



Visual Arts Graduate Program
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE ARTIST'S GARDEN: Reshaping the Landscape

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Declaration of originality

I, Leo Robba  hereby declare
that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project
undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless
otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of the ideas,
references, quotation and paraphrases attributable to other authors.

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The Artist's Garden: Reshaping the Landscape

Abstract

This practice-led research in painting investigates the artist's garden tradition and explores formal aspects and distinctive features of garden culture which I have observed in Australia and in England. My relationship to my own garden and my reflections on the processes of gardening are central to this project. I discuss the philosophical and conceptual underpinnings of my relationship with gardening and describe the processes of making garden landscape paintings of a variety of garden types, ranging from large formal English estate gardens visited on fieldwork, to much smaller private gardens in places such as Newcastle, Moree and the Blue Mountains. Parallels are drawn between the art of gardening and the art of painting.

The resulting body of work includes numerous *en plein air* paintings as well as large-scale studio paintings, and I discuss the practical and aesthetic issues involved in working between these two modes. Two key artist gardeners feature for discussion and analysis: John Glover and Stanley Spencer.

My reflections on garden design traditions and gardening as a practice have been informed by several valuable texts, two of the most significant are Robert Pogue Harrison's *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* which gives a broad-ranging philosophical account of our human connection to gardens; and the collection of writings compiled in *The Genius of Place: The English Landscape Garden*, edited by John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, which gave me a better understanding of the development of the English garden landscape.

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Introduction

Prologue

The creation of a garden, like the creation of a painting, is an act of anticipation, an expression of optimism that draws together the past and the present in a continuum of ideas, activity, meaning and, in the case of gardens, life. Although physical, these creative activities hold memories and thus can be psychological as well as physiological. In the purest sense, as a gardener and painter I gain immense satisfaction and fulfilment from caring for plants and seeing something I've planted grow, or from seeing a finished image emerge from the seed of an idea.

To locate the main theme of this study it is important to record my own convictions and to give voice to what I believe a garden to be, particularly in relation to landscape painting and the Australian context. The following quote partly expresses those beliefs:

“Planting a garden is an act of anticipation. It is also an act of memory and settlement: those who make a garden look back to recollected forms and forward to new growth that will become a special kind of place”.¹

At the time of the European settlement of Australia, “territorial improvement”² and the Western ideology of man's dominance over nature were presiding philosophies in the culture of landscape gardening. This exegesis and the associated works, founded on a fascination with gardens and their cultural significance, should be read alongside and contextualised by the fact that Australian gardens must be viewed as contested ground and a continuing act of settlement and dispossession.



This practice-led research investigates the relationship between the artist and the constructed garden to understand the mimetic shaping of nature and its direct compositional relevance to pictorial design, composition and space. This project explores the subject of gardens as a genre in landscape painting and examines styles of depiction and interpretation. While I appreciate that gardens and their traditions

¹ Katie Holmes, Susan K. Martin, and Kylie Mirmohamadi, *Reading the Garden: The Settlement of Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

which have been implemented in Australia since European settlement are a manifestation of cultural imperialism and mask a history of violence and dispossession, this has not been the core focus of this research. My focus for this study has been to spend time creating paintings, actively gardening, studying different gardens and to concentrate my efforts on an exploration of the parallels between the practice of gardening and painting and their interrelated interactions. Exploring more current forms of garden culture in England and Australia, this study includes an analysis of the Picturesque—its development, overarching ideology, translocation to Australia, and diffused but persistent manifestation within a contemporary context.

The nexus between painting and gardening is significant in my life and their joint creative practices. The subject matter of my painting dramatically shifted after a move from the confinement of the inner suburbs of Sydney to a relatively substantial garden in Springwood in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales.



Fig. 1.
*Autumn View
from the Garden,
Bundanon (2000)*

Throughout my art practice I have painted a wide variety of gardens, but this relocation to the Blue Mountains supported greater focus and a sustained, immediate, and enveloping relationship with the landscape along with a greater awareness of the order imposed on the natural environment.

In the past I painted gardens that possessed what I perceived to be quite distinctive, idiosyncratic characteristics as I travelled to different parts of the country *looking* for subject matter. An example of this is the grey, twisted trees and bare-leafed branches depicted in *Autumn View from the Garden, Bundanon (2000)* (fig.1). Often, these subjects have been gardens found on the fringe of suburbia, farming properties, or

even views of a car park with an attached garden. With the relocation to the Blue Mountains, my own garden as subject was just beyond the studio door. The move from Sydney allowed for a deep interest in landscape painting and gardening to extend into growing my own produce. This more active relationship with the landscape brought me into closer proximity to a less urbanised and more fundamental connection to the natural world. This geographical change, made largely for economic reasons, resulted in a profound shift—a physical and philosophical attachment to my garden in Springwood that has now become an extended and ongoing process of research.

The parallels between gardening and painting

In the preliminary stages of the research project, the paintings I produced depicted different garden styles and prompted me to more broadly consider, alongside *the garden* as a subject for painting, the philosophical underpinnings of gardens as constructions by designer-makers, and as products of the creative process. This also inspired a curiosity as to the many practical and visual commonalities that exist between gardening and painting. As part of my practice-led research I explore an appreciation of gardens for their composition and their aesthetics, and consider more specifically how elements incorporated into their design inform and relate to the formal elements within a painting.

These formal considerations led to what was to become of central importance to this project – my exploration and articulation of the parallels between gardening and painting. These parallels can be defined by several factors: aesthetic (or appearance-based) considerations such as style, composition and colour; cultural considerations such as the environment and politics; more esoteric considerations relating to our imagination and sense of mystery; and practical considerations such as the material quality that contributes to their creation and, in the case of gardens, their care and maintenance. Whilst these categories are overlapping, I will focus on the power of our imagination and aesthetic and practical considerations as they relate directly to my practices of both painting and gardening.

The power of imagination

It could be argued that at their very centre both paintings and gardens are products of our imagination and owe their existence and expression to the mind. What informs the creation of paintings and gardens is our ability for imagining and visualising mental pictures or complex concepts of what is not actually there but is understood through our experiences and by our senses. Links between painting and gardening are reinforced by the notion that the imagination has “the power of reproducing images stored in the memory under the suggestion of associated images”.³ This view of imagination also goes to the concept that both gardens and painting express not just ideas and cultural visualisations but evoke in us a sense of mystery. This theory is conveyed by the notion that gardens, and I would argue paintings, are “an epiphany of man’s relationship with mystery” and that “this relationship is [their] meaning”.⁴

Aesthetic consideration: Composition

When analysing a painting—its framing—the choice of what is inside or outside of the picture frame is what defines its artifice. It is also a combination of the internal structural elements (the content) and what lies outside the frame that defines its composition and crucially contributes to its meaning. Again, it is our “relationship with mystery”⁵ and the imaginative potential of what lies outside the frame that helps explain this expression of meaning. We can draw similar parallels with what lies outside of a garden and the notion of painting a garden from the inside looking out. The recurring idea that gardens rely on enclosure to define their existence also suggests the all-importance of that divide. Gardens, while considered to be emblematic of nature, mark their separation from nature through their enclosure. This separation is only fleeting, as our imagination and sense of mystery along with the cultural weight that gardens hold is at the same time informed by what lies outside its perimeter. Equally gardens and paintings are cultural manifestations; both are grounded in composition, both are defined by a physical and imaginary framework, both are cultivated and informed by taste, both can be appreciated, both are highly subjective in terms of their symbolic meaning, both express variety in

³ <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/imagination?s=t> (accessed on 4 January, 2017).

⁴ Robert Pogue Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

their many different forms, and both are recursive, involving repetition and the application of a set aesthetic principles relying on successive results.

Looking and awareness

Painting, and particularly painting *en plein air*, has many parallels to the art of gardening—it demands adaptability and it requires you to really look and to analyse what is seen. It also requires practical adjustments such as working on site, adapting to conditions of light, geography, and weather, choosing the right tools for the job, and an understanding of processes and material. Compositionally, gardens also present many parallels and are sometimes referred to as living sculpture. In the creation of a garden many compositional elements are open for consideration: colour, leaf tone and texture, the shaping and manipulation of plants, and planting that influences scale or foliage density. There is also the opportunity to define particular areas, feature plants through repetition and pattern making, or use plants to redefine landfall or frame vistas as an aid to point to what lies beyond the confines of any garden; in essence, this is the making of a picture in the form of a garden.

As part of my gardening practice, as in my painting practice, I go looking. Habitually, each morning I go into the garden and do the rounds, checking for the prevalence of bees, sooty mould, and soil moisture, and monitor weeds, grasses, new buds that may be appearing, leaf formations, plant health, aphids, red rust, and evaluate the overall appearance. This process often occurs several times a day. This active looking keeps me in tune with the garden and the flow of nature and also provides critical information that contributes to my developing knowledge. I monitor plant health and gauge my potential responses, all of which is underpinned by a preoccupation with the aesthetics of the garden. I also make observations in relation to time and the seasons. Specific plants, I've discovered through looking, are more acute indicators of time and change. The red dogwood for example is always the first plant to show autumn colour.

Materiality

Material qualities are core to the realisation of paintings and gardens, and carry century upon century of development, practice, and theoretical interpretation. Gardeners prune, hedge, dig, rake, mulch, top-dress, weed, dead-head, compost, and

plant. Painters on the other hand brush, blend, model, glaze, under-paint, over-paint, stipple, scumble, scrape, block-in, wash, layer, and drip. All are actions and all connect the material quality with the process and the physical and aesthetic outcome. Whilst this is an obvious parallel, the materiality is intrinsic to both art forms. The most obvious of all is earth—soil and pigment. When gardeners describes soil they use words such as richness, texture, humus, sandy, or loam, or refer to colours such as black, brown, or red. When a painter describes paint they use words such as viscosity, translucency, opaqueness, transparency, or fluidity.

Paintings and gardens as art forms possess the ability to convey meaning, either implied or meaning of more explicit significance. The materiality, what is used and how it is used, in the creation of paintings or gardens is fundamental to engaging the view and evoking a response. Historically, paintings like gardens have given expression to ideas through their various forms. The distinctly human act of transforming everyday materials such as pigment, canvas, soil, and plants into cultural expression and works of art is grounded in the material practice that binds the physical, emotional, and intellectual experience. The material presence of a painting, the paint surface—its textures, colours, types of marks, finish, and refinement—exists in its own right and can prolong and reinforce effect, which in turn can contribute significantly to viewer engagement.

When soil, an amalgamation of minerals, rock particles like sand and clay, organic matter, and micro-organisms, is identified, developed, and employed in the creation of a garden, it becomes more than just soil. It is the conduit for not just the physical well-being of the plants but a crucial determinant in evoking aesthetic experience. Its health, exuberance, tones, colours, and textures of the outward appearance—its physicality—like the surface of a painting affects our perception and response to what we see. Techniques (the types of marks, how a painting is painted or a garden is planted) also affect the material and expressive quality of their particular genre.

My initial study highlighted other shared qualities conveyed through the practice of gardening and painting such as form, structure and format, colour in combination with material qualities like texture, and the framing of views. The implementation of these shared qualities relies upon and is enhanced by sustained observation, and all

are qualities that contribute to a garden's potentiality as a subject for art. This exploration of the parallels between gardening and painting have given rise to further questions: What could my engagement with gardening contribute to my practice as a painter? What could my painting practice contribute to my understanding and practice as a gardener?

These questions are practical and philosophical and could be explained by Paul Cézanne's conviction that art existed as a "harmony in parallel with nature".⁶ This belief fits with a more universal notion that gardeners, like landscape painters, work together with nature and in cooperation with it. The conviction in a shared purpose and parallel harmony works in conjunction with a gardener or painter's desire to *make real* their ideas. This also points to *Edenic* notions, a garden's *other-worldliness* being conjured in our minds, and what Cézanne professed—"Art must imbue [nature] with eternity in our imagination".⁷ Unlike Cézanne, my paintings are concerned with capturing moments in time and exploring the atmospherics expressed by time, given the formal qualities of gardens. I have been conscious of the transitory nature of gardens and the need to find structure within the *tradition* of painting. Henning suggests that Cézanne's "aim was to give stability to such ephemeral images through the formal structure of his compositions and thus to rescue them from their transience".⁸ This idea of making the *living* live on via paintings is realised by the paintings I have produced for this research.

My garden in Springwood, originally known as *Forrest Home*, was first planted in the late 1880s. It was the second house on Bee Farm Road, the first being attached to the original bee farm. According to land registry records it has had six different owners since then who have each in their own way left their mark on the garden. Prior to white settlement this land belonged to the Darug and Gundungurra peoples; Springwood was the acknowledged dividing ridge line between these two Nations. The garden in its current form is approximately 7000 square metres in size and sits on a ridge above Sassafras Gully, backed by what is now the World Heritage Blue

⁶ Mareike Hennig, et al., *The Painter's Garden: Design, Inspiration, Delight* (Hatje Cantz Verlag, Zeppelinstrasse 32, Ostfildern, Germany, 2002), 266.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

Mountains National Park. Its type could be described as a typical semi-formal Blue Mountains garden in the English style, a style that sits at the nexus between my interest in reshaped landscape gardens and Australia's landscape painting tradition. The garden's position is both complicated and enriched by its location on the edge of the national park, a situation that embodies recurring themes in my paintings such as nature transposed, the imposition of an 'alien' style, and the creation of boundaries or a sense of enclosure. It is important to note that gardens such as mine extend over time, embodying the imposition of an English landscape aesthetic and existing as a signifier to the dispossession of the indigenous population.



Fig. 2.
View of the pines
and pepper tree
outside my studio
(2013)

There are two main strands to this project. The first strand is formed by the paintings of my own garden, which explore the garden's context and form, my philosophical and physical connection to it, and its relation to my painting practice. The second strand consists of paintings I have produced of other gardens in Australia and England. The English paintings explore the English garden landscape tradition and its cultural context; the Australian garden paintings explore the way that the English landscape tradition has been adopted and transplanted into this landscape. For me, in all their forms, gardens are pictorially accessible and versatile in terms of the creation of an associated painted image, but it is a garden's context—its boundary or enclosure—that holds the key to expressing meaning.

Early on in my research it became clear I needed to ask: *what is a garden?* In *The Garden of Ideas*, Richard Aitken writes that “gardens have a profound significance to humankind. They have universal values as repositories of cultivated plants,

maintained using the skills of horticulture and order through diverse processes bound by tradition and innovation”.⁹ Those words—*diverse processes bound by tradition and innovation*—directly mirror what I understand of my own painting practice, which could be characterised as an acknowledgement of the tension that always exists within painting between *tradition* and *innovation*.

If you believe in ongoing traditions and that “human culture has its origin in stories, and its ongoing history is one of endless storytelling”,¹⁰ then it is fair to say that garden culture (nature rearranged) and our relationship with plants are an important part of the human narrative. The types of plants, the various climates, how different plants grow, and the way they are ordered in nature is woven into our understanding of place. Indeed, we rely on nature for our very existence. Our understanding of place is also greatly affected by prevailing social, political, and environmental issues, as well as historical considerations.

Understandings of *what constitutes a garden* differ widely; style, choice of plants, level of detail, and scale all contribute to a garden’s difference and intent. My fascination with gardens and their potential as a subject for painting is founded in this difference—a difference explained by the gardens shown in figures 3 and 4. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary describes a garden as “an enclosed piece of ground devoted to the cultivation of flowers, fruit or vegetables”.¹¹ Philosopher and art historian Mara Miller’s definition includes the elements, proposing that a garden is “any purposeful arrangement of natural objects . . . with exposure to the sky or open air in which the form is not fully accounted for by purely practical considerations such as convenience”.¹²

⁹ Richard Aitken, *The Garden of Ideas: Four Centuries of Australian Style* (The Miegunyah Press in association with the State Library of Victoria, 2010), ix.

¹⁰ Robert Pogue Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human condition* (The University of Chicago Press, 2008) 83.

¹¹ Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 5th edition (William R. Trumble and Angus Stevenson, eds.) (2002).

¹² David E. Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens* (Oxford University Press), 13.



Fig. 3. The Flower Clock garden at Sydney's Taronga Zoo (2012)

Fig. 4. By comparison, a very different type of garden in Bathurst NSW (2013)

The links between painting and gardening led me to consider several practical and philosophical questions. In purely practical terms, gardeners garden and painters paint. The practice of gardening may require one to weed or to break up old pavers in order to create a new flowerbed—both constitute gardening. The practice of painting, likewise, may require the sketching out of an idea in a visual diary or the building of a stretcher-frame—both are painting activities. These examples illustrate that both practices are bound, not just by physical activity or diverse processes, but by their material manifestations. Philosophically each of us *read* gardens in our own way—one way may be as a mirror of their owner's power, another may be as a “token of the enslavement of nature”¹³ or, more simply, as an expression of our relationship with nature. These ideas further connect with some of the questions that arose as part of my practice-led research:

- How and in what way do nature and culture intersect in the context of gardens and paintings?
- How might I experiment with methods to build the physicality of my paint surface, trial formats, and experiment with material changes to heighten compositional structure to develop more coherent bodies of work?

I have also considered the historical development of the English garden and western landscape painting tradition from *Tudor gardens* to *knot gardens* and *parterre gardens* to *picturesque parkscapes*. This encompassed the evolution of the various

¹³ Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens*, 113.

forms and pictorial renditions of these traditions. This study led to themes relating to the development of the Picturesque in England and its transference to Australia, including an examination of the landscape works of English artist Stanley Spencer and the diffusion of the Picturesque aesthetic over time and within contemporary practice.

In turn, this study prompted other questions relating to my art practice. How might I engage with the formal conventions and attributes gardens are endowed with to convey a sense of transformation, given that gardens represent nature re-imagined? Given that gardens are places of reflection, how can I best translate the atmospheric qualities that gardens express into the illusionistic, material language of painting? Many of the questions and ideas in this research emerged slowly as a result of my analysis of different texts and my constant gardening in combination with the experimentation that occurred through fieldwork and studio practice.



This exegesis consists of six chapters, all of which explore quite distinct yet related subject matter. The order and underlying narrative of these topics has been designed to best mirror the pathway taken throughout this project. I produced a body of work that consisted of 265 paintings that resulted in four separate solo exhibitions, one of which was a concluding exhibition held at the ANU in Canberra in March 2016.

Chapter One explores several interconnected themes that include the development and dissemination of the Picturesque, its depiction, ideology, and cultural semblance. In order to appreciate what was to become the *cult* of the Picturesque I examine key voices who articulated the aesthetic principles of the Picturesque and promoted their adoption in various forms. As a frame of reference I explore some of the key events that drove the changes in taste and the links that were made between gardens, art, and nature. In the lead up to the formal pronouncement of the *Picturesque* I explore the significance of the landscape gardener Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown, purveyor of the *ideal* English parkscape. His influence and the implementation of this type of garden is discussed through the frame of paintings I produced at a Brownian designed garden, Compton Verney, in Buckinghamshire in 2011. The Picturesque is then discussed in a contemporary context through an analysis of works by three

different artists working in the field: Australian photographer Rosemary Lang, Australian mixed-media artist Joan Ross, and British sculptor-photographer Andy Goldsworthy. These artists, two Australian and one British, have been chosen to illustrate the persistence, diversity, and contemporaneousness of the axiom of the Picturesque. I conclude the chapter with a personal account and acknowledgement of Aboriginal dispossession and a review of the existence of Aboriginal memorial gardens documented by early white explorers and the shared cultural practices of the constructed garden landscape.

Chapter Two continues to explore the development of the Picturesque through an examination of European garden culture, its arrival and implementation in Australia by early settlers, and the paintings of colonial artist John Glover, in particular his garden painting *A View of the Artist's House and Garden, in Mills Plains, Van Diemen's Land* (1834–35). This chapter explores associated themes of improvement and transformation and acts of settlement related to the politics of colonisation, including the rise of notions of *landscape* and ornamental garden practises associated with the Picturesque. In part this chapter is a summation of the Picturesque aesthetic, the European idealism that largely defined Glover's artistic work, and Glover's contribution to the prolongation of the Picturesque.

Chapter Three analyses several key garden landscape paintings where I outline the methodology and compositional structures employed by artist Stanley Spencer. Whilst many artists and artworks have greatly informed this study, the English garden landscapes by Spencer were not only inspirational but highly instructive in terms of how they were made, their compositional complexity, their material presence, their narrative quality including their illusionistic depth and assiduous brushwork, and their overt detail. I also define Spencer's version of the Picturesque and his differing styles giving some context to the artistic time frame in which he worked. This is discussed in relation to the influence his work had on my own.

Chapter Four discusses the field trip I undertook to the UK in September 2011 to paint firsthand the English garden landscape. This chapter charts my pictorial response to five significant and quite diverse gardens, outlines the process and logistics of painting in the field, and addresses my approach in material terms and in

terms of the gains in knowledge, experience, and critical reflection this process afforded me. To give some context to this study I provide a brief history and description of each garden, outlining various styles including the knot garden, the French parterre garden, the Picturesque parkscape, and the English traditional cottage garden. The five gardens are Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens in London; Cliveden House in Berkshire; Uplands House near Banbury in the Cotswold; and Compton Verney in Warwickshire.

The works produced in the UK provide a crucial link to the subsequent paintings I produced of two distinctive formal gardens shortly after arriving back in Australia. In total I painted seventeen different gardens, but in Chapter Five I concentrate on two highly individualistic gardens because of their acute differences and because of the intensity of the *painting* experience each represented for me. Another consequential component of this research has been that, through painting a wide variety of contrasting gardens, I have been able to hone in on and apply ideas and methods relating to what I felt were the more successful works. The two gardens that are the focus of this chapter also express for me one of the parallels that exists between gardening and painting—that is, that gardens and paintings each possess the ability to offer a heightening of our visual and sensorial perception and therefore our experience. The two gardens are *The Everglades*, a European modernist style garden that extends over thirteen acres designed by Paul Sorenson and situated in Leura in the Blue Mountains, and a garden I call *Rowans' Garden* (fig. 5), located in suburban Newcastle, NSW, that could be described as a private, extreme example of obsession—part *knot garden*, part *Japanese garden*, and part *English garden*.



Fig. 5.
*The Urn, Rowan's
Garden, 2011*

Chapter Six describes my thinking and response to three key works I produced of three disparate gardens, followed by an examination of the paintings I produced of my own garden in Springwood. The three key works are explained in the order of their execution: *Cherry Doughnut, Kingswood Western Sydney* (2011), *Headdress, Looking Through Shadows* (2013), and *View from the Garden, Stuart's Creek Station* (2014). These paintings were chosen because they best express my conviction that gardens are ultimately as much a product of our imagination as they are about reality. Each distinctively portrays a sense of place and each has been individually defined by their makers. These three paintings depict Australian gardens that articulate my clearest visual understanding of transposed culture and nature re-imagined. Their differences highlight what individuals in vastly different locations and from different cultural backgrounds bring to the creation of a garden. These paintings best illustrate my overarching question of how paintings of gardens might engage with the many formal conventions and attributes of gardens themselves to communicate a sense of the transformation of landscape. They also express that *otherworldly* quality that some gardens and some paintings can achieve.

I reiterate in broad terms the concepts raised by the many parallels between gardening and painting. I outline my understanding of these similarities and the creative (thinking) process and practical applications involved in the *making* of a garden and the making of paintings. These similarities are explained via a detailed examination of several key works depicting my own garden in Springwood. I also reflect on some of the changes I made to my garden and outline in detail my approaches to composition; I analyse the pictorial structures and my thought process embodied in several key works. In examining my own paintings I explore the topics of mood and atmospherics as well as ideas relating to Renaissance painting devices like *the stage* and the elevation of the spectator.

The concluding chapter presents a reflective and critical commentary to draw the work to a close. The chapter identifies strengths and short-comings of the project, and points toward areas in need of further investigation.



Several key writers and their texts either informed my thinking or reinforced my understanding of this subject. I drew on Tim Bonyhady's *The Colonial Earth*, in particular his detailed description of Glover's arrival in Tasmania and the many different plants pictured in his garden; David Hansen's contextualisation of Glover's life, painting, and attachment to the *picturesque*; Robert Pogue Harrison's *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* for his broad-ranging philosophical account of our human connection to gardens; and the collection of writings compiled in *The Genius of Place: The English Landscape Garden*, edited by John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, which gave me a better understanding of the development of the English garden landscape.

Chapter One: The Picturesque Landscape as Constructed Nature

Introduction

In this Chapter I explore the history of the Picturesque to contextualise its relationship to gardens, nature, and art. In broad terms, this research constitutes an examination of painting and gardens, and through their manifestations, histories and associations, an exploration of the intersection of nature and culture. In its broadest and most literal sense, the Picturesque means “in the manner of a picture; fit to be made into a picture”¹, as it was defined in the 1703 Oxford English Dictionary and this use of the term makes the a natural connection between gardening, landscape and painting.

There are many well-known historical examples of artist gardeners; two notable examples are Claude Monet (1840–1926) and Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), both of whom were influenced by the wild gardens of English designers Gertrude Jekyll (1843–1932) and William Robinson (1838–1935). Jekyll herself expressed the belief that “planting ground is painting a landscape with living things”.² An earlier example that also expressed the link between painting and gardens is the Chinese flower gardens of the seventh-century that were “considered as landscape paintings in three dimensions”.³ While these connections are historically important and link with my topic, I have focused on an exploration of the Picturesque aesthetic—its development, principles, ideology, and continuing evolution. This is important for this study as it provides context and in helping define the aesthetics links with the English landscape garden, Australian landscape painting, my own work and the ideology of landscape.

In this chapter I identify some of the early influences, competing voices, and events that influenced the aesthetics and politics of the Picturesque aesthetic. I focus on two key figures: William Gilpin, credited with most clearly defining the aesthetic principles of the Picturesque, and Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown, whose ideal English parkscape gardens

¹ <http://www.seadict.com/en/en/picturesque>, (accessed 15 December 2016)

² Fenja Gunn, *Lost Gardens of Gertude Jekyll* (Letts, 1991), 160.

³ Joseph Wang, *The Chinese Garden* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1998), 17.

redefined the English landscape in the lead up to what is sometimes described as the ‘cult’ of the Picturesque.

The Picturesque owes its existence largely to several divergent influences in post-1750s England, including the burgeoning industrial revolution, the war with France, the food shortages that resulted from the war, and the new economic value of land. These events combined with the “taste for nature and the natural” towards the formulation of a set of aesthetic principles that attributed a higher meaning to nature.⁴

“As a result of its new economic value, land at the end of the eighteenth century acquired new social and political value as well. Simultaneously, Nature, with its various representations in painting, poetry, letters, manners, dress, philosophy, and science, became a supreme social value and was called upon to clarify and justify social change”.⁵

Richard Payne Knight (1750–1823), a leading exponent of the Picturesque, purposefully linked art and gardens. His insights can be summarised in these terms: it is through the stimulation of the mind that we gain endless gratification from viewing gardens via associating them with landscape painting.⁶ This appreciation is also embellished and contrasted through these associations in the creation of paintings and gardens. Over time the Picturesque has come to be understood as a classification for both painting and landscapes.

