THE LAND OF RAINBOWS

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Abstract

My research is about the community where I was born and raised in rural Victoria, the town of Rainbow. Rural communities are now seen to be fading into the abyss. Within these communities exists a deep emotional and rich visual culture covered by layers of relics and artifacts, a resource for the arts not just historians. My practice draws on the lived experiences and memories I shared in this community. My practice uses digitally manipulated visual media to reflect a mindscape and narrative correlating with medieval artists such as Bosch and Chaucer. I further translate these influences and digital processes into my practice via my journey into other worlds. In this project, the other worlds I inhabit are the jail, the asylum and death. These other worlds come without the protection and nourishment of the microcosmic world of Rainbow.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the masters except where indicated in the Preface*,

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

(iii) the thesis is <insert word limit here> words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices OR the thesis is <insert number of words> as approved by the RHD Committee.

Dianne Dickson
Acknowledgements

My dearest Aunty Mary
DR John Cooper
DR Stephen Haley
DR Mark Dustin
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Introduction

This thesis is a meditation on four places that have fundamentally contributed to my visual practice: the rural town of Rainbow in north-western Victoria; the Aradale Lunatic Asylum; Pentridge Maximum Security Jail and Melbourne Juvenile Justice Centre; and a metaphorical ‘place’ I refer to as ‘death’. Through poetic form and various insights into my own life and artistic inspirations, this written component reflects on how these places have formed in my subconscious as a visual mindscape or narrative. I have chosen to use poetry, as it is a raw and immediate way of writing, and therefore, an appropriate platform for reflecting on my visual subject matter. This subject matter is exclusively my lived experience in the four places described.

Rainbow

I was born and raised in a rural and remote township in the northwest of Victoria named Rainbow. The pioneers of the southern Mallee once described the desert as a wasteland fit only for rabbits and dingoes. Rainbow has only been in existence since the late 1800s’. This thesis is then structured to engage with the mythologies and stories and imagined actualities of an almost dream like place. As such it is less analytical than speculative, poetic and consumed with the narrative that will soon replace the actual bricks and mortar to become the last remembrance of Rainbow.

Rainbow is a small rural town that is experiencing a general worldwide phenomenon of decline as rapid urbanization transforms such places into folk law. In the 1900s 10% of the world’s population lived in urban centers. Now the figure is 50% and rising rapidly. This thesis intends to capture the poetics of loss in a manner most appropriate to this situation. Each image is accompanied by poems intended to both expand and explain the contents of the work.

My art practice is deeply connected to this community and landscape, and the storytelling associated with this remoteness is deeply embedded in my psyche.
The human connection to the land, its overpowering beauty and loneliness creates a narrative unique to this way of life. The physical nature of survival and the role ‘God’ played as a main protagonist is enacted in this thesis and body of works.

The influence of Bosch and Chaucer are reflected in this almost medieval way of life. A remote community such as this creates an uncanny sense of place as humans have invaded the uninhabited landscape. This is a dying remote town and as such is already becoming a mythological rather than an actual place.

**The Asylum**

The Aradale Lunatic Asylum housed my intellectually disabled brother for ten days during the 1960s. Although this time was brief, his experience there was horrendous. It has become a traumatic moment that stays with me to this day. Today this old former Lunatic Asylum a Institution of the Victorian era has become a tourist attraction. Aradale in Ararat runs ghost tours through the old asylum that only closed in the early 1990s. So what are people drawn too? Is it the stories the guides tell them, the display of artifacts of violence or, imagining the imbeciles who were once housed there?

**The Jail**

I was employed as a teacher at the Pentridge Maximum Security Jail from 1990-1995, and then a further ten years work at a Juvenile Justice Centre in Melbourne. This experience showed the human condition at its most raw and confronting state.

**Death**

I have played a supportive role during the death of a number of family and friends. From these experiences I perceive death as an often more peaceful state or place than living can sometimes be. Being in the asylum or the jail was like being in a living death—the process of dying, is a valuable and connecting experience similar in many ways to birth.
The process of collecting memories through photos and artifacts

My computer houses a world of photographic images scanned and scattered randomly. Littering my computer or my 'other brain' with artifacts and memories of my life, becoming a storage facility. I use the word litter because many images I have randomly thrown into my computer memory, without any order or care, like rubbish or objects that wait to be recycled. They are housed handy objects that have no place in my life as of now but may be used one day.

Cyberspace has become an extension of my brain, a new studio to work in, no longer a physical place that smells of paint and no brushes to clean. There is no physical evidence of the painter; I have a very clever brush now. Photoshop allows me to use my artifacts as a palette, to create hundreds of layers of images. I distort them, and recreate a new image from an old pile of unloved pixels or cells. Photoshop gives me quick access to imagery like a memory flickering onto the screen with its clever tools I can capture all sorts of fleeting ideas and play with them using the opacity and distortion tool. Photographs are my main reference material because they capture the present and the past.

Susan Sontag writes,

Cameras began duplicating the world at that moment when the human landscape stared to undergo a vertiginous rate of change: while an untold number of biological social life are being destroyed in a brief span of time, a device is available to record what is disappearing.¹

I use the photographic image to engage with what is disappearing, or has already.

How my artwork and poems express these lived stories

The computer screen is a world I transport myself into looking for images that

are reflections of my lived experience? The invisible self, the psyche, gives a second life to the memories that are not fully present but I want to desperately re-engage with them in the hope of bringing them back into existence, reconstructing a new narrative, as opposed to taking or using photos or snapshots as works of their own. I am on a mission to penetrate the surface of the photograph to make it my internal and external space. Using photographs as the basis of my image making allows me to penetrate the photograph, turning it in to a miniature theater a play. I vividly remember as a child before we had television sitting in front of the wireless wondering how people could be made small enough to fit inside the wireless to perform, entertain us. I feel I am doing this with my manipulated images, making them perform for me, but no longer through the eyes of a child, but an adult no longer a innocent child.

