

2014

Material murmurings

Brooke Zeligman
Edith Cowan University

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Material Murmurings

Brooke Zeligman

Faculty of Education and Arts

2014

Doctor of Philosophy

This exegesis is submitted in partial completion of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at Edith Cowan University.

Abstract

This thesis, *Material Murmurings*, comprising of exegesis and creative practice, focuses on the central research question: “How do we understand the materiality of glass and what happens when said materiality is approached through feminist scholarship?” This question forms the basis for an investigation through creative practice and analysis via an interpretive framework of feminist knowledges of the body. The creative practice embraces glass as the central medium with a series of exhibitions that responded to the interpretive paradigm. It is expected that *Material Murmurings* will highlight and make evident the value of post-technical approaches in glass art which have only recently become an acknowledged form of contemporary visual arts within Australia and, to a lesser degree, the broader international context.

The intention of this thesis is to address the lack of dialogue surrounding glass as a contemporary visual arts material by discussing how female artists have been using glass within their practice through a paradigm of feminist scholarship of the body. A lack of formalised inquiry into the material depth of glass exists. Through formalising this discussion via a framework of feminist knowledges, the study will open up the possibilities for writing about glass, allowing for the expansion of the dialogue surrounding contemporary glass art. The study will also make visible and highlight the breadth and diversity of contemporary glass works being produced particularly by female visual artists, embracing the material itself for its depth and wealth of possible meaning.

The exegesis pays particular attention to the work of female artists who have embraced glass for its materiality. Materiality is understood as the insistence of meaning that a material contributes to a work of art; the qualities, history and function beyond the decorative or aesthetic value that the material contributes to the artwork. My feminist visual arts praxis has provided the motivation for this exegesis and my obsession with glass has driven the choices of artists and theorists discussed. The exegesis demonstrates how glass can be interpreted/read/understood within the visual arts through a feminist lens.

Various exhibitions through the research period culminated in a final exhibition titled

Material Murmurings (2013). These exhibitions revealed different ways of critically interpreting and locating glass works beyond the traditional craft paradigm. This research has responded to the contemporary scholarly call for a need for visual arts critical review to be more inclusive of contemporary glass works, and has provided through practice-led research that is inclusive of materiality, praxis and process, a basis for this, with significant outcomes exhibited as artefact/object/publication.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- ii. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or
- iii. contain any defamatory material.

Brooke Zeligman

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I have been very privileged to have the most incredible panel of supervisors throughout this journey. A supportive, encouraging and generous group of women who have allowed me to run, leap and crawl, to navigate my way through what at times was a quagmire of confusion and at others times bright epiphanies that shone like fireflies in the dark.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Declaration	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
Table of Figures	viii
Glossary of Terms.....	xiii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: murmurs the material	4
perspectives, positions and parameters	6
the post-technical turn.....	12
understanding the status quo	15
Chapter 2: a murmuring material methodology	20
Glass and the body/imaginary/experience	22
Methodologies engaged by Arts-Practice-led research	25
The Materiality of glass in the work of Louise Bourgeois	28
Chapter 3: materiality	36
materiality as metaphor.....	38
A Pragmatic Orientation in Theory.....	42
Material Feminisms	43
It's the Body AND the Mind/You are what you eat.....	46
Materiality and feminism	48
Materiality, the visual arts, a feminist arts praxis and the practice-led researcher	51
Chapter 4: The practice and the process of an experimental chef	55
The process.....	60
Oozing drooping processes	63
Material/ity or embodied process.....	64

A recipe from my grandmother.....	65
Chapter 5: Maternal Musings Not Permitted.....	70
rootprints: Spectrum Project Space September 2008	70
an embodied discourse	70
feast: The Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery, August 2009.....	81
feasting on Excess.....	81
The heartache of lost work.....	81
feast.....	83
Excess	91
voice or loss	93
The M Words: Elements Gallery, June, 2012.....	98
m words.....	98
A story of preservation.....	103
murmur.....	104
zinnias.....	106
Chapter 6: Material Murmurings: Spectrum Art Gallery, March 2013	109
Conclusion	124
References.....	126
Appendix.....	ix

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Brooke Zeligman and Claire Canham, *Learning to count*, 2005, recycled children's toys, glass, wood, dimensions vary

Figure 2: *Column flask*: core-formed from opaque blue glass with yellow and white thread decoration; Egyptian, ca. 1400–1200 B.C., H. 8.5 cm

Figure 3: *Amphoriskos*: core-formed from opaque blue glass with yellow and white thread decoration; Eastern Mediterranean, 6th–4th century B.C.; H. 10.5 cm

Figure 4: Alice entering the looking glass, image by Sir John Tenniel, from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*, 1871

Figure 5: Hieronymus Bosch, *Garden of Earthly Delights*, circa 1504, oil on panel front

Figure 6: Hieronymus Bosch, *Garden of Earthly Delights*, circa 1504, oil on panel internal detail

Figure 7: Norman Foster, Reichstag Dome, Berlin, 1993-1999

Figure 8: Louise Bourgeois, *Cells 1*, 1991, installation detail, mixed media

Figure 9: Jocelyne Prince, *Slide Library*, 2002, glass, wood, light, dimensions vary, detail

Figure 10: Mark Zirpel, *Tract II*, 2000, blown glass, latex, steel, dimensions vary

Figure 11: Brooke Zeligman and Claire Canham, *Mouthie*, child's harmonica, glass, wood, 40cm x 33cm

Figure 12: Brooke Zeligman, Tarsh Bates, Emma Petersen, Claire Canham, *bare, Just Browsing*, 2005, performance at Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts

Figure 13: Brooke Zeligman, *C Horse*, 2005, genital prints and mixed media, installation view, Moores Building, Fremantle

Figure 14: Louise Bourgeois, *Precious Liquids*, 1992, installation and detail, mixed media

Figure 15: Louise Bourgeois, *Precious Liquids*, 1992, installation and detail, mixed media

Figure 16: Gabriella Bissetto, *Prayer to Myself (75mls blood/kg body weight)*, 2007, 70 x 75ml blown glass spheres, wine, stainless steel wire, engraving, 3500mm loop

Figure 17: Mona Hatoum, *Silence*, 1994, glass, 126.6 x 93.7 x 58.7 cm

Figure 18: Kiki Smith, *Bloodline*, 1994, blown glass, 100 units x 20cm diameter, detail,

Figure 19: Irene Frolic, *Prayer Series: Beggar 1*, 2009, Kiln cast glass, H 35cm, W

12.5cm Figure 20: The Mobius Strip

Figure 21: Brooke Zeligman, *pâte de verre* mould from *feast* packed and waiting to be fired

Figure 22: Brooke Zeligman, the hot casting process, creating ovum for *rootprints*

Figure 23: Brooke Zeligman, pouring molten glass for the making of glass ovum, 2007, Hyaline Studio, ECU

Figure 24 Brooke Zeligman, detail of the drooping, oozing glass from *zinnias (a grandmother's garden)*, 2013, hot cast and slumped glass, stainless steel, MDF, polymer, dimensions vary

Figure 25: Brooke Zeligman, *rootprints* construction and chutney making

Figure 26: A recipe from my Grandmother, circa 1920s

Figure 27: Brooke Zeligman, *06.01.08 06.23.08 07.17.08 08.06.08 09.03.08 (the dated series)*, 2008, hot cast glass, auto paint, MDF, LED lighting, 720mm x 420mm x 35mm x 5

Figure 28: Brooke Zeligman, *rootprint, memory and lifewriting*, 2007, hot cast glass, polymer, marine-ply, LED lighting, 600mm x 600mm x 35mm x 3

Figure 29: Brooke Zeligman, *lifewriting series*, 2007, hot cast glass, polymer, marine-ply, LED lighting, installation detail, 600mm x 600mm x 35mm x 4

Figure 30: Brooke Zeligman, untitled series i (yellow), 2008, hot cast glass, auto paint, MDF, LED lighting, 600mm x 35mm

Figure 31: Brooke Zeligman, detail of the crumbs, the bones, the scraps of what was once a *feast*, 2009, *pâte de verre*, dimension vary

Figure 32: Brooke Zeligman, *feast*, 2009, *pâte de verre* and mixed media, installation details from the Moores Building, Gallery 6

Figure 33: Brooke Zeligman, *feast*, 2009, *pâte de verre* and mixed media, tableau detail Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery, Gallery 6

Figure 34: Brooke Zeligman, *feast*, 2007, *pâte de verre* and mixed media, installation test tableau detail

Figure 35: Brooke Zeligman, detail of draped napkin from *feast*, 2009, *pâte de verre*, installation detail from the Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery, Gallery 6

Figure 36: Brooke Zeligman, *feast*, 2009, *pâte de verre* and mixed media, installation detail from the Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery, Gallery 6

Figure 37: Brooke Zeligman, *Thrice Baked and Fallen*, 2007, slumped *pâte de verre*

Figure 38: Brooke Zeligman, *Grandmother's bowl*, 2008, *pâte de verre*

Figure 39: Brooke Zeligman, *feast*, 2009, *pâte de verre* and mixed media, installation detail from the Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery, Gallery 6

Figure 40: Brooke Zeligman, *feast*, 2008, installation test detail, *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary

Figure 41: Brooke Zeligman, *Here sits great grandmother Coombs*, 2008, *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary

Figure 42: Brooke Zeligman, *napkin with bowl*, 2009, *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary

Figure 43: Brooke Zeligman, *m words i*, 2012, hot cast glass, steel, installation detail

Figure 44: Brooke Zeligman, *Inverted white globe*, 2013, plaster bandage, *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary

Figure 45: Brooke Zeligman, *murmur*, 2012, kiln cast lead crystal, pieces from found wood highchair, 1020mm x 620mm x 420mm

Figure 46: Brooke Zeligman, *Childlessness*, 2004, glass and mixed media, dimensions vary

Figure 47: Brooke Zeligman, *zinnias (a grandMother's garden)*, 2012, hot cast and slumped glass, steel

Figure 48: Brooke Zeligman, *Material Murmurings*, 2013, gallery view, Spectrum Art Gallery

Figure 49: Brooke Zeligman, *m words i & iii*, 2012 -13, hot cast furnace glass with stainless steel, and kiln cast recycled lead crystal with stainless steel, dimensions vary

Figure 50: Brooke Zeligman, *m words i*, 2012, hot cast furnace glass with stainless steel, dimensions vary

Figure 51: Brooke Zeligman *m words iii*, 13, kiln cast recycled lead crystal with stainless steel, dimensions vary

Figure 52: Brooke Zeligman, *m words i*, 2012, hot cast furnace glass, dimensions vary

Figure 53: Brooke Zeligman, *feast*, 2009, *pâte de verre*, installation 2013, Spectrum Project Space, dimensions vary

Figure 54: Brooke Zeligman, *06.01.08 06.23.08 07.17.08 08.06.08 09.03.08 (the dated series)*, 2008, hot cast glass, pigments, auto paint, MDF, LED lighting, 720mm x 420mm x 35mm x 5

Figure 55: Brooke Zeligman *Material Murmurings*, 2013, gallery view under and across *feast* to *zinnias (a grandMother's garden)* and *egg, and*, Spectrum Art Gallery

Figure 56: Brooke Zeligman *Material Murmurings*, 2013, gallery view across *feast* to *untitled series i (yellow)* and *untitled series ii (midnight blue reduction)*, Spectrum Art Gallery

Figure 57: Brooke Zeligman *Material Murmurings*, 2013, gallery view *zinnias (a grandMother's garden)* on the floor, *rootprint, memory and lifewriting* on the back wall and *I got a brand new shiny ute (and no room for a baby seat)*, and *Monaro twins*,

Spectrum Art Gallery

Figure 58: Brooke Zeligman *zinnias (a grandMother's garden)*, 2013, hot poured and slumped glass, stainless steel, polymer, MDF, dimensions vary, detail

Figure 59: Brooke Zeligman *lifewriting series*, 2007, hot cast glass, polymer, marine ply, LED lighting, 600mm x 600mm x 35mm x 2

Figure 60: Brooke Zeligman, *Inverted white globe*, 2013, plaster bandage, *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary, installation view

Figure 61: Brooke Zeligman, *lost*, 2013, broken *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary, installation view Spectrum Art Gallery

Figure 62: Brooke Zeligman, *murmur*, 2012-2013, kiln cast lead crystal, found objects, 1020mm x 620mm x 420mm

Figure 63: Brooke Zeligman, constructing *murmur*, 2013 Spectrum Art Gallery

Figure 64: Brooke Zeligman, *m words ii*, 2012-2013, *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary

Figure 65: Brooke Zeligman, *m words ii*, 2012-2013, *pâte de verre*, installation detail, dimensions vary

Figure 66: Brooke Zeligman, *m words ii*, 2012-2013, *pâte de verre*, installation detail, dimensions vary

Glossary of Terms

Abjection: Kristeva uses this term to refer to the state of horror engendered by the encounter with something dark or taboo (a corpse, an open wound, bodily fluids, faeces) that causes us to lose our sense of the distinction between the self and the other. In my work I am especially interested in the ways abjection is associated with the trauma of childbirth and the horror of associated bodily fluids. In psychoanalytical terms abjection is encountered for the first time at the moment when a child becomes aware of its own identity and separates itself from mother. As all women are capable of birth, of menses, all women are potential sites of the abject and associated taboo (Grosz, 1994, 1995; Kristeva, 1982).

Autoethnographic: a writing and research mode that connects the autobiographical and personal, to the cultural, social and political (Ellis, 2004). The autoethnographic voice has been indicated through the use of italics in this paper.

Conceptual practice: When used within this paper refers to artworks that are driven by ideas, cultural commentary or social theories, the works discussed within this paper often use materials and their inherent materiality in order to communicate these ideas.

Corporeality: Elizabeth Grosz explains in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* that, regardless of theory “There will always remain a kind of outsidedness or alienness of the experience and lived reality of each sex for the other. Men, contrary to the fantasy of the transsexual, can never, even with surgical intervention, feel or experience what it is like to be, to live, as women” (1994, p. 207) She draws attention to “the irreducible specificity of women's bodies, the bodies of all women, independent of class, race and history” (1994, p. 207). She argues that the corporeal is inescapable and the lived, sexed body must be embraced and acknowledged within the exploration of new knowledges. This is further to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the lived body which challenges the traditional Cartesian approach of knowledge making as rooted in conceptualisation and identifies the body as the body as the initial source of all understanding.

Écriture féminine: from Helene Cixous, a literal translation from the French would be *women’s writing* but in “The Laugh of the Medusa” from *Coming to writing and other essays* (1991), Cixous argues that women’s bodies have been appropriated and formed by language, a masculine, patriarchal language that is dominated by male writers. Cixous argues that women must write women into history as a means of reclaiming their bodies.

Female imaginary: Luce Irigaray, in response to Lacanian and Freudian ideas on the importance of the imaginary in the formation of identity, challenged the theory by proposing there must be two separate imaginaries. The imaginary that Lacan and Freud developed was drawn from the male body, which dominated culture and impacted on science, medicine, philosophy, language and all social structures. Drawing on the sexual difference between male and female bodies, Irigaray conceptualised the female imaginary as plural, whereas the male imaginary is singular. For a woman to view herself through the male imaginary and to navigate the social structures that have been influenced by it, meant that women only ever experienced themselves as fragmented beings. The notion of a female imaginary allows for a woman to experience herself as a whole and to take pleasure in herself (1993).

French Feminism: Dominated by Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray. French feminisms look at how women's bodies have been repressed, subverted and dominated by the masculine domain. In particular, they focus on the structure of language and its influence on the construction of social structures that allow for the ongoing repression of women thereby challenging fields of psychoanalysis and writing and using them to appropriate language in a way that allow women the space to live. *Écriture féminine*, *jouissance*, abjection and the female imaginary were some of the strategies that evolved from their work and have had a far reaching influence that continues today within feminist theory and practice.

Jouissance: a French term which is associated with sexual pleasure, with excess and overflow, but, as Kristeva explains in *Powers of Horror* (1982), for women *jouissance* goes beyond sexual pleasure and engages the pre-verbal. It signals both pleasure and pain .

Linguistic turn: a term used to describe the focus on language adopted by contemporary feminist theorists including Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, and Julia Kristeva, all of whom I have engaged with within this paper. These theorists were particularly interested in not only how language constitutes reality but in how language influences the construction of gendered roles and identities (Butler, 1988; Irigaray, 1993; Kristeva, 1980, 1982, 1986, 1980).

Materiality: The insistence of the inherent meanings of the medium within a work, which disrupt traditional modes of analysis and understanding (Adams, 2008).

Phenomenology: For this paper I use feminist academic Judith Butler's ideas on phenomenology which go beyond patriarchal ideas of phenomenology first developed by Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and George Herbert Mead that explain how social agents make up our reality "through language, gesture, and ... symbolic social sign". Butler embraces Simone de Beauvoir's claims that, "one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman" in order to explore how phenomenology impacts upon female identity, postulating that "gender is in no way a stable identity" rather, it is "tenuously constituted in time" by the repetition of actions formed by language and gesture. Regardless of the mundane nature of these phenomena, a woman can be agentic in expressing the phenomenology of the female body and experience, which is different to that of the male (Butler, 1988).

Polyphonic: refers to two or more voices combined to create a harmonic whole. In this paper I use the term to refer to the making of the art works, which are informed by multiple voices, those of the academic researcher, the autoethnographic writer, the chaotic maker and the many theoretical and poetical voices that have been engaged with during the research.

Polyvocal: refers to a text that combines multiple voices. In my work I combine the tradition based voice of the academic researcher, which provides historical and theoretical context; the voice of the commentator, which is in the first person and provides a personal commentary on the insights, achievements, methodologies and challenges of the researcher (Hamilton, 2011), and the poetical voice of the artist practitioner, designed to engage with the effective or pre-verbal domain that engages with feelings and sensations. This voice also engages with the autoethnographic. Cixous calls this the truth of poetry (1997).

Post-technical: When used in this paper refers specifically to glass works that do not fit the

traditional parameters of beauty, used for glass critique. They tend to be contemporary works that do not necessarily shun technique and often show a high development, and understanding, of the techniques used in glass making, but often have a material focus.

Introduction

The intention of this research project is to address the lack of dialogue surrounding glass as a contemporary visual arts material by discussing how female artists have been using glass within their practice through a paradigm of feminist scholarships of the body. Through formalising this discussion via a framework of feminist knowledges, the study will open up the possibilities for writing about glass, allowing for wider discussion within the realm of contemporary glass art. The study will also make visible and highlight the breadth and diversity of contemporary glass works being produced particularly by female visual artists, embracing the material itself for its depth and wealth of possible meaning.

This inquiry is driven by the use of glass within my visual arts practice as a female visual artist. While artworks and the materials we use as artists are not gendered, artists are themselves gendered, and consequently our artistic product is often marked by that gender, perhaps in the traces we may leave, the topic the work engages with, or the reading the work is given by an observer. In my work, which is largely autobiographical and often confessional, I deliberately engage in issues political, social, cultural and personal: issues that directly impact on contemporary women. Consequently when I read the work of other women I bring my context and interests to that reading. Of course there is no right way when it comes to reading art: the art critic may be privileged in education and might be more adept at reading the signifiers within a specific artwork but this does not necessarily make them right. We are all used to the notion that there is no one right answer. My reading is just one of many possible approaches. Stephen Scrivener underscores the subjectivity of each individual response when he writes:

What significant role does art perform, if it is not about acquiring and communicating knowledge? ... [Art] has often been understood as providing deep insights into emotion, human nature and relationships, and our place in the World, etc. This view encompasses much of [our] appreciation of art ... generally speaking, we experience these insights as possibilities rather than conclusions: as, "I think that" rather than "I know that". In this sense, artworks offer perspectives or ways of seeing. These perspectives may concern, for example, the way the World was, is, or might be. ... [There is] the ability of works of art to affect our perception, emotion and aesthetic sensibility. Because artworks have the potential to arouse such responses we are able to associate sensation and feelings with how things were, are, or might be. In this sense, artworks provide both ways of seeing and ways of being. (2002, p.44)

Like Luce Irigaray, I feel that the meaning of the text lies very much in the identity of the reader; the only reply that can be given to the question of the meaning of the text is:

read, perceive, feel ... Who are you? would be a more pertinent question, provided that it does not collapse into a demand for an identity card or an autobiographical anecdote. The answer would be: And who are you? Can we meet? Talk? Love? Create something together? (1991, p.149)

This exegesis briefly explores the development of glass art and looks at how the introduction of glass into tertiary institutions has helped to steer glass art into new arenas. This exegesis pays particular attention to the work of female artists who have embraced glass for its materiality. Materiality is understood here as the insistence of meaning that a material contributes to a work of art: the qualities, history and function beyond the decorative or aesthetic value that the material contributes to the artwork. The motivation for this exegesis is driven by my visual arts feminist praxis as are the choices of artists and theorists, and demonstrates how glass can be interpreted/read/understood within the visual arts through a feminist lens.

The exegesis begins with a brief exploration into the history of glass art in Australia and beyond in order to establish the motivation for the focus of this research. It was originally intended that the discussion take a solely Australian focus, yet during the course of the study it became apparent that while contemporary post-technical glass work was more accepted within the international context there remains a gap in understanding/interpreting these works both in Australia and internationally. This gap is discussed in detail in Chapter 1. murmurs the material, in the section titled perspectives, positions and parameters.

Chapter 2. a murmuring material methodology, looks at how the strategies and methodology that were employed throughout the journey impacted on the making and writing of the thesis. The discussion then turns to the interpretive paradigm and establishes the parameters and focus through which works will be discussed, before going on to establish a definition for the concept of materiality. This will be accompanied by a detailed analysis of how the materiality of glass can be understood. Materiality will then be explored via the chosen interpretive framework by reviewing the much-lauded works by Louise Bourgeois and the more contemporary works by Kikki Smith and Mona Hatoum.

In the final chapters of the exegesis I discuss my own work which has been exhibited throughout the PhD journey. There is discussion of process, practice and methodology, and

of how the work developed in response to, as well as independently from, the research. The chapters detailing the exhibitions are broken into three different bodies of work. These began as individual explorations of identified themes of abjection, *jouissance* and excess within the interpretive paradigm. Throughout the writing and the process, it became apparent that these ideas were not so easily separated: instead, they overlap and interweave, creating junctions and exchanges of meaning through the materiality, object and story.

In presenting a discussion of my work, and the work of Bourgeois, Smith and Hatoum through whom I contextualise my practice, it is not my intention to deny other interpretations or readings. As Helene Cixous suggests, theory can entail a cut that disconnects, and while it is necessary to take a particular position, for new knowledges and understanding it is important to remember that “alone it is false” (1997, p. 4). I do not intend that my reading or chosen paradigm is taken to be the only possible elucidation, nor do I intend a hierarchy of knowledge or interpretation. Like my intention for my practice, the intention for my reading is to always remain open, holistic, eclectic and inclusive. My desire is never to deny another interpretation and always to say “*yes, yes and yes*”.

Throughout the exegesis I have used different inflexions of voice that indicate the shifts between the multiple methodologies engaged within a practice-led model: that of the academic researcher, the voice of the artist involved in an in depth exploration and immersion of the material and the confessional, autoethnographic voice of lived experience. The shifts in voice are indicated via italics. It is a strategic reflection of the process: the polyphonic, the multiple voices involved in being both visual arts practitioner and academic researcher which entails an eclectic approach. I refer to it as cooking, as recipe making, as combining flavour and ingredients to make a cohesive whole, a meal. While the flavours remain identifiable and distinct, they are complementary, sometimes challenging, yet together, they form the whole.

Chapter 1. murmurs the material

The great eventful Present hides the Past; but
through the din

Of its loud life hints and echoes from the life
behind steal in;

—John Greenleaf Whittier, *The
Garrison of Cape Ann*, 1857

The 2005 *Revivify* exhibition (post-undergraduate and pre-honours) held at Spectrum Project Space, as a collaborative exhibition with artist Claire Canham, featured works made from recycled materials and glass. Discarded objects such as photo negatives and forgotten toys were placed between sheets of glass removed from old photo frames and broken windows. The objects were burnt out in the kiln; the glass was fused and slumped around the charred remains. The charred objects housed in distorted glass were then returned to the original photo and window frames which had been painted white to signify the illusive nature of memory as it fades and blends. In essence, forgotten memories, lost treasures, hermetically sealed in glass tombs (Figure 1). Figure 1 depicts the charred remains of a wooden train: each compartment of the train had been a number, a toy that had helped teach a child to count. The compartments were separated into the individual white frames. The work hung low to the ground and continued around a corner as if the toy had been left in the middle of play. Discarded and forgotten as so many moments are.



Figure 1: Brooke Zeligman and Claire Canham, (2005), *Learning to Count* (installation view) recycled children's toys, glass, wood, dimensions vary.¹

Learning to Count was created as a response to a men's shelter located across the road from

¹ All images of artist's work taken by artist unless otherwise stated.

Spectrum Project Space on Beaufort Street.² I had interviewed and recorded the residents sharing their stories of life and loss. For *Revivify* (2005) the space's front window had been painted out with latex, creating a leathered skin across the outside world. We had left small peepholes that focused on the men's shelter where viewers could stand while listening to audio of the shared lives, the men's lived experience. The shelter however was unmarked. There was no signage, just a dilapidated building. Its residents sat on the veranda, smoking, watching a world that had forgotten them. The shelter has since been closed, the building bulldozed. In its place stand luxury apartments.

The exhibition was reviewed briefly in *The West Australian* newspaper by Ric Spencer (Appendix p. 151): "Zeligman and Canham have the same melancholic love of glass that an alcoholic might have for a bottle" (2005). We received condolences for the bad review, yet I didn't think it was bad. Despite its brevity, I felt Spencer had intuited, if not unpacked, the melancholia we also felt through the use and handling of the glass.

At the time of the review Canham and I were students. Experimentation with glass in contemporary visual arts learning contexts was beginning to promote new approaches allowing for innovative artistic expression. Contemporary commentators were also beginning to acknowledge that the introduction of glass into educational institutions has resulted in major changes in the field. For example, Ursula Ilse-Neuman, curator at the New York Museum of Arts and Design, while sitting on the panel of The Corning Museum of Glass, *New Glass Review* 25 (2004), noted:

[there is a] greater emphasis on the conceptual and sculptural ... [and this] is a reflection of contemporary trends that are dissolving borders in the fine arts and eliminating hierarchies of media. (p. 50)

While this development has liberated and expanded the boundaries of what is possible with glass, it has also, as the reception of the "bad review" cited above indicates, left a gap between artist and viewer/critic, as the latter struggle to find a point of reference and understanding for these new works.

This chapter gives insight into how glass can be understood through historical reference, its uses beyond art such as the domestic, scientific and architectural, and the

² Spectrum Project Space is no longer located on Beaufort Street in North Perth opposite the men's shelter, having moved onsite to the Mount Lawley campus at Edith Cowan University. It is here that the final exhibition will be held for *Material Murmurings*.

understanding of glass as metaphor in a broader arts context. Here I look at how glass has been positioned within the arts. I discuss the introduction of glass into tertiary institutions and its impact on the use of glass in contemporary art, and I bring into focus the need for new ways in which glass can be read and understood. This chapter references the international attitudes to glass in art in order to contextualise practices and approaches.

perspectives, positions and parameters

For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face.

— Corinthians, Chapter. 13, Verse. 12

Since its inception as the first material made by humans, glass has become firmly entrenched in history. Embraced for its numerous applications, used in both utilitarian and decorative contexts, it is a material that has enabled humanity from the moment of discovery. Originating in the Middle East and, it is thought, discovered by accident, glass first appeared between 2000–3000 BC (Craig, 2008; Macfarlane & Martin, 2002), although traces can be found on the glazing of pottery samples as early as 8000 BC (Macfarlane & Martin, 2002). The earliest pieces of glass were formed by a technique known as core forming and now more widely known as *pâte de verre* (Grossmann, 2002). The technique known as *pâte de verre* was named by French artist Henry Cros who was responsible for reviving the almost forgotten process during the late 19th century (Frantz, 2005b). *Pâte de verre* requires crushed or powdered glass, packed into a mould and fired in a kiln to achieve a final piece. Figures 2 & 3 show two examples of early Egyptian glass using *pâte de verre*: the first was most likely used to hold kohl for rimming the eye in black, the second perfume oil. The more widely known process of glass blowing is relatively young by comparison, evolving again, in the Middle East, circa 100BC (Macfarlane & Martin, 2002).



Figure 2: *Column flask*, core-formed from opaque blue glass with yellow and white thread decoration; Egyptian, ca. 1400–1200 B.C., H. 8.5 cm, The Yale Collection, Yale University, New Haven (Grossmann, 2002). (Exception to copyright: Section ss 40, 103C. Exception: Research or study.)



Figure 3: *Amphoriskos*, core-formed from opaque blue glass with yellow and white thread decoration; Eastern Mediterranean, 6th–4th century B.C.; H. 10.5 cm, The Yale Collection, Yale University, New Haven (Grossmann, 2002). (Exception to copyright: Section ss 40, 103C. Exception: Research or study.)

Glass was rapidly utilised for utilitarian purposes as the above examples of ancient works demonstrate. And throughout its long working life glass has enabled breakthroughs in architecture, science and technology,³ all of which contribute to the reading and understanding of the material within the arts. The result of this rich, diverse and long history is that glass contains a multiplicity of possible contextual readings when used within the arts. It becomes a material of excess in its fecundity of metaphor and meaning.

Glass is laden with symbolism and a richly diverse history of glass imagery as metaphor exists. “Metaphor is literally a ‘carrying across’ or transference [of meaning through association or perceived likeness] from one point to another” (Kirby, 1997, p. 532). “Through the looking glass” (Figure 4) or “through the glass darkly”, are perhaps the most easily recognisable of all glass metaphors, where everyday objects such as mirrors or windows are transformed, becoming portals through which we are able to see the unattainable, undefinable “other”. The “other” used here references the Lacanian position of the “other” as the unconscious or ego (Macey, 2000). The very action of peering into the mirror shows us we are both voyeur and exhibitionist, highlighting the powerful duality of the self.



Figure 4: *Alice entering the looking glass*, image by Sir John Tenniel, from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*, (1871). (Exception to copyright: Section ss 40, 103C. Exception: Research or study.)

Since its inception, glass has captivated the imagination of humankind, “a miracle material capable of transformation, not only in practical terms but through symbolism as well” (Edwards, 2005, p. 25). Examples of glass imagery as metaphor appear repeatedly in various verbal, written and visual art forms throughout history. They are “abstractions in the guise of visual metaphors, forms that represent notions or emotions of a compelling kind” (Edwards, 2005, p. 23), such as serenity and isolation seen in Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly*

³ Innovations that were crucial to Western development like the lenses of the microscope or telescope and the pressure glass of a barometer, revolutionised the sciences of observation — biology, medicine, astronomy and chemistry. These paved the way for further seminal discoveries such as Louis Pasteur's preparation of artificial vaccines (Macfarlane & Martin, 2002).

Delights, circa 1504 (Figures 5 & 6), with idealised figures of lovers and landscapes contained in domes and bubbles of glass that highlight their fleeting radiance. I am told of a French proverb that observes “pleasure is as fragile as glass”; another declares that “happiness is like glass, it soon breaks”. The proverbs like Bosch’s figures in glass illuminate the rarity of such moments.



Figures 5 & 6: Hieronymus Bosch, (circa 1504), *Garden of Earthly Delights* (front and internal detail), oil on panel.

The representational nature of these metaphors is “rooted in semiotics: the relationship to the forms of the objects in the phenomenal world ... not only in terms of ‘participation’ but also in terms of mimesis” (Kirby, 1997, p. 531). In Germany, modernist, post-war architecture (Figure 7) used enormous expanses of transparent glass, the nature of the material suggesting a mimetic government, transparent in action and intent (Archer Barnstone, 2005).



Figure 7: Norman Foster, (1993–1999), Reichstag Dome, Berlin, Germany. (Exception to copyright: Section ss 40, 103C. Exception: Research or study.)

The mimetic metaphor of transparency is also “emblematic of the pure, the delicate and

the elusive”, signifying “rarefied isolation” through the removal “from the anguish and turmoil of daily life” (Edwards, 2005, p. 24–25) as seen in the *Garden of Earthly Delights* by Bosch (Figures 5 & 6). Yet these are double-edged and there is a duality of possible meaning within the metaphor: Louise Bourgeois’ installation *Cells* (Figure 8) 1990–2001, with the glass vessels, Sylvia Plath’s novel *The Bell Jar* (1963), and the fairytale of *Snow White* (1864), asleep in her hermetic glass coffin are symbols of the body/self in exile, in unwilling or enforced isolation. The bell jar symbolised Plath’s depression that prevented her from interacting with her family. Bourgeois’ use of not only medical and scientific glass vessels, but large hand blown balls in *Cells* can be seen to be representative of the self that turns inwards to escape familial turmoil, decay and illness, and *Snow White*, the innocent victim of jealousy, is imprisoned for her youthful beauty, and so we see from this that the very nature of glass is dual, capable of rupture as much as it is of rapture. The metaphor of “rarefied isolation” is also one of exile, loneliness and imprisonment.



Figure 8: Louise Bourgeois, (1991), *Cells 1*, (installation detail), mixed media, New York (Malin, 2004). (Exception to copyright: Section ss 40, 103C. Exception: Research or study.)

Metaphor is semiotically marked language where we see the operation and interaction of signs creating a semiosis of elements, where “these elements are ... the ‘representamen’ or sign ... that stands for or signifies the object to ... the interpretant” (Kirby, 1997, p. 535). Art too is a semiotically marked language, which can be read through the figurative metaphor, and also through the very materials from which it is constructed. These materials can be rich in semiosis, giving depth of meaning and possible interpretation to the work. Glass in visual art carries with it the scientific (Figures 8), the architectural (Figure 7), the historic, domestic and decorative (Figures 2 & 3), and the metaphysical (Figures 5 & 6), before we even begin to discuss the physical nature of the material and the plethora of possible meaning it is capable of contributing to an artwork.

In his conference paper “Byron's Dream: Glass in Times of Rapture and Reverie” (2005) curator Geoffrey Edwards elaborates on glass metaphors that are romantic, essentially beautiful, mystical and even enlightening. He avoids comparisons of glass to the body in order to discuss the metaphysical approach to the metaphor. Edwards directs the reader to exhibitions that have focused on glass as body metaphor, curated by Susan Frantz: *The Glass Skin* (1997), and *The Other Side of the Looking Glass: The Glass Body and its Metaphors* (2003). Glass as body metaphor is common, used by glass craft practitioners and contemporary artists, male and female alike. This was repeatedly acknowledged by artists who presented at the Adelaide Glass Art Society (GAS)/Ausglass conference, held May 7–9 2005, for “its inherent symbolic references to different aspects of human nature” (Steinarsdottir, 2005, p. 48). The commonality of the metaphor was recognised by the jurors of the *New Glass Review 25* (2004), as were “the inherent qualities of glass to suggest the same qualities in the human body, sensuousness, fluidity, strength and fragility” (Ilse-Neuman, 2004, p. 50). Frantz notes in *The Other Side of the Looking Glass*: “glass, like the body and the psyche, is simultaneously resilient and vulnerable” (2003, p. 4). It is these conflicting qualities that so many artists see as “the poetic kinship between the human body and glass, [of] the paradoxes of fragility and strength, [of] the narrow line between myth and reality” (Lalouche cited in Frantz, 2003, p. 3).

Glass as body metaphor is illustrated in the catalogue essays for the Frantz exhibitions. In her essay for *The Glass Skin* Frantz states that the material can be used to approach the body metaphor in many ways: physically, through process, and literally via representation (1997). She argues that the skin of glass has “a variety of physical and metaphorical

parallels to the living, breathing sheath in which we exist” (1997, p. 12). Her contributors elaborate upon this, drawing out the comparisons to the skin as container, protective boundary between inside and outside, where the form/body is concentrated, presenting a mask to the world (Ricke cited in Frantz, 1997, p. 9). They note that glass within the postmodern world is “symbolic of our fragile, stressful, and lonesome contemporary age” (Mizuta cited in Frantz, 1997, p. 14). Frantz explains that “the line between the inside and outside is more than a barrier: it is the transition point between the public and the private worlds” and glass as body metaphor serves to “heighten the tension between the worlds” (1997, p. 12).

Frantz explains that glass “is suitable ... as metaphor for all manner of human strengths and weaknesses” (1997, p. 13), “like the body it carries memory and reflects experience” and that it is an “appropriate device for evoking living matter and the substances it may excrete and absorb” (1997, p. 13). In my own work I position glass as body and self. I draw comparison not just to the inherent qualities of strength and fragility so readily associated with glass as body and self, but also to notions of the fluid, and the abject, the substances excreted and absorbed, and to notions of exile. I use glass to stand in for the female body, the female self, myself.

This will be discussed in the coming chapters. I am fascinated by the “intricate and multilayered relationships between the cold inorganic substance of glass and the warm pulse of life” (Frantz, 2003, p. 7). My aim with this exegesis is to explore the materiality of glass not just through the historical and utilitarian but also as it relates to the body through its physicality, examining this via feminist knowledges of the body and demonstrating its operation within my visual arts practice in order to make visible the depth of the material and thus provide greater insight to the viewer/critic into new glass works within the visual arts.

the post-technical turn

Could Spencer's response to the *Revivify* (2005) exhibition: "Zeligman and Canham have the same melancholic love of glass that an alcoholic might have for a bottle" (2005), be seen as a reflection of "the art world's reluctance to accept objects made from glass for consideration" (Buckley, 2009, p. 41)? While there is no clear-cut reasoning for this recalcitrant position, many believe it lies in the "undeniable beauty of glass ... where too much beauty is seen as circumspect" (Buckley, 2009, p. 41), and the longstanding location of glass in craft, where the focus lies on technique, craftsmanship, and object aesthetic through which the critic finds a traditional and dated paradigm for review. Certainly what is clear is that "the term 'glass artist' remains a marginalising and dismissive one" (Buckley, 2009, p. 41), so for this reason, beyond this chapter, I deliberately avoid its use. I avoid the term "glass art" for the same reason. Instead I use "glass in visual art", which acknowledges the already burgeoning existence of these exciting works that are "dissolving borders and eliminating hierarchies of media" (Ilse-Neuman, 2004, p. 50).



