box of life or Life packed into boxes to be sifted. Lost not forgotten</td>
<td>More to be read on this form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 1</td>
<td>Image 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Line leads the eye around the swirling, windy, misty, elements</td>
<td>A tree trunk: A harmony of line and earthy colours</td>
<td>Horizon provides context and start point. Swirling clouds lead the eye</td>
<td>Fecundity and the woman in the womb yet to be born.</td>
<td>Line and Light. The yellow gives a warm pleasing feel</td>
<td>Birth canal into the ocean</td>
<td>A mottled person reaches for the heavens, the divine</td>
<td>Decay and wretchedness. The secret earth beneath</td>
<td>Buried strips A putting away, shedding of hurt, emotion and skin, leaving a new and vulnerable creature</td>
<td>Rebirth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Stormy Coast</td>
<td>Pushing back the darkness</td>
<td>Looking through the curtain</td>
<td>The rain came down</td>
<td>Looking up – hope for things to come</td>
<td>Above</td>
<td>Below</td>
<td>Life’s boxes</td>
<td></td>
<td>I really feel the rain in 5 (Relief II 3/1/10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Human Desire/ Enigma</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Eternity/ Eternal Peace, growth or journey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voyage of the Spirit</td>
<td>(2/1/10 Irritation) This is the enigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Profile in Utero</td>
<td>RILE</td>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Pausing with intention</td>
<td>Scaled</td>
<td>Emancipation</td>
<td>False Gravity</td>
<td>The people</td>
<td>Desperation</td>
<td>Nine kinds of medication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Vision of a promised land, but a long harsh journey</td>
<td>Confusion better in light than dark</td>
<td>Pushing back the dark, or taking a step through</td>
<td>Constant flow</td>
<td>Never perfect</td>
<td>Healing and risk hand in hand</td>
<td>A need to leave some boxes closed</td>
<td>Changing dark to light</td>
<td></td>
<td>This person really gets no. 7.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Perhaps some day</td>
<td>Earth Encyclical</td>
<td>Rococo Iteration</td>
<td>Atmospheres</td>
<td>Genesis</td>
<td>Prevail</td>
<td>Tactical Acceptance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Emerging</td>
<td>Ups and Downs</td>
<td>Triumph</td>
<td>Courage and Trust</td>
<td>Through</td>
<td>Beyond</td>
<td>Break through</td>
<td>Wounded (A) Drifting (B)</td>
<td>Buried</td>
<td>Beyond Words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Enlightenment</td>
<td>Contemplation</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>The journey</td>
<td>Peacefulness</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Turmoil</td>
<td>Troubled</td>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 1</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Life in the womb. Feelings of life and joy but possibly pain and loss of life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I wonder if this was the participant who then painted about a miscarriage?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>New Beginnings</td>
<td></td>
<td>Open Highway</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>They also saw the road!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Still</td>
<td>Ash to Ash</td>
<td>Spirit Hovers</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Clarity</td>
<td>Fertility</td>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>Wilderness</td>
<td>Departure</td>
<td>Terrain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Softly down</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cavern</td>
<td>Artist Humus</td>
<td>The coming and the going</td>
<td></td>
<td>Intriguing title – is this an artist?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48a</td>
<td>emerging</td>
<td>shadows</td>
<td>Above and below</td>
<td>Weighted oppressing</td>
<td>veiled</td>
<td>Opening unfolding unpeeling</td>
<td>Lifting farewell</td>
<td>No words please! Caverns</td>
<td>Boxed contained controlled</td>
<td>What does it mean to be healed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48b</td>
<td>Disappearing, unknown edges</td>
<td>Up and down, light and dark</td>
<td>Vitality depths – my favorite</td>
<td>Enclosed in emptiness</td>
<td>Unbearable opaqueness (of being)</td>
<td>Into the depths (roll away the stone)</td>
<td>Another country</td>
<td>Rough light</td>
<td>Odd box out</td>
<td>Too much for words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Sliding into Peace</td>
<td>Standing strong</td>
<td>Baptism</td>
<td>Born again</td>
<td>Boundaries</td>
<td>Contemplation</td>
<td>Furnace</td>
<td>Leap of faith</td>
<td>Interior rooms</td>
<td>Emerging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Earth Moods in mystical</td>
<td>The soul of bark</td>
<td>The second coming</td>
<td>Renewed Eden</td>
<td>Spiritual circle</td>
<td>Hands of prayer</td>
<td>Angel view</td>
<td>Heaven on earth</td>
<td>Caged minds, enclosed spirits</td>
<td>Symbolic mysteries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>The Opening</td>
<td>Crust</td>
<td>Divine Spark</td>
<td>Renewal</td>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>Beyond time</td>
<td>Lost and Found</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Swamp</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hidden</td>
<td>The Wall</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes! I like the naming of the boxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 1</td>
<td>Image 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Ancient tree trunk</td>
<td>Light and hope</td>
<td>Woman’s release</td>
<td>Path through the fog</td>
<td>Funnelling strength</td>
<td>Reaching for the universe</td>
<td>Richness of nature</td>
<td>Disorganised order</td>
<td>Life’s Wonder</td>
<td>I am without words now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Erosion</td>
<td>‘Ha’adama’</td>
<td>Enveloped</td>
<td>Peace at last</td>
<td>Finding a way through</td>
<td>My soul is bleeding through</td>
<td>The work of life</td>
<td>Stripped, separated, divided</td>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Grounded in material presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Desolate landscape</td>
<td>Solidity</td>
<td>Beautiful chaos</td>
<td>Enveloped</td>
<td>Peace at last</td>
<td>Finding a way through</td>
<td>My soul is bleeding through</td>
<td>The work of life</td>
<td>Stripped, separated, divided</td>
<td>Present and Awake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Rush for the Unknown</td>
<td>Rusted flame</td>
<td>Underneath</td>
<td>Swing</td>
<td>Dark Flow</td>
<td>Blue Tears – Passing Wave of Time</td>
<td>Stripped, separated, divided</td>
<td>Present and Awake</td>
<td>This person really gets me and my experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>The fog</td>
<td>Not out of the woods</td>
<td>The light cleanses</td>
<td>Seeking Cleansing</td>
<td>The glass half full</td>
