

example that of Post-Freudian psychology, where it is a metaphor of the external self, concealing the reality within."<sup>34</sup> "Our natural impulse when confronted by a mask is to ask what it conceals. The key to understanding the role of the mask in the ancient world is not to pose this question, but to take it at face value."<sup>35</sup>

The attraction of the mask to me is precisely because it is not real, but a symbol, not a portrait (so much of our Western art has been connected to portraying lifelike reality the status of the sitter and its greatness judged accordingly). The distortion and exaggeration allows your own imagination play. A mask is curiously still and silent.

Primitive masks now divorced from their ritual function still have universal qualities, almost as if they themselves reveal so easily and expressively what we are often at great pains to conceal and repress, magic, emotion, fear, superstition, awe, wonder.

When I stare in fascination at an ancient mask I am in thrall to the puzzle and mystery of being human. To me they are visual manifestations of what psychology tries rationally to explain.

These words of Steiner's explore this: "But if much of poetry, music and the arts aims to 'enchant' - and we must never strip that word of its aura of magical summons - much also, and of the most compelling, aims to make strangeness in certain respects stranger. . . . We are at key instants, strangers to ourselves, errant at the gates of our own psyche. We knock blindly at the doors of turbulence, of creativity, of inhibition within the *terra incognita* of our own selves. What is more unsettling: we can be, in ways almost unendurable to reason, strangers to those whom we would know best, by whom we would be best known and unmasked."<sup>36</sup>

### Drawing (Plates 10-16)

This project began with drawing. The drawings were made with pastel and gouache on black paper and mainly featured figures in silhouette and white outline. These are working drawings - evidence of the thinking eye. I made many experiments with scale, with colour, with combinations of figures, but mainly with loose expressive drawing that felt rather than thought or argued its way to conclusions and resolutions. The drawing used deliberate distortion and exaggeration of means to achieve a heightened mood, and at times was being simplified. Some drawings are crude, quickly finished and not “worked”. I relied on the effect of a sensuous and telling line. I am interested in drawing as a graphic art in its own right, and in the particularly ‘graphic’ qualities of line.

### Collage (Plates 17-20)

A parallel activity to drawing and tapestry was the making of collages. I think of these as poetry as in relation to, say, the prose, of a tapestry. Collage can include flights of fancy and whim and can be like unproductive play not concerning itself with results. These collages are constructed drawings. They include quotes from magazines and newspapers, photos of the tapestries as they were being woven, paper torn and cut from existing drawings, detritus from the studio floor, combined, repeated patterned. They are a kind of visual journal or diary. Words and phrases deliberately cut, pasted and quoted include 'certain places', the view from here', 'are dark but challenging', no entry fees and no exit fees', the desire to elsewhere', 'boredom verging on madness', how to make it work', 'again'. Ironically perhaps, the collages contain and express a sensuous love of materials not so evident in the tapestries.

### Small Tapestries (Plates 21-27)

I also made small tapestries as explorations in scale and also of the process of direct and faithful interpretation from drawings. These works sometimes investigated a thought or idea, sometimes aimed to capture a mood.

In *Advice* I consciously chose a moralistic phrase or precept and experimented with the form of a sampler. Old Victorian cross stitch samplers often used a proverb or 'improving' message for its educational value to girls and young women here I've used a couple of gossiping women beside the phrase 'Never Get Out of the Boat'. One woman holds and controls the other with her urgent talk. In fact "Never get out of the boat" is a phrase from the film Apocalypse Now directed by Francis Ford Coppola. My use of this phrase is salutary. One woman preventing another from full participation in life's journey.

#### Tapestries and Drawings (Plates 28 & 29)

I made two experiments with the combination of tapestry and drawing. I thought they were interesting, but ultimately too different from each other to really succeed, in terms of my own project.