Figure 9: Jocelyne Prince, (2002), *Slide Library* (detail), glass, wood, light, dimensions vary. (Exception to copyright: *Section: ss 40, 103C. Exception: Research or study.*)

Buckley (2009, p. 41) suggests that another reason for the reluctant acceptance of glass in visual art is the omnipresent life of the material, but also argues that the "historic utility" is allowing for "visually stunning and thought-provoking works that take on long standing preconceptions and biases". For example, the works of Jocelyne Prince (Figure 9) and Mark

Zirppel (Figure 10) clearly demonstrate the embracing of 'historic utility' with reference to the use of glass in science as does Bourgeois' *Cells 1* (Figure 8). These works play on the material's scientific life, and while these artists are capable of displaying the technical mastery of the material that draws out the connections for the viewer, and gives the critic framework for analysis, they often choose a post-technical approach to working with the material. The question then becomes what happens when an artist's approach focuses on the "post-technical and ... working with narrative" (Moles, 2009, p. 23); how then does the viewer/critic position these works?

It is important to state that taking a post-technical approach when working with glass does not result in a complete refusal of the technical. In almost all forms, to work with glass requires technical knowledge, because unless using a technician to make the pieces or working with found objects, the artist/maker must first acquire the skills to manipulate the material. What the post-technical does is go beyond the beautifully crafted object to focus instead on subject and narrative through materiality.



Figure 10: Mark Zirpel, (2000), *Tract II*, blown glass, latex, steel, dimensions vary. (Exception to copyright: *Section: ss 40, 103C. Exception: Research or study.*)

Returning again to Spencer's response to *Revivify* (2005), we could consider that the post-technical narrative focus within the works exhibited left the viewer/critic adrift, without paradigm as an in-road into analysis. Without the traditional framework through which to review glass objects, Spencer perhaps overlooks the semiotic interaction of metaphors

teased out through “historic utility”, and hinted at through the material. Overlooked were suggestions of the museological — the preservation of the forgotten and discarded under glass, the scientific — each individual piece a bell jar, forcing careful consideration of the specimen within, the architectural — each piece a window into memory, framing not only object but gallery wall, bringing the eye back to the structure of the building. Notions of loss and exile are created through the hermetic glass coffins (Figures 1 & 11) and through the glass darkly, face-to-face with the debris of a consumptive Western life. With a broader framework for analysis that takes into consideration the nature of the material, as well as traditional points for consideration, perhaps a different and additional insight into the work could have been gained.



Figure 11: Brooke Zeligman and Claire Canham, (date), *Mouthie* child’s harmonica, glass, wood, 40cm x 33cm.

In *Australian Glass Today* (2005), Margot Osborne states that glass is a material “imbued with historical resonance” (p. 11), and acknowledges the “flowering of glass as a contemporary creative medium” (p. 1). Yet she dismisses much of the contemporary work being produced, claiming that there is “an unfortunate tendency to elevate ... conceptual approaches to the medium as being inherently more serious” (p. 11), which “denigrates the work of those with a technical focus as merely decorative” (p. 11), and states that glass can “best be appreciated through an intimate gaze that focuses on skill and traditional notions of beauty” (Osborne, 2005, p. 11) — ironically supporting this denigration of glass art as merely decorative. My intention is not to denigrate traditional glass art nor claim hierarchy for glass in visual art. My intention is to provide an understanding and broader acceptance

of new works which use glass in the visual arts, and so to help create an avenue into their analysis.

Osborne (2006), along with Dan Klein (2005) and Noris Ioannou (2005), are key commentators of glass art, as well as glass in visual art in Australia. While Osborne and Klein maintain that the only frame for critical review is through a lens of tradition (celebrating craftsmanship, technical proficiency and aesthetics) Ioannou looks for further development:

If writing [about glass] is to go beyond mere description of technique and object, stylistic comparison, or profiling, the writer's query needs to be more incisive, like: What drives a glass artist to select their particular area of expression? What is the basis of his or her fascination and/or obsession? What is it about a work that has the genius to awaken in us emotional experiences beyond the power of speech? And, who or what determines the mainstream of standards and the thrust of glass development? (2005, p. 89)

This was echoed, five years later, by Megan Bottari in her 2010 exhibition catalogue *Tour de Force*, for the exhibition of the same name held at Wagga Wagga Gallery (Bottari, 2010).

In part two of this chapter I start with the last of Ioannou's questions: "who or what determines the mainstream of standards and the thrust of glass development?" (2005, p. 89), by looking at the development of "glass art" before reasserting the position of "glass in visual art" following Rogers, juror for *New Glass Review* argues, "Glass art is now becoming art with glass" (2004, p. 56). In part three of Chapter 1, and throughout the exegesis, I provide answers to Ioannou's other questions, via a discussion of my relationship with the material and a feminist approach to understanding materiality. This will provide a broader frame through which the viewer/critic can commentate on the use of glass in visual art.

understanding the status quo

To understand why glass art, the assessment of glass art, and the writing about glass art is so focused on traditions of beauty, aesthetics and technical proficiency, it is important to understand the origins of the current studio glass movement. The introduction of glass into fine art educational institutions in the United States by ceramics professor Harvey Littleton in the 1960s is largely credited for the state of studio glass today (Klein, 2005; Littleton,

2006; Page, 2008). According to Page (2008, p. 10), Littleton's academic standing "gave glass immediate legitimacy and helped to speed up its adoption in university art programs". With help, Littleton "was able to solve the technical challenges of blowing glass on a small-scale" (Page, 2008 p. 10), putting glass directly into the hands of the artist/designer for the first time, and moving away from the European tradition of the factory where master craftsmen made pieces to the specifications of the artist/designer. "The central role of the university in the growth of studio glass was a critical factor" (Page, 2008, p. 10-11), and while the uptake of glass was not repeated to the same extent in institutions outside of the USA, Littleton's model was influential and far reaching, with glass entering universities (Page, 2008), in Europe in the 1960s, and Australia in the 1980s (Osborne, 2005).

After the introduction of glass blowing, other techniques were soon to follow, and the processes of warm glass working — kiln casting, fusing and slumping, and *pâte de verre*, soon became part of curricula (Page, 2008). Since its introduction into universities in Australia the studio glass movement has seen "increasing numbers of artists ... attracted to the medium, making it undoubtedly ... the most dominant art medium in Australia's recent history of contemporary art and design" (Grigson, 2000, p. 94). As Frost and McGrath argued in 1961, this phenomenal growth and interest is most likely due to the seductive nature of glass and the material's unique nature and ability to:

take any colour and, through possessing no texture in the ordinary sense of the word, any surface treatment. As for responsiveness to light and shade, it has no serious competitor. It is capable of extreme finish and delicacy [...] and may be graduated almost imperceptibly from transparency through to translucency to opacity, from perfect reflection through diffusion to the completely matt surface. There is, in fact, hardly any surface quality that it cannot assume. [...] Whether it is embossed, engraved, painted, sand-blasted, mirrored, impressed with any pattern [...] moulded, blown, flashed and so on — there is almost no limit to what it will endure or to the possible permutations and combinations of the different treatments. (cited in Macfarlane & Martin, 2002, p. 5)

Glass has been so enthusiastically embraced by Australian practitioners that within two decades, a strong, critical presence was gained on the international stage. This has been acknowledged as significant: "Geographical isolation, the mere 200 years or so of European settlement, and a small population of 18 million, make it a significant achievement that so much has happened in such a short time" (Jirasek, 1997, p. 46).

Perhaps international critical presence explains the reluctance of some commentators to acknowledge new developments, and their insistence on assessment as solely based on the traditional framework. The high standard achieved in such a short time, resulting in international recognition for artists working with glass within the well-established parameters, might suggest a formula that should not be tampered with. But what needs to be understood is that artists, who, under the influence of tertiary institutions, will often pursue, what Osborne and other call a “conceptual” focus to their work, do not abandon skill, instead they embrace a post-technical approach, which focuses on the material in order to communicate an idea. A post-technical approach is a moving beyond the parameters of developing work that displays skillful manipulation of material, into an exploration of the very material itself, pushing the boundaries of what is possible through the testing of the parameters of hard won skill and technique, developing the language of the material, its metaphorical associations and challenging the accepted aesthetic.

The question remains, how did the paradigm for review evolve? The answer lies in the emergence of studio glass. Once the logistics of glass making on a smaller scale, and here I mean in terms of output rather than object size, were overcome, the untrained artist turned to the master craftsman for training. And many craftsmen crossed the divide, making their own designs for the first time. The centuries-old traditions of glass making — technique, craftsmanship and aesthetic — firstly had to be learnt, before they could be challenged.

The position of glass in the broader art world is not uniquely Australian. Andrew Page observes:

Glass artists ... in America have struggled for acceptance by the larger art world, which often remains suspicious of an intense focus on material. Those artists working with the medium of glass must often overcome the preconception that their work is first and foremost materials-based, and it is therefore not concerned with larger conceptual or political issues. ... Despite the use of glass by major artists, or the success of individual glass artists, the majority of artists working in glass struggle for wider acceptance. (2008, p. 15)

Annie Buckley (2009, p. 41) also discusses “the art world’s reluctance to accept objects made from glass”. Yet it is Australian commentators who take a recalcitrant position towards acknowledging new approaches to glass. As Page and Buckley demonstrate, international commentators are discussing new approaches and also raising dialogue to

challenge the broader arts context.

In spite of the apparent reluctance of Australian critics to take new works in glass seriously, the innovative application of glass, particularly within the works of female artists, has been repeatedly recognised by the jurors of the annual *New Glass Review* since 2004, with jurors noting the pioneering endeavours into the broader arts community, “these artists are ... providing a certain conceptual element” (Scanlan, 2005, p. 83), resulting in “glass... becoming progressively assimilated into the larger field of fine art” (Rogers, 2004, p. 56). Susan Frantz in *Notes from a Distant Observer* (2005a, p. 38) comments that there is a generation of Australian artists working with glass “whose work demands and survives consideration within a broader context”. What is clear is that the introduction of glass into tertiary institutions has promoted new aesthetic and post-technical approaches, allowing for innovative artistic expression within the field. It has expanded the boundaries of what is possible with glass, and reposed the often-asked question: What constitutes art? (Littleton, 2006). Interestingly, the refusal to move beyond the status quo by Australian commentators, is denying the pioneering history of Australian glass: “What differentiated the Australian glass artists from the Europeans or even the Americans was the lack of training. The pioneers in the first hour were basically self-taught” (Nickle, cited in Klotz, 2000, p. 24).

[Australian] studio artists ... lack[ed] the benefits of centuries of tradition and the expertise and facilities provided by long established trading firms and studios.’ Several commentators argue that this lack of tradition has created a blank canvas for Australian practitioners, allowing them to develop their own identity and uniqueness: ‘In Australia the studio glass movement has developed as a very pure form’. According to Mark Thiele: ... ‘I think lack of tradition is great as people can be too locked into tradition. I think that the success of Australian glass is because we have the opportunity through freedom of exploration to create something quite unique’. (Carrell, 2003, p. 8)

This “pioneering self-taught” tradition has influenced my making as one of the first students at Edith Cowan University (ECU) to focus on glass as a central working medium. Dr Nien Schwarz’s approach to teaching glass at ECU (2001–11) was unique in that she approached the material from outside of the craft tradition, encouraging students to look at the material from a perspective of how glass can inform a sculptural practice. Taking this unique approach we looked at glass not via a critical crafter’s lens, but via a material lens, developing an understanding of the language of the material alongside technique.

Zimmer, in his journal article “The First Overseas Travelling Exhibition of Australian Glass” (1985, p.52) raised an important point when he comments: “Feedback, especially in the form of unbiased and informed critical appraisal, is necessary if our glass artists are to progress”. In order for any artist to grow, critical feedback is an essential tool. As it stands, critical feedback for artists predominantly working with glass in a sculptural frame means they are faced with being assessed through the lens of art glass requirements. Artists choosing a post-technical narrative focus and pushing boundaries of how the material is understood are being limited by the current critical paradigm. The question then is how do we interpret works in glass that operate outside of these confines? For this I turn to an understanding of the nature of glass that makes a work in glass so rich — the materiality. I develop within this exegesis a reading of materiality through feminist scholarship that will provide another avenue into the understanding of glass art, and begin with defining materiality in Chapter 2. My work, my visual/material practice, engages with materiality to explore and expand upon the dialogue surrounding glass art and craft, challenging the status quo that exists not only within Australia (Bottari, 2010; Ioannou, 2005) but on a larger international scale. It answers Bottari’s call for the “the development of strong conceptual practices that engage on a broader, humanist level — in a way that pushes the boundaries and intelligently interrogates the art-craft dichotomy” (2010, p. 1).

Chapter 2: a murmuring material methodology

This thesis follows “The Research Question Model” put forward by Barbara Milech and Ann Schilo in their essay “‘Exit Jesus’: Relating the Exegesis and the Creative/Production Components of a Research Thesis” (2004). The two components of the thesis, the exegesis and the creative practice, continually pose and repose the central research question: embracing the ideas evident within feminist scholarship and repeatedly asking and re-asking, “How do we understand the materiality of glass and what happens when said materiality is approached through a feminist visual arts practice?”

At the proposal stage of this research project, my planned research design was very different from the path that was taken. The initial methodology was to focus on joint exhibitions with other Australian female visual artists working with glass: curatorial projects, panelled discussions with exhibiting artists regarding the materiality of glass within a feminist paradigm, peer reviews and an interactive website for exhibiting artists to engage in discussion.

This design had intended data collection, yet the design neglected my own arts practice. In search of data I forgot that visual arts research is:

different to the objectives of the sciences, etc., and ... art may lose sight of its own objectives by adopting predefined notions of research. ... Art needs to ensure that what it chooses to call research contributes to its interest’s first and foremost. (Scrivener, 2002, p. 26)

I had lost sight of the objective and was not putting my arts practice first and foremost in order to investigate the materiality of glass and how it can be seen operating within a feminist praxis.

What also became very quickly evident was that female visual arts practitioners were very reluctant to exhibit under a feminist umbrella when they did not identify as feminist practitioners. I was forcing my own agenda onto possible collaborators without first identifying what it was I was trying to say within my own visual arts practice. Despite clear signifiers within their works that enabled my reading of their works as feminist texts many

artists responded to a popular vision of feminism as negative (Summers, 2003; Zeligman, 2005) and were reluctant to label themselves as feminist practitioners. I discuss the signifiers of feminist texts later in this chapter.

What became evident was that I needed to return to my own practice as the source of the research and consider an alternate methodology in order to flesh out an understanding of materiality through a feminist lens. And so, the very elaborate research plan was scrapped, keeping only the plan to exhibit often, in order to obtain feedback from viewers, on the works presented.

The thesis explores the research question: “How do we understand the materiality of glass and what happens when said materiality is approached through a feminist visual arts practice?” I have adopted an inclusive material feminist interpretive paradigm in order to investigate what can be revealed about glass within a contemporary practice. The material framework was chosen because of the lack I found within both post-structural feminism, which is where I began, and corporeal feminism which is where I was led. I wanted a feminism that was inclusive and that search led to material feminisms. The thesis explores the central question through my own visual arts practice in order to broaden the understanding of glass outside of a craft context. This next section lays out how the question was researched via the creative practice.

It should be the creative practice that is informed by the exegesis and the practice-led research in turn informs *the written exegesis*. And although the creative practice intends to answer the same research question it does so via visual language, and materiality, rather than the written word. In Estelle Barrett’s *Exegesis as Meme* she writes:

The exegesis articulates the idea or internal representation of the creative component. The exegesis may be viewed both as a replication or re-visioning of the completed creative work as well as a reflective discourse on significant moments in the process of unfolding and revealing. It operates as both a noun (an artefact in its own right) and a verb (a re-enactment of the artefact as process). Through this dual articulation, the exegesis becomes a medium for validating the process of creative enquiry and expanding the merit of its outcomes (2007, p. 159–163).

It is intended the two components will complement each other in answering the research question.

The very form that this thesis takes, the creative model which is an alternative form of thesis, composed of exhibition plus exegesis, is still relatively new. “Art and writing are two different ways of reaching for truth” (Paperstergiadis cited in Milech & Schilo, 2004, p.1) and the newness of this methodology, the combining of the two to become “practice-led research” produces challenges. As Robyn Stewart points out in *Practice vs Praxis: Constructing Models for Practitioner-Based Research* (2001, p. 1) it has been suggested that the “formalising [of] practice as research will destroy creativity, encumber practice and deny the role of intuition, serendipity and spontaneity”. And I felt that my initial methodology did just that.

The benefit of practice-led research is that:

If we, as artists can understand and situate our practice then we own the practice. We can use the notion of research as a way to develop better understandings of the changing and significant roles of artist, artworks and agency. (Stewart, 2001, p.1)

This research project is helping to provide a language of analysis for new post-technical works in glass and highlights the significant roles of the artists, the artworks, and their agency in broadening the visual arts.

My personal fear throughout this process has been that my visual arts practice becomes didactic, illustrative and contrived, resulting in work that illustrates an idea or theory, rather than being informed by it. For this reason I have foregone the original intended interpretive paradigm of French feminism and instead embraced material feminisms while taking cues from French and corporeal feminisms. This was a deliberate and strategic move to allow creativity, intuition, serendipity and spontaneity to flow.

Glass and the body/imaginary/experience

It is not only the lived body/imaginary/experience that I am interested in, but also how we operate in social, economic and cultural structures. The work of women artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Kiki Smith, and Gabriella Bisetto, who have used glass in their visual arts practice, embracing its materiality for its depth and ability to stand in for the lived body/imaginary/experience have influenced my arts practice and research.

My aim for my practice is to connect with the personal, which is always political, while also paying attention to the social/economic /cultural via form and materiality.

To this I add that I have found the writing stage of the research degree to be extremely challenging. I feel that there is a need to avoid being illustrative and didactic here, as there is in the practice. By this I mean that when involved in the process of practice-led research the practitioner runs the risk of attempting to use their visual arts practice as an illustration of the theory, and as a result they risk their work becoming didactic and easily read, shutting down the poetry. The multiplicity of feminisms has proved beneficial, a strategy of openness allowing both the writing and the visual arts practice to exist outside of each other.

Robyn Stewart describes research in the arts “as critical, reflective, investigative praxis” which “involves the critical and inextricable meld of theory and practice” (2001, p.1). This “is concerned with processes for theorising practice, using appropriation, pastiche and collaboration as basic tenets” (Stewart, 2001, p. 1). *Material Murmurings* theorises practice via the interpretive paradigm, embraces pastiche and appropriation through the notion of *écriture féminine* and relies on the practice to explore the ideas outside the scope of the written. In doing so this research renders new knowledge that promotes the understanding of the materiality of glass as it stands outside of traditional craft approaches.

Glass is ubiquitous. It is firmly located within the quotidian as vessel — bowl, cup and jar. It is architectural — window, ceiling and floor. It is practical, scientific, ornamental and dangerous. There are endless possibilities as to how glass can be used, limited only by the imagination of the user. Within my practice, I embrace glass for all the properties therein that I perceive as human and as female. From its domestic locale to its seductive pull and sensual fluidity, glass becomes a metaphor for the self. The possibilities seem endless. Glass is adaptable, malleable and beautiful with histories ripe for the referencing. It is dangerous, hypnotic and seductive in its molten state. The domestic goddess within me rejoices. My destructive and creative obsessions relate. I am home. Rich in historic utility and allegory it is adaptable, malleable and beautiful. I become obsessed when I am working. The processes used to work the material are like cooking. There are big pots of molten glass to stir and ladle, coloured flours to bake. With glass, I am Kali — destroyer and creator. Queen of rupture and rapture.

Many female artists use labour-intensive practices repeatedly within their work, constantly creating and recreating objects or images as a tool to highlight that there is more: “there is ... a sense that here ... is something very important to convey, which justifies the hours and hours of concentrated work” (Khamara, 2007, p. 18). It says take another look, come closer, think, what else is there beyond the object?

I obsessively work with glass within my sculptural practice. It is a guilty pleasure, like eating too much chocolate. I indulge my obsession in order to draw out a paradox that exists within the material: an experience of both *jouissance* and abjection. Of rapture and rupture. My creative practice has taken shape via a series of process-based sculptural works including *feast* (date), *rootprints* (date) and *m words* (date).

feast (date) is a tableau, an installation made up of multiple pieces, whereas *rootprints* (date) and *m words* (date) are bodies of work. *feast* (date) was the first to begin but not the first to be exhibited. The intention was to focus on the theme of exile within *feast* (date), yet what became apparent was the inescapable and ever present existence of the multiplicity of themes and the polyphonic nature of glass. The intertwining is inescapable and abjection is ever present, not simply for the reference to the oral horror but through process, through cooking (see Chapter 5, section Feasting on Excess for an expanded discussion of the work). I have focused on glass as content, allowed the materiality to lead the practice-based research in order to expose the inherent themes within the materiality of glass demonstrates that is able to operate as lived body/imaginary/experience. The work references female association with craft, the domestic, time, the body — both maternal and not — the architectural, the decorative and myth making.

Methodologies engaged by Arts-Practice-led research

Lyndall Adams writes:

Methodologies engaged by arts practice-led research involve a process of information gathering; including non-linear systems that are inclusive, chaotic, and holistic. Various visual and multi-media methods of selection, analysis, synthesis, presentation and communication including; journals, digital photographs, proofs and drafts are engaged under the paradigm of performative research. Arts-practice-led research is pluralistic in approach; uses multi-method techniques tailored to the individual project; reflexivity is acknowledged and the interaction of the researcher with research material is recognised. (2008, p. 2)

My approach is varied, exploratory and absolutely chaotic. I liken my approach to research as how I think of my practice: it is cooking, recipe making. My studio and my study, like my kitchen, are in constant states of chaotic productivity. And much to the horror of my obsessively neat partner, the books, the materials, the ingredients, are always at hand — to grab, add, stir, bake, and never put neatly away. Through material feminisms, I have embraced methods that are overt without being explicit or alienating. My 3D visual arts practice in which I investigate historic and contemporary notions of female agency, is autobiographical at its heart, and traces pathways through memory and desire in order to challenge culturally prescribed values in relation to childbearing, the matriarch and the lived body/imaginary/experience. I work predominantly with glass, a material of obsession, excess and contradiction in which I locate not just woman's corporeality but also social and cultural structures through the rich and multi-valent nature of the material. Much like the nature of feminisms, my approach acknowledges that practice-led research is eclectic in nature.

My visual arts practice is an embodied discourse, constantly performing itself through process and product. It is always in process, writing and rewriting the narratives that inform it — this is the myth making, a labour that leaves behind a product and yet continues in constant reflexivity. (Firstname) Crouch writes:

adopting a performative attitude creates the potential for the individual to assess the creative act from outside of the act, then adopting a reflexive viewpoint allows an understanding of the creative process from a subjective viewpoint, revealing a dynamic relationship between the context, construction and the articulation of the act. (2007, p. 105)

The practice, the process and the resulting works are in a constant state of performativity, each continually performing the other, and performing the body, and ideas of the body. The materiality of the glass adds to this performativity, enriching the embodied practice with the ubiquitous, the historical, the physiological, the scientific, the architectural, the museological, the decorative, the domestic.

This idea that my work is a confessional of sorts is nothing new: all work to a certain degree — all creative practice — is a form of autobiography. We use our lived experience within our lifeworlds (Habermas, 1984) to communicate ideas through a visual language. My work is autobiographical and it is confessional — it partly stems from choosing childlessness in an era that politicised motherhood. There is the battle with the matriarch that we see in *feast* (date) and also in the *rootprints* series (date) (a return to the idea of motherhood sitting so uncomfortably within the self when I cannot reconcile my own relationship with my mother — and here is the confession). The very title of *feast* acts as a confession as it points to excess, gluttony, dysfunction in the form of eating disorder, self-harm.

When I first went to art school back in 1989 what we were taught seemingly goes against this autobiographical voice. It was a very traditional approach to art history where we talked about the work as it existed outside of ourselves and in relation to other works, a postmodern pastiche. And this is where my methodology for this thesis was falling short — I was trying to apply my ideas to others' works in order to make them speak for me. This was just not going to succeed as this is my story — my voice — and it is ok for my voice to be here.



Figure 12: Brooke Zeligman, Tarsh Bates, Emma Patersen and Claire Canham, (2005), *bare, Just Browsing*, performance at Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth.

In earlier works I embraced the genre of Cunt Art, creating works that were deliberately confrontational and highly political (Figures 12 & 13), dedicating much of my honours thesis (2005) to its exploration. The basis of Cunt Art and much of the performance art of the 1970s was to make the invisible visible, revealing hidden aspects of female sex such as menstruation, which located women as monstrous or unclean (Betterton, 1996, p. 137). The intention was to invert rather than deconstruct the binary division through which the female body is identified with base matter. Although much of the work produced during this period was designed to challenge the silencing of women's sexuality within culture, the works raised questions as to whether such revelation can of itself transform the discourses through an "aesthetic that is based on transgression, on 'breaking open boundaries' of the dominant discourse, [which] can only have a limited viability for a feminist politics of the body" (Nead, 1992, p. 69).



Figure 13: Brooke Zeligman, (2005), *C Horse* (installation view, from: xxx exhibition), genital prints and mixed media.

My more recent work, *feast* (2009), *rootprints* (2008), and *m words* (2012–13), remains political, addressing gender roles and social expectations via the phenomenology of lived experience. In these works I continue with the exploration of the body as a problematic site which disrupts normative assumptions of gendered difference, to represent experiences of the female body that are physically and culturally determined (Betterton, 1996). However, in a significant departure from the explicitness of the imagery informing Cunt Art, I no longer use such directly confronting imagery. Instead, the images, the metaphors, the political and social messages underpinning my recent work are abstracted and hinted at. Like embodied memory, like the also-stories of women's embodied lives that lurk, submerged, unbidden beneath the grand narratives of contemporary culture (Cixous, 1991; Cixous & Sellers, 1994; Lekkie Hopkins, 2009; Irigaray, 1993), these images remain latent until uncovered by a feminist viewing of the work. My work with latent imagery is discussed more fully in the *rootprints* section of Chapter 5.

The materiality of glass in the work of Louise Bourgeois

In this section I will look at the works of women artists using glass outside of a craft context. First I will have a look at how the materiality of glass operates as the lived body/imaginary/experience in the work of the late Louise Bourgeois. I will discuss what has been written in analysis of the glass within her work. For this I center on Griselda Pollock's essay *Old Bones and Cocktail Dresses: Louise Bourgeois and the Question of Age* (Pollock, 1999). Pollock uses French feminisms as a paradigm paying particular attention to Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Pollock does not address Cixous' theories; however I have pointed to the notion of *écriture féminine* where appropriate. It is important to note that Pollock comments on the glut of discursive material in existence surrounding Louise Bourgeois' oeuvre. I am not intending to add to this. However, I do use the example of the materiality of glass within Bourgeois' work in order to contextualise my own visual arts practice while setting a visual arts precedent for why it is important to look at materiality when considering post-technical artworks with glass. I will also discuss the works of younger contemporary artists, Kikki Smith, Gabriella Bisseto and Mona Hatoum.

Bourgeois used various objects within her work; both found and constructed, to stand in for the lived body/imaginary/experience. These objects function as “condensations of weight and substance that evoke an absent human presence, whether one that would occupy some empty area close by them, or one that is anchored in the spot where the object was placed” (Potts, 1999, p. 42). Amongst these objects Bourgeois often used found glass vessels and constructed glass sculptural elements to stand in for the body and the self. In *Cell 1* (1991) (Figure 8), Bourgeois created what Eve Keller (2004, p. 21) refers to as a “construct of memory”. This was representative of taking care of her sick mother. Contained within *Cell 1* are used glass medical vessels that alert the viewer to the resonance of an ailing body. These vessels become a metaphor for the nursed, Bourgeois’ mother, and the career, Bourgeois. Keller (2004, p. 24) notes, “by superimposing the immediacy of the metaphor and [its] symbolic implications ... Bourgeois generates a disquieting mixture of security and oppression, of knowledge and intuition”. Primary within this generated knowledge is the idea of the ailing body with all its leaking fluids, reinforced by the glass emesis basin. This is abject corporeality, which will be expanded on in reference to Bourgeois’ own description, later in this chapter, of how the glass body functions within her work later in this chapter.

The narratives that drive Bourgeois’ work are personal and as such come from her individual experience, her own life as woman, mother, wife, daughter and sibling. This marks her work as “recognisably feminist, despite not subscribing to any one particular aesthetic” (Hess, 1994, p. 93). This is now recognised as typical of feminist art (Lippard, 2007; Reilly & Nochlin, 2007; Zeligman, 2005). Arguably to analyse Bourgeois’ work via a feminist paradigm is not misplaced. Robert Storr has said of Bourgeois:

In Louise’s work repetition is the conjugation of the verb “to be” in all its present, past, future, conditional, and subjunctive modes — “I am”, “I was”, “I will be”, “I could be, I should be”, “I could have been”, “I should have been”. And then the cycle begins again with an emblem ... that state[s] with the full force of artistic assertion “I am”. (2004, p. 46)

It is through the analysis of the repetitive emblem, which for my purposes is the glass object, within her work that we begin to see the emergence of themes inherent within the materiality of glass. Within Bourgeois’ “to be” is the tension of the metaphor, the inscription of sexual difference, of lived body/imaginary/experience and is a form of *écriture féminine*.

Pollock (1999) notes that when looking at Bourgeois' body of work, meaning can be found "through some kind of formal signification/exteriorisation" that can be understood as a "signification of difference". Within the signification, which is the repetition of the glass object as body/imaginary/experience, there is release and relief from "Trauma/Jouissance/Anxiety ... the diversely gendered and sexed body". Here we see the rupture and rapture of glass at work. Bourgeois' creativity, as Pollock explains, transforms the body and provides "the tenderness necessary to let the other live". Pollock then notes that this concept of transformation via creativity allows room for the other — the exile. A discussion of finding relief from exile through creativity can be found in *Julia Kristeva 1966–96: Aesthetics, Politics, Ethics* (cited in Pollock, 1998), but more importantly here I return again to the idea that the materiality of glass holds within the exile.



Figures 14 & 15: Louise Bourgeois, (1992), *Precious Liquids* (installation and detail), mixed media. Centre Pompidou (Malin, 2004) (Exception to copyright: *Section: ss 40, 103C. Exception: Research or study.*)

Pollock examines Bourgeois' *Precious Liquids* (1992) (Figures 14 & 15), in which a child's bed is surrounded by two trees of glass phials containing bodily fluids. Bourgeois has said about *Precious Liquids*:

Since the old fears were linked to bodily functions, they resurface via [the body.] For me, sculpture is the body. My body is my sculpture. Glass becomes a metaphor for muscles. It represents the subtlety of emotions, the organic yet unstable nature of the mechanism. When the body's muscles relax and untense, a liquid is produced. Intense emotions become a material liquid, a precious liquor. (cited in Pollock, 1999, p. 75)

We see from this Bourgeois acknowledges glass as metaphor for corporeal abjection within her work. Pollock notes that this statement is a complex one. I would add that its complexity echoes the complexity of the materiality of glass, as it shifts “between the modes of representing bodily processes and both the psychic connotations of physical functions and the aesthetic effects of objects that metaphorically invoke the psychosomatic” (1999). It is the “evocation of the body through its fluids” via the glass materiality within Bourgeois’ work “that signifies both the interior workings of a body and of a psychic space” and is the repulsion/expulsion/attraction of the abject (1999). Pollock suggests that the glass is a metaphor representative of female desire/psychic space within *Precious Liquids*, and creates corporeality, which is reinforced by the knowledge of the abject being linked to the maternal and thus female. This female desire/psychic space is figured through “phial, emanation and liquid”, and “displaces all existing visual traditions and poetic tropes for the representation of the body and desire” (1999) and in doing so set a precedent for the use of glass in contemporary art. Bourgeois was somewhat of a pioneer in her aesthetic of glass as representing abject corporeality.

There is argument against using the French feminist paradigm when analysing Bourgeois’ work. It can be said that doing so derives:

a counter theory from the feminine body [and there is] a danger of collapsing desire, subjectivity, sexual difference back onto a corporeal identity in which the only way to think feminine difference is through the specificity of the maternal body. (Pollock, 1999, p. 81)

Kristeva’s theory of abjection is linked to the maternal body, as is her theory of the semiotic. In defence of the use of this paradigm I will say firstly, in our current cultural/political climate the maternal body is a site of contestation (Summers, 2003), and to use the fragile materiality of the glass, regardless of essentialism, becomes a strategic tool. Second to this, is that materiality with its multivalent nature exists outside of the maternal. Thirdly French feminism is widely understood to be poststructuralist and to fit within the linguist turn within academic feminism. Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray, while challenging linguistic construction, I believe, recognised the need to maintain a connection to the body as a strategic site for feminism as discussed earlier. And finally material feminism and materiality are inclusive, they say “yes and”, and as such, to use this framework is not misplaced.

Bourgeois' *Precious Liquids* presents the lived body/imaginary/experience via glass which is representative of "the conversion of psychic tension into bodily signs: leakage and liquid, container and contained" (Pollock, 1999). For Pollock (1999), finding ways in which to appreciate Bourgeois' work "without falling prey to either a reductive overfeminisation ... or to a total underfeminisation" is the challenge. By this, she means ignoring the "question of sexual difference by trying to escape reductive feminism". Analysing the materiality of glass through the paradigm of French feminisms may be risking "overfeminisation". However, to not acknowledge the appropriateness of the paradigm is to commit "underfeminisation". It is not a system of signification that I wish to impose upon all who use glass in light. Rather it is an acknowledgement of the operation of the material in the work of many female artists that make the paradigm suitable. For many contemporary female visual artists, embracing the resonance of glass is a way of writing lived body/imaginary/experience and it is this that I investigate within my work.

Rosi Huhn states:

Bourgeois achieves her work in a terrain of mental exile ... Outside systems and established ideas, she reveals her Self, as a woman, as an artist, and as a subject ... Her work is the outcome of the coexistence of vital forces, destructive and creative alike. She seeks out the aesthetic and the psychological terrains where the real, the imaginary and the fictional, the conscious and the unconscious, the outside and the inside intermingle and where the intimate and the anonymous merge into something strange, Anonymity and strangeness heighten her otherness and her disintegration as an artist and as a subject. (cited in Pollock, 1999, p. 88)

This is an echoing of "Julia Kristeva's structural linking of dissidence, sexual difference, writing and exile" (Pollock, 1999) found in Kristeva's *A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident* (1986). It is also reminiscent of the ideas of Cixous in *Coming to Writing* (1991). These theories can be seen operating within Bourgeois' works that incorporate the materiality glass, using it to represent the body/imaginary/experience, and within the works of other female artists who use glass in a similar way.

Glass has a particular ability to stand in as abject body within contemporary works. In its molten state glass is able to ooze, by making the glass to set during the oozing, pouring process, as I do within some of my work, and which will be discussed later in Chapter 5. *Maternal Musings not Permitted*, the glass maintains an abject quality of oozing bodily

process.

Glass has a physical skin; a glass vessel positioned within a work becomes the body, in the empty vessel or, in some cases, the full vessel, such as Bisetto's *Prayer to Myself (75mls blood/kg body weight)* (2007) (Figure 16), where the individual glass beads contain wine, not only referencing the blood of Christ but also the artist's, the messy, bloody, fluid-filled internal body.



Figure 16: Gabriella Bisetto, (2007), *Prayer to Myself (75mls blood/kg body weight)*, blown glass spheres, wine, stainless steel wire, engraving. 3500mm loop, 70 x 75ml. (Exception to copyright: Section: ss 40, 103C. Exception: Research or study).



Figure 17: Mona Hatoum, (1994), *Silence*, glass, 126.6 x 93.7 x 58.7cm. (Exception to copyright: *Section: ss 40, 103C. Exception: Research or study*).

Mona Hatoum, a Palestinian artist living in exile in the UK conveyed incredible tension in *Silence* (1994) (Figure 17), with a child's crib made of thin glass tubing reminiscent of test tubes, that brings to the surface notions of exile, the pain of infertility, horror, abjection and neglect through the use of incredibly delicate glass. Tapping into responses that are primary and transporting, the viewer moves away from the analytical and reacts. It is "the conversion of psychic tension into bodily signs" that Pollock referred to in relation to Bourgeois' *Precious Liquids*. The body is conjured through its emanations, those associated with the maternal body and childbirth, but also blood and the infant corpse.

Kiki Smith is another artist whose use of glass often refers directly to abjection (Figure 18)

yet little has been written in relation to this. To date the only available reference to glass as abject body within Smith's work was within an electronic article which briefly related Smith's use of glass to Joseph Beuys's use of fat (Perreault, 2006). Smith's work using glass is often figurative, and much less metaphorical than that of Bourgeois. What makes the works so successful is the appropriateness of the material via the materiality. Blood, sperm and urine have all been figuratively represented by Smith in glass. The liquid, bodily materiality brings depth to the works, and the *jouissance* and the abject held within makes the work luscious and desirable and yet challenging.