<td>Reborn</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Fire and water</td>
<td>Review of life - Baggage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Mars</td>
<td>Deep Forest</td>
<td>Spaghetti Fields</td>
<td>Dancing in the light</td>
<td>Alien Moon</td>
<td>The green caves</td>
<td>Stripped, separated, divided</td>
<td>Present and Awake</td>
<td>Indeed (21/1/10 Compassion)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Brazen Edges of the Unknown</td>
<td>Dark grain</td>
<td>Arctic light</td>
<td>Syshiprs (?) within</td>
<td>Part of the edge</td>
<td>Pouring out pain</td>
<td>Facing the darkness</td>
<td>What archetype sleeps here?</td>
<td>To hold or discard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Stay Strong</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Take Hope</td>
<td>Rebirth</td>
<td>Golden Glow</td>
<td>Cleansing Stream</td>
<td>Glass half full</td>
<td>Breaking through</td>
<td>Unearthed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Short sighted – no wider perspective</td>
<td>Horizon</td>
<td>Trapped / re-birth/ consumed/ battle</td>
<td>Blurred</td>
<td>Looming / Despair</td>
<td>Veiled / Covered</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Rusted / Worn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62a</td>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Mind</td>
<td>Lift</td>
<td>Cream</td>
<td>Calix</td>
<td>Tete</td>
<td>Skin</td>
<td>Desert Song</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62b</td>
<td>Edge</td>
<td>Constellation</td>
<td>Conscious Subconscious/ Tuner’s dawn</td>
<td>Envelop</td>
<td>Cataract</td>
<td>Well</td>
<td>Monument</td>
<td>Corrosion / Rust or Scraffito</td>
<td>Memories</td>
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<td>This person also made two choices for each work</td>
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<td>Image 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Two Time zones in two landscapes come together</td>
<td>Through the forest</td>
<td>On the water: rain an squid ink</td>
<td>I am alive! I am woman!</td>
<td>Optical illusion: The eye behind the veil</td>
<td>Into my body – the depths of my physical being</td>
<td>Lifting the veil</td>
<td>Face in the rugged in landscape</td>
<td>High rise living</td>
<td>“The Essence of Life” or “Stuff” or “Fullness / Ruggedness”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Flow</td>
<td>Caged</td>
<td>Serene</td>
<td>Ponder</td>
<td>Rust or Risk</td>
<td>What to make of my remnants?</td>
<td>I love the resonance with remnants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Flow</td>
<td>Caged</td>
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<td>Ponder</td>
<td>Rust or Risk</td>
<td>What to make of my remnants?</td>
<td>I love the resonance with remnants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Lo I walk through the valley, I will fear now evil</td>
<td>God’s healing, flowing down</td>
<td>New happiness</td>
<td>Her spirit lives</td>
<td>The son has healed me</td>
<td>Healing flows through Christ to me or His tears have washed me well</td>
<td>His banner over me is love and healing</td>
<td>I would rather do the work of healing than Risk or Rust</td>
<td>Baggage unloaded</td>
<td>Seems like we are running from the real experience into Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Reflecting long lengthy life with dabbles of experience to keep going</td>
<td>Left my fears behind and filled with inspiration</td>
<td>Soul – desire to be rid of ill feeling. “Ridden”</td>
<td>Trying to keep focus on the light and forgiveness in a dark place</td>
<td>Lifting the veil</td>
<td>Face in the rugged in landscape</td>
<td>Rust or Risk</td>
<td>What to make of my remnants?</td>
<td>I love the resonance with remnants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Empty place - flow</td>
<td>Rusty, flowing, rocky, solid surfaces</td>
<td>Explosion of faith – finding balance</td>
<td>I am here. I accept. I am.</td>
<td>Light The start of a ring of confidence</td>
<td>Awakening femininity, opening up- the beginning</td>
<td>What the eye can see and what the heart feels</td>
<td>Raw emotions emerging and finding a place of acceptance</td>
<td>Filing, digging, putting emotions in boxes</td>
<td>Hiding, confronting, finding enlightenment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Flow - Falling into, rising out of... both</td>
<td>Fecund Horizon Above &amp; below, public &amp; private, spoken &amp; unspoken, seen &amp; unseen</td>
<td>Lifting the veil</td>
<td>I love the word Fecund. I also like the ability of that painting to hold all the opposites</td>
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354
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image 1</th>
<th>Image 2</th>
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<th>Image 7</th>
<th>Image 8</th>
<th>Image 9</th>
<th>Exhibition</th>
<th>Researcher's Response</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feels exuberant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower piece is ‘Beyond feeling’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comment that ‘untitled’ allows for depth of emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>A new country</td>
<td>Emerge</td>
<td>Light, Storm, Vortex</td>
<td>A glimpse</td>
<td>Integrate</td>
<td>Engorged into becoming</td>
<td>Could it be...?</td>
<td>Conflicted – deep sadness</td>
<td>More to go... A ripping away and rawness</td>
<td>A creative person had to almost draw the words</td>
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<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>The brink</td>
<td>Bush fire</td>
<td>Light after storm</td>
<td>Maturation</td>
<td>Hidden Path</td>
<td>Chasm</td>
<td>Oxidation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Difficult it is to see all the works in a large crowd</td>
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<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
<td>True Life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Behind the veil</td>
<td>Body of earth</td>
<td>In the beginning</td>
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<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>A new foreign land</td>
<td>Dark Reality by hope</td>
<td>Overwhelmed the light: working with hope</td>
<td>A breath in surrender</td>
<td>Resting in the sacred: A joyful awakening</td>
<td>Relapse: grappling with hope and change, fear and longing</td>
<td>Integration and regeneration</td>
<td>A journey toward integration: Through fear, surrender and hope</td>
<td>This person uses the language of MS</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Strong wind blowing, dust storm</td>
<td>Tree, dust</td>
<td>Anger underneath</td>
<td>Stretching womb</td>
<td>Light, circle of life</td>
<td>Sad face, womb, waterfall</td>
<td>Person, veil, injury, undulating</td>
<td>Confusion, swamp, afloat on a boat</td>
<td></td>
<td>In nearly misread undulating as undertaking!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Tease</td>
<td>Disease</td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>Release</td>
