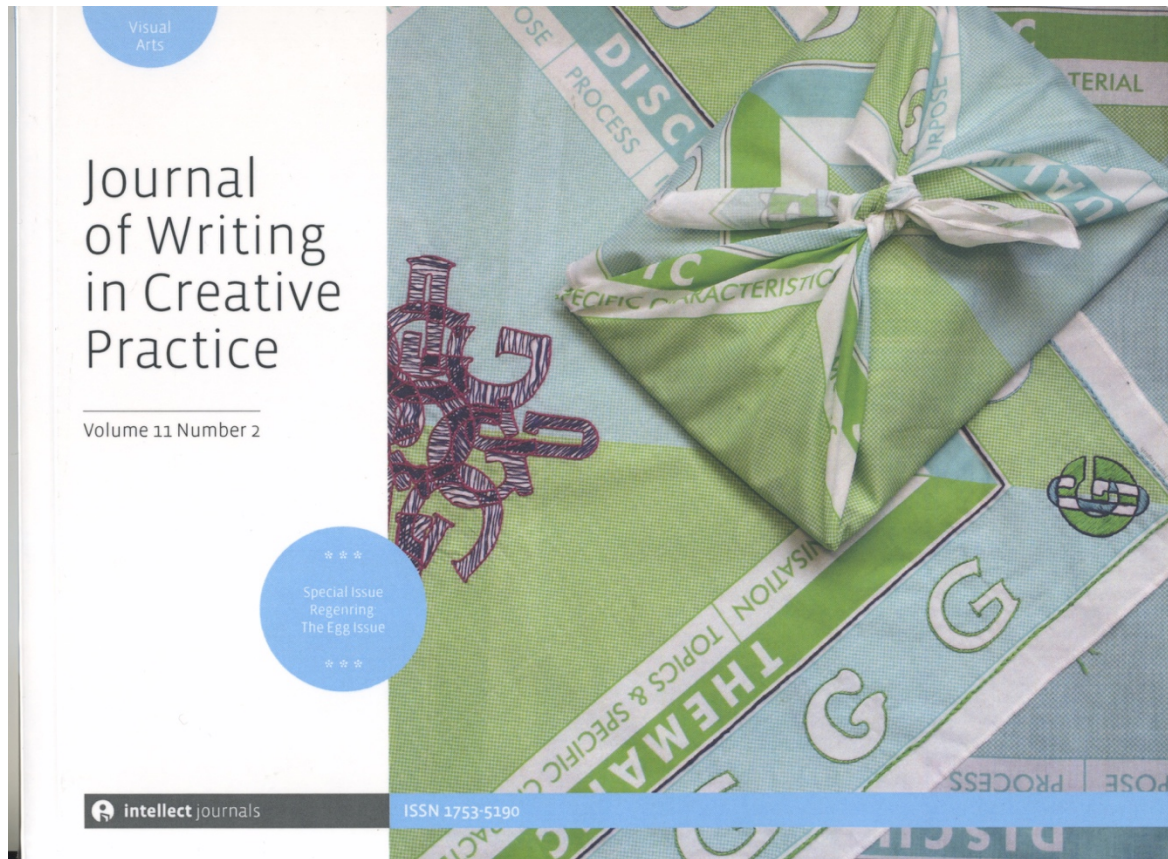


Regenring ...visual Lives. SARAH TAYLOR AND SHEILA GAFFNEY

Leeds Arts University



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Abstract

Writing for visual arts students remains a current dilemma. Academic essays frequently form assessment requirements in awards that are studio practice based. This series of images illustrates a project created for fine art undergraduates, drawing upon the research-led practice experiences of the academic leaders. The Academic Poster Project regenred a model commonly used in science to accommodate both the individual interests and methods used by visual learners, which in turn become the participating student's plan for narrating argument, knowledge and criticality.

Sarah Taylor | Sheila Gaffney

Writing in the visual arts can be difficult territory [...] students (and indeed staff) are often uncomfortable with the role of writing and theory within the subject: it is often seen as separate and unrelated.