The Picturesque

“The Picturesque represents more than a trend in gardening or a footnote to the history of the sublime, the Picturesque represents a complex and at times paradoxical moment in the evolution of the eighteenth-century attitudes about art, nature and aesthetic experience”.⁶

William Gilpin (1724–1804) began to publish ideas about the Picturesque based on accounts from his landscape tours of England during the 1780s, but it was not until 1792 that he formally set down his theories of the Picturesque in *Three Essays: On*

⁴ Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740–1860* (Los Angeles, USA: University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989), 57.

⁵ *Ibid*, 1.

⁶ David. E Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2006), 15.

⁶ David Marshall, *The Problem with the Picturesque*, Vol. 35, No. 3, *Aesthetics and the Disciplines* (Spring, 2002), 413–437.

Picturesque Beauty, On Picturesque Travel, and On Sketching Landscape. Gilpin's version of the Picturesque was focused on notions of Picturesque 'effect' observed in natural scenes (fig. 6). He sought these effects in landscapes described as 'all roughness, irregularity, and variousness', and later called scenes possessing these qualities 'extremely romantic'.⁷ He linked art and nature but unlike Knight elevated nature above art.⁸



Fig. 6.
An illustration from William Gilpin's *Observations on the River Wye* (Second edition) (1789), facing p. 39.

The term 'Picturesque' as a set of rules and as a construct was defined through its relationship to two main aesthetic ideals—*sublimity* and *beauty*. Although Picturesque appreciation was considered a basic human instinct and not part of rational decision-making, it relied upon notions of refinement and connoisseurship, as well as conversancy with art. Along with Gilpin, Knight defined the Picturesque in the realm of those who are "in the habit of viewing and receiving from fine pictures, who will naturally feel pleasure in viewing those objects in nature".⁹ Knight elevated pleasure and refinement and bound the appreciation of paintings to nature.

From the 1750s, garden design was shaped not only by several competing ideas of what constituted a Picturesque landscape, but also by prevailing fashion and the innovations of designers such as Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1716–1783),

⁷ Laura Mayer, *Capability Brown and the English Landscape Garden* (Great Britain: Shire Library, 2011), 51.

⁸ Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*, 1.

⁹ John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis. *The Genius of Place: The English Landscape Garden, 1620–1820* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 1988), 349.

Humphrey Repton (1752–1818), and before them William Kent (1685–1748). These designers and their clients also had competing visions. The gardens they designed and the landscape art that depicted these estates relied on patronage and patronage meant politics and wealth (fig. 7). This reliance is significant, as it ultimately ensured the elevation of the Picturesque aesthetic and the enduring relationship between garden design and the development of the Western landscape painting tradition. Poet Alexander Pope (1688–1744), on looking through the entrance arch of the Botanic Garden at Oxford, declared: “All gardening is landscape painting. Just like a landscape hung up”.¹⁰



Fig. 7. One of Humphrey Repton’s unrealised ‘Gardenesque’ designs fashionable at the close of the 1800s.

As the concepts of *nature* and *naturalness* took hold, they did so at a time of great political and social upheaval. The advent of the industrial revolution and England’s war with France (1756–1763) increased the importance and value of land and propelled the “improvement of the real landscape”.¹¹ Wartime food shortages drove the imperative to increase agricultural yield and as commodity prices rose, so too did the price of land. These factors coincided with the rise of the Picturesque and the fashions espoused by landscape gardeners like Brown. Gilpin’s Picturesque was *rustic* and he sought out and identified his version of the aesthetic in natural scenes throughout Britain (fig. 6), describing the Picturesque as “that kind of beauty which would look well in a picture”.¹² Uvedale Price (1747–1829), unlike Gilpin, sought Picturesque qualities in the (old) estate gardens that Brown was

¹⁰ Peter Martin, *The Pleasures of Virginia: From Jamestown to Jefferson* (University of Virginia, Charlottesville, London, 2001), xxii.

¹¹ Birmingham, *Landscape and Ideology*, 66.

¹² Mayer, *Capability Brown and the English Landscape Garden*, 49.

successfully transforming into parkscape. Whilst many believed that Brown's 'innovations' of clumps of trees and serpentine lakes expressed the new naturalism in gardening, Price attacked Brown for his 'contrived effects' and artificiality.¹³ The Picturesque that preceded Brown was defined as "the practice of configuring real space to resemble paintings"¹⁴ and a systematic way in which to view and appreciate the world. Early in the 19th Century, through patronage and partly because of the value of land, the landscape as a genre began to assert itself over the established genre of history painting.¹⁵ The rise in popularity of Picturesque travel in England, alongside Gilpin's ability to communicate his ideas to a broader audience contributed to the notion that "moderately circumstanced, literate, middle-class people were capable of making aesthetic judgements",¹⁶ which in turn drove the taste for landscape painting and re-making the landscape. Gilpin, himself an artist, defined in compositional terms how a truly Picturesque landscape should be formatted: the foreground should be united with side screens, a brighter middle distance should provide views of a far-reaching distant prospect, and, to add consequence, a ruined abbey should break into the sky.¹⁷

The Brownian landscape: Compton Verney

One of the most enduring exponents of the 'ideal English parkscape' was the landscape gardener 'Capability' Brown who, during his almost forty-year career, designed over 170 garden estates, one of which was Compton Verney in Warwickshire. Compton Verney was begun in 1768 and took Brown and his garden-labourers six years to complete.¹⁸ The rise of Brown and changes in taste away from 'Classical Arcadia' and more 'eclectic Rococo gardens' of the preceding decades signalled the growing desire for more natural,

¹³ Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*, 68.

¹⁴ <http://www.encyclopedia.com/literature-and-arts/art-and-architecture/art-general/picturesque> (accessed 15 December 2016).

¹⁵ Kay Dian Kriz, *The Idea of the English landscape Painter: Genius as Alibi in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1997), 66.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Mayer, *Capability Brown and the English Landscape Garden*, 49.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

opened-out garden characteristics.¹⁹ These features became the aesthetic underpinnings of the Picturesque. To give some context to this rise in prominence, by Brown's death in 1783 over four thousand landscape parks had been made-over in England.²⁰ Not everyone admired what Brown did. Picturesque theorist Uvedale Price was scathing of Brown's gardens; whilst they were seen as a new synthesised naturalism Price believed they were not natural enough and constituted a "rape of nature".²¹

During my 2011 UK field trip I made several paintings of the grounds at Compton Verney, all of which feature the now enormous pines (fig. 8). Two of these paintings in particular, *Framed by Pines, Compton Verney* (2011) (fig. 10) and *Through Big Pines / Compton Verney* (2011) (fig. 14), exemplify my preoccupation with *the frame within the frame* as a structural matrix employed to highlight specific motifs, add illusionistic depth, and reinforce the composed nature of the garden I am painting. To further illustrate this, I have set these two paintings amongst several other paintings of different gardens where I have used similar compositional devices.



Fig. 8.
Compton Verney,
Warwickshire.
(2011)

The four paintings shown together under the section titled *Framing the View: Placing a Central Motif* (figs. 9, 10, 11, and 12), while quite varied, demonstrate my compositional approach and the way in which I set out to frame a certain aspect in each garden. This

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

²¹ Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*, 67.

may be a dead tree, a small shaped pine, oddly shaped gum situated amongst European plants, or a glimpse of a swimming pool. I may isolate a subject as if posing an open-ended question, but more often than not the reframed object possesses some kind of personal significance. This may be a memory from my past, recognition of a previous painting or painting experience, or an allegorical, human connection. When choosing to paint or painting a landscape I am actively looking for visual cues and the metaphoric potential contained within the elements that make up that scene. This is a cognitive process involving interpretation and thus the editing of what is seen. Different places like Compton Verney can trigger the search for new visual solutions or prompt me to revisit familiar territory in the search for a new approach.

As a subject for painting, the parkscape grounds at Compton Verney were significant; unlike many of Brown's gardens, they remain relatively unchanged from his original design. As with all gardens, apart from direct human intervention and wholesale change, the main agents of change are the normal cycle of growth, natural mortality, and the ongoing remediation that occurs when caring for any garden. These two paintings of Compton Verney illustrate the beginning of a more conscious approach to composition and the notion of a garden as a *theatricalised* space involving the honing of what I describe as *the frame within the frame*. This search for a stage-like quality led to the predominate use of a portrait format to enclose the viewer's gaze.

These works reaffirmed the compositional explorations of the earlier paintings produced at Boolooroo Station near Moree (fig. 13) where I located myself within the garden looking out. My approach there was influenced by Stanley Spencer's compositions (a subject-activated foreground and naturalistic depiction) as opposed to an overtly romanticised *Claudean ideal*. The Boolooroo Station paintings, along with the Compton Verney works, were important reference points for the subsequent body of work produced at the Everglades in Leura (some which will be discussed in Chapter Five). These paintings led me to seek out similar characteristics within other gardens and to produce new works incorporating multiple framing devices. These also included strong verticals and recurring focal elements.

For these framing devices to be truly effective, my paintings needed to depict real (not imaginary) places, enforcing the need for more observed *en plein air* painting. Whilst the light and level of detail of each scene (figs. 13 and 15) may have been edited or adjusted, each painting's reframed compositional structure relied upon a faithful depiction of that place. In order to create a sense of the hyper-real that hovers within the realm of believability but also questions reality, I sought to locate the garden by heightening the particular mood of each painting and combining that mood with a convincing portrayal of the setting. These were not extreme adjustments but more of a shift in emphasis, a heightening of luminosity or an intermingling or saturation of different colours. As in *Through Big Pines / Compton Verney* (2011) (fig. 14), the changes found expression through the interplay of shadows and their defused definition and contrast, as well as the narrowing of the aperture through which the central subject and view are visible.

When painting, I'm interested in gaining insight into the underlying compositions of each garden. This is spurred by my curiosity as someone who is passionate about gardens and how they are put together—why certain plants are chosen, their position in relation to each other, and the labour involved in their production and situation. A vital part of this process of understanding is to, wherever possible, make several works in each garden, focusing on differing views of the same elements. The layout of Compton Verney, particularly the area around the lake, made it appealing to paint; it offered groupings of trees and strong structural elements broken up by passages of open ground. Each garden I paint teaches me something new. In the case of Compton Verney, the monumental scale of the pines planted by Brown provided a new opportunity.

Just as many gardens have paths or areas of respite, I am always conscious to frame each scene in a way as to allow the viewer *space* to enter the picture. The three paintings illustrated in figures 13, 14, and 15 under the heading *Looking into Light* were designed to allow the viewer room to dwell in a moment of stillness and to build the atmospherics of each painting. In each case, these foreground areas were adjusted and subtly reworked with directional brush-marks and merging colour variations to increase the sense of enticement. Again, it was equally important that each of these works conveyed pictorial

believability by achieving a degree of naturalism. My intention is for each work (and each depiction of that place) to articulate a visual truth (of that place) but to allow for a questioning of that truth, an articulation that produces a space between the believability of what actually existed and the often-strange qualities and interactions that are created when nature is re-organized or tampered with.

Compton Verney's most striking features appear in both paintings: the huge, 250-year-old pine trees that truly dominate the landscape. Garden designs and plantings on this scale factor in longevity, grandeur, and a sense of heroics, and are a much different proposition to paint than more intimate, eclectic, or strangely situated *alien* gardens. The title of the painting *Framed by Big Pines* (2011) describes the genesis for this composition and points to their odd shape, gnarled trunks, and missing limbs. Their form, as pines and as they exist in this painting, signifies their time in the earth and the extent of human intervention needed to create their peculiar structure.

In *Through Big Pines / Compton Verney* (2011) I have chosen to invert the composition to create a less open, much more intimate view. I have used the pines' foliage and their shadows to close in and funnel the view in an effort to add the illusion of depth rather than present the more open invitation expressed in *Framed by Big Pines, Compton Verney*. I chose to enhance the level of detail when articulating the tips of the foliage so that they reach out into the light as if to caress the central pine figure. The shapes of the shadows in the foreground have been adjusted to create a *visual* path leading through the pines and towards the light. I have positioned the horizon line towards the bottom half of the composition to elevate the viewer's gaze so that the viewer is positioned to look upward, into the light. When painting this scene I have also taken care to articulate the central pine so that it may be read as a figure.

Framing the view: Placing a central motif



Fig. 9. Study, *View of the Artist's Garden, Hillston*, oil on canvas, 38cm x 156cm, 2010



Fig. 10. *Framed by Pines, Compton Verney*, acrylic on canvas, 40cm x 30cm, 2011



Fig. 11. *Dusk, Looking Through Big Pines*, oil on canvas, 124cm x 69cm, 2012



Fig. 12. *Two Hedged Pines, Gold*, oil on canvas, 38 x 52cm, 2010

Looking Through into Light: Moree, NSW; Compton Verney, UK, The Everglades, NSW



Fig. 13. *Australian Picturesque, Boolooroo Station*, oil on board, 22.5cm x 30cm, 2010



Fig. 14. *Through Big Pines / Compton Verney*, acrylic on canvas, 40cm x 30cm, 2011



Fig. 15. *Study for Inside Hedges, Looking out*, oil on canvas, 52cm x 38cm, 2012

Contemporary reading of a new Picturesque

Historic images of the Colonial Picturesque and their resultant socio-political implications continue to inform the work of many Australian and international artists. Past legacies of ‘landscape culture’ such as colonisation and dispossession resulting from notions of transformation and man’s primacy over nature are also reflected in contemporary cultural discourse and image making. The ongoing ramifications and omnipresent politics of ‘land’ can be attributed to a continuum of the past that links present land and resource practices and the all too real threat to ‘natural’ systems. The belief that we (as human beings) are separate from nature is challenged by the material consequences of climate change, toxic pollution, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, and ocean acidification. Contemporary artists like Rosemary Lang (1958–) challenge our perception and question our relationship to nature through picturing landscape interventions such as *groundspeed (Red Piazza) #4* (fig. 16).



Left: Fig. 16.
Rosemary Lang,
*groundspeed (Red
Piazza) #4* (2001),
Type C photograph
edition 15.

It is important to note that Lang does not digitally manipulate or enhance her photographs, preferring like British artist Andy Goldsworthy to physically intervene in the landscape and to document her own form of visual truth. This work pictures red, retro carpet that in turn depicts floral emblems of nature laid across the rainforest floor. As a composition this photo is highly conventional and framed in a Picturesque manner. It possesses darkened landforms on either side of the frame; it conveys depth through a standard receding foreground, mid-ground, and background and directs the viewer’s gaze through a centrally lit area that is framed by two trees in the middle of the picture.

In her video animation, *Touching other people's butterflies* (2013) Joan Ross (1961–) more directly exploits the Picturesque by combining appropriated historical images with contemporary representations of nature that have been digitally manipulated to overtly juxtapose the past and the present (fig. 17). Like Lang, Ross deploys conventional framing methods but more pointedly alludes to acts of settlement and a Picturesque ideology. In this frame, Ross's jarring neon colours are incorporated with an image by colonial artist-forger Joseph Lycett and others in a cut and paste, post-punk mash-up that suggests that the times may be different but not much has changed. In doing so Ross not only challenges our perception of nature and the environment but also critiques and questions the politics of land and land practices in reference to current cultural norms.



Left: Fig. 17.
Joan Ross, *Touching other people's butterflies* (2013); still from single channel digital video animation, colour, sound.

British environmental artist Andy Goldsworthy (1956–) challenges the past and the way we look at landscape and nature through his ephemeral, site-specific sculptural works. It could be argued that his works stand as a rejection of Picturesque ideology, but it must be said that to read and fully appreciate his images we require prior knowledge of the aesthetic conventions and ideology of the Picturesque. Whilst less physical and less interventionist in their creation, my garden paintings also depend upon a physical interaction with nature. They involve an expression of that experience through my interaction and end with a pictorial response. It is not until I paint sections of my own garden that I have worked to reshape that I begin to share some common ground with Goldsworthy. I have chosen Goldsworthy as an example to give context to a contemporary Picturesque because of the environmental underpinnings of his works and

the fact that (even though his work may be ephemeral), like a gardener, he has re-shaped and re-imagined nature.

The notion of viewing nature in terms of a picture (which relies on the frame and a set of conventions that reduces a view to its two-dimensional form) rather than as an all-encompassing, multi-sensory experience is an expression of Western culture. As Busch (1989) writes: “Each culture constructs its own world out of the infinite variety of nature ... [Nature is] socialised ... recognised ... [and] made into a material manifestation of social structure”.²² The notion of reconstructing a world out of nature, which is then recognised through an image, hung up, and displayed, goes to the heart of the Picturesque and Goldsworthy’s practice.

Goldsworthy challenges the way we look at landscape and nature through the creation of ephemeral sculptures; through his actions, he re-presents nature by intervening in the landscape, then separates himself (and us) from nature via a reframed photographic reinterpretation (figs. 18, 19). By using what is at hand (like a gardener) he works with nature to highlight his overarching philosophical agenda and to communicate the concept that we as living beings are also part of nature.



Fig. 18.
Left: Andy Goldsworthy, *Large Fallen Oak Tree, Jenny Noble’s Gill, Dumfriesshire* (15th September, 1985).

Fig. 19.
Right: *Dandelion Flowers, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, West Bretton* (1st May, 1987).

²² Thomas Greider and Lorraine Garkovich, *Landscapes: The Social Construction of Nature and the Environment* (Lexington, USA: Department of Sociology, University of Kentucky, 40546–0215, 1994), 6.

Philosophically, his temporal works sit at odds with and question the viability of Capability Brown's Picturesque gardens. By working with nature, they directly challenge notions of conquering nature and remaking the world, as well as the ideology of *improvement*. Yet, however temporary his sculptural works may be, his photographs (like many images which represent gardens) are permanent evidence of the Picturesque trait of *transformation*. Once complete they stand as a pictorial expression of his idealised version of nature. Despite the often, fleeting nature of his sculptural works, Goldsworthy's practice is significant because in working with nature the way he does many of his works express, or refer to, the art form of gardening.

Acknowledging the past

In September 2010, I made a trip to Moree on the northwest plains of New South Wales to paint the garden at Boolooroo Station and to attend an opening of an exhibition of my paintings at the Moree Plains Regional Gallery. I had seen this complex and passionately maintained garden, the result of three generations of the same family, on a previous trip. At the opening of the exhibition I had a fleeting conversation with a local Aboriginal woman who asked me what I thought of Moree and I told her I had been painting the garden out at Boolooroo Station. I also commented on how dry it was and suggested that we needed some rain. Without malice but tinged with deep sadness, she asked if I knew that the area around Moree had once been an abundant wetland that, after more than 150 years of intensive farming, has all but disappeared. At the time her statement made a real impact on me and I felt it important when writing about the Picturesque to acknowledge the significance of what she told me, highlighting continuing political, social, and environmental ramifications. The shrinking wetlands that she spoke of are now promoted as a regional tourist attraction and the attached Gwydir River that feeds the garden and the various crops at Boolooroo Station once fed the Kamilaroi people.

Aboriginal memorial gardens

In 2010 the State Library of NSW held an exhibition entitled *Carved Trees: Aboriginal Cultures of Western NSW*. This exhibition documented the cultural practices of carving ceremonial trees to mark burial sites. Whilst the carved ceremonial trees are of great interest, their significance in term of this research is as markers of grave-sites and memorial gardens. Bruce Pascoe writes that “landscaping and garden design around cemeteries and ceremonial grounds were observed by a number of early settlers”;²³ this has been documented in many parts of Australia. He also notes that “the photographs we have of graves and graveyards indicate that the site was selected for its beauty and show many arbors, which we can assume had been planted to enhance the aesthetic”.²⁴



Fig. 20.
(*Illustration 1*) Depicted in:
Two Expeditions into the
interior of South Australia,
Vol. 1, entitled Native Burial
Place, Near Budda

Thomas Mitchell’s field notes and drawings also record the landscaping of the Aboriginal cemetery near the Darling River. The image (fig. 20) depicts Blandowski’s interpretation of an Aboriginal burial place as described to him by the explorer Charles Sturt.

Of particular interest in terms of its Picturesque aesthetic and what it depicts is the picture drawn by G. E. Evans (fig. 21) which was done whilst on expedition with John Oxley in the 1820s. The Indigenous Services Librarian, Ronald Briggs, writes that “John Oxley gave the first European account of carved trees in 1817, when he

²³ Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu Black Seed: Agriculture or Accident?* (Western Australia: Magabala Books Aboriginal Corporation, 2014) 178.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

encountered a Wiradjuri burial site on the Lachlan River”.²⁵ The exhibition catalogue describes the work thus: “The Grave of a Native of Australia, drawn by GE Evans and published in John Oxley’s journals of two expeditions into the interior of New South Wales in 1820”.²⁶



Fig. 21.
*The Grave of
a Native of
Australia,*
GE Evans

The work by Evans clearly illustrates a parkland not unlike the Tasmanian Gentleman’s park described by John Glover. Glover, referring to the country near where he lived, writes that “it is possible almost everywhere, to drive a carriage as easily as in a Gentleman’s Park in England”.²⁷

The power of this work is in the representation of culture by another codified culture, a stilted, almost naïve Picturesque depiction of a sacred cultural practice being recorded and acknowledged at the same time as it was being expunged and denied. The image depicts a cleared site nestled amongst trees—a place of ceremony, reflection, and memory. Strangely, when we look at this picture, there is something truly beautiful about what we see but also something immensely sad. An

²⁵ Ronald Briggs, “European Discovery”, In *Carved Trees: Aboriginal Cultures of western NSW* (Nelson Meers Foundation, State Library of New South Wales, 2011), 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ David Hansen, *John Glover and The Colonial Picturesque* (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart and Art Exhibitions Australia, 2003), 98.

image of shared but tenuous cultural links that express strong emotion and, as we can see, through gardening and memorialising the dead, common human practice.

The constructed landscape

The historic English version of the Picturesque and the constructed landscape was in part reclamation—a reaction to the ugliness of the industrial revolution. The politics of land was attached to beauty and the taking back of nature. The concepts of beauty and nature, the principles of the Picturesque, and the new constructed landscape attached order and meaning to place and harked back to old, green English ideals. When Glover came to Australia there was no industrial revolution underway; what he thought he encountered was wild, untamed, and *uncivilised* nature. Glover's audience was not colonial settlers; he produced paintings for a market back in England curious to understand the new world.

The landscape that the colonists made, as we do now, was “a working, productive entity, adapting and changing uses overtime”.²⁸ The pressures that drove the Picturesque and the production of landscape paintings helped define the pictorial parameters of the garden landscape. Today, our contemporary expressions of the Picturesque are influenced by history and the multitude of technologies available to artists, as in Joan Ross's use of digital video animation to contrast historical events with ideas that critique environmental pressures in a globalised world. Once, plant hunters searched to discover the *exotic* and cherished the unknown; today we see the planet's biodiversity disappearing before our eyes. Prior to white settlement, 30% of Australia was covered by forest and of that forest 40% is gone.²⁹ These figures reflect the paradigm and context in which I view the world. The politics of land, nature and, by association, gardens, are more complex and so too is how Picturesque aesthetics are read and disseminated.

²⁸ Pheobe Brady, University College Dublin, <http://www.presidentsmedals.com/Entry-36411> (accessed 15 December 2016).

²⁹ <http://jpe.oxfordjournals.org/content/5/1/109.full> (accessed 15 December 2016).



Fig. 22.
View Past Shadows,
Rowen's Garden
(2011), oil on canvas,
85 cm x 65 cm.

There are several dualities, such as the beauty of nature and (reshaped) nature, expressed in my work and in the paintings of my own garden cut into the bush of the Blue Mountains. Each painted picture inevitably expresses an idealised version of that actual garden but also the politics of that garden's position. In pictorial terms my paintings can be seen as intimate, observed explorations of beautiful gardens but also representations of culture laid over culture (fig. 22). On a personal level, my paintings explore different evolving garden aesthetics—ways of transforming nature—but in picturing different gardens my intention is to explore and question my relationship to the natural world.

Throughout this research, when painting gardens, I've tried, where at all possible, to frame out man-made structures such as paths, trellises, or buildings. Crucially I have wanted to allow the plants themselves, in each particular garden scene, to demonstrate human intervention and accentuate the way we as gardeners arrange and distort nature. As a gardener and as an artist, I observe and frame the plant forms within their landscape context to express the colour, rhythm, structure, and human interaction. In every painting that forms this research I have deliberately chosen not to depict a garden with a house at its centre. Instead I have placed

myself between the house and garden, inside the garden, in order to portray the garden and contextualise its relationship to what lies beyond. This is an important distinction as the house is *implied* but not known; what is most significant is *the garden*, its own expression, and the nexus between its boundary and the culture and politics of its situation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the Picturesque and its relation to gardens and landscape painting. I have focused on its development and principles as a construct, and its ideology and slow evolution from the competing voices of William Gilpin Richard Payne Knight and others, through to today's more contemporary interpretations of the aesthetic. This chapter also seeks to define the Picturesque as a way of viewing nature through the elevation of the notions of refinement and pleasure as well as its relationship with garden design and how it was shaped by the competing ideas, prevailing fashion and the innovation of designers like Capability Brown. The contribution of designers like Brown and others raised the Picturesque aesthetic to ensuring its enduring relationship between garden design and the western landscape painting tradition, of which I am apart.



In the next chapter I explore the art of John Glover and the colonial Picturesque and discuss the making and painting of his house and garden at Mills Plains in Tasmania. I also discuss what Glover brought from England, what he found on his arrival, and the implications of the art that he produced. This is done to give some context to what is outlined in this chapter and further consider the development and ideology of the Picturesque in relation to gardens, Australia landscape painting, my own paintings, and the politics of landscape.

Chapter Two: The Making of a Garden and the Painting of a Picture



Fig. 23. Left: *A View of the Artist's House and Garden, Mills Plains, Van Diemen's Land* (1835).

Introduction

In this chapter I review texts addressing artist-gardener John Glover and his painting *A View of the Artist's House and Garden, Mills Plains, Van Diemen's Land* (1835) (fig. 23). I analyse the links between Glover's art and his garden, and discuss how the image of his garden shapes what we understand of that landscape. In the establishment and picturing of his garden, Glover distanced Europeans from the capture and removal of Aboriginal people. I investigate the rise of settlement during the 1820s and 1830s and the politics of colonisation through the attendant rise of landscape and ornamental gardening practices conceptually organised by the Picturesque, an aesthetic and intellectual regime with roots in seventeenth and eighteenth century European idealism that largely defined Glover's artistic work. Australian garden historian Richard Aitkin acknowledges that the colonial reshaping of naturally-occurring and Aboriginally-managed land was carried out with an explicit appreciation for "qualities found in nature that could be viewed as if through the eye of a painter", such that "the emotional and associative power of the landscape quickly became imbued with notions of the Picturesque".¹

¹Richard Aitkin, *The Garden of Ideas: Four Centuries of Australian Style* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne University, 2010), 45.

Key themes and phrases emerge in surveying the critical literature on Glover's Australian landscapes as images of settlement: colonial notions of *transformation and improvement*, of *rural bounty*, and of an *idealisation* of the landscape, are set against accounts of dispossession: *the taking of land*, and *capture and removal*. These contextualise Glover's migration to Australia, and his relationship to Mills Plains (now known as Patterdale farm) and to the surrounding landscape. I will discuss these themes in relation to my focus on exploring connections between his painting practice, this new landscape, and his garden.