<td>Cease</td>
<td>Appease</td>
<td>Ease</td>
<td>Decease</td>
<td>Little Ease</td>
<td>I wonder if this person has worked hard to link them all rather than taking them one at a time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The table above contains a subset of the data from the original text, focusing on specific concepts and their relationships. Each row represents a comment or observation related to a particular image or concept, with corresponding responses or interpretations provided. The columns include the image number, the concept or phrase associated with it, and detailed responses from a researcher, discussing aspects such as the emotional depth, creative process, and the interconnected nature of the concepts presented.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image 1</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Promised land</td>
<td>Spirit disturbed with hope</td>
<td>Psalm 121</td>
<td>Unfinished Beautiful dancer</td>
<td>Where is grace?</td>
<td>Embrace Blessing Gift</td>
<td>Virgin’s praise</td>
<td>Cathedral</td>
<td>What has been?</td>
<td>Ground of being? Containing. Giving life</td>
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<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Spiritual Escape</td>
<td>Depressive Lethargy</td>
<td>Superficial Wellness</td>
<td>Protective Bubble</td>
<td>Light Connection</td>
<td>Darkness Visible</td>
<td>The Solitude of Disease</td>
<td>Dichotomy of health</td>
<td>The sombre consolations of compartmentalisation</td>
<td>Healing from the Inside</td>
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<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>Devastation Desolation</td>
<td>Thick, dark place</td>
<td>Light appearing Regeneration</td>
<td>Pushing back the darkness</td>
<td>Light, brightness, grey shadow</td>
<td>Darkness embraced</td>
<td>Curtain thrown off</td>
<td>Peacock, murky calmness separate from chaos</td>
<td>Boxes being opened – dirt, colourful</td>
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<td>Wow…. I do feel a bit exposed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Immolation (sacrifice)</td>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td></td>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>Wound</td>
<td>Rust / Oxidation</td>
<td>Detritus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I like learning a new word (immolation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Promised Land</td>
<td>Sacred Journey</td>
<td>Vision Quest</td>
<td>Dealing with Grief</td>
<td>Lost Soul</td>
<td>Rebirth</td>
<td>Veil of illusions</td>
<td>Deep in my heart</td>
<td>Journey to the light</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Singing now ‘Deep in my heart… I do believe… we shall overcome someday”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>Katabatic</td>
<td>Dry Rot</td>
<td>The darkness beneath</td>
<td>Naked determination</td>
<td>Bicycle in the rain</td>
<td>Unwashable</td>
<td>ET Phone home – but who?</td>
<td>Stalag -tight</td>
<td>To dust we will return</td>
<td>Ground under heel</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>memory or imprint, rust, but also the mundane</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Love the idea of a bicycle in the rain!</td>
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<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>It’s just a puzzle, the world is just a stage, discovering the actor</td>
<td>Let me out! Anger, nausea, despair, whispers or magic stars</td>
<td>Beauty! Just beauty. It is all real</td>
<td>Fun adventure</td>
<td>Unwashable memory or imprint, rust, but also the mundane</td>
<td>Depth of feminity, crying, watering the earth, holding the darkness – peaceful mist</td>
<td>In sickness and in health, until death do us part. Promises to self.</td>
<td>Alone in this vast and complex landscape. But also alive. A truthful contradiction</td>
<td>Exhaustion, Surprises, fertility</td>
<td>Change OR Beyond the self</td>
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<td>Mmmm I feel a bit stuck with this. Doesn’t really ring true for me</td>
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<td>Image 1</td>
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<td>84 The Place</td>
<td>Water’s</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td>Contemplation</td>
<td>Fall and rise;</td>
<td>Folds and</td>
<td>Angel, veil,</td>
<td>Change,</td>
<td>Burial</td>
<td>Change</td>
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<td>movement;</td>
<td>form; Storm</td>
<td>light, light</td>
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<td>funnel upon a</td>
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<td>Glory of Shit</td>
<td>Effluence in a</td>
<td>Avon Calling</td>
<td>Oh Uterus</td>
<td>Twilight</td>
<td>Bile Duct</td>
<td>Hrd Island</td>
<td>Need 2</td>
<td>Empirical Swing</td>
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<td>86 I Am</td>
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<td>One day at a</td>
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<td>87 Barren</td>
<td>Curtain</td>
<td>Green</td>
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<td>89 Mountain /</td>
<td>Sap/ run</td>
<td>Sea/ squall/</td>
<td>Cave / placenta</td>
<td>Sun/ moon/</td>
<td>Figure in the</td>
<td>Insist</td>
<td>Buddha</td>
<td>Withdraw/</td>
<td>Spirit Ghosts</td>
<td>(1/1/10 Longing)</td>
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<td>90 Navigating</td>
<td>Beautification</td>
<td>Enlightenment</td>
<td>Held transformation</td>
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<td>Unique anonymity</td>
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<td>(epiphany)</td>
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<tr>
<td>91 Island in the</td>
<td>Brown –</td>
<td>Anger or</td>
<td>I can hardly</td>
<td>Solid reality</td>
<td>Storm rain,</td>
<td>Wave, bubble,</td>
<td>Risk, Boat</td>
<td>Clear away</td>
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<td>midst – just</td>
<td>Depression or</td>
<td>excitement – I</td>
<td>bear that you</td>
<td>underlying</td>
<td>funnelling,</td>
<td>moonscape –</td>
<td>floats</td>
<td>the clutter!</td>
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<td>suspect it</td>
<td>painted over</td>
<td>brightness in</td>
<td>Adventurous,</td>
<td>light in</td>
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<td>Life</td>
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<td>92</td>
<td>Swoosh Pain</td>
<td>Klunk metal</td>
<td>Krash Hairline</td>
<td>Thump Tight</td>
<td>Cuck Plastered</td>
<td>Gluck Tight</td>
<td>Shhha Gold</td>
<td>Glump Blue</td>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>Silence Undone</td>
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<td>94</td>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>Impaired vision</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Trapped</td>
<td>Light</td>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Hiding</td>
<td>The journey</td>
<td>Deterioration</td>