Figure 18: Kiki Smith, (1994), *Bloodline* (detail), blown glass, 100 units x 20cm diameter. (Exception to copyright: *Section*: ss 40, 103C. *Exception*: Research or study).

It could be said:

that, in general, artists do not strive to control the meaning that a work of art can have Few artists ... make claims for their work as having particular meaning and many appear to revel in the fact that a work can engender multiple and even inconsistent interpretation. (Scrivener, 2002, para. 31)

Certainly when it comes to my own work, I avoid answering when asked by viewers what it means, and tend to respond by asking what they think it means. This is partly because I do not want to limit another's insight, and also because I believe that once a work is made it takes on a life of its own which means it is open to interpretation from all areas. For this reason I deliberately avoid saying "this means" or "this represents" in the relation to the works. My work is autobiographical and I will tell stories that lie within. I will discuss ideas that inform it, but there will be no "this work means this ..."

Chapter 3. materiality

In this chapter, I acknowledge that the thinking of contemporary material feminists like Susan Hekman and Stevi Jackson has allowed me to explore the materiality of glass through a feminist lens. Additionally, I argue that the gift of the evocative and hugely important body of work generated by corporeal poststructuralist feminists during the phase of the linguistic turn (Grosz, Irigaray, Cixous, Kristeva) is that my current reflections on materiality can sing with a new resonance. It is now no longer possible within feminist circles to consider materiality as divorced from language and discourse, just as it's no longer possible to consider the body as separated from the mind. It is no accident that my title, *Material Murmurings*, links the material with the murmur of words/language/discourse in ways which value both, reciprocally, without hierarchy or favour. These inextricable intertwinings I see as the legacy of decades of feminist debate, from its practical activist beginnings in the 1960s and 1970s, through the more highly theorised poststructuralist turn of the 1990s, to the present acceptance of the inevitability that the material will coexist with and be informed by language and representation at every turn. In a sense, then, my exegetical reflections provide a material illustration of the thinking of contemporary material feminists.

Adams defines materiality as

the insistence of the medium within the operation of the work's meaning. It is the operation of matter that causes the disruption of the traditional categories of interpretation. Materiality produces the means by which visual language and visual narrative are disrupted. (2008, p.2)

Adams is discussing the active materiality of paint through which a painting can be understood as a "dynamic object" that exceeds "pure signification and [can] be understood as bringing something new into being" (2007). The paint — the material the work of art is constructed/made from — has a life of its own within the artwork. Rosemary Betterton (2004) describes it as "a pressure on, or a pulse in, the see-able". And so — a work is not just "merely images, but materialisations that can have an insistent presence ... [through] 'materiality [which] insinuates itself and cuts across the visual language', in a kind of 'visual stutter' that makes ... [an artwork] more than just a sign".

Materiality of glass within an artwork, “the insistence of medium” can be interpreted in other ways aside from ‘historic utility’ in which the ubiquitous life of glass discussed in Chapter 1 inserts itself into the meaning of the work, cutting across the object’s “visual language” with a “visual stutter”, a semiotic seeping.

For many artists the structure of glass (a discussion of which occurs later in this chapter) allows it to act as metaphor for the lived body. This is particularly true for artists working within a broader arts context because the “inherent symbolic references to different aspects of human nature” (Steinarsdottir, 2005) are inescapable. Louise Bourgeois and Kiki Smith, previously discussed in Chapter 2, are well-established artists operating in the broader arts community with multifaceted sculptural practices that incorporate a multitude of materials, including glass. Smith and Bourgeois have recognised within glass “the inherent qualities ... [that] suggest the same qualities in the human body, sensuousness, fluidity, strength and fragility” (Ilse-Neuman, 2004) and yet neither are glass artists. When using glass elements within their practices they work with found objects (Figure 8) or employ a technician to make the glass pieces for them (Figures 17 & 18). These works with glass objects, when critiqued, are not critiqued on beauty or technical knowhow.

It seems that without the hand of the maker in direct ownership of concept, the reading of glass becomes not about beauty or skill but about materiality. An understanding of the material does not happen just on a technical level. An understanding of materiality, of the history, the metaphors, the applications, the imbued meaning of the material that can enrich and enliven an artwork is as valid as the understanding of process. The creative exploitation of glass within post-technical works that are not necessarily formed/made within the confines of traditional glass approaches, are fulfilling what Klein, despite his position that glass critique always be based on the tradition of technique, craftsmanship and beauty, as discussed in Chapter 1, holds up as a truism to great art, that “Only the truly creative exploitation of a given material can release its riches” (2005).

In the next section of this chapter I will further discuss how the materiality of glass exists as body and self and has been seen to do so historically within glass art.

materiality as metaphor

To make metaphors is, quintessentially, to be able to perceive likeness- and thus, almost by definition, difference. (Kirby, 1997, p. 547)

There is historical precedent that sets up this idea of glass as body metaphor. It focuses on the decorative qualities inherent in the material. Italian Renaissance drinking goblets were likened to the female form with their fragility and top-heavy structure. They were said to carry “the stereotypic feminine characteristics” of frailty and instability (Frantz, 2003). James Howell compared Venetian glass with women, suggesting that “the first handsome woman that was ever made was made of Venice Glasse, which implies beauty, but brittleness withal. Fine but fragile” (cited in Edwards, 2005). However the materiality of glass is far richer than such a shallow comparison.

John Kirby (1997) suggests a good metaphor relies on the artist’s ability to see a likeness in things which not only appear seemingly dissimilar and do not easily suggest themselves but also prevent the metaphor from becoming inaccessible. This process of being able to perceive likeness and create metaphor is the process of artistic mimesis. Rosa Lee proposes the concept of *mimesis*, not as imitation but as the tracing of our bodies in the world (cited in Betterton, 2004). A material can contain a metaphor, or even several metaphors within its very nature. The metaphor exists within an artwork without direct involvement of the artist’s hand. This is materiality at work; an artist does not need to create a glass body in order to have glass operate as body within the work. However, it is also important to note that materiality does not immediately imply the body in a work of glass; an artist’s intention must be taken into consideration.

Glass is a material not of nature, but wholly of art, composed of the action of fire on the most common material on earth, mostly quartz silica, and so when the final holocaust comes all the world and all the people in it will turn to glass. (Neri cited in I Frolic, 2005, p. 29)

Neri’s words illustrate that the connection between the lived body and the materiality of glass has been recognised for centuries. Frolic (2005) responds to this quote from Neri and describes her Polish birth in 1941 as arriving “directly in the eye of the storm that was the

Holocaust". She argues that her early work was thus informed by this experience and tells of how the material, the glass became the metaphor and that the meaning was introduced through the process and the way the glass was handled. Frolic describes her treatment of the surface of the glass, to leave it scarred by the process of the firing as representational of her own scarring (Figure 19). This is what Tom Moore (2005) calls the "subversion of the radiant purity of glass" and the "spotless minimalist aesthetic" of more traditional glass making which have been the parameters for critique as discussed in the previous chapter.



Figure 19: Irene Frolic, (2009), *Prayer Series: Beggar 1*, kiln cast glass, 35cm x 12.5cm. (Exception to copyright: Section: ss 40, 103C. Exception: Research or study).

This *scarring* is something I have embraced within my practice. I am not interested in perfection: the scars of the making locate the self, *me*, in the work. They are indications of physical processes, both in terms of the technical processes needed to create the work, but also the scarred and lived body. The scarring of the glass, by subverting the traditions of classical glass making, enriches the possible narratives of an artwork. This is the material's ability to be used as metaphor for the lived body not only through literal representation but also via process which Franz elaborates on in *The Glass Skin* (1997).

Glass is often referred to as a super-cooled liquid that moves over time, evidence of which can be viewed in old churches where the glass in the windows is thicker at the bottom than the top, a result of many years of gravity at work. This is incorrect: on a molecular level glass is neither liquid nor solid but sits in between, occupying the space between liquid and solid. When viewed through a microscope the molecules of a solid are ordered and form a

rigid, regular latticed pattern. In a liquid the molecules appear as disordered, are not rigidly bound and do not form a pattern. In glass the molecules are disordered and do not form a regular latticed pattern but they are rigidly bound (Gibbs, 1997). A fascinating paradox sits within this not-liquid, not-solid, indescribable characteristic.

Glass exists in a molecular state between solid and liquid, and sparks much debate as to whether or not it is a super-cooled liquid or an amorphous solid. I have provided a basic description of how super-cooled liquid/amorphous solid operates here, but I leave the argument regarding the molecular state of glass to the physicists. What I will say is that glass, when heated, behaves like a liquid and is amorphous. When in its cooled solid state it is undefinable: the undefinable other. It is its liquid characteristics, its undefinable status and its amorphous qualities that allow it to operate as metaphor for the female body and the female lived body.⁴

Within glass binarisms coexist, they in the middle meet and kiss. I think this is due in part to the nature of the material; the physical structure of glass which is undefinable, neither liquid nor solid, but an other. The materiality of glass operates at a multi-valent level of human existence and in particular female lived experience.

Countless artists who work outside of the realm of traditional approaches to glass art — legendary artists such as Bourgeois and Smith, established artists like Silvia Levenson and Beth Lipman, and emerging artists such as Denise Pepper and Akie Haga — are embracing the materiality of glass, letting it operate within their works as body, as lived experience, as woman. It is the idea of excess of meaning, not to mention process, which makes a feminist reading applicable.

This feminism(s) is characterised by a metaphorically rich approach to the reclaiming of the body as a positive site for women via re-representation. This reclamation “refuses the traditional binary oppositions” (Grosz, 1989, p. xv) of the body, which are historically associated with the female as other,⁵ as base, animalistic and outside of culture and instead,

⁴ I recognise that there are many male artists who make use of glass but as I am using Grosz’ definition of a feminist text, I leave the analysis of these works to another researcher, perhaps one that chooses to explore masculinist texts.

⁵ Linguistic constructionism is also referred to as the cultural turn, the linguistic turn and the discursive realm.

places the reclaimed body “firmly within a socio-historical context” (Grosz, 1989, p. xv). This re-inscription of female corporeality replaces the sexed body, that which is inscribed upon the female subject by the dominant systems of knowledge as less than the masculine.

In *Space, Time and Perversion: The Politics of the Body* (1995, p. 41) Elizabeth Grosz notes that French feminism(s) developed from the position that knowledge “cannot remain neutral or objective”. Systems of knowledge do not simply reflect the social and historical but they also “actively inscribe and engender the meaning of the social” (Grosz, 1995, p. 43). From the position that no knowledge is neutral, Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva make room for the female/feminine knowing — the female imaginary, which could not be named within dominant modes of knowledge. Within Cartesian knowledges, women are positioned as the body — “the irrational, the natural and other ... devalued binary terms” (Grosz, 1995, p. 42)

Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva seek to reposition the body outside of these binary terms and then reclaim it via embodiment. By representing the body in and on their own terms, the representation becomes uncontaminated and clear of dominant gendered knowledges.

Irigaray writes:

It may be that in destroying already coded forms, women rediscover their nature, their identity, and are able to find their forms, to blossom out in accordance with what they are. Furthermore, these female forms are always incomplete, in perpetual growth, because a woman grows, blossoms, and fertilizes (herself) with her own body. (1993, p. 110)

By using a post technical approach and embracing glass for its materiality that holds within it a refusal of binarisms by being neither liquid nor solid but both, we are seeing women artists using glass to express the lived body, experience and imaginary within their work, it is a re-representation, a breaking down of coded forms to create embodiment. Within the works of artists such as Itsel Tasman, Akie Haga and Annie Catrell is contained an innate sense of the polymorphous body with their use of glass:

a polymorphous body, which explores the boundaries of gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, age ... Bodies are lived in. They bare scares. They age. They secrete.

Bodies are polymorphous. Because of the fluid nature of the social reality in which it exists and functions. (Smithard, 1996, p. 1)

Within Cixous' *The Laugh of the Medusa* (2001), she notes there is a privileging of masculine product (knowledge, discourse and writing), over the female product which is devalued. This privileging promotes the continuation of the oppression and domination of women. Cixous' response to this is *écriture féminine* or female writing. *Écriture féminine* subverts the masculine through the writing of the female body, experience and emotion. It is a form of corporeal reclamation via embodiment. Cixous states that women "must write about women and bring women to writing" (2001, p. 2039) in order to recover the female body/imaginary.

Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, were influenced by Derrida's concept that speech is incapable of manifesting truth directly. There is a lag between the signifier — that which is spoken, and the signified — that which is understood as the meaning. This is symptomatic of the logocentric or binary structure of language (Leitch, 2001). Out of this Derrida developed the notion of *différance*, which preconditions and exceeds binary oppositions. *Différance* exists as both the same as and different to (Grosz, 1989), and consequently operates outside of logocentrism. Logocentrism is the dominant system of knowledge which relies heavily on identity founded through binary polarisations (Grosz, 1989). Previous to this, writing was considered secondary to speech: the spoken word had stood for truth and immediacy. Derrida essentially undermined this as both were now recognised as imprecise (Leitch, 2001). From here the theory of *écriture* came into being. *Écriture* acknowledges that writing is an imprecise science and therefore brings into question all modern knowledges which are written. As already discussed, glass due to its nature, its materiality exceeds binary oppositions, defies logocentrism, giving space for the other to exist, to be written into existence.

Cixous embraced the theory of *écriture* and argued for *écriture féminine*. As writing had formerly been understood as lack, absence and difference it could also be seen as a realm of the other — of female (Leitch, 2001). Cixous argued that this realm had previously been inhabited by men and so the female writing herself was reclamation of the female body. *Écriture féminine* — woman placing "herself into the text — as into the world and into history — by her own movement" (Cixous, 2001, p. 2040). When female artists use the materiality of glass within their work to stand in for the female body/experience/imaginary they are writing

their bodies into their work. This could be termed as *écriture féminine dans verre* however to do so would be appropriation of Cixous. I understand glass to operate as a physical embodiment of Cixous' women bringing women to writing when seen in my own work but also within the works of other female visual artists.

In *Sexual Subversions* (1989), Grosz explains Kristeva's 1982 *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, is a furthering of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* 1930. Here Freud proposed civilisation is founded on the expulsion of the impure or taboo incestual attachments. This is seen as a rejection of the attachment to the mother. This was then furthered by Kristeva who posited that the self or subject is founded/created in a similar way with the expulsion and rejection of the abject, also linked to the maternal body. The development of the clean and proper body comes via the expulsion of (the) unclean bodily processes. However these bodily processes and behaviours, the fluids and sexual drives, can never truly be expelled or subsumed, they "hover at the borders of our existence, threatening" the veneer of the clean and proper body: "It is *impossible* to exclude these physically and socially threatening elements with any finality. The subject's recognition of this impossibility provokes the sensation Kristeva describes as abjection".

Kristeva writes in *Powers of Horror*:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced (1982).

It is precisely this quality of abjection — the impossibility of excluding the physically threatening that is also inherent within glass, for while glass is capable of rapture it is always also capable of rupture. Abjection is the space of the marginalised, it is the state of being cast off, and is the position of the other — the exile. Kristeva argued in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1994) that the role of the exile is to make known that which is concealed — further to this, in itself, exile is a place of creativity. She argues: "Marginality is not always disempowerment. It can be a privileged space, of aesthetic transgression, of political transformation" (Kolbowski et al., 1995). This concept is furthered in *Julia Kristeva 1966-96: Aesthetics, Politics, Ethics* (Pollock, 1998) which proposes that this creativity then becomes a place of transformation where the other can exist. Kristeva also explored the link between dissidence, sexual difference, creativity and exile in *A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident* (Kristeva & Moi,

1986). This position of exile and creativity is reminiscent of the ideas of Cixous in *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*:

There is something of foreignness, a feeling of not being accepted or of being unacceptable, which is particularly insistent when as a woman you suddenly get into that strange country ... where the fate of women is still not settled. ... So, sometimes you are even a double exile, but I'm not going to be tragic about it because I think it is a source of creation and symbolic wealth. (1991)

Cixous, like Kristeva, believes that exile is a place of creativity and transformation that provides, to quote Griselda Pollock — “the tenderness necessary to let the other live” (1999). The feelings of banishment, of exclusion, of ‘otherness’, the themes of exile, thread throughout Cixous’ *Coming to Writing*, where she writes from a deeply personal stance of “my origin, my sex” (Cixous, 1991). Her writing always returns to sexual difference — to otherness and to exile.

Kristeva said in interview:

I am interested in language, and in the other side of language which is filtered inevitably by language and yet is not language. I have named this heterogeneity variously. I have sought it out in the experience of love, of abjection, of horror. I have called it the semiotic in relation to the symbolic. (cited in K. O’Grady, 1998)

I use the materiality of glass to express the notion of other, of abjection, of exile but also of *jouissance* to exist within my work. I do this because glass is an other; neither liquid nor solid, it is both fragile and strong, capable of providing pleasure but also and always harm. I recognise, within the materiality of glass, elements that represent aspects of my experience as female. These align with the ideas of Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous who, in their different ways, have sought to represent the female experience via attention to corporeality. Cixous in interview said: “Our richness is that we are composite beings” (1991). Repetition is the path not to the single truth but to the composite that makes up the truth and the act of repetition exposes each layer. Repetition within my works exposes layers of truth, layers of materiality, which will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Visual art is a form of writing in the sense that an artwork is a text, in Grosz’s sense of text: “What is meant by text is any product of a discursive practice that can be read via a tangible network of signs be it literary, visual or otherwise” (1995). Helene Cixous has said, “What is most true is poetic. What is most true is naked life. ... The world written nude is poetic” (cited in Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997). I take this as key in materiality, allowing the naked truth of a material to operate within a work. Allowing the material to exist without denying its essence/truth brings poetry, and layers a work with meaning:

What is most true is poetic because it is not stopped-stoppable, all that is stopped, grasped, all that is subjugated, easily transmitted, easily picked up, all that comes under the word concept, which is to say all that is taken, caged is *less* true. ... Each object is in reality a small virtual volcano. (cited in Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997)

This act of analysis through feminist scholarship is a “step back from the thinking that merely represents — that is, explains — to the thinking that responds and recalls” (Heidegger cited in Cixous & Sellers, 1994) for approaching glass via materiality rather than craft, technique or skill is a rewriting/reclaiming/renaming of the qualities/histories/meanings that lie forgotten and buried within the traditional approach to glass. It is an act of *écriture féminine*, that:

entails a going beyond borders, despite innumerable difficulties, [...] and ‘holding words out’ in the other’s direction. It is an inscription deriving from a level of being that precedes the automatic confines of thinking, ‘where each being evolves according to its own necessity, following the order of its intimate elements’.(cited in Cixous & Sellers, 1994)

Glass is other; and with it I name the other. To embrace, absorb and become. It is the idea of excess of meaning, not to mention process that makes a feminist reading applicable. The concept of materiality is not a new one, and owes a large part of its development to feminist theory.

A Pragmatic Orientation in Theory

The concept of materiality is somewhat ambiguous and remains in flux throughout much theoretical discussion as it becomes more widely used in debates surrounding the arts, visual culture, cyber culture, virtual realities, science, architecture and feminism. This state of flux that surrounds materiality is allowing for a reinvigoration within social and theoretical discourses that many feel have stagnated and stalled in a post-structural linguistic frame (Hekman, 2010).

For feminism in particular, the state of flux that is surrounding the reawakening of the material debate and new discussions on materiality is an important and empowering strategy that promises to move forward the ongoing contest adjoining the mind/body binary, an enduring site of contention for feminism (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008), in which “the body [has been] seen as something owned by, and thereby separate from, the self” (Lennon, 2010). And while there is much discussion surrounding new materialities throughout many theoretical spheres it is the site of feminism with which I will be engaging in the following chapter before discussing the history and growing popularity of materiality in the visual arts.

This choice of focus is driven by my feminist visual arts praxis in which glass is the central medium, a medium that I have identified as a material of obsession. Following this chapter I will engage in a discussion of the processes used within my visual arts practice.

Throughout this chapter I deliberately use the term *material feminisms* as current discussion differs from the original ideas found within material feminism. The focus of material feminisms is on the notion of inclusive materiality as opposed to a material, social, cultural and economic focus with which the material feminist debate was initially concerned.

Material Feminisms

Quite simply put, material feminisms insist that matter, in all its guises, matters. We are material beings existing in a material world. While “many social constructionist theories grant the existence of material reality, that reality is often posited as a realm entirely separate from that of language, discourse, and culture” (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008). For many, this can be simplified to the distinction between mind and body and “falls short of capturing the complex interaction between the material and the immaterial” (Knoespe, 2008). This is referred to as linguistic constructionism⁵. It also “conforms to a long tradition of Cartesian dualism” (Knoespe, 2008) the origins of which can be traced back to Plato in which “metaphysical assumptions often separate the human capacity for language from the material world” (Knoespe, 2008).

Linguistic constructionism is characterised by the important debate that has recognised gender as a construct of language and has played a starring role in much of feminist and queer theory, dominating the 1980s and 1990s with scholarship on the body being “confined to the analysis of discourses *about* the body” (Alaimo, 2008). Without denying “the ongoing importance of discursive critique and rearticulation for feminist scholarship and feminist politics, the discursive realm is nearly always constituted so as to foreclose attention to lived, material bodies and evolving corporeal practices” (Alaimo, 2008). This “separation has meant ... that [much of] feminist theory and cultural studies have focused entirely on the textual, linguistic, and discursive... defining materiality, the body, and nature as products of discourse [and skewing] discussions of these topics” (Alaimo, 2008).

Constructionism has provided and remains an invaluable tool for explaining how social structures maintain the subordination of women (Hekman, 2010), and it is not my intention to appear critical of linguistic constructionist discussions which have made enormous contributions to the field of feminist and cultural theories. I acknowledge, too, that “postmodern, postcolonial theorists [such as Spivak] speaking from the location of the previously marginalized ‘other’ ... [have] played a major role in reorienting feminist theories” (Jackson, 2001). It is my intention and the driving force behind material feminisms to be inclusive, to say “yes, and...”

Materiality “induce[s] us to develop a fuller social ontology of gender and sexuality; one that weaves together social, cultural, experiential and embodied practices” (Rahman & Witz, 2003). With the developing discussion of material feminisms a call is being made for:

not critique of linguistic constructionism but a concerted effort to define an alternative approach that brings the material back in. This approach must incorporate the insights of linguistic constructionism without ... rejecting the material. It must describe the complex interactions of language and matter, the human and the nonhuman, as well as the diverse entities we have created in our world. It must be able to explain the interactions and even agencies of these entities without retreating to ... [essentialism]. Although critiques of linguistic constructionism abound in contemporary discussions, what is lacking is the articulation of an alternative approach. (Hekman, 2010, p. 16)

The approach being developed within material feminisms will see a reinvigoration of not just feminist theory but much of cultural theory, many believing the site of which has stagnated (Hekman, 2010).

Material feminisms are inclusive of the physical world without reducing the debate to mere biology or economy. This differs from first wave material feminism in a number of important ways: contemporary material feminisms insist that knowledge cannot be separated from the material world and that the material/physical/corporeal/lived body and experience, the economic, the environment/natural and linguistic construction all impact and act upon knowledges. The material cannot be denied, dismissed or separated from how we view or experience the world. Material feminisms can be understood in terms of openness, in a state of constant change and flux, much like feminism, constantly developing and reinventing as more is learned, uncovered and understood.

Grosz in *Volatile Bodies* uses the Mobius strip (Figure 20) to provide us with a dynamic image, helping us understand why the body cannot be separated from the mind:

The Mobius strip has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another. This model also provides a way of problematising and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of the one into the other, the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside. (1994, p. xii)

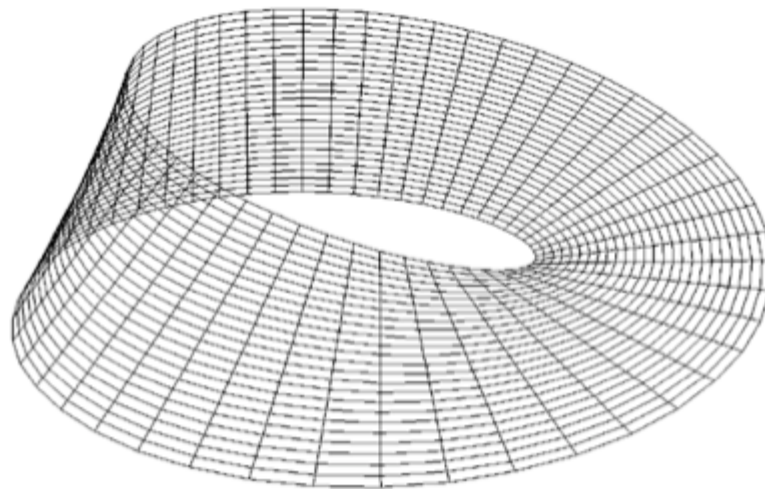


Figure 20: Illustration of the Mobius strip (Grosz, 1994). (Exception to copyright: *Section: ss 40, 103C. Exception: Research or study.*)

Our existence in the material world is lived through our material bodies with all their capacities, experiences and limits, and acts on how we learn.

While Grosz uses the Mobius strip to illustrate the action of mind into body and body into mind as a tool that challenges the mind/body binary, the image can also be applied to all material spheres, to the social, cultural and economic worlds in which we live, all of them weaving in and out on one big crazy Mobius rollercoaster. Material feminisms allow a space in which all can exist and form an understanding of how our world operates.

Returning to the materiality of glass we can see how the idea of the Mobius strip can also apply. The weaving in and out of solid, liquid, fragile, strong, rapture, rupture, abjection, *jouissance*, of history, science, architecture and the domestic is rich in metaphor and meaning in the hands of an artist seeking to express the lived experience/body/world.

It's the Body AND the Mind/You are what you eat

To be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view towards the world. (de Beauvoir, 1953, p. 39)

As a morbidly obese woman I am aware of the horror my body instills in others.

In me.

In vain I try to rein in my grotesque borders as I move about. Through crowded passageways I struggle to tuck my arse in, it must not dirty another body with accidental brush, pull my chest back to prevent mortifying collisions with inanimate objects.

I am watched, judged, commented on, avoided, and reviled constantly.

Bodies have material realities. They are inescapable and constantly changing — age, circumstance, race, gender, weight ... This is the phenomenology of the body, the lived experience. Our individual materialities impact on the way we negotiate and perceive the world.

The body as a site of contention for feminists began in the 19th century with women struggling for the rights to control their bodies and what happens to them. Women were the victims of forced male and medical intervention. The right to control our bodies later became an important platform for fighting against rape and sexual violence, and for birth control and abortion. As Lennon tells it, after the granting of suffrage and World War 1 the debate continued due to the politicisation of motherhood after the large loss of lives and the strengthening of the abortion debate (2010). And although the title of material feminism was yet to be coined, Simone De Beauvoir was engaged in discussions that many advocates of material feminisms now recognise as the beginnings of the current discussion (Lennon, 2010).

Stevi Jackson's (2001) essay *Why a Materialist Feminism is (Still) Possible and Necessary* clearly outlines the Marxist origins of material feminism, providing a detailed discussion of the limitations of Marxist feminism, which provided the platform for the development of material feminism. Jackson feels that material feminism was still in its relative infancy

before postmodernism and poststructuralism came to the forefront of feminist theoretical discussion, not only sidelining material feminism but reducing as limited its focus on economic and social structures.

Heckman (2010) is highly critical of linguistic constructionism, claiming it “has trouble with matter” and its “loss of the material, its inability to bring the material dimension into theory and practice, its inability to talk about anything except language, imposes an unacceptable constraint on theory”. Yet in doing so she ignores that many, while writing from within the genre, used imagery of the body to illustrate their ideas. Certainly “dogmatic adherence to linguistic constitution cannot account for the reality and agency of [the] world” and perhaps this is why writers like Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous used rich, visceral imagery of the body in order to illustrate their ideas. I see this as a strategic move, maintaining a connection with the corporeal, in doing so highlighting its importance within and not being dismissive of our material selves while engaging in the post-modern linguistic debate.

Jackson writes “In the early 1990s, when postmodern feminism seemed to have become the established theoretical orthodoxy, materialist feminism began to be revived ... [and] reinvented, especially in the United States” (2001). One of the key components of material feminisms is that material social inequalities still exist and for this reason there is a need to revisit the site of material feminism while holding onto the insights gained within linguistic constructionism, poststructuralism and postmodernism.

Since Jackson’s essay, corporeal feminism has gained popularity within feminist discussions yet the linguistic/discursive “turn” has continued to dominate much of feminist debate.

Material feminists such as Jackson, Hekman, Bolt, Barrett and Alaimo are now forging through the opening that corporeal feminism’s popularity and acceptance has provided within post-structural and postmodern feminism with the support of corporeal theorists such as Grosz (2010). “We are currently witnessing a sea change in intellectual thought ... [and] feminism is at the forefront of this sea change ... [and] our goal at this point must be to define an alternative approach that brings the material back in” (Hekman, 2010). Hekman writes:

feminists ... never meant to reject the reality they studied, to move away from the material in favour of the discursive. Rather, their intent was to better understand material reality. For feminists, the baseline has always been the reality of women's situation and an attempt to understand that reality and

alleviate the pain it causes. (2010, p. 19)

Like feminism we are witnessing a new direction in glass that focuses on the material, which says “yes and ...”

Materiality and feminism

If a primary goal of feminism is to improve upon gendered power relations within the everyday lives of women, then it is vital that feminist theorists maintain a connection to reality (Hekman, 2010). Part of that reality is about the ongoing oppression of women that continues regardless of the many goals that have been achieved over the years by feminism. Women continue to deal with sexism in the work place on a daily basis, and on all levels, as demonstrated by Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s 2013 speech on misogyny (Summers, 2003, 2006, 2013). Child rearing continues to be a political issue (Summers, 2003; Zeligman, 2005). And physical and sexual violence against women at the hands of men is ongoing: the most recent Australian statistics which can be viewed on the Australian government’s Australian Institute of Family Studies website (2010), indicates a staggering 57% of the women surveyed had experienced sexual assault.⁶ Hekman argues for a return to discussion of ‘the reality of women’s bodies’:

If everything is a linguistic construction, then these claims lose their meaning. They become only one more interpretation of an infinitely malleable reality. Moreover, feminists have been and continue to be concerned about the reality of women's bodies. We want to be able to talk about women's ... bodies. (2010, p. 15)

To be able to talk about the body while demonstrating that body and mind are inseparable, as established previously with Grosz’s Mobius strip analogy, is a powerful political strategy — it is the *mindandbody*. This is not about a return to the material as embraced within modernity. As Hekman has successfully argued, linguistic constructionism highlighted the deficiencies of that approach. Additionally, Hekman has argued that language and discourse cannot be separated from the material and must connect to the everyday and the phenomenology of the lived body (2010).

As Jackson (2001) argues, structural analysis, as long as it is not reductionist, can address the position of women within local and global contexts, but structural inequality cannot be

⁶ Internationally the horrendous violent crimes against women have recently included the shooting of 14 year old school girl, Malala Yousufzai, in Pakistan by the Taliban (Boone, 2012). And in India the gang rape of a 23 year old female student on a bus brought to light a staggering amount of violent sex crime perpetrated against women on a daily basis (AP, 2012).

ignored in the pursuit of a universalistic truth. Difference consists of “real, material inequalities. Institutionalised racism, the heritage of centuries of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism, along with local and global divisions of labour, are at least as important as culturally constituted difference”. The goal is “to deconstruct the language/reality dichotomy by defining a theoretical position that does not privilege either language or reality but instead explains and builds on their intimate interaction” (Hekman, 2010).

Jackson insists that a materialist approach has more to offer feminism as it is inclusive of postmodern and queer perspectives. This approach reasserts the importance of the material and the social and encompasses all aspects of social life:

from structural inequalities to everyday interaction. It is concerned with meaning, both at the level of our wider culture and as it informs our everyday ... It includes subjectivity because our sense of who we are in relation to others constantly guides our actions and interactions and, conversely, who we are is in part a consequence of our location within gendered, class, racial, and other divisions, and of the social and cultural milieu we inhabit. (2001, p. 284)

Further, Jackson argues that a materialist approach is a “multilayered, multifaceted” and contradictory life, allowing us to see how we operate within social and cultural structures and categories while maintaining agency with the ability to interpret, apply meaning to, and act upon events that exist within our everyday and locate us within our life worlds (2001). By being inclusive, “a more nuanced understanding of the many facets of social and cultural life, enables us to relate meaning and subjectivity both to the everyday actualities of women’s lives and to the wider social and cultural contexts in which those lives are lived” (Jackson, 2001).

Jackson (2001) contends that material feminisms take into consideration patriarchal, gendered, racial, colonial, imperial, economic and capitalist structures. These all interact in unpredictable and contradictory ways. Material feminism understands that the social order is not a monolithic entity and taking a materialist stance precludes no one:

on the contrary, a full understanding of those differences requires that we pay attention to material social inequalities and everyday social practices. Nor does materialism ignore issues of language, culture representation, and subjectivity, but it does entail locating them in their social and historical context. (p. 284)

Material feminisms embrace corporeal feminism. They are inclusive, eclectic and have far reaching consequences for many fields of feminism, promising to advance the ways in

which we view/acknowledge/consider the world and all its knowledges. They do not deny post structuralism or post modernism — they say “yes and ...”:

What is required, and what has emerged over subsequent years, is a theory of embodiment that could take account not simply ... sexual difference but ... racial difference, class difference and differences due to disability; in short the specific contextual materiality of the body. (Shildrick, 1999)

And, “above all, materialist feminism does not reduce women’s oppression to a single cause; it eschews attempts at totalising grand theory and transhistorical, universalistic claims” (Jackson, 2001).

The widening interest in /awakening of material feminism according to Jackson is accredited to:

a global context characterised by extremely stark and worsening material inequalities— and it is often women who are most disadvantaged by the intersections between global and local exploitation. Within the wealthy Western nations, too, gender class and racist inequalities are still with us. The “things” that feminists identified as oppressive in the 1970s—male violence, the exploitation of women’s domestic labour, and low-paid waged labour— continue to shape what it means to be a woman, although the precise constraints we face and their meanings for us vary depending on the specific social locations we each occupy. (2001, p. 286)

Jackson wrote this in 2001. Eleven years on, the “things” identified as oppressive still hold. This has driven many theorists to seek new approaches to revitalise the site of feminist theory, while remaining inclusive of the ideas that developed within the “linguistic/cultural turn” (2001). The result is a “more open, eclectic approach rather than an insistence on theoretical purity, making use of conceptual tools that seem useful for a particular purpose rather than being guided by a dogmatic allegiance to a particular set of concepts” (Jackson, 2001).

Material feminisms aim to create a manoeuvre that promises to reconcile the mind/body binary, while material feminists avoid the narrowing down of the meaning of materiality. Intangibility is a strategic move within feminism in order to remain inclusive within the discourse.

Materiality, the visual arts, a feminist arts praxis and the practice-led researcher

Living in Canberra, I've become aware of the popularity of the word *materiality*. It appears repeatedly, in catalogue essays, critical reviews and artists talks. During 2012 it was even used in an advertisement for a gallery on prime time commercial television. The first time I heard the ad playing in the background I stopped, did a double take. Since I began the PhD process the word has become omnipresent within contemporary visual arts. I can't help but think that perhaps, for every practitioner it might mean something different because if there is one thing that my inquiry into materiality in both art and feminism has demonstrated, is that it carries many different connotations. It's probably why I like it so much — materiality is multi-valent and open to interpretation.

As a visual arts practitioner I firmly believe that material understanding can only enrich and enliven an artwork, from both the makers and the viewer's perspectives. I believe, too, that in order for new and exciting forms of visual arts to emerge, students must be made aware not only of art genres, histories and techniques, but also of materiality.

As Hekman says: "Linguistic constructionism is deeply imbedded in the academic culture" (2010). It has been the central focus of much of academic feminism and while I have found creative inspiration for my praxis, and understanding of my position in the world in the works of Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva, it is because they never lost sight of the body as an important strategic site for feminism. Yet there was much about the linguistic turn I found alienating. It left me wondering where I sat in amongst so much theory. The linguistic turn provided a key insight:

Language ... constitutes the reality that we as humans inhabit. It constitutes our social world and the structures that define it. It also constitutes the natural world by providing us with concepts that structure that world. We humans, in short, are the creators of all we survey. (Hekman, 2010, p. 11)

I agree with Hekman (2010) when she says feminism's goal must now be to find a new approach and bring the material back in. Practice-led research with all its eclectic approaches does just this; that is, it provides an alternative space that for the material to operate in theory and within the physical practice on a multiplicity of levels.

Practice-led research forces practitioners into an accelerated reflexivity as they constantly uncover and dissect new information, and with feminism necessarily being a site of reflexivity (Nochlin, 2003), material feminisms allow room for the self-reflexive practitioner to maneuver.

What makes this conceptualisation of the self potentially congruent with a materialist perspective is that it locates individual subjectivities and biographies within specific historical, social, and cultural contexts, linking the self to the actualities of social existence. (Jackson, 2001, p. 288)

Reflexivity, always an act of labour, becomes double. The self is not static, rather it is always in process, analysing and reconstructing narratives and biographies (Jackson, 2001; Madison, 2011).

The act of self-reflexivity becomes a performance of the self:

Reflexivity becomes a particular quality of labour that works to leave something behind, something that lingers, something that will remain long after our reflexive work takes form. What labour as reflexivity leaves behind both embraces and jettisons notions of hauntings and memories, because it contemplates its own contemplations within past and future contingencies of self and Other that are boundlessly committed to an enlivening present. Labour as reflexivity is enumerated as being constituted by materiality, futurity, and performative temporality. (Madison, 2011)

A feminist visual arts praxis is able to make evident the multiplicity of agency, social structure and cultural categories through narrative, phenomenology and ethnography: it is a physical result of the labour of reflexivity.