Given that *A View of the Artist's House and Garden, Mills Plains, Van Diemen's Land* is not typical of Glover's Picturesque aesthetic and larger body of work, I want to explore its relation to other paintings he produced at that time. I draw links between specific paintings that I believe to be significant and question the views of different authors in an effort to understand not only the implications of Glover's painting, but where it fits into Glover's oeuvre. I consider the politics of colonisation, his thinking at the time, and the stylistic changes he made after his arrival in Australia. As an artist and educator concerned with the creation of gardens, garden paintings, and, more generally, the tradition of landscape painting as it persists into the contemporary period, my project looks to Glover's painterly methods and stylistic changes to read the politics of the establishment and portrayal of his garden.

Improvement and transformation

In *The Colonial Earth*, Tim Bonyhady links "Glover's eagerness to transform his new landscape" with "his enthusiasm for what he found there", a succinct expression of the superior ambivalence at the heart of the colonial Picturesque.² One of the first examples we have of Glover's 'eagerness to transform' is expressed in the painting *Hobart Town taken From My Garden Where I lived* (1832) (fig. 24). Bonyhady cites Sharon Morgan offering that "Glover fixed on its bounty" and that the flowers were evidence of "what perfection Gardens may be brought (to) in the Country".³

² Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000), 93.

³ *Ibid.*

We cannot know whether Glover himself worked this garden or indeed what portion of the garden constitutes the potted plants, seedlings and seeds that came with him from England, but Bonyhady makes clear he was determined to make *improvement* to his holding at Mills Plains.⁴ He also asserts that Glover's job was made simpler in that the land he was granted was largely cleared and rich with grasses almost certainly a consequence of Aboriginal burning, otherwise known as fire-stick farming.⁵ This European notion of *improvement* and the industrialisation of land sits in stark contrast to the much more sustainable land management systems practiced by Aboriginal people.



Fig. 24. Left: *Hobart Town taken From My Garden Where I lived* (1832).

What makes *A View of the Artist's House and Garden, Mills Plains, Van Diemen's Land* unusual is its openness; it doesn't conform to Glover's more usual *Claudian Picturesque* framing conventions as displayed in the first major garden picture he painted, *Hobart Town taken From My Garden Where I lived* (1832). The *Claudian Picturesque* involved atmospheric, light effects, and the enclosing of a central view in the composition, framed on either side with rocks or trees. The viewer's gaze is held in place as he / she steps through the picture from a darkened foreground to a mid-ground and ultimately to the all-important distance.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

Bonyhady suggests that Glover was preoccupied after his arrival in Tasmania with the subject of Gum Trees, as evidenced by his numerous sketchbooks; he took delight in drawing a profusion of big old trees.⁶



Fig. 25. Left:
John Glover, *A View
of Mills Plains, Van
Diemen's Land*
(1833).

By my analysis, these drawings and paintings focus on the contorted branches of gum trees that many other colonial artists failed to truly depict. A prime example of this is Glover's painting *A View of Mills Plains, Van Diemen's Land* (1833) (fig. 25). Under the terms of Glover's 2,560 acre land grant, he was legally compelled to spend an amount of money equivalent to the value of the grant to improve the land; Bonyhady highlights his *appetite for improvement* at Mills Plains, and what he undertook outweighed his legal obligations.⁷ This notion of improvement is bound up in the ideology of landscape gardening and the Picturesque and is a colonising view transposed to this environment. Thomas Shepherd's *Lectures on Landscape Gardening in Australia* (1836) helps define this culture of transformation and improvement thus:

“By the art, skill, and taste of the Landscape Gardener, a more sublime, picturesque, or beautiful scene, and the state of things, is formed, than nature could present, if left entirely to her own exuberance, or sterility. He improves upon nature by directing her power, and renders generally agreeable to the sight of the beholders such objects as might, without his skill of arrangement, be contemplated with indifference or aversion”.⁸

⁶ *Ibid*, 91.

⁷ *Ibid*, 94.

⁸ Aitkin, *The Garden of Ideas: Four Centuries of Australian Style*, 45.

Writing about *A View of the Artist's House and Garden, Mills Plains, Van Diemen's Land*, Bonyhady again reinforces the notion of transformation: Glover's painting of his new house and garden expresses his immense satisfaction in how he remade Mills Plains.⁹ Whilst Bonyhady believes that the great majority of plants depicted had been introduced by Glover we have no idea to what extent he was involved in working the soil and laying out the garden. And whilst we know he was keenly interested in his burgeoning garden and that he brought with him several trees from England that flourished, we cannot be sure that the painting is an actual depiction of the plants that were there.¹⁰

The growing of food in settler gardens was essential for a sustained existence and this painting shows evidence of the garden two and a half years after Glover's arrival. Identifiable in the painting are pink rose bushes and geraniums stepped out across the foreground and just beyond the floral display a burgeoning orchard and rows of fruit trees. We can also see that Glover has put the numerous seeds and potted plants that he brought with him from England to good use in order to *transform* Mills Plains.¹¹

On closer inspection we can identify the large variety of different flowers in bloom, some of which are out of season. Bonyhady claims that this was done to increase "the impression of bounty";¹² although this artistic interpretation is almost certainly correct, it is ultimately inconsistent with the idea that his painting records to be a faithful depiction of what the garden looked like after two years.¹³

An idealised landscape or a realistic depiction

Glover's House and Garden painting is not just a representation of a house and garden; as Ron Radford writes, Glover expresses "the artist's joy in this new Arcadian paradise".¹⁴

⁹ Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth*, 94.

¹⁰ James Backhouse, *Journal*, May 9, 1833, Part 6, p. 41, B730, ML.

¹¹ Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth*, 94.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Ron Radford and Jane Hylton, *Australian Colonial Art: 1800–1900*, (Daniel Thomas, ed.) (Adelaide: Art Gallery Board of South Australia, 1995), 71.

Furthermore, like Bonyhady, Radford identifies the recurring notion of *transformation* and Glover's adherence to his European traditions.¹⁵ Counter to what I understand this painting to express, Radford makes the contentious claim that Glover's painted garden image is not idealised but one that is realistic.¹⁶

I believe that Radford's opinion here cannot be adequately squared with the available evidence. In addition to Bonyhady's horticultural insight that the floral garden was in bloom and not consistent with their accepted seasons¹⁷ and therefore it must be fantastical or an exaggeration, I believe we have evidence of a more *realistic* impression of the house and garden from Glover's sketchbooks.

A small ink-wash sketch, now held in the collection of the National Library of Australia (fig. 26), depicts what appears to be a much less established garden. In the sketch, the garden closest to the house and studio is plainly visible, but the organised, established beds and radiating rows of flowering plants evident in the painting are not clearly articulated. As an artist whose practice is based upon a combination of primarily information-gathering *en plein air* painting and more imaginative and interpretative studio painting, it is my opinion that this sketch is more likely to be a truer representation of what was *actually* there.



Fig. 26. Left: Detail from John Glover's sketchbook (1834?), *Landscape with trees; Glover's house and garden picture*, 2 drawings: pen, ink and wash; on sheet 17.8 x 26.5 cm.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth*, 95.

Glover appears to have produced the ink sketch from an elevated, slightly more distant vantage point, whereas in the painting we are positioned at eye-level with the horizon, directly in the garden. Whilst this sketch is tiny, Glover has loaded it with considerable information and detail. His skill and experience from years of assiduous drawing and visual note-taking are evident in this sketch. We can clearly make out, from both the sketch and the painting, the line in the mid-ground that traces across the plain to the pond. What's more, we can make out the growth that surrounds the pond.

What makes this small sketch significant is not its similarities to the painting but its differences. Details such as the small window in the facing side of the studio appear in the sketch but not in the painting. The scale of the path or road that leads to the stone house in the sketch is not given the same prominence in the painting. Most striking of all is the disparity in the scale, shape, and portrayal of the surrounding hills. The sketch shows more regular, rounded hills comparable to other paintings and contemporary photographs of Patterdale, whereas in the painting Glover has depicted a much more stylised version of the hill. In composing this picture, Glover has triangulated the main hill, now known as either Pinner's Pine or Sugar Loaf Hill, to reinforce the repeating triangular forms within the composition (fig. 27). This is also expressed in elements such as the pitch of the studio roof, the angled tops of the flowering bushes, and the matrix of angular paths that fan out across the foreground of the painting; these elements all owe their form to Glover's sense of order. Even the clouds located above the hill have been ordered to reflect the hills' triangular shape. There is a circularity in picturing landscape; by imposing order and bounty to his garden, Glover has in turn applied order and a framework to create a Romanticised version of what was there (and possibly what was not there). As in theories of the Picturesque, the natural world requires pictorial composition to be complete.

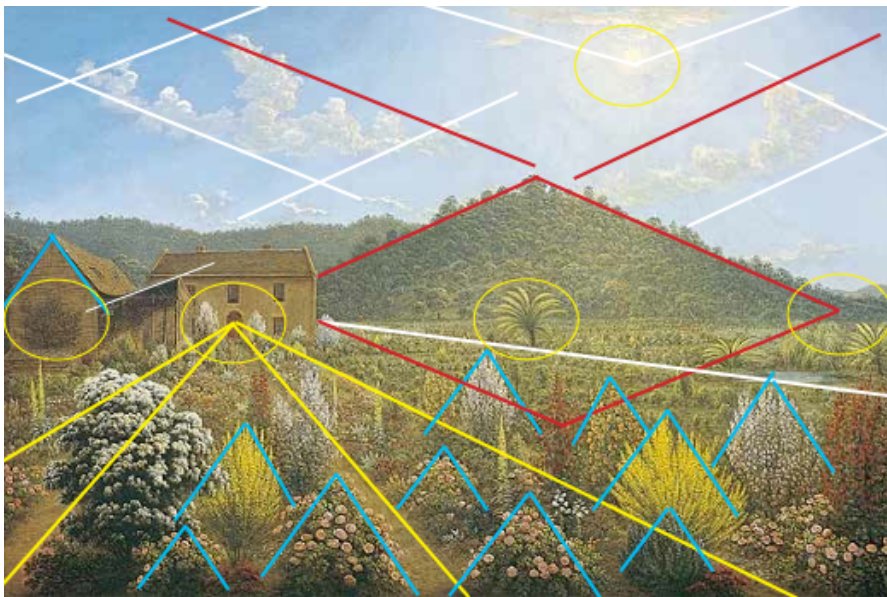


Fig. 27. Left: Compositional diagram created to illustrate the emphasis Glover placed on the repeating triangular shape within the picture frame.

I contend that this painting on first impressions appears to be quite simple in its format but on closer reading reveals many complexities.

Drawing on the methodologies I have developed in my painting practice, I propose that it is more likely that Glover was inspired to reshape the hill via the triangular shape of the cloud depicted in the *en plein air* ink sketch. Whilst this is speculation, it is based on my own experience and what I look for in a landscape, my working methods and my compositional triggers. It leads me to disagree with Radford’s reading of Glover’s painting as “realistic” rather than an “idealised landscape”.¹⁸ John McPhee, in contrast to Radford, presents a more widely-held view in *The Art of John Glover*:

“This painting of Patterdale shows the house, Glover’s studio and gallery surrounded by hectares of garden of almost Arcadian qualities. This garden, the result of seed and plants brought from England, must surely be something of an exaggeration, presumably in anticipation of a future result”.¹⁹

This notion of anticipation and future is bound up in our understanding of gardens and gardening. A gardener in the act of creating a garden is enacting their own Idealised Picturesque through the planning and composition of a garden by weeding and pruning; ultimately, they create a view. I seek to express something similar in my painting *A View of the Artist’s Garden, Hillston, Springwood* (2010–2011), a homage to Glover’s idealised view of Mills Plain where what appears in the painting is a projection of future plantings and my own sense of anticipation (fig. 28).

¹⁸ Radford and Hylton, *Australian Colonial Art*, 71.

¹⁹ McPhee, *The Art of John Glover* (London, New York, Melbourne: Macmillan, 1980), 35.



Fig. 28. *A View of the Artist's Garden, Hillston, Springwood* (2010-11).

Seed, settlement, parklands, and dispossession

Bernard Smith suggests that it is not totally clear why Glover migrated to Australia but it seems that his family was at the centre of those reasons. We also know that Glover grew up on a farm and as a young boy spent time working in the fields.²⁰ Early on this proximity and connection to farming and the land “enabled him to go into the field and woods to sketch the landscape and pastoral scenes with which he so much enjoyed surrounding himself”.²¹ This suggests that in coming to Van Diemen’s Land he could return to what he knew and fulfil his desire to establish, not only himself but his family in a productive enterprise while continue his painting.²² These connections between land and art are deeply entwined in the paintings he produced in Tasmania.

Sharon Morgan’s *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania: Creating an Antipodean England* documents how seeds and plants were exchanged between the colony and Britain and how colonists often shared and swapped produce with neighbours and friends. Morgan outlines garden practice as largely observational; seasonal advice was shared, and experienced settlers helped inform newcomers. Just prior to Glover’s arrival in the colony in 1831 specific written material on gardening in Van Diemen’s Land had begun circulate.²³ By the time Glover was ready to start his garden there was much more horticultural knowledge and a growing appetite for ornamentals and the integration of an

²⁰ McPhee, *The Art of John Glover*, 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 260.

²³ Sharon Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania: Creating an Antipodean England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 92.

English cottage garden with the more familiar and practical kitchen garden. Morgan writes that whilst some information is known it is extremely difficult to really know the true form these early colonial gardens took, but paintings by Glover and artists such as Joseph Lycett and Augustus Earle give us some idea of colonial garden formats and the types of plants they contained.²⁴

As previously acknowledged, Glover painted two garden scenes during his time in Tasmania, the first being *Hobart Town taken From My Garden Where I lived* (1832). Morgan suggests that this painting could be a credible interpretation of the appearance of a colonial garden.²⁵

“The general state of the plot—only half tamed—suggests the problems facing gardeners of the period. The grass is roughly cut and the paths made of dirt. ‘Glover noted that the geraniums, roses etc. will give some idea how magnificent the Garden may be had here’”.²⁶

Morgan goes on to suggest (unlike Radford) that Glover’s second painting of his house and garden shows more care and effort than early settlers could have afforded and that the painting “gives a more idealised view of the ‘Compleat’ English cottage and garden”.²⁷ In the early days of settlement prior to Glover’s arrival, colonists were too concerned with warding off hunger that what was considered fashionable in England.²⁸ The development of the more fashionable English cottage gardens after Glover’s arrival in 1831 is in contrast to the English Gentleman Parks depicted in the preceding decades by artists such as Joseph Lycett and John Eyre.

²⁴ Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania*, 92

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁸ *Ibid.*



Fig. 29. Left: Joseph Lycett's *The Residence of John Macarthur Esq. near Parramatta, New South Wales* (1825), hand coloured aquatint.

Lycett's hand coloured aquatint *The Residence of John Macarthur Esq. near Parramatta, New South Wales* (1825) (fig. 29) embodies the notion of the *English Gentleman's Park*, which Bonyhady defines in *Images in Opposition* as typical of the parks designed and constructed by landscape gardener, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown in the mid-Eighteenth Century.²⁹ In *Inventing the English Landscape Garden*, Tim Richardson outlines the aesthetics of the Brown landscape as "sweeping pastures grazed by animals right up to the house, a large lake in the middle distance, clumps of trees naturalistically adorning hilltops",³⁰ all of which is evident in Lycett's picture. Lycett's picture also illustrates Brown's philosophical aim of *drawing the surrounding countryside into the Park* (garden) and the Picturesque's need for idealising the view.³¹

Both Glover and Lycett arrived in Australia at a time of massive expansion of the colony. Bonyhady writes that squatters significantly changed the landscape of the country

²⁹ Tim Bonyhady, *Images in Opposition: Australian Landscape Painting, 1801–1890* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985), 45.

³⁰ Tim Richardson, *Arcadian Friends: Inventing the English Landscape Garden* (Second Edition) (London: Transworld Publisher, Bantam Press, 2008), 469.

³¹ *Ibid.*

between 1820 and 1850 by rapidly occupying vast tracks of land.³² He argues that artists such as Glover did not paint the usual:

“pastoral landscape in the conventional artistic sense, of views in the tradition of Claude Lorrain, giving visual expression to the poetry of Virgil and Ovid and depicting an imagined golden age in which man lived a peaceful rustic existence of primitive simplicity”.³³

Rather, Bonyhady proffers that Glover painted Arcadian landscapes that express a sense of simplicity and profusion while simultaneously concealing colonial hardships.³⁴

I believe *My Harvest Home* (fig. 30), a painting produced in the same year, is intrinsically connected to Glover’s Mills Plains’ house and garden painting. Both views are highly personal and both express Bonyhady’s described notion of ‘ease and plenitude’; equally, both project an “idealising of the view”³⁵ and a *drawing in of the landscape* around them. Each view and its sentiment are as one. Both paintings were painted for an English audience, but both shroud a darker occurrence—the taking of land.

The politics of land and landscape, integral to comprehending both the Picturesque and subsequent industrialisation, were exported from England. Before long, Richard Aitken writes, “gardening and remaking the landscape quickly became an overarching term for territorial improvement”.³⁶ Again, the legal document that granted Glover the land where he built his house and realised his garden explicitly demanded that he ‘improve’ the plot. In *Australian Pastoral: The Making of a White Landscape*, Jeanette Hoorn reads *My Harvest Home* as a celebration on three levels:

“it celebrates Glover’s own triumph, his success as an emigrant farmer in Tasmania and finally, it celebrates the displacement of local aboriginal people, a process Glover had himself supported by donating funds to George Augustus Robinson and personally painting him a picture in which he congratulates Robinson for his efforts”.³⁷

³² Bonyhady, *Images in Opposition*, 40.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Aitkin, *The Garden of Ideas*, 45.

³⁷ Jeanette Hoorn, *Australian Pastoral: The Making of a White Landscape*, (Fremantle Press 2007), 75.

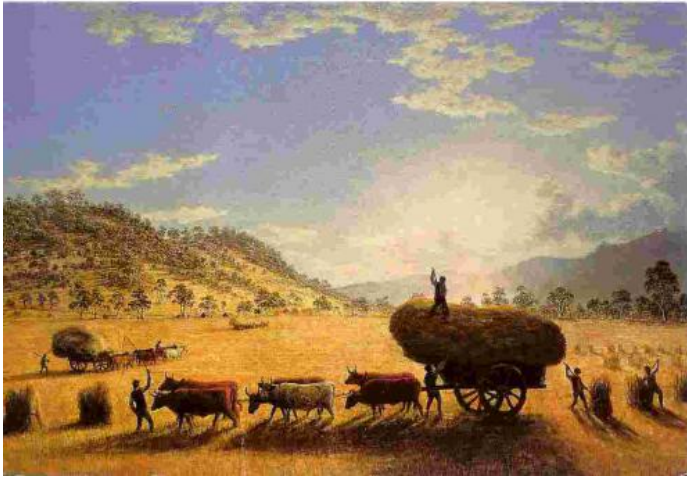


Fig. 30. Left:
John Glover,
Harvest Home
(1835).

Robinson, known as the *Chief Protector of the Aborigines*, was charged with rounding up the last three-hundred Tasmanian Aborigines for transportation and resettlement on Flinders Island; many were to die of illness or homesickness. There is a general understanding by scholars, including Bonyhady and Hoorn, that there are two main strands to Glover’s colonial landscape paintings. One figures Australia as a “pastoral arcadia”, the other as an “Aboriginal Arcadia”.³⁸ Hoorn notes that “the absence of aboriginal people is notable in most of Glover’s compositions about European land use” and emphasises that this can be explained because it was commonly known that John Batman and George Augustus Robinson had taken the local Aboriginal people captive around Patterdale by 1832.³⁹



Fig. 31. Left:
John Glover,
*Natives at a
Corrobory, under the
Wild Woods of the
Country* (1835).

³⁸ *Ibid*, 40.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 79.

In discussing the absence of Aboriginal people in the majority of Glover's pictures that portray pastoral settlement, Hoorn makes clear that Glover was aware of the discourse that circulated around the capture and removal of local of Aboriginal people and that, at the time he commits to canvas both a vision of his house and garden and his successful harvest he knew not only of the violence perpetrated against the local Aboriginal people but also the brutality that was inflicted in the surrounding area. In many of Glover's depictions of Aboriginal people there is no hint of dispossession or capture. Quite the contrary, *Natives at a Corrobory, under the Wild Woods of the Country* (1835) (fig. 31)—painted the same year as Glover's house, garden, and harvest pictures and given as a gift to G. A. Robinson—portrays the enactment of a ceremonial custom by an Aboriginal community. Hoorn further notes that Glover enacted a pictorial solution that distanced Europeans from these unfortunate events in an attempt to allow the viewer to avoid the unpleasantness of the subject of the removal and exile of Aboriginal people.⁴⁰

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored the notion of the transition from the settler garden, one primarily more concerned with survival and the production of food, to what Glover planted—a garden that combined food with the emerging trend towards a flowering English cottage garden. I have also explored Glover's making and painting of a garden, and connected these actions with his understanding and support for the capture and removal of the local Aboriginal people. I have made aesthetic comparisons between Glover's garden paintings *Hobart Town taken from the Garden where I lived* (1832) and the main subject of this chapter *A View of the Artist's House and Garden, Mills Plains, Van Diemen's Land* (1835). Framed by this work, I have touched upon Glover's colonial version of the Picturesque and the notion of the idealised landscape view as it pertains to his house and garden painting.

This painting is not typical of Glover's more classical 'Claudian' oeuvre *per se* but, in my view, remains connected to his earlier works through its expression of many

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 84.

Picturesque traits: an idealised view of his garden, a romanticised, highly composed vision of the land and, like his earlier English, Italian, and more classical Picturesque paintings, an implied narrative.



In the next chapter I explore several key paintings by British artist Stanley Spencer and in particular, his individualistic working methods. I compare and contrast the two quite distinctive, yet related strands of his oeuvre; his figurative subject paintings and English garden landscape paintings. In the second half of the chapter I examine Spencer's *version* of the picturesque, his choice of subject and, in relation to my own work, three main influences; the material quality of his work, his methodology and the highly original compositional structures he deployed.

Chapter Three: Stanley Spencer: Painting the English Landscape Garden

Introduction

My interest in the paintings and working methods of Stanley Spencer (1891–1959) have inspired and informed this research from the start. In the previous chapter I discussed the development of the Picturesque and its significance for artists like Glover in order to better understand the historical relationship between gardening and painting and highlight the cultural and political dimensions of this landscape aesthetic. This chapter outlines Spencer's highly individualistic version of the Picturesque and demonstrates his extension and development of the pictorial representation of landscape. Spencer's wide range of subject matter and two distinct painting styles make him hard to categorise. As acclaimed representations of the English landscape, however, his works exemplify a key progression in cultural negotiations around the Picturesque and the long history of landscape depiction. Spencer's garden landscapes fit within a framework that stretches from John Constable and the emergent Rustic tradition (fig. 32) to Alfred Parson (fig. 33) and Helen Allingham's early-1900s manifestations of 'Happy England', while articulating, alongside contemporaries such as John Nash and Cedric Norris, the vernacular, suburban picturesque that began to emerge in England between 1930 and 1960.



Fig. 32. Left: John Constable, *Golding Constable's Kitchen Garden* (1815).

Fig. 33. Right: Alfred Parson, *Orange Lillies* (date unknown, exhibited in Feb 1909).

Artists of eccentricity and contradiction, John Glover and Stanley Spencer produced large bodies of work that may be generatively read through particular time frames, subject matters, and stylistic variations. Unlike Glover, however, Spencer produced three distinct bodies of work: religious subject paintings, garden landscapes, and portraits. Although I am primarily concerned with Spencer's English landscape garden paintings in the present study, I begin by drawing on two subject paintings to illustrate what I believe to be an underlying link between Spencer's naturalistic landscape garden pictures and his highly stylised, figurative subject paintings. I then examine two of his English landscape paintings and outline their relevance to my own work, and finally give a detailed analysis of the methodological, material, and compositional influences Spencer had on my work.

Reverence, garden culture, and picturing place

Spencer began *Zacharias and Elizabeth* (1913–1914) (fig. 34) when he was just twenty-four. It is set in a churchyard in Cookham, the town where Spencer lived for most of his life and the subject that underpinned many of his paintings. In *Art of the Garden*, Martin Postle offers that “for Spencer, Cookham was a virtual Garden of Eden ... [he] transformed the village and its inhabitants into a heaven on earth”.¹ The spiritual-horticultural concept nexus captured by Postle's references to an Edenic *heaven on earth*—a paradise that, crucially, must be (re)produced through the *transformation* of ‘given’ landscapes—permeates two of the three distinct strands of Spencer's work and aligns with the colonial and Picturesque cultural threads I analysed in Glover's *A View of the Artist's House and Garden, Mills Plains, Van Diemen's Land*.

¹ Stephen Bann, Stephen Daniels, and Martin Postle (eds.), *The Art of the Garden: The Garden in British Art, 1800 to the Present Day* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 113.



Fig. 34. Left: Stanley Spencer, *Zacharias and Elizabeth* (1913–1914).

Spencer's painting depicts the biblical tale of the angel Gabriel's visitation to Zacharias. Gabriel tells Zacharias that God will answer his and the aging Elizabeth's prayers for a baby who should be named John—John the Baptist. Describing this scene, Keith Bell suggests that his portrayal of several versions of Zacharias and Elizabeth is probably "inspired by the multiple narrative pictures of the early Italian masters which Spencer was studying at the time".² The dramatic high wall enclosing figures of Zacharias on the left-hand side of the composition is described by Bell as "an expression of the artist's sense of mystery", what Spencer explains as his "feeling of wonder at what was on the other side".³ Spencer painted this view from the rear window of the house he was renting at the time. The highly active foreground is made more dramatic by offering a slightly elevated view of what is going on in the churchyard. This perspective, in which a viewer 'peers over' and 'looks down upon' special secrets contained in a garden, developed into a common compositional trait throughout Spencer's career.

In a 1937 letter to brother-in-law Richard Carline, Spencer explains some of his thinking behind this painting:

² Keith Bell, *Stanley Spencer, RA* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, in association with Weinenfield and Nicolson, 1980), 49.

³ *Ibid.*

“I wanted to absorb and finally express the atmosphere and meaning the place had for me ... It was to be a painting characterising and exactly expressing the life that I was, at the time, living and seeing about me. It was an attempt to raise that life around me to what I felt was its true status, meaning and purpose”.⁴

For me, this concept of drawing out *meaning* and *purpose* from the world around him and of expressing the *meaning the place had for him* extends beyond his subject paintings to his more naturalistic landscape garden compositions. Steven Parissien similarly argues that Spencer painted “fields and hedgerows” as if “each one carries with it an element of potential change and a suggestion of higher significance”.⁵ There is a stage-like quality in the design of this work and we are privy to what is being enacted. Spencer attaches significance to the *specialness* of the garden as a place, defining it as a human place and therefore a place of sin, suffering, victory, redemption, and ultimately paradise through eternal life.

By the River: Bellrope Meadow and Cookham Bridge



Fig. 35. Left:
Stanley Spencer,
By the River (1935).