There is a kind of mythology surrounding these three other strange worlds – the jail asylum and death - that is quite different from Rainbow. There is a part of my practice that seems to have been sanitized prior this investigation, yet their pre-existence in my life has left traces of the macabre and sinister. Bosch drew his images from myth, allegory and reality. He witnessed the change from rural to urban life. His work reflects the reality of the human condition along with myth and allegory of the time in which he lived. His vision is a poetic history that still resonates in today’s world. The old Victorian institutions that housed the insane and the criminals conjure images and voices of madness, evil and grief. They have all closed we now have new, small, less iconic buildings and community centers now house, the insane, disabled, the criminals and the dying. They sit quietly in the landscape, in an effort to demystify their narrative.

With all mythology that draws on the handed down stories, real or unreal they too become relics of a past human’s existence leaving layers of narrative that are source material for artist evaluations, as well as data collection for historians. The Chapman Brothers are contemporary artists who are immersed in and who question the macabre and bizarre side of humanity. They write:
“It is not simply an agnostic age, but an age of disbelief and shopping”²

“Our suffering is not from starvation but obesity.”³

The Chapman Brothers

This quote could be a metaphor referencing the over indulgence of imagery in western culture. Our culture is saturated with images on a second by second basis through and.⁴ mass media, causing a numbing affect on our sensibility. We are constantly sitting in front of computers screens, I Phones, watching TV and using Facebook with our mouths open, like a hungry helpless baby, being spoon feed processed food that lacks the nutrition of the unprocessed prepared meal. We fill up on whatever is available, and easy.

Like the mother that feeds her baby processed food without nutrition it grows obese from its poor diet, we too feed on imagery that lacks nourishment, that is to say real emotional experiences, unlike real unprocessed food that involves the senses. The emotions of real experiences are of others not our self’s, unless we become victims. Images of accidents, illness and pornography, wars and disasters, we just sit and watch not daring to participate in the suffering of others, it has become unreal or is it too confronting? What does a victim feel?

Do we genuinely have empathy for the human condition or is it negated by the saturated image driven by western, culture that thrives on it. Have we become mere spectators of the human condition until it directly impacts on lives? These questions fuel this project. The images created are sinister and confronting but part of the human condition------Rape, murder, death are the undercurrent of humanity.

I’m interested in creating images exposing these often sidelined but important subjects in my practice. My life’s lived experiences could be viewed as marginalized, Yet I have seen a view of the world not accessible to the majority of the population.

³ ibid.
The Chapman brothers’ work is not based on lived experiences as Goya’s disaster of war, etchings are. Their appropriation of Goya’s disaster of war series was a controversial project; described by Mark Holborn “what we really confront is the gap between the image, perpetuated through the history of art, and the event that it so explicitly describes. Their image of the mutilated bodies and their parts suspended from a tree and recreated in the Great Deeds Against The Dead (1994) for me lacks the intimacy of Goya’s original etching they appropriated, they transform it into a Hollywood macabre scene, lacking the emotional impact of Goya’s work. Even though Goya’s’ work is about the atrocities of war in his time, it transports the viewer back to scene in an intimate way, through Goya’s eyes as he felt it.

Jake Chapman tells mark Holborn in an interview:

> However Familiar we might be with the imagery of conflict, few if any of us have actually seen a massacre. Jake goes further. He is adamant that their work is not in fact ocular.” It is not about seeing at all.”

My project is not fuelled by the atrocities of war and disasters as such, but other important and confronting subjects that are the experiences of the marginalised within our society. Rape murder, illness accidents loneliness, death These subjects are my lived experiences, unlike the Chapman brothers and other art practice which is based on a second hand view of these realities.

These stories and experiences are the basis and underbelly of my work.
My life’s lived experiences are of marginalized subjects and not always accessible to the majority of the population.

\[6\] ibid.
Section 1: Rainbow

Welcome to Rainbow
Visit Rainbow (pop.600), and its as if time stood still somewhere around 1955. Kids ride their bikes barefoot and bareheaded, the hairdressers’ doubles as a social club, and most business is still conducted face to face, not over the phone. Bounded by desert on one side and wheat on the other. Rainbow is a good hour from the big smoke---and that’s Horsham.7

Beauty School Drop In
Hairdresser Val Dickson’s salon is a popular meeting spot for rainbow’s womenfolk—often Val has five ladies in the salon, with only two paying customers. “I hate doing a blow wave” she says, “it cut out a good conversation.”8

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8 ibid.
This is how I visualize Rainbow in my mind’s eye, my first world.
A poetic microcosm: past and present.
My homeland: narrative wilderneses were my sense of self and family exists

The sense of nostalgia is a strengthening emotion, as it enhances my feeling of identification and ability to draw on values and meaning when life strikes an ugly blow.
Layers

I will give you a quick view in to the backstage of my place in this story.

My family lived on the main street of Rainbow my mother the local hairdresser for 65 years, my father a returned soldier, boxing coach bricklayer and professional fisherman. We lived behind the shop which was originally a bakery, we had shifted there from another shop we rented further up the street which only two rooms, one the kitchen the other were mum dad myself and sister slept.

There was no bathroom and way down the back yard an out house or dunny. The new shop was ours and it had a bathroom.
No more sitting in a concrete trough Saturday was the only day we could bath. The copper was used to heat the water and buckets used to fill the bath, we all used the same bath water the cleanest person went in first, the dirtiest last, by then the bath water resembled brown cream, a year after we moved to the new shop or Salon I should say a baby brother arrived followed by another boy and then a carrot red headed girl.

By the first year of the first brother’s life he was diagnosed with terrible brain damage and would not develop more that an 8-month-old baby. As he got older my mother devised away of keeping him in the hairdressing salon while she worked.

This meant the smell of soiled nappies the grunting and squealing of a gorilla and being ever vigilance not to go with in arms length of him, as he would grab anyone he could reach with the tightest grip and would not let go until one of the family helped release his grip.

It was very unusual in those days to keep a (intellectually disabled) retarded child at home. The town truly embraced my brother and held my mother in the highest esteem for her ability to work care for him and still enjoy and love life accepting her misfortune as just a matter of life.

In fact a family rift was caused when my grandfather tried to bribe my mother in to putting him in an institution he though my brothers disability was a slur on our family.