If a major goal of material feminisms is “to deconstruct the language/reality dichotomy by defining a theoretical position that does not privilege either language or reality but instead explains and builds on their intimate interaction” (Hekman, 2010), then practice-led research, as I have undertaken, offers the space in which to do it. The research through creative product is able to challenge and open up new paths to theoretical inquiry. Why does matter matter? Practice-led research helps to provide an answer to the question with both researcher and creative practice firmly located within the material. The researcher becomes a physical link between theory and art product — a living demonstration of the very argument.

I define myself as a feminist who focuses on materiality, that is, while gender and social

divisions and inequalities can be traced to “material social structures” initially identified within Marxist theory and then expanded within a feminist context (Rahman & Witz, 2003), I believe that matter matters, in all its guises — the phenomenology of the lived body, the world lived in, gender, class, race, economy, privilege, space, time, discourse, knowledge and material are all intrinsically intertwined. As Grosz so beautifully illustrates with the Mobius strip, my aim is not to name the feminism I subscribe to and by doing so, limit its usefulness, but to remain all-inclusive, which is what I believe the concept of materiality to do.

“The body being the instrument of our grasp on the world, the world is bound to seem a very different thing when apprehended in one manner or another” (De Beauvoir, 1949, p. 29). This is the phenomenology of the lived body. It is important to both materialities within feminism and within art as the phenomenology of the lived body impacts on how we live/know/experience our lives. It also impacts on how we view/interpret/make art and how we read the materials used within art.

The practice, the process and the resulting works are in a constant state of performativity and reflexivity, each continually performing the body, ideas and ideas of the body. Materialfeminisms aim to create a maneuver that promises to reconcile the mind/body binary. Arguably, a creative practice, be it visual, written, performance-based, or musical, provides a space in which to do it.

Chapter 4: The practice and the process of an experimental chef

There are multiple glass making and forming processes I use in my practice. *Pâte de verre* involves the packing of plaster and silica moulds with a mixture of crushed glass (frit) or powdered glass and glue as discussed in the previous chapter (Figure 21). Kiln casting involves the making of plaster silica moulds, often through the lost wax process where first the object is created in wax then covered with a plaster and silica mould, the wax then melted out. The resulting mould is then packed with “bullets” — chunks of glass, placed in a kiln and taken to a high temperature (800–900 degrees Celsius, depending of glass type) to allow the glass to melt and fill the void to create the object. Glass slumping involves an already formed glasswork, or sheets of glass, placed over an object in the kiln. The kiln is then taken up to a low temperature (600–700 degrees Celsius) at a slow rate to allow the glass to soften and droop, taking on the shape of the object it rests upon.



Figure 21: Lace mould for *feast*, date, made from plaster and silica packed with *pâte de verre*, ready to be fired, ECU studios, Mt Lawley.

All the processes mentioned above are referred to as kiln forming or warm working. This is because the temperatures that the glass is taken to are often not as high as the temperatures used when working from a glass furnace for blowing forms. The glass furnace, in which sits a crucible, a ceramic pot filled with molten glass, is kept hot (1100–

1200 degrees Celsius) at all times in order to keep the glass molten. Working from the glass furnace is called hot forming. Glass blowing is the most common form of hot forming. In my practice I use sand casting and hot casting. Sand casting involves the use of large heavy iron ladles, used to scoop the molten glass from the furnace. The molten glass is then poured into or over a sand mould, which was previously created. Sand casting results in a distinct surface that is textural, taking on the grain of the sand. Hot casting (Figure 22) also includes ladling the molten glass from crucible to mould, here however the moulds are steel, fiber board or plaster and silica.

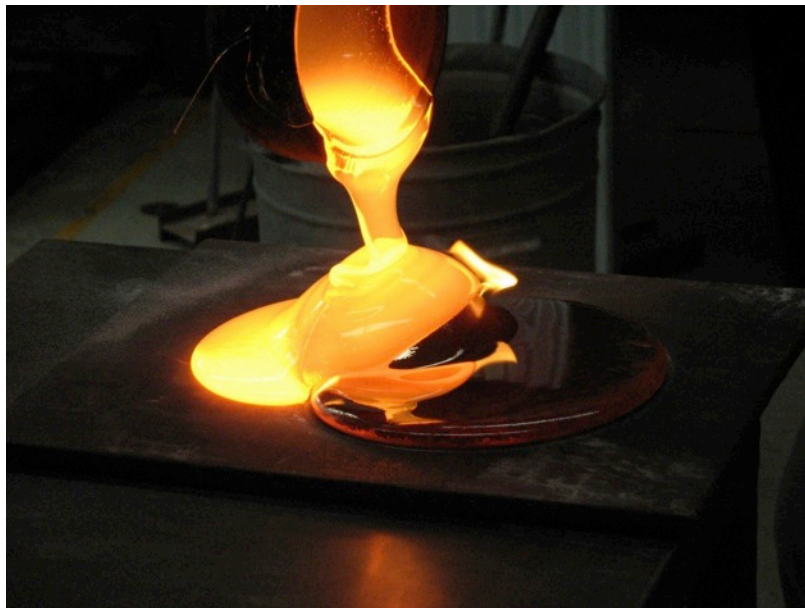


Figure 22: Brooke Zeligman, the hot casting process, ladling molten glass to create ovum for *rootprints*, 2007, Hyaline Studio, Mt Lawley.

I liken these processes to cooking. I've always linked the importance of the processes I use to my history as cook. And to the personal — *as a child hiding from familial storms in the kitchen — hands sticky from sweet sickly security. Growing up, the kitchen was a place of refuge in which I would spend long hours with my mother cooking, watching her cook, helping, tasting, learning. The kitchen was a place of escape from the furies that raged in the form of a father. A place of comfort, where fear was fought and conquered with food.*

I worked for many years as a cook before going to art school. I see myself as a cook, rather than artist. Glass cooking processes are central to my practice — from the scooping and ladling of the molten glass, the mixing of mould materials, the baking of glass in kiln, to the slow hand-crafting of wood and steel as accompaniments to complete the meal. These processes allow time for meanings to rise. The flavours seep into the work where they

develop, ripen and rot. The seductive molten state and my desire to touch and taste its toffee-like perfection. In my mind a scene plays out; I reach to touch and flesh melts as it connects with the toffee, the 1200 degrees Celsius molten glass. When I work with glass I use different temperatures to achieve different effects, a low kiln for the slow cooking of a slumped work may only reach 600 degrees Celsius, but the fast cooking of hot casting requires the heat to be instantly flesh melting.

Abjection lives in the dark heart and I experience my repulsion/desire — a bodily experience of the visceral and domestic, this link to food, to body, I cannot escape, not only in process, but within the works themselves. These links to abjection, to food, body, and history are discussed in the *feast* (date), *rootprints* (date) and *M Words* (date) sections in Chapter 5.

My pans and utensils are now moulds and ladles, my oven the kiln, my soup pot the glass crucible, my ingredients have become plaster silica grog glass ...

*The writing process, like my visual arts practice, I also view as cooking — experimental cooking, recipe making. There will be fallen soufflés and burnt biscuits, before the written feast is ready. The ingredients come from the words of others, reading the recipes to knowledge, wondering if their ideas will be crisp, crunchy, or if their words are more like stale, day old bread to be avoided unless desperate with hunger. I wonder about putting my writing into the oven and seeing if its smell is appetising — seeing if the aroma of the slowly baking pages will make my mouth water. I think of the film, *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (Greenaway, 1989). There is a scene where the lover is caught and forced to eat his academic obsession — his books — page by page they stuff them down his throat. The colours, depravity, and gluttony within the movie make me think of my practice, my obsession, glass.*

I am an experimental chef. And whilst my preferred tools, ladles and form work are downed, and kilns are cold, as I write I have at my fingertips a whole new set of utensils and ingredients. Books are the stock of the soup, the flavour building base, theory and writers the ingredients.

I often wonder as I work. If an artwork — a sculptural/3D work — cannot be touched in a

gallery setting, does it become lonely? I admit to touching. When no one is looking I am going to engage in a physical encounter. A bodily connection. The lightest of touches, quickly stolen like a kiss from a secret lover — the secret, the forbidden, making it all the sweeter, nuanced.

As a maker I struggle with looking and not touching. Sculpture is not an illusion, it is not a photo. It is not a painting, drawing, print or film. It does not exist on a two dimensional plain separate from me — it exists in this space, in my space, now, here.

At an Auguste Rodin exhibition I checked to see where the gallery attendants were looking, and when their eyes were else from me I would run my finger over the bronzes. Feeling the curves, the cool metal, the marks made. Seeing the technicians chisel and mould, wiping sweat from the brow under the watchful eye of Rodin. Hearing the pour of the molten bronze, the calls of the foundry workers. Here is myth. Here is narrative. But there is also this. Hidden unless you look, “the forest before the book” (Cixous, 1998, p. 57). Hidden unless you touch.

I cried quiet tears, jouissance, as I ran my fingers over the Rodin. I was immersed. Then caught, an attendant was watching me intently. I snatched my hand away, blushed at what I thought must have seemed foolish, but he smiled. He put his finger to his lips — sssshhhh — a co-conspirator of touch.



Figure 23: Brooke Zeligman, pouring molten glass for the making of glass ovum, 2007, Hyaline Studio, Mt Lawley.

My entire body is immersed in the making. I injure my back, I spill my blood, hair gets tangled up and sets into the materials. I drip sweat, swear, talk lovingly, coax — I make work about lived experience and as I make I live, I experience, I am deeply engaged. Once made I don't detach, that's my DNA in that work, I must continue to touch. How is it then that I can ask a viewer to not touch, especially when I must? "It's from inside the body that the drawing-of-the-poet rises to the light of day" (Cixous, 1998, p. 58).

I wonder if the viewer feels the same. You, out there, who are you? I've seen viewers gently graze their fingers over the sharp edges, the delicate, terrifyingly fragile glass structures.

Children always — adults covertly.

I love the process a thousand times more than the Trial process (no, a hundred times more). I want the tornadoes in the atelier. (Cixous, 1998, p. 57)

The process

Whether it is the meandering line of a pen, a drip of oil paint, a deeply etched mark, or a performative, bodily gesture, the creative process is often communicated through the materials with which an artwork is made [and] the way in which process and materials can be central to the purpose and meaning of a work of art. (Hammond, 2007, p. 1)

I cook with the heart, measure with eye and taste bud. Instinctual and passionate, if unhappy it shows in the finished product. When asked for recipes I am quick to list ingredients but lost with quantities. Baking challenges, the preciseness of measure, the need for control requires that I stop. Breathe.

Making in the studio is the same. The approach gets me into trouble. I rush in full of excitement, eager. I forget vital steps. Simple little elements that would save hours of frustration if only I had taken my time, measured and weighed correctly, stopped, breathed, thought about each step.

I never learn. I do it again and again. Rush. Forget. Regret. Rush. Forget. Regret.

And I suffer the loss. This is embedded in the work. Material, emotion, time. I retreat to the kitchen when the studio is in mourning. I rolled a car once when working as a cook on a mine site, “lucky to walk away” they said. The miners came back to tables laden with food — pies, cakes, biscuits, quiches. The patience required for baking had calmed.

I must remember the recipes. Measure the quantities. Take time for *mise en place*. Stop think breath. The recipes I use are borrowed. Learnt from masters of their craft. Their work is light, colour, form, technique, skill. A baker’s skill.

An essential ingredient in my work is the work of the glass masters. I borrow from their waste pots⁷. Their ideas, frustrations, failures, loss, become my material. I collect the broken glass

⁷ In the glass studio, the hot shop, sit dump buckets, metal bins filled with water. The glass blowers use these buckets to dump failed works — glass end down they place their pipes into the water, the temperature difference of hot, hot glass into cool water causes the glass to shock, rupture and crumble from the blowing pipe. At the end of the studio day the buckets are drained, the fractured, crumbled glass set aside for student use.

from the dump buckets. Every single piece I have ever made from furnace glass has contained their sweat, texture, their flavour.

They seek light and form and colour. I seek the material. Carried in the material is the history of their pursuits.

Glass has a memory. Its skin carries scars, “Metaphor is made flesh” (Cixous, 1998, p.58). My studio is chaotic. I am often plagued with guilt by this when I think of the studio of Howard Taylor who was renowned for his almost obsessive neatness. I can’t help it, I am totally absorbed with the process when I make. My body and mind are engaged with the task at hand. I cannot look at the finished product without seeing myself.

The processes I engage are physical, messy, and the works hold within them the lived experience of the making. In order to cast an object there are multiple steps. The cleaning and preparation of the high chair, I used for the making of *murmur* (first exhibited in *m words* (2012), Figure 45) required that I first strip back as much of the many layers of paint that had accrued over the years. I slathered on toxic paint stripper, inhaled the fumes as I watched layers of history bubble and peel. Then the patient scraping away of the softened paint. Flecks flew and stuck to my skin, I sat speckled yellow and wondering about the babies that had sat, a boy or girl who fed in the yellow chair? The blue layer a boy. I find myself rocking, subconsciously mimicking — the rocking motion either comforts or alerts depending on the personality profile. I find it comforting.

I sit cross-legged on the dusty floor of the garage. Listening to the chickens in the yard scratch and cluck as I take mallet, chisel and driver, carefully, gently, patiently dismantling the chair, piece by piece. Thinking about the construction, wondering about carpenter or factory worker, whose hands had put these pieces together? Methodically laying out each piece, considering the replica in wax and then glass. There are scratches, chips, dents in the wood. It too carries scars.

I choose to cast in glass each piece separately. To then construct as the original piece had been, a remembrance of the first making. It will require the very careful measuring of each stage. Each piece precise and fitted, each socket smooth. When the work fits together as a wax reproduction then it should fit when in glass, I wonder about give — glass so much

more rigid than wood, than wax.

In casting the highchair in glass, I am aware that I am engaging in a very a technical process with this project and I am reminded of baking again. In the kitchen I tend to go with the heart — the quantities and ingredients are dictated by availability and mood, it's largely instinctual and even when trying new recipes rarely do I follow what is written, instead adjusting as I go. Pouring hot glass is much like this too, dictated by mood, the swing of the arm, the tilt of the ladle.

Lost wax casting, the process I am immersed in with kiln casting of the chair requires precision, preparation, careful measuring, a steady hand, patience. It's the baking of glass making. The ingredients are set and dictated by pre-existing recipes, everything must be weighed:

Mould Mix
500gr Casting plaster
500gr Silica (200grade)
500ml water

A weight ratio of 1:1:1

Mix the plaster and silica together in a bucket. Once thoroughly mixed add water and stir gently to avoid air bubbles becoming trapped in the mix. Once the mixture is well blended set aside until the mixture begins to warm, this will take a few minutes but keep a close eye on it as if it is left too long the mixture will harden and become unusable. Once the mix has begun to warm apply to the object. Mix another batch and repeat until the desired thickness of the mould is achieved.

There is little room for instinct. There is process after process that requires time, a slowing down of thought; formwork — *a ramekin* — must be built in order to house each individual silicone negative. A carefully constructed clay base, level and smooth is built into each formwork, the object embedded evenly, cleanly. A release agent — *melted butter* — spray silicone applied carefully and thoroughly.

A mathematical equation is required to calculate the volume of silicone rubber needed, I am in luck here, my partner being the math genius engineer type creates excel spread sheets

that allow quick calculation of volume and weights of materials required. The silicone rubber requires weighing — *40g plain flour, 240g grated gruyere* — the catalyst measured, it must be 2.5% of the weight of the liquid silicone, is added to the base, stirred, not too vigorously, too many bubbles mean unwanted air pockets in the finished result, but fast, there is only 20 minutes in which to stir and pour — *the mix must be light and fluffy, it requires a gentle hand, when the egg white is added it must be folded not stirred to prevent the air being knocked out* — pouring the silicone into the form work must be done in a steady stream, not too hastily as air trapped around the object will ruin a mould, the air must be allowed to work its way out. The edges then cleaned of spills — *wiping any drips or spills from the rim promote even rising*. The mould is placed on a shelf and left to set, extreme temperatures will affect the setting rate, a thermally stable environment is best. *Keep the dough covered in a warm place, dramatic changes in temperature will impact on the rise*. Once set, the form work is opened, the clay removed, leaving the object embedded in a rubber silicone base. A second pouring of silicone rubber. A second setting. Then the form work is opened, the layers of silicone peeled apart, the object removed. A negative is made.

I repeated this process 18 times over. This does not include failed moulds, where I measured quantities incorrectly, where the form work was not secured, where the ingredients were not fresh — *week old eggs are the best for baking, helping to maintain air and creating a finer texture* — silicone has a shelf life, old stock may fail or set with an undesirable texture.

Oozing drooping processes

Inside these processes there are others. As I let silicone set I cook in the kiln. Something earthy. *My grandmother loved zinnias and hydrangeas. Her garden was a riot of colour that betrayed her cool exterior. I grow zinnias in my garden. Big bright, beautiful, a riot of unruly colour each plant putting out bloom after bloom of red or orange, yellow, magenta, purple. How can one plant produce so many flowers, each a different colour from the next? Such a rebellious plant.*

The glass that I cook in zinnia forms is allowed to droop and sway and ooze. To be liquid, fluid, abject. *I season each piece with colour. Bake at various temperatures. The work feels rebellious. The technical denied, although not completely, there is always technique, this is glass after all (Figure 24). Dripping oozing drooping just like me.*

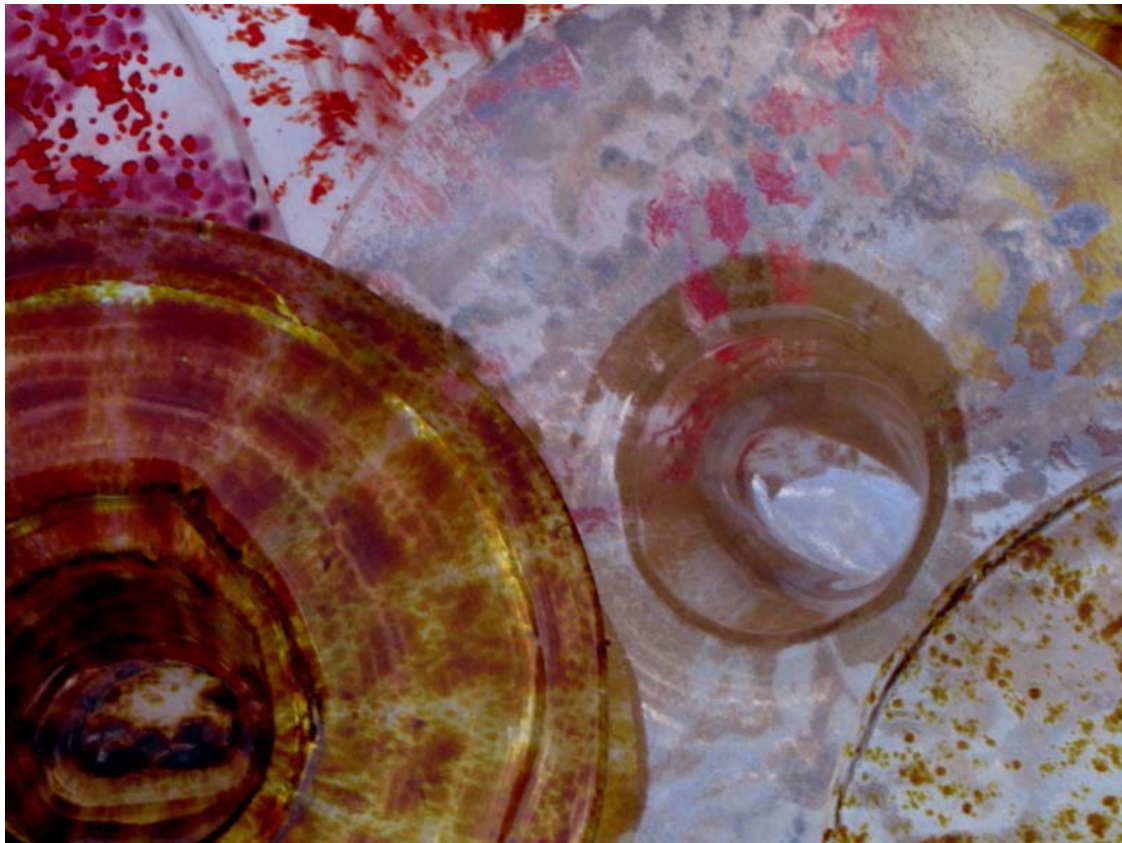


Figure 24: Brooke Zeligman, (2013), *Zinnias (a grandMother's garden* (detail of the dripping, oozing glass), hot cast and slumped glass, stainless steel, MDF, polymer, dimensions vary.

Material/ity or embodied process

In a 2007 edition of *Artlink* the magazine focuses on the notion of “work” within artists’ practice and while none of the artists discussed work with glass, many engage with materials that hover on the borders of the art/craft debate and require hours of laborious, repetitive, time-consuming action. What is interesting in the links between these artists is how they view the importance of their labour and see it as essential to the meaning of the work. An embodied practice of embodied knowledges.

Many of the artists hold a strong belief in the artist as a craftsman who fabricates intricate work. The emphasis being on personal intervention, that aim is to re-devise the familiar (Huangfu, 2007). With my processes I re-devise the familiar — *feast* involves reconstructing complete table settings by casting crushed glass into tableware. *rootprints* (date) turns objects recognisable as eggs into functional light boxes — my flushed away menses becomes furniture of a sort.

Like many artists, I see my method of working as a type of meditation and confession (Huangfu, 2007). Within the action, the repetition, the performativity of process and narrative, continual writing and rewriting of the myth, of the self, is a confession — it is all those things that I am too fearful of saying. This is softened and diffused through the process of making and I am safe. Just don’t ask me to tell you what it’s about because then you are stealing the whispered confession and forcing me to scream what I never wanted to say in the first place.

The process of making is a ritual. I make a conscious choice to perform this ritual and it brings comfort.

I must make my work. My work changes meaning if made by others. I could not present an object as my own if I had not had a hands-on approach to its making as it would cease to be the labour of love/anxiety/depression/anger/confession. In the making of the works in the 2008 *rootprints* exhibition, discussed in detail in Chapter 5, I continuously struggled with this very thing. My partner provided me with technical assistance and became heavily involved in the making of the boxes — often too involved and at times I felt I had to reclaim

ownership, draw lines in the sand and mark my territory. I am fiercely protective. I enjoy the symmetry of my partner's involvement in these works in relation to the parent-child metaphor that many artists experience in the making of their work — yet they are not collaborative works, his role is technician, or perhaps this too is incorrect as I worked beside him, learning the skills he has to offer.

A Recipe from my Grandmother

There is a fig tree in my back yard. Surprising in prolificacy as it rises up in all its fecund abundance from the desert-scape of our back yard — the Bassendean dune sands of Shoalwater.⁸ The fig tree brings me great joy, which my partner does not quite understand due to his dislike of the soft purple flesh. It's a textural thing. He says he doesn't like the tiny seeds, the way they pop, which is precisely why I love them so much. I love how when they are cooked, transformed into jam or chutney, baked into cakes or dried for cheese platters, these tiny little seeds maintain their integrity. There is something mitotic/popsic about them. It is no wonder figs are a symbol of fertility, so closely linked to female sexuality, the swelling purple tender flesh. Perhaps it is the obscenity of them that frightens my partner, who blushed at scenes of intimacy on film.

It's late May and the fig tree is still fruiting. The fruit is slower to ripen now and the thought of the soon-to-be barren tree saddens me. I feel guilty about all the fruit I let drop, that now lies in a rotten mat around the base of the tree, the edges starting to mummify.

I link the fallen figs to my own optic offerings as I make the light boxes for *rootprints* (date) and feel the urge to pickle and preserve. I've found a recipe in my obsessive tagging of cooking magazines, it's for a pickled walnut and fig chutney and I'm thinking this is the only way to assuage my guilt at the fallen figs.

⁸ During the writing and making of this thesis I have moved a total of five times with my partner who works in Defence. Four of those moves have been interstate. At each house I would plant a vegetable garden, often only to have to rip it up months later, this disruption became a symbolic — a green echo of the thesis. Not all of the houses had fruit trees, but I have been lucky with most, mangoes, plums and cherries have all filled my pots over these years. I have two fig trees now, I planted them myself and look forward to their abundance.



Figure 25: Construction and chutney making for *rootprints* (date), at the artist's home, Shoalwater.

I never make just one thing at a time (Figure 25). There are always multiple projects being juggled. My research through making sees ideas and projects cross over and into each other. As I work on *rootprints* (date) I search for recipes for figs. And I see *feast* sneaking into *rootprints* (date), through material and form, through the links to cooking and family and mother. The cooking of elaborate recipes and meals is as important to the process as the making of the moulds, the pouring of the glass.

The food I am making is not simple. It is rich and complicated. Requiring multiple stages as does my making. It is in these stages that the flavours and meanings seep out. Develop. Slow cooking has become a joy, garlic lamb shanks with red wine reductions roasted in a low oven till the meat is falling off the bone. Oxtail risotto starts with roasting off beef bones to make stock, stock in which to braise the oxtails. A cassoulet requires the soaking of white beans for 24 hours, the beans then boiled slowly for hours before the stock and ham bone is added. Two days later I am rewarded with something rich and comforting. My gorgeous partner's girth grows in response and I think perhaps I need to stop.

In the studio I set up formwork in carefully laid out grids, greasing the sides to stop the mixture from sticking. I measure out plaster, silica, talc and water. Mix carefully to avoid trapping air; a trapped bubble of air in the investment material can ruin a finished piece. The mixture must rest like a batter, just long enough for the alchemy to occur and then it is poured, gently into form work over waiting doilies which have soaked in water acting as a release agent, stopping the plaster mix from soaking into the delicate loops and swirls,

setting the doily forever more into plaster blocks. I swap between casting doilies for *feast* and pouring eggs for *rootprints* (date), and stirring pots in the kitchen wondering where one begins and the other ends.

The kitchen is where I practice recipes that have been handed down and discover others to share with my family. It is here that I think about the women from my family who I know and have known and those that exist only as stories. I think about them making and tasting, using the very same ingredients that I use, greasing tins, stirring pots, waiting patiently for cakes to rise, connecting us. I gaze at the fig tree through the kitchen window and think about *rootprints* (date), the wood and the glass. The smell from the kiln in the studio out back as the plaster cooks, mingles with smell of dinner roasting slowly in the oven. A recipe from my grandmother (Figure 26).

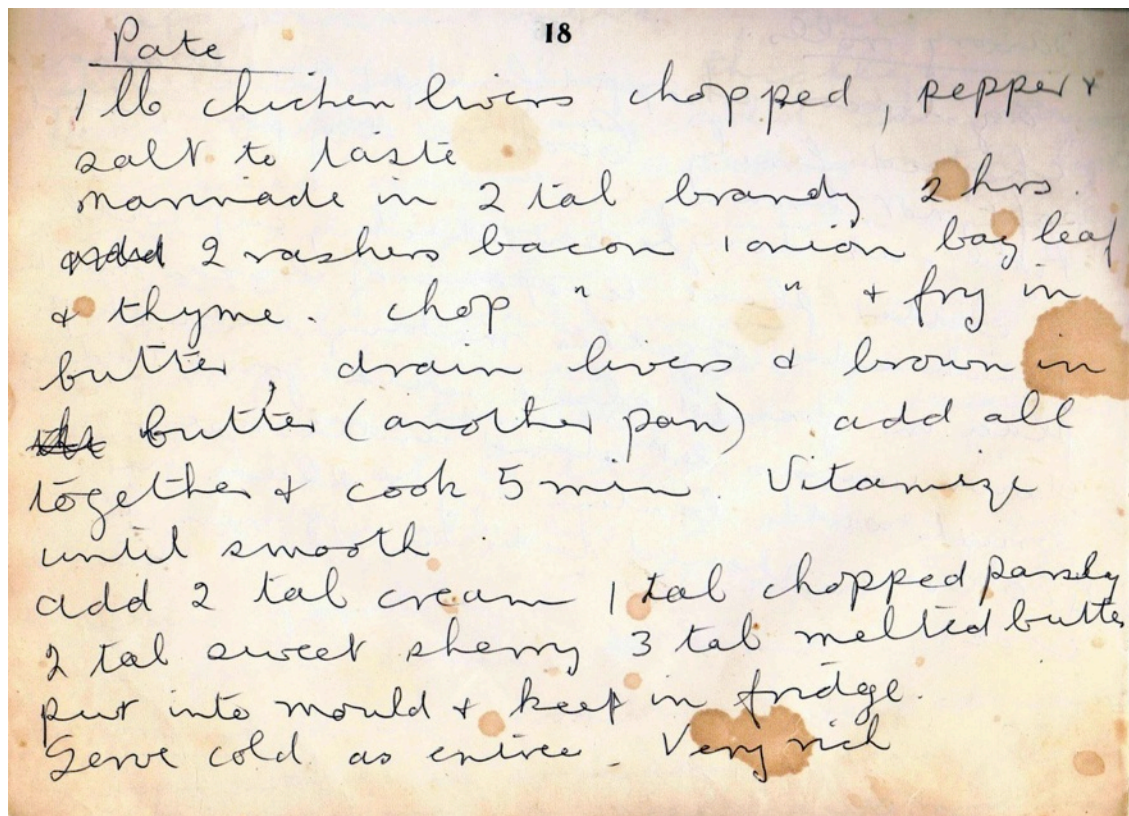


Figure 26: A recipe from my grandmother, circa 1920s, Adelaide.

My grandmother would write her recipes in an old school diary; started in the 1920's she kept it her whole life. She died in 2002. Reproduced here is her Pâté recipe. I don't know where she got it from but she made it every Christmas we spent together.

Pâté

1lb chicken livers,
chopped, 2 tbs brandy for
2 hours,
2 rashers bacon
chopped, 1 onion
chopped,
1 bay leaf,
sprig of
thyme
butter for
cooking 2 tbs
cream
1 tbs chopped
parsley 2 tbs sweet
sherry
3 tbs melted butter

Marinate chopped livers in brandy with salt and pepper to taste, for two hours. Meanwhile fry off bacon, onion, bay leaf and thyme in butter until onion is translucent, set aside. Drain the livers and fry in butter for 5 minutes. Add to bacon mix. Remove bay leaf and thyme and blend all ingredients till smooth. Add cream, parsley, sherry and melted butter and mix well. Pour into mould, cover and place in fridge until set.

She says to serve it cold as an entree and adds that it's very rich. It is.

Chapter 5: Maternal Musings Not Permitted

Loving, saving, naming what would otherwise be annihilated is political in a more immediate sense. (Cixous & Sellers, 1994, p. 83)

I am more than aware at the irony of the reoccurring maternal theme of my work. Countless times I have been accused of “pining” and “essentialism” — the childless woman manifesting her secret desire. And I have been making work about motherhood, non-motherhood, matrons and the maternal for years now. I seemingly can’t escape it — my urge to make these works — although I admit to works that brew under the surface that promise to leave this barren (by choice) body alone. Perhaps my obsessions with this topic hint at some sort of truth to the notion of biological imperative (I can hear the shrieks of horror echoing back), but that is not my argument even if I do touch on it here and there.

This chapter discusses the artworks that I have made throughout the thesis journey as they have been exhibited, under the titles of the exhibitions. They are discussed in relation to the themes that inform the work and how the materiality of the glass operates within the works. In the appendices is included the exhibitions catalogues, invitations, media, work lists, and a list of all works completed during the PhD.

rootprints: Spectrum Project Space, September 2008 — an embodied discourse

As women, we engender children. Can one create anything more extraordinary, bodily or spiritually, than a living being? Thus creation, which is our preserve, is so wonderful that all other works can seem secondary, even raising the children themselves. But this marvellous women's work has been turned into an obligation to procreate, especially boys. The greatest creators of the universe, women, have thus become servants devoted to the reproduction of the male social order. (Irigaray, 1993, p. 108)

Nine days before the rootprints exhibition opened at Spectrum Project Space in 2008 the electronic invitation was sent out. A little late, I know. The next morning I received an email from my big brother. He declined the invitation — as I knew he would, he lives too far to come — but also included was this: “Hey, what exactly do you know about the paradox of childbearing?” (personal communication, 2008, September 3)

He had pulled the line from the small description included in the invitation: A body of carefully constructed works that combine “glossy mounds of free formed glass sensuously poured from a long handle” (Schwarz, 2008, p. 56) with marine ply, auto-paint and lighting. The pieces are meditations on childbearing that explore the paradox between repulsion and desire; tracing a path through the notion of the abject and laying bare bodily processes and sexual drives.

At the time I was 38 and childless. I am now 42 and happily childless.

We are all born and have mothers so are authorised to have an interest in birth and maternity, as Irigaray says “Given that we are all of woman born, the maternal body stands as the origin of the human” (cited in Bergoffen, 2007, p. 153), my interest lies as the non-mother, the childless and my brother's quip has left me angry and defensive, regardless of authorisation.

I had several responses to my brother's email, most of them angry. In the end I didn't respond, not to my brother.

Instead I think of Cixous:

..... one cannot
talk about it without

.....
attitudes, positions, dispositions of the body-(and)-of-the-soul or even
mechanisms

(Cixous, 1997)

Do those “attitudes, positions and mechanisms” get in the way of knowing? Or are they in themselves a knowing?

I am childless.

The ticking of my biological clock wakes me up in the small hours.

New born babes bring involuntary tears to my eyes.

I want to rip them from their mother’s arms.

Squeeze their fragile sweet smelling innocence to me.

I am childless.

When friends come to visit with their young children I am unsure of myself.

I know I should revel in their motherly joy but I don’t.

It makes me uncomfortable.

It bores me. They. Bore me.

I am childless.

*There was a time I was determined to get
pregnant. I fucked my way across foreign shores
unprotected. I wanted to shock my mother with a
bastard child. Preferably one of colour.*

I am childless.

*At the age of 24 a parasitic life was found growing in me after weeks of drunken drugged
excess.*

A little creature I couldn’t care for.

I had it removed.

I'd never do that again.

I am childless.

I don't want children.

I will never be accused of ruining a life.

For me there is no mother-blame.

I am childless.

My income is my own.

I sleep in when I want.

My nights are free to do as I like.

There is no guilt at not being there.

I am childless.

There are no toys scattered through the house.

There are no little arms reaching up to me.

No rose bud mouth.

No reaching arms.

I am childless.

Is there something wrong with me?

The next time someone looks at me with their smug mother expression and tells me "you don't know what you're missing out on" — well — the next time someone does that, I'll do what I always do. I'll smile and say "neither do you".

The *rootprints* exhibition at Spectrum (formerly located on Beaufort St in Northbridge) contained carefully constructed works that explored the paradox between repulsion and desire, tracing a path through the notion of the abject and laying bare bodily processes and sexual drives. The series of 3D works (name them here) incorporated hot glass elements with marine ply, MDF and LED lighting to create a conduit through memory and desire (Figures 27–29). The works respond to the ideas expressed within the writings of Kristeva and Cixous. The exhibition and some of the works within the exhibition have been named

after Cixous' *rootprints* (1997) which discusses how poetical language exposes meaning, as a material can expose meaning within an artwork.

This was achieved through an investigation of the specificity of the lived body through abstraction, exploring the complexities of reproduction and artistic production. A non-linear methodology was employed in the making that was ethnological; part pastiche, part recipe making, and part myth-making. The approach acknowledged the gendered nature of experience, identity and art making through the reference to the female body and female reproductive body. The glass pieces were based on ovum and the menstrual flow. Held within mouths that trembled on the verge of spilling, the mouths contained within individual boxes that referenced the domestic and constructed spaces of our daily lives, or circles and ovals that hinted at the microscopic view or medical intervention (Figures 27–29). The works were informed by the polyphonic and included the subjective voice: “I am childless”, political, cultural and mediated voices that position childbearing as central to woman’s identity. And the theoretical voice that engages with the simple question that resonates on a basic level within much of feminist inquiry, it asks “what is woman?” (Brooks, 1999).

As one entered the gallery — a stark white space — directly opposite the door, hung the central work of the show titled *06/01/08 06/23/08 07/17/08 08/06/08 09/03/08 (the dated series)* (Figure 27), a work consisting of five white oval structures housing glass, egg-like objects, arranged in a flower formation. The housing was constructed from MDF and finished using slick white automotive paint that achieved a high-gloss surface reflecting light, shapes, and viewers. The pink and red coloured hot-poured glass eggs appeared almost jelly-like, a result achieved during the pouring process. Rather than contain the glass in a mould, ladled glass was allowed to flow over a mound, to find its own resting place. The resulting free-flow form created a connection to the movement of the molten, abject, fluid state, making each egg/ovum unique.

