Exposed to the Elements: representations of atmospheric phenomena and the construction of a cultural psyche

Archival Durable Record

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1. Research Proposal

Title of Project

Exposed to the Elements: representations of atmospheric phenomena and the construction of a cultural psyche

Summary

By referencing the images and texts of selected 19th century artists and writers, my project will investigate the ways in which experiences and representations of atmospheric phenomena have permeated the English cultural psyche and become a significant element in the definition of Englishness. The project will culminate in a body of print-media based work, which will reconsider the position of printmaking in contemporary art practice. The inherent properties of printmaking, such as sameness and difference; repetition and reproduction will be investigated, properties that underpin our readings of atmospheric phenomena. The exegesis will contextualise the visual research by examining the cultural conditions of 19th century England and their impact on the work of artists and writers of the time.
Aims and Objectives

The objective of my research project is to develop a body of work for exhibition based on an examination of the ways that atmospheric phenomena have permeated the psyche and become an element in the definition of Englishness. By referencing selected texts and images by 19th century artists and writers I aim to explore and elucidate connections between experiences of atmospheric phenomena and the psyche. This will result in an exhibition of print-media based work engaging with and reinforcing these ideas.

Background

The weather has long been a topic of speculation. From the beginning of recorded history to the present, atmospheric phenomena continue to have an impact on our lives. Until the Renaissance it was a major theme for the discourse of Western Philosophy and literature and, although the topic declined during the Enlightenment, it was taken up again in a vigorous way by the Romantics when images of the weather pervaded painting and literature.

Associations between the weather and cultural distinctions began with Aristotle, who formulated one of the first examples of this link in his *Meteorologica*, where he compared and contrasted the inhabitants of Europe, Asia and Hellas. Samuel Johnson also made similar associations in 18th century England, when he referred to the weather as a subject that everyone talked about: "It is commonly observed that when two Englishmen meet, their first talk is of the weather; they are in haste to tell each other, what they already must know, that it is hot or cold, cloudy or bright, windy or calm."

Among the burgeoning scientific discoveries in 19th century England were those relating to natural phenomena, such as meteorology. This scientific progress fires the imagination.

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of his age and had a significant impact on the work of many Artists and writers, in particular, the quintessential English artists, John Constable and J.M.W. Turner, and poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

In 1803, Luke Howard published his essay *On the Modifications of Clouds*, followed in 1815 by Thomas Forster's *Researches about Atmospheric Phenomena*. Both these publications had a profound effect on artists and writers of the period. Constable studied both publications in detail and responded to them with a series of cloud studies painted on the spot. On the back of each he made notations about the weather and the time of day. A typical entry reads: "Sepr. 12. 1821. Noon. Wind fresh at West...sun very Hot. Looking southward exceedingly vivid and Glowing, very heavy showers in the Afternoon but a fine evening. High wind in the night."

In Turner's work no two days or dawns are alike and he too emphasised passing periods of time by giving the shifting light of twilight or sunrise an unrepeatability by effects of light. For both these artists, the passage of time is concurrent with changing weather conditions. A linking of the momentary with subsequent developments shows a 'modern' view of the weather as a sequential process.

In 1832 Ernst Lehrs wrote an essay, *The Language of the Clouds*, in response to Luke Howard's 1803 essay. This was published, along with the reprint of Howard's *Essay on the Modifications of the Clouds*, and it began:

> Perhaps among no other people in the world is cloud-observation so widespread and so keenly pursued as among the inhabitants of the British Isles. [...] This keenness in cloud study is, of course, stimulated by the peculiar strength and beauty of the cloud formations in this part of the world; but it is also the symptom of a definite spiritual impulse which, from ancient Celtic times, has worked through the cultural evolution of this country.