**Rainbow microcosm**

The world I looked out on to the was the main street I watched the world go by with a direct view of the bottom pub, which I would love to sit see the blokes fall out of at closing time.
It was a town filled with people of all types poor rich the simple the ill, war veteran’s mad and bad ugly. The characters of Chaucer’s’ from the Canterbury tales were alive and well in Rainbow.

Every day I listened to the stories told by the women getting their hair done stories that were bawdy and colorful, a good dirty yarn in the right context was welcomed, never any vulgar language was used, it was a visual language that created wonderful imagery.

Swaggies, Hawkers travelled the district on foot covering vast distances in search of work and sales. All denominations of Christian religion that had sailed over with the Europeans, erected their own places of worship. There were regular dances every Saturday. Nearly every household would have someone who played a musical instrument.

There was a brass band, plays and concerts preformed by locals to raise money for any service or club the town needed there were no government grants available even for a Hospital The town’s people raised the money and built all community facilities.

**Saturday afternoons**

Every Saturday afternoon Dad would pick a chook to kill for Sunday’s dinner. This was a family affair, all of us down to the wood heap, a large chopping block stained with blood from the weekly slaughtering, a chook was grabbed and taken to the chopping block its head held down with one hand then the swift chop with the axe the head would hit the ground, blood would pulse from its neck, then it would run around with no head for a few minutes then die. I vividly remember picking the head up and trying to put it back on thinking I might bring it back to life.

The visual and sensory imagery that stays with me is of the blood against the white feathers, yellowy scaly claws, the feel of the hot blood on my hands, the stained dirt, a mixture of rich colours, the bluest sky the stem of boiling water in a large copper, a
wood fire burning under neat, like a witches cauldron, Mum putting her hands in to pull the hot smelly guts of the chook out, we would look at all its organs guessing which organ from another. Once gutted it was dipped in the boiling water, to soften the skin so plucking its feathers could commence, the feathers were hot and clammy with a pungent sweet and sickly smell. The pink skin would appear, a speckled pink palette until it was plucked bald, the quills still remaining, were then burnt to make it easier to pull them out. The sensation and satisfaction of this process was exhilarating, not only was it about sight smell and touch it had ritual of many process or layers to become a lovely golden brown roast with vegetables.

Figure 3. Dianne Dickson, unfinished, 2013, digital collage, variable dimensions.
Inhabiting the landscape

"For as many rows of trees that once stood in the wild wood," writes a local poet in 1550, "so many streets and inns now can be seen in this stately city. Truly, just as the dark forest was home to all manner of creatures of different classes and trees of different types, so 's-Hertogenbosch is home to people of every description."62 The human replaces the natural, though retaining its uncanny variety. The idea of a wilderness of people resonates with Bosch’s drawing, since its fable of trees, ears, field, and eyes describes a social dystopia where one is ceaselessly monitored by gossips, enemies, and spies. Once ingenius invention has made space for it, the human world becomes more uncanny than the forest it replaced. 9

The human replaces the natural, though retaining its uncanny variety. The idea of a wilderness of people resonates with Bosch’s drawings, since its fable of trees, ears field, and eyes describes a social dystonia where one is ceaselessly monitored by gossips, enemies and spies.Bosch’s world has become more uncanny than the forest it replaced.10

Rainbow rose up out of the wilderness, after thousands of years without any human intervention on the landscape, the aboriginals quietly moved about leaving little impact on the landscape they were part of its being.

Whenever I am in the desert around Rainbow I feel an overwhelming sense of strangeness a foreboding that nature can process me, Whiteman seems like a strange a creature inhabiting an alien world when you are in a remote place. We are

10 ibid.
not truly part of this landscape we have created a new uncanny place by our habitation.

The uncanny is not something I fully understand on a conscious level, yet it seems to surface in my work, I play with it as it creates an anxiety in me about the human condition, of things seen and experienced and our strangeness in the landscape. I cannot divorce myself from the ideas of aging death cruelty violence whilst bearing witness to these experiences. Suffering has its own internal language and space that cannot be put right until one has finished with it.

This is a hard place to make art from.
My other brain

My computer is randomly littered with thousands of artifacts
Photography's or snaps shots that I have collected and fed into my computer.
It has a sense of total chaos as I prospect around trying to find images that will be
objects of my painter’s palette. That's how they exist once processed by my
emotional brain. Images from every day life people tools machinery landscapes
shadows death anything that engages my sensory field of vision. A lot of them have
been given to me to archive, our shared experiences. All of them have come from
the community I grew up in a small isolated rural town established in the late 1800’s.

Stoic and hard working families that arrived with very little in the way of worldly
processions created the town of Rainbow. The value of religious faith and natural
intelligence developed a strong and vital community that flourished for many years.
It grew to a society that established an oyster bar, churches a German school, butter
factory, flourmill, amongst many other trades and business. The Bush Nursing
Hospital swimming pool, bowling club tennis golf club football pavilion were all paid
for by the local community.

Even an ice skating ring I find that so bizarre in the hot dry climate that saw animals
die from drought, crops failing from lack of rain. For me as the daughter of the local
hairdresser I had a bird’s eye view in to the every day life and experience that
occurred in a time of no television just the wireless. Pictures once a week so the
daily chatter was off the most colorful vernacular rich in visual langue there were
many tragic story’s accidents women dying in childbirth illnesses all were shared,
those in need were tended to with the spirit of belonging to one big family if
something happens to your neighbor it was part of your experience to share in
collective grief or celebration.
Rainbow Artifacts

Figure 4. Dianne Dickson, The Dry Garden, 2000, digital photograph, dimensions variable.