(Shreeve et al. 1999: 345–57)

This is a transcript of a discussion between Sarah Taylor and Sheila Gaffney. It was recorded in July 2017 as part of a reflective discussion in the coffee shop at Tate Britain. In conversation...

Sheila Gaffney (SG): *It was exciting to me when you joined our team and talked about your research towards your Ph.D., and you showed me how in the University of Ulster you won a poster competition (see Figure 1). Now to me a poster was just something to tell us there was a disco on a Friday night. I didn't know anything about an academic poster. It wasn't my field.*

Sarah Taylor (ST): Nor mine, however the challenge seemed attractive as the examples I had seen were, well a bit boring. I considered the competition and thought 'I can do that' how great to work creatively within a set of structural limitations...

SG: *I then saw this thing, your poster, in all its splendor. It is such a powerful image. I've looked and looked and looked at it as it hangs on the wall of our department now – conventional in size, A1, so to me it seemed obvious – can we do this with the students?*

ST: It seemed an obvious way for students to think about their work in a very visual way, particularly useful to students that were unable to present in a confident manner because they hadn't had the experience of it. And also, quite importantly to enable them to present non-linearly, with ideas that came from a visual prompt. That's how I communicate and think about work, how I pull things together – always from the visual, but then it's important to consider how you link things, because as curious inquisitive people I think that's what we do. I wanted to contribute to and enrich the students' ideas of themselves by being competent in a more visual language. It's not all about writing an academic essay... but it can be as powerful and as poignant – if not more so because the structure actually allows *things* to be incorporated that students have actually made and the thought about... through the actual materials and in the making. The cognition that *making* allows.

So... the solution.

We placed the task of the academic poster in the hands of visual and creative learners to allow for a restructuring of research interests that are predominantly visual, and can synergize practice and theory as an appropriate alternative to a traditional dissertation form which prioritizes written work. This approach was designed to empower the individual student, inspiring their creativity, individual interests, personal life experiences and out-of-the-boxness. It was a successful model using group and class work effectively to promote peer review of research.



Figure 1: S. Taylor, *Aspirational Beauty, Backgrounds and Backdrops the Staging of Class*. Academic poster 594 × 841 mm, First Prize, The University of Ulster, 2010.



Figure 4: J. Montgomery, academic poster, 594x841 mm, Leeds Arts University, 2016.