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2 During the years 1821 - 1822, Constable made about '50 studies of skies tolerably large' (R.B. Beckett. *John Constable's Correspondence, Vol. V*, Suffolk Records Society: Ipswich, p. 98), in which he attempted, without precedent, to pin down these most transient of atmospheric phenomena.
The portrayal of psychological conditions, a looking inward, inevitably borrows from the vocabulary of the outer, and the vagaries of the weather have been utilised to evoke states of mind, not only in the work of 19th century artists and writers but persistently in the present. In the paintings of 19th century artists, Caspar David Friedrich, Samuel Palmer, Heinrich Fuseli, for example, twilights and dusks reflect the contents of the subconscious. The work of contemporary artists such as Hamish Fulton, Tacita Dean, Roni Horn and Therese Oulton is grounded in the external, visible world, yet implies the intimate and the mysterious. In Hamish Fulton's photographs, skies and clouds become mediums to convey the feelings aroused by the text below the images.

The main emphases of this research are the elemental forces of the weather, the transitory effects of light and atmosphere and their influence on the psyche.

**Studio and Technical Research**

I will employ a diversity of media to investigate the potential for printmaking to enhance representations of atmospheric phenomena. This will include traditional printmaking techniques such as relief printing alongside more contemporary means of reproduction and replication such as digital imaging and photography. I will encompass a range of formal vocabularies from minimalism and photography to text-based conceptualism in the production of the work.

The project will consider the position of printmaking and print-based media and its role in contemporary art practice. I will investigate and develop the possibilities of printmaking in addressing notions of sameness and difference, repetition and reproduction, concepts that underpin our readings of atmospheric phenomena.

As well as referring to actual images made during early 19th century England, the visual research will be based on selected texts of artists and writers, in particular, incidental notations referring to specific locations and atmospheric conditions at the time of the notation.
Research Questions

• What significant changes occurred in the culture of early 19th century England that inspired artists and writers to place such particular significance on the representation of atmospheric phenomena?

• In what ways have experiences of atmospheric phenomena and daily experiences of the weather entered the English cultural psyche?

• In what ways can print media be utilised to interpret 19th century images and texts and give them significance in contemporary art practice?

Rationale

The research will build on a long tradition of curiosity about atmospheric phenomena and their impact on our daily lives. This study will contribute further to our understanding of 19th century English culture, art and science, casting additional light on this subject.

As the end of this millennium approaches there is an ever-increasing emphasis on the definition and construction of personal and cultural identities. We are inevitably a part of the atmosphere or air; it surrounds us and we breathe it in. One's air, or temperament, is the point at which the self meets the world, and it can apply to the self or the way one exists in the world. Our unconscious responses are taken for granted, including simply breathing in and breathing out and the body's ability to maintain thermal balance.

Attempts to control the weather persist without the possibilities to succeed and our helplessness in this is seen periodically on television and in newspapers. Climate control is on the international agenda and responsibility for dealing with it is viewed as a cultural issue. This project will examine the role of the English cultural psyche in response to a quotidian experience over which we have no control.

The research will expand awareness of new interpretations of cultural identity through an investigation of the impact of the varying manifestations of atmospheric phenomena on the individual psyche.
Methodology

The literature research will be twofold:

• An examination of the work of 19th century English artists and writers, such as Constable, Turner and Wordsworth, with particular emphasis on their work that references atmospheric phenomena.

• Examining contemporary references to atmospheric phenomena such as daily weather forecasts and on the Internet.

The visual research will be undertaken in my studio in the City of Melbourne and at RMIT University in the Printmaking studio and Digital Imaging research lab. The work will utilise material collected from books in libraries in Melbourne and England and material downloaded from the Internet and from newspapers. Research for the exegesis will take place in libraries and major art collections in Melbourne and London.

The visual research will result in an exhibition of print-based media. The exegesis will examine the cultural conditions of early 19th century England and their resultant impact on the work of artists and writers and their implications in the present. It will also contextualise the visual research by linking the studio investigation to the written work.