Figure 5. Dianne Dickson, Funny Garden, 2001, digital photograph, dimensions variable.
Figure 6. Dianne Dickson, Merry X-mas from Rainbow, 2001, digital photograph, dimensions variable.
Rainbow Poems

Figure 7. Dianne Dickson, The Pet, 2000, digital photograph, dimensions variable.
Figure 8. Dianne Dickson, Wild Dogs, 2003, digital photograph, dimensions variable.
Chaucer Travels to the Outback

Herbie grayling had been sailing the seven seas
Finally landed at lake Albcutya
He had a hair lip, which was neglected on the ship
His skin was thick
His bones small
His flesh was dry and hard
Wrinkles etched deep resembled the parched dry Mallee soil grey and cracked like a salt lake
A blotched faded blue tattoo of an anchor
Stamped on his forearms
A relic of his past

He meant no harm this strange creature
He seemed to have come out of the earth
Of some strange birth
Not from the sea as he wished to be
He squatted up in the sand hills at the top of lake albcutya
No permission needed the days before land was mans possession
A corrugated tin hut he built in the white sand
As a dwelling
The floor was dirt
His blankets his dogs
Strange trinkets nailed to timber
Ruminants
Of a lost and forgotten past
A gold bracelet a ring tin mugs

He rode a pushbike in to town for supplies
Which was soon spent on drunken lies
Then one day the lake dried up
And land became the ownership of others no squatter’s rights
So into town he came
He lived in an old house across from Mrs. Mounce
Who lived alone she was deranged
A lunatic insane madness owned her

Her hair was matted down to her hips
She was small of stature
A side show dwarf
Skin the colour of a celluloid doll
Never washed a film of pink hard skin to keep her madness in

A shrew she could be called
A soft pink mushroom coloured coat she wore every day from summer to winter
Maybe it cost a penny in its day

That day was long ago

Her youngest son was run over in the main street in full view
He lay under henrys Ute

From that day on she ranted and raved cried with the grief of madness
Walked up and down the
Street lashing out at whom ever crossed her path
A big string bag she carried full to bursting a whack from that would set many a man
back to last week

The butcher gave her meat the bakery bread
No one asked for payment
She had suffered enough
They came and took her other 4 children
No husband
Just her alone to suffer

Herbie feared her not madness
It had visited him too

He was our family friend
Mum would send him to do messages
I would visit his squalor house
To putrid for a field mouse
It was littered with dog turds scattered empty
Tins from which he ate
Old paint tins full of piss

He was at our back door every day
Just to say giday

All was well until I turned twelve
That's when I grew breasts that
Set him to the test

One day in our kitchen
He grabbed me by the arms
And pressed his dry rough old mouth hard on to mine
The carnal swine
His tongue like a lizards slipping and sliding into my mouth
A reptile
The shock made me jump
I took off out the door

To begin my new formed body war
The glazed look of lust I never mistook again.
Figure 9. Dianne Dickson, Moonlight, 2013, digital collage, variable dimensions.
Introduction to Madge

Madge and her family where close to our family her mother and father and brothers and sisters all unique characters themselves endure much sadness extremely hard workers, very strong willed.

They lived like most people trying to scratch out a living. Willing to try any work available. They were not farmers but all had worked on farms in the district over the years, Shamus the father was a woodcutter and rabbit trapper mainly, son bob a baker, Jackie worked on the railways, Madge did house cleaning ironing cooking for hospital, pub and weddings. There was no social security, that is why people did what ever work was available homes where shared with two or three generation and often people who had no family lived within other families.

Figure 10. Dianne Dickson, Magic Madge, 2009, digital collage, dimensions variable.
Magic Madge

She married young had three sons
And two daughters
Out on a farm they lived
She married eddy whose income was unsteady
The drink he preferred
One day he was to met the children at the farm gate

But this day he was very late
The grog had got him

The kids came back to the house
One was not with them

Time stood still

As she ran toward the dam
Her breath left her
Her heart pulsed through Her brain

Numbed to pain she felt insane

She saw his small body floating
She could not swim
To get to him

A stick she found
And into the cold murky water she
Walked
The grey mud sucked her down
Sinking she used all her strength to lift each leg
From the mud
With her stick she did reach him
And finally with the stick pulled him to the dam edge

She held him limp and blue
There was nothing she could do
The other children stood around her
Eyes transfixed
The hot sun did not warm her as she carried him
To the house
She was alone with her dead son
Her other children walked behind her
So long she held him
Her heart did shut the pain so unbearable
Never again would tears come
She was so empty and numb
That day changed her

Figure 11. Dianne Dickson, 2013, digital collage, dimensions variable.
Shamus the Father

Nine children she bore and never swore
Magic’s mother was a cook of great renowned bread cake and stew
Which was not all she knew
Hair white and fine like wispy clouds in the bright blue mallee sky
Where it was always dry and hot
A buxom woman breasts as round as the largest pie melons covered by her starched white aprons
Hands soft skin as smooth as the dough she kneaded

A heart that no longer pleaded
For the husband she needed
Up early a brand new shirt she could sew before bob set of for school in the morning

Shamus her spouse had been set out of the house
To the sleep out
His drinking binges left the door loose at the hinges

On frosty nights in the sleep out
He barely survived with a bottle of rum
He felt no warm bosom just the warmth of alcohol
 Burning his brain to soak up the pain

He breathed in the frost as it settled on the moss
It reminded him of fighting in the trenches of France

A young man full of cheek when he went over
The mud the blood the cold the faces
Shattered he dream of peaceful places
The drink was his solace

But blood and mud noise and death
Youthful passion became more like a nightly bashing
The chopping tree
Whack a bird nest falls to his feet
The finest china shell smashed liquid splashing on his boots
Like the numbness that engulfed his heart
the day he saw
His first mate die at his feet
His broken scull splashing hot red blood on his boots

His mates are with him now they set up their woodcutters camp
Young jackie his son has just begun his first wood chopping run joining the drunken fun
He breathed in the frost as it settled on the moss
It reminded him of fighting in the trenches
The mud the blood the grey cold faces
Shattered dreams of peaceful places
The drink was his solace

So he had passed it on too all his sons

It’s was not what he wanted
It was all that was left
Pain is shame
Love is not yours to know
He was as hollow as the trees the bird’s nest in
Figure 12. Dianne Dickson, Back from the War, 2013, dimensions variable.
The Dry Garden

The photographs I use in my work I refer to as artifacts because they belong to the past an object that can transcend into a psychoanalytic object. “Construction “of the psychic reality of the other.”