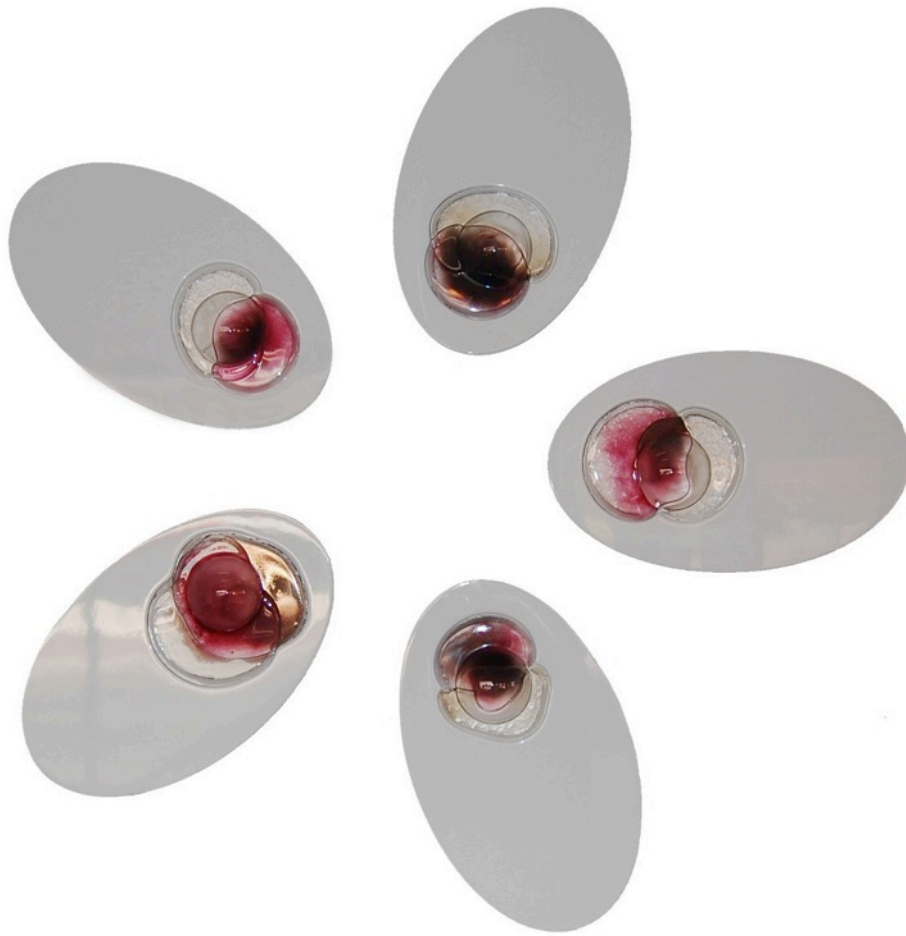


Figure 27: Brooke Zeligman, (2008), *06.01.08 06.23.08 07.17.08 08.06.08 09.03.08 (the dated series)* (from: xxx exhibition), hot cast glass, pigments, auto paint, MDF, LED lighting, 720mm x 420mm x 35mm x 5mm.

The form of the hot cast glass eggs (the process of making described in Chapter 4, the practice and process of an experimental chef) are based on the ovum; in this work they are pretty pink and feminine. The stark white surface of the housing suggestive of the hospital, medical intervention, the petal formation a common symbol used in fertility clinics but also of female fertility in general. The petals are the vulva, the chora, the passive housing, the mother/nurse that allows for the semiotic weeping of (Grosz, 1994) the material — the fluidity of the poured glass pieces sitting within the *Vesica Pisica* or the *vagina dentate*. The title refers to the passing of the months, for which I kept a record of my menses during the making. I chart my menses because they have become overly frequent, coming too often, sometimes only a fortnight apart. They bring pain and riotous hormones, *I want to hurt something, scream at my partner*, the hormones are the worst. I have been diagnosed as

peri-menopausal. I am only 38, even though I never really wanted it, I am aware that my time for child bearing is almost over. Medical intervention would be my only way of conceiving.

drip tock

Tarsh Bates (2008) wrote in her essay for the *rootprints* catalogue: “The oval is the opening of the cunt, combined with pretty pink it is the petal of the flower — delicate, mythic feminine, romanticised vision of the chora” (p. 3). And “The planes in these works could [also] be interpreted as *vagina dentata* — the threat of castration, of being devoured lingers here however it is the castration of the creative impulse — the artist devoured by her fertile possibilities” (p. 3).

There is a small LED light behind each glass piece, a soft little glow, a spark of life. These lights can be turned off, as they can in all the works, changing the pieces, creating two works within one, while also crossing a boundary between art and design (function). The use of light raises questions. It hints at a “potential for an excess of signification” (Cixous cited in Blyth & Sellers, 2004, p. 69). This spark prevents fixture: it is life/not life, function/not function. The work is allowed to hover within its own contradictions. Is it craft, architecture, design or art? “That’s how the language plays: in several directions and at several levels” (Cixous cited in Blyth & Sellers, 2004, p. 69).

On an adjacent wall hung a series of three, *rootprints, memory, lifewriting* (Figure 28). The title borrows directly from Cixous, as does the exhibition title. Here the works are housed in squares, the grid referencing constructed domestic, urban spaces, as well as the calendar with each square representing a passing month. Made from marine ply, a common building material, the skin of the glass is echoed through the highly reflective paint treatment of the marine ply, as it has been echoed by the use of auto paint with the other works exhibited. The glass pieces here are yellowed and reminiscent of bile connecting to the abject body. “The abject both fascinates and horrifies: it thrives on ambiguity and the transgression of taboos and boundaries” (Chaudhuri, 2006, p. 91). The hanging of the works at waist height are designed to create within the viewer an awareness of their physicality, the positioning of the womb, and a connection between the body and the work as viewers navigate through the space. Although the abject is ultimately part of us, we reject it, expelling it and locating it outside the self, designating it as “not-me”, in order to protect our boundaries. In

her first category of abjection, Barbara Creed includes bodily wastes such as “shit, blood, urine, and pus”, all connected to physical act of childbirth, as well as dead bodies, which are the ultimate in abjection (Chaudhuri, 2006; Creed, 2001).



Figure 28: Brooke Zeligman, (2007), *rootprint, memory and lifewriting* (from: xxx exhibition), hot cast glass, polymer, marine ply, LED lighting, 600mm x 600mm x 35mm x 3.

As the viewer moved into the next section of the gallery the grid continued and was echoed throughout the space with the framing of the wall and passage way. The masculine marine ply boxes each housed differently coloured ovum (Figure 29).



Figure 29: Brooke Zeligman, (2007), *lifewriting series* (from xxx exhibition), hot cast glass, polymer, marine ply, LED lighting, installation detail, 600mm x 600mm x 35mm x 4.

Within each work there is a gaping mouth the vagina dentata — the monstrous feminine — that holds in place/spews forth an egg/ovum. From within the constructed space of the grid it screams out in all its vivid jarring colour juxtapositions (bright blue, orange, olive ...) against what is expected: cultural constraints, expectations of motherhood, and femininity of women being framed by government by their reproductive capacity as; “Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other” (Bartky cited in O’Grady, 2005). “Aurally excess is marked by recourse not to the coded articulations of language but to the inarticulate cries” (Williams, 1991); visually these mouths house inarticulate cries, the ovum held trembling on the precipice, about to fall from the lips, which are double. To paraphrase Helen O’Grady my intention here is “not to imply a uniformity of experience”, but to touch upon common themes and factors that exist within the multiplicity of experiences within diverse groups of women and the processes experienced in relation to childbearing (2005).



Figure 30: Brooke Zeligman, (2008), *untitled series i (yellow)* (from xxx exhibition), hot cast glass, auto paint, MDF, LED lighting, 600mm x 35mm x 40mm.

Against the back wall of the gallery the final series sits in random formation, circular and black (Figure 30). The circular forms thwart closure, the egg/ovum form is no longer boxed, housed, contained within the culturally constructed space of the grid, they are allowed their own non-linear spaces in which to spin. They hover at the mouth of the cave, a threatening globulous anamorphic mess that promises life, or not. Contained within the circular repetition of the form is a meditation. It is a refusal to meet the moment of closure, to shut down and fix the exploration of childlessness into one series. Every month I am reminded of my choices and so for every month there is another meditation. My leaky mouth makes me ask the question: *Are you sure?* Bates writes:

the ova sit in the dark plane like gelatinous blobs in a rotting Petri dish — the growing colours vivid and promising ... the constructed grid, the masculine plane has been removed and the artist is now the parthenogenetic mother — the sole parent who is both giver

and taker of life examines her capacity for reproduction with a darkened eye. (2008)

drip tock

Returning to 06/01/08 06/23/08 07/17/08 08/06/08 09/03/08, this work has been informed by the polyphonic, there is the subjective voice: “I am childless”. There are also the political, cultural and mediated voices that position childbearing as central to woman’s identity as we navigate the “motherhood moment — from celebrity mom baby-bump sightings to recent televised debates between ‘stay at home moms’ and ‘working moms’, and from ‘welfare mothers’ to ‘Alpha moms’. Images of motherhood are circulating in popular media as never before” (Dever, 2008). Within the Australian political climate women are openly encouraged and bribed with cash bonuses to return to the home and populate the country in what academic, writer and political commentator, Anne Summers terms the “Breeding Creed” (2003, 2006). The overwhelming suggestion here is that the most worthwhile thing a woman can do, according to government, is have children, says Summers: “All notion of women’s status in society has now gone. Now we only exist in the eyes of the government in our family roles” (2006). The theoretical voice that engages with the simple question that resonates on a basic level within much of feminist inquiry, asks “what is woman?” (Brooks, 1999).

Repetition in these works, such as the dated series, and in my writing, is a form of meditation that attempts to deny the Cartesian approach to the body as a fixed thing. It is a refusal to meet the moment of closure, to shut down and fix the exploration of childlessness into one series, answer, or response. My material, formally analytical and linguistic meditations locate the body within the essence of the difference that has rendered it as inferior, weaker than, that sees it positioned culturally as reproductive vessel. The associations with breast, mouth, vulva and *Vesica Pisica* are deliberate. It is the reclamation of essentialism in order to highlight the social construction of gender, and of women as reproductive body, they ask: “‘What am I beyond this’? At the crossroads of sexuality and ideology, woman stands constituted (if that is the word) as object. As subject, woman must learn to ‘speak otherwise’, or ‘make audible’ [what] ... suffers silently in *the holes of discourse*” (Gauthieras cited in Spivak, 1981). “Cultural inferiorising of feminine identity” — with recourse to biology, emotion and reason — historically implies that women are the weaker of the two sexes in all three areas (O’Grady, 2005).

The materiality of glass was used to highlight aspects of the lived body through the deliberate use of fluidity, drawing out the connection to the abject, sexual and reproductive bodies; associations with mouth, skin, hymen, vulva, breast and ova through form strengthened this quality. The role of glass in reproductive technologies such as in-vitro fertilisation was also used to strengthen these associations.

The incommensurable Other/other. The space between. The undefinable/inexpressible. The looking glass, the dark glass, the highly reflective surfaces, the portal/porthole, my other is reflected back at me. I am voyeur and exhibitionist, here is the powerful duality of the self, choice versus base desire.

Excess, the overflow of feeling, the undefinable. In *jouissance* excess is the joyous in its original meaning, but also sexual overflow, joy and of course orgasm. The abject, a form of excess -that, which we expel from us — is associated with defilement and death. It is the excess of negative feeling which we also want to expel. This excess of feeling thus sees it operating much like *jouissance* as it is indescribable, extra, other, overwhelming, frightening, thrilling. The abject is perhaps the binary opposite of *jouissance* and when spoken of together express the two sides of the coin that in some sense are similar but never meet — they just kiss in the middle — the taboo and the joy.

***feast*: The Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery, August 2009 —Feasting on Excess**

The work (table setting) titled *feast* uses the qualities inherent within glass — the contradiction between strength and fragility, the rapture and rupture, the decorative, the domestic, the *jouissance* and abject, and the sensuous visual — to operate as metaphor for aspects of lived body/experience/imaginary. It is a multivalent work that explores ideas of family, the feminine, tradition and the handmade, memory, desire, exile, (m)othering, consumption and loss. Much of *feast* (date) no longer exists, destroyed in transit before it was even exhibited. What I have are the crumbled remains.

It may be that in destroying already coded forms, women rediscover their nature, their identity, and are able to find their forms, to blossom out in accordance with what they are. Furthermore, these female forms are always incomplete, in perpetual growth, because a woman grows, blossoms, and fertilizes (herself) with her own body. (Irigaray, 1993, p. 103)

The heartache of lost work

The women in my family travelled from Adelaide, Dampier, and Cairns to meet in Perth for feast. An exhibition of glass pieces that form a tableau, a table setting, each piece incredibly fragile, pushed to the structural limitations of the pâte de verre technique. A work made in response to us, my family. In response to the stories of women that came before us, and to their skills and their traditions that have since been lost. To our passion for cooking, to recipes that have been handed down and shared, to the things that are never said, and to those things that are said too often.

The works, which have been freighted from Cairns, are late, days late

weeks

years

The freight company has no idea where they are. I switch between panic ... fury ... sickness. The work arrives. We gather. I lift the lid on the first crate. There is sound where there should be none — small things grinding, crunching. The brief flicker of relief burns out; sickness returns. Nestled in a bed of foam bubble and beads is no longer a fragile confection of *pâte de verre* that defies reason with its delicacy. Instead, in its place, are the

crumbled remains.

Wide eyes stare at me. Platitudes — it's only one box.

And the next ... and the next ... and the next ...

I ask everyone to leave just as the blood from my body has already gone. I can't continue this with an audience. Not even one that loves.

With less than two days to install I have lost over half of the work (Figure 31). Years destroyed by careless handling. Exquisite pieces of glass lace that defied logic with their fragility.

Gone.

I am left with the crumbs, the bones, the scraps of what was once a feast.



Figure 31: Detail of the crumbs, the bones, the scraps of what was once a *feast*, the works broken, 2009, *pâte de verre*, dimension vary, Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery, Fremantle

I keep reminding myself that this is the nature of the work. I did this. It was deliberate. It was me who had pushed the glass to the edge of fragility, to its structural boundaries. It was me who reveled in the work being almost ephemeral. For Kristeva, modern literature ... is haunted by the threat of the extinction or collapse of meaning and is therefore characterised by its constant and horrified evocation of the abject (cited in Macey, 20001). This work had embraced notions of the abject, the rejection of the maternal. I sit amongst the crumbled remains and wonder if this is the extinction, the collapse of meaning?

feast

feast (date) was exhibited at the Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery in 2009, it is a delicate and dangerous tableau (Figure 32) made entirely from *pâte de verre*, glittering golden crushed glass, it is a table setting where a feast is imminent. The table appears set for many and yet there is only one completed setting, the diner will be alone, alienated from the familial surroundings. *feast* (date) is about exile. Within that exile there is fragmentation, isolation, and dysfunction. *feast* (date) is about loss, of family, of tradition, of self. It is both joyous and horrific, containing *jouissance* and abjection.



Figure 32: Brooke Zeligman, (2009), *feast* (installation details from xxx exhibition), *pâte de verre* and mixed media.

It is a deeply personal work that operates across multiple themes simultaneously which is made possible by the polyphonic, multi-valence of the materiality of glass. For each layer of the setting there is a layer of grief. There is one for my father, whose hands were huge and cruel, who ended his life and left me with little but *why?*

There is one for my grandmother, cold and unyielding. Her hands were gifted, but never nurturing. There is a layer for my mother, whose soft, perfumed hands promised safety but only for herself, cooking — forever cooking. And there is one for me. My hands, I am told, are just like my father's.

This work, this *écriture féminine* in glass, in which exists “the tenderness necessary to let the other live” (Pollock, 1999), the familial exile is allowed home — but never completely ...

The process, the cooking, central to my practice, is where I nurture time, for the meaning to rise. The flavours seep into the work where they develop, ripen and rot. The notion of abjection strengthens and I experience my repulsion/desire — the bodily experience, the visceral nature. I see the eating of the glass, the shredding of the internal.

feast (date) is an orally sadistic work that plays on desire. The desire to belong, the desire for lost tradition, the desire for that which never was. And finally: the desire for the absent matriarch — the warm protective womb. There is also desire for the beautiful and the desire of obsession. The decorative aesthetic is subverted by the sadistic oral, the possibility for harm plays on primeval terrors — the power of horror.

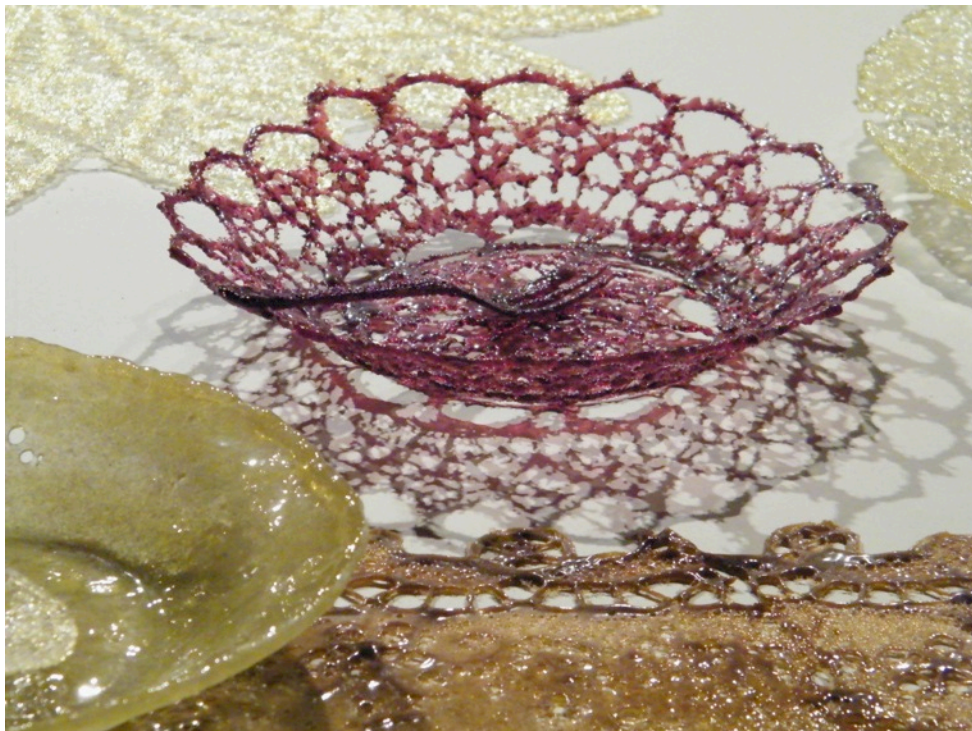


Figure 33: Brooke Zeligman, *feast*, 2009, *pâte de verre* and mixed media, tableau detail, Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery, Gallery 6, Fremantle

feast (date range) was, and is, a delicate, dangerous tableau (Figures 32 & 33) made from

pâte de verre, a labour-intensive process involving countless hours making and packing moulds, while thinking of the myths, the stories of family. Roasting the pieces in the kiln — creating and destroying.

Begun in 2006 and exhibited in 2009, *feast* is a work that evades completion, a work I must force myself to stop, a work that will remain forever in my mind as incomplete. Like cooking the perfect dish, the end to *feast* is always just out of reach, it goes on and on.



Figure 34: Brooke Zeligman, (2007), *feast*, *pâte de verre* and mixed media, installation test tableau detail.

Boxes fill with pieces. As I write this I have stopped making, it has been years, but I could so easily start again. It is obsessive, neurotic, the story I am trying to tell is too much. The stories it holds are too many. It is my story and it is the story of family and fragmentation, war and exile.

I found the beginnings of *feast* in a box in a cupboard. In the box was my grandmother's lace, made over a life time that I thought was cold, quiet, and aloof. My grandmother's lace has exposed a woman that I never knew: isolated and contemplative, conversational and confessional: "Loving, saving, naming what would otherwise be annihilated is political in a more immediate sense" (Cixous & Sellers, 1994).

A glittering confection of sugary glass is laid across tables that appear set for a feast (Figures 33–42). Plates, bowls, jugs, platters, goblets, cutlery sit atop place mats, amongst doilies, every piece, every object, made of fragile glass. Arranged on long tables that sit in a diagonal procession down the center of the gallery space, dining tables set and ready, waiting for the feast to begin. And yet there is no order. A spoon sits neatly by an empty bowl awaiting the arrival of a diner, a napkin is draped over a corner (Figure 35 over page), cutlery lies across an empty plate suggesting the diner has already been, the feast already consumed.



Figure 35: Brooke Zeligman, (2009), *feast* (installation detail of draped napkin from: xxx exhibition), *pâte de verre*.

The tables are actually interior doors, new and unpainted, portals or thresholds into liminal spaces — the in and out of the door connects the past to the future, creating a link. The moulded metal legs they rest on are from trestle tables, the kind that are hired for parties, weddings and celebrations. Yet there are no chairs and only one completed table setting, as if, despite the initial appearance of a table laid for many, the feast can only accommodate one. The gallery is dark, the work spot-lit, creating drama as if something has, or is about to, unfold. As viewers move around the work, the uneven wooden floor boards of the first floor

gallery shift, creak, and move underfoot, making the installation tremble. The impossibly fragile pieces shudder. Viewers freeze, guiltily, as if caught in the act of touching when they had not.

feast (date) is an incredibly fragile work. During the making process the fragility of glass has been drawn out, pushing the boundaries of what the material is capable of. The extremely fragile quality is created by controlling the thickness of the glass as it is packed into the moulds. I carefully layer and pack the crushed glass until a thin and even coat exists, so it can barely hold its form once fired. Many of the pieces began their life as doilies that had been made by my grandmother. The doilies have been draped over bowls, moulds taken, and the resulting lace impressions then packed with powdered glass or frit and fired. The results are Oh-so-delicate glass lace bowls, plates and serving dishes.

Within the installation lace bowls sit on lace plates that in turn rest on doilies or lacy placemats, creating layers that allude to an impossible construction of feminine identity within the family that travels through generations. *feast (date)* attempts to shake off layers of constraint and restriction, of domesticity and expected motherhood and yet, it never does. All the while it mourns for the loss of tradition: “As women, we have [...] been enclosed in an order of forms inappropriate to us. In order to exist, we must break out of these forms” (Irigaray, 1993). *Pâté de verre* is often talked about in terms of laciness when discussed within glass references, this is due to how the glass is handled during the packing of the mould. A loosely packed mould will result in holes, formed as the glass melts and the particles adhere to each other in their molten state. Loose packing means that there is not enough material to form a solid layer and so will result in holes as the glass particles pull and adhere, searching out their final form. The technique seems well suited to referencing feminine construction. The translation of the old, traditional forms, of doilies, through material, form, technique and process, into something new yet incredibly fragile, symbolic of a breaking loose, a denial of femininity.



Figure 36: Brooke Zeligman, (2009), *feast* (installation detail from: *xxx* exhibition), *pâte de verre* and mixed media.

As both maker and viewer I respond to the contradictions within the material, to the binaries defied — I am drawn to the lusciousness and the beauty of the material, yet when held at a distance, afraid of its fragility and brittleness, the possibility for ruination and harm. I explore this contradiction by pushing the boundaries of what the material is capable of, taking it to its structural limits, to the point of possible collapse in order to draw out these seemingly opposite elements of *jouissance* and abjection. *Thrice Baked and Fallen* (2007) is an example of this, the material having been baked three times. The glass was allowed to fold in on itself and to devitrify — to crystallise like overcooked toffee — making it sugary sweet looking and exceptionally brittle. *Thrice Baked and Fallen* (Figure 37) was perhaps my most favorite of pieces and one that was destroyed during the transit of the work from Cairns to Perth.



Figure 37: Brooke Zeligman, (2007), *Thrice Baked and Fallen* (from xxx exhibition) slumped *pâte de verre*, 450mm x 450mm x 220mm.



Figure 38: Brooke Zeligman, (2008), *Grandmother's bowl*, *pâte de verre*, 200mm x 200mm x 40mm.

The fragile aesthetic and beauty is used to bring out the *jouissance* of the material, acting as a “lubricant to evoke metaphors of vulnerability, connectivity and interdependence, bearing

witness to the transience of life” (sic) (Osbourne, 2008). *Grandmother’s bowl* (2008), (Figure 38) is another favourite because it comes from the first doily that was lifted from the box, and it connects me to Betty, the woman. In its fragile beauty I find pleasure, an irrepressible joy, an experience fleeting, furtive and beyond words. It is a response to the delicate aesthetic, and the time spent in the making — ultimately futile due to the fragility that lends the work an almost ephemeral quality, and counters my pleasure with a sense of loss.

Jouissance is indefinable. We can describe it as bliss, or enjoyment, but it is more than this. It is an excess that cannot be contained within language and goes beyond pleasure (Grosz, 1989). *Jouissance* exceeds “socially tolerable boundaries” and is problematic to the construction of identity (Grosz, 1989) with its too too muchness. When handling *Grandmother’s bowl* I hold my breath. As if not breathing would stem the thrill that I get from touching something so fragile; a thrill that threatens to overflow, causing me to squeeze just a little too hard and shatter the bowl.

Excess

The moment I came into life [...] I trembled: from the fear of separation, the dread of death. I saw death at work [...] I watched it wound, disfigure, paralyse, and massacre from the moment my eyes opened to seeing. I discovered that the face was mortal, and that I would have to snatch it back at every moment from Nothingness [...] Because of my fear I reinforced love, I alerted all the forces of life, I armed love, with soul and words, to keep death from winning. Loving: keeping alive: naming. (Cixous, 1991, page number)

feast (date) is a work of excess. The title, the tables set with multiple sets of tableware, the glass doilies formed as plates and serving dishes all connote a meal, not just a meal, but a banquet, (Figure 39) for one with only a single complete table setting, a suggestion of extreme consumption and bodily excess. Rosemary Betterton suggests: “The tension between repression and release is inscribed ... [upon] the bodies of women through eating. Femininity and the consumption of food are intimately connected” and excessive consumption indicates woman out of control and “the failure of feminine identity” (1996).



Figure 39: Brooke Zeligman, (2009), *feast* (installation detail, from: xxx exhibition), *pâte de verre* and mixed media.

The theme of excess is *feast* (date) — from the excess that exists within the obsession with the material, the excess that lies within the processes required to work the material, there is the idea of the excess of the consumption of energy that is necessary to engage in those processes — which connects to excess within personal consumption, the excess of the collector of the finished objects, the excess in the repetition of form and the excess that lies within the personal — that of disorder, doubt and dysfunction.

Within excess there is *jouissance*. In *feast* (date) I experience *jouissance* through the beauty and aesthetic of the patterns and rhythms and fragility of the work, and through the material. Glass, with its luscious glow and glittering radiance fascinates and captivates the imagination with its refractory capacity. It is seductive and sensual, the stuff of obsession.

Abjection also exists within excess. As contradictions collide, it is here that meaning collapses and lingers at the edge of reason. Abjection and *jouissance*, different yet the same, are like magnets of opposite poles, their too too muchness must be controlled unless they overwhelm the body.

It is understood that abjection consists of three layers or categories — food, death and the female body (Betterton, 1996). *feast* (date) contains formal signifiers of abjection, which act as multiple layers of meaning, signaling internalised codes and allowing access to what lies beneath the aesthetic. The decorative, domestic nature of the lacy fragile table settings point not only to the construction of femininity, but also the female body and food.

A threat lies behind the glittering crystal and golden façade of *feast* (date). Orally sadistic, it is the fear of being eaten by the unknown, the fine hair rising on the back of the neck, the pimpled goose flesh on arms; a primal unease. Kristeva writes of abjection: “It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced” (1982). When I look at *feast* (date) I see consumption. I hear the crunch. I taste the blood in my mouth. I feel splinters catch along my throat. There is brutality hidden here beneath the delicate exterior that both worries and fascinates.

In the not-liquid/not-solid nature of glass I see the abject made manifest: its ooze and flow when molten, the ubiquitous domestic applications, the association with decoration and craft all allow it to operate as metaphor for the female live body/experience/imaginary. Glass is connected to the storage, cooking, presentation, service and consumption of food, and I have an urge to bite and lick it in its various states, from molten toffee to sugary sweet crystals. Glass, with its potential to shatter, to pierce the skin, to draw blood, forever threatens carefully constructed borders, serving as a reminder of mortality. The female body, food and death — the three layers of abjection — create identification, not just as feminine and female but also and always monstrous.

voice or loss

The women in my family are cooks. On the phone we speak of recipes and flavours. Gourmet triumphs and shameful failures keep us connected. I worked as cook for many years and now I cook only for friends and family, but I liken the processes I use in the kitchen to those of my art practice: the mixing of ingredients; the perfecting of recipes in mould-making; the baking and roasting in the kiln; and the ladling of hot molten glass from the furnace pot. Cooking sustains me in moments of doubt and has become a strategy for when my voice fails me: *there will always be a plate of something I can offer* (Figure 40).



Figure 40: Brooke Zeligman, (2008), *feast*, (installation test detail), *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary.

feast (date) is a work of confession. Within the confessional lies the excess of consumption, an autobiography of emotion. *feast (date)* manifests and embodies all that I cannot say; it confesses all of what must always remain unspoken. In doing so it gives me voice.

Many viewers have shared their stories in response to seeing the work. Tales of family celebrations, of doilies decorating tables, of how they wish they had learnt how to cook or crochet, or that they had not thrown out their aunt's doilies; of grandmother's dishes and forgotten recipes. Some have shared their stories of bulimia, of shame, of guilt and loss.

feast (date) contains the myths and stories of the women of my family; stories told with pride but never shared outside the family.

Here sits my twice great-grandmother Coombs, who never wanted children. When pregnant, she would hitch horse to cart to careen across rough hill paths to shake the leaching life free from her. She did this 14 times. She had only nine children. (Figure 41)



Figure 41: Brooke Zeligman, (2008), *Here sits great grandmother Coombs, pâte de verre*, dimensions vary

What began as a tribute to my grandmother's making has become the story of reluctant matriarchs. Five generations of women coexist in *feast (date)*, present in the layers of doilies, placemats, cutlery and serving dishes. It is a complex emotive appeal that creates connection to family and to history, evoked through the layers, textures, patterns, tones and rhythms of the work. The delicate patterns allude to the cultural construction of

femininity and motherhood. However, hidden in these layers are razor sharp spikes and peaks. Created during the making process they leave tiny glass splinters in fingertips.

But at the table there is more than matriarchal lineage. There are other women present, women who never had a voice. Memory is a fragile thing and these silent women have left no memories.

As my mother ages I listen to her claim providence to stories I have told her; stories of my father's family of which she knew nothing. He was a closed and secretive man. I have only gained access to these stories through the search for family that was denied me, from family who was also denied, who found a fading trail and followed it to me.

As I have told my mother these stories and they have become hers. *Passed on, she says, from a secretive man who shared nothing.* She's not lying. She is reconstructing.

My father who had cruel hands suffered at hands that were cruel. His father, like mine, like him, never shared, only hurt. My father's mother dies young, after losing her second child, a girl, Hannah. My grandmother, never known to me, was hit by a Melbourne tram in 1956.

She was an m word. Miriam.

They were poor. Fled Europe as Nazi Germany rose and spread its toxic shadow. Perhaps my father had never mentioned Hannah because mourning a young child was a luxury they were not allowed. In her grey world of patched and boiled clothes, wrung out to dry, I wonder how often Miriam thought of Hannah?

Through strangers who have sought out family I have learnt the history of a grand family. Associated stories are what they cling to. Zionist heroes. Architects of new Tel Aviv. Builders of armies. I know why my mother claims history. It shines. Romantic and grand when the truth is, for us, for the women of *feast* (date), it is tainted and rotten.

I claim the forgotten. The unspoken. The tragic Miriam and the little Hannah who have no one to remember them. Miriam exists in the gesture of a milk jug, Hannah in the tiny and delicate sugar spoons. Sit here, beside me, whisper your stories, I will remember you.



Figure 42: Brooke Zeligman, (2009), *napkin with bowl* (from: xxx exhibition), *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary. Photographer Eva Fernandez.

“To find a voice. What does it mean? What does it mean when a woman finds her voice? And when she finds it, what then?” (Modjeska, 1990). *feast* (date) gives a voice to me and to all the women in my family. It contains all the stories that are spoken, and those that cannot, must not, be spoken. It is the collective catharsis that Irigaray talks of. Full “creeping sentimentality” (Irigaray cited in Wright, 2008) — full of yearning for what was — what is lost — what I never had and will never have. It unabashedly drips with sentimentality.

“The hours and hours of work involved are ultimately futile” (Angeloro, 2007), the fragile, almost ephemeral state of the glass is symbolic “of man’s hubris” (Angeloro, 2007) and ultimately the countless hours it has taken to make *feast* (date) are just as futile, I cannot recreate what has been lost and anyway — the work is too fragile to survive (Figure 42), even if, like my grandmother’s lace that inspired it, it is boxed away, safe and sound, it will eventually get destroyed like the traditions of lace making that have been lost, but also the stories the woman/women that disappear over time, like the woman my grandmother was who I never knew. “As women, we have [...] been enclosed in an order of forms inappropriate to us. In order to exist, we must break out of these forms” (Irigaray, 1993). Glass, with its decorative history has been tied to the female form as I too have done. Rapturous, decorative, delicious, drawn, stretched and fragile beyond belief, it carries the

threat of rupture, to break out of that form at any given moment.

The confession in *feast* (date) contains “potentially explosive excesses” that must never be uttered. Here lie secrets, strategically contained, preserved, captured fragile, and ready for “polite society”. Noelle McAfee (2004) cites Kristeva when she explains: “Our everyday uses of language in social settings generally operate by trying to contain the ‘excesses’ of language, that is, the potentially explosive ways in which signifying practices exceed the subject and ... her communicative structures”. Through *feast*, excesses, whispered confessions; the unspeakable is allowed.

It is the voice of visuacy, carried through object, form, narrative, presentation and materiality — the insistence of meaning in material. A voice of love, labour, strength, and fragility. A voice of fear, loss and yearning. A voice filled with inaudible excesses. The voice is mine. Bottari writes: “You are what you make — and artists have an obligation to be faithful to their own true nature” (2010). “The portrayal of suffering is [...] for women an act of truthfulness. It’s also akin to an individual and collective catharsis. As women they’ve been obliged to keep quiet about what they go through” (Irigaray, 1993).

The M Words: Elements Gallery, June 2012

The M Words was a joint exhibition with artist Lyndall Adams, held at Elements Gallery in June of 2012, in which I exhibited three sculptural works. *m words i* is a collection of hot cast glass breasts on steel mounts (Figure 43), *zinnias (a grandMother’s garden)* is a grouping of colourful flower-like structures made of hot cast and slumped glass mounted on steel rods (Figure 47), and *murmur* is a kiln cast glass and wood high chair (Figure 45). I have written about the process involved in the making of *murmur* in Chapter 3.

m words

In the making of *m words i* (date) (Figure 43) I received the most precious gifts. Breasts. Beautiful breasts of all shapes, sizes, ages — firm, heavy, perky, soft, round, scarred, puckered, droopy, pendulous beautiful breasts. The women who took part in these works have filled me with absolute joy, so exquisite it becomes too much to bear at times and I find myself turning to doubt and frustration. How is it that I can be worthy of such trust? Such honesty and generosity? My *jouissance* is abject and in a way, I wanted to run from this work before I even began. I now see this work as a very intimate and personal journey full of bravery and generosity, and for that I am thankful. Not every woman has an easy

relationship with her body, her breasts and overly critical self-appraisal can be far too cruel.

I had the privilege and honour of listening to Lekkie Hopkins give a reading of her paper “Bad News: a narrative account of the subjective experience of mastectomy” (2003). The paper is a deeply personal and highly rigorous account of her journey towards a simple mastectomy: “*A simple mastectomy* is medical speak for what is a fairly straightforward medical procedure. They simply cut off your breast”.

At the time of the reading I had been ignoring the dull and consistent ache in my breast and Lekkie’s reading did two equally important things. Firstly it galvanised me into having the mammogram that I had been avoiding. With a strong family history of breast cancer, the dull ache had been a carefully suppressed knot of dread — as it turns out — I am fine. Secondly, the reading was a bolt of pure inspiration. In my mind’s eye I immediately saw an artwork. A wall of breasts, dozens of them! Made from glass they glow softly in the ambient light.

The title of the work *m words* is taken from the words of Hopkins (2003); at night

the *m words* erupted, marching through her dreams like persistent ants. They were never there as she drifted into sleep, but on waking throughout the night, there they’d be, repeating over and over in her head: *mastectomy, mammogram, mammary, Mumma, mutilate, mammal, mastitis, Mum. Mastectomy, mammogram, mammary, Mumma, mutilate, mammal, mastitis, Mum* (p. 131)

The repetition in my work involves a kind of turning back on the object that recycles and reflects the flux of making and the kiln casting process (discussed in Chapter 4). A reconnection with/to the body that engages in the act, of making, of being. When I begin my making there is urgency, a desire to convey the moment, story, experience of the lived body. Otherness, alterity. Cixous asks:

Are we not *always* prey to otherness? ... We ‘take decisions’: in a stroke, we come down on one side — we cut out a part of ourself. We are tortuous, impenetrable. We do the thing we just decided not to do. We are the place of a structural unfaithfulness. To write we must be faithful to this faithfulness. (1997, p. 9)

This idea of being faithful to unfaithfulness is the very flux of making. I have described my

process as eclectic, holistic, part pastiche, part myth making. In doing so I am embracing the excesses and contradictions that live within the act. It is the process performing the work performing the body performing itself.

*No sooner I write...it is
not true.*

*And yet I write hanging on to
Truth.*

(Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, page number)

This is the myth making at work. The stories I tell through my work, the autobiography, the ethnography become mythical, they are as untrue as they are true. Faithful as they are unfaithful.

*a deluge
We would have to annul Time, undo
History. Un-recount. Un-know.*

Un-arrive

Un a gree

- *Begin again at zero, all powerfully*

(Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, page number)

Every time I repeat a motif, an action, an object, I begin at zero. The story begins again, the objects are set free, if only for a second, to become powdered and delicate *pâté de verre*, or in contrast solid, heavy and mounted:

the cliché of *jouissance*, the cliché in the body. (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 11).

The glass breast is an object of excess. It carries the specificity of the lived body. The story of the other; we live, if only for a second, those stories, to see ourselves within that lived experience (Figure 43). I acknowledge that there is much academic discussion surrounding the cultural and social significance of the female breast. This, however, is not where my interest lies. I am interested in the fragility of life and body, and the materiality of glass with its ability to express and embody the lived life.



Figure 43: Brooke Zeligman, (2012), *m words i* (installation detail, from: xxxx exhibition), hot cast glass, steel, dimensions vary. Photographer: Eva Fernandez.