In the seventeen years that Glover lived in Van Diemen’s Land he produced several paintings of his house, garden, and Patterdale property. Like Glover’s depictions of Mills Plains, Spencer’s English garden landscapes were concerned with the immediate world around him; he painted fields, local gardens, and countryside in the vicinity of what is now known as the Picturesque English village of Cookham.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Stephen Parissien, *Stanley Spencer and the English Garden* (Compton Verney, England: In association with Paul Holbertson Publishing, 2011), 78.

Like *Zacharias and Elizabeth, By the River* (1935) (fig. 35) has a Cookham garden as its setting. Keith Bell writes that “Spencer identified this scene as Bellrope Meadow with Cookham bridge in the distance and the church tower above the trees”.⁶ This is significant because the church tower and Bellrope Meadow are the subjects of one of Spencer’s most important garden landscape paintings. *Bellrope Meadow* (1936) (fig. 36) was painted the year after *By the River*, and I believe among Spencer’s works, expresses the strongest connection—in terms of its appearance, atmospheric, detailed articulation of plants, and subject’s significance to the artist—to Glover’s house and garden painting.

Loaded with immense detail and offering up distant glimpses hemmed in by dense imagery, *Bellrope Meadow* and *By the River* share a composition of opposing, dual focal points and a cleverly divided visual order achieved through a series of interlocking diagonals and triangular structures. In the foreground of *By the River*, Spencer flattens and opens out the picture plane, yet in the mid- and distant-views, he shifts back to a more conventional perspectival framework. This flattening of the foreground and opening out of mid- and distant-views is a technique he uses in many of his garden landscape compositions to heighten viewer perception. It offers the viewer a close-up look and an experience of what the artist has experienced.



Fig. 36.
Stanley Spencer,
Bellrope Meadow
(1936).

⁶ Bell, *Stanley Spencer, RA*, 49.

Addressing *By the River*, Bell writes that Spencer “probably intended to retain the dual meaning of the picture in the blending of springtime bliss and religious joy”.⁷ This blending of meaning (and Spencer’s awareness of it) combines with the blending of conventional and nonconventional compositional devices to reveal Spencer’s Pre-Raphaelite influences. Andrew Causey identifies in many of Spencer’s paintings “a Pre-Raphaelite mixture of close-up figures and glimpses of deep space”.⁸

Apparent in *Bellrope Meadow*, Bell writes that Spencer “took considerable care over the accuracy of the landscape settings in his figure paintings”.⁹ If we look to subject paintings like *Zacharias and Elizabeth* and *By the River*, we can garner some insight into the compositional strength and meaning expressed in Spencer’s garden landscape paintings. *By the River*, for instance, is marked by a duality of stylistic techniques; plants in the foreground are rendered *stylistically* as if Spencer were depicting figures, but as we move through the painting and beyond, the buildings, plants, and garden morph, becoming more detailed and naturalistic in their portrayal. Bell offers a further layer of insight:

“Spencer’s interest in formal abstract design (which is prevalent in his subject paintings) is evident in the flower-patterned dress of the young girl who clings to the artist’s leg, a shape which is reflected in the bunch of real flowers which he holds above her. The triangular shape reappears in the dress of the woman reclining in the foreground, the two dimensionally of which is echoed by her upper torso and head, which bears some resemblance to some late manifestations of Cubism”.¹⁰

The great success of Spencer’s subject paintings lies in his ability to blend an ambiguous narrative with awkward, often distorted and stylised depictions in highly complex compositional structures. This bringing together of inventive composition, narrative, and an idiosyncratic version of reality gives rise to an intense viewer experience. I would also argue that what we experience in *Zacharias and Elizabeth* and *By the River*, while stylistically very different, finds expression in the complex compositional structures also deployed in many of Spencer’s garden landscapes.

⁷ *Ibid*, 134.

⁸ Andrew Causey, “Stanley Spencer and the Art of his Time” (*Stanley Spencer, RA*, 1980), 19.

⁹ Bell, *Stanley Spencer, RA*, 149.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 134.

Stinging Nettles: Method and Composition

A significant aspect of Stanley Spencer's landscape paintings is that they are not preoccupied with the notion of the *grand vista*. They are much more personal explorations of particular places. Whilst Spencer regularly articulates a distant view, the view is often reached via an active, highly organised foreground. In many cases, the distance and what is depicted is pictorially subservient to the foreground's subject. The distant view is required to place the subject, to add to the sense of naturalism, and to help articulate space and time, but not to override the image with a dramatic sky or atmospherics. This sits at odds with historical Picturesque framing conventions and artists like Constable and Turner; it locates Spencer in Modernism. An example of this mode of depiction is Spencer's Wangford landscape *Stinging Nettles* (1926) (fig. 37).



Fig. 37.
Stanley Spencer,
Stinging Nettles
(1926).

By positioning the horizon line towards the top of the picture Spencer sites himself and his viewers directly in front of the titular subject of the painting. We encounter a full side-view of the nettles and, as in many of Spencer's pictures, are invited to peer over to what lies beyond. The curved abundance of the nettles entirely fills the foreground except for the subtle flash of a green-blue pond on the left of the frame. Variations of contrasting green almost entirely make up the picture; Spencer offers us very little difference, except for the soft orange of the flowers on the right-hand side in the

mid-distance and the dark browns of the buildings clustered along the horizon. Spencer activates the mid-distance and draws us in by accentuating the detail and by attaching visual significance to the fence and the reeds on the far bank of the pond as they trace across the landscape. Both paintings mimic the other's repeating vertical form and re-emphasises the same vertical form expressed in the stems and leaf structures of the stinging nettles.



Fig. 38. Left: Stanley Spencer, *The Bridle Path, Cookham* (1938).

Fig. 39. Right: Stanley Spencer, *Cookham Rise* (1938).

Two works that illustrate the artist's proclivity for this format and the high positioning of the horizon can be seen in figures 38 and 39. As in *Stinging Nettles*, he activates the middle-distance of the picture through the use of either a clump of trees or a cluster of houses.

In his time, some considered Spencer to have “modern, European tendencies”—a “Pre-Raphaelite who had looked at Cezanne”—and other, more conservative critics who praised the *Englishness* of his landscapes.¹¹ This application of a modernist eye to the overt, technical detail required of his Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic may explain where Spencer sits in terms of English landscape painting and the originality of his compositions. Describing his feeling about this painting in a 1927 letter to his friend Desmond Chute, Spencer wrote:

“This stinging nettle one (*Stinging Nettles*, painted at Wangford, Suffolk) is more imaginative as a composition (than some of the other paintings). I had real feelings about it and something is growing in me as a result of having painted it, this last fact is what made me feel that my desire to be able to paint a landscape is not without reason”.¹²

¹¹ Bell, *Stanley Spencer, RA*, 26.

¹² Duncan Robinson, *Stanley Spencer's Gardens*, (Plaidon Press, Oxford, 1990), 26.

When viewing *Stinging Nettles*, I don't just see a landscape, I see a portrait of stinging nettles in a very particular landscape. By framing the view the way he has, Spencer has brought the nettles to life and at the same time attached a metaphoric theological significance to them. The human activity inherent in the landscape views Spencer painted hark back to his earliest childhood and to how he attached human significance to the visible world:

“... as a child I used to peep through the chinks and cracks in fences, etc and catch glimpses of these gardens of Eden of which there was a profusion at Cookham. From these glimpses I used to get, I assumed that some sort of saint or very wonderful person lived there”.¹³

Magnolia: The importance of the foreground

The second work of Spencer's of special relevance is *Magnolia* (1938) (fig. 40), painted between the World Wars during a highly productive time for the artist. *Magnolia* was painted in the Spring of 1938 and “on 5 April he wrote to his long-term Art Dealer, Dudley Tooth, that it was as good as anything I have done”.¹⁴ He continued to work on the painting for the next two weeks and Tooth sold it immediately to a private collector.

Magnolia, like Spencer's *The Jubilee Tree Cookham* (1936) (fig. 41), *Landscape in North Wales* (1938) (fig. 42), *Bellrope Meadow* (fig.36), and many others, displays the artist's inclination to make the foreground subject a key overriding component of the work. In each, the foreground subject either partially blocks, shrouds, or entwines the distant view and in doing so adds weight to its significance and the illusion of distance.



Fig. 40.
Stanley Spencer,
Magnolia (1938).

¹³ Parissien, *Stanley Spencer's Architecture*, 90.

¹⁴ Bell, *Stanley Spencer, RA*, 169.

When we study *Magnolia*, Spencer's positioning of the branches and flowers appears quite naturalistic as they reach inwardly from the right-hand edge of the picture frame. They systematically extend across the picture plane, leaving openings that reveal vital sections of the background. Spencer carefully delivers just enough visual information for our imagination to complete the background picture; he leaves us expectant, visually engaged but searching for just a little bit more.



Fig. 41. Left: Stanley Spencer, *The Jubilee Tree, Cookham* (1936).

Fig. 42. Right: Stanley Spencer, *Landscape in North Wales* (1938).

If we were to omit the branches and clusters in *Magnolia* this would still be a highly active scene. The combination of the garden-bed and bushes in the foreground, the large central trunk positioned in the mid-ground, the fence and row of trees that mark the transition to the distance, and the fields, houses, and fading hills would constitute enough subject matter for most landscape painters, but Spencer wanted to create that sense of mystery and ‘special meaning’ when visualising his world.¹⁵

Magnolia exemplifies the type of compositional structure by Spencer that I am most drawn to. When I go into the field, I seek out similar scenarios to trail and position myself to capture both foreground detail and distance. I’m not setting out to replicate a Spencer, but to develop this as my own system and imbue my paintings with a high

¹⁵ Parissien, *Stanley Spencer's Architecture*, 78.

degree of (formal) energy. As a gardener, I believe the interaction between the colours, textures, and scales of different plants give a garden its appearance, its many layers which make it visually sustaining.

Three main influences: Materiality; Methodology; Composition Materiality

Golden Shadows, Hillston (fig. 43), produced in 2012 after my UK Field Trip, is a work that demonstrates the changes in thinking and approach that resulted from the study of Spencer's working methods and paintings. This study initiated changes to the material quality of my work as well as changes to the methodological approach I took to my *en plein air* painting practice, and it led to the trialling and implementation of new compositional structures. While informed by my study of Spencer, these changes did not mirror his methods directly; they were modifications to my work practises based on a critical analysis of his methods and approach.



Fig. 43. *Golden Shadows, Hillston* (2012).

In the first instance, it is important to discuss materiality. The information gained from viewing Spencer's paintings up close and for sustained periods of time was a totally different proposition to the information I had previously garnered via reproductions. On close inspection, the surface of Spencer's paintings show very little evidence of conventional glazing techniques. From the photographic evidence that exists of Spencer working and my own observations of the surface quality of his paintings it is clear that as

each section of a painting was completed he moved on to complete the next section. His paintings are concrete evidence that his brush marks and application of paint were confidently and very directly applied in what is known as the *look and put* method. His method for articulating forms is tonal, breaking down complex objects graphically into coherent variations of colour and tone. A very good example of this technique is the painting *The Garden at Cookham Rise* (1952) (fig. 44), which demonstrates Spencer's ability to clearly define the smallest detail amongst the chaos of multi-coloured stones, flowers, garden stakes, and the array of overlapping, green-on-green foliage. Whilst not as overt, I incorporated a distilled version of this technique into my own work (fig. 43).



Fig. 44. Stanley Spencer, *The Garden, Cookham Rise* (1952).

As a result of viewing Spencer's paintings first-hand I decided to change the type of canvas I had been using and opted for a much heavier weight and broader weave (18 oz. Chinese linen). I made this decision to force myself to apply more paint and to achieve a more unified, *complete* surface. My intention was to move away from the sketchy surface seen in (fig. 45) to a multilayered, fully covered ground that expressed the combined physicality of the canvas substrate and the painted image (see fig. 47). My intention was to express a fluent directionality within the brush marks so that the viewer could clearly determine that the surface had been extensively worked and more highly resolved in comparison to my earlier works (fig. 47). Prior to starting *Golden Shadows, Hillston* the canvas was triple primed, then coated with two solid layers of acrylic paint in brilliant

orange. The layers of gesso and orange acrylic base coats that constituted the underlying ground helped to increase the intensity of the composition's different colours as well as the overall presence of the painting's surface. Even though this differs from the final effects he achieved, my intention was to emulate the physical presence of paint that was evident in his work.



Fig. 45. Left: Detail section from *Study, Autumn Hillston* (2011). **Fig. 46.** Right: Detail section from Stanley Spencer's *Landscape in North Wales* (1938).

Until this time I had been using white, single-primed 10 oz. cotton duck canvas and, like Spencer, my paintings had tiny flecks of white canvas clearly visible on the surface of the finished works (fig. 45, 46). In many of Spencer's landscape paintings the flecks of white canvas are quite pronounced. This effect was something I wanted to eliminate. These unpainted flecks occurred in part because of the practicalities of painting with oils using the *look and put* method, and in part because of the self-imposed time imperatives of working outdoors. Other contributing factors are the fluidity, mix-ability, and extended drying time of oils, as well as the reality that painting wet on wet makes it difficult to retain the purity of colour and to avoid *muddiness*. Up until this point each *en plein air* painting had been completed in one session. To avoid muddiness and retain the desired colour purity, a painting's construction, its colours and tones, was predominately accomplished by placing brush mark beside brush mark. Blending and modelling were achieved subsequently by working those individually placed paint marks together. By pre-priming and pre-coating the canvas I was able block the white of the canvas and realise a smoother surface that allowed for more consistent paint flow. The acrylic sealed the canvas and reduced brush-drag while allowing the oil paint to better cover the surface. This made it easier to achieve the lyrical freedom and articulate more confident,

directly observed brush marks when working from life. By combining a more layered physical surface with glazed and blended atmospheric and carefully articulated forms, I was able to meld the advantages of both my *en plein air* and studio practices. Using Spencer's model, I applied similar levels of detail to every part of the painting—foreground, mid-ground, and background—in an attempt to intensify the viewer experience and draw the viewer closer. The colours and level of plant detail depicted in *Golden Shadows, Hillston*, while based on life, have been adjusted and intensified in relation to one another. The brush marks, choice of colours, and tonal variations that articulate the central arching tree form have been modelled and blended to combine and contrast with the detailed multi-layered highlights (fig. 48).



Fig. 47.
Left: Detail section showing the coverage and density of the surface of *Golden Shadows, Hillston* (2012).

Fig. 48, 49, 50, Left to Right: Detail sections from *Golden Shadows, Hillston* (2012).



In several key areas I have employed muted variants of Dioxazine Purple, Australian Red Gold, and Naples Yellow Reddish (fig. 49) to accent the overall atmospheric and to embed a visual consistency that circulates throughout the picture. At different times over the course of a week thin layers of Dioxazine Purple were used as an over-glaze in many

of the passages of deep shadow to increase contrast, suppress definition, and add a sense of mystery by deepening the recesses of shadow (fig. 50). To achieve these effects I worked with fast drying mediums and produced the work during several painting sessions allowing for drying time.

Methodology

The key methodological influences garnered as a result of my review of Spencer's *en plein air* landscape paintings were practical and led to significant advances. As far as I can ascertain Spencer never used photographic reference, preferring to spend many days in the field taking what time was needed to complete each work. After choosing his subject he would accurately draw up (often using a grid system) in pencil on canvas a detailed version of the finished composition and then literally fill it in with oil paint. Starting in one corner he would work across the surface fully completing each section as he went all the while referring back to the details of the scene in front of him. This is a highly unusual way of working and leaves little room for error. The crucial element that I took away from Spencer's method was how he situated himself in front of his subject day after day and worked directly from life to achieve the complexity he was seeking. The most significant changes I made to my methodological approach were:

- to consider the *en plein air* works equal to, and not just studies for, the studio based works;
- to spend considerably more time on each work and produce substantially larger paintings in the field;
- to meld the visual effects and techniques of the *en plein air* and studio practice (e.g. multilayered painting and glazing).

Throughout this research and into the future, the level of detail and naturalism I employ is constantly under review. When starting a work, I sketch up my subject in paint delineating the size and scale of each main element setting out a framework for the overall compositional structure. One way to describe this would be as a large thumbnail sketch. Once I have defined the general parameters of the picture I work from the centre out, adjusting elements of the schematic as I proceed. This method differs from

Spencer's detailed initial rendering but allows me a degree of flexibility and the ability to respond intuitively as I proceed. These practical changes in methodology allowed me to better integrate the different strengths of my *en plein air* and studio practice.

Composition

Compositionally, I sought to challenge the orthodoxy of *some of the works* produced up to this date that depicted a centralised motif, a defined horizon, and a somewhat standard layout of foreground, mid-ground, and background (fig. 51). The compositional structure of *Golden Shadows, Hillston* is inherently linked to the central tenet expressed by the content of the picture, which is the dominant tree and its shadows. These qualities are defined by the visualisation of the interplay of light and shadow and the all-encompassing atmospherics that join with this scene's deliberate emphasis of the garden's enclosure.



Fig. 51. Left: *Uplands House, The Flower Urn* (2011).

Starting in the foreground and moving back through the picture, the dark bush in *Golden Shadows, Hillston* serves a similar purpose to Spencer's *Stinging Nettles*. This intruding form sites the viewer in front of the subject but also acts as a partial barrier. My intention was that the bush would create the sense of 'peering' into the garden. The foliage and

purple flowers are positioned to subtly radiate along the perimeter of its curved form to further accentuate the arch of the shadow (fig. 54). The tendrils of the foreground shadows reach back to connect and ground the bush within the painting. The foreground shadows while reflecting the shape of the tree (fig. 54) add to the complex matrix of



Fig. 52, Fig. 53, Fig. 54. Left to right: *Golden Shadows*, Hillston (2012).

intersecting lines. The combination of the arching branches, the dark bush, and the shadows sets up a rhythm within the painting which in turn sits in opposition to the angularity of the two hedged forms in the centre of the picture. The curve of the shadow was intentionally positioned to signify a pathway for the viewer. And the prominent dark bush along with the similarly shaped clump of bromeliads around the base of the main tree step back through the composition and are mimicked by the position and shape of the orange bush in the mid-distance (fig. 52). The dark branches of the small yellow tree on the left-hand side of the composition act as a visual link to join the curving upper branches with the shadows in the foreground (fig. 53). The flaming yellow-orange foliage has been intentionally intensified to draw the viewer's gaze towards a glimpse of the garden beyond the hedge framed to accentuate the symmetrical tension created by the position of the opposing view on the right-hand side of the composition (fig. 53).

Conclusion

Spencer, while significant for me in terms of his compositional approach, is equally informative because he was an *en plein air* landscape painter. Also of great interest is the way he applied paint, his complex application of shifting tones, and how he was able to separate objects through contrasting elements, halos, and the use of deep shadows.



In the next chapter I discuss the practice of painting *en plein air* during my field trip to the UK in 2011. I give a brief history of the five key gardens I painted and provide a detailed analysis of several of the works that informed my practice beyond my field study. I explore the material I took and the bearing this had on the paintings I made. I also take the opportunity to build on some of the ideas expressed about composition and discuss how I implemented these ideas in the field.

Chapter Four: UK Field Trip: *En Plein Air* and the English Garden

Introduction

A field trip to the UK in September 2011 was essential to my exploration of the English garden, estate gardens, and other more elaborate, historic garden forms. It also provided me with the opportunity to study and paint both large and small-scale domestic European gardens in England. The study of these gardens and the resultant paintings helped inform the subsequent body of work. This chapter surveys my pictorial response to the gardens I studied and the framework of that study. During this time my focus was on compositional elements common to gardening and painting such as colour, light, unity, scale, variety, balance, repeating forms, texture, the artificial, and most importantly compositional structure.



Fig. 55. Left: ornamental Sunken Garden at Kensington Gardens (2011).

Fig. 56. Right: Hedged form, Kensington Gardens (2011).

As part of this chapter I provide a brief history of each garden to give some context to the types of gardens I encountered (e.g. knot garden, parterre garden, Picturesque estate garden) (figs. 55 and 56). The works produced helped provide a frame of reference for the less grand but nonetheless European type gardens I went on to paint back in Australia. As part of the field study I also visited the township of Cookham, the home of artist Stanley Spencer. I further outline some methodological, compositional, and stylistic approaches of his that influenced my work. These paintings are a response to my study of his works and my decision to locate myself (like Spencer) inside the garden looking out. The work produced on the field trip was a continuation of my experimentation and my depiction of an often centralised garden feature where I seek to activate the foreground content to express a stage-like

quality. Whilst some of my methodology relating to Spencer's work was discussed in the previous chapter I re-emphasise some of those ideas and provide further discussion as they relate to specific *en plein air* works. Whilst there were others, the gardens specifically outlined in this chapter include Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, Cliveden House, Uplands House, and Compton Verney.

Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens

The first garden I painted was Hyde Park in central London. Hyde Park's current form has been shaped by a complicated history that extends back over the last nine hundred years. Henry VIII acquired the Park from the Monks of Westminster Abbey in 1536 and turned it into a hunting park. In the Eighteenth Century Queen Caroline, a keen gardener, took three hundred acres from the park to create the Kensington Gardens. While there, I painted two scenes of Hyde Park and one of Kensington Gardens.



Fig. 57. Left: *The Pine, Hyde Park* (2011). **Fig. 58.** Middle: *Oak and Hedge, Kensington Gardens* (2011). **Fig. 59.** Right: *Oaks, Hyde Park* (2011).

The ornamental Sunken Garden at Kensington Gardens was of particular interest because of its enclosed, stage-like design. Whilst I missed the opportunity to paint it due to inclement weather, I did get the chance to make some detailed sketches between intermittent showers. Planted in 1908, the garden “was modeled on a similar garden at Hampton Court Palace and celebrated a style of gardening seen in the 18th Century”.¹ Designed in classical proportion the garden was set around a central pond bordered on all four sides by floral terraces that stepped up to ground

¹ Historic Royal Palaces, <http://www.hrp.org.uk/KensingtonPalace/stories/sunkengardens> (2016).

level. One viewed the garden from above by looking over a wall and were prevented from entry. This idea of a walled garden oasis (with water at the centre) harks back to notions of Eden and offers links with Persian, 7th Century Islamic garden design.

When painting *The Pine, Hyde Park* (2011) (fig. 57) I decided to focus on the dark colours and head-like shape evident in the large pine. It dominated the view, dwarfing the neighbouring trees. Because of its size and deep, rich, blue-green tones, and given that it was quite an overcast morning, it seemed to attract the surrounding light and hold it within. Partly because of its scale, I decided to position the pine in the centre of the frame and shape the clouds in the top half of the sky to magnify this central position. At the time, as a tribute, the clouds were changed to resemble clouds I'd observed in a John Constable painting. The clouds were angled gently inward to direct and hold the viewer's gaze on the pine. I reshaped the size, form, and position of the garden-bed in the foreground to mirror the scale of the clouds to, again, accentuate the pine. When painting the lower part of the sky I strengthened the highlights of the clouds to amplify the sense of luminosity and the horizontality of the composition. Of the twenty-four paintings produced on the field trip only two were in landscape format.

In *Oak and Hedge, Kensington Gardens* (2011) (fig. 58), I again centralized the oak as the main motif, which in turn created a strong vertical element and divided the upper section of the picture plane. I decided to paint this scene for several reasons. I was first attracted by the luminosity of the oak leaves (which has been substantially enhanced) that lit up each time the sun appeared from behind the clouds. My intention was to imbue the oak tree with human-like qualities and to create a sense of rhythm and movement. What initially drew me to this scene was the potential for a horizontal split composition and the dichotomy it would set up between the chaos of the leaves and the upright twisted oak against the controlled flatness of the clipped hedge.

Cliveden House: The Long Garden

Cliveden House contains arguably one of England's most renowned gardens. The beginnings of Cliveden House date back to the 1600s and its garden has had a rich

and varied history. The house is set on 376 acres and is a National Trust managed Grade One listed formal gardens and woodland. The famous *Parterre* was originally designed in 1855 by John Fleming whose planting schemes became world-renowned.⁴ The beds of the Parterre garden we see today have been restored to their former state based on Fleming's original designs. As well as the various formal gardens the grounds consist of extensive woodlands that overlook the River Thames. The woodlands both separate and help define each differently themed garden.

The part of the garden I mainly concentrated on was the Long Garden and I spent two days painting there. The Italian-style Long Garden was developed by Lord Astor and comprised topiary forms of different birds, box hedges, cork-screw shapes and was designed in 1900 by Norah Lindsay.⁵



Fig. 60. Left: *Bird in the Long Garden* (2011). **Fig. 61.** Centre: *The Daleks, Cliveden House, Long Garden* (2011). **Fig. 62.** Right: *Topiary Bird, Long Garden Cliveden House* (2011–2012).

Whilst there I concentrated on articulating the forms of the topiary; again I found it difficult to portray the expansive scale of this garden. The sculptured bird form pictured in the painting *Bird in the Long Garden* (2011) (fig. 60) was approximately three metres tall and almost as wide. As a gardener, I marveled at the density of the foliage and the masterful pruning. On close inspection, I could clearly see the modeling of the form created by the shears. Each cut apparent and purposeful, not unlike a freshly shorn sheep. This modeling of the pine, bit by bit, is not unlike the approach I would take to paint the same form. The illusion created through careful

⁴ National Trust, <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cliveden/> (2015).

⁵ *Ibid.*

rendering and attention to detail takes shape when viewed from a distance. When pruning or hedging my own garden I constantly refer to the colours and tone of the old and new growth. Intuitively I seek that perfect midway point at which to cut. Equally, I intuitively seek to balance the level of detail I apply to represent the illusion of such a form in combination with colour and tone. This illustrates the significance of process and materiality in the outcomes of painting and gardening.

While the forms and layout of the *Long Garden* were complex, as can be observed from the paintings, the plant and floral colours within the garden were kept to just three: shades of green, light violet, and a soft yellow. What was most significant about this garden was that the forms were deliberately designed as an interplay and to be viewed from every angle. As one moves through the space the relationship between each sculpted-form changed dramatically, not unlike a theatre-in-the-round. The garden's layout also consisted of a series of internal channels between the hedged beds, which allowed one to interact and fully experience the topiary forms. The garden also contained an outer path that allowed one to view the closed garden internally as a whole. The experience was akin to being an actor on a stage set, unlike gardens that envelop a visitor or direct one towards a specific view.

When painting *Bird in the Long Garden* (2011) I exaggerated the angle and direction of the clouds to help counterbalance but heighten the effect and angle of the bird leaning into the picture frame. When I first saw the bird form I felt it was shaped in such a way as to appear to be about to take flight. This action was further emphasised by my decision to lower the horizon line to give the bird scale and an heroic presence, as well as to create drama through separation by using the sky as a flattened pictorial backdrop. The idea behind this painting was to place this re-imagined bird centre-stage, against the sky ready for takeoff. The positioning of the bird makes use of positive and negative space by increasing contrast. The bird's shape is also situated to frame the garden beyond. Its form, whilst modeled, is orientated to sit in parallel to the picture plane thus greatly enhancing its graphic form. This also isolates the bird to express the inherent function and formal beauty of topiary and hedged plants. The bird's outline provides two pictorial windows by encircling the lower sections of the background. The exaggerated perspective employed on the receding hedged garden beds in the middle-distance provides a

polarity and contrasting illusionistic depth. Through this, these perspectival forms are then grounded within the composition by the enhanced depth of the tone applied to the shadows in the backdrop of trees. This in turn defines the garden's enclosure. The surreal nature of the clouds were purposely designed *almost as a pattern* to link and reinforce the graphic qualities within the work. They were also devised to augment the idiosyncratic nature of the hedged bird.