The images of suffering have a long history in art, ‘Suffering from natural causes, such as illness or childbirth, is scantily represented in the history of Art; That caused by accident, virtually not at all—as if there were no such thing as suffering by inadvertence or misadventure.”

Figure 13. Dianne Dickson, Ha Ha, 2013, unfinished digital collage, dimensions variable.

12 ibid.
Figure 14. Dianne Dickson, unfinished, 2013, digital collage, dimensions variable.
Figure 15. Dianne Dickson, *My brother had a Roman nose, 1973, photograph, 10 x 15 cm.*
My Brother had a Roman Nose

And lovely pink toes---- No brain
A man baby

He looked the same as us all
No deformities of body or face
We had blood of the roman race
Echoed on his lovely face

Great grandmother from Genoa

Mums nose was roman too

Exotic and romantic

Grunted like a gorilla, was as strong as a ox,
No words just a baby giggle

His hair was black thick and curly

Clear milky skin not a freckle stamped upon it

Creamy soft skin unblemished by black whiskers sprouting

His eyes brown as a nut
Never able to focus

He was short in stature
But well formed muscles
Large cream teeth
To clean them; wrestling with a gorilla
When his second teeth arrived
To add to our fascination he grew three huge front teeth
One, which grew straight out horizontally

It amused us no end he was so handsome
It tainted none of his beauty

He had no brain
The time eventually arrived : when mum said “it’s off to the dentist for our Billy buttons”
a day off school
A long trip in the car to the big smoke

Thin bitumen line of road; bubbles and sweats in the heat of the day
Shimmering mirages flicker in the distance I dream of film stars
And pictures on Saturday night
Cowboys and Indians riding a white horse up the sand hills
Being kissed by a handsome cowboy

Hot dust fills the car each time mum hits the gravel she says” I’m just as good as
A racing car driver”
I feel proud cause she is confident in all she does
Never seen her afraid

The job of containing brother bill require
Will require special skill
No seat belts way back then
The challenge is mine I become a wrestling
Of significant skill,
Lollies coloured material and old coat hanger with coloured string
He would jiggle and flick likes a baby testing its fine motor skills
Anything to distract him from the car handle door
I was mums right hand man
Pride I saw in this adventure

So it was a matter of me wrestling; I was 9 years older than him
Feeding lollies like a monkey at the zoo
Distracting him as best I could
Hoping he did not piss on me
Or shit him self

The huge nappies we had to take
Change him in the back of the car
  His legs up in the air
Him laughing kicking us
Mum would get the job done
Dirty nappy a cloth
No such thing as disposables
  Wrap in in a towel take it home to be washed
A pleasant aroma for the drive home
Figure 16. Dianne Dickson, unfinished, 2013, digital collage, dimensions variable.

Figure 17. Dianne Dickson, digital photograph, 2001, dimensions variable.
The Electrocution

Charred black bodies one holding the other like bodies in a Pompeii Ruin
Burning flesh smoldering
Small puffs of smoke dissipated
Just like a burning stump
A plie of farm rubbish
Not a sound just few bird cries and the wind
Sky the usual blue not a cloud
Hot Mallee day
Fitting in a way

They burnt many a stump over the years just like old Charlie and Ern
Clearing land
Lots of spot fires where stubble burnt
    Over the years
Burning back
Bush fires
The desert fire in the 50’s was the worst
But today was not what any could imagine

Their mates
    Related to a few
The Pidgick fire crew

They all stood motionless

Their mouths were dry
    Not with thirst
the air was full of their burning flesh
A cremation with out a Curtin
Fucking electricity cant shut it off
Shit!!! Christ those city bastards
Don’t get it
Gotta wait for electricity Crew
could be hours

We just stand and watch them burn
Played footy with him last week

For treasure hunting old plates tins rusty
Tractor bits
Could make a sculpture outta this stuff

They get it
Only assessable by four-wheel drive
Wait for power grew to come and cut off power
Its canna be a least 3 hours before we can get near them
This was not rubbish it was a father and his son

She’s in the kitchen
His uniform informs
Her there’s trouble
What’s up?
Standing at the sink not a blink
I think you’ll need a seat
No I wont I am tuff
She new her blood was already cold
No I need you to sit
I told you I can handle it just tell me

I am sorry to tell you both are dead
Her mouth opened wide
Somewhere she heard a scream
She wasn’t sure whether it was
From herself or someone else
She steadies herself on the sink
As she felt body left her
Not a sound faces both faces
In and out they went
Then the grandson then his wife
She opened her eyes his uniform was closer
Take me to them now no we cant
Fucken take me now
No the power is still on
So fucken what
Take me now
I am sorry but they were electrocuted
And we can’t get near them
They are burning
Waiting for crew from Horsham
They need four-wheel drives
Going to take hours
Fuck fuck no no I have to go I don’t care what state there in they are mine mine
He held her back she crumbled into his arms
Can I call any one?
She did not move her eyes were open but she could not see
A pain that was physical retched at her heart
Numbness encased her
There she sat

The first friend arrived
There arms felt like cold tubes
Squeezing her harder and harder
They called her name but she could not hear
She recognised the face
No make up same age
She meet her eyes
The blood started to flow the cold tight tubes softened in
To arms holding her
Then the sobbing started
Her body floated
But her heart was firmly held
By her friend then another and another

Voices every where
She new she answered
What she said was not in recall

That was the last day.

Figure 18. Dianne Dickson, unfinished chip chop, 2013, digital collage, dimensions variable.
Section 2: The Lunatic Asylum

Figure 19. Aradale Lunatic Asylum, photograph, web image.

“Aradale is Australia’s largest abandoned lunatic asylum. Opened in 1867 as Ararat Lunatic Asylum, this building housed tens of thousands of people described as "Lunatics", "idiots" and "imbeciles" - some of them described as the worst lunatics in the British Empire.

Completed 40 years before Freud, this building saw some of the most controversial psychiatric treatments in Australia. Around 13,000 people passed away here in it's 130 years. As a result, Aradale is considered one of the most haunted locations in Australia.

At its height, Aradale consisted of 68 buildings and was home to over 2000 patients and staff, making it a self-sufficient town.