<td>The stages of illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>Looking into a chasm possibilities could be good</td>
<td>An abyss, Light becomes darkness</td>
<td>Sometimes I feel flickers of God</td>
<td>God my God, where are you?</td>
<td>There is light.. promised symbolised by the bow seem distant</td>
<td>Sometimes there is a form in the void</td>
<td>My hurting body, my angry mind.. peeps through a veil</td>
<td>Patches of light canoeing so not to lose my mind</td>
<td>Where are you?</td>
<td>It was difficult to correlate responses to numbers bcs handwriting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Sky blue</td>
<td>Driven</td>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>Rising</td>
<td>New Start</td>
<td>Behold</td>
<td>Unseen</td>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>Pieces</td>
<td>Awakening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>From here to there / The promised land</td>
<td>What lies beneath</td>
<td>Quarter percent</td>
<td>The birth</td>
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<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>Japanese Influence</td>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>Fait lux – mirror of water and light</td>
<td>The revelation of life – the dance</td>
<td>The continuum</td>
<td>A wormhole to the future, a pain of hands</td>
<td>Looking past the veil</td>
<td>Beautiful together like a rainforest</td>
<td>Compartments opened and revealed</td>
<td>Through the veil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>Not quite hopeless</td>
<td>Creation</td>
<td>Breaking out</td>
<td>Melting</td>
<td>Violation</td>
<td>Evolving</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Continuing regeneration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Overwhelmed, sitting in unknowing</td>
<td>Awaiting regeneration</td>
<td>Embracing &amp; invigorating</td>
<td>Resisting oppression (soft &amp; powerful)</td>
<td>Awash with warmth and reassurance</td>
<td>Whirlwind</td>
<td>The depths of despair into the haze of unknown</td>
<td>Retreating to safety in isolation</td>
<td>Invisible within the ordinariness of life</td>
<td>Empowering to engage and strive. The evolving self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 101     | Secret flows | Verdant | Wading Through | | Alien | Risk | | | | Really???
| 102     | Misted Window | Cervix | Cobalt wound | Fucking beautiful painting | Exquisite | Awesome | | | | ??? made me laugh
| 103     | To rise | Unreflected light | We rise | Obscurity | Waterfall | Unrelated | From Earth | | | From Earth to Rise | One more to go!
| 104     | Life has many textures and forms | How accurate are our reflections? | Joy in the darkness | Obscurity | Where has the time gone? | Where is safety | Life is a cycle | Step by step – to where? | | Am I growing in Experience of Pain | This handwriting was shaky – possible someone in pain |
Direct References to Illness and Healing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Exhibition as a whole</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suffering Exposed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grief</td>
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<td>Clean Dressings</td>
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<td>Unsettling</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Edge of Breath</td>
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<td>Awareness of life cycle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holding open the hope</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nine kinds of medication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affect (ed) by life</td>
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<tr>
<td>What does it mean to be healed?</td>
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<td>The Struggle: Breathe in, Breathe out</td>
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<td>Lo I walk through the valley, I will fear no evil</td>
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<td>Overwhelmed, sitting in unknowing</td>
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<td>Minor Cause</td>
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<td>Ups and downs</td>
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<td>Curtain</td>
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<td>An abyss, light becomes darkness</td>
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<td>Not quite hopeless</td>
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<td>Image 4</td>
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<td>Keep trying</td>
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<td>I am here. I accept. I am.</td>
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<td>Reimagining the light – working with hope</td>
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<td>Pushing back the darkness</td>
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<td>Dealing with grief</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image 7</th>
<th>Image 8</th>
<th>Image 9</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Scarred tears</td>
<td>Despair</td>
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<td>Can’t breathe</td>
<td>Coping via compartmentalising</td>
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<td>Bleeding, hiding, afraid</td>
<td>Do the work of healing rather than rust or risk</td>
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<td>Looking up - hope for things to come</td>
<td>Conflicted – deep sadness</td>
<td>Heart beat</td>
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<td>My soul is bleeding through</td>
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<td>Shedding of hurt, emotion &amp; skin, leaving a new &amp; vulnerable creature</td>
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<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Filing, digging, putting emotions in boxes</td>
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<td>His banner over me is love and healing</td>
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<td>Relapse: grappling with hope and change, fear and longing</td>
<td>To dust we will return</td>
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<td>Injury</td>
<td>Exhaustion</td>
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<td>The solitude of disease</td>
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<td>Curtain thrown off</td>
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<td>Deterioration</td>
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<td>In sickness and in health – until death do us part: promises to self</td>
<td>Step by step – to where?</td>
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<td>Bile duct</td>
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<td>My hurting body, my angry mind, peeps through a veil</td>
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<td>Cobalt wound</td>
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<td>Where is safety?</td>
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### INITIAL CODING: Image 1