Stage 1 (18 months) March 1998 - September 1999

• Preliminary library-based research to locate texts and identify the work of artists and writers to be investigated

• 2 X 5 day walks in Flinders Island and Cape Barren Island

• Initial experiments with the possibilities of print-media including traditional approaches and more contemporary means of production

• June 1998, exhibition of first stage of experiments at Galerie Düsseldorf in Perth

• July 1999, smaller exploratory exhibition in artist-run-space, Temple Studio, Melbourne

• Develop bibliography
Stage 2 (18 months) September 1999 - March 2001

- Continue research into appropriate images and texts in libraries and museums in Melbourne. The NGV has one of John Constable's cloud studies from 1822.
- Continuation of research into techniques and materials with a particular emphasis on the incorporation of contemporary means of transmitting information relating to atmospheric phenomena.
- Examination of the ideas and issues raised in the research relating to the production of experimental work.
- 2 X 5 day walks in New Zealand - Rees/Dart Valleys and Nelson Lakes.
- 2 X 6 day walks in Chile - Villarica Volcano and Los Dientes in Isla Navarino, Tierra del Fuego.
- Further exploratory exhibitions in conventional and experimental places -
  Dust, Spare Room, RMIT Project Space
  The Colour of Water at Galerie Düsseldorf for the Perth Festival
  Lightfingered, Orange Regional Gallery, NSW

Stage 3 (12 months) March 2001 - March 2002

- Year-long, daily documentation of the weather using photography and text.
- 4 day walk in New Zealand - Kepler rack.
- Exhibitions of experimental work -
  Deceptio Visus, Stephen McLaughlan Gallery, Melbourne
  Un/Natural Selection, First Site Gallery, Melbourne
  No Muttering, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney.
- Possible trip to London to access primary research material in major collections such as the British Library, the Tate Gallery and Victoria and Albert Museum.
- Preliminary outline of exegesis and the form it will take.
- Continuation of further technical research.
Stage 4 (12 months) March 2002 - March 2003

- 7 day walk in Newfoundland - Gros Morne World Heritage Park
- Analysis of primary research material collected on trip and its incorporation into the visual project
- Evaluation of work to date
- Work on the final format of the exegesis
- Further exploratory exhibitions in conventional and experimental spaces -
  - Seeing Double, Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth
  - ZOOM, Gippsland Art Gallery - Sale
  - Text &., RMIT Project Space, Melbourne

Stage 5 (6 months) March 2003 - September 2003

- Consolidation of work to date along with documentation
- Exhibitions of exploratory work -
  - Installations, Conny Dietzschold Gallery, Sydney
  - Act XII: new works on paper, George Adams Gallery, Victorian Arts Centre
- Development and consolidation of format for the final presentation of the work
- Commence work for final exhibition
- Final draft of exegesis

Stage 6 (6 months) October 2003 - March 2004

- Finalise exhibition details such as presentation and installation of the final project
- Complete documentation of visual research in the form a Durable Visual Record
- Complete exegesis and forward to supervisors
- Final presentation of work for examination
2. List of Illustrations

1. Installation views of *element* at Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth
   31 May - 21 June 1998

2. *Dust* (1998) at Galerie Düsseldorf
   Solvent transfer and relief print on paper, 130 elements
   Overall size: 220 X 340 cms

   Relief print on paper, 98 elements each 11 X 12 cms
   Overall size: 85 X 185 cms
   Bottom: *Drift* (1998) in RMIT Project Space

   Relief print on paper, 98 elements each 11 X 12 cms
   Bottom: *Drift* (1998) detail to show reverse
   Relief print on paper, 98 elements each 11 X 12 cms

   Top: detail of single panel
   Middle: Detail of single panel with reflections
   Bottom: details of 4 panels showing text and image

   Photographs, photocopy on drafting film and acrylic
   Bottom left: *Gust* (1998) panel detail
   Bottom right *Gust* (1998) panel detail