And now, for the first time, Aradale's doors have opened for evening explorations. Do you have what it takes to explore one of Australia’s eeriest buildings after dark?”13

Summary: Welcome to the Lunatic Asylum

The following two poems are about my brother’s experiences of staying for a short period of time in the Aradale Lunatic asylum. The other poem is about Post-traumatic distress – disorder.

The butted out cigarette burns
Patterned his arms and legs like puss freckles
Ahh no brain no pain
He smiles not a flinch
His mothers breast no longer swollen with milk
It dried up twenty years ago

What a pity
His man baby face still looked
Like a baby wanting to be suckled

There he lay in the stench of piss
Human waste all over his beautiful face
Grey concrete compound not a human sound
They dragged him in to dress him
We stand and wait
Rainbow Artifact

Figure 20. Dianne Dickson, Brother and Sister, 1973, photograph, dimensions variable.
Rainbow Artifact

Figure 21. Dianne Dickson, *Man baby*, 2010, digital photograph, dimensions variable.
THE LUNATIC ASYLUM, 1970

Billy buttons the man baby

Weeping wounds safety pins crusted in pus
Vagina broken; brain damaged
Pools of blood red velvet
Gently moving with the wind
Dry’s the crust on his new born skin
Eight years since last baby
Too long; not to know why this went so wrong
Put him away put him away
That’s what the grandfather says
Shame to family name
Shame to family name

Fuck you old man from the city

Have you no pity; life can be shitty
Not all pretty 1960 to 1998
Institutions that’s were they go
Hide them from the world
The lunatic asylum

Three times he went for a week
To three lunatic asylums
At 10 to pleasant creek 1970
14 to Kew cottages 1974
18 to Aradale 1978

Each time he paid for his defenselessness
Neglected human animals
A Bosch painting distorted faces  
Red and blue heads some shaped like paper bags  
Deflating balloons skin scabbed scratched  
Picked at to the bone always alone  
Distorted gapping mouths frozen  
In time  
Contorted Heads stretched plasticize  
Mouthing utterances of geese creatures  
Insect’s reptiles  
Eyes that focused into nothingness  

Grey grey concrete wall cubicle  
In the yards like cattle hosed clean with cold water that’s what I saw the day we  
came to collect him  
My baby now in my arms  
Mums man baby shivering in the out side compound  
As water hoses all his humanity  
Into the water trap  

He sits and struggles  
As other legs and arms  
Fight like an octopus  
Without the ocean  
In stranded motion  
No words come this image is forever  

He is no match for those who walk and talk  

Cold, noise human feaces  
Dribble  
Shitty nappies hairy flesh  
Grunting; animal gestures shrieking
Some are frightened;

Pleasant creek what a cheek
Kew cottages nearly dies only there 4 days
Rainbow hospital all good
Aradale cigarette burns
Takes mum into the world of no existence
Billy buttons goes to pleasant creek for a week
Pus safety pins no one will own up
Right through his stomach the pins went
Straight through his flesh in and out Thick flannel nappy no protection
From this ignorant injection
Sharp steel plunging in so
Forcefully to connect thick flannel and human skin in one maneuver
Did he flinch cry out in pain?
Now yellow pus oozes from the holes were the sharp pins are attached to his skin
Smell of putrid stinking bacteria
To take it out ahh mum gently squeezers
The head of the safety pin releasing it
Yanks it out
The pus runs like soft whipped cream
On to his stomach
I want to see the face that did this to him
No point no rights rage powerless
Nightmares are now in mum’s head
Better of both dead
Figure 22. Dianne Dickson, unfinished, digital collage, 2013, dimensions variable.
Figure 23. Dianne Dickson, Guess Who, 2013, unfinished digital collage, variable dimensions.
Madness

Have you ever seen the glazed eyes of madness?
Pain screaming from the soul
Clawing at the air
Plunging into nothingness
Seeing the face of fear

The smell of unseen faces and feeling places
Filling the room
Like thick smoke
Choking for air
Images places times that live again
Right now

You scream and spit to destroy them
They soon over power you with shame
You no longer have a name
Your body no longer contains you

All eyes are on you
All those images and smells
Pain anger is YOU now
Every one just saw your gaping wound
So deep so raw
Oozing naked in a room full of unknown enemies

Those who did not see
Those you tricked
Walk away
Won't meet your eyes
What have I done
Don't go
Please stay
I need you
  they walk away
You have hurt them
Like you we're hurt
Alone a child again
If death would only come
Section 3: The Jail

Figure 24. Dianne Dickson, photograph of inmate drawing, 2001, charcoal on A3 paper.
Which Hell

The narrative of lived experience

Bosch, the chapman brothers Goya the apartheid animations of Kent ridge, they all talk about man inhumanity to man at different times in history the discourse pain and suffering often employing as in the case of the chapman brothers shock tactics. The chapman brothers admit there art is not about their personal experience but rather a perversion and extensional second hand view of modernity.

Knowing the details of a murder is a phenomena in my minds sees Arrests my senses, I can transport myself in my imagination to the abhorrence Sensuality of violence if you have witnessed it, can trigger the actual moment in time the smell the sounds the fear, all return you to that experience. PTSD is now recognized as a condition of witnessing a traumatic event or being in fear of your life, shell shock, as it was referred to post world wars.

The phenomena becomes the noumenon.

Although we cannot see things apart from the way we do in fact see them, we can think them apart from our mode of sensibility (perception); thus making the thing-in-itself a kind of noumenon or object of thought.¹⁴

**Seven Deadly Sins**

Bosch's work the seven deadly sins is one of his most notable according to most scholars portrays the world as a wicked place, and life as a succession of evils punished inevitably by the inescapable judgment of god.\(^{15}\)

Laurinda Dixon contributes art historian Walter s Gibson as unlocking much of Bosch's complex and meaningful iconography to his work. Walter Gibson notes “that the circular ring of genre scenes surrounding the central figure Christ Is meant it depict the eye of god, which reflects, like a cosmic mirror, the pathetic condition of the human race.”\(^{16}\)

The idea of a cosmic mirror seems to suggest to me even today with the use of media Internet news Reporting and graphic images bombarding our senses to reflect simply the same ideas are still relevant today.