#### Overlapping Words

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<th>Sensory: Aesthetics</th>
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<td>Barren landscape</td>
<td>Emerging</td>
<td>Sitting in unknowing</td>
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<td>Tease</td>
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<td>Rage</td>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>Rush for the unknown</td>
<td>Human desire / enigma</td>
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<td>Disappearing unknown edges</td>
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<td>Anxious mist</td>
<td>Outsider</td>
<td>Sliding into peace</td>
<td>New horizons</td>
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<td>Vision of a promised land, long journey</td>
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<td>Geography</td>
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<td>The brink</td>
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<td>Gateway</td>
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<td>Earth moods in mystical</td>
<td>Stay strong</td>
<td>Shifting Fog</td>
<td>Empty place, tranquil place - flow</td>
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<td>Shrouded Unknown</td>
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<td>Landscape within a landscape</td>
<td>Line leads- swirling, misty elements</td>
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<td>Distant lands</td>
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<td>Chasm Crossing</td>
<td>Mountain cold</td>
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<td>Promised land</td>
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<td>swoosh</td>
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<td>It’s just a puzzle</td>
<td>Stormy coast</td>
<td>Looking into a chasm – possibilities could be good</td>
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<td>From here to there; promised land</td>
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<td>The fog</td>
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<td>Mars</td>
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<td>Edge</td>
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<td>Mountain</td>
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<td>Through mist</td>
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<td>Island in the mist – just out of reach</td>
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<td>Archipelago</td>
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#### TITLES WITH OVERLAPPING CODES

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<th>Existential</th>
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<th>Seeing</th>
<th>Sensory</th>
<th>Researcher’s Response</th>
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<td>What is emerging is indeed unknown – a spiritual, physical reality?</td>
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<td>Human Desire</td>
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<td>Integrating all of our senses</td>
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<td>Physicality of the landscape seems to be the certainty</td>
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<td>A safe response? Feels like a positive outlook</td>
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<td>A less safe response – opening the possibility of damage, change, transformation, hope</td>
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<td>Locating us soundly in the middle ground of the unknown</td>
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<td>Discovery</td>
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<td>Given that the sky is NOT blue – is this provoking an existential question?</td>
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### INITIAL CODING: Image 2

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<td>Evening forest heat</td>
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<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Tree trunk</td>
<td>Beginning to shed</td>
<td>Flow, falling into – rising out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Still standing</td>
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<td>Risky adventure</td>
<td>After the fire</td>
<td>White hot</td>
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<td>Contemplation</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Trees</td>
<td>Erosion</td>
<td>Awaiting regeneration</td>
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<td>Flow</td>
<td>Layers of time and experience</td>
<td>Short sighted</td>
<td>Sapling with timber cut background</td>
<td>Exposed</td>
<td>To rise</td>
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<td>Long lengthy life</td>
<td>Ash to ash</td>
<td>Long lengthy life – experience</td>
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<td>Bark stripped bare</td>
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<td>God’s healing, flowing down</td>
<td>Anger, Despair</td>
<td>Up and down: Light and dark</td>
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<td>Spirit disturbed with hope</td>
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<td>The darkness</td>
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### TITLES WITH OVERLAPPING CODES

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<td>Water’s passing, forging &amp; forgiving</td>
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<td>See the face beyond</td>
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<td>Is this a longing – to see something other?</td>
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<td>Awaiting regeneration</td>
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### INITIAL CODING: Image 4

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<td>Tribute to Isadora</td>
<td>Forest dance</td>
<td>Lifting the veil</td>
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<td>Embryo</td>
<td>Mother – still unknown (now dead)</td>
<td>I want to be free</td>
<td>Membrane</td>
<td>Stretching space</td>
<td>Overcoming</td>
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<td>We all live in a bubble, so that’s life</td>
<td>Trapped or safe?</td>
<td>Enclosed in emptiness</td>
<td>Dance among the trees</td>
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<td>Strength from within</td>
<td>Woman’s release</td>
<td>Keep trying</td>
<td>Step of courage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hopping into the shower</td>
<td>The woman in the womb yet to be born</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Dancing in the light</td>
<td>Fecundity</td>
<td>Bubble</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keeping on</td>
<td>Pushing back the darkness</td>
<td>Happy days</td>
<td>Unfinished beautiful dancer</td>
<td>Weighted oppressing</td>
<td>I am alive! I am woman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holding on by the finger nails</td>
<td>Taking a step through</td>
<td>Courage and trust</td>
<td>Cave</td>
<td>I am here. I accept. I am</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step of courage</td>
<td>The journey</td>
<td>Joy, pain, loss</td>
<td>A glimpse, A blink</td>
<td>Release</td>
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<td>Thump Tight</td>
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<td>Rising</td>
<td>Breaking out</td>
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<td>Ha’adamah</td>
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<td>Joy in the darkness</td>
<td>Resisting oppression</td>
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<td>Rebirth</td>
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<td>Caged</td>
<td>Her Spirit lives</td>
<td>Avon calling, Shit a brick</td>
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<td>Stretching womb</td>
<td>Contemplation</td>
<td>I can hardly bear that you painted over this one</td>
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<td>God my God, where are you?</td>
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<td>The revelation of life – the dance</td>
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### TITLES WITH OVERLAPPING CODES

