

*Just A Pretty Picture?*

*The practising artist and the influence of art education  
in the lives of visual arts graduates*

*by*

*Paul Reader*

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Master of  
Education with Honours (Adult Education & Training) of The University of New England.*

**September 2000**

**University of New England**

## Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the willingness of twelve visual arts graduates to speak about their lives and former study. In addition to their contribution, I would also like to acknowledge the support of a number of visual art educators, who helped in the search for past graduates, and other artists who participated in early discussions about the topic, via the Internet.

My gratitude is also extended to the three supervisors of this work, Dr. Margaret Somerville, Mr. Peter Wright and Mr. Barrie Brennan, who patiently and regularly guided me through the evolution of this research, a process that has extended over nearly three years.

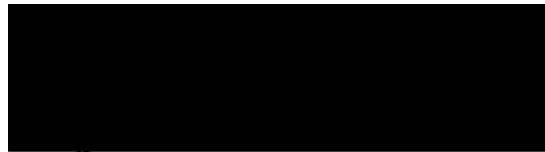
As a researcher with a family, I would further like to acknowledge the support of my family, especially my wife Bettina, who were frequently called upon to ignore my absences and preoccupation during study, at times when they might otherwise have expected my presence. At other times, in quite the opposite way, my family was recruited as a sounding board for the ideas and passages, which lay beyond this page. For all of those mentioned here, it is only proper that they receive acknowledgment in this thesis, and I thank them all for their assistance.

Paul Reader

***Certificate of Originality***

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degree.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge any help received in preparing this thesis, and all the sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



.....  
Paul Reader

## Table of Contents

Table of figures .....	v
Abstract .....	vii
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b><i>Vanishing without trace: the search begins</i></b> .....	<b>1</b>
What this research is about .....	1
The way it was when the graduates were noticed to be missing .....	2
The artist researcher .....	4
The Map: A summary of the research project in its investigative stage .....	9
Preparing to go in search of the lost tribe - The initial assumptions .....	12
Some notes before venturing further .....	15
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b><i>Concepts and contexts of artists, art education and graduates evident in literature</i></b> .....	<b>17</b>
Art and Adult Education .....	18
The artist and artistic freedom .....	19
Transformation through art .....	21
The relationship between art, education and adult education .....	23
The Politics of Art Education .....	27
Freedom and the Art School .....	28
The Professionalisation of Art Education and the creation of Art Industry .....	30
Opposing positions .....	33
Art as research .....	35
The field of the art student and graduate .....	36
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b><i>Methods and order in the research</i></b> .....	<b>39</b>
Introduction .....	39
The nature of the methodological problem .....	40
Exploring through a paradigm shift .....	42
Initial preparation .....	44
The group of participants .....	46
The Initial literature search -Finding the field .....	49
Clarifying the research problem .....	50
How and when the data was collected .....	51
How the data was analysed .....	52
Return to the literature .....	54
Further analysis .....	55

**Chapter 4**

<b>Twelve Lives .....</b>	<b>57</b>
Mary .....	58
Darcy .....	61
Janet .....	65
Alfred .....	69
Stefan .....	73
Anna .....	76
Christina .....	79
Richard .....	82
John .....	85
Michael .....	89
Dorothy .....	93
Shelley .....	97
Overview of the graduates' lives .....	103

**Chapter 5****Graduate-artists and their learning..... 105**

Being a "practising artist" .....	105
Reorganising roles and identities .....	110
Self Revelation .....	115
The art-school and its culture .....	116
A pedagogy or andragogy of freedom in art-schools .....	118
Personal transformation .....	123
Being an artist and being free .....	124

**Chapter 6****Once an artist..... 129**

Assumptions about the lost tribe of graduates .....	129
Perspectives on art-schools .....	131
A lost tribe of possibilities .....	137

**Bibliography..... 142****Appendices..... 148**

Appendix 1: Interview Questions 1.
Appendix 2: Background Questions
Appendix 3: DEET Graduate Destination Surveys 1993-1994
Appendix 4: Letter of Consent

## Table of Figures

Figure 1: The Researcher as an Artist.....	7
Figure 2: The Map of the Research identifying the world of the visual art graduate ....	8
Figure 3: The researcher's own professional practice as a graduating artist in 1972..	38
Figure 4 The paradigm shift of the research project methodology .....	45
Figure 5: Validating the label "artist" .....	104
Figure 6: Art in community education.....	128
Figure 7: Perspectives for understanding art schools.....	132
Figure 8: The perspectives of visual art education and their influence through the current art-school model .....	138
Figure 9: Just a Pretty Picture? The researcher's personal art work.....	141

### **Abstract**

Every year in Australia, around 2000 students graduate from higher education in the visual and performing arts. The intent of many of these visual arts courses in particular, is to produce practising artists. However, the occupation of practising artist is not an easy one in which to survive. In 1999 there were around 16,000 visual, community arts, and craft-persons practising professionally. Therefore, questions arise as to how the majority of graduates apply their professional knowledge gained in art school? And what happens to these graduates in their later lives? These questions are of importance to tertiary visual art education because the majority of these art school graduates will sooner or later end up working in fields that are different from the one they trained in, that is, the profession of practising artist.

This research looked at the lives of twelve graduates from a range of visual art disciplines. Through this examination I sought to understand: how these graduates viewed their lives since graduation, how they viewed their education in art-school, and what could be learned from this experience for art education in the future. As the research project unfolded, I began to discover in the graduates' lives ideas and constructs that changed the frame of the world-view that I had adopted, since graduation, some 25 years ago. Taking this information, together with my own earlier experience as an art-student, and information I have gathered from the literature about art education, it was possible to construct other ways of looking at art education.

The result of this process led to the construction of this thesis, in which the current perspective of training institutions on the training of practising artists, is not necessarily congruent with the value of art school found by graduates some years after their attendance in art school. In the light of this construction, I go on to argue that academic, governmental, traditional, and commercial influences or perspectives are responsible for the formation of an art education perspective that directs tertiary visual art education provision. Through this research project I identify largely unacknowledged, additional perspectives on personal development and adult education or "lifelong learning". These additional perspectives may be useful in the

development and understanding of tertiary visual art education provision, that is broader than the singular aim or perspective of educating the practising artist.