Is the internet is our cosmic mirror, what conclusions we draw on human behavior is not that removed from the ideas expressed in the middle ages by Bosch's' view of his world.

In Bosch's garden of earthly delights exterior panel the monochromatic image of a transparent globe is the vision I have in the growing up in a small remote community where my world was a microcosm that existed and was contained with pleasant images of life and dreams like a medieval village time moved slowly and the individual was not considered as an independent set apart from the rest of the group. But dependent on the whole community to be accepted for their individual abilities.

Bosch was seen to paint not only the externally man but had the ability to paint the inner- man his fears desires and depravity. Every day I worked in the jail as a teacher


\(^{16}\) ibid. p.45
over a period of fifteen years felt that I had walked into Bosch’s world of The Seven Deadly Sin’s.

The jail had become another microcosmic world so removed from anything I had ever experienced. The impact on my artwork and my vision of the world became very clouded by violence and depravity. I lived and breathed a kind of Bosch like dream world as I tried to survive in an institution that housed the most violent criminals in Victoria and some of Australia’s most Notorious.

Not to acknowledge this experience would leave a blank in my art practice. I am not talking about art as therapy but the impact of working in conditions that confronted every value I held about human condition, causing a warp in my vision of the world. I cannot comment on much more of this but have written a few poems that I hope reflect the impact this experience had on my psyche and an insight into the dark side of the human condition.

*Bosch’s world nightmares.*
Which Hell

They sniff me like a dog greets its foe
Their sour breathe filthy words
Are like sprays of shit that hit and miss

The stench of their sweaty skin lingers
Long after they go
Back to their cells

Green track pants
White T shirts white volleys
Merge into one mass burred faces
Scabs sores tattoos Brocken teeth
Blue grey skin of an over dosed corpse
The daily feast of fast foods and coke on the street
Their bodies filled with the nutrients of despair
Eyes hollow and glazed
They call me a stupid old cunt
I say don’t call me stupid
They settle I breath they wait
For new bait
Whose top dog today
Tobaccos up his arse
Chop us out you dog
I will fuck your mother
The war is on
Head hits the wall desk across the room they all go him
I hit the alarm
Youth officer head locked by the biggest one
This is gunna be fun
Hands around his neck
Face is red and bloated like a balloon about to burst
As his air way shuts
I watch his eyes roll back in his head
Fuck I think he is dead no one comes
The alarm, I hit it again and again
I am going insane
I don’t know how but I am tangled in between
I manage to get under the one on top I head butt him
In the guts
I scream stop
Someone has pulled the choker off
Silence he has let go
I hear the gurgling and gasping of the pus face one
As he inhales air
There all they’re now yelling swearing they drag them out
Did anyone get the tobacco out of his arse?
Chop us out!

Next class at 2pm
Fuckers
Figure 25. Dianne Dickson, photograph of inmate drawing, lifeline, charcoal of paper dimensions A3.
Figure 26. Dianne Dickson, The milk of human kindness, 2013, figure digital collage, dimensions variable.
Figure 27. Dianne Dickson, unfinished, digital collage, 2013, dimensions variable.
**Murder by Children**

Fat face smiling could be my son  
He is 14  
13-year-old mate  
Every day they come

What am I suppose to teach them  
I try not to see it but came just as my eyes close  
She was 78 years old my mums age

Raped stabbed with BBQ fork 78 times  
Head stomped on  
Kicked  
Murdered  
Her simple son hiding in his room

The fat face smiles at me giggles like a child
Timetables Up

Shit look who I have got the pair that murdered the
Taxi driver in Preston for $20
Cut his throat so deep they nearly severed his head
Just hanging by his spine
Poor bastard
Both under 15

The second time I teach the younger one
He goes right of at me
I was still a bit green
Don’t know what set him off
I will kill you- you fucking cunt
I feel his spit on my face like snake venom
The guard’s hold him back he’s still screaming

Write report
I don’t go back to that section again
Fuck the monies well
I will buy those $400 boots
Figure 28. Dianne Dickson, Wieramu, 2001, digital collage, dimensions variable.
The Secret

Wierumu paces he mumbles he is very jumpy wont look at anyone
He’s driving me crazy the others push him
He lashes out/the officer becomes agitated
All hell is about break loose

I walk across the classroom to him what’s up
Wierumu

He says I must tell
Ya something
Don’t tell anyone please
What I did

I was one of them that kicked that kid to death
In broadie the other night
Me and me cousins

Oh shit
I hear the boots stomping on his head
Blood
Vomit
Blackness
Silence
Rape

She was only 7 and a half when he raped her

No more dress ups

No more little girl

No more giggles

Statements taken

They got him

To late he had already taken her

Her body grew obese to cover her shame
Figure 29. Dianne Dickson, Rape, 2013, digital collage, variable dimensions.
Section 4: Death

Welcome to Death
The idea of photographing the dead is as old as photography itself.
The post-mortem portrait implies a desire to see and remember the person in death.\(^\text{17}\)

From childhood into adulthood I have seen numerous dead people as a mark of respect I was taught viewing a loved one was important, they were not repulsive or to be feared but it was a privilege to say I finally goodbye even to kiss them.
To sit with the deceased in reflection of your feelings for them and your grief Was part of the ritual of death, just as today in rainbow every shop window displays a black ribbon stretched across diagonally its main window for one week, when a local resident dies? The sanitizing of death has occurred in western culture during the late 60s to the 1990s.