7. *Every Cloud*, 8 details each 150 - 350 cms

   Watercolour on paper, embossing, acrylic on wood
   9 elements each: 40 X 40 cms
   Top: embossed - *vapour*
   Middle: embossed - *grisaille*
   Bottom: embossed - *haze*

   Watercolour and relief prints on paper, acrylic on wood
   15 elements each: 22 X 30 cms
   Overall size: 68 X 155 cms
   Relief prints on paper
   Overall size: 80 X 60 cms
Middle: *Untitled (Yellow)* detail, (1998). Each panel 15 X 11 cms
   Overall size: 80 X 60 cms
Bottom left: *Untitled (Yellow)* detail
Bottom right: *Untitled (Red)* detail

   Relief print on graph paper and tracing paper, 24 elements each 29 X 29 cms
   Overall size: 90 X 245 cms
   Bottom: *Doubt* detail

   Relief print on paper, 8 elements each 15 X 11 cms
   Overall size: 31 X 48 cms
   Bottom: *Doubt* detail

13 *Sky Blue I* (2000)
   Inkjet and relief print on paper
   85 X 110 cms

14 *Sky Blue II* (2000)
   Inkjet and relief print on paper
   85 X 110 cms

   Inkjet and relief print on paper
   85 X 110 cms

16 *Sky Blue IV* (2000)
   Inkjet and relief print on paper
   85 X 110 cms

17 *Sky Blue V* (2000)
   Inkjet and relief print on paper
   85 X 110 cms

18 Top: *Dust* (1999) at Spare Room, RMIT Project Space
   Solvent transfer and relief print on paper, 250 X 350 X 450 cms
   Bottom: *Dust* at Spare Room, RMIT Project Space, opposite direction

19 *Dust*, 12 details
20. **Top:** *As the Western Wave (morning)*, (2000)
   Relief print on paper
   Overall size: 60 X 155 cms
   **Middle:** *As the Western Wave (evening)*, (2000)
   Relief print on paper
   Overall size: 60 X 155 cms
   **Bottom:** *As the Western Wave (morning)* and *(evening)* details to show reflected colours

21. **Top:** *Sudden Shower* (2000) details in ZOOM to show rainbow reflections
   **Middle:** *Sudden Shower* at Temple Studio with figure to indicate scale
   Relief print on paper approx 850 elements
   Overall size: 350 X 800 X 1.5 cms
   **Bottom:** *Sudden Shower*, details in ZOOM to show gradations of grey

22. **Left:** *Sudden Shower* (2000) in RMIT Gallery
   **Right:** *Sudden Shower* (2000) in RMIT Gallery, detail

23. **What a Day!** (2001)
   Inkjets prints
   Diptych: each 85 X 110 cms
   Overall size: 85 X 230 cms

24. Installation views of *Deceptio Visus*, Stephen McLaughlan Gallery Melbourne
   3 - 26 May 2001

25. **Top:** studio view of making of *Still*
   **Middle:** Studio view of making of *Still*
   **Bottom:** Studio view of *High/Low* in construction

26. **Top:** *High/Low* (2001) part 2
   Inkjet and relief prints on paper, silkscreen on glass, acrylic on wood
   Each panel: 28 X 28 cms
   **Bottom:** *High/Low* details. Left BLEAK, Right RADIANT

27. **Top:** *Still 1 - 5* (2001)
   Oil and embossing on paper on canvas, acrylic
   Each approx: 10 X 15 cms
   **Bottom:** details of *Still*

28. **Top:** Installation of *High/Low* in *No Muttering* at Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney
   4 October – 3 November 2001
   **Bottom:** Installation of *3 Mornings and 1 Evening* at Fremantle Arts Centre, WA
   26 February – 3 March 2002

29. **Installation views of Seeing Double** at Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth,
   19 May - 9 June 2002
30 **High/Low (2001)**  
Inkjet and relief prints on paper, silkscreen on glass, acrylic on wood  
Each panel: 28 X 28 cms  
Overall size: 61 X 127 cms