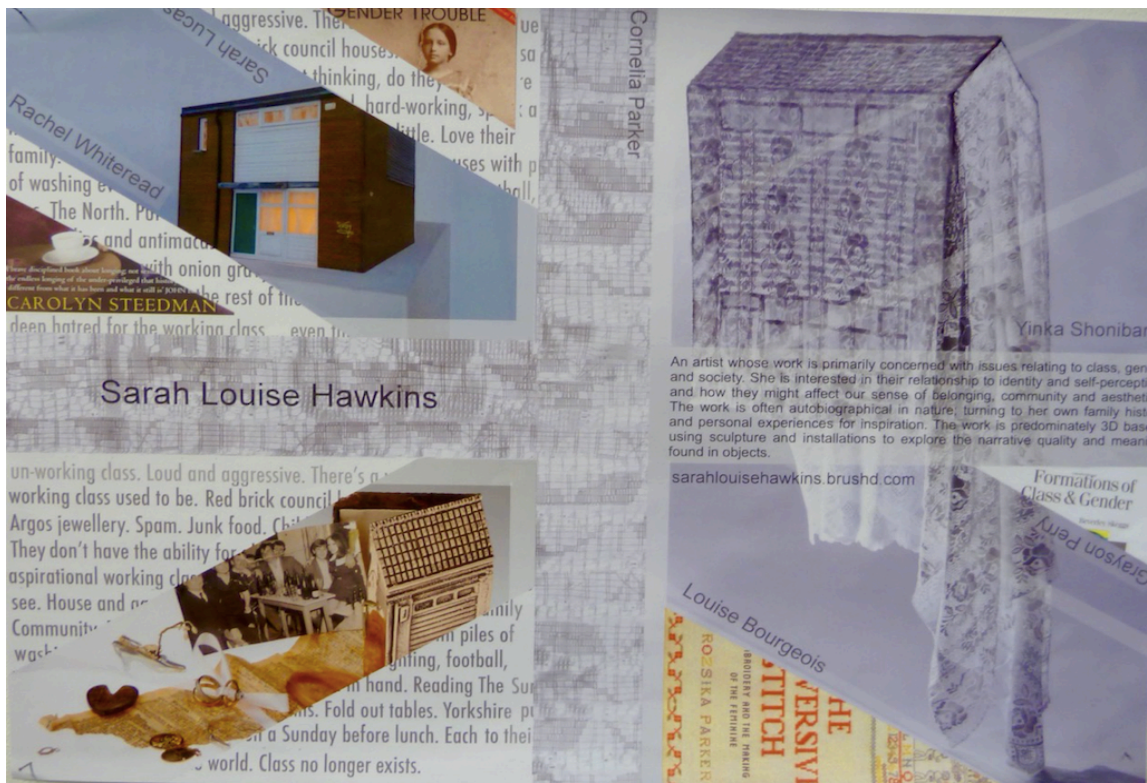


Figure 5: S. Hawkins, academic poster, 594x841 mm, Leeds Arts University, 2015.

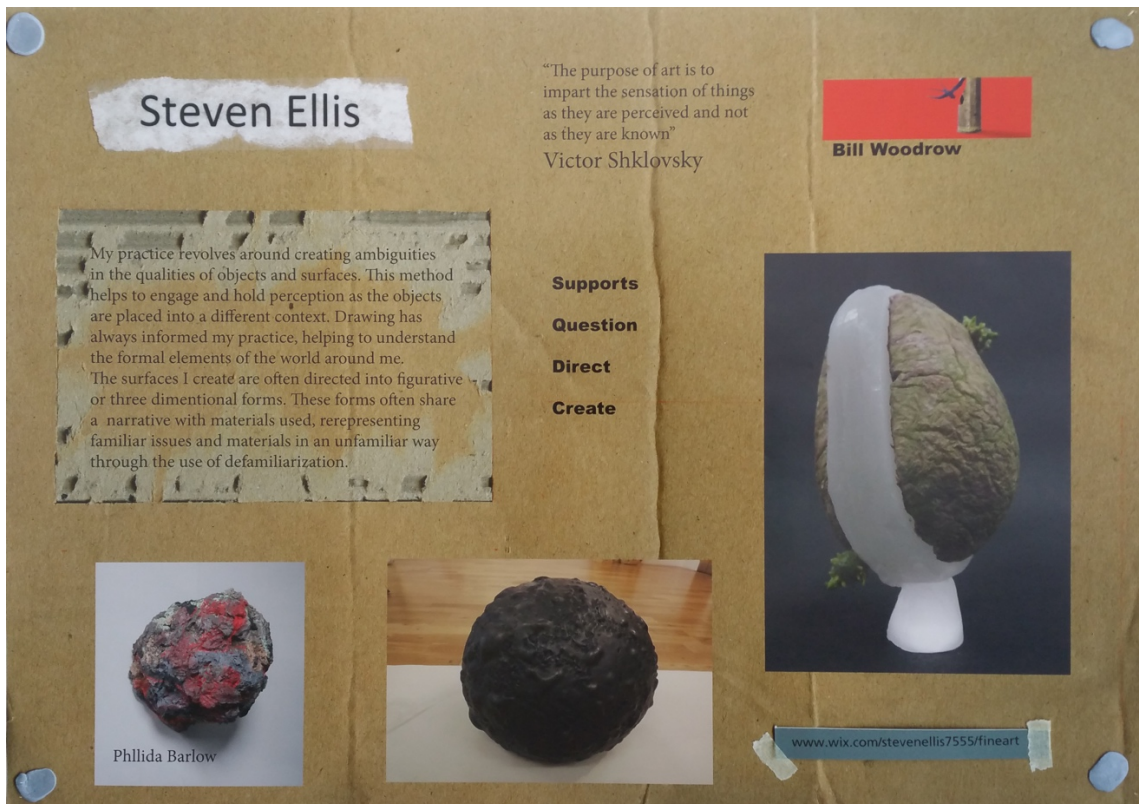


Figure 6: S. Ellis, academic poster, 594 x 841mm, Leeds Arts University, 2015.