In the exhibition the breasts on display belong to a particular group of women (Figure 43). These breasts are linked by 20 years of friendship.

When younger they were inseparable, over indulgent, a formidable group of post adolescents, invincible, excessive. As they grew older, married, birthed, or not, their lives, inevitably, took different paths, but even when they drifted apart they would always find each other again.

I am a part of this group. Before I left Perth to move across the country, they each cast their breast, shy, brave, laughing, one by one. It was a farewell for me, off to live on the other side of the country. These women are not academics, artists or feminists; they are mothers, nurses, carers, givers. The last woman to cast was scared. Her breasts, double H in bra size, have been a source of great shame. Huge. Pendulous. Heavy. Painful. Her days are marked by discomfort, unwelcome glances and back pain.

The other in all his or her forms gives me *I*. It is on the occasion of the other that *I* catch sight of *me*; or that *I* catch *me* at: reacting, choosing, refusing,

accepting. It is the other who makes my portrait. Always. And luckily. The other of all sorts is also of diverse richness. (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 13)

Despite careful directions, her embarrassment and nervousness, her / portrait at exposing the form of her flesh made her rush through the process. She missed patches. Left holes.

Used too much water. Peeled the cast off before it had properly set. The resulting cast is fragile. It resonates with her horror. I feel it. Know it.

At one point I thought about writing to the Breast Cancer society and asking if they would allow me to contact their members, explaining the project, asking for their participation. I would send out casting kits with instructions and plaster bandage to those willing. I did not. The idea sat with me for a long time. It itched and scratched and pinched and left red marks like a badly fitting bra. The trouble was, it made the work into an awareness campaign. It tied it to a group of unruly cells and forgot all about the stories.

I had already made a choice of asking that the women only cast one breast. This was a response to the "simple mastectomy" concept raised by Hopkins. I did not need to load the work even more. As it is there are two women who have cast both, one is me. I have a story, one of comparison and wishing mine were... better, firmer, even... The other, well, that, is her story.

A story of preservation

In a plaster bandage cast of a breast I found a poem, a haiku:

Inverted white globe
A breast captured in hardness.
Time coagulates

Written in pencil, it is as beautiful as the breast it was formed for (Figure 44).

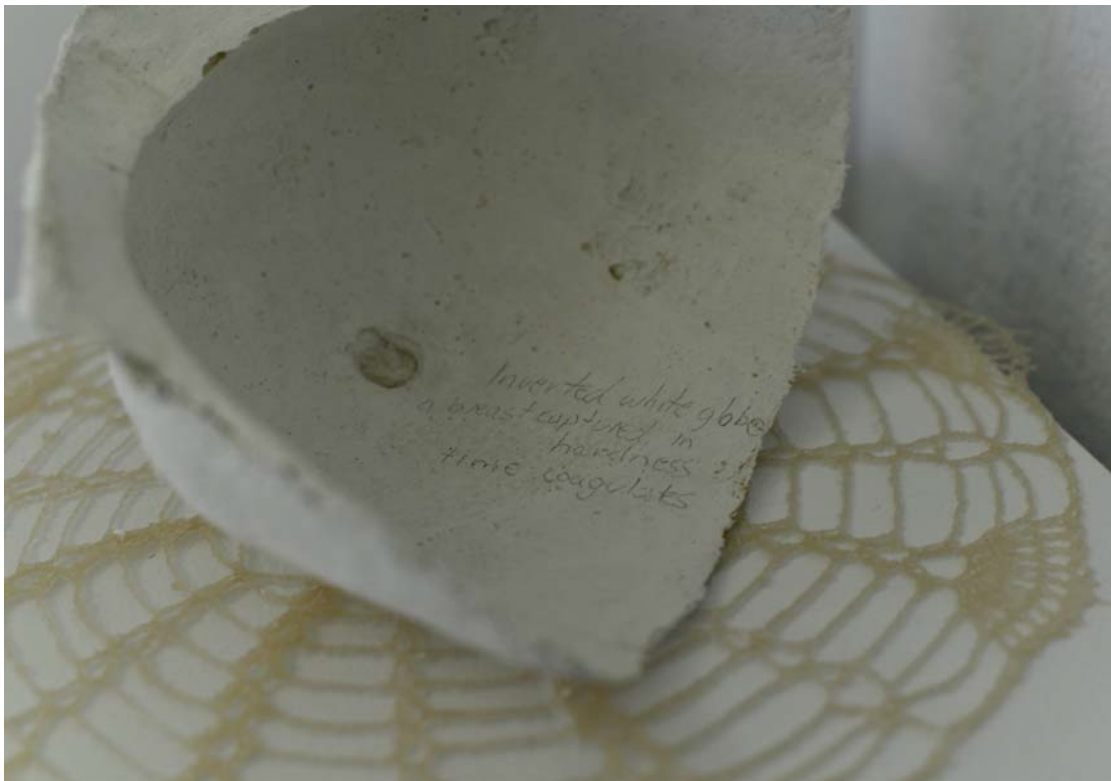


Figure 44: Brooke Zeligman, (2013), *Inverted white globe* (from: xxx exhibition), plaster bandage, *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary. Photographer: Lyndall Adams.

Murmur

murmur (2012) (Figure 45) is a work I have thought of and planned for years, even as an undergraduate it existed, if only in the imaginary. As a third year graduating student, I made its predecessor *Childlessness* (Figure 46 on next page) as the major work for the ECU graduation show.



Figure 45: Brooke Zeligman, (2012), *murmur* (from: xxx exhibition), kiln cast lead crystal, wood pieces from found highchair, 1020mm x 620mm x 420mm. Photographer: Eva Fernandez.

The work began in response to the politicisation of child bearing and is heavily influenced by woman's social and cultural construction as reproductive vessel, as mother.

Here I include an edited discussion of *Childlessness* from my honours thesis *The Unpopular Practice: Being Feminist in an Anti-Feminist Age* (2005):

The project ... had arisen out of personal struggles with the decision to have, or not to have children. Child-bearing and rearing are central to a woman's position and identity within contemporary society. For those who choose not to bear a child this can become very problematic and it raises questions of how one is then positioned in terms of the feminine ideal. Writer and journalist Laura Thompson *Please, let me be childless in peace* (2005), in which she discusses the still seemingly controversial position within popular culture of being a woman leaving her childbearing years childless, and how "mother love still holds an iconic position within Western culture" (Zeligman).

I have also included a discussion of the politicisation of mothering and childbearing in the *rootprints* section of this chapter. What should be acknowledged here are the ongoing and repeating themes within my works, the reoccurring themes that haunt my making — family, childhood, non-childbearing, body, *I*.



Figure 46: Brooke Zeligman, (2004) *Childlessness*, glass and mixed media, dimensions variable.

murmur (date) (Figure 45) exhibited in the *m words* consisted of 22 individually kiln cast pieces, and included three pieces of the original wood highchair. Working with glass objects

contains risk. Things get knocked or dropped and break. Sometimes they fail in the kiln, which was the case with the seat for murmur. Three times I attempted the casting and three times the mould failed. And then two other pieces broke during the testing of the work. It is always frustrating when these things happen, but it is the nature of the material. The inclusion of the wood and the installation of the piece of a plinth mean that for me, the work remains unresolved, the plinth was necessary for the gallery space in which it was set — in a corner next to a door way. Intended to alert the viewer of the object's fragility, most gallery goers were respectful of the visual cue. Except for an elderly gentleman who was as fragile as murmur appears. He used the work as a handrail to help him down the single step. The exhibition opening night became an exercise in anxiety as I watched, waiting for another patron to use the chair for support.

zinnias (a grandMother's garden)

zinnias (a grandMother's garden) (2012) (Figure 47), returns to ideas contained within *rootprints* (date), the hot cast and slumped glass flower-like objects referencing the vulva are held up in steel stirrups. Grouped together as a colourful giant bouquet I return not only to issues of childbearing and medical intervention but also to my grandmother, to the woman I knew, but not really, who wove and knitted, and cooked and crocheted, who kept to herself and planted the brightest coloured flowers she could find. I think the riotously coloured flowers (echoed in the colours of *lifewriting* series (date), Figure 59) reveal a rebellious heart. Like her mother, with her horse and cart, and like myself, she is a reluctant matriarch. They did not have a choice. I do.



Figure 47: Brooke Zeligman, (2012) *zinnias (a grandMother's garden)*, hot cast and slumped glass, steel, dimensions vary. Photographer: Eva Fernandez.

In 2008, not that long after I had begun my thesis journey, my poly-menses, night sweats, mood swings and vagueness were finally diagnosed as peri-menopause. I say finally because there was an immense feeling of relief in understanding why my body had been so unpredictable, my mind so ... floppy. I had gotten used to its vagaries; the disappointment/frustration/shame it had brought me was life. When the symptoms had set in I had felt betrayed, again. *My awkward, fat, thin, tortured body. My childlessness self.*

Diagnosis was freedom. From more than just body but also choice. I say diagnosis because that is what the doctor gave. I was not/am not sick. At 38 I was relieved of any biological imperative by biology. It was liberating. My eye has become more clinical in regards to my body. I do not carry the Brac1 gene that my cousins, who have, and want more children, carry. My menses has become nuisance rather than a sense of time passing. And that in itself is also time, the *drip tock* no longer holds the possibility of denied imperative but rather, impatience for the end. The freedom from menses.

I am impatient for bloody peri-menopause to become menopause.

Chapter 6: *Material Murmurings*, Spectrum Project Space, March 2013

Material Murmurings (2013) was a PhD retrospective, a gathering of the majority of the works completed during the PhD process while investigating the research question: “How do we understand the materiality of glass and what happens when said materiality is approached through a feminist visual arts practice?” Any works absent had been purchased and are documented in the list of completed works in the Appendix.



Figure 48: Brooke Zeligman, (2013), *Material Murmurings* (gallery view, from: xxxx exhibition).
Photographer: Lyndall Adams.

Upon entering the gallery, the viewer was required to navigate a procession of glass breasts, (Figures 48 & 49). *m words i* and *m words iii* were displayed on white plinths in two formal lines at chest height. The primary function of choosing this arrangement was to set up a gendered space; to allow the viewer to recognise that this exhibition, in terms of the work and the artist, was female. For the female viewers the height of the glass breasts echoed their own, allowing for a comparison, a celebration of shape and form, difference and sameness. As invigilator I heard female viewers comment “That’s like MY breast”, and the procession became a welcome, each *m word* a greeter and greeting.



Figure 49: Brooke Zeligman, (2012–13), *m words i & iii* (from xxx exhibition), , hot cast furnace glass with stainless steel, and kiln cast recycled lead crystal with stainless steel, dimensions vary. Photographer: Lyndall Adams.

Male viewers reacted in a multitude of ways; some with curiosity, others with embarrassment, (as did some of the female viewers, although most seemed to connect with, and enjoy the work). Unfortunately there were male viewers who could not move beyond breast as object of desire and possession, reacting in a manner that I can only describe as lecherous. Making what I found to be offensive commentary. This was largely dictated by age, with some younger men (university students), behaving badly. I cannot help but feel that this is a failure of these works. I had hoped that the disembodiment of the pieces would allow for a curiosity that would lead to a connection with the lived experience behind the object, but also an appreciation of the beauty and bravery behind the works, but of course, the viewers are not privy to the process, for them they are isolated objects. While I had hoped that the materiality would take the forms beyond objectification, and while I believe that this did happen for some viewers, it did not happen for all.

While the *m words i* (date) (Figure 50) and *m words iii* (date) (Figure 51) were displayed here together, *m words iii* (date) had progressed from the original *m words i* (date). The process used to create the breasts was kiln casting rather than the hot casting used for *m words i* (date). The materials were different, and yet the same. While still glass and steel, the breasts for *m words iii* (date) had been cast with lead crystal, a much more expensive glass than the furnace glass that had been used in *m words i* (date). Lead crystal is considered precious because of the clarity it permits, the very best service and tableware was once made from lead crystal — although this tradition stopped due to the resulting lead poisoning. Trophies are also made of crystal, and the link to the idea of trophy was strengthened by the steel stands and the white plinths on which the glass breasts were placed. In contrast to the mild steel square bases of *m words i*(date), the stands for *m words iii* (date) were made from stainless steel, their round bases echoing the form of the breast.



Figure 50: Brooke Zeligman, (2012), *m words i*, hot cast furnace glass with stainless steel, dimensions vary. Photographer: Lyndall Adams. Figure 51: Brooke Zeligman, *m words iii*, 13 kiln cast recycled lead crystal with stainless steel, dimensions vary, Photographer: Lyndall Adams.

Both series had been made from recycled glass. *m words i* (date) had been hot poured from the furnace using the recycled glass of glass blowers. The effect of the process used was clarity, the kind of clarity you might expect from a lead crystal object. As a result, the glass breast objects refracted light and glowed (Figure 50). *m words iii* (date) was kiln cast using recycled lead crystal. This time though, the glass has been recycled from my failures, in particular the failed pieces from the making of *murmur*. Now where clarity of material

was expected, it was thwarted, the recycled crystal glass carrying the scars of previous forms created a clouding, that left marks and traces through the glass that were reminiscent of a mammogram. *m words iii* (date) unexpectedly absorbed light (Figure 51).



Figure 52: Brooke Zeligman, (2012), *m words i* (from: xxx exhibition), hot cast furnace glass, dimensions vary. Photographer: Lyndall Adams.

Some of the breasts from *m words i* were placed lying down flat (Figure 52). This was a deliberate choice. During the making of the breasts the casts had sat flat in the studio for some time while I worked on ideas for the installation and display. I would often find myself unconsciously caressing these prostrate forms. The frequency with which my hands strayed surprised me time and time again. And so I'm always delighted when visitors do the same. Perhaps this gesture is a response to a physical memory of the mother's breast? Leaving the breasts lying flat was an invitation to touch, maybe remember, and feel the materiality of the glass, the full roundness of the form, and the varying textures of the skin.



Figure 53: Brooke Zeligman, (2009), *feast* (installation view, 2013), *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary. Photographer: Lyndall Adams.

After being greeted at the door of the gallery by *m words i* and *m words iii*, the viewer was then drawn into the gallery by *feast* (date) (Figure 53). The number of *pâte de verre* tableware pieces were reduced and displayed on a small round kitchen table rather than the five festive banquet tables at the Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery in 2009. The round kitchen table was treated with white polymer and echoed through material and colour, *06.01.08 06.23.08 07.17.08 08.06.08 09.03.08 (the dated series)* (2008) (Figure 54 over page) from the 2008 *rootprints* exhibition. The circular, reflective surfaced white table also echoed the circular bases of *m words i* (date) and the highly reflective surfaces or stainless steel, polymer and auto paint found through the works in the gallery.



Figure 54: Brooke Zeligman, (2008), *06.01.08 06.23.08 07.17.08 08.06.08 09.03.08 (the dated series)*, 2008, hot cast glass, pigments, auto paint, MDF, LED lighting, 720mm x 420mm x 35mm x 5.

The polymer surface of the table used for this final incarnation of *feast (date)* not only connects the installation to other works through formal associations but also reflects the delicate layers of *pâte de verre*, adding to the multi-layering of the glistening pieces while reflecting back up at the viewer, an image of themselves. The old fashion table also draws out the idea of heritage and tradition. The setting here is from a small family-sized meal finished. Cups, plates and bowls randomly stacked are ready to be cleared. The *feast (date)* has passed, only the memory of it remains.



Figure 55: Brooke Zeligman, *Material Murmurings* exhibition, 2013, gallery view across *feast to zinnias (a grandMother's garden)* and *egg, and*, Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley. Photographer: Lyndall Adams.

The glass lace pieces chosen for this second version of *feast (date)* are all in tones of amber

and yellow (Figure 55). Underneath the table, separated by space and colour are delicate pieces predominantly in white, with hints of pink (Figure 56), echoing the white surface of the petals, and the pink glass of the ovum of *06.01.08 06.23.08 07.17.08 08.06.08 09.03.08 (the dated series)* (date). These pieces of *feast* (date) on the floor can be read in two ways, as excess from the finished meal, or as a ghosting of meals and families past.

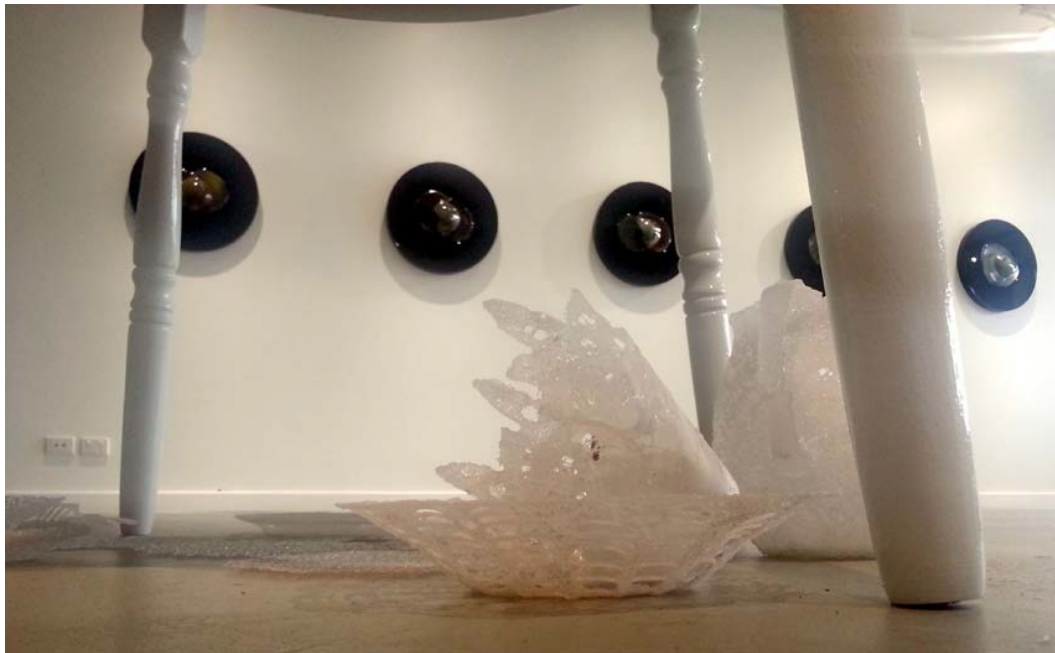


Figure 56: Brooke Zeligman, *Material Murmurings* exhibition, 2013, gallery view under and across *feast* to *untitled series i (yellow)* and *untitled series ii (midnight blue reduction)*, Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley. Photographer: Lyndall Adams.

The table setting of *feast* (date), like *the dated series* (date) that hangs behind it, and the procession of breasts that greet viewers on entry to the exhibition, are all distinctly and recognisably female. The links between reproduction, nurturing, childbearing, menses, mothering and matriarchs occurs through a dialogue between the works, through form, colour, pattern and narrative, each drawing the other out. These are then strengthened by the shared materiality of glass. The delicate fragility of this glass, its decorative use, and its functional associations with the domestic are all connected to the scientific through the oozing, drooping and dripping ovum of the *rootprints* (date) works, echoed in the drooping and dripping vulva like flowers of *zinnias (a grandMother's garden)* (date). The *dated series*, the works from *rootprints* (date) and the continued exploration of those semi-functional forms of the *rootprints* (date) works seen in *I got a brand new shiny ute (and no room for a baby seat)* (date), *Monaro twins* (date), *green, egg, and*, and *untitled series ii*

(*midnight blue reduction*), all connect to *zinnias (a grandMother's garden)*.

The links here are process and material based. They draw out themes of abjection. The works imply menses, bodily fluids and excess, and continue the very female dialogue of the exhibition. Through the various glass-forming processes glass was allowed to flow and droop, playing on the materiality of glass as other, as neither liquid nor solid. The works have been mounted in a way that shows these themes housed in constructed spaces, or under the microscope of medical intervention, held up by steel stirrups, or pierced by steel points, as seen in *m words i* (date) and *m words iii* (date).



Figure 57: Brooke Zeligman *Material Murmurings* exhibition, 2013, gallery view of *zinnias (a grandMother's garden)* on the floor, *rootprint, memory and lifewriting* on the back wall and *I got a brand new shiny ute (and no room for a baby seat)*, and *Monaro twins*. Spectrum Project Space, Mt. Lawley . Photographer: Lyndall Adams.

Diagonally across from *feast* (date) and *the dated series* (date) are two groupings of *zinnias (a grandMother's garden)* (date). The spatial relationship between them creates a zigzagging flow as the viewer moves through to the rear of the gallery. The zinnias formally echo other works, strengthening and creating narrative dialogues. The circular, white polymer coated bases of the zinnias, are plinths (but could be garden beds), and form the same reflective/reflexive function as the round, white polymer-coated table of *feast* (date), the round stainless steel bases of *m words iii* (date), and the wall mirror-sized housings of the wall-mounted ovum works.



Figure 58: Brooke Zeligman, (2013), *zinnias (a grandMother's garden)* (detail, Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley), hot poured and slumped glass, stainless steel, polymer, MDF, dimensions vary. Photographer: Lyndall Adams.

The circular forms of the ovum are repeated in the glass of the zinnias, which, when touched, bob and sway on their long steel stirrups (Figure 58). Many of the zinnia surfaces bear lace-like patterns that echo the use of lace in *feast* (date). The formal connection of colour also links *zinnias(a grandMother's garden)* (date) to the later explorations of the ovum works, with the bright yellows and purples of *Monaro twins* (date) and *egg* (date) (Figures 55 & 57). The garden bed and floral arrangement of the work infers fecundity and fertility and links to *06.01.08 06.23.08 07.17.08 08.06.08 09.03.08 (the dated series)* (date) (Figure 54).

At the back of the gallery, mounted at womb height, is *rootprint, memory and lifewriting* (Figure 57), the very first works made during the PhD journey. These works provide a very linear pause in what has been a non-linear journey around the gallery. They are solid and dark; quite male in amongst so much female. While these works are still very much based in the droop and drip of the abject, it is the containment of these fluid-like glass forms within the hard-edged grid of marine ply box constructions that yank viewers to the back of the gallery. The solid, almost masculine presence is felt also through the boldly exposed linear grain of the varnished wood, creating an unsettling juxtaposition both within the works and in relation to the other rounded works in the gallery.



Figure 59: Brooke Zeligman, (2007), *lifewriting series* (from: xxx exhibition), hot cast glass, polymer, marine ply, LED lighting, 600mm x 600mm x 35mm x 2.

Hidden around the corner from *rootprint*, *memory and lifewriting*, is an odd space; an unsettlingly long and narrow shopfront-like space with tall windows down one side. It's like an extended closet but exposed to the outside world through windows obscured from the outside by a garden. A viewer standing outdoors must make the decision to stop and look in order to see what is in here. What I have placed here is visible and yet not. Hanging opposite the windows are two early works from the *lifewriting series* (date) (Figure 59). Also housed in marine-ply they are bright and light and hung at such close quarters to the viewer the works become about surface and texture.



Figure 60: Brooke Zeligman, (2013), *Inverted white globe* (installation view, from: xxx exhibition), plaster bandage, *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary. Photographer Lyndall Adams.



Figure 61: Brooke Zeligman, (2013), *lost, broken pâte de verre* (installation view, from: xxx exhibition), dimensions vary.

Further down the narrow space, almost hidden behind a structural beam is the story of preservation. *inverted white globe* (date) sits on a tall narrow plinth (Figure 60), on top of an exquisitely delicate pink glass doily. Here the sense of time that is present in so many of my works reverberates again as a breast sits, preserved, defying the aging process. *inverted white globe* (date) links the *m words* series (date), creating dialogues that jump from gallery space to gallery space through the exhibiting of a single breast mould, a nod to the process from which the works have been made.

The sense of preservation in *inverted white globe* (date) (Figure 60) is then starkly contrasted with the scattered and crushed remains of what had belonged to the banquet-sized *feast* (2009) are displayed here, on the floor, at the end of the narrow passage way (Figure 61). These

remains of what was are completely hidden from outside eyes, a decaying skeleton in the closet; highlighting the loss of the works, of time and history. While connecting to the everyday kitchen table sized *feast* (date) on display in the central gallery space.

Murmur (date) and *m words ii* (date) are the last two works that I will describe. They too are separated from the main space. The space they occupy is dimly lit and does not invite immediate attention. These are quiet and contemplative works. The themes of mothering and childlessness are perhaps at their strongest in this room.



Figure 62: Brooke Zeligman, (2012–2013), *murmur*, kiln cast lead crystal, found objects, 1020mm x 620mm x 420mm, Photographer Lyndall Adams.

murmur (date) sits with its back pushed up against the wall (Figure 62). A glass and wood highchair, on a family heirloom white linen and lace table cloth. Lit with two spot lights large

shadows loom against the wall behind it. The chair has been made from lead crystal. Its making was a labour of frustrations and failings with cast pieces breaking both in and out of the kiln.



Figure 63: Brooke Zeligman, constructing *murmur*, 2013, Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley.
Photographer: Lyndall Adams.

The table cloth rug acts again like a plinth, and is intended to keep viewers at bay, warning them to keep their distance. A sense of danger, of possible collapse, destruction and even harm is palpable. Figure 63 shows the delicate process of installing the work. How people whisper in this space is a testament to the force of the medium and form. To put a child in the full size crystal highchair is unthinkable. There is no support to be found in a chair so fragile. *murmur*, like *feast* and *zinnias (a grandMother's garden)* connects to family history. To the unknown, the lived and the imagined.



Figure 64: Brooke Zeligman, (2012–2013), *m words ii* (Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley), *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary. Photographer: Lyndall Adams.

Opposite *murmur* (date), mounted on a mantle height white shelf, is the final series of breasts. *m words ii* (date) (Figures 64–66) is made from *pâte de verre*. Delicate and fine, each is white with a pinkish nipple. At first glance these fragile, translucent breasts appear as if made from finely carved marble and reminiscent of ancient Classical sculpture. Lined up next to each other like specimens awaiting our inspection. Diagonally across from the shelf a group of the *pâte de verre* breasts sit on a plinth (Figure x). They lie flat like the few breasts from *m words i* (date) at the entrance of the gallery. A three-way dialogue exists between these prostrate works displayed on the plinth, the line of standing breasts on the mantle and the glass highchair. There is the suggestion of choice with the unseen child, and of being discarded and set aside.



Figure 65: Brooke Zeligman, (2012–2013), *m words ii* (installation detail, from: xxx exhibition) *pâte de verre*, installation detail, dimensions vary, , Mt Lawley, photograph by Lyndall Adams

The connection to fertility, food and food service, of excess and consumption, and of woman out of control, echoes throughout the exhibition. We might encounter this through the bared ova, the idea of each life beginning at the breast and on to the processional display of lollipop-like breasts. Or the delicate *pâte de verre* breasts lined up and waiting to be chosen by in imaginary infant waiting to be fed, precariously balanced in a glass chair that promises no support. The tradition of lead crystal table and service-ware connecting *i ii* and also *murmur* (date) displayed on my great-grandmother's lace and linen table cloth. To the excessiveness of *feast*, the edible looking sugary sweet, *pâte de verre* table settings the lollipop-like flowers of *zinnias (a grandMother's garden)* (date), inviting to be plucked, and the egg forms and ovum, that nourish and create, until finally, hidden around the corner at the end of the closet is the crushed and spilt candy, the heartbreak and the loss, the rapture and the rupture, the hidden family secrets of broken traditions, displayed for all and none to see of *lost* (date).



Figure 66: Brooke Zeligman, (2012–2013), *m words ii* (installation detail, from: xxx exhibition), *pâte de verre*, installation detail, dimensions vary, Photographer: Lyndall Adams.

Throughout these works there is a sense of loss and exile. Whether it is because the viewer is held at bay by the fragile and often threatening materiality of the glass, or in terms of theme. Of lost traditions, time and family, health, or the *petite mort* of the passing of menses and the children never born, and the destroyed works scattered on the

floor, there is the loss of a life lived in these works (Figure 66).

The final exhibition, *Material Murmurings* (date), allowed me to see the different and separate bodies of work exhibited together for the first time and the polyphonic, multi-valent nature of the materiality of glass was made evident as the different processes and techniques used highlighted the vagaries and challenges of the lived body. I had engaged with multiple glass techniques in the making of these works. The initial intent behind the different techniques was to draw out prevailing themes that became stronger via my choice of different processes. For instance, the link to the abject body is most evident when using hot pouring such as for *rootprints*. In *feast* the notion of excess and the feminine is appropriately explored with the sugary-textured and lacy *pâte de verre* constructions. Fragility and strength, rapture and rupture is conveyed with kiln cast works such as *murmur*. *The M Words* engaged the three major processes used throughout the thesis — those of *pâte de verre*, kiln casting and hot pouring.

What became evident to me during the making and exhibiting of these works is that these themes exist together, always, enriching and enlivening, bringing meaning, changing meaning, creating paradoxes within the works that allow binaries to co-exist and thwart hegemonic knowledges, allowing the other to exist in all her glory. The works, which were not created to be one cohesive show, coexist within the space, each setting up a dialogue with the other, strengthening narratives and creating a rich oeuvre of work that where the lived female body/imaginary/experience can sing in polyphonic harmony. The exhibition displays the value in the post-technical approach towards glass and demonstrates how, via repeating themes and the dialogues that they create together, to understand glass beyond the traditional approaches discussed in Chapter 1.

Conclusion

Through this journey I have embraced Lyndall Adams' (2008) definition of materiality as how the insistence of the medium can be seen to operate within a work, and applied this to explore the operation of glass in contemporary visual arts practice with a feminist praxis. This was done in order to demonstrate new ways of interpreting glass outside of the traditional paradigm for review, which has considered that glass is best "appreciated through an intimate gaze that focuses on skill and traditional notions of beauty" (Osborne, 2006). *Material Murmurings* demonstrates that the multiplicity of the materiality of glass and its polyphonic nature are able to disrupt the traditional categories of interpretation, creating multiple readings of works that interrupt and dislocate narratives.

In the discussions of the body of work I have produced during and for this thesis, and in relation to the central research question: "How do we understand the materiality of glass and what happens when said materiality is approached through feminist visual arts practice?" what has been demonstrated, is that glass is moving beyond the traditional approaches. This has largely been influenced by glass practices appearing on tertiary curricula and being taught within visual and fine art departments. These include rigorous theoretical explorations beyond art history which encourage students to be socially, economically and culturally aware, to become self-reflexive practitioners of the visual arts and their cultural positioning.

It can hardly be expected that glass artists, who have emerged from these curricula adopt approaches to working with the material that are solely traditional, particularly when considering the multi-valent nature of glass, which is historically and metaphorically rich; even more so when seen to be operating within a feminist praxis. This is because glass continuously defeats and denies binary constructs: it has an ability to represent the lived body/imaginary/experience, in my view, more so than any other medium.

Glass embeds a multiplicity of narratives that visual arts practitioners with a feminist praxis are able to embrace in order to create rupture and ambiguity, a recognised approach in feminist scholarship so that multiple stories to coexist. Certainly this has been made evident within my own practice via the works created and can be seen operating within the stories that continue to open and reopen within the works.

This thesis has responded to and addressed the lack of dialogue surrounding glass as a contemporary visual arts material. It has responded to and answered the contemporary scholarly call for new ways to understand and review the visual arts works that are emerging with glass that operates beyond the traditional parameters of review. This has been done through practice-led research that has allowed for articulation and elaboration of the review paradigm.

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Appendix

CV

List of completed works

Newspaper article — “Students lead the way” by Ric Spencer

Feminist Futures Symposium

rootprints exhibition documentation

feast exhibition documentation

The M Words exhibition documentation

Material Murmurings exhibition documentation

Photograph of the artist.

Brooke Zeligman

EDUCATION

- 2007-2013 Doctor of Philosophy (Visual Arts) Candidate, ECU
- 2006-2007 Master of Visual Arts, ECU
- 2005-2006 Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts) Hons 1st Class, ECU
- 2002-2004 Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts), SoCA, ECU

EXHIBITIONS

Solo:

- 2013 *Material Murmurings*, Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA
- 2012 *The M Word*, with Lyndall Adams, Elements Art Gallery, Dalkieth, WA
- 2011 *Brooke Zeligman*, Artespresso, Kingston, ACT
- 2010 *Fragile Inheritance*, Elements Art Gallery, Dalkieth, WA
- 2009 *feast*, The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA
- 2008 *rootprints*, Spectrum Project Space, Northbridge, WA
- 2005 *The Gendered Agenda*, The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA
- 2005 *Bare* - Artopia, Free Range Gallery and Studios, Subiaco, WA
- 2005 *Bare* - D&K Presents, PICA, Northbridge, WA
- 2004 *(un)hatched*, Free Range Gallery and Studios, Subiaco, WA
- 2003 *Fractured*, Black Box White Box Gallery, Mt Lawley, WA
- 2003 *Untitled*, Space Five Installation Space, Mt Lawley, WA
- 2003 *Obsessive*, Black Box White Box Gallery, Mt Lawley, WA

Group:

- 2011 *CAPO '11*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, ACT
- 2010 *Elements Christmas*, Elements Art Gallery, Dalkieth, WA
- 2009 *Off The Wall: Art Sydney 09*, Royal Hall, Sydney, NSW
- 2009 *Elements Express*, Elements Art Gallery, Dalkieth, WA
- 2009 *Sculpture Inside: Cottesloe 2009*, Cottelsoe Surf Lifesaving Club, WA
- 2009 *Sculpture by the Sea: Cottesloe 2009*, Cottesloe Beach, WA

- 2009 *Umm: The ARTiculate Practitioner*, The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA
- 2007 *Drawing in Darkness*, Runtspace, Monash University, Melbourne, Vic
- 2007 *Drawing in Darkness*, Breadbox Gallery, Northbridge, WA
- 2006 *A Place in the World: ACU Visual Art Prize*, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, SA
- 2006 *Synectics: The Fusion of Opposites*, Mundaring Art Centre, Mundaring, WA
- 2006 *Flair 2006: Contemporary Studio Glass*, Perth Council House, Perth, WA
- 2005 *SoCA Honours Graduate Show*, Spectrum Project Space, Northbridge, WA
- 2005 *Hyaline Hybrids*, Spectrum Project Space, Northbridge, WA
- 2005 *Waiting Rooms*, KK Space, Mt Lawley, WA
- 2005 *Incandescence 2005: An Exhibition of Illuminated Art Glass*, Nexus Gallery, Adelaide, Adelaide, SA
- 2005 *International Student Exhibition*, SAU Art Gallery, Adelaide, SA
- 2005 *Mind Maps: Cartography of Glass in Australia*, Craft Victoria, Melbourne, Vic
- 2005 *Continental Drift*, Sculpture Garden Gallery, Melbourne, Vic
- 2005 *Revivify: Material as Content*, Spectrum Project Space, Northbridge, WA
- 2004 *SoCA Graduates Show*, SoCA, ECU, Mt Lawley, WA
- 2004 *Annual Sculpture Survey*, Gomboc Gallery, Middle Swan, WA
- 2004 *Flair 2004: Contemporary Studio Glass*, Perth Council House, Perth, WA
- 2003 *Annual Sculpture Survey*, Gomboc Gallery, Middle Swan, WA

AWARDS:

- 2008 Janet Holmes à Court Artist's Grant
- 2007 Australian Postgraduate Award
- 2007 ECU Excellence Award
- 2006 Finalist, *A Place in the World: ACU Visual Art Prize*, University of Adelaide, Adelaide
- 2004 Graduate Sculpture Award, SoCA, ECU

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS:

- 2013 Davies, C., *Milk glass (in conversation with Brooke Zeligman's Feast)*, Text Journal, Issue 17
- 2011 Hadley, D., *Sculpture by the Sea: The First 15 Years*, Surry Hills, Media 21 Publishing
- 2011 CAPO '11, Gallery Catalogue
- 2010 Schwarz, N., Artnotes WA, *Art Monthly Australia*
- 2010 *Sculpture by the Sea '10* Calendar
- 2009 Bates, T., Domestic Memento Mori, *feast Catalogue*
- 2009 Schwarz, N., Artnotes WA, *Art Monthly Australia*
- 2009 McGrath, J., *Sculpture by the Sea: Cottesloe 2009*, *Art Seen in Western Australia*.
- 2009 Volske, A., Life can be sweet when sun, sea, sculpture and Life Savers meet, *West Australian*, March 5th, p. 1, March 5th
- 2009 Bergmeier, E., Ummm...The Articulate Practitioner, *X Press Magazine*, p. 27, February 5th
- 2008 Schwarz, N., Artnotes WA, *Art Monthly Australia*, Issue 213
- 2008 Bates, T., Poached Fecundity, *rootprints Catalogue*
- 2008 Nugent, M., Challenging Stereotypes, *Weekend Courier*, September 19th
- 2008 Logan, B., Morning Magazine Radio Interview *RTR 91.1*, September 11th
- 2006 Fowler, T., ECU – Visually Spectacular, *3rd Degree*
- 2005 Fatin, M., Morning Magazine Radio Interview *RTR 91.1*, December 8th
- 2005 Spencer, R., Graduates Lead the Way, *West Australian*, Weekend Extra p.13, January 22nd

List of Completed Works

2007:



Rootprint, Memory, Lifewriting, sand cast glass, marine ply, polymer, LED lighting, 600mm x 600mm, exhibited 2007 in *Drawing in Darkness* at runtspace, Caulfield East, Vic and breadbox gallery, Northbridge, WA. Exhibited 2008 in *Rootprints* at Spectrum Project Space, North Perth, WA, and 2011 in *Brooke Zeligman* at Artesspresso, Kingston, ACT, and in 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA



Lifewriting series (black), sand cast glass, marine ply, polymer, LED lighting, 600mm x 600mm, exhibited 2008 in *Rootprints* at Spectrum Project Space, North Perth, WA, and 2011 in *Brooke Zeligman* at Artesspresso, Kingston, ACT
Destroyed in transit 2013.