When painting, I also reshaped the top outline of the backdrop of trees to form an arc, amplify the curving form of the bird, and to create harmony, rhythm, and a sense of movement. This also stands in opposition to the stark angular forms represented in the lower section of the composition. The limited palette and uniformity of colour were employed to maintain simplicity and to prioritise the *bird* by conveying the obsessive formal nature of topiary and the almost comical features of what is depicted.

Cliveden House: The Parterre Garden

The formal *parterre* garden at Cliveden House was designed, ultimately, to be viewed from the terrace in front of the house but because of its vast scale I was more interested in depicting the detail and individual elements from ground level. The spike-like forms that punctuated the garden drew my attention immediately.



Fig. 63. Left: *Parterre Garden, Cliveden House* (2011). **Fig. 64.** Right: *View from the Parterre Garden, Cliveden House* (2011).

Like sentinels, they stood at variance to the more organic shapes expressed inside the formal beds. The decorative circular beds anchored these angular forms to the ground adding to their incongruity and presence. As can be seen from the painting

and photograph (figs. 63 and 64), on either side of the *parterre* garden and separating lawn there are banks of trees that formed a less formal backdrop. In the painting *Parterre Garden, Cliveden House* (2011) these were employed graphically, almost as cutouts to help heighten the formal qualities of the foreground *parterre* subject. Inspired by these circular hedge forms at Cliveden House and the Cherry Doughnut in Kingswood (see Chapter 6) I set about introducing similar hedged forms in my own garden as subjects for painting (figs. 65 and 66).



Fig. 65., Fig. 66. Circular forms implemented in Springwood in 2013 – 2014.

Whilst I step back from creating recognisable forms like those in the *Long Garden* I am interested in the formal properties of hedging: defining space, partitioning sections of gardens, or containing and embellishing other quite different plants. In my own garden, I have predominately used hedges to highlight productive trees like the numerous citrus, pomegranate, and quince trees planted since the commencement of this study.

While topiary is a recognised art form in many cultures (e.g. Japanese cloud-pruning or French *parterre* gardens) through the creation of what is sometimes termed living sculpture, my own intent is to provide structure as part of the overall layout of a garden and soft protection to fruiting trees. Also, as pictured in *The Cherry Doughnut, Kingwood Western Sydney* (2011) (fig. 113, p. 125), a key work I discuss in more depth in Chapter Six, my aesthetic leaning is for the formal (nonrepresentational) hedged elements of a garden to sit in contrast to the irregular, surprising, or exotic.

Compton Verney: Brown's England

One of the difficulties in defining particular periods of garden style is the overlapping timeframes and interpretation of what constitutes a particular form. As

ideas emerged and gardens were implemented they would subsequently gain wider support. Established landscape gardeners would cling obstinately to what they understood of taste, refinement, or tradition and garden landscapes gradually transitioned as inclinations changed. Estate gardens like Cliveden House contained several different forms, some of which are *revivals* of past manifestations. Prior to the 1720's the "axial formalism"⁶ of the French parterre garden in England was fortified by Royal support. The subsequent move away from the prescribed rigidity of these garden to one which espoused Englishness and the improving of existing countryside was considered radical and based on the idea that gardens "demanded a succession of pictures".⁷ Capability Brown's rise to prominence ushered in the era of the 'Parkland garden' and what was considered a more natural form of gardening took hold in the 1750s. Brown remade hills, planted and repositioned existing trees into irregular clumps, diverted streams to create serpentine lakes and opened up the countryside to frame vistas.⁸ Others argued that Brown's creations were not natural enough. Brown's parklands like Compton Verney were important for two reasons. First, this era was overwhelmed by the Picturesque aesthetic. Second, what Glover found on his arrival in Tasmania resembled Brown's aesthetic and was described as the open Picturesque parkland ready to paint. This *changed landscape* we now acknowledge was the result of Aboriginal fire-stick farming, the propagators of which are referred to by Bill Gammage as "Australia's first gardeners ... they first managed country for plants. They knew which grew where, and which they must tend or transplant".⁹ Bruce Pascoe presents extensive evidence that Australia's Aboriginal people "domesticated plants, grew crops, collected seed, irrigated land, worked to improved soil and built stone structures to store food".¹⁰

Brown became famous for rolling grasslands, ornamental lakes, and Cedars of Lebanon such as the ones he planted at Compton Verney. As previously explored in

⁶ Laura Mayer, *Capability Brown and the English Landscape Garden* (Great Britain: Shire Library, 2011), 9.

⁷ Roy Strong, *The Artist and the Garden* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 251.

⁸ *Ibid*, 252.

⁹ Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How the Aborigines Made Australia* (Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland, London: Allen & Unwin, 2011), 3.

¹⁰ Pascoe, *Dark Emu*, 12.

Chapter One, the two paintings picturing the grounds at Compton Verney were designed to capture the view within the view or, in compositional terms, the frame within the frame (figs. 67 and 68). Although the estate was vast, like most of my paintings I wanted to focus on what was directly in front of me and construct *contained* garden pictures. The monumental nature of the trees proved a challenge and was quite a different experience to gardens I had encountered prior to the trip.



Fig. 67. Left:
Framed by Cedars,
Compton Verney
(2011).



Fig. 68. Right:
Through Big Pines /
Compton Verney
(2011).

Brown's expressed "habit of drawing the surrounding countryside into the garden and of idealising the view"¹¹ was very apparent at Compton Verney with highly composed open views in every direction. At first I found it difficult to isolate my subject and spent considerable time scoping out the garden. After the up-close intensity and detail experienced at the various gardens at Cliveden House, Compton Verney's organised vistas lacked the bold colour and personality previously experienced. In an affirmation of this Tim Richardson writes:

"Brown was striving to be meaningless, to blot out complexity with a smothering pastoralism. The old, idiosyncratic style of gardening was dying away. While the early landscape garden tended to be strange and mythic in character, dependent on artifice and the creation of the stimulating and strange, the Brownian landscape represents the re-creation of what felt comfortably familiar, an ideal version of the English pastoral scene".¹²

¹¹ Tim Richardson, *The Arcadian Friends, Inventing the English Landscape Garden* (London: Bantam House, The Random House Group, 2007), 469.

¹² *Ibid.*

Over the course of my many field trips I have largely steered clear of the pastoral scene being drawn to what Richardson describes as the mythic and strange—dependent on artifice. This idea of seeking out and stimulating the strange took hold in subsequent paintings produced at The Everglades in the Blue Mountains which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

Uplands House: Cotswolds

Uplands House was built in 1875 with the stone from the old Ratley Manor, a local 12th Century house. The garden faces south and looks out over what is now farm land, remnants of a much larger garden estate that was designed by the earlier mentioned purveyor of “the ideal English Parkscape”¹³ Capability Brown. Still clearly visible from Uplands house is the Ha-ha (which is a recessed landscape element that impedes livestock whilst providing an uninterrupted view) and clumps of trees that Brown is now famous for. The garden consisted of several quite distinct areas: the pond and rose garden, the garden terrace, which was closest to the house, the lawn garden, and an extensive kitchen garden, which provided produce for the house. As is often the case, the kitchen garden was purposely hidden from view by hedges and as a working garden was attractive in its own right.

Uplands’ garden layout had similarities to gardens I had painted back in Australia: a view from a house, then a garden that looked directly onto paddocks or, in this case, fields. One thing was markedly different; in the Cotswolds, the transition from garden to field was relatively seamless compared to the harshness of the Australian experience. In Australia, the transition between the garden’s edge and the paddock is much more stark; the plants are more alien, more obviously imposed, but visually I



Fig. 69. *Uplands House Garden Panorama* (2011).

¹³ Mayer, *Capability Brown and the English Landscape Garden*, 33.

have been conditioned to accept this. Painting this scene provided visual evidence of an opposing reality. Several of the other paintings produced of this garden mirrored compositional structures I'd experienced at Rowan's garden in Newcastle.

Study for View of the Artist's Garden

My painting *Study for View of the Artist's Garden* (2011) (fig. 70) whilst pictorially very different, was an important catalyst in the production of *Uplands House Garden Panorama* (2011) (fig. 69) and prompted the panoramic format. I had painted my own garden in Springwood, a view of the garden backed by native bush ostensibly as a *portrait* of the garden. Importantly, in the painting of my own garden the native bush provides the context; at Uplands House, Brown's contrived landscape adds meaning. *Uplands House Garden Panorama* unlike *Study for View of the Artist's Garden* is a relatively simple design. *Study for View of the Artist's Garden* was conceived as a depiction of three quite distinct views combining to make one larger view. It was also the study for the almost six-metre version I was to paint over the course of a year in 2011. It visualises approximately a 250 degree view, stretched out and flattened. On the left, a Picturesque view across water is framed by pines; the central view features an orange, distinctly odd-shaped angophora; an azalea hedge extends across and points to the third view, which features the large over-arching pepper tree and two citrus trees.

The work was conceived as a *walk through* encapsulating multiple views that combine to express warmth and light, a multitude of texture, and a variety of garden experiences. The pines sitting on either side of the path framing the gum tree and a view across water is my own *pictorial* expression of the Picturesque. Like Glover's house and garden painting, the flowers all bloom out of season, with mandarins ready to pick as Autumn colour begins to show. Compositionally I have used the panoramic format in combination with the flatness of the sky blue, the uniform consistency of the extended foreground shadow, and the lack of tonal variation in the bush background in an effort to limit the *illusion* of depth and present the garden (front on) like a stage. Each view within the whole offers something different and was intended to mirror the variety offered by a multidimensional garden experience.



Fig. 70. *Study for View of the Artist's Garden, Hillston* (2011).

Uplands House Garden Panorama

Having painted seven pictures of the Uplands House garden as vignettes drawing out specific parts of the garden I thought it important to explore a more complete view and capture my own contemporary version of the pastoral 'ideal': a view looking from the garden out into the field expressing the duality of *agriculture* and *garden culture*. This was to express these *cultures*' long-term co-existence and explore relations between nature, nurture, cultivation, and the politics of land. I was also very keen to capture the ubiquitous 'clumps of trees' carefully situated in a field that was once part of a 'Capability' Brown garden.

In *Uplands House Garden Panorama* (2011) (fig. 69) the view is deliberately and awkwardly split across the centre of the picture to intensify the horizontality of the scene. On close inspection, you can clearly make out key elements from some of my other paintings produced at Uplands House. The two flowering urns seen in the mid-distance are motifs that feature in *The Flower Urn, Uplands House* (2011) (fig. 75) and *Two Urns, Uplands House* (2011) (fig. 76). The red-hot poker visible on the far-right extremity of the picture frame and the clumps of oaks that formed the view from the rose garden appear in paintings discussed later.

In *Uplands House Garden Panorama*, I have chosen to pay special attention to the repeating rhythms inherent in the garden. I have accentuated the rhythmic curves of the lavender and potted pansies in the foreground which were designed to set up a formal structure and create a dialogue that echoed each layer as you step back through the painting. The colour and plant forms in the foreground were positioned to hem in the lawn and field and to squeeze the viewer's gaze horizontally. The negative spaces created against the lawn, the lavender along the fence line, the clumps of trees in the paddock and beyond, as well as the shapes of the clouds

against the sky, work in concert with the horizontality of the format to amplify the desired sense of rhythm. The two-tone green stripes of the mown lawn extend across the painting again, adding to the horizontality and graphically expressing the highly manicured nature of the garden.

I positioned the clumps of trees and urns evenly across the picture and exaggerated the lawn area to allow for more open areas of sky and to add soft atmospherics to the scene. The central, main tree in the mid-ground was positioned to anchor the composition and has also been stretched and purposely shaped to imply that it is reaching out in an attempt to connect each side of the garden. I have also tilted the angle of the trunk to the right, along with its diamond shaped foliage, as a way of giving it its own unique identity. Just behind to the left I have counterbalanced this with one oak leaning to the left. At either end of the painting I manipulate the gardens so that they bookend the composition and close off the view.

This work was painted over the course of a day, taking approximately eight hours, and was intended to be my memory and last experience of the garden. While I painted, the two regular gardeners worked away clipping hedges, sweeping paths, and mowing the lawns. At various times during the day they would check my progress, occasionally offering advice. Months later, back in the studio, I applied a layer of oil paint (over the acrylic) to strengthen areas of contrast and greatly intensify the purple of the lavender in the foreground.

The break in the lavender in the foreground in the bottom right hand corner of the work provides the visual entry point from the terrace to the lawn. I have sought to draw attention to this opening through the positioning, pronounced rendering, and incongruity of the spherically shaped bushes. The obviously floral setting, the colour, and the overall attention to detail were in some measure my response to what I considered at the time to be one of the most powerful works in the Spencer exhibition, *Bellrope Meadow* (1937) (fig. 71).

In *Bellrope Meadow* we observe a highly active composition in which Spencer employs an untypical higher-key palette. Unusually he has also produced numerous areas of highly complex blending to create a sense of luminosity. The physicality of

the painted ground and the almost effortlessness of each mark brings this subject to life. He adds complexity to his subject through the complicated compositional device of multiple focal points. The bushes, flowers, and clouds work in unison to create a sense of movement to express a 'real' garden experience.



Fig. 71.
Stanley Spencer,
Bellrope Meadow (1937).

Spencer often denigrated his landscape work, considering them inferior to his compositionally more complex, highly figurative religious paintings. Even though his landscapes are generally somewhat less complicated than his other works they are still highly inventive and meticulously conceived. An example of this complexity appears in Spencer's *Rock Roses, Old Lodge, Taplow* (1957) (fig. 72), which inspired my painting *Poppy's Rose Garden, Uplands House* (2011) (fig. 73).



Fig. 72. Left: Stanley Spencer, *Rock Roses, Old Lodge, Taplow* (1957).
Fig. 73. Right: *Poppy's Rose Garden, Uplands House* (2011).

Prior to reviewing Spencer's exhibition many of my garden compositions consisted of centralised objects or motifs that I intended to suggest a *figure in the landscape* and relied on blending, tone shifts, and colour to express depth. The dramatic use of perspective and the interplay of angles and the illusion created through Spencer's use

of shadows, strong highlights, and obsessive detail became more apparent when seeing his work *en masse*. This prompted me to trial this approach. A good example of this is *Poppy's Rose Garden, Uplands House* (2011) where I set out to articulate multiple layers of chaotic foliage in the foreground that cuts across the image yet frames the distant view. The level of detail and layered complexity meant that this work took considerably longer than other studies. There was added experimentation with the introduction of dark layers of merging under-painting, overlaid with tonally stronger and more direct, solid brush marks. This breakthrough led to subsequent further experimentation and use of these techniques *en plein air* and studio-based works produced from then on. Spencer's ability to articulate form through complex tonal bends and to use highlights to create separation from the background or from other complex objects was particularly informative.



Fig. 74. Left: *The Urn, Rowan's Garden* (2011). **Fig. 75.** Centre: *The Flower Urn, Uplands House* (2011). **Fig. 76.** Right: *Two Flower Urns, Uplands House* (2011).

Prior to going to the UK and to Uplands House I painted *The Urn, Rowan's Garden* (2011) (fig. 74), a somewhat comical painting of an urn that could be read as a human bust with big hair and wrap-around sunglasses. And, even though I did marginally enhance this scene, it was the framing and action of turning it into a picture that realised the human content. Whilst at Uplands House I took the opportunity to revisit this theme but focused more on drawing out the surrounds and a less contrived, implied sense of human form.



Fig. 77. Left: Stanley Spencer, *Wisteria, Cookham* (1942). **Fig. 78.** Middle: *Red Hot Pokers / Uplands House* (2011). **Fig. 79.** Right: Stanley Spencer, *Red Magnolias* (1938).

My painting, *Red Hot Pokers / Uplands House* (2011) (fig. 78) best demonstrates the significant influence Spencer's work has had on my different methodological approaches. *Red Hot Pokers* was made in direct response to my review of Spencer's paintings *Red Magnolias* (1938) (fig. 79) and *Wisteria, Cookham* (1942) (fig. 77). *Red Magnolias*, one of the smallest and, in some ways, the simplest paintings in the exhibition, had a profound impact. Viewed closely, it is quite roughly painted. There is a physicality and directness in the application of paint and in compositional terms it differs from many of Spencer's complex, more organised garden pictures. What the artist has offered is an up-close, awkwardly framed but potent view of the Magnolias; their twisted stems and disheveled buds are strongly articulated against a particularly unremarkable landscape. Unconventionally, we look down on the magnolias from a slightly elevated position but it is Spencer's positioning of the flowers in the foreground, almost filling the picture plane, and the veil they cast over the rest of the view that is conceptually most compelling. After my field trip, this type of composition—its system—was adopted to produce *Pines, King Edward Park, Newcastle* (2011) (fig. 80) and subsequent paintings.



Fig. 80.
Pines, King Edward Park,
Newcastle, (2011).

Conclusion

It is important for me to acknowledge the value the field trip to the UK as it provided not only the opportunity of seeing these English gardens but the possibility to explore their form and physical presence through painting and through an extended period of observation. It also afforded the chance to examine Spencer's work in the flesh, to review the material quality of his marks, the finish of the paint surface and to review some of the garden landscapes that formed the content of his painting. On reflection it was also particularly important to bring that knowledge and experience back to Australia, and to apply this to the paintings I made immediately after my return at *The Everglades*. The experience gave me a greater appreciation of the transference of English garden landscapes and traditions but also new ways to consider what I had garnered from Spencer's works; his attention to detail and how he used his highly individual compositional and framing techniques to evoke a sense of place.



The next chapter explores the works produced at the National Trust garden *The Everglades* in Leura and a suite of paintings made at Rowan's Garden, a private formal Knot garden in Newcastle. *The Everglades* constituted a sustained production of larger more finished *en plein air* works and a shift in methodology and material practice. Both gardens were detailed and compositionally complex and both have held on to an aesthetic coherence envisaged by their original makers.

Chapter Five: Two Key Gardens

i. The Everglades, Leura, Blue Mountains



Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the series of works produced during my time painting at *The Everglades*, the National Trust's historic garden in the Blue Mountains, NSW. I outline my working method and the key works that have informed my broader inquiry. I describe changes I made to my process when painting *en plein air* and the resulting outcomes. I also discuss the history of the garden, its designer, Paul Sorenson, and his legacy. The abundance and cool climate of Leura were in stark contrast to the very harsh environs of the homestead garden at Boolooroo Station, Moree. *The Everglades* was much more like the gardens I had painted in England. In Leura logistics afforded me the opportunity to paint for extended periods which led to significant changes to the way I worked.

Later in this chapter I discuss the series of paintings I produced in Newcastle at a garden I have named *Rowan's Garden*. While *Rowan's* and *The Everglades* each have particular distinctive features, both are highly shaped gardens and ardent examples of place-making. The outward appearance of both these gardens

reflects the ambition of their makers; both are expressive of their longevity and demonstrate the care needed to maintain their originator's vision.

The garden's beginnings

Before examining specific paintings from the body of work produced at *The Everglades*, it is important to give some context to the garden's creation and to acknowledge the influence of its original owner, the industrialist Henri Van de Velde, and the important shared contribution of the renowned horticulturist and designer Paul Sorensen (fig. 82).

The Everglades sits on a ridge looking across the Jamison Valley to Mount Cloudmaker, Kanangra Falls, and Mount Solitary. On the western side, the land drops away dramatically to Gordon Falls below. After acquiring the thirteen-acre site, in 1936 Van de Velde commissioned the already successful Danish horticulturalist and landscape designer Paul Sorensen to create what was until then his most ambitious project.



Fig. 82. Horticulturist and Landscape Garden designer Paul Sorensen.

Sorensen, born in Copenhagen in 1890, trained at the Danish Hørsholm Planteskole. While studying, his experience included the maintenance of Queen Alexandra of Denmark's summer-house, Villa Hvidovre. It is not clear why Sorensen moved to Australia in 1915, but there was war in Europe, Australia was in drought, and there was little work when he arrived. Sorensen and Van de Velde formed a great working partnership. The industrialist's tremendous energy, resources, and deep love of modernism combined with Sorensen's

sensitivity, training, and unique skills. Together they produced what is regarded as one of Australia's great gardens.

The site in Leura posed many challenges, including poor soil and a steep, rocky slope that was full of ironstone fragments. Sorensen worked with the landscape, creating several formal terraces that cascade down the site towards the house, each featuring expansive dry-stone walls using the enormous amount of ironstone reclaimed from the site. As in the house, Sorensen incorporated his modernist aesthetic into the garden design, which also included many Art Deco features that pay tribute to some of the gardens he had visited in Europe in the 1920s.

First encounters

I spent approximately thirty days making work at *The Everglades* throughout 2011 and 2012. As I painted, summer gradually faded into autumn and I was able to observe the gardeners' constant pruning and replanting, and the regular stream of visitors. As I watched them moving around the garden, I was struck by how little time most people spent in the garden, and I reflected on how limited their experience would have been of this complex, multidimensional place. Robert Pogue Harrison, in *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition*, explores the complex philosophical connection we have with gardens and outlines his views on "the lost art of seeing".¹ His writing puts voice and valuable context to my own belief that much can be gained by sustained looking. Artists such as Claude Monet (1840–1926) searched for meaning by returning time and time again to reinterpret the same scene. The creation of his own garden at *Giverny* was to become almost the sole focus of his practice for the last thirty years of his life. His garden creation, the incessant adjustment, the daily care and worry in regard to its progress, and the years and years spent observing this constant state of change, illustrates Monet's complex philosophical, physical and emotional connection to his garden.

¹ Robert Pogue Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 114.

Harrison's view is that to fully comprehend a garden's appearance as a place of visible richness we need intense powers of observation. This applies equally to our appreciation of paintings. The experiential nature of *en plein air* painting—the impulse to paint, the prolonged act of looking, and the response to that looking—ultimately contributes not just to the realisation of an artefact but to the reflective process that bolsters continuing artistic practice. This crucially involves processes of observation and assessment similar to those required to be an effective garden practitioner. My creative impulse is driven by *what I see* and yet the experience of art practice necessarily involves both successes and failures. The impulse to persist with both painting and gardening is given voice by Henry Mitchell:

“Now the gardener is the one who has seen everything ruined so many times that (even as his pain increases with each loss) he comprehends; truly knows—that where there was a garden once, it can be again, or where there never was, there yet can be a garden”.²

When initially seeking specific scenes to paint, I was drawn to the deep shadows in the many recesses Sorensen had created. As you travel up the mountains to Leura, 985 metres above sea level, the light softens and the shadows deepen. This more diffused light interacting with the garden's stately forms played a significant role in the paintings produced at the Everglades.



Fig. 83.
Left: *Study for Inside Hedges, Looking Out* (2012).

Fig. 84.
Right: *Study for Monument, The Everglades* (2012).

² Henry Mitchell, *The Essential Earthman: Henry Mitchell on Gardening*, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1981), 3.

My decision to paint *The Everglades* was bound up in the garden's overall sense of restraint and its contrast of open areas, detailed planting and angular shaped pines. Many of its formal design qualities, when combined with the way certain parts of the garden captured the mountains' soft changeable light, were reminiscent of the austere nature of Caspar David Friedrich's paintings. Friedrich (1774-1840) often depicted or placed a human presence at the centre of his landscapes. *Garden Terrace* (1811–1812) (fig. 85) is the artist's only unambiguous representation of a garden. Like the terrace at the Everglades, Friedrich's enclosed garden terrace possesses features that act as pictorial devices to frame the view. The dark foreground of the terrace garden dwells in shadow expressing order but a pervading sense of disquiet. The soft, contrasting



Fig. 85.
Left: Casper
David Friedrich
Garden Terrace
(1811–1812).

pale yellow of the sky in *Garden Terrace*, like the sky in *Monument, The Everglades* (2013) (fig. 81) highlights the wilderness beyond the man-made. Whilst each painting depicts an enclosure, the viewer is beckoned to look beyond the garden.

Particularly striking was the way Sorenson created a sense of enclosure, of gardens within a garden, by taking advantage of the site's cascading incline and dramatic elevation. While Friedrich's paintings—his stark forms and dark Romantic palette—resonate with the landscaping of the Everglades, Sorenson's design also reflects the influence of European modernism. Sorenson worked in Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, and France before coming to Australia, which may account for the fact that although some parts of *The Everglades* are shaped, it is much more restrained than the formal gardens I had visited in England.

The ordered nature of *The Everglades*—its layout, the way its spaces flow from one level to the next—gives it a compositional coherence. For a painter of gardens it offers a multitude of choices. The dramatic shaped pines on the central level can serve compositionally as a formal anchor to which the rest of the garden is tied. The first two paintings in this series of ten works, completed in the garden over four to five days, were *Study for Inside Hedges, Looking out* (2011) (fig. 83) and *Study for Monument, The Everglades* (2011) (fig. 84).

My premise for painting these first two works was to harness the unique formal qualities of this part of the garden and to attempt to capture the inherent figurative quality of the shaped pine. Coleen Morris writes that “Sorenson excelled at pruning trees and with theatrical gestures, extolled the virtues of bringing out the ‘spirit’ of a tree”.³ This mirrors my own intentions to bring out a sense of theatricality.

This section of the garden was different in many ways to any garden I had seen or painted before. During this first week I worked on both paintings and took regular breaks to explore the garden. Because I had decided to work in oils I found it helpful to switch from one painting to the next, working on different sections and allowing for drying time in between. At the end of each day’s painting I was able to review the work and leave them to dry. This method of staggering and planning each stage of a painting was more akin to the way I would approach studio painting than to my usual *en plein air* practice. Here, I was able to work directly from nature but spend time building up the surface and adjusting the atmospheric and tonal qualities of each work. I had experimented with this approach on a relatively large work in my own garden, but until this point had largely regarded my fieldwork as a process of making studies and collecting information for my studio practice. While on my field trip in the UK, I had worked solely in acrylic; although this had advantages in terms of speed and transportability, it had drawbacks in terms of the eventual outcomes and paint surface quality.

³ Coleen Morris, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/sorensen-paul-edwin-bielenberg-15730> (2012).

Strong shadows play a significant role in the composition and mood of these hedge studies, as do the distant glimpses of the blue escarpment through the trees. While both these paintings are of hedged pines, and while they were conceived originally as a pair, they were intended to express quite opposite ideas. The intention was to emphasise both the positive and negative spaces created by the garden's design. The first, *Study for Inside Hedges, Looking Out*, was a focused view of the light falling between the pines and depicts a view painted from inside the shadows. By directing the viewer's gaze towards the space and light in the centre of the painting, my intention was to create a heightened sense of depth in the pictorial plane and a feeling of enclosure and, through this, a sense of other-worldliness. A romanticised, subjective version of the natural world.