Many mothers of stillborn babies were not allowed to see their dead children During the 1950s up until the late 1980s, this has changed significantly today Women and men are encouraged to take a dead baby home for a day photograph it, take casts of its feet let the other children hold the child as a way of dealing with grief, even foetus is considered a right to be mourned publicly, with a burial site in cemeteries for them, other than a medical waste bin.
In the words of

\[\text{Kubler-Ross and Kessler referring to the witnessing of death of a loved one.}\]
\[\text{It unifies us .it helps us deepen our understanding of each other.}\]
\[\text{It connects us to each other in a way that no other lesson in life can.}\]
\[\text{When we are joined in the experience of loss, we care for one another and experience one another in new and profound way}\]

Figure 30. Dianne Dickson, Dead Cow, 2009, digital photograph, dimensions variable.
Birth

She came out so quickly she nearly bounced of the wall
Fat and red then on my breast

The metals cold and hard on my back
Legs cramping as I am told to keep them bent
Warm blood oozing from my body
He pushes the cold metal inside me
I’ve got it
It’s a fetus he holds it up then drops it in the bin

I have no words

Got to 6 months another fetus in the bin
Got to 4 months another fetus in the bin

Got to 3 months this one down the toilet
Got to 9 months she came out red and alive suckled at my breast 2 yrs.
Got to 6 months another fetus-- I nearly went in the bin with it
Got to 7 months he came out alive- we both survived
Figure 31. Dianne Dickson, *After birth*, 2013, digital collage, dimensions variable.
Asbestos

Did I see any colours today?
Every thing was grey
Grey as my asbestos house
I sleep in his bed now
He is dead
It was asbestos that got him
He could not breath
He gasped and sweated
Held our hands
Wrote us notes
His oxygen mask kept slipping held my mothers hand
He loved her
Said he was sorry
For going to the pub
She said it doesn’t matter now Tom
We have had a good life

Told me I was to look out for mum
He was grey all that day
The day was grey
His breath was grey
The asbestos on my house is grey but it hasn’t died!
Figure 32. Dianne Dickson, Dad, 2003, digital collage, variable dimensions.
Freckle

I am on my mother’s knee----she holds me upside down
And kisses my out stretched neck------ on my special
Fairy freckle—I giggle---- I love it -----I love her

I can’t find it anymore
I want some one to kiss it----make me feel warm and happy
Please some one kiss me
Kiss me like you love me I want to feel loved again

The wireless goes all night – I sleep beside her
Her oxygen tube slips from her nostrils—I reach for her hand and drift
Back into the darkness.

Is the water too hot? She tries to part her legs so I can wash her
She is so weak----I turn her over
One tiny bed sore

I do her hair ---lipstick----nails

She says “no good being sick and looking sick ------we laugh
My mother said to me “you know Dianne I am still living while I am dying
It’s all part of the life

It’s time for another one to my sixth grandchild was born in August 2007 three weeks later my mother looked at me and said well one more of us has come into the world leave this world, I have had enough and so have you I will be gone in three days, so you best call the rest of the family and true to her word she went in three days, we all held her and waited for her last breath

Her dog Rastus sat on her knee late into the evening, when the Undertakers arrived he looked at them and simply hopped off her knee. I heard the sound of the metal trolley coming to the front door this day of sitting with our mother’s body in the scene of domestic life food children laughing and crying was abruptly shattered as we realised we had to hand her over to strangers no longer ours, I could not bear the sight of a metal trolley wheeling her out in to the street.

From the softness of her chair my brother sister and I picked her up and carried her out to the hearse then gently laid her on the cold hard trolley, a maroon body bag surrounded her no shroud of her own they let us slowly zip it up to her face one last kiss and she was gone.
Figure 33. Greta Ryan, black ribbon across shop window to indicate the death of local person, 2007, digital print, dimensions variable.
Figure 34. Dianne Dickson, Mum, 2007, digital photograph, dimensions variable.

My mothers body within minutes of her death, my brother and sisters all took a photo of my mother after she died, I have no explanation of why, was it because we had all been part of her dying process over a few short hours, the similarity Of birth and death the emotional and supportive role we played in her death.

Did we see our reflection in this image and, is this the living image of a corpse? Her image is nothing to fear her life was still within us.

I also saw her as an object. A reflection of the images of Christ being taken from the cross the priest had just arrived to give the final sacraments The very ordinary sadness of the death of a loved one the lonely Journey of grief that we all take through life, they are not atrocities, it can be illness mental anguish personality disorders betrayal I document my own life but don’t use these personal images in there raw form I use them as a source of expressing my experiences and the empathy I have for the every day of others. I recreate images that are more objectified and graphic that cannot be recognized as the original image.
No Words

Please hold me hold me tight
I cannot take this feeling
I want the feeling of my children in my arms when they were small fat faces sticky fingers so long ago
Little skinny man dance on my hand
Let me flick you into the fire
Cause I have lost all desire

You look thro me
You look pass me
You never look at me
Do I disgust you?
Because I said I love you?

You still hold me tender
Your mouth is swallows me whole
U crush me with your passion
But there is no small talk
A joke
A story
You’re dying
No one is crying
You are being eaten alive
Your bellies full of creatures
Your blood has morphed into
Unknown matter you sweat and cough
Stumble as you crumble before me
Never a word to say you’re scared
They cut away the dead bits
Fill you with poison
Still you keep it still
I know your dying

But you wont let me start crying

All these years

Our secret we kept

And now I fade away with you
We never existed
Yet we new more about each other
Than anyone

I cannot touch you
I cannot comfort you

The layers of your flesh
Fall away the yellow globules of fat
Are eaten by your creatures

The final Curtin I an certain
Figure 35. Dianne Dickson, ink, charcoal, scanned drawing, 2012, dimensions variable.
Conclusion: The End

Susan Sontag writes:  

All photographs are memento mori.
To take photograph is to participate in another persons (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to times relentless melt.

This explanation of photography is the main reason I choose to use Photoshop As my implement to manipulate the image of a photo into a different reality that Transcends that moment in time, into an imaginary time and place, without the emotional distress of the implications of being just the spectator.

This research paper based on lived experience phenomenology (ranging from experience perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity.)

I have come to think that physical changes that have occurred to the town of rainbow obscures the cultural changes, when I am living in the community I feel the inherited phenomenology of the past and present that are indistinguishable for me at this stage in my research.

My poems have helped me uncover a language that has allowed me to voice feelings and memories that I have been incapable of expressing in prose. Poetry has enabled me to tap into the language of my art practise.

According to classical Husserlian phenomenology, our experience is directed toward — represents or “intends” — things only through particular concepts, thoughts,

ideas, make up the meaning or content of a given experience, images, etc. These and are distinct from the things they present or mean.¹⁹

Bibliography


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