Lifewriting series (orange), sand cast glass, marine ply, polymer, LED lighting, 600mm x 600mm, exhibited 2008 in *Rootprints* at Spectrum Project Space, North Perth, WA. Exhibited 2009 in *Art Sydney, Off the Wall*, Royal Albert Hall, NSW, and 2011 in *Brooke Zeligman* at Artesspresso, Kingston, ACT, and in 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA

Gifted



Lifewriting series (blue), sand cast glass, marine ply, polymer, LED lighting, 600mm x 600mm, exhibited 2008 in *Rootprints* at Spectrum Project Space, North Perth, WA, and 2011 in *Brooke Zeligman* at Artesspresso, Kingston, ACT

Sold



Lifewriting series (red), sand cast glass, marine ply, polymer, LED lighting, 600mm x 600mm x 35mm, exhibited 2008 in *Rootprints* at Spectrum Project Space, North Perth, WA. Exhibited 2009 in Art Sydney, *Off the Wall*, Royal Albert Hall, NSW, and 2011 in *Brooke Zeligman* at Artesspresso, Kingston, ACT, and in 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA

Gifted



Bastard child ii, sand cast glass, marine ply, polymer, LED lighting, 600mm x 600mm x 35mm, exhibited 2008 in *Rootprints* at Spectrum Project Space, North Perth, WA, and 2011 in *Brooke Zeligman* at Artesspresso, Kingstom, ACT

Sold



Grandmother's bowl, pate de verre, 210mm x 50mm, exhibited 2009 as part of *Feast*, a tableau of works at The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA

Destroyed in transit between 2009.



relic: lace bowl i, pate de verre, 210mm x 50mm, exhibited 2009 as part of *Feast*, a tableau of works at The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA

Destroyed in transit 2009.



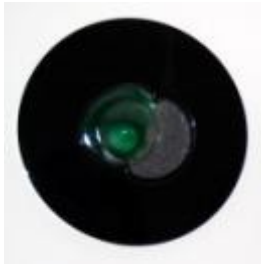
relic: lace bowl ii, pate de verre, 210mm x 50mm, exhibited 2009 as part of *Feast*, a tableau of works at The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA

Destroyed in transit between 2009.



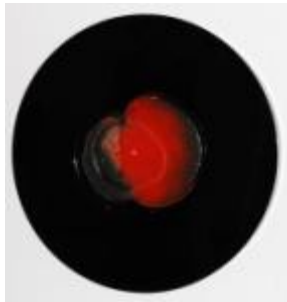
plates with bowl, pate de verre, dimensions variable, exhibited 2009 as part of *Feast*, a tableau of works at The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA, and in 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA

2008:



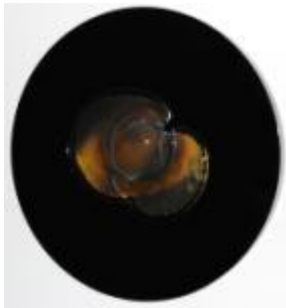
untitled series (green), sand cast glass, MDF, auto paint, LED lighting, 600mm ϕ x 35mm, exhibited 2008 in *Rootprints* at Spectrum Project Space, North Perth, WA

Sold



untitled series (red), sand cast glass, MDF, auto paint, LED lighting, 600mm ϕ x 35mm, exhibited 2008 in *Rootprints* at Spectrum Project Space, North Perth, WA, and 2009 in *Art Sydney, Off the Wall*, Royal Albert Hall, NSW

Sold



untitled series (yellow), sand cast glass, MDF, auto paint, LED lighting, 600mm ϕ x 35mm, exhibited 2008 in *Rootprints* at Spectrum Project Space, North Perth, WA, and in 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA

Sold



06.01.08 06.23.08 07.17.08 08.06.08 09.03.08 (Dated Series), sand cast glass, auto paint, MDF, LED lighting, 720mm x 420mm x 35mm x 5, exhibited 2008 in *Rootprints* at Spectrum Project Space, North Perth, WA. Exhibited 2009 in *Um: the articulate practitioner* at The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA and 2010 in *Fragile Inheritance* at Elements Gallery, Dalkieth WA, , and in 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA



*Grandmother's bowl with relic: lace bowl I, plates and bowls, pate de verre, dimensions variable, exhibited 2009 as part of *Feast*, a tableau of works at The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA, some pieces exhibited in 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA*

Some pieces shown here were destroyed in transit in 2009.



*Here sits Grandmother Coombes, pate de verre, dimensions variable, exhibited 2009 at *Sculpture by the Sea Indoors* Cottesloe, WA and as part of *Feast*, a tableau of works at The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA*



*Arianne's Nanna doily with bowl and serving spoon and fork, (test installation detail), pate de verre, dimensions variable, exhibited 2009 at *Sculpture by the Sea Indoors* Cottesloe, WA and as part of *Feast*, a tableau of works at The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA*

Some pieces shown here were destroyed in transit in 2009



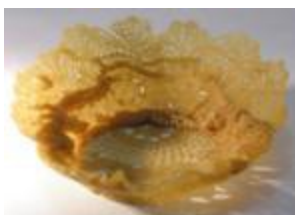
*lace bowls and plates, pate de verre, dimensions variable, exhibited 2009 as part of *Feast*, a tableau of works at The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA*

Some pieces shown here were destroyed in transit in 2009



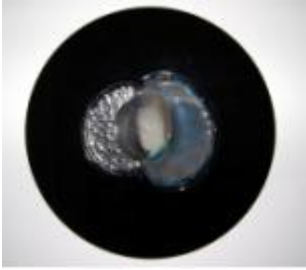
*large lace bowl, fused and slumped pate de verre, dimensions variable, exhibited 2009 as part of *Feast*, a tableau of works at The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA*

Sold



*Thrice Baked and Fallen, fused and slumped pate de verre, 450mm x 450mm x 220mm, exhibited 2009 as part of *Feast*, a tableau of works at The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA*

Destroyed in transit 2009



untitled series ii (midnight blue reduction), sand cast glass, MDF, auto paint, LED lighting, 600mm ϕ x 35mm, exhibited 2009 in *Elements Express* at Elements Gallery, Dalkieth, WA, and Art Sydney, *Off the Wall*, Royal Albert Hall, NSW. Exhibited 2010 in *Fragile Inheritance* at Elements Gallery, Dalkieth, WA and 2011 in *Brooke Zeligman* at Artesspresso, Kingston, ACT, and in 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA



untitled series ii (midnight blue reduction), sand cast glass, MDF, auto paint, LED lighting, 600mm ϕ x 35mm, exhibited 2009 in *Elements Express* at Elements Gallery, Dalkieth, WA, and Art Sydney, *Off the Wall*, Royal Albert Hall, NSW. Exhibited 2010 in *Fragile Inheritance* at Elements Gallery, Dalkieth, WA and 2011 in *Brooke Zeligman* at Artesspresso, Kingston, ACT

Sold



untitled series ii (midnight blue reduction), sand cast glass, MDF, auto paint, LED lighting, 600mm ϕ x 35mm (Sold), exhibited 2009 in *Elements Express* at Elements Gallery, Dalkieth, WA, and Art Sydney, *Off the Wall*, Royal Albert Hall, NSW and sand cast glass, MDF, auto paint, LED lighting, 600mm ϕ x 35mm and *CAPO 2011* at National Archives of Australia, Parkes, ACT, and in 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA

2009:



Lifesavers, fibreglass, polymer, 1500mm x 500mm x 5, in collaboration with Denise Pepper, exhibited 2009 in Sculpture by the Sea Cottesloe, Cottesloe, WA



feast, pâte de verre and mixed media, installation detail from the Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery, Gallery 6, 2009



Green, egg, and, sand cast glass, MDF, polymer, LED lighting, 600mmφ x 35mm, exhibited 2010 in *Fragile Inheritance* at Elements Gallery, Dalkieth, WA and 2011 in *Brooke Zeligman* at Artesspresso, Kingston, ACT, and in 2013 in *Murmurs the Material* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA

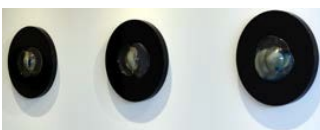


Monaro Twins, sand cast glass, LED lighting, lithium ion battery, MDF, polymer 700mm x 420mm x 35mm x 2, exhibited 2010 in *Fragile Inheritance* at Elements Gallery, Dalkieth, WA, and in 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA

Sold



I got a brand new ute (and no room for a child seat), sand cast glass, LED lighting, lithium ion battery, MDF, polymer 700mm x 420mm x 35mm x 2, exhibited 2010 in *Fragile Inheritance* at Elements Gallery, Dalkieth, WA, and in 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA



untitled series ili (midnight blue reduction), sand cast glass, MDF, auto paint, LED lighting, 600mmφ x 35mm (Sold), exhibited 2009 in *Elements Express* at Elements Gallery, Dalkieth, WA, and Art Sydney, *Off the Wall*, Royal Albert Hall, NSW and sand cast glass, MDF, auto paint, LED lighting, 600mmφ x 35mm and *CAPO 2011* at National Archives of Australia, Parkes, ACT, and in 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA



*Tissue Thin Skin, pâte de verre, dimensions vary, exhibited 2009 as part of *Feast*, a tableau of works at The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA*

Destroyed in transit 2009



*napkin with bowl, 2009, pâte de verre, dimensions vary, exhibited 2009 as part of *Feast*, a tableau of works at The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA, and in 2010 in *Fragile Inheritance* at Elements Gallery, Dalkieth, WA and in 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA*

Destroyed in transit 2013



*Cup of tea luv ii, pâte de verre, dimensions vary, exhibited 2009 as part of *Feast*, a tableau of works at The Moores Building, Fremantle, WA, exhibited 2010 in *Fragile Inheritance* at Elements Gallery, Dalkieth, WA*

Sold

2012:



murmur, 2012-2013, kiln cast lead crystal, found objects, 1020mm x 620mm x 420mm, exhibited 2012 in *The M Words* at Elements Gallery, Dalkieth, WA and 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA



m words i, 2012, hot cast glass, steel, installation detail, dimensions vary, exhibited 2012 in *The M Words* at Elements Gallery, Dalkieth, WA and 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA

Sold



zinnias (a grandMother's garden), 2012, hot cast and slumped glass, steel, dimensions vary, , exhibited 2012 in *The M Words* at Elements Gallery, Dalkieth, WA and 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA



m words ii, 2012-2013, *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary, 2013, exhibited 3013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA

2013:



m words iii, 2013, kiln cast recycled lead crystal with stainless steel, dimensions vary, , exhibited 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA



Inverted white globe, 2013, plaster bandage, *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary, installation view, Spectrum Art Gallery, exhibited 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA

Gifted



lost, 2013, broken *pâte de verre*, dimensions vary, exhibited 2013 in *Material Murmurings* at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, WA

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Date: Jan 22,
2005;

Section: Weekend Extra;

Page: WEE 13

Students lead the way

Social duty, social consciousness, socialist riddles . . . and hummingbirds. Ric Spencer visits some of Perth's latest visual arts exhibitions.

This year's visual arts openings began in earnest last week with a couple of student-run initiatives showing the way. At the Artshouse Gallery in the Northbridge cultural centre, Patrick Doherty and his friends have put together *Duty Free*, a highly organic and socialist statement with a strong vibe.

Even if the title came from a throwaway line it seems apt to ask questions about social duty in the climate of recent catastrophe. When does our sense of social duty kick in? Where are our personal boundaries in relation to community, duty and a sense of wanting to care?

In light of these questions I found walking into *Duty Free* intriguing. The show works on the seesaw of refusal and acceptance. Refusal to feel duty toward a system, to be part of the mainstream, but the show is also about building some form of alternative communal consciousness.

Duty Free, as did the recent graffiti extravaganza at PICA, continues to proffer street art as the art of social consciousness made by individuals who sidestep social duty by sitting outside the system.

This position feeds off the old quandary of Marxist alienation, the taking away of creative power and indeed social consciousness by capitalist society. But these shows always make me wonder how much of this artistic positioning is just aesthetic bluff.

In terms of these questions, there are some stand-out pieces among the barrage of material covering all available wall space. Jacob Smith's *Modern Man Series* illustrates beautifully the need of adolescent manhood to be seen standing aside from social duty.

His soft, almost pathetic photos of male ego come close to nailing the socialist riddle put up by *Duty Free*.

The portraits of Thomas Jeppe's local band, *Homicide*, in full throttle show the

adolescent male in another light. Raw and aggressive, the band sits outside the mainstream, yet there is a form of social duty in both what the band is undertaking and in the images themselves.

Patrick Doherty's Series 1-8 are skilfully drawn, sexually explicit works which explore that inept, hollow feeling you get when you first realise you're a whore to an economic system.

Duty Free came together over a few days in the Artshouse space and is curated in an open and vital style. Uninvited guests were also welcome to show alongside those sought for the exhibition, adding to the sense of communal cause. Revivify, at Spectrum Gallery, is a collaborative effort between Brooke Zeligman, Claire Canham and Ben Mitchell. The exhibition consists of a number of slump glass pieces and some urbanscapes by Mitchell. Zeligman and Canham have the same melancholic love of glass that an alcoholic might have for a bottle.

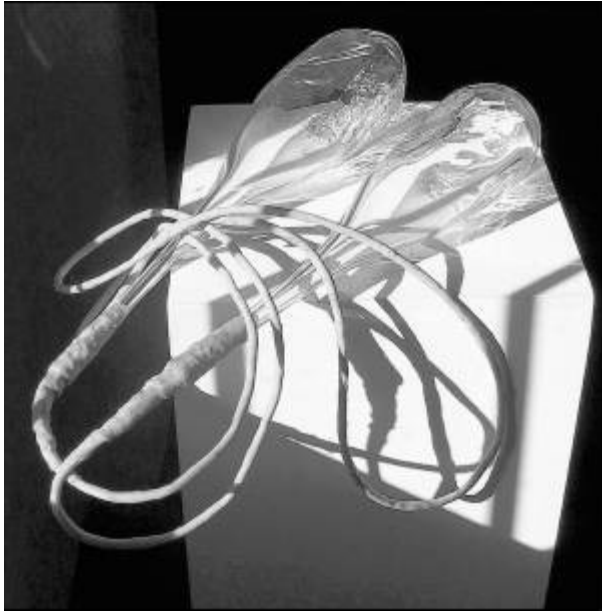
There is a cherub of a show at the Free Range Gallery in Hay Street, Subiaco. Hummingbird Lives is the first solo effort for Jodi Bassett. The exhibition is a cascade of small works, over variously by hammering, drilling and weaving. Each depicts a hummingbird, caught in different stages of flight.

Bassett could not be at the opening because she is bed-bound with myalgic encephalomyelitis or chronic fatigue syndrome, a debilitating illness that manifests symptoms based on neurological, cardiac, immunological and endocrinological dysfunction. She can't sit up for too long so the fact that she has managed to put this show together lying down is astounding. She has chosen the hummingbird as her proxy and also as a metaphor for her relationship with her illness.

It's easy to overdo a metaphor, or even simply miss with it, but in this case it works well. These hummingbirds are meticulously painted, treated with love. They are controlled — but they break out, venting their frustration at every opportune time. They are both the artist and the illness.

I couldn't help but think of Matisse's bed-bound later works while viewing Hummingbird Lives. Matisse's cut-outs give me that feeling of insight into the personal nature of the artist as an organic entity, dealing with both fragility and strength.

I left Hummingbird Lives in adoration of Bassett and the relationship she has with her illness. The exhibition speaks of respect, awe, containment and pure hatred. This is a critical and intensely personal show and I felt very humble viewing it.



Revivify.



Revivify, at Spectrum Gallery.



Brooke Zeligman's slump glass.

The images in the above article were incorrectly labelled or not accredited to the artists; the above work is by Claire Canham, as is the first image. The middle image is of a work by Benjamin Mitchell.

The Australian Women's and Gender Studies Association International Conference:

Vision, Memory, Spectacle

Call for papers

Abstract

Conference program

PowerPoint presentation

Feasting on Excess:

Feminist Inquiry through Practice-led Research in the Visual Arts

This visual presentation and critical commentary presents the work in progress of a doctoral candidate undertaking practice-led research in the visual arts. It offers a body of work entitled *Feast*, a delicate dangerous tableau made from *pâté de verre* – crushed powdered glass. Glittering golden, it is a table setting where a feast is imminent; an orally sadistic work that plays on desire, memory and excess. *Feast* is an embodied discourse that is the foundation for the research project *Visible*.

Visible uses a practice based methodology to explore the central research question: "How and why do artists manipulate glass as an expression of female identity?" The research looks at the work of contemporary female artists who use the qualities inherent within glass, such as the paradox between strength and fragility, to operate as metaphor for aspects of female experience. This analysis is done via a French Feminist framework.

Like feminism(s) itself, glass is fluid, adaptable, multivalent, and changeable. *Feast* is the first of three works exploring the female imaginary through the theme of excess, showing how glass operates within a feminist visual arts praxis.

Bio

Brooke Zeligman is a visual artist whose sculptural practice incorporates elements of glass, performance and mixed media. She has exhibited extensively in WA and the eastern states and is currently a doctoral candidate at ECU.

Feasting on Excess

the too too muchness of an
overflowing glass in practice led
research



Feast, April 2008, test installation detail, pâte de verre cast and slumped glass

These images are from a work in progress titled *Feast*. They are part of the documentation process I use when testing my ideas, and should be thought of as a first draught. The work will not be exhibited until late 2009 early 2010, so this is a sneak preview.



Feast is an incredibly fragile work: all the pieces are made in glass via a process called *pâte de verre* – this translates as “paste of glass”. It is labour intensive and the oldest known glass making method in which crushed and powdered glass is used to paint and pack moulds. These are then fired in a kiln and cooked.

Feast is emerging as the central focus of my practice-led research project entitled *Visible*. Glass art is generally recognised as belonging to the craft world in the visual arts. My interests as researcher lie in unpacking how glass can be interpreted within a feminist praxis beyond our current understanding.

I use a post-structuralist feminist paradigm to do this.



I obsessively work with glass within my sculptural practice. It is a guilty pleasure, like eating too much chocolate. I indulge my obsession in order to draw out a paradox that I believe exists within the material: an experience of both *jouissance* and abjection. I think this is due in part to the nature of the material; the physical structure of glass which is indefinable, neither liquid nor solid, an 'other'. A fascinating paradox sits within this not-liquid, not-solid, indescribable character.

As both maker and viewer I respond to this contradiction – I am drawn in by the lusciousness and the beauty of the material yet held at a distance, afraid of its fragility and brittleness, the possibility for ruination and harm. I explore this contradiction by pushing the boundaries of what the material is capable of, drawing out these seemingly opposite elements of *jouissance* and abjection.

Thrice cooked and fallen is an example of this, having been cooked three times. The glass was allowed to fold in on itself and to devitrify, to crystallise like overcooked toffee, making it sugary sweet and exceptionally brittle.



I found the beginnings of *Feast* in a box in a cupboard. In the box was my Grandmother's lace made over a life time that I thought was cold, quiet, aloof. My grandmother's lace has exposed a woman that I never knew: isolated and contemplative, conversational and confessional.

This piece, *Granny's bowl*, is a favourite of mine. In its fragile beauty I find pleasure, an irrepressible joy, an experience fleeting, furtive and beyond words. It is a response to the delicate aesthetic, and the time spent in the making – ultimately futile due to the fragility that lends the work an almost ephemeral quality, and counters my pleasure with a sense of loss.

The fragile aesthetic in *Feast* is used to draw out the beauty and the *jouissance* of the material. Margot Osborne describes beauty as a lubricant used to evoke metaphors of vulnerability, but also of connectivity and interdependence, that bears witness to the transience of life and the futility of human endeavour (2008, p. 25).

Every time I handle *Feast*, little pieces of it crumble in my fingers.



Granny's bowl, 2007 in *Feast*, June 2008, test installation detail, pâte de verre cast and slumped glass

Jouissance is indefinable. We can describe it as bliss, or enjoyment but it is more than this. *It* is an excess that cannot be contained within language and goes beyond pleasure (Grosz, 1989, p. xix). *Jouissance* exceeds “socially tolerable boundaries” and is problematic to the construction of identity (Grosz, 1989, p. 56) with its too too muchness.

When handling *Granny's bowl* I hold my breath. As if not breathing would stem the thrill that I get from touching something so fragile; a thrill that threatens to overflow, causing me to squeeze just a little too hard and shatter the bowl.



Feast is a work of excess. The title, the table setting, the pieces of glass doilies laid out in plates and serving dishes all connote a meal; not just a meal but a banquet, a suggestion of extreme consumption and bodily excess. In *Intimate Distance* Rosemary Betterton suggests that “The tension between repression and release is inscribed ... [upon] the bodies of women through eating. Femininity and the consumption of food are intimately connected” and excessive consumption indicates woman out of control and “the failure of feminine identity” (1996, p. 131).

Feast is a work of confession. Within the confessional lies the excess of consumption, an autobiography of emotion. *Feast* manifests and embodies all that I cannot say; it confesses all of what must always remain unspoken and is unspeakable. In doing so it gives me voice.



Feast, June 2008, test installation detail, pâte de verre cast, slumped and hot formed glass

The confession in *Feast* contains 'potentially explosive excesses' that must never be uttered. Here lie secrets, strategically contained, preserved, captured fragile, and ready for "polite society". Noelle McAfee (2004) cites Julia Kristeva when she explains: "Our everyday uses of language in social settings generally operate by trying to contain the "excesses" of language, that is, the potentially explosive ways in which signifying practices exceed the subject and ... her communicative structures" (p. 13).

Excesses, whispered confessions; the unspeakable is allowed at this table.



Within excess there is *jouissance*. In *Feast I* experience *jouissance* through the beauty and aesthetic of the patterns and rhythms and fragility of the work, and through the material. Glass, with its luscious glow and glittering radiance fascinates and captivates the imagination with its refractory capacity. It is seductive and sensual, the stuff of obsession.

Abjection also exists within excess. A too too muchness that must be controlled unless it overwhelms the body. It is understood that abjection consists of three layers or categories — food, death and the female body (Betterton, 1996, p. 135). *Feast* contains formal signifiers of abjection which act as multiple layers of meaning, signalling internalised codes and allowing access to what lies beneath the aesthetic. For example the decorative, domestic nature of the lacy fragile table setting points to the construction of femininity, the female body and food.



Feast, June 2008, test installation detail, pâte de verre cast and slumped glass

The women in my family are cooks. On the phone we speak of recipes and flavours. Gourmet triumphs and shameful failures keep us connected.

I worked as cook for many years and now I cook only for friends and family, but I liken the processes I use in the kitchen to those of my art practice: the mixing of ingredients; the perfecting of recipes in mould making; the baking and roasting in the kiln; and the ladling of hot molten glass from the furnace pot. Cooking sustains me in moments of doubt and has become a strategy for when my voice fails me: there will always be a plate of something I can offer.



My pans and utensils are now moulds and ladles. My oven — the kiln; my soup pot — the glass furnace; my ingredients chop and change between plaster, silica, grog, glass, and words. It is experimental cooking. There will be fallen soufflés and burnt biscuits before Feast — written or glass — is served. As I borrow ingredients from the words of others, reading recipes of knowledge, I wonder if their ideas will be crisp, crunchy, or soggy day old biscuits, I dream about putting my books into the oven to see if their smell is appetising, if the aroma of the slowly baking pages will make my mouth water.



Folded Serviette, 2007 in *Feast*, June 2008, test installation detail, pâte de verre cast and hot formed glass

A threat lies behind the glittering golden façade of *Feast*. I describe *Feast* as “orally sadistic”, a term borrowed from Rod Giblett who uses it in connection with Freud’s “monstrous uncanny”. It is the fear of being eaten by the unknown, the fine hair rising on the back of the neck, the pimpled goose flesh on arms; a primal unease. Kristeva writes of abjection; “It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced” (1982, p.1). When I look at *Feast* I see consumption.

I hear the crunch. I taste the blood in my mouth and feel the splinters slide down my throat. There is brutality here, hidden beneath the delicate exterior, it worries and fascinates.



In the not-liquid/not-solid nature of glass I see the abject made manifest: its ooze and flow when molten, the ubiquitous domestic applications, the association with decoration and craft all allow it to operate as metaphor for the female body. It is connected to the storage, serving and consumption of food, and I have an urge to bite and lick it in its various states, from molten toffee to sugary sweet crystals.

Glass, with its potential to shatter, to pierce the skin, to draw blood, forever threatens carefully constructed borders, serving as a reminder of mortality. The female body, food and death — the three layers of abjection — create identification, not just as feminine and female but also and always monstrous.



Here sits Grandmother Coombs, 2008, pâte de verre cast glass

Feast is the stories of the women of my family; stories told with pride but never shared. Here sits my twice great grandmother Coombs, who never wanted children. When pregnant, she would hitch horse to cart to careen across rough hill paths to shake the leaching life free from her. She did this 14 times. She had only nine children.

What began as a tribute to my Grandmother's making has become the story of reluctant matriarchs. Five generations of women exist in *Feast*, present in the layers of doilies, placemats, cutlery and serving dishes. "It is a complex emotive appeal" that creates connection to family and to history, evoked through the layers, textures, patterns, tones and rhythms of the work.

The delicate patterns allude to the cultural construction of femininity and motherhood. However, hidden in these layers are razor sharp spikes and peaks, created during the making process they leave tiny glass splinters in fingertips.



In the words of Shohini Chaudhuri; “The abject terrifies us but fascinates us all the same” (2006b, p. 94). This duality makes the very core, the very nature of abjection ambiguous — it continuously attracts and repels, threatening boundaries with its uncharacterisable nature. This, the paradox of desire and horror of abjection, is also the paradox of glass. With its power to seduce and mesmerise — the unnameable, unspeakable, undefinable draws us in yet repels us.

“The time of Abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth” (1982, p. 9).

This dark, dangerous revelation, this too too muchness, operates like *jouissance* — thrilling, seductive. *Feast* brings us to a confrontation with both sides of excess, bringing us face to face with both abjection and *jouissance* through form, narrative and materiality. The most compelling layer is the paradox that operates within this expulsion/rejection, the paradox between desire and repulsion that exists as a fascination of that which is considered taboo.



Abjection is “the place where meaning collapses” (Kristeva, 1982, p.2). It lingers at the edges of meaning, and threatens to annihilate the clean and proper social subject, just as *jouissance* threatens borders by returning us to a place that is pre-language, pre-symbolic (Grosz, 1989, p. 56). Abjection and *jouissance* are two sides of the same coin — seemingly contradictory their sides touch and repel like magnets of opposite poles.



Arianne's Nanna's doily with bowl and serving spoon, 2008, pâte de verre cast glass

My Grandmother and her sister were textile artists – wives, mothers, home makers – textile artists. They learnt from their mother Alice, whose tissue thin skin, fragile as the glass of *Feast* always smelt of mothballs. Alice liked to play games: when asked her age, she would always reply: “Older than my hair, older than my teeth.”

Friends have started to give me the doilies they have inherited from their grandmothers and great aunts. They have them tucked away in cupboards, not really wanted but still too precious to throw out. I think they too value the hours spent, the dreams woven, and recognise the lives being forgotten.



Feast is a gift of excess to women. It goes beyond exchange, beyond surface, and never demands response. The years of work involved in *Feast* are ultimately futile because the fragility of the material renders the work ephemeral. The work is too fragile to survive, even if, like my grandmother's lace, it is boxed away safe sound — it will disintegrate.

Like the time taken to make the work and the stories that lie hidden within it, I can never recreate what is lost. *Feast* is a multivalent work, an overly rich layer cake. The purpose behind creation, the seductive glittering gorgeousness of surface, the dark heart that reveals itself through consideration, the durable image from documentation, and the futility behind the hours and hours of making something that cannot last, are allowed a seat at the table, to co-exist within their contradictions. It is an exploration and response into the too too muchness of meaning within glass.

To the child hiding from familial storms in the kitchen - hands sticky
from sickly sweet security.



Rootprints:
Spectrum Project
Space, September,
2008

Rootprints: a proposal for exhibition

Rootprints is a series of carefully constructed works that explore the paradox between repulsion and desire, tracing a path through the notion of the abject and laying bare bodily processes and sexual drives. The body of 3D works incorporates 'hot cast glass' elements with marine ply and LED lighting to create a conduit through memory and desire. The works respond to the ideas expressed within Feminist scholarship on the body, particularly the ideas found within the writings of Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous.



Brooke Zeligman, *Rootprint, Memory and Lifewriting*, 2007. Hot cast glass, marine ply and LED lighting, 600mm x 600mm x 40mm x 3

The processes used within the works include hot glass casting – the ladling of molten glass into a preformed mould. With the *Rootprints* series the glass is poured over a sand mould and allowed to flow and find its own resting place. Making each piece unique and preserving the material's liquid nature, capturing a sense of movement and fluidity. The skin of the glass is then echoed through the highly reflective treatment of the marine ply that houses each piece within a grid, referencing the construction of the urban space.

It is proposed that the exhibition will be of a maximum of 13 works – the majority of which have already been constructed, and will occupy Gallery 6 of the Moores Building for 1 week. The placement of the works will be designed to create within the viewer an awareness of their physicality through a connection between the body and the work as they navigate through the space. There will be both floor and wall works. As the majority of the work has been constructed the exhibition will be ready for installing anytime after the 1st of May and the exhibition date is flexible. For this reason no preferred date has been nominated as the show can fit into the Moores program where suited.



you are invited to the exhibition opening of

rootprints

an exhibition of 3d works by Brooke Zeligman

opening 6pm, Friday 12th September, 2008

Spectrum Project Space
221 Beaufort Street
Northbridge, WA

opening 2–6pm, Wednesday – Sunday 12th–26th September

(08) 9328 2088 spectrum@ecu.edu.au

<http://www.sca.ecu.edu.au/projects/spectrum>

A body of carefully constructed works that combine “glossy mounds of free formed glass sensuously poured from a long handle” (Schwarz, 2008) with marine ply, auto-paint and lighting. The pieces are meditations on childbearing that explore the paradox between repulsion and desire; tracing a path through the notion of the abject and laying bare bodily processes and sexual drives.

Schwarz, N. (2008). Artnotes WA. *Art Monthly Australia, September* (213), p.56.



rootprints

3d works by brooke zeligman



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Poached Fecundity

Brooke Zeligman's *Rootprints* comprises four series of minimalist sculptures, sixteen hot poured glass egg forms nestled in glossy geometric boxes. Glass is a uniquely abject medium: both solid and liquid, fragile and strong, organic and industrial, associated with food, nurturing and consumption, with injury and rupture, with containment and visibility.

Rootprints skilfully exploits these qualities, preserving moments of fluidity and temporality. The works are viscerally compelling; the conceptual and affective depths belied by glossy minimalist surfaces and sparsity of form.

Ova are symbols of fertility, nourishment and sustenance, of the potential for life. Like glass they are also extremely abject: chaotic life contained by a fragile membrane, easily destroyed. Brooke's ova are simultaneously luscious and futile; poached fecundity, the *jouissance* of life and death. Hot poured glass albumin flows around a yolk fertilised by small LED lights. The solidity of each egg disrupts the usual association of glass as hollow vessel and denies the fragility of the medium. Layers of texture and colour form complicated depths.

The visceral excess of the eggs is framed by painted or stained marine ply: the semiotic chora is contained by order, language and culture; "me" safely separated from "(m)other" by the Law of the Father¹. The smooth surfaces and sharp edges of the frames provide a stark contrast to the textural and tonal complexity of the eggs, a safe zone between the world and the abyss: "there, I am at the border of my condition as a living being"². In viewing the works, we are forced to navigate the source of life and the immanency of death, "an impure process that protects from the abject only by dint of being immersed in it"³.

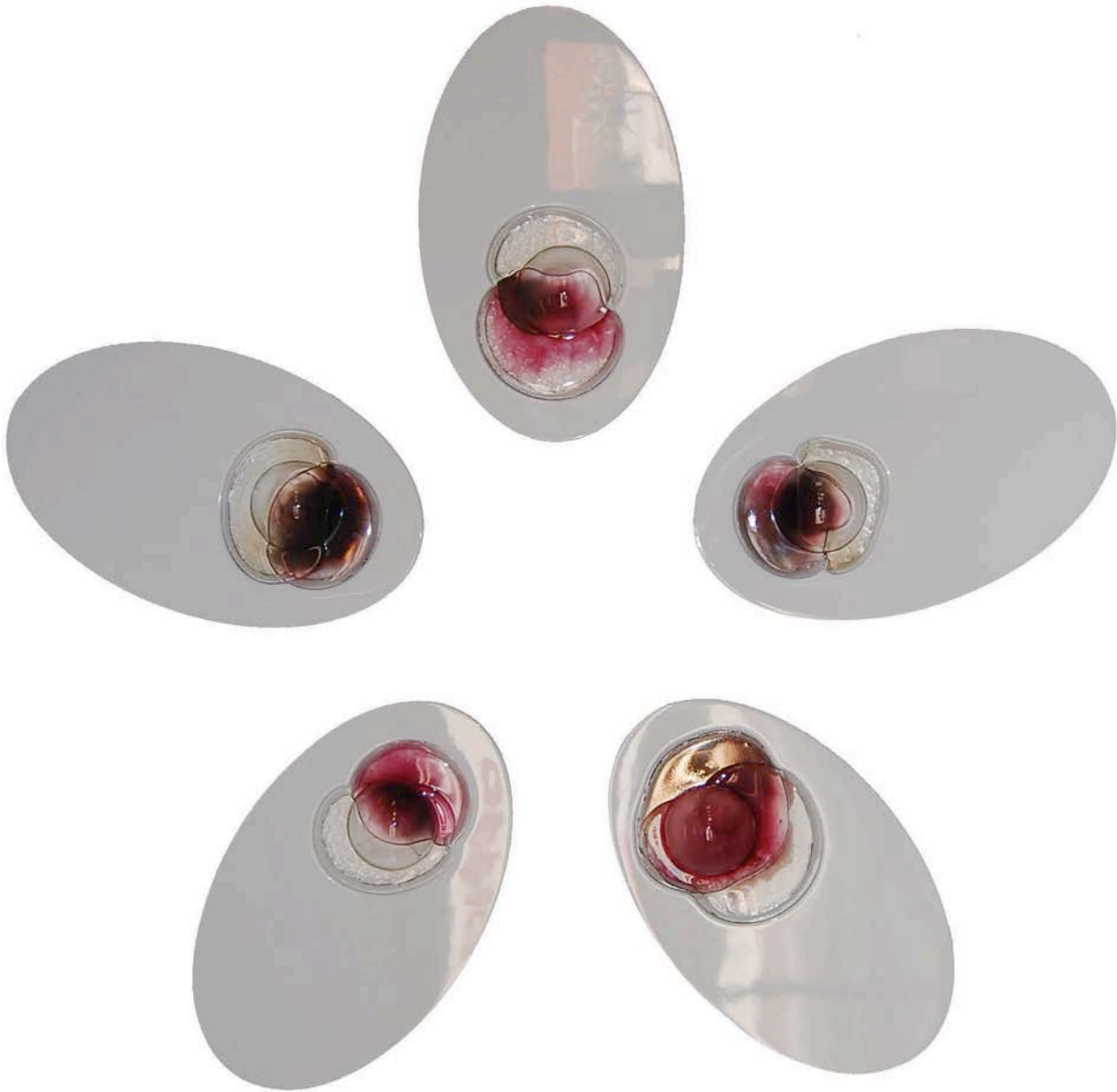
Packaged in inorganic vessels, the ova of *Rootprints* are presented for consumption in polished industrial containers, the mechanisation and commodification of modern reproduction. The series *06/01/08 06/23/08 07/17/08 08/06/08 09/03/08*, is particularly evocative of the medicalisation of reproduction: five pink ova contained in sterile white petri dishes, coldly illuminated by the blue-white of hospitals and laboratories. The work subtly raises ethical questions about the hyper-fecundity induced by "Assisted Reproductive Technologies" to improve the chances of conception. The series asks what happens to the unsuccessful eggs or the unwanted embryos that result from this excess of creation. The work also conflates petri dishes with flowers, the reproductive organs of plants, suggesting selective breeding principals are at work.

The quadtych *Life Writing Series* celebrates joyously in light browns and bright red, blue, orange and purple. The work signifies the "yummy mummy" of contemporary culture, the happy, well rested and impeccably quaffed mother of magazine and tv ads, whose baby is always laughing and cuddly and whose house, like her baby's bum, is spotless. This series also draws attention to the interchangeability of babies within our reproductive commodity culture; like Skittles one bright, happy baby is much the same as the next. The deep purple egg however, provides a note of dissonance, complicating this happy shiny scenario.

The glossy black circles of *Untitled Series 1* allude to the incomprehensibility of life, the elusive and random nature of conception and gestation. The circles connote the viewing frame of a microscope: a demonstration of the ineffectuality of reductionist science. Our attempts to determine the origin of life by isolating a single organism from its environment or the code of DNA are shown to be futile in the complexity of the universe. Reflected back to ourselves in the shiny



Rootprint, Memory and Lifewriting, 2007
Sand cast glass, marine ply and LED lighting
600mm x 600mm x 35mm



06/01/08 06/23/08 07/17/08 08/06/08 09/03/08, 2008

Sand cast glass, MDF, auto paint and LED lighting
720mm x 420mm x 35mm

surface of the frame, this work suggests that we can only see our limitations.