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<th>Researcher’s Response</th>
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<td>Body</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lifting the veil</td>
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<td>Emergence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step of courage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bubble</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am alive! I am woman</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am here. I accept. I am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushing back the darkness</td>
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<td>Emergence</td>
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<td>Breaking out</td>
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<td>Resisting oppression</td>
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<tr>
<td>We rise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Body</td>
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<td>Glaucoma</td>
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<td>Deadline</td>
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<td>Moving to light</td>
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<td>Blurred, fissure</td>
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<td>Cataract</td>
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<td>Optical illusion</td>
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<td>Cease</td>
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<td>Fall and rise</td>
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<td>Oh Uterus</td>
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<td>The continuum</td>
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<td>Obscurity</td>
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**TITLES WITH OVERLAPPING CODES**

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<th>Researcher's Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Such a solid statement for such a vague painting!</td>
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<tr>
<td>It certainly is – though not more so than it was before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is indeed – which is interesting to me when I think of my experience of illness and what the edge means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hope that this work has managed to do this – though I am not convinced</td>
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<tr>
<td>I would like to know more about how this name fits?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Body</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Sad face</td>
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<td>Held transformation</td>
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<td>Cleansing stream</td>
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<td>Healing flows through Christ to me</td>
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<td>The tears have washed me well</td>
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<td>Soul – desire to be rid of an ill feeling</td>
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<td>Awakening femininity – the beginning</td>
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<td>Rebirth</td>
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<td>The birth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where has the time gone?</td>
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**TITLES WITH OVERLAPPING CODES**

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<th>Sensory</th>
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### INITIAL CODING: Image 7

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<td>Looking up</td>
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<td>Waiting, watching, hoping</td>
<td>Black hole</td>
<td>A bold face in the darkness</td>
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<td>Your mercies are new every morning</td>
<td>Indecision</td>
<td>Raising the veil</td>
<td>Spilling or seeping</td>
<td>What is it all about?</td>
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<td>Beyond the darkness</td>
<td>Fear of discovery</td>
<td>Hidden cracks</td>
<td>Black, silent hole</td>
<td>Cracks appearing</td>
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<td>Facing the darkness</td>
<td>Lifting the veil</td>
<td>False gravity</td>
<td>Never perfect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standing still</td>
<td>Contemplation</td>
<td>Afraid</td>
<td>Cracks appearing</td>
<td>Break through</td>
<td>Prevail</td>
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<td>Bleeding, hiding</td>
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<td>A bold face in the darkness</td>
<td>A mottled person</td>
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<td>We think our planet is the centre</td>
<td>Pit of despair</td>
<td>Another country</td>
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<td>Veiled / Covered</td>
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<td>Truce</td>
<td>Monument</td>
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<td>Lifting the veil</td>
<td>Light in conversation with darkness</td>
<td>The solitude of disease</td>
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<td>Shhhh</td>
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<td>Turmoil</td>
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<td>Lifting farewell</td>
<td>Wave, bubble, moonscape</td>
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<td>In sickness and in health</td>
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<td>Glass half full</td>
<td>Gold</td>
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<td>Trying to focus on the light</td>
<td>Alien</td>
<td>Evolving</td>
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<td>Bile duct</td>
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<td>Virgin’s praise</td>
<td>Ease</td>
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<td>ET Phone Home – but who?</td>
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<td>Reaching from the depths of despair into unknown</td>
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<td>Where is safety?</td>
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### TITLES WITH OVERLAPPING CODES

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<td>Never perfect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prevail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
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<td>Facing the darkness</td>
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<td>Could it be?</td>
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<td>The solitude of disease</td>
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<td>Curtain thrown off</td>
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<td>Lifting the veil</td>
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### INITIAL CODING: Image 8

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<th>Seeing: Aesthetics</th>
<th>Sensory: Aesthetics</th>
<th>Overlapping Words</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weighted, heavy, can't breathe</td>
<td>Named</td>
<td>Dreams</td>
<td>Jungle</td>
<td>Mould, cool scarred tears</td>
<td>Finding light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My feet upon a rock</td>
<td>Primal</td>
<td>The small window to escape</td>
<td>A light in the forest</td>
<td>Quiet descent into fecund stillness/silence</td>
<td>Healing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmed, rest</td>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>Fear and trembling</td>
<td>Other planet</td>
<td>After the fire</td>
<td>The people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wounded</td>
<td>New life</td>
<td>Through darkness to hope</td>
<td>Brown rust in motion</td>
<td>Moving forward</td>
<td>No words please!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drifting</td>
<td>Into the abyss</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Matter</td>
<td>Earth’s iridescence</td>
<td>Lost and found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grasp</td>
<td>Man’s will through risk to God’s will</td>
<td>The cool of the mind</td>
<td>Jungle of life</td>
<td>Cascade rush</td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost and found</td>
<td>I am the earth, being, the land</td>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
<td>Above, below</td>
<td>Decay and wretchedness, secret earth beneath</td>
<td>Regeneration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hidden</td>
<td>I am here, underneath it all</td>
<td>Enchantment</td>
<td>Wilderness</td>
<td>Lost and found</td>
<td>Emergence</td>
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<td>Breaking through</td>
<td>Through the glass darkly</td>
<td>Decision: risk, open, vulnerable</td>
<td>Cavern</td>
<td>Blue tears, pressing wave of time</td>
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<td>Tactical acceptance</td>
<td>Swamp, afloat on a boat</td>
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<td>Decease</td>
<td>Journey into life</td>
<td>Troubled</td>
<td>Rough light</td>
<td>Stalag -tight</td>
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<td>Dichotomy of health</td>
<td>Will I enter the cavern? Take the risk?</td>
<td>The work of life</td>
<td>Richness of nature</td>
<td>Change, stillness, transformation, sanctuary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retreating to safety in isolation</td>
<td>Healing and risk, hand in hand</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Oxidisation</td>
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<td>Ponder</td>
<td>Fire and water</td>
<td>Patches of light, trying not to lose my mind</td>
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<td>Heaven on earth</td>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>The green caves</td>
<td>Beautiful together, like a rainforest</td>
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<td>What archetype sleeps here?</td>
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<td>Corrosion, rust, scraffito</td>
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<tr>
<td>In the beginning</td>
<td>Raw emotions emerging</td>
<td>Face in rugged landscape</td>
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<td>Beyond feeling</td>
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<td>Conflicted – deep sadness</td>
<td>Oxidisation</td>
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<td>Rust, oxidation</td>
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<td>Deep in my heart</td>
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**TITLES WITH OVERLAPPING CODES**