31 **Untitled I - IV (2002)**  
Inkjet and relief print on paper archivally laminated to aluminium, aluminium dust on aluminium  
Diptych: each panel 60 X 80 cms

32 **Untitled IV (2002)**  
Inkjet and relief print on paper archivally laminated to aluminium, aluminium dust on aluminium  
Diptych: each panel 60 X 80 cms

33 **Untitled I (2002)**  
Inkjet and relief print on paper archivally laminated to aluminium, aluminium dust on aluminium  
Diptych: each panel 60 X 80 cms

34 **Untitled II (2002)**  
Inkjet and relief print on paper archivally laminated to aluminium, aluminium dust on aluminium  
Diptych: each panel 60 X 80 cms

35 Installation views of *Text & at RMIT project Space, 9 - 27 July 2002*

36 Top: Installation view of *2 Mornings and 1 Evening*  
Embossed cardboard, each panel: 85 X 105 cms  
Middle: Installation view of *2 Mornings and 1 Evening* with *Lux in Tenebris*  
Bottom: details of *2 Mornings and 1 Evening*

37 Installation views of *ZOOM* at Gippsland Art Gallery · Sale  
27 July - 25 August 2002

38 Installation views and details of Artists' Books in *ZOOM*

39 **Every Cloud in ZOOM**  
Top left: Installation view of *Every Cloud*  
Relief print on silk, acrylic on wood, 33 elements  
Overall size approx: 170 X 280 cms  
Bottom left: *Every Cloud* detail  
Bottom right: detail with *Sudden Shower*
40 Views of ZOOM
Top left: Introductory wall text and Sky Blue I and II
Top right: Introductory wall text
Bottom left: ZOOM with figures and Sky Blue I - IV
Bottom right: ZOOM with figures and Every Cloud

41 Dust in ZOOM
Top: Complete piece
Bottom: details to show colour on reverse

42 Installation views of Installations at Conny Dietzschold Gallery, Sydney
13 March - 8 April 2003

43 Sky Blue in Installations at Conny Dietzschold Gallery
Inkjet and relief prints on paper archivally laminated to aluminium
Each 60 X 80 cms


45 Squint (2003)
Inkjet, relief and silkscreen print on paper
Each panel: 41 X 55 cms
Overall size: 41 X 175 cms

46 Wink (2003)
Inkjet, relief and silkscreen print on paper
Each panel: 35 X 60 cms
Overall size: 35 X 190 cms

47 Blink (2003)
Inkjet, relief and silkscreen print on paper
Each panel: 35 X 55 cms
Overall size: 35 X 175 cms

48 Experimental installations of Dawn and Dusk, RMIT Faculty Gallery, August 2003

49 Then & Now (2004)
Inkjet prints
Each panel: 85 X 100 cms
Overall size: 85 X 205 cms

50 Then & Now (2004)
Installation view of *Peculiar Weather* at Monash Gallery of Art, 24 March – 2 May 2004
From L. to R. *Gust, Wink, Blink* and *Squint, Sky Blue, What a Day!*

Installation view of *Peculiar Weather* at Monash Gallery of Art, 24 March – 2 May 2004
From L. to R. *Squint, Sky Blue, 2 Mornings and 1 Evening, High/Low*

Installation view of *Peculiar Weather* at Monash Gallery of Art, 24 March – 2 May 2004
From L. to R. *Wink, Blink* and *Squint, Sky Blue*

Installation views Faculty Gallery, RMIT University, 29 April 2004

Installation view Faculty Gallery, RMIT University, 29 April 2004
Detail

Installation view Faculty Gallery, RMIT University, 29 April 2004
Detail showing *Sudden Shower*

Installation view Faculty Gallery, RMIT University, 29 April 2004
Detail
element
Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth
31 May – 21 June, 1998
In the first falling before men, there was no skill in the power of nature. It is the habit of man in the first falling before men, there was no skill in the power of nature. It is the habit of man in the first falling before men, there was no skill in the power of nature. It is the habit of man in the first falling before men, there was no skill in the power of nature.
Large waves begin to form; the white foam crests are more extensive everywhere (possibly some spray).