The triptych *Rootprints, Memory, Lifewriting* is a lament in murky dark browns, blues and greens, evoking the primordial soup, our tenuous connection to existence and to other lifeforms: “an ambiguous relationality”⁴. This work most successfully manifests the semiotic chora of Kristeva⁵, the earliest pre-linguistic stage of development, when self is indistinguishable from other. Dominated by the chaos of perceptions, feelings and needs, we are the pure materiality of existence. This work is an embodied subjectivity: “the site of an elementary transfer that disturbs the borders between inside/outside, intelligible/sensible, self/other”⁶.

Rootprints explores the complexities and contradictions of re/production in a culture that simultaneously valorises and rejects mothering through several works that re/present the significance of our reproductive options and decisions. The works resist didactic conclusions, manifesting instead the cyclical, non-linearity of Hélène Cixous’ *écriture féminine*⁷.

The elegant simplicity of *Rootprints* creates mediating spaces where the complexities of the lived experiences of our reproductive bodies are explored, contradictions revealed, and simplistic resolution is disrupted by the preservation of “the alterity of the entities engaged in the process of mediation, though not at the expense of their connectedness”⁸.

Tarsh Bates, Bioartist, Symbiotica, University of Western Australia

¹ Kristeva, Julia. "Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

² Ibid. p.4

³ Ibid. p.26

⁴ Kristeva, Julia. "Revolution in poetic language." Trans. Margaret Waller. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

⁵ Margaroni, Maria. "'The Lost Foundation': Kristeva's Semiotic Chora and Its Ambiguous Legacy." *Hypatia* 20.1 (Winter 2005): p.93

⁶ Ibid. p.91

⁷ Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *New French Feminisms*. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds. (New York: Schocken, 1981).

⁸ Margaroni. p.82



Untitled series 1 Red and cover image *Yellow* detail, 2008
Sand cast glass, marine ply, auto paint and LED lighting

Brooke Zeligman

EDUCATION

2007- Doctor of Philosophy (Visual Arts) Candidate, ECU 2005-
2006 Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts) Hons 1st Class, ECU 2002-
2004 Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts), SoCA, ECU

EXHIBITIONS

Solo:

2005 *The Gendered Agenda*, The Moores Building, Fremantle
2004 *(un)hatched*, Free Range Gallery and Studios, Subiaco
Fractured, Black Box White Box Gallery, SoCA, Mt Lawley
Space Five Installation Space, SoCA, Mt Lawley
2003 *Obsessive*, Black Box White Box Gallery, SoCA, Mt Lawley

Group:

2007 *Drawing in Darkness*, Runtspace, Monash University, Melbourne
2007 *Drawing in Darkness*, Breadbox Gallery, Northbridge

2006 *A Place in the World*, ACU/University of Adelaide Visual Art Prize, Adelaide
2006 *Synectics: The Fusion of Opposites*, Mundaring Art Centre, Mundaring
2006 *Flair 2006: Contemporary Studio Glass*, Perth Council House, Perth

- 2005 SoCA Honours Graduate Show, Spectrum Project Space, Northbridge
- 2005 Hyaline Hybrids, Spectrum Project Space, Northbridge
- 2005 Incandescence 2005: An Exhibition of Illuminated Art Glass, Nexus Gallery, Adelaide
- 2005 International Student Exhibition, SAU Art Gallery, Adelaide
- 2005 Mind Maps: Cartography of Glass in Australia, Craft Victoria, Melbourne
- 2005 Continental Drift, Sculpture Garden Gallery, Melbourne

AWARDS:

- 2007 Australian Postgraduate Award
- 2007 ECU Excellence Award
- 2006 Finalist, A Place in the World, ACU/University of Adelaide Visual Art Prize, Adelaide
- 2004 Graduate Sculpture Award, SoCA

- 2005 Revivify: Material as Content, Spectrum Project Space, Northbridge
- 2005 Bare - Artopia, Free Range Gallery and Studios, Subiaco
- 2005 Bare - D&K Presents, PICA, Northbridge
- 2004 SoCA Graduates Show, SoCA
- 2004 Annual Sculpture Survey, Gomboc Gallery, Swan Valley
- 2004 Flair 2004: Contemporary Studio Glass, Perth Council House, Perth
- 2003 Annual Sculpture Survey, Gomboc Gallery, Swan Valley

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS:

- 2008 Schwarz, N., Artnotes WA, Art Monthly Australia
- 2006 Fowler, T., ECU – Visually Spectacular, 3rd Degree
- 2005 Spencer, R., Graduates Lead the Way, West Australian

Acknowledgements

Many thanks and deep gratitude to Julie Robson, Nien Schwarz and Tarsh Bates for their encouragement, wisdom and words, David Hay and Pete Reynolds for their generosity and advice, to Ed Ellison, for his endless patience and technical knowhow, and to family and friends always.

rootprints

Brooke Zeligman

12 -26 September 2008

Spectrum Project Space

1-5.	<i>06/01/08 06/23/08 07/17/08 08/06/08 09/03/08</i>	\$6000
	sand cast glass, MDF, auto-paint, LED lighting	
6.	<i>Rootprint</i>	\$800
	sand cast glass, marine ply, LED lighting	
7.	<i>Memory</i>	\$800
	sand cast glass, marine ply, LED lighting	
	<i>Lifewriting</i>	\$800
	sand cast glass, marine ply, LED lighting	
8.	<i>Bastard Child ii</i>	\$800
	sand cast glass, marine ply, LED lighting	
9.	<i>Lifewriting Blue</i>	\$800
	sand cast glass, marine ply, LED lighting	
10.	<i>Lifewriting Purple</i>	NFS
	sand cast glass, marine ply, LED lighting	
11.	<i>Lifewriting Red</i>	\$800
	sand cast glass, marine ply, LED lighting	
12.	<i>Lifewriting Orange</i>	\$800
	sand cast glass, marine ply, LED lighting	
13.	<i>Untitled Series 1 Yellow</i>	\$1200
	sand cast glass, marine ply , auto-paint, LED lighting	
14.	<i>Untitled Series 1 Green</i>	\$1200
	sand cast glass, marine ply , auto-paint, LED lighting	
15.	<i>Untitled Series 1 Red</i>	\$1200
	sand cast glass, marine ply , auto-paint, LED lighting	

feast: The Moores Bulding Contemporary Art Gallery, August 2009

You are invited to

Feast

A tableau of saccharoidal glass works by

Brooke Zeligman



Opening 6pm Friday 16th October

To be opened by Leigh Robb, Curator of PICA

Exhibition runs from Saturday 17th - 25th of October 2009

Upstairs in Gallery 6

Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery

46 Henry Street, Fremantle

Gallery open 10-5pm every day.

mooresbuilding
contemporary**art**gallery



This project was sponsored by the Janet Holmes à Court Artists' Grant Scheme, supported through a donation by Mrs Janet Holmes à Court, financial assistance from the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council and administered through NAVA, the National Association for the Visual Arts.

Feast

Acknowledgements

Many thanks and deep gratitude to Julie Robson, Nien Schwarz and Tarsh Bates for their encouragement, wisdom and words, Leigh Robb for her time and generosity in opening the show, to Ed Ellison, for his endless patience and technical know how, and to the women of my family without whom this work would not exist.

This project was sponsored by the Janet Holmes à Court Artists' Grant Scheme, supported through a donation by

Mrs Janet Holmes à Court, financial assistance from the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council and administered through NAVA, the National Association for the Visual Arts.



BROOKE ZELIGMAN

mooresbuilding
contemporary**art**gallery

16—25 October 2009

Opening speech by Leigh Robb, Curator of Perth Institute of Contemporary Art

Brooke Zeligman and Georgina Criddle

Moore's Building

16th October 2009

It is a great pleasure for me to introduce the latest exhibitions of Brooke Zeligman and Georgina Criddle - both of whom consider themselves Perth artists, though Brooke now lives in Cairns and Georgina splits her time between Berlin, Prague and here. For everyone here it is a welcome return for both of them and a rare occasion to see the fruits of their recent labour.

And when I speak of labour, although these two exhibitions have been conceived separately as solo shows, they are both extremely labour intensive bodies of work that have accumulated over the last few years. Both artists engage with very traditional, hand-made crafts, Brooke with pate de verre, the oldest form of glass casting, and Georgina with needlepoint and tapestry. As a result, quite serendipitously their exhibitions weave well together, both starting with a thread and a stitch. Their shows are very sympathetic to each other and say a great deal about the relevance of the handmade in contemporary art today.

Brooke Zeligman comes from a rather long line of textile makers and cooks! Here, between the crocheting and the recipes Brooke's practice takes place. The first groups of doilies that Brooke ever cast are from her grandmother, left to the artist as part of her inheritance and which has provided Brooke with the material, both literally and conceptually to produce her intricate glass works, which are an abundant continuous homage to a long line of matriarchs. Brooke describes the act of making these works as completely obsessive, and as such they are intimate manifestations of the artist's thought process.

Brooke has described this show as a 'Feast', which very purposefully conjures up ideas of eating and indulgence, and it is very much an overflowing cornucopia, a generous spread for us to consume. Woven into the thoughtful display behind us is the story of how these delectable works came into being. The glass plates and bowls are all carefully laid upon wooden surfaces, which are in fact cupboard doors, which relate back to the mothballed

cupboards where the doilies have come from, carefully unwrapped and made into moulds and reshaped into the most delicate casts of crockery. The trestles they rest upon are the standard legs used for wedding tables or banquets. But it is an impossible banquet, the glasses and bowls can't hold liquid and the cutlery too fragile to wield.

What is so interesting about these works is that as a viewer; you can negotiate them on so many different levels. As well as using them to eat off or with, you do also want to eat the crockery. From frosted icing to treacle toffee to blackcurrant jam and red wine, both in colour and texture these works are tempting us to touch and taste. They also have an element of danger and risk, eating or swallowing a piece could likely kill you, or holding a glass doily too tightly and crushing it could lead to some serious splinters.

As beautiful as they are, these works go far beyond the merely decorative. The more one looks at them, the more layered and complex these pieces become. Interestingly, in many cases, through the act of preserving these works, of giving the lace doilies and cloths a new visibility as a glasswork, often the original doily gets destroyed in the making of the mould. The extreme contradictions of excess and loss are manifest in these works and for me that is where the fascination lies – the entire tableau is abundant and generous, but the process in realising it is also about loss; the original is sacrificed. Brooke's glassworks started as a tribute to her grandmother, where stands as an homage many women and to histories of lost traditions.

A similar thread runs through Georgina's work (pardon the pun – but it had to be done!). Georgina's tapestry project is in two parts, and started in 2007 during her time in Smichov, an area of Prague. In an effort to actively engage with her new surroundings, she started researching the graffiti around the Artspace where she was in residence, in order to understand the motives of the people that made their mark in this way – was it a political gesture, narcissistic or part of a marking of territory? Georgina ended up meeting three local graffers who were given the large pieces of tapestry cloth you see here, and invited to spray paint them with their tag or design. Georgina then spent many months turning these fast, spontaneous expressive gestures into well-woven detailed wool tapestry.

The second part of Georgina's project that you can see in the smaller works are the outcome of a 6 week residency that she ran in a retirement home in Prague, where she invited a group of elderly ladies, most of whom have lived through 2 world wars to make tapestries over graffiti patterns.

The interest in these works, in both projects is the issue of translation, of material and language. Georgina was explaining to me that she had to have translators with her at all times. Whereas the boys were very forthcoming and amused that their graffiti would become a permanent, historical document or sorts, the women were reluctant to embroider over the graffiti they were given, as they considered it vandalism - preferring instead to add their own decorations, or changing the colour, adding in sun and birds – opening up a discussion about the changing values across Czech generations.

I don't want to be reductive and keep grouping Brooke and Georgina's exhibitions together, but the more I considered them independently, I kept coming back to the art of Louis Bourgeois, probably one of the most imminent female artists alive. The famous French artist who has spent most of her adult life in New York was the daughter of tapestry repairers. Her famous works feature large spiders, whose work is also to weave. A reluctant matriarch herself, much of her work is about relationships, and considering an entity in relation to its surroundings. Both Georgina and Brooke come from families that have traditions of craft. But like Bourgeois, the relationships that are revealed through the process of making are at the centre of their practice.

Both are daring perfectionists, finding ways of working with materials in the ways they want – Brooke teaching herself pate de verre and eventually creating a studio space, or perhaps what could be called a private bakery, where she can make the moulds, grind the glass powder, and bake and cast the doilies, sometimes obsessively into the night. Georgina on the other hand is driven by the need to literally try her hand at specialised areas, from gardening to bird houses to tapestry, becoming an expert through the sheer will to teach herself a whole new language of making each time, a polymath of sorts.

Through their exhibitions they are both taking risks with materials. But it's also about scale, how small things can have big effects. In particular the strength of these works is in the role

of the handmade, without it being the expressive gesture of abstract expressionist painting, because the handmade-ness or the physicality of the object, I think is what, to me, is really important. That sense of handmade-ness is very different from that language of industrially produced artefacts, and, how taking time and not submitting to this can be a radical gesture.

Independent scholar

Cath Davies

Milk glass (in conversation with Brooke Zeligman's *Feast*)

Biographical note:

Cath Davies is currently completing her PhD dissertation, 'Curdle: notes on a practice and performance of induced lactation', in Sydney University's Media and Communications department. When not engaging in academic acts, she can be found playing across a variety of stages, magazines, short films and gallery spaces.



Fig. 1. Brooke Zeligman, *Milk (Mothers)*, *pate de verre*, detail from *Feast*, at the Moore's Building Gallery, photography by Michael Schwarz

high tea

set the scene for the feast. *filigree plates and saucers and bowls and platters and jugs and serving utensils, all piled up and spread across and spilling over every available surface.* I am small and sit underneath the table, peeping out and catching glimpses of ornate doilies and austere linen napkins draped carefully over the edges; crystalline teaspoons linger, partially dissolved against fine bone cups, chipped with pursed lip prints and conversational tooth marks. *human breastmilk has twice the sucrose content of that from a cow, our sweet teeth are equal parts calcium and saccharine.* mother takes her tea with two sugars and milk. if the temperature's not quite right then a little sugar lingers at the bottom of the cup undissolved, and the very last sip tastes like ambrosia and tannin. *just milk for me thanks, I'm sweet enough already.*

milk glass

the feast looks like milk ice and milkshakes and milk teeth, but doesn't contain a drop of milk (*milk glass contains no milk at all, it is an opaque or translucent milky white or coloured glass. the white colouring may be made by the addition of bone ash*). *the feast is carefully cast pate de verre, glass delicately pasted over moulds and cautiously removed like bandages over freshly healed wounds, always leaving a little trace of adhesive or taking a sliver of skin.* I remember more than once painting my

Mud map: experimental women's writing

TEXT Special Issue 17, Moya Costello, Barbara Brooks, Anna Gibbs, Rosslyn Prosser (eds.)

young hands with craft glue, the pleasure of peeling it away. when it dried it came off broken always, but taking the form of my epidermis all its creases pores and knuckles – a perfect white death mask likeness of my lifelines. *fabric might be stained yellow-brown by rusty pins or perspiration or piss or spilled tea or light exposure or being washed in iron-rich water.* later I would use beeswax hot and dripping, savouring the sting but the imprint was rarely as precise, and the yellow made me think of old anatomical models and jaundice and decay. *everything at the feast echoes afterbirth lochia's placental palette, lochia rubra bright red with blood cells, lochia serosa brownish or pink with serous exudate and erythrocyte and leukocytes and cervical mucus, lochia alba white-ish or yellowy white and made of epithelial cells and cholesterol and fat.*

the laws of liquids

I could eat you all up, suck at your marrow and slurp at your gelatinous soup. molten glass acts like toffee, stringing and stranding, like saliva thick as honey licked straight from the comb, viscous, the seductive stickiness clogging my oesophagus, amniotic fluid filling my lungs, I am drowning in molasses and spit. *glass is generally not described as a liquid, but rather an amorphous solid, (although some argue its liquidity as it lacks a first-order phase transition). despite the fact that the atomic structure of glass shares attributes with a supercooled liquid, glass is inclined to act more as a solid below its glass transition temperature.*

pick your poison

if I knew you were coming I'd have baked a cake, an airy sponge its molecular structure on show, stuffed with a thick layer of cream and strawberry jam. served up in the sunroom with a scalding hot cuppa, poured from a tarnished silver pot by sun-spotted hands. *champagne glass was modelled on the bosom of some French Louis's lover or another. (Liebfraumilch, literally 'beloved lady's milk', is a semi-sweet white wine produced from the vineyards of Church of Our Lady.)* letdown feels like small shards of glass drawn through the intricate framework of milk ducts – as if your mirror-image had been smashed inside your breasts and was now being slowly drawn out. *in old detective novels and crime shows ground glass is added to the victim's food, slowly scraping away at the gut's lining until internal bleeding finishes him off.* the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. poisoning is always women's work *(the manmade chemical bisphenol A, or BPA, is used in polycarbonate plastic, the material used to make many plastic food containers including baby feeding bottles and concerns over BPA's safety – it is reported by some sources to have hormone-like effects on the reproductive system – has increased the sale of glass bottles in recent years)*

Mud map: experimental women's writing

TEXT Special Issue 17, Moya Costello, Barbara Brooks, Anna Gibbs, Rosslyn Prosser (eds.)

feast

warp and weft I weave you, spin you a feast from my curds and whey. (*reusable glass milk bottles are commonly used for the home delivery of fresh milk by milkmen; milkmen are often credited with the paternity of children who do not show obvious visual similarities to their presumed fathers.*) I stitch you up my glory box, replete with tating and embroidering and lacemaking and other forms of fancywork. the parish ladies taught me to sugar starch my homespun wares (*3 parts granulated sugar to 1 part water; saturate pre-moistened piece in the mixture then smooth with a hot iron, always careful not to let them dry out too quickly lest they flake, crust or scab*). my fingerbones feel arthritic, clumsily I manipulate the intricate threads and filaments. cast on, knit one, purl one. *knitting bones and christening gowns, by hook or by crook.*

dessert

what a tangled web. trapped, stuck to your flypaper. strangers always have the best candy. sickly sweet, sticky sweet, my sweat glistens studded with diamond dewdrops. engorged, my mouth blows ruby-raspberries, bubbles bleed from one corner. split lip, spilt milk, tongue twisted. suck every last morsel of your feast, the crumbs caught in my throat make my glass eye water.

The M Words: Elements Art Gallery, June, 2012

Lyndall Adams & Brooke Zeligman

the M word...

ARTIST FLOOR TALKS FRIDAY 8 JUNE AT 5:30PM

OPENING FRIDAY 8 JUNE 2012 AT 6.30PM

EXHIBITION RUNS FROM 7-24 JUNE 2012



ELEMENTS ART GALLERY PROUDLY PRESENTS
lyndall adams & Brooke Zeligman
the M word...
7 - 24 June 2012
Artist floor talks: Friday 5.30 pm 8 June
Opening Night: Friday 8 June 6.30 - 8.30 pm
to be opened by Dr Lekkie Hopkins

elements
art gallery
131A Waratah Avenue, Dalkeith, WA 6009
tlf: +61 8 9386 2000
e: mail@elementsartgallery.com.au

Mantra
Pharmacy Wholesaler

mimi... all on linen, 100 x 50 cm, 2012

zinnia, a grandMother's garden, hot poured & slumped glass, aluminum, steel, dimensions variable, 2012

the M word...

Some women have large families. Others decide not to have any children. Many women desire a baby but struggle to conceive. In today's society families are often blended.

Regardless of the circumstances, to some extent whether or not a woman becomes a Mother shapes and defines their identity.

This exhibition examines the emotions of loss, grief and joy associated with parenting and the polar opposite perspective of not having children.

Artist and academic Dr Lyndall Adams has five children. Fellow artist academic Brooke Zeligman has none. Lyndall invited Brooke to show sculptural work (glass/mixed media) alongside her paintings. Throughout the creative process, both artists have been collaborating, exploring and responding to conversations surrounding 'the M word...'. The show will include an Artist's Statement containing 500 'M' words.

Brooke Zeligman is completing a Doctor of Philosophy (Visual Arts) and Master of Visual Arts at ECU. Dr Lyndall Adams holds a Doctor of Philosophy from Southern Cross University, Lismore and lectures in Visual Arts at ECU. Both artists have exhibited widely across Australia.

For information, interviews or images please contact manager Emma Mahanay P:93862000
M:0452594661 E:emma@elementsartgallery.com.au A:131A Waratah Ave Dalkeith 6009

Mother ... Motherless ... Mammary ... Milk ... Milky ... Mound ... muff ... merkin ... More ...
 Memory ... Mammogram ... Mastectomy ... Menses ... Menstruation ... Menopause ... Mouth
 ... Matriarch ... Maternal ... Material ... Murmur ... Monster .. Mum ... mummy ... that noise
 toddlers make just before they learn their first words mummumummum ... mushy ... musty
 ... me? mine? my? Myself ... Most ... Maybe? Patriarchal ... Patriarchy ... matrilineal ... marry
 me? metahistory ... musing ... make ... music ... making ... maker ... materiality ... manipulate
 ... master ... miss ... moment ... macerate ... microcosm ... macrocosm ... marginal ... magnetic
 ... mirror-phase ... mammal ... magenta ... meet ... metacognitive ... Mobius ... Magdalena ...
 masterly ... maven ... maternity ... masochism ... mutate ... metabolic ... metabolism ...
 mimesis ... mimicry ... mirror ... molecular ... multiple ... multiplies ... multiplicities ... mould
 ... masculinity? minimal ... minimalism ... morose ... mourning ... moan ... matters ...
 menstrual blood ... meta-narrative ... mammalian ... Mammalia ... mate ... mating ...molecule
 ... midlife ... mental ... myoma ... myomectomy ... muscle ... membrane ... mucus ... manna ...
 mothering ... marriage ... Middlemarch ... Middlesex ... minority ... minorities ... misogynist ...
 mistress ... modern ... modesty ... mom/mum ... martyr ... monogamy ... monogamous ...
 marital ... marry ... marriage ... meal ... moral ... morality ... mystery ... mysticism ... myth ...
 mirror mirror ... maturity ... Marxism ... materiality ... married ... martyrdom ... manuals ...
 masturbation ... mana ... manage .. magic ... mumble ... Mutatis mutandis ... Marsha
 MeSkimmon ... manifest ... Myomectomy ... microscopic ... male ... Monday ... Member ...
 media ... median ... manage ... manager ... meeting ... muscular ... moment ... masturbate ...
 minute ... matter ... message ... massage ... James Bond's M ... misfit ... makeup ... make-
 believe ... matricide ... mess around ... manchild ... menses ... moribund ... morbid ...
 masticate, metastasis ... metamorphosis ... mammogram ... mystic ... mystical ... mesmerising
 ... mannequin ... metacritic ... metatarsal ... muse ... meadow ... Moron ... monogram ...
 meatloaf ... mitochondria ... microscopic ... myopic ... migraine ... menieres ... marine ...
 miserable ... misericord ... mouth ... mattress ... memo ... memory ... monogamy ...
 materialism ... mms ... mania ... Menzies ... mope ... moke ... moose ... mouse ... merry go
 round ... merit ... meritorious ... magnificent ... magnanimous ... morphous ... monstrous ...
 megalomaniac ... mariachi ... moussaka ... meringue ... munch ... menu ... macabre ...marble
 ... mania ... McBeth ... machine ... mace ... magnet ... magnify ...magnolia ... maiden ...
 maidenhead ... mantle ... mail ... email ... mainspring ... mainstream ... maintenance ... make-
 up ... malcontent ... malaise ... malignant ... malinger ... malleable ... mammal ... mammology
 ... man-about-town ... man-at-arms ... man-child ... man-eater ... man-made ... man-of-war ...
 man-sized ... man-to-man ... memesis ... metalanguage ... mutli-valent ... mmmmm

the M word. . .

Lyndall Adams & Brooke Zeligman



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art gallery

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Dr Lekkie Hopkins' speech for The M word opening.

The M word...

I'm delighted to be here tonight to open this exhibition of work by two inspiring and courageous artists, Lyndall Adams and Brooke Zeligman. I could have called them *marvelous* and *meteoric*, or *mesmerizing* and *moving*, in keeping with the M words theme of the exhibition – and these appellations are entirely appropriate. But I want to begin tonight with an acknowledgment that emerges from the words *inspiring* and *courageous*: the etymology of these two words takes us back to the body, the breath, the heart – *inspire* comes from the Latin *spirare, to breathe*, and *to inspire* can mean *to breathe life into, to inflame*...And *courageous* comes of course from the Latin root *cor*, meaning *the heart*, and remains in English and French as a metaphor for inner strength. As a feminist scholar I am intensely interested in embodied ways of knowing and in articulating the lived experience of inhabiting a woman's body, and although I don't want to actively assert that the work in this exhibition is feminist – that's something for the artists themselves to do, not for me to claim – the feminist lens that I inevitably use to view their work takes me back, again and again, satisfyingly, to the body, the breath, the heart.

I'm not a visual artist but I am very much enjoying being educated into visual literacy as part of my experience of the Magdalena Talks Back feminist reading group, of which Lyndall and Brooke are each a part. Here then is the first of our m words: *Magdalena*. I

was privileged to be able to establish this reading group at Edith Cowan University about 5 years ago in the company of Julie Robson, another inspiring feminist scholar who is here tonight in spirit if not in body. Julie and I wanted to create a forum where women academics and postgraduate researchers would have the chance to read feminist literature together, to bring feminist voices into the room. We wanted it to be a space underpinned by a curiosity and interest in feminist thinking as it might apply to our contemporary lives, but also very much a space of welcome inquiry and broad membership. Along with her friend and colleague Dawn Albinger, Julie was already a member of a global women's theatre network called the Magdalena Project. Julie conceptualized our reading group as a spin-off from the Magdalena Project, and so Magdalena Talks Back, with all its implicit cheekiness and earnestness, seriousness and wit, was born. From the beginning the group has brought together women from a huge range of disciplines: contemporary performance, visual arts, theatre studies, media and communications, creative writing, history, the social sciences, psychology, the biological sciences, the health sciences. A crucial part of our education has been the sharing of passions, the exploration of ideas from differing points of view, the introductions to each other's disciplines. Hence the beginning of my education into visual literacy. Through the work of Lyndall, Brooke, Nien Schwartz and others, my eyes have been opened to new ways of seeing, feeling, interacting. Like Jeanette Winterson in her piece, *Art Objects*, I find that art takes time; learning to see, to give art the time it needs, is like learning to love a new body, a new landscape. Magdalena Talks Back, then, with its shared commitment to the creative articulation of the stuff of our lived experiences, has brought me into new territory, and I feel richly blessed.

The m-word title for this exhibition emerged from such a transfer of knowledge which began in the Magdalena Talks Back group. Brooke was struck by an image I had created in an academic paper I wrote a decade ago attempting to articulate the subjective embodied experience of mastectomy. Before the surgery even happened I know I was imagining that mine would be a story of resilience and grace. But the body has other stories to tell, and in this case my body expressed its rebellion and protest in the form of the m words. In that paper I wrote:

If I think back into the three weeks between diagnosis and surgery, I cannot help but acknowledge that somewhere, somehow, protest about loss of bodily integrity was being registered. Here was a woman whose body and psyche rebelled against the stoicism of the courageous survival narrative. By day she talked and prepared and psyched herself into accepting that this was happening to her. But at nights, the m words erupted, marching through her dreams like persistent ants. They were never there as she drifted into sleep, but on waking through the night, there they'd be, repeating over and over in her head:

Mastectomy, mammogram, mammary, Mumma, mutilate, mammal, mastitis, Mum.
Mastectomy, mammogram, mammary, Mumma, mutilate, mammal, mastitis, Mum.

It's clear from this glimpse of unruly tales of bodily and psychic rebellion, that a complex suite of stories threads its way up and under, over and through the surface narrative, giving life and resonance and messiness and complexity to the polished story of resilience and grace. Bodily narratives in any art form disrupt and embellish those other narratives we choose to tell, and in the movement from one suite of narratives to the other, back and forth, moment to moment, fresh insights accumulate to re-write a story in all its complexity.

As artists Lyndall and Brooke each welcome and work with the disruptions of bodily narratives, Lyndall in two dimensions, Brooke in three. Lyndall's work, often with paper and paint and print archives, and here, with rich oil paint on linen, always intrigues me with its apparently naïve, innocent, evocative surfaces, its charming reminders of times gone by, and, beneath those surfaces, its deeply incisive, relentless wrestle with forces evoked in this exhibition as mesmerizing memory, mutinous maternity, marvelous movement, magic moments.

Brooke's medium - glass - insists at the very level of material upon the elision of binaries: just as glass itself is both fluid and solid, fragile and strong, warm and cold, light and dark, so too, her work conceptually defies binary oppositions. Of her own making processes Brooke writes:

My entire body is immersed in the making, I injure my back, I spill my blood, hair gets tangled up and sets into the materials. I drip sweat, swear, talk lovingly, coax - I make work about lived experience and as I make I live, I experience, I am engaged. Once made I don't detach, that's my DNA in that work, I must continue to touch. She cites Helene Cixous: *It's from inside the body that the drawing-of-the-poet rises to the light of day*" (Cixous, H., 1998, p21).

In this exhibition, with a nod perhaps to Luce Irigaray and to other feminist scholars searching for ways to render the stuff of women's lives, these two artists take us back and back to honour the mothers, the grandmothers, the women in their families, their spheres whose lives have created paths to follow, memories to dance in...

Whether created in two dimensions or three, the work in this exhibition I find to be life-

affirming, breathful, deeply felt, and, yes, mesmerizing and marvelous too. I commend Lyndall and Brooke on their tenacity for finding ways to live as artists and as feminist scholars in 21st century Australia – no mean feat – and I thank them for giving us all new ways to see. I have much pleasure now in declaring the M-word exhibition open.

Lekkie Hopkins

Friday 8 June 2012

The M Words: Elements Art Gallery, June, 2012



Material Murmurings

the final PhD exhibition by

Brooke Zeligman

at Spectrum Project Space

opening night Friday 8th March 6pm
to be opened by Dr Nien Schwarz

gallery open 9th - 23rd March 2013
Tuesday - Friday 11am-5pm
Saturday 12pm-5pm

Edith Cowan University
Building 3, 2 Bradford Street
Mount Lawley

e: spectrum@ecu.edu.au
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ECU Media Release

27 February 2013

Women through the looking glass

Australian artist Brooke Zeligman has used more than 80 handmade glass and mixed media objects to explore the roles of women in modern society in her newest exhibition, opening on International Women's Day.

Entitled *Material Murmurings*, it explores themes such as family, child bearing, patriarchy and loss of tradition and looks at issues that impact contemporary women.

It is the culmination of five years work and is the final exhibition in Ms Zeligman's PhD thesis.

Inspired by strong female artists such as Mona Hatoum and Louise Bourgeois, the pieces range from small and intimate installations to large pieces more than two metres wide.

They combine traditional glasswork with stainless steel, polymer coated MDF, found objects and LED lighting.

Ms Zeligman said the exhibition was the chance to make a statement about the role of women in today's world.

"My work explores the lived body and experience and as a result engages in a multiplicity of issues that impact on women, examined through an academic feminist lens" Ms Zeligman said.

"I find inspiration for my work in the everyday, the lived life. My work is very much based in personal experience and the narratives within the works are intimate stories based on family."

Material Murmurings opens on Friday, 8 March 2013 at 5.00pm to coincide with International Women's Day. It will run from Monday, 10 March to Friday, 22 March at Spectrum Project Space, based at ECU's Mount Lawley Campus.

Spectrum Project Space is open 11:00am to 6:00pm Tuesday to Friday and 12:00pm to 5:00pm on Saturday.

High-resolution images are available on request.

Media contact: Natasha Richards, Corporate Communications Officer, Edith Cowan University, 6304 2288 or 0422 326 745 / n.richards@ecu.edu.au

ECU Media Release

About Spectrum Project Space:

Spectrum Project Space is an initiative of ECU's School of Communications and Arts. It features 188 square metres of floor space, LED lighting, environmentally friendly floor paint, a light tracking system and state-of-the-art audio. It opened in August 2011.

Spectrum Project Space offers opportunities for creative research across visual and performing arts, design and media and text and sound, generated by artists and academics associated with the School of Communications and Arts and the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), as well as artists from the wider community.

Spectrum is open Tuesday to Friday from 10.00am - 6:00pm and Saturdays from 12:00pm to 5:00pm with special weekend openings and events. Exhibitions can be viewed after hours by appointment.

E: spectrum@ecu.edu.au W: www.scca.ecu.edu.au/projects/spectrum



"Untitled series I, Yellow, detail, glass with mixed media", 2008 (image courtesy of the artist)

ECU Media Release



"Milk (M)others, pate de verre" 2009 detail from Feast at The Moores Building Gallery,
photographer Michael Schwarz

MATERIAL MURMURINGS

BROOKE ZELIGMAN

8 March to 23 March

Opening event: Friday, 8 March, 5.00pm

Opened by Dr Janien Schwarz.

Artist statement

Material Murmurings is the final exhibition of Brooke Zeligman's PhD thesis. The exhibition brings together separate bodies of works that have been developed in response to the multivalent nature of the materiality of glass and its undeniable ability to communicate the lived body. The pieces are made of glass in conjunction with multiple materials to create a series of works and objects that engage with design, architecture, installation and functionality, the decorative and the hand made. These touch on a number of themes, exploring the fragility and strength of the human condition, the excess of consumption, family, child bearing and the loss of tradition.

Australian artist Brooke Zeligman has used more than 80 handmade glass and mixed media objects to explore the roles of women in modern society in her newest exhibition, which opens on International Women's Day. It is the culmination of five years work and is the final exhibition in Ms Zeligman's PhD thesis.

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Entitled *Material Murmurings*, it explores themes such as family, child bearing, patriarchy and loss of tradition and looks at issues that impact contemporary women.

	<i>title</i>	<i>medium</i>	<i>year</i>	<i>price</i>
1	<i>06.01.08 06.23.08 07.17.08 08.06.08 09.03.08 (Dated Series)</i>	sand cast glass, auto paint, MDF, LED lighting, 720mm x 420mm x 35mm x 5	2009	\$5000
2	<i>feast</i>	pate de verre, dimension variable	2009	POA
3	<i>murmur</i>	22 individual kiln cast lead crystal pieces, dimensions vary	2012-13	\$6000
4	<i>m words series iii</i>	pate de verre, dimension variable	2012	\$200
5	<i>I got a brand new shiny ute (and no room for a baby seat)</i>	sand cast glass, LED lighting, lithium ion battery, MDF, polymer 700mm x 420mm x 35mm x 2	2010	\$2400
6	<i>Monaro twins</i>	sand cast glass, LED lighting, lithium ion battery, MDF, polymer 700mm x 420mm x 35mm x 2	2010	\$2400
7	<i>zinnias, a grandMother's garden</i>	35mm x 2 hot cast and slumped glass, stainless steel, MDF, dimensions vary	2012	\$250 each
8	<i>Rootprint, Memory, Lifewriting</i>	sand cast glass, marine ply, polymer, LED lighting, 600mm x 600mm	2007	\$400 each
9	<i>Lifewriting series (red)</i>	sand cast glass, marine ply, polymer, LED lighting, 600mm x 600mm x 35mm	2008	\$400
10	<i>Lifewriting series (orange)</i>	sand cast glass, marine ply, polymer, LED lighting, 600mm x 600mm	2008	\$400
11	<i>inverted white globe</i>	Plaster, pate de verre, dimensions variable	2008	\$300
12	<i>lost</i>	broken pate de verre, dimension variable	2009	\$600
13	<i>green</i>	sand cast glass, MDF, polymer, LED lighting, 600mm ϕ x 35mm	2011	\$1200
14	<i>egg</i>	<i>sand cast glass, MDF, polymer, LED lighting, 600mmϕ x 35mm</i>	2010	\$1200
15	<i>and</i>	<i>sand cast glass, MDF, polymer, LED lighting, 600mmϕ x 35mm</i>	2010	\$1200
16	<i>untitled series i (yellow)</i>	sand cast glass, MDF, auto paint, LED lighting, 600mm ϕ x 35mm	2009	\$1200
17	<i>untitled series ii (midnight blue reduction)</i>	sand cast glass, MDF, auto paint, LED lighting, 600mm ϕ x 35mm	2009 - 10	\$1200 each
18	<i>m words series i</i>	hot cast glass, steel, dimensions vary	2012	\$350 each

19 *m words series ii*

kiln cast, recycled led crystal, stainless
steel, dimensions variable

2013

\$400
each

About Spectrum Project Space

Spectrum Project Space is an exhibition and performance space that functions as a laboratory for exploration and experimentation with an inclusive approach to creativity and is a site for multidisciplinary approaches to artistic practice.

Since opening in 2003, Spectrum has grown to be one of Perth's most important venues for both emerging and established artists providing a flexible exhibition and research space, allowing artists to participate with the city's diverse arts communities and to engage publicly in the process of developing creativity through education.

The Spectrum Northbridge location closed in 2008 and after an 18-month hiatus, the newly purpose built Spectrum Project Space opened its doors in 2011 at the Mount Lawley Campus.

Since its relocation Spectrum has assumed a much broader scope in terms of offering opportunities for creative research across visual and performing arts, design and media, and text and sound, through its association with artists and academics from the School of Communications and Arts and the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA).

With an educational perspective, Spectrum Project Space attempts to reveal a range of reflective processes that underpin creative practice in all its forms. Systematic and intuitive approaches to art have their value but it is often the by-products of these processes that are the most interesting, yet rarely exhibited. Spectrum both promotes and celebrates this kind of invention, experimentation and intuition irrespective of its outcome and therefore contributes to our understanding and appreciation of contemporary culture both locally and globally.

Contact

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Photograph of Brooke Zeligman, 2009, at the ECU hot-shop, Mt Lawley.