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<td>Healing</td>
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<tr>
<td>The people</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>No words please!</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost and found</td>
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<td>Seeing: Aesthetics</td>
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<td>Overlapping Words</td>
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<tr>
<td>To hold</td>
<td>Timeless metamorphosis</td>
<td>Midden, mud and heavy loss</td>
<td>Earth boxes</td>
<td>Vintage shock</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fertility</td>
<td>Life's detritus</td>
<td>Discarded, lost, forgotten</td>
<td>Filling</td>
<td>Regeneration</td>
<td>What has been?</td>
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<td>Dead</td>
<td>An earthen way through dry land</td>
<td>Coping via compartmentalising</td>
<td>Buried strips, putting away</td>
<td>At the end of the day</td>
<td>What to make of my remnants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redemption</td>
<td>Exposed</td>
<td>Buried</td>
<td>Heart beat</td>
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<tr>
<td>The past is a far country</td>
<td>Despair</td>
<td>Tamished</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garden of Eden</td>
<td>The places where feelings might go</td>
<td>Artist's hummus</td>
<td>Lost but not forgotten</td>
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<td>Box of life</td>
<td>Buried memories</td>
<td>Box contained, controlled</td>
<td>Leaving a new and vulnerable creature</td>
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<td>Rusted, worn</td>
<td>Tarnished</td>
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<td>Departure</td>
<td>Exposed</td>
<td>Detritus</td>
<td>Interior rooms</td>
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<td>Caged minds, enclosed spirits</td>
<td>Secrets</td>
<td>Buried remnants</td>
<td>The Wall</td>
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<td>Review of life - baggage</td>
<td>Conditional release/ hesitant hope</td>
<td>Deterioration</td>
<td>Disorganised order</td>
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<td>Unearthed</td>
<td>Life packed into boxes to be sifted</td>
<td>Pieces</td>
<td>Stripped, separated, divided</td>
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<td>To dust we will return</td>
<td>Shedding of hurt, emotion &amp; skin</td>
<td>Compartments opened and revealed</td>
<td>To hold or discard</td>
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<td>Burial</td>
<td>Desperation</td>
<td>Exquisite</td>
<td>Thoughts</td>
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<td>Step by step – to where?</td>
<td>A need to leave some boxes closed</td>
<td>Memories</td>
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<td>Invisible with the ordinariness of life</td>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>High rise living</td>
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<td>Odd box out</td>
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<td>More to go...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baggage unloaded</td>
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<td>A ripping away and rawness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Filing, digging, putting emotions in boxes</td>
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<td>Surprises</td>
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<td>Exhaustion</td>
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<td>Unearthing my secrets</td>
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<td>Need 2</td>
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<td>Withdrawal</td>
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<td>Clear away the clutter!</td>
<td></td>
<td>And they're all made of bit so ticky tacky</td>
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**ADDITIONAL CODING FOR OVERLAPPING WORDS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Untitled</strong></th>
<th><strong>Body</strong></th>
<th><strong>Existential</strong></th>
<th><strong>Emotional</strong></th>
<th><strong>Seeing</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sensory</strong></th>
<th><strong>Researcher’s Response</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What has been?</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What to make of my remnants?</strong></td>
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# INITIAL CODING: Exhibition Titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Seeing: Aesthetic</th>
<th>Sensory: Aesthetic</th>
<th>Overlapping Words</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clean Dressings</td>
<td>Unchartered Territory</td>
<td>Boxed memories of life cycle</td>
<td>Eclectic</td>
<td>A journey toward integration</td>
<td>Equilibrium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nine kinds of medication</td>
<td>A pause in the journey</td>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>Elements</td>
<td>The Edge of Breath</td>
<td>I am glad it is untitled -gift</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affected (ed by life)</td>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>Unsettling</td>
<td>Dripping</td>
<td>Emerging</td>
<td>Crucible</td>
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<td>Life’s wonder</td>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>Earthed Emotions</td>
<td>Terrain</td>
<td>Desert song</td>
<td>Search for light</td>
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<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Veiled truths</td>
<td>Awareness of the life cycle</td>
<td>Change matter, form</td>
<td>Silence</td>
<td>Undone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Present and awake</td>
<td>Holding open the hope</td>
<td>Through fear, surrender and hope</td>
<td>Empirical swing</td>
<td>Awakening</td>
<td>Beyond words</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working with what comes</td>
<td>Rebirth</td>
<td>Little ease</td>
<td>Seeing the surface - much hidden beneath</td>
<td>Changing dark to light</td>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
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<tr>
<td>The struggle; Breathe in, breathe out</td>
<td>Voyage of the spirit</td>
<td>Hiding, confronting</td>
<td>Through the veil</td>
<td>Continuing regeneration</td>
<td>What does it mean to be healed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>The coming and the going</td>
<td>Empowering to engage and strive</td>
<td>Awesome</td>
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<td>Too much for words</td>
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<td>Corpus</td>
<td>Symbolic mysteries</td>
<td>Understanding the evolving self</td>
<td>From earth to rise</td>
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<td>The Essence of Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suffering exposed</td>
<td>Journey</td>
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<td>Ground under heel</td>
<td>Ground of being</td>
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<tr>
<td>The stages of illness</td>
<td>Journey to the light</td>
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<tr>
<td>Am I growing in the experience of pain?</td>
<td>Spirit Ghosts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding enlightenment</td>
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</table>