Belinda Ayres

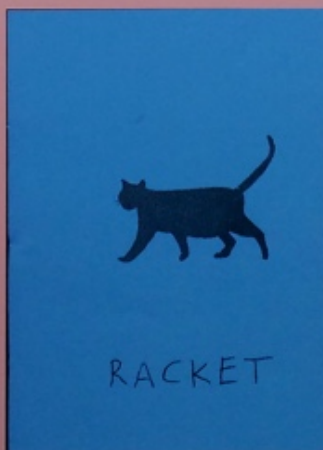


Belinda Ayres, *How large the ocean, how*, 2016

Exploring the contradictions of being alone and the feeling of loneliness. How these state of minds are apparent as a child and the management of these feelings are made through imaginary friends and toys. Progressing into adulthood we become much more aware of these feelings but are no longer 'allowed' or feel as comfortable managing them with the same comforts.

Connotations of 'play' in my work are also contradicted with the feelings of violence and uneasiness which mirror the feelings of loneliness in adulthood.

Using collage of found images from the internet and creating mini comics and zines I explore this idea in a playful theme to create a balance of the intense-ness of the subject through imagery and colour.



Belinda Ayres, *RACKET*, 2016

Belinda Ayres, *How large the ocean, how*, 2016



Belinda Ayres, *How large the ocean, how*, 2016



Belinda Ayres, *How large the ocean, how*, 2016

Figure 7: B. Ayres, academic poster, 594 x 841 mm, Leeds Arts, 2016.

ENVIROGUE

I describe my current art practice as being 'Envirogue' - Fashion collages inspired by recycling and Mother Nature

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IN THE FUTURE

I hope to see my collages on a much larger scale in public places for all to see

As part of my practice I am currently exploring and researching environmental issues, I collect old

Fashion Magazines

as well as nature and gardening books as a source for my collages. I then manipulate and combine a collection of layers to create a final collage. I can then edit and perfect using photoshop to a professional standard.

I want my collage creations to make a statement. To rebel against typical advertisement schemas and to create something refreshing. Showing links between human and nature

BY SAVANAH JAYNE FORTE

Figure 8: S. Forte, academic poster, 594 841mm, Leeds Arts University, 2016.