The second painting, *Study for Monument, The Everglades*, was concerned with isolating and centralising one aspect of the garden (the shaped pine) and imbuing it with an implied (imaginary) sense of human figuration. The symmetrical positioning of the shaped pine, reflects Friedrich's approach of depicting a human figure or human presence at a composition's centre. The strong verticals on either side help to shield the view but at the same time draw attention to it. I have sought to use the low brick wall and trellised grapevine to enclose the space and therefore give the shaped pine a theatrical presence.

* By way of note: I made a larger version of this work, entitled *Monument, The Everglades* (fig. 81) and two others larger works based on *Study for Inside Hedges, Looking Out* (fig. 83).

There are always certain aspects of a place that capture my attention. It may be the potential to draw out a sense of human figuration in the configuration of trees, finding repeating forms that create rhythm, or misshapen foliage that can be exaggerated to activate an unusual compositional structure. An important part of my process when painting *en plein air* is not to preconceive a final outcome but to respond to what is in front of me. What is important is that I bring out *what I see* as the personality of the place, building a body of work based on each painting experience and building on a measured reflection of each work.

Even though the central terrace and the shaped pines constitute a small part of *The Everglades*, they became the central focus of the work I produced there, in part because of the connections I felt to the works of Friedrich. This part of the garden was more open but ordered than other parts of the garden.

Whilst *The Everglades* could be considered a large garden, each section has been designed as an independent space that cascades into the next. Each section frames glimpses of the *Jamison Valley* from different angles and elevation, but rather than open out the garden's design and play directly to the view, Sorensen carefully enclosed the spaces so that you almost need to go looking for the view. This restraint, the idea that you can be in a space that offers only fragments of what must be described as an exceptional view, has been explored in several of my paintings. One example is *Five Pines, The Everglades* (2012) (fig. 87).



Fig. 86. Left: Eugene von Guérard, *Weatherboard Creek Falls, Jamieson's Valley, New South Wales* (1862).

Fig. 87. Right: *Five Pines, The Everglades* (2012).

Sorensen, like Friedrich, directs us to what he wants us to see and thereby influences and changes our experience. So epic is the view from the garden that it belies any effort on my part to attempt to wholly depict it in paint. The grand vistas offered in Eugene von Guérard's sublime portrayal of *Weatherboard Creek Falls, Jamieson's Valley, New South Wales* (1862) (fig. 86),⁴ which represents a 19th Century sublime Romantic aesthetic, pictures his deep appreciation of the beauties of nature through the exotic, the remote, and the mysterious. Whilst von Guérard clearly depicts a recognisable version of

⁴ Jamieson's Valley referred to in the title of Eugene von Guérard's painting is now commonly known as Jamison Valley.

Jamison Valley he imbues his painting with transient and dramatic light effects to evoke a sense of awe and grandeur.

In the paintings of *The Everglades* I have attempted to capture my version of this place as another world: a *believable* world that is in the here and now, but one that also is imbued with an allegoric dimension and that can be reinterpreted to reveal hidden meaning. A world that has removed itself from wilderness and that has become a protected and maintained idealised place; a world that people now pay to visit and experience a romantic sense of time past.



Fig. 88. Detail view of iron stone wall at *The Everglades* (2012).

During this period of research, as both practicing painter and practicing gardener, I have become much more conscious of the time and the physical resources it takes to create and maintain a garden such as *The Everglades*. The sheer volume of stone used to create the terracing, the hand digging and shaping of the land, the mulching, the preparation and the planting of each individual specimen is to be admired.

As I was painting the *Study for Monument, The Everglades* several volunteers, along with the head gardener, were clipping the hedges I was painting.

Observing their activity, the care and attention taken, heightened the attention I paid to the details and shadows within plants and my awareness that my painting is not just about articulating the formal characteristics of my subject, but about remembering that each plant is a living thing. What I am attempting to do is

capture its being or, like Sorenson, “bring out the ‘spirit’ of a tree”.⁵ This notion of being and of bringing out the spirit was also evident in many landscapes by Stanley Spencer and the attention he paid to the depth of shadows within plants. Whilst Spencer was not a gardener, he possessed an ability to articulate detailed foliage through tonal shifts, creating the illusion of depth by heightening the contrast of the highlights. These techniques and attention to atmospheric detail have significantly influenced my approach.

Back from the Cotswolds

The series of works produced at *The Everglades* resulted in part from my decision to pause from painting my own garden so I could explore a much more formal garden setting. The field trip to the UK gave me the opportunity to paint and study several much larger, more formal gardens and this created several new lines of inquiry. How as a painter could I best exploit such highly composed gardens? I was keen to gain experience from painting many different types of gardens.

On my return from the UK and after some reflection, I came to the belief that several of the *en plein air* studies I produced while in the Cotswolds lacked the energy and surface tension and physical material quality I had been striving for. There was a flatness to the paint surface in many of the works and the colour was over played and less naturalistic than intended. Compositionally, some of the works felt somewhat contrived and therefore lacking authenticity or a sense of believability. When travelling, working in acrylics on unstretched canvas had been the practical approach, but I now felt those works lacked the depth and subtlety of tone that I could achieve in oil. When trying to achieve a sense of mystery and tonal depth in areas of dark shadow or subtleties in the colours to express the drift in and out of shadow, working with the less familiar and pliable medium of acrylic had presented a challenge.

⁵ Coleen Morris, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/sorensen-paul-edwin-bielenberg-15730> (2012).



Fig. 89. The series of angled hedged pines that feature the central terrace and that were the focus of my time at *The Everglades* (2012).

However, while as a group, the field trip paintings were not as successful as I had hoped, they signalled the need to take more time in the production of my *en plein air* paintings. This decision freed me up to work on a larger format and to build each painting in layers rather than try to complete each work in a single sitting. Being able to rework specific areas and to approach each new session with the hindsight of the previous day allowed the paintings to develop more systematically by giving me the ability to devote time to each work as needed. Another interesting discovery was that rather than being a negative, the opportunity to respond to the same view the next day, even though conditions may have been markedly different, allowed me either to reinterpret what I had done or continue as I had started. This also required at times that I worked from my memory of the previous day. This extra time devoted to looking and re-looking was a valuable step forward.

At the time I had no direct personal links with *The Everglades* other than that it was in the Blue Mountains, but the garden's design was of more interest to me as a result of my experiences in the Cotswolds. Whilst stylistically *The Everglades* was vastly different to my own garden, crucially, both are manifestations of a formal European garden in an Australian context. I also hoped that by painting a very different type of garden than my own, it would help stimulate other ways of *seeing* my garden. This prompted me to consider that when painting a particular place from fixed points, there is a tendency to see that place more as a view than as the experience we get from walking through a place and taking in numerous multifocal views. Looking intensely from a fixed point while painting from life,

often for several hours, is a totally different experience to passing through a garden space or simply sitting and taking in a view.



Fig. 90. *Looking into Light, The Everglades* (2012).

What is also apparent from these works is that they were developed sequentially yet with different interpretations of the same place. This method was to guide the approach when painting my own garden. I wanted to explore the complexity of specific aspects of the garden's design and to offer a view that offered a refuge from the world. Unlike my paintings *Cherry Doughnut, Kingswood* (2011) (fig. 113) or *Study for View from the Garden, Stuart's Creek Station, (Rain Coming)* (2011) (fig. 105), where those gardens' separation from the world—their very difference—was reliant on seeing the dichotomy between the garden and its surroundings, my aim with *The Everglades* was to create a very different narrative through capturing the distinct forms of the garden while only allowing tiny glimpses of the world beyond to be seen. One painting that, in part, illustrates this point is *Looking into Light* (2012) (fig. 90), which shows a vine encircling the view and limiting the ability of the viewer to take full account of the distant escarpment across Jamison Valley. My aim was to create an image of restraint by denying the viewer a certain degree of access.

Looking into light

It was almost impossible to paint at *The Everglades* without including a pond, an urn, a rock wall or a built structure of some kind. In the past, wherever possible I have tried to avoid man-made inclusions, choosing views where the trees, bushes, flowers, and foliage express the structure of the garden. I generally exclude garden infrastructure because I feel these things diminish the garden's direct relationship to nature, and distract from my central concern to focus on painting gardens as transformed (composed) nature. The idea that you assemble a collection of plants from many different parts of the world and bring them together in a very particular way, place them in the ground and nurture them, so as to remake a place, is in part what my research is about. Even though gardens are built and require infrastructure, it is the shaping of the plants, their combinations, their layout, and the way they sit together that draws me to them.

Before painting gardens in the Cotswolds and *The Everglades*, I had mostly painted gardens that had disguised the system of construction within the garden. What became clear during my time at *The Everglades* was that Sorensen had left his mark: the infrastructure of rock walls, paths, and terraces is integral to the garden's form. The paths lead you through so that the different plants close you in or offer you a view, and all combine to deliver an experience.

The golden pond

One work that illustrates my efforts to deal with the 'built quality' of this garden is *Golden Pond, The Everglades* (2012–2013) (fig. 91). This painting was part of a small group of works started in early spring of 2012 and the last painting I made at *The Everglades*. Because it was spring I thought it would be a good opportunity to revisit the garden and observe the changing of the season and to extend the variety of this body of work. When looking at this work it is clear that it was glorious weather, but what is not apparent from the image is that, being late August, it was still quite cold in the Blue Mountains.



Fig. 91. *Golden Pond, The Everglades* (2012–2013).

While painting at *The Everglades*, I was often surprised by the speed of change in the weather conditions. The clouds appeared to move more rapidly than in other places I have painted; more akin to my experience painting at Cradle Mountain in Tasmania or in England. Even though *Golden Pond, The Everglades* expresses a sunny disposition, while painting it was cold and extremely gusty, with the clouds and light constantly shifting. I mention the weather because this painting was produced as part of an experiment I decided to undertake, which was to film my *en plein air* painting process. My thinking was that it could be worthwhile to actually see my process and method and review how I arrive at a finished painting. Needless to say, when painting *en plein air* scale and the level of detail of a particular work have a big impact on the time each work takes. The scale of this work made it difficult to complete in under three hours, but because I was filming the process I wanted a work that was large enough to easily observe taking shape. The film consisted of some twenty-five thousand images shot over three hours and condensed (in stop motion) to create footage that runs for approximately two minutes and thirty seconds.

- To view an augmented reality version of this film, download the **Aurasma App** and click 'follow' on a mobile device (smart-phone or tablet) using the link: **<http://auras.ma/s/abg80>** (You can then hold your mobile device over Fig. 91 to view me painting the painting inside the painting).

Two particularly useful aspects of this experiment were that I was able to observe the changing weather conditions—the sky, the shadows—and to take account of the order in which the painting was made. When painting in oils, the order of construction is crucial, not just in terms of ease of production or speed of application but for maintaining the clarity of brush marks as well as the purity of colour and the blending of tone. When working from life I tend to limit the use of media and work as much as possible with paint straight from the tube. This helps me to maintain control of the paint and how it reacts to the surface but also allows me to build a physical presence and create surface energy with the paint and directness of individual brush marks. The brush marks and paint quality in shadows or in areas one might describe as ‘voids’ are just as important as areas of more intense detail. What might be described as ‘more empty passages’ in a painting are critical, as they allow the eye to travel to areas of more meaning.

Although I do not consider this particular work amongst the most successful paintings of the actual garden, I found the filming of my working process helped me consider adjustments in the practicalities of painting from life. For example, I recall the struggle I had in dealing with the large expanse of lawn in the mid-ground. The sharp angles of the pond and hedges and the detail and definition required to articulate the suspended branches of the cherry tree as they cut across the dense but complex foliage in the top section of the picture took considerable time to rework after filming. Thus, the date of the painting is shown as 2011–2012.

Before I started painting at *The Everglades*, I had a chance meeting and brief discussion with the head gardener, who talked passionately about the history of the garden and his role in maintaining Sorensen’s vision. He outlined the ongoing tasks the garden’s staff faced in providing the visiting public with an authentic experience of a time past. This conversation stayed with me as I painted and led me to consider the notion that my paintings, like the energies of the head gardener, are just part of the garden’s collective history and one person’s version of the place. We talked about the seasonal challenges faced with such a large garden, his personal feelings relating to a sense of custodianship, and the privilege he felt in being connected to this “great living presence that will

exist long after (he is) gone”.⁷ He was very interested to see what I would do with “how his garden looked”⁸ and which facets of the garden I would focus on. Over the course of my research, and in conversations with several committed gardeners, this sense of custodianship arose often as a common consideration. When I consider what Monet achieved with Giverny or what Sunday Reed oversaw at Heide, this becomes a very legitimate concern. Unlike most paintings, gardens are never finished.

The meeting with the head gardener also crystallised many thoughts I had about my own garden. He talked about the garden’s extended history and his responsibility to the ongoing legacy and importance of the site, but also the duty he had to Sorensen’s original vision. He was also very mindful of his role in the experience gained by the numerous people who pass through the garden. On a personal level, he said his own memories of his working life were contained within the soil, rocks, and plants and that like an artist, he sought to understand more through history and tradition. He enjoyed the changeability and vagaries of climate and the need to work with both mind and body to achieve his overall aims. In the same way as the Epicurean philosophers in 3000 BC, he was educated in “the ways of nature”⁹ and as a gardener was willing to work with the “interplay of earth, water, air and sunlight”¹⁰ and the harmonies of the garden’s endless “cycle of growth and decay”.¹¹

My own garden, established in the late 1880s and originally named Forrest Home, was originally laid out barely fifty years after Glover’s arrival in Tasmania and only twenty years after von Guerard painted *Weatherboard Creek Falls, Jamieson’s Valley, New South Wales*. Von Guerard visited the Blue Mountains in December 1859, making numerous pencil sketches from which he would later make paintings. After his arrival back in Melbourne he invited his friend, the art critic James Smith, to inspect the landscape studies. Smith was impressed with what he saw:

⁷ Head Gardener, *The Everglades*, Personal communication (March 2012).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Harrison, *Gardens*, 73.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

“Among the sketches from the portfolio are several he made in the Blue Mountains, and for sublimity, majesty, and eeriness, I should imagine this scenery can scarcely be surpassed in any part of the world”.¹¹

Today, Sorensen’s garden enshrines this changed place, and I have made paintings of his garden, cut into the side of a mountain, perched high above the forest floor, the same valley von Guerard first drew and painted more than 160 years ago.

¹¹ Gavin Wilson, *Picturing the Great Divide* (Blue Mountains Cultural Centre, 2012), 19

ii. Rowan's Garden Newcastle



Fig. 92. Left: *Pine and Hedges, Rowan's Garden* (2011).



Fig. 93. Right: *Inside Looking Through at the Rowan's* (2011).

Introduction

Rowan's Garden, as I have called it, is a private suburban garden in Newcastle. Owned by the Rowan family, who also own three large landscaping and nursery businesses, the garden is a fastidiously maintained example of the way conflicting styles can be blended to create a striking and harmonious whole.

I came to paint the garden while in Newcastle as part of an Artist in Residency at the city's Lockup, formerly the old jail. The director of the Lockup organized with the owners for me to paint *Rowan's Garden* over the course of a week. I did not meet the family but was shown around the garden by their full-time gardener who explained the garden's overall design, his role, and the constant planting, replanting, and general maintenance required to keep this garden looking its best. He made it clear that the Rowans were primarily responsible for the garden's overall look and the regular changes made to it.

The garden sits on a relatively modest suburban double block of approximately twelve hundred square metres which also contains a two-storey house. Every section of the garden is carefully tended, clipped, and manicured, and at first gives the impression of a much larger estate garden that has been compressed into a small space. Several overlapping styles are visible in the garden's five

distinct ‘rooms’. Some areas pay homage to the *knot* style of garden; some sections are clearly influenced by the *French parterre* (revival) tradition; and in others, *Japanese* influences are visible. Although garden purists may regard these styles as conflicting, the layout and plant choices had remarkable continuity and flowed well from one section to the next.

Formal considerations

The garden presented significant potential for painting because of its completeness and because it appeared much grander in scale than it was in reality. The perceptual change created by the shift in scale was enhanced by the elaborate shaping and detailed plantings. This in part explained my strong emotional response to the design and the intensification of the visual experience that increased over time as different layers of detail came into focus. Over the course of the week I produced nine relatively small paintings of the garden; it was, up until that stage, the most complex garden I had painted.



Fig. 94. The parterre garden at *Cliveden House*, Buckinghamshire, is one of the largest examples in *Britain*; I painted it later that year (Oct 2011). The garden on the front lawn at *Cliveden* is in the 19th Century *Revival* style, which differs slightly from the original 15th Century *French Renaissance* garden or the more elaborate 17th Century *Baroque* style.

Given that the garden consisted of five separate *rooms* that transitioned from one to the next, I made the decision to do at least one painting of each section in an effort to capture variety and an overview of the complexity of the planting and garden layout. I started with a painting of the entrance and moved through the garden day by day, painting each section as I went. This is not normally how I would work, but I felt this could be valuable experimentation that could be applied to the approach taken when painting my own garden.



Fig. 95.
Above left: Stanley Spencer,
Clipped Yews (1935).

Fig. 96.
Above right: Stanley Spencer, *The
Monkey Puzzle Tree, Northern
Ireland* (1952).

Fig. 97.
The Entrance, Rowan's Garden
(2011).

During my time at *Rowan's Garden* in the lead up to painting at *The Everglades* I began to consider more deeply factors such as the many different types of garden design, the nature of garden 'culture', other artists who have painted gardens, and where my work sat within this tradition. Until that point I felt the artist most closely aligned with the type of images I was making, both compositionally and in relation to their subject, was Stanley Spencer. One painting that I reviewed closely at the time was his *Clipped Yews* (1935) (fig. 95) which provided useful information in terms of the way Spencer articulated the repeating and receding forms, and how he paid particular attention to detail through the clarity of his rendering of the foreground foliage. As the forms of the shaped yews receded deeper in the pictorial plane, he moved away from depiction of detail to the use of calibrations of tone and modeling. He also employed dramatic perspective to draw us closer to the yew and to heighten our perception by fixing us to his viewpoint.

The other painting, *Monkey Puzzle Tree, Northern Ireland* (1952) (fig. 96), was informative in the way Spencer used tone and contrast to create separation when articulating foliage. The artist brings the tree to life by defining its interior and exterior, cleverly separating it from the garden background. This painting is a good example of techniques Spencer employs to break down complex, highly detailed objects through the use of tone, contrasting colour, and multi-directional brush marks. Achieving pictorial effects such as contrast, tonal shifts, and separation are some of the challenges when painting scenes such as those presented at *Rowan's Garden*, which was made up predominantly of shades of yellow and green, laden with complex formal detail and plantings.

Again my method was to paint *en plein air* using acrylic on small, primed wood panels and on loose pieces of primed, un-stretched canvas. At this time I was experimenting with a slightly freer, more sketchy painting approach with the aim of responding as directly as possible to what was in front of me and as a way of trialing Spencer's method of breaking down tones and articulating complex forms. While the approach may have been 'sketchy', I was still concerned with articulating plant detail, structure, and tonal depth.

A world set apart

Before painting at *Rowan's Garden* I had mainly been painting my own garden, which is backed by native bush and open to the views beyond, and at that time did not possess any firm stylistic design characteristics. One of the interesting characteristics of *Rowan's Garden* was that while it was obvious from the outside that there was something special within, it was impossible to imagine what lay behind the outside wall of plants. This dichotomy created a real sense of expectation before entering the garden. Once inside, the outside world was essentially invisible except for a small view of the street from the front gate. In painting terms there was no view that could be captured beyond the confines of the garden except for the sky. Once in the garden, I was totally immersed in that (garden world) place.



Fig. 98. *The Lawn, Rowan's Garden* (2011). **Fig. 99.** *Four Pines, Rowan's Garden* (2011).

A painting that I think best demonstrates the garden's challenge to my perception of scale is *The Lawn, Rowan's Garden* (2011) (fig. 98). The scene pictured is a section of the garden that is approximately ten metres wide by twenty metres deep. While I was painting this picture, the (brown) garden beds at the base of the hedge on either side of the lawn were in the process of being replanted with a floral border, which occurred on average every six to eight weeks. My aim was to depict the very composed and ordered nature of the space, and to also portray the curves and the sense of movement they created, drawing a viewer through.

Towards the back of this section of garden, the lawn subtly dips as it transitions to the entry to the next section, which can be viewed in *Four Pines, Rowan's Garden* (2011) (fig. 99). This section is in stark contrast to the other areas of the garden, allowing for less movement and promoting a more 'still', contemplative experience. The notion of contemplation is expressed in this painting where my aim was to create a work that dwelled in the shadows and that paid little attention to what lay beyond. It was about the sensory pleasure of being under the tree inside the garden, and about emphasizing the symmetry, order, and peacefulness of the space. In the top right-hand corner of the painting, the small patch of blue-green allows us to look back at the lawn garden we left behind. Although I never got the chance to meet the Rowans and discuss their garden with them (as I have with all the owners of the other private gardens I have painted for this project), I do feel that I got to know them in some way through painting their garden.



In the first half of next chapter I examine three key works that best exemplify the compositional and framing devices that emerged as consistent thread of my research. While these works depict very different gardens in very different places, they share common devices in the framing of the view and the directing of the gaze and importantly, the use of a centralised motif. In compositional terms, these three paintings form the bases of further explorations and the approach to the paintings I produced of my own garden in Springwood that is discussed in the second half of the chapter.

Chapter Six: Three Key Works and Springwood Paintings



Fig. 100.
Headdress,
Looking Through
Shadows (2011).

Introduction

Composition, structure, and framing are words that express ideas common to both gardening and painting; they also express what I understand to be a core part of this research. In this chapter I discuss three key works produced that feature particular compositional and framing devices that I have adopted. I also discuss specific paintings by artists whose compositions either reflect or have inspired my thinking. Given that one of my aims has been to represent the ‘other-worldly’ quality that gardens can express it is important to understand that what lies outside the frame is in itself a significant part of the picture’s narrative. In describing my approach I have broken my thinking into three sections: *the frame within the frame*, the view from *inside looking out*, and the view *from outside looking in*. In *Headdress, Looking Through Shadows* (2012) (fig. 100) I reflect on the *frame within the frame* and the compositional motif that is intended to centralise the gaze in order to reinforce the offer of a shared experience. In discussing the *Cherry Doughnut, Kingswood, Western Sydney* (2011) (fig. 113) I reflect on the parkland garden design and the urban vernacular. In the third work, *View from the Garden, Stuart’s Creek Station* (2011) (fig. 105), I discuss the beneficial effects of my field-work in the UK

and, on return, seeing Australia's landscape with fresh eyes. I also discuss the stark contrast of the imposition of the English garden aesthetic on the arid landscape of western Queensland and the experience of painting the view from inside the garden looking out.

Finally, in section IV of this chapter I discuss what I have learnt and how I have applied the knowledge from my many site visits and production of studio paintings of other gardens, to works which explore my own garden in Springwood. The paintings described here in many ways represent the evolution of this process of research; the material changes that I have made, the exploration of compositional structures; the heightening of atmospherics and the centralising of plant forms. These works also embody the necessary creative to-and-fro that constitutes my painting and gardening practices.

i. Key work one: Headdress, Looking Through Shadows

For much of 2012 and 2013, I concentrated mainly on paintings of *The Everglades* in Leura and my own garden in the Blue Mountains. During the making of many of these works I explored the idea of 'the frame within the frame' in an attempt to concentrate the viewer's experience of my subject. Another aim was to explore ways in which to evoke different feelings, one of those being what I would describe as a sense of *stillness*. Gardens naturally communicate sensory information which can heighten our state of consciousness by instilling feelings such as calmness or tranquility. These feelings are connected to our perception of time but also can contribute greatly to our sense of wellbeing.

In order to create the emotive linkage between stillness and time I sought to concentrate the viewer's gaze through my use of an archway or gateway as a compositional framework that would invite them to share this (other) garden world. My aim is for the viewer to experience an enhanced, illusionistic world that is seemingly real but other-worldly; a place where time is fixed to a moment but where feelings such as tranquility, stillness, or even disquiet can unfold. This vision is based in a sensory place that is both reflective and meditative, one which expresses

the immersive world many gardeners seek to create and which can be experienced through time spent in such gardens.

Three works in particular have inspired my focus on compositional devices featuring central openings or gateways: Caspar David Friedrich's *The Cemetery (Churchyard Gates)* (1825) (fig. 101), Stanley Spencer's *Greenhouse and Gardens* (1937) (fig. 102), and his *A Gate, Yorkshire* (1928) (fig. 103). What particularly interested me about these three paintings is that Spencer and Friedrich have created works that allow us, as viewers, to participate in a shared experience through the depiction of an open doorway or gates that can be read symbolically, for instance, as a kind of religious allegory or view to the future.



Fig. 101. Left: Caspar David Friedrich, *The Cemetery (Churchyard Gates)* (1825). Centre: **Fig. 102.** Stanley Spencer, *Greenhouse and Gardens* (1937). **Fig. 103.** Right: Stanley Spencer, *A Gate, Yorkshire* (1928).

These paintings influenced my compositions and informed my adoption of 'the frame within the frame'. The painting *Headdress, Looking Through Shadows* depicts a formal, symmetrical composition of the garden viewed through a central archway. The choice of the headdress archway and portrait format was designed to deliver a more concentrated view and to reinforce the sense of enclosed space. I wanted the painting to intensely convey the key attributes of the garden, but primarily, like Friedrich and Spencer, I wanted to compose the painting as an open invitation to a shared experience of the garden. By offering a limited view of the sky but very focused view of the garden, my aim was to increase the viewer's desire to travel beyond the path, enter the garden, and ultimately share a sense of the garden's

character. The archway positions the viewer to experience the garden's sense of light, safely enclosed, and to revel in the cool of the shadows, while imagining the garden that exists beyond the confines of the picture frame. I consider *Headdress, Looking Through Shadows* (2013) one of the key paintings to come out of my body of work because it involves a personal narrative. While this garden archway is clearly consciously designed, there is also an element of improvisation about it as I reveal below.

My neighbour Peter had often expressed an interest in my work and I offered to do a painting of his garden in exchange for some work he did for me. Peter's garden backs the top corner of my garden but is blocked from view by a high, very dense hedge. Even though I had lived next door to him for several years I had no idea what sort of garden lay behind the thick growth; when the time came to see it I was very pleasantly surprised.

The first of the three paintings I made of Peter's garden was painted *en plein air* and is the most naturalistic of the three. The second version, pictured here, is a much larger work I produced in the studio. As I painted the original piece, Peter and his wife Maria talked about gardening, what gardens meant to them, their approach, the structure of their garden, and their roles in its maintenance. Many of their decisions were not aesthetic but driven by purely practical considerations such as the height of their ladder or by plant health such as ways to improve the production of their citrus trees.

When I asked Maria why she had shaped the foliage on the top of the arch in the way she had, she explained that she simply couldn't reach the top and as a consequence she only ever pruned the sides. This strange and wonderful squared up vine—the thing that I really loved about their garden—was just a practical quirk, an improvisation, rather than a conscious design. I was surprised to find a quirky beauty in the *ad hoc* way practical considerations and solutions had resulted in quite idiosyncratic and striking garden features.