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## CHAPTER V

### MAPPING *maps to get lost in*

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*In the mirror  
I see myself as others don't  
turned  
unfamiliar to them  
I know this self  
I comb her hair and paint her face  
I turn around this turned self  
out into the world  
and stay behind her all day*

To begin this discussion about my own praxis and process I would like to briefly discuss the meaning of research. Implicit within the word research is the notion of disinterested scholarship. This scholarship entails the careful and thorough reading of texts, the putting aside of personal feeling and prejudice where possible, the slow accretion of information and facts. This scholarship also involves the putting on of blinkers so as to be able to concentrate on, analyse and classify a range of facts, ideas or events. The results of this research add to knowledge. This traditional idea of research is in turn based on a scientific process - forming a hypothesis, testing it with experiments and arriving at a conclusion or result. There is also a sense in which this kind of research is causal in a way that not even philosophy is "thinking is always result-less".<sup>37</sup> Art involves a result which is not necessarily either truth, knowledge or conclusion.

What does research mean for an artist? How for instance do we address the gap between knowing and feeling, or between knowledge and faith and are we prepared to acknowledge that there are different ways of knowing? Are we able to doggedly document the process of art making? It has been said before that it is easy enough to imagine a picture or a painting the hard thing is the realization - the point where imagination comes up against reality - in this case the reality is

the material. The material by which we realize an idea, a thought a notion, a whim or a glimpse. Our research is *by way of* and *through* material. We make an idea manifest in visual form. In a very basic way we manipulate material.

I think of research as preparation and play, for example, I have the beginnings of an idea and will 'research' it before I begin actually making works. The ideas will emerge from, not drive this process. That research could be drawing, dreaming, looking, photographing, collecting, sorting, editing, reading, time for reflection, time for change and refinement, time for ruthless editing and analysis. According to what criteria are these activities carried out? According to my own judgement and intuition and by my own aesthetic criteria. In the end that must be personal, even wilful. An often quoted line that sometimes seems like a truism but has a solid foundation of truth, is that in all good art there is evidence of head, heart and hand.

I want to flesh out this assertion with three useful guides - the idea of receptivity, the notion of intuition, the importance of memory.

Gaston Bachelard in his brilliant exploration of the poetic image says: "A philosopher who has evolved his entire thinking from the fundamental themes of the philosophy of science, and followed the main line of the active, growing rationalism of contemporary science as closely as he could, must forget his learning and break with all his habits of philosophical research, if he wants to study the problems posed by the poetic imagination . . . One must be receptive, receptive to the image the moment it appears; . . . The poetic image is a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche."<sup>38</sup>

This idea of receptivity is most telling, and compelling as a way of describing how an artist carries out his or her work as well as how it might be possible to 'receive' or look at art. Many Asian artists talk about the necessity of having the mind empty so as to be able to receive ideas and images. They see our western minds as being crammed too full. If your mind is too full you can't be receptive and an artist

needs to be open and 'susceptible' to sights, images, ideas and processes. This state of emptiness is not barren, it is a kind of alert relaxation and needs to be cultivated and nurtured. This watchfulness is paying attention to one's inner world and also as an observer to the outside world. It is the trained and cultivated ability to look and notice - not always in a literal way, combinations of colours, reflections, shadows, the quality of human movement, the quality of light, the quality of dark, combinations of shapes, the whole atmosphere and experience of the visual world.

Many artists report of their work coming through them, of their not really being in control, of feeling like a conduit, of letting things happen. David Hockney writes about this process "Although I am interested in theory, I am not of course a theoretician. I ask such questions and make the theories only afterwards, not before - only after I have done something. I keep pictures I have done around the studio; you want to look at them and it takes a little while to realize what I really did there, how it works; then I may use them in something else. But although painting can't be done theoretically, all painters must to a certain extent, analyse their work afterwards. I'm sure the cubists didn't plan it that way, they didn't self-consciously sit down and say Well perspective has to be broken, that's what the problem is. Its a groping, they're groping slowly and in different ways . . . You allow a semi-consciousness to tell you how to go on, or else the painting would be intentional, and you couldn't be doing it intentionally. You make the discoveries of what is going on inside you; you don't need to know this; you work intuitively. Most artists, good artists trust their intuition. I trust mine."<sup>39</sup>