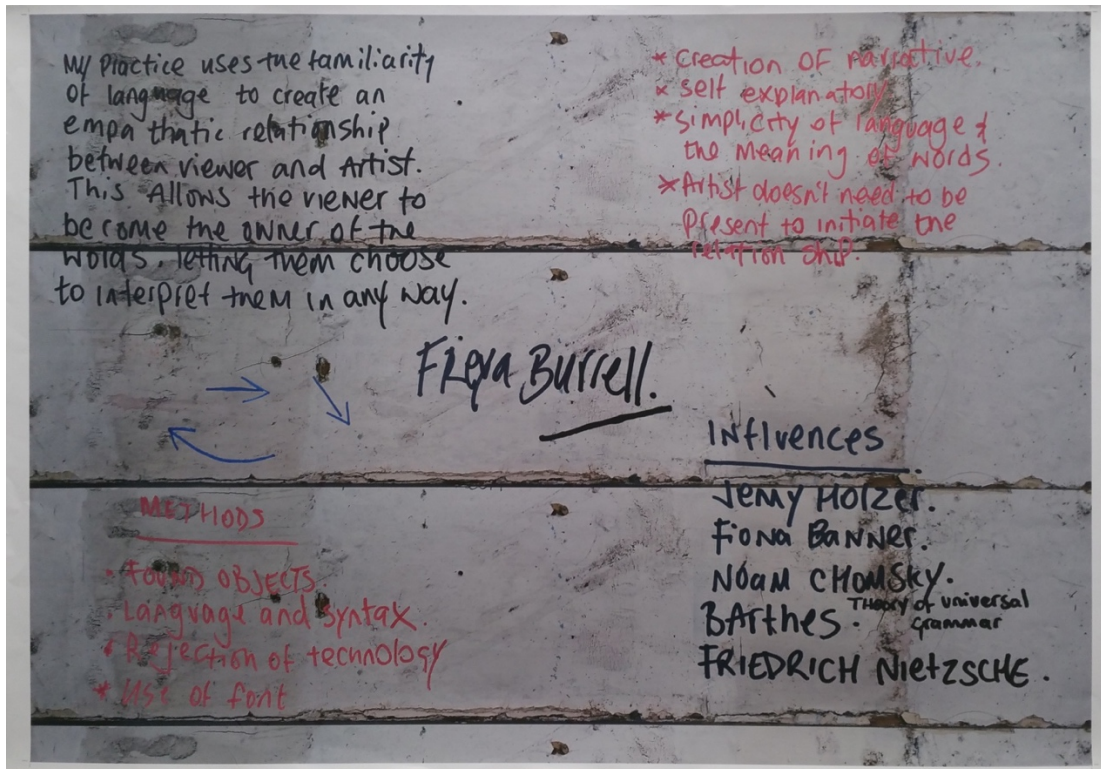


Figure 9: F. Burrell, academic poster, 594x841 mm, Leeds Arts University, 2017.

Gains and losses / A list of the gains that were made through adapting this new genre:

- Promotes the making of 'something else' that students can think their ideas through interactive.
- Prioritizes non-linear and non-hierarchical research interests, allowing for the personal voice.
- Reclaims the use of 'I' as a means of claiming/reclaiming subjecthood.
- Easily allows staff engagement of students' research interests with overview of the synergy between theory and practice.
- Supports non- 'traditional' highly inventive and personal voices to gain currency.
- Students benefit from peer review and immediate feedback on the proposed research and practice-led research at the same time.
- Staff fully participate in the review, in the presence of the student, as opposed to an anonymous assessment.
- There is evidence that this format has been used by students to gain employment, in the form of a competitive commission and gaining a place on a practice-led Ph.D. course.

The losses noted were:

- Comfort in using engrooved practices – some initial hesitance, apprehension and suspicion were demonstrated by highly academic students and staff.
- Staff sitting offsite and alone in a darkened room marking a pile of scripts.
- A conventional tried and tested frame into which knowledge can be fitted.
- 100 per cent confidence of the entire staff team at the onset of the project.
- The measurement of the direct and transparent relationship between written work and assessment judgments.

Reference Shreeve, A., Wareing, S. and Drew, L. (1999), 'Key aspects of teaching and learning in the visual arts', in H. Fry, S. Ketteridge and S. Marshall (eds), *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Enhancing Academic Practice*, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 345–57.

Contributor details

Dr Sarah Taylor's educational background is in Fine Art Painting. She studied at Chelsea College of Art and the University of Ulster. Her current research investigates the relationship between gendered working-class identity and painting as a value-laden form of aesthetic practice; international survey exhibitions of contemporary painting since the 1980s and life writing at the intersection of class and feminist politics. In 2011, she introduced the concept of *Aspirational Beauty* to understand creative endeavors and practices that fall outside of, or that are marginalized from established theoretical conventions and definitions. She is currently subject leader in Fine Art at Leeds Arts University.

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Professor Sheila Gaffney is a sculptor and the Director of Art & Performance at Leeds Arts University. She established the BA (Hons) Fine Art course at Leeds Arts University in 2006 and led it until 2017. Her research encounters psychoanalysis, life writing and making sculpture. It investigates their relationship through sculpture, drawing and scholarly writing. She studied sculpture at Camberwell School of Art & Crafts and the Slade School of Fine Art.

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Figure 10: T. Harker, academic poster 1, interactive GIF, Leeds Arts University, 2017.



Figure 11: T. Harker, academic poster 2, interactive GIF, Leeds Arts University, 2017.