Large branches in motion; whistling heard in telegraph wires; umbrellas hard to use.

Moderate waves, taking a more pronounced long form; many white horses are formed (chance of some spray).

Small trees in leaf begin to sway; crested wavelets form on inland waters.
The popular belief that stars and planets can be seen from the bottom of a well or shaft is a myth. It is likely that a person observing the stars in the dark or closed状态下, they are not illuminated. Transfused light can be cut off and considerably increased by the strong line of the eye, making it appear that the eye is the eye of the observer, when it is actually the eye of another person. It is said that there are about twenty stars of the first magnitude too bright to be detected by the naked eye, looking from the eye of a well or pit. The planet Venus can be seen if you look into the need of the eye if the observer knows where to look.
Sudden Shower
Temple Studio, Melbourne
30 July - 15 August 2000
Deceptio Visus
Stephen McLaughlan Gallery, Melbourne
3 May - 26 May 2001
Seeing Double
Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth
19 May – 9 June 2002
1 Deep, deep blue  2 Somewhat lighter  3 Hint of sunset - pink tinged and golden rays, tranquil  
4 Full of mist and quite devoid of blueness  5 The atmosphere is not blue  6 Evening red and morning grey. Morning red and evening grey  7 A multitude of silvery greys

1 Glow in the sky at twilight, tinged silvery-blue  2 Absence or presence?  3 Infinite blue space. Where to focus my eyes?  4 Rising vapours catching silvery light  5 Black and white together make blue  6 Moody, patient, angry, listless  7 Blunted light/filmy space

1 The atmosphere is not blue  2 Cirrus pearl white  3 Colours we see before our eyes everyday  4 Purple and blue, lurid shadows of cold, dark shape  5 Vapours, tongues of mist dewy bright, then gone  6 Air is like water, the whitest of things  7 Impenetrable

1 When seen in a dark mass it looks practically blue  2 A warm hue melted and broken into a fine neutral grey  3 Is this cerulean or ultramarine?  4 Half cloud - half plain  5 Shimmering, vibrating blue  6 I can feel the atmosphere but do not see it  7 Overcast
1 Deep, deep blue 2 Somewhat lighter 3 Hint of sunset - pink tinged and golden rays, tranquil 4 Full of mist and quite devoid of blueness 5 The atmosphere is not blue 6 Evening red and morning grey. Morning red and evening grey 7 A multitude of silvery greys
1 When seen in a dark mass it looks practically blue 2 Brilliant light of a silver yet warm hue melted and broken into a fine neutral grey 3 Is this cerulean or ultramarine? 4 Shimmering veils, vibrating blue 5 I can feel the atmosphere but do not see it
1 Glow in the sky at twilight, tinged silvery-blue 2 Absence or presence? 3 Infinite blue space. Where to focus my eyes? 4 Rising vapours catching silvery light 5 Black and white together make blue 6 Moody, patient, angry, listless 7 Blunted light/filmy space
Text &
RMIT Project Space, Melbourne
9 – 27 July, 2002
ZOOM
Artist Books
Gippsland Art Gallery - Sale
27 July – 25 August 2002
It is a strange thing how little in general people know about the sky. It is the part of creation in which nature has done more for the sake of pleasing man, more for the sole and evident purpose of talking to him and teaching him than in any other of her works and it is just the part in which we least attend to her. 

The noblest scenes of the earth can be seen and known but by a few; it is not intended that man should live always in the midst of them; he ceases to feel them if he be always with them: but the sky is for all.

John Ruskin, 'Of the Truth of Skies'. 1897
Conny Dietzschold Gallery, Sydney
13 March – 8 April 2003