The motif of the archway as a symbol of entry and of welcome differs from an open gate or doorway. An arch, unlike a gate or door, cannot be closed but exists as a

decorative structure on which to grow other plants and as a marker to guide visitors in and through the space beyond. An arch is an open formal signifier through which we may look, offering potential and promise.

When looking through the archway in my painting, we see a circular garden bed full of agapanthus. When I selected this angle of view through the archway I was struck by what I first thought was a strangely shaped tree; I was surprised at the idea of Peter and Maria shaping a tree in this manner, but what looks like a small tree growing out of the center of the bed is in fact a mature grapevine that has entwined itself around a *Hills Hoist* (clothes line). This vine has so completely consumed the hoist that it was not until I had finished the painting that I realized what it was. At the centre of this composition is a cultural quirk, a tree-like structure of vine leaves held up by an almost redundant Australian suburban icon, the *Hills Hoist*. My painting recorded an aspect of this garden's history, a moment in time, part of its evolution and character, and an aspect of Peter and Maria's relationship to this place.

Headdress, Looking Through Shadows is largely tonal and, although many layers of colour have gone into making up this picture, I deliberately restricted my palette to predominantly shifting variations of greens and yellows. I have consciously heightened the tonal contrast and deepened the shadows to increase the illusion of depth through the archway. The motif of the arch serves several purposes; the most obvious being to signal the entrance to the garden and to frame what lies beyond. The archway is a living structure and therefore very much part of the garden and connected through nature to everything that is seen. As the title of the painting implies, I see the arch as an anthropomorphic form. The finished work is not a straight-out depiction but is an idealized view of Peter and Maria's garden and it was very much my intention to imply a human presence or ornament for a head.

I also more clearly defined the plants and the spaces between the garden-beds to accentuate the well-kept order and to present the garden more dramatically than in life. The curve of the arch is echoed throughout the painting and helps set up a rhythm that stresses the symmetry of the compositional uniformity. Structurally, the archway serves to emphasise what is seen through the centre but to also define in almost equal intensity the detail and significance of the forms on either side of the

arch. I see this painting as a portrait of this garden. It is a landscape in ‘portrait’ format, conveying a human presence and representing this garden’s appeal and force of personality.

Light, shadow, and metaphor

Gardening, like painting, is as much about looking as it is about doing. The more I garden and the more time spent painting gardens, the more I believe that it is important to not just seek cultural meaning within a garden’s structure and form but to find meaning and metaphor in what I describe as *deep shadows*. As I have spent more and more time in the garden, sitting and looking, I am now much more aware of how light interacts with nature to create a multiplicity of colours, tonal ranges, and shadows. This light and its shadows give expression to the garden’s cultural form but also help convey more emotive and sensory meaning.

In this regard, the process and outcome of this particular painting was a significant breakthrough. With this new painting I could see greater potential for metaphoric associations within the recesses of gardens and in the, often, latent meaning that exists in their deep shadows. As is the case in this painting of Peter and Maria’s garden, the deep shadows of early summer are where one would escape the heat and find cool relief and where the harsh glare fades and what exists becomes more clear. But when viewed from a distance these deep shadows embrace not just the seen and unseen but that elusive aspect: *atmosphere*. Gardens and the natural world are marked by death and decay and from this, life. In a garden, deep shadows are where death, decay, and life are held, but importantly these elements also mark time. I would suggest that deep shadows not only hold and express time, but express atmosphere.

As autumn and each falling leaf counts down time to winter and as winter gives way to spring, a garden expresses active-time. When we look at a painting of a garden we see time stilled, but the deep shadows of gardens may be the spaces of memory. In *Headdress, Looking Through Shadows*, I have sought to enhance that which is not quite seen. This may be partially explained by Robert Pogue Harrison’s idea that “where appearances recede into the depths of space and time even as they come

forward to stake their claim in the phenomenal realm, they make special demands on our powers of observation”.¹

As gardeners we rely on our powers of observation in reading the wellbeing of our gardens. It is often in the shadows, on the underside of the leaf, or ‘where appearances recede’ where we read the signs of a plant’s health. In defining deep shadow, I refer to those places in the garden where light is low and complex colours and tones mingle as space and form recede. When painting this aspect of a garden I have focused on describing the recesses where they meet the ground and the shadows that fall inside the leaves of a tree rather than how (we may think) light hits and gives form to the outside of the object.

Harrison writes of what he describes as the ‘lost art of seeing’ and “that a garden is a place where appearances draw attention to themselves, but that doesn’t mean they necessarily get noticed, no matter how much they may radiate or beckon the eye”.² But once noticed our perception can ascribe importance and meaning. Gardening has taught me to be more attuned to the natural world, to look for signs of stress in plants, disease, pests, or soil health. Through gardening, I have learnt and continue to learn how to read the signs of nature and thus to really look. This process of looking and reading nature’s signs requires critical thinking and a certain adaptability in terms of your approach.



Fig. 104. John Constable RA,
Study of the Trunk of an Elm Tree (1821).

¹ Robert Pogue Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 114.

² *Ibid*, 144.

Painting a garden marks time and is expressed not just through colour or tone, but light and, therefore, shadow and was formative when painting *Headdress, Looking Through Shadows*. The familiar illusion of shadows serves to draw the viewer in and is the basis from which the garden takes form. Considering illusionistic painting and the endeavor to portray a perception of physical space, of light and the way in which it falls on different foliage, shrubs, trees, or the ground, it is light that enlivens or draws out the metaphoric potential of any garden. This painting's contrast between profusion of light and deep shadows viewed through the archway offers an invitation to the garden but also seeks to invoke emotions, familiar memories and be emblematic of a deeper suggested, more symbolic meaning.

Light naturally gives expression to form and through light the form expresses meaning. The play of light locates a scene in time and can convey notions of spiritual meaning or of life and death. To illustrate what I mean, John Constable's *Study of the Trunk of an Elm Tree* (1821) (fig. 104) is a study of the lower portion of the trunk in a clearing, softly lit by an overcast sky. The scale of the trunk and the way it is framed as a centralised iconic motif has the potential to express nature's majesty, a sense of growth, survival, or longevity, and in each of these aspects the common thread is time. The English Elm is a symbol of tradition and of European garden culture and this tradition and culture is itself marked by time.

ii: View from the Garden, Stuart's Creek Station



Fig. 105.
Far left: *Study for View from the Garden, Stuart's Creek Station* (2011).



Fig. 106.
Left: *View from the Garden, Stuart's Creek Station, (Rain Coming)* (2014).

The *Study for View from the Garden, Stuart's Creek Station* (2011) (fig. 105) was completed approximately two weeks after I arrived back in Australia from my field trip to the UK. In England I had painted in many places, the highlights being the manicured floral and topiary gardens of Cliveden House in Buckinghamshire and the picturesque landscape garden of Compton Verney. The contrast between the English and Australian landscapes could not have been more stark. In the Cotswolds I worked around the constant drizzling rain while in Queensland I found a landscape that had not had any meaningful rain for more than two years and where the bush and grasses were parched. Much of the rest of the country had also come through an extended period of drought and this was still fresh in my mind as I had spent many hours hand-watering my Blue Mountains garden just to keep many of the plants alive, only to lose several silver birch, rhododendrons, and hydrangeas.

When I arrived at Stuart's Creek I was still trying to process the work I had produced in England. Before heading north-west to Roma, I had hung the twenty or so works from the UK field trip in the studio and was beginning to consider how these paintings would inform my ongoing research. It was extremely valuable to be able to compare what I had painted in the UK with paintings I had completed of my own garden prior to the trip. Soon after I returned I produced several drawings and variations of the paintings of the English gardens I visited in preparation for larger

studio-based works. The impact of viewing Stanley Spencer's English Garden exhibition and my time painting and drawing the English garden landscape was still very fresh in my mind and I was eager to apply to the Australian landscape some of the compositional elements I had explored while in England. I was particularly keen to develop a larger version of the red-hot poker painting I had executed as an homage to Spencer's *Magnolia*, which I had seen in the exhibition at Compton Verney.

The invitation to stay at Stuart's Creek was accepted prior to leaving for England, and I had no idea of what to expect. The station is owned and operated by the family who have lived and worked on the property for several generations, one of whom is a friend. She was keen for me to see and paint the garden, and I hoped it would complement and extend the works I had produced at Boolooloo Station (Moree) and Arkaba Station (Flinders Rangers). I am always reluctant to commit when people suggest ideas or specific places to paint, but painting *en plein air* is like fishing: you never know when the next one will bite.

The station was settled in 1900 and the second and surviving homestead was built in the 1930s. The garden around the house is approximately one and a half acres, but outside the fence there are discernable remnants of a much larger, older garden. The original size of this cattle property was seventy-eight thousand acres, but it is now forty-eight thousand acres after sections were sold off about twenty years ago. The surrounding vegetation is harsh and topographically the country is slightly undulating. From a farming perspective, the country has been reasonably productive. In an Australian context it is unremarkable except for the numerous bottle trees (*Brachychiton rupestris*) dotted across the landscape. These huge, slow-growing succulent trees populate large parts of this area of Queensland.

Like Boolooroo Station in Moree (a homestead garden I had painted a year earlier), Stuart's Creek Station also possessed a very beautiful, well-tended garden, although in terms of design the two gardens were very different. One thing that set the Stuart's Creek garden apart from its southern counterpart was the harshness of the surrounding landscape and its distance from any significant surface water. As we approached by road, the house and garden appeared in the distance like an oasis.

When we finally arrived at the house, my immediate reaction to the garden was one of surprise at the way an unlikely collection of plants had been made to thrive in a most inhospitable environment. The garden featured an array of roses, camellias, salvia, lilies, petunias, and all manner of flowering plants: a real English cottage garden, in fact. In amongst it all were large, perfectly positioned bottle trees. Inside the fence-line at the front of the garden was a row of hedged camellias that enclosed the space well and marked the boundary between human and herd or, should I say, between human culture and agriculture. A similar separation is evident in my own garden in the Blue Mountains, which is surrounded by a large, living fence of established photinias. This formal device helps to give the garden its structure. The hedge defines the overall space by providing a green wall and in the case of my garden hugs and flows with the slope of the terrain. Its principal role is in providing a screen and a privacy barrier to shut out the outside world. Like the back of the Stuart's Creek garden, however, my garden is also open to the view beyond. The front garden presents as a display to the world but the back garden connects us with a different reality.

The water that maintains the Station's garden is pumped from deep underground. What lies beyond the garden fence—a distinct lack of what gardeners call *colour*, the harshness of the climate, the quality of the soil—would present significant challenges for any gardener wishing to create and maintain this type of European garden. The lack of water here and the anomaly of this transplanted English-style garden reinforce the sense of place but also mark the difference. The jarring mismatch between the nature of the surrounding landscape and the imposed, imported garden landscape draws our attention to the dispossession of the first Australians. For many people, gardens express hope and a connection with nature, but for Aboriginal people the early colonial gardens indicated not just our intention to stay but our intention to take their land.

Sydney Eddison's idea that "gardens are a form of autobiography"³ can also be extended to the idea that gardens reflect who we are and where we come from. Perhaps for most people gardening involves little analysis of the traditions and

³ Sydney Eddison, *Gardening for a Lifetime: How to Garden Wiser as You Grow Older* (Timber Press, 2011), 14.

culture that lie behind it, but when viewing gardens in the context of this study, and in particular homestead gardens, it was important to consider the cultural issues of land use, sustainability, and politics. And although I feel a deep attachment to gardens, their history and practice, I am very mindful of the devastating role that settler gardens and farming have had on the lives of this nation's first people.

Although the pastoral landscape and garden landscape are very different, I find they are each in their own way interesting and beautiful. What I have tried to capture in my homestead garden paintings is the narrative that is expressed in the contrasts between the two landscapes; despite their differences, in the context of homestead life, each requires the other for its existence. These two pursuits—that of raising cattle and that of maintaining a garden—have vastly different outcomes and express quite different values, yet both require a good understanding of ecology, plants, changing seasons, and weather patterns, and both require significant human endeavour.

The philosopher Robert Pogue Harrison highlights this divergence: “conventional wisdom has it that gardens first arose either as a byproduct of agriculture or as a form of primitive agriculture”.⁴ He also offers the words of the poet W. S. Merwin, who believed that, “if anything agriculture arose as a result of gardening, not the other way around”.⁵



Fig. 107. John Glover, *Mount Wellington with Orphan Asylum, van Diemen's Land* (1837).

Fig. 108. Pierre Patels, *The Palace of Versailles* (1668).

Harrison's observation that “gardens mark our separation from nature even as they draw us closer to it”⁶ rings true for me. This phrase articulates an important aspect of *View from the Garden, Stuart's Creek Station*. The broadleaf bottle tree featured in

⁴ Harrison, *Gardens*, 40.

⁵ Merwin, W.S. quoted in Harrison, *Gardens*, 40.

⁶ *Ibid.*

the painting marks the separation of the farmland from the garden but also draws us closer to the different kind of beauty of the outlying, parched landscape. The garden frames the homestead and gives voice to the success of the farming enterprise but also acts as a conduit by which to express the owners' personal narrative, family history, and cultural heritage, and the challenges and paradoxes of this approach to land management.

Outside the garden looking in

One example of the reverse view, *from the outside looking in*, is a small *en plein air* study, *The Ivy Tree, Cotswolds* (2011) (fig. 109), I made from the side of the road of a private garden in the Cotswolds. Strangely, for the entire time it took me to paint this picture, I was watched by a woman from the second-floor window of the house to which it belonged. I had been driving back to my hotel after a full day's painting and happened upon this wonderfully strange hedge and tree and decided to stop to take a closer look. Although chance plays a role in the discovery of painting subjects, it must be said that the more I have immersed myself in this garden subject, the more often scenes and gardens have shown themselves to be painted. The dead tree featured in the centre of the painting was slowly being consumed by ivy and reminded me of a burnt tree in my own garden (fig. 110) that has been taken over by star jasmine. The view has been slightly manipulated to draw out the narrative and heighten the almost comical nature of the tree figure. I have used the parting clouds and the blue of the sky to point inwards and frame the tree.



Fig. 109.
The Ivy Tree,
Cotswolds, (2011).



Fig. 110.
The Kitten Tree,
Hillston, (2011).

The shadows in the foreground lean forward like hands trying to touch the ivy tree but fall just short of the top of the hedge. The dark clouds on the horizon have been emphasised to add weight to the bottom half of the painting and split the composition to afford the waving limbs more prominence against the white of the clouds. The tree itself has been turned front on to face the viewer which shifts the emphasis of the overall painting towards the tree. The foreground, hedge, and sky act as a stage, and whilst this shift in position flattens the composition, it also serves to heighten the interaction between tree and viewer. This tree, seen from the outside looking in, is seen as a striking point of comparison with the Stuart's Creek bottle tree.

The challenges of *en plein air*

Over the week of my stay at Stuart's Creek Station I made several paintings focusing on different aspects of the garden, but I felt that only two were successful: *View from the Garden, Stuart's Creek Station* and *View from the Remnant Garden Stuart's Creek Station, Roma* (2011) (fig. 111). When painting *en plein air* I tend to shift between oils or acrylics depending on the predicted weather, time-related factors, and whether there is a need to travel by plane. While in the UK I had worked exclusively in acrylic, which suited the conditions and the fact that I was moving around. The temperatures during the day ranged between eighteen and twenty-two degrees celsius, allowing the paint to dry over a consistent time and at a manageable rate. In central Queensland, however, the dry air and hotter conditions made it a challenge to work fast enough with the acrylics with which I had arrived. The need to balance the choice of subject, the various conditions, and the range of materials when painting outdoors is a constant challenge.

The relatively simple view of the bottle tree painted from inside the garden on the last day of my stay captured something meaningful about the place and I felt was an image that I could take further in the studio. Perhaps contributing to the success or at least the promise of this work was the fact that towards the end of my stay, heavy clouds rolled in and it rained for the first time in months. The clouds provided added interest in terms of painting and the rising humidity markedly extended the drying time of the acrylic paint, which allowed me to work at a more regular and consistent pace.

During my time in the UK and at Stuart's Creek Station I renewed my focus on the creative tension around evaluating the success of the works I produce *en plein air* and what was produced in the studio based on the *en plein air* studies. When painting from nature I have generally achieved a reasonably naturalistic portrayal of the subject, something I have set out to do. But when working in the studio from my *en plein air* studies, the work naturally shifts towards a more heightened, intensified version. This is something that I have questioned in the past but this process of research has helped me to more clearly define the difference between what is created in the studio from what is captured when painting *en plein air*. To build upon what I experienced when painting from life—to take what was important at the time and to develop the creative capacity to distill what is there, to re-edit, exaggerate and intensify and make a new version of that place. To harness the captured fragments and what I saw as important at a moment in time and to blur and heighten those memories through the creation of something new.

Creating tension within any composition is important and is something that I look to achieve within my paintings. In *View of Stuart's Creek Station, (Rain Coming)* (2014) (fig. 106) I have emphasised the horizontality of the landscape through the directional application of brush marks to work in opposition to and highlight the strong vertical presence of the bottle tree. I have also positioned the (whole) tree in such a way so that the fine upper branches and twigs have a direct dialogue with the edge of the picture frame. This is often made more important by the fact that I am painting my version of an already composed view.

Inside looking out

View from the Remnant Garden, Stuart's Creek Station (2011) (fig. 111) was painted *en plein air* over a period of two days, briefly interrupted by a visit from a two-metre brown snake that slithered under my table while I was painting. This was definitely not the Cotswolds! This view depicts a remnant section of the original garden that borders the paddock, now largely untended. The green tinge of the grass in the foreground is testament to the care it once received, but the fence wire is broken and the area is now accessible to livestock. When I first saw the view of the paddock from the old garden at Stuart's Creek I decided to paint it as a companion piece for

Uplands House Garden Panorama (2011) (fig. 112) using exactly the same size and format to depict the garden and the view of the paddock.



Fig. 111. *View from the Remnant Garden, Stuart's Creek Station* (2011).



Fig. 112. *Uplands House Garden Panorama* (2011).

Many early colonial artists such as John Glover, Joseph Lycett, and Eugene von Guerard pictured gardens and pastoral scenes the other way around, painting views of the houses and gardens from the paddock. Tim Bonyhady writes of *A View of the Artist's House and Garden, Mills' Plain* as reflecting Glover's "pride in how he was transforming the colonial earth".⁷ The painting *View from the Remnant Garden, Stuart's Creek Station* could suggest the reverse, one hundred and eighty years on: a once thriving garden falling into disrepair. An awareness of this perspective—that I was painting gardens from inside looking out—occurred while researching the work of artists such as Glover. My inclination had always been towards the depiction of the garden as an existing, already transformed, place. While I was aware that colonial artists portrayed early gardens as a symbol of success and a record of their 'civilising' force, I had not until now drawn the link so directly to what I set out to achieve.

The field trip to the UK was a significant turning point for my research. This concentrated period of painting a specific subject day after day enabled me to evaluate what I had achieved to that point and consider new possible directions. One quite large change that resulted from the field trip was that instead of trying to

⁷ Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Melbourne University Press, 2000), 94.

produce completed *en plein air* works in each session, I decided to take more time with each work and, if necessary, work over several days—much the same approach that I would take in the studio. My thinking was that I would approach painting *en plein air* the way I would approach gardening. The aim was to make each *en plein air* painting more about the time spent (experience) in a garden rather than capturing the subject and the compositional information to produce a painting back in the studio. This allowed my focus to shift from the overall to the specific, to the deep shadows and changing light or to hidden views, natural rhythms, and foliage.

iii. Cherry Doughnut, Kingswood, Western Sydney



Fig. 113. *Cherry Doughnut, Kingswood, Western Sydney (2011).*

This painting came about by chance and confirms for me the notion that almost everything is potential subject matter for a painting; it just depends on the way we look at things. I was in Kingswood, Western Sydney to get my car serviced in preparation for a painting trip to Moree to paint Boolooroo Station's garden the next day, so I had my paints packed in the boot of the car. The car was booked in for a one-hour service that actually took four hours. This delay turned out to be a gift of time to paint. What initially sparked my interest in this scene was the fact that this manicured formal piece of garden seemed so out of place. It looked as though the council had decided to add it to the corner of the park as an afterthought and I couldn't help but wonder what the council workers charged with maintaining this folly thought about this strange piece of garden design.

The painting *Cherry Doughnut, Kingswood, Western Sydney (2011)* (fig. 113) depicts a very small section of a much larger view that on first impression is an unremarkable scene. The area adjoining the parks is a cluttered, slightly shabby, medium density slice of suburbia. This particular parkland fronts the Great Western

Highway and is surrounded on three sides by modest, poorly built houses and 1970s red brick flats. On the opposite side of the highway there are car-yards, a service station, various light industrial businesses crammed with signage spruiking their services and wares, and the suburban train line.

The concept of a garden for most of us is a familiar part of human culture; because they are commonplace, gardens may go unnoticed or unappreciated. In the urban setting, with cost and space pressures on the increase, it seems that gardens are more and more considered non-essential places. Urbanisation, vertical living, and the embrace of digital and virtual technologies combined with more sedentary behaviours make our interactions with nature much less frequent and much less real. While vertical living and our need to still be connected to nature has generated the trend of vertical gardens, as a form of nature they in themselves signal our separation from the earth and the natural cycle of growth and slow decay. Gardens and gardening reflect the advances of technology. *Cherry Doughnut, Kingswood, Western Sydney* is testament to British textile designer, Edwin Beard Budding's invention of the lawnmower.

There is a certain forced happiness I have tried to imbue in this work through my painting of the cherry tree. Depicted here, the trees and bushes serve as my *figures in the landscape* and the cherry tree's metaphoric exuberance awkwardly waves to passersby. The box hedge doughnut gives weight and presence to the cherry tree. The brush marks that illustrate the foreground lawn and bricks are purposely directional and radiate out from the centre of the picture to both break up the expanse of lawn and re-emphasise the importance and peculiarity of the energy of the tree and hedge.

Just prior to my encounter with the *Cherry Doughnut* I had been reading Joseph Leo Koerner's book *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* and was inspired by his analysis of Friedrich's painting *Trees and Bushes in Snow* (1828) (fig. 114). Koerner's poetic description put into words the tension Friedrich created by impeding our view through the thicket, the outer twigs of which extend to the edges of the composition. Whilst the *Cherry Doughnut* featured in the painting isn't blocking the view and could be describe as a centralised, iconic feature more

reminiscent of Spencer's Stinging Nettles, *Trees and Bushes in Snow* led me to consider compositional tension and the importance of the picture frame.

"You do not stand before a 'landscape', since the thicket blocks any wider prospect of its setting, nor do the snow and alders, pushed up against the picture plane, quite constitute the monumentality of a 'scene', for they provide the habitat for an event. What alone welcomes you, what corresponds to your attention, is the thicket's very placement in the picture".⁸

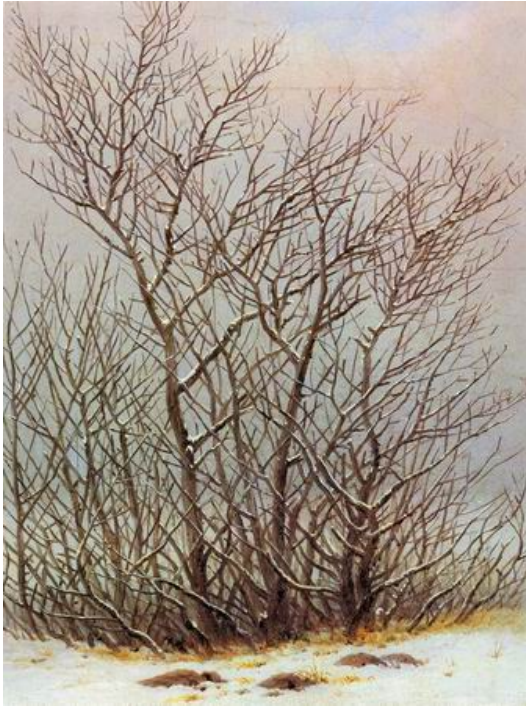


Fig. 114. Caspar David Friedrich, *Trees and Bushes in Snow* (1828).

My aim when painting the studio-based picture was to set up a compositional structure that would do one of two things. I placed the cherry tree and the circular hedge in the foreground as a focal point so that each, in combination, could express their difference. The bright colours and distinctive forms of the cherry tree and the doughnut hedge draw our attention to them and contrast with the dark foliage of the gum trees. The illusion of space in the mid-ground that separates the cherry doughnut from the gum trees highlights the contrast between the introduced and native plants. Yet, while the form of the cherry tree and hedge are seemingly so out of place, what we are looking at is somehow also very familiar—a real Australian scene expressing a suburban vernacular imposition.

⁸ Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (Second edition, expanded and updated) (London: Reaktion Books, 1990–2009), 9.

As I was painting the study for this work, I recall feeling a sense of nostalgia about the place and strong emotions that related to my earliest experiences and visual memories of similar Brisbane parklands. This sense of nostalgia harked back to childhood memories of large open spaces as part of new housing estates in which parkland was set aside and developed for the future, but then seemed to lay in wait for someone to arrive. And whilst in my mind, parks and gardens are places designed for engagement, this scene, like parklands from my past, conjures up a very emotional response through its lack of any meaningful human engagement. For me, both this park and the parks from my past are spaces one moves through on the way to somewhere else; but parks such as these belie the concept “that in the modern urban world, the garden having once been a place for man to escape from the threats of nature” has become a “refuge for men”.⁹ In many ways, these badly integrated parks and gardens are nature suspended, set aside out of tradition, and now exist almost as an homage to our desire to engage with the natural world.

This also builds on the theme I have explored throughout this entire period of research, seen more specifically within the paintings of my own garden in Springwood. In the case of this parkland it is worth acknowledging that while an attempt has been made to make it look natural, nothing about this landscape remains untouched, and more and more we find it hard to define what real nature is (for example, terms such as virgin bush, natural, pastoral landscape, garden landscape, fire-stick farming, back burning, etc. have become part of our common discourse).

The multi-dimensional aspect of gardens—the different combination of plants and even competing styles within a garden—fascinates me. This garden view is part formal *parterre garden* and part *Continental European garden (English)* but with a colloquial twist. Here, high garden traditions are held hostage to the vernacular and reduced to an awkward regional quirk. By using the stems and branches of the cherry tree to radiate out and up, I have partially screened the native gums in the distance which in turn has allowed the dark foliage of the gum trees to become the platform on which to accentuate the vibrancy of the floral forms. The gum trees could have been planted when the park was developed but I suspect that they were left in place

⁹ *Ibid*, 319.

and are the remnants of this area's bushland. Strangely, the uneven clumps of gums and the open grassland recall England's Eighteenth Century landscape gardens, created by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, which emphasised punctuating expanses of lawn with groups of trees and man-made lakes (the only things missing are the serpentine lake and crumbling ruin!).

During the many hours I spent in this park I saw almost no one else. The absence of people was unsettling and it was a quality I tried to capture in this work. At different times I have experienced similar suburban parks that have been designed for community participation and enjoyment. When uninhabited these types of parks and gardens take on an eerie quality that is, in some ways, more threatening than the solitude of bush landscapes.