A further application of this whole idea of receptivity is the act of looking at art - of 'receiving' it. The notion of inter-subjectivity is here a useful one - the ability to imagine another's reality. As spectators we can be open to the experience of art, past and present. Francis Bacon talks about the wonderful experience of going to an exhibition and coming out and the world looks different and you feel a bit rearranged. This is a direct experience. It is not merely a matter of making

judgements, this is good, this is bad, this is right this is wrong, this isn't contemporary etc.

Related to the notion of receptivity is that of memory as important for the artist as technique. Hauser writes about the methods of Proust. ". . . the procedure of Proust, who likewise put himself into a kind of somnambulist condition and abandoned himself to the stream of memories and associations with the passivity of a hypnotic medium, but who remained at the same time a disciplined thinker and in the highest degree a consciously creative artist."<sup>40</sup>

A man who remembers nothing of his childhood is less than complete, if the self is the sum of everything we remember. For society too, the cult of youth, technical progress and the golden future teach us to mistrust the past and with it memory. Writing about scholarship C. Wright-Mills says: "To say that you can 'have experience' means that your past plays into and affects your present, and that it defines your capacity for future experience. As a scholar you have to control this rather elaborate interplay, to capture what you experience and sort it out; only in this way can you hope to use it as a guide to test your reflection and in the process shape yourself as an intellectual craftsman."<sup>41</sup>

In her fascinating study Frances Yates examines the 'art' of memory. The Greeks invented this art which was passed on to Rome and thence into the European traditions. "This art seeks to memorize through a technique of impressing 'places' and 'images' on memory. . . . in the ages before printing a trained memory was vitally important; and the manipulation of images in memory must always to some extent involve the psyche as a whole. . . it is an art that uses contemporary architecture for its memory places."<sup>42</sup> Memory then, becomes a place, a building in which we are free to enter and walk about in, and is most of all a place of images.

The thought of making a prayer rug or rugs first came into my mind one warm afternoon on the verandah of a house in the Australian bush. I was talking to

another artist in a casual way about Buddhism when the prayer rug idea was suddenly there in my mind. I began 'research' the very next day by photographing a friend lying on an old kilim - initially I thought I would simply superimpose a figure onto a traditional rug. Then I made a number of drawings that played with the shape of the indented rectangle.

I was experimenting, trying things out, mainly through drawing and collage continuing with some ideas, discarding others, building up a repertoire of images and compositions. Many ideas and images just come through this process and there are many changes and new images along the way. Tapestry is a mural art and for the individual really large works are not practical. However small scale works can look like potholders or dishcloths. Firstly I made quite large pastel drawings and small tapestries loosely around the same theme. Many of these works became an exhibition called *Speaking and Silence* held at Maudespace in Sydney. The tapestries were like small sketches or studies and the really big drawings quite finished and considered pieces. Later after embarking on the large scale tapestries I also made small works which were the exact size of a postcard and could be made quite quickly in one day.

The next stage involved a commitment to a particular series of works - the four large Prayer rugs made to a certain scale and with particular materials. This requires planning and decision making to do with practical matters of equipment, materials space and time. There are many misconceptions about the making of a largish scale tapestry, pre-conceived ideas about patience, time, change, spontaneity, serendipity, accident and expressiveness. For me the drawing that sits behind the warp (Plate 30) is a map and is only a very loose guide, its main contours are drawn to scale rather than enlarged on a photocopier. It is not a template or a pattern that must be followed exactly and precisely. In this sense my drawing is very unlike the traditional tapestry cartoon.

Also I do not have a small scale full colour drawing to work from because I try to keep the process as risky and fresh as possible as one of my aims is to achieve in