# ADDITIONAL CODING FOR OVERLAPPING WORDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body</th>
<th>Existential</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Seeing</th>
<th>Sensory</th>
<th>Researcher’s Response</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equilibrium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Could acknowledge all of these areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanks for the gift</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Who knows what other categories this touched - but aesthetically it was a gift</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crucible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The body is the crucible where all of these things are activated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for light</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>this could engage some or all of these areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beyond words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Acknowledgement of lived experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Holistic approach to medicine? or spirituality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does it mean to be healed?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Acknowledgement of the question – no clear answer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Too much for words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Much going on for this person – are they overwhelmed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The essence of life</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The work has distilled something for this person</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where are you?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Art evokes more questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explorations in transformation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a title that evokes questions… rather than resolving</td>
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<td>Healing from the inside</td>
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<td>A moving response – that maybe does not see the body so easily?</td>
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<td>Change / Beyond the self</td>
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<td>Touches on the psychology of change and eludes to soul, and body</td>
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<td>The need to integrate all these elements is held within this title</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>Noun</td>
<td>Adjective</td>
<td>Invitation</td>
<td>Questions</td>
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<td>Into Eternity</td>
<td>Zen in autumn</td>
<td>Shrouded Unknown</td>
<td>Looking into a chasm possibilities could be good</td>
<td>What’s around the corner?</td>
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<td>To traverse the watery way or not?</td>
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<td>Trek</td>
<td>Chasm crossing</td>
<td>Shifting fog</td>
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<td>Apartness</td>
<td>Outsider</td>
<td>From creation to new creation</td>
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<td>Birth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Still standing</td>
<td>Maybe hope</td>
<td>Landscape within a landscape</td>
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<td>Swirling, windy, misty, elements</td>
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<td>Enigma</td>
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<td>Rush for the unknown</td>
<td>Human Desire</td>
<td>Vision of a promised land</td>
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<td>Stay strong</td>
<td>Profile in utero</td>
<td>Long and hard journey</td>
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<td>Overwhelmed, sitting in unknowing</td>
<td>Perhaps someday</td>
<td>Weathered, still standing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moving away from uncertainty</td>
<td>Enlightenment</td>
<td>Unknown edges</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flow</td>
<td>MRI</td>
<td>Desolate landscape</td>
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<td>Strong wind blowing</td>
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<td>Mars</td>
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<td>Island in the midst, just out of reach</td>
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<td>A new country</td>
<td>Isolated</td>
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<td>The brink</td>
<td>Sky blue</td>
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<td>A new foreign land</td>
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<td>Promised Land</td>
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<td>Devastation, Desolation</td>
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<td>Mountain / Cold</td>
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<td>Verb</td>
<td>Noun</td>
<td>Adjective</td>
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<td>Questions</td>
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<td>Evening Forest Heat</td>
<td>Come Explore</td>
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<td>Eyes move vertically</td>
<td>Sentinel</td>
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<td>Rust River</td>
<td>Oxidisation by waterfall</td>
<td>See the face beyond</td>
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<td>White hot</td>
<td>Not out of the woods</td>
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<td>Through the forest</td>
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<td>After the fire</td>
<td>Exposed, stripped back, back to the bone</td>
<td>Spirit Disturbed with Hope</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating light</td>
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<td>A harmony of line and earthy colours</td>
<td>Let me out!</td>
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<td>Rile (to irritate)</td>
<td>Lost Soul</td>
<td>Earth encyclical</td>
<td>Life has many textures and forms</td>
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<td>Standing strong</td>
<td>The journey</td>
<td>The soul of bark</td>
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<td>Flowing</td>
<td>The darkness</td>
<td>Rusted flame</td>
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<td>Flow</td>
<td>Stream of life</td>
<td>Dark grain</td>
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<tr>
<td>God’s healing, flowing down</td>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>Deep forest</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Flow – falling into, rising out of – both</td>
<td>Trees</td>
<td>Short sighted – no wider perspective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emerge</td>
<td>Sapling with timber cut background</td>
<td>Reflecting long life with dabbles of experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forging and Forging</td>
<td>Sediment</td>
<td>Rusty, rocky, solid surfaces</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run</td>
<td>A tree trunk</td>
<td>Thick, dark place</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Klunk</td>
<td>Ups and Downs, Light and Dark</td>
<td>Whispers or magic stars</td>
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<td>Light becomes darkness</td>
<td>Brown – depression or Life?</td>
<td>Impaired Vision</td>
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<td>Driven</td>
<td>metal</td>
<td>Not quite hopeless</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Awaiting regeneration</td>
<td>Crust</td>
<td>Glory of Shit</td>
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### SECOND LEVEL CODING: Image 4

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<td>Discarded, lost, forgotten</td>
<td>Midden, mud and heavy loss</td>
<td>The past is a far country</td>
<td>A need to leave some boxes closed</td>
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<td>Coping via compartmentalising</td>
<td>Earth boxes</td>
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<td>Review of life</td>
<td>What to make of my remnants?</td>
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<td>Humbled</td>
<td>Redemption</td>
<td>Beautiful but 'inferno' landscape</td>
<td>More to go...</td>
<td>Step by step – to where?</td>
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<td>Filling</td>
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<td>Boxes contained controlled</td>
<td>To dust we will return</td>
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<td>Despair</td>
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<td>And they're all made of bits of ticky tacky</td>
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<td>Conditional release, hesitant hope</td>
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<td>Life packed into boxes</td>
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