In parts of Western Sydney and other suburbs on the urban fringe, infrastructure like this garden park are put in place and seemingly lie in wait for the community to build up around them. These garden parkland 'spaces in waiting' express a loneliness—one that is hard to define—not overtly threatening, but more foreboding. The emotions that gardens evoke are an important part of my motivation for painting such scenes. With my own garden, I long to share with others the deep joy and satisfaction found in working to add to and maintain the garden. This desire to share my garden also corresponds with a satisfaction felt in sharing what is captured through painting.

*(*As an aside, it is approximately four years since I painted the Kingswood parkland garden; I drove past it recently and it has fallen into disrepair and several of the plants are either dead or in the process of dying.)*

iv. Springwood Paintings

Introduction

In this section, I focus on several key works based on my own garden and outline the general approach taken to produce the larger body of work that constitutes part of this research. These works were completed over approximately three years but in a sequence broken up by the production of numerous works of the sixteen other gardens I painted. I had no preordained system or approach other than to create a series of works through a continuum in which each work informed the next. It was important for this research that my subject be investigated over a sustained period of time so that I could judge my work against my reasoned exploration of the topic, relevant texts, any new understandings, key artists who had explored similar ground, and historical precedents, all combining with my critical thinking around material and practice. Mood and atmospheric perspectives formed a significant part of the new investigations developed in the paintings I produced in late 2012 and early 2013 as part of this research and these are further discussed here.

Winter dogwood

Dogwood Before Dark (2013) (fig. 115) is one of the few works of my garden painted not from within the garden but from an elevated position looking down. This work depicts the view from the back balcony of the house looking down onto the garden and out across to the bush. Like several other works produced around this time, it is an expression of the muted golden tones that often occur as the sun is setting and that are common to many Romantic allegorical landscapes.

Prior to starting this painting I had begun a period of re-evaluating my working methods because of a need to address the tension that existed between my studio and *en plein air* practice. Despite the advantages of immediacy and the sensory experiences offered by painting from life, the control afforded by being in the studio complemented the direction of some of the more atmospheric works.



Fig. 115.
Dogwood Before Dark (2012).

It may be obvious to state that the dogwood tree pictured in the foreground is one of the key focuses of this work, but set against the dogwood is the backdrop of bush that encloses the garden and defines the order and anatomy of the space. What has also been defined is the distinct nature of the individual elements of the scene. This heightened definition and centralised clustering of plant forms also exaggerates the strong vertical (portrait) format. The dark silhouetted pine on the right side of the image and the pines angled inward stress contrast and crowd the clustered trees. The term ‘hemmed in’ would best describe the emotional intention I wished to portray through the arrangement of the pictorial structure. A garden *hemmed in* by wild nature is a common juxtaposition in the Blue Mountains and one expressed in my own garden. It also is informed by the notion of enclosure that permeates this research. The bush and perimeter hedges delineate the garden. The clustered elements mingle oddly at the centre of the picture but through colour and tonal contrast step back through the scene to suggest depth. These elements also express their own sense of hierarchy through ascending scale and positioning. My use of an overt symmetry is a common compositional trait that I employ and in this case was designed to amplify the orthodoxy and my adherence to standard pictorial conventions. Through the amplification of orthodox conventions and the viewer’s own recognition of this I endeavour to create a sense of disquiet or unease and a questioning of what is seen.



Fig. 116.
Surface detail of
*Dogwood Before
Dark* (2012).

Dogwood Before Dark is grounded in atmospheric and the nostalgia we feel in the gloaming where plant forms intermingle and deep shadows begin to coalesce. This painting was the result of an investigation into atmospheric, light, muted colour combinations, and multilayered glazing techniques. The detail shown in figure 116 illustrates the multi-layered approach in the application of colour and tone, and the variation of brightness and density of pigment. Each different form was initially blocked in with a dark rich base tone and built up slowly using slightly lighter layers as I progressed. The scale of the brush marks remained similar throughout the process; I used either a No 2 or No 4 size *Neef* filbert brush. While the overall composition is relatively formal and each individual tree or hedge is well defined, I sought to challenge this rigidity through the use of small-scale multi-directional loose brush marks. This also lent a sense of movement to the different foliage and enlivened the areas of deep shadow with variations of dark tone and movement. At various stages through this process and as the surface was accumulating its material and physical character, I applied thin glazes of deep Olive Green, Australian Red Gold, and Raw Umber combined with Paynes Grey. This experimentation built on similar techniques trialled when painting the much smaller work *Golden shadow, Hillston* (2012).

The stage

Gina Crandell's writing on Renaissance painting, elevating the spectator, portrait landscapes, and the stage prompted a sharpening of approach to some familiar compositional ideas. In *Nature Pictorialised*, Crandell offers Jan van

Eyck's *The Madonna and Chancellor Rolin* (1425) (fig. 117) as an example of what she describes as the "terrace solution",¹⁰ which depicts a panoramic landscape with distant views that uses the "mechanics of composition"¹¹ to position the subject. This multiple portrait pictured against a landscape divides the composition and compartmentalises the (linked) narrative from what is happening in the foreground and what is in the background, in doing so setting up a stage-like quality and communicating a layered or dual narrative.



Fig. 117. Jan van Eyck's *The Madonna and Chancellor Rolin* (1425).

Crandell's analysis of van Eyck's painting influenced the compositional direction of several works, including *Dogwood Before Dark* (2012) and to some extent *Dusk, Looking Through Big Pines* (2012). This later painting is a largely remodelled composition based on an *en plein air* study. For this larger version I employed a more elongated format to heighten the sense of drama and position the viewer's line of sight in the bottom half of the picture plane. The small glimpse of water in the lower third of the painting (fig. 118, i., left) was positioned to draw the eye to the base of the pines and to create tension between their tips as they extend almost to the top of the frame. The bushes on the lower left side of the picture combine with the deep tones of the foreground shadow to frame and contrast with the inviting glimpse of the blue-green water and the illuminated hedges in front of the two pines. In terms of my actual garden's composition these pines are a central element and stand in stark

¹⁰ Gina Crandell, *Nature Pictorialised: "The View" in Landscape History* (The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1993), 76.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 77.

contrast to the native bush. In purely compositional terms it would be accurate to say they are a dominant architectural feature from which the rest of the garden radiates. The large angophoras and white mahoganies in the mid-distance form the backdrop, conveying this difference but also expressing the juxtaposition of wild nature and the shaped garden landscape.

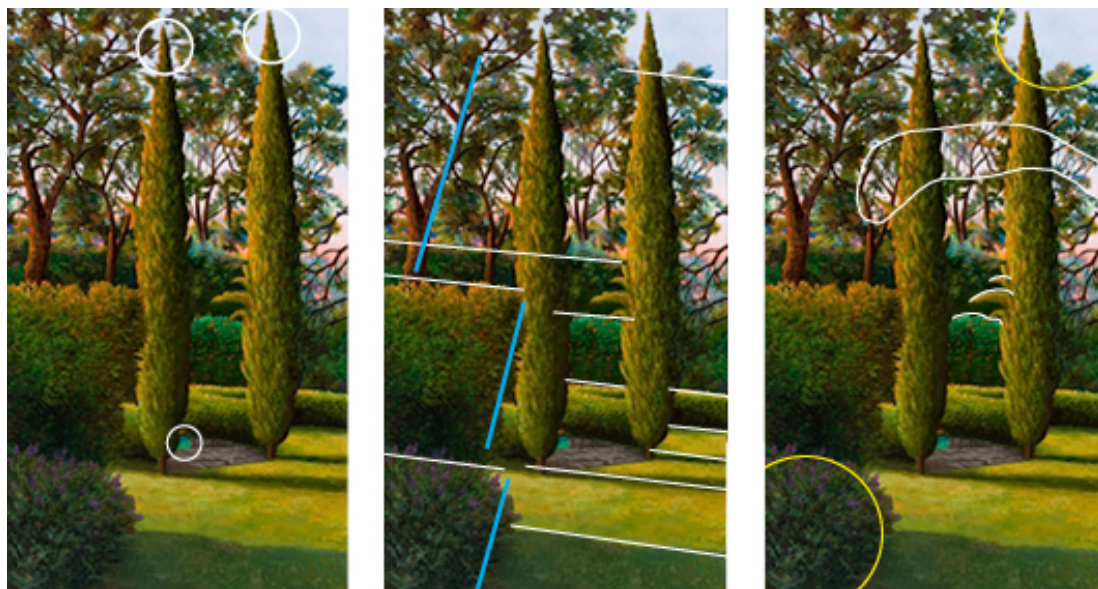


Fig. 118. i, ii, iii. *Dusk, Looking Through Big Pines* (2012) illustrates the key elements of the composition.

The angles (illustrated by white lines in fig. 118., ii., centre), drifting down from left to right were built into the composition to counterbalance the angle of the large angophora in the mid-distance and the angle of the right-hand edge of the two bushes in the foreground (illustrated by blue lines). These two opposing sets of angles create interest by contradicting the rigid verticality of the pair of big pines. The mood of the sky replicates the atmospherics of summer gloaming I experience regularly in the garden. A sentiment that describes what I hope to communicate through *Dusk, Looking Through Big Pines* (2012) is “appearances owe their poignancy—their almost unbearable beauty and power of evocation—to the time-boundedness that attunes us to the fleeting views of nature”.¹²

¹² Harrison, *Gardens*, 20.

Winter Dogwood (2011) (fig. 119) and *Winter Shadows and Camellias* (2011–2012) (fig. 120) were conceived as companion pieces and depict the view from my studio. While both works are garden paintings, my intent was for each to be a portrait of the angophoras that sit at the back edge of the formal part of the garden. Their scale, position, and identity delineate the boundary between the native and the introduced as the slope gently increases and drops away into the bush. Since painting these two pictures I have made substantial changes to this area of the garden and worked to more clearly define the separation they illustrate. In *Winter Dogwood*, the fine, radiating, lace-like branches of the dogwood extend across the picture plane and act as barrier to what lies beyond. In *Winter Shadows and Camellias*, the viewer is offered an open invitation through a clear line of sight and a framed view to the central motif of the angophora. The large tree was also given more prominence by the purposeful lack of foliage. My intention was to use the tree's form and to bring out what I saw as its anthropomorphic characteristics. Subtle changes were made to its form so that it more clearly emulated a human figure: the upwardly outstretched branches act as a welcome; the pink of the trunk was adjusted to suggest human flesh; and the background foliage was darkened and shaped to project the form.

The triangular shape of the tree's upper limbs is mirrored in and conforms with the angle of the orange leaves of the tulip tree on the left side of the painting, as does the sky that punctuates the dense bush. Part of my thinking behind this composition was to juxtapose the directness of the angles in the top half of the painting with the natural curves of the hedge, shadow, and garden bed in the foreground. On the right side of the composition I have used the linear, directional qualities of the Banksia Rose to curve in and point the viewer to the central tree. Many of the structural decisions I have outlined were not preplanned but part of a process of incremental adjustments or refinements that took place over a period of time and in reference to other works in this series. Each of these works informed the other.



Fig. 119. Left:
Winter Dogwood (2011).

Fig. 120. Right:
*Winter Shadows and
Camellias* (2011–2012).

When writing about my paintings it is important to acknowledge that there is much testing and a degree of trial and error, the known and the unknown, hesitation and discovery, all of which are part of an intuitive process of problem solving built on my existing knowledge and experience.

A split view

Hedged forms appear in almost all of the paintings of my own garden. This was not a conscious decision but can be attributed partly to my predilection for structure and partly to the association of hedges with philosophical and emotional notions of protection, safety, and order. As previously stated, Spencer's *Red Magnolias* (fig. 79) was inspirational in terms of its composition when painting *Split View with Hedge and Pine* (2011) (fig. 121); as in *Winter Shadows and Camellias*, I have shaped the sky into a triangular format. This mirrors the shape created by the branches, splitting the picture plane and lending the distant pine more prominence. As well as splitting the composition in half diagonally, the hedge forms a horizontal divider between the pine in the top half of the painting. The heavy shadow employed under the hedge gives the hedge and the foreground weight and a foundation to the composition, as well as contrasting tonally with the soft blue sky. The flecks of light yellowy-green highlights seen through the hedge were added later in the studio to strengthen the horizontality of the (composition) hedge and foreground and add to the illusion of depth.



Fig. 121. *Split View, Hedge and Pine* (2011).

This work was painted *en plein air* in an attempt to capture the sensation that is created by light as it falls through leaves and the traces of bending shadow as they fall across the lower branches. It was a simple but direct response to an everyday experience in the garden. My intention was for the mottled branches to be directly in front of the viewer, creating the perception of being under the trees and inside the garden where you could imagine simultaneously the warmth of the sun and the cool of the shade.

Big Autumn

The overall composition of *Big Autumn* (2012–2013) (fig. 122) pictures a view from my studio and is anchored by two quite distinct plant forms that frame the middle view and set up a centralised stage. Featured on the left is a large, head-shaped bush (a port wine magnolia), and on the right is the naturally sculpted form of a cypress pine. The panoramic format allows for the easy depiction of multiple viewpoints. The view at the far left of the work is closed in and consists of a series of hedges that act as barriers to what lies beyond, while the more open right-hand side of the painting allows for a view of the native bush. I have added a small nod to the picturesque in the form of a view across water and, while there is no crumbling temple or serpentine lake, this is my small homage to Capability Brown.

The foreground is clear across the width of the painting and provides no impediment to entry. I wanted the work to suggest to the viewer an invitation to step into the garden. Compositionally I have divided the background section into two quite distinct sections but have allowed for the foreground area to bind the horizontality of the work.



Fig. 122. *Big Autumn* (2012–2013).

The work was intended to parallel John Glover’s painting, which “showed these flowers all blooming together out of their proper seasons, in order to heighten the impression of bounty”.¹³ *Big Autumn* pictures the colour of leaves and the turn of a season; but as the leaves fall, the camellias flower and spring bulbs sprout. This painting revisits the format and the tenor of *View of the Artist’s Garden, Hillston* (2011) (fig. 123). Again, in *View of the Artist’s Garden, Hillston*, the fruit is seen ripening on the tree, flowers bloom, and leaves turn as the seasons overlap. The composition takes in a 220-degree view and I have spaced key trees and bushes quite evenly across the picture to allow for each to have a form of separation. I have done this in an endeavour to give each their own personality.



Fig. 123. *View of the Artist’s Garden, Hillston* (2011).

¹³ Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Melbourne University Press, 2000), 95.

The long hedges, garden edge, and lawn area in the foreground and continuous blue of the sky have been deployed to strengthen the sense of panorama. The big pines and the view between them anchor one half of the painting, while to the right the pepper tree stretches across to link the other half. In the absolute centre of the painting I have positioned an angophora that is coloured and shaped to suggest a human form. What would not be clear from the work itself is that parts of this painting incorporate plants that were not there at the time but that I intended to introduce. Since painting this picture in 2011 those plants have become part of the garden, which now more closely resembles this view.

Of the many works produced as part of this research, *Under the Pepper Tree* (2011) (fig. 124) is one work where I vividly recall the emotional experience I had while painting. My attachment to this painting is not just based on its composition or the colours or even the material quality or what is depicted but the meaning I found through the act of painting. Whilst it is a painting of my garden, the real focal point of the painting is the two trees, one a mandarin, the other a clementine. Each year for the past ten years I have pruned and cared for them, and each year they have rewarded me with hundreds of fruit. This painting visualises the active relationship



Fig. 124. *Under the Pepper Tree, Hillston* (2011).

I have with these two citrus trees and my garden, and expresses my personal memories of an experience I had painting my garden.



The following concluding chapter presents a reflective and critical commentary to draw the work to a close. It reflects on my research questions and key themes raised throughout this process in relation to my practice of painting and gardening. It also identifies the key artists and several important texts that informed my thinking and points to some of strengths and short-comings of the project, and toward areas in need of further investigation.

Conclusion

The genesis of this project was my fascination with gardens as a transfigured physical entity and as a subject for painting. John Glover's painting *A View of the Artist's House and Garden, Mills Plains, Van Diemen's Land* (1835) (fig. 23) provided the initial inspiration as well as an historical framework and pictorial precedent through which to frame and visualise this project. While I have read widely and studied numerous works of art by a broad range of artists, many of the questions I have asked, such as those that relate to the many parallels that exist between painting and gardening, were crystalised through painting my subject. Worth highlighting is Robert Pogue Harrison's reflections on 'The Lost Art of Seeing' in *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* as it provided me with a philosophical framework in which to consider my own approach to *seeing*. Harrison's thoughtful deliberations coupled *looking* with the notion of truly *seeing* and then linked both, with time. His drawing together of looking, seeing and time, steer me towards these important parallels and practices required for both gardening and painting. Equally David E. Cooper's text *A Philosophy of Gardens* for his wide-ranging exploration of what gardens mean and why gardens matter.

This study has explored the idea that, both gardens and paintings are constructions by designer-makers and are products of the creative process, but when drawn together, can be defined as the intersection of nature and culture. The creative process—the thinking and making—requires experimentation, method, representation and finally transformation. Central to the appreciation of a garden is aesthetic considerations such as composition and specific features that combine in their design to inform, all of which can also be associated with the formal features within a painting. The rich cultural history and inter-connectedness that artists have with gardens has made for a truly rewarding exploration. Stanley Spencer, John Glover and Caspar David Friedrich have helped locate my study and frame many of my questions in relation to the painting process, composition and technique. By frequently returning to examine what is expressed in their paintings, and in the way they worked, I have been able to analyse different approaches and reflect upon my visual concerns. Their art and the work of many others also helped locate

developments in garden landscape painting, different ways of depiction and the evolution of the Picturesque.

My methodological approach from the beginning has been shaped by active field-work as a mechanism to explore the variety of styles expressed by different types of garden and then, to apply that experiential knowledge to the paintings I produced of my own garden. Partly, as a keen garden-maker I did this out of a curiosity to further understand how gardens are made but also to obtain a comprehensive overview of their many manifestations as expressed through style, colour, planting, and formal choices in current and historical garden practices. Knot gardens, English Parkscapes, French Parterre gardens, Cottage gardens, Memorial gardens and a European style Modernist garden have all formed part of this study. The experience gained from this extended period of exploration—the multitude of different painting situations, the small challenges encountered along the way, along with the possibilities that have been opened up through experimentation—are embodied in my paintings. Much of the progress has been incremental but at times quite small changes have resulted in major advances such as the shift in emphasis from *en plein air* to larger less naturalistic *other-worldly* studio-based works.

Over the course of this exploration, the sustained painting of gardens has slowly revealed the curious parallels that painting and gardens have in relation to one another. Some of the more obvious parallels are the *pictorial* conventions expressed through style, colour and composition; another is the *practical* considerations founded in the physical and material properties each require; further to this are the *cultural* considerations bound up in nature, the environment and politics. Other parallels are more *esoteric* and relate to the power of our imagination and our sense of wonder and mystery. This in turn, is coupled with the expression of *meaning* (symbolic, allegoric or metaphoric) that can help invoke ideas such as a sense of place. In terms of a painting, what lies inside or outside the frame or in terms of a gardens, its boundary—help to inform and add meaning.

Prominent gardens such as the *Everglades* and *Boooroo Station* provided added levels of inspiration through designs that closely modelled my own pictorial inclinations; their well-conceived, ordered complexities lent themselves to a

multitude of interpretations. By developing several smaller parallel bodies of work based on gardens like *Uplands House*, *The Everglades*, and *Rowan's Garden* I was able to better analyse and develop my thinking in combination with my material practice. These works, and each garden's different *place*, style and physical manifestation were invaluable when it came to producing paintings of my own garden in Springwood. At the time of making these discreet bodies of work I considered each garden's individual form or *personality* important because I believe it speaks to the maker's vision—an expression of physical and visual reality. While this is still true, upon reflection and after reviewing the many different gardens I have painted, I have come to the realisation that a garden's context—its position in the world—is what gives it *real* meaning. The garden maker is crucial in terms of the creation of form and the garden's outward appearance; however, it is a garden's position that grounds it in time giving it a social context and from that, attaches to it site-specific cultural- and political- attributes and associations.

The process and challenge of painting different types gardens in different terrains and localities, in some cases under quite difficult conditions, has led me to make changes to my usual methods of *en plein air* and *studio* practice. These changes were implemented as a response to the location of the various gardens I painted, the artists I studied, and the types of garden images I wanted to make. As my research progressed the paintings gained in material complexity, and I spent more time considering my process, my materials, mediums, and techniques in an effort to heighten effect. This experimentation and search for ways to draw together the composition of both gardens and painting were an attempt to intensify atmospherics that heighten the emotional connection to place and ultimately to activate an intensification of experience. These ideas flowed through to additional plantings and to the extensions I implemented to the existing garden in Springwood and to what has become a more long-term project of reconfiguring and composing new sections of garden in the anticipation of new paintings. Transforming a place, with seeds, a variety of plants, colours, textures, and through style and composition has now become part of my ongoing creative process.

In the latter stages of my research, the paintings of my garden became more layered and less bound by naturalistic concerns as I focused on the types of brush marks,

descriptive details, and atmospherics of each new painting. Their outward appearance shifted to be more focused on *time*, mood, and the *other worldliness* that gardens and paintings can express. Through this study I now realise, that gardens can exist—*like Eden*—as places in the mind, and that gardens prevail in our memory as *imaginary places* that are known in different ways to all of us. I know with my own garden I have an understanding of what it is as well as a vision of its potential—what it can offer and what it could be. In order to visualise the transient sensory aspects of gardens and allude to a more *imaginary place*, I felt the need to adjust some of my methods. I devoted much more time in the field to each painting, made changes to the type of canvas I used, changed my oil paints to a brand with a much higher concentration of pigment, and introduced a variety of mediums. I also implemented more complex tonal variations and glazing techniques, and introduced multi-layered underpainting to increase surface density, tension, and luminosity.

One overarching aim was to produce images of gardens by drawing out certain features that, once framed in a particular way, are accentuated to express a form of communicable meaning. My hope was to communicate not just something personal but something contemporary. The large angophoras and dense bushland that feature in paintings of my own garden, for example, signify for me a form of cultural schism, a marker between the safety offered by the garden and the wildness of nature. This separation defines the garden's duality and the innate politics of its position while reinforcing the central theme of the *shaped landscape*.

Before this project, I considered the act of painting to be one thing and the act of gardening to be another. When painting a garden I viewed this as part of my painting practice and when gardening I merely considered it to be gardening. A quite unexpected outcome has been that each pursuit has enriched the other; each fulfils a similar creative desire and the line between the two practices has blurred. The most acute similarity between the two is the habitual observation both require. Through the process of focused study I have arrived at a situation where painting my garden and the way I see landscape *and nature* has been challenged and enriched. In the future I see my work shifting emphasis to a more conceptual approach. This I envisage would more directly accentuate the politics of garden landscapes and their embedded cultural meaning.

The beauty of gardens, like paintings, is that they are relatively easy to rework. Having spent countless hours pruning and clipping to shape numerous hedges in my own garden I have found something deeply satisfying not just in seeing the newly defined shapes but, in time, the fresh green shoots as each plant starts the process all over again. The pruning and shaping connects a gardener to each plant and the regrowth is nature's response to their efforts. This cycle of give and take, of care and repair, is in essence the reshaped, humanised landscape and for me these actions are not so much about control but a shared path of wellbeing. The same can be said about painting—there is something deeply satisfying in reworking and reshaping parts of a picture and in the subsequent emotional response experienced as a result of your efforts.

This project has been extremely valuable, as it has allowed me to develop and extend my visual memory, something that I believe is an essential part of the creative process. As human beings we can experience quite profound moments even when confronted with the most ordinary scene. As an artist I try to read the landscape, tap into the profundity that I find within the (changed) landscapes, and not just paint a fleeting moment but recall, recreate, and relive past memories. As artists, I believe we seek clarity of vision through creative endeavour; creative endeavour allows me to visually sift through *where I go* and *what I do* to arrive at a point where there is some form of symbolic meaning. I say this without attributing some form of heroics, or a monumental shift in thinking or to some kind of profound light-bulb moment, but more a private, personal reflective sense of purpose with continuity that allows for insight through critical thinking and continued pictorial questioning. By its very nature this project has taken me along many paths; by recording, reflecting, and analysing each step along the way I have been able to develop a deeper understanding of my subject and art practice. I now have a much clearer understanding of my garden subject. I have become the *artist gardener*.



My own journey through this project in many ways mirrors the growth and evolution expressed in the life of a garden; I come away from the experience uplifted as do, I hope, viewers of my paintings. As stated in my introduction, a garden, like the

creation of a painting, is an act of anticipation as well as an expression of optimism. Through this interaction *of making* I have encountered experience and reward. What is difficult to reconcile, however, is that whilst refuge can be found in the garden, that refuge has come at a cost. The taking of land from Aboriginal people and role that colonial gardens played in our history needs be acknowledged; until there is real constitutional recognition and reparation for the taking of land paid to the original custodians of this country, there remains—unsettled business.

Appendix

i. The story of the broad-leafed bottle tree from Stuart's Creek

By Lillian Tomkins, Toowoomba, 27/02/2014 (D. O. B. 1923)

Many years ago, and now I am quite sure that it was 1956 because that was the year Rosie and Libby commenced at the Glennie Prep and at that time Ann was at Stuart's Creek and about five years old and so she was with us when we went on a very comprehensive trip through Queensland. Ken was President of the Queensland Graziers' Association, and probably the trip was to visit all or as many as possible of the cattle producers to rally their cause. We were driving a Humber Super Snipe which we had flown to Melbourne to collect in the middle of 1947. How well I remember that, for it was the first flight I had ever made in any aeroplane bigger than a tiger moth on a joy flight in Roma.

1956—We drove from Stuart's Creek to Blackall where we met our good friends Reg and Kath Mant from Brooweena (near Maryborough) and Reg was helping Ken at meetings in various western towns—they must have flown from Brisbane to Blackall. As Reg Mant's cousin managed Barcardine Downs, we had planned to spend a couple of nights with them. His Christian name has gone out of my head—I do recall he had a brother Brian Gaide in Brisbane who I think was a stockbroker. And I think the station manager's wife's surname was Button—probably because that name amused Ann and me. It is very, very strange why one forgets so many small details and is able to remember trivia.

Barcardine Downs homestead was a huge, double-storeyed timber house, bedroom and wide verandahs upstairs and living rooms, dining, offices, kitchen and cooks and maid quarters on the lower level. It was in the garden grounds that Ann and I found the little seedling bottle tree and we asked for a jam jar a few centimetres (inches then) in size to pot it and take it home.

So it [the baby bottle tree] was in the boot of the Hummer Super Snipe for the next three to four weeks while we visited strange places: Isisford and Stonehenge; I recalled of course Longreach, Winton and Muttaborra, Hughenden and Richmond

and across to Cairns. Ann, dear little girl, watered the wee tree-in-a-jam-tin almost every day until we returned to Stuart's Creek. There were lots of cattle towns on the way back from Cairns to Brisbane and Ann was glad to be home. She said one day "I've been to Cairns and I've been to Cunnamulla and I do not wish to travel any more". God bless her. It [the tree] we removed from its jam tin and planted near the corner of the tennis court—no swimming pool in 1956—and in 56 years it has grown very happily. So that is the bottle tree story, and now it will be forever remembered from your painter friend's beautiful pictures.

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